

# The Plainfield Co-op Newsletter

*Summer 2019*

**- Celebrating 50 Years -**



**Hours:** 7 days a week 9AM-8PM

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## Advertise in the Newsletter: Spread the word about your business! Support the Co-op!

Deadline for the Fall issue is Sept. 5, to be published late September. This newsletter is published quarterly in a black & white paper version and in color online.

Electronic graphics files are preferred, but we are able to work with any clear copy. For questions about ad copy or help in designing your ad contact Sarah Albert, 802-476-0526 or sarah@vtlink.net. Submit ad copy to Sarah.

## Newsletter Advertising Rates

Ad size	Single issue	4 Consecutive issues (prepaid: 20% discount)
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Quarter page	\$25	\$80

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## About This Newsletter

On the cover, boxes of peaches from Pennsylvania wait for pick-up at the Plainfield Co-op in 1974. They are shaded by the overpass that once existed

between the building that is now the town offices and the Community Center. (Image from *The Country Journal*.)

The roots of the Plainfield Co-op go back 50 years. As we celebrate our first half century, we look both backwards and forwards from this present moment (but not the only moment) of financial strain. We hope this newsletter provides information to those of you who didn't get to the Annual Meeting or the Special June 8 meeting, and encouragement to

participate in the August meeting as well as act on some of the many suggestions offered in these articles as ways to support your Co-op at this critical time.

We welcome contributions to the newsletter—photos, articles, etc. Submissions are due to the editor by Sept. 1 for fall issue.

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# EAST HILL TREE FARM

Nursery for Fruit Trees, Nuts, and Berries



**3499 East Hill Rd. Plainfield, VT**  
**Check: [www.easthilltreefarm.com](http://www.easthilltreefarm.com)**

# President's Report

by Sarah Phillips

For a while now, the Board has been sharing about the financial challenges of the Co-op with the member-owners and staff. Here are a few of the headline numbers:

- The annual operating budget for the Co-op is about \$470,000.
- Our target sales for our current store should be about \$1,340,000.
- Over the last three years, our average sales have been \$1,155,000.
- We need about \$175,000/year more in gross revenue to meet our budget.

At this revenue (\$1.3 million), we would cover our true operating expenses and achieve our target 2% profit margin of about \$25,000. That profit is critical to be able to reinvest in the Co-op to keep up and improve the building, invest in social mission, etc.

Why does the Co-op struggle financially? There are a lot of factors but here are a few: The grocery business is tough; even natural foods, organic grocery is very competitive. We serve a rural community, which means we have a small population base. We also have a changing demographic (that is, decreasing population). In many ways, the Plainfield Co-op is a convenience grocery store, in the sense that a vast majority of shoppers also shop elsewhere. And tucked on the back corner of the village, we don't pick up much of passerby shopping.

So what has kept us in business for 50 years? You – our member-owners. The Plainfield Food Co-op is owned by its members. That means if you are a mem-

ber, you (and also a bunch of your neighbors) own the Co-op.

Our status quo is heading towards bankruptcy. Now is the time for our member-owners to invest in the Co-op with your time, energy, expertise or wallet.

- Join the conversation about our future. On June 8th, the Board hosted a meeting to kick off a summer of “Kitchen Table Conversations”. You can host or participate in a Kitchen Table Conversation about the future of the Co-op by contacting a Board Member. (Board info is on p. 2 of this newsletter and on the website.)
- Get up to speed—read the newsletter, read the board minutes, read the annual meeting minutes and reports. They can all be found on our website [www.PlainfieldCoop.com](http://www.PlainfieldCoop.com). (Thank you member-owner Bob Fancher!)
- Be on the lookout for a survey from the Board in July, e-bulletins and an invitation to a Special Member Meeting in August to hear about and vote on proposed changes at the Co-op to steer us to financial sustainability.
- Lend a Hand!
  - Join a working committee and get your hands dirty by putting ideas into action: Marketing Committee, Building Committee, Newsletter Committee, Fundraising. (Committee contact info is on pg. 2 of this newsletter.)
  - Consider joining the Board—we are looking for a couple thoughtful, dedicated new members.

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## Supporting the Plainfield Co-op

# May-October

Free day use of the river and trails  
all season for locals!



Onion River Campground

**802-426-3233**

[www.onionrivercampground.com](http://www.onionrivercampground.com)

[onionrivercampground@gmail.com](mailto:onionrivercampground@gmail.com)

- Become a working Member—share a few hours (or more) a week helping in the store.
- Shop at your Co-op—Use it or Lose it!
  - Pre-buy your groceries by purchasing yourself a “gift card” at the register. When you add credit to your account, it makes checking out a breeze and helps with the Co-op’s cash flow.
  - Pay in cash or check when you can to help cut down on credit card fees.
  - Buy Co-op first—before you head to Montpelier, Barre or Berlin with your shopping list, stop buy the Co-op first to spend your dollars locally.

Recently, I was asked to imagine a Plainfield without a co-op grocery. It’s

hard to even think about what this would mean to our community, to the village, to my family, to me.

Instead, let’s ask ourselves, can we imagine a thriving co-op grocery? What would it look like to you? To your neighbors? How has it changed from our current store? What are you willing to give to have a co-op grocery in Plainfield?

On a sunny summer afternoon, I invite you to stop into the store. Pick up your beverage of choice (perhaps a kombucha from the new dispenser), take a moment to be grateful for 50 years of the Plainfield Co-op with its many chapters, and think what our next chapter might bring. I look forward to writing the next chapter together. ♦

# 2019 Annual Meeting Delivers Sober News

by Gail Falk

The member-owners who attended the Co-op's 2019 Annual Meeting heard sober news about the Co-op's financial struggles and staffing concerns.

Treasurer Giordano Checchi's report documented a net loss of \$46,000 in 2018 with continuing losses in the early months of 2019. The Treasurer reported that "signs of difficulty" were "visible in previous years" with chronically weak revenues and underfunding of wages and infrastructure. Checchi concluded his report saying,

*I invite all of the Co-op members to think about major changes, not of small adjustments, but of serious changes. Think about taking a bold step into the future of our Co-op. Other options may work for the short time, but would lead to a delay of the same issues we are suffering today.*

For a full text of the Treasurer's Report, see the Annual Meeting Minutes ([link at end of article](#)).

Jean Hamilton explained that in March Kevin Levesque stepped down as General Manager and is now Operations Manager. To fill the gap, Jean resigned from the Board and began serving as General Manager on a part-time basis. She said her focus in the part-time

position is communication with members and staff, financial management, strategic direction and human resource issues. Jean noted some bright spots:

- The Co-op has continued to be open every day
- Staff are super dedicated
- Cost control strategies are showing a positive effect in holding down costs
- Gross margin is improving
- Working membership is growing (thanks to Charlotte's work)
- Gift card use is up by 75% saving credit card fees
- The Community Center is used robustly and can now be scheduled online
- We have some robust committees: Building, Newsletter, Marketing. We are launching a fundraising committee.

Jean added that, in the midst of the financial crisis, a staff member was terminated. She described the situation as "painful, sensitive and complicated." The former staff member, Rosemond London, was present and participated actively in the meeting. She and other staff and former staff raised concerns about procedures for staff discipline, staff communication, the propriety of a person moving from the Board to General Manager without a formal hiring process, and why the only African American staff was fired. An Ad Hoc committee was appointed and tasked with developing a productive framework for discussion of the termination with the Board, including what can be shared and with whom.

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Board President Sarah Phillips reviewed results from the Marketing Study, which concluded that the Co-op has very limited ability to grow its customer basis at its current location (but would grow on Route 2) and that most customers use the Co-op as a convenience store. To read the full report go to <http://www.plainfieldcoop.com/documents/2018%20marketing%20study.pdf>

Sarah said the Board is looking for deep engagement with the member-owners about how to proceed. The Board will be scheduling meetings this summer to engage member-owners in serious conversation about the Co-op's future. (Note: the first such meeting was June 8.) The Board sees this as a Now or Never moment, when member-owners

must get involved to decide what the Co-op will become.

Board elections could not occur for lack of a quorum. The number of attendees was similar to past years, but the roster of member-owners has grown to more than 900, and the by-laws require 5% of members for a quorum. In the absence of a vote, Giordano Checchi, Charlotte Domino, and Bram Towbin will serve in interim appointments to the Board until a Special Meeting later this year. (Note: Bram Towbin resigned from the Board in May).

For a more detailed account of the Annual Meeting, go to <http://www.plainfieldcoop.com/documents/2019%20Annual%20Meeting%20Minutes.pdf> ♦



# June 8 Member Meeting

by Gail Falk

On a gorgeous June 8th afternoon, more than 50 Co-op members, young and old, filled the Plainfield Community Center to learn why the Co-op is in financial trouble and to bring the energy of their hearts and minds to creating a direction for the future.

General Manager Jean Hamilton outlined the financial stresses which brought the store to the brink of closing this winter (see *Treasurer's report in the Annual Meeting minutes* <http://www.plainfieldcoop.com/documents/2019%20Annual%20Meeting%20Minutes.pdf>) and a \$46,000 deficit for 2018. Losses continued in January, February, and March. Sales growth in April and May together with budget-cutting measures taken by the staff have put the store on track to break even for the year and perhaps catch up on arrears to vendors, she said.

But, Hamilton continued, last winter's crisis exposed the Co-op's precarious structure and finances. For years, the store has limped along by deferring building maintenance, underpaying staff, and failing to invest in professional skills and developing a strong leadership structure.

The store simply cannot continue as it is without some basic changes, Hamilton concluded. The Board and General Manager see four basic options going forward: Grow, Shrink, Sell, or Close, and it is the member-owners who must tell the Board and management which options for change they prefer. Hamilton explained that her focus as Acting

General Manager is to keep the store stable and operating through the summer to give the Board and Membership time to consider how they want to change. Not changing, she emphasized, is not an option, but it is possible to keep the store stable for the next few months to give the members time to study the options and weigh in on the path forward.

Board president Sarah Phillips explained that this meeting was the start of the process of engaging members in the decisions about how to move forward.

There were questions and general comments from the group, such as

- What happens to member dues? Could needed capital be raised by increasing member dues?
- The Co-op could benefit from engaging in the Vermont Council on Rural Development's Revitalizing Marshfield/Plainfield process
- What became of the management collective that used to manage the Co-op?
- The "gift card" is not actually for giving a gift, but a pre-buy system like a CSA. It helps cash flow and avoids credit card fees on small purchases.
- Could the Co-op become a non-profit? What happened to the plan to create a non-profit board for the Community Center?

Then the members present divided into groups of 5 to 8 people to discuss whether they wanted to Grow, Shrink, Sell, or Close, and to offer specific suggestions about how. After a half hour, all

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reassembled and the groups reported back their main recommendations. There were no recommendations to Close or Sell the store, although there were recommendations to explore the option of merging with another co-op, such as Hunger Mountain or Buffalo Mountain. There was strong support for a campaign to get members to commit to do more of their shopping at the Co-op and to pre-buy. Most members present made a commitment by a show of hands to increase their level of shopping at the Co-op and to invest in a pre-buy. There was support for getting more work done by volunteers, improving marketing and sales, and promoting use of the Community Center. Many of the groups recommended a combination of growing by getting members to shop more at the Co-op while shrinking by using volun-

teers and cutting expenses. Jean Hamilton said she will tabulate the reports from all the groups for use in planning over the summer.

To further the conversations started at this meeting, members were encouraged to host “Kitchen Table Conversations” in June and July where friends and neighbors gather to join in further discussion about the Co-op’s future. Those interested in hosting a Kitchen Table Conversation were encouraged to contact Sarah Phillips (sa\_philli@yahoo.com, 426-2043). The results of the Kitchen Table Conversations, an upcoming member survey, and other input from members will be tabulated and used to develop a plan for fall and winter operations and longer term directions, which the Board will present to the members in August. ♦

## Working Member Discount Update

In recent months, as has been communicated to member-owners, the Co-op has struggled to maintain a positive bottom line and cash flow. To bolster our current situation, the Board and management are taking some steps to bring expenses in line with our revenue.

Effective immediately, working members will continue to receive a store discount (3% or 7% based on the amount of hours worked in a month). However, working members will no longer be able to extend their working member discount to another household member who shops at the Co-op. If you are receiving a discount because another member of your household is a working member-owner, your discount will end. The good news is that we still have lots of ways for you to contribute time to the Co-op as a working member-owner to receive your own discount! If you are interested, please reach out. Ask the staff member at the checkout counter, and look at the bulletin boards behind the counter and in the hallway.

Working member discounts are decided by the Board. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sarah Phillips, Board President  
sa\_philli@yahoo.com / 426-2043

# Plainfield Co-op Manager's Report

by Jean Hamilton

50 years! Not bad for a small grocery store in rural America.

I've only known the Plainfield Co-op for six of those years, but it has proven to be a centerpiece of my life. My daughter has grown up in the store. Friendships and neighborliness are strengthened by bump-ins in the aisles. The Co-op fuels everything from comfort meals alone to my biggest summer bbq's. I can't imagine life in Plainfield without this store and I want to express my sincere gratitude to EVERYONE who has kept this store alive for the past 50 years. It takes a village to muster this much vision, audacity, tenacity, patience, compassion, and celebration.

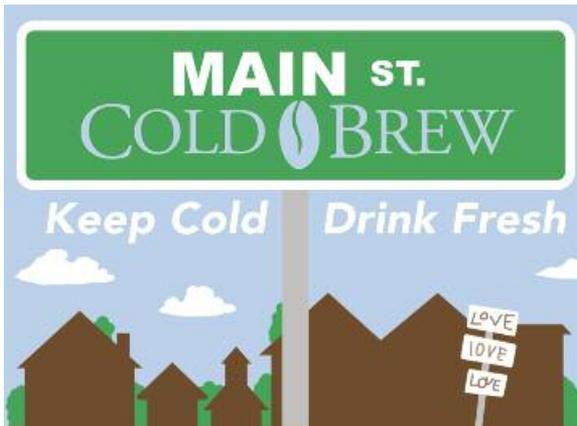
In our 50th year, it's appropriate to engage in deep reflections of what the Plainfield Co-op is to our community. While this time of reflection is valuable, it also brings fears (what if we lose our store?), complex conversations (what's the best way to move forward?), and pain as we weave a cohesive plan from the varying needs of our staff, member-

owners, vendors, shoppers, and neighbors. Through all of this, I have seen our community step forward with courage and trust as we tackle authentic community, ethical, and interpersonal challenges together. This is the kind of work that transactional capitalism seeks to eliminate but so often at the expense of community, justice, and relationships.

And in the midst of it all, the Plainfield Co-op staff have kept our store open day in and day out. It is not easy work in a place that is under constant financial strain, shifting leadership and accountabilities, and has 900+ owners. But our staff are awesome—they come to work each day with an incredible commitment to our store and this community. In the face of fears of the Co-op closing, the staff have committed to doing everything they can to keep the store open and viable including:

- This spring our staff accepted reductions to their schedule, benefits, and wages to help balance our declining revenue and increasing expenses.

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- They have demonstrated skill in working together to improve gross margins and control inventory.
- Our register staff have stepped up in promoting the value of memberships to shoppers and the value of pre-buy cards that strengthen the community and our Co-op.
- And, staff have continued to maintain a bedrock culture of community in the store. At a recent staff meeting, I was touched by the humaneness of our business as staff resolved a difficult conversation about employee benefits while passing around Kevin and Laura's babies.

Earlier this year, I stepped off of the Board to fill a role as general manager on staff. There is a longer term need for the organization to continue to develop an organizational structure that serves its business model, community, and healthy functionality (building on learnings from the evolution of the management collective and the management restructure

group). For now, I am serving in this role to support the staff and organization through this financial crisis and the ensuing member-owner strategy sessions. I see my role as absorbing and addressing the emergencies so that our staff can stay focused on the day to day operations of running the store. While there is a lot about this role that is awkward, it is a sincere pleasure to work with the staff. I hope you will join me in expressing gratitude for their passion and care.

And on behalf of the staff, I thank you dear members! For keeping this vision alive for 50 years. For investing in our community. For knowing what an important contribution you make to Plainfield's vitality every time you shop at the Co-op. For giving yourself (or a neighbor) a pre-buy grocery card so your checkouts are easy and the Co-op can cash flow its operations. And for letting us know how you value this Co-op. We love reading your comment cards and always welcome your feedback: [info@plainfieldcoop.com](mailto:info@plainfieldcoop.com). ♦

## THIS GIFT TO THE CO-OP COSTS YOU NOTHING!

No bucks! No work! How is that possible? By using a Co-op Gift Card. This sounds like you're giving a gift of store credit to someone else—which it was originally used for, and still can be used for. But when you buy a Gift Card/pre-buy card for yourself, you're helping the Co-op several ways:

You help the Co-op's bottom line by advancing the money to pay for the products you buy. Right now, most of the Co-op's debt is to our suppliers—not a happy situation for anyone.

If you usually pay with a credit or debit card, the Co-op doesn't get the full payment; a substantial percentage goes into the pocket of (most likely) a big, fat bank. The Co-op estimates it has saved \$6000 in the past year in bank fees it didn't have to pay because members used Gift/pre-buy Cards. When you purchase your card with a check rather than with a credit card, you save the Co-op even more.

For you, the Co-op member, checking out is now a breeze--just use your credit. If you're not yet a member, being able to use a Gift/pre-buy Card is one more reason for joining. ♦

# What's Your Vision for the Future Co-op?

Gathered by Gail Falk

As the Co-op looks forward to its next 50 years, we asked several members what their vision for the future of the Co-op is. We got a rich variety of answers. As you read these visions, think about what your vision for the future is. Email it to [jean.myung.halmilton@gmail.com](mailto:jean.myung.halmilton@gmail.com).

*I want to see that our town continues to have a place where I can buy organic and local food. I want the Co-op to continue with more focus on organic. I see keeping things small and simple is a good approach. Even smaller might work better: bigger/faster/better doesn't seem like the best approach. Hunger Mountain is right down the road, so we don't need another store like that. I shop at both stores depending on where I am.*

I think it is worth considering moving the Co-op up to a more commercial area on Route 2. The current location is comforting and familiar, but it has a lot of deficiencies: lack of handicap access, parking issues, not enough space, lack of visibility. We are going to be getting a traffic light on Route 2, which will calm traffic. There is going to be a sidewalk from the Lower Village over the bridge up to the Opera House. The house next to the Gallison House could be a good location. It is a large house, with a carriage house, and it is a double lot. In the 1940's it actually was a Co-op Grocery Store (there's a photo at the Historical Society) and it had a gas station out front.

We need to work hard to keep the Co-op in Plainfield, so we should ask town leadership to help in identifying properties. I really want to keep the Co-op in Plainfield, and I see moving as a way for it to become sustainable. There would be

great synergies with the Opera House, which is becoming more and more active. People could go over to the Co-op to shop or get a bite to eat.

*I would not like to see this location go away. It is very important for people who live in the village, and we have a strong relationship with the immediate community. In an ideal situation we would have two locations, one here and one on Route 2 for people who don't come into the Village. The important thing is to maintain our relationship with the immediate community, where we are loved. I hope we can improve our efficiency (we already are) and pay our employees better.*

Price really matters to me. I wish we could stock food upstairs and get better prices by buying larger quantities. I would like to see more competitively priced staples, like Booth Brothers milk and bags of potatoes and onions. I would like to be able to buy more lower priced commercial products, such as Marcal toilet paper instead of Seventh Generation; it is less pure but I have a very limited budget. It's about size. We need both types of product.

*I would like to see the Co-op reach out to the schools and hire high school grads from this community.*

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My vision is that where there is now a flower garden there would be a cafe that would become a popular, well-used place people could come to have lunch, meet friends. There would be a small attached kitchen and a chef who would make items for brunch and lunch. If this could happen, I think it would be the salvation

of the Co-op. The town really needs a place for people to gather and meet friends now that Maple Valley is closed.

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*I want the management to be leaders on the side of the organic movement. I get very upset when I see broccoli flown in from Guatemala.* ♦

**“You can do a lot of climate change mitigation by what you eat.”** — Roger Hill, 6/22/19, Climate Forum in Plainfield

### **We Need Each Other:**

#### **Food Co-ops Support their Local Economies, and Local Economies Support their Local Food Co-ops**

*by Shane Rogers, Vermont Farm to Plate Network, fortuitously published in the Times Argus on June 8, the day of our Special Member Meeting to save our Co-op*

A lot of the success of Vermont's food co-ops, and food co-ops in general, is due to their community member ownership and the influence that has over the store. With the member-owners being based in the area which the store serves and also serving on the boards of directors that help to set high-level store policy, this leads to business plans that focus as much on supporting the community, such as helping to grow the local economy or ensuring access to food for all residents, as they do on the bottom line.

... The commitment from Vermont food co-ops to incorporate a values-based approach to business, in addition to not being driven by short term profits, has resulted in their giving the opportunity to many smaller Vermont producers and food artisans to sell their products in a setting that they may have not traditionally had access to.

“We're supporting the development of local products and food,” says Robyn O'Brien, general manager of Putney Food Co-op. “It's an active part of what we do and how we think.” ♦

# EDITORIAL: Fifty Years of More than Shopping

by Glenda Bissex

In 1968 my family moved to Plainfield and a few years later became involved with the pre-order Co-op operating out of members' homes and delivering bulk orders of non-perishables every month. This included such items as snow shoes and wood stoves though grains and beans were the big sellers. The delivery system—from volunteers who drove their own trucks sometimes to Boston or even Georgia to pick up the bulk ordered items, to the volunteers who then broke down that big order by neighborhoods, to the members who drove to other members' homes to pick up their orders—was volunteer-intensive. Someone had to coordinate the whole operation, including making up the pre-order forms, tabulating them, collecting the money and paying the merchants. As I look back on it now, I'm quite amazed it worked.

How we celebrated when we had an actual store that was open for a few hours a few days a week! Over 50 years the Co-op has been transformed and times have changed. Now a smaller portion of our members volunteer their time; most of the work is done by paid

staff. What today are co-operative solutions for sustaining ourselves in a world where “organic” food is available at every supermarket, often at lower prices? What is the community we serve? Has that changed, too?

A positive change is that our Co-op, like other food co-ops, now buys more products from local farmers, bakers, brewers, and such. Our Co-op has supported the growth of small, niche farms and producers, who have in turn supported the Co-op by supplying what our customers want to buy. As an integral part of our small business community, the Co-op's closing would hurt not only those of us who depend on shopping there, but the local businesses we help support by buying from them.

Many of our members now seem to have less time and energy to give to the Co-op. They are mostly shoppers. Even though we are called “members,” and more recently (since equity) “member-owners,” many of us think of ourselves mainly as “shoppers” and do not feel the responsibilities of ownership. The Co-op has well over 900 members yet only 33

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Alan Taplow — 802-454-4675 — [ataplow@gmail.com](mailto:ataplow@gmail.com)

<http://preserve-your-memories.info>

of them showed up for the Annual Meeting in April—less than the 5% quorum required for voting! The slowly increasing “shopper” mindset among a larger proportion of our members may be the biggest destabilizing change in the Co-op over its 50 years.

If member-owners are to take their responsibilities seriously, their importance needs to be supported by the rest of the Co-op organization. For years there has been no Membership Committee. New members paid their \$20. and moved on with no letter of welcome and orientation, no follow-up, no new member parties. Charlotte Domino saw the need and gave her energy and ideas to being Membership Co-ordinator as a staff person. (See winter '18-19 newsletter.) When she had to choose between doing that and running for the Board, she understandably chose the Board, where she felt she could

most effectively contribute to the Co-op. That there is no new Membership Co-ordinator on top of no Membership Committee makes me feel that one of our most valuable assets is being overlooked.

We now have a revitalized Marketing Committee and a new Fundraising Committee, both aimed at getting more money, which is the Board's responsibility, after all. As often happens, a crisis brings forth new creative ideas as well as a return to fundamental principles. If enough of us see ourselves as more than “shoppers”—and the turnout and energy at the June 8 meeting suggest we do—we can keep our Co-op alive and healthy. For me, the question of saving the Co-op is bound up with saving a way of doing business and relating to one another, to our community, and to the earth in a way that is non-exploitive—in a word, co-operative. ♦

## **WHEN IS BUYING ORGANIC MOST IMPORTANT?**

*from EWG report*

In terms of the amount of pesticide residue on conventionally-grown vegetables and fruits, the deadliest produce is kale, spinach, and strawberries.

This year, the non-profit Environmental Working Group (EWG) actually included kale in their “Dirty Dozen” guide to the most contaminated food products. “More than 92% of kale samples had two or more pesticide residues detected, and a single sample could contain up to 18 different residues,” the report read. The kale and spinach samples that were tested had, on average, 1.1 to 1.8 times more pesticide residue by weight than any other crop.

It's quite a pity that kale ended up in the Dirty Dozen list because a single cup of raw, chopped kale gives you more than 200% of your daily allowance of vitamin A and nearly 700% of your daily allowance of vitamin K. It's also full of vitamins like B6, calcium, vitamin C, and potassium.

If you're planning to get kale from the groceries, consider buying organic kale instead. ♦

# Featured Products

by Kevin Levesque

**Tex Mex Trail Mix** – Happy Summer! We've been bringing in some new, exciting items to get you on the trails. We now have a super affordable, delicious slightly spicy trail mix.

**Grandy Oats Curry Cashews** – New in bulk, lightly roasted with invigorating spices including turmeric, paprika and red pepper. A touch of cayenne adds a zing!

**Zing Ales** – Based in Williston, Zing Ales are a local producer of sweet soda! We sell a wonderfully balanced Pineapple Ginger, and their delectable Tulsi Rose.

**Amy's Vegan Chocolate Bars** – By popular demand, we now have multiple offerings of Amy's vegan chocolate bars! Find them across from the register.



**Fresh Herbs** – Fresh herbs are now in stock in produce, along with herb starts. We have basil, mint, parsley, cilantro, and more!

**Lagunitas Hoppy Refresher** – Hoppy Refresher is a fresh take on an old tradition ... An IPA-inspired refreshment that's zero-alcohol, zero-carbohydrate, and zero-calorie. It's chock-full of Citra,



Equinox, and Centennial hops, as well as some natural flavors and a pinch brewer's yeast to biotransform-ate the hops to just the right flavor.



**Idletyme Beer** – Idletyme, out of Stowe, has recently begun distributing their special ales and lagers. To start, we have brought in their helles, and grapefruit infused pale ale for your enjoyment. These are brand new to Plainfield!

**Cereus Botanicals** – Out of East Calais, these all natural skin products promote plant reconciliation while encouraging an excuse for self-care and an awareness of one's own inherent beauty.



**Quill Pig Farm** – It doesn't get much more local than this! Quill Pig farm is a Plainfield staple, and we are proud to sell their pork in our freezer section. Their bacon, pork chops, hocks and more are available on a rotating basis. Come support some local farmers!

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**Bien Fait Specialty Cakes** – Have you tried their cheesecakes in our cooler, or the cinnamon buns in the store corner, or maybe their granola in the bulk aisle? We love their sweets and think you will too. Try out a banana nut muffin for the perfect start to your day.

**Klinger's** – We now carry Klinger's Farm Buns! These are the perfect bun for your favorite deli sandwich. Try these buns with our Nieman Ranch pulled pork for a mouthwatering combination. Find them in the bread section. ♦

## Greening the Newsletter—<sup>still</sup>we need to hear from you!

Right now our quarterly newsletter is published in 3 versions:

1. a paper copy that is mailed to members who request it. Paper copies are also available in the store (near the door) for anyone to pick up.
2. an electronic facsimile of the print version, but in color. Members who have requested electronic newsletters are notified by email when a new issue is available and given a link to it. This version is posted on the Co-op website [plainfieldcoop.com](http://plainfieldcoop.com)
3. a reformatted version of the newsletter that enables individual articles, recipes, etc. to be easily printed separately. This version is also on the Co-op website.

Currently, we mail newsletters to approximately 150 members.

Postage is now \$.55 at a cost of about \$330. a year. We want to reach as many Co-op members and customers as possible, but we are also concerned about trees and money. IF YOU CURRENTLY RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER BY MAIL, how would you feel about picking up your newsletter in the store rather than in your mailbox, or receiving the electronic versions instead of the printed copy? WE ARE CONSIDERING DISCONTINUING MAILING THE NEWSLETTER AND WANT TO HEAR FROM OUR PRINT SUBSCRIBERS AS WE DECIDE.

### How to respond:

- Contact Glenda Bissex, newsletter editor by email ([songboat@vtlink.net](mailto:songboat@vtlink.net)). ♦

# Burrowing into Our Days of Yore

by Charlotte Domino

Happy birthday, Co-op! It's our 50th anniversary this year. That's half a century! During this monumental year, I'm excited to look back on our accomplishments, changes, and hurdles that brought us to where we are today.

As an individual, I've always been interested in our Co-op's history. I love to talk with people who were part of the beginning, to go through our records, to study old photographs and read historic newsletters. So I've inadvertently found myself getting requests for historical photographs, or being asked where we could find archived information.

Sometimes when discussing Co-op history, others will look at me and I'll realize they're fact checking what we're talking about.

I'm excited when people want to learn about our Co-op, so I've started studying more and quizzing myself so I would be able to provide answers and information to anyone who wanted them. The newsletter committee gave me this opportunity to examine our history and speak to other people who've been here longer than I. Due to various personal hurdles, I've not had as many conversations as I'd like with our membership, but will be writing a part two for this article in the next newsletter.

As some of us know, the Plainfield Co-op started as a buying club in 1969, in a building on Route 2 that has since been

demolished. There was no monetary requirement to join and be a member; if you wanted to be a part of your neighborhood food circle, you had to commit to a certain amount of volunteering time. The jobs in our baby co-op varied. We needed folks to ferry our bulk bags and cases of vegetables from farms and other distributing locations. We needed people to receive and inspect the goods we ordered. We needed people to sort the food into portions for each household that ordered, and then to distribute them to the families.

We've changed a lot over the years, but in a lot of ways I feel we're still operating in a very similar way to our origins. Though we have a fixed location and a broader selection of goods, we still rely heavily on volunteers; we continue to have bulk ordering options for individuals; and we are constantly receiving shipments from small farms and distributors.



One thing that did change? Bees. That's right. One of our older newsletters alerted me to the fact that we used to sell bee swarms with the queen. That tidbit was from a 1976 article, and said the swarm cost customers a whopping \$24.50. Some members would drive down to Georgia to pick them up. How cool is that?

Sometimes we struggle, as everything in life comes and goes. Even though we can see so clearly where we want to be,

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it's important to remember we have a lot to be proud of. Look at how much we've done, how many connections have been forged through our Co-op, how much we've helped our community and local economy in fifty years.

(If you'd like to talk about the history of our Co-op and how it's impacted our community in the past to the present, please reach out! I'd love to hear from you, and put your input in the next article. Ivanna.dark@gmail.com) ♦

## FINANCIAL CRISIS, 1977

The Plainfield Co-op experienced its first sales loss in 1976, and the \$7,428 deficit and how it should be overcome have split the membership and created a philosophical crisis. The membership is split over which way to go—growth or retrenchment. —*Times Argus*, Feb. 21, 1977

Members of the financially ailing Plainfield Co-op voted Wednesday night to move the co-op to Montpelier. The move is calculated to bring the Co-op's food purchasing, warehousing, and distribution operations closer to the majority of its members. The Plainfield Co-op now operates from the old Grange building in Plainfield village. Members of the Plainfield Co-op also decided Wednesday night to immediately mortgage their Grange building to pay the balance of the deficit left from 1976.

A splinter group, the Winooski Valley Co-op, has been formed by Plainfield Co-op members from the Plainfield, Marshfield and East Montpelier areas.

—*Times Argus* some time later in 1977

The rest is history—the two very different histories of the Hunger Mt. Co-op and the Plainfield Co-op (named at the split the Winooski Valley Co-op).

## PLAINFIELD COMMUNITY CENTER



Space available for your:

**Classes**

**Meetings**

**Parties**

**Workshops**

**Art Gallery Exhibitions & Special Events**

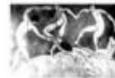
\$9/hr. for Co-op Members, \$15/hr. for Non-Members

Events: \$35 for Members, \$50 for Non-Members

Scheduling Book at Co-op Register

More Information?

Contact Rosemond London at the Co-op



*Using the Community Center benefits The Plainfield Co-op*



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## Vintage Recipes *from Debra Stoleroff*

These are two recipes from community members who, not in the distant past, didn't need to have their surnames added. The titles would have been Randy's Chocolate Mousse and Dennis' Onion Dill Pancakes. But time marches on, our dear community members grow elderly or pass on. Their names are substituted with current awesome people. Fifty years of awesomeness. None to be forgotten. Their memories and recipes continue to fill our bellies. ♦

### Randy Keeney's Chocolate Mousse

#### Ingredients:

7 oz. dark chocolate      ½ cup heavy cream  
¼ cup black coffee      2 TBL sugar with vanilla & brandy in it  
5 eggs, separated

#### Directions:

1. Melt chocolate in double boiler
  2. Add coffee
  3. Beat egg yolks with sugar
  4. Stir in warm chocolate
  5. Stir in cream
  6. Beat egg whites stiff and fold into the mixture
- SOOOOO good. The mousse is also delicious frozen!

### Dennis Murphy's Onion Dill Pancakes

"Doesn't sound like much but these are REALLY yummy!!!", said Dennis.

1. Make up Dennis' basic pancake mix:
  - 1 cup cornmeal
  - 2 cup white flour
  - 1 TBL baking powderAdd enough water to make up a batter
2. Chop a LOT of onion very fine
3. Saute onion in oil until clarified
4. Add about 2 tsps of ground dillseed (use a grain-mill)
5. Stir for a moment and dump this into the batter then mix it in. (optionally add some dillweed at this point)
6. Cook pancakes as usual
7. Serve one of these ways:
  - Greasy way: add lots of butter
  - Healthful way: sprinkle lightly with "salt substitute" (potassium chloride)
  - Goes nicely with delicious hot pickles

# What's Going on Upstairs? Plainfield Community Center and Gallery News

by Alexis Smith, Gallery Curatrix

The current new exhibit is again an annual show of more new works from Peter Schumann of the Bread and Puppet Theater: "Implementation – More of The Possibilitarian Uprising." And a snippet from this summer's new theme, "Diagonal Man Theory and Practice." Our B&P summer season has begun with the museum open Friday nights and the classic Sunday Circuses, where you can find me hiding inside the old garbage man for my 33rd year.

Museum tours start off the day at 1:00 pm on the grounds of the Bread and Puppet Theater in Glover, followed by side shows, the Circus with a full brass

band, the Pageant, bread & aioli and press, cheap art bus sales galore!

The PCC upstairs art exhibition of giant black and white woodcut banners on The Possibilitarians theme and this summer's "Diagonal Man" work comment on our askew current global situation balanced with "The Possibilitarians," giving us all a hopeful look into the future, especially for our Co-op and our community.

The annual Maple Hill School art show and event was last month and was a very creative and inspiring youth event, host-

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*Floor painters extraordinaire, Daniel Marcus and Ian Maas.  
Photo credit: Mike Brosky*

ing many young talented artists and their guests.

Our next exhibit in the Plainfield Community Center gallery will be the summer group show for July-August. Then we welcome another early fall B&P tour stop of giant banner paintings and more huge works by Peter Schumann. Ethan Hubbard's generous Photography Project "Our Co-op Is Our Community" exhibition will be reinstalled on permanent exhibition in the gorgeously newly painted stairwell after a few repairs and reframings are completed.

Thanks to our volunteers for the lovely new paint job in the stairwell and lobby. It looks so lovely you will just have to come up and take a peek! Also a round of applause for our new spring cleaners, Dawna MacLaren and Charlotte Domino, who have been the cleaning fairies of all time. We are all so appreciative and happy the Co-op can honor important working member jobs like this one. We can always use more help upstairs with the constant improvements being made, so please give us a call or just stop by and mop and vacuum the floors!!!!

Thank you to all the folks who visit the Community Center for events and special classes! Please remember to park only on the street or in one of our 4 town parking lots! We thank you for shopping and supporting the Co-op before your events when you visit us upstairs—it really makes a difference! We in the Co-op have a marked increase in sales and activity on days when events are happening upstairs.



Any artists or groups interested in exhibiting their work in the space please contact me by email: [freealexis@hotmail.com](mailto:freealexis@hotmail.com) or call me at 802-371-7239.

PS: Still on our wish list are thermal windows and a piano tuning. And some real signage out front in both directions for "The Plainfield Community Center and Art Gallery" while we're at it! ♦