

Living Energy Farm August-September 2012 Newsletter

Harvest Season is Underway

It's September, and the crew at Living Energy Farm is enjoying our lovely fall weather while working hard to harvest and process the bounty of seeds- and vegetables!- coming from our fields and gardens. This is our second season working our fields mostly by hand and irrigating with solar-powered pumps. By the end of the year, we hope to bring in about 40% more income from seeds than last year. We've also cleared and cover cropped a half acre of land that will come under cultivation next year.



Rosa checks out how the corn is coming along

One of the great joys of being a seed grower is trying out new varieties. This year's highlights include Red Cherry, a sweet, productive and disease-resistant tomato; a very big and tasty pepper called Super Shepard, and Orange Glo, a delicious orange-fleshed watermelon that made melon breaks the highlight of many of our Saturday work parties. We also grew a very impressive stand of a dent corn called Tennessee Red Cob. Some of the plants topped 12 feet, and we estimated the field produced a yield of nearly 140 bushels per acre! Most of the corn will go to Southern Exposure Seed Exchange and be sold for seed, but we expect to have plenty left over to make into grits, polenta and cornbread this winter.

On August 18th we offered a seed saving workshop. Emily and Jon explained the practical and political significance of saving seed, and how to grow and process seed from your own vegetable garden. Emily demonstrated the seed cleaning techniques that we use on our farm, which can be easily modified to a home scale. If you'd like to learn about saving seed but missed our workshop, come out for any Saturday work day. We usually spend the morning harvesting and the afternoon processing seed, so you'll have the opportunity to observe and practice the techniques used to save seed while you help us out.



Emily explains how to pour a pepper seed ferment at our seed saving workshop

Life Without a Refrigerator

At Living Energy Farm we are using a blend new and old technologies to live a comfortable life without the need for fossil fuel. When it comes to food preservation, we have an abundance of very old technologies to choose from. Humans have been preserving and preparing food for eons without any fossil fuel. However, these technologies might not support the kind of food lifestyle that most of us are accustomed to.

One way we get around the "need" for a refrigerator is by adjusting our meal preparation. Many of us are used to making a big meal for dinner, and eating leftovers for lunch. But storing leftovers overnight without a refrigerator is less than ideal, as is cooking two elaborate meals a day. We usually get around this by cooking a lot more for lunch, and re-heating it at dinnertime. This is more in line with the traditional southern meal schedule. This also fits better with using a solar cooker, since the sun is a lot stronger in late morning than it is in late afternoon.

While many of us are used to storing nearly all of our food in the fridge, including vegetables, fruits, bread, nut butters, and condiments; the reality is that most of these things don't need a refrigerator at all. At Living Energy Farm, vegetables are harvested fresh from the garden, except for onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes and squash, which all keep for many months at room temperature (the potatoes will do better once we build our root cellar). Grains and beans are stored outdoors in air-tight containers. Bread, fruit, and peanut butter are stored indoors, at room temperature. A few things we eat need some kind of cold storage- particularly dairy products and tofu. For these items we use the a very old-fashioned kind of fridge, our spring-fed creek. The creek does not stay at refrigerator- cold temperatures, but usually doesn't go above 60 degrees.



Our creek "refrigerator"

Another ancient food preservation method is fermentation. We have been fermenting vegetables like cabbage and green beans by adding a brine which encourages the growth of beneficial microorganisms while keeping the harmful bugs at bay. Fermented foods like sauerkraut can keep for months at creek temperatures, and provide us with a "convenience food" that can be served at any meal without further preparation. We have also been enjoying keifer, a kind of cultured milk which tolerates warm temperatures better than yogurt. It tasted mighty sour in the heat of the summer, but all those beneficial microorganisms are good for you, or so they say.

Thank You, Emily and Tom

Living Energy Farm is sad to say good-bye to our two summer interns, Emily and Tom. Emily has gone on to spend the fall and winter with her family in Philadelphia, and Tom has gone back to complete his senior year at William and Mary.

Tom will leave his mark at Living Energy Farm through his many building projects, including fences, pergolas and a trellis in the orchard, and some complex shelving in our new barn. He was instrumental in keeping our orchards watered and weeded through the busy summer months. Emily was an invaluable help in the seed growing business, taking on most of the management responsibilities in that area. Thank you Emily and Tom, you will be missed!

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.