

Biodynamics

RETHINKING AGRICULTURE
Spring/Summer 2016 | #286



Who Owns the Land?
And Why Does It Matter?



BIODYNAMIC
ASSOCIATION

Contents

SPRING/SUMMER 2016: Who Owns the Land?

WELCOME

- 4 EDITOR LETTERS
Growth and Transition
Rebecca Briggs
- 5 Asking the Right Questions
Karen Davis-Brown
- 7 NEWS

WHO OWNS THE LAND?

- 8 AN END TO THE AGE OF ENTITLEMENT:
Land Ownership, Use, and Community
Reconsidered
John Bloom
- 13 AGRICULTURE AND THE CAMPHILL MOVEMENT
Hartmut von Jeeze
- 17 WORTH PROTECTING: Perpetual Stewardship in
a Time of Transition
Karen Davis-Brown
- 22 NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL: Nature's Path's
Commitment to Regenerative Agriculture
- 23 TEMPLE-WILTON COMMUNITY FARM'S PURCHASE
OF OUR FARMSTEAD AT FOUR CORNERS FARM
Anthony Graham and Ian McSweeney
- 25 GETTING LANDED: The Development of
Yggdrasil Land Foundation
John Bloom
- 28 "TO GIVE SELFLESSLY AND RECEIVE
GRATEFULLY": Farmer-to-Farmer Transition
in the 21st Century
Karen Davis-Brown
- 34 FARMER-TO-FARMER TRANSITION AT
WINTER GREEN FARM
- 36 FARMER WITHOUT A FARM
Ruth Mischler
- 37 THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE: Observations of a
30-Something Farmer
David Burnford

40 RESOURCES

- 41 STEINERIAN ECONOMICS
Gary Lamb and Sarah Hearn

PREPARATIONS

- 43 READING THE BOOK OF NATURE
Stewart Lundy

RESEARCH

- 46 VITALITY AND QUALITY AS SEEN THROUGH
PICTURE FORMING METHODS
Barry Lia

INTERNATIONAL

- 52 OUR EARTH — A GLOBAL GARDEN?
2016 International Biodynamic Conference
Steffen Schneider

NEXT GENERATION

- 54 GRAIN STEWARDSHIP PROVIDING SELF
CULTIVATION
Cache Stone Hunter

COMMUNITY

- 56 SECOND NATIONAL BIODYNAMIC
CONFERENCE IN MEXICO
Eduardo Rincón
- 58 THE STRONG BUFFALO
Craig Strong
- 62 TIERRA VIVA: Farming the Living Earth
Thea Maria Carlson
- 64 BIODYNAMIC ASSOCIATION UPDATES

Asking the right questions

This issue of *Biodynamics* has been a journey. It started with a simple idea: “it’s time to do an issue again on associative economics.” Then came the reality that we would need to narrow the focus for anything substantive to emerge. It did not take us long to figure out that one of the biggest questions in the biodynamic community on this continent, at this time, is how best the legacies of the “outgoing” generations of farmers can be strengthened and taken forward into the future — both the land and the human elements of the farm individualities they have created. With that answer came the next question, and the theme of the issue: “Who owns the land? Why does it matter?” John Bloom’s article, “The End of the Age of Entitlement,” frames these questions in a clear and substantive way.

Asking this question of established biodynamic farmers soon made clear that there are many diverse, creative, well-researched models for protecting the land they have stewarded as they step back from active involvement in their farms. The challenges and opportunities of effectively passing on enterprises and decision-making to the next generation, however, are proving to be more complex and personally demanding. The articles “Worth Protecting: Perpetual Stewardship in a Time of Transition” and “To Give Selflessly and Receive Gratefully: Farmer-to-Farmer Transition in the 21st Century” were written in consultation and partnership with many farmers, apprentices, and others who are committed to accomplishing both aspects of “succession” with consciousness, integrity, and good will. We cannot express how grateful we are to all those who took time from the busiest part of the season to write and talk with us about their ideas, their mistakes, and their discoveries; we are especially grateful to the North American Biodynamic Apprenticeship Program (NABDAP) apprentices who shared with us so thoughtfully and eloquently the challenges that they face and the future for biodynamic practice on this continent that they envision. We also want to thank John Bloom of the Yggdrasil Land Foundation board, Dag Falk and the folks at Nature’s Path, Wali Via of Winter Green Farm, and Anthony Graham and Ian McSweeney of Temple-Wilton Community Farm and the Russell Farm and Forest Conservation Foundation for the insights they provided into their efforts, which are also shared here. David Burnford’s article sharing what he learned along the way as a beginning — and now established — farmer brings home the reality of the challenges facing all of us in agriculture today and reminds us that “good relationships make good farms.”

In the end, we come back to the foundational insights regarding how best to organize societal structures and human interaction that Rudolf Steiner outlined at the beginning of the twentieth century. These concepts and their practical applications were developed under the umbrella of what is termed “social threefolding” and are described throughout this issue in excerpts from Steiner’s *Toward Social Renewal*, Lamb and Hearn’s *Steinerian Economics*, and a 1975 article by Hartmut von Jeetze on the Camphill movement’s relationship to land and agriculture in those intentional communities.

Like Parsival, in the end the question we need to ask is how, individually and collectively, to stay human as we make this journey into the future together.

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Who Owns the Land?

AN END TO THE AGE OF ENTITLEMENT

Land Ownership, Use, and Community Reconsidered

JOHN BLOOM

ASK THE QUESTION: What is my purpose in this lifetime? What resounds is a picture of culture and consciousness at work in forming me. That each of us has the privilege of asking him- or herself such a question reveals an important aspect of what it means to be human. However, when I look around me in the world, I realize that all this inquiry is meaningless without paying particular attention to the earth we all stand on and cohabit. While each of us wrestles, if we choose, with the question of purpose, we rarely ask the deeper questions about the meaning of land, our connection to it, and the reality that it is our shared commons—even though we have been conditioned not to think of it this way in Western culture.

Modern economics has parsed land in a way quite destructive and unimaginable to many indigenous cultures—certainly to America's first peoples. This market-centered methodology is founded upon a materialistic worldview that values things, commodities, and quantification above all else. Ownership of land, and its attendant control, has become an end in itself that has been used to justify some extraordinary means, including rendering the land infertile in the pursuit of profit from it, or distorting its value by using it as a kind of root cellar for capital and as a generator of appreciated development value. This may seem harsh judgment, but both conditions have rendered much productive land unusable and inaccessible, either through industrial farming or overdevelopment. Both are anathema to anything like a regenerative economy. Superfund sites and real estate speculation are more a commons of economic distress in the sense that we all share the costs of their consequences. The long-standing imperative to own and control land as property has its parallel in the competitive drive for control of markets and economic life in general. This age of entitlement has to come to an end along with its destructive practices. From the perspective of the land, we are all commoners, even if we would prefer not to think of it this way.

As a counter imagination, wise stewardship of the land and natural resources upon which humanity depends might render a more mutual and compassionate

interdependent community—a true commonwealth. Farmers working with high-integrity sustainable practices understand this. Their ultimate purpose is building soil fertility. Land trusts are founded on the principle of protecting and stewarding land on behalf of the commons. Neither the farmer nor the land trustees treat the land as a commodity. To do so would be an abrogation of their missions and the high purpose of their service. And, thankfully, there are many private landowners who operate in solidarity with these principles—but not currently enough to rescue the earth from commercial abuse.

I am proposing here to recast the question of land ownership in light of two other critically important, but less attended to, elements, namely, use and community. Imagine these three—ownership, use, and community—as the primary elements of the human relationship to land and, from a different perspective, the aspects of consciousness and praxis that the land is calling forth from us. Each of these elements has its particular qualities, practices, and ethic, and yet they are inseparable. Use and community are often subsumed within our concept of ownership, a situation that no longer serves the economic future in which ecological limits and the diminished capacity of land (and all natural resources) to support human needs are becoming painfully evident.

Change will require a new consciousness, one that transcends conventional polarity and dualistic thinking that are the hallmarks of the bicameral mind. Instead, we will need to cultivate what was called in ancient Greece and Buddhist practice “the middle way,” a path that recognizes the both, and holds the extremes of the polarity and that which mediates them. This requires a certain flexibility of mind, and I would say feeling. In this threefold picture, each of the three elements are of equal importance and serve as tension holder and balance to the others. Collectively, they are a unified system; each with its unique character completes the others. Like the three primary colors from which all other colors emerge, ownership, use, and community are the primary elements of a whole relational system. While this may seem a highly theoretical approach, my hope here is to demonstrate quite the opposite—it is both directly practical, a bearer



of collaboration rather than competition, and a possible tool for healing our centuries-long violent relationship with the earth and each other. This last hope may seem arrogant and overreaching, and it is with all humility that I propose it. But I do not know how else to frame a counter imagination to the dominant paradigm of land ownership.

Ownership

Historically, land ownership was invented as a right, a legalistic structure that was designed to serve power and to wrest control from that which resided in the commons. The language itself—title, deed, lots or allotments, boundaries—is a reflection of the power and value structures inherent in the concept of ownership. I am reminded of a famous line delivered by baseball umpire Bill Klem when a batter complained about a pitch call: “It ain’t nothin’ till I call it.” This is absolutist thinking driven by a kind of self-assigned divine right, the same divine right that drove manifest destiny, colonization, and the destruction of indigenous wisdom along the way—the very wisdom we now need to resurrect and cultivate with new collaborative consciousness if we are to survive on this planet.

The outcome of the present legal structure of land ownership in America is that the land itself is placed into the world of commodities—bounded, parceled, priced, and marketed—with the landowner having virtually absolute control over use. Were we to remove these artificial, self-serving, state-created aspects of ownership, we could see that there are some very positive aspects to ownership. If an individual or private entity owns the land, whether

inherited or purchased, then that person’s identity and destiny are connected with that land. In this light, ownership is a cultural or spiritual responsibility. The owner has a free choice to steward the land for future generations or, at the other end of the spectrum, to treat it as a commodity to sell or use without reference to community. Of course, ownership comes with the right to sell, but toward what end, and for what purpose, are the significant destiny questions. The options are many, but could be looked at through the lenses of use and community as tools of discernment and guidance.

Use

Use of land is attached to the ownership of it, and the owner bears the right to determine its use, but these two concepts are not the same. The tendency is to conflate them. If I buy a residential house with land, the intent and use are clear. However, somewhere in the background, unless it is contested, the use of land is governed primarily by agreements such as zoning laws and tax structures, and most notably by lease agreements if the owner is not the user. Such agreements are framed in something of an exchange in which both parties give up an element of control in order for their needs and the community’s needs to be met. The contracts that arise from these agreements supersede the rights of either party, except the right to cure, renegotiate, or abrogate the agreement if the terms are not met. If I were to want to convert a residence into a business, I would likely have to seek a zoning variance by way of public hearing. Even property tax is a kind of use agreement in the sense that the right of owning in a community comes with a required financial contribution

back to the community to maintain shared services such as road access, fire protection, and law enforcement. One result of this is that potential owners or businesses choose where to locate based upon the expected contribution or, in the case of businesses, tax incentives offered. Thus the use of land, regardless of ownership, is a matter of rights and agreements.

Community

In some ways, community is the most complicated of the three elements to articulate, because it is the most diverse in its expressions and our culture barely holds it consciously. I have already touched on community tangentially in the use section addressing the question of taxes. Clearly taxes are set by elected or appointed officials who represent the broad interests of the community, as defined by political boundaries. Such officials serve at the will of the community. Tax levies arise not only as an expression of community agreements, but also in the framework of the economy of the community. As I mentioned, taxes are mandatory gifts and are therefore a critical component of economic life. Without shared roads, business would have a difficult time getting supplies and then distributing manufactured goods. It is through zoning that the community indirectly chooses the best use of land, whether residential, educational, or industrial. But community does not get to determine who owns private land. Instead, ownership is a product of real estate market activity. This situation has resulted, for example, in corporations or real estate speculators purchasing land and, as owners, using or developing that land for private gain without necessarily having accountability for how they have treated the land or supported its productivity or fertility. While profit may have been extracted from the land, those profits often leave the community to go instead into distant shareholders' hands. In these circumstances, the "investor" community is delocalized from the land and has no direct or real accountability within the community of place and, further, often drives the economic process through the free-market principle of profit maximization. In this situation, the profits leave the community, but the unaccounted expense of compromised land stays as a burden to the community without recompense. Thus, the place-based economy often becomes unsustainable and non-regenerative.

The consideration of community is an important, and often ignored, element in the context of ownership and use. From the vantage point of the land, community is an economic function. The community is formed on the basis of interdependence. I may own a piece of land and lease it to a farmer. If that farmer then uses toxic chemicals that seep into the groundwater, and thus pollutes

the watershed, the whole community bears both the consequences and the expense. Ecological economics recognizes the systemic interconnections in nature, and also sees the truth of our interdependence as humans dependent for our wellbeing upon the land, the earth, and all its natural resources. From an economic standpoint, community is inseparable from land.

Closing

Land is the foundation of economic life. The boundaries we impose upon land, the rights we confer to ourselves, are a reflection of our political life. Who we are and how we bring our labor to work on the land is a matter of culture and vocational destiny. It is important to understand that each aspect of this threefold framework must be given equal recognition and weight and yet be worked with in mindful integration with the other two—land as economic source governed by community-determined rights and right use; ownership as a path to realize stewardship responsibility, as well as initiative on and from the land. If we work with this threefold framework as background to finding a renewed purpose in stewarding land rather than consuming it, economic life will shift into a more stable and sustaining modality—one of sufficiency. If we recognize and value the human community, which depends upon the land, then that community needs to have a voice in how the land is best used and renewed. The community may even have a say in who is best suited to bring their capacities to the land, whether farming, manufacturing, or development.

Such approaches exist. But to get there, the relationship between ownership, use, and community has to change, to be brought into a balanced yet dynamic relationship. The age of entitlement, which gives primacy to private landownership through policies and laws that trump use and community, has to change. In such a skewed system, a distorted, unjust, and unsustainable system has emerged driven by extreme self-interested behavior. The world is full of evidence for this. The challenge is to develop a way of being with land that brings ownership, use, and community into dynamic equilibrium so that human nature and nature itself thrive in reciprocal nurturance.

Land trusts, the high-integrity sustainable farming movement, enlightened land owners, the landless workers movement, the rise of the new peasantry, and those practicing true social finance are all striving to find this renewed relationship to land that is supportive of life, human destiny, and the collaborative community we could call the world economy.

John Bloom is Vice President of Organizational Culture at RSF Social Finance in San Francisco, where he guides the organizational culture. John has worked with over 100 non-profits in the areas of capacity building and culture change. He has led many workshops, lectured, and written about aspects of money and governance for non-profits. John has founded two non-profits, served as a trustee on several (including Yggdrasil Land Foundation), and worked as the administrator at an independent school before joining RSF. He has written extensively on many aspects of charitable organizations, associative economics, life as an active member of Live Power Community Farm, and on the topics of money and philanthropy, including *The Genius of Money—Essays and Interviews* *Reimagining the Financial World*. He lives in San Francisco.

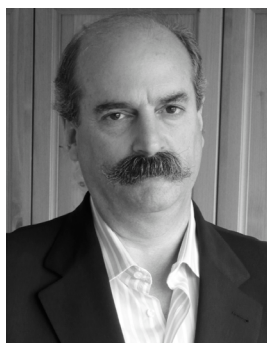



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AGRICULTURE AND THE CAMPHILL MOVEMENT

HARTMUT VON JEETZE

Hartmut von Jeetze was a lifelong farmer and coworker in the international Camphill movement, which is comprised of intentional communities where he lived and worked with adults with developmental challenges. He currently lives with his daughter in upstate New York. More information regarding Camphill can be found at www.camphill.org.

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TO UNDERSTAND THE APPROPRIATE place of the land within a community of people has been a challenge to Camphill ever since its beginning in 1939. Although not always appearing in the foreground of our activities, the land has at all times been of great concern to all Camphill communities. Often misunderstood in its social, therapeutic, and economic function, it had to take the place of a stepchild. That this is so is due to a peculiar relation most people still have to the land today.

In the light of indications given by Dr. Rudolf Steiner concerning principles governing the social organism, it was possible for us in Camphill to gain a new understanding of our relation to the land. Out of this, new approaches to work with the land have been developed. To describe some of these principles shall be the attempt of this article. To what degree they apply elsewhere must of course be left to the reader.

In order to understand man's relation to the land, it is necessary to see that there are three distinctly different functional areas of involvement with it.

I

The first area is the cultivation and care of the land. This is often mistaken as the area of economics, since its outcome is the harvest, food substances. The act of cultivation of land has, however, nothing to do with the economy to which the harvested goods are subject. The words "cultivation" and "agri-culture" signify a human activity, a discipline. Everyone knows the carefully disciplined steps that are required to guide a particular type of plant from seed to fruit. The gardener's role can be compared to that of a teacher guiding a class through the elementary grades of a school. Equally irreversible, the moment when a farmer carries out his decision to turn over an old ley, by setting the plough to the first furrow, shows that the nature of decisions underlying all acts of cultivation is one of individual spiritual activity on the part of those cultivating the land. That these acts have desirable economic results is only to be hoped. Cultivation itself, as the word shows, belongs in the field of spiritual activity.

That the method to be employed in the cultivation of



the land in our trust should follow the biodynamic principles of agriculture was never questioned. The biodynamic method is employed in all Camphill centers where land is cultivated.

This method was developed on the basis of indications and directions given by Dr. Rudolf Steiner to farmers and gardeners who in 1924 had approached him for advice on ways of revitalizing the soil. The effectiveness of this method can, today—fifty years later—no longer be questioned. It is well documented as a fully workable method of agriculture, exemplified by the results achieved by hundreds of farmers and gardeners in many countries. Both in quantity and in quality of products, the biodynamic principles of agriculture are able to hold their own in comparison with conventional methods. This is well documented by supplementary research, as published in various periodicals and papers, available from biodynamic farming and gardening associations around the world.

That the biodynamic method of agriculture cannot and does not employ chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, or other chemical toxic agents acting detrimentally to organic processes, should be self-evident from the above. Neither, however, is it to be understood as a “de luxe” type of organic gardening or farming. To work on biodynamic principles presupposes an entirely new method of cooperation, on the part of those working the land, with the formative forces which underlie the processes of growth and decay active in nature. These are the forces that are, in the last resort, responsible for the harmonious growth of plants. A technical description of this method, however, is not the purpose of this article.

One may ask: if the above method of working the land provides such a successful avenue of farming and gardening, why is it not practiced more widely, particularly today when it might be the answer to ever-increasing needs? The question is no longer one of finding a viable method; the problem can no longer be sought for in nature. It must be looked for elsewhere. It is one of our relation to the land. It becomes a social question. This is not easily admitted.

In order to understand this we have to consider the second important functional area of agriculture.

II

The second area is the field of economics. Two distinctively different economic principles apply to our relation to the world. They cannot be mixed up without causing harm to each other. One embraces our relation to goods and commodities, if you like: the world of inanimate things. The other concerns our relation to living organisms. In the first, we are the recipients of things; in the second, the administrators of processes.

A close look at food substances will show that these belong to the first area, while agriculture itself belongs to the second. Food substances come into existence at a certain, definite moment, at the end of the process of cultivation, the moment of harvest. Before harvest they are living organisms, parts of which may become food. The act of harvesting therefore signifies the dividing line of two processes. At the moment they are severed from the living organism, one could say, food substances are born. They immediately, like all goods, become subject to different principles and laws than before (weight, measure, etc.), economic laws that apply to all material things.

The first principle, therefore, can be formulated like this: all goods, once removed from their original natural context by man, become part of an economic process governed by man. These goods generate, serve, and sustain our socio-economic life. In doing so, however, they are subject to a process of diminution and destruction. (In order to yield lumber, a tree must be felled; to make bread, the grain has to be ground.) Life in the sphere of economics depends on a process of the dying of living things.

In order to satisfy a given situation to a maximum of their inherent potential, goods serving the social organism must be used according to two principles:

1. Optimum quantity required
2. Maximum development of inherent quality, physical or otherwise

This law of the inherent economic value of a commodity, strictly observed, avoids, among other things, waste and pollution. Unfortunately, this law is not usually adhered to, fully, except in situations where lives are obviously at stake, as in the construction of bridges or airplanes, or where actual starvation is a factor.

Adam Smith's idea of free enterprise and competition introduced a highly constructive element into the field of social economy. Through it, a discipline inducing individual thought and ingenuity in the development of the maximum potential inherent in goods, in the sense of the above law, came about. Today's technology is based on this method of handling goods.

While constructive as a discipline, its real value was defeated by the introduction of another principle, that of selfish gain for the competing individual. Today one would say: what can I get out of it? Through this attitude, the goods of the earth have been degraded to mere objects, to be regarded solely from the point of view of maximum usefulness for the individual. Smith's constructive ideas of free enterprise and competition, by being coupled with the idea of maximum gain for the individual, introduced



detrimental consequences. Not only did the resulting ideology subject the goods of the earth to human egoism, but it precipitated an avalanche of utilization—nay, ruthless overexploitation—of resources, now reaching global proportions, fired by self-interest under the whip of the principle of the survival of the fittest.

The second principle applicable to living organisms is quite different. All living organisms—plant, animals, men—are dependent on laws that, contrary to the above laws of economics, lie outside man's jurisdiction and control, such as day and night, seasons, weather, etc. All life roots in these rhythmic processes. The earth with its most sensitive part, the soil, is part of this living organization and subject to the same processes. The reader will not find it difficult to understand, therefore, that a garden, and particularly a farm, is a living organism.

Our individual life as man depends on this living organism. In the same way that we fully expect that there will be sufficient air for our next breath, we depend on the earth to yield our food. Thereby the land becomes our host. Our life is inextricably linked to these living elements, and through them also to every other person. Almost universally we have overlooked this dependency by leaving it to farmers and gardeners to see to it that we have enough to eat. It has made us overlook the following:

1. Inasmuch as the land sustains our life, it is our host.
2. Apart from the human being, a farm or garden is the only living organism in nature created by, and

dependent on, man. Like a child, it is an organism in which man's activity and that of nature can meet without mutual detriment, but to mutual advantage.

3. The fact that the land is our host and at the same time dependent on us puts the farmer and gardener into a new position quite different from the one realized until now. This puts the third functional area—the place of the farmer—into perspective.

III

To understand this third functional area, we have to see that, because of increasing demands, the land has been invaded by a principle valid only for goods. This has had detrimental effects. It has put the farmer into a defensive position. Since agriculture has become an industry, the farmer, having at the same time to defend his stewardship on behalf of the land, has been forced to look for compromises. The use of spare land (as long as available), cheap labor, artificial fertilizers, forced breeding of plants and animals, mechanization—all these have, because of their seeming success, prevented our recognition of the fact that they are largely compromises, obscuring the effect of inappropriate economic principles on the land. The reason for the flight of people from the land may well have to be sought for in this fact.

The now apparent global limits of capital resources, including soil fertility, may make us ask, how can we reverse this trend? A community of people would have to recognize that the land is our host, and that we are

indebted to it. This recognition would allow the farmer, gardener, or forester to be placed in a different position than is customary today. He would become a mediator between the land and a community of people. On the other hand, he would have to be provided, by his community, with the means necessary for the cultivation of the land on their behalf. From composting to sowing to harvesting, he should be given full freedom to administer the land according to its needs, according to methods and principles which are in harmony with the living organism of the farm. At the same time, he is no longer forced to make compromises. He no longer needs to be on the defensive in the face of wrong economic demands, but can use methods which allow the land its optimum ability to grow crops, without defensive artificial means.

Through the above approach, practiced in some of the Camphill centers, the farmer has been freed of the fight for survival, of having to compete with economic principles that have no place on the land. His position is no longer that of a social outcast forced to try to justify two economic principles. Once again the farmer is assured of his true position, that of a mediator between a community of men on the one hand and divine forces working in the organism of the land on the other.

The above approach to agriculture is in no way impractical or merely idealistic and Utopian. In our experience, in the communities of the Camphill movement, it has solved deadlocked situations on the economic, social, and cultural levels, helping to close the gap between man and the land.

Another important aspect of the land is its therapeutic value. Our approach has made it possible for many persons people who elsewhere would be social outcasts in a world of competitive “profitability”—to find true fulfillment in the social organism of Camphill. In the centers of the Camphill movement, which integrates handicapped people into creative community life, many mentally retarded persons have been able to find a place meaningful for them, as well as for the social organism of which they are a part, only through being allowed to

take their place in the work on the land.

Quite apart from economic considerations, their day-by-day involvement in nature’s seasonal processes of growth, dying, and rebirth has a therapeutic value that could not be replaced by other means. Not to avail oneself of this opportunity would be unthinkable in the Camphill approach to man and nature. The social and therapeutic value of work and life with the land is unquestionably re-established in the striving of the Camphill centers throughout the world.

Photos from Camphill Village Minnesota, which was founded by Harmut von Jeetze and his family, are courtesy of the Camphill Association of North America and ©Rebecca Wilson Photography.

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WORTH PROTECTING

Perpetual Stewardship in a Time of Transition

KAREN DAVIS-BROWN

IT WAS THE EARLY 1990S. Stephen and Gloria Decater had come to the Round Valley in Mendocino County, California, twenty years before, as students of Alan Chadwick. They had established and worked Live Power Farm with horses, apprentices, and a great deal of ingenuity, dedication, and will. They had married and their three sons were born there, and they had grown a thriving “community farm” and a group of friends and colleagues committed to healthy food, land, and community with a depth that only comes from putting down roots and following a dream.

But they never owned the land. They didn’t really believe in land ownership, and the person who did own it was generous and supportive of their endeavors. Twenty years after this journey began, however, they and their community realized that this arrangement couldn’t go on forever. They began exploring together how to assure that this precious place would continue its work and mission “in perpetuity.”¹

After three intense years of discussing, planning, researching, and praying, they developed a model together that still fulfills its purpose after twenty years of testing and change. And it is one that is still in some ways unique, as other growers, owners, communities, and concerned citizens have worked together to assure long-term, healthy stewardship of many other parcels of agricultural land

across the continent since that time.

One has a vague sense that change is in the air, as the generation of farmers that entered agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s must make decisions regarding the future of their land and operations. Still, the current statistics are astounding. Between 2014 and 2018, an average of 10% of farmland in the U.S. will change owners. Thirty percent more owner-operators than owner non-operators plan to keep or put the land they intend to transfer in trust—70% versus 40%. Sixty percent of non-farmer owners intend to sell or give away the land they will transfer, compared to 30% of farmer owners.² As more and more biodynamic farmers—owners and non-owners—consider how best to support the continued health and maturing of their farms, models are emerging that include the one developed by the Decaters and their community. These models, like the farms they are designed for, have several common elements, along with characteristics that address the unique situations and needs of the farms and communities they serve.

In his classic *The Biodynamic Farm: Agriculture in Service of the Earth and Humanity*, published in 1989, Herbert Koepf wrote that “a number of initiatives are in progress, arising from biodynamic work or related to it, that are putting into practice the idea that tillable soil should not be a commodity. The land they hold is no lon-

Stephen Decater of Live Power Community Farm





Elizabeth Simpson and Henning Sehmsdorf of S&S Homestead Farm; Roxbury Farm

ger treated as a private asset. It cannot be sold, inherited, or even used as a security.... The emphasis is on bringing farmers and non-farmers who share spiritual and social goals into a working relationship.”³

Eight years later, in 1997, Trauger Groh and Steven McFadden asserted in *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited* that “[t]he widely held belief that there is such a thing as private ownership of pieces of our living planet is a fiction, a social lie...when one holds title to a piece of land, one actually holds a bundle of rights to use the piece of land exclusively or in cooperation with others unlimited in time, and the right to hand these rights...on to successors.” They went on to say that “[h]and in hand with the fiction of private property...we developed the use of land as collateral...but the history of farm mortgage is the history of farm crises.” Their conclusion was that “every piece of farmland has to be purchased for the last time, and then, out of the free initiative of local people, be placed into forms of trust that will protect it from ever again being mortgaged or sold for the sake of private profit.”⁴ They then included an appendix written by Chuck Matthei of Equity Trust, entitled “Gaining Ground: How CSAs Can Acquire, Hold and Pass on Land,” which describes the work he did with the Decaters and the Live Power community.

Many biodynamic farmers, including the Decaters, are planning the transition of the land and operations that they have stewarded for decades, and they share the principles outlined by Herbert Koepf and Trauger Groh/Steven McFadden. For their land, customized variations on a model that engages a land trust, the farmers, and the community served by the farm, are being developed and

implemented. Though seldom quick and easy, most are finding a process with which to lay a solid groundwork for the future.

S&S Homestead Farm is a fifty-five-acre diverse operation on Lopez Island, Washington, that also offers educational opportunities for all ages. For many years, Henning Sehmsdorf and Elizabeth Simpson developed the farm on weekends and during school breaks while teaching full-time in a nearby city. Half of their land is rented at this time, and they own the other half. Over the years, this farm has become both a national model of a successful operation practicing biodynamics, and an integral part of the Lopez Island community. Henning reported that “when I first came here and asked about farmland, people thought I was crazy. There was very little farming on the island. Now, with the local food movement, agriculture is returning to Lopez Island, and our community is more and more able to feed itself.”

Henning and Elizabeth are currently in the process of working with a wide spectrum of community stakeholders and a local land trust to develop partnerships and the best arrangement for continuing regenerative agriculture on S&S Homestead Farm. Because of the small, rural, nature of their community, the stakeholders involved in this process reflect a much broader representation than others. They include churches, the local family resource center, the Transition Town group, the school district, “locavore” groups, and a supportive land use lawyer. While many farms inspired by biodynamics offer educational opportunities to local schools, S&S Homestead’s connection to the local K-12 district is particularly longstanding

and positive, and the district is working with them to integrate educational and vocational opportunities at the farm at all grade levels. This strong partnership will be built into the final legal document that protects the farm and its mission for coming generations.

Roxbury Farm, located in the Upper Hudson Valley of New York State, was a pioneer in working with the land trust model as a way of making its farmland financially accessible and of preserving its integrity as agricultural land. As long as twenty years ago, farmland in the Upper Hudson Valley was being purchased by wealthy urbanites for speculation, tax breaks, and/or weekend country estates.⁵ Jean-Paul Courtens, a biodynamic farmer originally from Holland, worked with the community served by the farm he had established on rental land to raise the money so that Equity Trust could purchase his present farm and put an easement in place that legally assures that the land will be passed on to another farmer at an affordable lease price when the time comes. Jean-Paul and his wife own the house, but not the land underneath it, with the restriction on their purchase from Equity Trust that it could only be sold to another farmer. They own the equipment and the farm business. Recently, a parcel of land was purchased, which is overseen by the National Park Service and has historical value. The Open Space Institute and Land Trust is a key third partner in maintaining the integrity of that land as both historical and agricultural.⁶

The model developed by the **Live Power Community Farm** in the mid-1990s was similarly based on a partnership between Equity Trust, farmers Stephen and Gloria, and the community that Live Power served. However, they built two unique features into their easement, which further strengthened their shared commitments to farmer freedom and the accessibility of the land to the next farmers. One of these features was what Stephen terms “shared equity,” where Equity Trust owns the non-agricultural and “speculative” rights to the land and the Decaters own the agricultural rights and the infrastructure and have a right to permanent tenure. This resulted in, essentially, a fifty-fifty partnership. The second feature was a specific formula for assessing the value of the land built into the easement, which Stephen adapted from California’s Williamson Act. He described this stipulation in the easement held by Equity Trust as “resale requirements that limit appreciation of land value to the level that can be financed out of the typical income stream that can be generated from sustainably farming the land and thereby makes the land permanently affordable to future farmers.”

Through their land preservation process, the Live Power community was able to articulate a strong and lasting set of values to guide their work. They include the principles of:

- Decommoditizing productive farmland to its working agricultural value;
- Creating permanent affordable access;
- Requiring a significant level of active farm production in recognition that the land is a food source for the community at large, not just a private resource or commodity and therefore subject to private abuse or exploitation; and
- Protecting the health of the soil, water, and environment by requiring regenerative biodynamic or organic farming practices and barring conventional, artificial fertilization, chemical herbicides, and pesticides and GMO farming practices.⁷

In their journey toward preserving the integrity of their farmland, **Angelic Organics** in north central Illinois on the Wisconsin border—a for-profit community farm and a not-for-profit Learning Center—is using a land trust model, with a unique twist: they chose to create their own land trust specifically designed to best support their vision for the future of their work.

Tom Spaulding is the executive director of the Angelic Organics Learning Center and one of the trustees of the Angelic Organics Association. Recently formed, the Association’s structure and mission are based on years of research and discussion between the Learning Center, the for-profit farm, and the community they both serve. The Association describes itself as:

“...a non-profit community land trust promoting social, economic, and cultural renewal through the integration of education, agriculture and the arts. The Association unifies economic, socio-cultural, and civic enterprises; holds land and facilities in trust; and provides ground leases and licenses to enterprises striving to fulfill the mission. Inspired by Anthroposophy and the ideas of Rudolph Steiner, the Association is open to and informed by all thinking that advances the mission.”⁸

In developing their model, Angelic Organics looked at what others were doing not only in the U.S., but in anthroposophical communities all over the world. In the end, the three models they found to be most like the one they envisioned were 1) a community farm in Madison Wisconsin, 2) Hawthorne Valley Farm in Upstate New York, and 3) models developed in Jarna, Sweden. All three of these models included mixed farm, educational, and residential uses. This decision was made largely because the community, farmer, and Learning Center boards wanted to create a structure where the right balance of guidance, without micromanagement, of the two entities

could be created specific to their situation. They also wanted the right balance and kinds of accountability between the for-profit farm and not-for-profit Learning Center that would best serve their community.

The Angelic Organics Association is currently in the process of acquiring the parcels of land owned by the CSA farm or Learning Center and will make them available to the entities with ninety-nine-year leases and use restrictions that support the vision and the mission of the Association into the future. Tom Spaulding observed that “we have recognized a need for a long time for an umbrella entity that brought the farm and Learning Center together in the right way. At this time of transition for both entities, the Association has been key in the communication and coordination needed to help these transitions be successful.” In closing, he also noted “the community also just needs to be able to continue to come here, to have access to this special place, in addition to the food and programs that are grown here.”

In England, many of the same issues regarding the loss of farmland are a concern.⁹ In 1995, the **Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm** cooperative was envisioned, and funds were raised to purchase Tablehurst Farm from Emerson College so that it could be brought into Saint Andrew’s Trust. Soon after, Plaw Hatch Farm, another biodynamic farm a few miles down the road and owned by a local charitable trust, was brought into a “co-operative” with Tablehurst. This vision was realized in 2005, as their website states, when “individuals in the community, known as ‘farm partners’ own the Co-op, the Co-op owns the two farm businesses, and St. Anthony’s Trust owns the farm land and buildings.... Each farm is a limited company and has a board of directors which is answerable to the Co-op. In practice, the farm manage-

ment teams make all the day-to-day decisions about the enterprises, whilst the Co-op attempts to set the long term agenda for the wider community initiative.”

All of these variations on an associative model of land ownership are grounded in, and incorporate the value of, balancing land, use, and community as described by John Bloom in his article, “Beyond the Age of Entitlement” (page 8). These three considerations parallel and complement what, in the vocabulary of social threefolding and associative economics, are referred to as the rights (legal), cultural/spiritual (individual), and brotherhood (economic) spheres.¹⁰ Over the last century, it has become more and more clear that the way to a viable social and economic future depend on finding the balance between these three areas of life, and nowhere is this more true than in agriculture, as we seek a healthier and more equitable future for all of humanity.

NOTES

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Goat barn at Angelic Organics Learning Center



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7. Personal communication with Stephen Decater, February 23, 2016.
8. "Angelic Organics Association Vision 2030," provided by Tom Spaulding February 26, 2016.
9. See, e.g., <http://sustainablefoodtrust.org/articles/family-farms-protected>.
10. Retrieved from http://wn.rsarchive.org/Articles/FuSoLa_index.html on February 28, 2016.

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Farms

Angelic Organics Farm: www.angelicorganics.com

Angelic Organics Learning Center:
www.learngrowconnect.org

Live Power Community Farm: www.livepower.org

Roxbury Farm: www.roxburyfarm.com

S&S Homestead Farm: www.sshomestead.org

Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm:
www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk

Organizations

Equity Trust: equitytrust.org

Open Space and Land Institute: www.osiny.org

Williamson Act (California Land Conservation Act of 1965): www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/lca



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"TO GIVE SELFLESSLY AND RECEIVE GRATEFULLY"

Farmer-to-Farmer Transition in the 21st Century

KAREN DAVIS-BROWN

THOUGH A CHALLENGE not to be underestimated, biodynamic farmers are successfully working together and with their communities to develop healthy models for protecting the land that they have stewarded into the future. A much more delicate and multi-faceted challenge is the transition of the farm operation, which includes the land, from one generation of farmers to the next.

The 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture¹ reported a 3% decrease in farmers since 2007—approximately 100,000 for principal, second, and third operators. (The census collects data on up to three operators on each farm.) The average age of all categories of operators increased significantly, between 2% and 4%. In 2012, the average age of all categories was between forty-six and fifty-eight years of age. Perhaps the most startling finding is that the percentage of new farmers dropped significantly an average of 20% during those five years. The percentage of farmers who had been on their operations for less than five years dropped 23%—almost one fourth.

This is a trend that we hear about and experience, but the numbers are nonetheless a cause for huge concern. The question we are all asking ourselves and each other is: why is this the case? And how do we address this trajectory in a healthy way? Certainly, older farmers want to hand on the farm organism they have stewarded to upcoming farmers, who are in turn eager for the land and opportunity that may otherwise be beyond their reach. As the larger biodynamic community, what do we need to understand, and to do, to support this process.

In talking to younger, and to older, farmers, the issues are complex. And this is pioneering work. In the past, farms were passed on to the farmer's progeny, and sometimes too many of them wanted to farm for one operation to support them all. This scenario is still a common one, but, more and more, the next generation leaves the farm to pursue other educational, vocational, and personal goals. While they may still be committed to keeping their "family farm" in agricultural hands, those hands will not be theirs.

Conversely, there are many people in their twenties and thirties today who choose farming as their vocation, but who did not grow up on a farm. How do we provide the training, guidance, and resources they need, developmentally and socially, to increase their chances of success? And how do we support the structures and processes

that enable these two groups to connect and work together, for the best shared outcomes?

These questions were explored with young people currently apprenticing on North American Biodynamic Apprenticeship Program (NABDAP) mentor farms, and with several established biodynamic farmers who train apprentices. While conversations regarding these questions were on an individual basis, the collective responses of both groups were surprisingly complementary and in sync with each other. These responses fell into the general areas of:

- 1) **Alignment** of approaches and values;
- 2) **Relationships** that embody trust and respect and mutually "generous" power dynamics and communication, so that both parties are able to make their choices in freedom;
- 3) Being embedded in larger **communities**, however community is defined; and
- 4) Long-term, realistic, solid **commitments** to the land, community, and each other.

ALIGNMENT OF APPROACHES AND VALUES

Growers, young and old, are drawn to biodynamics because of the essential spiritual component in which it is based and because of the individual and communal values that it embodies. In their responses to the above questions, NABDAP apprentices stressed the importance of "...a continued centering around our higher purpose for continuing this work, holding intention in ceremony together, and studying the esoteric foundations for the challenges we face."

Brent Wasser, a NABDAP apprentice at Dottenfelderhof, a 470-acre Demeter farm just north of Frankfurt, Germany, stated, "Part of my understanding of biodynamic farming includes the ideal of transcending a dualistic engagement of the world in favor of experiencing the world in fluid relationship. In my view, this is an important step toward realizing the nature of the living beings on the farm and becoming active in the spiritual processes of the farm organism...the spiritual context of agriculture informs everything on the farm, including land ownership."

However, *how* this component is made accessible to aspiring farmers is important. One apprentice noted that “existing biodynamic/anthroposophical people could do better to bridge the gap between what I hear called ‘regular science’ and spirituality with research in this direction and, frankly, open-mindedness. These people could also be careful with specific words...and being a Steiner literalist [is] unhelpful.”

All of the established farmers who were interviewed assumed that a shared commitment to biodynamic agriculture and other financial and social values would be the foundation for any transition of land and enterprises. Wali Via of Winter Green Farm in Oregon talked about the need for a long-term relationship between farmers and with the land in order to create a common vision out of shared ideals and to shift ownership not only legally and financially, but in a partnership with the farm organism that honors “where it’s been.”

RELATIONSHIPS

A strong connection between incoming and outgoing farmers in terms of values regarding agricultural practice, environmental stewardship, and social priorities are foundational. But both apprentices and established farmers were clear that mutual respect and clear communication are also crucial for a successful farm transition. As an apprenticeship so aptly put it, “We need to work together, to keep an open dialogue, to give selflessly and receive graciously.”

One apprentice stated it as simply as “some property owner needs to take a liking to you and offer something reasonable.” Underlying this statement is the reality that

the established farmers hold a certain level of power over the transition because they hold the land, infrastructure, and enterprises to be transferred. One apprentice observed that “I also know farmers who have never owned land and always found places to work where their vision is supported.” However, we all know situations where “young farmers agree to farm on a temporary lease for a certain time, and then, after establishing themselves and adding value to the land and community, the lease ends and they have to leave. In this way, the hard work of the farmers is pulled out from underneath, and their good intentions helped to appreciate land value in the community and advance gentrification.”

Apprentices were also clear regarding what they need in order to experience the mutual work with established farmers in the transition process, and both upcoming and established farmers talked, generally and specifically, about the need for each to feel free to participate in this process “in freedom.” Inclusion in discussion, decision-making, and planning were mentioned as key by both groups, as well as the freedom for the younger farmer to learn from mistakes. One apprentice noted that one thing that is “important for the growth of a farmer but is so difficult to nurture in an apprentice-based farming situation: experimentation. I full-heartedly believe that you can’t really know something until you’ve tried the alternative. Working for an experienced farmer is great, and having a watering schedule is great, but how can I really know how little water I can put on those tomatoes to have the best tasting fruit until I have tried it myself? Do attractor plants really work to relieve insect pressure on the crop? Can I incorporate experimental permaculture design of perennials to produce food alongside annuals for the members of my farm?”

NABDAP apprentice Brent Wasser



Apprentices were keenly aware of the challenges of acquiring land and enterprises or of maintaining a financially healthy farm organism. One observed, “I don’t think it’s right for young farmers to expect older farmers to just hand over the land or the business. I also don’t think it’s right to allow young people to invest their work on a farm without the farm truly giving back and investing in that person. This is a problem of organization, of trust, of logistics. It’s not the farmer’s fault, it’s not the apprentice’s fault, it’s not the economist’s fault.” Brent Wasser shared:

I see that the ownership structures of land and capital prevalent in the

United States often strain the development of the farm organism. I have witnessed the stagnation of a young vegetable farm on leased land...because tenure concerns halted the evolution toward the farm individuality. I have also seen new farmers thrive... in Massachusetts as their farm rapidly expanded on land that they owned, but to suffer under the debt of the initial land purchase. Neither of these instances is conducive to the healthy development of the balanced farm organism. I recently heard Manfred Klett, the former director of the agriculture section in Dornach, explain that agriculture is not in a position to aggregate capital beyond land, because the sole true capital of a farm is the land. As a practice firmly rooted in the living, agriculture is in its ideal form a self-fulfilling cycle that relies upon the inherent generosity and abundance of nature. I think that this is the truth with which the answer to the land ownership question can most fruitfully begin.

Established farmers who were interviewed were also keenly aware of this power differential and the need to even out the financial and decision-making playing field, and they worked hard to do their part. Once values were aligned and it was clear that the transition could move forward in a long-term, mutually beneficial working relationship, they felt that the succession to the next generation could move forward.

Ingo and Sabine Heusing of Long Alley Farms in Grey County, Ontario (www.saugeencountrydairy.com/farm.html) are in the process of transitioning their 560-acre, fifty-cow dairy farm to their son, Hauke, and his wife, Jenna. Particularly in transitioning to their own next generation, they saw it as important to keep in mind what it was like for them starting out and to support the right balance between freedom and responsibility, right from Hauke's decision to come back and farm after university and working elsewhere. Ingo stated, "I scouted out with others: 'What is it like to be a young farmer these days?'" — understanding that the challenges now are different than they were when he and Sabine began farming. When asked what he would share from his experience with others, he was clear: "Both generations need to recognize each others' strengths. The age difference needs to be addressed

openly, and a balance needs to be found between the older generation letting go and the younger generation needing to be open and patient." Lastly, he stressed that "day-to-day conflicts are part of human nature, and the will forces to address them need to be found. The focus needs to be on the positive and the awareness of shared ideals, but there also should be an open recognition of differences and awareness of their subtle effects, and an exit strategy should be built into the formal agreement between the two generations."

COMMUNITY

The importance of farmers and a farm organism serving and being supported by a larger community was also stressed by both apprentices and established farmers. One apprentice stated, "I am well aware that there are many farmers in or above their sixties who love the land they own dearly but are searching for a way to pass on the land. I believe this connects to how we are framing farming as a practice and the need to restructure our farms within larger community organisms."

Apprentices described several forms that community may take. One was as simple and basic as:

Although I love farming, it can feel intimidating about how I will continue after my training. I have one year left; then I will be done with the training. I think networking is a big part of this. I recently had the opportunity to go to EcoFarm in Pacific Grove, California. I was able to meet many other young

Ingo and Sabine Heusing of Long Alley Farms with their son, Hauke, and his wife, Jenna



farmers and see how they are working through the joys and challenges of farming. It was a profound experience for me, and it reminded me that there is a large farming community out there, and people are farming everywhere.

Another talked about community in relation to financial structure:

While I do see the value in acquiring basic business and financial skills, I continue to resist the notion that the farms of the future need function as for-profit enterprises. I am interested in exploring alternative farming models, whereby the farm is incorporated as an aspect of a non-profit organization, a public or private school, a retreat center, or a university.... While I personally feel challenged to find monetary security with this work, I am seeking this more through the avenue of collaboration with local schools, consulting, and farming in community under a larger invisible structure like a 501(c)3.

Farmers in both groups talked about new and creative ways for land to be “held” so that it belongs to, and best serves, the farm’s community. One apprentice reflected:

In my opinion, it would be ideal if agricultural land weren’t privately owned. If no one person or family had the ability to benefit exclusively from the necessary exploitation of agriculture regardless of the end condition of the land, then a farmer’s means and ability to profit would be entirely dependent on how healthy their relationship is with that land. Personally, I would like to have a community farm under this kind of thinking.

Based on his experience apprenticing in Germany, Brent Wasser brought the discussion back to the larger, biodynamic community when he noted that:

Collective or institutional land ownership strategies often make sense because they relieve the individual of financial burden and facilitate the change of farmers on a piece of land without the transfer of money. At recent conferences and meetings, I have encountered young German farmers looking to revive farms collectively. As biodynamic agriculture develops into the future, it is important that ownership models and business plans reflect the material as well as the spiritual possibilities of the farm in the whole household of nature. This is where the biodynamic community can help.

The established farmers who were interviewed all perceived themselves and their farms as embedded in larger communities. For some, it was the biodynamic community. For others, their local area. For others, their employees or their CSA customers. Tom Spaulding, Executive Director of the Angelic Organics Learning Center in north central Illinois, stated the question succinctly: “How do we structure the new relationships so that we balance freedom and community?” For Stephen and Gloria Decater of Live Power Community Farm in northern California, whose markets are in San Francisco and Ukiah, their “community” is less geographically based and more “a network of people who are interested in the what the farm represents,” including “self-selected” CSA members who take the initiative to be more involved. However, it was this “community” who provided input, guidance, and resources, and who made possible the pioneering process of developing the easement for their land.

COMMITMENT

The last “leg” of the process that creates a stable and successful farmer-to-farmer transition is the commitment from both farmers to the long-term health of the farm organism. One apprentice noted that, for him:

Land ownership doesn’t matter, it’s just a piece of paper, really. In my opinion, what matters is land security and land stewardship. Why do I think it matters to have land security? Obviously building a farm is a great investment of self, and of money, materials, community, etc. Once the ball is rolling, the true potential of a farm is unleashed and the sphere of influence has an opportunity to broaden. The farm is so intimately connected with the land it occupies that picking up and moving because the owners or the bank had a change of heart could very well be career-killing.

This commitment to land and enterprises, for both groups, was grounded in the need for a supportive commitment from the larger agricultural community. One apprentice stated that “someone who can and understands these things would have to create some kind of small non-profit that a young person like myself can approach and be guided through the process of finding, leasing, writing agreements, establishing a trust or conservancy, budgeting, finding small loans, connecting to other young people as potential partners, etc.”

Brent Wasser described this component using an image grounded in biodynamic practice:

Land ownership is tied to the farm individuality. The development of the farm organism, in which the earth, plants, animals, and the farmer(s) work in harmony to realize a coherent unity, is central to the biodynamic model. I think that this integration, when successful, can facilitate the insight past dualism that I mentioned above. The development of such a smooth orchestration takes much time and asks the people farming the land to undergo a significant internal development parallel to the outward development of the farm. In my experience, this development is most possible when the land—the physical body of the farm organism—is secure and free to develop into a limitless future. This does not necessarily require private ownership by the farmer, but it does suggest that whoever legally owns the land is dedicated to the spiritual development of the place.

Another apprentice was clear with his request to us: “One tool I can imagine to make the future generation of farmers more empowered would be a promise. It can’t be a specific promise, obviously, but since this realm of work is so uncertain as this time, having an organization like the Biodynamic Association promise to do everything that they can to support the people who will be growing food for this world’s future would be indispensable for everyone.”

Understandably, established farmers are not quick to make long-term commitments regarding their farm individuality, though they agree on the importance of mutual commitment in the transition process. They all agreed on the importance of several years of working together, to assure a “fit” on all levels. And they all understood the importance of an “exit” strategy for potential incoming farmers, as part of creating a successful, lasting succession. Henning Sehmsdorf from S&S Homestead on Lopez Island in Washington State estimated that “it takes seven to ten years” to know how to farm, and the challenge is: “How do you implement ideas in practical action?” He, and others, noted that many apprentices come and go; some make the decision not to farm at all, and others

will move on to farm in other places. Many learn that, for them personally, the ideal of farming also includes hard work for relatively little pay and involves complex and often uncomfortable agricultural, business, and financial decisions, as well as the joy and satisfaction of living on the land and growing healthy food.

There are many organizations and groups who are working in tandem to offer tools and programs to facilitate farmer-to-farmer transition of land, enterprises, and markets. (See “Resources” on page 40.) For instance, the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) states, “We envision a country where young people who are willing to work, get trained and take a little risk can support themselves and their families in farming.” To accomplish their mission, “NYFC represents, mobilizes, and engages young farmers to ensure their success,” and they offer a clearinghouse for information on training, land access, and financial resources. Another important aspect of their work is political advocacy for the needs of young farmers at the federal and state levels. Farmer-to-farmer support and training/mentorship are key aspects of their programs, and current policy campaigns center on the financial and land access barriers for young farmers as well as improved and expanded training. Holly Rippon-Butler, NYFC’s Land Access Program Director, has recently been working with Equity Trust and other agricultural conservation leaders to develop and offer “Land Access Innovations Trainings” for land trust staff at the national and regional levels. These trainings share information and best practices regarding the creation of conservation easements for agricultural land, and a working group and listserv were also developed to sustain the work between and after trainings. Holly’s image of the succession process is a “funnel,” where options are explored, choices made, and relationships are supported so that the path for the young farmer becomes more and more clear. One of her goals is to speed up this process so that a young farmer proceeds through this “funnel” into a career path more quickly, but in a way that incorporates long-term financial and personal viability.

Another organization that works extensively to support successful farmer-to-farmer succession is the

“... We can only properly experience the rights’ relationship that needs to exist between ourselves and others when we encounter this relationship in a realm quite different than the economic one.... If people carry the interests which they serve in the economic realm into the legal structure and government of the state, the laws and rights which come about as a result will only express those economic interests.” (p. 46-7)

Excerpted from Steiner, R. (1999). *Toward Social Renewal*. M. Barton, tr., Fourth Edition. London: Rudolf Steiner Press.

Land Stewardship Project (LSP). LSP takes a multi-level approach to keeping “More Farmers on the Land,” with a spectrum of training opportunities for incoming farmers, a “Transition Toolkit” and subsequent coaching to support established farm families in clarifying and developing strategies to pursue their shared vision and goals for the future of their operation, and several venues for farmer-to-farmer support and exchange regarding land access, problem-solving, and best practices. Karen Stettler, LSP Program Organizer with a land access focus, explained that LSP is a membership organization and that most of their programs originate as issues and concerns from members and member-based steering committees. One example is the Transitions Toolkit (available on LSP’s website), which offers information, several profiles of families that describe their unique circumstances and farm transition process, and guidance for families to use in “asking the tough questions” about the future of their family’s farm. LSP offers a workshop series designed to help families thinking about the next steps for their farm to begin the farm transition planning process. LSP also offers one-on-one support with a trained “transition coach” who helps families connect to technical and professional resources for further exploring and implementing the goals they identify.

LSP has tiered farmer training courses, which include “Farm Dreams,” a half-day workshop for those considering entering agriculture. The next level, for those with some initial farming experience, is the year-long “Farm Beginnings” course, which combines farmer-led presentations on various business planning topics such as goal setting, financial planning, and marketing as well as on-farm experiences. For those farmers who are in years three through five and are considering scaling up, LSP offers the Journeyperson (JP) course. The two-year JP course focuses on helping farmers develop successful business plans and strategies based on holistic management principles and practices. In this program, there are winter planning retreats and one-on-one mentoring (both enterprise and financial). In addition, there is an Individual Development Account (IDA) component where participants make monthly deposits that are matched by LSP. By the end of the two years, JP participant could have close to \$5,000 to use on a piece of equipment or another business purchase. Karen noted that, “along the way, the networking and camaraderie between people and the access to resources also contribute to the viability of these new farms and farmers.”

Conclusion

Like all of life in the twenty-first century, agriculture as a vocation in North America has entered a new phase

as fundamentally paradigm-shifting and far-reaching as the push West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And, while in many respects the personal human desires and decisions that went into that “push” come from the same place in human souls, changes in agriculture in the last fifty years are in some ways a pushback from the worldview of entitlement, success, and mechanistic thinking that molded that movement and led to so much exploitation of land, animals, plants, and human beings.

As was mentioned above, now is when the first transition is taking place from the first generation of the “back to the landers” of the 1960s and 1970s. They were pioneers, and now they are pioneering the anchoring of the ways of relating to land, animals, plants, and other people that they value, for the future. The upcoming generation of farmers are the children of this pioneering generation, and they grew up with expectations of being able to make choices, of being treated respectfully and honestly by their elders, of being able to question and make mistakes and have that be accepted as part of life. In most farm families, it is no longer assumed that the children will farm; they make a free choice, sometimes in their mid-twenties after being educated and working in other fields. These realities make the transition of a farm from one generation to the next a rich and satisfying experience, but also challenging and humbling for both the older and the younger farmers.

The other reality is that many young people in their twenties who want to farm today have never really done it. They have high ideals and a beautiful image about relating to the land and taking up a pastoral lifestyle. There is something in them that understands its value, but developing the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual stamina to deal with hard work, long hours, complex planning and financial challenges, and fundamentally different definitions of success and quality of life than they grew up with, prove to be too much. They return to what they know and do best—and leave agriculture. Sometimes this is the best choice. But it is incumbent upon the larger biodynamic community to support both generations with all of our creativity and resources so that the best possible chance for success is within reach, for this work that is the new “frontier” of the future for all of humanity and creation.

NOTES

¹ Retrieved on March 5, 2016 from http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Highlights/Farm_Demographics.

Photos courtesy of Brent Wasser (p. 29) and Ingo and Sabine Heusing (p.30)