



# Annapurna Times

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## Pond Capacity Doubles

In the summer of 1999, Annapurna's largest rainwater catchment pond was enlarged from 4,000 cubic metres to 7,800 m<sup>3</sup>. The work was done by Auroville's Water Harvest, a service that repairs and upgrades hydrological infrastructure in the surrounding bioregion.

The existing pond had been excavated by hand, a process that progressed gradually over the previous 10 years. In less than 5 days, the Water Harvest crew nearly doubled the capacity of the pond with one of the two new earth excavators which were recently donated to Water Harvest by the TATA corporation.

Soil from the pond was used to create a road around the farm's perimeter. This road serves as a bund which directs runoff toward catchments.

The work was completed at a cost of \$3,300 (US), and was made possible by

the support that Annapurna receives from the Maroma company.

The pond's greater capacity enabled us to grow more crops in the post monsoon season, and raise fish for the first time this year. We are presently seeking funds to enlarge the pond again in the summer of 2001.



*Excavation equipment from Auroville's Water Harvest service deepening Annapurna's pond*

### Mission Statement

- Within the context of producing food for the experimental, international township of Auroville, the stewards of Annapurna aim to discover, develop, demonstrate and document methods of food production that are organic, regenerative, healthy and humane. We emphasize the utilization of traditional techniques and the conservation of indigenous biodiversity.

## Annapurna Farm; a Brief History

Annapurna was purchased for Auroville in the mid-1960s. The land was farmed conventionally until the mid-1970s, at which point it was abandoned. In 1986 it was resettled by Geert Tomassen (Tomas). With support from well-wishers, he has spent the last 15 years gradually reclaiming the farm's 135 degraded acres; planting thorn fencing, bunding the fields, establishing infrastructure, and experimenting with different crops.

Today, approximately 25 acres are under crop/green manure rotation, 20 acres

are under mixed forest, 25 are under plantation forest, and 12 acres remain unreclaimed. The remaining land produces fodder, is grazed, or is under infrastructure. In 1989, Tomas was joined by Andre Mom. In 1995, Tomas and Andre were joined by Brooks Anderson who had been assigned to serve in Auroville as an agricultural mission volunteer by the Presbyterian Church (USA). They presently co-manage the farm with the help of 19 employees from neighboring villages.

## Student Guest House Nears Completion



*Student guest house nearly finished*

We have nearly completed the construction of a two room guest house for students who want to study or participate in the work at Annapurna. This project is made possible by a \$3,300 grant from the Foundation for World Education.

Over the years, many students have come to Annapurna, but they

never were given proper accommodation. The new guest house has a single room and a double room. It is electrified by solar power, and there is an attached toilet. The building has been designed to provide students with a degree of comfort and facilities that enable them to make the most of their time at the farm.

Students who are

seriously interested in the work at Annapurna are welcome, but because the farm's finances are limited, students should find sponsorship for their stay.

Students who are interested in visiting the farm are invited to write to us.

## On-farm Ecological Accounting Research

In the summer of 1999, Brooks started an on-farm ecological accounting research project to monitor and analyze biological, chemical, financial, energetic and physical relationships, storages and flows on the farm.

Brooks started the study with a literature review. He received help collecting materials from many people, notably David Pimentel at Cornell University, Marty Bender at the

Land Institute, Colin Laird at Healthy Mountain Communities, Susan Subak at the NRDC, and Norman Myers at Oxford University. The first two years of the study are funded by the Foundation for World Education.

The literature review was developed into a paper discussing various approaches to agricultural ecological accounting. Brooks presented this paper at the first meeting of the Indian Society for Ecological Eco-

nomics in Bangalore, in December, and at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in Hyderabad, in February.

Next steps in the project include recording data, creating an ecological accounting reference guide, and building a computer database to store and monitor ecological data.

**"Practically every marketed activity or product that uses environmental resources is underpriced."**

- economist Paul Ekins

## Rice Acreage Increases

Much of Annapurna's land is underutilized because we lack the funds needed to create infrastructure to irrigate such land, and to store the crops. In 1998, Paul and Laura, the executives of Maroma, a company in Auroville, recognized that Annapurna had great potential to satisfy Auroville's demand for organically-grown food. They offered to sponsor development that would increase food production at An-

napurna. In 1999, thanks to Maroma's annual contributions of \$7,500, Annapurna doubled its area under rice to 5 acres. To maintain the fertility of the land, we are preparing a large area for an experimental green-manure/rice rotation.

Annapurna's deep black vertisol is ideal for rice cultivation. However, rice production at Annapurna is limited by the decreasing availability of groundwater. As in much of India,

groundwater in our area is overextracted by farmers who are given free electricity by the state. Ironically, many farmers pump precious groundwater with this free electricity to produce non-nutritive or non-edible cash crops, such as sugar cane and firewood. Consequently, we rely primarily upon the captured rainwater in our pond to irrigate our rice crop.



*Fields being prepared for green manure-rice rotation*

## Godown Undergoing Major Expansion

With the help of a grant of \$11,000 from Gateway Trust and our ongoing support from the Maroma company, Annapurna's multipurpose godown is finally undergoing a long awaited major expansion. The godown was started in 1992 after the farm received a substantial gift from a friend in California. In 1998, the structure was slightly enlarged to create an office and additional grain storage space.

The present expansion will create secure storage space for material, vehi-

cles, implements, equipment, supplies, seeds, grains and cowfood, processing area, a workshop, and rooms for the employees to bathe and change their clothes. The threshing floor has also been enlarged.

This development brings the farm's infrastructure into greater balance with its landbase. Once construction is finished, the greatest constraint to putting more of Annapurna's land under production will be the availability of irrigation water.



*Masons completing the walls for new storerooms on the back of the godown*

## Annapurna Employees Enrolled in Pension Fund

This fall, thanks to support received from the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of New Haven, USA, the Jade-tree Two foundation, and Daniel Kanter, a Unitarian minister in Boston, USA, we were able to enroll most of Annapurna's employees in a pension fund.

### Donor Updates

The year 2000 started sadly with the death of Eleanor, a devoted supporter since 1992. Eleanor organized the first harvest celebration at the farm in 1988, and she visited each year to see changes.

Our other primary individual funder, Luciano, is retiring this year from his job at the Venice airport. Although he will continue to spend 4 months working with us each year, as he has

The fund will provide employees with a modest income after they retire, at a time when many of them will have no other source of financial security.

The farm employs more women than men. Several of these women are single mothers and are of the untouchable caste category. This makes them the

poorest and most vulnerable of the poor. For such people particularly, the pension fund will make life after retirement a bit less difficult.

We are all very grateful to the donors who have made this possible.

since 1995, he will no longer be able to fund us as substantially as he has for the past 6 years.

The remarkable generosity of these two individuals sponsored much of the farm's development as well as its recurring expenses for several years.

At present, much of our work is made possible by grants from the Maroma company, Gateway Trust, and the Foundation for World

Education, and donations from a few individuals. However, the farm badly needs sponsors who can help to meet our considerable recurring expenses, particularly the employees wages, and road and fence maintenance. Please contact us if you would like more information about ways that you can support the work at Annapurna. All contributions are deeply appreciated.

*"Agricultural disaster, rather than prosperity, has taken place in barely three decades."*

*-journalist, Kumkum Dasgupta, summing up the impact of the green revolution in India*



*Eleanor visiting Annapurna in 1999*

## Annapurna Farm

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“Organic matters!”, insist Priya and Pamela, two of our Gir milk cows.



*The new community kitchen, opened on 1 September 2000*

### *Kitchen Expansion Completed*

In the summer of 1999 the mud walled community kitchen was demolished to make room for a larger, more permanent structure. The original kitchen, which was constructed in 1991 with a grant from the Threshold foundation, could no longer accommodate the farm's growing community and was in need of major repairs.

Construction of the new building has taken 16 months. The new kitchen provides us with a decent facility for receiving visitors, and it allows the farm's residential community to grow.

The kitchen plays a vital function in our collective economy at the farm, providing shared space for common meals, reading, relaxing, meetings and discussions.

Like the old kitchen, cooking in the new building is fueled primarily by methane from our biomass digester, and the electricity is from solar power. The grains and milk that we consume are produced on the farm.

The kitchen and the guest house make it much easier for Annapurna to accommodate visitors who would like to work on the farm for a while. The farm needs more residents. If

you are considering staying at Annapurna, please let us know so that we can send you more information.