

From the General Manager

In conversion to organic

By MICHAEL BLAKENEY

The past few months have been interesting and challenging for a relative newcomer to the organic industry. It is exciting to be part of such a passionate industry with members who are proud of their efforts.

Industry members are not afraid to speak out on topical issues and, as it was succinctly explained to me, I too would need to undergo my own in-conversion period.

I would like to thank members who have welcomed and encouraged me. I would also like to thank those clients and members who have offered suggestions on improvements the Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) and Australian Certified Organic (ACO) can make.

Your suggestions are taken seriously and I hope clients and members will notice continuous improvement in both BFA and ACO services.

STANDARDS ISSUE

The BFA has serious concerns over the path that certain organisations are taking with the issue of standards and the organic industry. Many of you will have read the BFA's discussion paper and concept paper on standards produced by Scott Kinnear.

If you have not had a chance to read it, I urge all interested industry stakeholders to find the time to review the discussion paper (see <www.bfa.com.au>).

The BFA's contrary view to the Organic Federation of Australia's application to Standards Australia is based on concern over insufficient assessment of implications of this application. The BFA is also concerned over the loss of industry ownership and control of organic standards.

This is a significant issue and may impact on all industry stakeholders. The BFA will endeavour to ensure a balanced, transparent debate takes place with real industry input.

SYDNEY ORGANIC EXPO

The Organic Expo recently held in Sydney allowed a large number of consumers and traders exposure to innovative organic products and operations. The BFA sponsored and exhibited at the Expo.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Michael Blakeney was appointed general manager of the BFA/ACO Group as of May. He has management experience across a range of agricultural enterprises. His qualifications include a Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Economics and Master's degree in Science of Agri-Food Marketing and Management. Contact: email <gm@bfa.com.au>.

I can confirm first-hand that the level of interest was overwhelming at times. The variety, quality and level of organic products on display was exceptional and a credit to the industry. Also encouraging was the number of inquiries received into certification.

The BFA views education and awareness of certification by consumers and potential industry entrants as critical to the long-term success of the industry. The growth of the Expo confirms consumer demand and the interest you no doubt see in your organic businesses.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The BFA sponsored the Queensland Landcare Conference held in Brisbane in August. As organic production aligns with many Landcare initiatives, it is important that Landcare proponents have access to information that supports the organic sector.

September sees the relaunching of the grower roadshow program, with the first meet scheduled for the Riverina. The program includes meets in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, with member-only sessions as well as publicly open workshops.

September will also see the BFA exhibiting at Fine Foods Australia in Melbourne and at BioFach Japan in Tokyo.

I look forward to meeting some of you at these events and always welcome your suggestions. ■

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