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PRESS RELEASE

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Visiting New Zealand scientist urges farmers to focus on food quality

Agricultural industries need to put as much emphasis on the *quality* of food it's producing as it does on the quantity.

According to New Zealand soil scientist and teacher, Graham Shepherd, not enough is done to improve the quality of food we are growing compared to the time we spend trying to increase yields and maximise food production.

Graham has travelled 14 countries and nations to teach farmers how to visually assess their soils and pasture and crop performance, winning a science communication award for his work in this area.

He will be in Australia in May to help farmers and graziers learn how to read the quality of their soils just by looking at them.

Australia's largest organic group Australian Organic is hosting Graham on its three roadshow events in Timboon, Victoria; Albury, New South Wales and Roma, Queensland.

Visual assessments tell you about the condition of the soil and its suitability to grow crops, not only in terms of production but also the *quality* of pasture or crop.

Graham says, "Generally the food we're producing today is less nutrient-dense than a few decades ago and this by and large comes down to soil management."

Visual assessments are becoming more widely used in agriculture around the world.

They enable farmers and agronomists to understand if there's something wrong with soils or plants.

He says, "Farmers can read a lot about the physical condition of a handful of soil in the paddock without sending it away to be tested in a laboratory.

"They can use visual assessments to help find out whether the soil is good enough to be growing healthy crops that are good for animals and people. If issues are identified they can send samples away for detailed testing."

"The economic performance of a farm is dependent in part on the quality of the soil.

I'm about teaching farmers the skills to do simple, inexpensive tests themselves beyond looking at the structure of the soil."

Visual assessments can also be used to assess a farm's potential environmental footprint, such as whether it is likely to be sequestering carbon, whether it is carbon neutral, or if it is likely to be loosing carbon.
They can also determine whether the farm is likely to be a low, moderate or high emitter of nutrients and greenhouse gases into the environment.

Roadshow organiser and soil specialist with Australian Organic Greg Paynter says, “We invited Graham to join the roadshows because he has a scientific background which he can apply very well to the field, this is an unusual combination.

“It’s important to make the connection between science and practice, something he’s done around the world. He can empower farmers so they have the ability to see things for themselves.

“These roadshows are designed so that farmers can take things away from them and apply to their farm, whether they are organic or not.”

Graham Shepherd is the keynote speaker for all three roadshows.

The Victorian roadshow will be a great chance for dairy farmers to tour the Biodynamic Timboon Farmhouse Cheese property as featured on ABC’s *Landline*.

New South Wales’ roadshow features the mixed commercial and organic teaching farm at Riverina TAFE with biologist, farmer and teacher Rob Fenton.

Queensland will host a two day roadshow which includes a visit to Patrick Hanley’s organic grazing property, DAFF and Resource Consulting Service (RCS). Agforce will also talk to farmers about negotiating with mining and exploration companies. A farmer forum and dinner is also included in the Roma roadshow.

Timboon, Victoria	May 2
Albury, New South Wales	May 4
Roma, Queensland	May 7 & 8

Roadshow tickets are now on sale. See austorganic.com for more information.

Images available

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Please note Australian Organic was formerly Biological Farmers of Australia, BFA.