



madeline watts Diploma of Agriculture (in Organics)

Madeline Watts, 20, of Blue Sky Organics, has planted herself firmly into her chosen career and is already harvesting the benefits—literally. Passionate about organic principles and expanding consumers' knowledge of the food choices they make, Madeline launched a garlic farm on her parents' property at Eagle Point, with a second property at Murrindal, near Buchan.

The Watts family use no chemicals, weed manually and ensure they are using the most sustainable practices to produce a robust, quality crop. "I want to help educate people about the food they eat and what has been done to it," said Madeline. After some volunteer work on a King Island garlic farm, Madeline knew she wanted to do and set about the task with enthusiasm, involving her whole family along the way. Her father, Chris, an engineer, developed and built a system to create the garlic beds, and a harvester that would enable them to bring in the largely manual crop, with minimal damage.

Home-schooled for a large part of their education, Madeline and her sister were taken sailing up the east coast of Australia by their parents. Madeline achieved excellent school results began an Ecological Agriculture degree in NSW, before discovering the Diploma of Agriculture (in Organics) at Farmtec available through Advance TAFE. She realised it would provide the support she needed on her path to becoming a fully certified organic garlic producer. "I have been able to work my certification planning into my course work," she said.

Garlic is an labour-intensive crop, requiring five-year rotations. With one acre now in production, everyone in the family is conscripted for the labour-intensive work of harvesting that runs from late October through to December.

They currently produce several different types of garlic: Red Rocamboles, Tasmanian Purple, White Crookneck, White Silverskin, limited amounts of a heritage Russian variety (Elephant Garlic), which has been growing wild on the Murrindal property for more than 50 years, and Estonian garlic, which will not be available for sale until December 2012.

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Halfway into her diploma, Madeline is already well on the way to achieving her goal. The Eagle Point property has reached the 'In Conversion' stage of certification with Organic Growers Australia (OGA) and Murrindal is in pre-certification stage. She already has back orders from returning customers keen to get their hands on the new crop. The harvest began as soon as she returned from the October IFOAM Organics World Congress in Korea, where Farmtec teacher, Alan Broughton, was a speaker.

Madeline's garlic is available through Lazzaro Bros in Sale, CERES in Brunswick or via www.blue-sky-organics.com.

"For me, the success is in showing people the great flavour you get from organically grown garlic," she said.