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VBMA Student Scholarship

My first influential experience with herbal medicine began when I started working on a Biodynamic dairy farm in the Hudson Valley of New York, Hawthorne Valley Farm. Biodynamic farming is based on the philosophies of Rudolf Steiner and employs herbal medicine to treat humans, their animals, and the soil on which they grow. In May, the whole farm crew would collect blossoming dandelions to use in a biodynamic preparation that, when spread on the soil at a certain time of year, intended to sensitize the soil to cosmic forces. While this was a more esoteric application of herbal medicine, I also had very tangible experiences.

As a farm crew we also harvested nettles together. We would put on gloves and wore long pants and sleeves, and go out to a large patch of nettles to harvest as much as we could. Some of this was used for a biodynamic preparation but most of it was used as medicine for our cows. The nettles were hung in the hay loft to dry and during the winter months, the herdsman would add bundles to the grinder each time he would prepare their grain. Dairy cows are under constant metabolic stress that is exacerbated in the winter time when they don't have access to fresh feed. This supplementation was intended to strengthen their immune systems, tonify their bodies, and provide vitamins and minerals they were lacking. I was inspired by every aspect of this effort: the community involvement, the resourcefulness, and the attention to the immune system of the cows. This method of seasonal mass treatment of dairy cows with foraged plants is something that I want to bring to my practice when I become a veterinarian.

The same herdsman also introduced me to the use of yarrow and goldenseal to heal wounds. When the cows would get udder rot or abscesses, we would mix together one part goldenseal powder to ten parts yarrow powder and pack that into wounds. I learned that the goldenseal was used to prevent infection because of its antimicrobial properties and that yarrow helped with tissue healing. The wounds healed rapidly and successfully, keeping at bay nasty infections and the use of conventional antibiotics.

Hawthorne Valley Farm was also where I learned about homeopathic medicine, which I would use almost daily on the farm. We would use it to treat cows with mastitis, calves with diarrhea, and animals that just weren't doing right. I enjoyed the process of matching a remedy with the ailment, it enabled me to delve deep into the character of the animal and the character of their disease.

After Hawthorne Valley, I became a herdsman at a small dairy that was transitioning to organic and grass fed. With the shift in diet and management some cows thrived while others faced significant health problems. Because many of these problems were unique to this transition, our veterinarians were not always able to find solutions that met the organic requirements. This led me to do my own research about organic veterinary care. In addition to remedies I had previously learned I also employed herbal tinctures and essential oils. In addition to homeopathics for our mastitis protocol, we used a homemade garlic tincture as well as oregano oil. I became very focused on the health care of the animals and this led me to the decision to apply to veterinary school.

Herbal medicine was my introduction to veterinary medicine and it is what drove me to become a veterinarian. I am excited about using herbal medicine when I am in practice. I want to implement herd wide herbal protocols for organic farms I work with and learn more about

using herbs in acute situations. I appreciate herbal medicine because of its versatility and how it offers an alternative and effective option to hormones, antibiotics, and steroids. I am looking forward to learning more.