



## The charter of WWOOF Belgium

### 1. OUR VALUES, OUR PHILOSOPHY, AND THE GOALS WE WISH TO PROMOTE

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- Create a direct link between consumer and producer, between city dwellers who don't live in connection with the land, and rural dwellers who live alongside her.
- Provide an opportunity to learn about the lifestyle and conditions of the biological farmer who lives from his/her agricultural activities.
- Offer timely assistance to farmers and any person who engages in an ecological project.
- Discover the know-how and skills, and the cultivation and commercial methods of organic farmers who produce healthy food for a local population.
- Raise awareness of the value and importance of food in our lives.
- Promote a philosophy of solidarity, mutual assistance and non-monetary exchanges.
- Offer opportunities to experience a way of life in ecological balance and conscientious of a respectful ecological footprint.
- Provide an opportunity to discover the 'real' Belgium to people from around the world.

### 2. A HOST

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#### Their profile

The profile of a host is very varied: an organic farmer, an individual maintaining her/his organic garden, or undertaking an eco-construction project, a craftsperson ...

What is common to all is the desire to share and transmit knowledge (over agriculture and organic gardening, different philosophies such as agro-ecology, permaculture, biodynamics, eco-construction...).

In addition, a host likes to share his/her lifestyle (everyday ecological practices, family and neighbourhood ties, projects for the future).

A host never sees a wwoofer as an employee with a duty of profitability and / or subordination. It is a relationship based on trust and respect, without a search for strictly personal gain.

The hosts' welcoming of the wwoofer must be occasional and of limited duration. As an example, two weeks can be considered as a minimum initiation period and maximum stay is to be negotiated.

## **Their commitments**

- 1) Ensure that on their premises, the land is managed organically and that only environmentally sound techniques are used.
- 2) Accept that WWOOF Belgium decide, on a case by case basis, whether to include a potential host in the network or not. Also the host accepts occasional visits from members of the WWOOF Belgium team.
- 3) Ensure comfortable lodging conditions (well maintained and secure home, quality food, opportunity to wash clothes...).
- 4) Reply clearly to each message from a wwoofer regarding the proposed activities and the lodging conditions, and inform them promptly if you need to change or cancel your plans.
- 5) Take out insurance. Each party should be insured to cover the risks which are inherent to their activities. The host should be responsible and not engage the wwoofer in tasks which can increase the risk of accidents or injury.
- 6) Contact WWOOF Belgium when a potential problem occurs, and also to share with us the success stories. This is in the spirit of working together to improve the network.
- 7) Be able to offer educational support (contact people, training) to wwoofers who wish to deepen their knowledge.
- 8) Offer free time to the wwoofer in consideration that the help they bring should not exceed 28hours/week.
- 9) Be conscious that a wwoofer is not an employee or a seasonal worker and that he/she is not there to do the extra work that some seasons bring. This distinction is important and should be visible in the case of controls by the employment authorities.
- 10) Fill out an accurate profile on the presentation sheet that one of the administrators of WWOOF Belgium will present to you during their visit to you following your request to become a wwoof host.
- 11) This profile will be your first point of introduction to wwoofers. The more information you provide (regarding accommodation, help needed and schedule desired, all details regarding hosting possibilities etc.) the easier it will be for wwoofers to choose a host which matches their interests and expectations.
- 12) To help avoid any uncomfortable situation, a host should, in their profile, be as clear as possible regarding the hosting conditions. We recommend that you mention if you abide by and partake in cultural/political/religious activities or rituals. The host should be aware

that a wwoofer is never obliged to participate in any of these activities or rituals which remain strictly of a private nature.

### 3. A WWOOFER

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#### **Their profile**

A wwoofer is primarily motivated by the desire to learn about the practices related to organic agriculture (family garden or commercial one, agroecology, biodynamic, permaculture...) and all other sustainable practices (renewable energies and ecological building techniques...).

They also share the wish to help and support organic farmers, but also any person who engages in a project with an ecologically sustainable vision, and that ranges from gardening to eco-construction.

The wwoofer is aware that their commitment is part of a collective effort to protect the planet, support the local economy and contribute to the creation of a more harmonious humanity in search of a sustainable future with nature and people.

They are pleased to share some of the family and social life of their hosts in a brotherly spirit.

#### **Their commitments / Their rights**

- 1) Certify to be at least 18 years of age. There is no age limit.
- 2) Participate freely and voluntarily in the hosts' activities according to the conditions which have been previously and clearly defined between you.
- 3) Be aware that a wwoofer is not a farm worker who is hired and paid to do seasonal tasks.
- 4) Be able to benefit from and enjoy the free time that their host concedes them considering that the help offered should be roughly 28hours/week.
- 5) Respect the people and place where they are welcomed, and act responsibly. Respect the cultural/political/religious choices, activities and rituals of your host, but never feel obliged to participate in any of them.
- 6) Justify and notify any changes in the terms of engagement between you and your host to the other party as soon as possible.
- 7) Commit to not share or disclose personal information and contact details about hosts to anyone else, and use the information they have only in the context of wwoofing.
- 8) Be in possession of their WWOOF Belgium membership card so that they can demonstrate at any time that they are there as a wwoofer.
- 9) Be sure to be covered by a civil liability insurance, as it is this insurance that will be called upon for any accident the wwoofer is responsible for.
- 10) If while on-site the wwoofer notes that the hosting conditions and activities are not consistent with what was previously defined with the host, he/she is required to inform the

WWOOF Belgium team. WWOOF Belgium rely on the feedback of negative and positive experiences of its' members to improve and boost it's network.

- 11) Commit to arrive to their host as negotiated, and advise the host as soon as possible if they will be arriving at a different time/day or not at all.

## **4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOST AND WWOOFER**

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- 1) This relationship must be determined and limited in time.  
It will be decided through mutual agreement between wwoofer and host.
- 2) It is a relationship of exchange and sharing, and therefore free.  
At no time during this relationship should a level of subordination be established or developed.  
Additionally the wwoofer receives no financial reward for the help they offer the host.

## **5. COMPLIANCE WITH THE CHARTER**

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To be integrated in the WWOOF Belgium network implies respect and adherence to this charter. Non-compliance with the charter will be sanctioned by the exclusion of the member from the network.

For the host, this concerns primarily the lodging conditions, the type of activities they engage in and require help with, and transparency of communication with the wwoofers.

For the wwoofer, this will concern primarily adherence to the engagements decided in advance with the host and the duty to advise the host of any changes (eg. Not arriving at the agreed time).

All complaints received will be investigated by one of our administrators who will contact all concerned parties. If it becomes clear that the member did not act according to the charter they may be excluded from the network. The administrator in charge of the complaint must inform the other members of the Board of Directors of the situation before deciding to exclude the offending member.

## **6. RESPECT OF THE CHARTER AND THE STATUTES**

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Before registering, we hope that in reference to our charter, our future members will be well aware of what this registration implies:

It is essential to understand that hosting a wwoofer is an act of sharing.

It's an act of sharing with the person offering him/her the opportunity to discover, to appreciate a job and a lifestyle respectful of nature, and an exchange with the person who hosts: to voluntarily and freely offer him/her some help, determined and limited in time.

There is no question in the wwoofing system of seeking a roundabout way to profit from black labour or to find a convenient way to enjoy cheap tourism.

Belgium is a country where the values of liberty, equality, fraternity are encouraged. They are the basis of our charter and we must ensure that these values are respected by all our members.

The wwoofers are volunteers that WWOOF Belgium guide towards hosts who have accepted and signed the charter. WWOOF Belgium ensure that this commitment is respected.

Thus, we encourage all our members to live in the spirit of sharing and discovery they will experience. WWOOF Belgium will be there to promote this and to catalog these experiences and give them the importance they deserve.

**From the moment the host or wwoofer accept or sign the charter, they become, according to our statutes, associate members of our association.**

## **7. REGISTRATION PROCEDURE FOR WWOOFERS WHO ARE REGISTERED AS UNEMPLOYED OR RECEIVING OTHER FORMS OF INCOME REPLACEMENT BENEFITS**

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We strongly recommend wwoofers who receive **unemployment benefits or are on sick leave** to contact the relevant authorities so as to regularise their situation as wwoofer.

For **unemployment benefit recipients** this means informing the ONEM/VDAB of their activities.

The ONEM/VDAB will take into account criteria such as the nature and extent of the activity and their consequences on the availability of the unemployed person on the labour market.

Wwoofers must be well aware that if their volunteer activities are carried out for a private commercial enterprise, they lose the right to unemployment benefits.

The wwoofer receiving unemployment benefits must complete and introduce a document to the ONEM/VDAB. This should be done before beginning any wwoofing activity.

For information regarding which forms need to be filled in and the complete procedure to follow please check the website of the ONEM/VDAB.

The WWOOFers who receive **leave of sickness benefits** must notify their health care insurance and complete the necessary documents before planning a wwoof stay.

**WWOOF Belgium offers this information for guidance only and shall in no event be liable if a wwoofer loses their entitlement to benefits.**

## 8. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF WWOOFING

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We would like to warn our hosts that **legally wwoofing might not be tolerated in case of a visit of work inspectors.**

Indeed, the Belgian legislation does not yet take into account our specificity. That is why we are working with other organisations in an attempt to make progress with this legislation.

In case of problems, WWOOF Belgium undertakes to remain loyal to hosts and defend them, without pretending to be completely able to protect them from risk.

The purpose of this section is not to scare potential hosts but to ensure that everyone engages in the project in full knowledge of the facts.

The Charter seeks to promote the spirit of sharing and helping out, values that have always been present in family and peasant agriculture, even though these values are today no longer recognised by the law. **Being prepared to safeguard these values by completely respecting the Charter will prove that your desire is not to abuse the law** but to enhance it by allowing wwoofers to discover the beauty and sense of your lifestyle and/or occupation. This will be your best defense in the case of any suspicion or distrust.