

WWOOF UK NEWS

WORLD WIDE OPPORTUNITIES on ORGANIC FARMS

Issue 220

September/October 2008



The Good Earth

It stood in a building merchant's yard. Brooding and pitiless like the 'Little Boy' bomb awaiting Hiroshima. Of thick black polypropylene its side was stamped 'Pres Peely orange. Product of Israel. 300 gallons.' My search had ended. A search motivated by two unsung heroes, Uno Winblad and Wen Kilama, authors of 'Sanitation without water.'

The catalyst to this chronicle was anger. Over many years I had witnessed continuous dumping of sewage off our beautiful coast and beaches. The appalling waste, health hazards and mounting furore over sewage disposal made me ponder solutions for us suburban and country dwellers. Surely we who surf the internet and touch the moon could find an answer. These thoughts led me to my heroes and micromania. Uno Winblad and Wen Kilama wrote of Chinamen eight hundred years ago composting human excrement using a system still practised today. Of microbes that to achieve decomposition of organic residues needed oxygen, and others that acted without it. Aerobic and Anaerobic. They wrote on pH values and carbon nitrogen ratios, best temperature and life inside the compost heap. How all household residues, ash and weeds helped the balance. How heat and time killed pathogenic organisms – the emerging humus finally contained no more faecal coliform organisms than normally found in soil. The staggering figure that in Vietnam six hundred thousand tons of sterilized organic manure are produced every year in compost latrines. Oh my word, what mountains of richness await wary Britain one day? Wonderful I thought. In a way

the planet was just one gigantic compost heap.

'Ready for priming?' I asked my wife. Nice little boy, as we preferred to call it, had been rolled into position and a hatch cut out from the base. This hatch was replaced and firmly secured with waterproof tapes. We screwed off its gag and exposed the gaping mouth. Two air holes on either side were covered with fine gauze. 'Here we go,' she said and started shoving armfuls of grass cuttings into that ever gorging maw. This was followed with nettles, earth, moss, sawdust, ash and finally a bucket of farm manure. The manure was alive with thin, red worms. We wished them good luck and shut its mouth. The cauldron commenced. A billion microbes gyrated and multiplied in a frenzy of composting. A week on, the dunny bucket was almost full. It lived in a traditional brick house overgrown with clematis. In spite of warm weather each deposit, when covered with sawdust, leaves or shredded paper, gave off no smell nor attracted flies. Our bin of household organic residue was also full. Tea bags, egg shells, fish bones, potato peelings, vegetable leaves, rabbit skins – the lot. Nothing went to waste. The time had come. We reverently tipped these offerings into the grateful, insatiable mouth of Nice Little Boy. Its black polypropylene skin absorbed the sun's heat. Inside the temperature built up rapidly. 'It's too good to be true,' my wife said, 'there's got to be a snag somewhere.'

Once a week we tipped. Always micromania continued apace. The mass of residues as if by magic, were remorselessly reduced in volume. Would it never fill? Our mentors said

that the mass could be reduced by as much a ninety-five per cent. Visitors came and after introduction to the bio-degrader and a brief resume of its workings would give us long worried looks. We enthused to architects, builders and plumbers.

'Look no water, no waste, no smell. Why don't you guys build super deluxe ones into houses. Design buildings to accommodate them. One chute from the toilet and one from the kitchen joining a single bio-degrader. Use lots of high tech materials and know how. Everything back as humus. Think of your profits when it's all de rigeur. You'll be ahead of the field. Besides you'll save the sewage swilling around the coast. The microbes do it all for free. Other countries in Europe use this system. Go on, give it a go.'

They replied bleakly, 'Yes, yes, unusual. See what you're getting at.' Just being polite I suppose. And then, 'Health regulations – very sticky on such matters. People aren't used to bio-degraders. Bit messy, wouldn't risk it, they want it easy, clean, no hassle. Pull the chain and whoosh, all gone.'

After yet another fruitless confrontation I asked my wife, 'Do you think there may be something wrong with us?' 'No, of course not,' she replied emphatically. 'The Brits are always conservative about these matters. It will happen one day soon when the price for being prodigal gets too much. Don't worry, you'll see.'

It is now four years since we primed Nice Little Boy. Never makes a noise and together with the teeming microbes just gets on with the job, gratis. Tomorrow we will take half. We've cheated and already know what the end product is like. Fed up with waiting we dug out a bucketful a few months ago, just to see. 'Wow, look darling,' I'd said, 'it's like crumbly Christmas pudding. My wife dramatically took some in her hand and sniffed it. 'No smell, though perhaps a little like earth. That's it, it's just like earth.'

It's extraction day minus a few hours. I awake at dawn and relish the thought. Not long now. Way below at the end of the valley I hear the bland August waves murmuring as they softly stroke the sand. Our resident Tawny Owl shrieks 'Kee-wick' and fled off to a well earned sleep. In the churning bowels of Nice Little Boy all is micromania. Silently, tumultuously, endlessly, making the good earth.

Dyson Wilson

Family WWOOF Weekends

We are a new WWOOF host in Clacton Essex interested in hosting a couple of weekends for people with children (single parents or families). The focus of our place is urban self reliance so we are installing solar panels, water recycling and other eco features to reduce our use of resources (see our website www.ecodiy.org for more information.) We can offer a friendly family space for any age of child (we have an 11 year old) within walking distance of the sea. We have chickens, bees, and a friendly Labrador dog and try to grow all the vegetables we use. The work at the weekends will be typical autumn jobs: harvesting, processing, preserving vegetables. Also manuring the beds, clearing the chicken house and making compost. I am sure we will fire up the outdoor pizza oven and make a trip to the sea. Accommodation is in a unit in the house or camping. Do ring us for a chat if you are interested on 01255 254548.

Possible weekends 27/28th September and 18th/19th October or during half term.

WVVOOF Ltd Directors

The Directors are elected at the Annual General Meeting each year – this will be at Canon Frome Court on 4 October 2008. - see page 5 for booking form. The following people have expressed an intention to stand for election at the AGM:

Richard Hazell: I became involved with WWOOF about 30 years ago. I started doing some publicity work and then became the Meetings Organiser and more recently a Director. I can offer my legal expertise as a solicitor and a strong commitment to the values of this life-changing organisation.

Craig Priestley: Involved with the organisational side of WWOOF since 2003. Co-editor of WWOOF Independents (WVIND) newsletter 2003 - present. WVIND development co-worker 2004 - 2007. Director since AGM 2007. Have particular responsibility for company finances and have gained many grey hairs as a result! Happy to continue this role if re-elected.

Emma Goodwin: Work: self worth: worship. Manual labour is good for the soul. We have distanced ourselves from "nature" but we are nature. The closer we can get to the earth, I believe, the happier we are. Ingenious WWOOF enables worthy exchange free from financial constraint. Let me promote it.

Moving On

I'm sad to say this may be the last WWOOF UK newsletter I put together as I am moving on at the end of July to work with a new charity supporting people with eating disorders. It has been a wonderful experience to share in the enthusiasm and hope that those involved in WWOOF have for an organic future. Thanks for all your great contributions to the newsletter - please keep them coming! Best wishes for an abundant harvest time, Alissa - WWOOF@LILI office

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am a WWOOFer and I want to share my WWOOF experience on 5 organic farms in UK. The farms are as follows:

1. Chevelsward Organic Farm, Kilworth
2. Primrose Organic Farm, Felindre, Wales
3. Stroud Slad Organic Farm, Gloucester
4. Primrose Cottage, Sawbridgeworth, near Cambridge
5. The Nursery, York

I really enjoyed my stay on these farms and the reception was very fantastic. I must commend the hospitality of my hosts. I was able to pick up first-hand experience on organic farming during the wwoofing period. All the farms are very beautiful especially Primrose Cottage. It is a place to visit especially the accommodating workforce. When I return to UK I hope to visit organic farms that grow arable crops.

I hope this contribution will feature in your next newsletter

Victor Olowe, Nigeria

Dear Editor,

I wanted to pass on my compliments to the amazing host family at Seafield Farm in Achnamara, Scotland, Jane Allan and James Livingston.

They are wonderful ambassadors for your organization and represented the beautiful heart of what I imagined WWOOFing to be about. This was my first experience as a WWOOFer, and I was a little nervous about taking the plunge.

I've come home resolved to change some of my practices in reducing energy consumption and inspired by their integrity, grace and devotion to a wholesome life.

Dawn Heather McLean, USA

CHRONICLING THE EARLY HISTORY OF WWOOF

Ali James, a supporter of WWOOF, has been assisting people involved in the 'alternative movement' for some time, helping both John Papworth, who founded Resurgence magazine, and Teddy Goldsmith, who started The Ecologist.

As he explains below, he is keen to record WWOOF's history, particularly from the organisational/administrative point of view.

It would be very helpful for WWOOF to have such an account for future reference. So if you feel you can help, please do contact him with your contribution.

Ali says:

"The idea is to gather together people's recollections of how WWOOF began, how it worked and organised itself in the early days: the trials, tribulations, successes and innovations, the joys and sorrows. How did WWOOF go on to transform itself as it became bigger and more formalised? What were the significant events, who were the significant characters involved along the way, and what were the problems and controversies that arose as the difficult turns in the road were being negotiated? How were they overcome?"

"By pooling together these recollections (even simply as an assortment of anecdotes) it would be a useful and inspiring resource for others who are venturing out into similar enterprises, as well as providing a sense of history and rootedness for those in the existing organisation (or thinking about joining).

"I have a personal interest in organisational structures in general. But also a particular interest, as I myself am involved in a fledgling enterprise that is embarking on an environmental cause and would like to learn from the experience of my elders. And maybe one day, someone will want to write up the story of WWOOF in full, in which case you will have all these personal anecdotes ready to hand. May the story be told . . ."

"Hoping to hear from you."

Ali James, ali@oxpc.co.uk, c/o 91 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1YJ.

Global WWOOF Stories

Exciting WWOOF web research project needs YOU - contribute your stories, advice and adventures to a new global website. Log on to <http://reli.sh> to find out more. Email Derry on derrynairn@gmail.com to submit stories or find out more.

Are you a seasoned WWOOFer heading off on a working holiday this summer?

We're looking for an eloquent, enthusiastic WWOOFer to make a short audio diary of their experience for BBC Radio. For more details please contact emily@justradio.ltd.uk

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those held by WWOOF or LILI

Could You Become A WWOOF Host Contact In Your Region?

WWOOF UK would like to recruit more volunteers in each region to help maintain contact with its network of hosts. Until now, each of the 12 regions in the UK relied on just one volunteer to keep in touch with hosts, screen all new applications from new hosts AND visit successful new hosts. These volunteers have been doing marvellous things, but they are somewhat overworked, and the time has come to share the workload with a few extra hands. The roles are flexible and could be shared by several people in each region; read on to find out how you can get involved...

WHO CAN BECOME A REGIONAL HOST CONTACT?

Anyone over the age of 18 who is keen to support WWOOFing in the UK, likes meeting new people and is happy using the phone and emails as key methods of communication.

WHAT WOULD I DO AS A REGIONAL HOST CONTACT?

Your roles would be the screening of applications from potential hosts, carrying out some visits to successful new hosts living nearby, and keeping in touch with hosts in your region. This workload will ideally be shared by a few volunteers in each WWOOF UK region (see point 5 below...). These are voluntary posts, but expenses are reimbursed for phone calls, postage and travel.

DO I HAVE TO BE A HOST TO BECOME A REGIONAL HOST CONTACT?

NO. In fact, many hosts simply haven't got time to host AND be a Regional Host Contact for WWOOF! What we need are people who are passionate about WWOOF, who enjoy meeting and working with like-minded folk, who would relish the opportunity to get to know the hosts in their region and are willing to travel short distances to visit new hosts living in their area.

DO I HAVE TO BE AN EXPERIENCED WWOOFER TO BECOME A REGIONAL HOST CONTACT?

NO. But you need to have WWOOFed a few times



– or be prepared to get that experience as soon as possible. Also, you need a willingness to attend the AGM this year at Canon Frome and receive some guidance on how to screen applications from new hosts, as well as carry out visits to successful hosts. (If you commit to the post before the AGM, your travel expenses will be paid and the AGM fee waived.)

CAN THERE BE MORE THAN ONE REGIONAL HOST CONTACT PER REGION?

YES. We are trying to share out the workload between several volunteers in each region. If you are interested but think you wouldn't have time to do screening, visiting and maintaining contact with the network in your region, PLEASE get in touch: we can find ways of sharing out the tasks to suit the volunteer.

These voluntary roles are really important for keeping the human-scale approach of the WWOOF UK network alive and well, and we're keen to fill them in time for us all to meet at this year's AGM (4-5th October). Becoming a Regional Host Contact is a great way of supporting WWOOF UK, and also gives you a big incentive to discover what's going on in your own organic back yard.

If you would like to find out more, please get in touch. We look forward to welcoming you to the WWOOF team!

Kath.hallewell@woof.org

Call 01296 714652 and we can pass a message on to Kath



WWOOF AGM & AUTUMN GATHERING

4-5 October 2008
Canon Frome Court,
near Ledbury
Book Now!

Each year WWOOF has a weekend when we come together to celebrate the past year, renew old friendships and have fun together! This is it!

We are very pleased to be back at Canon Frome Court again – Canon Frome are long standing members of WWOOF and have a stunning walled garden and a beautiful lake. The weekend will feature a lot of WWOOFing; Music and fun; A bring-it-and-swap-it shop; The 'Main Office' staff and some formal and informal meetings

For many people involved in WWOOF, this is the best weekend of the year, as it is a chance to find out how WWOOF works, to share the joys and aches of different WWOOF farms, to meet the organisers and to have a say in the future values and direction of WWOOF.

Accommodation is various shared rooms or camping. Please bring your own sleeping bag/duvet and pillow case. All meals will be provided from Saturday lunch to Sunday lunch – some help will be needed with table moving and in the preparation of food and in the washing up. The charges are £35 per adult and £22 per child (up to 16 years) for shared rooms and £22 per adult and £15 per child for camping. Reduced rates are available on request. Numbers are strictly limited to 50 people, so book early please!

Canon Frome Court is about seven miles from Ledbury. All directions will be provided with confirmation of your booking, or look at www.canonfromecourt.org.uk. Please let Richard know on 07904 548042 if you need a lift from the station. Ledbury is the nearest station and connects via Worcester to London and Birmingham but Hereford has connections to Crewe and beyond and also to Wales.

Please send your booking form to Richard Hazell, our Meetings Organiser by post, email or fax. Please do not contact Canon Frome Court direct nor Main Office. Please come and share your enthusiasm for WWOOF and its values and help us to take forward your vision of the organic mindset.

Send by post to: Richard Hazell, 11 Falcon House Gardens, Woolton Hill, Newbury, RG20 9UQ, or email to richard.hazell@wwooof.org, or fax to 01793 432193.

PLEASE ENCLOSE A CHEQUE PAYABLE TO 'WWOOF' WITH THE BOOKING FORM

AUTUMN GATHERING – 4–5 OCTOBER 2008 – CANON FROME COURT

Names (and ages of children): _____

Address: _____

Home Tel: _____ Email: _____

ACCOMMODATION

Shared room _____ adults@£35 each and _____ children@£22 each

LIFTS

I shall be driving from _____ and can offer lifts to _____ people

I would like a lift from _____ area

SIGNED: _____

DATE: _____

“I Don't Know What He Means By An Organic Future”

Over the last few years WVVOOF UK has initiated an in depth discussion about the developing and growing organic-mind-set. These have occurred at WVVOOF annual gatherings, council meetings and several newsletters.

Within this talk I suggested that WVVOOF might like to change the 'F' for 'Farms' to 'F' for 'Future' – so we would become 'World Wide Opportunities for an Organic Future.' I suggested that WVVOOF should become an organisation that could take on board any organic-way-of-life-hosts that demonstrated an adequate commitment to an organic approach to life and livelihood – be it rural or urban. Examples included thatchers, shingle roofers, coppice/greenwood merchants, specialists in low impact sustainable dwelling construction, organic bakers using wood-fuel ovens, painters and decorators sourcing natural paints etc etc.

The feedback on these ideas has been prolific! Mixed reactions too! The WVVOOF Independents newsletter revealed real enthusiasm for the idea, whilst including some guarded reservations. Likewise the WVVOOF UK newsletter recorded some helpful comments.

Verona Bass warns –“One meddles with names at one's peril” whilst welcoming a broader WVVOOF host remit. She also adds – “A huge shift of consciousness is taking place, and WVVOOF has to be part of this.” Sue Coppard, WVVOOF's founder, feels that 'Farms' are all embracing places, big or small, where WVVOOFers find a “kind of lifeline” and that 'Futures' just sounds like a campaign group.

I respect these views. Consequently, let's not rush into a name change. But I do want to promote the idea of developing a sophisticated understanding of what an 'organic future' entails. WVVOOF could promote itself by stating “Join WVVOOF – and help us all to bring

about an organic future.”

At a recent WVVOOF UK council meeting when all of this was under discussion one member said “I don't know what Edward means by an 'organic future.' A sustainable future is easier to understand and more generally accepted as the desired way forward.”

I've put a lot of thought to this and am finding the 'organic' challenge for the future is much more testing than the 'sustainable' alternative, the latter so often open to abuse when distorted to suit the user's needs! 'Organic' should imply a way of life that constantly renews itself by replacing what is used and exploited in the process without harming the well being of the environment in which it exists. 'Organic' cannot be compromised and yet, in my opinion, it very often is! A registered organic farm, certified by the Soil Association, can hugely rely on finite fossil fuels and minerals to operate all its machinery. Is this actually fulfilling the true, holistic spirit of its organic label status?

I begin to wonder if organic produce should be graded to indicate how purely organic it actually is. A top-level grade product, for example, could demonstrate that no or minimal finite resources had been utilised in its production and lower down the organic scale grade would reveal the degree to which the organic status had been compromised!

So an 'organic- future-for-real,' if it was to play fair, should actively promote an adherence to being beholden to what could be called a disciplined 'renewablism' (a new word! – a new doctrine!?) steered by those with an advanced environmental conscience. This is obviously a daunting and extreme ambition, but are we going to remain in a state of green denial or are we really prepared to face the green music?

On our 15 acre small-holding, I increasingly question the use of fossil fuel driven machinery - for example, hay making (done by contractors). This year a useful amount of top grade hand made hay was made via 100% use of hand tools (Austrian scythe and human powered energy!) Hard work, but deeply satisfying and seriously fulfilling the needs of a world in transition and a world that can be seen to be practicing a forward plan, that treats planet Earth with the care that she deserves. What do WVVOOF hosts and WVVOOFers feel about this? Is this pie in the sky or actually getting real about going organic green? We need to talk amongst ourselves so as to help keep up the long-term survival momentum. So: -

CHANGE THE STORY – CHANGE THE FUTURE

This is the title of the last chapter of a really inspiring book by David Korten called 'The Great Turning' which shows how we can create cultures where our enormous human capacity for joy, caring and cooperation can be realised. I see no reason why WVVOOF should not be more out front in promoting, on our terms, what an 'Organic Future' culture actually must embrace. Hosts and their WVVOOFers are already setting the trend. As David Korten says, in the last line of his book, “We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

By the way, I got into conversation with Katherine Hallewell, the newly appointed and very dynamic development worker for WVVOOF UK and amongst her bubbling enthusiasm for everything WVVOOF she told me how keen she is for WVVOOF hosts to venture forth from their holdings and meet up with each other to walk-the-above-organic-talk. I said, “Yes, I totally agree!”

My wife and I did this just recently

when visiting the Orkney Islands. We knocked on the doors of two WWOOF hosts and were welcomed in with open arms! Margaret Rinder of Braesdene plied us with generous lumps of cake with tea and coffee. We listened with sympathy to the description of her small wind-swept site and how she and WWOOFers had nevertheless managed to create windbreaks to encourage the growth of a prolific abundance of organic fruit and vegetables. Further north, Eric Shortland, after taking part in a local raft race, showed us round his Trumland Farm on the island of Rousay. We shared a pint or two in the local pub. His pioneering plans for going organic in remote Orkney were truly inspiring.

Now that we have discovered the anecdotal joy of chatting with fellow hosts, my wife and I are bound to organise future time out in the U.K where good access to WWOOF hosts is part of the journey plan. So any host reading this – please come and knock on our door at Sprint Mill if you are in the area or visiting The Lake District (phone 01539 -725168). Can't wait for a bit of WWOOF crack. Our kettle sits and waits on the Rayburn (wood fired!) and we can make a big mug of tea or coffee within a minute or two!

Edward Acland - WWOOF UK
Director and WWOOF HOST

News Round Up

New book! The Community Orchards Handbook - Drawing on twenty years of championing orchards and the experiences of many people who have created Community Orchards, the Handbook offers philosophy and practical advice to those inspired to become Community Orchardists.

A5 spiral bound, 226 pp. Chapters include: Orchards and Local Distinctiveness, What are Community Orchards? The place of orchards in our landscape and culture, How to start, Planting a Community orchard, Adopting an old orchard, Conserving and attracting wildlife, What to do with the harvest, Celebration, Safeguarding your orchard, Orchard fruits and wild fruits; Appendices include: Choosing the right legal structure for your Community Orchard, Model Constitution, Draft Tenancy Agreement, Orchard groups and support organisations, National contacts, Nurseries and equipment, Fruit identification, Funding ideas and sources, Bibliography. Illustrations; 90 colour photos by Common Ground and Community Orchardists, illustrations by Brian Grimwood and Charles Raymond.

Written by Angela King & Sue Clifford
available from www.commonground.org.uk for £10

Organic Futures is a grass-roots movement led by young people who want to ensure the continuity of sustainable food, farming and rural life in Britain.

With the average age of farmers in Britain at nearly 60 and few opportunities for young people to enter organic food and farming as a profession and way of life, the root causes of the problems must be fundamentally addressed. Organic futures was set up by a group of young people, all with a deep commitment and connection to organic farming to change this trend. It seeks to overcome the key barriers that are preventing more young people from entering farming. People of all ages and backgrounds who care about the future of food, farming and rural life in Britain should get involved.

Visit www.organicfutures.org.uk

Take Action!

For the first time, the European Commissioner for Environment, Stavros Dimas, proposes to deny approval for the commercial release of two new GM varieties of maize. But his colleagues in the Commission are about to overrule his proposal. Write to EU Commissioners at <http://www.saveourseeds.org/en/index.php>

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“Dysfunctional technology” of GM: no answer to world hunger

Across Europe, the great GM food and crop debate has taken off once again. Only through widespread adoption of GM technology will we feed a hungry world (9 billion mouths by 2020 – UN figures), say the all-powerful (US) life science companies.

The danger is that politicians and policy-makers are being pressured by glitzy PR and political pressure rather than by any scientific or field evidence that this statement is true.

Indeed there is now a strong body of published evidence that shows GM crops do not increase agricultural yields. Other work indicates negative health impacts for livestock reared on GM feed and potentially for humans consuming produce from those animals.

The International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) published its 2500 page report this year. Based on peer reviewed publications it concluded that the yield gains in GM crops “were highly variable” and in some places “yields declined”. Asked at a press conference if GM crops were the answer to world hunger, IAASTD Director Professor Bob Watson (he’s now Chief Scientist at Defra) said - “The simple answer is no.” The UK Government approved the IAASTD report on June 9th this year.

An agro-ecological option

The IAASTD also concluded that “business as usual is no longer an option” and called for a shift to ‘agroecological’ food production. Their assessment questioned GM’s claims to be the solution to global poverty, hunger or climate change. In fact, large sections of the IAASTD favoured organic production, much to the irritation of the GM lobby.

Questions of GM yield and performance (GM Freeze)

- A report (April 2006) from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) states that “currently available GM crops do not increase the yield potential of a hybrid variety. In fact, yield may even decrease if the varieties used to carry the herbicide tolerant or insect-resistant genes are not the highest yielding cultivars”.
- A UN Food and Agriculture Organization report on agricultural biotechnology acknowledges that GM crops can have reduced yields (FAO, 2004).
- In the journal Science, a 2003 report stated that “in the United States and Argentina, average yield effects [of GM crops] are negligible and in some cases even slightly negative”.
- A European Commission study showed yields of

both GM and conventional varieties varying - sometimes greatly - depending on growing conditions, degree of infestation with insects or weeds, weather, region of production, etc.

Away from the raw science, the growing argument against GM crops is that they reinforce an outdated model of agriculture, wholly unsuitable for adapting to and dealing with the conditions that climate change and expensive, scarce oil bring for global food security.

And plant breeders consider that technology which manipulates single genes is unlikely to deliver crops capable of thriving in extreme drought stress or of dealing with high salinity – the reality of plant physiology is far more complex than that.

“Our efforts need to be focused on developing production systems that are ethically and environmentally sustainable, based as far as possible on local resources. Food security, self-sufficiency and value for money rather than a spurious notion of cheapness will be important for the future.

We should concentrate on developing a food system based on those and not seek to cling to a dysfunctional system by relying on the dysfunctional technology of GM crops,” says Lawrence Woodward, Director of The Organic Research Centre.

The greatest flaw

In other words the greatest flaw in GM cropping is that it reinforces agriculture’s unsustainable reliance on vast inputs of fossil-fuel derived inputs in the form of fertilisers and pesticides – which are now becoming economically, as well as environmentally, unaffordable. It’s not just the poor farmers in developing countries that can’t afford expensive chemicals; even big arable producers in the UK question their viability as fertiliser costs rocket to over £350 a tonne.

And there is a real worry that GM crops will actually add to climate change, by requiring the added inputs of the same old chemical fertilisers that already consume half of all the energy used in agriculture, adding yet more emissions of damaging greenhouse gases.

So, where are we on any commercial adoption of GM crops in the UK? The campaign group GM Freeze – of which the Organic Research Centre is a member – points out that four crops were extensively tested in the UK during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The Government’s own scientific advisory committee advised Ministers that three of the crops (herbicide tolerant

winter and spring oilseed rape and sugar/fodder beet) would cause long-term harm to farmland wildlife because they reduced weed cover and with it food and shelter for insects and birds.

The Government listened to the advice and announced these crops would not be approved. The fourth crop studied, GM fodder maize, was given the go-ahead by Ministers, but was withdrawn a month later by its developer, Bayer CropScience, for “commercial reasons”.

Although yields were not measured as part of the trials, this was widely accepted to mean that the GM variety did not perform as well as contemporary, non-GM bred varieties of maize.

Failure to deliver

So far, GM technology has failed to fulfil almost every promise it made on its introduction twenty years ago. It continues to serve its commercial owners rather than the world’s farmers or the world’s hungry. It won’t solve the problems of starvation in developing countries, but is set to increase, in a neo-imperialist way, the dependency of farmers on multi-national companies that supply GM seeds and chemical pesticides. As Defra chief scientist Bob Watson so eloquently says – “The absence of GM crops is not the driver of hunger today”.

Diverting attention

Perhaps the time has come to ask if undue focus on GM foods and crops is diverting our attention from the development of truly reliable alternatives of sustainable (organic) agriculture which are capable of feeding those soon-to-be 9 billion hungry mouths.

A recent letter in the national press from the chairman of Natural England, Sir Martin Doughty, presents a powerful summary for the situation in this, affluent, country - “We need to be mindful of the lessons of the past before rushing headlong to embrace genetically modified crops as the solution to rising food prices.

The evidence of field-based trials on GM crops previously proposed for commercial release in England demonstrates that they can have a detrimental indirect impact on farmland biodiversity. We clearly face a huge challenge in reconciling the surging global demand for food with the need to conserve and enhance our natural environment.

However, there is little evidence to date that the current generation of biotechnology products will help. The precautionary principle compels us to understand the full impact of each GM crop on a case-by-case basis before commercial release. GM crops can in no way be seen as a quick fix.”

Richard Sanders, Elm Farm Organic Research Centre
www.efrc.com

Cead Mile Failte To Orchard Acre Farm.

We are a very small very productive little farm of 2.4 acres. In fact we have just enough land to even register as a farm with the Department of Agriculture. I would say we are probably the smallest registered farm in Ireland.

What Do We Do?

We are a small farm business of two halves. The first half is dedicated to learning activities, through our natural resources here on the farm in the countryside around us. We have built a brand new classroom using the highest possible Eco standards right in the middle of the kitchen garden.

The other half of the business is growing and selling herbs, salads and soft fruits for the local restaurant trade and local ice cream producer Ticket Moo. So we are pretty busy all the time.

Why Do We Have Volunteers?

We have a strong community spirit here in the West of Ireland, so becoming hosts for volunteers with WVVOOF was easy. We came across WVVOOF whilst on a study Environmental trip to Brittany and during our stay we ended up volunteering on a farm who were WVVOOF hosts. This was the start. It’s worth noting we regularly volunteer ourselves through WVVOOF and with other organisations.

Volunteers enrich our family and farm life. They can be brilliant, a complete pain in the butt, wonderful sources of information, a drain on my energy, totally inspirational and endless fun to be with. We do not rely on volunteers to run our business; instead they add value to what we do. Some stay for a few days other stay for months. Some I can’t wait to see the back of them, others I cry my eyes out in the bus station when we say goodbye.

Why do Volunteers come to Orchard Acre Farm?

Often volunteers are on a personal journey and need space and time. We hope we offer volunteers that personal time and space here in our beautiful wee corner of planet earth. We hope their visit will enrich their lives. It really is beautiful here in Fermanagh (NW Ireland). It is unspoilt, very rural, culturally alive, the people are really friendly and our farm is a very tangible example of what can be achieved with a few acres. We are really good to our volunteers, but we expect a fair exchange. What we exchange for bed and board is individually negotiated by email before hand and personally on arrival.

Would I continue to be a WVVOOF Host?

The answer is simple. Yes www.orchardacrefarm.com

CLASSIFIEDS

Non-trade classifieds under 50 words are now free to WVVOOF UK members. Email your ad and membership number to ukeditor@wwoof.org or send by post to WVVOOF UK Ltd, PO Box 2154, Winslow, Buckingham, MK18 3WS. **Box numbers £2.50. Ads over 50 words, trade ads and ads placed by non members charged at 25p per word.** Series discount 10% off for the same advert in 3 consecutive issues and 20% off for 6 issues. Cheques to be made payable to 'WVVOOF' (please write your address on the back) and send to the main office. Send a SAE if you would like a receipt. WVVOOF accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of advertisements and does not endorse the products and services offered. You are advised to check before availing yourself of what is offered.

HELP WANTED

DYFED PERMACULTURE FARM

TRUST near Newcastle Emlyn. Help wanted with our permaculture vegetable garden, winter land work and wooden "eco-caravan" build. An opportunity to learn about low impact living. Cycles available for exploring. Stays of 1 week initially. Contact Michelle on 07813 464990 michelle_laine@care2.com

Wilsford Organics, near Sleaford, Lincs. WVVOOF Host: E16 Would like regular help about once a month at weekends in return for available veg and eggs. Please contact John or Jacky - tel. 01400 231062 or email: scottcombes@btinternet.com

SC 86 WVVOOFers are welcome all year round on organic holding with veg box scheme. About 22 miles east of Edinburgh close to beaches. Caravan accomm. Cycles provided. Good fun and learning opportunities alongside friendly staff. Phantassie, East Linton, East Lothian Tel 01620 861531 stephen@phantassie.co.uk

W/EB20 Beautiful Welsh Border Farmhouse Longer term WVVOOFer required for stonework. Contact The Hobb 01547 520925 or www.thehobb.tv

WANTED strong gentleman to help two ladies with animal rescue. Free furnished cabin, pay own utilities in exchange for help and being part of the family. Must be n/s veggie/vegan and have a high standard of animal cleanliness. Dragon's Lair Animal Rescue, Devil's Bridge, Aberystwyth SY23 4RF

The Community Herb Garden is a working medicinal herb garden supplying herbal medicines. This

Summer we are putting in a mosaic path with a mosaic artist and would welcome helpers. Accom. is in barn, yurt, caravan or bell tent in beautiful South Hams near alternative Totnes. Contact Frances 07720 440866 greenlaneherbs.frances@virgin.net

S02 VINEYARD NEAR GLASTONBURY.

Wide range of wines, cider and apple juice (SA symbol). Year-round seasonal work with vines and other fruit. Making and selling wines and cider. Caravan accommodation, mainly self-catering. Building a cabin for WVVOOFers. Phone 01749 860393 email pennardorganicwines@mail.com

NWA21 Help needed for the early stages of development of a Community Herb Garden being set up as part of a growing collective of resources which form the educational centre here at the bottom of the Llyn peninsula, N.Wales. The vision of the garden is to create a sanctuary whereby people can gain a deeper connection with their natural environment. Work will involve heavy manual labour so physical capability is necessary. The work will include the laying of border edging, placing of stepping stones, cloathing (rammed earth stone walling) and cultivating. No previous experience necessary, though an interest in the project is vital whether it be herbalism/medicinal horticulture/biodynamics etc. A wonderful opportunity to learn, share and explore. Basic accommodation and food provided. 1-2 week stays, longer stays also potentially possible. Call Sam at Felin Uchaf Community Land Initiative on (01758) 780280

HELP WANTED - on wonderful 6-acre viable ecological smallholding

near Hay-on-Wye. SA symbol; market garden with polytunnels, greenhouses, vegetables, fruit and herbs. Established permaculture area with large forest garden. Very varied work with excellent learning potential + food and accommodation. Innovative and traditional building methods adopted. We are in the process of installing renewable energy i.e. solar water heating panels, wind turbine and log boiler. Additional interests: singing, music, chanting, sound healing and seasonal festivals. We hold organic and sustainable courses and education projects in schools. Very inspirational place which is particularly suited to people who are prepared to invest positive energy. These people love it and leave fired with enthusiasm. Also helping in the kitchen is expected. The accommodation may be considered modest by those with high expectations. Contact Paul, Primrose Organic Centre, Felindre, Brecon, Powys LD3 0ST. Tel: 01497 847636. E-mail: paul.benham@ukonline.co.uk

VINEYARD NEAR HASTINGS

- 6 Ha vineyard near south coast resort of Hastings offers long or short-term self-catering working holidays in large mobile home. Wide variety of 'hands on' vineyard tasks all-year-round, as well as wine making and processing of fruit juices on site. Vineyard & Woodland Nature Trail plus wine tastings for visitors during summer. Free use of facilities such as shower, washing machine, local phone-calls and on-line computer. Visit website www.englishorganicwine.co.uk for more details.

CAMPS, COURSES, EVENTS & HOLIDAYS

The Old School Hostel – come and stay at our 4 star eco hostel on the beautiful Pembrokeshire Coast. Beds from £11 per night. Singles and doubles also available. Hosts and WVVOOFers especially welcome! www.theoldschoolhostel.co.uk

LOWER SHAW FARM -Weekend courses and learning holidays. Programme includes: Willow baskets, Felt-making, Bushcraft, Women's Wellbeing, Walking, Yoga and Massage, Song writing, Easter, Summer and Autumn Family Activity Holidays, Healthy Cooking, Fungus Foray, Circus Skills, Writing - and more! Friendly atmosphere, local, organic food. www.lowershawfarm.co.uk. Tel 01793 771080. Lower Shaw Farm, Old Shaw Lane, Shaw, Swindon SN5 5PJ

M03 BRAZIERS PARK, South Oxon. For a sociable WVVOOFing experience in a friendly community setting, book in for our estate and garden work events. Dates in 2008 include weekends and midweeks. 19-21 September, 5-7 December. For details and bookings: admin@braziers.org.uk Tel: 01491 680221

ROOFS WANTED

Dartington Theatre Student seeks land for yurt and van. Needs to be a cycle ride from Totnes and have access to water. Planning to live off grid and would like to help out on the farm or have a small veg patch. Work or money for rent. Interested? Please call Zoe on 07891661475 or email afro_zo@hotmail.co.uk

2 bedroom cottage with garden wanted for eco-friendly father and daughter for long or short term let in rural location. Up to £550 monthly, in Beds, Bucks or Northamptonshire. Will accept any condition. Please call Elvira 020 7692 5753 or email: elvi.c@hotmail.com

Late 30s professional female making career change to horticulture (following WVVOOFing!) seeks

Edinburgh accommodation. Will be returning to college September and seek flat or room in a shared house in exchange for reasonable rent and/or possible contribution to gardening, cooking, child, pet minding or house-sitting. Call 07905 938449 or ktaylor.home@googlemail.com

Property sought for mother / daughter or 2 separate places (mobile home even) quiet & responsible duo! Available for part - help or house / animal sitting possibly. Ideally rural setting. Please contact kalieye@aol.com

Low impact living couple with two cats looking for somewhere to park a van and live quietly. Happy to pay rent for outbuildings or a small piece of land, or within a community or collective. Please contact Simon & Sarah on 07984 184581 or at greenandserene@hotmail.com.

PAID OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED

S16 HELP REQUIRED March - November on 2 acres (100 species) medicinal herbs on 35 acre organic farm. Great opportunity to learn about herbs, herb production and processing. Own mobile home. £60/week. Contact Anna, The Organic Herb Trading Co, Milverton, Somerset, TA4 1NF. Tel 01823 401205 anna@organicherbtrading.com

SWA18 TWO MOTIVATED SUPPORTWORKERS WANTED to help run the commercial, organic business on inspiring permaculture and education centre; sustainability, education and a deep respect for the earth. £50/week + food and accommodation. 6 months' minimum stay. References essential. Contact Paul, Primrose Organic Centre, Felindre, Brecon, Powys LD3 0ST. Tel: 01497 847636. E-mail: paul.benham@ukonline.co.uk

MISCELLANEOUS

NE09 PENNINE CAMP HILL COMMUNITY works with young adults, many who have learning difficulties. Hands on learning is offered through craft workshops using natural materials based in an old colliery alongside and extensive organic horticultural holding, small farm and riding school. The community is seeking to extend and is looking for new members. We are able to accept families and offer training and support. Pennine Community, Boyne Hill, Chapelthorpe, Wakefield www.pennine.org.uk

FOR SALE VWLT35 1995 Medium wheel base van with high top roof, converted it to live in and so is all ready to go. The van itself is in great condition and runs off a dual tank system of diesel & veggie oil so is really cheap to run. Please contact me by phone for further info 01935 881975

Family looking for land, buy/long lease for green wood work, tuition and small scale yurt camping. Lyme Bay / New Forest, water supply. We plan a cycle friendly site, so near farm shop or similar. Keen to work with local producers. Also, looking for a home for us: 2 plus 2 girls, small dog, cat. Excellent references; can work in woodland or garden for part payment. Please email on greenwood@brightwater.org.uk phone 01308 485465

ADS FROM NON WVVOOF HOSTS

WORKING VISITS - We are a retreat and meditation centre, set in 42 acres of beautiful parkland. In exchange for 35 hours work per week, you receive free meals, accommodation and access to meditation classes. For an application form contact: www.madhyamaka.org Madhyamaka Centre, Kilnwick Percy Hall, York, YO42 1UF Tel: 01759 304832 Email: info@madhyamaka.org

HELP OFFERED

Mature versatile WVVOOFer available Xmas and New Year to care for your home and animals (60 mile radius Eastbourne) Phone Eileen 01323 768425

SEMI-RETIRED, male, USA, healthy, seeks world wide placements. Interests: Sustainable farming, living, transportation. Do all types carpentry, plumbing, some electrical, barns, garages, small bridges, rock work, landscaping. Build hand-hewn log cabins, set up springs; passive solar, small hydro; operate & repair light & heavy equipment. Do layout & bldg. of roads. Teach & speak English, some German. Experience in clinical psychology, college teaching; editing, proof reading. Doug Franklin D_ Franklin70@yahoo.com or phone 828-389-1027 or 530-342-9178

INTERNATIONAL STORIES

It is a perfect spring day as I sit in the garden under a trellis of purple flowers listening to a chorus of bird song and the distant call of a cuckoo bird.

We are now on an organic goat farm in Southern France within sight of the snow capped Pyrenees mountains. It is a beautiful rural setting of lush fields and gently rolling hills dotted with massive old stone farm houses that probably originally held a few families and all their animals.

The house we are staying in is over two hundred years old and has walls about two feet thick. It was early April when we moved in and the weather was cool. It took two days to get the temperature in the main room up to 16 degrees using a small wood stove.

In the summer they say that the stone walls keep the place delightfully cool despite the heat, but we were certainly glad that we had long johns!

The farm belongs to Laila and Peter, two Swiss Germans who moved here 20 years ago to farm and now have two children, a son Paco 15, and a girl Lu, 8. There is also another 8-year-old girl and her mother who live in a separate apartment in the farmhouse. This is ideal for Isaac, who has been having lots of play time with the two girls and has to speak only French to them. Peter and Laila both speak English quite well, so parental French is not really improving.

Each morning we wake around 7 am and head up to the milking barn at 8 where we do the morning milking of the 70 goats. Once you get used to it, the routine is pretty straightforward, but goats being inquisitive creatures always have a trick or two to pull on you. Yesterday, one overturned her feed bowl on my head and occasionally there is one who will simply refuse to stick her head into the feed grille and you need to grab her horns and wrestle her into position.

After the milking is complete we assist in the small cheese factory if there is any work to do. Here we put cheese curds in cloth bags so the whey can drain off and help to mould or package the soft goat's cheese for sale in small speciality cheese shops.

Some of the cheese is moulded into an ecu (triangle

shape) and aged, but most is rolled or patted into various shapes and then sometimes covered with herbs, or spices for a colourful finish. Quite delicious with a glass of the local red wine!

We have also been working to repair and clear the farm fences. As this is an organic farm, they use no pesticides and broom and brambles grow rampant despite the daily grazing of the goats. These weeds have to be hacked away from the fences or they would soon topple the fence posts.

The kids have some chores to do as well, but mostly in the mornings they do school work and it has been great for them to get into a regular routine. They have both accomplished quite a bit and are focusing right now on math and French.

Our hosts do not make us work that hard and we have plenty of free time to explore the surrounding country by bike or to visit some of the historic sites in the region using one of their cars. This is the area that had many thriving Cathar communities in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Catholic Church eventually decimated the religion by declaring a crusade against them and burning hundreds who would not recant as heretics. However, remains of their fortified communities still perch atop remote hills in the area and are fascinating to visit.

The cycling here is fantastic. Small country roads are paved and plentiful, but hardly see much traffic. They are really wide enough for only one car, so if there is another vehicle coming in your direction you simply pull off onto the grass and let them pass. These small roads lead to quaint, quiet villages that are dotted throughout the verdant countryside.

It is hard to pull myself away from the garden in this beautiful weather, but I do feel that I should earn my keep so I'll pull on my gumboots and head down to join the boys who are working on clearing the fences. If you have the impression that we are enjoying ourselves here, you would be correct!

Steve Outlet and Miriam Wideman

Via WVVOOF Independents newsletter www.wwoof.org/wwindynews