

# Professional Group for Biodynamic Fruit Growing

## Summer meeting 2023 in Steiermark, Austria

The Professional Group for Biodynamic Fruit Growing was founded in 2001, linked to the Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum with Manfred Klett and Markus Hurter. The members come from numerous European fruit-growing regions. It is an independent group of about 15-20 commercial fruit growers, with a focus on apple, pear and stone fruits. The winter meeting usually takes place at Dottenfelder Hof, Bad Vilbel (Germany). Topics discussed and explored include varieties, cultivation systems, breeding, product quality, preparations, homeopathy, organic/Demeter markets and Demeter Standards. The summer meeting regularly takes us to European fruit-growing centres where interesting developments are taking place and biodynamic practice can be seen on site.



*1 Biodynamic fruit growers, group picture*

LTR standing: Josef Weimer, Fritz Prem, Thomas Pfisterer, Martin Webhofer, Niklaus Bolliger, Piet Korstanje, Matjaz Turinek, Anselm Peer, Klaus Oberhofer

LTR kneeling: Hansi und Irene Trummer, Pieter Jans Jansonius, Albrecht Dennerer, Peter Bentele, Josef Tinzl, Martin Peer

## Biodynamic fruit growing in the Steiermark region, Austria

The biodynamic developments in Steiermark were the reason for a visit by the professional group in July 2023. One focus was the marketing of Demeter fruits. For this purpose, we were warmly welcomed at **the fruit processing company Obst Gössl in Puch/Weiz**. Peter Lohr, Hannes Schaffler and Fritz Prem (VON HERZEN Biobauer) gave an insight into sustainable storage and sorting

techniques as well as marketing strategies for Demeter fruit. On the Gössl farm, 20,000 tonnes of exclusively organic apples from about 100 organic farms are processed in two shifts. 40% of the energy is supplied by photovoltaics. One of the special features is the 12-month sale of Gala apples, which can only be guaranteed by combining several components, such as special location/farm, correct harvesting window, hot water showers and DCA (Dynamic Controlled Atmosphere) storage. Water consumption has also been drastically reduced through filtration systems. Rotten apples are ground and stored in liquid form in tanks, so that they can be taken to the biogas plant at little cost. Trials are running to use these liquid rotten apples as fermented fertiliser to close the circle in the orchards.

### Associative Economics

The farmers, Demeter Association Austria and Spar supermarket in Austria joined forces three years ago for marketing the Demeter fruit. The various fruits, such as apples, pears, cherries, grapes and berries are offered in uniform Demeter packaging. One special element is that the farmers can submit their prices directly to Spar Austria. The prices are not calculated from the top down, as is usual in the market, but from the bottom up, thus ensuring a fair price for the farmer. The prices were accepted, consumers praised the good taste of Demeter products and Spar noticed much less spoilage and weight loss. Read more here (in German):

<https://www.spar.at/nachhaltigkeit/produkte/vielfalt/demeter>



2 Demeter products



3 Biohof Schloffer in Oberfeistritz, Orchard

### Direct marketing and show garden

In the afternoon we went to **Biohof Schloffer in Oberfeistritz**. The direct marketing farm has planted various apples, pears and peaches. In addition, the family has a large orchard as a biodiversity area and at the same time as a product supplier for various jams, juices, syrups and schnapps, which are successfully sold in the farm shop. An 8,000 cubic metre irrigation pond is used for frost protection irrigation. Compost fertilisation and preparations are used to break up deep soil layers in order to make the crops more resistant to diseases and drought. The grass is mown twice a year with a converted roundabout mower and placed on the tree line. When we tasted WUR Tinning, Crimson Crisp and Natyra, we were able to confirm the good taste and storage properties.

### Cherries and chickens

**Hannes Ponhold's farm in Ilztal** grows 65 ha of Gala, Braeburn, Natyra and Kanzi apples, 5 ha of Kordia, Regina and Sweet Serena cherries and 6 ha of wine. In the cherry orchard, he manages aphid



infestations with nettle and tansy tea, as well as with about 30 retired chickens. The retired chickens are inexpensive, lay eggs, eat all the cherries from the ground and deprive the cherry fruit fly of any chance to reproduce.

## The apple-chicken project

**Irene and Hansi Trummer** grow apples, chokeberries, peaches, pears, spelt and oil pumpkins on their organic farm in **St. Margarethen**. The newly acquired Dexter cattle, a dual-purpose breed, provide the manure for the biodynamic preparations. Another project with animals was realized along with the BOKU (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences), Vienna and FiBL Austria: the apple-chicken project. Approximately 30 retired chickens are kept in small mobile houses, helping to reduce the numbers of codling moth and apple sawfly. Read more (in German): <https://projects.au.dk/mixed/networks-national-teams/austria>



4 „Von Herzen Bio-Bauern“ Irene und Johann Trummer: Apple-chicken project

Since 2017, organic advisor Claudia Feiding has been supporting Demeter farms in initial discussions on cultivation and farm development. The **Demeter Fruit Growing Group Austria** is very active and meets a few times a year to work on the further development of biodynamics on the farms.

The farm of **Anna-Maria and Fritz Prem in Kaindorf** comprises 14 ha of apple orchards and 12 ha of forest. Fritz is chairman of the VON HERZEN organic farmers marketing structure and of the European Organic Fruit Forum. The farm has a plant protection sprinkler system and a GPS-controlled tractor that carries out spraying work. The assortment has recently been adapted through grafting-on.

**Demeter Austria**, represented by chairman Andreas Höritzauer, along with Irene and Hansi Trummer organized lectures at which local Demeter farmers were invited to participate and exchange ideas. Robert Matzer, TU Graz, gave a lecture on the microbiome of biodynamic preparations. Different origins of horn manure preparations, composts and compost teas were examined for their fungal and bacterial content in the initial product, after preparation and after a certain time in the soil. A clear

increase first in bacterial, then fungal diversity in the soil was found with only one application of horn manure.

Birgit Birnstingl-Gottinger BSc spoke about new marketing channels for biodynamic food. She presented a crowd-farming project, which tries to connect farmers directly with end consumers via an internet platform. She also pointed out the special quality of biodynamic food, for instance, the presence of a special microbiome in the core of the apple, which in turn has a positive effect on human intestinal bacteria. Read more here (in German): <https://apfelmikrobiom.tugraz.at/konzept-wissenschaft/>

Many thanks to all the farm managers, to Demeter Austria and especially to Irene and Hansi Trummer for their warm welcome and perfect organization of the educational trip.