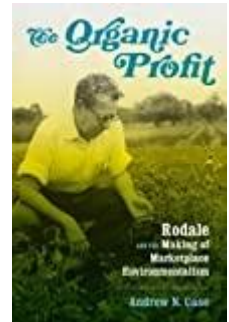


Andrew N. Case. *The Organic Profit: Rodale and the Making of Marketplace Environmentalism.* Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books Series. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018. xvii + 272 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-295-74301-1.



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Published on H-Environment (October, 2022)

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Curbside Composting and Dr. Oz

The Organic Profit illustrates how ignoring the marketplace and perceiving businesses as the antithesis of environmentalism neglects their formative role in postwar environmentalism. The study is part of a recent wave of scholarship that underlines the importance of businesses in postwar environmental politics. Using the publishing company Rodale Press as a case study, Andrew N. Case convincingly argues that the marketplace was "not a sideshow to the 'real' environmental reform of social and political movements." On the contrary, it was a site where Americans "navigated the changing ecology of daily life in the postwar decades" (p. 8).

At the center of Case's argument is the concept of "marketplace environmentalism," which he defines as a space in which people could vote with their wallets and as "a popular marketplace of ideas, products, and personalities" in which non-experts participate in environmental politics (p. 8). One of the greatest strengths of this study is its

avoidance of simplistic narratives that hone in on the vices or virtues of the marketplace regarding environmental politics. Instead, the author aptly teases out the tensions within the concept: between prophecy and profit, universal scientific truth and individual experiences, and political engagement and consumerist self-improvement.

Case demonstrates the multifaceted nature of Rodale Press and, consequently, marketplace environmentalism through five chronologically structured chapters starting in the 1930s and ending roughly in the 1990s. Chapters 1 and 2 (1930-1960s) center on the founder of Rodale Press, J. I. Rodale, and give insight into his ideas. Rodale used his publications to promote preventative health and organic gardening. He argued that organic foods and natural vitamins (bone meal, for example) would improve individuals' health and protect people from consuming synthetic chemicals, which became increasingly omnipresent in the postwar era. The tension between

universal scientific truth and individual experiences is central to these first two chapters. For example, Rodale used his business to create a space in the marketplace where he, together with his readers, could develop an organic gardening method and, thus, participate in environmental advocacy. This open platform had its advantages. It, for example, mobilized a broader set of voices and experiences with legitimate critiques on expertise and consequently "punctured confidence in postwar scientific advances." The major flaw was that they "could also slide into unscientific conclusions that bordered on conspiracy and quackery," pushing themselves further into the fringes (p. 58).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 (1960-1990s) predominantly focus on Rodale's son, Robert Rodale, and show how the business evolved from the margin to the mainstream. The central tension in these chapters is how Rodale Press navigated political engagement and consumerist self-improvement. Following a larger trend in environmental politics in the 1970s "that turned away from protest and toward personal choices," Robert Rodale expanded the organic method into a lifestyle primarily focused on personal changes and consumption (p. 161). Case is skeptical about the transformative power of Rodale Press and the lifestyle changes they promoted, stating that they "succeeded in altering the aisles of supermarkets but could barely make a dent out in the fields" (p. 208).

Case is transparent about the limitations of his source material, stating that he could not use the Rodale archive freely but was given unprecedented access. The study's narrow selection of source material is probably a consequence of this restriction. The author predominantly employs public Rodale publications, such as magazines by Rodale Press and columns written by the Rodales. Nonetheless, due to the vast number of publications and intelligent reading of the sources, the book skillfully weaves together Rodale Press with

broader trends and events that signify postwar America.

In *The Organic Profit*, Case proves himself to be a skilled historian and a proficient author. The study is a great read for academics and the general public. The book has humorous excerpts highlighting the Rodale Press's dichotomous nature: for example, how the company deserves credit for "curbside composting" but is also responsible for "Dr. Oz and the Food Baby," or how, by the end of the 1980s, the company that was once known "for promoting compost heaps and bone meal tabs" was now famous for its "glossy magazines that championed six-pack abs and guided young men and women in their sex lives" (pp. 216, 182).

In sum, *The Organic Profit* aptly shows the complexities and the historicity of such concepts as "organic," "natural lifestyles," and "marketplace environmentalism." It is a must-read for those who want a deeper understanding of the history and tensions underlying green consumerism.

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Citation: Amber Striekwold. Review of Case, Andrew N. *The Organic Profit: Rodale and the Making of Marketplace Environmentalism*. H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. October, 2022.

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