



Soil & Health AGM July 2020

Chairperson's Report – Marion Wood

Tena koutou e hoa ma.

The state of the Association

The last year has been a roller coaster. We started the year with the challenge of turning around a deficit of just under \$136,000. To do this we put in place a break even budget which required drastic pruning of our staff. It is to the credit of Lucy Blackburn, our Manager and Florence Lundon-Moore, our Administrator, that they kept to the budget target and even helped us improve the financial situation. We were sad to accept Lucy's resignation in November 2019, but this allowed the National Council to review the role of the staff and rewrite the job descriptions.

This year we received a bequest from the estate of Linda Faye Blackwood which helped us to restore the accounts in the financial year 2019-20 with a surplus of just over \$138,000. This will allow us to move forward with a strong focus on campaigns and education, rather than the consolidation and survival mode with which we started last year.

To help us on this journey we are more than delighted to welcome Pete Huggins into the role of General Manager. Pete comes to us with a strong background in communications, finance, strategy development and campaigning; he is a former Co-Convenor of the Green Party and most recently their Communications and Strategy Director. Pete has hit the ground running with strategic suggestions for the glyphosate campaign, strong support for all the team and great ideas on marketing Organic NZ.

The impact of Covid-19

All these skills were tested immediately as we were hit by Covid-19. The first casualty was the magazine, which was deemed non-essential, though many of us would beg to differ. So our wonderful magazine team turned this setback around with our first virtual magazine. This was provided free to give people a taste during lockdown of the vision of a world in which organic regenerative growing methods can build climate change resilience, food security, biodiversity and community wellbeing. The team is now working hard to convert the new virtual readers into subscribers. I personally think that the latest issue is one of the best so far – congratulations to Philippa Jamieson, our editor and all the dedicated magazine team.

Our next 'first' is the virtual AGM and this highlighted to the National Council the need to modernise our constitution to allow for such contingencies. This has resulted in the remits we will be discussing.

All our activities this year were affected by Covid-19. Soil & Health is the umbrella organisation for Organic Week and this had to be postponed from the original week in May to September 5th – 13th. BioGro will be kicking off the national conversation with a conference on Organic Regenerative Agriculture, making it very clear that the concept of regenerative farming is inextricably linked to organic farming. We are also launching the Soil4Climate project during Organic Week. This was developed from last year's activities in Organic Week and focuses on soil health as a mitigating factor in climate change. We are confident that this year we will reach more people with more activities.

BioGro shares

Soil & Health is the owner of BioGro, the leading certification agency in Aotearoa and our relationship with BioGro continues to strengthen. Two Soil & Health Councillors are on the BioGro board and we are constantly impressed by the competence of the team led by Donald Nordeng. We also appreciate the support BioGro provides for Organic Week by paying for the National Coordinator.

The Organic Products Bill

Soil & Health has been very active in support of legislating to protect the use of the word 'organic'. We were, however, concerned that the Organic Products Bill currently going through Parliament does not reflect the consultation process undertaken by the Ministry for Primary Industries last year. As a result we are working with all other sectors of the organic movement, under the leadership of Organics Aotearoa New Zealand, the umbrella group for organics, to ensure the final version does reflect the needs of the sector. Jenny Lux, who is the Deputy Chair of the National Council and a market gardener certified by Organic Farms New Zealand, has been leading the Soil & Health response and we thank her for the clear-headed submission she has written and presented, and her clarity of thought in subsequent negotiations. Jenny also wrote and presented our submission on the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act 2019.

Our campaigns

We were very relieved to hear that the new regional plan for Tai Tokerau will contain precautionary and prohibitive GE/GMO provisions. This is a great victory for the courageous persistence of GE-free New Zealand who kept up the struggle even though Soil & Health were unable to continue our financial support over the last year.

Our thanks go to Jodie Bruning who has prepared our glyphosate campaign with thoroughly researched background papers. We have also built up a dossier of replies from local authorities regarding their use of glyphosate. Our financial belt-tightening in the last year made it difficult to resource this campaign adequately by providing staff time, but we are now in a strong position to campaign using the background information so ably developed by Jodie.

National Council changes

The National Council has worked cooperatively and effectively this year. We received resignations from Bailey Perryman and Mike Ryan and co-opted Barbara Collis who gives a legal perspective on our plans and activities and has offered to review our constitution in more depth this year to ensure it truly reflects the modern organisation. Peter Wells provides the Canterbury perspective and Steffan Browning, who is not standing for re-election, has provided a historical perspective.

Our association has emerged from a difficult period and is in very good heart and a sound financial position. Warm thanks to our staff for being the mainstay of the organisation and for the quality and importance of the work they do. And a special thank you to all our members for your unstinting support and encouragement.

Marion Wood
Chair, Soil & Health Association of New Zealand