

ORGANIC FUTURES FOR AUSTRALIA CONFERENCE

The 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 years conference "Organic Futures for Australia" is scheduled to be held October 2-4 in Adelaide in South Australia.

By CAT MILLS

The conference is expected to draw interest from a range of institutions and it is hoped that it 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 line up of speaker includes 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 Ellyard, 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." ►

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.

REGIONAL CONFERENCES IN WA & QLD WELL ATTENDED

WA Organic & Biodynamic Conference

Sponsored by the RURAL INDUSTRIES RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (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

Queensland has also hosted a regional organic conference: *Organically Speaking - Soil and Society*. With RIRDC backing, an organic conference was held in Cairns at the end of July, and by all accounts, the conference was also well supported and extremely successful.

It was encouraging to see so many certified clients amongst the attendees - another indicator that the Australian Organics industry is reaching new levels of maturity with existing clients searching out the latest developments and research available to them.

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.

PROGRAM

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.

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

Seven awards have been established to recognise organic excellence among our producers, manufacturers, distributors, retailers and researchers. The Awards Categories are:

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION

PLEASE CONTACT THE CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT, CAT MILLS, BY TELEPHONE ON (08) 8339 7800 OR YOU CAN

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT www.australianorganic.com.au ■



About the author

Cat Mills is the Conference Organiser of the "Organic Futures for Australia" conference.

Cat has been involved in the organics industry for many years. Some of you may recognise Cat from her work in the finance department of The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia. You can contact Cat by telephone on (08) 8339 7800 or check out the conference website <http://conference.ofa.org.au>