

ORGANIC INSIGHTS

The magazine of the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia | Autumn 2019

Wrap from the 2018 Biological Farmers Conference

Full story on pg 10



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d'Arenberg winery release their first certified organic wine

Agroecology: What is it?

Setting up an online business for small organic operators

What's in a label, plus much more...

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MESSAGE FROM THE GM

My first week as General Manager of NASAA was a bit of a blur. Since then I've been asked a number of times, 'How was your first week?' In reality it was a bit of a whirlwind, but it did confirm my belief that whilst there is much to do, NASAA are well positioned to continue to be a positive force in the organic industry.

Having applied sustainable agricultural practices to my own farm in the Adelaide Hills for the past 17 years, I am empathetic and committed to building the industry.

Some people I have spoken to who aren't aware of NASAA, have asked what NASAA does and how it differentiates itself in the market. It's been encouraging to find out just how much NASAA is respected and involved within the organic industry. There is a strong platform on which to further build our presence and influence on behalf of the organic industry both locally and overseas.

From the outset I have been provided with clear strategic objectives set by the NASAA Board. I strongly believe that I have been given the privileged opportunity to take the reins at NASAA at an exciting time in our history.

My background in growing a diverse range of businesses, and business and market development around food production and manufacturing environments in Australia, Asia, USA, NZ and Europe, will be valuable in continuing NASAA's work and role in organic industry leadership and development.

NASAA has the largest area of organic land certified to an organic standard, meaning I have the unique opportunity to be part of an industry leader. I resonate with NASAA's Mission and look forward to the many opportunities and challenges that await, ensuring NASAA continues to provide services that are vital to the certified organic industry's development around market access, export, industry capacity development and advocacy.

There is certainly a lot to learn and during that first week I have already had the privilege of meeting and speaking to a number of key opinion leaders within the organic/biodynamic world. In the immediate short term I am endeavouring to communicate with as many people in the industry as possible in order to understand the respective needs and where the best results can be achieved.

These are exciting times indeed.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Organic Insights.

Mark Gower
General Manager

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REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Integrating water, soil, plants and animals



Major General the Honourable Michael Jeffery, AC, AO(Mil), CVO, MC(Retd), Chair of Soils For Life and National Soil Advocate, recently addressed the 3rd International Controlled Traffic Farming Conference at Federation University.

The following is an extract from his speech exploring regenerative agriculture.

In 2012, I was appointed Australia's Advocate for Soil Health... we have never needed this advocacy more.

We face the combined impacts of climate variability, drought, salinity, nutrient runoff and the alarming fact that around 50% of the rain that falls on Australia simply evaporates, mainly because many of our soils are so bare that the water rapidly runs off taking top soil with it, the soil lacks adequate carbon, or is so compacted that the rain cannot filtrate.

My other hat is as Founding Chair of the not for profit Soils For Life organisation. Our objective, quite simply, is to restore, maintain and preserve the health of the Australian agricultural landscape, comprising some 55% of our continent and managed by around 100,000 farmers on behalf of 23 million urban Australians.

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Our objective is very simple—to restore and maintain the health of the Australian agricultural landscape by successfully integrating the management of our soil, water, plant (and where appropriate our animal) assets. If any one fails, so do the other two or three. The term is regenerative agriculture; I call it common sense!

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At Soils For Life, we demonstrate how to regenerate, maintain and protect strong healthy soils through some 24 carefully selected and performance measured farming case studies.

We intend rolling these out to 100 in the coming two to three years, Australia wide.

The majority of our case studies at this stage are livestock or mixed farms rather than 100% cropping, and I understand there are different challenges in adopting some of these practices to broad acre cropping operations.

However, cropping will increasingly feature in our future case study portfolio, and our latest case study, at Brownlow Hill near Camden, involves a lucrative lucerne producer who uses a combination of stable waste and minimal tillage to great effect. Our case study farmers are sustainably productive—and they're making money.

In the process of being sustainable, they are also increasing the levels of carbon in their soils.

And there has never been a more urgent need to do so...

With integrated, regenerative landscape management, farmers store and retain large amounts of soil organic matter, which can remain in those soils for millennia.

Unfortunately, many neighbours of our [Soils for Life farmer's] still continue with their old industrial agriculture practices—even firing their stubble—but the current drought is forcing them to ask questions of themselves, including taking a look at the land management practices Soils for Life promotes.

I tell them not to be afraid to go for change—to give it a go, one step at a time, to transition, if you like, bit by bit.

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What is Regenerative Agriculture?

The principles are simple. Strong, healthy soils with adequate carbon levels retain water, support strong, nutrient rich plants, and promote biodiversity.

It's not rocket science. These principles have been practised for millennia by land managers who see themselves as stewards whose responsibility is to enhance and preserve the landscape for future generations.

Regenerative landscape management techniques generally focus on integrated management of soil, water, vegetation and biodiversity and becoming more efficient in the use of natural resources.

Regenerative agriculture is not a 'one size fits all' approach to land management.

Techniques include:

- Applying organic composts, fertilisers and bio-amendments
- Encouraging natural biological cycles and nutrient transfer
- Adopting holistic management
- Implementing time-controlled planned grazing
- Using grazing management and animal impact as farm and ecosystem development tools
- Retaining stubble or performing biological stubble breakdown
- Constructing interventions in the landscape or waterways to slow or capture the flow of water
- Fencing off waterways and implementing water reticulation for stock
- Investing in revegetation
- Pasture cropping
- Direct-drill cropping and pasture sowing
- Changing crop rotations
- Incorporating green manure or under-sowing of legumes
- Managing for increasing species diversity
- Reducing or ceasing synthetic chemical inputs
- Integrating enterprises

Benefits include:

- Increased productivity, leading to increased profits
- Improved soil health—structural, chemical and biological properties
- Supporting a diversity of vegetation to moderate temperatures, provide habitat and build resilience
- Sequestering greater amounts of carbon from the atmosphere
- Retaining more water in the soil for uptake by plants and animals—extending the growing season
- Supporting health and biodiversity in soil microbes
- Facilitating healthy nutrient cycling
- Producing more nutrient-rich vegetation and livestock
- Producing healthier, more nutritious food and livestock, and therefore healthier people
- Regenerating, rather than degrading, the natural resource base
- Building a landscape which is more resilient, especially to climate extremes (such as flood, drought and fire), able to recover more quickly
- Reducing input costs
- Enabling sustainable production
- Smoothing out production and profit peaks and troughs
- Applying techniques that could sustainably feed growing global populations
- Encouraging neighbours to adopt regenerative practices, through leading by example

**More information on
Soils for Life and
Regenerative Agriculture**

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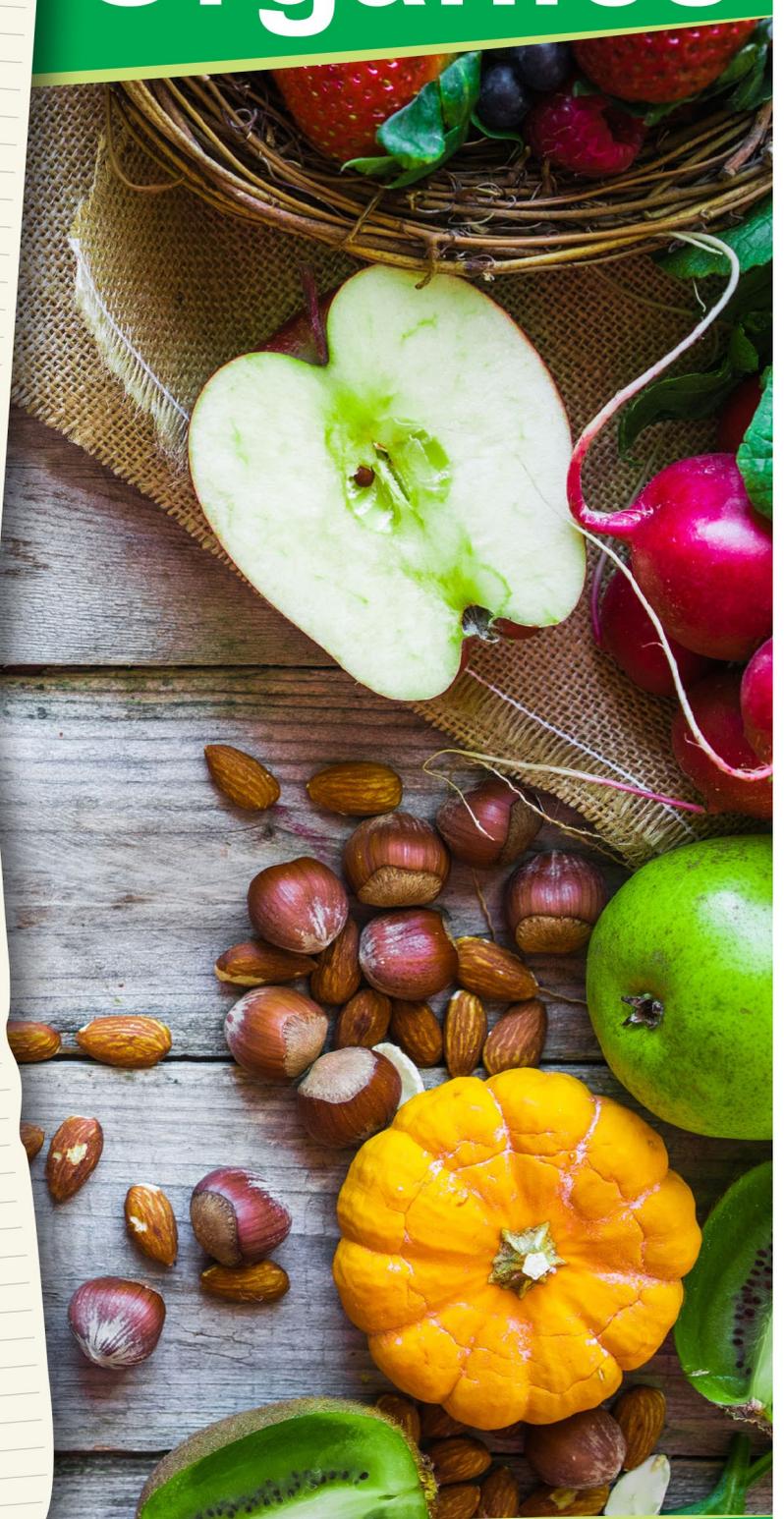
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**Famous d'Arenberg winery
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Vegan friendly, made with biodynamically grown grapes from family-owned vineyards, the wine is a product of d'Arenberg's ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability.

Since 2016 all d'Arenberg estate owned and leased vineyards have been certified for organic and biodynamic processes, and approval has now been granted to label the 2018 vintage as organic wine. Certification was obtained through NASAA, Australia's most respected certification organisation.

'From 2005, we trialled organic and biodynamic practices in three vineyards for three years, balancing productivity with low impact on the environment,' said Chester Osborn, Chief Winemaker. 'We found our wines to be richer, with more earthy flavours. Changing crushers in 2019 will add more minerality and purity to the wine, the biodynamics will add complexity.'

“ The exciting thing is, now we have certification to show that we process our wine under the strictest international standards. ”

Chair of NASAA, Glenn Schaub, said the certification represented the highest standard of excellence in organic wine. 'The d'Arenberg team is to be congratulated for their passion for producing premium wine grown and processed under the strictest international standards.'

'This certification will reinforce d'Arenberg's commitment to sustainable viticulture and cement its reputation as an industry leader in organic wine on the international stage.'

The first organic wine from the 2018 vintage to be released is The Money Spider Roussanne, an exotic white, robust, full flavoured and complex with a rich, textural mouthfeel. The wine retails at \$20, and is available to purchase at darenberg.com.au/organic, and at selected retailers.

Throughout 2019, d'Arenberg will release further organic wines from the 2018 vintage.

The Money Spider Roussanne 2018

The story behind the name...

The first crop of Roussanne from the 2000 vintage was covered in tiny 'money spiders'. Popular belief is that kindness to these creatures will bring good luck, so Chester refrained from sending the spiders to their death. By the next year the money spiders had relocated, making the first release of this wine in 2001.



The winemaking process

Small batches of grapes are gently crushed and transferred to stainless steel basket presses. Fermentation is long and moderately cool to retain fresh fruit characters and was conducted in stainless steel tanks. Only free-run juice was used for the final wine with no malolactic fermentation.

The tasting note

A vibrant and textural wine with aromas of peach, banana, lemon, honeydew melon and flowers. The palate is more on the tropical side, with green mango, citrus peel and nectarine. A juicy mid-palate merges with a vibrant and tangy acid back palate.



A close-up portrait of Wambui Gikenye, a Black woman with her hair styled in braids. She is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a dark blue turtleneck sweater, a necklace of green and white beads, and large hoop earrings with green beads. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

The 2018
Biological
Farmers
Conference

Science meets nature

NASAA Certified Organic Certification Officer, Wambui Gikenye, attended the Biological Farmers Conference at Southern Cross University in November 2018. She shares her thoughts on the conference and a summary of key presentations.

'I was looking forward to the presentations, they all looked very interesting. When I did get there, I was pleasantly surprised by how informative and well presented the sessions were,' Wambui said.

'You can tell a farmer by their hands and it looked like about 90% of those in attendance at the conference were off the land. They have so many things to be thinking about, so it was great to see the presentations delivered with that audience in mind.'

The Great Mineral Debate

Presented by Michael Philips

Michael is passionate about fungi and has written a book titled ***Mycorrhizal Planet***, where he explains that the symbiosis between fungi and roots is the foundation for soil fertility and in turn, nutrient density in our foods.

Key points:

- Flooding plants with good microbes fights bad microbes, e.g. a foliar spray of good microbes prevents rust microbes attaching onto the leaf (somewhat like human gut health)
- A little disease is good for plants because it keeps them sharp and stimulates the crop fighting system
- Cover crops used in crop rotation should consider mycorrhizal plants, e.g. broccoli should not be followed by buckwheat because both are non-mycorrhizal crops
- Rotations can also be utilised for successful no-till cropping, e.g. the strong tap root of a radish cover crop planted in the summer, followed by sowing seed into the mulch, can result in successful no-till cropping with much less effort. The lesson is using the natural aptitude of cover crops to do the work for you.

“ I really liked his analogy of having a huge team working for you (soil microbes) ready to spring into action day and night. You just need to recruit them and support the fungi to interact with the root systems. ”

Healthy soils, who cares?

Presented by Jeff Moyer, Rodale Institute

Jeff is a very well-spoken organic teacher, in all forms of the word, i.e. both from an agronomic perspective as well as having a very good knowledge of certification (NOP).

He's resourceful in his teaching methods, a real pleasure to listen to, and consistently challenges farmers to identify their individual opportunities.

My main take away was, organic farming is not about replacing Glyphosate with Slasher or BioWeed etc but rather it is about building a robustness within the system, so that your crops have adequate immunity to take care of themselves.

Jeff Moyer presentation

[CLICK HERE](#)

Farming Together

Presented by Lorraine Gordon

Farming Together aims to:

- Improve knowledge of how co-operatives, collective strategies and supply chain negotiations can improve farmers' returns.
- Improve the knowledge of business models and collaboration options available to farmers and farm advisors
- Improve the agriculture-focused legal and financial expert advice available regarding the process, implementation and management of such business models.

Farming Together is a pilot program launched at a national forum on 29 August, 2016 which ran until June 2018. The program was managed by Southern Cross University from the campus in Lismore, NSW. The program encourages the formation of farmer groups; either formal co-operatives, looser collaborations or collective strategy and bargaining groups.

One of their success stories presented on at the conference was NASAA Certified Organic Mount Alexander Fruit Gardens run by Hugh and Katie Finlay in Harcourt, Victoria.

[Mt Alexander Fruit Gardens website](#)

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5 minutes with...

Professor Carlo Leifert

Director, Centre for Organics Research,
Southern Cross University



What are your research priorities for the Centre for Organics Research (COR)?

- Breeding/selection of crop varieties suitable for the organic farming sectors in Australia; COR has applied to join an European Union (EU) project which focuses on breeding/selection of wheat, soya, buckwheat and potato varieties suitable for organic farming systems in semi-arid environments.
- Improving soil-borne disease and IPM-based pest control protocols in perennial fruit and nut crops
- Optimising soil management protocols in non-irrigated arable crop production systems
- Quantifying impacts of organic management practices on the nutritional and sensory quality of crops, meat and dairy products produced under Australian soil, climatic and organic regulation environments.

The global meta-analyses we carried out showing significant benefits of switching to organic production methods include virtually no data for Australia; since soil and climatic conditions in Australia are quite unique it is not scientifically sound to extrapolate nutritional differences between organic and conventional foods from global meta-analyses results.

What do you see as key growth commodity areas for organics in Australia?

In order of when I expect this to happen in time:

- 1** Fruit and veg for the domestic market
- 2** Grain legumes and oil crops for the domestic market
- 3** Dairy, cereals, beef and lamb for both the domestic and export markets
- 4** Cannabis and other medicinal plants for the export market

Is the current regulatory framework supporting the local industry satisfactorily through the standards?

In my opinion, a legal standard and farm auditing approach is essential and the best approach for maintaining consumer confidence in organic farming. The most important gap I see in the regulatory framework in Australia is the lack of a legal standard for products marketed in Australia.

A government body or government licensed body that sets the legal basic standard (like those in the EU and USDA) will also be very beneficial with respect to maintaining consumer confidence in certified organic products in Australia.

The words 'organic', but also 'ecological' and 'biological' should be legally protected so that they can only be used for food products produced on certified organic farms. This would bring Australian legislation in line with EU legislation on the labelling of certified organic food products.

How do you bring greater legitimacy of organic farming systems to mainstream agricultural science research, teaching and education?

I think the only approach to gain a greater acceptance of organic farming in the academic community is to carry out research based on sound experimental designs and state of the art analytical methods that produce scientific data that can be published in highly-rated, peer-reviewed scientific papers.

When interpreting results, it is also important to highlight problems and focus future research and development on addressing the deficiencies in the currently used organic farming protocols; especially where organic farming practices are not in line with the organic principles (e.g. those defined by IFOAM).

How important is certification? What about farmers who are using sustainable agriculture practices but may not have undertaken a three-year formal conversion process?

Studies in Europe have clearly shown that certification is essential to maintain consumer confidence because nowadays organic products are primarily marketed through anonymous supermarket supply chains, where

the customer never gets to see what happens on farms. Certification also has substantial benefits (especially with respect to increasing the customer base) for farmers who sell directly to their customers.

Certification can be a substantial cost for direct-marketing small producers, and I therefore feel the certification bodies should make every effort to make certification more affordable for small producers, while maintaining a reliable auditing/certification process, e.g. via encouraging co-op development and offering group certification schemes.

In the United States, produce labelled 'organic' must be evidence-based but this is not a requirement in Australia other than for 'certified' organic produce. What are your thoughts?

To avoid consumer confusion, I feel it would helpful to adopt the US and EU approach and legally protect the word 'organic' so that it can only be used for food products from farms that are certified by a licensed Australian certification body.

[Professor Leifert's presentation](#)

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What is in Certified Organic labels?

Why do people buy organic?

Irrespective of the Certifier involved, people are motivated to buy certified organic food because of a belief in the health and environment benefits, as well as access, price, control over food choices, food safety; and social and socio-economic status.

These consistent themes are revealed in numerous studies from around the world. For example, ***Nandi et al 2016*** found five latent motivations or set of consumer concerns as 'food phobia' (health), 'environment,' 'humanity,' 'healthy eaters,' and 'control'. Other research suggests that price, availability of organic products, product information and the subjective opinions of others are important determinants of consumers intent to buy organic products,' ***Lodorfos G. N., Dennis J. 2008.***

Respondents to surveys in Croatia and Slovenia identified the most important motives for buying organic food products as the health value and care for the environment; while in Bosnia Herzegovina the idea of return to nature, health value and safety of organic food products were important.

CerjakM et asl, 2010. Quah Q, Tan A. K. G. 2008, reported on attitudinal characteristics for Malays and found food-safety concerns, sick friends/family, health-supplement expenditures, and those who consider price or availability to be important attributes. The researchers also found that the Chinese market consists of older female consumers with fewer children, who are concerned about food safety and who acquire health supplements regularly. Consumers of Indian/other ethnicity were found to be solely motivated by being users of health supplements.

A thorough review of the existing literature (***Anisimov T 2016***) during 2016 on consumer buying behaviour of organic foods identified healthism, hedonism, and trust among some factors that enhance consumer experiences with organic foods; while in 2010 ***Dettman R. L., and Dimitri C.,*** found that households with high levels of education are more likely to purchase organic vegetables, while the probability of purchasing organic vegetables is lower for African Americans and for older households.

Do organic labels make a difference?

Studies show that being Certified Organic and displaying this label has a direct impact on the perceived benefits of organic food.

Kiss M., Kun A. 2015, found that organic labels can significantly modify consumers' perception and evaluation of chocolates with every attribute....fragrance, healthiness, calorie content and price. The researcher also found that products with an organic label have a positive image that is transferred to the sensory and that bio labels can modify consumers' perceptions (in the case of chocolates) in multiple dimensions.

Researchers in Italy found that increasing organic knowledge is of paramount importance to increase the attention paid by consumers to organic labels. Their findings also show that other factors explain the intention to purchase organic food products such as attitudes towards their purchase. Consumers with positive attitudes towards the

purchase, are more likely to be willing to buy organic food. In particular, consumers who support buying organic foods are more likely to be willing to purchase them, ***Magistris T., Azeucena G. 2012.***

Who makes the decision about labels?

No studies report that one label is more recognised or motivates consumers to buy product before all others.

Consumers are not involved in decisions about the choice of Certifier or the use of their label.

Importantly, decisions to use a label are made either by certified producers who supply directly into consumer markets, or processors who combine ingredients to make value added products. Hence it is fair to say that people all over the world buy certified organic produce because it says 'Certified Organic' and represents a credible internationally recognised quality assurance program.

What is the downside of organic certification labels?

There is a clear belief in the credibility of certified organic food labels, but underlying this, is a lack of understanding and confusion.

Unlike our major trading countries, Australian organic labels lack domestic regulation with a related national mark that speaks to the quality of Australian product.

To improve the understanding and marketing of organic foods, clarity about what constitutes organic and better public education are the two overriding factors that emerge from consumer behaviour and perception studies.

Looking more deeply we find that the organic sector in Australia still has a long way to go, in building the credibility and understanding of organic certification within our domestic market.

Combined with cynical use of the word 'organic' to imply the health value of conventionally produced food, attempts to promote one certification label over all others, adds to the confusion of consumers as to what constitutes third party bonafide organic food.

Undertaken during 2008, NASAA commissioned Newspoll to conduct a market research survey to investigate consumer opinion about the current certification system for organic food in Australia.

A large proportion of consumers did not recognise or understand the organic certification symbols, and felt 'burdened with a sense of "confusion"'. The results from the survey indicated that a vast majority (72%) of consumers surveyed would prefer the organic industry to adopt a new certification symbol as it would be 'easier, clearer, and less confusing'.

These findings are not unique.

During 2015, **William R. Jr.**, a market researcher with the firm Mintel found that over half of shoppers say they believe that labelling something as organic is 'an excuse to charge more,' and more than one-third say they believe 'organic' is just marketing jargon 'with no real value or definition.' William reported that the biggest selling point for organics is the perception that the products are healthier, much more so than any environmental or ethical reason.

William also reported that consumers appear confused about the benefits of organics versus products labelled as natural, suggesting manufacturers have failed to communicate organic benefits to potential (for that matter, to current) consumers. William suggests that organic brands will need to address consumers in a more open and transparent way to maintain credibility in this confusing market.

Following the Marsh versus Baxter case the University of Sydney Law Journal 2015 published **Organic Food Labelling in Australia: A 'Murky Environment' in Need of Reform**, which was undertaken by Curtin University

Law School Lecturer, Christina Do.

According to Ms Do, organic certification standards have a long way to go before they can be regarded as reliable. She found that the current co-regulatory framework within the Australian organic industry further perpetuates Australian organic consumers' vulnerability as there is no legally enforceable standard enforced with respect to organic products intended for the domestic market. *Unsurprisingly the current co-regulatory organic labelling regime in Australia appears to nurture consumer uncertainty, confusion and increases consumer vulnerability.*

What is required to improve understanding of Organic Labels?

Ms Do concluded that the only solution is government intervention and regulatory reform.

Ms Do states that the paramount priority is the implementation of a national organic standard, with legislative effect, within the Australian organic industry.

In terms of marketing, attempts have been made to achieve a unifying organic identity mark for Australia's organic sector, which would tell consumers here and overseas that the product was Australian and with that came a high level of integrity and quality.

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Just a couple years ago, the Organic Federation of Australia (OFA) created such a mark, which was not put to the market. Our contemporaries and trading partners, such as Europe and the USA have domestic regulation to back-up and provide assurance for their national marks.

In order to provide assurances of Australian quality the Organic Industry Standards and Certification Council (OISCC) in 2016 created National Organic Mark for Australia.



The wide use of this mark has the potential to increase the perceived value of all Australian Certifier labels. The hope was to enable all Certified Organic operators in Australia to take advantage of this additional highly valuable marketing tool alongside their Certifier's Label.

However, only some Australian operators have adopted the use of this mark in conjunction with their Certifier's label.

Shortly after **Ms Do's** report the Federal Minister for Agriculture at the time, initiated the Australian Organic Industry Working Group AOIWG through his Department with the view of creating a truly representative peak body. The goal was to achieve a peak body that could speak with one voice for the whole of the organic industry on key legislative and policy issues, and lead the use of a unifying Australian mark for certified organic.

For the past 18 months, NASAA has supported this process unequivocally.

However, until all Certifiers are prepared to set aside their competitive differences and commercial goals; and join together to support a national mark that is used in conjunction with Certifier's labels, which is also supported by a unified Peak Body, it appears that the organic industry in Australia will continue to be challenged by the market and legislative barriers this lack of unity creates.

Glenn Schaube
NASAA Chair

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Agroecology: What is it?

Agroecology is an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system.

*Source: Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations*

About Rob Fenton

Rob Fenton grew up on a mixed farm on Phillip Island, Victoria. He is currently head of the Department of Agroecology which incorporates the organic farming, permaculture, sustainability, conservation and indigenous land management for TAFE (Southern NSW).

Rob addressed the post-NASAA Annual General Meeting in November 2018 and shared his thoughts on agroecology and the organics industry....

Rob Fenton was always destined to work in sustainable agriculture.

'I grew up on a little piece of paradise, right next to Bass Straight on Phillip Island, surrounded by magnificent wilderness yet I could see the damage that farming was doing to the landscape,' he said.

'Over time that interest made me move towards organics. Back in the 70s and 80s, it was that group (of organic farmers) who seemed to have the passion to make changes. And that's how I ended up dabbling in it.'

So, what exactly is agroecology?

'Really it's just the science behind organic farming,' said Rob. 'In my mind, organics has a set of rules or ethics but the science behind how we grow the food in that system is agroecology.'

Fast-forward to today and Rob now heads a centre of agroecology education based at a leading NSW TAFE where he teaches around 350 students on campus and via distance education and is a guest speaker at numerous industry events and forums across the country.

‘But what has happened over the last decade or two has been, because of the preponderance of small land holders around the world that are practicing agroecology, it’s become a social movement as well.

‘And so there are two parts—the science behind the farming and the social movement.’

How does agroecology interface with regenerative agriculture?

‘Well, any kind of food production that is using the understanding of ecology to help guide the design and management of their systems is using agroecology,’ he explains.

There are so many buzzwords about now. How can farmers and consumers navigate the different but similar language and systems?

‘Well that’s why I like agroecology. Whether it is regenerative agriculture, biodynamics, permaculture, organics 3.0; in my mind they are all using the science of agroecology,’ he said.

Agroecology as a discipline can trace its origins back to the 1930s but enjoyed a resurgence in Latin America in the 1970s when the research focus extended beyond studying the ecosystem from a natural science perspective and started to examine the socioeconomic, sociocultural and political dimensions of agriculture.

Rob set up the National Environment Centre in the NSW Riverina in the mid-1990s to teach organics and permaculture. Around the same time, there were several seminal books released by industry trailblazers, e.g. Stephen Gleissman (USA) and Miguel Altieri (Chile).

‘We then realised that permaculture design systems and organic farming were the set of guidelines and rules but what we were really doing was agroecology.’

Rob successfully lobbied to gain funding to buy a parcel of 200 hectares and built a solar passive rammed earth teaching facility which would become the centre of the organic farm, attached to the Riverina TAFE.

He sees diversity as a key principle of agroecology.

‘Systems that are complex are usually more stable,’ said Rob. ‘Imagine a food web with only a couple of branches in it, if one collapses, it is no longer a food web.

Whereas with a really complex food web with lots of different branches, if a single branch was to disappear it would still be a complex system.

‘We see the same apply on our farm at the National Environment Centre. What we are trying to do is set up a very simple but contrived ecosystem with a multitude of branches on its food web. So that idea is that it doesn’t matter what climate change, or the economic situation throws at us... parts of the system could be challenged but the whole system is still relatively operational.’

Find out more about the National Environment Centre at the Riverina Institute of TAFE

CLICK HERE

Read more—The 10 Elements of Agroecology: Guiding the Transition to Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems.

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Setting up a successful certified organic e-business



You have already done the hard work producing or processing a great organic product. And then you put the systems and processes in place to gain certification with Australia's most respected organic certifier, NCO. Now you want to take your precious product to market via an e-commerce site. **Where to start?**

Determining the next step from farm gate sales or small-scale production to dedicated e-commerce site can seem daunting but many operators are discovering the value of leveraging their brand online and reaching valuable new markets.

E-commerce in Australian business is now worth \$23 billion and continues to grow particularly for small to medium enterprise, yet there is still a reluctance in some areas to embrace the full potential of the digital economy.

For an industry that sometimes carries a perception of being anti-technology and innovation, it seems many Australian organic producers are bucking the trend and demonstrating astute commercial acumen and creativity in their online presence.

Below are some key aspects to establishing an e-commerce site that organic operators should consider as part of their overall business and marketing planning.

E-commerce provides a large range of benefits for businesses that are otherwise unavailable in a standard bricks and mortar store, some of these are*:

- Ability to expand into new markets—selling online provides your business with the opportunity to expand your market, even expanding globally.
- Reducing expenses—selling online is a great way to keep your costs down, as there is no physical store to rent or increased number of staff to pay.
- Providing convenience to your customers while increasing sales—your business is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week, providing consumers with the ability to buy a product or service whenever it suits them from the comfort of their home. This can increase the number of orders you could potentially receive rather than if you were just a 9–5 physical store.

- Increasing customer engagement—selling online allows you to keep an eye on your customers buying habits and interests. This provides a chance for you to tailor your products or services to suit your customer requirements, improving your relationship with them and likely increasing sales.

How does the online shopping process work?*

Online customer transactions follow a process that is very much like shopping at a physical store:

1. Enter an online store.
2. Browse through the products or services on offer.
3. Select the items that you want to purchase.
4. Place these items in a (virtual) shopping cart.
5. Proceed to the 'checkout'.
6. Arrange for the delivery of the products or services.
7. Pay for the purchases with the preferred (electronic) payment method.

*Source: business.gov.au

Organic claims must be substantiated

Whether you are selling organic products online or in a face-to-face retail environment, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission clearly sets out the requirements for promoting your product.

Misleading, false or deceptive organic claims are against the law so make sure you can substantiate everything you say about your products—whether you are referencing the Standard or not.

[For more information](#)

[CLICK HERE](#)

The NCO certification mark—a stamp of quality, integrity and authenticity



When you see the NASAA Certified Organic label on a product you can be sure that it is certified to the highest standard available in Australia (and to one of the most stringent standards in the world). It is your guarantee that the organic integrity of that product has been third-party verified.

Always check the label to be sure.

E-commerce via website or Facebook?

This is a common question for small to medium businesses with an existing website and established social media presence.

There is no right or wrong approach as every business will have different objectives and resources. Return on investment is the main driver which means making the most of whatever marketing channels you use to reach your target audience and achieve sales.

Some key points to consider:

- What are your goals from an e-commerce site? Beyond the obvious increase in sales are there other opportunities to inform, educate or engage with your customer? Are you running events, sending newsletters or running competitions?
- Where is your particular target market most active? Are they already engaging with you on Facebook or Instagram or will they more likely search for your product via Google? Understanding how your target audience prefers to engage with your brand is critical.

Integration really matters—if you already have a website, adding an online shop can be relatively straightforward and cost effective. Aligning all of your digital media including any social media channels with your other marketing activity will create a seamless, consistent brand for your existing and new customer base.

Don't forget fulfilment

Now you have an e-commerce site up and running and the first orders are rolling in. Don't drop the ball on fulfilment. Ensure that product is picked, checked, packed and labelled appropriately (with the NASAA Certified Organic label) and that you have identified the best methods of delivering it to your customers.

A final note on feedback and engagement—keep the dialogue between your brand/product and your customers going. Look at ways to maintain contact, and future sales, whether that be through a regular newsletter, direct mail, social media post or a presence at relevant events.

Good luck!

Selection of NASAA Certified Organic e-commerce sites

Dunn and Walton	●
Kew Organics	●
Lettuce Deliver Organics	●
Organic and Natural Store	●
Augustine Approved—human food for dogs	●

Tips, tricks and tools

Google Garage—get new skills for a digital world	●
How to sell in online marketplaces	●
Getting started online	●
Web alive—72 features for e-commerce website	●
Make the most of Facebook for your e-commerce store	●

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Latest research in organics

Gregory A. Barton: The global history of organic farming

[REF] Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK: 2018, 242 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-964253-3

Organic agriculture has evolved from a fringe movement within the agricultural world into a significant component of agriculture and an important player in agricultural policy development.

This generated a much-needed balance into the continuing debate among business, farmers (large scale vs small scale), and consumers on central issues in society—the provenance, cost, and quality of food. To write a ‘global history’ of any topic is an ambitious task; this book tackles the evolution of the organic farming movement primarily with an emphasis on developments since the turn of the twentieth century. But it is not until the concluding sections of the book that we get some definitions of what organic farming actually is; we do not really learn which of them is the one actually adopted by the author.



[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)

Turning water into wine: Exploring water security perceptions and adaptation behaviour amongst conventional, organic and biodynamic grape growers

[REF] Sarah Ann Wheeler & Angelika Marning

Highlights:

- Water scarcity perceptions and behaviour explored with 37 viticultural growers.
- Alternative growers felt less vulnerable to water shortages or climate shocks.
- Conventional growers’ adaptive capacity most influenced by external influences.
- Alternative growers’ adaptive capacity was most influenced by internal influences.



[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)

Soil Health and Its Management for Organic Farming

[REF] Elizabeth A. Stockdale Tony C. Edwards Christine A. Watson

Book Editor(s): David Atkinson Christine A. Watson

Soil is the basis of all sustainable agricultural production.

There are significant elements of our understanding of soils which are common to all of agriculture. These are identified in this chapter which deals with soil in this unifying sense. There are also elements which are of particular importance to organic production, and these are identified here although much of the outworkings of this basic information is explored in other chapters.



[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)

Organic farming: A need for the new era

[REF] Divyesh Shekhada, University of S.A., Amit M Polara and Jasminkumar Kheni

Abstract:

In the recent period, the most important challenges globally have been to produce enough food for the increasing population. Therefore it is necessary to develop high-yielding crop varieties are used with combination of irrigation, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The continuous uses of chemicals will concerns of soil health, environmental pollution, pesticide toxicity, and sustainability of agricultural production.



[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)

VALE ROSS CARTER

Remembering an organic pioneer

Ross Carter was well-known and respected by many in the organic farming community and NASAA and NCO are sad to lose our first certified organic broad acre farmer in Australia.

The following words kindly written by Chris Penfold (Organic Inspector)

The path for those who buck the system and instead follow their convictions is usually one of many challenges.

The support systems in place for the majority are absent for those in the minority.

Such was the case for Ross, who in 1973 made the decision to farm organically at his property on the fertile plains near Wolseley in the south east of South Australia. He was one of the first to do so, being the 5th producer for the newly formed NASAA in the 1980s.

Despite some setbacks, which Ross continually learned from, he endured, creating a highly successful mixed farming operation and home to his wife Lorna and daughter Charlotte.

An avid reader, Ross maintained a strong interest in alternative farming and nutrient management practices being used in the USA, and on numerous trips to see Lorna's family, he was able to distil those with potential and utilise them in his own operation.

Always experimenting, Ross loved the challenge of farming without synthetic chemicals while still being able to achieve high yields and producing grain that was sought after by the local flour mills.

People who knew Ross from those early days had varied memories—of his pride associated with the bags of grain branded with the ram's head and the farm's name, Roslon Grange.



Ross took pride in his capacity to farm without herbicides but still with few weed issues. He employed numerous tactics to tame the weeds. Sheep were integral to the farm operation, so pastures coupled with diverse rotations which enabled late sowing and in-crop harrowing were all employed. Roadside weeds did not escape his vigilance either, being uprooted and disposed of in a bin on the back of the ute.

Ross was always enthusiastic but realistic about his approach to farming.

Meeting Ross for the first time when as a Roseworthy College student we visited his farm in 1988, his mild mannered sincerity was immediately apparent, and lots of discussion followed as we travelled to the next stop, about this farmer who was succeeding in doing all that we were told not to do for best farming practice.

After not seeing the family for many years, it was pleasure to have the opportunity to see them on an unannounced inspection visit in November 2018.

Ross was upbeat about overcoming his illness, though he wasn't sure if the cause of the lethargy he was experiencing was instead due the shearing he was doing the previous day.

Ross will be remembered kindly as an enduring broad acre organic farming pioneer.

All at NASAA and NCO extend our deepest sympathies to Ross's family, we will always remember this visionary man and organic pioneer.

VALE

Scott Sargood

On behalf of the entire NASAA family and the wider organic industry, we extend our deepest sympathies to Scott's family.

Here are a few words by Brian Flegler (Organic Inspector) which help sum up our thoughts as we mourn this unexpected loss.

I got to know Scott and his family through our association with the organic industry. His passion towards the beef industry was second to none. His wife Adma and family, Roslyn, his mother and brother all contributed 100% to their beloved industry. Scott fought tooth and nail to better the industry against many odds.

The huge sign he constructed alongside the boundary fence of his property 'Halton', west of Charleville, challenging the Queensland Government's Vegetation Management Laws was a testament of his relentless commitment to the industry.

“ Scott always had a caring attitude, not only towards his family, but also the welfare of others within the industry. ”

We travelled far and wide to audit his family's properties —from Roma to Charleville to Augathella, and anywhere in between, where Scott operated property, both his own or leased. Scott was always looking for opportunities to better his family's business.

My last audit was just before Christmas and I stayed with Scott and Adma at Halton Station west of Charleville and I remembered saying this is one of the reasons that I love working in the organic industry.

To be able to be welcomed into the family and not as an auditor complicating the industry with red tape. You get to know a person when this occurs, and the integrity of that person as well, and believe me, Scott's integrity was beyond reproach, as are the rest of his family. That overnight stay will always be remembered.

Scott leaves a legacy that will always be remembered not only by his family, but to all who knew and associated with this fine man.

My sincere condolences to Adma, Mitch and Bonnie.

Further to the above an article can be viewed courtesy of Queensland Country Life

[CLICK HERE](#)

Learning more about the value of organic farming

Although the environmental and social benefits of organic farming have been increasingly recognised in science and politics, the potential for organic farming to solve the environmental and resource challenges of our time remains inconsistently assessed.



With this in mind, the Thünen Institute, together with several research partners and funding from the German Federal Ministry of Food, have released the 2019 Thünen Institute Published Study titled *'The Value of Organic Farming'* which analysed and evaluated 528 studies and resulted in 2,816 comparative pairs.

Researchers found that across water protection, soil fertility, biodiversity, climate protection, climate adaptation and resource efficiency, organic management was more advantageous than conventional management.

In the area of animal welfare as determined by management practices no significant differences were found.

[View the study & find out more](#)

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In the media



\$55m organic dairy facility breaks ground

Work has begun on the construction of a dairy manufacturing facility in Victoria that will include Australia's first dedicated organic nutritional spray dryer. Corio Bay Dairy Group (CBDG) is building the new \$55 million plant to produce organic infant formulas and other nutritional powder products. CBDG is a joint venture between Aussie farmer-owned Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia (ODFA), Wattle Health Australia (WHA), and Blend & Pack.



Old-fashioned farming turns organic sweet potato growers' business into success

Producing purple, white and orange sweet potatoes has become a sweet success for a farming couple in South Australia, who once never imagined growing them. Last year, Australia's sweet potato industry faced difficult times with an oversupply of sweet potatoes leaving many growers in Queensland with returns below production cost. But these small-scale growers have found their perfect niche market.

How will Australia feed our growing population? (podcast)



Just how will we feed 50 million Australians and a ravenous growing region? Is business filling the innovation void? And is Government prepared to make the brave long-term calls? These were just some of the questions tackled by The Age's National Editor Tory Maguire and a special panel line-up – Jessica Irvine (senior economics writer, The Age), Ralph Ashton (director, Australian Futures Project), Tony Bacic (director of the La Trobe Institute for Agriculture and Food) and Joost Bakker (environmental activist and restaurateur) – as they examined solutions to short-termism in Australian policy making, specifically related to food security for the future.

Events



First International Conference on Agroecology

Nairobi, Kenya Safari Park Hotel & Casino
18 to 20 June 2019

- Reducing synthetics (pesticide use):
The effects, impacts and need for change.
- Scaling up agroecology (frameworks, practices, policies, Resilience of systems, ecosystem services)
- Promoting organic agriculture (economy, value chains, standards and certification schemes, stimulation of markets, policies, exhibitions)

Australian Agronomy Conference

Wagga Wagga,
New South Wales
25 to 29 August 2019



The conference theme Cells to satellites highlights the integrative nature of agronomy. Each of us work across a range of disciplines to optimise crop or pasture production for productivity and profitability. We have an increasing number of tools available to increase the precision and accuracy of our work; whether it is at the 'cellular' level where DNA is mapped and biochemistry is unravelled or using 'satellites' for remote sensing or guidance. The opportunities for enhancing our agronomy research is boundless.



Soil Organic Matter 7th International Symposium on Soil Organic Matter

Adelaide, South Australia
6 to 11 October 2019

Soils directly underpin terrestrial life on earth. They are the most complex biological system on the planet in their own right, both harbouring, sustaining and exhibiting enormous diversity both below and above ground. Central to soil's function is soil organic matter (SOM), a complex and diverse milieu of necromatter that facilitates and complements a vast array of chemical, physical and biological functions. The conference theme, 'Soil Organic Matter in a Stressed World' has the dual objectives of better understanding and quantifying the functions that SOM sustains in both natural and managed systems, and understanding the stressors that impact on both its stability, and its ability to continue to deliver these key ecosystem functions.