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Changing valuations

When considering this issue's Focus on the pros and cons of organic agriculture, I decided it would be worthwhile, as an urbanite, to try 'going organic', as a way of assessing both its effects on well being, and the practical experience of buying organic products today.

The results are in. I've definitely noticed that organic food tastes better, and I seem to feel better, although the physical effects are probably influenced somewhat by the decision to take in less red meat and caffeine too. However, one major side effect is that my budget really hurts.

Buying organic products is currently a financial commitment beyond what might be expected – in some cases there's more than an 80 per cent price premium on organic products. One question why.

It's an obvious discouragement if looking at things from the price perspective alone, but I tried to build into my buying decisions – as many organic purchasers are increasingly doing – the added, inherent value of greener practices and more chemically benign eating, as well as the cost weight of low supply volumes in a boutique industry.

And that's another key observation from the trial: although it's clear that the organic produce industry is growing rapidly, it is still not big enough, yet, for anyone to walk into a Melbourne supermarket and buy just the basic, everyday organic groceries they need. The organic sections of my local superstores are extremely limited, to say the least. Being a fully committed organic buyer today means separate trips to dedicated organic produce shops, enough to put the general punter off, no doubt.



Beyond that, though, it's impossible to regularly eat 'organic' if you're a restaurant or dinner party goer.

But those times may come as the popular momen-

tum builds – and it seems to be. There's no doubt that organic agriculture is shaking things up. On pages 8-12 Steve Davidson gives an assessment of the organic agriculture industry and the reasons for its surge. Australia's still a smaller player in the organics game, but looks to be coming on strongly.

The other Focus on pages 16-25 provides an overview of the significant steps being made in Australia and internationally to attach tradeable financial value to the services provided by the environment. Just ten years ago the process of costing environmental services was radical and cutting edge. Now it's at the point where ecosystem parameters can literally be accounted into corporate budgets, or traded against, to offset certain lines. This is a significant, positive evolution in thinking about sustainable practice.

Enjoy your reading.

James Porteous
Managing Editor



Judy Watt

Next, in issue 128

The December–January issue carries a Focus on the influence of land trust organisations on natural resource management in Australia. We'll also look at the debate that's raging over the pros and cons of a new rice growing technique being trialed across parts of Asia.