

Biodynamic profiles

» **Adam Birkby** takes a look at two very different biodynamic operations from opposite sides of the country.

Burnside Organic Farm

Burnside Organic Farm is set on 15 hectares next to Bramley National Park in the Margaret River district of Western Australia. The property is operated by Lara and Jamie McCall and has been certified biodynamic for the last five years. The McCalls specialise in growing a variety of products including fruit, macadamias, eggs, avocados, olives and wine.

They chose to go into biodynamic agriculture because they were interested in minimising inputs and maximising and nurturing the biological life of their soil. Lara says, 'Biodynamic agriculture seemed to offer some solutions, so we attended a workshop and carried out some trials on our property. We found that the 500 sprays seemed to work as a tonic for struggling trees and were amazed by the ability of 501 to increase brix levels (measure of sugar content in grapes) in a wine grape crop.'

Jamie recalls the turning point in becoming biodynamic: 'In a very poor season with neighbours unable to ripen their crops we achieved excellent ripeness which was in part attributable to biodynamic practices. After this experience we committed ourselves to biodynamics,' he says.

Burnside Organic Farm is certified organic and biodynamic. The McCalls see biodynamic agriculture as an extension to organic farming and another method that



enables a balanced and productive outcome of their farming practices. Lara says, 'We still have management issues on our property, but believe the biodynamic framework helps us to approach these constructively and carefully. In the long term we find it far more beneficial than trying to spend our way out of issues, with the list of allowable inputs in one

hand and the phone in the other,' she says.

Overall the advantages for the McCalls are clear when they pronounce, 'Being biodynamic helps us to identify ourselves to our customers as people who have taken a step further along the path towards sustainable farming – creating and building soil health for the future.'

Macquariedale Estate

MACQUARIEDALE ESTATE IS located in the picturesque district of the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. Ross and Derice McDonald established the Macquariedale estate in 1993 with a purchase of land and a passion to produce outstanding Hunter varietal wines. They investigated both organic and biodynamic practices before choosing to go into biodynamics.

Ross remembers that the decision was made from the point of view of what they saw as the most sustainable practice. 'The options of organic or biodynamic were reviewed in depth. We believed organic agriculture was only sustainable by substituting organic chemicals for conventional chemicals. Biodynamics on the other hand has the ability to be more than sustainable by building up the life forces in the soil,' he says.

'Through working with the biodynamic



preparations there is an ability to recreate soil and humus and hence add to the soil deposits and increase organic matter for increased soil health. Biodynamics is the way forward by way of repairing the damage to the environment that has already been created,' Ross says.

Ross says that the overall benefit of farming biodynamically is enormous. 'The produce from farming biodynamically has been shown to be more nutritious, more

tasty and of a greater benefit to the environment. The biodynamic approach allows for biodiversity to be fostered with both plants and animals. Not using any toxic chemicals enables farmers to once again get in touch with mother Earth – the great provider. Why would you farm any other way?' he asks.

For those contemplating biodynamics as the way to farm, Ross says they should commence the transition patiently following the very deliberate biodynamic schedule. 'The practices are very much about intent and monitoring the results for each individual situation, and then making adjustments accordingly. Do not be hasty and expect immediate results. Often the soil and the crops take time to adjust to the new regime and the overall benefits may take several years to be realised. The end result is an improved environment with uncontaminated, high quality food and wine.'