

Working with biodynamic preparations in urban food growing

Our group at the February 2018 Biodynamic Agriculture conference in Dornach, Switzerland had the honour of running our 3 workshops in the roof dome room of the Goetheanum Glashaus. This building, designed by Rudolf Steiner and built in 1917 has been the Section for Agriculture base for many years, heart of the global biodynamic impulse. What better place in the world could there be for our workshops?

In fitting with the global nature of the conference, we had people from 6 countries at our workshop and one participant very kindly did translations. The workshop had 2 facilitators, Peter Kearney from Brisbane Australia and Bastiaan Frich from Basel, Switzerland. We provided a combination of lengthy urban agriculture experience in our countries with deep understanding of biodynamics.

With using the World Cafe method in our workshops, it soon became very obvious how effective it was at opening the hearts and minds of the participants. We started with a very open question on the first day - "How did we feel about working with biodynamics in an urban food growing context" We broke into groups and worked through this question allowing everyone to express what was arising from their souls at that point in time.

On next day we split into twos and went on a "dialogue walk" for 30 minutes. This involved one person talking for 10 minutes, the other listening. The listener then asked questions for 5 minutes and the roles were reversed. We asked people to focus deeper on their key questions and comments arising from the previous day. Each person shared their reflections of the experience when we came back together and notes were summarised.

By the third session, a pattern had emerged with participant content and some very clear conclusions emerged around inner attitudes and outer physical things to implement. These are summarised as follows:

Individuality

Working with individuality of the garden or farm in an urban context required a different interpretation of the organism of the garden or farm because many inputs could not be sourced from the growing space and establishing an appropriate balance of animals was very difficult. Our conclusions were:

- The boundary of the farm or garden organism is extended to include the neighbourhood or city, for example (1) Green waste sourced from the neighbourhood to make compost, (2) Coffee grounds from a large number of cafe's in a city used to make mushrooms
- At the garden site, transform external inputs with biodynamic preparations, for example, external organic matter enhanced with the biodynamic compost preparations
- Use internal inputs as a resource for food growing and enhance with biodynamic preparations, for example, weeds from the garden turned into a liquid fertiliser
- The gardener is a primary vehicle for individuality of the garden and the biodynamic preparations are an ideal conduit into the earth and plants of the gardener's higher consciousness
- Use smaller animals such as chickens, create habitats for native beneficial insects and environments where native animals are welcome and become part of the life balance.

Community outreach

Even though cities are full of people, it was recognised that it's often challenging to draw people out of their busy lives and develop the will to grow food enhanced with biodynamic methods. Our conclusions were:

- Create localised groups to support the biodynamic food growing experience, improve accessibility and develop the cultural impulse of local food
- Get people involved firstly in the tactile willing experience of working with biodynamic preparations in urban food growing, experience joy and then seek knowledge, i.e. start with willing, followed by feeling and then thinking, rather than engaging their thinking too early in the sometimes challenging concepts of biodynamics.
- Tap into green cities movements where urban dwellers are being encouraged to get involved in healing the earth and having healthier cities
- Create opportunities for community connection to commercial scale urban food growing where biodynamic preparations are used.
- Develop ways to measure the success of biodynamic food growing in urban environments so localised case studies can be shared and further developed
- Engage children through activities and stories that connect biodynamic practice to nature

Attitude

It was recognised that consciousness of the gardener or farmer was a vital aspect in working with biodynamic preparations. With supporting this “inner gardening”, our conclusions were:

- Being open about the consciousness aspects of biodynamic practice whilst following the more accessible pathway of willing, feeling and thinking in biodynamic practice
- Growing food in cities with biodynamics and in the process healing yourself and the earth was an empowering pathway of personal responsibility
- Recognising the polarity between the intellectual and physical hardening of conventional agriculture with the freedom, mystery and love of the earth in working with biodynamics
- Developing heart centred thinking was an important aspect in bringing the appropriate level of sensitivity to biodynamic practice.

Our workshop was a wonderful collection of people from many countries who had diverse skills, and we all shared the same passion with getting biodynamic preparations and practice more widely used in the urban context. It was an inspiring experience!

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