

# What is Biodynamics?

by Michael Bate (*Head gardener at Weleda UK Ltd*)

In the last hundred years, there have been two major developments on the land that seem to go hand in hand - the increasing mechanization of agriculture and the sense that nature is becoming degraded and losing its vitality. Add to this the pollution of the environment, the signs of illness in trees and violent changes in the weather, and we feel that nature is crying out for both a new way of understanding the environment and a new way of working the land to heal the earth.

It was concern about worrying trends developing in agriculture that led farmers to ask Rudolf Steiner to give his 'Agriculture' lectures in 1924, on which the biodynamic agricultural movement is founded.

What he set out there can be regarded as the foundation for a new understanding of life which recognizes a spiritual dimension by enlarging the basis of science to include the cosmic and what is beyond the sense-perceptible. Biodynamics has a holistic world-view that, for example, sees the influence of planetary rhythms on the growth of plants and animals as of equal importance to a purely chemical analysis.

It is however, the regeneration of the forces that work through the soil to the plant, aided by enlivened compost or manure, that is the central aim of biodynamics and which is conspicuously different to other organic systems. When crops are harvested from the land it is not only their substance which is removed but also the forces and vitality which make them worth eating. To give back this vitality we use special therapeutic preparations for the soil, the plants and also for the compost and manure.

These are :

**Horn manure Preparation (500)** - specially prepared manure is made into a spray to vitalize the soil, enhance seed germination, root formation and primary shoot development.

**Horn silica Preparation (501)** - ground mountain quartz (silica) is made into a spray to benefit plants: it helps them achieve optimum development and maturity and particularly affects taste, color and aroma.

**Compost Preparations** - these are added to the compost or manure heap in small quantities and are made from yarrow, chamomile, nettles, oak bark, dandelion and the juice from pressed flowers of valerian. They work to regulate the composting processes and to enable the different elements (calcium, nitrogen, phosphorous etc.) needed for healthy plant growth, to be present in a living organic way.

When the treated compost or manure has been applied to the soil, the plants become more sensitive to their environment and responsive to the rhythms of the day, seasons and planets that the farmer takes note of when sowing, cultivating and harvesting.

At the heart of biodynamics is the ideal of the farm as a self-contained, mixed farm providing its own seeds, fertility and feed for a wide range of different animals and a range of environments from ponds and hedges to orchards, woods and pasture. It is the art of the farmer to develop the right blend of animals, crops and environments to encourage bird and insect life and to provide a harmonious and sustainable balance for each particular holding. In this sense each farm becomes an 'individuality' shaped by the inter-relationship of the farmer and the land.

Increasingly farmers and gardeners are actively involving the community in helping to ensure continued care for the land, whether through box schemes, community trust ownership or school visits etc.

There are biodynamic farms and gardens in more than 30 countries throughout five continents. Biodynamic produce is marketed under the Demeter symbol which is linked to an international network of Demeter organizations. Biodynamic Associations exist in 26 different countries. As well as fostering the practical development of biodynamics they arrange conferences, offer training, produce journals and undertake research.

The world-wide movement has its centre at The Goetheanum, in Dornach, Switzerland, the home of The School of Spiritual Science, of which there are seven departments. The Biodynamic Agriculture Department is part of the Natural Science Section.

Biodynamics provides a sustainable agriculture answering the urgent need to heal the earth and provide nourishing food for the whole human being.