

THE JOYS OF SUMMER AND LOCAL CHEESE

by Michele LeLandaïs, Berkshire Co-op Staff

We find ourselves once more on the very cusp of summer. This means cheese made from animals fed only on pastureland. In the winter months, living in barns, animals eat dried hay and grain. When spring arrives they begin eating grass, flowers, wild herbs, and just about any edible green that is native to their habitat. The flavor of these plants makes its way into the milk and imparts a special flavor to the cheese. Seasonal cheesemakers who limit their cheese production to pasture milk only insist in no uncertain terms about the superiority of these cheeses. We like to imagine the animals, finding themselves suddenly out doors, free to roam and eat at will in a pasture of young and tender plants, impart the flavor of their joy, as well as the flavor of the pasture, into the milk. Local cheese is indeed filled with the joy of a new and promising season. We have already seen the first Rawson Brook Chevre and Gould Farm Cheddar from Monterey and a selection of Lazy Lady goat cheeses. Soon we will have the new season's Blue Ledge Farm La Luna, Hillman Farmstead goat cheese, a selection of Westfield Farm goat cheeses, Willow Hill La

Fleurie, as well as other local and regional favorites and new finds. Come by the Cheese Department and celebrate the season.



Jake Smerchniak pets one of the goats at Rawson Brook Farm.



42 Bridge Street
Great Barrington, MA 01230

413.528.9697

www.berkshirecoop.org

Monday - Saturday 8 am - 8 pm

Sunday 10 am - 6 pm

Summer 2007

Newsletter



Member Owned

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FROM FILM GIRL TO FARM GIRL

by Mira Hilbert, Berkshire Co-op Staff

In 2004, when her friend Rory O'Dwyer asked Laura Meister to assist her in starting a farm, Laura told herself that she was just going to help out, and then get back to the world of film production. Three years later, she finds herself producing beautiful veggies instead of video. As the owner of Farm Girl Farm, a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm located on a beautiful piece of land adjacent to the Green River in North Egremont, Laura has found herself a place to thrive doing exactly what she loves.

Born in Boston, Laura spent most of her life in the suburbs of Philadelphia, with no real exposure to farming. "I knew that the tomatoes we grew in our yard were better than any other tomatoes, but that is as far as my thought process went." While attending the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, her love for the outdoors led to a summer job at the The Farm & Wilderness Camps in Plymouth, VT. It was the place where Laura was first exposed to an organic garden and began to understand the importance of growing your own food. "Working outside you develop an appetite and appreciation for working with food, more than usual," explains Laura. Her desire to be outdoors led her to work for the camp for 14 years. In that time, she found herself with a BA in Art History for UP Philadelphia, a MA in Art History from Tufts, and working at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston as the Assistant to the Curator of Photographs. "I liked to be around all the works of art, and have a backstage view. But there was something missing. It became harder and harder to return to the city [from camp], work indoors, go to the grocery store and, having come from a place where we were growing a lot of our food and connecting to our food, going to the grocery store felt anonymous and overwhelming."

Her passion for the outdoors and organic food practices led her to attend the Visionaries Program in 2002, located in Sheffield, and where she earned her Masters in Documentary Video Production. "I thought the best thing I could do to support small organic farms was to use my background in the visual arts—to make documentaries about what farmers and people were doing so I could help get the message out about the importance of small family farms." Her thesis project, the documentary *Sweet*



Photo by Bill Shein

Laura Meister of Farm Girl Farm

Soil, co-produced with Erica Spizz (who is now a Co-op Board Member), beautifully highlights the relationship between the Berkshire Co-op Market and local farmers.

During her studies, Laura got a part time job at Indian Line Farm, and met Rory O'Dwyer who was doing an apprenticeship. Once she graduated, she decided to stay in the Berkshires to work on video projects, and found jobs working at Equinox Farm, and with Sean Stanton of North Plain Farm. "We were selling seedlings, and Michele LeLandaïs (fromage guru of the BCM) bought some. When I dropped off the seeds I saw her property, and Michele mentioned that she was looking for someone to farm there. I went and told Rory." During the agreement process, Rory asked Laura to help her get started. "I said yes, but after [helping] I was going to go back to video." They decided to operate the farm as a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture.) "I really liked the idea of the food going directly from the farmer to the families. Not everyone has time for a garden, so we're a communal garden for this group of people [members]."

Story continues on page 8.

42 Bridge Street • Great Barrington • MA • 01230 • 413.528.9697 • www.berkshirecoop.org

Store Hours: Monday - Saturday 8 am - 8 pm • Sunday 10 am - 6 pm

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



David Case, President



Diana Felber, Vice President



Craig Swanson, Treasurer



Erica Spizz, Secretary



Lawrence Davis-Hollander



Daniel Seitz



Bill Shein



Monica Wagner

ANOTHER VIEW OF AFRICA

by Lawrence Davis-Hollander, Board Member

Dandora is a slum located a few kilometers from the city center of Nairobi Kenya, East Africa. Most of us think of Kenya with its blue skies and the open and varied terrain of the Serengeti Plain, populated by herds of grazing animals such as zebras, wildebeests gazelles, and giraffes. Dandora is no park. It hosts the largest garbage dump in sub-Saharan Africa, accumulating 1,500 tons of rubbish daily including industrial and medical waste. For many, this dump is a primary source of food, clothing and other supplies.

Approximately 700,000 people live here. The dump exudes all types of toxic compounds into the community and eventually the Nairobi River. People suffer from an array of ailments from chronic diarrhea to tuberculosis, cancer, eye problems, and various respiratory illnesses including high rates of asthma.

Most of Dandora is a vast shantytown comprised of one or two room houses built from sticks, mud, manure or cardboard, and sheet metal. The blocks of houses are arranged close together. Garbage of all sorts is strewn around. Water is contaminated with toxic leachates from the dump, and human waste, runs in between the blocks of houses. There are no sewage systems or amenities such as electricity.

Amidst this background lives a little girl we know as Joyce Kanai. Joyce is ten years old. She's got a beautiful smile, big brown eyes, and her hair is pulled back in cornrows. We have been sponsoring Joyce through Children Incorporated, a non-profit organization based in Richmond, VA, since she was six years old. Every month we spend \$28 to help support her education and other needs. This money goes a long way in a place where the average monthly wage is \$38. She goes to school at the Dandora Community Centre, which has an enrollment of 500 students, a nursery school and a primary school for grades one to eight. There is also a daycare center, a large multipurpose hall, a school of tailoring and dressmaking, and a reading room for students who cannot study at home. The Presbyterian Church of East Africa runs the center.

The point of my telling you about Joyce and where she lives is that we in the Co-op family have an opportunity to help kids directly all around the world to have a chance at having a good life, to truly make a difference for them between life and death, poverty and misery and happiness. It is so easy for us to take food for granted. We are able to focus on issues of purity, quality and organics. I imagine Joyce would be astonished just to see our food bar. Many of you reading this may be doing a similar or identical project. Programs like this are great because you are directly helping someone you can watch as they grow up. Participating in this program has been as rewarding to us as a family as it has been to our friend, Joyce.

For more information, contact Lawrence Davis-Hollander at ldh@roadrunner.com

Thank you to Susan Lacombe for the new photos of Berkshire Co-op Board and Staff.

NOTES FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Berkshire Co-op Market Board of Directors has gone through a few significant changes in the last several months. Two of our directors, Amy Cotler and Tom Kleinman have resigned from the board due to personal considerations. A third board member, Alan Inglis, won election to the Great Barrington Board of Selectmen on May 21. There was a remote possibility that serving on both boards could constitute an occasional conflict of interest. To be on the safe side, Alan has made the decision to step down as one of our board directors.

Serving on the Co-op Board of Directors is a challenging and rewarding experience. In every sense of the word, it is a "working" board, where the commitment of time and energy is a significant one. We owe a debt of gratitude and heartfelt thanks to Amy, Tom and Alan for all that they have contributed, and we are delighted that we will have the chance to see them regularly in the Co-op as members.

The board solicited advice and recommendations from a variety of sources and interviewed several potential candidates to fulfill the remainder of the three-year terms. We are delighted to announce that Bill Shein and Daniel Seitz have been offered, and have accepted positions as directors.

Bill Shein is a writer and democracy-reform activist who moved to Berkshire County in 2002. Daniel Seitz has worked for 20 years in the field of complementary and alternative medicine education, accreditation and regulation. He currently serves as the executive director of the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education—the

accrediting agency for doctoral programs in naturopathic medicine—and consults with colleges of complementary and alternative medicine on accreditation and program development.

Bill and Daniel are men of thoughtful insight, as well as good humor. Both have the ability to listen and communicate, and both are committed to the cooperative principles, as well as, the stated vision and mission of the Berkshire Co-op Market.

Based on our by-laws, membership will be able to vote on accepting these appointments for the remainder of their terms by a simple majority at Annual Meeting in October.

We are looking forward to Bill and Daniel connecting with our members and being able to provide an improved feedback mechanism between the membership and the Board of Directors. The next couple of years are going to be fascinating as we delve into Bridge Street projects, an increased need for activism regarding food supply and safety, reincorporation of our legal structure, and beginning to plan for the next ten years as the Co-op continues to grow.

We should also point out that there is always a desire for members to more actively participate in our work. If you are interested in joining the Member Linkage committee, you can e-mail the Board of Directors at bod@berkshirecoop.org. Also, keep in mind that elections will be coming up in October for open board positions.

MEMBERSHIP:

It makes good food even better.

Thursday, July 26, 2007
is Berkshire Co-op Market
Member Appreciation Day!

All members in good standing receive
a **10% discount*** on this day.



* **CANNOT** be used for Buying Club orders,
Membership Payments, or with Senior Discount.

* All Membership payments **MUST** be up-to-date.

* Membership Cards **MUST** be presented to receive this discount.

* BerkShares **MAY** be used for 50% of purchases with Member Appreciation Discount.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

Board meetings are held on the
4th Wednesday of each month at 6 pm
at Berkshire South Community Center.
Those interested are invited to attend!

Stay Informed!

Join the Berkshire Co-op Listserve:

Go to www.berkshirecoop.org and sign up today!

STAFF SPOTLIGHT:



The Berkshire Co-op Market is happy to announce the arrival of its new Wellness Manager, Eric Jesner. Eric is originally from south Florida and the Boston area, and holds a Bachelor of Science with a split major of Finance and Entrepreneurship from Babson College. He comes to the Co-op with seven years experience in management and purchasing in the Whole Body Department of Whole Foods Markets from Boston to Seattle. Most recently, Eric and his partner Cheryl (who works in the Office of Institutional Advancement at Simon's Rock) moved to the Berkshires from Hadley where he was the Team Leader for the Whole Body department.

Eric and Cheryl, along with their "children"—2 cats and a dog (Izzy, Pleebo and Atticus)—have just purchased a home in

Otis and are settling in. When he is not reorganizing the Wellness Department for better ease of shopping, Eric enjoys hiking and mountain biking, cooking and baking, and he is a connoisseur of good cheeses.

The Co-op leadership team is excited to have Eric on board, and we invite you to introduce yourself when you see him in the store.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT GROCERIES

It's not just about groceries at the Berkshire Co-op. While this list is certainly not complete, here are a few things that the Co-op is involved in. All of these are either available to members or services rendered on the behalf of our members:

- Lending Library, Including Videos
- Monthly Farm Tours
- Community Business Discounts (Community Connections Program)
- Wellness Seminars & Training
- Giant Summer Solstice Celebration
- Sponsorship of Several Events in Berkshire County
- Referral Advice to a Variety of Organizations
- Donations of Services, Money, and/or Product to Various Berkshire, Litchfield and Columbia County Organizations*
- School Outreach Program
- Donations of Waste Food to Area Farmers
- Support of Local Economy in Purchasing and Service Practice
- No Charge Wireless Internet Access
- Computer Dedicated to Public Resource Usage
- Community Bulletin Board
- Educational Materials Throughout the Store Including the Entrance, Customer Service Desk, Bulletin Boards, Wellness Resource Center
- Kids' Toys and Book Swap in the Café
- Purified Drinking Water Machine
- Fundraising Opportunity at Cash Registers for Local Non-profit Groups
- Fundraising "Scrip" Program for Area Schools
- Venue for Local Artists to Display Their Work
- Venue for Member Local Musicians to Sell Their Music
- Resource to Other Co-ops Across the Country
- Quarterly Newsletter; Email Listserve
- Website Loaded with Information and Links to Information
- Café Meeting Space for Small Regular Groups
- Program Development and Sponsorship to Bring Healthy Foods to Financially Challenged Community Residents
- Partnership with Area Health Organizations to Access Good Foods for Clients
- Basic Food/Basic Prices Program
- Buying Club Online
- Environmentally & Geographically Sensitive Landscaping Project

Also, something fascinating has been happening. After the lunch rush is over, and the crowds in the Café thin out a bit, people are gathering on their own, and meeting other people. There are some fascinating discussion taking place, and it seems that the Café is becoming a hub of sorts. There's an energy that has developed within the Co-op that has nothing to do with selling groceries.

Berkshire Co-op Mission Statement

The Berkshire Cooperative Association exists to cultivate a sustainable local economy and build community with a member-owned natural foods store as its primary vehicle.

Our Vision

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

7 Co-op Principles:

1. Voluntary, Open Membership: Open to all without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.
2. Democratic Member Control: One member, one vote.
3. Member Economic Participation: Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of the cooperative. The economic benefits of a cooperative operation are returned to the members, reinvested in the co-op, or used to provide member services.
4. Autonomy & Independence: Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members.
5. Education, Training And Information: Cooperatives provide education and training for members so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public about the nature and benefits of cooperation.
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives: Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, regional, national and international structures.
7. Concern For The Community: While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.

LEADERSHIP STAFF



Art Ames
General Manager



Joe Bonneau
Store Manager



Susanne Bergendahl
Human Resources Manager



Nancy Olsen
Finance Manager



Amy Demarest
Marketing & Member Services Manager



Andrei Smerechniak
Produce Manager



Daniel Esko
Grocery Manager



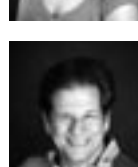
Michele DiSimone
Front-end Manager



Eric Jesner
Wellness Manager



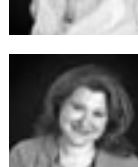
Heather Klein
Grocery Buyer



Dennis Barron
Systems Administrator



Jennifer Foley
Marketing & Communications



Mira Hilbert
Administrative Support

* DONATIONS MADE IN 2007

- | | |
|--|---|
| Berkshire Hills Regional School District | Mahaiwe Performing Arts |
| Berkshire Pulse | Mountain Road School |
| Berkshire Taconic Community Fund | Muddy Brook Elementary School PTA |
| CATA (Community Access to the Arts) | NOAH Center |
| CTSB (Community Television of the Southern Berkshires) | Northeast Organic Farming Association |
| EGGS Foundation for Foster Children | Norman Rockwell Museum |
| GB Rudolf Steiner School | Peppe Family Fundraiser |
| Gould Farm | Project Native |
| Great Barrington Rotary Club | Sheffield Land Trust |
| Hawthorne Valley School | S. Berkshire Chamber of Commerce |
| Hevreh of Southern Berkshire | Southern Berkshire Child Care Program |
| Hospice Care of the Berkshires | Southern Berkshire Performing Arts |
| Housy Kids—Habitat for Humanity | Southern Berkshire Reg. School District |
| Kristen Cosentino, US Marine Corps. | Step It Up |
| Lee Regional Visiting Nurse Assoc., Inc. | WBCR-LP 97.7 fm Community Radio |
| | Western Massachusetts Labor Action |

EXPERIENCING LOCAL FARMS

by Tina Pagliosotti, Berkshire Co-op Staff



The Mead Farm Tour Group



Oyster Mushrooms at Blue Moon 'Shrooms



One of the many fields at McEnroe Farm

The Farm Tour season started off in March at Mead's Maple Syrup Farm. As I drove up to the farm it looked like green ribbons wrapping a bunch of trees together, but later I realized that these "ribbons" were actually tubes connected to little pin-sized taps all leading to the Sugar House. Owner Winter Mead, started up the fire for the sweet sap that was first put through an osmosis filter to remove much of the water. The sap then gets pushed in to the boiling pan. The pan has walls that have a small opening at the corners.

As the thin sap enters the pan at one end it pushes the thicker syrup into the next pan and so on until we have the final product. Winter and Judy were wonderful hosts, and even made pancakes for us to sample their syrup! There is nothing like eating pancakes with maple syrup outside on a beautiful brisk morning in March right at the foot of the maple trees.

Then, in April we went to Leslie Taff's Blue Moon 'Shrooms. As she took us into the Shitake mushroom room, it smelled as if we were in a rain forest. The shitakes grow from spore-filled sawdust blocks. The oyster mushrooms sprout through holes in plastic bags that dangle from the ceiling. I bought some of these mushrooms from Leslie, took them home and roasted them just until they began to turn brown on the edges, and they tasted exquisite.

Leslie also dries her shitake mushrooms and grinds them into powder. The powder is a great way to add flavor to soups, gravies, or just about anything you cook. It also adds nutritional value to your food. Leslie adds the powder to her animals' food for longevity and youthfulness. The powder and the dried whole shitakes are available in the bulk section of the Co-op.

On June 2nd, we toured McEnroe Organic Farm in Millerton, NY. Ray McEnroe took us around his beautiful farm showing us everything from the chickens, cows, pigs and sheep, to sweet corn fields, lettuce fields, compost yards and, most impressively, the many hot houses of the famous McEnroe tomatoes. Ray had us do a blind taste test of his different tomatoes, and no one could pick a favorite—they were all incredible.

When we were done with the tour, Ray put out an amazing banquet lunch of all of his best produce and meats. No one left hungry, and everyone had a wonderful time.

Don't miss out on these upcoming interesting, informative and fun Farm Tours. Sign up at the Customer Service Desk. For more information call 413.528.9697 ext. 10 and ask for Tina.

Left Field Farm, Middlefield, MA – July 14

Project Native, Housatonic, MA – August 4

Farm Girl Farm, North Egremont – August 18

Check our website for updates and details: www.berkshirecoop.org

NEVER JUDGE A TOMATO BY ITS SKIN

by Michelle Larson-Sadler, Member, Community Food Co-op; Bellingham, WA



Let's have a contest. In my right hand I hold an aesthetically beautiful, everyday tomato. Its color is a rich tomato red and its shape is a perfect sphere. Its skin is thick and taunt, without a crease or blemish anywhere. In my left hand, I hold a ripe, fragrant, blackish-purple heirloom tomato. It was recently harvested and

transported a short distance to the Co-op and placed in the bin. It has an irregular shape, is thin-skinned, and has a couple fine cracks near its stem.

Now, which one would you want on your next sandwich, salad, or plain topped with a little olive oil and some fresh basil? Before you make your choice, let's take a taste from both of them. You'll find that there is no contest at all.

Not very long ago, heirloom tomatoes fell victim to commercial food production and distribution. Modern hybrid tomato seed varieties were originally created for better transportability and storability over taste; for increased crop yield; and for production of fruit that were uniform in size, color, shape and ripening speed. At the present time, heirloom tomato production is presently making a renaissance in order to keep up with the ever-increasing customer demand.

Noted for their marvelous flavor, heirloom tomatoes are often organically grown in small quantities on a small-to-medium family farm. Because of their lessened resistance to disease, pests, heat, cold and rigors of long-distance transport, the heirloom tomato is usually hand-harvested instead of by machine and immediately transported a short distance from farm to market. Once the tomatoes reach the produce bin, their shelf life is a fraction compared to that of the eye-pleasing conventional tomato.

What Characterizes an Heirloom?

Heirloom seeds are always self-pollinated or open-pollinated and produce plants with the same traits planting after planting, generation after generation. Modern hybrid seed varieties do not always reproduce plants with exactly the same traits, and if a hybridized variety is only planted, the risk of a fungus or plant disease destroying an entire crop runs very high. Heirlooms are always open-pollinated or self-pollinated, however, not all open-pollinated or self-pollinated varieties are considered an heirloom.

Commercial heirlooms are open-pollinated varieties that have existed since before 1940. Family heirlooms have shorter histories than commercial heirlooms, and are considered heirlooms because the seed may have been passed down for several

generations through a family lineage. Created heirlooms have two known parents (either two heirlooms or an heirloom and a hybrid) and through dehybridization over a period of years or generations, undesirable genetic characteristics are eliminated and desirable genetic characteristics are stabilized. Mystery heirlooms are varieties that are a product of natural cross-pollination of two heirloom varieties.

Heirloom varieties boast special histories or physical characteristics. Perhaps one can trace the plant's origins to a particular region of a country, families can recall that their great grandparents brought the seeds over from Europe, or a variety may have a distinguishing physical attribute such as color, design, or shape and is named after that characteristic.

Enjoying Heirloom Tomatoes

Heirloom varieties ripen quicker, are more fragrant, and contain more lycopene (an antioxidant abundant in red tomatoes and processed tomato products that may help prevent prostate cancer and heart disease) than hybrid seed tomatoes. If tomatoes seem overripe, provided that they aren't moldy or rotting, they are perfect for making sauce, as cooking fresh tomatoes enhances the release of lycopene.

As a rule of thumb, the color of the heirloom tomato determines its acidity. Yellow and orange-colored varieties don't contain any lycopene and are the least acidic. They are higher in sugar and boast the mildest and sweetest flavor of any of the heirloom tomatoes. Pink-colored tomatoes are also sweet and richly flavored, however, they have a greater amount of acidity than the yellow and orange varieties. The redder the tomato, the greater its lycopene content, sweetness and acidity. The greener the tomato, the more tart it becomes. The purple and black varieties have the greatest acidity, however, they also boast the boldest, richest flavor of any of the heirlooms.

Look for plump, heavy fruits with thin, smooth skins and free of bruises or blemishes. To promote further ripening, place it with an apple in a closed paper bag for a day or so, as the ethylene gas produced from the apple will further ripen the tomato. Store heirloom tomatoes out of direct sunlight at room temperature, since heat or cold will cause damage and destroy their flavor. If you must refrigerate a tomato, bring it back to room temperature before serving. It is not uncommon for heirloom tomatoes to have cracks at the stem ends, however, if the cracks do not run deep, they should not affect the tomato or its flavor.

When people bite into a juicy heirloom tomato, most don't usually think about the shrinkage of the incredible pool of genetic variability and diversity and the many varieties that would become extinct if they had purchased that everyday tomato. When we continue to place demand for and enjoy heirloom varieties of vegetables, fruits, grains and beans, we continue to encourage biodiversity, as well develop an awareness of a sense of history and cultural heritage behind the food we eat.

Spicy Tomato Cocktail

(Makes 2.5-3 Quarts)

From *The Tomato Festival Cookbook: 150 Tempting Recipes That Make the Most of Your Crop of Lush, Vine-Ripened, Sun-warmed, Fat, Juicy, Ready-to-burst Heirloom Tomatoes*, by Berkshire Co-op Market Board Member Lawrence Davis-Hollander.

Ingredients:

6 pounds very ripe tomatoes, coarsely chopped
3 stalks of celery, leafy tops left whole, stems chopped
1 medium onion, peeled and sliced

1 medium green bell pepper, seeded and sliced
1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and sliced
1 clove garlic, peeled and crushed
1 jalapeno pepper, or other small hot pepper, seeded
2 teaspoons salt, or more to taste
½ teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon black or white peppercorns
1 bay leaf
1 tablespoon sugar, or more to taste
2-4 tablespoons lemon juice, or more to taste
Tabasco or other hot sauce (optional)

1. In a large pan, combine the tomatoes, celery, including the leafy tops, onion, green pepper, red pepper, garlic, jalapeno, 2 teaspoons of salt, coriander, peppercorns, and bay leaf. Set over low heat until the juice is running, about 5 minutes. Raise the heat until the mixture comes to a simmer. Simmer until all the vegetables are very soft, about 30 minutes.
2. Let cool until mixture is lukewarm. Pass through a food mill, food processor, or blender set with finest blade to remove tomato seeds and other coarse material. Taste and add sugar and lemon to adjust flavor. If desired, add a few drops of Tabasco for a very spicy mixture.
3. Store in the refrigerator and use within 2 of weeks.

THE FARM BILL: YOU REALLY NEED TO READ THIS ARTICLE

by Claudia Ricci, Working Member

One quick way to get you to stop reading right now is to tell you that it's a long and complicated story about a vitally important piece of legislation called the Farm Bill. But the fact is that this article is a must read. You absolutely need to know about the Farm Bill of 2007 because the future of our family farms, the organic food industry, our farmland, our health and our children's health, and a host of other crucial food and fuel issues are at stake.

The great thing is that you can have a voice in the debate over the Farm Bill, which is going to Congress within a few short months. If you want to participate you need to connect with one of a couple different food organizations dedicated to making important changes in the legislation (see websites below).

First, you need to know is that the Farm Bill, by all accounts, should really be called the Food Bill, because it controls most everything about what is being grown, how, where, and by whom. It's a gigantic bill—the legislation itself is said to measure several feet worth of paper—and it directly affects what you and I eat, what our kids eat in school, how far our food dollars go, how the food industry operates, and whether our family farmers will survive.

The bill in question is a mind-boggling \$90 billion "omnibus" piece of legislation that comes up for consideration by Congress approximately every five years. At this moment, a bunch of committees in the US Senate and House of Representatives are considering changes to the Farm Bill before it goes before legislators for a vote. If all goes as scheduled, the legislation will come up for a final vote by October 1, 2007.

And here is where you can make a difference. A number of pro-family farm, pro-organic, pro-sustainable agriculture groups are spearheading activism on behalf of an important agenda of items. If you care about organics, sustainable agriculture, family farming, good nutrition and health, then you will want to join a network and have your voice heard.

"We need people to be available to advocate on behalf of our interest in sustainable agriculture by responding to action alerts," says Liana Hooded, organic policy coordinator for the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, a group based in Pine Bush, NY that is educating hard on the Farm Bill on behalf of organic farming and other issues.

Hooded says her group has an eight-point agenda that advocates for expanded organic farming. In the old days, Hooded says, legislators barely paid attention to those advocating on behalf of organic farming.

"In the past, we'd have our organic agenda and go up to the Hill and the staff and legislators would either fall asleep or just sit there playing with their Blackberries. They didn't understand and didn't care to understand," Hooded says. "But now, they're listening. Many legislators want to back some form of legislation supporting organics."

Among the group's priorities, Hooded says, are a higher share of research funding for organic farming, financial help for small farmers trying to certify as organic growers, new incentives for plant and animal breeding, and full funding for The Conservation Security Program, which promotes better protection of our natural resource and more responsible stewardship of farmland on working lands. But organics and conservation are just two small pieces of this mammoth Farm Bill. This mind-boggling piece of legislation funds myriad other agricultural research programs and food-related programs including WIC, food stamps, and farmer's market nutrition programs.

The biggest piece of the Farm Bill involves crop subsidies, that is, how much money big-business agricultural farmers will be paid by the US government (meaning you and me, the taxpayers) to overproduce five main crops. You might not be aware of this, but farmers (mostly in the Midwest) get paid lots of money by the federal government to grow corn, soy, wheat, rice and cotton. Farmers do not get paid subsidies for growing those wonderful Co-op produce items like chard, carrots, kale and collard greens and broccoli. And therein lies a huge problem. Because farmers get paid huge sums to produce vast amounts of corn, the nation is awash in high-fructose corn syrup, which in turn gets funneled into processed foods. Those processed foods make us Americans fat.

Listen to the way author Michael Pollan, author of *Omnivore's Dilemma*, explained it in a wonderfully instructive piece in the *New York Times Magazine*. The result of lopsided commodity support for corn and soy, he says, is "...a food system awash in added sugars (derived from corn) and added fats (derived mainly from soy)." A huge amount of corn syrup is pumped into a countless number of processed foods that pile up on America's grocery store shelves. Meanwhile, says Pollan, "The Farm Bill does almost nothing to support farmers growing fresh produce."

Now, perhaps, you are beginning to see why we need to care about the Farm Bill: "A



result of these policy choices," says Pollan, "is on stark display in your supermarket, where the real price of fruits and vegetables between 1985 and 2000 increased by nearly 40 percent while the real price of soft drinks (a.k.a. liquid corn) declined 23 percent. The reason the least healthful calories in the supermarket are the cheapest is that those are the ones the Farm Bill encourages farmers to grow."

But wait, don't we have an epidemic of obesity in the U.S.? Aren't researchers discovering that all of us, including our children, are falling prey at alarming rates to diabetes and the other health effects of obesity? Yes. Traditional farm policies are not good for our health. And because of this growing realization, the public health community is another interest group that is keenly interested in what happens with this year's Farm Bill. Health researchers and officials realize that in order to address the nation's obesity and diabetes epidemics they have to address the Farm Bill and the way it promotes the subsidization of corn and soy and the production of high-fructose corn syrup in processed foods.

Significantly, another major piece of the Farm Bill determines what we feed our children in school lunch programs. Anybody who is worried about all those chicken nuggets that pile up on lunch trays will realize that school lunch program priorities need to be seriously revised too.

So how can you become involved? Hooded offers four websites where you can begin to educate yourself about the Farm Bill and join an internet network of consumers and activists who will help to advocate for expanded funding for organic and family farming, sustainable agriculture, land preservation and environmentally friendly farming practices:

National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture: www.sustainableagriculture.net

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition: www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org

Community Food Security Coalition: www.foodsecurity.org

Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group: www.nesawg.org

The Internet has made advocacy a lot easier. Through websites like these and others, we can inform ourselves quickly and efficiently about important food legislation. We can, with the touch of a button, choose the issues we care about more specifically. And then, when we are called on to participate, we can join with others and make our voices heard.

Sure, the Farm Bill is big and hard to wrap your mind around, but there are many dedicated food advocates out there who say, in the end, it's not really all that complicated. "It's simple," says Amy Little, Founding Director of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. "We're losing farmers faster than we're losing farmland. We need to take steps to save family farms. We need to do something right away that promotes small-scale sustainable farming, and doesn't let organics get hijacked by huge corporate interests."

Professional writer Claudia Ricci is a full-time faculty member at SUNY Albany, where she teaches journalism, English and creative writing.

ORGANIC VS. SUSTAINABLE: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

by Mira Hilbert, Berkshire Co-op Staff



As you walk through the produce section of the Co-op, you see the beautiful bounty that our local farmers provide. While we work hard to provide the freshest ingredients, we wanted to take a moment to explain the difference between "organic," and what we term as "sustainable" products.

Organic: The Government Stamp of Approval

In order for a farmer to achieve the "organic" label, they must meet the standards of the USDA and pay annually for the label (up to \$5,000). The USDA's definition for Organic Food Standards and Labels is: "Organic food is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides; fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge; bioengineering; or ionizing radiation. Before a product can be labeled "organic," a Government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet USDA organic standards. (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>)" Any product that has been certified as "organic" will have the USDA's Organic label on it.

Sustainable Agriculture: It's How They Operate

While a certified organic farm is also considered sustainable, a "sustainable" farm does not have the "organic" label and, by law, cannot be labeled organic.

Prior to the Organic Certification Act of 2002, some of our local farmers were selling their produce to us as "organic" but because of the new law, we can no longer promote those products as "organic," so we use the term "sustainable" instead. This means that we have visited the farm, and determined that they grow their products in a "sustainable" fashion, are good stewards of the land and environment, and have a commitment to selling a clean/unsprayed (or organically sprayed) product. In 1989, the American Society of Agronomy published the definition of sustainable agriculture that is now adopted nationwide as: "A sustainable agriculture is one that, over the long term, enhances environmental quality and the resource base on which agriculture depends; provides for basic human food and fiber needs; is economically viable; and enhances the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole."

Why We Carry Both

We at the Co-op recognize the importance of supporting our local farmers, and we want to provide the freshest ingredients possible. Our produce manager, Andrei Smerechniak, when faced with a choice between an Organic Label product and a non-organic product, will choose the one with the organic label because that is what our customers are looking for, and it supports the farms that have gone through all the paperwork and testing to reach the certification level. However, we hope that by allowing all local farmers to have a place to sell their products, we are, in turn, being good stewards to our customers and our community.

WOULD YOU LIKE PAPER OR PLASTIC...OR CANVAS?

by Art Ames, General Manager



Reusable canvas bags are the most environmentally friendly choice.

Over the last couple of months, the controversy surrounding the best choice of bags has been discussed frequently. The Berkshire Record wrote a couple of articles, a new gift certificate incentive has cropped up in town, the large grocery chains are now offering very inexpensive alternatives, and the discussion continues.

Paper or plastic? We already know the preferred answer—neither. Both use valuable natural resources, and both are unnecessary. We are one of the few remaining countries in the world that still offer bags at no cost in stores. Some countries simply don't offer anything, and some countries charge a significant fee for each bag used.

At the Co-op, we've struggled with the right way to go. To my recollection, we've never offered plastic bags to our customers. While there is disagreement among experts and consumers as to which is a better choice, we've only offered paper for the following reasons:

- New technologies are adding higher percentages of post-consumer product to paper manufacturing. Our current bags offer the highest percent currently available at up to 50%, along with environmentally friendly soy or water-based inks. We expect a new bag soon that will contain even more of a percentage of recycled product, as soon as testing is completed.
- Consumers, based on numerous studies, are more likely to reuse paper bags for either shopping or recycling. That's another reason why we chose to transition to paper bags with handles on them.
- A paper bag can hold almost four times as much product as a typical store plastic bag.
- Our paper bags are completely compost ready.
- We are able to reuse used paper bags dropped off by customers more readily than plastic due to sanitary considerations.
- By joining a joint purchasing program with over 100 other co-ops across the country, the bag manufacturer is able to use less energy by producing larger quantities of bags at one time.
- We simply can't get past the fact that it takes over 1,000 years for plastic to break down in landfills, and that plastic is primarily a petroleum-based product.

We believe that our members and general shoppers are more in tune with recycling. Depending on availability, we also offer boxes and recycled paper bags at the registers.

Recently, the Co-op chose to not join the local incentive that offers a monthly gift certificate to random shoppers who bring in their own bags, as we already offer a "punch card" which offers a free drink to anyone who uses their own reusable bags a total of 20 times. If you don't have one, please ask a cashier next time you are in the store.

It's been rewarding to see that other businesses are becoming more aware of this as a concern. The large chains have even been honest in declaring that they cannot remove plastic bags as a choice because paper bags cost more to buy. However, as mentioned earlier, they are now offering low cost reusable shopping bags in their place. Unfortunately, they still do not offer recycled boxes to their consumers as an alternative. I've been told that they feel that the clutter it would cause at the front of the store is part of the reason. Naturally, if customers happen to ask for a box, and if it happens frequently enough, perhaps the store management will reconsider. (Consider that a subtle hint).

As the paper vs. plastic discussion continues, some cities, states and even countries are considering a ban on plastic bags, including Boston, San Francisco, Oakland, New York State, Australia, India, Ireland, Italy, South Africa, and Taiwan. I do think and hope that this will gain momentum, and call on all of our local grocers to consider making a statement by eliminating plastic bags from their mix.

For the past two years, the Co-op, in an effort to raise awareness, has charged 10¢ for each new bag used during the week leading up to Earth Day. All funds collected were then donated to a local non-profit, dedicated to environmental and recycling concerns. Each year, a large portion of our membership has asked us to make this permanent. We honestly weren't sure if many of our shoppers and members were willing to do this, but perhaps this is the right time to consider it again.

Here's a proposal for you to consider, please let us know your thoughts. The Co-op would charge 10¢ for every new paper bag issued, year round. We are also bringing in less expensive cotton canvas bags that would be sold, at our cost, to anyone interested. We will continue to offer boxes and recycled bags at no charge as long as we have a supply, and will continue to encourage members to bring in their old bags for reuse. All money collected would be donated to local non-profit agencies that focus on environmental and recycling concerns. We would ask our members to choose three appropriate agencies in addition to CET (Center for Ecological Technology), and would change the recipient every four months.

We'll only do this if you let us know that you are willing (send an email to community@berkshirecoop.org, or put a note in the suggestion box on the Customer Service Desk and title your email or note "Bag Proposal".)

By the way, this year we collected over \$50 for the week, representing over 500 paper bags. That may seem like a lot, but because we have a much higher percentage of shoppers who bring their own bags than anyone else, it is significantly less than other stores would use, given an equal amount of customers. Good for us! Can we take it one step further? "Paper or plastic?" "No thanks, I brought my own bags."

INVASION OF THE PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES

by Michele DiSimone, Berkshire Co-op Staff



Boys playing among a mountain of plastic bottles in the Philippines.
Photo © J. Tanodra/UNEP/Peter Arnold, Inc.

I recently bought myself one of the great stainless steel water bottles that we sell here at the Co-op, simply because I was feeling like there had to be something environmentally unfriendly about the amount of bottled water that I bought on a weekly basis. Sure enough, I did some research on the topic and was overwhelmed by what I found. I never want to buy another bottle of water again.

Bottled water is the nation's second favorite beverage (soft drinks being the first), with Americans consuming water from disposable plastic bottles at a rate of more than 70 million bottles each day. Last year, \$11 billion was spent in the US alone on bottled water. As for the resources that it takes to supply us with the water, it takes 47 million gallons of oil a year – this is enough oil to take 100,000 cars off the road and 1 billion pounds of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. And sadly, we just aren't recycling these plastic bottles as much as we should. Consumers only recycle about one out of every five bottles that they drink out of, and only 4% of bottles sold are used to make new plastic bottles. The rest of the bottles that aren't recycled end up in landfills, leaking toxic additives into the groundwater and taking up to 1,000 years to biodegrade. Essentially, this may be harming our future water supply. More than 60 million plastic bottles end up in these landfills daily.

But why are so many people drinking all of this bottled water? Well, the bottled water industry is dominated by three large transnational corporations: Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Nestle. As you can imagine, the marketing efforts of these companies play a large role in the popularity of bottled water. There is also the idea that bottled water is cleaner than tap water. While this may be true in some cases, the federal standards for tap water are actually higher than those for bottled water. There are holes in the way the bottled water industry is regulated – there are no rules about how bottled water should be filtered or kept free of pathogens, as must be done for tap water. In fact, about one quarter of bottled water is actually just tap water. For example, Pepsi and Coke buy water from Detroit, Michigan, purify it, and then sell it as Aquafina and Dasani.

So what can we do? Well, here at the Berkshire Co-op, we have a few alternatives to buying yet another plastic bottle of water. As mentioned before, we sell stainless steel bottles, but we also sell polycarbonate plastic bottles, both made by Enviro Products. The polycarbonate bottles are made of glass like, non-porous material. There is no plastic leaching or heat or cold distortion. My children have each picked out their favorite colors of these bottles to put water in for the summertime, but I am already partial to my stainless steel bottle. I encourage everyone to buy themselves a water bottle to refill for the summer – if you always have water, then you won't have to buy a bottle off the shelf! Also, don't forget that the Co-op has a filtration system in our bulk section - you can bring in one, three or five gallon jugs and fill them for just \$.50 a gallon (\$.25 for members)!

As for me, I don't plan on buying another bottle of water for a long time. But, if you find yourself buying water off the shelf, please consider reusing the bottle...and of course, recycle it when you are done. Happy drinking!



**"UNLESS SOMEONE LIKE YOU CARES A WHOLE LOT,
NOTHING IS GOING TO GET BETTER. IT'S NOT."**

~ Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

CHIAPAS, MEXICO REVISITED

by Art Ames, General Manager



Women from Francisco Villa in Simojovel, Chiapas picking high altitude coffee with the 2006 Interfaith Delegation. Photo courtesy of Equal Exchange.

A little over two years ago, I traveled with an Equal Exchange-sponsored group to Chiapas, Mexico to visit the coffee cooperatives in the region. Although I expected to learn a great deal about the art of growing and harvesting coffee, and to gain a better understanding about the way of life of the indigenous people, I was unaware of the political struggles in southern Mexico.

During my visit, it became clear that there are significant and far reaching negative

affects revolving around our international Free Trade agreements, and there is a movement in Chiapas to relocate the native peoples in that area to other parts of the country in order to make way for "progress" such as hydroelectric dams that would flood the growing areas and displace thousands of people, as well as super highways allowing better access to the southern rainforests for harvesting.

Unfortunately, I witnessed many examples of subtle repression and intimidation in the town centers during my visit. The police drove around in black clothing in the backs of pick up trucks in large groups, weapons visible and fully loaded, regularly "swept" the towns in walking patrols as a show of force, and reacted strongly to any signs of dissidence. It wasn't until we ventured out of the towns and into the villages that we could appreciate the beauty, values and determination of the wonderful people of Chiapas.

Here is a letter sent a few months ago by a human rights group located in San Cristobal, a small city in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. Although it does not speak of overt atrocities, it does represent a regular life style for those in the region attempting to affect positive change.

*San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas; México. January 17, 2007.
(Translated from original Spanish)*

*To the Good Government Assembly of the Oventic Caracol,
To Human Rights Defenders,
To the state and national governments,
To public opinion,*

With this letter, the Centre of Economic and Political Research for Community Action (CIEPAC, AC), based in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, manifests and denounces to you the following:

CIEPAC is a civil society organization which works peacefully and legally for peace, justice, democracy, autonomy, and in defense of the human rights of the indigenous and campesino peoples of Chiapas since its foundation in 1998. We accompany the organizational processes of indigenous, student, campesino, ecclesiastical, etc. organizations with information, analysis, training, and the

elaboration of popular education materials which support these organizations in their decision-making processes. We maintain strong links with organizational processes on the local, national, and international level which struggle against the unjust neo-liberal system. We seek and support the construction of alternatives by and for the poorest and most marginalized peoples. Recently, CIEPAC has not only signed on to the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, but has actively promoted the Other Campaign in the indigenous and campesino communities of Chiapas, since the latter represents a real option of change for peoples' well-being.

Due to this support and social commitment we have assumed, CIEPAC members and our offices have been the target of harassment and surveillance. When our members go out to the communities to carry our work, they have been followed by people in police-looking vehicles with tinted windows. On various occasions, the houses of members of CIEPAC have been subject to surveillance on behalf of suspicious vehicles without license plates...increased harassment and repression against organizations in Chiapas and Mexico which struggle for a dignified life. In the past year, many communities, organizations, collectives, families and individuals have been targeted with brutal repression as the response of the bad governments to social demands, and CIEPAC has not been the exception.

CIEPAC does not believe that these governments who assassinate and harass will investigate themselves, nor will they punish their own gunmen, police, or secret investigators. We do not trust in these institutions because they have failed to do anything with regards to the multiple human rights denunciations and complaints presented by Mexican and international human rights defenders. Thus, we do not ask that the government investigate these cases, nor do we ask for protection measures, since they would only send us more police to keep us under surveillance.

We make it known that CIEPAC will reinforce its surveillance and security mechanisms and, in coordination with the communities of the Highlands of Chiapas that it works with, will send the pictures and necessary testimonies so that the Good Government Assembly and the Honour and Justice Commissions, which truly implement justice, decide what to do with these enemies of the people.

At the same time, we call upon our compañeros and compañeras from international solidarity to maintain themselves alert, and to pressure their governments and international human rights defending organizations to denounce the Mexican government for its acts of repression and injustice towards our peoples, until we obtain a more just, democratic and free Mexico for all. We reiterate our commitment to push ahead in the construction and development of the Other Campaign and the alternatives to the neo-liberal model.

*Sincerely,
The CIEPAC team
Contact person: Onésimo Hidalgo Domínguez (tonio@laneta.apc.org)*

It's difficult to get accurate information about the southern Mexico situation in the news. For an overview of the history and reasons for the current social and political conflict, I recommend *The Zapatista Reader*, Tom Hayden, Editor Avalon Publishing Group 2002.

MELISSA KUSHI LAUNCHES HIMALASALT



You can find HimalaSalt by the Cheese Department.

Melissa Kushi has devoted much of her life's work to sustainable foods, alternative health and ethical business models. As a social entrepreneur she traveled some of the world's most remote and deeply cultured regions creating bamboo micro-industries in rural Africa, replacing coca crops with organic cotton in the jungles of Peru, and introduced heirloom soybean seed to organic farmers in the US. Working with indigenous people, Melissa was inspired by their wealth of ancient knowledge, biodiversity and traditional heirloom foods, and firmly believes them to be key to our collective future. It became clear to her that, as the third world seeks balance for survival, the first world seeks balance for meaning.

Formerly a whole-foods cooking teacher, macrobiotic educator, and a successful international organic commodities trader, Melissa founded Sustainable Sourcing, LLC, makers of HimalaSalt (www.HimalaSalt.com), as a means for nourishing both. In this interview, we find out how this entrepreneur's life-long learning and her connection with the Co-op helped her launch her latest business venture.

What kind of a product is HimalaSalts, and how did you get involved in it?

Ten years ago, a friend from the Himalayas gave me some pink Himalayan sea salt. I began using it my cooking and was fascinated by the immediate shift in quality over the regular sea salt I had always used. In cooking, flavors were enhanced, colors were rich, and I also found that I had more energy and my thinking became clearer. Having had a long-standing connection to the natural foods industry, I was inspired at the thought of bringing a product like HimalaSalt to the natural marketplace. For me, good quality salt and pure water are essential to baseline wellness, so it just made sense.

HimalaSalt was created 250 million years ago during a time of pristine environmental

integrity. It's ethically hand-harvested from a protected source, stone-ground, and contains over 70-plus essential trace elements required for well-being. Essentially, HimalaSalt is pre-people, pre-pollution, and is distinctly different from both table salt and sea salt. HimalaSalt is free of pollutants, unlike sea salt from today's polluted oceans, and importantly, it is all-natural, unrefined, with no additives, unlike common table salt.

Most people don't realize that table salt is chemically refined, extracting all essential trace minerals that are then used in industries such as pharmaceuticals, chemical fertilizers, paint, and industrial chemicals. This leaves sodium and chloride in isolated form, which is toxic to the body. In addition, anti-caking agents are added, which are derived from aluminum. These additives are in a number of unsuspecting sea salts, since the FDA doesn't require their disclosure to the consumer.

HimalaSalt was recently picked, along with Equal Exchange and Pangaea Organic Cosmetics, to represent Ethical Consumerism today, by New Hope Natural Media at the Natural Products Expo West in Anaheim, CA. HimalaSalt's parent company, Sustainable Sourcing, has recently partnered with United Natural Foods to begin distribution throughout the Eastern Region, including Iowa, as well as Tree of Life, Associated Buyers, and Amazon.com.

What role was the Co-op able to play in your business development?

The Co-op was really key for me in the beginning stages, showcasing my "green, local product", hosting demos: it was really encouraging, the level of enthusiasm and demand for HimalaSalt, people love it. Art [Ames, General Manager] and Dan [Esco, Grocery Manager] have been incredibly supportive. Art was instrumental in helping me break into the NCGA's Co-op Advantage Program, which launches in September in the Eastern United States, which is really exciting.

Any final comments?

The Co-op is almost like a second home to many people in our community. In addition to supporting local farms and producers, it's a wonderful resource for alternative living, eating, and coming together as a community.

YOUR CO-OP, YOUR NEWSLETTER

by Bill Shein, Board Member



Board Member Bill Shein

It's safe to assume that, in general, people don't develop strong feelings for an email address. That is, people fall in love with other people, with their pets, with certain kinds of music, and, of course, with the fresh food and healthy products offered at the Berkshire Co-op Market. But an email address? It just doesn't seem possible.

But let me propose that a certain email address – newsletter@berkshirecoop.org – is worthy of your love and affection. Why? Because it's part of the Co-op's effort to seek member input and ideas for our quarterly newsletter, one of the best ways to stay up-to-date on what's happening on

Bridge Street and in the larger world of cooperative business.

With that simple email address, you can communicate with the recently formed Co-op Newsletter Committee, made up of Co-op staff, a board member and a member representative. The committee's purpose is to make sure the quarterly newsletter is meeting our members' minimum quarterly requirement for useful information about the Co-op, natural food, healthy living, creating a vibrant local economy, and the other issues that are central to our mission.

One of the great benefits of a member-owned cooperative is the ability to tap the knowledge, resources, creativity and ideas of our membership. And with more than 2,000 active Co-op members, there's lots to tap.

So, here's what we'd like to know: What do you want to see in the newsletter? What kind of information would be useful? Have a comment about an article in a previous newsletter? Want to see more recipes? Articles about your member-owner benefits? Clip-and-save hot-bar menus? Next week's winning lottery numbers? We'd like to hear from you (and especially from anyone who can provide us with next week's winning lottery numbers).

Don't like email? Share your ideas for the newsletter by leaving a note in the Co-op's Suggestion Box, conveniently located on the customer-service desk at the front of the store. Just note that your idea is for the newsletter, and the kind-hearted Overseer of the Suggestion Box will forward your note to the Newsletter Committee.

Remember, the email address is newsletter@berkshirecoop.org. Use it frequently to share ideas for, and comments about, the Berkshire Co-op newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you!

FROM FILM GIRL TO FARM GIRL

...continued from cover

Farm Girl Farm's (www.farmgirlfarm.com) first season was the summer of 2005. The Farm Girls focused on basic veggies, some flowers, and culinary herbs. It was a "leap of faith" that they would be able to meet their commitment to feed their then 40 members from June to November. Right in the middle of the summer, Rory got sick and Laura had to finish out the season on her own. "I started out thinking that it was temporary helping Rory, but I fell in love with what I was doing, and couldn't imagine not doing it. I was nervous about running the business myself, but knew I was surrounded by people I could ask for advice and help. Everyone I worked with around here I've learned something from. There's a lot of exchange and I don't take anything for granted. The second season was smoother sailing because the infrastructure was in place and [I had] a season under my belt."

In 2006, Laura took over as the sole owner of Farm Girl Farm (Rory recovered from her illness and now lives in California), and increased the CSA membership to 50. It was also the first year that she began selling her veggies to local restaurants instead of selling at farmer's markets. "I love working with the chefs who appreciate the food, and who take the food and make it even more incredible going out on someone's plate. People buying food at the restaurants are so supportive—working with what we have each week instead of insisting on a certain product each week. We live in a community where people are looking for an authentic food experience and are looking for local food on the menus because it means quality. People take a lot of pride where so much food grown here is available."

Laura's veggies are also available throughout the summer at the Co-op. "I think that [BCM Produce Manager] Andrei has done a super fantastic job with stocking the produce department with as much local products as possible. I find that I want to be part of that. I want my veggies to be alongside the many other local farmers, to create this amazing display of what's possible here. The community feeling – it's a grocery store – but it's an extension of my community. It's a place I look forward to going to – it's not just a place to get groceries – it's a place where I run into a friend, or someone I need to talk about business, it's a hub of the community."

This summer will see Farm Girl Farm continue to grow, expanding to another acre owned by members Michael and Laurie Lee, and increasing the membership to 60 members. Laura is especially looking forward to the tomato crop this year. "They're so beautiful, and I love seeing and trying new varieties and colors of cherry tomatoes. Last year I created a rainbow cherry mix, which was a big hit. I found some more shades to add to the plate this year. I look a course in flower arranging over the winter in order to be able to do more with the flowers that we grow."

Even though it is harder to grow vegetables than hang paintings, Laura has definitely put Farm Girl Farm on the map. She doesn't measure success by education, or money, or even time. "Do I still have debt? Yes. Am I making a living? Barely. But I love it. The hardest part is how to bring the financial realities of growing vegetables to putting food on my own table. I realize it takes time to get established, and I ask myself would I rather work in an office? And I wouldn't trade financial stability for lifestyle." Especially when the lifestyle involves a masterpiece of vegetables.

LITTLE GREEN HOUSES FROM CET

A Message from the Center for Ecological Technology

Take steps towards environmental sustainability with CET's Green Home Audit:

In response to customers who are seeking sensible solutions for creating a healthier home with a smaller ecological footprint, the Center for Ecological Technology (CET) is now offering a comprehensive Green Home Audit to Berkshire residents and border counties in New York, Connecticut, Vermont, and New Hampshire.

CET's Green Home Audit includes a comprehensive building science analysis and home performance testing, after which CET's green home auditors will help participants set priorities for taking actions that have an immediate impact on the environment. Customers receive a list of recommendations including measures for saving energy, addressing comfort, health, and energy efficiency issues, ensuring combustion safety, protecting watersheds, and incorporating renewable energy technologies. Together these puzzle pieces often save money, create a "greener" dwelling, and greater peace of mind that you are reducing your environmental impact. For more information, check out CET's Green Home Audit brochure at www.cetonline.org (on the "For Your Home" link), and call Lisa at 413-445-4556, ext. 10.

Start your path to a greener home now!

WESTERN MASS LABOR ACTION

If you haven't had a chance to talk to the Western Massachusetts Labor Action (WMLA) volunteers at one of their tables in front of the store recently you should! They have a very exciting project underway on behalf of Berkshire County's lowest paid workers.

Since 1974 WMLA has built Berkshire County's only all-volunteer, non-government funded membership association by and for low-income seasonal and service workers with the aid and alliance of their friends in the community. Through WMLA, thousands of low-income workers and their families have found that in organization there is strength to overcome poverty conditions that would otherwise be insurmountable.

WMLA's membership of over 15,000 includes in-home care providers, housekeepers, child care providers, workers in the hospitality industry and in dozens of other occupations in the service economy. Many elderly, disabled under- and unemployed are also members.

Twenty-eight percent of Berkshire County residents have incomes insufficient to cover basic living expenses. Those who fall short would need, on the median, an additional \$17,000 a year to cover those basics. As it stands, forty-nine percent of those who rent in the county have to take money from other necessities to pay their rent.

Since its inception, WMLA members and volunteer organizers have responded to day-to-day needs, seven days a week, 365 days a year with emergency food, advocacy to prevent utility shut-offs, legal advice, preventive medical care and non-emergency dental care, budget-saving programs such as back-to-school clothing and supplies and holiday toy and food distributions.

WMLA's staff is all-volunteer, from top to bottom. Members help other members with the aid of community volunteers and voluntary contributions of goods and services to make this program possible. Through volunteer organizer training programs, low-income workers step forward as community leadership to represent and speak on behalf of themselves and others facing similar conditions.

Co-op members and others who shop here have stepped forward to provide extraordinary support to these efforts. For those who have seen in amazement the tiny, worn out office out of which this work is accomplished, the plans that have coalesced (after four years of preparation) for a much needed expansion are generating great excitement.

WMLA is now embarking on the construction of a new office directly adjacent to their home since 1978 at 298 Columbus Avenue in Pittsfield. The new building will enable WMLA to expand and strengthen the voice of Berkshire County's low-income workers, and will serve as a beacon of hope to those who struggle for a better life.

WMLA invites members of the Co-op to contact them and find out how you can be part of these historic and heroic efforts. There is a way everyone can assist, be it through donated time or resources to expand WMLA's essential day-to-day program or to advance their building project. Please contact Thacher at (413) 443-9862.

SUMMER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION
JUNE 23, 2007
10AM - 6PM
MEMORIAL FIELD
(next to Berkshire Co-op Market)

Sponsored by Berkshire Co-op Market

ALBERT'S ORGANICS ✪ ANDRUS POWER SOLUTIONS ✪ HIGH LAWN FARM
IREDALE COSMETICS ✪ MEADWESTVACO
PITTSFIELD CO-OP BANK ✪ TOOLE INSURANCE ✪ WOOD BROTHERS MUSIC