

THE LOST HISTORY OF ORGANIC FARMING IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

It has not been previously reported that the world's first "organic" farming society was the *Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society* (AOFGS) which was founded in Australia in October 1944. The association was based in Sydney, New South Wales, and the first issue of its journal, the *Organic Farming Digest* (OFD), was dated April 1946. This was Australia's first, and the world's second, "organic" farming journal. The eighteen month delay between the founding of the society and the first publication of the journal was because paper was unavailable in Australia for that purpose during WWII. The society published a total of 378 articles in 29 issues from 1946 to 1954. Articles from Australia, UK, USA, New Zealand, South Africa, Germany and Denmark were published. Topics included: farming and gardening; health; environment; politics and economics; and animal welfare. More than 190 authors were published. British authors published included Sir Albert Howard, Lady Louise Howard, Lady Eve Balfour, and Friend Sykes. American authors published included Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Jerome Rodale, Gaylord Hauser, and Louis Bromfield. Australian authors from the states of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland were published. These included Sir Stanton Hicks, then Professor of Physiology and Pharmacology at Adelaide University, NSW grazier Colonel Harold White, and Tasmanian Henry Shoobridge. More than 130 original articles were published; and other articles were reproduced from many sources including: *Organic Gardening* (USA); *Bio-Dynamics* (USA); *Soil and Health* (UK); *Health and the Soil* (UK); *Mother Earth* (UK); *Trees and the Earth* (UK); *Farmers Weekly* (South Africa); and *Compost Magazine* (NZ). The Society was wound up in 1955, due to lack of financial support. The digests published by the AOFGS document a decade of the thoughts, aspirations, focus, theory and practice of Australia's first practitioners and proponents of organic farming, from the mid 1940s to the mid 1950s.

Keywords: history of organic agriculture, Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society, Organic Farming Digest, Farming and Gardening Digest, Farm & Garden Digest, Professor Stanton Hicks, Colonel Harold White, Sydney, NSW, Australia.

1. Introduction & Context

The first documented use of the term "organic farming" was by Lord Northbourne in his London-published 1940 book *Look to the Land* (Paull, 2006). The Soil Association was founded in London in 1946. So it is surprising to report here that the precedence for the first "organic" organisation was the previously undocumented *Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society* (AOFGS), which was founded in 1944. The AOFGS has a second claim to precedence, producing the first "organic" journal to be published by an organic farming organisation, that being *Organic Farming Digest*, (OFD) first appearing in April 1946 in an issue comprising 32 + iv pages. The AOFGS followed Jerome

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Rodale's lead in extending Northbourne's usage of "organic" from farming to gardening as well. It was Jerome Rodale who privately published what my research indicates was the first "organic" periodical: *Organic Farming and Gardening (OFG)*. The first edition of OFG was dated May 1942, it comprised 16 pages, was priced at 10 cents, and was released under the imprint of Rodale Press (Emmaus, Pa. USA). The Soil Association (of the UK) was founded in 1946 (SA, 2008).

The claim has been made that *The Soil and Health Association of New Zealand* "is the oldest Organic Organisation in the world" (e.g. SSPI, 2007). This claim cannot be sustained unequivocally, and requires some qualification, since it is the lineage back to *The Humic Compost Club*, founded in Auckland in May 1941, and which published the first issue of *Compost Club Magazine* in 1942, which underpins such a claim. The club changed its name to the *Humic Compost Society* in 1947, and to the *NZ Organic Compost Society* in 1953, "because people did not understand the word humic", and finally to the current *The Soil and Health Association of New Zealand* in 1972 (SHANZ, 2008). So, any claim to a New Zealand precedence, while interesting, is tenuous, and a claim for the precedent usage of "organic" is unsustainable.

2. Organic Farming in Australia

This present study establishes that the earliest history of organic farming in Australia dates from 1944 which is four decades prior to the dates generally indicated in previous accounts. Such prior accounts are noteworthy for their vagueness. They typically refer to the "1980s", without any greater specificity as to time or place or people.

In 1981 Foreman (p.10) stated that "Although the bio-dynamic method of agriculture has been practised to some degree on commercial farms in Australia for the last thirty years, there have, as yet, as far as is known been no academic studies undertaken here". Foreman made no mention of any organic farming activity.

In 1991, Derrick under the heading: "Organic Agriculture in Australia", reports that "in Australia interest in organic farming has grown considerably in the last few years" (p.4), and that "there are a number of farmers who have used organic methods for many years and have well established systems" (p.5). In a 1995 account, Derrick (p.5) states under the heading: "Organic farming in Australia", that: "Whilst organic farming was receiving attention in the 1980s it has been practiced by some farmers for far longer" and that two surveyed farmers "had commenced organic farming in the 1960s".

In 2000, Penfold (p.15) claimed that "Organic farming in Australia has made a steady increase in acceptance and popularity amongst the farming sector over the last 20 years or so".

In a sequence of reports dated 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, Wynen begins her accounts of the history of organic farming in Australia, in each case, in the "1980s". In the first account: "Organic Farming in Australia" (Wynen, 2005, p.80), the "History" section begins: "In the early 1980s ...", although it was acknowledged that "biodynamic farming was organised under the leadership of Bob Williams and Alex de Podolinski [sic] well before the 1980s" (p.80). Subsequent accounts by this author of organic farming in Australia, each begin: "In the 1980s ...", under the headings respectively of: "History"; "History and institutions"; and "Background" (Wynen, 2006, p.119; 2007, p.121; 2008, p. 208).

Alex Podolinsky founded the *Biodynamic Agricultural Association of Australia* (BDAAA) “in the mid 1950s” (Bradshaw, 2003, p.6), which as the present study shows was a decade after the founding of the first “organic” farming association.

The two oldest, as well as largest, national organic certifier organisations in Australia are the *National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia*, which was “inaugurated in March 1986” (Wynen & Fritz, 1987, p.2), and the *Biological Farmers of Australia* which traces its origin to 1987 (BFA, 2007).

In 1999, three organic organisations were reported as operating in Australia: NASAA, BFA, BDAA, and “In addition an Organic Retailers and Growers Association of Victoria (ORGAV) has been established” (AQIS, p.4). Of these four organisations only ORGAV includes “organic” in its title, and only ORGAV mentions “organic” in its statement of purpose.

BDAA stated that it “trains farmers in Bio-dynamic practices”, and that there are three grades of certification; Grades A and B are produced without “artificial fertilizers or synthetic chemicals”, while for Grade C produce, “a minimum of chemical sprays have been applied” (AQIS, 1999, Annex B). NASAA stated that it promotes “sustainable agriculture”, and that its “systems exclude or severely restrict the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides” (AQIS, 1999, Annex B). BFA uses the term “regenerative farming” (and neither of “sustainable” nor “organic”), however it states unequivocally that: “Artificial fertilizers, chemically synthesised weedicides, pesticides, fungicides, fumigants and growth promotants are not tolerated” (AQIS, 1999, Annex B). ORGAV stated that it accepts the NASAA position “with the following additions” which included that “Organic farmers do not use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, or antibiotics and growth hormones”, and that ORGAV also excluded “synthetic ripening agents, fumigants, preservatives or irradiation” (AQIS, 1999, Annex C).

3. Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (1944-1955)

The *Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society* (AOFGS) was founded on 5 October 1944 (Executive Officers, 1954, 3:05, p.1), during WWII while Australia was still fighting the war on multiple fronts. The “purpose and objectives” of the AOFGS are stated in a ten paragraph statement (3:01.12, p.39-40) (Table 1). The content clearly stamps it as an Australian provenanced document, and is almost certainly the first Antipodean statement of organic principles as they might apply “down-under”. It identifies concerns that remain of high salience in Australia today: water, fire, deforestation, and reforestation. The ecological concerns and appreciation of Australia’s first organic farming pioneers evidenced in their stated concerns for soil micro-organisms, birds, insects, and “the balance of Nature” (Table 1). The only appearance of the “purposes and objectives” statement is in FGD 3:01.

The list of office bearers of the AOFGS appeared in all issues from Volume 1 Number 1 (1:1) through to 3:2; the final three editions omitted tabulations of such data. Only one office bearer, Mr E Jeremy, maintained his position for the duration of the life of the society (1:01, p.iv; 5:3, p.2) (Table 2). The honorary solicitors for the society, Minter Simpson & Co., (now Minter Ellison), were also a constant throughout the life of the association.

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. The Society associates with these unwise land practices, the destruction of bird life, the denuding of forests by over-exploitation and bushfires, and the pollution of rivers and streams.*
2. *The Society is convinced that by upsetting the balance of Nature as outlined above, 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.*
3. *The Society therefore advocates organic methods of agriculture viz., ley-farming (or four years arable followed by four years of pasture). Also mixed farming in place of monoculture. For garden cultivation, the Society recommends the use of compost, prepared in accordance with its directions.*
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, instead of being incinerated as often occurs with garbage, or of ocean discharge of sewage, which is the usual Australian practice, where towns and cities are close to the seaboard.*
5. *The Society holds that the natural function of birds is to keep insects in check. It deplors the wanton destruction of birdlife now prevalent, which gives rise to periodic plagues of insects e.g. locusts, etc.*
6. *The Society maintains that insects are Nature’s sensors, their primary function being to consume and thereby remove those physical forms, plant or animal, which fail to conform to Nature’s standard of fitness. The Society therefore 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. In place of these poisonous preparations, the Society advocates enriching the soil with compost, thereby providing plants and trees with their natural vitality to resist infestation.*
7. *The Society considers that in this semi-arid land, lacking the snow-fed river systems of other countries, extraordinary precautions should be taken against bushfires. It holds that a Commonwealth-wide bushfire fighting service should be established, equipped with every modern appliance including aeroplanes, to bring bushfires under control by the most scientific and quickest means. Precautionary means should also be adopted to guard against future outbreaks. These measures should include widespread publicity regarding the careless use of fire.*
8. *The Society advocates large-scale tree-planting operations to temper the natural aridity, conserve moisture, foster bird-life, and provide wind breaks; thereby preventing soil erosion.*
9. *The Society considers it inimical to national safety that more than one-half of Australia’s population should dwell in towns and cities (Sydney and Melbourne alone account for one-third of Australia’s entire population). This rapid urban growth is accompanied by a shortage of basic foodstuffs, also of workers in primary industry. Such economic unbalance could prove disastrous and calls for prompt action by the responsible authorities.*
10. *The Society holds that water conservation is of vital importance, but that schemes for impounding water should not be viewed solely as engineering operations. Such projects will be futile unless care is taken to ensure that catchment areas are fully protected by trees and vegetation, against erosion and bushfires. In the absence of this protection, dams and streams will fill with silt and river beds rise, resulting in greatly diminished water capacity. This, in turn, will give rise to rapid evaporation during dry seasons and to disastrous flooding after heavy rains.*

Table 1: “The Purpose and Objectives of the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society” (AOFGS, 1952, 3:01, p.39 -40), exhibit a distinctly Australian flavour.

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	<i>nil</i> ; (C. Chapman, 3:3)
Secretary	E W Jeremy	E W Jeremy
Solicitor	Minter Simpson & Co.	Minter Simpson & Co.
Vice Presidents	<i>nil</i>	Col H White & P W Odbert
Primary Producers Union Representative	<i>nil</i>	R C Gibson
Graziers Association NSW Representative	<i>nil</i>	F B Fleming

Table 2: Office bearers of the Australian Organic Farmers and Gardeners Society, 1946 & 1952 (AOFGS, 1:1, p.iv; 3:2, p.ii).

4. Organic Farming Digest (1946 - 1954) - From shortage of paper to shortage of funds.

The “object” of the *Organic Farming Digest* was stated by the editor in the first edition as: “to present in succinct form the latest information from England, USA, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and elsewhere on the all-important subject of wise farming. It will show farmers how to restore the soil to health and maintain it in a fertile condition. It is surely time that man cultivated a ‘soil-sense’ - Nature will not forever endure man’s wrong use of the soil” (Kelly, 1946, 1:01, p.3,4).

In that first edition an article entitled “The Why of it”, (White, 1946, 1:01, p.4) states that “We have been lured from the sound practices of our ancestors and are wandering in a maze; we must get back to the narrow path laid down by Nature for our safeguard and well-being”. “We appeal to all land holders that they hold the health of the community in their hands, for the way the food is grown makes all the difference to the health of the persons eating it” (p.6). White was an experienced NSW farmer and he predicted that “the time is not far distant when England will demand that imported foods be grown by organic methods” (p.6).

The initial publication of the AOFGS was delayed approximately 18 months due to the wartime shortage of paper in Australia, and none was made available for this new venture. “Because of bureaucratic obstruction in connection with a war time paper quota, the first magazine ‘Organic Farming Digest’ was not published until April 1946” (3:05, p. 1). Publications from AOFGS ceased in 1954 due to a shortage of funds. Three volumes were published, editions were published quarterly, there were 12 issues per volume. The final publication was dated December 1954. In total there were 378 articles published in 29 issues over the nine publishing years. All 29 issues bore the legend, on the front cover:

“Dedicated to the conservation of man’s greatest heritage - the living soil, and to the promotion of health in plants, animals and mankind”.

Throughout its life, the size of the journal was 220 mm high and 145 mm wide (i.e. *demy octavo*, [*demy 8vo*]), which is approximately A5 size) and with, from 32 + iv pages, to 48 +

iv pages, printed in black ink on white stock, staple bound, with a card cover printed in a single colour (red, green or brown). The journal title was *Organic Farming Digest* (OFD) for the first 13 issues (1:1 through 2:1) and *Farm & Garden Digest* (FGD) for the remaining 16 issues (2:2 through 3:5) (Fig.1). The FGD bore the legend “incorporating Organic Farming Digest” on all 16 issues.

This name change of the AOFGS’s journal was explained as follows:

“The change of name from ‘Organic Farming Digest’; to ‘Farm and Garden Digest’ has been made to permit of an appeal to a greater circle of readers, which the former name might have had the effect of discouraging ... We assure our readers that the change of name of the ‘Digest’ does not effect the POLICY of the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society, which remains the same” (AOFGS, 1949, 2:2, p.ii).

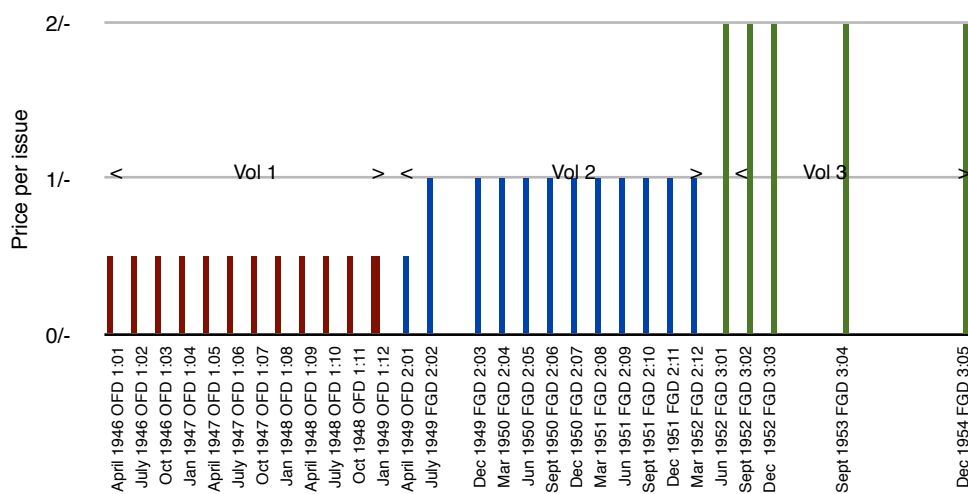


Figure 1: Publication history of the Digest (OFD & the FGD incorporating OFD).

The price of the *Digest* quadrupled during the nine years of publishing, 1946 to 1954. The price started at sixpence (6d) for the first 13 issues, increased to one shilling (1/-) for the next 12 issues, and was two shillings (2/-) for the final 5 issues (Fig.1). By way of comparison, in the period 1945 to 1954 the average wage increased from £4 16s to £11 16s (Hancock, 1960, p.543), an increase by a factor of 2.45 (i.e. a 145% increase). During this period the price of a daily newspaper in Sydney, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was 1d (one penny) in 1946, 2d in 1950, and 3d in 1953; all prices as at January 1st of the respective years (Ye, 2008).

Throughout its publication, the *Digest* bore the legend (in the footer of the front cover), either “Published quarterly” or “Published at the beginning of each quarter”. The first 14 issues met this schedule. The issue due in October 1949 was delayed until December, with regular quarterly publication resuming for 13 issues; from that point issues appeared annually (Fig.1). There were between nine and 16 articles per issue (Fig.2). The publications are now, after the space of 60 odd years, fragile, and the pages are brittle and yellowed.

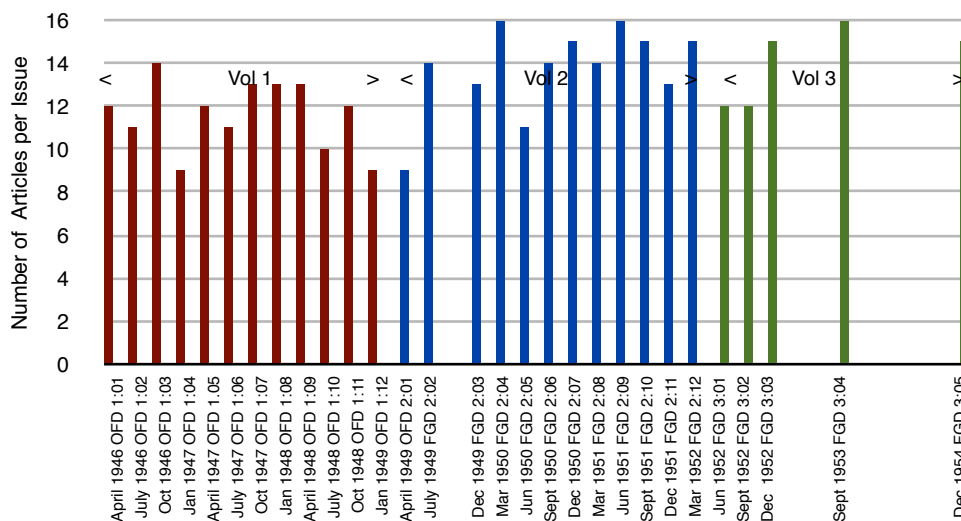


Figure 2: The distribution of the number of articles per issue for the 29 issues of the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society's Digest.

5. Methods

While searching for early mentions of organic farming in Australia I came across an item, in the catalogue of a Perth antiquarian bookshop, advertising various issues of a publication titled “Organic Farming Digest”. I purchased this incomplete set and have subsequently supplemented it from another bookshop, a private collection, and filled in remaining gaps *via* interlibrary loans. I have thereby assembled a full set, mostly in the original, of the 29 journal-issues published by AOFGS.

Each issue of the journal has a listing of Contents (title and page number) on the front cover. For the purposes of analysis, I have defined an article as an item appearing in such listings of contents. This yielded nine to 16 articles per issue (Fig.2). The consequence of this definition is that some content, usually filler items of less than one page, are excluded from the analysis (e.g. 3:01, p.40: “Food and Flavour”, a 12 line filler item, reproduced from *The Times* and written by Professor Frederick Keeble, Oxford University).

For each published article six attributes were recorded on a spreadsheet: the volume and issue; the title (abbreviated); the author; the country of origin of the article; that the article was original, or alternatively, the article's source; and the topic category.

5.1 Volume, Number, Article

In referring to articles I use the following coding: 1:05 to refer to Volume 1 Number 5; 1:05.03 to refer to Volume 1, Number 5, Article 3; and 1:05, p.26 to refer to Volume 1, Number 5, Page 26. For the purposes of simplicity and clarity I denote the four “pages” of the cover as i, ii,iii, and iv, for the front cover, the inside front cover, the inside back cover and the back cover, respectively.

5.2 Author

Recording the field “Author” was straight forward since most articles identified the author. Mostly articles were authored by a single author. Articles were coded as Author = Anon (anonymous) where no authorship was identified. In a few instances articles were from an organisation, for example the *Albert Howard Foundation* (3 instances), and the *United States Department of Agriculture* (USDA) (one instance), in those few cases the author was recorded as the institution. Only one article (2:10.03) had two identified authors, and none three.

5.3 Country

The field “Country” was intended to capture the country source of the article. Most classifications were clear-cut. Many authors of original articles identified in the article credit a geographic location, a state, or a country affiliation. In a few instances the country was inferred from internal geographic evidence or geographic references within the article (rather than in the title credits); this was the case for several articles where the Author was Anon. Where an article was a reprint of an article from another periodical, the country location of the periodical was identified as the country. This served well, although it generated at least one anomaly. An article (1:04.02) attributed to Albert Howard (UK) was reprinted from *Organic Gardening* (USA) and hence was classified in the present analysis as Country = USA. No country affiliation was identified for two articles (1:05.11 and 3:02.06).

5.4 Source

For the field “Source”, articles were classified as “original” in the absence of there being no indication that the article was reprinted from elsewhere. Most instances were clear-cut, and many in this category were from AOFGS office bearers or affiliates (e.g. V H Kelly and H F White). Where an article was reported as an address to a conference or a group (e.g. 1:09.09 and 2:06.14) or as a broadcast (e.g. 3:02.05 and 3:05.02) then these were classified as “original” on the basis that this was the first publication of the texts. Articles that were identified as reprints were recorded according as the source was identified in the journal, e.g. Source = *Organic Gardening* (USA) and Source = *Health and the Soil* (England). Only one article failed to be classifiable under this regime. There is the possibility that this system overstates the number of “original” articles, if for example the editor reprints from elsewhere but omits any attribution to the source; it is the authors opinion that any overstatement is minimal (or non existent) based on the fact that the two editors (Mr V H Kelly and Mr C Chapman appear to have been fastidious in attributing sources).

The first 25 issues, (being all the issues under the editorship of V H Kelly), included in the “Contents” an article titled “From Far and Near”. This item in each issue, was a collection of variously sourced “curios”, sometimes jokes that perhaps appealed to the editor (e.g. 1:07.07), sometimes snippets of news pertaining to the purposes of the journal (e.g. 1:03.09 and 1:05.07). The articles “From Far and Near” were classified once only (despite each being a collection of such snippets), and on the basis of the first snippet that bore an attribution (i.e. a stated Author and/or a stated Source).

5.5 Category

For the field “Category” I initially followed a tri-partite classification scheme modified from Nielsen (2005) as to why consumers choose organic: Health, Environment, and Animal Welfare. This proved inadequate and was expanded to include three further categories:

Farming, Political and Other. Each article was classified into one of these six categories: *Health, Environment, Animal Welfare, Farming, Political* and *Other*. Categorising most articles was straightforward, and yet is the most contentious aspect of this project since it required, in a few instances, the exercise of careful judgement, for example where the content of an article ranged across several categories. In most instances, but not all, the title declared the author's intent, and accurately signaled the forthcoming content. Where titles were vague, ambiguous or misleading, weight was placed on the content of the introductory and concluding paragraphs in particular, and the full thrust of the article was considered where uncertainty remained.

Articles that offered practical or theoretical farming advice or experience, and in a few instances gardening advice, were classified as "Farming" (e.g. 2:06.14, "The Practical Application of Organic Farming"; and 2:06.09, "The Use of Dolomite"). Articles that raised, warned or resolved health issues were classified as "Health" (e.g. 2:06.11, "The Natural Treatment of Disease"; and 2:06.1, "Is Aluminum Deadly?"). Articles that raised "big issues", that were of an ecological or environmental nature and were beyond the scope of single farm management, such as world population, and large scale erosion, were classified as "Environment" (e.g. 3:01.02, "Water and Power Shortages in Tasmania"; 1:09.01, "The Soil is Australia's Capital"). Articles that focused on the well being of animals were few; where they occurred they were classified as "Animal Welfare" (e.g. 1:10.09, "Horses Respond to Good Treatment"; and 2:07.09, "Cruelty to Cow and Calf"). Articles where the thrust was solely on economics, politics, activism or administrative issues were few, and were classified as "Political" (e.g. 1:05.04, "Agricultural Research"; 2:09.07, "A Plea for Decentralisation").

A few articles did not fall into any of the foregoing five categories and were classified as "Other". The items "From Far and Near" contributed significantly to "Other" since they were often jokes; there were however additional articles that fell outside the five prior headings, and were thereby classified under the heading "Other" (eg. 1:09.03, "A Tribute to the Late Sir Albert Howard"; and 1:02.02, "Under the Spotlight").

6. Results

There were 378 articles published in the 29 issues of the OFD and the FGD (Fig.2). The results analysed by author, country, source and content are presented here.

6.1 Authorship of Articles

There were more than 190 contributing authors to the Digests. Thirteen percent of articles were anonymous. The eight most prolific authors contributed almost 27% out of the total of 378 articles (Fig.3).

Leading international authors were well represented in the pages of the Digest. The top two authors from the UK were Albert Howard (14 articles; author of *An Agricultural Testament*, 1940; and a co-founder of the *Soil Association* of the UK, 1946) and F.C. King (5 articles; author of "Gardening with Compost", 1944). Leading proponent of Bio-Dynamic agriculture and protege of Rudolf Steiner, Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer (10 articles) was the leading contributor from the USA. Jerome Rodale (6 articles) was the seminal publisher and promoter of organics in the USA in the 1940s and beyond, and founder of the *Rodale Institute*, 1947.

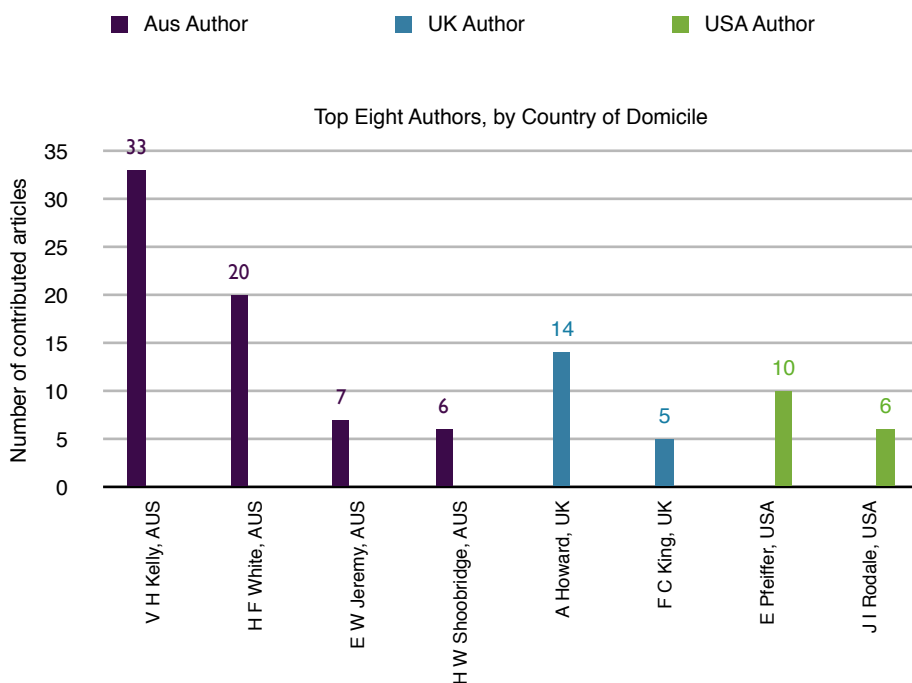


Figure 3: The eight most prolific contributing authors for the AOFGS's Digest, with country of domicile indicated (Australia, United Kingdom, United States of America).

The leading contributor to the Digests was V. H. Kelly who served as editor for most of the life of the Digests, who contributed 33 articles, and whose final identifiable contribution was "T.V.A.- Practical Democracy"(3:02.08). The NSW grazier Colonel H.F. White was the second most prolific contributor to the Digests, contributing 20 articles, starting with the initial issue (1:1.03), and his final contribution was in the final issue (3:05.02). Professor Stanton Hicks of Adelaide University, the founder and first director of the Australian Army Catering Corps (AWM, 2008), contributed three articles (1:06.03; 1:7.02; 3:02.05).

Other authors of prominence and interest included: Lady Eve Balfour, (3:03.08); Lady Louise Howard, (2:03.02); Louis Bromfield, (2:07.08); L.F. Easterbrook, (1:01.11); Gaylord Hauser, (3:02.10); Jorian Jenks, (2:10.04); Viscount Lymington, (1:02.06); and Friend Sykes (1:1.04).

6.2 Geographic Provenance of Articles

Seven countries contributed articles to the Digests of the AOFGS. Forty seven percent of articles were from Australia (N=177), 26% were from the UK (N=99), and 22% were from the USA (N=82). The other contributors were South Africa (N=7), New Zealand (N=6), Germany (N=2) and Denmark (N=1). The geographic provenance of four articles was unidentified (Fig.4).

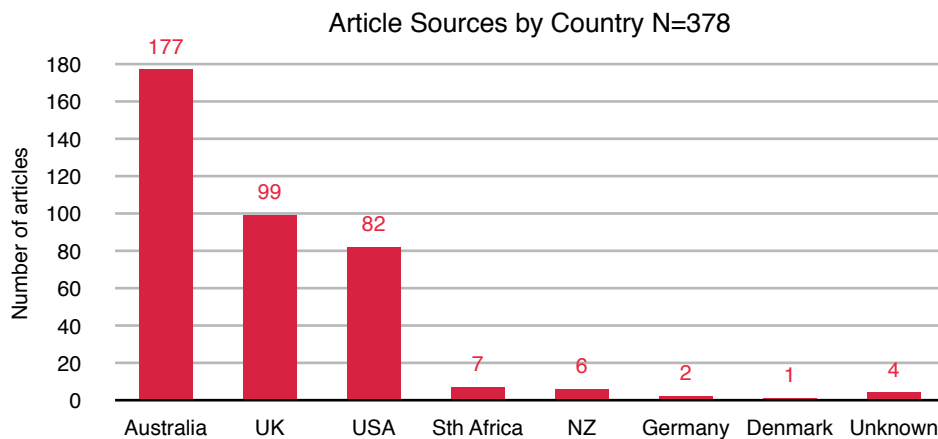


Figure 4: Sources of articles, by country. Seven countries are represented.

6.3 Articles - Original and Reprints

Nearly 40% of articles published by the AOFGS were original (Fig.5). This mix of articles allowed a good potpourri of sharing local content and experience, together with exposure of readers to thoughts, experience and knowledge from around the world.

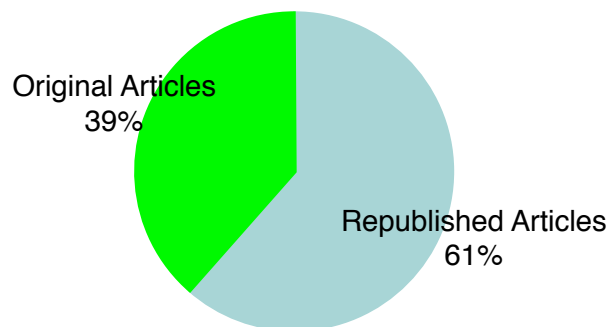


Figure 5: The distribution of original versus reprints in the Digests of the AOFGS.

6.4 Contributing Publications

The editors of the AOFGS's Digests sourced 232 articles from more than 85 other publications. The leading contributor of reprints was *Organic Gardening*, USA (N=41) with *Mother Earth*, England (N=17) second, and *The Farmer*, England (N=13), the third major contributor (Fig.6). *Farmers Weekly*, South Africa (N=6) ranked seventh as a contributor of reprints.

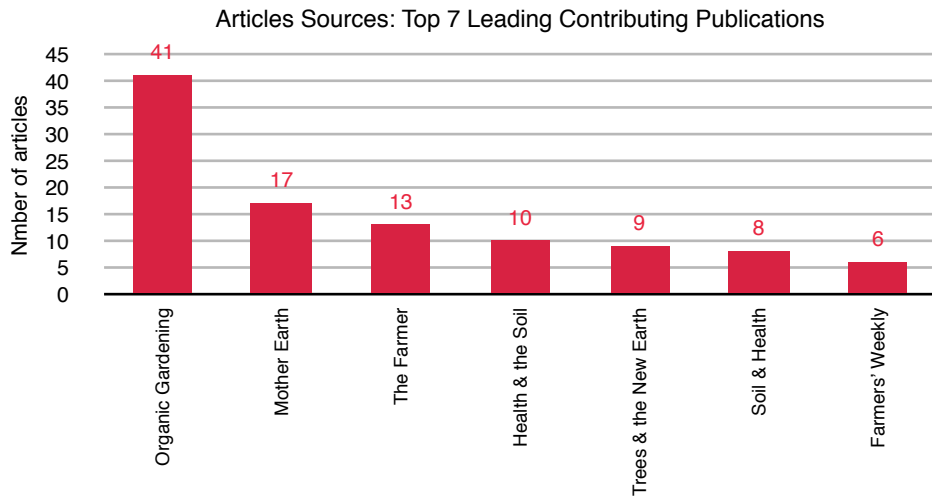


Figure 6: Leading sources of reprint-articles for the AOFGS's Digests.

The list of contributing publications is broad and eclectic. Some were organic publications such as *Health and the Soil* (N=10), *Bio-Dynamics* (N=4), and *Compost Club Magazine* (N=2). Farming periodicals, included *The Cattleman* (N=1), *Field* (N=1), and *Bee Craft* (N=1). Popular magazines included *Smith's Weekly* (N=3), *New Era* (N=3), *Country Living* (N=3), and *Readers Digest* (N=4). Scientific journals included *Scientific American* (N=1), and *Soil Conservation Journal* (N=2). Newspaper sources included the *Hobart Mercury* (N=1), the *Gippsland and Northern Co-operator* (N=5), and the *Illustrated London News* (N=1). Other sources were as diverse as: *The Rosicrucian Digest* (N=2); the *Bank of NSW Review* (N=5); *Audubon Magazine* (N=1); *The Guild Gardener* (N=3), and *Hansard* (N=1).

6.5 Content of Articles

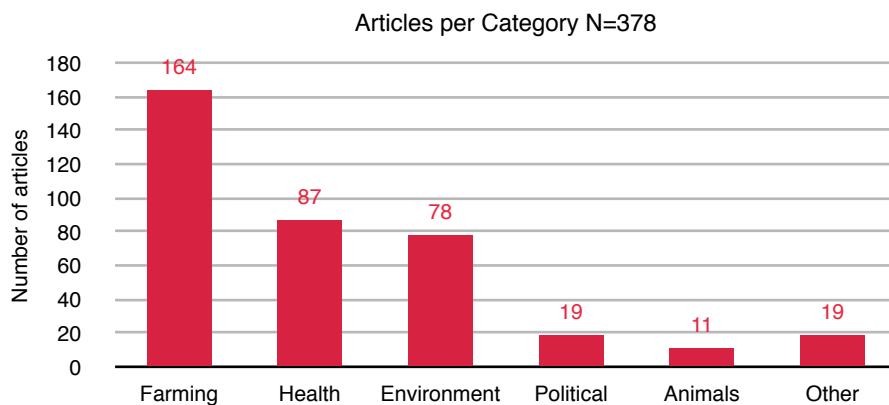


Figure 7: Articles published in AOFGS Digests classified by topic.

Articles pertaining to farming theory or practice predominated the content of the AOFGS Digests, accounting for 43% of the content (N=164) (Fig.7). *Health* issues ranked second and accounted for 23% of articles (N=87). *Environment* accounted for 21% of articles (N=78). Articles that were predominantly *Political* (including Economic topics) had a 5%

representation (N=19). *Animal welfare* and related issues comprised 3% (N=11), and articles classified *Other* accounted for 5% (N=19).

8. The Demise

The 29th issue of Farm & Garden Digest incorporating Organic Farming Digest was dated December 1954. The “Farewell” editorial lamented that “Insufficient financial support has been forthcoming to continue its publication which requires £800 per annum” (3:05, p.1). This amount exceeded by 30% the average annual basic wage which was £613 12s in 1954 (Hancock, 1960, p.543). Readers had been forewarned of the impending demise: “Warning!!! It costs money to print this magazine, and, unless contributors promptly renew their subscriptions, it will have to cease publication” (3:4, p. 40).

The epilogue of the journal recognised what has been hallmarks since that time. That “organic farming” is “a movement”, that it operates under a financial disadvantage and that mainstream agricultural power-brokers have largely withheld support. The Executive Officers wrote: “strange as it may seem today, no support was given to the Society by horticultural societies” (3:05, p.1).

The Executive Officers found some cause to reflect:

“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” (3:05, 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” (3:05, p.1).

They recorded, in perhaps a misjudgment of the zeitgeist of the times, that:

“there is a growing recognition of the importance of agriculture, and a realization that food is not a factory product like washing machines and motor cars” (3:05, p.1).

They identified an intensification of disease and environmental; degradation:

“These dangers have inspired the establishment of societies throughout the world with varying objectives - erosion control; tree planting; prevention of river pollution; establishment of wildlife sanctuaries, etc; but their common basis is the maintenance of soil fertility and ecological balance as the foundation of national health. Such societies should not be necessary, but the fact and the extent of their existence is a reflection of the degeneracy of western agriculture” (3:05, p.2).

They identified the inherent financial asymmetry of the struggle of voices for organic farming to be heard:

“A feature of these organisations is that almost invariably they are honorary efforts; and where there are paid staffs, they are supported by extensive voluntary activities” (3:05, p.2).

They reserved “special acknowledgment” for two individuals:

“Sir Albert Howard and Dr. E. Pfeiffer, both of whose original and pioneering work was the initial inspiration for the establishment of the Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society” (3:05, p.3).

They acknowledged the demise of their enterprise:

“your Society’s approach to the problem of wise land use did not meet with the public support it merited (due to our exaggerated estimate of national conscience in this regard” (3:05, p.2).

Forlorn notices in that last edition included:

“A limited number of organic farming books are available at large reduction in cost. E Jeremy, 56 Chapman Avenue, Beecroft” (3:5,48).

The “Special Notice” (3:5, p.ii) advised that there would be a meeting on Monday, 19th January, 1955 at the Primary Producers’ Union Office [Sydney], where item 2 on the agenda was:

“Disposal of the assets (if any) of the Australian Farming & Gardening Society”.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The AOFGS was in many ways an organization before its time. Organic farming societies, prior to the existence of certification schemes for organic agriculture and lacking a secure income stream, were destined for tight budgeting. In the case of the AOFGS, by their own admission they overestimated the interest at the time in organic issues, and reliance on sales of their periodicals foundered ultimately due to costs failing to be covered by sales revenue.

The Digest was warning of the dangers of DDT as early as 1947 (e.g. 1:06.01; 1:10.07; and 2:04.01), 1950 (2:04.01), 1951 (2:08.01 and 2:10.11). Compare this to *A Manual of Australian Agriculture* (Molnar, 1966, p.313) which crowed that “A major advance in the control of insect pests was made when the insecticidal activity of DDT was discovered. This and similar chlorinated insecticides ... offer the best economic control of pests”. In the next edition it was trumpeted that “Hundreds of herbicides are now available for agriculture. It is no longer possible to define particular herbicides as being selective or non-selective because the majority of herbicides can be used for both purposes depending on the problem and the type of application” (Molnar, 1974, p.311). The *Manual* was by then recommending DDT for insect control for apples, pears (p.274), bananas, beans, (p.275), beetroot, carrot, parsnip, potato, tomato, lettuce, turnip, cabbage (p.276), plum, citrus, celery, pea (p.277), linseed, cotton, tobacco, maize, cereal (p.278), macadamia (p.279), peaches, apricot, cherry, grape, plum (p.283), barley, and pasture grasses (p.284).

It appears likely that the *Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society* (AOFGS) was the world’s first association to incorporate “organic” farming or agriculture into its title. The society had a life extending over 12 years (1944-1955), with publishing activity spanning nine years (1946-1954). It witnessed the development of like-minded societies, including the *Living Soil Association of Tasmania* and the *Victorian Compost Society* (3:05, p.ii).

Further analysis of the content and development of the AOFGS, the *Organic Farming Digest* (OFD), the *Farm & Garden Digest* (FGD), and of the lives, thoughts and experiences of the officers and associates is warranted, and will throw further light on this seminal organic farming enterprise. The present account should be read as the first installment of the examination of this Antipodean enterprise.

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