



[www.redsemillas.org](http://www.redsemillas.org)

The Seed Guardian Network (Red de Guardianes de Semillas, RGS ) is a not for profit, grassroots organization that works for the conservation and use of traditional organic seeds and related knowledge in the Tropical Andes, aiming to build a sustainable future.

We believe that without the culture that supports it, the seed is nothing but an empty receptacle. Thus we research, preserve and promote old & new skills that can help us build a sustainable future, such as nutrition, alternative economics, natural building and appropriate technologies .

RGS is formed by people who work directly with nature, organic production, and local culture. Seed Guardians, as we call them, are heirs to a very ancient culture, living in one of the more important hotspots of agricultural diversity. The incredible genetic and cultural wealth of the Tropical Andes is being lost today at an alarming rate, and thus the Seed Guardians' work is a most needed one.

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## **VOLUNTEERING IN AGROECOLOGICAL FARMS**

Volunteers on this program will be able to work in four different agroecological farms associated to RGS, located in different regions of Ecuador. They will be staying 4 months in each farm.

Listed bellow you will find the descripti on of the farms and their activities.

### **1. FINCA SARITA**

Located at 50 meters above sea level, on the coastal plains of Manabí province, Finca Sarita offers one of the best examples of sustainable development at family level in Ecuador. Servio Pachard, owner of the farm, inherited it from his father and chose to stay and develop it using agroecology and permaculture, as a way to show his community a viable alternative to current destructive practices.

Finca Sarita is part of the agricultural zone called Sarapiquí, nearby the little city of Calceta. Climate is very dry for most of the year, with a little rainy season. Traditional products from the region include rice, tropical fruits, peanut and maize.

In Finca Sarita you can find a very diverse “huerta” (vegetable garden), animal tractors, a fruit orchard and nearby rice fields, all under full organic cultivation practices. Houses are made of bamboo and wood, using traditional techniques with palm-leaves roofs. Food is largely based on vegetables and fruits, with optional meat from free range poultry and cattle, using a mixture of traditional Manabí cuisine and modern vegetarian recipes.

Finca Sarita takes a maximum of 5 volunteers at a time, providing a homely and close to the country experience.

### **Activities:**

- Learn how to make chocolate
- Use the "Bunque" for hand peeling rice and coffee
- Learn traditional soapmaking
- Make banana vinegar
- Extract oil from oil seeds using our press
- Make artesan crafts in our workshop using local materials (Tagua, Bamboo, Real Palm, Mate Gourds, Coconut Shells, etc)
- Make organic fertilizer (Biol) and Soil Amendments (Rice hull carbon)
- Harvest/Plant/Process/Prepare Peanuts, Coffee, Cacao, Corn, Tobacco, Rice, Sugar Cane, Yucca, Bananas, Papayas, and much more!
- Assist in the feeding and care of the pig, rabbit, goats, chickens and dogs.

## **2. CAIMITO**

In Caimito near Quingue, a few houses along the road face the ocean up on a cliff, surrounded by tropical forests. George Fletcher, an Ecuadorian-peruvian biologist and permaculturalist has made his home there, in a small campesino home, along his wife and little son.

George manages several friend's properties in Caimito, using agroforestry as a technique for protecting forests and producing fruits, grains and roots. One of these properties is a project called Caimito Ecovillage, owned by people from Quito who plan to come and live in Caimito in a few years.

George also created, with local campesinos, an association of producers called Ecocacao. This organization is rebuilding old cacao orchards in a permaculture way, and producing high quality fine aroma cacao for national use and fair international trade. In 2009, George started an Agroecology School with members of Ecocacao, to share and experiment with theoretical concepts and practical techniques of agroecology, adapting them to local conditions.

#### **Activities:**

- Agroforestry plots management.
- General support for Caimito Ecovillage house and gardens: cleaning, repairing, etc...
- Seed production and storage.
- Maintenance and harvesting diversified cacao plots.
- Annual crops culture and harvest.

### **3. ÑUKANCHIK KAWSAY**

Heirs to one of the last true Yachaks (shamans) from the Ecuadorian Amazonia, the family of Ramón Mamallacta and Flora Chango have developed a special relationship with medicinal and food plants from the tropical rainforest. They cultivate them, use and share the knowledge in an effort to protect their culture and help heal the world. Permaculturalists by conviction, they consider the rainforest as a home and a living school.

Ñucanchi Kawsay Center (Our Life in Kichwa language) is located nearby the little town of Archidona, 5 hours drive from Quito. The region has very important natural attractions, like the Tayos cave system, rivers, waterfalls, and of course the mighty Amazon Rainforest.

#### **Activities**

- Plant nursery management
- Ethnobotanical garden maintenance
- Help building aquaculture systems
- Compost and other disposal systems.

### **4. KURIKINTI**

Kurikinti is a small farm, located in the highland valley of Cotacachi, a couple hours north from Quito.

Owners Héctor and Aya are developing an eco-farm and eco-center for people who want to work or volunteer in the area of Cotacachi -Otavalo and subtropical Intag valley. They have been important actors in the ecological movement in the area for the past decade.

Food in Kurikindi is vegetarian, with an interesting mixture of indigenous and Japanese cuisines. Work is needed in the garden, but also in organizational chores and daily living.

Cotacachi is very famous for its strong indigenous culture and fantastic landscapes.

### **Activities:**

- Work in the garden.
- Help with daily chores.
- Building and farm maintenance.
- Supporting the alternatives to mining in nearby Intag Valley.

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### **VOLUNTEER PROFILE:**

The first requirement for this volunteering program is the will to learn about sustainability, and the curiosity and respect for local cultures.

At RGS we are very clear that we want a sharing of experiences among equals. So we look for people prepared to listen and learn with humility, understanding deeply the local reality, before giving advice and providing solutions. The solutions must rise from the local culture. Volunteers are important because they can serve as cultural bridges, helping local people to understand the western world.

Volunteers will have the opportunity of experimenting traditional ways of life in different regions of Ecuador. They will be part of daily activities of families and communities.

We value volunteers that establish an exchange of knowledge, which means that meanwhile they learn, they also share things they know or are good for.

Some important characteristics for volunteers are:

- Willing to do hard work in agriculture, carpentry, building. No previous training is needed.
- Willing to awake before dawn, when needed.
- In all places sanitation is complete, but requires a certain adaptation from the volunteer, having wood / cane structures, dry compost toilets, cold water, etc.
- Volunteers must be clean and organized, taking care of their own places.
- Volunteers are expected to help in cleaning and house chores, cooking, etc.
- We prefer non smokers and people who consume only small quantities of alcohol. Drugs are not allowed.

- We respect political and religious choices, and expect the same from volunteers. Local societies are very traditional. Other subjects to be careful are gender choices and feminism. We recommend first understanding local realities, and later voicing your opinions carefully.

Volunteers need to be interested in at least one of the following topics:

- Permaculture,
- Agroecology,
- Seed processing and conservation,
- Fair trade systems,
- Renewable energies,
- Appropriated technologies,
- Animal caring,
- Natural alimentation.

The appropriated age to apply on this program is between 18 and 30 years old.