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## **CRUNCHING THE ORGANIC NUMBERS – PAST REPORTING DOWN ON TASMANIA**

Australian rural industries research will be provided a valuable new data platform with the introduction of regular biennial organic market reports, says Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) Director and Organic Standards Convenor Dr. Andrew Monk.

The first Australian Organic Market Report was commissioned and published in 2008 by the Biological Farmers of Australia from independent research by the University of New England (UNE), and work on the next report, to be produced in the first half of 2010, will begin in mid-2009.

“The organic industry is extremely complex and diverse and the challenge of data collection is acute,” says Dr Monk.

“The organic industry covers every sector of the supply chain and a range of producers – from compost to cosmetics – a diversity of small, medium and large operations, cottage industry and agribusiness, and range of retail outlets that embraces local and farmers markets, farm gate sales, export and major retail outlets.

“To date there has not been an established mechanism capable of comprehensively collecting and analysing organic production data and extrapolating the information necessary for the optimum growth and stability of this vital industry sector.

“Even with possible future involvement of the ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) for some commodities, this inherent complexity will only be measured effectively via tailored organic specific research. The BFA reports will fill this gap in industry reporting and provide a data base that can be tracked in future years,” he says.

Dr Monk says that the methodology for such data collection is a new science and is still being refined and developed, while increased industry involvement will also be vital.

“Whilst the 2008 report was by design and request conservative in its industry estimates there were discrepancies. One such case in point was the reported statistics for Tasmanian organic horticulture and livestock which were lower than the actual figures.

This under-reporting overlooked not only the current viability and vibrancy of the Tasmanian organic sector, but also the significant potential for growth in supply in the coming years.

“Access to improved methodology, combined with the additional resources both the BFA and UNE are planning to commit in the coming years, will tighten future survey results,” says Dr Monk.

“The Australian Organic Market Report will continue to be an essential feature in tracking and understanding the growth and development of the nation’s organic industry.”

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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. More information is available at [http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?Sec\\_ID=260](http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?Sec_ID=260)



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