

## Intuitive farming and the biodynamic influence

A new field of research



Decisions, even in agricultural companies, are always based on a degree of intuition. This supposedly scientifically incomprehensible sense of context is nevertheless formed mentally and can be used more consciously. What does the research say?

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Intuition is rarely associated with business management in agricultural experimentation. But a small, growing number of scientific studies over the past fifteen years have shown that many farmers rely on their intuition when making practical decisions. They often prefer these to the computer-based decision-making that has been developed as an auxiliary tool in mainstream research. All authors of these studies agree that farmers should be supported in the active development of their intuitive abilities. However, to date there have been only a few research efforts in this regard. The reason for this could be that it is a great challenge for scientists to understand intuition and the processes that affect it. There is also no consensus about what exactly intuition is and how it works. Nevertheless, many farmers use their intuition and therefore it could be helpful to find new ways to develop this skill in modern agriculture.

## Definition of intuition

Perhaps the most accurate definition of intuition is "knowing without knowing how to know." And although the exact process has not yet been recognized, it tends to be referred to in the scientific literature as a "sudden, precise and subconscious, ubiquitous component" of all decisions, which is very useful, foreseeing that the decision-maker is in harmony with it. It seems that logic and reason are preferable when tasks are analytically simple, but intuition is advantageous when the analytical complexity of the task at hand is increased. This is also recognized by some management consultants, for example as part of the planning system for agricultural businesses developed by "Holistic Management International": here is the last and most important of the seven test questions

the holistic management decisions have to exist, the so-called "gut feeling". This is not determined by what you think, but rather by how you behave feels during an action or decision".

Farmers and scientists may disagree on how to define intuition - be it gut feeling, instinct, greater sense of observation or years of experience. Unlike scientists, however, farmers agree that the use of intuition is at the heart of their decision-making process. It is a familiar approach for indigenous people, self-sufficient farmers and small farmers: they all work closely linked to nature and have relied on their ability for thousands of years; They continue to do so because their access to formal and computer-aided decision-making processes is limited or non-existent.

Even in industrialized countries, some successful farmers see intuition as essential to healthy business management. In a study of over 79 organic farmers in Germany, Austria and Great Britain, developing intuition was one of the ten key aspects of running healthy and resilient agricultural systems: "We always talk about things that are actually incomprehensible... Numbers and measurements, however, this is something older, something we have lost, like intuition," as one farmer put it.

Other farmers in the study noted that the management of a healthy agriculture must also take into account the individuality of the farm in order not to just use ready-made solutions and that intuition enables adapted, practical decisions. This is consistent with some scientific studies that have found that intuition plays a significant role in finding innovative solutions to problems. The knowledge,



Intuition also helps in finding the right time

Using this ability successfully could empower farmers to find specific solutions to everyday problems and to manage their dynamic, complex agricultural ecosystems in an appropriate manner. It can then also be useful to adapt to local environmental changes that are occurring faster than science can keep up with adjusted decision-making guidelines in order to meet the needs of farmers.

### Described advantages of intuitive farming

In studies published to date, farmers who consciously use intuition in their decisions report the following benefits:

- less input (e.g. water, fertilizer, veterinary costs and time spent on decision-making),
- better output (e.g. feed utilization in animal husbandry, longer shelf life of products, higher yield),
- higher profit margins,
- improved farm health and reduced negative environmental impact, and
- Improved personal well-being (e.g. feeling healthier, more satisfied with decisions made and more in harmony with nature).

In an ongoing qualitative study, I interviewed some farmers about how they use intuition in their decision-making process and they reported similar benefits to the studies mentioned above. A couple on an organic vegetable farm in the Western Cape region of South Africa said that they first instinctively feel what the right, practical management decision is and then confirm the decision through thoughtful observation, attention to detail and experience. They reported 100% accuracy in making the “right” decision based on feeling, but they found it difficult to describe what that feeling is like or where it comes from. However, they described that this feeling did not develop in the head but in the body, and that the initial feeling led to the right decision before making a second guess.

These farmers use homeopathic remedies to address nutrient deficiencies and pest/pathogen problems and report significantly fewer pest infestations in their crops, healthier produce with a noticeably longer shelf life than other organic growers in the Western Cape. Region. These farmers say their labor costs are higher to ensure their producer quality. However, due to the significantly lower costs of external inputs, the consistently good quality and the higher selling price of their products, the profit margin is higher than that of conventional farmers who aim for the same harvest. All of this strengthened her confidence in making her decisions in this way.

Another case study is a dairy farm in the Dutch province of Gelderland with a herd of 90 cows, a larger herd in this region. The fourth-generation family business switched from the conventional system to organic decades ago, has been organically certified since 1991 and in 2004 was one of the first companies in the Netherlands to stop using antibiotics and vaccinations. These farmers report that although the transition was difficult, they now fully trust their intuition and other subtle skills to determine whether and how other means, such as: B. Homeopathy should be used in your animal population. They claim to have a very high success rate using intuition to select the right remedy and that the accuracy of their decisions increased as they practiced techniques to develop intuition. The dairy products from this company have received multiple local and international awards for their quality over the last ten years. The family also said they were very happy with this method of decision making

is.

## Development of intuition

Farmers who use their intuition agreed that it can, in principle, be developed by anyone and that intuition is closely linked to experience. For example, a farmer can learn intuition theoretically in class, but he has to train it in practical operations.

There is no scientific consensus on how best to develop intuition, although various models and methods have been developed to produce the state of mind that corresponds to intuitive thinking. Training can take a relatively short or long time depending on the amount of effort and time required to perfect this skill. Confidence in intuitive thinking can also be strengthened in training groups.

Interestingly, some articles say that it seems that intuition appears more often when you are not actually trying to act intuitively! But you should know what exactly the feeling of intuition is in order to recognize it. Practices such as meditation, mindfulness, keeping a diary, dancing or other types of movement that help develop interception - i.e. internal body awareness - help us relax the logical mind and intuitive awareness to expand.

## Intuition in biodynamic agriculture

Some of the most extensive and clearest work on intuition comes from Rudolf Steiner, including practices that relax yet maintain attention. He saw intuition as the highest level of non-physical perception that can be trained, similar to how intellect can be trained. His work provides a systematic, specific and individually usable guide that puts the responsibility for developing intuition in the hands of the individual.

In his publications "Philosophy of Freedom" (GA 4) and "How to achieve knowledge of the higher worlds" (GA 10), Steiner explains to the reader practices for developing a highly sensitive inner perception, similar to Goethe's theory of observation and his phenomenological orientation Concept of visual judgment (putting yourself in one's shoes). In the "Stages of Higher Knowledge" (GA 12), Steiner describes methods of how imagination and inspiration form as precursors to intuition. In his view, "intuition is not the state of knowledge that is inferior to intellectual knowledge in terms of clarity, but even far exceeds it." In his agricultural course lectures he appeals to readers to use intuition if the suggestions he presents are to be implemented.

Even though Steiner writes regularly and in detail about these aspects, Demeter certification only evaluates the physical practices of agricultural companies. The not easily accessible information as to whether Demeter farmers are active

Developing your intuition and using it according to Steiner's recommendations is not tested. However, biodynamic agriculture is the only type of modern, Western alternative agriculture that actively recognizes and encourages intuitive elements in agriculture.

## A potential research community

Farmers already operate intuitively to some degree, so any research that supports the use and improvement of this ability is valuable. Because Steiner's work provides a thoughtful basis for fine-tuning, it could be beneficial for biodynamics and mainstream agricultural research to engage in collaborative research on intuitive methods in agriculture.

Biodynamics is already practiced in at least 47 countries - with a growing number of associations and members. Since peer feedback plays an important role in intuition training, this network could give farmers access to other farmers who aspire to similar intuition thinking and other subtle skills consistent with biodynamic principles. This type of research could also help change the viewpoint of conventional farmers on biodynamic agriculture, as well as that of mainstream agricultural researchers and decision-makers, which would in turn support the awareness, willingness and application of biodynamics.

Intuitive farming could revitalize agricultural research and lead the industry towards more efficient, adaptive and coherent practices that are integrated into nature and the system of a farm, with biodynamics leading the way. •

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