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Co-director Patrick Fitzgerald and his daughter Isabel (then 2 years old) planting an orchard at Rizoma Field School.

## **Rizoma Field School: Practicing Resilience in a Latin American Context**

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I was sitting in grad school class and my mind was seven thousand miles away – thinking of a plot of land I bought with my husband in Uruguay, hoping for a future there. As I daydreamed, the discussion in my Environmental Sociology class turned to risk society theory<sup>i</sup>. The theory goes that our global society is faced with multiple overlapping risks, and on top of it we don't trust the science that is produced to help us understand and cope with the risk. The solution? Citizen science. Make your own knowledge, and share it.

We picked Uruguay to settle for multiple overlapping reasons all related to stability: of climate, politics, resources both human and natural. The people of Uruguay hold extensive embedded knowledge about how to live with less, well. Resources like electricity and consumer goods are expensive in Uruguay when compared with the U.S.; so a culture of recycling, sharing and reduced overall consumption has developed. Despite this, Uruguay is consistently ranked among world nations as having extremely high well-being and happiness<sup>ii</sup>. If any one of the predicted environmental crises turns to collapse<sup>iii</sup>, it will be countries like Uruguay that will be well-versed in livelihoods set up not only to survive but to thrive. Based on examples of crisis such as extreme weather events in the U.S. where supermarket shelves quickly empty, it seems

Americans may want to explore the lived experiences of other cultures that have made do with less for longer.

Through travel, my husband and I have had the transformative opportunity to learn about sustainable livelihoods from local communities. Lessons that can only be absorbed through experience. We decided to open Rizoma Field School as a way to pay these incredible lessons forward by providing in-context experiences, with the Field School serving as a conduit for local knowledge and practices.

After processing the experiences of local livelihoods ourselves, we wanted to encourage sharing the lessons horizontally through networks of those interested in building a resilient future. We envision the Rizoma Field School as a living laboratory where we combine sets of practices in action and test results. It can provide a space for discussing multiple overlapping risks (e.g. soil contamination, water loss, climate change, radioactivity, energy production, linear waste cycles), and can produce knowledge in combination with local practices, while also being free to attempt practices shared with us from other living laboratories around the world.

The Rizoma Field School's first group will be coming Winter Break 2017-2018 from the University of Idaho on an Alternative Service Break. We are able to customize a diverse set of programming that can fit the needs of many groups, keeping resilience as the guiding principle. The Idaho students will be providing service to farmers in our region doing subsistence agriculture. In the process, they will be witnessing first hand a livelihood that has a much smaller carbon footprint than industrialized nations such as the United States<sup>iv</sup>. We also take care not to perpetuate a stereotype created in the voluntourism industry of an impoverished, at-risk community. Instead, flows of education and power will go in the opposite direction. Community partners will identify their own need for which the students will provide service and community members will be empowered through their role as teachers of subsistence agricultural techniques. In this process, students will both feel the efficacy of doing hands-on, in-context work, and naturally through the process come to learn about local, resilient ways of living.

Rizoma, or Rhizome (in English), is a "a continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals<sup>v</sup>." In the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, a rhizome is "non-hierarchical, heterogeneous, multiplicitous, and acentered<sup>vi</sup>." Rhizomes form a network through which to share resources<sup>vii</sup>. At Rizoma Field School, we hope to educate a network of individuals who can hack, subvert, create, resist and share strategies across contexts. We encourage mutually beneficial partnerships so that we can work together in envisioning and creating a world that can be continually better for all its inhabitants.

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The Rizoma Field School has recently joined the MAHB as a node. You can learn more through [rizomafieldschool.com](http://rizomafieldschool.com) or the group's node profile: [Rizoma Field School](#).

The MAHB Blog is a venture of the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere.  
Questions should be directed to [joan@mahbonline.org](mailto:joan@mahbonline.org)

MAHB Blog: <https://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/rizoma-field-school/>

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.helsinki.fi/henvi/societalinteraction/Pdf/Massa\\_2013.pdf](http://www.helsinki.fi/henvi/societalinteraction/Pdf/Massa_2013.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://happyplanetindex.org/>

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/jared\\_diamond\\_on\\_why\\_societies\\_collapse](https://www.ted.com/talks/jared_diamond_on_why_societies_collapse)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://happyplanetindex.org/countries/uruguay>

<sup>v</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/rhizome>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/rhizome.htm>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/12/23/the-intelligent-plant>