

Industry comment

Organic Standard: too much to lose?

Do you support the OFA application to Standards Australia to develop an Organic Standard, and if yes, why, or if no, why not? Given that the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) intends to stop its third-party accreditation role some time next year, what do you think is the best replacement for AQIS?



**DR ANDREW MONK, CHAIRMAN,
BFA STANDARDS SUBCOMMITTEE**

"The real issue is that there is a lot of concern from grassroots of the industry saying, 'We need to get this right and we need to ensure industry maintains ownership of the Organic

Standard going forward – we are not yet convinced.

"There are clearly concerns towards actions taken by purported leaders of industry that have not been sanctioned by the majority of industry, let alone most industry members even knowing what is going on.

"In this environment, there is certainly not a convincing case with the current process. More focus is needed on how we as an industry are going to determine the coming decade of regulation – that is, it is about involvement and coming to agreement.

"In terms of accreditation (as distinct from standards, which must remain in industry hands), AQIS remains the industry's best generic option.

"AQIS accreditation is not as relevant for ACO being one of the most accredited certifiers worldwide (IFOAM, ISO 65, USDA NOP, JAS and others).

"Having noted this, other smaller certification agencies will either need to take up accreditation with another recognised body, or AQIS continue to aid industry in its self-regulation.

"Let us not forget — AQIS is there currently on industry request. If industry requests it stays, then it will need to stay."



**GERALDINE DE BURGH-DAY, TASMANIAN
ORGANIC-DYNAMIC PRODUCERS:**

"I do not support any application to Standards Australia to develop an Organic Standard, by OFA or any other industry body — we already have one!

"A cornerstone of our Standard is the process of certification inspections. Standards Australia does not involve itself in any way with certification inspections.

"With regard to OFA's application, it is my understanding OFA was set up to become the peak body for the organic industry, with its prime function to interface with Government.

"In this capacity, I believe any involvement in the actual certification process, or in setting or administering standards,

would compromise that process and effectiveness of the organisation (OFA) to lobby Government.

"Now that AQIS has advised of its intention to stop its third-party accreditation role, growers and producers within the industry have the option to approach another formally recognised audit and accreditation body to perform the role vacated by AQIS.

"Alternatively, growers and producers can set up an independent audit and certification body, as is being considered by most certifiers via Organic Certifiers of Australia.

"The certifying body should house the Organic Standard and administer continual review and updating of the Standard, as is currently done through OIECC under the auspices of AQIS.

"I think the course chosen will depend on results of careful scrutiny of the options by individual certifiers, and hopefully the decision will be arrived at with all certifiers setting aside their individual differences and focusing on the best future of the organic industry as a whole."



**DAVID BOOTH, BURONGA PASTORAL CO,
COOTAMUNDRA, NSW**

"I do not support the application to Standards Australia as the loss of mandatory auditing and certification leaves our sector in a dangerous situation.

"Auditing and overseeing is a necessary expense. Without this process, we risk seeing products in the marketplace without any inspection or certification claiming to be produced in accordance with the national standard. 'Organic' could become a generic label with no link back to the producer.

"We also risk the industry losing control of our standards, opening the floodgates to big business that sees only the dollar value in organic and push for standards to be watered down.

"The Standards Australia option leaves our systems open to be rorted. It will be a very sad day if this happens after all the work people have put in over the years to bring integrity into the system.

"There is a moral structure to organic production for food based on quality rather than the quick-fix mentality of conventional systems. We risk this being exploited.

"I believe industry must take this matter into its own hands and more discussion needs to occur between all of industry before a decision is made on both the subject matters." ■