



## November 2007 – part 2

### Second part

Due to a combination of too much paper on the editor's desk (hence not including an article that should have been included in part 1) and some issues turning up very recently, here is a further instalment of November's issue.

### Biodynamic training

*The Severn Valley Bio-Dynamic Group answers a vital need for an informed sustainable food production training.* Report by Vivian Griffiths.

Imagine if you will a country village hall, a dozen students from bio- dynamic holdings throughout the north east Midlands and the south west of England gathering on a cold November day (please somebody turn on the heating if you can work it out!)

They have come inside after an in-depth farm walk of [Hungary Lane Farm](#), a 17 year bio-dynamic farm on the Notts/Leics border, the M1 and the London-Sheffield railway line thundering by, yet a rich farming and surprisingly rural landscape has met them; of coppice and field, of village and in the distance the Radcliffe-on-Soar Power Station and the lights of Nottingham.

Yet in the charm of the village of West Leake with the Young Farmer's Club and Women's Institute posters (good, that one about no more plastic bags), we are gathering to speak about, share experiences and learn through presentations, the Nitrogen Cycle, one of the most important elements of agricultural study set in the body of the Hungary Lane Farm.

Surprisingly we are engaged in clay modelling and before Sean Bradley's DVD of a Year on Hungary Lane, we are experiencing the animals who are involved in this nitrogen cycle by

modelling them, getting to know their shapes and forms – all part of the study of the farm's organism which is central to the study of bio-dynamics.



The group gathered in West Leake Village Hall are twelve apprentices. They come from bio-dynamic farms like [Fern Verrow](#), Herefordshire, (featured recently in the Observer sending high quality biodynamic vegetables and fruit to a London market and in the recent Bio-dynamic Food Fortnight Celebrations); from [Botton Village](#) in the North Yorkshire Moors (a unique community with people with special needs with five farms and the Stormy Hall Seeds project); the [Ruskin Mill Educational Trust](#); holdings at Nailsworth, Gloucestershire and Vale Head Farm, Kinver near Stourbridge (scene of a port of call of the recent Lands End to John O'Groats bike ride by Organic Futures supporters - see [www.powertopedal.org.uk](http://www.powertopedal.org.uk)).

For several weekends and weeks over two years, these students will cover the main aspects of the Apprentice Training which include Block Courses on Plants, Animals, Soil and Astronomy (bio-dynamics is, after all, through an understanding of planetary forces and soil types, the main user of the sowing calendar).

Weekend Courses include studies on the World Task of Agriculture, Plant Breeding and Seeds, a Bee Workshop option, Weather Observations, and a Sense of Place, all contributing to a broad picture to inspire the future of land work and

its' people.

With Agricultural Colleges empty of farm students and less craft agriculture and horticulture taught, the Severn Valley Bio-Dynamic Group answers a vital need for an informed sustainable food production training course based on the bio-dynamic compost and spray preparations.

So, where's tractor driving training or pests and diseases, or health and safety procedures then? And where are the exams, marks for presentations and three gongs and you are out if you don't attend!?



Well a different mood is the attempt where the students work together on the presentations complimenting knowledge discoveries and experience on the farm and garden with their resident tutors.

The students arrive with an idealism that is remarkable and commit themselves to a high level of daily land work where the practical knowledge of growing crops is underpinned by the weekends together. Here discussion on topics that surround the subject is impressive. So, for example, in our weekend the question of slurry in an organic/bio-dynamic holding was looked at from various angles – noting for example that Denmark does not allow the spreading of the stuff – injection is the only way.

A re-appraisal of the use of this environmentally threatening product gave the conclusion that the best place for slurry is in the methane ingestor supplying fuel for the Land Rover! Then, the remaining substance could be composted! In fact, the compost heap and the Preparations remain as the major element of the bio-dynamic holding.

So far it has been all work, but the weekend and Block Courses also have outings and time to talk over the meals (and the washing up!), along with social evenings too.

Some weekends are in camping barns (a “no snoring” clause will have to be included in entry requirements) and some in tents, and ours in a B & B – very comfortable!

Our East Midlands weekend saw us visiting a Nottingham windmill complete with dramatic sails moving the shafts to grind the wheat (and moving the whole building it felt). As part of the farm organism the wheat came from Hungary Lane – fully inspected Demeter Wheat going to provide bio-dynamic flour for sale in Nottingham Park's department!

There was a lecture from the Trent Rivers Trust which showed the return of salmon to the river and their work with farmers to reduce levels of nitrate as well as to provide salmon flows to get past the weirs common to the industrial processes. Their work is truly admirable in creating a cleaner river environment.

Nitrogen as soul of a farm – the inclusion of nitrogen in the farm organism, examining the individuality and, therefore, the soul of a farm is part of that and its' workings – now that's interesting and not a main topic on the National Certificate of Agriculture!

So, how do you get on this course?

Well, vacancies on bio-dynamic holdings, whether a family farm or community gardens, do exist and armed with an idealism for the future of the land and a place at a bio-dynamic

holding, you will automatically be placed.

The Bio-Dynamic Office in Stroud has all the details

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Gloucester Street

Stroud

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(01453) 759501

[www.biodynamic.org.uk/Training.htm](http://www.biodynamic.org.uk/Training.htm)

It is from my experiences as facilitator, that this article is written. The willingness to engage, the quality of the presentations and the interest in the talks and visits was tangible – a privilege to be among such young people – and you couldn't get to the bar for Bio-Dynamic Land Students at the Guest House – now what does that mean?!

*Vivian Griffiths is Public Relations Secretary at [Camphill Communities UK](http://www.camphill.com)*

## **Learning from the past**

The Peckham experiment in SE London was one of the first healthy living centres in Britain. Interestingly, it was founded at a similar time to the Soil Association and had close links with Lady Eve Balfour, the Association's founder.

An interesting programme was broadcast on BBC Radio 4, titled *The Long View*.

Listen again, until Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/longview/index.shtml>

## **Global thinking**

Everyone knows that trees act as carbon sinks, but how many countries have thought of selling the concept of carbon sinks on a national scale? Well, Guyana has.

In an extraordinary move, the president of Guyana has offered complete protection for the

country's intact rainforests (bigger than the area of England) in return for money for economic development. This would effectively create the largest carbon offsetting scheme ever conceived.

Read the article in The Independent [here](#).

## **“Be the change”**

Some inspirational material from a recent conference in London with world class speakers.

*“In an age of looming climate chaos and chronic social injustice, it's time to set a new course. Join with some of the best thinkers and doers on the planet for 3 days discussing and designing the changes we all want to see in the world.”*

<http://bethechange.org.uk>