

NASAA and the Thai government have agreed to work together to maintain and progress good organic trading relations between Australia and Thailand. In a meeting on the weekend with the Thai Vice Minister of Commerce Veerasak Jinarat, Mr May, Chairman of the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA) told those present that their mutual interests would be served by trade in organic food and fibre products and that NASAA would assist in this process through promoting an equivalence agreement between its organic program and Australia. Importantly, and more immediately however, it could achieve this through its quality partnership with Thailand's own IFOAM accredited organic certification group "ACT".

The discussions were at a meeting between the Thai trade delegation, which also included senior secretaries, officials, organic trade associations and farmers and the Organic Federation of Australia (OFA). NASAA which has had over 23 years certifying organic farmers and manufacturers in Australia and SE Asia, was considered by the Thais to best be able to ensure that organic certification matters between the countries would be harmonised.

Through its multiple accreditations with importing countries such as the USA, Japan and Canada, NASAA provides access to those organic markets where no Australian Government scheme can. The failure of the Australian Government to achieve any significant long term recognition for organic equivalence with importing countries since 1992 has been noted by many onlookers and the role of organic certification bodies such as NASAA is now becoming increasingly appreciated by domestic and international trading partners.

"Here is yet another example of how an association such as ours, consisting of members and directors actively promoting organic agriculture, can assist the growth of organic agriculture through trade and access", said Mr May, himself a small organic farmer from Hepburn shire.

One of the key factors identified at the meeting was the similarities, although off seasonal, between many Australian and the small Thai tropical farming systems. Some definite synergies and opportunities for co-operation also exist in the areas of research including that into tropical aquaculture. Thailand's organic rice production, fed on natural rainfall, its organically processed products, its off season fruits and vegetables and its own growing demand for organic imports were all matters of discussion as the meeting heard from successful organic traders present.

The delegation which also included the deputy permanent secretary to the ministry of commerce appears to have been missed by the state or federal government whose place was taken in the political realm by local councillors including a meeting the following day with Cr Ruth McGowan, Mayor of Baw Baw shire who has previously played an important role in organic agricultural testing. Local governments have much to contribute and can benefit directly by investments in speciality agricultural products such as organic food and are applauded by NASAA for their interest in expanding international trade opportunities in sustainable products from rural areas.