Institutional Barriers and Opportunities for Scaling Up Local Food

Soil: Not all Four Letter Words are Dirty

By: Tim Messner

“Dirt” is a derogatory term that should only be used when referring to the substance trapped under your fingernails. In all other contexts, its use should be avoided. This doesn’t trivialize the inherent complexities and importance of soil in biological, geological, chemical, and cultural processes. In other words, life on Earth depends on dirt – many soil.

Soils form from C.O.R.P.T., an acronym used to describe the combined influence of Climate, Relief (topography), Organisms, Parent material (sediment), and Time. As a result, different areas have different soils. So just as each state has a flower, we also have a soil state.

New York’s is called “Honeoye” and it spans 500,000 acres across agricultural fields and woodlots. In the Potsdam area, our soils formed from sediments laid down by ancient lake, beach, dune and glacial deposits. Over time, these sediments were chemically and mechanically altered resulting in our current soils which range in depth from shallow (<20cm) to deep (>50 cm) and are clayey to sandy in texture. These soils support North Country’s local farms. And while productive, most benefit from amendments.

Soils have inherent properties, but they are also dynamic. People around the world have long recognized the ability to improve the inherent properties of their soils. For example, in the Amazon basin of Brazil, Native peoples 500 years ago learned that dark organic rich soil famously referred to as “Terra preta” or black earth. This fertile soil stands in stark contrast to the otherwise infertile soils of the surrounding rainforest. A little closer to home, ancient Native people of eastern North America tilled hummocks and low ridges to improve drainage, thermal properties, and depth of organic rich soils. Fields were frequently rotated and allowed to go fallow in an effort to rejuvenate the soil. These examples illustrate the long history of people improving soil quality.

In many respects, North Country food producers strive to do much of the same in their fields and garden plots. By rotating, rotating crops, and using green manures. More and more farmers and gardeners are changing their philosophy on food production. The trend is away from producing food, to producing soil.

As spring approaches, how will you improve the soil quality of your fields? Give us the “dirt” on how you will improve the soil quality and health of your fields?

SIMPLE HOMEMADE CHOCOLATE CANDY

By Mary-Am Cateforis

Use this recipe for big chocolate chips, or to make chocolate covered raisins, or other chocolate covered goodies. Control sugar content by using chocolate with different percentages of cocoa or mixing percentages.

INGREDIENTS

One more handfuls of Callebaut chocolate
Optional: raisins (Organic Flame are a nice large size); roasted whole coffee beans; ginger chunks of crystallized ginger; finely-ground dried (organic) orange peel, etc.

UTENSILS

One or more jelly or similarly shallow pans or cookie sheets as smooth as possible for easy release of cooled chocolates
Small spoon, teaspoon size spatula, stainless steel, with thin, sharp blade

METHOD

Melt chocolate on a jelly roll pan, in a warm oven. Use the lowest possible temperature to melt the chocolate. Watch closely for ten minutes. You want the lump to be melted, but viscus. If the chocolate is too hot it will be runny and difficult to control. If it does get too hot and thin, let it cool a little before proceeding. In summer, the heat on a sunny window-sill may be enough to melt the chocolate. Drop the semi-viscous chocolate by half-teaspoonfuls on a jelly roll pan, as neatly as you can. If you wish to enclose raisins, dump a handful on the edge of the hot chocolate, stir till coated, then drop individually chocolate-covered raisins, or clusters of smaller raisins, on the pan. You can do this with any ingredient you wish to coat in chocolate. To use dried orange peel, grind to a powder (sift if necessary to aid handling) and stir into the melted chocolate. You may need to experiment with proportions to find the desired flavor. Set pan with the candies in a cool place to harden. That will mean a refrigerator in the summer. When the chocolate no longer sticks to your finger, take the pan out and use your spatula to loosen the candies and shovel them into a wide-mouthed jar and cover with a lid. They can be stored at room temperature in winter, but will probably need refrigeration in summer. A good cold hiding place is also not a bad idea. The white bloom that appears on refrigerated chocolate is not an indication of spoilage or any other problem.

Institutional Barriers and Opportunities for Scaling Up Local Food

By: Alex French, Sustainability Coordinator, Clarkson University

When a large institution such as a university is shopping for produce, they don’t order by the pound, they order by the pallet. Coordinating with universities, schools, prisons, and hospitals is critical to encouraging the sale of local food. Institu-

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By: Eric Jesner

It was a strange winter and I am excited for spring. Seed sales have taken off as usual so I think we are all ready for spring. As I write this update, we have just entered mad season, so I am hopeful it will be dry by the time this newsletter reaches you.

SALES
Our strong 2016 sales have continued into the beginning of 2017. At the end of February, sales were up more than four percent over last year. This is a result of the continued hard work from the staff who make sure the Co-op is meeting your needs better every day. I know I say this a lot but, please let us know if there are products you’d like to see in the store so we can serve you better.

MARKET STUDY
By the time your are reading this we should be in the middle of our Market Study with CDS Consulting Co-op. The Customer Address & Transaction (CAT) survey should be over so I’d like to thank all of you who participated. The CAT survey is a necessary step to defining the trade area we serve - all of the information we collected will only be used for this one purpose. Debbie, our consultant from CDS Consulting Co-op, will be visiting us to evaluate our current site and facilities, as well as the surrounding area, to help identify our market potential and site possibilities. All of this information will be used by the board to help decide our path forward.

COMPUTER FOR STORE USE
We recently found ourselves needing to upgrade a computer in the office, which left us with a ChromeBox for use on the sales floor. We have placed it on the shelf across from the shelf stable milk alternatives. This computer is for shoppers and staff to use to find the Internet to answer questions that regularly come up. We have many of our large vendor’s websites saved on the bookmarks bar to make it easier to see if they carry products you may be looking for. We have some co-op related resources, as well as recipe resources saved. This also allows us to move away from paper slips for buying club items and move towards online buying club orders only. This will save many hours of Andy’s time and will allow us to communicate the status of your order with ease. For those of you who have issues using the online version of the buying club, please ask any co-op staff member - they are always more than happy to assist you.

MUSIC
Some of you may have noticed that the music in the Co-op has been going through some changes lately. I had received quite a few customer complaints about the volume, content, and style of music playing. Our first solution of using the radio in the store was not well received as many people felt it was generic and we lost some of the “Co-op” feeling. So, we recently began a subscription to a music service to try to find the right balance of content and “Co-op” feel. There is now a varied mix of music, more than we have ever had, without the worry of questionable lyrics or aggressive music. The staff has been very pleased and we have even received positive feedback from those people who already shop at the Co-op back up over 1000 current member-owners to introduce the Co-op to their friends, co-workers, family, and neighbors who are not familiar with the Co-op. Bring them in, show them around, and talk to them about the benefits of membership-ownership. When you refer a new member-owner, you’re entered to win a prize, but of course, we all win when Co-op membership is strong.
**Co-op Bread, Before the Carriage House**

By: Gloria McAdam

There has been a lot of talk about food waste in recent years, and while it is a global problem in the US. Estimates of the amount of food wasted here vary from 28% to 44% of all the food produced in this country.

Although I spent thirty years working in the food bank world where our primary task was to save good food from being wasted, I’m always surprised when people jump from talking about the problem of food waste to the problem of hunger. I’m a firm believer that good food should not go to waste, but solving the food waste problem will not be a solution to hunger. Recovering wasted food and getting it to people in need is a good thing to do, but it cannot provide a steady supply of food for those who need help, nor can it provide the right mix of foods to provide a healthy diet. This kind of food recovery effort tends to operate on feast or famine cycles. One month there is a lot of bread. The next month, it’s cereal. And another month it’s fresh produce.

For a food pantry, a “feast” of non-perishable items will be welcomed if they have a large storage space. But the truckload of produce or other perishables may not be as useful as they may not have adequate refrigeration for it. Since many food pantries are only open one day a week, with some only open one day a month, a truckload of fresh tomatoes, no matter how tasty and nutritious, may go to waste after a short time.

Even if we solve all of the practical and logistical problems of salvaging food from being wasted and the food bank network has gotten really good at this over the years - this alone is not a solution to hunger. In part, it’s not a solution because there is not close enough food to replace the government assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, and school meals that help ensure low-income people have adequate diets. But really, it’s not a solution because it’s still a hand-out.

In more than thirty years of working in the anti-hunger field, I have yet to meet an able-bodied adult who wanted to be standing in line at the social service office or the food pantry. They are there because of circumstance sometimes beyond their control and sometimes the result of bad decisions. But they do want to be able to support themselves and their families. Their work that pays enough to do that and the supports that allow work, like child care, job training, and education. They want stores that sell healthy and affordable food in their neighborhoods.

Food waste, which comes from dedicated volunteers working to salvage food waste from or government programs, will never end because hunger is a symptom of the more insidious problem of poverty. While it’s good to work on solving the food waste issue, we will only solve the problem of hunger in the US if we expand opportunities for our most vulnerable neighbors and get everyone healthy, affordable food available to all.

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**Is Food Waste a Solution to Hunger?**

By: Alissa Haller

The Co-op is the Best Place to Work and Shop

I started working in the grocery business when I was 14 years old. The Potsdam Food Co-op is my seventh grocery store that I have worked in 14 years. The previous six stores were corporate and the Co-op is different and better.

The pace at the Co-op is different, too. Many corporate stores make you work hard to get customers through the line without revealing that you are trying to rush them in and out of the store. In these stores, customers are dollars signs. There are customers that come into the Co-op, however, and I can chat with them and find out what is going on in their lives without having my hand on their shoulder and showing them out the door while nodding. Sure, profit is important, but at the Co-op, so is community and connection. When you don’t come from the background and corporate grocery stores, it may be hard to understand. But here at the co-op, I feel I can be genuine with my fellow member owners and that is something I don’t take for granted.

I also love all of my grocery shopping at the Co-op. If I don’t raise it or grow it myself, I purchase here or at a farmer’s market or local business. I like knowing that my money is going back to my community, not to some corporate office in a different state or country. Honestly, big chain grocery stores are trying to eliminate the amount of plastic and trash I create, so buying items from our bulk bins enables me to cut down on packaged items that will clutter our landfills.

Did you know that you like chain grocery stores in the area, the employees have a script they are supposed to greet you with? Here, I cringe every time I have to ask for a member-owner card or ask “credit or debit?” “need a receipt?” because these phrases bring me back to the days when I had a scripted way to talk to customers. We even had acronyms to remember what to say: “Are you wearing your HATs?” Which is code for Hello, Ask, Thank you, Smile and Shop. I like that conversation is not forced but more genuine at the Co-op and I feel that I can truly get to know those customers that want me to know more about them.

Out of all the stores where I have worked in 14 years, I was most happy at non-departmentalized stores. That means that everyone does a little bit of everything. Grocery clerks do everything. Grocery clerks do everything. However, at the Co-op we have different roles, but front end teammates do much more than just the register. It’s great to be able to walk around and help on the sales floor rather than CONTINUED ON PAGE 5.

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**Coop Bread, Before the Carriage House**

By: Laura Corids

Art and Anne Johnson’s Co-op card identifies them as Potsdam Co-op members, a unique perspective which puts them among the founders of our Co-op. The Johnsons moved here from Maine in 1968 when Art accepted a position in SUNY Potsdam’s History Department. “It was down to Potsdam or Trumansburg.” Anne recalls. “When we learned that SUNY Potsdam had the Cran School of Music, we opted for Potsdam!”

Art had turned English with her to Potsdam, and a toddler. (She and Art later also adopted a daughter through St. Lawrence County Department of Social Services.) Anne also brought a passion for baking. “For several years, I baked bread at home for the Co-op to sell,” she tells me. “I made about 40 loaves every weekend – Challah, French bread, and a twelve-grain were my specialties. Even though I had a commercial mixer, there was always flour everywhere. What a mess! Anne bakes to make the French bread – and what hard work!”

When I ask how much Anne was compensated for her baking, she pauses. “Sometimes I was compensated. Sometimes I baked for work credit. And sometimes I just gave it away.”

Eventually, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (which inspects Co-ops and other grocery stores) notified Anne that her kitchen needed to be inspected. “For example, at first I wasn’t happy when we accepted non-working members, and then when we decided to allow non-members shop there – but I got over it. Another thing that’s changed is all the prepared deli food. As we get older, we find we’re buying those items more and more often. We still love our Co-op.”

Anne definitely hasn’t given up her baking either. “I never buy bread. She still bakes and gives her bread away, including four Challah loaves - that were each two feet long - that she baked for a Bar Mitzvah. “They were so heavy I could barely lift them.”

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**INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS… resource that can reach the neediest” we need for a robust food system.**

This is my recipe going forward. We need a mediator to bridge the gap between farmers and dining halls. Start small by focusing on a couple produce items. Brian suggested start with lightly processed, fresh cut vegetables such as onions, tomatoes, potatoes, and squash. Maybe a good start goal would be to provide fresh fries to dining halls for a month. Our new mediator will take orders from dining halls with the responsibility to collaborate with farmers, and hire staff to process vegetables at the Extension Kitchen. The mediator can act as a distributor or try to work with a company like Renzi to have products delivered. Then let it simmer. Work out any issues with the farmers, add new produce items, begin flash freezing local fruits, and slowly add new farmers and institutional buyers.

I’m excited about the new Extension Kitchen and the growing interest in local food from stu-
Introduction
Board President: Laura Cords

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the Co-op, I am pleased to provide the following report to our Member-Owners. This report consists of the General Manager’s Report, the Treasurer’s Report, and a summary of each Committee’s achievements in 2016.

At our retreat last March, we identified 5 areas for focus for the year: our physical space, membership engagement, outreach in the larger community, financial stability, and defining what we sell. Specific measurable objectives and responsibilities were identified, and our committees re-aligned to better address each priority. Progress was monitored and reported at every Board meeting. In short, your Board and GM took these responsibilities very seriously.

Overall, our Co-op is performing well. Our sales are up, and we ended the year in our best financial position in memory. At the same time, our membership numbers have remained stable, and our outreach, marketing, and community-building activities continue. None of this would be possible without the efforts of our amazing community of volunteers, the hard work of our General Manager, and the leadership of our Board of Directors.

General Manager
General Manager: Eric Jesner

SALES
Sales were up 3.57% to $1,799,659, before discounts of $176,195. This is up 2.5% for the year as compared to $1,623,464 in 2015. Neither of these efforts was easy. At the beginning of this year, this Co-op was in the red. We needed to make some changes to turn the Co-op around.

MEMBER-OWNERS
Ownership is down 18 to bring us to an average of 968 member-owners for 2016. This number has bounced around this range for the last few years. I believe we need to do more to make our Co-op attractive to new members and to retain current members. The percent of sales to member-owners is up 2.3% to reflect the larger Co-op. This is a measure of how long our product mix is constantly changing for the better and most bills will be paid on time.

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS
We made two major changes to our home this year. The first was a large overhaul of the Co-op’s physical space with new bathrooms, sinks, and a large wall of windows. The Co-op’s physical space is much more attractive to customers and is much appreciated by customers as well as staff. Thank you Stefan Grossmeier and Josephson for the installation work. Abby Lee deserves a special thank you for not only painting, but being the point of contact to make the project happen.

Another change is still somewhat controversial, the reorientation of our parking lot. I have gotten some negative feedback and acknowledge all of you who do not like the additional walk across the parking lot or the added concern of crossing the traffic in the lot. What we have gained is more than doubling our parking capacity in the area when parking up the back of the lot for deliveries. We have gotten much busier during lunch hours over the past few years. It is hard to tell sometimes because the lot does not get clogged up like it used to.

Lastly, I’d like to thank all of the Co-op staff. We continue to refine our operations and staff continue to adapt to the many changes. More is being asked of each staff member as sales continue to grow and I’m grateful for the responsibilities that each person takes to make sure the Co-op meets all of your needs.

Finance Committee
Chair: Robin McClellan

A VERY GOOD YEAR
As a bean counter, I am not prone to exuberance, irrational or otherwise, but 2016 has been an exuberantly very good year. 2016 had record sales (excursively close to $1.8M) but more importantly an operating profit of nearly $20,000 and a net income of over $39,000. (Net Income includes other income such as dues.) To put this in historical perspective, this is the first time in the last 5 years that we’ve had positive operating profit.

Sales, however, grew fairly steadily over the period, going from $1.5M in 2012 to the $1.8M in 2016. The biggest increase in sales was in 2014, but there was a net loss of $13K. This indicates some underlying issues. This year was dedicated to discovering them.

UNDERLYING ISSUES
The first issue we knew: an increase in minimum wage. The Co-op starts employees at above minimum wage but when minimum wage first rose, management, with the support of the Board, also raised the wages of other workers. Minimum wage continues to rise and the Co-op remains committed to paying a fair and living wage.

The second issue is health insurance, another known. Health insurance is a benefit open to all full time employees (35 hours a week or greater) and rates have gone up about 10% a year over the last 5 years. The Co-op doesn’t pay all of the health care for employees, in fact it hasn’t increased its contribution as the rates have gone up, but it offers a range of plans that give employees choice.

At the beginning of 2016, the Treasurer and the general manager worked on the new reports that looked at the profitability of each department. This tool was instrumental in identifying inefficiencies at a more detailed level. This led to some changes in pricing, particularly in the Bakery Department, with similar changes for a larger number of months. Now inventory takes significantly less time as well as being more accurate and less tedious. Kudos to Jayne, Eric, and dedicated volunteers to show up to quality to count.

In 2015, the Finance Committee worked with Eric to come up with measures to automate much of the bookkeeping that was done by hand. The motivation for this was twofold: efficiency and accuracy. Like all major changes, this one has taken a long time. The major change is converting from Accounting Edge (also known as Mind Your Own Business or MYOB) to QuickBooks.

Finance Committee member Jay Vega oversaw some Clarkson students who first tried to make the conversion. Next Jay and I worked while opening the open the books for 2016. In particular mention goes to the Co-op’s buyer, Andy Peet, for his work on improving the quality and desirability of what’s in the store.

I want to acknowledge the staff, and particularly the management teams: Eric, Jenna, Andy, Chris, Jayne, Lynn, and Meagan, who are the people who not only make the Co-op the pleasant place it is, but who have made the Co-op the pleasant place it is, but who have made the Co-op what it is today.

Inventory Turnover

GREASING THE MACHINE
The manner in which quarterly inventory is taken has changed over the last few years. Several years ago there was a switch to the use of scanners to take inventory. At first the main benefit was the ability to use actual costs (rather than estimating it from price and markup) and having the inventory numbers in weekly rather than monthly. Now inventory takes significantly less time as well as being more accurate and less tedious. Kudos to Jayne, Eric, and dedicated volunteers to show up to quality to count.

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Some of the other projects the Finance Committee worked on with management were: continued documentation of the bookkeeping process; the implementation of a more rigorous budgeting process; and the formation of a committee necessary to set up capital reserves.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE PROFIT

One question that comes up with our new found profit is what is going to happen to it? The Co-op model promises unexpected expenses such as a new furnace arose when there was money to pay for them. It is important to prepare for future expenses, the Finance Committee is working with management to set up Capital Reserve and Repair Reserve funds for the repair and replacement of key pieces of equipment. These reserves will be funded from the increased profits. It will be possible to increase the budget for maintenance and replace things before they break.

As for the money itself, a lot of what we have on the Board and in management has been seen, culminating actions being exercised. There are strategic directions that the change in our finances is due to fundamental changes that have been made over the years and if the Co-op is still solid in the black by the end of the third quarter of 2017, then new options may be considered.

An option that the Board has considered but not implemented is patronage dividends. This would allow the Co-op to distribute excess profits back to the Member/Owners. There are still unanswerable questions about how this plan would be implemented, but there will be some bylaw changes necessary.

FORWARD, INTO THE FUTURE

This year marks a new chapter in the Co-op experience, and 2017 is intended to be more optimistic than we’ve been in years. In addition to positive net profit, increased sales, and improved financial health, other metrics of financial health are better:

- Gross margin is up 0.4% from 2015, and 3.3% from 2012.
- Personnel cost as portion of Sales is 0.308, down from 0.309 last year, despite increases in Personnel wages.
- The $39K Profit is still only a modest 2.2% of Sales, and Current Ratio, a measure of general liquidity, is 1.47, the highest it’s been since 2012.
- Whenever I’ve worried about the future, I’ve always tried to look at what we have and don’t have. With no long term debt, the amazing good will of the membership and community, and a great staff led by a wonderful General Manager, the institution was safe, despite losing signifi- cant amounts of money in 2013 and at the same time it lived close enough to the edge that it was hard to think in terms of the growth and evolution that the Co-op will inevitably need.

This year, all that changed. The Co-op board and the Co-op commit- tee critically considered what growth and evolution could look like. The first investment the Co-op will make in that regard is the Market- ing and Marketing studies that will happen this year. With that infor- mation in hand, we will make a decision on how to grow and evolve, and the Board and management will have the tools to write the prologue to the next chapter in the saga that is our Co-op.

Executive Committee
Chair: Laura Cordts

The committee met monthly with the General Manager to review issues related to personnel, store operations and the Gener- al Manager’s performance and review yearly. The committee consisted of the President Laura Cordts, Vice President Joe Andriano, Treasurer Robin McClellan, and Secretary Erica LaFountain.

Governance Committee
Chair: Joe Andriano

The Governance Committee primarily focused on modern- izing our bylaws this year. We continued to work with our attorney to review our bylaws, which resulted in the changes which are being voted on at the Annual Meeting. Additionally, I served on the tasks which we are responsible for each year; recruiting new Board members and reviewing/updating our Board Policy Manual and Calendar.

Marketing Committee
Chair: Samantha DaGrossa

Highlights from 2016:
- The Marketing Committee (MC) separated from Member- ship/Events in July 2016 to focus solely on “outreach” to gain new shoppers and encourage current member-owners to shop more Co-op Speaker’s Group – cur- rent focus “Ambassadors Program”
- What is it?
  - For those member-owners inter- ested in being a “Ambas- sador” at community events and to speak at local organizations, public forums, etc.
  - What for?
  - Those who are interested will be trained to present an if- ormed, unified message about the Co-op’s Mission & Values and the benefits of becoming a Member-Owner
  - To increase the Co-op’s com- munity presence and gain new membership
  - To have a reliable list of Ambassadors to draw from for events
  - Created materials to rollout the rising bread prices in August 2016
  - Welcome coupons for local businesses (10% discount “Welcome” cer- tificates for CPLU, SLU and Clarks - initiated and tracked through the end of Summer 2016, tracking at registers has seen a response
  - Membership expiration email - will test this on select member-owners of upcoming expiration

Executive Plans for 2017

- Grow Ambassadors Program –plan more invitations to join, improve definitions as needed and find ways to increase the Ambassadors’ pres- ence in the community
- Plan Membership Drive – to increase Co-op’s membership by setting specific goals and planning ways to meet those goals during a set time period: also to set a guide for future years’ drives
- Increase some media presence and sharable content – some discussion and efforts made in 2016 to increase the Co-op’s presence on Facebook & Insta- gram, but the MC will discuss ways to do more
- As the Ambassadors will be a physical presence in the local community, the Co-op needs to expand its online presence in the social media community
- Update “Local Producer Post- ers” to emphasize the Co-op’s support of local farmers and its offerings of local products – find ways to emphasize this online too
- Once the CDS market research study is complete the MC will help to action plan

Much discussion was raised in 2016 on how to attract local shoppers to the Co-op, and the MC will continue to discuss and decide on what the Co-op can do to help maintain its Mission & Values.

IT & Web Committee
Chair: Eric Ouchida

In 2016 the IT & Web committee worked hard to improve as- pects of the Co-op’s data security and to manage data flow. With new tools for storing and securing information, the Co-op can rest a little bit easier.

We’ve also taken steps to ensure the accessibility of our website. This will let us know what visitors are most interested in and from there we can make decisions on how we can display that informa- tion more conveniently. When we begin updating our blog, this will play an even more crucial role.

Lastly, in 2016 the Co-op commit- tee initiated the task of tracking software and hardware used throughout. The goal here is to make sure the Co-op never falls too far behind in terms in these important areas. Outdated software and unup- dated hardware cause data reliability issues, so tracking both will remain an important task of this committee.

Membership Committee
Chair: Maggie McKenna

The ultimate goal of the membership committee is to provide excellent benefits to member/owners and an effort to encourage more people in our area to join the Co-op. We work in tandem with the marketing committee to find out what people are looking for about how great the Co-op is for shopping, of course, but also for networking and entertainment.

This year, the membership and marketing committees reworked their individual duties to uti- lize the talent spread across the committees in the most efficient way. The membership committee, sometimes known as the events committee, took on the task of organizing and coordinating events for Co-op members including the Fall Open House, the Baking Fest and this Annual Meeting with the help of the Board.

In addition to the regular events this membership committee worked on, we also started the Co-op Community Cooks monthly potluck with no agenda. The potlucks have been a great success, allowing members to mingle, get to know one another; it is already beginning to assemble a regular crowd! These events will be held on the 4th Thursday of every month except November starting at 6pm in the Portland Town Hall Com- munity Room.

This coming year, the commit- tee has also decided to organize regular farm field trips around the area including a maple sugar shack, a number of our local vegetable vendors and possibly even a trip to the coast.

We are also hoping more people will spread their joy of communi- ty networking and event planning by joining our new “Ambassador” committee. We meet on the first Tuesday of the month at 6pm above the Carriage House. If you have any ideas of things you’d like to see us work- ing on, please feel free to reach out to Maggie at mmckenna.violin@ gmail.com.

Co-op Forward Committee
Chair: Marie Richmond

At our spring retreat, the Board created this temporary Committee to strategize new ideas to sustain our Co-op’s relevance and resil- ience into the future. We identi- fied three long-term objectives. First, Co-op needs data to better understand our current situation and assets, the market in which we operate and our potential for future growth. We also need a market- ing plan to help us maximize that potential. Second, we need to use the resources that are available to us to inform a facilities plan, so we can determine if our current facilities are adequate and, if not, to consider options for expansion, renovation, or relocation. Third, we need to begin examining opportunities and ramifications of possibly affiliating or merging with other Co-ops in our region.

The Committee solicited proposals from local, regional, and national firms, and the Board has budgeted to contract for a two-phase market analysis with 2016 as the long-term objec- tive. A national firm that provides services exclusively to Co-ops. This will take place in the first and second quarters of 2017.

Conclusion
Board President: Laura Cordts

It has been my pleasure and honor to serve as Board Presi- dent this past year. Our Board is diverse and dedicated. Our Committees, all of which include both Board and non-board mem- bers, bring real expertise to their respective responsibilities. Our GM is passionate and talented. Our staff – the “face” of our Co-op – is always motivated to keep Co-op running smoothly. And of course, you, our mem- ber-owners, continue to define what Co-op is all about.

I had the opportunity recently to speak with Fred Hanss, Potsdam’s Director of Economic Development. He said that Co-op has grown and evolved to become an “anchor business” for Potsdam, and that Co-op plays a unique role in defining and differentiating Potsdam from other local com- munities. As we begin our 44th year, let’s remember our humble beginnings, celebrate our current successes, and continue doing all we can to keep Co-op going strong.

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It’s Our Co-op – Small Changes Toward Big Benefits

By: Jim Fryer, Member-Owner

Like many of you, I have a strong connection to the Co-op. It’s an excellent store with a strong sense of local community and I find that I’m there every other day or so, whether I have a reason to go or not. Sometimes, there have been plenty of times I’ve left work, driven to the Co-op and asked a worker to fill it. If you washed your own jar, it is obviously clean enough for you. In contrast, the jars that are made available in the bulk liquids area of the store must be sanitized (not merely washed) for the customers’ use. Only the truly clean, sparkly sanitized jars will be acceptable to us and our NYS Agriculture & Markets inspector. So, sanitizing jars is more than loading and unloading the dish washer. For example, all labels must be removed from jars. This may sound easy but often takes a bit of effort. It is work for patient fastidious folks who find satisfaction in striving for perfection...at least in this task.

Instructions for sanitizing jars are available at the Co-op. You can ask the Packaging Coordinator or any other staff member to provide a copy of the Jar Sanitizing Policy for you.

Even if you don’t want to become a jar sanitizer for the Co-op, (which you can earn you either 10% or 20% discount, depending on the amount of jars you sanitize each week), you can still donate your used but clean glass jars to the Co-op for our trained sanitizers to make ready for the store. You can’t give us just any used glass jar; we do have some standards. Here’s what makes glass jars/bottles or lids unacceptable. If a jar has any of the following problems, please don’t bother giving it to us to reuse:

• Jars or lids with food residue that might attract pests
• Jars that are too difficult to wash inside (ex. very narrow necks)
• Jars with solidified oil or oily lids
• Lids with any amount of rust or mold
• Dented lids
• Any jar that contains any moisture inside
• Jars that smell strongly of salsa, pickles, vinegar, garlic, etc.

If a jar looks or smells too gross for you to reuse even for yourself – please don’t donate it to us. We’ll think in terms of conservation. You can bring in your glass jars for sanitizing and place them in the bin in the center brome closet, in the store. If you can’t find it just ask a staff person.

If you would like to consider becoming a trained jar sanitizer for the Co-op, please talk with the Packaging Coordinator or another staff person. There is often a need for more jar sanitizers and there have been times when a shortage of usable jars has caused inefficiencies for the customers.

As stated in our mission, “...we encourage environmental respect through the goods we sell and in the manner in which we conduct our daily operations.” With your help, we can reduce the amount of packaging used in our store which is good for all of us.

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I read Michael Pollan’s thoughtful article in the Winter 2017 newsletter about reaching $2 million in annual sales, a point at which we hit that mark. I spent five weeks analyzing my spending habits to see why I might be able to do help us hit that mark.

First, I needed a baseline measurement. I spent five weeks in early 2017 buying groceries like I would normally, which includes the Co-op and other local grocery stores. I spent 49% of my grocery money at the Co-op during that time. Sure, that’s a decent percentage for a concerned member-owner, but I figured I could do better. I thought it might be difficult, since I decided a while ago that there were certain groceries I would only buy from the Co-op – fruits and vegetables, vitamins, yogurt, eggs, coffee, etc.

After those five weeks, I looked through my receipts, and made some decisions on what I could do differently. Over the next three weeks, I managed to get that percentage up to 70%. Here are some of the small changes I made to get there:

1. Strategic decisions! My family goes through about a gallon of milk per week. At the time this article was written, a half-gallon of Byrne’s organic whole milk costs $5.19, and a half-gallon of organic whole milk from the local chain grocery store costs $3.99. Over the course of a year, milk from the chain grocery store would cost $141.96, while milk from the Co-op would cost $539.76. Yes, that would potentially be an additional $124.80 to buy from the Co-op instead of from another store. However, that’s also more than $500 that I’m now spending at the Co-op, instead of somewhere else.

Plus, these numbers don’t include any sort of discount. The standard 2% member-owner discount would amount to $10.80 off the total of milk. However, if I could manage to get caught up on my hours worked for the 10% discount, that would be a discount of $53.98. At that point, it would only $70.82 more to buy from the Co-op than from a chain grocery store. I could spend a little more than a dollar a week, and turn that into more than $500 into the Co-op’s account, just from milk alone.

2. Random purchases! Every once in awhile, I try to buy something from the Co-op that I normally wouldn’t – maybe it’s on the expensive side, maybe it’s an ingredient I have no idea how to use, or maybe it’s something on that “new additions” shelf near the registers. (I’m an absolute sucker for anything with a sticker of usable jars has caused inefficiencies for the customers.

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# Business Partners

These locally owned businesses have generously agreed to grant the following offers to Co-op members. Present your current Membership Card when asking for the discount. One time offers will be checked off when used.

## Food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Offer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Italy</td>
<td>Potsdam</td>
<td>30 Market St, Potsdam, $1.00 off any large pizza. 10% off brewed coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lawrence Alter Busters Jerabii Coffeehouse</td>
<td>Potsdam</td>
<td>11 A Maple St, Potsdam, 10% off brewed coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Bears Gluten Free Bakery &amp; More (Potsdam)</td>
<td>Potsdam</td>
<td>32 Market St, Potsdam, 10% off Farm-to-Fork menu Monday through Friday. For each $10 purchase you will be entered into a drawing to win their featured dessert of the month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple Rice</td>
<td>Potsdam</td>
<td>20 Elm St #105, Potsdam, $2 off one lunch special (one time offer).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Retail

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Offer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maple Run Importers</td>
<td>Potsdam</td>
<td>49 Maple St, Potsdam, 10% off All Maple Run Importers branded merchandise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Sports &amp; Toys (formerly The Cornerstore)</td>
<td>Potsdam</td>
<td>76 Market St, Potsdam, 10% off with a purchase of $25.00 or more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UPS Store</td>
<td>Canton</td>
<td>10 free B&amp;W self-service copies, daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple Rice</td>
<td>Potsdam</td>
<td>5% off all in-stock items at both locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of the Potsdam Public Library</td>
<td></td>
<td>10% discount at the regular Saturday 10-1 sale in the library basement.</td>
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</table>

## Home Services

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine Foam Insulation</td>
<td>315-262-6544, 5% off residential foam insulation job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renew Architecture &amp; Design, Rebecca Weld AIA and LEED AP</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rebecca@renewarchitecture.com">rebecca@renewarchitecture.com</a>, 5% discount on residential architectural services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Health/Beauty

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body Shop Fitness and Salon</td>
<td>47 Bank St., Canton, NY, 10% off Fitness Center Membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Yoga Loft</td>
<td>17 Maple St, Potsdam, NY, One time $5 discount for any drop-in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alchemistr</td>
<td>17 Maple St, Potsdam, NY, 10% off body art (excluding specials).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Technique Lessons and Workshops</td>
<td>(315) 212-0502, 73 Larry Street, Potsdam, 10% off first lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiropractic Office of Dr. Jamie Towl &amp; Dr. Lisa Francy Towl</td>
<td>16 Park Street, Canton / 3276 State Route 11, Malone, 10% off chiropractic services at both locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needle+</td>
<td>143 Market Street &amp; 26 Market Street, Potsdam, 10% off first massage or gift voucher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Wellness</td>
<td>55 S. Main St, Downtown Canton, 5% off all in-stock items at both locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazzercise</td>
<td>22 Depot ST, Box 624, Potsdam, 1 complimentary class to new customers (may not be combined with other offers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BodyWorks Chiropractic</td>
<td>17 Lamy Street, Potsdam, 15% off initial visit for those without insurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potsdam Center for Innovative Dental Technologies</td>
<td>83 Market Street, Potsdam, 10% discount.</td>
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## Entertainment

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<tr>
<td>CPS Community Performance Series</td>
<td>15% off regularly priced tickets at the box office (some restrictions may apply).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Lawrence County Arts Council</td>
<td>1 time SLC Arts member rate discount on a community arts class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra of NNY</td>
<td>315-267-3251, 10% off regularly priced tickets.</td>
</tr>
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</table>