Practitioners' Track, IFOAM Organic World Congress 2014, 'Building Organic Bridges', 13-15 Oct., Istanbul, Turkey

A Combination of Traditional Turkish and Japanese Agriculture in Afyon Başmakçı

VEHBI ERSOZ[1]

Author's Background

Vehbi Ersoz was born in 1961 in Afyon. After completing his military service in 1983 he started farming. As an alternative to the farming with fertilizers, pesticides, and covered seeds, he tended to the organic production and he has been the first organic farmer who produced for the domestic market. Vehbi Ersoz then tried many methods such as under cover greenhouses, Shumei, and has led the way for many farmers into the organic production. Vehbi Ersoz, currently performs agriculture in 40 percent of his 20-acre land with the Shumei philosophy and biodynamic agriculture in the remaining sixty percent.

Summary

Farming since 1983, Vehbi Ersoz always thought there were some problems with the conventional farming methods. Using a different pesticide for each varmint and a different fertilizer for each missing substance in the soil made him question the function and procedures in conventional agriculture. Favoring a more holistic perspective in agriculture, he tried many methods to enrich the soil and increase the soil microorganisms, which in turn do the actual work. In his region he brought many leading and innovative techniques to life. Some of them are greenhouse farming, organic farming, biodynamic agriculture and Shumei method of agriculture. As a side benefit of applying many different techniques, he discovered that methods applied in one philosophy, may in fact be applied and can be useful in a different philosophy.

Background

In 1983, we started agriculture as a young farmer. When we started farming, we realized that using a different pesticide for each varmint or using a different fertilizer for each substance does not only make conventional agriculture unprofitable but also poses a risk to our health both as a consumer and a user of these substances, hence we sought for alternatives. Because after the drug application, especially in places such as greenhouses, our lungs were hurt. We collected information from domestic resources, foreign experts and universities. We have increased our expertise by trial and error. Each time we did something right we tried to sustain it and each time we did something wrong, we tried to understand what went wrong and to avoid it next time.

Main chapter

Currently we perform agriculture in 40 percent of our 20-acre land with the Shumei philosophy, and with the biodynamic agriculture in the remaining sixty percent. We certainly have no yield problem. We receive yields at least as much in the conventional agriculture. Since the inputs are usually our own production or gathered from the nature, our profit margins are quite satisfactory.

We offer our biodynamic agriculture products in the organic market for sale. Produce from the Shumei portion of our land is consumed by a group of Japanese consumer. We have quite close relations with these people. They come and work in the fields, we collect the first harvest and feast together in a celebration mood. Moreover, from time to time we host volunteers who also contribute to the workforce.

In biodynamic agriculture we try to make a closed-loop production. We produce our pesticides and fertilizers are either self-produced or gathered from plants in the nature. For example, cucumber is very sensitive to sulfur, but you cannot directly apply sulfur to it. However, our own garlic, which is repellent to insects, is supplying cucumber with its low sulfur content. Or we irrigate melons with water that we make using daisies as fertilizer. Because potassium needed by the melon is abundant in daisies.

We aim to increase the number and variety of microorganisms in the soil. In this way, the ingredients we add to the soil can be converted into forms the plant needs. To increase soil micro-organisms, we fill an old cow horn with manure and bury it to the ground. After couple of months, we remove it and give it to the soil after diluting it. In this way, using our own compost, we are increasing microorganisms in the soil. Worms found in the compost also help us in this matter.

Core messages and conclusions

Using a different item for each problem in the soil not only strains the farmer's budget but also destroys our relationship with the soil. The main concern should be to increase the microorganism population, which dissolves any nutrient in the soil into plant usable forms. Instead of artificial chemicals and fertilizers, biodynamic methods can be used in order to handle many varmints with a single substance, to repel some insects and fertilize at the same time (for example, garlic) and to increase microorganisms in the soil. On the other hand, since the substances are also natural, we raise or we collect from nature, hence, we produce them quite cheaply.

[1]Vehbi Ersoz, Afyon, Turkey, email: mert.c.demir@gmail.com

In order to enrich the soil and increase microorganisms, we produce our own compost and support the production of worms in the soil.

Organic product is not necessarily a product with a worm in it. In biodynamic agriculture and in Shumei agriculture we have no loss of yield. We are receiving comparable amounts both with the organic and conventional agriculture alternatives.

We are a small farmer family but from time to time we require external workforce. It is always possible to fulfill this need with paid labor but occasional volunteers help us in this area. By this way, we get the opportunity to share our knowledge and receive cheap labor at the same time. We think this is community supported agriculture.

We came to this point by trying various novelties and by persevering in agriculture. We had occasional failures but we never gave up. Each year we tried to understand our mistakes and to do better by changing one or several factors.

Trying different philosophies gave an advantage to us: An application in one philosophy can be used in a different way in another. For example, in the Shumei method, we plant nice looking and fragrant flowers in order to increase aesthetics. We applied this to the places where we make biodynamic agriculture as well because we realized that these flowers allure useful insects and bees to the place.