

Lizzie says that anecdotal evidence suggests that consumer confidence is enhanced because of the organic certification and this has a very positive marketing effect, especially noticed with the success of the 1kg Retail Pack.

Figure 59: Harvesting is carried out by Sea Bounty's fleet of fishing vessels: specially designed gear is used to haul the ropes aboard

CASE STUDY: GIPPSLAND DAIRIES

At a time when many dairies are closing, Scott and Suzanne Wightman have expanded their organic dairy enterprise in Leongatha in Victoria's Gippsland. The average annual rainfall is 1016 mm. Scott explains that the basic reason for their successful production is their *focus on soil*. This doesn't mean that they focused on purchasing properties with excellent soil but rather that they set about *understanding and improving* the soil they had. Scott notes that other factors are important for successful production but these will have little effect if the soil structure and fertility is not improved and maintained. The farm has now been certified A Grade with ACO (Australian Certified Organic) for four years.

The importance of the soil. The Wightmans have their soil regularly tested by an independent soil consultant and they use additives as recommended: lime is added at one tonne per hectare and rock phosphate has been added for slow release of phosphorus, composted poultry and pig manure is bought-in, they have a mulcher (mower) which they use to mow behind the cows, mainly in spring. They also use an aerator on the pasture after the cows have grazed on it; the spike is about 15 cm deep and is used mainly to stimulate the release of nitrogen by aerobic nitrogen-fixing bacteria. Ten years ago (when they bought the farm) potassium, nitrogen and phosphorus levels were all too low, but they have now improved. The most important ingredient is adding soil biology, which is the main activator for turning soil into humus. Humus is the most important structure within the soil. It has the ability to hold water and nutrients and release it to the plants as they require it.

When the Wightmans bought the neighbouring farm they were able to improve the soil to very productive levels within three years. There was at first a stark contrast between their property and the new one: the neighbouring property had compacted soils, shallow grass roots, no earthworms and low value grasses such as bent grass. Scott observed that it took longer to rejuvenate the heavy grey soils whereas the red soils responded more quickly.

Figure 60: Scott and Suzanne show the improved soil; note the crumbly structure and lack of compaction in the inset



Livestock health. Scott and Suzanne ran beef cattle before they changed to dairying and they noticed that the cattle had problems with milk fever (for example 80 per cent of calving cows had milk fever) and grass tetany; a magnesium supplement fixed the problem but Scott wanted to find and address the cause of the problem. He changed the balance of the soil as described above and cattle health improved dramatically.

Scott explains that the dairy herd needed some homeopathic preparations in the transition stage (from conventional to organic) but now it is rare to have any health problems at all.

Water. There are good springs and a large dam on the property to supply water to troughs in all 54 paddocks. Water from the effluent pond at the dairy is irrigated back onto the pastures and crops.

Figure 61: Silage stored under cover and above the ground. Shelterbelt in the background.



Crops grown include a mix of chicory, rape and millet. Pastures include rye grass and white clovers. However, the plan is to have more diversity in the crops and pastures and to have a sufficient store of organic hay and silage to supplement grazing.

Pests. The pastures and crops have had no problems with pests whereas others in the district have had problems, especially with the cabbage white butterfly and cockchafer insects. Scott thinks that the humus levels in the soil promote moisture storage and high sugar content in plant leaves, and these conditions deter pests and strengthen the plants.

Labour. Full-time and casual labour is hired for milking and other farm work.

Tree planting. Scott and Suzanne undertook a major tree planting program on the property. They have planted thousands of native trees: blue gums, mountain ash, wattles, *Melaleuca ericifolia* and dogwood. The plantations combat slips, filter swampy areas and form windbreaks; the latter protect both the herd and the pastures. The family won the primary producer Award for South Gippsland Landcare and was consequently a finalist for the Victorian Landcare Award.

Markets. Scott is a Director and was Founding Director of Organic Dairy Farmers Co-operative. The group market organic milk to major processors so that the organic milk and cheese products are sold to wholesalers and supermarkets in Victoria and New South Wales. Most dairy beef is sold on the conventional market but sold organically whenever there is a market possibility.

CASE STUDY: TURKEY

Figure 62: Matthew Jamieson with a free range organic turkey

Matthew Jamieson produces *Sunforest* organic turkeys on the red soil plateau at Bangalow above Byron Bay in northern New South Wales. He has one full-time employee. There are usually 1500 birds on the farm and they are slaughtered and then frozen at 13 to 20 weeks of age at a certified abattoir at nearby Alstonville. The poultry is then sold to a variety of shops in Sydney and Queensland that market organic meat and poultry. Some poultry is sold to people who send their orders directly to the farm and Matthew also attends local growers' markets.

Day old turkey chicks are purchased, usually in batches of 300 to 500 chicks but sometimes in a relatively small batch of 150 chicks. The chicks are kept in a *brood room* for three weeks. The young chicks need warmth and the initial brood room temperature of 37°C is gradually brought down to 25°C by opening the windows wider and for longer periods each day until the chicks are ready for normal outdoor temperatures. Gas and electricity provide the warmth. It is essential to keep the door of the brood room closed, not only to maintain the warmth but also to keep predator birds out.

The brood room is thoroughly cleaned and prepared for each new batch. Each batch has litter of clean dry sawdust or wood shavings (editors note – it is essential that sawdust and shavings are from non-treated timber) and is provided with organically certified feed starter