

ORGANIC INSIGHTS

AUTUMN EDITION 2018 - WWW.NASAA.COM.AU



THE MAGIC OF MUSHROOMS

FROM SELF-CONFESSED CITY SLICKER TO AUSTRALIA'S
LEADING ORGANIC MUSHROOM PRODUCER

Full story on pg 4

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COMMENT



AFTER MANY MONTHS OF DISCUSSION, THE ORGANICS INDUSTRY HAS AGREED TO ESTABLISH AN INTERIM PEAK BODY AT THE RECENT LOVE ORGANICS SYMPOSIUM.

Organics Industries of Australia, a member based incorporated association, will pave the way for the establishment of a permanent entity to drive policy, research and development (R&D) and new market opportunities.

One point is clear – with a federal election due in the next 18 months, the industry is now able to deliver a cohesive and visible profile within the broader agricultural sector.

SO, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR NASAA AND NCO OPERATORS?

Representation, recognition and reward.

NASAA, and NCO Certification, continue to be acknowledged as the benchmark for the highest possible standards. As more and more operators enter the market you can be confident that you have aligned with the most respected and internationally recognised industry leader.

Nonetheless, from a policy and R&D perspective, strength also comes from size and scale.

I firmly believe that there is much more that connects us as a sector than divides us. The fundamental principles and philosophy of sustainable farming will always be the bedrock of organics. Therefore, irrespective of specific certification, everyone involved

in the organics value chain deserves a voice as part of this new peak body.

Let's also acknowledge the rewards. The bottom line matters – especially as demand for organics continues to outstrip supply and opportunities abound. We want to see our organic producers and processors do well and their businesses thrive. We want organics to keep gaining market share on the supermarket shelves and we want consumer recognition and financial reward for the premium produce that comes from our sustainable farming practices.

FOR ALL OF THESE REASONS, WE MUST COMMIT TO A STRONG, UNIFIED VOICE NATIONALLY.

There will be more stakeholder consultation over the coming months and I urge you to share your thoughts on the future of our industry and how a peak body can add real value to your enterprise.

Finally, Biofach 2018 in Shanghai is rapidly approaching and I would be pleased to discuss joint exhibitor packages with those interested in testing the China market or reinforcing existing relationships with East Asian trade partners.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Organic Insights*.

Mark Anderson
General Manager

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OPERATOR SUCCESS STORY



HOW SELF-CONFESSED CITY SLICKER, CHRIS McLOGHLIN, COMBINED HIS VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND ASTUTE BUSINESS ACUMEN TO BECOME HEAD OF AUSTRALIA'S LEADING ORGANIC MUSHROOM ENTERPRISE.



THE MAGIC OF MUSHROOMS

WHAT DREW YOU TO ORGANIC FARMING?

I came to a view in my late teens and early twenties that a lack of custodial or symbiotic farm management would result in pretty catastrophic outcomes for our society i.e. we run out of topsoil, we run out of food. That's a bad outcome for everyone.

I really liked the whole idea of organic farming and biodynamic farming. It proved to be the most promising methodology for maintaining and rebuilding soils because that's what we'd been screwing up – and probably still are.

DO YOU COME FROM A FARMING FAMILY?

No. My parents are both city slickers but my Dad's family are sheep farmers and my god-parents are wheat and cereal farmers so we spent a bit of time on the farm as kids. But I am definitely a city slicker.

WHY MUSHROOMS?

I just had a curiosity about mushrooms. And I guess for the same reasons I was interested in organic and biodynamic production - the benefits they delivered to the soil biology. Fungi underpins all of that. Without fungi none of the other living kingdoms have a crack.

HOW HAS THE NCO CERTIFIED BRAND SUPPORTED YOUR BUSINESS?

Well historically, NASAA and the NCO brand, distinct from others in the market, have a pretty strong reputation among growers for defending the standard and having a high set of values in its implementation.

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION IS A SIGNIFICANT COMMITMENT - HOW DID YOU MANAGE THE TRANSITION?

We were fortunate to purchase a mushroom farm from a guy who had been farming organically for 25 plus years. We set up a mentoring transition with NASAA and the former producer for a period which included all the training. With mushrooms it's all about what you're NOT doing as the baseline measure to make sure you are doing everything organically. It is the exclusion of a whole bunch of chemicals and fungicides that the conventional guys use.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES ORGANIC FARMERS FACE?

You have far less immediately obvious tools to deal with the problems that will invariably arise.

For a conventional grower there is often a large body of literature, plus ten other farmers who have dealt with the same situation i.e. "here is the chemical, this is what you do... follow the instructions and spray." In organics, the accumulated knowledge base is harder to access.

ARE YOU LOOKING TO EXPAND INTO OTHER HORTICULTURAL COMMODITIES?

Not immediately. We see so much scope in producing different varieties of mushrooms, different applications and different fungi not necessarily for human consumption. We produce so much compost each week, which is highly nutritious, we're looking at other production systems to tap into with that product.

If we can't find another system that fits, it may well be that we create one ourselves.

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WHAT WILL HELP ORGANIC FARMING GROW IN AUSTRALIA?

Improved government relations will benefit the whole organics sector with better advocacy and better organisation. Organics is a category that ticks a lot of boxes for a lot of different government departments and agendas - we need to align ourselves to reap the benefits.

And it's all about consumer demand. If we can bring prices down then a lot more consumers will buy it. That is a slow burn.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER PRODUCERS CONSIDERING ORGANIC CERTIFICATION?

Find a good consultant who has been involved in organic conversions before and understand all of the aspects involved in the process. Don't listen to anyone (unless they put it in writing) who promises new markets - it may be a mirage.

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NASAA TEAM WALKS FOR WATER

NASAA AND NCO STAFF WILL BE “WALKING FOR WATER” IN MARCH TO RAISE FUNDS TO SUPPORT WATERAID, AN INTERNATIONAL NOT-FOR-PROFIT, WHICH AIMS TO MAKE CLEAN WATER, DECENT TOILETS AND GOOD HYGIENE NORMAL FOR EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE WITHIN A GENERATION.

Chief Certification Officer for NASAA Certified Organic, Melanie Bullers said the goals of the Walk for Water event aligned well with NASAA’s sustainable agriculture mission.

“Careful water management is a fundamental principle of organic farming,” said Ms Bullers. “We look closely at water resourcing every day as part of our role in certification.

“We may live on the driest continent however it’s easy to take clean water for granted, even if it’s not always in abundance. That is not the case for so many other communities. I hope we can make a small difference to a very big global problem, especially in Africa and Asia.”

NASAA works with a number of developing countries to improve their capacity for sustainable farming through training, education and certification initiatives.

“It will be good for our team to come together and focus on an issue that resonates on many levels, within our workplace and far beyond,” said Ms Bullers.

The Walk for Water event invites participants to walk (or run) 10,000 steps a day for five days in late March. The event coincides with World Water Day, which is recognised annually on 22 March.

“We felt this event would not only help to support better living conditions for those most in need but also promote our work in sustainable agriculture and the critical importance of water in feeding the world,” said Ms Bullers.

To support the NASAA/NCO team visit the Walk for Water fundraising page.

[CLICK HERE](#)

DOYENNE OF AUSTRALIAN ORGANIC INDUSTRY STEPS DOWN AS CHAIR OF NASAA

AFTER SEVEN YEARS AS CHAIR OF NASAA, JAN DENHAM ANNOUNCED AT THE FEBRUARY 2018 BOARD MEETING THAT SHE WOULD STEP DOWN FROM THE ROLE BUT REMAIN ON THE BOARD, AND FOCUS ON HER ROLE AS CHAIR OF NASAA CERTIFIED ORGANIC.

Ms Denham, a successful organic citrus producer from western NSW who joined NASAA in 1992 having gained certification for her farm in 1989, has served twice as Chair of the Board. She said she was proud of her contribution to NASAA and the development of the booming organics industry.

"The organic farming and certification landscape, in Australia and internationally, has changed so much since the early 1990s," Ms Denham said. "In the early years we had to fight extremely hard for organics, and sustainable farming generally, to be seen as a legitimate system.

"Now you can walk into any supermarket and find organic products across all major commodities on nearly every shelf.

"It has been an absolute privilege to lead NASAA and so rewarding to see the industry go from strength to strength," she said.

"I will still be working closely on the certification side but it's time for change."



Images left to right:

Late 1990's, launch of the NASAA website with special guest The Hon. Alexander Downer, Member for Mayo

1996 ABC Victorian Rural Woman of the Year

Signing the Multi-Lateral Agreement in Florence



MOVING ORGANICS FROM ENTRÉE TO MAIN COURSE

NEWLY APPOINTED NASAA CHAIR, GLENN SCHAUBE ADMITS HE FELL INTO THE INDUSTRY AND ORGANIC FARMING ADVOCACY MORE BY FATE THAN DESIGN.

Passionate about sustainable agriculture with a strong background in communications, stakeholder engagement and agribusiness, he outlines some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Australia's original organic certification organisation.



WHAT DO YOU SEE AS A MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR THE SECTOR IN ACHIEVING GREATER UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE?

The growth in consumption of certified organic foods by consumers speaks for itself but moving to a fully accepted and mainstream form of food production still has its challenges.

Setting aside structural issues such as consistency of supply and inputs, I believe education and awareness across all levels of government, agribusiness, academic communities and consumers – are priorities.

Addressing concerns of the science community.

Confusion around the term 'organic' is a major challenge as all too often it is used to infer that numerous consumer products are better because they are natural.

A more accurate and acceptable description of 'certified organic' is required if the sector is to gain credence as a legitimate and scientifically definable food production system; and hence open new opportunities for growth and development.

Concepts like regenerative farming systems, which describe the goal of seeking to achieve a state of environmental equilibrium using naturally occurring reproductive and growth means, may provide a more accurate description.

The wisdom of NASAA's founders in naming NASAA the National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia, may well continue to provide a platform for educating key agribusiness, science, government and the community about food production systems.

HOW DO YOU SEE NASAA WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT?

NASAA is unequivocally committed to creating and supporting a new permanent peak industry body that provides a single voice on key industry wide issues and data. This is essential if the sector is to be represented accurately and consistently, and achieve a supportive policy and legislative environment that underpins the interests of the organic sector and market growth.

To be truly representative and non-partisan, the new peak body must become totally independent of any one interest group, organisation or board.

Given this, it was very encouraging to see the Australian Organic Industry Working Group recently establish the Organic Industries of Australia as an interim peak body and single voice for the sector.

For more than 20 years I have been involved in government relations and advocacy for various industry groups and not for profit organisations. To achieve success in this field of endeavour, I have found that the industries that set aside their past deference in the interests of addressing legislative and policy barriers succeed. Those that do not, fail. I hope that the goodwill and commitment will continue and that all parties involved will support the new organisation.

WHAT ABOUT CONSUMER EDUCATION?

I believe that helping consumers understand more clearly why buying certified organic food is a better choice, despite the premium, is a key issue.

Generally, I think it fair to say that most consumers believe that organic food is better for them, containing fewer residual chemicals and being more nutritious and tastier. They hope that it will help them live healthier, longer lives.

They may also have a vague understanding of production principles, as being grown and produced more ethically, avoiding soil and environmental degradation; supporting community, and protecting animal welfare.

As a public relations and marketing practitioner of nearly thirty years, I believe that the more the sector can define why 'certified organic' is healthier and better for consumers and the environment the more consumers will be motivated to seek out and purchase product.

This in turn should lead to higher demand, lowering of production costs and continued growth in the sector.

Glenn Schaube
NASAA Chair

NASAA LAUNCHES NEW THREE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

NASAA HAS LONG BEEN RECOGNISED AS THE CUSTODIAN FOR ORGANIC STANDARDS IN AUSTRALIA.

With this reputation comes the opportunity to expand industry services well beyond certification.

NASAA's new three year Strategic Plan 2018 - 20, recently ratified by the NASAA Board, identifies several priorities and opportunities to provide greater value to the organic sector hinged around increasing the uptake and demand for sustainable organic agriculture and products.

Partnership programs that involve government and industry to further expand the sector are a high priority. Other areas of focus include market growth, research, innovation, education and professional development. This can include unique programs aimed at helping specific commodities e.g. dairy and horticulture as well as new operators and exporters.

**CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD
THE NASAA STRATEGIC PLAN**

CERTIFIED ORGANIC COWS SHINE DURING INTERNATIONAL DAIRY WEEK

**WITH OVER 100 DAIRY OPERATORS UNDER
THE NASAA CERTIFIED ORGANIC (NCO) BANNER,
ORGANIC COWS AND DAIRY PRODUCTS
ACROSS AUSTRALIA WERE IN THE SPOTLIGHT
DURING INTERNATIONAL DAIRY WEEK
HELD JANUARY 20-24, 2018.**



DAIRY IS A SIGNIFICANT AREA OF GROWTH FOR THE AUSTRALIAN ORGANIC INDUSTRY WITH DEMAND FOR ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCTS OUTSTRIPPING SUPPLY IN AUSTRALIA AND GLOBALLY.

“We’re seeing strong interest and uptake in both organic processing and handling of dairy products as well as conversion of traditional dairy operations,” said Mark Anderson, General Manager of the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture.

It can take up to three years for a dairy to be certified organic and it is not just the way the land and feed is managed—animal welfare and health care in addition to specific quarantine measures for incoming stock are all critical components behind NCO certification.

“Certification considers all aspects of farm management from stocking density and weaning practices to identification and record keeping,” said Mr Anderson. “Much of this stems from maintaining very high biosecurity measures but it is combined with strict feed standards: organic cows must be fed on organic feed – both pasture and/or grain.”

MR ANDERSON ALSO REMINDED CONSUMERS TO CHECK THE LABELS OF ORGANIC MILK PRODUCTS CAREFULLY TO ENSURE THEY CARRIED AN AUTHENTIC, RECOGNISED CERTIFICATION STAMP, LIKE NCO.

“Unfortunately, there is still no mandatory requirement for certification of organic products sold domestically in Australia including dairy,” he said. “Businesses must ensure organic or certification claims are true. Therefore, consumers should always take a moment to double check how the ‘organic’ claim is substantiated.

“The key is to choose dairy products with a clearly visible certification stamp. You want to be confident that your baby’s formula or the fresh milk you pour on cereal has definitely gone through the strict quality control process and meets all of the requirements to earn an organic certification seal,” he said.

FAST FACTS

- There are over 100 NCO certified dairy producers and processors in Australia, including cows, sheep and goats, spread over 32,000 hectares
- Organic dairy represents about 6% of all processors with 51% located in Victoria and a 21% in NSW
- Dairy represents 16% of ALL export certificates nationally
- China (including Hong Kong) is the top destination for exported organic dairy products
- NASAA has agreements with Chinese certifiers to enable smooth transition to those markets for NCO operators
- Australian milk and milk products has a reputation for emanating from a clean, green environment – attracting premium price.

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**TIM MARSHALL,
THE 'FATHER' OF NASAA
AND INTERNATIONALLY
RECOGNISED ORGANIC
FARMING CONSULTANT
LOOKS AT RESEARCH
AND EDUCATION IN
ORGANICS TODAY.**

WHERE ARE THE EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH DOLLARS FOR ORGANIC FARMING?

When Tim Marshall's daughters finished high school and enrolled at university to study agriculture the last place he expected to appear was on the lecture theatre podium, not once but twice.

"Both girls had one lecture on organic farming during their courses. And both were delivered by me - as a guest lecturer," he said with a wry smile. "Organics is still hardly touched upon in curriculum."

While it is rewarding to be acknowledged as one of Australia's foremost authorities on organic farming and sustainable agriculture, Tim points to a more serious issue: the lack of academic focus on organics in research and teaching across Australia.

The organics industry is booming with 15% growth reported year on year. So it seems odd that targeted research and development is not following suite. Is it purely a structural issue with organic producers represented across a myriad of commodity groups or is it attitudinal as well?

"It's definitely a hangover from the old days," said Tim. "There is far less influence from those with extreme anti-organic views today." However the intractable mindsets have often been replaced by a disappointing level of apathy.

"Those taking their place never really received any positive exposure to organics in their training," said Tim. "It's only the imperative of the market that is drawing their attention. So at the moment there is very little in the way of assistance for organic farmers which is specific to their farming system."

This means aspiring organic producers and processors, whether they be small enterprises or large scale businesses looking to redirect part of their conventional operations to organic, may have limited options to access quality higher education and/or research support.

TIM SAYS THE FIRST PROBLEM IS A LACK OF EVIDENCE-BASED DATA ON THE SECTOR.

"We don't have enough research underway, and the right sort of research, on organic farming. At the moment, because the market is clearly accelerating in advance of the industry, we really need more positive assistance," he said.

"Government is unlikely to provide too much to help people convert. Although there are some little things that governments want to do, they are unlikely to directly subsidise conversion.

"But what they can do is help with research," he said.

One of the barriers facing research and development and education in organics is the distribution of the industry across hundreds of commodity areas. From bee keeping and aquaculture to rangeland beef, grains, horticulture and wine, what brings organic producers and processors together is the farming system, not the product.

"Organic farmers already pay their levies to the commodity organisations," said Tim. "Because they are spread across all of the specific industry R&D corporations, there is not the momentum in any one group to drive research in organics."



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SO WHAT WILL AUSTRALIAN ORGANIC FARMING LOOK LIKE IN 2028?

“I definitely see biological farming becoming a much more common choice,” Tim said. “I see organic certification increasing as well and I think we need larger scale horticultural operations, especially tree crops, to meet the demand.

“It would be great to see more conversions of small farmers too but realistically we’re not going to meet demand without the much larger producers,” he said. “At present, we only have a few organic operators that I would call medium/large. In beef we have huge operations because it makes sense for their scale but we don’t see that yet in horticulture.”

Tim successfully transitioned from organic gardening to farming early in his career and firmly believes there are fundamental aspects of the industry that don’t require a university degree or a R&D grant.

“You have to be prepared to do a lot of your own research,” he explained having visited more than 4,000 organic farms over the years.

“Organic producers have to learn to become really good observers on their own farm. That means having a deep understanding of the local conditions: soil, moisture etc become really critical.

“Be aware and learn to observe. I know farmers who can scream past their vineyard on a motor bike and just look at the leaves and know they need to turn the tap on.

Then there are others who can stare at the same vine and know something is wrong but struggle to identify what it is,” he said.

“It’s just the ability to detect a leaf that may have gone from ‘this to that,’” he said turning his hand almost imperceptibly.

“Some people have that natural ability... what we might call ‘green thumb’, and others don’t. But you always can teach yourself,” he said.

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RuralBizTraining Certificate IV in Organic Farming	CLICK HERE
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WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE ORGANIC EVENT ACTIVITIES COMING SOON



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INTERNATIONAL COMPOSTING AWARENESS WEEK 6 - 12 MAY

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BEEF AUSTRALIA'S BEEF WEEK
6 - 12 MAY

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BIOFACHCHINA
into organic

BIOFACH 2018 CHINA
26 - 28 MAY

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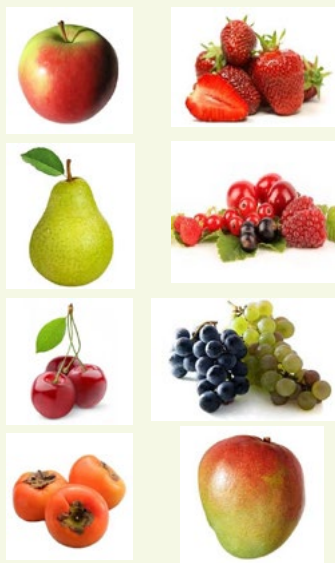


SHEEP WEEK
18 - 27 JUNE

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NEWS ROUNDUP

VIEW THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA AND AROUND THE GLOBE -
JUST CLICK ON THE ARROW ON EACH STORY TO SEE, HEAR AND READ MORE.

MEDIA

NASAA IN THE MEDIA: ON GENE EDITING AND ORGANICS

- ▶ ABC Country Hour SA
- ▶ ABC Rural
- ▶ ABC AM radio - Friday 19 January

ORGANIC FARMING IN AUSTRALIA

▶ Agribusiness Outlook 2018:

Farm sector tipped to benefit from improved global economic conditions. Australian wine and wool are tipped to be the standout commodities in a year of forecasted growth across the agricultural sector. Global agri-banker Rabobank's Agribusiness Outlook 2018 report states that improved global markets and increasing Asian incomes will drive the growth.

▶ Grass to glass: Why people are smitten by micro-dairy milk

We have one question for you food connoisseurs who buy free-range eggs, know the source of your morning coffee beans and can sniff out a menu boasting seasonal, paddock-to-plate produce better than a truffle-hunting hog: Do you know where your milk comes from?

ORGANIC FARMING INTERNATIONALLY

▶ When should you consider buying organic?

When buying vegetables and fruits, it can be challenging to know when it's worth spending more for organic products over conventionally produced options that generally have more chemicals. Scientists have linked pesticides in foods to fertility issues and other adverse health effects.

▶ The roots of organic farming lie in fascism

It sounds perverse that contemporary organic farming has its origins in fascism. But both the hard left and hard right shared some common ground during the inter-war period. Both were in support of the worker against industrial capital; both were suspicious of mechanization in agriculture; and both argued that power should reside in the collective.

▶ Supporting the growth of Canada's organic sector

The Government of Canada will provide the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) the necessary funds to cover costs associated with the 2020 Canadian Organic Standards review. The review is done every five years to ensure production methodologies reflect current practices and technological advancements. USDA Clarifies Ruling that Allows Non-Soil Organic Production. Soil-vs-hydroponics-organic-FEATURE Last fall, National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) ruled non-soil-based production methods using organic products can be certified organic.

▶ Walmart Sued Over Misleading Marketing on Organic Cage-Free Eggs

A class-action lawsuit was filed against Walmart earlier this month, with plaintiffs alleging that the company misled shoppers in the marketing of its store brand organic cage-free eggs.

▶ USDA Clarifies Ruling that Allows Non-Soil Organic Production

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POLICY

NASAA has provided formal responses to the following inquiries:

- ▶ Inquiry into mechanisms for compensation for economic loss to farmers in WA caused by contamination by genetically modified material
- ▶ 2016-17 Technical Review of the Gene Technology Regulations 2001
- ▶ Department of Agriculture and Water Resources' Organic export orders review

RESEARCH

▶ The organic industry in Australia

▶ Crop yield gap and stability in organic and conventional farming systems

GRANTS

▶ Agricultural Trade and Market Access Program

Grants are available to promote cooperation in accessing international markets. Applications may be submitted for projects valued from \$55,000 to \$1.65 million (GST inclusive). There are no set funding rounds and applications for programme funding can be submitted at any time until 31 December 2018 or until all funds have been allocated.

▶ Drought and rural assistance

To help farmers and primary producers face an increasingly variable climate. Prepare for and manage the effects of drought and other challenges.

▶ Managing Farm Risk Programme

Provides rebates for advice and assessments to help farmers prepare and apply for a new insurance policy that assists with the management of drought and other production and market risks.