

New Co-op Store on the Way!

Planning Has Begun for Our New Store at 100 Bridge Street - Our GM Will Answer Some Frequently Asked Questions

By Art Ames



As you have probably heard, the Co-op is planning to build a new store. Negotiations have begun to erect a new building at the 100 Bridge Street development just across the river from our current location.

Since the decision to embark on this adventure was announced, a lot of questions have been asked. In this piece, General Manager Art Ames will do his best to answer your most commonly asked questions.

The Process

Why do we need to expand?

The question says it all. We don't just want to expand, we need to. There are several reasons.

Space: Our sales are going to be in the neighborhood of \$8.3 million this year, and our store is 4,500 square feet of retail. Thank goodness we designed the Co-op smartly all those years ago. The national average for store size is approximately \$1,200 in sales per square foot, which means we hit the "average" at \$5.4 million. Running a retail business gets very difficult with those kinds of numbers. Eventually, conditions like these affect a business' ability to succeed.

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A Look At Four-Season Farming

Availability of New England Winter Produce on the Rise

By Matthew Novik



Spinach inside a cold weather hoop house at Woven Roots Farm in Lee

Photo by Jen Sainetti

It's February. And, for the most part, it's cold. Winter around these parts is usually a time filled with hot drinks, woodstoves and snow sports. The land is snow covered, the earth is frozen, and the farms are closed for the season. Or are they? Most people assume that local vegetables are simply not a part of the New England winter experience. But, more and more these days, farmers are proving otherwise.

The enjoyment of local vegetables in the off-season is nothing new. Root cellar storage was long the primary method of making produce last, until home use of refrigeration became prevalent in the 1920s. And greenhouses have been used for growing in controlled environments as long ago as the time of the ancient Romans. But, when the trucking industry boomed and farming became big business, food from Florida and California ruled the day. And with their popularity came the decline of these age-old practices.

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www.berkshire.coop
Mon - Sat 8 am - 8 pm
Sunday 10 am - 6 pm



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NOTES FROM HQ: THE GM REPORT

By Art Ames



I'm going to be more concise than usual this time around. Don't all of you applaud at once.

It's a fascinating time for our co-op as we balance the natural flow of change with the anticipated larger relocation project. We are just beginning the process of making internal changes to prepare us for this next growth spurt, while implementing changes that will allow us an opportunity to better serve your needs today. I note that last year at this time, I was "on the road"

somewhere much warmer, and maybe that's part of the reason that I seem to have less patience for cold weather this year. I hate to admit it, but I'm looking forward to spring. My apologies to all of you winter enthusiasts out there.

Fresh Foods

We are actively interviewing for the position of Produce Manager. Cian Dalzell has been serving as Interim Produce Manager for these last few months. His ability to create and maintain systems, along with his knowledge as a farmer, has been very helpful and we are thankful for all his hard work. When all is said and done, we expect that we will be better prepared to enhance our currently strong relationship with our local producers, and be more readily able to invite new growers into our community. While we will not be completely ready for the growing season, we will be well prepared for harvest, and truly look forward to next year as well. As part of a more global approach, we have also built a relationship with financial resources (see Carrot Project on page 8) that can assist our local food producers with necessary funds for projects involving increased production, season extensions and other necessary projects. This type of an approach is invaluable to us if we are indeed going to increase regional food self-sufficiency in the years to come.

We continue our efforts to produce and source more items right here instead of bringing them in from more distant locations within our own operation. Slowly, we are increasing our in-house cold cuts (see Fresh Foods Report, page 12). It's expected that we will in the coming weeks roll out an in-house packaged cold cut choice to eventually replace our current prepackaged choices. When done, we expect that you will be able to purchase cold cuts with even fewer additives, naturally reduced sodium, and at a lower price.

Physical Plant

We just completed a project in partnership with National Grid that replaced just about all of our lighting with more modern, energy efficient lighting. National Grid paid for 70%, and we spent just shy of \$4,000 for the conversion. Even though we are eventually moving, the energy costs that we will save will pay for a significant portion of that investment. Money matters aside, it is important to us from an environmental standpoint that we do whatever we can to use less electricity.

In a few weeks we will be making significant physical changes to our Wellness Department. The biggest change is that we are removing the "office" area and opening it up to you as retail and consultation space. When completed the area will be much less congested, and it will be easier to find things. You are going to like it!

Relocation

First of all, please take a moment to read the accompanying articles in this newsletter that speak specifically to our intended new location and expansion project. I've answered some frequently asked questions in an article that starts on the front page, and Tim Geller, the executive director

of Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire, has written a short summary of the project, which is on page 4.

Although there isn't a lot to report yet, this phase of the project is focused on identifying our eventual partners, consultants, resources and other stakeholders as we not only figure out the eventual team but what role everyone will play. It's both a rewarding and frustrating experience. All of us want to get going right now, and are chomping at the bit. Yet we also realize that slowing things down now and planning completely will save time and money and frustration later. Once we actually borrow funds, the financial clock starts ticking, and at that stage we want to be in a position to accelerate the project.

All of you have opinions. Thank goodness! It means that we are all invested in what we do. We will be setting up a variety of avenues for us to listen and you to comment. I expect that we will have a few group meetings, will have a table set up in the store, and will open up many more areas of communication. Please, please, please help us help you by making sure that you are getting e-mails from us and have signed up for our list serve. You can call us, stop at Owner Services, or go to our website to do so.

I also know we all have a tendency to dismiss mail at certain times as "junk" mail or not important. Again, I ask that over the next several months that you take a quick moment to really look at what we send you before deciding to set it aside or discard it. Communication is indeed a two-way street, and we will all have far more fun if we continue to communicate.

Finance

The first quarter of our fiscal year (July - September) was robust. We are still analyzing this last quarter. While results were positive, some of our expenses, particularly payroll, increased. This quarter we will focus on capturing opportunities to improve our bottom line while still improving services and being sensitive to the needs of our employees.

Most of you are familiar with PPOT. After a promising start, owners signing up for this program intended to decrease our absurd bank fees has slowed. It is in none of our best interests to needlessly supply anonymous banking institutions with obscene profits. We are all frustrated, and PPOT is a small yet effective way to begin to find our own balance. As owners, you pointed out your frustrations, we developed an alternative, and now more of us must embrace the concept to make a difference. If none of this makes sense, look for a brief summary of the program in this newsletter, and next time you are in the Co-op, please stop at Owner Services and let's have a conversation.

Just us Folks

Two weeks ago, we had our holiday employee and Board of Director's party. Actually, we never have time during the holidays, so we have it at the end of January. Many of us think of our fellow employees and participants as family. This year, almost all of our staff chose to attend and I was amazed at all of the kids who also attended. It seems that our staff and board have had their own growth spurt in recent years, and I was struck at how much our family has literally and figuratively grown in recent years. For me, I also note that often our new employees were at one time toddlers in the store, as the next generation of "Co-op kids" grows up and becomes more involved in what we do and what we hope to become. I'm not sure that I really have any point to make except to recognize that while we sell groceries at the Co-op, and as important as that is to our customers, that collectively we've created and sustained so much more. I just want to thank you all.

Relocation Questions?: Here are Some Answers

Continued from Page 1

Parking: We knew that parking would be a challenge when we moved to Bridge Street. Now, with so many customers coming to the store every day, we are beyond maximum capacity for our little lot.

Infrastructure: The building that we are in is being abused. It simply was not intended to have this many people coming in and out and would need significant improvements if we were to stay. Our owners notice that the store can be too cold or hot, floors are now uneven, and we are beginning to see structural issues. We have known for some time that major and significant funds would have to be applied either to the existing structure or to a new home for the Co-op.

Local Food: We've been trying to strategically plan our co-op's future, based on educated assumptions about our community and the world at large. We determined a few years ago that the combination of changing weather patterns, uncertain national economies, stress on the national food system, and approaching rising transportation costs indicated that Berkshire County must be more self-sufficient in feeding itself. Consequently, our Board of Directors directed our team to work toward increasing the local food supply. A bigger store will increase our ability to work with local food suppliers, challenge them to increase production, and give them a retail outlet for that food.

Storage: More storage space will allow us to receive fewer deliveries per week when gas prices go up and delivery fees skyrocket.

Community Involvement: Our Board of Directors has also instructed us to do what we can to help the local economy and educate the community. By

increasing our capacity and the size of our organization, we will increase resources that we can then put back into our community.

How did the Co-op come to choose this site?

We've been looking for quite a while. In the end, the choice boiled down to expanding at our current site or building a new facility at 100 Bridge Street. Both had advantages and challenges. Once we factored in acquisition costs of the current building and the additional parking that we will need to the project at 100 Bridge, the two ended up costing about the same amount.

When all was said and done, we realized that we could build a new home to fit our needs that would take advantage of new technologies that address environmental concerns, take a blighted property and transform it into a recreational destination by finally allowing open access to the river, and increase the tax revenues by putting the developed parcel back onto the tax rolls. Everybody wins!

Why don't Co-op owners vote on this kind of decision?

Indirectly, Co-op owners do vote in a very meaningful way. We use a representative type of governance, and our owners vote for their Board of Directors. Our Board, presented with the facts, made the decision to pursue the chosen location. Also, choosing a site involved a technical decision, made by experts in their field, taking everything into consideration while balancing owners' needs and desires.

FAQ cont. on page 11

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ENDS STATEMENT (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

DATES OF INTEREST

2013 OWNER APPRECIATION DAYS 10% OFF TO OWNERS IN GOOD STANDING

TUESDAY, APRIL 16TH 2013
WEDNESDAY, JULY 17TH 2013
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17TH 2013

2012 BOARD MEETINGS

HELD THE 4TH WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH
SCHEDULE CHANGES NOVEMBER & DECEMBER DUE TO THE HOLIDAYS
6:00 PM • BERKSHIRE CO-OP OFFICES • 307 MAIN STREET

FEBRUARY 27TH - MARCH 27TH - APRIL 24TH - MAY 22ND

Co-op owners are welcome to attend Board meetings. Owner-input time is reserved from 6:45 – 7 pm 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

Learning About the Cooperative Food System

A co-op board director spends some down time thinking about the future of cooperatives and her winters

By Alexandra Phillips



One of the best things about winter is having the time to go to conferences and classes to glean inspiration from teachers and those with more experience than I.

On January 12th I attended the Massachusetts Northeast Organic Farmer's Association winter conference in Worcester. One of the workshops offered was called Growing the Co-operative Food System, presented by Erbin Crowell, the Executive Director of the NFCA (Neighboring Food Co-op Association). The more I immerse myself in the co-op world the more fun it is to geek out to co-op facts and figures. Erbin taught a refreshing class that started out with the basics—the benefits of cooperatives as democratic entities, their roots in values based goals, and the placing of the common good before that of profit. Erbin emphasized that we are struggling today with similar questions to those that were being asked during the Industrial Revolution. Can we trust our food sources? Will we be able to afford quality food? I didn't realize (until watching *Downton Abbey*, and more reputedly, hearing from Erbin) how big an issue food security was during those times. Prices skyrocketed on a whim and products were mixed with non-foodstuffs to save money. For example, a bag of flour could contain up to 50% limestone! In 1844 the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, a group of weavers, unionists and community activists, started a member-owned store that was based on valuing food and product security. They were also the first cooperative to pay a patronage dividend. (By

the way, have you cashed your checks?) I knew of their story, which is fascinating and uplifting, but what I did not realize about the Rochdale store is that just ten years after it opened, the British cooperative movement had grown to nearly 1,000 cooperatives! Not only that, but Rochdale Pioneers is still in existence in England! Over the years it has merged with other cooperatives and now operates under a different name, The Cooperative Group, with over six million members!

It was thrilling to learn that presently there are one billion co-op members worldwide and, not only that, but co-ops are resilient and continuing to grow in these belt-tightening times while managing to maintain their values. In fact, last year was Organic Valley's best year, even amidst the financial struggles in the United States. Erbin also touched on some of the decisions that co-ops make that other businesses would consider "crazy." For example, spending time and labor communicating with and ordering from fifty or more farmers, processing their deliveries, and keeping track of what is coming from whom and how much of it they have. I take all this for granted, assuming that any savvy co-op would be doing this. But that's exactly the point. The co-op is doing all this extra work because it is focused on delivering benefits to the community and keeping the loyalty of customers and growers. And it works out for all parties in the long run! Our co-op market experienced a breakthrough year in local sales, proving that all that time and effort on the part of grower and co-op employees was well worth it.

Dan Seitz wrote an article in a recent newsletter about Mondragón in Spain and its thriving cooperative structure. Similarly, Erbin spoke of

Bologna being the co-op capital of the world and explained that in Italy a cooperative cannot legally be sold unless the assets go back to the members. Upon further research I found that Bologna is still holding strong as a cooperative hub, and is staying savvy among rapidly changing global and competitive economics. The great challenges appear to be that of balancing entrepreneurial efficiency and social values, finding a balance of generating competitive organizations while guaranteeing members' rights of participation.

As a gardener and farmer, most of my work is packed into three seasons with a much needed "rest dip" in the winter. But as many others in my position know, this dip can be tough on the wallet and momentum of life. I've often daydreamed about a winter worker task force in the southern Berkshires. I haven't worked out (any of) the kinks, but the idea is that someone would come up with a product that could be locally produced and distributed during the winter season, and those in need of winter work would be paid a fair wage to do one of the many jobs it would take to get this product made and get it off to market. But why stop daydreaming there? After Erbin's lecture I was inspired to continue in a cooperative train of thought. Not only could production of this valued fill-in-the-blank item create jobs in our area, but the business could be built on cooperative principles, benefiting our community on a even larger scale. So, all you winter daydreamers...any ideas?

Along with being the Co-op Board Secretary, Alexx is a landscaper, gardener and co-owner of Second Hand Farm in Great Barrington

Berkshire Co-op Market Sets the Tone at 100 Bridge Street

The location of the new Co-op store to be a transformational development for Great Barrington

By Tim Geller, Executive Director, Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire

An expanded and dynamic new home for Berkshire Co-op Market exemplifying ecologically intelligent, sustainable design and green building practices; a locus of local businesses and organizations that focus on sustainable living, holistic health and wellness; super energy efficient, cooperative-style residential units overlooking the Housatonic River: **100 Bridge Street** is one of the most exciting and transformative real estate projects in the history of the Southern Berkshires.

The Co-op will be the flagship of the multi-use building on the corner of Bridge Street and the Housatonic River, and will set the tone for the entire development. The Co-op's community and environmental values will be amplified by other like-minded, locally owned retail businesses on the ground floor, and the second floor will be dedicated to local holistic medical and wellness practices. Condominiums on the third floor will further reflect BCM's values with state of the art green building techniques and near-zero carbon footprint technology. This projected mix of uses, combined with a very high level of sustainability and the riverfront location, will offer a quality of live-work-shop opportunities that is unique in our region and that will be a model for sustainable living through the 21st century.



For further information about the 100 Bridge Street development as a whole, please contact the Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire (413)528-7788, tccdc@verizon.net, or Allegrone Companies (413) 997-9222.

Berkshire Youngsters Love Food Adventures

The Co-op's collaborative in-school education program continues to grow and evolve

By Jenny Schwartz, Education & Outreach Coordinator

On Tuesdays and Thursdays at Conte Community School in Pittsfield, the second graders filed in, followed shortly by the third graders, then the fourth graders and lastly by the fifth graders, making the switch from homework help to an after-school class. They arrived at the school's learning kitchen, which is located in the science room, placed their backpacks on the hooks of the cubbies, washed their hands, checked the job chart, and sat down at the table. "What are we making today?" was the popular question as they went through the routine. "Oh, we're making something with carrots," one child commented to another as they looked at the counter that displayed ingredients waiting to be used. When everyone was seated, the kids did a drumroll on the table until the recipe was announced. Rainbow wraps, a Food Adventures favorite.

This is a typical scene in a Food Adventures program, a dynamic cooking and nutrition program that the Co-op runs in collaboration with the Nutrition Center of Pittsfield. The Food Adventures team has worked with elementary school children at Conte Community School, Morningside Elementary School and the Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center this fall. And what a fall it was! With the help of Morgan Kulchinsky, an educator at the Nutrition Center, we made all sorts of great food. Breakfast burritos, rainbow wraps, mini frittatas, kale chips, squapple crisp (a combination of butternut squash and apples) and a fall quinoa salad were among the kids' favorite recipes. To further the collaborative nature of the program, we worked with IS183 art school and our introduction to Morningside was thanks to them, who invited us as visiting artists. We focused on culinary arts and made recipes related to the art school's ingenious curriculums.

In our first class with the Conte kids, we played a cooperative game to focus on the importance of working together. The kids were divided into two groups and were given a large blanket. When ready, a ball was placed in the middle of the blanket and they needed to work together to keep the ball on the blanket and away from the ground. It took teamwork, communication and patience. Afterwards we had a discussion about how important it is to work together, regardless of whether or not you are working with a friend. We asked questions such as: Did the ball drop when you were working together? How does this activity relate to cooking? Are recipes more likely to be made on time if you work together? The game set the tone for developing the positive group dynamics we wanted to see in the class.

While the kids were interested to hear what they were making in cooking class, they were just as excited to see their job assignment for the class. There are always shouts of excitement when two children read that they are head chef for their group. This meant they were in charge of delegating tasks to a small group of children. The head chef would read aloud the ingredients and directions of the recipe and then assign cooking jobs to their peers. In a recent class, the head chef tested her math skills to get more kids involved. After everyone finished learning how to dice, chop, julienne, grate and mince an apple, later to become applesauce, there were a few more ingredients that needed to be added before it began to cook. The recipe called for one teaspoon of cinnamon. She broke it up into fractions, found the appropriate measuring spoons, and asked four kids to measure out the ingredients. The remaining three children were in charge of measuring the cups of water needed. Word problems are much more fun when you can act them out and include everyone in the group!

Server was another favorite job in our class. These kids were in charge of serving the finished recipe to students at their table and then picking an adult in the school with whom they would like to share the recipe. They could hardly contain their excitement when it was time to serve a favorite staff member, and they waited enthusiastically for their reaction after tasting it. These staff members are great, particularly when they eat the occasional recipe that has been overspiced by some overly eager measurers. Sometimes an eighth of a teaspoon of cayenne pepper is really all you need.

And then there's stovetop, where the children got to use a hot stove, plain and simple. They loved it! If they didn't get one of these jobs, they were a dishwasher, table cleaner, floor sweeper or compost person (they collected the compost and brought it to the school garden or back to the Co-op). We recently began weighing our compost to see how much was being collected and not ending up in the trashcan. It's another opportunity to incorporate math into the class. The kids loved weighing and documenting the amount on a chart. Some took the initiative of announcing to the group how much was collected that day. The jobs were different each week, ensuring everyone got an opportunity to experience each one.

Shortly after the season of trick or treating, the kids at Conte got into the habit of trading ingredients they were preparing, for a taste of someone else's ingredient. We like to emphasize which ingredients are edible raw and encourage them to try things as they work. We would see arms stretching over the table (with really clean hands, I promise!), handing a sample of an ingredient in exchange for what a friend was working on. One day there was a mad dash to the sink as three boys decided to taste a healthy helping of grated ginger. They fought for position in front of the sink in order to be the first to fill up cups of water. They all agreed the ingredient was more delicious in the vegetable fried rice than by itself. Third grader Simeon admitted to being reluctant to try this recipe, as there were a lot of vegetables he didn't recognize. After seeing his friend Joseph, another ginger taster, happily eating some, he went for it. Later, he commented how glad he was that he tried some because he ended up having fourth, fifth and sixth helpings!

Once the cooking jobs had been completed, everyone had cleaned up and we were waiting for the food to cook, a lesson was taught. Some topics we covered were: How to make their own balanced meals; understanding the nutrition behind the ingredients; the importance of seasonal foods; why it's good to eat breakfast, and eating a rainbow. This was accomplished through engaging discussion, activities and games.

We ended the semester by having an iron chef activity. The class was divided into two small groups; each group had a head chef (a fourth or fifth grader) and a sous chef (a second or third grader). They came up with team names, which were "Head Chefs" and "Iron Chefs," and worked together to help their group design a recipe based on the specific ingredients we told them would be available. Coincidentally, both teams chose to make breakfast burritos. Through a newly formed relationship with IS183, Lucie Castaldo, IS183's Coordinator for Curriculum Development, visited our class and worked with the groups during this. **ADVENTURES cont. on page 10**



Students playing the Cooperation Game

Photo by Jenny Schwartz



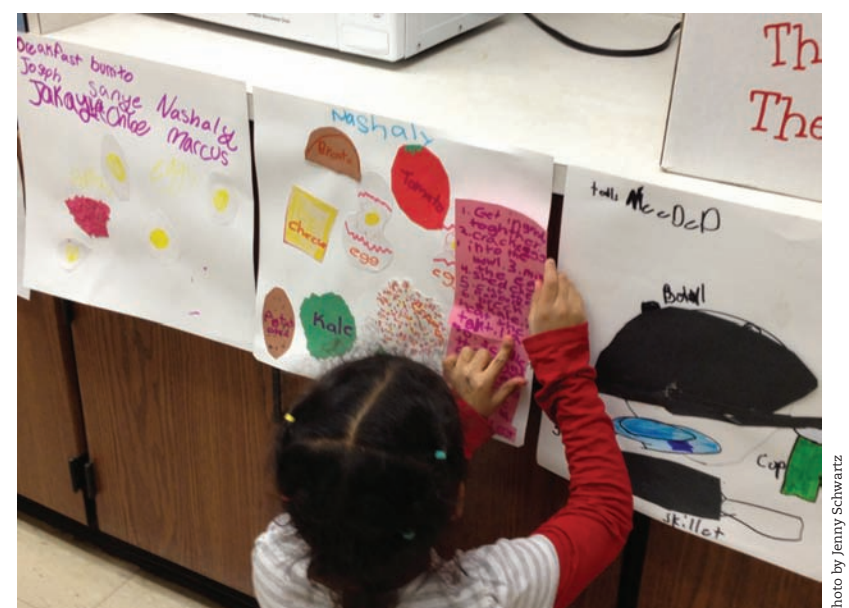
Morgan Kulchinsky of the Nutrition Center chats with preschoolers at Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center in Pittsfield.

Photo by Jenny Schwartz



Having fun with Food Adventures

Photo by Jenny Schwartz



Nashaly checking her written directions for the Iron Chef activity

Photo by Jenny Schwartz

Winter Farming: The Wave of The Future - and the Past

FOUR SEASON cont from page 1

Then came the local food movement. Attention turned to the local economy and the regional food supply and we all started to talk about winter crops once again. Up and down the Berkshires and surrounding areas we are seeing the construction of greenhouses and root cellars on vegetable farms. Farmers are supplying local produce during all four seasons, winter farmers' markets are sprouting up everywhere, and consumers are getting the opportunity to enjoy delicious local vegetables even when the world is white and the ground is frozen solid.

Get Down to the Roots

A root cellar is a structure built underground or partially underground in order to keep food at low temperatures and consistent humidity. They keep produce from freezing in the winter and protect food from excessive heat in the summer.

While nobody knows for sure who did it first, we do know that it was the 17th century English who perfected the construction of the root cellar. And when those Englishmen crossed the ocean and settled America, they brought the practice with them. New England settlers found the root cellar a necessary part of feeding their families as well as their animals. Root cellars were built into hillsides, under houses and as freestanding structures.

Today, the methods haven't changed much. Some people are starting their root cellars in simple dirt-floor basements. They open and close windows to control air flow and pick different spots for different vegetables according to temperature and humidity. Other, more ambitious folks are digging into flat ground and covering their root cellars with a shed. More still are hollowing out hillsides and building up a wall for entry. But, all in all, the technology is the same as that of the original settlers.

Greenhouses for Everyone!

Greenhouses have been a part of our agricultural scene for hundreds of years. But, as with root cellars, their popularity faded as national and international shipping of fresh produce increased. Early greenhouses were expensive and time-consuming to build. They were made of metal and glass, which made them very heavy and difficult to build. At one point they were purely a luxury of the rich and were built with elaborate designs and only with aesthetics in mind. As technology for lighter and easier to work with materials became available, the greenhouse became a more practical venture. When polyethylene film became widely available in the 1960s, hoop houses and greenhouses began to pop up on small farms across the world.

The Eliot Coleman Method

In 1968, a farmer named Eliot Coleman moved to Maine and began farming there. While living and farming there, Coleman developed methods for growing in the harshest of winter climates. In 1992 he published *Four-Season Harvest*, his book on the subject, and it has become a bible of sorts for winter growers in New England.

In *Four-Season Harvest*, Coleman sheds light on many incorrect assumptions about the Northeast in the winter. He highlights the fact that our region has more winter sunshine than the south of France. And he explores how farmers can use that sun to grow vegetables in cold frames and hoop houses without supplementary heat. He also tells stories of his trips to France to research winter farming methods and provides simple, inexpensive designs for cold frames, unheated mobile greenhouses, and root cellars.

Coleman's practices proved that winter farming in the New England cold was possible. And he continues to prove it at Four Seasons Farm, the experimental market garden he runs with his wife, Barbara Damrosch. There, they grow all sorts of crops. He even manages to grow artichokes, a traditional warm climate crop, claiming in a 2011 *New York Times* article by Mark Bittman, "I grow them just to make the Californians nervous."

Four-Season Farming Here at Home

In the Berkshires, farmers are starting to seriously take up the four-season concept. Greenhouses are being built to extend seasons and root cellars are being dug to store crops. The greenhouses may be primarily for starts and cellars may be small, but there is no doubt that local farmers are thinking about cold weather local food.

"For farmers, season extension can provide important extra income during what are traditionally the lean months, making the whole venture more economically viable," said Amanda Dalzell of Three Maples Market Garden in West Stockbridge. "People really respond to the idea of being able to eat locally all year long—when you're used to eating the best local produce, there's something uninspiring about picking up a plastic-wrapped cucumber from Mexico in January."

Over the last couple of winters, Berkshire Grown has sponsored Holiday Farmers' Markets on the days before Thanksgiving and Christmas. The markets, held in Great Barrington and Williamstown, generated tens of thousands of dollars for local producers while simultaneously opening local residents' eyes to four-season farming. "We only really boosted our winter production when Berkshire Grown started the winter markets," said Elizabeth Keen of Indian Line Farm in Egremont. "They allowed me to grow and produce a lot of produce and move it quickly. Winter farming is a lot of work. But there is no doubt that the work can be worth it if farmers are looking to increase their bottom line, want to use a space that lays idle in the winter, and have a desire to do what it takes to make that happen."

But it's not just about the bucks. "Season extension allows local consumers to benefit from fresh produce without having to depend on large amounts of fossil fuel to get it there," said Jen Salinetti of Woven Roots Farm in Lee and Tyringham. "The result is a more vital, nutrient-rich food supply for our community without a negative environmental impact."

While many farms are exploring their options, others are well on the way. Some are just now looking into greenhouses, while others have been building and using them for years. "At Woven Roots we create mini-greenhouse tunnels over established crops in the field in order to extend the harvest window and we utilize moveable greenhouses," said Salinetti. "We also make good use of the small root cellar that we currently have by



Photo by Jen Salinetti

Winter carrots at Woven Roots Farm



Photo by Jen Salinetti

Woven Roots Farm in the middle of winter last year

carefully harvesting fall crops. Some of them are packed in sawdust while others remain in bushel baskets. Regular monitoring of cellar temperature allows produce to last well into the spring."

Meanwhile, at Three Maples Market Garden, they funded their greenhouse on the fundraising website Kickstarter. That greenhouse is now up and running and heated in a very natural way. "We heat our greenhouse with manure," said Dalzell, "which allows us to get very early crops of greens, and early harvests of heat-loving crops like cucumbers and tomatoes. At the other end of the season, crops like lettuce and spinach will stop growing in the greenhouse around the end of October, but we can harvest from them all winter long."

The farmers we talked to are optimistic about the future. They both talked about winter CSAs, larger storage areas including root cellars and freezers, and larger infrastructure and growing space. But Salinetti put it best. "We would offer a variety of fresh produce to our community for as much of the twelve-month calendar as possible." And when they are able to do so, this community is sure to be there to eat.

Woven Roots Farm
Lee & Tyringham, MA
www.wovenrootsfarm.com

Three Maples Market Garden
West Stockbridge, MA
www.threemaplesmarketgarden.com

Indian Line Farm
Egremont, MA
www.indianlinefarm.com

Note: Pete Salinetti of Woven Roots Farm will be teaching a workshop with Elizabeth Keen of Indian Line Farm on Four-Season Growing at Indian Line Farm on Saturday, March 2nd from 9:00 am to noon. The workshop is offered by NOFAMass. For more information, please visit nofamass.org

A Winter Tour of Red Fire Farm

A visit to this Pioneer Valley farm shows how winter farming can grow and prosper

You may have noticed that we've had some local produce this winter. Well, one of the reasons we've been able to do that is thanks to our friends at Red Fire Farm, in the Pioneer Valley. They've been growing with certified organic practices since 2001 and, along with a thriving in-season CSA, wholesale and market operation, have developed one of the area's largest and most successful four-season programs.

The farm has 251 acres of land in organic production and runs a thriving summer CSA that has 18 pickup locations from Boston to Pittsfield. They also do egg, flower and fruit shares and offer members a pick-your-own program. And then there's the winter. They also run a deep winter farm share that has over 150 members. And it's growing every day.

Red Fire Farm's winter operation is something to see. At their Granby location, there are six large, heated greenhouses where they grow hearty greens and salad greens all winter long. That's enough to supply a deep winter CSA of over 150 members plus five weekly winter farmers' markets. At their Montague location, they store thousands of pounds of produce in a root cellar in the basement of an old barn. This year, they added three large walk-in coolers to the mix. Between those two spots they store enough root vegetables, squash, potatoes and onions to last until the new ones start to grow.

Here at the Co-op we've been thrilled to be able to supply you with local carrots, radishes, beets, rutabaga and other root vegetables this late in the season. In fact, for the first time ever, we expect to be able to sell you local carrots for the entire calendar year.



The main building in Granby, MA. Winter may look quiet, but we know better.

Photo by Matt Novik



Photo by Matt Novik

Just some of the treasures in the RFF root cellar



Photo by Matt Novik

Inside one of the greenhouses in the dead of winter



Photo by Matt Novik

February local produce on the Co-op shelves

ROASTED WATERMELON RADISHES (from www.redfirefarm.com)

A great, simple recipe recommended to me by a winter farmers' market customer. I found out about this just as we were running out of these radishes for the year, and I was so sad to have to wait a whole summer before eating them again! You can do this with other radishes too, though black radishes might be a bit spicy.

watermelon radishes, cut into wedges
olive oil to coat
a drizzle of maple syrup to coat
salt
pepper

Preheat oven to 400°. Cut your radishes into wedges, six or so per large radish, fewer if smaller, aiming for consistent size. It looks pretty if you keep a little bit of tail on each wedge. Toss in olive oil, maple syrup, salt and pepper. Spread on a baking pan in a single layer. Cover with foil and put in the oven. The foil will protect them while they soften. After about 20 minutes, when they are soft, take the foil off and let them brown a bit before taking out to serve. Taste and add more salt if needed. They're great cold on salad after the fact too!



PPOT

Way back in June, 2012, the Co-op launched a new program in an attempt to offer an alternative to the credit card economy to its owners. Many consumers are looking for another option for spending without amassing debt and incurring fees. The Co-op as well has been looking for a way to alleviate the substantial fees charged with every credit card transaction, a total that has now topped \$100,000 annually. The PPOT program, which allows owners to use their owner cards to pay at the register, provides that alternative.

Prepaid **Owner** Tabs AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE CREDIT CARD ECONOMY

TOTAL SPENT: **\$92,627**

That's nearly \$100,000 that won't create income for Credit Card Banks

TOTAL USERS: **110**

YOU CAN BE #111

The Carrot Project Makes First Berkshire Loan

Leahey Farm Moves to Pastured Dairy with Financing from the Greater Berkshire Agricultural Fund

By Benneth Phelps: Loan & Outreach Coordinator, the Carrot Project

The Carrot Project recently announced the first loan made through the Greater Berkshire Agricultural Fund, to Philip and Jennifer Leahey of Leahey Farm.

Nestled in Lee, MA, in the October Mountain region of the Berkshires, Leahey Farm is one of the last small family farms left in Lee. The farm has been family owned and operated since 1889, and is home to three generations of Leaheys. Leahey Farm produced and sold milk for more than a hundred years. Until the 1970s the Leaheys ran a bottled milk delivery business. Today they sell pasture-raised beef and pork. The loan proceeds will allow them to begin selling bottled milk again as well as frozen yogurt.

Phil and Jen take pride in their stewardship of the land. Raising animals on pasture requires more knowledge and skill than sending them to a feedlot. In order for grass-fed beef to be succulent and tender, the cattle need to forage on high-quality grasses, especially in the months prior to slaughter. Providing this nutritious and natural diet requires healthy soil and careful pasture management. Their herd includes dual-purpose heritage breeds that can produce both quality milk and meat, and are adapted to New England pastures.

The Leaheys are investing in milk bottling and frozen yogurt processing equipment, which they will install on the farm property this winter. Customers can look forward to a new summer treat in town as the farm will serve scooped frozen yogurt with local fruit toppings this summer at their Great Barrington Farmers' Market stand.

The Leaheys currently market their products through the Great Barrington Farmers' Market and Berkshire Organics, and plan to sell their expanded product line through these same outlets and possibly others.

The Leaheys worked with the Carrot Project to finance their project through the Greater Berkshire Agricultural Fund, a joint program of the Carrot Project and Salisbury Bank. Through the Greater Berkshire Agricultural Fund, loans of \$5,000-\$75,000 are available for capital or operating uses.

The Carrot Project offers specific programs for both loans and related financial technical assistance for farmers and food system enterprises, such as farm, forestry and fishery businesses; and processing, distribution and storage enterprises for any type of local agricultural product.

In addition, Carrot Project director Dorothy Suput noted: "We are currently reviewing applications from a number of other local farmers and processors, and also offering business and cash flow planning assistance to those looking to grow their business or improve their bottom line." Farmers and local food system entrepreneurs in business stages from beginning through established are eligible for loans and services through the Carrot Project's Greater Berkshire Agricultural Fund programs.



Jan and Phil Leahey at their Farm in Lee



For more information about the Carrot Project and the Great Berkshire Agricultural Project, visit www.carrotproject.org or call 617.674.2371

Creating small-farm financing solutions

Co-ops Join Together to Make a Difference

By Matthew Novik

Members and Associates of the National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA) banded together in 2012 to use their buying and selling power to raise money for two very important causes. Between both projects, nearly \$150,000 was raised.

World Food Day, 2012 took place on October 16th. October was also National Co-op Month, and the entire year of 2012 was the International Year of the Cooperative. Those three coinciding events led the folks at NCGA to put their heads together on a national effort to fight hunger.

Member stores were asked to donate a percentage of their sales from October 16th to the national nonprofit *Share Our Strength* to support their national campaign *No Kid Hungry*, which is an ongoing effort to end child hunger.

A donation goal was set at \$100,000, the final donation exceeded the goal by \$6,500. Partner brands included Alaffia, Alter Eco, Divine, Dr. Bronner's, Equal Exchange, Frontier, Nutiva, Once Again, Organic Valley, and Shady Maple Farms.

To celebrate the International Year of Cooperatives, NCGA set out to create a program that would help U.S. co-ops assist other co-ops in the world through sales of product and the spirit of donation. It was decided that the most logical avenue for such an effort was chocolate.

NCGA contracted Theo Chocolates to create two special edition fair-trade chocolate bars for member stores to sell. Once Theo agreed, the rest was simple. For every bar sold in the stores, 50¢ would go to the farmer co-ops that produced the cocoa for the bars, Fortaleza del Valle Cocoa Cooperative in Ecuador and CEPICAFE cocoa cooperative in Peru.

The symmetry was perfect and the chocolate was sweet and delicious. At the end of the year, \$41,076 had been raised, exceeding the initial goal by almost 40%!

The donations will be used to address vital needs of the cooperatives including governance, health and education, farmer rights and empowerment and product quality and yield improvements.

It was a thrill for us to be part of such an effort and we can only hope to do it again soon.



For more information on Share Our Strength & No Kid Hungry visit www.nokidhungry.org



For more information about the cocoa co-ops and NCGA, visit strongertogether.coop

Lessons Learned from the Neighbors of My Youth

Thoughts of the house next door turn to ideas about strengthening community

By Matthew Novik

The house I grew up in was a twin. It is in Housatonic, which, like many towns in these parts, was created because of the mills at its center. In these mill towns, many of the houses were built by the mill owners for incoming employees. So, to save money and time, they often built multiple houses with the exact same design. The house I grew up in is identical to the one next door. And the yards are connected so closely that it's hard to tell them apart.

From the day my family moved in, our neighbors have been a Polish immigrant couple named Bessie and Matthew. The close setting of our two homes required us to know each other. Fences just weren't an option. Luckily, we all became fast friends. Bessie and Matthew are amazing people. Their history was rich. They survived Nazi-era work camps, came to America, raised their children and were embracing retirement by the time my parents and their two young children moved in next door.

Bessie and Matthew were the uber-neighbors. Their lawn was beautiful in the summer, and in winter their driveway was always clear of even a flake of snow. She baked like a madwoman and sewed clothing to send to her family in Poland. He built furniture and every year painted one side of their house.

My parents, having grown up in the Bronx, didn't know much about country living. What they learned, they learned from the neighbors. Matthew inspired my father to embrace power tools. Bessie made us snacks and left them on the table for after school. I learned the art of stacking firewood from Matthew and a love of pierogi from Bessie. Bessie hemmed my pants when I was young. Matthew built us a porch swing because he thought we needed one. And when my parents split up, they never stopped watching over our house, knowing my mom was alone.

In return, we helped them whenever we could. Neither of them drove a car. So my mother took them to the grocery store, doctor appointments and other far away destinations like Bessie's once-a-month trips to the fabric store in Pittsfield for supplies. Their English wasn't great, so my mother helped them make phone calls and explained paperwork. And now that they have gotten older,

she helps them navigate the ins and outs of Medicare and Social Security.

I've been thinking a lot about neighbors lately. Maybe it's because my job leads me to thinking about community. And community is just another way of describing a network of neighbors. Growing up, I had a stronger home because of my neighbors. And they were stronger because of us. And that's what having neighbors should be like. As the Co-op begins to talk about our relocation/expansion project, some comments have been made about our growth having a negative impact on other local businesses. In response, I can only say that I believe the exact opposite will be true. Here are just a few of the reasons why.

We do business locally: Last fiscal year, nearly 30% of our sales came from within a hundred miles of our doors. That's over \$2 million dollars worth. The money used to purchase those goods goes to local people so more of it stays in our community. When we grow, that total will grow as well.

We do business differently: Because our co-op has no one person that profits from our success, the community profits instead. On average, a very small amount of our profit is reallocated into the business; the rest goes to our owners, or staff, community donations, educational efforts and more. Our business practices seek to find a place where all stakeholders succeed, not just us. And our bottom line is not just financial, but takes community and the environment into account as well.

We treat our employees well: We pay a living wage and supply outstanding benefits for the industry. Co-op employees are invited to participate in the store's policies and management and are treated with respect at all time. With a bigger store, we will be able to hire more local people and continue these practices on a larger scale.

We support local sustainable agriculture: At the Co-op, local is not just a marketing advantage. It's part of what we are here to do. We not only buy from local farmers, we provide support whenever we can, be it financial, administrative or operational. When the Co-op works with local



A view of the neighbors house from our front lawn

Photo by Alan Marwine

farmers and food suppliers, we are committed to paying fair prices and working to make sure that the financials work well for both sides. When our produce department is larger, these relationships will only grow more prosperous for all. Our ability to be a resource will increase exponentially with higher annual sales.

We strive to educate: We have a full-time employee who concentrates on education. We do healthy snack programs in local schools that cover nutrition, cooking, food awareness and more. We also run education programs for kids and adults at our store and in many other locations. With a bigger store, we will be able to devote more funds to these causes.

Strong neighbors make strong communities. And our Co-op's community-first business strategy will make us a very strong neighbor. It's as simple as that. Maybe the people making those comments should refer back to my story and remind themselves what community really means.

Old Fashioned Polish Pierogi

Recipe From www.tasteofhome.com

Prep: 45 min. Cook: 20 min. Yield: 28 Servings

DOUGH:

4 cups all-purpose flour
2 eggs
1/2 cup sour cream
1 teaspoon salt
2/3 cup warm water

POTATO FILLING:

3 medium potatoes, cooked, drained and mashed, about 1 pound
1/2 medium onion, chopped
1/4 cup butter
Salt and pepper to taste

CHEESE FILLING:

2 cups (16 ounces) 4% small curd cottage cheese, drained and patted dry
2 eggs, beaten
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup butter, melted

SAUCE:

1 large onion, chopped
1/2 cup butter

DIRECTIONS

To make dough, mix flour, eggs, sour cream, salt and water (a little at a time). Knead dough until firm and elastic; cover with a bowl and let rest 10 minutes. For potato filling, prepare potatoes; set aside. For cheese filling, combine ingredients and mix. Divide dough into three parts. On floured surface, roll dough to 1/8-in. thick; cut into 3-in. rounds with cutter. Place a small spoonful of filling in center of each round; fold and press edges together firmly to seal. Drop pierogi in simmering chicken bouillon with 1 teaspoon oil. Do not crowd. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring gently with wooden spoon to prevent sticking. Remove with slotted spoon; drain well. Saute onion and butter until golden. Place drained pierogi in casserole and pour onion/butter mixture over all. Garnish with brown mushrooms. Yield: 7 dozen.

Nutritional Facts 1 serving (3 each) equals 175 calories, 9 g fat (5 g saturated fat), 54 mg cholesterol, 262 mg sodium, 18 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 5 g protein.



Photo from newfinmysoup.blogspot.com/

Community Art Project Brings Out the Best in the Berkshires

Homemade snow-globe workshops bring the community together and helps it to heal

By Jenny Schwartz

What were you doing when you heard about Sandy Hook? I was in my office getting ready to leave and work with the elementary school kids at Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center. We were making vegetable dumplings that day. As I watched and helped the kids cook, it was incomprehensible to think how something like this could have happened. While I didn't know anyone at Sandy Hook, I remember being in first grade and I've been in countless classrooms. My thoughts inevitably drifted to the many children I know who are or were that age. This, in conjunction with my disbelief that these children lost their lives so young made me want to do something. I couldn't stop thinking about the children who survived and how they will be forever altered by this experience. With the help of the community, I wanted to create something for them.

After recently holding two successful Snow-Globe Making Workshops at the Co-op, I looked at our leftover supplies and wondered how realistic it would be to generate a community workshop that focused on making art for someone in need. It was, in fact, the holiday season and with new toys on their way, it felt like a good time to purge the old ones for a creative use and good cause. As interest grew, this idea started to take form. With heated debates over gun control and mental health in the news, I wanted to create a space for people who simply wanted to make art as a way of processing this tragedy. We respectfully asked that people who joined us refrain from talking about these controversial topics. With community donations, publicity and participation, we set out to create a series of workshops that aimed to make 700 snow globes for the Sandy Hook children.

By Thursday, December 27th, we had collected enough materials to get started. In about twelve hours worth of workshops we made over 250 snow globes. As we grew nearer and nearer to our goal every day through donated jars and toys, the idea of making something handmade for someone else was becoming a reality. The community support this project received went over and beyond all expectations.

- Gabrielle Senza of Studio Eleven graciously lent out her studio for the Co-op to use, and created a few ingenious snow globes as well. Her studio provided the perfect, tranquil place



to make art with ideal lighting, space and great music.

- CrossFit Great Barrington collected and donated materials in addition to kindly hosting two snow-globe making workshops at the gym. One wouldn't think that pull-ups and crafts could go hand in hand, but it is in fact possible! 20" boxes were quickly transformed into a "snow globe buffet" of supplies.

- NBT Bank contacted the Co-op and wanted to help by becoming a location for donating materials for the project. We got some great toys, jars and other items through their collection. Thank you to Jennifer Simms for making that happen.

- Many Co-op employees donated their time to participate in this project. A special thank you to Sammi, Lynn, Brenna, Michele and Deb for your supply donations and participation.

- The Frame Shop in Sheffield donated a lot of fun treasures.

- Out of Hand in Great Barrington donated little toys.

- Our friends at Berkshire South Regional Community Center loaned us tables to use for the workshops.

- Railroad Street Youth Project led its own snow globe workshop.

While the snow globes were accumulating every day, generous donations from all over the world were also accumulating in Newtown, CT. Even though our original contact in Newtown was initially in support of the project, we shifted our decision to send the snow globes to Sandy Hook due to the overwhelming number of gifts they received. It got to the point where they simply could not accept any more.

In honor of the children who died on December 14th, we decided to give the snow globes to children in our own community who are at-risk or underprivileged and who might enjoy one of these little works of art. Children who utilize the Construct, CHP, Elizabeth Freedman Center and Berkshire Children and Family organizations were able to benefit from this community project.

It's unfortunate that it often takes a tragedy for people to come together and do something for others. On the other hand, it has been great to hear about the random acts of kindness that were inspired by the tragedy. I know it's a New Year's resolution for me to make more of an effort to pay it forward a bit more.

Thanks again to everyone who helped and supported this project!

Food Adventures Programs Reach Kids County Wide

ADVENTURES cont. from page 5 challenge. The kids wrote out the ingredients and directions on a piece of paper. After that, each child was assigned one direction each to create out of construction paper. They cut and pasted eggs cooking on skillets, a rainbow of chopped fruits of vegetables, and colored in additional detail with markers. On the day of the competition, we hung up their colorful recipes in order of the steps so they could refer to it during the class. We presented them with their ingredients and off they went. They had until 5:15pm. Both groups cooked, cleaned up and were ready to eat by 5:12! We were beyond proud of how well they worked together and got the job done. While they chose to make basically the same thing, the taste and appearance of the final product couldn't have been more different. It was amazing to see how far the kids had come, from coming to us for guidance in the initial classes to being completely self-sufficient and working together at the conclusion of the semester. The students not only learned about cooking and nutrition, but other translatable skills such as cooperation, teamwork, leadership, self-sufficiency and time management. These are all important skills that can lead them to many new adventures.

Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center

This year, we experimented with a new curriculum for our younger adventurers, the preschool class at Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center. We had six fun sessions with this lively group of three- and four-year-old children. The class focused on a different letter of the alphabet each week. We were there for E, F, G, H, I and J, so we developed a curriculum that focused on energy, fruits, grains, healthy snacks and how we already make healthy choices in the "I am healthy" class. Our last class concluded with a pizza party to celebrate all the great work they did.

These kids were ready to get messy as they greeted us in their bright blue, long-sleeve turtleneck smocks. They were dressed to work with the world's

messiest ingredients. Mixing was definitely a favorite task and there were some promising chefs in this group. They mastered knife skills by chopping their own vegetables to make English muffin pizzas and vegetable dumplings. One of their favorite recipes was for whole-wheat pretzels. They enjoyed stretching and rolling the dough, making it into different shapes, "painting" the pretzels with an egg wash and sprinkling them with salt. It was a popular idea to shape the dough into SpongeBob SquarePants characters.

While the food was cooking and cooling, we read stories that related to our weekly theme associated with the letter of the week. *Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables from A-Z*, by Lois Ehlert, *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food* by Stan and Jan Berenstain, *The Pumpkin Book*, by Gail Gibbons, and *The Little Red Hen* were some of the stories we read in class.

On our last day, the students gave us handmade thank you cards complete with painted pictures and a witty phrase such as:

"We're bananas about nutrition."

"Nutrition is grape."

"We love nutrition berry much."

"Nutrition is the pumpkin pie of my eye."

"Nutrition is tops (carrot tops that is)."

"You're a great pear."

If you are interested in having a Food Adventures program at your school or establishment, please contact Jenny Schwartz at 413-528-9697 ext. 33, jschwartz@berkshire.coop or Morgan Kulchinsky at 413-429-8110, info@thenutritioncenter.org.

Frequently Asked Relocation Questions

Continued From Page 2

Most important and telling, in order for the Co-op to go ahead and actually build the new store, Co-op owners will be asked to loan funds. If Co-op owners are not excited about and supportive of the project, they will not loan us the necessary money, and the store will not be built. In the spirit of the Co-op, our owners will once again be asked to vote with their dollars. We believe in the collective wisdom of our owner base, and we believe in the viability and necessity of this project. Consequently, we believe our owners will lend us the necessary funds.

The Expansion

How much is the new store going to cost?

It's always more than we would like. We are looking at this move as the permanent home of the Co-op. Consequently, we need to build the infrastructure accordingly. An educated guess at the moment is 6 million dollars; we will have firmer numbers in the spring. We will be sure to make financial details available as soon as they exist.

Why not bring prices down or give employees raises instead of expanding?

We have actually done both consistently and constantly, but both of these worthy ideas are a separate issue. Our margins are lower than they were when we were at the Rosseter Street location. Food costs have gone up far more drastically than our retail prices. That's a simple fact. Additionally, our employees' average hourly rate has gone up every year (with the exception of 2008) over the last decade. Once again, it is our opinion that it isn't that we necessarily want to move; instead we realize that we must make the change.

Will the project make my Patronage Dividend smaller?

Temporarily, it is likely that your Patronage Dividend will be smaller or possibly not disbursed for two to four years. However, with increased sales, in the long run it is most likely that Patronage Dividends will actually increase significantly. Historically, cooperatives with higher volumes in sales are able to draw from a larger pool of net income to return dividends to their owners, and we don't anticipate our situation being any different than the several dozens of other examples across the country.

Will Co-op expansion mean trouble for local small businesses?

It is disturbing to us to find that people believe that, because we work with and assist local businesses almost every day. We offer a variety of free professional services including product development, organizational structuring, ServSafe instruction, temporary bridge loans and far more. Our vision shouts that we will support the local economy. Synergistically, healthy businesses attract more healthy businesses. As we design the store, similar to the way we did over a decade ago, we will be sensitive to what we put on the shelves so that we enhance the local choices, instead of targeting others' strengths. We are open and public about our finances and will continue to be with our new store plans. We will offer meetings to further explain our intentions to any locally owned business that could be considered a "competitor" to the Co-op, so that they can plan accordingly, and we will do so willingly and joyously.

As we explore the best use of the new space, it is very likely that there will in fact be room for new or expanded businesses as well, leading to a more robust economy and job creation. This is exciting stuff.

What's better about a bigger Co-op?

From a community standpoint, we will have space to share with others, such as hopefully a classroom and possibly a cooking facility. We will be able to increase storage capacity, including our ability to bring in bigger stores of produce, giving our local growers more reason to grow more successfully in order to meet the demand and to prepare for increased food self-sufficiency for Berkshire County in the coming years. Understanding that food prices will continue to rise and the economy may worsen, we will be able to expand those departments, such as our Bulk Department, that directly address affordability. As we purchase more goods from our national distributor, we will realize a small savings, which will be passed on to our shoppers, and as a larger entity, we will have more positive influence on those same national suppliers.

It's evident that many of our owners do their best to use the Co-op as a "one-stop" shop. An increased size will allow us to provide a more complete food shopping experience so that there will be greater choice for those owners. We stress the word "choice," as it also refers back to the previous answer in that our consumers should have a healthy variety of choice within the actual store and within the town.

The Site

What is the history of the site and who owns it?

For years, the site was used as a manufacturing facility for log-home kits. Several years ago, the closed factory caught on fire, and the fire was put out, leaving a partially collapsed facility. About six years ago, the property having been abandoned and now owned by the town, it was decided that the Town of Great Barrington would transfer ownership of the property to Community Development Corporation (CDC), a nonprofit dedicated to "creating affordable housing and economic opportunity." As it turns out, it is likely that there will be a housing component, that jobs will be created, and that a blighted property will be drastically improved so that value goes up, and the town will increase its tax base, all of which conforms to CDC's stated mission.

What is the development going to look like?

I have a sense of the finished project, but that will be more easily answered over the next several months. There are some givens. Because of the nature of the property and proximity to the river, there must be a green element and public access. Aesthetically it will be in every stakeholder's interest to

marry the physicality of the natural space with the bricks and mortar. Every resident of the town and surrounding community is directly or indirectly a stakeholder in our eyes. Absolutely, Berkshire Co-op Market will hold a significant and primary physical space in the development, and we will help design a multi-use development that will take into account the needs of the community.

Are you worried about the longer walk from downtown?

Over a decade ago, we were told by a variety of experts that people would simply not walk from the downtown area to our current location. We now know that this has not been the case. We'd like to think that by being closely involved in all that happens on Bridge Street, that people will want to take a walk, particularly in pleasant weather. We hope to integrate elements of the River Walk with our green space, and expect to create a different type of destination. Some may walk down there less during Monday through Friday business hours, but I expect that what is now a fenced-off blight with zero pedestrian access and interest will end up being something far different for decades to come: a community gathering spot and destination.

What about the pollution issues at the site?

I admit that I have a peculiar sense of humor. Let's just put it out there: a natural foods cooperative is planning on moving onto a polluted site next to a waste treatment plant. It sounds like a Monty Python sketch at first listen. In reality, there have been years of planning, still being updated to take advantage of new methods of remediation. Our Co-op will absolutely not make any final commitment to build there until we are completely satisfied that all issues have been addressed, and we will share that information publicly. We will not risk our owners' funds and will not risk the wonderful community that we've established for anything less.

I encourage all of us to look at this challenge in a positive vein, and even a hint of a chuckle. When done, we will have been instrumental in bringing back an amazing part of town that hasn't been freely accessible to any citizens in living memory. When we succeed, just imagine what this does to long-term thoughts of smart growth, green space, "walk-ability," and potential access to other public lands to the south. Perhaps this is the most exciting aspect about this project.

The Future

How will a new store differ from the current one?

I don't have all the answers yet. Experts will be asking for input and eventually feedback from our Board, owners, department managers, and every employee at the Co-op. Initially, we expect that our Bulk, Produce, Meat and Seafood, Cheese, and Fresh Food departments will expand significantly. Bluntly, we have run out of room in which to do our jobs. Accordingly, employee work areas will be restructured so that we can do our jobs for a long time to come. Have you ever seen our current back room? If not, ask me. I'll be glad to give you a peek. I expect we will also be able to allow enhanced customer and owner services, and classroom space. You may not know this, but right now we rent storage space across the parking lot, maintain offices and a training facility on Main Street, and cram ten work stations into an office that's not much bigger than a couple of standard cubicles.

As for the look of the place, we will not be a cookie cutter store that looks and feels like everywhere else. We will not have high, warehouse type ceilings or antiseptic track lighting that make you easily forget what really makes all us successful in the relationships we have with each other. And when all is said and done, if you as individuals decide to participate in our process, you will see your own opinions and ideas come to fruition.

What are projected sales for the new store?

Currently, we project that we will have sales close to \$8.3 million this year. We suspect that the new store will be close to 10,000 retail square feet, a significant difference from our current 4,500 square feet of retail. We expect the first full year of sales in our new location to be approximately 40% greater than whatever sales would be in our current location. Consequently, based on current sales, we anticipate \$12+ million for the first year. I once again point out that in our type of business, this kind of information is rarely shared. As a community-owned cooperative, we want you to know what's going on now so that you have a better understanding of what to expect.

What is going to happen to the current building?

We lease the current building from the Dempsey family. It's been a terrific and supportive relationship for years. Ultimately, once our lease expires, it will be up to the family to decide what happens to the building. We have consistently let them know that we are more than willing to continue to be partners with them to assist in any way possible to find a good use for the building, particularly if it is of benefit to the owners and the citizens who live here. With the work currently going on and expected to happen along Bridge Street, we collectively have a rare opportunity to be able to expand the downtown area through smart growth that will benefit all. We see this as a gift, and would love to be part of the bigger discussion. Ultimately however, it will be the Dempsey family as owners who will be making the final decisions.

If you have questions that have not been answered here, please, please, please, be in touch. You can call me at 413.528.9697 X11 or email to generalmanager@berkshire.coop. - Art

The Departmental Reports

Non-Perishables From Daniel Esko

Greetings from the center store! It's hard to believe that we're into the new year already, and we are looking forward to a very busy year with many exciting changes in store for the department. First off, I would like to recap some of the recent changes the department has undergone.

We reset our chip, snack and shelf-stable beverage section in December. The purpose of this reset was to expand the chip/snack section and make room for increased item selection. Some new items introduced were more economy size bags of potato and corn chips from Garden of Eatin' and Kettle Chips and some new sprouted grain tortilla chips from Way Better Snacks. These delicious snacks have sprouted quinoa, sprouted flax, sprouted broccoli seed, sprouted black beans, sprouted brown rice flour, and sprouted daikon radish. Sprouted foods are more digestible and nutritious, as the sprouting process does some great things to the whole foods we all enjoy. It converts starch into simple sugars for easier digestion, converts protein into amino acids and fat into fatty acids so your body doesn't have to do the work, and concentrates vitamins and minerals. This maximizing of nutrient density increases their bioavailability in the human body. Stop on by and try some of these great snacks when you have a chance. You will not be disappointed.

Finally, the tofu, tempeh, seitan, non-dairy cheese alternatives and related product moved to a single-door cooler next to the prepared foods grab and go case. This was done for food safety and quality reasons as the cooler they were in before couldn't keep the right temperature for these products. Unfortunately, we did lose a little bit of our selection, so please let us know if you are missing something and we will do our best to accommodate your needs. Also, thanks for all of your patience during the two-week period when these items moved around a bit prior to the final change.

Upcoming changes!

Over the next five months we will be resetting the frozen food, dairy, pasta, crackers, canned soups, beans, pasta, pasta sauce, tomatoes and several other sections in the center store. The reasons for these changes? To better serve your needs. We will be fine-tuning our item selection; shrinking, growing, and consolidating categories; increasing shelf presence of popular items, and introducing new ones. Stay tuned for reset news as the planned changes get closer.

Other New Item News:

Lily's Stevia Sweetened Chocolate: This stevia-sweetened chocolate is perfect for people with blood sugar concerns. Organic, non-GMO, and Fair Trade Certified. Great quality chocolate.

Pamela's Gluten-Free Baking Mixes: We've added mixes for pizza crust, muffin and scones and oatmeal cookies along with an all-purpose baking mix to round out our offerings from the most popular gluten-free baking products company in the country.

Good Karma Flax Milk: A refrigerated item, this product is new to market, certified organic, and is gluten, soy and dairy-free. It's high in omega 3s and a great alternative to soy milk.

High Country Kombucha: New flavors! Ginger, Tropical Mist and Goji Berry. Certified organic, Non-GMO Project Verified, these new flavors join the ever-popular Wild Root flavor we have carried for a while now.

Gatherer's Granola: Right out of Schenectady, NY, this granola company uses over 70% organic and all non-GMO ingredients. The names of their products include Chipmunk's Choice, Squirrel Bait and Fox's Fancy. They will be out for sampling so try some when we get the demo's going.

That's all for now from the center store. Daniel

Produce From Cian Dalzell

Winter has never been such an exciting time for local produce in our department! This year we were able to carry local Integrated Pest Management apples well into January, and still have local, certified organic root vegetables from Red Fire Farm in Granby, MA. Our hope is to have local carrots for a full twelve months (you can keep track at home; the first local carrots of 2012 arrived in May). Red Fire Farm is a large organic grower in the Pioneer Valley with the ability to store large amounts of root crops through the winter. During most of the year they run a CSA that delivers in the Valley and the Boston area, so they only have the extra produce to sell to us during the winter. We're hoping to work with them again throughout future winters.

While the Northeast produce has been booming, our California counterparts have not been as productive as usual. There was a long cold snap in California in December and January that brought in fewer items, reduced availability, and caused some prices to go up. This has affected the citrus, greens and celery more than anything else so far. It seems that it's getting a little warmer out there, so we're hoping everything gets back on track quickly, but we've been told to expect limited availability of some items all the way through February. While that means that we may have smaller bunches of kale or heads of lettuce, or fewer bunches of celery coming through, it also gives us an extra reason to eat hearty New England soups while we watch the snow falling.

We'd also like to welcome Guy Caswell and Asa Vanness to the Produce Department. Guy is generally sporting a scarf and always sporting a smile. Asa comes to us with some serious experience in retail produce handling, and is excited to be the new Assistant Manager. They, along with the rest of the department, look forward to seeing you in the store.

Wellness From Brenna St. Pierre

Hello from your soon to be improved Wellness Department! We will be Hopening up, expanding and reorganizing the department to make it easier to find products and offer you more options. The biggest change you will find is that brands like Vitamer, Solgar, New Chapter and Megafood are no longer together on the shelf. We have reorganized so that like products, such as all the multivitamins, all essential fatty acids and all inflammation support supplements, are all together in the same section. This will make price, brand and product comparisons much easier. If you have trouble finding your favorite supplements, we're happy to help you find the new location.

We have brought in new product lines that have been requested and had national success. We've expanded our selection of Garden of Life's Vitamin Code line to include most of their individual raw vitamins, in addition to the probiotics and multivitamins we've had since this past winter. The Vitamin Code supplements are raw-food created nutrients that are better recognized by the body and contain accompanying essential co-factors that enable better absorption and utilization of the vitamins and minerals. Each Vitamin Code supplement has live enzymes and probiotics for additional absorption assistance and many contain their raw, organic fruit and vegetable blend for added nutritional support. Our selection now includes the Raw Iron, Raw K Complex, Raw Zinc, Raw Vitamin E, Raw B12, and Raw B Complex, as well as their chewable Raw Kids Multivitamin. The Organic Raw Protein and Organic Raw Meal replacement have done well and we now offer all flavor varieties in the individual packets, perfect for the first-time buyer who would like to try before investing in a large container.

Our meal replacement selection has been expanded with the addition of Vega One Nutritional Shake from Vega. This is an all-in-one, clean, plant-based fuel for your healthy, active lifestyle with 50% of your recommended daily intake of vitamins and minerals, 15 grams of protein, 6 grams of fiber, 1,500 mg of omega 3s, plus antioxidants, greens, and probiotics for optimal absorption. Vega One has a low glycemic index and is sweetened only with stevia. This shake is free of dairy, gluten and soy, and comes in three sizes, including individual packets for people on the go or first-time buyers.

We hope everyone will be pleased with our newly arranged department. We do anticipate some initial confusion on product location, but ultimately we think the changes will make the department easier to shop. No more searching for multivitamins in eight different places; now you will find them all together. We welcome comments and requests and we're here to answer your questions. See you all in the new department!

Fresh Foods From Jeff Schilling

The Co-op Kitchen has been working hard lately to provide new, clean and delicious options for you. The biggest project of late has been the creation of house-roasted cold cuts to be sold out of our deli counter and on the café sandwiches. We are proud to offer you four flavors right now and we will continue to strive for more.

Basic Roast Turkey: Have you ever looked at a typical cold cut turkey breast. They don't really look like turkey breasts at all, do they? Most deli turkey is a moderately processed product that is made of ground meat scraps and additives to enhance bonding and flavor. Our is a simple, slow roasted turkey breast. No added salt, no added sugar, no additives at all.

Basic Roast Beef: Our roast beef is a basic, slow roasted product that is free of any additives including sugar and salt. It's like you roasted it at home and sliced it for your sandwiches at lunch time.

Herbed Turkey: For those that are looking for slightly more flavor from their cold cuts, we are now offering garlic herbed turkey. While not as pure as the basic offerings above, this is a delicious option.

House-Cured Roasted Ham: Our deli ham is a basic pork breast brined in salt, sugar and herbs before being roasted to perfection. It's a true treat for ham lovers all over the Berkshires.

In other news:

- We are planning to reset our café sometime in the near future. Keep an eye out for more news about improvements to our bakery set and the café menu and ordering process.

- In an ongoing effort to offer diverse and healthy food, we are working on new items for our hot bar. Keep an eye out for recipes you've never seen before. Lately we have featured some wonderful Indian influenced food, turkey meatballs with onions and fresh, warm cornbread. We will let you know when more new items are planned and we'll ask you for feedback.

- Don't forget about Pizza Friday! Every Friday you can order from the Co-op Pizza Shop. The pies are freshly tossed and utterly delicious. Just call the store and ask for the pizza shop.

- Preorder your Co-op cakes! We want to remind you that our bakers make some of the best all natural cakes around. We offer chocolate, carrot, mocha, German chocolate, midnight, lemon and white cakes along with vegan chocolate, carrot and almond, and wheat-free carrot. We can do many sizes, frostings and fillings to fit your needs. Call us for more information.