

# Mid North couple



Australian Carob Company founder Michael Jolley says it was hard to convince Australian distributors to give the unfamiliar product a go but once they did, they were surprised by how quickly it sold.

By MAX OPRAY

**W**HEN Michael and Jam Jolley look over their fast-growing carob empire, it seems like a dream come true.

"We ask: how the hell did we do it?" Michael said.

It was the year 2000 when Michael first looked into the Mediterranean-grown legume and decided to give it a shot on his 8-hectare plot at Booborowie, near Burra.

"I saw that carobs were almost all imported from the Northern hemisphere and thought: why not try them out?" he said.

"It's been bloody hard work. My wife and I planted about 6000 trees ourselves and did all the irrigation and everything."

"The biggest challenge we had was financial – I'm just a gardener, my wife's a cleaner, so we're just everyday working people that started with nothing but a bare block of land."

The couple had to invest in a

removed, the carob starts to flower, and takes until the following March to mature.

In September, more processing is carried out, including roasting and milling. The ground is cultivated several times a year as needed.

The Australian Carob Co's orchard has seven different carob trees – Casuda, Clifford, Sfax, Santa-Fa, Irlam, Tyleria, and Waite. Each tree needs the right amount of water and correct pruning to survive and thrive.

In keeping with sustainable farming practices, it is a complete no-no to any form of pesticide or insecticide.

## Finer points of cultivation

THERE are three kinds of carob trees – male, female and hermaphrodite varieties. The Jolleys have planted six rows of female trees followed by two rows of hermaphrodite trees in sequence, choosing to shun the male tree as the hermaphrodites have been productive when pollinating female trees.

Carob beans are harvested in March and taken directly to the manufacturing shed onsite.

There, they are allowed to dry naturally before processing starts.

The pods are washed and processed in April. As the pods are

### FAST FACTS

- Country's leading processors
- Business booming after ten-year wait
- Chasing down export opportunities

a story on their success and the business was awarded the 2012 Advantage SA Regional Awards for the Mid North and Yorke Peninsula, and won the Innovation Category at the 2012 SA Food Awards.

Michael still cannot believe it. "When you've dedicated so much of your life to something, it was just a dream come true," he said.

The company now has capacity to expand to 600 tonnes a year, and is investigating export opportunities in Europe, India, Indonesia, and Thailand – where Jam originally hails from.

Through Jam they also linked up with website designers in Thailand to produce a site that Michael rates as one of the key ingredients of their success.

He says the website helps educate consumers about a product most Australians are not familiar with, and informs them about the companies using their carob.

But it is not Michael's main marketing tool.



▲ Hard work ... Michael and his wife Jam planted about 6000 trees on their property by themselves.

# thrive on carobs

"Word-by-mouth travels damn quick, especially where I am, in a country area," he said.

"So I've built my business on that – if you're good to people and have something to offer in that regard, they will tell others about their experiences."

Michael says his product has a key point of difference to the more traditional growers in the northern hemisphere.

"Overseas they plant varieties for the seed, while we plant for the taste of the outer husk, and the seed is just a byproduct," he said.

"My advice to growers looking to produce something not normally produced in Australia is simple – make sure you have a point of difference like that, and all the rest comes down to hard work."

Details: Australian Carob Company 0408 891 994 or [www.australiancarobs.com](http://www.australiancarobs.com)



▲ Carob sales leapt nearly 331 per cent from May 2012 to May 2013, and Australian Carob Company now harvests 100 tonnes a year. The company is investigating export opportunities in Europe, India, Indonesia, and Thailand.

## Hortex Alliance program updates



**THE Hortex Alliance is striving to build the capacity of the South Australian horticultural industry through projects and programs that support grower networks and increase grower knowledge. Here are some:**

### Soil condition project

The project funded by *Caring for Our Country* exceeded its target, with 232 growers. It centred on the theme *Adopting Best Practice to Enhance Soil Condition in Horticultural Systems*, and concluded with an industry soil condition and compost symposium at the Vine Inn, Nuriootpa in May which featured compost, soil organic matter, and microbial health. Details on the two vineyard case studies, project outcomes summary, SA Grower article featuring the symposium, soil pit videos, photos, and more is on the Hortex Alliance website.

Details: [www.hortexalliance.com.au](http://www.hortexalliance.com.au)

### Greenhouse pests

A one-year project that focused on biological control of key greenhouse pests has successfully assisted 20 greenhouse growers of capsicums, cucumbers, and tomatoes in the Northern Adelaide Plains. The Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board-funded project saw pesticide use reduce by more than 80 per cent and improved crop protection.

A consultant's report and on-farm videos is available online.

### Soil advancements

The Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board and Hortex hosted a visit to the Northern Adelaide Plains by Major General Michael Jeffery, Australia's Advocate for Soil Health. They stopped by the greenhouse properties of Hung Nguyen and Tom Loulios who have adopted advanced soil health management practices and biological pest control.

### Grower case studies

A new project funded by the AMLNRN Board aims to capture the practices underpinning real success stories on 12 greenhouse farms in Virginia. The growers who will be involved have improved soil health, pest management, and general plant care to a large extent, and substantially increased yields and quality. One champion capsicum grower, Phuong Vo, is funded by the vegetable levy. A dedicated website features many resources and details about his farming practices, and its costs and benefits.

### Native plants cut

One Hortex Alliance project seeks to increase adoption of native plant species that do not harbour crop pests because research shows they can be used to replace weeds, suppress pests, and reduce chemical use. Free workshops in August and September will demonstrate

how this low-tech approach can be undertaken on farm.

Details: Glenys Wood 0401 122 145

### Pest identification

Here is a project that will increase grower skills to correctly identify crop pests and build their knowledge of pest lifecycles and disease transmission. With appropriate training at the free workshops, growers can use portable USB microscopes to easily identify insect and mite pests. The workshops will be conducted in August and September.

Details: Glenys Wood 0401 122 145

### Save the date

Hortex is hosting a free barbecue at the Virginia Institute and Grounds on Thursday, September 26. It will be a day where you can enjoy some fine local produce, see interesting industry displays and presentations, watch an entertaining cook-off, and explore pathways to sustainability. Demonstrations will showcase what sustainable farming looks like and illustrate ways to get there. Hortex has some achievable strategies for adoption and will display proven practices and technical innovations in sustainable agricultural systems.

Details: Brian and Geoff Johnston 08 7127 2812 or [brian@beyondgarbage.com](mailto:brian@beyondgarbage.com)

Details: Hortex Alliance [www.hortexalliance.com.au](http://www.hortexalliance.com.au) or Domenico Cavallaro, chairperson, 0417 839 082.