

BFA Media Release Thursday 19th March 2009

Bending Our Own Bananas

A Biosecurity Australia (BA) decision in early March recommending that Cavendish bananas from the Philippines be allowed to enter Australia has drawn a quick and concerned reaction from many stakeholders concerned with protecting a major Australian industry.

The Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) and Biological Farmers of Australia have come out strongly in opposition to the move.

Banana farmers, workers and local business people will hold a demonstration in Cairns; the IGA chain of 1,270 supermarkets will lobby Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) to refuse the import recommendation and will not stock Filipino bananas while local supplies are available and a Senate Inquiry has been held on the issues.

Dr. Andrew Monk, BFA Organic Standards Committee Convenor, says that Australian producers' certified organic status could be placed in jeopardy by the imports, should they introduce exotic diseases that cannot be treated or eliminated using organic or biologically orientated methods.

Dr. Monk says exposure to foreign pests and disease, several of which are endemic in the Philippines but do not exist in Australia, could destroy the livelihoods of farming families and farm workers in the organic banana industry – “a promising and growing market sector in its own right” – in a matter of days.

Despite claims from the Philippines that diseases such as Moko, Black Sigatoka and Freckle could be eradicated with proper phytosanitary procedures, Dr Monk says the import recommendation jeopardises Australia's growing reputation as a provider of 'clean and green' foods - a claim which many organic and other farmers build upon.

“BFA supports the prohibition of specific imported products from countries where there are clear biosecurity risks associated,” he says.

“We do not want to ruin the advantage of separation from product contamination which Australia's isolated geographic position affords.”

BFA is calling for reform of the current assessment methods used for scientific and market risk review to a format that embraces developing specific markets such as organic.

Several government departments are relevant to such reviews, including the Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry (DAFF); AQIS; and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).



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The Philippines is the biggest banana exporter in Asia.

Gary Grima, an organic banana grower from Innisfail, has concerns about the economic impact on a major Australian food industry if the imports are allowed and even deeper concerns about the possible effect of exotic pests and disease that may come into the country.

“Spot checks from a whole imported shipload coming into the country leaves a margin for error. There’s already been one outbreak of Black Sigatoka in a commercial production area in Australia; they threw everything at it and Australia’s the only country that’s ever beaten it.

“I’d just started organic farming and had to put it on hold until the outbreak was eradicated because of the synthetic chemicals used. If it ever gets into organic farms all we can use is mineral oil – and that won’t stop Black Sigatoka. If Moko or Freckle get in nothing will stop them.”

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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 2008 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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