



## ORGANIC OR SUSTAINABLE FARMING

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After farming in the Moree district from 1955 till 1970 where I was continuously cropping the same paddocks without chemicals or superphosphate, I moved back to the south, between Young and Temora, to buy the family farm in 1970.

In 1974 after getting advice from the Organic Growers of NSW, Geoff Wallace of Wodonga (inventor of the Wallace Soil aeration plough) and reading books, such as "The One Straw Revolution" by Fukuoka and "Silent Spring" by Rachael Carson, I decided to try farming organically, and was told that I would not do any good. Nevertheless I decided to give it a go, but also fearing the transition period and loss of income.

But really, despite the fears, there was no real loss of income.

I am running this 1,000 acres on mixed lines, growing crops of wheat, oats, barley and rye.

Also I run about 30 head of cattle and roughly carry about 800 to 900 head of merinos for wool production, and have a small pig enterprise, plus orchard and home garden vegetable garden.

Also I am aware of the overclearing of the land here and am an active tree planter and propagator.

### CROPPING

Firstly, I will deal with the cereal crops and method of farming.

The land for winter crops is fallowed in late winter and spring to stop the weeds from seeding and to conserve moisture over the summer months.

The land is mainly worked or broken up using a heavy duty scarifier (tined) implement, I prefer this method as it does not turn the soil over and leaves the trash and weeds and grass etc. on top to protect the soil from the elements.

If there is too much trash I use a (double gang) disc harrow for the initial working.

Sheep are used to keep any growth down and the soil is only worked to kill weeds with subsequent rains when necessary. This way the soil is not overworked; no more than 3 or 4 cultivations are necessary.

Sowing is carried out following autumn rain, mainly April or May. Late sowing here is not wise as the area is flat and the heavy to light clay soil types tend to become waterlogged easily if heavy rains come.

## WEEDS

The main weeds are black oats and rye grass, these don't seem to be a great burden, and a few plants that come provide a good pasture the following year.

I mostly only crop land the once and if a second crop is sown, light disc harrowing is done on the grazed stubble.

## OTHER METHODS OF WEED CONTROL

Slashing or topping has been done and then grazed to check regrowth.

Sheep and farming go well together.

## FERTILISERS USED

Lime has been the main fertiliser with some dolomite, rock phosphate and gypsum added.

## STUBBLE

Is not burnt at all and is grazed or left to cover the soil to assist pasture growth.

## YIELDS

Have been satisfactory most years and some comparable to conventional farming.

## SHEEP

I have not drenched the sheep only drenching young weaner sheep in wetter years.

Dipping has been done regularly but with below full strength rates.

Dung beetles are in evidence in the pastures.

Flystrike is not a real problem, I have made home made licks or blocks for supplements in summer months and adding sulphur has helped reduce flystrike I believe.

## CATTLE

Charolais X cows are run and crossed to a Poll Hereford bull. I don't have much trouble with calving.

Cattle are not sprayed or drenched at all. Lice don't seem to affect them but I have noticed any 'bought in cattle' seem to be affected for a period.

## PIGS

I don't run many pigs, mostly only 2 or 3 sows.

They are run free range to graze and are housed in small sheds with straw being used in winter for bedding.

No drenching has been done: or very little on young pigs.

Diesel fuel is used for tractors but not very necessary.

I have always obtained premium prices for pigs at local sales, they seem to look better with softer and silkier hair:

## FOWLS

I run about 60-70 white x layers, free range in a fox-proof netting enclosed 2 acre patch.

These are fed only on organic oats and wheat with cut or chopped greenfeed when dry weather prevails.

There is a ready demand for the eggs.

## ORCHARD

The orchard consists of about 50 odd mixed trees, consisting of apples, pears, plums, peaches, nectarines, apricots and almond trees, also grapes. and about 15 citrus trees. This area is not really suitable for fruit growing but good tasting fruit are obtained.

Some skin blemish is evident: but the taste, which is much better than that of commercial orchards, is worthwhile.

### Cultivation

Cultivation is done for weed control by discing with harrows and tined tiller also slashing has been done to leave a coat of trash on top.

Mostly trees are deep mulched with stubble straw about the shade lines. This keeps topsoil cool, prevents weeds growing around the trees, holds the moisture and also provides a soft base for falling ripe fruit.

Mostly trees have to be covered by bird netting, fine nylon mesh, to control birds. This is draped over the tree and wire clips secure it about the bottom of the trunk.

There is a ready demand for surplus fruit either dried or fresh.

## Citrus

The citrus trees are mulched with about 1" of straight fowl manure, yearly, with straw or spoiled hay, layered on top of manure, this method results in a healthy tree with good quality, tasty fruit.

Rarely do trees need spraying, occasionally with white oil used to control scale, or sooty mould.

## VEGETABLE GARDEN

Nearly all kinds of vegies have been grown successfully, with little or no cultivation (or no dig method).

Animal manures are used again with straw or waste hay mulch. After the crop is finished, straw or mulch is raked aside and new crop planted straight into the old bed and mulch re-applied when crop is established. Rotation is practiced, but tomatoes have been grown in the same beds for 3 or 4 years running. Companion planting is practiced sometimes, with good results, pests are not a real problem with snails, slugs, and cabbage butterfly being the worst. To get young seeds or plants established the old mulch has to be cleared well away so as not to provide harbour for slubs, slaters etc.

I always save my own seeds as I find the commercial ones seem to be hard to start and seem weaker plants.

Up to a kerosene bucket of seed has been obtained from a spent crop at times providing a host of seed for years. I supply a lot of seed to seed banks such as ADRA or Henry Doubleday Research Assn.

## SUMMARY

I feel organic growing is worthwhile, but I would like to see more money spent by government departments on researching this method, as it is very hard for the ordinary layman to find the necessary answers.

I certainly do not know all the answers and never will, but I have not gone broke and am not in debt to anyone.

It certainly makes more work and one has to be prepared to accept this.

Finally, I think I am healthier for it, often eating produce raw and uncooked straight out of the garden, which is much more beneficial to ones body and health generally.