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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP ESSENTIAL FOR NATIONAL ORGANIC MARKET INTEGRITY**

#### **National Standard, Consumer Safeguards Needed**

**Adelaide, SA - 22 July 2005** – Government backing for a national ‘certified organic’ standard, and an effective framework ensuring compliance, are essential pre-requisites for the on-going health and development of the Australian organic industry, according to a prominent industry leader.

On the eve of a major industry roundtable to be hosted by the Organic Federation of Australia (OFA) in Sydney on July 29, NASAA\* Chair and CEO, George Devrell, has claimed that the Australian organic industry has the potential to become both a significant local environmental leader and a global export force, but has been held back by lack of official and industry support for the peak industry body.

On July 29, the industry roundtable will consider vital issues including the enhancement of consumer identification of certified organic products, a strengthened compliance regime governing organic produce, and future organic standards development.

“The current confusion in the Australian consumer and media marketplaces resulting from inconsistent labelling of organic produce is directly attributable to the ongoing failure of Government and industry to combine in support for the widespread implementation of an AQIS Mark agreed to by industry in 2002 and again in 2004”, Mr Devrell said.

#### **Funding, Consumer Awareness Lacking**

“Through inspection, auditing and testing, certifiers are responsible for ensuring the integrity of the official organic grades of production – Certified Organic, Certified Biodynamic or Certified in Conversion. Their customers are the producers and manufacturers of organic product, not the consumers. Today, the certification segment of the organic industry is operating competitively and effectively.

“While no individual certifier has the financial resource or consumer profile to establish and manage either a national certification logo or a national brand, there is a pressing need to build consumer awareness of the value of certification in maintaining high organic standards.

“At the most basic level, this requires clear and consistent presentation of the certification status of all organic produce.

“With organic produce now entering the mainstream, consumer safeguards maintained solely by self regulation are inadequate, and neither organic certifiers nor producers can redress this situation without official intervention.

“NASAA is strongly supportive of OFA efforts to redress this overall situation and through a partnership with Government, build a market environment in which consumer confidence can be absolute. We hope to see very substantial progress at the industry summit.

“For Australian consumer protection, we believe the best outcome would be the use of a single, authoritative logo on all certified organic produce as part of the National Standard - as a standard condition of certification which may be augmented by a private seal if so desired. Auditing and certifying to this National logo would then become a normal part of the organic certification process,” he said.

“Based on international experience, the most suitable independent authority to ensure honest and truthful use of the National logo is likely to be a Government body. Overseas, for example, high consumer confidence is associated with certification managed by such bodies as the USDA.

“In the Australian instance, while the industry standards may be housed in Standards Australia, compliance might be best afforded through the Trade Practices Act, State Offices of Fair Trading and the ACCC.”

### **Need For Export Quality At Home**

Mr Devrell believes that one of the major issues to be resolved in any re-organisation of organic certification is the need to ensure that Australians continue to enjoy the best of organic quality on the domestic market.

“AQIS currently ensures all export produce meets both the Australian National Standard for organic production, and the standards imposed by importing customer countries such as the EU. In addition, individual accredited certifiers such as NASAA ensure the acceptance of product into countries such as the US and Japan, where stand-alone organic certification programs are in operation.”

“Any reduction in the influence of the National Standard on local market management could leave the way open for different standards to evolve here, with a possible lowering of produce quality. NASAA believes that the correct way forward in this environment is to formally adopt, at a domestic level, the high standards currently administered through AQIS in meeting the general requirements for exported organic product.

“This not only ensures the best for the Australian consumer, but also sets up the Australian producer for relatively simple export accreditation.”

### **Export, Environmental Support Wanting**

“With our clean, green image, Australia has the potential to be an organic salad bowl for the region, and perhaps further afield. It is particularly important to act now that conventional horticultural industries are under threat from low cost imports, and while demand and consumption for organic produce is soaring in traditional Australian agribusiness markets.

“Australian farmers can readily move into the value-added, extra margin organic market - and I believe very substantial domestic and export opportunities will unfold. We have a solid foundation here to build on, but minimal effort is being applied to the opportunity.”

“While we might be struggling to compete in producing some horticulture commodities, we can lead the world in organic production and processing of many well suited crops and livestock products.

“There is a clear lack of recognition that widespread adoption of organic farm practices will beneficially impact upon the health of Australian farm communities through reduced chemical exposure, the health of our environment through improved land management, our global image through an extension of our clean green and humane product range, and our export balance of payments.

“Massive amounts of money and support are now being poured into organic support in European agriculture specifically to achieve these social, environmental and economic benefits.”

Mr Devrell says there are current Australian Government programs in agriculture that provide precedents for action.

“The current adoption of the NLIS system by the national beef industry, with government sponsorship, is blatant intervention to ensure world class quality assurance for an important export industry. The debate on integrity and compliance in the organic industry provides a direct parallel in an important opportunity area – but one in which Government interest appears very low.

“Similarly, Australian Governments have poured millions of dollars into successful rural Landcare programs, yet a similar investment into promoting the adoption of organic production practices would not only take us from ‘caring for’ to ‘nurturing’ our land, but would also help improve the health and economic welfare of people in farm communities.”

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**\* NASAA at a Glance**

Formed in 1986, The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA) is one of Australia’s largest organic certifiers.

With operations both in Australia and Overseas, the company provides certification and inspection services, which assist in facilitating market access throughout the world for NASAA certified organic product.

NASAA is accredited with the following bodies and programs: AQIS (Australian Quarantine Inspection Service), IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements), ISO65, JAS (Japanese Agricultural Standard) and the United States National Organic Program (US NOP).

With a national office based in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia, NASAA is a non-profit company limited by guarantee comprising an association of members and certified operators (over 1000).

NASAA will play proud host to the 2005 IFOAM World Organic Congress to be held in Adelaide in September [www.ifoam2005.info](http://www.ifoam2005.info).

For further information visit the NASAA website at [www.nasaa.com.au](http://www.nasaa.com.au).