

Rancho Mastatal Updates

January 2010

Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the months of DECEMBER 2009 and JANUARY 2010

Please accept our sincere apologies for the long delay between newsletters. We've been as busy as ever these past two months tending to groups, orienting new interns, developing and working on projects and feeding the masses. The dry season has firmly established itself once again though we have been blessed with a few nice rains since it took hold in early January.

Since the passing of the busy holiday season we've been hosting groups almost continuously while simultaneously working on a mass of new projects including a front garden overhaul, goat husbandry, planning for the Community Learning and Sharing Center and loads more. The mostly outdoor-oriented work has prevented us from keeping up to speed on the indoor work of producing this little newsletter. But now that we've settled in to our dry season routine again we're hoping to be able to find a bit more time for more consistent communication with our readers.

Thanks as always for your continued interest and dedication. Believe it or not we're in to our ninth year at Rancho Mastatal and we recognize that many of you have been with us for the entire wild ride. This year looks to be as active, engaging, demanding and full of activity as ever. Long-term and part-time residents GRANDELON, SUCIA, BRUJITA, NICOLAI, ALEX SAWATSKY, WATSON and TIAGO anchor the new team of interns and volunteers as we delve into areas new to many of us including the production of goat milk, fish farming, orchard design and implementation, food production using swales and fermented earth, and the construction of community libraries. We have a profusion of new energy, ideas and muscle-power from this year's marvelous winter intern crew made up of LAURA and SCOTT, PIPPA, ADELAIDE, AMY, CHRIS and MIA, ELYSSA, FRANCES, ANDREW and JORDAN. We're as excited as ever for the coming season and look forward to 2010 becoming a year that truly demarcates the construction and food production eras at Rancho Mastatal. Not that we plan on putting down our hammers for good, especially with the realization of Mastatal's library just around the corner, but we are committed to our almost decade-long dream of seeing the Ranch become a true contributor to and leader in responsible and sustainable food production in the Tropics. Enjoy the update and let us know how you're doing when you get a minute.

This month's update includes:



Pico and timo hanging at the river

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Photo from a recent SEI workshop held at Rancho Mastatal. Photo courtesy of SEI

photo by SEI

RM Program News: 7th Annual Solar Energy International Workshop

For the seventh year running, [Solar Energy International](#) (SEI) held its Renewable Energy for the Developing World workshop in Mastatal this past January. On the heels of low-key holiday and New Year's celebrations, the Ranch made a rapid entry into 2010 with another jam-packed week of solar installations and classroom discussions, the electricity jokes and jargon flying around at any and all hours of the day. While past workshops have run the gamut of energy topics, including solar cooking, wind power, passive solar hot water, methane bi-digesters and solar electricity, this year's focus was primarily on the latter, with 25+ course participants and instructors installing a record four photovoltaic (PV) systems during the week-long workshop.

The first installation took place at the Cork and proves to be the most extensive system to date that SEI has brought to Mastatal. The package comes complete with an inverter to provide AC power for, among other things, Alan's up and coming solar-powered stained glass studio. While much wiring remains to be done, this newest PV system, the Ranch's third, is already a big hit.

Continuing its tradition of supporting local community members in need, SEI also provided lights for 2 families in San Vicente and one in Zapatón. Two solar-powered lanterns were also given to other community members who were not able to receive complete systems this year. The solar-powered electricity provides lighting for these families who were previously using kerosene lamps and candles. In addition to reducing that monthly expense, the solar light also reduces the indoor air pollution.

About half of the participants in this year's course were from a technical college in Madison, Wisconsin, but other U.S. states were represented, as well as a handful of Ticos and a couple of Europeans. One of the really interesting things about SEI is that their courses tend to draw in people from all spectra of life, from farmers, to students, to retirees, to restaurant managers, to wandering engineers. All were able to work as a team, learn from each other, and have fun while enjoying the beauty of Mastatal and its people.

Many thanks to instructors IAN, JASON and KEN for their time and energy, as well as to SEI interns CHRIS and MIA for their continued dedication to maintaining past solar and bio-digester installations in the community during their two-month stay. May the successes of renewable energy in Mastatal and beyond continue for years to come.

Building Report: Kitchen Pantry, Cork and Goats

The recent completion of our new tool shed has freed up space for a project that will fill the hearts of anyone that has worked in the Rancho Mastatal kitchen over the years - a kitchen pantry. The old tool bodega has been transformed into a beautiful and functional pantry space that sits adjacent to the Ranch's beautiful kitchen. Fall interns have transformed the space to be able to handle all the kitchen's needs including racks for the fruit and veggie baskets, space for bulk grains and pulses and dedicated shelves for soap making supplies and our homemade mead and wines.

Never again will sawdust and turmeric or soy sauce and used chainsaw oil be mistaken for one another. Thank you to everyone that had a hand in making this possible.



Rafter monkeys celebrating the Cork raising

Meanwhile, the return of GRANDE y SUCIA has meant a renewed push up at the Cork, in particular with the outdoor bathroom. The new year also brought a quick boost in new construction over at ALICE and BONNIE's place, which sports a nice view into the Hankey toilet for those who care. On other fronts, various furnishings continue to plug away at themselves over in the woodshop and in our minds. Indeed, now perhaps more than ever, minds are at work round the clock turning the wheels of the Ranch. Wait...Alice and Bonnie?



The Ranch Nursery

Conservation Report: The Shift is On

It has recently been spoken by the higher-ups at the Ranch that these days mark an official and major transition towards the food production and regenerative design phase of operations. Yes, this transition has been coming for a long time, though has until now truly sunk its grip into the earth `round these parts. With so much building going on over the last eight years, it has been recognizably difficult to maintain a proper focus on agriculture, though the desire and intent to do so has remained within us all the while. Due to the gracious hands and determination of scores of volunteers and interns, the Ranch's gardens have produced an exciting though

relatively small proportion of food resources. Our food forests have consistently supplemented our fruit intake, and we continue to harvest many of our own beans, herbs and some vegetables for the

year on Ranch grounds. Yet the idea of closing many loops through increased food and resource production calls for much more.

The arrival of 32 laying hens last year set at least one wheel in motion. We now average 18 eggs a day from 23 hens. This year, we have expanded our modest animal husbandry world with two young dairy goats, courtesy of our friends at Barking Horse Farm outside of Puriscal. With an eye on the future, the Ranch hopes to employ these young ladies in the conversion of much more land to food production, all the while managing their health and happiness in the hopes of receiving fresh goat milk next year.

After a brief bout of diarrhea, the goats have settled into their new surroundings, sharing a stable built in record time to coincide with their arrival. A modified post-and-beam structure built of many recycled and salvaged timbers, it is a basic but nice home for Alice and Bonnie and someday their children. These girls are a bright and exciting element to the dynamic new face of the Ranch. While we wait patiently for goat milk, cheese, yogurt and potentially soap, we hope to have Alice and Bonnie work on converting much of the old farmland on Jeannie's property back to a vibrant agricultural zone. Not only will their waste provide a valuable compost for our gardens, but their diverse browsing will also help us to expand into new areas of production. As we shift their paddock around the grounds, visions of a food forest of orchards, bamboo and pasture run happily through our heads. The future is large, and little by little we intend to embrace it with a renewed connection to the earth. Stay tuned for a new section on garden news in upcoming editions.

Intern/Guest Gossip: Saturday Hoopsters

As a child, winters meant snow, hot chocolate, and basketball. If not battling it out with my brothers in the driveway, it was running up and down the elementary school gym on Saturday mornings for our weekly community league, Saturday Hoopsters. As the years passed, the competition got hotter and the t-shirts got larger. Today, some shirts still fit, and the fever still burns. It is in that spirit that we have begun our own little hoopsters outfit here in Mastatal. With a dozen or so ballers currently living at the Ranch, it doesn't take much to scare up a game these days. In addition to the midweek impromptu sessions, we have initiated a Saturday morning tradition of 3-on-3 and 4-on-4 matchups in the community center. Competition has been high and fierce at times, but so far we've managed to avoid any major injuries. Indeed, it's been a great early morning run-around, but any attempt to beat the heat around here is usually short-lived, as most players leave the court drenched and in need of a twenty minute cool-down. While no formal teams have been formed yet, a mini-tournament is likely on the horizon, and the possibility of holding more clinic-style sessions for interested locals continues to pop up on the radar. As things heat up, look for people practicing their layups and through-the-rafters shots in the off-hours. Game on...

Community Facts/Stories: Fería Científica

Two young boys, both raised by single mothers of modest means in a small rural school in Costa Rica, made history a few months ago. MOISES and ION, sons of LAURA and KATTIA respectively, took first prize in one of five categories in the national science fair competition! Yes, you read that right. Competing against 500 projects from all grades and from all regions of the country, the boys, with their project on wattle and daub and earth construction techniques, won the granddaddy of them all. They spent three all-expense paid days in the capital as a reward for

making it to the finals. To get to the ultimate competition they succeeded in triumphing in the local, district and regional rounds; no small feat. They then went on to defy great odds by winning the national competition. We take much joy and hope in these bright young minds and what they mean for our collective future. Stay tuned for more accomplishments as the new school year gets underway this month.

Comida Corner: Orange Carrot Banana Bread (& BONUS RECIPE)

Two great ones. Enjoy!

(makes two 9 x 5" loaves)

Ingredients

3 cups whole wheat flour
1½ tsp baking powder
1½ tsp baking soda
¼ tsp salt
2 tsp cinnamon
2 tsp cardamom
1 egg
4 small bananas, pureed
2 cups sugar
1 cup veggie oil
1 tsp vanilla
2 tbsp orange juice
grated zest of an orange
2 cups of grated raw carrots

1. Whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and cardamom together.
2. Beat eggs and sugar together.
3. Add oil gradually while beating the wet mixture.
4. Add vanilla, orange juice and zest.
5. Fold in carrots.
6. Stir dry into wet ingredients until smooth.
7. Pour into greased pans until 2/3 full. Bake 50-60 min at 350 degrees.

BONUS RECIPE: Banana Mocha Pecan Swirl

A brunch special for those chocolate crack addicts...

Makes one loaf

Ingredients

2 eggs
2 bananas, mashed
½ tsp vanilla

½ cup strongly brewed coffee
1 cup sour cream
2¼ cups flour
¼ tsp baking soda
2 tsp baking powder
¾ cup sugar
¼ tsp salt
½ cup butter/oil
1 cup chocolate, melted
½ cup chopped pecans

1. Mix dry and wet ingredients separately, minus the chocolate. Split the wet into two bowls and add chocolate to one.
2. Split the dry evenly between the two bowls of wet ingredients.
3. Alternate two bowls into pan to make a swirl.
4. Add more chopped pecans and/or sliced bananas on top if desired.
5. Bake at 375 for 35-40 min.
6. Enjoy the fiesta.

Fútbol Follies: Return of the Galacticos

Mastatal opened the new year by hosting both a men's and women's friendly match with opponents of mixed origins. It was the first official action the *cancha* had seen in months, having actually remained in decent shape following a relatively mild rainy season. The women took the field first and proceeded to handily outplay their adversary. KATTIA marked first with a penalty kick, followed by two goals from NICOLAI, the ringer the Mastatal women had been waiting for since they first saw her play last summer. With her and others around for a little while, hopefully the recent push in women's play will continue. In men's action that day, the yellowshirts found themselves hot, tired and down 4-2 early in the second half, but rallied strong to draw 4-4. An average but encouraging first outing for the 2010 Galacticos.

Likely still a bit sore from their 1-5 defeat at home last season, San Antonio de Tulin called for an early January rematch with Mastatal, in the form of another midweek under-the-lights showdown. Having not yet truly gelled again as a team since the rainy season hiatus, the Galacticos would have to truly bring it together to handle the stacked Tulin squad. After over an hour traveling in a cattle truck, the yellowshirts took the field and managed to take an early lead with the craftiness and speed of JUNIOR up front. He went on to complete a hat trick, and, backed by strong defense and a valiant MARCOS in goal, the Galacticos came away with a shutout victory.

The winning continued in Vista del Mar, with a high scoring 6-4 victory, but Mastatal failed to perform in a mini-tournament in La Gloria against Gamalotillo. Things were progressing for the *amarillos* when TYLER y TIMO connected headers early for the first goal, but the team struggled again on a small field, where, ran as they did, they couldn't seem to shake the Saturday dance goma. Let's hope for some redemption soon.

Inspirational Impressions: Make Dragonflies

Stem starts swearing from his corner of the "Farm Homies Bunkhouse." I ask what's the matter. "Oh, just the world ending in three years," he responds, dramatically. Well shit, I think from my own corner in the kitchen.

"Well ... I guess that is something to worry about." I say finally. "What would you like to do, how would you act if you knew that the world was ending in three years?" I ask him.

"Be crazier," he replies. I wonder what that means. Be crazier. Then he asks, "What would you do?" I pause. I can hear the ocean rolling us deeper into the night and see a silver haze hovering above the ridge betraying the hiding moon. Sucia's on gchat.

"Make dragonflies," I respond, and continue twisting twine and wire around a cinnamon stick to try to make a wing.

Nicole Esclamado

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew