Both are farming methods which contrast drastically with the conventional, chemical agriculture so common today.

They attempt to build up the soil's humus content, and rely on biological activity for fertility and pest control. The use of toxic chemicals, whether insecticides, herbicides, or fertilizers, is strictly forbidden. Their differences are not as numerous as their similarities.

Everything we do on our biodynamic farm allows us to be certified organic, but the reverse is not true. Biodynamics has stricter rules on what can be used, and also has further requirements that organics doesn't. The restrictions are in regards to soil fertility, pest control, and cultural techniques. The requirement are the use of homeopathic preparations made from herbs and animal organs.

How a farm maintains soil fertility is at the heart of the agricultural question. A biodynamic farm is ideally self-contained, having the proper amount of land with livestock on it, so that excess fertility is available for other crops. All the feed for the animals is grown on the farm. The only inputs allowed are ground rock powders such as limestone, granite meal, or rock phosphate to help remineralize the soil. Compost is made from materials found on the far. As a remedy to help rebuild worn out farmland, a limited amount of a neighbor's beef cattle manure can be allowed, provided it's free of chemicals and will-composted before it's used.

Organic farms also use manure and compost, but it doesn't have to be generated from the farm. They do not have to raise livestock like a biodynamic farm does. The manure can come from commercial animal operations such as chicken factory farms, large scale confinement feed lots, or modern dairy farms. These places use growth hormones, antibiotics, and other practices biodynamics doesn't allow or support.

An organic farm can use fish emulsion, cottonseed meal, potassium sulfate, calcium nitrate, and other fertilizers in limited amounts. The fish are of unknown origin, cotton is highly sprayed, and water soluble fertilizers hurt soil microorganisms. But all of these are better than what commercial agriculture uses.

For insect control, organics permits insecticides such as Rotenone, Pyrethrin, sops, oils, and other non-synthetic but deterrents. Again, these are certainly less toxic than what else is available, but biodynamics simply doesn't do anything against bugs. We rely on a rich humus soil growing healthy plants which don't attract excess insect damage.

Plastic is not used much on a biodynamic farm, although we have grown melons on it. We have no greenhouse and don't irrigate; we grow in-season produce and use the water nature provides. Large scale organic farms often use plastic mulch and irrigation.

Traditionally, farmers relied on the manure from animals to keep their fields fertile. Biodynamics, introduced in 1924, articulates the need to use compost and manure from within the farm itself. The organic movement sprung forward with the writings of Albert Howard, Robert Rodale and others, who also spoke out against chemical agriculture.

After the recent surge in demand for organic food, a new type of organic farming appeared, one that relies on off-farm inputs. It is disheartening to see the desire for organic food drive the industry to lower its standards.

Food, like wine, has a sense or taste of the place where it's grown, especially when the soil is full of humus. To meet the widespread need for nutrient, flavor, and energy rich food will require a nation of small, self-sufficient farms which depend upon their own resources to maintain fertility.

That what a farm can export must be generated from within the farm itself seems to be the main difference between modern organic agriculture and the original model of biodynamics.