

3 May 2019

Re: Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia Ltd submission to the Tasmanian Government review into the GMO Moratorium

This is a joint submission by Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia Ltd (ODFA) – a 100% farmer owned co-operative; three Certified Organic Tasmanian dairy farmers who are members of ODFA and who supply their fresh organic milk to the co-operative; and one Tasmanian dairy farmer who is currently in the final four months of transition to becoming Certified Organic.

With food and beverage being a key driver of 'Brand Tasmania' values, ODFA Tasmanian farmer members believe the outcome of the Tasmanian GMO Moratorium is critical to the ongoing success of Brand Tasmania.

Likewise, providing pure, organic, GMO and chemical free milk, under Organic Certification is critical to the Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia Co-operative, and the farmers who own our organisation, manufacturing facilities and farms.

Currently four of our farmer owners run very successful farms in Tasmania's North West and are working in the Tasmanian dairy industry to increase Tasmanian membership in the Co-operative so that more farmers can enjoy a stable, premium milk price and, farm in a sustainable, ethical manner suited to the Tasmanian landscape, philosophies and climate.

At the very core of ODFA is a mission and vision where we want to see more Australians and international consumers gain access to affordable organic dairy products, free from GMOs, while maintaining a premium milk price for our farmer owners.

The non-GMO, grass-fed and Certified Organic credence are essential components of the ODFA farming, brand and pricing strategies, with an increasing number of consumers willing to purchase organic dairy products at the premium Certified Organic price – to ensure the health and safety of their families.

A key principle of organic farming systems is that organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soils, plants, our herds, our people and our planet.

This principle points out that the health of individuals and communities cannot be separated from the health of ecosystems - healthy soils produce healthy crops that foster the health of animals and people.

Health is related to the wholeness and integrity of living systems. It's greater than the absence of illness. Immunity, resilience and regeneration are key characteristics of health.

Organic Certifier NASSA says, "The role of organic agriculture, whether in farming, processing, distribution, or consumption, is to sustain and enhance the health of ecosystems and organisms from the smallest in the soil to human beings. In particular, organic agriculture is intended to produce high quality, nutritious food that contributes to preventive health care and well-being. In view of this, it should avoid the use of fertilisers, pesticides, animal drugs and food additives that may have adverse health effects." (Source : NASAA website <https://www.nasaa.com.au/organic/principles-of-organic-agriculture.html>).

Organic agriculture is deeply rooted within living ecological systems. Nourishment and well-being are achieved through the ecology of the specific production environment. For example, in the case of crops this is the living soil and for animals it is the farm ecosystem.

Organic farming systems should fit the cycles and ecological balances in nature, attaining this ecological balance through the design of farming systems, establishment of habitats and maintenance of genetic and agricultural diversity. Introducing genetically modified seeds and plants threatens the very principles of organic farming systems.

As agricultural producers, we are acutely aware of the global food system challenges and our preference is for a non-GMO solution. There is potential for organic agriculture to provide the solution. There are many people – from consumers and farmers to scientists and international organisations – who believe that organic agriculture can produce enough nutritious food to feed the world without destroying the environment, while being more resilient to climate change and improving the livelihoods of farmers.

Just because we have the power of knowledge and science to produce GMO seeds should we use it? Part of the answer to our food yield issues may lay in education, with people learning to change their diet and reduce food waste to avoid having to increase food production as the global population grows. Expanding organic produce availability and investment in organic farming could be important tools in developing more sustainable global agriculture.

We are encouraging our scientists, organic certification bodies, non-GMO advocacy groups and organic producers like ODFA, to close some of the critical knowledge gaps about organic farming systems, to better understand its achievements and help address its challenges.

Researchers John Reganold and Johnathan Watcher, said in their published research paper *Organic Agriculture in the Twenty-First Century*, they found that only 1%* of agricultural land is organically farmed worldwide.

And, if organic land continues to expand at the same rate that it has over the past decade, it will take another century for all agriculture to be organic.

They believe that organic farming's influence goes beyond that 1% acreage and stated that over the past 50 years, organic farms have provided conventional agriculture with examples of new ways to farm. And, has acted as a testing ground for a different set of management practices, from diversifying crop rotations and composting to using cover crops and conservation tillage.

ODFA is encouraging of Tasmania growing its organic agricultural system which is closely aligned with the thinking, practices and branding of Tasmania, the brand. Tasmania is a true leader in the clean, green, pristine space and we look to your state as a symbol of agricultural purity.

We are increasingly driven by consumer demand for products and production methods that are variously sustainable, humane, organic, biodynamic, natural, clean/green, and paddock-to-plate. General consumer concerns about a product's origin and provenance are also driving the current surge in the organic food and beverage industry. It's no secret that ODFA believes Organic Certification is one of the best steps you can take towards ensuring that your product is the healthiest food possible.

The carefully built clean/green Tasmanian Brand values have been the basis for much of the state's tourism, food and wine successes. The slightest movement towards allowing GMOs would severely undermine the Tasmanian Brand.

"Any increased use of GMOs has the potential to damage our current and future competitive advantage, our point of difference in the market and would likewise have the same impact on the Tasmanian Brand values."

--Jeff Cole, CEO – Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia--

"The quality and uniqueness of our product is enhanced by the extraordinary high trust our customers have in the Tasmanian food brand. We rely on the maintenance of those brand values and fear a lift in the GMO Moratorium would damage the Tasmanian food brand and our markets."

--Simon Elphinstone – Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia & Organic Milk Group-- Flowerdale, Tasmania

"As an organic dairy farmer, I am philosophically opposed to GMOs. It is vital to retain the GMO moratorium in Tasmania. Along with protecting the Tasmanian Brand and our niche food industries it is vital to sustaining the Tasmanian clean pure food image."

--Mark Lambert – Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia & Mersey Vale Dairies -- Sunnyside, Tasmania

"Our organic dairy is located in Smithton and we operate one of Tasmania's three main organic dairy farms. We developed the Organic Milk Group's 'OMG' brand of milk that is proudly branded Tasmanian and sold throughout the state.

Strong emphasis is placed on the product being organic (and therefore GMO free). This is a point of difference for the marketing of our product. Collectively we need to keep building on this and encourage those that take it for granted, to empower themselves by using Tasmania's attributes to market their product."

--Gary Watson – Organic Dairy Farmers of Australia & Organic Milk Group-- Smithton Tasmania

In conclusion, we recommend you do not lift Tasmania's ban on GMOs. Tasmania's niche in food, beverage and hospitality is based on Tasmania's food and beverage being pure, fresh and natural. The introduction of GMO into Tasmanian agriculture would destroy the unique market advantage that Tasmania currently has.

Tasmania is poised to develop a new organic agricultural industry and it is a risk to contemplate any change from the current total ban on GMO. In fact, ODFA is supportive of a widening and reinstatement of the ban through legislation in all states of Australia. We also recommend research and investment into Tasmania's organic agriculture, food and beverage industries, to further strengthen Brand Tasmania.

Thank you for consideration of our submission.

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Submitted on behalf of:
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