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**editorial**

**welcome to the winter 2017 edition of WWOOF UK News**

Spring should be officially with us by the time you read this, and I’m hoping it’s going to be a gentle and replenishing one after what feels like a long, cold winter. We have some new initiatives to start the growing year with – our first **Taster Day** was sold out well in advance and we are looking for more hosts willing to encourage non-members into the WWOOFing fold, page 3.

The minimum age for WWOOFer volunteers has been reduced to 16; we explain the thoughts and intentions behind that on page 11 while on page 7 we offer a guide to the UK Immigration Rules.

Some hosts may be particularly interested in the possibility of interest free loans, page 9 and RHC David Beaton draws on his recent experience helping out with a WWOOFing medical emergency and advises us on how to **plan for the worst**, page 11.

WWOOFer Carolyn Gemson shares some of the side effects of WWOOFing she’s found, page 9 and vintage WWOOFer Martin talks to Chief Exec Scarlett, page 4.

Mr Fluttergrub tells how to tend to and propagate Jerusalem Artichokes on page 6 and allows me to introduce the word ‘fartichoke’ into the newsletter which gives delight. Childish, I know.

WWOOF UK trustee Katie Hastings shares details of the UK and Ireland Seed Sovereignty Programme on page 10 and on page 8 Phil Moore, ex-WWOOFer and Ecological Land Alliance friend, tries to persuade us to get on our bikes and go dragon dreaming in Wales.

Please continue to send me your news, comments and experiences, we love to share them.

Elaine Koster, Editor

**stay in touch**

Please send contributions for our print editions to editor@wwoof.org.uk or by post (address page 12) by the following dates:

- 30th April for Summer 2018 issue
- 31st July 2017 for Autumn 2018 issue
- 31st October for Winter 2018 issue
- 31st January for Spring 2019 issue

The deadlines for material to be included in the next four electronic updates are:

- 13th April 2018
- 13th July 2018
- 5th October 2018
- 11th January 2019

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

Follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/wwoofuk) on Twitter: @wwoofuk and Instagram: @wwoofuk

And don’t forget members can always post adverts, question and comments on our members’ forum [www.wwoof.org.uk/forums/forum](http://www.wwoof.org.uk/forums/forum)

**what is WWOOF UK?**

- WWOOF UK holds a list of organic farms, gardens and smallholding, 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, café and education centre.
- WWOOF hosts should follow the IFOAM organic principles but need not be registered with a certifying organisation.
- Hosts do not expect WWOOFers to know a lot about farming and growing when they arrive, but they do expect them to be willing to learn and able to fit in with their lifestyle.
- The list of hosts is available, either online or as a book, 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.
- WWOOFers do not pay to stay with hosts and hosts do not pay WWOOFers for their help.
- The ethos and mission page of our website gives full details of what is expected of hosts and WWOOFers.
- WWOOF UK is a charity registered in England and Wales 1126220 and in Scotland SC045524.

**cover:** Taryn Field

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those held by WWOOF UK
Recently it was highlighted we are only communicating with our current members; it seems potential, interested and ex-members would like to hear from us as well. Keeping WWOOF in people's minds is especially relevant at a time when volunteer numbers are dropping. Can you think of anything else we are overlooking with our communications?

**Host contact Taryn Field says:**

With the Spring approaching I wanted to remind you, if you haven't already, to fill out your 'host availability' and keep it current so WWOOFers know if you have vacancies. For those hosts that haven't uploaded photos yet, please do, WWOOFers are more likely to contact you if they can see where they are going. Helpful photos include the gardens, animals, the house, WWOOFers accommodation, people, other WWOOFers.

I hope you all have a productive growing season and attract many interesting and vibrant WWOOFers.

We heard some disturbing news in late January; our Coordinator/Chief Exec Scarlett Penn tweeted:

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**Scarlett Penn**

@ScarlettPn

Shocked to hear that charity @gardenorganicuk is selling off its base at Ryton Gardens on the open market. Members are saying they haven't been consulted. The ashes of Lawrence Hills the 1954 founder are scattered on site. gardenorganic.org.uk/news/ryton-gar ... #SaveRyton

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**Taster Days off to a flying start**

We're really chuffed with the response we've had to the launch of our **WWOOFing Taster Days**, which took place in York on Saturday 24th February. It was sold out!

Although we thought local people would be the first to sign up – in reality folk travelled from all over the country for this micro-WWOOFing experience.

As well as completing some farm tasks, eating good food and having the opportunity to ask lots of questions, the day included a short presentation that introduced these non-members to the wonderful world of WWOOF. Our aim was to equip them with the knowledge and confidence they need to contact hosts and become top quality volunteers.

The £10 taster day fee was deducted from the cost of membership for anyone who signed up on the day.

Given this event's popularity we'd like to do more and could do with venues in Scotland, Wales and further south in England.

If you are a host who would find promoting WWOOF a pleasure and have a task coming up that needs a team of people for a morning or afternoon, please message us using tasters@wwoof.org.uk.

All future Taster Days will be promoted on our home page.
vintage WWOOFers

‘Age does not depend upon years, but upon temperament and health.’ Tyrone Edwards

Scarlett Penn, WWOOF UK Coordinator, and also one of our 670+ hosts, chats with one of her post-retirement WWOOFers

So then... would you like to introduce yourself?

Sure! I am Martin, I am 68 years old, living in Finland for most of my life but born in Germany. I retired from my job as a carpenter and carpentry teacher this summer.

How did you get into WWOOFing?

All my life I’ve been taking part in volunteering. I choose things which interest me, ecological things and enterprises that are not commercial. In 2004 I discovered WWOOF. Probably I found it online while looking for new volunteering opportunities, but I cannot remember exactly. The first time I went WWOOFing was in Fife, Scotland. It was the remarkable Monimail Tower Project. What interested me was to see how a community works and Monimail is part of the Diggers and Dreamers network of intentional communities. I’m more of a Digger and Thinker! Anyway, I’ve now been four times. It’s very interesting and a nice way to learn about people and the area I am in.

What do you like about volunteering your time?

When I make holidays I’m not the guy to be on the beach for three weeks burning and browning. Or to run from one castle to the next church, sightseeing. Although sometimes they’re interesting, it is not for me. I like WWOOFing because I’m doing something constructive. I know this is now a bit of a bad word for WWOOF, but I like it because it’s work. On other holidays I have to think ‘what shall I do’ and then report what I have done – I’ve seen the Eiffel Tower! I’ve done this, I’ve visited that! With WWOOF I get given tasks, so I don’t have to think about what to do and I like that. I am in interesting surroundings, I eat plenty of nice food, I cooperate with the ‘boss’, the person in charge, I get to know them very well and that’s usually nice. Then I can go home to my family and say ‘I got a new experience, this holiday I built a glass house’ and they can be impressed.

On this exchange we are concentrating on a small building project, and you are very handy to have around for that. We especially benefited from your ability to fix broken tools and equipment. What other kinds of activities have you done as a WWOOFer?

Oh, all sorts. I am a cabinet maker so I often get asked to do some wood creation. At Monimail I built them a splendid rack for their plates, which is much admired by neighbours. Every time I go there is the joke they have the most famous dish shelf in the Kingdom of Fife! I have made a chicken house with the best view in the Mediterranean, I have done roofing, made doors, blinds for windows, created specialist shelves and miniature chairs for grandchildren. But also I have done bakery, ceramics, made ale, fixed bicycles and other farm items and of course, done gardening.

Besides Scotland and England, where have you done all this volunteering Martin?

Many places: Northern Sweden, Northern Spain, several times in France, Northern Italy, twice in Germany and then four months in Japan. I bought a bicycle and toured around to four or five hosts there.

And last week you cycled from your friend in Bath to here in Shropshire. How far was that? Did you enjoy it?

It was 100 miles, from Bath to Ludlow. A wonderful local lady offered me a lift up the steep hill as I neared the farm, but I declined. You see, I want to approach slowly the place
Was it easy to find a host in the UK?

I sent out five emails to hosts in the West Midlands and received no replies. I understand that hosts have a lot to do, I don’t blame anyone, but it made things very awkward for me as I needed to book a flight and it was all very uncertain. I sent out a further email and got a response from you here in Shropshire, thankfully. It would have been so helpful if there had been a response from the previous people, any response, even if very short or even a lie! But just to know.

What has been your favourite learning or experience while WWOOFing?

Noticing how much of a cultural thing eating is in places like Italy. And learning how food is grown and how much work has gone into it, at many levels. A young couple in Spain had bought an abandoned village near the border of Galicia. It was on a hill and they had the rights to the water in the valley so they could build a mill. Well from nearly on top of the hill there was a wonderful irrigation system, all the land was terraced, you could see how much work these people have been making for hundreds of years, all these little details, to produce food. Yet we abandon this huge amount of work of our ancestors because we can no longer go there with our tractor. I was in Northern Sweden and there was nothing more growing there than cows in pastures. I started to understand that a farmer gives freedom to the cows, they don’t have to fear the wolves. In the end the farmer calls one of these cows over and – bang – that is the end of you. Even though I am vegetarian I can accept that. But not 1000 cows fed by computers. Optimised systems that produce udders so big they need bras. Not natural.

Do you have anything else you’d like to share?

Host are a bit special people. They have an attitude of ecology. Money is a factor, but it’s not so important, like it is in normal society. To me it is very important a host does not depend upon WWOOFers, and I would not choose a big commercial farm. I like to volunteer and help, but if you want to make money from me then you have to pay me! Hahahaha. The host gives a lot of themselves; the volunteer sees the whole family in the family home and setting, the pets, their hopes and dreams, it’s very nice that people open their home. I want the possibility to choose a host that fits with my ideology when I’m applying. Clear and honest host descriptions are very important, and it’s my responsibility to read them carefully. I went to a place advertised as a community in France but there was only one communard left! The guy had a whole zoo in a way. Doves, chickens, donkeys, cows, sheep, goats. It was so interesting to see these animals, these anarchistic goats. They did what they wanted, they were in the trees! Wonderful crazy eyes.

Anarchistic goats with crazy eyes – what an enjoyable image you leave us with! Thank you for sharing all this with us Martin. Tomorrow we say goodbye and you will cycle to Manchester via Ironbridge; a diversion, but you are curious to see where the Industrial Revolution started. It has been a great pleasure to experience someone who lives the phrase, ‘Age does not depend upon years, but upon temperament and health’.

Was it easy to find a host in the UK?

I have never felt any bad reaction to my age as a volunteer. I can understand a surprised reaction that a guy of my age is coming, but it’s different to paid work. When you retire from paid work there’s a line; OK you reach this age, you must stop working, right now, finish! WWOOF is not like that. Of course a host might want to take age into account and wonder, is this guy fit enough for this or that, they might make sure we know our own boundaries and borders, and that we don’t overestimate our own physical ability. Sometimes we forget we are older you know! I can understand a host would want to guard against someone older having a heart problem for example, or falling down.

Are there advantages to being a more mature WWOOFer?

Yes. You have a kind of ‘power’ through your age, which younger people do not have. A confidence. I have also found my age can have a calming experience on a host, and sometimes between hosts and WWOOFers, should it be needed. I see it as an advantage. I don’t look to the clock – I do tasks and that’s it and hosts appreciate that because they are the same. It’s good for the body to be used, to keep going. Older people who keep going are fitter than much younger people who do not.

Where do you go. You learn already about the place and what it is. The journey is very important to me. One time I woke up in a wonderful, beautiful place in Southern France but I had been collected from an airport and driven at high speed to my lodgings. I felt disoriented.

That’s not bad for a 68 year old! You’re obviously very fit and healthy. Have you ever had any discrimination or negative comments about your age?

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on the plot with Mr Fluttergrub

Jerusalem Artichokes

Why the Jerusalem artichoke is not more widely grown is a mystery to me as they are an easy crop and usually very productive. It is true that they have a reputation for being indigestible and causing flatulence: the epithet ‘fartichokes’ is not altogether undeserved. It’s also the case that the plants have a triffid-like habit. Full grown they will tower well over two metres in height. But this is a vegetable that will thrive almost anywhere, even in part shade or poor soil. What’s more it is extremely hardy; tubers can be safely left in the ground in winter and dug up when required.

Jerusalem artichokes are grown by planting individual tubers in much the same way as potatoes. Tubers can be bought, at considerable expense, but most gardeners simply replant their own. This is how I grow them although I do find that after a number of years the harvested tubers tend to become more ‘knobbly’. As a result, about every seven to eight years I refresh my stock and buy new ones to plant. I always go for *Fuseau*, one of the few named varieties available which produces far smoother and more uniform tubers than unnamed types.

Although Jerusalem artichokes are an easy crop there are a few things to remember if you want the best possible yield. First of all, don’t keep tubers for planting hanging around. Unlike seed potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes will go soft and ‘flabby’ quite quickly out of the soil. Secondly, if the tubers for planting have visible shoot(s), this is a growing tip, not a root, so place them with it pointing upwards. Finally, and most importantly, do not allow Jerusalem artichokes to regrow from old tubers left in the ground. Although common practice, this leads to a messy tangle of crowded and unproductive plants.

When starting Jerusalem artichokes afresh in a new area it’s best to choose a site on the periphery of the plot. This helps reduce overshadowing of other crops by the mature plants, especially if orientated in a row running north-south. Tubers are easily planted using a trowel. Simply place in a hole so the top is about ten centimetres beneath the surface and cover. Spacing should be at least 40 centimetres apart. Any closer will give a reduced crop with smaller tubers that are fiddly to prepare in the kitchen.

Green shoots from the planted tubers should take three to four weeks to emerge. The baby plants seem palatable to slugs, so keep an eye out for damage. Once well out of the ground little attention is needed other than occasional weeding. However, in late summer it’s probably best to support the abundant top growth to reduce the risk of toppling in strong wind. I bang in heavy posts at the ends of the row and weave a web of baler twine between the plants at waist height.

Towards the end of autumn the tall leafy growth will brown and die. It’s then best cut to the ground. Slug damage does tend to increase later in the winter and, if you’re unlucky, nibbling rodents may take a toll. Generally, though, Jerusalem artichokes continue to yield into the spring. Indeed, I often dig the final batch when the first shoots of the new crop are visible.

Photos:
- tubers: Dr Hagen Graebner, from WikiCommons published under the Free GNU Documentation License
- flowers: Paul Fenwick, from WikiCommons published under the Free GNU Documentation License

Mr Fluttergrub is the pen name of someone who is close to the heart of WWOOF UK. Based in the north of England he’s a very experienced grower and has agreed to write a regular column for us. Let us know if his suggestions work for you or if you have other ideas for your region, please get in touch using: info@wwoof.org.uk.
UK immigration rules

a guide for hosts and WWOOFers

Of the many hundreds of our members who come WWOOFing in the UK from overseas, we believe that only a very small percentage ever experience serious problems at the UK border. However, we did hear about five examples in 2017, and having even one WWOOFer go through the traumatic experience of being deported is one too many.

There are three key points about immigration and WWOOFing which all WWOOFers and hosts should understand and be ready to discuss with border officials if necessary.

1. Immigration problems happen more often to WWOOFers who are non-EU citizens

All WWOOFers, regardless of nationality, must take responsibility for having the necessary travel documents and permissions to enter the UK. However, every immigration issue and deportation we have heard about since 2014 has happened to non-EU citizens.

In April 2017, a WWOOFer arrived in the UK having flown from Barcelona. She is an Andorran citizen, and there is no airport in Andorra so Barcelona is the closest airport to her home, but she was deported because Andorra is not an EU country!

2. Essential Immigration Rules for non-EU volunteers to know:

a) you must be coming to the UK as a visitor – e.g. as a tourist, or to visit friends or family

b) you can volunteer with a registered charity whilst visiting the UK (WWOOF UK is a charity registered in Scotland, England and Wales)

c) the volunteering must NOT be the main reason you are coming to the UK (this is described in the Rules as ‘incidental volunteering’)

d) you must not volunteer for more than 30 days during your visit.

In November 2017 a WWOOFer, who is a US citizen, arrived in the UK having planned to stay in the country for about five weeks to visit two different friends. She had arranged four weeks of WWOOFing in between visits to her friends. This sounded to us like incidental volunteering because the main reason for her visit was to see her friends, but border officials did not agree and deported her. WWOOF is currently discussing this case with Home Office ministers to make sure we get absolute clarity on how to judge when volunteering is ‘incidental’ to a WWOOFer’s visit. We’ll keep you posted – the immigration page of our website is updated regularly with information and advice.

3. WWOOFing is not work

Visitors to the UK cannot work during their visit. If, when questioned at the UK border, any non-EU WWOOFer starts talking about the ‘work’ they’ll be doing with a host, this will ring alarm bells for border officials. Be very, very clear – WWOOFing is volunteering, or an exchange, a visit or an educational experience, but it is never ‘work’.

In October 2017, a US citizen arrived at the UK border and was questioned by officials about what she would be doing whilst in the country. She explained that she would be doing bar work and administrative work for two WWOOF hosts. She was deported.

WWOOF UK is a charity based on principles of education. Serving behind a bar or helping with a bit of admin just about passes as something a WWOOFer might do a little of to learn about a host’s land-based activities. In immigration terms, a WWOOFer coming to the UK ‘to do WWOOFing working behind a bar’ will almost certainly not be allowed into the country, whereas an explanation of how the WWOOFer’s time will be spent ‘volunteering with an educational charity, learning about land-based living’ will be much more acceptable!

Like them or not, the Immigration Rules are something WWOOFers and hosts have to live with for now and whilst WWOOF UK staff do occasionally have to speak to the Home Office when we believe the officials haven’t got it right, most of the time they are following the Rules.

WWOOFers can arrange their visit to the UK without falling foul of the Rules; and hosts can help to make getting across the UK border to do a spot of WWOOFing easy (and educational)!!
Phil Moore is one half of Permaculture People @permapeople and a keen cycle tourer working with, in his words, the awesome Brake the Cycle. They are planning a week long ride through Wales focused on permaculture and the exploration of new (& old!) ideas around ecology, economy and conviviality during May this year and calling it Dragon Dreaming. He explains...

WWOOFing and wheeling go hand-in-hand. Brake the Cycle is a social enterprise that runs cycle tours to ecological projects across the UK and Europe and shares the WWOOF ethos of openness and inclusion.

Our rides visit a number of WWOOF hosts where cyclists get to inhabit spaces they ordinarily wouldn’t see, including delicious food grown by the host and, if there’s time, a brief tour. This marks out Brake the Cycle tours from the normal ‘holiday’ or cycle tour. It’s something else and WWOOF is a big part of it. The privilege of being welcomed into people’s spaces as active participants, not simply as customers is hugely appealing. The interaction and opportunity to ask those who create special places, how they’ve done it, is important to us and for those taking part. Indeed, many of our past riders have been so inspired by meetings with remarkable WWOOF projects that they’ve returned as willing volunteers.

Over the Pyrenees, from one side of the Iberian Peninsula to the other, around the Greek island of Evia and through the lost lanes and verdant valleys of Wales, our cycle tours are designed to see things differently. This is largely inspired by the idea of ‘Slow’ cycling. In short, the destination isn’t the goal. It’s all about the ride, about the ‘now’. And about rekindling connections — to those around us, our friends, our community; to place, to the rhythms of the world, to looking up and hearing the geese honking high in the clean blue sky. If poetry is composed of a patchwork of felt details — the sun kissing your cheeks as the wind blows through your hair whilst puffing up a hill knowing that your eyes, now fixed on the seemingly infinite tarmac will lift to reveal a grand vista when you get to the top — then cycling is a portal into poetry. Peddling helps reconnect you to the world around you. It gets you out and about.

In large part ‘Slow’ cycling is about visiting places and really breathing them in. That’s why Brake the Cycle is necessarily drawn to projects that are keen to share, and of the projects visited, many of which are WWOOF hosts, it is the examples of natural builds, abundant food spaces and places using organising tools and spaces for more communal and cooperative models of living that are hugely appealing.

As one of our past riders said of the temporary travelling community that is a Brake the Cycle ride, ‘being on a bike with others reminds you you’re not alone in this world as well as offering you time to mull over the beauties when it’s just you and your bike’. We’ve found that many joining our rides are often at a critical juncture in their life where they need some perspective and space to think. This is a beautiful thing, and having the support of your fellow riders can be hugely beneficial.

What’s also important to Brake the Cycle tours is a break from the ‘norm’ and seeing how things can be done differently, how another world is possible. This is where WWOOF hosts, who, having welcomed us into their spaces, demonstrate that there are other ways to produce and consume food and how we can communicate with one another. These are laboratories of insurrectionary imagination at the edge of change but also dynamically abutting on mainstream society.

Brake the Cycle rides are open to all. No previous experience of cycling is required — just enthusiasm and an open mind. An adventure for both body and mind, Brake the Cycle invites contemplation of the inner terrain as riders push pedals up and over mountains and beautiful scenery. If you’re seeking change, adventure and personal transformation, create the space for it on a Brake the Cycle adventure. To find out more visit www.brakethecycle.xyz
Thanks very much to WWOOFer Carolyn Gemson for sending us this.

‘Are you here for the starlings? ’ asks the binocularered warden.

‘You should have seen the crowds at the weekend – some even tried to park in the field. Well, it would be June at the earliest before they’d get off a Levels field!’

I was enjoying an afternoon off from my Glastonbury WWOOFing exploring the RSPB reserves on the Somerset Levels. Unlike the masses of the previous weekend today it was quiet; so quiet that half an hour earlier a secretive bittern had passed within three metres of me, so absorbed was it in its hunt for the next meal, whilst a pair of electric blue kingfishers enchanted me with their trips from branch to shimmering stream.

And yes, I was here for the starlings. I wanted to experience the daily roosting ritual that my hosts had told me about, known as the murmurations.

It was a late January afternoon, the wintery sky’s patchwork of golden pink clouds mirrored in the wetland landscape. Cold rain blew in suddenly creating a rainbow arch across the wide horizon, dissolving as quickly as it had arrived. Overhead a solitary wide-winged hawk hovered keen eyed, seeking the camouflaged vole that scurried across the earth’s peaty blackness.

Flat, quiet, a water-laden scene edged by a vacant spinney, awaiting its nocturnal residents; the sun now a burnished ball descending through a filter of feather-topped reeds.

And then it started. A trickle of movement in the eastern sky. A swelling overture. A growing movement. Starlings flying in rapid harmony. Within moments other flocks joined them and then the silent symphony began. Thousands of birds flooding the sky, a shape-shifting mass flying in close formation as though linked by a magnetic force. Now bound tightly, shadowing the sky. Now stretched ribbon-fine in a constantly changing drift and flow. They twisted, they wheeled, morphing seamlessly from one magical form to another. Passing overhead with a cacophony of pulsing wings.

And then just as suddenly as it started, it was over. The sky drained empty and sight was replaced with sound as the chattering roost settled for the night.

I was suddenly aware of the chilly dampness and the twilight dusk and was pleased that I had my own roost to return to. It came with the promise of shared food and good company for a winter’s evening and the pleasure of another WWOOFing experience with added benefits.

photo: David Kjaer from the RSPB website

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interest free loans for hosts?

The Organic Research Centre, (ORC) launched the new Dean Organic Fund at the Oxford Real Farming Conference earlier this year. The fund offers interest-free loans, typically ranging from £5,000 to £25,000, to small-scale organic/ecological growers and food businesses. The Organic Research Centre is inviting applications for interest-free, unsecured loans from organic farmers and food producers who wish to expand their enterprises by investing in equipment or stock or would benefit from other working capital. The fund is also open to those producers that are not certified organic but whose operations are closely aligned with organic principles.

Details here: goo.gl/t9ujEg
The turning of the New Year has seen an exciting programme spring into action. The UK and Ireland Seed Sovereignty Programme is being hosted by the Gaia Foundation and will see partners such as the Soil Association, The Seed Co-operative and the Land Workers Alliance working together to strengthen the movement of agroecological seed producers in the UK and Ireland. Katie Hastings, a WWOOF UK trustee, is their seed coordinator for Wales and explains how the programme will work.

Recent years have seen a huge surge in activity around Food Sovereignty, with people reawakening to questions of where their food is produced, how it is produced and what impact this has on the planet. But we cannot talk about food without talking about the seed that is the start and end of any food plant. According to John Navazio’s history of the agricultural seed, saving seed was an integral part of farming right up until around 100 years ago. He explains that seed ‘was woven into the fabric of the farm’ until we started to hand our seed production over to commercial companies after the second world war.

With the commercialisation of seed production has come the huge increase in F1 hybrid seed being created. While this seed could offer new varieties with enticing traits such as disease resistance, the seed from these plants could no longer be saved and grown ‘true to type’. Farmers passed on the delicate art of producing their own locally adapted varieties to the seed companies, losing many local crop varieties in the process.

Organic issues are also at the forefront of seed sovereignty. Currently only 3% of all seed available to grow on the UK market is organic. That means the majority of the ‘organic’ products we purchase and consume are grown by organic methods, but not from organic seed. While food growers across the UK are thinking twice before spraying chemicals in the field, is enough thought being put into the production of the seeds that we are bringing into our ecosystems?

The good news is that seed sovereignty is taking root in the UK and Ireland food sovereignty movement. Inspiring seed companies such as the Seed Co-operative and Real Seeds are producing open pollinated seed in ecologically sound ways.

So how will this ambitious programme be practically realised? The Seed Sovereignty Programme aims to remain profoundly local, with regional activities being informed by geographic area and the ideas of those in those locations. Here is a roundup of some of the regional activities that WWOOF hosts can get involved in:

**Wales:** As the regional coordinator for Wales I am currently engaged in recruiting professional growers and market gardeners in a seed production training programme. Working in partnership with Real Seeds, growers are being invited to two training events at Real Seeds headquarters, as well as being offered ‘technical intensives’ with author of Back Garden Seed Saving, Sue Stickland. Those able to produce high quality seed will be able to move on to producing seed for sale in the Real Seeds catalogue. I am also supporting the establishment of a Welsh Seed Hub in which seed producers can share seed and knowledge. katie@gaianet.org

**Scotland:** Scottish Coordinator Maria Scholten says ‘we start the seed programme with small-scale trials in 2018, to investigate seed production under Northern agroecological growing conditions: a short growing season with long summer days. If you have suggestions for crops or varieties to trial, want to offer land, or just be informed, get in touch’. maria@gaianet.org

**West England:** Coordinator Ellen Rignell is supporting the set up of a seed producers co-operative. Looking to the future, Ellen is wanting to connect with more growers in the Western region, particularly in Cornwall. ellen@gaianet.org

**East England:** Coordinator Page Dykstra has been working with several regional groups of the Land Workers Alliance to discuss possible trainings and events around seed production, particularly in the East Anglia and North East (and West) regions. She is also discussing possible London-based activities with the London Freedom Seed Bank. page@gaianet.org

**Ireland:** Wayne Frankham is working in Ireland through a dynamic partnership between Irish Seed Savers and the Gaia Foundation to run variety trials looking at how hybrid and open pollinated seed perform in the field. 1 The Organic Seed Grower, John Navazio, Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 2012

WWOOF welcomes 16 year-olds

On 1st February 2018 WWOOF UK made a significant change to the sign-up process for volunteers by reducing the minimum age for joining from 18 to 16. Given the recent decline in WWOOFer numbers we hope this will give our membership a much-needed boost.

To accompany this development, we are offering ten lucky young people bursaries to cover their membership fees and travel costs to their first host. Many thanks must go to Beccy Murrell, Regional Host Contact for the North West who secured this funding for us from her employer, THINK Consulting Solutions, as part of their charitable activities.

Bursary applications need to be submitted by 16th April 2018 and will be assessed by Beccy and a WWOOF UK staff member, with successful applicants being notified in May. More details can be found on our home page, www.wwoof.org.uk.

We are aware that for some members this change may raise questions about legal responsibilities, in particular child protection. We have thought about this innovation long and hard and consulted a number of professionals and organisations in the process. The advice we have received has been added to the FAQ section of our website, www.wwoof.org.uk/faq.

Please refer to the FAQs initially but if you don’t find the answers you need please contact us using: info@wwoof.org.uk

Having shared this news with hosts before the official launch on our website we have been buoyed by the response which has been overwhelmingly positive.

plan for the worst

Midlands RHC, David Beaton, suggests a few simple steps that will save time and anguish should a host be faced with a WWOOFer with a medical emergency.

Most of the time WWOOFing works well for both hosts and volunteers. However in September I received a call from one of my hosts who was dealing with a serious medical crisis. Fortunately, the outcome was satisfactory, but the incident did throw up some points that I feel should be passed on.

A medical emergency can arise as a result of accident, physical or mental illness.

Where to get help:
999 for life threatening emergencies
NHS 111: the operators here will give advice, despatch an ambulance or first responders if necessary. They can advise on physical or mental illness. Staff are available who can speak a range of languages, just ask when you make first contact. Sometimes NHS 111 will need to call you back, so make sure you have enough charge in your phone and a decent signal. A landline is a safer option.

your RHC: we are available to offer help and for you to discuss your concerns with us

WWOOFer information:
If you are handing someone over to the emergency services they will need the following information, so you should have it to hand. In an emergency you do not want to be trawling through your emails to find this information.

Full Name
Date of Birth
Next of Kin and contact details
any medical history you know about

I know Taryn, our Host Contact, does recommend that you include this information in the questionnaire which you send out to potential WWOOFers. But is it readily accessible? We keep this information for current WWOOFers in a ring binder which is always to hand, but use any method which suits you.

Remember you cannot rely on the WWOOFer to provide this information at the time.

If they are unconscious they obviously cannot, but be aware that if they do not have English as a first language whatever English they know quickly disappears when shocked, under stress, or anxious.

The WWWOOF admin team is always grateful to know if any of our hosts or WWOOFers have had to deal with an emergency while WWOOFing so please let us know using info@wwoof.org.uk
Classified ads are free up to 50 words at the editor’s discretion. WWOOF UK 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@wwoof.org.uk

Courses at Karuna Insight Design, beautiful established 18 acre Forest garden project in Shropshire: Grafting 4 March, Scything 9 June, Permaculture Intro 4-5 August, Forest Gardening 11-12 August, Grow Beyond Vegan (permaculture) 1-2 September. You can WWOOF before or after a course. Contact merav66@hotmail.com, 01694-751374, karuna.org.uk, Karuna insight design on Facebook


French family of four: 2 boys, Chris (46, English teacher) and Bruno (47, stone mason/landscape gardener). We plan to live/work/WWOOF in south west UK, from August 2018-January 2019. Interested in offers for long term WWOOFing or house sitting/small rent. We all speak OK English and have already WWOOFed in Australia+ UK. Contact: chrismignon@laposte.net

We are always interested in hearing from members who would like to be more closely involved with WWOOF UK. Contact scarlett@wwoof.org.uk

We are looking for someone to help us run a thriving, organic market garden near Hay-on-Wye, from April till October 2018. We offer food, accommodation and £50/week as well as a good learning environment. Email us at primroseorganicfarm@gmail.com or call Glenn: 07891756358 or Tamsin: 07427041939

Room to rent in large country house on 13 acre organic smallholding. Suit single or couple. En-suite. Woodburner. Woodlands. Shared kitchen. Space to grow own veg. Rural location 6 miles from Exeter. Contact Hazel 07876267591 hazelacland@gmail.com

Where have all WWOOFers gone? Is there no one out there with an affinity to country living/animals/gardening etc? Non-smokers, any age or gender warmly welcomed to this Welsh Hill Farm. Host ID 39555 Contact 01239 820432 (evenings best)

Free holidays for tired WWOOFers. Large shed with woodburner, cooker and necessary cutlery etc, separate shower, loo, and upstairs bedroom, free for short breaks in our six acre wildlife home in rural North Cornwall. No dogs. Email: alison@zanzig.plus.com

If you want to give an ethical gift that supports a great charity then you’ve come to the right place!

A year’s WWOOFer membership for friends or family makes a great present

Go to the home page of our website, www.wwoof.org.uk and follow the link

copy deadlines: 13th April for next e-update, 30th April for Summer print issue; send to editor@wwoof.org.uk
WWOOF UK, PO Box 2207, Buckingham, MK18 9BW