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Organic consumers active in monitoring industry

Organic consumers are playing an integral part in maintaining the integrity of the Australian Certified Organic industry, says Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA).

Consumers have been identified as a lynchpin in monitoring possible substitution of organic ingredients for non-organic counterparts, and in reporting on possible abuse of the Australian Certified Organic (ACO) logo.

Following a recent report of product substitution in the UK, where certified organic oats were swapped for non-organic equivalents containing pesticides, BFA says consumer control - in addition to mandatory audits and monitoring - has been effective in eliminating some similar incidents in Australia.

"The feedback and concerns of consumers – particularly those who purchase organic on a regular basis – have provided a number of leads which have on several occasions identified issues that needed addressing," says Greg Paynter, certification reviewer with ACO.

He says organic annual audits, and unscheduled audits of 5% of certified clients also provided a good level of consumer security.

"Organic auditors can certainly ascertain, from the annual review process, a local region's basic organic production capacity.

"That means they can raise alarm bells when – for example – one producer is harvesting 4 tonnes per hectare, where the local average is 2 tonnes."

He says the results of both risk based and random sampling of on-shelf products also help.

"Products are laboratory tested for traces of prohibited food chemicals, pesticides, and so on to keep industry in check and to protect consumers."

But he says conscientious consumers and industry members remain an integral part of successful organic regulation.

He says if operations deviated from organic standards, it did not take very long for other organic industry members or organic consumers to raise concerns for further investigation.



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"In a still relatively niche industry, everybody tends to know each other's business and possess a general ethos for the maintenance of organic integrity.

"Consequently, cases of certification non-compliance in Australia are relatively low."

Dr. Andrew Monk, BFA Standards Chair, says active consumer and industry involvement in sticking to the standards is a major reason consumers in Australia can have confidence in organic products produced and sold here.

He says consumers reporting products which have no 'certified organic' logo keep industry alert.

"Ultimately the consumer must look for the certification logo, as this will protect them in common law."

He says without a certification logo there is no guarantee that the product is organic.

"This will not change, even after the introduction of a new base standard next year."

ENDS.

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The BFA has a vision for organic industry growth and education in Australia. Ask about your copy of the Organic Industry Market Research Report to see how the organic industry in NSW is achieving its goals! More information is available at http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?Sec_ID=260



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