

Meeting Your Herbs in Transylvania County

Our Wellness Manager reflects on her visit to Gaia Farm where herbs for the popular line of supplementments are grown.

By Brenna St. Pierre

Overlooking the misty green expanse of Gaia Farm to the Blue Ridge mountain peaks, I knew this was a place I could live. Having grown up in the Berkshires, I find few places green and vertical enough, but Transylvania County in northwestern North Carolina would suit me fine. It is where CEO and President Ric Scalzo envisioned a farm to supply Gaia Herbs with the highest quality raw materials and as the staging ground for the company's intent to become stewards of the land.

Founded in 1997, Gaia Farm now encompasses an entire valley—350 acres of land protected from neighboring contamination. The farm, manufacturing process and building are all certified organic each year by Oregon Tilth. The mile-long farm is richly diverse, with thickets of wildflowers and brush between the fields of herbs, and there is a mountain creek snaking through the farm, the perfect place for a chilling dip after transplanting flats of gotu kola, propagated from the original crop in 1998. Tall stands of silent bamboo draw the curious across fields of oats and California poppy, while snow-white valerian planted across the lower fields gives the illusion of Summer in June. The remaining landscape is green: light, dark and every subtle shade in between.

It is shocking that anyone could be unhappy here, but I found myself in that undesirable state



It's quite a view from Gaia Farm in North Carolina

find the bracelet. They were concerned, asked detailed questions, and even stopped harvesting hawthorn to help me look. On our last day at the farm, I was ecstatic to find the bracelet while hula-hooping on the hill overlooking the fields. The compassion I was shown by everyone there was truly unexpected and unforgettable.

THE FARM TOUR

Ric Scalzo's appearance was initially bewildering; he was dressed in shorts, a white T-shirt, sandals, and representing New England with his Patriots hat. But first

after misplacing a treasured bracelet on the farm. In an incredible testament to the character of the Gaia Farm crew and the participants of the tour, I was taken aback by how many offered to help

impressions were swiftly shattered as Scalzo began to share his wealth of knowledge from years of experience as a naturopathic doctor and herbalist. His mission is to know these plants,

GAIA cont. on page 8

Answers to GMO Q&A

The Co-op's GM answers your questions about GMOs

By Art Ames



We all grapple with balancing our thirst for knowledge and concern for our health when it comes to growing, buying and eating food. As we become more educated, instead of making things simpler, each answer seems to lead to more questions. In this piece, I'll try and answer many of the most common questions we ask about one of the most pressing food issues today: GMOs. Some of the answers here are not ideal. All we can do is try to find the best solution to a complicated issue. By the way, I want to recognize the Non-GMO Project. I used much of their provided information to answer these questions.

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NOTES FROM HQ: THE GM REPORT

By Art Ames



Happy summer! As I write this, we are still recovering from one of the rainiest early summers I can remember. I vaguely recall a summer similar to this in the late '80s, but nothing in recent memory. We are all dealing with the consequences, including mosquitoes. I particularly sympathize with all of our growers and their people out there in the fields growing their products, and when I start to complain about my own small inconvenience, that helps me to keep things in perspective. Certainly Brenna and her staff in our Wellness Department are fielding lots of questions from many of you, and we have many items that can help, but not really solve the dilemma. I admit that if I'm going to spend considerable time in the woods hiking, I judiciously use products that contain DEET. I suppose it's a trade-off, and we will continue to keep our eyes out for any new, non-chemical products that come to market that may be effective.

I usually leave it up to others to talk about new products, but I can't resist talking about one development. I have a weakness. OK, I probably have many, but one food weakness is my love of all things pasta. Fiori does a terrific job making pasta, and we are now selling it at the Co-op. In a little while we will be packing it in two convenient sizes. What's unique here is that we are also selling it loose by the pound out of our deli case. If you've never cooked with fresh pasta, you are in for a real treat. If you have, then I don't have to tell you a thing. Just remember that to successfully cook fresh pasta, cooking times are often less than half of what it would be for dried, so be aware. It is also recommended that you use considerably more salt in the cooking water than for dry pasta. Don't worry. It does not significantly increase your sodium intake. Also, as a general tip, rather than draining the pasta, putting it on a plate, and putting your topping on, it's suggested that you lightly drain the pasta, put it into a warm pan, add the warm toppings

to the pan and cook together for a couple of minutes. Just ask any of us at the counter for more tips. We are incredibly proud of the quality of the fresh foods that we sell here and want to help you get the most out of these local gems.

Relocation

I wish I had more to tell you. As you know, we are working with CDC of South Berkshire as the landowner and Allegrone Construction as a possible developer to build ourselves a new home at 100 Bridge Street, just across the Housatonic River to the east of our current location. Frankly, the Co-op is ready to get started. We anticipated one year to plan, design and permit the site, and one year to actually build the new store. There have been some delays, but we will continue to work toward making 100 Bridge Street our new home, although it now looks like it's more realistic that we could open a new co-op during the fall of 2015. When I have more information to share, I will certainly let you know.

In the meantime, we certainly want to keep the conversation going. I encourage you to join us for "co-op convos," which are small group discussions about co-op matters. We talk about anything on your minds, including the new store. You can sign up in the Co-op. We will also move toward having members of our board of directors in the store during predetermined times, and will let you know the dates when we have it all scheduled. Once we have firm plans and a timeline in place, we will hold a series of meetings and anything else that we or you can think of to make sure that you have lots of input. This is a team effort and all of us have an important role to play.

Store Changes

Most of the department changes have now happened. Thanks for your patience. We've opened up the café area, moved the self-serve coffee around, along with our in-store baked goods, and reset our bulk products, including coffee, into one general area for your convenience. We have one more tweak to make.

Right now, our herbs and spices are in two units at the end of two of our back aisles. By using smaller jars and moving (probably) the bulk teas to another bulk spot, we will soon be consolidating those two spice units into one. We believe it will be far more convenient for you.

Our Employees

The numbers change here and there, but we currently have close to 75 employees. Most of us really enjoy working here, and certainly a few of us work here because we have to work. I know that we have a generally satisfied and content staff, and we do our best to provide an exceptional working atmosphere. Of course, people work at the Co-op, not too mention various other places, for many reasons. Some of us feel this is a career; some of us work part-time as we go through school or for extra money, and some of us work here while we search for other jobs more in tune with what we want to do with our lives. None of those reasons is better or worse than any other. Over the last several months some familiar faces have left, and some new faces have become more familiar to you. I'm often asked what happened to so-and-so. As a reminder, unless a former employee gives us formal permission to discuss their situation, we must respect confidentiality and not talk about it. That said, you should never assume that the departed employee left on bad terms, or even good terms. In any case, I think you'll find our actual breakdown interesting. We actually have a much lower turnover rate than would be typical in a small retail grocery operation such as ours. Nine members of our staff have been here for 10+ years, 16 have been here for 5+ years, 20 for 3+ years, 17 for 2+ years, and 12 have been here for under 2 years.

Two of our more recent additions are settling in nicely. Jake Levin, our Produce manager, and Austin Banach, our meat/seafood buyer, have a wealth of knowledge about our local food scene, in addition to cheese, seafood, meat and produce. Use them and abuse them. Not really, but certainly talk to them, in

addition to the rest of our amazingly knowledgeable staff, about any food questions you might have, local insights or cooking ideas.

GMO Update

We continue to talk and work with our sister co-ops across the country to continue to slow the progress of GMO crops entering our food chain. To date, 14 co-ops have adopted or tweaked Berkshire Co-op Market's policy to not bring in any new items for sale or use unless they are vetted to be GMO-free. Our combined sales to date are \$182 million dollars. Over the next few weeks, I will put together a letter and solicit other co-ops across the country. While labeling laws are also crucial, they truly won't be enough, and our co-op will continue to press the issue in a variety of ways. We also belong to National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA), a member driven co-op. This vital organization allows us to purchase products through a joint co-op contract, and is responsible for putting together our bi-weekly national sales flyer. Because of our efforts, NCGA has adopted a similar policy in that they will not put any new items into sales programs unless vetted to be GMO-free. This program affects 148 co-ops across the country. Our small but growing group of 14 co-ops are delighted that NCGA has joined our effort.

I continue to ask you for help. When new products enter the marketplace, manufacturers put a huge amount of funding into marketing. If you see or hear of a new product that you want, only to discover that we aren't carrying it because it cannot be verified as GMO-free, please, please, please do not give in to the temptation to buy it somewhere else. Let us help you find an alternative. This has nothing to do with increasing our sales. Instead, spread the word! Consumers alone will ultimately dictate GMO changes by simply not buying infected (yes, I did call them infected) products. Money talks.

Have a great, and hopefully drier, summer.

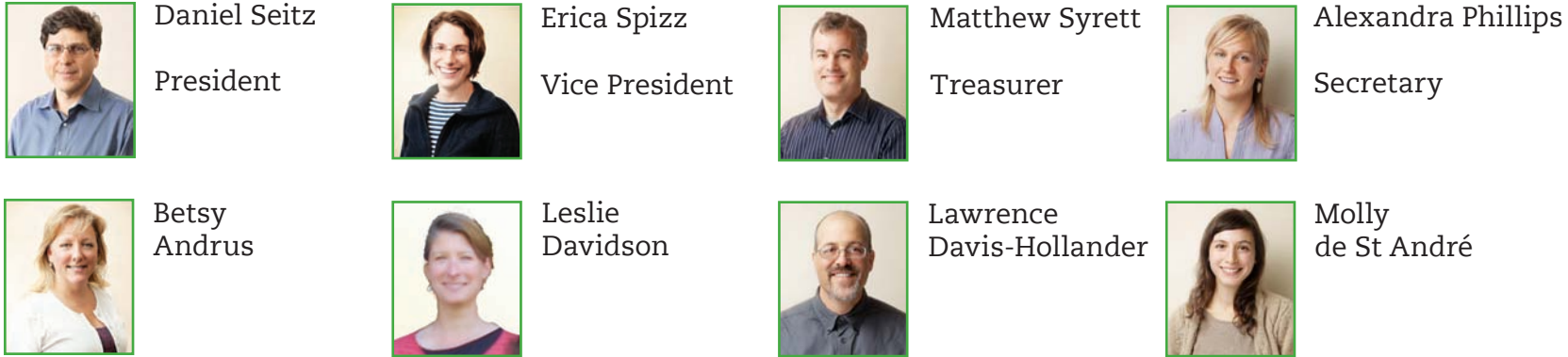
PPOT

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.

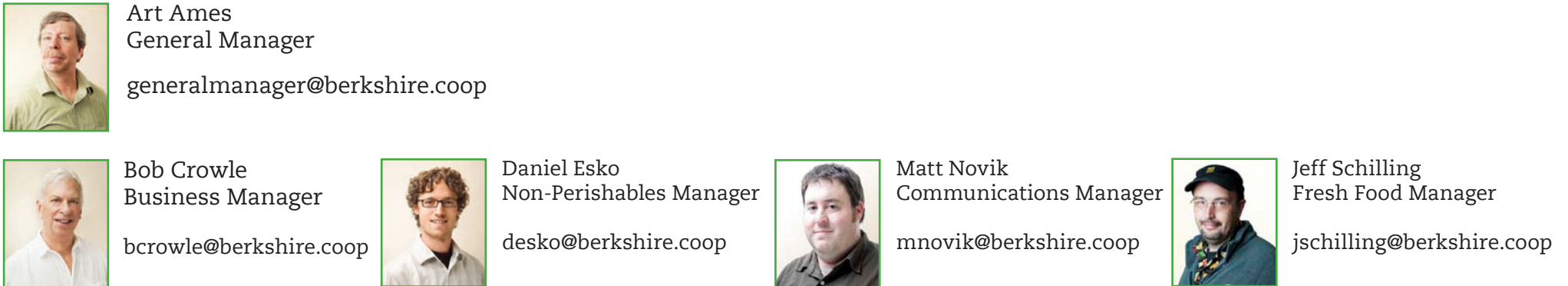
Prepaid **Owner** Tabs AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE CREDIT CARD ECONOMY

129 OWNERS HAVE SIGNED ON SO FAR YOU CAN BE #130

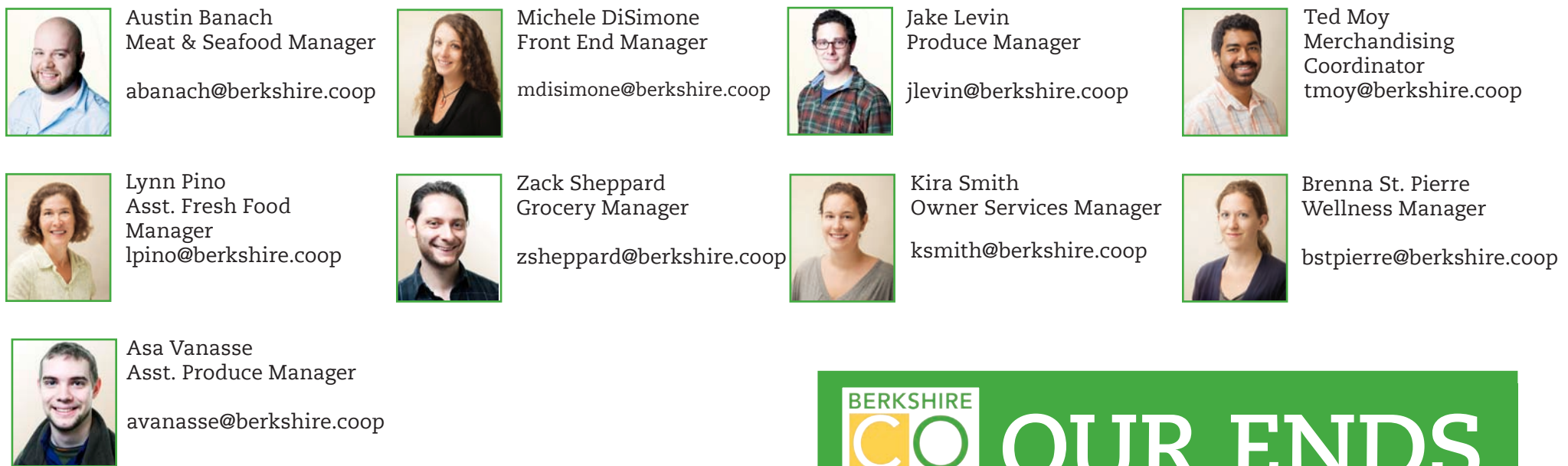
THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS BOD@BERKSHIRE.COOP



THE MANAGEMENT TEAM



THE LEADERSHIP TEAM



DATES OF INTEREST

2013/14 OWNER APPRECIATION DAYS 10% OFF TO OWNERS IN GOOD STANDING

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17TH
SATURDAY, JANUARY 18TH
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16TH
THURSDAY, JULY 17TH
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16TH

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

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



OUR ENDS

(Developed By The Board of Directors)

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

To this end, the Berkshire Cooperative Association:

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

OPERATIONAL VISION

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

Conference Fever: What I Learned At CCMA

A co-op board director reviews her experience at the Consumer Cooperative Manager Association Conference

By Alexandra Phillips



In the beginning of June I attended my first CCMA (Consumer Cooperative Management Association) conference in Austin, TX. This was my first time in Austin, so of course I was smitten with the abundance of Airstream trailers, the huge, spring-fed community swimming pool, and Austin's bats, which come pouring out from under the bridge at dusk. After this awe-inspiring show the bats go on to eat 30,000 pounds of bugs a night. I'm thinking we need to lobby for more bats in the Berkshires for healthy mosquito control, and fast!

The annual CCMA conference brings together leaders from consumer co-ops around the country to educate attendees on topics such as improving operations, management strategies, consumer education and marketing plans. The over 450 attendees included managers, board directors, educators and consultants. This conference provides opportunities to share best practices, discover new products and services, discuss governance and management, and learn how to market food cooperatives in an ever-changing competitive landscape.

Wheatsville, Austin's food co-op, hosted the conference. What quickly became clear is how wonderfully Wheatsville embraces the city's slogan, "Keep Austin Weird." While on a tour of the second Wheatsville store, which will be opening in several months, we were told a story about the location of the new store remaining a secret to the staff until one special night. Employees met at midnight and got on two buses that were taken along two different routes (just to make the destination more confusing) and then met at the new location to set off sparklers, dance, and write messages with chalk on the shell of the new building. After hearing that story, I couldn't help but wonder what we could do at our store to embrace a stronger foundation of fun.

I was fortunate to be able to be one of four representatives from our co-op at CCMA. I took a great deal of information and ideas away from the conference and caught a serious case of conference fever over the three days of events and workshops.

Here's a short summary of a few of the workshops in which I participated:

Everything's Bigger in Texas: Wheatsville's Big Direction outlined the plan created by Dan Gillotte, the store's general manager, as his operational interpretation of the Board's Ends policies, which facilitate communication and full organizational alignment (board, staff and owners). The Big (Business Is Good) Direction created a deep unification between the staff and board and has resulted in a powerful assessment tool from which to make more aligned decisions.

A Working Model for Diversity and Inclusion: The board president and member services manager at GreenStar Co-op in Ithaca, NY, explained the store's multifaceted approach to their creation of a diversity/inclusion program that has helped their store increase diversity among members and staff. The basis for this change was the implementation of a low-income assistance program called FLOWER (Fresh Local and Organic Within Everyone's Reach). GreenStar brought in consultants to change any non-inclusive language in that co-op's paperwork and to train staff and board members in antiracism communication. There was a great deal of openheartedness and vulnerability expressed in this workshop. I am excited to share what I learned from GreenStar's changes with our board and staff.

A Co-op State of Mind—Rethinking Expectations of Board Governance: The spirit of the Year of the Cooperative in 2012 continues with the Cooperative Decade, a challenge to make co-ops the fastest growing and preferred form of enterprise by 2020. Board governance will play a crucial role, and to attain that goal will require a greater comprehension of what it means to be



a democratic business and how to advocate for democratic behaviors. Because after all, these are the key things that co-ops do that corporations cannot imitate. They are our leg up to growing and making an even greater difference. The workshop leader, Art Sherwood, a Cooperative Development Services Co-op consultant, defined democracy as the "meaningful and skilled participation by owners in the process of reflection and choice." Democracy is hard work and takes planning, but it is our responsibility nonetheless. He explained that for it to truly function well means more than just voting at annual meetings. The workshop addressed next-level ways of thinking about member-owner participation and engagement. If you've ever heard Joel Salatin speak, know that Art Sherwood was a similarly motivating and outspoken force on the topic of co-op growth.

I'm happy to share more about my experience with anyone interested. I'll end with a quote from Dan Gillotte, Wheatsville's GM, from an article in Edible Austin magazine; "The downside of the investor-owned business is that really only a few people benefit from its success. At Wheatsville, we all benefit: the management team, the owners and shoppers and the community." Sounds pretty good to me.

Education & Outreach Report

By Jenny Schwartz, Education & Outreach Coordinator

As always, things are busy in the Education & Outreach department. I am lucky enough to spend most of my time working with kids across the county to help them learn about nutrition, healthy living and cooking. It's a lot of work and a lot of fun. Here's some details about what we've been up to.

FOOD ADVENTURES:

Over the last eight months, Food Adventures, a collaboration between Berkshire Co-op Market and Morgan Kulchinsky, a nutrition educator from the Nutrition Center of Pittsfield, visited ten schools and organizations in our area, taught over 150 classes, and worked with over 560 children. But there was one program in particular that stood out from the rest. Our relationship with the students at Morningside Elementary School in Pittsfield was quite special, as it was led by members of IS183 art school, located in Stockbridge, MA. Our curricula creatively merged to transform the children into "culinary artists." We were not only teaching children about healthy cooking and nutrition, but science, math and English as well.

We taught the kids at Morningside about the solar system through the use of food, learning about nutrition along with IS183's Shuttles, Stars



and Galaxies curriculum. Focusing on the colors of each planet and the reasons why each one is different, we used foods of similar colors to represent the planets in "space," which for us was a big trash bag. We also had an opportunity to teach proper knife skills and cutting techniques before the kids enthusiastically placed their prepared fruits and vegetables in the correct order of the solar system. Diced yellow beets were converted

into Jupiter, complete with red beet juice, which was used as paint in order to represent the storm. After the lesson was complete, the solar system became a salad bar to make delicious vegetable wraps. As we often tell the kids, it would be the worst cooking class ever if they couldn't eat what they made.

When we met with the third-graders a second time, we continued our work with the Shuttles, Stars and Galaxies curriculum, focusing on foods that can survive in extreme hot and cold climates, and talking about what season different foods grow best in. The class was divided into two groups. One group made a cold-press salad, which was cool and refreshing for summertime, while the other group made a hot squash crisp (made from apples and butternut squash), which was heartier for the wintertime. There was an emphasis on how foods that grow in these particular seasons help to warm and cool the body while providing important nutrients needed for the specific seasons.

With the first-grade class, we went back in time to harvest quinoa as part of the Time Travelers. Learning history through mixed media curriculum, students learned about the history and growing

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Visiting Wolfe Spring Farm

By Jake Levin, Produce Manager

Some of the first local produce we got in this spring were tall bunches of tender, elegant asparagus and deep green bunches of succulent, peppery watercress. Within hours of arriving we would sell out, no matter how much was delivered to us. Soon we started getting sugar snap peas; the same problem. That assortment of tasty and fleeting produce was brought to us by the Wolfe family of Wolfe Spring Farm on Hewins Street in Sheffield, MA. In many ways, the story of the Wolfe family and Wolfe Spring Farm epitomizes the very best of agricultural history in Berkshire County.

The Wolfe family has been farming in Southern Berkshire County since 1808, when they moved here from Coxsackie, NY. The original Wolfe family farm was in New Marlborough; the next generation moved to Sheffield, then the next three generations were in Great Barrington. The Great Barrington farm, like so many others in South County, was a dairy farm, and like almost all of the other dairy farms in the area, they could not keep up with industrial dairy farming. Jim and June Wolfe, the owners and farmers of Wolfe Spring Farm, started over, this time back in Sheffield.

Jim and June purchased their present farm in 2006, when they ran out of room in Ashley Falls. The farm was originally called Cold Spring Farm, and was farmed by the Hughes/Griffith family for many generations. When the daughters inherited Cold Spring Farm from Eleanor Griffith they decided that they did not want to farm the land, but they did not want to see the land developed. They decided to sell the development rights to the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program and sold the land to us, with the help of the Sheffield Land Trust. The Wolfe Family lived in a yurt until they finished building their passive solar house in 2008.

Jim Wolfe has been farming all his life; it's in his blood. June didn't have her first garden until she was in her twenties, but with Jim's mentoring she took to it quickly, and hasn't looked back. When they started out they had a garden and concentrated on growing fruits and vegetables. But when their son Seamus was a baby, the FDA had approved the use of bovine growth hormones in milk. That's when they decided to add a milk cow into the mix, reaching back into Jim's family history. Then they decided to add meat chickens, then egg layers, and on and on. The Wolfes have been farming together for twenty years, but they still work off-farm jobs to help make ends meet.

For the Wolfes, organic and sustainable farming is not just



“For the Wolfes, organic and sustainable farming is not just about growing good food, it is a part of a larger life mission of being stewards of the earth. Since 1989, they have made an environmentally based New Year’s resolution every year and they have kept all but one.”



about growing good food, it is a part of a larger life mission of being stewards of the earth. Since 1989, they have made an environmentally based New Year's resolution every year and they have kept all but one. They started small with recycling and cloth napkins, and each year set bigger goals. Last year they bought an electric car; this year they expanded the solar array on their roof. They also challenge themselves to try to make products they like, like ketchup or pretzels, with as many locally and organically sourced ingredients as possible. They regularly make their own pickles, sauerkraut, ice cream and yogurt; they even dry their own spices, including paprika. This year they taught themselves how to make their own soda. Members of their CSA even get the chance to take classes with the Wolfes to learn some of these skills, like basic cheesemaking.

They started selling what they were growing, raising and making because they believe that everyone should have the opportunity to eat locally. They sell a lot of their products through their CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), as well as at the farmer's markets in Millerton, NY, and at Rubiner's in Great Barrington, MA. And, of course, they sell their produce to us here at the Co-op. When I asked them why they grown organically, June said, "To fix something, you have to understand how it works. To fix our food system, we think that farmers have to understand how things grow in their natural environment and provide those ideal conditions for the plants and animals that they foster. As far as organic production, we have seen the power of nature and we would rather have her as an ally than an enemy."

The Wolfes are deeply committed to this idea. So much so that they don't just stop at organic farming, but they also work hard at training the next generation of organic farmers, including their own children. Two of the next generation of Wolfes, Amelia Wolfe and Seamus, are working as sustainable farmers using organic practices. They also take on interns, many of whom who have gone to become organic farmers.

Wolfe Spring Farm is best known, and most proud, of their asparagus. They grow the thinnest, tenderest green spears; there is no other asparagus like in the Berkshire foodshed. But in all honesty they are just one of those farms—whatever they decide to grow has unbelievable flavor. Please feel free to ask us in the produce department about what we have in from Wolfe Spring Farm.

GMO Q&A

Continued From Page 1

What are GMOs?

GMOs, or “genetically modified organisms,” are plants or animals that have been genetically engineered with DNA from bacteria, viruses or other plants and animals. These experimental combinations of genes from different species cannot occur in nature or in traditional crossbreeding.

Virtually all commercial GMOs are engineered to withstand direct application of herbicide and/or to produce an insecticide. None of the GMO traits currently on the market offer increased yield, drought tolerance, enhanced nutrition, or any other consumer benefit.

Are GMOs safe?

Most developed nations do not consider GMOs to be safe. In more than sixty countries around the world, including Australia, Japan, and all of the countries in the European Union, there are significant restrictions or outright bans on the production and sale of GMOs. In the U.S., the government has approved GMOs based on studies conducted by the same corporations that created them and profit from their sale.

Independent testing has not proved that GMOs are unsafe. However, there are trace chemical residues that remain on and in GMO products, and there are hundreds of studies to prove that ingesting artificial chemicals is hazardous to our health.

Do GMOs affect our environment?

Over 80% of all GMOs grown worldwide are engineered for herbicide tolerance. As a result, use of toxic herbicides like Roundup has increased fifteen times since GMOs were introduced. GMO crops are also responsible for the emergence of more tolerant bugs and weeds, which can only be killed with ever more toxic poisons like 2,4-D (a major ingredient in Agent Orange). GMOs are a direct extension of chemical agriculture, and are developed and sold by the world’s biggest chemical companies. The long-term impacts of GMOs are unknown, and once released into the environment these novel organisms cannot be recalled.

What is the Co-op’s GMO Policy?

Below is a summary of our current policies. Please take a look at our full policy if you want more details. You can find our full Food & Product Policy on our website or in the store at the front desk.

- *Grocery and Wellness: We will not carry introduce new non-organic products that contain high risk GMO ingredients as defined by the Non-GMO Project. These are Alfalfa , Canola (Rapeseed),Corn, Cotton, Soy , Sugar Beets, Papaya , Zucchini, Yellow Summer Squash.*
- *Produce: We will require all local farms to ensure that GMOs are not part of the farm’s process at any stage. Farmers will be asked to sign a statement that states the same. All products sourced outside one hundred miles will be certified organic.*
- *Animal Products: We recognize that in matters of animal feed, there is an added difficulty in tracing and confirming sources. Furthermore, strict non-GMO policy in this category could severely limit our ability to source from local farms and dairies and control consumer cost. With that in mind, we will follow these practices. We will not sell products produced with synthetic hormones like recombinant bovine somatotropin (rBST) or recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH); We will offer certified organic beef, chicken, milk, cheese and eggs at all times (barring instances of supply shortages). These options will be clearly labeled; We will offer educational resources on GMOs in animal products to help consumers make informed choices.*
- *Additionally, we will label all Non-GMO project verified products at the point of purchase and continue research on current stock, adjusting selection when needed.*

How do I know what is GMO and what is not?

If it is certified organic, or has been certified GMO-free by a reputable third party tester like the Non-GMO project, then you’re pretty safe. If it is a new product in the marketplace and the Co-op carries it, then it has been vetted to be GMO-free. If the product is not certified organic and does not carry a label and includes the ingredients listed above as high risk, there is truly no current way to know if it is GMO-free. In fact, even the Non-GMO folks have a small level of tolerance within their acceptable levels, and organics are at some risk for cross-contamination. The issue is just that pervasive! Sadly, if conventionally produced by the most accepted giant consumer brands, we suggest that you may want to assume that it does contain GMOs. And, in the end, the only way to be 100% certain that your food is GMO-free is to completely avoid high-risk ingredients like soy, sugar, corn, canola and the others on the GMO list.

Why not just remove all GMO products from the store immediately?

First of all, we really don’t know for the most part which products would contain GMO if they were not organic or vetted. We don’t have the resources to find out, and many of our manufacturers don’t know themselves. A lot of them buy foods such as corn and soy as a mass-market commodity from brokers and do not know much about the sourcing.

Second, it’s likely that we would end up with many empty shelves and would not be able to serve all of our owners’ needs. Before we can remove all products, we need to change the marketplace through labeling laws, restricting the ability of manufacturers to develop new products and get them to all the markets, and build consumer demand for GMO-free product. As consumers demand these products, the free markets will respond.

Why focus on new products?

In the food industry, manufacturers spend millions of dollars developing new tastes, test marketing new items, getting those products to the stores, and advertising heavily on TV and other media. The “next big thing,” when successful, provides millions of dollars in profits to manufacturers. We have taken this approach for two reasons.

Because we don’t have the resources to investigate all products, this gives us a logical and (barely) manageable approach to begin to transition our offerings. If we begin to ban new GMO items and can get others in the food industry to join our efforts, two things will happen. First, manufacturers will see declining profits in developing new products and will be closed out of some markets. This will force them to consider transitioning to non-GMO choices. Second, we can better support those companies who are already turning away from GMO product as we bring their products in as featured alternatives.

What are other co-ops doing about this issue?

Surprisingly, our co-op is considered relatively radical and more proactive than most when dealing with GMO issues. Many of our sister co-ops supports GMO-labeling initiatives, yet few to date have adjusted their own offerings. Our co-op has been leading the charge to change that.

So far, fourteen co-ops nationwide have adopted or used their own version of our GMO policy and have committed to banning new products unless certified to be GMO-free. This (so far) represents a combined \$168 million in annual sales. These fourteen co-ops are now working together on a new initiative, and we believe that this number will be in the dozens by year’s end. Additionally, we belong to a national organization called NCGA, and due to our joint purchasing power, we are able to offer you many benefits including deep sales. NCGA represents 115 co-ops, by the way. Due to our initiative, NCGA has just adopted our policy and will no longer allow new items into our sale program unless vetted as GMO-free. This is a significant victory and it will be noticed in the industry.

What is your take on Whole Foods and their decision to demand GMO labeling by 2015?

As a realist, at first glance it sounds wonderful. In truth, Whole Foods is very clever when it comes to effective marketing. Labeling is coming. Sooner or later some state will vote it in. This is a low-risk statement to make, and if Whole Foods truly wanted to change the game they would adopt similar measures, cutting off the flow of new products.

Labeling alone, while a good first step, will not be 100% effective. In order to eliminate GMO product from our food supply, we must approach it from many different directions. Once labeling is instituted, there will be a major PR campaign to convince people that GMOs are fine. It will include media messaging, price lowering, and more. We need to use the momentum that labeling will help create to make long-lasting change in the market and the potential profitability of GMO products. It’s the only way to win.

Why does our government support GMO products?

In our opinion, partially because it is difficult to say with scientific certainty that GMO products are permanently harmful. Our government uses Monsanto experts to test for issues. I know. This doesn’t make sense, so why does it happen? For years, all of our government agencies that deal with food, from FDA to USDA, have been underfunded and understaffed by a huge amount. There’s no funding for research. The chemical companies offer the studies for free. We would have to quadruple the FDA and USDA budgets to even get them up to speed on carrying out existing projects. Also, big companies constantly state that cracking down on GMO would negatively affect the economy and that we would lose jobs. Our political climate is such that even threatening without proof of these consequences is enough to make policy decisions.

As a consumer, what can I do if I am opposed to GMO?

The most important is the most difficult for some; purchase certified organic products or GMO-free products. If the Co-op or your other local store is not carrying a new product because it can’t be certified GMO-free, do not go and buy it elsewhere. Tell your friends. Ultimately, it’s all about profits. If enough people don’t buy it, they will stop making it. Tell your lawmakers that you don’t want GMO, and tell them often. Consider supporting projects such as the Non-GMO Project, and state voting initiatives with time and/or money. Spread the word. Support our local sustainable farmers. When you become aware of local growers using GMO seed, be vocal, insistent and public about your displeasure. If you belong to or shop at another co-op, ask to speak to the manager and let them know that you would favor more aggressive anti-GMO policies. Most important of all, because once again this is a health issue that will be solved (or not) through dollars and cents, support those growers and businesses that are aligned with your values, and let your friends and neighbors know. Once again, you are the only ones who can change this through your own actions and purchases. Nobody will do it for you.

What if I have more questions?

Please ask us. We don’t have all the answers, but we’ll do our best. 413.528.9697 x11 or generalmanager@berkshire.coop

Learning From a Litter Bug

By Matthew Novik

Next to my house there is a small wooded area that includes a network of walking paths. Every morning, and most afternoons, I take my dog for a walk along those paths. And every day I feel lucky to have such easy access to such a wonderful place. The woods are a perfect example of the beauty the Berkshires has to offer. In each season—yes, even in Summer—there is something wonderful to behold in those woods, and I am thankful for it all.

Unfortunately, there is one other thing that exists along those paths that really puts a damper on the experience: litter. Maybe it's the proximity to town or the use as primary walking path from Great Barrington's business district to the residential neighborhood in which I live, but there is a constant supply of discarded trash along the path. And, frankly, it's really gross.

Something about littering really gets me angry. As kids, we were taught that it was something you just did not do. I remember watching my grandfather, old school in so many ways, throw candy wrappers out the car window and being appalled enough to ask my mother why he did that. She didn't have an answer. But I knew the important lesson. For the rest of our family, littering was simply not an option.

So, as an adult, walking through these beautiful woods, noticing discarded cigarette boxes, beer bottles and food containers really ruins the experience. For the life of me, I do not understand what goes through a person's head when they throw garbage on the ground. Is it so hard to carry an empty bottle a few more steps? Is the weight of that empty Marlboro pack weighing them down so much that they have to defile the natural habitat? I suspect it is simple ignorance and selfishness, neither of which is an excuse in this environmentally aware era.

It got to be very frustrating. I started to get so annoyed by the litter that I couldn't enjoy the beauty. I even ended up driving to other locations to walk my dog, hoping to avoid the displeasure. Then, one day, it hit me. I was on the path and I noticed an Olde English 40 oz. Malt Liquor bottle haphazardly tossed into a cluster of ferns. And, instead of getting angry and walking on, I picked it up and carried it to my recycling bin at home.

With that one action, everything changed. Now, I pick up every piece of litter I see. And I feel great about it. With each piece of litter I remove



from those woods, I feel better about myself and the effect I have on my surroundings. Now, once I complete my walk, I feel like I've done something good for myself, my neighbors and my ecosystem. Where the litter once had me angrily looking for other places to walk, I am now eagerly looking for trash to pick up. It is a complete reversal.

What a lesson this was for me to learn. Imagine if every person who knew what I know did the same thing. Together, we could offset the ignorance and the selfishness that once made me so upset. In fact, when you look at the big picture, we could change the whole world. As I look at my co-op and the people that support it, one thought comes to mind. Maybe that process has already begun.

From the Farmer's Point of View

By Amanda Hanley Dalzell of Three Maples Market Garden

When you're on a roller coaster, there's a moment at the top of the very first peak when, if you had the presence of mind to look around, the view would be amazing. Sometimes, at Three Maples Market Garden, it's a lot like that. There's a brief moment when the beds are neatly laid, seeds are sprouting in orderly rows, and transplants are tucked into the soil and happily taking root. For a split second the farm is everything I imagined all winter long, but it's hard to take the time to notice it because— whoosh—here comes the ride.

Now it's summer, and the farm carries a different kind of perfection. The pea vines are bearing prolifically, the lettuce heads are lush and delicious, and the squash plants are growing before our very eyes. There are also the not so pretty parts: pests and weeds and, this season, waterlogged plants. It's the nature of a small produce farm that no one task takes very long, and my mind is always on what needs to be done next. While weeding the green beans I'm also noticing that the eggplants could use a dose of foliar feed and remembering that I need to check the cucumbers for the striped yellow beetles that can really put a damper on their growth. I make a mental note to tell my husband that we need to start trellising the tomatoes this week. I remember how lucky I am to be on the farm full time, which we can only manage right now because he works forty hours in town each week, and then comes back here and puts in another twenty-five hours in the garden.

This season our CSA program has nearly thirty members who have paid in advance for a weekly share of the farm's harvest. One day a week we make deliveries, bringing bags full of freshly picked produce to CSA members at offices around the county (five at Lee bank, three at Riverbrook Residence, and so on). Other members come to us, picking up their share on the farm and stopping to chat about this week's haul. On Mondays I walk through the fields and decide what will be in that week's shares. Parsley, check. Radishes—the last of this planting. Kohlrabi needs another week. Plenty of peas! Wednesday mornings we harvest and I set up the prep station, painstakingly sorting blades of grass and slightly yellowed leaves from the lettuce mix and transferring it to our spiffy new five-gallon salad spinner. When it comes out it is gorgeous, sweeter and fresher and prettier than anything you'd find in a grocery store cooler—unless you shop at the Co-op, that is.

In the evening I go over my day in verbs: weeded, watered, harvested, transplanted, seeded, prepped for sale. There are farmers, whose farms are literally thousands of times bigger than ours, who recount their days in a single verb; plowed, say, or sprayed, or something else involving long hours on a large tractor. I may be sweaty and sore and tired and a whole lot dirtier, but I don't envy those farmers.

If running a farm is like riding a roller coaster, then midsummer is that moment halfway through when you're wide-eyed and can't quite catch your breath. It's exhilarating and a little terrifying, and I'm already looking forward to going again.



Pea Blossom



Beets

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

Visiting Gaia Herb Farm



From left to right: six-foot tall Valerian plants, Echinacea seedlings and Stinging Nettle up close. (photos by Brenna St. Pierre.)

Continued From Page 1

in every which way, and to share their gifts. Ric wants everyone to meet their herbs, and he has developed an outstanding ability to express the extensive scientific, historical, medicinal and energetic qualities of each plant.

It was his dream to create a sustainable and steady source of raw materials whose international supply chains were not interrupted by political and economic instability worldwide. Transylvania County has the highest biodiversity in the country; the dark, alluvial soils supporting 80% of the plant species found in North America, and many animals, including the elusive white squirrel. The herbs grown on the farm grow best in this climate, but each year the Gaia Herbal Research Institute continues trials to see what other, exotic herbs can be grown in the Southeastern United States. Under two decades after its inception, nearly 30% of Gaia Herbs' sales volume comes from herbs grown on the farm.

We arrived at the farm amidst an orchard of ginkgo biloba trees. Named for their bi-lobed leaves, ginkgo trees date back nearly 200 million years, are near extinction, and have no known close relatives. Gaia Herbs sought to continue their preservation and planted this vibrant orchard in 2007, not in conventional rows, but naturally staggered, giving the trees plenty of room to stretch their ancient branches. They encourage their ginkgo trees to grow multiple trunks in order to increase yield at harvest time in September and October when the leaves gain their golden edge. After meandering out of the ginkgo orchard our noses were met with the astringent, hearty smell of the hawthorn stand across the dirt road. The group soon experienced more of these trees as bare arms were tugged at by the inch-long protective spines camouflaged on each hawthorn branch. The scent of the trees intensified as we neared the farm crew high up on ladders, harvesting the last of the hawthorn buds. Sitting among the spiky, pink blossomed trees, Scalzo divulged his hawthorn wisdom, the lore of the tree, its medicinal properties, and how that herb was made to sustain us, and we it. And so it was with every herb we met.

Scalzo's dedication to the philosophy of coevolution is evident in each sentence he utters, his love and reverence for these plants underlying every attribute and description. Meeting your herbs, knowing them from seed to field to processing is what Gaia Herbs' mission is all about. When we understand the incredible effects these plants can have in our lives, we have a duty to steward the land they need to grow and preserve them for the benefit of all.

Gaia Herbs increases their sustainability each year by collecting their own seeds from the farm, mostly from echinacea, stinging nettle, valerian,

skullcap, and holy basil. When other seeds are needed they look to Horizon Herbs, a certified organic seed supplier in Oregon. The company is intensely committed to supporting their staff and local community with their vegetable garden, which grew over 36,000 pounds last year for employees, and every year donating twice a week to the local community kitchen. All farm tractors and machinery are run on bio-diesel that is locally produced and collected. They support their international suppliers with fair trade practices and community projects; in Vanuatu, 10% of all kava kava profits go back to the community; they support the Medicinal Plant and Turtle Sanctuary in Costa Rica; they work with New Forest (formerly Forestrade) cinnamon farmers in Sumatra, and pay a premium price that is distributed throughout the community to build schools, and increase sanitation and general public welfare.

LAB TOUR

The green of the farm made it difficult to move inside the manufacturing plant, but it was no less incredible. There is no break in dedication to the product once the herbs have been harvested. Whether grown on the farm or imported from elsewhere, every batch of raw materials is tested for integrity, purity and potency, three words that embody the quality of Gaia Herbs supplements. All raw materials must have assays for specific herbs as well as documentation validating the country of origin and harvest protocols. All wild-gathered raw materials must fulfill the same harvest protocols, including documentation ensuring sustainable harvest practices.

Integrity is tested first through organoleptic methods, by smell, taste, appearance and texture. The material is then microscopically and macroscopically tested to ensure identity by looking at edges, hairs, plant tissues and stem cells. Purity is determined using a Solaris machine, which burns down a sample to its essential elements, which are examined for the heavy metal contaminants lead, cadmium, mercury and arsenic. Samples are also applied to an agar culture and examined in a microbial test for bacteria, mold, yeast, e. coli, salmonella, foreign matter, excess moisture, pesticides, adulterants and other contaminants.

Potency is determined for every batch, as the active compounds found in herbs change according the season, age of the plant, time of day and weather at the time of harvest, among other variables. Gaia Herbs lab determines whether the raw material is at peak bioactivity and what parts of the plant contain the highest concentration of what compounds. Raising the bar for the entire herbal industry, the people at Gaia Herbs know that only the highest quality raw materials make a high quality finished product.

Once the raw materials are approved, the botanicals are ground up to expose as much surface area as possible and then combined with water and organic alcohol. Gaia Herbs does full spectrum extract of their botanicals, not focusing on one compound, but the whole profile of herbal bioactives. Gaia's standards are uncompromising as they pay a high premium to use organic alcohol so pure it is suitable for drinking and thus taxed at over \$25 a gallon. In the beginning, the company did static maceration extractions, a process involving each extract sitting for four to six weeks, filling up the hallways of their manufacturing plant. Today, their state-of-the-art manufacturing plant takes around 36 hours for each extraction, but Gaia's scientists say they could use three more units to keep up with demand.

Gaia is not only on the cutting edge of herbal supplements, but also in the manufacturing of the bottles that carry them. They are the cofounders of Earth Renewable Technologies and have successfully created a bio-plastic container that is suitable for industrial composting and free of all petroleum products. Gaia Herbs currently offers two products in this bio-plastic packaging, their Maca Powder and Chia Powder, and have completed the initial stages of making supplement-size bio-plastic bottles as well as others for viscous liquids. They hope to have success bringing these new sustainable packaging products to the market over the next few years.

Gaia Herbs sets the standard for transparency in the sourcing of their ingredients with the creation of their Meet Your Herbs program. Every Gaia Herbs supplement comes with a code that can be entered on their website to provide full information on the country of origin and test results for every ingredient. This fall the company will release Meet Your Herbs 2.0, celebrating Gaia Herbs by creating a closer connection between people, the herbs they use and those who grow and harvest them. They work each day to provide an ever-expanding resource for anyone interested in herbal farming and medicine.

"Every plant, in its true form, has the extraordinary ability to restore our bodies' natural vitality through a symbiotic chemical interaction. It is our deepest belief, our duty, to help others return to a state of harmony by stewarding the coevolution of plants and people—encouraging individuals to meet the herbs that will work for them." This passage from Greg Cumberford and Ric Scalzo's book *Meetings & Awakenings: The Coevolution of Plants and People*, impressed upon me the depth of Gaia Herbs dedication to their products and consumers; those roots extend deeply. I am blessed to have had the opportunity to visit the farm and would like to extend my sincere thanks to my incredible coworkers who made it possible. It was an inspiring adventure with many more tales to tell.

Gaia Herbs Maca Root 101

The folks at Gaia Farm tell us about one of their most popular superfood products: Maca Root Powder

History

Maca is an indigenous Andean plant that belongs to the brassica (mustard) family. Maca is a vegetable that has been cultivated as a root crop for at least 2,000 years and used both nutritionally and medicinally. It can be found wild in Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina, but has primarily been cultivated in the highlands of the Peruvian Andes. According to folk belief, Maca is an aphrodisiac and enhances sexual drive in humans and domestic animals, which tends to be reduced at higher altitudes.

Function

Maca is known as an adaptogen, broadly contributing to overall well being and a healthy mood. Additionally, maca root has been touted to normalize energy levels and endurance and support a healthy libido.

Uses of Maca

Endocrine Function - Adrenal
Energy
Reproductive System

Parts Used

Root

Important precautions

Maca may alter the levels of sex hormones and may interfere with the effects of herbs taken for oral contraception. Glucosinolates may cause goiter if taken in excess combined with a low-iodine diet.

Active Constituents

Alkaloids, Saponins, and Tannins

Disclaimer

This information in our Herbal Reference Guide is intended only as a general reference for further exploration, and is not a replacement for professional health advice. This content does not provide dosage information, format recommendations, toxicity levels, or possible interactions with prescription drugs. Accordingly, this information should be used only under the direct supervision of a qualified health practitioner such as a naturopathic physician.



Information provided by gaiaherbs.com

Maca on the Menu

Our friends at Gaia Farm have some incredible recipe suggestions for their Maca Powder. Here's a couple for you to try.



Strawberry Maca Smoothie

1 ½ cups original almond milk
1 Tbsp. Gaia Herbs Maca Powder
2 cups strawberries
1 banana
1 tsp honey
1 tsp coconut flakes
1 tsp vanilla
¼ tsp lime juice
1 cup ice

Thoroughly blend all ingredients, except ice. Add ice and blend again until smoothie reaches desire thickness.

Macamole

By Amie Valpone

¼ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro
½ small jalapeno seeded and minced
Sea salt
7 ripe avocados (3.5 lbs) peeled, pitted, and diced
1 medium orange, peeled and segmented
½ cup fresh watercress, finely chopped
10 cherry tomatoes, halved
3 Tbsp. Gaia Herbs Maca Powder
2 tsp fresh lemon juice
½ tsp fresh lemon zest
1 ½ Tbsp finely chopped fresh basil
Assorted organic vegetables for serving such as bell peppers, celery, fennel, snap peas, zucchini and carrots.

Combine cilantro and jalapeno in a large bowl. Season with sea salt and mash with the back of a fork. Remove skin from orange segments, add peeled oranges to avocado mixture. Mash to combine. Add remaining ingredients and season to taste. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.



Education & Outreach Report

Continued from Page 4

process of this ancient crop. From there we made quinoa cakes with carrots, beets and spinach. The group got creative, coming up with the recipe themselves and adding their own touches as they went, which resulted in a unique and flavorful culinary creation. Quinoa was a new ingredient for the majority of the group, and they were pleasantly surprised by how much they liked this nutrient-packed seed. The students learned about the history, observed through pictures the beautiful colors it can grow, and the various terrains in which it is found.

Second-graders studied geology in IS183's Classic Rock curriculum. We discussed the cycle of minerals and how they get into the food we grow and eat. The cycle of minerals was drawn on the board, showing calcium and iron from rock, how the process of erosion (wind, water, time) breaks the minerals down and they become part of soil, then how vegetables are planted in the soil and absorb those minerals, and finally how when we eat the vegetables those minerals become part of us. When it came time to cook, we used sea salt on shredded purple cabbage and massaged it until the salt started to break down the cell structure, essentially "cooking" the cabbage with our hands. Carrots, green apples and a lemon-parsley dressing were added to make the salad. The kids loved it, and for many it was the first time eating and enjoying purple cabbage.

We are excited to be participating in Morningside Elementary School's Summer Camp program, where we are continuing to bring art, food and nutrition together!

For more information on IS183, visit www.is183.org. For more information on the Nutrition Center please visit www.thenutritioncenter.org. Donations to the Food Adventures program are always appreciated; to donate please visit www.food-adventures.org.

If you are interested in seeing Food Adventures in action, you will find Morgan and me at the Downtown Pittsfield Farmers' Market, located on First and Fenn Streets, from 9am-1pm. We offer free five-minute cooking classes on how to make delicious bake-free recipes using healthy in-season ingredients that can be purchased right there at the market.

GET UNPLUGGED

Our third annual Get Unplugged event, in collaboration with Berkshire South Regional Community Center in Great Barrington, took place during the week of April school vacation. The focus of this program is to get kids in gear for Earth Day and National Turn Off Your TV Week. We aim to provide as many environmentally friendly and fun activities for children in our community to participate in for free. Almost 300 children participated in the Get Unplugged Program this year.

We had amazing workshop leaders this year who helped get the message across through comprehensive lessons and interactive activities. Throughout the week children were engaged in a variety of screen-free activities, such as making solar ovens, making goat cheese and seed balls, to hula-hooping and more.

Annie Stilts from Center for Ecological Technology came and led two workshops, one on energy and the other on how to make solar ovens from pizza boxes. Despite the uncooperative weather, the kids had a great time learning about these important topics.

Karen Lyness LeBlanc from Project Native led a great workshop on how to make seed balls, and she even did it one-handed! The kids got messy and they congregated around an old children's pool filled with clay, dirt, sand and seeds. They learned how they could take charge and begin growth wherever they pleased by placing one of these seed balls anywhere in the ground. They collectively made over a hundred seed balls, some of which Karen was able to hand out at a community CHP event!

Justin Torrico and Tashi Colston from Community Cooperative Farm, and Will Conklin and Mike Leavitt from Greenagers came together to lead our second annual Garden Day, where we got the community garden ready for plots this year. The kids weeded, removed cover crops, planted pea seeds, and drew labels for crops that would soon be planted.

Jamie Samowitz and Erin Morris from Berkshire Botanical Gardens brought two kids—baby goats, that is. Lucy and Chica made their way over to the community center where the kids learned about how to properly take care of goats and make their own goat cheese. Lucy and Chica were troopers, standing patiently while kids of all ages stopped by the courtyard of the community center to say hello and give them a pat on the head.

Stu Besnoff taught children about how to heat their own water, and educated adults in the community center as well.

Berkshire South Regional Community Center had an opportunity to spotlight some of their teachers, so they hosted a soccer clinic and a zumba workshop. A group of boys had the time of their lives working with soccer instructor Pedro Orellana. Barbara McAllister led an engaging zumba class that had all the kids up and dancing around. In a short period of time, the kids worked in pairs to create two unique dances with a different feeling to each dance, one fast and one slow.

From the Co-op, Brenna St. Pierre led a great workshop in hula-hooping, which was very popular; there were more than twenty children twirling hula-hoops in the gym of Berkshire South. They learned some basic hula-hooping skills and had fun just hooping away. The Co-op also led a workshop on natural tie-dyeing. The dye was made from red cabbage, onions skins and beets. Children colored muslin produce bags (in keeping with a sustainability theme, we discussed all the different uses one could have with the produce bag). Then they got hold of some rubber bands and tied away. Finally they dipped the bags in the colors of their choice.

A special thanks to Terry a la Berry, who gave a great concert for Get Unplugged participants, community families and preschool children. The kids had a blast singing and dancing to great, kid-friendly tunes. A special thanks to John Parker, Robin Manning and Jenise Lucey from Berkshire South Regional Community Center, who helped make this program possible!

GROW YOUR MIND, GROW YOUR FOOD

Our third annual Grow Your Mind, Grow Your Food will take place on Tuesday, August 6th at Woven Roots Farm, and Tuesday, August 20th at McEnroe Organic Farm in Millerton, NY. Grow Your Mind, Grow Your Food is a great opportunity to spend a day on a farm and learn what happens there on a daily basis. We have the pleasure of working with the nonprofit Greenagers, who will bring their crew of young workers to support the projects that takes place on the farms. GYM, GYF takes place at the end of the Greenagers' season, so they will have a chance to show off their skills!

This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in learning more about farming and gardening that can be taken back to their own home, school, etc. It is also a way for anyone interested to learn more about the local food movement and the specific growing practices of the farms we will be visiting. There will be Q&A with the farmers, a special meal made with food from the farm and a chance to really get your hands dirty.

We are traveling to a new location this year, as we plan to spend a day at McEnroe Farm, where the day will begin with a farm tour. After that, there will be several different choices for tasks. Clearing invasive plants, working in the farm's educational garden, and working with their sheep and chickens are among the options for the day.

This will be our third year visiting Woven Roots Farm in Tyringham, MA. This year we will continue to help out at Jen and Pete's new farm. If you have attended in past years this is a great opportunity to see how their land is continuously changing.

Please stop by or call the front desk to attend: 413-518-9697 ext. 10. While this is a free event for our customers and owners, registration is required. Directions to the farms will be available at the front desk. Remember, this is a hands-on farm day, so dress to get dirty!



Berkshire Rice Project: An Update

By Daniel Esko, Non-Perishables Manager

In the summer of 2012, I and several local farmers and community members embarked on a journey: an exploration to test the viability of growing rice in Berkshire County. Inspired by the rice-growing efforts of Christian and Gaella Elwell, owners of South River Miso, the Berkshire Rice Project was born. It became a pet project of sorts for me, beginning with a visit to South River Miso to receive over thirty rice plants, which I then distributed to several local farmers, including Justin Torrico of Community Cooperative Farms, Mitch Feldmesser of Left Field Farm, and Cian Dalzell of Three Maples Market Garden. We all grew our plants in five-gallon buckets in an effort to control the



growing conditions and produce viable seed for the next season. You might have noticed several plants growing in a white bucket on the Co-op patio last summer. These plants were the public face of the project and spurred many a curious discussion about this exciting idea. The earth's abundance is expressed with the simple phrase, "from one grain, ten thousand grains," and in that spirit the season ended with all of us harvesting thousands of seeds from just a few plants each.

It was now early spring, and winter had come and gone with little discussion about what the plans were for this season. I had thousands of seeds still on the stalk that Mitch had dropped off in the fall. If I didn't get the seeds to people who wanted to grow them soon, these seeds would be stored for another year. I felt like the project had lost momentum. People in the store were asking me what was happening with the project and I had little to report. Some folks had expressed interest in receiving seeds, but I had yet to give any away. I was unsure of which direction the project was actually heading. That is, until one day in late April.

That was the day that I learned that Cian and Justin had been growing their rice in plug trays and were planning on planting in the ground in late May. This was exciting news that inspired hope for the future of the project. What happened next, however, was either a very fortuitous coincidence or some higher power at work answering my call to the universe to get these seeds into people's hands.

That very same day, I was working in the store and I ran into Fred Chapman and Nancy Lee, two long-time Co-op owners who were doing their shopping. Fred had expressed interest in growing rice after reading my first article on the project last year. He was the first recipient of the seeds that were in the office. He agreed to take several hundred seeds, and throughout the rest of the day, "from one grain, ten thousand grains" played out in real life. An hour later I ran into Dominic Palumbo of Moon In The Pond Farm. Energized from my earlier interaction and seed exchange with Fred and Nancy, I asked him if he wanted some rice seed to experiment with. It turns out he had intended to ask me for seed the next time he saw me. We both laughed at the coincidence and I quickly got the seeds for him. While I was retrieving

the seeds I ran into Lisa Federico, a long-time Co-op employee. She saw me gathering the seeds for Dominic and asked if she could have some for herself and Barbara Bockbrader, another long-time Co-op owner. Things were definitely moving fast. Within three hours I had given seed to four people with little to no effort on my part. Later that afternoon I was checking my business email and I received a message from an individual named Sarah Gallagher. She leads a 4H group in her community. She explained that they were growing grains with the kids this year and wanted to add rice to the list of varieties they were experimenting with. I couldn't believe my eyes.

The last of the seeds had found a home. All in one day, and in such a natural way that if you believe in destiny, you could say that the project's destiny was being fulfilled that day.

I recalled the first pictures I saw of Christian and Gaella's beautiful rice paddy, pictures my father had taken when he visited in 2011. I thought about the awe-inspiring beauty of the flowing grain and the ecosystem the farmers created and supported. I then remembered the day in early summer of 2011 when my brother Sennin Esko brought me six rice plants to grow in my garden. These were pivotal moments, which upon reflection, I now felt had inspired all that was to come. They were in fact the first seeds sown in the Berkshire Rice Project and all that followed from there was merely another expression of "from one grain, ten thousand grains."

Still wrapped up in my thoughts, I considered the incredible power of food. It creates every fiber of our very being. It gives us the energy needed to live productive lives. Food creates our future, or in other words, food is destiny. It has the power to transform the lives of people, the communities in which we live, and the world as a whole. This is the true purpose of the Berkshire Rice Project and all the work I do at the Co-op every day: using food to make a positive and meaningful difference in the lives of all stakeholders in the community. To think that these rice seeds, whose ancestors may have touched the hands of Marco Polo himself when he brought them from China to Italy in the 16th century, then made their way to the region now known as Ukraine, could end up in Christian and Gaella's hands in Conway, Massachusetts, is a profound notion. This rice has altered the destiny of every individual, farm and community in which it has been cultivated. It has provided wholesome sustenance and created incredible biodiversity across three continents. It will continue to do so right here in Berkshire County. Truly profound indeed. Or at least that is how I like to think of it.

Stay tuned for more Berkshire Rice Project news in future newsletters. We will be checking in with all of the people who are growing rice this year and reporting back to all of you on their endeavors. If you are interested in getting involved and would like some seed for your own backyard trials, feel free to contact Daniel at desko@berkshire.coop

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MARK YOUR CALENDERS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17TH

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18TH

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16TH

THURSDAY, JULY 17TH

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16TH

CO-OP OWNERS GET 10% OFF STOREWIDE

The Departmental Reports

Non-Perishables From Daniel Esko

Greetings from the center store! Many changes have occurred in the department since the release of our last newsletter. We reset our bulk department and several grocery sections; introduced many new options in the bread and other departments; lost our entire freezer inventory due to equipment loss, and helped out several sister co-ops in the region, including Monadnock Food Co-op in Keene, NH, The Old Creamery Co-op in Cummington, MA, and Fiddleheads Food Co-op in New London, CT. We said goodbye to our long-time bulk buyer, Chris Schickl. Chris was the Co-op's bulk buyer for almost seven years and has now found his calling, so to speak. He left to pursue a career in the arts, specifically iron sculpture. He will be missed here at the Co-op, and I would like to thank Chris for his many years of service and dedication to the Berkshire Co-op family.

Many New Local and Regional Products

Back Roads Granola from Spirit Hill Farm: A local, USDA-certified granola coming out of Brattleboro, VT, this is the highest quality and best tasting (in my opinion) granola on the market.

Pierce Brothers Fogbuster Coffee: This is a very robust and intense dark roast coffee that will shine some serious light through the haze of your early morning. Pierce Brothers is located in Greenfield, MA. Look for more varieties to come soon and don't forget to stop on by the bulk department and pick some up today.

Akara Beancake Co. Falafel Patties: Made in Greenfield, MA and sold frozen, these certified organic products are a great vegan alternative for the grill.

Hawthorne Valley Farm: We are excited offer the following new items:

Beet Kvass: A delicious, live, nutritional beverage filled with vitamins and minerals. Whether you enjoy it as a sports drink or digestive aid, beet kvass is a rejuvenating liver cleanser and excellent blood tonic. This wonderful sweet and salty kvass can also be used as a base for soups, salad dressings or marinades.

Hot Pepper Sauce: One of our (Hawthorne Valley Farm) most popular sellers, this hot pepper sauce is a pleasantly spicy, vinegar-free sauce made from peppers grown in the Hudson Valley. Try it swirled into soups, folded into scrambled eggs, or as the star ingredient of a spicy dip.

Sauerkraut Juice: Plain Sauerkraut Juice is the juice left over from making the sauerkraut. It is a great probiotic drink and can be used as a base for marinades and salad dressings.

Whole Life Pet Treats: Made from 100% human-quality, hormone-free, free range and organic meat, with no chemicals, preservatives, additives or artificial fillers. Whole Life is also a local company; they make all their products in Pittsfield, MA. Check them out; they look delicious.

Cayuga Pure Organics Grains & Beans: The next new product is particularly exciting for all of us at the Co-op because it contains the first, repeat the first regionally grown grains and beans to be sold in the store. Most of our grains and beans are from other parts of the country and the world. From the Finger Lakes region of New York State, Cayuga Pure Organics produces some of the finest quality certified organic grains, beans and flours available anywhere. "The mission of Cayuga Pure Organics is to create a food system that works. A working food system is not only fundamental in nurturing the health of consumers; it also nurtures the long-term health of our communities and of the planet on which we live." From Navy to Red Merlot beans, from Emmer Farro to Spelt Berries, their offerings are all 100% certified organic and family farm grown. Their flour offerings include All Purpose Flour, Spelt Flour, Rye Flour, and Whole Wheat Bread Flour. For the time being, we are only introducing the packaged line of their products in order to give people a chance to try them and then hopefully demand that we carry all of them in the bulk department.

Gluten Free Bakery: Gluten-free breads from Our Daily Bread in Chatham, NY. These breads are made by Our Daily Bread in a certified gluten-free baking facility. They approached us last year and we had some concerns about the source of the canola oil (potentially genetically modified) they were using in their breads. What did they do next? Instead of walking away and not bothering to consider alternative ingredient sources, they sourced a non-GMO canola oil and may even switch to safflower oil in the near future. This is a great example of the positive influence our food policy can have on a local vendor. I hear that their gluten-free breads are the best in the country. No joke. We have four varieties to start, including "Seedy," made with a multitude of seeds as the name implies; Sandwich Bread (their basic offering); Caraway, or European-style rye, otherwise known as "Gluten Tag," and Cinnamon Raisin.

Well, that's all for now from the center store. As always, feel free to stop on by the store anytime to chat with myself or any other staff member about the changes we have made, the new products we have introduced, or any new products or changes you would like to see in the store.

Wellness From Brenna St. Pierre

The Wellness department has been refreshed by a new layout for the department and my trip to Gaia Farm this past June. Be sure to check out the full article about my time on the farm (page 1), as well as some of the new products from Gaia Herbs. Gaia Herbs is a leader in herbal supplements, setting the bar for eco-friendly packaging and for ingredient transparency with their Meet Your Herbs program.

Their gelatinized Maca Powder is hard to miss in its green bio-plastic Earth Bottle. Organically grown in the Peruvian Andes, this maca powder is gelatinized, a 100% vegetarian process that removes the hard to digest starch from this root powder. Gelatinization increases the potency of the product as well as eliminating digestive distress when used. Maca is an incredible plant, rich in nutrients, and has been used as a food staple in the Andes for thousands of years. Unfortunately, human interference has created the need for a warning on the label of this product. Maca is only grown in the high plateaus of the Andes where the soil has accumulated lead from the atmosphere. Because root crops especially, including the organic varieties, are susceptible to lead absorption, all maca has significant levels of lead. Gaia Herbs abides by California Prop 65 standards and their Maca Powder is the only item they make that requires this label. Prop 65 allows for .5mcg of lead per day; a cup of organic carrots contains roughly 12mcg of lead. Their unwavering commitment to transparency in their process is inspiring. Please see me if you have questions about maca and lead. Don't miss my full article on the tour of Gaia Farm which includes some Maca recipes. And come visit if you want to know more about Gaia Herbs. Have a safe and happy summer and fall!

Fresh Foods From Jeff Schilling

It's always a fun and exciting time in Fresh Foods. As the largest department in the store, it also always difficult to summarize months of activity into just a few paragraphs. That said, here it goes.

Cafe

If you're a cafe customer and haven't noticed the changes we made a couple months ago, we may just have to question your powers of observation. We opened up the sandwich prep and order station in a way that has completely changed our ability to provide great customer service by allowing for more face to face interaction. In addition, the space is brighter and more engaging and we like that.

We also made some long-needed changes to the menu. We kept a lot of your favorites and added what will hopefully be some of your favorites of the future. All our sandwiches are now made with our house-roasted meats to go along with organic vegetables and locally made breads. We have even been able to add a regular gluten-free option from The Gluten Free Bakery in Chatham, NY.

Kitchen

Our co-op chefs have been trying hard to offer you some new and different hot bar options. Have you tried the pork vindaloo? Or the Turkey Meatballs? What about the bitki? We'd love to hear your thoughts about the new entrees (or the old favorites). The suggestion box is located at the front desk.

Meat & Seafood

our new man at the meat and sea counter has been knocking it out of the park lately. Austin has been adding new items to the seafood case every week including a lot of massachusetts caught whole fish and some wonderful offerings from Wes at BerkShore. He's also sourced some great local meat that is stored in the freezer next to the bulk department. He's also pretty handy in the kitchen. If you have any questions, just ask.

Produce From Jake Levin

Produce geeks in the Northeast LOVE this time of year! Mid July to Late September is the absolute PEAK of our region's growing season. As I write this, we have 20 farms represented and over 60 local products on our shelves. We are swimming in local stone fruit (try the yellow nectarines!), local sweet corn, greens, and tomatoes (sungolds are here and they are delicious). It is such a fun time for us. Working with the local farmers is a pleasure and it simply feels great to place our orders knowing that our purchases are helping and feeding our friends and neighbors.

The refrigerated box truck we bought last season is getting some real work in. We are going out three times a week to purchase from farms in New York State and the Pioneer Valley. The result has been a consistent and high quality supply of foods like blueberries, organic sweet corn and stone fruits. All items that have been difficult to source from farms closer to home. In the process, we have been able to help another co-op, The Old Creamery in Cummington, by picking up for them and dropping off on the way home. It's really exciting to see what may be the beginnings of a co-op distribution route that could end up strengthening our region's food supply by increasing sales for all involved. That's going to be a while, but it's interesting nonetheless.

On another, more frustrating note, we have no lemons. Organic lemon growers had a terrible season and they don't have enough product to meet demand. We've been told it will be late August before we see organic lemons again and even longer before they are a reasonable price. In their absence, we are offering packaged organic lemon juice. If you really need whole lemons, other stores are sure to have conventional ones for you.

In the meantime, I suggest we all take advantage the season. Eating local food isn't just a socially beneficial action, it's a delicious one as well. So stoke up those grills, mix up those salads and have yourself a local meal!