



SHAPING THE FUTURE FOR AUSTRALIAN ORGANICS

ISSUE 9

YOUR QUARTERLY UPDATE

WINTER 2003

CONFERENCES AROUND AUSTRALIA BOOST OUR ORGANICS INDUSTRY

The Australian Organics Industry is on the up and up, and the number of conferences that have been held, not to mention very well-attended, is proof that Aussie growers are on the look out and just can't get enough information about managing businesses organically.

Where it all started

When the first National Organics Conference was held in Sydney in 2001, the organisers had no idea that the demand for organic information would see a rollout of organic conferences held around Australia over the following two years.

Some 360 people attended the initial National Conference, lining up to listen to over 60 speakers - from both certified and conventional businesses. The Conference drew together a comprehensive selection of speakers, issues and contacts. It also served to highlight our great diversity as a national industry—yet encouraged us to focus on the issues that really matter.

National "Local Global" Conference Lismore, NSW

With so much interest in the first organic conference, and two years before it was due to be run again, the Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) decided to run an industry-wide national conference, but this time in a regional area—Lismore in New South Wales.

With an impressive line up of international marketers, technical and educational speakers, as well as a measure of producers and other organic business owners, "Local Global 2002", sponsored by RIRDC, was a great success and demonstrated that the thirst for organic knowledge was far from quenched.



THE WA CONFERENCE HELD IN EARLY JUNE THIS YEAR WAS AN ENORMOUS SUCCESS THANKS TO THE KEEN INTEREST IN ORGANIC BUSINESS BY PEOPLE IN THE WEST

WA Organic & Biodynamic Conference

Again sponsored by RIRDC, WA decided it was time to pull together a regional conference to cater for the grower number of people interested in organics in the west.

The Conference had a total of 146 delegates attending from various parts of Western Australia and interstate. 22 trade exhibits showcased a range of certified organic and biodynamic input supplies and food products. Several representatives of Australia's certifying bodies were there to answer questions on conversion to organic or biodynamic practices.

QLD Organic & Biodynamic Conference

It was only a matter of time before Queenslanders decided they would hold a conference of their own. With RIRDC backing, an organic conference was held in Cairns at the end of July, and whilst the results of the conference were not in when this publication went to print, the *Organically Speaking - Soil*

and *Society* conference is expected to follow suit and be extremely successful.

Second National Organic Conference

These conferences around Australia have been very successful at meeting the needs of participants at different levels, and really providing the chance for people from across industry to get together and share their common interests and develop opportunities and a way forward for Australian Organics.

With such a strong demand from the Australian public, RIRDC will continue to give its support to ensure these events occur into the future.

RIRDC has sponsored these conferences as a means of communicating research findings as well as understanding industry needs for research.

Showing strong support for the development of Australian Organics, RIRDC is firmly behind the second National Organic Conference to be held in October.

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for more information www.rirdc.gov.au

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SHAPING THE FUTURE FOR AUSTRALIAN ORGANICS

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in this edition

Welcome to the winter edition of the RIRDC Organic Newsletter, my first since becoming the Organic Produce Program Manager. Having now settled in to the job, I am finally getting round to organising a newsletter. I have really enjoyed my first year and a half, in particular keeping in touch with RIRDC's project investigators and meeting people interested in organics and biodynamics from across Australia.

I sense a really good feel to the Australian organic industry. Growth is strong and a wide array of organic products is becoming available from a range of outlets including, conveniently for me as a consumer, from my local supermarket. I have met many Australian producers interested in entering the industry because of their concern for the environment. The media tells us that this is also an important issue for consumers.

The Inaugural OFA National Organics Conference in 2001 played a significant role in igniting interest in the industry. I congratulate the organic industry on taking this momentum forward through several excellent conferences. These include the BFA's Local Global Organics Conference at Lismore in October 2002, and inaugural State conferences - the Organic Biodynamic Conference organised by the Organic Growers Association of Western Australia at Mandurah in June 2003 and the Organic Producers' Association of Queensland's Organic Conference in Cairns in July-August.

The forthcoming 2nd OFA National Organics Conference, Organic Futures for Australia, to be held in Adelaide in October will again be a highlight, drawing together industry, researchers, business and government. I strongly encourage you to be there if you can. Information can be obtained from the Organic Federation of Australia or from RIRDC.

I would also like to mention the Australian Organic Food & Farming Systems Cooperative Research Centre. RIRDC was a supporter of the 2003 bid, which while not successful, received strong encouragement to bid again in 2005. A successfully established CRC will see many important research issues, fundamental to organic industry development, addressed. I encourage you to become involved and support the new bid.

The last year has seen some interesting projects completed and the published reports of these will be available from RIRDC shortly. They include Viv Burnett's Decision Support for Organic Conversion, Robyn Neeson's Organic Production and Training Workshops for NSW (including conversion packages for organic vegetable production, organic soybean and rice production, and organic livestock production for the rangelands of western NSW), Paul Horne's Pest Management for Organic Agriculture and Janet Grice's Organic Sugar: End-user Support and Grower Perception.

Finally, keep your eyes open for the announcement of the new RIRDC call for submissions to undertake R&D projects commencing in 2004/05. This will be made in The Australian in early August and information will be available from the RIRDC website.

I look forward to writing to you again in the Spring 2003 issue of the RIRDC Organic Journal.

Denise Millar
RIRDC Organic Produce Program Manager.

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ORGANIC CRC BID RIDING ON SUPPORT

Just months after the initial bid failed, a follow up Organic CRC bid process is well underway, and even in these early stages is attracting much interest. The bid needs to build on this support from industry to ensure it gets off the ground.

The bid process is being coordinated by a group of professionals from the Australian organic food, agriculture and organic input supply sectors, who have adopted the collective name of the "Australian Organic Development Group".

The group is advocating a strategic action plan to establish a Co-operative Research Centre for Organic Food & Farming Systems to assist in realising the significant opportunities for the Australian organics industry.

The Organic CRC will benefit Australian agriculture through a national co-operative effort that harvests the expertise of Australia's leading universities, research institutions and industry. It will help set the agenda for Sustainable Australian Agriculture through a program that



establishes organic systems as a public good. It will facilitate research, development and education that places Australia in the forefront of organic food production and export, with a positive impact on the nation's triple bottom line (i.e. the economy, environment and society), particularly for rural and regional communities.

Following a successful bid, the CRC will concentrate on promoting consumer access to certified, appropriately labelled, Australian organic foods. The Organic CRC will be facilitate a number of underlying projects to achieve this

KEY OUTCOMES OF THE CRC

- Organic farming systems tailored to fit the unique Australian environment.
- Simpler conversion of farming, processing & manufacturing systems from conventional to organic.
- Stronger local, regional and global markets, more efficient and reliable supply chains for Australian organic food.
- Better skilled workforce and education opportunities in Australian organic food industries.

INDUSTRY INVESTMENT IN THE ORGANIC CRC

You may invest in the Organic CRC in one of four ways:

CORE INDUSTRY PARTICIPANTS will contribute at least \$100,000 cash a year. This will be a seven-year commitment. Core participant companies will not begin funding until July 2005. You may be represented on the CRC Board, have a direct role in establishing the CRC programs and defining project targets and outcomes. Your contribution will be recognised through projects that meet the needs of your company.

PROJECT PARTNERS will normally contribute \$10,000 - \$100,000pa for 3 to 5 years as part contribution to projects developing specific products, processes or systems which benefit you. You will leverage your investment to deliver earlier solutions and will share benefits and profits of commercialisation of findings.

RESEARCH ASSOCIATES will contribute agreed access to their farms, factories, products or other facilities as in-kind contributions to research. You will receive early access to the results from applied research solving your problems and these results will be widely disseminated to achieve maximum industry benefits.

SPONSORS will contribute over \$2,000 cash a year for the life of the CRC. You will receive free newsletters about CRC findings, preferential access to field days and symposia, and possible membership on advisory committees to guide research and get early feedback in your areas of interest.

The CRC will develop intellectual property and hold patents to this work. As a core participant you will be able to negotiate advantageous license agreements which may include an exclusivity period. Research and development funded by and carried out specifically for your corporation will result in special arrangements that protect your intellectual property rights. ■

YOUR CHANCE TO GET INVOLVED

If you are interested in participating in this exciting bid, please contact a member of the Bid Management Team below as soon as possible. Our application for this CRC must be in by November 2003, so the earlier you offer your support, the more chance we all have of gaining the benefits that will flow from a major injection of funds into organic R&D, education and commercialisation.

CONTACT ORGANIC CRC BID MANAGEMENT:

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SECRETS FROM THE BEST GROWERS

By ADAM WILLSON

The following article highlights the best kept secrets from Australia's most profitable organic farming enterprises. It is by no means comprehensive but sets the background to what growers can do to improve their soils and bank balance.

Not just chemical free

Too many organic growers concentrate solely on being chemical free. Very few get out and inspect their soil. The best organic growers concentrate on building stable soil humus. Humus is a bi-product of the microbial breakdown of organic matter. It holds 20 times its weight in water, holds nutrients and stimulates beneficial microbes such as mycorrhizal fungi. It is the foundation of flavour and aroma. With the right farm inputs, it can be developed in just 12-16 weeks.

Identify markets carefully

The Australian organic market is not as big as has been reported. Over the last few years, reports of an industry worth \$250 million may have been exaggerated. Most of the industry is domestically focussed and this has not reflected the same demand as overseas. The real opportunities are in export and to do this properly, quality, shelf life and presentation are crucial. Some growers have already visited a number of overseas exhibitions such as Foodex and BioFach in order to develop new markets. For more information on displaying at BioFach under the banner of Australian Organic Products, please contact info@australianorganic.com.au

Competition around the corner

With the launch of sustainable food labels like EcoFoods, competition is just around the corner. EcoFoods purpose is simple; grower driven, keep the retail price the same as conventional, produce quality nutrient rich food that is sustainable, and develop consumer loyalty. Based on a UK supermarket model, profit sharing by retailers such as EcoFoods gives more profit to the processor and grower. With the adoption of biological control techniques to remove pesticides the organic industry's claim of being chemical free may not be enough, especially with price sensitive consumers.



Need for nutrient rich food

A few growers have identified that producing nutrient rich food gives them a market advantage. Improvements in shelf life, better flavours (including sugar levels), richer aroma and higher protein levels can all be improved by starting with good soil and plant nutrient management. In the marketplace, we have seen the rise of low glycemic index foods like soy and oats. The next phase will be complete nutritional foods rich in beneficial organic compounds such as enzymes and vitamins.

Quality Assurance and Organic Management Plans

In these days of high tech agriculture, growers are spending more and more time on paperwork. Even though it appears a waste of time, supermarkets, processors and packing houses are demanding full traceability. For the better growers, the development of Quality Assurance and Organic Management Plans have helped in ensuring the regular review of the business. Speaking from personal experience, ISO 9001 has helped our family company finetune how we monitor and review our operations on a daily and monthly

basis. The systems we have in place now means that employees can fall sick or take a holiday and the company will not come to a grinding halt. You cannot store everything in your head.

Business Plans

Business plans can also help growers deal with financial institutions with minimal fuss. They provide market background, projections and also helps to keep everyone involved informed. Over 95% of the population (including these institutions) come from the city so a little explanation helps bridge the gap and gives them confidence to lend.

Take 2 days off a week

One of the best pieces of advice I read came from a Kondinin Group survey. It found that the top 5% of growers in Australia took two days off a week and did some time off farm. It sometimes meant study, taking the kids to sport, church or fishing with some mates. The key point is even though you are not at work you are still thinking about it. This is a time for review and finetuning, the result is that you use your time more wisely when you are at work. ▶



About the author

Adam Willson specialises in agronomic advice for professional organic growers.

Adam brings a wealth of experience, having consulted to organic growers for 15 years.

You can contact Adam by telephone on (07) 3716 0688 or via email on adam@soilsystems.com.au

The best growers have developed a systematic approach to improving their farm and profitability.

The key steps include;

1. All practices must be focussed on building soil humus
2. Walk around your paddocks with a spade and observe the soil, root growth and other agronomic issues.
3. Keep records of each paddock/block and compare yields.
4. Use soil testing that reflects biological activity
5. Be aware that balanced and adequate nutrition is critical. For example; calcium and potassium ratios effect sugar and protein production; calcium and boron levels effect leaf/root diseases and insect pressure
6. There is no miracle product – the secret is a system based on building soil humus and there are very few that actually work. The system used should create a snowball effect; each year builds a better humus and nutrient rich soil.
7. Always test a new product/system on the better paddocks. Choosing the worst paddock is too easy for the salesman to demonstrate improvement; this may not be replicated across the better parts of your farm.
8. Choosing the right foliar sprays can result in a yield increase of up to a 10% if applied correctly. This equates to an extra \$100 – \$800/ha depending on the organic crop. Type of foliar, timing and wetting agents all play an important role.
9. Compost ain't compost. Use quality compost that is biologically active, rich in beneficial humic/fulvic compounds and works in the current crop. Dry inert compost can take up to 2 years to be of any benefit if at all.

With all the best growers, the primary objective is to quickly build stable soil humus, the foundation of profitable farming and reduced water use. ■

NEW RULE TO ENSURE INTEGRITY OF ORGANIC VEGETABLES

New organic production standards will soon be introduced to ensure all seeds and seedlings used in organic production are organically raised.

On a date yet to be finalised, but certainly after 1 January 2004, a clause which has permitted organic producers unable to source organic seeds or seedlings to use conventionally produced material, will cease to exist.

The Australian Organic Industry, in recognition of the potential issues organic vegetable producers may encounter in sourcing organic planting material, has commissioned a 6-month study to increase awareness of the new rule and determine industry needs.

NSW Agriculture's organic industry liaison officer, Robyn Neeson and vegetable research horticulturist, Greg Howell will coordinate the Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation funded project.

"The ultimate objective of the project will be to assist the industry to make the transition to fully organic seeds and seedlings as smooth as possible. And to do that we need to fully understand the current situation and plan for industry needs in the future," Ms Neeson said.

The project will produce a database of organic vegetable producers and input suppliers of seeds, seedlings, fertilisers, pest control and other relevant products.

It also plans to present the industry with a set of production guidelines for organic vegetable seedlings.

The industry estimates up to 15 million organic vegetable seedlings are currently required each year.

And with industry expansion estimated at 15 per cent annually this demand could increase significantly over the coming years.

Ms Neeson said potential opportunities could come out of the new ruling.

"The new rule will drive the suppliers of seed and seedlings to reconsider how their current production techniques comply with the requirements of the National Standard for Organic and Bio-dynamic Produce," she said.

"While some may decide to cease supply to this market, others will see it as a market opportunity and diversify or expand their production. Organic seedling production will require the use of organically approved potting media, fertilisers and pesticides, and this requirement could lead to the development of new products."

Industry representatives from NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia will be invited to attend information and networking workshops to learn more about the new rule and discuss issues which may affect their ability to meet its requirements.

Organic producers and input suppliers who would like to be included in the database or participate in the workshops are encouraged to become involved in the project

CONTACT

Robyn Neeson or Greg Howell on (02) 6951 2611.

UPDATE ON ORGANIC R&D VICTORIA

By VIV BURNETT

Organic farming systems research and development through the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) in Victoria continues to deliver key results for producers and the industry.

In a recent report published by DPI in October 2002, a series of organic livestock case studies and their economic performance over the past 10 years have been reported. This report contributes to the economic information available for prospective organic producers in beef, sheep and dairy industries. In addition, DPI have appointed an organic livestock industry development officer, Kellyanne Semple, who will work with producers and processors to build supply chains for organic meat in Victoria.

In another project that is jointly funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, titled: 'Making the Most of Naturally Victorian', two workshops for Victorian producers have been conducted in Rutherglen, north east Victoria, and in Mildura, north west Victoria during 2002/2003. At the Rutherglen workshop, where the majority of participants were from a

conventional farming background, producers were asked to list the barriers preventing them from adopting organic farming practices. The most common response was weed and disease management (23%). However, differences between individuals within a farming family was also cited as being an important barrier to the adoption of organic farming practices.

Further evaluation of producers will be conducted to find out whether the information provided at the workshops has encouraged them to change any management practices on their farms. Two additional workshops will be held as part of this project, in Gippsland and in south west Victoria during 2003/2004.

BARRIER	% RESPONSE
Weed and disease management	23%
Family (differences in views)	19%
Access to information	12%
Sourcing organic inputs	12%
Benchmarking good operators	11%
Certification costs	8%
Lack of local organic groups	4%
Processing product	4%
Finance	4%
Time	4%

Proceedings from the Rutherglen workshop are available via the DPI website, www.dpi.vic.gov.au. ■



About the author

Viv Burnett is a Research Scientist with the Department of Primary Industries Victoria.

She is currently working as the Organics Coordinator for the DPI's research & development farming project at Rutherglen.

For more information about organic farming systems research and development in Victoria, please contact Viv by phone on (02) 6030 4500 or via email on viv.burnett@nre.vic.gov.au

ORGANIC CONVERSION PACKAGES SOON TO BE RELEASED

The NSW Agriculture and RIRDC funded project "Organic Production and Training Workshops for NSW" has resulted in the development of draft information packages for three key organic agriculture production systems - vegetables, rice and soybeans, and rangeland livestock production.

The packages provide a framework for organic conversion and suggest possible strategies and pathways towards conversion. In addition to general organic principles, each package describes possible methodologies for organic production of the commodity, their market potential, possible marketing strategies, the economics of production, processing requirements and quality assurance considerations.

Members of the RIRDC Organic Produce R&D Advisory Committee are currently reviewing the packages, after which they will be published and made available to producers.



RIRDC BACKS AUSSIE EXPORTERS

"I have had my eyes opened to the true extent and possibilities of the organics market – the scale of the organics industry overseas is just massive," says Sam Statham, the Managing Director of Rosnay Wines, one of the twelve Australian organisations that attended BioFach in Germany in February.

Biofach is a global organics trade fair held each year in Germany in February and Japan in October. Seeing the marketing potential for Australian exporters, RIRDC has sponsored these events to help promote the Australian Organics Industry. The RIRDC support enabled the coordination of an Australian Organic Products branded stand - to showcase just some of Australia's organic businesses wishing to expand into the export market.

This year was the first time Rosnay Wines (producer of biodynamic Chardonnay and Shiraz) had attended the organics fair, and Sam Statham says he was blown away by the variety of items there – and the amount of interest in Australia's organic products.

"To try this kind of exercise on your own would be an incredibly expensive way to learn about the market. I highly recommend going as a group – and going with the Australian Organic Products stand not only helped keep the cost down, but also gave us a united front to work from," said Sam

"We picked up contacts in Europe and the UK – there are people at Biofach from all over the world. We picked up a good database of contacts especially in the UK. It was well worth the effort of going."

Sam found that it was beneficial to attend in person, and whilst he had a display and tasting area at the Australian stand, he found that some of his best contacts were made by [planned] wandering around the expo, with a bottle of wine under his arm. Pure Harvest, who has been attending the fair for many years now, also found this to be the case, and spent most of their time conducting meetings with people in and around the expo - bringing interested parties back to the stand to look at their display and participate in taste testing. Nippon Meat Packers Australia, Australia's



Stephen Kelly of Nippon Meat Packers Australia displayed at BioFach Germany this year for the third year running

lia's largest organic meat packer, has attended Biofach for several years now, and saw a 'significant upsurge' in interest in organics this year, says Nippon's General Manager – Production & Planning, Stephen Kelly.

"Biofach has increased at least 20% from last year. When you are looking at the export market, BioFach attracts the kind of people to which we have to promote Australian Certified Organic produce if we are serious about going down the exporting path," he says.

Nippon Meat packers put on a good Aussie BBQ, to which people flocked whenever the familiar smell of freshly cooked beef wafted throughout the exhibition hall.

Stephen believes the collective approach, which sees all organic companies exhibiting overseas under the Australian banner, gives this country's organics businesses real strength.

"Respect for the Australian brand is more important in organics than in other areas. We are seen as clean, green and above all that our products have underlying integrity - and that gives us a lot of weight."

"Helping Australian Organic businesses to have a presence at Biofach is lending weight and credibility to Australia's organics movement.



Sam Statham of Rosnay Organic Wines displayed his organic chardonnay and shiraz at this years event

"When a large multi-national such as Nippon Meat Packers takes organics seriously, you know that this is big business", he says. "Nippon clearly expects the organic market to be a significant category into the future and has taken concerted steps to ensure that they play a catalytic role in this."

The success of BioFach Germany follows closely on the heels of that experienced last year with the BFA organised a display at BioFach Japan. Similarly, the ten certified clients who exhibited under the Australian Organic Products banner met with success and a considerable database of contacts to aid them breaking into export markets.

TO PARTICIPATE IN UPCOMING SHOWS IN JAPAN 2003 & GERMANY 2004

There is an increasing amount of interest in using trade fairs as a promotional front for Australian export.

The Australian Organic Products stand will be coordinated for three major worldwide Organic Trade Shows in the coming year. BioFach Japan in October 2003, BioFach Germany in Feb 2004 and BioFach America in September 2004.

If you are interested in displaying at any of these events, please contact info@australianorganic.com.au ■

THE ORGANIC PROGRAM

RIRDC 5 YEAR PLAN

PROGRAM 1. Organic Production Systems

- ▶ System Design & Environmental Sustainability
- ▶ Pests & Diseases
- ▶ Nutrition
- ▶ Soils

PROGRAM 2. Conversion Processes

PROGRAM 3. Regulation, Validation & Market Access

PROGRAM 4. Supply Chain Management & Intelligence

PROGRAM 5. Communication & Facilitation

HOW RIRDC WORKS

A new call for submissions for research and development (R&D) projects to be funded by RIRDC will be made shortly. Announcement of the process and deadlines for this year's round will happen sometime during August in the press and from the RIRDC website.

Projects selections are made by a committee comprised of people with strong knowledge of the industry and of the role that R&D can play in the industry's development. The RIRDC Organic Produce R&D Advisory Committee is the group who selects organic and biodynamic projects. The current framework for choosing projects is the Organic Produce Plan 2001-2006.

PROGRAM 1. ORGANIC PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

System Design & Environmental Sustainability

Generate and maintain viable organic systems which will help increase industry adoption of organic systems

- ▶ Benchmark design attributes of successful organic and similar sustainable systems
- ▶ Document and develop new designs appropriate to Australia

Pests and Diseases

Effectively manage pests and diseases using organic methods to increase product quality and reduce losses due to pests and diseases.

- ▶ Document existing pest and disease knowledge and practice
- ▶ Develop understanding of integrated and viable pest and disease management

- ▶ Overcome pest and disease regulatory impediments
- ▶ Increase awareness of preferred pest and disease methodologies
- ▶ Develop regulatory acceptance of preferred organic input products

Nutrition

Achieve optimum levels of nutrition, and balanced organic plant and animal production systems which will bring about increased yields, improved quality and plant and animal health, and to minimise nutrient loss from cropping, livestock and composting systems.

- ▶ Document existing knowledge and practice
- ▶ Develop new practices of plant and animal nutrition
- ▶ Increase awareness of successful organic plant and animal nutrition

Soils

The foundation of organic agriculture is a healthy soil. The project looks to maintain the potential of Australian soils through improved organic management techniques concentrating on optimal soil health and structure.

- ▶ Document existing soils knowledge and practice
- ▶ Develop understanding of integrated soil management techniques
- ▶ Increase awareness of preferred soil management methodologies
- ▶ Benchmark soil health

PROGRAM 2. CONVERSION PROCESS

Facilitate the adoption of organic systems including increasing the number of conventional commercial enterprises converted to certified organic and increasing the scope and scale of certified enterprises.

- ▶ Develop collaborative opportunities

with conventional farming systems to promote conversion

- ▶ Develop linkages between conventional and organic agriculture
- ▶ Overcome structural, technological, economic and social impediments to conversion

- ▶ Develop cost-benefit analysis of conversion
- ▶ Document successful processes for conversion in a variety of industries
- ▶ Document policy issues influencing the take-up of organic agricultural methods.

APPLY TO RIRDC FOR TRAVEL ASSISTANCE TO NATIONAL ORGANIC FUTURES FOR AUSTRALIA CONFERENCE

A small number of travel grants will be available from RIRDC to assist people who wish to travel to the 2nd National Organic Conference: the OFA 2003 Organic Future for Australia, to be held in Adelaide from 2-4 October 2003.

Information will be available in August from the RIRDC website or by contacting Anna Ferguson at RIRDC on 02 6272 4205.

PROGRAM 3. OPTIMISE MARKET ACCESS

Optimise market access for both exports and imports of organic products.

- ▶ Develop international and domestic consumer respect for Australian standards
- ▶ Develop Australian standards equivalence with our export markets
- ▶ Unrestrained market access for Australian certified products
- ▶ International trade agreements and equivalence protocols
- ▶ Standardised branding of certified products as a basis for increased consumer awareness and demand for Australian products
- ▶ Growth in demand and sales for Australian organic products
- ▶ Investigate, and validate regulations

PROGRAM 4. SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT AND INTELLIGENCE

Improve the margin between costs and returns for Australian organic products

- ▶ Improve efficiency of supply and logistics systems
- ▶ Improve quality of information available
- ▶ Improve management skill of people in the supply chain
- ▶ Overcome supply chain inefficiency, and lack of market information
- ▶ Adopt systems from conventional industry supply chains where beneficial
- ▶ Analyse market and economic information relevant to the design, conversion and implementation of organic systems and markets
- ▶ Communicate relevant R&D findings
- ▶ Progressive growth in GVP of Australian organic production - \$350 million by 2005

PROGRAM 5. COMMUNICATION & FACILITATION

Disseminate information and knowledge for the benefit of organic enterprises and industry and foster industry development & networking.

- ▶ Develop innovative information
- ▶ Develop proven information
- ▶ Develop database of stakeholders
- ▶ Annual industry workshop
- ▶ Quarterly newsletter
- ▶ Educational kits
- ▶ Increase in both new and total certified growers
- ▶ Industry satisfaction/unity
- ▶ Increased organic commodity availability
- ▶ Research/higher education institution involvement in R&D Program
- ▶ An increase in the number of professional courses available across the organic industry.

Through workshops, field days, newsletters, and organic advisory services, including journals and the media, knowledge will be disseminated to all members of the organic industry

A new RIRDC Organic Produce R&D Advisory Committee is about to take up the reins. An announcement will be made shortly. However, this is a good opportunity to thank the outgoing committee who have done a great job over the last three years. They are:

- § Chris Alenson - Organic educator and consultant
- § Steve McCoy – Agriculture Western Australia’s organic advisor
- § Rod May – Organic producer and consultant, Chair of the IFOAM Standards Committee
- § Andrew Monk – CEO of Biological Farmers of Australia
- § Kenrick Riley – Herb grower
- § Els Wynen – Agricultural economist (Els stood down during the last year to enable her to work in Europe).

RIRDC is grateful to these people for the huge effort and time commitment that they have made.

The committee’s chairperson is Don Fraser. Don will be continuing in the role as the new committee begins its task.

The industry intends to allocate R&D support broadly in five areas, in line with the following formula for the period 2001 - 2006

1. Organic Production Systems	40%
2. Conversion Processes	25%
3. Regulation, Validation and Market Access	10%
4. Supply Chain Management and Intelligence	10%
5. Communication and Facilitation	15%

LEVY SYSTEM & RESEARCH QUESTIONED

By ELS WYNEN

While organic farmers pay levies for research and development purposes, it is sometimes argued that they do not receive sufficient benefits from the research funded with the levies.

Behind this claim lies the assumption that funding provided is less than the amount paid by organic farmers in obligatory research and development levies. But is this the case? How much do organic farmers contribute? And how much do they receive in return?

The RIRDC funded "Organic Agriculture in Australia - Levies and Expenditure" report released in March this year set about quantifying these issues by examining the levies paid by organic farmers in 2000-2001 and comparing them with estimates of direct and indirect funding of research into the organic sector.

The conclusion of the report was that the total amount spent on R&D into organic agriculture in Australia falls well short of \$656,200 - the amount collected from organic farmers and matched with Commonwealth contributions.

In 2000-2001 (please note the data here supercedes that included in the original report), the research and development levies paid by organic farmers are estimated to be \$392,100. Together with matching Commonwealth funding, this amounts to about \$656,200.

On the other side of the coin, research funding of organisations that benefit organic farmers directly adds up to approximately \$351,000. An additional amount of around \$50,000 for research (proportioned out from rather generous amounts assumed to benefit organic farmers) is estimated for horticulture and dairy.

Presumably, some projects of relevance to organic farming undertaken in the grain, meat and wool industry are not included here. Nor are the estimated benefits of the organic projects to conventional farming included. The exact amounts to which this is the case - either way - is often a matter of subjective judgement.

Another issue is that existing organic farmers are not necessarily the beneficiaries of the \$656,200, consisting of levies collected from them and



The report suggests more research, such as that currently coordinated through RIRDC, is needed in Australia to help develop the industry to its potential

Either purchase a copy of the report from RIRDC or download a free copy from www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/ORG/03-062.pdf

matched with Commonwealth funds in 2000-2001. This is because some of the funding is given to projects for conversion to organic agriculture, that is, not for existing organic farmers.

Most farmers pay marketing levies. Although most of the levies originate from livestock, horticulture also contributes a substantial amount, \$54,100. Almost all organically produced horticultural products are sold on the organic market, yet it appears that only a small proportion of the marketing levies collected in this sector is used to aid the marketing of organic horticultural products. Likewise, it seems organic producers receive few benefits from their contribution to the levies on the National Residue Survey and animal health.

MORE RESEARCH NEEDED

There is little accurate information about the size, structure and composition of the organic industry and information on prices and values of sales is sketchy at best. Collecting more detailed information would make it possible to obtain a more accurate estimate of levies. In addition, more and better data would provide a basis for assessing the industry's present situation to aid future developments.

For the future, it may be worthwhile for some of the certification organisations to consider collecting more detailed data than what is done at present. ■



About the author

Els Wynen is the author of the research report "Organic Agriculture in Australia - Levies and Expenditure".

Els is a reputable researcher and economist who has been heavily involved in the organics industry worldwide, but particularly in Australia.

You can contact Els by email on elswynen@yahoo.com - she is currently working overseas

ORGANIC & QUALITY STUDY

By BARBARA GENO

While the origins of and motivation for the development of the organic industry worldwide are diverse, the industry has generally been supported by consumers who are concerned about avoiding the risks inherent in conventional means of food production

In order to protect consumers from fraudulent claims of organic practices being used during production, the labelling of food as organic has become increasingly prevalent. In addition the audit and certification by a third party to verify organic status of the product has become necessary. This certification is done in the context of a set of standards.

Many of consumers of organic products do so out of their personal conviction that organic food is safer than food produced in conventional agriculture as well as more nutritious, yet there is little evidence that organic food is safer than conventional food over all possible categories of risk.

The primary purpose of the RIRDC funded discussion paper on the integration of food safety management systems based on the Hazard and Critical Control Point Analysis (HACCP) with organic certification was to inform those within and outside the organic industry of recent developments in this area.

The report highlights the need for the organic industry to address food safety management as part of the organic certification process.

During the past two years, legislation and international demand in the marketplace for food safety management (complete with verification of the use of these systems) has led to a situation where it has become more a matter of 'how' than 'if'.

The report starts by summarising the issues of food safety risks as well as a brief overview of the history of food safety legislation. An outline of the underlying principles of quality assurance systems, HACCP programs, the mechanisms for independent audit and uptake of HACCP are also reviewed in some detail.

The report covers principles of food safety management in the context of primary production in Australia and outlines three major programs pres-

ently underway in the agricultural industry: Approved Supplier Programs, the SQF 2000 code (now expanded internationally) and Freshcare code of practice.

The provision of the state of play in the various states demonstrates that the development of food safety systems is at different stages in different states and this will affect the reactions of the organic industry members depending on the state in which they reside.

It is important to note that some of the certifiers already have HACCP provisions built into their Standards. Two of the largest certifiers in Australia, National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia Limited (NASAA) and Australian Certified Organic (ACO/BFA) have also explored providing a one-farm/one certification organic/HACCP plan and audit.

HACCP certification requires flow diagrams to be presented for various production stages and further work needs to be undertaken to develop these for specific cropping systems to assist in uptake of these food safety systems on organic farms.

SUMMARY

This report serves to provide a concise examination of the risks and benefits to the organic industry of inclusion of food safety management systems within the organic standards and certification process and makes recommendations as to the strategic direction that such incorporation will take.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations concerning the future direction for further developments in integrating HACCP and organic certification and expanding the conversion process through a focus on producers with food safety training.

New food safety legislation requirements that pressure growers into quality assurance systems and audit may also make the lower organic certification and audit costs more attractive.

However, it is necessary to establish that organic practices and certification can meet the requirements of the new legislation in order to justify such assumptions. As these systems evolve, it is obvious that food safety will simply be a part of commercial agriculture of any type, organic or otherwise. ■

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report outlines several points as being important to the further development of organic standards during the next few years. It is assumed that the organic industry will continue to build on the work already done to date to train auditors and to incorporate food safety plans into the standards of each certification body.

- ▶ Domestic Standards should incorporate HACCP plans as a basic requirement for organic labelling.
- ▶ Organic products should include reference to additional components to which they are certified (if these are otherwise not reflected on the label)
 - Safe (HACCP)
 - Quality (QA system ie. SQF 2000)
 - Environmentally safe (EMS; ISO 14000)
 - Socially responsible (food miles, fair trade)
- ▶ Clear differentiation from other types of labels, such as sustainable agriculture or eco-labelling, needs to be maintained by the organic industry as a high priority to maintain consumer recognition of organic products as green and safe.
- ▶ The organic industry should become proactive in recruitment of growers who have instituted any program such as the Freshcare code of practice, Nature's Choice or SQF 2000 by demonstrating that further modification of practices could yield marketing benefits to the grower.
- ▶ The organic industry should devote resources to the education of target markets as to the specific benefits that organic food offers in addition to being green and safe.
- ▶ Research funding needs to be focused on the incorporation of food safety concerns within publications outlining organic practices. Documents such as Organic Production Systems Guidelines (covering beef, wheat, grapes and wines, oranges and carrots) would be usefully expanded by details on quality assurance and food safety management systems.

The integration of HACCP food safety management systems and organic standards is already well underway. - the organic industry has taken proactive steps to include food safety management systems as an integral part of organic certification. Despite these first steps toward integration of HACCP with organic management systems, there is still considerable room for expansion of these developments in the context of strategic planning for growing organic industry.

ORGANIC NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2003

This year's National Organic Conference follows some two years after the National Organic Conference held in Sydney in 2001. It is intended that these conferences will be held every two years at different locations around Australia.

This event will draw interest from a range of institutions and will assist the definition of the broadening role of organic agriculture in sustainable development. It will bring together members of the organic, scientific, business and consumer communities to explore sustainability issues for development.

The presence of leading international and Australian organic industry decision-makers reflects the importance of this national event.

Dr Urs Niggli, Director of FiBL and Bernward Geier, Director for International Relations for IFOAM will discuss current organic developments from an international perspective. Dr Peter El-

lyard, well-known Futurist will offer his vision of things to come and Dr Helen Scott-Orr from NSW Agriculture will present details of future research projects in Australia and a panel of experts will discuss GMOs and their potential impact on organic industry, whilst Professor Henry Nix will demonstrate what makes our organic systems unique.

There will be several concurrent sessions and workshops focusing on different aspects of the main themes. Delegates can choose from special sessions on Converting to Organic, Developing New Markets, Soil and Water Management and Biodiversity as well as the Relevance of Certification to Consumers.

Participants can learn first hand what it takes to convert a conventionally managed operation into one that is certified organic or biodynamic. Attendees will learn about the economics involved in organic/biodynamic management, the costs, benefits and relevance of

certification programmes, and the challenges and rewards of "making the switch." Organic farmers discuss the methods used to develop and manage a balanced ecosystem and create an environment where biodiversity increases the microbial activity in the soil.

The University of Adelaide will become the hub of the organic sector as industry members network, seek out sources of produce, seek out buyers for products, gauge consumer opinion on a range of issues and learn more about specialist spheres of activity.

Special rates apply for Certified Operators (including those in Precertification) and Students and an Earlybird discount is available until 31 August 2003.

PROGRAMME

Contact the Conference Secretariat to receive your copy of the Conference Programme Brochure or visit the conference website for further details. ►

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS IN 2003



Robyn Williams, AM, BSc(Hons), Honorary Doctorates from Universities of Sydney, Macquarie, Deakin and ANU.

Science journalist and broadcaster, Robyn Williams presents Radio National's *Science Show*, *Ockham's Razor* and *In Conversation*. His sharp wit, keen sense of humour and ability to present science as an interest to just about anyone, has ensured the popularity of these programmes. Having graduated in England, he admits to spending as much time acting as studying. He made guest appearances in *The Goodies*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and *Dr Who*. Fortunately for us, his love of science has led to a more serious broadcasting career. In addition, he has served as President of the Australian Museum Trust, Deputy Chairman of Australia's Commission for the Future, and President of the ANZAAS Congress in Brisbane. He has written more than 10 books and was the first journalist elected as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science.



Dr Urs Niggli, PhD Weed Physiology; BSc/MSc Agriculture

Director of the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and since 2000, President of the Board of FiBL Berlin/Germany; Trustee of the German Federal Research Station for Agronomy (FAL); Trustee of the Research Institute for Vital Quality, Wetzikon/Switzerland; 1998 Organiser of the First SREN Workshop on Research Methodologies in Organic Farming (FAO) at Frick. Recently, he co-authored the FiBL Dossier *Organic farming enhances soil fertility and biodiversity* in which the results of the DOK long-term trial – unique in its conception – compares the consequences of bio-organic, bio-dynamic and conventional farming systems. The DOK-field trial was started in 1978 at Therwil, Switzerland and is

the oldest long-term trial comparing these farming systems worldwide.



Dr Peter Ellyard, Adjunct Professor of Intergenerational Strategies, University of Queensland

Dr Peter Ellyard is a specialist in global, regional and national future issues. He is currently Executive Director of Preferred Futures Pty Ltd, and Chairman of the Universal Greening Group of companies and of the MyFutureFoundation. A former Executive Director of the Australian Commission for the Future, he held CEO positions in a number of public sector organisations over 15 years. Peter also spent three years as Director of the Commission for the Future. He is a Fellow of the Australian College of Education, the Environment Institute of Australia, and the Australian Institute of Management. He is a senior adviser to the UN Development Program, the UN Environment Program and UNESCO.

His 1998 book, *Ideas for the New Millennium*, has recently been re-released in an updated and revised version. It proposes visionary but practical, educational, economic and ecological programs for a sustainable society.

ORGANIC FUTURES FOR AUSTRALIA

Welcome Cocktail Party An excellent networking opportunity for all delegates, being held on Thursday 2 October at the National Wine Centre as part of the Programme. Sample some local organic produce before exploring the flavours of one of the many and varied restaurants in the East End of central Adelaide.

OFA 2003 Organic Peasant Feast As a finale to the OFA 2003 2nd National Organic Conference, an organic Peasant Feast will be held on 3 October 2003 at the Adelaide Town Hall in conjunction with Le Cordon Bleu and Tasting Australia. The food will be robust and healthy and the music healthily robust. Appropriate settings will set the tone for an evening of fine food and song with uplifting music provided by Flight of Ideas.

ORGANIC TOURS

To demonstrate and expand on some of the issues raised during the conference a special selection of organic tours has been developed. Travel North, East or South and explore some of South Australia's most interesting organic and biodynamic operations or venture on an overnight adventure to the famous Riverland district.

Adelaide's Northern Food Bowl Head North of Adelaide to the drier plains and look at a famous integrated property, visit vegetable, olive and wine growers and see how organic operators handle water management, increasing salinity, and higher temperatures. At lunch hear how one operator has successfully overcome some of the issues relating to his operation.

Dynamic Organic Adelaide Hills Visit innovative organic and bio-dynamic operators succeeding in the moist Adelaide Hills zone. Visit a state-of-the-art biodynamic dairy, an organic herb grower and health products manufacturer and see what issues an organic fish and cattle farmer faces.

Mediterranean Wine and Olive Experience Visit one of South Australia's well-known organic wineries in the morning, discuss the issues facing organic olive and grape growers and spend the afternoon tasting some of the organic wine being produced in South Australia's famous and picturesque McLaren Vale region.

Riverland Organic Overnight Tour Visit the world-renowned Bookmark Biosphere in the northeast of South Australia, along with organic vine and citrus growers and see how they are dealing with the issues of irrigation in today's environment. When returning on Sunday have lunch at an organic farm restaurant.

Organic Retail Food Safari (self-drive) Enjoy the variety and flavours on offer from the Food State. Contact the OFA Secretariat for maps and details and venture on a voyage of self-discovery of where to find organic retailers and restaurants that provide organic produce for sale in the Food State of Australia.

OFA 2003 ORGANIC INDUSTRY AWARDS

In 2001, the Organic Federation of Australia and RIRDC established seven awards to recognise organic excellence among our producers, manufacturers, distributors, retailers and researchers. This year, in conjunction with Acres Australia we are pleased to offer these awards again. A small, national, independent, non-affiliated committee has been established to review all nominations and select the winners. Winners will be announced and awards presented at the OFA 2003 Organic Peasant Feast at the Adelaide Town Hall on Friday 3 October 2003. Each award will also have a runner up.

Awards Categories

1. Best organic producer - more than 5 years certified
2. Best organic producer - less than 5 years certified, including in-conversion
3. Best organic processor or manufacturer (products)
4. Best organic independent retailer / foodservice
5. Best organic multiple retailer / marketer
6. Best organic education project
7. Best organic research project

Closing date for nominations 31 August 2003. Nomination Forms and Selection Criteria available from the 2003 Conference Secretariat.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

PLEASE CONTACT THE CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT, CAT MILLS, BY TELEPHONE ON (08) 8339 7800 OR YOU CAN VISIT THE CONFERENCE WEBSITE <http://conference.ofa.org.au>

THE FACES BEHIND THE RIRDC ORGANIC PROGRAM

DENISE MILLAR

Program Manager

RIRDC Organic Produce Sub-Program

Denise has been with the RIRDC Organic Produce Sub-Program for just on 18 months in the position of Program Manager.

A keen advocate of the organic industry, Denise brings a wealth of experience to this position. During her previous employment with the Victorian Department of Natural Resources for some 25-years, Denise championed the re-establishment of the organics program area, and together with the NRE's Agribusiness Group, saw several funded projects ranging from conversion and production to supply chain issues undertaken.



DON FRASER

Chairman

RIRDC Organic Produce Sub-Program

The organic industry is fortunate to have secured the services of Don Fraser, who comes from a long career in the food industry, with involvement in the USA, Spain, Asia and New Zealand.



Don is currently an independent Management Consultant/Corporate advisor and serves on several Company Boards. Don is based in Melbourne, following retirement from line management in the food retail industry. Don brings to the Organic Industry a deep understanding of the mainstream food distribution industry and the critical importance of efficient supply chain management in today's business environment.

Don has been an Executive Director of the Safeway supermarket group for 17 years and General Manager of Woolworths Queensland.

During the past seven years, Don has worked for the Hong Kong based Dairy Farm International - a company operating 1900 supermarkets, convenience stores and restaurants in nine Asia Pacific countries.

His roles with Dairy Farm included International Fresh Food Development Director, Joint Managing Director of Simago in Spain, CEO of Franklins, and Regional Director with responsibility for New Zealand and Australia.

Don has been very active in the Australian Organics Industry since joining RIRDC, and is now working on getting the organic CRC bid up for 2005.

DR SIMON HEARN

Managing Director - RIRDC

Dr Hearn was appointed Managing Director on 4 July 2002.

He has extensive experience in agricultural and mining commodity policy development and economic analysis in Australia and overseas. He has held a number of senior research and senior executive positions and he was the Agricultural Representative in the Australian Mission to the European Union based in Brussels.

Simon Hearn's formal qualifications include a BSc in Agriculture and Economics (Reading University) and a PhD in Agricultural



ANNA FERGUSON

Program Coordinator

RIRDC Organic Produce Sub-Program

Anna has recently joined the RIRDC Organic Products sub program area as the new program coordinator, following the move of Merryn West to another program area. Anna's qualifications include a BA in Political Science and History at the ANU.



PROF BETH WOODS

Chair - RIRDC

Prof Woods is the foundation Suncorp Metway Professor in Agri-business at the University of Queensland (Gatton). She has a background in agricultural extension and research management, specialising in field crops & horticulture.

Re-appointed 19 January 2001 for three years, Beth was formerly a member of the CSIRO Board and is the current Chair for International Agricultural Research.



NON-ACCREDITED ORGANISATIONS

Organic Federation of Australia (OFA)

PO Box Q455 QVB Post Office
Sydney NSW 1230

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Biodynamic Farming & Gardening Association of Australia (BDFGAA)

PO Box 54
BELLINGEN NSW 2454

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poss@midcoast.com.au

Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA)

PO Box 3404
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ACCREDITED INDUSTRY ORGANISATIONS

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Contributions are welcome. Please contact Suzi Moore on phone 07 4639 3299 or email info@australianorganic.com.au

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RIRDC ORGANIC BOOKSHOP

Organic Farming in Australia – Levies and Expenditure

by *E Wynen*

While organic farmers, like all farmers pay levies for research and development purposes, it is sometimes argued that they do not receive sufficient benefits from the research funded with the levies. This publication quantifies the levies paid by organic farmers in 2000-2001 and compares them with estimates of direct and indirect funding of research into the organic sector.

2003,21pp,03/002;\$16

Integrating Organic Certification with Food Safety Certification

by *B.Geno*

The primary purpose of this discussion paper on the integration of food safety management systems based on the Hazard and Critical Control Point Analysis (HACCP) with organic certification was to inform those within and outside the organic industry of recent developments in this area. It also intended to highlight the need for the organic industry to address food safety management as part of the organic certification process. During the past two years, legislation and international demand in the marketplace for food safety management (complete with verification of the use of these systems) has led to a situation where it has become more a matter of 'how' than 'if'.

2001,59pp, Pub.No.01/171;\$16

These publications are the latest in RIRDC's diverse range of over 600 titles - visit the web for other titles.

Polyculture Production – Principles, Benefits and Risks of Multiple Cropping Land Management Systems for Australia

by *L. and B.Geno*

Provides a well-balanced synthesis of information available on polycultural production. Polyculture places an ecological framework to the growing of more than one crop at a time in one place.

2001,115 pp, Pub.No.01/034;\$21

Organic and Biodynamic Produce – Comparing Australian and Overseas Standards

by *R May & A Monk*

Compares and contrasts the current and emerging organic standards for each of the EU, USA, Japan and IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements) with the Australian Standard. Sets out in detail the regulatory status for each of 13 key regulatory dimensions in each market or agency.

2001,46pp, Pub No 01/005;\$16

Organic Production Systems Guidelines

by *S McCoy and G Parlevliet*

Forms Stage Two of a project that aims to increase the export opportunity for clean and organic agriculture. Outlines organic production system guidelines for beef, wheat, grapes/wines, oranges and carrots. Provides details of strategies and methods used by organic growers. Aims to assist conventional growers with interest in developing agricultural production systems that can be certified organic or biodynamic.

2000.156pp, Pub No 00/189;\$26

National Organics Conference 2001

compiled by *RIRDC*

Compilation of over 40 speakers' papers from the inaugural OFA national organics conference held in August 2001. Over 360 people attended the conference, which addressed a diverse range of R&D and marketing issues and discussed visions and directions for the industry's future.

2001,266pp, Pub No 01/121;\$26

Organic Produce Research in Progress by RIRDC

Contains short summaries of all continuing and completed Organic Produce research projects funded by RIRDC during 2001-2002. The complete report on all RIRDC's 20 programs is only available in electronic format on our website at www.rirdc.gov.au

2001,20pp, Pub No 01/069;Free

R&D Plan for the Organic Produce Program

by *RIRDC*

Identifies five key objectives for the R&D investments made on behalf of the organic/biodynamic industry and the Commonwealth Government. The efficiency of organic supply chains is given greater emphasis in this plan. The objectives will assist the industry to become a sustainable and profitable industry, acknowledged by the government and community as a professional mainstream industry committed to the sustainable production of high quality products.

2001,25pp, Pub No 01/104;Free

THE BOOK LIST

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ONLINE: www.rirdc.gov.au/eshop

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From Farmer to Consumer -The Future of Organic Agriculture in Australia R97/013 (1997,30pgs)	\$16
Inaugural OFA National Organics Conference 2001 R01/121 (2001,263pgs)	\$26
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