

Living Energy Farm

March-April 2014 Newsletter

Upcoming Workshops

We've got some exciting workshops lined up for the spring and summer. Coming up on **Saturday, May 24th**, from **1-3pm**, Sean will be teaching a **Sweet Potato Growing Workshop** at Living Energy Farm (1022 Bibb Store Road, Louisa). Growing and shipping sweet potato slips is our biggest business; and workshops participants will learn about growing their own slips, variety choice, transplanting, sweet potato soil and water requirements, harvest, selecting seed potatoes, and storing sweet potatoes through the winter. Come out and learn about this very important staple crop of the southeast, and take home some slips for your own garden.

On **Saturday, June 14th** from **1-3pm**, Adam will teach a **Hand Tool Sharpening Workshop** at Living Energy Farm. This workshop will focus on sharpening simpler tools such as knives, chisels, and hoes. Adam can also touch on sharpening hand saws and other forestry and woodworking tools if there is interest.

Later in the summer, Nina Cohen will be teaching two all-day **Introduction to Construction Workshops** at Living Energy Farm. The first, on **June 28th**, will be open to all, and the second, on **July 12th**, will be for women only. The workshops will run from **9am to 4pm**, with a potluck lunch. Nina will cover a number of elementary construction concepts, including the basics of accurate measuring, marking, and layout. The workshops will also include tutorials on several hand tools and power tools. This year we'll have more shelter and protection from the heat as the workshops will be held in our new kitchen!

We ask for a \$25 donation for half day workshops and \$40 for full day workshops, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. Please RSVP livingenergyfarm@gmail.com or call 434 282 6471 if you plan to attend.

Construction Update

Progress on the kitchen and main house has picked up considerably with the improvement in the weather. We packed straw bales into the walls of the kitchen a few weeks ago and applied the first coat of stucco on the outside, and earthen plaster on the inside. Drywall work on the composting toilet is moving along nicely as our crew hones their skills; the ceiling on the kitchen is complete and ready for blown cellulose to insulate the roof.



Sean, Al and Carrie apply stucco over the straw bale kitchen walls..



The foundation before pouring the slab.

We compacted the dirt under the main house enough to bring in course gravel to go under the slab. This course gravel is the heart of our solar heating system: the rocks are big enough to allow hot air from the roof to pass completely under the building, while soaking up the heat and slowly radiating it back to the living space. The gravel is so large that there is no efficient way to move it except by hand, one rock at a time. We put out a call for help to spread the rock and got a great response. Thanks to everyone who came out, you made quick work of a daunting job!

We have now poured the slab on the house and have begun framing, which is an exciting step forward!

Eating off the Land in Springtime

With the long cold winter finally over, early spring is a time to be enjoying the outdoors. Most of us can be found outside, working the garden and taking care of animal chores. But while spring is a time to put lots of time and energy into growing food, the harvest itself is still pretty sparse. Historically spring was the hungriest time for farmers living off the land because last year's harvest is at its lowest point, and the garden has not yet started really kicking in.



Our garden in late April- much of it is still under row cover.



Al shows off one day's worth of goat milk.

Luckily, some foods are at their best in spring. Our gardens are starting to crank out large volumes of fresh greens, and many wild greens like chickweed and dandelion are at their peak flavor in spring. Soon we'll be enjoying baby carrots and beets, as we thin out our early plantings, and fresh snap peas. Our nanny goat who kidded in February has excellent milk production as the wild brambles and brush leaf out. We're now making goat cheese nearly every day. While production from a single goat is modest compared to a cow (about two quarts per day) a little cheese goes a long way in sprucing up our spring salads.

But mostly spring is a time to plant, weed, and look forward to the bounty of summer and fall. After May 1st it is considered safe in our area to plant frost tender crops, which make up the the bulk of our seed production. This year, we've simplified our seed production in order to keep the focus on construction, but we're still growing all our favorites: peppers, okra, tomatoes, winter squash, and of course, watermelons. If you come out for a Saturday work day in the next couple of months, we're as likely to hand you a hoe as a hammer. Come on out and see what's growing!

Expanding our Bicycle Fleet

When we made a commitment to living without fossil fuels at Living Energy Farm, we knew it would take some years to divorce ourselves completely. Some things we were able to jump right into- like cooking with solar and wood, solar hot water, and photovoltaic lighting. Other aspects of life and farming have been more difficult. We still run our tractors on gasoline, as projects to build a wood gasifier and bring in draft animals have been put on hold while we focus on getting a roof over our heads.

Transportation has been our other big challenge. We've been fixing up donated bicycles and have invested in two cargo bike trailers, and two kid trailers for bikes. We're now running about two town trips per week by bicycle, where someone does the errands for the group using a bike and bike trailer. We've also built a bike shed, so our precious fleet does not deteriorate in the rain.

In the future, we plan to do our over-the-road hauling by bike trailers or horse carts. But the real shift away from car culture does not mean simply replacing one technology (cars and trucks) with another (bicycles and draft animals). It means a shift in lifestyle- a general slowing down, planning ahead, and changing expectations. It's a big change from the normal American lifestyle, but we think a healthy planet is worth the trade-offs.



Our new bike shed is filling up fast!

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.