



# How to Volunteer on an Organic Farm

Volunteering on an organic farm is a good way to help someone while gaining valuable experience. If you are considering owning your own organic farm someday, volunteering on a farm first is a good way to get an idea as to whether or not you can handle it. Even if you are just curious, working on an organic farm can be the experience of a lifetime.

## Steps

**1 Decide whether you want to volunteer at home or abroad.** There are volunteer opportunities on organic farms in nearly every region of the world. If you want to volunteer on an organic farm in your own country, limit your search to organizations and opportunities within your country and state or province. This option is most useful if you have a job or other commitments that you are unable to break away from. If, however, you would rather kill two birds with one stone and get some traveling in as you volunteer, get in touch with an international organization.

**2 Research organic farming volunteer opportunities.** If there is an organic farm near your home, you could attempt to contact the farmer there and ask if he could use any volunteer help. In addition to opportunities on your local neighborhood farm, you can also consider looking for volunteer opportunities with trusted organizations, such as organic farm programs sponsored or set up by universities.<sup>[1]</sup> Be careful about the opportunities you choose, though. Never accept an offer from a person or an organic farm that you have no way of researching or doing a background check on.

**3 Apply for membership with an organization.** An alternate way to find organic farming volunteer opportunities is to join an organization that specializes in connecting hosts with volunteers. The largest and most effective organization is the WWOOF, or World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, which provides opportunities throughout the globe. Simply search for the country that interests you and go from there. There are other organizations you can use, but most are not as far-reaching. When joining an organization, you can expect to pay a small fee, usually somewhere around \$25.

**4 Subscribe to that organization's list of farm hosts.** Depending on the organization you apply with, you may or may not need to purchase or request a specific list of organic farm hosts separately. Even if you do not need to purchase the list, you will likely need to request a list from the country or region you are interested in volunteering in.

**5 Select an opportunity that you can handle.**<sup>[2]</sup> Comb through the list and be realistic about what you can and cannot handle. If you need Internet access, make sure the host farm has Internet access. If you have physical limitations, make sure that the explanation of duties provided do not list a task that you will be unable to perform. Also make sure that you can commit to the daily work requirements. Most farms will want you to work anywhere between five and eight hours a day, Monday through Saturday. If this schedule is too demanding, you will need to look for one that specifically states a lesser amount of time.

- Make sure that at least one person there speaks a language you speak. Theoretically, you can survive on a farm for several weeks without being able to speak the native language, but it will be immensely difficult to take instructions and learn if no one there can speak a language you understand. The head farmer does not need to speak English, necessarily, but if English is the only language you speak, you should make sure that someone in his family or on the farm can translate for you.
- Pay attention to the start date and minimum time limit. Oftentimes, there is no maximum time limit, and if there is, it is simply until the end of the growing season. There is almost always a minimum time limit, though, and if you are unable to commit to that amount of time, starting sometime within the start date range requested, you should probably skip the request.

**Contact the farm host.** Email, call, or send a letter to the farm host once you have selected the opportunity that best

**6** matches your needs and wants. In this initial correspondence, you should include information that demonstrates your interest in the volunteer opportunity as well as what you can offer.

- Include your membership information. If the organization you are a part of gives you a membership number or card, send either a copy of the card or the number to the prospective organic farm host.
- Provide a little information about yourself. Tell the host where you come from, which languages you speak, why you are interested in working for his or her farm, and what skills you can offer. Also mention your limits, including how long you are able to stay and any physical limitations you have or needs that must be met for you.
- Ask for more information about the opportunity and the farm. Ask for greater detail about the type of work you will be doing, how to get to the farm, where the nearest town is located, and what sort of accommodation, if any, will be provided. It also helps to take an interest in the farm. Ask about what the farm produces and a little about its history.

**7 Stay committed.** After you make your final arrangements with the organic farm host, you must stick with them unless something urgent and unavoidable happens. Do not back out. Most of these farms are small and run by families, and the reason they hire volunteers instead of workers is because they have limited resources to work with. In all likelihood, the farm is in desperate need of help. If you back out, you will be putting the farm in a real pinch, as they may be unable to find a replacement in time.

- Moreover, if you are going through a volunteer organization, your membership could be cancelled if too many complaints are filed against you.

## Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.msuorganicfarm.com/volunteer>
2. <http://beersandbeans.com/2010/12/08/tips-wwoof-winery-farm-organic/>