

## Tasmanian Organics, Leader or Lagger?

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Organic agriculture in Tasmania accounts for less than one percent of agricultural land and less than one per cent of farm gate dollar value. Of the certified organic hectares in Australia, 75% are in Queensland, 20% are in South Australia and a mere 0.1% are in Tasmania (Halpin, 2004).

When I suggested at a recent Organic Coalition of Tasmania (OCT) forum that, in the light of the dramatic growth worldwide of organics (McKinna, 2006), Tasmania was lagging, Graeme Stevenson of the Organic Gardening & Farming Society of Tasmania, suggested I review the data on the basis of organic farms per capita.

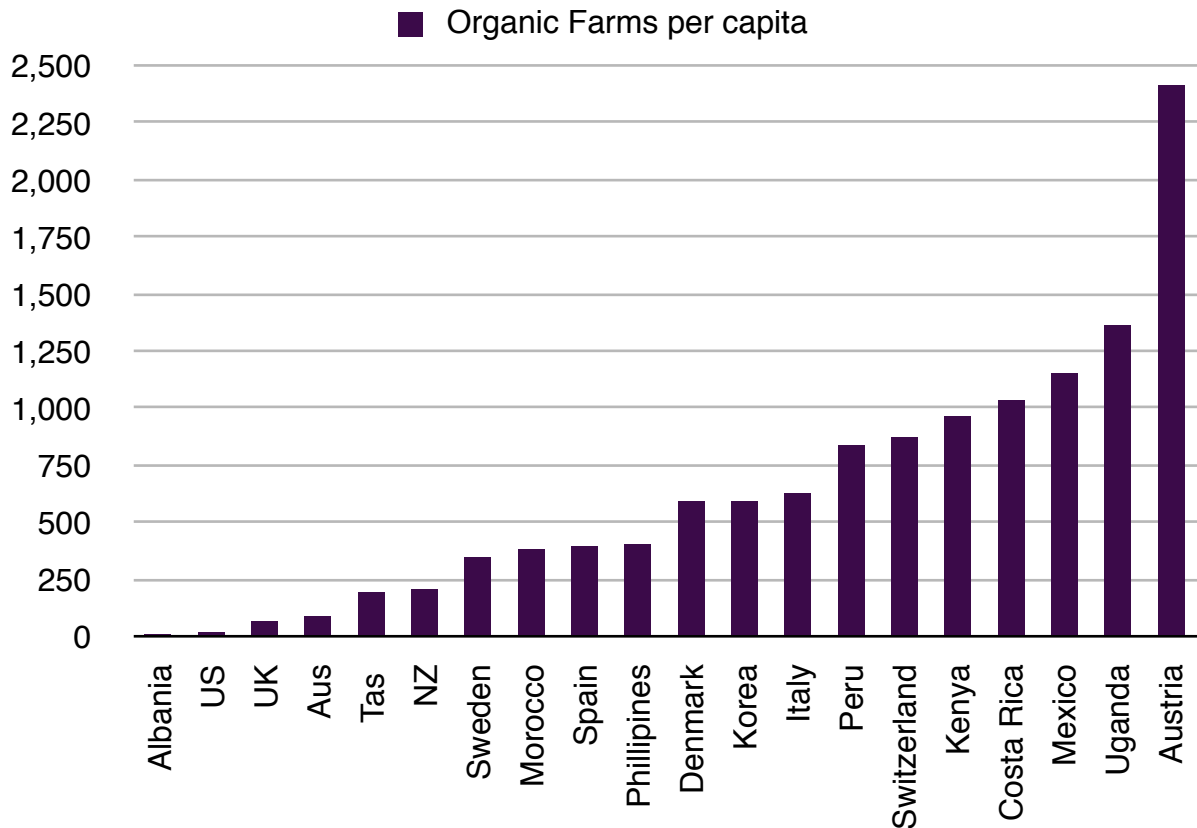
Tasmania appears to have a huge potential for organic agriculture. The state has a higher proportion of rural dwellers than other Australian states, it has a long tradition of successful agricultural pursuits dating from the earliest European settlement, it is the only state with its own organic certifier, and geographically it is well placed to capitalise on its clean and green image.

International organic data is reported by Willer & Yussefi (2006). For each country, three key organic indices are presented: total organic hectares, organic hectares as a percentage of total agricultural hectares, and total organic farms. Organic farms per capita has not been a typical metric, it is not reported by Willer & Yussefi, yet it seems an interesting and promising approach.

A lack of data on Tasmanian organics was noted by Dawkins (2005). Halpin (2004) reports 54 organic farms in Tasmania. Using a population figure of 500,000, this yields 108 organic farms per million for Tasmania. Local sources, including Brunswick-Hullock (2006) and Stevenson (2006), suggest the figure is closer to a total of 100 organic farms in Tasmania, and this yields a statistic of 200 organic farms per million, and that is the figure used in Figure 1.

New Zealand with 820 certified organic farmers and a population of 3.9 million yields 210 organic farmers per million, and is comparable to Tasmania. Other countries comparable to Tasmania on this measure, are Germany with 200, Indonesia with 195, Turkey with 190, and France with 185 organic farmers per million of population.

Australia has 92 organic farms per million, the UK has 67, the US has 29, and Albania lags with a mere 16 organic farms per million of population.



**Figure 1. Organic farms per million of population for selected countries. (With the exception of Tasmania, the number of organic farms is sourced from Willer & Yussefi (2006) and population data sourced from CIA, 2002).**

Austria yields the highest metric with 2418 organic farms per million of population. If Tasmania had the same density of organic farms as Austria, there would be 1209 organic farms. This confirms the view that there is a huge opportunity in Tasmania to grow the organic sector, and suggests a potential for 1000% growth.

Countries with a diversity of geographies, economic structures, governance, climate, ethnicity and farming traditions have a considerably higher penetration, than Tasmania, of organic farming based on the metric of organic farms per million of population. Located in Europe, Africa, Asia, South America, and Central America they set the example for what can be achieved. The mission of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements is that all agriculture will be organic (IFOAM, 2006). Based on what has already been achieved in other countries, the OCT can raise the bar for what is achievable in Tasmania, so that Tasmania claims a place as an organics world leader.

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