How to Use This Guide

This guide offers an overview on WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), along with resources for students and alumni interested in pursuing volunteer opportunities as WWOOFers.

Overview

WWOOF is an unpaid exchange - volunteering in exchange for food, accommodation and learning opportunities in organic agriculture. WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) links volunteers with organic farmers, smallholders and gardeners. WWOOF organizations compile a list of farmers and gardeners that welcome volunteer help at certain times. Volunteer helpers ("WWOOFers") can then contact these farmers and gardeners ("WWOOF hosts") to arrange a stay.

WWOOF aims to:

- offer first-hand learning opportunities about organic growing techniques
- offer opportunities for people to experience life in the countryside
- help the organic movement, which is labor-intensive
- give people in the organic movement a chance to meet, talk, exchange and learn
- provide an opportunity to learn about rural life in other areas and countries by living and working together

WWOOF hosts mainly pursue a simple, sustainable lifestyle. Some farms are commercial producers; others practice farming as a hobby. Some farms are large properties, inherited or bought; others are smaller and have been developed through hard work and sweat.

What you do:

WWOOFers give help that is wide and variable, but includes

* sowing seed
* making compost
* gardening, planting
* cutting wood, weeding
* making mud bricks
* harvesting
* fencing
* building
* packing
* milking
* feeding livestock
How Do You Become a WWOOFer?

The best way to begin WWOOFing is to register through an online website that will connect you to host farms. The most common and well-known sites are:

- [http://www.wwoof.org](http://www.wwoof.org) (International and US)
- [http://www.wwoofusa.org](http://www.wwoofusa.org) (US only)
- [http://www.wwoofindependents.org](http://www.wwoofindependents.org) (International)

There are other sites that offer opportunities to connect with host farms, most associated with specific countries -- a Google search of WWOOF + country of interest could yield very useful results. Most of these sites require registration and a small fee in order to begin contacting host farms, although it is usually possible to do a preliminary search without registering.

Planning Your First WWOOFing Experience

**Decide what you want from your WWOOF stint.** This will help you filter through a WWOOF country's database faster. Sample questions to ask yourself:

- Are you especially interested in working with vegetables, fruit, grains or animals?
- Do you want to learn how to make products for sale from the farm produce you work with? E.g., jams from fruit, noodles from wheat, sausages from sheep or pigs etc.
- Are you interested only in farming, or would you rather be at a place that had related activities / businesses? E.g., a rural inn, spiritual centre, market stand, restaurant etc
- Would you rather be on a farm where you’re likely to be the only volunteer, have 1-3 more volunteers with you, or be part of a large rotating group of volunteers?
- Do you have allergies and/or dietary restrictions? Do animals make you sneeze? Could you stand to potentially go vegan or vegetarian for a few weeks? Or give up your vegetarianism for a few weeks?
- Can you picture yourself living in a tent for a few weeks, or do you need to sleep under a roof?

**Identify what you can bring to the table.** Create a reference list for yourself. List planting, harvesting, or building experience you may have. Don't despair if you're a city slicker and have no farm experience! Farmers need all sorts of non-farm help as well. Desired skills can include IT knowledge, business planning, marketing, photography, and copywriting.

**Pick a season.** Consider the year from the point of view of a farm. You're more likely to get a WWOOF stint you want in spring or autumn, as farms are busiest and most need help. Spring offers extensive planting and animal birthing; autumn features harvesting. Summer can be a busy time as well if your WWOOF host grows fruit and berries and especially if they dry or can fruits. Summer is also a time for building projects given the relatively dry weather. Winters are usually quiet times on farms.
Decide how long you can/want to WWOOF for. WWOOF hosts usually mention in their listing the minimum and maximum duration they’ll offer for any one volunteer. Two weeks can be a good length for an initial visit, for it is long enough to get into the rhythm of the farm, but not so long that if there is a problem it becomes unbearable. The amount of hours worked per day can vary depending on the farm, but the average is 5-6 hours per day, and generally no more than 30 hours per week.

Create and organize your target list. Join your WWOOF country organization of choice, dig into their database and create your long list of target farms. Every country’s individual WWOOFing website is slightly different -- check if it has a mailing list (e.g., Kenya), or host review platform (e.g., Japan) where past WWOOFers have posted reviews/recommendations of specific hosts. Use these reviews to help shorten your list.

Customize your email to each WWOOF host. WWOOF hosts are rightfully picky about who they take into their home, and popular farms get plenty of applications. A well-written and tailored letter will distinguish you. Your letter should contain the following components, preferably in the following order:

- **Details of your inquiry**: You are inquiring about the possibility for the farm to host x volunteers for x days, from x date to y date.
- **Who you are**: A short paragraph on who you are (e.g., backpacker / young couple on honeymoon etc), and why you are interested in WWOOFing at all.
- **Why WWOofing at their farm**: A short paragraph on why you are interested in that host's farm in particular, and what projects / tasks you are particularly keen on getting involved with.
- **Your contributions**: What relevant skills you can contribute, especially if you can match it to their published list of tasks and projects.
- **Your Prior Experience**: List any farming, gardening or building experience if any, even if they weren't WWOOFing experiences. After your first WWOOF gig, be sure to list your previous WWOOFing experiences.
- **Your additional skills**: What additional skills you offer (couch this with "if it turns out to be helpful". Stress that you are happy to help out with whatever is needed on the farm.)

Send out your emails well in advance. Plan to send your emails 2 months before you would hope to start your WWoof stint. Planning in advance can be especially helpful if you plan to travel to another country. The more lead time you set up for yourself, the better the odds are for your top target host having availability for you. WWOOF organizations suggest contacting WWOOF hosts one at a time, and write to the next one only after you hear back from the previous one. Because some hosts don’t always answer, a better way would be to rank your list by your level of interest in them. On Day 1 send out emails to the top 3 or 4, then after 3 days (if you don't hear anything) email the next 3 or 4, and so on. Try to reply as fast as possible to responses. Once you’ve confirmed a place, inform other farms that you won’t be staying with them so they're not left to wonder.
For the best WWOOFing experience, do your research -- on the country, on the region you will be in, on your host. Do not hesitate to call your host several weeks in advance and establish exactly what your mutual expectations are. Trust your gut -- if something seems off, letting it go might be the best solution.

**Sources/Useful Resources:**

How WWOOFing works: [http://www.wwoofinternational.org/how-it-works/](http://www.wwoofinternational.org/how-it-works/)


Guides to WWOOFing: [http://matadornetwork.com/change/a-first-timers-gudie-to-wwoof-ing/](http://matadornetwork.com/change/a-first-timers-gudie-to-wwoof-ing/)


Macalester alum blogging about WWOOFing: [http://randyandhollys farmingadventure.blogspot.com/](http://randyandhollys farmingadventure.blogspot.com/)

Tips for new WWOOFers: [http://www.goingwithmygut.com](http://www.goingwithmygut.com)
**Notes:**

**Next Steps:**

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**Networking & Professional Identity:**

- Tools to access Mac alumni
- Social media inventory
- LinkedIn profile review

**Need help? Questions?**

- Scheduled 30- or 60-min. appointments
- 15-min Drop-in Appointments: M-F: 2-4pm
- Appointments also via phone, email & Skype

**Connect with the CDC!**