

The Plainfield Co-op Newsletter

Fall 2021

Annual Meeting



Photo: Gail Falk

Open Seven Days a Week

Monday – Saturday: 9 AM–7 PM Sunday: 10 AM–7 PM

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Deadline for the Winter issue is December 15. 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.

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About This Newsletter



The hundreds of members who didn't attend the Annual Meeting can learn about it here. Did we finally make the big decision? Read Gail

Falk's report of the meeting and Peter Youngbaer's discussion of it in his General Manager's report and Alice Merrill's dissenting voice. President Cat Klarich's article will catch you up on recent personnel comings and goings, including the two new Board members introduced here. How are we doing financially? Read Rose Paul's user-friendly Treasurer's report.

Wondering about the impact of Danone's recent cancellation of contracts with 27 Vermont organic milk producers? Read Glenda Bissex's "Endangered Organic" article. Or just nourish yourself and your family with some delicious fall foods—how about carrot and orange soup?

This newsletter is brought to you by the contributions of many members. Gail Falk captured moments from the Annual Meeting in her photos. Special thanks to Sarah Albert, former layout editor, who has volunteered her skills once again while layout editor Elizabeth Mathai is out of the country.

We welcome your contributions of letters, photos, cartoons, poems, whatever. Deadline for the winter issue is December 15.

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On Board!

by Board President Cat Klarich

What a year it's been for our little Co-op! We've gone from being open to closed to open with restrictions. This summer, the Co-op opened without restrictions and things seemed to be going back to a "new normal." Recently, there was an uptick in COVID cases and the restrictions had to be put back into place. It's been quite the roller coaster ride! Checking in with Peter and the staff on a typical shift, the events of the day are generally bonkers and it's not even noon! It is a challenge to keep a small rural food cooperative open in the best of times. In the worst of times—systemic racism, climate crisis, and a global pandemic—it's almost impossible. Despite the toll, the staff are resolved to keeping this essential resource available to the community. The services the Co-op provides are precisely why the staff are considered essential workers. On behalf of the Board, thank you all so very much for all you do. We value your strength and resilience, your flexibility and loyalty.

I joined the Board because the thought of Plainfield without the Co-op made me want to move! So much of my passion for the Plainfield Co-op was wrapped up in my sentimental attachment to the physical store. What I have learned in the past couple of years, however, is that the Co-op is so much more than the store—it's about the membership and broader community having access to good food and being able to pay staff a livable wage. It is the Board's duty to work towards a thriving Co-op, not one that is merely surviving. Understanding the limitations of the current store, we proposed resolutions at the Annual

Meeting and received the membership's approval to investigate other possible locations to expand the Co-op. If you weren't present, Gail does an excellent job in her article summarizing the Annual Meeting.

Since the meeting, we have been receiving a lot of queries, particularly the question "Is the Co-op moving?" The answer quite simply is we don't know yet. Peter's article outlines his experience over the year and a half that informed the Board's decision to explore alternate properties, and Alice Merrill wrote an article about keeping the Co-op in its current location. Whether we stay or move is a song that we have been singing for years in harmony with our neighbors or, as I lovingly refer to them, our cousins, the Buffalo Mountain Co-op. Like the Buffalo Mountain Co-op, we are an established Co-op in a historic building with similar space constraints, ADA inaccessibility, and parking issues. The Buffalo Mountain Co-op Board recently announced an opportunity to purchase the Hardwick Village Market property, but the purchase is contingent on member-owner approval. Similarly, if the Plainfield Co-op's Board finds a property that we think is a good fit, we would present the feasibility and financial viability to the member-owners so you can make an informed decision and vote accordingly. We appreciate you putting your trust in us to explore all opportunities available to the Co-op.

A recent article in the Burlington Free Press reports that "Vermont ranks second highest for monthly grocery costs" at

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nearly \$500 per person, second only to Hawaii! This figure is based on data using “basic” grocery items, not local or organic. An average VT family of 4 spends an average of \$1200+ a month on groceries and that doesn’t include toilet paper! I receive candid feedback all the time from local families that the Plainfield Co-op is too expensive to shop at. We live in a small rural community where most families live at or below the poverty line and the local public school students are eligible for free meals through the Federal Title I program. For me, this was one of the biggest reasons I keep an open mind about relocation because I believe that better visibility and efficiency would give the Co-op more buying power, making the Co-op more accessible and welcome to all.

Sincere gratitude and the warmest wishes to our GM Peter Youngbaer who is retiring. Little did he know his emergency management experience would come in so handy one week on the job. If anyone deserves a long vacation, it’s Peter. He is the ultimate essential worker that dug deep and stuck it out during a scary and weird time to be running a grocery store. He is leaving big shoes to fill!

A huge shout out to all of Plainfield Co-op’s essential workers, especially Chloe and Kevin who moved on after so many years devoted to the Co-op, and loyal staff member, Eben, who has logged many, many hours at the Co-op during the pandemic. Chances are, he was working the last time you shopped!

Thank you to my fellow Board members Liz, Rose, Roseanne, Shana, and Les for their good work this past year. We say a warm farewell and thank you to Shana who is stepping down and to Les who has completed his term. Shana provided invaluable support developing the Capital

Improvement Plan, and Les brought years of Policy Governance experience to the table. We welcome two new board members, Jess Taylor and Lucy Blue. Thanks for stepping up. We’re looking forward to working together!

Thank you to all of the dedicated committee volunteers, with a standing ovation for the Building Committee and Chris Thompson, for keeping the Co-op’s mechanicals up and running. The Building Committee has an opening for a Chair. I know there are member-owners out there who have the skills! Please consider lending a hand. Joining a committee is a great way to get involved with the Co-op. Committee volunteers also receive a working member discount.

The General Manager Hiring Committee isn’t ready for a big announcement as of the deadline for the newsletter, but we look forward to an introduction soon! This newsletter is an important communication tool for the Board to reach the membership. Credit to the Newsletter Committee for putting together such a great read and to those of you who read it! (I’m talking to you, Tammy and George!) Thanks to the member volunteers, with special gratitude to Paula Emery and Judy Cyprian for their help at the Annual Meeting. To the member-owners who have sustained the Plainfield Co-op for the past 50 years, demonstrating how much you value the Co-op, thank you a million times! ♦

Cat’s Meow: I had a recent conversation with staff member and awesome mural artist, Deb, who wanted me to remind the member-owners about SO. What is SO? Special Orders! Placing an SO is a member-owner benefit and a great way to save money on items that you use a lot of, like toilet paper! Check in with a Staff member and place your SO!

General Manager's Report

Summary of the Quarter - June, July, August

by Peter Youngbaer

The summer months are usually our busiest in terms of sales and this year has been no exception. We met our sales targets and profit margins, but we have also seen some expenses higher than usual. Those costs are in the areas of repairs and maintenance, equipment replacement, and personnel costs. The latter due mostly to having to recruit and train an unusually high number of new staff.

Two long-time staff members, Chloe Budnick and Kevin Levesque, departed in August. Their contributions to the operation of the Co-op were many, and the institutional work platforms they left behind will continue to serve us long into the future. We also had two staffers head off or back to college, and lost a couple of subs, so have had to bring on and train a lot of new folks.

COVID-19 continues to haunt our central Vermont community, and we had to reinstate COVID restrictions for the store: masks required, four customer limit, social distancing, and no members working on the floor or in the back stock area.

Annual Meeting Summary

On August 29, 59 people attended the Co-op's Annual Meeting, 47 of whom were members in good standing and eligible to vote. Two of our General Manager candidates attended, as did the President of the Board of the Belfast, Maine Co-op.

The membership heard various reports from the Board and GM, elected two new Board members—Lucy Blue and

Jessie Taylor, and adopted the three resolutions that had been proposed by the Board. The upshot of those resolutions was to let the Board know that the membership was here for the long haul, no matter where we are located, but also authorized the Board to explore alternative locations and gave them authority to put money down as a deposit, right of first refusal, or other mechanism that could hold a potential property until the membership voted to acquire it. All real estate transactions must be approved by the membership, as per our Bylaws.

Attendees enjoyed refreshments and door prizes as well, while following COVID protocols for contact tracing, masking, and social distancing, which was much appreciated.

It can also be said that there was a fair amount of consternation over the voting process. Our Bylaws state that all decisions (except Board elections) must be made by consensus. But, if 80% of those attending agree that consensus can't be reached, then decisions can be made by 2/3 majority. Thus, it was a ponderous process that first took a vote on whether or not folks though consensus could be reached (it couldn't), then voting again to see if 2/3 supported the proposals (they did).

As I pointed out at the meeting, this process is a higher threshold than the Congressional filibuster. I personally think it gets in the way of the Co-op making decisions. I checked some other Co-

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op Bylaws, including Belfast, Maine's since their Board President was here. Their Bylaws require a 10% quorum vs. our 5%, but then decisions are made by majority. I propose that we amend our Bylaws to do the same. Of course, ironically, we'll have to use the current consensus/80%/2/3 process to do so.

Short term updates: Since the Annual Meeting, a number of things of note have taken place. First, our new furnace was installed, tested, and is ready to heat the building for the winter. Sales are declining slightly more than usual for the season. We attribute that to state and national trends that other co-ops are seeing. Buying habits are changing as people go out to dinner more, despite the continuing presence of COVID in the community. We also believe the pedestrian bridge construction has had an

impact, and the new Fox Market in East Montpelier is pulling some business.

Our Marketing Committee is preparing for National Co-op Month in October. You will see signage in the store to this effect, including identifying items on the shelves that come from other co-ops. One of our Ends is to support other co-ops. We're reaching out to other area co-ops to see what we can do jointly to mark the occasion. As I write this, I'm waiting for a Zoom interview with the General Manager of the Washington Electric Co-op, with whom we share constituencies. The interview will be done by the editor of WEC's newsletter, The Cooperative Currents, and that article will be featured in their October edition. The Committee is also looking ahead to next year, our 50th Anniversary. However, they will

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need additional money in the budget to carry out some of the projects (see budget discussion below).

Our new freezer units are scheduled to ship on October 4. We don't have a specific date for arrival and installation, but when they do arrive, we'll need to close the Co-op for at least a day and a half, perhaps two full days. This will, unfortunately, cost us sales and revenue, but is unavoidable due to the space constrictions in our building. We will need to dismantle the current four-door unit on site, move some of the grocery shelving and inventory, and remove the receiving/ repacking counter in the back stock area in order to allow the two new units to come in the back door, turn the corner, and be put in place in the front retail area. They then need to be stood up and sit for 24 hours to

allow the coolant to settle before the units are turned on. Once they reach proper temperature, they can be re-stocked and the store re-opened.

Longer term: The Co-op continues to face major challenges in our building, with structural and equipment needs as well as operational sustainability. The last issue of the Newsletter went into great detail about those challenges and opportunities. At the Annual Meeting, we discussed those further and took actions to begin to address them more long term. Let me give one example.

A key metric for looking at a co-op's financial sustainability is the ratio of personnel costs to overall sales. The Plainfield Co-op's number is 27%, roughly double what it should be for a store our size. A natural first reaction would be to say, "So, cut staff by half." However, our staff is about as bare bones as you can get. We are one deep in most positions. We have no back up buyers or administrators, and barely have enough floor staff and substitutes to keep the store open. In fact, we have closed several days due to lack of staff.

A more appropriate second reaction would be to say, "So, let's double the size of the store." Frankly, that is what we need to do. Doing so will provide appropriate space for operational efficiencies and proper equipment. It can also provide space for a deli department, usually the most financially productive department of any co-op. It would also provide opportunity for local growers and producers to grow their businesses, thus increasing the economic impact of the Co-op on our community.

However, that's not where we are today. As we begin to build next year's budget,

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we already know that personnel costs will be higher for all staff, but especially the new GM, as well as repairs and maintenance and equipment. Our Point of Sale system is old (DOS based) and experiences glitches, our email, phone, and security systems will cost more. Most co-ops spend 1.25% of their gross sales on marketing—we spend less than half of 1%. Further, in order to fund our Capital Improvement Plan, we will also need to make additional profit to set aside for those costs. It is hard for me to see a balanced budget, much less a profitable one in the near future in this space. I do think we need to be prepared to run in the red short term unless major changes are made.

My Final GM Report

So, this is my final GM report, as the hiring process for the new GM nears conclusion. I have a few projects that I'm hoping to see completed before I leave. Installation of the new freezer units is at the top of the heap. Supporting staff who have recently taken on new roles (Buyer/Administrative Assistant) is right up there as well. Working with our tax preparers to complete our 2020 Federal and State tax returns, including putting

in place what is necessary to draw down the new Employee Retention Tax Credits authorized under the American Rescue Plan is an important administrative task that I also hope to complete. This should provide a significant benefit for the Co-op, albeit one time, as were the other COVID relief actions. Finally, doing a comprehensive onboarding of the new GM will help ensure a smooth transition.

It has been both a pleasure and a challenge to serve as your General Manager the past year and a half. The Co-op had challenges to begin with, and the arrival of a global pandemic didn't make it any easier. Personally, it has been incredibly stressful to try to keep the Co-op open, try to keep staff safe, try to keep myself and my family safe and deal with not seeing most of our family for over a year. It has been, quite candidly, an all-consuming job. If I can wish anything for my successor, it would be for COVID to disappear so they can focus on the Co-op's future.

Our Co-op has been a community asset for the past 50 years and, with appropriate attention, vision, and hard work, can continue to be for the future. Thank you for the opportunity to have served you. It's time for me to be "just a member." ♦

Treasurer's Report

by Rose Paul

I will compare our first two fiscal quarters with the year-to-date. Our fiscal year is January 1 to December 31. Our first quarter, during the winter months, is typically slower, then sales pick up in the summer months. This year we eked out an \$800 net profit in the first quarter (Jan-Mar), then for the second quarter (Apr -Jun) we had a net profit of \$2,811.

For the first two quarters, our sales were higher than we predicted in the budget, so thank you to our shoppers and our Marketing and Membership committees who are doing a fine job! We consistently met our target for gross profit margin which is important. Our buyers worked conscientiously to keep products moving on the shelves at the right price, and to reduce spoilage.

Now, if we look at the year-to-date, as of August 31, we have a net loss of \$5,775 over the eight months due to losses in July and August. Our sales were slightly lower than budgeted for July and August, and expenses were higher than budgeted. Expenses were up for a variety of reasons: cost of advertising for hiring new staff; double staff shifts to train new people; replacing a label printer; large losses due to food spoilage because refrigerator and freezer units have repeatedly failed; and repair bills for those units.

Our freezer is at the end of its lifespan and this fall we'll have an unbudgeted expense of \$18,000 to replace it and another estimated \$6,000 in lost sales during installation. We recently replaced our furnace as well at a cost of \$4,000 which was not anticipated in the budget.

It is clear that our monthly profits are slim, and setbacks due to faulty equipment and spoilage are budget busters that can quickly erase our hard-earned profits. (Note: many people think the Co-op is a non-profit but this isn't true. We are a co-operative association.)

I'd like to talk about our cash assets and cash flow to close.

As of August 31, we had \$121,713 in our various bank accounts. Our savings account, which we don't dip into to pay the routine bills, had \$91,116. So in the short-term, we can cover the costs of these repairs and new equipment without having to take out a loan. We have a line of credit for \$45,000 at the Northeast Cooperative Bank and we owe \$17,571 on this loan.

We have an excellent record of paying our bills on time throughout this year, including the loan repayment. All bills are being paid on time and our cash flow to cover these payments has been good. ♦

Marketing Committee Update

by Leah Tedesco

The Marketing Committee is preparing for National Co-op Month, which is in October. This year's theme is Build Back for Impact. We have been reaching out to other co-ops in the area to see if they would be interested in combining efforts and/or resources in promotional materials.

Annual Meeting 2021

by Gail Falk

This year's Annual Meeting was much more than the usual officers' reports and elections. More than 50 members and friends of the Co-op gathered at the Plainfield Opera House August 29 for an in-depth discussion about the future of the store, and, in the end, 70 per cent of members present voted to authorize the Board to seek a new location for the store, and, if a suitable and affordable location were found, to commit up to \$10,000 to reserve the property.

Over the years, the Co-op's members and staff have shared numerous conversations about whether to move or to remain in the Co-op's historic building. But this year's meeting was different. The Board set aside time for all voices present to be heard and then asked the membership to vote "yes" or "no" on whether to start the process of finding a new location.

General Manager Peter Youngbaer set the stage for the conversation in his report to the membership. He described the challenges of maintaining an aged building with inadequate retail and work space at a location with no room to expand. "I have concluded," he said, "that the Co-op cannot sustain itself financially at our current location and recommend no further investment in the current building."

During an hour-long session moderated by mediator Judy Cyprian, members shared their thoughts and questions about relocating. Those opposed to relocating described their love for the historic building and its location in the vil-

lage center, and its walkable location for people who live in Plainfield Village. Those who opposed relocation noted that moving

- Would contribute to sprawl
- Might not bring in more customers
- Would require us to have a mortgage, while currently we own our building outright
- May not find a buyer for our current building
- Would take us out of the historic district.

Some one doubted that we could find a suitable location on Route 2, and others opposed a location that more people would access by car.



Photo: Gail Falk

Those who favored moving described the advantages of a new building with more space and more efficient design in

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a more visible location. Those who favored relocation said a new site would provide

- Room for an expanded, handicap accessible building
- An opportunity for creating an energy-efficient space
- More customers because of greater convenience and visibility for Route 2 commuters and tourists
- More jobs and a larger market for local farmers
- Freedom from the design restrictions of being a historic building
- More efficient layout and larger inventory, leading to more efficient staff time
- A better use of time and money than trying to retrofit and repair our aging building.

Some people said they support moving to a new location with greater space and visibility, but want to be sure it will still be within Plainfield Village, and will have a walkable/bikeable location. Others want to be assured that the Community Center will be retained either in the old building or at a new building.

Following discussion, the members voted on three resolutions proposed by the Board:

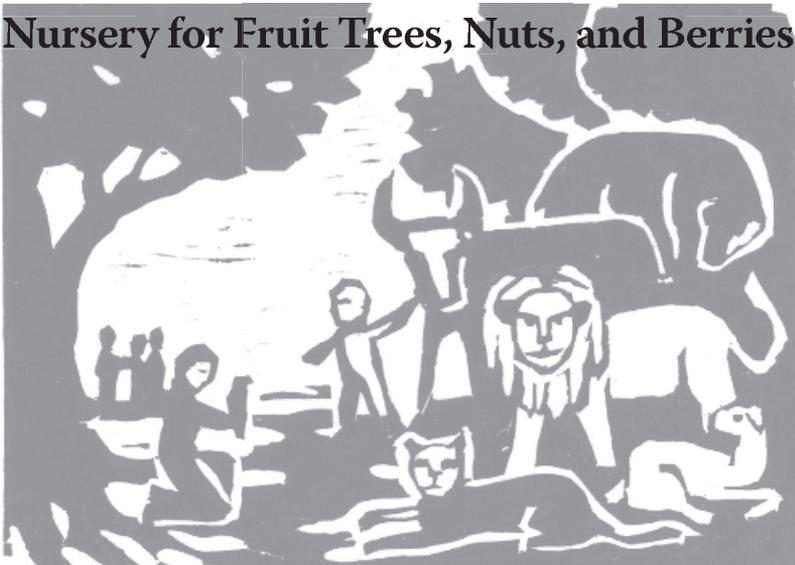
1. *Given the hurdles the Co-op is facing in the coming years and the amount of money we need to keep it open ...do you, the membership, support all the work that will be involved to keep the cooperative open...*

This resolution was agreed to by consensus.

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2. Will you, the membership, agree to support the board in exploring other locations for the Co-op?

The members present were unable to come to consensus on this resolution. On a hands-raised vote, 29 of 41 voting members (11 opposed, 2 abstaining) agreed.

3. Will you, the membership, agree to authorize the board to spend up to \$10,000 to reserve a potential property while we seek membership approval?

The members present were unable to come to consensus on this resolution. On a hands-raised vote, 31 of 40 voting members (7 opposed, 2 abstaining) agreed.

Following the votes, Moderator Paula Emery spoke for those present in asking the Board to keep members updated on the status of relocation.

Board elections

Two current Board members, Les Snow and Shana Siegel, are leaving the Board, and four members are remaining. The by-laws require 5 to 7 Board members. Two Co-op members expressed interest in the joining the Board: Jess Taylor of Plainfield

Village, for a three-year term, and Lucy Blue of Marshfield, for a one-year term, filling out the remainder of Shana Siegel's term. Both candidates were elected unanimously.



Photo: Gail Falk



Photo: Gail Falk

Recognition and Commendations

Recognizing that the work of many people goes into sustaining the Co-op, several people were specially recognized:

- Deb Barnwell for painting the mural in the entryway
- Peter Youngbaer, for his extraordinary work in leading the Co-op through the pandemic year.
- Chloe Budnick for her long years on staff
- Shana Sigel for her leadership in developing a Capital Improvement budget ♦

Building Committee

If you love hands-on work, problem solving, and historic buildings, the Co-op needs you! The Building Committee is seeking a new Chair. This Committee helps coordinate repair and maintenance projects throughout the year. Committee volunteers receive a working member discount!

Peter Youngbaer (peter@plainfield-coop.com) or Cat Klarich (catklarich@gmail.com) would be so happy to hear from you.

A Voice from the Village

by Alice Merrill, Co-op Member

Mission statement: as a cooperative association, the Plainfield Co-op serves local producers and 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.

If you, Co-op Member, haven't read the Summer 2021 Newsletter, please do. It is also important to review the 2018 G2G Marketing Study. Both of these can be found on the Co-op website:

plainfieldcoop.com/newsletter/2021-summer

plainfieldcoop.com/documents/2018%20marketing%20study

After about 50 years, the Co-op is ready to jump higher and be more competitive in the natural food market. Both Management and the Board advocate for a move to a larger storefront on US 2—a sustainable co-op that will provide local jobs at a livable wage and better support local farmers. At the 2021 Annual Meeting, by a 2/3 majority vote, Membership agreed.

The reasons for the relocation are compelling. The obvious question: is it worth investing \$250,000 in a business with limited retail space, visibility, and parking that struggles to be sustainable?

But the question I have is: how will the Co-op relocating to US 2 affect the lower village and is it possible to make it sustainable at its current location? One business leaving can have a big impact on the neighborhood. It is important to realize that all businesses and amenities in the village support one another and the loss of one would affect the others.

For several decades, a lot has been done to improve the vitality of the lower village. The Municipal Office relocated from US 2 to Main Street; a sidewalk network between the lower and upper village was constructed; new street lights were installed; Mill Street Park, the information kiosk, and the Park & Ride were built; improvements were made to the recreation field. Several businesses appear to be securely established. GMT provides bus service several times a day. These improvements have created an inviting environment for shoppers, residents, and visitors and continue to strengthen our economic base. The safety issues to be addressed at the entrance to the village from US 2 to Main Street will do the same.

Plainfield Village has been designated by the State as a Village Center and, as such, properties within its boundaries can benefit from public funds, including

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tax credits for historic building rehabilitation and code improvements. This designation also gives priority consideration for certain State grants. The DVC programs, along with Historic Preservation, motivate communities to take care of the traditional village center that Vermont is known for.

Co-op Membership has given the Board the directive to investigate a new location for the Co-op on US 2 and to spend \$10,000 to retain the property until Membership can weigh in on purchase. I believe there should be, at the same time, a commitment to investigate the possibility of making the business sustainable at its current location. I believe the issues brought up in the Marketing Report and at the Annual Meeting can be addressed adequately.

Consider the following:

- There is a proposed design to expand the existing building that will increase the retail space on the first floor from 1,200 sq. ft. to 1,860 sq. ft. How will that affect sales?
- It's time to put some money toward a professionally designed floor plan, including the proposed addition, to determine the most efficient use of space and equipment and how that will affect sales.
- There are ways to be compliant with ADA without installing an elevator. The second floor could provide an additional 1,200 sq. ft. of retail space.
- The Board can negotiate with the Town to increase the number of parking spaces allotted to the Co-op. Since there is no longer a tenant renting the second floor of the

Municipal Building, spaces should be available.

- Should the Co-op consider becoming a renter and sell the building to a non-profit organization that could leverage public funds for the maintenance of the building and equipment repairs/purchases? This would relieve the Co-op of the burden of maintaining real estate, but also take away the equity of the building.
- There are Members who are willing and able to write grants to support investigating the option of staying in the current location

Our Co-op is an authentic, community grocery store—a Plainfield landmark associated with Goddard's heyday, known throughout the state. In addition to serving local producers and growers, our small storefront has a reduced/free veggie shelf and there is a donation jar for neighbors who are suffering through hard times. In partnership with the Friends of Winooski, the storefront provides a boat access to the river and enjoys a community garden. Shopping there—not a soulless experience—is enriched by the staffs' choice of tunes and fashion and the opportunity to catch up on local gossip. As one member described the Co-op during the Annual Meeting, "It is the heart of the Village."

How do we find our niche in the competitive health food market? I think it's by focusing on what makes us unique. Can the Co-op be small and personable and still be sustainable? Does Membership have the desire, time, and energy to devote to pursuing this vision? This consideration is the most crucial one. ♦

Welcome, New Board Members!



Hi. My name is Jess Taylor. I've been in Plainfield for about three years now. After 24 years off the beaten path in E. Montpelier, it is really nice to be tucked in the Village.

Ironically, I was on Chickering Road, which has had two other Board members in the past—Art Chickering and Sue Chickering. Now that I'm retired, I've been looking for ways to get involved. In addition to the Co-op Board, I have also joined the Twinfield mentoring program.

My work background has been eclectic. In my twenties I owned a riding stable, then managed a small ski lodge, on to working at a hardware/garden store, then the Nature Center in Montpelier and, most recently, spent a decade in elder care. I have two sons that I adopted as newborns. We homeschooled through the grade school years, which was a wonderful journey. They are grown now and live in the area, as does most of my family. I've been in Vermont my whole life and am fiercely proud of our little state. Sometimes I feel guilty about our lives here when so much of the world is in turmoil. We are truly blessed.

I join the Board with enthusiasm and look forward to the next chapter for the Co-op, whatever that may be. ♦

My name is Lucy (Carty) Blue. I was born in NYC, and my family moved to Vermont when I was two years old. We lived in Marshfield, then East Montpelier, and then "the Inn" on Route 2 in Plainfield. After graduating from Twinfield High School in 1966 and college out of state, I worked for 12 years as a United Nations staff member, and had an almost 30-year career as a freelance copyeditor, including some 13 years as coordinator of a website translation project for Byron Katie International. I returned to Vermont in 2007.

Now retired, I find myself once again living in the small town where I grew up. Truly there's no place like home. There's also no place like the Plainfield Co-op. To me, the Co-op is much more than just a store. It's an important community gathering place, a "human" place. It has heart.

In 1972, my father, the late Cyril Carty, was instrumental in transferring ownership of the Ivy Grange hall to the Plainfield Co-op. I feel indebted to him and to the many people who have unselfishly over the years supported the Co-op with their time, money, and energy. It's now time for me to give back. I'm excited to be joining the Board as the Co-op opens up to new possibilities for serving the people in our community. ♦



Endangered Organic: What does “organic” really mean?

by *Glena Bissex*

When you buy organic apples or organic broccoli or organic milk, where do you envision it coming from? Probably not from a vast industrial farm, yet more and more that is the case. As “organic” has become popular and profitable, small organic farms—mostly family farms—have been taken over or driven out of business by big “organic” agriculture. The latest victims are 89 small to mid-size organic dairy farms in New England, including 27 in Vermont.

In August they were given notice by Danone, an international conglomerate that owns Horizon Organic, that their contracts to ship organic milk would be cancelled next August. It’s cheaper to buy from big organic dairies that have been able to lower their expenses by taking advantage of loopholes in the USDA organic certification regulations, and by lax oversight in enforcing the regulations. “Organic” factory farms have continuously added conventionally raised cows to their herds, skirted minimum grazing requirements, and fed their cows conventional feed that is fraudulently labeled “organic.”

Fearing for the fate of the wonderful local organic dairy products our Co-op carries, I contacted Strafford Creamery, Butterworks Farm, and Rogers Farmstead. None of them ship milk but use all the milk their cows produce in their own bottled milk, ice cream, yogurt, heavy cream and other dairy products. Past issues of the newsletter have profiled Rogers Farmstead in Berlin (winter 2018), Strafford Creamery in Strafford (winter 2020) and Jack

Lazor, co-founder of Butterworks Farm in Westfield (winter 2020). If you want to see what organic was intended to be, check out these articles and photos.

So now there’s a “real organic” certification, organized by farmers who are actually practicing it. The label was created to distinguish soil-grown and pasture-raised products under USDA organic. Locally, these include Littlewood Farm and their Blackbird Organics, Cate Farm, Rogers Farmstead, Butterworks Farm, and Pete’s Greens. You can see the complete list of Vermont farms at realorganicproject.org. Some small, local farms may not have gotten certified, but one advantage of local is that we can know the farmers who feed us.

The industrialization of farming by megacorporations is a phenomenon not only in dairy but in all of agriculture. It is our capitalist-industrial economy at work. Danone is not some especially heartless multinational corporation; it is part of a system driven by greed. Four million farm families have lost their businesses and their land since 1935. Organic farms are beginning to follow the same consolidation trends as conventional farms. Consolidation is allowing just three companies—Organic Valley, Danone, and Lactalis (owns Stonyfield Farm)—to control the market.

What can we do? Support our Co-op that helps support small farmers. Support local organic farmers by buying their products. When we do, we’re buying

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more nutritious food because it has been grown in soil that has not been poisoned and soil that also absorbs more carbon. We're supporting our local economy, which in turn supports us. We're reducing the pollution generated by transporting products long distances (like from California or Mexico). The local products may cost more, but if we contribute to "green" organizations, consider our local organic farmers to be such organizations. The "organic" products we buy at supermarkets may cost less because they're probably industrial organic.

"We need to get bigger to survive." Who questions this equation? "We need to get bigger to survive." Where does it end? Where does it end for farmers? Where does it end for our Co-op? I don't know the answer, but as a small cooperative with a social mission, we ought to be asking these questions.

Resources:

NOFA-VT (Northeast Organic Farming Association) nofavt.org
The Cornucopia Institute cornucopia.org
See their scorecard for organic dairy brands.
Sign petition to Danone/Horizon at organicfarmersassociation.org ♦

Seeking Ad Co-ordinator

The Newsletter is seeking an ad co-ordinator who will solicit new advertisers as well as track current advertisers and renewals. This job provides a working member discount. Contact the editor: Glenda Bissex, songboat@vtlink.net or 454-7895.

Carrot and Orange Soup

Adapted from *The Silver Palate Cookbook* by Julee Rosso and Sheila Lukins

Ingredients:

4 TBL butter
3 cups chopped onions
1-2 lbs chopped carrots (peel if you prefer)
4 cups chicken stock (alternative veggie stock)
1 cup orange juice
salt and ground pepper to taste
grated orange zest

1. Melt the butter in a pot. Add the onions and sautee until tender.
2. Add carrots and chicken stock and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer until carrots are very tender.
3. Pour the soup through a strainer. Put the solids into a blender or food processor. Add a cup or so of the soup stock and blend until smooth.
4. Return puree to the soup pot. Add the orange juice and additional stock (2-3 cups) until soup is of desired consistency.
5. Add salt, pepper and orange zest to taste. Simmer until heated through.

RECIPES collected by Debra Stoleroff

It is mid-September as I search my recipe stocks for possible late autumn meals. This afternoon I picked some basil and the last of my green beans. There are still tomatillos, celery, zucchini, winter squash and carrots to harvest. Onions are drying and garlic is ready to plant when the weather is consistently cooler. I'm hoping autumn is on its way as I'm looking forward to cooler temperatures after a too-hot summer. Autumn when I can comfortably cook and bake without overheating. Here are three recipes I'm looking forward to enjoying: carrot and orange soup; spanakopita and a baked squash, lentil and feta salad.

Spanakopita: a Greek spinach pastry

(from the *Moosewood Cookbook*)

1.5 hrs preparation time, 8 servings

Ingredients:

2 cups crumbled feta cheese
5 eggs
2 Tbs. flour
3 Tbs. butter
1 cup chopped onion
2 lbs fresh spinach
2 cups (1 lb.) cottage or pot cheese
1 tsp. basil
1/2 tsp. oregano
salt and pepper to taste
1 lb defrosted package of filo dough
1/2 lb. butter

Filling:

Clean, stem and chop the spinach. Salt it lightly and cook, adding no water, for 5 minutes. Sauté the onions in butter. When soft, combine with remaining ingredients and spinach.

To assemble:

Spread melted butter on a 9"x13" baking pan.
Place a strudel leaf in the pan (It will outsize the pan. Let the edges climb the sides) and brush generously with melted butter.
Repeat this process until you have a pile of 8 leaves.
Spread on half the filling.
On top of the filling, make another layer of 8 leaves (don't skimp on butter)
Spread the remaining filling.
Piles as many more layers of filling and filo dough with butter as your baking pan will accommodate.
Butter the topmost leaf.
Bake uncovered in 375° oven for about 45 minutes until golden.

Roasted Butternut Squash With Lentils and Feta

(don't know where I got this—possibly from the *NY Times* recipes)

Ingredients for salad:

- ½ cup (uncooked) black or green lentils
- 1 (3-inch) cinnamon stick
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- Kosher salt
- 1 (1-pound) butternut squash
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ cup crumbled feta
- 4 scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons roasted, salted pumpkin seeds

Ingredients for dressing:

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons honey (or maple syrup)
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin, toasted
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- Kosher salt

Preparation:

1. Heat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Put lentils, cinnamon, garlic and 1 teaspoon salt into a pot and cover. Add enough water to cover everything by 1 inch.
3. Bring the water to a rolling boil over medium-high heat, then reduce to low and let simmer until the lentils are tender but not mushy, about 20 minutes. Drain the lentils, discard the cinnamon and garlic.
4. Transfer the lentils to a large bowl.
5. While the lentils cook, prepare the squash and start to cook it. Peel the squash and halve it lengthwise. Remove and discard the strings and seeds. Slice the squash crosswise 1/4-inch thick and place the pieces on a baking sheet. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon olive oil and season with salt and pepper.
6. Roast the squash until completely tender, slightly caramelized and golden brown, about 30 minutes. Remove from the oven, and let cool for 10 minutes. Once cool, add to the lentils.
7. While the squash cooks, prepare the dressing: In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil, honey (or maple syrup) cumin, cayenne and black pepper. Season to taste with salt.
8. Sprinkle the feta, scallions and pumpkin seeds over the lentils and squash. Pour 2 to 3 tablespoons of the dressing over the lentils and squash. Serve warm or at room temperature, with the remaining dressing on the side.