

The latest in organic R&D news

# Government spotlight on organic citrus

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is taking steps to help the citrus industry grasp opportunities in export and domestic organic markets, and continue its move to more sustainable crop and land management.

While many growers may be interested in the idea of organic production and certification, information on how to best implement the requirements of organic management in the grove is not always readily accessible.

A new project, supported by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and Murray Valley Citrus Board, will document management practices for organic citrus production in Australia, to help new and established organic producers develop and fine-tune their orchard systems. It will also guide conventional growers in their adoption of specific organic practices.

Scientist David Madge from DPI's Mildura centre developed the project after completing similar work for the viticulture industry.

"A lot of information relevant to organic production exists, but considerable effort is required to find and collate it, and most growers just don't have the time to do that," David said.

The new project will gather relevant information from local and international contacts, research projects, scientific literature and industry publications. The wealth of knowledge and



Courtesy of Mt Gayndah Ecofruit P/L

practical experience held by organic citrus producers will also be a vital ingredient.

More information on this project may be obtained from David Madge, DPI Mildura on 03 50514500 or david.madge@dpi.vic.gov.au.

## Green lights ahead for organic lamb project for western NSW

In the Central Far West of NSW, Joe and Melanie Hughes of Belarabon station own and operate an organic prime lamb business run on 170,000 acres, using Damara and Dorper meat bred sheep.

The breed of sheep has been found to be ideal for the western division country due to its ability to gain weight in tough times.

With a growing interest from exporters and high untapped demand for domestic product, Joe Hughes believes that pristine organic western NSW is primed to cater for a lucrative trade in organic lamb.

Their intention is to develop an organic grain supplement program to enable them and other growers to reg-

ularly turn off prime stock regardless of climatic conditions in an organic environment.

"This would assure our processors a regular supply and aid in retaining valuable domestic markets and more importantly expanding export trade.

"It is important that we devise a means of delivering continuity of product," said Mr Hughes.

There are five growers that have been chosen to hold trials on their properties located on different soil types across the western division. These growers will help local growers in their areas with implementation of new practices based on the findings of the trials.

Mr Hughes says there are many topics to address in the trial.

"The most desired objective is to run less mature ewes for the same return in lambs, for example, instead of running 7,000 ewes for 6,000 lambs we would like to run 6,000 ewes for 7,000 lambs.

"This could deliver greater ground cover, quicker grass response, less water run off and greater growth rates in lambs allowing earlier sales of lambs while delivering less impact on the land."

A proposal has been put forward to Meat and Livestock Australia and has recently been granted approval for funding.

"We have an application before RIRDC for additional funding and have already received sponsorship from Commonwealth Agribusiness and other sponsors are in the process of signing up to the project.

"We have full and energetic support from RIRDC and the DPI and have been asked to participate in their four year roll out plan for organics," said Mr Hughes.

Updates on the progress of the trials will be reported in BFA publications, and on the website [www.bfa.com.au](http://www.bfa.com.au).