

Living Energy Farm February 2011 Newsletter

It's an exciting time for Living Energy Farm. We are proud to announce that we have received an earmarked donation of \$10,000 to build our solar water system! Our water system will use a solar pump to draw water from a well. During the summer irrigation season, the water will then pass through residential buildings where it will absorb heat, thus cooling our living spaces. The water will then travel on to be distributed in durable drip irrigation systems to water our crops. This donation could not come at a better time for us, as we have many needs, and water is vital to all of them. We are very happy to moving forward with this aspect of our project!

Our Saturday work days continue to be productive and fun, attracting volunteers from all over the region to join our "regulars" from Acorn, Twin Oaks, and Charlottesville. In addition to our work days, Alexis and Jon have begun working on the land several days during the week, bringing out volunteers to clear land, work on the road, and build our pole barn (see below).

Preparation for the 2011 growing season has begun as well. We've secured seed growing contracts with Southern Exposure Seed Exchange and Baker Creek Seeds, and plan to grow seed crops including corn, squash, tomatoes, watermelons, cucumbers, sunflowers, peanuts, beans, and sorghum. In order to make our first growing season a success we are working hard to improve fertility and provide irrigation to our gardens. We are also recruiting Living Energy Farm interns who will concentrate on seed growing.

Pole Barn!



Jon, Edmund, Alexis and Jonathan raise the beam for the north side of the barn.

Thanks to the skill and enthusiasm of our volunteer workforce, Living Energy Farm is well on its way to its first outbuilding- a pole barn built almost entirely from materials harvested from our land. It will provide much needed tool and tractor storage, and an outdoor kitchen.

Pole barns are an old technique of building structures using unmilled timbers as the major structural element.

Because of the difficulties in bringing large amounts of materials onto our site, as well as our limited budget and lack of electrical power, this design made the most sense for us. The only materials we purchased for this structure were nails,



June secures roof rafters while Jonathan and Debbie put up bracing.

sheet metal for the roof, and a small amount of concrete for the pillars.

To build our barn we harvested cedar, pine, and poplar posts from our land, cut them to the proper size using cross-cut saws, stripped the bark using a barking spud and draw knife, and cut notches using an ax and adz. We pre-drilled posts using a brace and bit hand drill. Volunteers got a lesson in proper use of these old-time hand tools, which all took some time and attention in order to use properly. But for those of us with experience using only power tools (or no construction experience at all), building such a structure without fossil fuels or expensive materials was both educational and empowering.

Spring Workshops



The Living Energy Farm is proud to sponsor a series of workshops to take place this spring. The first will be a fruit grafting and propagation all day intensive on April 23 at Woodfolk House in Charlottesville. This workshop will be an overview of growing fruit and nuts in Virginia without pesticides and fungicides. Participants will learn which fruit trees can be grown from seed, which can be rooted, and which must be grafted. Participants will then learn techniques for preparing fruit tree seeds for planting, rooting fruiting plants, and grafting. Each participant will take home two fruit trees that they graft themselves. Rootstock and scions (grafting wood) will be provided.

The second workshop will be an introduction to training and driving oxen to take place May 14 at Living Energy Farm in Louisa. This workshop will be taught by Luke Conner, a local oxen trainer with nineteen years' experience working and showing teams. Participants will learn about the history and context of using oxen for draft on the farm, raising and training young teams, building yokes, and working a mature team.



Jon training Lojki and Fiddle.

Participants will have the opportunity to work with Living Energy Farm's eight month old team, Lojki and Fiddle, as well as Luke's four year old team, Calvin and Hobbes.

Living Energy Farm is also organizing a workshop on solar cookers to take place this spring or summer. Date and location TBA.

We are still seeking donations of building materials, farm tools, and funds. For more information regarding our workshops, or to join our mailing list, see our website at livingenergyfarm.org, contact Living Energy Farm at livingenergyfarm@gmail.com or 434 409 6006.