

Biological Farmers of Australia Media Release Thursday 14th May 2009

Setting the (organic) Standard – from experience over two decades

Dr. Andrew Monk, convenor of the Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) Standards Advisory Group, says a new standard for organic being developed with Standards Australia will not change the answer to the consumer question – “how can I trust organic?”

“The only solution for the consumer will remain the same: look for a ‘certified organic’ logo to be absolutely certain a product is organic.”

A certification logo currently must accompany the word ‘organic’ on a product for the claim to be verified.

Dr. Monk says a new standard will not change this in the absence of legislation – “which is not likely to occur in Australia in the coming years.”

He says the certified organic industry already has clear standards and exacting certification requirements for organic products – “in clear distinction to many other food product claims in the marketplace.”

“Unlike claims such as “green,” “sustainable” and “natural” the certified organic industry relies on recognised standards and most importantly independent auditing and certification to back those claims.”

The Australian Certified Organic ‘Bud’ logo, which is the certification mark for products complying with the BFA’s Australian Organic Standard (AOS) and Australia’s best recognised organic certification mark (1), is now prominent on certified organic products in supermarkets, independent retail stores, and other markets.

Dr. Monk says better shelf exposure means consumers are becoming more aware of what the ‘certified’ in certified organic means.

“Certified organic companies are answerable to strict regulation. They are subject to annual audits and unannounced inspections, as well as market product sampling.”

He says under the current certification system, the Australian organic industry has developed internationally recognised organic standards, and that action is taken against products not complying with certification requirements - including a benchmark case where an operator was fined for fraudulently claiming his eggs were certified organic.

He says retailers, including supermarkets, are also becoming more vigilant about the status of their certified organic products.

“The irony is that while supermarkets are an easy target when it comes to the expectation for rigour in organic integrity, the majors lead the marketplace, along with certified independent retailers.”



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“In actual fact it is locally marketed produce such as at farmers markets, which is often more of a concern to the organic industry because clear labelling and certification is less commonly displayed.

But he says local farmers markets and produce will remain an integral part of the organic industry, and continue to grow at a very healthy rate.

“Consumers nonetheless need to look for those certification marks for assurance of true organic. To help address labelling issues, BFA introduced a new section to the AOS for Farmers Markets last year, which clearly outlines a code of practice for local organic markets and sellers.”

He says BFA has developed the AOS to include sections for organic aquaculture, organic fairtrade, agricultural inputs allowed in organic systems and organic cosmetics to a level which has been internationally acknowledged.

“These are practical standards, developed in line with what the consumer expects from an organic product – accounting for matters such as animal welfare, environmental sustainability, food safety, and responsible farming systems.”

He says the Australian organic industry is on its way to establishing realistic requirements for domestic producers, rather than being forced to adopt what are in some cases “very inappropriate” European specific standards.

“It is necessarily a work in progress to ensure issues raised by both producers and consumers in Australia are continuously noted and addressed.

“The BFA will continue to articulate clearly a comprehensive and broad-reaching review of organic standards, as it has done for the past 20 years, with a 2009 updated edition of the AOS now in the final stages of preparation”.

The new edition AOS 2009 is due for release in the final quarter of this calendar year.

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(1) Data from: ‘Green Tracker’ research conducted by the Mobium Group Pty Ltd March 2009

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



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