



# Australian Organic *Connect*

## **'Our Future: Growing Together' Australian Organic Conference**

Read about key themes explored at our second ever organic conference, where winners for the 2024 Industry Awards were also announced.

**See page 6**

## **Organic Livestock Takes the Lead at Beef Australia 2024**

The Southern Hemisphere's leading beef event came to Rockhampton during May, with top-quality organic beef on show to the world.

**See page 22**

## **AOL Speaks at Senate Inquiry into Greenwashing**

Calls for harsher penalties to be enforced upon companies misleading consumers with unfounded 'organic' claims.

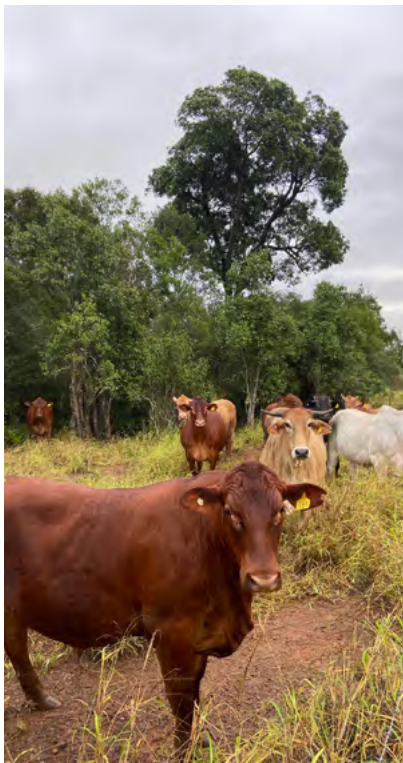
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## **Organic Operators in Focus**

We speak to a range of organic businesses, including a Yeppoon farmer reducing input costs with a unique microbial solution.

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FRONT COVER: Australian Organic Industry Awards, Pullman Melbourne on the Park, 8 March 2024

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# A Note from the CEO

## Welcome to the Winter 2024 Issue

Welcome to the Winter edition of Australian Organic Connect!

This issue of our e-magazine will be the last for the foreseeable future, as our team moves onto new initiatives that will help spread the word about the value of organics. This will also be one of my last correspondences as Chief Executive of Australian Organic Limited, as I step down at the end of July. AOL's work to grow the sector and drive positive outcomes for operators will not slow for a moment - I have every confidence that a new executive will bring fresh ideas that will benefit us all.

Since our last e-magazine, AOL's second biennial conference was held in Melbourne, based around a theme of 'Our Future: Growing Together'. The two-day event in March brought our industry together with fantastic contributions from across the nation and across the globe. It was capped off by our Industry Awards Gala Dinner where we celebrated the sector's best and brightest individuals and enterprises. I'd like to sincerely thank everyone who made the trip to Pullman Melbourne to take part in our conference schedule. Check out pages 6 through 15 for details about the event including a full list of Industry Award winners.

Elsewhere in this edition you'll find interviews with leading certified organic innovators, including livestock operators James and Sarah Pearson who achieved impressive marks in recent MSA quality tests. We also hear from the Eldridge Fresh Organics team in Murray Bridge about their efforts to bring fresh cut organic vegetables to Australian consumers. AOL's visit to Beef Australia in Rockhampton is also covered, while the current state of global organic agriculture is explored.

On behalf of the AOL team, I'd like to thank everyone who has supported the Australian Organic Connect e-magazine across its 17 issues. We have covered an expansive range of topics relevant to organic businesses and worked hard to connect operators across the supply chain.

On a personal note, thank you to all the operators who have offered their valuable time and insights during my six-plus years with AOL. Thank you to the AOL members for your ongoing support to the cause and the operational team who are as passionate as you about the industry. Despite my tenure coming to an end, I will remain an AOL member, devoted organic consumer and advocate for years to come.

I look forward to connecting in the near future.

*Niki Ford*

Chief Executive Officer,  
Australian Organic Limited



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Australian Organic Limited (AOL) is the peak industry body engaging with government and industry to promote the commercial and social interests of those who are certified and protect the integrity of the sector against fraud and misleading organics.

AOL has been at the foundation of organics since 1987 and is identified by the most recognised mark in Australia, the Australian Certified Organic 'Bud' logo. This trademark signals the highest of integrity and is recognised by 64 per cent of Australian consumers.



# Thanks Niki!

Here at AOL, we'd like to thank Niki for her courage, dedication and hard work since joining the company as its first female CEO in 2018. As our longest serving CEO she has navigated a demerger, restructured the organisation into the highly regarded industry body it is today and led the charge for organic regulatory reform, all while building strong relationships with government and industry. We truly appreciate all you have done.



# Truth in Labelling

## AOL speaks at Senate Inquiry into Greenwashing

Australian Organic Limited (AOL) called for harsher penalties on companies found to be misleading consumers when it presented at the latest public hearing of the Senate inquiry into greenwashing in Canberra on Friday 24 May.

Since AOL's initial submission to the Senate committee in May 2023, the ACCC conducted its own inquiry into greenwashing after an internet sweep over October and November 2022 found 57 per cent of businesses were making concerning claims about their environmental credentials.

However, AOL CEO, Niki Ford, said the ACCC report fell short in effectively deterring business from making misleading claims of being 'organic' without legitimate certification.

"AOL would like to see the outcomes of the ACCC inquiry strengthened so that significant consequences are imposed on anyone making unsubstantiated claims around sustainability," Ms Ford said.

"Without penalties that outweigh the benefits of using terms like 'organic' as marketing tools, mere guidance will not resolve these issues. The ACCC has highlighted the requirements to avoid greenwashing, so it is crucial to enforce these guidelines in a manner that significantly impacts organisations choosing to disregard them.

"AOL is urging severe ramifications to deter operators from engaging in repeated greenwashing."

Australia is the only OECD country with no domestic standard for organic products, meaning a product can be labelled "organic" with little to no verification on that claim. Some uncertified organic products contain as little as two per cent organic ingredients.

Lax labelling laws are the main contributor to a significant portion of shoppers still citing trust in organic status as a barrier to purchase, with the 2023 Australian Organic Market Report finding 33 per cent of organic shoppers surveyed purchased a product thinking it was organic based on packaging claims, only to later find it was not.

"There are currently over 2,000 businesses in Australia claiming to be organic that are not certified, with no way for consumers to verify the authenticity of their claims," Ms Ford said.

"This jeopardises the efforts of producers who have gone through the rigorous third-party organic certification

process, proving how they promote biodiversity and encourage soil regeneration with natural alternatives to synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.

"The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) requires any operator making organic claims to be able to support such claims, but there is little to no action taken on businesses which are selling misleading products.

"Until the laws are changed to stop uncertified operators marketing their product as 'organic', even the most discerning consumers will continue to be misled by businesses unscrupulously using the term."

AOL presented at the public hearing alongside David Keens of Manna Farms and Sonya Dowling of poultry producer Envirogenic Farm.

Ms Dowling spoke of how a butcher she had sold Envirogenic poultry to was able to continue passing off their chicken as organic, long after Envirogenic had stopped supplying them.

"We have proof over several years that businesses use our logo, certification and reputation to sell fraudulent products. I have attempted numerous times to get (these businesses) to remove their claim with no assistance from current ACCC processes. Consumers are being misled by paying a premium for non-organic chicken, at our financial and reputational cost," said Ms Dowling.

More information on the Senate inquiry into greenwashing [here](#).



**PICTURED:** AOL Operations and Technical Manager Josefina Pettersson, AOL Chairman David Keens and AOL Chief Executive Niki Ford.

# Australian Organic Conference 2024

## *'Our Future: Growing Together'*

Where to from here? Organics in Australia has grown exponentially from a cottage industry into a robust and diverse sector, but there is clearly still room to grow. In this spirit of growth, AOL convenes a biennial conference to bring the industry together and exchange new ideas.

Australian Organic Conference 2024 was held at Pullman Melbourne in the Park during early March 2024, with more than 200 participants taking part to discuss the event theme of 'Our Future: Growing Together'.

The two-day event spanned a variety of topics, ranging from profitable production systems to global organic trends, proactive management, upscaling an organic business and much more. Keynote speakers included US impact investor Robyn O'Brien, National Farmers' Federation President David Jochinke and regenerative agriculture expert Dr Allen Williams.

Check out pages 8 and 9 for some deeper insights into the conference schedule of 'Our Future: Growing Together'.





# Collaboration

## The Key Theme of 'Our Future: Growing Together'

On Day 1 of the Australian Organic Conference held in Melbourne, US impact investor Robyn O'Brien, known as "food's Erin Brockovich", said Australia is the global frontline of the intersection of agriculture, climate and food security.

Centred on the theme 'Our Future, Growing Together', the two-day event brought together the leading lights of the certified organic industry. Australian Organic Limited (AOL) CEO, Niki Ford, addressed the crowd at Pullman on the Park on Day 1, highlighting the ongoing opportunities and challenges in front of the industry.

"I've been in this role for more than five years, and I think we've come together more in the last twelve months in the name of growing together than we ever have before," Ms Ford said.

"The discussions you'll hear over the next two days will highlight the vast opportunities in front of us from government regulation all the way through to industry insights from overseas.

"We have speakers from the US and New Zealand who will share insights on how we can continue to improve what we're doing here. It will be exciting as well to hear from all of the political parties that have been supporting us from a government perspective.

"We've been around for decades as an industry, but there's still so much renewed interest in the sustainability and circularity of certified organics.

"This industry is so diverse, which is one of our greatest strengths but also our greatest challenge at times. We've got to be better at talking about ourselves and sharing our story. Talking consistently with one, unified voice around the needs of the industry will ensure we can capitalise on the environmental and economic opportunities we have."

Mick Hewitt, CEO and Managing Director of Hewitt, a Gold Sponsor of the Conference, echoed Ms Ford's optimism.

"The pathway that we as certified organic producers are on is one of profound importance, and our work is a vital cog in driving positive change for future generations," Mr Hewitt said.

"Our ethos has always been about nurturing the land and its productivity and creating high-quality products while doing minimal harm to the environment, animals and people.

"While the climate crisis poses many challenges, the certified organic industry is adaptable, innovative and resilient, and continues to grow globally each year.

"I'm always encouraging my team to think big and think together. I'd challenge each of you here today in this room to ensure that your team members care about your mission as much as you do to ensure we continue to promote food security and economic development into the future."

### AOL CEO Niki Ford



### Hewitt CEO and Managing Director Mick Hewitt





Keynote speaker for the Conference, global business innovator Robyn O'Brien, emphasised the urgent need for farmers and leaders to adopt regenerative agriculture practices that prioritise soil health, reduce chemical inputs, and promote biodiversity.

"I cannot emphasise enough how important this group is here today," Ms O'Brien said.

"I absolutely believe that Australia is the frontline of the intersection of agriculture and climate and food security. And whatever we figure out here in Australia, I think, are the best practices that the rest of the world need to know.

"Our food system is changing pretty quickly and pretty radically. This is being driven by escalating rates of disease, the food security crisis, water security crisis and other pressing issues which make the work of certified organic producers even more crucial.

"It's becoming more widely understood that soil's ability to carry carbon, nutrients and water is a key part of the climate solution.

"What we do to our soil, we do to our future.

"Up until now we've been in an abusive relationship with soil. More farmers realise the need to continue making the transition away from chemical inputs which can damage not only the soil but also the financial health of the growers experiencing increased debt levels - which is why the group here is so important."

Ms O'Brien, who made the Forbes Impact 50 list of the most notable investors for her work at the intersection of agriculture and climate, emphasised that the choices farmers make also need to be aided by choices made by investors.

"You cannot fix a broken food system with a broken financial system. The debt levels of the growers are a problem, and if the money isn't there to finance the transition and build smarter systems, the transition cannot happen which is why impact investing is so important," she said.

"Capital is the first ingredient in the food system. Farmers understand this better than anyone. Water, soil, clean air - these things are not free. If we destroy them, the whole system goes down.

"The problem is you have companies out there trashing the planet, and the revenue they create we call GDP. Then you have a company like Hewitt which is helping to restore and regenerate the planet, and we call it GDP. Those two things are not the same, and yet we give them equal measure. One actually should be penalised for the disruptive impact they have while the others, like Hewitt, should actually be rewarded."

Ms O'Brien rose to fame in 2008 when she was dubbed food's "Erin Brockovich" (by Bloomberg and the New York Times) over her concerns of what additives and modifications were being made to foods, particularly focusing on what it could do to children.

"As a mother of four, this is really what keeps me up at night," she said.

"One in three kids in the US now have what are called the 'four A's' - autism, allergies, ADHD or asthma. Whatever we do to our food system today is what our children will inherit tomorrow.

"I truly believe healthcare starts on the farm. So, we have a choice, and the people in this room have already made it, but the challenge is how we communicate it outside of our community. We need to create the tools and resources to really spread certified organics in a global way.

"We cannot place that burden of education on top of the farmer though, which is why the work that Australian Organic do is so important. I believe that 10 years from now this room will be too small - there'll be thousands of farmers and industry leaders starting their organic journey with more understanding of what you all already know.



**Keynote speaker Robyn O'Brien**



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\*IRI Organic Wine Report January 2022

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The Georgopoulos family from Shepparton East in Victoria was awarded a \$250,000 grant to grow organic fruit with trellising, environmental netting and irrigation.

Georgopoulos Orchards Director Chris Georgopoulos said the grant will enable their business to meet customer demand for great quality organic produce.

"We are very conscious of our carbon footprint and are committed to reducing chemicals and introducing cleaner farming practices to give the consumer a truly organic experience," he said.

coles nurture fund  
[coles.com.au/nurturefund](http://coles.com.au/nurturefund)

Photo: Chris Georgopoulos and his granddaughter Sienna Georgopoulos

**coles**

Value the Australian way

# Australian Organic Industry Awards

## Winners announced for 2024

This year's winners of the prestigious Australian Organic Industry Awards were crowned at a gala event in Melbourne on Friday 8 March.

Hosted by Australian Organic Limited (AOL), the awards ceremony marked the conclusion of the two-day 2024 Australian Organic Conference at Pullman Melbourne on the Park.

AOL Chief Executive Officer, Niki Ford, congratulated the winning businesses and individuals for their outstanding contributions to Australia's \$2.6 billion organic industry.

Australia's largest certified organic meat producer, Hewitt, was named Business of the Year, while its retail brand, Cleaver's Organic Meat, took out Brand of the Year.

"Thank you to the forebears of our company, who are also some of the early pioneers of certified organic meat in this country – most notably Peter Gall who's here with me tonight," Hewitt Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Mick Hewitt, said.

"When I think of organic farming I think of my grandfather, who at 95 years old is still living a natural and healthy life – he helped lay the foundations for what we do and many other organic farmers.

Carly Burnham was another beef producer to win a major award, named this year's Organic Farmer of the Year.

Fifth generation producers at Monto, Queensland, Ms Burnham and husband Grant gained organic certification for their Bonnie Doone Beef enterprise in 2017, and last year gained the distinction of becoming the largest holder of Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs), following the implementation of a long-running soil carbon project run in conjunction with CarbonLink.

"I feel very proud to be an organic producer, as I'm really living by my values," Ms Burnham said.

"This recognition enforces we're on the right path in producing good-quality, healthy organic food. As many people in farming know, it's often not just one person running the show, so I want to pay tribute to my husband back at home right now mustering cattle while I'm here accepting the award. It's a real team effort so thank you to everyone at Boonie Doone."

The Awards were hosted by Julia Jones of Captivating Conversations, while Federal Member for Casey Aaron Violi MP gave a speech and spoke to his background in organics and commitment to the sector's future.



# Australian Organic Industry Awards

## 2024 Winners



### Brand of the Year

#### Cleaver's Organic Meat

Since being founded in 1998, Cleaver's Organic Meat has been guided by a simple philosophy: treat animals well, treat people well and treat the land well. The certified organic business supplies high-quality beef, lamb and chicken products in select Coles, Woolworths and independent supermarkets across Australia.

### Business of the Year

#### Hewitt

Hewitt Foods is a global food producer with a fully integrated and ethical supply chain. The business has a rich history in family farming and vision to becoming the world's most sustainable meat producer. Today they have more than 200,000 livestock across Australia as well as the largest integrated supply chain of certified organic meat.



### Innovation Award

#### WoodShield

WoodShield supplies a range of certified organic businesses with durable and innovative fence and trellis posts, made from chemical-free timber and encased in recycled polymer. The posts are a circular economy product, with the recycled plastic sourced from agri-waste from farms, vineyards and similar locations.

### New Product of the Year

#### Soulfresh, Lo Bros Purple Grape Organic Kombucha 330ml

LoBros Purple Grape came about from a wish to create a nostalgic, sweet and delicious kombucha that takes consumers back to their teenage grape bubblegum chewing days. The certified organic product uses 100% natural ingredients and authentic brewing practices, as well as being packaged in recyclable amber glass with a paper label.



### Retailer of the Year

#### Santos Organics

Santos Organic has supported hundreds of organic growers and suppliers since 1978, and now exists as an environmental not-for-profit social enterprise and retailer. The Byron Bay retailer is dedicated to supporting their local community of growers, suppliers, businesses and customers through a range of initiatives such as their recently launched 'Grow the Growers' project.

# Australian Organic Industry Awards

## 2024 Winners

### Farmer of the Year

#### Carly Burnham, Bonnie Doone Beef

Carly and her husband Grant operate Bonnie Doone Beef in Monto, Queensland. The fifth-generation family operation uses livestock to regenerate pasture and sequester carbon. Bonnie Doone is managed as an organic system, producing natural, pasture-raised, happy cattle for many people throughout Australia and the world.



### Organic Woman of the Year

#### Karen Ward, Honest to Goodness

Karen is the co-founder of Honest to Goodness, a certified organic manufacturer, retailer and national distributor that started as a market stall more than 21 years ago. The growing business operates four brands under the Honest to Goodness umbrella, and Karen plays a key role in a leadership team that is committed to supporting gender and cultural diversity.

### Young Organic Leader

#### Chelsea Eldridge, Eldridge Fresh Organics

Chelsea is a fifth-generation agricultural specialist at Eldridge Fresh Organics, a leading vegetable farming operation based in Murray Bridge. As a key figure in the Eldridge Fresh management team, Chelsea works on initiatives including technology advancements, integrated pest management and data analytics.



### Chairman's Award

#### Andrew Youngberry, Inglewood Organic

Andrew and his family operate a range of agricultural and farming businesses around the Darling Downs region of Queensland, including Inglewood Organic, Country Heritage Feeds and Country Synergy. He has worked tirelessly to deliver innovations across the organic supply chain, building successful organic businesses that stick closely to the ethos of our industry.

### Hall of Fame

#### Biodynamic pioneer Alex Podolinsky (1925 - 2019)

*AWARD ACCEPTED BY ALEX'S SON, PETER PODOLINSKY*

Alex Podolinsky of the Bio Dynamic Research Institute (or BDRI) dedicated the vast majority of his life to organics and biodynamics. Alex was born in Germany and emigrated to Australia in 1949, where he set about his work in building the biodynamic movement Down Under. He was a skilled teacher who farmers really connected with, and he inspired many to change their growing methods along the way.



Australian Organic Industry Awards





Certified by Australian Certified Organics, the Organica range of products feature a range of natural fertilisers, trace elements, bio protectants and bio stimulants designed for organic farms and growers wanting to become more sustainable.

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### BIO "LIGGY" MAX

- Chelated NPK + Calcium + Silica + Trace Elements. A complete chelated bio fertiliser. (improves "BRIX" overnight).

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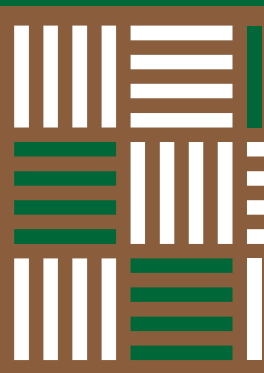
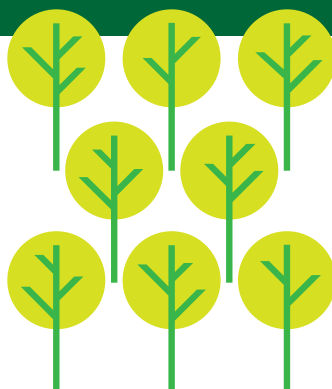
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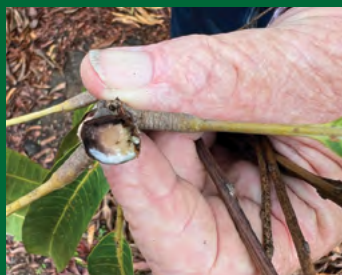
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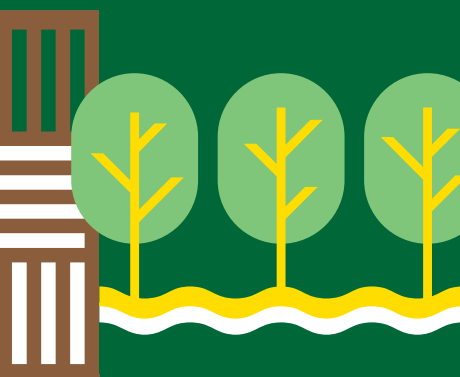
Before



After



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# Organic Pioneers

## The family story of Eldridge Fresh Organics



When Shane Eldridge started growing certified organic produce, the industry was almost as fresh as the veggies picked from his Prosperity Grove farm. But a passion for sustainable farming had run through his family for generations.

“One of my uncles grew organic produce a long, long time ago and I used to visit his farm as a kid,” Shane said.

“He encouraged my parents to start growing organic tomatoes for a small shop just out of Adelaide which was struggling to source organic produce. It was all about filling a gap in the market because that was the very early days of organics.

“More markets and shops started asking us for more organic produce, so I started my own business in 1990 called S&J Eldridge with my wife Julie, which evolved into Eldridge Fresh Organics in 1997.”

Since then, Eldridge Fresh Organics has become one of the leading producers of certified organic vegetables in Australia, supplying local and international supermarkets and wholesalers with tomatoes, potatoes, onions, cucumbers, celery, cauliflower, zucchinis, cabbage, capsicum, chilli and eggplant.

Shane and his team grow their produce outdoors and in polytunnels and glasshouses across six farms in Murray Bridge, around an hour east of Adelaide.

Beyond avoiding chemicals and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the growing process, Shane and his team are constantly finding new ways to improve their

ecological sustainability. Some of their recent innovations include using artificial intelligence to monitor produce in real-time to improve resource efficiency and inform environmental management, and transitioning to reusable plastic packaging.

Shane says one of the biggest advancements his business has made is in the use of beneficial insects – species which help combat more harmful bugs.

“It’s been a gamechanger for us how far beneficials have come since I first started farming,” he said.

“Earlier this year we had a big problem with aphids decimating our cucumber crop, but in the space of a few weeks using these certified organic predator bugs the crops were thriving again.

“On top of new species and the use of beneficials, the boom in organics has meant we have a range of certified inputs we can use now. When I first started, I couldn’t imagine having things like certified organic sprays or fertilisers, but there’s been some great research in this area which has allowed that.”

While some of the methods and technologies have changed, one thing remains a constant for Shane.

“If I see a gap in the market I do everything I can to fill it – I think it’s in my DNA,” he said.

“The only way certified organics will continue to grow is ensuring a consistent supply of high-quality produce that is affordable and tastes great. That’s our mission.”

That mission has now been passed down to another generation of the Eldridge family, with Shane's 23-year-old daughter, Chelsea, named Young Organic Leader of the Year at the 2024 Australian Organic Industry Awards.

As Business Support Manager at Eldridge Fresh Organics, Chelsea is involved in all facets of the business from precision farming and data analytics to pest management, inventory control and supplier relations.

Similar to her father, she is driven by the need for a consistent supply of quality produce.

"I'm motivated to always be improving the quality and taste of what we put onto the shelves," Chelsea said.

"It's really nice to hear the feedback from customers about how much they love our vegetables, and it's a bonus knowing they don't have any nasty chemicals or additives. Especially after COVID, I think a lot more people are thinking critically about the quality of food they buy.



**ABOVE:** Shane Eldridge, of Eldridge Fresh Organics in Murray Bridge.

**BELOW:** The business produces a wide range of fresh vegetables ranging from cabbage through to snow peas.



"Organics has come a long way in the last five to ten years, and I think it's a great time for more people, particularly young people like me, to get involved.

"I feel privileged just to be involved in the organic industry, so it was a pretty amazing surprise to be named Young Organic Leader of the Year."

Shane was also recognised at the Organic Industry Awards, named as a finalist in the Farmer of the Year category.

"I was more excited for Chelsea to win her category than I was for mine!" he said.

"I'm super proud of her, and it's a great recognition of the hard work and enthusiasm she's brought to the business. We've seen her grow from a little girl sitting in the picking trolleys to a fully-fledged businesswoman who empowers those around her."



**ABOVE:** Chelsea Eldridge accepting her Young Organic Leader trophy at the 2024 Industry Awards.

**BELOW:** Shane and Chelsea with members of the Eldridge Fresh Organics team.



# Statistics and Emerging Trends

## ‘The World of Organic Agriculture 2024’ released

The global organic sector has evolved a great deal in recent years, with many countries establishing robust programs to serve an increased consumer preference for products that are grown and processed organically. Given this rate of change and the relatively small size of the global industry, regular data collection is vital to tracking the growth of organics.

An annual publication on the state of the global industry is compiled by two eminent organisations - the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), and IFOAM – Organics International.

Entitled ‘The World of Organic Agriculture’, this extensive document includes contributions from all over the world, including Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania. The 2024 publication was released earlier this year at the BioFach trade fair in Germany, and a full PDF is available for [free download on the FiBL website](#).

An article on the current state of the Australian organic industry can be found on pages 250 – 253. Some noteworthy insights from the World of Organic Agriculture publication have been listed below.

### **Global organic food and drink sales reached nearly 135 billion euros**

In 2022, the global organic food and drink market was worth 135 billion euros according to FiBL. The strength of the US market (58.6 billion euros) was a large contributor to this figure. The European Union (45.1 billion euros) and China (12.4 billion euros) were the next largest markets. While this is something of a stabilisation following the 2020 surge brought about during the COVID-19 pandemic, growth is expected to resume as economic conditions get better.

### **Australia is a world leader in organic agricultural land**

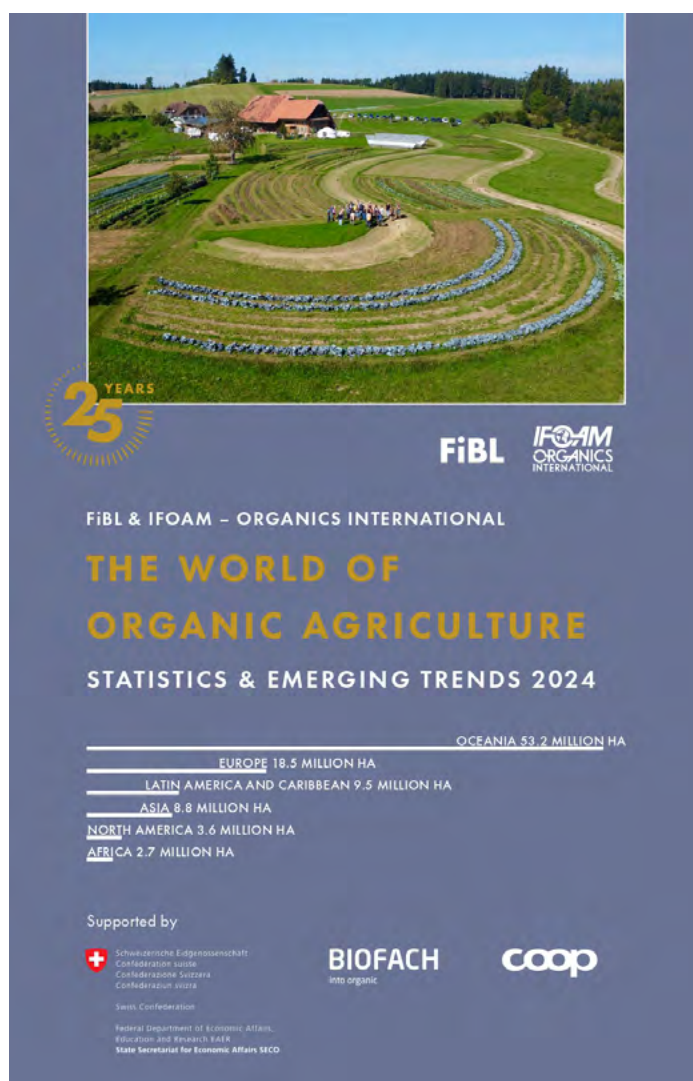
96.4 million hectares of land are under agricultural management worldwide, and Australia is home to 53 per cent of this total. While a large proportion of our total is extensive grazing areas, this does still highlight the growth potential of Australia’s organic industry given its relatively small size in the broader picture of the nation’s agriculture.

### **There were 4.5 million organic producers in 2022**

The global count of organic producers has surged, increasing by 25.6 per cent over the previous year’s figures. The majority of organic producers are in Asia (61 per cent), trailed by Africa at 22 per cent, Europe at 11 per cent, and Latin America at 6 per cent. India is home to the most organic producers by far, with more than 2.4 million according to the publication.

‘The World of Organic Agriculture’ is now in its 25th year, with up-to-date statistics on the number of countries with established organic regulations also included.

**SOURCE:** Willer, Helga Jan Trávníček and Bernhard Schlatter (Eds.) (2024): *The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2024*. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL, Frick, and IFOAM – Organics International, Bonn.



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# Organic Livestock

## Visiting Beef Australia 2024

The Southern Hemisphere's largest cattle industry expo was held from 5 to 11 May in Rockhampton, and this year's event saw attendance figures smashed as attendees flowed through the gates in Rockhampton.

Beef Week has been held every three years since 1988, quickly growing in stature to become the leading event on the Australian beef calendar. The 2021 edition was somewhat mitigated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but 2024 saw more than 119 thousand gate entries and representation from 35 countries across the globe.

AOL took the opportunity to attend Beef 2024, making the trip north to represent the organic sector and speak with MPs about the role our industry can play in a more sustainable agriculture industry. We met with Queensland Shadow Minister for Agriculture Tony Perrett MP, Federal Shadow Minister for Trade Kevin Hogan MP, and Dannielle Martin, Advisor to Michelle Landry MP, Member for Capricornia and Deputy Chair of the House Standing Committee for Industry, Science and Resources.

Select meetings were supported by the presence of organic livestock operators who have been recognised for producing top quality beef in accord with strict organic principles. These operators included Carly Baker-Burnham of Bonnie Doone Beef, who have generated a record number of Australia Carbon Credit Units for their soil carbon sequestration project. We were also joined by the Pearson family of Bull Creek, and Iain Scholes of Braemar Investments, both of whom have been recognised by Meat Standards Australia grading as leading grassfed beef suppliers.



While in Rockhampton, the AOL contingent hosted a roundtable where organic operators could come together and discuss what needs to be done at an industry level to support further growth. There was a great turnout and robust discussions about where our focus should remain in the months and years ahead.

While it is clear that the certified organic beef sector is a positive place as of now, there is still plenty of room for growth with so much of Australia's farmland now under certified organic management.



*LEFT TO RIGHT: Iain Scholes, Carly Baker-Burnham, Niki Ford and Kevin Hogan MP.*



*LEFT TO RIGHT: Kevin Hogan MP, Niki Ford, James Pearson, Sarah Pearson and Josefine Petterson.*



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# Organic Livestock

## Certified operators lead the way in MSA indexing



*Last year the Pearson family of Bull Creek Beef took top spot in the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) index for larger volume grassfed suppliers in Queensland. In fact, seven of the top ten in the category were all Certified Organic cattle producers, all supplying their beef products to Hewitt.*

*Assuring the eating quality of MSA beef requires standards to be maintained from paddock to plate. The top five placegetters came from a variety of geographic zones, and collectively, the group achieved 96 per cent compliance against MSA grading.*

*AOL met up with James Pearson of Bull Creek Beef at Beef 2024, to find out how his business is achieving such remarkable results.*

**AOL:** Could you give us an overview of Bull Creek Beef?

**JP:** My parents acquired 'Bull Creek' at McKinlay in northwest Queensland in the late 1960s and we've been

there ever since. We now own four properties and lease another and we run around 12,000 Santa Gertrudis cattle. Our main turn-off property is at Taroom in southeast Queensland, where we turn off all our bullocks and steers.

**AOL:** What motivated you to go organic and when did you achieve certification?

**JP:** We started down that track in 2005 and sold our first organic cattle in 2008. It was early days, but we would talk a lot with some of the other early certified organic beef producers like Iain Scholes and Lindsay Russell, and Peter Gall and Alister Ferguson who helped set up the Arcadian Organic Meat Company (which has since been acquired by Hewitt). The premium involved was attractive, we didn't have to change our management practices and the country we own lends itself to organic production. We're proud of the fact we can produce such a clean, no additive product. And there's more and more demand for it across the world.



**AOL:** What's the key to maximising returns from organic beef?

**JP:** We believe you've got to take every beast up to slaughter weights and sell everything to be processed. That's where the premiums are if you're an organic producer. Our cattle are marbling a bit over score two, which I think is really good for straight grassfed cattle. Handling and nutrition were two of the biggest factors in achieving good eating quality results.

**AOL:** You must've been pleased with your results in the MSA rankings last year?

**JP:** We were thrilled with that, and very surprised. I thought it was a hoax call! It justifies the money we invest in genetics and the type of cattle we've been breeding. We've seen a big difference in our cattle over the years as we get tougher on the attributes we want. We've seen our turn-off weights lift between 50 and 60 kilograms which is significant. So obviously that's paying off.

**AOL:** The top five in the MSA rankings were Certified Organic. What does that tell you about the industry?

**JP:** It shows you that Australia is actually a grassfed beef producing country. That's what the land lends itself to and it's turning off some pretty high quality meat. Eating quality is a very difficult thing to measure but Meat Standards Australia is a terrific tool. It means the end

buyer can have confidence that it's going to be a good eating experience for them.

**AOL:** Here at Beef 2024, you met with Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Tony Perrett MP. What did you talk about?

**JP:** Mainly about labelling. There are a few issues with greenwashing where people just label something organic and there's no traceability, so we want to stamp that out and get some sort of consistency. And I know that AOL have been doing a lot of work with that in Canberra over the years - the Government needs to stamp it out. It's easy for people to label a product 'organic' when it's not. That damages our industry.

**AOL:** Would a domestic standard around the word 'organic' help to reduce greenwashing?

**JP:** Yeah, every country runs off a different set of standards and it'd be much easier if we could have a set standard to market it. So no matter where you are, when you see Certified Organic that's actually what it is, there's no grey area. You can't have 'organic' and then 'certified organic'. As certified organic producers, we have to go through some pretty strict auditing processes. Unless you're doing that, you shouldn't be called organic. It's like fake meat - why should it be called meat when it's not?





# Organic Operators in Focus

It's that time of the year when the mercury heads south and the blankets come out. For organic consumers, winter is a perfect time to try out new warming recipes and enjoy the fantastic fresh produce that our industry creates without resorting to pesticides and GMOs.

There are some promising signs on the horizon for winter crops after a few challenging seasons for many growers. Here's hoping that our organic counterparts across the nation have a positive harvesting season and can get ahead before the days turn warmer.

In this issue, we've profiled three diverse organic operations serving their consumer bases from Australia's east coast. We hear from a Melbourne family business striving to liven up your pantry with natural stock powders, a unique Brisbane-based butchers serving a range of certified organic meats, and a Yeppoon farmer who has reduced input costs with a homemade microbial solution.

# San Elk

## Hand-Crafted Certified Organic Stocks

Melbourne-based family business [San Elk](#) have been producing a range of certified organic stocks since 2017. Their business is built on a passion for natural and additive-free foods that liven up your pantry and help turn ordinary meals into delicious ones.

San Elk offer a range of four products, all of which are certified organic; They have a Beef Bone Stock, a Chicken Stock, a Vegetable Stock and a Low FODMAP Vegetable Stock.

Each batch is hand-crafted using high quality dehydrated and finely ground vegetables, herbs and spices, mixed with other natural ingredients to make a tasty and nutritious stock. All products in the range are free from maltodextrin, MSG, GMOs, palm products, gluten, lactose and other fillers. Additionally, the dehydrated beef bone and chicken used in their meat stocks do not contain hormones or antibiotics.

One 160g tub of San Elk powdered stock makes approximately 13 litres of liquid stock. This container form allows for significantly less packaging material than liquid stock, meaning less cartons end up in landfill. Their powdered stock is also shelf-stable and doesn't need to be stored in the fridge, so you can keep it in your pantry for easy accessibility. The packaging is reusable kraft paper cardboard, suitable for other applications once you finish your container.

San Elk operates under a farm-to-table philosophy,

with the owners always looking to support local certified organic farmers and producers where possible. Their products are available in health food stores and markets across multiple states. You can use the handy [Stockists](#) tool on their website to find your nearest supplier, or else visit their website and [shop online](#). Bulk varieties ranging up to 20kg are available to food service companies looking for certified organic options.

To reach out to the San Elk team for further information, feel free to email [info@sanelk.com.au](mailto:info@sanelk.com.au) or call 0403 232 411. You can also [follow them on Instagram](#) for some fantastic recipes and meal ideas.



**Business owners Loredana and Arthur with their three boys**



# Sherwood Road Organic Meats

## *A Trusted Supplier for Brisbane's Southside*

Sourcing quality, ethically produced certified organic meat can be a challenge in major cities, but there are innovative retailers who sell direct from local family farms for consumer convenience.

One such example is [Sherwood Road Organic Meats](#) in Rocklea, who stock Brisbane's biggest retail range of certified organic beef, lamb, goat, pork, chicken and smallgoods. The family business is a unique enterprise, with dad Adrian Tiller supplying lamb & beef from his organic property near Roma, Western Qld, while his daughter Amy Tiller owns and runs the Rocklea store.

Sherwood Road Organic Meats also source their products from a [variety of Australian producers](#), including Bendele Farm Organic Chicken, OBE Organic Beef, Gundooee Organic Wagyu and Borrowdale Free-Range Pork. While traditional butcher fare is the core focus of the store, they have branched out recently into a range of products such as ethically sourced seafood, game, a huge line of grocery items – even pet treats!

Since opening over 10 years ago, the retailer has remained committed to educating customers on ethical farming practices and supporting producers who operate under the same principles. The butcher is accredited under the Australian Certified Organic Standard, with all organic options clearly labelled so customers know exactly what they are purchasing.

Sherwood Road Organic Meats was a finalist for Retailer of the Year at the 2024 Australian Organic Industry Awards. Customers choose to shop at the retailer for a variety of reasons; the lack of chemical

inputs in their meat (such as vaccinations), the lack of filler ingredients (such as preservatives) and their commitment to supporting farmers who actively work to protect animals and the environment. Plus of course, the quality and taste!

The store is located near to the famous Rocklea Markets and adjacent to a branch of [Market Organics](#), making it a great option for Brisbane consumers looking to pick up all their organic shopping in the one location. While the butcher is open to the public for all small quantities, [bulk orders](#) can be made online for those looking to stock up. Delivery options are available, while a free click-and-collect service is on offer for Northey Street Organic Market or at the Rocklea storefront. The business has a stall at the Northey Street Organic Farmers Market, which runs every Sunday in Windsor.

To stay up-to-date with the latest news and special offers from Sherwood Road Organic Meats, make sure you follow them on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).



# HS & D Barlow

## *Home-made Microbial Solutions as an Input*

Howard Barlow has operated his family farm under certified organic practices since 2000, when it became clear that conventional farming methods just weren't working for the property. Located on just under 200 acres in Yeppoon, Queensland, the mixed vegetable farm has been home to a range of organic crops including zucchinis, eggplant and cucumber.

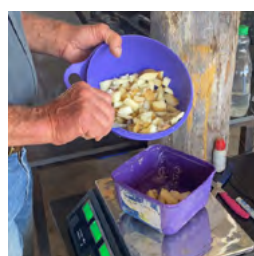
Crop rotation is a key technique used by Howard as a means to work with nature and allow the soil in their paddocks to remain in optimal condition. Howard believes that "micro-organisms are one of the most important factors when thinking about natural organic farming." He is interested in the Jadam principles of organic farming, given that they can reduce reliance on external inputs and thus allow farmers to improve their bottom line. This is especially handy during periods of reduced yield.

One of these techniques currently utilised on the farm is a home-made microbial solution used in Jadam. All you need is leafmould soil from your farm, two strainer bags, cooked organic potatoes, a bucket of water and a little salt to create a solution that allows microbes to multiply. See below if you'd like to have a go at creating it yourself.

The amounts described below are used to fertigate approximately one quarter of a hectare on Howard's property. Incorporating the starch from the organic potatoes is key to the mixture's success. The amounts aren't an exact science, so try it out yourself and see how you get on!



1) You'll need roughly six handfuls of leafmould soil from your property. Collect it in a strainer bag and tie it off.



2) In a container, measure 200g of boiled organic potatoes.



3) Add around 15-20g of salt. Pour the contents into a second strainer bag and tie it off.



4) Suspend both the bag of leafmould soil and the bag of potatoes in a large bucket filled with water from your property.

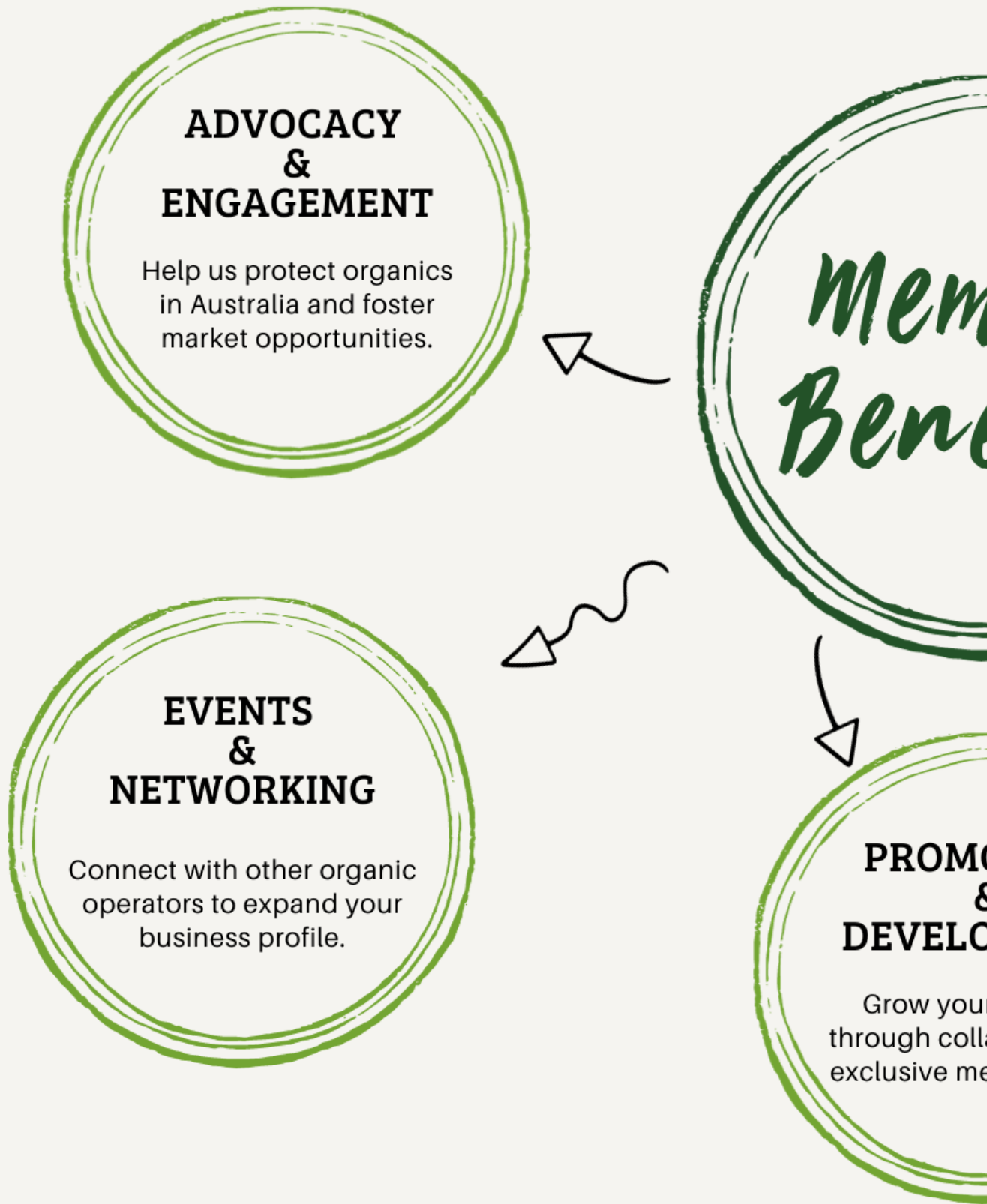


5) Squeeze the bag of potatoes to release the contents.



6) Leave both bags suspended in the water for at least 48 hours. At this point, the nutrient-rich water will be ready to be tipped into your fertigation system.

The most effective way to address business and support the industry is b



*If you would like to become an Australian Organic Limited membership, please contact our Business Development team.*

Contact Tracy Bennett | E: [membership@australianorganic.com.au](mailto:membership@australianorganic.com.au)



member, or have any questions regarding your current or potential business development executive Tracy.

## Why Join Australian Organic Limited?

Together we are stronger

AOL has united a growing community of certified organic operators. Together, we work to promote and protect the maturing organic sector. We have been representing our members for 35 years and we invite you to join us to have your say in shaping the future of the organic industry. When you join Australian Organic Limited, we provide you with:

- A direct voice to government to address our industry's greatest challenges and opportunities
- Industry research and resources to help position your business for success
- Marketing support through industry awareness & promotional campaigns

By becoming a voting member of Australian Organic Limited, you help to shape the future of the organic industry through your contribution at our Annual General Meeting.

## What are the benefits of becoming a member?

As a member of this dynamic industry you will receive exclusive access to the below benefits, and so much more.



### Australian Organic Market Report

Complimentary copy of the most recent Australian Organic Market Report to develop your business strategy.



### Marketing & Sponsorship Opportunities

Access to discounted marketing and sponsorship opportunities, including a complimentary member profile published on our website.



### Australian Organic Awareness Month

Exclusive discounts to be a part of Australia's largest campaign celebrating certified organic products every September.



### Monthly Member & CEO Update

Access the most recent industry news and updates relevant to the organic industry, including a regular email from our CEO.



### Industry Awards & Wine Awards

Discounted submission to the highly respected Industry Awards and Wine Awards, as well as discounted tickets to attend the events.



### Conference, Forums & Networking Events

Access to discounted tickets for events to educate and connect the industry, foster growth and innovation.



### Exclusive member portal

Access to a range of resources, publications and webinar recordings.



# critical issues facing your organic by joining Australian Organic Limited

## How do we use our member funds?

### We are working for you

Australian Organic Limited continues to invest Industry Development Levys (IDLs) and membership fees through progressing the organic industry by the following key activities:

- **Government Advocacy:** AOL continually advocates on behalf of the certified organic industry by working with government on key industry issues such as organic domestic regulation, market access, biosecurity and relevant industry matters.
- **Promote Consumer Awareness:** AOL continues to educate consumers on the benefits of organic and the importance of checking for certification marks through the Bud Organic Club website, newsletter and social media platforms. AOL has also established **Australian Organic Awareness Month**, the nation's largest campaign to promote the benefits of organic produce.
- **Engage with Federal & State Government:** AOL continues to develop relationships with Ministers, Departments and key industry partners such as the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and the Australian Food & Grocery Council (AFGC).
- **Research & Development:** AOL, through the strategic direction of our Board and advisory committees, engage key research and industry bodies to work towards establishing further organic oriented Australian agricultural research.
- **Provide Market Analysis:** AOL invests in consumer and commercial research by supplying data and information to support trade negotiations.
- **Lobby ACCC on "fake organic" products:** AOL works with the ACCC on misleading claims and has successfully negotiated the inclusion of the National Standard for Organic & Biodynamic Produce on the ACCC website and has been appointed a position on the ACCC Agricultural Consultative Committee.
- **Assist Organic Importers:** AOL has driven significant outcomes for organic importers regarding mandatory biosecurity changes relating to seeds and khapra beetle through fostering strong relationships with federal and state Biosecurity teams.
- **Support Export Opportunities:** AOL contributes on export by providing the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade input into Free Trade Agreements, collaborating with international industry counterparts and maintaining an export website **Trade Organic** and masterclass program that provides resources on organic exports and international markets.
- **Educate New Generations:** AOL manages the Australian Organic Schools Program to encourage learning about organic principles and practices in Australian schools.

## Membership Structure & Fees

### Ordinary Certified

\$275 incl. GST per year\*

ACOS Operators licensed to the Bud; includes AGM voting rights.

### Associate Non-Voting

\$550 incl. GST per year

For any business, organisation or individual.

### Associate Voting

\$1,800 incl. GST per year

For any business, organisation or individual, includes AGM voting rights.

*\*Certified organic operators who are licensed to the Bud and pay Industry Development Levies receive Ordinary Certified Membership at no additional cost.*

***If this applies to you, [CLICK HERE](#) to activate your free membership.***

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