

Proposed Branding for
Grassroots Magazine

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How we Began



by Pam & John Tucker Emerald Vic

Pam and John Tucker began their organic vegie enterprise in the beautiful Dandenong Ranges through a personal interest in organic food. They soon realised, however, that in order to develop into a successful business they needed to take a businesslike approach. This attitude, together with a commitment to quality and to customer service has ensured that their small business continues to diversify and thrive.

In our mid forties, we (Pam and John) found ourselves with the option to lease about an acre of land, with house, on a 250 acre beef cattle property in Macclesfield, Victoria, about 10 minutes drive from both Emerald and Morbuik,

close to the Dandenong Ranges. John was new to the area, so good jobs were hard to find, and Pam had lived in the area for four years.

After having chosen this new lifestyle, we initially tried our hand at building up a gardening run, which John still maintains today, mowing, clearing and tidying varying sized blocks of land. Pam took on a relieving position in a hospital and began selling surplus homegrown produce to staff members, and it was also given to some of our regular gardening clients as a goodwill gesture.

The Produce Business

Slowly the idea dawned, from the resounding success of our produce, that we could develop a business supplying farm-fresh organic produce to the local community. To test the idea out, we set up several local community market stalls which eventually ran for a couple of years.

We sourced produce from our own garden (which at this stage started to expand), and also from the organic section of the Footscray wholesale market. With a good response to our market stall, we decided to embark on a Future in Small Business course at a local TAFE college, and then were accepted onto the NEIS (New Enterprise Incentive Scheme). In the meantime, we continued trading at the markets and began a very small home-delivery run into the Dandenong Ranges, supplying a full range of organic fruit and vegetables, farm-fresh eggs and honey. The business course proved to be very instructive and helpful, giving us both insight and confidence and enabling us to overcome many personal hurdles. Putting together a business plan was challenging, but a very beneficial experience. We registered a business name, 'Country Tucker Enterprises', which was to serve as an umbrella for a variety of activities. Our vegetable garden of approximately half an acre is on a north-facing slope below the house, which sits atop a hill overlooking a vast valley. The Warburton Ranges form the backdrop for what we consider to be one of the best views in Australia. The slogan 'Vegies With a View' needs no further explanation!

Our farming techniques, although small-scale, are strictly organic, and, although we initially built up a steadily expanding customer base without organic certification, we applied for, and ultimately attained, A-grade rating. We feel this offers an additional assurance for our customers. Our garden produces quite an array of seasonal produce and we grow all year round.

We look upon our business venture as a true 'growing experience'. With very limited working capital, we have renovated packing sheds, designed and built a 'hilton for hens' poultry house, and totally redesigned and expanded our initial garden plot. We have expanded into wholesaling, supplying a number of local small shops, B&Bs and a restaurant. We have secured an additional supply of free range eggs and started a small local egg delivery run.

Our farm-fresh produce is now supplemented by supplies from several local organic growers, small-scale like ourselves, who also form part of a recently formed regional growers' group. The group provides support and friendship to its members, our current venture being the establishment of a number of different organic farm tours. Our farm is featured also on two local tourist maps, and this brings some very interesting and motivated visitors to our doorstep.

'Country Tucker'

'Country Tucker' has now been in existence for just over three years. It is essentially (and intentionally) a small family business supplying only quality organic produce. By setting out a business plan, we were able to initially define our areas of skill and interest, and these we have built upon. John, always a keen home gardener, handles the areas of soil preparation, planting, raising seedlings, and the like. Pam takes care of the more internal tasks such as customer liaison, orders, bookkeeping, and caring for a flock of 85 hens.

As much as possible we try to integrate with each other's areas of responsibility so that we are both aware of what is happening and able to keep the business functioning in the other person's absence. John delivers customer orders one evening a week while Pam harvests the garden crop and helps with general garden maintenance. We find that we are both able in this way to keep in contact with our customers and also keep up with what is happening in the garden.

We encourage new and existing customers to visit the farm and always make time to take them on a tour of the garden and have a chat. The surrounding cattle property has various bush trails, and many a customer has enjoyed a stroll while waiting for their order to be prepared. Since most people visiting us lead very hectic lifestyles, this is always a great success! We try to keep our orientation a providing a service to people rather than just strictly running a business.

As our business has expanded, so have our needs, and we currently have a very supportive group of regular and casual helpers who either trade work for a box of fresh produce, or, more recently, work in exchange for food and lodging. We are not a WWOOF host farm, simply because we seem always to have numerous offers of help from people who visit.

We include the following "Principle of Commitment", by Goethe, which was given to us as a gift at the outset of our venture. ■

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