

Achacha – the fruit that tastes like sorbet

A new owner is needed to take the reins of this abundant 101-hectare Queensland plantation.

It travels well, looks good and has a unique sweet and tangy taste, but most Australians have probably never heard of an achacha.

The egg-shaped tropical fruit (pronounced ah-cha-cha) originates from the Amazon basin and, more than 20 years ago, Bruce and Helen Hill hadn't heard of it either. The fruit is a *Garcinia*, from the same family as the mangosteen, with a flesh that tastes like sorbet.

Today, the Hills manage about 15,000 mature achacha trees on a 101-hectare Queensland plantation, believed to be the world's largest.

Their first brush with the achacha (*Garcinia humilis*) came after Bruce and Helen returned from living in Latin America for several years.

They became involved in Latin American cultural activities and met a Bolivian man who convinced them to grow and market the fruit here.

Intrigued, the almost-retired couple took a chance and Bruce visited Bolivia to see it growing there.

"The fruit travels well, looks and tastes good and has a long shelf life and it was sitting there, waiting to be exploited, we felt," he says.

Bolivians believe the fruit's skin suppresses hunger. Initial studies into the fruit's health benefits are positive, and it's been found to be rich in potassium, vitamin C



Achacha plantation owner-managers Bruce and Helen Hill plan to retire soon.

and folate and contains much less sugar than many other fruits.

The Hills formed a group which bought the first seeds in 2002, and bought a sugarcane farm south of Townsville the following year, planting the first 3000 seedlings.

The first fruit took six years to come.

"Until then we didn't have a clue whether or not the trees would actually fruit," Bruce says. "In that time we'd planted over 15,000 of them. We were agricultural virgins completely. We couldn't afford to do it alone, so we had to get people involved to help us.

"It was a bit difficult to get people interested when they didn't have a clue what the fruit was and it wasn't written up

on the web," he adds, "but we thought it'd be a good experience and keep us involved with Latin America."

The plantation is now certified organic, using biodynamic practices designed and introduced by Helen.

The produce is sold mainly via wholesale markets in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, and the export demand is more than they can manage.

The Hills have been major owners and managers, but plan to retire soon, and a new owner is needed to take the reins.

"We've enjoyed what we've been doing but it's time for someone else to take the next step," Bruce says.

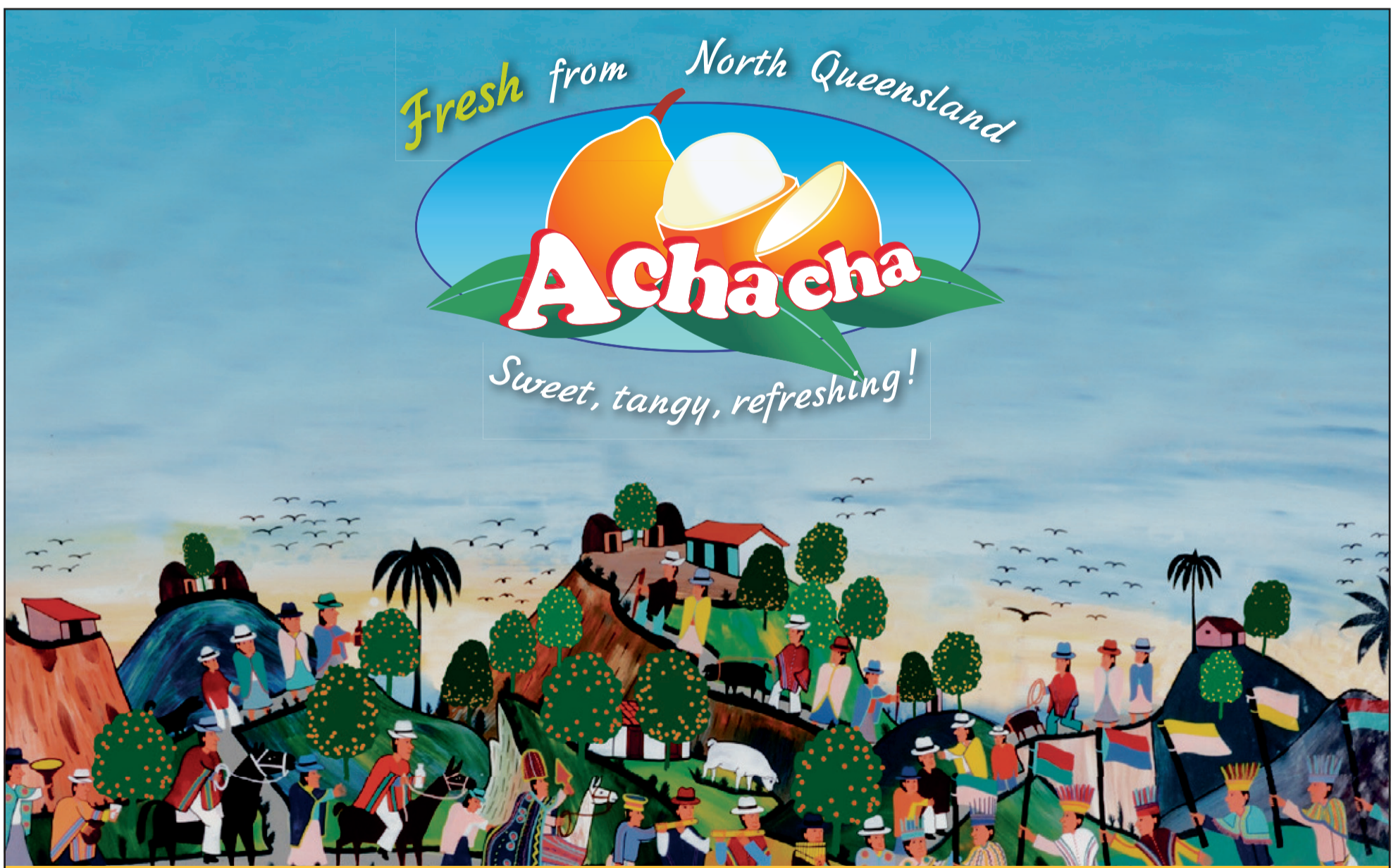
The fruit is protected by plant breeders' rights until 2036, and Bruce says someone with scientific or horticultural knowledge will be ideal to exploit its potential.

"We've done quite well. We cannot supply enough to Melbourne, but there's still a lot of people who don't know about it," he says.

"If you take the skin off and make a gelato, sorbet or drink, it will certainly take off.

"We've had trial quantities of it in ice-cream shops in Sydney, Townsville and Noosa and it's been a real hit, but it needs an industrial process to extract the pulp from the skin."

The Achacha plantation also yields up to a tonne of honey a year.



Fresh from North Queensland

Achacha

Sweet, tangy, refreshing!

Available from independent fruit stores in season January – February – March

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