

Organic Village Bali

Marjan van Ravenzwaaij and Wayan Sukerta came to Mundak Lumbang 4 years ago, a lush remote landscape at the foot of Mount Batukaru. They immediately fell in love with the place and started a life which saw them, with a group of local villagers, running a successful environmentally conscious lodging and farm called Organic Farm Bali. Their immense love of the land eventually opened their eyes to acute problems that are slowly killing the livelihood of the resident farmers. They are now leading an uphill battle to rescue their adopted home by way of a newly established foundation called 'Organic Village'.



WHAT DID YOU FIND IN MUNDAK LUMBANG WHEN YOU FIRST ARRIVED?

I immediately fell in love with the people and was overwhelmed with the power of nature in this village. I visited the village because my gardener (and Wayan's uncle) had bought land in the village and encouraged me to visit the location. It took him 2 years of telling me weekly before I finally relented. (How many times a day do foreigners like me get offered to visit beautiful land, which turns out to be ugly?) But in this case he was absolutely right!

Beautiful, but what can I do here? I am not a farmer; I am a city girl from Amsterdam. I don't know anything about farming.

Wayan and I talked with Dodi, the neighboring farmer and discovered marketing is the main problem for farmers. They totally depend on the middlemen for their produce and income. The village still had no running water, just one teacher for 42 kids in a school in desperate need of renovation. But the worst thing was that farmers are selling their land to pay off their debts to foreigners, Jakartans and Balinese that sold their land in the south of Bali.

If this goes on, the village kids will all have to work in the South of Bali, or abroad, leaving their parents and grandparents behind. Who is going to take care of them? How is the culture of Bali going to be? Why are tourists coming to Bali? It's the rice fields and the Balinese culture. And what kind of work will the villagers get without proper education?

WHAT DO YOU THINK NEEDS TO BE DONE REGARDING THE PROBLEMS IN MUNDAK LUMBANG?

We have to pay more respect to farmers. They work very hard for our food every day. Yet they are the most unrespected and underpaid people in the world.

We should shell out more for our daily organics instead of trying to get a bargain. We humans depend on our farmers. Hotels and tourism in Bali should support the local farmers instead of getting everything imported from abroad.

The Indonesian Government should open their eyes and take care of their farmers instead of promoting their own business, which is pesticides. Farmers even spray DDT in Bali, which is forbidden in Europe! Almost all meat in Indonesia is full of antibiotics as the Government is promoting their own animal food industry as their extra income business.

The same with *asbest*, forbidden in Europe but still sold here for *warungs* (food stalls) and (animal) housing because it's cheap. And who are the shareholders? The Government.

HOW DID THE FOUNDATION COME ABOUT?

I am not a farmer, but I am very good at 'googling'. I am fortunate that I grew up in Holland as a girl without sex discrimination and maximal study opportunities. All goes back to good education. Together with our guests we can try to help this village, and thus, the farmers, to get more education and entrance to the government networks. The Mayor in the village is the President of the Foundation.

With what we already did in three years without the Foundation --just enthusiastic village kids, farmers, and guests-- I can imagine residents of this village, and hopefully the whole of Bali, won't have to sell their land, their rice fields and tradition, and the environment can stay beautiful.

That is the reason why tourists want to come to Bali, right?



WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE FOUNDATION AT THE MOMENT?

To be honest? Dealing with the Government. We shouldn't have to start the Foundation, with help from abroad, if the Government would have taken care of education, healthcare, water, roads, trash, (organic) farming, right?

We don't even have running water in the village although we are very close to sources. But the water is sold to the south of Bali, a very bad road into the village, but the good road to the temple is subsidized by the government.

Our Bupati (head of the area) lives in our neighboring village. The road to her house is perfect. She is a woman who studied abroad. But does she care about her neighboring village or local girls' education? No. I have sent her many letters, inviting her for a delicious organic lunch, but no reply so far.

HOW CAN PEOPLE HELP THE FOUNDATION?

This village needs running water first, for health care, for animal and farm care in the dry season, along with education. Education can prevent farmers from selling their land. We need consumers, and chefs, and the tourism industry to pay a little extra to take care and promote local produce, make the farmers sexy and pay them a decent income.

We need help to connect with the Government, as nobody in the village has an "office job in the Government, forbidding them access to subsidy".

We are grateful to all guests who stay at or visit The Organic Farm Bali or The Organic Village Bali, Chef Elke at Alila, the owners of Alila, Pascale and Pica from Sardine, Veronica from Oazia, Gonzalo from La Salle, Chef Kevin from Cuca starting up in Jimbaran, Ibu Kartini from BOA. They have played big part in getting us this far. **Now**

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