## REFLECTIONS ON MAKING BD #500

by Corry Watts

Corry and his wife, Alice Petty, farm biodynamically in Horse Branch, Kentucky. They raise sheep and cattle.

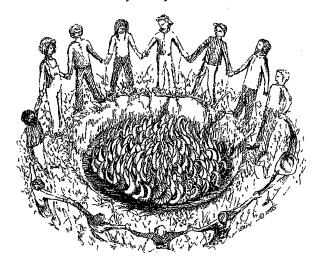
As a biodynamic farmer and longtime student of anthroposophy, part of my mission parallels, actually coincides with, that of the Josephine Porter Institute. So, periodically, I give some time to Hugh Courtney and JPI to assist in the mission; to educate and also to produce quality biodynamic agricultural preparations based on the spiritual scientific research of Rudolf Steiner.

So, during a working visit in October, I participated in a great day of making BD #500 by stuffing many, many cow horns.

We were hosted by our editor and family, and members of the Cranberry Creek Community in Dugspur, Virginia. One could see why this was to be an activity of great need in this geographical area, since the typical approach to farming and food production, i.e. chemical and monoculture, was all around. It is interesting how BD farms seem to be outposts, points where healing energy radiates.

Our hosts outdid themselves with the food and hospitality. There was such a sense of community... all coming together to work and believe, an expression of faith. Though it was a festive atmosphere and a bit of a picnic, most people were able to maintain a focus and appropriate spiritual frame of mind.

The burial pit for the horns had already been dug, and judging from the number of rocks and the condition of the



soil, it seemed the easy task lay ahead, that of stuffing enough horns to fill the pit.

We washed horns in water fetched from Cranberry Creek at the bottom of a long, steep hill. The horns were dried in the sunshine and breeze that energized and helped us with our work. The manure was screened to help homogenize and strain it.

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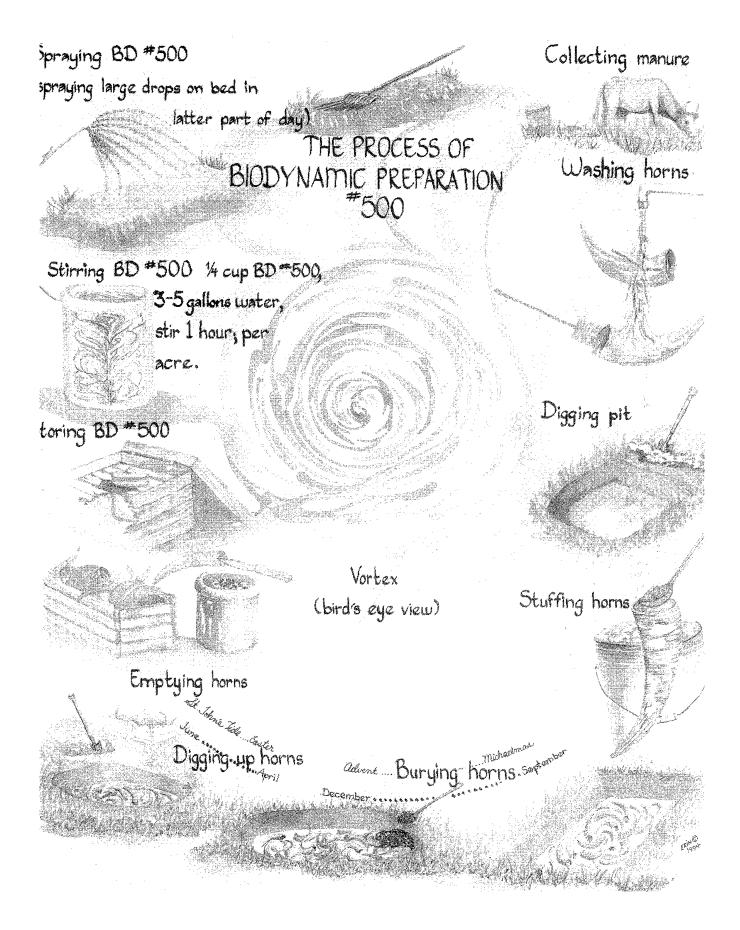
#### REFLECTIONS (continued from page 8)

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Approximately sixteen people stuffed 1,313 horns, which filled the pit that was about 8 feet in diameter. All those horns lying side by side in a circular pattern was a sight to behold.

All participants gathered around the pit and held hands as we blessed the horns. A layer of peat moss was sprinkled over the horns. Then many shovels went into motion as we filled the pit to encase the horns for the winter.

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## SIDEBAR #1

Editor's Note: To the proverbial question "What is biodyanmics?," Jeff Poppen, a Tennessee biodynamic gardener, gives the following answer. (This is a handout which Jeff provides to those asking the question.)

## BIODYNAMIC FARMING by Jeff Poppen

Rudolf Steiner was once asked "How can it happen that the spiritual impulses, for which you are constantly providing stimulus and guidance, bear so little fruit? Why is the will for action, for the carrying out of these spiritual impulses, so weak?"

His surprising answer was: "This is a problem of nutrition. Nutrition, as it is today, does not supply the strength necessary for manifesting the spirit in physical life. A bridge can no longer be built from thinking to will and action. Food plants no longer contain the forces people need for this."

In June of 1924, Dr. Steiner gave eight lectures on agriculture,† and provided insight into the nature of these forces, and how we can develop food plants that have them.

A plant is connected, through its roots and soil life, to all of the other plants around it, and also to the stars and farthest reaches of the cosmos. The growth and reproductive forces of calcium, working with the earth and water elements, are balanced by hardening and ripening forces of silica, working with air and warmth.

The elements of carbon (earth), oxygen (water), nitrogen (air), and hydrogen (fire) bind together to make our food with the help of sulphur and phosphorus, the light bearers. Also, potassium, magnesium, and the trace elements are all realized as forces, not just substances; and it is the processes of these forces that we are interested in.

Specifically, yarrow flowers are sewn up in a stag's bladder, hung in the sun, then buried in the winter, and a teaspoonful of the resulting substance is put into a huge compost pile so that the forces of sulfur and potassium are enhanced. Likewise with chamomile flowers in an intestine for calcium; stinging nettle for iron and silica; white oak bark in a calf or sheep skull for a special calcium relation to plant diseases; dandelion flowers in a mesen-

tery for silica; and the juice of valerian flowers for phosphorus, all used in small amounts in a compost pile.

Cow manure is buried in a cow horn over winter and a small amount is stirred rhythmically for 1 hour and sprinkled on the land, as are ground quartz crystals that have been buried in a cow horn over summer.‡

These are homeopathic remedies for the earth, where small amounts, potentized, work with subtle processes.

Ashes of weed seeds, insects, pests, and rodent skins can be burned at certain times and spread back on the land; and a tea from the horsetail plant is recommended for plant diseases.

Finally, Steiner points out that food as a substance nourishes our head and nerve system, but that there are cosmic forces that are at work there; just as our body, bones, and muscles are made of cosmic substances absorbed through breathing and our senses, coupled with earthly forces. With the use of these preparations, we can make our plants sensitive and able to draw in these forces from the cosmos and earth; and thus supply our thinking, feeling, and willing with the proper nutrition.

These impulses are meant to be used in conjunction with proper farming techniques, which involve gentle tillage, crop rotation, cover crops, and many other good farming practices too complicated to go into in this short article.

†Available as a book *Agriculture*, by Rudolf Steiner. The new edition can be purchased from JPI, PO Box 133, Woolwine, VA 24185. (Paperback: \$17.50 plus \$2.00 postage; hard cover: \$22.50 plus \$2.00.)

‡All preparations may be purchased from the Josephine Porter Institute.

# FURTHER THOUGHTS ON MAKING BD #500 by Hugh J. Courtney

In the Michaelmas issue of Applied Biodynamics last year, in the article entitled "Recipe for Making BD #500", I outlined the bare essentials of placing the manure in the cow horns and burying them in the earth. As anyone knows who has ever gone through the process, there is much more to the making of BD #500 than this. Crucial to the successful making of BD #500 is its excavation and its subsequent evaluation. Perhaps even more crucial may be the attitude with which one approaches the entire task of making and digging up the highly precious horn manure.

Let us look first at the task of excavation and evaluation of this preparation. The most obvious, but often overlooked, requirement is to have marked the horn pit carefully and thoroughly enough so that you can find it again when you are ready to dig up the pit. I can well remember one of my first experiences at making horn manure at a friend's place in Eastern Virginia. I took careful note of just how far it was from the fifth fence post from the corner, in full confidence that it would be an easy matter to recover the three or four horns that I was burying. Imagine my dismay when I made my return visit

the following spring to discover that over the winter months, my friend's farmer neighbor, who was responsible for maintaining the fence, had removed it, bulldozed the entire fence line and was in the process of reconstructing it. Needless to say, the whereabouts of that particular horn pit remains hidden to this day.

Assuming that you have full assurance of the exact location of your buried horns, the excavation should proceed in a manner so as to remove all soil from atop the horns, while trying to disturb the horns themselves as little as possible. That is, when there is still considerable soil covering some of the horns, it is quite easy to be so rough in the digging up that you can actually spill dirt into the opening of the horns that happen to be facing in the direction of the soil being moved. I begin the actual step of lifting and removing a cow horn from the pit by scraping off the excess soil that might be clinging to the exterior of the horn. For this, I use a small trowel, or a kitchen or putty knife, or even a pocket knife. Next, using the

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blade of a pocket knife, any soil that may have lodged in the "throat" of the cow horn is carefully removed, until I am reasonably certain that only horn manure is still contained in the horn. When all the horns are taken from the pit in similar fashion, I then begin the process of actually emptying the horns themselves. Often, the first step is to smell the manure in the horn, hoping that my nostrils will detect an earthy smell, rather than any odor resembling the raw cow manure that was packed into the horns the previous Fall. Almost simultaneously, my eyes are carefully assessing the color of the material in the horn. Most desired is to see a deep rich black color, followed next in preference by an earthy brown color. Anything that resembles the greenish color of the raw manure that went into the horns to begin with, particularly when coupled with a raw manure smell, is cause to set that particular horn aside. However, if the color is wrong, but the smell is right, the problem most likely is a lack of air, and the manure from such a horn if emptied and exposed to air for as little as 24 hours will usually take on a more acceptable color. (Often, a major cause of this lack of air is the water which has somehow entered the horn, in spite of all efforts to position the horn in the pit to prevent this.) If it happens that you dig up your horns quite early in the Spring, and you experience either wrong color or odor or both, my best recommendation is to rebury the horns. Some people who contacted me this Spring with this problem and followed my recommendation reported better results when reexamining the pit as little as two weeks later. In some instances, with horns that do not pass muster, either by smell, sight, or both, storing them in our root cellar for a few weeks has led to a "curing" process that yields BD #500 with good smell and color. This root cellar location is well below the normal soil level, and serves, in essence, as a kind of horn pit in and of itself. The lack of soil actually surrounding the horns constitutes the major difference between leaving the horns buried, or allowing them to "cure" in the root cellar.

During this past winter, many areas of the country experienced long periods of heavy ice. This may have resulted in much less "breathing in" of air into the Earth. A snow cover does not seem to limit the air penetration in the same way that the ice cover appears to do. However, a number of people who reported problems with their #500 were in a location that did not experience any snow or ice this past winter. My speculative explanation for this is that we were experiencing a "light/ air/flower" year. That is, the major area for the working of the formative forces for the year was in the realm of the air, with little or no penetration below the soil surface during the winter. Since that speculation continued the Fire/Earth/Air/ Water rhythm that I have decided I have been observing over the last several years, I have a certain fondness for it. Such speculation requires far more than just a few years observation before it can be deemed to have substance. Also, I have not been too confident in determining the beginning of each year, or at least, the change-over time of one formative force or elemental impulse into its successor. Currently, my choice for such a change-over point would be St. John's Day. If you feel a certain resonance of thinking as regards my speculation, I would be very glad to hear your comments.

There is, however, perhaps an even more critical factor in assuring the production of acceptable BD# 500. That factor involves the attitude, or attentiveness, that one brings to the horn stuffing process. In my effort to identify and label this factor, I have referred to it in my own mind as the "green thumb/black thumb syndrome". More than once over the years, I have seen different people achieve different results with the finished product of #500, in spite of using manure from the same source, horns of equivalent value, and with the horns buried side-by-side in the same pit. Initially, I preferred to assign the difference to some innate, but not easily observed difference in the quality of the horns. Recently, however, the evidence of a "green thumb/black thumb" factor has become too strong to ignore any longer. Accordingly, in the future, each individual participating in our horn stuffing activities will either bury his/her horns in a separate pit or else use a separate individually assigned marking on horns buried in a common pit. In the Spring of the year, when the pit is dug up, the resultant #500 will be indicative of success or failure. Any "grade" is actually assigned by the "elemental kingdom", and not by myself or anyone else overseeing the operation.

Let us examine more closely this factor of attitude or attentiveness in the making of not only BD #500, but all the other preparations as well. During his visit to Kimberton, PA in June 1992, Alex Podolinsky was heard to say that the biodynamic preparations are the only true sacrament in the Earth today. Whether you agree with his statement or not, I would believe that it is at least indicative of the attitude one must bring to the preparations making task. It was certainly the attitude held by Josephine Porter who was my mentor in the preparations making art. Whatever success I have subsequently enjoyed in that art, I must attribute to my emulation of her attitude regarding the sacredness or holiness of this task of preparations making. If we approach the making of the preparations as just one more farm task that we "have to get done", and without any consciousness of their importance in healing the Earth, we should not be too surprised if we achieve rather indifferent results. One of our directors here at JPI, Jim Marquardt, has suggested that an appropriate ritual should accompany the making of each preparation. While we shall certainly consider the feasibility of this, I hesitate to do so in order to avoid "fixing" or "dogmatizing" the process. What is really needed, is an "inner ritual" by each person participating in the preparations making activity. Perhaps in the future, one could consider a "sweat lodge" or some other "purification" process, but the whole biodynamic effort requires the individual to be constantly working on inner purification. Whatever might be stated here as regards the making of the preparations, should be seen as equally applicable to the using of the preparations. If one is in an argumentative or otherwise "bad" frame of mind, one should probably plan to make the preparations another day. If you find yourself performing the

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