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Monday, May 14, 2012

Connie and Anthony's Trip to Bethlehem Farm

Connie and Anthony

For us two River Stewards, the previous week has been filled with great adventure and new experiences. Together, along with three other students from UD, we traveled all the way to Bethlehem Farm in Pence Springs, West Virginia. Over our week-long stay we immersed ourselves in their environmentally conscious lifestyle. Bethlehem Farm is a sustainably run homestead that is the base for a small charity-driven home repair program. The caretakers tend to chickens, donkeys, a horse, a pig, and a plethora of produce to sustain their lifestyle. A while back, the caretakers expressed interest in having volunteers from the ETHOS Program build a passive solar high tunnel on their property. This would allow them extend their growing season so fresh produce could be provided even in the winter. For this purpose we spent the week in service at Bethlehem Farm.

After a week of stress from finals and poor eating habits Bethlehem Farm was the perfect place to recover. Every meal was organic, delicious and purchased locally from neighboring farmers. All the meat was humanely slaughtered and raised. Sustainability practices were encouraged from the beginning to the end. In some of the restrooms they use sawdust toilets for the brave few and rigorously practiced the slogan "if it's yellow let it mellow, if it's brown flush it down" procedure. The human waste from the sawdust toilets is used to fertilize the gardens after it has naturally decomposed in their holding bins, then the gardens provide fresh vegetables and seasonings for every meal. They also compost their food waste, as well as any organic waste from their farm. We were additionally asked to limit the amount of showers we took to two per week and one of the showers we took had to be an outdoor 5 gallon bucket shower. Initially, showering outside seemed like a frightening cold option, but after trying it, both of us decided to take all of our showers that week in the outdoor bucket shower. Every morning we were asked to help out with farm chores where we helped feed the animals, collect eggs, weed the gardens, and plant new vegetables. Assimilating into this sustainable lifestyle inspired us both continue our interest in finding ways to limit our environmental impact away on campus.

The greatest realization we made was that sustainable living isn't only about making sure we recycle our waste, it is also about limiting overall trash. This means that we need to purchase less plastic, and only throw away unusable materials. Limiting energy consumption is also a necessary part of sustainable living. This can be any form from unplugging unused appliances to buying items that are locally made to supporting businesses that use sustainable practices. Overall, the best way to minimize your total environmental impact is not to simply recycle or compost once in a while but to make small alterations to your entire lifestyle. It's easy to act sustainably, it simply requires a new mindset.

