

Europe BD Trip 2008

A couple of years ago I ran an Introductory Field day at Yarra Junction. After the day was over I was approached by one of the participants, who had been very attentive during the day, to ask me if I would be interested in going to Greece to talk there. Her name is Athena Marini, an Australian of Greek origin, who was moving back to Greece. I said that I would but never actually thought it would eventuate. She kept in contact and due to her endeavor and persistence, and contact with Marios Dessyllas, the trip was organized, including a two-day seminar on Australian Demeter Bio-Dynamic agriculture. (Athena and Marios report in this issue also.)

On Thursday the 1st of May I landed in Athens after a long flight. Athena Marini met me at the airport and took me to her place, in Penteli, to settle me in. She performed some Kinesiology on me to bring me to European time and I felt very good. We spent the rest of the day sightseeing, the history absolutely amazing. Got to eat in my first Taverna, more on the food later.

On the Friday we went to the village where I was to talk, Krioneri, on a part of Greece known as the Peloponnese, not far from where Hercules slain the last lion. Krioneri is on the river Elisson and the accommodation and venue for the seminar overlooked the river and valley. That evening a few people began to gather for the seminar and we enjoyed a great meal prepared by Athena, Maria, Jorta and others. I was beginning to feel a little a bit tense about the next couple of days, as I hadn't yet met Marios, my translator (agronomist also) and discussed what we might cover in the seminar.

People began arriving the next morning for a 9.30 start. The farmers and gardeners there for the seminar, about 60 in total, were all very warm and welcoming, and very keen to hear about the Australian Demeter BD method. Some had good English and others none. On that first day we covered plant feeding, humus, soils and soil cultivation, 500 (took it with me), plant expression, root growth and structure, followed by a practical compost making session with information about using the compost preps (took some with me). I had the essential information that I needed to get across over the two days, but let the day flow somewhat, interspersed with questions related to the areas we had covered. I had plenty of photographs to show relating to the various topics. About 7 hours in total, with everything translated also, Marios had done a great job and was as exhausted as I was.

That evening was a fantastic meal with beautiful wine, followed by great Greek music and dancing. Quite a few of the participants were musical also, with two or three playing several instruments. Everybody else could sing! It was certainly entertaining and they all made a great effort to make me feel at home.

The following day we started early with still a bit to cover. We quickly recapped on the previous day and as we finished the day with traditional composting, we began the new with sheet composting via green manure. A little on pasture management, more on 500, stirring correctly, stirring machines, storing, applying, etc and same on 501. Moon planting, seed saving, the BDAAA and BDGAI, Demeter certification, and GMO were covered also. After a later lunch we had a question session that covered topics to numerous to mention. All this was filmed for future reference.

I had seed with me from my collection and a lot donated by the BDGAI, as well as some copies of BD Growing to give out as well. The participants were very appreciative of the open pollinated seed and thanked us very much.

We finished, another 7 hour day, with several of the participants expressing their gratitude for such a practical seminar and for the efforts of Athena to get me there. Several, farmers and growers, who could speak no English shook my hand and embraced me, with smiles on their faces and saying ef haristo (thank you). This was a great relief to me and meant more than words could say. Athena, Marios and I had a feeling of a job well done.

Before heading back to Athens we visited the property of one of the participants, Harris, in Velina and also visited Athena's home village of Kefalari. There we were kindly given tea by Athena's uncle and aunt, George and Sofia Marinis, ex Aussies now back in Greece. They were very happy to be visited by an Australian. We finally arrived back in Athens about 1 am.

Next morning Athena, Marios and I went to the island of Tinos, one of the less tourist islands in the Aegean Sea, to visit the market garden of one of the seminar participants and also for some rest. Tinos is close to the island of Delos, the island of Apollo. Nilufer, a very interesting lady of Turkish origin, and Christos the market gardener met us there. We got settled in, in a beautiful stone house, had a look around the island, lots of Venetian pigeon houses built centuries ago still remain. There were lots of churches and a lot of postcard views and villages. Had lunch at a taverna in a small village, the food was magnificent, as it was all over Greece. Each taverna has its own local red and white wine, hard and soft cheese, and breads, even if only a few kilometers away from the next taverna. Goat and lamb, fish (on the islands), lots of salads, yoghurt, and always a steamed bitter herb. Placed in the centre of the table and shared, a very nice way to eat and drink. Had a very early night as we only had about 4 hrs sleep between getting home from the seminar and going to Tinos.

Christos picked me up next morning to have a look at his market garden, we were met there by another of the seminar participants, Kostas, a market gardener also. Christos has been interested in BD for some time and had brief contact with Alex about 20 years ago. His 2 acre market garden is on terraced land so all work is done by hand, with help from migrant workers. All farms, vineyards, market gardens in Greece are small, especially by Australian standards. A mixture of fruit and vegetables are grown on quite nice soil, although not Bio-Dynamically active. Christos could see this, especially after having seen photos of well structured BD soil at the seminar and hopes that the Australian Demeter BD method can develop in Greece. Due to time constraints, and time getting away, I didn't get to spend all the time I would have liked with Christos at his market garden, to cover more aspects of practical BD application. He does, however, have more than enough to start with. It was back to Athens that afternoon.

The next day I gave an interview to an eco magazine that is published in Greece's largest weekend newspaper. Athena has informed me that they printed a double page spread on Australian Demeter BD. That night I was invited to give a talk to a Greek greens group. I spoke a little on practical BD application but mainly on the environmental, ecological and social benefits of the Australian Demeter Bio-Dynamic method.

My week in Greece was over before I knew it. I was to head to Italy the next day. I made some good friends and formed some strong bonds with the warm and welcoming Greeks. They assure me that we provided a foundation for practical Bio-Dynamics to grow there. (Some European style BD and an offshoot of this called Homeo-dynamic have been practiced in Greece and I will write briefly about this in another article). I have promised to help all I can and have put them in touch with the Italian Association that is practicing Australian Demeter BD. They have very kindly

asked me back next year, but it will probably be a couple of years before I can go again. This is now the time for them to show some initiative and see what they can get happening.

The next day I was picked up in Rome by Alberto, who works at Agrilatina, and after a nice lunch took me to meet Pasquale. I got to spend about 4 hours with Pasquale at Agrilatina and even though they were winding down for Summer I got to sample some of his magnificent produce, including bananas. We got to talk about many things of a Bio-dynamic and market gardening nature and had a look at the packing facilities etc. A full farm tour, a look at implements, the preparations and a meeting with Giovanni, who sprays and looks after the preps at Agrilatina followed. I was very appreciative of the time that Pasquale could spare me.

I met Bridget Olsen the next day in Florence and went to her house, 45 min away near a village called Borgo San Lorenzo. I first met Bridget 5 or so years ago while laying the 500 at Alex's place, she had come over here to learn how to do so. Bridget has done a lot of work in helping to start an Italian and European BD Association that practices the Australian Demeter method. She translated spoken lectures for Alex during some of his visits to Italy and translates Alex's written work as well, which has been essential to help the method spread in Italy. Saverio and Stefano also do a lot for BD in Italy but due to missed phone calls, bad timing etc, I didn't get to meet them on this trip.

Bridget grows herbs on a field near her house and makes teas, ointments, oils and other products of a very high quality that she sells locally. The plants show very good bio-dynamic expression and have the finest aromas, experienced while helping to harvest some thyme and calendula. Bridget is also making 500 and the compost preps. She had lifted the preps a few weeks before I got there and they were of good quality. During the 4 days I spent there, I got to get some rest, do some work, learn more about BD in Europe and how it operates in Europe under Demeter International, exchange many ideas and experiences and forge a friendship for the future. I thoroughly enjoyed my stay in Italy.

Next stop was Germany and the market garden of Maria Bienert, in Taucha, near Leipzig. Maria is flat out growing BD veggies, both outdoors and in the greenhouse. They were all of good quality and very nice to eat, with the best Kohl Rabi that I have tasted. She also grows grains. Maria appeared in a recent edition of BD Growing and you can refer to that article for a detailed description of what Maria does. We had a trip planned but as it turned out I could only spend a couple of days there, as I had to return home for family reasons. Thanks Maria, for my short stay.