

\$400,000 available to Victorian organic operators

THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT will provide support for the state's organic food industry with a new funding program, to the tune of \$400,000.

Regional and Rural Development Minister Jacinta Allan announced during National Organic Week in October that the 'Support for Organics Grant Program' would be implemented to foster what she described as "Victoria's nation-leading approach to production, consumption and export of... organic products."

She said the package – which will provide funds over two years - was also expected to help secure jobs and enhance lifestyles for organic farmers and producers in regional and rural Victoria, and provide them with the capacity to stay one step ahead of their competitors.

"This (package) will provide new investment to help the farming sector respond to change, drive innovation and capture new market opportunities," she said.

The organic grants program has been funded through the Brumby Labour Government's four-year \$205 million Future

Farming Strategy.

Ms Allan said Victoria was well placed to capitalise on a growing appetite for organic food worldwide.

"Victoria has Australia's second largest number of certified organic food producers, representing about 22% of the 2,750 certified producers in Australia," Ms Allan said.

Ms Allan said to be eligible for the grant, businesses or projects needed to aim to build the capacity of the organic sector for future growth and increase the awareness of consumers and producers of the organic sector.

Activities are also likely to be favoured if they are based on defensible information and statistics and foster cohesive industry representation.

To be eligible, a proposed activity must also align with one/ more of the following key priority actions: Develop supply chain/ value chain capacity; Raise knowledge and awareness of the organic option; Develop leadership skills; Develop business skills; Demonstrate innovation in products and processes; Undertake research & development; Encourage exports.

Eligible applicants include those from food businesses (including industry organisations), regional development organisations, local government, education and training providers, science and research institutions and State Government agencies.

Dr. Andrew Monk (BFA director) says the BFA was welcoming and supportive of government initiatives which aided the continued development of the organic sector - most particularly where there was matching industry support and industry driven initiatives to develop our industry further.

"BFA would welcome the approach of any members or sectoral groups interested in undertaking initiatives in their own area of expertise or sector, that BFA may work with them to develop."

He says the key to continually progressing the success of the organic industry in Australia is industry driving its own agenda and initiatives via its members – that is the organic business people, be they farmers, processors, retailers or others, whose businesses will rise or fall based on the success of the overall organic market. ◆◆

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