

Living Energy Farm

July - August 2016 Newsletter

Living Energy Global Initiative (LEGI) Drills a Well in Kenya

In our most recent newsletter (linked on our website) we announced the formation of the Living Energy Global Initiative, a partnership between Living Energy Farm and Africa Transforming Lives (ATL). The intent of LEGI is to empower communities to meet their needs without fossil fuels. We did a couple of fundraising events, and raised about \$700. Thanks to all those who helped.

For a while, we have been thinking about how to take LEF abroad. When Nick Degala, a native born Kenyan activist showed up on our doorstep, it seemed like we should try to help him. Nick stayed with us for two months this spring (and pulled a lot of weeds!). He told us about the families where he lives who go hungry in the dry season. He mentioned that he was the only one in his family with white teeth because he went away from the village to go to school. In the village, women have to haul water, and the water is so dirty that everyone has stained teeth. We initiated LEGI. Nick took our modest funds back to Kenya. And now hundreds of people in Bindura Village have access to clean water. (See photo).



Nick and the Well Drilling Crew, Bindura Village, Kenya

Nick also networked with the Christian churches in Louisa. They also started raising funds for his project. They have raised enough money for ATL to begin construction of a demonstration facility on land donated to ATL that will showcase organic agricultural methods, solar energy, and other tools and methods that can help African villages become more self-sufficient.

A fantastic result of initiating LEGI is that we have begun communicating with a number of individuals and organizations that are doing grass-roots development work in Africa and India. Hopefully, these communications will lead to further opportunities to partner with worthwhile projects abroad. In our last newsletter, we talked about the technologies we are working with at LEF and the role we might play in empowering other communities to become energy self-sufficient. We

will keep you posted as this process evolves.

To continue with our work with Nick and ATL, we need two things. We will need more money. Some of the work Nick has started has been extended on credit. He needs to pay the people who are helping him. (He needs \$300 to pay the well drillers.) We will also need on-the-ground technical support in Bindura Village in Kenya. We are working on that, and a few options seem to be available. You can donate to LEGI by going to the LivingEnergyFarm.org website. Go to the bottom of the page. You will be directed to Network for Good. Look for LEGI in the dropdown menus. You can also donate to the LEF Education Fund in the same spot. (LEF in the dropdown menu.)

LEF Seeks Technical Development Intern

LEF is seeking a Technical Development Intern. Especially now that we are engaging in expanding the mission and methods of LEF abroad, we need to develop and refine our tools and technologies. Near-term projects would include working on a solar boiler, woodgas, solar ice maker, and/ or nickel iron battery testing. A minimal proficiency with hand tools is required. We will provide room, board, stipend, and instruction. You will be developing vital technologies for deployment to people who really need them. You will learn a lot about plumbing and mechanical systems. Six-month minimum time commitment required.

Farming and Building at LEF

Late summer finds us very busy at LEF. We want LEF to be a viable economic model. The



Dried Food at LEF, Grown and Preserved with Sunshine!



Florianni Flint Corn, Beautiful, Tasty, Sustainable

economic backbone of our project is growing open-pollinated seeds. Such seeds grow plants that pollinate each other generation after generation, just like in nature. Open pollinated seeds are the counter-movement to the corporate control of food. At this point, about a dozen people have control over the entire industrial food production process, because they control the corporations that own the hybrid/ GMO seeds that now grow the vast majority of the food that humans eat. Such centralization of power is a bad omen for the future of democracy. People have asked us at times if we think organic farming with open-



The Grateful For Grace Crew and (third from right) our favorite intern ever, Larissa

pollinated seeds could feed the world. An honest answer to that question is not easy to come by. Industrial agriculture is enormously productive (at a price), and we are utterly addicted to it.

This year at LEF we grew our biggest corn crop ever, a whopping half acre. We grew a corn called Florianni Red Flint, a beautiful corn that is clearly much closer to wild corn than the industrial stuff. In harvesting the corn by hand, ear by ear, you can see the variations and peculiarities that hearken back to the wild and diverse corns that grow in Mexico. You can also taste the difference. Florianni tastes much different than store-bought corn meal, with a much richer and interesting flavor. There are other open-pollinated corns that are more productive than Florianni. Our crop did well. (Though the deer enjoyed it too.) Seeing up close the productivity of organic, open pollinated seeds gives us hope that we can feed ourselves using sustainable methods.

We want to grow as much of our own food at LEF as we can manage. Preserving food without refrigeration has been coming together well. We can food in jars, as do many people. We have an Amish-made wood fired canner that is fantastic, and allows us to put away all of the tomato sauce we want, quickly and efficiently. Only acidic foods can be canned. Last year we tested our solar powered food drying system that re-directs heat from the heating system on the kitchen. This year we built more drying screens and we are using that system full-tilt. The results are fantastic. With some of our seeds crops (tomatoes and peppers), we take the seed out AND eat the vegetable. We have been drying peppers, okra, eggplant, onions, sweet corn, squash, green beans, carrots, beets, and any kind of fruit we can get our hands on. This is a great way to store food. Dried foods often taste better and retain more nutrition than canned food because it has not been cooked. Once it is dried, it can sit for a long, long time without using energy (unlike refrigerated/frozen foods that consume energy in an ongoing fashion). Yum!

Our other big project these days is trying to finish our main house EarthHeart. That is coming along well. We conducted our strawbale workshops, and they went well. We put out a call for volunteers and we got a lot of help, including an enthusiastic, colorful crew called Grateful for Grace. We continue to be blessed with really sweet, idealistic and hard-working interns. (See photo).

We packed all our walls with straw (and sweat). We use the cheapest, simplest kind of construction, which looks like the same 2 X 4 walls you would see in an ordinary house. The building inspectors like to see things with which they are familiar. Then we simply stack straw bales inside that wall, so the 4 inch wall becomes an 18 inch wall that insulates well. Our first layer of interior stucco is clay. Then we skim coat with sand/lime/cement stucco. The end result looks charmingly like a stone wall.



Finish Stucco Walls in EarthHeart

LEF Needs Construction Help Sept 17 - 20

We will be insulating our interior walls Sept 15 - 16. The drywall has to be installed in the next few days after that, before the cellulose has a chance to fall out of the walls. If you can come help anytime Sept 17 - 20, please do.

Conference 2017

**A Positive Environmental Future
You Know What You Oppose
What Do you Support?**

As LEF become fully operational, we would like to spread the word. Do you have any experience organizing events? Would you be willing to help us put on a conference in 2017 to focus on living gracefully and comfortably within a modest energy budget? Let us know.

The Way Forward

We have convinced ourselves that the global environmental crisis is a huge, unsolvable problem. That conclusion is convenient in that it leaves us free to not act. Most people have been taught to not care about the natural environment. Those that do care are being told over and over again that we can support our industrial lifestyle with renewable energy. That just isn't true. As big as these problems may seem, the solutions are clear and at hand. At LEF we talk about sustainable "technologies" because, frankly, it's bait. It's something that people find interesting. The reality of it is that the key "technologies" that allow us to live sustainably are moderation and the cooperative use of resources. Poor people all over the world share resources, and that has a stigma attached to it. Rich and educated people develop "technologies." You want to "Save the Earth"? All we need to do is de-stigmatize the cooperative use of resources, and use them with a modicum of modesty.

The environmental movement realized a while ago that "gloom and doom" does not bring in enough donations to support large organizations. So now we talk about "renewable" energy production. At LEF, we have put together a micro-economy that can support a small village without fossil fuels. We are trying to put together a community that treads the fine line between being truly sustainable and something modern people might recognize as comfortable.

Every day now, all day, we can hear the clank and rattle of bulldozers. Less than two miles away, 250 acres of beautiful Virginia hardwood forest has been razed. The land is being subdued so an industrial solar generating facility can be built. Thirty thousand photovoltaic panels are to be installed. The problem is that those panels do nothing at night, and have minimal output on cloudy days. The first year I lived in this area, 30 years ago now, we went over 30 days with no sunshine. The heat pumps and refrigerators that those panels are supposed to run do not shut off at night, or on cloudy days. Yesterday the North Anna nuclear plant, which is also nearby, did its siren test. That test reminds us all that we might have to pack it all up and leave one day, leave everything we have spent our lives to create, on short notice. So we're taking an expensive, complex and dangerous electrical generation and distribution system and adding an utterly unreliable industrial "renewable" energy supply to it. Dominion Power (our local power company) fought hard against solar power. Then they realized they could industrialize it. They also get tax credits now for burning trees to make electricity. Except the United

States ran out of firewood in the mid-1800s. That's when we shifted to coal and oil in earnest. Now we have forests because we don't burn them. Industrial solar and industrial biofuel make people feel better. They are a net loss for the environment.

At LEF we have no heat pumps. Our DC motors run fine on cloudy days. We adjust our schedule and our lifestyle to the rhythms of renewable energy. It's not hard. We are pretty happy, as are our kids. Our parents generation perhaps had an excuse. Maybe they did not understand. Our generation does, still we keep building what they taught us to build. Now we are building an infrastructure our children can't use. Think about it in purely selfish terms. Do you want your kids to earn a living, eat good food, have a good life? The industrial equipment we continue to put in place cannot sustain them. There is a different way. It's not hard. Please help.

Links for Media Articles About LEF

Article about LEF in The Central Virginian

<http://www.livingenergyfarm.org/cvarticle.pdf>

LEF on CNN

<http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2015/09/us/communes-american-story/>

Cville weekly in Charlottesville VA

<http://www.c-ville.com/off-grid-model-environmentalism-made-easy/#.VcHobF054yo>

LEF article in the Central Virginian Newspaper

<http://www.livingenergyfarm.org/cvarticle.pdf>

First video on youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppTBO8d6jhY>

Second video on youtube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdSX_TIYkD4

Video on vimeo

<https://vimeo.com/128744981>

Slideshow produced by Alexis a while ago

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x_C3iScoAw

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 to the Living Energy Farm Education Fund are tax deductible.