

# NASAA and Organic Agriculture in Australia

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## 13.1 Introduction

In a country where organic agriculture is highly fragmented and its practitioners isolated, sooner or later there will be a movement to try to combine the related forces and present a united front towards the outside world. In Australia, this happened in the early 1980s, when the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia (NASAA) played a central role in the development of the organic industry in Australia. It set itself the tasks of defining organic agriculture; of providing information about the relevant issues to producers, consumers and the public; of being an intermediary in the market by providing certification and information to sellers and buyers; and of lobbying the government to provide a climate in which it was easier for organic agriculture to thrive. Here, we explore the history of NASAA and the significant contributions it made to the development of the organic industry in Australia.

## 13.2 Background

### 13.2.1 Agriculture in Australia

Australian agriculture is extensive in nature and export-oriented. These features also influenced the development of the organic sector.

Of the approximately 15 million inhabitants in the early 1980s, around 80% lived in a handful of big cities, the capitals of each state.

Large tracts of rural areas were, and still are, sparsely populated, with many areas being farmed extensively. This reflects the absence of adequate rainfall or irrigation.

In 2003/04 the total farm area, including pastoral properties but excluding horticulture, was approximately 443 million hectares, with 86,700 producers. More than half of these ran livestock only (graziers). The second largest group, one-third of all producers, consisted of grain growers and grain-livestock farmers, and about 11,000 or 12.8% were dairy farmers (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE), 2006, Tables P1–P8). In 2002, a total of 22,500 growers managed horticultural enterprises. Of the total agricultural production in 2005/06 of AUS\$38.4 billion, almost 80% (AUS\$30.4 billion) was exported (estimates by ABARE, 2006, Tables 3 and 6).

### 13.2.2 The growth of organic agriculture since the 1980s

Organic farming has grown rapidly from its small beginnings in the early 1980s. The number of organic farmers increased from fewer than 500 in 1982 to between 950 and 1200 in 1990, although the numbers are not strictly comparable (Conacher and Conacher, 1991). Another study (Hassall and Associates, 1990) reported that half of all Australian organic producers (600–700) in 1990 said that they had been farming organically for 3 years or less, with over two-thirds farming organically for 5 years or less. In 2005, the number of organic producers had risen to 1869, and estimates of the area under organic management put the figure at 11.8 million hectares (Ian Lyall, AQIS, November 2006, personal communication) (the actual value is somewhat lower, as some producers are doubly or triply certified). This is large in absolute terms, but the fraction of total agricultural area under organic management is 2.6%, which is in the middle of the range for industrialized countries around the world. Figures provided by the two largest organic certifiers in Australia (NASAA and the Biological Farmers of Australia, BFA) indicate that approximately 97% of the total certified area was under extensive grazing management in 2005. This means that of the total of 11.8 million hectares, close to 370,000 ha are in non-pastoral areas, which is approximately 0.7% of the total conventional area for included industries (the total area of wheat and other crops, mixed broadacre, and dairy for 2003/04 was 60 million hectares, which does not include horticulture). Although the non-pastoral portion is only 3% of the total certified area, more than half the total value of the organic sector originates from those areas.

The growth of the market has paralleled the increase in the number of organic farmers. Fritz (1991) estimated the market for organic produce

in Australia in 1987 at AU\$6 million. In 1990, the retail organic market was estimated at AU\$39 million (Hassall and Associates, 1990). The current retail value is a matter of dispute. Wynen (2003), using data from the certifying organizations, estimated the total farmgate value of organic production in 2000/01 at AU\$89 million, including produce not sold as organic. This figure was then used to estimate the retail value of that production. The result, reduced by the part sold in the conventional market, was AU\$107 million. To arrive at the total domestic retail value, exports should then be deducted, imports added and value added for processed goods. No details were available to do this, but it seemed reasonable to assume that exports from Australia were considerably higher than imports, and that processing was not a substantial part of the organic market. If this is correct, the retail value would have been closer to AU\$100 million than to the AU\$400 million at which NASAA put the retail value in 2003 (NASAA, 2003). For that year, Halpin (2004) estimated the total retail value of products sold on the organic market at AU\$127.9 million (estimated by adding all enterprises reported by the producer respondents). Imports were estimated at AU\$13 million, while export figures were (and still are) only available for quantities, not values (Halpin and Sahota, 2004). The NASAA figure may be high, because it presumably assumed continued growth at the rate of approximately 25% found between 1990 and 1995 (Hassall and Associates, 1995).

Exports have been an important part of the Australian market. Austrade (2003) estimated that one-third of Australian organic products were exported, with an export value of around AU\$50 million (year not specified).

### **13.3 The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia**

#### **13.3.1 Origin**

In the early 1980s, no organic certification scheme existed in Australia. Organic agriculture was of interest to two different groups. The first consisted of farmers who used practices generally consistent with today's standards of organic agriculture. Most of these farmers were geographically isolated and did not know of the existence of other organic farmers (Wynen, 1990, 1994). Many had experienced significant problems with their own health or that of their crops or livestock when farming conventionally, and felt that drastic changes were needed to solve those problems. Later, when organic farming became better known, they found themselves fitting into a recognized agricultural sector.

Biodynamic farming was organized under the leadership of Bob Williams and Alex de Podolinski well before the 1980s. Later, some biodynamic farmers were united under the leadership of Alex de Podolinski, who ran the Bio-Dynamic Research Institute (BDRI).

The second group consisted of regional and state-based organic gardening organizations such as Henry Doubleday Research Association in New South Wales and the Soil Association in South Australia. Because of the large distances between them, these organizations usually operated in isolation. The public was largely unaware of organic and biodynamic farming *per se*.

Against this background, there was a perceived need for cooperation and for combining the efforts of all forces in organic agriculture. The idea of NASAA as a way to achieve this was first developed as a major project for a Graduate Diploma in Agriculture at Hawkesbury College, near Sydney (Fritz, 1984a). In 1983, Sandy Fritz circulated a proposal to develop a national association of organic agriculture to 13 organic organizations around the country, most of whom responded positively. Several articles were placed in organic and permaculture journals (e.g. Fritz, 1984b). The idea of an umbrella organization that combined all forces interested in organic agriculture, including producers, consumers, traders and researchers, was presented by Fritz at several events in 1984, including the Organic 1984 Festival in Tasmania, the Permaculture International Festival in New South Wales and the Conference on Organic Farming in South Australia. The response at these events was generally enthusiastic.

### 13.2.2 Aims

As a result, a small group of people representing organic groups in all states of Australia began meeting to discuss the purpose and structure of a national association, and subsequently to develop a constitution. The general aims of such an association were to:

- Establish a communication network to assist organic growers in resolving common problems;
- Influence the direction of agricultural research and policy;
- Lobby to reduce policy and marketing obstacles to organic practices;
- Bring organic farming to the attention of the mainstream agricultural industry;
- Increase public awareness about organic farming.

Although many of the objectives were producer-oriented, it was recognized at a very early stage that organic agriculture could progress only if all stakeholders were involved, including consumers.

### 13.2.3 Structure

By early 1986, there was agreement on a constitution and a structure for the national organization, and NASAA was formally inaugurated. It was incorporated in early 1987, with Tim Marshall as its first chair and Sandy Fritz as Secretary and de facto Executive Director. By that time, about 30 organizations, with a total of 5600 members, were affiliated with NASAA.

In those early years, the NASAA Committee consisted of two representatives from each state. These were chosen from State Councils, which were made up of two representatives from organic organizations in each state. Although in theory this was a democratic way to involve the grass roots, in practice it meant that those involved with NASAA had to be committed on several levels, and had to be able to travel long distances for meetings – a rather costly business in Australia. The obligation to be involved on several levels and the financial demands placed on individuals, such as for attending meetings, would prove too onerous for many.

This structure was ideologically based. Despite the recognized value of a broadly representative structure (such as being democratic and egalitarian, and promoting community networking), it also had important limitations. The structure and demands on the organization resulted in frequent turnover of directors. Additionally, the financial stress, that any growing organization experiences, necessitated much work to be done by volunteers, albeit professionals. Although NASAA's influence on the national scene increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the structure and geographic issues made it more difficult to achieve all that NASAA set out to do. Still, it enjoyed relative success in achieving its objectives.

By 1991, there was a recognized need to involve certified growers in decision making. The structure of NASAA was changed at that time so that certified growers elected one of the two representatives from each state. More recently (NASAA, 2000), it was decided that state representation was too cumbersome for the organization, and a new type of membership (voting membership) in NASAA was required in order to vote for Board directors. In 2006, NASAA had 126 members. This low level of community input, where not even all operators licensed by NASAA (such as growers and processors) have chosen to be voting members, perhaps indicates little interest in participating in decision making at the national level.

## 13.3 NASAA's Early Work

### 13.3.1 Setting standards

The first requirement for an organization that wished to inform the farming community and the public about organic agriculture and to

influence government was to define organic agriculture. To this end, organic standards for Australian conditions had been worked on by a small group of people under the leadership of NASAA Committee member Lionel Pollard, who also developed Australia's Willing Workers on Organic Farms. The work on standards was brought to the NASAA Committee for completion. The first set of NASAA standards was in March 1987. NASAA then developed policies on certification (Wynen, 1989b), and a certification system was introduced, both for individuals and groups of producers, as well as for the service sectors, such as farm inputs and processing. At that time NASAA began to run workshops to train inspectors, and developed an inspector's guidebook (Marshall, 1990). It also supported work on conversion to organic agriculture (Wynen, 1992) and worked to promote the NASAA logo to ensure that consumers understood the importance of certification and to enhance consumer confidence in product integrity.

In the early 1990s, NASAA started to develop certification procedures for countries in Asia and the Pacific, especially at the request of European importers who used NASAA to do certification for them. In later years, this work expanded considerably.

### 13.3.2 Raising community awareness

NASAA's second requirement in those early years was to present the case for the importance of organic agriculture and to make this comprehensible for lay people, as well as policy makers. This was done by way of a book that constituted the first publication in a series of discussion papers (Wynen and Fritz, 1987). It outlined the problems with current farming practices, the alternatives and the policy implications of a shift to those alternatives. The book introduced many readers to NASAA and the scope of alternative agriculture at the international level. It was launched by a federal politician and attracted significant media coverage.

At that stage, the organic movement used the word 'sustainable', as it was thought that 'organic' had negative connotations for many people outside the movement. In later years, the word 'sustainable' was appropriated by advocates of certain technologies within conventional agriculture, notably minimum tillage (also known as 'conservation farming', of which the main characteristic was the replacement of soil tillage with herbicides). The organic movement then went back to using the word 'organic', although NASAA has kept 'sustainable' in its name.

During those first years, a priority was to obtain media coverage not only of organic agricultural practices and events, but also of NASAA's stance on many issues of concern relating to conventional agriculture, including practices related to the use of pesticides and fertilizers, health

issues and environment impacts. In the late 1980s, NASAA started to be widely known in Australia, and was often sought out by the media for comments on these issues.

### 13.3.3 Education

NASAA's drive to provide information was directed not only at the media, but also at educational institutions. Before 1987, no agricultural colleges or universities in Australia were involved in education on organic agriculture in an official way. However, by 1991 several institutions had held conferences and established programmes on the subject.

NASAA seminars on organic farming were co-sponsored by at least five colleges of agriculture/horticulture. NASAA sometimes published the proceedings (e.g. Wynen, 1987) or provided funds. Hawkesbury Agricultural College established a 1 ha field dedicated to teaching organic production techniques. The Orange Agricultural College, now part of the University of Sydney, developed a postgraduate course in sustainable agriculture, with significant NASAA collaboration. This development included study modules in organic (Fritz, 1992) and biodynamic agriculture, a first for an Australian university.

The increased demand for knowledge on organic agriculture encouraged Australia's Technical and Further Education institutions to offer short courses on organic farming, sponsor guest lectures and hold seminars to educate their agricultural staffs. NASAA's first discussion paper (Wynen and Fritz, 1987) was an important source of knowledge, particularly for students looking for information on organics.

### 13.3.4 Marketing

In 1986, there was very little organic food available on the Australian domestic market. While some products were sold as organic, they were too few to constitute a real market. No significant wholesalers of organic products existed. However, by the end of 1987, several wholesale businesses specializing in organic produce were established in capital cities.

As a result of a stronger market, growers wanting to sell their products as organic began to seek certification to assure traders and consumers that their products truly were organically grown. Towards the end of 1989, applications for NASAA certification began to increase dramatically.

Around this time NASAA received a government grant (Fritz, 1987) to carry out a 12-month project to develop the market for organic products. The project focused on three areas:

- Developing the domestic market by increasing consumer awareness and information;
- Investigating processing requirements and opportunities for organic products;
- Investigating and developing export market requirements and opportunities.

Although NASAA was very clear that as an organic certifier it should not be involved with marketing of organic produce *per se*, it was also clear that a very important part of developing the industry was through helping organic farmers to develop the export market. An Overseas Marketing Officer (Els Wynen) was appointed to provide information about NASAA and its standards and certification scheme to the European organic world so that importers would have confidence in Australian products with NASAA certification. The Marketing Officer also provided general market advice and export guidelines for Australian farmers who wanted to export organic products (Fritz and Wynen, 1991; Wynen, 1991).

Because exports are so important in Australian agriculture, government support for organic agriculture emphasized export promotion. For example, in 1989 the government funded consultants to research the market on the organic industry. NASAA assisted extensively in this work.

### 13.3.5 IFOAM accreditation

As assurance of organic status was essential to potential overseas buyers of NASAA-certified products, NASAA sought accreditation of its status as a certifying body by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). NASAA was evaluated by the IFOAM in 1990, receiving a 'positive' evaluation; at that time, the IFOAM did not yet 'accredit' organizations. Export markets responded favourably.

The IFOAM began offering full accreditation in 1993. NASAA was one of the first three certifying organizations to be accredited by the IFOAM in 1994 (NASAA, 1995), along with KRAV (Sweden) and Biodinamico (Brazil).

### 13.3.6 Policy influence

NASAA's first discussion paper (Wynen and Fritz, 1987) was used extensively in the preparation of a Government White Paper (Parliamentary discussion paper) on organic agriculture by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS, 1988), part of the Federal Department of

Primary Industries and Energy, which was responsible for imports and exports. The White Paper included recommendations to immediately conduct a multidisciplinary study of the economic, social and environmental consequences of organic systems compared with conventional systems, as well as to develop a wide range of research and extension services for organic farming. Although such a study was never initiated, over time some work fitting this description was carried out with some government assistance, such as NASAA's market development work (1989), market research by a consultant (1990) and encouragement for state departments of agriculture to adopt a higher profile on organic agriculture.

The second NASAA discussion paper (Wynen, 1989a) detailed the marketing problems of organic wheat growers. The problems were caused by marketing regulations that compelled all wheat to be marketed via the Australian Wheat Board (AWB). As this organization did not have any provisions for handling and selling organic wheat, it sometimes entered into complicated arrangements with individual organic farmers, allowing them to market their own wheat. However, to take advantage of this possibility, wheat farmers had to meet the statutory requirements of the AWB, which in practice translated into payments to the AWB of up to AUS\$30 per tonne (which could be between 10% and 20% of conventional wheat prices). At the time of the publication, a major overhaul of the entire wheat marketing regulation was taking place. As the existing policy was thought to discourage farmers from converting to organic management, NASAA published the discussion paper and lobbied the government. The new regulation allowed all farmers to sell their own wheat on the domestic market without a permit, and exports were allowed by other than the AWB, with permission. For organic farmers, this meant that they could now sell their wheat without the difficulties experienced in previous years.

The third NASAA discussion paper (Wynen, 1989b) concerned internal policies in setting certification costs. This formed the basis of NASAA's costing policies, and was published to promote transparency within the organic sector.

NASAA also provided submissions to, and appeared before, several commissions and enquiries into agricultural issues, such as the Royal Commission on Grain Storage, Handling and Transport (1988); Enquiry by the Industries Assistance Commission into the wheat industry (1988); and the Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals in Australia (1989). These submissions specified how existing policies affected organic farming, what changes would be needed to address the problems, and how organic farming could help solve the problems caused by conventional agriculture.

## 13.4 Developments from the Early 1990s

In the early 1990s, a major market for the Australian organic produce was Europe. The introduction of EC regulations in 1991 altered requirements for imports of organic products. This brought with it a need for official certificates to accompany imports into the EU. To meet this requirement, government accreditation of organic certification organizations became necessary. Hence, the Australian government became more important to the organic industry. The increased importance of certification, and changes in NASAA's management in 1992, meant not only that NASAA changed direction (focusing on certification), but also that other organizations emerged as providers of organic certification. In the resulting absence of a single organic industry voice, several attempts were made in the 1990s to unify the industry, an issue that only recently seems to have come to fruition.

### 13.4.1 National standards and certification

In 1990, AQIS called a meeting of organic stakeholders to discuss, amongst other issues, the need to develop a national organic standard that would facilitate exports to the important European market. The group consisted of representatives from the organic certifying organizations, of which there were three by that time, NASAA, BFA and the BDRI. Also present were representatives of the Australian Commonwealth Minister of Agriculture; the Federal Department of Primary Industries and Energy; three state Departments of Agriculture in their capacity as representatives of the Standing Committee on Agriculture/Australian Agricultural Council; the National Farmers Federation (a lobby group of conventional farmers); representatives for the consumers sector (the Federal Bureau of Consumers Affairs, the Australian Federation of Consumers Organizations and the Australian Consumers Association); and the Organic Retailers and Growers Association of Australia. At that meeting it was agreed to continue cooperation by formalizing the meeting's participants as the Organic Produce Advisory Council (OPAC). The OPAC was to draft minimum national standards and inspection guidelines, and advise the Minister of Agriculture on matters of organic farming. The OPAC agreed to minimum national standards in late 1991, which were endorsed by the minister.

These standards were referenced in a Ministerial Export Order to give them the force of law from 1 January 1992. However, they applied only to exports, not to the domestic market. In other words, within Australia the word 'organic' was not legally defined. As a result, Australian products that were not certified organic could be sold on the

domestic market as 'organic' without legal repercussions. Consequently, because of World Trade Organization rules relating to national treatment, the Australian government could not require organic imports to be certified to any particular standard. Although the export standards served as the de facto domestic standards, uncertified products could be sold as organic in the domestic market. Despite several formal attempts to establish a legal definition of the term 'organic' for the domestic market, the issue was a matter of contention between the Australian organic industry and policy makers for a long time. Only recently (early 2007) has this situation changed (see Section 13.4.2).

The OPAC, as a representative body for the organic industry in Australia, was expanded to embrace all the certifying organizations accredited by the AQIS for export purposes. In 2003, it was renamed the Organic Industry Export Consultative Committee (OIECC). Membership was changed to include government, the certifiers, the Organic Federation of Australia (OFA, see Section 13.6) and the IFOAM. Membership was later extended to include the Organic Produce Programme of the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), a body that funds research on organic agriculture in Australia.

Contrary to the situation in most countries, the organic movement has had to pay 60% of the costs incurred by the government on its behalf. For example, for 2002/03 the AQIS programme, that is, the Australian national accreditation programme, cost the organic and biodynamic sectors AUS\$84,500, to be paid by seven certifying bodies with a total of approximately 2345 total certifications, of which 1730 were certified growers. At present, it costs approximately AUS\$105,000 per year, with a total of 2540 certifications, of which 1830 are certified growers (Ian Lyll, AQIS, November 2006, personal communication).

### 13.4.2 Certification: a changing role for NASAA

In 1992, considerable changes were made to the running of NASAA. Amongst others, some of the functions undertaken until that time by the Secretary – the de facto Executive Director – were taken over by the Chair. Some of the original committee members of NASAA, including Sandy Fritz, who held the position of Secretary/Executive Director, left the organization.

Even though much of its work was still done by volunteers, NASAA experienced financial difficulties. Possibly partly to solve that problem, and because those with a bigger vision of the organization's role in the industry had left, NASAA focused on certification and moved away from the other tasks it had set itself, and which continue to be in its constitution.

Although the scope of NASAA's work has narrowed, it has done an excellent job in moving from a voluntary to a self-sufficient, non-profit organization, and has obtained a very good name internationally as a reliable organic certifier. Under the direction of Rod May and Jan Denham, NASAA has continued to stay well ahead of developments in the field. For example, in 2004 it became the first IFOAM-accredited certifier to achieve ISO 65 accreditation by the IOAS, an accreditation of the certification system as such that does not cover the standards. NASAA has been instrumental in consolidating contemporary practices within its own organization and also outside of NASAA, such as by establishing independent inspector services for the organic industry within Australia.

NASAA has had an important role in the international organic field, with representation on the Australian delegation to meetings on organic standards and certification of the Codex Alimentarius Committee on Food Labelling, which take place annually in Canada. NASAA representatives have also been active on IFOAM committees, such as the Programme Evaluation Committee and the Standards Committee.

### 13.5 Continued Unifying Efforts

One of NASAA's original main aims was to unify the organic industry. However, this proved to be a difficult task. Although the NASAA directors worked closely with a range of farmers (large and small), they themselves tended to be small farmers and academics in the first years of NASAA's existence. In the late 1980s, some large-scale organic farmers outside of NASAA decided to form a separate group representing farmers only. This resulted in the formation of the BFA, which adopted the NASAA standards with only minor changes. The BFA presented itself as an organization to promote organic farming by farmers, but from a different angle could be seen as 'early adopters' wanting to protect their interests, such as price premiums, by having more direct control over operations within the industry. The BFA certified only biodynamic farms. At present, the two main certifiers (NASAA and the BFA) certify both organic and biodynamic producers.

[AQ1] From the early 1990s, several other organic certifying organizations emerged in Australia, including the Organic Vignerons Association of Australia (OVAA), which merged with the BFA in 2001; the Organic Herb Growers Association (which later changed to the Organic Growers' Association (OGA), and presently is in the process of merging with the BFA); the Tasmanian Organic-Dynamic Producers (TOP); the Organic Food Chain (OFC), an offshoot of the BFA; and the Safe Food Production Queensland (SFPO). The Organic Retailers and Growers Association

of Australia provide an industry-based certification programme for retailers and wholesalers.

Of the six remaining AQIS-accredited certifying organizations, four are listed under European and Swiss law, and as such can provide inspection and certification services for all Australian export consignments; five organizations provide inspection and certification services for products exported to Japan; two have 'conformity assessment' arrangements with the US Department of Agriculture's National Organic Programme, while other countries, such as New Zealand, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Canada, currently accept Australian-certified produce that has been issued a government organic export certificate to verify its authenticity (Jenny Barnes, AQIS, November 2006, personal communication). At present, no foreign certification bodies are operating in Australia, and no local certification bodies work in association with international certification bodies.

With the increase in certifying organizations, the need for a unified voice for the industry was as important as ever. In 1992/93, the Department of Primary Industries and Energy funded a workshop to ascertain the priorities of the industry. The main recurring theme at the workshop was that of industry unity. At the end of the workshop, an Investigative Group was formed to assess options for one unifying structure, to develop proposals to assist future development, and to build on the results of the workshop (Wynen and Fritz, 1993). No single industry body was agreed upon at that time. In 1996, funding for a second workshop was provided by the RIRDC, and again, the call for unity was loud (Dumaresq *et al.*, 1996). As a consequence, the OFA came into existence a year later, with the establishment of an interim committee in mid-1997.

### 13.6 Organic Federation of Australia

The interim committee comprised three certifier representatives, two growers, one processor, one wholesaler/exporter, one retailer, one consumer and an independent chair. The initial funding for the OFA came from the RIRDC, on condition that the R&D Committee of the OFA take the role of assessing and approving RIRDC grants for sustainable agriculture. The aims were similar to NASAA's original aims: unifying the industry by providing a forum for discussions; providing information; developing policies for organic agriculture; and lobbying the government. Issues pertaining to certification were left to the OPAC and the certifying organizations.

In its early stages, the OFA enjoyed considerable media attention, with its biannual scientific conferences (in 2001 and 2003) and its stand

against genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as a major issue. None of the Australian organic standards allowed the use of GMOs, and the organic movement was lobbying conventional agriculture also not to accept their introduction. However, this topic was taken up less vigorously over the years, possibly in part because of a change to a chairman with different priorities, and in part as a result of bans on GMOs in many states in Australia, thereby creating the perception that the need for action was less urgent.

In 2004, a round table took place during which it was decided that the OFA's constitution needed to be amended to adapt the rules on representation by the different organizations in the OFA. By June 2005, the OFA adopted a new constitution. The structure consisted of a Main Board and several Advisory Boards, representing producers, consumers, certifiers, processors, traders, as well as the research and educational sectors. Organizations could join and send representatives to Advisory Boards, which in turn had representatives on the Main Board. The aim was that the different stakeholders would decide what was important for them, and then get the weight of the OFA behind them to reach their aim. The OFA is represented on national committees.

One of the main issues for the revamped OFA was that of domestic organic standards. After lobbying the government long and hard for a change in this situation, the decision was recently made to house the organic standards in Standards Australia (a private, not-for-profit organization). This allows the government to call up these standards into regulation.

Another national concern is that of a national logo. This was an issue of special interest to consumers, traders and wholesalers, but less to certifiers. The AQIS has offered the organic operators the use of a national logo, which is used by some, but by no means all.

These two issues, of domestic standards and a national logo, have really tested the notion of unity within the organic movement over the past few years. Although many in the industry profess that unity is important, in practice historical attitudes have prevailed whereby organizations seem to have a desire to retain their individual identity instead of forming a coalition that would advance common areas of national interest. In addition, in a world where powers shift, in this case away from the once all-important certifiers to the organic community in general (including consumers, marketing and education), it is perhaps not surprising that there are struggles to define boundaries. This factor inhibits the organic industry's ability to work effectively on the policy level with the government and within mainstream agricultural bodies, such as the National Farmers Federation.

Another major issue with which the OFA is involved is the direction of research in organic agriculture. Research funding specifically

for organic agriculture provided by the RIRDC has only been around AUS\$270,000 annually for several years (Wynen, 2003). The first attempt to get much greater funding was aimed at developing a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) in 2002. A CRC is a consortium of different stakeholders, public and private (such as farmers, wholesalers, retailers and researchers) operating in a particular field, with considerable government funding commitments. In 2002, the efforts by proponents for an organic CRC were unsuccessful. Another attempt was mounted in 2004, where participation from a large retailer increased the likelihood of success. The OFA supported the proposal of the CRC. However, in 2004 the proposal was rejected, and little has come out of it since then. In 2006, the OFA published a position paper on its priorities on research and extension in organic agriculture in Australia (available at: [http://www.ofa.org.au/papers\\_menu.html](http://www.ofa.org.au/papers_menu.html)).

### 13.7 Concluding Observations

From the early 1980s, some people perceived that a single body could increase the organic industry's potential. Thus, NASAA was established. This organization had several priorities: defining organic agriculture (standards and certification); promoting organic agriculture via the press, educational institutions, conferences and seminars; communicating about how to convert to organic farming; seeking policy and research support; and facilitating marketing of organic products.

From the mid-1990s NASAA's change of emphasis and the establishment of other certifying groups resulted in an organization with a narrower scope of interest than was originally intended. Its emphasis shifted towards certification and away from education of the public and political lobbying.

The Australian government has shown little interest in organic farming, except regarding overseas market requirements. This is seen in the low level of research funding (via RIRDC) and the policy of having industry pay some of the expenses incurred by the government for services provided (e.g. by AQIS). The government's lack of interest has made involvement in issues other than certification difficult for private organizations, and certainly not financially sustainable.

Throughout the period of development, fragmentation has diminished the impact of the industry in gaining more supportive government policy, required agricultural research and commercial development. Repeated efforts to unite the industry occurred during the 1990s, ultimately resulting in the establishment of the OFA, indicating that many in the industry still see NASAA's vision of one industry body as important. It can perhaps be said that in a way, NASAA, through support of

the OFA ever since its inception, has tried to realize some of its goals through this organization.

It is not clear why the organic industry's vision of unity has not been realized yet – whether the problem is the struggle for survival, the desire for success within individual organizations or personality conflicts amongst key players. What is clear is that the outcome is continuing competition amongst some organizations and their key individuals instead of cooperation. In recent work carried out on the adoption rate of organic agriculture in several European countries, cooperation or constructive competition amongst organizations serving the organic community was found to be an essential part of the industry's growth (Moschitz *et al.*, 2004). Organic industry bodies in Australia, although on their way, have yet to achieve this.

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**Author Query:**

[AQ1]: Please check whether “Organic Growers Association” can be changed to: “Organic Growers’ Association”