

Regional organic news

Partners sought for guidebook

The Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) Bionutrients Sub-committee has identified the need to develop protocols and frameworks for using biological farm inputs.

These include compost, microbial stimulants, minerals and biological liquid fertilisers — all of which are becoming commonly used by mainstream Australian farmers.

Industry guidelines are needed to ensure they are used safely and effectively to ensure positive outcomes for

agricultural production and users. The sub-committee is developing a guidebook on safe, effective use of biological farm inputs to provide sound, science-based guidelines for using these inputs.

Project partners in the natural resource and sustainable agriculture communities are being sought to help complete the project. Co-sponsorship is also possible.

Contact: David Hardwick, phone (07) 3350 5716; email <bio-nutrients@bfa.com.au>.

OCEANIA PACIFIC JOURNAL LAUNCH

The web-based *Journal of Organic Systems* was launched in Sydney in July.

This long-overdue initiative provides the first opportunity for those committed to organic approaches to publish their work in English in a Southern Hemisphere refereed journal.

It is a significant step in the maturity of organics in the Oceania Pacific region. Though international, it has a distinct Down Under pulse.

"Researchers and practitioners of organic approaches can publish their findings and ideas," its Australian co-founding editor, Professor Stuart Hill, says.

"These may relate to design and management of production systems, their problem-proofing and problem-solving, produce handling and marketing, policy issues and associated organisational and technological issues, and supportive approaches to education, research and development."

The editorial group comprises some of the most respected, active researchers in their field, currently from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.

The journal will be free and electronic-based at <www.organic-systems.org>.

Contact: Prof Stuart Hill, phone 61 (02) 4736 0799 (wk) or 61 (02) 4753 1158 (h); email <s.hill@uws.edu.au>; Brendan Hoare, 886 (0) 91 293 9026, email <bhoare@unitec.ac.nz>.

GMO AWARENESS DRIVE

The genetically modified (GM) Subcommittee officially launched the 'Say No to GMO' campaign at the Organic Expo at Darling Harbour in July.

Its chairman, Scott Kinnear, said: "The aim of the campaign is to keep pressure on all State and Territory Governments to keep existing moratoriums in place. With the exception of Queensland and the Northern Territory, all states have adopted moratoriums on commercial release of GMO food crops until 2008."

ORGANIC WOOL
FUTURE EXCITING

Chemical residues in the wool clip are attracting increasing concern but on Trevallyn Station on the Darling River near Wilcannia NSW, they are a distant memory.

Elders Premier wool manager, Craig Eckert, says the results the McClure & Daughters family partnership is achieving on its property are astonishing and attracting interest from buyers around the world.

He says the most recent organic offering of 116 bales from Trevallyn Station was snapped up by BWK Germany and headed for the United States market.

"The family owns a dynamic group looking to work at the cutting edge of marketing, finding new markets and establishing a strong foothold in them," he says.

Running 4000 ewes on Southrose blood using genetics especially designed for their enterprise, the McClures also produce certified organic Merino meat, which they supply to niche organic butcher shops and international markets in Bangkok.

"With the Southrose genetics, our micron in the flock is starting to come down, which is also something we want to achieve," Janie McClure says.

"So we see a very exciting and rewarding future with what we are doing. This year we will have about



Trevallyn Station certified organic Merino lambs heading to export abattoirs.

360 bales of certified wool and we have recently been successful in getting three lines tested for the Eco label at the CSIRO."

In addition, McClure's fledgling marketing company, Rural Organics, is working carefully at developing certification procedures and markets for other growers to help them sell meat and wool into certified organic markets.

Contact: Janie McClure, phone 0417 009 556; email <ruralorg@netspace.net.au>; or Craig Eckert, phone 0428 974 421; email <craig.eckert@elders.com.au>.

"GM foods on the market have not undergone adequate testing to ensure they are safe to eat and will not harm the environment over the long term," Kinnear said.

"Overseas experience brings concerns that GM will cost Australia overseas trade markets; cost farmers through increased dependence on herbicides; and lead to loss of organic farming communities due to contamination that is almost impossible to control.

"The BFA feels GM is taking farming in a direction irrelevant to the environment and consumers.

"There is a strong demand for organic food, and research has shown organic farming has multiple, long-term environmental and social benefits. Use of GMOs is banned in certified organic food and farming."

The BFA has started a petition to help governments halt growing of GM crops, which can, along with further information about the campaign, be accessed via the BFA website <www.bfa.com.au>.

A brochure is available from the BFA office outlining facts and concerns regarding GM. Members and subscribers are welcome to copies for distribution.

MEAT DEMAND OUTSTRIPS SUPPLY

Organic meat sales continue to surge in North America, with 51% growth registered last year.

New research finds the meat sector fastest-growing in the North American organic food industry. Organic meat sales have expanded by more than 150% since 2002, with high growth rates expected to continue as retail distribution increases.

A new study by *Organic Monitor* finds undersupply, particularly of organic beef and pork dampening on market growth rates. Producers cannot find enough organic meat supply to meet burgeoning consumer demand, so some companies resort to imports.

Marketing manager of Organic Meat Company, Alister Ferguson, believes Australia is well-positioned to take advantage of the growing demand for organic beef in the US as we can supply 100% grass-fed, range-reared organic beef in steady volumes 12 months of the year.

He says the US is up to 10 years off being able to do this as it is geared more towards grainfed programs, with cattle bred for this purpose.

Contact: More information – website <www.organicmonitor.com/300244.htm>.

HORTICULTURE GROUP SET UP TO PLAN FUTURE

Horticulture remains the largest organic sector in Australia, however not until now has a formal group been set up to identify and deal with such issues as planning for the future.

The BFA Horticulture Subcommittee has recently been formed and we congratulate the following on being appointed members:

Val Tanguilig (ACO), Alasdair Smithson (Cazali Organics), Hugh and Faye Smith (H&F Smith), Jackie O'Reilly (O'Reilly's Orchard), Les Nicholls (Sandy Creek Organic Farm), Adam Willson (Soil Systems Australia), Tom Rafferty (Supply Chain STO), Terry Elliott (TK Elliott), Tom Benson (Bossy Boots Farm), Robert Bauer and Trudy Townson (Bauers Organic Farm) and Nick Miall (Organics Direct).

Essentially, the group will make recommendations to the BFA Standards Committee on areas of the organic standards needing revision; identify issues that need addressing to progress the sector; research and initiate projects to develop supply chains and markets; and grow the sector as a whole to benefit all involved.

Tom Rafferty, of Supply Chain STO, is greatly encouraged by formalisation of this subcommittee. He has considerable knowledge of horticulture supply chains, having been commissioned by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) to analyse supply chains in the fresh potato industry.

Currently, he is working with a small number of progressive growers to improve their supply chain systems. Rafferty believes that "until fair systems are put in place, it is not hard to see who will benefit in the future as the market matures".



Picking carrots at Bauers Organic Farm, Lockyer Valley, Qld.

"I want to make the organic sector aware of challenges growers will face in future as retailers and their suppliers consolidate further and there becomes little choice but to be in with the big boys or out of the game completely," he says.

Rafferty strongly believes these systems need to be grower-driven. Relying on current distribution channels will deliver an undifferentiated commodity, with most of the created value going to the retailer — not a good plan, he says.

Adam Willson, of Soil Systems Australia, says he looks forward to working with the group to help growers understand the changing marketplace.

"Consumers are now not only looking for chemical-free, but nutrient enriched, food," he says.

An initial meeting will take place at the BFA Head Office on August 28. Minutes of the meeting are available to all industry members by request to <horticulture@bfa.com.au>, or phone (07) 3350 5716.

Those who wish to offer their expertise to the subcommittee are encouraged to apply.