

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## First Trimester 2015

*During the first decade of our existence, we shared a version of this newsletter with you every month. Since then, the frequency of our correspondence via this medium has steadily fallen off. In an effort to compensate and modernize, we have brought you more frequent updates via our Facebook postings even when we've felt that many of you prefer the more in-depth look at our activities that this publication provides. This is our first big update of the year as limited time and a sluggish Internet connection makes completing this task a bear for us at times. We're contemplating going to a trimonthly mailing that will allow us to prepare and send out newsletters during the times of the year when we are generally nearer to a faster Internet connection. The newsletter is important to many of you but also one way that we're able to document our work as we more seriously think about jumping into the enormous project of writing a book about our experiences. That said, thanks for your patience with our constantly evolving updates and please don't hesitate if you have any feedback for us.*



*The first half of 2015 was an uplifting whirlwind here at the Ranch. It's been a productive and balanced year so far with many of our new systems starting to pay significant dividends. Our current apprentices are surpassing all expectations, the facilities have gotten a lime plaster facelift with the help of our newly honed plastering skills, and the core team continues to improve our innovative and powerful educational programs. We've also been busy overhauling many of our financial and organizational structures and feel confident that we are setting the table for increasing prosperity well into the next decade and beyond. In many ways I feel that this has been our most successful year to date. We've had as many people come through our doors as any other year yet we've structured ourselves in a way that allows for more balance. And we continue to build our reputation in the region as the premier sustainability education center while connecting more and more with the amazing network of environmentally and socially conscientious projects in Costa Rica. You can learn more about some of our recent changes by listening to Scott Gallant, Ranch co-director, in a recent interview by [Permaculture Voices here](#). Enjoy the podcast and the update and keep us abreast of your goings on when you get a minute. Our next newsletter is scheduled to go out in August. In the meantime, we wish you the best in your work and look forward to connecting with many of you in person in the near future.*

This month's update includes:

**RM Program News:** Finances

**Building Report:** Earth Everything

**Conservation Update:** DIY Shampoo and Conditioner

**Farm Facts:** Alley Cropping

**Community Stories:** A Local Obituary

**Intern/Guest Gossip:** Reflections on this Wild World, Community Living, and Personal Resilience

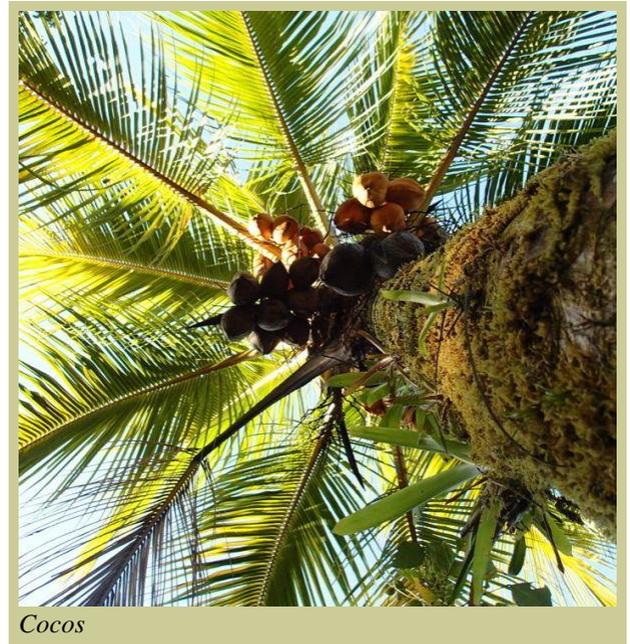
**Comida Corner:** Papaya Ketchup

**Inspirational Impressions:** Community

## RM Program News

### *Finances*

Bookkeeping, accounting and financial analysis are oftentimes left off the list when asked about our organizational and personal strengths. Acknowledging this while simultaneously recognizing the importance of these skills recently motivated us to seek professional counsel from those in the field that better embrace this type of critically important work. With great fortune, our search led us to ED TIFFANY, a retired financial expert from Boston, and RAHEL SMITH, a financial planner from the Bay Area. Both agreed to come to the Ranch at different times to spend 3 weeks with us to assist us with dialing in our finance systems while enjoying a little bit of the tropics and all that the Ranch has to offer. Their time here was beyond a blessing, set us on a path to a vastly improved financial understanding of our business, and broadened our growing network of supporters and friends. The last few weeks have resulted in one of the most important transformations, and keep in mind that there have been many, that the Ranch has ever experienced.



Cocos

Budgets, spreadsheets, Quickbooks, P&L statements, balance sheets, double entry accounting and other terms such as these tend to make my head swim and beads of sweat to build on my brow. Even though I took numerous business courses in college, the concepts I learned in these classes never seemed to resonate with the type of business that I had sometimes dreamed of starting. Thinking back, I should've paid more attention to the nuances of and differences between managerial and financial accounting. And even though I've been using Excel for multiple decades, little did I know the magic that it could perform when trying to better understand one's financial stability in the sometimes frenetic economic paradigm that we operate in.

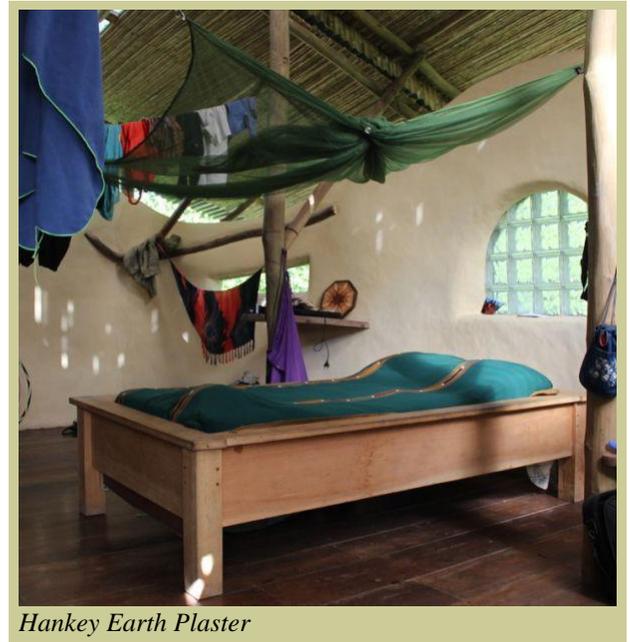
The exercise of looking deep into our books has been cumbersome, time-consuming and at times frustrating, but now that we're starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel, there is a peace that's starting to settle over the Ranch. We know exactly how much money we're spending and where it's going. We have a solid idea of what revenues and expenses we'll be looking at in the coming months and we can now confidently say that our business model is relevant, with the numbers to

back it. We still have a long way to go with our number crunching but the foundation is now set for future and long-term financial success. With the bulk of the gruntwork done, we're convinced that our new systems will make our bookkeeping easier and more consistent than ever. An enormous thank you to Ed and Rahel for guiding us down the path to better understanding our numbers!

## Building Report

### *Earth Everything*

The last few months at the Ranch have been frantically crazy, as ever. With several courses coming at us back-to-back, including the Natural Building Intensive (NBI), we have been busy buzzing around with preparations and wrap up! As always, the NBI involved an immense amount of pre-course work. Nevertheless, on reflection, it was worth all of the sweat that the core team and apprentices generated to get everything ready so that the students could simply roll in, learn and contribute in a meaningful way to our infrastructure! The Hankey House received a massive facelift that has totally transformed the space from something I tried avoiding looking closely at to a structure that I now look at with awe. We have spent many years building with earth but not since Liz and Ryan came to the Ranch have we been able to dial in the little details that make the difference between success and failure. Our plasters, both earthen and lime, have been totally revolutionized. The Hankey can now be used as a model demonstration for these types of finishes.



*Hankey Earth Plaster*

In other building news, we have totally revamped the biodigester building. We not only replastered the edifice (including tadelakt!!!) but also replaced the two, custom plastic toilets with traditional porcelain toilets. One of these was rescued from an abandoned house several years ago and the other we removed from an old septic system at Jeanne's House. We believe that this change has led to the added bonus of increased methane production as it has regulated and therefore increased the amount of water going into the system (as now each turd is accompanied by a standard flush of water).

Following the end of the class, as is oftentimes the case after building workshops, we had a number of projects to wrap up, including our fourth tadelakt shower! This now compliments the tadelakt shower on the other stall at the Hankey shower and adds to the growing repertoire of tadelakt showers at the Cork and the Honey Hut. Next up is the levelling coat on the Casucha extension walls and the completion of the Honey Hut bathroom.

Lastly, work on the food processing kitchen is progressing nicely! Laura is currently using the structure to run her fermentation class and although the space is not quite up to full functionality, it's remarkable how the space was totally transformed with just the addition of some tables, benches

and stainless steel counter tops. We'll be starting the final section of the frame soon and will then have our work cut for us to install the walls and the rest of the tables, shelves, sinks and counters that are part of the design.

## Conservation Update

### *DIY Shampoo and Conditioner*

As I was packing my bags for Costa Rica this year I noticed that my bag was filling quickly. When I came to my bottles of shampoo and conditioner I thought how bulky they were going to be to pack and haul. Then I started thinking of how unsustainable buying bottles of beauty products is, how many people buy a bottle of shampoo and conditioner every few months, and then how those bottles are thrown into some landfill where they will never break down. Along with the plastic bottle issue, traditional store bought products are bad for your hair (stripping your hair of natural oils), your health (containing dangerous chemicals that can cause cancer and other health issues) and the environment (chemicals draining into our soils and water systems).

Even those that call themselves 'natural' don't always adhere to my perhaps more stringent definition of the term. My rule of thumb is if there are more than ten ingredients in the product, it most likely contains some synthetic material that you don't want on your body. I have always tried to buy natural, bio-degradable beauty products, which gets expensive, and still produces the same problem of consuming and throwing away plastic products.



*Ali in the Shower*

I'd heard of the 'no poo' method; using baking soda and vinegar in place of your shampoo and conditioner. With no room left in my pack I decided that I was going cold turkey and decided to try the 'no poo.' All I took down to Costa Rica was a couple of squeeze bottles, Dr. Bronner's, and tea tree oil, knowing I could get the rest of the ingredients in country.

Baking soda is great for cleaning. It's main benefit is it's a mild alkali with fine, slightly abrasive particles. These two factors work together to break down dirt and grease incredibly effectively, leaving your hair super squeaky clean. It also is not a common irritant and so should not cause issues for most people.

Apple cider vinegar works in complement to baking soda incredibly well. As a more acidic product, it balances out the alkalizing effect of the baking soda to restore your hair's natural pH levels. It also helps kill bacteria and is a natural humectant, which means that it helps hold in moisture.

I have altered the simple baking soda and vinegar recipes a bit to work better with my hair and to give some extra nutrients and benefits. You may need to alter your recipes as well to fit your type

of hair; you can find many different suggestions online. Here is the ratio I have found works well for me.

#### Shampoo:

1 Tablespoon baking soda

½ cup water

¼ cup castile soap (I use Dr. Bronners)

1 Tablespoon coconut oil

#### Conditioner:

¾ cup water

¼ cup apple cider vinegar

2 Tablespoons aloe vera gel

1 Tablespoon coconut oil

A few drops of tea tree oil

It may take you several weeks before your hair adjusts to this new method. You can either go straight to only using the baking soda and vinegar, or slowly ease into it. You will also find that you won't need to wash your hair nearly as often. I now only wash my hair twice a week.

This new shampoo and conditioner method can prove to be more cost efficient, environmentally friendly, and better for your health and hair! Hope you give it a shot!

## Farm Facts

### *Alley Cropping*

Fifteen acres of agroforestry is what the “productive” part of our farm measures out to be. Every year we continue to add to the scale of our plantings. Over time one begins to realize that sheer diversity for diversity sake, once above a backyard scale, becomes unmanageable. Especially with a transient workforce. This has led to us focusing on crops which will play a larger role in our kitchen, and scaling those up. With much of our climax orchard species in place, this results in installing short rotation annuals and understory corps. For the 2015 rainy season we have or are planting the following species: Banana, Platano, Pineapple, Yampi, Tiquisque, Malanga, and Ginger in bulk quantities



*Alley Cropping*

Each of these is being established in existing alley cropping systems. These include contour lines planted with nitrogen fixing trees and vetiver, with young fruit and nut trees spaced throughout. Eventually most of these gaps will be taken up by the canopy of these trees, but in the meantime we stack in space and time by taking advantage of the open ground, installing these short

rotation crops.

This is a planting pattern which we hope to share with our region as we learn what works and what can be improved. We look forward to maturing with these systems and sharing the results with all.

*Scott Gallant*

## **Community Stories**

### ***A Local Obituary***

*May 23, 2015*

“Bar Donde Alex”, aka "the bad bar", passed into Mastatal history after three years of low sales, ear-splitting music, and general debauchery. Alas, no longer will we fall (or not fall) asleep to the thumping sounds of reggaeton, bachata and finely crafted Latin pop hits. While some may lament the reduction of town nightlife options, most rejoice in the return of more peaceful evenings. Surviving the bar are broken bottles, concrete foundations, and the sweet sounds of cicadas. So here's to the bad bar, we raise a glass of homemade hooch as we toast your demise; rest in peace because we certainly will.

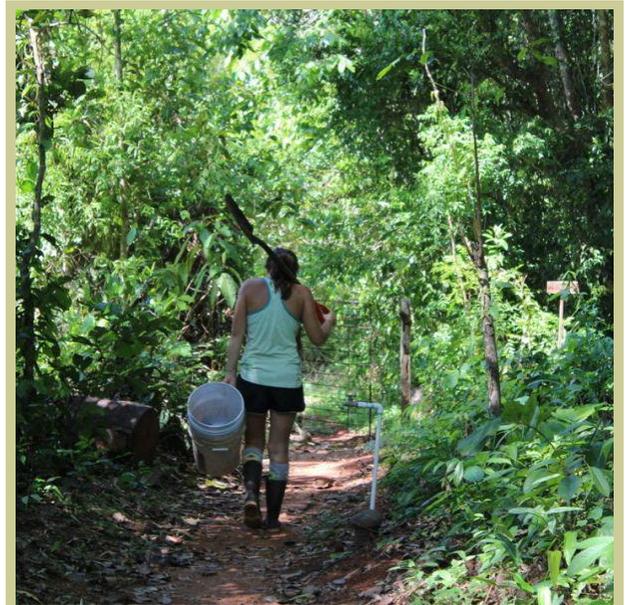
## **Intern/Guest Gossip**

### ***Reflections on this Wild World, Community Living, and Personal Resilience***

The moment I knew this new adventure had begun, was the moment I looked out the window of the rickety old school bus, filled with faces and goods, watching us barrel through the winding dirt roads, switchbacking through mountains and skimming pastures en route from Puriscal to the rural lands of Mastatal. Since then I've been convinced my watch is broken, cycling faster each day... four months have passed since that first bus ride that introduced me into this beautiful world. It's been a challenging, rewarding, dynamic, balanced and inspiring experience thus far. Everyday I find a new reason to be thankful, and a new experience to learn from that I never thought about prior to coming into this experience. This ranges from the wild, yet untouchable jungle, the challenges and benefits of community living, to the definition of sustainability and permaculture on a personal level.



*The Long View*



Here at Rancho Mastatal, our backyard is a national park, La Cangreja. It's overflowing with conserved natural habitat, which means lots of furry, slithery, and frolicking friends, that keep the night far from silent! Towards the end of February, the apprentices all woke up around 5, before the rooster alarm clock, dragging ourselves out of bed, putting together our packs (which my pack alone included 5 litres of water)...and were picked up by a Ranch friend and driven to the trailhead of La Cangreja. The hike began with a steep incline up a dirt road, already revealing the view of rolling hills. We then followed a tight trench-like path, which was originally macheted, trenched, maintained and established by our guide and friend, Junior. It was very meadowy, grasses tickling and scraping any exposed skin. The second third of the hike almost felt like home, lush green forests, with a thick canopy. The last third we switchbacked and wandered up to the peak that had impeccable views. We could see for miles, steep mountains rolled into hills that flowed into the ocean. Mastatal looked incredibly small, buried in a tropical forest, a reminder of our desire for a small footprint. The view and experience provided great vivid perspective of beauty and the importance of minimizing our impact on this earth. Seeing Mastatal and the minute imprint the Ranch had on the land from a bird's eye perspective reenforced many values of living with an intent to form a symbiotic relationship with the earth.

This hike was wonderful but changed my perspective on the term, wild. Here the wild land is untouchable. I yearn to go off the path, like in the thick woods of Vermont. Home in New England, going off the beaten path, is physically and metaphorically entering a sense of wild(life). Yet here... especially when I seek and yearn for alone time I can't run through the woods looking for a tree to sit against. Each night I watch every step for snakes, check my sheets for scorpions and hide away from intense house rattling thunderstorms. Here I live within the wild. I've formed a new found appreciation for this jungle, this constantly thriving and alive world that begins just outside my doorstep. While I yearn for that first night home in New England where I can walk through the woods led only by moonlight, and to gaze at the stars with no fear of darkness, I still acknowledge and remain grateful for this wild jungle that sings me to sleep each night, awakens me in the morning and constantly keeps me on my toes.

Community; living, sharing, and engrossing in it, with staff, groups, friends and locals has been an incredible learning experience. It's been both challenging and rewarding, but I know that I'll take a tremendous amount of knowledge and understanding of methods and values away from this lifestyle. On the challenging spectrum, living in an intentional community means sharing a house with fellow apprentices that you work, live, eat, and play with all day...every day. This experience can lead to many things, disagreements, irritability, differing personalities, but all challenges are met with learning. I've learned new forms of communication, new demands for personal time which has led to personal independence, and most importantly support, which has led to creating a family, away from home. It has been a challenge, but a challenge worth experiencing. We also take on groups and guests, from varying backgrounds, people of all ages, different demands, and different sized groups. Last week we had a grand total of 43...this week 38, which has been a learning experience within itself. It's been challenging in the sense that after a laborious work day, you still need to be prepared to answer questions, engage in conversations and spend Saturdays and Sundays cooking large meals. In the end, this challenge has been an incredibly rewarding one. I've met people of varying backgrounds, from doctors, to homemade ukelele makers, lots of college

groups, farmers, musicians, a professional acrobat... the perspective, the places, the stories and the lifestyles of each person I've met has been the greatest learning experience I could ask for. The connections I've made with people, whether they're here for a night or a month has been incredible. The groups, guests and students that the Ranch attracts brings differing individuals together in the pursuit of a similar quest, while sharing stories, learning from one another, and making life-long connections even after just one conversation. There is something very powerful that has happened here, taking away the easy accessibility of communication (phones/computers) has provoked much deeper connections. Conversations don't trickle out because a phone rang, a text came in, or a facebook notification popped up, everyone here is living in the present. There is no where else here, but the present.

Being Personally Sustainable: this thought never really came up before, until Timo mentioned it once during a community check-in. We're always defining resiliency and sustainability in regards to the earth when defining concepts like permaculture. However one key component of permaculture, sustainability and resiliency for the earth is that the initial step to make overall change is to begin with and within yourself. In Ben Falks book this is referred to as Zone 00. Both challenges can be stressful; how to take care of the earth if we struggle to take care of ourselves; to remain healthy, to be stress free, to find balance, and to be happy. This is what I personally strive for to essentially be a resilient and sustainable individual within to remain energized in what is and will be a life long battle for multiple generations. Seeking and utilizing alone time has been a great way for me to recharge by battery through journaling, music, drawing, writing, crafting... Playing soccer and frisbee almost daily has helped me sweat out the small stuff, and release those essential endorphins. The food I've been fortunate to fuel my body with here daily helps me remain energized for the various tasks and projects at the Ranch, which the projects alone are what is helping the earth become a more sustainable and resilient place, through projects like zone 1, natural building, fermentation, solar electricity, wilderness education and more. I've also been introduced to a plethora of new knowledge of fermentation, and have fallen in love with dairy kefir, balm (a drink similar to kombucha), our home-made cheeses, pickling, kimchi, lots of fermented turmeric and various other delicious additions to our daily meals. I struggled for a few years with a rough digestive system which at times left me without energy, wasting days resting, and wasting time trying to find a reasoning, when all that needed to change was my diet. The addition of probiotics in the dairy kefir, and microbes in all our fermented goods have completely altered my stomach's ability to digest and utilize the fuel, after wasting too much time, the solution was all found in the food I was consuming and the beneficial additives that occur just through certain methods of preparing foods. Through hard work, play, food, and personal time I've seen myself transform into a more resilient individual which consequently carries over to the efforts I put in each day here with each new task and project we complete to keep this sustainable learning center running. There's a reason people should spend hours in the kitchen preparing one meal that will be consumed in 20 mins... because the nutrients and energy will stay with us for a day and build up for a lifetime of healthy wholesomeness.

“Unless the sacred is imbued in your day-to-day life, in your work, in the food on your table, in the attitude you take toward the healthy of your own community, it's value is limited.”

--- John Edler

*Addie Halligan*

## **Comida Corner**

### ***Papaya Ketchup***

This was most delightful and the most exotic thing I have made so far.

### *Papaya Ketchup*

Serving Size 1 Cup

Use either mango or papaya

- 1 1/2 Tablespoon oil
- 1/2 Cup chopped onions
- 1/2 Tablespoon chopped ginger
- 1 small ripe papaya (about 1 lb) peeled, seeded, and chopped
- 1/2 Cup water or additional as needed
- 1/4 Cup sugar
- 1/4 Cup cider vinegar (I used extra)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt or to taste (I used a lot more)
- 1/4 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
- 1/8 teaspoon ground allspice
- Pinch of ground cloves

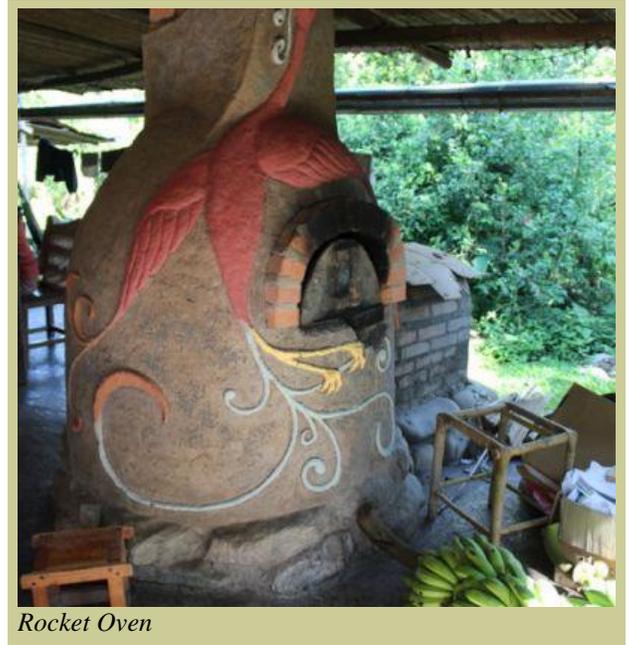
We had to substitute the oil for lard, the sugar for tapa dulce, and the cider vinegar for our homemade banana vinegar. Quick note here. Lard is not as bad for you as some marketing has otherwise made you think.

In a medium saucepan heat the oil over medium heat (or a rocket-stove if you have one, and if you do you are awesome). Add the onion and ginger cook until tender about 2-3 min. Add the garlic cook stirring constantly 3 min. Add the papaya and cook, stirring constantly about 3 min. Add the remaining ingredients and bring to a boil over med high heat. Stirring and scraping the bottom regularly. Once it is at a boil reduce heat a bit and simmer uncovered 20 minutes. (I had to add a bunch more salt and vinegar at this point because that's how I roll).

Transfer mixture to a food processor and blend/process until smooth. Let cool to room temp. Should be stored covered in fridge up to 5 days before using. (Or serve it hot same day like we did).

*Mariah Albertus*

For more, please see Mariah's blog at <http://mariahrayneroots.blogspot.com>.



*Rocket Oven*

## Inspirational Impressions

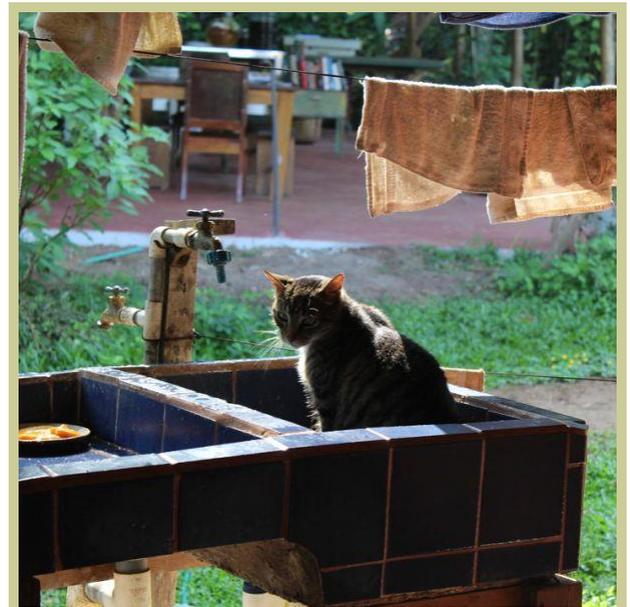
### *Community*

“Our present idea of freedom is only the freedom to do as we please: to sell ourselves for a high salary, a home in the suburbs, and idle weekends. But that is a freedom dependent upon affluence, which is in turn dependent upon the rapid consumption of exhaustible supplies. The other kind of freedom is the freedom to take care of ourselves and of each other”.

--- Wendell Berry

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew



*Maximo Gato*