

Professional group for biodynamic fruit-growing on tour in France

"When you go on a journey you come back with tales to tell" (German original: "Wenn jemand eine Reise tut, so kann er was erzählen" Matthias Claudius, 1740–1815). With exactly this in mind, the professional group for biodynamic fruit-growing chose France as their destination this year. The town of Cluny, with its medieval abbey, was the starting point of the tour, conveniently placed for the first visit to the preparation maker Vincent Masson. His farm in the village of Château is perfectly organised for making the preparations. Our mobile phones had to stay in the car, and we listened in his training room to his impressive report on the latest research on the microbiome in the soil, as well as on its discovery and characterisation by a number of research institutes in recent years. For promoting the microbiome in the soil, Vincent Masson depends on the horn manure preparation 500 or 500P and their colloidal form. In support of this he quoted scientific studies and shared illustrations of the soil colour, structure and porosity. From his field observations as a consultant he is able to detect an increase in plant health when using horn silica at the start of the growing period. But more than three sprayings in spring do not result in any additional benefit. Spraying at midsummer and in the fruit ripening period leads to better flower buds and better-tasting fruit. Masson also spoke about water quality and the creation of chaos when stirring the preparations. It is only vigorous stirring that produces real chaos and therefore a "thorough penetration" of the preparations. For biodynamic preparations to be effective requires a professional manufacturing process, something akin to the manufacture of medical remedies.



From l to r: Josef Tinzl, Thomas Pfisterer, Fritz Prem, Klaus Oberhofer, Regula Bolliger, Karl Schloffer, Vincent Masson, Martin Peer, Albrecht Dennele, Niklaus Bolliger, Piet Korstanje

Impressed by these presentations, we then visited a commercial farm belonging to Patrice Saussac in Saint-Didier-sous-Aubenas. Saussac grows peaches, apples, rye and potatoes and uses composted cow dung as manure. After harvest he lets the horses graze the fields. In spring and autumn he applies 500P to improve the taste of the fruit while horn silica is applied mainly in May and June. He grows rye in the peach orchards to increase biodiversity. The fruit is kept in cold stores and Mat Tiempo boxes and then sold direct from the farm and through retailers.

Next day our itinerary took us to the biodynamic farm run by Bernard and Natalie Brun in Mautlaur-en-Diois. In some of the vineyards 100% of the flowers were damaged by frost. This year's wet spring made it harder to control fungal attack in the vines. As well as the use of preparations, Brun sprayed horsetail

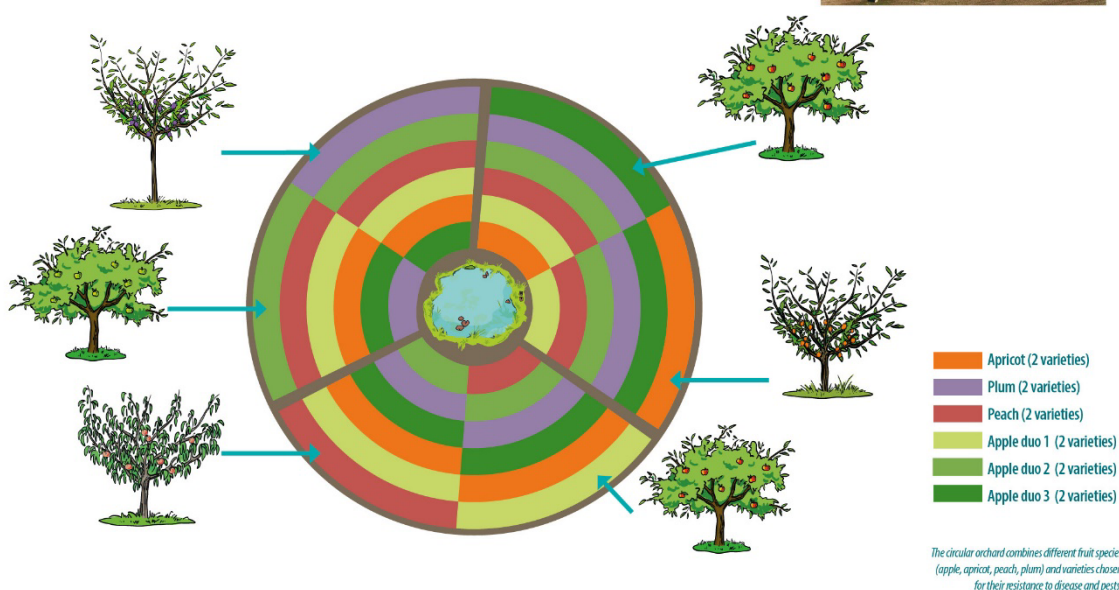
tea to help minimise the use of copper. He also applied nettle and meadowsweet teas. For his walnut trees he had confusion pheromone traps placed on the high trees using a drone. The nut orchards are kept open in July using a cultivator in order to keep moisture in the soil. In autumn they are then sown with green manure. The nuts are washed, dried and shelled. The nuts and nut oil are sold to retail trade while the nut shells are used as a cost-effective and sustainable energy source.

Le Cèsarde, the family farm owned by Roland Tourre in Châteauneuf-de-Bordette, grows 17 ha of biodynamic olives, apricots and pistachios. It is a very Mediterranean climate and has become increasingly dry over the last few years. This year frost also decimated the apricot harvest. The reservoirs built in 2003 were used to irrigate the olives, but it proved impossible to get the olive flies under control. The trees in the plots that were not irrigated were resilient to this pest, so irrigation was switched off again. Horn silica is used frequently here because it boosts plant health and product quality.

On the final day we were invited by Sylvaine Simon of the Gotheron Integrated Experimental Research Unit (INRAE) and marvelled at Project Z that was planted in 2018. To promote biodiversity, various varieties of apples, plums, peaches, apricots, figs, pomegranates, nuts and berries are being grown in a large circle covering 1.5 ha – entirely without any plant protection sprays. In addition, sowings are made of green manure, lavender and rosemary. The trees are healthy and without any signs of scab or mildew. The aim is to find out how plant synergies, soil systems and the relationship of pests to beneficial organisms function. The yields are calculated economically and, in the case of apples, achieve around 65% of a dessert fruit yield, in the case of figs, a similar yield to normal production. Thanks to the offset layout of the rings of fruit trees, production costs can be kept low. Following this we had a discussion session on boosting plants using herbal teas, potentised preparations, and the pH value and redox potential (Eh value) of the plants.

Diversified fruit production circles

- › To produce pome and stone fruits
- › To diversify species and varieties in order to limit the development of pests and diseases
- › Varieties the least susceptible to the main pests and diseases of each species
- › An equivalent number of trees per species and variety to facilitate marketing
- › Efficient circulation along the six spirals of fruit trees



Brimming over with the many wonderful impressions and inspired by the biodynamic preparation work from our visit to Vincent Masson, we were able to see how biodynamic principles were put into practice on the three farms run by Patrice Saussac, Natalie and Bernard Brun, and Joseph and Roland Tourre. We

are impressed by the love, expertise and hard work that go into running these farms and by the high quality of their products.

The circular orchard of INRAE in Gotheron that we were shown by Sylvaine Simon far exceeded our expectations. We are certain that it will produce interesting results to be transferred into practice.

We wish to thank François Warlop, Claude-Eric Parveaud from GRAB, Soazig Cornu from MABD and all the others involved, but particularly Niklaus Bolliger for organising and for his professional interpreting.

Professional group for fruit-growing
Klaus Oberhofer