

Promoting sustainable agricultural practices through our involvement with farmers and growers in Assam and on the west coast of Canada

THANKS TO THIS YEAR'S VOLUNTEERS IN ASSAM!



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# Fertile Ground:

## East/West Sustainability Network

UPDATE — FALL/WINTER 2010

### Reaching out to flood-affected families in northeast Assam - Community-based demonstration gardens

This winter, Fertile Ground's volunteers will begin working on a new project to create a network of small community gardens in the northeast corner of Assam.

Families from five remote villages in the Sadiya area will work along with the Canadians to prepare the soil, erect fences to keep out wandering livestock, and assemble simple play-ground equipment for school-aged children.

There is no road access to Sadiya, and virtually no employment. In most places, sandy soil and a lack of water for irrigation means most people can barely produce enough food for their families.

Most of the people now living in this area traditionally lived along waterways in the Brahmaputra River valley. They lost their homes and land as a result of flooding caused by the heavy monsoon rains and unregulated logging in the nearby Himalayas.

As the gardens develop, villagers will learn how to use simple, low-cost practices such as composting, crop rotation and compost "teas" made from animal manure, leaves, seeds and roots of local plants.

The project will help participants produce organic food for their families, and to explore possibility of selling agricultural crops as a potential source of income. It will be carried out in partnership with NEADS, an NGO that has been working with flood-affected families in Assam for the past 20 years.



Heavy rains didn't dampen the spirits of participants at a workshop on compost making held in Ambikapur village earlier this year.



### Don't miss the Mad Hatter's Dance Party !

A special fundraiser for Fertile Ground  
Saturday, November 27th  
The Bridge Lounge, 5th St., Courtenay  
Tickets \$15

Enjoy an array of tasty tidbits and unique concoctions  
Prizes for the most outrageous hats!

Doors open at 7, dance to **Flying Debris**  
and stay late to see who comes out after midnight....

For information, call 337-8348



## FIELD REPORT FROM POMPY - Training for Bodo Tea Growers



“When I first met Mr. Bosumatori, tea grower and local secretary of the Small Tea Growers Association, it made me very happy, as I had not met such a thirsty or interested trainee before.

What did he tell to me when their group first came to Digboi? *“We just need some technical information about how to grow organic tea. We have virgin land, cows, organic materials, manpower and all. We have knowledge about land preparation, plant management, harvesting and processing.*

*For marketing we will try our best. We have faith we will not have much problem to sell our organic tea.*

*But we have no idea how to grow the organic tea. If you please give us little bit idea about what we should do, we will be very much thankful to you.”*

I showed the growers pictures we took at the tea gardens of Gobin Hazarika and Binod Saharia, and explained how to use local plants for controlling insect and disease, and how to make compost and different extracts. First day was theoretical training and second day practical training by Iqbal, Babu and Sumon.

While they were leaving from ASP, they said, *“Whenever we will plant the first sapling of tea in the new land, we will invite you to our place, please you come to see.”*

They fixed a date for planting the first plant of organic tea garden on August 19th, and did not forget their promise to Pompy. One month prior, they sent an invitation to me to join this ceremony, so I booked a train ticket to Kokrajhar.

On the day of the event, about 15 people went to the new organic garden. They sprinkled some sacred water on the land and lit candles. After that, everybody present planted a tea plant. Sweets were given to all including the laborers.

Afterwards, several other tea growers were invited to the office for discussion. Almost all said they like to start at least 5 bigha’s of land for organic agriculture, but may need training. I assured we would visit when you arrive in December.”

“The greatest constraints to growers who are shifting towards more sustainable practices are the lack of knowledge, information sources and technical support.”

United Nations Food and Agriculture Report

## Working together to support a shift to organic farming

Over the past 10 years, the concept of organic agriculture has been slowly gaining a foothold in Assam. But while programs promoting the production of vermi-compost and use of compost are on the rise, so are schemes encouraging farmers to borrow money for expensive hybrid seeds that only produce well if they’re irrigated and receive regular applications of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.



Members of Fertile Ground, ASP and NEADS met in Jorhat earlier this year

Our network of organic growers is small, but strong. Fertile Ground is pleased to be working this year with NEADS, a pioneer in Assam’s movement for social and economic justice.

We believe this connection will strengthen both organizations, and offer additional support to Adarsh Seuj Prakalpa staff that will enable them to take a more active role in the management and operation of the centre.