

Foreword

By David Graham,
Chair of Vegan Organic Network

The Vegan Organic Network (VON) was formed in 1996 to promote a system of farming without using synthetic fertilisers or sprays, livestock manures, and animal remains from slaughterhouses. Alternatively, fertility is to be maintained by vegetable compost, green manures, crop rotation, mulches, undersowing, a method that is sustainable and ecologically viable, ensuring long term fertility and wholesome food for this and future generations.

We declared that our commitment is to peace and justice for people, animals and the environment. To achieve this we must change our lifestyles and introduce a philosophy and practice which will continue to maintain our unique planet. That we are motivated by our awareness of the unease in society that we are moving towards a world that can no longer sustain life. Therefore, to achieve sustainable agriculture there has to be a new relationship between food producers and the economic system. We reject an economic policy that condemns millions to poverty, ill health and death.

How do we begin this campaign? We discovered there was a farmer already practicing this system and embracing these ethics. His name is Iain Tolhurst. In 2004 he became the first farmer to attain the Stockfree Organic Standards. With Jenny Hall, another stockfree farmer, the standards were published as *Growing Green – Organic Techniques for a Sustainable Future*, as the first ever step by step guide to stockfree organic growing. This was accompanied by a DVD *Growing Green*, a tour of his farm demonstrating how fertility is maintained to grow the bountiful crops. Tolly has become the prime supporter and inspiration to VON and therefore of stockfree organic farming.

However, it must be said that despite the interest generated and government pronouncements to eat less meat and “five a day” the gap between theory and practice is only very slowly being overcome. It seems that there is a huge cultural chasm that must be breached if the catastrophe of global warming is to be avoided.

The farm has developed into an education centre attracting hundreds of visitors from the UK and abroad every year. These are students, scientists, farmers, government officials, the curious and doubters. The outcome is that he has become an advisor to overseas agricultural ministers, farmers, a teacher, broadcaster and writer for journals including the influential *The Organic Grower*. Tolly’s stockfree system demonstrates that if the FAO report *Livestock’s long Shadow* is taken seriously, the stockfree organic system can significantly reduce greenhouse gases and diminish the long shadow.

BACK TO EARTH: UK Organic Horticulture through the Lifetime of a Grower looking back over 40 years is an account that celebrates successes and learns from less successful experiments in sustaining life in the soil without which there would be no life on earth. This book should be in the library of every educational institution and in the hands of every farmer and grower and all who are concerned with preserving our unique planet. You can meet Tolly on one of the farm’s open days; you will then be aware that the life in his soil has become an integral essence in the life of this dedicated grower.

By Helen Browning,
Chief Executive of the Soil Association

Iain Tolhurst, known to all who love him as Tolly, has been an inspiration to organic growers throughout his life. He has been, and still is, a pioneer in the true sense of the word, challenging convention, not only by surviving and thriving on his precious land at Hardwick, but doing so without stock or external manures.

Then he aimed for a zero carbon approach, not only in his production, but in packaging and distribution too. He is a man who has run his business according to his values; many of us have tried to do this, but he has succeeded. His trials and tribulations, documented here, should inspire a much wider audience.

Tolly's work has extended outside of his life as a grower. He has travelled extensively and always engaged with the wider world with his special blend of warmth, challenge and humour. His contribution to the organic movement cannot be over-stated, and it's hard to know how he has found the time to write as well. So this book of his thoughts and experiences over a forty year period of huge change should be required reading for any young grower starting out, or indeed anyone who is interested in the practicalities of making a living from the land, or in the philosophies of a deeply thoughtful, delightful man.



By Sir Julian Rose,
Owner of Hardwick Estate

It was back in 1986 that I started advertising the availability of a run-down 2 acre walled market garden situated directly behind Hardwick House, the South Oxfordshire 16th century manor house where I grew up and later inherited, along with 900 acres of mixed farming and forestry that comprise the Hardwick Estate. In 1975, I had set about the conversion of this land to organic farming, eager to ensure that it retained its unique biodiversity and potential for a wide variety of quality food enterprises.

The walled garden at Hardwick had gone into decay some time earlier, defeating the previous tenant's attempt to maintain its viability. So I was anxious to find someone to take it on who would not be daunted by the task at hand, including the copious brambles and collapsed buildings that adorned the site.

Advertising in various farming/horticultural journals attracted a fair amount of interest, but almost all parties baulked when confronted by the reality. However, one did not, and that was Iain Tolhurst. 'Tolly' as Iain likes to be known, seemed to relish the very considerable challenge presented by this once classic Victorian Market Garden, and soon produced a pragmatic business plan that would serve as the basis for taking on the tenancy of the gardens.

Recognising the fact that the financial returns would be very slim in the early years, instead of charging a rent I suggested an arrangement whereby the tenant would take 94% of the income

and the owner 6%. I also agreed to invest in building materials needed for the reconstruction of the useful buildings, with Iain (a skilled builder) carrying out the work.

At the time I was working full-time on building-up an organic mixed livestock/arable enterprise on the Estate's rolling Chiltern Hill farm. One of my main products was unpasteurised Guernsey milk and cream, delivered in the area. Iain came to Hardwick with a reputation as being the organic movement's first certified strawberry grower. Here was the perfect match ... those fortunate enough to participate in the marriage of these two outstanding products are unlikely to ever forget it!

A further acreage of field vegetable production was added to the lease as the gardens progressed, and eventually a farm business tenancy was agreed with the share farm agreement having served its purpose.

Iain, with able support from Lin Tolhurst and at times other members of the family, had not only brought the old Victorian market garden back to life, but were able to secure a viable income as the fruits of their labour. A very considerable achievement.

'Tolhurst Organic' has become a by-word in professional horticulture, attracting many visitors to Hardwick and gaining recognition as one of the UK's leading organic fruit and vegetable specialist enterprises.

BACK TO EARTH: UK Organic Horticulture through the Lifetime of a Grower will surely rise up out of the soil itself, as a life-story whose evolution is wedded to the stark realities of this highly demanding yet richly rewarding all-weather way of life. All those with a love of the land and an itch to be green fingered ecological pioneers in their own right, will surely wish to have this book prominently displayed in their personal libraries.

