

# WWOOF UK NEWS

world wide opportunities on organic farms

issue 231

summer 2011



people power!

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[www.wwoof.org.uk](http://www.wwoof.org.uk)

# editorial

**Welcome to the Summer edition of the WWOOF UK newsletter!**

It has been great fun putting this issue together as preparation for our bumper 40th birthday issue in the Autumn. Hearing Sue Coppard recount WWOOF's humble beginnings was a real joy and what struck me most was how WWOOF has developed so quickly into a truly global phenomenon, yet still retains so much of Sue's founding ethos. This seems most rare, in times of accelerated change, competition and scarcity. All those involved in WWOOF should be very proud of this! Turn to pages 6&7 for the story of how it all began and please, write in and tell us your best, funniest, trickiest, happiest WWOOFing moments and we'll publish them in the next issue.

Also, don't forget to come and celebrate with us - the Birthday party and AGM are on the 15th and 16th October at the wonderful 'seat' of WWOOF's birth - Bore Place in Kent. It will be a magical weekend, so do make sure you book early and secure your place!

Enjoy your summer,

**Alissa Pemberton, Editor**

## write to us!

We're looking for interesting host features, WWOOFing stories, your letters, international news, Transition Initiatives news from food and farming groups, seasonal stories - recipes, customs, food storage, book reviews and, of course, your classified ads.

Please send contributions to [editor@WWOOF.org.uk](mailto:editor@WWOOF.org.uk) or by post to the office, by the following dates:

**3 1st July for Autumn 11 issue**

**3 1st Oct for Winter 11 issue**

**3 1st Jan for Spring 12 issue**

**30th April for Summer 12 issue**

Please note the classified advert payment rates - see page 11 for more details.

Don't forget you can always post adverts, questions and comments on the forum at [www.lowimpact.org](http://www.lowimpact.org)

## 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](http://www.lowimpact.org)

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

# news from the office

## Feedback

For some time now, WWOOF Council have been considering the issue of a feedback functionality so that WWOOFers can make public their experience with hosts, and hosts can comment on their volunteers. It's a common system used by many companies and even by other exchange-based organisations. However the subject more-or-less polarised the WWOOF membership; volunteers wanted to be able to feedback their experience, while hosts felt they wouldn't be willing to allow their lives and dreams to be boiled down to a subjective opinion on a ratings scale.

WWOOF have taken the issue very seriously and gathered a lot of thoughts and comments. At our meeting in February we discussed the issue at length and finally decided that, while it was important to make sure exchanges are as successful as possible, there are methods of doing this which do not involve public feedback.

We realise that the key is making sure the expectations a volunteer might have match the reality of the host's situation, so our starting point has been to create two types of host description. The basic default one is limited to 150 words in order that the printed book is not too big, but now there is an optional second and much larger field for the online directory. This way, hosts can be much more detailed about what a volunteer visiting their home can expect to find.

If you have further suggestions about how we can help improve the quality of exchanges, please contact [scarlett@wwoof.org.uk](mailto:scarlett@wwoof.org.uk)

*Please remember the key to a successful WWOOF exchange is clear prompt communication. Please try your very best not to let hosts down at last minute – they can be relying on you and have purchased food and other necessities!*

## WWOOF in the news

Check out the recent article in The Guardian:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2011/apr/23/wwoof-world-wide-opportunities-on-organic-farms>

**Dear Editor,**

I am so pleased WWOOF has decided against a system of feedback. I have been a host for ten years. Almost without exception accommodating and working with volunteers has enriched our lives, although occasionally the environment here or personal dynamic has been disappointing. I agree with Neil and Helen McLeod that the present system is adequate and that subjective comments about our way of life being published on our host listing would be totally inappropriate. I look forward to the coming season,

Yours sincerely, Hilary Bumstead

## Documenting diversity

In 2009 and 2010 James Goodhind travelled the UK to film hosts for his documentary 'WWOOF in the United Kingdom'. The documentary aims to show potential and current WWOOFers the range and diversity of hosts in the UK, exploring the main topics of interest such as where volunteers stay, what they do and how they benefit from the experience.

With hosts selected from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, this documentary hopes to demonstrate that there are plenty of interesting and varied places to visit within Great Britain without having to go abroad. The documentary takes the viewers from commercial farms to small holdings and family gardens, giving a broad view of the types of hosts available for willing volunteers.

'The concept of WWOOF is such a great idea, where people can work together organically in a symbiotic relationship' says James, 28 from Dartford, 'I was hooked on WWOOFing after visiting a host in Kent, it was after that I decided to produce a documentary to explain and promote it'. The format of the programme is very informative, with an insight into seven different hosts around the country, answering the important things volunteers would want to know from the people who'll work with them – the hosts.

Although he was filming at the various hosts, James found time to help out where possible - 'My most memorable time was on a small Shetland croft, North House, where I found myself milking an ewe in the early hours and caring for their lambs. It was the first time I'd done both and it was great fun, far better than being at work!'

The documentary is 27 minutes long and is available now on DVD for £7.50 (includes P&P) from [www.blueatomstudios.co.uk](http://www.blueatomstudios.co.uk)

If you would like to promote WWOOF UK at your local event, festival, Transition group, Smallholders' Association, permaculture gathering etc. please contact [scarlett@wwoof.org.uk](mailto:scarlett@wwoof.org.uk) to be sent a copy on loan for a week. The film lasts 26 minutes and is a great prelude for a talk or Q&A session

## Can you help Radio 4?

Radio 4 is looking for older WWOOFers who've decided to spend this Summer/Autumn travelling around the UK and mainland Europe fruit-picking. We're keen to explore why people choose this lifestyle and what they feel they get out of it. Please do get in touch: [karen.gregor@bbc.co.uk](mailto:karen.gregor@bbc.co.uk) or 0121 567 6739

**Cover Photo: Marion Siroi and Roy Turnbull moving logs**

Follow us on <http://twitter.com/WWOOFUK>

# diggers and dreamers

**Jonathan How from Diggers & Dreamers shares his thoughts on why WWOOFing in Intentional Communities works so well.**

When you're looking for a WWOOF host do you consider the "intentional communities" that offer themselves as hosts or do you think that they might not be your cup of tea? Intentional communities is a slightly grand phrase but it was created at a time when the noun "commune" had been so misused and abused by the tabloid press that people living communally couldn't bear to use it any more! It recognises the fact that we all live in communities of sorts but only some people choose to live in "communities of intention".

The media still consider hippy communes to be a sixties fad that came and went. The reality, however, is that communal living has a long and illustrious history in Britain and, in fact, if there was a surge in interest - it was in the 1970s. The reasons? The country seemed near to collapse and also there were quite a lot of properties that nobody wanted and which could be purchased for relatively small amounts.

The vast majority of those 1970s communities still very much exist. Their profile may be lower but they've just kept on keeping on because - the fact of the matter is that - communal living is a **very** viable long-term way of living. WWOOF has its origins in the same era and consequently there has always been strong support of WWOOF by communities - none of whom are likely to contemplate anything other than organic horticulture! In addition to this strong core many newer groups have been formed in the last 30 years and a lot of them also very much value the input that WWOOFers can make.

So what can you expect if you go WWOOFing at an intentional community? Well, the first thing to be aware of is that there's no "one way" to do communal living. Within the UK there is a huge variety of options ... rural/urban location ... mutual/private ownership ... political/spiritual focus ... domestic/institutional scale ... all life is there!

Some communities are just a handful of families sharing facilities - your experiences at these locations may be not dissimilar to those on a "Mom and Pop Smallholding".

Larger communities may feel more institutional to people coming through the door for the first time. A common pattern is that families have their own living units and so parents may well disappear off to them with their kids in the evenings.



Postlip Community in Gloucestershire has been going since 1970



Steward Community Woodland

This can be quite disconcerting to a visiting WWOOFer who may feel that they have been abandoned in the ground floor communal space when their vision had been of everyone sitting around a cosy fire all evening!

The scale of the agriculture or horticulture carried out varies hugely as well. Quite a lot of the "big house" communes have a walled garden and perhaps orchards but there are several communities that farm about 50 acres of land. They grow grains and have some agricultural machinery. Most rural communities have some chickens and sometimes a dairy cow or two. Sheep and pigs are also popular. But once again, don't expect that absolutely everybody in the community is totally involved in food-growing and animal-rearing. People have all sorts of motivations for living communally and self-sufficiency is not necessarily what everybody is after.

So where do you begin? You can just consult your WWOOF Hosts list if you want. But if you'd like a shortcut go to [www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/volunteers](http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/volunteers)

This contains a listing of communities that are also official WWOOF hosts (as well as places that are currently seeking volunteers of all kinds). Browse through the entries to see which ones you like the look of; contact them and make your booking. Larger communities will often have one person who is the WWOOF co-ordinator, if this is not the case make sure that you get the name of the person who has approved your booking because having somebody to ask for will make you feel a lot more confident when you arrive on the doorstep!

"Diggers and Dreamers" has been published as a guide to communal living since 1989. Its directory (which is now available online) has been the starting point for many people who live in communities today. For many years we have suggested that visiting communities on a WWOOF basis is a way that people interested in communal living can "check out" different places without necessarily expressing any firm interest in joining. You would also be surprised at how many communities resist hosting visitors until they actually need new members. In these cases visiting as a WWOOFer may be the **ONLY** way of taking a look at a place for many years ... a very useful spin-off benefit of WWOOF membership!

So if you think that joining a community is something that you might like to do one day why not follow this avenue yourself?!

# apple tree grafting at karuna

I don't know if it was the beautiful view of the surrounding Shropshire hills, or the welcoming smiles of Janta and Merav but as soon as I stepped on the land at Karuna my tummy flipped. There is something so magical about seeing a landscape being healed. To see trees reclaim a hillside, abundant varieties budding with new energy, to know that each one has been planted with heartfelt intent.

I was coming to Karuna to learn how to graft apple trees. To understand the art and science of combining a cutting of my favourite trees to rootstocks, to grow different varieties to plant in my orchard. The day began with introductions, a diverse group with everyone from locals to Londoners, most there to learn the skills to care for their own small patches of land. Janta gave us all an apple, the last of their own, to connect with. After grounding ourselves and reflecting on the nourishment we receive from the land, we were all treated to the taste of Karuna - delicious!

The day began with a tour of their stunning site, with Janta showing us their nurseries of fruit trees. We listened to the intriguing descriptions of the different varieties, some from unknown varieties aptly named by the family instead, such as 'Earthworm Giant' and 'Little Red Apple'. Merav explained how the young trees are mulched with card and straw and other organic material, which helps retain moisture, keep down weeds and strengthen the little trees while they are growing. We walked down to their orchard area, kept pest-free by ducks and fed by their own cycling of nutrients - 'humanure' and pee bales. A living example of a truly 'closed-loop' system.

Janta talked through the trees that gift them with fruit each year, helping us to decide which two varieties we would choose to graft later on. He also showed us his method of tree planting, describing how each tree at Karuna (and they have now planted over 8,000) has had its own hole dug, (never notch planted, but planted with Karuna/compassion) been fed and lovingly patted in by hand. Perhaps this is why a local farmer came to Janta for advice on how his trees have done so well on this elevated Shropshire hillside!

We then each planted out a two year old tree and I couldn't help but be impressed by their vigour for such young trees. These were from the first established nursery at Karuna. We observed and absorbed instruction of how trees are planted at Karuna, then got on with planting an apple tree each ourselves.

Soon it was lunch and then shortly after it was time for our apple grafting tuition. Janta explained the different known methods and gave us his opinions of which had worked for him. He talked to us about the whip, stab, straddle, cleft & strap techniques and then showed us his own 'karuna style' method, which was a lot more simple and straightforward and apparently the most successful for him. He recommended to have no less than three and no



more than six buds on the scion (cutting) and also demonstrated the importance of making a smooth cut.

Unfortunately, despite Janta's attentive warning, in all of my enthusiasm to make the perfect cut, I also managed to cut my thumb! The lovely sharp knife managed to slide straight through even my thumbnail. My tummy flipped again, not at the magic of the land, but at the sight of my own blood! Merav took me to clean and dress the wound, sat me down and fed me

dates, I certainly couldn't complain!

After this happening at the beginning of the workshop, everyone else seemed to take even more care with the sharp tools but continued to practice, cutting carefully a short length of rootstock to expose the cambium layer (it's sappy life force) and binding it to another carefully cut scion. By the summer the tree will have healed its wounds and the tape can be unbound revealing a hopefully healthy little tree.

Janta emphasised the importance of keeping the environment clean, of carefully placing your cuttings so that they are as clean as possible when bound together. As I had managed to put myself out of action so quickly, Janta grafted my chosen trees. He'd selected one for me however, a juicy red dessert apple called 'Liberty'. I am now sectioning off my own little nursery bed at home so that when my thumb is healed I can practice grafting and build my own little collection of fruiting wonders.

Each attendee was given Janta's patient and gentle attention, one on one and I'm sure that everyone left feeling confident that they had learnt what they had come for. Sadly, mine wasn't the only injury, at the end of the session, a Shropshire community gardener Leila, had also managed to take a swipe of her thumb. However despite the bandages, the day still got the thumbs up from us!

Thanks again to Janta and Merav, and their sons, for having us and making us feel so welcome. Next time I visit I hope to bring my own grafted tree, minus the bandages.

**Nicole Vosper** - <http://www.wildheartpermaculture.co.uk/>





# how it all began

**WVVOOF celebrates it's 40th birthday this year. In advance of our bumper birthday issue in the autumn, Sue Coppard, WVVOOF's founder shares the story of WVVOOF's birth.**

In 1971 when I started WVVOOF I was secretary to the Textile Research Unit at the Royal College of Art in London. I loved London and my life was interesting and fun, but I did miss the countryside. When I was a kid my brother and I used to stay on my cousin's farm where we ran wild - exploring the woods, picking flowers, playing by the stream, tree climbing, watching the animals, collecting the eggs and sliding down hay stacks in the barn. Bliss! However, by 1971 I had no friends or family living in the country - no 'country seat' where I could invite myself to stay. Watching from my window the leaves bowl along the London pavement one sunny, windy day, I just knew I had to find a way back.

I wondered whether I could find a farm which would let me stay? Perhaps in return for my help with their work? But maybe it would be lonely without companions to chat to. I wondered whether anyone else would like to do the same thing? It occurred to me - correctly - that an organic farm (I'd just about heard of them from helping on 'RESURGENCE' magazine) might be more inclined to use unskilled labour than a big, commercial farm, and I set about finding a place to try out the idea. A couple of contacts (Andrew Singer, who published the booklet 'Making Communes', and Michael Allaby, journalist to the Soil Association) put me in touch with Emerson College, the anthroposophical college teaching Rudolf Steiner's philosophy in deepest Sussex, which owned Tablehurst Farm where students studied bio-dynamic agriculture. The three farm managers were distinctly dubious when I was introduced to them (what use could townies be?). However, John Davy, the very helpful vice-principal at Emerson and science correspondent to the 'Observer', lent on them gently and they had no choice but to agree to a trial weekend.

Once back in London I hastily put a brief advert in trendy 'Time Out' magazine: "Working Weekends on Organic Farms: SAE to Box No." It brought 15 replies, to whom - with the aid of Royal College of Art duplicating facilities - I speedily sent the proposal. In the event, just three of us, together with sleeping bags and work clothes, travelled down on the Friday evening from Victoria Station, were met at the other end and transported to the College. I had been a little apprehensive as to what the others would be like, but they turned out to be real kindred spirits and a pleasure to be with.

We had a brilliant weekend doing what I can only describe as housework: hacking back encroaching brambles from a field, and clearing out blocked ditches so they ran freely again. The sun shone, the birds sang, we had some interesting conversations, and they gave us a strawberry and cream tea in the barn, with pigeons cooing aloft and the odd moo from a neighbouring cow. My bedroom was in a small cottage with herbs hanging to dry from

the rafters, the moon shining in, and owls hooting from beyond. It was heaven.

We must have done OK because at the end of Sunday afternoon the farmers said to us: "Yes, you've done quite well, would you like to fix another weekend?" And so WVVOOF began.

It wasn't long before we began to learn what the Organic Movement was all about, and the more we learned the more enthusiastic and keen to help we became. On one of the early WVVOOF weekends, Soil Association councillor Hugh Coates sat us down after Saturday dinner and gave us a long discourse on the how's and why's of Organic, and we became total converts to The Cause. From then on, WVVOOF had a win-win dual function: nourishing ourselves and helping the planet. (The way I see it now is that WVVOOF was hanging about in the stratosphere in the abstract, looking for a way to 'manifest', and picked on me as a suitable channel: a London secretary with modest organisational skills who needed to get out into the countryside!)

An inspiring, funny journal at that time was quirky 'alternative' little magazine 'SEED', run from a tiny office in London's Notting Hill by Ken Sams, an American who had come through the Korean war and was now bent on offering people more enlightened values (and father of Craig and Greg, who first brought organic food to London). They had read an article about WVVOOF, 'Coppard's Land Army' written by Michael Allaby, and contacted me for an interview. We met over coffee and chatted, and as I was now between jobs and they needed a secretary I joined 'SEED'. I wrote the piece myself, subtitle 'Rent-a-Serf'. I learned a lot about health, nutrition and spiritual matters typing all those articles, and would contact the organic farmers I read about, offering them weekend WVVOOF



help. I was thrilled when they accepted.

As the weeks went by and more people got to hear about WWOOF, membership increased. People, especially the town-bound, were dying to get into the country for their fix of Green 'Vitamin C'. Fortunately, farms and smallholders also heard about us and invited us to come and help them, so both sides of WWOOF - Helpers and Hosts - expanded gently. We realised we had joined a very important wider movement which had immense power to transform the world.

Individuals have assorted reasons for joining WWOOF. Many like myself have a need to get back to nature. Others wish to learn how to grow their own food or tend animals, and there is no better way than learning by doing. Some hope to move to the country or find rural employment - WWOOF is an excellent way of dipping a toe in the water. Ditto finding out first hand whether communal life in a commune is for you or not.

Through the other end of the telescope, WWOOF Hosts generally get a lot from having WWOOF help besides the much needed assistance. Sometimes they feel lonely or out on a limb as none of their neighbours are of the 'organic' mind set. WWOOFers bring a fresh, enthusiastic attitude and an enquiring mind, and appreciate the hard work the way of life demands. They are also by and large very interesting people. Sometimes they bring new techniques to teach the Host - I felt very proud when I, a London secretary, was able to show a farm manager and his son a really stable pattern for loading hay bales onto a trailer (learnt at Emerson!). I was also taught how to store log 'igloos' (bark facing outwards) to protect the wood from rain - which I naturally passed on. American WWOOFers helped one Cameroonian Host battling alone in his unsupportive village to set up his own website and apply for funding for his projects (creating a botanical garden, for instance). Another, French WWOOFer taught him how to make wooden beehives and drove him on a tour around Cameroon, which he had never been able to manage before. The unstoppable 'Farmer Tantoh' has since completed a scholarship year in the USA studying organic methods, and in the UK at the end of May he is to be awarded the 2011 African Achievers Award.

WWOOF started life as Working Weekends On Organic Farms - which was precisely what it said on the tin. Scheduled weekends were arranged for up to a certain number of Helpers to book through the Regional Organiser to stay at particular WWOOF places. It took a lot of admin. However, quite soon offers were received from Hosts who were too far flung for weekend stays, for instance Dick Roberts' sheep and fruit farm in New Zealand. So the ever-expanding FIY List (Fix-It-Yourself) was produced to enable members to make their own arrangements to WWOOF independently. Meanwhile, WWOOF had sprung up in countries where distances made 'weekending' impossible. These WWOOF's called themselves Willing Workers On Organic Farms, and eventually WWOOF UK followed suite. We were, after all, no longer confined to weekends. Finally the FIY system took over from Scheduled Weekends which were dropped.

Possibly some UK immigration officials did not comprehend



WWOOF's altruistic volunteer ethos and construed from our then name (Willing Workers) that WWOOF was acting as a migrant worker agency. Indeed, on arrival in the UK some new members from certain countries did go AWOL (absent without official leave) and we never heard from them again! As a result, other unfortunate wannabe WWOOFers were sent straight home. Our membership secretary stopped sending application forms to the rogue nations as it was felt too many applicants could not be trusted not to abuse WWOOF's function. And as WWOOF had now spread right round the world, we changed to the current name of World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms to avoid giving a misleading impression of what was being offered. I guess this name is as big as it gets!

Nowadays the sun never sets on WWOOF! It spreads right round the globe and the number of countries with their own WWOOF organisation is constantly expanding. To see the most up to date spread it's best to visit [www.wwoof.org](http://www.wwoof.org) where you can view the whole picture. For ease of use you can click on any country in an alphabetical list, or you can see which countries have WWOOFs within a specific world region. As I mentioned, there is another list of countries who have a few WWOOF Hosts but no organisation - for these click on 'WWOOF Independents'. At present the number of Hosts in the UK is 480 with about 5,534 active WWOOFers. Fifty countries have their own national (and autonomous) WWOOF organisation, and 58 countries are available via the 'WWOOF Independents' organisation. There is no central organisation that records membership data, each organisation does this themselves. Recent estimates suggest that there are over 7,000 WWOOF hosts around the world. It seems probable that up to 50,000 volunteers have current membership to the global network of WWOOF organisations.

**We'd love to publish your best  
WWOOFing memories in the  
next issue - so get writing!**

**email: [editor@WWOOF.org.uk](mailto:editor@WWOOF.org.uk)  
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# small is successful : creating sustainable

## Key findings from The Ecological Land Co-operative's report.

As a number of the case studies in this report are WVVOOF hosts, we thought these findings would be of interest to both hosts and WVVOOFers.

The report - Small is Successful - examines eight smallholdings with land-based businesses on 10 acres or less. The smallholdings demonstrate that economically viable and highly sustainable land based livelihoods can be created on holdings of this size. While the incomes generated would be described as modest, none of the smallholdings receive subsidies, and the income examined does not include money from non-agricultural activities, such as any courses, consultancy work or B&Bs that the smallholders also provide. By comparison, English farms lost an average of £19,000 in agricultural activities last year, remaining in business largely due to subsidies from the Single Payment Scheme.

### 1. Ten acres or less can provide economically viable, highly sustainable livelihoods

When livelihoods are carefully designed it is clear that 10 acres is enough to provide a land based livelihood. Indeed, throughout the UK there are a growing number of people earning their livelihood from under ten acres. The Real Seed Company, for example, supports five people based on a growing area of 0.5 acre. Whilst much is possible on micro holdings, more land increases the possibilities. Longmeadow Organics, for example, have spawned several businesses from 9 acres and created an annual turnover of £48,000 on 3 acres.

### 2. Small-scale livelihoods can increase the productivity of marginal land

Most of the case studies began with the purchase of marginal sites, with high elevations, north facing aspects and/or exposed, denuded and compacted soils. Only one case study, Honey Pot Farm, is located on Grade I agricultural land. The case studies have demonstrated an ability to work sensitively with each site to develop livelihoods appropriate to each location and capable of improving the fertility and productivity of the land available. Lower Farm, for example, has taken unproductive pockets of land, marginal to conventional farming, and turned it into a series of highly fertile, productive raised beds, producing a £53,000 turnover from 2 acres.

### 3. The range of enterprises capable of supporting low acreage livelihoods is diverse and growing

This report has found that vegetable growing combined with direct marketing is currently the most reliable and common way to generate a livelihood from a small acreage, due to its high productivity, high value per unit area and labour intensive nature. Even within this niche, however, there is considerable scope for variety in the crops grown and methods used for marketing. The latter include direct distribution such as box schemes, delivery rounds, market, fair and show stalls, farm shops and mail order as well as indirect distribution by supplying to other local growers/distributors as well as shops, restaurants and hotels. Local

marketing of fresh produce that is consumed regularly by most of the population will continue to offer the greatest opportunities. This avoids the risk of local market saturation for niche products such as shiitake mushrooms.

However, livelihood options are proliferating for small-scale producers, and this trend is set to continue. As public interest in and awareness of food's role in terms of health and social, economic and environmental impacts rises, demand for quality, local food increases. Food, energy and other commodity prices are increasing. The range of products capable of supporting low acreage livelihoods increases directly with such trends. Added to this is the ability of smallholders to proactively shape demand and use technology to produce and market a growing range of land based products. These factors combine to offer a burgeoning palette of options for small-scale land based livelihoods.

### 4. Livelihoods follow a low and slow development trajectory

This allows livelihoods to be largely self-funding, with practitioners investing time and money as these become available. As with the land based sector generally, margins are often small, so avoiding the need to repay commercial loans is a strategy adopted by most successful low acreage livelihoods. Skills and knowledge are often built up "on the job", reflecting smallholders' practical, solution focused attitudes. Producers prefer to commence their livelihoods and refine them as they go along rather than wait until they have all the "ideal" array of resources in place. Skills built up in this way often include "trade" skills, such as carpentry and plumbing, as well as self-sufficiency skills. Practitioners typically grow some, if not most, of their own food, for example, and employ a range of such strategies to reduce costs.

'Low and slow' also fits with the need for close observation and the willingness to work with each site's inherent qualities. This trajectory reflects the way low acreage livelihoods often co-evolve with their eco-systems.

### 5. Mental attitude and approach are the strongest determinants of success

Acreage, aspect, soil conditions and levels of knowledge are all important factors in establishing viable livelihoods. However, such factors are less crucial than the attitudes and approaches of those establishing and running small acreage livelihoods. This is demonstrated by all the case studies which, despite divergent physical conditions and socio-economic backgrounds, share remarkably similar attitudes and approaches. Commitment and a willingness to work long hours constitute only one facet of this. Other components include patience and the ability to take a long-term perspective, attention to detail, creativity and solution-focused thinking.

### 6. 'Adding value' brings viability to low acreage livelihoods

All eight case studies achieve high levels of income per unit area by intensive and/or diverse cropping and then increasing the value of the raw products through some form of processing or direct marketing. For example, at Maesyffin



# livelihoods on 10 acres or less

Mushrooms (case study 6), shiitakes are dried and made a into a mushroom pate. The ability to develop ways of adding value to produce from the land further illustrates mental attitude and approach outlined above.

## 7. Livelihoods often mix and match different enterprise options

Combining a range of enterprises allows robust, resilient and efficient livelihoods on small acreages. Efficient use of resources can be made by choosing enterprises where the bi-product of one can become the raw material of another. For example, at Honey Pot Farm pomace from pressing apples for cider and apple juice is fed to pigs, whilst cider vinegar, a bi-product from cider, is processed into chutney.

The adage “don’t put all your eggs in one basket” has been recognised within the case studies along with generations of traditional smallholders and contemporary permaculture practitioners. By drawing upon a range of enterprises, livelihoods are able to withstand changes in weather, market conditions and supplies. Livelihoods which use and value diversity in this way are often more balanced nutritionally, socially, economically and environmentally.

## 8. Attention to detail is a key asset

The old adage “the best fertilizer is the gardener’s shadow” is confirmed by the case studies. An intimate knowledge of their land, produce and markets allows viable livelihoods to be created on small, previously marginal sites. Most profitable land based enterprises on 10 acres or less are labour intensive and use labour that cannot readily be replaced by large-scale, mechanised production. These livelihoods can therefore compete on their own terms within the wider market place. For example, growing, harvesting and processing salad leaves, soft fruit, seeds and mushrooms all require careful attention to detail. A small acreage brings the benefit of being able to focus more attention per unit area of land, to maximise its productivity and profitability. This also explains why small farms are consistently more productive per unit area than larger farms.

Smallholders are able to offer greater attention to detail than farmers managing a large acreage, and are well placed to meet the growing demand for local, artisanal foods produced to high environmental and animal welfare standards. Many products that are labour intensive to produce or harvest, such as French beans or cut flowers, are imported from countries where labour costs are lower. Growing interest in minimisation of food miles provides an opportunity to substitute high value imported goods with those that are produced locally. On a small-scale, where handwork rather than machinery is employed, it is feasible to devise systems that utilise the land’s resources more productively. For example, fruit trees and bushes can be planted where the micro-climate is most suitable and harvested by hand. Hence, a variety of different fruits can be harvested when they are perfectly ripe and either sold or processed into jams in batches small enough to optimise their flavour, which results in a product that customers are willing to pay more for. At a larger scale it would not be possible to give such care.



photo: Peter Richardson

## 9. Horticulture is generally more suited to low acreage livelihoods than livestock

Whilst this research has uncovered several case studies which demonstrate that low acreage livelihoods are possible in the UK on ten acres or less, it found only one based upon livestock. The classic ecosystem food pyramid is at play here, with species such as herbivores requiring more space to feed themselves than species lower down the pyramid such as plants. In addition to this nutrient requirement, livestock requires space for rotation of grazing to control parasites. Although pigs and poultry can be kept in smaller spaces, they generally rely on “ghost acres” off-site for feed. However, these constraints do not necessarily apply to cows, which develop immunity through exposure and can be kept in numbers suited to low acreages. Micro-dairies are emerging as one example of a livestock-based low acreage livelihood, particularly where they can establish a secure, concentrated consumer base nearby. Simon Fairlie, for example, runs a micro-dairy in Dorset which makes a livelihood on 4.5 acres. As this enterprise is still being established it does not yet have a full year’s accounts and was not featured as a case study in this report. Further research in this area is crucial.

## 10. High property prices and the planning system are the greatest barriers to growth in this sector

Where growers can self-build on their smallholding, they have an affordable route into farming.

Without this costs are prohibitive. An entry level holding with residential permission costs at least £250,000, with growers required to demonstrate earnings over £50,000 in order to qualify for the requisite mortgage. Based on our knowledge of small-farm incomes, this is clearly impossible. The self-build route is therefore essential for any new entrant who cannot afford to invest over quarter of a million pounds in a dwelling. Due to the complex nature of the planning system, a fraction of those willing and able to establish viable smallholdings have been able to pursue this route. The current overhaul of planning within the National Planning Policy Framework and Localism Bill is thus welcome, promising to simplify and streamline the planning system. This should create conditions in which independent businesses can operate on a more level playing field.

**Read the full report, find out more and support their work at [www.ecologicaland.coop](http://www.ecologicaland.coop)**

# WVVOOF AGM & 40th Birthday Celebration

## 15 to 16 October 2011

Each year WVVOOF has an event in the autumn when the WVVOOF organisers and members come together for a weekend to hold the formal A.G.M. of WVVOOF and to discuss the policies and procedures involved in running WVVOOF. This is your chance to come and hear about some of the recent developments affecting WVVOOF and to influence its future direction.

This year is a special one in WVVOOF's history, as our founder Sue Coppard went WVVOOFing at Emerson College for the first time in 1971. The event is being held at Bore Place, Chiddingstone, Kent. Bore Place is just amazing. It is the home of the Commonwork Centre which comprises an organic dairy farm, a residential centre and a brand new purpose built educational centre. Bore Place House is itself a Grade 2 listed Tudor/Jacobean mansion and has been adapted for modern use to a very high standard.

Bore Place is also the home of the Grow2Grow project that is being run by Paula Conway due to a successful National Lottery application in WVVOOF's name. This project provides support to young people with mental health problems including care leavers and young offenders. You will see the cabin used to shelter from the elements and the organic market garden created by them. We have booked the whole of the Commonwork facilities for the weekend. It sleeps a maximum number of 50 people. The accommodation is in Bore Place House, the Old Stable and the Small Barn. The rooms are one, two or three bedded – extra beds can be provided for families. All participants are expected to stay at Bore Place – the nearest village is about two miles away.

Directions can be found on the excellent website [www.commonwork.org](http://www.commonwork.org).

If coming by train, there are two options: (a) Sevenoaks: taxis cost £15 – we can put you in touch with fellow travellers to share a taxi. (b) Penshurst: this station is about two miles away – if you ring the landline of Bore Place House on 01732 746502 or the Old Stable on 01732 742435 (do use the Ansaphone) we can come and get you.

Be warned that mobiles do not work at Bore Place, except for Vodafone or in the car park!

The weekend will run from Saturday to Sunday lunchtime. There will be a farm tour after lunch and then the AGM and other meetings. We hope to have a small band playing music for us in the evening. There will be WVVOOFing on the Sunday morning. This should be our best ever event - please come along and bring your energy to help us to celebrate everything that is great about WVVOOF and how it changes people's lives!

The cost is a flat rate £45 per head. Campers pay £30 per person. Concessionary rates are available on application.

Please do contact Richard and not Bore Place if you have any difficulties with your booking, e.g. if you wish to cancel or if you have transport difficulties. Be warned that you will lose your booking fee if you cancel less than a week before the event. Please do not contact Bore Place direct to book for this event. They are under strict instructions not to take any bookings. Please DO NOT turn up without having booked, nor ring Richard in the week before the event, begging to be allowed to come, having heard about this event but not having seen this Newsletter!

If you have any problems, do contact Richard Hazell, our meetings organiser, on 07904 548042 (do leave a message slowly and clearly - he will ring you back), or send him an email at [richard.hazell@wwoof.org](mailto:richard.hazell@wwoof.org). See you in October!

## WVVOOF AGM & 40th Birthday Celebration – 15 to 16 October 2011

Names (and ages of children): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I shall be driving from \_\_\_\_\_ and can offer lifts to \_\_\_\_\_ people

I would like a lift from \_\_\_\_\_ area

I want to share a taxi from Sevenoaks station between 12 noon and 1pm Yes/No

I want a lift from Penshurst station and will bring Bore Place House Yes/No

Any dietary requirements/special needs? \_\_\_\_\_

One, two or three bedrooms (delete which) \_\_\_\_\_ adults @£45 each

\_\_\_\_\_ children @£45 each

Camping \_\_\_\_\_ persons @£30 each

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE ENCLOSE A CHEQUE PAYABLE TO 'WVVOOF' WITH THE BOOKING FORM**

# the classifieds

Please note that a flat rate of £10 for up to 50 words will be applied to all adverts in the classified section. Please send adverts to editor@wwoof.org.uk and cash or UK bank cheque to the main office: WWOOF UK, PO Box 2154, Winslow, Buckinghamshire, MK18 3WS. Payment must be received by the copy deadline in order for your advert to be printed. 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.

**Bunkhouse accommodation for let.** Ideal for family, sleeps up to 5. Very close to beautiful white sandy beaches on a croft in NW Scotland. Good for lots of outdoor activities. For more info please call 01571 844315, evenings best.

**Affordable Courses & Weekends.** Yoga and Massage, Crafts, Jewellery, Willow, Baskets, Mosaics, Foraging, Wildflowers, Music and Singing, Family Breaks, Circus Skills, Creative Writing, Cookery School, English Language Summer School, and more. Winner 2009 Observer Ethical Award! Lower Shaw Farm, Shaw, Swindon, SN5 5PJ. 01793 771080. enquiries@lowershawfarm.co.uk. www.lowershawfarm.co.uk

**Scythe courses in South West Wales.** Learn how to use the essential smallholders tool. Introductory one day and intensive two day courses, sharpening and peening workshops, hand hay making days. For more information email scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk. Tel Michelle 07813 464990 Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust

**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. Varied work for learning. Food, accommodation provided. Some paid work opportunities. Suited to motivated people. Contact Paul, Primrose Organic Centre, 01497 847636, paul@primroseearthcentre.co.uk www.primroseearthcentre.org.uk

**Vineyard near Hastings,** 6 Ha vineyard offers long or short-term self-catering working holidays in large mobile home. Wide variety of 'hands on' vineyard tasks, wine making and processing of fruit juices on site. Free use of shower, washing machine, local calls, and internet access. 8 miles north of Hastings. Roy Cook, Sedlescombe Organic Vineyard, TN32 5SA Tel : 01580 830715, or freephone 0800- 980-2884

Email: roy.cook@englishorganicwine.co.uk

**Long-term WWOOFing opportunity** on established organic vegetable farm in South Wales UK. We grow produce in several large 50m polytunnels and on 10 acres of land for local box schemes. We have been taking wwoofers for 10 years. We need help this summer. Please ring 01558 668088 or email: Organics2go@googlemail.co.uk.

**Help needed October harvesting** .pressing ,bottling apples. 2,000 reused bottles in aid of Oxfam and Practical Action. Pasteurising with waste wood. S.Devon coastal smallholding. Communal fruit and veg group. Greenhouse polytunnel Various R.E. installations Forest Garden. Caravan or house accommodation. 01548 830650 j.watson@virgin.net j.watson@virgin.net

**Help wanted,** supporting the WWOOF UK stand for Royal Highland Show in Edinburgh. Build up 20-22nd June and 23-26th June Show. Camping on site for the week. Contact John Ouchterlony on johnouchterlony@onetel.com

**Help Wanted.** We need enthusiastic and highly motivated people to join the Crooked End Farm Organics team. If you love organics, have a flair for sales, enjoy working hard, and have a genuine interest in the business of organic food and farming tell us more. Email sales@crookedend.co.uk or tel 01594 544482

**Opportunity to WWOOF and create your own home in Devon.** Barn ready for simple conversion, we supply recycled materials and you do the work. You end up with a great space to live in, on our smallholding on the edge of Dartmoor in exchange for some work or low rent. You need some building skills and to love animals and outdoors. Contact Judy on 01364 644174 or judycc@hockmoor.eclipse.co.uk.

**How to build a Pole Barn.** Come and help us on our lovely smallholding in Devon and learn with our master craftsman-farmer. You will need some practical skills and strength, a love of farming and animals. Project starting in Spring and going through Summer till finished. Also longer term opportunity available - see our other ad. Contact Judy on 01364 644174 or judycc@hockmoor.eclipse.co.uk

**Housesitter/s required,** for 10 days in early July to look after 2 ponies, cat, house and garden in beautiful Highland glen. Wonderful walks, and bike rides locally. Will have to have own transport. Tel Juliette on: 01349 884440

**Short Courses in North Wales** , offered by WWOOF Host throughout 2011: Beekeeping, Organic Growing (Vegetable, Salad, Fruit), Forest Gardening, Living Willow Structures. For more information see www.foodskillsforall.co.uk Email busybees@cooptel.net Tel. 01248 361576 Jonathan or Lisa Caravan / camping available on request

**Quaaaack!** Attention WWOOFers! Ever thought of fusing your enthusiasm with an educational course experience at Karuna?, a Roots- Low impact Permaculture project?(see Wwoof news ). Discover Permaculture, Forest gardening, Scything, Low Impact living, Basket making, Earth oven making, African Drumming, or simply 'retreat'. Full details at www.karuna.org.uk, tel 01694-751374, e-mail merav66@hotmail.com

**Volunteer stewards wanted,** for four day summer art & nature event at our organic farm in Devon. We need friendly self reliant people to help us set up, run and take down the event from 10th - 14th August. Start from mid July and stay up to a month. You will need your own camping equipment but food will be provided. www.trillsummerweek.co.uk

# organic news

## Low Carbon Farming

The Soil Association has launched a new Low Carbon Farming Project to help farmers reduce carbon emissions and improve the resource efficiency of their farms.

The project will identify user-friendly carbon foot printing tools and provide a benchmarking facility along with information, advice, and detailed case studies. There will be a number of low carbon workshops and on-farm training events on offer in the coming months open to all interested farmers and growers. In order to provide a benchmarking facility the Soil Association needs to collect carbon foot printing data from different farms and is looking for farmers to get involved.

Poppy Johnson, Low Carbon Farming adviser at the Soil Association, said: *"There is a growing urgency for farms to reduce their carbon footprint. This kind of work is essential if we are going to reach government targets of reducing green house gas emissions 80 per cent by 2050. Farming has a vital role to play when it comes to our impact on climate and is responsible for 30 per cent of UK greenhouse gas emissions.*

*"We hope to encourage adoption of best practice by enabling farmers to learn from each other, make assessments of their current activities and identify areas where improvements could be made. I look forward to hearing from farmers keen to get involved in the initial carbon foot printing exercise."*

For more information about getting involved in the carbon foot printing exercise please contact Poppy Johnson Low Carbon Farming adviser at the Soil Association: [pjohnson@soilassociation.org](mailto:pjohnson@soilassociation.org) or call 0117 314 5127.

## Contract tendering process launched for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

CompeteFor is the main procurement portal for the London 2012 Games. It's a free service that enables businesses to compete for contract opportunities linked to the London 2012 Games and other major public and private sector buying organisations, such as Transport for London (TfL), Crossrail and the Metropolitan Police. With a particular focus on supply chain opportunities, CompeteFor acts as a brokerage service, matching buyers with potential suppliers. To apply for contracts advertised on CompeteFor, businesses complete a business profile which is then used to match the business with contract opportunities it can then apply for. Businesses can also use CompeteFor to search for suitable partners.

Please see the CompeteFor website or contact their helpdesk on 08452 177 804

## Knead to Know: the Real Bread starter

The Real Bread Campaign has just published Knead to Know: the Real Bread starter, the introductory guide to bringing Real Bread back to the heart of a local community. Published both as a limited edition book (£10 to Campaign members, £15 for everyone else) and as a PDF download, Knead to Know contains information on business models, legislation, money matters, equipment, ingredients, basic recipes, techniques, voluntary apprenticeships, courses, equipment and ingredient suppliers, further reading, and much more.

Knead to Know is available to order from [www.realbreadcampaign.org](http://www.realbreadcampaign.org)

## Grants for young horticulturalists

Are you between the age of 18-35 or in your first five years of a career in horticulture with a love of plants, gardens and gardening? Do you need financial assistance to visit gardens in the UK or abroad? To study plants in their natural habitats anywhere in the world? If so, then the Merlin Trust may be able to help you.

Applications for grants from Britain and Ireland are invited throughout the year. Funding is also available if you are a foreign national studying in the United Kingdom

<http://www.merlin-trust.org.uk/>

## Summer Week at Trill Farm

**Musbury, Axminster, Devon - 11th- 14th August 2011**

Summer week at Trill Farm gives families the opportunity to take an adventure together and explore the secret woods, rolling hills, nooks and crannies of a working farm and connect with nature in all it's glory.

Highlights include making giant origami farm animals, foraging lunch with Fat Hen, whizzing through trees on zip wires, dancing at a silent disco in the woods, wild swimming, building a raft and orienteering with Jim Oakley, making organic bath bombs and lip balms with Karen Gilbert, listening to trees with sound artist Alex Metcalf, star gazing with the Sidmouth Observatory's giant telescope, bushcraft skills with The All Elements Company, learning to dance a ceilidh, hearing the dawn chorus, meeting the bats and badgers with Adrian Bailey, campfire songs, walking with floral expert The Meadow Maker, doodling with Anorak magazine, making instruments and sound recordings with Steven Ashmore, falling under storyteller Rachel Rose-Reid's spell, hear Ben Moor's tall tree tales, eating a four course organic feast by food writer Daphne Lambert and making botanical cocktails.

More special guests and activities to be announced.

[www.trillfarm.co.uk](http://www.trillfarm.co.uk) - [www.trillsummerweek.co.uk](http://www.trillsummerweek.co.uk)

**next copy deadline: 31st July 2011 [editor@WVVOOF.org.uk](mailto:editor@WVVOOF.org.uk)  
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