

Brown Bread Bakery Organic Bread

Michael Schmid, the driving force behind Varanasi's Brown Bread Bakery, talks to Good Food about his passion for organic breads and sustainable living

As told to KAINAZ CONTRACTOR Photographs WILLIAM CHANG

The idea of starting the Brown Bread Bakery germinated after I founded a non-profit organisation in 2005 for schooling street children in Varanasi. Besides needing regular funding for the school, I also realised there were barely any options for backpackers in Varanasi to get hygienic and healthy food.

So in 2006, I started the Brown Bread Bakery and Organic Food Private Ltd. Part of the bakery's earnings are donated to the school. Having worked in my family's restaurant and organic vegetable farm in Germany, I was determined to start an organic and sustainable project using produce from local farmers. But back then, organic certification wasn't as organised and did not involve lab check ups or routine inspections after the official recognition was given.

We decided not to chase after an organic certification. Now we work only with small farmers near Varanasi who can't afford to get certified but actually follow sustainable agricultural practices. We routinely check up on these farms to ensure that the produce is organic. Then we buy it at a fair price.

Immediately after opening the bakery, we started the café and organic shop. The café serves regular café fare along with Italian, German and Indian mains while the shop sells organic goodies like jam, pickles, muesli and tahini made by the local

women's empowerment group. All of the sale proceeds go towards the group. We also stock cheeses sourced from artisanal cheese makers in Auroville, Kodaikanal, Himachal Pradesh, Nepal and Sikkim.

All breads are made from organic grains and seeds. We source them whole from farmers around Varanasi and grind them to make our breads. The only exception being the rye grains which we source from unorganised, organic farmers in Ladakh. Since the electricity supply in Varanasi is erratic, we even knead our own dough and avoid the use of electric machines.

Since 2009, I have been helping the German Bakeshop in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi transform itself into an organic bakery - right from staff training to replacing imported ingredients with local produce. I will soon take up ownership of the

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café. Further promoting our vision of sustainable living, we even supply our breads, jams and other organic produce to some stores in New Delhi (such as the Altitude Store, Live Organic and Navdanya), embassies and several German institutions.

BREADS AT THE BAKERY

Whole wheat bread made of barley flakes / sesame / linseed / sunflower seed
Sourdough bread
Rye bread
Brown bread (wheat, barley, millet)
Muesli bread
German breads such as *vollkorn* (wholemeal bread), *laugen bun* (pretzel bun), *laugen stange* (long crusty wheat roll) and *laugen brezel* (German savoury pretzel)
Five types of corn bread
French bread like baguettes and croissants
Ciabatta and focaccia

HOW ETHICAL IS BROWN BREAD BAKERY?

Organic Brown Bread Bakery does not get its produce from organically certified farmers. However, it does maintain quarterly checks on its suppliers to ensure that their farms are following eco-friendly and sustainable practices. Apart from helping the German Bakeshop go organic, Schmid is also an advisor with Organic Uttarakhand, the state's certification body, to open a chain of green restaurants that will only use produce grown by organically certified farmers in Uttarakhand and Uttaranchal.

Brown Bread Bakery, D5/127, Tripura Bhairavi Dashaswamedh, Varanasi. Tel: +91 98388 88823. (brownbreadbakery.com)

Organic German Bakeshop, 33B, 9/9 Kishangarh, Main Road, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi. Tel: +91 11 6462 0222 / 99718 83225. (german-bakeshop.com)





top producer
bread



Michael Schmid with
his organic breads

