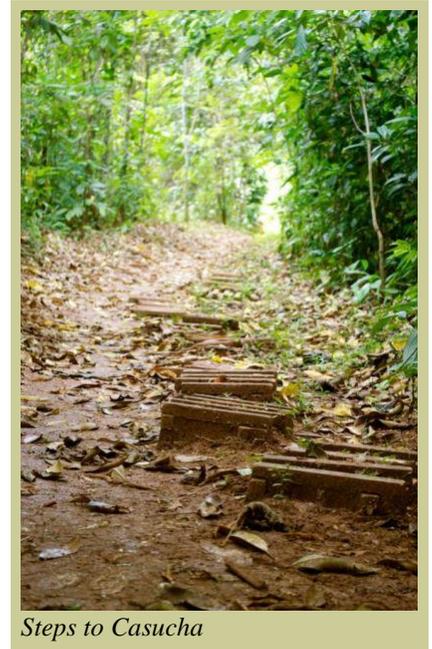


Rancho Mastatal Updates

April May June 2012

The rains are back. That means it's time to get the thousands of trees and other plants that we have in our nurseries in to the ground as soon as we can. The Goat and Biodigester Slopes and Ferngully have all been getting complete makeovers during the past few months as we continue our epic push towards increasing food production. Alongside this thrust for increased plantings that will eventually result in more food on our plates, we've begun the associated offensive to get thousands of nitrogen fixing trees and plants in the ground. Velvet Bean, Sun Hemp, Madero Negro, Pigeon Pea, Poro, Peanut Grass, Jack Bean, Schizlobium, Leucanea, and other species make up the throng of plants that do much of the work for us while we're sleeping. Building fertility in the tropics is no small task. Almost 11 years ago, we started working this land which had been cultivated aggressively and extensively for decades prior to our arrival. We began our growing endeavors in the worst possible soil; extremely acidic and exceedingly tired. Our greatest challenge since moving to Mastatal has been working to revive and build our soils. We finally feel as if we're starting to get there. We're beginning to see results from our hard work and accumulated experience. We owe a lot of our recent success to dozens of individuals over the past few years who have been instrumental in making this all possible. It feels as if we're making great strides towards creating a truly regenerative food system. Almost all of our meals now feature some important ingredient from our farm and many of our meals are made up entirely from products produced on site. Weekend meals are commonly locavore and propane free, even when rolling out 100+ plates in a day. We're getting geared up for a busy summer before our annual lull begins in September. Our new internship begins in July soon before our annual Permaculture Design Course (PDC), one of our favorite offerings of the year and always a source of inspiration as we work to improve and refine our food systems. We hope that some of you are able to come and see all of the changes and others we're looking forward to see soon stateside. Enjoy this edition and please write and let us know how you're getting on.



Steps to Casucha

This month's update includes:

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Gerardo during the Indigenous Skills Course

RM Program News: Indigenous Skills Course

"If you give man the option between a mango tree and \$100, he will choose the \$100. He will spend the money by the next day, whereas the mango tree will continue to provide for a lifetime." - Gerardo

The morning of May 22nd, when the sun had just peeked over the tops of the towering trees, we found ourselves gathered in Rancho's classroom beginning what would be an eye-opening experience. Our guide: Gerardo Perez from the Zapaton Indigenous Reserve down the road. Our classroom: the tropical wet forest of Costa Rica. Gerardo began to recount the legend of how the National Park, La Cangreja, received its namesake. Sitting on the edges of our seats, we listened to the tale of seven men and their attempt to steal a treasure from the peak of La Cangreja. However, their expedition was brought to a halt when they were confronted by the water spirit of the mountain. This protective spirit took the form of a giant crab, *una cangreja*. From the confrontation with this spirit came the lesson that instead of trying to steal from the forest, we should learn to live *with* it, using the abundance of resources in its possession with respect.

Following the tale of La Cangreja, Gerardo stood up and led us, his apprentices, through a number of skills traditionally used by the indigenous community of Zapaton to live off the land. Our education began with a tour through the forest where we sampled some of the forest's finest cuisine ranging from bitter palm hearts to sweet tree sap. We then turned our attention to the construction of a traditional shelter, *un rancho*, entirely from material gathered on site. Tree trunks were used for the frame and secured with strips from the inner bark of trees. Our roof was assembled from broad leaves, locally called "*cola de gallo*", stacked and then secured with vines. The ranch now stands as a resting place for weary travelers to and from the river or as a refuge from the rain. We concluded the three days with a lesson in the intricate art of basket weaving—a craft not designed for anyone short on patience or dexterity. It can be said with certainty that all of us gained a profound respect for nature and will carry on a part of the indigenous culture to all parts of the world.

By Ruud Kooloos, Naomi Robert, and Lisa Buck

Building Report: Fertility

Having spent a good chunk of my Rancho months working on the different phases of creating a new structure, there is so much buzzing around in my head that I cannot pin one thing down to write about, to sum it up. Should I write about how building has changed my perspectives? The simple but effective skills and tools we used? What I learned about myself? What I learned about how people live and build? About the amazing people and teachers I worked beside? When I think of all the words I would have to use to describe any of these, it makes my head swirl a wee bit...So I tried to pare it down to a minimum of words:

Honey Hut

*We built some foundations,
A roof
Some walls
A classroom
An experiment*

*An example
A monument
A sculpture
A view point*

*Some pride
Some mistakes
Some right angles
Some trapezoids
A playhouse for the children;
All mortised and tenoned together.*

*We built;
Sole came to laugh,
And Pico came to rest,
The goats and chickens came to visit.
Don Mario sheltered from the rain,
And a MotMot shat on the floor.*

*People will sleep under that roof,
Within those walls.
Maybe they will feel the presence
Of all those pairs of hands;*



Honey Hut

*A community diaspora
That raised them up.
Or perhaps, to them
It's just a house*



Mushroom

Conservation Update: Lovi-Lovi for Lunch

There is a magical and wonderful new world steadily growing all around the Ranch. This world is often hidden and always full of surprises, it is the stuff that myths, legends and dreams are made of. It can drive some Ranch interns to the brink of madness and beyond.. What am I talking about, but of course it is the fascinating world of tropical fruit trees!

Is there anything more magical than tasting a new fruit for the *very* first time? What colour will it be? How big or small will it be? What will it feel like? And of course the smell, the taste, the texture... it is a multi-sensory experience which could lead to the best thing you have ever tasted in your whole life, or in the case of the Noni fruit, it could taste like puke, wow!

For the past few months at the Ranch I took on the role of "fruit tree lady", helping to map and create a detailed inventory of all of the 250+ young fruit trees spread across the Ranch property. During this venture I had the great pleasure of tasting many delectable and wonderful tropical fruits:

1. Miracle Fruit

The miracle of these scraggly trees beside Jeanne's tends to go unnoticed by your average passerby. The trees aren't much to look at but from March to April they start to sprout tiny clusters of oval shaped berries which turn from white to green to bright red while maturing. The miracle happens in the eating - when you put one or more of these berries in your mouth and chew them slowly there is a sweet and almost flowery taste that coats your mouth, and then a change takes place: anything you eat that is sour tastes sweet instead! I had to try this to believe it but it works, and it usually leads to a tasting frenzy with beer, vinegar or anything that might taste different. The only downside (for me) is that after eating a miracle fruit my teeth always feel fuzzy from eating so much lemon!

2. Jackfruit

This is the biggest fruit in the world, the average one being about the size of a baby, a big brownish-green, spiky baby. There are about 10 of these trees planted around the ranch, mostly out at the Goat Slope. Ranch Jackfruits won't be producing for another few years but I was lucky enough to try some from a nice older couple who passed through for the fermentation workshop and brought a Jackfruit that had fallen off a tree at the side of the road. When cutting into a Jackfruit, it has the feel of a squash with its mountains of peachy-yellow flesh. Certain bits are too stringy and tough to eat but the soft stuff around the the seeds is the gold - it melts in your mouth and tastes like a wonderful sweet and juicy bubble gum with a pleasing slightly rubbery texture. The most impressive part about these fruits is of course their sheer size, the fact that you can gorge yourself and still have enough to share with the rest of the Ranch! The seeds of the Jackfruit are also edible we had them roasted with a bit of oil and salt and they tasted a bit like soya nuts. One day the Ranch is going to have more of these fruits than they know what to do with which is great because the goats love them as well..

3. Lemondrop Mangosteen

A beautiful tree with branches coming straight out like elegant arms and big bright shiny green leaves. The fruit

grows in balls along the arm of the branch starting green and then turning bright yellow. And the taste... oh the taste... like smooth lemon sherbert, tangy and tart yet sweet and mellow. I only had the pleasure of trying one but I could have easily eaten 100's. There are a few varieties of Mangosteen dotted around the Ranch including Cherry Mangosteen which I can only imagine is also a taste sensation.

4. Pitanga / Suriname Cherry

Although the Ranch has around 20 of these trees planted, don't plan on tasting the fruit anytime soon. Only a couple of the trees are mature enough to bear fruit and Sole has a stronghold on both of them! The Pitanga tree has delicate leaves and beautiful little fruits shaped like Chinese lanterns or tiny pumpkins. These fruits take an excruciatingly long time to ripen over a period of days turning from green to pale orange, to bright orange to dark orange and finally to their prime eating colour: fire engine red. The vision for the future is to have hedge rows of these trees/bushes everywhere around the ranch so that everyone can enjoy the burst of sweet and sour goodness that they provide.

5. Salak

Most people would not recognize this spiky palm plant as a fruit bearing tree but it is indeed a wonderful fruit tree of which the Ranch has almost 40. Salak fills a great niche in the tropical food forest because it can grow very well in the shade and unlike most palms it doesn't grow very tall, instead its leaves extend from a ground level trunk. As mentioned Salak is very spiky and therefore the outer branches must be kept pruned to enable the harvesting of the fruit which grows in bunches of plum sized spiky balls. To get the spikes off you just put the fruits in a bucket and bash them around for 20 seconds. The skin of the fruit is uncannily like a dark maroon coloured snake skin, it peels off pretty easily to reveal the fruit which is in segments and looks just like a big wrinkly brown chestnut. The taste is somewhere between pineapple and strawberry and the texture is crunchy and juicy which is a nice change from most tropical fruits which are generally soft.

The fruits above are just 5 of the over *60* fruit, spice and nut varieties being grown at the Ranch. You know I could keep writing about 5 varieties of fruit for every newsletter and still be waxing lyrical about tropical fruits in 2016! In the meantime, next time you visit the Ranch take the time to appreciate and care for these wonderful trees because hopefully one day we will be having Breadfruit for breakfast, Sweet Carambola for snack, Lovi-Lovi for lunch, Durian for Dinner, Tahitian Chestnut for Tea....

Farm Facts: Leche

Milk is life-giving. From mother to child, the process is powerfully intimate and beautiful. From cow or goat to human, it gets complicated.

I am not writing in order to change your mind about conventional milk or convince you of its evils. You probably already know the arguments.

Instead, I am writing to a specific audience. I'm writing to the other humans who are trying to make sense of the milking process and preserve the life-giving potential in milk.

In other words, I write to support those who also wonder what the hell they are doing chasing a goat down a farm road at 6 am Sunday morning, while the rest of the human world is still in bed.



Izzy with her Twins

I write to wipe away tears that can well up in a kind of rebellion that follows on the heels of a faulty sense of entitlement. I object to the perception that having a college degree and human intellect puts you above such matters as scrubbing pails, sweeping poop, and pleading with goats to budge just a half-inch to the left.

I write as a way to open my heart to those who have had to pull a newborn goat away from her mama as she strained forward on wobbly legs toward that ripe, swollen teat - and instead chose to offer a nipple protruding from a hard plastic bottle.

I write with no clear answers about what is right or wrong to do in the world of small animal husbandry. We define the functions that animals serve in our food systems. We balance the inputs of financial and natural resources, of personal energy and time, with the outputs of milk and cheese. Reason maintains the necessity of this equation.

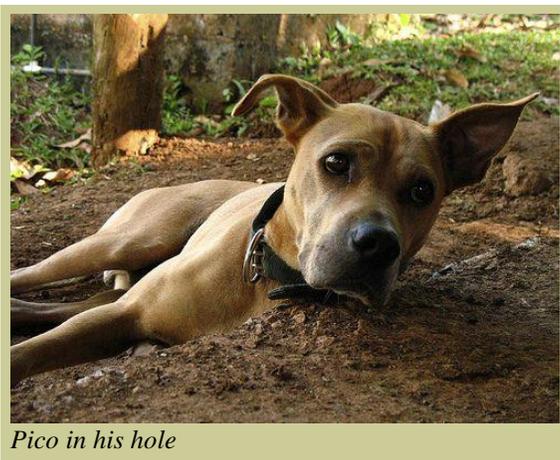
... But then this equation shapes the lives and deaths of living beings. And in the daily movements of animal care-taking, the equation stretches and shrinks like a shadow in the light of infinity.

I write in a feeble attempt to acknowledge what numbers cannot capture. There is a need for animals to keep us humble and remind us that we do not have the only way of knowing and living in the world. Efficiency and routines, sterile technique and order are important and, in many ways, essential. But so are those open moments in which we hold no expectation for a tangible product, except to come out a better person in the world.

I write to formally reject the arbitrary clock that takes my time for the benefit of the economy and detriment to most life, in exchange for money that will never buy back my youth. However inconvenient it can be, I choose the clock wound by the rise and fall of the sun, the growth of grass, and the caprice of a goat.

I write to express my deepest gratitude to the goats, for showing how to give oneself to the present moment - amidst the chaos and madness, the frustrations and sadness - how to leap into the air, kick your legs out and land in a new way.

Change.



Pico in his hole

Community Stories: A Sad Goodbye

We're gutted to bring you the sad news that our dear canine friend Pico has barked his last bark in Mastatal as he makes his way to a new life sans thunder and with abundant *chicharones*. Pico brought so much happiness over the last 8 years and on June 3 took his last breath after struggling with an undiagnosed sickness. Many of you reading this have already received the sad news and we appreciate the many kind words and condolences that we've received from so many. We know that he has a special place in the hearts of many of you reading this. Our memories and impressions of this truly incredible dog are almost endless. His epic marathons are of legend and his ability to spread happiness on a tough day magical. We want to include a truly special thank you to Sparky for making sure that

Pico became an important fixture at the Ranch. Without his saving move outside the front gate that fateful day many years ago, our lives would have been so much less full than they are today. My favorite Pico trait was his true love for a monster ass slap. Whether in a good or bad mood, my day would be made better after an arm-tiring butt whacking session that almost always inspired Pico's trademark low-growl, high-tail wagging response. I'll miss that alongside his morning leaps through our bedroom window more than anything. Though this is by no means all I will miss about the dog that won over just about everyone that he came in contact with.

We had a beautiful ceremony for Pico at the Choza when we planted a special mango ginger on his grave. He lies next to our cat Cururu, both who now have one of the best views in the world out to La Cangreja. We trust that they'll make good company and will miss them both. Rest in peace Pico. We love you.

Intern/Guest Gossip: Creating a Narrative

Hundreds of people make their way through our gates every year. Dozens upon dozens of them send messages of support, thanks, photo albums, and donations. Their words and memories can pick one up in the moment of burden, fill a rainy day with happy eyes, but then they drift away. Occasionally the photos end up on the webpage and messages constantly fill up the guestbooks; often, however, they fade into the email black hole, moving farther and farther down the inbox.

What if we could capture and share all these thoughts and memories and photos? And better yet, share them with the world, and use them to tell the Ranch's story? For better or worse technology makes this possible today. From twitter to blogs to clouds, it appears that our current technological innovation is driven by a desire to share, re-connect as a community, and build a collective narrative. These appear to be good things, even if it all takes place through the mysterious black magic of the world wide web.



Guitars hanging on the wall

Off in the jungle of Mastatal, it is always challenging to explain what actually happens at the Ranch. If you've spent time here, you know this feeling. The question: "So...what do you actually *do* down there?" Implying large quantities of rum, missionary work, drum circles, or vacation. You can go to any number of websites of Central American eco-villages, education centers, permaculture sites, and intentional communities, and read and read and read about how special they are. But the personal experience of a place is often quite different than what one expects. So, can we harness this social media technology to create a more accurate and current narrative of the Ranch? Perhaps allowing those seeking, to better find a path?

As you may have heard, the Ranch is now actively participating in Facebook. While we move forward cautiously, we have been amazed at the overflow of words and photos, the narrative if you will, that we are all collectively creating on the page. This is good for us in so many ways. It helps us to spread the word about internships, provide updates on projects, and advertise our workshops—things that can be difficult, time-consuming, and expensive through traditional marketing. But this all is secondary, because most importantly this page is for everyone who is part of the Ranch community. If you've been inspired by your time in Costa Rica, everyone else wants to hear about it. Folks who walked through our gates seven years ago love seeing photos of trees being planted and children growing older. For what it is worth, and despite all the trepidations

around technology and the monster that is Facebook, this is an opportunity to tell the story of the Ranch, and in keeping with Ranch style, to do it collectively. Thank you for being part of this incredible story , and for sharing it with the world.



Brunch Spread

Comida Corner: Lime Pickle

This recipe comes from LAURA K. and has earned itself a place at the end of the buffet table next to all of the Ranch favorite condements and ferments. This one is tangy and intriguing and has you coming back for more.

Get yerself a bunch of fresh limes, lemons, or baby oranges (if you can't grow them yourselves like we do make sure they are organic). Wash 'em up real nice and slice 'em in quarters. Dump 'em in a bowl and mix 3 parts citrus with 1 part salt. Pack it all in a jar and weigh it down so the brine rises above the level of the limes. Cover with cheese cloth. Put the jar out in the sun for a week or so.

After a week take out the limes and put them in the food processor till they're little chunks or smaller. This is your basic lime (citrus) pickle.

To this you can add chile, spices, herbs, chopped or pureed fruits, oil, and or vinegar, sugar, etc.

Use as a chutney, flavoring for pinto, or as a base for hot sauces.

Enjoy and Buen Provecho!

Futbol Follies: The Beautiful Game

The time is four twenty-five PM. and my internal clock tells me its time to put down my palin (long-nosed shovel) and adorn my football boots and cut off long-johns. I've just planted six vine-nut plants and covered with mulch and I'm feeling a little proud and decide to give myself a pat on the back. I can hear the distant noise of the kids in the street calling for the recruitment of players to the plaza. I feel my heart quicken slightly at the prospect of finally scoring a goal today after four weeks without hitting the back of the net! I get myself a bottle of water ready and take a steady drink from the tap. The temperature isn't too hot today (22 deg) but my body knows that coming from the temperate climate of the UK to the tropics of Costa Rica is like moving from the fridge to the oven.

I've managed to raise a good sweat just walking to the plaza, a mere 300 yards from the Ranch. As I approach the soccer field I hear the cat-calls and tomfoolery of the 15 or so players assembled on the pitch. The ages of the players range from eight years to mid 40's, but every single person is treated with the same respect and dignity.



View from La Casa de Tiburon

We kick off by five o'clock and begin playing in earnest. There's a good turn out today and some of the girls from the pueblo have donned their kits and are fired up to play. Rarely in my 37 years of life have I ever seen soccer played with so much conviction, skill and enthusiasm than here in the small village of Mastatal. The teams are well matched today and the atmosphere is intense but jovial. We have no referee as such, but the play is always fair and rarely do we see free kicks for bad conduct. Usually in football there is a tendency to be less aggressive when playing against younger players and ladies, but not here. Everyone gives as good as they get, and I'm astounded by the skill and tenacity of the younger players. They are fearless and I am rarely able to take the ball when tackling or retain it when tackled. The sky is growing heavy with thunder clouds and we see lightening flash in the distance but the players are unmoved. I'm playing in defense as I feel I serve the team better and can keep my breath for the whole game. We have a special player on our team, his name is Junior, 28, and he's by far the fastest and most talented all-rounder on the pitch. Watching him skip past players with such speed and grace is like watching a master painter brushing his canvas with an almost un-conscious touch.

He knows where the ball is at all times and has the ability to pass and shoot to near perfection. I have to remind myself to stop watching him and keep an eye on the game! My heart is almost beating out of my chest as I continually remind myself to quit smoking. My eyesight is blurred by the sweat rolling down my brow and my tired legs are being harassed by my mind for not having the staying power to keep up with the girls. We don't keep score but I have a feeling that our team is slightly ahead on goals. I'm desperate to get just one goal so I move up towards an attacking position and spur myself on as best I can. I'm being marked by Katia, a strong 30 something year old and she's a powerful force in defense. I receive the ball on the left side of the box and have a golden shot at the goal... but my mind and body are out of sync and I'm easily put off by Katia's bold presence. The ball flies high in the air and well over the bar. The opposing team (and my teammates) laugh and jeer and I laugh too as I pick myself up from the dusty turf! The fun and geniality of the game and atmosphere on the pitch is fabulous. I feel like we've been playing football all together for years. No matter where you're from or whatever your background, we all find a common denominator in football.

It's now six o'clock and we all have that tired look in our eyes and the overcast evening sky is turning pale. No goals today but maybe tomorrow. I console myself with the fact that I gave it my best and when we finally call it a day we all shake hands and head back. Walking slowly home to the Ranch I fully understand the beautiful essence this wonderful community has and feel a spirit that is almost tangible. I feel so welcomed and even loved by these people I have know for little more than a few weeks and feel honored that they let me partake in their beautiful game...

If and when I get my goal I'll surely broadcast it in the next newsletter. Until then... saludos.

Spence



Sole's 4th Birthday Party

Inspirational Impressions: King

Cowardice asks the question, "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question, "Is it politic?" And Vanity comes along and asks the question, "Is it popular?" But Conscience asks the question, "Is it right?" And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right.

----- **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew