



## MEDIA RELEASE

20 June

# Money to grow organic fruit & veg

The horticulture industry is struggling to keep up with a dramatic increase in demand domestically and internationally for organic fruit and vegetables.

To address the shortfall Australian Organic has developed a three year, \$1.2 million program. Horticulture Australia Limited, HAL, is contributing 40 per cent of the funds.

A major component of the program is a horticulture industry development officer who will educate and support growers with Australian Certified Organic certification.

According to the *Australian Organic Market Report 2012* fruit and vegetables are the most commonly bought organic item and researchers IBISWorld predicts organic farming will double in five years; it's already the third fastest growing industry in Australia – next to superannuation and gemstones.

Australian Organic's Commercial General Manager Joanne Barber says the certified organic horticulture sector needs help to grow and to be financially sustainable.

She says, "We are seeing a lot of large conventional businesses growing certified organic vegetables. We are also seeing small to medium size farms struggling to keep up with demand for consistent supply of products, particularly to the major retailers.

"The HAL funding is significant. It will give the industry a considerable boost because up until now there isn't much development support for organic growers – many have to search online for agronomy solutions and they can feel quite alone."

Joanne says, "The funding will help certified organic farmers in Australia establish sound business plans and it will encourage new growers to the industry. Certified organic vegetables have a really bright future and it's great that we will now be in the position to enable more farmers to grow organically."

Australian Certified Organic is the largest and most well known certification body in Australia.

It takes three years for a farmer to achieve organic certification and they are audited every year to ensure they comply with the *Australian Certified Organic Standard*.

Certified organic horticulture growers manage pests and weeds without synthetic chemicals, improve soil fertility and maintain and encourage biodiversity on the farm.

Australian Organic is also implementing an onboarding program to help all Australian Certified Organic farmers and graziers to achieve organic certification and to have long term profitable businesses.

Australian Organic is presenting at the national AUSVEG conference in Cairns today and is meeting with a delegation of international buyers who are looking for more certified organic vegetables.

"This is the first time the organic industry has been encouraged to attend such a significant event in the horticulture calendar and just goes to show how important the organic industry is to the horticulture market in Australia and overseas," Joanne says.

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Images available.