

ON THE FARM - THE GOOD DIRT

AUGUST EDITION

HEALTHY LAND, HEALTHY CATTLE

Moving into a certified organic enterprise "... was the best thing we ever did," claim Euroa organic beef farmers Nev and Carol Bredden. Their 184 hectare property supplies young cattle to a butcher in Prahran and the Breddens are enthusiastic about the improvement in their soil, pasture health and productivity since they moved into organic farming.

Organic farming begins with the soil fertility, soil structure and biological activity which build healthy plants, then healthy animals and ultimately healthy people. Good nutrition, husbandry and animal welfare, which follow from attention to the soil, are cornerstones of organic farming.

Nev and Carol began farming at Creightons Creek near Euroa with an Angus herd in 1980. Having a 'green thumb' Nev learnt about growing herbs organically in 1995. He loved this sideline but in the drought years the workload of keeping beef and herb enterprises going proved difficult. As reward for their good work another door opened in place of the herbs. Organic retailers encouraged the couple to sell them their beef, and in 2004 the whole farm achieved organic certification. They have 110 breeders and spring and autumn calving

gives them a continuous supply of young cattle for the butcher.

A crucial part of maintaining organic status is to have regular tests which monitor the conditions of the soil. In 2000 the Bredden's soil test showed a phosphorous level of 43.8 parts per million (ppm). By 2012 the phosphorous



Nev and Carol Bredden monitoring organic fertiliser in the 'burping barrel'.

level had risen to 70.6ppm. Calcium levels rose in the same period from 104.6 to 434ppm. Nev keeps careful records and can trace the effect of inputs in his soil and cattle production over his years of farming.

Superphosphate is not used on organic farms. Instead rock phosphate, lime, dolomite and gypsum work to correct most soil based deficiencies. Nev sprays liquid fertilizer 'home brew' which he creates from kelp, fish emulsion, worm juice, molasses and minerals. Yeast is added and the mix goes into a sealed container which Nev calls the 'burping barrel'.

The result of fertiliser inputs and careful grazing management is plain to see in the paddocks. Formerly there were bare patches, now pasture covers these. Rotational grazing, promoted in organic farming, and direct drilling of seed supports improved pasture. There is a mixture of clover, annual rye grass, Microlaena and wallaby grass. "I don't want a monoculture. The more variety out there the better," says Nev.

The health of the herd means there are very few problems with the cattle. Worms are dealt with using a kelp and apple cider drench and lice are unknown on the property. While problems are few, Nev emphasises how important it is to anticipate difficulties and deal with them early.

Indicators of healthy soils are clear when you get down on hands and knees claims Nev. "I can go out and part the dry grass and see the worm casts on top of the ground. There is soft soil that's friable, so I know that I must be doing something right."

WHAT'S ON

Healthy Soils – Healthy Food

28th Sep

1.00pm-4.00pm

Sonia Sharkey 5734 6312

Swg_landcare@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au

West Gippsland CMA Regional Soil Forum

3rd Nov

11th October

www.wgcma.vic.gov.au

Soil recovery after fire

Details to be finalised

10.30am-1.00pm

Sonia Sharkey 5734 6312

Swg_landcare@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au

Soil and sustainable farm practice demonstrations and trials to improve soil health can be supported through the Goulburn Broken CMA's Beyond SoilCare project with funding through the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country Program. For details on the Goulburn Broken CMA Soil Health Action Plan visit www.gbcma.vic.gov.au.

FURTHER INFO

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