

Living Energy Farm

November-December 2013 Newsletter

Focus Returns to Construction

With the seeds harvest in and cold weather upon us, the focus of our work at Living Energy Farm has returned to the construction of our fossil-fuel-free home and kitchen. We've had a great response from our recent call to help, with dozens of folks from near and far coming to see the farm and help with construction. A big thanks to our crews coming out for Saturday work days (and during the week as well.)



With large crews comes the need for lots of materials to keep them busy. It's a challenge to move materials on our dirt road in the winter, so we've been taking advantage of every dry spell to bring in sand and chicken wire for stucco, pipes and insulation for the heating system (photo left), and more windows and lumber. Soon we'll be bringing in straw bales to insulate the walls of the kitchen, which will come from a farm 5 miles down the road.

But bales need to stay dry, so before they can go in place we have to finish construction of the solar roof. The entire south-facing roof of our kitchen will be a solar collector, including a flat-plate water heater on the west end. The solar collector is a homemade, low-budget design. We put foam on top of the trusses (polyisocyanurate, which will not burn), then black roofing metal, then glass. Hot air will be circulated through openings in the roofing metal (photos above and at right), then through ducts that lead to pipes under the floor.



While the kitchen roof is built we're plugging away at the foundation of the main house. We've set the insulation lining the inside of the cinder block foundation that will hold in heat for the radiant floor. Insulation and block currently serve as Rosa and Elan's jungle gym (photo left) while our volunteers diligently move mud around to set the pipes and level the fill before we bring in gravel. Keith has been cutting openings for air to move from the pipes to the gravel beneath the slab



(photo left.)

Construction of the composting toilet adjacent to the kitchen has been ongoing as well. Our composter will be a two-chamber mouldering system, where humanure on one side can compost and age for a

year while the other side is used. We've built out the composting chamber and the dividing cinder block wall (photo right) and framed the walls and roof.



Upcoming Workshops

In January, it's time to break out your seed catalogs, because LEF is offering a series of workshops on **Garden Planning and Design**. The first will be **January 11th** and will cover topics such as fertility, crop rotation, and succession planting. The second will be **January 25th** and will focus on garden planning for seed saving. At both workshops we'll offer suggestions on what to plant, and some seeds will be available for sale. Weather permitting, these workshops will take place **1-3 PM at LEF**, following a morning work day and a potluck lunch.

Monday evenings, from 7 - 9 PM, we will offer **Bicycle Repair and Maintenance** workshops (**Jan 6, 13, 20, 27**.) These workshops will NOT be at LEF. They will be at **Woodfolk House in Charlottesville, 912 Woodfolk Drive, 22902**. The first workshop will focus on judging quality and selection of a good bicycle, and how to ride in cold weather. We will start working on tire repair in the first workshop, and continue with tire repair and general lubrication in the second workshop. In the third workshop, we will demonstrate how to rebuild bearing (in wheels, bottom brackets, pedals, etc.) The fourth workshop will continue with maintenance and repair instruction, as well as road safety skills, based on how much we cover in the first three. Feel free to bring bicycles that need attention, and we will help you work on them as time allows.

We will offer a pruning workshop in late January or early February, also at Woodfolk House, date TBA.

All of these workshops are offered free of charge, but donations of labor, building materials, or cash are gratefully accepted. Please RSVP livingenergyfarm@gmail.com if you plan to attend.

LEF Sets a Goal: Finish House by Fall 2014

We've spent the last three years building a house and a road while also growing seeds,

selling sweet potato slips, growing and preserving much of our own food, offering workshops, and building connections with our local community. Our community and farm have been growing faster than our infrastructure has to support them! In order to build a truly sustainable community, we will be pulling back from farming in 2014 so we can push to finish our house in the coming year. We'll still sell sweet potato slips next spring, but we'll grow fewer seeds and less of our own food. With some hard work, luck, and cooperation from the weather, we'll finish the house in the coming months so that we'll be able to focus more on farming and outreach in the years to come.

With less agricultural income coming in next year, we'll be depending on donations to help with the costs of building materials. We have most of the money we will need to finish the house, but we will need further support. We also need help. Particularly if you have some carpentry experience, please consider helping us out in the coming months. Inexperienced people are welcome as well. Watch for our big work parties when we will be stacking strawbales, stuccoing them, etc. If you'll be giving donations this holiday, please keep Living Energy Farm in mind. We believe that the best present we can give our kids is a sustainable future. At LEF we are doing what we can to make that happen.

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, or contact us at livingenergyfarm@gmail.com. Donations are tax deductible.