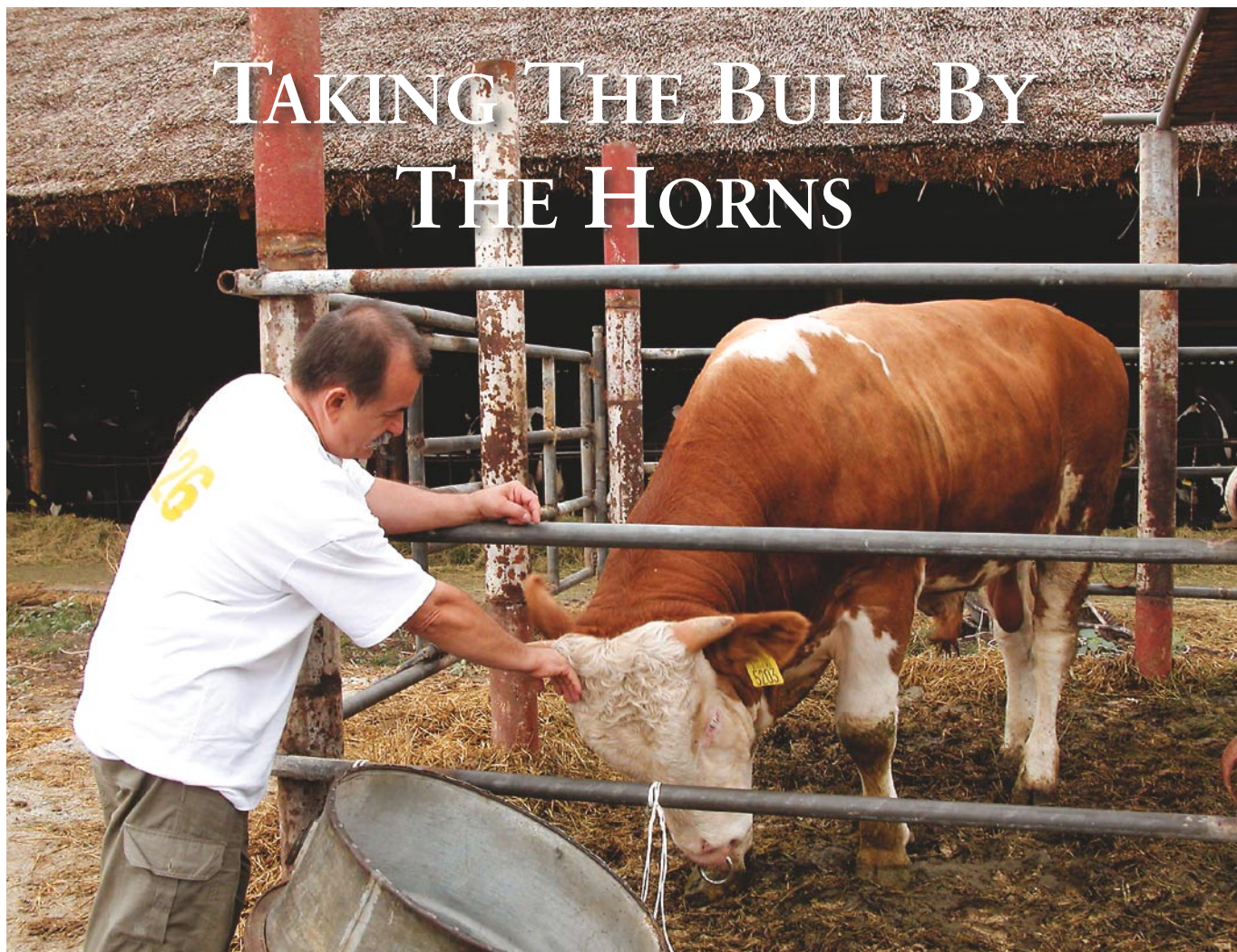


TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS



This summer Hildur Jackson visited a remarkable Hungarian project near Budapest pioneered by people who have held a vision for 15 years and are just about to see it come to fruition.

When the Russians were still ruling Eastern Europe, a young Hungarian, Géza Varga, studied organic farming in Lund in Sweden. Here he was introduced to the alternative health movement and the Scandinavian Folk High Schools† and was inspired to return to his native land and create a project which combined an alternative health clinic, a Folk High School, an organic farm and an ecovillage.

He found a site 40 minutes outside Budapest in beautiful surroundings with hot geothermal water far below the ground (important for the health clinic even if it was very expensive to reach) and a lake. A stream called the Galga runs through the nearby village of 2,000 people.

FOLK HIGH SCHOOL & THE FARM

In 1988, Géza founded a Folk High School where health care and ecology was taught to local people. This was also where Géza and his partner, Katalin Orosz, met. Kati is a psychologist practising in Budapest. She writes articles and books and has a weekly TV program on natural health. Together with 15 other people, they are spearheading the development of a land-based ecovillage.

During the Russian occupation there were two NGOs in Hungary – one for the blind and the Red Cross. In 1992, one year after the liberation, there were 15,000. One of them was the Folk High School, another was the Gaia Foundation, founded to build the ecovillage and health centre, and the third was Galgafarm Association itself, which includes 300

hectares (740 acres) of farmland. Kati also started a Hungarian Transpersonal Society and a cancer organisation. These are very dynamic people and this was a time of great opportunity. The authorities had not yet created all the rules and regulations and this made it easier to create new projects than it is today.

Above: Géza and Hungarian bull in front of 56 cows in open free-range stable covered with straw.

† *Folk High Schools are a type of adult education originally pioneered in Denmark. The idea is to stimulate the intellectual life of young people, generally between 18-25 years old, and provide vocational training with special courses, including agriculture.*



Top:
Géza Varga,
Imre Killian
from Gyurufy
and Ross
Jackson at
the ecovillage
building site.

Géza tells me more about the farm, “Here eight hectares produce one workplace, whereas the kolhos (the former collective farm) needed 100 hectares to produce just one workplace.” The farm is open every second Sunday to the public. As we pass the cows in an open barn he explains, “We cannot let them out as there is no grass due to this summer’s drought.” A new young Hungarian breed of bull is enclosed in a small pen. He will create off-spring for both milk and meat. “A bull is much cheaper than using artificial insemination. In fact only half the cost,” explains Géza.

Centre:
Geza, Ross
and Imre at
machines and
bottles for
producing
marmalade.

The idea of the farm was to earn money from the produce to build an ecovillage, but it has been difficult. In the farm building we see two big heaps of grain: one wheat and the other spelt. “This year, the three month drought has reduced the harvest to a disastrous 30% of normal yield. This room used to be filled up with grain. The spelt has lower yield, but a much higher protein content. Half of it disappears when the shells are taken off in this machine.”



Opposite:
Model of the
ecovillage.

ADDING VALUE BY ENTERPRISE

Géza’s house itself has been expanded into an education centre which is also used as a hotel and restaurant. When we arrive, a wedding with 200 guests creates a festive atmosphere. The centre

Below:
The Gaia Hotel,
40 minutes from
Budapest.

Galgafarm Co-operative itself has been owned since 1992 by 100 people from the nearby village. The 300 hectares are actually more than was needed by this group and 30 people currently get their income from the farm and its products. The first years were spent developing the organic farm and establishing a group of interested people around all the projects.

When Géza showed my husband, Ross, and I around the farm he explained that the goal was to try and process products locally. Consequently, few unfinished raw materials are sold from the farm and they always try to add value first. There are many independent activities: growing crops like wheat, spelt, corn, rye, and alfalfa; a herd of 56 milking cows; a milk processing unit that produces cheeses; a bottling plant for fruit and vegetables to be processed into marmalade, jam and other products using lactose preservation (a very old tradition here); and a bakery and making pasta.





can accommodate 36 people and has a big seminar room with modern facilities. The restaurant is contracted out to a professional chef.


All together they have built up the value of the different enterprises to one million Euros over and above the value of the land. Despite drought, the community is now ready to build their ecovillage.

Géza takes us to the site of the future ecovillage where a mud brick construction workshop has just been completed. They have also built a long road to the site and a well and they can now even sell fresh spring water. The foundation has been laid for the solar/biomass heating system and next spring the community house and the first eight dwellings will be built. The

total project will eventually comprise 50 houses, a church in the middle of the village next to a community house, 10 youth houses for rent, and a recreation centre. They specifically want it to look much like an ordinary village in contrast to Gyurufy, the other big Hungarian ecovillage project 200km (124 miles) away.

Ross and I gave a slide show and talk about ecovillages and the world economic system. Many of the people who came were future inhabitants of the ecovillage. They said that seeing the slides from around the world will give them energy for a whole year.

Building an ecovillage is never easy. The turbulence in Hungary and a lack of ready capital has not made it any easier. A lot of people now just want the

consumer goods of Western Europe and so the project swims against the tide of the emerging mainstream culture. But the vision and perseverance of Géza and Kati is impressive. They have not swayed from their goal for 15 years. They will soon be able to show this project to the international community as a wonderful model 

CONTACT

Géza Varga, Gaia Ecological & Rural Development Foundation, H-2193 Galgahévíz, Foút 83, Hungary.

Tel: + 36 30 921 99 52

Fax: + 36 28 460 014

Email: gaia@zpok.hu

Web: www.gaiaalapitvany.hu (at the moment available only in Hungarian)

We are open to people from all around the world who want to stay for a few months, years or whatever, and who want to be part of our group in the creation of the most wonderful ecovillage of our region.

Hildur and Ross Jackson founded the Gaia Trust in 1987, a Danish charity whose objective is to promote a global consciousness that experiences the whole planet as a living organism of which human beings are a part of the whole. They pioneered the Global Ecovillage Network, an alliance of ecovillage projects all over the world and are engaged in developing new paradigms which create a sustainable and just society.

Hildur edited Creating Harmony – Conflict Resolution in Community and co-authored Ecovillage Living – Restoring the Earth and Her People with Karen Svensson (both available from Permaculture Magazine's Earth Repair Catalogue).

GÉZA VARGA



Géza and Kati

In September 2003, Géza Varga toured the US with 10 other agricultural experts from all over the world visiting different farms. The tour, organised and paid for by Via Campesini, a global organisation of small farmers, was filmed and will contribute to the debate on the sustainability of US farming. He participated in the WTO meeting in Mexico for Via Campesini to try to defend the interest of small farmers and of poor countries. He is an internationally recognized expert on organic farming and an adviser to the EU. Next spring Galgafarm will host a three week course in ecovillage design.