

Tuesday, May 16, 2017

## Growers Grasp Organic Opportunity

*Mackay & Whitsunday fruit and vegetable producers to learn soil health techniques from successful North Queensland organic farmers.*

**EVENT MAY 25 NORTH QUEENSLAND** // Organic farmers leading the way in horticulture practices, will share their experience with a lucky group of growers from the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac region this month.

In 2011, Gary and Angela Spotswood identified an opportunity to tap into the lucrative organic fresh produce market on their 450 ha Burdekin farm. The latest 2017 Australian Organic Market Report states fresh produce is the dominant purchase in the organic market valued annually at over A\$1.7 billion.

Gary Spotswood, third generation farmer at Mt Alma said, "Not all farmers want to go down the road of certification, some are just interested in soil health systems. Either way, produce grown in healthy soil speaks for itself. Customers are prepared to pay a bit extra for the flavour, health benefits and longer shelf life."

The diversified farm encompasses cane, cattle, mangoes and seasonal vegetables. The couple concentrates on soil health, soil carbon capture for water retention and reduced run-off.

Gary said, "A 1 % increase in soil carbon can store up to 15 tonnes of carbon per hectare and 144,000 litres of water, soil carbon storage is what we are aiming to achieve."

Their practices promote healthier plants, reducing pest problems and ultimately growing produce with a higher concentration of nutrients.

Gary and Angela use their cattle herd for biological inputs to stimulate the farming system. Cattle graze on multi-species fallow crops to gain kilos but also add value to the market garden, providing inputs such as their specialized bio-fertiliser, putting valuable nutrients back into the soil.

Luke Hargreaves from Growcom will discuss the emerging niche market trends, current biosecurity issues and water quality.

**Date:** Thursday 25 May 2017  
**Departing:** 7:00am bus leaves Reef Catchments, 85 Gordon St Mackay. Alternative pick up points are Mt Ossa Rural 7.30am, Bloomsbury 8am, Proserpine 8.30am, Bowen 9.30am  
**Returning:** Approximately 5.30pm  
**Cost:** Free for landholders, lunch and morning tea provided  
**RSVP:** Friday 19 May 2017, phone 4968 4200 or email [reception@reefcatchments.com](mailto:reception@reefcatchments.com)  
**MEDIA:** Media are invited to attend the event

ENDS

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