

WWOOF HOSTS ON TOUR

By Tony McQuail

As we started haying in June 2005, we were looking forward to the completion of our first cut with more than our usual enthusiasm. We had planned a holiday which would start once the last bale went into the barn.



reading the WWOOF directory and seeing the great diversity of host farms. As the day of our departure got closer, we started looking at the map with more focus and realized that we were in for some long drives from Southern Ontario to the distant Northwest. What could make that long journey more interesting—to us farmers? We got the bright idea that maybe we could stop at some of the WWOOF hosts along our route. About ten days before we were hoping to leave, we emailed

Fran McQuail with David and Maureen Weiman stooking it up in Saskatchewan.

It was to be a six-week driving holiday to the Yukon and Alaska sandwiched between the first-cut of hay, and the grain harvest and the second-cut of hay. It was going to be possible because our daughter and an apprentice would be looking after the livestock and garden.

We had been WWOOF hosts for a couple of decades and had enjoyed the visitors who had come to our farm. We had also enjoyed

Tony McQuail with David and Maureen Weiman horsing around in Saskatchewan.





Solar water heater and garden at Northern Sun Co-op, Manitoba.

We shared the joy which comes from meeting people with shared concerns and visions for a sustainable world who are working in their own corner of the planet to make change happen.

WWOOF (Willing Workers On Organic Farms, now known as World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), is an international network of organic farms which are willing to exchange room and board with visitors interested in helping out on their farms. Usually WWOOFers expect to work alongside their farm hosts while eating good food and participating in the full “farm fitness” program. Farms are listed in the WWOOF Canada directory and WWOOFers contact the hosts directly. WWOOF Canada is coordinated by John Vandenheuvel, 4429 Carlson Road, Nelson, BC V1L 6X3 or www.woof.ca.

a number of the farms near our path from Manitoba to the Yukon.

We knew we weren't offering the usual incentive to have WWOOFers. Usually a WWOOFer stays for several days and helps out in exchange for their room and board. We told them we would likely be exhausted from the haying and the last minute work one always crams into the week before getting away, as well as the long drives each day. And we were only able to stay the one night as we had miles to go again the next day. But if they would enjoy visiting with longtime WWOOF hosts travelling through, we would love to meet them, see their operation and spend a night.



Tom Burns and Judy Ternier with their children in their garden in Saskatchewan.



The giant solar oven is a memorable feature at Big Rock Farm in Manitoba.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. We ended up with ten farms to visit and had a wonderful time seeing a variety of farms and gardens in every province we passed through. We also remembered to do what we encourage our WWOOF visitors to do, and that was to bring photos of our home and farm so that we could share a little from our lives and experiences.

We visited off-grid solar-powered farms, horse-powered farms, a beef ranch, and several mixed operations doing farm production for retail sales. It was hopeful and encouraging to see the different activities.



Tom Burns and son Johnny with their work horses at their WWOOF host farm in Saskatchewan.

And while we didn't do hours of work, we did make a contribution. We shared ideas and approaches to organic production challenges that had been useful on our farm. We shared the joy which comes from meeting people with shared concerns and visions for a sustainable world who are working in their own corner of the planet to make change happen. We shared wonderful organic meals and had the pleasure of breaking bread together. And we even got to pull a few weeds and stook a few bales of hay.



Fran McQuail and David Weiman on the Weiman farm in Saskatchewan.

As WWOOF hosts we are often busy with our own farms, and the workload and seasonal pressures that come with farming. Having a chance to meet and visit with other WWOOF hosts was a wonderful opportunity. While our farms and climatic regions may be very different, we share many of the same joys and challenges. We hope to be able to return the opportunity for food, bed and fellowship when other WWOOF hosts are passing our farm. And we hope to do it again when next we have a long drive across parts of Canada.



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The greenhouse at the farm of Brian Lendrum & Susan Ross in the Yukon.

Tony and Fran McQuail run Meeting Place Organic Farm, a horse-powered family farm with certified organic cattle, sheep, goats, apples and community shared garden, near Lucknow, Ontario.