

**Biological Farmers of Australia Media Release
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Organic farmers not willing to forgo health

Interviews conducted by Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) to help discover why producers 'go organic' reveal a high number of farmers consider the switch for the health of themselves and their families.

Rob Bauer (Bauers Organic Farm, Qld), one of Australia's largest organic horticultural growers, says he turned to organic farming 27 ago after farmers in his area became ill with cancer.

He says he wanted to decrease health risks associated with synthetic farm chemicals.

"I started thinking about farming differently after growing up in the Lockyer Valley (Qld) where friends and family passed away in their fifties after years of intensive agrichemical production."

He says neurological problems, tumours, and cancer were among the chronic diseases he watched take their toll on his local farming community.

"I wasn't comfortable with producing food using harsh farm chemicals for consumers," he says.

Steve Skopilianos, commercial lettuce producer from Ladybird Organics in Keilor (Vic) looked into organics when he started a family.

"We had been applying pesticide blends with no understanding of their effect on people and employees.

"There were times prior to organic conversion where I would not take my own produce home for my family to eat."

Biodynamic producers of macadamias* are happy to avoid high levels of agrichemicals typically used on the nuts.

"Working without a high exposure to synthetic chemical farm products is a weight off your mind," says Marco Bobbert, from Wodonga Park Fruit and Nuts macadamia plantation (Qld), certified biodynamic since 1987.

He says direct chemical exposure could easily occur on conventional farms from accidents in production.

"All it takes is a broken spray pipe."



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He says it is not just organic farmers who are concerned - "All farmers try to minimise their contact with chemicals on-farm. But organic production actively works toward negating that risk".

Research has shown there is good reason for producers' concern – a high exposure to some farm chemicals can lead to major health problems.

Particularly problematic substances include organophosphate insecticides and pesticides, which have been connected to several types of cancer, sterility and cognitive deficits (1).

The agrichemical endosulfan is one example of a highly toxic (organochlorine cyclodiene) insecticide still in use in Australia.

ENDS

**A macadamia crop in Qld is currently under investigation for environmental chemical contamination after reports of animal (fish) deformities and the possible contraction of cancer by employees on a neighbouring fish hatchery. Link to story: <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,27574,24905243-1248,00.html>*

(1) Ciesielski, S, Loomis, D, Rupp Mims, S, Auer, A, *Pesticide Exposures, Cholinesterase Depression, and Symptoms among North Carolina Migrant Farmworkers*; American Journal of Public Health, 1994. Link from: <http://www.ajph.org/cgi/reprint/84/3/446.pdf>

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



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