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## **COAL SEAM GAS AND ORGANIC PRODUCTION: CAN THEY COEXIST?**

Contamination from fracking chemicals used during coal seam gas (CSG) extraction, is a major concern to organic farmers, says Greg Paynter, consultant to Biological Farmers of Australia.

Following the revelations of the recent ABC Four Corners program in to the current CSG practices, BFA supports the call for a moratorium on CSG mining until a full investigation has been undertaken.

With the environmental impacts of some mining activities under question, the risks being revealed to primary producers makes it an uncertain future for many, however for organic producers, meeting domestic and international standards brings with it further challenges.

Across Australia mining companies are exploring, drilling, fracking and extracting CSG, and the environmental repercussions of this form of mining are yet to be fully recognised and understood which makes it particularly difficult in terms of managing risks to organic certification.

Hundreds of drilling sites around properties in south-east Queensland have already been set up. The drilling process can interfere with farming production, degrade the land and deplete the water table. Chemicals used in the fracking process to extract the gas may leach into the ground polluting the land and water.

“Organic management systems are based upon avoiding use of synthetic chemicals in farming and managing the risk of potential contamination from on and off farm. Mining brings with it many new questions around risk management with the concern that chemicals used in mining have the potential for pollution of land and water,” Mr Paynter said.

“A number of ACO clients have already been affected by these types of coal mining operations. Others are currently under threat due to proximity, or the activities have yet to start in their region. The BFA group is increasingly being contacted by clients in relation to their engagement with sectors of the coal industry and the potential threat that may occur from that.

“Concerns held by ACO clients are in relation to the continuance of their organic certification, health of their families and workers; loss of potential markets domestically and also in export markets; and interruption to farming processes due to changes of the farm landscape caused by mining infrastructure,” he said

According to Akiko Nicholls, ACO managing director, if the land is contaminated from the result of CSG, organic certification status may be suspended.

“Producers could face loss of all markets for their produce for three years and even longer if there are ongoing problems with managing the risk and level of contamination,” she said.

Greg Paynter says the BFA is working for the best outcome for organic primary producers.

“We are communicating with growers, grower groups and Government to gain an accurate understanding about the extent mining activities are affecting or may affect producers' organic status in future.

“Any producers who are organic, or potentially looking to become organic in the future, are urged to contact the BFA to discuss their particular circumstances in order to know their options.”



It would appear that in the short term, there may be huge financial gains from CSG; in the long term, Australia may be left with depleted and polluted water tables and unusable primary production land with food security breached.

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