

Blueberry Fields forever — looking at a holistic approach to Blueberry growing

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Blueberry fields is a family-owned blueberry orchard located within the Byron Bay region of northern NSW. Otto, Lynette and their son Jascha Saeck own and manage the farm and have been growing blueberries for over 30 years. Currently they have over 34 hectares of blueberries with 28 hectares planted to southern highbush varieties and the remaining 6 hectares under Rabbiteyes. Jascha has grown up helping on his family farm, but in 2016 decided to leave his job as an engineer to work full-time helping to run the farm.



Jascha Saeck out in the fields doing what he loves best.
Photo credit: Melinda Simpson, NSW DPI

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I was always going to come back and work on the farm, I enjoy it and I think I'm much better suited to it. I enjoy being outside and the lifestyle... I never have been a fan of too much paperwork.

Blueberry Fields sell their fruit to the Sydney central markets at Flemington and also sell at the local markets in the Northern Rivers region.

The Saecks share a sustainable vision which many of their practices reflect. They are currently trialling several biodegradable and recyclable containers to package their blueberries for sale at the local markets.



Biodegradable and recyclable packaging ready to be filled with blueberries for sale at the markets. Photo credit: Jascha Saeck



In 2018, Jascha decided that it was time to start diversifying and so started trialling raspberries, blackberries and just to be a bit different, pigs.

At first the pigs started as a novelty idea, a way of getting rid of their reject fruit by supplementing the pigs' diet with this fruit and then marketing the pork as 'Blueberry-fed pork'.

However, now the Saecks are looking at how they can integrate the pigs into their current business and are currently using the pigs to clean up old blocks for replanting. Once the pigs do a thorough clean-up of the blocks, the next stage is to trial a soil builder seed mix which should improve the soil before re-planting back to berries or diversifying into something else.

Figure 5. Blueberry Fields' compost (above) and Jascha checking effects of application under the bush (below)



Jascha has just completed a “Holistic Management” course through InsideOutside Management and is trialling the implementation of many of the principles he has learnt through the course.

On the farm at Brooklet Blueberry Fields the Saecks also make their own compost on-site using locally sourced materials which they apply to their blueberry mounds each year. By doing this, they have increased the organic matter and carbon in their soil by more than 10-fold, making it much more biologically active than when they first started farming.

In the future, Blueberry Fields plan to continue to expand their raspberry and blackberry production with a view to a more rotational block plan which will keep the soil of each block much healthier than if they were to leave it as was done in the past. They are also in the process of planting 15,000 native Big Scrub rainforest trees in corridors on the property to encourage local wildlife and enhance diversity of flora.

The Saecks would like to see more research into determining the nutritional requirements of blueberries at different stages of growth and how this varies in different soil types. They are also interested in alternate weed control options such as trialling different ground covers that could provide benefits to the soils and plants as well as acting as a way of controlling unwanted weeds.



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Blueberry Fields
from the Byron Bay Hinterland



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