

Biodynamic Agriculture Australia Ltd

Living Soil Living Food

“Stories from Australian biodynamic farmers and gardeners”

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*Compiled by Anna Kula, Senior Researcher,
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Announcement

In conjunction with this “booklet of profiles” on selected biodynamic gardeners and farmers, a series of detailed interviews of each biodynamic grower is given in the soon to be released podcast series produced by Andrew Nicholson. The podcasts will be posted on various platforms including: PODBEAN, SPOTIFY and APPLE PODCASTS and YouTube.





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The Essence of the Biodynamic Method

The biodynamic system has a powerful vitalising effect on soil and plants. It benefits food producing and other local ecosystems and where it is applied.

Biodynamics is an organic method of utilising plant and mineral-based vitalising agents known as “the preparations”, described by Rudolf Steiner in the early 20th Century. Preparations enhance the soil food web and various soil forming processes, which strengthen plant growth and provide resilience to disease, pests and climate extremes. Therefore, biodynamic growing is regenerative enabling growers to produce longer lasting food of delicious taste and high nutritional value.



It may be difficult to accept that the minuscule quantities of substances, the ‘indications’, used in preparations achieve the highly significant effects to soil that they do. Elevated Brix (plant sugar) levels, accelerated accumulation of soil carbon, and the dramatic increase in rainfall infiltration and water holding capacity are just some of the massive benefits of biodynamics.

Properly applied biodynamic preparations and practices in place of conventional growing practices enhances soil biology, improves plants resistance to disease, insect attack and climate extremes, as well as reducing input costs. Several years of biodynamic practice can build topsoil down to 300mm where a mere 4mm was present at the beginning of the biodynamic treatment. Any scepticism evaporates as the potency of the preparations becomes evident. Moreover, a well-run biodynamic system is syntropic – building complexity and producing much more energy than it consumes. Such a system is truly sustainable.

An important part of biodynamic practice is the observance of solar, lunar and planetary influences. Adherence to these patterns can result in notable increases in plant vitality and productivity. Specific guidance involving an antipodean Astro calendar is available for Australian growers.

Transformative results from biodynamic applications are seen worldwide in an extensive variety of gardening and farming practices. For many though, the biodynamic impulse also involves a certain consciousness or attitude, in recognition that the Earth is a sacred being, humanity is valuable, and food is a divine gift.





About Us

Biodynamic Agriculture Australia Ltd is a not-for-profit company located in Bellingen NSW. We have been making and supplying biodynamic preparations as well as supporting biodynamic growing in Australia for over 30 years. We are a small enthusiastic team, the preparations and products are mostly handmade using quality ingredients and we sell online Australia-wide.

We are governed by a Board and offer membership, which provides significant benefits. We produce a Biodynamic Handbook and a quarterly journal, News Leaf and everyone can subscribe to our free e-zine, Between the Leaves. If you follow us on Facebook or Instagram you will be kept up-to-date on everything biodynamic and how to go that one step further.

There is a wide range of situations where biodynamics can be applied, our job is to enable that to happen! If you are interested in growing food or fibre using this wholistic method, be it on a balcony, home or market garden, vineyard, cattle property, grain farm, dairy or orchard it can be done biodynamically and we are here to help.

Written by John Hodgkinson, Editor – Between the Leaves, Biodynamic Agriculture Australia Ltd

BIODYNAMIC PREPARATIONS

healing the earth





Cherie Hutchinson, Jurlique Farm Manager (SA)



Land

105 acres, 300m above sea level, mixture of sandy and clay loam.

Location

Biggs Flat, Adelaide Hills, South Australia.

Biodynamic techniques

Traditional Steiner inputs, made by Jurlique Farm Team, including 200 tonnes of biodynamic compost.

Produce

Over 35 different botanicals and healing herbs such as roses, calendula, pansies, chamomile, marshmallow root, lavender and lemon balm.

Jurlique is a natural skincare company established in 1985 by Jurgen and Ulrike Klein. The owners were passionate about growing biodynamically which led to Jurlique's farm receiving biodynamic accreditation in the 1990s. The Biggs Flat farm which Cherie manages was purchased later in 2006. Jurlique prides itself on owning each part of the process or as Jurlique refer to it- the seed to skin journey!

Cherie was initially employed with Jurlique in Production Management to help expand the business. Working for the company Cherie fell in love with the ethos of biodynamic farming. Fast forward a decade Cherie finds herself working 'The Farm' as Farm Manager with a Diploma in Horticulture in tow. Cherie received her Diploma in Horticulture through a training provider with both study and on the job learning. She attended regional and statewide workshops on agriculture and horticulture and learnt about biodynamics on the job, through training providers and workshops including those run by the Biodynamic Australia Association. Cherie has met with local growers and networked within the horticulture industry, however her biggest teachers have been the Jurlique staff who have shared a wealth of experience and knowledge with her.





The role of Farm Manager provides Cherie with a mix of corporate responsibilities, managerial work, farm work and managing tourism. When talking about her workplace Cherie says “The Farm team live and breathe Jurlique each day so you can’t help but feel inspired by it. When you see the love and hard work that goes into the product... You feel a true sense of pride and satisfaction from your work.”



Another aspect of her job that Cherie enjoys is educating customers on Jurlique’s Organic and Biodynamic farming. Cherie breaks down the meaning of Biodynamics as *bio-* life and *dynamis-* force, the life force of nature. “To me, life force can be felt, it’s about energy, balance, looking, seeing, tasting. Biodynamics for me is more than just ‘farming’, it’s having a relationship with your property, producing things yourself so you do not have to leave the farm gate ... the end result is of the upmost quality as you have worked with nature, not against it”.

Cherie has witnessed a 2.5% increase in the soils’ organic matter in the heavy use production area’s since implementing biodynamic techniques on The Farm. Cherie

lists introducing more organic matter as being one of the biggest challenges of working on the farm. The property was a dairy farm for over 100 years, despite this the soil had low traces of heavy metals as the previous owners were quite organic with their farming. In the future Cherie plans to continue to look for leaner ways to farm denser crops while cultivating less soil. In the last few years Cherie and her team have been looking at ways to minimise land usage to get the same results. “It’s been challenging but also very exciting, we’ve seen some amazing wins already”.



Working in ‘cadence with nature’ is what Cherie enjoys most about growing biodynamically. Finding this flow or cadence helps Cherie prepare for the changes and challenges ahead. “If mother nature is throwing something at us, heavy rain say, or dry conditions, we don’t panic. We know we’ll find a window to plant, to weed, to harvest ... we trust the process instead of pushing against it, biodynamics allows you to really connect with this more.” This way of working with the land and the seasons helps Cherie manage her team’s expectations and look for windows of opportunity to get the job done. “You walk away feeling quite empowered by your days, your weeks, your seasons. It’s fantastic.”





Experience working on The Farm throughout the seasons has taught Cherie to slow down and connect with nature and its rhythms. Observing the seasons has given Cherie insight as to when to plant each herb for maximum yield and minimal labour and weeding. Planting and propagating against biodynamic timelines have given the Jurlique team great accuracy and success in germination. This meaningful connection with nature has helped Cherie and her team in more ways than one. “I have quite an accurate breakdown of each year, knowing the peaks and troughs” relaying this to her team “means we know the stresses and we generally have quite good seasons with great consistency in yield, staff performance and general wellbeing of the team.”

On a personal level biodynamic practice has restored Cherie’s fitness level to that of her younger self and connected her with nature and her surroundings as she looks forward to the changes each season brings.



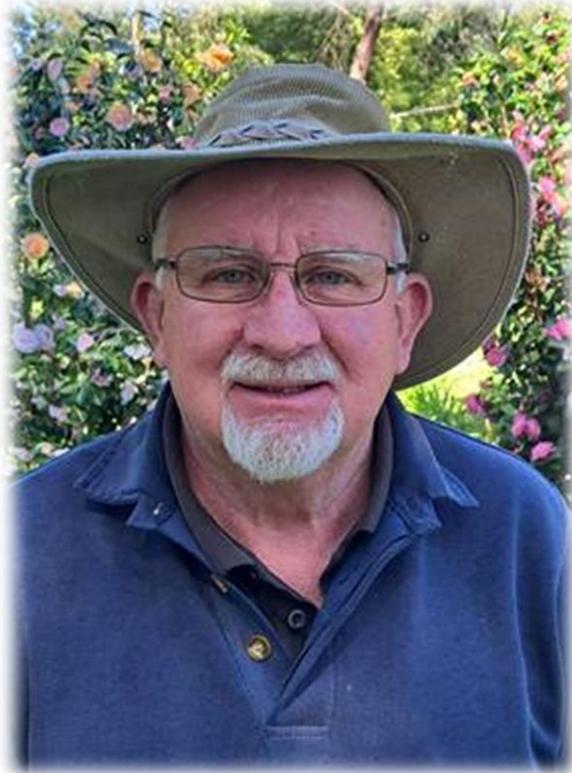
Cherie’s advice to beginner biodynamic growers is to focus on the soil, “adding more to it, seeing what it needs and understanding your plants” while using biodynamics to guide your flow of timing. Cherie suggests looking at the year ahead of you, any big events you may have and working back from there. “A mud map is a great way to start!”







Kym Green, Ellimatta Orchards (SA)



Land

Four 12-hectare properties on rolling hills with a mixture of tree crops and native bush land. Terrain has alluvial flats, steep and very steep hills.

Soils vary from clay loamy soils to eroded sandy loams.

Location

Lenswood, South Australia

Biodynamic (BD) techniques

Soil and atmosphere spray, tree paste spray, tree wash – horn manure 500 and horsetail foliate spray

Soil testing and analysis with the right amendments, multi-species green manure crops, permanent ground cover mid rows, composted animal manures and plant teas with biodynamic preparations.

Produce

Apples and cherries.

Kym and his brother Peter are sixth generation fruit growers in Lenswood, South Australia. Their orchards, Ellimatta Orchards, are intensively planted with multiple modern varieties of organic and biodynamic apples and cherries.

Ellimatta Orchards were once standard commercial orchards farmed chemically for many decades. This all took a turn after Kym attended a one-day soil presentation by American Elaine Ingham in 2000 which focussed on soil health, biology and compost. He attended a four-day workshop the following year presented by Elaine and Arden Andersen who spoke about improving soil health using compost and compost teas, as well as the physics and chemistry of soil. Kym says the presenters spoke of the damage “we farmers were having on the environment and human health using artificial chemicals and fertilizers! Very confronting... Then, they returned to the USA, leaving us to aimlessly wonder about to find our way forward- certainly not supported by local resellers or department of agriculture.”

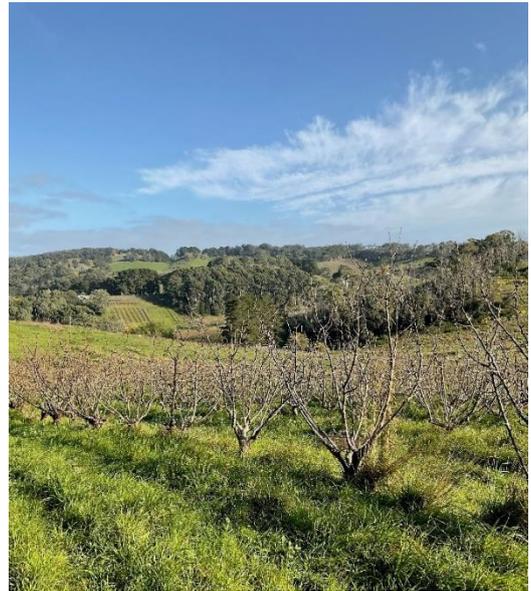
Sometime later in 2006 Kym was looking for direction when he heard about biodynamics and attended a workshop held at a local farm. “This was a big turning point, a way forward” for Kym and Ellimatta Orchards. Gradually Kym implemented biodynamic practices alongside the chemical system he had been using for the last 45 years. The more he learned the more his soil and land improved. “The organic matter in our orchards has risen significantly. When we started with [biodynamics] in 2006, the organic matter was around 1 to 2%. Now it’s 6.5 to 8%. This has led to



more rain fall staying on farm soaking in, not running off causing erosion. During the irrigation season we apply 60% less water than my neighbour. If I irrigate more, it runs out of the blocks.”

For Kym biodynamic practice is all about helping build soil and plant health, which in turn builds resilience against pests, disease, and climatic conditions. In fact, Kym feels that the biggest impact biodynamics has had on this property has been on the farm’s resilience to varying climatic conditions, with his plants and trees tolerating climatic changes far better than the crops of neighbouring farms.

Kym has also found that his orchards have fewer insect pests compared to its chemical farming days. “The broad-spectrum sprays were killing off many insect species even the predators!” he says. Today Ellimatta Orchards are herbicide-free and tree undergrowth growth is left undisturbed. This helps keep the ground up to 12 degrees cooler in summer and provides habitat for bugs to help feed the orchards’ ecosystem.



Despite all the positive changes biodynamics has given the land some challenges remain. “Disease is our major issue. Black spot spores germinate on most rain events. The spores can come from within the orchard, neighbouring orchards or from rain drops themselves.” Kym’s biodynamic consultant has suggested using copper and sulphur sprays on the trees as to avoid the dreaded black spot blemishes on their fruit.



When Kym was first starting out with biodynamic farming, he would time applications according to cosmic rhythms and calendar dates. Nowadays those are applied according “gut feel” and muscle testing. “It has been said that most people fail with biodynamics because they were wanting perfect conditions and timings - that never comes, so they didn’t apply.” As Kym has gained more experience in biodynamics his approach to stirring and spreading preparations has also changed. Today his methods are focussed more on making sure he has enough time to apply preparations on his crops while minimising the stress of stirring over a longer period. In “busy times I simply hand stir in a bucket for 1 minute and add to my orchard sprayer that is filled with a [PHI’ON] energized water...No stress, no anxious ‘intent’ in the water and gets the job done.”

Kym explains that the biodynamic preparations bring good order to the orchards’ natural environment and the people who work there. On a personal level “[biodynamics] has changed me considerably. I feel more empowered in helping/ assisting my orchard- it’s soil, its plants, its life, to cope with producing high quality fruit through the course of the season... Our fruit has that ‘WOW’ factor now. The cherries have certainly changed over the [biodynamic] journey, with more flavour, texture, and shelf life.” Through his journey with biodynamics Kym has found himself more in tune with his orchards and the natural world around him. “I’ve turned off the tractor radio and now observe my trees and plants and let them tune into me. We have some sort of communication happening which I feel is good for the orchard and myself. When I’m pruning— which is a massive





job taking many months, I don't look at the tree over all — I just prune the bad wood out of the tree — I feel the trees guide me and at the completion they look absolutely magnificent!"

Biodynamics has given Kym a better understand of the farm's ecosystem and his role in it, helping build plant and soil resilience through natural inputs. Knowing that he plays a role in improving and supporting his orchards has also improved Kym's mental health. "The joy I feel when customers comment on the wonderful eating experience of our cherries. They say 'they have never tasted anything like them' — this is an awesome feeling. I feel very proud with the product we have grown and how we grew it."

At 67 Kym feels as though he is still in his prime and has lots to offer other growers, he is interested in going out and assist willing growers. Compiled on the following page are just some of the tips he has for those at the start of their biodynamic journey.





Kym's Top Tips for getting started

1. Speak to Biodynamic Agriculture Australia Ltd. Get their advice and guidance, they can help a lot as you learn and understand. They have published a great 'how to' manual (the Biodynamic Handbook)- it's the wealth of knowledge you need to go forward into biodynamics.
2. Attend workshops run by knowledgeable biodynamic growers.
3. Search the internet. It has lot of articles biodynamics and connections.
4. Speak to practicing farmers who are growing your crops- not all crops respond the same!
5. Look for guidance. Find a mentor.
6. Join a biodynamic group in your area.
7. Get the biodynamic preparations out on your land. Don't stress over amounts and timings, 'just do it'. Bear in mind that biodynamics is not all about the preparations.
8. Know your soil—get the right type of soil test. Probe your soil with a penetrometer or a thin rod to feel for looseness or compaction and dig holes to see and understand what's under your feet. Smell the soil.
9. Get a good advisor to assist in understanding what is required to improve your soil. I have found that the soil adjustment with the most beneficial results is a combination of lime, gypsum and humidified compost.
10. Grow multi-species ground cover crops, this is most important in the formative years.
11. Keep good records and observations— sometimes things change slowly, and we forget about these changes over time.
12. 'Observation is the basis of intelligence' it's the key to success. One example is looking at weeds to help indicate where you're placed. You can sweeten your soil with calcium, phosphorus, hume acid and bacteria foods to balance and build your system. Green manure crops are also great for building soil health.
13. When starting off you need to push things along to get things happening especially with horticulture. Cultivation and herbicides are very disruptive to the biological world— avoid where you can.



on

to





Go one step further



Work in synergy with nature:

- growing chemical free biodynamic organic food
- enhancing soil fertility to benefit plant and animal health
- improving water holding capacity
- increasing resistance to disease and insect pests
- creating habitat for biodiversity

Become a member to receive:

- products at reduced rates
- News Leaf quarterly journal
- access to consultants
- The Biodynamic Handbook

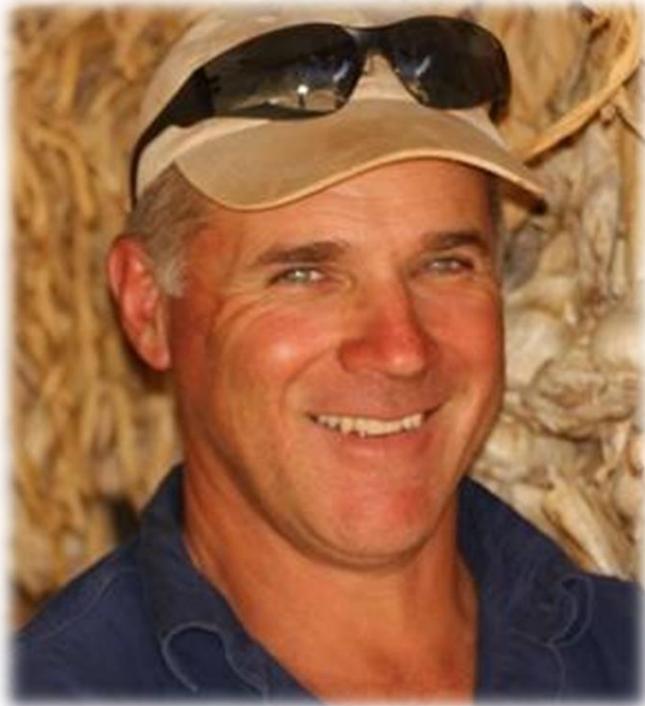


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Adam Collins, Kisima Farm (QLD)



Land

100-acre block, creek running through the middle. Two layers of basalt soil with clay overlaid in different areas.

Location

Evelyn Tablelands, far north Queensland.

Biodynamic techniques

Remineralised soil, own compost and preparations including growing, harvesting, drying and processing herbs through animal parts. Biodynamic calendar guides planting, cultivation and harvesting.

Produce

Main crop is garlic. Corn, potatoes, peanuts, oats, chickpeas, lupins, ancient grains, rice, vegetables, fruit, cattle, chickens and pigs have been grown also.

Born and raised in Kenya, Adam completed his Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture in the United Kingdom. However, after five years of learning how to 'kill' everything, Adam felt disillusioned as he felt farming was "about growing life, not killing it." In 1985 Adam's family moved to Australia and bought a 100-acre block, named Kisima Farm - the place of peaceful water.

After doing some soul-searching and travelling, Adam partnered with his father on the farm in 1999 and struck a deal. "Since I was going to be doing all the physical work, I made it clear I was not going to be using chemicals or [follow] the industrial [agriculture] model of food production." Adam was keen to take the once-was grazing property to greener pastures. Not knowing quite where to start, Adam spoke to a local organic farmer who directed him to the National Biodynamic Association at the time.





One-week later Adam found himself travelling across India with acclaimed New Zealand biodynamic horticulturist Peter Proctor in a group organised by Cheryl Kemp of Biodynamic Agriculture Australia. Following this expedition Adam took a week-long course to become a Master Prep Maker and has now been running workshops across Australia for twenty years!

Speaking about his journey to becoming a biodynamic grower Adam says, “I came to realise that I had to work with the Whole, to help others raise their awareness so whatever form of farming or gardening you are part of ... Biodynamics helps it all by helping you becoming more connected to it.” For Adam, biodynamic agriculture has been about learning the part he plays in the wider picture, “what is our function as human beings not just as human doings.”



Adam first ‘got hooked’ on biodynamics when learning about the solar and lunar rhythms, and the influences the planets have in our solar system and our life on earth. He realised that there was so much more to experience than what was in front of him. “When we are operating from just the physical, we only [see] a small part of the picture. When I started working on the farm biodynamically, I noticed a shift in myself. Changing the energies helped not only our soil, plants and animals tune in and start vibrating at a higher frequency, but also myself.” On a personal level Adam says that biodynamics helped him to ‘wake up’ and change the way he was living. “I am coming to a place where I feel more at ease with life, sure I have moments of flapping... but overall a sense of inner calm and that everything is O.K. no, actually everything is beautiful and perfect.”



In Adam’s teachings there are three elements to biodynamics. First is learning about good organic management; factoring in the diversity of microbes, plants and animals, crop and animal rotation, companion planting etc. The second is learning about biodynamics on the energetic or emotional level, necessary for using Biodynamic preparations made with the right intentions, with reverence and gratitude. “These preparations help us to re-tune, not only our selves but the plants, animals and soil, back to nature, back into the whole picture, the whole cosmos.”

Lastly biodynamics can be understood on the spiritual level. “It’s just about us rediscovering our true selves, our intuition, our knowingness, the gut feeling we so often ignore, becoming *part of* not apart from” Adam explains. “I see biodynamics as a tool that helps me see all the pictures of our universes, to raise my awareness to all levels of life...It works on the physical, emotional and spiritual levels and helps with whatever I do, do better.”



So how do the results of the multi-faceted biodynamic practice compare to that of conventional farming? Adam conducted a produce longevity experiment where he placed three tomatoes on his windowsill, one grown in hydroponics, one chemically and one biodynamically. The hydroponic tomato started to decay within three days, the 'chemical' tomato showed signs of black rot after six days whereas the biodynamic tomato showed some wrinkling only after two months.



When Kisima Farm switched over to biodynamic growing, the Collins family noticed a greater variety of different birds and insects - ones they had not seen before. Over time the structure, colour and water-holding capacity of their soil also improved. Although this result hasn't been easy as Adam lists getting the heavier clay soils to work as one of the biggest challenges on the farm. However, with time, those have become their most productive soils and recently came out as top of the region in a blind test.

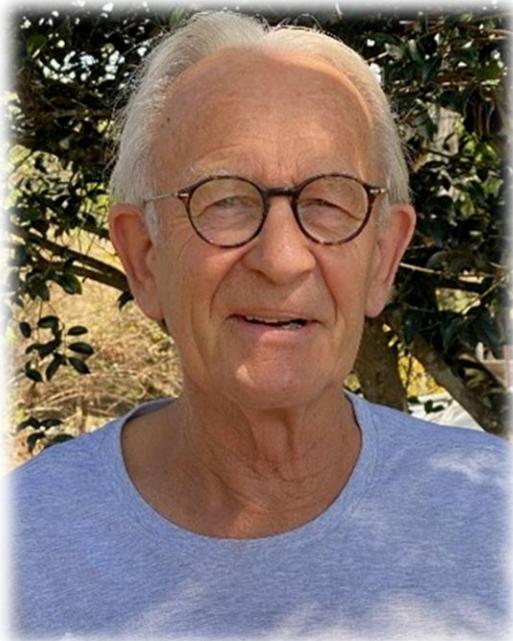
For Adam, life on the farm is supported by his community of friends. "Seeing the 500 horns being buried and then lifted by a group of friends, the joy and anticipation but most of all, it's the sharing that makes my heart sing. Biodynamics is the energy that surrounds us and helps us to reconnect with the physical and emotional parts of our beings." In the future Adam and his partner Gwen hope to create a 'little piece of paradise' to share with others, growing a mix of crops, grains, vegetables and fruit trees, maintaining forested area and wetlands.

For the last 20 years Adam has spent many hours on the phone or at people's farms helping others 'find their way into biodynamics', to understand what it is all about and how to get started. His word of advice is "start small, gain some knowledge and understanding then expand from there and know you're not alone."





John Hodgkinson, backyard gardener and former joint owner of *Hodge Podge Farm* (NSW)



Land

1989-2005: 40 hectares on a steep-sided valley of red basalt soil (*Hodge Podge Farm*).

2016-present: Container garden with highly paramagnetic Dorrigo soil, highly paramagnetic quarry crusher dust, Nambucca Series (shale) soil and compost. Joint garden with red paramagnetic soil on a river terrace.

Location

Dorrigo Plateau, NSW (previous)
Bellingen, NSW (current)

Biodynamic techniques

Applications of 500 (horn manure) and horn silica (501) to 8 hectares of permaculture (*Hodge Podge Farm*). Composting with the preparations 502-507.

Produce

Many varieties of potatoes, fruit and vegetables (*Hodge Podge Farm*). Culinary, medicinal herbs and vegetables (current).

At the age of three, John's family forewent city life in Sydney and moved to a 256-hectare property east of Glen Innes in NSW. They ran it as a dairy farm before the Korean War wool boom when the family swapped Jersey cows for Corriedale sheep. John's father followed the NSW Agriculture Department and CSIRO guidelines for pasture improvement using exotic grasses, clover species, fertiliser as well as toxic chemicals for animal parasite treatments; and soil conservation etc. Superphosphate was the answer to almost all soil issues at the time.

In 1964 John left the farm to pursue a science degree at the University of New England but dropped out after eighteen months. Some years later after seasonal work around Australia (for example cane cutting in FNQ), and teacher training, he started on a 21-year career with the Royal Australian Army Educational Corps (RAAEC) where he completed his studies. John speaks fondly of his last 6-year posting, "I was conducting numerous geography field trips out of our Enoggera Education Wing (School of Army Education) into diverse and often controversial south-east and central Queensland locations ... I took every opportunity to encourage my students to think critically about agricultural land use and





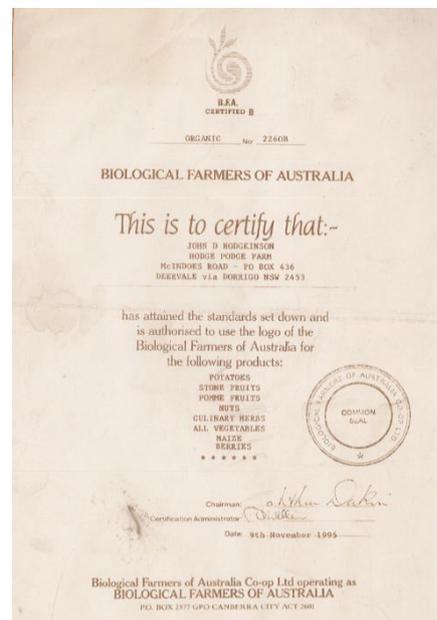
carefully assess both built and natural environments for sustainability. I like to think that I had a beneficial effect on serving members in this way, especially regarding how training areas are cared for environmentally.”



In the late sixties John was inspired to adopt a ‘do no harm’ approach growing food organically in his backyard in Sydney and later in Brisbane after reading *Silent Spring* (1964) by Rachel Carson, documenting the environmental harm caused by pesticides. This approach omitted the use of chemical pesticides, fungicides or soluble fertilisers. John realised that the produce he grew after applying homemade compost “grew spectacularly better than with artificial fertilizers, was better tasting and resisted insect and fungal attack much more than before.”

In 1993 John retired from RAAEC and moved with his wife onto their own property on the Dorrigo Plateau in NSW, lovingly named *Hodge Podge Farm*. In 1996 a town noticeboard flyer caught John’s attention advertising for a two-day horn retrieval in Thora. “The experience launched me into full-scale adoption of the biodynamic method on our property. Right from the start the efficacy of the preparations was clearly visible, not only to me but to numerous visitors ... and study groups.” When John returned from what was essentially a two-day workshop he began applying 500 and horn silica (501) to his 8-hectare permaculture-designed polyculture on *Hodge Podge Farm*. When he began spraying the vortically stirred 500, he noticed an intriguing phenomenon where “many different species of birds simultaneously appeared and began repeatedly swooping over the sprayed area.” John has since heard of similar reports of birds reacting to soil (500) and atmospheric (501) spraying. “We call this an example of the animal response to a changed local energy regime, and name it ‘ether swoops’ into the ‘energy dome’.” For John this “reinforced the notion that biodynamics is more about putting out energy than substance.”

As John continued to grow food biodynamically he “noticed a tendency towards ‘giantism’ in both fruit and vegetables, especially in root vegetables ... brassicas and pomme fruits.” John observed superior aroma, flavour, quality and shelf-life in his biodynamically grown produce compared to conventionally farmed food. When asked to describe biodynamic growing John’s response was that “the fundamental difference from conventional growing is the near-absence of external inputs to the garden or farm in the case of biodynamics. At its best a biodynamic property is operated as an independent entity based on strong stimulation of its soil food web, with plants growing in harmony with this environment, continually maintained and enhanced by timely application of the biodynamic preparations.”



Aside from the physical transformations of his food garden, John feels that biodynamic practice has developed his “lateral thinking and problem-solving ability” which helps him embrace change more readily, feel healthier and have “a more spiritual outlook on life.” Viewing the garden or farm as “a singular self-sufficient entity (in terms of external inputs such as fertilizers) is just the beginning of this guiding spiritual philosophy.”





Visitors often described the “special feel of *Hodge Podge Farm* from the moment they entered the driveway.” John feels that this comes from the “physical and aesthetic thrill at the display of powerful life force: plant and animal health in an oasis-like setting.” Over the years the farm attracted Coffs Harbour and Armidale TAFE horticulture classes, TV programs such as *A Big Country* (ABC) and *11 AM* (Channel 7), journalists, as well as customers of his and his wife’s Dorrigo Café. John’s main order of business were his varieties of mail order potatoes, supplying “small consignments of seed and eating tubers to mainly backyard gardeners” across Australia. The business model was labour-intensive, and unfortunately the cultivation required over such a limited area, lowered the soil organic matter and invited unwanted pathogenic fungi.



After 10 years of operation John was obliged to sell the farm when he moved to Bellingen to care for his ageing parents. He took over his father’s 300 square metre backyard vegetable garden and had the soil tested. The results found no fungal association due to chlorination of the town water. John then turned it into a “mini *Hodge Podge*” without the tree polyculture, but of course using the biodynamic preparations. Since his parent’s passing and the selling of that property, John has managed numerous rental gardens, and currently maintains his biodynamic container garden by making and applying compost and mulches and keeping on top of crop rotations. Between 2005 and 2011 John also shared in developing a 200 square metre terraced bed veggie garden just outside town supplying bunched salad varieties to a weekly grower’s market stall.

John’s advice to fellow biodynamic backyard gardeners is to “learn biodynamic techniques carefully via a workshop or mentoring and/or study of the Biodynamic Agriculture Australia’s *A Biodynamic Handbook* and the *Antipodean Astro Calendar*.”

Since moving to Bellingen in 2005, John has volunteered at Biodynamic Agriculture Australia. Here he has been involved in making preparations 500-508, packaging and dispatching, and has recently turned his talents to the role of “editor/writer/adviser/mentor and workshop presenter.” John feels fortunate “to have been able to spread biodynamic positivity” through his farm in Dorrigo but more so through his “writing, article selection and editorship for Biodynamic Agriculture Australia’s quarterly member journal *News Leaf* and latterly the subscription e-zine *Between the Leaves*.”

John continues to observe and learn different approaches to, and outcomes from biodynamic practice through presenting his biodynamic extension work. “It has left me in no doubt as to how close attention and strong intent lead to predictable and exceptional outcomes and co-creation with Nature.”







Go one step further

Access support to achieve:

- chemical free biodynamic organic systems
- land rehabilitation
- regenerative agriculture
- soil stability for erosion control
- habitat for biodiversity

Work in synergy with nature:

- reduce input costs
- achieve ethical environmental management
- enhance soil biology, increase water holding capacity, quality of food and resistance to disease and insect pests



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Luigi and Nidya Marasco-Bellido, The Patch Organics (NSW)



Land

Share farming a certified organic 500-acre farm with wide rolling hills, 200 acres of thick ancient forest valleys, with a creek through the middle. The Patch Organics cultivates on an acre paddock that used to be a holding pen for dairy cows. The site was highly compacted with heavy clay soils covered in Kikuya but rich with nutrients.

Location

Levensvale Farm, Bellingen, NSW

Biodynamic techniques

Spray preparations, composting, clay balls for compost. Astro calendar to sow, transplant, propagate, harvest for storage or eating and to plan for when to spray or apply biodynamic preparations.

Produce

Herbs, vegetables, and pasture-raised chicken. Cattle are also raised on the property using holistic management grazing methods.

When Nidya and Luigi met in Brisbane, Luigi was running a tiling business and Nidya worked in the corporate sector. Both were starting to feel burnt out and disillusioned in their respective fields, with Luigi feeling the effects from the toxic building materials he was working with and hard labour on his body and health. The couple were also becoming increasingly concerned about the state of the world and “wanted to learn skills that would help [them] be more resilient.” Together they undertook several permaculture courses in Brisbane, which led them to examine their lifestyle and way of life going forward. “We soon discovered that we wanted to move away from the city into a smaller community, that was a bit more climate resilient and started investigating small towns that were like-minded.”

Around that time their friends, The Bakers, bought Levensvale Farm in Bellingen which was in conversion to being a certified organic farm. The Baker family had an idea of sharing their land to a market gardener to increase the diversity of produce and to gain access to organic produce. On the 2nd of January 2021 the couple took a gamble designed the Patch Organics Permaculture system in six months and moved in June and so The Patch Organics was born!





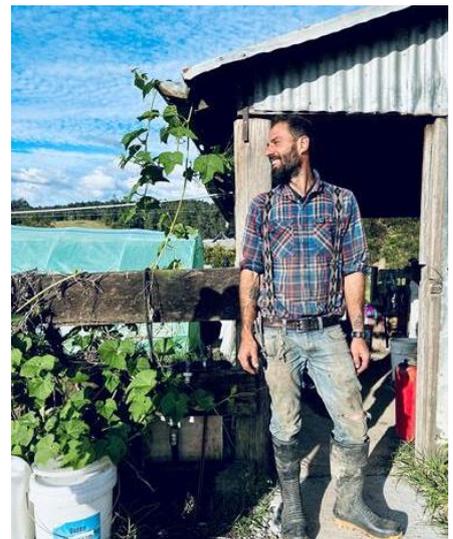
Work commenced several weeks later as Nidya and Luigi began excavating terraces on the farm's slopes. They brought in paramagnetic crusher dust, a nutri-tech mineral mix and some compost. Tillage radish was used to break up compaction in the soil and abundant crops, such as cucumbers and pumpkins, were planted to bring additional biology to the land. Each terrace has a support row of perennial, deep-rooted plants to prevent erosion, attract pollinators and predatory species for pest management.

Today The Patch Organics is a permaculture-designed, organic and biodynamic market garden growing numerous vegetables as well as pasture-raised organic chicken. The two hope their organic garden will "create a more resilient community and environment" by improving access to good, nutritious food grown using regenerative growing practices and "by delivering workshops that increase skills and knowledge around food."

Nidya and Luigi have held several workshops over the last two years teaching permaculture, humane slaughtering, butchering, and hunting. Between 12- 24 of November 2023 the couple will be co-hosting a Permaculture Design Course on Levenvale Farm with Garden Juju Collective that "encompasses our influences, the farm's strengths as well and the values of Bellingen town." The course will deliver the permaculture design curriculum as well as preparing students "to meet the challenges and opportunities that we are facing today such as regenerative ag, biodynamics, walkabout permaculture, social permaculture, rewilding and sovereign food."

The couple continue to share-farm on the Levenvale property which also operates as a certified organic beef cattle farm. When asked about this approach they say, "we've taken a very unconventional approach that most people would say is crazy... [but the Bakers have] brought us in, integrated us into the farm and life, and have sort of acted as an "incubator" of sorts to help us get up and running." This way of share-farming has "been very much a relationship of deep trust, respect, deep gratitude, and shared values. They've shared their vision with us, we've shared ours with them. We try to have meetings to ensure we are on the same page, we nurture our relationship as friends, and we genuinely care about each other."

When the pair were starting up the market garden, they became interested in biodynamics but had not made the 'dive' into its teachings and practice. This all changed when Luigi and Nidya welcomed their baby daughter in April of 2022. During this time Luigi was running the farm single-handedly as Nidya navigated motherhood and caring for their newborn girl. Luigi says that he "found the biodynamic Astro Calendar an essential tool for his own stress management" during this time. The "astro calendar is a great place to start, the information in it is rich and deep, but you don't need to understand it all to use it." The couple recommend starting small and concentrating on understanding the planting categories - when to sow, transplant and harvest.





Later that year Luigi was introduced to Mark Pye by a mutual friend and was invited to volunteer at BAA where Mark worked at the time. “When Luigi went in, he met the rest of the team including John Hodgkinson who also connected with Luigi. We believe that they saw something special in what we were trying to create with The Patch Organics and they wanted to support us. Soon after, Luigi was offered a casual role on the prep team” says Nidya. Later that year Luigi and Nidya attended an ‘Introduction to Biodynamics 2-Day Workshop series’ with Hamish McKay and Charlie Arnott hosted on Levenvale Farm. This inspired Luigi to study the Agricultural Course by Rudolf Steiner and he has since started a “mixing and spraying” service, spraying preparations on farms in the community.

These days Luigi and Nidya employ a range of different biodynamic techniques at The Patch Organics. The market garden is scheduled according to the biodynamic calendar with preparations sprayed according to the season and the current microclimate on the farm. Composting enhancer clay balls are used to ‘super charge’ compost so that “they are not just full of biology but also, life force.” The farm also uses a cow pat pit, vermi-composting tanks and preparation spraying.

Switching to biodynamic growing Luigi and Nidya noticed an immediate change to their garden beds which have become “luscious, vibrant and pest-free.” “Our plants look completely different compared to year 1 and while time and effort regenerating the soil is definitely a big influence, I don’t think we could have reached the quality we have achieved as fast as we have if it wasn’t for our use of Biodynamic preps and practices” says Nidya.

The family feels that the practice of biodynamics has connected them to the land in a deeper more spiritual way. When asked to explain what biodynamics means to them the answer is “biodynamics is a form of physically practicing anthroposophy, and over time, the practice deepens, and the revelations unfold. We are only just at the start of our journey.” The family hopes to evolve their market garden into “a showpiece of a small-scale permaculture system, circular economy and alternate system living.” Their hope for the future is that the business thrives, feeds and supports their family and the community while regenerating the environment.







Sam Statham, Rivers Road Organic Farms (NSW)



Land

Rosnay Farm is ~37 ha within the 140ha community title farm, Rivers Road Organic Farms.

Red clay soils- sections with little or no topsoil, some with deeper topsoil but heavier, slow draining soil underneath.

Location

510 Rivers Road, Canowindra. The farm slopes north to the Belubula River and up to higher hills at Orange and Mount Canobolas.

Biodynamic techniques

Horn Manure, stirring machine and small spray tank. Mix biodynamic preparations in self-made compost, preparation 501 and pepping have also been used.

Produce

20 ha of vineyards for wine, and 10 ha of olives for oil and for fruit, and 110 fig trees.

Sam grew up on a family farm described as a “bush paradise of rough, hilly country” in northern NSW. His father Richard rarely used pesticides on the bushy terrain but despite this, Sam had little exposure to organic farming both at home and in his studies of environmental management at university.

In 1995 Sam’s parents moved to a smaller property near Canowindra with irrigation and better soil. The following year biodynamics made its way into Sam’s life when he found “Biodynamic Gardening” by John Soper on his grandfather’s bookshelf shortly after he passed. Sam took the book sailing with him to New Zealand where he happened to meet biodynamic farmers Ian and Gita Henderson in Christchurch. The couple showed Sam their biodynamic farm and when questioned about their preference for machine stirring Ian replied, “I made the machine with my own intentions.” This mix of practicality and intent has inspired Sam’s understanding of biodynamics as he continued to read more of Steiner’s work. “I think that the projection of intentions, whether through physical actions, energy projection, or even just prayer-slash-communion with the land, are all valid uses of the same laws of nature in which we are all part of ‘The All’” he says.

Sam continued his venture across New Zealand to Hōhepa, an anthroposophic farm in Hawkes Bay which provides on-site school and home-life for children and adults with disabilities. Here Sam learned about the rhythms, cycles and energies of the earth and sky. “Still growing today, Hōhepa is an ongoing source of inspiration and I look forward to going back” says Sam.



After his exposure to biodynamic farming in New Zealand, Sam rediscovered the benefits of working in a family business and changed his career to go back to the family farm. His parents, Richard and Florence also realised the benefits of biodynamic farming and so the farm got its first treatment of horn manure in spring of 1997. Following this Sam and Richard were inspired to learn about biodynamics from Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association members Cheryl Kemp, John Priestley, and Hamish Mackay, attending various workshops as well as a conference in 1998. They visited private growers and had consultants visit the farm. “These were all inspirational people and they showed us a wide range of ways that the goals of biodynamics can be achieved.”



In the last 20 years, Sam and his family have continued to develop their farm using organic and biodynamic practices. Sam’s family began grape growing, contracting other wineries to produce their wine. Sam was later inspired by his “cousins in the south of France who carry on the tradition of ‘Vin De Garage’ - winemaking in the village. They said to me... that I would be totally capable of making wine...as long as I had control over the vineyard and knew the quality of the fruit I was using.” Sam’s wine making evolved quickly, with his first wine winning ‘Organic Wine of the Year’ in

the Winestate Organic Wine Awards in Adelaide. The wine was made using sulfites, yeast and filtration. For some time, Sam produced ‘Vin De Garage’ wines alongside commercial wine; now commercial wines are made on the farm with very few additives with the goal of becoming ‘additive free’ in the near future.

The farm itself has been turned into a Community Title subdivision inspired by Hōhepa and the Billen Cliffs community in Nimbin, both of which had a mix of private and commonly owned lots. Today the property has 23 lots, one common, 12 farm and 10 housing lots “with multiple growers working together under an organic covenant”. “The housing lots all have a farming lot attached which can’t be sold separately thus preserving the ‘farm community’ aim of the project.” Sam, his wife Simone and three children live in their owner-built strawbale house on one of the lots.



Sam’s farm ‘Rosnay’ continues to use horn manure but now uses a stirring machine and small spray tank to make stirring and spraying a bit easier. “Our experience is that spraying boundaries can be just as effective as spraying whole blocks” Sam advises. Compost is made by mixing manure and old straw with the farm’s waste products such as grape marc, waste figs and olives, then using a front-end loader to turn the windrows. Biodynamic preparations are added and the resulting compost is spread across the land every second year. The farm also uses preparation 501 “in wet springs to try to ‘pep up’ the soft vine foliage, or in cool autumns to try to speed up the sugars and ripeness of the vines.”





The family have experimented with peppering which has produced mixed results. Following Cheryl Kemp's instructions, peppering stopped starlings eating the grapes making them "groggy and solitary as opposed to sharp and hive-minded." One year later the same approach was a miss. Recently, during a particularly wet spring they were able to successfully pepper snails but unfortunately this was only effective for a week. The biggest challenge has been working to rejuvenate the soil. Sam and his family have used deep ripping, liming and gypsum, rock phosphate and basalt dust, compost and cell grazing. The farm has needed constant input as "it doesn't take long for the fertility to dwindle especially in a drought."



Despite the trials and tribulations of working to produce a successful biodynamic farm Sam says he feels "blessed that I live and work on a family farm, with the added benefits of being part of a community title farm." When asked about how his family sees this lifestyle Sam says "the kids see how much work is involved, and its daunting...if they go into the wider world and then do their own thing, at least we will always have a place here for them that they can call home."

For Sam the practice of "biodynamics is an expression of love of the land, and of the land's ability to bring people together". He believes that Steiner wanted farmers to build on his ideas which has now resulted in the spectrum of different perspectives on biodynamics from traditional "physical approaches to the use of radionics and field broadcasters, and even to the communion with 'Boss' animals such as kangaroos, asking for guidance and ... paying respect to the land and its spirit." Sam personally believes that "there is a connection between the human and the universe though the spirit" that we are all part of 'The All.' I think Steiner learned and shared many ancient ideas...there's plenty that he didn't share because we all have to make our own journeys." In biodynamic farming Sam experiences "forces of attraction and repulsion that we can feel in our hearts, harmony and balance in our sense of beauty, rhythms of up and down in our energy and motivation, cause and effect in every action and thought...it just 'feels good'". The result of such spiritual farming is the making of great wine which reflects the good intent and biodynamic practices used.

Sam offers his personal experiences and advice to other growers. "[If I] find that if it's going to be too hard to use a biodynamic practice at the right time, e.g. 500 during the waning moon, I don't do it. The challenge has been to say to myself, "it doesn't matter if it's not the perfect time, it's the thought that counts, just get out there and do it"."

