

FARM GATE ROUNDUP Saturday 25th August 2007

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What's happening on the Farm Gate Trail this weekend?

Apart from the exhibitions in the various galleries that are listed on the HH website there is not a great deal happening fresh food wise at this time of year being between seasons however there are still plenty of vegetables growing at the moment. Next month is a different kettle of fish and two events I will mention today so people can get organised to come out and participate in are:

Artburst which celebrates the bud burst on the grape vines along with the local artists. This provides an opportunity for people to meet the artists in their studios and to talk to the winegrowers about how they go about their business

When is it on?

15 and 16 September

And the second is the *Hawkesbury Earth Care Fair* on the 22nd September

On that day there will be a wide range of activities and demonstrations that can inspire anyone who seeks to minimise their ecological footprint. There will also be a market place with entertainment and good food.

The Earth Care Centre is situated on the beautiful Hawkesbury Campus of the University of Western Sydney at Richmond. The Centre is a model of integrated environmental practices as well as a Community Garden.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Lots happening in Sydney today on an environmental note with Live Green at Victoria Park near Sydney uni at Broadway

Yes Hawkesbury Harvest is bringing the FGT to the city today as part of Live Green with a range of in-season vegetables, oranges, mandarins, free range organic eggs, a range of jams, honey, pecan nuts, verjuice and the native hibiscus in syrup that you can put in champagne.

I'm hearing lots of talk about verjuice these days

People are asking more and more about it, what it is and how to use it. Verjuice by definition is the acidic juice made from unripe fruit, primarily grapes. It can also be made from crab apples, unripe plums or gooseberries.

It is an ancient product with the Franklin in one of Chaucer's tales using verjuice in a grandiose pie of chicken and turkey meat in puff pastry. Modern cooks most often use verjuice in salad dressings as the acidic ingredient,

when wine is going to be served with the salad. This is because verjuice provides a comparable sour taste component, yet without "competing with" the wine the way vinegar or lemon juice would.

So the use of verjuice has adapted to changing times

Very much so Simon and that adaption can apply to agriculture as an industry and land use in the urban and urbanising situation if it is provided the opportunity. I personally believe we are going to see a revolution in the urbanisation of agriculture in Australia and it would not surprise me that it begins here in Sydney. I was up in Lismore a few weeks ago at the invitation of the Tweed Richmond Organic Producers Organisation to tell them about what I had seen on my Churchill study tour last year on urban agriculture. I had the opportunity to see two really interesting things while I was there.

I met an organic farmer Dan Hamilton who showed me an organic vegetable plot full of beautiful vegetables where he had not applied water since the plot was planted on 28 February of this year. The thing that was so remarkable about this is that there had been virtually no rain since that time. Lismore was as dry as a chip when I was there. It has rained since my return however. By trial and error Dan had worked out how to grow vegetables organically with virtually no water apart from what was in the ground when the seeds were planted. One of the things he does is to build up the fertility of the soil to greater than the plant requirements so that the soil fertility would never fall below the optimum required by the plants.

So there were never less nutrients than the plants would require at any time to achieve their potential

Yes. And the second thing I saw which I believe has the potential to revolutionise the commercial production and marketing of certain food items in the urban environment was a concept called the Ecocity Farm. The prototype of this was featured on the ABC's New Inventors in November last year and was chosen by the judges as the best invention on the night. The inventors have been invited by the ABC to this year's ABC Gardening Australia Expo which is on today at Homebush bay

When I was in Lismore I went to Nimbin and visited the farm where a team of the young and passionate innovators have made great steps in developing the prototype for commercial use. The thing that really impresses me about this innovation apart from the fact that it lends itself to being a feature of the Farm Gate Trail, because it is virtually direct from grower to consumer technology, is the fact that it addresses issues such as food safety, bio-security and environmental management systems.

What foods is it suited to growing?

Most leafy vegetables and herbs and crops such as zucchinis, capsicum and tomatoes and fruits such as strawberries and melons. Producing fish is part of the system and it is the nutrient rich waste from the fish that is fed to the plants that is at the core of the process. The plants extract the nutrients from

the water from of the fish tanks and the clean water then returns to the fish tanks. It is a self sustaining technology. This technology has commercial application in those part of cities where other forms of commercial and industrial activity take place. We will have brochures on the technology on the Hawkesbury Harvest stand here at Live Green today and if people would like to come and talk to me about it I would be pleased to do so.

Did you see anything like it any where in the world on your trip?

I saw variations on aquaponics but I did not see nor have I read about anything that matches the commercial capacity of this technology. Quite frankly I believe that the concept has the potential to provide a world first in the reinvention of agriculture in the urban situation and to contribute greatly to a knowledge industry that is exportable.

To find out about we have talked about today and more people can go to

www.hawkesburyharvest.com.au