

Report from the 3rd Meeting of the Professional Group Herbs and Medicinal Plants

during the Agricultural Conference on the theme «Land and economy – agriculture between the farm and the world» at the Goetheanum, Dornach (CH), 8th February 2019, in the Glashaus, 15:15 - 16:30

This meeting was largely held in English – with whispered translation into French.

Greeting by the Group coordinators Ola Aukrust and Michaela Spaar

In 2017, the Professional Group Herbs and Medicinal Plants joined the existing groups *Biodynamic Viticulture, Preparations, Seeds as a Commons, Bees, Fruit-production, Olive cultivation* and *Landscape project*.

A first mutual meeting of members of the Steering committee with the Head of the Section *Jean-Michel Florin* took place in the autumn of 2018. Present at this meeting was also the new Section-employee Sarah Sommer, who has taken over the administrative support of the Professional groups.

The Professional Group Herbs and Medicinal Plants is still relatively at the beginning of its work and would like to give itself first of all a mission statement. First steps in this direction took place during two events of the Professional Group at the Agricultural Conference 2018:

- Specialist Forum «Cultivation of medicinal plants and herbs and the effect of biodynamic preparations»
- Professional Group meeting

The respective reports/protocols for these events are available on the [homepage of the Section](#) (Newsletter No. 4 and Professional Group meeting). Furthermore, there is a comprehensive collection of questions from the forum (DE, EN, FR) in the Annex to Newsletter No. 3. This will be sorted thematically in the course of the year 2019 – cooperation and comments are welcome!

Current members of the Steering committee are, besides Ola Aukrust (N) and Michaela Spaar (CH), also Michael Straub (D), Bettina Billmann (D) and Henrik Hoeren (CH).

Mission statement «What is a biodynamic medicinal plant?»

Referring to the suggestion of Jean-Michel Florin, the Professional Group would first like to consider the question of what a biodynamic medicinal plant is at all, with illustrative questions such as: In what form does the essence of a medicinal plant express itself? Are there any archetypes? Is there a special character of the biodynamic compared to the conventionally grown plant?

The aim of this work should be the development of basic criteria that can serve as the basis for the certification of biodynamic medicinal plant cultivation.

Keynote speech by Michael Straub, Head of the Weleda medicinal plant garden in Schwäbisch Gmünd:

Medicinal plant cultivation in the field of tension between quality and quantity

Possible areas of conflict that could be faced:

<i>Scientific based phytotherapy</i>	<i>Spiritual healing</i>
<i>Active substances</i>	<i>Coevolution Plant/Human</i>
<i>Pharmacopoeia requirements</i>	<i>Life expressions of the plant</i>
<i>Standardized procedures SOPs</i>	<i>Plant/Human/Nature interactions</i>
<i>Care in horticultural cultivation</i>	<i>Wild collection in wild sites</i>
<i>Quantity and price</i>	<i>Quality</i>
<i>Marketing Authorization</i>	<i>Who heals is right</i>

In order to approach the «essence of the plant», different perspectives can be taken. Michael Straub explained these different perspectives and showed what conclusions can be drawn when dealing with medicinal plants (see also literature below).

- 1 Myths and Legends
- 2 Natural science
- 3 Antique medieval medicine
- 4 Folk medicine
- 5 Homeopathy
- 6 Phenomenology – Meeting the plant (see Goetheanistic plant view)
- 7 Anthroposophic medicine

If you only try to generate «active ingredients», you may lose understanding of the essence of the plant. Therefore, several perspectives should be envisaged whenever possible → Conflict of views.

Literary reference:

Frank Meyer, Michael Straub: *Die magischen 11 der heilenden Pflanzen*; Publisher Gräfe und Unzer, Munich 2011.

The budding ethnologist Christina Spieß introduces herself and reports on her research work in the Weleda medicinal plant garden in Schwäbisch Gmünd.

Christina Spieß's Master's thesis deals with the topic «Human and medicinal plant. An ethnological study on the relationship between human and medicinal plant in the gardens of Weleda». She uses methods of the so-called *Multispecies Anthropology*, which tries to overcome the separation of culture and nature – meaning, involving other living beings in ethnology in addition to humans. Plants and animals that once, at most, appeared on the margins of ethnology, should be considered as equal to humans and thus conceded their own power of action. Accordingly, ethnobotany, which deals with the knowledge and ideas of plants, also plays into this area. Christina Spieß will carry out her research on these topics as part of an internship from 11 March to 13 September 2019 at the Weleda medicinal plant garden in Schwäbisch Gmünd (D).

Questions from the plenum to Michael Straub

→ *Interaction with non-human influences, such as constellations?*

1. Calendar of constellations, e.g. internal calendar of the Weleda

2. Read the book of nature:

- Example Hypericum (Plant of the year 2019):
Plant of the sun, never stands in the shade, receiving habitus
- Example Ferns: Plant of the shadow, growth direction predominantly horizontal
- Example Salix: Plants of water, habitus often flowing, swinging
- Quality improvement with the help of the preparations 500 (Horn manure) und 501 (Horn Silica)

→ *Poor growth conditions cause resilient plants with more/better ingredients – can one «imitate» this in culture?*

Cultivation always brings different plants, reasons are in the soil, in the fertilization and/or the climate.

→ How is the «true» archetype of the plant defined? Where is the potential for healing? What is the goal in cultivation?

- Sometimes – e.g. Arnica - it is better to protect the wild habitat rather than taking the plant into cultivation.
- Some plants need stress, e.g. Edelweiss grows in the valley like salad (statement by Andreas Ellenberger from the plenum).

→ In Israel, all plants are medicinal plants – have the plants a different effect on other people or cultures?

- Each plant has a slightly specific effect on everyone
- For many plants in Central Europe, the healing effects have not yet been explored, and here as well, potentially all plants are medicinal plants.

→ Wild plants are also used for anthroposophic remedies. What makes such a plant biodynamic?

- The wild collection usually eliminates the use of the preparations. But, they also can be used if necessary.
- However, it is believed that e.g. Elemental beings are so strong at the wild site that they need no support from the preparations.
- The wild site strengthens the individual character.
- Plants have reasons to grow exactly at their respective location. With biodynamic wild collection one looks exactly, why which plant grows where ... and says THANK YOU!
- « A pig needs a muddy place to be a pig, salix needs a special environment nearby rivers or ponds to develop its archetype. »

Ola Aukrust: Ideas for the Professional Group website

- Projects and contact persons should be mentioned from all countries.
- In order to cover the costs of the Professional Group, Herb growers as well as companies can present themselves on the website in exchange for a contribution.

Conclusion of the event

- A landscape or a biodynamic organism is needed to produce a medicinal plant of high quality!
- It would be nice to have something like guidelines for the cultivation of medicinal plants.
- Central point: SOP – Standard Operating Procedures

Note

At the end of the event, attention was drawn to the summer excursion of the associations «Netzwerk Kräuter Baden-Württemberg» and «Hortus Officinarum» on 25th and 26th May 2019 to the Krebsbachhof near Marburg (D), where the Professional Group can also meet. And maybe there will be a first conference or excursion of the Professional Group Herbs and Medicinal Plants in about two years ...

Report: Bettina Billmann