



Volunteer Policy

There are two types of volunteering at Common Soil:

1. **Regular volunteering** - A Common Soil regular volunteer is a person who gives time and talent free of charge in a regular weekly, fortnightly or monthly slot, to work under the supervision of paid staff or contractors on defined tasks and to learn about sustainable food growing. Their involvement is to advance the mission of the organisation and regular volunteers make a commitment, are accountable to the organisation and are entitled to regular support and teaching offered by paid staff or contractors of Common Soil.

Regular volunteers are encouraged to become community members of Common Soil and can sign up for £1 (this is due to the requirement to hold a 'share' that must be purchased for a nominal fee) without paying the regular monthly membership fee. Regular volunteers can also have some veg from the harvest margins.

Regular volunteers can commit their time in line with the seasons and there are three options of regularity, which the volunteer is asked to choose at sign-up:

- **Weekly** – A weekly 3-hour/half-day shift April to Oct and then this can reduce to fortnightly in the winter if the volunteer prefers, or can continue weekly.
- **Fortnightly** – A fortnightly 3-hour/half-day shift April to Oct and then this can reduce to monthly in the winter if the volunteer prefers, or can continue fortnightly.
- **Monthly** 3-hour/half-day shift year-round.

The times for regular volunteer shifts at the field are:

Mondays 10am – 1pm

Tuesdays 1.30pm – 4.30pm

Wednesdays 10am – 4pm (3 hours within this)

Fridays 10am – 1pm

Having regular time slots means that volunteers have more people around to socialise with and that growers can plan tasks and offer support with them.

Regular volunteering that is not at the field (e.g. administrative tasks) can be done outside of these times, by negotiation with Common Soil staff and contractors.

2. **Occasional volunteering** – An occasional volunteer is someone who responds to a call-out from Common Soil for support with a specific task on a specific date (e.g. weekend work days, community planting or digging sessions) or who approaches Common Soil with an offer of support for a short time or task. Occasional volunteers

do not receive the overall support and learning that regular volunteers do, but will be supported in the specific task they are engaging with.

All volunteers act with respect for the beneficiaries of the scheme and for the community. All volunteer involvement should mutually benefit the volunteer and the organisation.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

At Common Soil, we believe that volunteering should be accessible to all. Common Soil intends to ensure that equality of opportunity is afforded to all volunteers. No volunteers will be discriminated against or disadvantaged in the recruiting and retaining process, training or in the provisions of services, including (but not exclusively) on the grounds of age, gender, cultural or religious beliefs, different abilities, marital status, racial origins or sexual orientation, physical challenges, class, employment status or HIV status. We will endeavour to establish and maintain a positive working environment where no volunteer feels under threat or intimidated. Breaches of the policy will lead to a disciplinary investigation and possible disciplinary action. Please also refer to our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

Volunteers are recruited directly through Common Soil via the staff and contractor team. Regular volunteering opportunities are advertised on the Common Soil website and in the email newsletters, in a way that is accessible to all members of the community. Occasional volunteering opportunities are advertised to the members of Common Soil through the email newsletter.

YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Young people (under the age of 18 years) may volunteer at Common Soil:

- with a parent/guardian;
- by themselves under a recognised volunteer or work experience scheme, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme or Prospects work placements. All young people wishing to volunteer at Common Soil independently of their parent(s)/guardian(s), e.g. for their D. of E. award, will be asked to complete a form (which provides basic information that will be handled in accordance with data handling laws) and attend two work sessions with a parent/guardian before volunteering independently. A parent/guardian of young people under the age of 16 years must give permission for their child to volunteer independently. Young people who are aged 16 or 17 years are asked to discuss their volunteering with a parent/guardian and state that a parent/guardian is supportive of their plans. See also Common Soil Safeguarding policy.

VULNERABLE ADULT VOLUNTEERS Vulnerable adults wishing to volunteer at Common Soil can do so with a carer/support worker.

SELECTION PROCESS

REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

Common Soil can only support a limited number of regular volunteers. For regular volunteering roles that require a level of commitment a selection process ensures that all prospective volunteers are invited for an informal chat with the Common Soil growers and a

trial work day on the Common Soil site. It is important that all prospective volunteers are given the opportunity to explore whether their time, availability and skills match the requirements of Common Soil and whether they will achieve what they want to out of volunteering.

Provided that the growers consider the prospective volunteer to have the necessary skills for the area of work they are interested in, and the volunteer wishes to work with Common Soil, a volunteer agreement will be signed. When it is considered that we cannot offer a volunteer a suitable role at Common Soil, the prospective volunteer will be informed.

For occasional volunteering roles for specific tasks that are advertised only to the existing members of Common Soil, the task is allocated to the first person/people who declare/s themselves able to complete the task according to the schedule required and who is considered able to fulfil that.

VOLUNTEERS INDUCTION

REGULAR VOLUNTEERS

All new regular volunteer should have an induction meeting to familiarise them with:

- The activities and site of Common Soil
- The people involved in Common Soil
- Health and safety
- Common Soil's volunteer policy

Other volunteers at work mornings or for occasional volunteering roles will receive appropriate health and safety briefings, according to the task being undertaken.

PROBATIONARY PERIOD For regular volunteers, there will be a probation period of 2 months, to ascertain whether the volunteer is suitable to work within the team. This will be established by the growers, through working with and supporting the volunteer. There is no probationary period for occasional volunteering.

REVIEW AND ONGOING SUPPORT Following the regular volunteer probation period, the volunteer will meet at periodic intervals with the growers at a mutually agreed time to examine the volunteer's satisfaction in the role and their development. All regular volunteers should be offered equal access to ongoing support with the growers/other supervisor (e.g. Co-ordinator). This should provide volunteers with the opportunity to: • Reflect on/share volunteer experiences • Share/discuss problems that have arisen • Discuss any areas of work they wish to develop, expand or change.

WHAT REGULAR VOLUNTEERS CAN EXPECT FROM US

While they don't receive a wage for their service, regular volunteers do receive multiple benefits from working for our organisation:

- Food growing experience and teaching
- References, if required for a job application or an any other reason
- Support according to their role
- Relevant insurance
- Relevant out-of-pocket expenses as pre-agreed with the grower/staff team
- Community membership of Common Soil
- Some veg from the harvest margins.

VOLUNTEERS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Common Soil recognises the rights of volunteers to: 1. Know what is (and what is not) expected of them 2. Have adequate support in their volunteering 3. Receive appreciation 4. Volunteer in a safe environment and be insured 5. Know their rights and responsibilities if something goes wrong 7. Be free from discrimination 8. Be offered the opportunity for personal development.

Common Soil expects volunteers to: 1. Be reliable. It is most helpful to the organisation and growers to know who to expect and when and for those individuals to be there regularly and learn about Common Soil and the food growing techniques. 2. Be honest 3. Respect confidentiality 4. Make the most of support opportunities 5. Follow instructions and carry out tasks within agreed guidelines provided by grower(s) or staff member on site 6. Carry out tasks in a way that reflects the aims and values of the organisation. 7. Respect the work of the organisation and not bring it into disrepute 8. Comply with the organisation's policies and follow procedures and standards including health and safety and equal opportunities in relation to its staff, volunteers and members.

REGULAR VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT Regular volunteers are expected to sign the regular volunteer agreement when they start their role. There is no intention for this to be a legally binding document, nor is there any intention to enter into a legally binding relationship. It is an agreement binding in honour only. The sole purpose of the volunteer agreement is to clarify the relationship between Common Soil and our regular volunteers. Neither of us intends any employment relationship to be created either now or in the future.

COMPLAINTS Any volunteer may report a grievance in the first instance to the Common Soil Co-ordinator. In line with the **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE** (below), if they are not happy with the response it can be taken to the management committee through the Chair (Bernard Jarman). If there are any complaints against the volunteer then the grower manager / other supervisor (e.g. Co-ordinator) will discuss the matter with the volunteer and a written record will be kept. A volunteer will have the right to appeal in case of any complaints made against them.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE FOR VOLUNTEERS It is the aim of Common Soil that all volunteers have a positive and rewarding experience while working with us. The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that volunteers have a clear channel for airing issues and for making any grievances known to Common Soil staff. If you have any problems or issues related to your volunteering at Common Soil, you can raise these at the earliest opportunity with the one of the growers or the Co-ordinator. The sooner we are made aware of a problem, the sooner we can deal with it. Any issues/problems discussed will be treated as confidential. Any written information regarding the issue or problem will remain in the volunteer's personal and confidential file. If after first raising the problem or issue with a grower or the Co-ordinator you feel further action should be taken you will be invited to communicate your grievance in writing to hello@commonsoil.org.uk (to be sent to members of the management committee). Your grievance will be subject to fair consideration. Within 30 days of receiving the complaint, an appointment will be made with you to meet with at least

two members of the management committee, appointed as needed. After the meeting, the management committee members will decide what other action is appropriate in relation to the specific grievance. The meeting between you and the management committee members may be followed by one/some of the following: ♦ Agreeing with you any action that will be taken and the timetable for it. ♦ Meeting with other relevant staff or volunteers to try to resolve the issue. ♦ Agreeing a monitoring process (further meetings etc to ensure that the issue doesn't arise again). ♦ Meeting with you subsequently to report on any action taken. The decision and additional actions will be recorded and logged in the relevant individual's/individuals' file(s). Any resolution will take account of the feelings of the parties involved and will be agreed within the policy and practice of Common Soil.

TERMINATION OF PLACEMENT

We hope that all volunteers will find working with us an enriching experience. However, any of the following actions will result in the volunteer being asked to leave by the management committee. • Theft of property belonging to Common Soil, another volunteer, a paid member of staff or the wider membership; • Acts of violence towards a member of staff, another volunteer or against wider membership; • Malicious damage of property (e.g. private property, property of other volunteers); • Conviction for a criminal offence that undermines a volunteer's suitability; • Behaviours or an attitude that may cause harm to the reputation of Common Soil, harm to staff members or other volunteers, or that may impair the ability of others to do their work (whether paid or voluntary).

INSURANCE All volunteers are covered under Common Soil's general insurance, which includes public liability and employer's liability insurance.

END OF VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT All volunteers will be encouraged by the Co-ordinator to fill in an exit questionnaire. This will help us to develop and improve the future quality of volunteering at Common Soil.

Last updated February 2024.