

Provocation for Richard Swann

The issue

So what makes you – yes **you** reading this Start and Furrow - convinced that biodynamics works? (I should say that the editor has asked me to ‘shake things up’ after the readers’ survey unveiled a suspicion that things are too cosy and self-congratulatory around here.) What have you, personally, experienced which you could put to a jury of your peers to demonstrate to their good faith that, even compared to organic agriculture, all this extra voodoo makes the slightest bit of difference?

If biodynamics is the manifestation of agricultural guidance from an initiate of the highest order, surely the result will be so vastly superior that those who wish to care for this ailing planet would be simple to convince. But rather than pushing at an open door one finds, in the main, that biodynamics is ridiculed when it isn’t ignored. The mainstream press considers that organic farming is a fad for the neurotic and scientifically unschooled. What is a journalist going to do with preparations, moon planting, and peppering?

And if the media has not earned a dignified reply, what about the scientific community; what can you put before a panel of experts to persuade them that biodynamic practices are not the bizarre rituals of a cult? Indeed what have you experienced that brings you conviction so you can try to be convincing to others?

In one form or another, these are the questions that I have asked for years. I have had some small response but there is not much that I have found which bears scrutiny for such a tough audience as the imagined committee of experts.

Perhaps this has something to do with the lag in getting German information into English. Perhaps we continue to fall short of the ideal Dr Steiner flags up for us in this very field in his address at Koberwitz on the 11th of June 1924. Undoubtedly, the many independent variables within agricultural experiences are a hindrance in showing clear differences (but may also provide a useful screen behind which enthusiasts distort their unsteady convictions). We do have some amazing pioneers to slipstream in this search but so many of their findings have not been reproduced by later researchers. At times I have come to the slightly depressing conclusion that no one is going to be able to convince me, let alone a panel of skeptic expert agricultural scientists.

I have been around this mental loop many times and eventually realised that I would like to progress towards answering my own questions. ‘What’, I asked myself, ‘would have to be in place to be convincing?’

Addressing the issue

We would need to propose an initial draft hypothesis. Hmm ... , ‘Biodynamics is a superior form of agriculture because it can deliver better produce with less environmental damage.’ (We would need to clarify our terms. ‘Better produce’: more

of it, tastes better, more easily digestible, stores well, robust, less disease, healthier descendents, more beautiful (!?), more invigorating. 'Less environmental damage': less odours, leachates, external carbon inputs, soil erosion...)

Statistically analysed demonstrations of applied biodynamics would need to form the backbone of a convincing case. These would show that when one thing is done, the result is significantly and regularly superior to what arises when it is not done.

We would then focus upon the defining techniques that differentiate biodynamics from other agricultural disciplines.

- The preparations – the hypothesis would be that the use of the preparations is necessary in guiding a property towards the superior form of agriculture because some aspect of the 'better crops' and 'less environmental damage' would be absent if they weren't used.
- Something similar would be said of the planting times.
- The use of the peppers to minimise the problem of the pests and weeds should be relatively simple to demonstrate if a difference can be elicited.

As I pondered what would be needed to make the case for biodynamics, I began to realise that the 'raw' data would be needed rather than the conclusions of researchers. By this I mean that it would be necessary to have a record of precisely what was done, when and where and what was noticed as a result.

To take one instance, we trust that the planting calendars are distilled from the carefully analysed results of years and years of experiments undertaken primarily by Maria Thun and her team. But even assuming that there was no micromanagement of the experiments and that all was recorded objectively, how do we know that the same results analysed using the 30° equal zodiac would not reveal equal or even superior results than the zodiac based upon the constellations? Whilst it may be that for Maria Thun the appropriate zodiac was used in her analysis (Hartmut Speiss' research and Nick Kollerstrom's re-evaluation notwithstanding), what about those 100,000 people who purchase her Calendar each year? What works for them I wondered.

Something new – 'Considera'

In lecture 5 Dr Steiner presents the home truth that stressing the negative is all very well but it only serves to annoy unless something new is suggested. I have now gotten sufficiently far in crafting a 'new something' to want to share it. This 'something new' is, I'm afraid, mainly manifest as a web site – <http://www.considera.org>. In essence it is a way of collecting raw data on planting time and peppering experiences and experiments. It is also a place for developing the use of and information concerning the preparations.

On this site you can find a literature search, the hypotheses spelled out, an attempt at elucidating the intellectual roots of biodynamics, a survey of past research and the various experiments which support and weaken the hypotheses. The 'new' parts follow this evaluation of what already exists.

In relation to the planting times there is a place to report your own relevant experiments. I have teamed up with an Estonian man who has developed 'reverse-astrology' software. (It is 'reverse astrology' because it does not predict on the basis of the time and place of an event, but simply looks for cosmic patterns correlating with a collection of mundane results.) This enables one to analyse experiments that note time and place amongst the variables of experiments, and look within this information for correlations to heavenly alignments.

With a modern home computer it takes a matter of minutes to evaluate this collection of 'raw data' with different zodiacs and 'anayamsas', different moon rhythms, fluctuations in sun spot activity, planetary configurations, geomagnetic index and on and on. We can acknowledge Ahriman's genius for enabling this can we not?

Having developed this computer programme, we also use it to evaluate experiments for peppering pests and weeds to clarify when the peppers should be burned for optimal results.

However, these two developments are totally useless, a complete waste of my time – unless people (**you** again?) do experiments and submit the results to the web site or post them to me.

Preparations

The other major piece of original work concerns the preparations. It serves to collate both existing information, and new experiments and experiences with the preparations. For instance, if you were to notice that Valerian gave you more blossoms on your roses you could submit that information to be gathered together with those things noticed by others anywhere in the world, in the expectation that a fuller picture can emerge of what each preparation does.

Having created this format of a database I realised that it could be used for any agricultural product! So I have solicited input on other products that leave minimal physical residue and this has led to the uncovering of homoeopathic research in many different countries. It is also available for radionic work although I haven't yet had much luck in rousing response from this community.

Another serendipitous aspect is that I can log on as anyone – such as the author of a relevant book. This facilitates the organisation of research that has already been published about preparations.

As an example one can type this in your web browser -

<http://www.considera.org/materiamedicagricultura.html?remtype=3&rem=8>

- to find what Sattler and Wistinghausen, Peter Proctor, Alex Podolinsky, Maria Thun, Rudolf Steiner, John Soper, Herbert Koepf, Kuenzel and Lippert, and others have had to say about what 507 does to the soil, plants, water, compost, and even the environment.

One can also see if there is anything in the collected information which might address a specific issue such as ‘ergot’ or ‘bunt’, or ‘flies’ just by entering this ‘keyword’ and looking through what is presented out on your screen. This means that diagnosis and treatment is facilitated.

‘Democratic research’

I have mentioned some of the pleasant surprises which have emerged by committing myself to answering my own questions, such as finding the homoeopathic research, the assistance from Nick Kollerstrom who has provided research which has not been available hitherto, and several other aspects which only became clear to me in the process of creating the site.

But there is something else of value that I would like to highlight. This is that in trying to create something that might convince the scientific community there is now a tool that allows anyone to get involved in research. I have always felt that any experiments I might undertake would of no use along side the heroic work of the pioneers like Lily Kolisko, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Maria Thun and co. With a family to support and businesses to run, there is absolutely no way that I could muster the necessary factors to create a serious body of experimental work, even if I thought I would be any good at it.

But for those who can manage even one experiment there is now a place where this might be part of the tide of evidence indicating whether we do indeed have the tools to help guide our planet back from the brink. If you have access to an allotment, a garden, a piece of scrub land, a farm, an orchard, a window box, a vineyard, or a few pot plants, there is ‘something new’ that can take your sincere experiences and forge them into a body of work that just might bring biodynamic agriculture forward.

Drawbacks

I also realise that there are potential pitfalls with such a tool and it makes sense to identify these earlier rather than later. The main one which occurs to me is that it may lead to seeing biodynamics out of context. The project is essentially an intellectual (analytical) tool rather than one of reason (holistic). I use these terms as Steiner uses them in ‘Epistemology Inherent in Goethe’s World View’. ie one could look up a remedy for chocolate spot on broad beans, apply it, and continue to farm without making more fundamental changes that currently go along with biodynamics. The tool makes no contribution towards appreciating the self contained farm entity, and rather draws focus away from it.

There are other drawbacks and potential pitfalls that I have considered, but I think that they are the reverse side of the potential benefits. I am alert to but comfortable with this dynamic.

Making this tool useful

If you – yes **you** again – want to get involved by trying moon planting, or using some of the peppers, or by observing the results of using the preparations, you can send your results to Considera at Oaklands Park or preferably, if you are at ease with computers, directly by using the web site mentioned. I would also be interested in

having assistance in guiding this work deeper and into other areas of biodynamics. All feedback is welcome.

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