

Letter from the chairman

BFA's position on media developments

Dear fellow members and certified clients,

As you have realised it is not with monotonous regularity that I write to you, simply preferring to get on with the job of looking after BFA/ACO and working in the organic industry, as we all like to do.

Several very important issues have surfaced in recent months that have most of the organic community wondering and questioning as to just what is happening. Unfortunately for the industry, the manner in which these issues have been handled has not been in the best professional manner. It has led to the media speculating on and embellishing premature ideas for our industry structure without even prior notification or consultation with BFA and the main stakeholders in industry.

The impact and confusion has been widespread and significant. This is qualified by the fact that BFA/ACO, through the office, the CEO Paul Dargusch, the directors and myself as chairman fielded in excess of some 300 emails, phone calls and faxes from a large cross section of clients and industry wondering and questioning as to what was happening with the logo and the standards.

While those involved and responsible for this incorrect media speculation probably meant well, both industry and consumers are now more confused than ever before.

Firstly the "Bud" of BFA and ACO is in no fear of being replaced or overshadowed by any other mark or logo, whether it be by a competitor or government. If there were to be a national logo, industry would be best to really have a good look at the Bud, as currently it appears on approximately 70% of all product in the Australian certified organic market place. This market acceptance of the Bud has been achieved by many years of integrity and promotion. The larger portion of industry is most definite that we don't want or need a government logo. History clearly demonstrates to us that if we were to have one logo or mark, that all of us would soon be relegated to the same level, which is usually to the lower level of the poorest performer in that field. Some new entrants to the industry have been very vocal with regard to calling for one logo, however their views have quickly changed when reality is explained.

The Organic Federation of Australia (OFA) at this time does not have a formal proposal before industry as to how it intends to fund its operation and continued existence. Government will soon lose patience, and that source will quickly fade. The possibility of a national levy has been raised and discussed on several occasions in recent months by the OFA, and of course this may be collected by a national logo, both to which BFA and ACO are strongly opposed. Yes, you will hear the argument that the national logo is optional,

however it would not be long before it was compulsory, thus leaving the door wide open to a compulsory levy. This would be paid for by mainly two groups: producers and processors.

In summary, your boards of BFA and ACO are very much against a national logo and levy. I really think that the last thing consumers want to see on their food is that it is government guaranteed! BFA and ACO will continue representing the true players in our industry. Our members have ownership of the Bud, which represents the Standard which we certify to, and the contribution that our members have made both financially and professionally towards development of our industry to this day.

Another concern is the intent of some to take the ownership of the National Organic Standard away from industry and to house this with Standards Australia. Some have identified that there may be some advantages to having this done, however the organic industry would lose ownership of the Organic Standard if this were to happen.

The certifiers over many years have continued to work very hard in both the development and continued maintenance of this Standard. To have it whisked away now by a few is not going to happen. For any movement, the certifiers would have to be satisfied that it was for the betterment of the whole of industry. At this present time there are no indicated advantages that have been demonstrated.

The point that both annoys and has tested the patience of industry is the fact that in an attempt to reestablish the OFA, a few of the hierarchy of that group have run with these ideas when there has been little or no consultation with the real stakeholders of the organic industry, these being the producers, processors, and traders.

BFA and ACO strongly support a peak body, and at this time both are members of OFA. However, that body will be successful in gaining the respect required to represent industry only if it can clearly regain credibility with the grassroots.

In closing, the OFA does not represent the views of BFA and ACO when it comes to a national logo, standards and a national levy.

I have led the BFA group for many years and reassure our valued clients that our logo and our standards will be well cared for, and there will not be a national levy.

Thank you for your time and all the best in organics.

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Doug Haas
Chairman, BFA