



# Organic farming: The arrival and uptake of the dissident agriculture meme in Australia

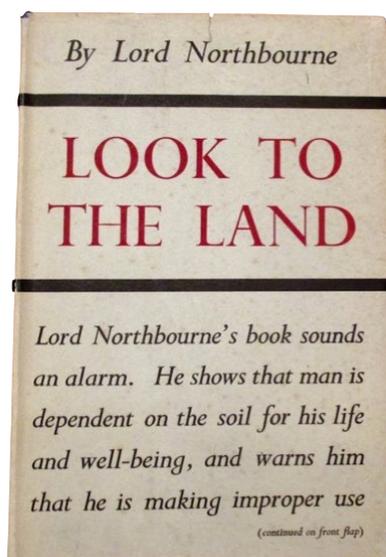
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## Abstract

Just four years elapsed between the coining of the term 'organic farming' and the founding of an association devoted to the advocacy of organic farming. The world's first association devoted to the promotion and proliferation of organic agriculture, the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS), was founded in Sydney, Australia, in October 1944. It is a geographically surprising sequel to the coining of the term 'organic farming' by Lord Northbourne and its first appearance in war-time Britain. Northbourne's manifesto of organic farming, *Look to the Land*, was published in London in May 1940. When the AOFGS published a periodical, the *Organic Farming Digest*, it was the first association to publish an organics advocacy journal. The present paper addresses the question of how the 'organic farming' meme arrived in Australia. Candidates for influencing the founders of the AOFGS were (a) Lord Northbourne's 1940 book, and/or (b) perhaps the derivative periodical *Organic Farming and Gardening* published in the USA by Jerome Rodale with its first issue dated May 1942, and (c) perhaps also the earlier book, *Biodynamic Farming and Gardening* by Dr Ehrenfried Pfeiffer which was published in 1938 in multiple editions (in London, New York, Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands) which set out to introduce biodynamic agriculture to a broad audience. The archives and records of the AOFGS have not been located, and, in their absence, newspapers of the period 1938 to October 1944 (and through the period of the AOFGS, i.e. October 1944 to January 1955) were searched for references to these three potential sources of influence. Pfeiffer and/or his book received two mentions in the Australian press in the pre-AOFGS period (in 1939 and 1942). Rodale and/or his periodical were not reported in the Australian press in the pre-AOFGS period. Northbourne and/or his book were reported in the Australian press as early as July 1940, and up to the founding of the AOFGS, there were 14 Northbourne mentions in the Australian press (all of them favourable or neutral) across four states: South Australia (SA) (n=6); New South Wales (NSW) (n=4); Western Australia (WA) (n=3); and Queensland (QLD) (n=1). The conclusion drawn is that in adopting the term 'organic farming', the AOFGS was informed primarily, and perhaps exclusively, by Northbourne's book *Look to the Land*.

**Keywords:** Organic agriculture, biodynamic agriculture, Lord Northbourne, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Jerome Rodale, Colonel Harold White, Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS), *Organic Farming Digest*, WW2, Sydney.



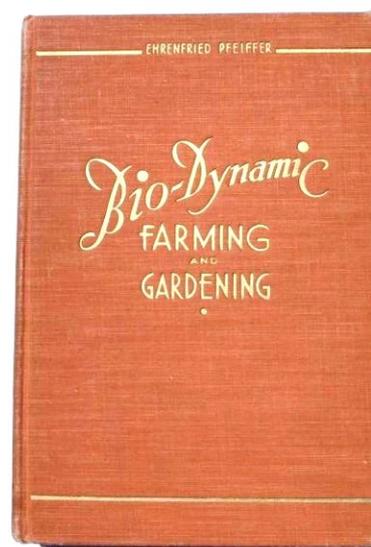
**Figure 1.** *Look to the Land*, Lord Northbourne, London, May 1940.

## Introduction

Four years elapsed between the coining of the term 'organic farming' and the founding of the world's first association dedicated specifically to the advocacy of organic farming (Paull, 2008). The term 'organic farming' was coined by Lord Northbourne and it first appeared in his manifesto of organic agriculture, *Look to the Land*, published in London in May 1940 (Figure 1). The book, published in the early days of World War II, introduced the world to not just the term 'organic farming' but also to its rationale and philosophy.

A surprising and unexplained event is how and why a term coined in wartime England (WWII) took root half a world away. The Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) was founded in Sydney in October 1944. It was the first society in the world to style itself as an 'organic' association. It was the first association to publish an 'organic' farming periodical (*Organic Farming Digest*) (Figure 4). The AOFGS was also the first association in the world to develop a set principles of 'organic farming' (Paull, 2008). At the time of writing, no archives of the AOFGS have been located.

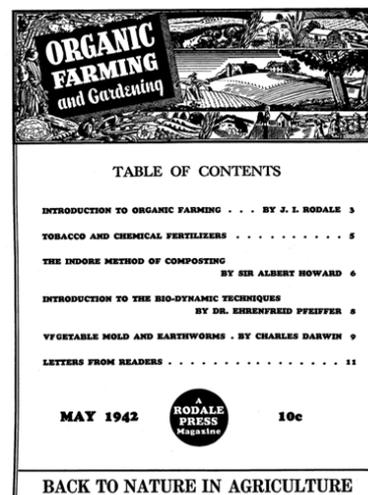
Northbourne was well aware that a differentiated agriculture needed a distinctive name and that it needed advocacy. He framed "organic farming" as a dissident agriculture in contestation with the prevailing "chemical agriculture" of his day. For Northbourne there was a battle of agricultural philosophies: "organic versus chemical farming" (1940, p.81). Northbourne had been impressed with Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's 1938 book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* (Figure 2). He travelled to Switzerland to urge Pfeiffer to present a conference on biodynamic agriculture to a British audience. Pfeiffer was, at the time, the leading advocate of biodynamics. Pfeiffer had 'outed' biodynamics to a broad audience by publishing *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* (1938) (Paull, 2011c). An outcome of Northbourne's visit to Pfeiffer was the Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Bio-Dynamics Farming, which Northbourne hosted at his farm in Kent and at which Pfeiffer was the key presenter (Northbourne, 1939; Paull, 2011b). Within months of the Betteshanger Biodynamics Conference, Britain and Germany were at war, so the window of opportunity for successfully spruiking Germanic agricultural ideas was slammed shut (Pfeiffer was German, Rudolf Steiner was Austrian). Northbourne reframed the Steiner/Pfeiffer call for an agriculture free of synthetic inputs and in harmony with the cosmos for an Anglo audience. He stripped out the overt mystical and anthroposophic trimmings and distanced its Steinerian provenance.



**Figure 2.** *Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening*, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, New York, 1938.

*Look to the Land* was an organics manifesto that Northbourne was temperamentally and experientially ideally positioned to write. He was a gifted wordsmith, a visionary thinker, a spiritually grounded individual, a graduate and lecturer in agriculture of Oxford University, the Chairman of Swanley Horticultural College, a Governor of the agricultural Wye College, as well as an experienced farmer. *Look to the Land* presented the rationale for an agriculture that was an alternative to chemical farming and which he dubbed 'organic farming'.

After the Betteshanger Conference, Pfeiffer migrated to the USA and was mentor to Jerome Rodale. In titling his book, *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*, Pfeiffer coupled 'farming' with 'gardening'. Rodale followed Pfeiffer's lead in titling his own periodical *Organic Farming and Gardening* (Figure 3). Although Northbourne was himself a keen gardener and he wrote of "our national love of gardening" and that "Our love of gardening can blossom into something greater" (1940, p.107) he nevertheless did not himself couple the terms 'farming and gardening' in his book. In this, Northbourne did not follow Steiner's lead (Steiner founded the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners in 1924) however he did cite Pfeiffer's *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* in his "Select Bibliography" (p.196).



The image shows the cover of the May 1942 issue of the magazine 'Organic Farming and Gardening'. At the top left, the title 'ORGANIC FARMING and Gardening' is written in a stylized font. Below the title is a black and white illustration of a farm scene with a barn, trees, and a field. The main part of the cover is a 'TABLE OF CONTENTS' section. The items listed are: 'INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIC FARMING . . . BY J. I. RODALE 3', 'TOBACCO AND CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS . . . . . 5', 'THE INDORE METHOD OF COMPOSTING BY SIR ALBERT HOWARD 6', 'INTRODUCTION TO THE BIO-DYNAMIC TECHNIQUES BY DR. EHFENFRED PFEIFFER 8', 'VEGETABLE MOLD AND EARTHWORKS . BY CHARLES DARWIN 9', and 'LETTERS FROM READERS . . . . . 11'. At the bottom left, it says 'MAY 1942'. In the center, there is a circular logo for 'A RODALE PRESS Magazine'. At the bottom right, it says '10c'. At the very bottom, the slogan 'BACK TO NATURE IN AGRICULTURE' is printed.

**Figure 3. Organic Farming and Gardening, Rodale Press, USA, May 1942.**

Jerome Rodale was an early adopter of Northbourne's 'organic farming' meme. Rodale was a publisher with a record of harvesting British material and appropriating, repurposing and repackaging it for an American audience (Jackson, 1974; Rodale, 1965). The first issue of his periodical *Organic Farming and Gardening* was dated May 1942. It was the world's first periodical devoted to the advocacy of organic agriculture and the timing places it as a candidate for influencing the establishment of the AOFGS.

Rodale was mentored by Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer had migrated from Switzerland to the USA (Selawry, 1992). Pfeiffer's biodynamics book introduced a global audience to Rudolf Steiner's biodynamic agriculture. The book fulfilled Steiner's injunction, of his Agriculture Course presented at Koberwitz (now Koberzyce, Poland) to put his "hints" to the test and develop them to a form suitable for publication (Steiner, 1924). Pfeiffer's book appeared in five languages, English, French, Italian, German and Dutch (1938a, 1938b, 1938c, 1938d, 1938e).

Rodale and the AOFGS were early adopters of Northbourne's 'organic' terminology and in this they were ahead of their contemporaries. Eve Balfour and Albert Howard, for example, and other contemporary authors on kindred themes were slower in the uptake. Eve Balfour quoted Northbourne extensively in her book *The Living Soil* (1943) with pages 14 to 17 of her book being a lengthy direct quote from *Look to the Land* (although it is barely differentiated in her text as a quotation and a reader may easily miss the, incorrectly dated, attribution to Northbourne). Balfour's book did not include a mention of 'organic' farming or agriculture and when the Soil Association was founded in London, the Memorandum and Articles of Association (Douglas, 1946) made no mention of 'organic'. Similarly, Albert Howard did not use the term 'organic farming' or derivatives in his books.

including *Farming and Gardening for Health and Disease* (Howard & Howard, 1945). Howard's book was republished as *The Soil and Health: Farming and Gardening for Health and Disease* (Howard, 1945b) and has more recently been oddly retitled by the University Press of Kentucky as *The Soil and Health: A Study of Organic Agriculture* (Howard, 1945a) despite the fact that Howard's text makes no mention of 'organic' farming or agriculture.

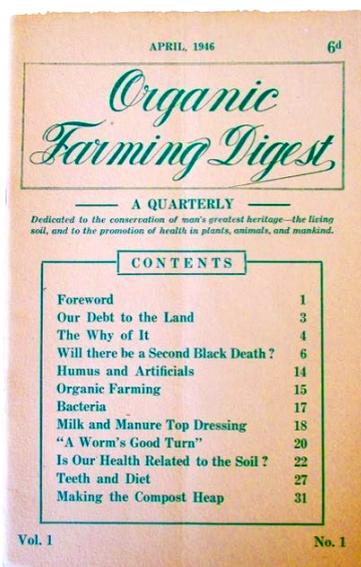


Figure 4. *Organic Farming Digest*, Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society, Sydney, April 1946.

The AOFGS was founded in October 1944/ After a decade of national organics advocacy it was wound up on 19 January 1955. The key vehicle of advocacy for the AOFGS as well as the major expense of the society was their periodical, the *Organic Farming Digest*. The first issue appeared in April 1946, which was just as soon as wartime restrictions on paper supplies were lifted finally enabling publication. The Society however failed to find a viable business model and the financial strain of publishing a periodical eventually led to the demise of the Society. The final issue of the periodical, by then titled *Farm & Garden Digest (incorporating Organic Farming Digest)*, was the 29th issue and dated December 1954. The Society was wound up at a meeting of 19 January, 1955 at the Primary Producers' Union Office, Sydney (Paull, 2008).

The present paper investigates the arrival, reception and uptake in Australia of the organic farming meme and seeks to distinguish between two potential candidates, Northbourne (1940) and Rodale (1942), as the genesis of the AOFGS, and to determine whether Pfeiffer (1938) perhaps also played a role.

## Methodology

The National Library of Australia (NLA) maintains the largest archive of Australian publications and newspapers. The online data base of the NLA, Trove ([trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au)), includes 882 digitised newspapers (NLA, 2015). The NLA digitised newspapers are from Australian Capital Territory (n=8), New South Wales (n=324), Northern Territory (n=8), Queensland (n=66), South Australia (n=59), Tasmania (n=43), Victoria (n=323), Western Australia (n=49), and National (n=2). The NLA database of digitised titles is the primary source of material for the present research. No archive of the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) was located and that is consistent with previous research (Jones, 2010; Paull, 2008)

The NLA newspapers were searched for the period from 1 January 1938 up to 19 January 1955 (these dates were chosen because Pfeiffer's book appeared in 1938 and the AOFGS was wound up on 19/1/1955). The results were sorted into two periods, pre-AOFGS and after the founding of the AOFGS; this was operationalised as pre 14 October 1944 and post 14 October 1944 on the grounds that the first identified public appearance of the AOFGS was on this date (Jeremy, 1944) and the Society was wound up on 19 January 1955 (Paull, 2008). The newspapers of all Australian states and territories were searched (viz.: National, ACT, NSW, NT; Qld; SA; Tas; Vic; and WA). All article categories

were searched (viz.: Article; Advertising; Detailed Lists, Results, Guides; Family Notices; and Literature). All article lengths were searched. Searches were not case sensitive.

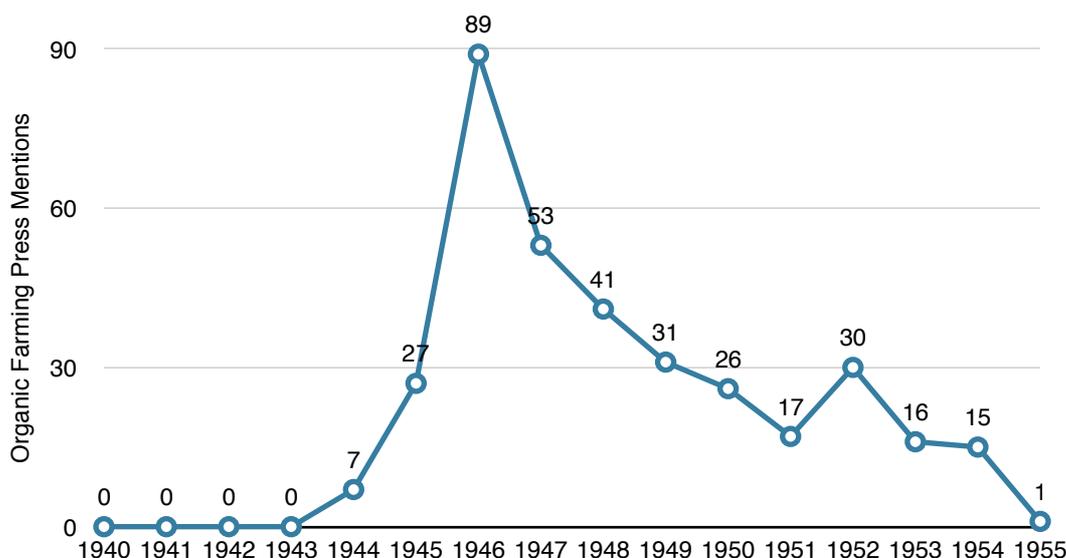
Items searched:

- (a) Pfeiffer mentions: items mentioning Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and/or his book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* (1938a) and/or bio-dynamic and/or biodynamic;
- (b) Northbourne mentions: items mentioning Lord Northbourne and/or his book *Look to the Land* (1940). Mentions of the social or political life of Lord Northbourne were excluded;
- (c) Rodale mentions: items mentioning Jerome Rodale and/or Rodale Press and/or his periodical *Organic Farming and Gardening* (1942); and
- (d) Organic Farming mentions: items mentioning 'organic farming' and/or organic agriculture' and/or derivative terms viz. 'organic farm' and 'organic farmer'.

### Results

Prior to the founding of the AOFGS (i.e. pre 14 October 1944) there were no Organic Farming mentions in the Australian press (Table 1, Figure 5). There were no Rodale mentions (Table 1). There were two Pfeiffer mentions (viz. Cairns Post, 1942; Queensland Country Life, 1939) (Table 1). There were 14 Northbourne mentions and these included reviews, articles, and advertisements for the book (Tables 1 & 2). Northbourne mentions appeared in the press in four states (NSW, n=4; SA, n=6; Qld, n=1; WA, n=3) from July 1940 to September 1944, i.e. up to a month prior to the launch of the AOFGS (Table 2).

In the period of the life of the AOFGS (i.e. from 14 October 1944 to 19 January 1955) there were 25 Pfeiffer mentions, 9 Northbourne mentions, 9 Rodale mentions, and 353 Organic Farming mentions (Table 1, Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Number of mentions of Organic Farming in the Australian press before and during the life of the AOFGS.**

**Table 1. Mentions of Pfeiffer, Northbourne, Rodale, and Organic Farming in the Australian press prior to the founding of the AOFGS and during the life of the AOFGS.**

Items	Press mentions prior to AOFGS	Press mentions during AOFGS
(a) Pfeiffer mentions	2	25
(b) Northbourne mentions	14	9
(c) Rodale mentions	0	9
(d) Organic Farming mentions	0	353

Within two months of its publication in London, Northbourne's *Look to the Land* was available in Australia (Table 2). The first mention of *Look to the Land* in the Australian press was the announcement of "Books Received" on 13 July 1940 in the leading newspaper of South Australia (Advertiser, 1940a). A favourable review of *Look to the Land* appeared the following month (Advertiser, 1940b) (Table 2).

**Table 2. Mentions of Northbourne in the Australian press prior to the founding of the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS).**

DATE	TITLE	NEWSPAPER, STATE
<b><i>Look to the Land</i> published in London, May 1940</b>		
13 July 1940	Books Received: General (Advertiser, 1940a)	The Advertiser, SA
24 August 1940	The Land Problem (Advertiser, 1940b)	The Advertiser, SA
4 December 1940	Man and the Soil (Macleay Chronicle, 1940)	The Macleay Chronicle, NSW
21 September 1940	Land-Love (SMH, 1940)	The Sydney Morning Herald, NSW
4 December 1940	Man and the Soil (Macleay Chronicle, 1940)	The Macleay Chronicle, NSW
2 August 1941	Rigby's for Books (Rigby Ltd., 1941)	The Advertiser, SA
6 September 1941	New Books and Publications (Alberts Bookshop, 1941)	The West Australian, WA
8 November 1941	Books of the Week: "Look to the Land" by Lord Northbourne (Palette, 1941)	News, SA
22 November 1941	Life & Letters (West Australian, 1941)	The West Australian, WA
27 November 1941	The Farm Bookshelf: When The Soil Dies (Martingale, 1941)	The Western Mail, WA
25 March 1943	Soil and Humus (Mount Barker Courier, 1943)	The Mount Barker Courier & Onkaparinga & Gumeracha Advertiser, SA
6 January 1944	Food Front Plan (Queensland Country Life, 1944)	Queensland Country Life, Qld
3 February 1944	Nemo's Horticultural Notes (Nemo, 1944)	The Murray Pioneer, SA
16 September 1944	The Rule of Return (Farmers' Friend, 1944)	Northern Star, NSW
<b>Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) founded c.14 October 1944</b>		

Northbourne's book was well received in the Australian press. Reviews were all favourable. They appear to have drawn most of their material from Chapter 1. None of the accounts of Northbourne's book mention his core tenet of 'organic farming' and none mention his framing of the agricultural contest of the times as 'organic versus chemical farming'. Nevertheless, the early Australian accounts of Northbourne's book were thoughtful reviews which retain their salience to this day and make for interesting reading; a selection follows.

The first review of *Look to the Land* in the Australian press reported:

Lord Northbourne attacks the subject of the biological sickness of the world by saying that the economic and spiritual sicknesses of the world are aspects of one and the same phenomenon. As agriculture is the basis of man's existence on this planet, so must agriculture depend on the soil.

He then discusses the properties and potentialities of the soil, emphasising the fact that soil is 'living.' Any discussion of this kind naturally leads to the problem of soil erosion, which is set out in the light of alarming statistics from America and interesting facts from China. Lord Northbourne blames the folly of those who, in their endeavour to 'get rich quickly,' exhaust the land on which they depend.

He complains that our present financial system is partly responsible for the evils he deplures; he says that it tends to drive people to the cities, and is placing intolerable burdens on future generations. The remedy suggested for soil erosion is a strict adherence to 'the rule of returns.' What has been taken from the land must be put back in some form, if the fertility of the soil is to be maintained.

Lord Northbourne has little faith in social legislation or the activities of great public bodies: he insists, however, on the necessity for a change of heart in the individual and a realisation of the importance of the family as a social unit. He wants to see families returning to 'the good earth' and settled on self-contained farms.

Lord Northbourne is himself a considerable landowner and has had farming experience, so his idealism is not that of an unpractical theorist. He wants to develop a more spiritual outlook, a greater strength of character, and a deeper understanding of Nature than is now apparent in our overgrown urbanised populations (Advertiser, 1940b, p.10).

The first advertisement in the Australian press for *Look to the Land* stated:

Lord Northbourne suggests that present commercial and industrial tendencies particularly in their effects on farming cannot be allowed to continue to spread disease and disorder, nor to reduce world fertility to starvation point. Price 9/9 (Rigby Ltd., 1941, p.10).

*Look to the Land* featured as book of the week in *The News* where it was recommended as "a book for everyone":

Lord Northbourne is a practical farmer, there is not much of the social or big business men about him. He is a large land owner and makes use of every yard of it in mixed farming and market gardens, working as hard as any employee, and, judging by his forthright character, as exemplified in this book, is a man after our own hearts and worth listening to.

He shows that man is dependent on the soil for his life and well being, and warns us all that we are not making proper use of our heritage. He tells you all about it in plain, everyday language, and makes his plaint so interesting and understandable that even the scribe who writes this covered the contents twice over.

... Starting off with the nutritional needs of plants, the importance of humus, he goes on to that dread subject, with which we in Australia can sympathise and understand - erosion.

These chapters on erosion are truly frightening, and are not the least overdrawn or exaggerated ...The Missouri basin has lost an average of seven inches of top soil in 24

years, which sounds pretty dreadful when learned professors have estimated the mean rate of soil formation as one inch in 10,000 years.

According to the author, much the same is true of many other countries. He makes the flat announcement that "Australia is going faster than America," but has only been under 'civilised' Influence for one-third of the time of the United States. He gives his reason, overstocking and unsound cultural methods.

Well, I leave it to those who are in a better position to know as to whether Lord Northbourne is right or not, but, judging from what has been written and illustrated in books, papers, and magazines, I take it that this noble farmer's arguments will be fairly solid hurdles to cover.

Lord Northbourne discusses the farmer, and says he has a reputation for individualism and independence. "These are sound qualities, but they are not appreciated in modern, large-scale business," he says, adding, "But that is a debased form of organisation."

... He holds that the farmer is not incompatible with the highest form of social life, and gives it value, for he improves the quality of the smallest units, from which any such organisation must grow.

In reading Lord Northbourne, I feel sure that he has had a thorough education in every phase of life, and he said one thing that was driven into my nut, when a young art student ... That is: "If we want to succeed in the great task before us we must adopt a humbler attitude towards the elementary things of life than that which is implied in our frequent boasting about our so-called 'Conquest of Nature.' We have put ourselves on a pinnacle in the pride of an imagined conquest. It is just as sensible as if a man should try to cut off his own head, so as to isolate his superior faculties."

A book for everyone, be he parson, docker, clerk, or farmer, and especially the suburban gardener (Palette, 1941, p.2).

*The Sydney Morning Herald's review of Look to the Land:*

Lord Northbourne is himself a farmer, but instead of being a strictly practical advocacy of sane agriculture, as one might expect, his book turns out to be an almost mystical Interpretation of the relation of man to earth and a plea for recognition of more than material considerations In farming. Somewhat after the style of Meredith, he shows how love binds all creatures and the earth together and that any disturbance of this union for gain creates a profound unsettlement In the life of man and results in the impoverishment of the soil. ... He believes man is paying for his disturbance of the normal order through greed and his general remedy is a return to the land particularly the small farm and a loving cultivation of it. Social life could well begin again from this basis, he considers the land must be studied not exploited.

His book is full of Interesting matter - discussions of economics, health, chemical farming, international relations - and it may provide valuable suggestions In a new order after the war (SMH, 1940, p.10).

*The West Australian reported positive sales results:*

Published over a year ago by Dent's, Lord Northbourne's book 'Look to the Land' is selling increasing numbers every week. (Price 7/6) (West Australian, 1941, p.7).

*The book was reviewed in Perth's Western Mail:*

Lord Northbourne is a landowner in Kent and Northumberland who runs a mixed farm and market gardens. His recently-published book, "Look to the Land" is one that should be read by all thinking men for in it he sounds an alarm which the world should heed, in man's exploitation of the soil; in his reckless wastage of his heritage, he traces the root cause of most of the physical, social, political, and economic ills from which the world is suffering. I started to review the book as a whole but found that the first chapter contained so much food for thought that I have contented myself with presenting in a condensed form, a few of the author's pronouncements concerning soil erosion contained therein ...

Lord Northbourne, author of 'Look to the Land,' modestly describes his book as an attempt by a layman, writing for laymen, to set forth how much more there is in agriculture than the mere production of cheap and abundant food.

The problems confronting agriculture throughout the world are not merely farmers' problems, he points out, for the soil is the foundation of the physical life of man, whether he be a farmer or a city dweller. It is the background of every man's life for he is dependent upon the soil for his nutrition.

The Soil is an Entity ... soil is a complex mixture of many ingredients living and non-living; a whole world in itself and a living entity ... Increases of production, the author points out, must not be taken as increases in fertility. Actually an increase in production is usually secured by "cashing in" on existing fertility, and, as it is used up we encounter the disastrous results which have been described ...

The temptation to exploit the fertility of the soil for immediate personal gain is no new thing, but during recent years man has enormously extended his physical powers by the use of mechanical devices so that one man can now do what used to be the work of hundreds and can do it faster. With the speeding up of cultural operations there has been a speeding up of erosion ...

Man sets about his desert making in various ways. He alters the texture of the soil by using up humus and failing to replace it - by failing to feed the soil with organic matter; livestock are the great converters of otherwise unwanted organic matter to a form in which it can be used by plants. Stockless farming, under-stocking, burning straw, etc., are all cases of failure to observe the 'rule of return' which is the essence of farming. Only by faithfully returning to the soil in due course everything that has come from it can fertility be made permanent and the earth be made to yield a genuine increase.

Large-scale monoculture (the growing of one crop only) upsets the balance of factors in the soil in many ways. There is no give and take between crops. Disease spreads easily. Nature always provides a mixture of plants, and of animals; only so can living matter be kept constantly in circulation without wastage ... The injudicious felling of timber may lead to much more than denudation of the hills on which the timber grows. Forests act as sponges, and level out the rate at which water leaves the hills. Thus injudicious deforestation leads to erosion on the hills, and to alternations of flood and drought in the valleys, ending in erosion or harmful silting of the valleys themselves ...

Debt and Destruction. "The rapid extension of exhaustive farming throughout the world is linked with the roughly simultaneous extension of a peculiar economic system which has led to a vast accumulation of financial debt. Such debt both internal and international has grown to a point at which repayment is practically impossible and the mere payment of interest is severely oppressive ...

Under present conditions the only thing that pays is quick profit making whilst the going is good. By ignorant or unscrupulous exploitation and exhaustion of fertility- vast profits have been made (by financiers rather than by farmers) in the name of cheap food. The pace is forced for the sound farmer wherever he lives.

As is usual nowadays, it will be left to future generations to pay for our mistakes, but they may not have the wherewithal. Money alone is notoriously useless in a desert.

"Look to the Land," by Lord Northbourne. Published by J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd. Price 9/6 (Martingale, 1941, pp.56-7).

Nemo (1944) reviewed *Look to the Land* in the Murray Pioneer, a South Australian rural newspaper. In the preamble he stated that:

Mr. W. Macgillivray (Member [of Parliament] for Chaffey), has kindly sent along a book for me to read which is so full of 'meat' that I don't know where to start to give it a full review. It is called "Look to the Land" by Lord Northbourne and deals with every aspect of agriculture in England, in the political, economic and scientific aspect, but covers a wide range of other countries as well" (p.8).

Northbourne's book continued to attract mentions in the Australian press during the life of the AOFGS with nine mentions in that period, all favourable or neutral (Table 3).

**Table 3. Northbourne mentions in the Australian press during the life of the Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS).**

<b>Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) founded c.14 October 1944</b>		
4 January 1945	Soil Fertility (Martingale, 1945)	Western Mail, WA
17 January 1945	Letters to the Editor: Soil Erosion (Daft, 1945)	The Mercury, TAS
7 July 1945	The Future Of Our Farm Industries (Scrutator, 1945)	Northern Star, NSW
13 July 1945	Books For Farmers (Alberts Bookshop, 1945)	Western Mail, WA
22 March 1946	Agricultural Bureau. Y.P Conference (Kadina & Wallaroo Times, 1946)	The Kadina and Wallaroo Times, SA
4 July 1946	The Economics of Primary Production (Till, 1946)	Murray Pioneer, SA
13 August 1948	Rural Review: The Abuse of the Land (Cobbett, 1948)	The New Times, VIC
20 June 1950	World Soil Erosion (Mannock, 1950)	Camperdown Chronicle, VIC
18 August 1951	Preece's Farming (Preece, 1951)	The Advertiser, SA
<b>Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) wound up 19 January 1955</b>		

No archive of the AOFGS was located. Colonel Harold White was prominent in the AOFGS, and was most likely a founder. He was the second most prolific author (after the editor, V H Kelly) of articles in the *Organic Farming Digest*, contributing 20 articles (of a total of 378 published articles) over the 29 issues of the Digest. White was an enthusiastic advocate of organic farming of the AOFGS, presenting lectures, doing radio interviews (e.g. White, 1954), writing letters to the editor, authoring a pamphlet (White, 1959) and co-authoring a book (White & Hicks, 1953). Of the participants in the AOFGS only White's very incomplete papers were located by the author and some of his library remains in the possession of his family. The remnants of White's library and papers revealed no copy of Northbourne's *Look to the Land*, no copy of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*, no issues of Rodale's periodical *Organic Farming and Gardening*, no books of Rudolf Steiner, and no material of the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners (ECAFG). White's surviving papers, as inspected by the author, throw little or no light on the genesis of the AOFGS; a case of absence of evidence rather than evidence of absence.

The ECAFG was active in Australia from 1928 with its members practicing Anthroposophical and biodynamic farming, precursors to organic farming (Paull, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). On the evidence as it stands at present, the genesis and activities of the ECAFG and the AOFGS appear to have proceeded independently of each other.

## Discussion and conclusion

The AOFGS adopted the term 'organic farming' as the defining *raison d'être* of the Society. The present research reveals that the book in which the term 'organic farming'

first appeared, Northbourne's *Look to the Land*, was available in Australia shortly after being published in London. It was advertised for sale in the four years prior to the founding of the AOFGS, as well as after. The book was favourably reviewed in the Australian press as a "Book of the Week" and it was recommended as a "book for everyone" which was "full of interesting matter".

The evidence available indicates that the AOFGS took up the term 'organic farming' directly from Northbourne's book. *Look to the Land* was reissued in Britain in 1942 bearing the "War Economy Standard" logo and 1946. The book continued to be advertised in the Australian press suggesting that these editions made their way to Australia despite the shipping challenges of the time.

Rodale adopted Northbourne's 'organic farming' term for his US periodical *Organic Farming and Gardening* (1942). There were no mentions of Rodale nor of *Organic Farming and Gardening* in the Australian press prior to the founding of the AOFGS. The evidence suggests that Rodale played no role in the genesis of the AOFGS. Historically, books and periodicals have generally entered the Australian market via British distributors, rather than American, and the apparent absence of Rodale's periodical in Australia at this time is no great surprise and confirms this market distortion of the time.

Pfeiffer and his book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* received scant attention in the Australian press prior to the founding of the AOFGS with just two mentions, and the book was neither reviewed nor advertised in the Australian press. The evidence suggests that it likely played little or no role in influencing the genesis of the AOFGS.

The present study leaves open the question of how the founders of the AOFGS settled on 'Farmers and Gardeners' in the title of their new society. The coupling of these terms - farmers and gardeners - generates a phrase that is generally absent in the agricultural publications and associations of the time (as well as now). The phrase 'Farmers and Gardeners' has nevertheless been used within the dissident agriculture movements from at least 1924. At his seminal Agriculture Course at Koberwitz, Rudolf Steiner (1924) established the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners (ECAFG) (Paull, 2011a). When Pfeiffer (1938) presented the work of Steiner and the ECAFG to the world, he carried forward the phrase 'Farmers and Gardeners' in titling his book as *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*. Four years later, when Rodale (1942) adopted Northbourne's term 'organic farming', and at a time when he was taking guidance from Pfeiffer, he titled his periodical *Organic Farming and Gardening*.

A standout feature of the tally of press mentions was that prior to the founding of the AOFGS there was not a single Organic Farming mention, while, in contrast, during the life of the AOFGS there were 353 Organic Farming mentions in the Australian press (Table 1, Figure 5). This is despite the wide coverage and availability of *Look to the Land*.

In the absence of the testimony of the founders of the AOFGS (which is lacking) and/or the emergence of the archives and records of the AOFGS (which remains a possibility), conclusions must remain tentative. That said, the conclusion to be drawn is that the founders of the AOFGS took up the term 'organic farming' from Northbourne's book, and it is, after all, the core meme of the book and its foundational idea.

AOFGS archives, minutes, and/or records may at some future point come to light. Australia has the advantage over many other countries in that there has been no destruction of documents due to bombing (for example, as occurred in Britain in WWII), no war-time seizures of documents as booty or intelligence (for example, as apparently occurred with Anthroposophical Society documents in Nazi Germany and during WWII). Added to this, Australian homes are larger than those of most countries and this is a cause for optimism in recovering 'lost' documents which may still be 'tucked away' in spare rooms or sheds.

The archives of two Australian organics organisations have been secured. Records of the Living Soil Association of Tasmania (LSAT) are deposited in the State Library of Tasmania (Paull, 2009a) and the records of the Soil Association of South Australia (SASA) have more recently been deposited by the SASA archivist, Dr Sandra Grimes, into the State Library of South Australia (SLSA) (Paull, 2009b).

At the demise of the AOFGS, the *Digest* reported: "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 ... there is solace in the fact that it has performed a service in publicising organic farming principles in Australia" (The Executive Officers, 1954, p.1).

The successful advocacy of organics by the AOFGS is clearly evidenced by the 353 mentions of Organic Farming in the Australian press during the course of the life of the AOFGS (1944-1952) and is contrasted by the zero mentions of Organic Farming prior to the founding of the AOFGS (Table 5). The rise and fall of the Australian press mentions of Organic Farming (Figure 5) is a proxy index of the organics advocacy of the AOFGS and offers a proxy snapshot of the rise and fall of the AOFGS, Australia's first organics association.

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