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## **‘Organic’ Chicken Debacle Reinforces Urgent Need For New Independent Australian Organic Standard**

Adelaide, SA – 6 November 2006 - Until a new independent Australian (national organic) certification standard is in place, both organic consumers and producers must learn to look carefully at labels on their certified organic products, according to George Devrell, chair of the National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA).

Devrell was commenting on revelations in the Sydney Morning Herald (4/11/2006) that high priced ‘certified organic chickens’ would not achieve compliance with the industry ratified National Standard for organic produce.

“Unfortunately, we appear to be entering an era in which the independent authority of a consistent National Organic Standard will end. There are signs that it is already being replaced by the use of commercial and unregulated ‘standards’ enabling the use of ‘marks of convenience’ or ‘tainted labels’ on products that cannot achieve any authentic form of organic certification,” Devrell said.

“The tainted labelling approach is based on so-called ‘domestic-only’ standards. In fact, no such ‘domestic’ standard exists. What we are seeing in some cases is entirely unsupportable product claims by commercial operators pursuing profit.

“Misleading labelling is commonplace with alleged ‘organic certification’ of products like bottled water – for which there is no organic standard whatsoever. The ‘domestic only’ certification of chicken products - as in this case - is another unfortunate step down a path that can only lead to consumer confusion and disillusion.”

### **Producers at risk**

“If this trend continues, we are facing the prospect of the Australian organic marketplace irreparably damaged by standards of convenience which are possibly sanctioned by the logos of well-known certification organisations,” Devrell claims. “This is a fundamental betrayal of trust both of producer and consumer.”

He believes failure in the certification system leading to a loss of consumer confidence may have devastating consequences for producers who have spent many years building certified organic enterprises.

“No one has more to lose here than Australian organic producers. Many operators have spent years and millions of dollars building organic enterprises for which all market credibility is delivered in the certification system. Few primary producers anywhere have put more effort and have greater commitment to quality standards than organic farmers.”

## **Background – National Organic Standard Issue**

“The core difficulty has been in gaining government and industry agreement on a national certification process and authority to replace the current National Standard, developed originally for export but also used domestically,” Devrell said.

The assurance of product integrity has been the fundamental role of the certification system. The sole purpose of the certifier has been to help producers and processors maintain comprehensive standards that offer market access to the producer and product integrity to the consumer.

Under the peak body umbrella of the Organic Federation of Australia (OFA), a resolution was achieved in late 2005 by which responsibility for the National Standard would be taken over by Standards Australia, working with industry technical committees. This resolution remains to be implemented.

The principal opponent of a strong independent standard provided by Standards Australia has been BFA, the parent entity of ACO, the organisation involved in certifying ‘domestic only’ organic chicken. BFA is the largest certification organisation in Australia, having recently announced a merger with another certifier, OGA. It is claimed the new entity will certify about 70% of Australian organic operators.

NASAA and BFA clashed in late 2004, when NASAA rejected a merger proposal from BFA on the grounds that this would have created a near monopoly in the Australian certification marketplace, to the detriment of both producers and consumers. NASAA, a not-for-profit organisation focussed on organic certification services, continues to hold a 26% market share of certified organic operators.

“We remain a strong supporter of an independent Australian Organic Standard for organic production and marketing,” Devrell said. “There is plenty of evidence that monopoly in any commodity marketplace can open the door to poor practice or corruption.”

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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).

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