

Healthy shift to organic production

A CHANGE to organic production has led to healthier soils and animals, and a happier farmer.

Chris Eggert, a fourth-generation farmer from Wauchope, made a change in 2000, which resulted in him dispensing with traditional farming methods and adopting an organic approach.

The result was his farm costs dropped and the quality of the nutrition in the products from the farm greatly increased.

Today, the farm produces one million litres of certified organic milk a year from a 170 mixed breed herd on a pasture-fed diet.

It also produces its own compost using nitrogen and nutrients from the cows' manure and urine combined with mulch hay.

The farm's 2000 laying hens managed for pasture ranged organic eggs also add to the nutrients on the farm.

The decision by Mr Eggert, his wife Ann, and his parents Paul and Jenny to adopt organic methods was triggered by high input costs, high stress, stock health problems and high veterinary bills.

The new farming practices have helped alleviate many of these problems.

Mr Eggert said when he studied at university, he was told about high input, high production and learnt about chemicals and pesticides.

"I didn't know much about organic farming, I thought it was something hippies did," he said.

"My father worked the farm by following traditional methods and used chemicals and pesticides and my grandfather told me that I couldn't farm without super.

"When the dairy industry was deregulated, I decided to give organic farming a go.

"The first few years were difficult.

"Attending conferences helped change our paradigms and since then we have evolved and enjoyed our farming endeavours.

"We're still learning and trying new techniques."

For example, the family used composted chicken manure to try to replace the synthetic chemicals they could no longer use, but it didn't work.

"The smell was terrible and people were walking around with hankies over their noses, but we persevered and experimented and now we use the manure produced on the farm more efficiently," Mr Eggert said.

"The results of our organic methods have been fantastic.

"It may not be for everybody but we can all learn from each other.

"The improved practices resulted in better soil water retention, healthier plants and animals.

"Carbon has become a major focus on our farm.

"Increased carbon levels in our soils have led to less leaching and runoff of minerals into the subsoil and waterways.

"Importantly, we have lower cow replacement costs and lower herd health costs.



Chris Eggert, a fourth-generation farmer from Wauchope, has changed to organic farming methods.

"In 1999 I spent \$20,000 at the vet, now I don't even know his phone number."

Mr Eggert will be a speaker at the first National Biological Farming Conference and Expo to be held at Southern Cross University in

Lismore from November 6 to 8.

People from a broad range of enterprises, including eggs, dairy, fruit and vegetables, nuts, beef, coffee and cane growing are expected to attend.

The conference has been organised

by SoilCare NSW, a Landcare organisation of primary producers with special interests in soil health and soil function. SoilCare is based in the northern rivers of NSW, but has members across Australia.

■ Visit www.soilcare.org

In Brief

Charity support: Aus-Qual is a certification body accredited by the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ), providing conformity assessment services for quality management and food safety (HACCP) management systems.

It also provides product certification systems for the Australian and New Zealand agricultural, horticultural and secondary processing sectors.

It has business activities in food production, processing and industry training.

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Exemplar Global and are qualified in a range of disciplines, and have technical specialists who provide support for the audit teams.

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Closing the loop: The carbonisation of biomass that would normally go to landfill makes so much sense for a variety of reasons but one of the best benefits is the increase in microbial activity from applying Biochar and Wood Vinegar to compost and soil, according to a Biochar spokesman.

Biochar's stable characteristics provide the home for microbes to live, hold more water, nutrients, bacteria and mycorrhizal fungi.

Wood Vinegar on the other hand provides 200 compounds that enhance microbial activity and speed up composting.

Biochar and Wood Vinegar work symbiotically together to feed and grow healthy soil microbes, reducing other inputs while increasing yields, which means more abundant, healthier and tastier crops which are more naturally resistant to pest and disease, the spokesman said.

■ Visit www.byronbiochar.com.au

Compost works: Inorganic fertilisers are one of the major input costs in pasture farming, and yet are often inefficient, according to a JPH Equipment spokesman.

However with compost, almost all of the nutrients would be available, with little loss through leaching, run off or emissions, the spokesman said.

■ Visit www.jphequipment.com.au or contact 0411 695 335.

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