

ORGANIC CO-OPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR OZ?



The bid for the Organic CRC (co-operative research centre) was not successful for the 2002 round. The next round is set for late 2004. The Biological Farmers of Australia's, Andy Monk, covers the review of the last application, why it didn't get up and how the industry may improve its chances next time round.

What is a CRC? It is a program operated at a federal level where a collaborative approach is sought and implemented across academic and scientific institutions and private industry – with the principle of the sum being greater than the parts. Federal government match the funds put up by industry. This model has worked extremely successfully for a range of sectors and industries to date.

So why is this so important? Obviously this question doesn't come up if you are a researcher or scientist. It is however vital as part of developing Australia's long term capacity to have both a viable and thriving organic industry. After all, whilst many individual farmers know their own organic farming system intimately, there is always so much more to understand and improve upon.

Further, the majority of farmers in Australia, let alone all those converting their farming systems currently to organic, are often very much in the dark as to having a road map and the requisite skills and knowledge, based upon good workable and enlightened "organic" science, to improve and ensure ongoing profitability for their own farming or processing operations. The CRC would go a long way to opening opportunities and establishing skills and technologies which would assist in this development. In the absence of subsidies in Australia for organic agriculture (never likely) and without a broad industry based levy which otherwise funds research, the CRC is arguably the best option the industry has.

It is worth going through what was being put on offer if this bid had been successful. The money is a quantum leap above what has been spent within the industry to date, totaling over \$100M over 7 years. This was broken down into:

- \$43.6M Universities
- \$12M Industry money (that would be required)
- \$25.4M State support
- \$26.5M Federal support

The programs proposed, following industry consultation in Sydney in early 2002 were:

- Program 1 Enhancing soil biological processes
- Program 2 Integrated management systems (on farm, inputs industry, etc)
- Program 3 Commercialising outcomes
- Program 4 Education and training (capability building)

The application was focused strongly on the export market – with a belief that this would assist the local industry in growth and development through time. The presentation projected Australia having a 5% share of the global trade in organic exports, making it a \$1billion industry by 2010.

There were claims put forward that a 10% increase in water use efficiency, a 1% increase in organic matter and a 1 pH unit increase over a three year period of conversion for organic farming systems can be experienced (in this case referencing the horticultural sector). Note that there is limited verifiable research outcomes to date on this. (The editor (media@bfa.com.au) would be interested in feedback from industry in terms of your own experiences, including soil test results and/or other documentation verifying claims of this.)

On the good side, it was noted that the organic industry and the OCRC potential is a strategically important research and development opportunity for Australia. This bodes well for a new application for 2004.

So why didn't it get up? Simply put industry needs to find private and industry funds to get the next one up. Some feedback - though debatable - on components of the bid included:

- More detail at the science/research level requested.
- The challenge to get the research outcomes to the farm level.

- Lack of large corporations with money offers.

The next application has already begun, being a long process. Those interested in involvement from either a commercial (funding) or research perspective, contact Linda Condon lcondon@swin.edu.au or phone (03) 9214 5997.

As a final note of interest, on the 5th December 2002, the Prime Minister announced four national research priorities. Most interestingly the top two are directly related to what the organic industry is aiming to achieve. They are:

- 1) An environmentally sustainable agriculture
- 2) Promoting and maintaining good health
- 3) Frontier technologies for building and transforming Australian industries
- 4) Safeguarding Australia

RIRDC in SA

Denise Millar and Don Fraser (Manager and Chair respectively of the RIRDC Organic Program) organised a RIRDC organic committee in Adelaide in April. South Australian Minister for Agriculture, Paul Holloway, opened the organic wine and food evening preceding the meeting of the South Australian Premier's Food Council and PIRSA (Primary Industries and Resources, SA) employees with organic industry representatives.

This was followed by an industry information day which covered such issues as the state of the international and domestic market as well as a history of the organic movement in Australia.

In the afternoon following this information session, RIRDC committee members met with PIRSA staff to discuss ways forward for the industry and how PIRSA and the government generally can best support this development. This was

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an encouraging and good sign from South Australia and signals a shift in thinking – with a realization that organic is now clearly an existing and high potential industry.

It was pointed out at the meeting that two of nine Australian clients who exhibited at the Biofach Japan tradefair last December happened to be SA based – Temple Bruer Wines and Paris Creek. Products from both these highly successful businesses were dished out to Japanese consumers and buyers at this fare.

The meeting ended with a note that

clearly there are two distinct “segments” of the organic industry to cater for – both the large market operators and the local market, regional food producers. By supporting both these areas of the organic industry the best of what the organic industry has to offer will be both displayed and developed most effectively.

More information is available from:

RIRDC
www.rirdc.gov.au/programs/org.html

BFA
www.bfa.com.au

NASAA
www.nasaa.com.au

CONFERENCES PROVIDING SCIENCE BEHIND THE INDUSTRY

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ORGANIC & BIODYNAMIC CONFERENCE
Date: June 6, 2003
Venue: Mandurah, WA (Approx 1 Hour South of Perth)
Info: www.greenskills.green.net.au

QUEENSLAND INAUGURAL ORGANICS CONFERENCE
Date: July 31-August 1, 2003
Venue: Cairns, QLD
Theme: *Organically Speaking - Soil and Society*
Info: www.geocities.com/opaq2001

NATIONAL ORGANIC CONFERENCE
Date: October 2-4, 2003
Venue: Adelaide, SA
Theme: *Organic futures for Australia*
Info: http://conference.ofa.org.au

ORGANIC EXPANSION FOR PRIME LAMBS AT RUTHERGLEN



Organic research and development is set to expand at Rutherglen Research Institute with a further 14 hectares commencing organic conversion in 2003. The new area adjoins the currently certified area and will provide additional land to undertake research into organic prime lamb and perennial pasture production reports Viv Burnett of Rutherglen Research Institute.

There are currently 9 hectares of land at the Research Institute that is certified for organic production and used as part of the Naturally Victorian Initiative project. Research has focused on the production of organic wheat and canola, and addressed management options for weed control in the crop and pasture phases. The new 14 hectare area will be used to expand research into perennial pasture establishment and maintenance (especially phalaris based systems that assist in salinity/acidity management), and the production of prime lambs to meet export markets. Victoria is the largest producer and exporter of prime lambs in Australia and is responsible for 43% of total production. Research funding to develop organic prime lamb systems is

being sought from the next phase of the Naturally Victorian Initiative.

As part of the current Naturally Victorian project a total of 20 organic prime lambs were produced and sold from the certified site during 2002. They were raised on the perennial pasture (phalaris and fescue) and had additional grain feeding because of the drought conditions. The lambs were contract killed at Radford's Organic Abattoir in Warragul. Results from the lamb production are presented in Table 1.

For more information on the organic research program at Rutherglen Research Institute, contact Viv Burnett on 02 60304500.



organic lamb carcasses

Table 1. Organic lamb results from Rutherglen Research Institute during 2002.

Group	Liveweight (kg)	GR (mm)	Fat score	Carcass Weight (kg)	Carcass Price @ 4.30	Gross Price
One (Sold end of October)	46.0	17	4	24.1	\$103.44	\$119.44 (inc. \$16/skin)
					Carcass Price @ \$4.20	
Two (Sold mid November)	47.1	19	4	24.2	\$101.46	\$116.86 (inc. \$15.40/skin)

GR = Fat described by standardised tissue measurement located over the 12th rib and 11cm from the backbone.