

Vinha Velha's Farm and Forest News



With the change of seasons, the landscape of Vinha Velha and its surroundings is transforming rapidly again. As the last pieces of green in the meadows are slowly disappearing, the landscape is remembering what comes next and prepares herself for a long season of drought. For other plants and trees, this is the moment to show their colours in the form of deep green leaves as a result of harvesting sunlight through their processes of photosynthesis.

After initial high hopes of a wet winter season, the rains stopped (too) early in the beginning of this year. But nature is wise, it adapts in the best way it can to push through another intense phase of its existence. The region is degrading, and the way humans treat land is not always helpful for her, but nature will eventually always find a way back to balance.

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Vegetable production

As the season is ripe for it, many new plants went into the ground through the capable hands of the agriculture team lead by Delia and Flo. The gardens turned green as the farm's production is going up. Apart from seasonal vegetables that will be used to sell in the shop and market, also flowers are colouring the main garden of Vinha Velha.

Part of the produce goes into the delicious plates of Dini, Vinha Velha's cook, and the rest decorates the shelves of Vinha Velha's shop, waiting to be bought by people connected to the farm. Part of the plants in the gardens are grown for seed production in collaboration with a local organically certified seed company called 'Sementes Vivas'.



Regenerative action

On Mattie's ([from Restore Nature Foundation](#)) initiative, a double row of trees and plants was planted in the main garden of Vinha Velha. This will serve as a windbreak and shading as this area is quite exposed to wind and sun. Using regenerative planting techniques, these rows will also serve regenerative processes with the aim to restore the native ecosystem.

On the pictures below you can see the 'nest' method that was used to plant: various trees, shrubs, cuttings and seeds are planted together in one planting hole, representing different layers of a forest ecosystem. Based on sunlight needs and life cycles of the various plants, the nests are strategically planned. After, we created a nest of biomass around the plants to imitate the birds in their strategies of protecting their babies. This biomass serves as a protection against sun, wind and frost, prevents evaporation of water and will protect and feed microbacterial life, that in turn build up the crucial layer of topsoil.



Want to have impact with Restore Nature Foundation?

You can adopt squared meters of land with us that we will regenerate in your name. On every adopted meter we plant a small ecosystem with native trees, cuttings and seeds. We add compost and cover the soil around it and take care of it. See some examples below. Follow the link in the button below to take action!

[Regenerate with us!](#)



Some words Margit, one of Vinha Velha's founders

Back to the cows

Old photos from the nineties show that the black and tan four-legged friends were already a feature of the early days of Vinha Velha. The reason for starting to keep cows was actually a mundane one: Hubert liked to drink fresh milk! From his hometown in Franconian Switzerland, he was used to buying milk from the organic farmer's farm to fill his milk can. In Portugal, however, 30 years ago you could only buy ultra-heated milk in cartons. In

at a time when households often didn't have refrigerators, that made perfect sense. For Hubert, however, it was no alternative, and as soon as possible he decided to buy his first cow, which was housed in an old barn ruin (today Casa Nova) and herded outside more poorly than well. In the early years there were no fences either and as the animals grew in number, it was not uncommon for them to feed in Barao de Sao Miguel's neighbour's garden and we got into trouble for it.

Later, when Jose (picture below) and Maria came to Vinha Velha as day labourers, the cows were tied by their front legs in the old Portuguese tradition, so that their radius was a little more restricted.



The daily milking has always been a great amount of work, initially done by Hubert many years and then by Jose, often twice a day. I still remember how Hubert filled the yield into a large jug, loaded it onto the pick-up truck and distributed and sold it by the litre to the housewives in the village, mainly from the older generation. A cow can supply far more than one family with milk, and milk processing was still in its infancy. In order to provide long-term conditions for cow husbandry, Hubert then planned the new cowshed, the completion of which (in clay construction) took years, but in the end there was room not only for half a dozen cows but also enough storage space.

At first only for our own use, later also for sale, we began to produce yoghurt, curd, fresh cheese and sometimes even butter.

I took over this work, as well as cleaning the buckets and cans, which in the early years was done in the bathtub! The yoghurt crate, specially made at that time, still exists today and is in use.



The amount of work involved in keeping cows, however, led Delia (see picture above milking the cows when she was 10 with Hubert in the back) to give up cow keeping with a heavy heart and the fact that there is now a calf on the pasture again is only due to the fact that, contrary to all predictions, the last young bull has produced offspring. The food is scarce, the calf is feasting and unfortunately there is not much milk left for us at the moment. Nevertheless, the cows are definitely an asset for the farm: monetarily, they are a purely subsidised enterprise. But in addition to the much sought-after manure, they are a great joy to countless children of the holiday guests who, having barely arrived, get out of bed early in order to be on time in the stable for the milking time with Bizou. For many, it is the first time they have seen milking by hand and the calmness that Bizou radiates during his work is well received by young and old alike. It would be great if we could find a way to continue keeping cows in Vinha Velha and the fact that we recently got reinforcements in the agricultural team gives us hope that it will continue after all....

New Vinha Velha members

We hereby want to introduce you to the 2 newest members of the Vinha Velha 'family'! Michel and Uli moved into the Yurt close to Vinha Velha's main lake. A couple of words from them:

'Since January 2023 we also became part of Vinha Velha. And we are filled with joy about it!

We help Vinha Velha's core team: Michel works on the farm in the agricultural area and I (Uli) work in the café and vegetable gardens. We enjoy this land, the people, the good food from Dini (Vinha Velha's cook), the sea, the Yurt in which we live, the smells of the plants and trees...

We come from Biberach, Germany and our 4 children still live there. 40 years ago we fell in love with this land and we always had the hope that one day we have the possibility to live and work here. Now we are here and sometimes it feels a little bit surreal but so good!

Thank you Margit and the rest of the team for believing in us!

Uli & Michel



Vinha Velha



Restore Nature Foundation