



LV CONVEGNO DI STUDI

METAMORFOSI VERDE
AGRICOLTURA, CIBO, ECOLOGIA

Complesso monumentale di San Pietro
Dipartimento di Scienze agrarie, alimentari e ambientali
PERUGIA 13-15 settembre 2018

Non-waged work on ecological oriented and organic farming - An exploratory analysis within Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms in Central Italy

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Abstract

Historically, the non-waged work provided by family workers, unpaid operators, and another farmer in exchange for a service has been a typical feature of farm operating and agricultural production.

In years past, rural and agricultural economists paid great attention to roles and functions fulfilled by unpaid workers in particular the non-waged family workers (Friedmann, 1990; Smith, 1985; Kubik, 2005; van der Ploeg, 2013). They dealt extensively with farm household production, consumption and extra-farm labour allocation decisions and take their effects on farm development into consideration. The large number of scientific studies and reports deal extensively with farm-household models bear witness to this interest.

In the developed countries, a transformation has recently occurred in the nature and configuration of non-waged work on farms; the decline in on-farm family workers and, by contrast, the growing of other non-waged workers coming from urban and suburban locations. Actually a growing numbers of interns, apprentices, and volunteers provide their labor with little or no monetary compensation, but are often given a combination of training, accommodation, meals, and a small stipend in return. Typically they are being recruited to work seasonally on ecologically oriented and organic farms across the Europe. To date, there has been little research examining these emergent forms of non-waged work both around the world (Maycock, 2008; Ekers et al., 2015; Burns & Kondo, 2015, Mostafanezhad, 2015; Lans, 2016), and in Italy (Tecco et al., 2016).

In this study, we analyze the relationships between non-waged agricultural work and the economic circumstances of farms and the non-economic ambitions of farm operators. Particularly this study explores the dimensions of volunteering within Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF), an association that links people who want to volunteer on organic farms or smallholdings with people who are looking for volunteer help, in an effort to support sustainable development through organic agriculture. This association is making an

important contribution to the world organic farming by bringing increasingly more people into direct contact with organic farmers. We do so through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of farmers' responses to a survey we conducted of farmers using non-waged workers in Central Italy.

Starting from the definition of "volunteer work" proposed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) "unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household" (ILO, 2011, p.22), this study focuses on descriptions of WWOOF as a model ripe with potential to boost alternative forms of agriculture (Maycock, 2008; Ord, Amer, 2010), explores on motivations for using volunteers via WWOOF (Alvarez, 2012), details the benefits that farmers receive through WWOOF (Terry, 2014); it also suggests the "economic" and "non-economic" dimensions of internships, apprenticeships, and forms of volunteerism sit uneasily alongside of one another, focusing on sustainability of non-waged work and ecological farming (Ekers et al., 2015).

The research questions that the study tries to answer are: What are the benefits and challenges associated with using non-waged workers? Is WWOOF- volunteering different from other forms of volunteering in agriculture? What are the real objectives of the host, to have low –cost workers, or to intensify a relationship with a particular cause to support a more sustainable food system while teaching farming techniques (McGehee, Santos, 2005)? Are farms dependent on non-waged workers? If yes, to what extent? And what are the reasons for being dependent, or not, on non-waged workers (Ekers et al., 2015)? Would the farmers be willing to pay workers a minimum wage if they had the financial resources (Ekers et al., 2015)? What are the real objectives of WWOOFer, to satisfy some normal touristic motivation, or to look for low cost accommodation?

The empirical analysis was based on a direct survey about WWOOF-volunteering; the main quantitative and qualitative data are as follow; 1) farm characteristics of WWOOF host (farm size, farm production, marketing strategies, on- and off-farm income); 2) working force composition and identity of workers as reported by farmers (family workers, waged workers receiving at least minimum wage, paid workers receiving less than minimum wage, non-waged workers, "temporary foreign workers"); and 3) WWOOFers' profile as reported by host (nationality, age, gender, education, employment status, economic well-being, subjective motives, period of stay, time dedicated).

Keywords : non-waged work, volunteering, organic farming, WWOOF Association

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