

20016 SEASON: DESPERATELY SEEKING VOLUNTEERS!

By late summer, the Organic Farm seems like a Botanical Garden, with the various plots and gardens growing a dozen different kind of lettuce with various shades of green and reds and greens, asparagus, rhubarb and every other kind of vegetable and herb you can imagine. The path edges are overflowing with colourful, edible flowers. Veggie Coop families drop by with their children to see how the gardens are growing. As weather permits, workers and volunteers sit at picnic tables near the pond or in the woods for breaks and lunches.

Why volunteer?

We are seeking volunteers who enjoy being outdoors and having their hands busy with the miracles of creation. When winter comes and things are dying back, it seems like we will never be able to have hardy, wonderful vegetables again, but over time, little by little, it starts to unfold. Volunteering on the Organic Farm will provide opportunity to learn effective organic practices in a food healthy environment. Over time, we have decided that we cannot offer any other compensation, i.e. a deal where volunteers get vegetables correlated with an hourly rate for work. We have tried that. We can't afford to provide fifty dollars worth of veggies for 5 hours of work. And, even if we could, it is often not convenient to stop work and pick veggies for a volunteer.

However, if you are a regular volunteer over the season it is likely that you will go home with some fresh vegetables. We sell the prime vegetables to restaurants but there are usually what we call, "house vegetables," which are shared among family, farm workers and volunteers. These will be vegetables and herbs with blemishes, such as cucumbers or zucchini with a broken end, kale with insect holes, peppers or tomatoes with blemishes, etc. There may also be herbs and veggies that were picked on a particular day, but not needed to fill an order. The bottom line is we enjoy sharing vegetables and herbs that may be available, but it will be a more spontaneous approach, not a guarantee that may be put pressure on staff to stop what they are doing and find vegetables for the volunteer.

Orientation for Volunteers. All volunteers will have an orientation, which includes a walk-about on the farm, using the farm map and some basic food safety guidelines. This takes about around 45 minutes the first visit. After that, if volunteers move into specific tasks such as seeding, they will be trained how to do the tasks they need to know.

What type of tasks do volunteers do? In April and May, volunteers help transplant seedlings into grow pots, organize sheds, inventory supplies and plant the greenhouses. Later, when the weather cooperates, they help re-establish the herb and mint beds, spread soil and mulch, plant lettuce and edible flowers and cover the fields with vegetable row cover to protect the plants from cold. There may also be an opportunity to "work in the woods" and build a cabin. By August, volunteers help pick gooseberries and beans, harvest potatoes, leeks and carrots and other wonderful vegetables. And, there is always weeding until Jack Frost drops by around mid-October.

A Regular or Predictable Time. We ask that volunteers make arrangements to come on a regular basis for three hours a week or every other week. i.e. Sunday afternoons, Wednesdays after 5 o'clock. How often is not as important as a minimum of 2 1/2 – 3 hours time block. (It can be more.) Volunteers will usually be assigned work partners, one of the salaried employees who is doing a task for specific set of tasks. As we make our work plan for the week, it helps to know when we will have volunteers.

Transportation?

The farm is located about 20 minutes outside downtown St. John's, in Portugal Cove. Unfortunately, we are not able to provide transportation. Occasionally, we may know of someone who is coming from the city and can suggest a ride/ or we might be able to match you up with a volunteer who drives out on regular basis. *It is worth an inquiry.*

Can I Volunteer for Membership in the Veggie Coop?

We already have several different arrangements for memberships or part-memberships in place for the 2014 Season; thus, we do not have any more for this season. Our focus for the past several years has been to develop appropriate volunteer roles for people who need organic vegetables for specific treatment programs they are using. Last season, one of our present employees began her relationship with the farm, volunteering one day a week.

What about bringing children?

A Gentle Reminder: Children who want to volunteer need to be 12 years or older. We do not have a strict rule about children who come with their parents; sometimes it can work out beautifully, but parents need to be responsible for their children. One season, mom and dad both came with their 3 young children. They took turns. One helped while the other played with the children. They took walks to see the fish and flowers, did bubbles, balls, swings and some planting in little pots. This seemed to work well.

How Do I Get Started?

The first time you visit the farm, you will have an orientation and fill out the volunteer information sheet, which includes emergency contact information. Next, the walk about and basics will take about forty-five minutes to an hour. Each time you come to the farm, you will begin with the Volunteer Sign-In book and also a log/time sheet as you leave, noting the tasks you completed.

If you have any questions or wish to schedule a visit to talk about with the possibility of becoming a volunteer this season, please contact e-mail: organicfarm@nl.rogers.com

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