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On the occasion of the launching of the
Historical Research Archive of the
Soil Association of South Australia (SASA):
"The History of Innovative Organic Knowledge:
Past, Present (and Future?)"

The Path to Otopia:
an Australian Perspective

John Paull
State Library of South Australia
Adelaide
4 February 2009

All photos: J. Paull

1

Thank you for the invitation to speak today.
I congratulate the Soil Association of South Australia
on 3 productive decades of supporting organics.
And now congratulations for depositing your archives with the State Library,
that is a very positive and useful step for understanding and sharing your organic journey.

"The History of Innovative Organic Knowledge:
Past, Present (and Future?)"

The Path to Otopia:
an Australian Perspective

All photos: J. Paull

2

One of my interests has been to look at the term "organic" as a meme, as an element of cultural transmission, and I've been curious to trace its transmission through time & space.
Sandra Grimes has challenged me today to also look to the future, so I am wondering are we on a journey to Otopia?
What is Otopia? I see Otopia as a place where agriculture is 100% organic. Otopia might also be a place where not only are the food & farming organic, but also floristry, forestry, local councils, schools, universities, homes and businesses are organic. That is a path of many steps.
.

3

Before we look at some of the nitty gritty,
let's look at the big picture.
Last year organic farming statistics were reported from 138 countries.
The world organic market was valued at A$60 billion,
and organic food is either produced or sold in almost every country.

Question to SA, 1947

6 August 1947

Sir Stanton Hicks
Adelaide

Have you got a Society in South
Australia working on this subject?

Yours sincerely
Henry W Shoobridge
President
Living Soil Association of Tasmania

4

Now let's step back 60 years. In 1947 a letter arrived in Adelaide from Tasmania.
Henry Shoobridge, President of the Living Soil Association of Tasmania
asked Stanton Hicks: is there a Soil Association in South Australia?
I haven't located his response,
but my belief is that in 1947 South Australia was still decades away from having a Soil Association.

Professor C. Stanton Hicks
University of Adelaide

"Man needs no atomic bomb to destroy himself, he has but to destroy his soil bacteria, and this he is rapidly doing by intensive mechanised farming and neglect of the claims of the circle of Life"

Hicks, 1950, *Food, Soil and Civilization*, p. xiv

5

Why did Shoobridge ask Stanton Hicks? (Cedric Stanton Hicks,1892-1976).
Hicks was a professor of Human Physiology and Pharmacology
at Adelaide University (1926 - 1958).
He had interests in food, the soil, agriculture, and organics,
& he was part of what I call the first wave of organics in Australia.
<VOLUNTEER TO READ STANTON HICKS BOOK EXCERPT: "Food, Soil and Civilization">

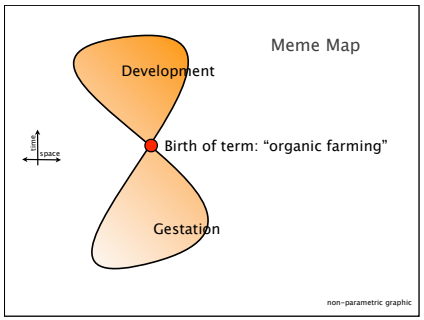
3 Waves of OA in Australia

Wave	Era	eg.
I	1940s	eg. Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society
II	1960s	eg. Soil Association of SA
III	1980s	egs. BFA* & NASAA**

* Biological Farmers of Australia
** National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia

6

My research suggests that there have been 3 waves of organic advocacy in Australia.
The 1st was in the 1940s, and I will describe that in some detail.
The 2nd wave was from the 1960s, and your Soil Association of South Australia is a part of that wave.
The 3rd wave was from the 1980s & includes Australia's major organic certifiers, the BFA & NASAA.



7

I have looked at "organic" as a meme, i.e. as a unit of cultural transmission.
There was a time & place where the term "organic farming" was coined
SO the first question is where & when was that?
Before the idea was born, what of the gestation of the idea, and afterwards, what of the development?
These are issues that I've been toying with.
So AFTER we receive the term "organic farming", one question is:
How quickly - or slowly - does it blossom into an association? and where?
I'll provide answers which I think are surprising.

8

So this is a detective story.
If you were looking for the world's first "organic farming" association,
i.e. the first association to call itself an "organic farming" association,
where would you start, where would you look,
& where are the candidates? Is it in the UK, USA, Europe, Asia, Africa, or even NZ?

Rudolf Steiner 1924

9

At the outset I want to make some acknowledgements and some exclusions.
Rudolf Steiner presented his Agriculture Course in Poland in 1924.
That led directly to BioDynamic Agriculture amnd that predates the term “organic”.
I want to acknowledge Biodynamic,
but that is not what I am looking at here.

Not...

“ancien régime organic agriculture”

“Permanent Agriculture”

“BioDynamic Agriculture”

“Permacuture”

“Natural”, “Bio”, “Biological”, “Ecological” etc

Not organic fellow travellers

10

This is a further disclaimer.
I’m not looking here at 10,000 years of organic agriculture, what I call ancien regime Organic Agriculture.
And I am not looking at Permanent Agriculture, BioDynamic, Permaculture, Natural, Bio, Biological, Ecological etc.
But rather, I’m looking specifically at: when do we get the term “organic farming”?
and then at its diffusion, and its uptake over time and space.

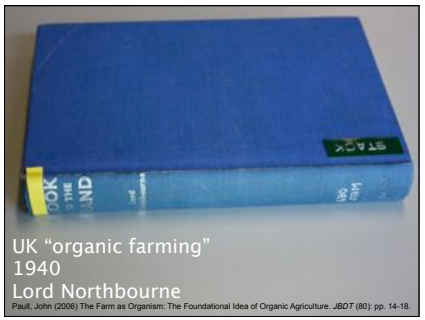
US Organic myth...

- “ ... organic farming, the American publisher J. I. Rodale is responsible for coining ... the defining term in 1942, in his magazine Organic Farming and Gardening”

Silver, L.M., Challenging Nature, 2006, p.230

11

There is an organic myth that the term “organic farming” was coined by
an American publisher Jerome Rodale.
Now Rodale made up various things, including the name “Rodale”,
but he didn’t make up the term “organic farming” in 1942 as claimed by Silver,
or any other year for that matter.


UK “organic farming”
1940
Lord Northbourne

Paull, John (2006) The Farm as Organism: The Foundational Idea of Organic Agriculture. *JBDT* (80): pp. 14-18.

12

My research result is that the first occurrence of the term “organic farming”
is in this book “Look to the Land”.
It was written in 1939
and published in 1940
in London.
The author is Lord Northbourne.
He has received little recognition for his achievement.

13

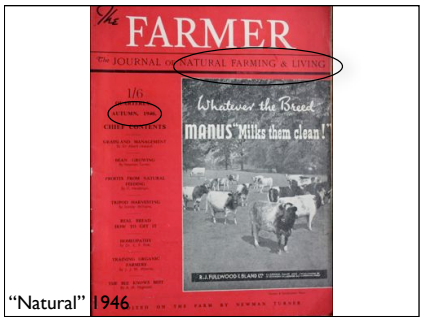
Oxford University once had a school of agriculture,
and it was here that
Lord Northbourne studied & later taught agriculture.

14

This is a photo of Lord Northbourne.
That's him on the far left.
This was twenty odd years after the publishing of "Look to the Land".

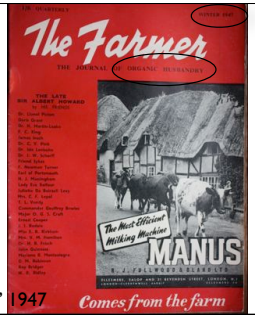
15

It was from that point in 1940 that the organic idea has diffused through time & space.
Before we get to the FIRST "organic farming" association, let me touch on some context:
The UK's leading Organic Association is the Soil Association, it was founded in November 1946.
Two points:
1. The Soil Association did not choose organic in the name &
2. this was 6 1/2 years after "Look to the Land" was published.



16

Another early player in the UK was Newman Turner.
He was the editor of "The Farmer".
You see here that in 1946 he had not yet adopted the organic terminology.



"Organic" 1947

17

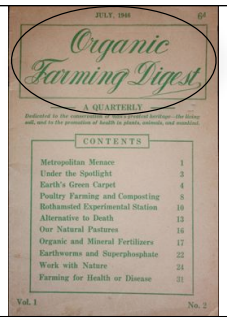
Then in 1947 Newman Turner adopted "Organic"
into the masthead of "The Farmer" as you see here.

18

There is a New Zealand claim that NZ started the first organic farming association.
That claim is based on this chronology.
Maybe this was the world's first Humic Compost Club, it was founded in 1941.
For its first 30 years it remained a compost society,
so I think the claim for organic primacy for NZ is equivocal at best,
and is rather an interesting case of of anachro-morpism,
that is, reframing some past activity into some present-day terminology.
Now let's get back across the Tasman.

19

There are multiple accounts of the development of Organic Agriculture in Australia.
These accounts place the beginning of organics in Australia "in the 1980s".
Soil Association of South Australia members know that such accounts are mistaken by a decade.
Now I'm going to put to you some evidence that these accounts are mistaken by four decades.



20

Here is an Australian publication from 1946.
The "Organic Farming Digest" was first published in April 1946.
To put that in context,
The Soil Association in the UK wasn't founded until seven months later.

Australia

5 October 1944

The Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society

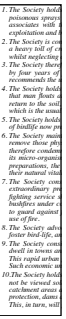
(WWII 1 Sept 1939 – 15 Aug 1945)

21

It gets more interesting.
The "Organic Farming Digest" is a journal of
The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society and
the society was founded in October 1944.
(By way of reference that is more than 2 years before the UK's Soil Association was founded).

"Purpose and Objectives"

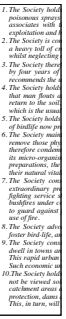
1. The Society holds that overstocking, overcropping, monoculture and the excessive use of chemical fertilisers, poisonous sprays and dusts have resulted in erosion and serious loss of soil fertility in Australia ... and the pollution of rivers and streams.



22

The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society
produced a 10 point statement of purposes & objectives.
I believe that this is the world's first organic farming association and
here is the world's first institutional statement of organic purposes & principles.

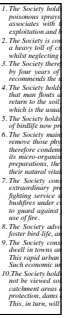
2. The Society is convinced that by upsetting the balance of Nature ... disease will continue to take a heavy toll of crops, animals and man, despite palliation by medicaments, which attempt to cope with effects whilst neglecting causes.



23

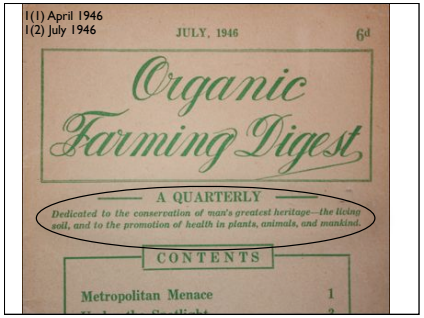
The Australian Farming & Gardening Society
warned about upsetting the balance of nature, and
asserted that dealing with effects rather than causes,
was a wrong approach.

3. The Society therefore advocates organic methods of agriculture ... mixed farming in place of monoculture. For garden cultivation, the Society recommends the use of compost, prepared in accordance with its directions.



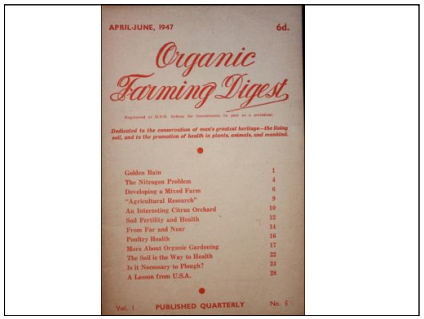
24

The Australian Farming & Gardening Society
very specifically advocated organic methods of agriculture
and that is reflected in their choice of name and in
their statement of principles.



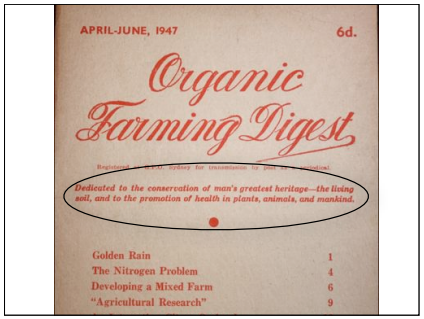
The masthead of the Organic Farming Digest
identified that it was dedicated to conservation,
to soil as our greatest heritage
to soil as a living entity,
and to the promotion of health, of plants, animals and humans.

25



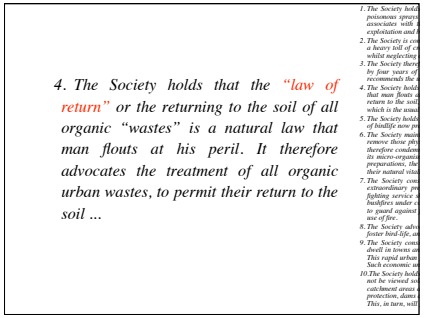
Changing the cover from green to red
was the first of a series of changes
that the Australian Farming & Gardening Society made as they
tinkered with their journal.

26



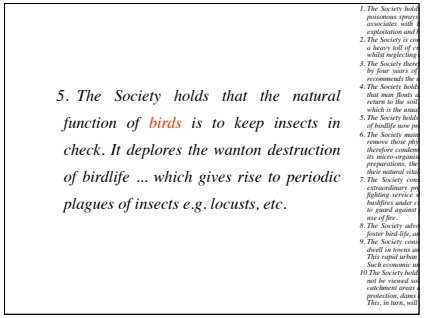
The core message of the journal however never changed.

27


4. *The Society holds that the "law of return" or the returning to the soil of all organic "wastes" is a natural law that man flouts at his peril. It therefore advocates the treatment of all organic urban wastes, to permit their return to the soil ...*

The Australian Farming & Gardening Society
advocated the law of return,
and that the soil was not something to be mined

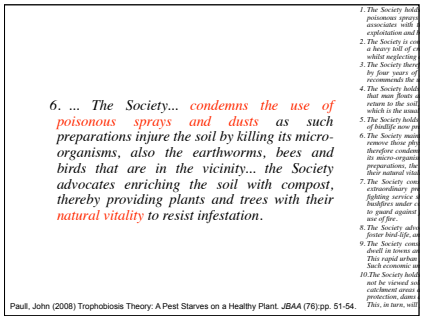
28



5. *The Society holds that the natural function of birds is to keep insects in check. It deplores the wanton destruction of birdlife ... which gives rise to periodic plagues of insects e.g. locusts, etc.*

29

The Australian Farming & Gardening Society
also advocated the valuing and protecting of birds;
this is still a cause of conflict between farmers and conservationists.

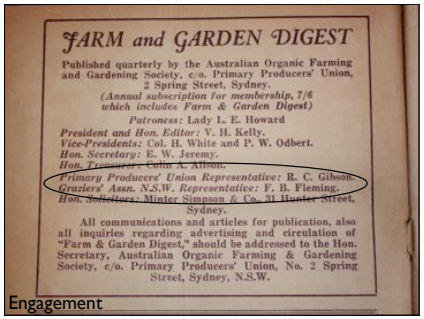


6. ... *The Society... condemns the use of poisonous sprays and dusts as such preparations injure the soil by killing its micro-organisms, also the earthworms, bees and birds that are in the vicinity... the Society advocates enriching the soil with compost, thereby providing plants and trees with their natural vitality to resist infestation.*

Paull, John (2008) Trophobiosis Theory: A Pest Starves on a Healthy Plant. *JBAA* (76):pp. 51-54.

30

The Australian Farming & Gardening Society
condemned the use of poisons,
pointing out that they damage the soil, micro-organisms, bees & birds.
This was 20 years before Rachel Carson and
40 years before Francis Chaboussou's Trophobiosis Theory.



FARM and GARDEN DIGEST

Published quarterly by the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society, c/o. Primary Producers' Union, 2 Spring Street, Sydney.
(Annual subscription for membership, 7/6 which includes Farm & Garden Digest)

Patroness: Lady L. E. Howard
President and Hon. Editor: V. H. Kelly.
Vice-Presidents: Col. H. White and P. W. Odbert.
Hon. Secretary: E. W. Jeremy.
Hon. Treasurer: Colin A. Allson.
Primary Producers' Union Representative: R. C. Gibson.
Graziers' Assn. N.S.W. Representative: F. B. Fleming.
Hon. Solicitors: Minter Simpson & Co., 31 Hunter Street, Sydney.

All communications and articles for publication, also all inquiries regarding advertising and circulation of "Farm & Garden Digest," should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary, Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society, c/o. Primary Producers' Union, No. 2 Spring Street, Sydney, N.S.W.

Engagement

31

As you see here, the Australian Farming & Gardening Society
was engaged with mainstream agriculture including
the Primary Producers Union and
The Graziers Association.

Society, c/o. Primary Producers' Union, No. 2 Spring Street, Sydney, N.S.W.

TO OUR MEMBERS . . .

IMPORTANT—ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society will be held in the Board Room of the Primary Producers' Union, 2 Spring Street, Sydney, at 7.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 7th May, 1952.

Please make an effort to be present. Country members especially welcomed.

TO INVESTORS

AGM

32

Annual General Meetings of the Australian Farming & Gardening Society
were held in the Board Room of
the Primary Producers Union.

Title evolution

33

In an effort to broaden the appeal of the journal
the “Organic Farming Digest” was rebadged as the “Farm & Garden Digest”.
The colour of the cover was changed to brown,
a rural graphic was added,
and the price doubled.

Conservation

34

With the change of name,
the dedication remained unchanged,

35

and the “Organic Farming Digest”
retained a place as an element of the cover.

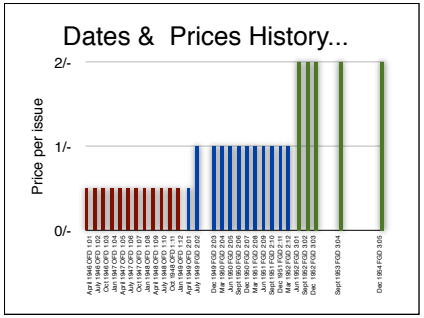
Who’s Who...

Office	1946 (1:1)	1952 (3:2)
Patron	Sir Albert Howard	Lady L E Howard
President	K H Cox	G M Kilby
Treasurer	H W Atkinson	Colin A Alison
Editor	V H Kelly	*nil*; (C. Chapman, 3:3)
Secretary	E W Jeremy	E W Jeremy
Solicitor	Minter Simpson & Co.	Minter Simpson & Co.
Vice Presidents	*nil*	Col H White & P W Odbert
Primary Producers Union Representative	*nil*	R C Gibson
Graziers Association NSW Representative	*nil*	F B Fleming

ice bearers

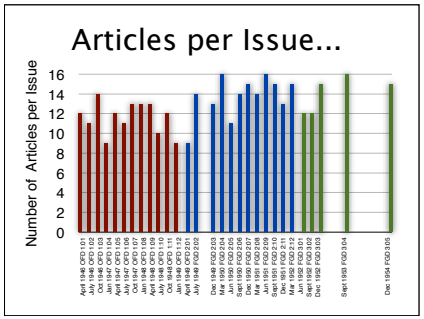
36

The patron at the beginning was Albert Howard (in the UK),
and after he died that role was taken up by Lady Louise Howard.
All other office bearers changed over the years,
except for the Secretary, E W Jeremy.



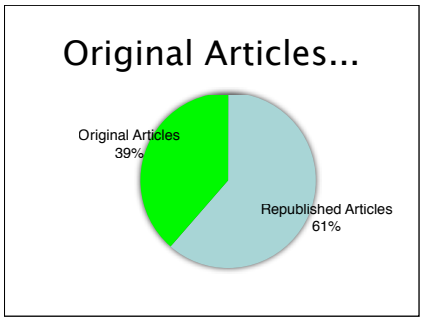
37

The journal was published quarterly and on schedule for the first seven years.
Then only a single issue appeared in 1953,
and the final issue appeared in December 1954.
Over time the price doubled from 6 pence to 1/-,
and again from 1/- to 2/-.



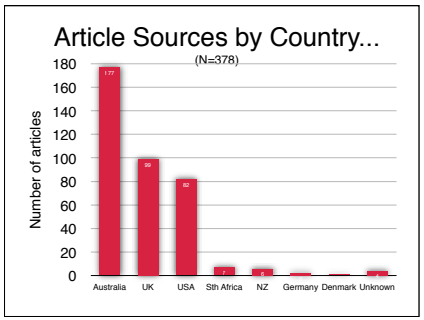
38

The number of articles per issue varied from 9 to 16 articles.
There were 12 issues in Volume 1 (shown in brown on the graph),
12 issues in Volume 2 (shown in blue here),
and there were 5 issues in Volume 3 (shown here in green).



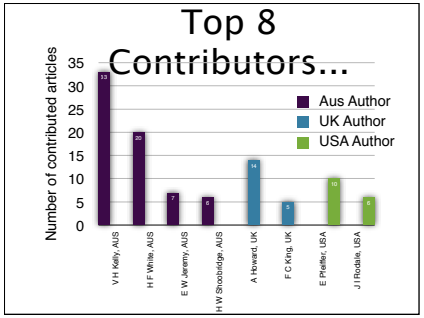
39

39% of articles were original to the journal.
61% were republished from elsewhere.



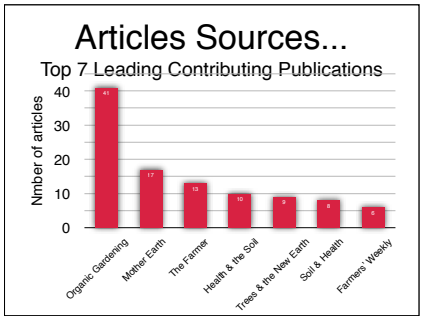
40

Contributors came from seven countries,
with Australia in the lead,
UK in second place, and
USA in third place.



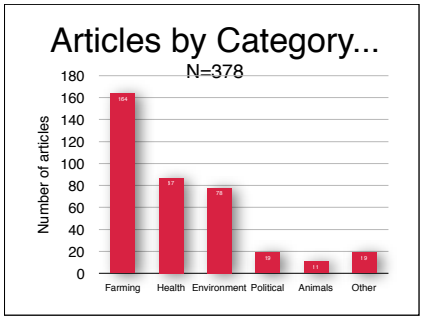
41

The two lead contributors were Australians, V H Kelly & Colonel H F White.
The leading UK contributor was Albert Howard.
The leading US contributor was Ehrenfried Pfeiffer,
Pfeiffer was the major proponent, in the English speaking world,
of Biodynamic Agriculture at the time.



42

Reprinted articles in the journal were sourced broadly,
mostly from like-minded periodicals in the UK and the US.



43

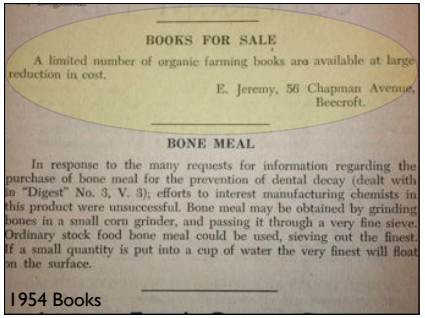
A great many articles were about practical farming issues.
Health & Environment were both prominent article topics.

Farm & Garden
DIGEST
VOL. 3. No. 5 DECEMBER 1954 QUARTER
FAREWELL
This is the final issue of "Farm & Garden Digest".
Insufficient financial support has been forthcoming to continue its publication which requires £800 per annum.
Although the termination of this magazine will be regretted by

1954 Farewell

44

The last issue of the Australian Farming & Gardening Society's journal
was December 1954.
The reason cited was lack of financial support.
The Society had at this stage promoted and publicised organic farming in Australia for a decade.



BOOKS FOR SALE

A limited number of organic farming books are available at large reduction in cost.

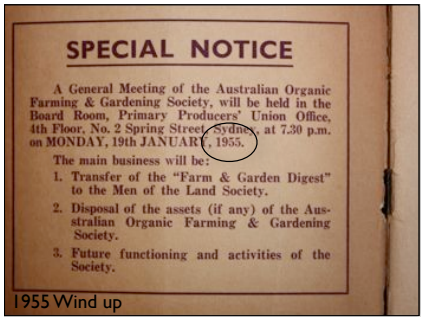
E. Jeremy, 56 Chapman Avenue, Beecroft.

BONE MEAL

In response to the many requests for information regarding the purchase of bone meal for the prevention of dental decay (dealt with in "Digest" No. 3, V. 3); efforts to interest manufacturing chemists in this product were unsuccessful. Bone meal may be obtained by grinding bones in a small corn grinder, and passing it through a very fine sieve. Ordinary stock food bone meal could be used, sieving out the finest. If a small quantity is put into a cup of water the very finest will float on the surface.

1954 Books

45



SPECIAL NOTICE

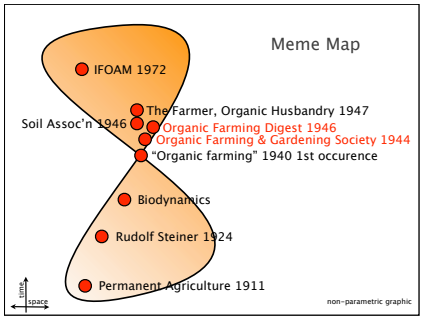
A General Meeting of the Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society, will be held in the Board Room, Primary Producers' Union Office, 4th Floor, No. 2 Spring Street, Sydney, at 7.30 p.m. on MONDAY, 19th JANUARY, 1955.

The main business will be:

1. Transfer of the "Farm & Garden Digest" to the Men of the Land Society.
2. Disposal of the assets (if any) of the Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society.
3. Future functioning and activities of the Society.

1955 Wind up

46



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The Australian Farming and Gardening Society

- 1st "organic farming" society in the world
- 1st institutional statement of "organic" principles
- 1st "organic" periodical by an association

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The secretary of the Australian Farming & Gardening Society
advertised organic books for sale,
"at large reduction in cost",
but unfortunately no list of titles or prices appeared in that final edition.

The wind up meeting for the Australian Farming & Gardening Society
was advertised for the 19th January 1955
including the disposal of assets (if any).

A Meme Map is a way I have developed of visually representing a set of meme events.
Here I have plotted some key organic events, including - in red -
the Organic Farming & Gardening Society & the "Organic Farming Digest".
I believe some primacy claims can be made for the Australian society & its journal.

The Australian Farming & Gardening Society (1944-1955)
has left us this legacy:
it seems it was the first "organic farming" society in the world;
it generated the first institutional statement of "organic" principles; and
it published the first "organic" periodical by an association.

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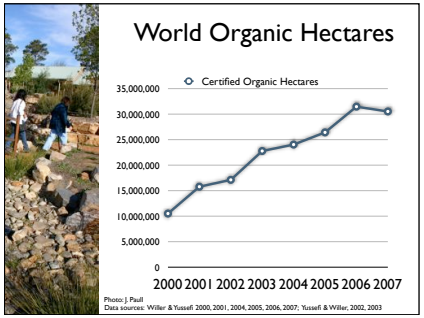
Now let's consider the future, as your SASA librarian Sandra Grimes has challenged.
IFOAM has the goal of the worldwide adoption of organic agriculture.
This worldwide adoption of organic agriculture, let's call it Otopia, will it happen?
how will it happen?
and when will it happen?



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This is a plot of the growth of worldwide organic hectares
over the past 7 years.
The IFOAM reports have presented statistics annually starting from the year 2000.
They give an annual cross-sectional snapshot of Organics.
I have done some mining of that and other data.

COUNTRY	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Weighted Total
China	2	0	1	3	7
Liechtenstein	2	0	0	2	6
Denmark	1	1	0	2	5
Germany	1	1	0	2	5
Latvia	1	1	0	2	5
Mexico	1	1	0	2	5
Switzerland	1	0	2	3	5
USA	0	2	0	2	4
Australia	1	0	0	1	3
Mali	1	0	0	1	3
Romania	1	0	0	1	3
Austria	0	1	1	2	3
Italy	0	1	1	2	3
Argentina	0	1	0	1	2
Fiji	0	1	0	1	2
Kenya	0	1	0	1	2
Madagascar	0	1	0	1	2
Brazil	0	0	1	1	1
Bolivia	0	0	1	1	1
India	0	0	1	1	1
Niger	0	0	1	1	1
Slovenia	0	0	1	1	1
Uganda	0	0	1	1	1
Zambia	0	0	1	1	1
TOTALS	12	12	12	36	72

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I have looked at organic leadership using an Olympics-type model, based on 12 separate measures of organic leadership, and awarded "medals" for first, second, and third places.
That process identified 24 leaders, i.e. 24 countries that scored at least one medal. China is the outright winner, with two Gold & one Bronze medal. Liechtenstein is the number two place-getter with two Gold medals. There is a broad geographic spread of organic leadership. Australia ranks ninth.
All continents are represented. (EU = 9; Africa = 6; Asia = 2; Americas = 5; Oceania =2). There is no representation from the Middle East.

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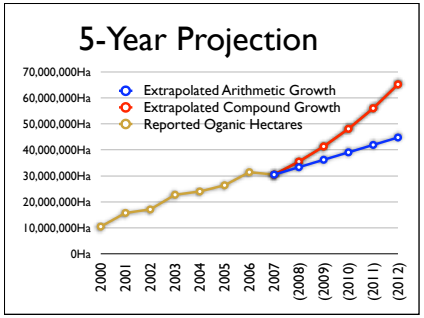
Here is how organic produce is promoted in a Shanghai supermarket



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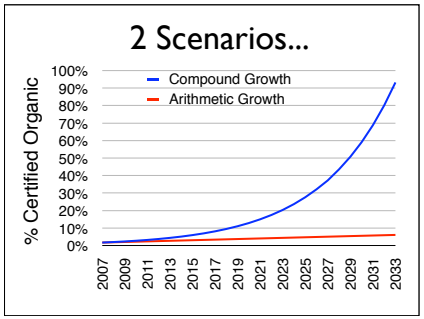
As we see here, there is a data set of global organic hectares from 2000 to 2007.
If the the increase is taken to be an arithmetic rate of increase,
then the rate of increase is 27.1% pa relative to the year 2000.
Alternatively, if the increase is taken to be a geometric rate of increase, i.e. a compounding increase, then the rate of increase is 16.4% pa.
At that rate of increase, the area will double every 4.4 years
In this graph you see I have extrapolated for the next 5 years assuming two growth styles.



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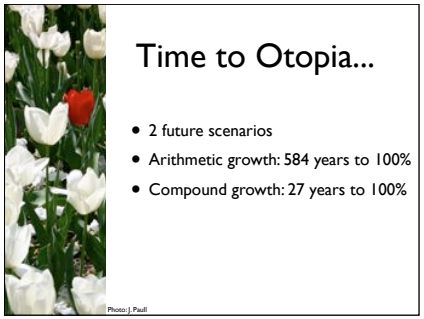
Now, let's take a longer view than five years out.
Here are two future organic scenarios:
currently organic represents 1.8% of agricultural land worldwide,
IF the current rate of increase persists,
and IF we take the arithmetic increase as the appropriate measure,
that is a 27.1% increase pa relative to the 2000 level, we will get to 100% organic in about 584 years;
IF however growth is compounding, and continues at 16.4% pa, that means a doubling every 4.4 years,
we will get to 100% organic in 27 years.



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So when might we reach a global state of Otopia?
If we assume arithmetic growth: it will take 584 years to reach 100% organic agriculture.
If we assume compound growth: it will take 27 years to reach 100% organic agriculture.

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Thank you.
I'm sure you have some questions.

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