

# Push for organic farming

## ADFA seeking growers to sign up to pilot scheme

THE Australian Dried Fruits Association is seeking urgent expressions of interest from growers who would like to participate in a pilot organic fruit production certification project.

ADFA industry development officer John Hawtin said the aim was to improve farm-gate returns.

"Many growers are nearly there with their minimal chemical usage, and could get going in organic production quite easily," Mr Hawtin said.

He said the project would include greater collaboration with processors and marketers of dried vine fruit.

"There's a strong market for organic fruit production, with potential retail prices 20 to 30 per cent above prices for standard retail lines, and better prices to the grower."

"Even higher prices have been mooted for processed organic food products containing raisins or sulfanas."

Mr Hawtin said while no guar-

antee could be given on prices, demand appeared likely to continue for organic-certified products.

New organic producers would undertake a pre-certification process to provide basic documentation and enable specific management issues to be identified.

After 12 months, producers who had successfully demonstrated compliance with organic procedures would move to an "in transition" status, where their product could be marketed accordingly.

In this way, they achieve some of the market benefit of organic production quite early.

"After a successful period, a minimum of three years, of demonstrating through annual audits, compliance with all relevant elements of the standard, the product can be marketed as certified organic," Mr Hawtin said.

He said organic production was one of three marketing projects being looked at by ADFA and consultants Street Ryan and Associates to-

wards improving grower returns.

Those interested in obtaining the certification, if not already ADFA members, will need to join first to participate.

As a group, there'll be cost savings using a shared auditor.

Mr Hawtin said about 15 growers were needed for the pilot.

Expressions of interest will be assessed and an initial meeting of the pilot group will be called in about a week. Mr Hawtin can be contacted on 5023 5174, or 0407 235174.