



Biodynamic Farming: Interdependence at its Best

If having a truly sustainable farm is your goal, read on. Biodynamic® farming might be right for you.

By Jessica Walliser

Most farmers have a reverence for the Earth. It is, after all, where our bread and butter come from, both literally and figuratively.

There is no NFL salary here, no fame, no glory; just a lot of hard work. There's a connection to Earth that can only be formed by plunging your hands into it, by sustaining your family on its fruits and letting it become a part of your life.

There's a special community of farmers out there that believe our reverence for the Earth is connected intimately with its health; that the spiritual connection we all have with our farms is part of what makes it thrive.

They believe that our interconnectedness with nature plays a major role in its vital functions. To them, the farm is a living, breathing organism that both nourishes and completes us. The farm is not separate from us, rather we live and work as one.

Much like a web, each organism on the farm—from the smallest microbe to the largest bovine—serves a critical function.

Each strand affects the others by serving as support and balance, yet each element is also crucially dependant on the others for the same.

Biodynamic® farmers take a holistic approach to farming, building a personal relationship to their farms and believing that a broader consciousness of life and learning is the best way to grow.

This family of farmers awakens each morning looking to connect with the land and the universe in hopes of creating a vital, thriving ecosystem right in their own backyard.

The Roots of Biodynamic Growing

The evolution of Biodynamic farming began with a series of lectures by Dr. Rudolf Steiner in Germany in 1924.

When approached by a group of farmers who saw a decline in soil health and farm productivity, Steiner developed the fundamentals of this unified approach to growing. You can read the translation of Steiner's original lectures in his book, *Agriculture Course: The Birth of the Biodynamic Method*.

In 1928, Demeter International was formed in Europe to support Steiner's methods. It still operates today as the only Biodynamic certifying agency and is active in 45 countries.

Biodynamic techniques were brought to the United States in the 1930s by Steiner's associate Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer.

The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association was founded in 1938 as an educational and informational organization. It works to advance Biodynamic techniques through conferences, workshops, publications and support of current research efforts. Today, approximately 150 certified-Biodynamic farms are located across the country.

The Ultimate Goal

Biodynamic agriculture combines many of the same principals employed by today's organic farmers with a deeper sense of commitment and connection to the rhythms of the cosmos.

The objective is to have a completely self-sustaining farm with little or no outside inputs: no nutrient sources that didn't originate on the farm itself, no pesticides derived from plants grown in another country, no animal feed imported from the next county over, no minerals mined from deep within the Earth.

Everything that comes out of the farm cycles back into it, one way or another.

The farm is seen as a whole, feeding itself through recycled organic matter and maintaining its health through regeneration



from within. Jim Fullmer, director of the Demeter Association, Inc. (the United States branch of Demeter International), says for many new Biodynamic farmers, closing this nutrient loop can be a hurdle, as can weaning one's farm off imported materials.

But, according to Parker Forsell, former Biodynamic program manager with Angelic Organics Farm in Caldonia, Ill., "To get results with Biodynamic farming, one must be consistent over time with using Biodynamic principals and also steering the farm toward a high level of on-farm resiliency.

"The goal of a Biodynamic farm is to grow less and less dependent on outside inputs over time. Viewing the farm as an organism involves seeing the farm become more self-sufficient in terms of fertility needs, pest control and outside inputs in general."

This is a long-term approach to farming that has a huge effect on everyday management decisions, but Biodynamic farmers the world over believe the process is essential to healing the Earth.

"The Biodynamic approach is a continuing journey; it never ends," says Steffen Schneider of Hawthorne Valley Farm, a certified Biodynamic farm in Ghent, N.Y. "I have seen produce that exudes vibrant life and health; animals being completely comfortable in their skins and environment."

Steffen believes that Biodynamic growing is the most holistic, complete approach to work on the land and to food and nutrition. Introduced to Biodynamic agriculture as a high school senior, Steffen reminds us that an explanation is "not easy to put into sound bites, and it is complicated. If you take Steiner's lectures as the foundation, a very complete, beautiful picture emerges."

He's been a Biodynamic farmer since 1983 and believes that in order to transition, a farmer needs a lot more than just economic motivation to drive him or her.

"It really requires a keen sense of observation and willingness to broaden one's consciousness and the willingness to change and learn continuously."

He also believes that, with the right inspiration, hobby farmers and home gardeners can readily adopt Biodynamic techniques. "Since it begins with developing a personal relationship to all of your garden and farm, one can do it anywhere. Really, careful observation is the basis; it's about using all of your senses to farm."

Biodynamic Preparations: How it Compares to Organic

Since Biodynamic agriculture views the farm as a self-contained living organism, an essential component of this method is the nurturance and improvement of the soil, which is, after all, the basis for all life on the farm.

Much like organic farmers, Biodynamic farmers utilize crop rotation to prevent nutrient depletion, and they realize the importance of using cover crops and green manures to prevent erosion and build the soil.

Differing from traditional organic techniques, though, the Biodynamic farmer improves and sustains soil health through the use of manures and composts produced through specific preparations.

These preparations are used to speed up and regulate the fermentation process (like yeast in dough) and produce balanced, humus-rich compost—a cornerstone of Biodynamic growing.

The nine preparations—numbered 500 to 508—used in Biodynamic agriculture are derived from herbal and mineral sources meant to aid organic-matter fermentation.

The first two, 500 and 501, are used as field sprays to aid in humus formation in the field and improve plant growth and health. The remaining preparations employ plants like stinging nettle, chamomile and dandelions.

Each of these preparations is made in a specific way that's meant to bring about its ability to both properly ferment the organic matter and to further the farm's ability to connect with the universe.

They are used in small amounts and in a specific fashion.

For example, preparation number 500 is called horn-manure and is created by filling the horn of a cow with cow manure and burying it in the ground in the autumn. The horn's contents are then mixed with water in a precise ratio and fashion



and sprayed onto the field in the spring.

Preparation 503 is created by stuffing chamomile blossoms into the small intestine of a cow, buried in autumn for use in the spring to aid in compost fermentation.

All of these different preparations are meant to steer a particular decomposition process within the compost or manure pile and to aid in the farm's overall vitality. [More about biodynamic preparations>>](#)

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About the Author: Horticulturalist Jessica Walliser writes about gardening and is the author of *Grow Organic* and *Good Bug, Bad Bug*. She writes the blog *The Dirt on Gardening* for HobbyFarms.com.