COW PROTE

Representatives from Hare Kṛṣṇa farms meet to discuss their progress in fulfilling Śrīla Prabhupāda's vision of self-sufficiency.

by Chāyā Devī Dāsī

Trilokātma Dāsa

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"Jiva, *dijo*! Jiva, *chehi*!"

JIVA THE OX hears the commands of Balabhadra Dāsa, moves forward, and then turns to the left. After several repetitions of these commands, Balabhadra takes Jiva to his stall, where he gently brushes and gently talks to him. Jiva's partner, Dharma, is standing in the adjoining stall, waiting for his turn to show what he remembers from his previous lesson.

Jiva and Dharma are a pair of three-year-old Jersey oxen at Krišnův Dvůr, the Hare Kṛṣṇa farm in the Czech Republic. Balabhadra Dāsa is ISKCON's global minister for cow protection and agriculture. Premadhatta Dāsa, Jiva and Dharma's teamster, was learning by watching Balabhadra train Jiva and Dharma to basic voice commands. Sweet, handsome, and gentle, Jiva and Dharma are to be the farm's next working ox team. They are part of a herd of fourteen protected

CTION *in Europe*

Ādi Rādhikā Devi Dāsi (far left) pets the ox Thakurji at New Vraja-dhāma, the Hare Kṛṣṇa farm in Hungary. At left: the oxen of Bhaktivedanta Manor in England.

cows living at Krišnův Dvůr.

Varṇāśrama Dāsa, president of Krišnův Dvůr, and his wife Padmamukhī Dāsī introduced us to Rasalila and Tungi—cows that give milk but have never given birth to a calf, seemingly defying the laws of nature. Because of her hip problems, the devotees never bred Rasalila, but she has been giving milk for ten years. Tungi just started giving milk before our visit. Premadhatta heard her mooing loudly in the pasture and rushed to her. Her milk bag was full, and she obviously wanted someone to milk her to relieve the pressure. Lifetime cow protection creates such peace and contentment in a cow that she can give milk without birthing.

It's inspiring to see cows protected in a country like the Czech Republic, so far from India, where cow protection originated. The

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The temple at Krišnův Dvůr (left and bottom left), in the Czech Republic, uses minimal electricity (generated by solar panels) and is heated with local wood. Below: Govindanandana Dāsa, head of the cow department at New Vraja-dhāma, drives the oxen Haladhara and Thakurji from the "cow palace" to the temple.

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credit goes to Śrīla Prabhupāda, who imparted Kṛṣṇa consciousness everywhere during his extensive travels.

ISKCON has several farms in Europe. At the first annual ISKCON EU Farm Conference, held last May, Hare Kṛṣṇa farmers attended from England, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Sweden, and Hungary. Even then, not all the cow protection farms in Europe were represented. Many of these devotee cowherds and farmers serve their farms in rural settings far from a bustling city temple. They perform their service with little recognition and applause, but their reward is in their service to the cows and the land and in living in a spiritual atmosphere, enjoying a peaceful, healthy life close to the land and the cows.

The conference, organized by Śyāmasundara Dāsa, ISKCON's European minister for cow protection and agriculture, was a first step toward increasing enthusiasm and support for cow-protection farms in Europe. In that attempt, it was a success, with the devotees leaving inspired and hopeful for the future.

Cows at the Manor

Śyāmasundara is the manager of the *goshalla* (cow sanctuary) at Bhaktivedanta Manor in England. Before we arrived in the Czech Republic at the Krišnův Dvůr farm, which hosted the conference, we stopped at Bhaktivedanta Manor.

"Bhima, get up! Bala, get up!"

Śyāmasundara Dāsa was taking us on a tour of the Manor grounds when down the lane came an ox-cart full of happy guests enjoying their open-air sightseeing tour. The rural charm of the bullock carts attracts guests to the Manor.

The oxen not only pull guest carts, but they also pull farm machinery in the Manor's fields.

In December 2007, the Royal Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), without permission from the devotees and against their expressed wishes, euthanized Gangotri, an ailing cow living at the Manor. The heart-wrenching event motivated the devotees of the Manor to approach the English government to recognize the practice of cow protection. The devotees are arguing the importance of the cow in India's culture and faith.

England's and India's views of the cow differ greatly. To the Western mind, the cow's importance is in supplying meat and milk. The

cow is a commercial commodity. To the Eastern mind, the cow is our mother, the bull our father. The cow gives milk—known as "the miracle food" when free of growth hormones and antibiotics. To produce this miracle food, the cow eats only grass. She takes so little from us and gives us so much, a true example of motherhood. The bull pulls the plow in the fields, preparing the soil for seeds that produce delicious vegetables and grains. Like a father, the bull is providing for us.

Both the cow and bull produce manure, which has been scientifically proven to contain numerous nutrients, good not only for the soil but for our health as well. Cow urine, often combined with herbs, cures many human ills and serves as a pesticide and herbicide. Cow dung is also used as fuel, by either burning it directly or processing it in biogas systems to make methane. The bull not only plows the fields, but he can power generators, sawmills, and other machines. Protecting cows makes sense, since the cow and bull provide our essential foods, as well as medicines, fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides, and ox-power.

The Western mind, however, has not yet opened to the many practical and spiritual benefits of the cow to human society.

The Moral Imperative Of Cow Protection

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.16.18) describes the following incident: "The personality of religious principles, Dharma, was wandering about in the form of a bull. And he met the personality of earth in the form of a cow who appeared to grieve like a mother who had lost her child. She had tears in her eyes, and the beauty of her body was lost. . . ."

Śrīla Prabhupāda comments:

> The bull is the emblem of the moral principle, and the cow is the representative of the earth. When the bull and the cow are in a joyful mood, it is to be understood that the people of the world are also in a joyful mood. The reason is that the bull helps production of grains in the agricultural field, and the cow delivers milk, the miracle of aggregate food values. The human society, therefore, maintains these two important animals very carefully so that they can wander everywhere in cheerfulness. But at the present moment in this age of Kali both the bull and the cow are now being slaughtered and eaten up as foodstuff by a class of men who do not know the brahminical culture. The bull and the cow can be protected for the good of all human society simply by the spreading of brahminical culture as the topmost perfection of all cultural affairs. By advancement of such culture, the morale of society is properly maintained, and so peace and prosperity are also attained without extraneous effort. When brahminical culture deteriorates, the cow and bull are mistreated. . . .

Aiming at Self-Sufficiency

Six of us arrived from England at the New Vraja-dhāma community. Besides me, in our group were Balabhadra Dāsa, Śyāmasundara Dāsa, Gaura Puruṣa Dāsa (Bhaktivedanta Manor farm supervisor), Katarina (cow milker, nurse for Gangotri), and Wenda Sehata (runs the Hugletts Wood Ahimsa Farm, a cow sanctuary in East Sussex,

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Gaura Śaktī Dāsa (above), president of New Vraja-dhāma, talks about garden production at Krišnův Dvůr. The EU Cow Conference seminars took place in the restaurant of the Krišnův Dvůr temple (far left). At left, Balabhadra Dāsa, Varṇāśrama Dāsa (president of Krišnův Dvůr), and his wife Padmamukhī Devī Dāsi talk about the cow Rasalila, who has never been impregnated but has been giving milk for ten years.

England). The New Vraja-dhāma temple sits on a rise, with the devotees' homes leading to the temple. Hosted at various devotees' homes, we lived without electricity, except for some of us who had solar power.

Balabhadra Dāsa gave the opening address at the conference. He spoke of ISKCON's need for a social structure to provide a haven from the outside world, a setting where devotees can live and raise their children peacefully so they too can be Kṛṣṇa conscious. Śrīla Prabhupāda envisioned such a social structure within farm life, or village life, with the cows and land providing all necessities. Our farm communities are therefore required, as they are the starting point for developing self-sufficiency.

In a 1974 letter, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote:

> Our farm projects are an extremely important part of our movement. We must become self-sufficient by growing our own grains and producing our own milk, then there will be no question of poverty. So develop these farm communities as far as possible. They should be developed as an ideal society depending on natural products not industry. Industry has simply created godlessness, because they think they can manufacture everything that they need. Our *Bhagavad-gītā* philosophy explains that men and animals must have food in order to maintain their bodies. And the production of food is dependent on the rain, and the rain of course is dependent on chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Therefore let everyone chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, eat nicely, and keep their bodies fit and healthy. This is ideal life style.

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As gas prices drive up the cost of food, and living in general, more people will see farms as the answer to an ever more difficult life. Instead of stretching the budget to buy the simplest foods, people can grow their own food, assured of fresh quality. Instead of traveling many gasoline-burning miles to work, they can work on the farm to provide their necessities. Instead of driving to the supermarket to buy milk full of growth hormones and antibiotics, they can milk their own naturally raised cow. Instead of breathing contaminated city air, they can breathe fresh air for a healthier life. On farms, material life is simplified, leaving time to contemplate the spiritual meaning of life.

In Mauritius, 1975, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Otherwise the idea which I am giving, you can start anywhere, anywhere, any part of the world. It doesn't matter. Locally you produce your own food. You get your own cloth. Have sufficient milk, vegetables. Then what more do you want? And chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. This is Vedic civilization: plain living, high thinking."

Of the ISKCON farms in Europe, New Vraja-dhāma is the most advanced in self-sufficiency. The conference included a tour of the New Vraja-dhāma operation, given by Gaura Śakti Dāsa, president of the farm community. From June through October, the community of 120 consumes only fresh produce from the farm, and during the winter months they are self-sufficient in grains and potatoes. The devotees recently built a winter storage unit with three chambers, each 150 feet by 20 feet. Two thousand fruit trees produce a variety of fruits, and eight devotees care for the five acres of vegetables. Five trained teams of oxen are active and perform most of the farm work.

"Haladhara, Thakur, *gaccha*! Haladhara, Thakur, *vama*!"

Ox handlers at New Vraja-dhāma use Sanskrit words for voice com-

mands. Antardhī Dāsa, a New Vraja-dhāma teamster, demonstrated his control over the young ox team with the help of voice commands. During our first-day tour, he showed a young team training, but the next day, we watched a fully trained mature ox team mow a field. The young team does light work. We saw them proudly pull a cartload of garbage.

The guided tours were an inspiration because they showed the possibilities for every ISKCON farm. Other farms also gave presentations. Varṇāśrama Dāsa talked about the successful flourmill business that helps support the Czech farm, where the devotees produce all their own flour from the grain they grow. They also sell some flour, and they make cookie *prasādam,* which they sell and distribute. Haladhara Dāsa, from the Cornwall farm project in England, gave a presentation on the Govardhan Whole Food business that helps support their project. Salad boxes, which cost little to produce, are profitable.

Eight devotees maintain the five-acre organic vegetable garden at New Vraja-dhāma (left). Below: products of New Vraja-dhāma's fields and garden.

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Besides food production, conference attendees discussed building methods and housing.

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Spiritual Importance

Balabhadra Dāsa and Śivarāma Swami, an ISKCON guru, governing body commissioner, and the spiritual leader of New Vraja-dhāma, spoke about the spiritual importance of farm projects. Śivarāma Swami said that to have cow protection one must have cow protectors and the cow protectors must be protected so they can protect the cows. To provide this protection and allow it to thrive, there is need for the social system of *varṇāśrama,* in which cow protection is an integral part. As explained by Balabhadra Dāsa, the entire cycle of preparing the land with the oxen, planting the seed, nurturing the plant, harvesting it, and then offering it to Rādhā-Śyāmasundara, the presiding deities at New Vraja-dhāma, is the perfec-

Varṇāśrama Dāsa (left) shows how to get the most efficiency from the ox-power mower. Antardhī Dāsa mows a field with trained oxen (far left) and trains young oxen in the barnyard (bottom left).

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tion of devotional life.

As we left Europe for our farm in the USA, we carried with us gifts of food for our trip. Cookies and baked goods from grains grown on the Krišnův Dvůr farm in Czech Republic, as well as preserved fruits and honey grown and produced at the New Vraja-dhāma farm in Hungary, were reminders of how healthy and delicious homegrown foods can be, especially in comparison to airplane dining.

We have some cookies left, and we're carefully rationing them. They're reminders of the European devotees who have seriously taken to heart Śrīla Prabhupāda's vision of Kṛṣṇa conscious simple living and high thinking—centered on the land, the cows, and Kṛṣṇa.

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