How to Form a Healthy Farm Organism: The Biodynamic Perspective on Economics

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Definitions

**Biodynamic farm:**
Individualized organism in interaction with the ecological, social, economic and spiritual whole of which it is a part

**Biodynamics:** “Life force” (Rudolf Steiner, 1861-1925)
From Grk. *Bios*=life+*dynamis*=force or power

**Oekonomia** (Aristotle, 384-322 B.C.)
Stewardship of the farm household based on “natural” principles
From Grk. *Oikos*=household+*nemein*=to take care of

**Krematistike** (Aristotle)
“Unnatural” management based on exchange of coins
From Grk. *Kremata*=coins, money
The Small-Scale, Integrated, Self-Sufficient and Sustainable Farm Organism:

Local vs. imported fertility:
- Composts
- Cover crops
- BD Soil Sprays
SARE grant 2004-7

Local Community:
- Educational Programs, Farm-to-School, CSA
- SARE grant 2003-4
  “Farm-to-School”
- BIOAg grant 2008
  “Fermentation Workshop”
- BIOAg grant 2008-9
  “Biodynamic Course”

Solar vs. fossil energy:
- Photosynthesis
- Photo-voltaic irrigation
- Hydronic heating
- EQUIP grant 2005
  “Solar Irrigation”

Self-Sufficiency:
- Food, Feed, and Nutrient cycling
- SARE grant 2002
  “Small-Scale Grain”

Biological vs. mechanical processes:
- Maximum soil organic life
- Place-specific immunities
- Disease prevention rather than suppression
- Run-off pollution control through biological cycling
SARE grant 2004-7
  “Bio-Dynamic Forage Production”

Pastoral vs. Industrial:
- Grass-based
- Plant-animal succession
- Farm-produced inputs
SARE grant 2004-7

Polyculture vs. mono-culture:
- Biodiversity
- Symbiosis of plants and animals
- Self-organization/self-correction/
  Self-sufficiency
SARE grant 2002

Perennial vs. annual species:
- Native plants/wildlife
- Naturalized forages
- Farm-produced replacements
SARE grant 2004-7

S&S Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Homestead Farm, Lopez Island, WA
Programs

*Synergistic programs:*
- Self-sufficiency
- Pastoral production
- Local fertility
- Solar energy
- Biological processes
- Perennial species
- Biodiversity
- Local community

*Public support:* SARE, EQIP, BIOAg grants

*Grant assumptions:*
Improve profitability of farm and community
Profit and Economic Viability

Conventional definition:

Profit = excess of income over expenditures

Profit = Economic viability (krematistike)
Economic viability: Biodynamic view

- Economic viability = solvency, no debt
- Economic viability = resource renewability
- Economic viability = self-sufficiency, -organization, -correction, -capitalization
- Economic viability = farm organism health
- Economic viability = “Natural” stewardship
  (oekonomeia)
Feed yourself (family, trainees, employees), sell surplus

Feed animals and soil from farm-produced inputs

Produce and cycle needed resources (water, energy) on farm
Economic production

Economic Data for S&S Homestead Farm and S&S Center for Sustainable Agriculture (a non-profit corporation)

Economic Returns to S&S Homestead Farm, 2001-2002
percentages are of total economic value of farm production

Costs vs. Profits, 2001-2002
percentages are of total economic value of farm production

S&S Homestead Farm, 2143 Lopez Sound Rd., Lopez Island, WA 98261 (360) 468-3335
Feed yourself (family, trainees, employees), sell surplus

Feed animals and soil from farm-produced inputs

Produce and cycle needed resources (water, energy) on farm
Natural systems are inherently balanced

Agricultural systems achieve balance through farmer’s actions based on “natural” principles

Healthy farm organism = synergistic balance of its parts

Healthy farm organism corrects itself as the farmer responds to the task of balancing
**Lessons learned:**

Complex, diverse systems are healthier, more productive and disease resistant than non-diverse systems.

Benefits of symbiosis are enhanced by farm produced fertility inputs (composts, cover crops, biodynamic preparations).

Cycling nutrients increases the *life force*.

Biological processes strengthen soil health.

Perennial species (farm-produced seed, animal replacements, perennial grains, native and naturalized plants, wildlife) strengthen soil and general farm health.
Solar energy on the farm

Plant physiology: sunlight produces chemical compounds in plant tissues (photosynthesis)

Animal physiology: sunlight produces vitamin D in the skin

Electrophysics: sunlight generates electromotive force to drive irrigation, heat in hydronic systems

Agronomy: solar heat flows determine rainfall, wind and gaseous mineral flow patterns shaping crop production and soil health
Energies behind photosynthesis and photoelectricity are gross phenomena in comparison to subtle formative forces shaping plants and animals.

Matter is the visible form of spirit, spirit the invisible form of matter.

Spirit is the life force causing the seed to sprout and lift itself into the air in vegetable, flower, tree form.

Spirit is the formative force manifested in plant and animal morphology.

Life force in plants and animals is released into the human body by digestion.
Biodynamic farming is pastoral, i.e. grass-based, to maximize harvesting solar energy.

Solar energies flow directly, and are reflected by planets and stars.

Planets and stars radiate energies received when they exploded out of the proto-sun (solar nebular theory).

Solar energy flows reach the earth according to dynamic seasonal and diurnal rhythms.
1755, Immanuual Kant proposed theory that the solar system concretized from gyrating nebula

1785, Marquis Laplace gave theory mathematical form

20th century physicists confirmed the theory as the most cogent explanation of the solar system’s origin
Modern astrophysics holds that essential mineral elements stream continuously from the cosmos to replenish the earth:

“…Stars blow up in titanic blasts that seed the galaxy with heavy elements, such as iron, calcium, and silicon. These elements come only from stars; the universe has no other way to create them. They drift into clouds of gas and dust which collapse into a generation of stars, planets and – in our case – life.”

“Life force” as universal idea

Old Testament: “Breath of God” turns clay into living beings
New Testament: “Creative logos” (Grk. word, form, thought) by which all things are made
China: “Ch’i” (natural energy of the universe)
Vedic India: “Prana” (Sanskrit “breath,” life-sustaining force)
Melanesia: “Mana” (impersonal force in humans, animals, nature)
Germanic tribal culture: “Hamingja” (personal force identified with chief)
European folklore: “Powers” (life principle(s) often imagined as separate nature beings)
Native America/ Africa: “Great spirit” (source of life and creation)
Emerson (Transcendentalism): “Oversoul” infusing all life
Goethe: “Earth spirit” (life force)
Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), Natural philosopher, mathematician: *Physics, On the Soul, History of Animals, Parts of Animals, Metaphysics*

**Concepts:**
- **Science** (*dianoia*: *dia*+*noein* = revolving in the mind)
- **Energy** (*energeia*: *en*+*ergon* = in+work)
- **Change** (*kinesis*: *kinein*+*aesthesis* = to move+perception)
  - **Potentiality** (*dynamis* = power)
- **Entelechy** (*en*+*telos* = *echein* = in+purpose+becoming)
  - Motion = fulfillment of potential purpose

**Methods:** observation of phenomena, induction, deduction

**Quote:** “The fulfillment of what exists potentially…is motion”

(*Physics, 201, lines 10-11*)
Rene Descartes (1596-1650) Philosopher, mathematician, scientist. *Meditations on First Philosophy, Principles of Philosophy, Discourse on Methods*

Concepts:

*Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am)

Separation of mind, spirit, God from physical world

External world = mechanism governed by natural laws

Motion = physical action

Universe a mechanical system describable in mathematical terms (reduction)

Methods: Intuition, deduction, empirical studies

Quote: “*But motion...is nothing more than the action by which any body passes from one place to another*”

*(Principles of Philosophy, II, 24)*
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) Poet, natural philosopher and scientist: *Theory of Color, Metamorphosis of Plants, Comparative Anatomy and Zoology*

**Concepts:**
- Ontogenesis irreducible to reductionist explanation
- Life processes understood teleologically, rather than causally
- Teleology of organisms illuminated by *form or type*
- Holistic science is qualitative, requires human observer
Goethe (methods)

Sustained observation of natural phenomena through senses

Experimental variation (perspective)

Macro-level vs. micro-level (molecular) construction

Avoidance of mathematical abstraction (reduction)

Gradual intuition of unifying concept (form or type)

Understanding of living organisms through artistic representation
"Wer will was Lebendigs erkennen und beschreiben,
Sucht erst den Geist herauszutreiben,
Dann hat er die Teile in der Hand,
Fehlt, leider! Nur das geistige Band.

(To know some living thing and describe it,
He hastens to expel its spirit;
Now he holds the parts in his hand,
But, alas! He lacks the spirit band)

Faust, Act I, Scene 4
(The devil mocking the scientist)
There is a delicate empiricism which intimately identifies itself with the object of study and thus becomes the actual theory

Aphorisms, no. 165