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New Zealand

Organic Products

New Zealand's Organic Certification

2000

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Report Highlights: The large number of New Zealand farmers converting to organics has lead to the establishment of a fourth organic certification scheme in New Zealand. These are Bio-Gro, AgriQuality, The Demeter trademark and now the Aotearoa Organic label. The New Zealand Government is working to meet future organic certification requirements of the EU and Japan. New Zealand agricultural leaders believe that it will be the market, not the Government, that will decide the best mix of food production methods.

The large number of New Zealand farmers converting to organics has led to the establishment of a fourth organic certification scheme in New Zealand. These are Bio-Gro, AgriQuality, The Demeter trademark and now the Aotearoa Organic label.

- Bio-Gro is the most well-known organic trademark in New Zealand. It has more than 700 certified farmers and processors with a turnover of over NZ\$1 million (U.S.\$430,000), 60 percent of which is exported. Its standards, particularly for livestock, are among the highest in the world.
- The Demeter trademark is used by the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association. The distinguishing feature of biodynamic farming is the use of special preparations and the belief in the influence of the planets and moon on biological activity. Standards are also extremely high.
- The Aotearoa Organic label is an initiative aimed at small-scale growers with a turnover of less than NZ\$30,000 (U.S.\$12,900) who are growing only for the New Zealand domestic market. Fees are cheaper because there is not the same level of bureaucracy involved as with supplying the export market. Standards required are essentially the same as for regular Bio-Gro.
- The AgriQuality label is part of AgriQuality New Zealand, which has been in the business of testing, analysis and quality assurance systems for primary industries for more than 100 years. It has recently added an organics label to its establishment with the development of Certenz, an independent certification body.

Both Bio-Gro and AgriQuality have ISO65, the standard necessary for access into the lucrative European and Japanese markets. The area where the AgriQuality standards differ most from Bio-Gro's is livestock production. Industry officials contend that though the AgriQuality standards for livestock are less stringent, there is no compromise. Sick stock can be given up to three pharmaceutical treatments before they lose their organic status and cannot be sold as organic for twice the legal withdrawal period of the veterinary treatment. Under Bio-Gro they lose their status with one treatment. Another difference is that stock from conventional herds or flocks can be "converted" under AgriQuality. Under Bio-Gro, stock can't be converted, but their produce (wool, milk, progeny) can become organic.

Currently, the New Zealand Primary Production Select Committee is pursuing an inquiry into organic agriculture in New Zealand. New Zealand agriculture officials have told this council that it will be the market, not the Government, that will decide the best mix of food production methods. These officials believe that consumers, not governments, should influence what food farmers should produce. The Government's role is to provide the framework that will lead to the most efficient allocation of New Zealand's resources. Government intervention has led in the past to an imbalance of supply and demand, with consequent downward pressure on prices. It is believed that there will be risks if New Zealand does not maintain a diverse range production system. A single marketing strategy based on organic production would be high risk because it reduces New Zealand's flexibility to respond to changes in market preference, as well as creating greater biosecurity threats.

New Zealand's organic exports to the EU are currently operating under a derogation under 2092/91, but this derogation is expected to end in several years. The New Zealand organics industry has asked the Ministry of Agriculture (MAF) to develop a national certification program which the EU would recognize. MAF would develop national standards allowing products to be exported and certified to meet third country requirements.

For organics exports to Japan, private New Zealand organic certifying bodies like Bio-Gro and AgriQuality are forming relationships with Japanese certifying organizations to allow New Zealand products to meet the new Japanese regulations. However, MAF would prefer if Japan would recognize the equivalence of a national New Zealand organic standard.