

AGRIolutions NEWS

dedicated to seeking and sharing natural answers for and with farmers

Welcome to this first newsletter from AgriSolutions. It has been a while in the making even though a lot has been achieved since the last one some 3 years ago under the Natrakelp umbrella. This newsletter is not just to promote seaweed, kelp and fish products but to support growers throughout Gippsland with ideas and innovations.

We have all been affected by the introduction of the GST, deregulation of the dairy industry, the usual economic pressures of running a farm business and the pressures bought to bear by the government in relation to the worsening environment and reduction of services in rural regions. It is in this context that a bright light is shining on the horizon in the realm of organic agriculture in Gippsland.

Much is currently happening in Gippsland agriculture, particularly in relation to the State Government's *Naturally Victoria* initiative, to give us hope for the future. This program embraces sustainable practices and is especially relevant to organic agriculture.

Gippsland is widely known as a leading region for organic agriculture. For example, Gippsland Organic Livestock is up and running with an elected committee in place and a budget of almost \$50,000 from the Federal Government under the Dairy Regional Assistance Program. To support this, Radfords Abattoir at Warragul is certified to process organic meat. Also, a small hard-working core of dedicated people in East Gippsland is setting up an organic vegetable growers group and yet another in South Gippsland is close to announcing the establishment of an independent organic milk network.

In addition to all of this, one of Gippsland's better known dairy research institutions is considering some meaningful research into natural and/or organic dairy farming systems. Something to look out for if dairying is your interest. And let us not forget the 40 dedicated people who travel weekly to the Organic Learning Centre in Bairnsdale to attend the TAFE supported course in Organic Agriculture run by EGOAA. The way to the future is to learn the science in agriculture and to relearn the old cultural methods conveniently forgotten in modern day agriculture. We will all gain from these 40 students as their knowledge passes on to neighbours and friends.

It really is an exciting period for Gippsland farmers who want to take advantage of the uncertainty created by the genetically modified foods issue, the environmental, social and economic pressures placed on conventional farming practices and the huge demand for real clean food.

It may interest you to learn that New Zealand has increased its export of organically grown and certified food by over 70% (!!!) in the last 12 months. What potential income premium is Australia missing out on by not exploring this option more seriously? It seems that Gippsland is leading the way but we need to grow together and support each other to be a serious contender in the export market.

A notion I would like to leave with you – farmers are traditionally ‘price takers’ and not ‘price makers’. Organic farming principles strongly advocate the growing of the soil and responsible custodianship of the environment. The caring consumer now wants to know where his food is coming from and the likely impact on the natural resources and ecosystem of growing that food. Underpinning this principle is the premise that the food will cost more to cover the costs associated with responsible and sustainable farming. This will be the way of the future. When the Federal Government realises that there are no more Telstras to sell off to fund Landcare and Natural Heritage Projects for remedial environmental work, the money will need to come from the grower, consumer or tax payer. Is it not to your advantage to be in a position now or in the near future where you receive premiums over and above those you now get and manage your farm or business more naturally and economically? Contact this office for details on joining any of the groups or to discuss the options with practicing organically certified farmers. And remember that once organic, you have two markets to sell into – organic and your current market.

AgriSolutions is in a position to continue to independently advance the application of kelp, seaweed and fish in most farming and growing situations. Some 10 years of sales into diverse farming enterprises in addition to 8 years of hands-on growing ensures that you get the best advice for your growing situation.

Fundamentally, most people realise the value of adding the sea-sourced additives to their soil, plants and stock. Apart from the nutrients being returned to the land in the form of seaweeds, kelp and/or fish (the ultimate in recycling as these nutrients were originally from the land in the first place!!), the benefits of supplying the vast range of naturally occurring trace elements, minerals, vitamins, amino acids to an already deficient base will often surprise the grower. The results achieved when using kelp, seaweed, fish and some old and tried inputs such as hydrogen peroxide will surprise the user. The results based on preventative application of these inputs with the lowered costs associated with soil, plant and animal health will support their continued use.

Since the last newsletter in 1998, AgriSolutions has made arrangements to access a variety of seaweed, kelp and fish products plus natural rock fertilisers, hydrogen peroxide and non chemical weeding systems from several suppliers to support the move to more sustainable farming. This enables you to a greater selection of products based on performance, price and availability contributing to the positive reduction of input costs to your business. Contact this office for more details on 03 5627 8663 or e-mail: agrisolutions@dcsi.net.au

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An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

a man should farm as though he will live for 1000 years but live as though he will die tomorrow.