Written by Jeff Poppen
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The Southeast Biodynamic Association was formed after our first annual conference in 1987. Realizing the value of shared experiences and observations, we agreed to gather together regularly, we think we are celebrating our silver anniversary, but our accounting may be off. Harvey Lisle called us the rebels, and insisted we hold our own conference. He had been involved with biodynamics since 1950, and was referring to the independent nature of Hugh Lovel, Hugh Courtney and me, who all lived in the south. Harvey's own open-mindedness, mirth and spirituality certainly guided our group, and he never missed a conference and the opportunity to spring forth new ideas. Hugh Lovel hosted the first nine conferences in Blairsville, Georgia. Each year Hugh Courtney would focus on one of the nine preparations and we learned hands on how to make them. There were other lectures and workshops, and we did not shy away from controversial subjects. Waldorf teachers, Anthroposophical doctors and many other students of Rudolf Steiner kept a lively flow of conversations going. From the very start we agreed on one thing, we had to be on a farm eating our own food. We understand that the bridge between thinking and activity required proper nutrition. It would do no good to offer education without biodynamic farm and food to feel the difference and inspire commitment. Every August I loaded up the pickup truck with melons tomatoes and whatever else Hugh didn't grow, and made the trip to Georgia. Everything from the breads and beans to the meat and diary was grown on our farms, and the meals were stellar. A festival atmosphere was created, mimicking the words used in the agriculture course regarding their conference. Children playing added to the merriment, and the music and bonfires and eventually a talent show all became as important as the lectures, and the food kept getting better as our soils improved. Forming our association on the last day of our first conference, we agreed on a few principals. The Southeast Biodynamic Association was open to all and required no dues. The conference fee of $100 (which is still the same 25 years later) would be waived if need be. You become a member by attending the party. We organized it using ideas gained from the three-fold social order. On the one hand, free reign was given to spiritual ideas with no strings attached. To do this we use no money, no staff, no newsletter and no rules. On the other hand we promote biodynamics through economics, by creating profitable, model farms. For example, by our farm being Demeter certified for 12 years, the word biodynamic appeared on grocery store shelves all over Tennessee. The many interns from our farms also spread the word, and several now have their own farms and gardens and apprenticeship programs. By 1995 we are hosting the conferences here in Red Boiling Springs. Our association accepts no grants or money, with one exception. The National Biodynamic Association helps us to bring in a lecturer most years. In 2005 we hosted the National Conference, and many folks commented that it was special to be on a farm rather than at a hotel. So here were are 25 years later, celebrating our 25th Southeast Biodynamic Conference. But I think it'd actually our 26th. Were lucky we don't have accounting to deal with. The word conference has been changed to celebration, and the 150 attending members will no doubt do their best to add to t he festivities. The feeling we have as we go into our 25th (or is it 26th?) year is more of a family reunion. For more info about the conference this weekend can be found at barefootfarmer.com