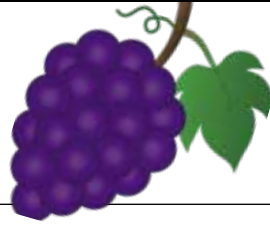


GRAPE TALK

Biodynamic wine acreage on the rise



Debbie Tollefson

BY DEBBIE TOLLEFSON

While the number of wineries in Oregon is increasing—from 150 in 2000 to over 800 now—so is the practice of biodynamic winemaking in the Applegate. In the Summer 2014 issue of the *Applegater*, I reported on Cowhorn Vineyard and Garden as the only biodynamic vineyard and farm in southern Oregon. (This beautiful winery on Eastside Road in the Applegate Valley, owned and operated by Bill and Barbara Steele, has been given multiple accolades and high ratings for not only their wines but also their vineyard and farm and tasting room.) Currently Troon Vineyard, on the Kubli Bench in the Applegate Valley, is working toward biodynamic certification.

Biodynamic wine production avoids artificial chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides and instead incorporates natural treatments, such as composting with organic manure augmented with yarrow flowers (*Achillea millefolium*), chamomile flowers (*Matricaria chamomilla*), stinging nettle stems (*Urtica dioica*), and other biodynamic preparations. The farmer sees the vineyard as a living system. In my earlier article about Cowhorn, Bill Steele showed that all aspects of grape growing and wine making are enhanced by the intense scrutiny of a biodynamic

system and the winemaker's attention to detail. Bill explained about his constant search for great natural processes and growing practices to enhance his gardens and vineyard. Cowhorn produces not only great wines but the best asparagus you'll ever eat.

Biodynamic farming is organic farming on steroids—"natural ones, of course," said Bill. Organic farming certification under the National Organic Program is just one of the requirements for biodynamic certification. The standard set by Demeter USA is much more extensive, with very strict requirements about pest and weed control, water conservation, and biodiversity.

Demeter USA, incorporated in 1954 and headquartered in the Willamette Valley, is the only certifier for biodynamic farms and products in America. It is part of Demeter

International, which was formed in 1928 and is the oldest ecological certifier in the world. Demeter is active in 50 countries.

Biodynamic farming has a little-known history: In 1924 Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner presented a lecture series, entitled "Spiritual Foundations for Renewal of Agriculture," to a group of farmers in what is modern-day Poland. These farmers were concerned about the effects of the newly produced chemical fertilizers and weed-control products developed after World War I.

Mr. Steiner was not a farmer but a social reformer and educator who felt the new practices might not be healthy and that growing monocrops, a new practice, would not be beneficial to farmers or consumers. He thought farming should go back to the basics that had been used for thousands of years: creating healthy soil and natural conditions.

Rudolf Steiner's ideas and his lecture series became the basis for the approach to farming that we know today as biodynamic. Biodynamic certification requires that the farming be regenerative rather than degenerative, with stringent guidelines for production and application. (Degenerative farming is extractive only; regenerative farming offsets a farm's extractive aspect through the removal of non-native invasive plants and the use of recycled nutrients, cover crops, and biodynamic teas.) Sixteen categories for biodynamic processing standards insure an unbroken chain of accountability from the farm to the finished bottle of wine.

Biodynamic farming is important environmentally, too, as 50 percent of the earth's habitable surface is used for agriculture (*National Geographic*, 2005) and, in the US, nine percent of total greenhouse gas emissions are caused by food production (epa.gov).

Biodynamic farming does not deplete the earth's natural resources and is focused on improving soil health and water quality and integrating animal agriculture. This is the Demeter vision to healing the planet through agriculture.

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