

## Living Energy Farm

### May- June 2013 Newsletter

Welcome, Keith and Rachel!

Living Energy Farm is very pleased to welcome Rachel and Keith as interns for the 2013 growing season. Rachel and Keith arrived in early May, joining Carrie and Nina to complete our excellent crew. Rachel comes to us from Cambridge Massachusetts, where she recently left a job at a law office to get a taste for farm work and community life. Rachel is interested in learning to grow food and in expanding her building skills; and while she warned us that she is a complete novice to tool use, she has taken quite easily to the hard work of construction.

Keith is also originally from the Boston area, but he has been traveling for the past few years, working on an organic bean farm in Indiana and on natural building projects in Ecuador. Keith is an enthusiastic worker who brings a welcome burst of energy to any project he takes on, from field work to construction to cooking.

#### Seed Growing and Sweet Potatoes

Thanks to our intern crew, the planting season at Living Energy Farm is moving along right on schedule. This is despite all the challenges mother nature has thrown at us this year, from late frost to floods to insect pests. This year our seed grow-outs include a beautiful multicolored dent corn called Daymon Morgan's Kentucky Butcher, a unique watermelon called Amish Moon and Stars, and an edible, long and skinny "snake" *Amish Moon and Stars Watermelon* gourd. We're also growing a large amount of okra for seed this year, which means if you come out for a work day in late summer be sure to wear long sleeves- picking okra can be scratchy work!



Non-coincidentally, seed planting season comes at the same time as the busy harvest and shipping season for our other business, selling sweet potato slips through Southern Exposure Seed Exchange. Sweet potatoes are propagated by spouting specially chosen seed potatoes in the early spring. The sprouts or "slips" can be cut off the seed potato and planted directly into the ground, where they grow roots and become a new sweet potato plant. Last year, we grew the seed sweet potatoes at LEF. This spring, Sean grew the slips at Acorn community, and the whole crew pitched in to cut, bundle, and ship slips to our customers.



*Valerie, Carrie, Sean, Keith and Rachel packing sweet potato slips.*

This year and last, LEF has been selling slips to Southern Exposure and been paid for our labor, but the business itself has been owned by SESE. Over the next few years we plan to transition the business to LEF, as we take on the customer service and all the order fulfillment. The slips will continue to be marketed through Southern Exposure, but this arrangement will allow us to increase our dollar per hour as well as expand the business itself. We're excited to be expanding our involvement with this business as growing sweet potatoes becomes more and more popular- as it should

be, as sweet potatoes are delicious, and fun and easy to grow!

## Wood Gasifiers- the Other Biofuel

When he's not fixing the road, building the house or keeping fruit trees alive, Alexis spends his free time working on our wood gasifier, which is getting close to being operational. Wood gas is an old technology which allows any gasoline engine to be run off of biomass, usually small chunks of wood. The biomass is burned under conditions of limited oxygen to produce gas (mostly carbon monoxide) that will ignite in a gasoline burning engine. Wood gas was widely used in Europe during World War 2 as a response to fossil fuel rationing. It is still used in rural parts of China, Russia and North Korea.

At Living Energy Farm we have chosen to use wood gas over other forms of biofuel because fuels such as biodiesel and ethanol compete with humans or animals for food, and have already contributed to rising food prices and to the deforestation related to the expansion of biofuel crop production. There is no such thing as "waste" oil- various industrial products depend on recycled vegetable oil, and taking oil from the waste stream only results on more oil being produced to take its place. Wood gas does not compete with humans or animals for food. This is not to say wood gas does not have the capacity to be abused- we could easily deforest the country if we attempted to run all our cars and trucks on wood gas. This is why we do not plan to use wood gas for every day transportation, but only for the heavy tractor work necessary to run a farm.

## Pedro Makes Gas!

In a quick update to the last newsletter, our biogas digester (who we affectionately call "Pedro") has produced some flammable gas! This is after three weeks of feeding with food scraps and cow manure. Usually the first gas



*Alexis lights some gas from Pedro*

produced is carbon dioxide, which is not flammable. The gas Pedro produced first seems to be a mix of carbon dioxide and methane. The gas should turn into mostly methane as the digestion process matures. Soon we'll be hooking it up to a gas range to test the cooking capacity of the gas. We're already looking forward to retiring our wood burning cook stove.

### Workshops for Summer 2013

On July 20th our construction manager, Nina, will be teaching an introduction to construction specifically for women. Nina will cover a number of elementary construction concepts, including the basics of accurate measuring, marking, and layout. The workshop will also include tutorials on several hand tools and power tools.

Later in the summer, Living Energy Farm will teaming up with Southern Exposure Seed Exchange to host two workshops on seed saving. The first will take place on August 24th and will concentrate on saving seed from tomatoes, peppers, squash, and melons. The second will take place September 21st and focus more on dry processed seed such as corn and okra. Both will be comprehensive overviews of the political and practical reasons to save your own seed; growing vegetables for seed; and processing, cleaning, and storing your seed.

All of our workshops take place on Saturday afternoons from 1-5pm following a work day from 9am-noon. A potluck lunch will be served at noon, please bring food to share. We ask for a \$25 donation in exchange for attending our workshops, although donations of labor, tools or other goods are also gladly accepted. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

What workshops would *you* like LEF to offer? In the past, we've offered workshops on a wide variety of topics related to agriculture, green building and renewable energy. If you're interested in learning about one of these topics, please respond to our recent workshop survey. If you're not on our local mailing list but you'd like a copy of the survey, send us an e-mail at [livingenergyfarm@gmail.com](mailto:livingenergyfarm@gmail.com).

*Living Energy Farm is a project to build a demonstration farm, community, and education center in Louisa county that uses no fossil fuels. For more information see our website [www.livingenergyfarm.org](http://www.livingenergyfarm.org), or contact us at [livingenergyfarm@gmail.com](mailto:livingenergyfarm@gmail.com) or 434 409 6006. Donations are tax deductible.*