



Soil & Health Association (Est. 1941)

Healthy Soil, Healthy Food, Healthy People

Chair's Report to AGM - 2022

Prepared by: Marion Wood, Chairperson

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa. It is so good to be able to hold a meeting in a real room with 3 dimensional people as opposed to trying to co-ordinate a sea of faces on a tiny laptop in a zoom meeting as I was doing last year! We have all of us been affected by the Covid pandemic and I want to acknowledge particularly those who have lost loved ones or may still be suffering from its effects.

One effect of Covid was that Organic Week 2021 went online and the Organic Awards also had to be changed at the last minute from an in-person event to an online event. In a minor miracle of logistics the awards were still exciting, informative and inspiring and congratulations again to all the winners. The next Organic Week and Organic Awards will be held in May 2023; the Council decided to move the date to co-incide with the autumn harvest rather than spring planting. We would love to see more organic farms host open days in their local communities.

Organic Week is hosted by Soil & Health through our stunning magazine, OrganicNZ. This is a major focus not only for the magazine team, but also for all our staff. In 2021 we sadly farewelled Philippa Jamieson who edited the magazine for 13 years. Philippa's knowledge of all things to do with soil and health and her passion for organics have sustained us all through those years. We are so glad we will not lose her superb advocacy skills as she has agreed to work with Soil & Health on our glyphosate campaign.

As the regenerative movement gathers steam in Aotearoa we often hear conventional farmers extolling the 'virtues' of glyphosate as the regenerative answer to tilling. We are fortunate to have experts like Charles Merfield and Philippa advocating for organic ways to avoid tilling. We are exploring other ways to amplify our opposition to glyphosate.

But our emphasis is overwhelmingly on the positive aspects of organic growing and making the links to mitigating climate change. The promotion of Organic Regenerative Agriculture (ORA) is one of the key planks of our current strategy and runs through all our current work. We also recognise that in Aotearoa Maori systems of organic growing need to form the bedrock for our development and for this reason Soil & Health provided financial support in 2021 to Te Waka Kai Ora to facilitate the revival of their verification system, Hua Parakore. This is very much in line with our tradition of supporting organisations with the same aims as Soil & Health.

Those who attended the Organic Aotearoa NZ meeting will already have an update on the way the Organic Products and Production Bill is slowly making its way through the parliamentary process. Our warm thanks to Jenny Lux for ensuring that the voices of small growers continue to be heard and for her ongoing work in shaping the national standards. Thanks also to Pete Huggins whose knowledge of Parliament has enabled us to lobby for OANZ as well as our own organisation.

The government has passed the Incorporated Societies Act 2022 which requires changes to our constitution. Our thanks to Barbara Collis who is a trained lawyer on our Council and who has ensured we are front-footing the changes needed. We now have a draft new constitution which we are introducing at this AGM. We are hoping that members who have an interest in constitutional issues will be prepared to go through the draft over the coming year, so that by the time we get to the AGM 2023 we will have finished all the discussion and wordsmithing and the new constitution can be agreed.


Soil & Health is the proud owner of BioGro the leading organic certifier in Aotearoa. We provide 2 board members and we take an active role in the board. BioGro continues to go from strength to strength and is superbly run by CEO Donald Nordeng who has also provided a wealth of knowledge and guidance in the development of the Organic Products and Production Bill.

Soil & Health's financial position is worrying. Last year the Council budgeted for a loss as we made a conscious decision to invest \$30,000 of reserves in marketing the magazine in order to increase subscriptions and sales. We ended the year with a loss of \$43,166 and this would have been greater but for a generous bequest from the estate of Patricia Mary Turner. Although we are regularly complimented on the changes we made, the investment in the magazine has not yet paid off. Instead we are facing real head winds in terms of increasing costs.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our General Manager, Pete Huggins – Pete is a superstar who is able to turn his hand to practically anything – typical of the organic community! He is ably supported in the office by Meghan Read and by the magazine team led by Rachel Clare.

The organisation is steered by National Council and I have been privileged to lead a committed and diverse group. Special thanks to Jodie Bruning and Bernie Mabbs who are not standing again. Jodie's research has provided the backbone for our work on glyphosate and she has provided thorough analysis on issues ranging from water to GE initiatives to hazardous substances. Bernie has brought us closer to our whānau Pasifika through involving us more closely in the Pacific branch of the Interncontinental Network of Organic Farmers Organisations (INOFO). We have also benefitted from her experience in strategy planning.

And finally our warm thanks to you, our loyal members and supporters. Our task is huge – in order to achieve an agricultural system that is part of the solution to climate change, we need to continue to unify the organic sector in Aotearoa and to help position organics as the gold star of regenerative farming throughout this land and the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marion Wood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The name "Marion" is written in a slightly larger font than "Wood". There is a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Marion Wood
Chair, Soil & Health Association