

# The Cow

*The cow can be understood as a huge digestive organ. Her whole life is dedicated to dealing with her food. To a biodynamic farmer, the cow's true gift is not her milk, but her manure.*

The cow spends most of her time digesting her food. If she is not actually grazing, she is chewing her cud. If she's not chewing her cud, chances are, she's grazing. All day long she chews and chews and chews, peacefully gazing out into the world with a solemn and calm expression.

The cow is about four feet tall at the shoulder. From the top of her head to her tail is a long, straight line, a ridge of spine and neck. Her rounded sides bulge down and out from her spine, with juttied, pointed hips, a medium length thin neck and sloping, thin shoulders. For her height, her legs are fairly short and each ends in a hard, compact hoof.

The cow's head is triangular, with a wide, wet nose. Her eyes are large, still and placid, with long lashes. Her funnel-shaped ears stick out on either side of her head and, if she's lucky, she has a graceful crown of horns sweeping up toward the heavens. Every cow has differently shaped horns and if a farmer's herd is solid-colored, horn shape helps distinguish one cow from another.

The cow's tail is stiff and hard and ends in a long tassel of hair. Sometimes her tail is still, but more often it swishes rhythmically to and fro, keeping biting flies from her sides or tender belly.

Below her rounded belly, between her hind legs, is the cow's udder. Cows are mammals and, like all mammals, produce milk. But over many centuries farmers have bred cows to have very large udders which produce far more milk than a calf can drink. And so the cow gives us the gift of her wonderful milk.

The cow's coat is smooth, though in cold weather she can become quite furry. She is not especially soft, but if well kept, her coat can be glossy. Many cows are black and white; others come in various shades of brown or grey or are solid black.

As the cow regards us with her quiet eyes, she chews. Endlessly her jaw works sideways, grinding and re-grinding mouthfuls of hay or grass between her strong back teeth. If you open your jaws wide and look in the mirror, you will see your own wide, flat teeth way in the back of your mouth. Like the cow, you too have molars which you use to chew your food. But unlike you, the cow has no upper teeth in the front of her jaw. Nor does she have canine teeth at the side. Her main teeth are her huge, well developed molars which she uses to grind the hard grasses she feeds on all day long.

When the cow is turned out to graze after having spent the night in the cowshed or barn, the first thing she does is start to graze the grass (or hay if no grass is available). She spends several hours filling the first of her four stomachs with grass. Then she finds a place in the shade if it is a hot day or in the sun if the weather is cold, to lie down and digest her food. She lies upright, her back legs and udder swung to one side, her front legs awkwardly folded under her. Calmly she fixes her dreamily gaze to the distance, occasionally flicking an ear or her tail at a bothersome fly, always chewing, chewing, chewing, chewing.