

Living Energy Farm
March - April 2024 Newsletter

Now Accepting Applications for our 2024 DC Solar Immersion/Training at Living Energy Farm!

Since 2022, LEF has been collaborating with El Departamento de la Comida (a Puerto Rican nonprofit) to offer annual DC Solar Immersion /Training(s) at Living Energy Farm. Our goal with this program has been to educate Puerto Ricans in designing and building DC Microgrids (the training), while also allowing participants to experience life powered by the DC Microgrid at LEF (the immersion). Thanks to these and other promotional events organized by El Depa, there are now many DC Microgrids across Puerto Rico and Jamaica. (Check out the “Guide to DC Microgrids in the Caribbean” on our website!) In order to lower costs and make the program more accessible, going forward, El Depa will be hosting the trainings they organize in Puerto Rico.

But these programs have been so much fun that this year, in addition to the program in Puerto Rico, we will be offering one at LEF as well! This training is not just open to Puerto Ricans, but to anyone with a sincere interest in incorporating this technology into their lives. If you are interested, visit this link to apply:

<https://form.jotform.com/241095288697068>

The LEF program will take place on July 26 - 29, 2024. The first two days of the program will be

dedicated to lecture and workshops, and will happen at Living Energy Farm. The second two days will be on-site training at a DC Microgrid installation site, Little Flower Catholic Worker house, which is 8 miles from LEF. The program is free and includes meals and accommodations (might be camping). In exchange for the training, we are asking that participants volunteer for 30 hours on a future installation on a project that has some social value to the public or a population in need. (It could be a project you find or choose.) Spaces are limited, and priority will be given to applicants who have an active project that will be applying DC Microgrid technology.



Building a batch collector at our 2023 training.



Marielisa learning to wire a DC breaker box at the 2023 immersion.

Want to learn more about DC Microgrids in the Caribbean?



A map of Puerto Rico with DC Microgrid installation sites.

Check out the “Guide to DC Microgrids in the Caribbean” recently added to our website.

(<https://livingenergyfarm.org/guide-to-dc-microgrids-in-the-caribbean/>) This page includes maps of Puerto Rico and Jamaica, with DC Microgrid sites labeled on each map. Scroll down and click on the names of the sites to learn more about each project. We’ll keep this site updated as more systems are built. It’s exciting to watch the movement grow!

Devastating Fire at Twin Oaks

Tragedy struck our friends at Twin Oaks Community (a 57 year old intentional community 10 miles from LEF) a few weeks ago. A brush fire was started by a neighbor on an extremely dry, windy day. It quickly grew to a 200 acre wildfire that threatened several houses in the neighborhood (including a few of Twin Oaks’ residential buildings), as well as Twin Oaks’ warehouse complex. As the local fire department concentrated on saving residences, the entire warehouse complex burned. For Twin Oaks, the loss is massive: several million dollars worth of uninsured equipment and inventory that was built up over decades. Twin Oaks probably can’t afford to replace the equipment and will likely have to stop making hammocks and hanging chairs. They also lost a lot of machinery for rope making, a sawmill, and a lot of very valuable woodworking equipment. Seed processing and drying equipment was also lost in the warehouse fire.

It’s a loss for Living Energy Farm as well. Twin Oaks had been very generous about letting us use the warehouse for the storage and shipping needs of our solar equipment business. Luckily, we didn’t have any inventory in storage at the warehouse at the time of the fire. It was a close call, as our big annual shipment to Puerto Rico had gone out about a month before.

We're doing what we can to support our friends in this difficult time. One thing we can do is help them set up better firefighting equipment. Alexis, an ex-fire fighter and ex-Twin Oaker who is very familiar with their water system, has been working with Twin Oaks to help them improve their internal firefighting capacity. In this emerging age of climate chaos, the scary reality is that even in the east we are going to need to be prepared to fight wildfires. The fire at Twin Oaks was much bigger and moved much faster than anything that is normal for this area, driven by unusually windy and dry conditions. As farmers, we are seeing more weather extremes every year.

Back home at LEF, we've been motivated by the fire at Twin Oaks to improve our own fire fighting setup. We've known for years that we're particularly vulnerable to brush fires at LEF, since we live in the middle of a recovering clearcut, and our road is not accessible in very wet weather. Years ago we set up our own modest fire fighting equipment. But we let it languish and re-purposed the storage tank for biogas. One reason our system was not kept up is because gasoline pumps are hard to maintain over time. The gas goes stale quickly. Last week, motivated by the Twin Oaks fire, we installed water tanks (that we already had acquired for that purpose), and set up our own "fire truck"- a hand wagon with a propane-powered pump and fire hose, ready to be pulled out and attached to the tanks at a moment's notice. Propane is stable indefinitely, so hopefully this pump will be easier to maintain than a gasoline one. Fire fighting is one use of fossil fuels that we can approve of.



LEF Fire Truck

Recordbreaking Fruit Year?



Peach blossoms in front of Earthheart.

In happier news, between our maturing orchard and mild spring temperatures, we seem on track to have the best fruit year so far at LEF. If you have been thinking for a while about coming out for a visit, this summer and fall might be the time to come! Our list of fruits include (roughly in order of maturity): strawberries, guomi berries, juneberries, mulberries, blackberries, blueberries, peaches, muskmelons, watermelons, pears, apples, muscadines, jujubes, persimmons, jujubes, and probably more I'm forgetting.

Please support us if you can.

*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 Institute are tax deductible. **To make tax deductible donations, do not go to the Virginia Organizing website, go here instead: <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/1388125>** **Make sure to designate your donation for Living Energy Institute.***

Articles and videos about LEF:

Low-Tech Magazine (based in France) did an lengthy, well-researched article, largely about LEF, entitled ***Direct Solar Power: Off-Grid Without Batteries***. It's at <https://solar.lowtechmagazine.com/2023/08/direct-solar-power-off-grid-without-batteries/> That article talks a lot about optimal utilization, translate “community is the magic bullet that makes renewable energy work.”

Matt Dhillon at Cville Weekly did one of the best brief summaries of LEF we have ever seen. The article is entitled ***Power Shift, Award-winning Living Energy Farm Makes Living Off-grid Sustainable***. It is at <https://www.c-ville.com/power-shift>

Truthdig did an article on LEF by Megan McGee, an excellent review of our work in Puerto Rico. It is entitled ***Decolonizing Puerto Rico Through Solar Power***. It's at <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/decolonizing-puerto-rico-through-solar-power/>

We continue to post new videos on Youtube. The latest is *Solar Power Systems That Last Forever*, focused on our solar powered kitchen. See <https://youtu.be/6XiHClx8d2Q>

How to Never Pay an Electric Bill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5Wk7inoIxI&t=201s>

This video is a walk-through of our energy systems at Living Energy Farm. It is a concise summary of how these systems work, and why they are not in common use already.

Solar Installations In The Navajo (Dine') And Hopi Reservations, March 2020

<http://livingenergyfarm.org/solar-installations-2020/>

This is a photo essay about our project to bring durable solar energy systems to the Dine' and Hopi Reservations, where thousands of people live without grid power involuntarily.

Support Living Energy Farm's Climate Justice Campaign, and Bring DC Microgrids to People Who Need Them

<http://livingenergyfarm.org/support-our-climate-justice-campaign/>

This is an updated web page describing our broader social justice ambitions.

How to Live Without Fossil Fuel (Introductory Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ri2U6u8p65E>

Powering a Community with Solar Electricity (LEF has the only DC powered community that we know of, here's how it works) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvdExgvHnRI&t=23s>

The Best Way to Store Off-Grid Energy Batteries that Last (almost) Forever <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfrgLsyFs0E>

Virginia Homegrown created a program at LEF (the LEF part starts at the 29 minute mark in the program)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDGP0C9MIzU>

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>