

## Organics thrive with EMS

Drover's Rest Enterprises supplies Western Australia with delicious, organic strawberries each summer. Not only do they produce fantastic fruit, they also ensure that they are looking after their environment along the way. This was formally recognised recently when the business achieved BestFarms certification through the Blackwood Basin Group's BestFarms Environmental Management System (EMS) program.

Errol and Irma Seymour began Drover's Rest Enterprises in 2000 in Bridgetown, WA. What started as a small retirement project has now grown into a thriving business with 40,000 plants supplying organic strawberries and berries to outlets across Australia.

The majority of the 217acre property is remnant vegetation and is periodically burnt in small mosaics to encourage natural regeneration. 20 acres of cleared land is surrounded by rabbit and kangaroo proof fencing and used on a rotational system to allow each site to recover and rest before being used again.



*Photo left: Irma and Errol Seymour with a strawberry plant destined for the mulch pile.*

As part of their production, Errol and Irma achieved full organic status with the National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA) in 2001. They are also certified under the Food Quality system FreshCare and are members of the Strawberry Growers Association WA.

Having always been conscious of the importance of looking after their environment, the Seymours became members of Land For Wildlife in 1999 and are current members of the Friends of the Forest group and the Tourist Association in Bridgetown.

Involvement in all these organisations has built a solid reputation of responsible environmental production for Drover's Rest Enterprises, and BestFarms certification has endorsed and contributed to this.

When first introduced to BestFarms in January 2004, Errol and Irma felt that an EMS would naturally complement their suite of environmental achievements.

“We are very pleased that we became involved in BestFarms and gained recognition for our environmental work so quickly. The benefits of the system become more abundant the further we go on.”

While price premium benefits are unlikely to occur in the next few years, Errol stresses the importance of building a good environmental reputation for both the business and product in the long term. And from the aspect of improved knowledge and support for their efforts, BestFarms has been invaluable.

Taking on an EMS has given the Seymours the confidence to formalise and improve some of the activities that they were already doing and to better understand the need and impact of these. Errol also feels that he has gained more precise control on issues such as water use and soil fertility. Continual monitoring of the bores used on the property have helped him to better manage water use and increase his confidence that he is using his water wisely.

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In the long term, Errol hopes to make Drover's Rest a BestFarms demonstration site to promote sustainable and environmentally responsible production.

Errol's advice to other farmers thinking about taking up EMS or organic certification is that ‘there is no comparison – it's the way of the future. Often people are discouraged by the systems or believe it will be too hard but I was surprised to find it really does work and isn't as hard as it seems at first.’

*Photo right: The Seymours in front of a patch of naturally regenerated bush on their Property.*



Errol and Irma plan to display their BestFarms certification in their new processing plant which will be completed in 2006.

‘We're excited about being able to show our customers that we have received formal recognition for our environmental stewardship, and are proud to know that we are looking after our land for the future.’

Congratulations Errol and Irma on your achievements!

Contact Drover's Rest Enterprises on 9761 2901 or BestFarms' on (08) 9765 1555