

# **ANOR Newsletter – December 2005**

## **Establishment of Healthy Soils Australia**

**A new National Australian organisation reflecting the views of ANOR has been established in Australia to enable farmers and community members to take more direct action to restore their soil health.**

During the last ANOR meeting in Akita, Japan, a proposal was put forward from Gerry Gillespie of Australia to investigate the return of organic waste products to their country of origin. This focus on the need to protect our soils to ensure trade and long-term markets is at the very heart of the new Australian organisation.

The new group, Healthy Soils Australia (HSA), came out of meetings of Zero Waste Australia, it is a national initiative to promote the health, productivity and sustainability of Australia's agricultural soils by assisting landholders to access and implement innovative soil management and remediation solutions. This is achieved by pooling national skills and science to address soil health problems faced by individual farmers, companies and community groups.

The persistence and expansion of major environmental issues such as acid soils, dryland salinity, clearing of native vegetation and water quality evidences the need for a new and coordinated approach to addressing land management. Current programs lack the coordination between rural and urban communities and between science, industry and government needed to effectively address the issues. By linking science, industry and urban and rural dwellers the HSA initiative provides the vision and integration essential for the improvement of production and environmental outcomes.

The HSA activities will address the sustainability of rural communities and environments but urban communities are also involved. Urban communities are the main market for the agricultural products and they are also a source of organic wastes needed to improve soils. Industry is similarly a major source of materials for remediating of soils, as well as a user of natural resources from the land. HSA has established an Innovation Fund to support R&D, commercialisation and delivery of new technologies and techniques for soil and land management.

HSA is an action-oriented program established primarily by industry to deliver outcomes beneficial for the whole community. Membership of HSA is open to all individuals and companies that seek to contribute to business and environmental outcomes of land use according to sound ecological, business and social principles. HSA is seeking associates and business partners to join this initiative.

Interest from farmers to date has been very positive and a number of trails and projects are in the pipeline for establishment this year.

More information can be obtained from the Healthy Soils Australia website at:

<http://www.healthysoils.com.au>

## **Managing the Carbon Cycle Forum**

**A soil carbon forum organised by Dr Christine Jones, was held on 14th and 15th of September in Armidale New South Wales, Australia. It brought together some of Australia's most innovative farmers, scientists and administrators to discuss the issue of carbon sequestration and its relationship to agricultural soils.**

Papers were presented by two Board Members of the Healthy Soils Australia group, Dr. Brian Tunstall and Gerry Gillespie.

Dr Jones, has extensive networks among the scientific and farming communities which enabled a diverse range of talents to be brought together to discuss this important subject.

Held over two days, the forum concluded with a forum discussion which enabled all participants to refine their thinking, enabling the forum discussion to be taken to the broader Australian public.

Assisted by Healthy Soils Australia and Zero Waste Australia in association with Compost Australia and Dr Christine Jones, further forums are planned for other states of Australia, with a larger conference planned for Canberra in 2006.

More information on conference papers and the work of Dr Christine Jones can be obtained at [www.amazingcarbon.com](http://www.amazingcarbon.com)

## **City to Soil enters it third year.**

Readers of the ANOR Newsletter may recall hearing about the City to Soil project at our last ANOR meeting. The on-farm research associated with this project will enter its third year in 2006.

The project addressed the issue of provision of Infrastructure and Services by Local Government which are traditionally viewed in terms of costs. This is the case with both waste management programs and recycling programs.

However, there is considerable economic and social benefit associated with kerbside recycling (Independent Assessment of Kerbside Recycling Nolan ITU 2001), which provides value back to the community in terms of jobs, resources and environmental value.

This is also true for the reuse of organic material. Except that when a product is processed into quality compost and used in agriculture, its value can grow exponentially.

This project demonstrated that if the service and process already being provided, maintain product quality at all stages and utilize the end product in a different way, it is possible to generate much more value to the broader community than the original cost of collection.

The price of landfill in the region where this trial was conducted, Queanbeyan, is now \$77 per tonne. The price of disposal of mixed waste to landfill for Sydney varies from around \$100 per tonne up to \$150 per tonne.

Yet a commercial processor can manufacture quality compost to Australian Standard AS4454 and carry the product at least 200 kms in any direction for a cost of \$50 per tonne, including profit.

This means that the product can be delivered to the farm gate for considerably less cost to the community than disposal to landfill.

The City to Soil project is a model, which can be modified and remodelled to suit any regional, rural or urban centre. It was designed to:

- Reduce contamination in kerbside collections
- Maintain high quality compost outputs
- Demonstrate agricultural financial benefits
- Return a small part of those financial benefits to the community for their source-separation efforts

The project used existing off-the-shelf equipment in a low-tech approach to collection, processing and delivery.

In order to connect the household as the source of the green waste, to its highest and best use in agriculture, a credits system had to be devised.

A credit system was devised which asked householders placed their green yard waste bins on the footpath for the normal fortnightly collection. The operators opened the bin to check its contents for contamination such as glass, metal or plastic. If no contamination was seen, the bins were emptied into the collection truck and the contents checked again. If again no contamination was seen, a small bar code fitted beneath the rear handles of each bin was scanned into a hand held scanner.

When collections for the day were complete, all recorded numbers were transferred to computer and two numbers selected at random as winners, for each fortnightly collection. The two households selected won a hamper of fruit and vegetables, again reinforcing the connection to food and the soil. In a larger system these rewards can be converted to community credits or ultimately, carbon credits.

The principal innovative aspect of this project was that it identified the range of financial benefits that came from applying quality organic material to agriculture. It

then returns part of that value to the suburban household for source separation of the product in the first place.

Copies of the report are available in both English and with Japanese subtitles from Gerry Gillespie in Australia.

A final report will be available in the new year, from fellow ANOR member, Dr. Sara Beavis.

### **A New Year for ANOR.**

All the very best for a happy, peaceful and successful new year to all of our fellow ANOR members from those of us in Australia and New Zealand.

I hope we can manage to all meet again very soon.

*Gerry Gillespie, Australia*