

Getting the terms right

THANK YOU FOR the informative Spring edition of Australian Certified Organic Magazine. As one in the packaging industry I found particularly interesting the article on biodegradable packaging, however I'd like to point out some of the important differences between degradable, biodegradable and compostable packaging, which were not covered in the article.

Everything breaks down eventually, however the term biodegradable is meaningless unless it's qualified according to time.

The question is over what period an item breaks down, and with what residues. Standards in Europe, USA, Japan and now Australia (AS 4736:2006) define these matters according to time. Biodegradable packaging must break down to 90 per cent – into CO₂ and H₂O and biomass (humus) – within a period of six months on exposure to the environment, and leave less than a certain level of proscribed minerals, meeting ecotoxicity tests.

Compostable materials must break down to the extent laid down for biodegradability, but within one composting cycle – which is 10 to 45 days. Thus, a product might be biodegradable but not compostable as it will not compost in the allotted time.

Degradable materials are neither compostable nor biodegradable and use small amounts of heavy metals to promote breakdown. The process simply turns polyethylene, a stable material, into an unstable



material that disintegrates on exposure to light and heat.

The small pieces remaining will stay in the environment for a considerable period.

How do consumers know if packaging is truly biodegradable?

At this stage the details of the logo to be used are being finalised, however it will almost certainly be the DinCertco logo (above left).



Meanwhile any packaging – including bags and films – that bears this logo (centre left) is compostable.

The other main mark to look for is the BPI logo, which shows that the packaging is compostable to the US Standard ASTM D6400-99 (left). If you see either of these you know the product will compost.



Neil Thomson

**Director BioBag Australasia Pty Ltd
(formerly Ausasia Link Pty Ltd)**

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Apathy about regulatory standards

I AM CONCERNED about the general apathy on the part of some members within the input supply side of the organic industry when it comes to complying with regulatory standards responsible for food safety and protection of works. With the ever-increasing level of awareness of organic products and a much wider customer base for organic food, a greater level of scrutiny from private and public regulators will become the norm. It's imperative that as an industry we continue to guarantee the integrity of the organic offer at all levels by strictly adhering to regulatory standards.

Organic integrity and food safety starts in the paddock, so it's of major concern that I see biological brews, plant extracts, and various herbs and spices used on food crops to control pests and disease without any credible research to justify their claims or qualified scrutiny of toxicological profiles. Compliance with local organic standards does not provide for expert review of the product's effectiveness or toxicological profile. If a product is designed to control a pest or disease in most cases it will have some type of biological toxicity profile. We must make sure that any product used on food crops to control pests and diseases must be reviewed by an independent regulator such as the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) and the TGA's Office of Chemical Safety, to be safe and effective for its intended use. Input suppliers to conventional growers must be compliant – so let's all clean up our act and make sure no finger-pointing is allowed to take place and food safety within organic food production is protected.

Gary Leeson

General manager Organic Crop Protectants Pty Ltd.