



## FINCA LUNA NUEVA AND VILLA VANILLA

### Pioneers in Biodynamics in Costa Rica

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with contributions from Osiris Abrego Plata, Matias Baker, Henry Karczynski, and Steven Farrell

**W**HEN RUDOLF STEINER gave the Agriculture Course in 1924 to large-scale farmers in Europe, he was not thinking of Costa Rica and the application of biodynamic principles in tropical Central America at the turn of the twenty-first century. He did, however, give substantial “indications” regarding the literal and figurative spirit of how to observe and understand the physical, etheric, and astral individuality of a farm in ways that can guide the application of biodynamic principles in tropical areas. He also gave a clear blessing to farmers to “experiment” with the information he presented in his lectures, in order to meet the needs of the agricultural individuality where they work. In other lectures, Rudolf Steiner indicated that the Americas engender great will capacities in human beings, creating the potential for transforming materialistic culture into something more spiritual. These indications complement our understanding of the potential of biodynamics to transform the earth’s soul to meet the spirit of the cosmos, and of the resulting need to explore how biodynamics should be practiced in this part of the globe.

So, what does it mean to apply the “spirit” rather than the “letter” of the Agriculture Course in Costa Rica, as compared to Northern Europe? The differences in climate, soil, topography, planetary influences, native plants and animals, rhythms of sun and moon, the elemental presence and balances of earth/water/fire/air—how can the vast amount of globally applicable guidance that Steiner provided be sorted out and applied in this extremely different context? And how does this work

relate to his message about the responsibility of human beings to work simultaneously on the land and on their inner life—particularly in Central America, which geographically parallels the function of the regulatory/ rhythmic system of the human being, situated as it is between North and South America?

New Chapter, with its farm Finca Luna Nueva, and Henry Karczynski of Villa Vanilla are pioneers in application, adaptation, and research at this frontier of the biodynamic movement.

#### NEW CHAPTER AND FINCA LUNA NUEVA

Over the past several decades, the mountain range where Finca Luna Nueva is located has attracted a variety of people interested in new ways of working and relating to its landscape. During the Korean War era, Quaker pacifists from the U.S. relocated to the area (in part because Costa Rica has no military) and established agricultural communities. In 1987, Swedish schoolchildren organized a fundraising effort to fight deforestation of the nearby Monteverde area, and that initial effort grew into an initiative in which children and adults from forty-four countries contributed to the creation of the 56,000-acre Children’s Eternal Rainforest east of Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve and adjacent to Finca Luna Nueva.

In the early 1990s, New Chapter founder Paul Schulick was unable to find organically, sustainably grown ginger for the dietary supplements made by the company. His unwavering commitment to quality and ethics led him

to partner with ginger grower and biodynamic practitioner Steven Farrell—and to the creation of Finca Luna Nueva.

Founded in 1994, Finca Luna Nueva is a 200-acre, Demeter certified Biodynamic ginger and turmeric farm in the rainforest of north-central Costa Rica. From its origins as a farm dedicated to the production of quality ingredients for New Chapter supplements, Finca Luna Nueva has diversified agriculturally and commercially in alignment with its mission of preserving the rainforest and developing and implementing sustainable practices for living and farming in the tropics.

Finca Luna Nueva produces root crops, which include cassava and taro, ginger, turmeric, and galangal. Two gardens grow a wide selection of greens and culinary herbs and spices, as well as papaya, pineapple, citrus, rambutan, and mangosteen trees. Ginger and turmeric are the primary cash crops, while fruits, vegetables, and root crops are used in the Finca Luna Nueva Lodge restaurant.

Finca Luna Nueva is also home to a diversity of domestic and wild animals. Domestic animals include sheep, goats, water buffalo (for milk, meat, and field clearing), oxen for plowing, poultry, pigs, and turkeys. The water treatment plant built for the dairy will soon produce tilapia, bass, fresh-water shrimp, and lobster. The ponds will be shaded by chayote and passion fruit trellises to prevent predation from wading birds.

Over the course of its history, Finca Luna Nueva has hosted hundreds of scientists, researchers, students, growers and producers, artists, eco-tourists, chefs, herbalists, service learners, healers, spiritual seekers, and builders interested in learning sustainable practices. Since 2003, the Finca Luna Nueva community has systematically developed the infrastructure needed to host these diverse international groups by building eco-lodges, rainforest walking trails, and three fully equipped kitchens.

Finca Luna Nueva hosts several workshops a year on a variety of subjects, including an annual conference on

**Photos:** view of vanilla field (facing page); turmeric flower; one of several kinds of nettle in Costa Rica (this page)



## ABOUT COSTA RICA

The motto of the Republic of Costa Rica is “long live work and peace.” With over 19,000 square miles and an estimated population of around four million, this Central American country claimed independence from its European colonizer Spain almost 200 years ago. It abolished its army in 1949, and ranks high across a variety of international indices for having a democratic government, high human development (a literacy rate of 95%), and exemplary environmental performance.

Only between nine and ten degrees north of the equator, Costa Rica has a largely tropical climate, with its seasons defined by amount of rainfall rather than temperature or light. With only two seasons—“dry” and “rainy”—in some areas it may rain constantly from December to April. Temperatures seldom sink below 50 degrees Fahrenheit in most areas. Within these parameters, diverse elevation, topography, rainfall, and geography create a variety of microclimates. The country is home to 5% of the world’s biodiversity, and approximately a quarter of the land area has been designated as national parks and protected areas.

Agriculture and eco-tourism comprise a substantial portion of income for the Costa Rican economy.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 10% of Costa Rica’s total land area is used for agricultural production, with the traditional export crops being coffee, bananas, cocoa, and sugar.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“Costa Rica,” [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Costa\\_Rica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Costa_Rica) (April 13, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>“Costa Rica Agriculture,” [www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Americas/Costa-Rica-AGRICULTURE.html](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Americas/Costa-Rica-AGRICULTURE.html) (April 13, 2011).



biodynamics. This annual conference began in 2006, with initial guidance by Wali Via of Winter Green Farm in Oregon. Agriculture professor Panfilo Tabora at Earth University in Costa Rica began bringing his students to Finca Luna Nueva to experience what he considered to be a “model farm.” Since then, the conference and biodynamic training led by Matias Baker and Osiris Abrego Plata has become a yearly event with fifty to sixty student and grower attendees from across South, Central, and North America. Growers, agricultural officials, and students from all over the country attend the conference, as well as growers from other countries.



**Photos:** gathering in the Finca Luna Nueva garden; Steven Farrell visits Costa Rican farmers to make the biodynamic preparations

With the ongoing assistance of Finca Luna Nueva and its contributors, students and established farmers who have taken up biodynamic practices because of this initial exposure and training are now starting their own agricultural projects or applying what they have learned to established farms all over the country. Plans are being developed to create more farm-based training for Costa Rican farmers about biodynamics and other sustainable agricultural practices, as well as to offer financial and educational support to build local networks of growers using these practices.

For the past four years, Matias has worked with Harold Eduarte and the Finca Luna Nueva staff to understand biodynamic preparation making for Central America. This work encompasses a wide spectrum of pictures and relationships, requiring the development of spiritual organs of perception to read the insights given by nature. In other words, working with biodynamics, particularly the preparations, involves the objective investiga-

tion of patterns using imaginative cognition. In developing personal relationships to the land, the team has spent a great deal of time researching and sourcing materials within the farm and the surrounding area to localize the preparation work. From there, efforts were made to identify native preparation plants, minerals, and organs that are archetypal analogs to those recommended by Steiner in the Agriculture Course. Also underlying the building up of the biodynamic work at Finca Luna Nueva has been an ongoing acknowledgement of the centrality of rhythm. Earthly and planetary rhythms are the basis of the science of biodynamic practice, and

the question for Finca Luna Nueva is: “How can we conduct experiments, using rhythmical protocols, to understand and practice balanced agriculture in the tropics?”

To continue this work, Matias and Osiris have worked with Finca Luna Nueva to create a suitable infrastructure to make and store the preparations and compost in this tropical climate. A major focus has been providing materials for the compost made and used at the farm. The compost is then used for making slurries, barrel compost, and compost teas. Monitoring and documenting climate, rhythms, moisture, light, and temperatures, combined with close, ongoing observation and rigorous experimentation, have been central to understanding the similarities and differences in the tropical landscape as compared to more temperate climates.

Since they have been able to use preparations and compost from ingredients that have come from the farm, longtime Finca Luna Nueva farmers and workers report observing increased soil fertility and product quality over

time. Testing and trials of products grown on the farm are also planned in partnership with the New Chapter laboratories. Rigorous testing is the next step, as New Chapter and Finca Luna Nueva staff work with herbalists and alternative medical practitioners to further document and improve product quality.

New Chapter's Chairman of the Board Tom Newmark's vision and implementation of the unique partnership and business model between New Chapter and Finca Luna Nueva has led to an environment where many innovative ideas are practiced. For instance, four years ago Newmark invited CEOs from companies such as Seventh Generation and Whole Foods, escorting them on a walk through the nearby rainforest, which led to support of preservation efforts that continues to this day.

New Chapter's most recent initiative at Finca Luna Nueva is the Semillas Sagradas Sacred Seeds Sanctuary. It began in 2005 as a single sanctuary for medicinal plants vulnerable to loss of habitat, inappropriate harvesting, or climate change. Working with indigenous communities, ethnobotanist Rafael Ocampo, and passionate student interns, the sanctuary's goals are to protect culturally and scientifically significant plant species, promote awareness of critical plant conservation, preserve biodiversity and herbal knowledge, and reconnect indigenous communities to their healing heritage. Since that time, a collaborative partnership with the William R. Brown Center at the Missouri Botanical Gardens has begun, and Semillas Sagradas has become part of a network of twenty-three foundational Sacred Seeds gardens around the world and has become a "sister garden" to Indian seed sanctuary Sacred Grove Hosagunda. A new book by Rafael Ocampo and Michael Balick, *Plants of Semillas Sagradas: An Ethnomedicinal Garden in Costa Rica*, is available at [www.fincalunanuevalodge.com](http://www.fincalunanuevalodge.com).

## VILLA VANILLA

As U.S. expatriates with a passion for Costa Rica, spice growing, and sustainable agriculture, Steven Farrell and Henry Karczynski met while on the board of directors for the Asociacion Nacional de Agricultores Organicas (ANAO), a Costa Rican sustainable agriculture organization. Since their involvement with the creation of a national certification agency twenty years ago, they have continued to work together to promote biodynamics to the country as a viable tropical agricultural system. Steven teamed up with New Chapter to establish Luna Nueva Farm, and Henry developed his vanilla and spice plantation, Villa Vanilla.

Villa Vanilla is a spice farm located in the Central Pacific rainforest ten miles east of Quepos and overlooking Manuel Antonio National Park. Certified organic since

## FARMS ONLINE

To learn more about the work being done by New Chapter, and the many agricultural and recreational activities offered by Finca Luna Nueva, visit:

[www.newchapter.com](http://www.newchapter.com)  
[www.fincalunanuevalodge.com](http://www.fincalunanuevalodge.com)

To see what Villa Vanilla and Rainforest Spices have to offer and to learn more, visit:

[www.rainforestspices.com](http://www.rainforestspices.com)  
[www.vanillareview.com](http://www.vanillareview.com)



Photos: working garden at Finca Luna Nueva; students from local organizations make the silica preparation at Finca Luna Nueva

1992 and Biodynamic since 2000, the plantation includes twenty-seven acres of agricultural production and 125 acres of primary and secondary rainforest. Cash crops include vanilla, true Ceylon cinnamon, cocoa, black pepper, allspice, turmeric, cardamom, fruits, essential oils, and medicinal plants. Sheep, goats, cows, and chickens are an important part of this diverse operation. Villa Vanilla's agriforestry approach also supports a variety of wild birds, monkeys, and other animals native to the area.

Villa Vanilla founder Henry Karczynski was born in Germany and grew up in Chicago. After studying and working in commerce for a few years, he became a Peace Corps volunteer in 1975 in order to expand his knowledge and experience. In 1977 he moved to Costa Rica and never looked back. He initially established Villa Vanilla in 1987 as a commercial vanilla farm and obtained organic certification through the concept of "benign neglect," which means not using prohibited inputs. In the pursuit of commercial efficiency, he copied other vanilla growers' mono-cropping systems. In the mid-1990s Karczynski and other vanilla growers in the area lost everything to disease. Excessive rainfall stress, degenerated vanilla cuttings, and unsound cultural practices provoked the collapse of this crop, which had been exploited for strictly economic gain with minimal attention paid to the soil and environment.

This served as a catharsis, forcing Henry to research sustainable practices in general and, more specifically, tropical agriculture. Reading a recommended book, *Secrets of the Soil: New Solutions for Restoring Our Planet* by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird, he discovered biodynamics. As he delved more into biodynamic investigation and practices, he realized that, instead of focusing only on production, he needed to focus on developing healthy soil, while

also taking into consideration the unique life forces and synergies of the tropics. Contrary to conventional agricultural wisdom, he replanted vanilla vines in the same diseased soil while applying the biodynamic principles adapted to his tropical farm organism. These practices contributed to the development of beneficial microorganisms in the soil, and he was able to restart his vanilla operation, imitating the rainforest diversity by planting trees and other spices.

Photos: Henry Karczynski of Villa Vanilla; Costa Rican coffee farmer digging his first biodynamic preparation 500



Henry, hungry for biodynamic knowledge, attended several conferences in the United States, where he had the opportunity to meet experienced biodynamic farmers. Initially using preparations made and developed for agriculture in temperate climates, Henry knew that, for biodynamic agriculture to be successful in the long term in Costa Rica, efforts would have to be focused on developing preparations in the tropics.

Henry had worked as a long-term project manager for several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and as a short-term consultant with vanilla growers in Mexico, El Salvador, Hawaii, Madagascar, and Costa Rica. As an agriculturalist, he has met enlightened farmers who contributed to his increasing understanding of tropical agriculture. He is willing to share his experiences and vision with students, practitioners, and visitors to Villa Vanilla. Single-source vanilla beans and other spices are packaged and sold on-site and farm-direct from the Villa Vanilla website.

Steven Farrell and the Finca Luna Nueva partners shared Henry's recognition that biodynamic preparations needed to be made in a tropical environment, and Finca Luna Nueva has allocated human and financial resources to this end for more than five years. Both Henry and Steven

agree that Costa Rica is ready to expand the amount of farmland devoted to biodynamic agriculture by using locally made inputs.

### LONG-TERM CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORLDWIDE BIODYNAMIC COMMUNITY

Though in some ways the landscapes where Finca Luna Nueva and Villa Vanilla are located are very different from each other, they both differ even more from the landscape of Koberwitz in Europe, where Steiner and the farmers he was addressing discussed the detailed application of the cosmic and earthly indications he sought to convey in his lectures. For instance, the amounts of moisture and clay in Costa Rican soils make it difficult to use the farm machinery typically used in U.S. and European agriculture without serious compaction of the soil. Even herds of larger animals risk damage to the fragile soils and ecosystems. Therefore, Finca Luna Nueva plows with oxen, and Villa Vanilla hosts only smaller domestic animals, such as chickens and smaller breeds of pigs. Such conscious decision-making, utilization, and testing of ways to balance animals as part of a diverse farm organism, combined with promotion of healthy soil, make important contributions to a global understanding and application of sustainable agricultural practices.

As mentioned above, due to differences in temperature and light in the equatorial tropics, there is also an ongoing challenge with certain plants—particularly with biodynamic preparation herbs such as chamomile, dandelion, and yarrow—to find varieties and ways to grow them that encourage them to move beyond vegetative development into blossom production. The research and testing to identify native plants that are “analogous” to the preparation plants identified by Steiner in the Agriculture Course—and to discover how, when, and for how long to grow, harvest, and bury them to create quality preparations—have major implications for biodynamic practice in the twenty-first century.

However, the most important and fundamental contributions of the pioneering biodynamic work being conducted at Finca Luna Nueva, Villa Vanilla, and other parts of the world are more in the realm of method and intention than in the specific practices that result. What such “research” requires is a fundamental shift toward understanding the role of the farmer/researcher as human being, and therefore as mediator between the earthly and cosmic forces and beings that guide agricultural work. In this “new” but ancient approach to agriculture, the relationship between the farmer’s inner, meditative work and outer, practical work is recognized as the fundamental vehicle for engaging her or his imagination in perceiving archetypes, forms, rhythms, and processes to communi-

cate and partner more successfully with the spiritual beings of a landscape. Rather than a recipe or checklist to be followed, this work honors biodynamic agriculture as a process of observation and relationship with the agricultural individuality as a spiritual reality and partner in production, that depends on the inner work and practice of the human beings who work there.

Because of their unique identities as herb and spice operations, the research and practices carried out at Villa Vanilla and Finca Luna Nueva further contribute to our perception and understanding of “quality” as a construct in biodynamic agriculture. For millennia, healers of human beings have understood what Steiner describes as “cosmic and earthly nutrition”—that it is the vital forces in the plant interacting with the vital forces of the human being that create health and wellness. They have also understood that their own spiritual work and connection to plants is the basis for the effectiveness of the healing work they do in partnership with plants’ vital forces. The parallel and compatible intentions of biodynamic growers and producers of medicinal herbs to heal, simultaneously, the individual human being, human social and economic relationships, human relationships with the earth, and the landscape where the herbs were grown, provide inspiration and a model that will hopefully be taken up by other areas of agriculture.

### CONCLUSION

Critical to the successful application of biodynamic principles and practices in Costa Rica and the equatorial tropics are regional 1) observation and documentation related to research, 2) efforts to support biodiversity and ecological health that include developing sustainable practices and seed work, and 3) capacity-building through training farmers and agricultural officials. This regional work has global applications, not in content, but in the development of methods and processes of perception and partnering with the spiritual beings of a place with clarity, integrity, rigor, and reverence. Villa Vanilla and Finca Luna Nueva will not provide recipes or shortcuts for other biodynamic farm organisms. What they do provide, however, are models and guidelines for an approach to biodynamic agriculture which we, in turn, can observe, learn from, and work to develop partnerships with our own landscapes.

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