



## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Nathan awarded Young Grower of the Year

An organic grower from a fourth generation farm has been awarded Young Grower of the Year.

Nathan Free from Alkira Organics, also trading as Duralgai Horticulture, accepted the award on Saturday night at the AUSVEG national convention in Cairns.

Alkira Organics produces stonefruit and vegetables at Lake Boga, near Swan Hill. The family owned company achieved Australian Certified Organic certification in 2011 and supply major supermarket chains.

A chuffed Nathan, 24, says winning the award shows the horticulture industry now welcomes different types of farming. He says, "It's good to get recognition within the industry - that what's happening within organics and the value chain is recognised. The award also brings you up a level in the industry."

"There are a few things we're doing that are normally outside the box. This award goes to show that whatever you're doing the industry recognises it as long as it results in the sale of fruit and veg."

Nathan started growing vegetables when he was 15 and sold them at a roadside stall. Now he manages vegetable production and the packhouse at Alkira Organics.

The Young Grower of the Year award is presented to a farmer who demonstrates commitment to the industry, innovation, business acumen and participation in the broader vegetable industry.

For Nathan a farm offers as many career opportunities as any business and needs good quality staff, from accountants to logisticians and agronomists.

The awards were held Saturday 21 June at the AUSVEG National Awards for Excellence Gala Dinner in Cairns.

It was an incredibly successful night for the organic industry and for the first time Australian Certified Organic growers were acknowledged in every category.

Large growers of conventional and certified organic produce Mulgowie Farming Co won the Impact Award.

Dr Andrew Monk, chair of Australian Organic, was shortlisted for the Researcher of the Year Award for the *Australian Organic Market Report*, which has tracked detailed trends in the Australian organic market place since 2007 and Australian Organic took out the Best Display Award.

Commercial General Manager of Australian Organic, Joanne Barber, says, "The organic industry has grown and it's great to see it being acknowledged for the quality it produces. A lot of conventional farmers at the conference who approached us wanting more information said: 'I don't want to use pesticides anymore because they're costly and I don't want to poison myself, or the soil'. I think we are at a turning point."

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