

## The new AS 6000 organic standard



Dr Andrew Monk answers most-asked questions of certified operators

**Q: Do I need a copy?**

**A:** No, though you are free to purchase one for \$113. As a certified operator you will continue to be certified to the often more comprehensive standard of your certifier eg BFA's Australian Organic Standard which remains a free download at [www.bfa.com.au](http://www.bfa.com.au).

**Q: I have heard it is mandatory, that everyone has to be certified to it, and that it will stop imports not complying with it?**

**A:** No, regrettably, on all counts. It is a voluntary standard, just like all other Australian organic standards currently. Of course because Australia has such a well self-regulated organic industry, consumers in the main now understand that if you buy certified organic product you are protected by common Law right now. This message will need to continue to be promoted by our industry.

**Q: I have heard that it could be called into legislation?**

**A:** While some have argued for this, and are suggesting this should happen, BFA is not currently in support of such a move. The reason is that experience overseas has shown that this approach can in fact be detrimental to industry, add costs (both for government and for operators) and add additional layers of red tape that are not needed nor desired by industry. Our industry is a paragon of self-regulation and far better regulated and controlled than many if not all other food industry areas from marketing claims (heart healthy, halal, etc) to food safety. We believe we should celebrate this and continue on our path of promoting the benefits of organic and educate consumers to look for certified product.

**Q: So what use is it then?**

**A:** There has remained a gap in the marketplace where if a product is claiming to be organic though not certified, there is no one single base requirement or standard that can be legally relied upon to resolve a dispute. Common law protects consumers buying certified organic products, but the hope is that the ACCC may be able to, in concert with industry, prosecute a non-certified operator who can't demonstrate that

their product is in fact produced in accord with a base organic standard and/or other relevant industry standards such as BFA's Australian Organic Standard. One example of this (luckily one of a dwindling number of cases) is a juice product that has blatantly included a preservative in its ingredients, not permitted by any known organic standard in the world. There have been similar cases for cosmetic products. Hopefully examples like these, if pursued and prosecuted will create a deterrent in the market for others. The BFA will be aiding and abetting the ACCC to achieve such outcomes.

**Q: I have heard that the AQIS National Standard will also remain in existence - why?**

**A:** Yes, the AQIS program continues to enable export to the EU and a limited number of other markets. At least another year will elapse where industry will assess whether in fact we can use the AS 6000 for this purpose as well or continue to use the AQIS National Standard.

Australian Certified Organic (ACO) maintains its ability to provide direct market access to most markets of the world directly, through its various accreditations (the international IOAS program, USA's NOP, Canada's COR, Japan's JAS, etc). From late next year we also expect that the EU market may be accessed directly via IOAS accreditation. This would lead to less requirement to have the AQIS accredited program in place.

**Q: Does BFA have any other concerns about the current situation?**

**A:** There still remain questions to be answered regarding resourcing of the review process for the AS 6000 standard. BFA will continue to resource its activities both in standards setting and most importantly in consulting with its industry members and stakeholders on technical and market matters. This remains the strength and integrity behind the Organic Bud logo programs.

*We are always interested in industry members' views. We look forward to hearing from you at [standards@bfa.com.au](mailto:standards@bfa.com.au) or ph. 07 3350 5716.*

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