

## **Making Ripples**

### **Willing Workers on Organic Farms**

by Amanda Bancroft

There's a lot of howling about WWOOFing. World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, or Willing Workers on Organic Farms (used interchangeably) has been a popular way for people to travel, gain work experience, do internships, or start a career in agriculture. Can't travel? That's ok! There are many opportunities around the country and world, including right here in Northwest Arkansas.

Major's Way Ecovillage in Garfield, Arkansas, near Bentonville, just successfully hosted two Australian WWOOFers who helped with their garden and earthbag house. Lisa Majors excitedly explained about the joy and experience of hosting WWOOFers, saying that she learned a lot and had fun hosting. One WWOOFer, Jiffy, explained that "some farms are looking for slave labor and that is just not what the WWOOF'ing experience is about. But since there is no money involved, WWOOF'ers can just leave at any time if they feel like their time is being exploited." Major's Way WWOOFers filled in gravel beds for an aquaponics system and built a shower wall from cut bottles. Their second WWOOFer, Forest, taught morning yoga, shared Australian recipes and baked homemade bread. "She showed Jiffy how to knit with two sharpened sticks, then she knitted a beautiful bathmat for me from torn strips of tee-shirts," Lisa said.

Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, USA ([www.woofusa.org](http://www.woofusa.org)) is "part of a worldwide effort to link visitors with organic farmers, promote an educational exchange, and build a global community conscious of ecological farming practices." Search their website for Arkansas locations near you, such as Fayetteville, Garfield, Eureka Springs, Elkins, or Combs, where there are current farms awaiting WWOOFers.

If you do want to travel but can't really afford expensive lodging and meals, WWOOFing is a sustainable way to see the world. It exists in 99 host countries and the duration of your visit can be as short as a few days to years, depending on the site. The work experiences you can get WWOOFing are variable, including permaculture, coffee bean harvesting, and hundreds of other options. Workdays average about five hours. According to Wikipedia, WWOOFing began in 1971 in England when it was originally called Working Weekends on Organic Farms by its founder, Sue Coppard.

To pick out an international destination, visit [www.woof.net](http://www.woof.net) or [woofinternational.org](http://woofinternational.org). You'll need to directly contact the organization in the country you're interested in staying. You generally need to be eighteen years old with a visa or passport, and capable of paying your own travel fees and insurance. Some farms welcome families with children, too! It isn't just for singles, but check with the farm and let them know you want to bring your family. Background

checks and security restrictions vary from country to country, so look into what requirements your potential host site went through and use your best judgment.

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