


The first day of teaching on the new course.

# Bringing Biodynamics to the Table

**TOM PETHERICK**

Picture Credits: Farmacy.

**We are an urban society. 85% of the UK's population live in towns and cities. We shop in supermarkets, work in offices and exercise in the gym. We take the dog for a walk around the city's streets. Many have little or no concept or understanding of what happens outside the city walls and almost no idea of where our food comes from. Farmacy Farm intends to change that.**

One hour from London by train and a little more by car, the farm which is found nestling in the Ashdown Forest just outside Forest Row in the Sussex Weald, is at the forefront of an emerging trend in the ever more vital conversation about food production, soil and human health and long-term sustainability.

That trend is the push towards bringing biodynamics into these conversations through the educational courses run at the farm and allowing the powerful organic world to feel the value of biodynamics and grasp the importance of its outcomes. The farm, from which numerous educational offerings are now forthcoming, is beautifully run. The first thing I notice on arrival is the sense of calm. It helps that the land is in a natural amphitheatre, surrounded on all four sides by the forest, but mostly this is achieved through human energy. It is quiet, peaceful and incredibly abundant. Diversity across nature, whether in grassland, crop, woodland or heath, speaks its own language, and here it is quite audible. This is a place on good terms with itself, something that is often evident when the biodynamic measures are much in use, which they are here. The layout is in three sections. From leaving the car the visitor is drawn gently downhill through a field of agroforestry, in which trees are planted in long grass, towards the middle field where stands an enormous glasshouse. The teaching space, the events centre. Here too are polytunnels for tender crops. Beyond this is the third field which holds the finest market garden imaginable.

This is the work of Annadelia Laterza. A wonderful grower and gardener, Annadelia trained under the watchful eye of Dorothea Leber, legendary gardener at Michael Hall Steiner School and now Head Gardener at Farmacy owner Camilla Fayed's garden in Kent.

The biodynamic impulse begins here. Both private garden and public farm/market garden are Demeter certified. In case anyone is unsure



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what this means there are some basics that warrant explanation.

To achieve certification a farm or garden is subject to an annual inspection and must adhere to certain standards which can be cross checked at the inspection. In the case of biodynamics, to reach and maintain full Demeter/biodynamic status, said farm or garden must at the very least be sprayed in its entirety each year with BD500 (horn manure) and BD501 (horn silica).

The use of the compost preparations in compost heaps is also a requirement. While these things need doing, most important of all is who does them. The engagement of the human being with the biodynamic measures and their relation to the land they are meeting is critical, and that this is happening at Farmacy is clear from the outset.

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With a combination of soil with a high clay content, good residual fertility, a skilled grower and intimate knowledge of biodynamics you have a recipe for success, and it is small wonder that reaching out into the world via education has become a focus for this farm rather than simply the sale of produce.

While the farm has its open days and does indeed sell its produce into the local market and through the excellent wholesaler Shrub (who have done plenty for biodynamic growers in the south), it is the development of a course in 'Regenerative and Sustainable Hospitality' that has propelled the work of this progressive group of people into the mainstream. With this propulsion goes biodynamic cultivation and this meeting of the mainstream with biodynamics is a powerful force for good.

This course brings some of the big names of biodynamics, organics and food together and was first offered by The Bull Inn in Totnes in conjunction with nearby biodynamic farm and teaching hub The Apricot Centre in Dartington. Now emanating from Farmacy it is aimed at the London market.

Accredited to Level 3 diploma/certificate by The Crossfields Institute, the course 'seeks to shape the next generation of hospitality leaders, providing them with the skills and knowledge they need to implement regenerative practices throughout their operations and do business in a way that is environmentally restorative and socially just.' The programme is offered by Farmacy Green Foundation, a charity dedicated to equipping the next generation with knowledge for dep restoration. Camilla Fayed, owner of Farmacy and inspiration behind the course says that 'Regenerative Hospitality grew out of a feeling that hospitality can and should do more than simply minimise its negative impact on our health and the health of the planet.






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It is about creating places that actively give something back to the land, to local communities, to our customers and to the people who work within them'.

'I came to it', she continues, 'through seeing the tension at the heart of the industry. Hospitality has an extraordinary ability to create joy, connection, beauty and a sense of belonging. But it can also be extractive, using resources heavily, placing pressure on local places, and sometimes treating people and environments as inputs rather than partners.

'That made me interested in a different question: what if a hotel, restaurant, hotel or retreat could leave a place healthier, more resilient and more connected than it found it'.

'For me, regenerative hospitality means designing experiences that are rooted in their setting, respectful of local culture and ecology, and generous to everyone involved. It is not only about sustainability anymore, it is much deeper, although that is essential still, it is about restoration, reciprocity and long-term value'.

'I suppose that is how I got there: through wanting hospitality to live up to its best qualities of care, welcome, real nourishment and connection and to extend those qualities beyond the guest experience.'

Tommy Tannock, teaching lead at Farmacy, hopes the hospitality course will be the first of many in a systems thinking approach to everything around education at Farmacy. Agroecology will follow, human nutrition, soil, livestock. The programme is geared he says towards consumer level.

Tannock has a background in hospitality that took him through years in Berlin restaurants where he developed an interest in natural wines (biodynamic wines are included under that header) all the way to Devon and the Apricot Centre where he took the Regenerative Agriculture Course.

On the way, at conferences such as Oxford Real Farming and Groundswell he was surprised at how little representation there was of hospitality, believing that chefs could and should be big ambassadors for farmers and growers. He sees farms as the teaching hubs of the future in different modalities than we are used to for learning. Especially for young people, who through these places may see a glimmer of hope for the future beyond climate breakdown and misery towards a sustainable future with food security. 'Land work', he says, 'holds so much potential for the next generation and beyond'.

I agree. Younger people are beginning to find their way to the understanding that a life spent working outside, on farms, in nature with clean air to breathe and good exercise is better for both physical and mental health, and while it may not pay as good as other sectors it is worth it. There are difficulties attached to this of course – access to land, transport, accommodation to name a few, but as Tannock and Farmacy understand, it is our responsibility to try and provide possibilities if we can.

The collaboration of Farmacy, with its steadfast commitment to biodynamics, and powerhouses of organics such as Guy Singh-Watson of Riverford Organics and his wife Geetie who owns the Bull Inn in Totnes, represents a milestone for biodynamics.

It is stepping out of its own comfort zone. This method of cultivation has often given the appearance of being unable to get out of its own way, on the path to reaching a wider audience. This is harsh of course because it is the oldest and longest recognised form of organic cultivation anywhere on earth, but it is nonetheless often accused of being inward looking. That it can make this move towards the mainstream speaks volumes for the team at Farmacy.

In coming face to face with biodynamics through wine in his time in restaurants in Germany Tommy Tannock saw the power of biodynamics for the fruit and how it came through in the finished complexity of the flavour. We know how important the French wine industry has been for the furtherment of biodynamics and we also know how much of it is kept under wraps by the great Burgundy and Claret houses.

In the face of AI and tech the human touch of farming may well prove to be the saviour, at least if Farmacy has anything to say in the matter.

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