

"A farm needs cattle," Dad informed us. It was 1974, and we'd just settled into our new (old) Tennessee homestead, which had obviously revolved around livestock. Dad had experienced the deterioration of the soil, and the local rural economy, in the Midwest during the previous decades, and attributed this to the removal of livestock from cropland. Nitrogen from cow manure or clover was not the same as nitrogen from a bag. Cattle and the crops they graze can improve the soil's humus content, and manure is the best fertilizer (except for the proverbial farmer's own footsteps). So we got a herd and spent the next 35 years chasing them back into the pastures. They were trying to teach me rotational grazing. The cattle stayed even though we became vegetarians and didn't make money on them. But the composts we made from our own cows were noticeably superior to what I made from the neighbor's. It seemed to break down quicker and more completely. We wanted to grow all our own food, so we needed cows. The domestication of cattle and the rise of civilization go hand in hand because a cow can produce more manure than her own feed crops require.

The young farmers received more fatherly wisdom, "Don't buy anything. Find or grow what you need on the farm." This was easy to follow given our income level back then. I was immediately endeared to Rudolf Steiner's Agriculture course when I recognized similar advice.

"Whatever you need for agricultural production, you should try to possess it within the farm itself (including in the "farm", needless to say, the due amount of cattle). A thoroughly healthy farm should be able to produce within itself all that it needs."

Around 35 cows and calves live on 100 acres here, which are divided into smaller paddocks and interspersed with 150 acres of woods. Eventually I realized that farming income does not come from livestock, but from the use of their excess fertility. Compost piles are built where I feed the hay out in winter, and are used to grow about six acres of vegetables one year later. I've found Steiner's guiding lines, given in 1924, extremely useful. Farming articles written before then fascinated me, I was impressed with the quantities of manure they used. It was not uncommon for market gardeners to spread 50-75 tons of rotted manure and bedding per acre per year. We've had good luck with lesser amounts, using Steiner's instructions. After introducing the horn manure preparation, he gave the following caveat.

"You must remember that the cowhorn manuring is not intended as a complete substitute for ordinary manuring. You should go on manuring as before. The new method should be regarded as a kind of extra, largely enhancing the effect of the manuring hitherto applied. The latter should continue as before."