



Critical review

Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) as part of the existing care economy in Canada



Cheryl Lans

IEZ (Institute for Ethnobotany & Zoopharmacognosy), Rijksstraatweg 158, 6573 DG Beek, Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 April 2016

Received in revised form 25 May 2016

Accepted 31 May 2016

Keywords:

WWOOF

Organic farms

Volunteers

Caring economy

ABSTRACT

This review paper discusses the program called Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF), in North America, as an example of a subset of the care economy in which volunteers contribute to farm care. Human care is partly direct (some childcare, kitchen duties and other housework), but mostly indirect, in that farm families get time off. This review expands on previous work that considered farms in Ontario, Canada as spaces of care and farmwomen as the carers. It critiques other research that claims WWOOFers do not replace local labor and that WWOOF represents an idealistic and ethical space potentially corrupted by tourists.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Contents

1. Introduction	16
2. The caring economy	17
3. Volunteer farm labor as part of the caring economy	17
3.1. Types of WWOOF host	17
3.2. Types of WWOOFers	17
3.3. The place of WWOOF in the economy	17
4. Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) as part of the caring economy	18
5. Conclusion	19
References	19

1. Introduction

People involved in organic farming in Canada and in co-operatives are working together to build an alternative economic future based on the values that they share (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003). These values include recognizing a link between healthy food and healthy bodies, environmentally-sound agriculture and fair trade. Buying locally keeps money within the community. Anti-globalization forces and food safety concerns have contributed to the growth of this alternative food economy.

The Vancouver Island organic certifying body, the Islands Organic Producers Association, has the following definition of organic farming:

It is both a philosophy, and a way of farming. The main focus is maintaining sustainable, productive farms, based on living soil ecosystems. The farmer's role is to use and support a community of organisms, both plant and animal, that maintain and build the soil, minimize predation by unwanted pests and weed plants, and produce healthy, nutritious food for the farm and the consumer. The process is as important as the product and the quality and sustainability of life is paramount.

[IOPA (1993)]

This definition is similar to that of the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia (COABC), the administrator of the Organic Regulations under the Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act of British Columbia. In 2012, the agricultural and agri-food sector accounted for 6.7% of Canada's total gross domestic product and employed 2.1 million people (Canada, 2014). The province of Saskatchewan has the largest number of certified farms (1015),

E-mail address: lans@ethnobotany.nl

URL: <http://www.ethnobotany.nl>

followed by Quebec (963), Ontario (685), British Columbia (471) and Alberta (275). In 2012, British Columbia produced 17.6% of the gross receipts of Canadian organic farming of \$906.6 million (Macey, 2013). Total net income in British Columbia was 14.3% of the Canadian total with operating expenses of \$133.7 million. Women farmers operate forty percent of organic farms, similar to non-organic farms (38%), with the highest average on Vancouver Island (52%). 21,000 farms support about 1100 food processors employing 54,000 people and generating \$2.3 billion in farm cash receipts (Macey, 2013).

2. The caring economy

The caring economy has been described as an economy at the service of human beings, not human beings at the service of the economy, where the input is labor and the output is care (Himmelweit, 2007; Eisenstein, 2009). Feminist economics show that caring labor includes both material and social provisioning in the economy and notes that market exchange plays only one part (Hinze, 2011; Nelson, 1995).

Caring labor is central to rather than marginal to economic life, as becomes apparent when it is computed and found to contribute 30–45% of Canada's GDP (\$5 billion) (Ironmonger, 1996; Canadian Federation of University Women, 2011). Care has been defined as the help needed by people with 'care needs' (child, elderly, sick, disabled), to be able to do what others can do unaided (Himmelweit, 2013; Eisler, 2012). Unpaid care is typically done by women undertaking a 'second shift' after their paid work (Egan et al., 1996), where this 'second shift' is equivalent to 584 h annually (Canadian Federation of University Women, 2011; Creese and Strong-Boag, 2005). This unpaid labor imposes costs on women and affects the financial security of caregivers, which can strain the caregiving relationship (Keefe, 2007). Traditional carers may provide care in anticipation of long-run reciprocity; which may backfire (Folbre, 1995).

3. Volunteer farm labor as part of the caring economy

In several parts of the world there is a sector of the caring economy that involves volunteering on farms. One of these programs is called WWOOF. WWOOF originally stood for Willing Workers on Organic Farms but has recently been relabeled Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (Terry, 2014). This paper reviews data collected on the WWOOF program operating in North America and uses it to present evidence on the realities of the caring economy. WWOOF can be considered part of the care economy with a non-waged, low to high turnover labor strategy. Herron and Skinner (2012) consider farms in Ontario, Canada as spaces of care, but only farmwomen as the carers.

Many WWOOFers are young, backpack-toting volunteer tourists, either on a gap year or seeking "authentic" tourism-related experiences. WWOOFers and hosts barter 20–40 h of labor per week for food and lodging (Mostafanezhad, 2016). Farm hosts can be house-rich if they are retired-empty-nesters. Hosts who still have children at home may offer bunk beds or external cabins or trailers.

The WWOOF organization is part of the non-profit sector and began in England in 1971 to connect urban travelers with organic farms in need of labor. The original name was Working Weekends on Organic Farms. Organic farms often have higher labor needs than conventional farms (Terry, 2014; Alvarez, 2012). WWOOF USA started in California in 2001 and WWOOF Canada has been operating since 1985. Each WWOOF host country has a website listing farm types, descriptions and tasks available and potential WWOOFers can search for a match in a location that they wish to

visit. WWOOFers also have a home page so that hosts can look at their profile to see what skills they have, their ages and places of origin and other details that the WWOOFer has provided.

The accommodation of most WWOOFers is within the home or in a host trailer, in a cabin or above the barn. WWOOFers may also bring their own trailers or tents. Most farms provide bicycles for volunteers to use on their day off; in a minority of cases hosts provide a car. On most host farms the WWOOFers eat at least one meal daily with the host farmer but there are cases in which the WWOOFers are given a separate food allocation (Terry, 2014).

3.1. Types of WWOOF host

There are two main categories of WWOOF host. One host type wants to share knowledge of organic farming practices, learn from others on cultures, recipes and farming techniques, have entertaining and skilled temporary company, and also obtain some labor (Alvarez, 2012; Ord, 2010). Therefore, WWOOFers who want to have their own goat farm in the future would volunteer at a goat farm (Terry, 2014; Alvarez, 2012). A professor who teaches wine making would visit a winery to learn new wine making techniques. These training-intensive hosts would have many repeat visits. These training-type hosts reflect the original aims of the WWOOF movement (Alvarez, 2012; Deville et al., 2016).

The other type of host just wants the labor. Some members of this host type have been reported on blogs and to the WWOOF organization as feeding junk rather than organic food or limiting the food WWOOFers can eat, or having them work more than the 3–6 h/day stipulated on the WWOOF site doing non-agricultural tasks like picking up rocks (Terry, 2014; Bender, 2010).

WWOOFers at labor-first host sites have to insist on days off and are not taken to see any part of the neighboring area. Some WWOOFers are put into unsafe places or situations (Alvarez, 2012). The host may be selling the farm and could be more disengaged from the situation than they otherwise would be. However, this reality contradicts the observations of Deville et al. (2016) that WWOOF represents an idealistic and ethical space potentially corrupted by tourists travelling cheaply for an authentic agri-tourism experience.

3.2. Types of WWOOFers

There are WWOOFers who are genuine tourists with jobs or school programs to go back to and others who may be future emigrants or escaping austerity (Ord, 2010). A minority of WWOOFers are travelling in their own country. Therefore, this is not a global supply chain, in which someone in the WWOOFer's home family has to take on the duties that the WWOOFer left behind (Fudge, 2013). Many European volunteers in Canada are from Germany and France and have a one-year working visa. Others from countries without visa agreements pretend to be on holiday when they go through customs or border controls. This is possible because many WWOOF hosts have cupboards specifically for clothes and equipment for WWOOFers.

3.3. The place of WWOOF in the economy

Volunteer labor is a response to existing policies that have presumably increased agricultural efficiency, but which either prevent some farmers from providing living wages to permanent local staff or enable them to increase their profits by relying on a constant supply of temporary volunteers that they may or may not treat well depending on their own character and moral standards (Hinze, 2011; Sayer, 2015). WWOOFers provide a short-term coping strategy for organic farmers and they don't necessarily address their underlying problems (Mostafanezhad, 2016).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073374>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5073374>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)