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A history of the organic agriculture¹ movement in Australia

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Introduction

History is of necessity incomplete – and this history of organic agriculture in Australia is no exception. Nevertheless, this account begins in the 1920s which is six decades before other accounts which have been styled as the ‘History’ of ‘Organic Farming in Australia’ and which begin their accounts ‘in the early 1980s’ (e.g., Wynen, 2007, p. 119), and it starts two decades before other researched accounts which begin in the 1940s (e.g., Jones 2010; Paull 2008, 2009).

Australia has some ‘bragging rights’ in the world of organic agriculture. The area of certified organic agriculture in Australia is 12,001,724 hectares which far exceeds that of any other country and accounts for 32 per cent of the world total (Willer, Lernoud and Kilcher, 2013). Australia was the home of the first ‘organic farming’ association and produced the first ‘organic’ farming periodical by an organic association, and produced the first statement of organic farming principles (Paull 2008).

Nevertheless, as a general rule, the organic agriculture movement in Australia has been a ‘fast follower’ of ideas that originated elsewhere and

¹ Thank you for the access to manuscript material and records held at the Archives of the Goetheanum (Archiv am Goetheanum), Dornach, Switzerland, the archives of the Soil Association, Bristol, UK, the Archives Office of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia, and the archives of the Soil Association of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia, and thank you to the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, the University of Oxford, for facilitating this research.

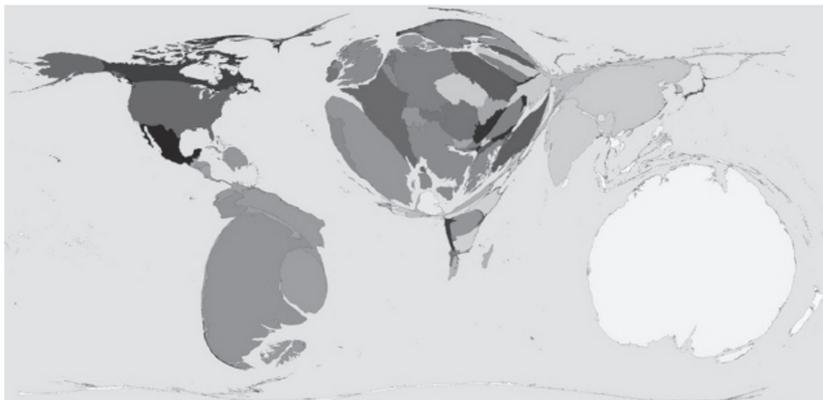
that have rapidly diffused internationally. The present account covers ten decades of the development of organics in Australia and traces the movement from its early infrastructure of resistance to the later infrastructure of capitalism – from meetings, newsletters, festivals and proselytisation, through to standards, labelling, certification, monetisation, and corporatisation.

Australia's involvement in the organic movement can conveniently be considered as four 'waves' of activity. In the present account, the First Wave (1920s and 1930s) is anchored by Rudolf Steiner's 1924 call at Koberwitz (now Kobierzyce, Poland) for a differentiated agriculture. This account reveals that Australian anthroposophists responded to this call by joining Steiner's Agricultural Experimental Circle (AEC) which was coordinated from Dornach, Switzerland. This First Wave culminated with the 'coming out' of biodynamic agriculture in 1938 – internationally with the publication of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*, and in Australia with Bob Williams presenting the first public lecture on biodynamics at the home of Walter Burley and Marion Mahoney Griffin.

The Second Wave of organic agriculture in Australia (1940s and 1950s) is anchored by the coining of the term 'organic farming' in 1940, in England. This Second Wave witnessed the founding of the first associations in Australia dedicated to the advocacy of organics. It begins with the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) founded in 1944 in Sydney, and it culminates with the year-long tour of Australia in 1959 by Eve Balfour, the founder of the UK's Soil Association.

The Third Wave (1960s and 1970s) is anchored by the publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* in 1962 which breathed new life into the organics movement worldwide. A plethora of new associations and periodicals for the promotion, advocacy and exploration of organics appeared in the two decades that followed Carson. There was the publication of Australia's first popular and widely distributed book devoted to organics, and there were fledgling moves to develop organic standards, labelling and certification.

Figure 3.1: World map of organic agriculture with countries proportioned according to the tally of certified organic agriculture hectares



Source: Paull and Hennig, 2013.

The Fourth Wave (1980s to present) is anchored by the Chernobyl nuclear accident in Ukraine on 26 April 1986. Radioactive fallout spread across large swathes of Europe, and beyond, and this dramatically refocused the world's attention on the safety of its food supply. This Fourth Wave of the organics movement witnesses the maturing of organics thinking in Australia and the development of the apparatus of organics governance. The first organics certifiers were established along with the establishment of standards, logos, labeling and product differentiation. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) brought the fifteenth Organic Congress to Adelaide in 2005, Australia's first academic journal devoted to organic agriculture was established in 2006, and a national organic standard was implemented in 2009. In this Fourth Wave organics advocacy has become monetised and corporatised and Australia now leads the world with its tally of certified organic agricultural hectares (Figure 3.1).

First Wave – Biodynamic pioneers – Anthroposophists – 1920s and 1930s

The Austrian philosopher and mystic, Rudolf Steiner, presented eight lectures on agriculture in the village of Koberwitz (now Kobierzyce, Poland) in June 1924 to 111 delegates from Germany (N=61), Poland (N=30), Austria (N=9), Switzerland (N=7), France (N=2), and Sweden (N=2) (Paull, 2011a). Farmers were concerned about changes wrought by the proliferation of synthetic fertilisers. Steiner's call was for a differentiated agriculture that treats the 'farm as an organism'. The Agricultural Experimental Circle (AEC) was established at the Agriculture Course at Koberwitz to put Steiner's 'hints' to the test and to develop the ideas into a form suitable for publication. This injunction culminated in the publication of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* in 1938 in English, German, Dutch, French, and Italian (Paull 2011e).

In the interwar period about 800 individuals from around the world joined the Agricultural Experimental Circle (AEC) of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners of the General Anthroposophical Society, which reported centrally to the Natural Science Section of the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland. There were at least eleven Australian members of the AEC (Table 3.1).

The first Australian to join the AEC was Ernesto Genoni of Dalmore, Victoria, 70 km south east of Melbourne, about half way between Melbourne and Phillip Island. When Genoni enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) on 25 January 1916 at Blackboy Hill, Western Australia, he declared that he was born in Tirano, Italy in October 1885, and he gave his age as 30 years, his nationality as Italian, his religion as Theosophy, and his next of kin as his brother Emil Genoni of Broome Hill, Western Australia. As a private in the 16th Infantry battalion of the Australian Army he embarked from Fremantle on 17 April 1916. He was discharged from the AIF "in consequence of joining the Italian

Army 18/10/16” (AIF, 1916). He joined the Anthroposophy Society in Milan, Italy, during Steiner’s lifetime, on 27 September 1920, with his membership number as #7768. He returned to Australia after the war, and the Goetheanum Secretariat at the Goetheanum recorded his new address initially as ‘Farm Dalmore, Gippsland, Victoria’ and then later addresses at Dandenong (Vic), Katanning (WA), and Noble Park (Vic). Genoni joined the AEC receiving #165 of the Agriculture Course, in German, about twelve months before the first English translation arrived in Australia. Genoni’s German edition was a numbered printed publication whereas the English edition of the Agriculture Course was issued in typescript up until 1938.

Table 3.1: Australian members of the Agricultural Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners (sorted in chronological order of sign on).

| Number | Member | Date | Address | Experiment location |
|--------|--|-------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 165 | Ernesto Genoni | c. Aug 1928 | Farm Dalmore, Gippsland, Vic | n/a |
| E14 | Crawford McDowell | 23/7/1929 | Sydney, NSW | Sydney, NSW |
| E17 | (signed by Ernesto Genoni for) Emilio Genoni | 15/10/1930 | Broome Hill, WA | Etna’, Broome Hill, WA |
| E24 | Charles Burford | 7/5/1931 | Sydney, NSW | ‘near Sydney, NSW’ |
| E32 | Kenneth Milroy Temple | 12/11/1931 | Willoughby (Sydney), NSW | Sydney, NSW |
| E50 | Ruby A Macpherson | 26/3/1935 | Mt Tenandra, Gulargambone, NSW | Mt Tenandra, Gulargambone, NSW |
| E55 | Ruth Beale | 11/1/1936 | Annegrove, Mount Colah via Hornsby (Sydney), NSW | Mount Colah. NSW |
| E52 | Ileen Macpherson | 26/1/1936 | Dandenong, Vic | Dandenong, Vic |
| E66 | Robert Williams | 1/7/1937 | Willoughby (Sydney), NSW | Willoughby (Sydney), NSW |

| Number* | Member | Date | Address | Experiment location |
|---------|---------------------|-----------|---|-----------------------------|
| E3 | Lucy C Badham | 7/11/1938 | Gordon (Sydney) NSW | |
| E4 | Eric M Nicholls | 9/2/1939 | ydney, NSW | Castlecrag (Sydney), NSW |
| E25 | Frank de Vere Kelly | 7/4/1939 | c/- Robert Williams, Willoughby, NSW | |

*Typescript copies of the Agriculture Course were numbered, they were issued in approximately numerical order, however copies returned to the Natural Science Section of the Goetheanum were occasionally reissued, hence the scrambled sequence reported here.

Sources: original manuscripts signed by the members and held in the Archives of the Goetheanum, Dornach.

Crawford McDowell of Sydney was the first Australian anthroposophist to receive the Agriculture Course in English. He joined the AEC on 23 July 1929, and the AEC membership was boosted to a dozen over the course of the following decade. The twelve AEC members were from three states: NSW (N=9), Victoria (N=2), and Western Australia (N=1). They each acknowledged receipt of a numbered copy of the Agriculture Course: “I accept it on loan for my own personal use in carrying out the experiments undertaken by <...name...> within the Agricultural Experimental Circle of the Anthroposophical Society, at the experimental station at <...place...>”. They each undertook to maintain confidentiality: “I hereby undertake to preserve the strictest secrecy in all quarters as to the content of the aforesaid Lecture course. I will conduct the experiments in such a way as to exclude all possibility of imitation; and I undertake to lay the same obligations of silence on any of my fellow workers” (Paull 2011e, p. 25).

The Agricultural Experimental Circle was active in Australia for more than a decade (1928 -1939) with most members clustered in the northern suburbs of Sydney (in Castlecrag, Willoughby, Gordon and Mount Colah). At least five of the Australian AEC members, Ruth Beale, Lucy Badham, Robert (Bob) Williams, Eric Nicholls (architect and business

partner of Walter Burley Griffin) and Frank Kelly (apiarist), were active members of the Castlecrag community of anthroposophists (Spathopoulos, 2007).

Biodynamic agriculture had its 'coming out' in 1938 with the publication of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* which was released internationally and appeared in at least five languages: English, German, Dutch, French, and Italian (Paull 2011c). Steiner had said from the outset that this agriculture was for all farmers, but he imposed the injunction to put his 'hints' to the test and to then present this agriculture into a form suitable for publication (Steiner 1924b, 1924c).

Coinciding with the release of Pfeiffer's book, Bob Williams presented the first public presentation of biodynamics in Australia, on 26 June 1938, at the house of Walter Burley and Marion Mahoney Griffin at Castlecrag (Williams c. 1984). This public lecture marks the beginning of public advocacy in Australia for an agriculture differentiated from chemical agriculture.

The Griffins were enthusiastic anthroposophists. Marion Griffin provided the venue for Williams' lecture and later stated that: "Australia is rapidly being awakened to the fact that there is something radically wrong with the present methods. Scarcely a week passes without a column or half-column article about the serious condition of the soil, about blights of the products and the diseases of the animals fed from the large quantity production methods attained by chemical fertilizers and other materialistic scientific methods some of which are denuding the districts, some creating growing deserts whose dry sands are sweeping on, constantly increasing the desert area, some of which are reducing the fertility of the soil till it is becoming a pasty concrete-like substance, its fertility lost. It is a pity" (Griffin 1949, III p. 337).

In the 1930s, Anthroposophy Festivals were regular events at Castlecrag occurring four times a year: 'Easter, St John's Tide, Michaelmas and Christmas' (Spathopoulos, 2007, p.320). Festivals comprised plays (in German and English), eurhythmy performances and lectures. Marion

Griffin ‘spoke on many topics’ (Spathopoulos 2007, p.320). Recalling those times, Spathopoulos recalls:

I remember young Bob Williams talking there, at one of the festivals, on organic farming and the wisdom of nature. He spoke of composting and the soil, of the phases of the moon and seasonal rhythms, and of interactions between the cosmos and the earth. He and his wife [Louise] later bought a couple of acres near the western boundary of Castle Cove, where they set up a small-scale experimental farm using the Steiner methods ... During the Second World War, Mrs Williams worked full-time on the farm as she raised their three children, while her husband returned to work there at weekends. They studied botany, especially grasses and medicinal herbs, and established a laboratory for developing biodynamic preparations for distribution in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Bob was sometimes invited to advise farmers on the best pastures to grow and gave lectures on related anthroposophical subjects (Spathopoulos 2007, p. 324).

These early anthroposophists set a ball rolling that rolls to this day. The biodynamic way of doing organics has maintained its identity and distinctiveness and has been incorporated into each of the organics standards up to and including the Australian Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Products, 6000-2009 (SA, 2009) (Table 3.2).

Second Wave – Organics pioneers – 1940s and 1950s

The Second Wave of organics in Australia is predicated on a sequence of developments in Europe (Table 3.2). Lord Northbourne, a farmer in Kent and an Oxford University agriculturalist, was impressed with Ehrenfried Pfeiffer’s knowledge. Pfeiffer’s book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* had appeared in 1938. Northbourne travelled to Switzerland to invite him to present Britain’s first biodynamic conference. Pfeiffer accepted the invitation with the result that the Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Biodynamic Farming was held at Northbourne’s estate in Kent in the first week of July 1939. One of Pfeiffer’s

Table 3.2: Milestones of the development of organic agriculture in Australia (augmented with some contextual international events).

First Wave – Anthroposophists – 1920s and 1930s

| Date | Event |
|----------------|---|
| 7-16 June 1924 | Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) delivers the Agriculture Course at Koberwitz (now Kobierzyce, Poland) and founds the Agricultural Experimental Circle (AEC). |
| 28 May 1926 | Steiner's Agriculture Course published (in German) for members of the Agricultural Experimental Circle. |
| August 1928 | Ernesto Genoni (1885-1975) first Australian to join the Agricultural Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners. |
| August 1928 | Rudolf Steiner's Agriculture Course is released in typescript in English translation and made available to members of the Agricultural Experimental Circle. |
| 1929-1939 | Eleven more Australian anthroposophists join the Agricultural Experimental Circle and receive the English translation of the Agriculture Course. |
| 1938 | Ehrenfried Pfeiffer (1899-1961) publishes Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening, with editions in English, German, French, Italian and Dutch. |
| 26 June 1938 | Robert (Bob) Williams (1907-1984) presented the first public lecture in Australia on biodynamics at the house of Walter Burley and Marion Mahoney Griffin at Castlecrag (Sydney). |

Second Wave – Organics Pioneers – 1940s and 1950s

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| May 1940 | Lord Northbourne (1896-1982) published Look to the Land and coined the term 'organic farming'. |
| 4 October 1944 | Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) was founded. The association was based in Sydney, New South Wales (1944-1955). |
| April 1946 | First issue of Organic Farming Digest published by AOFGS 29 issues through to December 1954. |
| October 1945 | Victorian Compost Society founded (1945 - ≥1965). |
| 30 August 1946 | The Living Soil Association of Tasmania (LSAT) founded (1946-1960). |
| March 1952 | AOFGS publishes 10 principles of organic agriculture. |
| 5 July 1956 | Organic Farming and Gardening Society (Aust.) founded. |
| 1/11/1958- 1/11/1959 | Eve Balfour (1899-1990), founder of the UK Soil Association, trip to Australia advocating organics. |

Third Wave – Disseminators – 1960s and 1970s

| Date | Event |
|------------------|--|
| 1962 | Rachel Carson's book <i>Silent Spring</i> published |
| 1965 | Soil Association (South Australia Branch), later Soil Association of South Australia (SASA) (1975-2009), now OFA (SA) (Sept. 2009) |
| 14 December 1967 | Bio-Dynamic Research Institute registered (Alex Podolinsky, Powelltown, Vic.) |
| 1970 | Henry Doubleday Research Association of Australia Inc. (Sydney) founded |
| 1972 | Organic Gardening and Farming Society of Tasmania Inc. (OGFST) (1972-2009) |
| ≤ October 1972 | Organic Food Movement founded in Adelaide, SA (incorporated 9/6/1975) |
| 5 November 1972 | International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) founded |
| 1975 | Organic Gardening by Audrey Windram, first commercially published book in Australia dedicated to organics; royalties to the Organic Food Movement. |
| 1976 | Organic Farmer and Gardener periodical launched by OGFST and achieves national distribution (1976-1980) |
| October 1976 | Organic Growers' Association of Western Australia (OGAWA) (now Organic Association of Western Australia) |
| 1977 | Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc. (COGS) founded |
| July 1978 | Diggers Club, now 'Australia's largest garden club' |

Fourth Wave – Certifiers – 1980s onwards

| | |
|------------------|---|
| 26 April 1986 | Chernobyl nuclear accident |
| 19 May 1987 | National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia Ltd (NASAA) registered |
| 22 February 1988 | Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) registered (deregistered 26 March 2013) (now Australian Organic) |
| May 1991 | Acres Australia founded, 'The national newspaper of sustainable agriculture' |
| 1992 | The National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce implemented as the Australian Export Standard by AQIS (Australian Quarantine Inspection Service) for products labeled organic or bio-dynamic. |
| 1998 | Organic Federation of Australia (OFA) founded |

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| 2000 | Australia reports more certified organic agricultural hectares than any other country in the first published global tally of organic agricultural hectares |
| 20-27 September 2005 | The 15th Organic World Congress of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), Adelaide, SA |
| June 2006 | Journal of Organic Systems, first issue |
| 13 September 2009 | All bread-making flour in Australia to have folic acid added from this date; organic flour is exempted. |
| 9 October 2009 | Australian Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Products, 6000-2009 a voluntary standard released by Standards Australia. |
| May 2010 | BFA's Organic School Gardens Program founded |
| 4 October 2011 | Australia's Andre Leu, chair of the OFA, is elected President of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) at the General Assembly, Korea |

Source: The Author, 2013.

lectures was ‘The Farm as a Biological Organism’ (Paull 2011b). Just months later the world was at war – and that left nothing untouched, including the British taste for Germanic ideas.

Northbourne published *Look to the Land* in May 1940. In the book he adopts Steiner’s and Pfeiffer’s concept of ‘the farm is an organism’ and from there coins the term ‘organic farming’. He lays the grounds for a contest of ‘organic versus chemical farming’. Northbourne’s manifesto of organic farming provided a framing with which to consider food and agriculture, and fresh terminology with which to discuss it.

The Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) was founded in 1944 in Sydney. It was the world’s first association to style itself as an ‘organic’ association (and, for example, it predated the UK’s Soil Association by two years). The AOFGS was frustrated by wartime shortages of paper and the prevailing restrictions stymied their plans for immediately launching a periodical. Their quarterly periodical, the *Organic Farming Digest*, finally appeared in April 1946 as wartime paper restrictions were eased. The first edition included a Foreword by the Labor Premier of New South Wales, William McKell, who stated that “Ex-

plotation of their land and its produce has utterly destroyed civilizations in the past and if the present civilisation is to avoid its own destruction in the future, then society must give heed to maintaining the fertility and productivity of the soil ... I can give an assurance that this important aspect of our national welfare will never be neglected” (1946, pp.1-2); McKell resigned the following year.

The Organic Farming Digest (OFD) was published for just shy of a decade. The first issue set the style for all subsequent issues in which there was a mixture of articles by Australian, British, American, and occasionally other authors. Over its publication history the Digest included articles sourced from Australia (N=177), UK (N=99), USA (N=82), South Africa (N=7), New Zealand (N=6), Germany (N=2), and Denmark (N=1) (Paull, 2008). The AOFGS published the world’s first set of principles of organic agriculture in 1952 – these ten principles predate IFOAM’s set of principles of organic agriculture by more than half a century (AOFGS principles are reprinted in Paull 2008).

It is uncertain from whence the AOFGS took up the term ‘organic farming’, and there are two potential candidates. Northbourne had published *Look to the Land* in 1940 in which he coined the term ‘organic farming’; there were issues by Dent and Basis Books and both appear to have been distributed in Australia. In the USA, publishing entrepreneur Jerome Rodale promptly adopted Northbourne’s terminology and published *Organic Farming and Gardening* in 1942. Whether the AOFGS took up the term ‘organic’ from Northbourne directly or via Rodale’s periodical is undetermined, however one or both of these potential sources are the primary candidates, given the temporal proximity of the coinage of the term in 1940 to the founding of the AOFGS in 1944. The original name of Rodale’s periodical is nested in the AOFGS name, and an article by Rodale (1946) appeared in the first issue of the OFD, however Rodale was, in that first Digest, described as the editor of *Organic Gardening*. What is clear is that there was an active interchange of ideas within the Anglophone world at the time.

In the final two years of the Digest publication was erratic with just a single issue in each of the years of 1953 and 1954. As post-war costs rose, the cover price had soared from 6d for the first issue, later to 1/-, and then to 2/- for the 29th and final issue. The demise of the AOFGS was blamed on lack of funds – the AOFGS had failed to establish a viable financial footing for itself. Nevertheless the Executive Officers declared that “The Society has always operated under a financial handicap, and for this reason the Digest fell short in some respects. However the principles of organic farming have been sufficiently publicised for the work to continue, and the supporters of the organic movement can best promote it by their own example of wise land use” (1954, p. 1). They reported with some justified satisfaction that: “Although the termination of this magazine will be regretted by many, there is solace in the fact that it has performed a service in publicising organic farming principles in Australia” (1954, p. 1). The AOFGS found what some others have since then similarly experienced: “strange as it may seem today, no support was given to the Society by horticultural societies” (1954, p.1).

The Living Soil Association of Tasmania (LSAT) was founded at a public meeting in Hobart in August 1946. The UK’s Soil Association had been founded in May of that year and the LSAT was the first foreign society to affiliate with it. The president of the LSAT, Henry Shoobridge (1874-1963), actively recruited members from the outset. Shoobridge a long-established and successful hops grower from Bushy Park, an hour’s drive up the Derwent River from Hobart. Shoobridge was well connected and active in civil society. He was a lay preacher for the Methodist Church and a member of the Masonic Lodge. The Secretary of the LSAT wrote that “Our President, Mr. H.W. Shoobridge who is one of the Founders of the Soil Association in England is spending considerable time in personally interviewing interested persons” with the objective of recruiting members (Bayles 1946a, p.1). In another letter Bayles (1946d) wrote that “our President (Mr. H.W. Shoobridge of □ Bushy Park□) is one of the Founders of The Soil Association in England and is keen in

widening the interest of interested people in Tasmania”. A member was urged to “keep in touch with this office regarding any experiments in organic farming you may be undertaking on your property” (Bayles 1947c).

The LSAT adopted the AOFGS’s Organic Farming Digest as its own official publication for members, thus relieving itself of the onus of publishing its own periodical. Membership peaked at 274 individuals (in 1952) (Paull 2009). The LSAT recruited from the outset nine farming associations as members of the LSAT Council.

In contrast to the experience of the AOFGS which failed to attract the support of agricultural societies, the corporate members of the LSAT Council were a veritable who’s who of the Tasmanian agricultural landscape. The LSAT Council listed as members: the Tasmanian Farmers Stockowners and Orchardists Association, the State Fruit Board, Stone and Berry Fruits Board, the Royal Agricultural Society of Tasmania, the Horticultural Society of Tasmania, the Upper Derwent Farm Home and Garden Society, and the Tasmanian Farmers Federation. Shoobridge sought broad societal support for the LSAT and he recruited several women’s groups to the LSAT Council: the Country Women’s Association and the Tasmanian Council for Mother and Child, as well as several government entities: the Education Department of Tasmania, and the Hobart City Council. In its push for social and civic inclusion, the LSAT was more successful than any organics advocacy group before or since.

An aim of the LSAT was to affiliate with the four like-minded organisations of Britain and Australasia:

We have applied for affiliation with the Soil Association (England), The New Zealand Humic Compost Society, The Victorian Compost Society, and the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (NSW). It is hoped that we will be therefore able to keep in close contact with these kindred bodies and exchange information etc. (Bayles 1947, p. 1).

Part of the vision of the LSAT was to promote organic food grow-

ing and consumption within schools. Junior members and Junior groups were catered for within the LSAT membership structure and 'Mother Earth Enquiry Centres' were proposed (LSAT 1947, p.1).

The AOFGS's Digest had been adopted by the LSAT, but the faltering and finally the demise of the Digest was a serious blow to the LSAT because these quarterly publications were the most tangible benefit offered to LSAT members. In 1953 only a single Digest appeared, likewise in 1954, and none thereafter. The LSAT was by this time in terminal decline. Shoobridge was 72 years old when he launched the LSAT, he was still active in 1960 delivering speeches as President of the LSAT at the age of 85 years, but that is the last trace of the LSAT identified by the present author. It seems that there was no succession plan and that the society followed its founder to the grave.

In 1959, Lady Eve Balfour, founder and president of the UK's Soil Association did a great service for Australia's fledgling organics sector by assembling a national overview. It was a service that the sector itself was incapable of managing, given that the AOFGS was by then dead, the LSAT was in terminal decline, and the only other kindred association, the Victorian Compost Society, founded in October 1945, had a regional and a narrower mission.

Balfour had the luxury of a year dedicated to living off the organics sector as she arrived armed with a list of 119 Soil Association members in Australia. She had no budget for travel and accommodation, and the plan was to rely on the hospitality of the Australians. She visited all six states of Australia. She had the ambition to turn her Antipodean adventures into a book, and the royalties would have come in handy, but no publisher took up the project and her account was instead serialised over twelve issues of *Mother Earth*, the Soil Association's journal (Paull 2011f).

In NSW, Balfour visited Bob Williams "who has a very remarkable Bio-Dynamic demonstration garden, where ... he grows all the herbs required for the various BD preparations ... and he is the principal supplier

for BD farmers and gardeners throughout the whole of Australia and New Zealand” (Balfour 1960, p. 397).

Balfour stayed with grazier Colonel Harold White in Guyra, NSW, on his 2,100 hectare property. White had played a prominent role in the AOFGS and was the most prolific of the Australian authors publishing in the *Organic Digest*. Balfour described White as “one of our earliest Soil Association members” (Balfour 1960, p. 409).

In Tasmania, Balfour met Henry Shoobridge, describing him as “President of the Living Soil Association of Tasmania and our oldest Tasmanian member” (Balfour 1959a, p.702). Shoobridge was an octogenarian at the time and he had been a Soil Association member since the outset. In Melbourne, the Victorian Compost Society (VCS) was still active and Balfour delivered an address to members at a monthly meeting (Balfour 1959b). Also in Victoria, Balfour visited Alex Podolinski (‘Pottalinski’ in her account) at Wandin. She wrote of “a most remarkable small farm ... I don’t think there are very many Bio-Dynamic farms in Australia, but I have never seen a more convincing demonstration of what this, or indeed any other, system of organic farming can achieve” (Balfour, 1959b, p.47).

In Queensland Balfour stayed at Alice Berry’s 16,000 hectare sheep station. In Adelaide she stayed with Professor Stanton Hicks who had co-authored a book, *Life from the Soil*, along with Harold White, in which they lamented the prevailing institutional resistance to the organics message: “here in Australia, the universities and Departments of Agriculture have neglected it, while boosting fertilisers in season and out of season. Indeed, one professor suggested a campaign against the advocates of organic farming before a gathering of [CSIRO] people and was applauded” (White and Hicks 1953, p.95).

Balfour claimed that she had recruited one hundred new Australian members to the UK’s Soil Association. That would have been a much needed boost for the Soil Association which was itself in a state of decline at this time (Reed 2010). The visit does not otherwise appear to

have borne immediate fruit. Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, was still a few years into the future and when it appeared in 1962 it gave the global organics movement a much needed impetus (Paull 2013).

Third Wave – Disseminators – 1960s and 1970s

The Third Wave of organics advocacy can be anchored from Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). The Third Wave ushered in a fresh generation of advocates, organisations, novel promotional activities, a popular and nationally distributed book on organic gardening, a push for organic standards, and a nationally-distributed, regular, attractive, and commercially-successful glossy organics magazine (Table 3.2).

After earlier organics developments in NSW, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania, now, in this Third Wave of Australia's organic movement, South Australia comes to the fore. First there was a group of SA members of the UK's Soil Association who came together as the Soil Association (South Australian Branch) (SASAB). It was a sensible and perhaps obvious response to 'the tyranny of distance' that Australians faced along with the shared geography and interests of these members – but no other state took up the example of the South Australians. The SASAB of 1965 grew to become, in 1975, an independent entity, the Soil Association of South Australia (SASA). Most recently, with the decline of membership, momentum and funds, along with the questioning of the ongoing relevance, salience and appeal of the 'Soil Association' name, the SASA has retreated back to branch status, but this time (September 2009) to be the South Australian branch the Organic Federation of Australia (OFASA). Time will tell if this is an innovative way of extending the reach of the OFA or is merely prolonging the demise of the SASA.

The Organic Food Movement (OFM) was active in South Australia as an independent entity from at least October 1972 (and most probably somewhat earlier). In any event, Australia's OFM predates the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) which

was founded in Paris in November 1972 (Paull 2010). There was no representation from Australia at the founding of IFOAM and it is a fair speculation that none was sought. The OFA ‘amalgamated’ to become an ‘autonomous section’ of the SASAB (Windram 1972, 1973) “to gain recognition, to overcome obstruction to organic farming and marketing” (Windram 1972, p.1). The OFM was incorporated in Adelaide in June 1975: “To promote the production and distribution of organically grown food” (Martin 1975, p. 2).

The first Australian organics book to achieve national distribution was *Organic Gardening* by Adelaide Hills organic strawberry grower, Audrey Windram (1975). The Rigby Instant Books were a sensation in their day. According to Vanessa Berry (2012): “In the 1970s in Australia, the equivalent of the internet was the Rigby Instant Book ... They cost 25-35c ... The Instant Books were published by Rigby Ltd, which operated from South Australia with offices in London and New Zealand. The American equivalent of these books, Dell Purse Books, was the same size and shape”. The copyright page of *Organic Gardening* declared that: “The author has donated the greater part of the royalties for this book to the Organic Food Movement”. *Organic Gardening* was number A75204 in the series. Rigby Instant Books were a winning combination in their day bringing together low price, fit-in-your-pocket dimensions, a manageable 64 pages, a breadth of practical titles, ready availability, and practical accessible information.

The Organic Food Movement established a Standards Committee and sought to adopt and adapt the standards of the UK’s Soil Association along with their trade mark. The OFM pioneered the development of standards however it appears that this aspect of the OFM did not come to fruition.

The Henry Doubleday Research Association of Australia (HDRAA) was founded in Sydney in 1970. Lawrence Hills had established the Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA) in the UK as an association in 1954 and as a charity in 1958 (Hills 1989). He appropriated

the name of an obscure and long-dead horticulturist Henry Doubleday (1810-1902) and rather oddly Australia's HDRAA followed this lead. The HDRAA continues to publish a quarterly newsletter *Natural Growing* for its members. It has not followed the lead of its parent, the HDRA, which adopted the name 'Garden Organic' and in this guise it is the world's largest organic gardening association (claiming 40,000 supporters) and offers visitors a ten acre organics experience at its ticketed-entry organics display garden at Ryton, England. Australia's Diggers Club, founded in 1978, claims to be 'Australia's largest garden club', it promotes organic gardening and its own seeds and is the closest Australia has to Britain's Garden Organic – and it is an image of what HDRAA might have become had it followed the lead of its UK parent.

The Bio-Dynamic Research Institute (BDRI) was registered in 1967 by Alex Podolinsky. The following year, BDRI appropriated Europe's Demeter logo, registering it as its own trademark despite the logo having been used for decades in Europe. The BDRI is not associated with the biodynamic certifying agency Demeter International. Bio-Dynamic Gardeners Association Inc. (BDGAI) was registered in 1991. According to the BDRI website, demeter.org.au, "In 1953 the Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association of Australia (BDAAA) was founded" although this claim could not be verified by the present author and no trace of the BDAAA was located in ASIC records.

The Organic Gardening and Farming Society of Tasmania (OGFST) has some claim to be Australia's most successful organics advocacy society. It was established at a meeting in 1972 at the University of Tasmania and was active until its wind up in 2009, making it one of the most long-lived of Australia's organics societies. At its peak the OGFST had about 1000 members, it proliferated across the state of Tasmania, with 22 branches recorded, and even to the mainland, with branches in Canberra, Ballarat, and Victoria. The OGFST produced a blizzard of publications – many branches issued their own newsletters, there was the OGFST members' newsletter *Grapevine*, there were various pamphlets

and booklets including the *Organic Gardener's Diary* and *Beginning Your Organic Garden – Nature's Way to Grow*.

The OGFST produced the first nationally successful organic magazine. It began as *The Organic Gardener and Farmer* in 1976, and evolved to become *Organic Growing*. There were 192 issues with the final *Organic Growing* appearing in 1994. With print runs of 11,000 copies, *Organic Growing* carried the organics message far beyond its membership and to all states of Australia (Stevenson 2009). The magazine relied on the enthusiasm and labour of a bevy of volunteers.

The OGFST presented thirty two Organic Festivals, including one children's festival, in the years 1975 to 2005 (Stevenson 2009). The OGFST set up a permanent venue for its festivals on acreage outside of the picturesque town of Penguin, North West Tasmania. Over the three decades of OGFST Organic Festivals there had been showbags and pony rides for children, talks at schools, and horticultural demonstrations, but at the final AGM in 2009 one octogenarian member confided to the present author: "We are now too old to dig". It was a reminder that civic associations, even one as successful as the OGFST, need to continuously pay attention to recruitment and succession.

In this Third Wave, the age of disseminators, there were other regional grass-roots associations of organics enthusiasts. These included the Organic Growers' Association of Western Australia (OGAWA) (now the Organic Association of Western Australia) established in 1976, and the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc. (COGS) established in 1977. The OGAWA produced *The Organic Grower* (1981-2006) and their periodical is now *WA Organic Life*. The COGS produced their *Newsletter* (1982-1992), which was replaced by the *COGS Quarterly* (1993-1999) and now *Canberra Organic* (1999 to the present).

Groups of enthusiasts proliferated in this era of the Third Wave of organics in Australia. Other kindred groups included: the Brisbane Organic Growers' Group, the Organic Farming and Gardening Society of Victoria, the Organic Growers Association (NSW), the Healthy Soil Association

(Qld), and the Natural Health Society of Australia. This era of disseminators was a time of amateur enthusiasts, of optimism, of volunteering and of civic engagement, and was quite different from the next era of certifiers which ushered in organic corporates, standards, certification, labeling, monetisation, along with an identifiable, quantifiable 'organics sector'.

Fourth Wave – Certifiers – 1980s to the present

The Fourth Wave of organics in Australia was ushered in by a global event, Chernobyl. The explosion of the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl, Ukraine, on 26th April 1986 dramatically focused the world's attention on food safety issues. Radioactive sheep in Wales and radioactive reindeer in Sweden were destroyed. In Australia imports of food from Europe were subject to bans, restrictions, and radioactivity testing.

This Fourth Wave of Australian organic development brings us to the present age, the age of certifiers, certification, standards, labeling, logos, corporatisation, and the monetisation of the organics project. The Fourth Wave has been the beneficiary of all those advocates, enthusiasts, visionaries, entrepreneurs, and innovators who went before, who were the grass roots of the movement and who explored a myriad of ways and means of advancing the organics project. The forebears of the Fourth Wave drew heavily on volunteers who struggled to move their advocacy onto a sound and enduring financial footing. This Fourth Wave has witnessed the founding of the first certifiers, the monetisation of the process, the setting of standards, the export of certified products and in general the corporatisation of the organics project (Table 3.2).

The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA) was incorporated in 1987 and soon after Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) was registered in 1988. Although there are now a handful of other organics certifiers in Australia it is NASAA (based in the Adelaide suburb of Stirling) and BFA (based in the Brisbane suburb of Chermside) that were the trailblazers in developing standards and certifying to those standards, and, having staked out the ground in the 1980s,

they remain the leaders in the field. At the time of their founding, neither NASAA nor BFA had the perspicacity to incorporate 'organic' in their names – or perhaps it was a lack of courage or commitment or clarity of vision? Whatever, NASAA has persisted to this day with its ungainly acronym, while BFA now uses its entity Australian Certified Organic Ltd. (ACO) (registered in 2002) as its certification arm and 'Australian Certified Organic' as its certification tag on certified products, and it has changed its own name to Australian Organic Ltd (registered in 2009).

There are currently two national organics periodicals and both began during this Fourth Wave period. Acres Australia began in 1991 and tags itself as 'The national newspaper of sustainable agriculture'. It released its milestone one hundredth issue in March 2013. The glossy magazine Organic Gardener has been published by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) out of the Sydney suburb of Alexandria since 1998. The ABC's Organic Gardener appears to have taken up the niche developed over the previous two decades by the OGFST's Organic Growing magazine. In settling into this niche, Organic Gardener has followed the name changing 'tradition' of the previous national organics magazines, Organic Farming Digest (1946-1955) and Organic Growing (1976-1994). Before settling on its current title of Organic Gardener it has variously been titled as: Gardening Australia's the organic gardener; Gardening Australia organic gardener; Gardening Australia the organic gardener; Gardening Australia's organic gardener; and Gardening Australia. The good news is that while Organic Gardener began life as a quarterly (like its predecessor Organic Growing) since 2007 it has been published every two months.

The Organic Federation of Australia (OFA) was founded in 1998 and claims to be 'the peak body for the organic industry in Australia' (OFA 2013). The *raison d'être* of the OFA is to unite the 'organic industry' and to represent 'the interests of Australia's organic and biodynamic producers to industry and governments at the local, State and Federal level'. These objectives remain aspirational. After 15 years, the scorecard

shows that (a) a unity under the OFA has failed to materialise, only two certifiers (OFC and NASAA) out of seven Australian organic certifiers are members and nor are most producers members, and (b) Australian government support for organics is almost non-existent.

The OFA claims as an achievement the Australian Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Products, 6000-2009 (SA 2009). Others may view this as a backward and retrograde step, and the voluntary standard released by Standards Australia lives behind a pay-wall owned and operated by SAI Global. The copyright of this standard belongs to Standards Australia, and not the organics sector. The consequence of this is the creation of a new business selling this organics standard of which SAI Global appears to be the sole beneficiary. While the planet is moving towards openness, OFA has taken this step in the opposite direction, denying consumers what they are surely entitled to know – for what they are paying when they pay a premium for organic. The OFA has ‘achieved’ a standard that is competing with the open-access National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce (OIECC 2009) which remains freely available at <http://www.daff.gov.au> to download.

The OFA appears to be proving over again what earlier organics groups in Australia have demonstrated repeatedly, namely, that a business model relying on membership subscriptions is a tenuous model. The chair of the OFA, Andre Leu, was elected to the presidency of IFOAM in 2011, and this must be chalked up as an achievement of the OFA and hopefully in time this can deliver tangible benefits for Australia.

IFOAM’s show-case event, the World Congress of Organic Agriculture, was held in Adelaide in 2005. The Adelaide World Congress was a first for the Southern Hemisphere and attracted leading organics researchers and advocates to Australia, many for the first time. Adelaide was an ideal choice for this triennial event. Adelaide was founded as a utopian enterprise, planned as a utopian city by visionaries, and has been described as a ‘Paradise of Dissent’ and a ‘Radical Utopia’ (Pike 1967).

Along with the World Congress came the 8th International IFOAM Organic Viticulture and Wine Conference, the International Scientific Conference on Organic Agriculture, and the IFOAM General Assembly.

The Journal of Organic Systems (JOS) was established as a joint Australian/New Zealand venture in 2006. JOS is a free, open-access, peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated to publishing organics research. JOS has published 12 issues to date, with research published from around the world. It is the world's leading open-access organics journal, and it is the first to offer readers the option of an e-book version.

Conclusion

Global figures for the organics movement have been published annually since 2000. They reveal that Australia has been in the lead position in terms of certified organic agriculture hectares from the outset of this dataset. In 2000 Australia reported 1,736,000 hectares (World total = 7.5 million ha.) and in 2013 reported 12,001,724 ha. (World total = 37,245,686 ha.) (Willer et al. 2013; Willer and Yussefi 2000). Of Australia's agricultural land, 2.93 per cent is managed organically (Falklands/Malvinas = 35.94 per cent; World = 0.86 per cent). There are 2129 Australian organic producers (World: 1,798,359). Annual organic sales are reported as AU\$1.178 billion (€942,000; World = AU\$59.779 b, €47.805 b) (Willer et al. 2013). Unlike many other countries, Australia is yet to report organic wild hectares, organic forest hectares, or organic aquaculture (Paull 2011d).

There continues to be little support from government in Australia for the organics sector. The CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation), Australia's national government entity for scientific research, has not been a useful ally in developing the organics sector, and despite there being zero consumer demand for GMOs, it is working contrarily to develop and commercialise genetically modified crops.

There is some ancient wisdom that declares "Where there is no vi-

sion, the people perish” (King James Bible, Proverbs, 29:18). Bhutan has boldly declared a vision of being 100 per cent organic, and others countries and states have declared lesser goals. Meanwhile, despite its long history of engagement with organics advocacy, as revealed in this chapter, Australia has no declared plan, vision or ‘roadmap’ for growing beyond its current status as a minor niche player. The World of Organic Agriculture Statistics and Emerging Trends has reported no change in Australia’s organic hectares for the past three annual issues (Willer and Kilcher 2011, 2012; Willer et al. 2013), and what seems likely is that the momentum of the growth of Australia’s area under organic management has stalled.

The First Wave of organics in Australia witnessed the take up of Rudolf Steiner’s call for a differentiated agriculture. The Second Wave witnessed the first associations for the public advocacy of organic agriculture. The Third Wave saw the national dissemination of organics know-how and rationale. The Fourth Wave witnessed the corporatisation of the organics sector along with the formalities of standards, certifiers, labels and logos. A Fifth Wave is now perhaps overdue to pick up the efforts of ten decades of advocacy and to carry them forward to the bigger, better, and bolder future that was always imagined.

Chapter Three

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