



## Canadian Organic Growers

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*Canadian Organic Growers Inc is Canada's national membership-based education and networking organization representing farmers, gardeners and consumers in all provinces.*

## COG Reference Series

### #1 , Part 1, Early Writings

As governments have done little to encourage ecological agriculture, there is little guidance or literature to be had from such sources. We have, therefore, to turn to printed information coming from private associations, universities, alternative presses and journals concerned with the organic movement. There is also an increasing number of articles in popular magazines on the subject.

Farming was always 'organic' and its tried and true methods gained by trials and error and observation, were only disrupted after World War I by the introduction of and, after World War II, by the obsession, with chemical agriculture. Today ecological farmers combine traditional agriculture with modern knowledge and technology as it pertains to organic principles. The founders of the organic movement are a 'must' reading for full understanding of its scientific and philosophical basis. The following are some of the more important early writers and practitioners:

**Albrecht, William** Dr. Albrecht was a U.S. farm boy who rose to be a scientist, soils professor and visionary. He wrote innumerable research papers between 1918 and 1974, a large proportion of which were collected and printed by Charles Walters, (Editor of the periodical Acres USA) and published in two volumes under the title **The Albrecht Papers**, 1975. More of his papers are printed in current issues of Acres USA. Dr. Albrecht found that soil infertility resulted from lack of organic matter and mineral imbalance, which affected plant quality and by extension animal and human health.

**Balfour, Lady Eve** The main founder of The Soil Association, (U.K.), she wrote **The Living Soil** (1945) and **The Haughley Experiment** (1942). They were combined into one volume in 1975 to the 4th edition of the book with the changed title of Clifton Park System of Farming and Laying Down Land to Grass, (1908). Reprinted by Faber and Faber. Lady Balfour gave her farm Haughley to The Soil Association for experimental purposes and her ideas had a dynamic effect on the organic movement in Britain and elsewhere. Lady Balfour's speech to the IFOAM in 1977 was a landmark one and has been in demand ever since. It has been reprinted as **Towards a Sustainable Agriculture: The Living Soil**. Lady Balfour still gave talks on organic agriculture until she died in 1990.

**Bear, Firman F. Earth the Stuff of Life** originally written in 1962 has been republished and revised by H.W. Pritchard and W. E. Aking, London. Clifton Park and Cockle Park associated with Elliot, had their seed mixtures prepared by Hunters of Chester, still in existence and still selling a modern Clifton Park Mixture! A speech given by J. Hunter in 1902 had the subject The Clifton Park System of Grass Growing and is available from them. W. Lamin also wrote *Thirty Years of Farming on the Clifton Park System*. London: Faber and Faber, 1944. Faulkner, Edward H. In 1943 Faulkner wrote *Plowman's Folly*, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, which was an effective condemnation of the moldboard plow. It caused a great deal of controversy and he later followed it with *A Second Look* stating his case more clearly. Published by University of Oklahoma Press, 1947. The new version contains Bear's writing with added information on aspects of more recent concern such as air and water pollution, waste disposal etc., and some good illustrations of conditions and concepts. Dr. Bear was a soil scientist, friend of Albrecht. The book tells you what soil is, the effects of acid rain on plants, animals and humans. He tested plant tissues and found great variation in mineral content, prompting him to analyze the reason behind the variation. He foresaw the dangers of conventional agriculture.

**Bromfield, Louis** Popular, readable books written between 1946 - 1955 on the regeneration of worn-out Ohio farmland. Bromfield wrote **Pleasant Valley** (Harper, 1946), **Malabar Farm** (Ballantine Books, 1947), **Out of Earth** (Harper, 1950) and **From my Experience** (Harper, 1955). A lot of people read these books from the pen of a popular novelist and they started thinking about what he preached. G.C. Bubolz wrote an article in *Acres USA* entitled "Louis Bromfield - his Contributions to Agriculture." Issue No. 13 (10). p. 8-10. 1983. An excellent book was edited by Charles E. Little entitled **Louis Bromfield at Malabar: Writings on Farming and Country Life**. John Hopkins University Press, 1988. There is a good introduction describing Bromfield's life and philosophy.

**Elliot, Robert M.** His theories of good grassland management recommended the inclusion of herbs (i.e. non-grasses - certain deep rooted mineral rich weeds such as chicory, yarrow, sheep's parsley, plantain, etc.!) in his pasture mixtures or for strip sowing in pasture land. His classic **Agricultural Changes Required by These Times** (1898) influenced many people, including Sir George Stapledon, who wrote the introduction to the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the book with the changed title of **Clifton Park System of Farming and Laying Down Land to Grass**, (1908). Reprinted by Faber and Faber, London. Clifton Park and Cockle Park associated with Elliot, had their seed mixtures prepared by Hunters of Chester, still in existence and still selling a modern Clifton Park Mixture! A speech given by J. Hunter in 1902 had the subject **The Clifton Park System of Grass Growing** and is available from them. W. Lamin also wrote **Thirty Years of Farming on the Clifton Park System**. London: Faber and Faber, 1944.

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**Fussel, G.E. Farming Techniques from Prehistoric to Modern Times.** Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1965. It is a history of agriculture in Europe and the reasons for the changing techniques that occurred. It provides given methods of cropping, soil preparation and soil nutrition, with references. A later book **Crop Nutrition: Science and Practice Before Liebig** traces an early history of farmers' methods to nourish crops and complementary views of philosophers on plant growth and development. Lawrence KS: Coronado Press, 1971.

**Hainsworth, P.H. Agriculture: A New Problem.** London: Faber and Faber, 1954. Republished in 1976 by B. and G. Rateaver, Pauma Valley, CA. A well documented study of biological agriculture. It is a good source of technical information for testing the validity of natural fertilizers. Some interesting and stimulating content.

**Howard, Sir Albert** An English plant breeder famous for scientific research in India and theories of composting and biological agriculture. Two of his important books are **An Agricultural Testament** (Oxford University Press, 1940) and a continuation of his ideas in **The Soil and Health: A Study of Organic Agriculture** (Schoken Books, 1947). Rodale published **The War in the Soil** in 1946, the story of the conflict between fresh, natural food and agri-business profits. For understanding the development of Sir Albert Howard's theories see **Sir Albert Howard in India** by A. Howard, Faber and Faber, 1953.

**King, Franklin Hiram** was Chief of Soils Division, USDA and associated with the University of Wisconsin. He was impressed with methods of agriculture he saw in his travels in the Far East resulting in his book **Farmers of Forty Centuries or Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan.** 1911. So-called "humus farming" is the term associated with what he advocated, the maintenance of soil fertility by the return of all wastes to the land. The book is fully photographed and a fascinating read.

**Kolisko, F. and Kolisko, L.** The Koliskos have had a considerable influence in the bio-dynamic movement. **Agriculture of Tomorrow**, Bournemouth, U.K.: Kolisko Archives, 1939, describes experiments with the effect of cosmic forces in crop production.

**Pfeiffer, Erhenfried** A seminal scientific influence on bio-dynamic farming from ideas spawned by Rudolf Steiner under whom he studied in Basel, Germany. The Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association is an off-shoot of these two men. He came to the U.S. in 1933 where he farmed, taught, lectured and was a prolific writer. He was a specialist in compost, compost starter and nutrition and he invented a process for determining the quality of food products, nutritional defects and the needs of the body called chromatography. His best known work was **Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening, Soil Fertility, Renewal and Preservation**, 1943. Pfeiffer wrote **Weeds and What They Tell, Soil Fertility and Bio-Dynamic Treatment of Fruit Trees, Berries and Shrubs.** Bio Dynamic Magazine Nol. 49 articulated Pfeiffer's "**The Art and Science of Composting: Observations and Testing Methods: The Chromatographic Method**", 1959.

**Rodale J.I.** It would be hard to assess the influence that J.I. Rodale and his son Robert have

had on the organic movement in North America. J.I. himself was interested in the work of Sir Albert Howard and the many other systems of organic farming that he saw or read about worldwide. He reprinted many of the books from the founding fathers and himself wrote **Pay Dirt** (1945), a preview of what we look upon today as ecological agriculture, **The Organic Front** (1948), **Organic Merry-Go-Round and an Organic Trip to England** (1954) and many others.

**Steiner, Rudolf** Teacher and visionary, he was the father of the Bio-Dynamic method. His metaphysical approach to eco-agriculture was reflected in **Agriculture** - a course of 8 lectures given in 1924 in East Germany. This began the Bio-Dynamic movement with its more cosmic approach to agriculture. Dr. Steiner whose degree was on problems of a Philosophy of Spiritual Activity, was an expert on Goethe's scientific writings. Steiner felt that for proper nutrition it was necessary to grow well-balanced food from well-balanced soil in a harmonious environment. A plant forced to grow bulk is not necessarily the healthiest, most nutritious or most resistant to disease.

**Stapledon, R.G.** (Sir George) was the first Director in 1919 of the Welsh Plant Breeding Station at Aberystwyth, Wales. His concern was the development of better pastures, he was influenced by the ideas of Elliot (see above) and was an advocate of the ley system of farming. He and the men around him (Fagan, Williams, Milton, Davies to name a few) published many papers in the ensuing 20 years. Stapledon wrote **The Land Now and Tomorrow** (1935), **The Way of the Land** (1943) and with W. Davies **Ley Farming** (1948) all published by Faber and Faber, London, as was Stapledon's **Introduction to the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of Elliot's Clifton Park System of Farming** (1943).

**Sykes, Friend** Faber and Faber, London, published three books of his **Humus and the Farmer**, (1949), **Food Farming and the Future**, (1951) and **Modern Humus Farming** (1959). These were all reprinted later by Rodale Press. Sykes was much influenced by the ideas of Elliot, above, and was a friend and co-worker of Sir Albert Howard. He became famous for what he termed "humus farming" (sheet composting) by which method in seven years he turned 750 poor acres into a productive, fertile farm at Chantry, which was shining proof that his ideas were effective. His books detail his experiences, methods and ideas.

**Turner N.** Faber and Faber of London also published Turner's books, the best being **Fertility Farming**, (1951) and **Fertility Pastures with Cover Crops**, (1955). Turner was influenced too by Elliot and was an advocate of the herbal ley. He developed his own seed mixtures (in alliance with "the cow"! ) and wrote valuable information on the properties of grasses for grazing. He wrote **Herdmanship** in 1955.

**U.S. Department of Agriculture. Soils and Men: Yearbook of Agriculture**, 1938. Extensive references. If you ever see a copy in a secondhand book store or auction/garage sale - get it! One of the best ever written. Another Yearbook was published in 1957, also on soil. There is much good in it but chemical agriculture had taken a real hold by 1957. Most of the early USDA Yearbooks before chemical agriculture are valuable. Another excellent one is **Grass**, 1948.

**Voisin, Andre** A leading French authority on grassland management concerned with the

quality of food and health aspects of husbandry. Voisin with A. Lecomte wrote **Rotation Grazing: The Meeting of Cows and Grass: A Manual of Grass Productivity**. London: Crosby Lockwood, 1962. A small but wise book on managing grassland. He also wrote **Soil, Grass and Cancer** (Paris, 1959), **Grass Productivity** (1958), **Grass Tetany** (1963), and other books. See also **Greener Pastures on Your Side of the Fence: Better Farming with Voisin Grazing** by B. Murphy. Colchester, Vermont, Arriba Publishers, 1987. This is a useful manual on the Voisin rotational grazing system, used to increase livestock production. See also an article by Murphy et al. "**Dairy Farm Feeding and Income Effects of Using Voisin Grazing Management of Permanent Pastures**" in the American Journal of Alternative Agriculture, 1986 (1): p. 147-158.

**Waksman, Selman A.** The outstanding American authority on humus during the first half of the century. **Humus: Origin, Chemical Composition and Importance in Nature** (1938) 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins.

**Wilkins, G. Good Farmers.** Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 1987. Recent studies have shown that traditional farming systems are ecologically sophisticated and can provide many lessons for improving the efficiency and productivity of modern farms.

For the reader interested in the philosophy of ecological agriculture see **The Organic Tradition: An Anthology of Writings on Organic Farming 1900-1950**. Edited by Philip Conford. Green Books. 1988.

Older books are not always easily available, though many of these have been reprinted. The COG library has several of the books listed above. Your local library can also obtain many of them through inter-library loan.

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Compiled by Ann Cleary, 1991.

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