



## HISTORY OF "ECOLOGY ACTION"

In 1966 **Alan Chadwick**, English gardening master, brought his synthesis of the biodynamic/French intensive method to the US and converted a barren slope at the University of California-Santa Cruz into a flourishing garden. In 1971 the city of Palo Alto, California invited Stephen Kafka, Senior Apprentice at the University's student garden, to give a four-hour class on the method. **Ecology Action** had been started that year and had developed a recycling program that was so successful it had been taken over by the city.

Members of Ecology Action were excited about the class and wanted to make the information more readily available to the public. In January 1972 the Board of Directors approved a Biointensive research and education project whose purposes would be to teach regular classes, collect data, make land available for gardening and publish information on the method's techniques. John Jeavons became the project's director. The Common Ground Organic Garden Supply and Education Center in Palo Alto was also started at this time as part of the Ecology Action organization.

After a five-month search for land, the Syntex Corporation offered three and three-quarters acres of their grounds in the Stanford Industrial Park, with all the necessary water. A half acre was kept for the research garden and the rest became a community garden. Alan Chadwick visited the garden site and gave us basic advice on how to proceed. We then attended a series of lectures he gave nearby. In the spring we started teaching our own classes, based on Chadwick's classes and Stephen Kafka's.

Our work grew out of a concern about worldwide starvation and malnutrition. If we could determine the smallest amount of land and resources needed for one person to supply all of his

or her needs in a sustainable way, we might have a personal solution to these challenges. In 1974 we published the first edition of what has become *How to Grow More Vegetables, Fruits, Nuts, Berries, Grains and Other Crops than you ever thought possible on less land than you can imagine*, (HTG) based on our research. The same year we sent out inquiries to 200 alternative technology organizations around the world, offering our materials. The only response at that time came from Dr. Seshadri of the Murugappu Chettiar Research Center in India. After the method was tried out by village women, it was reported: "This method can be taught to people with no previous experience of vegetable growing. They can produce good yields with locally-available resources in poor soils."

1980 was the garden's last year in Palo Alto. Syntex now needed the space. But while the garden was still functioning, a University of California graduate student in soil science tested the beds. He found an unexpected accelerated rate of humified carbon buildup, a process that normally takes hundreds of years. A search began for a rural site for the research garden that would also be the headquarters for Ecology Action.

In 1982 we moved to a site near Willits, California, with conditions for a garden similar to those experienced by farmers in much of the world: steep, rocky, with heavy winter rains, prolonged summer droughts, and a short growing season.

In retrospect, the years from 1976 to 1984 laid a firm foundation for the expansion and outreach that has marked our work ever since. Two revised and expanded editions of HTG were published, as well as many booklets based on our research. HTG was translated into Spanish, French and German. *Gardensong*, a video based on Alan Chadwick and the projects he inspired, was aired many times on PBS-TV, and magazines printed articles about our work, resulting in thousands of inquiries. An apprenticeship program was started. *Bountiful Gardens*, a mail-order supply service for essential seeds, books and garden supplies, was launched. We co-sponsored the Third International Conference on Small-Scale and Intensive Food Production in 1981, which drew 100 participants from 14 countries around the world, including China. Polly Noyce, Carol Vesecky and Sandra Mardigian, soon to play important roles, became acquainted with Ecology Action.

In 1984 the Biointensive method began to catch on globally. Juan Manuel Martinez, who was director of the *Menos y Mejores* project in one of the poorest areas of Mexico, chose the Biointensive system to teach to villagers after reading the Spanish translation of HTG. As a result of this five-year project, 2,000 Biointensive growing beds were established in 67 villages in the area and hunger and malnutrition were significantly reduced. Polly Noyce, on a trip to Kenya, bought a former boys' school four hours north of Nairobi and offered it to Ecology Action as a site for a Biointensive project. Ecology Action's Board approved the idea and the Manor House Agricultural Centre was started, with a two-year program for training high school graduates in Biointensive agriculture and other alternative technology methods. The Peace Corps started using the French translation of HTG in Togo, West Africa, and has been using it and other translations ever since. In 1986 Julian Gonsalves, who had attended the 1981 conference, worked for the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction in the Philippines. He helped establish the Biointensive Gardening Project, which initiated 300 Biointensive growing beds on the island of Negros as part of a UNICEF project for malnourished children.

In 1987 Sandra Mardigian, who had lived in Kenya and was concerned about the marginal conditions under which rural villagers lived, began a two-year correspondence with Manor House. She started Kilili Self-Help Project, which in 1989 began sending groups of farmers to Manor House for one-week trainings in Biointensive agriculture.

From 1985 through 1989 we published several more books and many booklets. A PBS video, "Circle of Plenty," about our work, was taped and broadcast nationwide. Articles appeared in major magazines. Ecology Action staff made two teaching trips to Mexico and Juan Manuel Martinez came to the Willits Mini-Farm for advanced training. At that time he and John Jeavons strategized the further dissemination of Biointensive mini-farming throughout Mexico and all of Latin America. In 1989 the first five-day workshop was held at the Willits site with participants from the US and Mexico. In 1987 Carol Vesecky took Ecology Action materials to distribute to contacts in Russia. In 1989 the first five-day workshop was held at the Willits site with participants from the US and Mexico.

1990 was the beginning of an ongoing series of workshops—many training people from other countries—which have continued to this time. That year nine gardeners from Russia attended a 5-day workshop given by Ecology Action at Stanford University. Ecology Action staff gave two more workshops in Mexico. 1993 saw the inauguration of our Three-Day Workshops. As of the beginning of 2005, 1,413 people from 46 states and 24 countries have been trained in these workshops. Fernando Pia was a participant at one in San Diego in 1993. An agricultural extensionist from Argentina, Fernando had been looking for ways to encourage small-scale sustainable agriculture in his area of Patagonia. When he returned home he started CIESA and spent the next 3 years researching the growing of crops using Biointensive. Since then, Fernando has given regular trainings in Argentina and Chile and has also trained people in Peru and Bolivia.

In 1992 Juan Manuel Martinez started ECOPOL, a non-profit organization that has been actively working to spread Biointensive throughout Mexico and Latin America. In 1993, Ecology Action published the Russian translation of HTG, which had been facilitated by Carol Vesecky. In order to help distribution of the book in the Former Soviet Union, she started the non-profit Biointensive for Russia. In the years since, the organization has facilitated workshops that have trained people in Russia, Siberia and Uzbekistan.

In 1994 Ecology Action started training six-month interns, many of whom are now directing significant Biointensive projects in other countries. During the last half of the 1990s Ecology Action inaugurated a Teacher Training and Certification Program to teach teachers who will teach other teachers, who will, in turn, teach beginning practitioners. Also, because the term biointensive has come into such general usage, we initiated the term GROW BIOINTENSIVE—somewhat like a brand name—to distinguish the system we have been developing for more than three decades.

In 2000, in order to promote sustainable agriculture and help GROW BIOINTENSIVE become better known in academic and scientific circles, we presented the "Soil, Food and People" Conference at U.C.-Davis. Over 200 people attended, ranging from university professors to farmers to directors of Biointensive projects, as well as members of the general public.

Looking back over our history it becomes obvious that things take time to develop—but that sometimes they can grow with unbelievable speed. We have remained a small organization by choice, functioning as a catalyst that inspires and encourages others to take up the work and run with it.

For more detail about Ecology Action's history, read our [Highlights](#) section.

<http://www.growbiointensive.org/index.html>