

Biodynamic Agricultural
Association of
Southern Africa



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BIO DYNAMIGHT

SOUTH AFRICA

MEMBERS' ASSEMBLY 2024

STRENGTHENING EACH OTHER FOR THE NEXT CENTURY OF BIODYNAMICS

This issue takes us to Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany where representatives from the BFDI's 35 member countries gathered for the annual Members' Assembly (MA) and to commemorate the centenary of Rudolf Steiner's Agriculture Course at Koberwitz in 1924.

Karen Mack representing BDAASA and Helen van Zyl, who is on the BFDI membership committee, were present. They share their reflections and snap shots of this event where the BFDI community came together to celebrate and collaborate on the way forward.

The programme was well structured and organised with much of the activity taking place in a beautiful building alongside the Krzyzowa Palace in Southern Poland, with a dining hall, lecture rooms and accommodation built around a huge quadrangle - a fitting venue that set the tone for the special week ahead.



▲ Accommodation adjacent to the Krzyzowa Palace for most of the Members' Assembly in Southern Poland



▲ Around 100 people attended, representing 35 countries

BEING A KOBERWITZER FOR A DAY

A highlight on Day One was the keynote address by Dr John Paull, from the University of Tasmania on The Koberwitzers: Those who attended Rudolf Steiner's Agriculture Course at Koberwitz in 1924. It took delegates through the evolution of the agriculture course, its historical context and present-day significance.

The 111 'Koberwitzers', as they called themselves, were very capable people, some of whom went on to champion and develop Rudolf Steiner's ideas about agriculture and other fields. While 33% of the Koberwitzers occupations are still unidentified, 38% were associated directly with agriculture, 6% were creatives and 6% were priests.

At the time of the lectures, Rudolf Steiner was mortally ill so the course was never repeated. It was up to the Koberwitzers to heed the call to develop a differentiated natural agriculture without synthetic chemicals.

The Koberwitzers met the call. There are now 251,842 certified biodynamic hectares in 55 countries included in the 71,514,583 certified organic hectares in 186 countries.

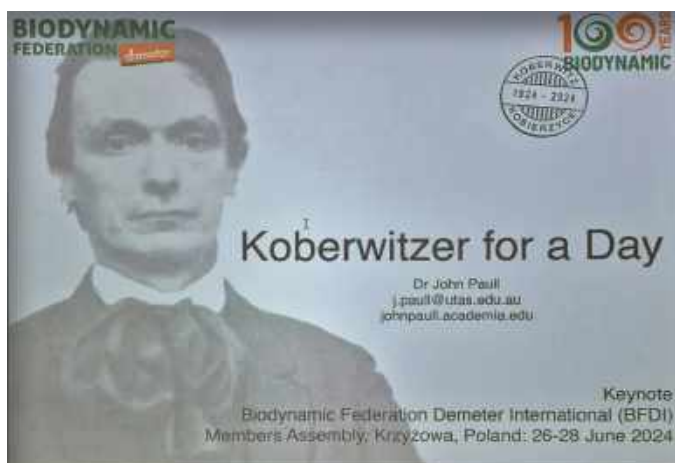
Each participant received a name tag of an original Koberwitzer and assumed the identity of that person for the duration of the lecture. "I was a priest. Being a Koberwitzer for a day added to the sense of reverence for Agriculture and respect for the pioneers that we all share," said Karen.

Working sessions were punctuated by verses for the day and activities that promoted unity. For example, before the poster session, we formed a big circle and were each given a stone to pass to the person on our right while keeping our left hand open to receive a stone from the person on

the left. The left hand represented our needs at the given moment; the right hand - what I can give to my neighbour or my community in that moment. In the beginning we dropped stones, but soon we had established a rhythm and were ready to enter the poster session with open hearts to see and appreciate what member organisations across the world were doing.



It was a time of togetherness where we enjoyed long evenings getting to know each other, including St John's bonfire on 24 June.



Visit to Koberwitz

Visiting Koberwitz the following day was unforgettable. Marcel Waldhausen from Demeter Germany, who had read countless memoirs of the Koberwitzers who attended the original agriculture course brought history back to life as we toured the hallowed halls and imagined ourselves back in time listening to Rudolf Steiner. Ueli Hurter contextualised the agriculture course for us and the founding of the experimental circle.

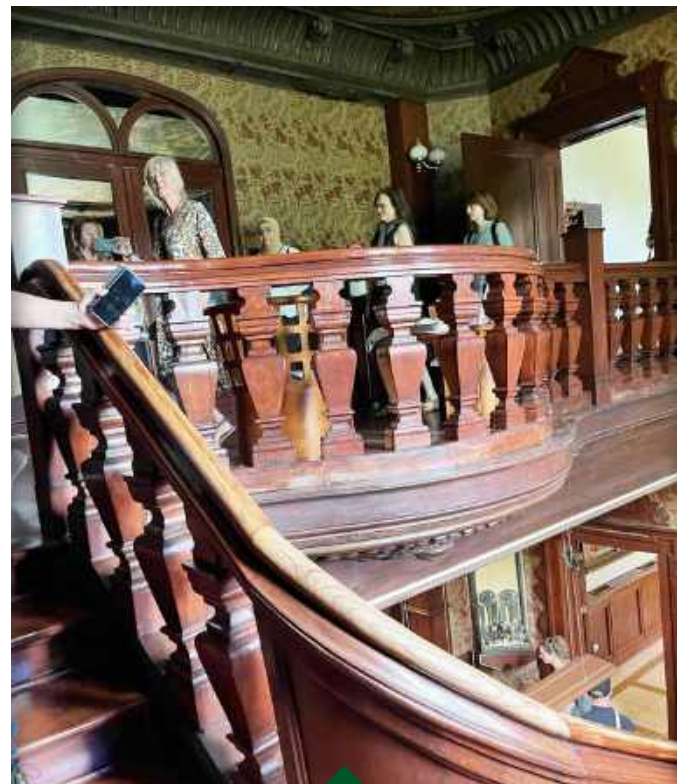


The Koberwitz Estate house where the Agriculture Course was given 100 years ago.

The building is currently used as the office of the City Mayor and the grounds are a public park.



Room where Rudolf Steiner delivered the original agricultural course



Inside Koberwitz estate house

FARM VISITS

ZDONOV FARM

It was interesting to see large scale biodynamic farming on our farm visits, which took us first to Zdonov Farm in the Czech Republic, where we were treated to a feast made from food from the farm.

An interesting feature on the farm is the Druid Stone Cross. Stones or menhirs have been placed to form a cross on ley lines using sacred geometry for the purpose of healing the land and the people.



▲ Menhirs - stones to promote healing - sculpted by Mikal Pogachinik on Zdonov farm

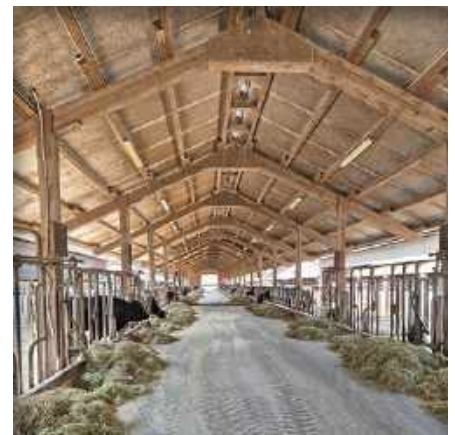
JUCHOWA FARM

Next was a visit to Juchowo Farm - a dairy and grain farm in Northern Poland, which is the largest Demeter certified farm in the country, covering some 2500 ha. It includes a cheese making facility, a bakery and meeting spaces.

With 6,175 acres of farmland, a lot of preparations are needed. They grow their own herbs and flowers for the preps and bury over 4000 horns for BD preparation 500.



▲ Cow shed: The cows come into the shed during the heat of the day, as temperatures above 80°F can reduce milk production.



▲ Prep storage - Juchowo farm



▲ Helen van Zyl at the prep box



▲ Impressive cow horns



▲ Stirring machine



▲ Spraying machine



▲ Prep storage cellar at Juchowo



▲ Group activity before one of the morning sessions.

STRENGTHENING OUR ASSOCIATIONS

Market Development

Working sessions included Market Development, where speakers shared examples of successful Biodynamic/ Demeter markets to provide us with a clear perspective on all the key aspects to be considered when developing our market strategies.

Group discussions, led by those with developed Demeter markets, then took place in country groups with similar markets and situations. We were encouraged to note action points for developing a market strategy appropriate to our local context.

Certification

Parallel working groups considered the needs of licensees and discussed the Future of Certification, a key theme that had been introduced at the Plenary session on the opening day when a pre-MA Working group reported back on this complex issue. The group consisting of 3rd party and PGS certifiers, farmers, teachers, researchers, advisors and people in supply chain appointed by the Supervisory Board at the 2023 MA session provided input on the direction certification could take.

A number of working groups then considered various key aspects aimed at addressing the challenges faced by different countries and finding a way to make certification achievable without compromising the reputation Demeter has in the marketplace.

Organisational Development

Following a talk on the stages in organisational development we were given a short questionnaire and organised in a row from the oldest association established in Germany in 1924 to the newest - Demeter Portugal established in 2023. We were encouraged to find our neighbours and form small groups to discuss our developmental challenges and to identify a member organisation for a peer review on our organisation's development later this year.

Hybrid Seeds

A number of member topics were on the agenda, including Open-pollinated seeds and hybrid breeding, which Karen attended.

"What struck me was that BFDI is aware of the challenges facing vegetable growers in respect of seeds and is encouraging interaction and ongoing research to ensure the farmers' success without watering down the value of the Demeter brand. Large scale vegetable farms are forced to use hybrid seeds. Where we now stand is that provided vegetable farmers use hybrid seeds that have been certified organic, the vegetables grown from these seeds can be Demeter certified," she said.

Working Together for the Future

We came to appreciate the dynamic nature of our Federation. It was clear

to all that BFDI is moving with the times and committed to engaging with members on issues of concern. There was lively debate and discussion on the state of play regarding new GMOs around the world, the worldwide political situation and on the EU Green claims directive aiming to substantiate all environmental claims on products and websites in the future.

BFDI under Clara Behr, has been working hard on policy and plans to issue short updates about the Federation's political work and the stand we are taking on issues more regularly.

"As a Federation, each member country has one vote, which requires interaction and collaboration to reach agreement. At the end of the day, every member association has an equal voice," explained Helen. "Although BDAASA may be small in relation to other member associations, we are heard and supported."

BFDI is looking to establish a Learning Community - a place to welcome biodynamic and Demeter farmers into the global community - where they can have perspective of the international movements, network, get an overview of training activities taking place worldwide and feel supported - a place where resources can be shared, such as examples of good biodynamic practices.

OUR TIME TOGETHER ENDED WITH ATTENDING GERMANY'S 100-YEAR CELEBRATION AT BRODOWIN FARM OUTSIDE BERLIN.

We are deeply grateful to everyone in the MA organising team: Anette Jorry, Anne Flohr, Paz Bernaschina, Petra Derkzen, Ute Bucholski of BFDI and Marta Kozłowska, Waldemar Fortuna and Pawel Bietkowski for Demeter Poland, for giving us the experience of a lifetime.



NEW BFDI SUPERVISORY BOARD



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEWLY ELECTED BOARD OF THE
BIODYNAMIC FEDERATION – DEMETER INTERNATIONAL.

Left to right – Helga Bernold-Germany, Alexander Gerber – Germany, Bettina Holenstein – Switzerland, Juan Martin Richter – Argentina, Jean-Michel Florin – France, Edouard Rousseau – France