

EXTRACTS FROM A HISTORY OF THE ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

BY JOHN PAULL

I discovered John Paull's writings quite by chance and as soon as I read this chapter I knew it would help place the history of Biodynamics in Australia. Here he is talking about the four waves of Australia's involvement of the organic movement. RG

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 that have been styled as the "History" of "Organic Farming in Australia" and which begin their accounts "in the early 1980s", and it starts two decades before other researched accounts which begin in the 1940s.

Australia was the home of the first 'organic farming' association

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% of the world total. 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.

Nevertheless, as a general rule, the organic agriculture movement in Australia has been a 'fast follower' of ideas that originated elsewhere and 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, labeling, 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 & 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 & 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 & 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, labeling and certification.

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.

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This extract was taken from "Organics in the Global Food Chain"

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