



**ABOVE** Churton Wines is certified organic and is managed using biodynamic principles.

# Healing the EARTH

A philosophy that transcends all cultures, religions, or science has been practised in Aotearoa for nearly a century. It's a holistic, ecological, and ethical approach to farming, gardening, food, and nutrition that is gaining recognition worldwide.

**A** holistic attitude to agriculture was initially proposed by philosopher and scientist, Rudolf Steiner, in the 1920s. Biological-dynamics (biodynamics) is a systems approach where the farm, vineyard, orchard, or garden is viewed as a living whole and each activity affects everything else.

“Biodynamics is an appropriate and powerful tool because of the way it works with different realms,” says biodynamics practitioner, Sam Weaver. “Biodynamics is inclusive, not reductive. It works with conventional science but also on a spiritual plane - that’s the power of it. It acknowledges that there are things beyond our knowledge that we can’t completely explain and certainly can’t control.

“Rudolf Steiner gave some suggestions about how those things might work, and biodynamic practitioners

have been exploring and evolving those ideas ever since.”

Sam Weaver is the owner of Churton Wines, a certified organic vineyard run biodynamically in Marlborough. He says there is a growing interest in biodynamics in Aotearoa from those gardening and growing inside a Te Ao Māori framework, but the fastest expansion of biodynamics is in Southeast Asia; in places like Thailand, the Philippines and China.

There is also a lot of interest in Brazil and other parts of South America, says biodynamics practitioner and educator, Rachel Pomeroy.

“Biodynamics is compatible with any religious or philosophical system that is based on the truth of the world,” says Rachel. She spent many years teaching in India alongside her partner, biodynamics legend, Peter Proctor. Biodynamics was a system that all of India’s diverse traditions could embrace, whether Muslim, Catholic or Hindu.

Sam Weaver has given presentations on biodynamics to sommelier and wine students in Shanghai and other major cities in China. “Those audiences understood the importance of a lunar calendar; cosmic influences are still part of their framework of belief. So biodynamics is very comfortable for them. It’s inclusive, just as applicable to modern Western cultures as it is to people of different cultures and spiritual traditions.”

While biodynamics is often associated with viticulture and wine-making (see OrganicNZ May/June 2023), there are other sectors that prize heightened senses and appreciate the subtle terrior enhanced by biodynamic practices. In India, growing and blending the best tea and coffee is



**ABOVE** Village women in India learning from Rachel Pomeroy how to make biodynamic preparations.



**ABOVE** Rachel Pomeroy discussing soil fertility management with Arifa Rafee, owner of a biodynamic mango orchard in India. **RIGHT** Working together to make a large biodynamic compost heap was among the many hands-on activities at the workshop.

comparable to premium wine-making. “Professional tea tasters and blenders in India, have lifelong expertise. They are sampling teas all day and they can notice the difference in the teas grown biodynamically,” says Rachel.

Rachel’s cheerful enthusiasm and curiosity are infectious. She has a MSc(hons) in Botany and Plant Physiology and decades of practical experience with biodynamics. She is comfortable in both views and adept at weaving insights from Western science into her teaching of biodynamics. For instance, the biodynamic practice of making a cow pat pit (CPP), which has many applications and encourages health and vigour, has been found to be exceptionally high in natural growth-promoting hormones, like auxins and gibberellins.

Rachel says it would be helpful to have more science that substantiates the impact of biodynamic practices, especially given the urgent need for practices that mitigate climate change and produce food in a more environmentally-sustainable way.

But for individual farmers themselves, corroboration from Western science isn’t needed. “It would verify what they already know from their own experience. People stick with biodynamics because they like the end result. If you hate putting poison on the ground, you’re not going to enjoy your days as an industrial farmer. Those who stick with biodynamics are those making a satisfactory income while farming in a way they find satisfying and worthwhile.” **ONZ**

Kete Ora Trust is a charitable organisation established in 1997 thanks to generous bequests. It invests in, and supports education and research into biodynamic, organic, and regenerative land use in Aotearoa New Zealand. Visit [keteora.nz](http://keteora.nz) for more information about applying for grants or making a donation.



There are many ways that biodynamics resonates with traditional ways of knowing and here in Aotearoa it seems there is a lot of enthusiasm for exploring how biodynamic ideas reflect customary Māori systems of food growing.

Kete Ora Trust supported a two-day workshop near Wellington in 2021, co-led by Rachel Pomeroy and Dr Jessica Hutchings, a notable Māori researcher, activist, and gardener. Dozens of people gathered to share their knowledge and deepen their understanding of both biodynamics and Hua Parakore, a kaupapa Māori system and framework for growing kai.

The workshop featured conversations grounded in the Kaupapa Māori principles underpinning Hua Parakore practices and the ordering principles of the cosmos as understood through biodynamics. “Just as Ranginui and Papatūānuku ground the woven universe that is Te Ao Māori; biodynamic approaches acknowledge and harness the polarity of light and dark and the relationship between stars and soil” said Jessica.

“Both approaches task tangata (people) with the role of rebuilding the vitality of our soils and strengthening the relationships between people and nature. Understanding ourselves as nature, and as nurturers of nature, were key learnings from our time together.”

### *More reading*

[hua-parakore.teachable.com](http://hua-parakore.teachable.com)

[biodynamic.org.nz](http://biodynamic.org.nz)

[biodynamics.com/what-is-biodynamics](http://biodynamics.com/what-is-biodynamics)

[papawahakaritorito.com](http://papawahakaritorito.com)

[churtonwines.co.nz](http://churtonwines.co.nz)