

LETTER FROM THE BOARD

JEAN-PAUL COURTENS

President, Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association

We hope you enjoy hearing a perspective from the board of directors from time to time. We share the vision of *a world where farms are integral, vibrant, and diverse; in symphony with all living forms and rhythms, and where food has the vitality to cultivate the essence of our Self*. Our challenge is to implement this with a particular chosen mission. The particulars are the outcome of listening, or sensing in, to the many local initiatives that live in North America.

Besides the activities coming directly out of our main office, we fully recognize the importance of local initiatives as an educational tool and as a means of fostering a sense of movement of which we all feel a part. While we can “dream” in big ways, we are also realistic that the implementation of any mission requires strong collaboration with other parties. Let me share with you what I perceive to be an important issue related to our identity.

As a movement we need to better articulate what distinguishes a biodynamic farm from an organic farm. Having said that, I immediately acknowledge there are clearly-defined standards in place that describe a biodynamic farm from the perspective of a marketplace. But that is what these standards are: quality assurances necessary for a biodynamic farmer to be recognized in our global economy. They are minimum standards, and no one including the Demeter Association has ever stated that the standards are a finite definition of a biodynamic farm. Individual farmers fill in the remainder of the picture by developing their own personal relationships to their farms in complete freedom.

You can wonder if describing the activities of a biodynamic farmer outside certification is merely subjective and isn't very helpful in defining a biodynamic farm. I would argue that, with the standards as a starting point, we will need to articulate the faculties a biodynamic farmer employs to further the spread of biodynamic agriculture in general. This additional perspective is reflected in board member Janet Gamble's effort with Rachel Schneider to help define the principles for “the guidance of a biodynamic farmer” as part of the educational and training effort. In this document, they state that a biodynamic farmer should have, besides the regular farming skills related to biodynamic agriculture, an ability to support the growth of community and social relationships and a commitment to inner self-development. Parker Forsell's efforts to foster stronger regional activity are an effective outcome of these insights. A strong social activity can facilitate education, CSA verification, and a stronger connection to other regional groups, the national office, and global initiatives.

If we agree that biodynamic agriculture is as much a spiritual path as the application of certain minimum standards described in the Demeter certification guidelines, we need to articulate how we do this. It is interesting to note

that many strong biodynamic initiatives are clusters of farms usually centered around one original pioneer. We can look at Zinniker Farm, Rudolf Steiner College, and Hawthorne Valley Farm as good examples. Out of personal experience I know that this exploration is difficult to obtain in isolation; biodynamic agriculture is not a static thing, but a journey that never ends. Strong local collaborative efforts are imperative if we want to foster knowledge on biodynamic practices. We need to help each other improve the quality in the making of the preparations and improve our practices as well as our inner development. Here we can take note of the wonderful initiative centered on the “Future of the Preps” by the Agriculture Section.

So, the biodynamic impulse is as much a set of practices as it is a social endeavor and a personal development. In essence, biodynamic farming is the individuation process of a farm in conjunction with the personal development of the farmer. The ideal is a farmer's development of the insight whereby inside and outside are no longer a polarity. The farmer allows the farm to become part of his or her inner life, simultaneously creating a space where the inner Self is heard and brought to action. In the words of John Peterson of Angelic Organics, “farms are a high level of poetry.” As words are the basis for the poet, John finds it in all the subtle forms of life on the farm. This is then composed into the farm as individuality. The more he gets to know the farm, the more he listens, which allows him to better express the farm individuality. This process requires as much meditation, inspiration, and imagination, as it does sound farming practices.

As Otto Scharmer points out in his new book *Theory U*: “Aristotle viewed science (*episteme*) as merely one faculty or capacity of the human soul to grasp the truth. In his view, applied technology (*techne*), practical wisdom (*phronesis*), theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), and the capacity to intuit the sources of awareness and intention (*nous*) are equally important.” While publishing and sponsoring research (science) are central to the Association's mission, we recognize that the cultivation of the other faculties is vital, as it defines who we are. This is exactly where we differ and have an opportunity to distinguish ourselves from the disastrous development of organic agriculture. When we articulate our differentiation, we are giving a voice to the many disgruntled organic farmers who feel shut out by the General Mills and the United Natural Foods of the world.

You as biodynamic practitioners offer the new laboratories whereby the public at large, the researchers from local land grant universities, and others have already observed that these methods work in creating healthy farms, thriving communities, fruitful employment for farm workers, and healthy food to our customers.