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“Compost is a natural way of increasing soil fertility at a reasonable cost.”

Frank Calvaresi

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Compost for vegetable growing – a case study from Calvaresi and Son, Virginia, SA

Who

Frank Calvaresi, Calvaresi and Son

Where

Virginia, South Australia

What

Lettuce and potatoes

Aim

Supply nutrients to the crop over a longer period, increase soil fertility and decrease synthetic fertiliser use

Outcomes

- additional \$20,000/yr through increased yield, produce quality and cost savings
- soil more friable with improved water holding capacity

Calvaresi and Son

Frank Calvaresi and his brother Bruno have been vegetable growers in the Virginia region of South Australia for the last 25 years. They grow Cos and Iceberg lettuce as well as potatoes under overhead irrigation on the red clay loam and black soils typical of the Northern Adelaide Plains. When paddocks are fallow, cover crops are grown to put organic matter and nutrients back into the soil.

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“The figure of \$20,000 is the combined cost savings and increase in yield benefits. That is, we saved money in costs and made more money by increasing yield.” Frank Calvaresi

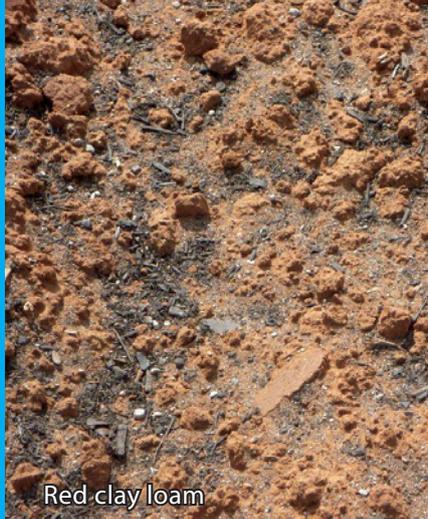
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“The crops are greener and more uniform and need less fertiliser and chemical sprays.” Frank Calvaresi

Why compost?

The Calvaresi brothers had always used chicken manure on their paddocks and found that the crop would tend to get a quick burst of nutrients initially but would run out of nutrients in the long term. They were looking for a product that would supply nutrients to the crop over a longer period and 10 years ago started experimenting with compost.



Red clay loam

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“Compost gives better overall nutrients to the crop for a longer period.” Frank Calvaresi

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The compost product

Frank purchases compost from a commercial supplier. It is applied to paddocks once a year at a rate of 15-20m³/ha, preferably a few months before planting. The soil is then ripped to a depth of 45cm to incorporate the compost into the soil. The cost of compost is approximately \$350/ha. Frank first started using compost at a rate of 12m³/ha but found greater benefits at higher application rates.

This year they added gypsum to the compost and spread both products at the same time. This meant only one pass of the tractor, rather than two. Less driving on the paddock helps to minimise soil compaction.

Frank has always used the same compost product from the same supplier and he's found that the quality has improved greatly over the last 10 years. There are now fewer impurities as well as less plastic, glass and other foreign materials.

Frank would advise other growers not to spread compost in windy conditions as they could get complaints from the neighbours.

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“It's a natural product that doesn't smell too much and gives long lasting results in your soil.” Frank Calvaresi

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Where to from here?

Frank is still experimenting and this year will keep a close eye on the paddocks where compost and gypsum have been applied together. Depending on the results, he may vary the rate of gypsum in his next compost application. Frank has been more than happy with the results he's seen so far from using compost and would thoroughly recommend it to other growers in the industry. He sees compost as a natural and economical way of increasing soil fertility and improving the health of their plants and soil.

The bottom line...

Frank likes using compost because it is a natural product, it doesn't smell too much and it gives long lasting results in soils that extend beyond supplying nutrients. Frank says it's hard to estimate, but the combination of higher yield and quality with reduced fertiliser use could amount to up to \$20,000/year.

To Frank, the benefits of compost are obvious and numerous. Their crops look healthier, are more consistent, and they don't need to apply as many fertiliser or chemical sprays. Compost also provides a better overall nutrient supply to the crop over a longer period of time. The best results he's seen have been when compost was spread 12 months ahead of planting crops. The soil is more friable and it has a better water holding capacity.

For more information on the program contact:



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the resource for compost users