

**Biological Farmers of Australia, Media Release Wednesday 16th
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Organic farmers avoid chemical cancer risk

A report given to a health forum hosted by the Cancer Council of Australia last week supports the views of a large number of producers who have moved to organic production says the Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA).

BFA interviews with organic farmers have disclosed that many producers opt to 'go organic' because of health concerns and to avoid exposure to synthetic pesticides which are prohibited for use in organic production systems.

The Australian National University's Dr Liz Hanna told a major health forum last week that the health of Australian farmers is being subjected to serious risks by exposure to some of the most dangerous chemicals available.

Dr Hanna said the increase in the rate of cancers in farming communities has become dire, exacerbated by little training and regulation of chemical use.

"It's quite critical. The issue to bear in mind here is that people have this attitude that chemicals can't hurt because they don't bite because they don't have teeth," Dr Hanna says.

"The problem with most chemical exposure is that the human response is actually delayed many years and so the people that are exposed frequently and over many years often and usually don't show signs until many, many years later."

The synergistic "cocktail effect" of many chemicals, albeit at legal limits, being combined in the environment and consumers' diets, has long been a concern of BFA and organic producers.

Particularly problematic substances include organophosphate insecticides and pesticides, which have been connected to several types of cancer, sterility and cognitive deficits (1). The agrichemical endosulfan is one example of a highly toxic (organochlorine cyclodiene) insecticide still in use in Australia.

Rob Bauer (Bauers Organic Farm, Qld), one of Australia's largest organic horticultural growers, says he turned to organic farming 27 years ago when he observed "neurological problems, tumours, and cancer taking their toll" on his local farming community.

Biodynamic and organic producers of macadamias* are pleased to avoid high levels of agrichemicals typically used on the nuts. Marco Bobbert, from Wodonga Park Fruit and Nuts says direct chemical exposure could easily occur on conventional farms from accidents – something as simple as a broken spray pipe.

Dr Andrew Monk, Standards Convenor, says that similar stories to these tend to dominate the reasons why producers shift from a conventional farming system to organic.



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“Personal health is a major motivator as is making the connection with health of the soil as well as overall farm resilience and productivity.

“It’s generally not until something goes wrong either at the farm or a personal level that people change their thinking. Moving into organic production often takes a major shift in mindset which is brought on by a major incident in peoples’ lives for example cancer in the family.

Dr Monk says “The stringent requirements of organic farming, which proscribe the use of synthetic agri-chemicals, are a major safeguard for the health of farmers, their families and consumers.”

ENDS

(1) Ciesielski, S, Loomis, D, Rupp Mims, S, Auer, A, *Pesticide Exposures, Cholinesterase Depression, and Symptoms among North Carolina Migrant Farmworkers*; American Journal of Public Health, 1994. Link from: <http://www.ajph.org/cgi/reprint/84/3/446.pdf>

(2) ABC Radio <http://www.abc.net.au/rural/qld/northwest/>

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The BFA is working to improve organic industry growth and education in Australia. Ask about your copy of the Australian Organic Market Report to see how the organic industry is achieving its goals! More information is available at http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?Sec_ID=260



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