

Staff

Rin Austin, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Deb Barnwell, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Chloe Budnick, *Bulk, Grocery, Frozen, Meat,
 and Refrigerated Buyer; Floor Manager*
 Laura Conklin, *Beer and Wine, Supplements,
 Body Care, Household and Gifts Buyer*
 Jezebel Crow, *Produce, Cheese, Coffee, Tea,
 and Bulk Herbs Buyer*
 Fiona Winter, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Kevin Levesque, *Operations Manager,
 and Bakery Buyer*
 Eben Markova-Gold, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Diego Maurice, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Kae Klepitskaya, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Stanzi Scribner, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Dan Siegel, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Leah Tedesco, *Membership
 and Marketing Coordinator*
 Chris Thompson, *Maintenance Coordinator*
 Annie Reed, *Floor Staff/Cashier*
 Margie Yoder, *Stocking/Inventory/Receiving*
 Peter Youngbaer, *General Manager*

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Newsletter Advertising Rates

Deadline for the Summer issue is June 1, to be published mid-June. The newsletter is published quarterly in a black & white paper version and in color online. To place an ad, contact Elizabeth Mathai, ad co-ordinator, elizabethmathai@yahoo.com.

Electronic graphics files are preferred, but we are able to work with any clear copy. For questions about ad copy contact Elizabeth Mathai, elizabethmathai@yahoo.com.

Page Size	Ad Dimensions width x height	Single Issue	4 issues; prepaid, consecutive
Full page	5" x 8"	\$75	\$240
Half page	5" x 4"	\$50	\$160
Quarter page	5" x 2" horizontal	\$25	\$80
Quarter page	2.5" x 4" vertical	\$25	\$80



About This Newsletter

For a little store in a little town, our Co-op packs an amazing variety of products. That's not just insider bias. An outside group

called Columinate, a group of Co-op professionals, was recently hired to do a Peer Review Audit to give our Board and Management suggestions for improving our Co-op. One of the assets they noted was the wide variety of products available in our store. Try counting the number of cheeses...

If you're looking for something you don't see, ask. It may be hiding on a lower shelf or some place unexpected. If you're a member, you can place a special order. Or if several shoppers request a particular item, it might appear. The buyers are very responsive, and you can, of course, talk to them in person.

Our General Manager, Peter, has to handle a variety of responsibilities, some of which he writes about in his report. When the ground warms, our gardener, Laura Ziegler, will be planting the bed in front of the Co-op. Laura is particularly interested in giving attention to unusual

varieties of flowers. In the spring the bed doesn't look too exciting, but then one summer day it will be bursting with luscious colors and assorted patterns.

Enjoy the variety of perspectives on the Co-op on these pages. We invite your submissions for the next newsletter—photos, letters, poems, book reviews, etc. The newsletter is a place for looking in depth at issues and people central to our Co-op. Deadline is June 1 for the summer issue. ❖

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New Store Hours Beginning March 22

Store

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday,
Saturday, Sunday: 10:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Thursday: 12:00 Noon - 7:00 PM

Express Window

Monday - Saturday: 9:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Sunday: 10:00 AM - 7:00 PM

Note: Analysis shows sales between 7 and 8PM were <4% of overall sales. We expect most will shift earlier in the day, saving us labor and other operational costs. We will likely add that hour back after Memorial Day for the summer, and switch back again after Labor Day. Sunday is opening an hour earlier to make it consistent and easier to remember.

On Board

by Board President Cat Klarich

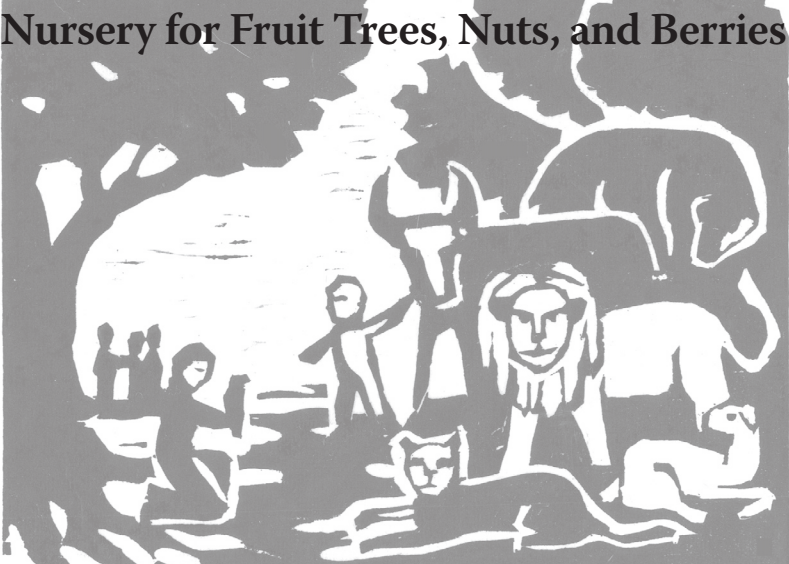
While ice shedding off the roof and ruts forming in the road bring promise of spring, I still have this weary winter feeling that we're not out of the woods yet! Then I am jerked by the reminder that we are one year deep into a pandemic. We've all had to deal with some kind of disappointment and hardship as we navigate this. It is with this understanding and awareness that we, as a Board, vowed to support and be kind to each other. We recognize the unprecedented time we are in and are deeply appreciative of the General Manager, Peter, and amazing staff who have kept the doors of the Plainfield Co-op open so that we can have access to healthy food. Peter marked his one year anniversary in February and we want to acknowledge his superhuman efforts over the past year!

Under these circumstances, we haven't had the luxury to do in person training and retreats, but we took advantage of the opportunities that have become available. It's comforting to meet, even virtually, other Board members from various Co-ops around the country. I was proud to be representing the Plainfield Co-op, rooted in our community since 1972! Some of these Co-ops were spring chickens, some were seasoned like us, but what we all share is that the way we conduct our board business has changed. Our Board Meetings are held via Zoom and we returned to meeting one evening per month. The agenda is posted a week in advance on the website and at the Co-op. Feel free to join our Board

continued >>

EAST HILL TREE FARM

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On Board >>

meetings; the next one is March 22 at 6pm. To join the Zoom meeting:

Meeting ID: 802 454 8579
Password: 558222
<http://zoom.us/j/8024548579>

This year, the Neighboring Food Co-op's 10th Annual Meeting, "Our Future is Co-operative: A Decade Growing an Inclusive, Just & Sustainable Food System," will be held virtually. I'm curious to see how they engage participants as we think ahead to our Annual Meeting. I enjoyed meeting outside at the Rec Field on that perfect summer day in August and hope we can plan to safely meet outside again this summer. What do you think about this? Please let us know: board@plainfieldcoop.com

I want to thank Roseanne Scotta, who served as interim Treasurer, for stepping in to fill a vacancy when we needed her. Rose Paul, who has been serving as Vice President, then volunteered to be Treasurer. She completed the 4 Part Financial Training for Directors and is good at everything she does. This leaves a vacancy for Vice President. Directors Les Snow, Shana Siegel, and Liz Bicknell are supportive, dependable, and committed to the Co-op and I am pleased to be working with them. Thank you, Gail Falk, for continuing to take the minutes! We are sad to see Bob Fancher step down as the Chair of the Marketing Committee. He has done such a great service to the Co-op and was very patient with my 11th hour agenda submissions! While it's going to take two people to wear all of the hats Bob did, Julia Wilk stepped up and volunteered to host and update the website. She is a professional graphic designer and the Co-op is lucky to have her. Welcome, Julia!

While the Co-op ended the year in the black, much of this was due to the dogged pursuit of miscellaneous income

in the form of PPP loans and EIDL grants that Peter applied for. Even though this is a reason to celebrate, we are still under financial hardship, with the aging store infrastructure and limited capacity to serve only 4 customers at a time. We have learned to expect the unexpected and want to be prepared for anything, keeping an ear to the ground for all opportunities that become available for the Co-op and the broader community. We are pursuing a USDA Rural Business Development Grant with support of the Regional Planning Commission. We are delighted to write letters of support for several separate initiatives from Universal School Meals, Farm to School Program, and Early Education Grants that provide access to nutritional food for our communities. Thank you Leah, Membership Coordinator, for staying on top of these Food For All initiatives.

I recognize that it is difficult to find ways to volunteer as a member-owner with the restrictions in place inside the store, but you can help! Please spread the word that all are welcome to shop here, member or not. People have a lot of choices of where to shop, but Co-ops are unique in their mission and values. Will you help us spread the word and be an ambassador for your local Co-op? Please follow the Plainfield Co-op on Instagram, like the Facebook page and spread the love for the Plainfield Co-op! From our little corner in Plainfield, Vermont, thank you for your dedication and support. ❖



General Manager's Report

by Peter Youngbaer

This Newsletter's theme is Variety, an appropriate title as I have a variety of items to report to you. As I write this report, I've just completed my first full year as GM here at the Co-op, and what a year it's been. The pandemic changed everything about how we operated and about my onboarding learning curve, for sure. We've gotten through it so far, and hope springs eternal.

Speaking of Spring, we've got some cosmetic changes in the works for the front end of the store. The entryway is being uncluttered and spiffed up, as well as the checkout counter area. The public bulletin board is now outside under the entry porch roof and will be refreshed the 1st of every month. A mural will ultimately hang in the entryway itself. A new countertop will be installed. These changes will roll out over the next two months as the work is completed. Inspired by a Peer Review Audit from a group called Columinate, a group of Co-op professionals, we believe this will make the Co-op more welcoming and efficient. Watch for this evolution as you come shop.

If you read our Treasurer's Report elsewhere in this issue, you'll see we ended the year in the black. I would say "miraculously," but it took the hard work of our staff on the buying and sales front, as well as the availability of federal and state COVID relief programs and donations from our members. If we looked at sales alone, we would have had a \$40,000 deficit, but with the one-time income, we were able to more than offset that, leaving us modestly in the black.

Sales for the first two months of 2021 are up a bit from 2020, but March will be a key bellweather for the rest of the year. Last March, we saw an extremely

large amount of panic buying at the onset of the COVID phenomenon, then sales crashed for the following several months.

Hopefully, this year will bring a slow but steady increase in the coming months.

As I mentioned in the last issue, we prepared two budgets for 2021. So far, we've been able to stay open, and signs point to us not having to go to Plan B and shutting down the store again to public traffic. Still, we remain under COVID occupancy and staff social distancing restrictions, so are still not at our full potential in this space.

Part of that limitation means we still can't open the Community Center or have working members on site. That doesn't mean there aren't opportunities to become working members as part of our various committees. Elsewhere in this issue, you'll see more on recruiting for those committees. You can help the Co-op be more efficient, reach our sales goals, recruit more members, and earn discounts at the same time. Check it out.

Those Committees have been busy. **The Marketing Committee** developed a plan for the year. We're underwriting Joseph Gainza's Gathering Peace program on WGDR. We ran ads with coupons in the Times Argus for two weeks in February. **The Membership Committee** has finished updating our member database — a project long in the works. A new membership brochure is about to be printed. **The Building Committee** just completed a weatherization project in the Community Center storage closets, getting rid of a ton of stuff that was no good and returning other items to their owners. Air infiltration has been stopped from outside, and the heated back stock

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GM Report >>>

and office space downstairs made warmer. **Our Newsletter Committee** is obviously up to the task; the results of their labor are before your eyes.

The Marketing and Membership Committees need more members, as you'll read elsewhere in this issue. Look for those details in a side bar and in the article from our Membership and Marketing Coordinator, Leah Tedesco.

Your GM and the Co-op's Buyers have been receiving training from consultants from Columinate, a co-op focused group of professionals who advise in all areas of Co-op operations. In addition to the entryway recommendations and membership outreach efforts, the third area they felt we could see immediate improvements was in the managing of our inventory and in meeting our sales mar-

gins. This should help us long term with our financial stability.

Another item I need to mention is our Co-op Annual Meeting. As was the case in 2020, the Board has decided to postpone the meeting until this summer, due to COVID, likely sometime in July or August. In the meantime, please make sure your equity payments are up to date in order to continue to be a "member in good standing" as per our bylaws. Not only is this necessary for voting privileges, but it entitles you to member-only discounts. We've incentivized this benefit for 2021, as you'll see the variety of items in our monthly sales fliers — almost all exclusively member-only discounts. So, get current and save!

Finally, the Board and your GM have been talking about our long term

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strategic planning, and you'll see another article on that subject in this issue, as well. We're working on a capital budget for the building and store equipment, as well as looking hard at the sustainability in our current space. The pending Route 2 Intersection project necessitates a hard and informed look at our options. We're pursuing a planning grant to assist us with professional analysis. These discussions all need the input and engagement of all our members, and we hope you will not be shy in participating.

In the meantime, enjoy the Variety of articles in this issue of the Newsletter,

and the Variety of offerings the Co-op has in our many departments. Variety is the spice of life, as they say, and our spice and herb department is one of the most expansive you'll find anywhere. So, enjoy, and shop the Variety of the Plainfield Co-op. ❖



Varieties of Dumplings

by Glenda Bissex

My German grandmother made chicken and dumplings—plain, baking-powder dumplings cooked in the boiling chicken gravy—one of my childhood favorites, and perhaps a northern version of biscuits and gravy. Many cultures have their own versions of dumplings; often they are stuffed. Our Co-op now carries 3 locally made stuffed dumplings: Bird-hous Pierogi, Sherpa Momo, and Rui's Dumplings. I tasted them all for this review.

Birdhous Pierogi are made in Barton, VT from an impressive list of local ingredients—except for the sea salt. They come frozen in a paper bag that is compostable. I followed the suggested cooking instructions of tossing them in boiling water for a few minutes and then pan-frying. The dough was rich and crumbly, almost like pie crust. The filling was basically very smooth and tasty mashed potatoes although the package said it included spinach and farmer's cheese. This was only one of the flavors the Co-op receives.

Sherpa Momo, authentic Nepalese dumplings made in S. Burlington, come with vegetable, chicken or pork filling. And with a small container of sauce spiced with quite warm curry. You can also buy jars of the sauce separately. The momo are refrigerated and can be microwaved or fried. I fried mine so they were crusty; microwaved they would have been soft.



Rui's handmade vegetable dumplings from East Hardwick come frozen in a generous package of 16 and can be steamed (boiled) or fried. The dough is part whole wheat; the ingredients are local when possible. After boiling, mine were soft like a noodle. The package had a recipe for a tamari-based sauce. Because the finely chopped vegetable filling was very mild flavored, a sauce is a good complement.

Green Mt. Farm Delivery enables small, local, specialty food producers like these to distribute their products to stores like our Co-op. ❖

Co-op Finances: End of Year Report

by Rose Paul, Treasurer

I recently switched hats on the Co-op Board as I was elected Treasurer. I have some good news: we finished our fiscal year (same as calendar year) in the black! This amazing feat in a very difficult year is due to the grit, nimbleness and competence of our General Manager, Peter Youngbaer, and our hard-working, un-daunted staff—and you our loyal shoppers!

I will not report on final numbers until our income taxes have been prepared, but here are the general trends that delivered a net positive income.

Total sales were slightly higher than last year, but less than our target of 3% growth in sales over 2019 (which we would have met if not for the pandemic). We achieved a 0.5% growth in our annual sales compared to 2019 despite the fact that the store was closed for in-person shopping for 3 months. Amazingly, when the store was fully open, we achieved a 12% increase in sales during the first quarter compared to the same period in 2019 (there was panic buying in March), and a 14% increase in sales during the last quarter compared to 2019. Clearly many things are going well and we can be heartened by that. We also suffered from aging equipment (coolers and freezers) that needed several repairs.

We would have ended the year with a modest net loss but we were buoyed by approximately \$66,000 of unexpected ‘miscellaneous income’, allowing us to end the year with a small net profit. We received a PPP loan and an EIDL advance (eventually converted to grants), State COVID 19 Hazard Pay grants, and other donations and grants. These were one-time revenues that we don’t expect to receive in 2021.

Other bright spots in our 2020 finances: our cash on hand was significantly high-

er than the prior year, and our cash flow has been good. We have been able to pay our vendors on time. We made the scheduled loan payments to the Cooperative Fund of New England. Our debt to equity ratio is low. Our cash flow has been bolstered by increased purchase of gift cards, thanks to many loyal shoppers.

Looking ahead, the board is investigating the need to create an equipment replacement fund so that we smooth out the expense of big ticket items such as new coolers. We must continue to increase our total sales, increase the number of member owners and non-member shoppers, maintain our target profit margin, and maintain adequate cash reserves to buffer against the unexpected and to prepare for anticipated large expenses.

For Co-op shoppers the message is simple: please continue to patronize our beloved neighborhood grocery store and we’ll get through this together! ❖



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The Co-op replaced all its fixtures with new LED efficient ones, so these are available for free. All in good working order. Delivery available. Contact Chris Thompson at 793-7328.

Plainfield Food Co-op: To What End?

by Rose Paul, Board member and Treasurer

The Board of the Co-op is actively considering how to begin a long-range planning effort. Our last strategic plan was completed in 2016 and happily, much has been done to fulfill the goals of that plan. However, events such as the pandemic have slowed other actions from being completed and there are new challenges such as the proposed Route 2/ Main Street improvement project.

▶ A look back

The four goals of our 2016 plan were: Develop a master plan for the building; Involve members as more than customers; Become more welcoming to everyone in our community; Address food insecurity in our community.

We have made many improvements to the building over the last five years, thanks to our fantastic building committee. Our equipment, particularly refrigerators and freezers, is quite old. We have improved the interior layout and are working with a food co-op consultant to make the interior more accessible and inviting. We have reached out in various ways to local folks who don't shop at the Co-op, and to non-member shoppers, to understand their preferences and needs, and our marketing committee is adjusting its strategies accordingly.

We have addressed food insecurity in several ways, including donating unclaimed patronage dividends to the Onion River Food Shelf and the Twin Valley Senior Center. Most recently we established the St. Corona Fund to accept monetary donations that food insecure shoppers can use to pay for their purchases.

We have had our financial ups and downs, and we are surviving the challenges of the global pandemic thanks to the loyalty of our Co-op member/owners

and the determination and grit of our hard-working staff and general manager.

▶ Looking ahead

As our Co-op grows and evolves to meet current and future challenges, we begin again to set some long-range goals. For most food co-ops, peering into our future starts with taking a fresh look at our Mission and our Global Ends.

▶ Mission Statement

“As a cooperative association, the Plainfield Co-op serves local producers, growers, and shoppers. Our purpose is to provide an outlet of distribution for local producers and growers, and to generate a sense of community in what would otherwise be a dispersed rural population.”

Is there anything you would change about this mission statement? The Board would like to know.

▶ Global Ends

The mission of the Plainfield Co-op is further defined by our Global Ends. The Ends are the high level, aspirational goals that describe broadly what we hope to achieve. Using the Ends, the Co-op staff and Board interpret what actions we should take to achieve these ends, and determine the benchmarks we will use to measure whether we're being successful.

The Plainfield Co-op will—

1. Distribute healthy, affordable food and other goods.
2. Actively seek local producers and growers, and support the local and regional economy.
3. Sustain the environment through its operations and the products it offers.

continued >>

To What End? >>

4. Increase awareness of cooperative principles and of other cooperative businesses.
5. Foster awareness about the quality and source of our food.
6. Build connections that are essential for a vibrant community.

What would you change about these ends? Is there something missing, or something that needs to be revised?

The Board of the Co-op is elected by and accountable to the member/owners. We need to hear from you! Please drop us an email at info@plainfieldcoop.com, or attend a monthly board meeting, usually the last week of the month, where the first agenda item is always to hear from visitors. ❖

Co-op Committees Need You!

Two of our Co-op committees
are in need of new blood:
Marketing and Membership



The **Marketing Committee**, Chaired by Julia Rapczynski – who stepped up when long-time Chair Bob Fancher stepped down – has only one other non-staff member and one staff member currently. The Committee generally meets once a month and implements the Marketing Plan they come up with each year. They have a Board-approved budget and work to make the best use of those dollars in promoting the Co-op to draw in business. Print and other media ads are created, as well as direct mailings and promotional items. A direct mailing to Plainfield and Marshfield residents is next up on the project list. If you have marketing skills or simply ideas and energy to carry them out, this committee could use you. Contact Julia at rapcsyjk@hotmail.com or Peter at Peter@plainfieldcoop.com.

The **Membership Committee**, Chaired by Paula Emery, has only one other member currently, Leah Tedesco, our Membership and Marketing Coordinator. The Committee has not had regularly scheduled meetings, so is really in need of more people. There are ideas aplenty: a membership outreach ambassador program, working member initiatives, and other membership engagement vehicles, but we need folks to refine them and carry them out. Growing our membership is the best way to build our business and to build our equity – the reserves we have to help fund improvements. You can really have a lasting impact on the future of the Co-op. Contact Paula at pemery@pshift.com or Leah at Leah@plainfieldcoop.com.

Note: Committee members are considered working members and earn a 7% discount in the Co-op for their committee work. ❖

New State Law Defines “Local”

by Gail Falk

When you check out at the Co-op, you can look at the register screen and see what proportion of your purchases were “local” and your receipt will have an “L” next to any local foods. Many of us want to keep track of how good a job we’re doing personally to choose local products, and the store, in turn, through its record of purchases, keeps track of how many local foods and other products it is selling.

Ten years ago, it was a matter of guesswork to estimate how much local food our Co-op was selling, but the Point of Sale computer system that the store installed in the early 2010s made keeping track a matter of a keystroke. Now when products are entered into the

computer system, not only does the Buyer record the price but also whether the product is organic (“O”), regional (“R”) and/or local (“L”).

But what is *local*? It’s been only 14 years since the word *locavore* was chosen Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionary and people started debating what *local* means. A few years ago, for the purpose of labeling our products, Co-op staff came up with this definition: *We define local as any product grown or produced within 100 miles of the Co-op, while regional extends to 250 miles from the Co-op.*

continued >>



Our Farmers Thank You

Since 1919, the farm families of Cabot Co-op have been passionate about making the world’s best cheese. We use only the purest ingredients to craft our creamy, delicious classics. Just maybe, that’s why we’ve won every major award for taste. Learn more at cabotcheese.coop



A new state law, enacted last summer, tells our Co-op and all other Vermont businesses that “local” means made or produced in Vermont. Previously, the term “local” could vary depending upon where a food product was sold because “local” food had to originate in Vermont or within 30 miles of the point of sale. As a result, Quebec food could be “local” in Newport, New York food “local” in Burlington, Massachusetts food “local” in Brattleboro, and New Hampshire goods “local” in White River. Now all “local” food is also “Vermont” food, and the definition is consistent throughout the state.

The new law addresses the thorny question of how to classify products that are made in Vermont but are not made from ingredients grown in Vermont, such as coffee, beer, or bread. The law says that a product made from ingredients that are not regularly produced or available in sufficient quantities in Vermont can be called local if the headquarters of the company are in Vermont and substantial transformation of the products occurs in Vermont. Thus, for instance, 802 Coffee can be considered “local” as well as breads made from wheat grown in the Midwest.

The law doesn’t prevent the Co-op from highlighting products that come from growers close by. We just have to be specific. For instance, we could advertise produce as “local to Central Vermont” or “local to Marshfield/Plainfield/Cabot.”

Re-labeling products is a huge job for a small store like ours. “It is a huge amount of work for our buyers to go through our entire inventory of thousands of items and appropriately label them as ‘local,’ ” says General Manager Peter Youngbaer. “I can

tell you that we continue to monitor the guidance and do what we can to update the system. However, it is beyond the capacity of our buyers to research every product, and we must depend on the suppliers and manufacturers to accurately label their products.”

And, while we are considering product origins, it is important to rededicate ourselves to the concept of the “regional” economy, a related part of our Co-op’s

End 2: The Plainfield Co-op will actively seek local producers and growers, and support the local and regional economy.

Ends. In a blog post weighing the impact of the new “local” definition, Skinny Pancake CEO Benjy Adler (writing under the name “Benjy Pan-

cake”) urges customers to cherish the value of the regional economy. He references **The New England Food Vision** as a resource on the value of regional food independence and he concludes:

Price, scale, and affordability often lead us to source beyond the hyper-local foods that come from the backyards and small scale farms of our friends and neighbors. And that’s where “regional” plays an important role.

These days you will notice signs... highlighting “New England grown.” If there isn’t a great VT-based option in front of you, it is money wisely spent to buy that New England produce instead of the options sourced from California, Mexico, China, or parts unknown.... Indeed, a sustainable, delicious, nutritious and economically healthy food system is, in fact, a regional food system. ❖



Membership and Marketing Committee report

by Leah Tedesco, Membership & Marketing Co-ordinator

The Membership Committee has been updating our membership brochure to be given to prospective and new members. Paula Emery has taken on most of the work for this task. To expand the opportunities to be a working member, we have implemented an Ambassador Program. Recruiting one member will earn the working member 3% discount for one week, and two members will earn them 7% discount. Be sure to include the Ambassador's name at the top of the new member form. There will usually be a delay between the signup and when the discount is implemented.

The Marketing Committee has placed an advertisement in the Times Argus for the first two weeks of February. Bob Fancher designed and created it. Customers who presented the ad at the register got 5% off their order (excluding alcohol, cannot be combined with other discounts). To process this discount, Kevin Levesque created our first ever barcode coupon for Floor Staff to scan at each register.

The store had round logo stickers printed to be handed out to new members, as well as when existing members make a payment to be in good standing.

For 2021, we have purchased an underwriting spot for Gathering Peace on WGDR.

We are now listed by the Vermont Cheese Council.

Bob Fancher is stepping down as Chair of the Marketing Committee, with Julie Rapczynski taking on that role. Bob is in the process of transferring website and email maintenance to Julia Wilk, who is moving both to more modern hosting services. Bob will still be doing the marketing email. Our buyers are in the

process of compiling an updated list, with blurbs, of vendors that appear on our website.

Two of our Floor Staff members, Deb Barnwell and Fiona Winter, are working on special surprise art projects for the Co-op. Be on the lookout for those soon. Chris Thompson has moved the community bulletin board to the exterior entryway. This board will be reset at the beginning of each month.

Both the Marketing and the Membership Committees are in need of members. If interested, please contact Leah, our Membership & Marketing Coordinator, at membership@plainfieldcoop.com. ❖



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Robin Taylor

An Interview by Gail Falk

Five-foot snow drifts line the greenhouse walls outside on a late February day, but inside, green spinach, kale and lettuce shoots are stretching toward the sun. It's the beginning of a new farming year at Robin Taylor's gardens and greenhouses off Beaver Meadow Road in Marshfield, an annual cycle of growing fruits, flowers, and vegetables that has shaped her life for more than 40 years.



Spinach coming up in the greenhouse

For nearly all those years Plainfield Coop shoppers have been enjoying the fruits of Taylor's work — fat asparagus spears, tender early lettuce heads, never-fail Sungold tomato plants, heirloom tomatoes, tender nutritious kale, winter squash, bright flowers, and sweet flavorful cantaloupes.

Taylor came to Vermont from Massachusetts in 1975 to attend Goddard's Adult Degree Program. In 1979, her garden in North Montpelier produced more

spinach than she could use. A friend suggested offering the spinach to a restaurant in Montpelier, which was happy to buy it. "That was eye-opening," she says, her clear blue eyes sparkling. She realized she could make money doing what she loved.

A self-taught gardener, Taylor learned to love gardening from her grandmother. "She was my gardening guru," she says. During her first years of gardening, Taylor didn't earn enough to make a living and had trouble finding work in Vermont. She went back and forth to Massachusetts, but soon decided she didn't want to live in the city and that she would come back to Vermont and try to survive. "Vermont isn't easy," she says with a shrug, but she thrives on country living and the alternative economics of barter, nonprofits and cooperatives.



Looking at six-foot snow outside greenhouse

It took her a while to find the right spot. She had a garden in Plainfield, but it was too small. She went to work at Smith Farm when it was still a dairy operation and built her first greenhouse there. Now, in Marshfield, she has the space for a

continued >>

large hoop house, smaller greenhouses, and ample outdoor acreage for flowers and vegetables on land owned by Russell Codling. “I helped him when he was farming, and now he helps me,” she explains.

Over the years, the market for fruits and vegetables, along with her crops and her energies, have evolved. She started with greens, lettuce and tomatoes and kept adding. “Every year I experiment with something,” she says. Her large sweet melons have been one of her most successful experiments. Last year she grew squash that are a combination of acorn and delicata (acorns aren’t so popular any more). This year she’s planning to try winter cilantro. In the past she sold to NECI, Foodworks, Food to Table, and several restaurants that are now gone. Buffalo Mountain Co-op in Hardwick and Plainfield Co-op have been consistent outlets for her crops, and she sells flowers to Botanical Flowers in Montpelier.

More people in the area are growing vegetable crops, “which is good,” she says, but means more competition. As a one-woman operation Taylor is making changes as she ages. She’s giving up her asparagus bed — too much weeding — , and growing more flowers, which are easier on the back than crates of melons and tomatoes. She would love to find a



Adjusting strings for tomatoes

younger person to garden with her and learn from her and help with the long hours and heavy lifting.

Taylor’s connection with Plainfield Co-op is deep and longstanding. From 1985 to 1989 she managed the Co-op after Cathy Chodorkoff left. There were just two paid staff back then — she and Ellen Bresler ran the entire operation along with volunteers. She says there were a lot of small suppliers before consolidation; “I would shop the sales to keep prices down. I worked *very hard*.” It was a much smaller operation then — \$100,000 a year in sales compared to more than \$1 million a year now. But the store was solvent when she decided it was time to move on. Reflecting on changes at the Co-op, she says she appreciates that staff have time to be friendly. “I think it’s lovely now.” Back in the 80’s she said, “I was always so stressed and maybe not as lovely as people are now.” She’s glad the Co-op is hanging on, and hopes it will continue and thrive. ❖



Entry to greenhouse

Photo credit: Gail Falk

RECIPES collected by Debra Stoleroff

Cajun Shrimp

If you are a shrimp lover, this is a nice variation from your typical way to cook them. You can also substitute the shrimp with scallops or mix it up with a variety of your favorite seafood.

Ingredients

- 1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 teaspoons Cajun seasoning (combination of smoked paprika, chili powder, onion powder, garlic powder, cayenne)
- ¼ cup unsalted butter (½ stick)
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
- 2 celery ribs, thinly sliced
- 1 red pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 (15-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1 to 2 teaspoons hot sauce, to taste (optional)
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon dried basil
- 2 dried bay leaves
- Fine sea salt and black pepper
- Steamed rice, for serving



Preparation

1. Toss the raw shrimp with 1 teaspoon Cajun seasoning and set aside.
2. In a large, heavy skillet, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Sprinkle the flour on top and stir constantly with a wooden spoon until a roux forms.
3. Add the onion, celery and bell pepper, increase the heat to medium and cook until softened, stirring occasionally. Stir in the garlic.
4. Stir in ⅓ cup water, then the tomatoes, hot sauce (if using), sugar, thyme, oregano, basil, bay leaves, 1½ teaspoons salt, ½ teaspoon black pepper and the remaining 1 teaspoon Cajun seasoning. Bring to a simmer, then reduce the heat to low. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes until thickened, stirring occasionally to make sure that the bottom doesn't burn. (If needed, add more water.)
5. Once the stew has thickened, add the seasoned shrimp and simmer until opaque and cooked through, about 5 minutes, turning each piece halfway through the cooking time. Taste and adjust seasoning.
6. Serve over steamed rice. ☆

Welcome, Julia Wilk, our new webmaster

Julia first studied web development and computer programming back in 2006. After a long detour into professional French Translation and hardware repair, she eventually came back to put her entrepreneurial skills to work as a full-time web developer and digital marketer. Throughout the years, she made many connections with other professionals and eventually settled in scenic rural Vermont.

Julia has been designing websites since 2017. With a background in languages and comfortable with all things technical, web design and content coordination are an obvious fit for her skills.

Julia is passionate about local, sustainable food networks. She's excited to be working with Plainfield Co-op for their webmaster needs.



Coconut Chicken Curry

Chicken curry is a quick easy variation away from roasted chicken. It is delicious served over rice, quinoa or your favorite grain.

Ingredients

- 2½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 tablespoon ground paprika
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
- 2 teaspoons salt, plus more as needed
- ⅓ cup oil
- 2 yellow onions, finely diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 (13-ounce) can unsweetened coconut milk
- 1½ tablespoons fish sauce, plus more as needed
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cayenne



Preparation

1. Trim the chicken thighs of excess fat and cut into 1/2- to 1-inch pieces; transfer to a bowl. Add the paprika, turmeric and salt, and mix well. Let the chicken marinate at room temperature while you prepare the other ingredients.
2. In a large pot, sauté onions and garlic.
3. Add the marinated chicken.
4. Pour in the coconut milk and bring to a near boil. Let the coconut milk simmer to thicken a bit.
5. Add the fish sauce. Stir in 1½ cups water and bring to a near boil.
6. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the chicken is tender, 30 to 45 minutes.
7. Stir in the curry powder and cayenne, then remove from the heat. ★

Waste Not Want Not

What does the Co-op do with its Compost?

by Jezebel Crow, Staff

Did you know that the Plainfield Co-op feeds a farm with its food waste? That's right, any food waste goes right to The Gypsy Farm of Woodbury. Though the Co-op is conservative with food and tries its hardest to eliminate food waste, it is inevitable that any grocery store produces compost. For years predating the Vermont law forbidding food waste being sent to the landfill, the Co-op has been feeding the dairy goats, chickens, ducks, and turkeys at The Gypsy Farm. The animals in turn produce eggs, raw milk, goat kids, amazing composted manure, and the goat milk soap that we sell at the Co-op. The animals thank you, and together we are closing the circle and wasting nothing.



Alan Paschell's Really Good Chocolate Pudding

Alan Paschell was one of my many housemates when I first moved to Central Vermont from Burlington in 1977. He was/is a great cook (potter and carpenter). Having grown up on chocolate pudding made from a box, I remember being wowed watching him whip up this delicious pudding. (Alan – if you are reading this newsletter, I hope you don't mind my sharing.)

— Debra Stoleroff

Ingredients

- 3 squares bittersweet chocolate
- 3 cups milk
- 5 tablespoons flour (white)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar (depending on your sweet tooth)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla



Preparation

1. Melt chocolate squares in a double boiler.
2. When melted pour in the milk SLOWLY. Stir continuously. Keep stirring.
3. In separate bowl mix together the white flour, sugar and salt.
4. When it is hot, slowly pour $\frac{3}{4}$ cups of the chocolatey milk mixture into the flour mixture. Stir out lumps.
5. Slowly pour the batter back into the double boiler with chocolatey milk. Stir until the mixture thickens to your taste.
6. Stir in the vanilla.
7. Pour into separate serving cups or large bowl to cool and serve. ★