

ORGANIC BITES

Australia can't kick the plastic bag habit

SYDNEY: A recent report by the Total Environment Centre shows that despite four years of government and industry pressure to reduce the number of plastic bags issued by retailers, the country still can't kick the habit. An undercover plastic bag survey of Sydney supermarkets revealed that in 67 per cent of cases checkout operators automatically handed out a free plastic bag without asking whether one was required, even when three items or less were bought. Sixty-four per cent of shoppers used these plastic bags, while only 32 per cent of shoppers brought their own bags.

Organic bakers escape FSANZ forced folate

ACT: Organic bakers are exempt from a decision forced on bread makers by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to add folic acid to their products. The decision to fortify bread was made in a bid to stop spina bifida and other crippling defects in babies. Mandatory fortification would deliver pregnant women half the dose of folic acid needed to avoid the neural tube defects, which affect 350 newborns a year. Surveys conducted by several major conventional bakeries found that most of their customers did not want folate added to bread, and implementing the plan is likely to increase the cost of bread.

Organic Gardener now blooms six times a year

MELBOURNE: The ABC's *Organic Gardener* magazine, launched in 1999 and sister publication to the highly successful *Gardening Australia*, is now bi-monthly. The publication's rich brew of gardening advice, recipes, book reviews, permaculture, pithy news and environmental reports, letters and eco-travel make it a must read, whether you are a long-term organic gardener or a novice. Sold nationally at newsagents and ABC Shops for \$7.95rrp. Also available by mail order subscription either online at www.abc.net.au/gardening or by calling 03 8317 8110.

**GE canola, coming to a farm near you?****URGENT ACTION REQUIRED NOW FROM ALL INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS**

THE GE CANOLA moratoriums in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia are being reviewed. Each jurisdiction has differing legislation to give meaning to the moratoria and each has a different process of review. By the time this goes to press the review process for South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales will be well underway.

There has been unprecedented build-up in the press lately from the pro-GE side, with hysterical claims of a desperate need for GE crops. Comments such as, 'If we had GE crops here now the impact from the drought would not be so great,' and, 'it would be great if we had GE crops here now that used less fertiliser.' There is no commercially released GE product anywhere in the world that is drought tolerant or that uses less fertiliser. When the world is being fed with myths it is little wonder that eventually people start to believe the spin.

BFA commissioned Alasdair Smithson (formerly of the Soil Association) to draft its submissions to the reviews (see BFA website www.bfa.com.au) and it will be lobbying state governments as hard as it can.

However, regardless of whether you are in the business of organic, this campaign urgently needs your help. If Australia goes down the GE grain path we may lose our grain export market to Europe. And once organic grains are contaminated with GE canola admix, they are forever contaminated.

Our customers have supported the growth of certified organic food because they care about what they buy – they want food that is as unadulterated as possible. While chemicals were used in agriculture before the application of organic standards and regulations, GE crops were not. This gives us a legal edge – the right to remain GE-free if we so choose. This right has not been tested in Australia, but in North America there are billions of dollars worth of lawsuits alleging lost income from

contamination disasters with GE crops, from StarLink corn to LLRice.

In May 2007 an injunction was granted stopping the commercial release of GE alfalfa (lucerne) on the grounds that the US Environmental Protection Agency had not properly assessed the environmental and social impact from contamination on non-GE and organic farmers.

Using figures from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE), we have calculated that the average price advantage for Australia with canola is \$68 per tonne better over the last two years than the previous ten years. This coincides with the full labelling of GE oils in Europe and China – something that we don't have in Australia.

It is essential that all of us within the organic sector get involved immediately by making our views known to our political representatives who will make these decisions on our behalf. The Greenpeace and GeneEthics websites have sophisticated cyber-campaign materials and the capacity to send your message to many politicians at once. The BFA website contains its submissions. Please get informed and involved for our sector's sake and for future generations.

As this publication goes to press we are trying to assist with the Australian release of Jeffrey Smith's *Genetic Roulette*. Smith's last book, *Seeds of Deception*, was a frightening read, and his new book comprehensively documents 65 unanswered health issues related to GE foods. Please buy a copy and urge your friends and family to do likewise and let's all be better informed.

"Regardless of whether you are in the business of organic, this campaign urgently needs your help."

Australian organic olive oil – 'world's tastiest product'

BRUSSELS:

Congratulations to Rylstone Olive Press, organic olive grower

and olive oil processor. The company was one of three Australian companies to receive a Superior Taste Award by the International Taste & Quality Institute (iTQi) in Brussels in June 2007. The highly competitive international competition aims to guide consumers who are looking for the world's tastiest products.

RYLSTONE OLIVE PRESS & BENTIVOGLIO OLIVES

Publication enjoys organic growth

TIMELINE OF THE BFA MAGAZINE'S HISTORY

1994 Launch of the BFA's *Quarterly Journal*, 20 pages. Internally produced, distribution 500 copies.

1995-2002

Distribution growth with increases in BFA membership.

2002 Launch of the *Australian Organic Journal*, internally produced.

2005-2007 Rural Press (now Fairfax) employed as contract publisher for design and greater distribution. Distribution grows to 6000 each quarter, includes conventional industry readers through Rural Press mailing lists.

SEPTEMBER 2007 Move to McGuireGuides, a division of Custom Publishing Pty Ltd, publisher of *CleanFood organic*. New look developed with enhanced editorial format. Circulation of the first edition is 8000 copies distributed to entire organic industry.



Organic farmer is runner-up NSW Farmer of the Year

SYDNEY: Mallangane organic farmer Stuart Larsson has been voted runner-up in the NSW Farmer of the Year competition at a gala awards dinner in Sydney recently. Mr Larsson was recognised for organic soybean production and diversification of seeds as well as improvement to the environment through the use of on-farm produced compost.

Now in its fourth year, the annual awards celebrate excellence in farming and environmental management, and increased recognition of farming diversity and sustainability.

This is the second time an organic farmer has received recognition for this award. In 2004 organic farmer Garry Hannigan of Broken Hill won the title.

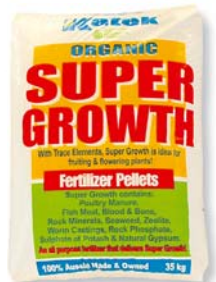
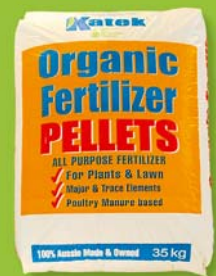
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Bud levy cap reduced



THE CAP ON levies payable by all BFA (Biological Farmers of Australia) certified producers and processors for use of the Bud logo has been reduced as of the new financial year. A significant 20 per cent reduction has seen a drop from the \$5000 payable last financial year to a current cap of \$4000.

Doug Haas, chairman of the BFA, says that this reduction is possible because of the BFA's continuing success as an organisation.

'For marketing of industry, our clients' levies assist to fund the numerous publications and

marketing tools that the BFA produces. A number of roadshows, expos, forums, workshops and general advertising commitments are also funded by the BFA's levies.'

Mr Haas says, 'Our levies help promote our product to customers by ensuring the BFA and the Bud remain at the forefront of organics.'

The Bud logo is now the most recognised industry trademark in organics and the symbol on over 70 per cent of certified organic produce.

FOOD FACTS

Organic food: a waste of money?

Keep this in mind next time a prospective customer tells you that they can't afford organic food because it costs too much.

- Planet Ark research has found that around 3.28 million tonnes of food is thrown out by Australian homes and businesses each year.
- Australians threw away more than \$5.2 billion worth of food and drink in 2004.
- Half of Australian households admit to discarding fresh food to the value of \$1000 each year, while one household in seven throws away more than \$2500 worth each year.
- According to Waste Audit and Consultancy Services, approximately 25 per cent of total waste generated by commercial kitchens and food retail outlets is food. Of this, 60 per cent is plate scrapings and 40 per cent is preparation waste, such as peelings.

Farmers' markets and good biosecurity

IT'S LITTLE WONDER that farmers' markets are becoming increasingly popular in Australia. They provide consumers with the opportunity to buy fresh produce straight from the farm, and enable farmers to sell their goods directly to the public. But with their numbers growing rapidly across the country, so is their potential to spread animal and plant pests and diseases. We are free of many serious animal and plant pests and diseases, but if they were ever to establish a presence here they could pose a major threat to our agriculture industries, and the producers and communities that depend on them.

With this concern in mind, the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), working with farmers' market organisers across the country, have produced an information kit to ensure effective biosecurity, animal health, plant health, bird flu prevention, and steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of pest and disease outbreaks, including tips for operating at a farmers' market.

In addition to standard biosecurity practices, the DAFF kit suggests that participants at farmers' markets should also adopt the following biosecurity measures:

- Don't share equipment with other stall holders without ensuring it is clean and free of soil and contaminants. Disinfect containers and equipment as necessary.
- Don't put other stall holders' products in with yours, keep them separate.
- Ensure the produce you sell is fresh and of high quality.
- Brush or wash fruit and vegetables to remove soil before selling.
- Always practice good personal hygiene and cleanliness at your stall as disease can be carried on clothing, footwear and skin.

FOOD SAFETY AND YOUR OBLIGATIONS

- Disinfect your equipment with household disinfectant.
- Keep an eye out for, and immediately report, any signs of animal or plant disease.

BIRD FLU

- Where possible use new egg cartons when selling eggs, as pre-used cartons can help spread disease. If you use pre-used cartons, keep them away from birds and always wash your hands after handling the cartons before handling your birds.
- Always practice good personal hygiene when handling meat and eggs.
- If you would like to receive a biosecurity information kit call 02 6272 310

For more information on biosecurity, visit www.daff.gov.au/biosecurity

UK Soil Association considers airfreight ban on imports

LONDON: Food flown into the UK could be stripped of its local organic certification if the UK Soil Association goes ahead with its plans to amend the organic standard to address the issue of 'food miles'.

Demand for organic food now greatly outstrips UK farmers' ability to supply it. Supermarkets imported 34 per cent of all the organic food they sold in 2005, most of it by air.

Other suggestions being considered by the Soil Association include plans to require that food be labelled with the air miles it has travelled, or an insistence that flights be carbon offset.

The Soil Association launched its airfreight consultation to look at ways of reducing or eliminating the environmental impact of organic airfreight. This is the first time the association has engaged in such a wide-ranging public discussion on a change to its organic standards as far reaching as this. The question of what to do about airfreight brings together the important issues of climate change, ethical trade, global justice and international development. The Soil Association will be consulting development charities, environmentalists, organic consumers, organic businesses in the UK and abroad and a wide range of other interested parties.

However, Robin Maynard, the association's campaigns director, said the introduction of a partial or even an outright ban was only one option it was considering. 'There are a lot of people to talk to and we have to make sure we act on all views before we make a decision,' he said. 'It could have a very significant effect on some people's businesses and livelihoods.'

New RIRDC/NSWDPI organic guide released

SYDNEY: A NEW BOOK DESIGNED TO HELP NSW FARMERS MAKE THE SWITCH TO ORGANIC LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION HAS BEEN LAUNCHED

GOING ORGANIC – *Organic Livestock Production: A conversion package for organic livestock production in the rangelands of western New South Wales*, a jointly funded initiative from NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSWDPI) and Rural Industries Research Development Corporation (RIRDC) aims to demystify the organic sector and help those farmers already involved in organic production who are looking to further diversify.

Speaking at its launch, NSW Minister for Primary Industries Ian Macdonald described the book as a great opportunity to link production efforts to the point of sale.

'Organically produced meat products are becoming increasingly popular among Sydney consumers and this is a great way of informing the customer about the efforts made by the producers themselves,' he said.

'Gaining organic certification can be a challenge and this booklet will provide a step-by-step guide to assist in a smooth transition into organics for producers in the western NSW rangelands.'

Minister Macdonald said the publication is

a significant document for the expanding organics industry.

'This is a growing, specialised industry, which is becoming increasingly professional and competitive and is now valued at \$400 million nationally,' Minister Macdonald said.

The first in a series of three, the guide was developed through workshops with NSWDPI staff and organic industry members, and was reviewed by key certifying organisations.

Topics covered include livestock breed varieties, weed and pest management, allowable inputs and identification of both domestic and export market opportunities.

While the guide is intended to target conventional livestock producers in the rangelands of western NSW, it will be of value to any conventional primary producer wanting to know more about organic production.

Copies can be ordered by contacting RIRDC enquiries, 02 6271 4100, or through the RIRDC website <http://www.rirdc.gov.au>

(See page 50 for review of this book)



NSW Minister for Primary Industries Ian Macdonald (right) seen here with Ken Taylor, MD of Cleaver's, The Organic Meat Company, at the launch of *Going Organic* outside Cleaver's organic retail outlet in Neutral Bay, NSW.

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ORGANIC BITES

Organic pork – food for Olympians

BEIJING: Organic pork will be served at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games due to concerns over athletes testing positive for banned growth hormones.

Organic vegetables will also be served in the village and press centre during the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In the village of Donglongwan, about 100 kilometres northwest of Beijing, organic eggplants, tomatoes, onions and other vegetables will be grown in a 30-hectare field surrounded by a two-metre-high steel fence.

An official of the company that operates the field said, 'We've agreed with the Olympic Organizing Committee not to publicise our activities to ensure the safety of the vegetables bound for the Games.'

McDonalds UK switching to organic milk

LONDON: In a shrewd marketing move and an attempt to clean up its image, McDonalds has announced it is switching to organic milk for its coffee and hot chocolate drinks in all of its restaurants in the UK. The fast food chain said it hoped this would increase consumer demand for organic milk and help the sector grow. It is estimated that the move could account for five per cent of the UK's organic milk supplies.

The fast food chain has recently changed its coffee bean supply to stocks certified by the Rainforest Alliance. The move added 10 per cent to McDonalds' coffee sales.

Japanese petition against GE in Australia

TOKYO: The Japanese are collecting signatures and sending petitions to Australian state governments for the renewal of moratoriums protecting against production of GM canola after February 2008.

According to the Japanese press Australia is the only country currently exporting non-GM canola to Japan.

Organic lamb group seeks partners

PERTH: Red Earth Organics is a grower-based organic lamb group that is proactively searching for new markets or partnerships, developing feed programs for the rangelands and promoting organics across all industries.

The group is offering the opportunity to organic lamb growers to register a confidential interest in supplying lamb for sale with the group.

Over the previous 12 months the group has been working hard to secure kill space, packaging and an export licence for chilled and frozen red meat. With these tasks recently completed, the group is now in a position to export.

The group is also involved in research and development projects including a 22 000 lamb program supported by two of the industry's biggest research and development bodies – Meat and Livestock Australia and Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

Red Earth Organics founder, Joe Hughes, says, 'We have been developing a supplementation program for lambs in rangeland areas with a view to increasing our annual organic turn-off by a modest 30 per cent, decreasing the number of lambs normally turned into the cheaper conventional market and alleviating the requirement for a feedlot.'

Another project is a partnership role with a large high school in Wagga Wagga, which involves aiding the school with their curriculum for an organic livestock and vegetable program.

The group welcomes interest from all states and



from growers belonging to all certifying bodies. Processors and butchers are also able to lodge an interest for the purchase of lamb and offal.

To find out more about the group, visit www.redearthorganics.com.au

Western Australia: Organic and biodynamic meats

PERTH: Recently there has been a promising development for the WA organic meat industry. A number of certified organic growers have been brought together by Steven McCoy, organic development officer, Department of Agriculture WA for the formation of a grower group.

A proposal has been put forward to the

department to create a group, to which growers pay a membership fee. The main aim is to allow strength in numbers to ensure supply and develop new markets. Currently the group is seeking expressions of interest for a coordinator to liaise with interested parties.

For further information contact Steven McCoy, 08 9368 3960, smccoy@agric.wa.gov.au

Macro closes store, wins international praise

SYDNEY: The rapid expansion of Australia's largest organic retail chain, Macro Wholefoods Market, has taken a hit with the announcement by CEO David Ginsberg in August that its Sydney inner west outlet at Concorde will cease trading. In an open letter to suppliers, Ginsberg admitted that the store was in the wrong demographic location. No specific date has been set for the closure. On a more positive note, Macro still plans to open a new store in November at Mona Vale on Sydney's Northern Beaches and another at Port Melbourne, Victoria in late 2008.

The chain was also recently named one of the 'Ten to Watch' retailers by international food and grocery expert IGD. IGD annually compiles a list of 10 retailers from around the world that it feels show strong growth prospects, global best practice and innovation, and this year selected Macro Wholefoods Market as a future star among the hundreds of retailers visited by IGD each year.

Former Coles group employee Joanne Fleming has been appointed Macro's new merchandise manager. Fleming helped to develop the Coles Organic range.

Standards & regulation

STANDARDS AUSTRALIA BEGAN

development of an organic standard in May 2007 after an application from the Organic Federation of Australia (OFA). There are views for and against this move. As the process progresses it is essential that all stakeholders stay informed and active in the debate.

The aim of this article is to make it clear that there is a fundamental difference between standards and regulation. While a standard is required to regulate a production system via a set of rules, you will not get regulation by possessing a standard alone.

At present we have the National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce (National Standard) developed by the organic sector with government assistance. We also have legislation via the export control orders for the export market and we have organic sector self-regulation for the domestic market. The National Standard incorporates a clause that makes it illegal to sell organic products for export that are not certified by an AQIS (Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service) accredited certifier. This clause has successfully stopped uncertified organic products claimed to be produced to the National Standard.

For the domestic market, an estimated 80-90 per cent of product sold is certified to the export system even though it does not need to be. This has been a credible and effective method for authenticating organic products, whether you are a farmer selling to retailers or processors, a processor selling to retailers or a retailer selling to customers. It is the 10-20 per cent of organic product that is sold without certification, and sometimes with clearly questionable claims, which worries all of us within the certified self-regulatory system.

In Europe, North America, Japan and a range of other countries where standards are under development, there is a mandatory requirement for certification. This is what we believe most organic sector members would like to see in Australia.

The biggest difference with a Standards Australia organic standard is that they will not mandate certification. It will be a voluntary standard that producers and processors could use to enable them to make a label claim to be producing organic products to this standard. It is possible that consumers may misconstrue such a label claim to mean that the product has been inspected by Standards Australia. Without certification there is no way to determine whether the product is genuinely produced to the Standards Australia organic standard.

There is now a considerable risk of the trickle of businesses that avoid certification turning into a flood. A very real economic reason why businesses may choose to do this is the direct costs of certification, inspection and levies and the indirect cost of internal compliance of certification.

It is better to wait until we have convinced



government of the need for full and proper regulation, similar to that overseas, before we should consider developing another standard. Under no circumstances should any voluntary standard be encouraged by the certified organic sector to be put into the Australian marketplace without regulation.

Should Standards Australia continue to develop an organic standard, there is a need for further work to be carried out to ensure that there is effective consultation as well as fair and equitable representation for the commercial operators who will be most affected by their standard.

Whether AQIS continues to support the existing National Standard or defers to Standards Australia, and whether Standards Australia releases an interim standard or not, are important questions that also need to be answered. Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) will remain engaged in the Standards Australia process to try where possible to add value and to minimise any impacts.

This is a complex argument – some sector members support such a standard from Standards Australia and some do not. It is incumbent on all of us within the certified organic sector, regardless of who we are certified with, to ask questions and to read the supporting statements that the OFA has made (www.ofa.org.au), as well as the information on BFA website (www.bfa.com.au). This should enable you to provide informed input on this important sector issue that will affect your commercial activities.

Scott Kinnear, BFA Director

“It is the 10–20 per cent of organic product that is sold without certification, and sometimes with clearly questionable claims, which worries all of us within the certified self-regulatory system.”