

WWOOF UK NEWS

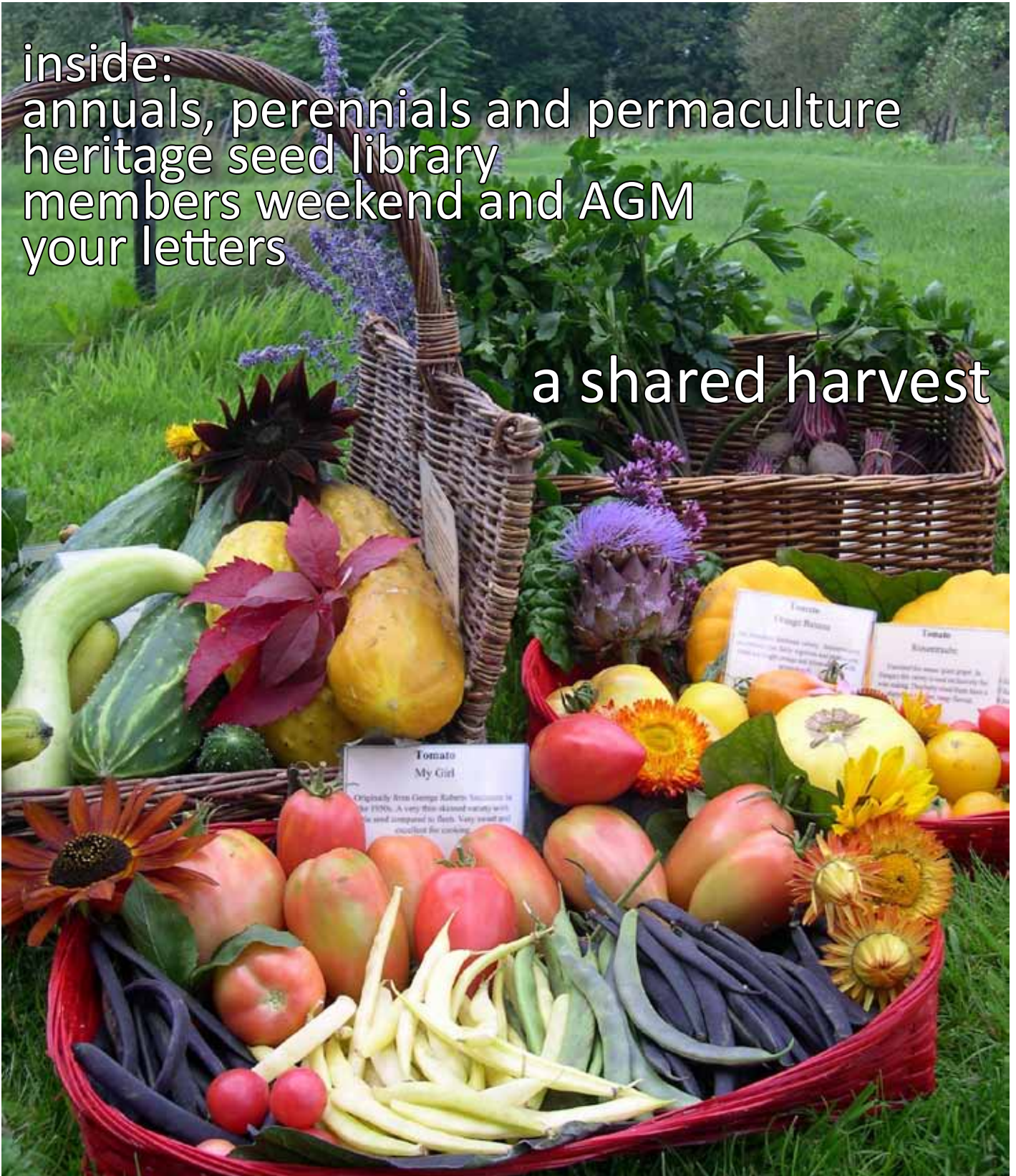
world wide opportunities on organic farms

issue 236

autumn 2012

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a shared harvest



editorial

Welcome to the Autumn 2012 edition of the WWOOF UK newsletter

I hope you've all had a fantastic summer wherever and however you've been WWOOFing - do write and share your tales with us.

In these lean times WWOOF makes more and more sense - a non-monetary exchange that benefits people and planet. And how you WWOOF too is up to you - with family and young children on an adventure abroad like Alice Griffin did on page 10 or at weekends or short term - connecting with a local-to-you host perhaps as Frances Wright suggests in her letter on page 8.

Whatever you do, don't miss out on celebrating at the Members Weekend and AGM on the 22nd-23rd September at the beautiful Kinnersley Castle in Herefordshire. It's sure to be a magical weekend.

Happy Harvesting,

Alissa



write to us!

Please send contributions to editor@WWOOF.org.uk or by post to the office, by the following dates:

- 31st Oct for Winter 12 issue**
- 31st Jan for Spring 13 issue**
- 30th April for Summer 13 issue**
- 31st July for Autumn 13 issue**

Don't forget you can always post adverts, questions and comments on the forum at www.lowimpact.org

We would particularly welcome your letters and photographs as well as your WWOOFing tales

what is WWOOF UK?

WWOOF UK holds a list of organic farms, gardens and smallholdings, all offering food and accommodation in exchange for practical help on their land. These hosts range from a low - impact woodland settlement to a 600 hectare mixed holding with on-site farm shop, cafe and education centre. Hosts do not expect you to know a lot about farming when you arrive, but they do expect you to be willing to learn and able to fit in with their lifestyle.

The list of hosts is available by joining WWOOF UK for a membership fee. Once you have the list you can contact hosts directly to arrange your stay. Your host will explain what kind of work you will be expected to do, what accommodation is on offer and will discuss the length of your stay.

WWOOF is a charity; WWOOFers do not pay to stay with hosts and hosts do not pay WWOOFers for their help. Charity number: 1126220

WWOOF UK is administered by LILI - the Low-Impact Living Initiative. www.lowimpact.org

Cover photo: courtesy of Heritage Seed Library www.gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl

news from the office

As the very peculiar growing season that purports to be summer 2012 speeds past us, the WWOOF team are focused on future events and developments.

We are looking forward very much to the Members Weekend and AGM at Kinnersley Castle in Hereford on 22nd and 23rd September and hope to see as many of you there as possible. We are also concentrating on further developments for the website and hope to unveil some

new functions at the AGM. Thanks to everyone who has embraced recent innovations, like photos for host profiles, and for the feedback we have received.

We thought you might like to know that our editor, Alissa Pemberton, has recently made the very bold step of starting her own gardening company, Bright Star Gardens. She draws on many years of growing ornamental plants and cultivating food (as well as cooking for many WWOOF

events). We wish you every success Alissa.

Our Co-ordinator Scarlett Penn continues to be deeply involved in changes in the international WWOOF scene. It's very complex and we thank her, Amanda Pearson (WWOOF International) and Ian Baird (WWOOF Independents) for representing us so well internationally. We look forward to bringing you full details as soon as everything is settled.

events

I have no more events confirmed this year but wanted to take a minute to say thank you to those who have come to help and the generous organisers for letting us attend. I am putting together a small pack which I can send out to events that I can't attend, so if you have a local green fair or country

show or perhaps have space on a farmers' market stall and want to spread the WWOOF word then let me know and I will send something out.

Other related things I have found interesting to attend recently have included a visit to the Young Farmers Federation, an open day

at Wakelyns Agroforestry Research station and a visit to the national fruit and nut tree collection at Brogdale.

Peas and Harmony

James Dennis
Projects and Promotion

members weekend and AGM

It's only a few weeks until our Members' Weekend and AGM at stunning Kinnersley Castle in Herefordshire and this year looks set to be a popular one. There will be opportunities to work with Ginko trees, a debate on local



WWOOFing, a talk by a guest speaker, the ever-popular swaps table, an evening's entertainment with a local chorister plus the chance to hear about what's happening internationally and speak to those who administer WWOOF in the UK.

There's still time to book either online or using snail mail to PO Box 2154, Winslow, Bucks MK18 3WS. Please let us know if you have any special dietary requirements at time of booking.

Date: midday onwards for lunch, Saturday 22nd – after lunch, Sunday 23rd September, 2012

Venue: Kinnersley Castle, Kinnersley, Hereford, HR3 6QF

Cost: £35 per person if staying in a shared room (reduced price for children), price for camping £25 per person including meals.

We are doing our best to keep costs as affordable as possible, so it is essential you bring your own bedding/sleeping bags, pillow cases and towels.

Hope to see lots of you there!

annuals, perennials and permaculture

Chris Smaje is a WWOOF host who blogs at www.vegboxpeasant.com

I've recently been exploring the issue of annual and perennial plants and the permaculture movement. An interesting debate on the Permaculture Research Institute of Australia¹ website initiated by Angelo Eliades has prompted me to reflect further on the question.

The question is whether it's possible to provide enough nutrients – particularly macronutrients such as energy and protein – for the planet's vast human population with a purely perennial agriculture.

It is striking that most wild floras are dominated by perennials, whereas most agricultural crops including the major staples are annuals (wheat, rice and maize provide the majority of global macronutrients). But there are some perennial staples – mostly tuber crops such as potatoes,

Neolithic revolution, most of the world's population has been fed by annual grain agriculture including all of the famous ancient civilisations, with tuber/perennial-based systems dominating in only a few areas such as New Guinea and parts of sub-Saharan Africa (see, for example, Mazoyer & Roudart *A History of World Agriculture* or Mithen *After the Ice*). Though relatively rare, these tuber-based systems have proved stable and successful.

Now, an important permaculture principle is to model human landscape design after natural systems, and since perennial plants are so dominant in the wild this alone is enough to make many permaculturists favour perennial-based cultivation. The puzzle then is why it has proved so relatively rare in human agricultural history. Eliades believes, first, that perennial plants are more productive than annuals, while simultaneously requiring less energy and effort



Both of these claims are so absurd that they shouldn't really require any refutation. To fabricate a cultivation system that conjures additional productivity out of nothing, while simultaneously dishonouring the many annual-based farming cultures that have laboured to create viable social ecologies takes a lot of cheek, and is the sort of thing that prevents the wider world from taking permaculture as seriously as it should. OK, perhaps I should register one slight qualification here – it is possibly true that grain-based agricultures better suit the interests of state-building elites than tuber-based horticultures (though I very much doubt it's really that simple), so in that respect perhaps there may be a small role for 'arrogance' in the development of annual cereal culture, but not nearly enough to explain its ubiquity.

So we're back to square one with the puzzle of annual agriculture and perennial flora. Professor J. Philip Grime's CSR theory provides a way to explain the puzzle. Grime classifies plants as

C = *competitors* (selected for in high nutrient – low disturbance situations),

S = *stress tolerators* (low nutrient – low disturbance) and

R = *ruderals* (high nutrient – high disturbance).



Harvesting potatoes at Landmatters

yams and cassava, although very often these are cultivated as if they're annuals, thus losing most of the environmental benefits of perennality. It's also worth pointing out that since the

to grow, which would make the puzzle all the greater if it were true. His answer is that, second, the only reason we plant annual crops is because of 'arrogance and lack of perspective'.

Most wild habitats are low nutrient, low disturbance and are characterised by stress tolerator perennials, with slow growth rates, cautious reproductive strategies and defences against herbivory, all of which tend to make them less appropriate for domestication in terms of yield and possibly palatability.

As both Paul Hillman and Angelo Eliades point out, there are nevertheless quite a number of highly productive perennial crops such as sugar cane, cassava, plantains, potatoes etc. With my thinking clouded by the perennial versus annual distinction in the context of CSR theory, my initial response was to suggest that these crops were probably less productive than the annuals. Quite how productive they are in terms of yields per unit fertiliser input or per unit solar input in comparison to the major annual crops is something I need to understand more about, but I'll readily accept that they might well compare favourably. Because on reflection, the broader point about all of these perennial staples is, I suspect, that they fit naturally into the 'competitor' category of high nutrient/low disturbance crops – essentially pioneer plants that quickly occupy and crowd out fertile space (think of the way gardeners describe potatoes as a 'cleaning crop', for example) before giving way to stress tolerators in long-term succession.

Many woody fruit and nut species also occupy the competitor or competitor/stress tolerator hybrid niches, as Grime has remarked. In this respect, perhaps we can place the three strategies on a continuum of agricultural usefulness (yield and perhaps palatability) from R to C to S. And if we map the annual/biennial/perennial distinction onto that continuum we'll find most of the



annuals and biennials and a few of the perennials at the R/C end of the spectrum, and most of the perennials at the S end.

That, at any rate, is my working hypothesis. It explains why agriculture and horticulture tend to favour R and C strategists and invariably try to prevent ecological succession (by ploughing, mulching or burning), and this in turn explains why our cultivated plants are mostly annual and biennial but with a number of important perennials.

All of this matters because C strategists – whether annual or perennial – are essentially short-lived, high nutrient demanders, so they don't exempt us from the fundamental agricultural tasks of generating fertility and preventing succession. This shouldn't be all that surprising, because in the spartan energetic economy of nature, nobody can expect a free lunch. The more we try to push productivity, the more we need to fertilise and curtail succession, and the more perennial agriculture starts to resemble annual agriculture (e.g. with sugar cane replanted every second year in high output systems). And unfortunately we do need to push productivity, because there are 7 billion

people on Earth.

I think it's worth being a little sceptical of anyone who claims to grow all their own food, and even more sceptical of anyone who claims to grow it all from perennials – which is not in any way intended to suggest that I think it's a bad idea to try. There's much to be said for abundant polyculture, but we do need to keep an eye on overall yield and energy balance. In that respect, every step towards a more perennial staple agriculture and horticulture is important, and initiatives such as the Land Institute² need our unqualified support. But the ultimate goal of a productive perennial agriculture is not an easy one to achieve – to state otherwise on the basis of a simplistic reading of permaculture principles risks discrediting the movement. There's already far too much snake oil on sale.

This article was previously published by Chris Smaje on June 25th 2012

¹www.permaculture.org.au/2012/06/06/perennial-plants-and-permaculture

²www.landinstitute.org

north east region (south) host gathering report

Saturday 28th July at Pennine Community, Wakefield

Present: 11 people and 3 children - 3 hosts, 1 very experienced WWOOFer, 2 new WWOOFers and 2 WWOOFers about to start WWOOFing

We started with some general discussion of our various experiences and focused on hosts saying what they felt made a perfect WWOOFer, and WWOOFers saying what they felt made a perfect host. This brought out some interesting ideas and viewpoints from the diversity of hosts and WWOOFers. An overriding theme though seemed to be the need for clarity of expectations. So, good communication beforehand and at the start of the stay was thought to be key. One host has devised a system whereby they ask prospective WWOOFers to complete an application form and then talk to them via Skype, before they accept the WWOOFer. They also have a document that states the 'house rules' so that there are no misunderstandings. The host felt more comfortable inviting strangers to their home this way. Another host thought that for people for whom English is not their first language, e-mail was easier, though it did not give a true picture of people's command of the language, with some surprises when the WWOOFer arrived! This was not thought to be a problem, though.

A new WWOOFer said that they

had found some inconsistencies in the information provided by hosts on the website. Apparently some hosts are not consistently using the 'situation' field on the website – ambiguity means some are giving different information. Both the new WWOOFers (even though they were mature people) seemed a little apprehensive about going to their first WWOOF, and it was thought that we sometimes underestimate the big step this is for WWOOFers who may not be used to staying in a stranger's home on their own. This then is another reason to provide plenty of information in advance so that they know what to expect. (We wondered if there any statistics about the number of people who join as WWOOFers but never go WWOOFing? Or people who are only a member for 1 year?)

The WWOOFers said they hoped hosts would be relaxed, welcoming and friendly, but also able to give directions about what needed to be done. They wanted hosts to tell them if they were doing something incorrectly, and acknowledged the learning element of WWOOFing. Most of those present agreed that it would be interesting for WWOOFers to return to hosts later to see the fruits of their labours. This would of course be easier for local WWOOFers.

After a good chat we were taken on a grand tour of Pennine by Steve. We were very impressed by the craft

facilities on offer to their special needs students – basket making, weaving, pottery etc. etc. There is a very large vegetable garden that cries out for WWOOFer help in the summer when the students are on holiday and not around to work with the gardener. There are also opportunities to work with horses (riding for the disabled), cattle, pigs, sheep and poultry.

We had a salad lunch together, which included Steve's excellent homemade bread, and green salad and homemade coleslaw using produce harvested that morning by another host. Incidentally, good food was another aspect particularly appreciated by WWOOFers. Having built up our strength we went forth to help clear some of the weeds that were threatening to strangle the vegetable plot. The pigs enjoyed all the pulled weeds, and we enjoyed working and chatting together over a shared task.

It was a very pleasant day, an opportunity to discuss the WWOOF experience from both sides, and further the understanding and co-operation that sticks the WWOOF family together. Having been to host only events in the past, we felt that local WWOOFers meeting local hosts was a much more enriching experience. We look forward to doing it again next year.

Jane Thurlow
North East (South) RHC

north east region (north) host gathering report

We had a very pleasant host meet at Priest Garth Farm, Gillamoor, North Yorkshire on Saturday 4th August, completely missing the showers. It was a select meeting with 8 people; one visiting WWOOFer and only three hosts represented but we had a great day learning about each other's holdings including John Gibson's long experience of cows and crops, how to stop the pigeons reaching your beans, the benefits of red clover in the rotation and tales from two biodynamic trainees like

the potato blight treatment based on the ancient horsetail plant and a slug control based on watered down dead slugs.

John showed us round his 150 acre organic farm whilst his cows calved in the fields. We had an excellent lunch. Two reps from the Clervaux trust cycled for almost three hours to the meeting and brought a bag full of veg!

We also had a discussion on any

problems encountered: One host mentioned a WWOOFer who apparently made a racist comment, was challenged and took umbrage leaving the next day. Another had a difficult visit from a WWOOFer who apparently started looking through the host's personal things and was asked to leave. The greater majority of comments were all positive.

Keith Dowell
North East (North) RHC

heritage seed library



Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library Manager Neil Munroe recounts his WWOOFing memories

I was ten years old when I grew my first vegetables and though I say so myself I didn't do a bad job! I produced some carrots, beans and potatoes and although my first success left me with the desire to grow more food I didn't manage to get around to it until much later.

My first experience of WWOOF came after a friend introduced me to 'organics' in the early 1980s. At that time the term 'organic' wasn't mainstream; was it something to do with chemistry or herbal remedies? I was intrigued and not long after I also heard about an organisation with an oddly canine sounding acronym – WWOOF! I decided to join and over the next few years I spent numerous weekends away (at that time WWOOF stood for Working Weekends on Organic Farms) visiting various smallholdings and gardens around the UK.

I remember one of my early revelations when I tasted lettuce

that tasted like... lettuce and not just a watery piece of green vegetation that was a vehicle to get salad cream into your mouth! I was astounded – lettuce had flavour!

A few of the hosts I volunteered with were biodynamic and it was good to see the differences in this method. I learnt about the preparations and became an expert on dung after spending a considerable amount of time stirring cow manure in a bucket.

My early experiences of vegetable growing were all gained through WWOOF and more importantly it gave me the confidence and the knowledge to start growing myself. I was inspired to get an allotment; there were loads of free allotments then and I even had a choice of plot. My WWOOFing weekends away gave me all the basic skills and knowledge to make the most of the allotment: composting, crop rotation, fertility building, seed sowing, transplanting and fruit pruning amongst others. I'd like another allotment but there's an eight year waiting list now, how times have changed!



It also taught me many other things, like the factors involved in community living.

I was fortunate to meet some great hosts who patiently put up with a 'newbie'. I am especially grateful for their

patience and all the information they passed onto me. They also inspired me with their passion for organic growing, a passion which I shared then and which still inspires me now.



My time WWOOFing was the catalyst for me to make the decision to leave my job in retail. So, in 1993 I made the change and enrolled at Pershore College to do a BSc in Horticulture.

While studying at Pershore I volunteered at Garden Organic (then HDRA) at Ryton Gardens and I was fortunate that in 1998 my volunteering led me to a full-time job at the Heritage Seed Library (HSL) there after a brief stint in the Gardens and Advisory Departments. I now manage the HSL and am still an inspired grower and definitely still have a soft spot for WWOOF!

do you have a story to share about how WWOOF changed your life?

your letters

Dear Editor,

I'm a host, and I would like to say how much I have enjoyed having three students on a WWOOFing weekend recently.



However, it seems that coming to a host for just a weekend isn't a popular option for WWOOFers. As a host, though, I find it a lot more manageable. I can focus on teaching and cooking for WWOOFers, and taking them out, for two days, but I find that being a host for longer periods can be a drain on my energy and resources. What do other hosts think?

And whilst there is a place for longer term WWOOFing, why aren't there more WWOOFers interested in WWOOFing for weekends, and if other hosts feel similarly, what can WWOOF do to attract more weekend WWOOFers?

Frances Wright,
Althaea Herbal Healing Garden

Dear Editor,

We have been hosts for 4 years now and each year have had French students – mainly Engineering - who have to come to improve their language skills.

Far from being unwilling, all of these students have been keen and enthusiastic to participate in farm and village life, willing to learn about and adapt to our way of life on the farm and at the same time keen to improve their English.

Indeed, I'd go so far as to say that these students have been among our best WWOOFers.

So, all is not lost, there are plenty of good ones around and we are looking forward to welcoming this year's contingent!

Marilyn Scholfield

good food, good farming - let's march to Brussels!

Start: End of August 2012 at different locations in the EU
End: 19th September 2012 in Brussels

The fate of our food and our farmers is being debated in Brussels. For the first time, the reform of European agriculture will be decided by both the European Parliament and national Governments. This is our chance to demand a Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) that delivers good food and good farming. **It's time for change.**

Over the past 50 years, our



taxes have been used to support industrialized food production. This form of agriculture is threatening the existence of our farmers in the global North and South.

It creates global food insecurity on the one hand and mountains of food waste on the other. It destroys the environment because it relies on the overuse of chemical fertilisers, harmful pesticides and fossil fuels. Factory farms depend on imported soy for animal feed. They disregard animal welfare, aggravate climate change and lead to the abandonment of rural areas. We call for a major rethink of our food and farming

system. **The CAP must change, let's march for change!**

This summer, farmers, citizens and young people from across Europe will march to Brussels by foot, bicycle or tractor. Along their way they will take part in events, actions and protests. We invite people to come to Brussels on 19th September 2012 to demand that the European Union delivers good food and good farming.

To join the 'Good Food March' contact Stephanie Roth: info@goodfoodmarch.eu, +49 30 28482326 www.goodfoodmarch.eu



host news



Zoe Haigh from Trill Farm shares an insight into how the farm has diversified its activities and how its enterprises form exciting plans for the future.

Romy Fraser purchased Trill Farm in 2007, following a long-held dream to establish an education centre on a working organic farm. The farm is located in an area of great natural beauty on the Devon/Dorset border, with 300 acres of pasture, rolling green hills and woodlands. Trill is now organically certified with The Soil Association and is in the second year of a ten year Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

We have a group of small, independently run enterprises based on the farm, along with dedicated space for



our WWOOFers to live, train and work with us. Our main objectives are to create a unique and accessible educational curriculum to address many of the imbalances found in modern society and to showcase what an ecologically diverse farm can produce in a commercially successful way.

In line with these objectives, Trill runs a varied, year-round programme of educational visits for schools, residential stays and courses in sustainable, practical skills and natural health. We also produce a small line of seasonal products for sale, using the many resources of the land. These currently include loom woven blankets, sheepskins, handmade soaps, honey, barley and muesli. The volume and type of products are limited by what the farm is able to produce in any given season, in keeping with our self-sustaining goals. The creation of each product is a collaborative effort and the product range and its packaging are designed by Romy's daughter, Tamsin Loxley. We strive to ensure that all of our products comply with the highest ethical and organic standards and are produced in such a way as to minimise energy use and waste creation.

When WWOOFers are staying with us, they are able to experience a wide array of jobs

and activities in addition to the more standard elements of farm and garden work. Depending on the season, volunteers have the opportunity to help out in the soap-manufacturing workshop, look after our beehives, assist



in shearing and sorting fleece before it is sent for weaving, gather wild harvest, and work in the kitchen alongside our chef.

The plans we have for Trill's future are both ambitious and exciting – to create a commercially successful, self-sustaining business which operates in harmony with the natural environment using traditional rural skills and methods.

www.trillfarm.co.uk

alice's family WWOOFing adventure

My five-year-old daughter, Isabella, sits with her arm looped through mine, her head resting on my shoulder. We are in the high pasture of a small family farm in Italy looking out towards breathtaking mountain views, and at 1000m up we are alone but for the tinkling of distant sheep bells and birds chirping in the trees. Breathing deeply I soak up the peacefulness of it all before my daughter breaks the silence, 'Oh Mummy, I wish I could show everyone this world' she sighs wistfully. I laugh and agree that, really, everyone should have the opportunity to see this view and partake in this experience and I feel brimming with gladness that I went ahead and decided to embark on this little adventure after all.

When I announced that I planned to take Isabella WWOOFing for a month in the Apennine Mountains of north-west Italy, some thought that I was quite mad, myself included. I have WWOOFed before but that was back when Isabella was a babe-in-arms and my husband had been by our side. This time I knew he would only be able to join us for a few days due to work commitments in the UK and that Isabella would want to be a lot more involved, so I had to feel sure that she would not only be a contented travel companion on planes, trains and buses, but that she would be able to join in and gain something from the experience itself without missing daddy too much. With this in mind I knew that I needed to find a host who was happy to have a child around and who potentially

had a young child of their own for Isabella to play with. When I stumbled upon Caterina at Fattoria l'Aurora I knew I had struck gold. Like me she is home educating her five-year-old daughter, Raia, and embraces her fully into the day-to-day running of the farm and luckily for me, she was enthusiastic about having a little girl come to stay who might prove to be both a playmate, as well as someone to engage in languages with. It took some digging around and plenty of emailing to prospective hosts throughout Europe to see how they would feel about a five-year-old tagging along and joining in



with work, but as with organising previous trips where I had to be sure people were happy with a whole family (including the dog!) staying in their home, the extra research was definitely worth it to find the right farm.

After we made initial contact and let the girls wave hello on Skype, we exchanged lots of emails both to each other and on behalf of our daughters, who were eager to find out about each others favourite foods, games and animals – like most five-year-

olds. When organising previous volunteer experiences it has always been important to open up good communication and make sure everyone knows as much as possible about the environment and what is expected from both sides, but this time it was even more important as I wanted to feel as sure as I could that the host was suitable. After all, I was planning to go for a month and I needed to be confident that both Isabella and myself were going to be able to integrate well into daily life and gain something positive. Of course, I needn't have worried as when we first pulled up at the gate I was blown

away by the setting, which was even more beautiful than the photos and my heart melted immediately when Raia came running towards us, her hair hidden underneath a square of cloth, her face smeared with dirt. In that moment I knew it was going to be exactly what I had been hoping for – a playmate who could match Isabella for her love of adventures in the

great outdoors as well as a friend to teach her about life on a farm. Off they ran to explore the small offering of toys we had brought along and the language of play took over.

Work began the next day with the task of clearing brambles and making natural fences so that the horses could make their way safely down the terraced land. Isabella and Raia tagged along and made dens in the trees, collecting all manner of leaves, cones and twigs to make potions

and I was amazed at how easily my daughter slipped into the new environment and timetable, reminding myself that kids do 'taking things in their stride' surprisingly well. As the days went on and I was engaged in duties such as digging trenches for water irrigation, caging up trees to protect them from inquisitive sheep, or loading up the hay barn, Isabella fell into her own routine. Sometimes we went off alone, giving the girls a break from each other, sometimes she helped me, sometimes she took her colouring and a blanket and simply watched, other times her and Raia would run off on their own adventure, but never was it a problem or hindrance to my work having her there. Of course, once we settled into our own regular chores she took great pride in them and enjoyed nothing more than watering the vegetable garden each evening or feeding those lambs who needed extra help in the early morning light and in particular she liked to feel that her role in herding the sheep up and down the mountainside was as important as anyone else involved, shouting with confidence, 'tay tay tay tay' as she walked in front of them shaking the corn bucket.

However the biggest surprise for me, and the thing I hadn't banked on, was her integration into the team as a whole. The other WWOOFers who were also volunteering during our stay, most in their twenties, embraced her presence involving her in tasks, looking after her when I was busy – or she just wanted a break from me! She was thrilled to feel part of a larger family and I was thrilled that here she was learning about the importance of working as part of a team and getting to know people from different backgrounds,

firsthand. Watching her in that environment I realised how incredibly important it is to me to educate Isabella about other ways of life, encouraging her to appreciate the importance of caring for our earth, whilst letting her childhood unfold naturally in the great outdoors. Giving many



more children the opportunity to do this with their family is something that WWOOFing can offer and it's also such a wonderful way to explore the world together, to learn about rural lifestyles and to meet inspiring people who care about our planet. Of course, it's also a relatively cheap way to engage in travel experiences with your family as long as you're prepared to give up your holidays and muck in and even though at five Isabella was pretty young, once I had matched us to the right host it made no difference at all.

At the end of our stay we had settled into an enjoyable routine on the farm and felt truly glad for the experience. I was invigorated from all the physical work, inspired by what I had seen and learned about farming on a small local level and filled with joy that Isabella had adapted to this

new and unfamiliar environment happily, embracing all that was put in front of her. I'm not sure how much useful language the girls picked up in the end, but I know that a great deal of fun was had playing freely outside, riding in the back of the pick-up truck to collect our milk from the farmer further up the mountain and spending quality time with all the animals every day. There were also the days off when we went into town with our host family and the other WWOOFers to sample ice-cream, or headed off down dusty tracks to find secret waterfalls and we were lucky enough to be introduced to the local cheese producer and have a tour of a small goat and sheep farm, seeing everything in action.

Before I headed off to Italy with my daughter there were all kinds of questions running through my mind: What would she do all day while I was working on the farm? Would it be safe? Would she get bored? What if she missed home? What if she had an accident all that way away from main towns? And in the run-up to our departure I had started to panic that perhaps I was taking too bold a step. But in that moment sat up in the high pasture towards the end of our trip, I realised that none of those fears had materialised and instead we had enjoyed the most wonderful stay and learnt so much about family farm life, as well as about ourselves. In fact I felt buoyed with confidence and excited at the prospect of future volunteering trips, with my daughter by



my side.

Alice Griffin is a mother, writer, nature-lover and traveller.

www.alicegriffin.co.uk

classifieds

Classified ads are free up to 50 words at the editor's discretion. WWOOF 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. editor@wwoolf.org.uk

'Is this the Future? An investigation into communal living' by Josephine Hall. A collage of fictionalised personal accounts, interviews and investigative essays. A WWOOF volunteer's frank and passionate exploration into the subject of communal living. Available now from Lulu.com and Amazon

Short term WWOOFers wanted, must not be smokers, drug users, dog owners or heavy drinkers. Either in North Wales (very basic caravan accommodation) work – trees, fencing, hedging, dry stone walling, pasture management. Or in Clare, Ireland (house accommodation) Work: tree planting, fruit and vegetable growing. Traditional musicians welcome. Ring/text Jinny 00-353-87-241-9010 or ring 00-44-1248-490836

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Long term WWOOF placement or farm sitting sought by mid 40s experienced WWOOFer. Prefer rural/quiet location. Interested in fruit/veg growing, low impact living, permaculture, wild food, vegetarian cooking, sustainable building, wildlife. Happy to look after pets and poultry. References available. Please email eoin_shaloo@yahoo.com

Inspirational, commercial, organic, award-winning horticultural holding near Hay-on-Wye; permaculture principles, forest garden; low carbon farming; renewable energy; sustainable building. Interests: singing, chanting, sound healing. Very varied work for learning. Food, accommodation provided. Some paid work opportunities. Particularly suited to motivated people. Contact: Paul, Primrose Organic Centre, 01497 847636, paul@primroseearthcentre.co.uk www.primroseearthcentre.org.uk

Vegan WWOOFer, male, 43 with experience of gardening and aspects of DIY including carpentry and painting seeks place for the winter November onwards anywhere in U.K. Please email grant_310@hotmail.com



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