

the heart beet

August 2021

A Pulse on What's Happening at the **Viroqua Food Co+op**



Food Equity/Food Economy

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Strong Local Food Economy

Jan Rasikas, General Manager

From our Mission: We emphasize organic and local foods and products to promote the long-term health of individuals and the environment.

Our Mission is clear when it comes to supporting locally produced foods. Sourcing locally strengthens our small-town economy, builds sustainability and ongoing regional food security. It's important to note how the resiliency we create through our support of local served us during the pandemic. The relationships we have with local producers kept our shelves full of fresh foods, even as the regular channels for food distribution were strained from unpredictable consumer buying. You may have noticed that products are still sometimes unavailable – but local, seasonal and fresh produce is always at the VFC!

We measure our success and see growth in local product sales, year over year, so we know we're on the right track. The VFC's commitment to a stronger local food system goes beyond selling products though. The Co-op also supports local growers with an interest-free microlending program, and we award small grants to local nonprofit projects that inspire folks to learn about food and eat healthy.

We want good food to be affordable too! Our Board's Ends Policies puts a strong emphasis on creating food access, no matter what your grocery budget. This means we're constantly working on ways to honor the real

cost of clean, healthy foods at a price you can afford. We promote accessibility throughout the Co-op with nationally negotiated sales called **co-op deals**. These deep discounts and coupons are found in the bi-monthly flyers and help you save on groceries and household items. Local products are often included in the weekly **fresh deals** for produce, meat and seafood, cheese, and deli items. These are rock bottom prices on staples and fancy favorites alike. Watch for **Flash Sales** and holiday specials when we really go deep on discounts! We pledge to increase our offerings in the **basics** program this year. This program brings together the manufacturers, distributors and retailers like VFC, to bring the lowest price possible to our co-op community. These **basics** products are predominately certified organic to bust the myth that organic food is too expensive.

There is great value in spending any of your shopping dollars at our local co-op. Our commitment to support local farmers, local producers as well as programs that help keep organic groceries affordable, is at the heart of our Mission and exists for the betterment of our community.

Thank you for choosing the VFC!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Peter Bergquist, *President*
Elizabeth Tigan, *Vice President*
Eric Snowdeal, *Treasurer*
Aurora Boyd, *Secretary*
Olive Reynolds
Julie Tomaro
Lizzy Haucke

GENERAL MANAGER

Jan Rasikas

The Board meets at 6:30pm on the 3rd Monday of each month. Meetings are currently hosted in the VFC Community Room. Changes are posted on the VFC website. To make a presentation or ask questions at a meeting, please contact the Board 10 days in advance at: vfcboard@viroquafood.coop

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The Heart Beet is intended as a vehicle for communication among VFC Owners and shoppers. Articles pertaining to health and nutrition are presented for informational purposes only. VFC recommends consulting a healthcare professional for medical problems and advice.

The Heart Beet is printed and available in-store monthly. A digital copy is available online at: viroquafood.coop/vfc-publications

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VFC News

Jeanette Burlingame, Program Manager at CHS

Community Hunger Solutions presents the Rural Southwest WI – Food Equity Project

Community Hunger Solutions (CHS) exists to connect locally produced food with community members who lack access. To accomplish this, CHS works with farms, food processors and others to source locally produced foods that would otherwise go to waste. Then, volunteers sort the food for distribution to food pantries and other community partners. CHS averages about 150,000# of produce annually – plus a growing amount of Organic Valley dairy, such as milk and cheese. While the primary source of food is through donations, CHS purchases anywhere from \$10,000 to \$40,000 worth of food from local family farms each year.

In addition to the work being done to feed people today, CHS is committed to removing barriers to food so that community members will have better food access tomorrow.

Based on county data, anywhere from five to ten percent of community members in rural Southwest WI identify as Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color (BIPOC) but the leadership within Community Hunger Solutions and partner organizations doesn't reflect this diversity. Current systems are failing to engage BIPOC leaders in a meaningful way. This means that a significant amount of work is being done without the input from up

to 10% of our community!

In response to this power imbalance, Community Hunger Solutions created the Rural Southwest WI Food Equity Project (FEP). The FEP creates connections between CHS and members of the community who identify as BIPOC and a platform for them to influence local hunger relief efforts, starting with Community Hunger Solutions. The FEP begins with in-person surveys conducted through community partners like Scenic Bluffs CHC and partner pantries. In person surveys will give CHS a community specific snapshot of each area we serve. Based on these surveys, CHS will recruit an Accountability Committee that includes representation from a wide variety of social identities who also have experienced food insecurity, ensuring that those closest to the problem are finally invited to help develop solutions.

“I've been leading the planning of this project for over four years. I'm thrilled to finally be talking about this with a wider audience and am looking forward to seeing what we can accomplish as a community! If done well, this project has the potential to shift the trajectory of the entire local food movement towards true equity. There's real power in that.”



To learn more, visit www.community-hunger-solutions/equity-work or email CHS Program Manager Jeanette Burlingame at: Jeanette@community-hunger-solutions.org



Burlingame at VEDA building in Viroqua with volunteers who help CHS deliver perishable goods.



Burlingame delivering perishable goods from CHS to the food bank at Cashton Cupboard & Closet.



Burlingame delivering perishable goods from CHS to Good Samaritan food bank in Hillsboro.



Cucumber Summer

Whether you're eating it on top of a salad, as a pickle, or just on its own – there's never a shortage of ideas on how to enjoy cucumbers this season!



Sweet & Spicy Refrigerator Pickle Relish

Serves 6. Total time: 4.5 hours (active: 15 min)

- 1 lb. cucumber, seeded
- 2 large jalapeños, seeded
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- 2 Tbsp sugar

1. Use the shredding blade in the food processor to shred the cucumbers and jalapeños. (You can also grate or finely chop the vegetables by hand.)
2. Place the shredded vegetables on a clean kitchen towel and sprinkle with salt. Toss with your fingers to mix. Let stand for 5 minutes. Wrap the towel around the vegetables, hold it over the sink, and twist the towel to wring out the liquid.
3. Put the cucumber mixture into a medium bowl, add the apple cider vinegar and sugar, and stir to mix. Refrigerate 4 hours or longer until serving.
4. Keeps for up to 2 weeks in the refrigerator, tightly covered.

This relish can liven up any number of summertime favorites. It pairs great with favorites like hot dogs, barbecued meats, grilled cheese, cold-cut sandwiches and cheese & crackers.



Cucumber Melon Chutney

Serves 6. Total time: 20 min

- 1½ cups seeded & diced honeydew melon
- 1½ cups seeded & diced cucumber
- 2 Tbsp minced red onion
- 1 small jalapeño pepper, seeded & minced
- 2 Tbsp minced cilantro
- 2 Tbsp minced fresh mint
- 1 tsp curry powder (optional)
- Juice of 1 lime
- Salt to taste

1. In a large bowl, stir together all of the ingredients, tasting for salt. Refrigerate for at least one hour prior to serving.

This chutney makes a fantastic seasonal bruschetta, spread on crusty baguette slices sprinkled with salty feta cheese and extra mint. Or add a spoonful or two to curried fish filets or fish tacos for a fresh summer flavor.





A Farmer-Led Future for Tea

Written by Equal Exchange

The Roots of the Tea Trade

Did you know that tea is the second most popular drink in the world – second only to water?

Here’s another question: do you know that, even today, it is likely that the tea products lining your grocery store’s shelves – even those sold as Fair Trade – were sourced from plantations established under colonialism?

Tea cultivation and consumption originated in China. Global trade for much of the 1700s and 1800s was defined by foreign companies trying to gain a foothold in the profitable tea market.

The top four tea producing countries today are China, India, Kenya, and Sri Lanka respectively – and it is no coincidence that after China, the top tea producing nations are all former British colonies.

After the British East India Company lost a long-standing trade monopoly with China, British colonists introduced tea production elsewhere, beginning in India in the mid-1800s.

As with so many plantation systems throughout history, cheap labor was essential to the scheme. British planters recruited labor from the most vulnerable populations through indentured contracts. Families were central to the

recruitment strategy as they were less likely to leave the plantation; after all, it was where they both worked and lived.

Tea Farming Today

Despite more modern reforms, the colonial plantation system created a vast monoculture tea infrastructure so deeply rooted that it remains largely unchanged.

Shortly after Indian independence from Britain, the Indian government enacted reforms meant to provide protections to plantation workers. While the reforms were a very important advancement for tea workers, the fundamental imbalance in power remains.

Tea workers remain deeply dependent on the plantations for all of their basic human needs. When tea prices fall below the cost of production, it is far too common an occurrence that plantations will be abandoned by the owners, leaving the workers and their families in dire circumstances.

Cara Ross, a Sales Director at Equal Exchange, recalls hearing from tea farmers who experienced this at the Potong Tea Garden in Darjeeling, a tea growing region in India. “Overnight, workers lost not only income, but housing, food, healthcare and education,” Ross says. “The Potong Tea Garden’s history stands out to me as a clear example of

the injustices of the colonial plantation model, which at its core is built upon the indentured servitude and dependency of workers.”

Building an Alternative: Power to the Farmers

Equal Exchange is working to forge a different path for small farmers everywhere. As an alternative trade organization (ATO), we partner with small farmer organizations around the world to change existing power structures and build economic solidarity between farmers and consumers.

We’ve traded tea with democratically organized small farmer organizations for decades. While our tea program is still relatively small, we have leveraged our limited volume to support and strengthen a number of small farmer organizations in India and Sri Lanka in an effort to help them gain crucial market access and develop their democratic organizations.

Most of Equal Exchange’s tea partners are small farmers: they own just a few hectares* of land and cultivate a mix of tea and other commercial crops like spices for export, as well as crops for their own kitchen. Through their democratic organizations, farmers can pool their resources and their harvests to trade at a viable scale.

The farmers at the Potong Tea Garden are building yet another alternative to the colonial plantation model: After the previous owners of the plantation abandoned the business when prices dropped too low, the workers from the garden organized together. Potong’s 343 members now collectively run the tea garden. Potong’s members are revitalizing the land, introducing native plants and regenerating the soil and local ecosystem while running the garden democratically.

With so much tea still cultivated on plantations, Potong shows us that another path is possible: one that puts power in the hands of farmers through democratic control. This model could have profound implications for the wider industry in the years to come.

Planting Seeds for a Better Future

Through good times and bad times, our futures as consumers are intertwined with the futures of small farmers. We are proud to celebrate 35 years of changing trade and more than 20 years of solidarity with tea farmers in India and Sri Lanka.

To create a future where the tea industry is led by farmers, we need to do two things – and we need your help to do them. First, we need to continue to build a marketplace for small tea farmers. Secondly, we need to build awareness about the problems in the industry.

As an alternative trader, Equal Exchange is deeply committed to both of these efforts: we’re continuing to expand their tea program, and creating spaces for consumers to learn about where tea comes from and the people who grow it.

You can help by shopping for small-farmer grown Equal Exchange tea at your local co-op. And if you’ve learned anything from this article, share it with your friends, family, and neighbors – and encourage them to ask for Equal Exchange tea where they shop!

Thank you for your support as we continue to build a market for small farmers and work for positive change in the tea industry, together.

To stay connected with Equal Exchange and learn more about our tea partners, consider joining our community at: equalexchange.coop/getinvolved

*One hectare of land ≈ 2.47 acres



Potong Tea Garden – Darjeeling, India



Cara Ross & Equal Exchange Visitors at Potong Tea Garden.

Give Where You Live

“Round Up” for Local Nonprofits to Make a Bigger Impact

Visit www.viroquafood.coop/community-outreach for a complete schedule.



Round up in the month of August for: Youth Initiative High School

Waldorf-inspired education for grades 9-12. Parents, students and faculty work together to encourage and assist students in becoming free thinkers, and in maturing, into active, response-able, empowered participants in the greater society. The school, its students, families and faculty strives to be of service to the larger community.

Nominate a new local nonprofit if you'd like to see them on the ballot this year.
Fill out a nomination slip here: viroquafood.coop/community-outreach



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