

# Organic News

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NSW DEPARTMENT OF  
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

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## New project to improve the yield & quality of organic spelt

With the increasing awareness of the link between diet & health, there is growing demand for specialty grains & their products within the health food sector. It is claimed that specialty grains such as spelt (*Triticum aestivum* var. *spelta*), cereal rye (*Secale cereale*), & Kamut® (*Triticum turgidum*) exhibit superior nutritional attributes to other more common cereals such as wheat. It is these nutritional claims that have sparked the greatest interest, particularly in the health food sector.

The most common use for specialty grains is as a substitute for wheat flour in breads, pasta, cookies, crackers, cakes, muffins, pancakes & waffles. In Australia, organic spelt is currently processed for flour & further value-added into bread, licorice, spelt flakes, & pasta. Specialty grains have also attracted interest in the

livestock industry as feed supplements & for grazing potential. European research is investigating spelt as a high-protein meat & bone meal replacement for livestock feedstuffs.



Above: A new 3 year project will evaluate a large number of spelt genotypes for their agronomic, yield & milling quality characteristics. Photo shows the 2006 spelt seed increase block at NSW DPI's Yanco Organic Research Site. Photo: R. Neeson

In Australia, spelt grain production is currently estimated at 4,000 tonnes. The current estimated retail value of processed organic spelt products is \$7.7 million. Estimates suggest that markets currently exist for approximately 10,000 tonnes of organic spelt grain per annum with an on-farm value of \$10.0 million (de-hulled), & retail value of \$19.2 million. The greatest demand is for organically produced specialty grains; however, poor yields & market irregularities are frustrating industry expansion.

A 3-year project conducted by researchers associated with the EH Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation (a collaborative alliance between NSW DPI & Charles Sturt University) will aim to develop more reliable cultivars of spelt & other specialty grains for organic production. The three year project is supported with funds provided through the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation's (RIRDC) Organic Produce Program. Other groups involved in the project include the Department of Natural Resources & Environment, Victoria, organic farmers from three regions (Cootamundra, Coleambally, & Grafton) who will be directly involved in spelt selection & agronomy experiments, & The Biological Farmers of Australia Co-op Ltd. (BFA).



Above: Participants at the Riverina Organic Farmer's Organisation / BFA Organic Roadshow inspect the spelt genotype trial planted at Yanco Agricultural Institute's Organic Research Site. Photo: D. Lemerle

Project Leader, NSW DPI's Organic Farming Liaison Officer Robyn Neeson describes the project's main objectives is to improve the supply & quality of organic spelt through the selection of superior lines that are well adapted to organic production systems & which exhibit acceptable quality characteristics from a nutritional & processing perspective.

Ms Neeson said the three year project will involve intensive selection trials as well as a number of experiments to gather improved agronomic information including optimal sowing dates, sowing rates, weed competitiveness, phosphorus (P) & nitrogen (N) requirements thus enabling organic farmers to optimise the yield & quality of spelt, Kamut® & cereal rye. The information gained from the P & N experiments will enable organic farmers to make informed decisions about paddock selection for spelt, their fertiliser management, & potential performance of spelt on their farms. Information gathered from the experiments will be compiled into a comprehensive agronomic information package.

The project commenced in July 2006 & seed has just been harvested from 63 spelt genotypes planted at NSW DPI's Yanco Agricultural Institutes Organic Research Site. A glasshouse trial was also established at Yanco to compare the P response of spelt (3 landraces), Kamut® (1 selection), cereal rye & traditional bread wheat.

During the project, observations are being made of the spelt genotypes growth, yield, & quality characteristics. Organic farmers were invited to assess the spelt lines growing at Yanco during a field day on December 7, 2006, & were asked to provide valuable input for the project by ranking their order of preference for the key physiological attributes which they felt would best adapt spelt to their organic production systems.

In 2007, trials will expand to include sites at NSW DPI's Yanco & Vic DPI's Rutherglen Organic Research Sites & on organic farms at Cootamundra & Coleambally. These trials will assess the spelt genotypes for their local

adaptability to a range of soil types & under both dryland & irrigated conditions.

Outcomes of the project will hopefully provide producers with greater confidence in organic production requirements & techniques for these grains, leading to a more sustainable organic grain industry that is better able to expand to its full market potential.

*For more information contact: Robyn Neeson on (02) 6951 2735 or Email: [robyn.neeson@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:robyn.neeson@dpi.nsw.gov.au)*

## 2006 Organic Spelt Field Day a success

The organic spelt field day 2006 was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December at NSW DPI's Yanco Agricultural Institute's Organic Research Site. More than thirty people attended the field day. Several speakers from research, production & processing fields talked about the different aspects of spelt production & processing.

The day started off mid-morning with Robyn Neeson, Organic Farming Liaison Officer, welcoming everyone & explaining the organic spelt project. This 3 year project aims to improve the supply & quality of organic spelt by selecting superior lines & developing agronomic guidelines for spelt production.

Esther van Meeuwen, Technical Assistant spelt project, presented a short introduction on spelt. The majority of research done in Europe & North America shows spelt as a hardy, versatile grain that has many uses for both human consumption & as stock feed.

According to Dr. David Luckett from the EH Graham Centre (NSW DPI & CSU) we will have to define the ideotype: the characteristics in spelt that are important to organic farmers & processors. To make a start at identifying those characteristics, field day attendees were asked to fill out a survey.

Dr. Jeffrey Evans talked about the importance of phosphorous (P) in organic systems & the



Above: Field day participants inspect spelt genotypes during the recent Yanco field day. Photo: Esther van Meeuwen

results of preliminary spelt phosphorous trials conducted in 2006. Early indications suggest that spelt may be able to assimilate P more effectively than common wheat.

A very tasty Organic morning tea was supplied by Buronga Organics & gave everyone the opportunity to stretch the legs, have a chat, & to walk through the spelt plots to see the vastly different characteristics of the 63 spelt genotypes.

After morning tea Vivienne Burnett, Organics Coordinator Vic DPI, explained a combination of management methods should be used to combat weeds in organic cereal production. This was followed by Mr. Alan Druce, Green Grove, Kamarah, who shared his experiences with organic spelt production.

On the post-harvest side, the existing & possible markets for spelt & spelt products were discussed by Mr. Geoff Brown from Buckwheat Enterprises & Dr. Ferenc Bekes a senior research scientist from George Weston Technologies talked about the quality requirements for spelt processing. Both speakers stressed the importance of retaining the unique quality aspects of spelt through careful genotype selection.

A beautiful organic lunch was supplied by Mary & David Booth from Buronga Organics

## New Organic Initiatives for NSW

A new \$250,000 Organic Industries Initiative package has been launched at the NSW Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) Bathurst Agricultural Research & Advisory Station.

The Initiative will fund two new organic agricultural positions & new infrastructure at Bathurst as well as the creation of the NSW Organic Ministerial Advisory Council. The Council's role will be to advise the Minister for Primary Industries on important matters facing the NSW organic industries & help harness the full potential of prospering organic markets by developing a strategic plan for the industry, & an approach to further developing the organic farming sector in NSW.

The Organic Ministerial Advisory Council includes a wide range of representatives from the production, wholesale, retail, processing, waste recycling & local government sectors. The members of the council are:

Terrance Healey, Chairman  
Ken Taylor, meat processor/wholesaler (Gosford)  
Catherine Ford, coffee (Rosebank)  
Richard Jones, former MLC (North Coast)  
Geoff Brown, cereals processor (Parkes)  
David Booth, goats, beef, cereals producer (Cootamundra)  
Jan Denham, citrus (Palinyewah)  
Stuart Larsson, beef & seed producer (Mallanganee)  
Eric Love, organic waste recycling (Sydney)  
Phillip Rougon, wholesaler (Sydney)  
Jan Barham (Mayor Byron Shire Council)

The NSW Organic Ministerial Advisory Council recently held its inaugural meeting in Bathurst at the NSW Department of Primary Industries' Bathurst Agricultural & Research Advisory Station.

NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald addressed the council, highlighting the State Government's investment in organics research & in particular the Bathurst Centre for Organic Farming.

Topics discussed at the meeting included:

- Investment in organic wine & olive oil production;
- Solutions to supply chain issues for organic meat;
- Soil fertility improvement in organic systems; &
- Facilitation of group marketing of organic produce.

The council is expected to meet 3-4 times a year with the next meeting planned for February.

which signaled the end of a successful & informative 2006 Organic Spelt Field Day.

*For more information contact: Esther van Meeuwen, Technical Assistant, NSW DPI on (02) 6951 2611.*

### News, Publications, Commentaries & Events

#### News:

#### Drought Hotlines & Assistance

The drought continues to affect farms & communities across Australia. For NSW producers NSW DPI has established a

comprehensive website which provides producers with a range of information on how best to cope during drought. The website includes a calculator to help producers make decisions on salvaging crops. The Excel spreadsheet calculates the cost of baling crops for hay or silage & of taking crops through to harvest. The NSW DPI drought assistance website can be located at: <http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/drought>

The Australian Federal Government is lending practical support to drought affected farmers & rural communities through income support, interest rate relief & free personal & financial

counselling. The Australian Government drought assistance website can be found at: <http://www.affa.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=D0C19333-3B03-4933-91BAE3D3975BE27C&contType=outputs>

### **Food Processing in Regional Australia Program Funding Applications Now Open**

Applications for Round 5 of the Federal Governments Food Processing in Regional Australia Program are now open. The final funding round for the Program, Round 5, will close 8 February 2007.

The Australian Government is investing in the future of our processed food industry with the four-year, \$12 million Food Processing in Regional Australia Program (FPRAP). Grants of \$15,000 to \$200,000 are available on a competitive basis for individuals & groups seeking funding for food processing projects. Many of the grants issued to-date have been for organic production & processing enterprises.

To apply you must be:

- a small to medium farm, food processor or agribusiness
- proposing a commercially viable food business project that will benefit rural & regional Australia, &
- able to demonstrate that you can match Program funding.

Under new guidelines, small-to-medium sized agribusinesses located anywhere in Australia are eligible to apply. The previous classification excluded agribusinesses in some inner-regional locations.

The degree to which projects will have a positive impact on rural & regional communities is a major point of consideration in assessing the relative merits of each application.

All Round 5 projects must be no longer than 12 months in duration.

For more information & applications forms go to: <http://www.affa.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=C0FA5B83-A059-472A-B0807C505079DC3D>

### **Publication reviews:**

#### *Bias in peer review of organic farming grant applications*

##### Abstract

Peer reviews of 84 organic farming grant applications from Sweden were analysed to determine whether the reviewers' Affiliation to one of two types of agriculture (i.e., organic & conventional) influenced their reviews.

Fifteen reviewers were divided into three groups: (1) scientists with experience in organic farming research; (2) scientists with no experience in organic farming research; & (3) users of organic farming research. The two groups of scientists assessed the societal relevance & scientific quality of the grant applications based on three criteria (i.e., presentation, methodology, qualifications), whereas the user group only assessed societal relevance.

The analysis showed that the two groups of scientists provided very different reviews. Scientist reviewers with experience in organic farming research agreed more with the user group on research relevance than did scientist reviewers without such experience, & the assessment of relevance was closely correlated to the assessment of scientific quality within both scientific groups. As both scientific groups did not clearly distinguish between societal relevance & scientific quality, the idea of an objective science is challenged. The contextual values associated with the norms of good agriculture were not clearly distinguished from the constitutive values of science associated with the traditional norms of good science. This raises the question of whether organic & conventional grant applications should be mixed for review regardless of the reviewers. [References: 31]

##### Authors

Rasmussen J. Langer V. Alroe HF.

##### Source

Agriculture & Human Values. 23(2):181-188, 2006 Sum.

### ***FiBL Activity Report 2006***

Who is doing what at FiBL? The 2006 activity report documents on 72 pages the advances made in FiBL's research & consultancy work. Lively texts generously illustrated with photographs give an insight into FiBL's projects, both completed & ongoing. See: <http://www.fibl.org/english/fibl/activity-report06.php>

### ***First Volume of the ISOFAR Scientific Series published: Long Term Field Experiments in Organic Farming***

The first volume of the ISOFAR Scientific Series has now been published. This book series presents the results of organic farming research carried out by members of the ISOFAR working group on long term field experiments (LTE).

The volume "Long Term Field Experiments in Organic Farming" contains a selection of 12 long-term experiments conducted under different site conditions in Germany, the USA, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria & Israel. Each experiment has a unique concept & scientific approach. But their common objective is to investigate characteristics of Organic Agriculture regarding key parameters of soil fertility, crop yield & quality. See: <http://www.isofar.org/>

### **Publications:**

The Common Agricultural Policy & Organic Farming: An Institutional Perspective on Continuity & Change by K Lynggaard  
August 2006 Hardback 1845931149

Going Organic: Mobilising Networks for Environmentally Responsible Food Production by S Lockie, K Lyons, G Lawrence, D Halpin  
August 2006 Hardback 1845931327

Organic Agriculture: A Global Perspective by P Kristiansen, A Taji, J Reganold  
July 2006 Hardback 1845931696  
Sociological Perspectives of Organic Agriculture: From Pioneer to Policy by G Holt, M Reed  
July 2006 Hardback 184593038X

Global Development of Organic Agriculture: Challenges & Prospects by N Halberg, H F Alroe, M T Knudsen, E S Kristensen  
April 2006 Hardback 1845930789

### ***Some slightly older books:***

Animal Health & Welfare in Organic Agriculture by M Vaarst, S Roderick, V Lund, W Lockeretz  
December 2003 Hardback 085199668X  
Organic Fruit Growing by G Lafer, K Schloffer, G Innerhofer, H Meister, K Lind  
September 2003 Hardback 085199640X

Organic Agriculture: Sustainability, Markets & Policies by OECD  
July 2003 Paperback 0851997406

Soil Use & Management Supplement: Soil Fertility in Organically Managed Soils by D B Davies  
September 2002 Paperback 0851996582

Sustainable Management of Soil Organic Matter by R M Rees, B Ball, C Watson, C Campbell  
December 2000 Hardback 0851994652

### **Events:**

#### **28 February 2007**

##### **Soil Care Expo**

North Coast SoilCare group & NSW DPI are organising a Soil Health Expo on February 28 at the Wollongbar Agricultural Institute. See website for details: <http://www.soilcare.org.au/>

#### **31 January – 3 February 2007**

##### **CSIRO w/shop: Root/soil biology in agriculture: towards a better integration**

A great course on the microbial interactions in the root world & includes some practical work on root exudates. It's free!

<http://www.csiro.au/csiro/content/event/pe5a.html>

#### **6-7 March 2007**

##### **Outlook 2007**

##### **ACT, Australia**

Outlook 2007, is Australia's premier commodity forecasting conference & will feature a diverse

range of international & national speakers discussing topics including the global commodity overview, trade, farm performance, horticulture, biofuels, Australian food industries, climate, livestock, crops & forestry. Hyatt Hotel Canberra.  
For more information or to register online please visit [www.abareconomics.com/outlook](http://www.abareconomics.com/outlook) or phone 02 6272 2303.

Register early as places are limited. Early bird discount applies for registrations until 19 January 2007.

**17 – 19 August 2007**  
**National Organic Conference 2007**  
**Canterbury, New Zealand**  
“Our Organic Future – Cottage or Corporate?”  
Lincoln University, Canterbury

The Conference will address these, & other, questions:

- If New Zealand is able to significantly expand organic production, consumption & exports, what will the consequences be?"
- How will organic production, marketing & trading look in the future?
- How can farmers convert to organics & meet the challenges of organic development?
- How can we develop a strong & effective advisory & extension service?
- How will we foster meaningful organic research?

Register your interest in attending this conference today by visiting website <http://events.lincoln.ac.nz/organics> or call (03) 325 3849 for further details

## Do you have any Organic News?

Do you have any research results, field day reports or other information that may be of relevance to organic agriculture? If so, let us hear about it! Send your contributions to:

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### DISCLAIMERS

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