



BIODYNAMIC® AGRICULTURE • *AT A GLANCE*

HISTORY OF BIODYNAMIC FARMING

In 1924 a group of European farmers approached Dr. Rudolf Steiner (noted scientist, philosopher, and founder of the Waldorf School) after noticing a rapid decline in seed fertility, crop vitality and animal health. In response, Steiner held a series of lectures that presented the farm as a living organism: self-contained and self-sustaining, responsible for creating and maintaining its individual health and vitality. This was in sharp contrast to the view of the farm as factory, able to boast production by importing chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, which was largely responsible for the observations of depleted vitality noted by the farmers who sought Steiner's guidance. Steiner was one of the first public figures to question the long-term benefits of this manufacturing view of agriculture, to warn of its environmentally destructive practices, and to propose an alternative to chemical agriculture.

HISTORY OF BIODYNAMIC CERTIFICATION

In 1928, following Steiner's agricultural lectures, Demeter (named for the Greek goddess of agriculture) was formed in Europe to promote Biodynamic farming, initiating the first publicly organized promotion of "sustainable" agriculture. A certification system, defined by rigorous farming and processing standards, was implemented, making Demeter the very first ecological label for organically produced foods. Today, Demeter International remains the only internationally recognized Biodynamic certifier and consists of a network of individual certification organizations in 45 countries around the world.

In the U.S. Demeter Association, a non-profit, was formed in 1985 to promote Biodynamic agriculture here, and is the sole holder of the U.S. Patent Office certification marks DEMETER®, BIODYNAMIC®, and DEMETER CERTIFIED BIODYNAMIC®. In order for a commercial farm or product to legally use the term BIODYNAMIC it must have obtained certification through Demeter. The Farming and Processing Standards underlying the certification enable Demeter to protect Biodynamic agriculture and in doing so, to pursue its vision of healing the planet through agriculture.

THE ORIGIN OF "ORGANIC"

Rudolph Steiner's concept of "the farm as organism" was adapted in the 1940's by the English Baron, Lord Northbourne, an agricultural science teacher at Oxford University, who, inspired by Steiner's writings, first coined the term "organic farming."

In the 1950's, influenced by the rise of Biodynamic farming in Europe, the American J.I. Rodale popularized the term "organic" in his publication "The Organic Farmer." Like its Biodynamic forbearer, primary importance was placed on soil health, eschewing synthetic chemicals, and encouraging the use of compost, cover crops, and holistic pest and weed management. However there was a divergence from the fundamental view of the farm as organism. In 2002 the USDA implemented the National Organic Program (NOP), defining the standard for organic food by focusing on allowed and prohibited materials- including the prohibition of synthetic pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers- instead of the farming system.

BIODYNAMIC® PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Biodynamic® agriculture views the farm as a self-contained, self- sustaining ecosystem responsible for creating and maintaining its individual health and vitality without any external or unnatural additions. It is an integrated farming system that addresses the health of the entire property and maximizes the unique characteristics of each farm.

In practice, soil, plants, animals and humans together create this image of a holistic living organism. On-farm recycling improves the individualizing character of the farm and includes the integration of animals and animal feeds, perennial plants, flowers and trees, water features, and composting. Farms reduce dependence on imported materials for fertility and pest control. Water conservation is emphasized. Specially prepared medicinal plants, minerals, and composted animal manures help increase the vitality of the products grown and further anchor each individual farm in time and place. Biodynamic farms are required to maintain at least 10 percent of total acreage as a biodiversity set-aside. Riparian zones, wetlands, grasslands, and forests: all are considered an integral part of the life of the farm.

Biodynamic farming is holistic land stewardship at its best. It is the highest paradigm of sustainable farming, offering one of the smallest carbon footprints of any agricultural method.

USE OF THE PREPARATIONS

A distinguishing feature of Biodynamic agriculture is the use of nine preparations made from herbs, mineral substances and animal manures that are utilized in field sprays and compost inoculants applied in minute doses, much like homeopathic remedies are for humans. Timely applications revitalize the soil and stimulate root growth, enhance the development of microorganisms and humus formation, and aid in photosynthetic activity.

ASTRONOMICAL CALENDAR CONSIDERATIONS

Farmers throughout time have realized that nature can be more fully understood by studying and integrating natural, cyclical rhythms as well as the gravitational pull of the moon on the earth's moisture. Many Biodynamic farmers refer to the astronomical calendar when planning activities such as pruning, cultivating, harvesting, and spraying the preparations. This emphasis on the importance of qualitative observation rather than relying solely upon quantified data is an important holistic contribution to the field of sustainable agriculture.

DEMETER CERTIFIED CROPS VERSUS PRODUCTS

The crop (for example, a tomato) that results from a certified farm is Biodynamic, but in order for a processed product (for example, tomato sauce) to be called "Biodynamic" it must have been made with Biodynamic ingredients and processed in accordance with the Demeter Processing Standard. The intent of the Processing Standard is to protect against manipulation of the product as much as possible to allow for the identity of the Biodynamic agricultural ingredients used to come through.

Although the number of Demeter certified products in the US market is growing quickly, worldwide Demeter has been recognized as a quality seal for many decades. Demeter's product list includes produce, dairy, grains, wine and distilled spirits, oils, coffee and tea, body care products, medicinal herbs, meats and breads.

BIODYNAMIC AGRICULTURE DEFINITION

Biodynamic[®] agriculture is an ecological farming system that views the farm as a self-contained and self-sustaining organism. Biodynamic farmers strictly avoid all synthetic chemical pesticides, fertilizers and transgenic contamination. Instead, they stress farm-generated, living solutions to pest control and fertility and set aside a minimum of 10% of their total acreage for biodiversity. The health and well being of the farm animals, the farmer, the farm and the Earth: all are integral parts that make up the whole.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact admin@demeter-usa.org for more information.