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With a philosophy that includes not using chemicals, biodynamic principles didn't seem so far-fetched when Mike Lightfoot started a vineyard. **STEVEN ELPHICK**

## Planting by the phase of the moon

Biodynamic farming: is it just a trend or is it justified tradition?

### NOVA KITCHEN

CHARLES LEARY,  
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No less an advocate of traditional farming than Prince Charles favours a practice known as biodynamics, a cultivation technique that we mentioned briefly in our last two Nova Kitchen columns on food choices. In his 2010 book *Harmony*, the Prince of Wales described planting by the moon phase as part of “a profound knowledge neglected by modern techniques.”

Yet Linda Chalker-Scott, associate professor and extension urban horticulturist at Washington State University — who is an advocate of organic cultivation — told us

unequivocally: “The only difference between organic production and biodynamics is the use of special preparations — which scientific research has shown fairly conclusively to have no impact on either plants or soils.”

So who is right?

After all, the prince made a famous declaration in a 1980s interview that he spoke directly to his plants. “Very important to talk to them,” he said. “They respond.” So, in comparison with choosing to simply be certified organic, is a farmer or vinticulturist making a reasonable decision when undertaking biodynamic certification? Should the consumer care?

The nub, for us, is that one has to be certified biodynamic, which

appears to lend scientific credibility to practices such as sowing according to the moon and the zodiac, spraying homeopathic remedies, and most famously, burying cow’s horns filled with manure and quartz to focus “vital forces.” (See the sidebar on biodynamic preparations.)

People we respect believe in biodynamic practices. At Lightfoot & Wolfville Vineyards, Rachel Lightfoot explains that “our founder, Mike Lightfoot, is a seventh-generation farmer in the Annapolis Valley. He grew up here learning from his grandmother, Evelyn, who farmed what would now a days be considered “natural” farming: no chemicals, timing harvesting and planting according to the lunar cycle, etc.” So, biody-

namic principles didn't seem so far-fetched when Lightfoot turned his mind toward starting a vineyard.

“Evelyn lived to a ripe 108 years of age so it is hard to dispute her teachings,” says Rachel. Indeed, biodynamics gave Lightfoot & Wolfville a concrete “framework to help transition the farm back to a form of more sustainable agriculture when the grapevines were planted in 2009.” That’s useful, practical, and has produced some great results in their excellent wines.

“We believe that biodynamic viticulture has a tremendous impact on the creation of quality wine,” Rachel notes. “Living soils grow healthy vines, bear balanced fruit and make quality wine.”

Lightfoot affirmed that securing Demeter certification places Lightfoot & Wolfville in the ranks of fine wine producers all over the world, and listed off fantastic estates such as Maison Chapoutier in the Rhone Valley, Domaine Leflaive in Burgundy, Benziger Family Winery in Sonoma, and Southbrook Vineyards of Niagara as examples.

So, when you decide to buy a biodynamic food or wine, are you helping the earth, the soil or local ecology more than if you buy something that’s just plain old certified organic? Tilo Kolass at Bear River Farms — Nova Scotia’s first certified biodynamic farm — wouldn’t say.

CONTINUED ON D3

## The art of charcuterie — a delectable passion

### MEET THE CHEF

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Meet the Chef is an occasional feature profiling the men and women behind some of Nova Scotia’s favourite restaurants.

Salt. Meat. Time.

Every now and again you meet someone who lives and breathes his or her craft. It isn’t something that can be learned quickly, or even something you’re formally schooled in. Often it’s heritage, upbringing and culture. Mostly it’s passion and the unflinching pursuit of authenticity.

Frederic Tandy is one of those rare individuals — a modern-day practitioner of the art of charcuterie. His authenticity shines through in everything he commits to, and lately he’s committed to a lot.

On any given day at Ratinaud,

his charcuterie store on Halifax’s Gottingen Street, an array of artisan delectables is displayed like little works of art. Six different kinds of sausages; a selection of cured meats, from coppa to guanciale and jambon to lamb batonnet; pates and rillettes from foie gras mousse to duck rillettes; aussi an array of chutney, jams and breads. This is his day job. At night, around a large wooden table at the back of the store, 12 patrons are treated to an eight-course tasting menu, prepared by Tandy and chef Joe McLellan as part of his restaurant, The Kitchen Table.

Ten years ago, after stints at Keltic Lodge, Bish and Fleur De Sel, he made the decision to go out on his own and pursue his dream of opening an authentic French bistro style restaurant. “I was never very good at taking instructions from someone else,” Tandy says with a laugh. The dream however, was quickly halted when the bank insisted on a



Chef Frederic Tandy's artform is charcuterie.

70 per cent down payment — they viewed a restaurant as a risky business. Revising his dream, he decided to change the business plan, focus on his craft of charcuterie, and open a store dedicated to cured meats and sausages.

“The bank was more keen on a bricks and mortar specialty store than a restaurant,” says Tandy. “They were happier taking the risk on a charcuterie store, which was kind of funny, because most people in Halifax back then didn’t even know what charcuterie was.”

Charcuterie is an ancient craft based on the principles of curing, salting, smoking and preserving. The word itself comes from the French words *chair*, meaning flesh, and *cuit*, meaning cooked. It traditionally was only made from pork and offal, and historically could only be sold in stores owned by charcutiers, who would showcase their products by hanging them in storefront

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