

INDUSTRY

Profile:

Doug Haas, 10 years Chairman of BFA



Doug Haas in conjunction with his wife Anne owns and operates a commercial vegetable farm, Red Country Produce, at Yeppoon, near Rockhampton.

Their property is SQF 2000 certified with SGS.

Doug became involved in the BFA in 1992 and went on to become a member of the BFA Board in 1996.

During the year of 1997, he was appointed to the position of chairman of the BFA Board, a position he has continued to hold uninterrupted ever since.

During this time the BFA has experienced some of the most important strategical changes that have been instrumental in preparing the BFA and ACO to assist the certified organic

industry in Australia to where it is today.

The following interview provides some background to the man who has achieved 10 years as chairman of the BFA; a milestone well worth noting.

Q: When did you first become passionate about organic food and what is it about organics that is important to you?

A: My passion for organics has not clouded my commercial judgment or reality of what an industry has to achieve to remain a viable alternative. If an industry is not viable then it is not a real alternative. Of course there are overall issues and they are health, environmental, soil, and animal welfare,

remembering that these are not in any formal order, as individuals would have varying views of priority.

Q: Tell us about your organic vegetable farm, Red Country Produce, where is it, what is it like and what do you grow?

A: Red Country Produce consists of approximately 75 acres (30.3 hectares) of mostly red soil country slightly north of Yeppoon, being about 55 kilometres from Rockhampton. Irrigation water is sourced from several underground bores and is all of only the best drinking quality. The area has mainly a northerly aspect and is considered relatively frost-free. Couple this with the fact that hail storms are almost unknown and one has a relatively kind environment for cropping. A wide range of Cucurbits are grown, which are complemented with capsicum, eggplant and tomatoes.

Q: Where are the products sold that are produced on your farm?

A: All produce is sold through wholesalers in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne as volume is too great for local market requirements.

Q: How has the organic industry changed in the past decade?

A: Industry has continued to change and the passing through what some would consider moving from short pants to long trousers has happened. It hasn't been painful, and while industry has its critics, no industry is without its internal arguments, which usually lead to better positioning and reality.

Q: Why are there so many certifiers in a country with a population as small as Australia's?

A: This is that great result of free enterprise and should never be changed. Certifiers will come and go as market determines. These changes will be the result of integrity of product, which the customer/consumer will determine. Service and value for dollar for producers and processors seeking certification will also be a factor that relates to longevity in the market place.

Q: There's been a lot of talk lately about why there should be only one organic logo in Australia. Do you think this will ever happen and what

will it look like?

A: The answer to your question is a definite no. Proponents of this socialistic idea cannot identify any other industry that has one logo. Consumers are intelligent and realise very quickly which logo gives them that security expected when purchasing for integrity and quality. One logo drags every one to the same level. Why would we want to devalue the "Bud"?

Q: Where do you see the rapidly evolving organics industry in five years time?

A: Consumers seek organics for a whole range of reasons; health, purity, taste, environmental, animal welfare and many others. So in this world where more and more people are

identifying these points every day, by seeking certified organic, consumers know that they are embracing all the above and probably more. For instance environmentally friendly means simply that. Animal welfare means exactly that, not necessarily embracing any of the others. Therefore the logical argument must follow that this industry will continue to accelerate at an even faster rate than it is presently enjoying.

Q: What is your background that has led you to becoming chairman of the BFA 10 years ago?

A: Attributes that have provided me with the skills to be chairman have been gained through an extensive association in politics and through negotiation with very large commercial companies. This background has given me the experience and capacity to lead the group and deliver outcomes.

Q: What have been the greatest achievements for BFA and industry during your last 10 years as chairman?

A: The greatest achievement for industry that I have seen has been its increased commercial maturity, which I've mentioned previously. BFA has also matured to become more financially sound and professional, with a well-qualified staff and board to assist and take the group forward.

The separation of the certification arm into Australian Certified Organic was a great achievement. This has proven enormous potential for exports and for country to country recognition of organic standards.

Two other achievements with significant benefits to industry have been the initial integration with Organic Vignerons Association of Australia (OVAA) and more recently the move by OGA into the BFA Group. While being one of the larger groups, BFA has not been viewed by many other certifiers as a threat, mainly due to its open democratic processes and being recognised as providing true representation of industry.

These two historic events are significant as the larger economy of scale opens doors to more streamlined processes and savings providing greater resources for improved service to members, increased media activity, employment of professional staff and other benefits leading to growth of industry.

Q: What is it that you enjoy most about working with BFA?

A: While I have been involved in other business, I have principally involved myself in primary production. When looking at agricultural production the best is most likely to be organic production. Seeing the industry grow from small roots to a commercially strong and balanced agri-business sector has been extremely rewarding.

As chairman I have enjoyed working with different growers and business people on a daily basis. I have enjoyed the assistance of excellent directors and managing staff of the Co-op during the years and together achieving BFA's strong position.

I enjoy learning from people and experience. I have learnt a lot from BFA and have been fortunate to work with highly skilled and intelligent people.

Q: What is the key to the success and popularity of the BFA Co-op?

A: The BFA has always been the group that tried to assist its members. I believe we have listened more, been more interactive, proactive and supportive of our members.

Secondly, while some certifiers pride themselves on the fact that they do not charge a levy for the use of their logo, BFA continues to charge a levy. This is why the BFA group is well-resourced and promotes both the BUD and the organic industry. Obviously this has been successful by the market presence and acceptance that the BFA Group has achieved. ■

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