

BFA Press Release 29/05/08

BFA sets new standard for nanotechnology control in the organic sector

BFA and subsidiary company Australian Certified Organic have released for industry and stakeholder comment a new policy to deal with nanotechnology – ‘the science of the extremely tiny’ - in the organic industry.

The policy, with final endorsement of industry, will be integrated into the Australian Organic Standard and put forward for consideration for inclusion in a base domestic safety-net standard, due to be released by Standards Australia at the end of this year.

BFA Standards Chair, Dr. Andrew Monk says the proposal takes a firm and clear stance on the use and application of nanotechnology, which has yet to be proven as safe.

“As with all technology choices, issues of consumer safety and environmental protection need to be balanced, assessing the “need” for the technology in the first instance. At this point the organic industry is taking the view that there is no confirmed need for nanotechnologies. There is noted divergence of views within the scientific community on safety and efficacy claims which impact both consumers and manufacturers”, said Dr. Monk.

Nanotechnology is a field of applied science where matter is manipulated at the nanoscale (down to 1/100,000 the width of a human hair) to change the internal structure of compounds and create new materials and products. Nanotechnologies are reportedly reaching the market at a rate of 3-4 new products per week with cosmetics and sunscreens representing a reported 60% of listed products.

The BFA last year provisionally banned the use of nanotechnology applications until further review of the issue.

Dr Monk says that internal technical review has occurred, and the BFA is now calling for industry members and wider stakeholders to comment on the drafts before them.

He says the precautionary approach to the technology taken by the organic industry is justified.

“Many technologies including GMOs in the food and agriculture system are being driven by commercial interests which could compromise government review and safety assessment processes. The organic industry is not opposed to new technologies however takes a precautionary approach to technology choice while maintaining a stringent adherence to natural farming and food processing practices”.

“We will continue to monitor and review the application of nanotechnology.”

Dr. Monk says the BFA would like to see nanotechnology properly regulated both by government and the broader food and industrial sectors, and called for more effective labelling of all new technologies in the marketplace.

“We have seen poor labelling regulation in the case of GMOs to the detriment of consumer choice and educated decision making”.



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Dr. Monk says with the proposed new nanotechnology standards in place, organic certification logos will provide consumers with the choice of purchasing products that have not been exposed to nanotechnologies or GMOs.

“The only current way for consumers to choose foods that are guaranteed to have avoided these technologies is to select certified organic.

“While this has the potential to increase the popularity of organic foods, it is hardly an appropriate arrangement for a broad range of consumers who will unwittingly consume food products from conventional avenues which may contain GMOs, and - into the future - may be subject to nanotechnology processes”, he says.

The new policy on nanotechnology which is available for comment can be found on the BFA website at the link: http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?Sec_ID=135.

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The BFA has a vision for organic industry growth and education in Australia. Watch out for the UNE/ BFA supported Organic Industry Market Research Report due for release mid 2008 to see how the industry is achieving its goals. More information is available at http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?Sec_ID=260



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