

Reviving Rush Farm in a Biodynamic Way, England



Rush Farm and its eco-business park are a community-owned farming trust (community shares available to public). Visit <http://stockwoodcbs.org> for more information.

In the article by Elisabeth Winkler it is explained how various biodynamic methods are used on Rush Farm in Worcestershire to restore the soil's fertility (interview with Anne Parsons, farmer and former secretary of the Biodynamic Agricultural Association from 1988 to 1994).

Biodynamic preparations

Preparation 500 - Cow Horn Manure

Basically fermented cow dung with billions of microscopic bacteria, fungi and other micro-organisms, this preparation mixed with water was sprayed on the soil every month for two years to promote microbial life. "It made an incredible difference, most clearly in the garden at first. People thought we had put in extra compost," says Anne.



At Michaelmas, (ancient festivals linked to equinoxes and solstices are part of the biodynamic farming calendar), the farm team collects fresh cow pats from cows that have calved, to fill 200 cow horns. "The cow pats and the horns have unique qualities that lend themselves to the natural process of transforming the cow pats into medicine for the soil and increasing soil microbial life, what scientists call the soil web of life," says Anne. The farm team bury the cow horns pointy side up in holes five inches or so deep. When they are dug up after about six months, their cow pat content has mysteriously transformed, "from green and smelly porridge to a brown-black crumble with a nice peaty smell," says Anne.

"Just as 1g of rich soil has a billion micro-organisms, a biodynamic spray will have microscopic amounts of bacteria and fungi. On one hand it is quantitative," says Kai Lange who teaches biodynamic methods at Ruskin Mill College." And on other hand it is energetic – that is, the quality which goes beyond the physical body. But you do not need to believe in biodynamic methods for them to work," he adds.

Although science cannot explain how biodynamic farming works, it can show that it does work. A 21-year old study found that organic and biodynamic plots contain for instance 25% more soil micro-organisms and have higher long-term soil fertility than their non-organic counterparts.¹

Preparation 501 - Cow Horn Silica

This horn manure, made with powdered silica, is for plants. Anne fetches a jam jar filled with ground-up quartz, a common white stone. "Silica is a mineral that brings balance, it improves nutrition, giving an indication to the plant of how to grow. You mix it to a slurry with spring



water and bury it in a cow's horn from spring to autumn," she says. It is sprayed on the fields in a similar way to Preparation 500.

The Compost Preparations 502-507

The remaining preparations are used to enrich the compost heap, which is created by layers, ideally alternating strawy material with green waste, and lime or slurry. You add a pinch of the six different plant preparations in tiny holes in the compost. Finally spray the heap with diluted juice from pressed valerian flowers. "It acts as an overcoat that holds in forces you are hoping to create," says Anne.

Stirring and spraying the field preparations

The preparations are added to buckets of water and stirred for an hour. "Water is an immensely complex substance and movement changes its nature. When stirring, it is important make a vortex – a kind of organised movement," says Anne. "Then you break up the vortex and reverse the spiral which collapses the organised form of the moment into total chaos. Count 15 then start again. The difference between order and chaos is dramatic, and the rhythmic transformation is crucial to the process. It is a bit like a mountain stream with still pools and crashing rapids."

Spraying is done with a hearth brush or fir branches. "It's like t'ai chi, you go up and down the field with slow arm movements spraying the soil, or the plants, with droplets," says Anne. For larger areas, such as fields, then knapsack sprayers or a sprayer on the tractor are used.

Collecting cow pats, burying and diggings up horns and spraying are community activities for the farm team. "They are proud to be part of this set-up which has turned a rather barren patch of earth into something quite different," says Anne.

"It sounds way out but I was born on a biodynamic farm so I am used to it. It's like baking a cake. You start off with flour and other ingredients, you mix them together and bake a cake. Science may not see at first glance how it works – but it works. The proof of pudding is in eating."

¹ www.fibl.org/en/media/media-archive/media-archive06/mediarelease06/article/europes-oldest-long-term-trial-in-organic-ar-able-farming-set-to-continue.html

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