



MEDIA RELEASE

30 July 2014

Responding to challenges of organic farming

The GM court case between organic farmer Steve Marsh and his neighbour in Western Australia highlighted the challenges facing farming in the 21st century.

In response to these sorts of issues Australian Organic has developed an innovative training program to help farmers farm organically and overcome obstacles.

The Australian Organic Onboarding Program is based on cutting edge research. It encourages farmers to be proactive and look for solutions in the face of external events.

Organic farming may be the third fastest-growing industry in Australia and expected to double in size over the next five years, but it's not always easy to achieve and keep organic certification.

Australian Organic is a not for profit company which owns the country's most recognised and largest organic certification body Australian Certified Organic. The Program is the first training initiative developed to help organic producers run a compliant and profitable business.

The program is in collaboration with training group the Agribusiness Development Institute. Australian Organic's Commercial Manager Joanne Barber says the road to organic certification can be difficult.

She says, "As the country's largest certifier Australian Certified Organic receives hundreds of applications each year but unfortunately not all are successful.

"Producers, new and existing, need more support to become certified and profitable. The Program holds farmers' hands every step of the way to make sure they're successful and tapping into the right markets. It's also about being pragmatic and helping the industry grow sustainably so that supply and demand are well-balanced."

Applying for organic certification can be daunting. Applicants receive a 100-page *Australian Certified Organic Standard* to get acquainted with and they're required to fill out applications and prepare for audits.

The Onboarding Program helps growers get through this, it also helps growers prepare for audits and fast tracks their understanding about running a certified organic business as well as overcoming practical farming challenges.

Joanne says, "Producers often have lots of questions when they start out. They want to know how to market their produce and how to help staff understand organics. The Onboarding Program can help with these.

"Who knows - this Program could also help farmers avoid the sort of conflict experienced by the Marsh and Baxters of the world who have a right to farm how they each see fit.

The Onboarding Program will complement the new industry development role Australian Organic recently announced.

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