

EVST 315 Profile Project: Step 4

Profile Overview: JI Rodale

In 1971, the *New York Times* Magazine featured a cover story portraying a man as “The Guru of the Organic Food Cult”. This man, J.I. Rodale (1898-1971), was an unlikely influencer and advocate for the sustainable agriculture and organic farming movement. Growing up as a “weak and sickly young man” in New York, his attempts at regaining health were unsuccessful until he moved his family to a farm in Emmaus, PA. There, he learned basic farming skills and ate a strictly organic diet, which he attributed to the dramatic improvement of his wellbeing. Although he was rather inexperienced when it came to farming, Rodale held strong opinions on the common growing and eating habits of his time, which was heavily linked to the societal push for industrialization. He is also remembered for his wacky (and often times problematic) claims such as various, medically debatable cures for cancer, a dietary cure for polio, and even attributing racial segregation to the vitality, and thus the lack of cancer diagnoses, of African Americans because they were “protected from the drains of modern life”. Rodale published books and magazines, under his publishing company Rodale Inc., in an attempt to educate the public about the dangers of conventional farming and other alternative health related topics. It is clear that he possessed an anti-modern, anti-establishment mindset that questioned the role of government, business, and science in food systems. Rodale’s audience and supporters of his ideas were relatively small in number until the release of Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*, which caused a nationwide uprising against the use of pesticides. Conveniently for Rodale, his claims and beliefs now fit right into the discourse about the distrust in agricultural industrialization, and he rose to fame accordingly. The Rodale Institute in Kutztown, PA continues Rodale’s legacy today through conducting research and educating farmers and consumers on the organic food movement.

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