

A Bridge Builder On the Death of Rainer Bächli

By Stephan Stockmar (translated by Susan Geugis)
In: Die Drei 07/2010

„The only reliable quality assurance is based on individual responsibility“. This quotation taken from an interview with Rainer Bächli in DIE DREI 2004 is a life and work motto of the founder and for many years, the leader of the Institute of Marketecology (IMO), Weinfelden, Switzerland, a certification body which supports organic farming projects all over the world. This motto has now become his legacy for posterity: Rainer Bächli died on 10 June 2010. During a business trip to Georgia he was involved in a fatal car accident on the way to Tiflis Airport.

It was always a particular concern of Rainer Bächli to cultivate the land in such a way that it did not get into such a neglected state as he had witnessed while in America as an exchange student. “Agriculture is the result of the interaction between man and the land. ... It should be of such a nature that life will also be possible in the future. Agriculture is a cultural challenge.” It is only recently that he wrote this in a draft for a picture book that was intended for both adults and children alike. Rainer Bächli was, at the same time, convinced that man can only develop further through his relationship with others. For him, the prerequisite for the formation of such an association between man and the land was an inner freedom and autonomy which was essential for the development of personal responsibility. These two impulses were what he tried to realize in his life-work which was devoted to the building up of the organic movement.

Rainer Bächli was born in Zürich on July 31, 1948 where he and his two elder brothers grew up in an anthroposophical household. Even as a child he was thirsty for knowledge and freedom. When he was twelve years old he had his first contact with the world of high finance when he invested his very first earnings with an American bank that offered a high rate of interest, but then went bankrupt. After the USA experience mentioned earlier, he decided to become a farmer. He graduated in agricultural sciences at the ETH Zürich (The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) in 1974 and for the following two years worked together with his wife on one of the very first biodynamic farms, the Dottenfelderhof near Frankfurt am Main. For want of a farm of his own he went on to manage a health food shop in Zürich for a number of years, acquainting himself with the perspectives of both trader and customer.

Finally, he addressed the world of science and began his doctoral studies at the ETH Zürich. His research subject was Rudolf Steiner's ashing method; using the rice flour beetle, a pest in stored grains, as an example he investigated the effects of cosmic constellations on this method, successfully completing his research in 1985. This was the first scientific research with an anthroposophical background at the ETH and sparked off intensive discussions there. It also brought him into contact with many leading figures in biodynamic agriculture in Europe.

His work as director of the VSBLO, the forerunner of today's Bio-Suisse and as secretary of the Demeter Trademark Commission and of the Biodynamic Consumer Association in Switzerland marked the start of his innovative influence on structures in the field of organic farming and the organic movement as a whole. It was the start of the boom in the organic

movement and his energy and commitment resulted in the foundation of cooperatives for the debt-relief of farms; he developed associative forms of collaboration between producers, traders and consumers; he launched new marketing initiatives for Demeter-quality meat and milk; he worked on the advancement of research and guidance in organic agriculture and organized international conferences on organic tea production, sustainable forestry and organic textiles as well as holding the first Swiss Organic Trade Fair (ERDA) of which he was the founder.

To advance eco-friendly products and an alternative form of consumer behaviour, Rainer Bächli founded the non-profit “Bio-Stiftung” in 1989. It was his vision to build a bridge between the simple farmers in developing countries and the demands of the consumers in highly technical ones. A better understanding on both sides was what he wanted to achieve. The Institute for Marketecology (IMO), which Rainer Bächli and his wife, Elisabeth Rüegg built up together, began as a department of this foundation. In the twenty years of its existence the IMO has developed into an international group of companies with thirty subsidiaries. More than 350 associates support projects in 90 different countries. From its beginnings, the IMO focused on the control and certification of organic produce. Without the foresight and drive of Rainer Bächli, the IMO would not be the leading service provider in its field that it is today, nor would it be recognized worldwide as a highly qualified, independent certification body.

In the obituary of the IOM team we can read: “Rainer Bächli was a highly creative thinker whose approach to finding solutions to challenges was always unusual. With the founding of the IMO group in 2006, in which he brought together the different IMO companies worldwide in a holding, he created a corporate form, innovative not only in a business but also a social sense. His aim was to embrace the manifold cultural influences and peculiarities of the individual offices but at the same time to guarantee a uniform quality standard worldwide. The individual and his or her personal responsibility was always most important to Rainer Bächli. This conviction was reflected in the way he trusted his staff, whatever our age, religion or social background, and in the way he encouraged us all to make our individual contribution to the organic movement.”

Bächli’s whole way of thinking was deeply rooted in spiritual ideals which always directed his actions. His immense powers of comprehension enabled him to get an overview of a given situation and he worked on the fulfilment of his mission determinedly and with great presence of mind. His straightforward, uncompromising manner was definitely seen as a provocation by many. For example, he always questioned and criticized the increasing red tape attached to organic agriculture as stated in the interview mentioned above. “He never allowed his thoughts to be restricted by practical constraints or the ever-increasing lists of rules and regulations of the world of certification; with innovative ideas, he was always a step ahead of the sluggish bureaucracy” (Obituary IMO).

Rainer Bächli was convinced that organic agriculture needs new economic structures. The important thing for him was never just the product alone or the mere fulfilment of the need for healthy food; it was more, it was always about the ecological sustainability of the projects and above all about the people involved in the projects; it was important to provide those people living in the rural areas of developing countries with a source of income free from the constraints of monopolisation; it was important to give them a perspective for the future.

With this aim in mind, he also cooperated with other initiatives like, for example, in Afghanistan with the *Fairwild Foundation*, also based in Weinfelden; this organisation works

together with governments as well as with businesses in endeavouring to ensure that Fair Trade- and -sustainable criteria are implemented in the collection of and the trade with wild plants. In such projects, his interest and curiosity enabled him to come to a deep understanding of the respective culture thus transforming his work into a practical contribution to world peace.

Rainer Bächli trusted people and the knowledge that he was doing his work, there where he lived, filled one with a sense of security. He was warm and charismatic and had a fine sense of humour. His life-work, based on a deep, spiritual aspiration, fulfilled him completely and seldom left space or time for the private Rainer Bächli to appear. For more than 40 years he was a member of an anthroposophical group in Zürich collaborating on the development and formation of innovative work structures. It is with regard to this work and on his own explicit request, that his funeral was to be celebrated as his spiritual birth. He had already written the invitation in his will: "We will see each other again! And I hope that in the spiritual world I will receive new energy and impulses which will once more enable me to play a positive role in the further development of mankind."

Rainer Bächli was and is a bridge builder between the spiritual and material worlds precisely in the way Goethe understood it in his Fairy Tale.

To build such a bridge, the individual has to cultivate consciously his thoughts, feelings and will-forces as represented by the golden, the silver and the iron king in the Fairy Tale. With the gifts of the kings he acquires the ability to control these three soul forces that take on an existence of their own after crossing the threshold to the spiritual world, thus allowing the "mixed king" to stand down. It is through his power of thinking and his will power in particular that Rainer Bächli attained the abilities that will help him in the world which he has now entered to actively influence not only his own development but also the future development of the earth.

Information about Rainer Bächli and the Institute for Marketecology: www.imo.ch