

Organic farmers have internal carbon advantage

Following Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's recent announcement that benefits of carbon sequestered in soil should be investigated for use in new carbon emission reduction markets (1):

Biological Farmers of Australia, Australia's largest organic representative group, says certified organic farm systems have contributed to carbon storage through soil sequestration for years.

BFA says organic farmers are well placed to take advantage of carbon trading schemes - if they account for soil carbon.

Dr Andrew Monk, BFA Standards Committee Chair, says at the farming level carbon sequestration is facilitated primarily by the accumulation of soil humus, a cornerstone of organic land management.

"Organic farmers rely for their livelihood on techniques and natural inputs designed to protect and/or increase humus content rather than application of inputs which may destroy soil life, such as synthetic fungicides and pesticides and certain synthetic fertilisers," he says.

"Organic farmers are required to address humus levels in their Organic Management Plans under the *Australian Organic Standard*, before they become certified organic."

Dr. Monk says some methods used in organic systems that facilitate the build-up of humus include; cover cropping and green manure crops; stubble retention and minimal tillage broad-acre techniques; cultivation of deep rooted plants; integration of cropping and livestock and crop rotations.

He says organic farmers follow these methods for on-farm benefit while contributing to the broader environment and community – advantages he says are not costed into our food and farming production economy.

"In the thirty years since the official inception of organic farming in Australia, organic farmers have internalised the costs of a production system that provides some great environmental benefits," he says.

He says inclusion of soil carbon in emissions trading schemes could be one way to reward their efforts for the long term.

Greg Paynter, soil health technical advisor and BFA spokesperson says carbon stored in soil can out-last carbon absorbed by trees.

"Carbon is stored in the soil in the form of stable humus fractions, which can last for more than a thousand years - longer than most trees live."

An American study found that if 10,000 medium sized farms in the US converted to organic production, the carbon they could store in soil would equate to 1,174,400 cars off the road, or reduced car travel by 27 billion km (2).

- (1) **Data: Rudd promises soil carbon investigation (Farm Weekly):**
<http://fw.farmonline.com.au/news/nationalrural/agribusiness-and-general/general/outlook-08-rudd-promises-soil-carbon-investigation/81713.aspx>
- (2) **Data: The Rodale Institute, 2003, The Rodale Institute Farming Systems Trial**
http://www.newfarm.org/depts/NFfield_trials/1003/carbonsequest.shtml

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. Improved soil health and carbon sequestration are two good reasons 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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