

# BODY AND SOIL

Peter Wadewitz is a special type of eco-entrepreneur who has built his business by regarding unwanted organic materials as a resource rather than waste.

Peats Soil receives and processes much of metropolitan Adelaide's green organics from council kerbside and industrial collections, as well as food organics from businesses such as hotels, supermarkets, schools, office buildings, food processors and manufacturers. Peter Wadewitz and his team developed the globally renowned BiobiN organic waste collection and on-site processing facilities to divert potentially useful products from being dumped into landfill. The breakdown of organic materials in landfill generates the potent

greenhouse gas methane and produces potentially polluting leachate. From a climate perspective, diverting green waste from landfill has the largest impact of any solid waste component. Peter has been the Managing Director of Peats Soil and Garden Supplies since 1974 and he is so well respected in his area of expertise, as well as being community and environmentally supportive, that he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2020.

"This is an unbelievable honour. I am blown away, it is something you never expect," Peter said at the time in response to the award. "I just do what I do because I am so passionate about it. I have been involved in composting for 50 years. You have your head down and your tail up, because you believe in what you are doing."

Peats Soil and Garden Supplies employs almost 100 people and is a family run company with a vision to be a world leader in sustainable and innovative organics recycling. For 45 years Peats have been processing and marketing recyclable organic resources, creating products for landscaping, garden and horticultural activities in South Australia where the business is based.

Converting waste organics into useful soil improvers has become a passion for Peter who estimates that more than 15 million tonnes of usable organic material is still being dumped into landfill in Australia every year.

"When you see compost going out onto farms and you see healthy soil and what it does for a plant, and what it does for micro and macro nutrients within a plant and the health of the plant, it is the most exciting thing," Peter says. Putting carbon back into the soil can have additional benefits other than curtailing pollution. Peter cites one farmer in NSW who has applied six tonnes of compost product per hectare for ten years and has built the soil carbon up from 0.5 per cent to 4.5 per cent and now uses less water and less fertiliser while growing healthier fruit and vegetables.

"We've also got vineyards that use 60 per cent less water than their neighbours because they are using organic matter in the topsoil," he says.

Peats Soil and Garden Supplies operate from three depots located in the Adelaide suburbs of Willunga, Langhorne Creek and Dublin as well as at Whyalla. During 2021 Peats Soils expanded into Darwin, although their own trucks don't run up the Sturt Highway with Mildura being the most distant regular destination. The trucks run regularly to Portland in Victoria as well as into NSW.

Peter has successfully experimented with producing quality biodiesel fuel and has obtained most of the necessary infrastructure to operate his own biodiesel plant and he also sees hydrogen as an emerging source of future energy.

"Man is creating too much CO<sub>2</sub> and something has got to be done about it. I believe we've got pollution issues with soils and waterways and air," he says. "I think it's about clean energy for clean air, but I'm just cautious that we don't send ourselves broke and don't come up with the wrong policies. I think hydrogen will be an answer when we get the economics right."

With so much happening within the ever-expanding organisation one could question why Peter continues to operate his own sizable truck fleet.

"The first and foremost reason is we believe we can give our customers the service when they want it. Years ago, I went down the road of subbies and they couldn't do the job and get to the customer on time or they would argue over a price," he recalls. "It's better to basically own your own supply chain, although I've got people in my company who keep saying sell the trucks and subcontract all the transport out. But I'm also a bit of a passionate truckie."

As Peter's parents owned a wholesale plant nursery, he grew up around horticulture. In his late teens due to his love for trucks, tractors and earth moving equipment, Peter travelled to Sydney and completed an operator's



Tim Richardson, Peats Soil Logistics Manager.



DAF CF 13-litre Euro,6 prime mover.



course for bulldozers and graders. He managed to convince his parents to allow him to buy two D series Fords which he brought back from NSW one on top of the other. The trip included going via Melbourne and to pick up a few varieties of potted plants for the nursery and which Peter loaded in the space underneath the truck being carried. Throughout the development of the transport side of the business Peter has been open to take on various brands of European trucks. It is natural given Peter's dedication to minimising his company's own environmental impacts that the two

latest DAF CF prime movers to join the fleet are powered by the Euro 6 compliant 13-litre engines which are rated at 530hp. The DAFs have the full suite of safety features including a driver's airbag and seat belt pretensioners, Adaptive Cruise Control, Forward Collision Warning, Lane Departure Warning System and Vehicle Stability Control.

"I've known the Crawford family [owners of CMV Truck Centres] for many years and one of the grandsons doesn't live all that far away from one of our sites and he's very interested in horticulture as well as selling trucks," he says.

There is already another couple of DAFs on order.

Peter had been having a few issues with another brand in the fleet so he took a serious look at the DAF product and the types of service contracts available with DAF which he says are significantly lower in cost than those offered by competitors.

"I'm very impressed. They guaranteed that a truck would be there available if one of ours takes longer than the agreed service time for some reason such as if a spare part is out of stock," Peter says.

"They'll have a truck available for us,

which is something others have been promising to me for about five years and haven't delivered on."

Although he is comfortable with a mixed truck fleet, when it comes to loaders Cat is the only brand for Peter.


"Ninety per cent of the reason is their spare parts and their service backup is just unbelievable," he says.

As the Peats fleet grows, however, so does the requirement for capable drivers.

"We just haven't done enough in the transport industry to train up good drivers," says Peter. "If we're supposedly taking our national fruit and vegetables production from \$60 billion to \$100 billion somewhere along the line it's got to be freighted by somebody."

In sync with the mixed fleet of trucks, the Peats Soils range of trailers includes a variety of manufacturers, each with their own specialities including walking floor units.

But why is it called "Peats"?

"When I first started at the age of 18 or 19 I used to pinch the old man's potting mix which actually had peat moss in it and I'd put it in a little bag and I'd put a label on it," he explains. "One of the staff suggested because it had peat moss in it and Pete made it why don't you call it 'Peats'? That's all the market research that went into that one." 



Loading up one of the 540hp DAFs on site in Adelaide.