



TOP: Heartwood Homestead's solar-power system produces more electricity than the farm can use, and Roger says the system will pay for itself within three years.

SUPPLIED

ABOVE: Roger manages the farm's no-till organic market garden.

"I hope Roxy will help to protect the chickens as she grows into her guardian role," says Karen.

Roger heads up the fruit, vegetable and compost components of the farm. The hen/rabbit system comprises a 20m² structure, and houses about 40 layer hens and eight breeding rabbits, which hang over the hens and compost floor in comfortable cages. The floor is covered with a 600mm layer of mixed organic matter that is turned once a week.

"We move the top layer to the side after eight weeks, and remove the compost at the bottom. The rabbit droppings and urine, in combination with chicken manure, work very well for the compost. At the same time the chickens provide us with eggs, managed with a clean, roll-away system," says Roger.

Once weaned, the rabbits are placed in rabbit 'tractors' (movable pens) on the vegetable beds. Like the chickshaws, the tractors have mesh floors, allowing the rabbits to feed while fertilising the soil. The tractors are moved every second day.

AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM

Roger is establishing a 'food forest' and two food gardens with plants ranging from ground cover

to permanent fruit trees. The entire farm is loosely planned and laid out on permaculture principles.

"I love this system and exploring how things are connected. I'm always looking at ways to improve," says Roger. As an example, he is currently planting plenty of pomegranates, pawpaws and granadillas: his family love to eat them, and they help to supplement animal feed.

The market garden, which Roger established in June 2020, uses Hügelskultur, which entails creating a base of wooden material such as logs and sticks, onto which topsoil is layered. As the wood decomposes, carbon and beneficial microbes are released into the soil, feeding it over time. It is also no-till and chemical-free.

Roger says wind is a big problem, as it tends to blow soil cover away. "We're managing the wind with edible windbreaks such as granadilla vines and sugar cane, and mulching with heavier organic matter, like maize stalks."

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

According to Roger, they are close to achieving their goal of being self-sufficient in food.

"The fruit still needs to come online, but meat, dairy and vegetables are almost all catered for."

Karen adds that each component of the farm is a microbusiness, but overall, they are almost breaking even. To fill the gap, she does part-time physiotherapy work, and Roger does graphic design work and carpentry.

"All the farming activities add to the experience we offer our guest house visitors," Roger adds.

'WE'RE TRUE BELIEVERS IN COMPOST TOILETS; THEY DON'T USE WATER, AND THERE'S NO BAD ODOUR'

The Galloways are also hosting a student internship programme as a contribution to their community. "Cebo Ndlazi and Bathandwa Sigudu are our first interns, and we're learning a lot from one another as we go along," says Karen.

The internship, which is faith-based, runs for nine months and focuses on practical farming skills.

"Our country has complex problems, but we want to be part of the solution. We want people to come to Heartwood, see what we're doing here, and either share their ideas on how we could improve or use our efforts to inspire their own projects," she says.

Roger's advice to anyone interested in off-grid living is to start small. "If you live in a flat or small townhouse, start by growing something edible in a pot or your backyard. Research, experiment, and grow from there."

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