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Going Organic

Official journal of TROPO, the Tweed Richmond Organic Producers' Organisation

No 56
March - May '04

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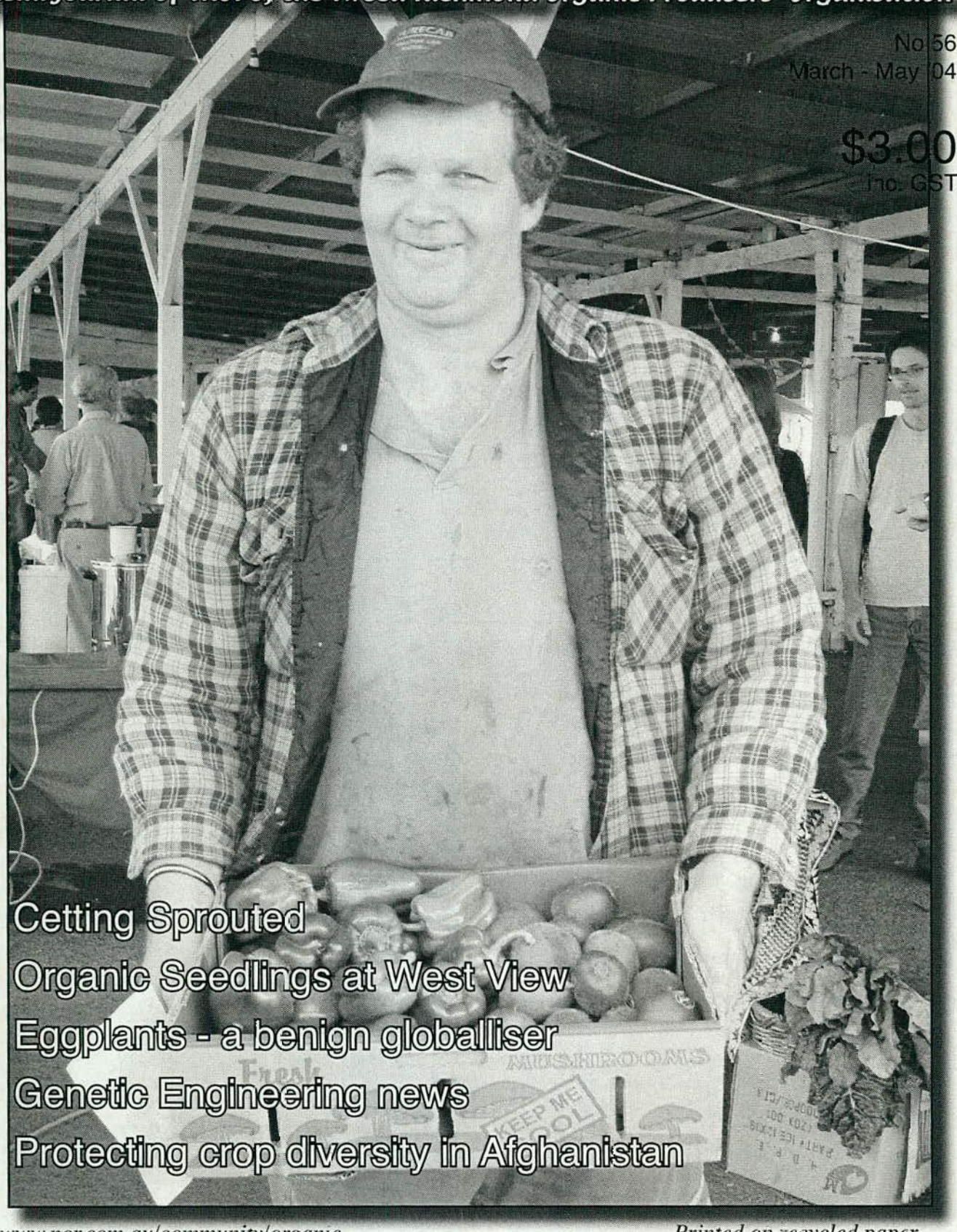

Getting Sprouted
Organic Seedlings at West View
Eggplants - a benign globalliser
Genetic Engineering news
Protecting crop diversity in Afghanistan

www.nor.com.au/community/organic

Printed on recycled paper

Buying Organic on the North Coast

To help promote the sale of organic produce in the Tweed Richmond region, Going Organic has compiled the following list of businesses, markets and box order schemes selling organic foods. If you would like your business added to this list, contact the Editor (details back page).

Organic Fruit and Vegie Outlets

Town	Shop	Address
Ballina	Fundamental Foods	Ballina Fair
Bangalow	Bangalow Basics	27 Byron St
Brunswick Heads	Brunswick Health Foods	20 Fingal St
Brunswick Heads	The Village Greens	23 Old Pacific Hwy
Byron Bay	Life's a Beech	Byron Hills
Byron Bay	Fun Foods	Old PO, Johnson St
Byron Bay	Ozigo	BP Service Bayshore Drv
Byron Bay	Santos	4/8 Lawson St
Kyogle	Box & Dice	137 Summerland Way
Lismore	Fundamental Foods	140 Keen St
North Lismore	Rainbow Wholefoods	52 Terania St
Mullumbimby	Santos	97-99 Stuart St
Murwillumbah	Fresh Wholefoods	43 Wollumbin St
Nimbin	Nimbin Emporium	58 Cullen St
Nimbin	Nimbin Organics	50 Cullen St
Suffolk Park	Suffolk Park Fruit & Veg	Shop 2, Clifford St
The Channon	Incredible Edibles	Channon village
Sth Lismore	Abruzzi Organics	1/105 Wilson St

Organic Box Order Schemes

Operator	Area	Contact
Organic Home Deliveries	Lismore	Nadine Miller Ph: 6622 2636 nadinemiller70@hotmail.com
Organic Alive	Ballina to Byron	Chris & Jacqui Ph: 6687 4820
Organic Lovers	Byron Shire villages & Lismore	Michael Maloney Ph: 6685 0192 maloneymj@yahoo.com
Santos	Byron & Mullumbimby	Santos administration Ph: 6685 5685

Markets

- Rainbow Region Organic Markets Tuesday 8am - 11am; Lismore Showgrounds. Contact Dave Roby on 6628 1084
- Byron Bay, Thursday 8am - 11am, Butler Street Reserve. Contact Vicki Rix on 6629 1666.
- Grafton - every 2nd Thursday.
- Lismore Farmers' Market, Lismore Showground, Saturdays 8am - 12

What is TROPO?

TROPO, the Tweed Richmond Organic Producers' Organisation, was established in 1989 as a grassroots local action group dedicated to fostering organic agriculture and gardening on the NSW North Coast.

Since then, membership has grown to over 150. Members include commercial organic producers, part-time farmers, home gardeners, conventional farmers considering converting to organic methods, and many others with an interest in supporting the kind of agriculture that does not poison people or the environment.

TROPO activities include meetings and field days covering practical organic farming and gardening techniques and looking at wider issues in sustainable agriculture.

In the struggle for a cleaner, healthier and more sustainable world, your views count, and TROPO helps make your voice heard. TROPO members provide input to a number of influential institutions including NSW Agriculture, OFA, organic certification groups like NASAA and BFA. The group also liaises with produce wholesalers and retailers.

Annual membership costs only $28 and includes regular meetings, field days and four editions of the Going Organic journal. Membership also provides access to experienced organic growers interested in sharing their expertise. See our membership form page 23 and full list of contacts on the back cover.

Catch us on the Web at: *http://www.nor.com.au/community/organic*

• GOING ORGANIC is TROPO's quarterly journal. See back page for contact details.

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***Cover** : Organic producer Ron Bartley, photographed by Pauline Roby*

WHAT'S ON

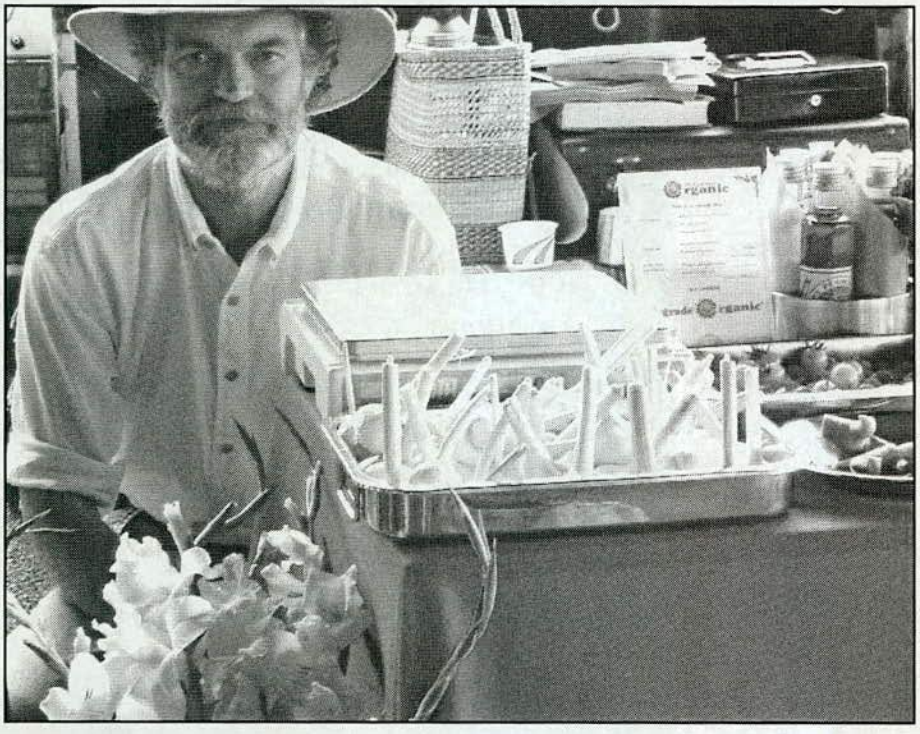
MOUNTAIN TOP FARM WALK

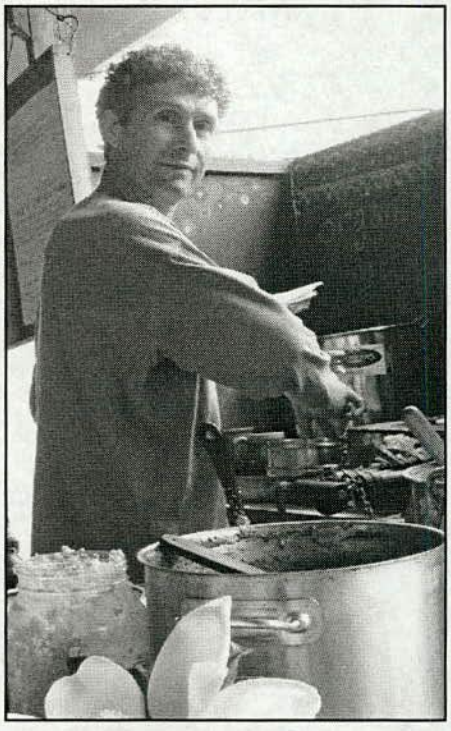
The farm walk series continues with a look at Elly and Rita Oort's - The Greengrowers - market gardens at Mountain Top Road, Mountain Top (featured in GO #54).
The walk will be on Sunday, 21st March starting at 10am. Elly and Rita have been farming here for 12 years and you will see a wide variety of established trees including coffee, bushfoods, citrus, olives, figs, Chinese raisin, delectable rose apples and much more. A feature of the farm is the chicken rotation system used in the plot where most of the vegetables are grown for market.
BYO lunch to eat overlooking lovely views.
In the case of wet weather, ring Elly by 8am on Sunday morning as the road can be a problem.
• Directions (from Lismore):
Take the Nimbin Road, turn left at Jiggi Rd, Goolmangar, and follow the road about 12kms. Don't turn off this road. Jiggi road turns into Mountain Top Road and starts winding up the mountain becoming a dirt road. The Greengrowers is at the top of the mountain on the right. Look for signs.
Phone: 6688 8307.

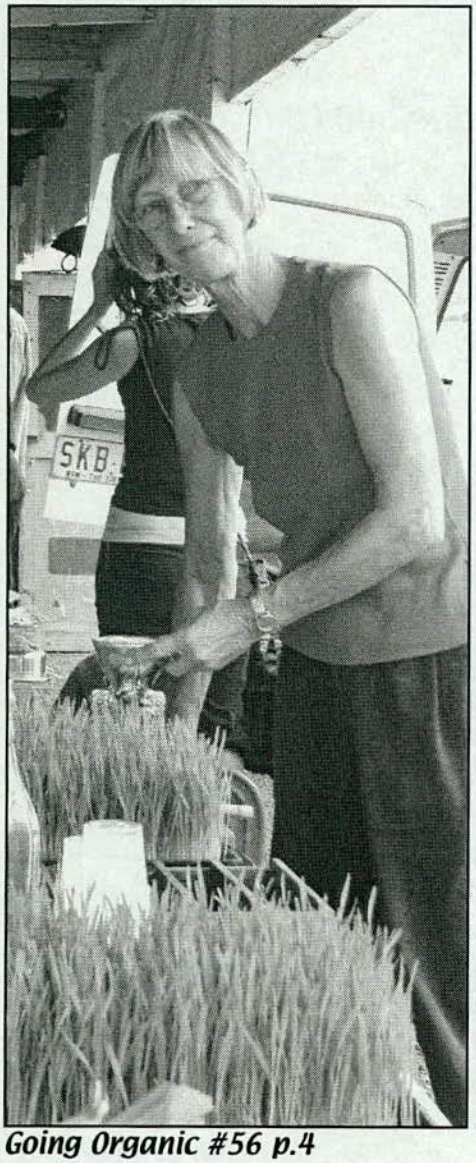
ORGANIC WORKSHOP FOR NORTH COAST

The BFA (Biological Farmers of Australia) is holding an organic industry workshop on April 18 in Lismore.
The workshop is one of a series being conducted around Australia by the BFA until July. The aims of the workshop are:
• to gain industry feedback on direction setting and priorities
• to outline changes and developments to regulations affecting the industry
• to have technical presentations on organic production and marketing
• to showcase individual businesses within the industry
• to showcase industry research on organics and seek feedback on priorities
• to enable effective networking within organics and with the BFA.
These workshops will be sponsored by marketers and input manufacturers. It is hoped the workshop will also include a catered organic meal and a field visit to local organic farm(s). For more details and venue location, contact:
Phone: 07 3350 5706
Email: a.monk@bigpond.com
Or register your interest to: media@bfa.com.au

RAINBOW MARKET BIRTHDAY BUZZ







It may seem like ancient history now, but it was only last December 9 that the Rainbow Region Organic Market (RROM) celebrated its fourth birthday. There was a fantastic turn out at the market's usual venue at the Lismore Showground, which was bursting with shoppers and stallholders.

The community of market goers had been invited to join the regular organic food sellers and set up a stand.
Local environment groups, social action groups, clothes makers, chefs, community gardeners and NSW Agriculture representatives were among the diverse group. The place was fairly buzzing.

NEWS

LOCAL NEWS

AWARD-WINNING RESTAURANT GOES ORGANIC

The Purchasing Manager for Sydney's award-winning Yoshii and Wasavie restaurants, Yoshifumi Tanimoto, visited the North Coast last year in search of organic produce.

He attended a number of farmers' markets to sample organic fruit and vegies with the aim of gradually introducing organic ingredients to the restaurants' menus.

Tanimoto said he intends dealing directly with growers in order to save on costs and so far has been in contact with 20 to 25 different farmers.

"We are expanding and society is demanding healthy produce from restaurants," he said.

Yoshii restaurant recently won 'Best Japanese Restaurant' in Australia. Yoshifumi Tanimoto can be contacted on: 02 9252 6011.

NATIONAL NEWS

HUNTER LOVINS IN OZ

Hunter Lovins - co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Institute, which works on issues linking energy, the environment and development - will be a keynote speaker at a major Australian environmental conference in April.

Lovins will speak at the 'A Just and Sustainable South Australia' conference in Adelaide on April 6 and 7.

With her husband Amory, Hunter has been a leading advocate of sustainable development for over 25 years and has co-authored nine books including Natural Capitalism. Also speaking at the conference will be Dr Tim Flannery and Peter Garrett. The conference aims to set out a vision for a sustainable South Australia.

For more details, phone:02 6281 6624;
Email: conference@conlog.com.au

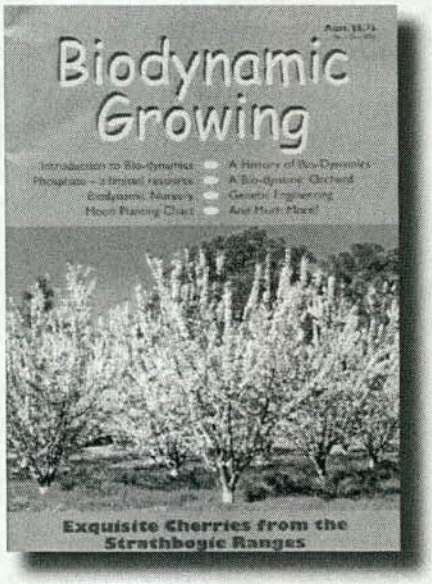
PERMACULTURE CONVERGENCE FOR 2005

Planning has begun for the Eighth Australian Permaculture Convergence to be held in Melbourne in April 2005. It is the major national gathering for the permaculture movement in Australia and a great venue to network. People or organisations wishing to run workshops or present talks should contact the organisers.

Contact: APC8, Permaculture Melbourne, PO Box 3079, Auburn VIC 3123. Email: pcmelb@vicnet.net.au

BIODYNAMIC MAGAZINE LAUNCHED

A new Australian magazine covering biodynamic (BD) farming and gardening has been launched in Victoria.



The magazine focuses on the Australian Demeter-standard method of BD. First-issue articles include a history of BD from an Australian perspective, and a series of Victorian-based farm profiles (Piano Hill Farm and Cheese Factory and Avonmore Estate's winery).

Contact: Biodynamic Growing, PO Box 479, Leongatha VIC 3953.
Email: bdgrowing@dcsi.net.au

PERMACULTURE COURSES ACCREDITED

Five nationally-recognised qualifications in permaculture will soon be available, following years of discussion and work by a dedicated team of permaculture teachers.

The nationally Accredited Permaculture Training (APT) will offer five qualifications: Certificates 1, 2, 3, 4 and Diploma. Certificate 1 is suitable for beginners from school age upwards, while the diploma is for experienced practitioners.

The APT will offer the first and only nationally accredited permaculture courses in Australia. The APT has been designed to recognise and build on current training in permaculture, including the Permaculture Design Course (PDC). People who have completed a PDC will receive significant credits towards the new qualifications.

APT provides a new opportunity to attract public funding and subsidy through programs such as Farmbis, NHT, Landcare, labour market programs, VET in schools, CDEP and Work for the Dole.

Qualifications can be achieved in two ways - by recognition of prior learning (RPL) for experienced

permaculturists; or through study at venues approved to deliver APT. APT is owned by the non-profit networking body Permaculture International Ltd (PIL) on behalf of the permaculture community. PIL has begun a series of regional and capital city Course Orientation Workshops. For more information, contact PIL or one of the reference group members (see below).

Permaculture teacher Virginia Solomon said of APT: "With the development of this new range of accredited qualifications, the richness and choice of colours in the education palette has vastly improved. Permaculture education has just come of age."

Another teacher, Janet Millington said the APT was a course designed and written by permaculturists, and would be constantly updated by the permaculture community.

"It will lead to increased credibility for our thinking and practices in this new century," she said.

• For more details, contact: Permaculture International, PO Box 219, Nimbin NSW 2480. Ph: 02 6689 1155.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

US STUDY SAYS GENETIC ENGINEERING LEADS TO MORE CHEMICALS

Greenpeace Australia reports that a new US study provides further evidence that herbicide regimes associated with genetically engineered (GE) plants are likely to cause environmental damage.

The study* by Dr Charles Benbrook into herbicide and pesticide use during the eight years GE crops have been grown in the US, found dramatic increases in the amounts of herbicides and pesticides used with herbicide-tolerant GE crops, particularly soy. It also concluded that there have been increases in weed resistance and shifts in the composition of weed communities as a result of GE. This follows a recent UK study that concluded that the herbicide regime required for GE canola caused significant environmental damage.

Greenpeace said the findings would put increased pressure on the Federal GE Regulator (OGTR) to improve the quality and rigour of assessments of GE in Australia.

The US study, which examined herbicide and pesticide use on soy, corn and cotton, found that:

"The pounds of herbicides required to achieve acceptable weed control is rising on most farms planting herbicide-tolerant varieties. As new weeds appear or as weeds become increasingly resistant to the herbicide that is required to be used with a particular GE plant variety, the amount of herbicide used increases and farmers resort to more toxic herbicides as well to overcome the increasing resistance.

As the report notes, reliance on a single herbicide as the primary, if not sole method for managing weeds on fields planted to HT [herbicide-tolerant] varieties, and the resulting, indeed inevitable ecological responses to such intense herbicide selection pressure, remains the primary factor that has led to the need to apply more herbicides per acre to achieve the same level of weed control."(p 4)

This study is particularly concerning for Australia in relation to herbicide-tolerant GE canola, according to Greenpeace GE campaigner Jeremy Tager.

"The Federal Regulator (OGTR), which has already approved one GE canola variety for commercial release and is likely to approve a similar application from Monsanto in the near future, has consistently claimed there is an absence of evidence of environmental harm associated with GE," Mr Tager said.

"Well, now there is evidence.

"This study and the recent studies in the UK provide a clear justification for both reviewing existing GE canola approvals and putting current applications on hold until this data can be confirmed.

"Based on this study, there can be little doubt that herbicide-tolerant GE varieties such as the GE canola already approved for commercial use in Australia will result in greater environmental damage in Australia than conventional herbicide regimes.

"It is absolutely extraordinary that no similar studies or assessments took place in Australia prior to the OGTR authorising unconditional release of herbicide-tolerant GE canola."

Greenpeace says the report is also bad news for Australia's farmers. The report concludes that:

"The efficacy of HT technology is now seriously threatened by weed shifts and resistance. Herbicide use and costs are bound to rise for the foreseeable future." (p. 6)

• Contact: Greenpeace GE Campaigner, Jeremy Tager, Ph: (07) 3892 7538; 0438 679 263.

• 1) Benbrook, C, Impacts of Genetically Engineered Crops on Pesticide Use in the United States: The First Eight Years, November 2003.

• Find the paper at: http://www.biotech-info.net/technicalpaper6.html

GE CANOLA GIVEN GO-AHEAD

The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator

(OGTR) has licensed Monsanto's herbicide-tolerant canola for release throughout Australia.
Only state government moratoriums are preventing the immediate release of the genetically engineered (GE) canola and pressure is already mounting on the NSW government to allow trials.
Bob Phelps, Director of the anti-GE group the GeneEthics Network, says key issues such as the increased use of toxic chemicals, contamination of GE-free supply chains, and lost market access here and abroad for Australian farmers were ignored by the OGTR in making its decision.
Now the companies wishing to trial GE canola in Australia are requesting that the farmers growing the GE crops be allowed to sell the product. It would seem under logical deduction that such a trial would then become not a trial, but a commercial operation. The whole issue is something akin to the hunting of whales for 'scientific' purposes.

MICHAEL MEACHER VISITS OZ

"When do we get a choice about whether we want to eat genetically modified oils? When do I get a choice about what I'm feeding my children?" asked one member of the audience at a packed public meeting last month on Growing Genetically Engineered Food in Australia. Michael Meacher, former UK Environment Minister, told the meeting that when the UK public were asked in a nationwide consultation process what they thought about GM crops, more than 80% said they didn't want them - which made it very hard for the UK government to ignore consumer concerns.

Michael Meacher

Mr Meacher was speaking in Sydney on a nationwide tour organised by Greenpeace to highlight the problems with Genetic Engineering and encourage people to keep fighting its introduction.
Of the Australian experience he said he was concerned about the lack of information available to the public.
"I'm amazed at the low standard of disclosure of your Gene Technology Regulator who has only published the results of their assessment of GM crop licences on their website, and not the complete raw data on which they based their assessment. In the UK, all the raw data is available on the website," he said.
Mr Meacher commissioned the world's largest ecological study comparing GE and non-GE crops. The results of the three-year government-funded study were released in October 2003 and found that herbicide-resistant GE canola fields had fewer native plants and insects than non-GE fields. This study has already resulted in GE canola being banned in many countries of Europe, and likely to be banned in the UK.
Now a backbencher, Meacher says this ground-breaking study did not go far enough in assessing the environmental risks of GE crops. Yet in Australia, GE canola has been approved for commercial release without adequate assessment. In February, Michael Meacher also gave a public talk 'in conversation' with US author Jeffrey Smith at Sydney's Valhalla Theatre in Glebe. They discussed the degree of collusion between the biotech industry and governments, which Meacher said "effectively shuts the public out and turns us into 'human guinea pigs' for genetically modified products". Go to the Greenpeace website for more.
Jeffrey Smith's book Seeds of Deception exposes industry and government lies about the safety of GE foods and presents evidence about serious health issues that have already arisen.
• Greenpeace: www.greenpeace.org.au

GLYPHOSATES BANNED IN DENMARK

Denmark has imposed widespread bans on the spraying of glyphosate-based herbicides on its fields and crops in response to new research showing they have been contaminating the country's ground water.
The ban came into effect last September following the release of data which found that glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup (tm) herbicide, has been sieving down through the soil and polluting ground water at levels five times above acceptable standards for drinking water.
According to the Third World Network Biosafety Information Service, the tests, done by the Denmark and Greenland Geological Research Institution (DGGRI), surprised researchers as it was previously believed that soil bacteria broke down the glyphosate before it reached the ground water. Denmark obtains much of its drinking water from groundwater.
"Danes should be able to put the coffee on in the morning without worrying about pesticides," Danish Environment Minister Hans Christian Schmidt was quoted as saying.
Cheminova, Syngenta and Monsanto, which manufacture or sell glyphosate, have put out a strong protest but the issue of pesticide use is set to ignite in Europe and further afield following the Danish move.
• ***This report courtesy of the Organic Gardener magazine.***

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

PRESERVING CROP DIVERSITY IN AFGHANISTAN

A report from the Seed Savers of Byron Bay

The call-to-prayer from several minarets resound around our walled courtyard. We are staying at the office of NICCO, the Japanese NGO hosting us in Herat, a 4000-year-old city to the west of the country.

Just stepping outside the security gate is fascinating. In the bustling streets is a timeless tableau of men in tiny mud brick shops beating at red-hot metal, carving doors and windows, weaving fine silk turbans and baking bread in underground wood-fired ovens. Protecting themselves from the dust stirred by the summer wind that is scheduled to finish any day, Afghani men wear flowing clothes and turbans made from five metres of silk while the women clothe themselves in chador cloaks and blue burquas.

Surrounding Herat are barren mountains and plains whose only vegetation is a range of low prickly bushes. The semi-desert sustains a people who tend massive herds of black goats and white fat-tailed sheep and live in low-profile mud villages. Ancient underground channels of up to 20 metres deep, called karez, join wells horizontally to a main karez that leads, still underground, to the villages on the plains.

Crops include ancient wheat, rock melons of many colours and shapes, alfalfa, apricots, grapes, pistachios and almonds.

We are now near the end of our intensive programme with NICCO and the Agriculture Faculty of Herat University on their collaborative projects to conserve biodiversity that include seed collection, a tree nursery, agroforestry plantations, kitchen gardens and the repair of irrigation channels.

Since our visit last December to train the lecturers and students, the University farm has acquired a glasshouse and a tree nursery and it has been planted with 1000 grapevines of five varieties, windbreak trees and in excess of 100,000 local fruit and nut trees; including pistachio, almond, apricot, mulberry, peach and walnut. The university requires its students to collect seeds and scion wood of the many local varieties of grapes, fruits, nuts and vegetables in their villages. Students have lessons in budding and grafting fruit trees in the nursery that NICCO is funding. Seed Savers passed on a small grant to the university for record keeping in their new seed bank and the labelling of all plants at the university farm. This is timely with the collection by the university of so many varieties of agricultural crops.

Men in a remote village in the mountains near the farm are collecting seeds from the remnant patches of natural forests that have survived Russian bombing, the Taliban and three years of drought. A wide range of pioneer species, medicinal herbs, trees and native fruits and berries will be collected.

They will be identified by the taxonomist at the university and propagated in the university's farm nursery.

The trees will then be transplanted into biological reserves alongside the irrigation channels above the village and in and around the village.

Jude Fanton of Seed Savers (back right) with women and children of the village of Kharja Sarbour where a rehabilitated channel will bring more water for growing gardens and trees.

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The trees produced by the NICCO nursery will also be replanted in household courtyards in Herat. Container gardens in local terracotta give comfort to women who are often confined to their homes.

Our visit coincided with that of representatives from the Slow Food Movement in Italy, which aims to preserve regional produce through helping local producers. Slow Food was there to film and report on the famous grapes of Herat.

Michel Fanton of Seed Savers is a juror for the Slow Food Biodiversity Award and this year had nominated a traditional Herati grape grower.There are over 100 local varieties famous in Afghanistan.

The method of growing grapes in this harsh climate is to plant them in two-metre deep trenches then train them up walls of about the same height. The vines are thus protected from the cold and hot winds. A charming atmosphere is created by the placement of many types of fruit trees, flowers and herbs near the grapes.

The attention Slow Food is giving to Herati grapes and sultanas will help to protect them from the competition from industrial produce.

Just west of Herat is the Iranian town of Masshad where numerous shops sell imported hybrids, chemical fertilisers, hormones, insecticides, herbicides and fungicides.

HOOD'S ORGANIC FERTILIZERS

ARE PROUD TO SAY THAT THEIR

BLOOD & BONE

IS NOW CERTIFIED ORGANIC BY BIOLOGICAL FARMERS OF AUSTRALIA (BFA)

ANALYSIS

6% Nitrogen (N) as Blood and Bone
6% Phosphorus (P) Ammonium Citrate soluble as Bone
1% Phosphorus (P) Ammonium Citrate insoluble as Bone
7% Phosphorus (P) total as Bone
14% Calcium (Ca) as Bone, 90% Fine 10% Coarse

BFA Certified No. A1208

AVAILABLE AT LEADING NURSERY AND PRODUCE AGENTS

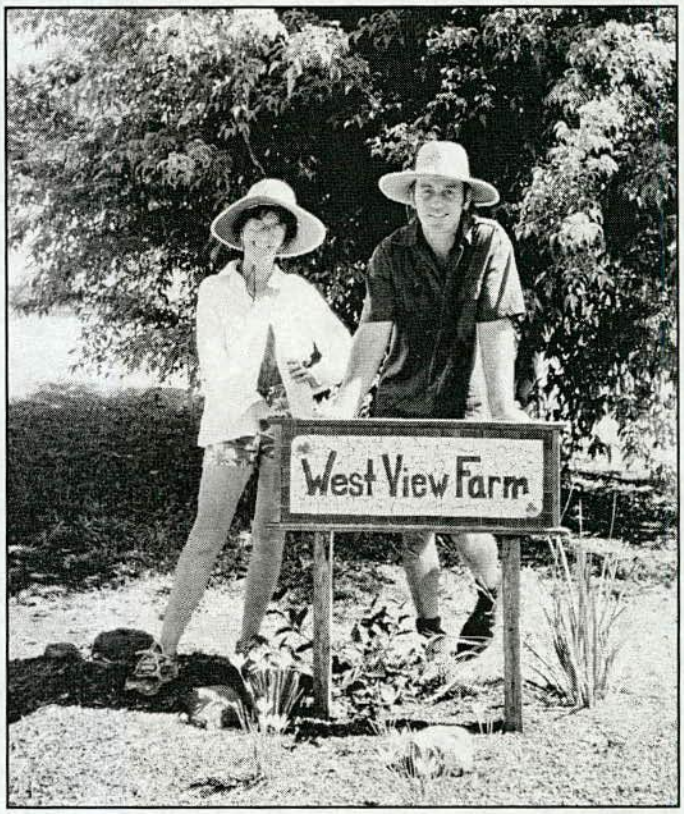
FARM PROFILE

THE VIEW FROM WEST VIEW

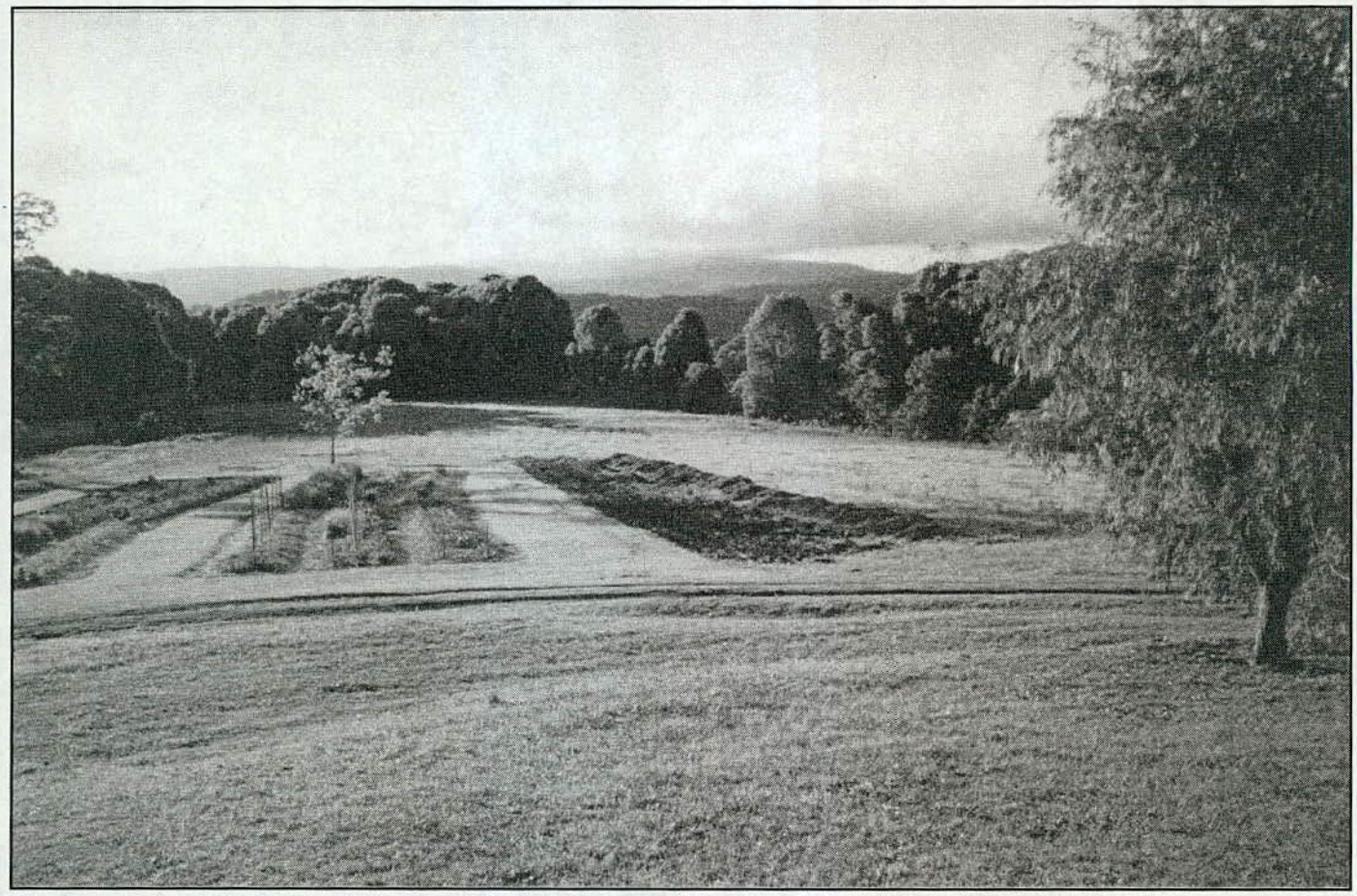
By Michael Maloney

A business that started with organic vegies has become a key supplier of organic seedlings in the Lismore-Byron area.

It is a Sunday morning and I'm heading off to Peter and Fran Neilson's West View Farm in Federal to find out about the couple's organic seedling and vegetable business.
I arrive half an hour early and just in time for breakfast - fresh orange juice, followed by Fran's homemade muesli with organic banana (grown by Frank Walker of Burringbar). The muesli is topped with LSA (a mix of crushed linseed, sunflower and almond). We finish with Fran's cumquat marmalade on toast and a pot of tea. The bread for the toast is courtesy of Faith Newham, a regular at the Byron Farmer's Market. Here is an example of localisation at work!



Fran and Peter Neilson at the entrance to West View.


The new bed on the right will be planted with Okra and Rosella to provide a windbreak in Summer.

Sitting on the back verandah you get a great view of Peats Mountain to the west. Peter tells me that the farm and adjoining lands have been identified as high conservation value in the recently completed Byron Shire Biodiversity Strategy.

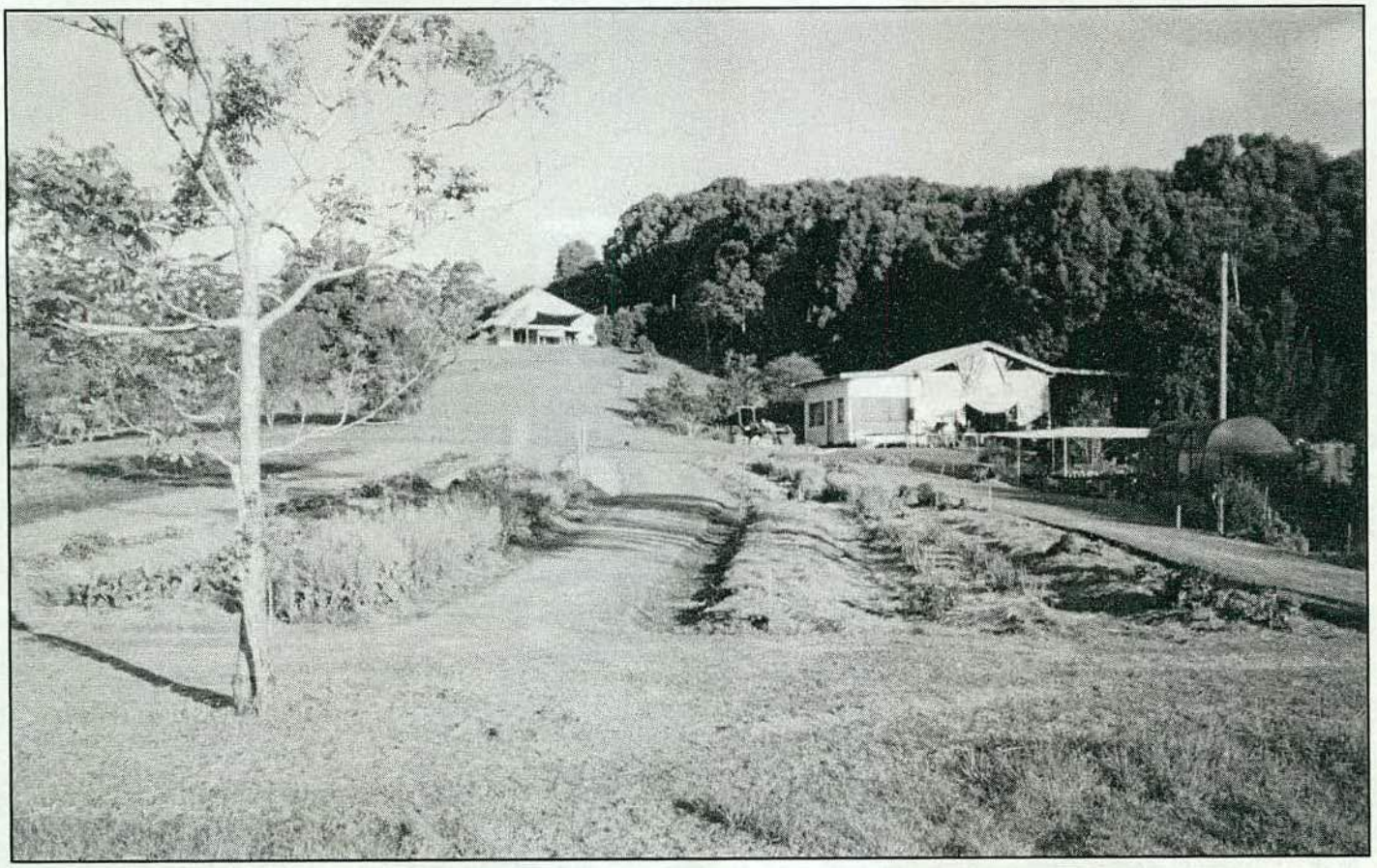
Over breakfast, I get an insight into why the Neilsons are doing what they are doing.

Fran grew up in the north of England and remembers helping her father grow food in the backyard of their council house. At seven, Fran was helping her dad plant gooseberries, rhubarb, potatoes and climbing beans. She would pick caterpillars off cabbages and squash bugs on tomatoes. Fran reckons her organic roots come from being a health freak (her words), her regime now includes walking five days a week, plus yoga.

Rainbow Chard looking delicious in the well mulched beds.

"Eating everything from our abundant garden is reward enough, although I'm a bit more relaxed about what I eat than I used to be," Fran says.

Peter's uncle and grandparents were sheep and wheat farmers in the mallee country near Swan Hill in Victoria. Peter would visit them on school holidays and do "work experience" as a farm hand. Peter says the district was strongly organic. His grandparents would rotate wheat, barley and oats and would always fallow a paddock every third year. They were averse to the use of chemicals and this



Looking back up the hill to the house and nursery.

Tall (*Davidsonia pruriens pruriens*) and short (*D pruriens jerseyana*) varieties of Davidson Plum grow side by side in the orchard.

attitude influenced Peter greatly. His mother, on the other hand, did floral displays for the Box Hill Horticultural Society. Peter would do designs on plates and often win prizes at local shows.

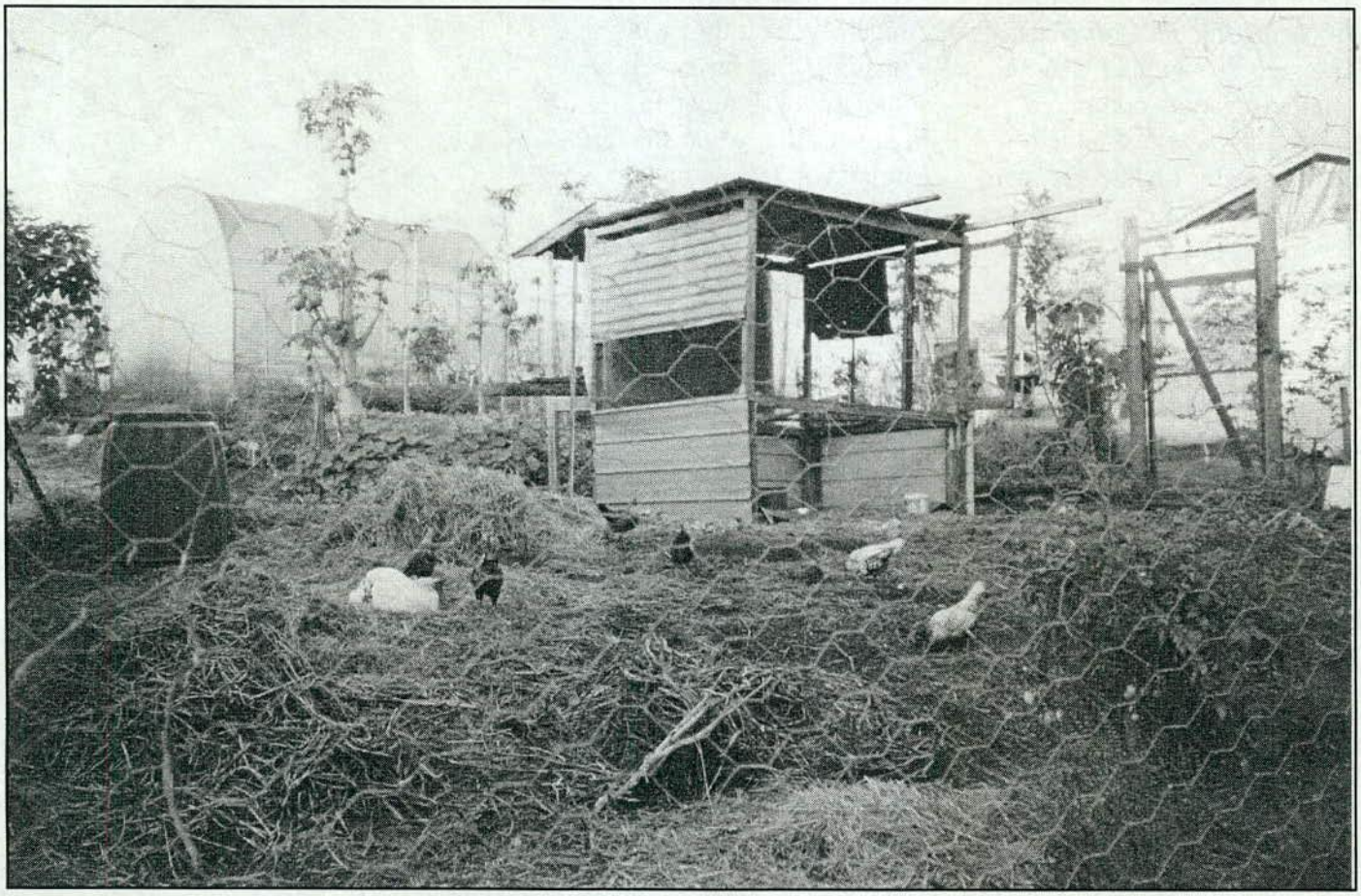
Peter and Fran bought their nine hectares (22 acres) at Federal in 1995. They built their house and moved in during 1997. The idea was to establish some trees and by the following year they had planted Davidson Plum, Riberry and Macadamia. They were always intending to grow vegetables, but the 'seedling idea' came later.

"Initially Peter and I started growing Asian greens and Daikon radish back in '98 and we would sell to a local organic shop. We were both working in Byron Bay at the time - me in retail and Peter at the Katia herb nursery."

Fran left her job in 2000 after nine

Fran at work in the seeding nursery

years in retail.
"I had outgrown the fashion industry," she said.
Peter followed in 2001, dropping outside work to concentrate on the farm.
"We were aware that there were no certified-organic seedlings being sold locally so we did a test and began selling seedlings at the Mullumbimby market. Then Eden@Byron, a large local nursery, began to place orders with us. We commenced selling at the Rainbow Region Organic Market (RROM) in Lismore in 2001."
The season dictates what seedlings are grown. Summer sees plants such as eggplant, basil, lettuce, okra, rosella, tomatoes and capsicums. Autumn will see broccoli, snow peas and English spinach begin to take over.
Fran says that conventional nurseries often sell some vegetables seedlings, such as broccoli, all year round, even if they are not suited to hot conditions. She says they are often not sun-hardened and when planted out, people wonder why they die.
As well as seedlings, the Neilsons grow a range of vegetables for sale at markets and to Santos wholefoods store in Mullumbimby. More and more their



The humble chook is treated in a manner befitting to its role at West View.

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www.enviroganics.com.au

focus is moving to the Byron market where sales are expanding. Fran says she enjoys the market experience.

"I enjoy the public, and positive feedback is really nice. Our regular customers are often enthusiastic gardeners and love to try the different seedlings with great results."

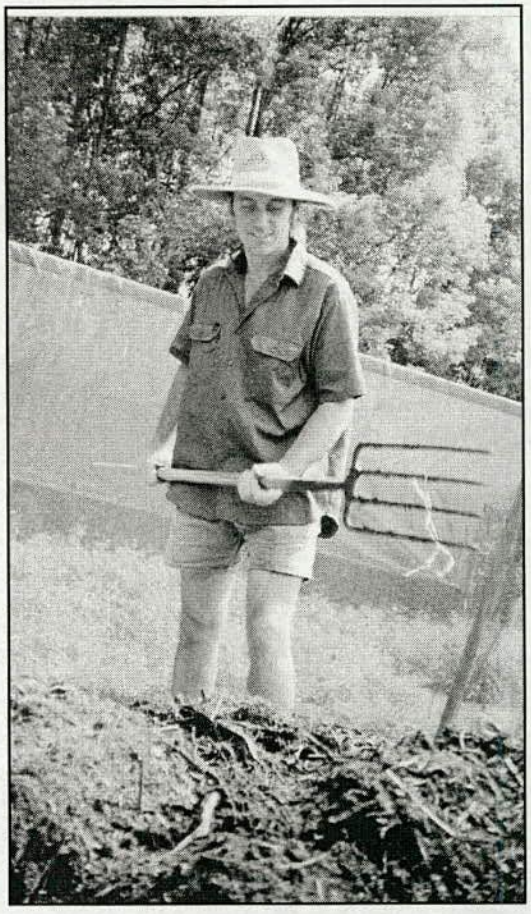
On the farm, Fran concentrates on seedlings while Peter does the more physical work like preparing the beds for planting. They are growing a lot more small crops now compared to'98, and have just added another water tank to get them through the August/September dry spell. As for the future, they would like to add more citrus trees to the farm.

The Neilsons make their own compost and run a worm farm that provides fertiliser for the gardens. The soil is red volcanic. Until a recent fox attack, chickens provided added manure. Repairs to the chicken coop are now being done before more birds are installed. Certified-organic mulch from the region is brought in where necessary.

The Neilsons' basic philosophy stems from the hippy awareness of the 1970s. Peter says: "What we do is absolutely ethical. We couldn't work in a business that promoted and sold alcohol or tobacco."

Fran says that when she left England at 25, she had no idea at the time that she would become an organic producer, smelling Dynamic Lifter instead of sweet roses.

"I know Buddha would approve," she says.



Peter takes a turn in the compost heap.

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AFFAIRS OF TROPO

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Items on the agenda at the December committee meeting included planning for upcoming events and the tightening of systems to ensure the smooth running of the organisation.

The membership database is now being maintained by the new membership secretary, Michael Maloney, so if your contact details have changed, or will soon change, please get in touch with Michael so he can ensure the database is up to date. Many thanks to Julieanne Harris for keeping the database running so well and coordinating the Going Organic mailout over the past five years.

The TROPO committee also has nominated Maureen Pederson as the new public officer of the organisation.

PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING

• TROPO is putting together a display kit to take to the Rainbow Region Organic Market and to various events in order to distribute information about TROPO and about the organic industry. We are looking for someone to look after the table on Tuesday mornings at the RROM market. Contact Alan Roberts if you would like to be involved on: 6663 5224.

• Moves are afoot to register a new domain name for the TROPO website with the aim of becoming more easily located on the web and having increased exposure.

• The committee is sourcing more advertising for Going Organic to increase revenue and to cover the increasing costs of running the magazine. Rates are very affordable and you will reach a dedicated organic audience. If anyone would like to advertise in Going Organic, please contact Hogan Gleeson on: 6628 2391.

NEW OFFICE SPACE FOR TROPO

Tropo has accepted the offer of cheap office space in the Big Scrub Environment Centre building in Keen Street, Lismore. The office space will provide a central spot to keep all Tropo files and its library. It will also allow networking with the Big Scrub and other groups and provide a possible meeting space as well as community contact point. It was observed by committee members when deciding to take the space that it would cost the equivalent of 20 new memberships. It was agreed to trial the arrangement for one year and seek to boost membership.

AGM PLANNING - GET INVOLVED

We are in the process of planning the AGM which will be held in August. Following discussion of various ideas for the evening, the committee voted to have as the theme for the AGM, 'Seeds and Propagation Materials in Organic Farming'. If you have any ideas for specific speakers and presentations for the evening, please talk to someone on the committee or come along to a meeting and get involved.

ALL WELCOME

All TROPO members are invited to attend committee meetings which are held on the second Thursday of each month at 6.30pm. Please contact a committee member (see back cover) to confirm location.

All members of the public interested or involved in organic gardening, farming, and food - and willing to be immediately forced into slavery - are welcome to become TROPO members (see membership form on page 23).

Seriously, even if you are not a member but are just interested in finding out more about organics on the North Coast, or want to help see it spread, call a committee member.

Northern Rivers Organic Herbs and Garlic

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PEOPLE OF TROPO

A SPROUTING FAMILY

By Sue Vader

The Boomsma family of Coffee Camp are living, breathing, eating - and selling - sunflower sprouts.

When Ken and Carol Boomsma finally took the plunge and bought their neighbours' organic sunflower sprout business two years ago, they got off to a chilly start.
It turned out to be a long, cold winter on their Coffee Camp property that tested their abilities as novice sprout growers. Oh, and their fourth child had just been born.
"It was a nightmare!" Carol said. "We were asking ourselves what on Earth we'd done."

"We believe growing the sprouts in soil gives the greens more flavour and, even more importantly, life force."

The unusually cold weather lengthened the growing cycle for the fragile sprouts to 22 days (from the usual six in summer), creating all sorts of problems.
"If there's any sort of change in the weather, you get problems," Carol said.
It's a very different story now that they've got a couple of years' experience under the belt - for one thing, putting the trays up on raised, contained shelves in winter to protect against the cold.
It's been a learning curve, but one they've been happy to make. Even though it's a hands-on, labour-intensive, seven-days-a-week business, they are both satisfied with

Carol Boomsma with a bunch of her own sprouts - Samantha, Jacob, Zachary and Elias - in the igloo.

their lifestyle choice. Ken was a high school maths teacher and felt he needed a change, and because Carol is able to dovetail her mothering role into her sprouting activities, she finds the lifestyle very accommodating. And their kids are accommodating too, helping out with the sprout business.
"Samantha (12) prefers inside work like labelling and filling the bags, and entertaining her younger brothers, while Jacob (9) gets really involved emptying and filling the trays," Carols said.
"Zachary (4) just potters around and entertains two-year-old Elias, who sits and eats the sprouts! They're all quite patient, so it works well."
Carol has recently started selling their BFA-certified sunflower sprouts at the Lismore organic market on Tuesdays as a promotional venture - and a great social occasion.

"We like to deliver them ourselves so we can monitor supply and demand - and freshness."

"I like getting the feedback and the market has also been good for networking - we've picked up another wholesaler already. Some people are surprised when they hear that we grow the sprouts in soil (in trays), rather than hydroponically, but once we explain, they feel really good about it. We believe growing the sprouts in soil gives the greens more flavour and, even more importantly, life force."

SPROUTS OR GREENS?

During the sprouting process, many dynamic changes take place. Enzyme levels increase, seed fats are converted to essential fatty acids, carbohydrates and proteins are converted into essential amino acids and sugars, and vitamin levels increase substantially.
So what is the difference between sprouts and greens?
"Sprouts are hulled seeds that have been soaked and sprouted for a day or so. Greens are the baby plants that result when unhulled seeds are grown in soil, generally for about a week. So, technically,

Carol gets ready to wheel out the latest crop for local delivery.

we are selling sunflower greens but, because consumers know them as sprouts, we decided to stick with calling them sprouts. Friends of ours, Helen and Greg, did all the hard work 16 years ago when they actually started the whole business, nutting out market awareness - of which there was very little - and how to raise it. People recognized sprouts - so sprouts it is."

Most people these days would have experienced the taste sensation of sunflower greens. These greens are delicious, nutty and sweet.

They are used in salads and sandwiches, while some people like to juice them and drink straight or mix with carrot juice.

GETTING SPROUTED

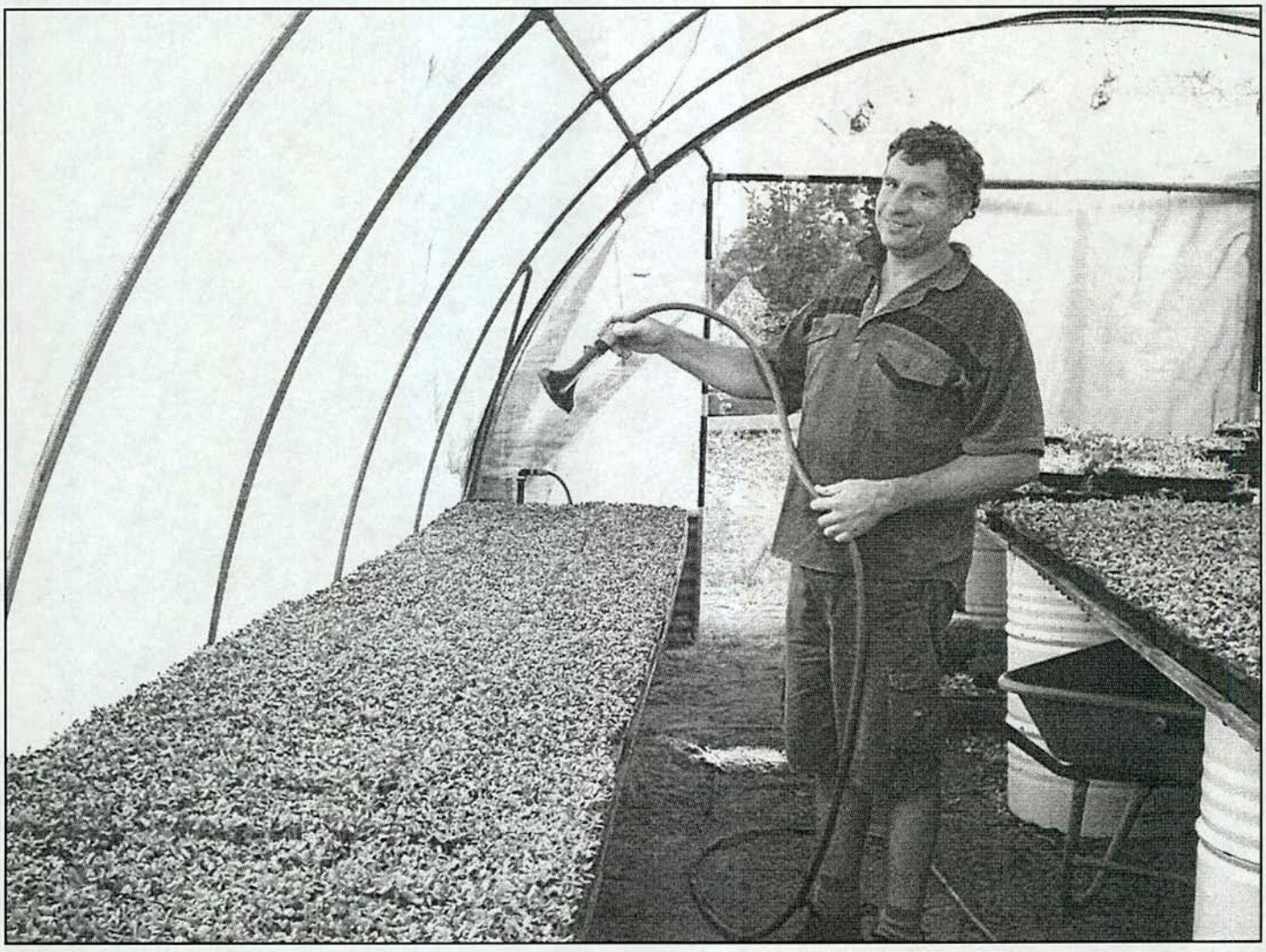
The sunflower seeds are soaked for 8-12 hours. They then go on to 5cm (2") of organic soil in plastic trays and are covered with washed river sand - which has been tested to make sure there are no contaminants. They are grown in the three steel-framed plastic igloos. Watering is done with hand-held hoses. Ken and Carol are lucky to have access to bore water if rainwater gets low.

Only two igloos are needed in summer because of the short growing cycle. The igloos can get very hot in summer but conditions can be manipulated by adding or removing layers of shade cloth.

"It's not just hands-on, it's eyes-on as well," Carol said.

"We have to check them a lot and baby them along. In the heat of summer they have two layers of shade cloth to protect them. Fortunately the igloos are only 15 metres long, so it's quite manageable to cover and uncover them."

The harvesting process starts when the sprouts are cut with a knife at tray level, then washed. After that, they're screened to separate any seeds still attached, and washed again. Then they go into a long trough filled with water for their final wash and to sort out any roots, seeds or sub-standard sprouts. They are then refrigerated, taken out for packing, and returned to the fridges. The three washings of the harvested sprouts are done with rainwater.



Ken Boomsma keeps the sprouts in top condition with regular watering.

HEALTH BOOSTERS

Sunflower greens are high in B vitamins which help the body digest carbohydrates, promote resistance to infection and aid the functioning of the nervous system, bolstering it against stress. They are also a rich in vitamin E and help heart function.

KEEPING IT LOCAL

The Boomsmas are not interested in sending their sprouts out of the region or to the cities for sale.

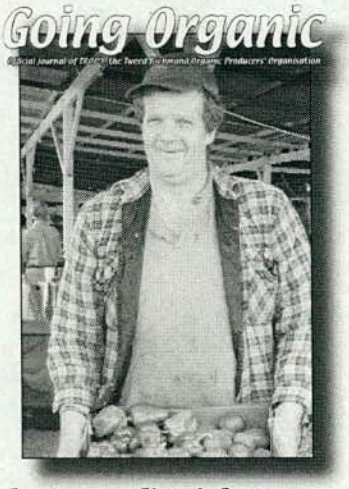
" We like to deliver them ourselves so we can monitor supply and demand - and freshness. Freshness is paramount with sprouts. We deliver daily to Lismore and every second day to Nimbin so people are always getting fresh product."

This meticulous attitude to freshness and constancy of supply mean that the customer doesn't end up throwing out half an unused bag of brown, jaded sprouts.

"We're harvesting every two days and in between times planting and working with the trays. But I think we'll do it for a long time. We might change our scale of production - either upwards or downwards. We might even get huge - who knows?" Carol says.

• ***For more info on Organic Sunflower Sprouts, phone Ken or Carol Boomsma on: 02 6689 9348; Email cboom@nnsw.quik.com.au***

A GREAT TIME TO ADVERTISE IN



With a new editorial team, fresh articles and a readership from the Qld Border to Coffs Harbour, advertising in Going Organic is cheap and effective. $110 f/p, $50 h/p, $25 q/p, plus 20% discount for four issues. Contact Hogan Gleeson on: Phone: 02 6628 2391

Extra igloos are needed to maintain regular supplies during slower growth in the cooler months.

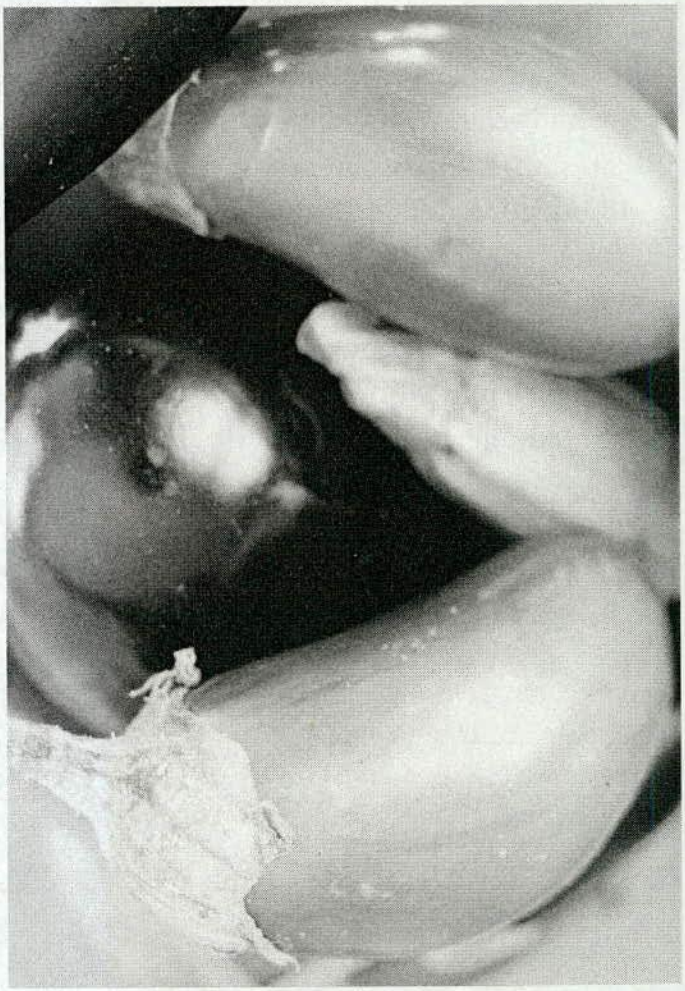
AUBERGINE - A BENIGN GLOBALISER

By Elly Oort
The Greengrowers, Georgica

If you have bought the small white eggplants available at North Coast organic markets, you'll have a fair idea of why these versatile fruits are called eggplants. Methinks they will soon be sold by the dozen, neatly packed in egg cartons.
We tend to think that all Solanaceae originated in the New World, but the aubergine (Solanum melongena), like the gypsy, started its benign form of globalisation in India.
Cultivating aubergines in a sub-tropical climate like the North Coast's is relatively straightforward. Like most annual food crops, they prefer a rich, well-drained soil and an open sunny position.
At our farm,'Mountain Top', we give them plenty of compost to muck about in, and once they're well watered we mulch with straw, or whatever form of coarse, non-matting organic material there is on hand.
Since we have expanded the worm farm there's a plentiful supply of this rich nutrient; worm liquid is applied at planting time to help the seedlings settle into their new abode. We treat them as annuals, but they can be successfully grown for another year provided they're in a frost-free position.
My personal favourite would have to be Pink Tongue. Apart from its luscious shade of pink, it has the shape of a sausage, making it ideal for cutting into uniform-sized slices. It's never bitter and lasts a good few days after picking.
We're all familiar with the large, shiny purple fruits for which recipes abound, but try finding and using the white, red and yellow varieties as well as the green, pea-sized Thai eggplants which give a deliciously tangy, bitter crunch when added to curries.

GET COOOKING

Recipes using eggplants are plentiful. Mediterranean diets have embraced them much as they have that other well known member of the Solanum family, the tomato. Greek, Italian and North African cuisines are unthinkable without them.
In her New Book of Middle Eastern Food, Claudia



Roden offers more than 40 recipes, while explaining that most zucchini recipes are also perfectly adaptable to eggplants.
Although the nutritional value isn't great, since it consists mainly of water, the unique flavour and versatility of this pretty fruit has established it as a firm summer favourite. It is a good source of vitamin C and contains potassium, niacin and iron.
Aubergine, eggplant, melanzana; under the last name it is available as a delectable ready-to-eat treat from the local Abruzzi Organics at the Tuesday organic market in Lismore, but it was once known in ancient India by the curious name of 'bong'.
For me, the very best way to use aubergine (though moussaka, ratatouille and babaganoush all make regular appearances at my dinner table), is in the Sicilian classic, caponata. Once made, it's one of those dishes that only gets better as days progress, and all you have to do is make sure the fridge is turned on. Eat it cold with either a leafy salad, a slice of good sourdough, some steamy pasta, or boiled waxy spuds. Eat it, and try and stop in time to have some left over for tomorrow. This is what you do:

CAPONATA INGREDIENTS

1 kg purple eggplants, diced
1 bunch of celery, chopped
Olive oil
1 sliced onion
50g tomato paste
50g pitted olives
2 tablespoons capers
4 teaspoons sugar
Pepper & salt
1 1/4 cup red wine vinegar

METHOD

1. Fry the celery in the oil in a good size pan, add the onion and sauté until golden.
2. Dilute tomato paste in a little water, add to the pan with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Cook for 15 minutes on moderate heat.
3. Stir in the sugar, vinegar, capers, olives and eggplant. Simmer for another 10 minutes.
4. Adjust seasoning and leave to cool.

• Note: if you're worried about any bitterness (especially with older eggplant), slice the raw eggplant, sprinkle with salt, leave for an hour. Rinse and dry.

Apples, bananas, cherries, dandelion, endive, figs, herbs, hummus, soya beans, tea, soap, macadamias, garlic, chillies, lemon grass, pasta, cauliflowers, roses, broccoli, peas, rocket, lettuce, bok choy, avocados, tomatoes, herbal extracts, massage oils, potatoes, carrots, cheese, jams, sauces, eggs, honey and more ....

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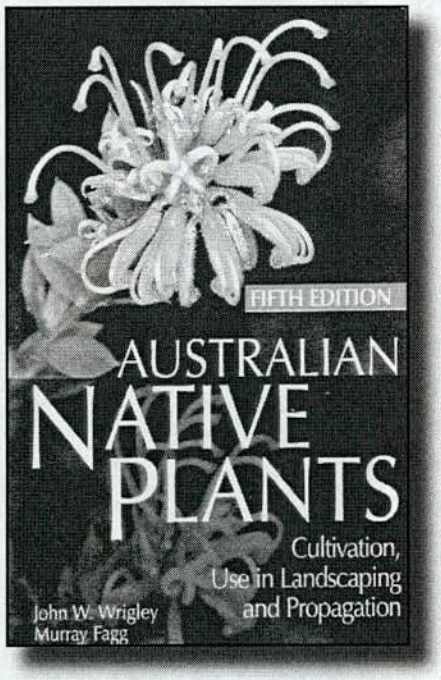
REVIEWS

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS (5TH EDITION)

By John W Wrigley & Murray Fagg
New Holland, 2003
Hard cover, 696 pages, $99.95

This book was first published in 1979 and now contains a wealth of updated information, including fresh layout, over 1000 colour photographs, 268 new plant descriptions and new easy-to-recognise symbols. Plant names have also been completely revised.
Australian Native Plants is an excellent guide to the native plants of Australia, and at nearly 700 pages, among the most comprehensive available. It would be an indispensable reference work for landscapers and professional horticulturists, or anyone seriously interested in natives.



There are 550 pages of plant profiles, many illustrated or photographed, and each with a series of symbols summarising characteristics, growth habits and needs, design potential and appropriate climatic region. There are also chapters on collecting material, propagation, pests and diseases, landscaping, and commercial uses.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE (2ND EDITION)

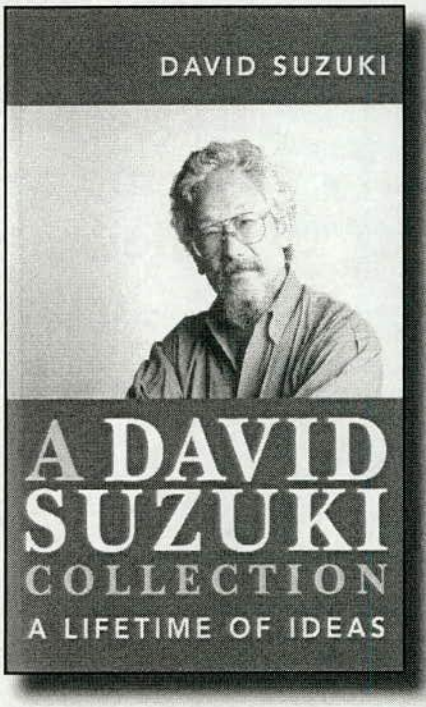
By John Mason
Landlinks Press, 2003
Soft cover, 204 pages, $49.95

This is a well presented and practical guide to the methods of sustainable agriculture which covers a wide range of topics. Soils, water management, pest and disease control, and natural weed management are included. Also, the management of crops and pastures, tree plantings and windbreaks. There is also a chapter on managing animals in a sustainable way.
Natural farming, permaculture, organic farming and Biodynamics are described. There are also good colour illustrations and tables.
This book is a straightforward introduction to sustainable farming but those seriously interested in getting started will need to seek out much more in depth advice.
• Availabe from: CSIRO Publishing. Ph: 03 9662 7666. Email: publishing.sales@csiro.au

A DAVID SUZUKI COLLECTION

By David Suzuki
Allen & Unwin, 2003
Soft cover, 388 pages, $29.95

This collection draws from four decades worth of the published and unpublished writings of renowned environmentalist and scientist David Suzuki.
In incisive and typically convincing style, Suzuki reveals his broad ranging concerns for the future of the planet, as well as highlighting the initiatives that are making a positive impact on the environment.



Suzuki combines poetry, philosophy and science to express his world view.
Many of the essays include an 'update' providing new information, sometimes encouraging, sometimes sobering, on the fate of natural areas and organisms or our changing perceptions. Ethics, economics and politics, and the big topics of today, such as global warming and genetic engineering, are covered.

GET INTO ORGANICS - JOIN TROPO NOW

TROPO Membership Form

To join the Tweed Richmond Organic Producers' Organisation (ABN: 43 805 045 275), fill out the following form and send cheque or money order for $28 to: TROPO, PO Box 5076, East Lismore NSW 2480. Make cheques or money orders payable to 'TROPO'.

Name

Address

Town

Postcode

Phone (bh) Phone (ah)

Fax Email

Occupation

Interests

Organic certification type
Total land area (ha)
Producing now (ha)
To be developed (ha)

Would you like to be included in a list of members available to other members? Yes / No

Can you help in TROPO organisational activities? Yes / No

Skills to share

Information/experience wanted

Signature (below) Date

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GET IN TOUCH WITH TROPO

THE TROPO COMMITTEE FOR 2004

Those listed below generally give a lot of time to TROPO, and make their phone numbers available for contact by members and others interested in organics. Please remember all have ongoing commitments to their families, farms or jobs. Phone after 8.30am and before 8.30pm. All phone numbers below have the prefix (02).

Rod Bruin 6679 2012 bruin@norex.com.au
Nadine Miller 6622 2636 nadinemiller70@hotmail.com
Maureen Pedersen 6636 4307
Russell Scott 6689 1668 russali2002@yahoo.co.uk
Hogan Gleeson 6628 2391 hogan21@bigpond.com
Dave Forrest 6688 4346 (ah) organicforrest@hotmail.com
David Roby 6628 1084 robyalst@nrg.com.au
Alan Roberts 6663 5224 alan_roberts@ozemail.com.au
Michael Maloney 6685 0192 michael@locall.aunz.com
Peter Gibson 6621 2649 futurevision@gcom.net.au
Greg Sparks (new contact details next issue)

SPECIAL INTEREST CONTACTS

Alternative Technology - Paul Jessop - Ph: 6621 2465
Avocados - David Roby - Ph: 6628 1084
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[illegible] Brad Moulton - Ph: 6688 8120
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Macadamias/Custard apples - Bruce Yaldwyn - Ph: 6628 3127
Permaculture - Hogan Gleeson - Ph: 6628 2391
Poultry - Angela & Robert Griffiths - Ph: 6636 2221
Organic Foods - Russell Scott - Ph: 6689 1668
Small Crops/Sheep - Hogan Gleeson - Ph: 6628 2391

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Ph: 6622 8780
Email: hummingwords@ozemail.com.au

• Advertising: Hogan Gleeson
Ph: 6628 2391 Email: hogan21@bigpond.com

• Contributions welcome!
Please contact the editor with story ideas before beginning articles.

WINTER 2004 CONTRIBUTIONS DUE: APRIL 5.

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