

# Bear River Farms is Atlantic Canada's first biodynamic farm co-operative



## By Trudy Kelly Forsythe

Saskia Kolass, 27, and her partner Tilo, 36, run a biodynamic farm near Bear River, Nova Scotia. It is the result of a passion that began after Tilo made his first visit to Canada as a Grade 12 student from Germany. He was on a graduation trip with his classmates and stayed on a farm in Ontario for over a month. It made a lasting impression on the young man, who had never farmed in his life.

"I made my mind up then that I needed to live on a farm," Tilo recalls. Despite that decision, he took a bit of a detour after graduation to study hotel management and work in sales. He finally fulfilled his need to live on a farm in 1999. That's when he purchased Bear River Farms in Waldeck and began, with Saskia's help, to build his alternative agricultural operation into a biodynamic farm. That farm is now in the process of being transformed into Bear River Farms Sustainable Agri-Cultural Co-Operative, Atlantic Canada's first biodynamic farm co-operative.

Biodynamic farming is a sustainable, self-sufficient form of agriculture that focuses on the concept of managing a farm as a self-contained living entity – a form of farming Tilo knew was the way to go. "It made sense to me," he says. "I'm a practical person and biodynamic farm practices simply work. And it is the cheapest way to farm," he adds.

### Cow manure

That's because biodynamic farmers do not spend money on chemical fertilizers, seeds or antibiotics. Fertilization is done through cow manure, from Tilo's own cows, which is treated with herbal preparations, also made on the farm. All seeds and animal feed is grown on the farm and, except for the first livestock brought to the farm, all animals are bred, born and raised there as well.

"The only stuff I buy right now is chicken starter," Tilo says. "But we will fill this gap, because we are getting our own stone mill next year."

Certified organic for the past three years, Bear River Farms became a full biodynamic farm this year. The farm was

certified through Demeter Canada when it purchased horned Canadienne cows from a biodynamic farm in Ontario.

"The Canadienne cow is the oldest cow of Canada," Tilo says. "It is very well acclimatized to conditions here and is called the poor man's cow because it gives the same value of milk as the Jersey for half the amount of feed. They are healthy, maintenance free and dual purpose."

the monthly costs and share the crops and food products produced and processed on the farm. The security for their investment is the livestock, which usually doubles every year. It's a model that offers an alternative food chain, providing each co-op member with a wide variety of fresh, whole and rich basic food products, including bread and other baking goods, eggs, chicken, goose, sheep, and next year pork.



Tilo and Saskia Kolass run Bear River Farms, a biodynamic farm co-operative in Nova Scotia.

Just as the biodynamic agriculture model made sense to Tilo, the co-operative business model also made sense.

### Food chain

"I like the idea that people buy into the farm, become co-producers, and achieve access to what the farm produces," Tilo says. "My goal was never to farm for profit. We're just really concerned about the food we eat and our goal is to get independent from the food chain."

"A lot of people share this idea but don't know how to do it," he continues. "So we thought why not give them an opportunity to own part of the farm, buy shares, share the costs of running the farm and share the product produced. I think this is the only future for small-scale farming."

To become involved in the co-operative, people make an initial one-time investment by purchasing a share of the operation, which they can resell. They then help with

### Safe source

"The farm owners will be mostly independent of industrial and designed food products, food stores and unnatural processing practices," Tilo says. "By running our own farm we know exactly where our food comes from, how it was born, raised, grown and processed. In addition, we've created a safe source of food that is more immune to economic crises or disastrous collapses of financial markets."

Other benefits of Bear River Farms agriculture and business models include making an investment in the future and the collective well-being of local communities, taking more responsibility for one's own food and local sustainable agriculture as well as promoting a greater awareness of the need to secure food rights now and for the future.

To learn more about the Bear River Farms operation visit [www.brffarm.com](http://www.brffarm.com).