

# Farmers get a 'breaducation'

IN the gleaming stainless steel surrounds of an industrial kitchen in Toowoomba, 25 grain growers stand wondering what they've got themselves into. At the end of the room, a Danish-raised expert in bread-making explains how they will be spending the next six hours. The farmers look worried.

A few minutes later, fingers glued together in lumps of sticky dough, the grain growers from southern Queensland and northern NSW are learning just how vigorous the art of bread-making can be. In unison, they lift measures of dough high into the air and then slam them down onto the steel benches in front of them – a process they repeat over and over until their white ropes of dough are looking soft, pliable and silky smooth.

"You're in control of the dough – don't be afraid of it," the trainer shouts above the cacophony as the thumping of dough on steel reverberates around him.

The farmers are here because the owner and managing director of Australia's largest dedicated organic milling company, Kialla Pure Foods, has had an innovative idea. Rather than spend the company's annual grower infor-

You're in control of the dough – don't be afraid of it.

mation day discussing production issues as usual, this year Quentin Kennedy has decided to give Kialla's dedicated organic growers a completely different but equally relevant experience: the chance to experience life as a baker for a day.

Mr Kennedy came up with the idea after watching an episode of the hit television show *MasterChef*, in which one of Kialla Pure Food's largest customers, Michael Klausen of Brasserie Breads in Sydney, ran a masterclass on bread-making, which featured Kialla's organic flour.

He asked Mr Klausen to come to Queensland to provide a workshop for Kialla's growers, to give them a first-hand insight into what happens to their grain beyond the farm gate, and the reasons why specifications are so important in the baking process.

The idea proves to be a hit. After six hours of mixing, thumping, kneading, proving, baking and dozens of back-and-forth questions, the organic farmers have managed to surprise themselves by producing fine loaves of artisan bread that look just like the expert's. They also find themselves with a much greater understanding of how their industry and product are viewed by a key customer.

Mr Klausen believes there is no shortage of consumer demand for quality organic product, demonstrated by the \$18/loaf customers are prepared to pay for some of the large sour dough loaves he sells in his Kings Cross bakery.

His number-one concern, though, is consistency of product. "It is very important for us," he says, adding that if more farmers don't take up organic production, it will limit the significant growth that the industry can otherwise achieve.

As the group waits for the bread to finish baking Mr Klausen takes the opportunity to find out more about his suppliers, and is extremely interested to know why they adopted organic production over conventional

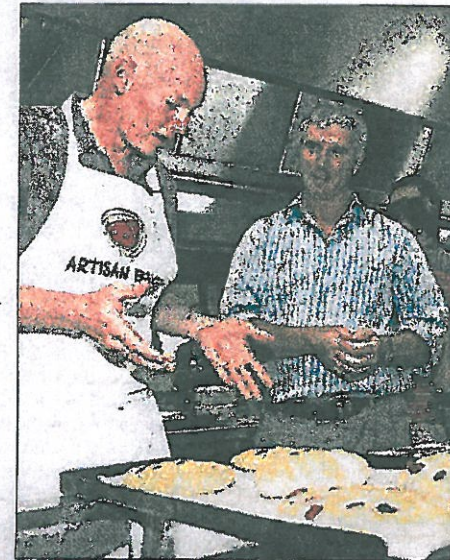


Bruce and Margaret Uebergang apply the finishing touches to their loaves of Schiacciata con l'uva bread before sending it to the oven.

farming, and what the main barriers to producing a quality product are.

The primary motivation for taking the organic path, growers explain, was a desire to move away from chemicals and to protect the health of their families. "You can actually smell the difference when you pick up a handful of soil – it has a beautiful smell," Chinchilla farmer Bruce Uebergang said.

One organic grower says he is often told that organic farming will never feed the world's exponentially growing population, but that's not necessarily the aim, he points out. "I'm not trying to feed the world. There is a certain group that wants this product and we are doing everything we can to look after them." – Story and picture: JAMES NASON.



LEFT: Brasserie Breads master baker Michael Klausen and organic grain grower Phillip Lynn from Glen Innes discuss the finer points of artisan bread-making. Mr Lynn's bread was judged the winner of the Kialla Pure Foods' growers day baking competition at the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE in Toowoomba last Thursday.