

## Chair's report to Soil & Health Association AGM, September 2021

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou. Nau mai, haere mai ki tēnei hui. This year marks the 80th anniversary of our organisation. Our motto is as relevant now as it was 80 years ago:

Healthy soil – healthy food – healthy people  
Oranga nuku – oranga kai – oranga tangata

For the first 40 years of our history the Soil & Health organisation was the face of organics in Aotearoa. We have always been passionate advocates for growing in harmony with nature and we led the world in recognising the importance of composting all wastes and returning them to the earth. We have always recognised that the soil is a living entity and a primary source of our health and well-being; we have always understood the concept of a circular economy. This has led us to stand against the development of industrial farming and the dependence on chemical inputs. We have always known such practices would pollute our earth and waterways and drive species to extinction – and we draw no satisfaction from being proved right.

The Soil & Health Association has also nurtured most of the organic sector organisations active in Aotearoa today, including the Biological Husbandry Unit at Lincoln, BioGro, Organic Farms NZ and Organics Aotearoa New Zealand. And the most recent addition is Organic Week which was started as a national celebration by BioGro.

For most of our history it has been a lonely journey; the ability of the chemical farming industry to externalise their costs has given the illusion that organic food is more expensive than non-organic. It is only now that we are realising that people are waking up to the effects of industrial farming on our soil, waterways, plant insect and bird life – indeed all aspects of biodiversity. We warmly welcome the focus of the emerging regenerative farming movement as they recognise the crucial importance of caring for the soil, composting and rebuilding biodiversity – and now more and more farmers are really keen to change.

So where are we now? We contracted the marketing company, GoodSense to review our wonderful magazine and to help us position it more securely in the retail market. By now you will all have seen the new-look *OrganicNZ* and our grateful thanks to our General Manager, Pete Huggins and the magazine team for doing such a fabulous job. Part of that refresh has been to establish a separate website for the Soil & Health Association and this has resulted in two stunning websites instead of one website that was trying to do 2 things.

The National Council decided last year to focus on building alliances to support organic regenerative agriculture – under the acronym 'ORA'. We've been building a partnership with Te Waka Kai Ora, the Maori Organic Authority, including a commitment to provide financial support for re-establishing a structure for growth of their organisation so that they can better support Maori organic growers and build the Hua Parakore brand.

The ongoing negotiations over the Organic Products Bill have seen strong collaboration with all sections of the organic community ably facilitated by Organics Aotearoa NZ. We continue to have real worries that the focus on exports comes at the expense of the local market and small growers and we will continue to advocate for these groups. We have continued to develop the Soil4Climate project and the glyphosate campaign, though both have been impacted by the lockdowns of Covid-19.

We budgeted for a \$21,000 loss in the uncertainty of last year, but we ended the year with a surplus of just over \$26,000. The credit for this goes primarily to Pete Huggins, whose financial acumen and marketing skills are of inestimable value to the organisation. I want to acknowledge the extent to which all our staff and magazine contractors go way above and beyond to support Soil & Health – it is very much appreciated.

Our relationship with BioGro has grown and matured over the past few years. They have carried much of the weight for the organisation of Organic Week until this year and we gratefully acknowledge their support.

Many thanks also to our National Council and the voluntary work they give to build and strengthen the association. They bring diverse views and perspectives and I always come away from our meetings having learned new things. Jenny Lux has led our advocacy on the Organic Products Bill superbly, Jodie Bruning is one of Aotearoa's leading researchers on glyphosate and our spokesperson and Barbara Collis has brought her legal mind to be right across the changes we have to make to our constitution. Bernie Mabbs is representing us with the Pacific organic movement and with IFOAM. We reluctantly farewell Peter Wells who has returned to the US and Ella Lawton who brought us the Southland perspective.

The Soil & Health Association has always been an essential part of the organic movement in Aotearoa. This year we have made real progress in every aspect of the organisation. None of this would have been possible without our members and supporters and our grateful thanks go out to each and everyone.

Marion Wood, September 2021