

Achieving Success, One Cashew at a Time

By Phyllis Robinson

Phyllis Robinson is in charge of Education, Campaigns and Special Projects at Equal Exchange, a worldwide leader in authentic fair trade commerce.

"During the war, my comandante told me that we were fighting for a house, a piece of land, and a business. Today, I have a house; some land; we co-own our business; and, my comandante ... is President [of El Salvador]!" – Oscar Valladares, former President of Aprainores

It was a hot, muggy afternoon this past March when my colleague, Mark DiMaggio, and I were touring the cashew farms on the Island of Montecristo. March is one of the hottest months of the year in El Salvador. The end of the dry season is approaching, the air is thick with humidity, and it feels like the skies could burst at any moment. But the cooling rains never really come; not until April or May. On this particular day, the temperature had reached 106 degrees.

Despite the weather, our spirits were high. After a long run of bad luck, it seemed like things might finally be turning around for the fifty-five members who comprise the small farmer cashew cooperative, Aprainores. The harvest was looking good, the weather was cooperating, and the processing plant was up and running. Plus, Equal Exchange had just agreed to fund a five-year project to help the members renovate their

farms, plant new cashew trees, and strengthen the productive and organizational capacity of the co-op.

We had driven down the coastal highway from San Salvador earlier that morning with Alex Flores, Aprainores' General Manager. At the office, we picked up Oscar (quoted above) and hurried down the long, dusty road, past the herds of slow-moving cattle, and the kids on bikes in their blue-and-white school uniforms. When we arrived at the banks of the Lempa River, Oscar jumped out and arranged for a motorized launch to take us out to the island. We had to go quickly: Montecristo is nestled between the Lempa and the Pacific Ocean, and river crossings must be timed with the tides.

The boat ride was particularly spectacular on that day. The skies were clear and the San Vicente volcano, Chichontepeque, could be seen rising magnificently in front of us. As we approached Montecristo, we spotted egrets, blue herons, and other birds searching along the sand bars for food. Montecristo has been designated a national



The author with the Aprainores crew in El Salvador.

reserve, and its estuaries and mangrove swamps shelter numerous species of birds, as well as turtles, iguanas, armadillos, and other wildlife.

A Brief History of Aprainores

Prior to 1992, Montecristo, the neighboring island of Tasajera, and what is now two repatriated communities on **CASHEWS Cont. on Page 10**

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413.528.9697
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Open Every Day 8 am - 8 pm

Exploring VT Cheese

Two Co-op employees, one car, nine farms, three days, and tons of great cheese!

By Austin Banach, Meat, Seafood and Cheese Manager



Happy cows at Thistle Hill Farm in North Pomfret, VT.

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It was just another Tuesday in the Co-op offices when Cian, our Special Projects Coordinator, approached me with the proposal of visiting fifteen cheese producers in Vermont. My initial response was something along the lines of, "That seems a little crazy—it would take at least three days to do something like that." Matt, who was sitting right there (and who happens to be the Communications Manager to approve such trips), swiveled his chair around and said, matter-of-factly, "Well, the Co-op does make a commitment to visit local producers. We do have a budget to train staff, and it would make a great story for the next newsletter." Three weeks later, we had three days covered at the Co-op and embarked on a long and windy trip up and back down the absolutely gorgeous state of Vermont to visit some of the state's renowned artisanal cheesemakers. I pictured us kind of like Paul Giamatti and that other guy in the movie *Sideways*. We tasted cheese (of course), met some diverse and charismatic

VT CHEESE Cont. on Page 11

Notes from HQ: The GM Report

By Art Ames, General Manager



Hi, all. Here's hoping you are all having a fabulous summer. It's a great time of year at the Co-op as we get to visit with our summer residents who are making their annual appearances. We are getting to meet lots of new folks, all enamored with the Berkshires.

Don't forget that you can now park in half of the area that used to be dedicated to Wheeler & Taylor. The best bet for finding a shady spot remains those spaces down the little hill next to the Quonset Hut. A small part of me misses the days when I had to "stand guard" out there to make sure that we had customer parking available. Now I can't use a parking crisis as an excuse for hanging around outside all day. Also, as a reminder, we are now open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day, including Sunday, and we will not be cutting back on these hours when the summer ends. We strongly feel that this added convenience should be available to all of us, including year-round residents.

Inside the Store

I just read an article in the New York Times that the "in thing" in the city is no longer a mini cupcake, tea store or gourmet bagel. Juice bars are becoming all the rage. How nice that these folks are finally catching up to what we already knew. Maybe that explains why our café is seeing a 30 percent increase in business compared to last year. I mention this because there are times during the day when David, Justin, Jen, Scott, Jan and Eleanor have a challenging time keeping up with the traffic. They're doing an incredible job, and we simply need a bigger space. Might I suggest that when we are busy, you stop at the café, put in your order, and go on with your shopping? We'll call you when it's ready. Also, you can help us by being prepared to pay at the café so that we can cut down on transaction times. Thanks for your help.

We recently expanded our Bulk Foods selection, integrating a separate display for dried organic fruits, and bringing in new choices in the rest of the department. This department remains a crucial part of our product mix since it offers the ideal combination of high-quality ingredients and lower prices by the pound. It also gives you the opportunity to buy the quantity that you need, not the quantity that the manufacturer wants you to buy. I also want to point out that not all bulk products are equal. If you are comparing prices and find that our prices are sometimes higher, then make sure you check in with Deidre. It's possible that our items are organic and "theirs" isn't. It's also possible and often probable that we are ordering more local or small-batch products.

Organic Supply/Food Chain

As mentioned in prior updates, food prices are on the rise. The consumer index puts the increase at 2.6 percent, and organic and specialty crops may see as much as a 6 percent rise. There are lots of reasons. Climate change is having a major impact. Droughts where there used to be plentiful moisture and rain where arid conditions used to exist is playing havoc with our nation's farmers. Demand for organic is increasing rapidly as many consumers become more worried about the health of our food supply. So far, increases in organic production have not kept up with demand. So when there is an issue, it hits organic supply harder. You may not realize it, but you are already experiencing shortages.

Organic Valley is having a tough time meeting the need for organic butter. In fact, their pasture butter is now only available for part of the year. You've seen us change the brand of organic chicken that we carry several times by now. We are constantly searching for the best quality and most humane conditions for all of our animal proteins, and formerly stable suppliers are not able to keep up with demand. We've switched away from a customer favorite, Bell and Evans, to Smart Chicken because the taste is amazing, the flash-cold process is a superior production method, and we can get a steady supply.

Where is this leading? Right now, our buyers are putting far more time and effort into sourcing

available products. We are also constantly looking to create new relationships, and perhaps as our sales volume grows, we will move up the "priority ladder" in the supply chain. Ultimately, however, I don't like where this is leading. Less expensive foods are becoming even healthier as manufacturers change ingredients to save money, successful organic companies continue to be bought out by large conglomerates, and demand is outstripping supply for local products in many areas. I do think we will eventually catch up to the changes, but simply, it is inevitable that all of us will need to budget more money for food and less for other things. If this coming winter plays havoc with our farming again, I expect we'll see another significant bump in food prices in February.

Sadly, the Co-op can't solve the problem of the cost of goods. However, we can offer you quite a bit of knowledge and support to help you make your food decisions. Please take a moment to talk with any of us. If you are not a constant user of our Bulk Department, give us a few minutes to show you why you should be. Use the sale flyer every week to help you stock up on products that you need. As an owner, use our Buying Club or find out about it. These increases are not going to go away, and one way to maintain our current standard is to change our buying habits. We are here to help.

Expansion

Most of you by now have seen the dramatic transition that 100 Bridge Street has had. Many of you have expressed surprise at how large the space is, how awesome it is that the river is right there, and we are all seeing this suite in a new light. Of course, excitement has increased. We are negotiating with the Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire (CDC) right now, and have designated 100 Bridge Street as our preferred choice for our new location. While it may sometimes seem like we've been talking about this for years ... Oh, never mind ... we have been talking about this for years. Oops. What I meant to say is that we are making significant progress, and you will be hearing much more as we move closer to our annual meeting in November.

You may have heard that a few weeks ago, the land reeked, and our poor neighbors were subjected to quite the odor for a bit of time. The CDC can give you a much more thorough answer since this is their project. But simply, the enzymes to clean the site were laid out. Theoretically, those enzymes slowly would have been altered so that they would seep into the soil, gradually improving the health of the soil. Naturally, Mother Nature has a sense of humor, and we were deluged with heavy rains after the treatment so that the enzymes were integrated all at once. What we were smelling was literally the soil healing itself. Think of farmland that has been recently treated with compost and manure and the aroma that it creates. Same thing. Anyhow, as we get more involved, we will work with the CDC to make sure that all of our neighbors know what to expect as this project moves forward.

Downtown Construction

As you know, the town managed to work out an agreement where the downtown project would not start in earnest until the fall. However, they did start on a smaller scale on the north end of Main Street. So far, it has really not had very much impact at all on the traffic flow. We do know that a small part of the project is heading our way in the coming weeks, and, once again, we expect that the worry will be worse than the actual affect. As I mentioned in the last newsletter, this is exactly the time when we hope that all of our local shoppers will not only take this in stride, but will actually make an extra effort to frequent all of our local downtown businesses. Some folks from afar will naturally begin to avoid the inconvenience as it increases a bit. Our local industry is part of what makes this town and neighboring towns as special as it is. For the next year or so, I'm hoping and expecting that this is when our community will join together and support one another. The Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce is doing a terrific job keeping us all informed, and we'll do the same in our weekly emails to you. What? You aren't getting them? Sign up right away at www.berkshire.coop, and we'll keep you informed.

Food Policy in Action

The majority of the citizens in this state and the majority of legislators in this state want to see GMO labeling become the law in Massachusetts. In spite of this, the proposed bill did not come up in this legislative session, which means that we'll have to wait a while to get started again. I could go into a lengthy explanation as to why a state whose citizens and lawmakers want to make something happen still face an uphill battle, but you are informed enough for me to use two simple words: money and influence. I can't even begin to tell you what a threat it is to petrochemical big business to even cut down on GMO crop production. Me? I want to eliminate it, unless there is long-term, truly independent research done to indicate that GMO products can be safe for the long term. Regardless, our Co-op will continue to ban any new product from coming into the store unless it's vetted to be GMO-free, and we will continue the fight to have others embrace elements of our strategy. We will keep you informed when the battle begins again in Boston and will ask for your support and participation. I'm optimistic that such a law will pass in Massachusetts, but my real fear is that the more conservative approach in Washington, DC may become even more conniving and try to figure out a way to ban individual states from applying these laws. Yes, I do see the irony in our conservative friends promoting federal law and trying to ban state law, but that's what's happening. Once again, money talks, and the best thing that all of us can do is simply purchase items that are GMO-free and refuse to purchase items that contain or are likely to contain GMOs. It's your purchases that can help to dictate policy.

In another Food Policy matter, we recently made a tough decision regarding Eden Foods branded items. As you know by now, the company—although a very strong supporter of local farms, a leader in BPA-free packaging, and a company that believes strongly in the purity of food—made a decision to take advantage of a US Supreme Court decision involving health care to limit some reproductive services to women, based on the company's beliefs. Let me first say that I recognize the absurdity that we are the only industrial nation in the world that counts on business to provide health care assistance. It's dumb, in my opinion. That being said, it's the system we have to work with, and it's my opinion that business should not be allowed to hold back elements of health care based on personal or religious opinion, and that full access should be offered to all. It's up to the individual to decide what to use and what not to use based on the user's beliefs. Many of you felt the same way, and initially asked us to boycott Eden Foods. We didn't.

Our Food Policy (available in print at the service desk and on our web site) speaks to the purity, safety, and distribution of food. Political issues are a separate issue. Our Co-op is intended to serve all of our 3,500 owners and approximately 1,500 associates. This may come as a surprise to some, but all 5,000 of us probably don't completely agree on everything, never mind something this controversial. We don't typically boycott because we believe in choice. Instead, we made sure that we have substitute products of equal or better value for as many Eden products as possible. We encourage all of you to buy your foods for all of the reasons that are important to you, including values and politics. Your actions will dictate our response. We are here to serve your needs, and, if those needs change, so will our selections. Eden sales are down. Your actions have caused us to evaluate the movement of these products, and a few Eden products will be removed from our shelves, partially due to your individual decisions to boycott their products. If your purchasing habits continue to change, we may very well remove more of their line and are always looking to substitute with similar products. That's true capitalist democracy in action.

Anyhow, enjoy the remainder of the summer. After close to a decade living in town, I moved from Great Barrington to West Stockbridge. I hate moving, and I'm very thankful that it's behind me. I look forward to spending much of the rest of my summer simply trying to figure out where all the light switches reside. See you in the Co-op.

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DATES of INTEREST

OWNER APPRECIATION DAYS

10% OFF TO OWNERS IN GOOD STANDING

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15

BOARD MEETINGS

HELD THE FOURTH WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH
SCHEDULE CHANGES NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER DUE TO HOLIDAYS 6:00 P.M. • BERKSHIRE CO-OP OFFICES • 307 MAIN STREET

Co-op owners are welcome to attend Board meetings. Owner-input time is reserved from 6:45 – 7 p.m. to speak on any topic. If you need more time or want to address something in more detail, you can request to be placed onto the meeting agenda. Please recognize that the agenda needs to be set and posted in advance of any meeting. Requests must be received at least two weeks prior to the meeting date.

Send requests to bod@berkshire.coop.



OUR ENDS

(Developed by the Board of Directors)

The Berkshire Cooperative Association cultivates a sustainable local/regional economy and cooperatively builds a vibrant community.

To this end, the Berkshire Cooperative Association:

- E1. Operates a financially successful, community-oriented natural food store that specializes in consciously fresh food and meals, with reasonably priced options
- E2. Flourishes
- E3. Is a model of social and environmental stewardship
- E4. Is accessible, welcoming, inclusive and innovative
- E5. Fosters the growth of local/regional food systems
- E6. Develops an informed and engaged community
- E7. Promotes healthful living
- E8. Supports a sustainable environment

OPERATIONAL VISION

- To be a transformative force in the community
- To serve as a model of a sustainable business alternative
- To nurture social and economic well-being in an environmentally sensitive manner

Catching Up with the Board

Compiled by Leslie Davidson, Board Director

The CCMA Experience

Each June, members of the Co-op board and staff attend the Consumer Cooperative Management Association (CCMA) conference. This three-day event brings together several hundred food co-op managers, staff members, directors, and consultants, plus their national allies, for education, inspiration, and networking. Three members of the board of directors attended this year's conference, which was held in Madison, WI. Below, Dan Seitz, Erica Spizz, and Molly de St André respond to a few questions about their experience.

How many times have you been to CCMA?

Erica: Seven: 2014, 2012, 2011, 2008, 2007, 2005, and 2004.

Dan: I've attended CCMA for the last five years.

Molly: This was my first experience at CCMA. I'm enjoying my third year on the board and was lucky enough to attend.

What key themes came through for you at this year's conference?

Erica: The growth of the sector—there were so many start-ups represented and a lot of second-wave food co-ops expanding to multiple locations. Another theme was cooperation among cooperatives and how food co-op leaders are being a force for building the cooperative economy in their communities.

Dan: Two of the workshops I attended were on the topic of four essential "pillars" (or principles) that should inform the governance work of a board of directors for a food cooperative: (1) Teaming. A cooperative board should always strive to strengthen its ability to work effectively together as a team through training to improve skills and a commitment to a respectful communication process. They should also always be thinking ahead about attracting capable new directors as current directors leave. (2) Democracy. Since cooperatives are committed to democratic capitalism, a co-op board should practice, protect, promote, and perpetuate the co-op's democratic mechanisms. (3) Strategic Leadership. A co-op board is responsible for providing strategic leadership for the organization, which includes setting the direction of the co-op by specifying the broad goals to be achieved and monitoring the progress in meeting those goals. (4) Accountable Empowerment. In order for a co-op's goals to be achieved, the board must empower the general manager (who reports to the board) and the staff to pursue these goals and run the co-op within a number of parameters, which include maintaining profitability; observing prudent, legal, and ethical business practices; and serving the needs of the owners and the larger community. However, having empowered the staff, the board must hold the general manager accountable for ensuring that the agreed-upon goals are achieved within the specified parameters.

Molly: A key theme was a stronger, more robust connection between co-ops in order to make an alliance to start fighting these huge food corporations. More and more, we are finding that our brands are just smaller satellites of the companies we hate. It's time to make a real change!

What's one inspiring idea you came away with?

Erica: Standard Operating Procedures. I loved the Outpost Natural Foods workshop on how they documented more than two hundred fifty SOPs across their six locations.

Dan: I was most inspired by one of the keynote speakers. Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin is an agronomist who is working with the Latino community in Wisconsin to create a network of small-scale, integrated sustainable farms that provide a dignified livelihood. His vision is to create a comprehensive agricultural infrastructure that supports these farms with start-up financing, developing effective methods for integrating the raising of crops and chickens, establishing local processing facilities, and outlining plans for distribution. By creating such an infrastructure, the farmers will lessen—and, hopefully, eventually eliminate—their dependence on large corporations that often pressure farmers to adopt environmentally and socially harmful practices in order to compete.

Molly: One of the most powerful moments of the conference for me was during the keynote address given by Venice Williams of Alice's Garden in Milwaukee. She spoke about race and the many misconceptions we have about the connection between race, poverty, and healthy foods. The top-down approach—hoping to bring low-income people into our co-op stores in order to "teach" them about healthy foods—is hugely misdirected in her eyes. Though I didn't feel connected to everything she said, I loved her idea of turning the tables and offering micro loans to lower-income members of the community to develop healthy products from ethnic and traditional recipes that could eventually make it onto our shelves.

What's one topic you would like to learn more about?

Erica: I attended a number of sessions on the "Ensuring Food Access" track and want to learn more about how food co-ops can bring fresh, healthful foods to as many people as possible.

Dan: One of the workshops was on the various avenues for financing an expansion project. Since the Co-op is planning a relocation/expansion in the near future, I'd like to learn more about the financing avenues for cooperatives incorporated in Massachusetts.

Molly: I loved a workshop I attended about marketing to moms. I found the idea of bringing in the mothers from the community through all kinds of programs, and more up-to-date marketing techniques very interesting. I was reminded how important moms are to the family and in business in general. I'd like to explore more creative ways that our co-op can focus on this important group of shoppers as we think about our new store.

Besides the conference, what was your favorite thing about Madison?

Erica: Spending time with my family that lives in Madison.

Dan: The people are incredibly friendly, there is an abundance of terrific independent cafés, and the city is vibrant

Molly: The Madison Farmers' Market! It was four blocks long and full of great local food! At 7 a.m. (the only time I could be there due to the busy conference schedule), it was packed with people. Amazing!



Dan Seitz



Molly de St André



Erica Spizz

Education and Outreach Update

Out and about on the farm, in the camps, at the schools, and more.

By Jenny Schwartz, Education and Outreach Coordinator

This summer, Food Adventures, a collaboration between Berkshire Co-op Market and the Nutrition Center, traveled all over the county to provide fun and educational classes to school-based camps. Our traveling kitchens visited students in four Massachusetts towns: Adams, Pittsfield, Lenox, and Great Barrington. Over the course of six weeks, we collectively taught fifty-seven classes. What was particularly special about this summer were the leadership opportunities that were presented to our students within the community. Along with nutrition, we focused on how one can shop healthily on a budget. The students were provided several opportunities to test their new-found knowledge.

Beginning in Adams, we led a five-day summer camp program at the Berkshire Arts & Technology Charter School (BART). There was a lot to cover in five short days, but it was also great to take advantage of the good weather and resources in Adams and Pittsfield. After giving a lecture about the buzzwords we hear in relation to food—such as organic, GMOs, sustainability, and the importance of eating local—we asked them to write five questions that they would like to ask a farmer about these topics. The following day, we headed down to the farmers' market at the Berkshire Mall, where they conducted interviews and worked together as a group of nine to purchase local ingredients for a stir-fry. We gave them a budget of twelve dollars, and they negotiated as to what they would buy and from which farm to purchase the ingredients.

Later that week, the students' enthusiasm for Food Adventures extended into our participation in Pittsfield's Third Thursday event. Two local youths volunteered their time help teach younger kids how to make a blueberry salsa at our Education Station. They taught them how to properly hold a knife and how to cut the various ingredients. It was great to see them model the same skills that were recently taught to them, in addition to having fun walking along the street and passing out information about Food Adventures (they wanted to)!

In our last class at BART, the group had an iron chef activity. We walked to the grocery store, and the teams purchased their ingredients with a budget of twenty dollars. The creativity in the recipes these students concocted was tremendous: Summer squash chili with fresh corn, sautéed tofu kabobs with a stir-fry of green beans and cauliflower, a watermelon smoothie, and a delicious broccoli salad with dried blueberries. What was unique about this particular iron chef experience was that all teams were inspired to build their recipes around a traditional family recipe.

After the conclusion of BART, we traveled down south to work with Monument Valley Middle School students in Great Barrington. In three days, we focused on a variety of topics such as how to eat a balanced breakfast and how, if possible, you can get more veggies in your diet in the morning. They practiced their knife skills by making a simple salsa, and then they transitioned to making a breakfast burrito and an orange-and-strawberry frothy. The breakfast burrito was filled with vegetables, and the kids loved it. After talking about local, organic, sustainable, and GMOs, the kids divided into groups and worked together to make a four-course meal, using various local ingredients. Afterwards, the groups worked with a twenty-dollar budget to create their own locally sourced recipes. Thanks to the use of Berkshire Hills vans, the kids were able to visit the Co-op, receive a store tour and then shop for their ingredients. Each team had a different role in the meal. One group worked on the appetizer, which consisted of deviled eggs and guacamole. Another group made an omelet as the main course. And the third group made dessert. This group was given a specific shopping challenge to see which was cheaper: to buy or make their own ice cream, chocolate sauce, and whipped cream. They learned they could make these things affordably on their own and control how many ingredients were used in each item they made.

What also stood out in this experience was one student's enthusiasm to share a family recipe of her own for the group to experience. Her family works at Xicohtencatl Mexican Restaurant in Great Barrington, and she brought ingredients and a lava rock mortar and pestle to make the group some of their amazing guacamole.

The following week, the students from Monument Valley joined us for our "Grow Your Mind, Grow Your Food" educational farm-day event at Woven Roots Farm in Tyringham, MA. The word "idyllic" was often used throughout the day, not only in regards to the perfect weather, but how a group of all ages came together and worked together to assist these farmers who provide food for our community. The students from Monument Valley worked to prepare a lunch using ingredients they harvested with the help of Woven Roots farmers Jen and Pete Salinetti's son, Diego. After lunch preparation concluded, the kids were paired up with Greenagers who were working out in the fields and learned various farming skills. It certainly was an idyllic day that consisted of learning how food is grown, what they can make with it, and making new friends in the community. One teen happily remarked while working that it was his favorite day of the summer.

Each Monday for five weeks, we traveled to Pittsfield and worked with several groups of students at Crosby Elementary School to introduce them to new food experiences. We were lucky to have a volunteer visiting from Austria to help out with the classes. During the last class, the students had a geography and nutrition lesson at the same time! They learned about Austria and made a crepe recipe that was traditional to the culture. Students had fun locating Austria on the map, hearing how long it took to get from there to Boston, and even learned some German. They learned the German words for hello, good-bye, and crepe. They asked interesting questions such as what the Austrian flag looks like, if it's the same time in Austria as it is in Massachusetts, and if Austrians eat the same food as Americans. Our youngest group of rising first graders had some fun questions and comments. When we asked if they thought they eat similar or different food in Austria, one girl raised her hand and said, "I think they eat different cherries!" And this led to the question, "Do you eat different cherries in Austria?" In case you are wondering, the answer is, no!

Now that summer programs have concluded, it is off to planning for fall and getting ready for some new Food Adventures with the great children in our community. In the meantime, visit the Great Barrington Farmers' Market on Saturdays between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. and you will find our Education Station ready to teach kids simple, no-bake recipes that they can make with ingredients found at the market. Our free workshops, Kids Can Cook and DIY Kids are also back in full swing as fall approaches.



Broccoli and Dried Blueberry salad made by one of the BART students.



A perfect day at Woven Roots Farm for Grow Your Mind, Grow Your Food.



A student at Crosby making an Austrian-inspired crepe recipe



Two brothers made their mom's popular summer squash chili.

Ownership Corner

1% WEDNESDAY UPDATE

Since the beginning of the year, we have been donating 1% of Wednesday sales to local community organizations each month.

Here's a list of who got what when.

JANUARY	Volunteers in Medicine	\$852.66
FEBRUARY	GB Fairgrounds	\$787.11
MARCH	Greenagers Front Lawn Food	\$860.96
APRIL	Center for Eco Technology	\$1,239.36
MAY	GB Trails & Greenways	\$1,031.20
JUNE	Berkshire Organics SEEDS	\$951.77
JULY	Construct Inc.	\$1,275.83

2014 TOTAL SO FAR: \$6,047.12

AUGUST	Berkshire Habitat for Humanity
SEPTEMBER	Berkshire Grown
OCTOBER	The People's Pantry
NOVEMBER	Community Health Programs
DECEMBER	Project Sprout

WHEN AND HOW WE DECIDE

1% Wednesday recipients are chosen as part of our Board of Directors Election. Votes will be counted at Annual Meeting on November 1. If you have a suggestion for an organization to be included on the ballot, please contact us at community@berkshire.coop.



**An Exclusive 6% Auto Insurance Discount
for Berkshire Co-Op Market Owners!**

Find out more. Call GoodWorks Insurance at 800-588-8330 x302
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UPCOMING OWNER APPRECIATION DAYS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15

OWNERS GET 10% OFF STOREWIDE

In Fiscal Year 2014 (7/1- 6/30)
the Co-op added

173

NEW OWNERS

We'd like to welcome
these new owners

Claudia • Maria • John • Alexander • Deidre • Joan
• Perr • Janet • Kim • Susan • Robert • Catherine
• Landis • Rachel • Theodore • Benny • Fred
• Erin • Frances • Jane • Paul • Jennifer • Mary
• Dmitriy • Kirstin • Justin • Jennifer • Emily •
Eric • Katie • Carole • Victoria • Malvina • Anthia
• Catherine • Wendy • Andrew • Jeane • Lisa •
Sabrina • Elizabeth • Kate • Ed • Dorthie • Erica •
Robin • Bryan • Audrey • Sharon • Barry • Jacob
• Shannon • Claire • Ted • Sue • Eliza • Laura •
Rachel • Montana • Andy • Guy • Edith • Ron
• Linda • Michael • Asa • Brett • Leon • Kate •
Austen • Bruce • Louis • Susan • Maria • Mark
• Judith • Maureen • Tom • Sabine • Candace •
Karen • Karyn • George • Sherry • Karl • Charles
• Alan • Marilyn • Lauren • Conrad • Alexcia •
Dawn • Stacey • Denise • Sarah • Janice • Matthew
• Vincent • India • Veronica • John • Andrea •
Martha • Amanda • George • Chris • Killian •
Jocelyn • Maggie • Caroline • Marcia • Michelle
• Ann • Alvin • Joseph • Thea • Alfred • Falecia
• Chloe • Josh • Rosanne • Michael • Jennifer •
Mary • Sarah • Russ • Naomi • Madeline • Roger
• Roland • Robert • Nyna • Ric • Lesiann • Beth
• Ann • Corey • John • James • Daphne • Helene
• Lauren • Rosalind • Erena • Laurie • Chaula •
Karin • Kelly • Marion • Patricia • Jamie • Henry
• Liz • Judith • James • Laurie • Pamela • Nina •
Eileen • Rachel • Snezana • Amy • Sarah • Kim •
Stephen • Courtney • Jo • Ernest

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SAVE THE DATE

ANNUAL MEETING OF CO-OP OWNERS

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1

COMPLETE DETAILS COMING SOON

SEASONAL EATING IN A PICKLE!

PRESERVED LEMONS



If you think a fresh lemon delivers a great flavor, you need to try a preserved lemon. The peels soften, and the fermentation adds great depth of flavor and umami. A salty, tangy flavor explosion, a jar of preserved lemons in your fridge can be your secret weapon for perking up boring foods. Try it minced into a salad, added to casseroles, even puréed into hummus.

Ingredients

10 lemons, scrubbed very clean (you may not be able to fit all of them in your jar)
2 extra lemons, for juice
1/2 cup kosher salt, more if needed
Extra fresh-squeezed lemon juice, if needed, from the lemons that won't fit in the jar
Sterilized quart canning jar
2 tablespoons whole cumin or fennel seeds, optional

Preparation

1. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons of salt into the jar. Prepare each lemon by slicing off just a little of the stem end and tip, then quartering each lemon lengthwise, leaving them attached at one end. As you slice each lemon, pry the quarters open and sprinkle salt inside and outside of each one, then pack into the jar. Pack them in with some force, to squeeze out some juice to fill the gaps with liquid. Once all the lemons are salted and packed in the jar, sprinkle a couple tablespoons of salt over them, then squeeze the remaining lemons, if necessary, to fill the jar with lemon juice. Screw the lid on the jar and let the jar sit out at room temperature for up to 30 days, turning it upside down occasionally to mix. Refrigerate once the skins soften.
2. To use, take a lemon out of the jar and rinse well to remove the salty brine. If desired, use pulp, or discard. Chop remaining lemon rind for use in recipes.

Tips and Notes

Save the salty lemon brine—it's delicious in small amounts in dressings, marinades or other dishes that might use lemon and salt. Hummus, tabbouleh, even pastas with greens or chicken are uplifted by a little preserved lemon and brine.

PINK PICKLED EGGS



Boiled eggs can be exciting, when you pickle them in bright beet-colored brine. The longer they soak in the brine, the deeper the color will go.

Ingredients

12 large eggs
1 red beet, peeled and chopped
1/2 cup balsamic vinegar
12 allspice berries
12 black peppercorns
1/4 cup sugar
2 teaspoons salt
4 cups water

Preparation

1. Put the eggs in 4 quart pan and add cold water to cover by an inch. Put on the stove on high heat. Bring to a full boil then remove from heat, cover and allow to sit for 9 minutes. Drain the eggs and rinse with cold water, immerse in ice water to chill quickly. When cooled peel carefully, trying to keep the surfaces from tearing.
2. In a 4 quart pot, combine the beets, vinegar, allspice berries, black peppercorns, sugar, salt and water, and bring to a boil. When boiling, lower to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes.
3. Pack the eggs in a wide-mouth quart jar or other storage container with a good lid. Pour the beets and liquid over the eggs and let cool, then put the lid on and swirl the jar to evenly distribute the liquid around the eggs. Refrigerate for three days before eating. The eggs will last up to a week in the refrigerator.

Serving Suggestion

Try slicing these to garnish salads, slice onto sandwiches, or chop and pile them onto sliced cold roast beef.

EASY & QUICK PICKLED BEETS



Most canning recipes make huge amounts, this one is engineered to help you crank out a smaller batch, in case you aren't feeding an army. The sweetness of beets lends itself to a great pickle. Once you've enjoyed your beets, try using the leftover brine in potato salad or vinaigrette, for a lovely boost of color.

Ingredients

1 pound beets, 2 1/2 inch diameter
1 small white onion, slivered
1/2 cup white wine vinegar
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup water
2 1-quart canning jars with lids
1 teaspoon each whole cloves, whole allspice, a couple of bay leaves, optional

Preparation

1. Scrub the beets and place in a large pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil. Boil the beets until they are tender when pierced with a paring knife, about 25 minutes. Drain, and run cold water over each beet, slipping the skins off and paring off the tops and root tips. Let the beets stand until cool enough to slice. Thinly slice beets, then pack into the two 1-quart canning jars, alternating with sliced onions.
2. In a 1-quart non-reactive pot, combine the vinegar, salt, sugar and water. Add optional spices, if desired. Bring to a boil over high heat, then pour the liquid over the beets in the jars. Screw the lids on the jars tightly, then refrigerate for 4-7 days before serving.

Recipe by Robin Asbel, also available at StrongerTogether.coop. Find more recipes and information about your food and where it comes from at www.strongertogether.coop.



These recipes and more can be found at
StrongerTogether.coop

From the Butcher Block to the Tomato Case

Our Produce Manager explores his career shift from meat to vegetables.

By Jake Levin, Produce Manager

When I told people that I had accepted the job as Produce Manager at the Co-op, I got some pretty funny looks, a few scoffs, and a lot of questions. My friends and family thought of me as a meat-obsessed nose-to-tail butcher—and I couldn't deny it. I apprenticed forty hours a week for four months at a butcher shop. I took low-paying jobs at conventional butcher shops to keep my knife skills sharp. And I drove six hours round-trip to work with farms on the weekends. I love to talk about, cut, look at, and eat meat. So why would I leave behind my work as a butcher in order to sell lettuce?

First off, I haven't completely left it. I am still very involved with the craft of producing pasture-raised meats through my work as the Roving Butcher; with the Berkshire Food Guild; and on the board of Berkshire Grown. But, to really answer the question, I need to answer another one I used to get all the time—why did I become a butcher?

I was twenty-five and living in Brooklyn, NY. I had graduated from Wesleyan University three years before and moved to the city to become an artist. Naturally, I took a job in the art world. But after three years of working with galleries and museums, I was unhappy and felt like the work I was doing was alienating me from making art.

I grew up in a food-obsessed family. When I was upset, frustrated, happy, or bored, I turned to making food. And here I was in Brooklyn, the epicenter of the emerging food movement. Farm-to-table restaurants, craft beer shops, nose-to-tail butcher shops, and artisanal cheesemongers were popping up all around me. I found myself frequenting these amazing shops, talking to the people behind the counters about their work, and learning about how they put a lot of energy into sourcing and producing food. I was slowly drawn into this delicious food revolution that was trying to bring local, sustainably raised food to everyone's table. When considering my different options for work, I kept coming back to this new food economy.

I really liked the idea of becoming a more direct part of this movement. But how? I knew I couldn't cut it as a cook or a farmer. So what could I do that would allow me to work directly with local farmers and the beautiful food they produce, and how could I do my part to grow the local food economy? The answer for me lay at my favorite shop down the block from me: Marlow



and Daughters. This local, pasture-raised butcher shop was owned by someone who would turn out to become a friend and neighbor, Mark Firth (owner of Prairie Whale and frequent Co-op shopper). I eventually decided to try an apprenticeship at Fleisher's Grass-Fed and Organic Meats in Kingston, NY, and the rest is history.

So here I am now—five years later, a nose-to-tail butcher with a bunch of carrots in my hand and a table of tomatoes in front of me. And I couldn't be happier. I am doing exactly what I set out to do. I am working directly with farmers I love. I am helping to provide my friends, neighbors, and larger community with fresh, local, sustainably grown food. And I am part of a community of people who are as dedicated and passionate as I am about growing and strengthening the local sustainable food system.

I won't lie. I hope to someday have that knife back in my hand and that butcher block in front of me. But, until that can become a reality, I could not be more happy talking to people about what to do with those Hakurei turnips or my favorite recipe for grilled Chioggia radicchio.

JAKE'S FAVORITE RECIPE FOR GRILLED CHIOGGIA RADICCHIO

A member of the chicory family, Chioggia radicchio is a deep, reddish purple with white streaks. Radicchio has a fresh, bitter flavor that mellows nicely when it is grilled until tender. It's perfect in a salad or as a side with a grilled pork chop. Serves 4.

Ingredients:

2 heads Chioggia radicchio
2 tablespoons olive oil
Coarse sea salt
1 lemon or balsamic vinegar

Preparation:

1. Quarter the radicchio heads lengthwise, leaving the cores intact. Brush the cut sides generously with some of the olive oil, and season liberally with sea salt.
2. Prepare a medium-hot fire in a grill.
3. Place the radicchio, cut sides down, on the grill and cook. Turn radicchio frequently, until browned and tender when pierced at the core with a knife, 8 to 12 minutes total.
4. Transfer the radicchio to a platter and drizzle each piece with about 1/2 teaspoon of olive oil and 1/2 teaspoon of vinegar or lemon juice. Season with additional salt and pepper, if desired.

Learning to Cooperate in an Internal Debate

By Matthew Novik, Communications Manager



Sometimes it takes a little pressure to really see things as they are. Yeah, I know that's a blanket statement and sounds a little more like drugstore philosophy than the sort of high thinking you're accustomed to reading in my articles. But, sometimes the simplest of statements ring the truest. Jeez, there I go again. Maybe it's best if I just give you some details and leave the rhetoric behind.

A little while back, an issue arose that challenged our organization to have a tough conversation and face

some difficult issues. In early July, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* that some "closely held" companies with religious objections may opt out of an Affordable Care Act requirement to pay for contraception coverage if the company chooses to offer employee health insurance. While that case had nothing to do with food specifically, the decision brought up a similar lawsuit filed last year by the CEO of Eden Foods, a very popular, top-of-the-line organic food company. Eden lost their case, but the recent Hobby Lobby decision is opening it up for reconsideration.

Just hours after the decision came through, I started getting messages. Whether they were through our web site email, social media, or my own personal inbox, the gist was pretty much the same. Outraged at their stance on the issue, these customers wanted the Co-op to stop selling Eden products. Obviously, these were quick reactions. The Hobby Lobby decision had been published for only about half a day, and I had already received four or five messages about Eden. And, I have to admit, I was having a similar gut reaction.

I was raised in a fiercely liberal and feminist household, and my left-leaning ethos was (and still is) offended by this action. I don't need to use this space to go into the argument. Needless to say, I had an instinctual reaction. I wanted to eliminate Eden from my cabinets. And I wasn't crazy about seeing them on the Co-op shelves either.

When I mentioned pressure in the opening paragraph, this is what I meant. Many of our employees had similar feelings. Others were conflicted

in other ways, depending on their religion or their political beliefs on government regulation. With all that passion flying around, it was hard to make a decision. But we had to make one.

One of the things that makes the Co-op special is how we operate with transparency. The Co-op's straightforward communication strategies were part of what drew me here in the first place, and it has been an honor to be tasked with continuing and improving them as Communications Manager. And it was with transparency in mind that I began to craft a statement.

In the end, we had to put personal belief aside and do what was best for our cooperative. Here's an excerpt from the statement we released:

"While many of our staff agree and are outraged themselves, the Co-op is a democratic organization that represents a diverse community of over 3,000 owners and stakeholders that consists of people on both sides of every issue. Therefore, this Co-op does not participate in boycotts of companies for values-based reasons, except in cases involving food and how it relates to our store's sourcing policies.

We do, however, encourage our customers to vote, on this and other issues with their dollars, supporting those companies they like and believe in and avoiding the ones that they do not. When (for any reason) products don't sell, the Co-op stops carrying them."

I know that some people didn't like this answer. A couple even got angry and called us cowards. To that, I feel I must note that our Co-op was the only store in the area (to my knowledge) that put out a statement on the subject at all. At the Co-op, we don't avoid difficult conversations. After all, at the essence of cooperation lies compromise. And, in a cooperative, sometimes you don't get what you want.

Frankly, I expected more negativity. What I got instead was dozens of positive responses. As I write this piece, I am still receiving messages from Co-op constituents. And the overwhelming majority support our statement even though they have strong feelings and will personally boycott Eden. These people were able to see beyond their personal experience and support what they felt was best for the group. This is what makes us a different kind of business. And every one of those messages made me relish this job, this community and, most of all, this cooperative.

Plants Are Awesome and Cool

Talking cut flowers with our Co-op plant and flower expert.

By Jordan Archey, Plant and Floral Lead



After a winter that seemed like it would never end and an even longer spring, things are finally blooming and locally grown produce and flowers are filling the department. This year, I am proud to introduce some new local flower farmers to the Co-op mix: Tiny Hearts, located in Copake, NY and Sol Flower Farm, located in Millerton, NY. And, as she has for years, Cindy Parson at Adagio Flowers in Stockbridge, MA is also supplying us with beautiful bouquets from her fields. We are psyched about supporting our local floral farmers, and we hope you are, too.

But why are local and sustainably raised flowers important? You're not eating them (well, most flowers anyway), and you're not rubbing them on your skin (for the most part). Think about it though: What's the first thing you do when you get a bouquet of flowers? You stick your nose in them, take a whiff, and touch the petals. The local flowers we sell are produced with the same care and high environmental standards as the local food we sell. Purchasing these flowers is just another way to eliminate harmful pesticides in your life and support sustainable agriculture in our community.

Local flowers also benefit our local ecosystem. By supporting local, sustainably grown flowers and plants—instead of what is stocked in big box stores—you are helping our local pollinators thrive and live to see another flower instead of ingesting harmful pesticides. Our pollinators are dying off at an alarming rate, and anything we can do to help is important.

Yet another benefit, as is the case with all locally made products, buying local flowers lessens our carbon footprint. More than 80 percent of flowers purchased in the USA come from Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Israel. By buying local products, we can lessen our contribution to the pollution that comes from transportation and delivery and keep our money local.

As I write this piece, the planting season is coming to its natural end and most gardens are in full bloom. I would like to take this moment to thank our plant propagators who have helped us start our gardens on time this year. A huge thank you to Left Field Farm, located in Middlefield, MA, High Meadows Farm, located in Putney, VT, and Project Native, located in Housatonic, MA. Their standards of growing have helped us bring local and organic plants into our homes and gardens, and their hard work is appreciated.

So what's next for your flowers at home? What is the best way to bring them to your table? And how do you get them to last as long as possible when you do? Cutting back your flowers is an important step for the growth of your plants. Severing expired and flowering blooms encourages the plant to send out more. So filling your house with cut flowers is helping not only you, but the plant itself. Here is a short guide on how to get the most life out of your floral arrangements:

The Tools

They invented floral shears for a reason. When cutting your flowers, you want the cleanest cut you can manage. Floral shears are designed to do just that. If there's one piece of advice you take away from this article, it's this: *Don't use household scissors.* While they may sever the stem, they do a better job at actually crushing it. This causes the bloom to close its stem and not drink water. A clean cut will promote a healthy stem, which will allow the flower to continue to drink longer. Always use clean clippers to avoid bacterial contamination. Make sure to cut the stems at an angle so that they are not parallel to the bottom of the vase. This will ensure that the water always has access to the inside of the stem.

The Water

Besides dull cutting, there is no worse enemy to a floral arrangement than dirty water. Once the flowers are severed, they naturally begin to decay. This causes the water they are sitting in to fill with plant bacteria. When the flowers drink bacteria-filled water, the stems become clogged and the blooms don't receive water. This is obviously detrimental to the flower, and they wilt and die. By giving them clean water, they are able to nourish themselves for longer, promoting a longer vase life. If the stems begin to look clogged or dirty, cut them about an inch up the stem to help them drink. It is also ideal to avoid getting water on the blooms since this will shorten the life of the flower significantly.

Cooling Down

While it varies from flower to flower, it is usually good to give the flowers a rest between the garden and the table. It's best to cut flowers in the morning or the evening when the flowers have filled themselves with water—not when they're hot and dehydrated from the midday sun. If flowers are given a fair amount of time (four hours or more) to sit in a cool location, then this will give them a rest and help lengthen their vase life. And, if you have the room in the fridge, it might help to put them away overnight. This helps slow the aging process of the flowers, and it will help quite a bit in keeping them fresh. For a full list of flowers and their ideal treatment, check the web sites of your local botanical gardens or other flower-related organizations.

Flower Food

Your flowers are most likely hungry, and being cut from their food source certainly isn't helping. This last tip is optional, and, though I don't use it personally, it has been recommended. The Co-op doesn't supply or use flower food because most of them have a high chemical content. However, the following recipe can be made quickly at home. This recipe contains bleach, which is included for the use of purifying the water and keeping it clear of bacteria; its inclusion is optional.

Flower Food Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon bleach (optional)
- 2 teaspoons lemon or lime juice
- 1 quart lukewarm water

Preparation

Mix all ingredients in a vase for the appropriate amount needed, and place the flowers in the water. Voila! Flower food.

On a final note, I would like to thank you all for your warm welcome to the Co-op, your encouragement for the plants and flowers, and your questions and compliments that have helped this department grow. Thanks again, and happy summer!

Owners Save on Insurance

Did you know that Berkshire Co-op Market owners can receive a special 6 percent discount on their automobile insurance, while at the same time supporting education, health care, and public safety in the Great Barrington area? This unique offer is being made by GoodWorks Insurance, located at 343 Main Street in Great Barrington, one block from the Co-op. The program underwriter is Main Street Group, a well-respected, regional insurance carrier.

What makes this offer different? GoodWorks returns 50 percent or more of its operating profits each year to local charities. The revenue generated by the Co-op program will greatly increase the amount of these donations every year. Recent recipients are as diverse as Berkshire Grown, Construct, Inc., Great Barrington Firefighters Association, Railroad Street Youth Project, and many more. If you would like to recommend a local charity for the program, then stop by the GoodWorks office and speak with a representative today. And, while you are at it, see how much you can save!

When owners combine their automobile and home insurance into one account, they can increase their savings. This is the result of many other discounts that may apply to an insured's particular situation. To see if these apply to you, contact GoodWorks. Owners can also enjoy electronic billing with no online fees and a claim and policy service that is local and professional.

During August and September, your Co-op will be featuring the automobile insurance discount program in many of our communications. Look for more details on our web site and in your inbox. We hope you will take advantage of this unique way your ownership can benefit you, your family, and your community.



An Exclusive 6% Auto Insurance Discount
for Berkshire Co-Op Market Owners!

Find out more. Call GoodWorks Insurance at 800-588-8330 x302
or visit us at 343 Main Street in Great Barrington.

Cashew Cooperation Helps Small Farms in El Salvador

CASHEWS CONT. FROM PAGE 1 the “mainland,” were all part of a 175-acre cashew plantation belonging to one German landowner. The plantation was just one of many large landholdings along the southern coast of El Salvador, and the landless class that worked on these cotton, sugarcane, and coffee plantations, worked under difficult conditions and received little pay. When efforts to organize for change were repeatedly met with repression, the country exploded in a twelve-year civil war.

The Bajo Lempa, as the area is called, was a highly conflictive zone during the war, and the population suffered greatly. Montecristo, with its thick mangrove jungles, provided excellent cover. Both sides of the war used the island for temporary shelter and from which to launch military offensives. The village was burnt to the ground, the local population forced to flee, and the plantation was abandoned.

The war, which claimed roughly 75,000 lives, officially ended in 1992. As part of the Peace Accords, a Land Transfer Program was established through which the government bought large tracts of land and transferred small parcels to eligible ex-soldiers, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) insurgents, and civilians displaced by the war. The cashew plantation was parceled out and the land apportioned to groups of ex-FMLN combatants.

With the war behind them, the recently established residents now faced new challenges: how to earn a living for themselves and their families. In 1995, they formed a dairy, cashew, and sugarcane cooperative. But without market access or technical assistance, the co-op eventually failed. They decided to refocus their efforts on the cashews, which were beginning to gain attention among some Fair Trade organizations in the north. In 1999, financial assistance was acquired to build a processing plant. Three years later, ten farmers formed a new co-op, Aprainores, specializing in organic cashews for export.

Things were looking up. Aprainores' cashews—sweet, creamy, and delicious—were in demand. Fair Trade organizations established relationships with the co-op, and the members were learning to build a business. But in 2005, the co-op and its Fair Trade buyers received a serious blow. The general manager skipped town suddenly, leaving behind a horribly mismanaged financial situation. It took a long time to get over the shock and unravel what had happened. When they finally did and accounts were settled, they discovered that he had left them in serious trouble: They were \$350,000 in debt.

The situation was bleak, but the Fair Traders stood by Aprainores. A plan was put in place. Alex Flores, who had been working at the co-op for the previous year, was asked to take over its management. He had studied agronomy and business management in the United States, and the co-op owners believed that he possessed the necessary skills to turn things around. More importantly, Alex had grown to know the farmers, and he cared deeply for them and their organization. Alex made a commitment to the farmers to help them succeed, and he promised the buyers that he would pay back the debt.

It was a remarkable turnaround. By 2012, Aprainores had consolidated their co-op. They now had fifty-five members, Fair Trade and organic certifications, and a processing plant that employed thirty women from neighboring communities—the only source of employment in the area. They had two long-term Fair Trade buyers; and each year, Alex has paid off some of their debt, along with the interest. The farmers supplement their income by fishing, growing corn, beans, and other subsistence crops. They still find work as day laborers on neighboring plantations. No one is quite making a living, but they have survived.

Equal Exchange Launches Fair Food: 2012

In 2012, Equal Exchange reaffirmed our commitment to small farmers and Authentic Fair Trade. Having built a successful model in coffee, we decided it was time to replicate our work, applying what we had done and what we had learned to a new product category. Throughout the world, nut and dried fruit cooperatives have formed to provide economic livelihoods for small farmers. In food co-ops, ethical consumers buy these products without information or knowledge about the products or the producers. Sadly, much of these nuts and dried fruits are bought off the commodity market: Sales of these products do nothing to support alternative trade organizations with social missions, nor do the profits benefit small farmers or their associations.

Our conclusion: It is time to make the connection between small nut and dried fruit producers and consumers in the north by building and strengthening these cooperative supply chains. When we tried our first sample of cashews from Aprainores, we knew we were on our way! Aprainores had already committed their harvest, but we managed to buy every last pound they could sell us. Within three weeks, the cashews had sold out. Our instincts were right on!

We signed a contract to purchase twice that amount the following harvest and began working with another remarkable co-op, the Fair Trade Alliance of Kerala in India. This way, we could have a year-round supply and keep the bins stocked. But as luck would have it, in March 2013, smack in the middle of the harvest, Alex called to tell us they had been hit by an unusual weather phenomenon. For three days, hurricane-like winds swept through eastern El Salvador. Occurring just at the time the cashew trees were in blossom,

the winds knocked the budding flowers and incipient fruit off the trees. The processing plant was also damaged. Aprainores had lost 70 percent of their harvest. There would be no cashews from El Salvador that year.

It was disheartening. I travelled to El Salvador to see the damage and talk with the farmers. In a meeting on the island, the farmers couldn't hide their discouragement. Alex, looking pretty weary himself, explained to them that it would be another year without profits. He reminded them that much of their hardship was due to the significant debt they were carrying. Nevertheless, he tried to encourage them: In seven years, they had paid off more than two-thirds of their debt; a few more years and they would be in the clear.

I was worried. Really? Was there nothing that could be done? They've worked so hard. Their product is so good and certainly has a market. Surely, between all of us working to support small farmers, democratic organizations, alternative food systems, and cooperative supply chains, we could figure this one out. Fair Trade is about relationships. These farmers had given up twelve years of their lives to fight for social justice; they couldn't just fail because of a three-day wind. Could they?

Taking Action: Co-ops Supporting Co-ops

Back at Equal Exchange, I got the support to make something happen. Alex met with the co-op leadership and they put together a plan. The path forward became clear. The cashew trees had been planted in the 1970s. While still producing, they were aging. The farmers didn't have the resources to plant new trees. They could barely find the time to keep up with the day-to-day farm renovations that are necessary to get their farms to full production. If they had more technical assistance and more staff, they could affiliate dozens of cashew farmers living in the area and have even more cashews to sell in the future. The loan needed to be paid off. They needed a revolving loan fund to provide credit to the members. In this way, the farmers could make it to harvest without having to borrow money from the market middlemen or coyotes who then snatch up their cashews come March, leaving the farmer unable to sell at a reasonable rate to support their efforts.

We were in agreement: Equal Exchange and Aprainores. In the spring, we wired the first round of funding. They used these funds to build a nursery, hire an extension worker to manage it, and install an irrigation system. The farmers chose seeds from their best trees and planted them in the nursery. During our visit, we saw the 5,000 seedlings that they then grafted with shoots from their strongest cashew trees. With luck, the trees will begin producing in three to four years.

And so, on that insufferably hot March day, Oscar and Alex excitedly showed us around the farms. We saw where each farmer had cleared land in preparation for the new seedlings that they will plant. We spent the day visiting the farms and meeting with the farmers. They were still cautious, but I could sense excitement and optimism as well.

As we walked around the island, Oscar told us the story of how he had incorporated into the guerilla at the age of nine. He had seen his entire family killed by army soldiers right before his eyes. Lifting his shirt and showing us where he had taken a bullet during the 1989 military offensive, Oscar told us he was feeling optimistic. The presidential elections had just occurred in El Salvador and Salvador Sanchez Ceren, one of the five military commanders of the FMLN, had actually won! Oscar told us, “It's been a long journey, and we never thought we'd see this day! Now, we're ready for the next stage of our struggle for economic and political rights here in El Salvador. This time, it's not happening with weapons but with cashew nuts.”

Closing the Circle: Food Co-ops Join the Initiative

Equal Exchange continues to build our Fair Foods program, searching for the right products and producer groups and working with our food co-op partners to build this new supply chain. Farmer co-ops, Equal Exchange, and food co-ops: All three partners are necessary to do this work and to do it well. There are no formulas to follow when trying to create an alternative food system to the one we have now. We all know that the deck is stacked against small farmers, Alternative Trade Organizations, and progressive food stores. So we need to trust each other and support one another. After all, we are all innovating, taking risks, making mistakes, and learning as we go.

Once we got home, a new idea emerged: Since we are all in this together, why not invite our food co-op partners—and their consumers—to join us in this initiative? What better way to build support for small farmer co-ops than by educating and engaging consumers in the food system, and by finding ways to strengthen relationships throughout the supply chain? The idea is a pilot program to support small farmer co-ops initiated by Equal Exchange, with participation from food co-ops that will involve financial, educational, and cross-cultural components.

We have only just begun this work, and we are so excited and so proud of the enthusiasm and the commitment we have received already. Hats off to Berkshire Co-op Market for being one of the first food co-ops to understand the value of this initiative and give us a resounding yes!



A cashew seedling at the Aprainores nursery.



Phyllis meeting with farmers on Montecristo.



Phyllis at the Co-op after we joined the effort.

The Story of a Vermont Cheese Road Trip

VT CHEESE CONT. FROM PAGE 1 people and animals, learned a thing or two about Vermont's rich cheese and dairy history, and were given a glimpse into the future of cheese. Without taking up this entire newsletter's space, I will attempt to capture it.

Commercial cheesemaking in Vermont goes back to 1824. Only in the last twenty years has Vermont (along with other US states) seen more handmade and artisanal cheese being made with particular care to the system of good farming, animal welfare, and, of course, delicious milk. Today, there are about fifty cheesemakers making about 150 different varieties of cheese in the state.

Vermont has long been renowned as a leading dairy state and a leading innovator of dairy technology, organics, and overall better farming practices. Today, Vermont has the most cows per capita than any other state in the country!

As Cian was the map holder and navigator, he strategically routed us on a crooked, horseshoe-shaped line up and back down the state. Choosing the farms was a tough decision, but we figured we could squeeze in nine farms for our tour.

Day One

Our first stop was Maplebrook Farm, right over the border in Bennington. We watched the production of their two signature cheeses, hand-stretched mozzarella and cream-filled burrata. What exactly is burrata? Burrata is a cream and mozzarella filling stuffed into balls of mozzarella. Maplebrook is exclusively a cheesemaking facility that sources its milk from small neighboring farms and has been making their Italian-inspired mozzarellas by hand since 2003.

Next we visited Consider Bardwell Farm in Pawlett, which has been around since the early 1900s. Cheesemaker Chris Gray took us on a full tour of their gorgeous old barns, which has been converted into cheesemaking facilities. He also showed us their beautiful pastures for goats, cows, pigs, and chickens. Here is where we started to learn about a sustainable cycle of a farm. Although they only market the byproducts of the cows and goats (cheese and meat), the other animals aided in farm management and utilization. The animals were rotated around the various pastures in a particular order: chickens, goats, and then cows. Chickens and goats are browsers, which means they are picky and nibble at only desirable grasses. Cows are grazers and will clean up what the other animals leave behind. The animals' waste fertilizes the ground, enriches the soil, and restores the grass for the next cycle. Also, the leftover whey from the cheesemaking is fed to the pigs, and the pigs feed the farmers and other staff at the farm. We began to see similar trends of self-sustaining models at other farms as well.

Michael Lee of Twig Farm in Cornwall built his small goat dairy right on the same property where he and his family built a home. Seeing goats roaming around outside their fenced areas made me wonder if the playground area in the house's front yard was for Michael's children or the goats. Michael, among many other small farmers, was a prime example of how a farmer—who is connected to his animals and is fascinated by animal husbandry—infuses his passion into his cheeses. Each goat had a name and some even came on command. A few notable names were Crabcake, Pickle, and Scooter.

A subject that was brought up between both Chris at Consider Bardwell Farm and Michael at Twig Farm was the supply and demand for artisanal goat cheese. Goat cheese is a healthy alternative for health conscientious consumers and for those who are lactose intolerant to cow dairy. Chris put it straight: "The demand and rise of more goat cheese is going to have to coincide with the education and consumption of goat meat." I never truly considered this point until now when I actually visualized the equation—more goat cheese equals more goats, both male and female, being born in addition to older goats that won't give milk anymore after a certain number of seasons. It surprised me to hear that goat meat is the world's most popular meat to eat since here, in the United States, it is rarely encountered.

Day Two

Our second day started in Enosburg Falls at Boston Post Dairy. This is a small farm with a big family behind the operations. The history of the Jarvis family is one of the county's most well-known stories and for a good reason—there were eleven brothers and four sisters. While the brothers mostly tended to the farms and cows that supplied the family with milk and meat, the sisters ran the dairy. In addition to cheese, they also made goat milk soap, yogurt, and maple syrup. We got a chance to put on a pair of Crocs (the choice shoes of almost every cheesemaker we visited) and talk to Anne, as she was unmolding cheese that was made the day before. Once in a while, we would hear a knocking coming from a glass window that separated the cheese room and the retail shop. Every time I looked up, I was dumbfounded to see a different nephew or grandchild waving in the window.

As we headed north, we drove for miles up a dirt road that had no electricity (let alone cellphone service). Lazy Lady Farm in Westfield is completely off the grid and powered by windmills, solar panels, and a couple of generators. Owner and cheesemaker Laini Fondilier has been making goat cheese here

since 1987. On her property are also two cheese caves, dug into the side of the hills, that age her cheese gems. Laini also sells baby goats to Twig Farm.

No cheese tour of Vermont is complete without visiting the cheese-aging hub that is Jasper Hill Farm and Cellars in Greensboro. It is so far north that, while driving, I received a notification on my phone that I had entered an international calling area. A project with the support of Cabot lead to a multimillion-dollar construction of what they like to describe as underground finger caves. I can best visually describe walking into the caves as entering subway tunnels where the trains and commuters are replaced by three- or four-story-high shelves of cheeses and cheesemakers carefully turning, brushing, and codling each one. The Cellars at Jasper Hill Farm were created not only to store and age the iconic Cabot Clothbound Cheddar but to create an outlet for neighboring cheesemakers to store and age their cheeses as well. The Cellars at Jasper Hill Farm act as an affinage (cheese selecting and maturing), much like Europe has done for centuries.



Separating curds and whey at Consider Bardwell Farm in West Pawlett.



Michael Lee makes goat Tomme at Twig Farm in West Cornwall.

Day Three

On a similar note of European tradition, our first stop on the third day was Thistle Hill Farm on a steep mountain road in North Pomfret. In order to understand how to make amazing cheese, owners John and Janine Putnam spent the better half of a decade traveling back and forth to France and Switzerland in search of a landscape similar to theirs back in Vermont. It turns out that northern Vermont is very similar in landscape to the Savoie area in France, which borders the Swiss Alps. John and Janine studied the land, animals, and cheesemaking process in Switzerland and France. They then brought their knowledge and passion back with them to create their one and only cheese, Tarentaise, named after a small village in France.

Just eight miles down the road in Reading is Spring Brook Farm. They have a large facility where farmers teach inner city kids where their food comes from through farming, cooking, and making cheese. I thought it was suspicious that their flagship cheese was also called Tarentaise until I got the full scoop. John of Thistle Hill Farm consulted Spring Brook Farm when they were building their cheese operation and sold Spring Brook Farm the recipe and rights to his Tarentaise cheese. John legally protected one of the first cheeses in the United States that was inspired by a place. Cheesemakers in Europe have done this for decades.

We took a change of pace when we next visited Vermont Creamery in Websterville. Again, although this is a cheesemaking facility and not a farm, the milk comes from local sources and from the animals at Boston Post Dairy. Besides making numerous award-winning goat cheeses, Vermont Creamery is expanding to a project that

is so new that we were not allowed to hear the full details. What we did gather was that they have bought several acres of land in a few towns over to build a sustainable goat farm. This might become a center for education and research. When I asked if this included more resources and outlets for selling fresh goat meat, I got a simple nod.

Our final stop was Woodcock Farm in Weston. Believe it or not, Woodcock Farm is one of only three farms in Vermont that makes sheep's milk cheese. Vermont's green landscape is a dairy land for mainly cows. Goats were brought into the picture because they are sturdy animals, smaller, and very smart like pets. Sheep are a bit harder since they require sheering, aren't adapted to the land, and produce much less milk than cows or goats. Mark and Gari Fischer have a passion for sheep's milk cheese and, despite the challenge, they continue to raise and milk sheep to make delicious cheeses. In order to sustain their business in the off-season or when the sheep are producing little milk, they buy cow's milk from a neighboring farm. They then make either a cheese that is a blend of cow's milk and sheep's milk or just a seasonal cow's milk cheese. Michael of Twig Farm and Laini of Lazy Lady Farm do this as well, not only to survive in the off-season but also to take full advantage of their cheesemaking skills and facilities.

Home Again

It was a long and windy road in Vermont, but the lessons learned were much more than just thumbing through cheese books or clicking on web sites. Vermont's rich culture, cheesemakers, and their ancestors are all playing a critical part in not only shaping the Vermont cheese community but setting the tone for the future and a model for the rest of the country. With concerns of the taste, price, and profitability of a given cheese or dairy product, we are also seeing farmers and consumers more involved in sustainability. We also discovered their growing efforts to promote goat meat, raise the bar in education, and support themselves and other dairies in difficult times.

Instead of complaining about how my back and eyes hurt from driving so much or how I only wanted to eat dairy-free for the rest of the week, I'll leave you with a point that Mateo Keller, owner of Jasper Hill Farm, made that really leaves an impression on not just the cheese movement but all of the slow-food movement of today and the future. He quoted cheese hero, Philippe Goux, who said, "We are not necessarily competitors; we are all in the same boat, and the enemy is standardization."

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Grocery From Zack Sheppard

A few organizational and personnel changes have been made in the grocery department during the past few months. We added the position of Assistant Grocery Manager to our organizational chart, and we hired long-time Refrigerated/Frozen Buyer Amie Decker for that position. She is doing a wonderful job taking on this added responsibility. To replace Amie's vacancy in Refrigerated/Frozen, we hired Front End veteran Sarah Rosenthal for this lead position. Just a short time on the job, and she's already innovating and excited about taking on more and more!

The grocery department also said goodbye to two of our favorite employees who left for personal reasons: Devan Arnold, who used to run the buying club and was one of our closers, and John Clarke, our former bread lead. It's always sad to see good friends go. But with the loss comes new faces and new opportunities.

We have a smattering of new products in the store. We are very excited about Matt's Cookie Bars. A local producer based out of Pittsfield, MA, they are dedicated to producing the most delicious, gluten-free cookies available anywhere. Their mission is to provide you with a high-quality, beneficial treat using ingredients that are organic and as close to whole food as possible. Check them out in our cookie section!

Meat, Seafood & Cheese

From Austin Banach

What a refreshing turn this department has taken this year! Sales are rising, and our small department is turning into a destination for organic and natural-raised meats and sustainable seafood. We have been paying attention to customer suggestions, training staff, and exploring new suppliers. We aim to be one of the best sources for meat and seafood in town and the Berkshires!

Meat: We've been facing several ups and downs with our chicken suppliers. Sadly, Eberly, who had been a great partner, shut down in the spring. We tried Bell and Evans, but there were quality and supply issues. Then Smart Chicken came along. Several samples were brought to the Co-op, and everyone agreed it was the best-tasting chicken of the national brands. Smart Chicken also made it possible for us to match prices to the competition, which has always been a challenge. There have been some concerns about the brand (we know they are sold at conventional stores as well), but I assure you that their practices are in line and their quality is high. Also, they seem to be the only company that can supply us consistently. We are talking to them about more sustainable packaging, and, hopefully, that change will eventually come.

In March, I attended the annual New England Meat conference with Brad and Heather of The Piggery. Since we introduced their non-GMO pork products, the success has been remarkable. Expect to see more great promotions and demos down the road with The Piggery.

Seafood: In seafood, there is no denying that the department's success is mainly from our relationship with Wes Malzone and his company, BerkShore. We are trying to influence customers to try sustainable alternatives like hake, redfish, porgy, or lemon sole. In order for us to continue to eat wild seafood, we need to turn to the lesser known species. I'm determined to educate myself, staff, and customers on buying and supporting sustainable seafood options.

Cheese: The world of artisan cheese is just growing and growing. One of the biggest proofs of this is the recent statement from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA wanted to ban the use of wooden surfaces for aging cheese in the USA and place restrictions on exported cheese that are aged on wood. Within forty-eight hours of the announcement, thousands of cheesemakers, cheesemongers, and other cheese enthusiasts came together to write to the FDA in opposition of the new ban. A day later, the ban was lifted. The culture around cheese goes beyond just the product. It also encompasses the animals, farms, farmers, and support of the consumers. I'm proud to help the Co-op be an important member of the cheese culture, and I look forward to sharing my knowledge and my continued work with such organizations as the Massachusetts Cheese Guild, Vermont Cheese Council, and American Cheese Society.



Wellness From Brenna St. Pierre

This is a wonderful time to enjoy the Berkshires outdoors. The Wellness department has you covered for the rest of the season and beyond with some new value offerings and best-selling immune products.

We are pleased to have a growing selection of personal care products in a 32-ounce size from top brands Clearly Natural, EO, and Alaffia. From Clearly Natural, we have their unscented, glycerin, liquid hand soap. This is great to refill the pump dispenser, and every purchase helps the Clean the World Campaign's efforts to eradicate preventable diseases through proper hygiene. A certified B Corporation, EO products are gluten-free and verified by the Non-GMO Project. The Everyone line is perfect for the whole family. And committed to philanthropy, Alaffia has established several fair-trade cooperatives, supports education and maternal health, and works to replant deforested areas in West Africa with native trees. Look for these great value products from brands with values.

With cold and flu season just around the corner, our immune-defense selection is stocked with your favorite remedies to support your health as the seasons change. Traditional best sellers are available in different options, with liquid alcohol and alcohol-free liquid extracts from Herb Pharm, Simpler's Botanicals and Gaia Herbs. Liquids absorb fastest and are an economical way to purchase herbal remedies. For liquid extracts in a capsule, look to Gaia Herbs and New Chapter herbal products. Our shelves are stocked with best sellers such as echinacea, astragalus, oil of oregano and black elderberry syrups. We have natural remedies suitable for children and adults, many made with certified organic ingredients. Happy August from the Wellness department!

Prepared Foods From Lynn Pino

As I write this update, a thunderstorm is raging outside, bringing with it the promise of cool, crisp air. However, the mild weather will not last long because this is summer in the Berkshires. And summer in the Berkshires is supposed to be hot. Our local farmers need this heat and rain so that they can provide our kitchen and café with the delicious produce we get each summer.

At this moment, there is rainbow chard, red leaf lettuce, and curly green kale from Woven Roots Farm in the kitchen's walk-in refrigerator. Alongside them are scallions and squash from Left Field Farm, bok choy from Etcetera Farm, and a spring mix and baby spinach from Equinox Farm. In the café, McEnroe Farm has supplied us with their sweet, juicy tomatoes so that we can provide our customers with the most delicious BLT sandwiches ever.

The local growing season is in full swing, and, as long as our farmers can supply us with produce, we will be serving it to you. It is the promise of Berkshire Co-op Market to serve our customers the freshest, local produce that we can procure during this, the most wonderful season of the year!

On a more disappointing note, it seems bacon prices are hitting all-time highs because of drought in the west that is raising feed prices and an epidemic that is killing thousands of pigs across the country. We are looking at the books, and we may have to adjust prices in the café. Stay tuned for more information.

Produce From Jake Levin

With the wet days and cool nights, it has been a challenging summer produce-wise. But things have been going smoothly and product is looking delicious. We have been utilizing the Co-op refrigerated truck much more this summer, which has allowed us to develop some great relationships with Pioneer Valley Farms including Warner Farm and Kitchen Garden in Sunderland, MA and Atlas Farm in South Deerfield, MA. Warner Farm was able to fill in for us when we weren't able to get organic strawberries from Thompson Finch Farm, which meant we were able to have local, organic strawberries consistently throughout the short season. Kitchen Garden is a fantastic farm that grows unusual varieties that we aren't able to get from Berkshire County farms like Treviso radicchio, shiso, and shishito peppers. This has meant not only a wider variety of produce but also a larger list of local farms to support.

As we move into late summer and early fall, we will continue to have fantastic stone fruit from Klein's Kill Farm in Germantown, NY, including peaches, nectarines, apricots, and plums. Organic sweet corn continues to roll in from Czajkowski Farm in Hadley, MA. In September, we can look forward to winter squash from Farm Girl Farm in Sheffield and High Meadows Farm in Putney, VT. We will also be getting apples from Windy Hill Farm in Great Barrington, MA, Thompson Finch in Ancram, NY, and Scott Farm in Dummerston, VT.

As I am sure you have all noticed, we have really grown our plant and floral department this summer and have seen great success with it. As the weather cools, we will continue to offer beautiful bouquets from our local flower farmers including Sol Flower Farm in Ancram, NY, Adagio Farm in Stockbridge, MA, and Tiny Hearts Farm in Copake, NY. We will also continue to stock the fantastic succulents from Tiny Hearts. If you have any questions regarding plants and flowers, please ask for Jordan Archey, our Plant and Floral Lead.