

My EVS experience on Biodynamic
farm Toivo in Finland

June&July

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This text is intended to young people who would like to experience life on farm and develop their own and strong critical thinking about food quality. Today many people consume a lot of processed food which contains whitened industrial sugar, bad fats, unknown emulgators ,etc. The main question is how big percentage of main ingredient is in final product. Sometimes declaration doesn't clarify important facts about how some products were made. Since we have too big population on our planet many processed food contains significantly reduced part of wanted raw material which is replaced with something else! One of the biggest enemies of our physical and mental health is previously mentioned industrial sugar which we actually don't need but we can find it in so many final products. I would like to induce people to stop to be lazy and to cook more or at least to eliminate sugar from their diet because we really don't need it. Being creative in kitchen means to be independent and to manage things on your own. Below I described how was my life on farm and why is good to try different things in life. Beside working on farm we had time to experience finnish culture and lifesyle as well.

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Biodynamic farm Toivo is located in southern Finland, 160 km from capital Helsinki. It is surrounded with beautiful lakes and forests, typically scandinavian place in nature and very peaceful.

There I lived with other volunteers from Finland who mostly used to stay one week or two and with other EVS volunteers from Netherlands, Italy, and Germany. There were also many workawayers from Germany and other countries. We worked together in field and on farm. Since I arrived there in June we were mostly occupied with weeding of plants in fields. There are planted carrots, onions, broccoli, spinach, cabbage, parsley, zucchinies, etc. The main goal of the farm is to produce their own food and to become independent as much as they can, what means less food from supermarkets and more from their own fields about which volunteers take care with a lot of patience and effort despite all the mosquitos, flying bugs and unpredictable weather. Anyone who is strongly motivated to learn about self sustainability should come on Toivo farm and learn something about farming and life on village. As a result you will appreciate cozy city life much more than ever before.

My first days on farm started with carrot weeding. Weeds covered each row of very small carrots which just started to grow and we had to rip it out very carefully in order to keep carrots in land. The easiest

way to make carrot weeding for me was sitting on land in waterproof pants because in squatting position after some time you start to feel pain in your knees, especially if you move slowly.



Pic no 1: Carrot field

2-3 weeks later when weeding was done we started to pluck carrots because they mustn't grow too close to each other. There should be a free space between each carrot, approximately like width of three fingers. Otherwise carrots don't have enough space for growing, as a result they tie and then farmers can't sell it to restaurants. All the carrots which are not first class are kept on farm and volunteers use it very often for cooking as one of the main ingredients for their dishes. Creativity and good imagination are very welcome during cooking on Toivo farm as food resources

are very limited. Food is vegetarian and during weekends volunteers mostly eat their own food which they buy in 30km distant small city Heinola. Sometimes on farm lives around 15-20 people and they create shopping list for those who go to Heinola and give them money.

In case that volunteers are not staying on farm during weekend they can go wherever they want, but first they have to manage transport from farm to some bigger place where they can take buses because there is no any single bus which drives close to farm. Good organization is important and bringing additional money with you is needed because monthly pocket of 125 euros is not enough as Finland is expensive. Sometimes short term volunteers from Finland come to farm by cars and then is possible to share gas cost with them if you go together to supermarket or excursion. If you go to excursion to another city or village by bus, then is smart to book it online in advance, it saves you a lot of money. It's recommended to ask one person to book tickets for others and to give that person money afterwards.

My arrival was close to midsummer date, so we organized one excursion to another village, close to the city Tampere. There we met other EVS volunteers who were very friendly and provided us with one room and food during 4 days. Each person gave them 10 euros for food and there we had plenty of

cakes and sausages for midsummer party. During our stay there, we were able to see very interesting and old Finnish customs which they organize especially for midsummer when everybody from cities come to village to be together and to celebrate the longest day in year. Making huge bonfire next to lakes, rivers and sea is very traditional custom in whole Scandinavia and on that place people gather around fire.



Pic no 2 and 3: People gathering on meadow in front of village houses, grilling sausages and serving cakes

After having dinner with local Finnish people, their friends and families from city and EVS volunteers who hosted us in their

traditional red painted wooden houses they raised finnish flag in front of houses and started to sing finnish songs for welcoming midsummer . When ceremony was done we all together went to the lake where bonfire was set and then all volunteers, guests and local people sang songs in their native languages. Weather was beautiful and we could listen singing and guitar playing while bonfire was burning. Next morning local finnish farmer brought us to their church by tractor and that was very funny and nice experience. Around 15 people were sitting in trailer of his tractor and we could sightsee beautiful green forest and traditional scandinavian village houses next to the road.



Pic no 4: House of our EVS hosts in Kurjentila, close to Tampere

When we arrived to church I was positively suprised with very friendly and openminded priest who was more than glad to see international group of people in his church. Church by itself was very simple wooden building but very beautifl. Even I'm not religious I like to visit churches in countries

where I go because it's a part of architecture of one country as well as museums, monuments and statues of famous figures.

After that official ceremony, we sat in front of church and had free coffe and cinnamon bunns with locals. Later that daywe spent our time on lake where our hosts swim.



Pic no 5: Bonfire on the lake close to house of our hosts



Pic no 6: EVS volunteers and work awayers together on lake beach

Weekend after midsummer party and church ceremony was more quiet. I went for a kayaking with other volunteers and that was one of my favorite memories from Finland. We visited small lake islands

where scandinavian people build wooden cottages and mostly there are saunas from which you can go straight to lake to cool down. Sounds good as it is and all tourists and foreign people who live in Finland simply love it. Once you try sauna you will always come back. Sitting in sauna has good health benefits and it's great place for socialising. We used traditional finnish saunas heated by wood and warmth inside was always relaxing physcally and mentally because wooden ambient makes you feel warm as well.

Saunas are very practic and useful after day in field and on farm, volunteers go there a couple of times per week when they want to relax after hard work. On day of return to our farm from excursion we set fire in our sauna as well, took a rest inside after traveling with big backpacks and prepared ourselves for next work day.

During week days someone always stays in kitchen and prepares lunch and dinner. Mostly there stay two people because big amounts of food need to be prepared. There is a work schedule with names in dinning room where meetings are held and every day from monday to friday tasks change. It means that one day beside working on farm or in field you can heat water and sauna, next day you clean toilets if needed and check if there are clean towels, then you prepare breakfast (serving of jams,

preparing of tea and coffee, cooking porridge, heating of frozen bread..), day after that you prepare lunch&dinner and clean house (vacuuming, clothes washing..), next day task after cooking is always to clean dishes after lunch and day after cleaning lunch dishes, you clean dinner dishes.

First day after return from midsummer excursion it was my turn to cook with my mate on daily tasks. Cooking is favorite task of many volunteers and new ideas can be achieved easily when you live in international community and cook with people from many different countries. People inspire each other to cook something new they never cooked before. It's a great international thing- to exchange the ways of how some food can be prepared and combined with other food. During my stay on farm I liked to prepare creamy soups with broccoli or carrots and to make it more creamy I used to add heavy cream from the top of fresh domestic milk. In the end I would spice it with herbal salt which is farm product and herbs inside give food exotic taste. As a main dish sometimes I used to prepare vegetable pies, baked zucchinies with grain filling, vegeterian moussaka, puree with tomato and zucchini sauce, etc..

According to very limited food resources we were more than creative in cooking and baking and cake lovers sometimes used to bake sweets as well when we had enough

ingredients for it. I mostly prefer healthy diet with no sugar but I used to taste peace of each cake other volunteers prepared because of my curiosity. I used to be sweet food lover as well before I decided to stop with sugar consumption. I baked several cakes and cookies for holidays and birthday and I used reduced amount of brown non refined sugar for it. I always avoided to consume increased amount of sugar but since I returned home I decided to stop with sweets eating at all. After new year I wanted to make a decision to stop with it and now I finally have enough strong character to say no to sweets without feeling inner wish to eat it. I'm very happy and proud on my self because it's a success. Time spent on farm helped me to deal with it, even there was a possibility to buy stock of sweets when we organized goings to the closest supermarkets. Instead of biscuits and chocolates I started to buy fruits only.

As days on farm were passing and new weed started to grow again, beside weeding of already big weed in cabbage, parsley, broccoli and beetroot fields we had to weed carrot field again. It was easier to weed carrots second time as they grew up and became more visible. In second round plucking of extra carrots was must before they become big under surface. We always used to pluck smaller ones so that bigger ones can have enough space and continue to

grow without getting tied. Usually farmers sow more carrots and that way they ensure better crop. If they sow less carrots with enough space between each other from start, as a result harvest would be smaller because sometimes not all of carrots grow. In the same field there grows onion as well and weeding of it is not so exacting because there is a bigger distance between onions from start, they are more visible and less sensitive. We could finish onion weeding much faster than carrots, so we left it for end.

When weeding of carrot and onion field was almost done, we started to plant lavender and rousmarine from greenhouse to land.



Pic no 7: We plant rousmarine and lavender on sunny day

Planting of them was nice and I was very motivated for it, despite warmth that day. Only thing which was spoiling my good will were annoying flying bugs. The best way to defend your self from them is to have big hat and to put on protective stick on your face and arms, but still they can bite you through clothes.

It was very smart idea to bring hat and my hat really saved me from sun and rain as well. After that day I was sleeping well for a long time baceuse warmt and bugs exhusted me. Luckilly, in Finland is never hot like in Croatia and even if you get sunburned, consequences are smaller then after being on strong mediterranean sun. Nice weather in Scandinavia is highly appreciated and every opportunity for swimming in lakes is welcomed with satisfaction and joy.



Pic no 8: Lake where I used to swim

When we had free time I really enjoyed in huge finnish forests where I charged my batteries a lot. Scandinavian nature in summer is beautiful, ful of wild flowers and

relaxing for body and soul. Swimming and cycling in forest was one of the best things I could do for my self, beside going to sauna. I will definitely explore Scandinavia more when I be able again.



Pic no 9: Wild flowers next to village road

I could write much more about what I did on farm, but I think I mentioned the most important things in general. All the things I did and learned about village life brought me one big experience for future. I will continue to eat healthy food more than before, to be more happy with my life and to keep all the meories about modern and traditional life in Finland. This was my second visit to Finland. I already visited Helsinki last year as a tourist. The fact I came back says I liked that country. During my stay in Helsinki I could see that many people who live there are friendly and very motivated to help tourists. There is a lot of green areas in Helsinki as well where you can sit and enjoy in harmony with nature.