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***** MEDIA RELEASE *****

**“Biological and organic farmers being held behind the registration eight ball...
as plague looms”**

At a time of locusts breeding in biblical proportions in the southern states, organic producers are finding they are being hampered by years of neglect in relation to a more “enlightened” and internationally aligned approach to registration of organic type inputs for farming and pest management.

This comes at a time that has seen one of few alternatives for locust control (Greenguard) disappear from the market as the governments of Victoria and NSW have swooped to ensure their own supply of softer option pest control for the plague of locusts destined to hit the southern states in the coming Spring months.

There is simply not sufficient supply of this material and no other legally registered product for organic farmers to use in its place.

The US government and closer to home New Zealand agencies have organic compatible and Australian Organic Standard compliant pest control products such as Azamax (an active agent from neem oil) registered for use right now, including for the control of locusts. Australia does not currently recognize these registrations, even though it is registered here by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) for use in ornamentals and cut-flowers against a range of plant pests.

“This is the same product with proven efficacy against similar locusts species globally, with the only difference being jurisdictions and the APVMA’s more risk averse approach to biologicals like purified neem extracts” noted Dr Andrew Monk, Convenor of the BFA Standards Advisory Group.

“It is one of many examples of the challenges organic producers face in Australia which hampers them in terms of competition with the world market for organic products.”

Such neem products are permitted in the Australian Organic Standard, however are not currently recognized by the APVMA. Many biologicals (as opposed to synthetic chemicals that are proprietary in nature) are often simply too expensive to register through existing channels that treat naturally occurring biological with the same degree of scrutiny as newly synthesised chemicals even though they may have already been assessed for safety and effectiveness by other world class regulatory agencies. Further, there is little to no commercial incentive for a given business to make the huge investment needed to develop and register a product for Australian plague locusts control because the pest is only specific to Australia and major outbreaks only occur every 8-10 years. Australian producers including organic farmers are at a major disadvantage to our global competitors due to the current lack of access to novel and innovative products because our regulatory system is too rigid and costly for local companies to invest.

“This is a classic case of market failure, that can only be rectified by the adoption of the more progressive and enlightened regulatory thinking manifested in countries such as the US and the EU.” said Dr Monk.

We do not have that level of government engagement and enlightened approaches to approval of “biological” pest management products yet in Australia.

“Australian producers are certainly still hampered by registration bureaucracy not faced by their competitor American and New Zealand cousins.

“While we are of the understanding that following a long review process by the APVMA that from later next year we may see some shifting of ground in this regard, it certainly won't be a moment too soon, and regrettably for this year does not at all help organic farmers, nor other farmers wanting to use softer, but nonetheless reliable, pest management tools such as the neem based product Azamax.”

“BFA is not in a position to be able to legally advise its members to use such products on locusts, even though in America this would be acceptable to do so, and permissible specifically for locust control.

ENDS

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