

# An Ancient Call to the Future

## Biodynamics & 'Homeopathic Compost' Revitalize Family Farm

by Anita B. Stone

According to Infinity Farm owner Jon Lyerly, "Conventional farming is like drowning in water. Organic farming is like treading water. But biodynamic farming is like swimming where you want to go, in your own direction."

On his 161-acre farm, located a few miles north of Hillsborough, North Carolina, Lyerly takes organic farming to another level. "I believe in sustainable farming, including the use of biodynamic preparations," he says. With the assistance of four ponds and drip irrigation, "all produce and pasture are grown with absolutely no pesticides, fungicides, herbicides and no chemical fertilizers." Lyerly says, adding, "You can quote me on the 'absolute' part. All cattle are 100 percent grass fed, antibiotic and hormone free, and always have access to pasture. Chickens are fed organic grains and are free-range."

He continues, "Some organic farmers use chemicals, but you really don't have to do that. In order to produce a healthier food supply, just let the crops grow naturally and apply certain preparations to promote plant growth and energy."

Black Angus, Devonshire (the first beef brought to this country by the Pilgrims) and Charolais roam freely across the pasture. Angora rabbits, goats and sheep also reside on the farm. Approximately 14 pounds of wool is spun from the sheep on the farm. "We make cheese, ice cream and buttermilk from the dairy goats," Lyerly says. "One gallon of goat's milk daily is great for any sensitive digestive system."



Jon Lyerly holds a handful of rich, energized cow compost.

Eggs produced by free-range chickens are abundant, and as many as 150 chicks are being raised free-range for broilers, eggs and reproduction. "I am learning to understand the interaction of nature and influences between the natural world and its greater surroundings while I apply biodynamics in agricultural practices," Lyerly says.

Lyerly considers the Earth as a living being, with its own set of natural materials. "Earth being a main tenant, my job is to create a thriving ecosystem using special plant, animal and mineral preparations."

Lyerly paused. "There is no franchise on the earth — each piece of land has its own uniqueness."

While in college, Lyerly studied microbiology and came across a European practice known as biodynamics. In the 1920s European farmers were influenced by the visionary Rudolf Steiner, a gifted scientist, philosopher and spiritual researcher who believed that there was a better way, through detailed observations of nature, to build up fertile soil, enhance plant and animal life, and increase the quality of our food. "They weren't as materialistic back then," Lyerly states. "They simply wanted to find a



The cows, sheep and chickens graze on open range, with four ponds providing natural water sources.

way to feed their families healthy foods. The practice continues today, and several colleges teach biodynamics as part of the curriculum. Here in the States, though, we don't have the availability of these techniques unless we seek them out from textbooks or individuals."

Fascinated with this method of farming and gardening, Lyerly pursued and studied the works of Steiner. After graduation, Lyerly returned to his farm and discussed this new concept with family members, who gave Lyerly their blessings to move forward with the innovative program. With the assistance of one full-time apprentice and one part-time worker plus family members, Lyerly proceeded to turn his farm into a living, natural piece of land, using preparations that are applied homeopathically for healthier plant growth. "There is nothing on my land to hurt the growth of a small plant. It can perform optimally when we assist it with natural nutrition, and we have the control to keep it free from a field of chemicals."

"The forces that surround the land are very real," Lyerly says. "Every activity — from germination to seed formation and everything in between — could not happen without forces at work, forces that we don't necessarily see at first glance."

The field of biodynamics addresses and responds to the interaction of these "mysterious" forces and influences between the natural world and its greater surroundings and applies this knowledge to the farm.

Biodynamics differs from standard organics in several ways. The first is in its emphasis on the idea of the farm as a living being — one that should be as self-sufficient as possible. On a biodynamic farm this would lead to establishing the proper number of animals neces-

sary to satisfy that farm's fertility needs without importing manure.

The second difference is in the recognition of cosmic as well as earthly influences on plant growth. Water, temperature and soil chemistry are acknowledged by modern agricultural methods, but biodynamics holds that the

needle and its properties, but also the magnetic field of the entire Earth. I look at the earth and up into the heavens in order to better understand nature. I believe even starry constellations play their part in nature here."

A third departure from organic agriculture is the use of the biodynamic preparations.

"These preparations make use of the unique qualities of specific herbs as well as certain animal organs," Lyerly explains. "Each preparation works in its own way to aid plant growth. They undergo something resembling a composting process, and the result is a variety of highly energized substances containing beneficial forces. The preparations are then applied homeopathically. This results in quality germination, photosynthesis, the forming of extensive root structure and increased nutrient absorption."

Preparations differ seasonally. In the fall, a cow's horn is filled with cow manure, then buried anywhere in the topsoil — on the living layer, avoiding the subsoil. Once buried, the manure breaks down, and after about six months it turns into crumbly compost. Lyerly purchases the horns from an outside source. "A cow's horn is a natural amplifier for forces we can't see," Lyerly says. "The horn and the waste product work jointly to produce top-quality compost."

During the spring season, cow horns are hollowed out and stuffed with silica or finely crushed quartz, then — just as with the fall preparation — buried under the top layer of soil, just above the subsoil. "The forces from the ground in effect become magical," Lyerly says. "Gravity cannot be defined. You can see the plant, but you can't see what's going on under the ground. Here's where biodynamics enters the picture. We try to find out what is behind the mystery."



*One of Lyerly's vegetable fields, with strawberries.*



*Newly arrived chicks are fed and fenced for their protection by Jon and a family member.*

forces streaming in from the cosmos are equally as important for healthy plant development. "The sun's effects are obvious — and now the moon's influences, which bring about increased germination rates and sowing near full moon, are slowly being accepted as fact, as they were in olden times," Lyerly says. "There are many other forces that play a major role here on Earth — just as, when considering how a compass works, we would take into account not only the compass

Homeopathic preparations and herbal compost — applied to standard compost pile and also sprayed directly on the fields — provide natural growth to the plants. Horsetail (sometimes used to make a tea), when stirred 20 minutes, acts as a spray preventative to lessen the effects when conditions are conducive to fungus problems that attack plants. Dandelions are put into the compost pile, which is then used to stimulate and attract cosmic forces to the soil. Oak bark is added to the compost pile to provide healing forces to combat plant diseases and enhance reproduction and growth. Lyerly uses nettles to stimulate soil health and provide plants with the individual nutritional components needed. Yarrow and chamomile, when added to the compost pile, are used for reproduction and growth, stabilizing nitrogen within the compost and permitting the plants to attract trace elements for nutrition.

“When my family eats biodynamic food, it gives all of us more energy and consciousness.” Lyerly says. “This comes as a result of the herbal preparations.”

Once preparations are completed, the proper care and storage of these materials is necessary if their effectiveness is to be maintained. Careless handling can result in impotent preparations. “Storing preparations is like storing vegetables or grains,” Lyerly states. “You want to preserve as much freshness and energy as possible.”

Storage requirements for horn preparations are simply to avoid moisture and permit exposure to direct sunlight. The storage receptacle may be a clear glass container with a non-plastic lid and is usually kept on a window ledge.

The herbs should be kept in a dry location in any brown glass or opaque container. Exposure to light may be destructive. Keep the material cool and tightly contained.

In general, preparations must not come in physical contact with one another or with foreign substances such as peat moss or straw. They must be kept away

from electronic and electric circuitry. An arbitrary distance of at least 8 feet is recommended to separate the preparation from any electromagnetic fields. No preparations should be close to noxious fumes from gasoline, household chemicals and bug sprays.

It is recommended that preparations be kept from drying out. They must be stored in a cool place away from excessive light, but they also need to “breathe.” They should be kept separately in one of the following kinds of containers: glazed ceramic crocks, glass or unglazed clay vessels. Drilling three or more small drain holes in the bottom of the crocks allows breathing room. Lids should be loose fitting. The suggested lid material is crockery, natural stone, glass, metal or cork. Wood may be used, but avoid plywood. A root cellar, pit, or an old well or shaded outbuilding are considered good locations to keep the preparations healthy and intact.

Storage receptacles should be surrounded on all sides by at least 3 inches of peat moss. Long-fiber sphagnum peat is less likely to throw up dust and contaminate the preparations. Pulverized peat moss can be wetted down a bit to prevent dusting. If smaller amounts of preparations are required, store them in clean glass baby food jars. Jar lids can be used and punctured randomly in a couple of spots. Another low-budget storage possibility is to bury a wooden barrel or stacked beehive boxes in the soil, and then place the containers surrounded by peat moss inside this space. A flat stone can be used as a floor if necessary.

The preparations should not be allowed to freeze. A 3-inch peat moss insulation is also advised around the cover of the storage unit. A preferred cover would be one made of thin slats of wood, but avoid all treated woods and plastic. A burlap or natural-fiber pillow may be used, but the fabric tends to deteriorate quickly and “bleed” peat into the individual containers.

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Biodynamics, in a nutshell, is the use of subtle forces in nature through physical substances, and Lyerly is convinced that these practices have benefitted his farm and his family's health. “These forces are very real, even though modern science has no names for them as it does for the forces of gravity, magnetism and so on,” he states. “Every activity in nature — from germination to seed formation and everything between — could not happen without natural forces at work. Biodynamics strives to increase the production of vitamins and minerals and understand the interaction of the forces and influences between the natural world and the greater surroundings and apply this knowledge in agricultural practices.”

And that's just what Lyerly is doing on Infinity Farm.

Infinity Farm can be contacted at 1600 McDade Store Rd., Cedar Grove, North Carolina 27213.