



» By Hugh Level

## Biodynamics: The Cutting Edge



Horn silica sifting.

**B**ack in early 1924, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, who later became one of the early leaders in biodynamic agriculture, was anxious to find ways to build bridges between active participation and the carrying out of life purposes without being derailed by personal ambition, illusions and petty jealousies. These were the negative qualities his mentor, Rudolf Steiner, had named as the main inner hindrances.

On a train from Stuttgart, Germany to Dornach, Switzerland he asked Steiner, "How can it happen that the spiritual impulse, and especially the inner schooling, for which you are constantly providing stimulus and guidance, bear so little fruit? Why do the people concerned give so little evidence of spiritual experience, in spite of all their efforts? Why, worst of all, is the will for action, for the carrying out of these impulses, so weak?"

Steiner's rejoinder surprised him, "This is a problem of nutrition. Nutrition as it is today does not supply the strength necessary for manifesting the spirit in physical life. A bridge can no longer be built from thinking to will and action. Food plants no longer contain the forces people need for this."

Pfeiffer was left to muse over this—a nutritional problem which, if solved, would enable people to integrate their thoughts and activities and become self-realized. This explained Steiner's statement, "The benefits of the [biodynamic] preparations should be made available as quickly as possible to the largest possible areas of the entire earth, for the Earth's healing."<sup>1</sup>

It is precisely these biodynamic preparations—known today, 84 years later, as the BD Preps—that set biodynamic agriculture so thoroughly apart from all other methods of agriculture today. Though they lie at the heart of the biodynamic method, it remains poorly understood how a handful of cow manure, buried in a cow's horn from autumn to spring and then sprayed over an acre of farm land, can possibly be of much consequence. Even stranger, that a pinch of

Though they lie at the heart of the biodynamic method, it remains poorly understood how a handful of cow manure, buried in a cow's horn from autumn to spring and then sprayed over an acre of farm land, can possibly be of much consequence—or even stranger, that a pinch of finely ground quartz buried in a cow's horn from spring to autumn and then sprayed into the air over that same acre can balance the horn manure and make crops really thrive.

finely ground quartz buried in a cow's horn from spring to autumn and then sprayed into the air over that same acre can balance the horn manure and make crops really thrive.

As far back as the 1870s Irish physicist, Osborne Reynolds, a specialist in fluid dynamics, showed that a microscopic change at a point can effect large scale changes in the medium. But we are so used to the notion that a bigger shift requires a bigger hammer that it seems very strange to expect profound results from the minuscule application of 9 or 10 BD preps to soils and weather. And as if that weren't enough of a challenge to get our heads around, the deeper question is how do we get the right timing, combinations or sequences of applications of these preparations to get the effects we most desire? Let us grant that a tiny catalyst can bring about a great transformation, but we don't want just any transformation. We want balance, robustness, delicacy and stability, insofar as these are achievable. It is rather like taking a canvas and 9 or 10 colours and seeing what great works of art we can produce.

What are our basic colours? The horn manure—often called BD 500—is noted for transforming soils that resemble pottery clay into crumbly loams, but that does not mean their minerals are balanced or that missing elements are supplied. In large part this is the role of additional biodynamic preparations—the yarrow, chamomile, nettle, oak bark, dandelion, valerian and horsetail preparations.<sup>2</sup> And we should keep in mind that if a soil needs liming, it still must be limed, or if it needs phosphorous or copper or whatever does not show up in a total soil digest (using aqua regia), then these elements have to be supplied.

On the other hand the horn silica—often called BD 501—is noted for its effects on the activities found above ground, namely photosynthesis, blossoming, fruiting and ripening. It tunes in crops to the sunshine and the weather, and has a particular affinity for the nettle, dandelion, valerian and



horsetail preparations.

Finally there is horn clay—a preparation Steiner apparently meant to include in his lectures but for one reason or another glossed over. This mediates between the activities of the horn manure that work into the soil and the activities of the horn silica that work into the atmosphere. Thus horn clay provides stronger sap pressure and nutrient uptake by day, leading to more abundant root exudation at night. This too is supported by the seven herbal preparations, particularly the nettles.

It is difficult enough to be unclear about how the biodynamic preparations work, but to know what each preparation can and cannot do and to know which ones to use when and in what combinations or sequences is bewildering, especially for beginners. Of course, there are the strict, cookbook formulas that reduce everything to a simple set of rules where one size fits all—and there are the biodynamic artists that use the biodynamic preparations like a painter's palette, striving for optimal effects.

Understandably, biodynamics is growing and evolving, and the journey has been somewhat frustrating—especially in light of Steiner's emphasis on the urgency of applying the benefits of the preparations to the largest possible areas of the earth. On the other hand, Steiner put it this way, "In these lectures I have only been able to supply certain guidelines, of course, but I am sure that they will provide a foundation for many different experiments extending over

a long period of time, and that they will lead to brilliant results if worked into your agronomical practices on an experimental basis."<sup>3</sup>



## References

- 1 Agriculture, Rudolf Steiner; pp 260, 261; Creeger/Gardner edition; Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association. Inc., USA
- 2 Steiner suggested that in other parts of the world other herbs could be found to fill the roles of those herbs found in middle Europe. Thus in Australia stinging tree, silky oak or river Casuarina may be substituted for stinging nettle, English oak or meadow horsetail. It may be argued that the effects will not be quite the same, and it may also be argued that the effects need to be somewhat different since it is a different part of the world.
- 3 Agriculture, Rudolf Steiner; pp 168,169; Creeger/Gardener edition; Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association. Inc., USA

**About the Author:** Hugh Lovel, formally educated in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and psychology, was a biodynamic farmer of more than 30 years experience in the mountains of North Georgia (USA) before becoming an Australian citizen. He currently lives in Tolga on the Atherton Tablelands, grows ginger, aloe vera, edamame soybeans and tends bees. Although his comprehensive soil and crop testing procedures are second to none, his AgPhysics consultancy covers all aspects of agriculture including livestock and environmental repair, with special emphasis on the underlying patterns of energy that determine such things as weather cycles, crop vigour, flavour and keeping quality.