

Biogaian Meeting 3/10/26

Brian Facilitating

Patricia Notetaking

Present: Laura, Thomas, Helen, MD, Eileen, Patricia, Anita, Fen, Brent, Kendall, Holly, Marlin, Reuben, Brian, (on phone Ka & Sylvan)

Agenda

- Soil Building Year (2026)
 - Animal fertilizer
 - Un-lean the apple tree
 - Biogaian barn clean
 - Compost bin finishing
- Tex Mil – next steps (feedback) & next steps & decision of land care labor

This is a high lever overview of the thinking of the Garden Leadership Team and their suggestions for this coming “Soil Building Year”. ***Talking Points for this discussion were handed out at the beginning of the meeting and can be found at the bottom of the minutes of this meeting.***

Context: Discussion points around story telling about what has been happening and possibilities for the coming year. Prepare people for change, can be scary, bring feelings of grief or disorientation, anger or delight, surprise, excitement.

Crisis and opportunity are two sides of the same situation. What wants to emerge? What creativity is being called for in this time.

Acknowledging who the delegated Garden Leadership Team is. A subset of the Biogaians that would hold the operations of the garden and the work of the Garden Steward. Laura, Helen, Anita, Patricia, Diane, Brian. This is a report back to the Biogaians of the work they have been doing.

How did this not come up until now? The end of November, a slipping into the recovery period and now the beginning of the new garden year became clear that something is happening that needs our attention.

Once this idea of a change came up, the team began to pull together other areas of concerns, patterns and threads leading to the idea of a need for a change.

- The garden has been going for 15 to 16 straight seasons and it seems like a good time to take a pause and reflect. Fallow or sabbatical are some ways to think about it.
- The collection of the data over these years has revealed that the garden produce has taken a significant downturn.
- The capacity of the regular workers in the garden are finding themselves not as able.

- The interns have been having more mental health issues – this is something that we are seeing in the general population. This is something that is putting our garden workers in harms way.
- As the garden workers are becoming fewer and the mental health issues increase this is putting more of a burden on the Garden Steward.

Crisis = Opportunity – examples

Knepp in England, the kitchen, the plaza, and the Native Forest Garden, Gabe Brown and the regenerative garden movement.

Financial Implications:

- Not asking for more funds – the funding from G2T, Songaia and the NRCS Grant funds are still available.

Structural Changes

- Shifting the Garden Stewards focus to do the listening and creative thinking to help us hear wants to emerge.
- Suspend the internship program for one year. Goal – to have more robust support for interns.
- Allow the Willow Center time to incorporate the program within the non-profit. The support that the non-profit (501 (c) 3) can bring are much broader and not possible within the G2T club (501 (c) 7). Washington State has now required that a contract must have at least more money or have your own employees...but that is possible in the non-profit.

Garden Steward Responsibilities – focus and direction on the long term goals

Fair amount of items that the Biogaian committee will need to tend to:

- Bare minimum – and really, really bare minimum what absolutely needs to happen.
 - Compost – Holly & Sylvan are willing to help
 - Make sure all the beds are covered – either by bags or cover crop – a few crops will be planted in the SE quadrant tomatoes, green beans, kale, lettuce, and strawberries stewarded by individuals.
 - Might be able to net some trees.
 - Rabbits will proliferate and Paul is returning
 - Irrigation will still be needed
 - Handful of perennials – Helen will uncover the Dahlias
 - Keyhole – Laura will need occasional wheelbarrow help
 - Mustard and kales will continue to grow
 - Comfrey dock and buttercup will need some tending
 - Tools will wear and rust, it would be good to have them organized
 - Dry farm?
 - Volunteers who contact us

- Shopper review and harvest for cooks

Budget: Have about \$4,000 in the regular budget, \$600 intern budget and some NRCS grant,

Are weekend seminars an option? Way to engage volunteers.

Thomas would like to prime the community with information about social dreaming.

How are you feeling? How is this landing in your body?

- Thomas – excited about new possibilities
- MD – like the plan, especially because more time and intentional reflection and action is one of my values – to slow down and consider. Great opportunity to summon community energy again.
- Eileen – don't know where I can contribute.
- Patricia – excited about what might emerge
- Kendall – excited about the improvements that could come out of this – when you step back and let things fall apart a bit you get clarity on what is important. Sad that they might not be here at all this summer. Maybe will come back.
- Holly – volunteers and budget stuff – happy to help with volunteers
- Fen – wholeheartedly support time for rest and reflection
- Marlin – from fallowness comes fruitfulness
- Reuben – excitement about more community engagement possibilities and excited about the Willow Center and the possibilities that lie there. Good to take a pause – times are urgent, we must slow down.
- Sylvan – grief but also grief is a way to clear old things out and make way for new things, especially in the realm of doing things in totally new ways. We can evaluate the ways we have been doing things and if we want to continue.
- Ka – don't forget that you are amazing. Collective you are amazing squared.

Tek Mil next step – form of constructive criticism. Create safe containers for healthy conflict.

Part 1 – specific topic and two facilitators – go around the room and speak self criticism and direct criticism. Focus on 2025 labor coordinating – MD's work last year.

Part 2 – the facilitators might get together and look at what was brought up and what to do.

MD can personally follow-up with people who had criticisms.

Between now and next meeting convene a subcommittee to think through this coming year's work. MD will call the subgroup. Holly, Patricia, Anita and Helen.

MD will send out a zine about Tek Mil.

Brent will organize getting a truck full of bags for the garden.

Next Meeting March 24

Patricia – facilitator

Helen – notetaker

Next Meeting Agenda topics:

- Debrief community meeting
- Fertilizer
- Compost bin finishing

Talking Points – Soil Building Year

Soil-Building Year Starting Points for Biogaian and Garden to Table Club officer meetings
For the past several weeks, the Garden Leadership Team (Helen, Laura, Patricia, Brian, Diane, and Anita) have been talking about the vision for the garden in 2026, in light of several important observations the last few years:

- We have been running this educational garden program for 15 years
 - it is an appropriate time for us to pause, re-evaluate and imagine what wants to emerge now.
 - In many agricultural systems, a “fallow” year is a recognized soil-tending practice
 - Educational systems have a similar creativity-tending practice “sabbatical” to enhance learning.

- The yield of our land has been going down every year.
 - While fruit yields have been increasing, vegetable yields have gone down year over year. (see chart below)
 - Something is happening with the garden’s health. We need to better understand why, in order to know what we need to do.
 - We feel now is the time to do something about it before more drastic changes appear.

- More interns are experiencing mental health challenges during the program.
 - The number and intensity of intern personal crises that the Garden Leadership team has experienced the past two years has been markedly different,
 - Last year, a focused redesign of the intern selection process, including intern recruiting, screening, and interviewing did not make a marked difference.
- The overall sustainability of the Garden Steward position’s role and responsibilities have increased
 - As community participation in gardening has decreased over the years, the Garden Steward role has picked up
 - The workload of running both garden production and the internship program has intensified as interns’ issues have increased

- The physical capacities of the core garden crew (Anita, Helen, and Laura) has been changing.
 - Anita has been experiencing a combination of PMDD and autistic burnout. We will be having a community circle in April, where we can learn more about the experience of neurodiverse people, including Anita.
 - Helen and Laura, who are at the heart of the daily garden crew, are feeling their physical capacities changing. They cannot sustain the same level of involvement as in the past.

Therefore, garden leadership team has been working on a plan for a “Soil-Building Year” that will focus on structural elements to increase soil fertility and organizational sustainability. Key changes for 2026 include:

- Move the Garden Steward position to the Willow Center

- Much like a condominium association was not the best structure to house a food program, the Garden to Table social club is not the best structure to handle an educational program like our regenerative garden internship.
- As a 501c3, the Willow Center is positioned to better hire and support employees. (501c7 social club → 501c3 education nonprofit)
- The Garden to Table club would pay the Willow Center for the educational program rather than an individual.
- Suspend the internship program
- We need to get clearer on how to best support overall intern well-being.
- We want the Garden Steward role to be supported to focus more on garden and educational outcomes, than intern mental health.
- We will be working with Willow Center on the re-imagining of the internship program under the Willow Center.

- Shift Garden Steward’s responsibilities to focus on this year’s overarching goal: the long-term health and yield of the garden and food for the community. Pools of activity include:
 - Enhancing garden soil structure to increase fertility
 - Continuing some production in a few key produce beds (leafy greens, tomatoes, beans)
 - Sharing and incorporating knowledge and connections cultivated over several years via [didn’t catch the names of the related courses for professional dev]
 - Working with Diane and Willow Center on re-imagining of internship and possible community apprenticeship program, to support the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.
 - Collaborating with Patricia on engaging the community and the land in deep listening—with our whole hearts, bodies, mind, and intuition—to what wants to emerge in the garden and garden program

Financial implications

- The soil-building will refocus how we will spend existing Garden to Table and Biogaian’s garden budget allocations. No additional funds from members are being requested.
- Reduced yield from the vegetable garden may have an impact on food costs in late summer and fall.
- Without the need to feed interns, we will likely recoup some of these costs.

○ Regular quarterly reports to the community will allow us to closely track whatever impact there may be, and make appropriate changes as needed.

● Regardless of soil-building year, in general, food costs are unpredictable and affected by a variety of factors.

○ Our current budget has a contingency fund that we regularly use to manage food cost unpredictability.

○ We have built up an additional cash fund (~\$7k) over the past two years, which is about \$3000 more than we need for regular bill paying, and was intended for food cost contingencies.

