

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**A New Beginning: The Establishment of the  
Biodynamic Movement in New Zealand 1930-50**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts  
in  
History  
at Massey University, Manawatu,  
New Zealand

Guilherme Barreto Dib

2018

# Acknowledgements

I have been inspired by many people who dedicated their lives to the task of resisting conventional agriculture based on large scale monoculture, indiscriminate use of agrichemicals and pesticides, consciously knowing that these practices have a negative impact on the environment, deplete the soil and also affect the health of animals and humans. These people struggled for a sustainable alternative of growing food including Biodynamic, organic and permaculture.

I have gratitude for Kete Ora Trust for the support towards this research and for funding some of the costs associated with it.

I'm also thankful for the support from the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association in New Zealand for granting permission to visit their archive at Martinborough to consult early records of the Biodynamic movement in New Zealand.

I appreciate Land Based Training for the support toward my studies and allowing me to take some time off from work to study.

Both of my supervisors, Geoffrey Watson and Michael Roche, were helpful and supportive throughout, making many important suggestions and consideration about the analyses and argument in this thesis. Without their guidance it would have been a difficult journey through rough seas.

The support from my partner was immeasurable and the love from my children was a source of inspiration.

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Motivation and Rationale for the Thesis. ....	6
Overview of Biodynamic Agriculture.....	7
Literature on Biodynamic Agriculture in New Zealand.....	11
Sources.....	15
Structure.....	16
Chapter One: Historical Overview of Agriculture in New Zealand.....	18
Historical overview of agriculture in New Zealand.....	18
Anthroposophy in New Zealand.....	28
Conclusion.....	30
Chapter Two: Building Networks c. 1930-40.....	32
Early Years of Biodynamic/Organic agriculture.....	32
The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand.....	36
The News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand.....	40
Experimental Work.....	44
Exchanging ideas, products and knowledge.....	45
Conclusion.....	47
Chapter Three: Qualified Recognition 1941-1945 .....	49
First Conference of Members.....	49
Dominion Reconstruction Conference.....	51
Wartime Opportunities.....	54
Politics, Social Issues and World War II.....	60

News Letter c. 1941-45.....	66
Conclusion.....	70
Chapter Four: Opportunity and Conflict 1945-1949.....	73
1945 Biodynamic Association Conference.....	73
Proposal to Purchase a Farm.....	75
Joint Experimental Farm in the Waikato.....	82
1947 Biodynamic Association Conference .....	88
A New Beginning for the News Letter 1945-49.....	91
Overseas content in News Letter.....	95
Resumption of Experimental Work.....	97
Teaching Biodynamic Principles.....	100
Marketing.....	106
1949 Annual General Meeting.....	107
Conclusion.....	108
Conclusion.....	111
Bibliography .....	116

# Introduction

One of today's greatest societal concerns is environmental and health issues. The understanding that these issues are strongly linked to conventional agriculture and its widespread use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers is becoming more widely accepted. To this end Biodynamic farming and gardening has presented itself as an alternative way to produce food, arguably of the highest quality, while maintaining a sound natural and sustainable method of working the land. Growers in New Zealand began to apply this form of farming developed in Germany in 1924 and taken up in New Zealand by 1929/30. By 1939 they organized themselves in order to promote Biodynamic principles and methods by forming the 'Rudolf Steiner Bio Dynamic Association in New Zealand' in 1939, later renamed the 'Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association in New Zealand'. For a period of time the Association was "the best organized and the fastest growing organic group in the country".<sup>1</sup> Within their Association, meetings and gatherings were held as well as field days and farm visits. They also produced numerous publications. Since then, an increasing though still relatively small number of people, approximately 25 in 1940 to over 300 members in 1950, has committed themselves to this unique way of growing food. Biodynamic farming advocates influenced a group of farmers, gardeners and food growers in this country and properties were converted into a Biodynamic regime. Biodynamic farming and gardening has offered an alternative reference point to the mainstream pastoral agriculture in New Zealand which was orthodox and based on use of fertilizers, scientifically driven, increasingly industrialized and predominantly export oriented as the 20<sup>th</sup> century unfolded.

---

<sup>1</sup>John Paterson, 'Resistance to the Agriculture of Modernity: The Old Order Amish, Biodynamic Agriculture, and Small-farming in New Zealand', *Occasional Paper Series Number 2*, Department of Social Policy, University of Waikato, May 2001, p. 8.

## **Motivation and Rationale for the Thesis**

My first contact with Biodynamic agriculture and farming occurred when my family moved to a community within a Biodynamic farm called Demetria near the city of Botucatu in Brazil in the late 1980s. Demetria, back then, had market gardens, a cheese factory, beef stock, a school and homes for orphan children from slums. I went to a Waldorf School<sup>2</sup> there and my parents were involved with Anthroposophy. When I migrated to New Zealand in 2007 I started to work in an Anthroposophical community within a Biodynamic farm called Hohepa Homes. Hohepa is a place which offers homes, schooling and work opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities based on Steiner's 'Curative Education' and practices of Biodynamic farming and gardening. My role in Hohepa was to involve the people with intellectual disabilities with the farm work, growing vegetables, milking cows, producing cheese, making compost, applying the Biodynamic Preparations to the land and plants and to ensure compliance with Demeter standards and certification. While employed by Hohepa I studied a Level 4 course on Applied Biodynamic/Organic through Taruna College in Havelock North. I currently work as an agriculture/horticulture tutor at Mangaroa Prison in Hawkes Bay delivering a National Certificate in Horticulture/Agriculture Level 3 to the inmates. Biodynamic farming and gardening is one of the topics in my lectures.

Since I became more aware of the loss of biodiversity, habitat destruction and other severe environmental effects caused by modern agricultural practices I started to seek and support other forms of growing food and cultivating the land. A number of alternative agricultural approaches have been developed, acknowledging ecological foundations while also placing agricultural activity within a political, social and economic context such as Biodynamic, organic and permaculture. I have an interest in examining the early history of the Biodynamic movement in New Zealand due to the fact that Biodynamic agriculture has been present in New Zealand since the 1930s, has had a small but dedicated group of practitioners who offered an alternative to orthodox agriculture and whose work has largely escaped study by historians. The period between 1930 and 1950 encompasses the development of the Biodynamic movement in New Zealand, in the early 1930s, the formation of an association in 1939,

---

<sup>2</sup> Waldorf education also known as Steiner School is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner

the wartime opportunities for organic and Biodynamic agriculture, the establishment of a community of practices and links with overseas organizations. By 1950 Biodynamic agriculture had a foothold in New Zealand with several hundred adherents. It was a niche form of farming and remained so, until the 1980s when 'alternative' forms of farming started to become more mainstream.

## Overview of Biodynamic Agriculture

The term Biodynamic is derived from the Greek word "bios" meaning "life" and "dynamis" meaning "force". Therefore it can be said that the word Biodynamic is translated from the Greek word and means "life-force". Within the Biodynamic circle the meaning of the term is commonly known as "biological-dynamics". Biodynamic agriculture is a method of farming proposed by Rudolph Steiner through a series of lectures entitled '*Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture*' delivered to a group of farmers from six countries and held at Koberwitz (then East Prussia but currently located at the South-West of Poland) between June 7 and 16 1924.<sup>3</sup> Biodynamic agriculture is a holistic system of organic agriculture which combines "practical experimental knowledge with Steiner's perspective on the interactions of spirit and matter".<sup>4</sup> Accounts of the early years of Biodynamic farming repeatedly featured in the News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand. The origins of Biodynamic farming date back to shortly after the end of World War I when "several farmers in central Europe became disturbed about the falling off in the quality of the wheat".<sup>5</sup> These farmers were disillusioned with synthetic fertilizers and wanted to use a different principle for food production. They approached Steiner for ideas "as to how

---

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was an Austrian philosopher, writer, artist, educator, etc. Steiner conceived the philosophy of Anthroposophy in which he attempted to combine science and mysticism. Steiner has offered a series of ideas, thoughts and insights in many fields such as; education, arts, health, agriculture, spirit, etc. The most outstanding of his ideas are on education, translated into Waldorf schooling (broadly applied world-wide) and agriculture with Biodynamic farming and gardening, which is also widely applied world-wide. One biography was written by Garry Lachman called: *Rudolf Steiner, An Introduction to His Life and Work*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Paterson, 'Resistance to the Agriculture of Modernity', p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August 1948, Vol. 1. No.2, p. 13.



they should tackle this problem and as to where the causes lay”.<sup>6</sup> Although not a farmer himself, Steiner presented to them his thoughts on agriculture which were translated into what is called “Biodynamic” farming and gardening. Accounts suggest that Steiner was involved with agricultural experiments as early as 1921 with Guenther Wachsmuth<sup>7</sup> and Ehrenfried Pfeiffer<sup>8</sup>. In 1922 Steiner carried out tests and practical experiments on the farm of one of these farmers. In 1924 “they got him to give a course of lectures to farmers and gardeners to give a direction for them to work along and to give them the anthroposophical view point on agriculture and its problems of that time”.<sup>9</sup> Steiner emphasised that “the course was practical and not prescriptive”<sup>10</sup> and in his understanding of agriculture “things are intended from the beginning to practical application”.<sup>11</sup> Accounts suggest that Steiner clearly indicated that “the ideas presented should all be tested experimentally under the co-ordination of the Section for Natural Science<sup>12</sup> at the Goetheanum”.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that Steiner was seeking for a verified validation to his proposals. According to Paull:

Participants at Koberwitz were given to understand that the Agriculture Course was subject to, in current terminology, ‘commercial-in-confidence’. It was a version of ‘measure twice, cut once’ and in the context of developing a new agriculture, Steiner was aware that some start-up investment of time, observation, and experiment was necessary.<sup>14</sup>

After this course of lectures the participants formed the ‘Experimental Circle’ to put Steiner’s indications into practice. While originally these farmers were concerned with the decline in soil and seed fertility which were impacting agriculture in Europe they were also worried about the implications of conventional farming on soil, plants and humans health.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August 1948, Vol. 1. No.2, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Director of the Natural Science Section at the Goetheanum.

<sup>8</sup> Ehrenfried Pfeiffer (19 February 1899 – 30 November 1961) was a German scientist, soil scientist, leading advocate of biodynamic agriculture, anthroposophist and student of Rudolf Steiner.

<sup>9</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August 1948, Vol. 1. No.2, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> John Paull, ‘Biodynamic Agriculture: The Journey from Koberwitz to the World, 1924-1938’, *Journal of Organic Systems*, Vol.6, No. 1, (2011), p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Paull, ‘Biodynamic Agriculture’, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> The Natural Science Section is one of the eleven Sections of the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum (is the world center for the anthroposophical movement)

<sup>13</sup> Paull, ‘Biodynamic Agriculture’, p.29.

<sup>14</sup> Paull, ‘Biodynamic Agriculture’, p.29.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolph Steiner, *Agriculture Course. The Birth of the Biodynamic Method* (trans. George Adams), 1924, Forest Road, reprinted London: Rudolph Steiner Press 2004.

Steiner was an influential figure in the dissemination of Biodynamic practices worldwide. Steiner died in 1925, so the spread of Biodynamic ideas was left in the hands of others. Indeed, as we shall see, the Biodynamic Society of New Zealand was initially named after him and their inaugural News Letter quoted his statement that “nature of soil, of plant, the animal and of Man does not only consist of complicated chemical – physical processes and laws but primarily of life Functions (Biological) brought about by Formative Forces (Dynamic)”.<sup>16</sup> The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand promoted Steiner’s views on agriculture considering that “bio-dynamic methods are an essential part of the Anthroposophical Movement and derive their effectiveness to the extent that the individual participates actively in the General Movement”.<sup>17</sup> The Anthroposophical movement is a global movement based on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and according to the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand:

There are two threads working together within Anthroposophy: an expansion of perception and knowledge (spiritual realism); and, the development of individual responsibility for actions (ethical individualism). Anthroposophy provides an individual path of spiritual development, visible in the arts, in social forms and practical initiatives.<sup>18</sup>

Of Steiner, the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand stated in 1944 that “to him – we, who are endeavouring to practice the agricultural methods derived from his spiritual insight, return heartfelt thanks and take from his life an inspiration to press forward”.<sup>19</sup>

Biodynamics is a way of farming and gardening in which the whole farm is considered as an integrated living organism where the balance between output (what you take out from the soil in the production phase) and the input (what is given back to the soil: manure and compost) is paramount. It takes into consideration the relationship between cosmic forces and moon rhythms, spirit and matter and how they impact on animals and plants as well as in the land operations. It suggests the need

---

<sup>16</sup> *Information Sheet No. 1*, issued by The Rudolph Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, (not dated).

<sup>17</sup> *News Letter*, No. 22, December, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Anthroposophy in New Zealand, <https://www.anthroposophy.org.nz/anthroposophy/#layer-about-anthroposophy> (visited on 13/03/2019)

<sup>19</sup> *News Letter*, No. 22, December, 1944, p. 1.

for a careful crop rotation plan in order to build soil fertility and plant resilience instead of depleting the soil and building increasing susceptibility to diseases.

Although Biodynamic agriculture is fully organic with no use of chemical fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides, or genetic modified organisms, and is similar in a number of ways to other forms of organic agriculture, it distinguishes itself from merely organic regimes by paying more attention to “seasonal, lunar and other bio-chronological influences”<sup>20</sup> and the compulsory use of small quantities of a series of preparations made in a specific prescribed way for the soil, plants and compost. These preparations are called ‘Biodynamic Preparations 500-508’ and are believed to regulate and stimulate “life processes in the soil, plants and animal manure”.<sup>21</sup> The Biodynamic Preparations are applied on the land through sprays, liquid manures and on compost heaps. The Biodynamic Association of New Zealand stated that the Biodynamic Preparations strengthened the plants and assist breaking down the materials used in the compost.<sup>22</sup> Biodynamic farmers used the Biodynamic Preparations to stimulate biological activity in the soil and improve retention of nutrients, such as animal wastes. As one News Letter of the Biodynamic Association noted:

One of the main purposes of using the B.D. “Preparations” or “Activators” in the compost heaps is to give direction to the ferments taking place there and to assist in the retaining in the fullest measure the “life forces” which are released when the organic matter is broken down by bacterial action.<sup>23</sup>

A Biodynamic approach to farming is the complete opposite to conventional scientific understanding and explanation. Biodynamic agriculture resists modernist forces and arguably “can be termed anti-modernist”.<sup>24</sup> In the Biodynamic view, the life functions of the plant world are greatly dependent upon cosmic influences and in a sense “this method of agriculture is the polar opposite of that method born of the purely Mechanistic and Materialistic”.<sup>25</sup> Biodynamic farming is locally focussed and oriented. According to the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Biodynamic

---

<sup>20</sup> Paterson, ‘Resistance to the Agriculture of Modernity’, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Paterson, ‘Resistance to the Agriculture of Modernity’, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Proctor, *Grasp the Nettle: Making Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Work*, Auckland: Random House. 1997, pp. 69-87.

<sup>23</sup> *News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand*, Christmas, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Paterson, ‘Resistance to the Agriculture of Modernity’, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Information Sheet No. 1*, issued by The Rudolph Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, (not dated).

agriculture was introduced in New Zealand in 1928 in Havelock North, Hawke's Bay.<sup>26</sup> In the following decade it expanded throughout the country leading to the formation of what was then called the Rudolf Steiner Biological-Dynamic Association in New Zealand for Soil and Crop Improvement in 1939.

## Literature on Biodynamic Agriculture in New Zealand

There is no dedicated history of Biodynamic farming in New Zealand, although there are items about the early days of Biodynamic farming in New Zealand. Those are mostly short articles published in the News Letters from the Biodynamic Association in 1994<sup>27</sup> and a paper by John Paull called *The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand* revealing the names of the first 15 people from New Zealand who joined the *Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners* (based in Switzerland) and received a copy of Steiner's *Agriculture Course*.<sup>28</sup> Paull's article was published (December 2018) in the writing up phase of this research. The literature on Biodynamic farming in New Zealand instead deals mostly with the methodology and principles applied to farming. A well-known book amongst Biodynamic practitioners to this end is *Grasp the Nettle: Making Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Work* written by a New Zealand farmer called Peter Proctor. The author, in his book, dedicates himself mostly to explaining how to apply the techniques of Biodynamic farming and he also shares his own experiences on the field with the readers. The focus of *Grasp the Nettle*, however, is primarily on technical and methodological approaches and it has only a few paragraphs in the history of Biodynamic farming in New Zealand.

Some aspects of early Biodynamic farming in New Zealand are discussed in a Masters thesis on the history of Anthroposophy in New Zealand written by Garth

---

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.biodynamic.org.nz/about-biodynamics> (visited on 20-05-15). As noted in chapter 2, it is difficult to determine the precise date when Biodynamic agriculture began in New Zealand, but it was certainly operational by the early 1930s.

<sup>27</sup> *Bio Dynamic Farming & Gardening Association Newsletter*, 47:2 (1994), pp. 20-32

<sup>28</sup> John Paull, 'The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand', *Harvests*, Vol. 70-3, Biodynamics New Zealand, Summer 2018-19, pp. 38-40.

Turbott.<sup>29</sup> In his thesis the author discussed the origins of Biodynamic farming in New Zealand and the people who started to apply this methodology in the country although the main emphasis of his thesis was the formation and development of Anthroposophy in New Zealand. He did, however write a worthwhile overview of the development of the Biodynamic Association and the background of the people who initiated Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand but he does not go into detail on issues such as the discussions over what, if any testing should be conducted and the proposed acquisition of a farm in 1946 which caused considerable division within the movement.<sup>30</sup> In addition, although not specifically focussed on Biodynamic farming, Barrie MacDonald's biography of Charles Alma Baker<sup>31</sup> touches on the latter's interest in Biodynamic agriculture.<sup>32</sup> In addition to accounts of Biodynamic farming, there are also some publications which discuss the history of organic farming and other alternative forms of agriculture, such as the Humic Compost Club.<sup>33</sup>

The development of Biodynamic farming in New Zealand will be discussed within the wider context of overseas literature on the subject. A chapter by John Paull about the history of the organic agriculture movement in Australia includes Biodynamic farming.<sup>34</sup> He argues that the Australian involvement with organic farming can be conveniently divided in four main waves. According to him, the First Wave 1920s-1930s, which interests us the most, was anchored by Rudolph Steiner's call for an alternative agriculture; the Second Wave 1940s-1950s "is anchored by the coining of the term 'organic farming' in 1940, England"<sup>35</sup>; the Third Wave, 1960s-1970s "is anchored by the publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* in 1962 which breathed new life into the organics movement worldwide"<sup>36</sup>; and the Fourth Wave 1980s to present, "is anchored by the Chernobyl nuclear accident in Ukraine on 26

---

<sup>29</sup> John Garth Turbott, 'Anthroposophy in the Antipodes: A lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s', (MA Thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Turbott, 'Anthroposophy in the Antipodes', pp. 84-89.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Alma Baker (1857-1941) was a New Zealander surveyor, miner and agriculturalist devoted to soil preservation and became a supporter of the early movement for biodynamic farming

<sup>32</sup> Barrie MacDonald, *Imperial Patriot: Charles Alma Baker and the History of Limestone Downs*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993, pp 107-117.

<sup>33</sup> John Edgar, *Urban Legend: Sir Dove-Myer Robinson*, Auckland, Hodder Moa, 2012, pp. 77-82.

<sup>34</sup> John Paull, 'A history of the organic agriculture movement in Australia' in B. Mascitelli and A. Lobo (eds.) *Organics in the Global Food Chain*, Ballarat: Connor Court Publishing, 2013, pp. 37-61, 241-244.

<sup>35</sup> John Paull, 'A history of the organic agriculture movement in Australia' in B. Mascitelli and A. Lobo (eds.) *Organics in the Global Food Chain*, Ballarat: Connor Court Publishing, 2013, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> John Paull, 'A history of the organic agriculture movement in Australia' in B. Mascitelli and A. Lobo (eds.) *Organics in the Global Food Chain*, Ballarat: Connor Court Publishing, 2013, p. 38.

April 1986".<sup>37</sup>In the chapter Paull gives the background and context for the Biodynamic wave, including the people who initiated it and how they obtained their knowledge. In his accounts there is a suggestion that the people who brought Biodynamic to Australia and New Zealand were disciples of Rudolph Steiner and former members of the Agricultural Experimental Group (AEC) which were coordinated from Dornach, Switzerland.<sup>38</sup> In this regard, there were parallels between Biodynamic practitioners in Australia and New Zealand, indeed as this thesis demonstrates, there was considerable contact between them.

Biodynamic farming spread quickly throughout the world since its beginning and has been the subject of considerable research internationally. Staudenmaier explores the connections between Anthroposophy, Biodynamic farming and Nazi ideology.<sup>39</sup> He argues that Biodynamic farmers and other anthroposophist's were deeply involved in promoting National Socialism as well as being part of the high ranks of the regime and its infamous hierarchy. For Staudenmaier Anthroposophy's "affinities with Nazi discourse are unmistakable".<sup>40</sup> Furthermore he suggested that "it was through biodynamic farming that anthroposophy most directly influenced the course of German fascism".<sup>41</sup> Indeed many Biodynamic farmers were members of the ranks of the Nazi regime and Biodynamic crops were established even in concentration camps and the occupied territories in the East. In 1941 this close relationship between the Nazi regime and Anthroposophy suffered a significant change with the closure of Waldorf schools, Biodynamic farms loss of official support and the imprisonment of important anthroposophist's. Furthermore Staudenmaier criticises post-war attempts by anthroposophist's for their inability "to come to terms with their history of compromise and complicity with the Third Reich" suggesting that they "are embarrassingly evasive and repeat the underlying racism which united them with the Nazi in the first time".<sup>42</sup> Although not specifically concerned with the issue of the historical connections between Biodynamic agriculture and fascism, this thesis will discuss the opportunities

---

<sup>37</sup> John Paull, 'A history of the organic agriculture movement in Australia' in B. Mascitelli and A. Lobo (eds.) *Organics in the Global Food Chain*, Ballarat: Connor Court Publishing, 2013, p. 39.

<sup>38</sup> John Paull, 'The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand', *Harvests*, Vol. 70-3, Biodynamics New Zealand, Summer 2018-19, pp. 38-40.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Staudenmaier, 'Anthroposophy and Ecofascism' Institute for Social Ecology, <http://social-ecology.org/wp/2009/01/anthroposophy-and-ecofascism-2/>, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Staudenmaier, 'Anthroposophy and Ecofascism'.

<sup>41</sup> Staudenmaier, 'Anthroposophy and Ecofascism'.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Staudenmaier, 'Anthroposophy and Ecofascism'.

and challenges experienced by Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand during World War II, which included, fertilizer shortages, new opportunities for organic and Biodynamic agriculture and the wartime *Dig for Victory* campaign.

There are also studies on whether the effects preached by the followers of this methodology of farming are factually supportable. For instance Holger Kirchmann argued that Steiner's "instructions were based on insights and inner visions from spiritualistic exercises and not on agricultural experiments".<sup>43</sup> He stressed the difficulty of proving Steiner's statements because a "scientifically clear hypothesis cannot be made as his descriptions were unclear and not stringent".<sup>44</sup> Some of these predictions which could be tested, according to vigorous scientific criteria, have been found incorrect according to Kirchmann's findings. He asserted nevertheless that for a number of participants "the application of Steiner's agricultural ideas became the most important task in their lives".<sup>45</sup> Scepticism over the effectiveness of Biodynamic farming has continued to be expressed on local newspapers in New Zealand. An article published 2010 reports that organic farmers in New Zealand were seeking scientific credibility for their methods of nurturing the soil and reducing reliance on superphosphate and nitrogen based fertiliser, but according to the article, "were frustrated at not receiving the validation of science".<sup>46</sup> In an article published in 2011 soil scientist Dr Doug Edmeades stated that "the pseudo-science behind organic and biological farming is dangerous and should not be tolerated"<sup>47</sup> on the grounds that instead of applying evidence-based science, organic farming is based on irrational beliefs. As we shall see, there were mixed views within the Biodynamic community in New Zealand in its formative years over whether they should engage in scientific testing to demonstrate the merits of their methods to the wider community.

---

<sup>43</sup> Holger Kirchmann, 'Biological Dynamic Farming – An Occult Form of Alternative Agriculture', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 7: 2, (1944), p. 173.

<sup>44</sup> Kirchmann, 'Biological Dynamic Farming', p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> Kirchmann, 'Biological Dynamic Farming', p. 174.

<sup>46</sup> *The Dominion Post*, September 23, 2010, p. c7.

<sup>47</sup> *The Dominion Post*, October 27, 2011, p. c5.

## Sources

The bulk of the primary sources to be used in order to answer the questions posed in this research are held in the archive of the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association in New Zealand located at Martinborough. They consist of various documents, newsletter, magazines, information sheet, notices to members and minutes from meetings. Prior to commencing the research, contact was established with the Association and permission was sought and given to seek in their archive relevant material for the purpose of the present research.<sup>48</sup> From 1939 to 1949 the, then, Rudolf Steiner Bio Dynamic Association in New Zealand published a collection of News Letter to its members and also Supplements to the News Letter from time to time. These have been carefully analysed in the research. In addition to the material from the archives of the Biodynamic Association, there are a number of documents held in the National Archives from the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research on Biodynamic agriculture which also have been analysed.<sup>49</sup> In addition to these archival sources, there is some relevant material in biographies from the time and contemporary newspapers. For example, former Minister of Agriculture Ben Roberts' biography<sup>50</sup> and publications by and about Charles Alma Baker<sup>51</sup> include relevant information.

---

<sup>48</sup> The News Letter of the Biodynamic Association will be referred by the varying names by which it was called between 1939 and 1949.

<sup>49</sup> "Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil", 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77, Archives New Zealand, Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga, Wellington.

<sup>50</sup> Enid Roberts, *'Remembered': Life and Work of Ben Roberts, M.P. Minister of Agriculture and Marketing, N.Z., 1943-46*, Masterton: Masterton Printing Company, 1965.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Alma Baker, *'Labouring Earth, Survey of Agricultural Conditions at Home and Abroad'*, Heath Cranton limited, 1942.



# Structure

The thesis is comprised of four chapters.

Chapter One, 'Historical Overview of Agriculture in New Zealand' analyses the evolution of agriculture in New Zealand from 1840 in order to outline the wider context within which Biodynamic agriculture developed. It begins by discussing the importance of agriculture to New Zealand's economy and identity and proceeds to discuss how the advent of refrigeration enabled pastoral products to be exported; the so-called 'Grassland Revolution'; the importance of farmers in national politics; the self-identification of New Zealand as the Empire's outlying farm, the trend towards increasingly scientific farming in New Zealand and the reliance on fertilizers by a range of industries. This chapter also gives a brief overview of the development of Anthroposophy in New Zealand because many of the original practitioners of Biodynamics were anthroposophists.

Chapter Two, 'Building Networks c. 1930-40' gives an overview of; the establishment of Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand during the 1930's. It outlines the leading group of pioneers who were members of the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners (based in Dornach, Switzerland) and the beginnings of a more organised movement in New Zealand, culminating in the formation of the Rudolf Steiner Biological-Dynamic Association in New Zealand for Soil and Crop Improvement in 1939. It also discusses early experimental work intended to validate Biodynamic practices, the establishment of the News Letter, and the initial development of a Biodynamic community of practice.

Chapter Three, 'Qualified Recognition 1941-1945', discusses the period between 1941 and 1945 which saw the Biodynamic Association gain a degree of public recognition. Key events included the first Conference of Members in 1941 and participating in the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture that same year. This chapter discusses the window of opportunity during wartime for the organic and Biodynamic movement, resulting from the shortage in supply of fertilisers and the demand to increase production. It also discusses the impact of Ben Roberts as Minister of Agriculture upon Biodynamic agriculture. This chapter also gives an

overview of the Association's views on politics and social issues as expressed in the Association's newsletter.

Chapter Four, 'Opportunity and Conflict 1945-49' evaluates the key issues encountered by the Biodynamic movement in the post-war period. These included the conflict over a proposal to purchase a farm in Kerikeri and the subsequent resignation of a co-founder of the Association as a Director/Secretary. It also discusses the Association declining an opportunity to pursue a joint experimental farm with the Government to undertake strictly scientific experiments and tests of Biodynamic methods. The chapter then explores how the association sought to recover from these challenges. This chapter gives an overview of the consolidation of a community of practice, as defined in the work of Wenger<sup>52</sup>, with mutual engagement of members negotiating a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire.

---

<sup>52</sup> Etienne Wenger, *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 72-85.

# Chapter One: Historical Overview of Agriculture in New Zealand

This chapter provides an overview of the social and historical context within which Biodynamic farming emerged in New Zealand. This chapter addresses the historical importance of agriculture to New Zealand's economy and identity; the importance of farmers in national politics; the trend towards increasingly scientific farming in New Zealand between 1890 and 1930; and the reliance upon fertilizers across a range of industries. This chapter also provides an overview of the beginning of the anthroposophical movement in the country.

## Historical Overview of Agriculture in New Zealand

Pastoral agriculture became very important to New Zealand from its beginnings as a British Colony. It was important for reasons of survival and economic development. According to W.J. Gardner, considering the small size and remoteness of New Zealand the economic progress achieved in the nineteenth century was quite rapid. He argues that New Zealand “possessed the advantages of reliable climate and pasture, and these were turned into a valuable staple export, wool”.<sup>53</sup> The growth of pastoralism by the mid-1850s impacted on the geography and economics of settlement and, as Gardner argues, the plains and hills of the east coast “of the two islands were soon to become the heartland of the colony's economy”.<sup>54</sup> The predominance of pastoralism continued after the New Zealand Wars (c. 1845-72) and ensured European settlers control and access to fertile North Island land.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> W.J. Gardner, 'A Colonial Economy' in: Geoffrey W. Rice, (ed.) *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2<sup>nd</sup>edn, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 57.

<sup>54</sup> Gardner, 'A Colonial Economy', p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> A. Stuart, and H. Campbell, "Business as usual": Contextualising the GM/organic conflict within the history of New Zealand agriculture. *New Zealand Sociology*, 19: 2, (2004), p. 225.

New Zealand's internal development in the nineteenth century further consolidated its links with the United Kingdom instead of decreasing them. New Zealand's economy initially relied on the export of timber and gold. Subsequently, wool and later meat and dairy products became New Zealand's main export commodities. Domestic supply is a comparatively insignificant part of New Zealand's economic history. In the face of low pricing and small returns from wool, from the mid-1870s, many runholders and large farmers adopted wheat cropping. The result of the rural exploitation from 1840-1870 was significant environmental impact on the land such as: "the depletion of native pasture by over stocking, fire, and erosion; the spread of noxious weeds; the unchecked depredations of rabbits"<sup>56</sup>. There was a rapid decline of much native pasture by the 1880s and it was compensated in agricultural terms by the development of pastures from English grasses. Banks Peninsula on the east coast of the South Island is a good example of environmental 'improvement' by clearing off the native forest in order to sow.<sup>57</sup> Brooking and Pawson suggested historians have overlooked "grass and its transformative power as an agent of imperial expansion".<sup>58</sup>

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, New Zealand farming was transformed to a new level, becoming vital for New Zealand's economy and ability to earn money from overseas. Britain was the leading destination for New Zealand exports by 1900. MacDonald argued, the "advent of refrigerated shipping ended the export dependence on wool, and helped to create a viable dairy and meat industries".<sup>59</sup> Refrigeration helped farmers to be able to "compete in any accessible market for pastoral products".<sup>60</sup> It opened up the export markets in place of the limited domestic market. The meat and dairy industry had a significant boom as a result of the introduction of refrigerated shipping. Consequently it gradually replaced the farmhouse system of dairy production with widespread adoption of the factory system. The external market demanded more regular supplies of dairy produce of a "uniform and reliable quality".<sup>61</sup> It was believed that the irregular supply and variable quality of

---

<sup>56</sup> Gardner, 'A Colonial Economy', p. 79.

<sup>57</sup> Tom Brooking and Eric Pawson, 'Silences of Grass: Retrieving the Role of Pasture Plants in the Development of New Zealand and the British Empire', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35, No. 3, (2007), p. 421.

<sup>58</sup> Brooking and Pawson, 'Silences of Grass', p. 428.

<sup>59</sup> Barrie MacDonald, *Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate*, Massey Memorial Lecture, Palmerston North: Massey University, 1982, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Gardner, 'A Colonial Economy', p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> E.C.R. Warr, 'A Changing Dairy Industry', *New Zealand's Heritage*, vol. 6, 77, (1973), p. 2135.

farmhouse butter from a large number of producers hindered New Zealand's dairy exports. There was, at that time, a perception that "the conditions of satisfactory dairy exports could be met only with the factory system, both as a means of fully utilizing new production methods and of instituting quality control in all phases of processing"<sup>62</sup>. The shift from farmhouse systems to larger and mechanised factories took place gradually in New Zealand between 1895 and 1930 and made the country become one of world's top dairy exporters. Grass-related products represented 93 per cent of New Zealand's exports in 1921.<sup>63</sup>

New Zealand farmers strongly influenced politics in the country and they have had a significant representation in Parliament over the years. Between 1893 and 1960 the numbers of farmers serving as elected representatives ranged from one quarter to more than one third of the seats. These statistics underline Gardner's argument that the "farmer politician was "the most distinct feature" of the New Zealand parliamentary scene in the twentieth century".<sup>64</sup> By 1911 one-third of all Members of House of Representatives (MHR) were farmers. The Farmers' Union was formally established in 1902 and led until 1920 by former MHR (1893-1896), Sir James Wilson of Bulls, a large landowner. The Farmers' Union increasingly became a platform of small farmer aspiration. The newly-formed Farmers' Union "was rapidly staking out a claim to be the political, but not the "party political" voice of farmers".<sup>65</sup> It was "during the Liberal Governments of Seddon (1893-1906) and Ward (1906- 1912) most politicians representing the farmer cause were gradually attracted to the emergent Reform Party led by William Massey"<sup>66</sup> who became leader of the opposition in 1903. Although the Liberals' possessive policies encouraging closer settlement, particularly their Advances to Settlers Act, which provided cheap loans to small farmers so they could get on the land and provision of leasehold land initially proved popular, by the early 1900s a growing number of small farmers wanted greater security of tenure over leasehold properties. Massey with a background in farmers' organizations had entered Parliament in 1894 and "his strong stand on freehold against leasehold, ensured his

---

<sup>62</sup> Warr, 'A Changing Dairy Industry', p. 2135.

<sup>63</sup> Brooking and Pawson, 'Silences of Grass', p. 418.

<sup>64</sup> W. J. Gardner, *The Farmer Politician in New Zealand History*, Massey Memorial Lecture, Palmerston North: Massey University, 1970, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> Gardner, *The Farmer Politician in New Zealand History*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>66</sup> MacDonald, *Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate*, p. 2.

political success as a spokesman for conservatives in general and farmers in particular".<sup>67</sup> Gardner believes that:

The Farmers' Union in its first decade achieved little of the direct political power predicted for it. Perhaps its chief contribution to rural politics was the point on which Massey put his finger: the rising conviction that the authentic farmers' advocate and defender was a small freehold farmer. Only a man wedded to soil he worked and called his own had the right spirit to confound the machinations of single-taxers and land nationalizers.<sup>68</sup>

Gardner asserted that with the ascension of Massey as Prime Minister of New Zealand in 1912, "Massey's farmer opposition became the farmers' government; the farmers' on defence became the farmers' in power".<sup>69</sup> Massey staunchly supported the use of chemical fertilisers on agriculture and as pointed out by J. Gould in *The Grass Roots of New Zealand History* stood as a champion of the cause of land improvement and intensified farming.<sup>70</sup> He carried the task of securing access to Nauruan phosphates for New Zealand farmers. A huge lobbying effort was also carried out by the Farmers' Union throughout 1917-1918 to get control of Guano Islands in order to reduce the high prices of fertilisers:

Farmers had demonstrated a growing awareness of the value of superphosphate since the turn of the century but with all essential ingredients having to be imported, the establishment of a major manufacturing industry in New Zealand depended on a guaranteed, cheap, supply of raw materials because it was only in this way that local manufactures could compete with suppliers from countries – in North Africa, for example – with both large deposits and cheap labour. The high quality of phosphate from Nauru and Ocean Island, the ease of mining, the relatively short distance for freight, were all critical factors in the establishment of the New Zealand superphosphate industry and the agricultural development that depended on it.<sup>71</sup>

Massey's philosophy, as Keith Sinclair argues, was that New Zealand was the Empire's outlying farm. According to him, for Massey, nothing could harm the primary producers, "upon whose output the community's prosperity rested".<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> MacDonald, *Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate*, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Gardner, *The Farmer Politician in New Zealand History*, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Gardner, *The Farmer Politician in New Zealand History*, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> J. D. Gould, *The Grass Roots of New Zealand: Pasture Formation and Improvement, 1871-1911*, Massey Memorial Lecture, Palmerston North: Massey University, 1974, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> MacDonald, *Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate*, p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, Auckland: Penguin, 1991, p. 59.

New Zealand agriculture was rapidly changing in the early years of the twentieth century. In the North Island, with its mix of environments, the early development took place mostly in the grasslands of Hawkes Bay and the Wairarapa. According to MacDonald; Taranaki, Manawatu, the Bay of Plenty, Northland and the King Country “were all opened to farming”<sup>73</sup> the in the decades prior to World War I. Indigenous plants, forests, wetland and grass-land were gradually replaced by English grasses culminating in the conversion from forest to pasture and arguably, as Brooking and Pawson suggested, “colonial development could hardly have occurred without grass and clover plants”.<sup>74</sup> Subsequently the hill country of the North Island experienced the replacement of native forest by pasture. Pastoral and arable farming at that time arguably was dependent upon overseas development of techniques and equipment. Attempts to establish a comparable system of arable farming to Britain were disappointing in the North Island and crops such as; wheat, turnips and fodder didn’t grow well compared to the South Island’s Canterbury Plains where there was more successful experience of arable farming. Because of the uncertain results from those crops North Island’s farmers relied heavily on grass. As Stephens noted:

The concept of treating grass as a crop, applying fertilizer to encourage rapid growth and organizing the farm around its management was completely unfamiliar, but by the 1890s some Waikato farmers were becoming aware that this should be their goal Cereals were a dead end and fodder crops on a large scale were profitable only if they could be fitted into a rotation built around cash crops.<sup>75</sup>

During the period from 1890 to 1939 the Government became more directly involved in agriculture. The Department of Agriculture was initially set up in 1892 under the Liberals, “intended to develop an export dairy, reduce weeds, and help prevent animal and plant diseases”.<sup>76</sup> In 1904 the Department of Agriculture was asked by the Waikato Farmer’s Club to carry out a top dressing trial with basic slag. The results impressed those farmers and particularly the manager of the Weraroa Experimental Station near Levin. It was believed that topdressing was the “key to the success of livestock industries”. Mainstream farming had a significant development in early twentieth century in New Zealand. Towards the end of World War I large numbers of

---

<sup>73</sup> MacDonald, *Massey’s Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate*, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Brooking and Pawson, *Silences of Grass*, p. 418.

<sup>75</sup> P.R. Stephens, ‘Innovation on the Farm’, *New Zealand’s Heritage*, Vol. 6, No. 81, 1973, p. 2261.

<sup>76</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/en/government-and-agriculture/page-4> (visited on 5/9/2018)

farmers started to apply superphosphate as well as heavy applications of lime in particularly in Southland. The use of modern techniques of excessive pasture management started to be broadly used in the dairy industry in the 1920s. Arguably, “the evolution and adoption of new ideas made the 1920s the most significant period in New Zealand’s agricultural growth”.<sup>77</sup> Mechanization was adopted with wider use of milking machines and shearing plants on sheep farms and the provision of a reliable source of motive power.

The ‘Grassland Revolution’ was the intensification of New Zealand pastoral agriculture and changes to farming practice resulting of a lot of thought, research and experimentation with farming techniques in the striving pastoral industry. Grass was to become the main crop in New Zealand. It began in the 1920’s with the aid of the English grasses, topdressing, herd testing and improvement of roads in rural areas. The expansion of pastoral products led to the formation of the Meat Board in 1922 and the Dairy Board in 1923. In 1926 the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research DSIR was established and subsequently Massey Agricultural College was founded in 1927. The availability of rural credit and the spread of electrical power favoured the dairy industry which was also having the benefit of the introduction of herbage strain testing in 1928 and also the inauguration of the New Zealand Grassland Association in 1931 with the aim of enhancing pastoral agriculture.<sup>78</sup> According to Brooking and Pawson, “grassland development was nonetheless clearly important both as a technology in the incorporation of the lands of the imperial periphery, and as the basis of trade in the networks of empire”.<sup>79</sup> They argued that the grassland transformation caused a significant change in every aspect of New Zealand life and imposed a type of “totalitarianism that marginalised other forms of landscape”.<sup>80</sup> Finally it was asserted that the forces behind these changes were a combination of efforts of farmers, seed merchants, and stock and station agents based in New Zealand. Grassland-derived products represented over 90 per cent of New Zealand’s outward trade in the 1920s. Although the development of grassland farming greatly favoured New Zealand’s economy, indigenous land, places and livelihoods were undercut and erased.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Stephens, ‘Innovation on the Farm’, p. 2262.

<sup>78</sup> Ray Knox, ‘Introduction’, *New Zealand’s Heritage*, Vol. 6, No. 78, 1973, p. 2156.

<sup>79</sup> Brooking and Pawson, ‘Silences of Grass’ p. 422.

<sup>80</sup> Brooking and Pawson, ‘Silences of Grass’ p. 425.

<sup>81</sup> Brooking and Pawson, ‘Silences of Grass’, pp. 428-429.



Moreover, as James Watson observes, the increasing involvement of Government in agriculture resulted in an increasing number of farmers looking to the state for guidance on farming techniques.<sup>82</sup> Farmers had a high level of literacy and interest in new methods and there was a widespread respect for the Department of Agriculture and its scientists amongst farmers. As Watson argued, due to the decreasing availability of farm labour farmers had the desire to make the farm a 'one man operation'.<sup>83</sup>

From 1919 to 1930 there was a significant increase in the production and exports from the dairy industry but export prices collapsed in 1921-22 because of large volumes released from storage onto London markets, coinciding with the end of the commandeers – the World War I bulk purchase agreement with the Imperial Government; and then fluctuated for remainder of the decade prior to the Great Depression. The swing towards grassland farming yielded results and marketing became more efficient and farmers were open for new ideas. The depression posed a challenge and farmers had to cut their costs in order to counter the lower prices of their products. The problem was that the farmer had to get more from the land, from his animals and his labour but “there was not much scope for further development on traditional lines”.<sup>84</sup> The grassland revolution superseded the traditional methods and was mostly based on scientific and technological techniques of farming which were heavily dependent on capital and fertilizers. The two basic changes which underlay it were “the concept of the cow as a commercially efficient converter of grass into butterfat; and the provision of greatly increased supply of grass all the year around from permanent pastures sustained by topdressing with chemical fertilizers, mainly superphosphate”.<sup>85</sup> In the 1930s the Dairy Board was marketing for the dairy industry by advertising New Zealand as the “Empire’s dairy farm”.<sup>86</sup> New Zealand projected itself as the ‘imperial grassland specialist’ and claimed its own identity by distinguishing itself from the rest of the Empire.

---

<sup>82</sup> James Watson, ‘The Significance of Mr. Richard Buckley’s Exploding Trousers: Reflections on an Aspect of technological Change in New Zealand Dairy Farming between the World Wars’, *Agricultural History*, Vol. 78, No. 3, (2004), p. 354.

<sup>83</sup> Watson, ‘The Significance of Mr. Richard Buckley’s Exploding Trousers’, pp. 358-9.

<sup>84</sup> Brooking and Pawson, ‘Silences of Grass’ p. 427.

<sup>85</sup> E.P. Malone, ‘The Grassland Revolution’, *New Zealand’s Heritage*, Vol. 6, 78, 1973 p. 2161.

<sup>86</sup> Brooking and Pawson, ‘Silences of Grass’, p. 427.

Government involvement in agriculture continued through the 1930s. During the Depression years between 1931 and 1935, McKinnon argued the Government favoured rural solutions such as closer settlement. In 1935, the First Labour Government came to power and offered a guaranteed price scheme for farmers, to give them some certainty over their income.<sup>87</sup>

The use of fertilizers in New Zealand had a significant growth between 1880 and 1914. From the 1840 onwards, Stuart and Campbell argue “different discourses of science within agriculture have been in conflict, with the dominant discourses tending to inform and authorise not only significant soil degradation in New Zealand agriculture but significant disempowerment of indigenous land use and management strategies”.<sup>88</sup> From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Stuart and Campbell identify an agricultural regime in New Zealand that “linked agricultural science, government activity, and the emerging fertilizer industry”.<sup>89</sup> From 1880 New Zealand experienced the intensification, diversification and increase of top dressing and mechanization. Between the 1930s and 1940s, New Zealand steadily moved towards industrialized practices, supported by the “combined forces of commercial (fertiliser) interest, State, and a reductionist science that assumed an engineering and input-based approach to life processes”.<sup>90</sup>

Horticulture was another sector of the primary industry in New Zealand in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which was the subject of scientific research and which received increasing doses of chemicals in the form of sprays. Orchardling was regionally important in Nelson and Hawke’s Bay but was at that time overshadowed by the predominant sheep and dairy industries. The use of chemical fertilizers was a common practice in agriculture at that time and with the development of a growing orchard industry new agrichemicals were introduced to combat pest and diseases in horticulture. The emergence of orcharding highlighting the inherent contradiction between the orchard standing for an “idealised lifestyle in a beneficent natural setting while at the same time maintaining it by applying more and more sprays”.<sup>91</sup> Fruit

---

<sup>87</sup> Malcolm McKinnon, ‘The Broken Decade: Prosperity, Depression and Recovery in New Zealand, 1928-39’, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2016, pp. 190-191.

<sup>88</sup> Stuart and Campbell, ‘Business as Usual’, p. 223.

<sup>89</sup> Stuart and Campbell, ‘Business as Usual’, p. 226.

<sup>90</sup> Stuart and Campbell, ‘Business as Usual’, p. 228.

<sup>91</sup> Roche, ‘Wilderness to Orchard’, p. 447.

growers became dependent upon spray regimes particularly due to the demands from overseas markets of a higher quality fruit and also the threat of transporting pests and disease from infected fruits. From 1910 Nelson was “transformed into an export-oriented apple growing region”<sup>92</sup> and became known for its orchard boom. The role played by the state to encourage the fruit growing was mostly focussed in the provision of export incentives, legislation for the control of pests and diseases, and the creation of a Biology and Pomology Division within the Department of Agriculture. Although without a university, Nelson was the site of “privately endowed Cawthron Institute, established in 1919 to undertake agricultural research”.<sup>93</sup>

Chemical spray systems were widely used in the orchard industry in New Zealand which was essentially unregulated until 1913 “when the Department of Agriculture issued certificates of competency in spray and pruning”.<sup>94</sup> Compulsory registration of orchard sprays only happened from 1959. There was a stream within the research community which supported biological controls. It was represented by a scientist Dr G. C. Cunningham from the DSIR. The biological control stream lost ground in the mid-1920s to the chemical sprays stream which was a much more “powerful alliance of scientists, industry growers and regulators”.<sup>95</sup> Roche argued that:

Government scientists played a dual role in extending knowledge about orchard pests and disease as well as developing competing chemicals and biological controls and actually developing regulatory systems. Although biological control advocates enjoyed some success, powerful establishment scientists such as Cunningham were disparaging and championed chemical solutions to pest problem.<sup>96</sup>

Apples destined for exporting were increasingly dependent on the regular application of sprays in order to meet targets of quantity and ‘quality’, export markets could be lost if fruit was pest-ridden, and importers were very demanding in this regard. The application of chemical sprays increased dramatically for all sorts of purposes aimed to combat pests and disease. As Roche pointed out, “from the 1920s sprays and

---

<sup>92</sup> Roche, ‘Wilderness to Orchard’, p. 436.

<sup>93</sup> Roche, ‘Wilderness to Orchard’, p. 440.

<sup>94</sup> Roche, ‘Wilderness to Orchard’, p. 443.

<sup>95</sup> Roche, ‘Wilderness to Orchard’, p. 447.

<sup>96</sup> Roche, ‘Wilderness to Orchard’, p. 446.

orchards developed in conjunction with each other”.<sup>97</sup> An array of chemicals and advanced spray systems became available in the 1930s.

New Zealand experienced a relatively rapid urban expansion and an increasing population living in towns and cities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The development of urban areas inevitably led to social problems such as crime and poverty inherent to urban growth. For some historians, New Zealand’s tradition and identity rested in the country and there was belief that the land was a prosperous place to live and a mentality that the city was to be blamed for most social problems. Miles Fairburn discussed the view that a New Zealand moral tradition sanctified the land based family and repudiated the city. He argued that there were three visions of arcadia which merged together to create a common rural myth, “all rejected the city; and they equally idealized the soil-based family as a fundamental foundation of the social order”.<sup>98</sup> According to Fairburn, the Government drive to facilitate the acquisition of land between 1890 and 1930 through promotion of closer settlement suggests that the “family-sized farm was intended less to serve an economic function than to fulfil a social ideal, the creation of an arcadia of small family farms”.<sup>99</sup>

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century unfolded, New Zealand farmers in general were seeking to find a way to improve production and fertility in the short term at low cost. As farming became more specialized and mechanized, there was a trend “that it must also become more scientific”.<sup>100</sup> Science offered the farmers a desired response for their immediate needs through intensive use of fertilizers, sprays and chemicals, translated in its short term ‘solutions’ to increase production and reduce costs.

Almost invisible against the backdrop of conventional agriculture was the foundation of Biodynamic movement in New Zealand challenging the long term effects to the environment, soil, waterways, and human health resulting from scientific farming. For the purposes of this thesis, what is important to note is that the development of Biodynamic agriculture in the 1930’s took place at a time when the use of chemicals

---

<sup>97</sup> Roche, ‘Wilderness to Orchard’, p. 441.

<sup>98</sup> Miles Fairburn, ‘The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier: An Approach to New Zealand Social History, 1870-1940’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 9, 1, (1975), p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> Fairburn, ‘The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier’, p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> MacDonald, ‘Massey’s Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate’, p. 3.

and fertilisers was actively endorsed by both farmers organizations and successive New Zealand governments.

## **Anthroposophy in New Zealand**

Biodynamic Agriculture was closely, although not exclusively, connected to the Anthroposophy movement in New Zealand. It appears that the first impulse of Anthroposophy in New Zealand was sown by Ada Wells<sup>101</sup> (1863-1933), who became a lifelong anthroposophist after hearing a lecture from Rudolf Steiner during a trip to Leipzig, Germany, in 1902. Steiner was, at that time, the leader of the German branch of the Theosophical Society. In New Zealand, Ada was deeply involved in social causes, political issues and had a high profile public activity. Ada and her daughters continued to study Steiner's philosophy through lectures and books which were available to them. Her oldest daughter, Christabel, was appointed the representative of the Anthroposophical Society in Christchurch in 1927 by Bernard and Rachel Crompton-Smith of Havelock North. The Crompton-Smiths "had themselves been formally confirmed as leaders of the New Zealand "branch" of the Anthroposophical Society by the Vorstand in Dornach".<sup>102</sup>

Emma Richmond (1845-1921) was another leading figure of Anthroposophy in New Zealand. Her first contact with Anthroposophy occurred during her trip to London in 1904. Although she came to contact with Anthroposophy later than Ada, she played a crucial role in introducing translations of Steiner's early works to the wider public in New Zealand. Emma was the "focal point of the study groups in Wellington and Havelock North which eventually led to the establishment of the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand".<sup>103</sup> Thus, she is considered as the Society's founder.

Emma and Ada are considered the pioneers of Anthroposophy in New Zealand. Beyond their commitment to Anthroposophy they also were devoted feminists and social activists. In New Zealand, the first impulse of Anthroposophy was seeded by both of them in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, interest in Anthroposophy grew significantly and it encompassed a wide range of topics including education, food

---

<sup>101</sup> Believed to be New Zealand's first anthroposophist, she was a well-known Christchurch suffragist and radical social campaigner.

<sup>102</sup> Turbott, 'Anthroposophy in the Antipodes', pp. 22-23.

<sup>103</sup> Turbott, 'Anthroposophy in the Antipodes', p. 23.

growing, arts and spirituality. Many groups formed in different cities, practical activities originated and by 1933 the anthroposophical movement in New Zealand reached a stage to form a body responsible of articulating these activities and groups and maintain links overseas. In 1933 the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand was established in Havelock North, Hawke's Bay. Hawkes Bay region arguably became the centre of Anthroposophy in New Zealand. Since those early days, as stated in the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand website, "schools, kindergartens, early childhood centers, medical practices and therapies, curative homes, biodynamic farming, businesses and other initiatives have been founded".<sup>104</sup>

According to Turbott, the first anthroposophists in New Zealand were predominantly of English origin, "some first generation immigrants, mostly born in New Zealand".<sup>105</sup> He argued that although they maintained their European connections, and on many occasions visited England and Europe to be closer to the anthroposophical movement, the early initiatives towards Anthroposophy "came mainly from individuals living in New Zealand and committed to this country"<sup>106</sup>, and therefore arguably 'home grown'. However, during the late 1930s the arrival of German refugees changed the dynamics. Two of these refugees, Ernst and Elisabeth Reizenstein, were devoted anthroposophists who, as Turbott argued, brought to New Zealand "a direct infusion of first-hand knowledge and experience from the heartland of Anthroposophy".<sup>107</sup>

Anthroposophical activity in New Zealand continued during the World War II, but large scale meetings discontinued. A national conference in 1944 held at Taruna, Havelock North, signalled the "re-birth" of the society. As the next chapter will explain, anthroposophists such as the Crompton-Smiths and George Winkfield played an important role in the development of Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand. Arguably, as will be discussed further, the anthroposophical connections with Biodynamic agriculture are important because it gave it access to an international network.

---

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.anthroposophy.org.nz/about/> (visited on 28/06/2018).

<sup>105</sup> Turbott, 'Anthroposophy in the Antipodes', p. 69.

<sup>106</sup> Turbott, 'Anthroposophy in the Antipodes', p. 69.

<sup>107</sup> Turbott, 'Anthroposophy in the Antipodes', p. 69.

## Conclusion

Agriculture was important to New Zealand's economy and identity from at least as early as the beginning of the colonial era. Wool was the main pastoral product destined for export for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the invention and availability of refrigeration in the 1880s, new pastoral products such as meat and dairy products started to be part of New Zealand's exports. The introduction of English grasses, regular application of fertilizers, and mechanization considerably transformed the dairy industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Agricultural exports, especially to the United Kingdom were vital to New Zealand's economy, and accordingly national interests. Farmers strongly influenced politics in the country and had significant representation in parliament. Farming became increasingly scientific as the twentieth century unfolded; by the 1930s intensive pasture based farming utilising fertilisers was the dominant mode of production. The state sponsored and strongly supported scientifically oriented farming and the use of phosphate. This was the context within which those seeking to promote Biodynamic agriculture had to operate

Fortunately for those who wished to pursue Biodynamic agriculture; the development of Anthroposophy in New Zealand provided something of a supporting infrastructure. Hawke's Bay became the centre of the anthroposophical movement in New Zealand. The first anthroposophists in New Zealand were predominantly people living and committed to this country, from English origin, mostly first generation immigrants born in New Zealand. So as the next chapter will discuss the development of the Biodynamic movement in New Zealand can be seen as both a 'home grown' and transnational initiative.





## Chapter Two: Building Networks c. 1930-40

This chapter gives an overview of a new beginning for the Biodynamic movement in the furthest country from its birthplace. This chapter will identify men and women responsible for introducing Biodynamic agriculture to New Zealand. It gives an overview of the formation of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand in 1939. This chapter also discusses the importance of the News Letter in promoting the Association and establishing links locally and abroad, and reporting experimental work carried out intended to validate the effectiveness of Biodynamic agriculture.

### Early Years of Biodynamic/Organic Agriculture

It is unclear when exactly Biodynamic methods were first introduced in New Zealand although it is generally believed it was practised at least as early as 1930. A number of people have been identified as pioneers. Bernard Crompton-Smith, for instance, had established an orchard in Havelock North around 1913 at a time when he was already an active anthroposophist. It has been suggested that he was the earliest person in New Zealand to apply Biodynamic Preparations “presumably after receiving copies of lectures from the agriculture course at some time after 1924”.<sup>108</sup> Crompton Smith was acknowledged as the pioneer of the Biodynamic movement in New Zealand by the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand and was made a life member of the Association in 1948.<sup>109</sup> Raynor Jones, a member of the Council of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand, writing in 1947 dated to the origins of Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand to the 1930s. One of the objectives of his paper was “to see how far Bio-Dynamic practices have been adopted here since their inception in 1930”.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, pp. 85-86.

<sup>109</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>110</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 5.

Recent research by Paull suggests that in 1930 four New Zealanders joined the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners based in Dornach Switzerland, and received copies of Steiner's Agricultural Course.<sup>111</sup> According to the records Crompton-Smith was the first New Zealander to join the Experimental Circle (15 February 1930), followed by George Winkfield (24 July 1930), James Coe (26 July 1930) and Clarence H. Jones from Christchurch (24 September 1930) and by the end of the 1930's fifteen people from New Zealand had subscribed to the Experimental Circle. These included four women: Ada Williamson; Alice Ruth Wilson; Mary Jean Elder Bauchop; Esther M Avery; suggesting a degree of women involvement in the Biodynamic movement. According to the article, "New Zealand's pioneers of Biodynamic farming signed a confidentiality agreement with Goetheanum. Switzerland"<sup>112</sup> and each of these 15 members of the Experimental Circle were "issued with a numbered copy of the *Agricultural Course* at the time of joining".<sup>113</sup> Members of the Experimental Circle had to agree to use the copy of the Agricultural Course for their personal use in "carrying out the experiments undertaken by [me] within the Agricultural Experimental Circle of the General Anthroposophical Society"<sup>114</sup> and that the copy "was to be returned to the Goetheanum should the recipient leave the Experimental Circle or the General Anthroposophical Society"<sup>115</sup>. The agreement suggests that this group of people had a degree of commitment to Anthroposophy as a whole philosophy and not only to Steiner's agricultural views.

George Boland Winkfield (1887-1957) is widely regarded as one of the earliest pioneers of Biodynamic in New Zealand. He was introduced to Anthroposophy through his friend Daniel Nicol Dunlop (1868-1935) in 1926. In 1930 Winkfield went to the Goetheanum at Dornach, Switzerland "to learn to make the biodynamic preparations"<sup>116</sup> and was recorded making the Biodynamic Preparations in New

---

<sup>111</sup> John Paull, 'The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand', *Harvests*, Vol. 70-3, Biodynamics New Zealand, Summer 2018-19, pp. 38-40.

<sup>112</sup> John Paull, 'The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand', *Harvests*, Vol. 70-3, Biodynamics New Zealand, Summer 2018-19, p. 38.

<sup>113</sup> John Paull, 'The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand', *Harvests*, Vol. 70-3, Biodynamics New Zealand, Summer 2018-19, p. 38.

<sup>114</sup> John Paull, 'The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand', *Harvests*, Vol. 70-3, Biodynamics New Zealand, Summer 2018-19, p. 39.

<sup>115</sup> John Paull, 'The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand', *Harvests*, Vol. 70-3, Biodynamics New Zealand, Summer 2018-19, p. 39.

<sup>116</sup> Ineke van Florenstein Mulder, *The Seeds and the Growth of Biodynamics in New Zealand*, *Newsletter*, 47:2, (1994), p. 20.

Zealand by 1931 thus “marking the first systematic use of Steiner’s agricultural methods in this country”.<sup>117</sup> He had returned to Auckland in 1931 and “replanted his extensive garden in Clonbern Road with the necessary herbs and plants and began making biodynamic preparations on a large scale”.<sup>118</sup> He worked several years (1905-27) as a cable officer for the Pacific Cable Board “until his appointment to senior administrative work in Auckland, in about 1927”,<sup>119</sup> retired as a cable consultant in 1933 and from then devoted his time to Anthroposophy and to the Biodynamic movement. Winkfield was an influential figure in the Biodynamic movement in New Zealand as observed in the following recollection:

As the years went by more and more people called in to see him on biodynamic matters, and his correspondence connected him with many parts of the world – the U.S.A, the U.K., South America, Australia, Malaysia and Europe.<sup>120</sup>

Winkfield was active in forging links with overseas Biodynamic societies. He attended the first conference of the Biodynamic Association in Great Britain in 1939. He maintained a correspondence with anthroposophist’s from many countries, including important leading figures such as Dr Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and Dr. Guenther Wachsmuth. Winkfield became “widely known as a supplier of biodynamic preparations, and an authority and consultant on biodynamics”.<sup>121</sup> Charles Alma Baker and Ben Roberts<sup>122</sup> were among the leading figures who consulted with him. They first sought advice about soil preparation and composting, and the latter, who was Minister of Agriculture 1943-1946, was searching for alternatives to phosphate fertilizers which were in short supply at that time. Winkfield was one of the founders of the Rudolf Steiner Biological Dynamic Association for Soil and Crop Improvement in 1939. Winkfield was elected president of the Association at its first Annual General Meeting and continued in this role until the early 1950s.

George Bacchus (1902-1966) was also another notable and influential pioneer of Biodynamic principles in New Zealand. He grew up in Otaki on his parent’s farm,

---

<sup>117</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 86.

<sup>118</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, pp. 86-87.

<sup>119</sup> Joyce Whelan, recollections of GB Winkfield, *Newsletter*, 47:2, (1994), p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> Ineke van Florenstein Mulder, The Seeds and the Growth of Biodynamics in New Zealand, *Newsletter*, 47:2, (1994), p. 20.

<sup>121</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 87.

<sup>122</sup> Benjamin Roberts (1880-1952) was the Minister of Agriculture and Marketing (1943-46) during the first Labour Government under Peter Fraser in New Zealand.

“attended Wanganui Collegiate School and Canterbury University and also graduated with a degree in electrical engineering”,<sup>123</sup> at a time when very few did university. Throughout the 1920s he worked on the Parnassus-Blenheim railway and also on the early Waitaki hydroelectricity projects. Bacchus “developed his interest in Anthroposophy independently over this time... and receiving study materials from prominent anthroposophists in Havelock North, Ruth Nelson and Edna Burbury”.<sup>124</sup> Influenced by Steiner’s teachings, George Bacchus decided to leave his career as an engineer in order to dedicate his life to Anthroposophy and the study of Biodynamic agriculture. After learning some German, he travelled to Europe to “visit Goetheanum and to work as a labourer and student on biodynamic farms and gardens in Germany and England”.<sup>125</sup> Upon his return to New Zealand in 1935, he wrote a summary of his overseas trip findings in an article to the *New Zealand News Sheet* in 1936. He worked in several farms about the country with the goal of gaining local experience. One of these was located near Woodville, the Jackson farm “Durslade”. He went there under the initiative of Mrs. Dorothy Jackson. It had 400 acres [161.87 hectares] with a large vegetable garden and orchard and there he “demonstrated the use of biodynamic preparations and composting methods”.<sup>126</sup> He married Nancy Crompton-Smith in 1936, and in 1937 they moved to the United Kingdom. While in the UK, George Bacchus was an adviser to the British Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, he also was “an itinerant worker on a variety of biodynamic farms throughout Britain”<sup>127</sup> during the years of World War II. The family moved back to New Zealand with four children in 1947, “settling on a dairy farm at Wharepoa on the Hauraki Plains”.<sup>128</sup> He served as the President of the Association during the 1950s and the Bacchus family farm, where he lived until his death in 1966, “was one of the first in New Zealand in which biodynamic methods were systematically applied to a whole productive unit”.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 90.

<sup>124</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 90.

<sup>125</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 90.

<sup>126</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 90.

<sup>127</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 91.

<sup>128</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 91.

<sup>129</sup> Turbott, ‘Anthroposophy in the Antipodes’, p. 91.

In the News Letter edition of August 1948 was an article written by him called “The Beginning of the B.D. Movement in Europe”<sup>130</sup> in which he briefly describes how Biodynamic agriculture started in Europe. He also gave an interesting account of his own contact with the Biodynamic movement in Europe in 1934 which he made observations of benefits from growing food applying Biodynamic methods. He also alluded to products being sold under the name ‘Demeter’:

There were some thousand farms and gardens using the system and they have registered the name “Demeter” and any one whose place was up to certain standard, and it was a high one, was allowed to sell his product as “Demeter Products”. In some places one could get bread baked from Demeter flour and buy “Demeter” vegetables.<sup>131</sup>

Demeter trademark and certification was introduced in 1928 in order to market Biodynamic produce.<sup>132</sup> It set out standards and quality control to ensure that food and products are produced accordingly with the Biodynamic principles. In New Zealand it was not until 1984 that the Biodynamic Association registered Demeter as a certification trademark.<sup>133</sup> As we shall see, however, there were attempts in the mid-1940s to establish criteria to define who could legitimately claim to be selling Biodynamic produce.

The early pioneers of Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand were mostly anthroposophists who were of independent means. Most were not seeking to make a living out of Biodynamic farming.

## **The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand**

The results and experience gained by the pioneering people in the 1930s reached a stage where an increasing number of people were either actively following or were close to starting practicing Biodynamic methods in New Zealand. Within this context a group of active individuals perceived that the “time has arrived in New Zealand to

---

<sup>130</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August 1948, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 13.

<sup>131</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August 1948, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 13.

<sup>132</sup> <http://www.demeter.net/what-is-demeter/history> (visited on 05-04-2017).

<sup>133</sup> <http://www.biodynamic.org.nz/demeter> (visited on 05-04-2017).

gradually build up an Association of Individuals and an organization which shall be a channel for the dissemination of Biological-Dynamic knowledge gained from local and overseas experiences”<sup>134</sup> and serve also as a “means of mutual help and encouragement for those engaged in following out the Biological-Dynamic methods in New Zealand”.<sup>135</sup> To this end a decision was made in 1939 to form an Association called: *The Rudolph Steiner Biological-Dynamic Association in New Zealand for Soil and Crop Improvement*. The name choice suggests a conscious desire to identify with Steiner. Over 25 people became members of the Association when it was launched in September 1939 representing an “activity throughout the Dominion from Keri Keri in the North, to Dunedin in the South”<sup>136</sup>. The claim of a nationwide presence may have been overly optimistic because in its pioneering years the Biodynamic movement in New Zealand was largely confined to particular places in the North Island. The formation of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand was credited to “long patient and self sacrificing activity by G.B Winkfield”.<sup>137</sup> As noted, Winkfield had practiced the Biodynamic methods in his garden since 1930. He worked with Courtenay Hall in 1938, who was also a member of the Anthroposophical Society and asked to be admitted to the Experimental Circle. Hall proposed forming the Bio-Dynamic Association and they both “agreed to work together and circulars were sent out to likely people”.<sup>138</sup> Once the Association was formed, Hall also was a leading figure in disseminating Biodynamic methods. As Winkfield noted in 1947, Hall “undertook journeys all over New Zealand from Dunedin to Keri Keri, and wherever possible lectured and increased membership”.<sup>139</sup>

Once it was formed, in 1939, the Association published and distributed to its members an ‘Information Sheet’<sup>140</sup> in which the objectives of the Association and the practical advantages of being a member were outlined.

---

<sup>134</sup> *Information Sheet No. 1*, issued by The Rudolph Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, (not dated).

<sup>135</sup> *Information Sheet No. 1*, issued by The Rudolph Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, (not dated).

<sup>136</sup> *News Letter*, No. 1, not dated.

<sup>137</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945.

<sup>138</sup> *News Letter*, No. 2, New Series, March, 1947, p. 1.

<sup>139</sup> *News Letter*, No. 2, New Series, March, 1947, p. 1.

<sup>140</sup> *Information Sheet No. 1*, issued by The Rudolph Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, (not dated).

The objectives of the Association were outlined as follows:

- (1) To make known, promote and apply, the Biological-Dynamic methods given by Dr. Rudolph Steiner for the betterment of Agriculture, Forestry, Orcharding, Market Gardening and Gardening.
- (2) To improve and maintain the nutritive quality of all produce from soil.
- (3) To promote the forming of Humus Activity in New Zealand soils.
- (4) To promote the rearing and feeding of sound and healthy live-stock.
- (5) Membership shall cover all advice and local literature – such as News Letter.
- (6) All literature printed and published overseas shall be charged for at nominal price.
- (7) The Biological-Dynamic Preparations will be available to Members of the Association only.
- (8) To promote consciousness that the Earth is a living Organism and thereby to assist in working with Nature and not against her.<sup>141</sup>

The advantages of forming an association were outlined as follows:

- (1) An Association to which enquiries dealing with Biological-Dynamic questions can be submitted.
- (2) The receipt of information upon the progress of the Biological-Dynamic Associations in Great Britain, the Continent and elsewhere.
- (3) The receipt of at least four News Letters per year in which it is hoped to insert New Zealand experiences and questions with answers.<sup>142</sup>

When the Biodynamic Association was first formed a Provisional Council was established and it was composed of three members from Auckland region; James Coe (Remuera – Auckland), George Winkfield (Remuera – Auckland) and Courtenay Hall (Mt. Eden - Auckland). This suggests the early concentration of Biodynamic farming was in Auckland. From the outset, the Biodynamic Association committed themselves to making contact with overseas organisations and developing a community of practice. The early adopters of Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand mutually engaged with a shared purpose of disseminating Steiner's agricultural teachings in New Zealand. This group of people negotiated a joint enterprise in the form of the formation and development of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand. The members of the Biodynamic Association also developed of a shared repertoire such

---

<sup>141</sup> *Information Sheet No. 1*, issued by The Rudolph Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, (not dated).

<sup>142</sup> *Information Sheet No. 1*, Issued by the Rudolph Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, (not dated), p. 1.

as upholding Steiner's anthroposophical philosophy, the making of the Biodynamic Preparations and backing the claims of their effectiveness.

The development of Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand coincided with the emergence of organic farming and in particular the Humic Compost Club. The organic social movement emerged in New Zealand in the 1930's, marking a "point of strong debate over the declining fertility and sustainability of pastoral farming in New Zealand".<sup>143</sup> Stuart and Campbell argue:

The collision and collusion between State, science and the fertilizer industry in formulating a response to the soil crises was resisted from a number of points in New Zealand. Most importantly, an emergent social movement based on the idea of organic agriculture brought together alternative scientific discourses with cultural and political visions of an independent New Zealand.<sup>144</sup>

The organic groups defended a balanced system of production asserting the relationship of food quality and health. The organic proposals from the 1930s suggested "improving local self-sufficiency and co-operative development as options to an increasing dependence on overseas markets and imports of fertilizers".<sup>145</sup> The organic movement developed almost simultaneously in many western countries. New Zealand, Stuart and Campbell's article observed, "led the way in formal organization, but had strong associations with similarly-minded proponents overseas, drawing on research undertaken in Britain and in Germany, where anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner developed his bio-dynamic approach".<sup>146</sup>

National health concerns linked declining soil fertility to poor nutrition qualities in food, and gave a platform to the formation of a viable organic organisation in New Zealand. Dental surgeon Guy Chapman believed that only food grown organically, through the application of compost and without artificial fertilizers could provide good nutrition. Chapman from 1930 "corresponded with Sir Albert Howard, a leading English organicist".<sup>147</sup> He began to promote whole food composting to "various institutions and communities, working also with Far North Māori and Te Puea".<sup>148</sup> Chapman was a

---

<sup>143</sup> Stuart and Campbell, 'Business as Usual', p. 223.

<sup>144</sup> Stuart and Campbell, 'Business as Usual', p. 228.

<sup>145</sup> Stuart and Campbell, 'Business as Usual', p. 230.

<sup>146</sup> Stuart and Campbell, 'Business as Usual', p. 229.

<sup>147</sup> Stuart and Campbell, 'Business as Usual', p. 229.

<sup>148</sup> Stuart and Campbell, 'Business as Usual', p. 229.



popular public speaker and had a regular nutrition programme on a public radio that “generated keen interest in his views and provided a platform for New Zealand first organics society, the Humic Compost Club, launched in 1941 to wide public support”<sup>149</sup>. The Humic Compost Club grew considerably becoming the largest exponent of organics, predominantly “at grassroots level of household rather than commercial production”<sup>150</sup>. Approximately 25,000 copies of its first pamphlet, called *The Living Soil*, were sold in the first two years from its publication. About 3000 people attended a public demonstration of composting and by 1943 the Club’s membership numbered 1200 people.<sup>151</sup> The Humic Compost Club remained more gardeners than farmers influencing more suburban and urban dwellers. There was some communication between the Humic Compost Club and people involved in Biodynamic agriculture, but they remained distinct organizations.

The Biodynamic movement gained a degree of mainstream awareness by 1940. As will be discussed in the following chapter, from 1940 the Government, via the Horticulture Division sought information on Biodynamic agriculture and asked for reports on who was practicing it from regional department staff. There was some interest in investigating Biodynamic claims, possibly because of wartime fertilizer shortages as we shall see in the next chapter.

## **The News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand**

The Biodynamic Association, initially called *The Rudolph Steiner Biological-Dynamic Association in New Zealand for Soil and Crop Improvement*, started to produce and circulate within its members a small pamphlet called the “News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand” in which news, information, notices, reports, quotes from books, advertisements were written. The News Letter was the Association’s greatest mechanism to teach its members Biodynamic methods and techniques. The News Letter was published regularly and distributed free of charge

---

<sup>149</sup> Stuart and Campbell, ‘Business as Usual’, p. 229.

<sup>150</sup> Stuart and Campbell, ‘Business as Usual’, p. 233.

<sup>151</sup> Stuart and Campbell, ‘Business as Usual’, p. 230.

to the members of the Association. Gatherings, annual meetings, farm visits and reports, discussion of research, are some examples of the activities held within the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand and well published in the News Letter.

The first issue of the News Letter was published in 1939. In keeping with the objectives of the association, it featured a detailed and consistent explanation of the Preparations 500 and 501. Members were informed when and how they were applied, how they were made, and most importantly that “the use of these two preparations is a pre-requisite for all Bio-Dynamic activity”.<sup>152</sup> Members were also asked to work out their individual requirements for the Preparations throughout the forthcoming year and to order them from the Association. The sales of the Biodynamic Preparations were a source of income for the Association.

From the very beginning the News Letter provided a full range of information in all aspects of Biodynamic farming and gardening. The Biodynamic Association considered that its farming principles could be applied at all scales from home gardens to large commercial enterprises, although most properties converting into Biodynamic farming throughout the 1940's were relatively small in size.

The Biodynamic Associations and groups throughout the world were interlinked since their very beginning. Biodynamic farming and gardening was an international movement spread throughout many countries. Regular contact between different Biodynamic Associations, groups of people and individuals involved with organic agriculture was established despite the distances separating these countries. Mutual support and promotion was an enduring feature of these groups and Associations. The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand was no exemption. Throughout the 1940s the News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand included material from 'sister' organizations in Great Britain<sup>153</sup> and United States of America<sup>154</sup>.

Words of support, ceding space on its magazines, gifts, visits and speeches were some examples of the collaboration between different Biodynamic Associations. Alma Baker for instance, New Zealand born who spent much of his life overseas, including the United Kingdom, generously gave to each member of the Rudolph Steiner

---

<sup>152</sup> *News Letter*, No. 1, not dated, p. 1.

<sup>153</sup> *News Letter*, No. 2, January 1940, p. 2.

<sup>154</sup> *News Letter*, No. 6, January 1941, p. 1.

Biological-Dynamic Association for Soil and Crop Improvement in New Zealand a copy of his, then, latest booklet titled *Peace with the Soil*<sup>155</sup>.<sup>156</sup> In this booklet, Baker explained that he had come to the understanding, that modern methods of “forced cultivation”<sup>157</sup> were depleting the earth of its fertility and that these practices were resulting in increase of deficiency and diseases. Baker believed that modern methods of mineral fertilizing and money driven farming “have led to the production of vast quantities of food that, for all its outward appearance of excellence is incapable of nourishing us and is the cause of all manner of comparatively new ailments in man and beast”<sup>158</sup>. Another example can be seen in the front page of the News Letter, January 1941, in which there is a small article called “Notes from American Experience of B.D. Methods”<sup>159</sup>.

Alma Baker passed away in April 1941, and his name was well known to most members of the Rudolph Steiner Biological Dynamic Association for Soil and Crop Improvement in New Zealand as “a staunch advocator and user of B.D methods”.<sup>160</sup> The News Letter published due tributes in the July 1941: “his passing on in April of this year takes from the realm of physical affairs an indefatigable worker and researcher after spiritual knowledge for practical application”.<sup>161</sup> It also summarized his last book *The Labouring Earth*. Alma Baker’s writings, mostly in the form of extracts and paragraphs relating to a particular topic, featured in many occasions in the News Letter for a long period of time.

Another service rendered by the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand was to give the best possible advice to its members about simple and practical ways to implement the Biodynamic program in their properties. Indeed converting a property into a Biodynamic regime wasn’t a simple task and doses of encouragement were given through notes and reports published in the News Letter. The Biodynamic Association thoroughly taught and explained throughout the News Letter the

---

<sup>155</sup> C. Alma Baker, ‘Peace with the Soil: *The World Power of Agriculture*’, Batu Gajah, Perak Federated Malaya States, (1939). <https://www.abebooks.com/book-search/author/baker-c-alma/> (visited on 08/11/2018).

<sup>156</sup> *News Letter*, No. 2, January, 1940, p. 1.

<sup>157</sup> C. Alma Baker, ‘Peace with the Soil: *The World Power of Agriculture*’, Batu Gajah, Perak Federated Malaya States, (1939). <https://www.abebooks.com/book-search/author/baker-c-alma/> (visited on 08/11/2018).

<sup>158</sup> C. Alma Baker, ‘Peace with the Soil: *The World Power of Agriculture*’, Batu Gajah, Perak Federated Malaya States, (1939). <https://www.abebooks.com/book-search/author/baker-c-alma/> (visited on 08/11/2018).

<sup>159</sup> *News Letter*, No. 6, January, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>160</sup> *News Letter*, No. 8, July, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>161</sup> *News Letter*, No. 8, July, 1941, p. 1.

Biodynamic principles and methods to grow food and work the land. It offered ways of implementing the Biodynamic regime and shared experiences from those who were in this direction at settings as such as orchard, dairy and market gardens. Short notes from members from different regions of the country were often published in various issues of the News Letter under the heading 'Notes from Members', where the intention was to share their own experience of Biodynamic activity such as description of a compost heap, application of Biodynamic Preparations, seed sowing on ideal lunar rhythms and other activities indicating a consistent development of a community of practice.

Illustrative of this is an article in the second issue of the News Letter, published in January 1940, called "The Orchard" in which the orchard is viewed through the Biodynamic perspective. In the Biodynamic view the whole farm is regarded as "an enclosed organism bringing to life all forms of living, Plant, Animal and Human"<sup>162</sup> and therefore it is a paramount to integrate animals in the orchards as "a certain amount of animal life and activity is really essential as prior condition to B.D. treatment".<sup>163</sup> It was mentioned that although a citrus orchard located in Kerikeri wasn't yet treated fully along Biodynamic lines and had animals grazing in it; it suffered less from prevalent citrus diseases. The article offered guidelines on applying Biodynamic treatment to orchard including fruiting tree and vine compost, fungous diseases and insect pests.

The numbers of members of the Biodynamic Association increased significantly throughout its first year of activity. By October 1940 more than 60 people had joined the Association. The News Letter published a note on its front page, October 1940 edition, acknowledging this achievement: "With the issue of this letter we enter the second year of the Association's Life" the first year "has essentially been one of Birth and now with a membership of over 60, the period of active growth begins"<sup>164</sup>. Members were encouraged to take a long term view. It also stated that it should be remembered that Biodynamic agriculture is a "PROCESS", "a way of Life" and that the "application of the methods demands patience, tolerance, enthusiasm and above all Devotion to these kingdoms which nourish his physical body and for whose evolution

---

<sup>162</sup> *News Letter*, No. 2, January 1940, p. 1.

<sup>163</sup> *News Letter*, No. 2, January 1940, p. 1.

<sup>164</sup> *News Letter*, No. 5, October, 1940, p. 1.

he is becoming increasingly responsible”<sup>165</sup>. Membership kept increasing and by 1943 it was reported that the membership of Biodynamic Association had reached 180.

## Experimental Work

Despite their criticism of scientific approaches to farming, there were occasions when the Biodynamic Association reported on experiments that they believed validated Biodynamic approaches. This may have been intended to reassure their readers that Biodynamic approaches worked.

One of the chief tasks of Biodynamic Associations worldwide was to carry out experiments and test the effects of Biodynamic principles. In New Zealand this task was taken seriously. Experimental work with compost, the application of the Biodynamic Preparations, seed sowing and land cultivation following lunar rhythms and constellation alignment, are some examples of these experiments. The News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand reported on several occasions’ about experimental work being carried out locally and abroad.

An example of these experiments reported in the News Letter can be found as early as January 1940. “Many experiments have been carried out on the Continent and in England by member of the B. D. Associations notably by Dr. L. Kolisnko, in order to place Lunar influences upon a scientific basis”.<sup>166</sup> In the referred experiment equal plots of various types of vegetables were sown at different dates in relation to full moon/new moon and the yields obtained were compared respectively to demonstrate that they are ideal moon phases to sow seeds. In the following edition of the *News Letter* a note was published under the heading ‘Seed Bath’ as follow:

Some members may be so situated that they can carry out seed bath experiments. Details should be thoroughly checked and results carefully tabulated against a control plant or plot. From existing results it would appear that there are THREE approaches which give good results. (1) The use of 500; (2) All the preparations and (3) Prepared Liquid Cow Manure.

---

<sup>165</sup> *News Letter*, No. 5, October, 1940, p. 1.

<sup>166</sup> *News Letter*, No. 2, January, 1940, p. 3.

In each case a .005% solution should be used and the seeds sun dried and then immediately sown.<sup>167</sup>

Reports on experiments featured in many issues of the News Letter indicating that the Association in New Zealand promoted a culture of carrying out experiments.

## **Exchanging ideas, products and knowledge**

Marketing Biodynamic products wasn't an easy task at times when very few people knew of Biodynamic produce and consumers were not mindful of what they ate, particularly in the context of wartime and food rationing. It appears that the main target at the beginning was to firstly encourage the Biodynamic Association's members to speak to friends, neighbours and the wider public about proper care of the soil producing healthier nutritious food. Secondly the News Letter served as a mechanism to promote and advertise biodynamically grown food.

In July 1940 a small note was published in the News Letter stating that "Mr. John Carter of 13 Manawa Road, Remuera, S.E.2., is willing to take placed orders for plants for transplanting purposes from seeds sown under B.D. conditions".<sup>168</sup> The readers were instructed to communicate with Mr. Carter direct should they wish to acquire his plants. In October 1940 another small note on seeds was published informing the readers that the Association was considering how to exchange seeds produced under Biodynamic methods and encouraging members to give suggestions to create such a scheme. The Association sought to engage with its members on seed saving schemes and announced that it "hope to put forward some ideas regarding the possibility of members saving and exchanging B.D. produced seeds".<sup>169</sup> Indeed there was a follow up about this seed saving scheme in the following edition with much more depth. An article called "Seed Saving Scheme"<sup>170</sup> was published in January 1941 firstly with an

---

<sup>167</sup> *News Letter*, No. 4, July, 1940, p. 3.

<sup>168</sup> *News Letter*, No. 4, July, 1940, p. 3.

<sup>169</sup> *News Letter*, No. 5, October, 1940, p. 4.

<sup>170</sup> *News Letter*, No. 6, January, 1941, pp. 3-4.

overview on the differences between artificial aids to seed germination and Biodynamic approach and secondly with 'Principles of Scheme' as follows:

- (1) Plants must have been raised from seed sown in the correct Lunar rhythm.
- (2) Plants must have been grown on soil treated with:
  - (a) Organic Compost
  - (b) Preparation 500
  - (c) No artificial water soluble fertilizer
- (3) Plants which have received Preparation 501 and NO chemical spray other than Colloidal preparation, or organic compounds, such as Pyrethrum, Derris Dust.
- (4) Seeds to be preferably SUN DRIED
- (5) For the time being members are asked to concentrate on Vegetable Seeds.
- (6) Cost to be arrived at by the member concerned.

Members who were willing to undertake such seed saving initiative were instructed to contact the Association "stating the name, species and if possible the quantity, and the approximate cost of seed he/she can save".<sup>171</sup> The information gathered could then be published in the News Letter benefiting the members. From the Association's understanding the matter of seed saving is serious and "such a scheme is necessary for these healing methods to be appreciated and recognised".<sup>172</sup> In response to the suggestions of the 'Seed Saving Scheme', four members offered to supply limited amounts of seeds and the readers were instructed to contact them directly. Their names and addresses were published with the respective list of seeds available from each of them. These seeds were intended to be purchased solely for the purpose of seed saving and not for cropping.

F.H. Billington, Market Road, Remuera, Auckland

G.L.H. Stubbs, Lodge Heaven, Puriri Road, Whenuapai

C.G. Burford, P.O. Box 1169K, G.P.O. Melbourne, Australia

G.B. Winkfield, 33 Clonbern Road Pd., Remuera, Auckland S.E.2

---

<sup>171</sup> *News Letter*, No. 6, January, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>172</sup> *News Letter*, No. 6, January, 1941, p. 4.

The emergence of a list of nominated distributors and a newsletter is indicative of a more organised, hierarchical organisation emerging.

## **Conclusion**

During the 1930s Biodynamic agriculture was introduced into New Zealand. It was strongly, although not exclusively, influenced in its early years by people with a connection to Anthroposophy such as Bernard Crompton Smith, George Winkfield, Courtenay Hall and George Bacchus. By 1939 the Biodynamic movement had reached a critical mass; with a sufficient number of interested people, including a number of women to form an association and produce a newsletter articulating its practices and worldview, form links with Biodynamic Associations and early adopters of organic practices in New Zealand, especially Compost Clubs. From its launching in 1939 to 1940 the Association grew considerably in number, from 25 to 60 members. The Association encouraged the engagement of its members in order to broaden its acceptance in the community. Initiatives towards marketing Biodynamic produce were undertaken aimed at encouraging the members to speak out to the wider public and inform them about Biodynamic, and also through advertisements in the News Letter. The Biodynamic Association promoted a culture of conducting experimental work aimed at proving the effectiveness of the Biodynamic methods locally and abroad.





# **Chapter Three: 1941-1945: Qualified Recognition**

This chapter gives an overview of the period between 1941 and 1945, years which presented a mixture of opportunities and challenges for the Biodynamic Association. It discusses important events such as the first conference of members and the participation of members of the Biodynamic Association at the Dominion Reconstruction Conference in 1941 and Hall's talk to the Ladies Gardening Club in Whangarei in 1943. It will be argued that during World War II the organic/Biodynamic movement in New Zealand gained some momentum and mainstream recognition, due in part to shortages in supply of fertilizers. The chapter also evaluates the ways in which the Government, via the Horticulture Division of the Department of Agriculture, sought information on Biodynamics. In this regard, the support of Ben Roberts, Ministers of Agriculture and Marketing 1943-46, to the Biodynamic Association was important. Finally, it discusses the wider philosophy of the Association as expressed in its News Letter and changes to the News Letter itself.

## **First Conference of Members**

The Biodynamic movement in New Zealand had developed rapidly in the early 1940s; membership had increased consistently; Biodynamic methods were implemented in home gardens, market gardens, orchards, and some farms. Despite constraints of war, the News Letter had grown in size and was being regularly published and distributed. The growth of the Biodynamic Association since its formation in 1939 encouraged its executive to organize a national conference. In April 1941 a proposal to hold the first 'Conference of Members' of the Association was announced in the News Letter and it was planned to hold this event in August 1941. The announcement stated that the "B.D. methods of Farming include an impulse

towards symbiotic form of civilization which must be built upon the ashes of the present essentially predatory form, and therefore, a Conference of Members seems desired".<sup>173</sup> The Association pushed ahead even though the war was underway. In July 1941 the plan and details of the Conference were advertised in the News Letter. The venue was to be held at the "New Women's Club Room – Buckland's Building, Quay Street, Auckland".<sup>174</sup> It was scheduled for Thursday, Friday, Saturday on August 14, 15 and 16 respectively. In the eve of the opening of the event, the topic was a "general address on Bio-Dynamic Agriculture",<sup>175</sup> by Hall, followed by, in the next day, discussions on "Composts, Preparations, Etheric Formative Forces and other important relationships",<sup>176</sup> also by Hall. For Friday evening, the agenda was for Mr. Walter S. Lang to read an economic paper which was enclosed to the members with the News Letter. The paper was broadly inspired by Steiner's view on economy and wealth. It was requested that the members study it "with a view to discussion at Conference".<sup>177</sup> On Saturday, the closing day of the Conference, Captain F.H. Billington was set to deal with "Crop Rotation in relation to soil fertility – compost value and food value".<sup>178</sup> The closing of the Conference comprised of a discussion on general matters and a talk on Native Tree Associations by Mr. R. Thornton. It was hoped that as many members as possible would participate in the Conference and they were encouraged to invite their friends as well. The following News Letter, Number 9, released in October 1941, contained 7 pages confined to present a report on the Conference proceedings with a short resume of each subject presented by a lecturer. Courtenay Hall opened the Conference with a lecture on the subject 'The historical background of B.D. and future implications'. He mentioned the "patient scientific work of many B.D. followers in Europe, England and America and particularly the work of Dr. Pfeiffer".<sup>179</sup> He acknowledged that New Zealand Biodynamic Association was younger than in other countries, but in terms of membership was extending from Kerikeri to Dunedin, and also had members in Australia. In his view, the necessity of healthy food was in a position of great importance and suggested that

---

<sup>173</sup> *News Letter*, No. 7, April, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>174</sup> *News Letter*, No. 8, July, 1941, p. 2.

<sup>175</sup> *News Letter*, No. 8, July, 1941, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup> *News Letter*, No. 8, July, 1941, p. 2.

<sup>177</sup> *News Letter*, No. 8, July, 1941, p. 2.

<sup>178</sup> *News Letter*, No. 8, July, 1941, p. 2.

<sup>179</sup> *News Letter*, No. 9, October, 1941, p. 1.

those who “adopt B.D. should mutually assist each other as far as possible in such ways as – implements, labour, experience and if possible the formation of a Biodynamic Consumers Association”.<sup>180</sup>

One year later the topic of forming a Biodynamic Consumers Association, discussed in the first ‘Members Conference’, featured in the first page of the News Letter:

It follows that any form of economic association to be Social must consist of Producers; Distributors and Consumers for then the individual is fully reflected within the Association – this is truly “Association”. In New Zealand, the Agricultural basis of such an Association is already in being and the conditions for growth are ideal if there is sufficient individuals sufficiently active.<sup>181</sup>

Although the idea of forming a Biodynamic Consumers Association was occasionally discussed within the Biodynamic movement, there is no evidence suggesting that such an organization was actually formed.

The Association had transformed itself in a few years into a well-organized group designed to promote the Biodynamic principles in the country and also served to strengthen the links between the people involved with this philosophy of farming locally and internationally.

## **Dominion Reconstruction Conference**

The Biodynamic Association actively promoted Biodynamic agriculture to the wider public and beyond its membership. To this end an address was given by Courtenay Hall, representing the Rudolf Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in N.Z., to the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture at Auckland, November 29<sup>th</sup> 1941.<sup>182</sup> A report of Mr. Hall’s address was circulated to the members of the Association. Hall stated that in the previous 50 years farming had been turned into an industry as a result of exploitation for financial gain. He argued that:

---

<sup>180</sup> *News Letter*, No. 9, October, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>181</sup> *News Letter*, No. 13, September, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>182</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 20 November 1941, p. 20.

To do this, first it was necessary to stimulate agricultural production not by increased human spiritual activity but by mechanical, technological, inorganic means; secondly, the art of Farming must be placed subservient to the sphere of Politics and thirdly the Economics of Farming must be decreed by finances.<sup>183</sup>

According to him there were three basic facts to be considered, firstly that a farm is a biological organism and that had been forgotten; secondly, the judgment of agricultural matters shouldn't come from the political and economic spheres but from farmers; and lastly a biologically balanced farm is the most economically viable. He also argued that farming in New Zealand was disadvantaged because it lacked a peasantry:

In older countries where farming is still a WAY of life and not merely a MEANS, that noble type of human being, the peasant, has instinctively kept alive methods of farming which at times are ridiculed and decried by certain type of intellects. In New Zealand we have no peasantry, hence not true farming – instinctive wisdom is lacking; farming wisdom of generations is conspicuous by its absence.<sup>184</sup>

According to Hall the problems in New Zealand wasn't the need for more cities, machines and industries but to create a "social state from the soil upwards"<sup>185</sup> and to this end New Zealand has adequate climate, geological basis, soil types but "as yet not the WILL TO CONSCIOUSLY create such Rural – not urban – organism".<sup>186</sup> The farming challenge in his view was to rebuild the "shattered ideal of self supporting rural organism".<sup>187</sup> Hall's speech demonstrates the different philosophy of Biodynamic farming compared to conventional farming. Hall was still idealising small scale farming at a time when New Zealand become focussed on commercial farming, so Biodynamic was not just a different method of farming, it was a different philosophy. Many New Zealanders were descended from agricultural labourers who had come to New Zealand because of harsh living conditions in Britain, so they would not have romanticised being a peasant. Tony Simpson book *The Immigrants* discussed why so many rural labourers wanted to emigrate from Britain, including to New Zealand. Many

---

<sup>183</sup> Address by L.C. Hall, representing the Rudolf Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand given to the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture, at Auckland, November 29, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>184</sup> Address by L.C. Hall, representing the Rudolf Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand given to the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture, at Auckland, November 29, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>185</sup> Address by L.C. Hall, representing the Rudolf Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand given to the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture, at Auckland, November 29, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>186</sup> Address by L.C. Hall, representing the Rudolf Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand given to the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture, at Auckland, November 29, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>187</sup> Address by L.C. Hall, representing the Rudolf Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand given to the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture, at Auckland, November 29, 1941, p. 1

people left Britain so as to escape harsh living conditions. Simpson argued that the price fall of British wheat combined with an increase in imports of agricultural produce in the 1870s among other factors had a negative impact for British farmers and led to mass unemployment in Britain. He asserted that after the 1870s British working class, including land labourers faced either unemployment or worsening employment conditions, and lower living standards. He suggested that “the labourers harboured significant resentments against their farmer employers on a range of matters beyond those of wages and hours of work”.<sup>188</sup>

The romanticised notion of the Peasantry expressed at the conference was later continued by an Auckland member of the Association Captain F.H. Billington, who in the second half of 1942 undertook the task to write a series of notes on ‘Peasant Wisdom’ and publish them in the News Letter from time to time. He argued that peasant wisdom in relation to agricultural matter is “based upon an instinctive knowledge of the workings of Etheric Formative in Cosmos, Earth and Man”.<sup>189</sup> In the first publication Billington argued that ancient wisdom was lost, ignored or dismissed in the present scientific age and that:

The fact that such wisdom persists mainly amongst so called illiterate or poorly educated people is superficially considered to discount its value. Nevertheless, broader minded scientists and others who have taken the trouble to examine and test some of these ancient believes and practices have found that not a few are founded upon fundamental, demonstrable truths , and to be worthy of preservation and observance.<sup>190</sup>

It seems that a number of members of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand shared an idealised agrarian philosophy, which romanticised the peasantry. While appealing to members, it may have limited its wider appeal.

---

<sup>188</sup> Tony Simpson, *The Immigrants, The great Migration from Britain to New Zealand 1830-1890*, Auckland: Godwit, 1998, pp. 160-161.

<sup>189</sup> *News Letter*, No. 12, June, 1942, p.1.

<sup>190</sup> *News Letter*, No. 12, June, 1942, p. 2.

## Wartime Opportunities for Biodynamic and Organic Agriculture

World War II provided some incentive for the formation of an organized organic movement in New Zealand as the country was under pressure to increase its food production, particularly to supply the United Kingdom and Allied forces in the Pacific. A shortage of fertilizer, however, made it difficult to achieve this objective by conventional means, and this opened a window for alternative approaches to agriculture, including Biodynamic agriculture. Stuart and Campbell argue that:

Shortages of imported fertiliser, however, meant rationing, which in turn caused panic among farmers and growers now assuming productivity gains from frequent fertiliser application. The organics movement suggested alternative and sustainable management, recognising perpetual limits to resources and the need to build up rather than mine the country's essential wealth, its soil.<sup>191</sup>

Stuart and Campbell observed that the organic movement emerged at a time of instability in agricultural terms and a crisis of confidence in fertiliser approaches to soil fertility problems. They argued that the organic movement linked soil depletion to social ills such as: “declining nutrition, colonial dependency, and reductionist technical solutions to environmental problems”<sup>192</sup>. Although the organic alternative gained some ground during World War II, it failed to gain full mainstream credibility after the war. Once access to fertilisers was restored the window was closed, there was a farming boom and conventional methods returned.

Another factor that contributed to the emergence of organic and Biodynamic agriculture in the country was the concern about shortage of food supply domestically during World War II. It opened up spaces where Biodynamic farming was seen as a potentially credible and legitimate option. The Government launched a campaign called ‘Dig for Victory’, in 1943, in the North Island which was extended in 1944 to the South Island.<sup>193</sup> The campaign aimed to promote and encourage the people to grow their own food in their backyards, lawns and public areas. Through a series of articles in the local newspapers and regular weekly radio programmes the campaign offered

---

<sup>191</sup> Stuart and Campbell, ‘Business as Usual’, p. 231.

<sup>192</sup> Stuart and Campbell, ‘Business as Usual’, p. 235.

<sup>193</sup> Bee Dawson, Dig for Victory, New Zealand’s World War II Gardens, *NZ Gardener*, April 2018.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/homed/garden/103311926/dig-for-victory-new-zealands-world-war-ii-gardens> (visited on 20/11/2018)

basic instructions on how to grow your own vegetables and it provided an opportunity for organic and Biodynamic approaches to reach out to a wider public. Some newspaper articles at that time linked Biodynamic/organic approaches with 'dig for victory'. In November 1943 the *Bay of Plenty Beacon* mentioned that "the digging for victory and compost heap-making craze have made many people so horticulturally minded that they are delving into other mysteries of gardening"<sup>194</sup>. The article briefly mentioned how there were several inquiries made about the consideration of lunar rhythms in agricultural operations and stated that these practices were part of the Māori traditions and fundamental in the Biodynamic approach.

The Women's Food League was another group in New Zealand that sought to make known the properties and values of food and to promote healthy nutrition; in line with food reformer Dr Guy Chapman and Compost Club. The activities of this group were reported in *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 6 February 1940, to the effect that it aimed to encourage people to grow their own fruits and vegetables in their backyards and reporting that the Women's Food League circulated bulletins to its members in which "shows it is fully aware of modern developments in horticulture"<sup>195</sup> including Steiner's Biodynamic compost method.

As early as 1940 the Government was already aware of Biodynamic agriculture being practiced in New Zealand and became interested in finding more information on Biodynamic methods and contact between representatives of the Biodynamic Association and the Government began in 1940. The Government, via the Horticulture Division sought information on Biodynamic agriculture and asked for reports on who was practicing it from regional departmental staff.<sup>196</sup> On 12 September 1940 a horticulturalist from the Department of Agriculture named William Hyde wrote to W.K. Dallas (Director of Horticulture Division of the Department of Agriculture) reporting he had been in contact with a number of people involved in Biodynamic farming in Auckland – including J.J. Cole and R.R. Randle – a tomato-farmer and florist. Interestingly Hyde referred to a product called 'Fantastex', purportedly "prepared in

---

<sup>194</sup> *Bay of Plenty Beacon*, 9 November 1943, p. 3.

<sup>195</sup> *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 6 February 1940, p. 7.

<sup>196</sup> National Archive, 'Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.



the biodynamic method”<sup>197</sup> and a factory in Federal Street, Auckland. This product seems to have been available at least as early as 1938, although the newspaper advertisement does not mention it being Biodynamic.<sup>198</sup> Hyde suggested making a list of experienced growers and investigating their results. Dallas made the same suggestion in a letter to District supervisors on 8 October 1940. He expressed an interest in finding out more and the following comment is revealing:

Although it strikes one as being somewhat fantastic in some respects, it has a strong backing by many experienced growers here and overseas and therefore demands our serious and careful investigation.<sup>199</sup>

Dallas also wanted that the field officers concerned “to study the method and its practice, noting carefully qualitative and quantitative production, flavours and keeping qualities, also disease resistance of the crop”.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, he had requested that the field officers to “keep in touch with the results in each case so that he will be in a position to supply a full report when request”.<sup>201</sup> In November 1940 the District Supervisor from Dunedin replied to Dallas informing that “all the persons contacted, including officers of the Department of Agriculture in the different centres, Lincoln College authorities, lecturers in agriculture, parks superintendents, etc., expressed total ignorance of the subject”.<sup>202</sup> Similar responses were received from District Supervisors from Whanganui, New Plymouth, Masterton, Gisborne and surprisingly Hastings, which arguably was the first region to introduce Biodynamic methods in New Zealand and had a concentration of anthroposophists. An Orchard Supervisor from Palmerston North reported that there was a market gardener named J.J. Hume experimenting with Biodynamic methods on composting at Kauwhata and that he

---

<sup>197</sup> William Hyde to Dallas, 12 September 1940, National Archive, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>198</sup> *Horowhenua Chronicle*, 6 April 1938, p. 3.

<sup>199</sup> W.K. Dallas to District Supervisors, 8 October 1940, National Archive, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>200</sup> W.K. Dallas to District Supervisors, 8 October 1940, National Archive, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>201</sup> W.K. Dallas to District Supervisors, 8 October 1940, National Archive, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>202</sup> District Supervisor to Dallas, 5 November 1940, National Archive, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

would be “in touch with this experiment and should be able to supply more detailed information later in the season”.<sup>203</sup>

In September 1941 Dallas followed up earlier enquiries by writing to Hume in Palmerston North asking to furnish him with a “report on the lines previously arranged”.<sup>204</sup> He also wrote to Douglas in Auckland asking for reporting on W.R. Cole trials growing tomatoes under glass applying Biodynamic methods. In October 1941 Douglas wrote to the Auckland District Supervisor reporting favourably on Cole’s crop, which he noted was in high demand during winter months and also stated “the quality of the crop was all that could be desired”.<sup>205</sup> In January 1942 William Hyde gave a further report on Cole and his tomato crop as follows:

Mr. Cole’s property is located is situated but a short distance from the residence of Mr. G. B. Winkfield, Secretary of the Bio-dynamic Society, and so he has full access to literature, supply of “preparations” and advice in all details of the method which has appears to have followed in every respect. As a test of the method on tomato cropping under glass Mr. Cole’s crop would be hard to beat.<sup>206</sup>

Hyde also suggested that Cole had been practicing Biodynamic methods since 1935, which would place Cole amongst the early adopters of Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand. Further on there was a classic statement of the tension between the anecdotal examples of Biodynamic effectiveness versus the scientific proof expected by Crown agencies, Hyde noted:

...the firm conviction he holds in its favour cannot be ignored – considering his experience and interest. At the same time one must guard against bias in favour of novelty.<sup>207</sup>

Hyde also advocated further comparative testing and suggested that Cole’s crop should be inspected on a regular basis. In June 1942 Douglas reported to Auckland

---

<sup>203</sup> Orchard Instructor to District Supervisor Palmerston North, 29 October 1940, National Archive, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>204</sup> Dallas to J. J. Hume, 16 September 1941, National Archive, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>205</sup> A. G. Douglas to Auckland District Supervisor, 9 October 1941, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>206</sup> W. C. Hyde to Dallas, 23 January 1942, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>207</sup> W. C. Hyde to Dallas, 23 January 1942, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

District Supervisor favourably on Cole's crop, but noted that as he was the "only grower of tomatoes under glass during the winter months... it is not possible to make a comparison with another grower".<sup>208</sup> The interest by Government agencies suggests a degree of mainstream awareness of Biodynamic by 1940, possibly stimulated by concerns over wartime fertiliser shortage. The reports indicate New Zealand practitioners of Biodynamic farming and gardening had attained a degree of credibility within Government by virtue of their commitment to proving its worth, although an underlying scepticism was also evident.

Another body in New Zealand to enquire about Biodynamic methods during wartime was the Farmers Union, which in October 1942 was reportedly seeking information on Biodynamic farming to circulate to its members. It was reported that "articles on the subject of bio-dynamic farming (compost etc.) be reintroduced and enlarged on further in the union's organ".<sup>209</sup> This report suggests that although not largely influencing mainstream farmers in New Zealand there was a degree of awareness of Biodynamic agriculture within their Union.

Courtenay Hall was also active in delivering talks and lectures on Biodynamic agriculture in the early 1940s. The newspaper *Northern Advocate*, published in 18 May 1943 a report of his talk to the Ladies Gardening Club in 17 May 1943 on the subject of Biodynamic gardening. The involvement of women in the Biodynamic movement continued to be noted. According to the report the attendees were particularly interested in growing vegetables "owing to the present-day necessity for producing more and more vegetables."<sup>210</sup> In March 1945 the *Northern Advocate* published a report on Biodynamic compost being consistently made and applied to citrus orchards in Kerikeri and in dairy farms in Te Aroha.<sup>211</sup> This report also gave an overview of the key objectives of the Rudolf Steiner Biological Dynamic Association in New Zealand for Soil and Crop Improvement as follows:

This association proclaims the objective of improving the nutritive quality of all soil produce, of improving livestock, in promoting interest in Bio-Dynamic methods of agriculture- the whole based on the consciousness that the

---

<sup>208</sup> A. G. Douglas to District Supervisor, 9 June 1942, 'Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77.

<sup>209</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 15 of October 1942, p. 4.

<sup>210</sup> *Northern Advocate*, 18 May 1943, p. 2.

<sup>211</sup> *Northern Advocate*, 20 March 1945, p. 5.

earth is a living organization and not an agglomeration of purely physical substances.<sup>212</sup>

A leading figure within the Biodynamic movement was Mr. Benjamin Roberts, who was an active member of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand and was practicing Biodynamic methods in Wairarapa region. There are reports of Roberts giving an address on Biodynamic agriculture to the Theosophical Society in August 1941.<sup>213</sup> The *Evening Post* reported that Robert's, "remarked that one of the major problems of reconstruction in the New World Order would be the regeneration of soil which had been robbed and exploited in ignorance and greed".<sup>214</sup> Roberts was appointed to be the Minister of Agriculture 1943-46 under the first Labour Government. Within the Biodynamic movement his appointment brought hopes that he would "bring a fresh impulse into agricultural methods in New Zealand".<sup>215</sup> While Minister of Agriculture the question of limited supply of fertilizer was raised by farmers who pledged to increase production upon supply of fertilisers. World War II disrupted the supply of fertiliser with the loss of Nauru and the reduction in supply from Ocean Island. The Department of Agriculture endeavoured to find deposits of phosphate in New Zealand but only very small quantities were found in the South Island. However, the Department of Agriculture under Roberts made a significant effort to advice farmers of "ways and means - other than using chemical fertiliser then unobtainable - to maintain fertility of the land".<sup>216</sup> To this end, articles were written and "demonstrations given in regard to the making of compost and liquid manure, and how each could be used to the maximum benefit of the land and crops"<sup>217</sup>. Ben Roberts opened the second Biodynamic Conference in New Zealand held at Te Aroha in 1945.

---

<sup>212</sup> *Northern Advocate*, 20 March 1945, p. 5.

<sup>213</sup> *Evening Post*, 19 August 1941, p. 10.

<sup>214</sup> *Evening Post*, 19 August 1941, p. 10.

<sup>215</sup> *News Letter*, No 18, December, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>216</sup> Enid Roberts, M.B.E, *'Remembered: The Life and Work of Ben Roberts, M.P. Minister of Agriculture and Marketing, N.Z., 1943-46'*, Masterton, p. 66.

<sup>217</sup> Enid Roberts, M.B.E, *'Remembered: The Life and Work of Ben Roberts, M.P. Minister of Agriculture and Marketing, N.Z., 1943-46'*, Masterton, p. 66.

## Politics, Social Issues and World War II

The disruption of World War II prompted considerable discussion among the Biodynamic Community as to how their world-view could solve wider problems. Biodynamic practitioners often were staunch followers of Steiner's entire philosophy including his views on education and on economy. From their perspective, most problems confronting humans were linked to bad management of soil and poor nutrition. Earthly issues were seen from a spiritual point of view instead of a materialistic perspective. The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand sporadically discussed some political and social issues affecting the world in the early 1940's but it was cautious and avoided plunging into the realm of party politics. The Biodynamic Association in its initial years left little sign of where they stood in relation to local struggles and issues arising from abroad during World War II. Given that the philosophies of Biodynamic farming have some affinities with Māori concepts such as *kaitiakitanga*, it might be expected that the movement may have sought support among Māori but there is little evidence of this in the News Letters. Nothing was published in the News Letter regarding the Māori people and culture in the initial five years of the Association. Nevertheless small hints on political topics can be found in the News Letter from time to time clues to the political stance of the Biodynamic Association. As will be discussed, their wider-world-view differed considerably from conventional farming as it was then conceived and practiced in New Zealand.

The Biodynamic Association consistently argued that the issues facing New Zealand agriculture during World War II could only be addressed by fundamental societal reforms. An example of this appeared in an article published in News Letter No. 11 in March 1942. It stated that the New Zealand's agricultural problem "arising from out of the present world catastrophe of war will demand a more than urgent solution".<sup>218</sup> It argued that a "Nation declines in proportion to the ascendancy that Industrialism gains over Agriculture"<sup>219</sup> and that this view is "repelled by the materialistic thinking through the impulse of cold fear which seeks to replace the products of nature with products of chemistry".<sup>220</sup>

---

<sup>218</sup> *News Letter*, No. 11, March, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>219</sup> *News Letter*, No. 11, March, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>220</sup> *News Letter*, No. 11, March, 1942, p. 1.

After World War I there were a number of soldier resettlement schemes intended, according to Roche, to “meet a national debt of honour to those who had served in the armed services, while also assisting with the rapid reintegration of large numbers of demobilised troops into civilian society”.<sup>221</sup> Some of these farms were successful, but many were not, and the reason attributed for their failure, by the Biodynamic Association, was the very concept of agriculture that they embodied. In the Association’s view:

It is curious to see that instinctively we here in New Zealand feel the latter idea to be correct as witness the various Returned Soldiers’ Land Settlement Schemes. And yet the latter have not been in social success primarily as a result of faulty social concept of Agriculture itself. In Bio-Dynamic Agriculture is to be found not only a method of turning old refuse into soil; not only a means of growing appetising garden foods; not only a means of Soldier Settlement; but a new orientation of Agriculture as a human social activity which could provide the necessary basis for economic health in a NEW order in which the empty phrase, mere convention and dead bureaucratic routine will have no place. The Agricultural problem and on into the future will not be one of Costs, Guaranteed Prices, Labour, etc., but essentially one of restoration of soil ORGANIC fertility.<sup>222</sup>

Central to the philosophy of the Biodynamic Association was the notion that society ought to be governed by social contracts and fundamental reforms in the world economy. The following paragraph, from the News Letter of December 1942, illustrates the Association’s view on social contract:

The concept of Social Contracts as distinct from Legal Contracts is entirely at one with the demand of our age and if these Social Contracts between Human groups in the realms of Industry and Agriculture can be established, not by State dictates, but by “Free Association” of the parties concerned then a vast step towards Freedom will have been taken. Social Contracts cannot have Money as their basis – only the question: - Do these contracts add to the spiritual well being of those concerned? For example the idea of a Biodynamic Consumers’ Association, as has been discussed in News Letters, is surely an example of “A Social Contract.”<sup>223</sup>

On the subject of economic reform, the Association published in December 1942 a ‘Supplement to the News Letter No 14’ which was an essay about a ‘World Economy’ from the point of view of agriculture, labour, power, money and meteorology. This

---

<sup>221</sup> Michael Roche, ‘A Duty of the Country: Soldier Settlement 1915-1941’, in Rachael Bell (ed.) *New Zealand Between the Wars*, Auckland: Massey University Press, (2017), p. 79.

<sup>222</sup> *News Letter*, No. 11, March, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>223</sup> *News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

document offered wide ranging statements on economic and societal matters. Some of the Association's views and aspirations in relation to political and economic issues can be drawn from this document. It begun by stating the world situation at that time "forced us to think into individual, national and world impulses"<sup>224</sup> and proceeded with the reasoning "unless we commence this active thinking the sacrifices of millions of human beings will be in vain and a far more intense form of suffering will result".<sup>225</sup> The 'active thinking' according to them was to:

To actively think into the present world chaos means to revalue all existing world, national and individual values in the light of conceptions and ideas that have a world value as their basis. But to do this requires a form of knowledge at once spiritual and physical – a knowledge of man, such as modern science cannot give, such as hereditary religion cannot give, such as no political philosophy, be it democracy, fascism or communism, can give – but only a new testament form of thinking can give.<sup>226</sup>

According to the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand, war was human chaos and the contradictions and polarities inherent in various realms of humanity needed to be resolved in order to avoid leading to total chaos in the individual, nation and world. These contradictions mentioned were: Marxist doctrines and Tory doctrines; National and Labour Parties; faith healers and surgeons; rationalism and authoritarianism in education; socialism and capitalism and demands of minorities and demands of the State. The document analysed the unfolding of history in the previous decades and reflected upon it stating that "the whole social history and evolution of man is, in our epoch from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - being reflected".<sup>227</sup> Furthermore "products of all proceeding civilizations; all the thoughts; all the feelings, all the impulses of will; are today revealed in this chaos and that world population is a vast mirror of the revelations of all proceeding epochs".<sup>228</sup> Within that state of chaos there was a demand of a 'new order' not merely emanating from the old polarities or a relapse of old forms of politics, economy and arts. It was argued that the tragic mistake made in the preceding 30 years by national groups was to "have applied the principle of national economy under all sorts of slogans, seeking world trade to satisfy national economy".<sup>229</sup> The chief task

---

<sup>224</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>225</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>226</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>227</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>228</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>229</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

was to understand that the meaning of the present world chaos was to “bring about a birth of World Economy”.<sup>230</sup> Such a system was described to encompass the entire planet and detailed as follows:

Such a system encompassing the whole Earth would know neither IMPORT no EXPORT; on the one hand would be the National Nature Basis including raw materials, climate, geographical position in relation to WORLD centres of population and on the other hand would be National TEMPERAMENT including talents, standards of living, hours and condition of work. World economy would link the TWO NATIONAL FACTORS. The inner structure of such economic system would be ENTIRELY SELF CONTAINED. Whereas National Economy can NEVER be an Autarchy in reality, World Economy in its very nature can be nothing else.<sup>231</sup>

The so called ‘World Economy’ would be built up from the combination of present knowledge and data of five spheres: Labour, Power, Money, Meteorology and Agriculture. It proceeded with a more detailed discussion on each of these spheres and highlighting that in every national structure can be found the economic effects of them. According to the article, these five spheres mentioned above could be “correlated into a world embracing system of economic activity unconnected with the Political machinery of National states”.<sup>232</sup> In conclusion it was stated that English speaking people have a historical task to forge a system of ‘World Economy’ and that the failure to develop a National Economy was pointed to as the leading reason for World War I and II.

Changes to agricultural practices were seen as an essential step to solving these problems. The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand referred to the historical symptoms emanating of “race and national degeneration”<sup>233</sup>, arguably this can be interpreted as hints of National Socialism thinking. Nevertheless, the Association considered that these symptoms were world embracing and could be seen in agriculture in the form of: artificial insemination, chemically driven agriculture, state dictation of farming and commercial interests controlling farming finance arguing that all talk of a new order “based upon high sounding phrases is verbose vapour unless it be realised that recourse to the past is quite futile in the solution of world problems”.<sup>234</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>231</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>232</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 14, December, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>233</sup> *News Letter*, No. 16, June, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>234</sup> *News Letter*, No. 16, June, 1943, p. 1.



Agriculture was seen as a spiritual-cultural activity of man and Biodynamic principles “are based upon a form of knowledge suitable for the solution of farming problems in this era”.<sup>235</sup> Farmers were said to be the only persons capable of fixing farming problems.

Rudolf Steiner’s views featured prominently in the News Letter, particularly on social issues. Members of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand frequently inquired the office asking whether Rudolf Steiner had suggestions concerning social order. To this end, in September 1943, the Biodynamic Association proposed to incorporate within the News Letter a series of articles devoted entitled ‘The Social Order’. These articles featured in the subsequent seven issues (No. 17-24) of the News Letter until July 1945. These articles illustrate the core of Association’s views on politics and world economy and the main effort placed was to link political, economic and social matters to the body, spirit and soul of the human being in line with Steiner’s concept of Three-Fold Commonwealth. The articles endeavoured to show that “unless the social life reflects the constitution of the Human individual in the Three-Fold nature of Body, Soul and Spirit then the prodigious efforts and sacrifices of the Second World War will be in vain”.<sup>236</sup> In each of these articles, a particular issue is discussed in depth through Steiner’s concept centred in the individual human being.

The first article in this series stated that Biodynamic methods envisaged the plant in its entirety and that in the social sphere there was a need for an approach which embraced the whole human being. According to the article:

The concept of a social system carries with it the ancillary concept of total man. By this is meant that social system is only (1) social and (2) a system, if it mirrors completely the activity of man. Hence one has to arrive at an understanding of precisely what the activity of man, in a social sense is. The materialistic concept of “survival of the fittest” denies at once the concept social. In Dr. Steiner’s use of the word social one has always to imply an added concept – moral. Not in the sense of convention, faith or religious but in the sense conscience social (moral) man, in this sense was an historical impossibility prior to this century, not that individuals, as such, were not social. Only just as technology becomes worldwide in the sense of a technician owing to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so today the social (moral) man can emerge. And it is our task to create an environment such that the social (moral) impulse of man can be reflected in outer institutions and practices. Today most of our conventional practices are a result of the a-moral concept

---

<sup>235</sup> *News Letter*, No. 16, June, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>236</sup> *News Letter*, No. 24, July, 1945, p. 1.

of Natural Science e.g. the slow but sure engulfment of small scale businesses by large scale companies.<sup>237</sup>

The Association endorsed its commitment to the phrase ‘the freeing of people’ which implied necessarily to take steps towards ‘freeing the individual’ and any form of social system should assure freedom to the individual. According to the article, each individual should find an environment in which its individual talents “can be expressed in perfect freedom”.<sup>238</sup> It reiterated Steiner’s statement that “outside in the social environment, the threefold organism must consciously be constructed so as to reflect the threefold activity of the individual”.<sup>239</sup> The hope was that this construction would bring forth a “truly moral co-operative force”<sup>240</sup>, but also warned the danger of the state falling in the hands of shadowy figures as follows:

Today we are face to face with Roman ghost elevated on worldwide pedestal – the State- wherein the individual exists for the State and when the State becomes dominated by shadowy figures lurking in the murk of modern economic activities, the ghost becomes active as in nightmare and the individual less and less human.<sup>241</sup>

In the subsequent article, published in the News Letter No. 18, there was a reflection on the idea of unitary state, which emerged in the previous 20 years, displaying two distinct facets political and economic. In such unitary state there is no room for the free individual and “hence the mass man emerges, the huge political vested interests, the vast economic trusts, cartels and organizations arise and the individual human being is swamped by the class, by the party, or by the business institutions”.<sup>242</sup> According to the article although New Zealand didn’t escape this worldwide trend it had a greater possibility of creating a social environment than most other countries. Throughout these articles it was emphasised that “a truly human social order must be threefold in character and form”<sup>243</sup> and divided into three distinct spheres; a spiritual/cultural sphere; a political/state sphere and an economic/social sphere. Each of these spheres was discussed in detail.

---

<sup>237</sup> *News Letter*, No. 17, September, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>238</sup> *News Letter*, No 17, September, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>239</sup> *News Letter*, No 17, September, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>240</sup> *News Letter*, No 17, September, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>241</sup> *News Letter*, No 17, September, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>242</sup> *News Letter*, No. 18, December, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>243</sup> *News Letter*, No. 23, March, 1945, p. 2.

The Biodynamic Association drew on these notions of the Social Order in their assessment of farming in New Zealand. In the front page of the News Letter No. 19, dated of March 1944, a strong statement was made regarding land deterioration in New Zealand resulting from a misbalance between “social order of man and the environmental forces and factors”.<sup>244</sup> According to it, the increasing agricultural decline in New Zealand related to the following:

- (a) Old established social and economic customs hoisted on to totally different conditions of environment;
- (b) The attempt by economic interests to invade a purely organic sphere with the Laws of Industry and Technology.
- (c) The refusal to appreciate the fact each farm is a biological and dynamic unit.<sup>245</sup>

Although in some respects World War II presented opportunities for Biodynamic Agriculture, its underlying philosophies, as reaffirmed in the series of articles, remained very much against mainstream thinking, because they were against chemical sprays, capitalism and government intervention. Moreover, although the name Steiner was dropped by the Association in 1945, it is clear his views remained influential, given the prominence accorded to them. Arguably, the strength of Biodynamic agriculture from its advocates perspective, namely its placing of agriculture within a holistic framework was its weakness when it came to seeking to persuade the wider public of its merits, because practicing it required a change of mind-set as well as method.

## **News Letter c. 1941-45**

The News Letter evolved with the years with new issues increasingly featuring more information, articles, local reports and news from abroad, and growing in size. Although only existing from 1939 and small in size, the News Letter had consistently published regular editions throughout the initial few years promoting Biodynamic principles in New Zealand and articulating a community of practice between members

---

<sup>244</sup> *News Letter*, No. 19, March, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>245</sup> *News Letter*, No. 19, March, 1944, p. 1.

of the Biodynamic Association at which Biodynamic practitioners connected through mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and shared repertoire.

In June 1942 a list of each issue of the News Letter previously published was printed under the heading “Index of the News Letter”.<sup>246</sup> It basically provided the issue number, from No. 1 to No. 10, and the topics discussed in each of them. Newcomers were able to acquire these issues upon request.

The News Letter continued to include material from overseas. In the Supplement to News Letter No 11, dated of March 1942, an Australian member of the of Biodynamic Association in New Zealand, Mr. C.G. Burford from Melbourne, wrote a contribution to some of the discussions held at the first conference of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand in 1941. Burford gave a brief on how he converted four acres of land 28 miles away from the city. The land itself was in poor condition and with years of Biodynamic management he claimed to produce high quality berries. He stated that the pre-war marketing was difficult and worsened with the war. According to him “If one is to keep to their ideals and have a rounded and balanced B.D. farm, then necessity drives them to provide their own markets”.<sup>247</sup> In his contribution Mr. Burford analysed the main challenges in setting up a Biodynamic farm within wartime economic circumstances. Based on his own experience he suggested that groups of people should buy larger amounts land together and establish co-operatives aiming to create mechanisms to form small communities with a horizontal management/organizational structure. In his understanding it would be possible to have Biodynamic farms organized in the form of co-operatives which were financially viable and ecologically sound. The inclusion of Australian members in the Biodynamic Association of New Zealand indicates that it had something of an Australasian character. As we shall see, contributions from Australian members would be very important in sustaining the association after World War II.

In reading the Newsletter between 1941 and 1945, the expanding scope of outreach activities by members becomes apparent. In 1942 Billington compiled and published a brochure titled ‘*Compost to Garden Plot or Thousand Acre Farm*’<sup>248</sup> in which he

---

<sup>246</sup> *News Letter*, No. 12, June 1942, p. 4.

<sup>247</sup> *Supplement to Newsletter*, No. 11, March 1942, p. 1.

<sup>248</sup> Francis H. Billington, *Compost to Garden Plot or Thousand Acre Farm*, Auckland: J. E. Jenkins, 1942.

described the use, making and application of Biodynamic made compost. Billington had a solid background and experience of agriculture working in countries such as England, Ireland, Argentine and New Zealand. The Association members were able to obtain this booklet from Winkfield.<sup>249</sup> One year later, in March 1943, the Biodynamic Association offered more details to its members about composting by publishing a Supplement to the News Letter No. 15 which was fully dedicated to compost making, particularly regarding common problems found after making a compost heap and ways to remedy them.<sup>250</sup>

The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand started to offer short courses on Biodynamic methods of agriculture to its members. In September 1944, the News Letter published a note under the heading 'N.Z. Notes on B.D. Activity' informing them that a week-long course on Biodynamic methods was given by Courtenay Hall at Te Aroha. The programme consisted of lectures on soil, Biodynamic treatment of soil, compost, pasture management, Biodynamic Preparations, home garden and self-supporting farm. There were also farm visits and a talk to local high school pupils. The Te Aroha members had formed a local Biodynamic group which included several farmers. According to the note "it was indeed an intense experience to lecture amidst such appreciation and hospitality and a definitive step forward has been taken".<sup>251</sup>

Another way of learning Biodynamic principles was through study groups which spontaneously formed in Kerikeri and Wellington in 1944. In Kerikeri a "half dozen citrus orchardists have formed a study group meeting once fortnightly for the study of B.D. and the practical side includes the building of about 1000 tons compost and the erection of liquid manure sumps".<sup>252</sup> The Wellington group was under Mr. MacDonald which was said to be "progressing steadily and increased interest is being shown"<sup>253</sup>.

Sometimes the News Letter published reports on farms in conversion to Biodynamic regime. For instance, in September 1943 a report was published about a farm in Kerikeri in conversion to Biodynamic program. There an experiment was carried on seed sowing and the results were shared in the News Letter to support the

---

<sup>249</sup> *News Letter*, No. 11, March, 1942, p. 2.

<sup>250</sup> *Supplement to News Letter*, No. 15, March, 1943.

<sup>251</sup> *News Letter*, No. 21, September, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>252</sup> *News Letter*, No. 21, September, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>253</sup> *News Letter*, No. 21, September, 1944, p. 1.

effectiveness of Biodynamic methods. The report stated that “although these results are approximate only, in the strict scientific sense, yet they do indicate the effectiveness of the B-D methods and certainly inspire one to further efforts”.<sup>254</sup>

The News Letter continued to encourage its readers to carry out experiments in conjunction with the use of the Biodynamic Preparations. It was asked if any member had a plot of land available to be used for such tests as well as the willingness to follow and comply with necessary instructions; if so they were invited to communicate with Courtenay Hall.<sup>255</sup>

The Biodynamic Association also started to consider implementing a type of certification for Biodynamic grown produce in New Zealand in 1944 under a registered trademark. To this end, the main idea proposed was to have a number of commercial growers to produce strictly grown food under full Biodynamic regime and to warrant a label to indicate it to the consumers.<sup>256</sup> It was reported as follows:

#### REGISTERED TRADEMARK FOR BIO-DYNAMIC PRODUCTS

Since the inception of the B.D.A. in New Zealand, a number of commercial growers are now in a position to warrant the use of a specially designed and colour printed label for produce. This label has been duly registered for the B/D. Association in New Zealand and the conditions for use are as follow:

1. The user must have been a financial member of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand for the last 2 consecutive years.
2. The user must have applied to the product at least 1 spray of 500 and 1 of 501.
3. The user must have used B/D. compost in the growing of the product.
4. No spray must be used with causes any permanent damage to the soil.
5. Authority to issue the labels is vested in the persons of L.C. Hall, Keri Keri, and G.B. Winkfield, Auckland, or any person delegated by them, acting jointly.
6. The persons named in paragraph (5) can at any time prohibit the user from using the label if the above conditions are not fulfilled.

The conditions may appear rigid and members will at once realise that the B/D. methods are THERE TO BE USED, and that for a Commercial produce, a 100% B/D. treatment is required.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>254</sup> *News Letter*, No. 17, September, 1943, p. 6.

<sup>255</sup> *News Letter*, No. 19, March, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>256</sup> *News Letter*, No. 20, June, 1944, p. 11.

<sup>257</sup> *News Letter*, No. 20, June, 1944, p. 11.

A list of permissible and prohibited sprays was also provided in the report. It is unclear if this initiative bore the desired fruits in the immediate time as no further reports on the progress of establishing certification and a trademark is found in the subsequent issues of the News Letter. Nevertheless, that the issue of certification was considered does suggest an increased interest in Biodynamics and a desire to control who could identify themselves as a practitioner of its methods.

## **Conclusion**

The Biodynamic movement gained a degree of mainstream awareness by 1940. Throughout the early 1940's the Association developed and extended its membership to both the North and South Island, although it remained predominantly more active in the North Island, particularly in Auckland, Kerikeri and Te Aroha. The Biodynamic Association had opportunities to present Biodynamic farming to a wider audience, such as Hall's address to the Dominion Reconstruction in November 1941, and a few newspaper articles also referred to Biodynamic practices. Women's involvement with the Biodynamic movement continued, including Hall's talk to the Ladies Gardening Club in 1943.

World War II, especially the period 1941-45, seemed to offer a window of opportunity to Biodynamic/organic farming. Wartime shortages of fertiliser meant Biodynamic/organic approaches were seen more favourably and linked to the war effort. In addition Ben Roberts' appointment as Minister of Agriculture meant they had a member of their organisation in a position of authority. There were a number of contacts between Biodynamic representatives and the Government between 1940 and 1945. As we shall see in the next chapter, by the end of 1945 the Government had an extensive memorandum on Biodynamic and an increasing interest to investigate Biodynamic claims, possibly because of wartime fertilizer shortages.

The Biodynamic movement formed a community of practice at which participants mutually engaged including in organizing a conference and undertaking tests; the members continued to negotiate a joint enterprise in the form of the Biodynamic

Association, intended to widen its insertion in the community; a shared repertoire of the Association's views on political issues and agricultural matters was disseminated throughout the period along with some discussion around certification and trademarks. The Biodynamic Association also used the war as a chance to explain their social philosophy and how it related to agriculture. Much of their thinking in this regard still revolved around Steiner, which may have limited its wider appeal.





# Chapter Four: Opportunity and Conflict

## 1945-49

This chapter gives an overview of the challenges and opportunities the Biodynamic Association encountered in the post-war period. It discusses the failure of a proposed venture to buy a property in Kerikeri, intended to serve as the centre of the Association and an area to carry out experiments and tests, which created an internal conflict within the Association. It further discusses the decision by the Association not to proceed in engaging with the Government in a joint experimental farm in Waikato. It then addresses the ways in which the Association responded to these challenges, including changing the newsletter. This chapter briefly assesses the importance the Association placed on educating and thoroughly teaching Steiner's agricultural methods to its members and, finally, developmental initiatives towards marketing Biodynamic produce and the resumption of experimental work.

### 1945 Biodynamic Association Conference

In December 1944 the News Letter announced that the second Conference of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand was scheduled to be held at Te Aroha in May 1945. The desire was to have a healthy level of participation and members were encouraged to attend "as we have reached a decisive stage in affairs of the Association".<sup>258</sup> The initiative to hold the Conference came from the Te Aroha group, which was very active at that time, and they were responsible for organizing the event. For those who attended, it was hoped they would depart with an "enhanced feeling of what Agriculture is with the Social organism"<sup>259</sup> since the Biodynamic "methods arise from out of a new social element the form of the conference should reflect this

---

<sup>258</sup> *News Letter*, No. 22, December, 1944, p. 5.

<sup>259</sup> *News Letter*, No. 23, March, 1945, p. 1.

freshness".<sup>260</sup> The Association's point of view that agriculture stands within the spiritual/cultural field of human activity was threaded through many articles published about the conference in the News Letter. It was suggested that although within the Association exists "an economic and rights sphere, but these two are overshadowed by the cultural"<sup>261</sup> and that the emphasis of the conference should be "laid upon the cultural form".<sup>262</sup> The Conference was opened by the, then, Minister of Agriculture, Ben Roberts who "spoke to members with a depth of feeling derived from personal insight, into what the B/D methods really contain and his remarks certainly gave hope to future activity".<sup>263</sup> According to the report 80 participants attended the Conference arriving from places as far as Kerikeri to Dunedin giving a sense of enthusiasm amongst members. A list of attendees is yet to be found in order check where the participants came from to establish if the Association could legitimately claim to be New Zealand wide but the number of participants does suggest a high level of interest. The report on the Conference projected a sense of cohesion and unity noting "when the Association affairs came up for discussion it was splendid being able to come to decisions from a clear cross section of members".<sup>264</sup>

At the Conference members presented and shared the results of experiments conducted in their properties. Mr. H. Carr, from Kerikeri, reported his experiment comparing the results of germination rate and growth of new grass sown in areas which have been sprayed with the Preparation 500 and areas which did not.<sup>265</sup> An experiment on dairy stock fed exclusively on Biodynamic diet conducted on Mr. G. Candy's farm was also reported at the Conference.<sup>266</sup> It was also reported that Mr. A. Rogers and Mr. Dale constructed manure sumps with power pump for pumping liquid manure aimed at substituting the old system of open drains for dairy farms.<sup>267</sup> These presentations reflected that a small but growing number of working farms were adopting Biodynamic methods.

---

<sup>260</sup> *News Letter*, No. 23, March, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>261</sup> *News Letter*, No. 23, March, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>262</sup> *News Letter*, No. 23, March, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>263</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, July, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>264</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, July, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>265</sup> *News Letter*, No. 24, July, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>266</sup> *News Letter*, No. 24, July, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>267</sup> *News Letter*, No. 24, July, 1945, p. 1.

A discussion about growth and development of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand took place at the Te Aroha Conference and a recommendation was made to expand the activities of the Association without delay including a proposal to purchase a farm in Kerikeri and the incorporation of the Association under the Friendly Societies Act. At the conference it was also proposed to increase the membership fees and a memorandum was published in July 1945 stating the new arrangements of entrance fees and annual subscription due to commence on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1945. A distinction was made between the new members as 'active member' and 'associate member'. The active member would pay less for entrance and subscription and would be entitled to use all of the Preparations. Associate members had a significantly higher fees and no entitlement to Preparations.<sup>268</sup>

## **Proposal to Purchase a Farm**

Six years after its inauguration, in 1939, the Association was now considering how best to address the challenges it was facing resulting from its growth and also to meet its future aspirations. Some, including Courtenay Hall, believed the solution was the acquisition of a permanent centre at which the administration/office would be located as well as to be an area to conduct research and experiments. The idea to purchase such a centre led to the first recorded conflict within the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand. The main source alluding to the conflict is the News Letter which may not necessarily have captured all perspectives on the matter.

As early as 1944 Courtenay Hall already had a plan to set up a unit to carry out experiments and research work in his own property in Kerikeri. In an appeal published in the Supplement to Newsletter 20, Hall expressed the view to members that the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand "...must look to the future and it is the writer's firm judgment that we have now arrived at a stage in our organization when the

---

<sup>268</sup> *News Letter*, No. 24, July, 1945, p. 1.

Association in N.Z. should begin to build our own Experimental and research unit".<sup>269</sup> Hall offered his own property to be used for such purpose stating that "if any member is interested, the writer would like to establish his land as the Experimental Research Unit for N.Z., but is severely handicapped in the matter of Finance!!".<sup>270</sup> Members were asked to contribute financially and a Trust was formed for raising funds.

In May 1945 a General Meeting was held at Te Aroha, presumably during the Conference of the Biodynamic Association, upon the request from the local group of members. The main topic in the agenda was the proposal of acquiring a property in Kerikeri to be the headquarters of the Association and the question of incorporation of the Association under the Friendly Societies Act. Both proposals were reportedly endorsed by the majority of the participants. A Council was formed with the responsibility of investigating ways and means to do so.

It was reported that an ideal property to this end located in Kerikeri had been offered to the Association. This property consisted of 14 acres of land (5.6 hectares), a large house with 17 bedrooms and situated in a location and environment deemed suitable for the purpose of such a centre. It was stated that "it was the wish of the meeting to see if this could not be acquired and in the meantime carry on the guest house until such time as the Association could carry on from out of its own resources".<sup>271</sup> The issue of uncertainty if there were "sufficient members with sufficient faith in the Association and sufficient courage to undertake the responsibility of developing such a centre"<sup>272</sup> was raised and the members expressed their wish to go ahead if there would enough capital forthcoming to pay for the property.

By June 1945 the Government was officially aware of the plans to acquire the farm at Kerikeri and was invited to contribute funding. The Government considered the possibility of becoming involved and assisting with the purchase but was advised to the contrary by R.B. Tennent, the Assistant Director General of Agriculture of the Department of Agriculture. In his letter to Ben Roberts, dated of 20 June 1945, Tennent argued that:

---

<sup>269</sup> *Supplement to Newsletter 20*, June, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>270</sup> *Supplement to Newsletter 20*, June, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>271</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>272</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 1.

In regard to the actual location of a farm at Keri Keri, I doubt very much the wisdom of the Association in selecting this particular block of land. In the first place it appears to me to be over-capitalised by the large guest house, and in the second place it is on a specialised soil type and too far from large centre. This means that the price per acre is far too high and consequently any work carried out by the Association would be subjected on land of high fertility so that the results could not be applicable to farm lands in general.<sup>273</sup>

Furthermore, Tennent stated that:

I consider in the interest of the Association that it would be wiser for them to acquire land more typical of farming generally, and at a much more reasonable price. Such an area should be selected near one of the main centres so that a ready market could be obtained for any produce grown thereon.<sup>274</sup>

Tennent suggested that instead of assisting with the purchase of the Kerikeri farm the Government offer land at a place such as Ruakura to conduct experiment and tests. Roberts, acting on official advice, did not offer Government funding for the homestead, but did offer the plot of land at Ruakura.

Meanwhile the Association sent out a circular to its members inviting them to indicate the amount they could contribute towards financing the centre and a fundraising plan was outlined. The Council of the Biodynamic Association reportedly objected to going ahead with the scheme “on the grounds that running of a guest house was not compatible with the methods and might become a financial embarrassment”.<sup>275</sup> Courtenay Hall was managing the property in question since August 1944 and suggested that instead of being a financial embarrassment the guest house could be a means of carrying the Association. At this point the first public controversy within the Association was triggered. The different opinions within the Association regarding the acquisition of the centre created conflict as observed in the following paragraph:

As a result of the Council’s attitude it seemed that the affairs of the Association would be held up from developing from the impulse that permeated it at Te Aroha. Fortunately the matter of incorporation had also been held up by the Council and so the way was clear for those members, who were willing to shoulder the responsibility of forming a centre, to act. As a result a representative group from Te Aroha came to Keri Keri and met the local active members. The full details resulting from the general meeting

---

<sup>273</sup> R. B. Tennent to Ben Roberts, 19 June 1945, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil’, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77

<sup>274</sup> R. B. Tennent to Ben Roberts, 19 June 1945, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil’, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77

<sup>275</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 1.

were placed before this meeting and as result the decision to purchase the Homestead property was unanimously recommended, thus only further implementing the wish of the Te Aroha meeting. A pro tem management committee was set up consisting of the Keri Keri active members in order to proceed with the incorporation and the raising of finance to purchase the Homestead.<sup>276</sup>

The need to establish a centre for the Association continued to be expressed and the following paragraph extracted from the News Letter No.25 of October 1945 illustrates it in detail:

...now that the outer conditions were bringing the methods to the fore it was realised that a definite centre was required so that the Association could stand on its own feet and face the contemporary world of agricultural science with its own results based on the same methods of analysis. It was obvious to those who were using methods practically that some such centre was very necessary and now that the essential conditions of growth had been complied with it became clear that a real centre had to be developed.<sup>277</sup>

A list comprising the 21 purposes of the centre was enclosed within News Letter No. 25. The key purpose of the centre was being the headquarters of the Association, the official channel through which N.Z. would be linked with similar associations overseas. It was stated that it "will place the methods firmly within the fabric on N.Z.'s social structure"<sup>278</sup>and enable implementation of special courses of Biodynamic instructions. A questionnaire containing 15 questions was also enclosed within the News Letter asking the members whether they would be an active or associate member. It also contained questions regarding the size and activities carried in their properties and if they agreed to the incorporation of the Association and the acquisition of the property in Kerikeri. The last question in the questionnaire asked members to "agree to the Keri Keri active members carrying on as a pro tem management team committee until the next General Meeting".<sup>279</sup> The questionnaire indicates that Hall was seeking strong backing from the members to the proposal.

Meanwhile the fundraising organized by the Association was looking promising, at that time, particularly due to a gift given from Australia and because the members of the Association committed themselves to raise over a third of the total price. A

---

<sup>276</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>277</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>278</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>279</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 4.

sympathetic non-member was willing to lend about half of the price for a period of time till the Association would be able to pay them back.

Nevertheless, in September 1945, the issue of incorporation was resolved and the Association became an incorporated society with a registered office at Kerikeri. The Association name changed to The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand Incorporated.<sup>280</sup> Steiner's name was dropped from the Association title without explanation. Upon its incorporation, the Association published a booklet entitled Rules of The Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand Incorporated. The booklet contained 12 pages and comprised 20 rules. The rules included defining the objectives of the Association, the affiliation with the General Anthroposophical Society based in Switzerland and the establishment of a Committee responsible for the affairs of the Association. The issue of the acquisition of the property in Kerikeri was addressed as follows in rule two:

The objectives of the Association are to promote a knowledge of Bio-Dynamic methods of agriculture, and for this purpose to purchase a property at Keri Keri, Bay of islands, and to set up and establish a scientific research unit for the implementing of Bio-Dynamic methods of agriculture in New Zealand and elsewhere, and to provide and make available a centre for education and scientific research in all or any of the following branches of Bio-dynamic practices...<sup>281</sup>

The stage was set to go ahead with the purchase and it was reported that "a purchase agreement is at the present being drawn up by a solicitor in Auckland and the settlement date has been fixed for November 14<sup>th</sup>".<sup>282</sup> Members were urged to contribute before the deadline.

In 1945, while the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand was engaged with the possibility of purchasing a farm in Kerikeri, Courtenay Hall was in contact with Mr. Paul Schiller of Melbourne, Australia who had a particular interest in the medical basis of Biodynamic and was working prior to the World War II with Dr Pfeiffer and other scientists on Biodynamic agriculture and other anthroposophical research. Hall thought, in his words, that Mr Schiller could become "most valuable co-worker at the centre if we can avail ourselves of his services".<sup>283</sup> The trans-Tasman connections

---

<sup>280</sup> *Rules of The Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand Incorporated*, September, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>281</sup> *Rules of The Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand Incorporated*, September, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>282</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>283</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 3.



between the Association was further demonstrated by two individuals from Australia, Mr. Macpherson and Mr. Williams, who donated money for the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand to help purchase the Homestead in Kerikeri.<sup>284</sup>

However, the fundraising initiative didn't bear the expected results after all and a meeting was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1946, in Winkfield's home in Auckland to address this issue. The meeting was attended by Messrs. Candy and Jones from Te Aroha and Lyness, Benner, Emanuel and Hall from Kerikeri, and a decision was made not to purchase the homestead in Kerikeri due to there being insufficient funds. It was reported that "this decision was forced on the committee owing to the fact that the £2000 it was necessary that members subscribe to finance the purchase, has not come to hand".<sup>285</sup> The Committee had believed the members would subscribe and raise sufficient funds and accordingly that "felt fully justified in contracting to make the purchase and in making the necessary deposit of £500".<sup>286</sup> According to the Reserve Bank inflation calendar £2000 in 1946 equates to c. \$168,513 today and so the £500 deposit equates to c. \$42,128. The decision not to proceed with the purchase resulted in the loss of the deposit and compelled the Association to consider how to mitigate the loss:

The problem that now confronts the Association is how to proportion this loss equally amongst members. It should be remembered that the decision to make this purchase was first taken at the Te Aroha Conference, and the purpose of this letter is not only to inform members of the position but to seek their co-operation and assistance in arriving at the fairest possible manner to all in facing this disaster.<sup>287</sup>

Courtenay Hall sent a letter to the Committee resigning from his position as Director and Secretary of the B.D. Association saying that "he realised quite fully that his handling of financial matters compelled him to resign".<sup>288</sup> In his resignation letter to Winkfield, dated of 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1946, Hall wrote, "whereat certain actions of myself were discussed, and as a result of complete lack of confidence in myself as Director was expressed and implied, I must ask you to accept my resignation".<sup>289</sup> He expressed his deep regret for the failure of the initiative, which in his words, "resulted in the crash

---

<sup>284</sup> *News Letter*, No. 27, August, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>285</sup> *News Letter*, No. 26, April, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>286</sup> *News Letter*, No. 26, April, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>287</sup> *News Letter*, No. 26, April, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>288</sup> *News Letter*, No. 26, April, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>289</sup> *News Letter*, No. 26, April, 1946, p. 4.

of an ideal that I have for over ten years worked to attain and now through my own fault it has crashed".<sup>290</sup> He also asked to remain an ordinary active member of the Association.

The homestead venture generated the first recorded conflict within the Association and exposed a degree of division between some members. The debt originating from the homestead venture was eventually covered with the donations received from both Mrs. Macpherson and Mr. Williams from Australia. They wrote to the Association stating that "they wish the money sent from Australia, £500 and £100 to remain here and be used in any way we think fit".<sup>291</sup>

During the annual meeting of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand, held at Te Aroha in September 1946, Mr. Malden expressed the official position that "the Association was confronted by rather an involved situation owing to what happened during the previous fifteen months or so"<sup>292</sup> and asserted that Hall "had registered a Bio-Dynamic Association, with an executive committee appointed by himself and had totally ignored the resolutions passed at the previous annual meeting".<sup>293</sup> Hall's main objective in registering the Association was to purchase the homestead property at Kerikeri, "a step which had been decided against by Dominion Council which had been duly elected to manage the Association's affairs".<sup>294</sup> Although Hall himself was one of the pioneers in establishing the Bio Dynamic Association in New Zealand and one of its most active members, his handling of the Association's affairs affected his standing within the Association and little reference was made to him thereafter. Winkfield wrote a brief note in 1947 acknowledging Hall's contribution to the formation of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand but refrained from mentioning his activities in the homestead. According to Winkfield, Hall originally "proposed forming a Bio-Dynamic Association"<sup>295</sup> and that they "agreed to work together"<sup>296</sup> towards it. Winkfield acknowledged Hall's work in the dissemination of Biodynamics in New Zealand and in recruiting of new members. According to him, "Mr. Hall undertook journeys all over

---

<sup>290</sup> *News Letter*, No. 26, April, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>291</sup> *News Letter*, No. 27, August, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>292</sup> *News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 2.

<sup>293</sup> *News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 2.

<sup>294</sup> *News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 2.

<sup>295</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 2, New Series, March, 1947, p. 1.

<sup>296</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 2, New Series, March, 1947, p. 1.

New Zealand from Dunedin to Keri Keri, and wherever possible lectured and increased membership”.<sup>297</sup>

The affairs of the Association became disrupted after the homestead venture and a number of members criticised Hall’s conduct.<sup>298</sup> Mr Malden suggested scrapping entirely the constitution of the Biodynamic Association as formulated and registered by Hall and replaced it with the constitution drawn up and approved by the general meeting in 1945. The resignation of Hall and his executive paved the way for the meeting to appoint for the “management of the Association’s affairs a council which would have the full confidence of all members”.<sup>299</sup> The fallout of the conflict arguably led to another new beginning for the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand.

## **Joint Experimental Farm in Waikato**

In the midst of the issue about purchasing a property in Kerikeri another important debate took place within the Association creating another controversy. The issue was whether the Biodynamic Association should engage in a joint venture with the Government to establish an area to conduct Biodynamic experiments through scientific parameters.

As previously noted, the Minister of Agriculture, Ben Roberts, acting on official advice, did not offer Government funding for the homestead venture at Kerikeri. The Assistant Director General of Agriculture of the Department of Agriculture, R. B. Tennent, had suggested in his letter to Roberts that “it might be asked for some of the proposed work to be carried out on one of the State farms such as Ruakura, or at one of the Agricultural Colleges”<sup>300</sup> and then goes on to say that “This brings up to the question as to whether the Bio-Dynamic Association might not consider the advisability

---

<sup>297</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 2, New Series, March, 1947, p. 1.

<sup>298</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 2.

<sup>299</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 2.

<sup>300</sup> R. B. Tennent to Ben Roberts, 19 June 1945, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil’, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77

of co-operating with one of our farms with a view to testing some of the ... debatable claims in its propaganda”<sup>301</sup> which hints at underlying reservations.

There was a meeting held, probably towards the end of 1945, in the Parliament Buildings between Ben Roberts, representatives of the Biodynamic Association, and representatives of Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and the Department of Agriculture to discuss the possibility of the Government becoming involved in jointly conducting scientific tests on Biodynamics. According to the report, Ben Roberts suggested that “it would be possible within the normal orbit of the work performed by the Department of Agriculture and Department of Scientific & Industrial Research to find some common grounds for investigation.”<sup>302</sup> The report of the meeting shows that Biodynamic advocates were at the table with the Government, but still faced scepticism. Interestingly, Tennent, noted that Department of Agriculture agreed with most of what Biodynamic advocates said but was concerned about the “10%” of their claims which were “mystical” and could not be proven. Nevertheless, he would be willing to acknowledge the benefits if they were proven. A letter by Tennent addressed to the Secretary of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research dated of 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1945 stated that “the Minister of Agriculture is anxious that some research work should be undertaken in connection with the biodynamic method of agriculture”.<sup>303</sup> Tennent’s letter reinforces Roberts’ commitment of supporting scientific tests on Biodynamics.

After the Council of the Biodynamic Association objected to the idea of purchasing the homestead in Kerikeri the Minister of Agriculture requested to meet with, then Secretary of the Association, Courtenay Hall, to discuss the possibility of the Department of Agriculture establishing an area to carry out experiments strictly under Biodynamic methods. A suggestion was made that Raynor Jones, who had the background to implement to New Zealand conditions the process of crystallization<sup>304</sup>

---

<sup>301</sup> R. B. Tennent to Ben Roberts, 19 June 1945, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil’, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77

<sup>302</sup> Report of Meeting held in Parliament Building between The Minister of Agriculture, Representatives of the Biological-Dynamic Society and Representatives from the Department of Agriculture and Scientific & Industrial Research.

<sup>303</sup> R.B. Tennent to the Secretary, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, 29 October 1945, ‘Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil’, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77

<sup>304</sup> Sensitive crystallization is a method initiated by Ehrenfried Pfeiffer used for examining the quality from living nature belonging to picture forming method.

and dynamolysis<sup>305</sup>, should be in charge of developing the area in conjunction with Courtenay Hall. The idea was that “this area would also be under strict scientific control and could be a centre where test of composts, liquid manures, etc. could be carried out for members”.<sup>306</sup>

It was indicated by the Minister that an area comprising 15 acres [six hectares] at Te Rapa near Hamilton was to be set aside “for the establishment of a B/D test and model unit under Govt. supervision”.<sup>307</sup> This idea was believed to reinforce the need for the Associations’ own centre instead of preventing it, since it was suggested that an increase in demand for Biodynamic methods would follow and the needed lecture tours couldn’t be undertaken by Public Service officers. Gratitude towards the Minister of Agriculture was expressed in the News Letter: “We are indeed blessed that we have a Minister of Agriculture who is not only interested in the methods himself as a farmer, but who can see the national benefits and who is prepared to take responsibility and action”.<sup>308</sup>

Furthermore, the Biodynamic Association wrote in 1945 a comprehensive memorandum directed to Ben Roberts outlaying the Biodynamic system of agriculture and reiterating its aspirations do conduct scientific test. The document stated that at the Te Aroha Conference in May 1945, “it was emphasised that there was now a need of personal observations and mere estimates of results being subjected to strict scientific tests”.<sup>309</sup> It was expressed that, “to be effective, such work would constitute – and appear to merit a full-time job for a trained scientist, well versed in B/D technique”<sup>310</sup> but the Biodynamic Association stated that it did not have financial resources to undertake much research work. The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand reported the possibility of conducting tests at Ruakura as observed in the following paragraph:

---

<sup>305</sup> Capillary dynamolysis is a method initiated by Lily Kolisko to get an image of the life force of a plant by making a solution of the plant essence through dilution and then adding a solution of certain minerals.

<sup>306</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>307</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>308</sup> *News Letter*, No. 25, October, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>309</sup> Memorandum for Hon. Minister of Agriculture N.Z., An Outline of the Salient Features of the Biological-Dynamic (B/D) System of Agriculture, p. 2.

<sup>310</sup> Memorandum for Hon. Minister of Agriculture N.Z., An Outline of the Salient Features of the Biological-Dynamic (B/D) System of Agriculture, p. 2.

Discussing this matter recently with Mr. A. Rogers of Eltow, Te Aroha, it was suggested that perhaps arrangements could be made whereby Mr. Raynor Jones of the Dominion Physical Laboratory – who as you are aware, - is well qualified to undertake such work – could be stationed at Ruakura where the necessary facilities for such scientific research are available, and where possibly a limited area – say 10 acres – could be assigned for this special investigation.<sup>311</sup>

The Biodynamic Association suggested that farms, orchards and market gardens from its members would be available “for more extended trials suggested by the research centre findings”<sup>312</sup> and that it would forward any reports from research carried overseas. The Association noted some of the benefits of such joint venture:

It is anticipated that by some such a means as here outlined the Dep. Of Agriculture would acquire useful data for its own use whilst the Association, on its part would, co-operate in providing practical demonstrations, not only for its own members, but for the benefit of primary producers in the Dominion generally.<sup>313</sup>

Further in the memorandum a document signed by Raynor Jones titled ‘Proposed Investigation of the Bio-Dynamic Method of Agriculture to be Carried out at Ruakura State Farm’ outlines the field and laboratorial work proposed to be carried at Ruakura. In addition to it the Biodynamic Association outlined the suggested procedure to be adopted at Ruakura as follows:

1. The B/D work at Ruakura should function as a totality, i.e. the fragmentation of research and analysis finds no place in the B/D methods.
2. Facilities for treating the project area should provide for the total implementation of B/D practices, i.e. the Basis is the soil.
3. The control and direction of research should be governed by:
  - (a) A person well equipped in scientific procedure as well as long study and deep understanding of that form of knowledge and the method of thinking required to understand these methods as originated and developed by Dr. Rudolf Steiner.
  - (b) The direction of research should be activated by the officer at Ruakura in conjunction with the Association Executive
4. It is suggested that the officer in charge at Ruakura be Mr. Raynor Jones, DSIR, Wellington. And that he have maximum freedom of initiative to develop the proposed Bio-Dynamic Section at Ruakura, in co-operation

---

<sup>311</sup> Memorandum for Hon. Minister of Agriculture N.Z., An Outline of the Salient Features of the Biological-Dynamic (B/D) System of Agriculture, p. 2.

<sup>312</sup> Memorandum for Hon. Minister of Agriculture N.Z., An Outline of the Salient Features of the Biological-Dynamic (B/D) System of Agriculture, p. 2.

<sup>313</sup> Memorandum for Hon. Minister of Agriculture N.Z., An Outline of the Salient Features of the Biological-Dynamic (B/D) System of Agriculture, p. 2.

with the Association through Mr. L.C. Hall and Dr. D.J. Smith, Veterinary Surgeon, Te Aroha.<sup>314</sup>

Although on several occasions the News Letter had referred to the effectiveness of the Biodynamic methods and suggested that they were scientifically proven the Association subsequently decided to not engage in such an initiative with the Government. After the failure of the homestead venture it was decided at the annual meeting held at Te Aroha, in September 1946 that the Association would terminate all negotiations with the Government, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research regarding experimental areas and comparative tests, intended to be conducted at Te Rapa. The original plan was that:

The two Government Departments concerned, should test B.D. methods and report on them, the Association being granted an area of land for demonstration purposes, orthodox science having a similar adjacent area on which would be used the ordinary agricultural methods at a present in vogue. The results, after a period of years, would then be compared.<sup>315</sup>

It was stated in the News Letter that “no useful result would be achieved by continuing the negotiations which had been entered into against advice to the contrary”.<sup>316</sup> An article called ‘Would Serve no Useful Purpose’ published in the News Letter No. 1 (New Series), further discussed the decision to withdraw from negotiations with the Government. It stated that the decision did not mean that the “Association is running away, that is afraid that it cannot substantiate its claims”<sup>317</sup> although acknowledging that its opponents certainly could “capitalise that point”.<sup>318</sup> According to the article “a little sober reflection should convince one that there is nothing to be gained at the present time by such a test, no useful purpose to be served”.<sup>319</sup> The understanding from the Association was that although the proposition seemed fair, the tests would be unsatisfactory because even if they did prove the Biodynamic methods superior “one may be quite sure that official science would find some explanation other than the real one”.<sup>320</sup> From the Biodynamic Association’s perspective:

---

<sup>314</sup> Memorandum for Hon. Minister of Agriculture N.Z., An Outline of the Salient Features of the Biological-Dynamic (B/D) System of Agriculture, p. 8.

<sup>315</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>316</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 3.

<sup>317</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>318</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>319</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>320</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 4.

Modern science is purely materialistic in its outlook: it is quite foreign to it to admit the operation of Nature. It would, for instance, submit the B.D. preparations to chemical analysis and would not find anything to account for their “magical” properties. Why they are used and how they work cannot be understood by one accustomed to think only as modern materialistic science thinks. Probably the most that would be admitted would be the fact that the use of compost certainly brings about beneficial results, but that there is any special merit in compost made along the lines indicated by Dr. Steiner would without doubt be denied, and B.D. methods derided as superstition and totally unscientific.<sup>321</sup>

The ideal picture from the Association’s point of view was that Biodynamic agriculture “can and must stand on its own merits”<sup>322</sup> and the results achieved to date and in the future would speak for themselves in the form of healthier, growth, plants, animals, and human beings, “no matter what science says about the way these results are achieved”.<sup>323</sup> The conclusion was that modern science could not admit the merits of Biodynamic and remain orthodox, although “someday it would be forced to, but until that happens B.D. Associations and Government Scientific Departments had far better remain apart”.<sup>324</sup>

The decision to discontinue negotiations with the Government received support from other Biodynamic organisations. The President of the Biodynamic Association, Mr. Winkfield, received in 1947 a letter from Westhall Farm Schools, Ltd., Scotland which supported from afar the decision by the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand to cease and withdrawn the negotiation with the Government to jointly establish an experimental farm in Waikato. The letter expressed the view that the Biodynamic method “cannot be separated from the moral principles involved in Anthroposophy and it is to my mind quite impossible to create a joint venture where materialistic technique has a joint say”.<sup>325</sup> The letter also stated that Westhall Farm Schools have registered the name ‘BINAMIC’ as a protected trademark and was hoping to hold a meeting with representatives from the various organizations there to discuss this question and suggested that the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand adopted the same trademark.

---

<sup>321</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>322</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>323</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>324</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 5.

<sup>325</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 2, New Series, March, 1947, p. 2.



## 1947 Biodynamic Association Conference

An Annual Conference was held at Te Aroha in May (24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>) 1947 and was attended by about 40 members from different regions. The number of attendees was significantly smaller than the previous Conference held in Te Aroha in 1945 when 80 people attended. The opening evening was dedicated to the Annual General Meeting of the Association. The President of the Association, Mr. Winkfield, said that the Association arrived at a stage at which was necessary to plan for the future and was positive that the meeting would be productive to this end. The Treasurer, Mr. Gibbs, reported proudly that the Association had £500 or more in hand for future activities. Mr. D. Brimblecombe, who replaced Hall as the secretary of the Association, reported that he was struggling to keep up with increasingly onerous secretarial work without assistance. The meeting agreed to address this issue by offering paid assistance.

Although membership reached over 300 members in 1947 and the conference was considered a success, it was stressed by some speakers that the Association “should be something more than just another compost club”<sup>326</sup> and that having 300 or more members should not be the criterion by which the “success or otherwise of the Association should be judged”.<sup>327</sup> It was also stated that the Association “must not be regarded as an organization trying to compete with many compost and humic societies, gauging success by the length of membership roll”.<sup>328</sup> These quotes suggest that although organic and Biodynamic movement were relatively similar, particularly in their opposition to mainstream agriculture, they had differences that could not easily be bridged.

Another issue discussed during the conference was the need of establishing a laboratory for experimental and testing purposes and to this end a sub-committee was appointed to report upon ways and means to achieve this goal. Another issue mentioned during the discussions at the conference, was the need for some kind of

---

<sup>326</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, New Series, July, 1947, p. 1.

<sup>327</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, New Series, July, 1947, p. 2.

<sup>328</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, New Series, July, 1947, p. 2.

register of members' activities in order to assist the work of helping and advising them. Related to this, it was reported that "a questionnaire which Dr Pfeiffer had circulated among his members in America was read to the meeting, and it was agreed that one along the same lines sent to all members in New Zealand would be useful".<sup>329</sup> A questionnaire was drawn up and enclosed within the News Letter in July 1947. The questionnaire asked the details of members, information regarding the size and activities carried in their properties, their crop rotation plan, if the Biodynamic Preparations have been applied, the results observed from the use of the Biodynamic Preparations. Members were requested fill up the relevant information and send back to the secretary. The following questions in the questionnaire suggest that the Association attempted to be more consultative:

If you tried D.D. preparations once or twice only, why did you not continue with the method?

If you have lost interest in the Association, why is this?

What are your main problems – in other words, how can the Association be of most help to you?

Are there any other comments you wish to make?

An interesting debate arose at the conference regarding the giving of lectures, and the holding of field days and demonstrations by people who had not received due authorization from the Association. There was an assertion that the Association "should do all in its power to prevent unauthorised persons writing and speaking on B.D. matters".<sup>330</sup> There is no explicit mention of who the 'unauthorised' speakers were and if they were knowledgeable about Biodynamic methods or poseurs and charlatans out for personal gain. This stance, in one hand suggests that some members of the Association thought that they had the sole authority to deal with Biodynamic matters in New Zealand. This statement suggests that the Biodynamic Association was seeking to reassert its status as the accepted authority on Biodynamic agriculture in New Zealand.

In the second day of the conference Raynor Jones gave a paper entitled "Bio-Dynamics in Relation to New Zealand"<sup>331</sup>, which was also enclosed within the News

---

<sup>329</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 3.

<sup>330</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 3.

<sup>331</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 3.

Letter (July 1947). His paper had three main purposes; firstly to give a review of Biodynamic literature “as it is from this source that the efforts of individuals have sprung and the movement as such developed in New Zealand”<sup>332</sup>, secondly “to see how far Bio-Dynamic practices have been adopted here since their inception in 1930”<sup>333</sup>, and lastly the paper intended “to give an account of New Zealand agriculture generally and how Bio-Dynamic method may be further adapted to it”.<sup>334</sup>

At the closing off of the Conference, the Association’s view that the health of the nation was depended upon farmers was once more expressed by Mrs. Howard Flanders: the, “right methods of agriculture were essential for healing”.<sup>335</sup> The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand occasionally linked economic and health problems to bad agricultural practices

The Annual Conference of 1947 elected a new Council comprised of 11 members and also elected the Association’s officers. Winkfield was re-elected president of the Association with Brimblecombe as vice president; Mr. N. Gibbs was elected as treasurer. The incoming council was given the task to address the question of the future organization and development of the Association. It was suggested that any suggestions to this end be forwarded to the News Letter to make known to other members in order “that the matter may be truly discussed at the next annual meeting or at any especial meeting called for that purpose”.<sup>336</sup> This suggests that the Association was taking a more consultative approach.

---

<sup>332</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 5.

<sup>333</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 5.

<sup>334</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 3.

<sup>335</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, pp. 3-4.

<sup>336</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 4.

## A New Beginning for the News Letter 1945-49

Hall's venture to purchase a homestead farm and criticism over his conduct resulted in internal crises within the Association which was reflected in the News Letter. From October 1945 to November 1946 the News Letter stopped publishing on its usual format, encompassing articles, and reports on experiments, news from abroad and other contents found consistently in the previous editions. Issue No. 25, dated of October 1945, mainly dealt with the purchase of the property in Kerikeri and organized the necessary fundraising, and laying out the main purposes of the centre. With the failure to buy the property in Kerikeri and consequently loss of the deposit, it is noticeable that the subsequent two issues of the News Letter, No. 26 (April 1946) and No.27 (August 1946), dealt mainly with finances of the Association and an update on Hall's resignation as Director/Secretary.

The first cycle of the News Letter, comprised of 27 issues published from 1939 to 1946, came to an end with the resolution of the internal crises of the Association. The 'second generation' of the News Letter was published in three editions between November 1946 and July 1947, in a new format called 'New Series', encompassing different contents, with a new shape and layout, and larger number of pages and more attention was given to its content.

Coinciding with the desire of making a fresh start and the election of a new Council the issue No. 1 of the 'New Series' of the News Letter was published in November 1946. It was the sole responsibility of the editor, Mr. H.W. Malden, from Havelock North, who stated that "for the News Letter to be of real use to members it is essential that they take full part in its production".<sup>337</sup> Members were asked to give constructive criticism, contributions and suggestions to the form and content of the News Letter. Again, we see a more consultative stance to members by the Association. In Malden's view, the News Letter "should be a link between members residing far apart from each other in all parts of the Dominion, giving them a common consciousness of what is going on in the Association and serving as a vehicle for the mutual interchange of ideas and for the discussion of mutual problems".<sup>338</sup> There was no immediate decision

---

<sup>337</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>338</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 1, New Series, November, 1946, p. 1.

regarding how often the News Letter should circulate but the editor's opinion was that a smaller monthly issue seemed more appropriate than a bulky quarterly issue. The following issue, No. 2, dated of March 1947, expressed that the News Letter had a favourable reception from members and a letter of appreciation was received from the former Minister of Agriculture Mr. Roberts. However, the editor mentioned that although he received a pat on the back from a number of members only a few of them made helpful suggestions and not many answered to the call to supply contributions. In his view, "it will always be helpful to other members to learn of their fellow-workers' successes, failures and difficulties, and in recording these there is no need to be different about literary ability".<sup>339</sup> The last issue of the New Series (No. 3), published in July 1947, contained 20 pages and a wide variety of topics covered, it was ironically the largest News Letter published up to that time.

It took 11 months until the next issue of the News Letter was published in June 1948, which was a relatively long period of time considering the Association's consistency in publishing the News Letter. Malden had resigned from the editor's role and was replaced by Mr. Marsden Dunningham from Papatoetoe Auckland. The following paragraph from an article called 'This is your News-Letter' briefly explains the main purpose of the newest iteration of the News Letter:

It is published expressively for the purpose of bringing to you the very latest and most reliable information in relation to soil fertility – to help you overcome those problems you are meeting with in your farming, gardening, or orchard work, in fact all problems met with in the cultivation of soil.<sup>340</sup>

Dunningham in his personal letter to the members of the Biodynamic Association, dated of June 1948, urged the members to co-operate and help with the production of the News Letter stating that; "we want this News-Letter to be a real News-Letter, to be full of NEWS".<sup>341</sup>

With the changes implemented the first pages were usually dedicated to messages to the members of the Association from the editor encompassing various topics. Also reports from different districts were published consistently in the News Letter. Articles about animal welfare and disease treatment were also published occasionally

---

<sup>339</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 2, New Series, March, 1947, p. 1.

<sup>340</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>341</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

suggesting that the Association attempted to supply relevant information to live-stock farmers, which may indicate a growing number of members who were making a living through Biodynamic farming rather than adapting small areas of land. The News Letter also dedicated space to 'Questions and Answers' in which members of the Association would ask all means of questions relating to Biodynamics and an answer would be given by the President of the Association, Winkfield, which suggests that the Association was seeking more engagement from its members. News from overseas Biodynamic societies was increasingly present in the new format of the News Letter. Arguably, this suggested that the Association projected itself at an international level and wanted to reaffirm the transnational nature of the Biodynamic movement.

Dunningham wanted the members to actively contribute content for the News Letter. In his view there was no genuine excuse for information not being sent by members and he made a proposal that one member in each district undertake the role of 'Official Correspondent'. The responsibility of these correspondents was to make sure the association was supplied with all the news from this district and lists of Official Correspondents would be published occasionally so that "members will know the channel through which to send their district news".<sup>342</sup> Following this appeal three members have volunteered to fulfil the role of Official Correspondent representing the districts of Te Aroha, Papakura and Hikutaia as reported in the following edition of the News Letter.<sup>343</sup> They received a formal welcome in the August issue in which an acknowledgment was made of the importance of the duties carried by the correspondents and that "the fullness and regularity of the reports sent in by them will be an example and inspiration to others".<sup>344</sup> In the October 1948 it was reported that another two people volunteered to be the official correspondents from Coromandel Peninsula (Mr. A.R. Donovan from Whitianga) and Bay of Islands (Mr. M.A. Carver from Kerikeri) respectively. Although relatively successful in recruiting volunteers for the task of official Correspondent there were still some districts unrepresented and members from these areas were urged to "send in their names so that we may be in the position of being able to publish a list of Official Correspondents, giving us a complete coverage of the Dominion, in the Christmas Issue".<sup>345</sup> People progressively

---

<sup>342</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 5.

<sup>343</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 10.

<sup>344</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 10.

<sup>345</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 9.

volunteered themselves for the task and in the following issues of the News Letter numerous District Reports were published. Notes were printed in the News Letter acknowledging new volunteers who came forward for the role of Official Correspondent giving the person details such as name, address and the district to be represented. It encouraged people to come forward to demonstrate the “real B.D. spirit”.<sup>346</sup> A relative success was achieved in recruiting Official Correspondents in the North Island, although many districts didn’t have one. The situation was worse in the South Island, there was no Official Correspondent at all and a note was published in the News Letter in April 1949 regarding this. The Biodynamic Association hoped to receive and publish “reports of all B.D. activities from EVERY district in EVERY issue of your News-Letter”.<sup>347</sup> It appears the Biodynamic movement in New Zealand was still most active in the upper North Island, with a limited but growing presence elsewhere.

Between 1948 and 1949 the News Letter regularly included quotations from books related to alternative agriculture from influential authorities on Biodynamic agriculture, particularly Lord Northbourne’s<sup>348</sup> *“Look to the Land”*<sup>349</sup> (August 1948, October 1948, April 1949, Spring 1949 and Summer 1949); Friend Sykes in *“Humus and the Farmer”*<sup>350</sup> (October 1948), and Alma Baker in *“The Labouring Earth”*<sup>351</sup> (October 1948, Christmas 1948, April 1949, Spring 1949, Summer 1949); suggesting that the Association referred to contemporary sources as well as Steiner’s agricultural teachings. These extracts from classic texts of the Biodynamic movement could be interpreted as an initiative to reassert the core values of the association after the disruption caused by the decisions not to purchase a homestead at Kerikeri and not to proceed with a joint testing station at Ruakura.

The News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand ceased publication between Christmas 1948 and April 1949. During that time members were encouraged to take the opportunity to do some reading and acquire books obtainable from the

---

<sup>346</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Christmas, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 7.

<sup>347</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, April, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 10.

<sup>348</sup> Lord Northbourne 1896-1982 is considered by many people the father of ‘organic’ agriculture. John Paull wrote Northbourne’s biography: <http://orgprints.org/26547/12/26547.pdf>

<sup>349</sup> Lord Northbourne, *Look to the Land*, J. M Dent & Sons, 1940, 1942.

<sup>350</sup> Friend Sykes, *Humus and the Farmer*, United Kingdom: Faber and Faber, 1946.

<sup>351</sup> Charles Alma Baker, *Labouring Earth, Survey of Agricultural Conditions at Home and Abroad*, Heath Cranton limited, 1942.

Secretary. A list of seven books considered to be worthy from different authors was supplied with their price including postage.<sup>352</sup> A note was published encouraging the members to take a list of the names and addresses of other members of the Association with them during their vocations and perhaps contact some of them and pay a visit. Many of them, it was stated, didn't know each other even those who lived relatively close together.<sup>353</sup>

In 1949 a decision was made to reduce the number of publications from the News Letter. It dropped from five to four issues per year. From then on each issue was linked to each season of the year. This decision was made following a commendation made by the members at the Annual Meeting. Thereafter the News Letter appeared as; Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring edition. A note regarding this change was published in the News Letter stating that; "It is our policy to give you a progressively bigger and better publication".<sup>354</sup>

## **Overseas content in the News Letter**

From its beginning, the Association saw itself of being part of a worldwide agricultural/philosophical movement and not an isolated compost club and this was reflected in the content of the new version of the News Letter. From 1947 members could subscribe to the English newsletter, and by 1948 the News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand was regularly extracting with due acknowledgements news and publications from similar Biodynamic societies. There are several examples of these connections in the News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand.

One example of these links is a copy of a letter received by Mr. McDonald, Wellington, from the United States reported in the News Letter in July 1947. The letter was a response to Mr. McDonald's earlier letter to them extending good wishes for their Biodynamic activities and offering to send news from New Zealand. Their reply

---

<sup>352</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Christmas, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 9.

<sup>353</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Christmas, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 9.

<sup>354</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Winter, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2, p 2.



contained some news and updates from the United States. The letter also expressed their hope that McDonald would write a report that could potentially be published in their magazine. It was noted in the letter that they never published any news from New Zealand and that their readers took particular interest in news from abroad.<sup>355</sup>

Another example of such contact was an article on the ties between D.M. Robinson, then the President of the Compost Club in New Zealand and later Mayor of Auckland, and Friend Sykes, an influential agriculturalist in the organic/Biodynamic movement and author of the book "Humus and the Farmer"<sup>356</sup>, from Great Britain. Robinson had sent Sykes a letter in which the later was invited to come to New Zealand to share some of his knowledge on seed germination and the outcomes of his research on seed germination from a particular variety of rye grass in different soils types which was carried in the UK.<sup>357</sup> The inclusion of the article suggested a closer relationship between the Compost Club and the Biodynamic Association

In October 1948, for instance, there is an article reprinted in full from the "Bio-Dynamics", the official quarterly of the Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association Inc. USA. This article sums up the talk given by Pfeiffer at 'Spring Conference' focussed soils and humus. As previously noted, Pfeiffer was a worldwide recognised agriculturalist who received recognition from a British journal called 'Health and Life' in which he was described as the 'foremost exponent of the Bio-Dynamic method'.<sup>358</sup>

The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand received a "long and interesting"<sup>359</sup> letter from the Secretary of the Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association U.S.A., Miss Evelyn Speiden in which she stated that she was stepping down from the role of editing "Bio-Dynamics"<sup>360</sup> in order to devote time to other Biodynamic work. Mr Fred Heckel replaced her and also sent a "friendly and enthusiastic letter"<sup>361</sup> to the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand. A note was published in the News Letter stating that "all B.D. members will join in reciprocating the goodwill and friendly

---

<sup>355</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 14.

<sup>356</sup> Friend Sykes, *Humus and the Farmer*, United Kingdom: , Faber and Faber, 1946.

<sup>357</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 11.

<sup>358</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 10.

<sup>359</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Winter, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2, p.4.

<sup>360</sup> U.S.A. equivalent of the News Letter

<sup>361</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Winter, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 4.

greetings expressed in these two letters from our co-workers in U.S.A.”<sup>362</sup>, and that “such accounts of progress overseas should remind us that our effort to return to natural ways of agriculture in N.Z. is not just an isolated effort”.<sup>363</sup> Articles of this type reaffirmed that the Biodynamic Association’s view that they were part of an international network.

## Resumption of Experimental Work

Members of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand took a great interest in experiments and tests to compare the results obtained from Biodynamic methods against conventional practices. Although the Association backed away from a joint project with the Government in 1946 on testing, it didn’t stop promoting and reporting experiments and tests carried locally and abroad.

The Biodynamic Association sporadically reported experiments carried abroad by some of the most notably authorities on Biodynamic agriculture, such as; Alma Baker, Friend Sykes, and Dr Pfeiffer. The Association claimed that the results obtained were unmistakable and proved the effectiveness of Biodynamic methods. According to the Association:

There is no longer any argument necessary. Proof we have in practice. The experimenting has been done for us by these courageous pioneers. There are several thousand B.D. farms spread over the whole of the civilized world. They too have proved the case for B.D.<sup>364</sup>

While allegedly having sufficient evidence from overseas to make a case for Biodynamic methods, the Biodynamic Association continued to encourage and report experiments and tests carried locally by members of the Association. A District Report, signed by George W. Keals from Papakura, published in June 1948, noted an experiment on the effect of Biodynamic compost on seed germination. Old rejected lettuce seeds were placed in different boxes, the first one containing good garden soil

---

<sup>362</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Winter, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>363</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Winter, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 4.

<sup>364</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August 1948, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 5.

and the second one containing mature Biodynamic compost. According to the report the result was a far superior germination rate of the seeds placed on Biodynamic compost.<sup>365</sup> Keals carried out another experiment and reported the outcome in the News Letter. In this experiment a single Chrysanthemums (flowering plant) was planted into two buckets. The bottom half of each bucket had been divided into two distinct compartments by fitting a wooden piece in between. In the first experiment the top half of the bucket was filled with ordinary garden soil and the bottom half, which were divided in two distinct sides, had in one side Biodynamic compost and in the other side normal garden soil. Once the plant grown for six months and then once it reached maturity it was lifted out of the bucket. It was claimed that the quarter side which contained Biodynamic compost was darker, moist, loose, friable and broken away in the edges. The same experiment was carried but with super phosphate added in one of the bottom quarter and similar results occurred according to the report. They washed away the soil from the roots of the two plants and as indicated in the illustrations of the experiments it was said that the root development was better and bigger on the side containing Biodynamic compost.<sup>366</sup>

Raynor Jones, a scientist employed by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, was active in carrying out tests and experiments and engaging with the wider farming sector. For instance, in 1948 he visited several commercial orchards in Hawkes Bay and according to his accounts, reported in the News Letter in June 1948, those orchards presented some outstanding features and he took particular note of the decline in production and increase on disease occurrence. The orchardists were seeking solutions to these problems. Although not an orchardist himself he observed problem areas and suggested ways to remedy those from a Biodynamic point of view.<sup>367</sup> In one of his practical experiments he tried out the effect of dipping young seedlings at the pricking out stage into the Preparation 500 and according to him there was an “obvious difference at the planting out stage, in the size and general vigour of the plants”.<sup>368</sup> He also carried another experiment on wheat with various dilutions of liquid manure which received the Biodynamic Preparations. Members of the

---

<sup>365</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 5

<sup>366</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Winter, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2.

<sup>367</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 7.

<sup>368</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, April, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 5.

Biodynamic community in Wainuiomata helped with the measurements at the end of the experiment period.

Raynor Jones also conducted tests and experiments on a glass house erected at his property in Wellington, which had been erected with financial assistance from the Biodynamic Association and subsequently purchased outright by Jones in 1949 and thereby paying off the Association's loan to him.<sup>369</sup> Reports suggest that the glasshouse was "a scientific centre of the B.D. movement in New Zealand".<sup>370</sup> It shows their approach to testing after declining the Government farm plot at Ruakura. The News Letter reported a visit to this glass house by a group of members of the Wellington branch of the Association in August 1949, whereat "all manner of interesting B.D. experiments were found to be in progress".<sup>371</sup> According to the report the continuation of Jones's experiments would provide more evidence to support the Biodynamic methods. Furthermore, the Association hoped that the evidence gathered in these experiments would "enable members to come forward in the fight against materialistic science of agriculture which threatens to bring disaster to this young country".<sup>372</sup> Jones's wife, Natalie Jones, also participated in the experiments carried in the glasshouse. The presence of a group at Wainuiomata and Wellington suggests a growing critical mass, outside of existing places the movement was established, namely Auckland; Kerikeri; Te Aroha and Hawkes Bay.

The Biodynamic Association in New Zealand indeed had the ambition to promote more experiments and tests. In the Annual Meeting in 1949, for instance, the matter was discussed with the members and set as a goal:

I'm convinced that the progress of the Association has not only been retained, but is growing as steadily as ever. Our next objective should be some central place where experiments and tests, implementing all B.D. methods, could be carried out for the benefit of New Zealand as a whole. This will take time.<sup>373</sup>

A significant amount of effort seemed to be going into presenting the case of Biodynamic farming in a way that sought to engage advocates of orthodox agriculture

---

<sup>369</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, April, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 9.

<sup>370</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Summer, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 4.

<sup>371</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Summer, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 4.

<sup>372</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Summer, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 5.

<sup>373</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Winter, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 6.

on their own ground by demonstrating, albeit without pure scientific backing, the effectiveness of Biodynamic agriculture. Arguably they were seeking to gain new converts by appealing to demonstrated effectiveness rather than gather adherents by the power of the Steiner philosophy about agriculture.

## Teaching Biodynamic Principles

Nearly ten years after being launched, the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand continued to consider ways to further develop the Association and to educate its members on Steiner's agricultural teachings. The Association wanted to engage in the community and encouraged its members to take initiatives towards it. To this end, the Association expected more commitment from members. In 1948 a small note entitled "Our Visitors' Book"<sup>374</sup> affirmed that the Biodynamic Association shouldn't be regarded like an ordinary Association but it is a 'brotherhood' and it should be treated as such by the all members. The Association worked increasingly as a community of practice wherein the mutual engagement from members was promoted as essential for the success.

In an article called "You and Your Association: A Friendly word of Advice"<sup>375</sup>, published in of October 1948, it was argued that individuals working together collectively can achieve greater results from their work than what they would achieve by expending equal effort individually. The article highlights that, although the individuals in an association still required to make an effort and work, the advantage would be that in association each individual would get a higher return from the same effort. It also warned that "if no effort is made by individual members then there is nothing to multiply".<sup>376</sup>

The task of teaching Biodynamic methods wasn't simple and many initiatives to this end were undertaken by the Association. Field trips, advisory work, workshops are

---

<sup>374</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 11.

<sup>375</sup> *News Letter of the Biodynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 18-19.

<sup>376</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 18.

some examples of these initiatives. The News Letter chiefly served as the Association's main mechanism to educate its members with in-depth accounts of Steiner's philosophy, with a particular attention to his thoughts on how Biodynamic principles could be translated to agriculture. Steiner's views on agriculture continued to be published in the News Letter. Another challenging task set by the Association was to teach and inform the wider public in the community about soil and plant illness and the impact they cause impact on humans and animals and how Biodynamic practices addresses these issues.

In July 1947, the News Letter published a small note informing the readers of the proposal that the two basic books on Biodynamics; Steiner's 'Agricultural Course' and Dr Pfeiffer's 'Soil Fertility'; should be available on loan "in order to assist those who really wish to study the B.D. methods seriously".<sup>377</sup> Subsequently, through a series of articles published in the News Letter in 1948, the Association endeavoured to set out a foundation for Biodynamic agricultural practice. It again pointed out the importance of the soil to contain the essential mineral elements and be treated as a "living entity".<sup>378</sup> The articles also intended to present and explore another essential factor on Biodynamic, the field of 'growth forces'. These growth forces were divided into two general classes, 'earthly forces', "which radiate from the centre of the earth outwards"<sup>379</sup>, and 'cosmic/spiritual forces' "which ray down upon the earth from the Heavens".<sup>380</sup> The article proceeded by explaining that these cosmic 'growth forces' comes mostly from the Sun and the Moon and the suggesting the influence it exercises on plant growth and development. According to the article, the teachings given by Steiner "gave us a vast amount of knowledge on this subject over 20 years ago"<sup>381</sup>. These teachings were gradually explained in News Letter. The main argument was that most objects around us were created by forces which we are unable to see, as they are invisible, but responsible for the progressive building up of all physical matter:

A great deal of troubles we experience in our gardens, orchards and in our farming, are due to the fact that we are unconsciously opposing these great natural laws. In other words, the practices we have adopted, being in

---

<sup>377</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, No. 3, News Series, July, 1947, p. 20.

<sup>378</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 1.

<sup>379</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 1.

<sup>380</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 1.

<sup>381</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 3.

opposition to these natural forces, have thrown things out of balance. This unbalance is the cause of much we call disease in plant, animal and man.<sup>382</sup>

The article recommended substituting disease with health and vitality, and it urged the readers to deal with the causes not effects to balance the 'life forces'.

Throughout 1948 the News Letter consistently engaged in providing its readers with detailed studies and the theoretical foundation of the Biodynamic principles. In the Association's view, the information published in the News Letter was considered to be "just as vital to one endeavouring to grow a few vegetables in the back garden as it is to one responsible for the management of an estate running into thousands of acres".<sup>383</sup> In April 1949 a note was published encouraging its readers, particularly new members, to acquire a complete set comprising of the four editions of the News Letter published in 1948. It was suggested that new members study them in a consecutive order prior to proceeding with new issues in order to be up to speed with the teaching.<sup>384</sup>

It was acknowledged by the Biodynamic Association that the general public might be unfamiliar with the language and concepts used to explain the Biodynamic beliefs. There was an understanding that one of the greatest challenge posed to the Biodynamic advocates was to convince these people of the issues raised and the solutions given in such a way that they would not consider the Biodynamic practitioners 'out of their mind':

It must be admitted that to those who are totally ignorant of the very complex activities taking place in the compost and in the soil, some B.D. practices may, and no doubt do, seem somewhat queer. It is our purpose, therefore, to explain as simple as possible, the scientific nature of the B.D. methods. You will not then be the least disturbed when some person says you're "nuts" and that B.D. is all "hooey" or you see published in propaganda pamphlets from the artificial "fertilizers" interests that B.D. methods are "reminiscent of the dark ages"<sup>385</sup>

Another way of disseminating Biodynamic methods was by study groups and the first initiative was carried by McDonald, who was the accredited Association representative in Wellington. The study meetings held at Karori, Wellington were open

---

<sup>382</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 3.

<sup>383</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>384</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, April 1949, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 11.

<sup>385</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Christmas, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 3-4.

to all interested on Biodynamic methods and were a way to recruit new members whereas the News Letter circulated to existing members.

In approaching the community, members of the Biodynamic Association were encouraged to be assertive with their argument to convince the public agricultural problems and the effectiveness of Biodynamic methods to resolve them. For instance, in June 1948, a strong and direct message was given to the members of the Biodynamic Association about their duties as a member, in which it was argued “that sickness and disease in plant, animal and man are increasing at an alarming rate no thoughtful person will deny”, and “the fact that you are a member of the B.D. Association is proof that you are fully aware that the answer to this problem of disease both mental and physical, is not bigger and better hospitals, more drugs and vaccines, but the restoration of the soil to its original fertility”.<sup>386</sup> The Biodynamic follower had the self-imposed task to restore this order of things as “B.D. agricultural practice is not just another method of artificially forcing out of the soil, a little more of its natural fertility”.<sup>387</sup> It was suggested that the every Biodynamic practitioner had the self-conscience that a living soil is paramount to the conservation of all physical life on this planet. Members were informed to be “also aware that right here and now our virgin soils in N.Z. have deteriorated rapidly in the last few decades”<sup>388</sup>, and that modern and scientific technique of farming reduced the fertile soils the USA to a sterile state. Therefore, “realising this great moral responsibility, is determined that the piece of land over which he or she, may be, for the time being, trustee, shall be handed over to those coming after, in a more fertile and living state than he or she received it”.<sup>389</sup>

The Biodynamic Association greatly encouraged its members to approach people in the community and show the results of the Biodynamic practices, to advise them about issues in their gardens and ways to deal with them in line with the Biodynamic belief, giving a “very simple explanation of the cause underlying their problems of sickness and disease”.<sup>390</sup> It was argued that for many years thousands of people enthusiastically engage with Biodynamics worldwide making practical use of their knowledge resulting in gratifying outcomes. In the New Year Message in 1949 the

---

<sup>386</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>387</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>388</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>389</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, June, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>390</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, April, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 7.



Association encouraged its members to share the knowledge with others. Biodynamic practitioners were discouraged to hold their knowledge for themselves only, it was argued that, “if in B.D. you have found something of real practical help, your first desire should be to share that knowledge with others”.<sup>391</sup> The goal was that members should be demonstrating to others the results achieved in their orchard, farm and garden from the application of the Biodynamic methods stating that “knowledge without action is valueless”.<sup>392</sup>

Addresses, lectures, workshops and talks given to the public are some examples of the interaction between the Biodynamic Association with the wider community. Mr. Dunningham was engaged by the Biodynamic Association not only as the editor of the News Letter but also giving talks and lectures on liquid manure sumps and the use of the Biodynamic Preparations. He spoke on Biodynamic principles and their relationship to health at the Gardening Circle of the Papatoetoe Branch of the Women’s Institute, on May 26<sup>th</sup> 1948, and the attendees were particularly interested in the organic composting aspect.<sup>393</sup> On 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1948 he gave a public lecture at Te Aroha on the subject on liquid manure sumps and the Biodynamic Preparations. It was thought that the subject was of vital importance to farmers and special invitations were sent to seven Farmers’ Clubs and six Federal Farmers’ Branches in the district. Although a genuine effort was made to engage with the wider local public, particularly farmers, there was a relatively small attendance of about 30 farmers and B.D. members. The lack of attendance was considered as a “reflect the apathetic attitude shown by so many people today towards the importance of a healthy living soil”.<sup>394</sup> The absence of response from Farmers Clubs and Federated Farmers Branches in the district indicates the lack of engagement from conventional sector. The following day another lecture was given by Dunningham to the Hamilton Branch of the ‘Humic Compost Society’. The lecture was “similar to that given at Te Aroha, but embraces Bio-Dynamics from a gardener’s point of view”.<sup>395</sup> This time “a decidedly different atmosphere was felt”<sup>396</sup> in relation to the previous day. It was reported that the room

---

<sup>391</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, April, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 6.

<sup>392</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, April, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 7.

<sup>393</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, August, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 12.

<sup>394</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 9.

<sup>395</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 9.

<sup>396</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 9.

in which the lecture was held was almost full and the participants demonstrated keen interest on the subject.

George Bacchus was another active member of the Association in giving talks and lectures. On 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1948 he gathered with the members of the Te Aroha Biodynamic Branch to share with the audience his experiences with Biodynamic work in Europe and Britain. He presented some photographs of composting and tomato growing as well as slides of crystallization tests. The official correspondent from Te Aroha, Mrs Eyleen M. Arthur noted that the members would be looking forward to receive more visits from Mr Bacchus hoping to gather useful information “from his stack of knowledge”.<sup>397</sup>

One of the aspirations from the members of Biodynamic Association was to establish a postal library to further extend the services offered by the Association. As a small dispersed group they had to rely on the printed work to disseminate ideas rather than regular field days. The postal library would serve as a mechanism to spread the word which was an important role of the Association at the time. A note regarding the matter was published on the News Letter issue of October 1948. It proposed to establish a Postal Library at the Headquarters. Some members were willing to help out to this end by donating book or a cheque with instructions to purchase a particular book. The note encouraged people to join the initiative “if you are able to help in this way please write your name and address clearly so that the presentation may be suitably recognised by inscribing your name on the front page of the book”.<sup>398</sup> The results arrived pretty soon in the form of cheque donations with the due acknowledgement to the person and also several books from anonymous donors.<sup>399</sup> This initiative is another way by which the Biodynamic Association connected people into a community of practice.

---

<sup>397</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No 3, p. 8.

<sup>398</sup> *News Letter of the Bio Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 20.

<sup>399</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Christmas, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 10.

## Marketing

Reflecting the greater concern with quality control and providing an authentic product, the association discussed ways of marketing their product. Members of the Biodynamic Association were constantly asking where to buy Biodynamic fruits and vegetables. The main task “is to bring the B.D. producer and the health conscious consumer together”.<sup>400</sup> The News Letter was willing to deliver this service.

It seems obvious that because B.D. members have a greater knowledge and understanding of life, they must provide the best market for B.D. grown produce. On the other hand, it seems that, if this service is to be made available to producers through the News-Letter, certain safeguards both to genuine producers and to consumers are advisable.<sup>401</sup>

Implementing the Biodynamic program wasn't an easy task. The conversion from a conventional regime to full Biodynamic could take up to several years. The conversion period often was gradually implemented to a complete Biodynamic regime. Fruit growers for instance started off by applying compost and total exclusion of artificial fertilizers and remained using poisonous sprays for a period of a time. The critical issue under discussion was how to market Biodynamic product? How could they be advertised? Today a product can only be claimed to be Biodynamic once a fully certified program is in place but there was no official certification on Biodynamic products at that time in New Zealand to guarantee consumers of compliance with the Biodynamic standards and programmes.

In order to protect the interests of the consumers the News Letter suggested that growers advertising their produce in the News Letter should “state exactly how far they have been able to implement the full B.D. program”.<sup>402</sup> Producers willing to advertise their produce were urged to provide detailed information regarding how the produce was grown. “Because B.D. producers are idealists they should be strictly truthful in their descriptions of all produce”.<sup>403</sup>

Once these conditions were met producers were invited to advertise their Biodynamic grow produce in the News Letter which would be benefitting both

---

<sup>400</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 4.

<sup>401</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 4.

<sup>402</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 5.

<sup>403</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 6.

producers and consumers. Prices for advertising were a full page (£2-0-0), half page (£1-5-0) and a quarter of a page (15-0).<sup>404</sup>

## 1949 Annual General Meeting

An Annual General Meeting was held in June 1949 in Te Aroha. It was reported that 22 largely local members attended. Mr Jones was unanimously elected the chairman. Mr Gibbs, the Treasurer, provided the participants with the balance sheet and financial report. Two telegrams were received from the Wellington Branch, one regarding the publication of the News Letter and the other that Wellington members, indicating that if necessary, they were willing to step up and take over the administration. The Secretary and the Treasurer were re-elected for their positions as well as Winkfield as President. All council members except Malden, who declined nomination, were re-elected with the addition of Mr W. M. Smith of Taranaki. The subscription issue was discussed with the participants particularly stating the difficulties of getting subscriptions in. This issue was previously discussed in the Council meeting held in Te Aroha on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1949, at which was reported that some members of the Biodynamic Association were behind with their fees and were receiving the News Letter although their membership dues were in arrears. A note regarding this issue was published in the News Letter informing the readers that the subscription dues were a paramount to keep printing the News Letter back then, urging those members to bring their dues up to date.<sup>405</sup>

Although overwhelmingly positive feedback about the News Letter was received from the members, particularly thanks to the good work from Dunningham the editor, complaints were made regarding the costs and quality of printing. The matter was discussed by the Council and referred back to the Meeting.<sup>406</sup>

---

<sup>404</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, October, 1948, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 6.

<sup>405</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, April 1949, Vol. 2. No. 1, p. 11.

<sup>406</sup> *News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand*, Winter, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 5-6.

## **Conclusion**

The Biodynamic Association experienced mixed fortunes after the war. On the one hand membership increased to 300 and successful conferences were held, one of which was addressed by the Minister of Agriculture Ben Roberts. There were, however, significant challenges. When Ben Roberts resigned in 1946 they lost a key supporter at the Government. The conflict over buying a farm in Kerikeri and the decision not to proceed with the offer of a farm in Ruakura created conflict within the Association and highlighted the ambivalent attitude towards testing, some saw it as useful, but many remained wary of scientific methods.

The disruption caused by the events of 1945-46 had a major impact on the Association's affairs and arguably a new beginning was implemented afterwards. The Association wanted to stand firmly on its feet again and took action to recover its momentum including electing a new executive, seeking close ties with overseas Biodynamic societies, releasing a new cycle of newsletters between 1946/47 called 'New Series' and implementing further changes to the News Letter in 1948 and 1949.

Despite the setbacks it experienced, the Biodynamic Association gained a greater public awareness and for a time engaged directly with the Government. The Biodynamic movement regained momentum in 1948-49 and functioned as a community of practice, with mutual engagement of participants in the form of district officers of the Association; negotiating a joint enterprise on an ongoing basis in the form of re-establishing the Biodynamic Association; and a shared repertoire by training and educating according to the philosophy of Steiner and other authorities. During this period the Biodynamic Association sought to take an active role in promoting Biodynamic agriculture and continued experimental work, thereby seeking validation for their claims, albeit not in a way scientists would accept. The Biodynamic Association also sought ways of marketing and branding and certifying their products.





## Conclusion

This research has contributed to knowledge and filled a knowledge gap, Biodynamic farming in New Zealand is now nearly 90 years old, yet we have little record of its origins and development. Through this thesis we have seen both the activities of the Association and its internal dynamics, as well as the views of the practitioners themselves, as expressed through newsletter contributions.

The transplantation of Biodynamic Agriculture to New Zealand represented a new beginning for this practice in a place very remote from its original European environment. Agriculture had been important to New Zealand's economy and identity since the colonial era. New Zealand's agriculture developed rapidly between 1870 and 1930 and New Zealand was considered itself the Empire's outlying farm. In the early twentieth century the dairy industry transformed considerably with the introduction of English grasses, regular application of fertilizers, and mechanization. As Chapter One demonstrated, in contrast to Biodynamic teachings, farming became increasingly scientific as the twentieth century unfolded. By the 1930s intensive pasture based farming utilising fertilisers was the dominant mode of production. The state sponsored and strongly supported scientifically oriented farming and the use of phosphate. This was the context within which those seeking to promote Biodynamic Agriculture had to operate.

Despite these obstacles, Biodynamic agriculture became established in New Zealand during the 1930s. A small group of individuals involved in the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand joined the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners based in Koberwitz, then German territory, in the 1930s and received copies of the Steiner's Agricultural Course. Biodynamic agriculture was being practiced at least as early as 1930 and by 1939 there were sufficient members for an association to be established, namely The Rudolph Steiner Biological-Dynamic Association in New Zealand for Soil and Crop Improvement. The



early adopters tended to be people of independent means with, in most cases with an affiliation to Anthroposophy. Biodynamic Agriculture was mostly based in Auckland, Kerikeri, Te Aroha and Hawkes Bay. This gave the Association an international dimension from the outset. By 1939 some of the features of a community of practice – mutual engagement of participants; a joint enterprise - the formation of the Association in 1939 and a shared repertoire – the Biodynamic Preparations and contacts between New Zealand and overseas organizations were evident.

By 1940 Biodynamic methods had a degree of public awareness and interest from the Government. The Government, through the Horticultural Division of the Department of Agriculture, requested its staff to gather information and also maintained communication with representatives of the Biodynamic Association.

World War II offered a window of opportunity to organic/biodynamic agriculture, a wartime shortage of fertilizer meant organic/Biodynamic approaches were seen more favourably and Biodynamic agriculture began to get more widely known. The First Conference of Members of the Association was held at Auckland in August 1941, solidifying member's engagement to the Association. An address was given to the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture by a member of the Association in November 1941 in an attempt to present to the conventional sector alternative ways to farming. With New Zealand under pressure to increase production to supply Allied forces, a window for alternative approaches to agriculture such as Biodynamics emerged in the wider context of the dig for victory campaign. Ben Robert's appointment as Minister of Agriculture in 1943 meant they had a member of their organisation in a position of Authority and the Government more sympathetic to sustainable farming.

The post-war period posed a number of challenges for the Association. At a General meeting held at Te Aroha in 1945, majority of the participants expressed their support for purchasing a property in Kerikeri to be used as the main centre of the Association and a site to undertake experiments and tests. The failure to raise sufficient funds to purchase the property in Kerikeri caused division within the Association. The Association also considered whether to accept offer of land from the Government to conduct strictly scientific tests but decided not to pursue a joint venture with the

Government on the grounds that Biodynamic farming should stand on its own merits, reflecting ambivalence towards scientific testing within the movement.

After these difficulties the Association had to re-establish itself. New people fulfilled administrative roles. The News Letter was revamped with a new format and layout. Links with overseas organisations renewed and the News Letter consistently reported overseas Biodynamic activities. The Association's had taken the responsibility to educate its members in depth on Steiner's Biodynamic agriculture teachings and encouraged them to proclaim its benefits to the public.

By 1949 the Biodynamic Association had expanded from 25 members in 1939 to several hundred. It had an established newsletter including regular correspondence from overseas organizations; there were practitioners in a number of places in New Zealand including Wellington; Te Aroha, Auckland, Kerikeri, Hawkes Bay, Manawatu and Taranaki; extension classes and public lectures had also been given. Women were involved in the Biodynamic movement, both in the sense of their involvement as correspondents and practitioners. The community of practice had developed further to include an updated constitution; and consideration was given to establishing some form of accreditation for marketing purposes. Steiner's views on economy and social issues were consistently expressed in the Association's newsletter, arguably demonstrating that the Biodynamic Association not only promoted Steiner's agricultural teachings but also attempted to, through agriculture, introduce anthroposophical philosophy. By 1949 Biodynamic had a foothold in New Zealand, it was a niche form of farming, still largely linked to Steiner, but had established at least some links with mainstream society.

By the 1950s, as Stuart and Campbell have noted, there were two clearly identifiable approaches to agricultural science, "the organic compost-based cyclical view of soil fertility, and the highly authorised input-driven view of 1950s agricultural science".<sup>407</sup> Although, both Biodynamic supporters and members of compost clubs projected their methods as scientifically verified and a viable sustainable alternative to mainstream agrichemicals, they were overwhelmed by post-war developments "in chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides, application technologies, and discourses of

---

<sup>407</sup> Stuart and Campbell, 'Business as Usual', p. 234.

plenty".<sup>408</sup> Post 1950 fertilisers become cheaper, so advocates of Biodynamic and organic agriculture lost momentum until the 1980s when renewed concerns about environment saw a more receptive environment. Although Biodynamic agriculture did not become mainstream, it had by 1949 attained a degree of recognition from Government agencies and had been demonstrated by its practitioners to be an alternative to the mainstream.

---

<sup>408</sup> Stuart and Campbell, 'Business as Usual', p. 234.



# Bibliography

## Primary Sources

### Newsletters of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand

Information Sheet No. 1, Issued by The Rudolph Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, 1939.

Summer school and conference on Bio-Dynamic farming, Report of proceedings, July 1939.

News Letter, No. 1, not dated.

News Letter, No. 2, January, 1940.

Supplement No. 1: A Resume of "The land of our Larder" by George Goodwin.  
Issued by the Rudolf Steiner Bio Dynamic Association in New Zealand, August, 1940.

News Letter, No. 3, April, 1940.

News Letter, No. 4, July, 1940.

News Letter, No. 5, October, 1940.

News Letter, No. 6, January, 1941.

News Letter, No. 7, April 1941.

News Letter, No. 8, July, 1941.

The Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, The establishment of AB-D farm economic and financial points of view. A paper to be read at the conference in Auckland by Walter S. Lang, August, 1941.

News Letter, No. 9, October 1941.

News Letter, No. 10, December, 1941. Supplement, Hall, L. C., representing the Rudolf Steiner Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand given to the Dominion Reconstruction Conference on Agriculture, at Auckland, November 29, 1941.

News Letter, No. 11, March 1942. Supplement, A contribution by Mr. C.G. Burford, Melbourne, Australia, to the discussion on aspects brought up at the 1941 B.D. Association conference.

News Letter, No. 12, June, 1942.

News Letter, No. 13, September 1942.

News Letter, No. 14, December 1942. Supplement, December 1942.

News Letter, No. 15, March, 1943.

News Letter, No. 16, June 1943.

News Letter, No. 17, September 1943.

News Letter, No. 18, December 1943.

News Letter, No. 19, March 1944.

News Letter, No. 20, June 1944.

News Letter, No. 21, September 1944.

News Letter, No. 22, December, 1944.

News Letter, No. 23, March 1945.

News Letter, No. 24, July, 1945.

News Letter, No. 25, October, 1945.

News Letter, No. 26, April, 1946.

News Letter, No. 27, August, 1946.

A circular to Delegates to The United Nations to accompany copies of a book "Threefold Democracy".

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, No. 1, News Series,  
November 1946.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, No. 2, News Series,  
March, 1947.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, No. 3, News Series,  
July, 1947.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, June 1948, Vol. 1,  
No.1.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, August 1948, Vol. 1,  
No. 2.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, Christmas 1948, Vol.  
1, No. 4.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, April 1949, Vol. 2, No.  
1.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, Winter 1949, Vol. 2,  
No. 2.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, Spring 1949, Vol. 2,  
No. 3.

News Letter of the Bio-Dynamic Association in New Zealand, Summer 1949, Vol. 2,  
No. 4.

Joyce Whelan, Recollections of GB Winkfield, Newsletter, 47:2, (1994), pp. 23-24

Ineke van Florenstein Mulder, The Seeds and the Growth of Biodynamics in New  
Zealand, Newsletter, 47:2, (1994), p. 20.

## National Archives Wellington

Memorandums and communication between Government and Biodynamic representatives: “Hydroponic and Biodynamic Farming – Production of Cattle Fodder without Soil’, 1938-47, Ag. 84/13/206, AAFZ W5739 412 Box 77

## Newspaper Articles

*Bay of Plenty Times*, 15 October 1942, p. 4.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/BOPT19421015.2.25?query=biodynamic%20&snippet=true> (visited on 17/12/2018)

*Evening Post*, 19 August 1941, p. 10.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19410819.2.131?query=biodynamic><https://www.google.com> (visited on 21/11/2018)

*Lake Wakatip Mail*, 6 February 1940, p. 7.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LWM19400206.2.31?query=biodynamic%20&page=2&snippet=true> (visited 17/12/2018)

*New Zealand Herald*, 20 November 1941, p. 20.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19411129.2.160.3?query=biodynamic> (visited on 26/11/2018)

*Northern Advocate*, 18 May 1943, p. 2.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19430518.2.17?query=biodynamic%20&snippet=true> (visited on 17/12/2018)

*Northern Advocate*, 20 March 1945, p. 5.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19450320.2.68?query=biodynamic%20&snippet=true> (visited on 17/12/2018)

*The Dominion Post*, September 23, 2010, p. c7.

*The Dominion Post*, October 27, 2011, p. c5.



## Other Primary Sources

Baker, Charles Alma, 'Labouring Earth, Survey of Agricultural Conditions at Home and Abroad', Heath Cranton limited, 1942.

Baker, Charles Alma, 'Peace with the Soil: The World Power of Agriculture', Batu Gajah, Perak Federated Malaya States, (1939).

Billington, Francis H., 'Compost to Garden Plot or Thousand Acre Farm', J. E. Jenkins, Auckland, 1942

Northbourne, Lord, *Look to the Land*, J. M Dent & Sons, 1940, 1942.

Sykes, Friend, *Humus and the Farmer*, United Kingdom: Faber and Faber, 1946.

Steiner, Rudolph, *Agriculture Course. The Birth of the Biodynamic Method* (trans. George Adams), 1924, Forest Road, reprinted London: Rudolph Steiner Press 2004.

## Secondary Sources

### Books and Chapters in Books

Edgar, John, *Urban Legend: Sir Dove-Myer Robinson*, Auckland, Hodder Moa, 2012

Gardner, W.J., 'A Colonial Economy' in: Geoffrey W. Rice, (ed.) *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd edn, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp ...

Lachman, Garry, *Rudolf Steiner, An Introduction to His Life and Work*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2007.

MacDonald, Barrie, *Imperial Patriot: Charles Alma Baker and the History of Limestone Downs*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993.

McKinnon, Malcolm, *The Broken Decade: Prosperity, Depression and Recovery in New Zealand, 1928-39*, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2016.

- Paull, John, 'A history of the organic agriculture movement in Australia' in B. Mascitelli and A. Lobo (eds.) *Organics in the Global Food Chain*, Ballarat: Connor Court Publishing, 2013, pp. 37-61, 241-244.
- Proctor, Peter, *Grasp the Nettle: Making Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Work*, Auckland: Random House. 1997.
- Roberts, Enid, '*Remembered*': *Life and Work of Ben Roberts, M.P. Minister of Agriculture and Marketing, N.Z., 1943-46*, Masterton: Masterton Printing Company, 1965.
- Roche, Mike, 'A Duty of the Country: Soldier Settlement 1915-1941', in Rachael Bell (ed.) *New Zealand Between the Wars*, Auckland: Massey University Press, 2017, pp. 56-81
- Simpson, Tony, *The Immigrants: The Great immigration from Britain to New Zealand 1830-1890*, Auckland: Godwit, 1998.
- Sinclair, Keith, *A History of New Zealand*, Auckland: Penguin, 1991.

## **Journal Articles and Periodicals**

- Brooking, Tom and Pawson, Eric, 'Silences of Grass: Retrieving the Role of Pasture Plants in the Development of New Zealand and the British Empire', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35, No. 3, (2007), pp. 417-430.
- Fairburn, Miles, 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier: An Approach to New Zealand Social History, 1870-1940', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 9, 1, (1975), pp. 3-21.
- Kirchmann, Holger, 'Biological Dynamic Farming – An Occult Form of Alternative Agriculture', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 7:2 (1994), pp. 173-187.
- Knox, Ray, 'Introduction', *New Zealand's Heritage*, Vol 6, Part 78, (1973), pp.

- Malone, E.P, 'The Grassland Revolution', *New Zealand's Heritage*, Vol. 6, 78, (1973), pp. 2157-2163.
- Paterson, John, 'Resistance to the Agriculture of Modernity: The Old Order Amish, Biodynamic Agriculture, and Small-farming in New Zealand', Occasional Paper Series Number 2, Department of Social Policy, University of Waikato, May 2001.
- Paull, John, 'The Pioneers of Biodynamics in New Zealand', *Harvests*, Vol. 70-3, Biodynamics New Zealand, Summer 2018-19, pp. 38-40.
- Paull, John, 'Biodynamic Agriculture: The Journey from Koberwitz to the World, 1924-1938'. *Journal of Organic Systems*, 6: 1, (2011).
- Roche, Michael, 'Wilderness to Orchard: The export Industry in Nelson, New Zealand 1908-1940', *Environment and History*, Vol. 9, No. 4, (2003), pp. 435-450.
- Staudenmaier, Peter, 'Anthroposophy and Ecofascism' Institute for Social Ecology, (<http://social-ecology.org/wp/2009/01/anthroposophy-and-ecofascism-2/>, visited on 20/12/2018), 2002.
- Stephens, P.R., 'Innovation on the farm', *New Zealand's Heritage*, Vol. 6, Part 81, 1973, pp. 2260-2264
- Stuart, A., and Campbell, H., "Business as usual": Contextualising the GM/organic conflict within the history of New Zealand agriculture. *New Zealand Sociology*, 19: 2, (2004), pp. 220-239
- Warr, E.C.R., 'A Changing dairy industry', *New Zealand's Heritage*, Vol. 6, Part 77, (1973) pp. 2135-2138
- Watson, James, 'The Significance of Mr. Richard Buckley's Exploding Trousers: Reflections on an Aspect of technological Change in New Zealand Dairy Farming between the World Wars', *Agricultural History*, Vol. 78, No. 3, (2004), pp. 346-60.

## Published Public Lectures

Gardner, W. J, 'The Farmer Politician in New Zealand History', Massey Memorial Lecture, Palmerston North: Massey University, 1970.

Gould, J. D., 'The Grass Roots of New Zealand: Pasture Formation and Improvement, 1871-1911', Massey Memorial Lecture, Palmerston North: Massey University, 1974.

MacDonald, Barrie, 'Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate', Massey Memorial Lecture, Palmerston North: Massey University, 1982.

## Theses

Turbott, John Garth, 'Anthroposophy in the Antipodes: A lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s', MA Thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, 2013.

## Websites

<http://www.biodynamic.org.nz/about-biodynamics> (visited on 20-05-15)

<https://www.anthroposophy.org.nz/about/> (visited on 28/06/2018)

<http://www.demeter.net/what-is-demeter/history> (visited on 05-04-2017)

<http://www.biodynamic.org.nz/demeter> (visited on 05-04-2017)

<https://www.abebooks.com/book-search/author/baker-c-alma/> (visited on 08/11/2018)

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/homed/garden/103311926/dig-for-victory-new-zealands-world-war-ii-gardens> (visited on 20/11/2018)

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/nwspapers/BPB19431109.2.8?query=bio-dynamic> (visited on 20/11/2018)

