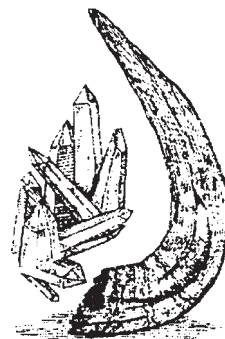


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Nick Franceschelli

An Interview with Heinz Grotzke

Heinz Grotzke is one of the most senior statesmen in the biodynamic movement. For years he was the owner and manager of Meadowbrook Herb Gardens, in Wyoming, Rhode Island, an operation that was legendary among biodynamic growers. His products were synonymous with quality. The astute reader will shortly discover why.

Nick Franceschelli: *It would be nice, because you are one of the biodynamic pioneers, if you could tell us how you got started in agriculture and how you met biodynamic agriculture.*

Heinz Grotzke: I certainly can. I got interested in biodynamics because when I was seventeen years old, I studied anthroposophy then and read the basic books like *Occult Science*, *How to Acquire Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, and so on; also the book *Spiritual Science and Medicine*, which discusses a lot of herb plants. I was always interested in herbs, so I became more interested in the agriculture part and I asked the person [Felicita von Brederlow] who introduced me to anthroposophy whether she could provide any material that Steiner might have written or talked about on agriculture and biodynamics. Then I discovered a secret, the book *Agriculture*, at the time in German, which was not available to everybody, but only to people who were members [of the Anthroposophical Society] and who were farmers. My mentor had a copy of the book and introduced me to it. I tried to handwrite as much material from the book as I could for my own use. So that's how I got started.

NF: *What year was that?*

HG: The year was 1947. At the time I also read *The Philosophy of Freedom*. Of course, my education was directed towards something else than agriculture. When I read *Philos-*

ophy of Freedom, however, I found the hint for readers, that they should if possible, choose a profession which would benefit humanity more than themselves. Then I wondered what type of work that might be, and I concluded that for me it would be growing food for other people. So that's how I decided to take on biodynamic agriculture. Not right away, because it was suggested that I first take a formal



Heinz Grotzke working with compost at Golden Acres Farm in Newtown, Pennsylvania in 1961. (The photo is from the *Natural Food and Farming* magazine and is reprinted here with kind permission from the Francis Family of Atlanta, Texas.)

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Notes

For some, explaining what biodynamic farming is and how it compares to organic methods can be a challenge. For Heinz Grotzke, this does not pose a problem at all. His years as a farm and greenhouse manager, growing herbs, vegetables and fruits using biodynamic compost, attest to a productive life emanating from his love of plants at an early age. Heinz is the author of *Biodynamic Greenhouse Management* and since 1999, is Associate Editor of *BIODYNAMICS*. In this issue, he shares his life's work in biodynamic farming and gardening with interviewer Nick Franceschelli.

Have you ever considered you may not be fully utilizing all the information offered in a biodynamic planting calendar? Well, it's never too late to learn the finer details of celestial forces. Hugh Courtney's article, along with a three-color insert of the August calendar sheet from the *Stella Natura-2003 Kimberton Hills Biodynamic Agricultural Planting Guide and Calendar*, offers the reader an opportunity to understand the positive, as well as detrimental aspects of cosmic influences upon plant life.

We have also included in this issue, a subscription form for you to pass along to those who may be interested in receiving *Applied Biodynamics*.

Have a fruitful summer.

Patricia Smith, Editor

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An Interview with Heinz Grotzke

education in agriculture. So I took an apprenticeship course and schooling and got a horticultural degree. After leaving school I tried to find a job in biodynamics and in 1949 located one in southern Germany.

NF: *Wait a moment. Were you in Germany at this point?*

HG: I was first in northern Germany, in a town called Lauenburg, near the city of Hamburg, and did my basic education in that area. When I was finished I was looking for a job in biodynamics. At the time there was a bimonthly magazine called *Die Kommenden*, which started, I believe, in 1946. It was an anthroposophical bimonthly and listed job offers for people who wanted to work in agriculture. I wrote to several and got invitations to come from two. I picked Lorch, a small town in southern Germany, near Stuttgart. I picked that one because it was herb growing, which I already did when I was in elementary school, and because the town had an old monastery on top of a hill. I was always attracted to such things, to churches, cathedrals and monasteries. I felt it would combine both growing herbs and being near a sacred place.

NF: *Which farm was this?*

HG: It was called 'Kloster Laboratorium.' 'Kloster' is a cloister, and 'Laboratorium' is a laboratory. The business was



Mission

The Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Bio-Dynamics Inc. (JPI), was founded to produce quality biodynamic agricultural preparations based on the spiritual-scientific research of Rudolf Steiner.

It serves as a living memorial to Josephine Porter, a pioneer for this work in America.

The mission of JPI also includes education and research in biodynamic agriculture. JPI undertakes these tasks so that the earth may be healed.

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The Editor, *Applied Biodynamics*

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called that because it was located opposite this monastery with a valley in between. These people [Mr. and Mrs. Petersen] made products from herbs: seasonings, herb teas and herb oils and also sold mustard seeds for medical purposes. It was altogether a pharmaceutical company.

NF: *And they were interested in having biodynamic products?*

HG: Yes. They wanted to have biodynamically-grown products, mainly because I think the two children they had, went to a Waldorf school nearby.

NF: *That's amazing. So you're saying that the monks or the nuns made herbal products?*

HG: No, there were no more monks and nuns. The buildings were used as a retirement home, but we were allowed to use the huge old barn and their buildings to dry our herbs in and package them in sacks and then bring them over for storage to the building that was the laboratory. Due to the location, the owner picked that name "Kloster Laboratorium", and the picture of this church of the monastery was always used on all of his advertising material.

NF: *That must have been remarkable! And this was a biodynamic man?*

HG: Well, he was not a biodynamic man, I think, but his wife probably was more so. She was trained by a physician to make medicinal herb teas. He was a Danish person who brought the mustard seed in from Denmark. That was his main activity.

NF: *O.K. Now did you also have gardens and fields?*

HG: Oh yes, we had gardens and fields. I had to grow a lot of herbs for the teas: mints, lemon balms, calendula and chamomile for the teas. Then we also bought from women and children the wild-growing herbs which they collected in woods and meadows, like yarrow, raspberry leaves, blackberry leaves, St. Johnswort and sweet woodruff. I had to buy them by the pound and chop them and dry them in this monastery barn.

NF: *At that point were you starting to apply the biodynamic products on the fields and in the compost piles?*

HG: Right away! Right away, because on Sundays I traveled to Weleda which was nearby in Schwaebisch Gmuend. It was about 10 kilometers away, and Sunday mornings I went there and studied biodynamics with the head gardener [Mr. Leihenseder] of Weleda. Whatever I didn't know, he knew, and I just followed his advice right from the beginning. Of course, I had studied biodynamics on my own already when I was at school, because there were no training courses at the time.

NF: *And that was a conventional agricultural school you went to, right?*

HG: Right, it was the Horticultural Experimental Station in the city of Hamburg, a well-established vegetable production and vegetable seed breeding operation.

NF: *At that time, when you were starting to work on this biodynamic herb farm, were you already getting involved in making the preparations, or did you have a supplier who could get them for you?*

HG: I got them from the gardener at Weleda. They made them there.

NF: *Did any of your herbs go over to Weleda, or did you have your own label?*

HG: We packaged them ourselves. We dried them, mixed them, and sold them by mail order.

NF: *So you really learned the herb business from that particular operation?*

HG: Yes, as I said, herbs fascinated me. I was always interested in herbs as far back as I can remember. Maybe from the time I was six years old, so it was just a continuation of growing these plants that I had found out in my father's home garden that whatever I touched would grow like crazy, even without having roots, in other words, from cuttings.

NF: *So you discovered that you had a green thumb at an early age.*

HG: People seem to call it such. I planted mints just by putting cuttings into the ground. I propagated currants that way. I just cut the tips of the branches and put them into the ground, and they all grew into big bushes, with the mints underneath.

NF: *When you switched from the conventional school to the biodynamic herb farm in southern Germany, were you already able to experience, see, or sense some major differences between the two methods?*

HG: Well, the conventional operation outside of Hamburg was more of a greenhouse operation. They had fifteen greenhouses and about two thousand cold frames. The outside area was mainly used for vegetable seed production, and also some of the greenhouses, as well. So I learned greenhouse vegetable production, seed growing and orchard management.

NF: *What were you seeing that was different when you got to southern Germany? Was that your first experience with practical biodynamic agriculture?*

HG: Well, of course, I knew from the *Agriculture* book that compost was the main backbone of biodynamics. The director of this experimental station near Hamburg also made compost in big piles. He actually bought cow manure by railroad carloads, and mixed it with other materials, such as cleanings from irrigation trenches and ditches. He didn't add preparations, but what he did in addition was to add fertilizer. He had, of course, tremendous success in growing greenhouse crops in compost to which fertilizer was added.

NF: *So it was a kind of 'fortified' compost?*

HG: Right. So when I switched to the biodynamic way with

herb growing, I only used manure compost and preparations. I think the compost was just as good, but it didn't produce as much bulk.

NF: *How about quality?*

HG: The best quality in herb growing is guaranteed by manure compost. This has been proven. The essential oil content of the plants will be higher if you use compost. Any type of compost will do, but especially biodynamic compost.

NF: *What happened after that? How did you progress with your education and your interest in growing herbs?*

HG: I stayed there in southern Germany five and half years, from '49 till the end of '55. I actually received through this mentor, who had introduced me to anthroposophy, an offer to go to the United States to take over a vegetable farm. It was all in writing. Every detail was explained, what I would expect and what I would receive. This woman, my mentor, knew the owner of this farm in Pennsylvania from Germany, because he was originally German. So the owner wrote me in German, and I answered in German. Of course, I had taken a half a year of English at a foreign language school in Hamburg and at the time studied English especially to work for the English Army as an interpreter and translator. Since I knew enough English, I thought, "Why shouldn't we go?" The conditions seemed to be much more favorable. I was married by then and we had a son. So I left in 1955 and went to Pennsylvania.

NF: *Did you start there as a biodynamic farmer or as a conventional farmer?*

HG: That was already a biodynamic farm.

NF: *Oh, is this Walter Stuber's place?*

HG: Yes, right, it was Golden Acres Farm.

NF: *Wonderful. Well, he just passed away a year or two ago here.*

HG: Oh, he did?

NF: *Yeah. He lived down the road from us up here in Hawthorne Valley. He lived just across the state line in Berkshire County.*

HG: He was a very nice gentleman. I always liked him.

NF: *What kind of an operation did you have there?*

HG: Well, he was an engineer in Philadelphia, making window blinds for Sears at the time. He had bought three adjoining farms in Newtown, Pennsylvania. They were a total of 375 acres, and he had divided them into a chicken farm, a dairy farm and an orchard farm. My task was to manage the orchard farm, which was also a vegetable farm. I started there in 1956. I came over in November '55. Of course, I had free rein, because he didn't know anything about farming, but [Dr. Ehrenfried] Pfeiffer came there once a month as a consultant. I had a chance to talk to Pfeiffer each time. He stayed three days on average, and I could talk to him every day about problems that I had or ideas that I had.

NF: *Boy, wouldn't it be wonderful if you could tell us a little bit about that time! I think that's going to be a forgotten chapter.*

HG: Pfeiffer and I became friendly with each other, and I learned a lot from him. I still have drawings from him, trying to explain to me the interactions in nature.

NF: *How did you experience him?*

HG: Very personal and warm, and very deep-rooted in biodynamics and anthroposophy.

NF: *I don't know many people who knew Dr. Pfeiffer, but I know Max and Mathilde Zinniker spoke very highly of him, and I know Walter Stuber thought highly of him, so it doesn't surprise me that you did as well. I know Hugh Courtney speaks highly of him. I really don't know anybody who doesn't*

HG: He was like a teacher during those years. I was there for five years and met him many times.

NF: *You discussed questions about practical agriculture and biodynamic farming?*

HG: All the details, especially about compost. I had to make compost from coffee grounds, from the chicken manure that we had, and from Hybro-tite, a crushed granite product which was available at the time. It was white as sand. It was not easy to get the right mixture. So as to have the coffee grounds decompose ideally, the pile had to be aerated well. It had to be turned quite often. The heat would come up very high, 150 degrees F in three or four days. Sometimes you had to add water. Pfeiffer was a compost expert, so of course I always had him advise me on how to best get the compost done. He was so satisfied with one batch of the compost that in one of the early issues of *BIODYNAMICS*, he published the analysis of the compost that we made and called it "Grotzke Compost"

NF: *How long did you work at Golden Acres?*

HG: I stayed there until '61.

NF: *When you think back to that time, did you notice any differences between the results you were getting growing crops in southern Germany and eastern Pennsylvania?*

HG: Oh, there were great differences, because as far as compost goes, the volume produced at Golden Acres was tremendous. We made, I think, 1,000 tons a year. That was used not only for our own farm, but part of it was used for the chicken farm and the orchard and vegetable farm, which I believe had forty acres. But we also sold compost. So compost was one of the main products I produced there. In southern Germany I had smaller areas. The manure that I used had to be bought from a farmer. Then I had to carry it out up the slope on my back to the herb beds. It was really an operation without machines. At Golden Acres Farm it was all machine-made with front-end loaders, manure spreaders, two tractors, and all that.

NF: Can you recall anything particular about the effects you were getting on the plants compared from Europe to the U.S., at least as far as those areas that you worked in? Did you feel like things were pretty much the same, or did you see a difference once you started growing herbs, vegetables and orchard crops here?

HG: I know what you mean. Let's put it differently. I think I always had pretty good success growing crops. I simply had to adjust the methods of growing crops and the amount of compost per acre to the climate, to the soil and to the environment. In southern Germany the soil stayed a little more moist due to rainfall and the soil itself was more sandy. At Golden Acres, it was clay soil which compacted very easily and wasn't aerated very well. So you had to adjust your whole management of the soil in each case. If you do get a relationship to the soil and build the right structure, then you get perfect crops.

NF: Right, and you were seeing that equally under both situations under variable management?

HG: You can't compare it too well, because in southern Germany I was only growing herbs, and at Golden Acres I grew vegetables and fruit. I introduced herbs though, because we had devised an animal herb blend to feed the dairy cows with.

NF: Oh yes. I remember that. That you also produced later at Meadowbrook. We used to get that on the Zinniker farm [in East Troy, Wisconsin] when I worked there.

HG: It really did a remarkable job for the dairy cows. We fed it on a daily basis. For that reason I introduced herbs. The herb formula actually came from Dr. Pfeiffer, who had received it from a German biodynamic farmer.

NF: At Golden Acres, did Pfeiffer use his [BD compost] starter and [BD] field spray, or did he also use the biodynamic compost preparations and the 500 and 501?

HG: At Golden Acres Farm we used the starter, the field spray, and the preparations 500 and 501.

NF: Did you spray anything on your soils?

HG: We used the field spray before plowing or disking, and 500 and 501 as called for.

NF: And you were getting good results that way?

HG: Right. I think we were getting very good results.

NF: What happened in 1961?

HG: Well, I probably would still be there, because it was such a fulfilling job and Mr. Stuber was so easy to get along with. When we talked and when I wanted to ask him things, I mean, I had a budget and all that, he always would say, "Use your own judgment." If you sometimes had a failure, he never would ask, "How come you miscalculated?" He always was in support of whatever we did. I still like this term, "Use your own judgment," because it's so easy to work according

Recipe for Animal Herb Blend Mixture (also known as Bio-Dynamic Cow Tonic)

Savory (*Satureja montana*) 0.2%
Marjoram (*Origanum majorana*) 0.5%
Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) 1.0%
Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) 1.0%
Southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*) 0.2%
Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) 1.0%
Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) 1.0%
Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) 2.0%
Angelica root (*Angelica archangelica*) 4.0%
Calendula flowers (*Calendula officinalis*) 1.0%
Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) 2.0%
Fennel seeds (*Foeniculum officinale*) 5.0%
Caraway seeds (*Curum carvi*) 5.0%
Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 15%
Linden flowers (*Tilia grandifolia*) 5.0%
Willow tops (*Salix purpurea*) 5.0%
Hazelnut leaves (*Corylus avellana*) 5.0%
Raspberry leaves (*Rubus idaeus*) 15.0%
Blackberry leaves (*Rubus fruticosus*) 15.0%
Birch leaves (*Betula alba*) 5.0%
Erica flowers (*Calluna vulgaris*) 10.0%
Goat's Rue (*Galega officinalis*) 0.5%
Lovage herb (*Levisticum officinale*) 0.6%

While the mix is considered a 'cow tonic', horses, goats, sheep, pigs, chickens and dogs enjoy this beneficial blend too. The dried ingredients can be rubbed through a screen or crushed by hand, reducing to ¼ inch particles. Once the ingredients are blended together, use as is, and add to the animal feed at the rate of one teaspoon per small animal or one tablespoon per large animal per day. The mixture keeps fresh for about a year when stored in darkness.

to that guideline. We were very successful at that time. Golden Acres Farm produced many finished products from crops grown on the farm. The grain, for example, was milled into flour, and a baker in Philadelphia baked bread from it. The chickens were frozen and sold as biodynamic chickens, and the meat [from the cattle] was cut up and sold as biodynamic beef to health food stores from Connecticut to Philadelphia. The tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers went into tomato relish, etc. I grew carrots, and a store in Philadelphia bought twelve bushels a week for a juice bar. The strawberries disappeared as fast as they could be picked, and everything went! There were deliveries to health food stores

every day of the week, going into different directions, from Connecticut into Philadelphia. All the vegetables went! I grew more than one ton of carrots and the same quantity of potatoes, for example. All the annual crops, like peppers and tomatoes, and beans, cabbage and whatever were grown. At the same time I also started biodynamic vegetable seed growing. We sold packaged vegetable seeds already in the 1950s.

NF: *Wow, you were way ahead of the curve!*

HG: Oh, I tell you! Now the effort to grow seeds was picked up again five to ten years ago?

NF: *You mean in the biodynamic organization?*

HG: That's right. [Heinz is referring to Turtle Tree Seeds in Copake, NY.]

NF: *I guess it's just in its embryonic stage here right now.*

HG: Well, I was trained in seed growing, and Burpee Farms in Doylestown was nearby. It was a logical effort on my part to make as many biodynamic products available as possible. A manager from Burpee's Seed Farm in Doylestown visited Golden Acres on occasion, because he found out that at that time I had developed a red-leafed Boston type lettuce that he was interested in. He was also interested in a tomato that I had selected from the early variety 'Valiant', which still would bear fruit in November. So he came a few times a year and was always surprised at what you could do with biodynamics.

NF: *So, you've been hiding your candle under a bushel here. I'm glad I'm asking you these questions!*

HG: It was a long time ago.

NF: *About forty-some years ago now. Let me ask you this. There's another neighbor near Newtown in Pennsylvania. That would be Josephine Porter. Did you get to know her?*

HG: Oh, she was in Stroudsburg. That was quite a distance from Newtown. That's up in the Delaware Water Gap area. Three hours away, I think. Pennsylvania's big like New York State. She always came to the conferences. At that time all the biodynamic conferences for the farmers were held in late summer or fall at Golden Acres. She was, of course, secretary of the Biodynamic Association. We also met at the conferences in Spring Valley every year. I think it was in 1956 that Pfeiffer made me a director of the [Biodynamic] Association in his own way.

NF: *I don't know. What would that mean?*

HG: (laughs) Well, Pfeiffer advised the board on all issues. There were the old farmers on the board, like [Ernst] Fetzer and [Hans] Mahle and [Ernst] Daniels, and so on, and he would just invite me to the meeting. After all issues were discussed at the board meeting, he said at the end of the meeting that he is proposing that everyone in the room is becoming a director for the following year. Then everyone looked at me, and he said, "OK. Now let's vote." And then I just got voted in.

NF: *That's how it worked?*

HG: That's how it worked.

NF: *There weren't that many other people, were there?*

HG: I would say there were maybe eight people.

NF: *And Josephine was on the board, too. How do you remember her? I think Hugh Courtney would love to hear that.*

HG: Oh, she was a very gentle lady. I mean, she was easy to get along with. She was always friendly and helpful, and, I think, a hard worker, because she did so many things, other than being the secretary. Above all, she made the biodynamic preparations. I had a very nice relationship with her. She was always helpful when I had questions and wanted to know things related to the biodynamic work. She was a real warm-hearted person.

NF: *Wonderful. Those are the people we are not going to interview anymore. Pfeiffer and Josephine. I'm glad it came up. So what happened in 1961?*

HG: Well, as I said, we became so successful that we reached a point where the farm couldn't produce enough products, especially the vegetables that were required. It started out with strawberries. I couldn't grow enough strawberries to supply stores in New York City and Philadelphia, and all the other towns in between. The second crop was carrots. I couldn't grow enough carrots to supply year-round for the one store in Philadelphia and all the other stores as well. I couldn't grow enough tomatoes. So Mr. Stuber hired a sales manager from Madison Avenue who had worked in advertising before. He moved to the farm, and Mr. Stuber moved to Massachusetts, so his house was occupied by this sales manager, and I continued to be in charge of vegetable and fruit production. What the sales manager then soon started, I just couldn't go along with. He went out to other farms and bought produce and then sold it as biodynamic. I told him if he would continue with such practice, I would leave Golden Acres Farm.

NF: *It's fundamentally wrong.*

HG: Well, he did not stop bringing in crops from the outside and selling them to our customers as biodynamic, so I made the decision to look for another job. That was in the summer of 1961.

NF: *So there was a kind of tragic ending to that successful story.*

HG: Unfortunately. To me the soul of the farm had died at that time. It didn't take long and the farm was sold for real estate. As I said earlier, I still would be there if things had developed positively, because we were in the forefront of biodynamic marketing.

NF: *It was a great team, it sounded like, with Pfeiffer doing the scientific work, you doing the practical management of it, and Stuber providing the physical body, so to speak.*

HG: Yes. And we were financially sound.

NF: *It was paying for itself?*

HG: As far as I could judge.

NF: *OK, so there you were, faced with the wide world of possibilities. What happened then?*

HG: Well, that year, in 1961, at the Spring Valley Conference there appeared a lady, a Miss [Margarete] Thomas, from Rhode Island, who came to the conference to learn about biodynamics. They had an herb farm in Rhode Island. Since I had a deadline to leave Golden Acres, I approached her and asked whether they could hire me. And then she said, "Oh sure. Why don't you come Labor Day and look at the place. If you like it, you can come." Then we made arrangements what I would get paid, and the hours, and all that. She said that they needed somebody to take care of the gardens because the old English gardener had died. We went there by car on Labor Day and looked at the farm. It was a beautiful estate. It had old-fashioned Lord and Burnham greenhouses out of stone and glass. The property had two thousand acres, with cranberry bogs and a big lake in the middle, just beautiful.

NF: *This was in Rhode Island?*

HG: Yes, and it was paradise, too. Blueberries were growing wild in the fields and along the woods. So I had accepted the position and I moved to Rhode Island later in 1961, after Labor Day anyway. Right afterwards we had a farmers meeting at the Piening Farm in New York State. It was the last meeting that Dr. Pfeiffer could attend. It was really a different meeting than all the others. Everybody felt some karmic developments were taking hold. We all felt like a real community of individuals and went home richer than we went there. Shortly thereafter I had to go back to Spring Valley, to attend Dr. Pfeiffer's funeral service.

NF: *Now in my own mind I invented that you had gone to Meadowbrook, but it sounds like you were working at a different estate at that point.*

HG: Oh, for certain. I worked at a different estate for another five years. My work cycles always seem to have been five years.

NF: *And this was the estate Miss Thomas had connected you to?*

HG: The place was called Greene Herb Gardens. The Greene was with an "e" at the end because there is the village of Greene. The owners of the estate were a Miss [Mittie] Arnold and her brothers. Arnold used to be a chemical firm in Providence, which I believe made textile dyes. Her father had bought this two thousand-acre farm a long time ago, and the children inherited it and were living there. Her brothers were living on other parts of the estate.

NF: *How did the owners view your interest in biodynamic agriculture?*

HG: Miss Thomas belonged to the New England Herb

Society and gave talks on plants and herbs at a radio station in Providence. She loved plants and the gardens and didn't want any poisons to be used in this private setting. Miss Arnold, as a friend of Miss Thomas, had the same interest and the finances to make changes if she wanted to. I remember when I made the condition that they had to buy a dump truck, another tractor, and a manure spreader, so that I could make compost. There was a plentiful supply of manure around in the area. I investigated that when I visited. She really agreed to acquire these tools. So when I came, I had a new dump truck, a new tractor and manure spreader. And every time thereafter when I wanted some other things, she responded by saying, "I have to sell some stock again."

NF: *Yes. I'm just thinking that it was paradise.*

HG: So I had all this new equipment, and I first made huge amounts of compost, which they didn't do before, and I also had the promise that I could grow vegetable and herb seeds there, because I had plenty of acreage.

NF: *Now was this an operation that had animals in it, or was it mainly fields and meadows and things?*

HG: It had fields and meadows and woods and lakes.

NF: *So you went right to work with your herb and vegetable seed operation?*

HG: Yes, right. I just moved it from Pennsylvania to Rhode Island.

NF: *Were you able to continue the strains that you had developed at Golden Acres?*

HG: Not really. The climate was so entirely different. It was much cooler. For example, I couldn't grow tomatoes as well, because the frost was much later in spring and earlier in the fall. Then I was so busy with other things, because they also produced herb seasonings and herb teas. I introduced the same teas that I had at Meadowbrook and Golden Acres. I continued growing crops for the animal herb blend. I was really busy, and I only had two people who could help me.

NF: *At this point were you using the Pfeiffer products [BD compost starter and BD field spray] or were you just farming straight organic, or how were you running it then?*

HG: It was the same biodynamic way. We used the compost starter, the field spray and 501.

NF: *Wonderful. And you were seeing good results as always, or was it a tough transition?*

HG: Oh, that was no problem, it was a productive soil, and then again, I'm a heavy composter when it comes to crops. I could put on up to twenty tons to the acre at Golden Acres, because we had enough compost. I could put on forty tons to the acre at Greene Herb Gardens if I wanted to and bring up the soil fertility fast, so I never had problems.

NF: *That's impressive. This is mature compost [1 to 1½ years], I take it?*

HG: That's right.

NF: *So, it sounds like you spent four or five years at Greene Herb Farm. Did you ever turn that into a commercial operation?*

HG: It was a commercial operation when I came there.

NF: *Oh, it wasn't just an estate garden?*

HG: No, it was not a hobby. Well. . . it was kind of a hobby, but they made some money from that hobby, too. They had herb drying facilities and sold packaged salad herbs and poultry seasoning and others by mail order, similar to the place in Germany. They had a Mayfair each year, inviting the whole community and from as far away as Providence.

NF: *Some of their elegant associates?*

HG: Right. Members from the herb society also came.

NF: *I guess we're up to 1966, or not yet?*

HG: Yes, 1966. I had the impression that I got too busy for them, because they expected a gardener who was taking care of the estate and of the formal gardens of the English type that they had.

NF: *Pruning the boxwoods?*

HG: Something like that. But I had the other people doing that. At any rate, Miss Thomas came to me and said, "Well. . . these fields need a sabbatical sometime. Let's put them into cover crops, and let them rest for a year." I said, "I cannot rest for a year though." She responded by saying, "I'm going to find you a job." She offered me one job to go to a college in South Carolina which I did not find attractive. She knew the dean of the College of Pharmacy at the University of Rhode Island, which was another option, taking care of their herb garden and laboratory. I talked to the dean and he was agreeable, but the job did not pay enough. At the time I used to go to an anthroposophical study group nearby with Dr. Howard Lasky as a group leader, who was living in Carolina, Rhode Island. There were other local people coming to the group, some even from Connecticut. One day, Dr. Lasky and I drove by a kind of a greenhouse operation that had a 'FOR SALE' sign. We looked at the property and I had the impression that I could never afford this place. It was a house with a three-car garage, a Quonset hut, a hundred-foot long plastic greenhouse with a shop attached. Dr. Lasky said that he knew the person selling the property. His brother had died recently and he hadn't any use for the five-acre property. So we called on the owner, and what do you think? They offered it to me for a very reasonable price, well below market value. Mr. Ernst Fetzer from Pennsylvania, who had become a friend and visited us quite often, said, "Take it", and provided the second mortgage. [The property Heinz is referring to is Meadowbrook Herb Garden.]

NF: *Amazing! And this place was all set up already?*

HG: Well yes. It was all set up, but I needed some capital to buy inventory, pots and so on. But the greenhouse and the other things were workable. The house was livable.

NF: *Then this next time would last longer than six years.*

HG: Well, I stayed there until 1983.

NF: *Now that you were your own manager, did you do things differently, or did you transfer the techniques and principles that you had been using previously?*

HG: I bought manure and again made compost in large quantities, because the five acres were very sandy, but not very fertile. I made the compost by hand though, because later on I had apprentices. The first four years I had to work outside at a textile-dyeing factory first and then I worked at Providence College, because I couldn't make my payments.

NF: *Didn't have enough volume?*

HG: We had the volume but not the customers. Getting customers was the main problem. The volume was always there.

NF: *Marketing was the big question.*

HG: You have to get recognized before you can get people to come to your place. So that's why I hired two people and I myself went out and worked three-quarter time for this college.

NF: *Wow! You knew the meaning of work at that point.*

HG: I would come home at four o'clock in the afternoon, and then I had to do all the work in the field and greenhouse, and work all weekend. But it was my best time, I must say, looking back.

NF: *You were really your own boss at that point.*

HG: It was the most rewarding time, because you did it the way you wanted to do it and you saw the results.

NF: *And that was again using the Pfeiffer products and the 501 spray?*

HG: Well, I used the 501 for all field crops. Later I used the compost starter for mechanical, machine-made compost, and the preparations I used for the hand-made compost.

NF: *Was Josephine Porter still making the preparations at that point?*

HG: She must have been. I invited Evelyn Speiden Gregg, who came to the farm and gave demonstrations of how to make the preparations ourselves for the benefit of the students and helpers. We made our own. I wanted to have our apprentices learn how to make compost. Every day they came, the first thing in the morning they had to do was turn the compost for one hour. They all benefited from it. They tell me now that by turning the compost every morning, they really were able to develop a feeling for life in the compost and in nature.

NF: *Could you mention a couple of names of the people who came through your operation in Wyoming?*

HG: Sure. David Miskell is one, who has now a tomato growing operation in greenhouses in Vermont. Owen Holder, who last was in Spring Valley, where he had a fatal [bicycle] accident, stayed with us five years, longer than anyone else. Janet Olive worked for us and became an eurhythmist, and [there were] many others. At peak times we had nine people helping us, not including my family.

NF: *I was told Owen Holder was a magnificent grower.*

HG: Owen Holder wanted to learn landscape plant propagation. He went to Maryland [to learn propagation and landscape management] but it did not work out so well, and I suggested to him to apply for a job in Spring Valley at Threefold Farm, because I knew they needed a gardener.

NF: *What would you tell a young person getting started in biodynamics here in 2003, fifty years after you got started?*

HG: I see great difficulties. For one, if you want to buy a farm like I did, it's very hard to do it nowadays, because you need the cash, and you certainly don't want to overspend right from the beginning. But there are, I think, positions available that are created by people who have the money to buy farms. There would be many people, I think, who would invest money in farming if they could find a biodynamic farmer. So the person would be working as an employee and not as an independent operator like the old-fashioned type. But there are enough people around who support organic/biodynamic farming, and there is certainly enough land around to have it farmed, if the people would be available.

NF: *If a young person was standing in front of you today, would you say the same thing Walter Stuber said to you, "Use your own judgment?"*

HG: (laughs) That would depend on the training they had. There are owners of land who wish to farm it biodynamically but cannot find qualified people to do so. It is a question that the Biodynamic Association is even struggling with now. Our [BDA] property in Oregon is a good example. But generally, there are more openings in biodynamics than applicants.

NF: *What about the CSA [community supported agriculture] movement?*

HG: On a local basis it's all right. It draws more people into agriculture, I think, and it establishes a relationship of townspeople to the land. Out of that group we might get one or the other person who becomes interested enough to become a farmer.

NF: *Just practically speaking, motivation aside, what makes biodynamic gardening interesting and worthwhile for you?*

HG: It is also the experience you have in doing the work. In time you come in tune and sensitive to the surrounding and to the relationship with plants. In our work, biodynamics was always equivalent with anthroposophy, and the

task for the individual farmer or gardener was to establish a link between the spirit in you and the spirit in Nature, and that's a task that might take a long time. Sometimes it might take half a lifetime, but sometimes it is also faster, especially if you started early, and if you are comfortable and familiar with statements that Steiner makes, in your work you can verify yourself what he said. You always stay in the living sphere. You never step outside. The more you do it, the more you become convinced that it's the only way to do it, so I never have had any problems. I had a good relationship to what you call the elemental world already as a child and had some experiences that made me sure when I read Steiner that he knew what he was talking about. I knew that what he said in some cases was true, for me anyway. In that sense I just grew into it more. Going even further, I always felt that biodynamics was given to us for a renewal of agriculture through anthroposophy.

NF: *I think that's amazing, because I believe some people realize that there is a whole other objective dimension of reality after they seriously study what Steiner said, but for you it was the other way around. You knew about this beforehand and found it confirmed in Steiner.*

HG: That's also why I wasn't impressed by organic agriculture, because that to me was always remaining materialistic. It just replaced chemical fertilizer with natural fertilizer. It never believed in and encompassed the spirit in nature. I once gave a talk to people at the agricultural college within the University of Rhode Island. I tried to explain that what they actually do is deny the spirit, and as long as they deny the spirit in agriculture, you cannot be successful, I feel.

NF: *I wonder how that went over!*

HG: Well, the professor was a customer of ours. He invited me, so he knew what I would say. He never could believe that in our greenhouse the plants in three-inch pots could grow all year without being fertilized now and then. He made soil tests. He wanted to see what that compost was like, and he said, "You don't have enough phosphate in there." He couldn't believe at first that I didn't fertilize the pots occasionally, but in the end he realized that biodynamics works differently. When I make compost the strange thing is, that for some reason I always have high phosphate in my compost.

NF: *I was just at the Copake Preparations Event [The Future of Preparation Making Meeting, February 2003], and one of the things that the wiser heads who have more experience told us was that we have to learn to accept that in biodynamic agriculture we are talking about the transmutation of elements. Is that something that you would agree with?*

HG: That's quite natural to me. I mean, how could I have more phosphate develop in the compost than what raw

materials bring into it? There is a transmutation taking place. Pfeiffer was right. Compost is the key to biodynamics. If you can't make good compost, you can't have a good biodynamic farm. In many cases, already in his time, compost was neglected a little bit, and he always stressed that you cannot make good compost by putting merely the starter in the gutter behind the cows and then think that's all you need to do. You really have to tend it. You have to turn it. You have to watch it. You have to treat it like your treasure.

NF: *As you say, the biodynamic preparations are not magic. You can't turn your back on them.*

HG: They are like yeast, and you have to really take care of them throughout the composting process, so that the compost will grow like a cake when you add the yeast, and that doesn't always happen by itself.

NF: *What's changed in the United States in the last fifty years, as far as biodynamics moving from its embryonic phase to the present?*

HG: Well, agriculture as such has changed from the family farm to a more industrial setup, and all the so-called organic products I see in the market are manufactured and packaged in more industrial operations than family farms. That's the danger, I think, because the biodynamic group just can't compete against that volume of production. We are outmaneuvered.

NF: *Have we gotten anywhere as a movement?*

HG: I think we're standing still. We haven't grown very much. When the generation of farmers that we mentioned earlier died, the farms were not taken over by the children, like Fetzer and Mahle, and many others. We have not regained enough biodynamic commercial farms to compensate for them. In that sense the organic farms have an advantage, because they have more market recognition. I think we have a mission to gain market recognition, because Demeter [the certifying organization for biodynamic agriculture] was not active enough to point out what the difference is between biodynamic and organic.

NF: *So what will it take?*

HG: Oh, it will take a great marketing effort. I have said many times that you would have to get together and create a marketing organization and coordinate the growing. That means the grower would produce the biodynamic product and then that marketing organization should buy these and all other biodynamic products and have them marketed or processed, and not leave it to the farmer, because he does not have the time and resources.

NF: *And ever since Pfeiffer invited you on the board, you were actively involved in the Biodynamic Association for all these years?*

HG: That's right, until this year [2002].

NF: *An honorary lifetime membership. So let's think: That's more than forty years! I'm always glad to talk about the history. Forty years are almost all of my lifetime. Except for David Miskell and Janet Olive, all the names you mentioned are no longer here, I believe. Would you be willing to say something about what biodynamic gardening is to you? What sets it apart and makes it really valuable?*

HG: I think it's a lifestyle. You have to do it because you love farming, you love plants, and you accept the thoughts of Rudolf Steiner as he expressed them in the *Agriculture* book, but also in all the others. In that sense, biodynamic farming, or a biodynamic lifestyle, becomes part of a philosophy of life, I think. Unless you love what you do, you cannot be successful, I feel. I told people that they shouldn't do anything they don't love to do, and if they love horticulture or farming, they certainly will make a success of it, but to do any work for nothing more than money is not really healthy.

NF: *That is a social statement.*

HG: You might see it that way.

NF: *For you, biodynamics is always a labor of love.*

HG: It was always an activity closest to my heart.

NF: *I really do appreciate this interview, and I think that many readers will too.*

Nick Franceschelli was born and raised in New York City. After high school he worked on biodynamic dairy farms and at the Josephine Porter Institute. He now works for the educational program at the Hawthorne Valley Farm in New York State.



Highlighting Celestial Forces in the Biodynamic Planting Calendar

The above title provides both a figurative and a literal approach to making more visible the various celestial forces at play when trying to take into account all that is involved in using a biodynamic planting calendar. As you will see from the insert of the August 2003 calendar sheet (reprinted from the *Stella Natura—2003 Kimberton Hills Biodynamic Agricultural Planting Guide and Calendar*) within this newsletter, certain colors have been used to highlight specific information in the calendar. One of the steps I take with the *Stella Natura* calendar every year is to use three different colors to distinguish helpful as well as less helpful energies deemed to be emanating from within the solar system which may affect the growing year.

From the work of the German researcher Maria Thun, we learn that she prefers to identify a time best suited for planting in the Northern Hemisphere as well as a different time for planting in the Southern Hemisphere. Since these times correspond in the Northern Hemisphere to the times of the descending moon and the ascending moon respectively, I choose to highlight the best times for planting in green and the less helpful times in red. The moon is ascending during the time it moves from the lowest point in the sky to the highest (presently in the constellation Gemini/Twins), and is a descending moon as it returns to the lowest point in the heavens (presently in the constellation Sagittarius/Archer). We also hear from Frau Thun that planetary oppositions generally have a beneficent effect on plants, while conjunctions, especially multiple conjunctions in the same time period can have a decidedly negative effect. Again, using green to highlight oppositions, and red to highlight conjunctions, provides an immediately visible “character” to any particular month insofar as the best times to accomplish certain tasks for the farm or garden. The color yellow is used to highlight the “trine” aspect between planets. According to Maria Thun, this trine or trigon aspect can, when certain planets are involved, actually create a stronger influence than the Moon’s presence in a constellation.

There is less than unanimous support amongst many in biodynamics for Maria Thun’s findings. If those who do not achieve the same results she has obtained would ensure that their effort includes the use of all nine of the biodynamic preparations, most especially BD #501 (horn silica) and BD #508 (horsetail herb/*lequisetum arvense*), it is much more likely that they will achieve results similar to hers. The strong emphasis placed by Maria Thun on the use of BD #508 is quite unique for European biodynamic practitioners.

There are some from that part of the world who object vigorously to labeling the horsetail herb as a biodynamic preparation, much less assigning it the preparation label of BD #508.

It is unfortunate that conclusions are reached about cosmic forces related to calendar use, when the approach to the use of the preparations does not follow the same practice of Maria Thun, and does not include the awakening of cosmic influences that can only be achieved when all of the preparations are used. Biodynamic agriculture cannot be practiced solely out of the sphere of the intellect, or to paraphrase Steiner, one who has not grown a beetroot should not give advice on things agricultural.¹

While a biodynamic planting calendar should not be approached from a dogmatic point of view that allows for no deviations from the prescribed recommendations, it at least provides a baseline for our own observations. For those willing to use all nine of the biodynamic preparations and also to use the work of Maria Thun as a baseline for their own work and observations, the likelihood of success is, in my experience, higher than simply relying on phases of the moon for planting and cultivating guidance. Until one promotes both BD #501 and BD #508 to the status of equal use with the other preparations, one will achieve the same picture of celestial influences based on moon phases and archaic tropical zodiac that has been in use for the last 2000 years, in spite of the precession of the equinoxes. That picture will work with chemical, organic and incomplete biodynamic practice, but a new level of forces will enter into the planting activity when all of the preparations are in use. There is much more work that needs to be done in defining all the nuances of cosmic extra-terrestrial solar system influences upon plants, and such work can be done on a backyard garden scale if careful records are kept. The beginning step is to carefully record the exact time of planting. All are encouraged to undertake their own calendar observations, however narrow in scope.

Reference

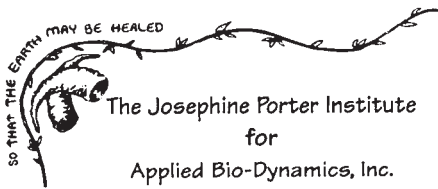
- 1) Rudolf Steiner, *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture* (Kimberton, PA: Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Inc., 1993), 15–16.

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“The old instincts have been lost. Intellect has lost all the old instincts – nay, has exterminated them. That is the trouble with materialism – men have become so intellectual, so clever. When they were less intellectual, though they were not so clever, they were far wiser; out of their feeling they knew how to treat things, even as we must learn to do once more, for in a conscious way we must learn once more to approach the Wisdom that prevails in all things.”

Rudolf Steiner – *Agriculture* (Adams translation), Lecture 7, p. 131

SO THAT THE EARTH MAY BE HEALED



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