

Organic Farming Internship and Volunteer Programs in India

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Author's Background

Mr Harish Chander Tewari is an Agriculture Micro-Biologist and did research on composting from G.B.Pant Agriculture University . He has vast experience of working in more than 10 countries in Europe, Africa and Asia at various projects related to Livelihood improvement, Water Management and Organic Agriculture . These projects were funded by SIDA, World Bank, IFAD, Department of Bio-Technology (Govt of India) etc. He is presently the Director of WWOOF India Pvt Ltd company . Presently there are more than 187 member Organic farms and many Ngos in WWOOF India network. WWOOF India focus on sustainable livelihoods and address issues of poverty, through community mobilization around income-generation activities combining cultural, craft and ecological dimensions of rural life which holds tremendous potential for both income generation and enhancement of the basic quality of life in the rural areas.

Dr. Poonam Tewari is a Junior Scientist in the Department of Home Science Extension, College of Home Science, Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand, India. She has been actively involved in field action, outreach projects and associated with the programme of community development and planning. She has also undertaken projects in multilateral and bilateral donor agencies. Her special area of focus has been rural sector, gender, education and women empowerment. She has made substantial contribution in the field of non formal education by developing many technical booklets for rural women related to income generation , drudgery reduction among rural women and community empowerment . She has authored approximately 15 international, 45 national research papers and 7 book chapters in the area of rural development , organic farming and women's studies.

Summary

Established in 2007, Worldwide Opportunities On Organic Farms India (WWOOF INDIA) www.woofindia.org facilitates cultural and educational exchange between its 187+ member farming communities and volunteers from all over the world. Spanning 16 of India's 35 states and union territories, all farms are associated with organic gardening, orchards, spices, tea and other sustainability projects. WWOOFers learn local organic farming procedures and issues while helping with farm duties. WWOOF India is a member of the International WWOOF Association .WWOOF INDIA is gradually involving more and more organic farmers into WWOOF India network, from just 14 organic farms in 2007 it has now more than 187 organic hosts farms (including many NGOs) under its network . WWOOF India has helped many farmers to convert towards organic farming, the farmers were supported through knowledge about Organic Standards set up by Govt of India , Practical training in nearby organic farms and through free volunteers help. More than 50 new organic host farms under its network across the country were started through this process. Through WWOOF India host members (including many NGOs) over the past 5 years more 2000 volunteers and 15 Interns from various Universities of EU and USA were trained in organic farming .These volunteers come from various countries across the world. The number of volunteers and interns coming to join WWOOF India is increasing each passing year. These volunteers were mainly youths who were interested in green living and sustainable agriculture practices. These volunteers were trained in host organic farms who provided them on farm opportunity to live and learn. Interns were mostly final year students from various Universities of different countries. In next 5 years WWOOF India plans to include 1000 Organic farms for placement of more than 5000 Volunteers and 200 Interns in various projects to learn organic farming. The learning opportunities are about crop rotation, preceding crops benefits, resistant varieties, composting, mixed cropping, no tillage crop production and pest prevention , green manure, soil covers, mulches, nutrient balance, nutrient cycles, resource recycling and nutrient. They design and implement a pest management system where observation, prevention and monitoring are main components. Important requirements for careful organic processing and discuss issues of contamination with non organic substances, non organic products. They also understand the structures of potential markets of various organic products produced and marketed by WWOOF India host farmers. They learn to differentiate marketing channels (direct marketing, farmers markets, specialised shops, retailers etc.) and to characterise them. They also get opportunity to analyse the certification process and understand the different issues to consider when developing an export marketing strategy.

Background

The constraint felt in the progress of organic farming is the inability of the government policy making level to take a firm decision to promote organic agriculture. Unless such a clear and unambiguous direction is available in terms of both financial and technical supports, from the Centre to the Panchayath (Village Councils) levels, mere regulation making will amount to nothing. We wish to work on awareness raising on following issues in future for promotion of Organic Farming

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In India chemical farming methods have dominated for so long that there is very little useful information available on non-chemical or organic farming methods and few qualified specialists capable of providing the needed know how. Conventional agriculture extension system promotes mainly conventional agricultural techniques and knowledge. In most situations, all government policies still promote the use of chemicals in agriculture very effectively, but do not promote the techniques of organic farming.

Established in 2007, Worldwide Opportunities On Organic Farms India (WWOOF INDIA) is working towards filling this gap by providing technical support to farmers interested in starting Organic Farming. In the above context WWOOF INDIA is gradually involving more and more organic farmers into WWOOF India network. From just 14 organic farms in 2007 it has now more than 187 organic hosts farms (including many NGOs) under its network.

WWOOFing was started in 1971, when Sue Coppard, a secretary from London, decided it would be a good way to support the organic farming movement as well as get more people to experience the English countryside. While wwoofing has been around for four decades, it has become especially popular after 2008, as recession-hit travellers decided that WWOOFing was a good way to get a break from their jobs. It provided them with a cheaper way to holiday, while they also acquired a skill they could use back home.

Many WWOOFers tend to farm hop, visiting one farm after another in different countries. This allows them to experience different farming practices and cultures while travelling around the world on a small budget. WWOOFing is great for anyone who enjoys adventure, loves working outdoors, has an interest in the environment, and doesn't mind physical work.

Main chapter

Increasing consciousness about conservation of environment as well as of health hazards caused by agrochemicals has brought a major shift in consumer preference towards food quality. Global consumers are increasingly looking forward to organic food that is considered safe and hazard-free. The demand for organic food is steadily increasing both in developed and developing countries, with annual average growth rate of 20–25%. India has a lot of scope for organic farming. Organic farming has been an integral part of Indian farming practices. India is bestowed with considerable potential for organic farming due to prevailing trend of integrated farming systems of crops and live stocks, high biodiversity on account of diverse agro-climatic conditions and large number of small and marginal farmers. Besides, inherited tradition of low input agriculture in many parts of the country, particularly in hilly and rain-fed areas too, is an added advantage and augurs well for the farmers to shift to organic farming and tap the steadily growing domestic as well as overseas markets. Imparting organic farming education to the new generation that heavily relies on chemical farming is the need of the hour.

The WWOOF India Network has now spread across 16 states in India. The objective of WWOOF is to help farmers adopt organic farming practices, to provide hands on experience on farming and organic production for the students and facilitate cultural exchange among various countries. Main purpose of WWOOF India is to create an interest and understanding for organic and biodynamic ways of living. It does this by producing a list of suitable destinations and making this list available to world wide volunteers, also known as 'WWOOFers', thus encouraging people to travel to other countries and increase their knowledge and understanding of other cultures, people and ways of life. It operates on the basis of exchange, boarding and lodging for help, and so allows its members to accomplish this as economically as possible. To support the continued growth of organic farming practices and volunteer networks, WWOOF plans to set up 4 WWOOF Global Villages (WGV) in India which are envisioned to become research centres on organic farming. The first WGV has been set up on 4.5 acres of land in the village of Surajpura, Madhya Pradesh. It is near the world famous Khajuraho temples and adjacent to the Ken River and Panna Tiger Reserve.

WWOOF is a world wide network It link volunteers with organic farmers, and help people share more sustainable ways of living. WWOOF is an exchange - In return for 4-6 hours per day, volunteer help they get free food and stay.

WWOOF India link people who want to volunteer on organic farms or smallholdings with people who are looking for volunteer help.

WWOOF hosts- Offer free food, accommodation and opportunities to learn about organic lifestyles. They Grow food organically, live sustainably and generally try to live a low impact life. They share knowledge and experience of organic growing, producing organic products and / or experience in more ecological and sustainable methods of living. They provide healthy meals and a safe, clean place to stay. They open their home to a diverse range of people, locally and internationally and welcome WWOOFers from all over the world in their organic properties.

In year 2007 there were 14 organic farms now it have 187 farms as hosts. There are many NGOs too in its network. State wise WWOOF India farms details is given below

Andhra Pradesh	5
Bihar	2
Assam	4
Goa	4
Gujarat	8
Haryana	7
Himachal Pradesh	16
Jammu & Kashmir(Ladakh),	1
Karnataka	29
Kerala	17
Madhya Pradesh	5
Maharashtra	13
Manipur	1
Orissa	2
Punjab	5
Rajasthan	19
Tamil Nadu	18
Uttar Pradesh	7
Uttrakhand	18
West Bengal	3

The Aims of WWOOF INDIA are:

- To give first hand experience of organic or other ecologically-sound growing methods
- To give experience of life in the countryside
- To help the organic movement which is labour intensive and does not rely on artificial fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides
- To give people a chance to meet, talk, learn and exchange views with others in the organic movement
- To provide an opportunity to learn about life in the host country by living, and working together
- To provide marketing information to its host members
- To engage in research development activity for development of organic farming in India

Farm Education Programmes

There are basically two ways of getting involved for learning organic farming – Volunteering and Internships – either on host farms or in the WWOOF Global Village.

Volunteering

Volunteering is done either on host farms or in WWOOF Global Village. These volunteers come from various countries across the world. These volunteers are mainly youth who are interested in green living and sustainable agriculture practices. The volunteers learn local organic farming procedures and issues while helping in farming. These volunteers are trained on host organic farms which provide them an opportunity to live and learn on farm. The host farms grow food organically, live sustainably and generally try to live a low impact life. They share knowledge and experience of organic growing, producing organic products and/or experience in more ecological and sustainable methods of living. They provide healthy meals and a safe, clean place to stay. The volunteers help on the farm for 4-6 hours per day and thereby benefit by 'hands-on' learning.

Wwoofers don't receive a salary, but hosts take care of their food and accommodation. Wwoofing provides an opportunity for volunteers to learn organic farming skills and gives them a taste of sustainable living. Apart from the skills wwoofers acquire, they get the opportunity to explore rural cultures and traditions. For farm owners who sign up as hosts, wwoofing offers a regular supply of labour, an opportunity to engage with people with varied skills, and a chance to pass on their knowledge of farming.

The Internship Programme

The WWOOF India internship program has been created with the goal of providing a stimulating environment and professional and academic resource network for students interested in research based activities in organic farming, sustainability and environmental issues. Interns are mostly final year students from various Universities of different countries. WWOOF India internships are project-based and are undertaken by either individuals or groups. Longer 12 week internships are better suited to those wishing to research, plan and implement their own projects, while the 4 and 8 week intern options work better for those who are prepared to research and implement a project suggested by WWOOF India advisors.

Internships comprise of three phases.

Phase I focuses on conceptual understanding and orientation. The internship begins at home; by learning about the internship process and the values and guiding principles of WWOOF India and host farmers, interns establish a meaningful and fruitful connection between themselves and WWOOF India hosts. The projects are identified during this period.

During Phase II, the student's time is reserved for more specific research as the project gains definition. Mid-term reviews are done which provide an opportunity for feedback and constructive criticism. Final presentations of the project proposal define the end of research and the start of action. In the

Phase III, the interns actually implement their projects on host farms. Some interns are also placed in WWOOF Global village for learning. Rural farmers of the adjoining villages along with volunteers and interns have been involved in various activities like growing nurseries using organic methods, construction of check dams, construction of shaded beds for nurseries, construction composting units etc.

By the end of the internship period, interns are expected to deliver a completed project based on the conceptual, practical and research based curriculum evolved during the three phases. Documentation of the project from the initial to the final phases is also required for the benefit of the intern and the program overall. Upon internship project completion, WWOOF India provides a certificate highlighting what was learned and accomplished.

Core Messages and Conclusion

The common refrain the farmers have is the increasing costs of labour and rising input costs which is not backed by commensurate prices for their organic produce. Also uncertainty of rainfall, lack of assured supply of water, increasing costs of transportation and other related issues have made farming for them a less attractive proposition and the younger generation prefers other sort of occupation to farming in their land. Lack of Awareness Farmers have only vague ideas about advantages of organic farming. Lack of knowledge and awareness about of bio-fertilizers and bio pesticides , modern techniques of compost making.

Inadequate Supporting Infrastructure The state governments are yet to formulate policies and a credible mechanism. There are only four agencies for accreditation and their expertise is limited to fruits and vegetables, tea, coffee and spices. The certifying agencies are inadequate and costly. Green markets are non-existent, the trade channels are yet to be formed and the infrastructure facilities for verification leading to certification of the farms are inadequate

To promote Organic farming in India , WWOOF india was started with just 14 Organic farms but now have 187 Organic farms in its fold . Every year the number of volunteers and interns is increasing gradually . Each year WWOOF India is also helping conventional farmers to start Organic farming and the movement is moving slowly but steadily . WWOOF India provide the newly added farmers in its network with the Organic Standards prepared by the APEDA Govt of India . These interested farmers then register as volunteer and go to nearby organic farms for practical training . After doing WWOOFing for some months in the other nearby organic farms these farmers then register as Host under WWOOF india network. WWOOF India is supporting such farmers by linking free volunteers to their farms. More than 50 new organic host farms under its network for last three years across the country were started through this process . In the next 5 years, WWOOF India plans to include 1000 organic farms for placing more than 5000 volunteers and 200 interns in various projects .

The volunteers come from various countries across the world. The number of volunteers and interns coming to join WWOOF India is increasing each passing year. These volunteers were mainly youths who were interested in green living and sustainable agriculture practices. These volunteers were trained in host organic farms who provided them on farm opportunity to live and learn. Interns were mostly final year students from various Universities of different countries The volunteers and Interns who join WWOOF India to help its host farmers also gain knowledge while helping in the organic farms . Their knowledge on organic methods/practices has increased. For example, they become more aware of practices like crop rotation, resistant varieties, composting, mixed cropping, no tillage crop production and pest prevention, green manuring, mulching, nutrient cycles, resource recycling etc. During their stay as volunteer or interns they design and implement a pest management system where observation, prevention and monitoring are the main components. Important requirements for careful organic processing have been understood. They discuss issues of contamination with non organic substances, non organic products. They also understand the structures of potential markets of various organic products produced and marketed by WWOOF India host farmers. They also learn to differentiate marketing channels (direct marketing, farmers markets, specialised shops, retailers etc.) and to characterise them. They also had opportunity to analyse the certification process and understand the different issues to consider when developing an exportmarketing strategy.

By bringing together hosts and volunteers, WWOOF has been building bridges where people help each other to share more sustainable ways of living and make a healthier world. There is also a general apathy amongst the youths in India to go and work in farms . The young WWOOFer working in farm from foreign country also become a role model for other youths of the local village to think about working in their own farms. In the process, a lot of cultural exchange is also taking place.