

Living Farms

The magazine of the Section for Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture works!

Four women show how

Farms as schools and places of healing

Three examples

In rhythm with the earth

Indigenous wisdom

How food affects us

Interview with Dr Jasmin Peschke

Breakthrough in research

Interview with Dr Jürgen Fritz

The secret of living forces

Mechtild Oltmann-Wendenburg

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The earth as a living being

Contributions from the Agriculture Conference 2025

Several articles in this issue of the magazine are based on contributions to the Agriculture Conference 2025 and were created in collaboration with the weekly journal *Das Goetheanum*. Would you like to read more articles about the Agricultural Conference 2025 or watch recordings of the main events? Then visit the website of "*Das Goetheanum*" or *Goetheanum.tv*. You'll find inspiring contributions from Chik Ying Chai, Ueli Hurter, Monique Macfarlane, David Martin, Jasmin Peschke, Matthias Rang, Eduardo Rincón, and Martin-Günther Sterner.

«*Das Goetheanum*»



[Goetheanum.tv](https://www.goetheanum.tv)

The recordings of the Agriculture Conference 2025 contributions will be uploaded to the media library starting 27 June 2025.



Dear Readers,

The earth is a living being. This statement is simple and clear, yet its meaning is profound: Are we allowed to naively indulge in the beautiful image of the earth as a living being because it nourishes the soul? Or should we question the claim, since it is not entirely scientifically verifiable? I believe we need a direct encounter and a comprehensive perception of the earth – a double expression of love: a kiss and an embrace. But how?

The field has been ploughed; now, before sowing, we must gather the stones. And look – what a wonder: I'm holding an ammonite in my hands! This limestone has been a living being since ancient times. Thus the solid earth with its geological layers reveals itself as a condensed, living entity that has come to rest over millions of years.

After the hot and dry summer, a light mist hangs over the morning landscape for the first time, and dew moistens the cows' hooves as they return from pasture to the barn. When I broaden my perception, I become aware of dew, mist, rain, snow – the earth's hydrosphere. Our cosmic neighbours, Mars and Venus, lack such a life-sustaining envelope; it

belongs to the earth thanks to its middle distance from the sun.

Against the flat light of autumn, I see the green tips of sprouting grain just a few days after sowing. A new life cycle is delicately commencing in this field. When I expand my gaze, it turns to the great, long-living plants: the trees. In the equatorial rainforests and the boreal forests between the 42nd and 71st northern latitudes, they create continuous, global habitats and enable the rhythmic seasonality in the temperate zones. Viewed this way, we live across the entire earth.

These examples show: authentic experience makes possible an encounter with the earth as you, as a living being – a kiss. The broad perspective allows us to develop a wise knowledge about the earth as a living being and its manifestations, drawing from the many insights of natural and spiritual science – an embrace.

This third edition of *Living Farms* offers insights into a wide range of encounters with the earth. It illustrates how we can build a respectful and sustainable relationship with it – including during the Agriculture Conference on "The Earth as a Living Being", taking place from 5–8 February 2025, with over 700 participants from more than 40 countries, to which several articles in this issue refer.

Ueli Hurter

Co-Leiter der Sektion für Landwirtschaft
am Goetheanum



Sustainable agriculture works!

Four practical visionaries leading the way

Agriculture is at a turning point. Around the world, farmers are striving to find sustainable cultivation methods that not only regenerate the soil but also offer social and economic perspectives. Four inspiring women from different regions of the world show how change is possible. With contagious enthusiasm, they opened the Agriculture Conference 2025 at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

Egypt: smallholdings and climate champions

Thoraya Seada from Sekem presented the initiative “Economy of Love”, which supports smallholders in Egypt through training programmes in applying biodynamic farming methods and establishing themselves in the market. She provides farmers with hands-on knowledge, creates incentives for the transition, and educates consumers. Currently, only 0.006 percent of farmers worldwide follow biodynamic principles. Yet, even the smallest impulse can create big change – like the highly diluted biodynamic preparations spread over the fields.

The numbers behind Economy of Love are impressive: Between its founding in 1977 and 2024, one million trees have been planted in Egypt, 26,000 tons of compost produced, and 25,000 hectares

of land converted to biodynamic agriculture. Five thousand small-scale farms have completed the certification process for carbon credits, removing 130,000 tons of CO₂ from the atmosphere. For these efforts, Sekem received prestigious honours such as the Gulbenkian Prize for Humanity 2024 and the UN’s Champions of the Earth Award. By the end of 2026, the initiative aims to transition 40,000 additional smallholdings to biodynamic agriculture.

Naglaa Ahmed, project manager at Sekem and representative of Egypt’s smallholder farmers, emphasises that healing the earth begins with healing the human being. The transformation, she says, is not only about farming techniques but also about a shift in mindset and awareness. Sekem pursues a holistic approach and has launched new initiatives, including health insurance for farmers and their families. The



Thoraya Seada



Naglaa Ahmed



Swati Renduchintala



Ercilia Sahores

effectiveness of biodynamic farming is also being scientifically studied, convincing more people to join the movement.

Ahmed shared the story of a farmer whose son died of cancer – a tragedy that led him to switch from conventional to biodynamic farming. He invited his neighbours to follow his example, sparking a ripple effect of change. People have different motivations for making the switch: some want to preserve the environment for future generations, others seek economic improvement or better health.

« I am here as a representative of the 'Economy of Love'. I would like to share our story with you – a story of love for our earth, for our soils, for our health, and our community. »

Thoraya Seada, Sekem, Egypt

India:
combining ancient wisdom
with new insights

Swati Renduchintala, a scientist at World Agroforestry and a representative of the Indian ecology movement, begins with a powerful statement: “I represent one million farmers of the state of Andhra Pradesh, India.” Her goal was to regenerate the earth by making agriculture imitate nature. She explains that it is not humans, but microbes that do the real work in the soil. Microbial activity was essential for soil fertility, yet since the 1960s this knowledge had been lost due to industrial agriculture and the use of chemicals and pesticides. It was therefore necessary to revive this “ancient knowledge” and combine it with new scientific insights.

Swati Renduchintala calls for scientific proof of the success of ecological farming, as universities and the agricultural industry have long worked against this approach. This transformation required more than short-term training programmes – it demanded a kind of withdrawal process: a detox from the belief in technological omnipotence promoted by the “Green Revolution”. Converting farms and changing public awareness required long-term support from people with not only theoretical knowledge, but also practical experience in natural farming.

Her experience shows that it is often women smallholders who lead the way in transformation. So far, one million smallholder farmers have joined her conversion programme, but the potential is far greater – in her state of Andhra Pradesh alone, there are 60 million smallholders.

Mexico:
bringing desert lands
back to life

Ercilia Sahores, director of the Organic Consumers Association, reports on her work in the semi-desert of Mexico, where she has established a sustainable farming initiative. In 2005, she first visited San Miguel de Allende, a picturesque town with cobblestone streets and a rich cultural heritage. Five years later, she moved there to organise the region's first agroecological street market. Since then, the state of Guanajuato – once shaped by agriculture and mining – has undergone major changes: today, it is dominated by vegetable export crops like broccoli and romaine lettuce, grown with heavy use of chemicals and pesticides. Urban sprawl, golf courses, and boutique hotels are also spreading.

This development has had severe ecological consequences. Groundwater levels drop by two to three meters each year, forcing wells to be drilled 120 meters



deep instead of the previous 40. Surface water is contaminated with arsenic, fluoride, and heavy metals. Sahores points to the region's colonial past, when silver mining, deforestation, and the forced labour of indigenous communities exhausted the land. Today, many farmers struggle to survive and are forced to let their undernourished livestock roam freely. Young people are leaving – working in tourism, migrating illegally to the US, or joining drug cartels.

Despite these challenges, Ercilia Sahores fell in love with the landscape – especially the moment when cacti bloom after a brief rain shower. But she warns that desertification is not only a problem in the Global South. Worldwide, 3.2 billion people are affected by degraded land. To counter this, she runs a sustainable farm with vegetable and fruit production, livestock, a permaculture and biodynamic agriculture school. A shop and restaurant offer local, GMO-free products. Still, a severe drought in 2019 caused major losses, reducing the humus layer from eight to three centimetres.

A turning point came with the discovery of fermented agave leaves as

animal feed – an “epiphany in the desert”. Mexico is home to 150 of the world's 230 agave species, commonly used for tequila. Instead of discarding the leaves, Sahores and her team began fermenting them into nutritious, low-water feed. Agaves don't require irrigation, retain moisture, and grow quickly. Combined with acacias, whose deep roots access water and improve the soil, they form a sustainable source of fodder. While clover requires 5,000 litres of water per kilo and corn 1,200 litres, agave feed uses only 60 litres.

« It's about bringing the earth back to life, regenerating it. Natural farming means 'imitating' nature. »

Swati Renduchintala, India

Initially, the idea met with scepticism, as raw agave had previously caused digestive issues in animals. Fermentation



« We are working against desertification: we have a farm where we grow vegetables and fruit. We have sheep, chickens, turkeys. There's a school. People come from all over Mexico to learn here. And we also employ people from surrounding communities. »

Ercilia Sahores, Mexico

made it digestible. Today, the project helps to regenerate degraded land, stabilise water systems, and improve livelihoods for smallholders. Sahores sees this not only as a sustainable technique but as a way to heal both the land and its people.

What enables change

The projects described demonstrate that sustainable farming methods not only regenerate nature but also open up economic opportunities and strengthen social communities. All four representatives of these inspiring initiatives highlight that the key to success lies in community and collaboration with political institutions: in India, farmers organise themselves in collectives; in Egypt, pilot projects serve as models for government programmes. Crucially, successful models must be documented and shared to overcome scepticism and accelerate transformation. Education, practical knowledge, and close support for farmers are essential to secure lasting change.



Schools, universities, places of healing

What farms can become

Agriculture is in crisis – economically, ecologically, and socially. How can today's farms, which often resemble lifeless industrial facilities, be transformed into vibrant places once again? Four visionaries show us what's possible.

Tobias Hartkemeyer

Educator, agricultural scientist, biodynamic farmer, teacher, and co-founder of the CSA farm Hof Pente in Germany

Growing up on a farm and a strong interest in education led Tobias Hartkemeyer to study both agriculture and education, with the aim of connecting the two. When he asked his father – also a farmer and academic – what he thought about combining community-supported agriculture, biodynamics, and schools, his father replied: “Well, it's impossible – but it has to be done.”

What does a person need to lead a meaningful life? Above all, places where they feel needed – where things can't function without them. In a school where everything is already finished and

structured, where order and cleanliness prevail, the question often arises: “What now?” There's little left to do but follow the curriculum. But is that enough? Everywhere on a farm, there are tasks to have to be done – unlike in a traditional school building. Children want to take part, take responsibility, and experience the impact of their actions. This is where

« What do we need to come alive?
We need places where we realise
we're needed – where things don't
work without us. »

Tobias Hartkemeyer



Tobias Hartkemeyer



Bernie Courts



Antoinette Simonart



Ruben Segers



the concept of a school on a farm comes in: it brings together the daily needs of the community, the earth, and life itself – creating a vibrant place of learning with purpose.

Bernie Courts

Lead researcher and advisor on practical skills, therapeutic education, and biodynamics at Ruskin Mill Trust, UK

For around 30 years, the Ruskin Mill Trust has been developing a learning approach called “Practical Skills Therapeutic Education” (PSTE). This pedagogical-therapeutic method uses hands-on work to support individual development. Craft, art, and farming activities are integrated to strengthen personal abilities, foster social integration, and meet educational and therapeutic goals.

Every Ruskin Mill school and college is home to biodynamic farms and gardens. Learners experience the rhythm of the seasons such as lambing, calving, and the autumn harvest. When the entire farm community celebrates a seasonal festival, the learners can reflect on how they’ve changed since the previous year.

To avoid feeling overwhelmed, the children and young people learn to recognise what is good for them and what they can let go of or work through. This helps them build both inner and outer trust. To maintain this quality, all life processes must be reliable and work in harmony. Only when learners experience such consistency can they take the next steps in their personal development. A farm is a role model for consistency, requiring constant care. In this way, the learners become conscious, self-determined individuals who actively shape both the community and the earth.

Antoinette Simonart and Ruben Segers

Farmers at the biodynamic farm Kollebloem in Belgium

Running a small biodynamic farm in the midst of a large, agro-industrial region is both a challenge and a privilege. Antoinette Simonart and Ruben Segers are trying to follow their own path – meeting the soil, living beings, and community with respect.

Honesty makes genuine encounters possible. It also takes honesty to acknowledge that people working in agriculture need a livelihood that sustains them – and shouldn’t have to fight for economic survival year after year. Through honest stories, biodynamic agriculture can have an effect like its preparations: small, yet meaningful for the environment, the community, and society. Because this task cannot be carried alone.

From time to time, people from the city visit Kollebloem. Every year, a group of bank employees from Brussels comes to spend a day on the farm. The visitors are always happy to stand in the mud and take on unfamiliar tasks. They seem to enjoy it. Ruben suspects they miss the feeling of doing something with their hands and seeing an immediate result. In a bank, one sees many numbers, but rarely anything tangible. After the work is done, everyone shares a meal, and the bankers return to Brussels with a good feeling.

In rhythm with the earth

Biodynamics as a bridge to indigenous wisdom

From India to Bali to Mexico: three individuals from indigenous communities share their journeys with biodynamic agriculture. Each in their own way combines ancient knowledge and spiritual insight with both traditional and modern practices. In doing so, they offer responses to the major questions of our time and show that agriculture can be an expression of a deep relationship between humans and the earth.

Anthoniselvi Savarimuthu, India

I am proud to be a biodynamic farmer in Tamil Nadu – a land with a history as rich as its soil and a culture as ancient as its mountains. When people speak of Indian wisdom, many think of the Vedas. But I would like to draw attention to Tamil culture, which is more than 3,000 years old and has left us with agricultural and ecological practices that still resonate today.

The Tamil tradition, documented in the Sangam literature, reveals a remarkable understanding of the close connection between human beings, nature, and the cosmos. In Sangam poetry, poems are categorised into *tinai*, each linked to a specific landscape type: mountains, forests, farmlands, coasts, deserts – each a living ecosystem where plants, animals, and human activity are interwoven. This ancient classification teaches us to respect ecological diversity and to adapt agricultural practices to the specific conditions of each region.

I am not only the daughter of a farmer from rural India, but also the daughter of the beautiful mountains of my homeland. In Tamil culture, we believe in the sanctity of all life. In Sangam poetry, there are stories of hunters stopping their carts so as not to disturb nesting birds. The great Tamil philosopher Tiruvalluvar emphasised the equality of all living beings, no matter how small. These principles are also reflected in Rudolf Steiner's seven life

processes, which show striking parallels to the agricultural wisdom of ancient Tamil culture. These timeless principles point to a deep harmony between humans and nature.

What I've learned is that biodynamics is not simply an "alternative" form of agriculture – it is part of our indigenous way of life. By combining it with the practices of my ancestors, it brings greater meaning to both our lives and our food. Even during recent years of drought, we were able to improve soil quality through biodynamic methods. The soil made the most of the little rainwater it received and regenerated itself.

However, I've noticed that more and more farmers are focusing on modern technologies and personal interests. Too often, competitive thinking dominates, replacing thinking in terms of community. As a result, the sense of community is lost – a feeling I believe is essential for a sustainable future in agriculture. In our community, we are working to restore that sense of oneness by embracing ancient wisdom and nurturing a way of life rooted in community living.

Etha Widiyanto, Bali

My story begins on the island of Bali, a place I called home for many years. Bali is often referred to as the Island of the Gods, and for good reason. Signs of deeply rooted spirituality are everywhere – in the small offerings placed daily and in the rituals people live by, in harmony with



Anthoniselvi Savarimuthu



Etha Widiyanto



Diego Porras



their surroundings. These traditions, this culture, and this way of life have shaped Bali for centuries. And even though many things have changed over time, one practice is still followed just as it was long ago: “Bali Wariga” – the path to wholeness. It is an ancient body of knowledge that explains the Balinese calendar.

This calendar is so closely woven into people’s lives that hardly any event takes place without it. Whether it’s a wedding, the right day to harvest bamboo, sow rice, raise animals, start a business, or build a house – a favourable date is always chosen from the calendar. Even everyday matters like settling debts are guided by this special system. In Bali, nearly every household has a copy of this calendar.

In Bali there is also the biodynamic calendar of our association, which is very similar to the Balinese calendar. The two calendars complement each other beautifully and are used freely. Our farmers decide for themselves whether they can wait for the right time or if they need to choose another way.

Bali is only one of over 13,000 islands in the Indonesian archipelago, and on many of these islands, indigenous farm-

ing is still practiced, strongly guided by lunar and solar calendars. Our goal is to rediscover this local wisdom across the entire archipelago, embracing the different perspectives and learning methods each place offers.

But things are also changing on Bali. Local consumption habits are slowly being lost, as more people turn toward the global market. Traditional diets and the appreciation of local products are gradually disappearing. The challenge lies in building a bridge between ancient traditions and modern market demands – without losing cultural identity. Biodynamic agriculture can help in this transition.

Diego Porras, Mexico

I want to bring in the perspectives of the Americas – a continent that, despite its complex political situation, is shaped by a deep sense of unity from north to south. My journey into biodynamics began with a simple but deeply moving experience: When I first joined a ceremony for making biodynamic preparations, I was reminded of the words of Taita Manuel, an Ingano elder from southern Colombia. He had taught me how the plants themselves



instruct him – how, through the plants, he can heal the people in his community. This wisdom isn't found only in Colombia, but throughout the Americas.

In the southern Andes of Bolivia and Ecuador, the Quechua and Aymara nurture the concept of Pachamama, Mother Earth. A bit further north, in southwestern Colombia, the Misak and the Nasa practice cooperation for the good of the community. And in northern Colombia, the Arhuaco maintain a strong awareness of the interdependence between humans and nature. If we travel even farther north to Guatemala, we meet the K'iche' Maya with a calendar that attributes a special energy to each day – an energy that influences daily life and work. These teachings

All of these concepts from different parts of the Americas teach us what it means to live in harmony with the earth. The message I bring from the indigenous peoples of the Americas is one of love, hope, and optimism. Even though we are living through difficult times, we know that this wisdom is still present – not as a relic of the past, but as a living source of inspiration and knowledge that continues to guide us today.

The effects of climate change are already being felt in our region: soils are becoming drier, and growing conditions are increasingly difficult. At the same time, more and more young people are moving to cities in search of better prospects. Rural areas are under economic pressure and increasingly suffer from a lack of labour, knowledge, and innovation. Just 15 or 20 years ago, our smallholders were highly attuned to the harvest cycles. Weather and nature gave clear signs for agricultural activity. But today, things have changed. Rainy seasons are less predictable, and dry spells are longer and more intense. Farmers face the challenge of selling their products in the market while the competition of cheaper imports from other markets is growing.

Yet despite these challenges, the wisdom of indigenous communities remains a precious resource. It teaches us that we must not only respond to external changes but also seek a deeper connection with our earth and the community – a connection that can give us strength and hope in these demanding times.

« The challenge lies in building a bridge between ancient traditions and modern market demands – without losing cultural identity. Biodynamic agriculture can help in this transition. »

from Mesoamerica are deeply spiritual and include the principle of In Lak'ech Ala K'in – “You are me, and I am you.” In southern Mexico, among the Tzotzil, there is a word that connects heaven and earth. And in the Sierra de Zongolica in central eastern Mexico, people begin each year with a special planting and harvesting ceremony that includes offerings of flowers and fruits.

Impulses for the future of our earth

Young voices from the global biodynamic movement

Ibana, Kam, Khotsofalang, Neil, Neris, Ponalagendra, and eight other young people were able to attend the annual Agriculture Conference at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, thanks to a conference scholarship. They are now taking the knowledge they gained there and the connections they made back to their home regions – supporting the future of agriculture on the ground.



Ibana Gómez
Building a CSA farm
in Uruguay

Together with around 15 families, I've been developing a diverse CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm in Uruguay for four years and am involved in the country's biodynamic network. Our community will soon be able to manage a new piece of land and farm it biodynamically – a key step for the development of biodynamics in Uruguay.

The conference was socially very inspiring for me. For people in agricultural enterprises with great responsibility and little free time, such living encounters are essential for physical and emotional renewal, gaining distance, and opening up new perspectives.



Kam Yew-wei
Founding a non-profit
initiative in Malaysia

I've been committed to biodynamic agriculture for many years – through my own farm and co-founding a biodynamic school. I'm now planning a non-profit initiative focused on seed breeding, preparations, and plant cultivation.

The conference theme, "The Earth as a Living Being", offered me new impulses. In particular, experiencing the seven life processes according to Rudolf Steiner and the international exchange with 700 participants reinforced my inner drive for biodynamics – along with the awareness that we can support one another across the world.



Khotsofalang Taetso
Caring for the Earth
in South Africa

In 2024, I founded the project "Awareness of Biodynamic Farming" to raise awareness of biodynamic methods in South Africa and promote their use. Our aim is to improve soil quality, strengthen farmers' knowledge, and spread regenerative practices.

What touched me most at the conference was the deep engagement with the earth as a living being – an invitation to meet it with consciousness, care, and responsibility. It strengthened my resolve to keep working passionately for it.



Neris Şenyaşa Biodynamics as a way of life in Turkey

As a young advisor for biodynamic farming, I began to share my insights and experiences in new ways after the conference – both in my work and within biodynamic communities in Turkey. For me, biodynamic farming is not just a method but an attitude to life – in harmony with nature. This is the attitude I try to pass on to others.



Neil Lin Advocating for better poultry farming in Taiwan

I run a farm with around 8,000 free-range laying hens – a rarity in Taiwan, where over 95% of hens are raised in cages. My goal is to increase the share of free-range hens and eventually establish the first Demeter-certified laying hen farm in Taiwan.

The visit to the Goetheanum was my first trip to Europe. I was especially inspired by the workshops that explored the soul and spiritual dimensions of being human. Back in Taiwan, I shared my experiences at a gathering of fellow farmers. Their enthusiasm was huge – and I hope in this way to spark new momentum for a future-oriented agriculture.



Ponalagendra Raja Education and biodynamics for young people in India

Growing up in a farmworker family, I developed a deep connection to agriculture early on. As a teacher, I realised that many children's learning difficulties were linked to malnutrition – this sparked my interest in healthy food and organic farming. Today, I train young people in biodynamic farming across Tamil Nadu.

When I returned from the conference, my community welcomed me with warmth and pride (see photo). I now pass on what I've learned to trainees in my region, offering them practical perspectives while also promoting sustainability, climate protection, and a healthy ecosystem.

Support young people with a conference scholarship!

For agriculture worldwide fit for the future

We also want to offer scholarships for the next Agriculture Conference, from 4–7 February 2026, on the theme “You never farm alone. Living communities for the future” – and sincerely ask for your support, be it large or small.

Depending on the country of origin, each scholarship costs between 500 and 1,000 Swiss francs.

Donate now
(purpose: Conference Scholarship):



Calming or energising? Cooling or warming?

Empathic Food Testing explores how food impacts us

When we eat, we usually focus on taste and aroma. But how do foods affect our physical and emotional state? Dr Jasmin Peschke reveals what lies “behind the taste” of food.

Anna Storchenegger: *When you hear the term “Empathic Food Testing” for the first time, it’s hard to imagine what it means. How would you explain this method in just a few words?*

Dr. Jasmin Peschke: Many people first associate sensory analysis with classic tasting and smelling. But Empathic Food Testing goes further – it explores what’s behind the taste. You could call it a mindful way of tasting food. The aim is to deliberately put the usual sensory impressions into the background and instead focus on how the food makes you feel. How does a particular food affect my physical and emotional state? Do I feel more awake, relaxed, cheerful, or tired after eating it? Do I feel warmer or cooler?

A typical example is coffee: most people don’t drink it just for the taste, but because it makes them feel more alert and focused. This effect is widely known. But the fact that many other foods also have specific effects on us often goes unnoticed – even though they can be just as perceptible. For instance, depending on its composition and origin, mineral water can feel refreshing, calming, or invigorating.

Are there clear trends in how people perceive the effects of certain foods?

Yes, all foods have characteristic effects that consistently appear. Over the years, Empathic Food Testing experts have developed a strong understanding of the effects of foods like milk, butter, coconut oil, and carrots through careful observation and experience.

In one Empathic Food Testing study on animal products and vegan alternatives, we examined cow’s milk, almond and oat drinks, as well as beef, seitan, and tofu. Notably, the vast majority of participants described the effect of Demeter-quality cow’s milk using terms like “secure/relaxed/warm”. Surprisingly, biodynamic beef was associated with a sense of grounding, warmth, and inner strength. The so-called vegan alternatives, however, were perceived as entirely different products – less as true substitutes and more as distinct in their own right.

How can you learn to consciously perceive such effects?

Basically, anyone can perceive effects through Empathic Food Testing methods. In a course, participants are introduced to a systematic approach that allows them to learn a clear method they can apply in everyday life. This helps avoid vague impressions. The aim is not to judge food as “healthy” or “unhealthy”, but rather to reconnect with one’s own sense of well-being.

Personal perception plays a big role. Could past experiences or preferences influence the results?

Yes, that really does play a role. We often associate certain foods with memories or personal likes and dislikes. That’s why it’s important to consciously set aside those associations. Of course, that’s not always easy. Especially if someone dislikes a particular food, it can be hard to open up to its effects. But if you stay curious and simply ask, “What does this



Dr. Jasmin Peschke is head of the Nutrition Department at the Section for Agriculture and a certified Empathic Food Testing trainer. Together with Dr Uwe Geier, Gesine Mandt, and Pamela Wieckmann, she co-authored the study “Emotional profiling of cow’s milk, beef and plant-based alternatives by trained observers.”



Anna Storchenegger, responsible for communications and public relations at the Section for Agriculture.



Study: Are vegan products alternatives to animal-based products or simply different?



Empathic Food Testing® is a research method developed by Dr Uwe Geier in 2016 that captures the effect of food. Learn more:



feel like for me?", you can often make surprising discoveries.

How is knowledge from Empathic Food Testing research used in practice?

On the one hand, there are professional panels – groups of trained assessors who regularly conduct tastings. These follow a fixed methodology, including standardised questionnaires so that results can be scientifically evaluated. This allows companies to find out how their products affect consumers. It can be helpful for product development or even used in marketing.

On the other hand, there is personal application and nutritional therapy: people can learn to choose food more consciously to support their well-being. For example, you can find out what foods help you during stressful times or what gives you energy in the morning.

Was there a personal experience that led you to Empathic Food Testing?

Yes, there were several. One that stayed with me: I once felt very exhausted and burnt out. Then I instinctively ate a piece of salami – and suddenly I felt grounded and balanced again. That sparked my

curiosity because I couldn't explain the effect at the time.

And how do you see the future of Empathic Food Testing?

There's so much potential! The method is still young, but it's already being used in vegetable breeding and could play a role in gastronomy in the future – for example, in the targeted selection of spices and ingredients. There are also many exciting research questions: how different cooking or processing methods affect food, or how cultivation methods influence its effects. First experiences have even been made with textiles and personal care products.

The secret of biodynamic preparations is being unveiled

Breakthrough in research

Dr Jürgen Fritz is one of the leading scientists in the field of biodynamic agriculture. His new research findings provide, for the first time, a comprehensible model of how the biodynamic preparations work.

Patrick Schellenberg: *You first came into contact with biodynamic agriculture as a young conscientious objector performing community service. What convinced you back then?*

Dr Jürgen Fritz: I had no prior knowledge of biodynamic agriculture and had a very hard time finding access to it. It is true that I liked the relationship of this type of agriculture with nature and animals. The role of cows and the farm as an organism also made sense to me. Nevertheless, I wondered why I still remained critical. I realised that I simply didn't understand a lot and had open questions. That's when I decided to study biodynamic agriculture scientifically.

The scientific basis of biodynamic agriculture is regularly questioned or even denied in the media. Do you have an explanation for that?

I think this is completely healthy and normal. One must be critical. I can best explain this with my own story. For my doctoral thesis, I researched the biodynamic horn silica preparation. When I had significant results that were statistically distinguishable, I couldn't believe it myself. I meticulously went through all the possible sources of error. Only after that did I trust my own results.

It has mainly been researched that the preparations work, but not how they work.

That's true, but in the last three years, we've made great progress. For the first time, we've found indications of how the preparations could work: they seem to influence the soil microbiome in a way that supports plant growth.

What is the soil microbiome?

The soil microbiome refers to the totality of microorganisms, that is, the bacteria and fungi in the soil. I work, among other things, with the so-called Multi-SIR method. SIR stands for substrate-induced respiration. Simply put, I can use this method to study the structure of soil respiration. And now, it turns out that there are significant and reproducible differences between soils treated with biodynamic preparations and those without treatment. This is a clear indication that the microbiome changes with the application of biodynamic preparations.

Do you also directly examine the microbiome? And if so, how does this research work?

Yes, we send a soil sample of just a few grams to a laboratory, and we receive a list of 1,000 bacteria and 900 fungi found in the sample. But that's not all: the laboratory also analyses the networks of bacteria with each other. Even here, a positive effect of the preparations can be proven. In a large-scale experiment at 23 locations in Germany and France, we found that, predominantly through the application of the biodynamic spray preparations, the proportion of potentially growth-promoting bacteria and fungi in the soil was significantly higher. These are very clear results.

And all of this is in the preparations?

Yes. We were able to prove that potentially growth-promoting microorganisms are present in the preparations in high concentrations. Our hypothesis was that by applying the preparations, the soil is inoculated with these potentially



Dr Jürgen Fritz has been researching biodynamic preparations for many years. As a research associate in the field of ecological agriculture and plant cultivation at the University of Kassel, he coordinates the biodynamic agriculture section.



Patrick Schellenberg is head of communications of Demeter Switzerland.



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growth-promoting microorganisms. To prove the effect of this inoculation, we conducted a time series. We sprayed the preparation and then measured the number of potentially growth-promoting microorganisms in the soil over a period of about four months. In the first eight weeks after applying the preparations, the values continuously increased, then gradually decreased again. This is the expected typical behaviour for inoculation of the soil and therefore supports the hypothesis that the application of the spray preparations inoculates the soil with potentially growth-promoting microorganisms. These microorganisms enter the soil with the preparation and remain active there for a certain period of time.

That sounds convincing.

Now we have a traceable model of how it works. However, there is a catch: inoculating with growth-promoting microorganisms doesn't work like a classical nitrogen fertiliser, which always brings identical results. The situations in the soil are very different. Because of this, one year we may see good effects from the preparations, and the next year we may not see any effects. Many questions remain unanswered.

On the trail of the mystery of life

A holistic approach

What is life – and where does it come from? Despite all scientific achievements, this question remains unanswered. Mechtild Oltmann-Wendenburg invites us to approach the great mystery of life: with a view toward the living being that is the earth and the spiritual dimension of our existence.

Threefold life

I've noticed that German only has one word for life. Ancient Greek, however – the language in which the New Testament was written, for example – has three different terms: *bios* refers to the life of plants – a life without consciousness. The second word is *zoē*, from which our word “zoo” derives. I would translate *zoē* as “soul life” – in the anthroposophical sense: the etheric life that plants possess and the astral life characteristic of animals and humans. Then there is a third term: *aiōn*, referring to the immortal I. From this comes our word “eon” – the eternal, imperishable life. I find it important to recognise that *bios* indeed describes an essential layer of life, but not the whole.

In his books, Hartmut Rosa coined the term “the uncontrollable.” By this he means everything that cannot be bought or forced – happiness, for instance. No one can foresee happiness. No one knows whether a meeting with a person I've long looked forward to will actually unfold as I hoped. There is always something uncontrollable added. These mysteries that surround such areas of life also envelop our earth like an aura.

Signs of life

Of the seven life processes described by Rudolf Steiner, I would like to highlight three areas that have become especially vivid for me through observing the phenomena of life. What are the signs of

life? One is breath. When you stand at the bedside of a person nearing death, waiting for their last breath, you become that breath. You wait with a trembling heart. Then the breathing slows, falters, pauses, and resumes. In that moment, you realise how precious breath is. When the final breath has been taken, a silence sets in that is unlike any other in the world – it cannot be created. It becomes so quiet that suddenly, you hear your own breath. And in that moment, when life has ended, you sense the spaces that have now opened up, once filled by life. And likewise, when a person is born and takes their first breath – how all of life seems to be inhaled by this tiny being. A cry announces: I have breathed! Here one senses something that is all-encompassing, global, life – and how it affects the whole person that we breathe. That is the message of life: breath.

A second sign is movement – and in humans, the heartbeat. These are the signs we check when someone is admitted to the hospital: Is the person breathing? Is the heart beating? The pulse, too, proclaims life. We can learn much about life by listening to the heart



Mechtild Oltmann-Wendenburg, born in central Germany in 1939. She studied psychology, trained as a bookseller, later attended the Seminary of The Christian Community in Stuttgart. She served for many years as a pastor in Berlin. She lectures and teaches at seminars. The Book of Revelation is one of her key areas of work.

« I find it important to recognise that *bios* indeed describes an essential layer of life, but not the whole. »



and breath – and still, we do not know who created life.

There is a third area: the beauty of the earth. There are breathtaking views today that touch us deeply, because we wonder: How much longer will this exist? Wherever you go – the earth is beautiful, beautiful for human beings. These are three aspects of the living: the etheric, the soul, and the spiritual dimensions of the human being that are constantly nurtured by and connected with the earth.

What do we owe to the earth?

We owe to the earth our solid footing, that we can stand on it, that we can raise ourselves to uprightness on it. And that means we are able to cultivate an “I.” The “I” is connected to uprightness. The human being is the only creature on earth that can stand permanently upright – not just temporarily.

A small child first says “I” when they can stand upright. Before that, they refer to themselves by their first name. The ability to say “I” and develop self-awareness is tied to standing upright. This uprightness is also connected to sincerity and truthfulness. We owe this to the earth – and organically to our spine, which enables us to stand upright.

Earth is the planet on which we form our I. The earth lives within us through our senses. The I-organisation of the human being works through our senses. It is the earth – the epitome of health beneath our feet – that carries, shelters, and protects us.

The next thing we owe to the earth is, of course, nourishment. An incredible gift! Food communicates itself to us completely, and we transform it. By uniting with the earth through food, we take it into ourselves and give something back that it needs.

Then there is the course of the year as the earth’s breathing process: over the course of a year, the whole earth takes a great breath, and human beings – wherever they live – breathe along. Here in our latitudes, we are not as incarnated in summer as we are in winter. In summer, we prefer to dream.

Giving birth to the I, becoming I

In Berlin’s Gemäldegalerie art gallery hangs a 16th-century painting, artist unknown, depicting not the Madonna, but the so-called “Woman clothed with the sun” from the Book of Revelation. She brings forth the I – she gives birth to the I. This woman appears in many religions: as Isis, who gives birth to the boy Horus, as the mother of Jesus – and yet she transcends all such attributions. She is a figure of the future, who gives birth to this child for humanity and helps us to bring forth our I on earth.

The remarkable aspect of the painting is that the child is immediately taken and brought before God’s throne for safety – because the dragon is pursuing it, just as the dragon also pursues the human I. This child is neither male nor female – which is characteristic of the I. The other constitutional elements of the human being, which we also develop,



« By uniting with the earth through food, we take it into ourselves and give something back that it needs. »

possess masculine and feminine aspects. But the I is spirit. What we are to bring to birth – the future that begins with the apocalypse of the human being – is depicted in this painting.



The figure of the woman stands on the moon and is surrounded by the sun. That reveals who she is. The sun surrounds her like an aura, heralding the birth of the I, which is preparing to becoming immortal – and with it, the earth. We would not be I-beings if we had no goals. Knowledge of the goal, the awareness: I am on a path, is part of the I.

In the final Book of Revelation, two great images of the goal appear: freedom and love. Rudolf Steiner named them. They will lead the life of the human being and the earth – and also their soul – to a goal that reaches beyond earthly life. To unite love and freedom: so far, we are barely capable of this. What we love, we want to grasp with our senses. But the goal is a love entirely permeated by freedom – and a freedom that is not self-centred, but filled by the freedom of the other: a freedom with love. If we succeed in making freedom and love real within us, then it will no longer matter what we call our God. Then there will be a God of humanity and a religion of humanity.

The birth of love

Finally, a thought from Rudolf Steiner's lecture cycle *Universe, Earth, Human Being* (CW 105): He speaks there of gods, humans, and the earth. Love only comes into being through the development of the I. Only the I is capable of love in a higher sense. Love arises from the

We receive something from heaven when we live on earth and develop our I through pain and hardship in destiny. This divine love evokes gratitude in us. And this gratitude rises invisibly to the gods. This is the archetype of worship. And through this – hard as it may be to believe – the gods themselves learn love. They learn love through human beings.

It is like a gift: the gods kindle love in human beings so that the human being can experience it. And the gods experience love as a reality only through human beings. Indeed, we know: something is missing for the gods if human beings do not live in love. The more love the human being unfolds on earth, the more nourishment the gods receive in heaven. To develop freedom and love on earth, therefore, is not just a task, but a gift. The work on the earth and the work on our karma – that is our task.

« That is the message of life:
breath. »

human I. The gods pour this love into human beings, who live on Earth and are engaged in the development of their I.

News from the Section for Agriculture

Current research reports – knowledge that moves

Each month, we publish insightful articles on nutrition and biodynamic research. Dr Jasmin Peschke and Lea Knöpfler explore current nutrition topics, while Lukas Maschek shares the latest findings from biodynamic research.

Stay informed – subscribe now to our monthly newsletter!



Inauguration of the preparation pavilion and bee sculpture

Two new structures were recently inaugurated in the Goetheanum garden park: the Preparation Pavilion and the walk-in Bee Sculpture. Both invite you to connect with the foundations of biodynamic agriculture in a new way.

Come visit the garden park, explore the structures, and let yourself be inspired!

Together for fair agriculture

With the campaign “Let’s support agriculture!”, NaturaSì in Italy is advocating for transparent food prices and fair compensation for farmers. Ueli Hurter, co-leader of the Section for Agriculture, attended the launch event in Rome.

In the Economy Council, we also address the question of a fair value chain. In cooperation with the Goetheanum World Association, regular online meetings are held on the “Challenges in the organic sector”. Additionally, the Economy Council gathers in-person once a year as part of the Agriculture Conference.

Learn more:



Events

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 23 June – 1 Dec. 2025 | Three-part online course series: “Human – Cosmos – Humus”,
Language: English, translations on request |
| 5 – 6 July 2025 | Summer excursion for professionals in medicinal, spice, and cosmetic plants
Lake Constance region, Switzerland |
| 1 Aug. 2025 – 4 Feb. 2026 | Development lab for impactful courses by biodynamic trainers, online |
| 31 Aug. – 4 Sept. 2025 | Third International Biodynamic Research Conference
Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, UK |
| 10 Sept. 2025 | Dynamic Nutrition Network, online |
| 24 – 28 Sept. 2025 | World Goetheanum Forum in Sekem, Egypt |
| 29 Oct. 2025 | Greening the Desert Day at the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland |
| 4 Dec. 2025 | Dynamic Nutrition Network, online |
| 4 – 7 Feb. 2026 | Agricultural Conference 2026 at the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland |

Our events calendar is continuously updated.
For the latest events and detailed information, visit:



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Through people in the worldwide biodynamic movement, the Section encounters current issues and challenges. We take these up in projects and create spaces that provide sources of inspiration – for all who are involved in agriculture and nutrition. We work on topics such as associative economics, nutrition, holistic health, the farm organism, climate resilience, the agricultural individuality, sustainability, and animal welfare in a number of professional groups and specialist fields for training, advice, nutrition, research and sustainability development.

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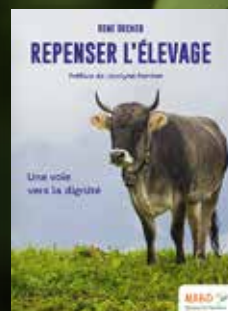
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