

March 2022 Newsletter from Bio-Benin

The highlight of our lives these past few months is a video focusing on the efforts Guillaume has made to produce the first craft beer in Benin. You can watch it [here](https://youtu.be/E4rMjLytjnQ) (https://youtu.be/E4rMjLytjnQ)

Perhaps my favorite spot is when he laughingly acknowledges that he never set foot in high school. His parents were too poor, and his father needed his help farming. Ten years ago, when we first met, he was embarrassed to admit to his lack of formal education. Now, he understands the importance of continual self-education, and practical experience. It's a huge advance and one that makes me happy.

On the farming front, half our onions turned out beautifully and full-size in a mere three months (everything grows faster in Africa because of the strength of the sun). The other half succumbed to a virus, perhaps because we planted them on newly acquired land that had been treated with Round-Up last year. We'll need to let the soil rest, treat it organically to kill the virus, and enrich it with cow manure.



Theo and Guillaume harvesting onions

Speaking of cow manure, (which we do a lot in Natitingou!), Guillaume made friends with a woman, Amina, from the local nomadic Peuhl tribe, whose riches stem from their herds of cows. Guillaume charmed her into letting us pay \$1 for each large sack of manure that we pick up, normally it's at least twice that. I stay out of the way as he and our gardeners head next door every few weeks to collect as much manure as we can handle. It's an enormous **richesse** that will improve the fertility of our soils immensely in the months ahead.

I realize not everyone thrills to the prospect of cow manure and while I love walking around our property with Guillaume and admiring the improvements we are making, I, too, need more than just manure, natural insecticides and weeding to talk about. So, I'm currently in Montreal where I found a fabulous (affordable) apartment on Sherbrooke St. East in the heart of town, known as Le Plateau. Anyone heading this way is welcome to come and stay in my sunny, bright, two-bedroom apartment. The locals are friendly and switch seamlessly from French to English, without the underlying antagonism of years gone by. I'm looking forward to a happy time here when I need to escape the vagaries of Benin.

I shall miss the fresh vegetables I pick from the garden daily to make soups of cassoulet beans, kale, potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, onions with their green stalks all seasoned with bay leaves and hot peppers. I doubt there is anything healthier or more delicious! I shall also miss morning bike rides with Guillaume along the dirt paths that crisscross the surrounding farmlands.



Guillaume and Julie on early morning bike ride across the fields and streams of Natitingou

I'm hoping that in my absence Arnaud, the new head chef at Chez Guillaume will manage to attract more customers and open up for breakfast. He's both charming and very competent, the perfect manager to take over from Guillaume and maintain his high standards. I also hope Guillaume can finally start selling his beer locally to other restaurants and hotels and create a steady stream of income.



Arnaud our new chef cuisinier with leeks from the farm

Despite the many setbacks -- most recently the loss of all solar electricity in the restaurant at night-- we struggle on with a certain amount of gritty determination and a goodly amount of joy as we slowly work towards achieving our dreams. More than ever now, as we try to achieve financial independence, we need your support. So please include us in your own efforts to leave the world a better place than you found it.

You can contribute via Paypal by going to our website www.bio-benin.org and clicking on the Donate button, or by mailing a cheque to 7483 Pinebrook Road, Park City, UT 84098. Soon we'll be registered in Canada as well and I'll add my new address to the mix.

Thank you for your generosity. Every bit helps and we greatly appreciate it.

With love from
Julie and Guillaume