

WWOOF NEWS

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WWOOF

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WWOOF(NZ) NEWS - BITS AND PIECES

- A host reports that they have had "the wonderful experience of engagements (between WWOOFers) and marriages (WWOOFer and local orchardist) and looking forward to new ones as the season gets underway".
- WWOOF is now based back in Nelson with a permanent address. During 1995 over 2500 travellers joined WWOOF with the host membership increasing to 500. It is projected that WWOOFer numbers will continue to increase while host numbers may level out. This has meant an increased work load for both of us. Andrew is trialing part time work so that he can help Jane keep things running. This will have advantages such as more regular newsletters and more WWOOF gatherings.
- If you wish to share your WWOOFing stories, ideas, experiences or advertising then send it in to us and we'll put it in the next newsletter. Any ideas for improving the WWOOF scheme are greatly appreciated.
- WWOOF is receiving widespread publicity through interested media such as a German newspaper reporter, an interview with Jane on Radio New Zealand and various other newspapers and magazines. Currently Maggies Garden Show is featuring WWOOF with some hosts farms in particular.
- There are hosts in Auckland, Wellington, Nelson and Christchurch who are able to join up new members to WWOOF. New WWOOFers are told how the organisation works and are able to complete a membership form. All details are sent to us at WWOOF Headquarters in Nelson and held for future reference. We are avoiding having WWOOF seen as an 'off the shelf item' as this has proven to attract people who do not appreciate the exchange that WWOOF is based on. If hosts find that there are problems with having WWOOFers who have joined through these hosts then please let us know. However we see this as being a compromise between an off the shelf item and available only through the mail.
- The Immigration Dept. still says that foreign travellers require work permits if they are WWOOFing. It seems unfair to require a work permit to collect the eggs and feed the pigs. Overseas WWOOFers are really tourists who are interested in meeting New Zealand people and experiencing life on an organic farm. However, if you are one of the few who have bothered to apply for a work permit on the basis of WWOOFing please let us know how you got on.

NEWS FROM OVERSEAS WWOOF ORGANISATIONS

WWOOF organisations exist in many countries including Great Britain, Australia, Canada, USA, Spain, Ghana, Hungary and Western European countries. They all operate independently but are based on similar principles.

WWOOF - Canada has about 150 host farms with about 500 WWOOFers in 1995. WWOOFer membership - CAD\$25. Host membership - CAD\$25 to \$50+ depending on number of WWOOFers they host each year. WWOOF is based in Nelson (Canada). They are having difficulties with Canadian customs requiring foreigners to get work permits to go WWOOFing. This is seen to be ridiculous so they keep a low profile, allowing foreigners to continue with their visits without too many hassles.

WWOOF - England has been operating for nearly 25 years. WWOOFer and Host membership - GBP 10. Mainly people from England WWOOF in the weekends. However, this is changing with eco-tourism. More and more tourists are wanting to WWOOF throughout the week as well. The host list contains farms from Wales, Scotland, ex-pat Brits in France, Italy, Greece etc as well as England.

WWOOF - Australia has about 450 host farms with over 2000 WWOOFers through in 1995. WWOOFer and Host membership - AUD\$25. We met Lionel Pollard at the IFOAM Conference last year and were able to exchange news and ideas. There is an accident insurance scheme for WWOOFers costing about \$5. This has been operating for a couple of years but its worth is still being tested. Lionel has split WWOOF into two separate lists, one The Australian Cultural Experience (ACE) and the other, The Org List. ACE caters for people interested in mainly meeting people while the ORG List caters for people who are more interested in learning organic growing techniques.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IN EMPLOYMENT ACT

This act outlines an employers responsibility to provide a safe work environment. The act is administered by Occupational Health and Safety - OSH (a division of the Labour Dept). Because the Labour Dept argues that hosts employ WWOOFers then the act is an issue to be considered by hosts.

Basically it is the hosts responsibility to ensure that a WWOOFer is not involved in any dangerous situations on the farm. Things such as chainsaws, tractor PTOs, power tools, machinery etc are dangerous in themselves - especially when used by the inexperienced. If, for example, a WWOOFer is injured on the farm after getting trapped in the chicken coup then there is probably no liability on the hosts part. If, however, the WWOOFer is injured while using an unguarded orchard mower then the host would have to accept responsibility for not providing a safe environment with adequate safety instructions. A copy of the act is available from your local Labour Dept for \$6. They also have people available to talk with you and pamphlets on the subject. One good idea is for hosts to discuss with the WWOOFer some of the

HANDY HINTS FOR HOSTS AND WWOOFERS

WWOOF operates with a small set of basic rules and guidelines. This allows it to suit the many and varied needs of the Hosts and WWOOFers. One of the main principles of WWOOF is mutual cooperation between WWOOFer and Host. This means that when the WWOOFer and Host first make contact, they should discuss details such as; hours of help, time off, type of help needed, household chores etc. If these details are worked out before the visit then it helps to make the stay more enjoyable and productive.

Below are some ideas and questions that members have sent in that you may like to discuss during the initial phone call.

Hosts:

- * Are you a genuine member of WWOOF?
- * How long do you want to stay?
- * What experience or talents do you have?
- * Are you interested in organic farming?
- * Where else have you WWOOFed?
- * Why do you want to come to our farm?

WWOOFers:

- * How long could I stay?
- * What type of help do you need?
- * How many hours should I help and what free time is there?
- * Say what special skills you may be able to offer.

WWOOFers, remember you are a guest in your hosts house. It costs money (which some hosts have little of) to accommodate and feed you.

Hosts, remember WWOOFers aren't slaves to run your farm. What you put on the table relates to a WWOOFers contentment and productivity.

DEALING WITH CONCERNS

Being a WWOOF member is a unique opportunity to experience other cultures. For WWOOFers, you get away from other travellers, instead staying with New Zealand families and experiencing life on a New Zealand farm. For Hosts, you may learn how to cook exotic dishes or learn different farming ideas. As a host once said, "Because we are unable to travel, the WWOOFers bring the world to us".

Each week we receive many letters from members telling us of their experiences. By far the majority are encouraging and full of praise for their respective hosts or WWOOFers. Of course there are times when a WWOOFer only comes to discuss their philosophy on life and drink the last of the milk. There are also some hosts who expect WWOOFers to run on the smell of nettle soup.

It is unfortunate that there are occasionally members who do not respect other members and abuse the system. If you find that you have concerns about another member (Host or WWOOFer) then please write down your concerns and send them in confidence to Andrew and Jane. We are unable to act on complaints if we do not hear about them. Hosts who prove to be unsuitable have and will be delisted. WWOOFers who abuse hosts will have their membership

History has proven that when a host accepts a traveller who claims to be a WWOOFer but has not actually joined, then the host is more likely to have problems with that traveller. Hosts must check that the WWOOFer is genuine by asking to see their WWOOF book and passport or ID. WWOOFers are told to show hosts this on arrival. Don't accept WWOOFers without the book with their name written in and our signature.

Remember hosts...

ASK IF YOUR PROSPECTIVE GUEST IS A GENUINE MEMBER!

LETTERS FROM MEMBERS

ORGANIC OR NOT?

At the WWOOF meeting in Nelson (Kimi Ora) the main concern of attendees was that some hosts in the WWOOF book are not genuinely organic or not progressing steadily towards being fully organic.

With the significant number of successful commercial organic farms now in NZ, plus active Soil and Health branches and organic producers groups in most regions the excuses "We'd like to be organic but can't afford it" and "We'd like to be organic but don't know how" no longer hold. If you're in the "We don't want to spray but have to" or "we only spray when we need to" category then you're also in the wrong book.

If WWOOFers leave your farm and make comments to other people such as "They said they were organic but were spraying weed killers" or "They said they were organic but drenched all their sheep while we were there" then you are doing a disservice to organics and the many genuine organic farmers in NZ.

If instead WWOOFers leave your farm making comments such as "While we were there we mulched all their fruit trees because mulches not only control the weeds but also improve soil structure, fertility and moisture retention" or "While we were there we only drenched the sheep who were prone to worms but these animals were culled and they only bred from ewes which have shown resistance to worms" then the WWOOFers have participated in organic farming techniques and will act as ambassadors for organics.

It doesn't matter whether you teach the WWOOFer something, or the WWOOFer teaches you something, or you both discover

something together (very popular with Californian WWOOFers!), the main thing is that we have help with our labour intensive systems and the WWOOFer takes away a positive experience. Possibly some of us can only afford to be organic by taking in WWOOFers, that's fine as long as the WWOOFer is working, learning, living on an organic farm.

Organic agriculture is clearly defined. It is based on sound objective and principles which are listed in associated standards booklets such as Bio-Gro and Demeter. If this is not how you are operating or progressing towards then perhaps you are in the wrong book.

As a final comment a possible extension of WWOOF is to have a studentship category. Host farms for this would probably need to be commercial Bio-Gro or Demeter properties, and able to provide good guidance and instruction for agricultural and horticultural students.

Seager Mason

Host

Nelson

-for more information contact:

Soil and Health Association

or Bio-Gro New Zealand

PO Box 36-170

Northcote

Auckland 9

The Soil and Health magazine is a good periodical for the beginning organic farmer. It has handy articles on techniques as well as references to events, resources and local contacts.

SOME IDEAS TO CONSIDER

I have WWOOFed in New Zealand for ten months and I would like to suggest some ideas through my experience.

The problems I found are:

- * Not many hosts are willing to teach because taking too many WWOOFers and tired. I found taking WWOOFers require hosts time and energy to organize, teach and get to know each other.

- * Not many hosts get to work with WWOOFers. This means WWOOFers don't get the chance to learn or ask questions.

So I would like to suggest the following ideas:

- * Encourage hosts (to be) more considerate with taking WWOOFers and be prepared to teach and communicate with WWOOFers.

- * Encourage hosts to work with WWOOFers where possible.

- * Update description more frequently and encourage hosts to report major changes.

I'd like to appreciate my wonderful (with few odd experiences!) experiences through WWOOFing. It was a good way to learn organics, to meet and know interesting Kiwis and for my personal growth.

Yoshiko Fujita

WWOOFer

MEMOIRS FROM AN EX-HOST

I started hosting WWOOFers in 1991, after my husband Gidon Blumenfeld died. The help, the company ... and the demands of the WWOOFers meant so much to me. I have no immediate family and the experience of sharing my home with a constant stream of visitors was real therapy. Often, we learned valuable lessons from them at the olive grove - if not in horticulture, then in matters like carpentry and so on. Above all, though it was a valuable cultural exchange and I felt really good when they enjoyed my cooking. I can't imagine what life without them would have been like over these past few years. About 90% of the WWOOFers left a very pleasant impression behind them.

Of course the 10% who would definitely NOT be welcome to return, I have this to say: It took me a while to learn not to behave like a social hostess, who had to pretend to ignore a guests impositions. I have since heard from a number of hosts whose hospitality has been abused. We can always ask WWOOFers, politely but firmly if needs be, to move on.

More unfortunate is the reverse position, where the WWOOFer is being unfairly treated. We've all heard of these cases by now, and frequently the complaints are about the same host. I have asked to WWOOFers "Did you report this?" but usually they are shy about it, or mean to but eventually leave it too late. The most common complaint is that they were expected to work right through the day, 7 days a week and no opportunity to see the countryside.

Well, having said that, I should add that the vast majority of the visitors have been warmly enthusiastic about their experiences in this country and say that their experiences as WWOOFers has been the most valuable part of their stay here. Jane and Andrew do a great service to us all, with your publications, your co-ordinating work and the general sense of community which you bring to the movement.

A tip I would like to pass on is that Asian visitors have an enormous appetite for rice and will appreciate having it every day, preferably short grain rice.

With thanks and every good wish,

Triska Blumenfeld

Ex-host

Picton

- *Triska sold her organic olive orchard last year.*

COMMENTS FROM AN EXPERIENCED WWOOFER

For the last 8 months I have been travelling through New Zealand as a WWOOFer. In this time I stayed with 16 different hosts. Now, I would like to tell you about my good and bad experiences.

Overall I have had a very good time and enjoyed it very much to travel this system. It is a very good way to meet Kiwis and to see alot about New Zealand lifestyle. The different sizes of the places makes a wide variety of work available. The more of less organic way opens some peoples eyes about abuse of chemicals.

Beside of all the very good experiences, I have had some bad ones as well. Some hosts expect far too much work for a very basic accommodation and simple food. Some hosts describe the work as very interesting and with a lot of variety but in fact it is always the same and very boring.

I was talking with other WWOOFers and most of them have had the same or similar meanings and experiences as I have. To you and the organisation all the best and good luck. Keep going. I would travel the same way again.

*Alois Wartenweiler
WWOOFer
Switzerland.*

WELLINGTON WWOOF GET-TOGETHER

Wellington WWOOF Hosts gathered at Frances Faudemer's farm in the Akatarewas in Upper Hut one Sunday last year for what is hoped will be the first of annual barbeques. St John and Diana Wakefield (Moonshine Road near Plimmerton), Glenn and Jean Fitzgerald (Upper Hutt), Cushla Mayer and Paul Shepard (Wadestown), Mark Henderson and Liz (Northland), Des (Frances' partner) and numerous children were all present.

The whether was highly organic so we had an inside barbeque with the highlight being a granddaddy crayfish supplied by Des who didn't eat any himself (did he know something?).

A visitor to the barbeque was an itinerant biodynamic seed salesman looking to boost business. One toddler got her leg jammed down the side of the pool and had to be rescued. (These events are thought not to be connected). After the vaguaries of bio-diverse uncoated, untreated seeds had been explained at some length, the conversation turned to WWOOFing, particularly the idiosyncracies of guest WWOOFers. The consensous seemed to be that some WWOOFers need a fair bit of supervision on tasks more complecated than cleaning the dishes - although apparently one WWOOFer even managed to turn this into a two marathon with a coffee break in the middle. Reading the WWOOF visitor book made for a bit of humour, especially the one who said he enjoyed staying with Frances except Vadden was a monster (lovely boy really).

Fun for all and nice to meet the other members in the area so in the words of the local dog - wwoof wwoof.

Mark Henderson

Host

Northland

BELATED THANKS FROM A WWOOFER

Preparing to leave for Kenya to work as an extension co-ordinator for the Kenyan Institute of Organic Farms, my mind drifts back to that bitterly cold, bleak November afternoon in S. England, when in the midst of pruning ancient apple trees one WWOOF weekend, I heard rumours of sunnier climes, permaculture, community living and New Zealand. By March I was there battling with sandflies, strange accents and frosted pumpkins. As I contrived to WWOOF for most of the six months I spent in New Zealand, I came to realise that organics was a philosophy, a way of life, and not nearly an adjunct to whatever else I did. I was inspired, encouraged and most warmly welcomed by all the WWOOF hosts and always felt humbled by their dedication and hard work. I became convinced that organics was something worth striving for and I was determined to, in some way or other, participate in this extremely challenging but rewarding way of life.

Once home, back in Ireland, I enthused about raised beds, compost, seaweed mulching, edible landscaping and permaculture. No one seemed to know what I was talking about so amidst hail storms, gale force winds, my brother and family were gently persuaded to help me put my ideas into practice.

By late August the veg beds were overflowing with produce and half the garden taken over with compost heaps, cold frames and cloches, organics was not viewed as such a mad option.

Meanwhile I had to start looking for other work, as so was absolutely thrilled to be offered a placement for two years in Kenya. As yet I am unsure exactly what my job as extension co-ordinator will entail, but I do know that due to all the support and help of those people who I meet through WWOOF New Zealand, I feel extremely excited about what lies ahead. So many thanks indeed, especially Sue, Seager, James and Louise Mason, Rob, Barbara, David and Lucy Knowles, and particularly Jerry Naylor who put up with me for weeks rather than just days. My new address is KIOF, PO Box 34972, Nairobi, Kenya and naturally you are all welcome.

*Tansy Bliss
WWOOFer
Ireland*

A WWOOFERS TESTIMONIAL

WWOOFing is truly a great way of meeting New Zealanders and travelling round this country. You really get to understand what it is like to live and work in this great country, unlike the hostel scene where you only get to meet other travellers. It is also much more personal and relaxed method of travel. You can spend a week or two in one place and really get to know it. Much better than rushing through a place doing the tourist traps and then moving on.

WWOOFing is also a much greener form of tourism. Instead of taking from the places you visit, you are giving so you receive so much more in the end.

*Charles Merfield
WWOOFer
Christchurch*