

Living Energy Farm

August - September 2018 Newsletter

Land Day Party!

Introducing the LEF Old Time Bluegrass Band! Come out to LEF **Sunday, November 11** and help us celebrate our anniversary. Festivities start at 2 PM and go into the evening. Homegrown bluegrass in the afternoon, DC powered dance party in the evening. We will make some food, potluck dinner in the evening (around 6 PM). Note, we have been working on our road, so we will not be able to run a hayride this year. Pedestrian traffic only, and it's a bit of a hike (apologies to folks with mobility issues). LEF is at 1022 Bibb Store Rd, Louisa VA, 23093.

LEF's Immersive Program

We're pleased with how our weekend immersion program is evolving. Last month we hosted 10 participants who experienced life off the grid, ate tasty homegrown food, and built a warm, friendly temporary community. The workshops, focused on designing energy self-sufficient communities, went very well. On Saturday we went over the nuts and bolts of how our unique DC micro-grid works, with a focus on daylight drive PV power and thermal storage. On Sunday, we worked as a group on a series of "design charettes," where we designed energy systems for several different situations, some real and some hypothetical.

We're excited to continue this program as long as interest lasts. We're especially interested in hosting folks who are working on specific projects where they are thinking of applying the technologies and design principles we use at LEF. If you are thinking of attending one of our weekends but money is an issue, please reach out for work exchange options. At this point we seem to have more interest in energy focus than food self-sufficiency, but if you would rather attend a food-focused immersive, please let us know. Our next immersive will be **Nov 30 - Dec 2nd**, focused on energy. We will send out more information soon. RSVP at livingenergyfarm@gmail.com

Farm Update

How is the farm doing? Quite well, thanks for asking! The extreme wet this year has been a challenge, but most of our crops yielded well and most of the harvesting is done. Bringing in our seeds crops and drying them properly was difficult. We ended up building some small wood fires and drying seeds in odd indoor places. We got our corn crop in before it was ruined. With our DC motors, they run even when its



Nika, Rosa, and a big Orange Glow watermelon.

raining from electricity directly from the photovoltaic panels, so we were able to stack the corn on pallets and dry it with forced air. This year highlighted the importance of planting varieties with resistance to fungal diseases, which thrive in cloudy wet conditions.



Rosa, Nika, and Anvi (from a neighboring community) and some of our fall fruit (many kinds of persimmons, hardy kiwis, jujubes, and winter pears.)

The persistent cloudy conditions put our solar-powered lifestyle to the test, and overall we are very impressed with how well our energy systems run with very little actual sunshine. During cloudy spells, just an hour or two of light overcast (a break from heavy clouds) is enough to keep our essential infrastructure running, like our water system, lighting and refrigeration. We have to pay attention to where the power is going and when, but we can run most of our power tools, washing machine, and grain grinder when it is cloudy.

This year we cut back a bit on seeds production, but increased our food self-sufficiency. We have been enjoying the results. Our shelves are full of canned and dried fruits and vegetables. Deb has been making the best flatbread ever with our homegrown grains.

We have had a steady flow of interns this summer, and Eric has been with us for the duration. We have a couple of more interns lined up for the fall, and we are considering how to plug them into our various technical and outreach programs.

The videos we started posting a few weeks ago have had some positive results. We have been communicating with a few activists and academics around the world about our project. We always get a little buried (and sometimes tired) around harvest time. As the harvest winds down, we are hoping to shift our attention back to more outreach.



Deb, Eva (our newest intern) and the kids preparing corn for shelling.

Rosa and Nika are happy and healthy. Rosa is reading more and more on her own, mostly about animals. Nika is celebrating his 4th birthday, and learning how to ride on the back of a tandem bicycle -- an important skill for living at LEF. We still don't have a car, though we catch rides with some regularity. We did just invest



Rosa running the corn sheller and Nika helping (sorta...).

in a triple tandem bicycle. Family bikes that can carry several people tend to be crazy expensive. We have looked into a number of different electric bikes and vehicles as well. They all seem to be expensive and not very durable. The batteries are expensive and don't last long. We found a fellow in Richmond who had a triple bike for sale. His kids are grown. He helped us set it up, and sold it at a reasonable price. We are looking forward to using it.

We continue to improve and use the tooling in our shop. It's really helpful to have

good tools -- drill press, grinders, saws, lathe -- all DC powered. It's really fun learning how to shape metal and build things, but challenging to maintain the level of precision necessary.

In spite of the wacky weather, it's been a pretty good fruit year. We had a good harvest of apples and peaches, and are still harvesting pears, jujubes, muscadines, kiwis, a few hazel nuts, and a few figs. Persimmon season is just getting started. As much as we like American persimmons, the Nikita's Gift and Rosseyanka, being American/ Asian crosses, remain the most reliable and tasty of fruits. We have brought in the newest American/ Asian cross persimmons (Mikkusu, Zima Khurma, and Cassandra), and are looking forward to investigating how well they grow, and how much food they provide. The heavy rains have changed our perspective a little on some fruits. Jujubes are an easy fruit to grow, and we have always recommended the Li variety as a reliable, heavy producer. But with rain like this, it rots before it ripens. Other varieties (Sugar Cane, Honey Jar, Tiger Tooth) hold up much better. Persimmons tolerate both drought and flood.

We are hoping to do some more promotional/ recreational events soon as we recover from harvest fatigue. We have made some small progress on our cooking and farm traction needs. We have been looking into more efficient means of mowing. Though we hold no fascination with perfectly trimmed lawns, we need to mow some to keep the bugs from taking over, and to keep the forest from taking back our orchards and fields. As much as farm tillage seems like a big deal energy wise, mowing is responsible for about three-quarters of our fuel use. We use scythes and sickles, but that has its limits. We are collecting the hardware to shift to sickle bar mowers. They require a bit more maintenance, and you don't want to bang them into tree stumps or rocks, but they are much more energy efficient. We will probably set up a pre-1960s Gravely with a sickle bar and see if we can run that on turpentine. (The old engines work better for that, and Gravely back then had their own lower speed, lower compression engines, which we hope will work with "turps.")

Our experiments in organic no till farming are continuing. Given the relentless storms we have had this year, we are shifting our no-till plots to some of our sloping land to control erosion. Next year we should have things in place to plant a sizable area in multi-cover cropped organic no-till (see previous 2 newsletters for more discussion about that). We have been improving our road some, experimenting with a grass-covered road with a modest (and cheap) gravel dust path up the middle. That is working well so far.



Rosa, Nika, Avni and our low-budget road improvements.

We have been working with the other small communities in Louisa county more lately. We are making arrangements that will

hopefully increase the sustainability of both LEF and neighboring communities. We have been arranging trades for sharing work, food, and childcare. We have had a few work events for making salsa, canning, harvesting, and construction. They have been both fun and productive.

Know Anybody In China?

We have a Chinese manufactured machine that needs a part. The company that has the part is very small, and does not seem to know how to mail things to the U.S. Do you know someone in China who could take delivery there and bring it home? About 5 pounds of metal. Let us know.

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 or Living Energy Farm, 1022 Bibb Store Rd, Louisa VA, 23093. Donations to the Living Energy Farm Education Fund are tax deductible.

Articles and videos about LEF:

LEF in the News!

Two different local news programs have done shows on LEF recently. The first is a PBS program called Virginia Homegrown. That show can be seen, for a while (?) at (the LEF part starts at the 29 minute mark in the program): <http://ideastations.org/watch/virginia-home-grown>

A local news program, NBC 29 in Charlottesville, also did a short story on LEF recently, at: <http://www.nbc29.com/category/175568/video-landing-page?&clipId=14245976&autostart=true> or <http://www.nbc29.com/clip/14245976/living-energy-farm-owners-employ-eco-friendly-techniques>

International Permaculture has done 2 articles on LEF. One is in issue #93, Autumn 2017, and the second is in issue #94, Winter 2017. See <https://www.permaculture.co.uk/>

Article about LEF at the Atlantic Online Magazine

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/anarchism-intentional-communities-trump/513086/>

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>

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