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**Compost and Consumption:**

**Organic Farming, Food, and Fashion in American Culture**

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**Compost and Consumption:  
Organic Farming, Food, and Fashion in American Culture**

by

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This work is dedicated to my remarkable grandmother, Mary;  
my devoted parents, Robert and Adriana;  
and my guardian angel, Joan

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# **Compost and Consumption:**

## **Organic Farming, Food, and Fashion in American Culture**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Jeffrey L. Meikle

This research analyzes the history and cultural significance of organic agriculture as a social movement. It illuminates how organic production and consumption are polyvalent and socially embedded. Organic farming has been classified as a hobby and as a constituent of agribusiness; organic food has been dubbed as a hollow preference and as an exploited industry. At its core, though, organics is a social movement. From agricultural pioneers in the 1940s to contemporary consumer activists, the organic movement has preserved connections to environmentalism, agrarianism, health food dogma, and other ideological alignments. Organic farming has been a method of agriculture, social philosophy, way of life, and subversive effort. Organic consumption has been a practical decision, lifestyle choice, communicative performance, status marker, and political act. The dissertation embraces this multiplicity and expounds on the nuances of what the organic zeitgeist has meant in American culture.

The study entails collection and analysis of historical and contemporary data, including archival, legislative, and regulatory documents. It applies discourse analysis, semiotics, iconographic study, and cultural analysis to texts and additional sorts of media. Observations of organic sites of consumption also enhance the historical and theoretical evaluations. This project includes scrutiny of rhetorical strategies used by organic farmers, business leaders, chefs, consumers, writers, and organizations that engage with the “organic lifestyle.” Despite the fluid intertextuality of these expressions, there are common themes. Unraveling the multivocality and interconnectedness of prevailing discourses provides insight into the movement’s epicenter.

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

In 1947, J.I. Rodale, the editor of *Organic Gardening* magazine, pronounced that “the Revolution has begun.” He told his 60,000 readers that the burgeoning organic farming and gardening movement was “gaining strength and numbers each year.”<sup>1</sup> In 1950, though, one organic farmer acknowledged that his own evangelical exertions were liable to be mocked as “the silly outpourings of some new kind of crackpot.”<sup>2</sup> A 1960 report from the Super Market Institute scoffed at “faddists” and “so-called ‘organic farmers’” for falsely claiming that modern farmers using chemical fertilizers were undermining public health.<sup>3</sup> U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz declared in 1971 that “before we go back to organic agriculture, somebody is going to have to decide what 50 million people we are going to let starve.”<sup>4</sup>

Though scorned as hokum for decades, organic farming made inroads from the periphery. People began eating organically with gusto. By 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama was planting seedlings for spinach, onions, cucumbers, and peas in the new White House organic garden. Martha Stewart plugged the virtues of organic food on her Twitter feed.<sup>5</sup> And *Organic Gardening* maintained that it was still leading “the charge toward a sustainable future.”<sup>6</sup>

This dissertation analyzes the history and cultural significance of organic

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<sup>1</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). With the Editor: The Principle of Eminent Domain. *Organic Gardening*. **10**: 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> Dodge, L. F. (1950). Planning Organic Profits. *The Organic Farmer*. **1**: 15-18. 15.

<sup>3</sup> King, C. G. (1960). Good Nutrition in the Shopper’s Basket. *A Report to the Nation: ‘The Good In Your Food’*. Reprinted from the Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Convention of Super Market Institute. S. M. Institute, Super Market Institute: 2-5. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Goldstein, R. (2008). Earl L. Butz, Secretary Felled by Racial Remark, Is Dead at 98 *The New York Times*.

<sup>5</sup> Telaroli, G. (2009). "Martha Stewart Tweets about Food, Inc." Retrieved December 28, 2009, from <http://www.takepart.com/news/2009/03/27/martha-stewart-tweets-about-food-inc/>.

<sup>6</sup> Rodale Inc. (2009). "Organic Gardening: About the Brand." Retrieved December 28, 2009, from <http://www.rodaleinc.com/brand/organic-gardening>.



agriculture as a social movement in the United States. It illuminates how organic production and consumption are polyvalent and socially embedded. From agricultural pioneers in the 1940s to contemporary consumer activists, the organic movement has preserved connections to environmentalism, agrarianism, health food dogma, and other ideological alignments. Organic farming has been a method of agriculture, social philosophy, way of life, and subversive effort. Organic consumption has been a practical decision, lifestyle choice, communicative performance, status marker, and political act. The dissertation embraces this multiplicity and expounds on the nuances of what the organic zeitgeist has meant in American culture.

Chapters are arranged thematically, with overlapping topics and chronologies. Jerome Irving (J.I.) Rodale is a foundational figure in the organic canon. Rodale popularized organic agriculture in the United States through his books and magazines. The first chapter examines Rodale's work in a cultural context, primarily from the 1940s to 1960s, along with his legacy in Rodale Press. The second chapter focuses on the prevalence of organic farming among homesteaders, backyard gardeners, and small-scale farmers. It delves into culturally resonant ideals of country life, family farms, and agrarianism within organic texts. Chapter three highlights environmental aspects of the organic movement and diverse paradigms of knowledge about nature that co-exist among organic missionaries. The fourth chapter considers the pursuit of health through organic food and situates this within broad American engagements with health food. Chapter five traces the dynamics of how subversiveness became routinized within the organic movement. The sixth chapter inspects organic food consumption, addressing "green"

consumerism, identity construction through purchases, New Social Movements, and critiques of gentrification that have plagued the organic food fraternity.

This interdisciplinary dissertation engages with several bodies of scholarship, including those on environmental history, consumer studies, and food studies.

These areas of inquiry have seen modifications and new critical approaches in recent years. This dissertation contributes to the existing literature in these fields, transcends methodological limits by considering them in tandem, and makes new critical interventions by presenting a more complete understanding of how food, consumers, and the environment are inextricable.

The first major field, environmental history, considers the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment by examining physical nature itself, the human socio-economic sphere, and the intellectual domain. Environmental history unites the fields of history, economics, geography, ecology, politics, and cultural studies in meaningful dialogue about the profound effects humans and the natural world have wrought upon each other. Environmental historians have examined topics such as the biological aspects of colonization, cultural causes for natural disasters, ecological results of industrialization, and varying definitions of nature.<sup>7</sup> Poststructuralist philosophy has posed a challenge to the strict dichotomy between nature and culture. Greater recognition of overlapping boundaries in the human/non-human realm has developed in environmental history. William Cronon pioneered a body of scholarship that illuminated

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<sup>7</sup> For example, see Clarence J. Glacken. Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought From Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century (1967); Roderick Nash. Wilderness and the American Mind (1967); Donald Worster. Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas (1977); Donald Worster. Dustbowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s (1979); Alfred Crosby. Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900 (1986); David Arnold. The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture, and European Expansion (1996); Paul Josephson. Industrialized Nature: Brute Force Technology and the Transformation of the Natural World (2002); Carolyn Merchant. Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture (2004).

links between city and country, placing the American frontier in a metropolitan perspective and revealing how market forces were also prevailing environmental forces. Cronon has also asserted that the very idea of “wilderness” was a human creation, not an essentialist category, and he has rejected the fundamental dualism placing urban industrialism in opposition to rural nature.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars have addressed nature-culture hybridity, revealing the natural or wild elements of cities and the human histories of “pristine” landscapes like National Parks.<sup>9</sup>

Initially, environmental historians who indicated the extent to which “nature” is historically contingent provoked intense controversy for their critique of widely shared cultural beliefs about the sanctity of nature. Developments in the academic realm have often run counter to discourse in popular culture. Many Americans insist that nature is an asylum from hectic urban-industrial life and prefer not to unravel the intricate web between those related concepts. However, in recent decades, challenges to the romantic tradition that artificially separated ideal, sublime nature from corrupt, human culture have become *de rigueur* in environmental history. Cultural geographer David Harvey has opposed the notions of nature “fetishization” or “idolatry” that insisted unspoiled nature had to be saved from human damage. Other scholars have emphasized the fluidity of categories like “natural” and “artificial.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See William Cronon’s Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (1991); and Cronon’s essay on “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” in William Cronon, Ed. Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature (1995).

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Mark David Spence. Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks (1999); William Deverell and Greg Hise, Eds. Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Urban Los Angeles (2005); Michael Lewis, Ed.. American Wilderness: A New History (2007); Eric W. Sanderson. Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City (2009).

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Bruce Braun, “Towards a New Earth and a New Humanity: Nature, Ontology, Politics,” in Noel Castree and Derek Gregory, Eds. David Harvey: A Critical Reader (2006); Ursula Lehmkuhl and Hermann Wellenreuther, Eds. Historians and Nature: Comparative Approaches to Environmental History (2007); Michael P. Nelson and J. Baird Callicott. The Wilderness Debate Rages On:

This dissertation complements previous literature in environmental history by scrutinizing the mélange of natural and human-made ingredients that gardens and farms encompass. My work recognizes the environment as an historical actor while also acknowledging material consequences of human thoughts and behavior. The environment has been a structuring agent constraining options for human activities. At the same time, human biases, preconceptions, ethics, and laws have impinged on physical places. Globally, agriculture has tremendous ecological, social, and philosophical implications. This dissertation demonstrates how organic agriculture unites rural and urban landscapes, producers, consumers, crops, markets, ideals, and technologies.

Consumer studies, the second area of analysis, considers commodities, consumers themselves, and social corollaries of consumption. Economists, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians have contributed to consumer studies. In appraising the capitalist system, Karl Marx described the “commodity fetishism” that arose when money instead of labor power bestowed the value of a commodity. Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) drew attention to “conspicuous consumption,” denigrating individuals and groups who used goods to signal their status. Subsequent scholars have been less judgmental but still highlighted the symbolic character of consumer goods. Jean Baudrillard’s *The System of Objects* (1968) was concerned not with the function of objects but with their secondary meanings, their inseparable levels of objective denotation and connotation. In *The World of Goods* (1979), Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood analyzed consumption from an anthropological perspective, as part of the social system. They saw goods as an information system, endowed with value by

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Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate (2008); Damian F. White and Chris Wilbert, Eds. Technonatures: Environments, Technologies, Spaces, and Places in the Twenty-first Century (2009).

fellow consumers, and challenged notions of a “puppet consumer” manipulated by wily advertisers. Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) similarly examined the “tactics” of consumption that individuals employed to appropriate and personalize products of mass culture. Historian Susan Strasser’s *Satisfaction Guaranteed* (1989) explored the creation of powerful mass markets for manufactured goods but maintained an emphasis on consumer agency.

Sociologists and economists like Pierre Bourdieu have studied how consumption and class position are connected.<sup>11</sup> Historians have examined evolving American attitudes towards consumer culture, shifts in aesthetics and design, and technological transformations.<sup>12</sup> Additional work has analyzed the expressive function of consumer decisions, the implications of choice on personal satisfaction, and the social psychology of shopping.<sup>13</sup> Much work has analyzed the importance of advertising, marketing, and branding.<sup>14</sup> Studies based on surveys and market research have noted the hierarchy of various motives that are factors in consumption decisions. Scholars have discussed how some consumers view shopping as a form of activism, while others seem to be acting

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<sup>11</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984).

<sup>12</sup> For example, see R.W. Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, Eds. *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (1983); Daniel Horowitz. *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (1985); Jeffrey Meikle. *American Plastic: A Cultural History* (1997); Katherine Grier. *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (1998); Daniel Horowitz. *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979* (2004); Grant McCracken. *Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning, and Brand Management* (2005).

<sup>13</sup> For example, see Rob Shields, Ed.. *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption* (1992); Barry Schwartz. *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less* (2004); Grant McCracken. *Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning, and Brand Management* (2005); Michael Silverstein and Neil Fiske. *Trading Up: Why Consumers Want New Luxury Goods--and How Companies Create Them* (2005); Allison J. Pugh. *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children, and Consumer Culture* (2009).

<sup>14</sup> For example, see Ernest Dichter. *Handbook of Consumer Motivations* (1964); Stuart Ewen. *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of Consumer Culture* (1976); Michael Schudson. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (1984); Roland Marchand. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (1985); Jackson Lears. *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (1994); Thomas Frank. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (1997).

only on an individual level.<sup>15</sup> In mainstream media, anti-consumerist literature urges people to reduce material possessions,<sup>16</sup> while proponents of “responsible consumption” encourage people to buy “eco-conscious” goods in order to help “change the world.”<sup>17</sup> Greater attention to resource use, commodity chains, and externalities of consumption have been key developments in the field.<sup>18</sup> My work contributes to this body of literature by demonstrating the dynamic character of organic consumption, the utilitarian and performative functions of organic food, the multifaceted motivations for purchasing it, the values consumers have assigned to it, differences between sites of consumption, the larger cultural systems in which consumption takes place, and the extent to which production and consumption are intertwined.

The third thematic strand, food studies, looks beyond the realms of cooking and nutrition by examining food practices, systems, cultures, symbolism, material artifacts, folklore, literature, media, and social relations. Scholarship in the growing field of food studies includes work by anthropologists, sociologists, food historians, and geographers who use ethnographic, quantitative, and qualitative methods. Anthropological approaches to the study of food practices have employed symbolic, materialist, and economic perspectives.<sup>19</sup> One of the earliest paradigms for food studies was a structuralist

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<sup>15</sup> For example, see Lizabeth Cohen. [A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America](#) (2003); Andrew Szasz. [Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves](#) (2007).

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Duane Elgin. [Voluntary Simplicity](#) (1981); John de Graaf. [Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic](#) (2001).

<sup>17</sup> For example, see Diane MacEachern. [Big Green Purse: Use Your Spending Power to Create a Cleaner, Greener World](#) (2008); Daniel Goleman. [Ecological Intelligence: How Knowing the Hidden Impacts of What We Buy Can Change Everything](#). (2009).

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca, Eds. [Confronting Consumption](#) (2002); Norman Myers and J. Kent. [The New Consumers: The Influence of Affluence on the Environment](#) (2004); Peter Dauvergne. [The Shadows of Consumption: Consequences for the Global Environment](#) (2008).

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Claude Lévi-Strauss. [The Raw and The Cooked](#) (1964); Carole M. Counihan. [The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power](#) (1999).

approach. Roland Barthes analyzed the “grammar of foods,” in which food was a sign, a system of communication, a body of images, and a protocol of behavior.<sup>20</sup> Many scholars have assessed how food serves as a signifier of the social environment, and their work has illuminated how food is used as a badge of identity, instrument of power, and symbol of resistance.<sup>21</sup>

The culturalist approach to food studies has explored subjective experiences, social cognition, and historical trends.<sup>22</sup> Several works have examined how national cuisines have been shaped by geography, subsistence needs, environmental factors, cultural taboos, technological developments, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization.<sup>23</sup> Scholars note that foodways are entangled with gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and class.<sup>24</sup> Despite fears that have been voiced about a globalized marketplace, some work has emphasized that the rise of mass-produced food and international chain restaurants didn’t result in culinary homogeneity.<sup>25</sup> Many historians have spotlighted particular foodstuffs, prepared foods, or food rituals.<sup>26</sup> Others have delineated the

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<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes. “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption” in Food and Drink in History: Selections from the Annales. R. Forster and O. Ranum (1979).

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Carole M. Counihan, Ed. Food in the USA: A Reader. 2002. Laura Shapiro. Something From the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America (2004).

<sup>22</sup> For example, see M. Conner and C. J. Armitage The Social Psychology of Food (2002); Warren Belasco. Appetite for Change (1989); and Warren Belasco. Meals to Come: A History of the Future of Food (2006).

<sup>23</sup> For example, see Harvey Levenstein. Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet (1988); Harvey Levenstein. Paradox of Plenty: Social History of Eating in Modern America (1993); David Bell and Gill Valentine. Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat. (1997); Leslie Brenner. American Appetite: The Coming of Age of a Cuisine (1999).

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussel, Eds. Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity (1984); Laura Shapiro. Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century (1986); Barbara G. Shortridge & James R. Shortridge, Eds. The Taste of American Place: A Reader on Regional and Ethnic Foods (1998); Donna Gabaccia. We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans (2000); Sherrie A. Inness, Ed. Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race (2000).

<sup>25</sup> For example, see James L Watson, Ed. Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia (1997).

<sup>26</sup> For example, see Sidney Mintz. Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History (1985); Kathy Neustadt. Clambake: A History and Celebration of an American Tradition (1992). Mark Kurlansky. Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World (1997); Virginia Scott Jenkins. Bananas: An American History (2000); Mark Pendergrast. Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It

commodity chains that connect disparate locales and bring goods “from farm to table” in the industrial food system.<sup>27</sup> Media attention to food sustainability has grown exponentially, and journalists like Eric Schlosser, Michael Pollan, and Marion Nestle have produced best-selling books on food safety, politics, and health repercussions of dietary choices.<sup>28</sup>

This dissertation builds on scholarly attention to the creation of meanings and identities through food. It explores organic food as a nexus of concerns about health, ethics, taste, status, authenticity, and control. My research notes parallels between the organic movement and other food networks that highlight politicized consumption and the ethics of eating, such as local food, slow food, and fair trade. My holistic approach examines intersections between producers, consumers, government regulations, landscapes of food shopping, advertisements, grassroots groups, and industries involved in the organic food movement.

Overall, my research combines perspectives from the interrelated fields of environmental history, consumer studies, and food studies, providing a multidimensional assessment of the organic movement. Unlike case studies or ethnographies that track specific organic farms, this project takes a more expansive approach. My study entails collection and analysis of historical and contemporary data, including archival,

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Transformed Our World (1999); Andrew Smith. Peanuts: The Illustrious History of the Goober Pea (2002); E. Melanie DuPuis. Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink (2002); Steve Ettlinger. Twinkie, Deconstructed (2007); and the series by Reaktion Books, including Carol Helstosky. Pizza: A Global History (2008) and Ken Albala. Pancake: A Global History (2008).

<sup>27</sup> See Warren Belasco and Roger Horowitz, Eds. Food Chains: From Farmyard to Shopping Cart (2009).

<sup>28</sup> See Eric Schlosser. Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal (2001); Michael Pollan. The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals (2006); Michael Pollan. In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto (2009); Marion Nestle. Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health (2002); Marion Nestle. Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism (2003); Marion Nestle. What to Eat (2006); as well as the films The True Cost of Food (2002); King Corn (2005); Fast Food Nation (2006); and Food, Inc. (2009).



legislative, and regulatory documents. It applies discourse analysis, semiotics, iconographic study, and cultural analysis to texts and additional sorts of media.

Observations of organic sites of consumption also enhance the historical and theoretical evaluations. While organic agriculture is an international phenomenon, with cross-cultural exchange between nations at various stages of organic development, my investigation concentrates on the United States as a paradigm.

This dissertation contributes to ongoing debates over sustainable agriculture, green consumption, nutrition and health, identity formation, and popular constructions of nature. It informs explorations of the dialectic between cultural production and consumer agency. The results of this study are relevant to the academic community as well as to the general public, since it places the organic movement in the context of wide-ranging environmental, economic, cultural, ethical and historical issues in American society.

### **Organics as a Social Movement**

Organic farming has been classified as a hobby and as a constituent of agribusiness; organic food has been dubbed as a hollow preference and as an exploited industry. At its core, though, organics is a social movement. Alberto Melucci defined a social movement as a type of collective action that involves solidarity, is engaged in conflict, and breaks systemic limits. Actors must recognize that they are part of a “single social unit.”<sup>29</sup> Formation of a collective identity is imperative to social movements. However, a movement is a transitory network of interaction among individuals, cohorts, and organizations, not a permanent monolith acting in unison. Group identity is mobile and fragmented, not fixed or unified. Movements re-invent themselves while adapting to

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<sup>29</sup> Melucci, A. (1989). Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society. Philadelphia, Temple University Press. 29.

changing circumstances. As Stuart Hall notes, identities are constructed by specific enunciative strategies that mark difference and exclusion. They are always “in process,” never completed.<sup>30</sup>

Individual input is essential for movements, but each personal action may or may not indicate involvement in a distinctive movement. Even while the collective identity of a diffuse movement resists ideological closures, it is not infinitely flexible. Affiliated people must self-consciously identify with particular concerns, demonstrating awareness of shared beliefs. Participants engage in a series of differentiated acts that reinforce the sense of belonging and identity.<sup>31</sup> A social movement is not simply an ephemeral interest group, organization, or industry.

Social movements entail meaningful attempts to alter existing rules and norms. They begin when contrasting value systems come into conflict.<sup>32</sup> Social movements make an effort to change public opinion and win support for implementing new political policies.<sup>33</sup> In promoting or opposing social change, they tend to fluctuate between phases of intense public activity and latent periods.<sup>34</sup> Over time, radical aims may give way to more moderate ones; and successes may trigger backlashes from opposing interests. The organic movement has its own history of solidarity, conflict, and violation of boundaries.

Claude Levi-Strauss’s notion of *bricolage* applies to the construction of meaning within a social movement. Organic *bricoleurs* manipulate and revalue signs, recombining available elements and making new arrangements. These *bricoleurs* are always at work,

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<sup>30</sup> Hall, S. (1996). Who Needs 'Identity'? Questions of Cultural Identity. S. Hall and P. D. Gay. London, Sage: 1-17. 2-4.

<sup>31</sup> Porta, D. d. and M. Diani (1999). Social Movements: An Introduction. London, Blackwell. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 237.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 20.

innovating with cumulative facets of culture to create a quilt of complex messages. Though it has been interconnected with other movements and was never static, the organic movement does have a distinct identity. It coalesced through core beliefs and attributes that have provided internal guidance and support. This ideology has also offered an “official” view of the movement to society at large.<sup>35</sup>

The organic movement can be fundamentally categorized as one of several contemporary New Social Movements (NSMs), which have garnered a growing role in late capitalism. NSMs differ from models of earlier mass social movements in their emphasis on consumption’s part in the political economy, rather than on their relation to the system of production. Many of these collective initiatives have shifted towards non-political terrain, dealing instead with “self-realization in everyday life.”<sup>36</sup> The self-reflexive and expressive actions of its members are indeed vital, but the organic movement overall has also continued to partake in political and cultural conflicts. Though the commercial organic food industry and market are prominent components of its structure, the organic movement as a whole maintains a social agenda.<sup>37</sup>

The organic legion can also be described as a community. As Anthony Cohen notes, communities are largely mental constructs, and symbolic boundaries create communal consciousness. When people construct a community symbolically, they make it “a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity.”<sup>38</sup> The community of organic farmers and consumers has lacked uniformity, yet there has been a

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<sup>35</sup> Goldstein, M. (1992). The Health Movement: Promoting Fitness in America. New York, Twayne Publishers.

<sup>36</sup> Melucci, A. (1989). Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society. Philadelphia, Temple University Press. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Kristiansen, P. and C. Merfield (2006). Overview of Organic Agriculture. Organic Agriculture: A Global Perspective. P. Kristiansen, A. Taji and J. Reganold. Ithaca, NY, Comstock Publishing Associates: 1-23. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, A. P. (1985). The Symbolic Construction of Community. New York, Tavistock Publications. 118.

commonality of forms—ways of behaving—even when content or meanings varied. Symbols are imprecise and subjective, so “individuality and commonality are thus reconcilable.”<sup>39</sup> Borders are permeable, and organic community members may simultaneously belong to other associations. Still, they do constitute a cadre of people who share actions and symbols, however malleable these might be, that significantly distinguish them from other groups.<sup>40</sup>

### **Organic Discourse**

The methodology of discourse analysis is useful in decoding a movement’s coherent body of beliefs. This research technique involves interpreting books, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, catalogues, websites, interviews, organizational documents, and other social sources. Discourse analysis views language as constitutive of objects, thoughts, and practices. Postmodern scholarship on identity as a sociocognitive construct exposes the ways in which discourse sustains “collective definitions, social arrangements, and hierarchies of power.”<sup>41</sup> Our comprehension of existence is constructed through the way we speak and write about it. As anthropologist Kay Milton observes, discourse organizes knowledge in communication and thereby “denotes how social reality is constituted.”<sup>42</sup> Texts alone never solely comprise culture, but discourse is woven throughout society and has a formative influence.

Foucault believed that discourses are grounded in power, and power produces knowledge. He revealed how particular discursive formations can have intimate effects

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 20-1.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Cerulo, K. A. (1997). "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions." *Annual Review of Sociology* **23**: 385-409. 391.

<sup>42</sup> Milton, K. (1993). Introduction: Environmentalism and Anthropology. *Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology*. K. Milton. New York, Routledge. 8.

on individuals, social groups, and perceptions of truth.<sup>43</sup> As forms of power, overriding discourses impinge on public consciousness, and some messages acquire precedence over others. There are battles between master narratives and alternative dialects. Privileged, authoritative voices speak prominently, while dissidents may be silenced or marginalized. The legitimacy or “truth” of a dominant discourse is contingent upon social context and power relations.

Mikhail Bakhtin conceptualized each text as a dialogue, in which multiple discourses interact. Bakhtin’s notion of dialogics emphasizes contradictory voices within every utterance. Social movements, like texts, are polyphonic. In any culture, a collision of voices from different sociolinguistic points of view creates heteroglossia, an open-ended dialogue of subcultures.<sup>44</sup> Movements rarely speak as univocal entities. Discourse always has a dialogical orientation; it is collective and multivalent. While the organic movement has no single, straightforward, or conclusive dictum, some notable players do speak vociferously. Not all actors participate equally or fully in the cognitive praxis, or articulation of movement identity. Some “movement intellectuals” are more visible as organizers or spokespeople.<sup>45</sup> This project includes analyses of rhetorical strategies used by organic farmers, business leaders, chefs, consumers, writers, and organizations that have engaged extensively with the “organic lifestyle.” Despite the fluid intertextuality of these expressions, there are common themes. Unraveling the multivocality and

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<sup>43</sup> Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction. Vol. I*. New York, Vintage Books.

<sup>44</sup> McDowell, M. J. (1996). The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm. Athens, The University of Georgia Press: 371-391. 380.

<sup>45</sup> Eyerman, R. and A. Jamison (1991). *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*. Cambridge, Polity Press. 94.

interconnectedness of prevailing discourses provides insight into the movement's epicenter.

### **What is “Organic”?**

Labels and laws are important discursive tools, always part of a historical conversation. The way people understood the term “organic”—the cultural designation—often differed from the stringent legal definition. Successive eras have assigned assorted connotations to the word. The meaning of “organic” was fuzzy for decades, and there were contentious struggles over pinning down precisely what organic agriculture involved. Since the 1940s, the concepts of holism, health, and natural balance were integral to the organic philosophy. But the discourses surrounding “organic” have shifted unceasingly, conveying multifaceted sensibilities. Though some of its methods had been used for centuries, a formal classification could not be forged until the chemically-based alternative prevailed. “Organic” was legislatively delineated as both an oppositional and positive label. It was contrarian in its critique of what conventional agriculture had become but innovative in its incorporation of unique features.

Rodale felt that the organic method was a way of “bringing nature back into balance.”<sup>46</sup> Addressing doubts and misconceptions about what “organically-grown” really meant, he defined it in 1953 as food and crops that had been “raised on soil fertilized by organic methods only.” He said the term “particularly indicates that no chemical fertilizers, conditioners, insecticides or any such type of spray, pesticide or preservative has been used at any time in the growing or preparation of these products.”<sup>47</sup> Rodale's definition was never legally sanctioned, and he modified it many times.

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<sup>46</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: Whither Science? *The Organic Farmer*. **4**: 13.

<sup>47</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). What ‘Organically-Grown’ Really Means. *The Organic Farmer*. **5**: 37.

“Organic methods” themselves were dynamic, evolving over the decades to accommodate new research and practices.

In the United States, it was not until 1990 that the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) established national standards for marketing organic agricultural products. This assured consumers that organically produced products met a consistent standard.<sup>48</sup> Products that had long been tinged with an intangible aura of virtue acquired administrative legitimacy. By 2001 the National Organic Program rules were finalized, providing national criteria for use of the term “certified organic.” Any person or retailer who misuses the term “organic” is subject to a penalty of up to \$10,000.<sup>49</sup> Organic chef Jeff Cox observed that, “from a one-page flyer called ‘Organic Gardening in a Nutshell,’ distributed by the thousands in the 1970s, the rules for organic agriculture have ballooned to sixty-three pages of government regulations, covering every aspect of organic food production.”<sup>50</sup> Few people have read all the intricate details, which are subject to revision as new issues arise. The recognizable U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Organic seal is a process claim, not a product assertion, because it refers to how the merchandise was made. The seal’s credibility has been crucial to the success of the organic food industry. However, the seal’s symbolic ambiguity affected the philosophies of organic growers in contradictory ways.

Recent scholarship on the “conventionalization thesis,” applied to organic farming, asserts that the growth of organic food production and consumption from a small niche market into a multi-billion-dollar global industry indicates corporate co-

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<sup>48</sup> USDA. (2007). "National Organic Program: Final Rule." Retrieved May 29, 2007, from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html>. 546.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 20-21.

<sup>50</sup> Cox, J. (2006). The Organic Cook's Bible: How to Select and Cook the Best Ingredients on the Market. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 32.

optation. The movement's ideals seem to have dissipated into profit motives. The transition from grassroots to mainstream has been well publicized. The organic campaign is a cultural resistance movement that, due to its success, has been subjected to what Max Weber called the "routinization of charisma." Critics of organic food's metamorphosis often ignore how motifs ingrained in organic rhetoric have, since their inception, served to reconcile the movement to the orthodox food system. The organic clan in the United States was never as wholly radical or seditious as some devotees profess.

The underlying motivations of those partaking in the organic movement have included improvement of physical health, personal fulfillment, and achievement of internal purity. Some people had lofty goals to change the world but conveyed this in a quest for private satisfaction. The seemingly palpable implications of each action exist concurrently with other connotations. Those growing and consuming organic food have expressed discontent, pragmatism, and defensive self-protection. Often, these acts have been limited responses. Chronic dependence on individual behavior restricted the movement's capacity to enact comprehensive social revolutions. Reliance on backyard gardening and routine consumer decisions was less effective than other kinds of activism, such as large-scale political lobbying, that could have challenged the core assumptions underpinning conventional agriculture. The movement grappled with the drawbacks and advantages of obliging the popular commercial market for decades. Yet, even as it appeared to succumb to the call of Wal-Mart, it retained transgressive elements.

Organic food and farming is a polysemic entity that is in perpetual flux, still in progress and open to new possibilities. The movement's interdiscursive elements are ideologically charged cultural artifacts. These constituents reveal fields of contention and



complacency, resistance and accommodation. This dissertation chronicles how the interplay among the organic movement's creeds, fissures, contexts, and subtexts has affected its meaning and station in American culture.

## CHAPTER 1

### “Touching Off a Powder Keg:” J.I. Rodale’s Organic Mission

Jerome Irving Rodale (1898 – 1971) began making compost heaps in 1941. He accentuated farming in “imitation of Nature” on the sixty acres he had purchased near Emmaus, Pennsylvania.<sup>51</sup> He used the term “organic” in reference to crops grown without artificial fertilizers or chemical sprays. J.I. Rodale believed that healthy soil would produce healthy food and, in turn, healthy people. His pesticide-free method, he discovered, could compete financially with the chemical system that governed agriculture at the time.<sup>52</sup> Heartened by his bountiful crops grown with compost and the physical vigor they spawned, Rodale was not content to be a reclusive gardener. With crusading zeal, he propagated the organic gospel and became the first major advocate for organic farming in the United States. Rodale is a pivotal figure in the organic canon. He is frequently cited as the “founding father” of the U.S. organic food and farming movement.<sup>53</sup> This chapter examines Rodale’s goals, activities, and legacy. It illuminates the intertwined themes of family farming, environmentalism, health, consumerism, and standardization in his work that have persisted throughout the organic movement and will be explored further in ensuing chapters.

An innovative, self-made man, Rodale was the quintessential Benjamin Franklin character of organic farming. He had no background in farming, but, in the first year after procuring his land, he received “such a wonderful crop that it was a joy to behold.”

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<sup>51</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). Pay Dirt: Farming and Gardening With Composts. New York, The Devin-Adair Company. 193.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Bryant, G. (1971). J.I. Rodale: Pollution Prophet. Penthouse. 2: 28-32. 28; and Sustainable Agriculture Network (2007). Transitioning to Organic Production, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program: 1-31. 3; and Sullivan, D. (2009). "Research Makes It Clear: Organic Food is Best for People and the Planet." Rootstock 9(1): 4-7. 7.

Seeing the promising results and convinced that “this compost system was nothing short of magic,” Rodale thought “it would be a crime” not to teach others about it. To share his knowledge of “this simple method of farming,” he began to concentrate on a different publication.<sup>54</sup> Rodale established *Organic Farming and Gardening*, touting it as a “New Kind of Agricultural Magazine.” Upon later reflection, Rodale said, “I did not dream at that time that I was touching off a powder keg.”<sup>55</sup> The inaugural issue in May 1942 included articles on composting, earthworms, soil fertility, and the superiority of animal manure over chemical fertilizers. Doing things “Nature’s Way” was a recurring theme. Each issue played an instrumental role in articulating organic farming philosophies.

Rodale’s magazine had far-reaching power with early organic growers, partly due to the dearth of other data sources. However, it was never just about farming or gardening. Rodale wanted to connect with the general public and address other pertinent matters. In his first editorial, he discussed how synthetic fertilizers altered the nutritive value of food. Touting the high quality of eggs, meat, and vegetables raised by organic methods, he wrote, “the better-earning class of the public will pay a high price if they can be shown its value, and that they will save on doctor bills.”<sup>56</sup> Throughout his life, Rodale displayed a keen interest in alerting people to health hazards or organic blessings. In a 1944 issue of *Organic Farming and Gardening*, Rodale wrote that if all the food-producing soil in the country were “intensively treated in the organic manner,” then “we could become a race of super-men and super-women.”<sup>57</sup> He supported the commonplace appeal of wholesome food and the profits it could reap. Rodale started numerous other

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<sup>54</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). Editorial. *The Organic Farmer*. **1**: 9-10. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Editorial: Looking Back, Part IV, The Beginning of Our Experimental Farm. *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 10-11, 36-39. 39.

<sup>56</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1942). Introduction to Organic Farming. *Organic Farming and Gardening*. **1**: 3-4. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1944). With the Editor: Is Our Health Related to the Soil? *Organic Gardening*. **5**: 3-8. 8.

periodicals, knowing that Americans were far more interested in optimum health, ample income, and tasty tomatoes than in how lime in their compost would maintain proper soil alkalinity. He wrote several seminal books, beginning with *Pay Dirt: Farming and Gardening with Composts* (1945). *Pay Dirt* proved to be an apt title for a book full of ideas that launched Rodale on the path to wealth and renown.

Rodale was an important player in the cultural revision of attitudes towards organic farming. Chemical agriculture reigned from the 1890s into the 1940s, when Rodale unleashed his crusade. He yearned to “saturate every segment of American life with the realization that there is something radically wrong with the foundations of our civilization.”<sup>58</sup> At first, skeptics vilified him as a “crackpot” and “food faddist.”<sup>59</sup> He eventually achieved a measure of legitimacy and prosperity as organic food came into vogue. The number of organic gardening adherents boomed in the late 1960s, and Rodale became the “leading apostle” of organically grown food.<sup>60</sup> Rodale’s ability to capitalize on the organic explosion prompted some critics to impugn his motives. Yet, earning revenue and cultivating middle-of-the-road appeal—not just sabotaging chemical agriculture—were among Rodale’s earliest ambitions. He was as much an entrepreneur as a farmer. His granddaughter, Maria Rodale, remembered “not a sun-weathered guy in dirty overalls, but a man who strolled his fields deep in thought wearing a gray suit and a pressed white shirt.”<sup>61</sup> In both capacities, Rodale thrived. He combined a genuine concern for educating Americans about organic farming and healthy living with an

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<sup>58</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Tenth Anniversary Editorial: Looking Back *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 11-14, 43. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Rodale, R. (1992). The Heart and Soul of Organic Gardening *Ibid.* **39**: 46.

<sup>60</sup> Tucker, D. M. (1993). *Kitchen Gardening in America: A History*. Ames, Iowa State University Press. 142.

<sup>61</sup> Briggs, B. (2001). Going organic: Enthusiastic consumers join craze. *The Denver Post*. Denver: 1-5.

aptitude for making money by publishing that information. More than any other form of publicity, his magazines and books lifted public awareness of what “organic” meant.

### **Seeds Planted**

Rodale can be categorized as an archetypal Ragged Dick, a success story torn from the pages of a Horatio Alger novel. He was born in 1898 as Jerome Irving Cohen, one of eight children raised in what he called “the slums of New York City.”<sup>62</sup> He grew up in a small flat at the rear of his father’s grocery store. In his youth, he suffered from nagging headaches and colds.<sup>63</sup> Heart problems ran in the family; his father and five of his siblings died in their fifth or sixth decade due to heart attacks. He described himself as “mildly health-conscious since young adulthood.”<sup>64</sup> To augment his fitness as a teenager, he followed self-improvement courses, such as Bernarr Macfadden’s body-building regimen.<sup>65</sup>

He worked as an accountant subsequent to graduating from high school. Feeling that a Jewish name would hinder his aspirations to enter the writing and publishing business, he changed his last name from Cohen to Rodale in 1921.<sup>66</sup> Rodale soon abandoned accounting and initiated an electrical equipment business with his brother. After moving their plant to Pennsylvania in 1930, Rodale suddenly found himself “part of an agricultural scene.” Observing farmers at work in the fields, he began to covet his own

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<sup>62</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Tenth Anniversary Editorial: Looking Back (Part II). Organic Gardening. **20**: 11-12, 37-38. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Greene, W. (1971). Guru of the Organic Food Cult. New York Times Magazine: 30, 31, 54, 56, 60, 65, 68. 30.

<sup>64</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). The Healthy Hunzas. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 31.

<sup>65</sup> Whorton, J. (1982). Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers. Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press. 332.

<sup>66</sup> Jackson, C. (1974). J.I. Rodale: Apostle of Nonconformity. New York, Pyramid Books. 55.

piece of land.<sup>67</sup> With the revenue he earned from the factory, Rodale instituted a publishing company that issued magazines and pamphlets on humor, health, and etiquette. Most of these were short-lived and unprofitable.<sup>68</sup> The link he later forged between organic farming and health would be a turning point in his vocation.

Rodale's interest in organics began when he discovered the work of British agriculturist Sir Albert Howard (1873 – 1947), who is widely considered the founder of contemporary organic farming. Howard served as Mycologist and Agricultural Lecturer to the Imperial Department of Agriculture for the West Indies, garnering knowledge of tropical agriculture. In central India, at the Institute of Plant Industry in Indore, Howard observed how the “methods of Nature” restored soil fertility. He developed the idea of emulating nature with a scientific composting system. In the 1920s, Howard devised the “Indore Process,” a practical way of making compost fertilizer. It manufactured humus from vegetable and animal wastes, with a base to neutralize acidity, and managed the admixture so micro-organisms could function effectively.<sup>69</sup> Howard focused on building fertile soil according to “Nature’s dictates.” He came to believe that plant disease was “punishment meted out by Mother Earth for adopting methods of agriculture which are not in accordance with Nature’s law of return.”<sup>70</sup> Gardeners who adopted his Indore mode of making compost discarded customary commercial fertilizers formulated with inorganic chemical compounds.

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<sup>67</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Editorial: Looking Back Part III, Tradition Throttles Research. Organic Gardening. **20**: 10-11. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Jackson, C. (1974). J.I. Rodale: Apostle of Nonconformity. New York, Pyramid Books. 61.

<sup>69</sup> Howard, A. (1943). An Agricultural Testament. New York, Oxford University Press. 39.

<sup>70</sup> Howard, A. (1947). The Soil and Health: A Study of Organic Agriculture. New York, The Devin-Adair Co. v.

In 1941, Rodale read an article in an English health magazine about an experiment demonstrating the benefits of feeding children food grown by Howard's organic composting technique. Intrigued, Rodale learned how the health of boys in a boarding school near London had improved when they were fed vegetables grown in this natural humus. Taste and quality of the vegetables also increased. The theory that the way food was grown could affect its nutritional quality was a new concept, unsupported by physicians or nutritionists. Yet, the evidence persuaded Rodale. Plagued by colds and regular headaches, he had tested various remedies but found none to be effective. Organically grown food seemed to be his salvation. Rodale contacted Howard and was profoundly affected by reading his book, *An Agricultural Testament* (1940).<sup>71</sup> Rodale said, "I could not rest until I purchased a farm in order to assure for ourselves a supply of food raised by the new method."<sup>72</sup> Howard and Rodale began to correspond, and Rodale later published many of Howard's writings. Rodale aspired to "carry the torch aloft for the spread of his ideas in this country."<sup>73</sup> After Howard's death, Rodale professed that the world owed Howard a big debt, because "it was he who first detected the pathetic fallacy of present day chemical fertilization."<sup>74</sup>

Rodale imported to the U.S. the principles of soil fertility that both Howard and Lady Eve Balfour (1899 - 1990) were propagating in England. After reading Howard's work, Balfour had initiated experiments at the 210-acre Haughley Research Farm in Suffolk, to scientifically compare the performance of chemical fertilizers and compost. Balfour believed in Howard's Indore process of manufacturing humus and asserted that

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<sup>71</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). *Pay Dirt: Farming and Gardening With Composts*. New York, The Devin-Adair Company. 139.

<sup>72</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Tenth Anniversary Editorial: Looking Back *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 11-14, 43. 13

<sup>73</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). With the Editor: Sir Albert Howard: A Tribute. *Organic Gardening*. **13**: 13-14. 14.

<sup>74</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). The Soil and Health Foundation. *Organic Gardening*. **11**: 31.

“composting is as old as agriculture.”<sup>75</sup> She noted that “sooner or later all advocates of organic farming cite the Chinese,” calling them “the Fathers of good husbandry.” The organic school often looked to Franklin King’s classic *Farmers of Forty Centuries* (1911), which extolled the efficient agricultural practices of China, Korea, and Japan, as an authoritative text.<sup>76</sup> King had urged the United States to adopt the techniques of these “old-world farmers” for maintaining soil fertility, including the use of organic matter as plant food.<sup>77</sup> Balfour insisted in *The Living Soil* (1943) that a nation’s health depended on the way food was grown, and agriculture should be looked upon as “the primary health service.”<sup>78</sup>

Howard and Balfour highlighted the relationships between healthy soil, plants, livestock, and people. Both were connected to the nonprofit Soil Association, founded in 1946 to promote health and organic agriculture, which played a central institutional role within the British organic movement. Their cohort included Lord Northbourne (1896 - 1982), born as Walter E.C. James, an agriculturalist who was the first to use the term “organic” with respect to a farming system. Lord Northbourne felt that the farm had to be “organic in more senses than one.”<sup>79</sup> He wrote in *Look to the Land* (1940) that, if “wholeness” was to be attained, the farm must have “a biological completeness; it must be a living entity, it must be a unit which has within itself a balanced organic life.”<sup>80</sup> He believed that adopting “true mixed farming” was “the first step towards the perfection of the individual farm,” and it would be “a healthy organic whole yielding a true profit

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<sup>75</sup> Balfour, E. B. (1948). *The Living Soil*. London, Faber and Faber. 44.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 137.

<sup>77</sup> King, F. H. (1955). *Farmers of Forty Centuries*. Emmaus, PA, Organic Gardening Press.

<sup>78</sup> Balfour, E. B. (1948). *The Living Soil*. London, Faber and Faber. 163.

<sup>79</sup> Northbourne, L. (1940). *Look to the Land*. London, Dent. 98.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 96.



rather than only a financial profit.”<sup>81</sup> For Lord Northbourne, as for Howard, the “Rule of Return” was the essence of farming.

A non-chemical agricultural method predating organics was the biodynamic approach, based on lectures given by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925) in the 1920s. Steiner advised working with natural forces, special herbal preparations, and the spiritual views of anthroposophy. In one 1923 lecture on beekeeping, he stated that men had “yet to learn much from Nature” and ought to “recognize the spiritual in Nature.”<sup>82</sup> Biodynamic farming used organic processes like manuring but included cosmic tenets, such as planting seeds by lunar rhythms. Rodale corresponded with Ehrenfried Pfeiffer (1899 – 1961), a key player in bringing Steiner’s opinions to the United States, and frequently discussed connections between organic and biodynamic techniques. Pfeiffer, the author of *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* (1938), believed that sound agriculture could only be achieved through “the principle of an Organic Whole.”<sup>83</sup> Rodale did not adopt Steiner’s mystical teachings but espoused the perspective of treating the farm as a biological organic unit. Pfeiffer became a regular contributor to Rodale’s farming magazine and wrote about his own practical research. *Bio-Dynamics*, a periodical first published in 1941 by the Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, featured articles on organic farming because there were many parallels between the two standpoints.

Edward Faulkner, an organic farming advocate who caused a ripple of excitement in the agricultural world with his rejection of standard plowing practices, became a friend

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>82</sup> Steiner, R. (1998). "Beekeeping: Nine Lectures on Bees." *Biodynamics*(216): 19-23. 23.

<sup>83</sup> Pfeiffer, E. (1938). *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening: Soil Fertility, Renewal and Preservation*. New York, Anthroposophic Press. 210-211.

of Rodale's. Faulkner gained national attention with his controversial book, *Plowman's Folly* (1943). He critiqued prevailing farming customs and what he regarded as the misguided use of science and technology. He buttressed the notion that the moldboard plow was damaging the soil by pushing organic material down too deeply. Instead, the disk harrow should be used and applied only to the upper surface of the soil. Resistance to Faulkner and to organic farming came from several members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The book was classified as agricultural heresy for violating the "divine right of plows." However, Rodale praised *Plowman's Folly*, which rapidly sold 50,000 copies.

### **Touching Off a Movement**

In February 1942, Rodale produced a special issue of his small magazine, *Fact Digest*, with a headline that shouted "Present Day Crops Unfit for Human Consumption!" This issue, unlike previous ones, "flew off the racks and resulted in a deluge of letters calling for more such articles."<sup>84</sup> Rodale decided to discontinue *Fact Digest* and create *Organic Farming and Gardening* instead. Albert Howard would be an associate editor. Rodale said, "little did I realize what I was touching off—that I would be the one to introduce this great movement into the United States." The first issue, in May 1942, was "a slim thing with a self-cover and 16 pages of coarse newsprint."<sup>85</sup> "Back to Nature in Agriculture" was the headline on the cover. Rodale promised readers that, although learning to make compost heaps from manure would mean extra labor, the farmer would be "more than repaid by getting better crops and selling them at higher prices."<sup>86</sup> He mailed out about 14,000 free copies of the first issue to farmers, soliciting subscriptions

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<sup>84</sup> McGrath, M., Ed. (1996). *The Best of Organic Gardening*. Emmaus PA, Rodale. viii.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>86</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1942). Introduction to Organic Farming. *Organic Farming and Gardening*. **1**: 3-4. 4.

at \$1.00 a year, but received only twelve responses. Though the “prospects looked bleak,” he was undeterred. After sending out circular letters instead, the list of subscribers began to grow.<sup>87</sup>

The October 1942 cover of *Organic Farming and Gardening* featured a warning that “the U.S. Government has admitted that the reason 50 percent of the men called for the draft were rejected was because they were undernourished.”<sup>88</sup> The magazine promised to tell readers how to make organic fertilizer to “remedy this condition.” Howard contributed an article with instructions for assembling a backyard compost heap. William A. Albrecht, a soil scientist at the University of Missouri, wrote about the effect of sick soils on animals. Additional articles addressed seaweed as fertilizer, the benefits of earthworms, and the increasing number of abandoned farms that were becoming “eyesores” in the countryside.<sup>89</sup> Articles by Faulkner, Lord Northbourne, and Charles Darwin were reprinted with permission from other books or journals. Rodale acknowledged in his Editor’s Note that most of these pieces were “heavy reading.” One page in the issue promoted a course of practical study to be offered by Ehrenfried Pfeiffer in January 1943, which would cover soil chemistry, tilling, botany, farm economics, dairy management, and other topics. The “Reader’s Correspondence” section included letters from readers in Ohio, Nebraska, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New York who had questions about chicken manure, weeds, and compost piles. There was a full-page advertisement for Hoegger Goat Supplies, along with smaller classified ads for compost equipment, earthworms, biodynamic farming books, and rabbit market magazines.

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<sup>87</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Tenth Anniversary Editorial: Looking Back *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 11-14, 43. 14.

<sup>88</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1942). Health and the Soil. *Organic Farming and Gardening*. **1**: 1.

<sup>89</sup> Gardenhire, F. J. Ibid. The Crime of Abandoned Farms: 13-15. 13.

*Organic Farming and Gardening* did not initially appeal to professional farmers. The magazine lost money for the first sixteen years, but it retained loyal readers and found an avid audience among home gardeners who believed in Rodale's cause. By 1943, Rodale realized that he "had better leave the farmer for later" and changed the name to *Organic Gardening*. Progress was more rapid from that time on, and Rodale saw that "people gave more respect to the publication."<sup>90</sup> In the February issue that year, he discussed how organic fertilization was "a far more natural method for raising crops than doping the soil with high-powered, concentrated chemicals."<sup>91</sup> A reader from Oklahoma wrote in approval of the magazine's viewpoint, because it was "quite at variance with the orthodox traditional attitude" that had developed under the "influence of commercial high pressure salesmanship" in American farming.<sup>92</sup>

Several issues discussed the ongoing war. The August 1943 cover decreed "Help the War Effort: Use Only Home-Made Organic Fertilizers." Rodale's editorial suggested that the creation of a "land army" after the war could preserve organic wastes and apply them to "enrichment of the land." He felt this would combat unemployment and also "save the soil of our country."<sup>93</sup> An article in July 1944 discussed how the victory garden movement was supplementing wartime foodstuff shortages and creating a greater interest in plants. In the early years of the magazine, the covers were plain and the only illustrations were hand drawings. Some black-and-white photographs appeared in 1944, and then covers over the next two years featured rustic photos of things like butterflies,

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<sup>90</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Tenth Anniversary Editorial: Looking Back *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 11-14, 43.

<sup>91</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1943). With the Editor. *Organic Gardening*. **2**: 2-4. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Lane, H. A. Ibid. Reader's Correspondence: 28-31. 28-29.

<sup>93</sup> Rodale, J. I. Ibid. With the Editor: Federal Program (Part II). **3**: 1-3. 1.

cows, farmhouses, trees, horse-drawn buggies, birds, flowers, children, vegetables, bunnies, and swans.

In the September 1944 issue, Rodale enumerated 40 reasons as to why farming with compost was superior to artificial fertilizers. The first was that it improved “the general fertility level of the farm and garden”; number 24 was that it reduced “the weed menace”; and reason 36 was that “foods raised organically taste better.” Rodale added that compost farming actually entailed less work overall.<sup>94</sup> The following month, he devoted his editorial to the relationship between health and soil. Instead of the millions spent annually on vitamin pills, the best investment for public wellbeing would be funding for farmers making humus. Organic food, he said, was the secret ingredient in “a veritable fountain of youth.”<sup>95</sup>

Readers continued to write in with testimonials. In February 1945, a man from Maine thanked Rodale for the “wonderful magazine” and stated that several men in his community were forming an Organic Gardening Club. Rodale printed the letter, hoping it would encourage others to start similar clubs.<sup>96</sup> A woman from California wrote in March 1945, sending snapshots of her own compost heaps made by the Indore process and expressing appreciation for the “education and moral support” she obtained from the magazine.<sup>97</sup> Some readers had quite specific questions, such as: “What causes leaves of African violets to become spotted with yellow spots?”; “Are eucalyptus leaves dangerous to earthworms?”; and “How many pounds of phosphate rock would I need for 9000

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<sup>94</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1944). With the Editor: Advantages of Compost Farming. *Organic Gardening*. **5**: 1-5.

<sup>95</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1944). With the Editor: Is Our Health Related to the Soil? *Organic Gardening*. **5**: 3-8. 6-8.

<sup>96</sup> Muckler, H. E. (1945). LettersIbid. **6**: 28.

<sup>97</sup> Driscoll, R. A. Ibid.California Compost: 24.

square feet of space?”<sup>98</sup> A Florida man’s letter in April 1945 conveyed interest in the magazine; he felt that organic gardening was “the answer” but warned that “yours is a crusade, and as you grow you will meet many obstacles.”<sup>99</sup>

There were, undeniably, obstacles to the budding crusade, such as when Alex Laurie of Ohio State University wrote a piece in the December 1945 issue of *Garden Path* contending that, although *Organic Gardening* had instigated “a revival of the old theory that ‘chemicals’ are injurious,” there was nothing wrong with commercial fertilizers.<sup>100</sup> Albert Howard agreed that Rodale’s “army of compost-minded crusaders” was certain to encounter opposition from the manufacturers of artificial manures and poison sprays and their “disciples in the administration, in the research stations and agricultural colleges, in the press, and in broadcasting.”<sup>101</sup> However, *Organic Gardening* also reported on advances in the movement. When a farm shop in London selling organically grown food opened, Rodale called it the first to develop the “commercial possibilities” of organics.<sup>102</sup> Heinrich Meyer, the magazine’s assistant editor, was cheerful about a radio program with “a wide audience among gardeners” that recommended *Organic Gardening* over the air.<sup>103</sup> Howard pointed out in *The Soil and Health* (1947) that he had been involved with the magazine since its beginning, and the number of subscribers had grown to 51,000 in August 1946, despite war-time publishing difficulties and paper shortages. Howard commended Rodale’s efforts and affirmed that “a definite trend towards organic farming and gardening is well under way in

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<sup>98</sup> *Organic Gardening* Ibid. Reader's Correspondence. **7**: 26-29. 27-29.

<sup>99</sup> Logan, R. W. Ibid. Results. **6**: 25.

<sup>100</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1946). With the Editor: A Debate Ibid. **8**: 2-4. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Howard, A. (1947). Organic Campaign Ibid. **10**: 19. 19.

<sup>102</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1945). Organic Food Shops Ibid. **7**: 9.

<sup>103</sup> Meyer, H. Ibid. Over the Fence: 21-22. 21.

America.”<sup>104</sup> Rodale had “started a movement in the New World which promises soon to become an avalanche.”<sup>105</sup>

Rodale himself felt that *Organic Gardening* represented “a major revolution in the matter of producing the food of America,” having “educated thousands of people to practice this new agriculture, and to go out and preach this new gospel.”<sup>106</sup> As more organic garden clubs formed across the nation, the magazine introduced a column devoted to their news. The San Diego club recounted that 42 people had attended its first meeting, local interest was “quite keen,” and some members were “carrying forward the good word of Organics” by giving lectures and classes.<sup>107</sup> Rodale thanked readers who took the trouble of sending in clippings from all over the country showing that “the organic method is spreading.”<sup>108</sup> While he suspected that “before long a considerable segment of the public will obtain their food from farmers who are pursuing organicultural practices,” Rodale sensed that “this revolution will take time.”<sup>109</sup> He did see incremental growth with the magazine’s circulation. There were 60,000 subscribers to *Organic Gardening* in 1947, each paying \$3.00 per year, and Rodale thought they represented “a vital force in our National community.”<sup>110</sup> With 90,000 paid subscribers in 1948, Rodale was confident enough to declare organiculture “a vigorous and growing movement” that was “here to stay.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Howard, A. (1947). The Soil and Health: A Study of Organic Agriculture. New York, The Devin-Adair Co. 241-43.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. vi.

<sup>106</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). With the Editor: The Principle of Eminent Domain. Organic Gardening. **10**: 16-18. 17.

<sup>107</sup> Calvin, R. H. Ibid. Club News: 53.

<sup>108</sup> Rodale, J. I. Ibid. Memorandum: 18.

<sup>109</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). With the Editor: The Rodale Diet, Part II. Organic Gardening. **11**: 11-13. 11

<sup>110</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). With the Editor: Should the U.S. Government Go Into the Chemical Fertilizer Business? Organic Gardening. **11**: 12-13. 13.

<sup>111</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). With the Editor: The Organiculturist’s Creed. Organic Gardening. **12**: 12-14. 12.

## ***Pay Dirt: Earthworms, Country Life, and Natural Food***

Rodale's writing pioneered the organic movement in American culture. His first full-length book, *Pay Dirt: Farming & Gardening with Composts* (1945), outlined organic farming as a superior form of agriculture and was a benchmark text of the organic canon. It was a practical guide to general theories of organic gardening. As a textbook for aspiring organic farmers and gardeners, it discussed the biology of soil; the theory and practice of compost; the dangers of artificial fertilizers; the connections between health, disease, and food; and "good" vs. "bad" farming practices. *Pay Dirt* also drew upon culturally resonant ideals of natural food, family farms, and harmony with the earth. Throughout the book, Rodale emphasized that organic farming was more humane, economical, and concordant with the natural world than chemical-intensive agriculture. He railed against the dominant form of "assembly-line, machine-run agriculture."<sup>112</sup> Organic farming, in contrast, was a straightforward "imitation of Nature."<sup>113</sup>

*Pay Dirt* dispensed detailed information on the entire process of organic farming, beginning with the biology of the soil. Rodale explained that soil was a living substance in which vital microbes lived together in "a delicate, balanced relationship closely controlled by Nature."<sup>114</sup> He argued that chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides deprived the soil of organic materials that fostered the healthy growth of plants. Earthworms functioned as "Nature's plow" and were necessary to maintain soil fertility. Chemical fertilizers killed earthworms, which was dangerous because "Nature consists of a chain of interrelated and interlocked life cycles. Remove any one factor and you will

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<sup>112</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). *Pay Dirt: Farming and Gardening With Composts*. New York, The Devin-Adair Company. 239.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 139.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 3.



find that she cannot do her work efficiently.”<sup>115</sup> An emphasis on the primacy of “Nature” and its intricate processes recurred throughout *Pay Dirt*.

Organic farming implied continuity with the past as it rejected commercial agricultural dogma. Rodale believed that organic farms imitated “old-fashioned farms,” because they used animal manure instead of chemicals, were self-contained, and relied on equilibrium between crops and livestock. Organic farms were consciously *not* run as factories. Rodale proposed that “vast-acred, assembly-line, single-crop farms ought to be outlawed.”<sup>116</sup> Yet, he did not see modernization itself as the enemy. He encouraged the use of certain machines, like manure-loaders, that could take “the back-breaking labor out of making and turning compost heaps.”<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, Rodale upheld timeless ideals of organic farming, affirming that he belonged to a “cult” in which membership had been held by “good practical farmers from Adam’s time on down the centuries.”<sup>118</sup>

Rodale supported the back-to-the-land movement that flourished in the United States, because “the majority of human beings need some contact with country life, to restore the soul.”<sup>119</sup> He asserted that nations, like people, “need to renew their strength by contact with the earth.”<sup>120</sup> He affirmed that the simple procedure of organic farming was perfectly suited for adaptation by amateur homesteaders, who would become an integral part of America’s “sturdy, healthy population.” The opposite trend—what Rodale called an “away-from-the-land” movement—extended “large-scale monocultural practices” and a “plantation kind of commercial farming,” which would only end in “disaster to the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 203.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 134-35.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 236.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 237.

land.”<sup>121</sup> The specter of dust bowls and abandoned farms that emerged during the agricultural crises of the 1930s loomed behind Rodale’s admonition. One of his goals was to demonstrate how to naturally rebuild depleted soil fertility.

Rodale criticized the corporate character of agriculture, stating that farms should not be too large. Raising chickens had become “Big Business,” dependent on an “assembly line sort of production” in which the birds were merely “egg machines” in the “laying factory.”<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile, farmers who bred chickens organically were penalized because the eggs looked odd. Rodale saw “fashions in eggs as in clothes.” He found it ironic that “the public by its own fickle whim encourages practices which give it foods of dubious nourishing qualities.”<sup>123</sup> However, Rodale advised organic agriculture entrepreneurs to trust that, like other fashions, this one was likely to change.

Rodale was especially concerned about nutrition and health, asserting that food raised organically tasted better and also contained more vitamins and minerals.<sup>124</sup> Using alarmist language, he warned about the dangers that synthetic weed-killers posed to soil, animals, birds, and humans. He insisted, “we cannot go on forever treating the soil as a chemical laboratory and expect to turn out *natural* food. What we are getting is more and more *chemical* food.”<sup>125</sup> Rodale castigated the “continuous propaganda of the chemical interests.”<sup>126</sup> He cited doctors who did assert that artificial fertilizers caused cancer; and he quoted scientists who acknowledged that poison sprays killed birds. Denouncing the deleterious effects of insecticides that were destroying wildlife and bird havens, he said

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 239.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 220.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 187.

“the balance of Nature is upset.”<sup>127</sup> Rodale cited articles from the American Medical Association confirming that DDT (Dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane) was a “definite health hazard,” even as it was being extensively used.<sup>128</sup> He alerted consumers to risks from bleaches in white flour and arsenic on fruit polluted by poison sprays. The only way to counteract these perils, Rodale insisted, was to use organic composts and adopt safe routines of checking for garden insects. Although he admitted, “if you tell a farmer that he can raise fruit without spraying he will look at you with that queer expression that seems to question your sanity,” Rodale averred that “actual results show it can be done.”<sup>129</sup>

In the introduction to *Pay Dirt*, Albert Howard praised Rodale’s “audacity” and courage for acquiring the farm, experimenting with compost on his crops, and offering the results to his countrymen.<sup>130</sup> *Pay Dirt* appealed to members of the general public interested in farming and gardening. One—albeit biased—reviewer in *Organic Gardening* called it the “garden book of the year” in 1946, because it explained “a substantial aspect of the revolution in farming and gardening which is going on all over the world.”<sup>131</sup> Commercially, though, Rodale deemed *Pay Dirt* a “dismal failure,” since it had sold only 36,432 copies by 1953.<sup>132</sup> Like Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), it was ahead of its time as an ecological treatise. Most Americans were not yet attuned to the anti-corporate farming sentiments Rodale articulated. After World War II, leftover chemicals and new technologies were revamping agriculture. The USDA

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 171.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 179.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 188.

<sup>130</sup> Howard, A. (1948). Introduction. *Pay Dirt: Farming and Gardening With Composts*. New York, The Devin-Adair Company: vii.

<sup>131</sup> Teller, W. M. (1946). ‘The Garden Book of the Year’. *Organic Gardening*. **8**.

<sup>132</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: What’s it all about? Ibid. **21**: 9-13. 12.

regularly insisted that farm chemicals were entirely safe. Rodale complained that agricultural scientists in the government and state colleges “seem to be fighting the spread of the organic method of farming. They say it is impractical and impossible without ever making a move to try it out.”<sup>133</sup> The post-war climate was infused with optimistic faith in science and futuristic technology that ran counter to Rodale’s “old-fashioned” proposals.

*Pay Dirt* later went through multiple printings and was published in Japan in 1951 under the title *Ogon No Tsuchi*, meaning *Gold in the Earth*. The publishers stated that it was “creating a sensation” among farmers who had been heavily burdened with payments for chemical fertilizer.<sup>134</sup> Few organic adherents read *Pay Dirt* today because a plethora of updated guides on how to farm organically exist. Nevertheless, it was a groundbreaking book, setting the tenor for the route that organic agriculture would travel in the United States.<sup>135</sup>

### **The Organic Food Guru**

Along with his own writing and farming, Rodale began to augment *Organic Gardening* magazine with related ventures. In 1947, he established the Soil and Health Foundation to fund agronomic research on interrelationships between the earth’s surface, food, and human health. The Foundation encouraged usage of humus and other organic matter to enhance soil fertility and “improve the health of man.” Its goals were fostering scientific studies, educating the public, and publishing findings on how organic and

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<sup>133</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). *The Healthy Hunzas*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 248.

<sup>134</sup> *Organic Gardening* (1951). *Pay Dirt* in Japan. *Organic Gardening*, **19**: 48.

<sup>135</sup> Jackson, C. (1974). *J.I. Rodale: Apostle of Nonconformity*. New York, Pyramid Books. 30.

artificial fertilizers affected soil, plants, animals and man.<sup>136</sup> Rodale announced that “we in America must take the lead” in battling the “unnatural methods” of commercial agriculture, which were “ruining soil and begetting degenerative diseases.”<sup>137</sup> The Foundation’s first grant was for a University of Missouri Agricultural College study of how potash from rocks compared to chemical forms of potash. Rodale hoped researchers would prove the superiority of the organic method, giving the organic camp “a scientific stamp so that our critics will stop calling us cultists and crack-pots.”<sup>138</sup> These unfavorable opinions, however, lingered for decades.

In 1948, Rodale wrote *The Healthy Hunzas*, which discussed the “marvelous health” of people who lived in the isolated Hunza region of India. His study was based on the work of Sir Robert McCarrison (1878 - 1960), an English physician who had visited the area and been particularly impressed by the Hunza health and immunity record.<sup>139</sup> According to McCarrison, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and even common colds were unknown in the district. Rodale asserted that “the hardiness of the Hunzas is closely associated with their method of tilling the soil.”<sup>140</sup> They used no chemical fertilizers but applied composted manure in raising food. Another factor in their “health and physical prowess,” Rodale said, was that they ate only the “unsophisticated foods of Nature: milk, eggs, grains, fruits and vegetables.”<sup>141</sup> Primarily, though, Rodale tied the wellbeing of the Hunzas to soil fertility, and this connection influenced his embryonic ideas about organic agriculture. He confidently proclaimed that following the Hunza procedure of soil

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<sup>136</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). Solicitation of Members for The Soil and Health Foundation. Organic Gardening. **11**: 14.

<sup>137</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). The Soil and Health Foundation. Organic Gardening. **11**: 31.

<sup>138</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1951). With the Editor: Grants to Research Institutions. Organic Gardening. **18**: 16, 18, 18.

<sup>139</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). The Healthy Hunzas. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 15.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 20.

cultivation would “begin the process of Hunzarization of our bodies which will result in nothing but favorable consequences.”<sup>142</sup>

In the back of *The Healthy Hunzas*, Rodale printed letters that he had received from readers attesting to the “astonishing benefits” of eating food raised in rich organic humus. He insisted that these letters proved how the health of the Hunzas was “definitely tied in with the element of soil fertility.”<sup>143</sup> A typical letter described a host of ailments that had plagued the writer but dissipated after he or she began to eat organically grown fruits and vegetables. One such letter said: “*Organic Gardening Magazine* is truly a blessing to mankind and to our nation. Results obtained from your methods are remarkable and frequently I bow my head in prayer for the success of your magazine.”<sup>144</sup>

In 1949, Rodale said that “the introduction of the organic method into the United States may be likened to a war.” Through a “hard-fought battle,” the subscriber list of *Organic Gardening* had reached 100,000 names, and organic gardening had received recognition in “some powerful quarters.” Still, Rodale was “aiming at higher stakes” by “fighting for farmers to join our movement,” hoping to “make a substantial dent in this rotten citadel of artificial farming methods.”<sup>145</sup> He wrote *The Organic Front* (1949) to elaborate on his message about the merits of organic farming. It discussed problems and ideas that had arisen since the publication of *Pay Dirt*.

Though Rodale was resigned to directing his first magazine at gardeners, he still wanted to wean more of those engaged in agriculture away from chemical methods. He felt that sufficient tests had proven that the organic method was practical and profitable

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 229.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 229.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 235.

<sup>145</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). Radical Change in Organic Method. *Organic Gardening*. **15**: 26-27.

on a farm scale.<sup>146</sup> Rodale said he had received requests for a publication that reached out exclusively to the needs of farmers and sent out pamphlets in 1948 about *The Organic Farmer*, “a new magazine that attacks chemical fertilizers and poison sprays.” He was inundated with enough advance subscriptions to furnish all the necessary start-up capital.<sup>147</sup> *The Organic Farmer* pledged to run “articles that most other farm magazine wouldn’t dare print.”<sup>148</sup> It ran pieces with titles like “Why I Disk,” “Winter Care of Geese,” “How Glaciers Make Soil,” “War: Some Agricultural Implications,” “5 Steps to 100 Bushel Corn,” and “The Insecticide Makers are Going Too Far.” Albert Lesle, winner of the magazine’s “How I Practice the Organic Method” contest in 1950, described how production on his California lemon grove had gone from under 400 boxes per acre to over 600 when he went organic.<sup>149</sup> One reader in 1952 told Rodale he “would pay four times the price that you are asking for this magazine, if necessary, in order to get this extremely valuable information obtainable nowhere else.”<sup>150</sup> *The Organic Farmer* had 50,000 subscribers that year. For a time, Rodale produced these separate periodicals for gardeners and farmers but then merged them in 1954, re-adding *Farming* to the single title.

In 1950, Rodale began publishing *Prevention* magazine, which promoted exercise, nutrition, and a system for better health based on deterring diseases. The purpose of *Prevention* was to reach the general public that neither farmed nor gardened, so they, too, could learn the “evils of chemical fertilization” and help “build the organic movement stronger and stronger.” The magazine accepted no advertising for medical or

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<sup>146</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). Notice about THE ORGANIC FARMER. *Organic Gardening*. **14**.

<sup>147</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). Editorial. *The Organic Farmer*. **1**: 9-10. 10.

<sup>148</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1950). With the Editor: The Flea Beetle. *The Organic Farmer*. **2**: 8-9. 9

<sup>149</sup> Lesle, A. E. Ibid. First Award. **1**: 47.

<sup>150</sup> Van Tuyle, D. A. (1952). Letter Ibid. **3**: 7.

health products but did make editorial comments on worthy goods. Rodale hoped people would consider the cost of subscribing a “medical fee” to keep them healthy, as an alternative to paying the doctor.<sup>151</sup> The *Prevention* system was meant to restore a “natural” diet of organic foods, eliminating chemical additives and refined foods. It advocated natural vitamin supplements to make up for the poor nutritional status of modern foods. This magazine gave Rodale a forum for news on nutrition and wellness that was more tangential to *Organic Gardening*, since some readers had complained that Rodale’s articles on cancer did not belong there. Within two years, *Prevention* had over 60,000 subscribers, and most were non-gardeners.<sup>152</sup> Still, it was consistent with the organic agricultural philosophy that a long-term preventative routine was the best approach to ward off plant or human diseases, rather than treating them with “quick fix” solutions. Rodale felt that chemical fertilizers were a “shot-in-the-arm method, like taking medicines,” and he disapproved of both.<sup>153</sup>

### **The Growing Cult**

In the 1950s, everyday gardeners were divided between organics and chemicals. The lines of this rift that was “shaking the gardening world to its foundations” were drawn as “chemicalist versus organiculturist,” said Rodale.<sup>154</sup> University and government research institutions pilloried Rodale and derided “organic cranks, manure farming faddists, the muck and mystery school, the muck and magic school, and apostles of dung who indulge in the hocus pocus of the cult.”<sup>155</sup> *Organic Gardening* circulation reached

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<sup>151</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1950). *Prevention*. *Organic Gardening*. **16**: 56.

<sup>152</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Tenth Anniversary Editorial: Looking Back *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 11-14, 43. 43.

<sup>153</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). Why Chemical Fertilizers Are Bad. *The Organic Farmer*. **1**: 15-16. 15.

<sup>154</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: What’s it all about? . *Organic Gardening*. **21**: 9-13. 11.

<sup>155</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: This Organic Gardening Bunk (part 1). *Organic Gardening*. **21**: 10-11, 49-54. 11.



the 250,000 mark by 1950.<sup>156</sup> It was the premier kitchen gardening magazine, brimming with hands-on advice, but the established press ridiculed it. Rodale observed how “chemical people” were drawing up “heavy artillery” and pelting organics with a “vicious barrage” of “misguided journalism.”<sup>157</sup> Mainstream gardening journals were scathing. R.I. Throckmorton, Dean of Kansas State College, wrote “The Organic Farming Myth” in *The Country Gentleman* in 1951, calling organic farmers “a cult of misguided people” who relied on “half-truths, pseudo science and emotion.”<sup>158</sup> In response, Rodale said “gloom enveloped the heart of every organically-minded person,” but he received thousands of encouraging letters and “took heart in realizing that the organic movement had become important enough to deserve the attention of big-time publications.”<sup>159</sup>

America’s oldest garden magazine, *Horticulture*, referred to “extreme organic gardeners” as “cultists” who were prone to discard valuable advances in scientific knowledge because of “fancies or whims.” *Horticulture* considered commercial fertilizers to be “one of the greatest gains of the nineteenth century” and thought gardeners ought to be indebted to the fertilizer industry.<sup>160</sup> Both *The Progressive Farmer* and *The Montana-Farmer-Stockman* belittled organic claims in 1952 as nonsense. *The Rural New Yorker* indicted the movement for simply trying to sell magazines. Rodale felt these “vicious articles” were part of a “planned attack of the chemical fertilizer interests.” Yet, his response to the abuse was to say that “if it is being a cultist to farm by the organic method

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<sup>156</sup> Rodale, J. I., Ed. (1966). *The Complete Book of Food and Nutrition*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 619.

<sup>157</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: This Organic Gardening Bunk (part 1). *Organic Gardening*. **21**: 10-11, 49-54. 10-11.

<sup>158</sup> Throckmorton, R. I. (1951). "The Organic Farming Myth." *Country Gentleman* **121**(9): 21, 103, 105. 21.

<sup>159</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: This Organic Gardening Bunk (part 1). *Organic Gardening*. **21**: 10-11, 49-54. 10-11.

<sup>160</sup> Beaumont, A. B. (1952). "Biochemical Gardening." *Horticulture* **30**(10): 388.

and beat the yields of the chemical farmers, then I am glad I am a cultist.”<sup>161</sup> Historian Warren Belasco later noted that the “much-maligned but indefatigable” Rodale didn’t seem to mind his “marginal status as intellectual gadfly.”<sup>162</sup>

Addressing “emotional outbursts on both sides of the argument” in 1952, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer reported on how many publications tended to “criticize the organic movement as a whole as fanatical” and avow that “this country has about doubled its acre yields with chemical fertilizers.”<sup>163</sup> Pfeiffer agreed that insecticides and weed killers had “done wonders,” but they had also backfired, making insects immune to DDT and killing natural enemies of pests. While fertilizers increased yields, soil structures declined Organic matter, on the other hand, fed the “microlife of soils” and was “the savings account of the soil.”<sup>164</sup> Like Pfeiffer, Rodale was unrelenting in plugging his case that organic soil inputs led to agricultural productivity and robust health, while inorganic supplements and chemical pesticides degraded the soil. In spite of the “disgracefully inaccurate” press reports, “the organic method goes on!” he exclaimed.<sup>165</sup> Rodale said his magazines seized “only a small share of the credit for the snowballing organic movement,” because it was more “the case of the idea being sound.”<sup>166</sup>

Rodale pointed out that hundreds of his readers claimed “wonderful improvements in their health due to eating organically grown foods.”<sup>167</sup> One subscriber to

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<sup>161</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: This Organic Gardening Bunk (part II). Organic Gardening. **21**: 10-11, 26-27, 34-35, 40. 10-11.

<sup>162</sup> Belasco, W. (1989). Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry, 1966-1988. New York, Pantheon Books. 16, 71.

<sup>163</sup> Pfeiffer, E. E. (1952). "The Organic-Chemical Controversy in Agriculture." Bio-Dynamics X(3): 2-19. 2.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 3-5

<sup>165</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: What’s it all about? . Organic Gardening. **21**: 9-13. 9.

<sup>166</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). The Mounting Campaign Against Organic Farming. The Organic Farmer. **3**: 32.

<sup>167</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1951). With the Editor: In Defense of the Organic Method. The Organic Farmer. **3**: 17-19, 49, 51-53. 18.

*The Organic Farmer* encouraged Rodale in a letter expressing “hope that the frothing at the mouth of the enemies of organic methods won’t get you down” and adding, “the truth always has enemies, but it will triumph in the end.”<sup>168</sup> Thousands of visitors toured the Rodale Experimental Farm each year, including Lady Eve Balfour while she was on an American speaking tour in 1951. The Organic Country Store at the farm sold seaweed and animal manure, phosphate, potash rock, peat moss, food shredders, and books. A 1952 survey counted 14,000 organic farmers in the U.S.<sup>169</sup> Rodale said that the tempo of the “organic farming revolution” was accelerating.<sup>170</sup>

Commemorating the tenth anniversary of *Organic Gardening*, Rodale felt that “exciting things are happening which we of the organic movement never dreamt would come to pass so soon.”<sup>171</sup> He saw a “solidly established” organic movement that had become “a definite part of the life and lore of the American scene.”<sup>172</sup> By late 1953, *Organic Gardening* decreed that the organic movement was still “growing by leaps and bounds, bringing like-minded people together from all over the world.”<sup>173</sup> This group encompassed “an aroused citizenry, an ardent group of patriots, a conservation-and-health-minded type of American,” in addition to farmers and gardeners. Rodale was convinced that, when the possibilities of organiculture became apparent, it “strikes a person with the impact of a ton of bricks.” He heralded the impending “organic revolution” that was “coming slowly but surely.”<sup>174</sup>

## **Organic Disciples and Success**

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<sup>168</sup> Bateman, H. P. (1953). LettersIbid. **4**: 6.

<sup>169</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Organic Farming—Bunk?Ibid.: 18-19.

<sup>170</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). With the Editor: Progress Throughout the Nation. *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 11.

<sup>171</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Tenth Anniversary Editorial: Looking Back *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 11-14, 43. 11.

<sup>172</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Miscellany: Looking Forward. *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 24-25.

<sup>173</sup> *Organic Gardening* (1953). Important AnnouncementIbid. **21**: 13-16. 15.

<sup>174</sup> Rodale, J. I. Ibid. With the Editor: What’s it all about? : 9-13.

Many organic gardeners have credited *Organic Gardening* for its formative function. A reader who wrote to the magazine in 1946 was thankful that it had started him on the “Organic Trail” and said, “May God bless your efforts.”<sup>175</sup> Rodale’s publishing company became Rodale Press in 1951. The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service has called Rodale Press a “highly visible and accessible source of information” that was “the single greatest influence on the shape and underlying philosophy of mainstream organics.”<sup>176</sup> According to Rodale’s son, Robert, he proffered an abundance of technical advice yet realized that “humus was not an end in itself, but a foundation upon which rested a way of life.”<sup>177</sup> Rodale felt that the organic movement generated “a spirit of aliveness.”<sup>178</sup>

Garden writer Eleanor Perényi received her first copy of Rodale’s magazine in 1945 from a friend, and she recalled it being “an inelegant little publication printed on cheap stock, with photographs strictly of the hand-held Kodak variety and a down-home prose style.” She remembered the “bearded countenance” of Rodale that “glared forth from the editorial page like that of an Old Testament prophet.” In the early 1960s, Perényi had the opportunity to interview him for a magazine article. Upon arriving at his farm, she recalled, “my first sight of Rodale seemed to confirm the impression that he belonged in another century. With his neatly trimmed beard, three-piece city suit, and overcoat, he was an incongruously formal figure against the backdrop of rich

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<sup>175</sup> Sherman, L. L. (1946). *Organic Gardening in Oakland*, Callbid. **10**: 57-58. 58.

<sup>176</sup> Kuepper, G. and L. Gegner. (2004, August). "Organic Crop Production Overview." Retrieved May 15, 2009. 2.

<sup>177</sup> Rodale, R. (1992). The Heart and Soul of Organic Gardening. *Organic Gardening*. **39**: 46.

<sup>178</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1954). An Open Letter to Readers. *Organic Gardening and Farming*. **1**: 53.

Pennsylvania farmland.”<sup>179</sup> Perényi said that *Organic Gardening* “changed my life” and “is the only magazine I have continuously subscribed to for thirty-five years.”<sup>180</sup>

Malcolm Beck, who started operating his family farm organically in 1957, said his “first inspiration came from Rodale Press’s little *Organic Gardening and Farming* magazine.”<sup>181</sup> A friend gave him back issues selling the idea that plants grown in balanced soil, rich in organic matter, would be strong and healthy. Beck’s modern farm magazine was promoting the stance that poisons and chemicals were needed to grow food and run a lucrative farm. Beck decided farming could be “more fun, a lot more challenging, and even just as profitable if we followed the natural or organic laws, and the food we ate would be more healthful too.”<sup>182</sup> He “really became a student of that organic magazine.”<sup>183</sup> Beck purchased his second farm in 1968 and founded GardenVille, an organic composting business and retail horticultural supply house. He later acquired a reputation as “the grandfather of organics in Texas.”<sup>184</sup>

Avid gardener Jeanie Darlington also described how subscribing to *Organic Gardening and Farming* changed her perspective. She had thought organic gardening was “something weird old spinsters” did, but the magazine put her on the road to discovering the intricacies of blood meal, kelp meal, ground rock phosphate, and other “exotic sounding things.”<sup>185</sup> She recalled that the publication would arrive each month with good ideas to help her. She soon wanted to instruct others in how to grow vegetables and flowers organically, because, not only did the food taste better, but, most importantly,

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<sup>179</sup> Perényi, E. (1981). *Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden*. New York, Random House. 44.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

<sup>181</sup> Beck, M. (2005). *Lessons in Nature*. Austin, TX, Acres USA. 174.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* 239.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* 240.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

<sup>185</sup> Darlington, J. (1970). *Grow Your Own: An Introduction to Organic Gardening*. Berkeley, Ca, Bookworks. 2.

it was “better for your soul” to garden organically.<sup>186</sup> Darlington published *Grow Your Own: An Introduction to Organic Farming* (1970) to share what she had learned.

Ecological consciousness and fear of environmental contamination from agricultural chemicals and other toxins swelled in the 1960s. Rodale produced the illustrated *Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening* (1959), a comprehensive A-to-Z guide that is still a standard text, and he published another detailed book, *How to Grow Vegetables & Fruits by the Organic Method* (1961). Soon after, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) topped the bestseller charts and aroused anti-chemical panic. Carson had been an early subscriber to *Organic Gardening and Farming* and echoed Rodale’s opposition to DDT.<sup>187</sup> She managed to generate considerable publicity and spurred government action. *Pay Dirt*’s comparative obscurity when it appeared nearly two decades earlier had been a matter of timing and style; it predated the contemporary environmental movement and lacked Carson’s poetic eloquence. Yet, salient similarities exist between the “balance of nature” rhetoric, public health concerns, and censure of the chemical industries both Rodale and Carson included in their work.

The number of subscriptions to *Organic Gardening and Farming* had arrived at 270,000 by 1961. After *Silent Spring* was printed, readership escalated to 300,000. Consternation over pollution gave the magazine new respectability.<sup>188</sup> Rodale built an added following in this climate. He initiated a newsletter called the *Environmental Action Bulletin*. As public interest in organic living and communal farms surged, Rodale actively endorsed and demonstrated organic farming techniques on his farm. Rodale’s *Our*

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>187</sup> Barrett, W. (1971). The organic way of gardening and its prophet. *Smithsonian*, 2: 52-55.

<sup>188</sup> Tucker, D. M. (1993). *Kitchen Gardening in America: A History*. Ames, Iowa State University Press. 151-2.

*Poisoned Earth and Sky* (1964) expressed qualms about air and water quality, radiation, drugs and cosmetics, and other pollutants. Much of the book focused on the evils of processed food, additives, preservatives, and pesticide-reliant agriculture. Blaming chemical companies for the “poison in our food,” Rodale directed his readers to write protest letters to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and to elected representatives. Until the government passed protective laws, he advised people to grow as much of their own food by organic conventions as possible or buy organically grown food.<sup>189</sup> Though critics liked to “ridicule the idea that natural organic fertilizers produce better food,” Rodale noticed that more nutritional facts were coming to light proving how good soil, good food, and healthy people were all related.<sup>190</sup>

An entrenched agribusiness system still dismissed the organic movement in the 1970s. Earl Butz, the Secretary of Agriculture with an infamous “get big or get out” mentality, scoffed at the organic inclination. The USDA did not officially recognize organic farming, treating it with hostility or apathy.<sup>191</sup> Consumer demand for organically grown food exceeded the supply, but some food was sold as organic under false pretenses, so skepticism ran high. Rodale launched a program to create standards and verify organic practices. Rodale Press bore the costs in order to show that credible organic farmers existed, and certification raised confidence among consumers.<sup>192</sup> In one issue of *Organic Gardening and Farming*, Rodale wrote, “let’s keep our chins up and help toward bringing America to an organic consciousness!”<sup>193</sup> The intellectual milieu

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<sup>189</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1964). *Our Poisoned Earth and Sky*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Books. 332.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* 184.

<sup>191</sup> Kuepper, G. and L. Gegner. (2004, August). "Organic Crop Production Overview." Retrieved May 15, 2009. 4.

<sup>192</sup> Allaby, M. and F. Allen (1974). *Robots Behind the Plow: Modern Farming and the Need for an Organic Alternative*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 30.

<sup>193</sup> McGrath, M., Ed. (1996). *The Best of Organic Gardening*. Emmaus PA, Rodale. 10.

did shift in the direction of organic awareness, and “organic gardeners were the Thoreaus of the 1970s.”<sup>194</sup> Significant attention to Rodale came when the *Whole Earth Catalog*, a landmark counter-culture guidebook, glorified *Organic Gardening and Farming* as the nation’s “most subversive” magazine. In the Spring 1970 edition of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, Gurney Norman wrote:

“The thing to remember about organic gardening is that it’s a movement, a national energy that since its beginnings early in the 1940’s has grown into a force so potent by now that it contains serious political implications...if I were a dictator determined to control the national press, *Organic Gardening* would be the first publication I’d squash, because it is the most subversive. I believe that organic gardeners are in the forefront of a serious effort to save the world by changing man’s orientation to it, to move away from the collective, centrist, super-industrial state, toward a simpler, realer one-to-one relationship with the earth itself.”<sup>195</sup>

Jerome Goldstein, who took over as editor of *Organic Gardening and Farming* magazine, wrote in 1970 that, “in this post-Earth Day atmosphere, the simple ideas of J.I. Rodale’s organic method have taken on a new aura of social significance.”<sup>196</sup> Rodale Press deemed itself the “communications center for environmental living ideas for the individual.” *Prevention*, which stressed “how the individual consumer can affect his environment by what he eats,” had 725,000 subscribers; and *Organic Gardening and Farming*, which developed “an organic way of life for readers, both in and out of the garden,” had 500,000.<sup>197</sup> The circulation of *Prevention* doubled between 1968 and 1971, when it reached nearly one million. Rodale Press also published magazines on exercise,

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<sup>194</sup> Tucker, D. M. (1993). *Kitchen Gardening in America: A History*. Ames, Iowa State University Press. 152.

<sup>195</sup> Goldstein, J., Ed. (1970). *The Organic Gardening Guide to Organic Living: San Francisco Bay Area Edition*. Emmaus, PA, Rodale Press. 50.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* 78.



composting, and theater, though only *Prevention* and *Organic Gardening and Farming* were turning a profit.<sup>198</sup>

As the organic movement gained steam, a flood of media sources focused on Rodale's role in popularizing organic farming. He became a well-known figure, and acclamations turned up in many national magazines and newspapers. In the early 1970s, Rodale told an audience:

“Years ago they heaped violence and poured ridicule upon my head. I was called a cultist and a crackpot...now even the chemical people have become respectful towards me and my manure ideology. I am suddenly becoming a prophet here on earth, and a prophet with profits.”<sup>199</sup>

A 1971 *Penthouse* article hailed “J.I. Rodale: Pollution Prophet,” as the “belatedly honoured” man who had “acquired overnight respectability,” overcoming the days when he was “widely regarded as an eccentric, if not an outright crackpot.”<sup>200</sup> *Time* noted that ever since Rodale discovered organic farming he had “religiously followed his own advice to eat only pure foods, avoid refined white sugar and walk several miles a day.” He looked and acted “like a much younger man.”<sup>201</sup> *Smithsonian* called Rodale a prophet of the organic doctrine and the “elder statesman of health food votaries.” While “still a rebel in his 72<sup>nd</sup> year,” he zealously guarded his health and betrayed “few signs of aging.” The article attributed growth of the vitamin industry largely to Rodale's crusading.<sup>202</sup>

A cover story in the 1971 *New York Times Magazine* proclaimed Rodale “Guru of the Organic Food Cult.” The article dubbed him organic food's “foremost prophet,”

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<sup>198</sup> Time. (1971, May 12, 2008). "Catching Up to Rodale Press." *Time* Retrieved Mar. 22, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>199</sup> Jackson, C. (1974). *J.I. Rodale: Apostle of Nonconformity*. New York, Pyramid Books. 220.

<sup>200</sup> Bryant, G. (1971). J.I. Rodale: Pollution Prophet. *Penthouse*. 2: 28-32. 28

<sup>201</sup> Time. (1971, May 12, 2008). "Catching Up to Rodale Press." *Time* Retrieved Mar. 22, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>202</sup> Barrett, W. (1971). The organic way of gardening and its prophet. *Smithsonian*. 2: 52-55.

categorizing his faith in “salvation through ingestion” as a brand of “secular fundamentalism.” Though Rodale looked “more like an apothecary than a revolutionary,” he was described as “a prosperous health freak” with an “unorthodox, even anti-orthodox” cause. His “organic gospel” was rooted in “steadfast opposition to chemical fertilizers.” Rodale acknowledged that his detractors scorned him as a “crackpot” and that the American Medical Association considered his health books to be “quackery.” He proudly confessed to having been “a counterculturist for decades.” Yet, he did not “conform to organic-food orthodoxies.” He frequently denounced vegetarianism; he sometimes indulged in ice cream; he thought milk was unhealthy for people; and he admitted to having “an unorganic meal now and then.”<sup>203</sup>

According to the *Times*, beneath the “homely surface” of *Organic Gardening and Farming*, “one can read an invitation to anarchy and parsimony, a disdain for big institutions and the products of technology.”<sup>204</sup> The article pointed out that, for nearly two decades, Rodale’s magazine had “struggled along on a hard core of cranky, generally conservative and often foreign-born gardeners as the main subscribers.”<sup>205</sup> However, circulation rates and advertising rocketed upward in a newly ecology-aware nation. Readership climbed 40 percent in one year, reaching 700,000. The youth culture embraced it. Medical and agricultural experts still considered Rodale a charlatan, but he could at least count on some reputable scientists like Barry Commoner for support.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Greene, W. (1971). Guru of the Organic Food Cult. *New York Times Magazine*: 30, 31, 54, 56, 60, 65, 68.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>206</sup> Tucker, D. M. (1993). *Kitchen Gardening in America: A History*. Ames, Iowa State University Press. 154.

*The Dick Cavett Show* invited Rodale to be a guest for an episode in 1971. Cavett introduced Rodale to the audience by saying, “my next guest used to be known as a food freak. Now that he’s rich and famous...a lot more people are listening to him.”<sup>207</sup> Unfortunately, while taping the show in New York, Rodale suffered a heart attack and died in the hospital that night. Many critics noted with irony that even the acclaimed organic health food guru couldn’t stave off death at the relatively young age of 73. Rodale himself had predicted that he would live to reach at least 100 unless “run down by a sugar-crazed motorist.”<sup>208</sup> Still, his granddaughter, Maria, later explained that Rodale “lived 20 years longer than any of his brothers and sisters, who all suffered from heart conditions.”<sup>209</sup> Considering Rodale’s family history, his organic lifestyle may indeed have extended his life.

Carlton Jackson’s *J.I. Rodale: Apostle of Nonconformity* (1974) exploited some of the sensationalized hype surrounding Rodale’s death. The back cover asked “Genius? Or Fraud?” in bold letters and broadcast “the uncensored critical biography of a professional iconoclast.” It branded Rodale as a “self-styled scourge of The Establishment.” The front cover indicated that when he died, he was “still waging a personal Thirty Years’ War that brought him from ridicule to triumph as the leader of the runaway organic farming and nutrition movements.” Calling him a true “Renaissance Man,” Jackson emphasized Rodale’s preference for self-training over formal education. His disdain for authority often caused trouble. He had scuffles with the Federal Trade Commission and American Medical Association over ostensibly misleading claims about health products he

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<sup>207</sup> Jackson, C. (1974). *J.I. Rodale: Apostle of Nonconformity*. New York, Pyramid Books. 222.

<sup>208</sup> Barrett, W. (1971). The organic way of gardening and its prophet. *Smithsonian*, 2: 52-55. 55.

<sup>209</sup> Rodale, M. (1998). *Maria Rodale’s Organic Gardening: Your Seasonal Companion to Creating a Beautiful and Delicious Garden*. Emmaus, Pa, Rodale. 14.

endorsed. Jackson designated Rodale as “a prophet and a man ahead of his time but also a crank, a manure-pile worshiper, a humus huckster, and an apostle of dung.”<sup>210</sup>

### **Family Business**

After Rodale’s death, his son Robert continued the family company’s organic educational and research efforts. Robert and his wife Ardath purchased a farm and conducted scientific studies on the viability of organic farming. As president of Rodale Press, Robert Rodale upheld his father’s long-standing policy of refusing to accept advertisements for alcohol, tobacco, chemical insecticides, or even coffee in his magazines.<sup>211</sup> Robert Rodale vigorously promoted an entire “organic way of life.” He asserted that, although organic homesteading had financial and bodily health rewards, the primary purpose of this undertaking was to “live more in balance with the Earth.” To be an organic gardener, he felt, one had to “reject the opinions of the experts and professors and stand up to occasional charges that you are a crackpot or faddist.”<sup>212</sup>

Although the Rodales did much to legitimize the organic movement, it was chiefly a fringe ensemble for decades. Kenneth Beeson, a Cornell University professor of soil science, said in a 1972 gardening column for *The New York Times* that the “militant” organic “cult” had “no valid evidence.” Supporting these “extremists” would limit agricultural output, causing “widespread malnutrition and even starvation.”<sup>213</sup> Robert Rodale’s *Sane Living in a Mad World: A Guide to the Organic Way of Life* (1972) noted continuing opposition but expressed hope that more people would start thinking like organic gardeners and farmers, because the organic way was “the *only* all-embracing

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<sup>210</sup> Jackson, C. (1974). *J.I. Rodale: Apostle of Nonconformity*. New York, Pyramid Books. 330.

<sup>211</sup> Business Week (1980). Rodale reaches out for the mainstream. *Business Week*, 85.

<sup>212</sup> Rodale, R. (1992). The Heart and Soul of Organic Gardening. *Organic Gardening*, 39: 46.

<sup>213</sup> Beeson, K. C. (1972). Spring Gardens: What About the "Organic" Way? *The New York Times*: D33.

ecological program.” He felt that “we organic people hold in our hands the key to the survival of America as a viable society.”<sup>214</sup>

Robert Rodale is credited with giving the organic movement increasing respectability, due in part to his espousal of broader social and environmental messages. He was conscious of the need to “welcome and hold the young converts to the organic gospel according to the Rodales, while comforting the older faithful.”<sup>215</sup> Introducing *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods* (1972), Robert Rodale pointed out that “the word ‘organic’ is a hot property these days. It’s appearing on more and more foods each year.”<sup>216</sup> He announced that the organic code was the “only one way to make America more natural, more reasonable in its burden on the ecosphere.”<sup>217</sup>

By 1976, there were more than 800,000 subscribers to *Organic Gardening and Farming*. The magazine dropped the *Farming* appellation for good in 1978, and only the *Organic Gardening* version survived, intended mainly for home gardeners. A *New York Times* article about Rodale Press in 1979 noted that, although the company had annual revenues of \$60 million, it was also working “to make the world a healthier place to live in.” The basic tenets of Rodale wisdom appearing in the company’s books and other publications were: “People must eat organic foods. They must strive to become self-sufficient. If they have the time and space, they should farm organically.”<sup>218</sup> By the 1980s, *Organic Gardening* was the largest gardening magazine in the world, with a

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<sup>214</sup> Rodale, R. (1972). *Sane Living in a Mad World: A Guide to the Organic Way of Life*. Emmaus, Pa, Rodale Press. 261.

<sup>215</sup> Greene, W. (1971). Guru of the Organic Food Cult. *New York Times Magazine*: 30, 31, 54, 56, 60, 65, 68.

<sup>216</sup> Goldman, M. C. and W. H. Hylton, Eds. (1972). *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods*. Emmaus, Rodale Press. 3.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>218</sup> Kleinfeld, N. R. (1979). Rodale Press: Organic Venture. *The New York Times*: D10.

circulation of 1.3 million.<sup>219</sup> Big institutions had become key distributors of organic food to the masses. The organic precepts and lifestyle finally resonated with a substantial segment of the country. In the mid-1990s, however, *Organic Gardening* struggled to retain readers and advertisers, and circulation declined to 800,000.<sup>220</sup> Still, Editor-in-Chief Mike McGrath wrote in 1996:

“*OG* has the largest paid circulation of any gardening magazine in the world! That’s some pretty hot compost, eh? And I firmly believe that *OG* is number one *because* we’re organic, not despite it...One thing that has remained unchanged over the years is our unyielding commitment to the organic philosophy. Fifty-plus years of pointing out that maybe it isn’t the best possible idea to spray poison all over your food before you eat it.”<sup>221</sup>

Robert Rodale coined the term "regenerative agriculture" to describe his vision of enhancing soil quality while using it for organic agriculture. The Soil and Health Foundation established by J.I. Rodale was renamed The Rodale Institute in the 1980s. The nonprofit organization is dedicated to regenerative organic agriculture. Its motto is "Healthy Soil, Healthy Food, Healthy People." The Rodale Institute engages with farmers, the food industry, and consumer groups as it researches and promotes organic farming. The Rodale Institute Farming System Trial (FST), a long-running experiment that compares organic and conventional farming methods side by side, began in 1981. The Institute claims its results have proven that organic management increases soil quality, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and groundwater pollution, and competes

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<sup>219</sup> Business Week (1980). Rodale reaches out for the mainstream. *Business Week*. 85.

<sup>220</sup> Gibbs, N. (1995, May 12, 2008). "Power Gardening." *Time* Retrieved Jun. 19, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>221</sup> McGrath, M., Ed. (1996). *The Best of Organic Gardening*. Emmaus PA, Rodale. vii-viii.

economically with conventional systems,<sup>222</sup> The Institute also inaugurated the first wholesale price index of certified organic foods, an online tool that helped organic farmers determine an appropriate premium to charge for their products. This index compared organic prices to conventional prices in selected produce, herb, dairy, and grain markets across the country and was updated weekly.

Robert Rodale died from a car accident in 1990, while trying to start an organic farming magazine in Russia.<sup>223</sup> Robert's wife, Ardath Rodale, became chairman of Rodale Institute and CEO of Rodale Press after his death. Robert's son Anthony Rodale was named vice chairman of the Rodale Institute and then served as chairman of the board of directors until 2005. Rodale Press remained a lucrative family-run business. By 1992, annual revenues of Rodale Press had reached \$350 million, and some "longtime devotees" questioned whether the company had become "more gray than green, more willing to consult customer data bases than its conscience."<sup>224</sup> Still, *Fortune Magazine* named Rodale Inc., the new corporate name for Rodale Press, as one of the "100 Best Companies to Work for in America" in 1999.

Maria Rodale dedicated *Maria Rodale's Organic Gardening: Your Seasonal Companion to Creating a Beautiful and Delicious Garden* (1998) to her father, Robert, and her grandfather, J.I.. She recalled a conversation with Bob Hofstetter, who began gardening for the Rodale Organic Farm in 1970. Hofstetter told her that J.I. Rodale "wanted to see organic farming as part of mainstream agriculture. He wanted to see this as part of society." Maria found it ironic that organics "became a hippie cult thing, since

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<sup>222</sup> Rodale Institute. (2009). "Rodale Institute web site." Retrieved May 26, 2009, from <http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/>.

<sup>223</sup> Rodale, M. (1998). *Maria Rodale's Organic Gardening: Your Seasonal Companion to Creating a Beautiful and Delicious Garden*. Emmaus, Pa, Rodale. 15.

<sup>224</sup> Holusha, J. (1992). Folksy Rodale Emerges as Hard-Driving Marketer. *The New York Times*: 37.

my grandfather was not a hippie at all. He was really more of a New York intellectual,” always dressed in “a gray suit, white shirt, and tie.”<sup>225</sup> Still, she said her grandfather taught her “to see gardening organically as a sacred responsibility and an essential way to help make the world and us healthier and happier.”<sup>226</sup> She explained that, more than anything else, compost was identified with organic gardening and was “partly responsible for giving organic gardening its questionable and ‘icky’ reputation.”<sup>227</sup> However, the Rodale Organic Method was committed to the use of compost, which was practical, easy, efficient, and fundamental to providing soil with excellent nutrients.<sup>228</sup> The purpose of Maria’s book was to show readers how to “make the world a better place by creating an organic Eden in your own backyard,”<sup>229</sup>

This ambitious objective of improving the world reappeared when Rodale Inc. began publishing *Organic Style*, a healthy lifestyle monthly that focused on “the art of living in balance.” The new magazine was a blend of environmental consciousness and pleasure, presenting organic living in a stylish way. Maria Rodale said she launched it in 2001 “to seduce people into doing the right thing rather than scaring them.”<sup>230</sup> The target audience for the glossy magazine was sophisticated, well-educated women between the ages of 18 and 49. Pam O’Brien, articles editor of *Organic Style*, said it was directed at women who are “intelligent, compassionate, and alive to life and all its pleasures.” The primary interest of its readers, according to O’Brien, was health. Stories also addressed

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<sup>225</sup> Rodale, M. (1998). Maria Rodale’s Organic Gardening: Your Seasonal Companion to Creating a Beautiful and Delicious Garden. Emmaus, Pa, Rodale. 72.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. Dedication.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. 121.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>230</sup> Rodale, M. and M. Rodale (2005). It’s My Pleasure: A Revolutionary Plan to Free Yourself from Guilt and Create the Life You Want. New York, Free Press. xx.



food, travel, fashion, yoga, home, and gardening.<sup>231</sup> The magazine promised potential subscribers that they could “have it all” without needing to “settle for less.” It claimed to be a “partner in your quest for health and well-being, authenticity and the search for balance.”<sup>232</sup> However, *Organic Style* struggled financially from its inception, due partly to its lack of a focus or consistent voice, and suspended publication in 2005.<sup>233</sup>

Rodale business ventures continued to advertise the organic spirit. By 2007, Rodale Inc.’s annual revenues had reached \$500 million. The Rodale Institute began in 2008 to offer an online “Transitioning to Organic” course, designed to help farmers who were ready to embrace organic certification understand the National Organic Standards. The program highlighted environmental, economic, and community-strengthening advantages of organic agriculture. Ardath Rodale was Co-Chairman of the Rodale Institute Board until 2007 and was “Chief Inspiration Officer” of Rodale Inc. until her death in 2009. Maria Rodale succeeded her mother as Chairman of the Board and became Rodale Inc.’s CEO in 2009.

The Rodale Institute operates a 333-acre organic Experimental Farm near Kutztown, Pennsylvania, which draws 25,000 visitors each year. It includes an organic demonstration garden, apple orchards, a composting site, and fields for scientific trials. Programs are geared towards farmers, agricultural professionals, children, and the general public. Most of the farm’s acreage is devoted to grains. The wheat is sent to an organic pretzel maker; the white corn goes to taco and tortilla chip producers; soybeans are sold to tofu or oil manufacturers; and oats, rye, yellow corn, and hay end up at organic

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<sup>231</sup> Walker, J. (2005). Editors at New Magazines Give Pitch Tips. *O'Dwyer's PR Services Report*, J. R. O'Dwyer Co.

<sup>232</sup> Text from subscription order letters for *Organic Style* in 2004.

<sup>233</sup> Smith, S. D. (2005). "Rodale to Shutter Four-Year-Old Organic Style." Retrieved September 1, 2005, from [http://www.mediaweek.com/mw/news/recent\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1001053674](http://www.mediaweek.com/mw/news/recent_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1001053674).

livestock farms. The produce is sold to local grocery and health food stores. Apples are made into cider and apple butter or picked by orchard visitors each fall.

Despite the rustic “family farm” atmosphere, Rodale Inc. is a global multimedia company that specializes in health and wellness. Its tagline is “Live your Whole Life,” and the press reaches a substantial popular audience. *Organic Gardening’s* advertising revenue increased 17% in 2009; and, finding itself “sitting on top of a tsunami of veg-growing popularity,” the magazine expanded its food and cooking coverage.<sup>234</sup>

Circulation jumped to 275,000 in 2010, a 28% rise since 2007. More Americans seemed drawn towards healthier, environmentally conscious lifestyles, and the publication unveiled a new design and editorial content meant to “help people truly bring the garden to their table.” Editor-in-Chief Ethne Clarke said *Organic Gardening* had commenced as “the prophetic voice of organic horticulture 67 years ago” and was “more relevant now than it has ever been.”<sup>235</sup> Often referred to as *OG*, the magazine now has a steady presence on blogs, Facebook, and Twitter.

Rodale’s *Prevention* is the world’s biggest health magazine, with over three million subscribers. Rodale Inc. also publishes *Men’s Health*, *Women’s Health*, *Runner’s World*, *Backpacker*, *Bicycling*, and *Best Life*. Among its best-selling books have been Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*; Martha Stewart’s *The Martha Rules*; and titles within *The South Beach Diet* and *The Abs Diet* franchises. Other publications pertain to fitness, environmentalism, lifestyle, home improvement, and, of course, organic gardening.

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<sup>234</sup> Harris, S. (2010). "Garden Rant: Ethne Clarke and the Makeover of Organic Gardening." Retrieved January 13, 2010, from [http://www.gardenrant.com/my\\_weblog/2010/01/ethne-clark-and-og-mag.html](http://www.gardenrant.com/my_weblog/2010/01/ethne-clark-and-og-mag.html).

<sup>235</sup> Rodale Inc. (2010). "Organic Gardening Relaunched with February/March 2010 Issue." Retrieved 2010, January 24, from <http://www.rodaleinc.com/newsroom/iorganic-gardeningi-relaunched-februarymarch-2010-issue>.

Rodale Inc. even wrote its own history in *Our Roots Grow Deep: The Story of Rodale* (2009). Advertisements for the book announced:

“Get inspired by the trailblazing story of the first family of the organic movement. With a corporate mission to inspire and enable people to improve their lives and the world around them, the Rodale family has kept the organic spirit alive for more than 75 years. Now, for the first time ever, their rich history of environmental responsibility and self-reliance is revealed... You’ll be inspired by the Rodale journey, from a family vision and passion for health and wellness to the largest independent book publisher in the United States that lives its mission and helps readers do the same.”

Maria Rodale reflected, “my grandfather’s books were eccentric, funny, crazy, and brilliant. He got into trouble for the stuff he said, but I was shocked at how much of it was finally proven to be true.”<sup>236</sup> She wrote:

“The first time I walked into a Whole Foods I cried. Finally, someone had gotten it right. I tried to imagine what my grandfather would have thought—back then if you wanted organic food you had to grow it yourself and endure the ridicule of your neighbors. Sixty years later you could enter a paradise and buy almost anything organic you wanted.”<sup>237</sup>

Rodale’s original definition for organic farming may have been short on “organic style” but conveyed an expansive vision for the movement. Organic farming and gardening meant “bringing nature back into balance,” and Rodale was part of “a movement in this country” attempting to “bring farming back to a more sensible and natural basis.”<sup>238</sup> He felt that a “sacred trust” was placed in the organic farmer, who had

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<sup>236</sup> Rodale, M. and M. Rodale (2005). *It's My Pleasure: A Revolutionary Plan to Free Yourself from Guilt and Create the Life You Want*. New York, Free Press. xix.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. xx.

<sup>238</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: Whither Science? *The Organic Farmer*, 4: 13.

been given the tasks of preserving soil fertility, producing food that would “impart health to the people who consume it,” and passing on this “precious heritage” to subsequent generations.<sup>239</sup> Once accused of being a con artist, J.I. Rodale is now revered. He was one of the first heroes for Jesse Ziff Cool, who opened an organic restaurant in Palo Alto in 1976, when organic ingredients were not yet easy to come by. In her cookbook, *Simply Organic* (2008), Cool praised the other modern-day heroes carrying forth Rodale’s beliefs, ranging from “the founders of organic food companies to the small local farmers doing their bit, one acre at a time.”<sup>240</sup>

Rodale introduced the concept of engaging in a sacred mission to achieve natural balance when he saluted the virtues of compost and manure. The organic movement gained momentum and permeated American society in ways that may seem remote from this model. Yet, Rodale was always willing to modify organic practice, feeling that “we organiculturists must not become too set in the stubborn tenets of our theories.”<sup>241</sup> Having already made some alterations in 1949, he predicted: “there will be further changes.”<sup>242</sup> In 1954, *Organic Gardening and Farming* declared, “there is nothing static about the organic method.”<sup>243</sup> The transformations and exponential growth of organics are part of Rodale’s durable yet mutating legacy.

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<sup>239</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). With the Editor: The Organiculturist’s Creed. *Organic Gardening*. **12**: 12-14. 14.

<sup>240</sup> Cool, J. Z. (2008). *Simply Organic: A Cookbook for Sustainable, Seasonal, and Local Ingredients*. San Francisco, Chronicle Books. 14.

<sup>241</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: What’s it all about? . *Organic Gardening*. **21**: 9-13. 13.

<sup>242</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). Editorial. *The Organic Farmer*. **1**: 9, 14. 14.

<sup>243</sup> Olds, J. (1954). Testing Ground for Organics. *Organic Gardening and Farming*. **1**: 24-27. 26.

## CHAPTER 2

### Living The Organic Good Life: Homesteads, Family Farms, and Agrarianism

After a lengthy career in the city, Harold Richmond and his wife moved onto three acres in a small Florida village in 1942. They began converting the chemical citrus grove into an organic farm. Their primary crops were pineapples, oranges, grapefruit, and tangerines. The early years were discouraging, so the Richmonds wrote to agricultural expert Ehrenfried Pfeiffer for advice on organic methods. With soil improvements attributable to the practice of composting, these homesteaders observed steady advances on their farm. They accomplished their longtime dream to “get back to the land” and support themselves.<sup>244</sup> For many people like the Richmonds, organic farming has been a critical element of a do-it-yourself lifestyle known as homesteading. Homesteading comprises practical as well as symbolic work. It is a deliberate, self-conscious choice to move from an urban to a rural setting and can be seen as an act of both rebellion and revitalization.<sup>245</sup> It may include cultivation of gardens or the operation of small-scale farms. To homesteaders, growing food is a prudent practice that helps sustain an autonomous existence. Participants tend to assume that their acts will yield freedom, security, simplicity, and a meaningful relationship with nature. Their goal is to decrease commercial consumption levels yet increase quality of life. In pining for a “middle ground,” the perfect balance of societal culture and peaceful seclusion, some find a private retreat; others maintain communal connections.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Richmond, H. S. (1948). "Story of a Citrus Grove." *Bio-Dynamics* VI(3): 2-11. 2.

<sup>245</sup> Gould, R. K. (1997). "Modern Homesteading in America: Religious Quests and the Restraints of Religion." *Social Compass* 44(1): 157-170. 162.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.* 158.

This chapter examines visions of homesteading and family farms presented by organic advocates and in relevant cultural sources. Social and historical contexts have shaped and molded diverse organic activities. Despite the ideological breadth of doctrines motivating organic gardeners and farmers, common threads recur. Persistent themes offered by organic advisers include veneration of “Nature” and simplicity; a quest for independence, sustainability, and health; anti-urban sentiments; celebrations of agrarianism and pastoralism; assertion of a purpose higher than profit; preference for division of labor by gender; and respect for honest hard work in backyard gardens and on small-scale farms. At times, organic farming has challenged conventional farming’s axes of power. For the most part, though, proponents have relied on non-confrontational language and indirect protests to demonstrate the pleasant benefits accruing to those who engage in organic activities.

Notwithstanding habitual claims that the organic system is the way farming has “always” been done, it was actually a new, distinctive movement advanced by Albert Howard, J.I. Rodale, and other pioneers. Organic practitioners deliberately chose their approach. Certain prominent “movement intellectuals” have been vocal in expressing what organic farming means to both producers and consumers. Along with Rodale, these farmer-philosophers include Helen and Scott Nearing, Wendell Berry, Eliot Coleman, and Joel Salatin. Their discursive strategies and actions have affected how organic farming has been represented and understood in American culture. These leaders also followed in the footsteps of distinguished figures who have commented on country life, including Henry David Thoreau, Liberty Hyde Bailey, Bolton Hall, Carolyn and Ed Robinson, and Ralph Borsodi. Interrogating the resilience and interdependence of their

ideals reveals pivotal tenets of the organic movement. Lived experiences, rhetorical expressions, and social interpretations are equally important in guiding how the movement has been perceived and encountered.

Although every written work is dialogical and can evoke a plurality of meanings, some consciously align with specific viewpoints. Garden and farm instruction books are cultural artifacts that have regularly conveyed organic credos. Organic handbooks and specialized publications share characteristics with a mass of prescriptive homesteading literature in American culture. Many homesteading texts are “modern jeremiads urging the reader to get back to the (organic) Garden.”<sup>247</sup> Authors in this vein have produced manuals for the general public that are permeated with references to superior facets of countrified life.

Henry David Thoreau is the archetypal character in rituals of homesteading and “living deliberately.” Thoreau’s aspirations in going to Walden Pond were simplicity, liberation from materialism, and communion with the natural world. He praised the “innocence and beneficence of Nature.”<sup>248</sup> Part of the lasting appeal of *Walden* (1854) has been the allure of being in “undisturbed solitude and stillness” next to a placid pond, listening to singing whippoorwills and eating hand-picked huckleberries.<sup>249</sup> Thoreau, like Rodale, the Robinsons, and Borsodi after him, provided his readers with lists and figures on the economic advantages of a simple life. He chopped down white pines to build his house and planted a garden. He insisted that self-sufficiency was within reach for everyone. He spent many hours hoeing, harvesting, threshing, picking, and eating the

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<sup>247</sup> Gould, R. K. (2005). *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*. Berkeley, University of California Press. 5.

<sup>248</sup> Thoreau, H. D. (1986). *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. New York, Penguin Books. 183.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. 157.

beans he planted. Both literally and metaphorically, he came to cherish the beans, because, he wrote, “they attached me to the earth.”<sup>250</sup> Thoreau perpetuated a long-standing belief that connecting with the source of one’s food fostered an uplifting sense of health and happiness.

## **Country Life**

Thoreau was an exemplary figure in the American pastoral tradition. In the early twentieth century, the “Country Life” creed depicting cities as crowded and diseased reflected Thoreau’s legacy. The Country Life movement saluted agriculture as the backbone of national existence. Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858-1954) was the primary spokesman for this impetus in the United States. Bailey served as editor of the magazine *Country Life in America*, launched in 1901, which presented the joys of rural living. It was full of “lush photographic articles depicting abandoned farms, wild and domestic animals, camping, canoeing, hunting, walking, winter sports, maple sugaring, harvesting, and kitchen gardening.”<sup>251</sup> However, *Country Life* noted how social and intellectual advantages of the city could combine with joys of the country. Bailey believed the simple life was “a state of mind.”<sup>252</sup> Objecting to mindless nostalgia, he argued that both urban and rural forces should shape civilization. Encouraging people to remain in agriculture, he resolved that it had to be a lucrative business. Bailey advocated conservation-minded farming, elimination of the middleman system to increase profits for farmers, and a general revitalization of the countryside. He said the farmer not only “feeds the world”

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid. 200.

<sup>251</sup> Tucker, D. M. (1993). *Kitchen Gardening in America: A History*. Ames, Iowa State University Press. 115.

<sup>252</sup> Bailey, L. H. (1911). *The Country-Life Movement in the United States*. New York, The Macmillan Company. 204.



but also “saves the world.”<sup>253</sup> President Theodore Roosevelt appointed the Country Life Commission in 1908 to investigate the lives of the nation’s rural population. The *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, published in 1911, expressed the view that country life must be made attractive, satisfying, and remunerative.<sup>254</sup> In its findings, the commission underscored the need for formation of organized business interests among co-operating farmers; development of new schools, with outdoor lessons to prepare children for country life; and improvements in roads and mail delivery to facilitate communication among country people.

Other spokesmen for country living accentuated the potential for homesteads and small-scale farms to prosper, offer personal contentment, and revive the countryside. Land reformer Bolton Hall advocated intensive farming on small city plots. He also encouraged people to leave overcrowded, unhealthful metropolitan life and move into the nearby country. Hall’s series of how-to books included *Three Acres and Liberty* (1907) and *A Little Land and a Living* (1908). He hoped to convince young men who saw agriculture as a stagnant profession that it could, in fact, be profitable and rewarding for those who approached it intelligently. Hall was part of a back-to-the-land movement that stretched from early in the twentieth century through World War II. Many Americans were hungry for a pre-industrial, bucolic world. Media sources that discussed the virtues of farm life helped educate those who wanted to move to the countryside. Along with *Country Life in America*, mass-circulation magazines like *Colliers*, *Sunset*, and the

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid. 198.

<sup>254</sup> Marquis, J. C. (1911). “[untitled].” *The American Economic Review* 1(3): 567-568. 568.

*Atlantic Monthly* offered articles on how to find rural property and first-person accounts of thriving on small acreages.<sup>255</sup>

Carolyn and Ed Robinson moved from New York City to a Connecticut homestead in 1942. Feeling “restricted” in the city, they wanted to begin country living on a piece of land that would furnish them with food, recreation, health, security, “fullness,” and extra income.<sup>256</sup> In *The “Have-More” Plan: A Little Land--A Lot of Living* (1944), the Robinsons promised that families could raise up to seventy-five percent of their food in their spare time, while finding real pleasure in doing so. Their proposal called for home ownership on at least an acre of land; a source of cash income; and a willingness to raise a variety of vegetables, fruit, poultry, meat and dairy products. While staying close enough to the city to retain a job and reap its advantages, the “Have-More” family would be self-reliant and happy in the country. Their food would be cheap and healthy, rich in vitamins and minerals.<sup>257</sup> The Robinsons offered advice on managing fruit trees, berries, hens, geese, turkeys, dairy goats, and beehives. Addressing housewives, Carolyn sympathized with city women who found housekeeping boring but claimed that her daily tasks were “stimulating, creative and varied.”<sup>258</sup> While the Robinsons did not explicitly prescribe organic farming methods, they were recognized homesteaders whose ideals matched those of numerous participants in the organic movement. Advertisements for *The ‘Have-More’ Plan* ran in 1944 issues of *Organic*

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<sup>255</sup> Jacob, J. (1997). *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future*. University Park, Pennsylvania State University. 8.

<sup>256</sup> Robinson, E. and C. Robinson (1973). *The "Have-More" Plan: A Little Land--a Lot of Living*. Pownal, VT, Storey Books. 2.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.* 64.

*Gardening*, and the Robinsons offered a booklet on “The New Science of Miniature Farming” to readers of the magazine in 1947.

Experiences of “returning” to the land were far from homogenous. Some homesteaders acknowledged their contribution to a cultural phenomenon, while others made more private choices. Some aimed simply to provide for themselves; others developed small-scale enterprises to supplement their income. Notwithstanding Thoreau’s solitary experiment, homesteading often engaged couples or communal groups. In most cases, a husband-wife team tackled the project. Tasks were frequently assigned by gender, although the degree to which labor and responsibility were divided varied. Like homesteading, “family farming” was regularly classified as gendered work. Liberty Hyde Bailey described farming as “a partnership between a man and a woman.”<sup>259</sup> The concept of family farming, though, was often patriarchal, because it customarily entailed a male farmer who served as head of the operation. Frank Gardner, a professor of agronomy who published *Successful Farming* (1916), conveyed his belief that success on the farm depended chiefly on efforts of the housewife and children. For this reason, he said, “farming is a family business and unmarried farmers are at a decided disadvantage.”<sup>260</sup> Gardner also asserted that large-scale farming had more drawbacks than moderate “family size” operations.<sup>261</sup>

### **Ralph Borsodi and the School of Living**

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<sup>259</sup> Bailey, L. H. (1911). *The Country-Life Movement in the United States*. New York, The Macmillan Company. 85.

<sup>260</sup> Gardner, F. D. (2001). *Traditional American Farming Techniques*. Guilford, CT, The Lyons Press. 786.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.* 827.

Ralph Borsodi (1886-1977), an economist and philosopher, moved his family from New York City to an expansive country farm in 1920. This groundbreaking homesteader intended his shift to be a critique of over-industrialized tendencies in “this ugly civilization.” Borsodi described in *Flight From the City* (1933) how his family began producing fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs, and nearly everything else they needed for a “more independent, more expressive way of life.”<sup>262</sup> Borsodi popularized the idea that any man facing unemployment or financial difficulties in Depression-era America could greatly improve his quality of life by choosing an agricultural mode of existence rather than an industrial one. He thought autonomous farm life was accessible to anyone willing to make the effort.

Economic security, personal satisfaction, and a sense of harmony with the earth were the incentives that compelled Borsodi to undertake modern homesteading. The farm enabled Borsodi to appreciate the beauty that came from “contact with nature and from the growth of the soil, from flowers and fruits, from gardens and trees, from birds and animals.”<sup>263</sup> It also convinced him that factories and mass manufacture were more wasteful than individual production. Through homesteading, Borsodi developed an appreciation for “pure and unadulterated foods” and “distaste for the commercialized foodstuffs which up to that time we had eaten.” He opposed commercial products for both economic and nutritional reasons, craving “pure and fresh food” instead of white bread, polished rice, or white sugar.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Borsodi, R. (1933). *Flight From the City: The Story of a New Way to Family Security*. New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers. xv.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. 22.

Borsodi reinforced traditional gender roles, insisting that cooking was an artistic endeavor through which the American housewife could exercise her creative talents. However, he supported the use of domestic machines to eliminate drudgery and claimed that “we are masters of machines instead of servants to them.”<sup>265</sup> He sought the best comforts of the city as well as the ease of country existence, rather than a “return to primitive ways of life.”<sup>266</sup> Borsodi stressed responsible use of natural resources and supported the organic agriculture movement. Borsodi wrote articles for Rodale’s *Organic Gardening* magazine, including “How You Can Save \$1.12 an Hour by Making Your Own Fertilizers,” a series on “Humus Manufacture in the Orient,” and pieces on soil depletion in 1944. He directed an experiment that compared the costs of buying and using artificial fertilizers to the costs of organic composts made with Sir Albert Howard’s Indore Process. This experiment revealed a net saving of \$4.10 per acre with the organic method. Borsodi concluded that it was unnecessary for farmers and gardeners to use chemical or commercial fertilizers and published his results in an issue of *Organic Gardening*.<sup>267</sup>

Borsodi also championed decentralized communities based on local control. Grassroots autonomy and cooperation were key aspects of the communal homestead movement Borsodi engaged with. In 1934, he created the School of Living in Suffern, New York, to teach other families how to achieve greater self-sufficiency and fulfillment. The School of Living was for decades a center for research and education in community development, ethical land tenure, and homesteading. The School’s journal, *Green*

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>267</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). Pay Dirt: Farming and Gardening With Composts. New York, The Devin-Adair Company. 90-91.

*Revolution*, touted itself as a voice for “modern homesteading, family-farming and decentralized culture.” It distributed how-to pieces, such as those on cheese-making, beekeeping, or building compost piles, but it also focused on political issues. Articles in the journal espoused the principles of decentralization, egalitarianism, and ecology. The School of Living relocated to Ohio in 1950 and continued to offer workshops in organic gardening, alternative energy, anarchism, forestry, holistic health, midwifery, poetry, prison reform, therapeutic massage, and tax resistance. Borsodi’s influence was also apparent at Deep Run Farm, a 36-acre offshoot of the School of Living that opened in 1976. Deep Run Farm operated a garden, greenhouse, kitchen, bakery, and studios in York, Pennsylvania. Possessions were owned jointly; 75% of every person’s individual income was shared; and each member contributed 15 hours of labor per week to the commune. Its alternative school, open to the larger public, instructed nearly thirty students between the ages of five and eleven.<sup>268</sup> Deep Run Farm served as the administrative center of the School of Living. In spring of 1979, a School of Homesteading and Organic Agriculture began there. It was a one-year program with a curriculum that included Agriculture, Food Preservation, Animal Husbandry, Aquaculture, Crafts, Mechanical Skills, Building Shelters, Conservation Skills, Survival Training, Forestry Practices, and Wild Area Projects. Director Arnold Greenburg likened it to a kibbutz, since members were mutually dependent on one another, producing most of their own food and developing many of their own energy sources.<sup>269</sup> The School of Living, now in Pennsylvania, is still operating, and *Green Revolution* is published as a

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<sup>268</sup> Shumway, A. (1976). "Deep Run Farm." *Green Revolution* 33(11): 9-11. 10.

<sup>269</sup> Greenburg, A. (1978). "Searching for Alternatives in Education: The Homestead School." *Ibid.* 35(5): 19-21. 21.

quarterly journal with a focus on cooperative living, land issues, monetary reform, permaculture, and alternative education.

### **Louis Bromfield at Malabar Farm**

During World War II, the Department of Agriculture's "Food Fights for Freedom" campaign inspired millions of Americans to plant "Victory Gardens." Vegetable patches appeared on front lawns, while kitchen gardens became badges of patriotism. A new wave of people dove into homesteading and farming. Louis Bromfield (1896-1956) was a recognized American farmer and author during the war years. He bought 500 acres in Ohio and in 1939 launched Malabar Farm as a unique agrarian experiment. Bromfield pursued humus-building organic techniques and, for a time, was a leading exponent of organic ideas. He wrote four books about his work, and his fame as a novelist and farmer established him as an important spokesman for Howard's "Rule of Return."<sup>270</sup>

In 1945, *Organic Gardening* published a favorable review of Bromfield's *Pleasant Valley* (1943). This book articulated a "profound belief that farming is the most honorable of professions and unquestionably a romantic and inspiring one."<sup>271</sup> Bromfield wanted to prove that worn-out farms could be restored. Self-sufficiency was integral to his plan. He blamed the "sickness of American agriculture" on the gradual disappearance of the "family-sized farm" and the "great mechanized farms which were more like industries than farms."<sup>272</sup> Like Rodale, he paid tribute to Howard's Indore process. He

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<sup>270</sup> Conford, P. (2001). *The Origins of the Organic Movement*. Edinburgh, Floris Books. 103.

<sup>271</sup> Bromfield, L. (1945). *Pleasant Valley*. New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers. vii.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

assessed his accomplishments on the farm by saying, “we have sought merely to build as Nature builds, to plant and sow and reap as Nature meant us to do.”<sup>273</sup>

Bromfield’s perspective had changed by the time he wrote *Malabar Farm* (1947), in which he professed the necessity for a more productive, efficient agriculture. After initially supporting organic school adherents, Bromfield later considered them “cultists.” When he began to believe that some artificial fertilizer was necessary in agriculture, this shift caused organic purists to disagree with him. Bromfield still echoed Rodale and Howard in idealizing the Hunza lifestyle in a distant Indian region; and he felt a need for “working *with* Nature rather than *against* her” in agriculture.<sup>274</sup> He still said, quite simply, “a farm life is a good life.”<sup>275</sup> Yet Bromfield admitted that many of his “Utopian” ambitions for achieving self-sufficiency on the farm had been abandoned. Resigned to the industrial realities of economics and efficiency, the farm moved toward specialization and concentration. While Bromfield believed that barnyard manure was the best source of fertilizer, he didn’t see how it could be produced in sufficient quantities for large farms and therefore accepted the addition of commercial fertilizers to maintain yields. He used sprays and insecticides to restore the “worn-out land.”<sup>276</sup>

Unlike Rodale, Bromfield avowed that chemical fertilizers in “reasonable quantities” would not harm living organisms. He accused “the fanatics of the organic material school” of erroneously assuming that vegetation grown on depleted soil could produce substantial quantities of calcium, potassium, phosphorous, trace elements or

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid. 296.

<sup>274</sup> Bromfield, L. (1948). *Malabar Farm*. New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers. 230.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. 230.



nitrogen.<sup>277</sup> Instead, there was a requirement for “natural” mineral replenishments, such as limestone and phosphate rock. Bromfield did not acknowledge that Rodale also insisted upon mild types of ground rock fertilizers as adjuncts to compost. The major point of contention was that Rodale approved *only* of safe, non-chemical enhancements for exhausted soil. Rodale used “not an ounce of artificial fertilizers or poison sprays.”<sup>278</sup> Bromfield addressed the debate by saying, “none of us at Malabar Farm are fanatic advocates either of the chemical fertilizer or the organic school.”<sup>279</sup> He said the dispute was a question of balance. Practical economics came to govern Bromfield’s decisions for the direction his farm would take, so he was willing to abandon what he perceived as organic “fanaticism” and romantic ideals about family farms. The farmer, he said, had to be a businessman who “should specialize and do well and efficiently a few things rather than attempting to do too many things inefficiently.”<sup>280</sup>

Similar to organic backers, Bromfield’s guiding philosophy was that “Nature has provided the means of producing healthy and resistant plants, animals and people and that if these means and patterns can be discovered and put into use, the need for ‘artificial’ and curative as opposed to preventive methods is greatly reduced.”<sup>281</sup> In 1951, he testified to a Congressional committee investigating chemicals in food. Though he was willing to use chemical fertilizer, insecticides, or fungicides, he claimed to choose the forms that were “comparatively harmless to animals and humans.” Summing up his perspective in *From My Experience* (1955), Bromfield explained that “one of our

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid. 282.

<sup>278</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1945). With the Editor: The Human Health Aspect of Organic Farming. Organic Gardening. 8: 2-4. 2.

<sup>279</sup> Bromfield, L. (1948). Malabar Farm. New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers. 292.

<sup>280</sup> Bromfield, L. (1955). From My Experience: The Pleasures and Miseries of Life on a Farm. New York, Harper & Brothers. 175.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. 36.

constant struggles at Malabar is to avoid becoming kidnapped by the organic extremists and even the cranks.”<sup>282</sup> Those “organic extremists,” in turn, became disenchanted with Bromfield’s tolerance for chemicals but continued to share his confidence in the merits of farming.

### **Factory Farming and Organic Responses**

Organic advocates in the 1940s—such as Rodale, Albert Howard, and Edward Faulkner—thought their method would bring health and environmental benefits. They promoted the link between ecologically healthy soil and human health. However, they were diverging from the tide of specialized agriculture dependent on purchased off-farm inputs. From the 1930s to 1950s, a “get big or get out” mentality triumphed in American agriculture. Widespread adoption of fertilizers and synthetic chemical pesticides made huge increases in yields per acre possible. Farm labor became more productive even as workers were exploited. Carey McWilliams coined the term “factory farming” in 1939 to describe the kind of agriculture emerging in California.<sup>283</sup> This technological, chemically intensive farming was connected to calls for high production in order to help fight the Cold War.<sup>284</sup> Biodynamic farmer Sterling Edwards complained in 1948 that “the federal and state governments have done so little to inform the farmer of the advantages and present stages of the art of organic soil treatment.”<sup>285</sup> The U.S. government created the Future Farmers of America (FFA) in the 1950s and promoted the use of chemicals like

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid. 183.

<sup>283</sup> McWilliams, C. (2000). Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California. Berkeley, University of California Press.

<sup>284</sup> Beeman, R. S. and J. A. Pritchard (2001). A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas. 77.

<sup>285</sup> Edwards, S. W. (1948). "Grindstone Run Empties Into the Potomac." Bio-Dynamics VI(3): 20-24. 21.

DDT left over from the war that would enable farmers to maximize growth. Chemical and technological advances facilitated specialization, enlarged farm profits, and amplified yields. Agricultural extension services pointed out that “today’s farmer is a specialist—a producer of food or fiber. His efficiency is steadily increasing.”<sup>286</sup> Fewer—but larger—farms were producing more than ever before.<sup>287</sup>

As productivity swelled and conventional methods succeeded, “the organic school appeared irrelevant.”<sup>288</sup> Still, there was a counterattack, and the 1950s saw much criticism of industrial agriculture in both the U.S. and United Kingdom. Joseph Cocannouer’s *Weeds: Guardians of the Soil* (1950) and *Farming With Nature* (1954) shared an emphasis on “Nature’s law of togetherness” and “co-operating with Nature” as the governing rules for agriculture.<sup>289</sup> He extolled “scientific compost making” as outlined by Sir Albert Howard and promised that weeds could be helpful to the farmer. Ben Easey, an active supporter of the organic movement in Great Britain, published *Practical Organic Gardening* in the 1950s. He discussed the critical role of making compost in organic gardening as “an art, a branch of gardening which deserves the same attention and skill as the old arts of brewing, baking and cheese-making, all of which apply biological principles.”<sup>290</sup> Easey asserted that organic gardeners and farmers had developed their techniques in response to the misuse of artificial fertilizers.

Membership in the Soil Association, Britain’s premiere organic agriculture

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<sup>286</sup> Oklahoma State University Extension Service (1960). *Oklahoma Agriculture Today and Tomorrow*.

<sup>287</sup> Committee on the Role of Alternative Farming Methods in Modern Production Agriculture (1989). *Alternative Agriculture*. Washington D.C., National Academy Press. 25.

<sup>288</sup> Conford, P. (2001). *The Origins of the Organic Movement*. Edinburgh, Floris Books. 211.

<sup>289</sup> Cocannouer, J. A. (1954). *Farming With Nature*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press. 169; and Cocannouer, J. (1950). *Weeds: Guardians of the Soil*. New York, Devin-Adair. 65.

<sup>290</sup> Easey, B. (1976). *Practical Organic Gardening*. London, Faber and Faber. 28.

organization, reached approximately 3,500 worldwide by 1957.<sup>291</sup> Lawrence Hills, a horticulturist interested in organic growing, established the Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA) in 1958. It began as a charitable research group to study the uses of comfrey, a plant introduced to Britain in the nineteenth century by Henry Doubleday. Early HDRA newsletters included advice on nutrition, health, and ways to grow plants organically. By the end of the 1960s it had 1,700 experimenting farmers as members. HDRA eventually changed its name to Garden Organic, acquired over 30,000 members, and became the largest organic body in Britain. Meanwhile, organic gardening continued to advance in the U.S. without oversight from a formal union.

### **Helen & Scott Nearing**

When Helen and Scott Nearing moved from New York City to a rural Vermont farm in 1931, they were yearning for “a simple, satisfying life on the land.”<sup>292</sup> They became influential campaigners for organic gardening and homesteading. The Nearings believed that Ralph Borsodi’s rural alternatives provided greater possibilities for a fulfilling life than urban situations. They criticized the city for its complexity, tension, and artificiality. In *Living The Good Life* (1954), these renowned homesteaders described their self-reliant lifestyle. They rejected the strain and greed of cities. Instead, they explained, “we moved our center back to the land. There we raised the food we ate. We found it sufficient, delicious, and nourishing.”<sup>293</sup> They worked to achieve economic, social, health-oriented, and ethical objectives. Their experiment was one of “sane living

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<sup>291</sup> Conford, P. (2001). *The Origins of the Organic Movement*. Edinburgh, Floris Books. 212.

<sup>292</sup> Nearing, S. and H. Nearing (1989). *The Good Life: Helen and Scott Nearing’s Sixty Years of Self-Sufficient Living*. New York, Schocken Books. 3.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.* 149.

in an insane world.”<sup>294</sup> They lived a structured life of purposeful actions. Like Thoreau, to whom they often alluded, they valued simplicity, convenience, and harmony. The Nearings viewed Thoreau as the superlative homesteader. *Living the Good Life* was a back-to-the-land instruction book, much as *Walden* was a manual for simple living. The Nearings believed that, by following their example, others seeking the good life could learn the liberating art of “living in nature.”

Organic food and farming were an integral part of the Nearings’ lifestyle. They believed in “fresh, vital food, organically produced.”<sup>295</sup> On their farm in the Green Mountains, they set about building up the soil by composting. Among the handbooks to organic farming that they relied on were Rodale’s *Pay Dirt* and *The Organic Front*; Albert Howard’s *Agricultural Testament* and *The Soil and Health*; and Eve Balfour’s *The Living Soil* (1943). They were adamant that fruits and vegetables grown in compost were healthier and tasted better. They also felt that organic gardening best expressed their compassion for nature and required minimal intervention.<sup>296</sup> They suggested that if other people helped create organized demand for organic food, this would extend its production and availability.<sup>297</sup>

The Nearings insisted on garden-fresh, unprocessed foods. They disparaged twentieth-century food habits that involved factories, large-scale enterprises, and chemical fertilizers. They distinguished between “man’s natural food” and the “denatured items displayed on the shelves of supermarkets.”<sup>298</sup> While most American families

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid. 192.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>296</sup> Krizmanic, J. (1989). Inch by Inch, Row by Row. *Vegetarian Times*: 44-53, 68. 46.

<sup>297</sup> Nearing, S. and H. Nearing (1989). *The Good Life: Helen and Scott Nearing’s Sixty Years of Self-Sufficient Living*. New York, Schocken Books. 134.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. 368.

depended on convenient canned soup and frozen entrees, the Nearings lived year-round from food raised during the brief Vermont growing season, including lettuce, cucumbers, squash, peppers, tomatoes, sweet peas, spinach, potatoes, beets, and cabbage. Eating “whole food” grown on their own farm enabled them to nurture a strong attachment to the earth and demonstrate an alternative to the dominant industrial lifestyle. They were also vegetarians for health and ethical reasons. Helen’s reverence for all forms of life even compelled her to apologize to carrots before ingesting them.<sup>299</sup> In general, the Nearings ate very little and gravitated towards a monotonous diet, claiming that these food habits were simple, economic, and practical.

By producing and consuming their own goods and services, the Nearings fashioned a subsistence homestead that was largely independent of the labor and commodity markets. The garden was the basis of their own consumer economy. They cut wood for fuel, put up their own buildings with local stone and wood, made implements, and bartered for other essential products. They calculated a ten-year plan for the homestead. The Nearings did not sugarcoat the amount of hard work homesteading necessitated. Still, while they persisted in regularly working during particular hours in order to attain their goals, they were equally diligent about scheduling time for intellectual and creative pursuits.

The Nearings were starkly set apart from their Vermont neighbors in several ways. For Scott, an economist, homesteading was “an act of resistance to unrestrained capitalism.”<sup>300</sup> He had been ousted from his academic position because of anti-government and anti-war political positions. The Nearings derived their income from

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<sup>299</sup> Krizmanic, J. (1989). Inch by Inch, Row by Row. *Vegetarian Times*: 44-53, 68. 46.

<sup>300</sup> Gould, R. K. (2005). *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*. Berkeley, University of California Press. 141.

lectures, writing, and maple sugar production. The couple intentionally chose to live in an austere, frugal manner; they were not involuntarily poor. They opted to have no telephone or radio. Although they celebrated farm life, the Nearings had reservations about rural life. They never realized an elusive sense of local community, in part because they regularly looked down upon their neighbors for consuming too many pies, cakes, doughnuts, and dead animals. The Nearings lamented that, even with open land at their disposal, nearby families would purchase canned or packaged food rather than raise it in a home garden.<sup>301</sup> These rustic Americans, in turn, were baffled by the Nearings' odd dietary habits and their disciplined, organized life. The Nearings did commend the "unpretentious" Vermonters and hosted an informal musical hour each Sunday morning for townspeople. They never locked their doors, and guests were always welcome, though most of those visitors came from the city. Ultimately, the Nearings felt that the nineteen-year Vermont experiment was a failure socially, although they deemed it a success in terms of individual health and happiness.

In 1952, the Nearings moved to Forest Farm in Harborside, Maine, where they continued their efforts at freeing themselves from "undue dependence on the Establishment."<sup>302</sup> Their new farm provided food, fuel, and shelter. They built compost piles, stone structures, and a yurt. Blueberries became their new cash crop. They worked out ways to store, dry, freeze, can, and preserve the food they raised organically. Due to the short growing season in New England, they built a sun-heated greenhouse along with

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<sup>301</sup> Nearing, S. and H. Nearing (1989). The Good Life: Helen and Scott Nearing's Sixty Years of Self-Sufficient Living. New York, Schocken Books. 124.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. 391.

a garden to supply themselves with salad and other greens on a year-round basis.<sup>303</sup> Since they refused to use animal products, they applied seaweed from the Atlantic Ocean as fertilizer. They said, “at all times we have in mind the basic principle of organic gardening: to put into the soil more fertility than crops or erosion take out.”<sup>304</sup> The rhythms of planting, composting, harvesting, and eating were significant rituals to them. The Nearings were resolute that “balanced, healthful living requires at-oneness with all aspects of nature.”<sup>305</sup>

Both Scott and Helen toiled on the farm, and their work was not divided by typical gender assignments. Helen did suggest that it was best for a couple—or an alliance of like-minded people—to tackle the work involved in the good life. She took sole responsibility for cooking. However, in *Simple Food for the Good Life: An Alternative Cookbook* (1980), she expressed the opinion that “women need not hang over stoves and should not spend the major part of their time fooling with food and household work.”<sup>306</sup> She favored recipes that used raw vegetables, straight from the garden, with minimal cooking. Her cookbook was directed at “frugal, abstemious folk who eat to nourish their bodies and leave self-indulgent delicacies to the gourmets.”<sup>307</sup> From their sixty-year experiment, the couple concluded that it was indeed possible to craft a robust, ethical, self-contained economy.

The Nearings became exemplars for the countercultural movement in the 1960s and 70s, due to their anti-establishment, organic, vegetarian, simple lifestyle. They were

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<sup>303</sup> Nearing, S. and H. Nearing (1977). Building and Using Our Sun-Heated Greenhouse: Grow Vegetables All Year-Round. Charlotte, VT, Garden Way Publishing. 134.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>305</sup> Nearing, S. and H. Nearing (1989). The Good Life: Helen and Scott Nearing’s Sixty Years of Self-Sufficient Living. New York, Schocken Books. 384.

<sup>306</sup> Nearing, H. (1980). Simple Food for the Good Life: An Alternative Cookbook. New York, Delacorte Press. 17.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. 9.



evangelical proponents of homesteading and wrote occasionally for *Organic Gardening* magazine. *Living the Good Life* was reissued in 1970 and became a best-seller, appealing to a new generation of budding homesteaders and emergent community gardeners. Forest Farm became a mecca for those who aspired to the simple life, and the Nearings regarded themselves as missionaries. Thousands of visitors from around the world made the pilgrimage to the Maine coast each year to ask for advice and absorb inspiration from the lifestyle the Nearings modeled and wrote about. Scott died at age one hundred, in 1983. After his death, Helen continued the no-frills homesteading life and still received a stream of visitors. Through her contagious zeal, she inspired countless people to change their lives, slow down, follow a vegetarian diet, or farm organically.<sup>308</sup> Helen died in 1995, at the age of 91. The nonprofit Good Life Center was established at Forest Farm, to preserve the Nearings' legacy and promote sustainable living.

### **Counterculture Homesteads and Farms**

Thoreau and the Nearings became idols when organic gardening and farming entered a fresh phase with the countercultural developments of the late 1960s and 70s. Scores of young people “dropped out” from civilization, retreating to distant communes and rustic farms. According to some estimates, over 3,500 utopian communes formed between 1965 and 1970, creating a reprieve from the dominion of industrial-capitalism and the homogeneity of manufactured foods.<sup>309</sup> Independent smallholders chose a more private yeoman model but also held to an anti-materialist creed. New publications

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<sup>308</sup> Gould, R. K. (2005). *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*. Berkeley, University of California Press. xvii.

<sup>309</sup> Vileisis, A. (2008). *Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need to Get It Back*. Washington, Island Press. 210.

celebrated homesteading and rural ways of life. *Mother Earth News*, a spiritual descendent of Liberty Hyde Bailey's *Country Life in America*, was launched just before Earth Day in 1970. Other journals like *Futurist*, *Future's Conditional*, *Vegan*, and *Natural Living* advocated organic farming, health food, and "appropriate technology."<sup>310</sup> These sources joined *Organic Gardening and Farming* as beacons for the mingling of organic and counterculture philosophies.

*The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods* (1972)—written by the staff of *Organic Gardening and Farming*—noted that young people were "in revolt," expressing "vigorous dissatisfaction with the money-oriented, polluted, selfish, unpleasant, technological society that has spawned them."<sup>311</sup> The editors sympathized with this back-to-the-land crowd and went on to say that "natural, unpoisoned food" had become a major purpose for "young revolutionaries." Those who were gathering in communes or establishing permanent homesteads were "carrying the organic system to an intensity of fulfillment that older people just wouldn't be able to accomplish." While some readers may be "revolting in a mild way by boycotting synthetic foods and dangerous drugs," these "longhaired young people" were "going much further by pulling up stakes completely and trying to live close to nature."<sup>312</sup> Among those "in revolt" were Pennsylvania homesteaders Tim and Grace Lefever, who farmed organically on sixty acres of land in the 1970s. The Lefevers frequently spoke to college, community, and church groups on the merits of organic food. They were steadfast about producing most of what they used; keeping material possessions to a minimum; and drawing on the sun

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<sup>310</sup> Beeman, R. S. and J. A. Pritchard (2001). *A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century*. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas. 107.

<sup>311</sup> Goldman, M. C. and W. H. Hylton, Eds. (1972). *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods*. Emmaus, Rodale Press. 306.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.* 307.

for energy to heat their home. They admitted, however, that the one modern convenience they found indispensable was their blender, utilized daily to make juice from edible plants like beet leaves, carrot tops, spinach, kale, and dandelion.<sup>313</sup> Robert Rodale saw the organic homestead as a testing ground for the “revolutionary anti-pollution and conservation methods” that were imperative to improve everyone’s quality of living. He regarded organic gardeners and farmers as “members of that dwindling group of Americans who still have close, direct attachment to the soil and who have not forgotten what it is like to grow food and make the simple essentials of life.”<sup>314</sup> He described the organic way of life as “sane living in a mad world.”

Homesteader Gene Logsdon also subsisted organically as a way to live sanely and pleurably. For him, the main objective of modern homesteading in the 1970s was to gain independence and self-reliance. Logsdon asserted that the basic philosophy of the organic homesteader was “accommodate yourself to nature whenever possible” and “don’t dominate nature when you don’t have to.”<sup>315</sup> He praised the virtues of compost. Logsdon admitted that organic farming was a more challenging way to raise food but believed that work on the organic homestead was creative and individualistic, something done out of love not duty. In terms of labor, he emphasized that the organicist combined knowledge from “primitive” and “civilized” people. In some cases, a good team of horses, fully in keeping with the spirit of organics, could be an asset to the homestead; however, a small tractor could be more sensible and economical at other times.<sup>316</sup> Two

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<sup>313</sup> Hollis, B. J. (1976). "Sonnewald Homestead." *Green Revolution* 33(11): 16-17. 16.

<sup>314</sup> Rodale, R. (1972). *Sane Living in a Mad World: A Guide to the Organic Way of Life*. Emmaus, Pa, Rodale Press. 237.

<sup>315</sup> Logsdon, G. (1973). *Homesteading: How to Find Independence on the Land*. Emmaus, Rodale Press. 246.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.* 221.

decades later, Logsdon still enjoyed farming his thirty-two acres in an ecological manner. Calling himself “the contrary farmer,” he said that homesteaders and “cottage farmers” ought to separate themselves from the “capitalist/socialist economy.”<sup>317</sup> However, like Louis Bromfield, he altered his staunch organic stance over the years. Although his garden and orchard were what he called “100 percent organic,” he no longer opposed applying a moderate amount of chemical fertilizer to fields as an economical way of maintaining fertility. In a rebuttal to those who critiqued him for not being “certified organic,” Logsdon declared that “if a small amount of chemical fertilizer every fourth year on my crop fields makes me a cheater among the Chosen, that will prove in the long run to be the organic fraternity’s problem, not mine.”<sup>318</sup> He continued to criticize “modern society” for losing touch with hands-on farming techniques and situated the garden as the only place urbanites could make close contact with “the basic realities of life.”<sup>319</sup>

Though organic gardening lost most of its rebellious connotations between the 1970s and 1990s, some participants still feel it entails defiance against industrialization. A greater number of farmers in India have recently been flouting the pro-chemical Green Revolution that swept the nation in the 1960s and 1970s by switching to organic agriculture. In doing so, they have faced criticism from agriculture industry officials who warn that this will jeopardize national food security and cause a crisis.<sup>320</sup> In opposition to World Trade Organization (WTO) policies, Indian activist and physicist Vandana Shiva

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<sup>317</sup> Logsdon, G. (1994). The Contrary Farmer. White River Junction VT, Chelsea Green Publishing Company. 19.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. 161.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>320</sup> Zwerdling, D. (2009). "In India, Bucking The 'Revolution' By Going Organic." Retrieved June 5, 2009, from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story>.

founded Navdanya, a movement for saving seed, protecting biodiversity, and resisting monopolistic control of agriculture. Shiva is a vocal foe of the “food totalitarianism” and “McDonaldization of world food” that destroys sustainable food systems.<sup>321</sup> Under the same premise, French organic sheep farmers José Bové and François DuFour helped to dismantle a McDonald's in Milau. Their 1999 demonstration attracted media attention, and Bové became a spokesman for those who opposed “junk food,” genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and artificial hormones, pesticides, industrialized agriculture, standardization of food, and economic imperialism. Like other organic growers, Bové characterized “traditional farming” as being “in harmony with nature,” but he was unconventional in that his antagonistic actions led to his imprisonment.<sup>322</sup>

Though less drastic, organic farmers Jennifer Megyes and Kyle Jones found when they began operating Fat Rooster Farm in 1998 that, to some fellow Vermonters, “‘organic’ meant a certain moral posturing, a zealotry, a lot of starry-eyed, pie-in-the-sky, highfalutin, tree-hugging, nature-loving, pious, finger-wagging rhetoric.”<sup>323</sup> Other local farmers were skeptical of the barter system that the couple proposed in lieu of cash payments.<sup>324</sup> Still, the public was intrigued by their twenty-eight varieties of heirloom tomatoes, so these sold successfully at the farmers’ market. Megyes and Jones then established a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that raised herbs, vegetables, flowers, maple syrup, eggs, lamb, duck, and veal. Organic and local food initiatives in contemporary communities—such as CSAs and “guerrilla gardening”—are

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<sup>321</sup> Shiva, V. (2000). *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*. Cambridge Mass: , South End Press. 70.

<sup>322</sup> Bové, J. and F. DuFour (2001). *The World is Not for Sale: Farmers Against Junk Food*. New York, Verso. 78.

<sup>323</sup> Smith, N. (2004). *Harvest: A Year in the Life of an Organic Farm*. Guilford, Conn, The Lyons Press. 46-47.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.* 47.

sometimes meant to resist power structures and open an “alternative economy,” detached from “intrusions of corporate or governmental control.”<sup>325</sup> These projects have become popular responses to pressing concerns in regions worried about their ability to regularly obtain fresh, nutritious food. In many urban areas, residents have turned vacant lots into public gardens, generating access to organic vegetables within city limits. The grassroots group Food Not Lawns strives to increase personal and community empowerment by encouraging people to grow organic gardens. It has promoted organic vegetable gardening as the radical first step toward a “healthier, more self-reliant, and ultimately more ecologically sane life.”<sup>326</sup>

Perceptions of “local” and “organic” often go hand-in-hand. Organic farmer Frederick Kirschenmann, a proponent of producing and acquiring organic food locally, has averred that food is at “the heart of any community,” and all people in a regional “foodshed” are “much more connected to their food source.”<sup>327</sup> In *Coming Home to Eat* (2002), ethnobotanist Gary Paul Nabhan documented a year of “eating locally,” which he defined as obtaining food within a 250-mile radius of his Arizona home. He combined home gardening and foraging with purchases from producers in the vicinity. While drawing attention to the tyrannical politics of biotechnology, he simultaneously celebrated the “sensual pleasure of food.”<sup>328</sup> Nabhan concluded that native foods tend to be healthy, good for the land, and “good for our souls.”<sup>329</sup> Inspired by this passion, more

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<sup>325</sup> Pretty, J. and P. Barlett (2005). Concluding Remarks: Nature and Health in the Urban Environment. *Urban Place: Reconnecting with the Natural World*. P. F. Barlett. Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press: 299-319. 307.

<sup>326</sup> Flores, H. C. (2006). *Food Not Lawns: How to Turn Your Yard into a Garden and Your Neighborhood into a Community*. White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green Publishing Company. 2.

<sup>327</sup> Kirschenmann, F. (1996). "What's News In Organic." *Biodynamics*(203): 10-12. 12.

<sup>328</sup> Nabhan, G. P. (2002). *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company. 14.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* 303.

than 1,000 “locavores” pledged in 2005 to eat only products from within 100 miles of their home. They instituted Locavores.com to discuss their attempts at eating locally. Bloggers who joined the “100-mile diet” effort also launched their own website, Eatlocalchallenge.com, to sway others. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* chose “locavore” as its word of the year in 2007.

Not all local eaters grow their own food, but many do combine a certain degree of home gardening with attempts to procure the rest nearby. Published accounts about other experiments to survive on local food include Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (2007); Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon’s *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally* (2007); and Doug Fine’s *Farewell, My Subaru: An Epic Adventure in Local Living* (2008). Erin Byers Murray and her husband gave local eating a shot, recording the endeavor in *Body + Soul* in 2009. They felt healthier and more ecologically responsible after a month of shopping at the farmers’ market. Though they did succumb to the lure of Popsicles, potato chips, and out-season-produce again when the trial was over, Murray said they had trained themselves to “always look for local, pesticide-free options before buying anything else.”<sup>330</sup> Like Thoreau, locavores frequently pay homage to local food as an enriching way to reconnect growers and eaters who have become alienated in an impersonal global food system.

### **Harmonious Homesteads**

The ideal of homegrown food appeals to Americans eager to bond with the land and collect its bounty. Most homesteaders seeking a self-sufficient livelihood place the garden and its results at the center of their days. In addition to dedicated farmers, millions

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<sup>330</sup> Murray, E. B. (2009). Eco Challenge: Eating Local. *Body + Soul*. 26: 52-54.

of people grow food in backyard gardens and local plots. Amateur gardeners usually appreciate the opportunity to work outdoors, save money, and eat delicious, nutritious food. Since homesteaders face acute awareness of where their meals come from, they tend to articulate clear-cut connections between food and nature.<sup>331</sup> Insistence that “accepting Nature’s terms” is enriching rather than limiting has been a leitmotif among contemporary homesteaders.

Sue and Steve Robishaw began their homesteading adventure in the 1970s by subscribing to *Organic Gardening and Farming* and *Mother Earth News*. After moving onto eighty acres in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, they found that “nature provides what we really need quite generously.”<sup>332</sup> They ate what they could gather in the woods and grow in the garden. The Robishaws thought those who created homes “in harmony with the earth” were “homesteading heroes.”<sup>333</sup> In a parallel vein, John Seymour’s *Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency* (1976) described the “true homesteader” as one who was striving for a higher standard of living; growing fresh, organic food; achieving bodily health and peace of mind; accomplishing difficult but satisfying tasks; and husbanding the land without disturbing its “natural balance.”<sup>334</sup>

Bob and Connie Gregson became prototypical homesteaders when they moved to a flower and nut farm on an island near Seattle in 1988. They said they were “determined

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<sup>331</sup> Gould, R. K. (2005). *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*. Berkeley, University of California Press. 76.

<sup>332</sup> Robishaw, S. (1997). *Homesteading Adventures: A Guide for Doers and Dreamers*. Cooks, Mich, Many Tracks. 94.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>334</sup> Seymour, J. and S. Seymour (1973). *Farming For Self-Sufficiency: Independence on a 5-Acre Farm*. New York, Schocken Books. 8.



to drop out of corporate careers for a better lifestyle.”<sup>335</sup> They commenced selling their organic fruit and vegetables at a self-service farm stand along the driveway and drew subscriptions for a CSA. Though the work was sometimes tedious and frustrating, they discovered it to be “glorious” and “immensely rewarding,” a true “labor of love.”<sup>336</sup> They felt that general culture disregarded the “mystical bond between people and the good earth” but ascertained that this link was “rekindled on the small organic farm.”<sup>337</sup> Enthused by their success, they wrote a handbook for others who wanted to make a “reasonable, community-oriented, non-exploitative, earth-friendly, and aesthetically pleasing living” as small-scale organic family farmers.<sup>338</sup>

Joan Dye Gussow, a nutritionist and self-proclaimed “suburban homesteader,” retreated from Manhattan in the mid-1990s, hunting for sustainability and “vegetable self-reliance.”<sup>339</sup> Along the banks of the Hudson River in upstate New York, she began to produce enough of her family’s vegetables to last throughout the year. Despite living in the northeast, she feasted on her own peppers, eggplant, zucchini, beans, onions, spinach, leeks, garlic, blueberries, currants, and raspberries. Like the Nearings, she referred to this endeavor as an “experiment” in re-learning dependence on the land. Though Gussow described herself as “absurdly healthy,” she was attracted to fresh, seasonal food primarily for environmental reasons. She opposed genetic engineering and long-distance food transportation. She advocated acceptance of seasonal limitations on local food, because we should “adjust our choices and our appetites to what Nature will provide in a

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<sup>335</sup> Gregson, B. and C. Gregson (1996). Rebirth of the Small Family Farm: A Handbook for Starting a Successful Organic Farm Based on the Community Supported Agriculture Concept. Vashon Island, WA, Island Meadow Farm. 4.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>339</sup> Gussow, J. D. (2001). This Organic Life: Confessions of a Suburban Homesteader. White River Junction VT, Chelsea Green Publishing Company. 15.

given year.”<sup>340</sup> Still, she did not eschew hedonism, confirming that re-educating one’s taste buds to prefer seasonal food was “a delicious adventure.”<sup>341</sup>

Contemporary homesteaders John Ivanko and Lisa Kivirist, in the spirit of Helen and Scott Nearing, moved from downtown Chicago to a small farm in southwestern Wisconsin in 1996 as part of their own quest for the “good life.” They grew organic crops, managed a bed and breakfast, and promoted the advantages of this lifestyle through the “Rural Renaissance Network” they established. Home gardening met about seventy percent of their food needs. Their rhetoric was analogous to that of the Nearings as they told of the “desire for living authentically,” celebrated “a life simpler in design yet richer in meaning,” and claimed that “Nature is our model.”<sup>342</sup> They described how the farm enabled them to live “more ecologically, more independently, and with a greater sense of community.”<sup>343</sup> Their motives for growing organically included health, safety, ecological diversity, soil conservation, and a lifestyle with an emphasis on “respect and care.”<sup>344</sup>

*Countryside & Small Stock Journal* is a periodical that caters to bona fide and aspiring homesteaders. In 1969, Jerome Belanger placed a classified advertisement in *Organic Gardening and Farming* announcing the inception of a newsletter for homesteaders. Within a few months, he had several hundred subscribers to *Countryside*, at \$1 per year. Belanger bought a country journal, *Small Stock Magazine*, and started *Dairy Goat Guide*; and then in 1973 rolled the two magazines and newsletter into the

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid. 107-108.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>342</sup> Ivanko, J. and L. Kivirist (2004). Rural Renaissance: Renewing the Quest for the Good Life. Gabriola Island, BC, New Society Publishers. xvii.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. 73.

bimonthly *Countryside and Small Stock Journal*. Soon there were ten thousand subscribers, and subscription numbers later neared 40,000. This periodical has been an information exchange for practical small-scale farming.<sup>345</sup> The magazine publishes articles on making cheese, pressing cider, raising poultry, cooking from scratch, preserving fruit, and organic gardening. *Countryside's* philosophy is an assortment of ideas and attitudes, including:

“a reverence for nature and a preference for country life; a desire for maximum personal self-reliance and creative leisure; a concern for family nurture and community cohesion; a certain hostility toward luxury; a belief that the primary reward of work should be well-being rather than money; a certain nostalgia for the supposed simplicities of the past and an anxiety about the technological and bureaucratic complexities of the present and the future; and a taste for the plain and functional. *Countryside* reflects and supports the simple life, and calls its practitioners *homesteaders*.”<sup>346</sup>

Belanger also ran his small organic farm on an experimental homestead. He felt that organic farming was both a philosophy and a management system. Belanger explained that organic farmers were opposed not to progress but to the misuse of technology.<sup>347</sup> He and his wife tried spinning wool, tanning rabbits, and making cheese, butter, and sausages. As more people asked them where to buy homestead tools, the Belangers started The Countryside General Store, which sold items like hog scrapers, kerosene lamps, and cast-iron cookware.<sup>348</sup>

The actual and imagined

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<sup>345</sup> Jacob, J. (1997). New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future. University Park, Pennsylvania State University. 23-25.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>347</sup> Belanger, J. (1977). Correcting Some Misconceptions About Organic Farming. Organic Farming: Yesterday's and Tomorrow's Agriculture. R. Wolf. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press: 7-20.

<sup>348</sup> Jacob, J. (1997). New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future. University Park, Pennsylvania State University. 25.

charms of organic homesteading continue to lure converts. Interested people who want to experience the small organic farm lifestyle can use the network managed by World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF), which helps potential volunteers find farmers willing to provide room and board in exchange for temporary labor. The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) organizes the Common Ground Country Fair each year to educate fairgoers about the vibrancy of small farms and homesteads. MOFGA's Journeyperson Program provides opportunities for prospective farmers to develop the requisite skills to farm independently. Agritourism, a branch of eco-tourism, is a dynamic business sector that includes activities like harvest festivals, cheese-making or hand-spinning workshops, and overnight stays on farms. Agritourism is popular among those eager to bask in a farm setting but not quite ready to make a commitment themselves. For example, guests at Stony Creek Farm in the Catskills pay over \$300 per night for the "privilege" of participating in farm chores and sleeping in tents on the property. Agritourism is a worldwide phenomenon. At Agrilandia, a fourteen-acre organic farm near Beijing, visitors from the city come to stay for the weekend; pick their own cherries, peaches, and pears; or dine on Italian-inspired meals at the farm's elegant restaurant. Agrilandia's founders also produce organic red wine, fresh cheeses, and ravioli while proselytizing about the merits of organic farming.

Today's "back-to-the-landers" must frequently rely on full- or part-time non-farm work to supplement their incomes. Each gardener or homesteader expends varying degrees of effort. In *The Lazy Environmentalist* (2007), Josh Dorfman applauded that "these days you don't need tools and soil in order to grow organic herbs, flowers, fruits, and vegetables. All you need is a glass of water and a Garden-in-a-bag made by Potting

Shed Creations. Pour some water and the accompanying seeds into the bag and presto! You've got yourself your very own organic garden."<sup>349</sup> Some gardeners feel they only attain therapeutic benefits with earnest sweat, while others prefer to avoid slogging through compost. Overall, homesteaders continue to place a high premium on personal sovereignty, an uncomplicated existence, domestic tasks, bonds with the natural world, and healthy food. These characteristics are analogous to those habitually attributed to small family farmers, particularly organic ones.

### **Old and New Agrarianism**

The broad American sense of self has been intertwined with a wistful agrarian aesthetic for centuries. Environmental imagery helps cultural groups develop collective identities. Natural landscapes carry symbolic weight within formulations of national and regional self-conceptions. In the United States, farms are the quintessential representations of an idyllic countryside. A philosophy known as agrarianism has acclaimed the rural world for possessing a certain moral, visual, and metaphysical superiority over urban situations. The agrarian ideal is predicated on private landownership. In the eighteenth century, individual small-scale farming developed into the dominant mode of national agricultural production and was economically vital.<sup>350</sup> The farmer became the heroic heart of the nation. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813), a Frenchman who settled in New York State as a farmer and writer, helped inspire American democratic agrarianism. In *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), he wrote of how "we are all tillers of the earth," and he praised "good substantial independent

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<sup>349</sup> Dorfman, J. (2007). *The Lazy Environmentalist: Your Guide to Easy, Stylish, Green Living*. New York, Stewart, Tabori & Chang. 185.

<sup>350</sup> Vogeler, I. (1981). *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture*. Boulder, Westview Press. 39.

American farmers.”<sup>351</sup> Thomas Jefferson, who maintained that “those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God,” is also renowned for his agrarian philosophy.<sup>352</sup> Jeffersonian agrarians celebrated farmers for their moral fiber, political virtue, and centrality to democratic society.

Other writers in the agrarian tradition have defended the honorable yeoman farmer as the best model for mankind. Visions of “the good life” are intertwined with those of the iconic traditional farmer in the Western world. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan analyzed the immense body of literature that sentimentalized farmers, promoted “the elevation and beauty of country living,” and subscribed to ideas about “the virtue of living and working close to the soil.”<sup>353</sup> Tuan noted that “work on the farm has always been hard,” but “it is this gritty character that makes farm life seem virtuous and good.”<sup>354</sup> Ironically, Tuan pointed out that most of this literature had been written by “members of the leisured class” who knew little about “the hardships of manual labor.”<sup>355</sup> Organic farming handbooks often echo ancient texts, like the *Tao Te Ching*, which “speaks nostalgically of a small and sparsely settled country where the people live on fresh food, have simple but beautiful clothing, comfortable homes, and pleasurable rustic tasks.”<sup>356</sup> The benefits of contact with nature and the virtues of austerity are essential elements of the agrarian mythology.

Agrarianism has been an evolving collection of ideas and rhetorical strategies, but all strains share the idea that the family-owned, family-operated farm is the chief

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<sup>351</sup> St. John de Crèvecoeur, J. H. (1997). Letters from an American Farmer. New York, Oxford University Press. 39-41.

<sup>352</sup> Jefferson, T. (1964). Notes on the State of Virginia. New York, Harper & Row. 157.

<sup>353</sup> Tuan, Y.-F. (1986). The Good Life. Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press. 38.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid. 127.

repository of the favorable qualities necessary to decent society. Agrarians have argued that farmers are more likely than other citizens to demonstrate the frugality, discipline, self-reliance, and respect for order that are crucial for a well-functioning republic.<sup>357</sup> A contemporary New Agrarian contingent continues to laud small farms, resolving that these are more ecologically, morally, and socially sound than large ones. New Agrarians value embedded connections between land and people. This worldview is posited as being in stark contrast to that of industrial agriculture. Much agrarian iconography elides recognition of the fluid boundaries between the city and the countryside, discounting indispensable rural-urban relationships. The organic movement has also availed itself of the ethical undertones attached to enduring agrarian convictions, including the Jeffersonian paradigm of virtuous American democracy rooted in an agricultural past.

Organic farmer Karl Schwenke expressed the belief that renewing the nation's "agricultural heritage" would require cutting back the scale of agricultural ventures. In *Successful Small-Scale Farming: An Organic Approach* (1979), he encouraged the adoption of "tried-and-true farm practices" that organic growers cherished, such as the "age-old method" of composting.<sup>358</sup> Since agribusiness was subsidized by tax dollars, undersized farms would have a rough time competing on the wholesale market, but the small-scale organic operator could "find his way into the consumer's pocketbook through his taste buds."<sup>359</sup> Schwenke was correct that consumers progressively became more eager to support family farms. For example, organic farmer Scott Chaskey's Quail Hill Farm in New York is a community farm that was inspired by a collective desire to

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<sup>357</sup> Smith, K. K. (2003). *Wendell Berry and the Agrarian Tradition: A Common Grace*. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas.

<sup>358</sup> Schwenke, K. (1991). *Successful Small-Scale Farming: An Organic Approach*. Pownal, VT, Storey Publishing. 9-11.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.* 47, 91.

encourage sound land stewardship and create a local source for fresh organic food. The CSA endeavor grows vegetables, berries, and apples for over 200 families. It also supplies restaurants, food pantries, and a local school.<sup>360</sup> Chaskey recorded the year-long challenges and rewards of a small farm in *This Common Ground: Seasons on an Organic Farm* (2005). In communicating his distaste for the obliterating effects of plows on land, Chaskey claimed to prefer “the holistic approach to farming,” a familiar agrarian attitude.<sup>361</sup> Advancing comparable sentiments, small farm advocate John Ikerd noted that consumers demanded organic food because “the philosophical roots of organics are in stewardship and community, in caring for the earth and its people.”<sup>362</sup> Organic farming was, for a time, seen as an economically viable way to keep old-fashioned, family-owned operations afloat. Ironically, when “organic” became an official USDA designation, many diminutive farms could not afford the expense of paying inspectors to have their small operations certified. Nonetheless, organic farms have largely been perceived as small, sustainable examples of the nation’s agricultural legacy.

For some contemporary Americans, the farmer is still a paragon of morality, but in many respects agrarianism has lost its cachet. Critics have interpreted agrarians as excessively unrealistic or reactionary. In 1978, Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz decried agrarian devotees for ignoring the fact that “our productive modern agriculture has freed millions of us from virtual serfdom on the land.”<sup>363</sup> Some isolated communities are indeed susceptible to provincialism. In so far as agrarian ideology is based on the infallibility of the family farm, it can be said to reinforce quixotic notions, because small

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<sup>360</sup> Chaskey, S. (2005). *This Common Ground: Seasons on an Organic Farm*. New York, Viking. 10.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>362</sup> Ikerd, J. (2008). *Small Farms Are Real Farms: Sustaining People Through Agriculture*. Austin TX, Acres USA. 149.

<sup>363</sup> Butz, E. (1978). "Agriblunders." *Growth and Change* 9(2): 52.



and large farms are equally capable of contributing to environmental degradation and social injustices. Agrarianism disregards the facts of slavery and exploited laborers, and it positions an autonomous male as head farmer. Patriarchal relations on family farms may subordinate women in domestic roles. Agrarian expectations of proper “wifehood” and “motherhood” tend to reinforce expectations of submissiveness under the guise of “traditional” values. Recent studies have found that division of jobs on farms still largely abides by traditional gender lines, with men more engaged in outdoor fieldwork and women responsible for the indoor labor of running a home. Men are more inclined than women to claim and be ascribed the identity of “farmer.”<sup>364</sup> Agrarian discourse may assign romanticized identities to “farmers” and “farm wives,” despite vast variations in these supposedly fixed, static roles.<sup>365</sup> Notwithstanding pervasive tendencies to put farmers on a pedestal, the prestige and relevance this profession once held seems to have waned in some quarters.

Agriculture is primarily an instrumental, utilitarian activity designed for feeding people, but it also has an aesthetic dimension. Perceptions of farming have altered in response to the advance of agribusiness. Geographer Paul Claval suggested that, in the postmodern era, farming lost its “friendly and amateur-like character.” The public, in the meantime, recognized how fields and pastures had become “increasingly similar to chemical laboratories for fertilizers and pesticides.”<sup>366</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, a California farmer and scholar, contended that the decline of family farming revealed the demise of

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<sup>364</sup> Peter, G., M. M. Bell, et al. (2000). "Coming Back Across the Fence: Masculinity and the Transition to Sustainable Agriculture." *Rural Sociology* 65(2): 215-233.

<sup>365</sup> Sachs, C. E. (1996). *Gendered Fields: Rural Women, Agriculture, and the Environment*. Boulder, Westview Press.

<sup>366</sup> Claval, P. (2005). "Reading the Rural Landscapes." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 70: 17.

Crèvecoeur's conception of American identity.<sup>367</sup> However, Hanson disagreed with "agrarian romantics" on several counts. He avowed that, while family farming was gone, agrarianism created "democracy and Western civilization," and those remained.<sup>368</sup> The deficit of family farms threatened not food or security, but "the countryside whose culture created America and from time to time knocks it back to its senses."<sup>369</sup> Hanson identified the imminent cultural loss as geographical and psychological.

The average size, yields per acre, and overall productivity of farms mushroomed throughout the twentieth century. Farm numbers steadily declined from 6.4 million in 1910 to under two million farms in 2004, while average farm size more than doubled during that same period.<sup>370</sup> Production has become concentrated on a small number of specialized operations. The distinction between corporate and family farms is not always clear. Complicated ownership arrangements interfere with attempts at establishing simple definitions. The USDA defines small farms as "farms with less than \$250,000 gross receipts annually on which day-to-day labor and management are provided by the farmer and/or the farm family that owns the production or owns, or leases, the productive assets." While this does encompass a majority of all U.S. farms, the net income of these small farms is below the U.S. poverty line.<sup>371</sup> Massive corporations produce ninety-five percent of American food and virtually monopolize sales.<sup>372</sup> In some senses, the dream of the independent American family farm is a mythical image that disguises the true trends

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<sup>367</sup> Hanson, V. D. (2000). The Land Was Everything: Letters From an American Farmer. New York, The Free Press. 6.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid. 158.

<sup>370</sup> Lyson, T. A. (2004). Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community. Medford, Tufts University Press. 31.

<sup>371</sup> Henderson, E., R. Mandelbaum, et al. (2003). Toward Social Justice and Economic Equity in the Food System: A Call for Social Stewardship Standards in Sustainable and Organic Agriculture, Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI-USA). 12.

<sup>372</sup> McMichael, P. (2000). "The Power of Food." Agriculture and Human Values 17: 21-33. 23.

of large-scale farming and agribusiness.<sup>373</sup> Visions of the ideal American society have been upended. However, numerous Americans who subscribe to the sacred notion of small family farms are continually distressed about their impending extinction by monolithic agribusiness.

A distinctive way of addressing the predicaments of modernity has been through nostalgia for vanishing cultural forms. Nostalgia is born out of discontent with the received idea that technological developments in capitalism indicated the rational advancement of humankind. Rodale and other organic farmers extended the reach of farm life's romantic, symbolic power. The anti-corporate impulses and arguments in defense of natural farming methods that appeared in *Pay Dirt* have recurred in the contemporary organic movement. Idealized representations of the past abound. Critiques of the politics of nostalgia, in turn, have been based on a firm belief in the modern narrative of progress and emancipation. Detractors often assert that nostalgia for the model farm is untenable and inaccurate, demonstrating a yearning for a time and place that never existed. Organic food critic Thomas DeGregori accused organic enthusiasts of holding "antiscience views," romanticizing the past, and "imbuing the lifeways of prior times with an array of virtues that they simply did not have."<sup>374</sup> Organic farmers have commonly been stereotyped as backwards.

Observers often designate organic agriculture as "the oldest form of agriculture on earth."<sup>375</sup> An *Organic Gardening* article in 1946 called composting "a return to the great

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<sup>373</sup> Vogeler, I. (1981). The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture. Boulder, Westview Press. 6.

<sup>374</sup> DeGregori, T. R. (2004). Origins of the Organic Agriculture Debate. Ames, Iowa State Press. 148.

<sup>375</sup> Iowa State University. (2007). "Iowa State University Organic Agriculture website." Retrieved May 6, 2007, from <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/organicag/>.

crucible of Nature,” agriculture that was “as old as Nature” and “older than Man.”<sup>376</sup> In a 1947 speech about his experiences, organic farmer John Hershey said the “returning to nature” way of farming was “known today as organic farming.”<sup>377</sup> The organic approach, though, is both ancient and modern, seasoned and fresh. It is not merely neglectful farming that ignores bugs. Rodale refuted charges in 1948 that the organic movement was impractical or a “religious cult,” saying instead that “the organic farmer must be scientific.”<sup>378</sup> Lynda Brown, author of several books on organic living, said organic farming used “the best of the old with the best of the new.”<sup>379</sup> Even organic farmers who claim to employ “Nature” as their model advance veteran as well as inventive techniques. Organic farming has blended tradition with innovation, simplicity with intricacy, and technophobia with avant-garde techniques. In a 1991 lecture to the Royal Agricultural Society, Prince Charles said he was “astonished at just how many other farmers still look at organic farming as some kind of drop-out option for superannuated hippies.” He felt that “organic farming combines the traditional wisdom of sound rotational farming practice with much of the best that modern technology can provide.”<sup>380</sup> Mary-Howell Martens, who ran a large-scale organic farm in Western New York, concurred, saying that “modern organic farming is not going back to the thirties. It’s not a case of using nothing. Modern organic farming is a synthesis of traditional methods with cutting-edge

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<sup>376</sup> Lawrence, O. (1946). Composting in the Olden Days. *Organic Gardening*. **8**: 39-40. 40.

<sup>377</sup> Hershey, J. W. (1948). "Organic Farming and Its Influence on the Health of Soil, Plants, Animals and Man." *Bio-Dynamics* **VI**(3): 11-19. 11.

<sup>378</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). With the Editor: Artificial Insemination. *Organic Gardening*. **14**: 12.

<sup>379</sup> Brown, L. (2000). *Organic Living: Simple Solutions for a Better Life*. New York, Dorling Kindersley Publishing, Inc. 43.

<sup>380</sup> Clover, C. and Prince of Wales (1993). *Highgrove: An Experiment in Organic Gardening and Farming*. New York, Simon & Schuster. 135.

science.”<sup>381</sup> Rather than coveting a golden age of “arcadian bliss,” organic farming aims for “gentler, more intelligent, more scientific methods.”<sup>382</sup> Organic farming guides often unite veneration for the past with novel recommendations for the future.

Keith Stewart left his small New York City apartment shortly after turning forty and became an organic farmer. In *It's a Long Road to a Tomato* (2006), he recounted his yearning “to live on a piece of land, closer to nature.”<sup>383</sup> He believed that a small farm was a place where one could develop an “ecological consciousness” and live in some measure of “harmony with one’s surroundings.”<sup>384</sup> Still, Stewart purposefully disabused others of idyllic notions that the farm was a romantic haven. Small-scale organic agriculture entailed taxing physical work. His diversified organic farm was “like swimming against the current” of industrial agriculture, chemicals, and cheap food.<sup>385</sup> However, he worked full-time on his eighty-eight acres and regarded the bodily effort as “enlivening.”<sup>386</sup> He soon realized that being a small organic grower selling vegetables and herbs to restaurants and directly to the public at New York City’s Greenmarket had become fashionable and profitable.

The picturesque appeal of the family farm has intensified even as the number of working farms drops each year. Elizabeth Henderson of Rose Valley Farm asserted the ubiquitous opinion that “farming is an art as well as a business and is practiced more

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<sup>381</sup> Sait, G. (2003). Nutrition Rules! Guidelines From the Master Consultants. Eumundi, Qld, Australia, Soil Therapy Pty Ltd. 23.

<sup>382</sup> Allaby, M. and F. Allen (1974). Robots Behind the Plow: Modern Farming and the Need for an Organic Alternative. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 26.

<sup>383</sup> Stewart, K. (2006). It's a Long Road to a Tomato: Tales of an Organic Farmer Who Quit the Big City for the (Not So) Simple Life. New York, Marlowe & Company. 2.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid. 270.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid. 92.

creatively by family farms than by big corporations.”<sup>387</sup> Small farms are depicted as ingredients of the country’s heritage and identity. Organic food itself also seems infused with integrity. Kimberly Rider, author of *The Healthy Home Workbook* (2006), advised consumers to choose organic for at least one meal a week. She wrote, “the sense of small farmers connecting with the community is at the heart of the organic foods movement.”<sup>388</sup> To create “A Truly Healthy Home,” she suggested supporting local farmers, baking bread from scratch, starting an organic herb garden, and growing organic vegetables.<sup>389</sup> Agrarians regard small organic farms as a necessary element for establishing a sustainable food system, built on close ties between farmers and consumers. Alternative forms of agriculture and food production that have gained visibility—including farmers’ markets, roadside stands, urban community gardens, CSAs, and box schemes—capitalize on the quest for deeper social connections in farming.<sup>390</sup> The nonprofit Kitchen Gardeners International more than doubled its membership between 2007 and 2009, while national seed manufacturer Burpee saw increased sales of vegetable and herb seeds.<sup>391</sup> The New York Botanical Garden hosted an Edible Garden exhibition during the summer of 2009, which included compost demonstrations, seed-saving instructions, and celebrity chef appearances. The events inspired people to grow, prepare, and eat garden-fresh produce under the mantra of “Buy Local, Cook Global” and verified the revival of interest in homegrown food.

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<sup>387</sup> Smith, M. and E. Henderson, Eds. (1998). *The Real Dirt: Farmers Tell About Organic and Low-Input Practices in the Northeast*. Burlington VT, Northeast Regional Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program.

<sup>388</sup> Rider, K. (2006). *The Healthy Home Workbook: Easy Steps for Eco-Friendly Living*. San Francisco, Chronicle Books. 44.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>390</sup> Lyson, T. A. (2004). *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*. Medford, Tufts University Press. xiii.

<sup>391</sup> Helmer, J. (2009). Get Growing! *Natural Solutions*: 65-68. 65.

## Wendell Berry

Farmer and writer Wendell Berry has been a pre-eminent spokesperson for agrarianism and small-scale organic farming. Berry retreated from New York City to his Kentucky farm in 1964, while continuing to teach at the University of Kentucky. In addition to fiction and non-fiction works, he has written for *Organic Gardening* and other Rodale publications. For decades, Berry has insisted that small family farms attach people to the land much more intimately and democratically than the industrial system does.<sup>392</sup> The multinational economic structure, he asserts, does not foster the same love and knowledge of terrain that traditional farmers possess. Berry believes that farmers enjoy a meaningful sense of place, because only familiarity can truly connect a person to land.<sup>393</sup>

Like Jefferson, Borsodi, Rodale, and others before him, Berry has sponsored the opinion that as many people as possible should share in land ownership.<sup>394</sup> However, he laments that the small, independent American farmer is being forced off the land by absentee owners, corporations, and machines.<sup>395</sup> Berry's disapproval of truant owners is equivalent to the criticism leveled against irresponsible tenant farmers by Rodale in *Pay Dirt*. Berry encourages local small producers and local consumers to revolt against global industrial corporations.<sup>396</sup> He frames the larger social struggle in terms of family farms versus factory farms. Berry also extends the concept of imperialism to argue that residents of rural areas in the United States are domestic colonists of urban industry. He claims that cities prey on the countryside, extracting resources and energy from their

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<sup>392</sup> Berry, W. (1987). *Home Economics*. San Francisco, North Point Press. 184.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. 164.

<sup>394</sup> Berry, W. (2002). *The Art of the Commonplace*. Washington DC, Counterpoint. 45.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid. 85-86.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid. 245.

victims while destroying the principle of self-sufficiency. Grassroots dissenters like Berry have outlined a desire to overthrow the multi-national economy and rebuild sustainable local economies. Berry's anti-establishment opposition to mainstream consumer capitalism echoes the outlook of legions of back-to-the-land supporters.

Critics have pinpointed Berry for naiveté. Earl Butz called Berry's *The Unsettling of America* (1977) a "fantasy" that exhibited a "nostalgic longing to turn the agricultural clock back."<sup>397</sup> Organic detractor Alex A. Avery also characterized Berry's poetic view of rural, small-town life as indicative of the organic movement's elitist, anti-technology "wish-dreams." Avery impugned the "myth of the organic utopia" as "a romanticized glorification of the agrarian economy of 1840 that bears no resemblance to historical reality."<sup>398</sup> Avery felt that "organic fantasies" were impeding acceptance of agricultural biotechnology, which was more environmentally friendly and less costly to society.

Berry is a prominent supporter of organic farming, stating that a person growing an organic garden was "improving a piece of the world."<sup>399</sup> He has also cautioned that the organic approach should not be an end in itself. He defined an organic farm not by its use of certain methods or avoidance of substances; rather, its structure had to imitate a natural system and hold the integrity of an organism.<sup>400</sup> Pointing out that organic farming was originally attractive "both as a way of conserving nature and as a strategy of survival for small farmers," he became dismayed at the emergence of huge organic monocultures.<sup>401</sup> Berry asserted that consumers who demand organic food have principled expectations for

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<sup>397</sup> Butz, E. (1978). "Agriblunders." *Growth and Change* 9(2): 52.

<sup>398</sup> Avery, A. A. (2006). *The Truth About Organic Foods*. Chesterfield, MO, Henderson Communications, L.L.C. 7.

<sup>399</sup> Berry, W. (2002). *The Art of the Commonplace*. Washington DC, Counterpoint. 88.

<sup>400</sup> Berry, W. (1987). *Home Economics*. San Francisco, North Point Press. 274.

<sup>401</sup> Berry, W. (2001). In *Distrust of Movements. In the Presence of Fear: Three Essays for a Changed World*. Great Barrington, Ma, Orion Society: 35-44. 36.



“good, fresh, trustworthy food,” and a global corporation could not produce such food.<sup>402</sup>

Like Rodale, he predicted the transformative potential of organic products. Berry proclaimed that when concerns about food quality and purity grew extensive enough, consumer demand for organics would rise and bear the power to change agriculture.<sup>403</sup>

### **Eliot Coleman**

Maine farmer Eliot Coleman has been another conspicuous figure in the organic movement. Coleman also believes in the values and rewards of the small farm. He has sought agricultural techniques that are “in harmony with the natural world.”<sup>404</sup> The key to successful organic food production, for Coleman, is to produce quality compost and enhance natural processes. The optimal organic farming system is a crop-friendly ecosystem that mimics the biology of the natural world.<sup>405</sup> Coleman has observed that pests do not bother healthy organic plants, so pesticides and other additions are unnecessary.

Coleman tends Four Season Farm in Harborside, Maine, on coastal land that is adjacent to the Nearings’ former homestead. When Scott and Helen were alive, they taught him a wide range of economic survival skills.<sup>406</sup> He managed to gross \$100,000 per year, despite farming only one-and-a-half acres. Like Liberty Hyde Bailey, Louis Bromfield, and others preceding him, Coleman felt that underlining the economic potential of farming was crucial for attracting young people to farming.<sup>407</sup> The Nearings’ greenhouse also inspired Coleman to devise a way to eat garden-fresh, chemical-free

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<sup>402</sup> Berry, W. (2002). The Art of the Commonplace. Washington DC, Counterpoint. 245.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid. 203.

<sup>404</sup> Coleman, E. (1995). The New Organic Grower: A Master's Manual of Tools and Techniques for the Home and Market Gardener. White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green Publishing Company. 2.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid. 278.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>407</sup> Ableman, M. (2005). Fields of Plenty: A Farmer's Journey in Search of Real Food and the People Who Grow It. San Francisco, Chronicle Books. 175.

food all year long, despite the snowy Maine winters.<sup>408</sup> His secret was low-energy cold frames and unheated greenhouses. Four Season Farm has been recognized as a national model of small-scale sustainable agriculture.

In *Four-Season Harvest* (1992), Coleman explained that his home garden had been organic for thirty years, because organic methods were simpler, worked better, and implied a “partnership with nature.”<sup>409</sup> Like Rodale, he said compost was the key to fertile soil. Echoing Rachel Carson, he wrote that chemicals “were conceived in an age of hubris by minds that ignored the marvelous balances of the natural system.”<sup>410</sup> Though Coleman disapproved of the “takeover” of organic labels by “industrial food giants,” he remained convinced that family farmers were “the last refuge protecting the values of the early organic pioneers against the onslaught of the industrial organic hucksters.”<sup>411</sup>

Coleman’s wife, Barbara Damrosch, is also a garden expert and a collaborator in Four Season Farm. Damrosch’s *The Garden Primer* has been a popular resource for gardeners since first published in 1986. Damrosch said, “I take my cues from the way nature gardens, and also from the gardens of the past.”<sup>412</sup> She issued a revised edition of the book in 2008 that carried a “100% Organic” symbol on the cover.

## **Joel Salatin**

Organic farmer Joel Salatin has garnered a good deal of attention at his environmentally-conscious “family-friendly” Polyface Farm in Virginia. Salatin farms

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<sup>408</sup> Coleman, E. (1999). *Four-Season Harvest: Organic Vegetables from Your Home Garden All Year Long*. White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green Publishing Company. xii.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid. 144.

<sup>411</sup> Coleman, E. (2004). "Can Organics Save the Family Farm?" Retrieved August 8, 2009, from <http://www.secretsofthecity.com/magazine/reporting/features/can-organic-save-family-farm>.

<sup>412</sup> Damrosch, B. (2008). *The Garden Primer: The Completely Revised Gardener's Bible*. New York, Workman Publishing. ix.

550 acres and sells most of his eggs, broilers, cattle, hogs, turkeys, and rabbits directly to consumers. In 2005, *Time* magazine featured Salatin as “High Priest of the Pasture,” due to his evangelical efforts in the realm of organic and natural farming. Salatin’s grandfather was an early devotee of J.I. Rodale.<sup>413</sup> He cites Sir Albert Howard, Louis Bromfield, John Muir, Wendell Berry, Charles Walters Jr., Allan Nation, and Paul Hawken as role models for his ecological perspective. He critiques the industrial paradigm as too rigid and simplistic, preferring to approach farming from a “nonmechanical” worldview.<sup>414</sup> Salatin allows that growth is not inherently bad, but he favors small farms and believes that “huge conglomerate agriculture cannot be family friendly.”<sup>415</sup> He has accused the industrial food system of “unabashed greedy pride” for destroying soil and disrespecting “the inherent uniqueness of the living world.”<sup>416</sup>

Salatin was an insider to the organic certification process and also became an early dissenter. He realized that food integrity could not be “bureaucratically regulated.” He saw farmers flock to this “premium-priced niche” without true convictions for what it involved and then watched the “corporate empire” join the organic movement and adulterate it further.<sup>417</sup> Salatin has always farmed organically, but he says organic is a “non-comprehensive term. It doesn’t speak to some of the larger variables,” such as the abhorrent potential for organic feedlot beef. Instead of using the word organic, he invented other terms, like those for his own “Piggerator Pork” and “Pastured Chicken,” to

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<sup>413</sup> Purdum, T. S. (2005, May 12, 2008). "High Priest of the Pasture." *Time* Retrieved May 1, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>414</sup> Salatin, J. (2001). *Family Friendly Farming: A Multi-Generational Home-Based Business Testament*. Swoope, VA, Polyface, Inc. 305.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.* 75.

<sup>416</sup> TreeHugger. (2009). "Joel Salatin, America's Most Influential Farmer, Talks Big Organic and the Future of Food." Retrieved August 5, 2009, from <http://www.treehugger.com/files/2009/08/joel-salatin-americas-most-influential-farmer.php>.

<sup>417</sup> Salatin, J. (2001). *Family Friendly Farming: A Multi-Generational Home-Based Business Testament*. Swoope, VA, Polyface, Inc. 267.

eliminate hardening of the categories.<sup>418</sup> Salatin maintains that that “organic by neglect is far different than organic by design” and refuses to give blanket approval to farmers appropriating the label.<sup>419</sup> He has described his own mode as “beyond organic.” Salatin was featured as a “forward thinking social entrepreneur” in the 2009 film *Food, Inc.*, which tackled the mechanized state of the American food industry, agriculture, and consumer health. A *New York Times* review of the film admired Salatin, “the philosophizing organic farmer,” as an agricultural hero whose free-ranging livestock provided a venerable counterpoint to villainous industrial feedlots full of “cruelly crammed cattle.”<sup>420</sup>

### **Michael Ableman**

Organic farmer Michael Ableman is another leading speaker and writer on organic matters in North America. When in California, Ableman managed Fairview Gardens, a twelve-acre organic farm that became a model for small-scale, urban agriculture. Alice Waters called it “a storybook farm set right in the middle of generic suburban sprawl.”<sup>421</sup> Ableman recalled that, “Nature seduced me and I fell in love with the little farm on Fairview Avenue.”<sup>422</sup> When he first started selling food directly to consumers, he never used the word organic, because it was “considered a bit weird, practiced by longhaired people with bare feet, who weren’t sophisticated enough to get

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<sup>418</sup> Sait, G. (2003). *Nutrition Rules! Guidelines From the Master Consultants*. Eumundi, Qld, Australia, Soil Therapy Pty Ltd. 213.

<sup>419</sup> Salatin, J. (2004). "'Sound Science' Is Killing Us." *Acres USA* 34(4): 1, 8. 8.

<sup>420</sup> Dargis, M. (2009). Meet Your New Farmer: Hungry Corporate Giant. *The New York Times*.

<sup>421</sup> Ableman, M. (1998). *On Good Land: The Autobiography of an Urban Farm*. San Francisco, Chronicle Books. 6.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

the techno-chemical thing straight.”<sup>423</sup> However, Ableman started a successful CSA, conducted many educational programs, and helped Fairview Gardens become the nonprofit Center for Urban Agriculture.

Ableman later moved to British Columbia with his family and began farming on Salt Spring Island. One year, on a quest to find farms that were “helping to put a face back onto our food,” he visited Coleman in Maine, Salatin in Virginia, and numerous other small growers.<sup>424</sup> Ableman believes that farmers possess a sense of rootedness and a relationship to natural cycles that other Americans long for.<sup>425</sup> He refers to growing and eating food as “sacred acts.” These sentiments are similar to those of many homesteaders, small-scale farmers, and agrarian advocates who have preceded him in articulating the dogma of organic agriculture.

Helen and Scott Nearing said that homesteading was “not only a movement for individual betterment; it implies social change and improvement as well.”<sup>426</sup> Organic homesteading and farming are akin to other manifestations of the organic movement in that they are largely personal acts. Those who felt alienated by urban life and went in search of sacredness, sanity or health expected a superior lifestyle for themselves, not social upheaval. Collectively, though, small-scale organic farming and homesteading are significant components of the diffuse organic movement.

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>424</sup> Ableman, M. (2005). Fields of Plenty: A Farmer's Journey in Search of Real Food and the People Who Grow It. San Francisco, Chronicle Books. 170.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid. 236.

<sup>426</sup> Nearing, S. and H. Nearing (1977). Building and Using Our Sun-Heated Greenhouse: Grow Vegetables All Year-Round. Charlotte, VT, Garden Way Publishing. 144.

## CHAPTER 3

### Harmony and Balance: Environmentalism and Organics

On each box of EnviroKidz Organic Amazon Frosted Flakes, an exotic rainforest mammal known as a kinkajou dangles by its tail from a branch, while another kinkajou cozies up to a bowl of cereal placed amidst the lush foliage. Boxes of EnviroKidz Organic Penguin Puffs, Orangutan-O's, Koala Crisp, and Gorilla Munch cereals also display appealing images of animals in natural settings. The products announce that one percent of sales are contributed to assist endangered species, habitat conservation, and environmental education for children. EnviroKidz donation recipients have included the World Wildlife Fund, Amazon Conservation Team, Australian Koala Foundation, and Dian Fossey Gorilla Foundation.

Environmental benefits are part of the complex network of incentives and rationales for growing and eating organic food. Studies have shown that consumers regard organic products as safer, more natural, and better for the environment than those produced conventionally.<sup>427</sup> The ideal of harmony with nature is used to market organic food. Some organic companies use sustainably-sourced ingredients or donate money to conservation leagues that protect endangered species, capitalizing on associations between organic farms and biodiversity.<sup>428</sup> Organic supporters are willing to pay more for food that is grown in a way that they believe protects the environment. This is both an altruistic and a self-centered motive, since healthy humans and a healthy natural world cannot be fully detached. For some families, saving the earth seems as painless as starting

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<sup>427</sup> Storstad, O. and H. Björkhaug (2003). "Foundations of production and consumption of organic food in Norway: Common attitudes among farmers and consumers." *Agriculture and Human Values* **20**: 151-163. 160.

<sup>428</sup> Halweil, B. (2001). *Organic Gold Rush*, Worldwatch Institute: 1-12. 5.

each day by pouring organic milk over a delicious bowl of organic Peanut Butter Panda Puffs cereal.

This chapter elucidates multifaceted environmental aspects of the organic movement and discusses related contemporary environmental theories. Semiological analysis reveals how organic iconography derived from product promotions and other sources relies extensively on illustrations of charming family farms, peaceful natural vistas, and sustainable “green” lifestyles. Visual metaphors have variable resonance and are in dialogue with additional cultural expressions. Still, organic emblems are significant, because landscape representations found in popular culture bear symbolic importance. Perceptions of the natural world are socially constructed images that go hand in hand with environmental practices and have political ramifications.

Discursive analysis indicates how organic farmers have long resolved that their goal is to work in “harmony with nature.” In the 1940s, J.I. Rodale championed the term “organic” as a fundamental farming practice imitating the “balance of nature,” in stark contrast to the domineering means of corporate agriculture. He maintained that the organic method called for “a study of the phenomena of Nature,” so that it would “not depart too far from her methods.”<sup>429</sup> A 1952 *Organic Gardening* article said every organic gardener knew that “the balance of nature must not be overlooked.”<sup>430</sup> Another organic farmer in 1954 discussed his aspiration to “raise in Nature’s own way the kind of food required for our well-being.”<sup>431</sup> In *The Organic Garden Book* (1993), Geoff Hamilton pronounced that organic gardening was “simply a way of working with nature

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<sup>429</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). With the Editor: Artificial Insemination. *Organic Gardening*. **14**: 12.

<sup>430</sup> Rodale, R. (1952). What Is Organic Gardening? *Ibid.* **20**: 14-15. 14.

<sup>431</sup> Luckock, V. O. (1954). You Don’t Need Acres ‘n’ Acres. *Organic Gardening and Farming*. **1**: 18-19. 18.

rather than against it” and added that basic organic cultivation principles followed “those found in the natural world.”<sup>432</sup> Eliot Coleman has said that true organic farmers understand how “nature’s elegantly structured system” must be “studied and nurtured.”<sup>433</sup> Diverse paradigms of knowledge among organic missionaries co-exist, and “Nature” has a range of meanings for participants. Nonetheless, attitudes about the environment’s properties affect how farming is performed.

Tension between environmentalists and farmers has historically stemmed from an assertion by wilderness-lovers that all agriculture causes undue ecological degradation. Since colonial days, when forests were cleared and “tamed” to create farms, cultivated land has been ideologically opposed to uninhibited “wild” land.<sup>434</sup> Yet, the organic movement has considerably overlapped with the broader environmental movement in American culture. Organic gardeners are said to be responsible guardians of the earth. Organic farming is perceived as far less harmful to the environment than conventional farming. The USDA Organic label is a declaration about an agricultural system meant to enhance “ecological balance.”

The final organic legislation emphasized the magnitude of ecology, biodiversity, and environmental stewardship more than human health, social justice, living wages, family farms, or other values. The National Organic Standards defined organic agriculture as a production system that was managed “to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling

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<sup>432</sup> Hamilton, G. (1993). *The Organic Garden Book*. New York, DK Publishing. 9.

<sup>433</sup> Coleman, E. (2004). "Can Organics Save the Family Farm?" Retrieved August 8, 2009, from <http://www.secretsofthecity.com/magazine/reporting/features/can-organic-save-family-farm>.

<sup>434</sup> See, for example, George Perkins Marsh’s *Man and Nature* (1864) and Frieda Knobloch’s *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (1996).



of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.<sup>435</sup> Key production practices that certified organic producers must follow include:

“abstaining from use of certain crop chemicals and animal drugs; ecologically based pest and nutrient management; segregation of organic fields and animals from nonorganic fields and animals; following an organic system plan with multiple goals, including sustainability; and recordkeeping to document practices and progress toward the plan’s goals.”<sup>436</sup>

The Natural Resources Defense Council has stated unequivocally that organic food is better for the environment, because it eliminates the massive quantities of toxic pesticides and synthetic fertilizers used in conventional farming.<sup>437</sup> However, other experts have demonstrated that organic farming is *not* always environmentally superior. The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) maintains a list of Allowed and Prohibited Substances that applies to organic food production. Public policy sentinel Jim Hightower was irate that the NOSB’s list of allowable non-organic ingredients had grown from 77 in 2002 to 245 in 2009, due to lobbying by organic agribusiness giants like Kraft and Dean Foods.<sup>438</sup> Some pesticides approved for use on organic crops may be more toxic than synthetic chemicals.<sup>439</sup> Horticultural scientist Jeff Gillman has stated that certain synthetic herbicides, when used properly, are safe for the environment, while all “natural” inputs are not guaranteed to be desirable. Gillman pointed out that organic growing is usually more beneficial for the earth, but the permitted practices are not risk-

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<sup>435</sup> USDA. (2007). "National Organic Program: Final Rule." Retrieved May 29, 2007, from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html>. 9.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid. 470-471.

<sup>437</sup> Eisenberg, S. (2007). "Is Organic Food Worth It?" This Green Life Retrieved May 3, 2008, from <http://www.nrdc.org/thisgreenlife/>.

<sup>438</sup> Hightower, J. (2009). The Hightower Report. Austin Chronicle. 28: 21.

<sup>439</sup> DeGregori, T. R. (2004). Origins of the Organic Agriculture Debate. Ames, Iowa State Press.

free.<sup>440</sup> This debate over organic agriculture's environmental integrity is vital to its legitimacy. The ongoing quest for proof of tangible environmental benefits has affected the degree to which the organic movement has obtained acceptance and approbation.

### **Moral Agriculture and Constructions of Nature**

Engaging with nature carries ethical connotations, and landscapes are endowed with moral weight. Traditionally, agriculture has figured prominently as a conduit for ideas about humans and morality. Although the Bible dictated that man was condemned to toil in the earth, most Christian exegesis denied the association of agriculture with sin.<sup>441</sup> Rather, man's ability to cultivate the earth substantiated his civilized traits. To subdue the land through agriculture meant triumph over the chaotic, depraved wilderness. As one of the primary sources of wealth in the ancient world, agriculture acquired further prestige.<sup>442</sup> Entrenched views about humans, nature, farming, and morality are consequential in contemporary environmentalism. The organic movement in particular has upheld positive correlations with simple farming methods, natural cycles, and unadulterated landscapes. J.I. Rodale's insistence that a "healthy society" must be "in touch with the land" embodied a cultural preference for an agricultural golden age that allegedly preceded the Industrial Revolution. Rodale subscribed to a pervasive opinion in Western culture that each man ought to own a piece of the earth. He acclaimed the idea of

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<sup>440</sup> Gillman, J. (2008). The Truth About Organic Gardening: Benefits, Drawbacks, and the Bottom Line. Portland, Timber Press.

<sup>441</sup> Glacken, C. J. (1967). Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought From Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century. Berkeley, University of California Press. 154.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid. 124.

“a country of prosperous farms and a healthy, vigorous people creating a fine, new community life.”<sup>443</sup>

Environmentalism has historically propagated a firm division between “nature” and “culture.” This age-old distinction is derived from an Enlightenment dualism that partitions ideal, sublime nature from corrupt, human society. One durable cultural vision categorizes nature as pristine and undefiled by the human touch. This has been prevalent within an eco-centric or “Earth First” approach, which urges a fundamental respect and need to “get back to” nature.<sup>444</sup> Conventional definitions of nature are “often invoked to ground value judgments about what is deemed ‘good’ and ‘bad.’”<sup>445</sup> The last chapter of Rodale’s *Pay Dirt*, for example, is titled “Good and Bad Farming Practices.” Employing this esteem for untainted nature, Rodale described organic farms as ones that imitated the structure of natural systems. Many others have classified the organic approach as gardening “with nature rather than against it.”<sup>446</sup> Followers of organic agriculture tend to privilege “natural” growing, placing this in opposition to “artificial” fertilization. The organic movement’s rhetoric depends on solid distinctions between nature/artifice; agrarian/industrial; and agriculture/agribusiness. Organic farmers are said to be “in tune” with nature and work to preserve the “stability” of life.

Assumptions about balance and equilibrium in nature are ensconced in Western traditions.<sup>447</sup> The themes of harmony, constancy, and order are tropes that recur in *Pay Dirt* and other work on organic farming. There are habitual references to “Mother Earth”

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<sup>443</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). *Pay Dirt: Farming and Gardening With Composts*. New York, The Devin-Adair Company. 240.

<sup>444</sup> Castree, N. (2001). *Socializing Nature: Theory, Practice, and Politics*. *Social Nature: Theory, Practice and Politics*. N. Castree and B. Braun. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers. 3.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>446</sup> Engel, C. (2005). *The Gaia Book of Organic Gardening*. London, Gaia Books. 9.

<sup>447</sup> Scoones, I. (1999). "New Ecology and the Social Sciences: What Prospects for a Fruitful Engagement?" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28: 479-507.

and “Mother Nature.” In the 1940s, the succession model of plant communities, advanced by Henry Cowles and Frederic Clements, governed ecology and agriculture. This theory posited that systems reached a stable state or climax of general stasis.<sup>448</sup> Although the perception of nature as static, pure, and unsullied persists in the popular imagination, critics have found the language of environmentalism to be “hopelessly romantic, and potentially reactionary, in its call for us to return to some putative state of harmony with nature.”<sup>449</sup> Since the 1980s, environmental historians have engaged in considerable debate about dominant definitions of nature. More scholars have moved beyond the “naïve greenness” of environmentalism that was powerful during the early twentieth-century American conservation movement.<sup>450</sup> Many ecologists, biologists, and other scientists now presume that the discourse exalting balance, harmony, or stability in nature is part of a spurious ideology, which erroneously assumes the existence of a fixed environmental state. Evidence of large-scale environmental disturbance and variability has undermined the impractical notion of ecosystem constancy.<sup>451</sup>

Greater attention by environmental historians to counter-narratives about nature has upended hegemonic interpretations of nature. As William Cronon notes, the process by which environmental myths and visions become culturally ensconced is not neutral or inevitable. Scholars select particular explanations from a *mélange* of stories that could be told about an ecosystem or epoch. Each prevailing narrative sanctions some voices and

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<sup>448</sup> Beeman, R. S. and J. A. Pritchard (2001). *A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century*. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas. 38.

<sup>449</sup> Levy, N. (1999). Foucault's Unnatural Ecology. *Discourses of the Environment*. E. Darier, Blackwell Publishers. 203.

<sup>450</sup> Stewart, M. A. (1998). "Environmental History: Profile of a Developing Field." *The History Teacher* **31**(3). 360.

<sup>451</sup> Sprugel, D. G. (1991). "Disturbance, Equilibrium and Environmental Variability: What is 'Natural' Vegetation in a Changing Environment?" *Biological Conservation* **58**: 1-18.

excludes or silences others.<sup>452</sup> The triumph of one account over another can have political implications, creating “winners” and “losers.”<sup>453</sup> Competing varieties of history bolster rival policies for the environment.

Poststructuralist philosophy has posed a challenge to the strict dichotomy between nature and culture. Many environmental scholars address the overlapping boundaries of the human/non-human realm and the nature/culture divide. Cronon rejects the fundamental dualism that places “capitalist urban-industrialism” and the forces of “modernity” in opposition to bucolic nature.<sup>454</sup> Nature and culture are intimately entangled. Since even “untouched” natural landscapes have a profound human history, greater recognition of nature-culture hybrids has developed. This approach suggests how the human relationship with the environment might be reinvented to incorporate a more nuanced view of nature and culture.

“Nature” is an ambiguous, contested notion. The ideological imperatives of imperialism, capitalism, science, conservation, and other interests have shaped perspectives on the environment. Contemporary environmental theory emphasizes the social construction of “nature” itself. Nature has been redefined as a culturally, historically, and geographically contingent idea, not an immutable fact. According to this line of thought, nature has never been purely “natural;” rather, it is “intrinsically social.”<sup>455</sup> Farmers, scientists, and other actors define and understand nature differently.

Rodale reinforced traditional conceptions of nature and “old-fashioned farming,” many of

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<sup>452</sup> Cronon, W. (1992). "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative." The Journal of American History 78(4). 1350.

<sup>453</sup> Swift, J. (1996). Desertification: Narratives, Winners and Losers. The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment. M. Leach and R. Mearns. London, The International African Institute.

<sup>454</sup> Cronon, W. (1993). "The Uses of Environmental History." Environmental History Review 17(3). 10.

<sup>455</sup> Castree, N. (2001). Socializing Nature: Theory, Practice, and Politics. Social Nature: Theory, Practice and Politics. N. Castree and B. Braun. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers. 5.

which have been challenged by theorists but sustained by broader American culture. Despite resistance among the general public, scholars have increasingly viewed nature as both an ontological and epistemological human construction.<sup>456</sup> Nature, then, has no inherent properties but must be conceptually or physically assembled through human discourses and actions in order to be comprehensible. The same holds true for anything distinguished as “organic.”

The word “nature” encompasses a complicated history that has entailed considerable discursive battles over its denotation. To many environmental activists, poststructuralist skepticism about anything “natural” seems “dangerously relativistic and abstract,” at the expense of pressing ecological issues.<sup>457</sup> Equivalently, tussles over the legal definition of “organic”—intended to bolster public trust in legitimate organic products—raised concerns that consumers would become even more dubious and confused about the label. For organic food to be credible and marketable, it had to meet consumer expectations. Prior to the implementation of a nationwide certification process, even dedicated users of organic food often doubted its verity. A 1972 *New York Times* article, for example, warned: “Organic Foods: Spotting the Real Thing Can Be Tricky.”<sup>458</sup> Recognizing this, and cognizant of occasional dishonesty, Rodale was an early proponent of authorized labels for organic food. Protecting the integrity of the term “organic” has been essential to the organic movement.

Assertions about nature, agriculture, and the environment can serve as instruments of control. Competing interpretations may seem neutral but generate material and

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<sup>456</sup> Demeritt, D. Ibid. Being Constructive About Nature: 21-40. 23.

<sup>457</sup> Levy, N. (1999). Foucault's Unnatural Ecology. *Discourses of the Environment*. E. Darier, Blackwell Publishers. 203.

<sup>458</sup> Warren, V. L. (1972). Organic Foods: Spotting the Real Thing Can Be Tricky. *The New York Times*: 72.

symbolic consequences. Control of knowledge—especially when couched in the authoritative aura of scientific discourse—precedes regulation of the land. In the United States, agricultural policies reflect machinations of power. After World War II, leftover ammonium nitrate, organophosphate nerve gas, and DDT were used to manufacture fertilizers and potent insecticides. Rodale critiqued how chemical industry representatives had influenced the USDA's position on artificial fertilizers. American farmers were told that petroleum-based chemicals were essential for boosting agricultural production. Agricultural extension services also praised mechanical improvements that enabled each farmer to work more intensively on larger units.<sup>459</sup> Technical advances seemed economically advantageous but had ecological and social justice repercussions.

Current farm and food policies still encourage overproduction of certain crops and generate artificially low prices. U.S. Farm Bills have traditionally allocated billions of dollars to subsidize soybeans, corn, rice, wheat and cotton. Farm subsidy benefits flow disproportionately to colossal farms. The bulk of commodity payments fund farm consolidation, hindering the survival of moderately-sized family farms.<sup>460</sup> Economic incentives for maximum per-acre yield often discourage adoption of alternative practices. Subsidies based on acreage that favor high production do not support smaller farmers growing organic produce. The USDA has largely been a proponent of hybrid crops, which are closely allied to the profit interests of the biotechnology industry. Some members of the organic movement accuse powerful biotechnology corporations of acting as colonizing agents, aggressively promoting the pesticides they sell and forcing farmers in both first- and third-world countries to purchase seeds for genetically modified crops.

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<sup>459</sup> Oklahoma State University Extension Service (1960). *Oklahoma Agriculture Today and Tomorrow*.

<sup>460</sup> Farm and Food Policy Project (2007). *Seeking Balance in U.S. Farm and Food Policy*, [www.farmandfoodproject.org](http://www.farmandfoodproject.org): 1-15. 1.

In 1952, Rodale said “it may be necessary for the organic movement to become interested in politics.”<sup>461</sup> Yet, little energy in the organic movement was ever directed towards overhauling the entire agro-food paradigm. A more radical course of action would have been stipulating that chemical-based agriculture pay for the externalities, such as pollution and resource extraction, that are absorbed by society at large. Instead of keeping the cost of natural resources artificially low through subsidies, the government could encourage conservation and conscientious production with laws to reflect their full cost. Pesticides and chemical fertilizers could be taxed more heavily than friendlier organic inputs. Government policies could encourage sustainable agriculture by providing “green payments” to compensate those organic farmers who are providing civic goods. The organic movement has rarely had commanding allies in the political realm, but it has also, at times, failed to petition stridently enough for deep policy reforms. Consequently, the fraction of U.S. cropland that is certified organic hovers at only 0.5 percent.<sup>462</sup>

### **Cooperation and Domination**

Agriculture is inherently a manipulative activity, since any form of cultivation disturbs the alleged equilibrium of the natural world. Farms and gardens are domesticated, not wild, landscapes. However, a basic tenet of organic farming and gardening is to manage crops and pests in a way that is less harmful to the environment than the aggressive intrusions of conventional methods. In contrast to techniques that aim to control nature, organic farming is said to cooperate with nature. The authors of *Taste Life! The Organic Choice* (1998) stressed that the organic model was “an integrative

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<sup>461</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Miscellany: Looking Forward. *Organic Gardening*, **20**: 24-25. 24.

<sup>462</sup> Greene, C., C. Dimitri, et al. (2009). Emerging Issues in the U.S. Organic Industry, USDA: 1-36.



world view” that replaced “the notion of domination with one of cooperation.”<sup>463</sup> In a 1998 study of Canadian organic farmers, Diane Baltaz concluded that these producers organized their farm practices and entire alternative lifestyles around nature. The organic farmers carefully worked with nature to manage ecosystems, while the mainstream farmers merely turned out commodities.<sup>464</sup> Organic rhetoric by and large refers to farmers “guiding” the land, as opposed to callously intruding on it.

Allusions to the hubris of conventional farming are common in organic factions. When Fairfield Osborn expressed his alarm about misuse of the land through chemical fertilizers in *Our Plundered Planet* (1948), he warned humans to “recognize the necessity of cooperating with nature...The time for defiance is at an end.”<sup>465</sup> Rodale said that “to subdue nature, to bend its forces to our will, has been the acknowledged purpose of mankind since human life began. The question still remains: who is winning the battle?”<sup>466</sup> Rodale felt that the real winning strategy was a restrained, organic approach.

Organic farming may be more gentle than ruthlessly imposing toxic chemicals, but it does require utilitarian management of landscapes. Partisans of organic or “traditional” farming who compare it to industrialized agriculture rarely acknowledge the extent to which *all* farming entails modification and domination of the land. Nature does not spontaneously till soil or build compost heaps. Still, exaltations of serene natural harmony recur throughout organic farming texts. Farmer F.H. Billington offered a typical explanation in 1943:

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<sup>463</sup> Richard, D. and D. Byers, Eds. (1998). *Taste Life! The Organic Choice*. Bloomington, IL, Vital Health Publishing. 158.

<sup>464</sup> Baltaz, D. P. (1998). *Why We Do It: Organic Farmers on Farming*. Ayr, Ontario, Sand Plains Publishers. 35.

<sup>465</sup> Osborn, F. (1948). *Our Plundered Planet*. Boston, Little, Brown and Company. 201.

<sup>466</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1964). *Our Poisoned Earth and Sky*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Books. 244.

“Organic husbandry is based on those methods which have been employed by nature to crop the major portion of this planet for countless centuries. From this it will be seen that organic methods of farming and gardening are largely biological and *constructive*—as opposed to currently used orthodox methods which are predominantly chemical and *destructive*.”<sup>467</sup>

The “father” of organic farming, Albert Howard, believed that “Nature, the supreme farmer, manages her kingdom.”<sup>468</sup> He observed how the peasants of China, who returned all wastes to the land, came nearest to “the ideal set by Nature.”<sup>469</sup> Howard’s Law of Return was his great principle underlying “Nature’s farming.” Nature had provided the utmost example to transform wastes into humus, and this was the key to agricultural prosperity.<sup>470</sup> Organic practitioner Joseph Cocannouer advised other farmers in the 1950s to build their pastures “Nature’s way.” He believed that adhering to Howard’s method of scientific compost-making resulted in a fertilizer that “ranks with Nature’s best.”<sup>471</sup> Dissenting from the customary war on weeds, he praised them as “Nature’s true guardians of the soil” and said weeds could be the farmer’s friends when used intelligently.<sup>472</sup> Cocannouer’s *Farming With Nature* (1954) declared that “in Nature farming the farmer accepts the blueprints of Nature as his guide.”<sup>473</sup> Nevertheless, he felt that applying outside materials to maintain soil fertility in heavily cropped land was a

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<sup>467</sup> Billington, F. H. (1956). Compost For Garden Plot or Thousand-Acre Farm: A Practical Guide to Modern Methods. Boston, Charles T. Branford Company. 69.

<sup>468</sup> Howard, A. (1947). The Soil and Health: A Study of Organic Agriculture. New York, The Devin-Adair Co. 17.

<sup>469</sup> Howard, A. (1943). An Agricultural Testament. New York, Oxford University Press. 20.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.* 223.

<sup>471</sup> Cocannouer, J. (1950). Weeds: Guardians of the Soil. New York, Devin-Adair. 109.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>473</sup> Cocannouer, J. A. (1954). Farming With Nature. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press. 16.

necessity, because “man cannot wait on Nature’s slow processes.”<sup>474</sup> He did not seem to regard this kind of impatient intervention as incongruous with the “Nature farming” ideal.

F. Newman Turner restored the diseased fields and cattle of Goosegreen Farm in Somerset, England by using organic manure methods. In *Fertility Farming* (1951), he hoped to demonstrate that “farming by the laws of nature” was simple and effective. Although he had witnessed an increase in crop yield, Turner measured the success of “organic fertility farming” above all by the health of living things on the farm.<sup>475</sup>

Malcolm Beck, who began operating his Texas farm organically in 1957, also cared most about “doing things Nature approves of.”<sup>476</sup> He said Nature had been building fertile topsoil “since the beginning of time,” by mulching and composting the surface of the earth.<sup>477</sup> Compost worked so well because it was “Nature’s way.”<sup>478</sup> To many organic farmers, compost is “black gold.”

In *Grow Your Own: An Introduction to Organic Farming* (1970), Jeanie Darlington accused those who used chemical fertilizers of disregarding the fact that soil was a “living breathing thing.” Poison sprays polluted the atmosphere and killed harmless insects and helpful predators, thus “destroying the balance of nature.” Gardening organically, however, was “working in harmony with nature.”<sup>479</sup> *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods* (1972) urged people to start their own organic gardens that would demonstrate the “cleanliness” and spirituality of “nature’s design for life on this

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>475</sup> Turner, F. N. (1951). *Fertility Farming*. London, Faber and Faber Limited. 21.

<sup>476</sup> Beck, M. (2005). *Lessons in Nature*. Austin, TX, Acres USA. 11.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>479</sup> Darlington, J. (1970). *Grow Your Own: An Introduction to Organic Gardening*. Berkeley, Ca, Bookworks. 13.

planet.” Compost was at the base of the organic method. Artificial chemical fertilizers, which had no part in organics, symbolized “unnatural” gardening and farming.<sup>480</sup>

Farmer Samuel Ogden began growing vegetables without chemicals in the 1940s and became a contributing editor to *Organic Gardening*. In 1971, Rodale Press published his *Step-by-Step to Organic Vegetable Growing*. For Ogden, the organic route meant studying “the whole cycle of life in the garden.” The organic whole functioned “harmoniously in nature and as nature intended,” though Ogden did add that this harmony had to be “carefully guided by the hand of man to his useful ends.”<sup>481</sup> Two decades later, Shepherd Ogden wrote *Straight-Ahead Organic: A Step-by-Step Guide to Growing Great Vegetables in a Less-than-Perfect World* (1992), which built upon the advice of his grandfather. One of the advantages of organic gardening, the younger Ogden said, was that it allowed people to fine-tune their connection to nature. He added that composting, an example of cyclical interaction of the natural world, was “the heart of modern organic gardening.”<sup>482</sup>

Some organic gardeners refer to composting as an “art form.”<sup>483</sup> Rodale told his readers in 1945 that “making compost is an art rather than a science,” and mechanically following rules would neither yield the best results nor be enjoyable.<sup>484</sup> *The Gaia Book of Organic Gardening* (2005) admitted that “organic gardeners go on a lot about compost,”

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<sup>480</sup> Goldman, M. C. and W. H. Hylton, Eds. (1972). *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods*. Emmaus, Rodale Press. 84-85.

<sup>481</sup> Ogden, S. (1971). *Step-by-Step to Organic Vegetable Growing*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 37.

<sup>482</sup> Ogden, S. (1999). *Straight-Ahead Organic: A Step-by-Step Guide to Growing Great Vegetables in a Less-than-Perfect World*. White River Junction, Vt, Chelsea Green Publishing Co. 74.

<sup>483</sup> Baltaz, D. P. (1998). *Why We Do It: Organic Farmers on Farming*. Ayr, Ontario, Sand Plains Publishers. 47.

<sup>484</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1945). With the Editor—The Theory Underlying the Composting Process. *Organic Gardening*. 7: 4-7. 4.

because it was clearly the best organic matter for soil.<sup>485</sup> Though composting was a simple process, it seemed “like magic.”<sup>486</sup> Organic farmer Charles Dowding agreed that “compost heaps and bins are magical means of turning garden waste into something of great value.”<sup>487</sup> Dowding began growing organic vegetables in Somerset, England in the 1980s, using “simple, natural practices.” The farmer, he said, should ignore chemical ideas and instead cultivate an approach “based on Life,” and he thought spreading good compost would best encourage this respect for life.<sup>488</sup> While Dowding admitted that some unnatural conditions were required, because “nature does not do vegetable gardens,” he still believed that he was gardening “the natural way.”<sup>489</sup>

Along the same lines, the authors of *Grow Organic* (2007) lamented that “we’ve lost sight of our own ability to garden in harmony with Mother Nature, instead of fighting her.” They prescribed organic gardening as the best way to “reconnect with our gardening roots,” by using “nature’s arsenal” rather than the quick chemical fix.<sup>490</sup> They also confirmed that “Mother Nature” was an ally, so properly managed organic gardens required very little human interference. Garden Organic, the UK’s major organic horticulture organization, affirmed in its 2008 growing guide that the organic approach was “in harmony with nature,” working within the delicate framework of the living world.<sup>491</sup> Comparably, a 2009 article in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, persuaded readers that vegetable gardening at home was not back-breaking labor, nor did it upset the “balance of nature.” The author, avid gardener Michele Owens, accentuated that it was “easy to grow

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<sup>485</sup> Engel, C. (2005). *The Gaia Book of Organic Gardening*. London, Gaia Books. 30.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>487</sup> Dowding, C. (2007). *Organic Gardening: The Natural No-Dig Way*. Foxhole, Devon, Green Books. 45.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>490</sup> Oster, D. and J. Walliser (2007). *Grow Organic: Over 250 Tips and Ideas for Growing Flowers, Veggies, Lawns and More*. Pittsburgh, St. Lyon’s Press. 2.

<sup>491</sup> Garden Organic (2008). *Grow Organic*. New York, DK Adult. 18.

a flood of beautiful food” and noted that gardeners were not bullying nature: “push a seed into the earth and it *wants* to grow.”<sup>492</sup> Owens, too, discussed the “magical” process of composting.

### **Pesticide Clouds and Ecology**

Various national organizations already promoted conservation, expressed alarm over industrial pollution, and discussed the effects of chemicals by the mid-1940s. The Audubon Society initiated one of the first studies of how unchecked use of DDT endangered bird life.<sup>493</sup> In 1947, organic farmer John Hershey pointed out that, while “ten years ago commercial fertilizer was the answer to a farm maiden’s prayer,” he now saw “an avalanche of public opinion against indiscriminate use of ‘the soil poison.’”<sup>494</sup> Rodale warned about DDT and other pesticides throughout the 1950s. Well-known farmer and writer Louis Bromfield counseled that the effects of “indiscriminate use” of such sprays as DDT had not yet been properly observed and assessed.<sup>495</sup> A key turning point, though, came with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), which inspired public rejection of commonly used chemicals. *Progressive Farmer* maintained in 1970 that environmentalists should not single out DDT for attack, because it was “one of the most useful chemicals ever discovered.”<sup>496</sup> Still, the USDA set up a monitoring program to determine the effects of routine pesticide use, and by 1972 it banned DDT. Carson is

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<sup>492</sup> Owens, M. (2009). Yours For the Picking. *O, The Oprah Magazine*. **10**: 95-96. 95.

<sup>493</sup> Bosso, C. (2005). *Environment Inc.: From Grassroots to Beltway*. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas. 34.

<sup>494</sup> Hershey, J. W. (1948). "Organic Farming and Its Influence on the Health of Soil, Plants, Animals and Man." *Bio-Dynamics* **VI**(3): 11-19. 17.

<sup>495</sup> Bromfield, L. (1945). *Pleasant Valley*. New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers. 35.

<sup>496</sup> *Progressive Farmer* (1970). Agriculture Has Big Stake in Crackdown on Pesticides. *Progressive Farmer*.

credited with launching the modern environmental movement and commencing a new wave of interest in organic gardening.

In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental and ecological values were part of the search for an enhanced standard of living.<sup>497</sup> Attempts to live lightly on the earth entailed a reaction against the throwaway mentality of industrial, urbanizing society. Conscious consumers looked for more “natural” products.<sup>498</sup> *Time* magazine dubbed 1969 “the year of ecology” and indicated that, suddenly, “all sorts of Americans utter new words like ecosystem and eutrophication. Pollution may soon replace the Viet Nam war as the nation’s major issue of protest.”<sup>499</sup> Rodale’s rhetoric contributed to the emerging counter-cultural discourse of the environmental and organic movements. Other pioneers of organic agriculture integrated holistic ecology into farming.<sup>500</sup> Organic farmers were at the forefront of ground-breaking research in managing farms as natural systems, demonstrating that crops could be grown and successfully marketed without chemical inputs.<sup>501</sup> While the founders’ concerns for “healthy soil, healthy food and healthy people” persisted, the modern organic movement differed from its earlier forms in that it added the core precept of environmental sustainability.<sup>502</sup>

Organic farmer Samuel Ogden observed an “extraordinary change in the public point of view concerning the use of poisonous pesticides and herbicides” by the early

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<sup>497</sup> Hays, S. (1987). Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985. New York, Cambridge University Press. 34.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.* 263.

<sup>499</sup> *Time*. (1969, May 12, 2008). "Ecology: The New Jeremiahs." Time Retrieved Aug. 15, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>500</sup> Beeman, R. S. and J. A. Pritchard (2001). A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas. 122.

<sup>501</sup> Imhoff, D. (2003). Farming With the Wild: Enhancing Biodiversity on Farms and Ranches. San Francisco, Sierra Club Books. 14.

<sup>502</sup> Kristiansen, P. and C. Merfield (2006). Overview of Organic Agriculture. Organic Agriculture: A Global Perspective. P. Kristiansen, A. Taji and J. Reganold. Ithaca, NY, Comstock Publishing Associates: 1-23. 6.

1970s. This realization of dangers to humans and their environment had “induced a tremendous upsurge of interest in the kinds of food we eat, and in the manner in which they are grown.” Ogden noticed a large demand for organically grown vegetables. More young people were leaving the city for the country, attempting to “return to the soil as a way of life.”<sup>503</sup> A *Newsweek* cover story in the summer of 1975 affirmed the expanding attraction to organic foods as part of the “The New Wave” in food.

### **Do-Nothing Farming**

Masanobu Fukuoka, who managed rice fields and orange groves on the hillsides overlooking Matsuyama Bay in Japan, was influential in the organic movement. Fukuoka’s *The One Straw Revolution* was published in Japan in 1975 and then in the U.S. by Rodale Press in 1978. He practiced what he called “do-nothing” farming, which was based on the idea that “nature, left alone, is in perfect balance.”<sup>504</sup> This method, he said, completely contradicted modern agricultural techniques. Fukuoka criticized agricultural authorities who focused only on new machinery to achieve greater yields. He did not use the term “organic” or make compost, but he utilized no machines, fertilizers, or chemicals. Fukuoka felt that the principles of organic farming popular in the West “hardly differ from those of the traditional Oriental agriculture practiced in China, Korea, and Japan for many centuries.”<sup>505</sup> Still, his tactics were not completely hands-off. To grow vegetables in a semi-wild way, Fukuoka would toss out seeds on a vacant lot or

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<sup>503</sup> Ogden, S. (1971). *Step-by-Step to Organic Vegetable Growing*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. viii.

<sup>504</sup> Fukuoka, M. (1992). *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming*. Mapusa, Goa, India, Other India Press. 34.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.* 117.



riverbank. He controlled weeds by spreading straw on the crops and was rewarded with high yields on his land.

Fukuoka also believed that the human diet should be adjusted to the “natural cycle.” Western nutritional science served only to isolate human beings from nature.<sup>506</sup> He sold his rice and fruit to natural food stores and reasoned that, since this kind of food could be produced with the least expense and effort, it should be sold at the cheapest price. He warned that, “if natural foods are expensive, they become luxury foods and only rich people are able to afford them.”<sup>507</sup> He urged simplicity in lifestyle, disparaging meat and imported food as “luxuries.” Instead, he said that a “simple local diet”—such as brown rice and vegetables—would allow people to live “simply and directly.”<sup>508</sup> As Fukuoka’s fame grew in organic and environmentally-minded circles, students arrived from around the world to live and work with him.

### **Holistic Farming**

Contemporary descriptions of organic agriculture reiterate that it is holistic, ecological, sustainable, and environmentally responsible. The organic philosophy views humans as “part of nature, not separate nor dominating or controlling it.”<sup>509</sup> While industrial farming is a “reductionist” and confrontational line of attack, organic farming is said to use a “whole system” methodology.<sup>510</sup> The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), founded in 1972, defined organic agriculture as “a

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid. 140.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid. 89-91.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid. 104.

<sup>509</sup> Kristiansen, P. and C. Merfield (2006). Overview of Organic Agriculture. [Organic Agriculture: A Global Perspective](#). P. Kristiansen, A. Taji and J. Reganold. Ithaca, NY, Comstock Publishing Associates: 1-23. 16.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid. 17.

holistic production management system that avoids use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified organisms, minimizes pollution of air, soil and water, and optimizes the health and productivity of interdependent communities of plants, animals and people.”<sup>511</sup> Francis Blake’s guide to organic farming said that it aimed to be “in harmony rather than in conflict with natural systems.”<sup>512</sup> Organic farming was a “holistic” philosophy of life, because it was “concerned with the wholeness, the interconnectedness of life.”<sup>513</sup> Blake advised that an organic system, “striving to be in cooperation with nature,” had to be suited to the conditions in which it operated.<sup>514</sup>

Bob Flowerdew, who wrote *The Organic Gardening Bible* (1998), acknowledged the need for manipulative acts. He said that organic gardening entailed cooperating with nature but also “enticing her.” This was not achieved by “letting nature have her way.” Rather, “we must guide and channel her.”<sup>515</sup> This guidance, though, did not preclude “harmony.” He blamed the chemical mode for displacing the “harmony and closeness to nature” of “traditional” gardeners and farmers during the last century.<sup>516</sup> He insisted that organic gardening was more sustainable, ecologically sound, natural, and environmentally friendly than the “artificial regime.” Instead of resorting to harmful pesticides, organic gardeners simply used “wit and cunning” to outsmart pests and diseases.<sup>517</sup>

Lynda Brown, author of several books on organic living, has also stated that organic farmers “work with nature rather than against it” and “share the same basic

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<sup>511</sup> IFOAM. (2007). "IFOAM web site." Retrieved May 13, 2007, from <http://www.ifoam.org/>.

<sup>512</sup> Blake, F. (1990). *Organic Farming and Growing*. Wiltshire, The Crowood Press. 10.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>515</sup> Flowerdew, B. (1998). *The Organic Gardening Bible: Successful Gardening the Natural Way*. Lanham, MD, Taylor Trade Publishing. 7.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid. 16.

holistic aims and beliefs, based on respect for all living organisms.”<sup>518</sup> The simple message of the “organic way,” she said, was to “respect nature, and nature will be your best friend.” Brown referred to organic growers as “guardians of the environment.” It was their preference for “cooperation at all levels, rather than destruction or domination,” that made the most sense.<sup>519</sup> In 2001, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations World Health Organization stated in its internationally adopted food standards that organic production systems “aim at achieving optimal agroecosystems which are socially, ecologically and economically sustainable.”<sup>520</sup>

Some commentators use metaphors of war and peace to distinguish between agricultural tactics. For Craig Sams, the former chairman of Britain’s Soil Association, organic farming was “the foundation of a philosophy that seeks a sustainable future for life on Earth.”<sup>521</sup> Sams believed that, while conventional farmers “wage war on nature,” organic farmers “apply a creative process of conflict resolution.” In response to this “contribution towards her well-being,” nature “volunteers her bounty.”<sup>522</sup> According to *The Gaia Book of Organic Gardening* (2005), organic growers should “make peace not war.”<sup>523</sup> The book advised organic gardeners to harness natural processes and “learn to love your weeds,” because “your garden is not a battleground.”<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> Brown, L. (2000). Organic Living: Simple Solutions for a Better Life. New York, Dorling Kindersley Publishing, Inc. 15.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>520</sup> FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme (2001). Codex Alimentarius: Organically Produced Foods. Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations World Health Organization. 6.

<sup>521</sup> Sams, C. (2000). Introduction. Handbook of Organic Food Processing and Production. S. Wright and D. McCrea. Malden, MA, Blackwell Science: 1-15. 2.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>523</sup> Engel, C. (2005). The Gaia Book of Organic Gardening. London, Gaia Books. 10.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid. 133.

For Nicolas Lampkin, director of the Organic Centre in Wales, organic agriculture entailed a “holistic” view, in which “everything affects everything else.”<sup>525</sup> It was dependent upon “maintaining ecological balance” and developing biological processes to their optimum level.<sup>526</sup> Organic farming attempted to enhance natural production by using a system that “mimics natural ecosystems.”<sup>527</sup> Similarly, the authors of *Living Organic* (2001) likened the organic gardener to a holistic therapist, working “alongside nature rather than in opposition to it.”<sup>528</sup> In *Eat More Dirt* (2003), organic landscaper Ellen Sandbeck characterized chemical fertilizers as “heroin for plants,” creating “a quick rush, then a sudden drop into weakness and dependency.” On the other hand, organic fertilizer was “a food, not a drug.”<sup>529</sup>

Longtime organic farmer Adrian Myers ran an extensive garden and orchard near Shrewsbury, in the United Kingdom. Organic farming, he believed, was holistic and did not attempt to battle Nature. At the heart of the organic approach to agriculture was the “view of Nature as self-organizing, self-sustaining, self-regenerating and self-regulating.”<sup>530</sup> Nature was the model for humans. Myers argued in *Organic Futures: The Case for Organic Farming* (2005) that organic husbandry was the standard in terms of sustainability, because conventional agriculture was fundamentally flawed.<sup>531</sup> He bucked the trend of supposedly “improving” Nature through “a simplified and systematic

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<sup>525</sup> Lampkin, N. (2002). *Organic Farming*. Ipswich, UK, Old Pond Publishing. 5.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.* 574.

<sup>528</sup> Clarke, A., H. Porter, et al., Eds. (2001). *Living Organic: Easy Steps to an Organic Family Lifestyle*. Naperville, IL, Sourcebooks, Inc. 129-130.

<sup>529</sup> Sandbeck, E. (2003). *Eat More Dirt: Diverting and Instructive Tips for Growing and Tending an Organic Garden*. New York, Broadway Books. 20.

<sup>530</sup> Myers, A. (2005). *Organic Futures: The Case for Organic Farming*. Devon, Green Books. 17.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.* 12.

scientific system of inorganic husbandry.”<sup>532</sup> One advantage of organic production was that it required less fossil energy per unit of food produced. Therefore, importing organic food that could easily be grown in the UK violated “the whole ethos of organic and sustainable farming.”<sup>533</sup>

Consumer guides echo the sentiments of organic farmers themselves. *The Organic Food Guide* (2004) said that “balance and prevention” were central to the philosophy of organic farming.<sup>534</sup> Organic farmers, it explained, “don’t believe in conquering nature; rather, they strive to coexist with it.”<sup>535</sup> *The Organic Food Handbook* (2006) asserted that organic farmers worked more closely with nature than anyone else. They cultivated “a down-to-earth sensibility along with a spiritual perspective about nature’s greater intelligence.”<sup>536</sup> *The Organic Cook’s Bible* (2006) also made it clear that “nature’s way” of growing vegetables required no toxins:

“When your vegetables are grown organically, you are assured that your food is wholesome, that you are supporting an environmentally conscious farmer, that you are helping protect all the creatures that make up the farm’s ecosystem, and that you are protecting the land itself through wise and sustainable practices.”<sup>537</sup>

The Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) asserted in a 2007 report that “switching to organic farming requires a major philosophical shift.”<sup>538</sup> While

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>534</sup> Meyerowitz, S. (2004). *The Organic Food Guide: How to Shop Smarter and Eat Healthier*. Guilford, CT, The Globe Pequot Press. 3.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>536</sup> Roseboro, K. (2006). *The Organic Food Handbook: A Consumer’s Guide to Buying and Eating Organic Food*. Laguna Beach, CA, Basic Health Publications. 19.

<sup>537</sup> Cox, J. (2006). *The Organic Cook’s Bible: How to Select and Cook the Best Ingredients on the Market*. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 54.

<sup>538</sup> Sustainable Agriculture Network (2007). Transitioning to Organic Production, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program: 1-31. 3.

acknowledging that many farmers convert to organic production for economic reasons, SAN stated that profit was rarely the sole argument for farming organically. Organic farmers used nature as a model for the agricultural system and considered the farm as an “integrated entity, with all parts interconnected.” Practices shared by organic farmers included crop rotations; use of cover crops; application of green and animal manures; and biological controls instead of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.<sup>539</sup> Wendy Johnson, who gardened organically at the San Francisco Zen Center’s Green Gulch Farm, said she did so because organic gardening was rooted in “local stewardship,” encouraged protection of land and water resources, worked “in harmony with natural ecosystems to sustain diversity,” and developed “real health in the garden and in the wider community.”<sup>540</sup>

### **Feeding the World and Seeking Proof**

A major argument on behalf of organic farming is that it provides environmental benefits. Organic farmers are commonly motivated by concern for the environment.<sup>541</sup> Some studies have shown that organic fertilizers improve soil fertility and crop quality.<sup>542</sup> Others have found that organic farms increase biodiversity by using fewer pesticides and incorporating wildlife-friendly practices.<sup>543</sup> Organic farms tend to support more plant and animal species than conventional farms.<sup>544</sup> However, numerous groups challenge claims

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<sup>539</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>540</sup> Johnson, W. (2008). Gardening at the Dragon’s Gate: At Work in the Wild and Cultivated World. New York, Bantam Books. xiii.

<sup>541</sup> Storstad, O. and H. Björkhaug (2003). "Foundations of production and consumption of organic food in Norway: Common attitudes among farmers and consumers." Agriculture and Human Values **20**: 151-163. 153.

<sup>542</sup> Granstedt, A. and L. Kjellenberg (1997). Long-Term Field Experiment in Sweden: Effects of Organic and Inorganic Fertilizers on Soil Fertility and Crop Quality. Proceedings of an International Conference in Boston, Tufts University, Agricultural Production and Nutrition. Boston, Tufts University: 1-11.

<sup>543</sup> Coghlan, A. (2000). "Going Back to Nature Down on the Farm." New Scientist **166**(2241): 20.

<sup>544</sup> Halweil, B. (2001). Organic Gold Rush, Worldwatch Institute: 1-12. 5.

that organic production methods are better for the environment.<sup>545</sup> Some say that relying on the plough rather than on herbicides contributes to greater soil erosion.<sup>546</sup> Copious controversies over mixed evidence exist. Daniel Imhoff noted that the environmental standards for organic farm management were indeed preferable but did not sufficiently take into account a farm's impact on its watershed and surrounding ecosystems.<sup>547</sup> Some detractors view the biggest cost of organic farming as its lack of efficiency, so expansion would require encroaching on additional wildlife habitat when placing more forested land under cultivation.

Disbelievers have frequently avowed that organic farming systems cannot produce the high yields that conventional agriculture does and would contribute to global hunger. Organic farmer Hugh Corley denied these assertions as early as 1957, in *Organic Small Farming*. Corley assented that "yields may be lower to start with, just as a drug addict may be in poor shape after he has given up his drugs, or as an underfed and overtired man may be unable to do much work." Yet, when "real fertility" was derived from organic methods, yields would climb and returns would improve. As an added bonus, this upgrade was "not bought at the expense of posterity."<sup>548</sup> Other experts have countered that the greatest cause of world hunger is inefficient distribution, not insufficient yields. Both sides of the debate have produced compelling evidence. However, as Samuel Fromartz has noted, "critics often portray organic farming as a pre-

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<sup>545</sup> Forrer, G., A. Avery, et al. (2000). "Marketing & The Organic Food Industry: A history of food fears, market manipulation and misleading consumers." (September). 3.

<sup>546</sup> New Scientist (2002). "Thought for Food: Feeding the world while nurturing the planet doesn't mean going back to nature. Nor does it mean letting biotech giants run the whole show. Smart farmers are learning how to have the best of both worlds." *New Scientist* 174(2343): 34. And see Avery, D. T. (1995). *Saving the Planet with Pesticides and Plastic: The Environmental Triumph of High-Yield Farming*. Indianapolis, Hudson Institute.

<sup>547</sup> Imhoff, D. (2003). *Farming With the Wild: Enhancing Biodiversity on Farms and Ranches*. San Francisco, Sierra Club Books. 9.

<sup>548</sup> Corley, H. (1975). *Organic Small Farming*. Pauma Valley, Ca, Bargyla and Gylver Rateaver. 191

industrial anachronism practiced by aging hippies, romantics, Luddites, and quacks who are incapable of feeding the world.”<sup>549</sup>

Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz famously debunked the organic farming vogue of the early 1970s, insisting that its widespread adoption would cause 50 million people to starve. According to Butz, chemicals and antibiotics were required to produce “adequate amounts of safe and wholesome food.”<sup>550</sup> Butz and others assumed that organic farming was a pseudoscientific hobby, only feasible on an amateur scale, if at all. Hilda White, a professor of home economics, concurred in a 1972 *Food Technology* article that if modern agricultural technology were discarded in favor of organic farming, “the worldwide problems of hunger, malnutrition, and famine would be multiplied immeasurably.”<sup>551</sup> Those who praised the abundance of American food often attributed it to the “miracle” of agricultural chemicals.

Critical assessments have pointed out that, if organic farming is not as productive and requires more land, then this leaves less wilderness. Soil scientist Norman Adams asserted in a 1990 *New Scientist* article that “lower-yielding organic farming methods take up more land for food production and put yet more pressure on dwindling wildlife habitats.”<sup>552</sup> A 2001 article in *Nature* magazine contended that organic agriculture resulted in more costly products, due to decreased yields and inefficient use of land. The author also argued that organic farmers caused damage to nesting birds, worms, and invertebrates because of frequent mechanical weeding. Conventional agriculture, on the other hand, was more environmentally friendly and could match organic yields while

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<sup>549</sup> Fromartz, S. (2006). *Organic, Inc.: Natural Foods and How They Grew*. Orlando, Harcourt, Inc. 6.

<sup>550</sup> Butz, E. (1971). "Crisis or Challenge." *Nation's Agriculture* **19**(July-August): 19.

<sup>551</sup> White, H. S. (1972). "The Organic Foods Movement." *Food Technology*(April): 29-33. 30

<sup>552</sup> Adams, N. (1990). "Forum: The case against organic farming - Farming with chemicals may be best for wildlife " *New Scientist* **127**(1734).



using only 50 to 70 percent of the farmland.<sup>553</sup> Developmental economist Thomas DeGregori said in 2004 that the issue of “how we will feed nine billion people in less than half a century from now” could not be seriously addressed by those who “seek refuge from modernity” in organic food.<sup>554</sup> A chief executive of the National Corn Growers Association, Rick Tolman, told *The New York Times* in 2009 that his organization felt there was “a place for organic” but did not reckon we could “feed ourselves and the world” that way.<sup>555</sup> Advocates of mainstream agriculture continue to verbalize this position.

Dennis T. Avery, a vocal opponent of organic farming, has denounced organic farming as an “environmental disaster.” If adopted as a global food production system, he said, it could force an additional five to ten million square miles of wildland to be plowed. Avery was adamant that careful use of farm chemicals to minimize crop losses was more beneficial to maintaining wildlife populations. He blamed naïve fears of chemicals and technology, along with “faith in going back to nature,” for blinding organic farming proponents to the positive effects of high-yield agriculture. Organic farming, he said, was “an imminent danger to the world’s wildlife and a hazard to the health of its own consumers.”<sup>556</sup> Alex A. Avery elaborated on his father’s arguments in *The Truth About Organic Foods* (2006), which exposed organic farming as a great threat to natural ecosystems and biodiversity. He hailed herbicide-tolerant crops developed through biotechnology as far more “cost effective” and “eco-friendly” than organic

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<sup>553</sup> Trewavas, A. (2001). "Urban Myths of Organic Farming: Organic Agriculture Began as an Ideology, But Can It Meet Today's Needs?" *Nature* **410**(22, March): 409-410.

<sup>554</sup> DeGregori, T. R. (2004). *Origins of the Organic Agriculture Debate*. Ames, Iowa State Press. ix-xi.

<sup>555</sup> Martin, A. (2009). Is a Food Revolution Now in Season? *The New York Times*.

<sup>556</sup> Avery, D. T. (1999). The Fallacy of the Organic Utopia. *Fearing Food: Risk, Health, and Environment*. J. Morris and R. Bate. Boston, Butterworth-Heinemann: 3-18. 3.

farming.<sup>557</sup>

The USDA, the IFOAM, and other organizations have firmly excluded genetically modified organisms from the definition of organic agriculture. However, *Tomorrow's Table* (2008), written jointly by a plant genetic scientist and an organic farmer, posed the unusual suggestion that combining organic farming with judicious use of genetic engineering was the “key to helping feed the growing population in an ecologically balanced manner.”<sup>558</sup> The authors argued that integrating GE plants into organic farming systems would protect the environment and help reduce crop losses to disease.

The land-use requirements of organic agricultural techniques are a major point of contention. A 2006 study in the United Kingdom found that, for many foods, the environmental impacts of organic agriculture crops were lower than for corresponding conventionally-grown food.<sup>559</sup> However, in the life cycle of some foods, organic agriculture posed its own environmental problems. There were a plethora of extenuating conditions and variations. For most basic carbohydrate foods, fruit and vegetables, dairy, and meat products, land use was higher for organic than non-organic versions, but pesticide use was lower.<sup>560</sup> Organic wheat production, for example, required less energy but more land to produce the same amount of grain. Organic and conventional potatoes, however, had matching energy requirements, mainly because the energy for fertilizer manufacture was replaced by the energy for additional machines, which were needed to

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<sup>557</sup> Avery, A. A. (2006). *The Truth About Organic Foods*. Chesterfield, MO, Henderson Communications, L.L.C.

<sup>558</sup> Ronald, P. C. and R. W. Adamchak (2008). *Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food*. New York, Oxford University Press. xi.

<sup>559</sup> Foster, C., K. Green, et al. (2006). *Environmental Impacts of Food Production and Consumption: A Report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*. Defra, London, Manchester Business School. 14.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.* 12-13.

work more land in organic systems.<sup>561</sup> Although organic milk eliminated pesticide use, it also gave rise to “higher emissions of greenhouse gases, acid gases and eutrophying substances per unit of milk produced.”<sup>562</sup> In terms of bread production, there was a stronger distinction between industrial and artisanal production chains than between conventional and organic ones.<sup>563</sup> This study used the technique of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), which analyzes the product system as it begins with material extraction from nature and moves through production, distribution, use, and disposal. LCA considers global warming potential, resource depletion, ozone layer depletion, human toxicity, ecotoxicity, photochemical oxidation, acidification and eutrophication. Nevertheless, LCA methodology does not fully attend to certain other factors, such as biodiversity or the implications of land use.<sup>564</sup> Therefore, the study did not find a clear-cut answer to the query of whether organic or conventional production had a lower environmental impact. The authors concluded:

“For organic agriculture to offer an approach to food production that is better than conventional agriculture, yields need to rise and methods need to be developed (or, if they exist, adopted) that reduce releases of nitrogen compounds, particularly the water environment.”<sup>565</sup>

Other research has been less ambiguous. A nine-year study based on experimental plots at Iowa State University concluded in 2007 that organic crop production systems did show greater yields, profitability, and soil quality over conventional practices. The most salient differences were in soil and water quality. The organic plots reduced soil runoff and cycled nutrients more efficiently. This study was touted as the “largest

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid. 141.

randomized, replicated comparison of organic and conventional crops in the nation.”<sup>566</sup> Researchers at the University of Michigan indicated in 2007 that organic farming could double or triple yields in developing countries. Meanwhile, in developed nations, yields were nearly equal on organic and conventional farms. One of the Michigan study’s principal investigators asserted that fears of organic agriculture causing people to starve were “ridiculous.” The findings revealed that organic farming was “less environmentally harmful yet can potentially produce more than enough food.”<sup>567</sup> Analogously, the Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trials concluded in 2008 that organic corn-soybean systems were 90 percent as productive as nearby conventional farms; while organic forage crop yields were actually the same as conventional yields.<sup>568</sup>

Leslie Duram’s *Good Growing* (2005) pointed out that organic farms should not be held to a higher standard of “ecological integrity and social change” than other farms, unless they were given adequate monetary support. She said, “we cannot expect organic farmers to step in and rescue our rural natural resources, save the family farm, and improve social relationships within agriculture.”<sup>569</sup> Current farm policies demand that farmers squeeze as much as possible from the soil and even encourage agriculture to encroach on environmentally sensitive lands or flood-prone areas.<sup>570</sup> There are some USDA “green payments” and other conservation programs that compensate farmers for being good stewards of the land, but organic farmers believe these need to be expanded.

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<sup>566</sup> Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture (2007). *Organic Practices Outpace Conventional in Long-Term Research*. Ames, Iowa, Iowa State University.

<sup>567</sup> University of Michigan News Service. (2007, July 10, 2007). "Organic Farming Can Feed the World, U-M Study Shows." Retrieved April 22, 2008, from <http://www.ns.umich.edu/htdos/releases/print.php>.

<sup>568</sup> J.L. Posner et al. (2008). "Organic and Conventional Production Systems in the Wisconsin Integrated Cropping System Trials." *Agronomy Journal* **100**(2).

<sup>569</sup> Duram, L. A. (2005). *Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press. 184.

<sup>570</sup> Farm and Food Policy Project (2007). *Seeking Balance in U.S. Farm and Food Policy*, [www.farmandfoodproject.org](http://www.farmandfoodproject.org): 1-15. 10.

A shift in farm policy priorities would mean that incentives could reward organic farming systems and promote ecological management. Rodale Institute CEO Timothy LaSalle feels that organic farming can reduce global warming. In a 2008 interview with Anna Lappé, LaSalle argued, “those who say we can’t feed the world with organic farming are perpetuating a myth of falsity. With the onset of peak oil, we will not be able to feed the planet with conventional chemical-based agriculture.” LaSalle also called organic farmers “climate change heroes,” because they take carbon out of the air by nourishing the biology of the soil.<sup>571</sup> He has proposed that farmers be paid for their “positive, soil-carbon impact” instead of for commodity crop yields.<sup>572</sup>

The National Parks Foundation, the EPA, and SafeLawns.org sponsored a venture in 2007 to maintain a four-acre section of the National Mall organically. The two-year project was designed to determine whether a healthier, hardier lawn would result from toxic-free care. Compost and organic mulch were applied to the soil, and the area was later reopened to public foot traffic so it could be tested by daily use. Environmental coalitions hoped assessments could prove that chemical fertilizers and pesticides were not necessary to create resilient lawns. The scheme also served to raise awareness about how more homeowners should consider organic techniques for gardens, lawns, and grounds maintenance. Organic landscaper Todd Harrington examined the National Mall Project after the first six months and deemed it a success; the EPA began fully evaluating the organic renovation.

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<sup>571</sup> Lappé, A. (2008, April 15, 2008). "An Interview with Timothy LaSalle." Retrieved April 21, 2008, from <http://www.takeabite.cc/organic-farming-and-carbon-offsets>.

<sup>572</sup> Sullivan, D. (2009). "Research Makes It Clear: Organic Food is Best for People and the Planet." *Rootstock* 9(1): 4-7. 5.

## **Organic vs. local**

The debate over whether organic or local fare is best for the environment has been prominent in food discussion circles. Organic foods that are transported long distances may leave “footprints” on nature nearly as large or larger than their conventional counterparts. Assessments of “food miles” have become common in addressing uncertainty about whether consumers should purchase organically-grown or locally-grown. While “USDA Organic” carries a stringent definition, local food is more difficult to define. Most classifications range from a radius of 100 to 250 miles, but each “local” eater may understand this term differently. Still, local food has become a popular issue, often either paired with organic food advocacy or contrasted to it. In May 2005, the cover of *Ode* magazine proclaimed “Local is the New Organic.” Local-foods activist Brian Halweil discussed farmers’ markets, community gardens, the Slow Food movement, protests for food democracy, and other indications of consumer interest. According to some surveys, 80 to 90 percent of American consumers preferred buying food from small, local farms to any other options, including organics.<sup>573</sup>

Media sources have fluctuated in their advice on navigating the choices. A 2006 Sierra Club list on how to eat responsibly placed “Buy organic” near the top, because organic farmers were generally better stewards of the environment. The caveat, though, was that consumers should be wary of “multinational food conglomerates moving into organics,” since these products traveled long distances. The list also included “Support local farmers,” “Eschew meat-centered meals,” and “Cut back on processed, packaged

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<sup>573</sup> Halweil, B. (2005). Eating at Home. *Ode*. 3: 34-46. 36.

foods.”<sup>574</sup> A Sierra Club short film, *The True Cost of Food* (2005), addressed the organic-vs-local rift as well. It praised organic farms for enriching the soil with natural ingredients, since chemicals pollute land, air, and water. However, organic farms that shipped their food around the world negated the idea of sustainability. The film advised consumers to get to know the farmer growing their food so as to feel comfortable with the choices they made.

As Wal-Mart and other national retailers began to take organic food seriously, food journalist Michael Pollan predicted that the vast expansion of organic farmland required to supply Wal-Mart would indeed be an “unambiguous good for the world’s environment,” resulting in “substantially less pesticide and chemical fertilizer being applied to the land—somewhere.” However, he expected Wal-Mart to source its organic food from the cheapest global suppliers. Since the chain planned to bring the price of organic food to a level just ten percent higher than that of everyday food, Pollan said this would “virtually guarantee that Wal-Mart’s version of cheap food is not sustainable.” The plan would “give up, right from the start, on the idea, once enshrined in the organic movement, that food should be priced not high or low but responsibly.”<sup>575</sup> Critics were concerned that the real costs of growing food would still not be reflected in prices at the cash register, and the bona fide benefits of organics would be disregarded.

Local food has gained countless fans. Cindy Burke’s *To Buy or Not To Buy Organic* (2007) noted that “organics are actually starting to smell like yesterday’s news,

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<sup>574</sup> Schildgen, B. (2006). "10 Ways to Eat Well: Mr. Green's Food Commandments." *Sierra* Nov/Dec 2006. Retrieved November 13, 2006, from <http://www.sierraclub.org/>.

<sup>575</sup> Pollan, M. (2006). Mass Natural. *The New York Times*.

while local, sustainable food is becoming the fresh choice for ethical eaters.”<sup>576</sup> In March 2007, *Time* featured the cover headline “Forget Organic. Eat Local,” with a photo of an apple. In the accompanying story, author John Cloud weighed the decision between an organic apple from faraway California and a non-organic one from his home state. While he would prefer a locally grown organic apple, Cloud contended that “for food purists, ‘local’ is the new ‘organic,’ the new ideal that promises healthier bodies and a healthier planet.”<sup>577</sup> In the end, when posed as an either/or choice, he came down in favor of local food, because it made him “feel more rooted,” it tasted better, and it seemed safer.<sup>578</sup> In a 2008 survey by the National Restaurant Association, 81 percent of chefs named locally grown produce as a “hot” trend, while 75 percent named organic produce.<sup>579</sup>

There are several complicating factors in determining how to best make environmental improvements via one’s diet. Calculations of food miles do not take the energy used to produce and harvest food, such as with farm machinery or by hand, into consideration. A 2006 study by the UK’s Manchester Business School found weak evidence for diminished environmental impacts of local food supply and consumption. Due to varying agricultural effects in different parts of the world, global sourcing was a superior environmental option for particular foods.<sup>580</sup> Therefore, supermarkets and food processors were told to be more discriminating about where they sourced their goods

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<sup>576</sup> Burke, C. (2007). To Buy or Not to Buy Organic: What You Need to Know to Choose the Healthiest, Safest, Most Earth-Friendly Food. New York, Marlowe & Company. xv.

<sup>577</sup> Cloud, J. (2007). My Search for the Perfect Apple. Time. **169**: 42-50. 43.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>579</sup> Nutrition Report (2008). Natural Selection. Women's Health: 28.

<sup>580</sup> Foster, C., K. Green, et al. (2006). Environmental Impacts of Food Production and Consumption: A Report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Defra, London, Manchester Business School. 15.



from, taking account of fluctuating environmental burdens in their purchasing systems.<sup>581</sup> Essentially, the study argued for a case-by-case assessment.

This context sensitivity also applies to the environmental impact of packaging, processing, and refrigeration. Economies of scale affect the efficiency of shipping products from farms to stores. For individuals, transporting food to the home, storing it, and cooking it are consequential. Few consumers who diligently shop at the farmers' market consider how the decision to boil or roast their baby purple potatoes is another weighty decision. Yet, some data suggests that, for certain foods, the ecological setbacks from car-based shopping and subsequent methods of home cooking are greater than those from transport within the entire distribution system itself. Some provisions require high energy usage to prepare and have a high environmental "cookprint." Some, but not all, packaging can be recycled. Large proportions of certain grocery products are wasted in the home, and every pound of wasted food that enters a landfill gives rise to greenhouse gases.<sup>582</sup>

A 2009 *Boston Globe Magazine* article averred that "local food is not greener food," in part because "shipping is a small portion of the total carbon footprint of any foodstuff." Mega-farms were more efficient and less resource-intensive, so the "warm and fuzzy" dream of saving the world with local food was misguided.<sup>583</sup> A definitive answer to the puzzle has not yet been supplied.

## **Vegetarianism**

Choosing local or organic food is not the only purportedly virtuous culinary option. Several studies indicate that consumers could help the environment most by simply

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>583</sup> Keane, T. (2009). A Bitter Reality. *Boston Globe Magazine*: 12.

eating less meat.<sup>584</sup> Meat products have the greatest environmental impact of any foods, followed by dairy products.<sup>585</sup> Animal protein sources are normally more detrimental to the environment than vegetable proteins. Carnivorous consumers may find that opting for organic meat helps alleviate their environmental guilt about this. One 2006 study revealed that production inputs were indeed lower for organic beef, sheep, and pork. However, inputs were higher for poultry, because organic birds took longer to reach their slaughter weight and needed more feed along the way.<sup>586</sup> This research also demonstrated that organic meat production did not necessarily result in fewer greenhouse gas emissions, because direct emissions of methane from the animals and nitrous oxide emissions from soil processes were not always reduced.<sup>587</sup> Overall, though, legumes were still “a more energy-efficient way of providing edible protein than red meat.”<sup>588</sup>

Frances Moore Lappé’s popular *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971) notoriously exposed connections between dietary choices and their environmental ramifications. Although Lappé did discuss the health risks inherent in the American “high fat, high sugar, low fiber” diet, her primary emphasis was on vegetarianism as a more democratic, ecologically sustainable food system. Urging adoption of a meatless, unprocessed, “traditional diet,” she pointed out that “what’s good for the earth turns out to be good for us too.”<sup>589</sup> Ethnobiologist Charles Heiser agreed with Lappé, explaining in 1973 that “we

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<sup>584</sup> New Scientist (2002). "Thought for Food: Feeding the world while nurturing the planet doesn't mean going back to nature. Nor does it mean letting biotech giants run the whole show. Smart farmers are learning how to have the best of both worlds." *New Scientist* 174(2343): 34.

<sup>585</sup> Foster, C., K. Green, et al. (2006). *Environmental Impacts of Food Production and Consumption: A Report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*. Defra, London, Manchester Business School. 95.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>589</sup> Lappé, F. M. (1991). *Diet For a Small Planet: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. New York, Ballantine Books. 12.

could feed seven times as many people directly on grain as are fed when a given amount of grain is converted into meat.”<sup>590</sup> He argued that reduction of livestock should be considered as a potential solution for world hunger problems.

Christopher Cook played on Lappé’s legacy with *Diet for a Dead Planet* (2004), which was full of dire warning about pesticides, ecological degradation, and a “toxic cornucopia of poison-laminated harvests.”<sup>591</sup> He cautioned that “we are steadily farming and eating our way to oblivion.”<sup>592</sup> The solution, he said, was a subsidy system that promoted “diversified, small-scale organic farming” and expanded food security “to make healthy and sustainable food economically viable.”<sup>593</sup> Though Cook had great hope for the “organic revolution,” he hesitated in giving it his full support, both because large corporations had become involved and because organic foods remained chiefly “pricey boutique items.”<sup>594</sup>

Anna Lappé, the daughter of Frances Moore Lappé, had a more buoyant tone about organics in *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen* (2006). The younger Lappé discussed how, in the past thirty years, organic food had “moved out of the patchouli-scented aisles of food coops into the fluorescent-lit grocery stores of Main Street America, or more accurately (because not too many Main Streets remain) into the Wal-Marts, Costcos, and Sam’s Clubs of the new millennium.” Organic food had become “haute cuisine;” and vegetarianism, once “more associated with yurt dwellers than

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<sup>590</sup> Heiser, C. B., Jr. (1973). *Seed to Civilization: The Story of Man's Food*. San Francisco, W.H. Freeman and Company. 36.

<sup>591</sup> Cook, C. D. (2004). *Diet for a Dead Planet: How the Food Industry is Killing Us*. New York, The New Press. 4.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid. 243.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid. 242.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid. 251.

Golden Arches connoisseurs,” had become “pedestrian.”<sup>595</sup> The environmental repercussions of dietary preferences, however, had not diminished. Anna Lappé advised that choosing healthy, nourishing food significantly improved the health of humans, the planet, farmers, and farmworkers, all at once.<sup>596</sup>

Though it was once associated with vegetarian diets, the organic food movement now promotes organic meat as an environmentally-friendly alternative. This “sustainable meat” rhetoric tends to ignore the extent to which the act of raising *all* domesticated animals is a major contributor to global climate change and requires production practices that are more wasteful when compared with growing plant-based food. Peter Singer, professor of bioethics and animal rights advocate, has argued that typical meat-eating Americans could reduce their personal contribution to global warming more effectively by switching to a vegan diet than by swapping their family car for a fuel-efficient hybrid.<sup>597</sup> In *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (2006), Singer and Jim Mason argued that, despite the availability of organically-produced animal products, the vegan diet was still “far more environmentally-friendly than the standard American diet.”<sup>598</sup> The typical American food selection generated “the equivalent of nearly 1.5 tons more carbon dioxide per person per year than a vegan diet.”<sup>599</sup> The international Vegan Organic Network also promotes plant-based “veganic agriculture” as a way to protect animals, improve soil life, and reduce farming’s ecological footprint.

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<sup>595</sup> Lappé, A. and B. Terry (2006). Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen. New York, Penguin Group. 57.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>597</sup> Waters, A. (2006). One Thing to Do About Food: A Forum. The Nation. **283**: 14-21. 18.

<sup>598</sup> Singer, P. and J. Mason (2006). The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter. Emmaus Pa, Rodale. 241.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid. 240.

Untangling the question of what to eat in order to best stay aligned with environmental values is far from a straightforward process. Consumers concerned about saving the environment continue to juggle organic, local, vegetarian, and other “earth-friendly” options. Until unequivocal evidence emerges to solve the quandary, though, many don’t seem to mind munching on the tasty chocolate cereal—made with organic cocoa, molasses, and brown rice flour—in a box of Koala Crisp each morning.

## CHAPTER 4

### Health Seekers and Organic Food

When J.I. Rodale and his staff published *The Health Seeker* in 1971, the thorough book covered everything from Accidents, Acne, Alcoholism, and Algae to Warts, Water Softeners, and X-Rays in an alphabetical format. On the subject of ‘Chemicals in Food,’ Rodale noted that the country was “at last waking up to the danger of sprayed and processed foods, and therein lies our salvation.”<sup>600</sup> He maintained that gardening by the organic method was the best way to obtain “the finest, most nutritious fruits and vegetables.”<sup>601</sup> In hunting health, Americans have persistently worried about how nutrition affects their wellbeing. The organic movement, like the broader health food movement, has emphasized that a “natural” or “pure” diet is essential to physical vitality.

Consumers associate better health, purity, and integrity with organic food. They tend to believe organic foods are more nutritious than their counterparts, though there is little substantiated evidence for this. In 1944, Rodale exhorted people to “demand food that is raised with organic fertilizers” in order to “achieve the ultimate in the perfection of health.”<sup>602</sup> Only organic food, he told an audience in 1948, had “the maximum amount of vitamins and minerals.”<sup>603</sup> In the 1950s, *Organic Gardening* avowed that organic food was “food as Nature intended,” containing “all the life-needed elements.”<sup>604</sup> The wholesome health properties of organics, or at least their façade of clean living attributes, have long been a foremost selling point. The federal organic standards do not mention nutrition or food safety, and reputable organic businesses tend to avoid making vague

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<sup>600</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1971). *The Health Seeker*. Emmaus, Rodale. 147.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid. 404.

<sup>602</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1944). With the Editor: Is Our Health Related to the Soil? *Organic Gardening*. **5**: 3-8. 8.

<sup>603</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). With the Editor: Insects, The Censors of Nature. *Organic Gardening*. **12**: 16.

<sup>604</sup> Allen, W. H. (1953). Crucial Crusade Ibid. **21**: 21.

health claims. However, to a multitude of consumers, organic sustenance is the *sine qua non* of a healthy diet. Despite the dearth of unambiguous proof, a perception that organic foods are more nourishing than conventional foods lingers. Part of the organic allure—real or imagined—is its contribution to physical robustness and, ultimately, “salvation.” This chapter focuses on the longstanding quest for attaining health through organic food.

In its early incarnations, organic food was linked with natural food shops, vegetarianism, environmental activism, and a degree of austerity. Organic meats were rare; organic lettuce might be wilted; and some organic bread was unpalatable; but a dedicated coterie felt virtuous in making their purchases. Organic corporations targeted what food journalist Michael Pollan called “the true natural”—a committed, socially conscious consumer. Then industry players saw that the future lay with a substantially larger ensemble of affluent “health seekers.” These individuals were “more interested in their own health than that of the planet.” Pollan pointed out that this posed a marketing challenge, because making the health case for organic food was more problematic than its environmental justification.<sup>605</sup> Still, a fresh assemblage of people commenced buying organic for perceived health benefits.

The profile of the average organic shopper changed during the 1990s. The ascetic element attached to behavior like eating spoonfuls of organic barley grass powder began to dissipate. Studies demonstrate that organic foods altered their image from “unattractive, worthy products for the ‘sandals brigade’ to highly aspirational products preferred on the basis of taste—and health.”<sup>606</sup> New shoppers for natural and organic

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<sup>605</sup> Pollan, M. (2001). Naturally: How Organic Became a Marketing Niche and a Multibillion-dollar Industry. *New York Times Magazine*.

<sup>606</sup> Heasman, M. and J. Mellentin (2001). *The Functional Foods Revolution: Healthy People, Healthy Profits?* Sterling, Virginia, Earthscan Publications, Ltd. 255.

products tended to be upper-income, wellness-conscious individuals. They were less likely to make ecology a factor in their grocery decisions. Beef became one of the organic industry's fastest-growing segments. Given the mounting assortment of health foods catering to mainstream consumers, many people no longer felt that it was imperative to sacrifice flavor or freshness for nutrition.

The organic movement is culturally situated within a particular bourgeois angst. Organic food's popularity may be due in part to what Andrew Szasz called the "inverted quarantine" phenomenon, an individualistic attempt to barricade one's self from looming toxic threats.<sup>607</sup> The narcissistic desire to protect their own bodies from harm motivates this segment of organic consumers. Health anxiety is largely self-centered, and studies have indicated that organic foods are most often procured because of their supposed benefits for personal health. Egocentric values, such as apprehension about bodily hazards, have been shown to predict organic food purchases to a greater extent than altruistic motives, such as concern for environmental or animal welfare. Distress about private wellness is the strongest predictor of favorable attitudes towards buying organic foods and is a significant predictor of purchase frequency.<sup>608</sup> Food scares and marketing based on fear have contributed to the popularity of organic foods. Among organic farmers, the desire to improve family health is also one of the main reasons cited for switching over from conventional farming.<sup>609</sup> Self-interested intentions usually trump unanimous ethical causes in the pursuit of organic fitness.

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<sup>607</sup> Szasz, A. (2007). Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. 4.

<sup>608</sup> Magnusson, M. K., A. Arvola, et al. (2003). "Choice of Organic Foods is Related to Perceived Consequences for Human Health and to Environmentally Friendly Behaviour." *Appetite* **40**(2): 109-17.

<sup>609</sup> Oelhaf, R. C. (1978). Organic Agriculture: Economic and Ecological Comparisons With Conventional Methods. New York, John Wiley & Sons. 147.



Individuals have always been expected to bear the monetary costs of acquiring organic food. Few organic advocates insisted that government subsidies to organic farmers, which could lower prices for everyone, were crucial. A plethora of consumers willingly consent to pay more for organic food in order to avoid health risks. Diverse practices and motivations do exist among participants in the movement. Organic foods are appealing for selfish reasons but are also attractive on selfless grounds. They deliver a package of benefits. Achieving optimal dietary vigor entails making personal modifications but may involve cultural and political transformations as well. Still, the association between organic food and health remains oriented largely towards acts of individual salvation, not social revolution.

### **Rodale's Zeal**

J.I. Rodale's work is both derived from and has swayed American health food rhetoric. With his intense opinions about health and sustenance, Rodale followed in the footsteps of dietary reformers and fitness evangelists like Sylvester Graham (1794 – 1851), William Andrus Alcott (1798 – 1859), Wilbur Atwater (1849 – 1907), Horace Fletcher (1849 – 1919), John Harvey Kellogg (1852 – 1943), and Bernarr Macfadden (1868 – 1959). Despite hard times, American diets grew more nutritious throughout the 1930s, due largely to added home canning, truck farming, and government distribution of vitamin-rich foods. However, the average U.S. diet still had plenty of room for improvement.<sup>610</sup> Nutritionists Samuel and Violette Glasstone lamented the pervasiveness of “devitalized foods” like white bread, white sugar, oleomargarine, coffee, canned beans, preserved meats, and overcooked vegetables. Americans were baffled about how

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<sup>610</sup> Time. (1940, May 12, 2008). "What Grandfather Ate." Time Retrieved Dec. 9, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

to apply discoveries in nutrition to their daily lives.<sup>611</sup> Rodale recognized this and sought to fill an informational void with his books and magazines.

Rodale published fervent treatises on the nutritional capacities of organic food all through his life. He first theorized that organic fare aided human health because it encouraged helpful bacterial and enzyme life in the stomach, whereas food produced with chemical fertilizers inhibited the growth of bacteria meant to assist in the digestive process.<sup>612</sup> Appealing to health-minded readers, Rodale wrote an advertisement soliciting magazine subscribers that promised: “You can help mightily to avoid rheumatism, arthritis, gall stones and kidney troubles by growing your own GOOD food...Learn how by reading ORGANIC FARMING AND GARDENING.”<sup>613</sup> He expounded on a host of other explanations for organic food’s superiority in the ensuing years. In May 1945, *Organic Gardening* cautioned readers about poison sprays on apples and envisaged that the day would come “when only organically grown fruit, carefully picked, will be marketable.”<sup>614</sup> Rodale acknowledged in 1947 that it would be “a long time before even appreciable amounts of organically grown foods are available generally in the public markets.” In the meantime, he prescribed the “Rodale Diet” for betterment of health, which included kelp, mushrooms, coconut, watercress, palm cabbage, wild rice, cranberries, honey, maple syrup, nuts, fish, and wild game that were “free from the taint of chemical fertilizers.”<sup>615</sup> In 1949, he extolled the simple diet of “primitive peoples” that

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<sup>611</sup> Glasstone, S. and V. Glasstone (1943). *The Food You Eat: A Practical Guide to Home Nutrition*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press. 252-253.

<sup>612</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). *The Healthy Hunzas*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 183.

<sup>613</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1942). You Can Do Much to Help Your Health! *Organic Farming and Gardening*. **1**: 31.

<sup>614</sup> *Organic Gardening* (1945). Poison Sprays on Washed Apples. *Organic Gardening*. **6**: 27.

<sup>615</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). With the Editor: The Rodale DietIbid. **11**: 12-14.

was unlike the adulterated, fragmentized, dehydrated food “not fit to be eaten by human beings” that had appeared in the last few generations.<sup>616</sup>

Rodale’s *Prevention* magazine began publication in 1950 and was dedicated to promoting a healthy-living philosophy known as the “*Prevention* System for Better Health.” In *The Complete Book of Food and Nutrition* (1961), Rodale outlined advice on healthy eating gleaned from a decade of *Prevention* issues. The tome’s 1,000 pages covered the properties—advantageous and dire—of individual foodstuffs. In the introduction, Rodale noted that the provender average Americans ate was undoubtedly responsible for “terrifying” rates of degenerative disease.<sup>617</sup> All processed foods contained preservatives and chemicals, and even “infinitesimal quantities” mounted up to dangerous, toxic dosages.<sup>618</sup> Rodale called for an awakening to the absolute necessity of returning to unprocessed food; avoiding foods poisoned with insecticides and chemicals; and fortifying diets with supplements.<sup>619</sup>

Rodale’s fundamental advice was to consume foods “in as near their natural state as possible.”<sup>620</sup> Some of his favorites for health were eggs, wheat germ, garlic, fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, raw foods in general, and, of course, organic victuals. He shared harsh words about the hot dogs, potato chips, candy bars, soft drinks, and other ‘empty calories’ that most children ate. Rather, he felt that Americans could learn a great deal by studying “primitive peoples who eat a primitive, simple diet untouched by the avaricious hand of the factory.”<sup>621</sup> This opposition to industrial processing recurred throughout

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<sup>616</sup>Rodale, J. I. (1949). With the Editor: Cancer—Part III: Primitive Peoples. *Organic Gardening*. **15**: 12.

<sup>617</sup>Rodale, J. I., Ed. (1966). *The Complete Book of Food and Nutrition*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. xiv.

<sup>618</sup>Ibid. 802.

<sup>619</sup>Ibid. xv.

<sup>620</sup>Ibid. 927

<sup>621</sup>Ibid. 637.

Rodale's work. In 1954, *Organic Gardening and Farming* included an article stating that "original Americans lived on organic food," which was unlike the foods "low in protein and mineral content" produced by artificial fertilizers.<sup>622</sup> The magazine also ran recipes, such as those for Soya Muffins, Rye Bread, and Wheat Germ Cookies.<sup>623</sup>

Rodale asserted that there was much evidence available showing "the vital influence that organic foods have on health and resistance to disease."<sup>624</sup> Acknowledging the lack of absolute proof that organic food had the upper hand, though, he suggested that people test this theory by eating organically-grown food for a few years and observing the difference in their health.<sup>625</sup> He urged readers to grow their own fruit and vegetables by the organic method whenever possible, or at least to purchase these products from organic growers.<sup>626</sup> Since all soil had been depleted of valuable trace minerals, natural supplements like brewer's yeast, bone meal, dessicated liver, and seaweed were also necessary. He predicted that putting everyone in the country on a "really nourishing diet"—in which refined foods were forbidden while fresh organically grown produce was served raw at each meal—would cause all psychosomatic illnesses to disappear within a few months.<sup>627</sup>

*Rodale's System for Mental Power and Natural Health* (1966) offered a blueprint for becoming "more vital physically and more mentally alert."<sup>628</sup> Rodale discussed the benefits of vitamins and exercise; the danger of foods with chemical additives; and even the relationship between a good diet and safe driving. Rodale said that those who abided

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<sup>622</sup> Clute, J. V. (1954). Even Indians Eat Organically. *Organic Gardening and Farming*. 1: 42-43. 42

<sup>623</sup> Springer, G. Ibid. Home on the Range: 64-65.

<sup>624</sup> Rodale, J. I., Ed. (1966). *The Complete Book of Food and Nutrition*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 559.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid. 558.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid. 625.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid. 799.

<sup>628</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1966). *Rodale's System for Mental Power and Natural Health*. Emmaus, Rodale. xi.

by *Prevention's* natural diet, took their vitamins, ate right, did calisthenics, and walked an hour a day, would not need any “drug crutches.”<sup>629</sup> In another extensive book, *My Own Technique of Eating For Health* (1971), Rodale elaborated on his personal diet of meat, fish, eggs, raw vegetables, and fruit. He did not eat anything that had “gone through a factory.” He objected to milk, sugar, wheat, salt, and citrus fruit.<sup>630</sup> Rodale recalled that, prior to becoming health-conscious 25 years earlier, he had been eating “a typical modern diet,” full of bread, cakes, starches, sweets, and no added vitamins or minerals. At the time, he weighed 205 pounds, did no walking, and was “very nervous” and angry. Now, at the age of 71, he weighed 168 pounds, walked for at least an hour each day, and had become “wonderfully stabilized” emotionally.<sup>631</sup>

Health food advocates have repeatedly been disparaged as faddists, hucksters, and charlatans peddling silly nostrums. Observers frequently ridiculed Rodale’s excessive use of vitamins, which he ingested to compensate for the poor quality of food sold in the markets. He said that the supplements—up to seventy each day—were not drugs but were “merely food arranged in tablet form.”<sup>632</sup> He felt that taking vitamins and minerals, eschewing sugar, adhering to a low salt diet, keeping his weight down, avoiding cigarettes and alcohol, and raising 80 percent of his food by the organic method were all deciding factors in giving him immunity to headaches, colds, and disease in general.<sup>633</sup> Although several media sources contended that dietary deficiencies were rare and counseled the public to beware of “food faddists,” Rodale pointed out that magazines were full of advertisements for the products that “faddists” like himself warned

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<sup>629</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>630</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1971). *My Own Technique of Eating for Health*. Emmaus, Penn, Rodale Press.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>632</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid. 173.

against.<sup>634</sup> He steadfastly maintained his devotion to organic food and reasoned that it was patriotic to be health-conscious, because “a sick nation is a weak nation.”<sup>635</sup> Rodale sought to reform the contemporary diet as well as contemporary culture through the organic way.<sup>636</sup> In doing so, he garnered both praise and mockery.

### **Soil and Health**

Early organic advocates in Britain linked healthy humans to healthy soil. Rich organic soil seemed to account for the benefits of what became known as organic food. In *An Agricultural Testament* (1940), a founding text for organic farming, Sir Albert Howard predicted that at least half the illnesses of mankind would disappear once food supplies were raised from fertile soil and consumed fresh.<sup>637</sup> Sir Robert McCarrison, Director of Research on Nutrition in India in the 1930s, found that farmyard manure produced foodstuffs of higher nutritive quality than those grown with chemical manure on the same type of soil.<sup>638</sup> During lectures on his findings before the Royal Society of Arts in 1936, McCarrison asserted that the quality of vegetable foods depended on the manner of their cultivation, including soil, manure, rainfall, and irrigation conditions. He was adamant that “perfectly constituted food” was the greatest single factor in the acquisition and maintenance of good health.<sup>639</sup> Similarly, Lionel J. Picton, a founder of Britain’s Soil Association who launched the *Medical Testament* on nutrition in 1939, suggested that organic agriculture could transform national health.<sup>640</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> Ibid. 297-298.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid. 422.

<sup>636</sup> Whorton, J. (1982). *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers*. Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press. 339.

<sup>637</sup> Howard, A. (1943). *An Agricultural Testament*. New York, Oxford University Press. 224.

<sup>638</sup> McCarrison, R. (1953). *Nutrition and Health*. London, Faber and Faber. 14.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>640</sup> Conford, P. (2001). *The Origins of the Organic Movement*. Edinburgh, Floris Books. 130.

Weston A. Price, a dentist who examined isolated cultures in the 1930s, deduced that tooth decay and other diseases indicated divergence from “Nature’s fundamental laws of life and health.”<sup>641</sup> He demonstrated how adoption of a “modernized” diet led to declining levels of health among “primitive” clusters. In *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration* (1939), Price avowed that people were actually malnourished on industrial foods like refined flours, canned goods, sweetened fruits, and chocolate. Rodale read Price’s work and appreciated the inference that dental conditions were “almost perfect” among groups eating a “simple primitive diet” of food from soil without chemical fertilizers.<sup>642</sup> Orthodox medical professionals largely ignored Price, but he gathered followers. The Weston A. Price Foundation, founded in 1999 to disseminate his research, has actively endorsed “traditional” foods of “our ancestors” that were displaced by the “so-called civilized diet.”<sup>643</sup> One of the Foundation’s primary concerns is proving that butter, raw milk, and other animal foods are *not* the cause of modern diseases. Rather, animal fats are “nutrient-dense whole foods.” Founder and president Sally Fallon has advised consumers to buy organically raised meats and produce, stressing that these were richer in nutrients and free from most toxic residues.<sup>644</sup> The Foundation’s opposition to prevailing technology and processed foods correlates with its support for organic and biodynamic farming.

Initially, believers in the clout of organic soil had difficulty proselytizing to the general public. Rodale testified to a Congressional Committee formed to investigate

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<sup>641</sup> Price, W. A. (1945). *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration: A Comparison of Primitive and Modern Diets and Their Effects*. Redlands, Ca, Published by the Author. 415.

<sup>642</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1945). With the Editor. *Organic Gardening*. 7: 4.

<sup>643</sup> Fallon, S. (2001). *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats*. Washington, DC, New Trends Publishing, Inc. xii.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.* 50.

chemical fertilizers in 1950. He cited Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's recent research at Threefold Farms in New York, which proved that a group of mice fed with organically produced food was far healthier than a group eating food raised with chemical fertilizers.<sup>645</sup> Rodale referred to other experiments corroborating that organic food had more vitamins. He pointed out that several physicians had written about the repercussions of chemical fertilizers and human health. In spite of all this verification, Rodale regretted that many agricultural scientists at American institutions had pronounced that there was "no evidence that the organic method of producing food gives people better health."<sup>646</sup> These authorities seemed to belittle him.

From the 1950s onward, researchers investigated more closely the relationship between nutrition and degenerative diseases, and some landmark studies were published.<sup>647</sup> Biodynamic farmer Sterling Edwards expressed pleasure in 1952 that it was "slowly dawning on many basic food nutritionists that the food industry all too often substitutes manufactured junk and general trash for healthful home prepared dishes." In place of this "devitalized stuff" that had been sprayed with poisonous chemicals, the natural foods important for good health were organic products like "fresh goat milk, natural figs, sunflower seeds, yogurt of combined B. cultures, flax seed meal, rice polish and raw wheat germ."<sup>648</sup> Jorian Jenks, an officer of the Soil Association, argued in *The Stuff Man's Made Of* (1959) that deteriorating human health could be remedied by the organic movement's embrace of biological wisdom. The organic approach emphasized

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<sup>645</sup> Rodale, J. I., Ed. (1966). *The Complete Book of Food and Nutrition*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 620.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid. 624.

<sup>647</sup> Heasman, M. and J. Mellentin (2001). *The Functional Foods Revolution: Healthy People, Healthy Profits?* Sterling, Virginia, Earthscan Publications, Ltd. 6.

<sup>648</sup> Edwards, S. W. (1952). "Grindstone Run Becomes a Summer Stream." *Bio-Dynamics* X(3): 20-23. 20-21.



“wholeness,” harmony between “Man and Nature,” and the “cycle of nutrition.” Jenks acknowledged, however, that agricultural chemists were still highly skeptical of organic farming’s efficacy.<sup>649</sup> The consensus of the USDA, American Medical Association, and American Dietetic Association was that organic or health foods in general were unnecessary, more expensive, and apt to mislead people who believed they might be cure-alls.<sup>650</sup> Many consumers were wary of being swindled. Acceptance of organic food’s virtues materialized only tentatively in the mainstream realm.

### **Wheat Germ and Brown Rice**

Organic food became a key component of the American psyche in the 1960s and 1970s, as an aspect of countercultural attention to nutritious cuisine. This health revival was spurred in part by emerging environmental awareness and distaste for pesticides. “Natural” became a popular phrase on food labels, health food stores prospered, and consumers developed suspicions of food additives.<sup>651</sup> Brown rice, lentils, sunflower seeds, tofu, alfalfa sprouts, and whole-grain bread were common accompaniments to farm-fresh produce for the organic food congregation. To those who were not disciples, “all-natural” meals seemed to consist of odd concoctions such as “marinated seaweed laced with blackstrap molasses and topped with a dollop of yogurt.”<sup>652</sup> One unfavorable assessment later accused the counterculture of “proscriptive dietary yammering” about the stereotypical “brown rice, adzuki beans, loaves of bread that could anchor a tugboat,

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<sup>649</sup> Jenks, J. (1959). The Stuff Man’s Made Of: The Positive Approach to Health Through Nutrition. London, Faber and Faber.

<sup>650</sup> Hughston, L. (1959). Crusading Zeal Abounds in Health Food Sales. The Washington Post: C16.

<sup>651</sup> Stacey, M. (1994). Consumed: Why Americans Love, Hate, and Fear Food. New York, Simon & Schuster. 116.

<sup>652</sup> Hunter, B. T. (1972). The Natural Foods Primer: Help for the Bewildered Beginner. New York, Simon and Schuster. 16.

meatless chili, tea made out of crabgrass,” and other “near-comestibles whose principal attraction...was that they were not what straight people were eating.”<sup>653</sup>

One of the best-known crusaders for organic diets was Adelle Davis, the “high priestess of popular nutrition” during the late 1960s. She wrote four best-sellers that provided nutritional information meant to assist in building health. Davis pushed people to acquire fruits and vegetables “grown on composted, mulched soils free from chemical fertilizers and insecticides,” promising that these would have “superb flavor and amazing keeping qualities.”<sup>654</sup> In 1973, *The New York Times* dubbed her “chief showwoman for health foods” in a “rapidly growing ‘organic nation’ of health-food devotees.” Though debunked by the “medical-scientific fraternity,” her popularity skyrocketed.<sup>655</sup> Rodale and the *Prevention* staff approved of Davis’s *Let’s Eat Right to Keep Fit* (1954) and praised *Let’s Cook it Right* (1947) as “the best cookbook we know,” despite not agreeing completely with everything in it.<sup>656</sup>

Famous forager Euell Gibbons esteemed hunting for wild foods, which were a cut above “the devitalized days-old produce usually found on your grocer’s shelves” that had been “sprayed with poisons.”<sup>657</sup> In *Stalking the Wild Asparagus* (1962), he described a self-procured meal that incorporated wild fruit juices, Snapping-Turtle Soup, Chicken-fried Frog’s Legs, Water Cress Salad, Boiled Day-Lily Buds and Cattail Bloom Spikes, golden muffins of cattail pollen with Wild Strawberry Jam, Blackberry Cobbler, Dandelion Coffee, and Candied Calamus Root. In *Stalking the Good Life* (1966), Gibbons explained that, although he preferred wild plants, he did believe that “the first

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<sup>653</sup> Maynard, C. and B. Scheller (1992). *The Bad For You Cookbook*. New York, Villard Books. xiv.

<sup>654</sup> Davis, A. (1970). *Let's Cook It Right*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 21.

<sup>655</sup> Yergin, D. (1973). Supernutritionist. *The New York Times*; 33, 58, 66, 71. 33.

<sup>656</sup> Rodale, J. I., Ed. (1966). *The Complete Book of Food and Nutrition*. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 431.

<sup>657</sup> Gibbons, E. (1962). *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*. New York, David McKay Company. 5.

organic gardener was born” when somebody decided to “deepen his relationship with nature” by domesticating wild plants in a way that was not possessive but “cooperative and mutually beneficial.”<sup>658</sup> Gibbons also expressed his support for organics in a regular column he wrote for *Organic Gardening* magazine.

Consumer demand for organic and natural foods exploded in the early 1970s. *Life* magazine ran a cover story on “Organic Food: New and Natural” in 1970, noting that “true devotees” of food grown organically had spawned a nationwide sub-industry to accommodate their cravings.<sup>659</sup> Natural, organic, and other health foods were 1971’s “glamour business,” declared *Barron’s National Business and Financial Weekly*. Despite high retail prices, the “surge of interest in ecology and the back-to-nature trend” was responsible for catapulting health foods into the national scene.<sup>660</sup> *The New York Times Natural Foods Cookbook* (1971) acclaimed the “nutritional benefits of the natural, fresh foods that Grandmother knew” and confirmed that demand for organic food far outstripped the current supply.<sup>661</sup> Its recipes, such as Millet-Stuffed Peppers, Goat Cheese Pancakes, and Organic Whole-Wheat Bread, were contributed by “dedicated followers of the natural foods and organic gardening movements.”<sup>662</sup> Alicia Laurel’s *Living on the Earth* (1971) guided parents in making their own baby food from organically grown fruits and vegetables, since she felt that commercial baby products were unhealthy. Laurel also recommended the Rodale books for organic gardening advice.<sup>663</sup> Meanwhile,

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<sup>658</sup> Gibbons, E. (1971). *Stalking the Good Life: My Love Affair with Nature*. New York, David McKay Company, Inc. 175.

<sup>659</sup> *Life* (1970). The Move to Eat Natural. *Life*. **69**: 44-46. 45.

<sup>660</sup> Pacey, M. D. (1971). Nature's Bounty: Merchandisers of Health Foods are Cashing in on It. *Barron's Financial Weekly*. 5.

<sup>661</sup> Hewitt, J. (1971). *The New York Times Natural Foods Cookbook*. New York, New York Times Book Co. 2.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>663</sup> Laurel, A. B. (1971). *Living on the Earth*. New York, Random House.

J.I. Rodale himself encouraged the formation of a dedicated group of “health vigilantes” that would band together, “picket supermarkets, enter them and break up sections that hold food with known harmful additives.” Only by eating “unadulterated” organic food and vitamins could citizens feel secure, he told an interviewer.<sup>664</sup>

*Time* reported that sales at “organic food shops” had reached \$200 million in 1971, and offerings there included “carrot cupcakes, sunflower-seed cookies and countless varieties of honey.” Although most of the provisions could scarcely be distinguished from those in conventional markets, aficionados insisted that their hallmarks were healthfulness and taste. *Time*, though, thought the most striking difference was price, since organic foods cost 25 to 50 percent more than regular foods. Again, this discrepancy was said to derive mainly from a shortage of supply.<sup>665</sup>

There was unprecedented interest in organic food, despite premium charges. The rising number of health food stores, from 500 in 1965 to more than 3,000 in 1972, indicated a “health-food explosion.”<sup>666</sup> More comprehensive grocers were established to accommodate demand: Bread & Circus in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1975; Mrs. Gooch’s Natural Foods Market in West Los Angeles in 1977; and Whole Foods Market—officially formed when two other stores merged—in Austin in 1980. As these specialized organic outlets appeared, some conventional supermarkets were also setting aside organic food sections. Beatrice Hunter’s *Natural Foods Primer* (1972) advised readers to look in health food stores or co-ops for natural foods grown organically. However, she noted that many large supermarket chains had started stocking organic

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<sup>664</sup> Bryant, G. (1971). J.I. Rodale: Pollution Prophet. *Penthouse*. 2: 28-32. 32.

<sup>665</sup> Time. (1971, May 12, 2008). "The Profitable Earth." *Time* Retrieved Apr. 12, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>666</sup> Time. (1972, May 12, 2008). "The Perils of Eating, American Style." *Time* Retrieved Dec. 18.

food for interested customers and described this as a “heartening development.”<sup>667</sup>

Although Hunter acknowledged that the escalated cost of organics might put a strain on one’s budget, she felt that so-called “cheap food” was actually more expensive if it led to ill health.<sup>668</sup> Bernice Kohn’s *The Organic Living Book* (1972) agreed that organic foods were “the most wholesome, the most nutritious, and surely the best-tasting foods we can eat.”<sup>669</sup>

*Time* reported in a 1972 item on “Eating Organic” that “health-food fans” did, in fact, live on “more than wheat germ alone.” Typical victuals included granola, skim milk, whole-wheat bread, almond butter, berries, and spinach noodles.<sup>670</sup> Also that year the second International Health Fair was held at Madison Square Garden. *Time* discussed this “nutritional circus” in which “visitors who wandered among the displays could pick up free vitamin-pill samples, munch organic foods or drink Swedish mineral water.”

However, *Time* tried to put a damper on the trend when it asserted that there was “no reliable evidence that organically grown foods are any more nutritious than those produced by conventional means” and added that they were “sufficiently expensive to make eating them an affectation of the affluent.”<sup>671</sup> Still, organic foods suddenly carried expansive appeal, and newly established health food stores were doing brisk business.

*The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods* (1972), written by the staff of *Organic Gardening and Farming*, explained that organic food was “ecological food,” nurtured in a “natural system.” Soil fertilized naturally produced richer food, yielding crucial

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<sup>667</sup> Hunter, B. T. (1972). *The Natural Foods Primer: Help for the Bewildered Beginner*. New York, Simon and Schuster. 38.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>669</sup> Kohn, B. (1972). *The Organic Living Book*. New York, The Viking Press. 12.

<sup>670</sup> Time. (1972, May 12, 2008). "Eating Organic." *Time* Retrieved Dec. 18, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>671</sup> Time. (1972, May 12, 2008). "Health and Hucksterism." *Time* Retrieved Oct. 23, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

vitamins and minerals. Biologically, organic foods provided “safer nutrition.”<sup>672</sup> The editors reiterated that “the best way to health is proper nutrition and good nutrition comes from organically grown foods.”<sup>673</sup> This dietary mantra, however, was not accepted universally.

Physician Alan Nittler castigated other doctors for ignoring how nutrition affected disease. After writing *A New Breed of Doctor* (1972), Nittler faced charges of “quackery” and “faddism” from the medical establishment; both the California Medical Association and American Medical Association discredited him. But Nittler staunchly advised his patients to avoid processed, heated, or chemically-treated foods, saying that “whole, organic, raw produce” should make up at least fifty percent of the diet.<sup>674</sup> However, he warned that organic food was being “prostituted” and mislabeled due to sudden demand, so consumers had to be cautious.<sup>675</sup> In some circles, organic produce had a reputation for poor quality, high prices, and outright fraud.<sup>676</sup> Associations with whimsical “hippie food” did not help establish its legitimacy.

### **Cynics in “Healthfoodland”**

Critics have accused the organic industry of capitalizing on consumers’ insecurities or falsely labeling products. Before rigid inspection practices were solidified, some unscrupulous merchants couldn’t resist the temptation to mark ordinary food as organic. Three major supermarkets—Safeway, Boys Market, and Market Basket Stores—faced a \$40 million class-action suit in 1972 for selling common food as “organically

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<sup>672</sup> Goldman, M. C. and W. H. Hylton, Eds. (1972). The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods. Emmaus, Rodale Press. 44.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>674</sup> Nittler, A. H. (1972). A New Breed of Doctor. New York, Pyramid Books. 16.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>676</sup> McLeod, D. (1976). Urban-Rural Food Alliances: A Perspective on Recent Community Food Organizing. Radical Agriculture. R. Merrill. New York, New York University Press: 188-211. 205.

grown.”<sup>677</sup> The dearth of irrefutable nutritional studies also plagued the movement. *Life* magazine asked, “What’s So Great About Health Foods?” in a 1972 piece that raised doubts about organic credibility. The *Los Angeles Times* ran an article that year titled “Organic Foods: Skepticism” in which a professor of food science reiterated that chemicals in food were indispensable.<sup>678</sup> Some nutritionists saw the organic craze as “a harmless search for nutritional peace of mind,” whereas others dismissed the “organic food cult” as “nonsense.”<sup>679</sup> “Scientists Assail Organic Food Fad” blared a 1974 headline in *The New York Times*, accompanied by quotes about the organic “nonsense” from members at a recent American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting.<sup>680</sup> Quirky theories were “turning Americans into nutritional hypochondriacs” but yielding nearly \$900 million in annual sales of organic and natural foods, according to *Newsweek* in 1977. However, experts in the article concurred that organic foods were “simply a fetish,” differentiated mainly by being unnecessarily expensive.<sup>681</sup>

Fredrick J. Stare, chairman of the Department of Nutrition at Harvard’s school of Public Health, and Elizabeth M. Whelan, a demographer and medical writer, implicated magazines such as *Prevention* and *Organic Gardening and Farming* for perpetuating “scare stories” about chemical additives in food.<sup>682</sup> They launched caustic criticism at Adelle Davis, whom the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health had proclaimed “the most damaging single source of false nutrition information in the

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<sup>677</sup> Los Angeles Times (1972). 3 Market Chains Face \$40 Million Organic Food Suit. Los Angeles Times: D1.

<sup>678</sup> Baltad, N. Ibid. Organic Foods: Skepticism: 8.

<sup>679</sup> Time. (1972, May 12, 2008). "The Perils of Eating, American Style." Time Retrieved Dec. 18.

<sup>680</sup> The New York Times (1974). Scientists Assail Organic Food Fad. The New York Times: 19.

<sup>681</sup> Clark, M. (1977). "Diet Crazes." Newsweek: 67.

<sup>682</sup> Whelan, E. M. and F. J. Stare (1975). Panic in the Pantry: Food Facts, Fads and Fallacies. New York, Atheneum. 13.

country.”<sup>683</sup> In *Panic in the Pantry* (1975), Stare and Whelan sought to prove that the “back-to-nature mania” and proliferation of health food stores was “a hoax” perpetuated by opportunists intent on taking advantage of nervous, gullible consumers.<sup>684</sup> They called J.I. Rodale the “founding father” of “Healthfoodland” and noted that he and his associates had reaped over nine million dollars in 1970 alone from advocacy of “natural living.”<sup>685</sup> Many companies were hopping on the “back-to-nature bandwagon” and exploiting “natural food myths.”<sup>686</sup> Food fraud was stemming from fuzzy definitions for organic and natural food and the presence of an “unsuspecting health-oriented consumer population.”<sup>687</sup> Stare and Whelan denied that organic food was nutritionally superior or that processed food was inherently unhealthy. Rather, they asserted that food additives were safe and played an important role in keeping the nation’s food supply “plentiful, fresh, and attractive.”<sup>688</sup> They were primarily disturbed that fascination with natural-organic products could potentially threaten the nation’s “imperiled food supply.”<sup>689</sup>

Stare and Whelan pursued their denigration of dietary gimmicks with *The One-Hundred-Percent Natural, Purely Organic, Cholesterol-Free, Megavitamin, Low-Carbohydrate Nutrition Hoax* (1983). Again, they criticized “health hustlers” and lamented how much money was wasted on overpriced natural or organic products.<sup>690</sup>

They said *Prevention* magazine, which then had a circulation of over three million,

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<sup>683</sup> Whelan, E. M. and F. J. Stare (1983). *The One-Hundred-Percent Natural, Purely Organic, Cholesterol-Free, Megavitamin, Low-Carbohydrate Nutrition Hoax*. New York, Atheneum. 13.

<sup>684</sup> Whelan, E. M. and F. J. Stare (1975). *Panic in the Pantry: Food Facts, Fads and Fallacies*. New York, Atheneum. xi.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.* 41-43.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.* 56.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.* 126.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>690</sup> Whelan, E. M. and F. J. Stare (1983). *The One-Hundred-Percent Natural, Purely Organic, Cholesterol-Free, Megavitamin, Low-Carbohydrate Nutrition Hoax*. New York, Atheneum. 8.



regularly discussed “poisons” in food and the yearning for a “100 percent natural way of life.”<sup>691</sup> Whelan and Stare felt that this “propaganda” was “nonsense” and forecast that discarding modern agricultural technology in favor of organic farming would transform the cost of ordinary food into “a luxury for most families.” They feared this would multiply worldwide “problems of hunger, malnutrition, and famine.”<sup>692</sup> Contrary to the principles of “Robert Rodale and his organic-gardening cult,” Stare and Whelan said there was no way to change the nutritional content of food by the manner in which it was grown. Consumers were getting ripped off when they paid twice as much for an organically grown apple that was “essentially the same as any other apple.”<sup>693</sup> Chemical additives were beneficial, providing consumers with better products at lower prices. Because poisonous chemicals and artificial additives were present in “extremely small amounts” in the food supply, Stare and Whelan insisted that they were perfectly safe.

The USDA Study Team on Organic Farming acknowledged in 1980 that many organic farmers perceived organically produced foods as more healthful than analogous conventional products. However, nutritionists and other scientists had examined the evidence, and, in each situation, the authority involved “denied the validity of claims for nutritional superiority made by others for organic foods.”<sup>694</sup> The Study Team reported that it had uncovered no conclusive proof that pesticide residues in foods caused “such health problems as cancer, miscarriages, birth deformities, or nerve disorders.”<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid. 138-141.

<sup>694</sup> USDA Study Team on Organic Farming (1980). Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming. Washington DC, USDA. 64.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid. 65.

Denouncing “nutritional quackery” and “health food faddism,” diet book author Dale Atrens made a point of dismissing organic food’s allegedly supreme nutritional quality. Atrens said that a health food store could “present any nonsense with the appropriate incantation of *natural, holistic, organic*, and so forth, and it will be swallowed faster than alfalfa pills.”<sup>696</sup> He flatly stated that the purportedly superior flavor of organically grown products was “a fiction” and “a simple prejudice supported by no data at all.”<sup>697</sup> He further claimed that, since organically grown plants were not sprayed, they were inevitably *more* susceptible to damage caused by insects and plant diseases. This meant organics were also more liable to be high in natural carcinogens and natural pesticides.<sup>698</sup>

### **Poison Apples**

Since the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962, agricultural chemicals have come under close scrutiny in the United States. By the late 1960s, anti-pesticide activity had reached new heights. Federal agencies and industry factions repeatedly said it was unnecessary to tremble about the possibility of accepted pesticide levels causing adverse effects on health. Entomology professor J. Gordon Edwards told an agricultural magazine in 1970 that the “barrage of anti-DDT propaganda” was “remarkably untruthful” and sensationalized. He called DDT a “great benefactor of mankind” and an “ally in our fight against death, disease and starvation.”<sup>699</sup> Another 1970 publication by the farm chemicals industry expressed astonishment at how vociferously the “anti-pesticide cult” was conveying its misdirected concern about

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<sup>696</sup> Atrens, D. M. (1988). *Don't Diet*. New York, William Morrow and Company. 219.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid. 232.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid. 233.

<sup>699</sup> Edwards, J. G. (1970). DDT Is Great Benefactor of Mankind Against Pests. [Texas Agriculture](#).

pesticides, when “the most common type of food poisoning is spread by rodent feces.”<sup>700</sup>

Plenty of activists, scientists, public interest groups, and concerned citizens have disagreed with these dismissals. While critics often imply that organic food buyers have succumbed to hysteria, fretful consumers see themselves as entirely rational and pragmatic. They weigh the risks of future illness and take actions to ward off these perils.<sup>701</sup>

Fear-based marketing and hyperbolic press coverage of food safety incidents have indeed contributed to the popularity of organics. A turning point for organic food’s healthy connotations came with the 1989 Alar shock. The plant growth regulator Alar, or daminozide, had been available for decades and was habitually used to treat apples. A Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) report on Alar’s carcinogenic effects in mice led to a dramatic CBS News broadcast of *60 Minutes*. The government’s top pesticide controller told astounded Americans that Alar posed an unacceptable cancer risk.<sup>702</sup> Overnight, parents stopped feeding their children apples. Other news conferences followed as every major television show, newspaper, and newsweekly covered the story. Sales of organic food catapulted. Skeptics pointed out that the NRDC report was never published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), FDA, and USDA all said risk estimates were inflated.<sup>703</sup> Still, the media blitz had direct results, and Alar was removed from the market.

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<sup>700</sup> Buskirk, R. G. V. (1970). Pesticide Formulators and Dealers, Have Confidence in Your Product! Farm Chemicals.

<sup>701</sup> Oelhaf, R. C. (1978). Organic Agriculture: Economic and Ecological Comparisons With Conventional Methods. New York, John Wiley & Sons. 139-140.

<sup>702</sup> Wiles, R., K. A. Cook, et al. (1999). How 'Bout Them Apples? Pesticides in Children's Food Ten Years After Alar. Washington D.C., Environmental Working Group. i.

<sup>703</sup> Davis, R. J. (2008). The Healthy Skeptic: Cutting Through the Hype About Your Health. Berkeley, University of California Press. 146.

In the wake of Alar mayhem, the organic food wave in the 1990s reflected consumers' increasing concern with health and food safety.<sup>704</sup> For some, the absence of frightening pesticides is the essence of organic food. Over 400 chemicals can be regularly used in conventional farming but not on organic crops. None of the 300 synthetic food additives permitted by the FDA in conventional foods are allowed in products that are certified organic.<sup>705</sup> Still, tests have shown that organic foods are never completely pesticide-free, due to contaminant levels present in air and water.

The USDA and FDA both collect data on pesticides in the food supply. The 1996 Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) required dramatic reductions in pesticide use. However, the pesticide industry, along with farm and agribusiness interests, opposed changes to standards. The EPA moved slowly to improve safeguards. Overall pesticide use actually increased by about eight percent during the 1990s.<sup>706</sup> Risks from neurotoxins, particularly organophosphate (OP) insecticides, also rose. According to the World Health Organization, millions of instances of pesticide poisoning occur each year among farm workers from direct and chronic exposure. There are numerous pesticides on the market today that could be treacherous for humans, and conventional fruits and vegetables may still provide unsafe exposure levels to consumers.

The Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit watchdog working to protect public health and the environment, advises people to be choosy about conventional produce. While recommending organic food as the easiest way to eat

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<sup>704</sup> Horowitz, J. M. (1990, May 12, 2008). "Bye-Bye Tofu; Hello, Truffles!" Time Retrieved Mar. 19, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>705</sup> U.S. Government (2005). U.S. Government Facts: Children's Chemical & Pesticide Exposure via Food Products: 1-2.

<sup>706</sup> Wiles, R., K. A. Cook, et al. (1999). How 'Bout Them Apples? Pesticides in Children's Food Ten Years After Alar. Washington D.C., Environmental Working Group. 5.

reduced amounts of pesticide, the organization recognizes that organic produce might be too expensive. Since the twelve most contaminated fruits and vegetables present the majority of health risks, it is best to select safer substitutes for these.<sup>707</sup> The EWG compiles a “Dirty Dozen” list of the most menacing produce—such as apples, bell peppers, celery, peaches, lettuce, kale, and strawberries—and a “Clean 15” list of those that tend to be the least contaminated.<sup>708</sup>

Health food purveyors have long positioned themselves to assuage unease about the food supply by providing choices for self-preservation. Media attention to pesticide use, mad cow disease, and genetically modified (GM) “Frankenfoods” inspired more major supermarket chains to increase their organic offerings. Many consumers buy organic foods deliberately to avoid excess pesticides, chemicals, injected hormones, and animal cloning. Demand for organic milk is strongly correlated to the fact that it does not contain rBST. There is a global consensus that organic standards should exclude genetic modification. Food in European Union markets must be labeled if it contains GM material, whereas the U.S. still has no such law. In the meantime, the USDA organic label provides assurance that there are no GM ingredients involved.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control reports that food is one of the main sources of pesticide exposure for American children. Concentrations of pesticide residues are six times higher in blood samples of children eating conventionally farmed fruits and vegetables, compared with those eating organic.<sup>709</sup> A 1999 EWG report accused the

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<sup>707</sup> Environmental Working Group (1995). *A Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce*. Washington, D.C., Environmental Working Group.

<sup>708</sup> Environmental Working Group. (2009). "Shopper's Guide to Pesticides." Retrieved May 31, 2009, from <http://www.foodnews.org/>.

<sup>709</sup> U.S. Government (2005). U.S. Government Facts: Children's Chemical & Pesticide Exposure via Food Products: 1-2.

government of not doing its job to shield children from pesticides, even ten years after the Alar episode. Organic activists have agreed that the EPA did not deliver on its promise “to fully protect infants and children from damaging pesticide exposures.”<sup>710</sup> Since pesticides affect the small bodies of children to a greater degree than those of adults, parents often choose organic products for babies and infants even before buying these for themselves. The German-based company Sunval began making organic baby food as early as 1950 under the Bio Bambini label, with raw materials coming from organic-certified farms. Products included purees of Parsnip & Potato, Apple & Mango, and Pumpkin with Potatoes & Fennel; Baby Muesli in a Pear & Apple flavor; and Ratatouille.<sup>711</sup> Nielsen Homescan data from 2004 revealed that parents of young children were more likely than childless people to purchase organic food.<sup>712</sup> A 2007 report showed that organic baby foods were becoming increasingly vital to parents looking for guarantees about nutrition and food safety.<sup>713</sup>

A *mélange* of organic food companies cater to this protective impulse. One recent advertisement for Earthbound Farm, known for its organic salad mixes, declared: “While farming organically may cost more, the rewards are most certainly worth it. Because with each delicious bite, you can take comfort in knowing you’re protecting your family’s health. And that’s priceless.” The text might have made consumers feel guilty for quibbling about the high price of organic arugula. The ad implied that, considering how organic food could elevate the health of one’s family, a few extra dollars ought to be

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<sup>710</sup> Benbrook, C., X. Zhao, et al. (2008). New Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-Based Organic Foods, *The Organic Center*,: 1-50. 17.

<sup>711</sup> Halweil, B. (2001). *Organic Gold Rush*, Worldwatch Institute: 1-12. 12.

<sup>712</sup> Dimitri, C. and K. M. Venezia (2007). *Retail and Consumer Aspects of the Organic Milk Market*, USDA: 1-18. 3.

<sup>713</sup> Soil Association (2009). *Organic market report 2009*. Bristol: 1-72. 28.

inconsequential. Earth's Best Organic baby food, made by The Hain Celestial Group, offers dinner blends akin to those healthy meals popularized by the counterculture, like Chicken & Brown Rice or Rice & Lentils. Its organic fruit and whole grain combinations include Banana Apricot and Plum Banana Brown Rice, perhaps insinuating that babies have fairly sophisticated palates. Meanwhile, Apple & Eve makes its organic juice expressly for children, with a line of Sesame Street Organics juice boxes available as Elmo's Punch, Big Bird's Apple, and Bert & Ernie's Berry.

Polls and market data suggest that food frights are an important factor in organic growth.<sup>714</sup> In the wake of alarming reports, organic sales tend to soar. *Time* reported that a "parade of food scares" was "propelling more shoppers to go organic" in 2002. With sales of natural and organic foods mushrooming at eighteen percent per year, "the industry no longer figures its prime market is Birkenstock-wearing proles hankering for tofu and lentils. It's courting health-conscious consumers of every stripe."<sup>715</sup> Creation of the organic label itself might have given some consumers the impression that all conventional foods were unsuitable for ingestion. Alex A. Avery, an organic farming critic, accused the organic industry of "scaremongering" tactics to frighten consumers into thinking that organic food was the only safe option. He asserted that pesticide residues on crops—both synthetic *and* natural—were miniscule and posed no threat to humans.<sup>716</sup> In spite of assurances like these, food scares and distaste for anything

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<sup>714</sup> Forrer, G., A. Avery, et al. (2000). "Marketing & The Organic Food Industry: A history of food fears, market manipulation and misleading consumers." (September). 9.

<sup>715</sup> Fonda, D. (2002, May 12, 2008). "Organic Growth." *Time* Retrieved August 12, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>716</sup> Avery, A. A. (2006). *The Truth About Organic Foods*. Chesterfield, MO, Henderson Communications, L.L.C.

“artificial” helped organics enter the mainstream.

### **Proof in the Organic Brown Rice Pudding**

Rodale always maintained that organically raised vegetables contained more vitamins and minerals.<sup>717</sup> Several studies have indicated that organic food does have more nutrients, vitamins, minerals, flavonoids, or antioxidants than conventional food.<sup>718</sup> The University of California at Davis released results of its Long-Term Research on Agricultural Systems project in 2007, demonstrating that tomatoes grown organically had “consistently higher levels of vitamin C and other antioxidants, including flavonoids,” which are associated with reduced risk of heart disease and certain cancers.<sup>719</sup> Some research shows that this elevated antioxidant content in organic plants is correlated with the lower amount of available nitrogen common in organic cultivation, when manure is used instead of synthetic fertilizer.<sup>720</sup> Some organic advocates have advanced reports that organic food helps protect against obesity.<sup>721</sup>

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<sup>717</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1953). With the Editor: Whither Science? The Organic Farmer. **4**: 13.

<sup>718</sup> See the following: Coghlan, A. (2001). "Digging the Dirt: Fans Say Organic Foods are Best, But Are They Just Full of Manure?" New Scientist **171**(2303): 15.

Worthington, V. (2001). "Nutritional Quality of Organic Versus Conventional Fruits, Vegetables, and Grains." Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine **7**(2): 161-173.

Edwards, R. (2002). "The Natural Choice: Organic Food has More of What it Takes to Keep you Healthy." New Scientist **173**(2334): 10.

Gwynne, S. (2009). Born Green. Saveur: 27-30.

Benbrook, C. (2005). Elevating Antioxidant Levels in Food Through Organic Farming and Food Processing. State of Science Review, The Organic Center: 1-6.

The Organic Center (2006). Core Truths: Serving up the Science Behind Organic Agriculture, The Organic Center.

Wang, S. Y., C.-T. Chen, et al. (2008). "Fruit Quality, Antioxidant Capacity, and Flavonoid Content of Organically and Conventionally Grown Blueberries." Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry **56**: 5788-5794.

Cox, J. (2008). The Organic Food Shopper's Guide. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

<sup>719</sup> Jaret, P. (2008). A Growing Trend. Cooking Light. **22**: 30-34. 32.

<sup>720</sup> Theuer, R. C. (2006). Do Organic Fruits and Vegetables Taste Better than Conventional Fruits and Vegetables?, The Organic Center.

<sup>721</sup> Sullivan, D. (2009). "Research Makes It Clear: Organic Food is Best for People and the Planet." Rootstock **9**(1): 4-7. 4.



The Organic Center, a nonprofit organization founded in 2002, is dedicated to presenting peer-reviewed scientific evidence on how organic products benefit human and environmental health. It specifically aims to publish “credible scientific studies” that advance the organic cause. The Organic Center urges consumers to seek out organic produce because of its higher antioxidant, vitamin, and mineral levels; and its lower levels of pesticides and mycotoxins, which may contribute to health risks and food poisoning. The Organic Center’s *Core Truths* (2006) included research on why organic food often tastes better; why organic food drastically reduces pesticide exposure; and why organic farms typically use less energy.<sup>722</sup> An extensive report in 2008 confirmed the nutritional superiority of organic produce, chiefly with respect to polyphenols and antioxidants.<sup>723</sup> These findings may be compromised by the fact that The Organic Center’s Board of Directors includes high-ranked executives from Aurora Organic Dairy, Dean Foods, Organic Valley, Whole Foods Market, Safeway, and the Organic Trade Association—all corporations that stand to gain financially from the advancement of organic foods.

Other studies categorically dispute claims of nutritional pre-eminence for organics. The data is mixed, skeptics abound, and the hunt for proof is hindered by significant disparities in individual farm practices and crop varieties. Organic food critic Thomas DeGregori has stated that “there is no scientifically verifiable evidence conferring any nutritional benefit to organic produce,” regardless of the “antimodernist”

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<sup>722</sup> The Organic Center (2006). *Core Truths: Serving up the Science Behind Organic Agriculture*, The Organic Center. 11, 52.

<sup>723</sup> Benbrook, C., X. Zhao, et al. (2008). New Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-Based Organic Foods, The Organic Center, 1-50.

preference for “eating closer to nature.”<sup>724</sup> Detractors tend to highlight the weak health claims of organic agriculture and also call attention to food safety issues related to the use of manure and compost.<sup>725</sup> In 2000, the ABC news show *20/20* aired an episode in which correspondent John Stossel stated that organic produce could actually be more harmful than conventional produce, citing findings of bacteria on certain samples. Environmental nonprofit federations challenged the allegation and uncovered that Stossel had fabricated his findings. Stossel later offered an on-air apology. Still, Alex A. Avery again asserted in 2006 that organic foods posed more risks than conventional foods. He attributed the greater potential of food-borne illnesses and fungal toxins to organic farmers’ heavy reliance on animal manure for fertilizer.<sup>726</sup>

The American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) published a report in 2008 stating that The Organic Center’s evidence of nutritional superiority for organic crops was based on unscientific comparisons and irrelevant data. The ACSH said that “a consumer who buys organic food thinking that it is more nutritious is wasting a considerable amount of money.”<sup>727</sup> Notably, the ACSH is a nonprofit consumer education consortium that has been funded in part by donations from Monsanto, Archer Daniels Midland, ISK Biotech Corporation, and Exxon, so it can hardly be unbiased. An independent study funded by the UK’s Food Standards Agency (FSA) created an uproar among organic boosters in 2009 when it declared that organic food did not offer any noteworthy nutritional benefits compared with conventionally produced food. The

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<sup>724</sup> DeGregori, T. R. (2004). *Origins of the Organic Agriculture Debate*. Ames, Iowa State Press. 98.

<sup>725</sup> Ingram, M. (2007). "Biology and Beyond: The Science of "Back to Nature" Farming in the United States." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97(2): 298-312.

<sup>726</sup> Avery, A. A. (2006). *The Truth About Organic Foods*. Chesterfield, MO, Henderson Communications, L.L.C. 76.

<sup>727</sup> Rosen, J. D. (2008). *Claims of Organic Food's Nutritional Superiority: A Critical Review*. New York, American Council on Science and Health: 1-15. 12.

Organic Center, the Rodale Institute, and the Soil Association criticized the study's failure to take pesticide residue and other germane criteria into account. Stonyfield Farm CEO Gary Hirshberg called the FSA study misleading and flawed for its failure to recognize that "organic farming's avoidance of chemicals offers health benefits beyond nutrition."<sup>728</sup>

Without more definitive scientific evidence, the organic movement could lose credibility in terms of plugging health attributes. The majority of consumers who already shun organic food may doubt that perilous consequences from pesticide residues will ever be manifested and feel organics are a rip-off. Factors limiting organic food selection include satisfaction with conventional food, lack of trust, and shortage of perceived value.<sup>729</sup> While the USDA organic label itself does not purport to convey assurances of food safety or nutritional value, the industry built around it dreads the possibility of a backlash that would curtail sales. People will only pay price premiums if they have faith in organic food's advantages, and sizeable skepticism or conflicting studies from the scientific establishment could temper organic market share.

### **The Quest for Organic Health**

Organic food is a noteworthy aspect of the wide-ranging health food movement in American culture. This movement is a diffuse collection of groups, associations, and industries that follow miscellaneous food philosophies thought to augment health. Formal organization is limited, though communication centers or "network nodes" do exist. Gathering points or distribution locations include health foods stores, organic farms,

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<sup>728</sup> Hirshberg, G. (2009). "UK Study Misleads Public by Ignoring Documented Health and Environmental Benefits of Organic Food." Retrieved July 31, 2009, from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gary-hirshberg/>.

<sup>729</sup> Honkanen, P., B. Verplanken, et al. (2006). "Ethical values and motives driving organic food choice." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 5(Sep-Oct 2006): 420-430. 421.

restaurants, and co-operatives.<sup>730</sup> Spokespeople who disseminate health food information in media venues enhance the reach of these physical entities.

Developments in both research and taste have altered American health habits. A variety of discourses on healthy eating affect everyday food customs. Nutritional criteria vary over time, depending on culturally and historically specific standards.<sup>731</sup> Messages about what constitutes a healthy diet can come from medical professionals, personal acquaintances, and media sources. Each of these authorities may define healthy eating in different and even contradictory ways.<sup>732</sup> Consumption patterns also change in response to price fluctuations, disposable income, and food assistance programs.<sup>733</sup> In a study of Canadian ethnocultural groups, researchers identified three distinct discourses. “Cultural/traditional” healthy eating discourses are drawn from family and community members. “Mainstream” healthy eating discourses tend to focus on ‘controlling’ and monitoring’ food and nutrient intake; these often compete with cultural notions. “Complementary/ethical” healthy eating discourses encompass moral values and sustainability issues; these include rationales for vegetarian, local, natural, and organic foods. While the discourses may compete, they can co-exist and contribute simultaneously to the everyday food decisions of individuals and groups.<sup>734</sup>

The 1970s saw a true upheaval in healthy eating. After decades of massive confusion about nutritional principles, America was paying a stiff penalty for its eating

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<sup>730</sup> Maurer, D. (2002). Vegetarianism: Movement or Moment? Philadelphia, Temple University Press. 60-61.

<sup>731</sup> Ashley, B., J. Hollows, et al. (2004). Food and Cultural Studies. New York, Routledge. 61.

<sup>732</sup> Ristovski-Slijepcevic, S., G. E. Chapman, et al. (2008). "Engaging with Healthy Eating Discourse(s): Ways of Knowing About Food and Health in Three Ethnocultural Groups in Canada." Appetite **50**(1).

<sup>733</sup> Wells, H. F. and J. C. Buzby (2008). Dietary Assessment of Major Trends in U.S. Food Consumption, 1970-2005. Economic Information Bulletin Number 33. E. R. Service, USDA. 3.

<sup>734</sup> Ristovski-Slijepcevic, S., G. E. Chapman, et al. (2008). "Engaging with Healthy Eating Discourse(s): Ways of Knowing About Food and Health in Three Ethnocultural Groups in Canada." Appetite **50**(1).

habits, as evidenced by dietary links to disease, diabetes, dental decay, and mental retardation.<sup>735</sup> Extensive government promotion of dietary goals and guidelines began to target many diseases and illnesses. The central premise was to “eat a variety of foods; maintain ideal weight; eat foods with adequate starch and fiber; avoid too much sugar; avoid too much sodium; avoid too much fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; and to drink alcohol in moderation.” This prescription was built on “a remarkable consensus among scientific and nutrition experts.”<sup>736</sup> In 1980, the USDA first published its complete *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

The commercialization of this healthy-eating makeover commenced when thousands of low-fat, fat-free, sugar-free, and high-fiber products were launched in the 1980s and 90s, instigating a continuing trend.<sup>737</sup> Health claims are essentially illegal in food labeling and marketing. However, the FDA, petitioned and pressured by the food industry, has approved a number of qualified food-specific health claims. Capitalizing on a study asserting the benefits of oat bran during an oat bran craze in the 1980s, the Quaker Oats Company and other food producers were allowed to flaunt the assets of oatmeal. Food, nutrition and health marketing began on an unprecedented scale in the 1990s.<sup>738</sup> Product labels that bore health-related implications proliferated. One of the main goals of health food activists has been to coerce the food industry to offer healthier foods. Manufacturers have responded by marketing a host of low-calorie, low-sodium,

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<sup>735</sup> Time. (1972, May 12, 2008). "The Perils of Eating, American Style." *Time* Retrieved Dec. 18.

<sup>736</sup> Heasman, M. and J. Mellentin (2001). *The Functional Foods Revolution: Healthy People, Healthy Profits?* Sterling, Virginia, Earthscan Publications, Ltd. 55.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid. xv.

whole-grain, and other products with enticing labels, while reaping enormous benefits for themselves.<sup>739</sup>

The food industry enthusiastically embraced the concept of “functional foods.” Also known as “nutraceuticals,” these foods and beverages are those that may provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition.<sup>740</sup> Functional foods blurred the demarcation between food and medicine. Marketers first developed products for people who were ill or had specific health-related medical conditions. Next came products directed at healthy people that enhanced individual health status and could possibly prevent disease. Vitamins, minerals, protein, or other isolated ingredients were added to make functional properties extrinsic. Furthermore, many ordinary foodstuffs—e.g. tomatoes, soy, and whole grains—were marketed on the basis of their intrinsic, health-promoting assets.<sup>741</sup> The food industry formulates and markets a broad range of products on health propositions. This spectrum includes organic, vegetarian, and reduced-fat items, as well as everyday foods said to bear built-in nutritional advantages.<sup>742</sup> Industry observers note that the central premise of the functional foods revolution is that “the risk of disease can be curtailed by dietary components,” so it thrives on nervousness.<sup>743</sup> Anxious consumers may choose a certain prominently labeled “value-added” food with the expectation that it will reduce high cholesterol, promote healthy blood pressure, or help them lose weight.

The organic label indicates that a product was grown or processed without forbidden pesticides or hormones, but it is emphatically *not* a health claim. Levels of

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<sup>739</sup> Goldstein, M. (1992). The Health Movement: Promoting Fitness in America. New York, Twayne Publishers. 62.

<sup>740</sup> Heasman, M. and J. Mellentin (2001). The Functional Foods Revolution: Healthy People, Healthy Profits? Sterling, Virginia, Earthscan Publications, Ltd. xvi.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid. 11-12.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid. 254.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid. 78

sugar, sodium, fat, and calories are not addressed. Yet, studies indicate that consumers continue to think organic foods are healthier than non-organic ones.<sup>744</sup> Organic companies may purposely reinforce this belief. Earthbound Farm's *Pocket Guide to Choosing Organic* (2008) urged people to choose organic food because it was more "nutritious and delicious," and it "helps keep potentially dangerous chemicals out of our bodies." Earthbound Farm's activity book proclaimed that children could "find out why Organic is the healthiest choice for you, our planet, and earthworms, too!" Some product labels complicate matters by combining functional and organic propositions. For example, Horizon Organic Dairy offers organic milk enhanced with an Omega-3 fatty acid and makes low-fat, vitamin-fortified, probiotic organic yogurt. The chocolate Organic Sandwich Cookies made by Late July Organic Snacks—affixed with both the USDA organic seal and Jane Goodall's seal for ethically produced products—are advertised as a "good source of whole grains," "good source of calcium," "good for the earth," and "good for all."

Consumers are bombarded with health messages and self-described health foods. Though health has become ensconced in national consciousness, this fixation has not necessarily improved actual eating habits or general levels of physical wellbeing, nor has it drastically reduced dietary-related diseases. In the 1980s, despite pervasive interest in health and exercise, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that more Americans had become overweight or obese. Some critics blamed the heavily advertised packaged-food industry for promoting foods high in fat, carbohydrates, sodium, and calories. Others faulted automobiles and technological gadgets for contributing to

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid. 254

declining exercise frequency.<sup>745</sup> The *Shopper's Guide to Natural Foods* (1987) noted that an increasingly health-conscious population had created a market for organic rice. However, of all the rice Americans ate, less than two percent was brown, and only 0.3 percent was organically farmed, so organic brown rice had not yet found its way into mainstream America.<sup>746</sup> Other unprocessed whole grains, such as quinoa and millet, have perpetually seemed even more foreign to the public.

There is an inconsistency between national fascination with improving diet and collective health statistics. The USDA's assessment of major patterns in U.S. food consumption between 1970 and 2005 noted that most Americans were not meeting federal dietary recommendations for certain food groups and that the U.S. obesity rate among adults had doubled during that period. Americans were consuming too many high-fat, high-carbohydrate foods and beverages and too few nutrient-dense foods and beverages. Consumers were eating more refined grains but not enough whole grains. They were eating more fruits and vegetables but less than the prescribed amounts. Americans tended to eat more meat, eggs, and nuts than necessary; and they needed to scale back on added sugars, sweeteners, fats, and oils.<sup>747</sup> Nutritionists generally assent that everybody needs to eat more fruits and vegetables, whether these are organic or not, to achieve better health.

The market for "natural" foods has always been even larger than that for "organic." A 2009 survey by the Shelton Group advertising agency indicated that

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<sup>745</sup> Elmer-DeWitt, P. (1995, May 12, 2008). "Fat Times: What Health Craze?" *Time* Retrieved Jan. 16, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>746</sup> East West Journal (1987). *Shopper's Guide to Natural Foods*. Garden City Park, NY, Avery Publishing Group. 22.

<sup>747</sup> Wells, H. F. and J. C. Buzby (2008). Dietary Assessment of Major Trends in U.S. Food Consumption, 1970-2005. *Economic Information Bulletin Number 33*. E. R. Service, USDA. iii-iv.



Americans preferred the word “natural” over the term “organic” when choosing a green product, thinking that organic was more of an “unregulated marketing buzzword” meaning it was more expensive.<sup>748</sup> In fact, “natural” is the word that has no legal consequence and is not strictly policed. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) attempted to establish a definition of “natural” in the early 1980s but concluded that it was unable to do so. Rather, the FTC adheres to “reasonable basis” standards to determine whether an advertisement is misleading. In 2004, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine filed a lawsuit against poultry giant Tyson Foods, charging it with fraudulent advertising for claiming that its chicken was “heart-healthy,” “natural,” and “naturally wholesome.” Tyson Foods dropped the ads. In 2006, the Center for Science in the Public Interest challenged use of a “100% natural” label for a soft drink that contained high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS), asserting that this was deceptive in terms of consumer expectations. After the Corn Refiners Association successfully petitioned the FDA in 2008, manufacturers of foods with HFCS were allowed to make “natural” claims.<sup>749</sup> Efforts to mandate a “natural” label have encountered even more obstacles than those for “organic.”

Some consumers are leery of “experts,” disregard complicated labels, or ignore mercurial nutritional advice. Others are constantly perplexed about exactly what constitutes the healthiest diet. Yet, interest in the relationship between food and health is sky-high, and “health foods” are enduringly popular. In a 2008 survey by the International Food Information Council (IFIC), 63% of Americans indicated that they

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<sup>748</sup> Business Wire. (2009). "National Survey: Green is Officially Mainstream--But Consumers are Confused, Skeptical About Products." Retrieved June 30, 2009, from <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20090630005830/en>.

<sup>749</sup> Hendley, J. (2009). The Sweet & The Sour. *Eating Well*. **8**: 40-41.

read the Nutrition Facts panel when deciding to purchase or eat a food or beverage, while 51% checked the ingredients list and 13% looked for the “organic” label on packaging.<sup>750</sup>

Michael Pollan has referred to a “national eating disorder” as “orthorexia”: an unhealthy obsession with healthy eating. Ironically, the American population is preoccupied with nutrition yet is markedly unhealthy.<sup>751</sup> The food industry, nutrition science, and journalism all stand to gain from widespread confusion about what to eat, so Pollan indicted the “Nutritional Industrial Complex”—an assemblage of “scientists and food marketers only too eager to exploit every shift in the nutritional consensus”—for this insidious bewilderment.<sup>752</sup> Like Weston A. Price and J.I. Rodale, Pollan traced most chronic diseases to the industrialization of food. His advice was to eat “well-grown food from healthy soils.” He acknowledged that it would be simpler to say “eat organic,” but since some “exceptional farmers” are not certified organic, he concluded that “organic is important, but it’s not the last word on how to grow food well.”<sup>753</sup> Furthermore, Pollan warned people not to mistakenly assume that the organic label automatically signified healthfulness, especially when the food was processed and transported long distances.<sup>754</sup>

Industrially processed organic foods once seemed beyond the realm of possibility. In 1972, Robert Rodale explained that, by his designation, organically grown food was not refined, chemically treated, or extensively processed. He said there could be no such thing as organically produced white bread, because refining the wheat would destroy its

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<sup>750</sup> International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation (2008). 2008 Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes toward Food, Nutrition & Health. Washington, DC, International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation, : 54.

<sup>751</sup> Pollan, M. (2008). In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto. New York, The Penguin Press. 9.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid. 6-8.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>754</sup> Pollan, M. (2006). The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals. New York, The Penguin Press. 181.

organic quality.<sup>755</sup> Soon, however, not only was organic white bread sold, but so was whole grain organic white bread—another product once considered an oxymoron. Furthermore, organic cookies, candies and other treats the Rodales would have certainly disapproved of lined the supermarket shelves. Industry observer William Lockeretz discussed how, “from the earliest days, organic farming proponents stressed the importance of a wholesome diet based on a variety of whole or minimally processed foods.” Since then, he had seen “a growing number of organic products that no doubt would have shocked the pioneers,” labeled organic without regard for nutritional implications.<sup>756</sup>

The proliferation of organic “junk” food illustrates a plane of cognitive dissonance—or what Antonio Gramsci termed “contradictory consciousness”—in American perceptions of health. For example, an organic Peanut Butter Classics cookie by Liz Lovely was touted on the package as “dairy-free, egg-free, no trans fat, low sodium, certified vegan,” containing fair trade certified ingredients, and “certified organic by Vermont Organic Farmers.” However, one cookie still had 420 calories, 24 grams of fat, and 28 grams of sugar. Comparably, when the Bernod Group introduced its Spun City brand of Certified Organic Cotton Candy in 2008, it advertised that this “deliciously decadent” vegan treat contained no chemicals, cholesterol, sodium, artificial colors or artificial flavors. The cotton candy was still laden with sugar, albeit listed as “organic evaporated cane juice.” Inclusion of organic ingredients does not transform every nutrient-deficient saccharine product into a healthy one. Research suggests no nutritional

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<sup>755</sup> Goldman, M. C. and W. H. Hylton, Eds. (1972). The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods. Emmaus, Rodale Press. 5.

<sup>756</sup> Lockeretz, W. (2003). What Are the Key Issues for Consumers? Organic Agriculture: Sustainability, Markets and Policies. O. f. E. C.-O. a. Development. Wallingford, Oxford, CABI Publishing: 239-243. 242.

difference between high-fructose corn syrup and table sugar; both are sources of “empty” calories.<sup>757</sup> Yet, some consumers rationalize that the organic label negates any guilt about indulging in sweets. Gramsci believed that the co-existence of contradictory views was not simply self-deception; rather, it signified how individuals always made choices between concurrent conceptions of the world.<sup>758</sup> Many consumers defend their purchases of items like FruitaBü Organic Smooshed Fruit Twirl Roll-Ups and Rawzins Organic Chocolate Covered Raisins as a lesser evil—or even downright saintly—in an ominous world of noxious foods.

### **The Gateway Drug**

Devoted announcers of the connections between organic food and health still abound. Bob Flowerdew, in *The Organic Gardening Bible* (1998), said that “anything grown organically at home of a good variety will always carry more nutritive value than store-bought produce, as well as fewer residues.”<sup>759</sup> To obtain maximum nutrition from a small space, he advised home gardeners to concentrate on organic carrots, spinach, chard, peas, onion, potatoes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and kale. Well-known physician Andrew Weil, Director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona and a board member of The Organic Center, has been a longtime proponent of organic food. He advises people that choosing organic is a way of getting “the nutritional

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<sup>757</sup> Hendley, J. (2009). The Sweet & The Sour. *Eating Well*. **8**: 40-41.

<sup>758</sup> Gramsci, A. (2000). Notes for an Introduction and an Approach to the Study of Philosophy and the History of Culture: Some Preliminary Reference Points. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*. D. Forgacs. New York, UP: 323-343. 328.

<sup>759</sup> Flowerdew, B. (1998). *The Organic Gardening Bible: Successful Gardening the Natural Way*. Lanham, MD, Taylor Trade Publishing. 140.

benefits nature provides. It is a cornerstone on which to structure a lifestyle that will promote and maintain health lifelong.”<sup>760</sup>

One innovative association that unites organic food, health, and vegetarianism is Organic Athlete. The organization professes to “combine the founding precepts of organic agriculture with an Olympic spirit.” Founded in 2003, it promotes health, ecological stewardship, and “a better world through sport.”<sup>761</sup> The diet that Organic Athlete endorses is organic and vegan for environmental, ethical, and health reasons. Organic foods, expected to be free from pesticides and other toxic chemicals, are preferable because they “have consistently higher amounts of essential vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients compared to their conventionally grown counterparts.”<sup>762</sup> The group strives to demonstrate that successful athletes do not require animal foods. Members share training tips, recipes, nutrition advice, and news. Athletes form local chapters to train together and plan events that will educate people about organic, plant-based nutrition. Organic Athlete also organizes “Tour d’Organics” for the public, an annual series of bicycle rides to organic farms.

Elaine Lipson, in *The Organic Foods Sourcebook* (2001), considered the overarching question: “Is Organic Food More Nutritious?” She concluded that this was the wrong query. Organic was not a health fact but, rather, “a claim about a food production system and all that implies for our communities and our world.”<sup>763</sup> Still,

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<sup>760</sup> Benbrook, C., X. Zhao, et al. (2008). New Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-Based Organic Foods, *The Organic Center*,: 1-50. C.

<sup>761</sup> OrganicAthlete. (2007). "Guide to Sports Nutrition." Retrieved January 10, 2007, from <http://www.organicathlete.org>. 2.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>763</sup> Lipson, E. M. (2001). *The Organic Foods Sourcebook*. Chicago, Contemporary Books. 90.

organic food, when eaten with comprehension of the farm it came from, could be “more wholesome.” Lipson added:

“greater nutritional value in the entire category of organic foods may not be provable. But all things being equal, that organic carrot will more likely have been grown in conditions that nourish both soil and humans without potential harm, and that may reveal to us, if we are willing, a joyous connection to the earth and to those who grow our food.”<sup>764</sup>

Grassroots gardening campaigner Heather Flores called organic food “a gateway drug to an ecological consciousness,” because “when you eat organically, your body chemistry changes and you become more attuned to the subtle harmonies of nature.”<sup>765</sup> Rodale’s declarations were never quite so ethereal. It was physical health or salvation more than communion with the natural world that he promised. Though other motivations for consuming organic food co-exist, its trajectory has been fostered by a culture of narcissism.<sup>766</sup> As with the health food movement at large, sometimes the most effective impetus for elevating organics has been the fear of illness or death. The notion that organic food may be a holy grail for personal welfare is a controversial but far-reaching aspect of the movement.

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<sup>764</sup> Ibid. 92.

<sup>765</sup> Flores, H. C. (2006). Food Not Lawns: How to Turn Your Yard into a Garden and Your Neighborhood into a Community. White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green Publishing Company. 193.

<sup>766</sup> Goldstein, M. (1992). The Health Movement: Promoting Fitness in America. New York, Twayne Publishers. 157.

## CHAPTER 5

### Organic Gypsies and Giants: Routinization of Subversion

Bert “Gypsy Boots” Bootzin (1914-2004), a fitness and health food crusader with a cultish following, was a recurring guest on *The Steve Allen Show* in the early 1960s. He entertained television audiences while encouraging them to eat piles of organic fruits and vegetables. *The Steve Allen Show* was a popular national comedy-variety television show that Bootzin appeared on 25 times. The long-haired “Gypsy Boots” would swing onto the stage with a rope, bearing organically grown food that he convinced Allen to try. He epitomized countercultural mavericks who celebrated simplicity in their choice to eat organic, vegetarian, and unprocessed natural foods.<sup>767</sup> Bootzin had lived a bohemian life during the 1940s and was the star of Nat King Cole’s 1948 hit song, “Nature Boy.” Celebrities sampled organic foods at the “Health Hut” he opened on Beverly Boulevard in 1958. He peddled organic produce door-to-door, offered fitness classes, wrote *Bare Feet and Good Things to Eat* (1965), and became a national healthy-eating icon. His obituary said that he “defined what it meant to live close to nature decades before the nation’s current obsession with organic foods, yoga and exercise.”<sup>768</sup>

Organic farming, espousing ideals of sustainability and simplicity, attracted scores of adherents as a component of multifarious 1960s countercultural developments. Organic food in this era overlapped with health food, vegetarianism, homesteading, and environmental critiques of the nation’s industrial food habits. Back-to-the-land aficionados planted scores of organic garden patches. Ecology-minded “hippies” chose to eat organic, natural, whole foods. *Time* reported that the youth of Woodstock nation were

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<sup>767</sup> Iacobbo, K. and M. Iacobbo (2004). *Vegetarian America: A History*. Westport, CT, Praeger. 170-173.

<sup>768</sup> Flaccus, G. (2004). "California's First Health Guru, Gypsy Boots, Dead at Age 89." Retrieved August 27, 2007, from <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/state/20040809-2136-ca-bit-gypsyboots.html>.

become vegetarians with “religious zeal” and were “in the vanguard of the flourishing organic-food movement.”<sup>769</sup> Helen and Scott Nearing, living the “good life” on their Maine homestead, inspired these idealists. Some young adults participated in an experimental social scene of communes serving organic, macrobiotic diets. Fresh organic produce came from small-scale farmers and was mainly available through farmers’ markets, natural food stores, or alternative cooperatives.

After the 1990 Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) passed in the United States, establishing consistent national standards for selling organically produced foods, an organic label began materializing more regularly in the marketplace. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) suddenly owned the word “organic” and regulated its appearance on fresh and processed food. At the time, the organic packaged and refined food industry was small and decentralized. Soon, sizeable corporations—like General Mills, Pepsi, Dole, and Kraft—experimented with organics. The organic sphere mushroomed from modest farms and roadside stands into a decidedly profitable section of the international import and export system. This growth entailed both a purported defeat with respect to corporate takeover of the cause *and* a hardnosed victory in terms of grasping a more extensive audience.

During the 1990s, agribusiness firms were appropriating lucrative segments of organic commodity chains, and many were abandoning sustainable agronomic practices traditionally associated with organics.<sup>770</sup> Organic farming was becoming ensconced in the industrial capitalist system, causing socially progressive initiatives to fall off the

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<sup>769</sup> Time. (1970, May 12, 2008). "The Kosher of the Counterculture." Time Retrieved Nov. 16, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>770</sup> Guthman, J. (1998). "Regulating Meaning, Appropriating Nature: The Codification of California Organic Agriculture." Antipode 30(2): 135-154.



agenda.<sup>771</sup> Critics alleged that agricultural intensification threatened to erode stringent regulatory standards. Some questioned whether the industry was truly practicing responsible agriculture. Whereas organic farming was once thought to challenge dominant systems of food provision, it became increasingly “formalized, institutionalized and integrated within conventional food systems.”<sup>772</sup> Food policy watchdog Jim Hightower said that agribusiness giants did not view the organic certification program as “an assurance of integrity but as a marketing tool.”<sup>773</sup> Lofty goals, it seemed, had dwindled.

This development became canonized as the “conventionalization thesis.” With conventionalization, organic agriculture was said to “resemble in structure and ideology the mainstream food sector it was established in opposition to.”<sup>774</sup> Capital was concentrated among large producers. Subsequent scholarship asserted that the growth of organic food production and consumption from a small niche market into a multi-billion-dollar global industry indicated corporate co-optation.<sup>775</sup> Conventionalization is not unique to organics, but the process has drawn frequent exposure in the past decade amid industry insiders and onlookers. The transition from grassroots to mainstream is a well-publicized aspect of the organic movement. The shift struck one observer as so sweeping that it had become “easy to forget how outrageous the organic worldview appeared only a

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<sup>771</sup> Goodman, D. (2000). "Organic and conventional agriculture: Materializing discourse and agro-ecological managerialism." *Agriculture and Human Values* 17: 215-219.

<sup>772</sup> Lyons, K. (2001). From Sandals to Suits: Green Consumers and the Institutionalization of Organic Agriculture. *Consuming Foods, Sustaining Environments*. S. Lockie and B. Pritchard. Brisbane, Australian Academic Press: 82-93. 82.

<sup>773</sup> Hightower, J. (2009). The Hightower Report. *Austin Chronicle*. 28: 21.

<sup>774</sup> Lockie, S. and D. Halpin (2005). "The 'Conventionalisation' Thesis Reconsidered: Structural and Ideological Transformation of Australian Organic Agriculture." *Sociologia Ruralis* 45(4): 284-307. 285.

<sup>775</sup> Guthman, J. (2004). "The Trouble with 'Organic Lite' in California: a Rejoinder to the 'Conventionalisation' Debate." *Ibid.* 44(3): 301-316.

few decades ago.”<sup>776</sup> This chapter analyzes the dynamics of the conventionalization explanation within the organic movement and in popular culture sources. It inspects manifestations of the phenomenon and considers why this rationalization has taken hold.

The organic movement meets Alberto Melucci’s definition of a social movement as a form of collective action that involves solidarity, is engaged in conflict, and violates boundaries.<sup>777</sup> A social movement may seek economic or political power but lose oppositional clout when it gains these. To the disillusioned, as soon as the organic movement won certain concessions, it also dropped some of its credibility and solidarity. Antagonists tend to denigrate the organic movement for being too big, industrialized, commercialized, or simply too popular. A chronic thread among discontented commentators is that invincible corporations will inevitably co-opt diminutive resisters. This chorus of lamentation, though, may be somewhat comforting, because it absolves the movement of responsibility for actively fighting for a structural agro-food rebellion.

Few accounts of organic history probe the extent to which the movement may have been a willing partner in its own “co-optation.” Though organic boosters indeed engage in conflict, they were not unswervingly subversive or adversarial. The drive to directly overthrow or reform the existing food production and distribution system was not always as great as the effort to promote organic validity as an alternative that could thrive simultaneously. The organic movement challenged crucial notions but also aligned with those in power in order to gain recognition and legitimacy, enabling it to touch a broader audience. One writer for *The Organic Farmer* in 1951 urged “aggressive farmers” to

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<sup>776</sup> Ingram, M. (2007). "Biology and Beyond: The Science of "Back to Nature" Farming in the United States." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97(2): 298-312. 299.

<sup>777</sup> Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press. 29.

“talk restaurant owners into featuring a few organic dishes on their menus.”<sup>778</sup> J.I. Rodale discussed two men who were capitalizing on the appeal of organic food that year, “determined to make a big thing in the retail stores” of an organic cooked cereal they were making themselves.<sup>779</sup> These were hardly the most aggressive acts organic combatants could have undertaken. Elements of the organic agenda that were especially successful in American culture indicate a ladder of values and priorities, while also revealing restraints within which the movement operated.

### **Routinization and Co-optation**

Organic food, in being absorbed by industrial-consumer culture, bears similarities to other cultural trends.<sup>780</sup> As soon as a countercultural movement wins public approval, it also loses some of its leverage. Examining the rise of “environmentally sound” products, Michael Maniates has noted “the relentless ability of contemporary capitalism to commodify dissent and sell it back to dissenters.”<sup>781</sup> Karen and Michael Iacobbo discussed how, as vegetarianism seeped into the mainstream, suppliers scrambled to meet the demand for products free from animal ingredients. However, the vegetarian movement began to be defined as simply a *diet* or *practice*, not as the *idea* or “community of *purpose*” that it was meant to be.<sup>782</sup> Much of the general population regarded it as “a taste option, rather than a dedicated dietary choice.”<sup>783</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Chute, J. V. (1951). Be a Salesman. *The Organic Farmer*. 3: 26-28. 27.

<sup>779</sup> Rodale, J. I. Ibid. Organic Food Crashes the Retail Market. 2: 61.

<sup>780</sup> See Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic* (2003); Kimberly Lau, *New Age Capitalism* (2000); and Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (1997).

<sup>781</sup> Maniates, M. (2002). Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World? *Confronting Consumption*. T. Princen, M. Maniates and K. Conca. Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press: 43-66. 51.

<sup>782</sup> Iacobbo, K. and M. Iacobbo (2006). *Vegetarians and Vegans in America Today*. Westport, CT, Praeger. 184.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid. 39.

Randal Beeman and James Pritchard scrutinized how “permanent agriculture,” a reformist-utopian ideology of ecological farming, was co-opted and watered down by traditional agriculture.<sup>784</sup> The agricultural establishment—including the USDA and farm-goods industry—adopted the terminology of “conservation” but ignored the holistic social and ecological worldview that was meant to inspire fundamental change. The remnants of permanent agriculture evolved into the concept of “sustainable agriculture,” and organic farming was one component of this broad, vaguely defined notion.<sup>785</sup> Beeman and Pritchard assert that co-optation did increase the legitimacy of many sustainable agriculture techniques, but “the establishment versions of sustainability focused on short-term profitability rather than long-term ecological integrity, land health, or any substantial social reform.”<sup>786</sup>

Warren Belasco’s *Appetite for Change* (1989) analyzed how the clash between the counterculture and the food industry in the 1960s led to a “countercuisine.” The organic paradigm, a major element of this, imagined “a radically decentralized infrastructure consisting of communal farms, cooperative groceries, and hip restaurants.”<sup>787</sup> But growth brought challenges, gentrification, and unrelenting attention from mass marketers. Including himself as one of the “counterculture missionaries” who wanted to apply dietary change to revolutionary ends, Belasco concluded that “we failed to change the world—or even ourselves—very much.”<sup>788</sup>

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<sup>784</sup> Beeman, R. S. and J. A. Pritchard (2001). *A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century*. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas. 72.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>787</sup> Belasco, W. (1989). *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry, 1966-1988*. New York, Pantheon Books. 4.

<sup>788</sup> Ibid. 10.

The organic campaign can be read as a cultural resistance movement that, due to its success, has been subjected to what Max Weber called the “routinization of charisma.” Weber evaluated the procedure whereby a “pure” form of charismatic domination would wane and turn into an “institution.” It was then mechanized, displaced by other structures, or fused with them. Charisma, Weber said, is “exposed to the conditions of everyday life and to the powers dominating it, especially the economic interests.”<sup>789</sup> As the antagonistic forces of charisma and tradition merge with each other, “charisma becomes a part of everyday life.”<sup>790</sup> It became a common assertion that the organic movement had turned into an institutionalized part of everyday life and, along the line, had lost its charisma. As one observer noted: “today you can buy organic food without adjusting your lifestyle.”<sup>791</sup> The prevailing “conventionalization” explanation is that external bodies seek to appropriate and benefit from elements of a counter-cultural philosophy without sincere dedication to the movement’s ethics. Those dismayed by huge organic monocultures contended that the agribusiness phenomenon negated the loftier mission of the grassroots movement. From this perspective, the industry seized and commodified humble organic farming ideals. It also engaged in rhetorical capture, thereby tainting the very word “organic.” These cautionary tales raised concerns about issues that had accompanied growth of the sector and potentially jeopardized the ultimate success of the movement. The normative theme was that the organic movement ought to be rescued from corruption.<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>789</sup> Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley, University of California Press. 1121-22.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid. 1123.

<sup>791</sup> Clarke, A., H. Porter, et al., Eds. (2001). *Living Organic: Easy Steps to an Organic Family Lifestyle*. Naperville, IL, Sourcebooks, Inc. 51.

<sup>792</sup> Lockie, S. and D. Halpin (2005). "The 'Conventionalisation' Thesis Reconsidered: Structural and Ideological Transformation of Australian Organic Agriculture." *Sociologia Ruralis* 45(4): 284-307. 284.

The organic movement was “a victim of its own hard-won success,” according to Daniel Imhoff, and it was “lurching toward mass production, long-distance transport, and even fast food.”<sup>793</sup> In *Agrarian Dreams* (2004), Julie Guthman argued that, in California, organic farming had “replicated what it set out to oppose” and fallen short of addressing social justice issues.<sup>794</sup> Kregg Hetherington discussed how government certification was an important step in making organic farms economically viable, but he thought that bureaucratization also “removed the element of trust between producer and consumer, the ‘bond’ that had always been fundamental to organic farming.”<sup>795</sup> Food journalist Michael Pollan insisted in *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006) that because the organic movement was “conceived as a critique of industrial values,” then industrialization would “cost organic its soul.”<sup>796</sup> *The Organic Food Shopper’s Guide* (2008) warned that “the term *organic* will become meaningless” as more compromises were made and small farmers were left out.<sup>797</sup>

Maine farmer Eliot Coleman asserted that organic farming was analogous to other successful ideas that diverged from “the orthodoxy of the moment.” The orthodoxy, he said, “first tries to denounce it, then tries to minimize its importance, and finally tries to co-opt it.”<sup>798</sup> In 2005, Coleman lamented the state of organics:

“longtime members of the so-called organic movement find themselves at odds with some of their organic-industry

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<sup>793</sup> Imhoff, D. (2003). Farming With the Wild: Enhancing Biodiversity on Farms and Ranches. San Francisco, Sierra Club Books. 138.

<sup>794</sup> Guthman, J. (2004). Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California. Berkeley, University of California Press. 2-3.

<sup>795</sup> Hetherington, K. (2005). Cultivating Utopia: Organic Farmers in a Conventional Landscape. Halifax, Fernwood Publishing. 23.

<sup>796</sup> Pollan, M. (2006). The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals. New York, The Penguin Press. 139.

<sup>797</sup> Cox, J. (2008). The Organic Food Shopper's Guide. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 19.

<sup>798</sup> Coleman, E. (1995). The New Organic Grower: A Master's Manual of Tools and Techniques for the Home and Market Gardener. White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green Publishing Company. 287.

colleagues. A movement that was based on the simple goals of regenerating soil and growing food for local communities has become an industry requiring a vast bureaucracy of organicrats to inspect, police, advise, and manage a comparatively small handful of folks who are actually doing the work of organic farming.”<sup>799</sup>

Organic farming has historically faced harsh skeptics in the “establishment.” J.I. Rodale criticized the USDA’s “apathy” and “ingrained policies” in 1952 and said, “I am afraid if we are going to wait for the Department of Agriculture to recommend the organic method instead of the chemical one, we will have to wait a long, long time.”<sup>800</sup> The following year, a writer for *Organic Gardening* called the organic crusade to eliminate chemical fertilizers a “vital cause” working “against great odds,” because it was a way of life hitting at “our most powerful pressure groups, the chemical industry, medicine and food processors, and their pocketbooks.”<sup>801</sup> Over time, attempts to undermine organic standards came from the Farm Bureau, food corporations, biotech companies, and industry-friendly government agencies. Organic farmers were underserved by the public agricultural research system for decades. As *The New York Times* noted in 2007, cheerleaders for industrialized agriculture “often viewed organics with suspicion, if not outright disdain.”<sup>802</sup> Hostility, however, helped fuel the movement and provided a sense of commonality. As disparagement subsided, some of the camaraderie that underdogs are inclined to share faded. When a social movement becomes broader, inclusive, and more acceptable to the general public, it naturally loses some of its charismatic intensity through diffusion or institutionalization. The movement’s creed is

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<sup>799</sup> Ableman, M. (2005). *Fields of Plenty: A Farmer's Journey in Search of Real Food and the People Who Grow It*. San Francisco, Chronicle Books. 176.

<sup>800</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Editorial: Looking Back Part III, Tradition Throttles Research. *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 10-11. 11.

<sup>801</sup> Allen, W. H. (1953). Crucial Crusade Ibid. **21**: 21.

<sup>802</sup> Martin, A. (2007). How to Add Oomph to 'Organic'. *New York Times*: 6.

diluted or even corrupted. New converts may not be as passionate about social principles as the early coterie. The shared symbols and conflicts that constitute a movement's collective identity evolve.

Many former foot soldiers were circumspect about the transformation of organics from an anti-establishment subculture into a multinational, routine presence. In a 2006 Sierra Club article on how to "eat green," the author wrote, "not too many years ago, natural and organic food were smiled on as the quirks of cranks and hypochondriacs... Today natural foods have become so mainstream that some of us former eccentrics are feeling uncomfortably normal."<sup>803</sup> The *Washington Post* in 2006 stated the customary criticism: "What passes for organic farming today has strayed far from what the shaggy utopians who got the movement going back in the '60s and '70s had in mind...if these pioneers dreamed of revolutionizing the nation's food supply, they surely didn't intend for organic to become a luxury item, a high-end lifestyle choice."<sup>804</sup> Agricultural economist John Ikerd agreed that the trends transforming organic food production into an exploitative process were "based on the principles of industry rather than nature" and directly contradicted the historic ethics of organic farming.<sup>805</sup> *New York Times* food writer Mark Bittman reminded consumers in 2009 that the word organic was "not synonymous with 'safe,' 'healthy,' 'fair' or even necessarily 'good.'"<sup>806</sup> Being organic was not tantamount to being categorically trustworthy.

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<sup>803</sup> Schildgen, B. (2006). "10 Ways to Eat Well: Mr. Green's Food Commandments." *Sierra* Nov/Dec 2006. Retrieved November 13, 2006, from <http://www.sierraclub.org/>.

<sup>804</sup> Maloney, F. (2006). "Is Whole Foods Wholesome? The Dark Secrets of the Organic-Food Movement." Retrieved March 17, 2006, from <http://www.WashingtonPost.com>.

<sup>805</sup> Ikerd, J. (2006). Contradictions of principles in organic farming. *Organic Agriculture: A Global Perspective*. P. Kristiansen, A. Taji and J. Reganold. Ithaca, NY, Comstock Publishing Associates: 221-229. 221.

<sup>806</sup> Bittman, M. (2009). Eating Food That's Better for You, Organic or Not. *The New York Times*.



Despite the discernible infiltration of organics into middle-of-the-road retail channels, only three percent of food purchases in the United States were for organic products in 2008. Less than one percent of U.S. farmland was certified organic.<sup>807</sup> Agricultural research was still disproportionately weighted towards chemicals and biotechnology. According to some critics, the USDA's National Organic Program remained under-funded and seemed to be a low priority.<sup>808</sup> Overall, though, the organic food and farming movement had openly transitioned from marginal to mainstream. More universities had acknowledged the need for research into organic agriculture methods. In 2006, Washington State University became the first to offer an organic farming degree. The USDA even announced in 2009 that it would offer \$50 million in new funding to encourage organic food production; create a division within the agency dedicated to organic agriculture; and plant a six-acre organic "People's Garden" at its headquarters. As organics acquired endorsements in majority culture, its insurgent potential was concurrently undermined.

### **Beyond Organic**

In the early years, people assumed that organic practitioners operated according to a different logic than large agribusiness firms. Offering a definition in 1945, Rodale called it "gardening in a way as close to nature as is practical under present day conditions," which meant rotating crops to uphold balance and using a mixture of animal and plant matter as fertilizer instead of strong chemicals.<sup>809</sup> Organic farmer Philip Arena predicted in 1952 that, since demand for organic produce was "getting greater and

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<sup>807</sup> USDA Economic Research Service (2009). Data Sets: Organic Production, USDA: 1-4.

<sup>808</sup> Imhoff, D. (2007). Food Fight: A Citizen's Guide to a Food and Farm Bill. Healdsburg, Ca, Watershed Media.

<sup>809</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1945). Reader's Correspondence. Organic Gardening. **6**: 25.

greater,” then the organic movement would thrive, as long as all growers continued to “serve the public fairly and justly.”<sup>810</sup> In 1972, *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods* professed that “growing food organically is a subversive activity.”<sup>811</sup> Most organic farmers had strong personal convictions. Yet, it was already clear that others were operating organically in order to supply a profitable market. The authors were optimistic that organic foods could be “a real force in America.”<sup>812</sup> However, as organic food became a “mass market idea,” it would need government assistance to ward off cheating and deception. Organic farmers required “a foolproof certification program to back them up.”<sup>813</sup>

Responding to similar concerns, a union of farmers founded California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) in 1973, the first U.S. organization to offer third-party certification of organic practices. Its goal was to combat fraud and ease consumer confusion. CCOF perceived itself as a grassroots organization and disagreed with the idea of universal standards, because these might smooth the path for agribusiness capital to enter smaller operations.<sup>814</sup> Other private organizations began developing certification criteria in the early 1970’s in order to strengthen legitimate product claims.<sup>815</sup> These certification programs were decentralized, and there was disagreement from state to state about what “organic” meant. Industry enforcement was not strict; there was much

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<sup>810</sup> Arena, P. (1952). Why I Operate an Organic Stand. *Ibid.* **20**: 16-17, 46-47. 46.

<sup>811</sup> Goldman, M. C. and W. H. Hylton, Eds. (1972). *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods*. Emmaus, Rodale Press. 325.

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.* 206.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.* 326.

<sup>814</sup> Guthman, J. (1998). "Regulating Meaning, Appropriating Nature: The Codification of California Organic Agriculture." *Antipode* **30**(2): 135-154. 144.

<sup>815</sup> USDA. (2007). "National Organic Program: Final Rule." Retrieved May 29, 2007, from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html>. 465.

confusion over the definition of organic food; and fraudulent labels were not uncommon.<sup>816</sup>

In 1980, the USDA Study Team on Organic Farming reported that demand for organically grown food was still limited, but the USDA was receiving an increasing number of requests for information on organic farming. At the time, little research or published information was available to assist organic farmers. Some felt neglected by USDA extension agents and land-grant university researchers. Many said that they had “no one to turn to for help on technical problems.”<sup>817</sup> According to the report, lack of certification programs and “poor understanding of certification standards by consumers” were obstacles to marketing organically grown products.<sup>818</sup> The study team recommended that research and educational programs be developed and implemented to address the specific needs and problems of organic farmers.

Studies by Julie Guthman and others demonstrated that agribusiness firms increasingly appropriated organic commodity chains in the 1980s and 1990s. Rent-driven land values helped replicate past practices of over-exploiting land and labor, thereby causing the “paradox of organic farming.” Price competition also undercut the ability to survive economically of those who did wish to apply a deeper form of organic farming.<sup>819</sup> As organic farming grew, there seemed to be accompanying changes in the type and motivations of farmers converting to organic methods. In *Rushall: The Story of an Organic Farm* (1987), veteran British organic farmer Barry Wookey wrote, ““going

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<sup>816</sup> Oelhaf, R. C. (1978). Organic Agriculture: Economic and Ecological Comparisons With Conventional Methods. New York, John Wiley & Sons. 177.

<sup>817</sup> USDA Study Team on Organic Farming (1980). Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming. Washington DC, USDA. xiii.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>819</sup> Guthman, J. (2004). Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California. Berkeley, University of California Press. 312.

organic' is really a philosophy of life as much as a system of farming." Nobody should embark upon organic farming, he believed, without accepting that "it involves a lifetime's commitment."<sup>820</sup> But many organic farmers and food processors were simply making economic decisions and did not subscribe to a social or political philosophy. *Time* reported that although the switch to organic could be difficult and expensive for dairy farmers, consumer demand for organic dairy products grew so rapidly, and the price premium was so enticing, that more farmers—even some who "once dismissed organic farming as a bunch of New Age nonsense"—wanted to join up.<sup>821</sup> Accusations circulated that a number of farmers were economically driven, cashing in solely to pursue revenues.

Consumers and farmers wanted greater assurance, and government involvement in certification established credibility for organics. However, formalized regulations are often simplified and reductionist, not holistic. It was difficult to codify the comprehensive morality of organic farming. Technical lists of acceptable or prohibited inputs were easier to mandate. The Organic Food Production Act of 1990 (OFPA) required the USDA to develop consistent, uniform standards for organically produced agricultural products. According to the Congressional Research Service, the OFPA passed with "widespread support from organic industry groups, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, and other farm and consumer groups."<sup>822</sup> Yet the Demeter Association, which certifies biodynamic products, warned that the USDA's course of action risked "undermining the basic principles upon which organic farming is based."<sup>823</sup> The

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<sup>820</sup> Wookey, B. (1987). *Rushall: The Story of an Organic Farm*. Oxford, Blackwell. 42.

<sup>821</sup> Buechner, M. M. (2003, May 12, 2008). "A New Cash Cow." *Time*. Retrieved Jul. 14.

<sup>822</sup> Rawson, J. M. (2006). Organic Agriculture in the United States: Program and Policy Issues, Congressional Research Service: 1-12. 3.

<sup>823</sup> Demeter Association (1996). "Position Paper on Organic Foods Production Act of 1990." *Biodynamics*(203): 10-11. 10.

protracted process for establishing federal organic standards involved struggles that, in the end, largely favored agribusiness and industry growth. Many purists felt that the OFPA left out philosophical codes they had associated with the organic movement.

The OFPA established the legal basis for the National Organic Program (NOP) and set up the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). The NOSB had fifteen members responsible for developing proposed criteria and advising the Secretary of Agriculture on implementing the NOP. The NOSB developed initial recommendations and submitted them to the USDA from 1992 to 1996. Organic farmer Frederick Kirschenmann, who served on the NOSB, bemoaned that hundreds of citizens' letters demanded guarantees of organic food safety but not soil health or a "balanced ecology."<sup>824</sup> Kirschenmann charged the USDA with facilitating the "hijacking of organic agriculture," because it refused to acknowledge that "elegant ecological systems" with closed nutrient cycles were far "more organic" than input substitution systems that met the minimum requirements.<sup>825</sup> Michael Sligh, a founding member of the NOSB, cautioned that if the process to institutionalize the word organic proved to be "too onerous or false, the soul of organics will be lost." In that case, "those who love organics" would have to either "reclaim the word and concept" or "find new words and concepts."<sup>826</sup> Sligh also felt that "family-size" grass-roots operations were more aligned with organic principles and a "balanced ecological system" than more developed farms.<sup>827</sup>

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<sup>824</sup> Kirschenmann, F. Ibid. "What's News In Organic." 10-12. 11.

<sup>825</sup> Kirschenmann, F. (2000). "Hijacking of Organic Agriculture...and how USDA is facilitating the theft." Ecology and Farming: International IFOAM magazine.

<sup>826</sup> Sligh, M. (1997). Toward Organic Integrity: A Guide to the Development of US Organic Standards. Rural Advancement Foundation International--USA. vii.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid. xxii.

Mark Lipson, writing in 1997 for the Organic Farming Research Foundation, examined the “dual personality” of organic farming. While the “small-o definition of organic” was prescriptive and provided “the agronomic identity of organic farming,” the “capital-O definition of Organic” was “essentially prohibitive, constituting the legal standard for production labeled as ‘Organically Produced.’” Lipson said that the small-o identity was “first fully articulated by J.I. Rodale and others in the 1940s.” This agroecological approach prescribed “high levels of soil organic matter, reliance on ecological processes for pest and disease management, closure of energy and material flows within the production operation, and reduction of external inputs.” Meanwhile, the capital-O identity stemmed from “the appearance of commercial markets for ‘Organically Grown’ foods.” It mainly emphasized forbidden synthetic materials and acceptable substances.<sup>828</sup>

Nutrition professor Joan Dye Gussow pointed out that the OFPA focused narrowly on the process of organic production but not on the product. Gussow tackled the ironic question of “Can an Organic Twinkie™ Be Certified?” and concluded that, for better or worse, it could indeed. While developing national standards, a segment of the organic food industry was “working toward a parallel food supply where a certified organic Twinkie or its equivalent would not be beyond imagining.” Although the rest of the organic community might be appalled by the idea of organic “junk food,” these objections—that organic foods should be “healthy” or “wholesome”—were far more

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<sup>828</sup> Lipson, M. (1997). Searching for the "O-Word": Analyzing the USDA Current Research Information System for Pertinence to Organic Farming. Santa Cruz, Organic Farming Research Foundation. 29-30.

difficult to quantify and legally define.<sup>829</sup> Gussow felt that, originally, the word ‘organic’ carried “an implicit environmental, social, economic, and nutritional wholesomeness.” But, under a strict legal definition outlining growing and processing methods, “the term no longer comes with a conscience.”<sup>830</sup>

In 1998, the USDA solicited public feedback on its first draft of the national organic standards. The proposal would have allowed irradiation, genetically engineered seeds, and use of sewage sludge for crops defined as organic. The USDA received over 275,000 outraged comments, which was the largest number of negative remarks in the agency’s history.<sup>831</sup> Some observers noted that the volume and source of the comments already reflected “the highly organized and coordinated nature of the organic and natural food industry” at that point, because a network of organic retailers, consumer organizations, and trade associations orchestrated the lobbying campaign.<sup>832</sup> Groups involved in rallying complaints included the Organic Trade Association, Mothers for Natural Law, California Certified Organic Farmers, Pure Food Campaign/Save Organic Standards, and Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association. Foes felt that the diluted standards in this “insidious proposal” were “an insult to organic farming.”<sup>833</sup> The massive protest caused the rules to be rewritten so as to exclude the practices that critics considered the most abhorrent.

Despite the modifications, federal organic standards did not establish a socially

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<sup>829</sup> Gussow, J. D. (1997). Can an Organic Twinkie™ Be Certified? For ALL Generations: Making World Agriculture More Sustainable. J. Patrick Madden and Scott G. Chaplowe, World Sustainable Agriculture Association: 143-153. 149.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid. 151.

<sup>831</sup> Stewart, K. (2006). It's a Long Road to a Tomato: Tales of an Organic Farmer Who Quit the Big City for the (Not So) Simple Life. New York, Marlowe & Company. 68.

<sup>832</sup> Forrer, G., A. Avery, et al. (2000). "Marketing & The Organic Food Industry: A history of food fears, market manipulation and misleading consumers." (September). 4.

<sup>833</sup> Moore, S. F. and A. Mendenhall (1998). "USDA's Proposed Rules for Organic Farming Threaten Biodynamic Farmers." Biodynamics(216): 15-18. 15-16.

just food system or an alternative to industrial agriculture. Examining organic and sustainable agriculture movements, David Goodman concluded that these had “failed to articulate coherent strategies to address issues of equity, food security, class, gender, and race in agro-food networks.”<sup>834</sup> Goodman felt that industrial farmers could be distinguished from a smaller “constellation of ‘movement’ farmers committed to a deeper, more ideological notion of sustainability and the agroecological tenets of organic farming.”<sup>835</sup>

After struggling for decades, the organic farming industry became one of the fastest growing segments of U.S. agriculture. The conventionalization of organic food attracted much publicity. The power struggle between grassroots organics and industrial organics was waged both in the legislative arena, where large-scale organics appeared to win, and in the popular media, where grassroots appeared to win. The industry soon seemed bifurcated between big, mass-production operations and small, artisan-style ventures. There was polarization between large organic farms, frequently categorized as superficial; and small organic farms, more often perceived as persistently striving to recapture marginalized values.<sup>836</sup>

Several presenters at the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) conference in 2000 expressed concern over the changing nature of the organic food market. One speaker noted that organic agriculture had grown from “a small and decentralized holistic foods movement to a diversified industry,” and, as more “mainstream” players entered the market, the challenge to organic “pioneers”

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<sup>834</sup> Goodman, D. (2000). "Organic and conventional agriculture: Materializing discourse and agro-ecological managerialism." *Agriculture and Human Values* 17: 215-219.

<sup>835</sup> Ibid. 218.

<sup>836</sup> Lockie, S. and D. Halpin (2005). "The 'Conventionalisation' Thesis Reconsidered: Structural and Ideological Transformation of Australian Organic Agriculture." *Sociologia Ruralis* 45(4): 284-307. 286.



amplified.<sup>837</sup> Another speaker predicted that small family operations would be “increasingly marginalized from mainstream organic markets,” and minor health food stores would be “either absorbed as parts of national retail chains or themselves marginalized as small players in the burgeoning natural foods and organic foods industry.”<sup>838</sup> {Jolly, 2000 #467}

Farmers and others who regarded these pernicious developments as co-optation or “selling out” sparked a backlash against “Big Organic” or “Shallow Organic,” favoring what they called “Small Organic,” “Deep Organic,” “Organic Plus,” or “Beyond Organic.” Some farmers sought an entirely new word, such as “authentic,” to define themselves. Michael Pollan’s 2001 *New York Times* piece helped raise awareness about the “organic-industrial complex,” under which organic food had attracted attention from “the very agribusiness corporations to which the organic movement once presented a radical alternative and an often scalding critique.” Pollan, who has long been vocal on developments in the organic realm, worried that the word “organic” was being emptied of its meaning. He also said that competition between small farmers and powerhouses had opened a gulf between “Big and Little Organic” and “convinced many of the movement’s founders that the time has come to move ‘beyond organic’—to raise the bar on American agriculture yet again.”<sup>839</sup>

Brian Halweil, a researcher at the Worldwatch Institute, predicted the development of two complementary markets for organic products: the “industrial organic

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<sup>837</sup> Doliner, J. D. (2000). Growing our Industry From Within: Meeting an Aggressive Demand Curve With Outside Investment Capital. *IFOAM 2000--The World Grows Organic: Proceedings of the 13th International IFOAM Scientific Conference*. T. Alföldi, W. Lockeretz and U. Niggli. Basel Switzerland, vdf Hochschulverlag AG an der ETH Zurich. 536.

<sup>838</sup> Jolly, D. Ibid. From cottage industry to conglomerates: The transformation of the U.S. organic foods industry. 512.

<sup>839</sup> Pollan, M. (2001). Naturally: How Organic Became a Marketing Niche and a Multibillion-dollar Industry. *New York Times Magazine*.

stream,” servicing major supermarkets and food manufacturers; and the “local and regional organic stream,” which sustained strong connections to consumers.<sup>840</sup> William Lockeretz comparably delineated two coalitions of organic consumers: a larger group that welcomed the convenience of processed organic foods available in mainstream stores, and a smaller clan that adhered to “a more all-inclusive notion of ‘organic,’ one that cannot be fulfilled if the organic food sector models itself on the conventional food industry.”<sup>841</sup>

When the National Organic Program rules were finalized in 2001, the USDA acknowledged that national standards might “change the composition of the organic industry.” Imposition of the rules could discourage some small organic operations from entering the industry and cause others to exit, “resulting in a higher concentration of larger firms.” On the other hand, the USDA suggested that it may be easier for small operations to comply with livestock standards prohibiting confinement production systems and requiring 100 percent organic feed.<sup>842</sup> Many reviewers had requested that the NOP proscribe certification of “factory farms,” which used customs and materials inconsistent with the OFPA. However, “commentators did not provide a clear, enforceable definition of ‘factory farm,’ and the final rule did not contain this exclusion.”<sup>843</sup>

The USDA implemented its National Organic Standards, a uniform set that replaced the prior patchwork of state standards, in October 2002. The final regulations

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<sup>840</sup> Halweil, B. (2001). *Organic Gold Rush*, Worldwatch Institute: 1-12. 11.

<sup>841</sup> Lockeretz, W. (2003). What Are the Key Issues for Consumers? *Organic Agriculture: Sustainability, Markets and Policies*. O. f. E. C.-O. a. Development. Wallingford, Oxford, CABI Publishing: 239-243. 243.

<sup>842</sup> USDA. (2007). "National Organic Program: Final Rule." Retrieved May 29, 2007, from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html>. 514.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.* 93.

governed production, handling, and processing of organically grown agricultural products. Any farm selling over \$5,000 worth of produce was not allowed to refer to its products or growing methods as “organic” unless certified. This rule worked well for larger farmer operations but put some small, diversified organic producers in a quandary. Certification was expensive and required a lengthy paper trail for each crop variety. Also, the transition period to reach full organic status was often stressful for producers and could result in a temporary reduction of crop yields, during which time the farmer had to forgo adequate compensation from premium prices that didn’t arrive until official certification was achieved.<sup>844</sup>

The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) asserted in 2003 that organic agriculture was “no longer limited to those farmers for whom organic production is a holistic life-style, selling through specialist outlets, but has extended into the mainstream of the agri-food chain as an economic opportunity to satisfy a niche market at premium prices.”<sup>845</sup> Although organics remained peripheral in terms of total agricultural production and food sales, organic food systems largely resembled their conventional counterparts.<sup>846</sup> Joan Dye Gussow lamented how organic was becoming what “some of us hoped it would be an alternative to.” She referred to “veterans of *Organic Gardening’s* earlier battles” with skeptics and held that “when we said organic, we meant local, healthful, and just.”<sup>847</sup> In 2005, organic farmer Malcolm Beck discussed how the word “organic” was “beginning to get screwed up.” Though the national organic

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<sup>844</sup> Rawson, J. M. (2006). *Organic Agriculture in the United States: Program and Policy Issues*, Congressional Research Service: 1-12.

<sup>845</sup> Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2003). *Organic Agriculture: Sustainability, Markets and Policies*. Wallingford, Oxford, CABI Publishing. 9.

<sup>846</sup> Lyons, K. (2001). From Sandals to Suits: Green Consumers and the Institutionalization of Organic Agriculture. *Consuming Foods, Sustaining Environments*. S. Lockie and B. Pritchard. Brisbane, Australian Academic Press: 82-93. 82.

<sup>847</sup> Gussow, J. D. (2002). The Real Story of 'O'. *Organic Gardening*. 49.

certification rules were helpful to some farmers seeking a niche, he said, “I don’t think Nature necessarily approves of all the rules.”<sup>848</sup> Eliot Coleman differentiated between “deep-organic farmers,” who mimicked the “elegance of nature’s systems,” and “shallow-organic farmers,” who looked for “quick-fix inputs.”<sup>849</sup> Keith Stewart, proprietor of a farm in Orange County, New York, said that the word *organic* “lost some of its luster soon after it received the federal and corporate embrace.”<sup>850</sup> Due to this tarnish, farmers who chose not to participate in the National Organic Program were opting for “words like *natural*, *biological*, *regenerative*, *eco-local*, and *sustainable* to describe what they do.”<sup>851</sup> Though Stewart himself decided to stay with the federal program, he was increasingly uneasy with it.

The nonprofit organization Naturally Grown created a Certified Naturally Grown™ label as an alternative to high certification fees. It appeared on produce from small-scale farmers who used organic practices but were not officially certified. Naturally Grown’s standards were based on USDA Organic Standards, but its requirements were more affordable. It was a grassroots program that professed support for “small farms at the heart of the organic movement.” Naturally Grown insisted that it did not want to discredit the USDA Organic Program; rather, the label was formulated to impel people to purchase organic food from small, diversified farmers. The organization claimed that “the Organic label was not grown with government control and high licensing fees, it was grown with sweat, idealism, and farmers helping farmers to improve and stick to those

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<sup>848</sup> Beck, M. (2005). *Lessons in Nature*. Austin, TX, Acres USA. 11.

<sup>849</sup> Coleman, E. (2004). "Can Organics Save the Family Farm?" Retrieved August 8, 2009, from <http://www.secretsofthecity.com/magazine/reporting/features/can-organic-save-family-farm>.

<sup>850</sup> Stewart, K. (2006). *It's a Long Road to a Tomato: Tales of an Organic Farmer Who Quit the Big City for the (Not So) Simple Life*. New York, Marlowe & Company. 164

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

ideals.”<sup>852</sup> Because it was not affiliated with the USDA, Naturally Grown could actually maintain more rigorous standards and not succumb to industry pressure to water down regulations.

According to USDA estimates, certified organic cropland more than doubled between 1990 and 2002, then doubled again between 2002 and 2005.<sup>853</sup> Total organic product sales also doubled during that time.<sup>854</sup> But not everyone celebrated this surge. When Wal-Mart announced that it would expand its organic offerings—and sell them at lower-than-average prices—Michael Pollan fretted that this would hasten the globalization of organic food. He said that trying to sell organic food for only ten percent more than conventional meant that Wal-Mart planned to bring industrial efficiency and economies of scale to a food production scheme that was “supposed to mimic the logic of natural systems rather than that of the factory.” This, Pollan thought, would fail to “advance the ideal of sustainability that once upon a time animated the organic movement.”<sup>855</sup>

Jane Goodall’s *Harvest for Hope* (2005) distinguished between deep organic, which meant trying to “grow the most delicious, nutritious food possible while assuring the health of the planet;” and shallow organic, which merely meant meeting certification standards “within the industrial paradigm.”<sup>856</sup> Despite co-optation by corporate interests, Goodall did believe that the organic certification movement was protecting consumers and the environment from the harm caused by industrial agriculture. However, she said

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<sup>852</sup> Naturally Grown. (2006). "Naturally Grown web site." Retrieved November 13, 2006, from <http://www.naturallygrown.org>.

<sup>853</sup> USDA Economic Research Service (2009). Data Sets: Organic Production, USDA: 1-4.

<sup>854</sup> USDA. (2007). "National Organic Program: Final Rule." Retrieved May 29, 2007, from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html>. 467-468.

<sup>855</sup> Pollan, M. (2006). Mass Natural. *The New York Times*.

<sup>856</sup> Goodall, J. (2005). *Harvest for Hope: A Guide to Mindful Eating*. New York, Warner Books. 166-67.

that farmers' markets, CSAs, and cooperatives were "the purest expression of the original vision of the organic movement."<sup>857</sup> John Ikerd drew an analogy between "deep organic" and "deep ecology." Deep organic, he said, espoused the biological and spiritual roots of organic farming. It required a philosophical commitment to farming as a "self-renewing, regenerative process, based on nature's principles of production." Ikerd contrasted this to the standardization, specialization, and consolidation that were driving the newer extraction-oriented organic approach.<sup>858</sup> Leslie Duram, in *Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works* (2005), also saw a conflict "between the market-driven success of organic products and the grassroots ethical concerns of organic farming."<sup>859</sup> Cindy Burke, in *To Buy Or Not To Buy Organic* (2007), affirmed that "many consumers are beginning to understand that some foods are *more organic* than others" and were seeking alternatives to big-business organics.<sup>860</sup>

Boosters of small organic farms repeatedly insist on their intrinsic superiority to gargantuan, industrial outfits. The bifurcation between "small-scale artisanal" and "large-scale industrial" is based on normative assumptions that organic is always good and conventional is always bad. Evoking this populist sentiment, organic farmer Raoul Adamchak described the goal of conventional farming ("high yields and inexpensive food") in contrast to the goal of organic farming ("health of the soil, the crop, the farmer,

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<sup>857</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>858</sup> Ikerd, J. (2006). Contradictions of principles in organic farming. Organic Agriculture: A Global Perspective. P. Kristiansen, A. Taji and J. Reganold. Ithaca, NY, Comstock Publishing Associates: 221-229. 221.

<sup>859</sup> Duram, L. A. (2005). Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press. 32.

<sup>860</sup> Burke, C. (2007). To Buy or Not to Buy Organic: What You Need to Know to Choose the Healthiest, Safest, Most Earth-Friendly Food. New York, Marlowe & Company. 66.

the environment, and the consumer”).<sup>861</sup> This ironclad distinction can be problematic, though, particularly since farms that sparingly use non-organic inputs may still be environmentally friendly, while a “corporate industrialized organic farm” may not be.<sup>862</sup>

The boundaries between conventional and organic farming are constantly in flux, and as producers convert from one method to another, they do not necessarily experience an upheaval in their personal or political stance. Within the organic movement, there is a continuum of approaches. Just as organic farming operations vary in size, some organic practitioners are rigid and purist, while others are more flexible.<sup>863</sup> A 1999 New Zealand study found that organic farmers were motivated by diverse reasons, including an organic philosophy, apprehension about chemicals in food, personal health, premiums, and concern for the soil.<sup>864</sup> A 2004 study of Australian organic farmers demonstrated no significant differences in the attitudes of large broadacre farmers as opposed to small horticultural farmers with respect to motivations for organic farming. The study authors further argued that growth in the number of organic farms had not de-radicalized the organic industry, since the values and beliefs propelling organic farmers were shared equally by longstanding and newer members of the business.<sup>865</sup> The definition and content of organic agriculture have always been contested terrain. Despite the binary of industrial-conventional-artificial agriculture that is set against sustainable-alternative-

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<sup>861</sup> Ronald, P. C. and R. W. Adamchak (2008). Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food. New York, Oxford University Press. 14.

<sup>862</sup> Conner, D. S. (2002). The Organic Label and Sustainable Agriculture: Consumer Preferences and Values. Ithaca NY, Cornell University. **Doctor of Philosophy**: 83. 54.

<sup>863</sup> USDA Study Team on Organic Farming (1980). Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming. Washington DC, USDA. xii.

<sup>864</sup> Fairweather, J. R. (1999). "Understanding how farmers choose between organic and conventional production: Results from New Zealand and policy implications." Agriculture and Human Values **16**: 51-63. 59.

<sup>865</sup> Lockie, S. and D. Halpin (2005). "The 'Conventionalisation' Thesis Reconsidered: Structural and Ideological Transformation of Australian Organic Agriculture." Sociologia Ruralis **45**(4): 284-307. 296-304.

natural agriculture in popular discourse, most farms fall somewhere in between these two ends of the spectrum.

### **Counterculture**

Many observers employ allusions to organic food as a former “hippie fad” when they evaluate arresting changes in the movement. Contrary to repeated media dictums, organic food did not spring from the mutinous impulses of free-spirit activists who feasted on brown rice and granola while dressed in psychedelic garb. Organic farming was a groundswell that had sober roots in the 1940s, when the connection between soil, health, and civilization were primary concerns for agricultural pioneers. Yet, organic food did resonate with the counterculture, and the movement flourished in the 1960s and 70s milieu. Doug Rossinow noted that “a counterculture was, by definition, both marginal and oppositional,” and its marginality in the 1960s “indicated radical potential and cultural authenticity.”<sup>866</sup> The cooperative movement, which included food co-ops, gave shape to anarchist sentiments. The goal was to run these stores “as democratically as possible, to eschew the profit motive, and to obtain and provide to the local hip population ‘natural’ food.”<sup>867</sup>

The *Whole Earth Catalog*, a canonical text for hippies and back-to-the-landers, espoused organic food, which was in keeping with the publication’s social values and ecological worldview. First published in 1968, the *Catalog* featured products and information related to gardening, geodesic domes, voluntary simplicity, “appropriate

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<sup>866</sup> Rossinow, D. (1998). The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America. New York, Columbia University Press. 251.

<sup>867</sup> Ibid. 282.



technology,” personal computers, and yoga.<sup>868</sup> Steward Brand, its creator, combined “the liberal social values and technological enthusiasm of the counterculture with the emerging ecological worldview” in a holistic manual for life.<sup>869</sup> The *Whole Earth Catalog* applauded *Organic Gardening* as one of the “anti-establishment heroes” and the “most subversive” publication in America. The *Catalog* recommended that “every young radical” should have a copy of *Walden*, *Organic Gardening*, and the *Cultivator’s Handbook of Marijuana*.<sup>870</sup> Related stereotypes have tagged along with organics. One observer of the young adults who embraced organic foods during the 1960s said that “cheap, simple, and natural became their credo...and beans, brown rice, and granola became their manna.”<sup>871</sup> Malcolm Beck, who began farming organically in 1957, recalled that he had trouble when he first tried to beguile a large independent grocery store owner with his produce, because “organic growing and pot-smoking hippies were thought to be on about the same level.”<sup>872</sup>

Jeff Cox started his first organic garden in 1969 and worked at *Organic Gardening* during the 1970s. In the hallways of the USDA, Cox had to conceal his affiliation with the magazine “just to get an interview with a plant scientist.”<sup>873</sup> He remembered that Rodale Press would take clients and guests to a lunchroom called Fitness House that served “the most unpleasant food imaginable: unsalted buckwheat groats, sweet potatoes without butter, potatoes boiled in milk, musty-tasting

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<sup>868</sup> Time. (1974, May 12, 2008). "Windmill Power." *Time* Retrieved Dec. 2, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>869</sup> Kirk, A. G. (2007). *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism*. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas. 1.

<sup>870</sup> Tucker, D. M. (1993). *Kitchen Gardening in America: A History*. Ames, Iowa State University Press. 152.

<sup>871</sup> Vileisis, A. (2008). *Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need to Get It Back*. Washington, Island Press. 209.

<sup>872</sup> Beck, M. (2005). *Lessons in Nature*. Austin, TX, Acres USA. 19.

<sup>873</sup> Cox, J. (2008). *The Organic Food Shopper's Guide*. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 23.

sprouts...Granola and groats became synonymous with organic food in many places in the 1970s. I ate many an unpleasurable meal at back-to-the-land communes from Maine to California.”<sup>874</sup> Even with various unpalatable options, sales of organic food boomed in the early 1970s, reaching new retail outlets. A vegetarian restaurant serving organic cuisine 24 hours a day, called H.E.L.P. Unlimited, opened in Los Angeles in 1971. The owner said it was meant to aid those who had eating or nutritional problems, so he also offered yoga, metaphysics, cooking classes, books, and health food for sale in the same spot.<sup>875</sup> Discussing health food stores of the era, Elaine Lipson said those early stores were “filled with character, community, and passion” and “helped seed a movement that has grown beyond the expectations of anyone you’d have asked back then.”<sup>876</sup> Natural food stores increased rapidly, and one economic analyst noted that they were “run by counterculture people who take lower incomes than their skill could demand elsewhere, in order to bring what they consider to be high-quality food to the people they wish to serve.”<sup>877</sup> The *Organic Gardening Guide to Organic Living* (1970) described natural food stores in the San Francisco Bay Area and mentioned that “the young mother in bell-bottom denims or the guy with hair down his back is a standard fixture in every store.”<sup>878</sup> At the Oakland Food Mill, a purveyor of organic food, the *Guide* observed that there were “families on the Food Stamp plan...young mothers with babies strapped to their

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<sup>874</sup> Cox, J. (2006). *The Organic Cook's Bible: How to Select and Cook the Best Ingredients on the Market*. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 21.

<sup>875</sup> Los Angeles Times (1971). 24 Hours of Organic Food. *Los Angeles Times*: 16.

<sup>876</sup> Lipson, E. M. (2001). *The Organic Foods Sourcebook*. Chicago, Contemporary Books. 76.

<sup>877</sup> Oelhaf, R. C. (1978). *Organic Agriculture: Economic and Ecological Comparisons With Conventional Methods*. New York, John Wiley & Sons. 132.

<sup>878</sup> Goldstein, J., Ed. (1970). *The Organic Gardening Guide to Organic Living: San Francisco Bay Area Edition*. Emmaus, PA, Rodale Press. 7.

backs...elderly people...and, of course, there are many young people—in flamboyant hats and colorful long dresses—often buying foods in bulk to use in their communes.”<sup>879</sup>

The *Shopper’s Guide to Natural Foods* (1987) claimed that the natural foods fad sprang up in the late 1960s, when “dietary reformers such as Robert Rodale, Adelle Davis, and macrobiotic educator Michio Kushi preached the benefits of returning to a diet centered around fresh, whole foods.” At the time, the “health food store” was the principal alternative provisions outlet, but it sold little actual food, focusing mainly on vitamins and nutritional supplements. Then “natural foods stores” opened, providing “whole, unadulterated, staple foods—organically produced if possible”—like “fresh produce, bulk grains, beans, nuts, cereals, and newly imported foods such as miso and tofu from Japan.”<sup>880</sup> Conjectures about “hippie” organic devotees linger but have also been amended. When Karl Schwenke published *Successful Small-Scale Farming: An Organic Approach* in 1979, he said, “an ‘organic’ farmer was synonymous with a ‘lonely hippie troublemaker’.” But in his preface to the 1991 reprint edition, Schwenke noted with irony that, by then, the organic farmer was “classed somewhere between a high-priced elitist and an opportunist liar.”<sup>881</sup>

Prince Charles of Wales, a high-profile supporter of organic farming, has served as the royal patron of both the Soil Association and Garden Organic in the United Kingdom. The Prince purchased the Highgrove house and gardens in the early 1980s. His Duchy Home Farm was comprised of 1,100 acres in Gloucestershire. He decided to turn the farm over to organic methods, because, he said, “I felt ‘in my bones’ that if you abuse

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<sup>879</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>880</sup> East West Journal (1987). *Shopper’s Guide to Natural Foods*. Garden City Park, NY, Avery Publishing Group. 2.

<sup>881</sup> Schwenke, K. (1991). *Successful Small-Scale Farming: An Organic Approach*. Pownal, VT, Storey Publishing. ix.

Nature unnecessarily and fail to maintain a balance, then She will probably abuse you in return.”<sup>882</sup> This was a controversial decision, since, as the Prince’s gardener, Charles Clover, noted, “the popular idea of organic agriculture at the time was of a mildly wacky ‘alternative’ activity practiced on Herefordshire communes by ageing hippies in bobble hats, with no hope of changing or influencing the mainstream technological agriculture that was going on around them.”<sup>883</sup> The Prince said the term “organic farming” conjured up “images of agricultural hocus-pocus; of some weird pseudo-scientific, ‘alternative’ farming system carried on by well-meaning, but essentially deeply eccentric, doom-mongers hankering after a pre-industrial, Arcadian past.”<sup>884</sup> He first had trouble finding experts in organic management systems. However, he unearthed useful information in books by Sir Albert Howard. Soon, organic gardening was utilized at Highgrove and the Prince’s other two gardens—Clarence House in London and Birkhall in Scotland. The entire Home Farm gained full organic status by 1996. His own line of organic food and beauty products, Duchy Originals, launched in 1992 with traditional oaten biscuits.<sup>885</sup> The brand soon included 250 items, became one of the UK’s leading organic food companies, and began exporting products to the United States. By 2002, Duchy Originals had reached \$99 million in sales and contributed all profits to charities. Wheat, oats, and other ingredients were harvested from the Home Farm.<sup>886</sup> Though all products were made in the UK, several international sources supplied premium ingredients, so there was some

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<sup>882</sup> HRH The Prince of Wales and Stephanie Donaldson (2007). The Elements of Organic Gardening: Highgrove, Clarence House, Birkhall, Kales Press. 6.

<sup>883</sup> Clover, C. and Prince of Wales (1993). Highgrove: An Experiment in Organic Gardening and Farming. New York, Simon & Schuster. 254.

<sup>884</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>885</sup> Duchy Originals. (2006). Retrieved May 18, 2006, from <http://www.duchyoriginals.com/>.

<sup>886</sup> Moran, M. (2007). "A Sustainable World." Gourmet Retailer 28(3): 84.

criticism of the company for its carbon footprint. Yet, Duchy Originals insisted that “the support of organic and sustainability is still a key feature of our brand.”<sup>887</sup>

In *The Organic Garden Book* (1993), Geoff Hamilton described two camps: “those who think that organic methods of cultivation are the sole remaining way to save the planet and, at the other extreme, those who think that organic gardening is the refuge of bearded loonies in kaftans and sandals who live in grubby communes on brown rice and sunflower seeds.”<sup>888</sup> Though he placed himself in neither faction, Hamilton admitted that “organic gardening does have more than its fair share of eccentrics.”<sup>889</sup> Ken Roseboro, in *The Organic Food Handbook* (2006), discussed how organics were once derided as a counterculture fad that “created images of granola-crunching hippies or wilted and bruised produce sold in natural food stores.”<sup>890</sup> Those days were gone, though, and people were choosing organic food for “a simple reason: common sense.”<sup>891</sup> At the time, an evocative advertisement for Kashi Organic Promise cereal illuminated this symbolic trajectory. Proclaiming the newfound panache of organics, it read: “Stop letting the macramé sandal crowd hog all the good food.” Kashi announced to stylish consumers that the organic label was not something reserved for the “free love,” “tie-dye crowd.” It was no longer the purview of bohemian communes.<sup>892</sup>

## **Selling The Farm**

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<sup>887</sup> Duchy Originals. (2006). Retrieved May 18, 2006, from <http://www.duchyoriginals.com/>.

<sup>888</sup> Hamilton, G. (1993). *The Organic Garden Book*. New York, DK Publishing. 6.

<sup>889</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>890</sup> Roseboro, K. (2006). *The Organic Food Handbook: A Consumer’s Guide to Buying and Eating Organic Food*. Laguna Beach, CA, Basic Health Publications. 5.

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.* 1.

<sup>892</sup> In 2000, Kashi, an independent natural foods company founded in 1984, became a subsidiary of the Kellogg Company, a worldwide leading producer of cereal and convenience foods, further contributing to the mainstream positioning of Kashi products.

There was a time when simple advertisements for organic food ran only in alternative publications. A small notice in the July 1944 *Organic Gardening* issue asked readers who desired to purchase sunflower seeds grown organically to advise Rodale at once, so he could arrange such transactions. A text ad in the Summer 1954 issue of *Bio-Dynamics* offered four pounds of organic oatmeal for \$1 plus postage. *Mothering* magazine, initially a home-based periodical, featured a classified notice in the back of a 1980 issue that quietly announced “The 6<sup>th</sup> annual Natural Organic Farmers Association Conference and Celebration of Life,” to be held that year in New Hampshire. Another hand-drawn *Mothering* advertisement from 1983 offered a cookbook entitled “Organic Cooking for (not-so-organic) Mothers.” These low-budget promotions indicated an organic movement that was still on the fringes, unfamiliar to the general public.

As the audience for organic food and the way it was produced changed, the iconography of the movement evolved as well. Organic food is still socially embedded and carries cultural messages. Promotional campaigns for organic food utilize culturally resonant words and symbols, attempting to capitalize on positive associations. On actual farms in the U.S., the sovereign yeoman with a few cows in the barn has capitulated to the monolithic enterprise of agribusiness and feedlots. Doves of small farms disappear each year. With the increased presence of large corporations in the organic landscape, the lines between organic and industrial agriculture blurred. Yet, a key strategy in contemporary organic food advertising is the marketing of nostalgia. Traditional, sentimental images are prevalent. The image of the self-sufficient family farm is a powerful myth of organic food advertising. Advertising is a way to transfer cultural meanings onto consumer goods, so it plays a role in shaping values and also reflects

them. Advertisements are part of the “fabric of meanings that constitutes culture” and reveal the significance that commodities hold for people.<sup>893</sup>

In *The System of Objects* (1968), Jean Baudrillard discussed the importance of analyzing promotional messages, comprised of both image and discourse. Advertising, he said, was a commentary on the object but also was itself “an object to be consumed.”<sup>894</sup> Advertising told people what it was that they consumed *through* objects. The power of objects as cultural signs derives from the implicit ideology that accompanies them. Advertisements for the organic industry’s products are a forceful medium for transmitting this language of goods. Advertisements sell products as well as meaning. They affect consumer behavior and also reflect cultural perceptions of organic food. In Louis Althusser’s notion of “interpellation,” ideology acts in such a way that it hails or arrests individuals and transforms them into subjects.<sup>895</sup> When advertisements function by interpellation, they hail their audience by aggressively broadcasting a discursive message. An advertisement may at times appear to be a one-sided imposition upon the psyche of the helpless viewer. However, Baudrillard thought that consumers were not immune to advertising but, rather, exercised discretion towards the advertising message.<sup>896</sup>

As Stuart Hall contends, all cultural forms are “composed of antagonistic and unstable elements.” Popular culture is a terrain of ideological exchange, or “continuing tension,” between various groups.<sup>897</sup> Therefore, we can view advertisements as a site of

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<sup>893</sup> Ohmann, R. (1996). *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century*. New York, Verso. 212.

<sup>894</sup> Baudrillard, J. (1996). *The System of Objects*. New York, Verso. 164.

<sup>895</sup> Althusser, L. (2001). Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*. New York, Monthly Review Press: 85-126.

<sup>896</sup> Baudrillard, J. (1996). *The System of Objects*. New York, Verso. 165.

<sup>897</sup> Hall, S. (1981). Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'. *People's History and Socialist Theory*. R. Samuel, Routledge & Kegan Paul: 227-240. 235.

negotiation, leading to what Antonio Gramsci called a “compromise equilibrium.”<sup>898</sup>

Advertisements are not a wholly oppressive force; they are part of a dialectical social process. They function both as interpellations, in the Althusserian sense, and as a site of ideological exchange, in the Gramscian sense. Advertisements both affect *and* respond to the complexity of the organic movement. Those who produce advertisements and those who interpret them both create cultural meaning. Individuals are recipients of messages but are also active in constructing subtexts. Consumers do participate in maintaining a symbolic universe. The symbols, however, must “ring true” to be effective. Alongside “false appeals” there are also “elements of recognition and identification.”<sup>899</sup> The iconography of organic advertising expresses and perpetuates culturally resonant ideals, so analysis of recurring themes provides cultural insights.

Advertisements for organic products are a powerful medium for transmitting the language of goods. Parallels with family farms and other wholesome values are woven into organic food advertisements. The industry attempts to correlate its merchandise with symbolic beliefs about health, purity, harmony with the earth, and the “balance of nature.” Organic advertisements rely on the assumption that people will purchase the product as well as its moral integrity, making an investment in the “good life.” Buying organic is expected to make one feel virtuous. Organic food advertisements depend on this aura of righteous wholesomeness. Taglines revealing ethical overtones have included “Food to Live By” for Earthbound Farm organic produce; “Goodness from the Ground

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<sup>898</sup> Gramsci, A. (1971). Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. New York, International Publishers. 161.

<sup>899</sup> Hall, S. (1981). Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'. People's History and Socialist Theory. R. Samuel, Routledge & Kegan Paul: 227-240. 233.



Up” for Seeds of Change frozen organic entrees; and “Making a World of Difference” for Horizon Organic milk.

In the agrarian spirit, an advertisement for Garden of Eatin’ organic tortilla chips depicts a solitary farmer harvesting his corn. Presumably the viewer is supposed to believe that the ingredients for all twenty varieties of chips are drawn from the “organic corn heritage” of diminutive farms and hardworking farmers, not a corporate entity. Garden of Eatin’ is a member of the influential Hain Celestial Group, and H.J. Heinz owns twenty percent of Hain. These obscure ownership configurations may lead consumers to believe they are purchasing organic food from small grass-roots companies. Similarly, a Santa Cruz Organic juice advertisement shows a woman in overalls and a sun hat, drinking a glass of juice behind teeming baskets of lemons and apricots. The text states: “our juices taste the way nature intended—wholesome and delicious as if you picked the fruit from the orchard and juiced it yourself.” Santa Cruz Organic, founded in the 1970s, is the world’s most successful organic juice brand. It buys fruit from hundreds of orchards throughout California and Arizona and is owned by Smucker Quality Beverages. A white middle-class farm girl did not leisurely pick all that fruit and juice it for fun one summer afternoon, though organic consumers might prefer to make this presumption. The USDA seal of organic approval does not guarantee compassionate treatment of migrant fruit-pickers, and organic agribusinesses have not ameliorated the arduous working conditions of agricultural laborers.

An advertisement for Nature’s Farm Organic Chicken is another illustration of the family farm myth. With a photo of rolling fields and a single wooden farmhouse, the accompanying text claims: “Mother Nature has been growing chickens a lot longer than

we have. So we decided to follow her example and go back to the simpler, more natural way of doing things.” The implication is that Nature’s Farm raises organic chickens the old-fashioned way, on a traditional New England-style farm. The advertisement also decrees: “Now it’s easy to serve your family farm-fresh chicken raised *the way nature intended*.” Nature’s Farm is owned by Tyson Foods, the world’s largest poultry conglomerate. These “natural” birds are still processed, packaged, and shipped all over the United States, just like conventional chickens, and are hardly as “farm-fresh” as the advertisement hopes to convey. Comparable marketing techniques for other organic products suggest the atmosphere of independent farmers, even as giant organic corporations displace those small-scale farms.

### **Big Organics**

In 1991, only seven percent of organic products were sold in conventional supermarkets, while 68 percent were sold in health and natural food stores.<sup>900</sup> In *Profitable Organic Farming* (1995), Jon Newton acknowledged that most organic farmers wanted to sell their products in their local towns and were “apprehensive about the power and ruthlessness of the supermarket buyers.” However, supermarkets were the main sources for food purchases, so organic food would have to be sold there to reach a larger portion of the population and achieve a significant percentage of the food market.<sup>901</sup> By 2000, more organic food was purchased in conventional supermarkets than in any other venue. Organic food was the fastest-growing segment of food sales in North America. United Natural Foods (UNF) was the largest distributor of organic food in the

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<sup>900</sup> Dimitri, C. and C. Greene (2002). Recent Growth Patterns in the U.S. Organic Foods Market. E. R. S. USDA. Washington DC, USDA: 1-39. 2.

<sup>901</sup> Newton, J. (2004). *Profitable Organic Farming*. Oxford, UK, Blackwell Science. 142-43.

U.S., and Whole Foods Market was the largest single buyer.<sup>902</sup> Although organic food accounted for only one percent of the total food industry, its rapid progression attracted attention from mainstream food producers and retailers.<sup>903</sup> Industrial food giants recognized the budding profitability of the organic food market and soon manufactured the majority of organic products in the retail market. Buyouts and acquisitions of small, pioneering organic companies by hefty corporations occurred regularly. Samuel Fromartz's *Organic, Inc* (2006) discussed the growth of organic food businesses and said "the organic food industry is littered with founders who built companies, then cashed out to mainstream food giants."<sup>904</sup> Daniel Imhoff noted that Wall Street mergers and consolidations were "undermining the community orientation of the movement's origins."<sup>905</sup>

Some high-profile businesses that capitalized on organic food—like Horizon Organic and Cascadian Farm—have been the target of hostile conventionalization critiques. Others—like Stonyfield Farm and Organic Valley—have been more successful at convincing the public that "Big Organic" can still be beautiful. Some fall in the middle of positive and negative perceptions. One example is the Hain Pure Food Company, which health-food advocate Dr. Harold Hain founded in 1926 to market his natural carrot and celery juices. He expanded the offerings, and, by 1970, his successors were selling \$5 million worth of safflower products. The company persistently sought to provide

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<sup>902</sup> Sligh, M. and C. Christman (2003). *Who Owns Organic? The Global Status, Prospects and Challenges of a Changing Organic Market*. Pittsboro, NC, Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI-USA). 24.

<sup>903</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>904</sup> Fromartz, S. (2006). *Organic, Inc.: Natural Foods and How They Grew*. Orlando, Harcourt, Inc. 185.

<sup>905</sup> Imhoff, D. (2003). *Farming With the Wild: Enhancing Biodiversity on Farms and Ranches*. San Francisco, Sierra Club Books. 138.

“wholesome and delicious products in their natural pure form.”<sup>906</sup> Hain Pure Foods became the original core of The Hain Celestial Group, which turned into the category leader of the natural-foods business in North America and Europe by buying up dozens of smaller companies. By 2009, The Hain Celestial Group owned dozens of widely recognized natural, organic, and specialty brands. These included Arrowhead Mills (grains, nut butters), Celestial Seasonings (tea), Walnut Acres Organic (juices, sauces, soups), Garden of Eatin’ (chips), Health Valley (soups, cereals, baked products), Spectrum Naturals (oils), Imagine Foods (soups), Soy Dream (soy milk), Rice Dream (rice milk), DeBoles (pasta), MaraNatha (nut butters), SunSpire (chocolates), Avalon Organics (personal care), and JÄSÖN (body care). Hain Celestial is the largest single supplier of organic products in the country. It extended its distribution channels through partnerships, such as when McDonald’s offered a McVeggie Burger that was co-branded with Yves Veggie Cuisine; Delta Airlines began serving Earth’s Best Organic Applesauce; and JetBlue Airways chose Terra Blues as its official chip. In 1998, Hain commenced an alliance with H.J. Heinz, which now owns approximately 20 percent of the company. In 2004, CEO Irwin Simon explained that the Hain mission still entailed “changing the way the world eats” and had also come to include providing “a healthy way of life.” Its business strategy, meanwhile, was to “enhance mainstream products for mass appeal” and meet consumer desire.<sup>907</sup> In 2007, Simon noted that “the natural and organic sector has moved into mainstream acceptance,” helping sales of Hain’s “better for you” products to soar. Consumers’ heightened appreciation for sustainability,

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<sup>906</sup> Hain Pure Foods. (2008). "Hain Pure Foods web site." Retrieved August 7, 2008, from <http://www.hainpurefoods.com/index.php>.

<sup>907</sup> The Hain Celestial Group (2005). 2004 Annual Report. Melville, NY, The Hain Celestial Group: 1-58. 2.

environmental responsibility, functional foods, and healthful solutions boded well for the company.<sup>908</sup> The Hain Celestial Group has touted that it preserved integrity and made a positive impact on people, while reaping profits in the organic kingdom.

Frank Ford, who founded Arrowhead Mills in 1960 to create a larger market for organically grown wheat, shares a similar story. Arrowhead Mills was part of what Ford said was “a counter-movement, the organic revolution,” a response to the bombardment of synthetic fertilizers and chemical pesticides that were polluting the soil.<sup>909</sup> As early as the 1970s, Ford recognized the need for a distribution system that would bring truckloads of his stock to major cities. He recalled that “there were other visionaries at this time who saw this same need, and together, we began to ‘plot’ the natural food revolution.”

Arrowhead Mills succeeded, and its organic products became available throughout the nation. The Hain Celestial Group purchased Arrowhead Mills in 1999. It now sells organic whole-grain flours, rice, beans, cereals, and nut butters, along with mixes for organic chocolate cake, stuffing, oatmeal raisin cookies, pizza crust, and more—all flaunted as “Deliciously Wholesome Choices.” Despite its accelerated growth, Arrowhead Mills maintains that it “upholds the principles it was founded on” and markets “products that are true to our heritage and organic roots.” Its slogan is “From America’s Heartland to Your Table.”<sup>910</sup> After retiring, Frank Ford also said he continued to eat organic foods “almost exclusively.”<sup>911</sup>

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<sup>908</sup> Ibid. 4-5.

<sup>909</sup> Ford, F. (1998). *My Life in Organics. Taste Life! The Organic Choice*. D. Richard and D. Byers. Bloomington, IL, Vital Health Publishing. 70.

<sup>910</sup> Arrowhead Mills. (2008). "Arrowhead Mills web site." Retrieved August 7, 2008, from <http://www.arrowheadmills.com/>.

<sup>911</sup> Ford, F. (1998). *My Life in Organics. Taste Life! The Organic Choice*. D. Richard and D. Byers. Bloomington, IL, Vital Health Publishing. 72.

Celestial Seasonings, a lucrative tea company, tells a corresponding narrative about how it safeguarded core values of “beauty and truth” despite intensive growth since its inception in 1969. Founder Morris Siegel recalled harvesting herbs by hand in the Rocky Mountains, drying them on screen doors, and using an old Singer sewing machine to create the muslin bags of tea he sold to local health food stores.<sup>912</sup> Celestial Seasonings became known in the 1970s for funky, artistic designs and inspirational sayings on its distinctive packages. Celestial Seasonings consumers can admire the peaceful pagoda, verdant mountains, and icy waterfall on the “Goji Berry Pomegranate Green Tea” box, or the Buddha curled up in purple flower petals and dancers formed from clouds on the “Sweet Coconut Thai Chai” box. Packaging is an aspect of product promotion that affects consumer choice. In his *Handbook of Consumer Motivations* (1964), Ernest Dichter pointed out that the packaging was part of a product’s “personality” and served to arouse emotions.<sup>913</sup> The cheerful overtones of Siegel’s innovative, colorful packaging are meant to elicit an upbeat mood in buyers who are making their tea selection.

Kraft, Inc. purchased Celestial Seasonings in 1984 and then sold it to Lipton, Inc. Though his endeavor went from cottage industry to national success, Siegel claimed that “even though we haven’t used screen doors and muslin bags for many years, we still make your teas with the same love and fervor.”<sup>914</sup> In 2000, the company merged with the Hain Food Group, generating the Hain Celestial Group. Celestial Seasonings has added organic coffee, spice blends, cider, and instant drink mixes to the line of green, black, red, white, herbal, wellness, dessert, and organic teas. Whimsical boxes of “Chocolate

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<sup>912</sup> Siegel, J. and M. Siegel (1996). *Celestial Seasonings Cookbook: Cooking with Tea*. New York, Park Lane Press. 11.

<sup>913</sup> Dichter, E. (1964). *Handbook of Consumer Motivations*. New York, McGraw Hill. 321.

<sup>914</sup> Siegel, J. and M. Siegel (1996). *Celestial Seasonings Cookbook: Cooking with Tea*. New York, Park Lane Press. 13.

Raspberry Bliss,” “Mango Darjeeling Organic,” and a seasonal “Sugar Cookie Sleigh Ride” are among more than 100 flavors. Celestial Seasonings now is the largest specialty tea manufacturer in the U.S. and has spread into international markets. The production plant in Boulder, Colorado—with a gallery of original artwork, free samples, Celestial Café, and gift shop—is open to visitors. Celestial Seasonings plugs that it is still “a company with a conscience,” quenching the thirst of consumers looking for unique teas.<sup>915</sup>

Stonyfield Farm also has a tale of humble beginnings. It started out as an organic dairy farm with seven cows in 1983 but grew into the world’s largest organic yogurt maker, with \$300 million in annual sales. Nutrition professor Marion Nestle has said, “Stonyfield may be organic, but it is Big Yogurt.”<sup>916</sup> Still, Gary Hirshberg has described himself as an “eco-entrepreneur,” the “CE-Yo” of a company that aims to be both sustainable and profitable. Hirshberg recalled that, in the 1970s, many dismissed organic food as a “fringy fad.” While he was committed to both the food and politics of the organic movement, he also believed that organics would have to accommodate supermarkets in order to “gain traction and grow beyond our original small enclave of activists.” This belief caused friction with friends “who seemed more interested in fighting culture wars than seizing new commercial opportunities.”<sup>917</sup> The key challenge to winning acceptance was taste, and Hirshberg decided that his organic yogurt would have to be “delectable” to gain customers. Fortunately, he said, “what began as a philosophical fondness for dishes like brown rice and seaweed eventually matured into a

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<sup>915</sup> Celestial Seasonings. (2008). "Celestial Seasonings web site." Retrieved August 7, 2008, from <http://www.celestialseasonings.com/index.html>.

<sup>916</sup> Nestle, M. (2006). *What To Eat*. New York, North Point Press. 106.

<sup>917</sup> Hirshberg, G. (2008). *Stirring It Up: How to Make Money and Save the World*. New York, Hyperion. 113-114.

tasty cuisine that attracted talented chefs.”<sup>918</sup> Hirshberg found that paying extra for top-quality organic ingredients was worthwhile, because his customers gladly shelled out more for a superior product. Stonyfield’s slogan became “You just can’t fake this stuff.” Hirshberg sold Stonyfield Farm to the multinational consumer-products giant Groupe Danone corporation, which also owned Dannon Yogurt and Evian Waters, in 2003 for \$125 million, asserting that the deal was a “win-win” situation for organic producers and consumers. Hirshberg resolved that Stonyfield Farm was still “here to change the world.”<sup>919</sup>

Stonyfield Farm first launched a national advertising campaign in 2003 for its organic yogurt. Though there was plenty of sugar in the yogurts, many of the spots focused on health. Another Stonyfield strategy was to cultivate rustic, pastoral images of itself. As Baudrillard noted, brands are used in the language of consumption to designate products but also to mobilize affective connotations.<sup>920</sup> Stonyfield has expanded its customer base by forging emotional connections, making its label an invitation to a lifestyle. Advertising that promotes a “brand image” tries to achieve a “following of consumers who feel psychologically attached, loyal, to the brand.”<sup>921</sup> This provides a ready-made identity, available for purchase. One advertisement for Stonyfield Farm Organic Yogurt caters to eco-friendly inclinations by promising: “You’re supporting farmers committed to protecting the environment.” The yogurt ingredients are listed as “Our Family Recipe.” Stonyfield professes, “We want you to feel good inside.” Cartons and lids are used as mini-billboards for relevant social and environmental messages,

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<sup>918</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>919</sup> Martin, A. (2009). Is a Food Revolution Now in Season? The New York Times.

<sup>920</sup> Baudrillard, J. (1996). The System of Objects. New York, Verso. 191.

<sup>921</sup> Schudson, M. (1984). Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society. New York, Basic Books, Inc. 21.



including information about Stonyfield’s support for organic family farming and its pledge to give ten percent of each year’s profit to environmental causes.<sup>922</sup>

Hirshberg is also the creator of O’Naturals, a fast-food restaurant chain that offers convenient, healthy meals. O’Naturals started its “revolution in fast food” with outlets in New England in 2001 and has since opened franchises in other locations. These restaurants proclaim that they do not serve ingredients with “additives, preservatives, and multiple syllable stuff that you find in processed foods.” Organic mixed greens, organic beef, organic tofu, and organic ranch dressing are incorporated into tossed salads, flatbread sandwiches, soups, pizza, and noodle dishes. The Caesar salad includes organic romaine, flatbread croutons, grated parmesan, and vegan dressing. Kids can also have organic mac ‘n cheese, hormone-free mini turkey sandwiches, or organic apple juice. O’Naturals says these “organic and natural foods are better for you and the planet too.”<sup>923</sup> With this venture, Hirshberg seemed to bridge the dichotomy that organic food advocates have often posed between “fast food” as an unmitigated evil and “real food”—meaning local, healthy, or organic—as its hallowed opposite.

Another organic frontrunner, Earthbound Farm, began as a roadside organic raspberry stand in 1984 that, according to founders Drew and Myra Goodman, was a “labor of love.” At the time, the Goodmans said, organic farming was known as “hippie farming”; choosing organic produce often meant a sacrifice in quality for consumers; and “organic wasn’t on the radar” for most people.<sup>924</sup> The Goodmans claim to have “started a

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<sup>922</sup> Hirshberg, G. (2008). *Stirring It Up: How to Make Money and Save the World*. New York, Hyperion. 97.

<sup>923</sup> O’Naturals. (2009). "O’Naturals web site." Retrieved August 23, 2009, from <http://www.onaturals.com/>.

<sup>924</sup> Goodman, M. (2006). *Food to Live By: The Earthbound Farm Organic Cookbook*. New York, Workman Publishing Co. ix.

salad revolution” in California’s Carmel Valley by selling their packaged, prewashed salad mixes to restaurants and supermarkets. They wanted to bring the benefits of organic food to as many people as possible and did not remain backyard gardeners for long. Earthbound Farm became the world’s largest grower of organic produce. The self-styled “family farm” now has thousands of employees and manages 40,000 organic acres in California, Arizona, Mexico, Canada, Chile, and New Zealand. It sells more than 77 different bagged fruit and vegetable products and reaps annual sales of \$360 million.<sup>925</sup> Earthbound Farm was a pioneer in demonstrating how organic food could move through an efficient industrial system. It has regularly offered information about the importance of organic food, such as an activity book for children; a cookbook—*Food to Live By: The Earthbound Farm Organic Cookbook (2006)* by Myra Goodman; and a *Pocket Guide to Choosing Organic (2008)*. Myra has insisted that “Drew and I still feel a personal commitment to everyone who buys an Earthbound Farm product.”<sup>926</sup> The company’s advertisements market nostalgia by highlighting longevity in the organic market as proof of the Earthbound’s dedication to uncorrupted values and family farming.

Michael Pollan used the “organic empire” of Cascadian Farm, which began as a “communal hippie farm” in 1971, to illustrate the progression of corporate routinization. When Cascadian Farm founder Gene Kahn started his 20-acre berry farm, he was a loyal subscriber to *Organic Gardening and Farming* magazine. Kahn believed in market populism and felt that, if the masses wanted saccharine organic confections, then organic

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<sup>925</sup> Earthbound Farm. (2008). "Earthbound Farm web site." Retrieved August 8, 2008, from <http://www.ebfarm.com/>.

<sup>926</sup> Goodman, M. (2006). *Food to Live By: The Earthbound Farm Organic Cookbook*. New York, Workman Publishing Co. x.

entrepreneurs should provide them.<sup>927</sup> Cascadian Farm began contracting with other organic growers and morphed quickly into a successful grower, marketer, and distributor of organic products. Although the company became a mini-conglomerate, Kahn regarded this as an opening to bring high-quality organic food to even more people. Cascadian Farm sells organic cereals, granola bars, frozen fruits and vegetables, fruit spreads, and juice concentrates. It became part of Small Planet Foods in 1998, and General Mills purchased Small Planet Foods in 2000. Pollan expressed his disapproval by saying that “in the eyes of General Mills, organic is not a revolution so much as a market niche.”<sup>928</sup> However, Cascadian Farm invites members of the public to visit its “Home Farm” in Washington’s Upper Skagit Valley for a dish of fresh berries. The original Roadside Stand is “still home to the organic values we’ve always believed in.”<sup>929</sup> When Cascadian Farm redesigned its products in 2008, a new series of advertisements featured the Cascadian Farm Organic logo across an image of crops in the foreground and mountains in the background, with the words “Founded in Skagit Valley, WA; Since 1972.” Beneath pictures of the granola bars and cereal boxes was the proclamation “organic goodness from farm to table.” Another advertisement showed a closer image of rolling farmland at dawn and the words: “This is the place that inspires our farmers...to make our organic granolas so incredibly delicious.” The Hain Celestial Group, Arrowhead Mills, Celestial Seasonings, Stonyfield Farm, Earthbound Farm, and Cascadian Farm have all done their utmost to distinguish themselves as corporations that retain the crux of wholesome organic attitudes.

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<sup>927</sup> Pollan, M. (2001). Naturally: How Organic Became a Marketing Niche and a Multibillion-dollar Industry. New York Times Magazine.

<sup>928</sup> Ibid.

<sup>929</sup> Cascadian Farm. (2008). "Cascadian Farm web site." Retrieved August 8, 2008, from <http://www.cascadianfarm.com/home.aspx>.

## **Sour Milk**

Organic dairy is a billion-dollar industry division that has been tremendously profitable even while plagued by disputes over regulations governing livestock pasture, feed, and confinement. The 2001 USDA Organic Standards required “access to pasture for ruminants,” but this law caused heated discussions because it did not give adequate details on stocking rate or feed expectations of pasture. Certification agencies have interpreted the requirements differently. Many organic consumers erroneously believed that all organic milk came from contented cows on small family farms. The “Happy Cows” advertising campaign by Real California Milk has bolstered this illusion as well.<sup>930</sup> Yet, some “factory farm” dairies, though certified as organic, confine thousands of cows to feedlots and feed them organic grain and hay, rather than grass from pasture. Organic factory farms may be organic in letter but seem to violate the spirit of organic standards.

Consumer interest in organic milk has burgeoned since the mid-1990s, largely due to increasing use of recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH) or recombinant Bovine Somatotropin (rBST) in conventional dairies. All cows produce natural growth hormones. However, conventional cows are commonly injected with a genetically engineered growth hormone to increase milk production by about a gallon per day. The FDA approved the artificial hormone, produced by Monsanto Corporation under the commercial name Posilac, in 1993. The FDA concluded that it did not pose a threat to human health. Supporters of rBST insisted that it was safe and effective. Organic dairies do not use the artificial growth hormone, and some non-organic milk cartons feature a

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<sup>930</sup> Real California Milk. (2010). "Happy Cows." Retrieved January 18, 2010, from <http://www.realcaliforniamilk.com/happycows>.

label promising that the milk comes from cows not treated with rBST. In 2003, Monsanto sued Oakhurst, a small dairy in Maine, for stating on its label that the milk came from cows receiving no rBST. Monsanto alleged that this implicitly disparaged milk coming from cows given the synthetic hormone. Instead of going to trial, Oakhurst agreed to add a disclaimer to its label: "FDA states: No significant difference in milk from cows treated with artificial growth hormones." In 2005, The Center for Global Food Safety, an industry group funded by agribusinesses, launched an aggressive "Milk is Milk" campaign to persuade consumers that there was no difference between milk produced by cows injected with genetically engineered hormones and organic or "natural" milk. The campaign also attempted to stop organic farmers and retailers from labeling their milk as "hormone-free," asserting that this was false and misleading, since all milk contains hormones. Speculation about cancer risks and other health hazards from the use of synthetic hormones is a major reason that consumers choose organic milk and other milk labeled rBST-free or rBGH-free. McDonald's announced in 2007 that it would switch to organic milk for its coffee and hot chocolate drinks in the United Kingdom. Wal-Mart determined in 2008 that, due to a lack of consumer acceptance, its store-brand milk would no longer be sourced from dairies treating cows with the artificial hormone. Monsanto decided to sell off its beleaguered Posilac business in 2008. By 2009, Dannon and General Mills had also declared that they would phase out the use of rBST milk, in accordance with consumer preferences.

Another milk controversy arose when The Cornucopia Institute, a farm policy watchdog group, filed a formal complaint in 2005 with the USDA's National Organic Program against Aurora Organic Dairy of Colorado for livestock management

improprieties. Cornucopia charged that Aurora's cattle grazed in feedlots rather than pasture and that Aurora obtained its cattle from a non-certified organic source. Aurora managed over 5,000 cows and provided private-label organic milk to chains including Wild Oats, Trader Joe's, Safeway, and Target. The USDA launched an investigation of Aurora and required that it meet certain conditions in order to remain in business as an organic dairy. The Cornucopia Institute charged that all confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, should be outlawed by organic regulations and also filed accusations against Horizon Organic and Organic Valley for alleged violations. The organization continues to police the organic dairy industry on behalf of consumers.

Organic milk differed from most other organic products in that it was more of a crossover product, appealing to a wide variety of people who had not tried any other organic foods. E. Melanie DuPuis attributed the rise of organic milk consumption to a “Not-in-My-Body” politics that arose in response to the rBGH controversy. Organic milk was unique, DuPuis said, because the clamor for it came “without the significant social and political organizing—the food co-ops, the consumer-farmer coalitions—that created the organic food system over the last few decades.”<sup>931</sup> Overall sales of organic milk and cream make up approximately six percent of retail milk sales. Conventional channels sell the majority of organic milk products. As of 2007, two main U.S. suppliers provided approximately 75 percent of branded organic milk: Organic Valley and Horizon Organic.<sup>932</sup>

Founded in 1991, Horizon Organic is the nation's largest organic food brand. The

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<sup>931</sup> DuPuis, E. M. (2002). Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink. New York, New York University Press. 220.

<sup>932</sup> Dimitri, C. and K. M. Venezia (2007). Retail and Consumer Aspects of the Organic Milk Market, USDA: 1-18. 2.

company considers itself a pioneer in organic dairy farming and land stewardship. Horizon's founders joined other industry leaders in helping to develop the National Organic Standards and the USDA Organic Seal.<sup>933</sup> Horizon garners over \$200 million in annual sales and is the leading brand of certified organic milk in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Dean Foods, a major food and beverage company that is the largest milk distributor in the U.S., owns Horizon Organic. Much of the organic milk is produced at industrial-size dairies with thousands of cows. The Organic Consumers Association (OCA) led a boycott on Horizon Organic in 2006, accusing its dairies of violating federal laws that govern organic foods. Critics charged that Horizon used milk from cows confined largely indoors. In response, Horizon defended itself by saying that the company complied with USDA requirements and also adhered to its own "Standards of Care" guidelines. While admitting that it sourced some milk from large farms, Horizon said the greater portion came from "small family farms."<sup>934</sup>

Charles Marcy, President and CEO of Horizon Organic, addressed the 2002 IFOAM Organic World Congress with a talk about organic sales and marketing. He said that one of the principles of good organic retailing was to "capitalize on the authenticity and commitment of the brand." In all retail formats, from natural food stores to supermarkets, an organic brand should position itself "as something that mainstream consumers would naturally and logically want to incorporate into their lifestyles."<sup>935</sup> Horizon has adhered to these strategies and catered to the majority. Its recognizable national advertising campaign features a fun flying cow mascot, publicizes the

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<sup>933</sup> Horizon Organic. (2008). "Horizon Organic web site." Retrieved August 8, 2008, from <http://www.horizonorganic.com/>.

<sup>934</sup> Philips, D. (2007). "Organic and Natural Dairy." *Dairy Foods*(June): 30-36. 32.

<sup>935</sup> Marcy, C. F. (2002). Organics in the Supermarket. *Proceedings of the 14th IFOAM Organic World Congress*. R. Thompson, Canadian Organic Growers. 194.

company's commitment to organic family farms, and emphasizes personal benefits to the consumer. Horizon also owns The Organic Cow of Vermont, which is promoted as "New England's original organic milk" and advertised alongside images of children frolicking in autumn foliage, although its milk is not produced exclusively at farms in New England.

One of Horizon's competitors, the Organic Valley Family of Farms, is the largest U.S. organic products cooperative. Seven Wisconsin farmers organized Organic Valley in 1988, when farmland values were at an historic low. The cooperative's goal was to serve small family farmers and improve rural community health. It capped production to guarantee each farmer a consistent income. CEO George Siemon, one of the original founders, said there had been few voices advocating "farming in harmony with nature" at the time, but J.I. Rodale was "an inspiration to all the early pioneers of today's organic movement."<sup>936</sup> More than 1,200 farmers in 34 states had joined the cooperative by 2007, when it reported revenues of over \$400 million. Organic Valley dairy products are available throughout the nation, and it also sells certified-organic meat products under the Organic Prairie label.<sup>937</sup> The Organic Valley logo features a red barn set on a picturesque field of crops in neat rows. Milk cartons have carried personal statements from farmer-owners. In 2008, Organic Valley embarked on a kid-oriented advertising campaign that announced "The Future Is Organic." The accompanying text on one ad read, "Choosing organic today helps ensure a healthy tomorrow." Organic Valley's single-serve milks, deli-sliced cheeses and cheese sticks were said to be "great for growing bodies" because

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<sup>936</sup> Sullivan, D. (2009). "Research Makes It Clear: Organic Food is Best for People and the Planet." *Rootstock* 9(1): 4-7. 7.

<sup>937</sup> LOHAS. (2008, March 27, 2008). "Organic Valley Sales at \$432.5 Million." Retrieved March 31, 2008, from <http://www.lohas.com>.



“they come from our family farms, where the cows eat grass and they’re never treated with antibiotics, synthetic hormones or pesticides.” An accompanying activity booklet, distributed at state fairs and other events in 2009, asked children to look at drawings of an Organic Valley farm and find “a cow happy to be outside eating green grass,” “an organic carrot in soil made rich by earthworms and compost,” “a piglet rolling in the shaded dirt,” “corn growing without chemicals,” and additional cute items. An adult-oriented 2009 brochure urged consumers to choose organic because of quality (“safe, wholesome food—produced in harmony with nature”); environment (“keeping our air and water safe from pollution”); and family farms (“a viable means to sustain their farms and strengthen our rural communities”). Overall, the cooperative pitches a sentimental connection between consumers and their organic milk producers.

Promotional efforts at crafting trust by organic companies have frequently been successful. Loyal organic consumers tend to forge intense relationships with the brands they feel connected to. According to a 2007 survey by the Natural Marketing Institute, consumers perceive brands such as Cascadian Farm, Horizon Organic, and Stonyfield Farm as small, authentic, and artisanal, despite the fact that larger corporations own these companies.<sup>938</sup>

### **Divided Consciousness**

The ascendancy of “organic agribusiness” reflects the extent to which big vendors apparently suppressed most avant-garde or subversive facets of the movement. However, as Raymond Williams argued, all alternative or oppositional initiatives are actually tied to the hegemonic. Williams stated that the dominant culture “at once produces and limits its

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<sup>938</sup> LOHAS. (2008). "Consumers Prefer Artisanal Foods." Retrieved January 24, 2008, from <http://www.lohas.com/articles/100992.html>.

own forms of counter-culture.” He also reasoned that some works and ideas, though clearly affected and possibly incorporated by hegemonic limits, still contain independent and original elements.<sup>939</sup> Unconventional meanings and values “can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture.”<sup>940</sup> Alternative and oppositional forms of social life and culture do exist, though there is always an attempt to incorporate them. The process of incorporation is essential to understanding the forces involved in a continual making and remaking of dominant culture.

Mainstream culture tolerated the emergent meanings and values of organic farming and adopted some of them. Critics of organic food’s metamorphosis often ignore how contradictions ingrained in organic rhetoric have, since their inception, served to reconcile the movement to the orthodox food system. The organic community in the United States was never as radical or seditious as some devotees claim. The movement grappled with the drawbacks and benefits of obliging the popular market for decades. Organic farmer Leonard Dodge told fellow organic farmers in 1950 that “we owe it to ourselves and to the world to sell the organic concept.”<sup>941</sup> Even the emblematically nonconformist Gypsy Boots took full advantage of accessible mass media to reach millions in his TV audience.

Despite the specter of “almighty agribusiness,” its supremacy was not merely a top-down model of control. Gramsci characterized hegemony as the spontaneous consent given by great masses of the population to the general direction of social life imposed by the dominant group. Overtly challenging the hegemonic culture is difficult, but there are

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<sup>939</sup> Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. New York, Oxford University Press. 114.

<sup>940</sup> Williams, R. (1991). Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory. *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*. C. Mukerji and M. Schudson. Berkeley, University of California Press: 407-423. 414.

<sup>941</sup> Dodge, L. F. (1950). Planning Organic Profits. *The Organic Farmer*. **1**: 15-18. 18.

ambiguities of consent. For Gramsci, consent involved a “divided consciousness” or “contradictory consciousness” that combined approval, defiance, and indifference on the part of subordinate groups.<sup>942</sup> Ostensibly docile victims may share complicity in their own subsidiary position. Raymond Williams described lived hegemony as an active process, emphasizing that it had to continually be “renewed, recreated, defended, and modified.” It was also “continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.”<sup>943</sup> The idea of hegemony has to be coupled with recognition of counter-hegemonies. The organic movement is one such example of counter-hegemony, and its members have frequently displayed a “contradictory consciousness.”

Rather than being static, hegemonic culture is in perpetual flux. J.I. Rodale embodied this complex, mercurial state since the 1940s. He preferred small-scale husbandry by assiduous farmers, but he also hoped organic farms would take over the world. He helped precipitate the organic invasion of the United States. In 1947, Rodale conveyed to *Organic Gardening* readers how important it was for them to “tell as many people as possible about the ‘goodness’ inherent in organic gardening.”<sup>944</sup> He predicted that conscientious consumers would be willing to pay premium prices for what they perceived as nutritional and environmental benefits, and he urged farmers to take advantage of this. At first, Rodale lost money on his attempts to disseminate information on organics. However, he profited enormously when organic food became fashionable, and profit was something he supported from the beginning. Rodale declared in 1949 that the field of organic farming was “wide open for money-making opportunities” to reach

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<sup>942</sup> Gramsci, A. (2000). Notes for an Introduction and an Approach to the Study of Philosophy and the History of Culture: Some Preliminary Reference Points. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*. D. Forgacs. New York, UP: 323-343.

<sup>943</sup> Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. New York, Oxford University Press. 112.

<sup>944</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1947). Notice. *Organic Gardening*. **11**: 13.

the “health conscious public.”<sup>945</sup> Many contemporary organic entrepreneurs have followed his example in being starry-eyed and idealistic, yet still practical and profit-minded. For example, in 2009 *Eating Well* profiled Vermont food activist Tom Stearns, a man who looked like a hippie farmer molded by the back-to-the-land counterculture. However, he was “no laid-back flower child.” Rather, Stearns had “fashioned his college hobby of growing and selling organic seeds into a multi-million-dollar business” called High Mowing Organic Seeds, and he served as an evangelist for healthy food in his work with the Center for an Agricultural Economy.<sup>946</sup>

The current state of organic food and farming reflects an intricate history of political, cultural, and discursive struggles. Moments of “purity” are rare in any social movement. Though the charismatic qualities associated with organic food and farming have indeed changed, the movement retains unorthodox and oppositional elements. In 2008, organic farmers Casey Gustowarow and Daniel Bowman Simon campaigned around the United States, gathering signatures for a petition asking President Barack Obama to plant an organic garden at the White House. These “ex-Peace Corps buddies” drove a school bus modified to hold an herb and vegetable garden on the roof, carrying on the lineage of somewhat bizarre flag-bearers for organic food.<sup>947</sup>

So-called “shallow” versions of organic production still leave room for “deeper” paths to co-exist. Seasonal organic blueberry stands and door-to-door milk sales persist alongside the magnitude of global supermarket chains. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs or box schemes are another example of complementary initiatives. Routinization has affected the organic movement’s transgressiveness, but

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<sup>945</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1949). Editorial. *The Organic Farmer*. **1**: 9-10. 9.

<sup>946</sup> Goodman, D. (2009). Foodtopia. *Eating Well*. **8**: 50-56, 81. 54.

<sup>947</sup> Jordi, N. (2009). The Garden Bus Guys. *bon appétit* **54**: 26.

many venues offering organic products continue to be differentiated spaces. When a mysteriously “green” bakery opened in the East Village of New York in 2005, customers were first told that the establishment had no name. It was built entirely from recycled and ecologically sound materials. The waitstaff, clad in hemp, served organic muffins, scones, and coffee from behind a recycled denim and bamboo countertop. It became known by the code name of “Birdbath.” Eventually word leaked out that the bakery’s owner, Maury Rubin of the well-liked City Bakery, had not publicized the name because he wanted to draw attention to its small-scale sustainable architecture and organic production.<sup>948</sup> Rubin’s goal had been to create a top-to-bottom green bakery that would showcase eco-friendly materials. He said he hoped to encourage people to link their organic food with the organic materials in the place they were eating. The walls were assembled from wheat and sunflower seeds. Floors were composed of cork. The paint used came from milk and beets. The bakery made deliveries on bicycle-powered rickshaws. Birdbath was acclaimed as “a political statement, an architectural pioneer, and a bit of performance art, all wrapped in one.”<sup>949</sup> It was simple, quirky, and all-natural. One got the feeling that J.I. Rodale, Gypsy Boots, and even the harshest critics—who had already thrown up their hands at the commercial nature of “Big Bad Organics”—would have approved.

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<sup>948</sup> Streep, A. (2006). "Sustainability Complex: Small Things, Done Right. The Next Great Leap Forward?" Retrieved June 2, 2006, from [www.orion.org](http://www.orion.org).

<sup>949</sup> Raisfeld, R. and R. Patronite. (2006). "Birdbath: Solving the Case of the East Village Bakery Without a Name." Retrieved August 27, 2007, from <http://www.nymag.com/nymetro/food/15533/>.

## CHAPTER 6

### **The Organic Consumer Movement: Buying, Eating, and Forging Identities**

In 1974, organic boosters called for a “consumer revolution” to convince organic farmers that a market existed for their crops. To achieve this, buyers were exhorted to ask for organic produce every time they shopped.<sup>950</sup> Three decades later, renowned primatologist Jane Goodall acclaimed consumer power by noting that organic food had indeed become universally available, thanks to people all over the world who insisted on it.<sup>951</sup> Goodall optimistically predicted that if everyone would make ethical food choices and request organics, then “we can, collectively, change the way our food is grown and prepared.”<sup>952</sup> This chapter focuses on the politics and discourse of consumption in the organic movement. It addresses the extent to which the ethos of buying and eating organic food is situated as a politically effective act, a statement of social position, and a marker of imaginative identity. Unraveling the multivocal, interconnected messages of organic consumption provides insight into the movement.

#### **Organic Fetishism**

Consumption is a socially embedded cultural phenomenon. Organic products permeate the lived experiences of consumers and bear a mixture of undertones. In developing a theory of consumption, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood asserted that goods are neutral, but their uses are social. Consumption is a way of using goods to make visible judgments and classifications about people. Consumers forge agreements to

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<sup>950</sup> Allaby, M. and F. Allen (1974). Robots Behind the Plow: Modern Farming and the Need for an Organic Alternative. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 167.

<sup>951</sup> Goodall, J. (2005). Harvest for Hope: A Guide to Mindful Eating. New York, Warner Books. 159.

<sup>952</sup> Ibid. xxiii.

endow goods with values.<sup>953</sup> While people do not always consider the full implications of their purchases, consumption is situated in larger cultural and social systems. Baudrillard defined consumption as an active relationship—to objects, society, and the world—that operated as the foundation of our entire cultural system. It was an action that consisted of the “systematic manipulation of signs.”<sup>954</sup> People bring their own expectations and values to commercial goods. Individuals attempt to find meaning, status, and identity through their consumption choices.<sup>955</sup> They may purchase items that align with personal philosophies or aspirations. Every consumptive decision has an expressive function in so far as it enables a person to make a character statement. Consumer goods are nonverbal vessels of self-representation.

Consumption of food cannot be separated from the conditions of production, beginning with how and where it is grown. Wendell Berry has notably stated that “eating is an agricultural act.”<sup>956</sup> Commercial markets and products are dynamically connected with physical landscapes and labor practices. For Marx, the labor power of a producer bestowed the value of a commodity. Yet, as money became the sign of worth, it erased labor’s clout and replaced it with an apparently autonomous value for the commodity. This illusion of sovereign value gave rise to commodity fetishism. The significance of labor power was disavowed.<sup>957</sup> Rather, the commodity was animated by its assessed monetary worth, indicated through a price tag. Commodity fetishism usually entails an erasure of the marks of production. However, organic food is fetishized precisely because

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<sup>953</sup> Douglas, M. and B. Isherwood (1979). The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption. New York, Basic Books. 67, 75.

<sup>954</sup> Baudrillard, J. (1996). The System of Objects. New York, Verso. 199-200.

<sup>955</sup> Princen, T., M. Maniates, et al., Eds. (2002). Confronting Consumption. Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press. 14.

<sup>956</sup> Berry, W. (1987). Home Economics. San Francisco, North Point Press. 326.

<sup>957</sup> Mulvey, L. (1993). "Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture." October 65(Summer): 3-20. 9-10.

it elucidates production circumstances. It is regarded as a specialty or even a craft object, rather than a mass-market commodity. Instead of making the worker's labor invisible, the organic certification system pulls back the curtain on production methods. The organic label is meant to de-mystify how food is grown. In this sense, it is an attempt at transparency, distinguishing it from unmarked food. Organic farming might have languished without escalating consumer awareness and demand for this recognizable label. While some producers began organic farming as a way of life, others saw it as primarily an economic enterprise, particularly when organic foods could be marketed with premium prices. Though both producers and consumers propelled the organic movement, consumers in high-income countries chiefly induced growth in the organic products sector.

Eating, like shopping, is a symbolic gesture and social performance. Food is a sign and a system of communication. In their pioneering study of American foodways, Margaret Cussler and Mary DeGive observed that “food is not a matter to be settled rationally between one's head and one's stomach; the heart has a good deal to do with it.”<sup>958</sup> The rich social and emotional associations of organic food have compelled people to join the movement. Meanings attached to commodities are objects of consumption as well, and organic foods have come to bear desirable qualities. These correlations are socially constructed in ways meant to tug at the heart, as well as at the head and stomach.

## **Consumer Sovereignty and New Social Movements**

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<sup>958</sup> Cussler, M. and M. L. DeGive (1952). Twixt the Cup and the Lip: Psychological and Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Food Habits. New York, Twayne Publishers. 147.



Many consumers crave good taste, exoticism, and ethical purity in their meals. Organic food is a form of epicurean ethics, located at the nexus of hedonism and morality. Its aspects of “culinary privilege” are part of what *bon appétit* has called a “happy utopian foodie future.”<sup>959</sup> This kind of “ethical food” is often juxtaposed to “fast food” or “junk food.” There are parallels between the organic movement and other principled food movements that emphasize vegetarianism, fair trade, and local food. The “eco-gastronomic” Slow Food organization, for example, rejects “fast life” and insists that food should be “good, clean, and fair.” All of these may be considered New Social Movements (NSMs), which are said to be distinct from older social movements in their focus on consumption’s place in the political economy. Having gained a growing role in late capitalism, NSMs often treat shopping as an axis for social change. They see “consumptive resistance” as a constructive individual tactic or collective strategy.

The term “green consumerism” describes purchasing practices directed at products that minimize deleterious environmental consequences and lessen consumer exposure to environmental risks. Marketers feature certain goods as edifying for people, nature, and society. Under the halo effect, these products carry a moral sheen. “Buying green” is frequently described as an alternative consumption practice, driven by conscious reflexivity, in that consumers monitor and reflect upon the outcome of their conduct.<sup>960</sup> These “conscientious consumers” are drawn to the proliferation of goods that they feel righteous about buying, such as organic food. “Ethical consumerism” is extolled as the best and most progressive method for enacting social change.

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<sup>959</sup> Jordi, N. (2009). Food's Golden State. *bon appétit*. **54**: 116-123. 118.

<sup>960</sup> Guthman, J. (2003). "Fast Food/ Organic Food: Reflexive Tastes and the Making of "Yuppie Chow"." *Journal of Social and Cultural Geography* **4**(1): 43-56. 45.

Some critics dismiss consumerism as superficial and materialistic. Just as Thorstein Veblen mocked “conspicuous consumption” in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), strict “simple living” advocates reject it as self-absorbed and gratuitous. Furthermore, under notions of consumer passivity, shoppers are merely inert pawns of the capitalist marketplace. From a structuralist perspective, people make their food cultures within dominant structures. The framework of consumption is thrust down by industries and arranges people’s actions. Various structuralisms share a sense that meaning is the “product of shared systems of signification,” not an entirely private experience.<sup>961</sup> Other scholars have intimated that shopping, as both a public and private activity, actually has “liberatory potential.”<sup>962</sup> From a culturalist perspective, which focuses on the importance of subjective experience, people make their own histories. Michel de Certeau defined consumption as another form of production, manifested through “ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order.”<sup>963</sup> He believed that the tactics of consumption were ingenious techniques of lending “a political dimension to everyday practices.”<sup>964</sup> Although a dominant ideology is still imposed from above, it can be resisted from below. Power relationships require consent and negotiation, which leads to what Gramsci called a “compromise equilibrium.”<sup>965</sup> Gramsci’s conception of cultural hegemony as a dynamic process underscores individual use and adaptation of the culture industry, not passive acceptance. Legitimation, not manipulation, is critical. In a Gramscian mode of analysis, there are material, cultural and social constraints that limit

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<sup>961</sup> Ashley, B., J. Hollows, et al. (2004). *Food and Cultural Studies*. New York, Routledge. 7.

<sup>962</sup> Strasser, S. (2002). "Making Consumption Conspicuous: Transgressive Topics Go Mainstream." *Technology and Culture* 43(4): 755-70.

<sup>963</sup> De Certeau, M. (1988). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, University of California Press. xiii.

<sup>964</sup> Ibid. xvii.

<sup>965</sup> Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York, International Publishers. 161.

our freedom to choose; however, through cultural negotiation, food consumption produces meanings and identities.<sup>966</sup> Organic products fit into the daily lives of consumers in diverse ways. The organic movement is a rich example of how consumption transmits multiple social connotations.

### **Consumer Motivations**

Consumers choose or forgo organic food for multivalent reasons. Food choice in general is affected by sensory properties, presentation context, and economic considerations. A 2008 survey by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) revealed that factors with the biggest impact on Americans' decisions to buy foods and beverages were, in order: taste, price, healthfulness, and convenience.<sup>967</sup> Faced with polyphonic messages about organics, consumers are attracted to variable angles. For some, organic food indicates a "natural" lifestyle; for others, it offers tangible benefits, such as greater safety and nutrition. Another group may not be concerned about pesticides or vitamins but still select organic food based on taste, freshness, or favored brands.<sup>968</sup> Organic food is liable to be viewed as a means of avoiding harm but also as "a benefit in itself, a personal way of aligning nutrition, health, and social and environmental well-being."<sup>969</sup> There is evidence that some consumers are willing to pay substantial prices for organically produced food, whatever the motive.

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<sup>966</sup> Ashley, B., J. Hollows, et al. (2004). Food and Cultural Studies. New York, Routledge. 59.

<sup>967</sup> International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation (2008). 2008 Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes toward Food, Nutrition & Health. Washington, DC, International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation, : 54.

<sup>968</sup> Lockeretz, W. (2003). What Are the Key Issues for Consumers? Organic Agriculture: Sustainability, Markets and Policies. O. f. E. C.-O. a. Development. Wallingford, Oxford, CABI Publishing: 239-243. 241-242.

<sup>969</sup> Fromartz, S. (2006). Organic, Inc.: Natural Foods and How They Grew. Orlando, Harcourt, Inc. 5.

Most consumers purchase a mixture of natural and organic foods alongside mainstream products.<sup>970</sup> Organic farmer Nicolas Lampkin noted in 1990 that, since big supermarket chains in Britain—e.g. Safeway, Sainsbury’s, Tesco, and Waitrose—were selling organic produce, they were eclipsing local, “alternative” outlets. He explained that these multiples were “making organic produce available to a much wider range of people, many of whom are likely to be less committed and only occasional purchasers.”<sup>971</sup> As the organic produce sector planted deep roots in U.S. retail markets in the 1990s, *Vegetarian Times* attributed this growth to “increasingly sophisticated organic growers” who, attuned to market demands, improved the appearance, quality, availability, and selection of organic fruits and vegetables. Despite pervasive high prices, Americans seemed “increasingly willing to pay the difference to make a difference.”<sup>972</sup>

Organic farming delivers public goods as well as personal benefits, and some of these are more tangible and immediate than others. A study conducted by the National Center for Public Policy (NCP) in 2000 revealed that a majority of consumers felt that a “USDA Certified Organic” seal indicated a positive difference over foods without the seal—that organic foods were “better in some way; safer; more healthy; and better for the environment.” The NCP was concerned that the seal would mislead consumers, because it was really “only an accreditation of production methods used by farmers and not an assurance of food safety, quality, nutrition, or health.”<sup>973</sup> A study by the Hartman Group in 2000 backed up this assumption, revealing that the top motivators for organic food and beverage purchases were, in order: health and nutrition; taste; food safety; environment;

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<sup>970</sup> Mogelonsky, M. (2008). Organic Food and Drink. *Prepared Foods*: 21-26. 26.

<sup>971</sup> Lampkin, N. (2002). *Organic Farming*. Ipswich, UK, Old Pond Publishing. 463.

<sup>972</sup> Lustgarden, S. (1993). Organics Take Root. *Vegetarian Times*: 72-78. 76-77.

<sup>973</sup> National Center for Public Policy. (2000). "Organic Labeling Study." Retrieved April 28, 2008, from <http://www.nationalcenter.org/OrganicLabel500.html>.

and availability.<sup>974</sup> According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in 2003, the main motivating factors for buying organics were the perceptions that it entailed benefits to health and the environment; higher levels of food quality and taste; and assistance to small-scale local producers and communities.<sup>975</sup>

Consumers have steadily gained greater awareness of the USDA logo. A 2005 survey indicated that 65 percent of consumers had tried organic foods, and ten percent consumed it several times a week.<sup>976</sup> Also that year, the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI) reported that 90% of U.S. consumers had heard of organic foods, and 30% used organic products. NMI divided consumers into Devoteds (9.2%), who were “committed, zealous and have high organic usage and spending rates;” Temperates (16.7%), who were “pragmatists, with moderate attitudes;” Dabblers (3.8%), who were non-committal and for whom organic usage was “more about hipness than health;” and Reluctants (70.3%), who had “some level of belief in the benefits of organic usage” but were not using organic products. Devoteds and Temperates together represented 90% of all organic spending.<sup>977</sup>

A global overview of the organic market in 2006 asserted that the attributes of organic products likely to influence consumers, from most to least important, were: health (low chemical residues and high nutritional value); environment (environmentally friendly production and processing); taste; animal welfare; minimal processing; novelty; and fashion. On the other hand, elements most likely to restrict consumption of organics

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<sup>974</sup> Meyerowitz, S. (2004). The Organic Food Guide: How to Shop Smarter and Eat Healthier. Guilford, CT, The Globe Pequot Press. 35.

<sup>975</sup> Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2003). Organic Agriculture: Sustainability, Markets and Policies. Wallingford, Oxford, CABI Publishing. 10.

<sup>976</sup> Dimitri, C. and K. M. Venezia (2007). Retail and Consumer Aspects of the Organic Milk Market, USDA: 1-18. 2.

<sup>977</sup> Natural Marketing Institute. (2005). "Organic Food & Beverage Sales Increase 18%; Household Penetration Decreases." February 23, 2005, from <http://www.NMIolutions.com>.

were high price; limited availability; skepticism about credibility of product claims; poor appearance; non-awareness of organic; and contentment with existing products.<sup>978</sup>

Organic promoters present exceptional taste as a foremost incentive for purchasing organic fruits and vegetables. *The Organic Food Shopper's Guide* (2008) assured consumers that organic food tasted better and contained “the maximum amount of flavor.”<sup>979</sup> Organic chef Jesse Ziff Cool, in the cookbook *Simply Organic* (2008), said that organic products had more flavor, and this “great taste is the reason why many chefs—even those not active in the organic movement—are purchasing organic products.”<sup>980</sup> While some research bolsters this belief, overall conclusions about organic food are complicated by diversity in farm management practices, which lead to considerable variations in the taste and quality of organic crops. Taste is a highly subjective consideration, and preconceived notions about organic produce can trigger biased results in studies on taste. Convictions about flavor superiority may be attributed partly to a halo effect of the organic label. One study published in 2008 showed that consumers preferred organic bread to conventional bread under blind conditions. However, when the identity of the samples was revealed and the survey group received information about health and environment benefits of organic food, they liked the organic bread even more.<sup>981</sup>

“Organic” is a credence feature that requires verification from a third party to prevent fraud. Since consumers cannot visually distinguish organic from standard foods,

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<sup>978</sup> Lockie, S. (2006). "Capturing the sustainability agenda: organic foods and media discourses on food scares, environment, genetic engineering and health." *Agriculture and Human Values*. 248-249.

<sup>979</sup> Cox, J. (2008). *The Organic Food Shopper's Guide*. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. vii.

<sup>980</sup> Cool, J. Z. (2008). *Simply Organic: A Cookbook for Sustainable, Seasonal, and Local Ingredients*. San Francisco, Chronicle Books. 16.

<sup>981</sup> Annett, L. E., V. Muralidharan, et al. (2008). "Influence of Health and Environmental Information on Hedonic Evaluation of Organic and Conventional Bread." *Journal of Food Science* 73(4): 1-14. 7.

they must trust the organic label to bestow credibility and consistency. Researchers have attempted to measure consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for foods with certain credence attributes. A 2006 study from the United Kingdom that analyzed WTP for organic food found that a perceived health benefit from reduced pesticides was the primary motivating factor, and taste was a close second. WTP was intrinsically related to quality perception and appeared to rise with added differentiation, such as fair trade certification and first-class ingredients. One limitation of this model was that it did not account for deviations on the basis of mood or emotion. Also, key components of marketing—such as atmosphere of the shop and promotions—sway the consumer.<sup>982</sup> Gender disparities may have repercussions as well. A 2008 Spanish case study of WTP with respect to organics showed that women had more favorable attitudes to the purchase and consumption of organic foods, but men were more inclined to pay markups.<sup>983</sup>

Some studies suggest that consumers do not see the purchase of organic food as a moral imperative, so they rarely feel guilty for selecting a conventional option. However, one study published in 2007 indicated that choosing organic food evoked positive feelings. Many consumers do “experience organic food choice as a morally right thing to do, which provides an internal reward,” and this moral feeling affects intentions to purchase organic food.<sup>984</sup> Still, consumers must often expend greater effort to locate foods with favorable traits, and when these products come at greater monetary cost, they have to weigh prices and convenience against ethics.

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<sup>982</sup> Holt, G. (2006). A Conceptual Model of Willingness to Pay for Organic food in the UK. Sociological Perspectives of Organic Agriculture: From Pioneer to Policy. G. Holt and M. Reed. Oxfordshire, CAB International: 88-106.

<sup>983</sup> Ureña, F., R. Bernabéu, et al. (2008). "Women, men and organic food: differences in their attitudes and willingness to pay. A Spanish case study." International Journal of Consumer Studies **32**: 18-26.

<sup>984</sup> Arvola, A., M. Vassallo, et al. (2007). "Predicting Intentions to Purchase Organic Food: The Role of Affective and Moral Attitudes in the Theory of Planned Behaviour." Appetite.

## True Naturals, Lohasians, and Trading Up

Choosing organic food is a communicative act. The desire to retain one's sense of self and convey a certain image to others can affect food determinations. Symbolic meanings influence buying decisions and help confer social identities.<sup>985</sup> Since organic goods can be symbolic *and* practical, they are not merely evidence of conspicuous consumption. Organic foods defy synthetic categories in that they are utilitarian goods with practical utility; hedonic goods, bringing subjective pleasure; and positional goods, carrying status-signaling power. Still, people use consumption to display or even flaunt ideologies. Marketers have long recognized particular demographic clusters as prime consumers of organic products. The Hartman Group distinguished a coterie of "True Naturals" who comprised the core of the demand for organic food.<sup>986</sup> Self-identifying as a "green" consumer has been singled out as a positive factor in predicting a person's intention to purchase organic food.<sup>987</sup> Analogously, ethical self-identity positively forecasts attitudes and intention to purchase organic produce.<sup>988</sup> A Norwegian study also found that the more people were concerned with environmental and animal right issues, the more liable they were to have positive attitudes towards organic food.<sup>989</sup>

A cohort known by the acronym LOHAS—Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability—is said to make conscientious purchasing and investment decisions based

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<sup>985</sup> Sparks, P. and R. Shepherd (1992). "Self-Identity and the Theory of Planned Behavior: Assessing the Role of Identification with 'Green Consumerism'." *Social Psychology Quarterly* **55**(4): 388-399. 397.

<sup>986</sup> Conner, D. S. (2002). *The Organic Label and Sustainable Agriculture: Consumer Preferences and Values*. Ithaca NY, Cornell University. *Doctor of Philosophy*: 83. 26.

<sup>987</sup> Sparks, P. and R. Shepherd (1992). "Self-Identity and the Theory of Planned Behavior: Assessing the Role of Identification with 'Green Consumerism'." *Social Psychology Quarterly* **55**(4): 388-399.

<sup>988</sup> Michaelidou, N. and L. M. Hassan (2008). "The role of health consciousness, food safety concern and ethical identity on attitudes and intentions towards organic food." *International Journal of Consumer Studies* **32**: 163-170.

<sup>989</sup> Honkanen, P., B. Verplanken, et al. (2006). "Ethical values and motives driving organic food choice." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* **5**(Sep-Oct 2006): 420-430.



on social and cultural values. According to a 2006 *Newsweek* report, LOHAS members, or “Lohasians,” were “dedicated to personal and planetary health.” Their interests included organic food, yoga, feng shui, meditation, eco-tourism, recycling, green building, and fuel-efficient cars. They engaged in “devotional consumption” of products related to health, the environment, social justice, sustainable living, and “metrospirituality.” They shopped at eco-conscious stores like Whole Foods, Anthropologie, and Patagonia. *Newsweek* said, “if you have a yoga mat and ‘singing bowls,’ if you chant or do polarity therapy or energy healing, if you consume goji berries or biodynamic organic wines, you just might be a Lohasian.”<sup>990</sup> This assemblage collectively spent nearly \$300 billion annually on products perceived as fitting their principles.<sup>991</sup> Advertisers reached them through magazines like *Body & Soul*, *Vegetarian Times*, *Yoga Journal*, *Plenty*, and *Mother Jones*.

The LOHAS preference for products with certain attributes has been an influential force in the ethical food explosion, helping to make organics the fastest-growing segment of the food industry. Eco-labels supply consumers with information that typically remains murky, buried in the chasm that separates farmers from the retail channels in which their goods are sold. Certified labels are a convenient way of allowing consumers to make selections that buttress their social values. In a competitive marketplace, labels imply superior characteristics. Credence labels include “Fair Trade Certified” coffee, tea, and chocolate; “Bird Friendly” coffee, “Rainforest Alliance Certified” coffee, chocolate, cocoa, bananas, and oranges; “American Humane Certified” bison, chicken, cows, pigs,

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<sup>990</sup> Waldman, S. and V. Reiss. (2006). "It's a Lohasian Moment." Retrieved June 5, 2006, from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13004986/site/newsweek/Beliefwatch:Lohasians>.

<sup>991</sup> Nestle, M. (2006). *What To Eat*. New York, North Point Press. 449.

sheep, and turkeys; and “Animal Welfare Approved” chickens, cows, ducks, geese, pigs, rabbits, sheep, and turkeys.

Organic guidebooks recognize that Lohasians want serenity without guilt, a form of stylish conscientiousness. *Organic Bath: Creating a Natural, Healthy Haven* (2007) told each consumer that using organic merchandise was “the best way to create an idyllic retreat” and transform a bath into a true haven.<sup>992</sup> This miniature waterproof book, designed to fit in a soap dish, promised that “using organic products for staying clean and serene can help slow brain waves, lower blood pressure, enhance visual tracking, relieve cold and flu symptoms, prime you for falling asleep, or get you in the mood for love.”<sup>993</sup> In a similar hyperbolic vein, *Organic Body Care Recipes* (2007) instructed readers on how to make organic personal care products that would lead to “skin, hair, and nails that sing with vitality, vibrance, and inner wellness.”<sup>994</sup> Author Stephanie Tourles, an esthetician and holistic skin care specialist, claimed that the natural approach to beauty began with a “whole-foods” diet. She advocated eating things “in their whole, natural, preferably organic, unprocessed state”<sup>995</sup> Her recipes included Parsley & Peppermint Astringent, Fennel Soother, Coconut and Vanilla Brown Sugar Body Buff, and Aloe & Calendula Cleansing Cream. Reminiscent of Euell Gibbons’s *Stalking the Wild Asparagus* (1962), Tourles said the required ingredients could be obtained by growing herbs from seed or by foraging for wild herbs.

Another grouping, dubbed “New Luxury” consumers, involves middle-market shoppers primarily interested in selectively “trading up” for products and services. “New

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<sup>992</sup> Roderick, K. (2007). *Organic Bath: Creating a Natural, Healthy Haven*, Melcher Media. 9.

<sup>993</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>994</sup> Tourles, S. (2007). *Organic Body Care Recipes: 175 Homemade Herbal Formulas for Glowing Skin & a Vibrant Self*. North Adams, Mass, Storey Publishing. 4.

<sup>995</sup> Ibid. 32.

Luxury” items possess “higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration” than other goods in the category but are not prohibitively expensive.<sup>996</sup> “Trading up” in food means seeking out organic vegetables, exotic ingredients, and premium ice cream. These may be self-indulgent pleasures, but many sybarites think of them as a medium for relaxation, personal reward, or revitalization. Some purchase New Luxury goods to achieve physical rejuvenation, emotional uplift, or comfort. These products could also be meant to express sophistication or success. They are based on strong emotional engagements.<sup>997</sup> Consumers align themselves with brands that they have a “genuine affinity” for and that match their own “Individual Style.”<sup>998</sup> Those who want to learn more about products eagerly embrace elaborate narratives authored by New Luxury companies, such as Trader Joe’s and Panera Bread.<sup>999</sup>

Brands with a distinctive personality or story are apt to be favored by organic shoppers. Trader Joe’s is a grocery chain that consumers interested in obtaining organic products tend to be fond of. It draws a higher-than average concentration of organics consumers.<sup>1000</sup> Joe Coulombe founded his first Trader Joe’s store in Pasadena, California, in 1967, with the mission of making difficult-to-find gourmet items more accessible to American consumers. His target shoppers were well educated and budget-conscious. He sold boutique wines and gourmet foods but maintained low pricing.<sup>1001</sup> Trader Joe’s touts itself as a “different kind of grocery store,” where “shopping for food is actually fun,”

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<sup>996</sup> Silverstein, M. J., N. Fiske, et al. (2005). Trading Up: Why Consumers Want New Luxury Goods--and How Companies Create Them. New York, Portfolio. 1.

<sup>997</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>998</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>999</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>1000</sup> LOHAS. (2007). "Wal-Mart Supercenter Tops Among Organics Shoppers: Study." Retrieved September 19, 2008, from <http://www.lohas.com/articles/100733.html>.

<sup>1001</sup> Silverstein, M. J., N. Fiske, et al. (2005). Trading Up: Why Consumers Want New Luxury Goods--and How Companies Create Them. New York, Portfolio. 121.

and value is taken seriously.<sup>1002</sup> It competes with mom-and-pop groceries, organic food stores, and gourmet shops. The 300 stores are apt to be smaller than traditional supermarkets, offering a limited selection of high-quality products. Trader Joe's gives the illusion that it is a non-chain, non-corporate store. Foods sold under the house brand are free of artificial preservatives, MSG, trans fats, and genetically modified ingredients.

Trader Joe's is considered a "New Luxury" player based not on excessive prices but on tasty, unusual products that appeal to middle-market customers who fancy adventure, discovery, and fun in their shopping experience.<sup>1003</sup> The *Fearless Flyer*, the store's monthly newsletter, has long-winded descriptions of products, ingredient sources, and business practices that save shoppers "serious money." Alongside quirky anecdotes and cartoons, the bulletin proclaims, "we've always felt that the purchasing and consumption of food should be a social experience; that's one reason why we run small, funky, often odd-shaped neighborhood stores."<sup>1004</sup> By 2005 Trader Joe's earned \$2 billion in revenues, despite using no broadcast advertising, and average store productivity per square foot was two to three times the industry average.<sup>1005</sup> Trader Joe's often packages products in innovative ways, with superfluous explanations. Offerings include private-label Organic Dried Tomato Halves, Organic Honey Sticks, Organic Steak Sauce, frozen Organic Foursome Vegetable Blend, and Get Thee to a Bunnery Organic Hamburger Buns. The store obtains Organic Mango Fruit Spread from Canadian fruit growers, Organic Mild Cheddar from Wisconsin, and Organic Fair Trade Breakfast

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<sup>1002</sup> Trader Joe's (May 2007). *Fearless Flyer*. Monrovia, CA, Trader Joe's. 1.

<sup>1003</sup> Silverstein, M. J., N. Fiske, et al. (2005). Trading Up: Why Consumers Want New Luxury Goods--and How Companies Create Them. New York, Portfolio. 122-124.

<sup>1004</sup> Trader Joe's (May 2007). *Fearless Flyer*. Monrovia, CA, Trader Joe's. 11.

<sup>1005</sup> Silverstein, M. J., N. Fiske, et al. (2005). Trading Up: Why Consumers Want New Luxury Goods--and How Companies Create Them. New York, Portfolio. 121.

Blend from “small mountain cooperatives at the base of the Andes.”<sup>1006</sup> These are the kind of engaging narratives that New Luxury consumers appreciate.

### **Whole Foods Market**

A number of retail chains seek to craft a distinctive shopping atmosphere. One of the most successful in doing so, Whole Foods Market, is the largest merchant of organic and natural foods in the world. Founder and CEO John Mackey has referred to Whole Foods as a “mission-driven business” whose deepest calling is to “sell the highest quality natural, organic foods in the world.”<sup>1007</sup> Mackey opened Safer Way Natural Foods in Austin in 1978, a “quirky granola den” using local farmers as suppliers. Influenced by people like Rudolf Steiner and Adelle Davis, the fledgling shop sold “brown rice, beans, nuts, unbleached flour, raw milk, and organic produce.”<sup>1008</sup> Mackey added other products and began to expand. In 1980 Safer Way and Clarksville Natural Grocery joined as Whole Foods Market, one of the first natural foods supermarkets in the U.S. *Time* magazine noted that this original Whole Foods Market served “vegetarians, macrobiotic dieters and those seeming oddballs who took supplements such as ginkgo biloba and Echinacea. Like other mom-and-pop organic shops that dotted the country, the store was friendly, cozy, intensely concerned with its products’ purity and expensive.” That coziness didn’t last. After going public and experiencing 900% growth, by the late 1990s it had become “a billion-dollar juggernaut with 78 stores in 17 states.”<sup>1009</sup> By 2005, Whole Foods was a Fortune 500 company. A 2007 study revealed that organics

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<sup>1006</sup> Trader Joe's (May 2007). Fearless Flyer. Monrovia, CA, Trader Joe's. 6.

<sup>1007</sup> National Public Radio. (2007). "John Mackey on Whole Foods' growth." *Marketplace* Retrieved February 26, 2007, from <http://marketplace.publicradio.org/shows/2007/02/26/PM200702266.html>.

<sup>1008</sup> Gwynne, S. (2009). Born Green. *Saveur*: 27-30.

<sup>1009</sup> Gwynne, S. C. (1998, May 12, 2008). "Thriving on Health food." *Time* Retrieved Feb. 23, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

consumers were over 200 percent more likely than the average consumer to have shopped Whole Foods during the past week.<sup>1010</sup>

Whole Foods capitalized on the rise of ethical consumerism, or belief-driven buying, by highlighting organic, natural, and eco-friendly products. It was the first national certified organic grocer, obtaining this voluntary certification from Quality Assurance International (QAI). The business donates five percent of after-tax profits to not-for-profit organizations. The store's slogan is "Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet." Whole Foods sells a surfeit of deluxe, high-end food. It also developed a private-label "365" line, meant to be more affordable and compete with lower prices at Trader Joe's. Yet, according to observations in *Time* magazine, its prosperity was due to the fact that Americans remained "a nation of committed Twinkie eaters even while welcoming organic foods to the table." Organic-minded consumers were far from ascetic and appreciated the conveniences of shopping in large stores.<sup>1011</sup> Two other conspicuous trends have been significant contributors: growing pleas for food free of pesticides, growth hormones, and artificial additives; and shoppers' "unaccountable willingness to pay premiums of up to 175 percent over the regular cost of ordinary supermarket food. The result is that the place is a giant cash mill of eco-righteousness." Whole Foods Market became "destination retail," hoping to both satisfy and delight customers.<sup>1012</sup>

In 2002, *Time* discussed how Whole Foods was selling a feeling of healthy stylishness while "enticing shoppers to gorge on fancy fare." Although the chain phased out all goods with hydrogenated fats, it produced its own organic chocolates and sold

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<sup>1010</sup> LOHAS. (2007). "Wal-Mart Supercenter Tops Among Organics Shoppers: Study." Retrieved September 19, 2008, from <http://www.lohas.com/articles/100733.html>.

<sup>1011</sup> Gwynne, S. C. (1998, May 12, 2008). "Thriving on Health food." *Time* Retrieved Feb. 23, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>1012</sup> Gwynne, S. C. (2006). Retail. *Texas Monthly*. **34**: 116-121, 191-193. 120.

organic cheese puffs. A Whole Foods representative said this apparent incongruity was part of the store's appeal to "healthy-chic" customers who wanted nutritious eating options not limited solely to brown rice and vegetables.<sup>1013</sup> Whole Foods employee Benjamin Wurgaft noted that consumers were willing to pay more for the products because they wanted high quality and the "assurance that they are doing no wrong." He described Whole Foods as a descendant of "hippie organic cooperatives of the 1960s and '70s, when the link between food consumption and activism was apparent," and he acknowledged that "some of my customers are as motivated by politics as our store once was." However, others just wished for absolution, hoping that their modest shopping habits could have an impact on the rest of the world. More prominently, by shopping at Whole Foods, the customer became "part of a culinary and moral elite."<sup>1014</sup> It was difficult to portray food consumption as activism anymore.

Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini asserted that the commencement of the organic movement was mistaken in that "it didn't place any emphasis on pleasure. It had an ideological, almost religious approach," insinuating that pleasure was antithetical to health and sustainability.<sup>1015</sup> Whole Foods remedied that alleged deficiency; its organic food was infused with the aura of bliss. Throughout all the stores were assurances of how virtuous its lovely products were. Whole Foods managed to marry green and healthy with comfort and elegance. Selling organic no longer meant "an unwashed carrot in a shop smelling of mould and patchouli." Instead, Whole Foods signified the "Starbucksification

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<sup>1013</sup> Fonda, D. (2002, May 12, 2008). "Organic Growth." *Time* Retrieved August 12, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>1014</sup> Wurgaft, B. A. (2002). "East of Eden: Sin and Redemption at the Whole Foods Market." *Gastronomica* 2(3): 87-89.

<sup>1015</sup> Petrini, C. (2005). "Speech at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Conference." Retrieved April 28, 2007, from [http://www.slowfoodusa.org/events/carlo\\_petrini\\_speech.html](http://www.slowfoodusa.org/events/carlo_petrini_speech.html).

of the supermarket.”<sup>1016</sup> At London’s Whole Foods, customers could book facials, mix their own cereal from the muesli bar, sample Earl Grey crème brûlees, or have a beer at the organic pub.

*Health* magazine named Whole Foods as America’s healthiest grocery store in 2008, referring to it as “the Rolls Royce of healthy eating.”<sup>1017</sup> The *New York Times* has described Whole Foods as a “Pleasure Palace Without the Guilt.” The absence of consumptive remorse stemmed from knowledge that the store’s “gustatory temptations” lacked unnecessary preservatives, hydrogenated oils, artificial colors, and genetically modified ingredients. Subscribing to a religion of “moralistic hedonism,” Whole Foods “built its empire...on the willingness of consumers to pay more for organic and natural foods.”<sup>1018</sup> It was a marriage of integrity and indulgence.

By 2007, Whole Foods was indeed an empire and generated twice the profit per square foot of any other US supermarket.<sup>1019</sup> It had nearly 300 stores throughout the U.S., Canada, and Britain in 2009. Along the way, it relentlessly acquired competitors: Mrs. Gooch’s, Bread and Circus, Wellspring Markets, and Fresh Fields. In 2007 it bought Wild Oats Market, a comparable natural foods chain, which was also managing stores under the banners of Henry’s Farmers Market, Sun Harvest, and Capers Community market. Annual revenues for Whole Foods were \$8 billion by 2009. *Natural Health* magazine gave it a Green Choice Award for being one of ten multinational companies that successfully pursued environmental initiatives. The magazine recognized Whole

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<sup>1016</sup> Renton, A. (2007). Ripe Target. *The Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/supermarkets/story/0,,2043674,00.html>.

<sup>1017</sup> Paul, P. (2008). America's Healthiest grocery stores. *Health*. **22**: 114-118. 114.

<sup>1018</sup> Grimes, W. (2004). A Pleasure Palace Without the Guilt. *New York Times*.

<sup>1019</sup> Renton, A. (2007). Ripe Target. *The Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/supermarkets/story/0,,2043674,00.html>.



Foods Market for supporting sustainable agriculture, purchasing offsets for 100 percent of its electricity use, and phasing out the use of plastic bags.<sup>1020</sup>

Whole Foods has served as a highly visible face of the organic industry. Accompanying regular attention by the press, an anti-Whole-Foods backlash became fashionable. Several observers accused the store of betraying its principles, making only a superficial commitment to local food producers and small farmers. Some critics indicted Whole Foods of misleading consumers about the products they were paying premium prices for. Charges of elitism were common, as was the nickname "Whole Paycheck."<sup>1021</sup> Many participants in the organic movement presupposed that big was inherently evil, so huge supermarket chains were incompatible with "sustainable, natural food production."<sup>1022</sup> Farmer Joel Salatin said that he had "found Whole Foods completely untrustworthy," that "a supermarket is still just a supermarket," and that all supermarkets were part of "an inherently disconnected" and opaque food system.<sup>1023</sup> Journalist Michael Pollan castigated Whole Foods as the epitome of Big (therefore Bad) Organic, because it had adopted the regional distribution system that other grocery stores used, which made backing small farms impractical. The "organic" label and the store's evocative prose conjured up a rich narrative, dubbed "Supermarket Pastoral," so consumers believed they were engaging in an authentic, bucolic experience. While posters in the store depicted family farmers, the vegetables on sale came "primarily from the two big corporate

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<sup>1020</sup> Mazori, D. (2009). The 2009 Natural Health Green Choice Awards. *Natural Health*. **39**: 58-65.

<sup>1021</sup> Maloney, F. (2006). "Is Whole Foods Wholesome? The Dark Secrets of the Organic-Food Movement." Retrieved March 17, 2006, from <http://www.WashingtonPost.com>.

<sup>1022</sup> Renton, A. (2007). Ripe Target. *The Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/supermarkets/story/0,,2043674,00.html>.

<sup>1023</sup> TreeHugger. (2009). "Joel Salatin, America's Most Influential Farmer, Talks Big Organic and the Future of Food." Retrieved August 5, 2009, from <http://www.treehugger.com/files/2009/08/joel-salatin-america's-most-influential-farmer.php>.

organic growers in California, Earthbound Farm and Grimmway Farms,” which dominated the American organic produce market.<sup>1024</sup>

In 2007, *New York Times* writer Marian Burros noted that Whole Foods was opening new, bigger stores, with “in-store restaurants, spas, concierge shopping services, gelato stands, chocolate fountains and pizza counters.” Countless shoppers enjoyed the amenities. Whole Foods had become popular with a broad range of people, not just devoted organic and natural shoppers. Yet, critics decry Whole Foods for straying from its “original vision,” which included the core values of espousing organic agriculture and local farmers.<sup>1025</sup> It seemed to some that Whole Foods had “sold out,” even as it had succeeded as a stalwart organic pioneer.

Confronted with harsh criticism about produce transported long distances, neglect of small farmers, and aloofness from grassroots communities, Whole Foods worked to increase visibility of its local options and created positions for “Local Food Foragers.” Mackey disputed charges of selling out, arguing that he helped bring organic food and responsible business tactics into the mainstream. He noted that there had always been an ongoing battle between “purists” and “pragmatists” in organics, and he was sympathetic to both points of view.<sup>1026</sup> Mackey said he actually wanted the stores to go “beyond organic,” doing more to address other ethical and ecological concerns around industrialized food.<sup>1027</sup> Whole Foods developed its own fair-trade label and continued to adapt to the changing consumer landscape. In 2008, to help counteract its “Whole

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<sup>1024</sup> Pollan, M. (2006). *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York, The Penguin Press. 137-138.

<sup>1025</sup> Burros, M. (2007). "Is Whole Foods Straying From Its Roots?" Retrieved April 23, 2007.

<sup>1026</sup> National Public Radio. (2007). "John Mackey on Whole Foods' growth." *Marketplace* Retrieved February 26, 2007, from <http://marketplace.publicradio.org/shows/2007/02/26/PM200702266.html>.

<sup>1027</sup> Renton, A. (2007). Ripe Target. *The Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/supermarkets/story/0,,2043674,00.html>.

Paycheck” stereotype in a troubled economy, Whole Foods introduced an advertising campaign that highlighted weekly bargains and inexpensive selections in all the stores. The chain’s reputation as a hedonistic organic mecca for “foodies,” however, was hard to shake.

### **Farmers’ Market Shoppers**

The location in which organic food is sold affects its meanings. Landscapes of food shopping possess elements of what Raymond Williams called the dominant, residual, and emergent. The supermarket is presently the dominant constituent within food shopping but exists in proximity with residual spaces, such as farmers’ markets, and with emergent sites, such as home shopping from computers.<sup>1028</sup> Americans in late capitalism embarked on a renewed search for “authentic” goods within the world marketplace. Feeling alienated, people wanted food to link them to distinct places and assumed these would be of supreme quality. There were renewed efforts to connect rootless consumers with the sources of their food. Farmers’ markets have flourished along with interest in place-based, organic, and “traditional” foods.

Farmers’ markets are an accessible, flexible sales outlet for farmers. A 2002 survey of market managers by the USDA indicated that organic farmers participated widely in the markets, and demand for organic products was strong. The number of farmers’ markets in the nation has grown, yet produce sold at these sites represents only two percent of U.S. sales.<sup>1029</sup> Organic farmers tend to rely more heavily on direct marketing to consumers, through farmers’ markets or Community Supported Agriculture

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<sup>1028</sup> Ashley, B., J. Hollows, et al. (2004). *Food and Cultural Studies*. New York, Routledge. 106.

<sup>1029</sup> Kremen, A., C. Greene, et al. (2003). Organic Produce, Price Premiums, and Eco-Labeling in U.S. Farmers' Markets, USDA: 1-12. 6.

(CSA), than conventional farmers do.<sup>1030</sup> However, direct organic marketing has actually declined in the United States. The percentage of organic vegetable growers marketing straight to consumers was 49 percent in 1994.<sup>1031</sup> Natural foods stores increased in size and presence during the 1990's and came to garner 66 percent of estimated total organic sales. Direct-to-consumer sales reached up to 22 percent of total organic sales during this period.<sup>1032</sup> By 2007, though, only 13 percent of organic farmers were selling directly at farm stands, markets, and restaurants; while 80 percent were selling through wholesalers.<sup>1033</sup>

Various retail venues have a propensity to draw identifiable consumer clusters. Farmers' markets sell not just produce but also culturally rich values, like "authenticity," "simplicity," and "heritage."<sup>1034</sup> In the 1940s, Louis Bromfield recognized his market stand at Malabar Farm as a differentiated consumer site:

"There is no point in the country roadside market attempting to compete with the chain stores on a basis of price and the chain store customer is quite frankly not the kind of customer we seek but rather those who want freshness and high quality and are willing to pay for it."<sup>1035</sup>

Farmers' market managers have noticed that their consumers sought "freshness, high quality, fair pricing, pleasant social interaction with farmers and market shoppers, and

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<sup>1030</sup> Dimitri, C. and C. Greene (2002). Recent Growth Patterns in the U.S. Organic Foods Market. E. R. S. USDA. Washington DC, USDA: 1-39. 2.

<sup>1031</sup> USDA (2006). Organic Vegetable Growers Surveyed in 1994. AREI Updates. U. S. D. o. Agriculture. 4: 1-4. 1.

<sup>1032</sup> USDA. (2007). "National Organic Program: Final Rule." Retrieved May 29, 2007, from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html>. 473.

<sup>1033</sup> Sustainable Agriculture Network (2007). Transitioning to Organic Production, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program: 1-31. 18.

<sup>1034</sup> Ashley, B., J. Hollows, et al. (2004). Food and Cultural Studies. New York, Routledge. 117/

<sup>1035</sup> Bromfield, L. (1948). Malabar Farm. New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers. 314-315.

locally grown foods.”<sup>1036</sup> Successful organic farmers also satisfied customer desires for “access to specialty crop variety, and excellent customer service.” Managers have reported that customers with the strongest insistence on organically grown products were most likely to exhibit interest in social and environmental issues.<sup>1037</sup> A 2009 survey in the UK showed that patrons particularly appreciated the freshness, quality, and traceability of farmers’ market products, along with the sociability of shopping there.<sup>1038</sup> A study in 2006 found that customers at direct markets were mainly interested in taste, quality, and natural or organic foods. Grocery store shoppers, meanwhile, gave higher importance scores to health measures, ease of preparation, convenient packaging, and product brand.<sup>1039</sup> While these consumer blocs do overlap, shoppers may have dissimilar priorities in mind when visiting alternate locales.

### **Gentrification of Organics**

Issues of class and income have been imbued in the organic movement since its inception. Envisioning the untapped market potential that organic food might hold, Rodale declared in a 1945 *Organic Gardening* editorial that “a large part of our population is not only health-conscious but has the money to pay a little more for quality food that will keep the doctor away.” He believed that “discriminating purchasers” would gladly pay elevated prices if the indulgence would reward their health and palates. He also predicted that “the time is not far off when grocers will offer special grades of organically grown fruit, guaranteed to be unsprayed, at higher than regular prices and

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<sup>1036</sup> Kremen, A., C. Greene, et al. (2003). Organic Produce, Price Premiums, and Eco-Labeleing in U.S. Farmers' Markets, USDA: 1-12. 2.

<sup>1037</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>1038</sup> Soil Association (2009). Organic market report 2009. Bristol: 1-72. 22.

<sup>1039</sup> Darby, K., M. T. Batte, et al. (2006). Willingness to pay for locally produced foods: A customer intercept study of direct market and grocery store shoppers. American Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meeting. Long Beach, California. 11.

they will have difficulty meeting the demand.”<sup>1040</sup> Within two decades, Rodale’s forecast would become a reality.

When it was associated primarily with dusty bins of buckwheat flour and droopy heads of lettuce, organic food did not appear snobbish. Over time, though, organic cuisine acquired greater overtones of gourmet elitism. As Michael Pollan observed, “the word ‘elitist’ has stuck to organic food in this country like balsamic vinegar to mache. Thirty years ago the rap on organic was a little different: back then the stuff was derided as hippie food, crunchy granola and bricklike brown bread for the unshaved set (male and female division).”<sup>1041</sup> In a more clean-shaven era, the organic label became a status symbol. A 2009 article in *The Atlantic* offhandedly listed the two-parent marriage, along with “fancy schools, tae kwon do lessons, and home-cooked organic food,” as another “impressive—and rare—attainment to bestow on our fragile, gifted children.”<sup>1042</sup> Expensive organic food in glitzy retail outlets illuminates this evolution. In most cases, organic fare costs more than its conventional counterpart. Organic foods are luxury items, rather than staples, in some circumstances, and eating organic has become associated with the well-to-do. When organic food carries a higher price tag, one implication could be that only the rich are enlightened and educated enough to covet healthy, wholesome food.

Consumption always has a particular class location, and class-stratified consumption is a hallmark of the postmodern economy. Food, like other commodities, is culturally constructed and can be used as a status indicator. Everyday food practices produce and reproduce class identities. As Pierre Bourdieu noted, food tastes are based in

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<sup>1040</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1945). With the Editor: Orchard Practices. *Organic Gardening*. 6: 7.

<sup>1041</sup> Pollan, M. (2006). Mass Natural. *The New York Times*.

<sup>1042</sup> Loh, S. T. (2009). Let's Call the Whole Thing Off. *The Atlantic*. 304: 116-126. 126.

class and social conditioning. Bourdieu discussed how tastes functioned as markers of class. Cultural practices and preferences were closely linked to educational level and social upbringing. Each class fraction had a system of dispositions, or *habitus*, that was an “internalized form of class conditioning.”<sup>1043</sup> One’s habitus generated particular practices and thoughts. People and classes distinguished themselves by the distinctions they made, and cumulative aesthetic choices constituted a lifestyle.<sup>1044</sup> Bourdieu also thought that tastes in food depended on the ideas each class had of food’s effects on the body, since it was through the body that tastes in strength, health, and beauty materialized.<sup>1045</sup>

Consumer choices are significant attempts by individuals to acquire cultural capital. Different forms of capital define class membership and serve as instruments of power.<sup>1046</sup> Foods classified as “gourmet” tend to require cultural and economic assets to obtain. The discourse of gourmet food writing confers high repute upon certain foods.<sup>1047</sup> Organic food, when situated as epicurean, is often framed as artisanal, authentic, traditional, or glamorous. The identities of some who align themselves with organics have evolved. There is a branch of the organic movement that prefers honey-glazed organic carrots served at upscale restaurants, rather than dirt-caked organic carrots straight from the farm. Those who dine on compote of organic apples rarely know how to make compost from organic apple cores. Many who extol organic farming do not actually

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<sup>1043</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press. 101.

<sup>1044</sup> Ibid. 283.

<sup>1045</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>1046</sup> Ibid. 316.

<sup>1047</sup> Johnston, J. and S. Baumann (2007). "Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing." *American Journal of Sociology* **113**(1): 165-204.

want to be farmers themselves. The organic lifestyle has become a mark of refinement, with no dirty fingernails required.

Organic food typically costs more than conventional food.<sup>1048</sup> Scores of consumers are willing to splurge for the perceived benefits that organic food provides. However, high prices are a significant obstacle to widespread acceptance of organic food. Market research indicates that price is the single most important factor serving as a deterrent to those who do not purchase organics.<sup>1049</sup> Nearly 90 percent of shoppers say they would buy organic produce if it cost the same as non-organic but find the elevated cost to be a barrier.<sup>1050</sup> Some observers claim that, for farmers, the price premium must be maintained to ensure the feasibility of organic agriculture.<sup>1051</sup> However, the premium is often value-added, rather than cost-based. Supporters militantly pronounce that if more people buy organic, then prices will drop. In the meantime, however, a completely organic grocery cart is beyond the scope of most low-to-moderate income people. It then appears that only the wealthy are privileged enough to indulge in unpolluted food, while the poor are left with chemical debris. Organic farmer Leonard Dodge noted in 1950 that marketing organic crops to “persons of above-average intelligence and education” was the most promising promotional strategy and felt that other farmers “should make a special effort to convert this special group” to organics.<sup>1052</sup> Organic advocates have often preached to well-heeled “enlightened” shoppers who seem more disposed to purchase

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<sup>1048</sup> Consumer Reports (2006). When It Pays to Buy Organic. Consumer Reports: 12-17.

<sup>1049</sup> Cottingham, M. and E. Winkler (2007). The Organic Consumer. The Handbook of Organic and Fair Trade Food Marketing. S. Wright and D. McCrea. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: 25-50. 46.

<sup>1050</sup> Wasik, J. F. (1996). Green Marketing & Management: A Global Perspective. Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell Publishers. 144.

<sup>1051</sup> Sligh, M. and C. Christman (2003). Who Owns Organic? The Global Status, Prospects and Challenges of a Changing Organic Market. Pittsboro, NC, Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI-USA). 14.

<sup>1052</sup> Dodge, L. F. (1950). Planning Organic Profits. The Organic Farmer. **1**: 15-18. 15.



organic food, rather than evangelizing to the humble “masses” who may have economic limitations.

Seeds of gentrified organic food grew in the 1970s. The *Organic Gardening Guide to Organic Living* (1970) noted that dozens of restaurants in the Los Angeles area were already serving organic food in gourmet style. The staff of *Organic Gardening and Farming* urged health-conscious readers not to overlook “one of the most important reasons of all for eating organic food. It tastes better.”<sup>1053</sup> Pointing out that the excellence of French food started on the farm, the staff pressed Americans to demand the superior flavor of organic food, which would bring “greater pleasure for our palates,” create better national health, and “ultimately revolutionize the entire system of food production.”<sup>1054</sup> They admitted that prices of organically grown foods would never be as low as those for commercially produced foods. However, many people were indeed willing to shell out more for the “quality, variety, and flavor” of organic foods, and, they advised, “you’re getting exactly what you pay for.”<sup>1055</sup>

*Life* magazine declared in 1970 that organic foods were incompatible on a mass scale with a supermarket economy. At “small country-style stores” that were meeting the demand, food grown organically regularly cost at least fifty percent more, but “believers find it irresistible, and willingly endure the hassle and pay the prices to get it.”<sup>1056</sup> Notwithstanding a recession, soaring prices, and absence of a nationwide code for “organically grown,” the *New York Times* noticed in 1974 that “a sturdy core of middle-

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<sup>1053</sup> Hylton, W. H., Ed. (1973). Organically Grown Foods: What They Are and Why You Need Them. Emmaus, Pa., Rodale Press. 60.

<sup>1054</sup> Ibid. 61.

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>1056</sup> Life (1970). The Move to Eat Natural. *Life*. **69**: 44-46. 46.

class consumers” continued to pay high prices for what they considered purer, more nutritious food.<sup>1057</sup>

Julie Guthman observed that “sales of organic food really took off in California when growers started to sell ‘through the back door’ to celebrity chefs and their restaurants.”<sup>1058</sup> California was “a center for both the counterculture and the yuppie explosion that put organic food on the proverbial map in the U.S.”<sup>1059</sup> It was Alice Waters who helped forge the connection between these two points on the organic continuum. Inspired by her visits to France, Waters opened a café in 1971 in Berkeley. Chez Panisse served fresh, local, seasonal, ingredients. The restaurant linked countercuisine to haute cuisine.<sup>1060</sup> At the time, Waters said she and her friends were “reacting against the uniformity and blandness of the food of the day” and soon discovered that “the best-tasting food came from local farmers, ranchers, foragers, and fishermen who were committed to sound and sustainable practices.”<sup>1061</sup> In 1977, Waters bought 160 acres and planned an organic garden to reap more crops for the restaurant.<sup>1062</sup> Consumers began to see her organic produce as a precious specialty item on the menu, and other tasteful restaurants followed suit. Organic salad mix became an elite commodity, playing into “yuppie sensibilities.”<sup>1063</sup> Waters has been a champion of organic farming, local food, and Slow Food throughout her career. Thomas McNamee, in his 2007 biography of

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<sup>1057</sup> Colamosca, A. (1974). Health Foods Prosper Despite High Prices. New York Times: 205.

<sup>1058</sup> Guthman, J. (1998). "Regulating Meaning, Appropriating Nature: The Codification of California Organic Agriculture." Antipode 30(2): 135-154. 140.

<sup>1059</sup> Guthman, J. (2004). "The Trouble with 'Organic Lite' in California: a Rejoinder to the 'Conventionalisation' Debate." Sociologia Ruralis 44(3): 301-316. 303.

<sup>1060</sup> Guthman, J. (2003). "Fast Food/ Organic Food: Reflexive Tastes and the Making of "Yuppie Chow". " Journal of Social and Cultural Geography 4(1): 43-56. 48.

<sup>1061</sup> Petrini, C. (2007). Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should be Good, Clean, and Fair. New York, Random House. ix.

<sup>1062</sup> McNamee, T. (2007). Alice Waters and Chez Panisse: The Romantic, Impractical, Often Eccentric, Ultimately Brilliant Making of a Food Revolution. New York, The Penguin Press. 136.

<sup>1063</sup> Guthman, J. (2003). "Fast Food/ Organic Food: Reflexive Tastes and the Making of "Yuppie Chow". " Journal of Social and Cultural Geography 4(1): 43-56. 49, 54.

Waters, said that she “transformed the way many Americans eat and the way they think about food. Her insistence on the freshest ingredients, used only at the peak of their season, nearly always grown locally and organically, is now a ruling principle in the best American restaurants and for many home cooks.”<sup>1064</sup> Restaurants that highlighted local, seasonal, and organic produce snowballed in the 1980s.

Another example of the classy organic wave is chef Nora Pouillon’s Restaurant Nora, which opened in Washington D.C. in 1979. It became the nation’s first certified organic restaurant in 1999. Pouillon was involved in crafting organic certification standards for restaurants. She said, “I made a conscious decision to live organically and create a venue to offer delicious, well-balanced organic food to the public.”<sup>1065</sup> At least 95% of everything dished up in Restaurant Nora comes from certified organic growers and farmers. The eatery’s web site claims that environmentalists and politicians eat there with a “clear conscience, knowing that what’s on their plate hasn’t polluted the environment, is healthy for them, and tastes good too.” The servers’ uniforms, from Patagonia, are made of 100% organic cotton. The menu includes a page that describes “Why Nora Believes in Organic and Biodynamic” and names local farmers who provide produce and meat. Seasonal main courses include “Sake Glazed Sustainable Norwegian Salmon with Shiitakes, Carrots, Asparagus, Snow Peas, Ginger Soy Emulsion, Crispy Yams” (\$28); “Crispy Amish Duck Confit Risotto with Asparagus, Wild Mushrooms, Spring Peas, Tomatoes, Leeks, Herb Pesto Emulsion” (\$29); and “Coriander Crusted

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<sup>1064</sup> McNamee, T. (2007). Alice Waters and Chez Panisse: The Romantic, Impractical, Often Eccentric, Ultimately Brilliant Making of a Food Revolution. New York, The Penguin Press. 6.

<sup>1065</sup> Clarke, A., H. Porter, et al., Eds. (2001). Living Organic: Easy Steps to an Organic Family Lifestyle. Naperville, IL, Sourcebooks, Inc. 7.

Rack of Lamb with Chickpea Eggplant Ragoût, Green Beans, Oven-dried Tomatoes, Black Olive Feta Gremolata, Rosemary Sauce” (\$35).<sup>1066</sup>

In 1990, *Time* reported on more modish restaurants providing elegant, urbane organic food. The article noted that, “in contrast to the monotonous vegetarianism of the ‘60s (steamed carrots, brown rice and beans ruled), today’s highbrow organic restaurants not only offer a wide variety of dishes but also often serve meat.” Fashionable restaurants bridged the gulf between gourmet cuisine and natural food. Although ordering from an organic kitchen entailed boutique prices, “growing hordes of patrons obviously believe the result is worth the extra money.”<sup>1067</sup> GustOrganics in New York, the first USDA-certified organic bar, serves organic Latin-inspired cuisine and beverages like its Buenos Aires Style Steak (\$26), Homemade Turkey Meatballs (\$21), Dulce de Leche Martini (\$12), and Sambazon-Açai Smoothie (\$4.75).<sup>1068</sup> One consumer guide, *Living Organic* (2001), reflected that organic food had “come a long way since the days when it had a reputation for being grubby, eccentric-looking, and usually found lurking in the dark recesses of health food shops.” Since then, “a new breed of organic supermarkets and juice bars frequented by wheatgrass-sipping celebrities, have helped give the organic image a designer makeover.”<sup>1069</sup> Organic was “becoming a gold standard for premium foods.”<sup>1070</sup> A survey of chefs by the National Restaurant Association found that the top

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<sup>1066</sup> Restaurant Nora. (2007). "Restaurant Nora web site." Retrieved May 7, 2007, from <http://www.noras.com/nora/about/>.

<sup>1067</sup> Horowitz, J. M. (1990, May 12, 2008). "Bye-Bye Tofu; Hello, Truffles!" *Time* Retrieved Mar. 19, from <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

<sup>1068</sup> GustOrganics. (2009). "GustOrganics web site." Retrieved August 7, 2009, from <http://gustorganicsnyc.com>.

<sup>1069</sup> Clarke, A., H. Porter, et al., Eds. (2001). *Living Organic: Easy Steps to an Organic Family Lifestyle*. Naperville, IL, Sourcebooks, Inc. 10.

<sup>1070</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

three “hot” menu items for 2008 were bite-size desserts, locally grown produce, and organic produce.<sup>1071</sup>

In *The Best Natural Foods on the Market Today: A Yuppie's Guide to Hippie Food* (2004), Greg Hottinger asserted that organic farmers deserved financial support. He wrote, “if you typically give to charitable causes, consider your extra expense of natural foods a donation to a healthier way of producing food.”<sup>1072</sup> Jane Goodall also acknowledged that organic foods cost more. However, she imagined that some people who paid willingly saw it “as a charity donation—a way to support the health of the planet or the farmers who are trying to do right by the land and their communities,” and others saw it as a “health insurance payment, recognizing that by ridding their bodies, and the bodies of their children, of agricultural chemicals they may have fewer medical bills.”<sup>1073</sup> Chef Jeff Cox, in *The Organic Cook's Bible* (2006), explained that ingredients for “the perfect dish” should be organic, because these tasted better. For the cook, “organic produce sets the standard of quality.” Organic foods grown in rich soil received all the nutrients needed to develop “maximum flavor nuances.” Also, Cox said, organic food had “come to be appreciated for its richness of flavor, its freshness, and its purity.”<sup>1074</sup> Many luxury hotels and resorts now operate their own organic gardens. For example, when the CuisinArt Resort & Spa in Anguilla wanted fresh salads for guests, it started an organic garden and orchard that has yielded peppers, pumpkins, okra, soybeans, melons, avocados, guavas, tamarinds, limes, lemons, and breadfruit.

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<sup>1071</sup> Sloan, A. E. (2008). "What, When, and Where America Eats." *Food Technology*: 20-29. 25.

<sup>1072</sup> Hottinger, G. (2004). *The Best Natural Foods on the Market Today: A Yuppie's Guide to Hippie Food, Vol. 1*. Huckleberry Mountain Press. 24.

<sup>1073</sup> Goodall, J. (2005). *Harvest for Hope: A Guide to Mindful Eating*. New York, Warner Books. 169.

<sup>1074</sup> Cox, J. (2006). *The Organic Cook's Bible: How to Select and Cook the Best Ingredients on the Market*. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 21.

Numerous top-notch companies have turned to organics. As interest in eco-fashion grew, high-end retailers increasingly requested organic cotton. Patagonia decided to convert its entire cotton line of outdoor apparel to organic in 1994, and Nike committed to using more organic fibers in its clothing; both are among the world's top organic cotton markets. Gourmet food purveyor Harry & David began offering organic fruit in its Fruit-of-the-Month Club and gift baskets in 2008. Seasonal organic choices included apples, pears, and grapefruit. The club was supposedly meant "for anyone who recognizes the health benefits of eating organically grown fruits," though two pounds of dark sweet cherries cost \$52, while four pounds of organic peaches was \$40. Through an Organic Options Club, customers could pay \$125 to receive nectarines in July, avocados in August, and peaches in September.<sup>1075</sup> The Body Deli, based in California, has "chefs" who use fresh organic ingredients to concoct skin care products, such as Crème de la Rose moisturizing cream (\$75 for two ounces), Sea Cucumber Gelee (\$45 for two ounces), Blueberry Fusion Scrub (\$36 for two ounces), and Coconut Cream Body Soufflé (\$26 for eight ounces). The world's first certified organic whiskey—Benromach Organic Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky—is brewed in a small Scottish distillery and sells for about \$70 per bottle. Prairie Organic Vodka, made with organic corn from a co-op of 900 Minnesota farmers, costs \$68 per bottle online. Organic wines, to which no sulfites are added, have also raised their profile in the market. La Riojana Cooperativa, a member co-op of indigenous farmers in Argentina's Famatina Valley, sells organic vegan wines under the Pircas Negras label. Frey Winery in California produces certified organic wines like Organic Dessertage Port (\$49), Organic Late Harvest Zin (\$25), and Organic Pinot

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<sup>1075</sup> Harry & David web site. (2008). "Organic Options Club." May 25, 2008, from <http://www.harryanddavid.com>.

Noir (\$18). The vineyard says its “emphasis is on producing wine of the highest quality while caring for planet and palate alike.”<sup>1076</sup> These and other examples of organic’s prevalence in the “green glamour” industry demonstrate its popularity.

A new *Organic Style* magazine launched in 2008, unrelated to the one Rodale Inc. had previously published. This was an online magazine from Organic Style Limited and was touted as “the premier green-living magazine.” The Spring 2008 issue featured Julia Butterfly Hill on the cover as an “eco-hero.” It included an article on Earth Day founder Denis Hayes; advice from PETA on how to throw a dog party; a report on a California biodynamic vineyard; and a piece on The Nature Conservancy’s ‘Plant A Billion Trees’ campaign. The cover also promised “down-to-earth inspiration and advice on gardening, travel, food, fashion, beauty, the environment, giving, and living.” Gerald Prolman, founder and CEO of *Organic Style*, discussed organic agriculture in the publisher’s note and said that it “thrives because both farmers and consumers are inspired by their love of the earth to make responsible choices. By growing organically, farmers care for the environment, for wildlife, for the people they employ—and for the people who conscientiously purchase their products.”<sup>1077</sup> The magazine’s boutique section featured jewelry, body care products, flowers, gourmet food and wine, garden accessories, apparel, dog treats, and other goodies from *Organic Style* vendors eager to reach these conscientious readers.

Organic food has, in many respects, become a sign of distinction and prestigious consumption, more representative of the gentleman farmer than the gritty homesteader.

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<sup>1076</sup> Frey Vineyards. (2009). "Frey Vineyards web site." Retrieved June 1, 2009, from <http://www.freywine.com/>.

<sup>1077</sup> Organic Style. (2008). "Organic Style web site." Retrieved May 24, 2008, from <http://www.organicstyle.com/>.

Organic advertisements designed for the affluent prototype take this reality into account. For example, in a Bija advertisement for Omega Truffles made with organic ingredients, the chocolates are portrayed as a luxurious but healthy indulgence, part of the sophisticated organic standard of living. They come in three “sublime vegetarian flavors”: dark chocolate, milk chocolate hazelnut, and white maple. Organic product promotions often exude the ethos of a prosperous lifestyle based on material possessions, wholesome cuisine, and domestic comforts. These products are explicitly directed at well-to-do consumers of organics. They subtly imply that those who are either uninterested in—or unable to afford—expensive organic food are morally and intellectually inferior.

Advertisements like these are fertile ground for discovering the ideological myths, or signs, that Roland Barthes observed throughout popular culture. Barthes’s *Mythologies* (1957) explained that the myths pervading the popular press, films, and pulp literature were derived from bourgeois ideology. He revealed elitist norms implicit in texts and practices. By propagating particular representations—such as associating steak with elegance and patriotism—the bourgeoisie crafted historically contingent realities as “evident laws of a natural order.”<sup>1078</sup> Barthes recognized the ideological influence of cultural forms, asserting that mythology participated in “the making of the world.”<sup>1079</sup> Any culture is a mosaic of messages, filled with conflicting meanings that are open to a multitude of interpretations. However, semiological analysis of advertising indicates how it selectively echoes and reinforces certain attitudes, behaviors, and values.

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<sup>1078</sup> Barthes, R. (1995). *Mythologies*. New York, Hill and Wang. 140.

<sup>1079</sup> *Ibid.* 156.



The strategic endorsement of exclusivity is visible in advertisements for Green & Black's organic chocolate bars. Eco-entrepreneur Craig Sams, the former chairman of Britain's Soil Association, founded Green & Black's in partnership with his wife, Josephine Fairley. This purveyor of costly organic confectionery is now a market leader, and mainstream candy company Cadbury bought the company in 2005.<sup>1080</sup> One 2008 advertisement for a Green & Black's Almond chocolate bar announced that it was "made with whole organic Sicilian almonds, pure organic cocoa and just a pinch of obsession." Text beneath this mentioned the importance of world-class organic ingredients: "We insist on Trinitario cocoa beans. And they must be grown organically, ensuring absolutely nothing gets in the way of their intense flavor." The opposite page featured a discussion of which Frei Brothers Reserve wine would best match each chocolate bar flavor—for example, Green & Black's Dark 70% was paired with Frei Brothers Reserve Pinot Noir, because "the light, fruity bitterness of the dark chocolate is complex but not too sweet, a perfect complement to the tart raspberry notes in the Pinot." Appropriately, this particular ad was placed in *bon appétit*, a magazine catering to those who appreciate fine food and wine.

The "Deep Organic" camp tends to lament the ethos of organic gentility that is visible in the media and at chic palaces of consumption. Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini generated controversy when he recounted his visit to the Ferry Plaza farmers' market with Alice Waters. He described it as "an exclusive boutique with fresh, healthy-looking food, all carefully marked *organic*. One could have spent a fortune there. The prices were astronomical." Petrini added that "the amiable ex-hippies and young dropouts-turned-farmers greeted their customers with a smile and offered generous samples of their

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<sup>1080</sup> Dolce, J. (2008). Mister Cool. *Gourmet*. 28: 58-61, 118. 61.

products to a clientele whose social status was pretty clear: either wealthy or very wealthy.”<sup>1081</sup> Ironically, Slow Food chapters themselves have a reputation for elitism and are perceived as being basically comprised of moneyed patrons. Furthermore, it is often the same faction of organic “purists” that simultaneously denigrates the inclination of discount stores to proffer organic products at low prices.

As the popularity of organic food grew, major retailers in the U.S.—e.g. Wal-Mart, Kmart, and Target—added organic products. The share of organic foods sold at these discount outlets instead of smaller stores jumped from 1% in 1998 to 13% in 1999.<sup>1082</sup> “Big box” retailers like Costco, Sam’s Club, and BJ’s Wholesale Club accounted for over \$600 million in organic sales in 2005.<sup>1083</sup> National supermarket chains rolled out organic private label product lines with more affordable prices. Safeway launched its version of organic packaged goods, “O Organics,” in 2005, and three years later this was the biggest organic brand in the country. Established independent organic companies met head-on competition from this upsurge in lower-cost store brands. Both wariness and enthusiasm from the public have greeted these organic leaps into the mainstream. When Wal-Mart announced that it wanted to democratize organic food by selling organic products for just ten percent more than their conventional equivalents—compared to the customary premiums of twenty to thirty percent—some observers championed the move as a way to introduce more low-income Americans to organic food. However, others grieved that this democratic accessibility entailed a loss of prestige for organic certification and possibly meant diminished quality for the organic niche.

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<sup>1081</sup> Petrini, C. (2007). *Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should be Good, Clean, and Fair*. New York, Random House. 130.

<sup>1082</sup> Halweil, B. (2001). *Organic Gold Rush*, Worldwatch Institute: 1-12. 7.

<sup>1083</sup> Bolton, D. (2007). "Costco Nurtures Growth of Organics." Retrieved May 1, 2007, from <http://www.naturalfoodnet.com>.

## Consumer Sovereignty

Advocates of the “free market” postulate that “consumer sovereignty” prevails under capitalism. Consumers are thought to bear power to choose and even control what is offered in the marketplace. A consumer is said to be “voting” whenever he or she selects a certain product. Organic food proponents regularly insist that to vote with your pocketbook, dollars, or fork for organics is to engage in an influential political act. They see organic shoppers as consumer activists. *The Organic Cookbook* (2000) declared: “Vote with your fork—choose organic.”<sup>1084</sup> *Living Organic* (2001) noted: “we can vote for better products with our wallets through ‘green consumerism’ or ‘ethical consumerism.’”<sup>1085</sup> This model of “responsible capitalism” assumes that certain companies provide socially and environmentally sustainable goods and services that are worth acquiring.

A plethora of consumer guides aver that buying organic food is a potent course of action, carrying persuasive power that will convince politicians and businesses to shift towards a better society. *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods* (1972), written by the staff of Rodale’s *Organic Gardening and Farming* magazine, avowed that paying for organic foods was an act of dissent that would “encourage change in American agricultural methods.”<sup>1086</sup> The authors added:

“By wanting to buy organically grown foods raised by a family farmer who is not supposed to be able to make a living on the land, you are helping to reverse a trend that has driven people off the land and made farming an old

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<sup>1084</sup> Elliott, R. J. and E. Treuillé (2000). *The Organic Cookbook: Naturally Good Food*. New York, Dorling Kindersley. 7-9.

<sup>1085</sup> Clarke, A., H. Porter, et al., Eds. (2001). *Living Organic: Easy Steps to an Organic Family Lifestyle*. Naperville, IL, Sourcebooks, Inc. 106.

<sup>1086</sup> Goldman, M. C. and W. H. Hylton, Eds. (1972). *The Basic Book of Organically Grown Foods*. Emmaus, Rodale Press. 328.

man's profession. By buying organic foods at a mama-and-papa neighborhood store that is not supposed to be able to compete with supermarket chains, you are helping to change the make-up of America."<sup>1087</sup>

The *Shopper's Guide to Natural Foods* (1987) made corresponding claims for the philosophical and political authority of shopping. Selection of produce was "the equivalent of casting a vote for the type of world you wish to live in."<sup>1088</sup> Organic fruits and vegetables were worth the extra cost, because, "in addition to sparing your body some poisons, you are supporting a grower who is raising food in a way that enhances both the soil and the environment."<sup>1089</sup>

The Environmental Working Group's recommendation in the 1990s was for consumers to "vote with their wallets" by purchasing produce with consistently lower toxic pesticides on them.<sup>1090</sup> In *Eating with Conscience* (1997), Michael Fox described how consumers could become "kitchen anarchists," simply by supporting "local, humane organic farmers and market co-ops."<sup>1091</sup> Buying power would make a difference, so "we can vote with our food dollars and change our eating habits for our own good and for the good of the animal kingdom, the environment, and caring farmers."<sup>1092</sup> The Northeast Organic Farming Association agreed that this was the best course of action, because "by making a few changes in what you purchase and where you shop and by joining our community of organic-agriculture supporters, you cast your vote for a healthier state and

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<sup>1087</sup> Ibid. 328.

<sup>1088</sup> East West Journal (1987). *Shopper's Guide to Natural Foods*. Garden City Park, NY, Avery Publishing Group. 61.

<sup>1089</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>1090</sup> Environmental Working Group (1995). *A Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce*. Washington, D.C., Environmental Working Group. 2.

<sup>1091</sup> Fox, M. W. (1997). *Eating With Conscience: The Bioethics of Food*. Troutdale, OR, NewSage Press. 12.

<sup>1092</sup> Ibid. 166.

a healthier planet.”<sup>1093</sup> *The Green Food Shopper: An Activist's Guide to Changing the Food System* (1997) advised readers to choose organically produced items when they could be found. The rationale was that, “as a consumer, you can help shape the global economy by what you buy.”<sup>1094</sup>

Many guides emphasize benefits to the overall agricultural system. Leslie Duram’s *Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works* (2005) said, “consumers speak with their wallets.” Since buying organic food had the potential to address the “ecological, economic, and social concerns that go hand in hand with our global industrial food system,” Duram thought buying food produced locally and organically was “the best way to ‘speak out’ against these problems.”<sup>1095</sup> *The Organic Cook’s Bible* (2006) assented that every piece of organic fruit purchased was another vote for “life-affirming, joyful, and humane farming.”<sup>1096</sup> The author wrote, “I think of my food dollars as ballots that can be cast either for agribusiness or for small farmers.”<sup>1097</sup> *Organic Housekeeping* (2006) urged consumers to “vote with your pocketbook for humane treatment for farm animals...and for clean water and healthy soil.” In the end, paying a bit more for food and buying organic would be “a real bargain” for everyone.<sup>1098</sup> *The Organic Food Handbook* (2006) was adamant that:

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<sup>1093</sup> McManus, F., Ed. (1997). Eating Fresh from the Organic Garden State: A Year-Round Guide to Cooking & Buying Local Organic Products. Pennington, NJ, Northeast Organic Farming Association--New Jersey. ix.

<sup>1094</sup> Mothers & Others for a Livable Planet (1997). The Green Food Shopper: An Activist's Guide to Changing the Food System. New York, Mothers & Others for a Livable Planet. 88.

<sup>1095</sup> Duram, L. A. (2005). Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press. x.

<sup>1096</sup> Cox, J. (2006). The Organic Cook's Bible: How to Select and Cook the Best Ingredients on the Market. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 217.

<sup>1097</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>1098</sup> Sandbeck, E. (2006). Organic Housekeeping: In Which the Nontoxic Avenger Shows You How to Improve Your Health and That of Your Family While You Save Time, Money, and, Perhaps, Your Sanity. New York, Scribner. 114.

“people do make a difference with their food choices. The small ripples created by individuals choosing organic is rising to a tidal wave of change that will transform agriculture and food production, resulting in better human health, a cleaner environment, vital farming communities, a more balanced economy, a greater appreciation for how food is produced, and a renewed connection between farmers and consumers.”<sup>1099</sup>

According to those who defend organics, price should not deter shopper-activists. As early as the 1940s, Rodale told his magazine readers that “at the beginning premiums must be paid” for organically grown food, but eventually there would be a “drastic change in farm practice.”<sup>1100</sup> Organic food handlers were not getting rich in their business, he said in 1951. Rather, many were “working under hardship, pioneering to hew out a clearing from the wilderness of poor nutrition,” and an important factor in comparing costs was that organically produced foods would “give better health” and eliminate doctor visits.<sup>1101</sup> Over half a century later, the Natural Resources Defense Council affirmed that organic food merited the added cost and counseled that organic food provided “extra value in the form of safer food that’s better for the environment.”<sup>1102</sup> *Ode* magazine proclaimed in 2007 that “if 2 percent of the population starts paying extra for organic, people notice. Markets change. Behaviours change. Next thing you know, the world has changed.”<sup>1103</sup> *Big Green Purse: Use Your Spending Power to Create a Cleaner, Greener World* (2008), announced that women could use consumer

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<sup>1099</sup> Roseboro, K. (2006). *The Organic Food Handbook: A Consumer’s Guide to Buying and Eating Organic Food*. Laguna Beach, CA, Basic Health Publications. 69.

<sup>1100</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1945). With the Editor—The Work of Weston A. Price. *Organic Gardening*. **7**: 4-6. 6.

<sup>1101</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1951). Expensive Organic Foods. *Organic Gardening*. **18**: 37.

<sup>1102</sup> Eisenberg, S. (2007). "Is Organic Food Worth It?" *This Green Life* Retrieved May 3, 2008, from <http://www.nrdc.org/thisgreenlife/>.

<sup>1103</sup> Godin, S. (2007). Organic Top 20. *Ode*: 60-69. 60.

clout to “create the world we want.”<sup>1104</sup> The author’s first principle was to “buy less,” but she also specified that favoring responsible companies built an incentive for their rivals to follow suit. Although organic food was more expensive, “the more you buy, the cheaper organic food will eventually get.”<sup>1105</sup> This maxim that positive upheavals were on the horizon has been repeated often.

Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition and public health, noted that, while businesses exploited public concerns about health, the best recourse against such manipulation was to “vote with your dollars every time you buy food.” She acknowledged, however, that it was not easy for an individual to “oppose an entire food system.” To facilitate better choices, the “food environment” could be altered in ways that encouraged eating healthfully.<sup>1106</sup> Still, Nestle pressed consumers who were concerned about pesticides or genetically modified foods to buy organics. Although organic produce had not proven to be more nutritious, she said “there are loads of other good reasons to buy organics, and I do.”<sup>1107</sup> She viewed the price of organics as a “political choice,” because “when you choose organics, you are voting with your fork for a planet with fewer pesticides, richer soil, and cleaner water supplies—all better in the long run.”<sup>1108</sup> Similarly, to justify organic purchases, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) launched a national consumer education and marketing campaign in 2009 called “Organic. It’s worth it.” This included a contest searching for an “Organic Idol” who would serve as an ambassador and spokesperson on behalf of organic products.

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<sup>1104</sup> MacEachern, D. (2008). Big Green Purse: Use Your Spending Power to Create a Cleaner, Greener World. New York, Avery. x.

<sup>1105</sup> Ibid. 164.

<sup>1106</sup> Nestle, M. (2006). What To Eat. New York, North Point Press. 521.

<sup>1107</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>1108</sup> Ibid. 66.

Advocates have accentuated the lack of effort required to protest the industrial food system. A 2008 article on the “Delicious Revolution” in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, stated that “all you have to do to join is pass up the chips and nuggets, and eat a locally grown, organic carrot instead.” Though this easy step was, admittedly, poles apart from lining up for the giant marches and boycotts of the civil rights or antiwar movements, the author still categorized those who were carefully considering what crossed their lips as being actors in “a full-fledged revolution.”<sup>1109</sup> To change the world, it seems, you only need to switch what you eat. The fact that this insurrection often tastes good has certainly helped the cause.

Wendy Johnson, who spent nearly three decades as an organic gardener for the San Francisco Zen Center’s Green Gulch Farm, expressed her belief that “growing food organically and eating conscientiously are political acts that help to establish and ensure social, economic, and ecological justice.”<sup>1110</sup> *Food Fight: A Citizen's Guide to a Food and Farm Bill* (2007) affirmed that “every day, we can support or choose not to support a particular aspect of the food and farming sector through our purchases.”<sup>1111</sup> Michael Pollan’s *In Defense of Food* (2008) concurred that “the more eaters who vote with their forks for a different kind of food, the more commonplace and accessible such food will become.”<sup>1112</sup>

As these examples demonstrate, the organic movement has principally adopted a utilitarian approach, underlining how pesticide-free food provides private benefits.

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<sup>1109</sup> Barbour, C. (2008). A Delicious Revolution. *O, The Oprah Magazine*. 9: 292-299. 294.

<sup>1110</sup> Johnson, W. (2008). *Gardening at the Dragon’s Gate: At Work in the Wild and Cultivated World*. New York, Bantam Books. xiii.

<sup>1111</sup> Imhoff, D. (2007). *Food Fight: A Citizen's Guide to a Food and Farm Bill*. Healdsburg, Ca, Watershed Media. 140.

<sup>1112</sup> Pollan, M. (2008). *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. New York, The Penguin Press. 14.



Advising consumers to vote with their wallets and choose organic food has often played on fear (e.g. risks to personal health and environment) or guilt (e.g. the plight of livestock and family farmers). This propelled acceptance of higher prices for organic products. In posing organic food as a desirable supplement to the typical fare, crusaders helped make it a niche product. As an amenity, it became part of the search for a better standard of living, tied to evolving levels of consumption.<sup>1113</sup> Meanwhile, those who could not afford to partake of organic shiitake mushrooms and micro greens were left with the cheaper, chemically-tainted residue. Ironically, many farm workers in large-scale organic agriculture operations cannot afford to purchase the organic food they help harvest.

Proponents of green consumerism argue that it does supply individuals who may eschew deeper ecological activities with a space for moderate environmental activism. Examining the paradox of “environmentally conscious” consumption, Annie Muldoon discussed the extent to which, as a form of participatory democracy, it was a critical first step. It provided a forum in which consumers could actualize environmental beliefs through their purchasing choices. Muldoon reasoned that “small, incremental changes may be derided as inconsequential, but they are perhaps the only way that substantial social change begins.”<sup>1114</sup> Daniel Goleman also proposed in *Ecological Intelligence* (2009) that “radical transparency” about the environmental impact of products would enable shopping to become “an opportunity for compassion,” generating ripple effects throughout global supply chains.<sup>1115</sup>

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<sup>1113</sup> Hays, S. (1987). Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985. New York, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>1114</sup> Muldoon, A. (2006). "Where the Green Is: Examining the Paradox of Environmentally Conscious Consumption." Electronic Green Journal(23).

<sup>1115</sup> Goleman, D. (2009). Ecological Intelligence: How Knowing the Hidden Impacts of What We Buy Can Change Everything. New York, Broadway Books. 245.

In the face of this chorus about the leverage of consumers, skeptics have exposed weaknesses in the notion of consumer sovereignty. The ideology of consumers' "free choice" in a "free market" masks imbalanced power relations. Consumer preferences are not always met. The act of consumption reinforces, rather than undermines, capitalist systems in which economic, political, and cultural authority are increasingly concentrated. Susan Strasser has observed that attempts to underscore consumer agency should not "blind us to the fundamental fact that Marx was right about this much: the point of capitalist enterprise is to make money." Inequality is still propagated through consumption. Corporations exist for the profit of stockholders, and "consumer culture itself is a means of control." Marketing strategies contribute to the creation of needs and awaken desires that may exceed a person's means.<sup>1116</sup> In *New Age Capitalism* (2000), Kimberly Lau also argued that "consumption is not political action. Believing it to be so is perhaps the greatest risk of modernity."<sup>1117</sup> When consumers presume they have the capacity to subvert the larger systems of global capitalism, this impression allows the capitalist system to profit and thrive.<sup>1118</sup>

Consumers can indeed exert significant pressure on the market. Progressive, enlightened consumerism can provoke change in what the capitalist marketplace offers. However, the widespread presumption that citizens trigger social cataclysms through everyday purchasing patterns bears greater scrutiny. "Conscious commerce" or "voting" with one's fork may have negligible effects. Intractable agricultural conventions continue to set the guiding principles for the American food system. Farm legislation has

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<sup>1116</sup> Strasser, S. (2002). "Making Consumption Conspicuous: Transgressive Topics Go Mainstream." *Technology and Culture* 43(4): 755-70.

<sup>1117</sup> Lau, K. (2000). *New Age Capitalism: Making Money East of Eden*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press. 140.

<sup>1118</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

historically favored industrial agriculture, based on efficiency and uniformity, rather than sustainable alternatives. The long-term viability of organic farms may depend more on restructuring agricultural policies than on cultivating consumer approval.

Rodale contended in 1952 that it was “up to those who are health-conscious to see that their needs and rights are honestly represented in the halls of Congress and in their State legislatures.”<sup>1119</sup> Yet, the organic alliance has chiefly focused on convincing consumers to engage in “green consumption.” The organic movement’s persistent emphasis on consumptive power led to individualization of responsibility, which ascribed culpability for consumption-related problems to isolated people. Rather than bolstering systemic reform, this legitimized existing dynamics of consumption and production. Individualization is apolitical and non-confrontational. Placing the burden on the shoulders of consumers absolves other crucial players of blame for social and environmental damage. It enables organizations and government to evade accountability for making agriculture truly sustainable. Creating better products can be a useful response to environmental troubles, but producing and consuming less overall would be wiser. The greatest challenge is to transform the structures that sustain over-consumption.<sup>1120</sup>

Consumer sovereignty is rooted in the supposition that industries merely respond to shoppers’ wants and needs, so companies don’t produce unless there is demand.<sup>1121</sup> Detractors assert that this hypothesis neglects to consider how consumers do not have complete information about their options, nor are they immune to the influence of marketers. Trends in global distribution and political-economic commodity chains also

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<sup>1119</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1952). Miscellany: Looking Forward. *Organic Gardening*. **20**: 24-25. 25.

<sup>1120</sup> Princen, T., M. Maniates, et al., Eds. (2002). *Confronting Consumption*. Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press. 328.

<sup>1121</sup> Ibid. 321.

affect what is actually produced.<sup>1122</sup> Individualization ignores larger forces shaping consumer decisions.<sup>1123</sup> Consumer rebellion remains an incomplete, unsatisfactory engine for prompting structural social revolutions.

### **Demographics and Food Access**

Early studies largely characterized organic consumers as “white, affluent, well-educated, and concerned about health and product quality.”<sup>1124</sup> Analysis of scanner data from a 2004 Nielsen Homescan study found that most purchasers of organic milk were “white, high income, and well educated.”<sup>1125</sup> Organic households were mostly in the West or East of the United States, with annual household incomes of at least \$70,000. They were “less likely than conventional households to be Black.” The data suggested that organic households had “higher discretionary income than conventional households.”<sup>1126</sup> Overall, demand for organics was concentrated in the world’s most prosperous countries, where consumers had higher purchasing power and could absorb the price premium.<sup>1127</sup>

However, industry studies of the “new” organic consumer began to indicate that the demographics had changed. By 2005, Latinos and African Americans were the fastest-growing group of organic core consumers.<sup>1128</sup> A 2006 Hartman Group study showed that core consumers, defined as those committed to an organic lifestyle, were

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<sup>1122</sup> Ibid. 322, 325.

<sup>1123</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>1124</sup> Dimitri, C. and K. M. Venezia (2007). Retail and Consumer Aspects of the Organic Milk Market, USDA: 1-18. 3.

<sup>1125</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>1126</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>1127</sup> Sahota, A. (2007). The International Market for Organic and Fair Trade Food and Drink. The Handbook of Organic and Fair Trade Food Marketing. S. Wright and D. McCrea. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: 1-24. 25.

<sup>1128</sup> Burke, C. (2007). To Buy or Not to Buy Organic: What You Need to Know to Choose the Healthiest, Safest, Most Earth-Friendly Food. New York, Marlowe & Company. 1.

most likely to be Hispanic and Black.<sup>1129</sup> According to another study published in 2007, there was a popular perception that most organic consumers were white, wealthy, and had young children. However, the consumer base of organic food had diversified. In fact, the authors showed that “Asian and African Americans tend to purchase organic over conventional produce more than Whites and Hispanics.” This study found “little consistent association between per capita expenditures on organic produce and household income.”<sup>1130</sup> Studies by the USDA also did not tie high household income to organic purchases, despite the price premiums. However, consumers still cited expense as the main reason that they did not purchase organic foods.<sup>1131</sup>

The myths of “consumer power” or the “free market” fall apart when considering that people do not have genuine choice when it comes to the food they eat. Food options in public situations—e.g., schools, hospitals, workplace cafeterias, and government food coupon programs—are often restricted. Race and class are factors in food access and consumption. Lower-income and minority neighborhoods have inadequate entrée to large supermarkets, which tends to correlate with reduced consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Individuals facing impediments to obtaining affordable, nutritious foods have more nutrition-related health problems.

There have been some attempts to bridge class inequalities in terms of access to organic food. The federal Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) was designed to provide families on public assistance with fresh, locally grown produce. This program for lower-income recipients bestowed vouchers that could only be redeemed at farmers’

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<sup>1129</sup> Dimitri, C. and K. M. Venezia (2007). Retail and Consumer Aspects of the Organic Milk Market, USDA: 1-18. 3.

<sup>1130</sup> Stevens-Garmon, J., C. L. Huang, et al. (2007). "Organic Demand: A Profile of Consumers in the Fresh Produce Market." *CHOICES: The magazine of food, farm, and resource issues* 22(2): 109-132. 110-111.

<sup>1131</sup> Greene, C., C. Dimitri, et al. (2009). Emerging Issues in the U.S. Organic Industry, USDA: 1-36. 16.

markets, encouraging purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>1132</sup> Some schools and hospitals now offer healthy, organic menus. Alice Waters started the Edible Schoolyard program at an underprivileged Berkeley middle school in 1994, planting a one-acre organic garden for students to tend that allowed them to eat wholesome food. In 2006, over 2,000 hospitals in the U.S. gained access to natural and organic foods, due to a deal between MedAssets, a leading purchasing organization for the health care industry, and United Natural Food Incorporated (UNFI), the largest wholesale distributor to the natural and organic foods industry. In one attempt to overcome the food gap, Holcomb Farm, a CSA in Connecticut, began extending subsidized shares to urban families below the poverty level because farm managers felt that organic produce ought not to be as elitist as it had become.<sup>1133</sup>

Several organic food advocates recommend strategies—such as buying in bulk, on sale, from a co-op, in season, or online—that can make organic food less prohibitive. *Consumer Reports* noted in 2006 that organic food costs were, on average, 50 percent extra but could be 100 percent more for milk and meat. The organization advised readers that it was worth paying more for organic apples, peaches, spinach, milk, and beef; but they could pass on asparagus, broccoli, seafood, and cosmetics. To avoid “sticker shock,” *Consumer Reports* also suggested comparison shopping, mail-order services, and CSAs for cheaper organic food.<sup>1134</sup> *Shape* magazine advised readers in 2009 on how to “Go Organic Without Going Broke,” by choosing store brands, using coupons from organic companies, finding CSAs, or asking the store for samples before purchasing new

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<sup>1132</sup> Stewart, K. (2006). It's a Long Road to a Tomato: Tales of an Organic Farmer Who Quit the Big City for the (Not So) Simple Life. New York, Marlowe & Company. 19.

<sup>1133</sup> Wine, M. (2005). "The Food Gap." *Orion* 24(5): 60-67. 62.

<sup>1134</sup> Consumer Reports (2006). When It Pays to Buy Organic. *Consumer Reports*: 12-17.

products.<sup>1135</sup>

The Sunflower Farmers Markets grocery chain expanded organic options by opening several new stores around the U.S. in 2009. CEO Mike Gilliland, who founded the Colorado-based business in 2002, was doubling it to include more than thirty locations. Modeled after farmers' markets, the stores specialized in natural and organic foods but kept prices at rock-bottom levels by minimizing overhead and capitalizing on supplier connections.<sup>1136</sup> Gilliland had found that consumers regarded the opportunity to purchase high-quality food at lower cost to be a refreshing change.

### **Organic Market Projections**

Organic food has been hailed as the most rapidly growing division of food sales in North America. As demand outstripped supply, manufacturers of organic products increasingly turned overseas to meet their needs. At the same time, producers took advantage of budding international markets to export organic products. Between 1997 and 2009, the U.S. organic food market quintupled. Over two-thirds of consumers reported buying organic products at least occasionally. Fresh organic produce and milk were the top-selling retail categories.<sup>1137</sup> Fruits and vegetables dominated the organic food segment, though manufacturers continued to introduce new organic beverages, snacks, cereals, and other products. Non-food organic offerings, such as clothing and cosmetics, grew 39% in 2008.<sup>1138</sup>

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<sup>1135</sup> Shape (2009). Go Organic Without Going Broke. *Shape*. 28: 126.

<sup>1136</sup> Novak, S. (2008). Sunflower plans to take root in Austin's natural foods market. *Austin American-Statesman*. Austin: D1-D2.

<sup>1137</sup> Greene, C., C. Dimitri, et al. (2009). Emerging Issues in the U.S. Organic Industry, USDA: 1-36. iii-iv.

<sup>1138</sup> Organic Trade Association. (2009). "U.S. organic sales grow by a whopping 17.1 percent in 2008." Retrieved May 12, 2009, from [http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2009/05/us\\_organic\\_sales](http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2009/05/us_organic_sales).

The organic industry represented only 3.5 percent of total retail food sales in the U.S. by 2009.<sup>1139</sup> The potential for expansion was wide, but the market could get saturated instead. Sales in the organic food market had escalated an average of 20 percent each year since 2002, but in 2007 the increase was just nine percent.<sup>1140</sup> In 2008, when fuel and food prices rocketed beyond the comfort level of many Americans, market research indicated that consumers were curtailing their consumption of organics. Core organic consumers were more attached, but rising commodity costs meant that less-committed consumers felt uncomfortable paying premiums for organic food during a recession.<sup>1141</sup> Demand for organic milk softened, the price of organic feed doubled, and organic dairy farmers suffered.<sup>1142</sup> In a joint poll by *Cooking Light* and the CNN Money web site, 60% of Americans stated that organic foods seemed too expensive to justify buying.<sup>1143</sup> After years of striking annual sales growth, the economic downturn may have curbed the organic momentum.

In the long run, though, retailers and consumers are not inclined to give up on organics. The Organic Trade Association reported that U.S. sales of organic food still rose 17 percent in 2008, despite the harsh economy.<sup>1144</sup> The Soil Association confirmed that, even with the financial downturn, sales of organic food in the UK increased 1.7 percent in 2008, indicating “underlying resilience in the organic market.”<sup>1145</sup> Martha

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<sup>1139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1140</sup> Mogelonsky, M. (2008). Organic Food and Drink. *Prepared Foods*: 21-26. 21.

<sup>1141</sup> Naughton, K. (2008). "Natural Response." *Newsweek* Retrieved May 3, 2008, from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/135377/output>.

<sup>1142</sup> Zezima, K. (2009). Organic Dairies Watch the Good Times Turn Bad. *The New York Times*.

<sup>1143</sup> (2009). The Economy and You: More Home Cooking, Less Organic. *Cooking Light*. **23**: 66.

<sup>1144</sup> Organic Trade Association. (2009). "U.S. organic sales grow by a whopping 17.1 percent in 2008." Retrieved May 12, 2009, from [http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2009/05/us\\_organic\\_sales](http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2009/05/us_organic_sales).

<sup>1145</sup> Soil Association (2009). Organic market report 2009. Bristol: 1-72.



Stewart declared in 2009 that she was still “totally entranced with fresh and organic.”<sup>1146</sup>

*Natural Foods Merchandiser* predicted that organic food would be the top “continuing trend” captivating the natural food industry in 2010.<sup>1147</sup>

Overall, organic boosters have clung to their faith in the power of consumers. In 1953, an *Organic Gardening* piece resolved that, if the “crucial crusade” was to “reach the momentum and magnitude necessary to revolutionize things now,” then “we must all get behind it 100 per cent.” To accomplish this, the grand plan of action was exhorting each subscriber to pass the magazine along to a friend and enlist at least one new subscriber.<sup>1148</sup> Organic campaigner Fred Kirschenmann has pointed out that, in the 1970s, nobody predicted that the USDA would one day buttress organic agriculture, but “it happened because we changed the trend.”<sup>1149</sup> Marion Nestle warned in 2006 that if organic standards would “continue to mean something in the United States (and I am convinced that they must), it will be because hundreds of thousands of people will demand that nothing be done to weaken them.”<sup>1150</sup> For the market to prolong its accelerated growth and the cadre of reliable followers to intensify, the bedrock organic philosophies tracing their lineage back to J.I. Rodale’s confidence in “discriminating purchasers” must not be compromised.

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<sup>1146</sup> Trespicio, T. (2009). Martha Gets Real. *Body + Soul*: 93.

<sup>1147</sup> Hopkins, C. (2009). "Fads that last: Experts reveal continuing trends for 2010." Retrieved December 18, 2009, from <http://naturalfoodsmerchandiser.com/tabId/107/itemId/4360/Fads-that-last-Experts-reveal-continuing-trends-f.aspx>.

<sup>1148</sup> Allen, W. H. (1953). Crucial Crusade. *Organic Gardening*, **21**: 21.

<sup>1149</sup> Kirschenmann, F. (1996). "What's News In Organic." *Biodynamics*(203): 10-12. 12.

<sup>1150</sup> Nestle, M. (2006). *What To Eat*. New York, North Point Press. 523.

## EPILOGUE: ORGANIC DESTINY

J.I. Rodale declared in 1948 that “organiculture” was “destined to alter our conceptions of the farm and the garden and to revolutionize our methods of operating them in order to secure for ourselves and others more abundant and more perfect food.”<sup>1151</sup> Rodale’s overconfidence in alluding to “destiny” belied the fact that the triumph of organic farming was far from inevitable. Predicting a “revolution” was ambitious, since the advent of organic food did not overturn all accepted wisdom about farming and gardening. Predicting the onset of “more abundant and more perfect food” was exceedingly optimistic, since shortages still occur and contamination issues persist. Yet, Rodale used the term “movement” even when his crusade was in its incipient stages, and he did feel that he was at the helm of something monumental.

A social movement, by nature, is an amalgamation of independent minds yet has a mind of its own. While encompassing individual convictions, it also fosters a sense of kinship. There are rifts and moments of unity. Individual steps propel developments, as do collective actions and cultural context. There is no blueprint for victory. The organic movement encountered internal and external barriers that may have alternately strengthened and diluted its cohesiveness. Not until the 1970s did national media sources sincerely recognize how organic food was infiltrating the main stage of American culture, having stepped out from the shadowy sidelines. Formerly branded as a marginal hobby, organic farming evolved into a mighty industry. Once regarded as a scam, organic food garnered adulation. Organics acquired both believers and hecklers; but, ultimately, it remained a movement. A dynamic combination of resonant values, social issues,

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<sup>1151</sup> Rodale, J. I. (1948). With the Editor: The Organiculturist’s Creed. Organic Gardening. **12**: 12-14. 12

economic factors, and articulate leaders coalesced in the organic movement to propel its trajectory from alternative to accepted status.

This dissertation has traced narrative strategies, ideological formations, and recurring premises in the organic movement. It is not clear what routes the movement will follow in the future. The Rodale Institute partnered with the Organic Valley dairy cooperative and the Nature's Path organic food brand in 2009 for an "Organic Heroes" campaign, which hoped to convince conventional farmers that farming organically could be an act of heroism. Advertisements encouraged each consumer to "Be a hero. Eat Organic!" Some organic growers and eaters may indeed self-identify as heroes or feel they are contributing to "the Revolution" that J.I. Rodale envisaged. Organic advocates have argued that "the most pressing challenges of our day"—including rising health care costs, global warming, and world hunger—can be met "one organic bite at a time."<sup>1152</sup> It is probable that devoted organic farmers, consumers, and activists will continue to set their sights on a world-changing revolution that grows more likely to be achieved with each organic nibble.

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<sup>1152</sup> Sullivan, D. (2009). "Research Makes It Clear: Organic Food is Best for People and the Planet." Rootstock 9(1): 4-7. 7.

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