



The Peak Body for the Australian Organic Sector

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From the desk of:

Andre Leu, Chairman

P.O. Box 800, Mossman, Qld 4873

Ph: +61 7 40987610 Mob: 0428 459870

MEDIA RELEASE

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Organic Agriculture Can Feed the World Four recent credible studies show organic systems producing higher yields

“Best practice organic agriculture can get better yields than conventional agriculture. Four recent credible studies show organic systems producing higher yields, particularly in the drier years that are predicted to increase with climate change.” stated Andre Leu, Chair of the Organic Federation of Australia.

United Nations Study - organic agriculture increased yields by 116%

The report by the United National Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) found that organic agriculture increases yields in Africa. ‘...*the average crop yield was ... 116 per cent increase for all African projects and 128 per cent increase for the projects in East Africa.*’

The report notes that despite the introduction of conventional agriculture in Africa food production per person is 10% lower now, than in the 1960s.

‘The evidence presented in this study supports the argument that organic agriculture can be more conducive to food security in Africa than most conventional production systems, and that it is more likely to be sustainable in the long term.’ Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary General of UNCTAD and Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP stated.

The Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trials

The Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trials found that organic yields were higher in drought years and the same as conventional in normal weather years.

In years with wet weather in the spring the organic yields can suffer when mechanical cultivation of weeds is delayed and were found to be 10% lower. This could be corrected by using steam or vinegar for weed control, rather than tillage.

The researchers attributed the higher yields in dry years to the ability of soils on organic farms to more quickly take in rainfall. This is due to the higher levels of organic carbon, making the soils more friable and better able to store and capture rain.

Scientific Review by Cornell University into 22 year-long Rodale Field Study

The scientific review found:

- The improved soil allowed the organic land to generate yields equal to or greater than the conventional crops after 5 years
- The conventional crops collapsed during drought years.
- The organic crops fluctuated only slightly during drought years, due to greater water holding capacity in the enriched soil.
- The organic crops used 30% less fossil energy inputs than the conventional crops.

US Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Pecan Trial

The ARS organically managed pecans out-yielded the conventionally managed, chemically fertilized orchard in each of the past five years. Yields on ARS’ organic test site surpassed the conventional commercial

Andre Leu, Chairman, OFA

P.O Box 800, Mossman, Qld 4873 Ph:07 40987610 Mob:0428 459870 Email: chair@ofa.org.au

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orchard by 18 pounds of pecan nuts per tree in 2005 and by 12 pounds per tree in 2007.

'These studies are very much in line with earlier studies, both overseas and in Australia, that indicated less variability in yields under organic management. In Australia, this work was carried out in the 1980s in the cereal livestock industry, and there is no reason to believe that the results would be different today.' OFA director Dr Els Wynen said.

'This research has enormous implications for Australia, which is seriously lagging behind the rest of the world with research into best practice organic systems.' Andre stated

'Given that the research shows that organic systems are particularly effective in achieving high yields in drought and drier seasons, the widespread adoption of organic practices should be a priority as Australia's rainfall continues to decrease in our main cropping areas as a result of climate change.'

'The research will have major benefits for Queensland growers who will have to comply with new laws to reduce herbicides, pesticides and synthetic fertilisers to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Best practice organic systems will allow them to maintain and even increase productivity while reducing their chemical inputs. This is a true win win situation.' Mr Leu said

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The Organic Federation of Australia is the peak body and the largest representative organic organisation in Australia. For further information please visit www.ofa.org.au

For Interviews:

Andre Leu, Chairman
Land: 07 40987610
Mobile: 0428 459870
Email: chair@ofa.org.au

Tim Marshall Deputy Chair
Work: 08 8339 1250
Mobile: 0412 473 230
Email: tim@tmorganics.com
Web: www.ofa.org.au

Dr Els Wynen Director
Land: 02 62583561
Email: els.wynen@elspl.com.au

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Source: Organic Agriculture and Food Security in Africa, Sept 2008.
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US Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Pecan Trial

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