

# Navigating uncharted waters

It is with great appreciation that BFA accepts long-term funding support from Horticulture Australia Limited over the next 4 years for delivering the next two editions of the highly important Australian Organic Market Report.

The market report, which will continue to be researched independently by the University of New England, Armidale NSW, is an essential document for our industry. It allows both current and potential organic industry members, investors, including government departments and others, to ascertain in which direction individual sectors of industry are heading and make informed decisions. It will enable us to continue to be able to reference the most current data possible, which is important during an extended period of vigorous growth and increased investment. The 2008 report has left many questions yet to be answered and many comparisons yet to be drawn with much data being available only for the first time. The 2010 and 2012 reports look forward to answering many of these questions and to assisting you in the planning and navigation of your business.

Surveys will be sent out towards the end of this year and we look forward to your input and support once again, as this is essential in gaining accurate information for all.

## Howard Rubin retires as OGA Chair

Organic Growers of Australia Certified Ltd (OGA) has reached the end of a 20-year era with the retirement of Howard Rubin as Chair. Since the organisation's establishment in 1989, Mr Rubin has remained at the helm even after its integration into BFA nearly 3 years ago. Over this time both Howard and wife Elle have dedicated an incredible amount of time and effort to the organisation's evolution and to the development of the organic industry at large. While Mr Rubin remains involved in the overall group as Chief Financial Officer, it is with honour and gratitude of the trust that the former Chair demonstrates in the BFA Group, that I accept the responsibility of the role of OGA Chair, in addition to my current position as overall BFA Group Chair.

The OGA program is a fully ISO IOAS 65 accredited and highly affordable program for smaller growers selling at markets or direct to retailers. In the short time since its inception as a program specifically catered to the smaller grower, it has already proven an important guarantee for consumers looking for organic local produce they can trust.

## Poor press unfounded

Recently the organic industry has attracted some negative press regarding the use of amino acid isolates in certified organic chicken feed. While the development process for an agreed National Standard is not yet finalised, the latest new draft recognises and lists amino acid isolates as allowed, in line with other recognised international organic standards, to ensure adequate animal welfare and balanced nutrition.

In response to the issue raised in the original Weekly Times story, the BFA has made it clear that from an animal welfare, feed balance and environmental perspective, the BFA sees synthetic amino acids as preferable to an increased level of non-organic feeds such as meat meal, with industry considering a full phase-out of non-organic meat meal over time.

## Avoid risk of exposure to non-payment

While the organic sector may be more insulated than most against the current economic situation in Australia, in good



times or bad it is essential to remain vigilant. Even in a strong growth industry such as ours, there always lurk in the shadows operations which do not operate in a manner that is conducive to sustaining strength based on robust, good business practices.

Recently while attending a workshop in Swan Hill Victoria, I and others travelling with me had the opportunity of visiting a very long-time member and supporter of our organisation who has remained in contact with us regularly over many years. While the lady was delighted to meet with us, we were sad to hear that she had recently fallen victim to a wholesaler whose business had gone into liquidation. The situation had left this lady, and a large number of other organic producers, in the position of simply not being paid for their product. While it is not unheard of and I myself have had this bitter pill to swallow in the past from badly managed businesses, what was especially distressing for all of us was that this lady and her husband are well into their 80s and simply love our industry and the fact that they are still able to participate. In order to minimize the risk of this all too frequent scenario, it is important to remain vigilant at all times especially when dealing with businesses that fall behind in their remittances. I would suggest that if your payments are not forthcoming on a regular basis that you have a strong discussion with the purchaser of your goods, and, if regular payments are not made in full, that you seek another outlet and sound legal advice.

I wish you all the best in organics. ◀▶

**By Doug Haas**  
BFA Chairman

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