

Asking a Premium for Organic Berries: Trust, Taste and Proof Matter

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For organic berry growers, the good news is that the consumer proposition is still clear. Australians generally understand what 'organic' means, and for many shoppers it still carries powerful associations with food grown more naturally, with fewer synthetic inputs and more care for the environment. The challenge now is making the organic premium feel worthwhile at the shelf.

Recent consumer research from Hort Innovation's Hort IQ Usage and Perceptions Program shows that 38% of Australians say they sometimes or regularly buy organic fruit and vegetables, up three percentage points since August 2024. That is a meaningful base of shoppers, but it also means nearly two-thirds of consumers are still only occasional organic buyers, or not buying organic at all.

When consumers are asked why they buy organic, the answers are encouraging for berry growers. Among those who sometimes or regularly buy organic fresh produce, 51% say they do so because it is grown without chemicals or pesticides, 48% want to support local farmers, and 46% believe organic is better quality or fresher.

For berries, that matters. Berries are mostly eaten on their own (66%) or as part of a meal or a snack (34%), according to the latest Hort IQ Consumer Usage and Perception dashboard. They are not hidden in a recipe or heavily processed before eating. Consumers can see the fruit, smell it, taste it and make a quick judgment about whether the premium feels justified. The challenge is that value is being judged more sharply than it was five years ago.

Around 2019–2021, the organic market was carrying strong growth signals. Australian Organic Limited reported that 65% of Australian households were buying some type of organic product or produce yearly in 2019, while the 2021 Australian Organic Market Report found 37% of organic shoppers had increased their household food allocation to organic in 2020. A 2022 consultation report prepared for the Australian Government also found that 51% of participants were willing to pay up to 25% more for organic products.

The latest Hort IQ research paints a more cautious picture for fresh produce, specifically 38% of Australians say they are willing to pay more for organic fruit and vegetables, and the same proportion say they would buy organic fruit and vegetables if they were readily available.

Interest in organic certainly remains, but the premium is now more conditional. In a cost-of-living environment, consumers are asking a very simple question at the shelf: 'Is this worth the extra money?'

For the 62% of consumers who rarely or never buy organic fresh produce, cost is the standout barrier. Hort IQ found 80% of these shoppers say organic 'costs a lot more than regular produce'. Other barriers are also telling: 33% say they are simply used to buying regular produce, 30% are unsure whether it is really organic, and 30% do not notice a difference in taste or quality.

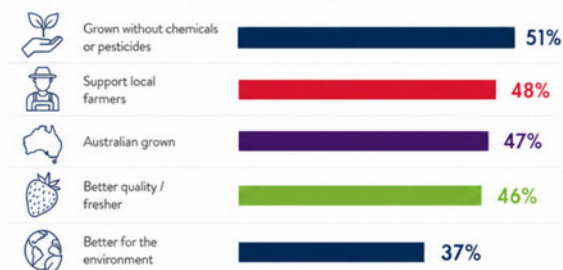
1. THE ORGANIC PURCHASE FUNNEL

Interest is strong, but cost remains the biggest barrier.



2. WHAT ORGANIC BUYERS VALUE MOST

Top reasons for buying organic fruit and vegetables.



3. THE PACKAGING TRADE-OFF

Consumers see benefits and concerns. The right balance matters.

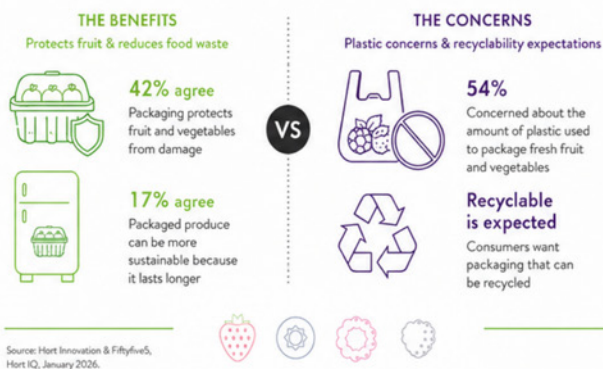


Photo credit: Created by Berries Australia using ChatGPT

This is a critical message for growers and marketers. The job is not just to tell people that organic exists or spruik the benefits. The job is to make the premium feel credible, and that starts right back with basic trust.

Australia's domestic organic labelling environment can be confusing. Under the scope of the Australian Consumer Law, the ACCC states that products intended for the Australian market do not need to meet a particular standard or be certified to be labelled 'organic', but businesses making organic claims must be able to prove them. For certified growers, this is both a frustration and an opportunity. Certification is not just an admin burden; it is a trust signal.

Australian Organic Limited's 2023 Market Report found that 64% of shoppers recognised the Australian Certified Organic Bud logo, up from 51% in 2019. 77% of organic shoppers are aware of certification marks (up from 59% in 2019), while 58% of organic

shoppers check for a 'certification logo on the label' of their purchases. In a category where some consumers are unsure whether products are 'really organic', clear certification marks, straightforward language and visible provenance all help reduce doubt and build trust.

For biodynamic growers, the same principle applies. The words 'organic' and 'biodynamic' may carry emotional appeal, but consumers still need simple proof points: Who certified it? Where was it grown? What does this mean in practical terms? Why should I trust it?

The second challenge is taste and quality. Organic messaging cannot rely only on what is not used in production. 'Grown without synthetic pesticides' is important, but it is not enough on its own. For berries, the consumer needs to see and taste the benefit: flavour, freshness, ripeness, careful handling and a punnet that feels worth the price.



The Australian Certified Organic 'Bud' trademark logo is the most well-known organic trust mark in Australia

Photo credit: Created by Berries Australia using ChatGPT

The third challenge is packaging. Packaging is especially tricky for berries because the fruit is delicate. A poorly protected berry becomes a wasted berry. Yet the organic consumer is often more alert to packaging choices, particularly plastic.

The Hort IQ report clearly shows the tension. Concern about the amount of plastic used to package fresh fruit and vegetables has softened, falling from 61% in May 2023 to 54% in January 2026. At the same time, 42% of consumers agree that packaging protects fruit and vegetables from damage, and 17% agree that packaged fruit and vegetables can be more sustainable because they last longer.

That does not mean shoppers love plastic. It means they are weighing up two forms of waste: packaging waste and food waste.

For organic berries, the worst outcome is packaging that appears to contradict the values of the product. A premium organic punnet in packaging perceived as excessive, hard to recycle or poorly explained may serve to weaken the story before the fruit is even tasted.

The best approach is not simply 'less packaging at all costs'. It is packaging that is fit for purpose, protects fruit quality, reduces waste and can be explained honestly.

If the punnet is recyclable, say so. If recycled content is used, say so. If packaging is needed to protect delicate fruit and reduce wastage, say so. It's certainly best not to assume consumers will just work it out for themselves.

The national packaging context also matters. The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) reports that 86% of packaging in Australia is now reusable, recyclable or compostable, but only 20% of plastic packaging is actually recycled or composted. This gap reinforces why growers and brands need to be careful with claims. 'Recyclable' and 'recycled' are not the same thing, and consumers are increasingly alert to greenwashing.

Even in an era tightly focused on the cost of living, the opportunity for organic berry growers remains strong, but the messaging needs to be comprehensive to meet the identified consumer needs.

Consumers need access to this information in an accessible way at the point of sale. Either directly on the packaging, or via initiatives like a QR code that takes consumers to a resource that quickly explains product and packaging features to assist them in their buying behaviour.

- Lead with recognised certification
- Make Australian provenance clear
- Talk about flavour and freshness
- Explain the care taken in production not just the mechanics of the farming system
- Give consumers practical storage tips to reduce waste at home
- Make packaging choices that support the organic promise rather than distract from it, and explain why packaging choices support quality

Most importantly, remember that consumers are not buying an abstract production system. They are buying a punnet of berries for breakfast, lunchboxes, smoothies, desserts and snacks. The richness of the organic story piques their interest, but it is the eating experience that brings them back. The price premium is still possible, but today it is more important than ever to earn it at every touchpoint.

Acknowledgements

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Australian Organic Limited (AOL) is the peak industry body engaging with government and industry to promote the commercial and social interests of certified members and protect the integrity of the sector against fraud and misleading organics. The Australian Certified Organic 'Bud' logo is owned by AOL and is the most recognised organic mark in Australia. Find out more at austorganic.com

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Hort Stats Handbook

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- Trade performance
- Category trends (75+)

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