

Rancho Mastatal Updates

June/July 2011

Wow. Where to start. We hope that this finds you all well. We're in to the heart of the *temporada lluviosa* and busy with our second high season and new interns. The Ranch seems to be garnering quite a bit of interest from many people and organizations these days with inquiries and tours on the rise. We had some hard goodbyes these past months with the departures of ALEXITA and BRIAN, SUSAN, SCOTT and LAURA, NELLIE, JACOB and others. On the other hand we've had both familiar and new faces crossing our threshold as we settle in to the busy summer. Since the beginning of June we've received groups from the Lakeside School, Butte Community College, Santa Clara University and Seattle University and are preparing for our upcoming Permaculture Design Course and group visits from the University of Washington - Tacoma and Hawaii Pacific University. RACHEL's back for a few month stint before starting graduate school at the [Conway School for Landscape Design](#) in MA. She will continue to help to dial in our orchards and other food systems. AMELIA's also due back in a few days for a medium-term stay before she heads to Guatemala to work on pedal powered projects with [Maya Pedal](#) and then back to the States to begin nursing school in January. We've recently finished assembling a great Ranch sitting crew for this fall as we prepare for our upcoming departure from Mastatal. Next winter has already filled up with a plethora of all-stars expected to return. As a result we'll be hosting a limited internship program and for the first time in a decade we'll be running the Ranch with a group of mostly veterans that hope to raise the sustainability bar to the next level. Between group visits and then, we'll be spending our longest stretch in 10 years (yes, we're almost a decade old!) in the United States visiting friends and family. We're looking forward to olives and spending some wonderful time catching back up with everyone.



Cana and the hen

photo by Maxine Chapman

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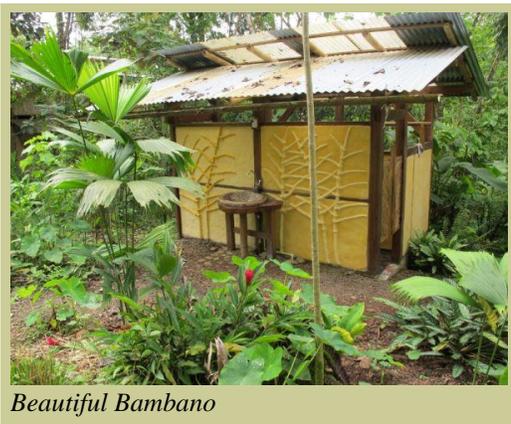
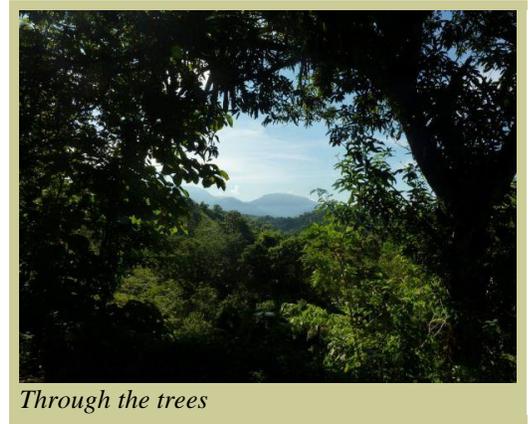
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RM Program News: Groups, Alliances and Workshops

As the Ranch's reputation slowly seeps out in to the world, we're getting more inquiries about how our programs might fit into the plans and curriculum of other institutions, individuals and organizations across the globe. We've been fielding more calls and emails than ever from people looking to combine efforts to spread the word about sustainability. In 2011 we added new programs and visits with Santa Clara College, Butte Community College, the Marion Institute, the University for Peace and Wilbraham & Monson Academy and next year we expect to add a few more. It's thrilling, encouraging and humbling to realize that more and more people believe in our work. We're committed to continue expanding and improving on our innovative, non-conventional, experiential learning programs, something that more and more educational institutions and organizations seem to be seeking. Please help us to spread the word to your alma maters, friends, colleagues, non-profits, and others who might be interested in our programs. You are why we have gotten to where we have in just less than a decade. Our marketing program is simple, maintain a good, informative website, treat people well, and stay true to our ethics and passions and then lean on people that believe in our work to help spread the word. Thank you.



Building Report: 2012

We've officially begun discussions on what to build in 2012. Finishing the CLSC will of course be a huge focus but we're also hoping to erect another structure or two during the next calendar year. There's been a lot of talk recently about a new off-grid, PV and biodigester-powered goat slope kitchen and living structure as well as another private Casucha-like cabin tucked in to the woods with a commanding view of La Cangreja just past the hen house. We're also getting pressed to add on another room or two at the Choza as Sole continues to grow up. We won't be able to get all of these projects started next year, but we're beginning to brainstorm about all of them. We will have a capable crew on hand early next year and will spend at least part of the season taking advantage of the drier months to get some building done. We'll keep you informed on how the plans and construction evolve.



Biodigester entrance and mosaic

Conservation Report: Leaving Behind Propane

We are making great strides in eradicating propane from our daily lives. For cooking options we now have the biodigester stove, the rocket stove, the cob oven, our two solar cookers, the propane stove and our newest addition, Sputnik, a high-tech stove given to us by the Bosch company that burns used cooking oil. We have recently succeeded in cooking all of our meals in a day without the use of propane and hope to continue to reduce our dependence on this flammable hydrocarbon gas in the coming months and years with the eventual goal of ridding ourselves of this imported petroleum product. On the

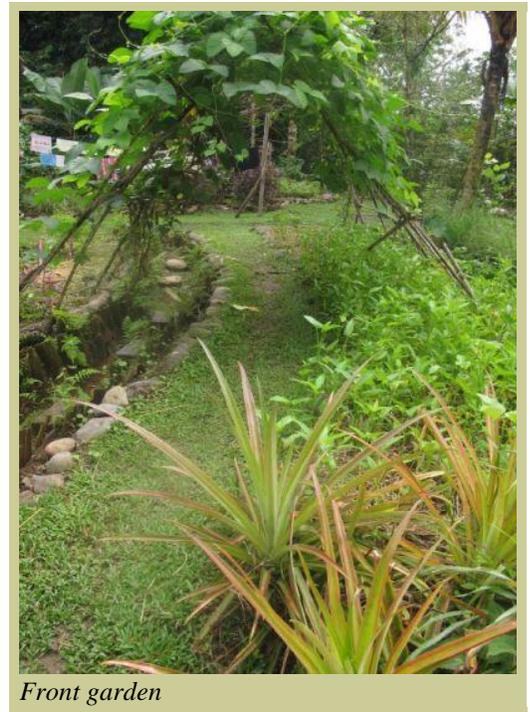
docket next year is the construction of another biodigester that will help power a new kitchen out at the goat slope and a new double burner rocket stove to replace DR. WATSON's ingenious self-feeding single burner model that we've been using quite a bit this year.

Propane sold in Costa Rica is imported from countries like Venezuela. It's extraction commonly negatively affects the environment and indigenous cultures. As a result, we're committing ourselves to greatly reduce its consumption at the Ranch. It will undoubtedly be a challenge as it's hard to compete with the convenience of propane, but with methane, lots of sun during some times of the year and plentiful wood all-around us, we have better choices to work with here at the Ranch. There's just something truly special about cooking your morning eggs on the methane produced from your yesterday's shit. *Buen provecho.*

Farm Facts: Adopt-a-Bed Program

This is introductory letter about our new and developing Adopt-a-Bed Program that all incoming interns read upon arriving to the Ranch. It was written by our dear friend SIMON LIMON.

Here at the Ranch, we have a collective goal of continually improving upon the systems we have in place for producing healthy, delicious, nutritious, high quality food, in abundance. While it is very important to us that we are supporting local farmers by consuming a bounty of local goods as often as possible, we also want to always be eating more and more out of our own gardens. In doing so we can continue to vitalize ourselves: all the beautiful volunteers, interns, guests, students, teachers, family, friends, and staff, with the rich life force stored in our land, transferred from earth to fruit, vegetable or herb and into our bodies (to be returned back to the land through our composting toilets, garden compost, or helping us cook our meals through our biodigester). Hopefully very soon we can produce enough food to share and exchange with our local community too. To us, a large part of living sustainable lives here in our little corner of Central America is being apart of the local economy, while also contributing to the



Front garden

livelihood, health and unity amongst the people in our community. The food that we eat and where it comes from is a big part of all that. Considering all of this, it is clear that adopting a bed, or orchard, or even one plant to care for here at Rancho Mastatal is a big deal! The Adopt-a-Bed program is designed to assure that our food production systems, from our relatively more intensively cultivated “Zone 1” garden beds, to our budding orchards and agro-forestry projects, get the love they need to continue to mature ecologically. We are working to create successively more mature eco-systems, helping them along to become more and more productive all the time, not only in feeding us, but also in providing habitat and food sources for native plant and animal life, as well as returning fertility back to the land we work. This is part of our responsibility as gardeners, permaculturists, and stewards of the earth. As an intern or volunteer here at the Ranch, by adopting a bed, you are helping us all towards our goal. You are also entering a magical world of plants, animals, insects, forests, sun, rain, wind, earth, and lots and lots of poop. Cow poop, horse poop, fish poop, chicken poop, duck poop, human poop, even toad poop! It’s a world filled with inspiration and passion, a world where you are sure to grow and evolve as a human being, to strengthen your intuitive connection with yourself, and with the plants too. You can learn so much about yourself, about gardening, permaculture, the dynamic ecological relationships in the gardens, orchards, and the forest. It is likely that those are some of the very reasons that inspired you to come to the Ranch in the first place. Rancho Mastatal is, as you know, a facilitator of education, awareness, and, hopefully, growth too. The Adopt-a-Bed program is also designed with this in mind. We want all the interns and volunteers to get involved, and to have the opportunity to learn, teach, and share together in their gardening adventures. The beds you adopt and the work and responsibilities involved can be tailored to your level of interest and experience. There is plenty of room for experimenting in the gardens here, be it with different plant species, new ways of making compost, soil amending, plant communities and guilds, or whatever else your big hearts desire. As an education facility we are dedicated to maintaining an open mind; researching, exploring, and implementing new ideas, and old ones too. That being said, it is important to keep in mind that, as mentioned earlier, we are really working hard in moving towards more serious food production. This means also focusing our energy on growing plants that we know grow well here in our climate, including both natives and exotics which we feel are valuable and versatile, and doing things in ways which are tried and true, efficient, sustainable, responsible and effective. If you have an idea for a project you want to take on and implement into our food production systems, please, share it with us! We recommend that you take the time to think over all your ideas carefully, and if you’re up for it, check out the “Niche Analysis” design process in one of Bill Mollison’s Permaculture Design books, or “Gaia’s Garden”. If you take your idea through this design process and present it to the “Garden Guild”, you can get feedback and guidance and we can all collectively decide together whether or not it is appropriate. Take advantage of the abundance of resources at your fingertips. These resources abound in our Garden Guild records, our library, and computer data, but they most definitely are not limited to there. Walk across the street and ask Chepo. If you dare, venture out into the forest and find Don Mario; pitch him that idea you have burning in your heart. Pay close attention. Walk in the forest and observe. Get quiet enough to be able to listen to the plants tell you what they need and want. Keep your heart and your mind open enough to be taught and learn the lessons that the plants, the forest, the local people in Mastatal, Timo and Robin, Sole, and all the other folks you’ll find hanging around here at the Ranch have to share with you and teach you. Grow lots of native basil, and enjoy it. Never call a pesto good without letting Sole taste test it first. It probably needs more garlic, which she’ll inform you of. Don’t forget that

plants can read your mind, and,

“Keep a green tree in your heart,

And a song bird will arrive”

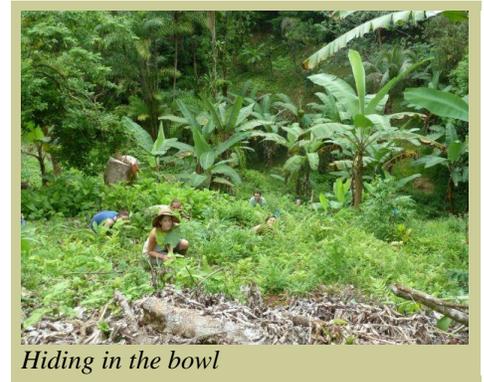
-Chinese Proverb.

By Simón Limón

Community Stories: Un Día en Rancho Mastatal

This is the first contribution in Spanish that we've had in a long while. A recent volunteer from Spain submitted it. Enjoy!

Somos tres españolas que llegamos al Rancho un sábado a la tarde después de 36 horas de viaje en avión, taxi y autobús. Cada una con una manera de ser, y con razones distintas para pasar las vacaciones tras 12 meses de duro de trabajo en España; pero con un interés común, aprender y conocer otras formas de vivir sin la visión consumista e independiente, ni las comodidades a las que estamos acostumbradas en Europa, (microondas, TV, lavadora, etc.).



?Podremos sobrevivir sin todas estas cosas?

Amagoia, Mónica y Laura lo intentaron durante 11 días en el Rancho Mastatal.

La vida en el Rancho Mastatal requiere organización, y está dirigido por Tim. Pero todos debemos ayudar y realizar las tareas que asignamos en una reunión diaria para mantenerlo limpio y cubrir las necesidades de sustento. Dichas necesidades dependen de nuestro trabajo y voluntad para hacerlo.

Hay que cuidar a los animales, cabras, gallinas, patos. Hay que alimentarlos, limpiarlos y recoger lo que utilizaremos para comer o para elaborar las comidas. Amagoia va con Maxiine y ordenan las cabras, recogen los huevos de las gallinas, dan de comer y los limpian! Con eso ya obtenemos leche, huevos...para hacer queso, tortillas...

Hay que cuidar a las plantas y árboles frutales. Mónica va con Rachel para cultivar y cosechar frutas y verduras que también formarán parte de nuestra comida, para sopas, revueltos, ensaladas...

Todo se hace con dedicación y amor.

Robin se encarga de organizar los trabajos de la cocina, guardar los alimentos recogidos y decidir el menú diario. Es importante comer bien y estar sanos para realizar las tareas necesarias con alegría!

Para la cocina, cada día tres personas hacemos el desayuno. Simon, Mary, Tim, Laura, Sara, Amy... Para la comida y la cena ya solo seremos pinches de dos cocineras ticas y expertas, Katia y Laura!

De los restos de nuestros alimentos y su preparación, cáscaras de huevo, piel de frutas, etc., se recogen para dar a los animales. Al igual que nuestros desechos que se recuperan para convertirlos en gas metano para la cocina.

Pero los recursos mas importantes son los naturales, sol y agua. El sol da calor y proporciona carga a las lámparas que nos alumbraran por la noche. Y el agua riega las plantas y frutales y mantiene el ecosistema de alrededor con ese verde indescriptible. No se puede vivir sin ellos!

Por todo ello, la comida, los animales, las plantas, el sol, el agua...; cada DIA antes de cenar unimos nuestras manos y damos las gracias a cada uno de nosotros por la tarea realizada y a la madre tierra por proporcionarnos los recursos naturales para el sustento.

En realidad el alimento y la convivencia entre las personas se convierte en lo mas importante. Hacer sentir bien a los demás, es decir, que los demás esten bien, hace que nosotras también lo estemos.

Gracias a Tim y Robin por este DIA...y otros 10 que pasamos con vosotros.

ESCRITO POR LAURA PAIS GARCIA

Intern/Guest Gossip: To Kill or Not to Kill?

That is the question bouncing around the Ranch these days as our oldest laying hens fall out of production. Our three-old ladies are sputtering after providing the Ranch and its guests with thousands of eggs over the past few years. They've been beautiful, hard-working and productive creatures but recently have not been pulling their weight as it becomes more expensive to keep them compared to the value of their manure and egg production. That puts us in a difficult place as up until recently, we've billed the Ranch fare as vegetarian. This brings us to the debate of whether to kill the chickens for food or let them live out the rest of their lives scraping by out at the goat slope. Chickens, like goats, were domesticated by humans thousands of years ago. They depend on us as much as we depend on them, a relationship that was developed well before we found our way to the Ranch. We delved in to the world of animal husbandry a few years ago when we decided that

animals would vastly improve our food systems by adding food, fertility and physical labor. We've rarely questioned our decision and now consider our animals; fish, ducks, hens and goats; an imperative part of our farm. Manure, food, work, pest control, food scrap management and love are just some of what they have provided us. So why kill a living creature that has given so much? A much discussed question here right now. Knowing that we've provided for and given



Chicken Soup

our hens a wonderful life and the fact that over the years these animals have evolved to provide for our species, we've made the decision to humanely kill our hens and throw them in to the soup pot. We hold the chickens upside down for a short while until they pass out and then quickly and efficiently decapitate them with a sharp knife, ending their life quickly and painlessly. After death they give us one last gift; an amazingly delicious and healthy meal. In return, we thank them at circle for their great gift of sustenance. Walking the path of sustainability is oftentimes an exercise in compromise and filled with difficult moments. We are constantly faced with challenging questions that when responsibly contemplated turn our realities upside down. This becomes more common as we directly involve ourselves in the well-being of others, both animals and humans. Every day, we do the best we can to improve the way we live and work. This endeavor in to the art of killing has been debated incessantly over meals at the Ranch and has brought in to question the long-held ideals of many. Our decision to foray in to eating meat has offended some, but we're prepared to defend our decision. This fall, I'll be rewriting a page or two of our website from "vegetarian fare" to "mostly vegetarian fare". We recently celebrated Sole's 3rd birthday with *arroz con gallina*, a local favorite of all of the town's kids. We now have 56 hens who provide us with a huge amount of daily protein and an amazing manure that feeds our gardens and orchards. We're grateful for their presence at the Ranch. It's hard to imagine the goat slope without our dear cluckers.

Comida Corner: Cookbook Release

Buen Provecho: The Recipes of Rancho Mastatal has officially hit the bookshelves and is available to any and everyone interested. We decided to give the cookbook a more refined look and the first 150 copies are flying off of the shelves. We'll be bringing back a batch of copies to sell at the Ranch late this year and expect swift sales from guests who get treated first-hand to our creative and scrumptious fare. You can buy a copy of our cookbook at the Rancho Mastatal [Online Store](#). We will ship the cookbook without delay from the Marion Institute in MA and all proceeds go towards the construction of the CLSC. In addition to everyone that we've already thanked for making this amazing publication a reality, we want to add our close friend MAXINE CHAPMAN to the list of the acknowledged for her great work in giving the cookbook its "final" edit. There are plenty of new recipes to add in the coming months and years so the second edition will most likely not be too far behind.



*Freshly baked bread from the Mastatal cob oven
photo by Claudio Pinzauti*

Futbol Follies: We Are the Champions

That's the title of the Queen song that we heard over and over on a recent Sunday after *Los Galacticos* stole the final game of the regional tournament to bring our small community of Mastatal it's first ever soccer championship. It was an exhilarating day for just about everyone from Mastatal. *Los amarillos* made it the final game a week earlier after a nail-biting 2-1 victory over the host team Naranjal in a tight game that the Mastatal team was able to pull out on a fantastic free kick from JUNIOR and a diving header by TIMO that snuck by the goalie to close out the first half scoring. The sideline was abuzz during halftime of the semifinal game with a huge (think rural Costa Rica) on hand. TYLER was a beast on defense and cleared away what most likely would have been the tying goal late in the game. The two first half goals were enough as Mastatal's defense withstood a fierce attack from Naranjal's offense for much of the second half. Naranjal scored it's only goal on a handball penalty-kick but could not find the back of the net again to tie the game. MARCOS was solid, even unconscious at times, in goal and overall it was one of the team's more memorable victories in a long, long time. Tulin, who surprised Guarumal 2-1 in the second semi-final game with a big win, set up the match-up with Mastatal for the finals.



Los Galacticos - Champions

The morning of the finals was a beautiful one for soccer. The game was set for noon and the venue was packed with fans, drums, food, beer and players. Tulin started the scoring in the first half with a sloppy goal in front of the Mastatal net. It was the only scoring they'd do this day. *Los amarillos* evened the score towards the end of the first half on a penalty kick awarded to Mastatal for a handball in the penalty area. PABLO SOLANO coolly placed the ball in to the right side of the net after blowing a kiss to his wife and baby boy. The first half ended 1-1 with nerves rising up and down the sideline. The second half remained scoreless for the first forty minutes even though both squads had their opportunities to go ahead. Many thought that the game was heading to overtime when a lob into the Tulin area dropped close to the goal line and a scramble ensued. Timo happened to be in the right place at the right time as the ball hit the ground and rolled towards him. A simple and timely heel kick pushed the ball over the line and mayhem ensued. Mastatal players and fans rushed the field for a good old-fashion pile-on. Tulin players and fans also rushed the field but to argue the goal with the referee. It took several minutes to regain control and when everyone found their positions again, Mastatal found itself up 2-1. The final four tense minutes passed without incident and after the final whistle, the sidelines emptied again and the hugs, kisses and party started.

For the victory, *Los Galacticos* won a new set of uniforms, a few new balls, a bit of money, a pig leg, and a couple of cases of beer. We had made history and brought our small town it's first ever championship. It was an epic day filled with laughter and fun and will be remembered by most that were there for many years to come. The day's events will be retold by *los viejos* for decades, even if the specific details of the day evolve a bit. Congratulations to *los amarillos* and all of their supporters over the years. This one was one for the ages.

Inspirational Impressions: The Shoes of Fisherman

"Yesterday I met a whole man. It is a rare experience, but always an illuminating and ennobling one. It costs so much to be a full human being that there are very few who have the enlightenment, or the courage, to pay the price. One has to abandon altogether the search for security, and reach out to the risk of living with both arms. One has to embrace the world like a lover, and yet demand no easy return of love. One has to court doubt and darkness as the cost of knowing. One needs a will stubborn in conflict, but apt always to total acceptance of every consequence of living and dying"

--- Morris West

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew