

Biodynamic Perspectives

BIODYNAMICS AND THE DIGNITY OF THE FARMER

ROBERT KARP

ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING THINGS about the food movement right now is the awakening that is taking place to the dignity and vocation of the farmer—an understanding of the farmer not simply as a producer of food, but also as an agent for social change and community revitalization.

It struck me recently that this recognition of the central importance of the farmer is something that has sometimes been overlooked, even in the sustainable agriculture world. We talk about the three legs of the stool of sustainability—the economic, the social, and the ecological. But sometimes we overlook the one who must build the stool in the first place: the farmer.

We rail against the corporations, but we often forget that industrialized agriculture has been able to take hold to the degree it has only by undermining farmers' trust in their own ideas, perceptions, and creative capacities. We forget that, in truth, our movement has grown and developed through a kind of spiritual awakening among farmers and, from there, to consumers and their communities.

How do we nourish this awakening?

In biodynamics, we recognize that the farmer's inner, creative fire—their deeper instincts, insights, ideas, perceptions, and imaginations—are what give shape to the farm. These are, therefore, what we must awaken and nurture.

This is why, for example, the Biodynamic Association's apprenticeship program includes activities like the keeping of a daily journal. This is why we offer workshops and courses for farmers that teach deep and careful observation of soils, plants, and animals followed by quiet, meditative reflection on what has been observed. This is why we are trying to build learning communities where farmers can share ideas, insights, best practices, and moral support with one another. The farmer is on a

path of development, and, as a movement, we must understand, nurture, celebrate, and support this developmental path, this spiritual journey of the farmer.

Most importantly, biodynamics illuminates the interweaving of the spiritual and material dimensions within ourselves and within soils, plants, animals, farms, and landscapes. This knowledge helps farmers see their work within a larger context; awakens their inner freedom and creativity; and nourishes wonder, responsibility, and self-confidence. It also calls forth the desire to create farms that are a source of health and healing as a deed of service to the world.

In contrast, human freedom and dignity are an illusion in the materialistic worldview, which sees us as impelled to act the way we do by forces outside of us and processes beyond our control. It is thus no surprise that industrialized agriculture undermines farmers' innate common sense and creativity and places them under the yoke of outside experts, banks, and corporations. It is ironic that these materialistic ideas and technologies are also imbued with the hubris of total human power and control over nature. These two principles—one-sided power over the world and one-sided powerlessness in the face of the world—go hand in hand in the soul of modern materialism.

The local, organic, and biodynamic farmers that I have been privileged to work with, on the other hand, are neither imposing their wills aggressively onto the world nor accepting passively what the world gives. They work more like artists in a continual process of give and take with the world. They listen deeply to the speaking of nature, cosmos, and social and economic conditions, and out of this listening they form creative pictures, moral imaginations, and inspired visions for their lives and their farms. Through this process they create the farm organism as a gift to the wider community.

While an agribusiness focused on one or two commodities can be run more or less mechanically by an operator or contractor or part-time farmer, a healthy, bio-diverse, farm-based ecosystem must be continually created and nurtured, day in and day out, by spiritually awake farmers who have the desire to learn ever again how to orchestrate soils, plants, ani-

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imals, manures, and markets into a dynamic community of life.

Biodynamics is not simply a movement that advocates a set of practices, standards, techniques, or even products that we think are the solution to the ecological crisis. Rather, we are a movement that, in the first place, seeks to awaken and nourish the inner freedom, fire, and creativity—and therefore the true dignity, the true vocation—of the farmer.

This awakening is the foundation of the food movement and is the wellspring, I would suggest, of a truly sustainable agriculture.

Robert Karp is the Executive Director of the Biodynamic Association and has been a leader in the local food and sustainable agriculture movement for over thirteen years. Stay up to date on Robert's writings and more on our blog at biodynamicsbda.wordpress.com.



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