

North American Biodynamic Apprenticeship Program
First Annual Farmer-Mentor Circle Workshop
February 13th-15th, 2009, Hawthorne Valley Farm
www.biodynamics.com/nabdap

Friday, February 13th

Orientation to the Program and the Role of the Mentor Farmer

On the evening of February 13th, thirty-one biodynamic farmers and gardeners were gathered for the inauguration of the North American Biodynamic Apprenticeship Program. Really, they were midwives of sorts, for this was a birth. After four years of gestation within the womb of the Agriculture Section, the program was finally ready to be brought into life.

Sherry Wildfeuer, who has been fulfilling the role of Program Administrator, urged the group to recognize the ancient impulse behind the program. It was *the questioning human soul* that began to examine the nature of the human being and the universe, giving birth to the Anthroposophical Society. It was *the questioning human soul* that addressed itself to Rudolf Steiner, asking how we might begin to heal the earth through our agricultural practices. And it is *the questioning human soul* that continues to drive the research of biodynamic farmers and the work of the Agriculture Section of the School of Spiritual Science.

Three years ago, the Agriculture Section turned its attention to the question of training. The members recognized a clear need for a structured, supportive program for those who are seeking a career in biodynamic agriculture. The first impulse was to look to the well-established European model of apprenticeship training. It was immediately apparent that the time commitment and rigor of this kind of structure would be met with a great deal of resistance in America. How, then, could the needs of this continent, where apprenticeship is not part of the culture, be met? Over time, the concept for the two-year program emerged. The Agriculture Section reached out to the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association and to the organic movement as collaborators in the development of the training program.

The program will require apprentices to spend a total of 24 months on biodynamic and/or organic farms. As many farms offer only 8-month apprenticeships, an apprentice might experience as many as three farms. At least one of these must be biodynamic. Applicants must first be accepted as an apprentice at a participating farm before they may be accepted into the program.

The apprenticeship program will consist of three components. First, apprentices will receive on-farm practical training and mentoring. This first Farmer-Mentor Circle

Workshop inaugurates the collaboration of mentor farmers, who will meet regularly and work together to create a common culture of on-farm mentoring practices.

The second component will be regional collaboration. Apprentices will visit and tour other farms in the region, participating in discussions of various relevant topics. These regional collaborations will be modeled after the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farm Training (CRAFT) program, originally piloted in New England, and developed successfully in other parts of the continent.

The third component is a formal curriculum, which will be offered on a regional basis. Apprentices will participate in weekend workshops or one to two-week intensive courses on topics specific to agriculture and to the anthroposophical worldview. This instruction will be provided by established institutions as well as in regionally-based workshops designed specifically for the apprenticeship program. Participating institutions with established curriculum offerings include the Rudolf Steiner Centre in Toronto, the Rudolf Steiner College in Fair Oaks, California, and The Pfeiffer Center in Spring Valley, New York. Hawthorne Valley Farm is developing winter intensive courses on Goethean observation, esoteric science, and the Agriculture Course. In addition to the curriculum offered by these institutions, workshops will be developed regionally to address local soil conditions. The steering committee for the Apprenticeship Program is currently working to establish equivalencies between institutions, and the curriculum offerings for this first year will depend largely on which regions have enrolled apprentices.

Each region will have a Regional Coordinator, who will provide support to both farmers and apprentices. The Regional Coordinator will be responsible for following apprentices through the interview process and through the program, even as apprentices move beyond their own region. Regional Coordinators will ensure that all apprentices receive the required formal instruction and master the required minimal skills, and will organize supplementary workshops as needed within the region.

The program requires a \$500 fee from apprentices, which is put towards the cost of workshops and intensives. This does not cover all actual costs, and in some cases apprentices may be required to put additional funds towards educational events. In the New England region, grant funding has been obtained, allowing for all costs beyond the \$500 contribution to be covered. The program ultimately aims to be supported by this kind of grant funding in the future. There is also the possibility to sustain the program partially by opening regional workshops on a fee basis to non-apprentices.

After the details of the program were introduced, the group of mentor farmers exchanged stories from their years of working with apprentices. There was a strong sense

of tenderness underlying all of the stories, and it was clear that this group of farmers was united in a desire to manifest what Sherry called “an offering to the next generation.”

Saturday, February 14th **Approaches to On-Farm Mentoring- Part 1**

Teaching Tasks

Sebastian Kretschmer, manager of Sankanac CSA in Kimberton Hills, PA, spoke about how mentor farmers might begin to think about orienting their apprentices within the farm setting and how to provide direction and context for performing specific tasks.

Sebastian worked with the New England Small Farms Institute (NESFI) on the development of *The On-Farm Mentor's Guide: Practical Approaches to Teaching on the Farm*, published in 2005. The term “mentor farmer,” as developed in the NESFI guide, is relatively new. It goes beyond a standard of basic instruction to encompass the idea of coaching and guidance. The mentor farmer is not concerned only with his/her labor needs, but considers the whole educational experience of the apprentice in a structured, methodical manner.

Although the North American Biodynamic Apprenticeship Program will allow mentor farmers to outsource formal curriculum-based instruction, it is still important for the mentor farmer to identify the curriculum that is embedded within the on-farm practical training. “Practical training should still be didactically structured,” Sebastian said.

Sebastian's experience has been primarily with bright, motivated, well-educated apprentices who have consistently met with success in their lives. They often come to the farm with a “sense of entitlement,” a belief that they will be able to figure out farming relatively quickly and easily, developing their own style and approach right away. He has found that these young people require a great deal of guidance and clarity to help them develop an awareness of and respect for the farm's infrastructure and the work itself.

The mentor farmer must be mindful of what apprentices are exposed to. Engagement with activities and equipment must be appropriate over the time period the apprentice is on the farm. Experiences ought to build upon one another, allowing the apprentice to make connections between past experiences and the task at hand. These kinds of connections allow the learner to access a “receptive state of mind” from which learning becomes possible. It is not enough, then, to tell an apprentice to be careful with the tractor. “A tractor is like a cello,” Sebastian often tells his apprentices.

These kinds of analogies and thoughtful explanations provide a context for the apprentice to understand the farmer's instructions and requests.

As the farmer seeks to orient and guide apprentices, it is valuable to think of the farm setting itself as a living text book. Inherent in the farm's organization, its buildings, roadways, and routines, is a wealth of information. There is intention and rationale behind every part of the farm, and apprentices should be encouraged to be aware of this. Sitting with this idea, one farmer wondered how to talk about and teach within a farm setting that is not fully developed, where not everything is in its place yet. Sebastian advocated strongly for full transparency with apprentices, especially about the limitations of one's farm operation. "There should be no tacit knowledge," he said. Apprentices should always have access to any information or knowledge that will illuminate the situation at hand. The mentor farmer must always be thinking of ways to give the apprentice as much context and orientation as possible.

When explaining a task or giving any kind of instruction, it is important to follow what Sebastian called the "learning sequence." First, the apprentice must be oriented into the "why" of the task. For this, (s)he must be in that **receptive state of mind**, relating the task to some previous experience. Kretschmer gave the example of harvesting salad greens in a greenhouse just the week before. He had been unable to accompany his apprentices to the greenhouse, but because they had performed the task before, he could call up a clear image of the space in their minds. Their prior experience cutting greens also allowed them to engage meaningfully with Sebastian's request that the greens be cut evenly. They had already experienced regrowth, and thus could understand the importance of evenness.

Next, the farmer must **demonstrate** the task while **commenting** on what (s)he is doing. In a long-distance situation like the greenhouse example, the demonstration can be pantomimed or explained verbally. For the greenhouse harvest, it was important for Sebastian to "create a choreography" so that the job would run smoothly within a small space. He gave specific instructions about how many people should work on each bed and how much to fill the crates. He used descriptive words, such as "swiftly" and "carefully" to paint a picture of the kinds of movements he expected.

The apprentice can then **imitate** the task, while **commenting** on it. This commentary assures the farmer that the apprentice has a clear understanding of the job. Again, if the instructions are being given at a different location, the apprentice might repeat the instructions back to the farmer. The farmer might also tell a group of apprentices to check on each other's work as they go.

Once the farmer feels confident that the apprentice understands and is capable of performing the task, (s)he can **practice independently**. The farmer may not, however, allow the apprentice to wander out of his/her thoughts at this point. The farmer must be ever-mindful of the learning apprentice, with frequent observation and check-ins.

After Sebastian's presentation, the group's discussion focused on how to convey a greater perception of nature and to awaken apprentices to their senses. Many farmers find themselves with apprentices who are attached to their ipods, overstimulated by media, and effectively numbed to their senses. As one farmer put it, they carry with them an enormous amount of "internal noise" and they are unable, despite their great yearning to do so, to actually see what's around them.

In response to this, Rachel Schneider of Hawthorne Valley Farm suggested two things. First she noted the importance of allowing apprentices to "live into their senses" according to their own inclinations. Over the years, she has observed that, in their first weeks on the farm, apprentices tend to want to go barefoot in the fields, bathe less frequently, and talk a lot about what their next meal will be. Mentor farmers must do what they can to allow and encourage these natural movements towards a more sensory connection to the natural world. Rachel also encouraged mentor farmers to bring awareness to the senses as they explain a task or work alongside apprentices. Ask them to feel the soil, notice the moisture content, observe how many leaves are on the seedlings they're transplanting. Over time, the apprentice will begin to make note of such things on his/her own.

One farmer added that we might address the issue of sense perception in our orientations with apprentices at the beginning of the season. Through discussion, it is possible to establish with one's apprentices "a collective will towards expanding sense perception," and to introduce them to the meditative possibilities inherent in the work.

Sebastian offered the idea that hard work is often the way to overcome the problem of "internal noise." Establishing a strong work ethic early on in the season is of great benefit to the apprentice. The mentor farmer must be "cruel but fair" and gradually, through that hard work, the opportunity for greater consciousness will emerge.

Working with the Skills Checklist

Janet Gamble, director of the Farm and Food Education Program and manager of Stella Gardens at the Michael Fields Institute in Wisconsin, introduced the skills checklist that will be used in the North American Biodynamic Apprenticeship Program. Developed by Malcolm Gardner and originally published in his training manual,

Becoming a Biodynamic Farmer or Gardener, the checklist will be available for download on the program's website (www.bdtraining.org).

The checklist consists of a comprehensive list of skills that might be taught on a farm. Each participating farm will be able to edit the checklist to reflect which learning experiences are being offered there. The skills checklist is an opportunity for the farmer to identify the strengths of his/her farm, and for the apprentice to choose his/her learning experience based on what (s)he wants to learn. Thus, the skills checklist becomes a kind of interview tool, working to create a very clear picture for both farmer and apprentice of the educational opportunities available.

Throughout the season, the checklist will be used by the mentor farmer and the apprentices as a way of tracking the apprentice's progress. When a task has been introduced, the farmer will place a checkmark in the appropriate box. When (s)he feels that an apprentice has mastered a task, a second checkmark will be placed. The checklist can be used during one-on-one evaluations. Janet suggested that at the beginning of the season, apprentices choose five particular skills on which to focus. These specific skills can be revisited and commented upon during evaluations throughout the season.

There are, of course, many underlying skills that are important for an apprentice to develop but are not represented on the checklist, such as organization, planning, and an ability to perceive the whole picture of what is happening on the farm. Janet encouraged the use of written evaluations to address some of these underlying aptitudes.

The skills checklist and any accompanying written evaluations then become a kind of transcript that will follow the apprentice from farm to farm. Regional coordinators will retain a copy of each apprentice's transcript and can refer to it during their own one-on-one meetings with apprentices. Because the checklist will function as a standard measure, farmers must be consistent in its use. A second checkmark must be regarded as a recommendation to the next farmer, and should not be given unless a skill is truly mastered. The written transcript need not be the only form of recommendation, however. Farmers should feel free to contact an apprentice's previous mentors as well as his/her regional coordinator for a full reference.

In order to receive certification on completion of the program, apprentices will be required to master certain minimum requirements from the skills checklist. These requirements are still under development by the steering committee and will be available on the website.

Organizing Tasks for Maximum Learning Potential Giving Increased Responsibility to Apprentices

Janet went on to explain some of the ways she structures work and delegates responsibilities in order to engage apprentices fully in the act of learning. She stressed the importance of a focused orientation early on in the season. "Even if you need to have apprentices come to your farm earlier in the season than you normally would, it's important to take the time to orient them to the rhythms and routines of your farm." Clear expectations must be set on both sides, and apprentices must be given an idea of what the season as a whole, as well as day-to-day life on the farm, is going to look like.

At Stella Gardens, there are "core chores" which are done every morning, such as irrigation and greenhouse watering. These chores are rotated between apprentices every three weeks. Because apprentices have mastered their chore by the end of their rotation, they are able to teach each other when the time comes to switch. Janet insists on the idea that all tasks on the farm should be transferable. "We ought to teach people to be teachers," she says. When an apprentice learns a task knowing that (s)he will be required to teach it to someone else later on, (s)he approaches the learning with more attention and greater responsibility. Ultimately, this approach makes for a more complete learning experience.

After the core chores are done, Janet holds a morning meeting with her apprentices. On Mondays, the group takes a look at the ongoing task list on the board and creates a task list for the week. Here, the apprentices learn some of the thinking behind the work, as Janet gives them insight into the reasons why she is prioritizing one task over another. During the rest of the week, morning meetings are used to set an agenda for the day. Apprentices always have a list of "fall-back tasks" that they can do at any given moment if they don't know what else to do. This might include checking on a particular crop or section of the garden for pest and disease issues or irrigation needs. This way, an apprentice begins to develop a practice of 'scouting' and observation.

In late June or July, Janet begins to delegate leadership to her apprentices. They take charge for a week at a time, delving into a deeper understanding of the thinking behind any given task. This coincides with a point in the season when apprentices are no longer ingesting quite so much new information on a daily basis and are beginning to hit the proverbial wall. A bit of added responsibility at this moment can "sweeten" the internal transformation an apprentice has to make to be able to endure the work. Janet stressed that delegation does not mean letting the apprentice out of one's consciousness. Observation and feedback continue to be very important. Feedback

should always take the form of a sandwich: a slice of tomato (praise), a slice of onion (constructive criticism), and another slice of tomato (more praise).

Beyond these weekly leadership stints, all the apprentices are involved in winter field planning, and second-year apprentices are given a copy of the master plan to use and follow during the season. Janet asks her second-year apprentices to take on more responsibility in the five skill areas on which they have chosen to focus.

Some of the mentor farmers in the group commented on their own systems. One farmer asks each apprentice to come to the Monday morning meeting prepared with his/her own task list for the week, and one apprentice is asked to present a detailed work schedule to the group. Another farmer suggests tying a second-year apprentice's success as a crew leader to a financial benefit. When the crew performs well, the farm performs well, and there is a financial reward, such as an end-of-season bonus or a share of the season's profits.

With these thoughts about second-year apprentices and increased responsibilities, the group's discussion began to stray towards the question of what comes after the two-year apprenticeship (a preview of Sunday morning's talk). How far should the apprenticeship take a young farmer? Janet introduced a linear continuum from entry-level apprentice at the left, to beginning farmer with a start-up operation in the middle, to an established farmer at the right. The program at Michael Fields, she said, brings people about halfway between entry-level and beginner farmer. Apprentices that come through the program are prepared to take on clear roles within a management structure at the next farm. How then, the group began to wonder, do we encourage our eager, entrepreneurial apprentices to intentionally pursue this kind of continued training? And how do we provide opportunities for them to do so? The matter was set aside to be addressed in greater detail on Sunday.

Approaches to On-Farm Mentoring-Part 2

Clear Record-Keeping and Written Instructions/Manuals

Ryan Voiland and Sarah Ingraham of Red Fire Farm in Granby, MA, talked about their Farm Season Binder. It is a comprehensive document that is given to farm interns on a CD at the beginning of every season. Hard copies are furnished to all management positions and are made available in the farm's library. The Farm Season Binder serves to get all of the farm's employees on the same page, clarify all guidelines and expectations, and give full transparency about the farm's operations and finances. It is also an invaluable resource for planting dates, locations, and methods. When in doubt, and in the absence of the farm manager, employees can always consult the binder.

The handout from their presentation, outlining all of the binder's contents, is provided in a separate document titled "Written Materials and Manuals."

Weekly Farm Observations and the Role of the Farm Journal

Dan Kaplan of Brookfield Farm in Amherst, MA, spoke about how he works with his apprentices. Dan came into agriculture through several apprenticeship experiences, taking the helm as manager of Brookfield Farm in 1995. Reflecting on his years of apprenticeship, he sees himself as having stood "on the shoulders of the pioneers" of biodynamic agriculture. In other words, he was given a strong foundation as well as a broader view of the agricultural landscape than those before him had. Dan continues in this tradition, providing his own shoulders as a point of departure for young farmers of the next generation. He has an impressive success rate, with half of his apprentices continuing to build careers in agriculture.

As one of Dan's mentors, Trauger Groh once said, "A farm is not a democracy. It is a hierarchy of skill." This is a fundamental principle of Dan's approach to working with apprentices. The only act of a farmer, Dan suggests, is to *choose*. The more experiences and the more data a farmer has, the better equipped he is to make the best choices for the farm. As a mentor to young and inexperienced farmers, his goal is to set his apprentices up to spend their entire season on the farm "trying to get into the farmer's mind."

Dan certainly doesn't go out of his way to make this difficult for his apprentices. He believes in full transparency. Like at Red Fire Farm, Dan provides his apprentices with all of the paperwork, records, and plans pertaining to the farm. Dan feels that sharing things like the farm budget or allowing apprentices to learn to operate equipment goes a long way in creating trust. If apprentices can trust him, then he can trust them as well. Transparency also gives the young farmer courage. It is important for the apprentice to recognize that the farmer doesn't know everything, but still continues to get up everyday and manage the farm. Seeing this allows apprentices to believe that they could do it too.

Dan gives his apprentices a clear breakdown of his thoughts each week during a Monday morning meeting. The process begins on Sunday evening, when Dan sits down at his computer, where he keeps his detailed field maps and records. He takes a mental walk through his fields and generates a categorized task list for the week. He gives this list to his assistant manager, a year-round employee of the farm. He and the assistant

manager meet over breakfast at 6 AM on Monday morning to finalize the list. It is then passed along to the apprentices during the Monday morning meeting. This meeting generally lasts about a half hour. Dan makes sure that apprentices understand what is on the list and how he is prioritizing the work.

This meeting is followed by a drive through the fields with the apprentices. As they pass each crop, Dan explains what he is seeing. He points out the need for water, weeding, or attention to pest management. The group makes one or two longer stops in critical areas. This drive-through takes another half hour, putting the Monday morning meeting at about an hour.

The management and labor structures of the farm are relatively simple. Dan hires an administrator and a mechanic. Livestock on the farm is overseen by a livestock manager, who is in an entrepreneurial relationship with Dan. A year-round assistant manager helps to oversee three apprentices, who are on the farm from April to November. In addition, Dan hires a weeding crew to work from the end of May until the end of August. He hires twelve people, often high school or college students, who may choose to come to the farm between 1 and 5 days a week, between 8 AM and noon. Usually four to five weeders come to work on any given day. They are paid \$7 an hour, and are overseen by a returning "weeder leader" who is paid \$10/hour. This weeder crew allows for apprentices to participate in a greater variety of work tasks.

Every morning, the apprentices start with chores at 6 AM. Each week, an apprentice takes on the role of harvest manager. This person is responsible for knowing what is supposed to happen each morning at 6 AM. Then at 8:00 the group meets to discuss the day's agenda. Dan posts the task list for the day, and spends about 15 minutes on this check-in.

The farm pays Dan's wife to cook the lunch-time meal, and everyone eats together. This is a time for everyone to share their thoughts, ask questions, and get to know each other better. At the insistence of his wife, Dan has established a 5:00 quit time. It is important to be clear, he says, that the farmer ought to drive the farm and not the other way around.

Dan keeps a simple farm journal, where he writes down the day's weather and the major tasks that were completed. Dan shows his daily farm journal to his apprentices and encourages them to keep one as well. The journals are impressionistic, resembling a travelogue. The aim is for apprentices to be able to look back and see how their thinking develops over time. Dan encourages apprentices to include anecdotes, and to think about how the weather for any given day relates to the decisions about work priorities.

Three times a season, Dan sits down for a one-on-one meeting with each of his apprentices. At the beginning of the season, he asks apprentices to write a broad letter of motivation and intention. This is a useful tool to check back against during these one-on-one sessions. He asks about how the living situation is working out. They also talk about the future expectations of both himself and the apprentice.

Another maxim Dan has retained from his mentor Trauger Groh is that “the smallest unit of learning on the farm is one year.” Dan spoke about the challenge of keeping his apprentices invested in the farm, likening a year on the farm to a movie. For first-year apprentices, the goal is to get them to stay until the end of the movie. Second-year apprentices might begin to consider how the director went about making the movie. Beyond the second year, the mentor farmer becomes more invested in “fear management,” encouraging apprentices as they face the (sometimes terrifying) challenge of starting their own operation. Wherever his apprentices are in their growth as farmers, Dan insists on the importance of approaching them with “a general gesture of patience.”

Meeting the Needs of Our Apprentices

In the words of Trauger Groh, when farmers take on apprentices, “we think we are getting a labor force, but we are getting human beings.” In the afternoon session, Sherry Wildfeuer asked the group of mentor farmers to put themselves in the shoes of their apprentices. “What are your needs, your fears, your expectations?” she asked. The group generated a large list of needs, and then began to consider how they as mentors might begin to address those needs.

The brainstorm is captured in the chart below. Many of the suggestions from the right-hand column can apply to more than one of the needs in the left-hand column.

Meeting the Needs of Our Apprentices

Needs and Challenges for the Apprentice	Ways for the Mentor Farmer to Address these Needs/Challenges
<p>Need for recognition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to have life experiences valued • Need to be seen for potential • Need for praise and confirmation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor the whole person. Find ways to encourage apprentices' interests- connect them to people outside the farm who might share and help them to develop their interests • Explore principles of adult education • Give praise often, honestly, and lightly- serve sandwiches! (praise-constructive criticism-praise)
<p>Need for structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need clear orientation to the farm context and structure • Need a unified approach/standards of practice from each farmer who is giving instruction/direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear guidelines and rules, both written and verbal • Decide on a unified approach • Don't air management's conflicts in front of apprentices
<p>Physical Adjustment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting to the long workday • Adjusting to physical labor • Adjusting to long-term repetitive tasks: the "thankless job that's never done" • Adjusting to life with structured routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model behavior: demonstrate hard work and elegance • Be patient- allow for time to adjust • Keep up a positive morale
<p>Sensory and Mental Adjustment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detoxing from the world of chatter and awakening to the physical senses • Learning to trust the physical senses • The pain of self-discovery; personal baggage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage artistic activities that stimulate sensory awareness, such as weekly drawings and journals • Respect free time: regard accompanying educational components as work time • Lend moral support
<p>Financial Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing financial obligations (ex. Student loans) • For older, career-changers: the need to develop new skill-sets in a short period of time because of family and financial obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to apprentices about their financial needs • Create a clear training plan and timeline
<p>Social Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loneliness- the need for a social life and connectivity • Culture shock- moving from a sub/urban to rural environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for exchange and interaction with previous apprentices and with apprentices on other farms • Build a sense of community on the farm, perhaps by sharing some meals • Allow time for internet usage • Be sure that someone looks out for ill/injured apprentices
<p>Household/Living Arrangement Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared housing arrangements and living with colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make suggestions for domestic arrangements that worked for past apprentices • Give time to create domestic order • Provide some domestic skills, such as cooking

Sunday, February 15th

Growing a Farming Community: Envisioning the Next Steps

Nathaniel Thompson, manager of Remembrance Farm in Trumansburg, NY, gave the final presentation of the weekend. Thompson explored how a more collaborative approach to farming might lend support to young farmers as they move beyond the apprenticeship stage and begin to envision and create a balanced, healthy, and productive life for themselves.

In Thompson's twelve years as a farmer, he has experienced a lot of transitions and encountered many obstacles. Through trial and error, he has succeeded in building a business that is both financially viable and supportive of his personal needs, a balance between his inner and outer life. Remembrance Farm is part of a cooperative CSA venture along with two other farms, known as the Full Plate Farm Collective. The collective preserves the CSA marketing model while allowing each farm to focus its efforts on specialized crops. Thus, each farm operation is streamlined, but can still maintain a connection to the broader community through the CSA. Administration and bookkeeping is managed by a third party non-farm-family member, and the association is strengthened by the friendship and trust that exists between the farmers involved. Thompson has found that working within the collective has relieved a great deal of the pressure he felt when farming on his own. He can produce a higher quality product and, with less stress, live a more complete life.

The collective model has also opened doors to greater possibilities for community outreach. The Full Plate Farm Collective has collaborated with several other local farms and the Cornell Cooperative Extension to launch the grant-funded Healthy Food For All Program, which offers lower-priced CSA shares to low-income community members. Because there are so many farms involved, the project is eligible for more grant funding. Funds for the program are also raised through on-farm events at all participating farms, such as on-farm dinners, developing a much larger financial base than any one farm could raise on its own. For Thompson, the opportunity to engage in this kind of broader community outreach is a key part of a fulfilling life, an aspect he could not have developed to such an extent without this model of collaboration.

Thompson spoke about the painful experience of watching many of his farmer friends struggle simply to "tread water," as "slaves to the farm or to their off-farm jobs." Why, he asked, are so many young farmers, who are committed to pursuing a career in agriculture, also resigned to lives of financial destitution? It is possible, albeit difficult, to make a living as a farmer, especially given the growing demand for local, organic

produce. What is lacking, Thompson suggested, is guidance from mentor farmers in the life-visioning process. Beginning farmers must be encouraged to carefully consider questions of quality of life as they craft their business plans and envision their futures.

Thompson opened the discussion to the group, asking the mentor farmers to consider how they might support their apprentices beyond the initial awakening experience on the farm. How can the mentor farmer create possibilities and opportunities for the new farmer to develop a high quality, balanced life?

The consensus in the room was that the work had begun in earnest this weekend. The development of a mentor farmer network, through which farmers help each other become better teachers, is underway. The group is working to develop best practices, a culture of guidance for young farmers. Mentor farmers can all help each other in creating ways to bring these issues of life-visioning to the attention of their apprentices.

One farmer suggested that when mentor farmers take on apprentices, they are making a commitment beyond the two-year program. They must continue to provide advice and support to their apprentices in whatever ways they can. The mentor farmer network comes into play here, too. Mentor farmers will be able to direct young farmers to resources that might help them gain much-needed experience and insight. Because of the network, mentor farmers will know who might be hiring an assistant manager, who has an excellent poultry operation, or who has experience working with land trusts.

It was widely agreed that the ability to be a good mentor is ultimately tied to the clarity of one's own self-understanding. The farmer mentor must become comfortable with his/her own operation, strengths, challenges, and intentions. (S)he must be able to answer these questions about the balance between inner and outer life before (s)he can guide young farmers to ask the questions themselves.

Another farmer pointed out that stronger networks create opportunities for more collaboration and mutual support, the very elements that can contribute to a lower-stress, higher quality of life. For example, out of CRAFT networks in Wisconsin have emerged "green grower groups" which work to assist farmers with production issues. These groups have developed buying clubs for seeds and equipment, as well as peer-to-peer mentoring networks. Often, CRAFT-type groups are created to benefit apprentices, but end up functioning as a great support for farmers as well. This support system then becomes a living example of collaboration for apprentices to observe and take advantage of in the future.

With this kind of networking, however, there is always the practical question of who among a group of busy farmers will do the administrative work. Some responded to this concern by explaining that the work is easier to do when the other farmers and

network members are your friends. This goes to the heart of the idea of growing a farming *community*. For the apprenticeship program itself, a lot of this kind of networking will be done by the regional coordinators.

The group's discussion turned towards how to introduce more formal, structural elements to the program beyond the two-year apprenticeship. Wildfeuer explained that, with farming being a lifelong path of learning, the question of training has been thought about by the Agriculture Section as consisting of three phases. This two-year program is the first phase, and now is the time to begin developing the second phase. Work is already being done to bring the program *Farm Beginnings*, a goal-setting program originally developed in Minnesota, to Hawthorne Valley Farm. Suggestions from the group for the development of the second phase included an expanded network of incubator farms, developing resources to assist apprentices with locating and applying for funding, developing programs like the sharemilking programs that exist in New Zealand, and exploring alternative land tenure models.

Closing Reflections

With time running short, members of the group offered some closing reflections. Stefan Schneider of Hawthorne Valley Farm remarked that, as a member of an older generation of farmers, he is impressed by the ability of the younger generation to focus on details of organization in order to create networks of this kind. He went on to talk about the ups and downs in "the biography of a farmer." There are times, he suggested, when a farmer has to dig deep within for inspiration and motivation. It is at these moments when teaching can be a revelation. A farmer may find him/herself as the primary beneficiary of the act of teaching. Above all, Schneider suggested, mentor farmers need to pay particular attention to their *biodynamic* practices. They must explore the depths of biodynamics, strengthen their own visions and each other's, dig deeper, and develop the inner life. It will require continued hard work.

Mac Mead of the Pfeiffer Center encouraged the group to consider the nature of an apprentice and to compare it to the nature of the farm. What we are talking about, he suggested, with both the farm and the apprentice, is the "unfolding of a young individuality." One applies preparations in order to awaken the senses of the plants and to enliven a greater intelligence in the soil. We might think about our work with our apprentices as bringing about a similar transformation. It is about connecting to the "young cosmic impulse." Indeed, that is why working with young people is so inspiring.

Sherry Wildfeuer drew a connection between this “young cosmic impulse” and her introductory image of “the questioning human soul.” We must think of the human being as the foundation of this enterprise, she suggested, and look at the role of the mentor farmer as that of a guide in the development of active sense perception. The ultimate goal of the mentor farmer is to help other people move through the senses to know the underlying spirit, to see the aliveness of things. Wildfeuer closed with a quotation from Rudolf Steiner:

“Seek the truly practical life, but seek it in such a way that it does not blind you to the spirit working in it. Seek the spirit, but seek it not out of spiritual greed, but so that you may apply it in the genuinely practical life. Turn to the ancient principle, matter is never without spirit and spirit is never without matter, in such a way that we say we will to do all material things in the light of the spirit and we will so to seek the light of the spirit, so that it evokes warmth for us in our practical activities.”