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Ethical label claims must meet standards, says BFA

Australia's largest organic representative group, Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA), has called for consumers to take control of unverified claims from companies looking for quick profits from sustainable branding.

"The only way for consumers to identify misleading marketing material is to actively make an effort to understand which symbols on product labels are reinforced by technical standards, and which ones aren't," says BFA Standards Committee Chair, Dr Andrew Monk.

The call follows a publicly reported surge in the incidents of 'green washing' and the ACCC's declaration last month that fines in the future could amount to more than \$1million for false environmental and other claims. (1)

Dr. Monk says the influx of unsubstantiated 'clean and green,' animal welfare, or environmental claims by businesses with no supporting regulatory or certification systems detracts from those who comply with rigorous requirements of recognised industry standards.

He says the issue is likely to increase with the rising demand for eco and welfare friendly products, and that unwary or misinformed consumers with good intentions are most vulnerable to fraudulent sellers.

"It's fantastic that consumer awareness is up –but shoppers need to understand there is literally a world of difference even between terms such as organic and *certified organic* products."

He said the *Australian Certified Organic* A-grade 'Bud' logo was a sign a producer had invested three years in ensuring their farm and methods were organic.

"This means there is documented, audited, assessed and point-by-point assurance that produce has been grown in compliance with the *Australian Organic Standard* which guarantees **animal welfare, environmental land stewardship, the prohibition of synthetic chemicals in farming, and the prohibition of preservatives and additives in processed organic foods.**"

The world market for environmental goods and services is forecast to grow to US\$688 billion by 2010. (2)

Consumption of organic produce in Australia is predicted to increase at 25–40% per annum. (3)

Dr. Monk says it was important consumers be able to associate the benefits of organic with a credible and visible symbol in the future given the potential for a green marketing influx.

"The Australian Certified Organic 'Bud' logo is currently found on the majority of organic products traded in Australia. We are hopeful that growth in the environmental category will be underpinned by the integrity of certification and standards, but ultimately this drive must come from savvy shoppers," he says.

- (1) Data: Austrade - <http://www.austrade.gov.au/Environment-overview/default.aspx>
- (2) Data: ACCC - <http://www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/810050>
- (3) Data: RIRDC - <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/programs/org.html>

The BFA has a vision for the organic industry in Australia - to grow organic food sales to 10 per cent of the food market in Australia by 2020. Guaranteed standards compliance is one good reason to buy organic and assist the organic industry to achieve its goal. More information is available at <http://www.bfa.com.au>

Ends.

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