



**Freie Hochschule
für Geisteswissenschaft**

Sektion für Landwirtschaft
Section for Agriculture
Section d'Agriculture
Sección de Agricultura

Activity report 2016 / 2017

Creating fertile soil – from nature to culture

This was the title of the Agriculture Conference 2017 at the Goetheanum. 750 participants from 36 countries attended the conference which was held in five languages. Soil fertility is a highly topical subject, both on a global scale and at the local level of farm management.

It is a hot topic now but has been important ever since humanity started agricultural work. How can farmers expect a yearly harvest from the soil and at the same time increase its fertility in the long term? This question touches the key foundations of a productive agriculture and can even make us question our existence on Earth that we take for granted. Is it possible to cultivate the Earth without destroying it? Is the existence of mankind on Earth an opportunity or a threat?

These existential questions are not abstract exercises for Anthroposophy, but they are questions that can be answered clearly in terms of cultural evolution and in terms of a personal biographical engagement. Human beings live in a partnership with the Earth, and as the biodynamic movement, we want to make a significant contribution for this partnership to be fruitful.

In his video message, Prince Charles appealed to us very clearly to take on responsibility and to not lose courage in the face of the alarming statistics on soil loss. Individual commitment of each person is what counts. Based on the 40-year old DOK trial, Paul Mäder from the FiBL showed that biodynamic and organic methods work for the soil, for the climate, and for people. Fridtjof Albert described the history of Marienhöhe farm. There it was possible to build up soil fertility over three generations, in communities beyond family ties and heredity. The farm survived and has become a cultural hotspot. The question of soil fertility was worked with in many workshops and keynote speeches from broad approaches to questions of very specific detail. It ranged from pH levels, rainworms per hectare, CO₂ equivalents to sensing the elementary aliveness of the soil and the soil of one's own soul. Spirit and matter meet in the human individual. The Agriculture Conference at the Goetheanum aims to explore and research this connection, to experience it and turn it into an inspiration for agriculture as a cultural task.



Selection of projects and conferences

Intensive study week for those carrying responsibility in the biodynamic movement

20 people worked on their current project, in a process inspired by the U-process of Claus Otto Scharmer. The projects included generational change on German farms, biodynamic association work in Australia, internet radio for biodynamic farms in Scandinavia, and many others. This process is about learning to let go of out-dated points of view and to discover oneself as the shaper of the future, so that one can move on courageously with what is needed to turn a project into reality. To encourage entrepreneurship in cultural, social and economic realms within the biodynamic movement is one of the distinguished tasks of the Section.

The biodynamic preparations in context

Individual approaches to preparation work and a look at worldwide practice

With the goal of moving the biodynamic movement towards becoming a preparation research community, an international research project with both scientific and social aims was started. Fifteen case studies portraying preparation makers from all around the world were conducted. The diversity of practices developed out of the recommendations of Rudolf Steiner is made visible for the first time in a comparable way. The study can be obtained from the Section in German and English as a printed copy or as a pdf. In summer 2017, a book based on this research will be published.

Updates: www.sektion-landwirtschaft.org

Seeds – A Commons

Breeding as a source of the real economy, rights, and culture by Johannes Wirz, Peter Kunz, Ueli Hurter

In the last 30 years, the ecological seed business has been developed with biodynamic plant breeding, reproduction, and trade. In parallel, a global seed industry has developed where the big players Syngenta and Monsanto make a lot of money from genetic engineering and patents. Breeding, rights, and profits have been privatised shamelessly. Therefore the question of how we can handle biodynamic breeding in the spiritual, legal and economic spheres as a common good has become urgent. This question has been researched and studied at the Section for Agriculture. The study is now published in English and German and can be ordered from the Section.

Coordination Centre for Nutrition set up

The quality of biodynamic produce depends not only on the conditions before harvest, but is affected also during processing, marketing, and consumption. The remit of work of the Section for Agriculture in the realm of nutrition was expanded in June 2016 when the nutritional science and home economist Dr. Jasmin Peschke joined the team. After a 40-year gap, a post on the topic of nutrition has been re-established at the Goetheanum. The human being that feeds himself, plays a central role in the supply chain and is the connecting point for interdisciplinary work, be it with breeders, farmers, pedagogues or physicians. The first year was promising and was used to set an emphasis on the topics of ripeness, warmth and secondary plant ingredients. A specific event for cooks was very successful (see next page).

Picture: Fattoria di Vaira



Experience with collective catering

Eleven cooks and chefs from Waldorf schools, social therapy homes, a community farm, an organic restaurant and a chef of a university clinic attended a professional development training week at Dornach in April. In addition to practical work in kitchens of local institutions and a guided tour of the Goetheanum, topics such as cosmic and terrestrial forces in plants and compost, the relationship between humans and plants and nutrition were worked on. A participant said with enthusiasm on leaving: „Next time I will send a co-worker.“

International biodynamic fruit growing conference

The international professional working group on biodynamic fruit production has existed for over 20 years. To make it even more international, a conference on biodynamic fruit growing was held in three languages on 24th and 25th November 2016 at the Goetheanum. 130 participants from many European countries and some from further afield learned new things and had a vivid exchange. Contributions on a diversity of fruit crops showed the wide range of biodynamic fruit growing, from the biodynamic basics up to questions on marketing and the use of the preparations, bringing a new swing into the movement of biodynamic fruit growing. The many promising opportunities derived from biodynamic practices as well as numerous examples to enhance biodiversity (e.g. keeping animals in the orchard) showed that biodynamics can give an important contribution to improving the health of orcharding.

Workshop «Discovering and unfolding a landscape's potential»

The mood was autumnal when the landscape workshop of 2016 took place at the Hödlgut farm in Austria. The participants learned how to find guiding motives for farm development out of landscape observation. Drawing and sculpting, listening and asking, soil sampling and vegetation mapping were some of the holistic methods used to gain ever new perspectives. In this way, specific assistance to guide decisions on the farm were found for the daily work as well as for collective efforts to be undertaken in harmony with the local agricultural practice and landscape. The workshop was lead by Jean-Michel Florin and Ambra Sedlmayr (both from the Section for Agriculture).

Economic Circle

From 1st to 3rd December 2016, 50 people from many European countries met in Conegliano in northern Italy for an exchange on economic questions connected to agriculture. The event was based at the headquarters of the enterprise Ecor-Natura-Si. The activities of that place inspired the excursions, meetings, and conversations.

For the well-established organic salespeople, the situation has changed: ever more organic and increasingly also Demeter products find their way into conventional supermarkets, where they are sold at lower prices. Now associative collaboration is needed. How can we come to new commitments between farmer, processor, trader, and consumer? The Economic Circle is an international platform of practical research on this question.

Picture: Giorgio Höslü für GZPK



The Section's responsibilities

The Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum

The Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum is one of eleven Sections of the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum, Dornach/Switzerland. Its main tasks are to coordinate and give new impulses to the biodynamic movement worldwide. We organize courses, seminars, working groups, conferences, lecture tours and publications for people who seek to deepen their knowledge of agriculture out of anthroposophical spiritual science. We carry out research and development projects. A key concern for us lies in stimulating individuals to take on responsibility in agriculture, gardening, processing, and trade, in nutrition, inner work, and public relations. We maintain a worldwide network with individuals and associations in many countries such as Demeter enterprises, research, consultancy and training institutions, with foundations in our field of activity and with other professional fields such as medicine and pedagogy.

We promote the complementarity of analytical natural science, goetheanistic phenomenology, anthroposophical spiritual science and experiential science. We aim to make the insights gained visible and available for the individual interested farmer and the public. That is our contribution to an agriculture that is an agri-culture in the widest possible sense.

Jean-Michel Florin and Ueli Hurter lead the Section. There are currently five team members (see picture), with a total of 360% full-time work equivalent. There is a varying num-

ber of self-employed individuals who join specific projects. The Circle of Representatives stands for the regional and functional diversity of the biodynamic movement. Currently, there are 69 representatives from 18 countries.

Four pillars support the Section financially. In 2016 the following results were achieved:

Free donations	CHF 123'000.–
Project funding	CHF 138'000.–
Income from event organisation	CHF 157'000.–
Baseline contribution from the Goetheanum household	CHF 118'000.–
Total income	CHF 536'000.–
Total expenditure	CHF 536'000.–
Result	CHF 0.–

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Donations

You can also support us financially.
Bank details and online donations at „donations“ at www.sektion-landwirtschaft.org

The team at the Goetheanum, from left to right: Therese Jung, Ueli Hurter, Verena Wahl, Jasmin Peschke, Jean-Michel Florin. Picture: Michèle Melzer

