

August 2023

heart beet

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



Fresh Food, Small Farms and the Cooperative Way

Jen McCoy, Marketing and Outreach Manager

At the Viroqua Food Co+op, we are a hub of the local food culture and help grow and support the local food and cooperative economies. For shoppers, we are a year-round local food source; for farmers and producers, we are a year-round market.



Viroqua is a foodie town. A place where fresh food is celebrated. Where small farms and cooperatives thrive, small businesses grow and innovation and excitement happen around community tables.

At the Viroqua Food Co+op, we are a hub of the local food culture and help grow and support the local food and cooperative economies. For shoppers, we are a year-round local food source; for farmers and producers, we are a year-round market. When members engage in the VFC experience, they contribute to vibrant local economies that transform our community.

In this collaborative culture, small producers can build a business and pass it on to the next person. So that even as folks move on, the products we love remain and the business moves forward, adding new innovations and ideas along the way. We've seen it through the transition

at Meadowlark Organics and, again, with our favorite ferments from Fizzleology. We are excited to see it again as Hidden Springs Creamery in Westby changes hands. In each case, new owners are welcomed, and the previous owner stays to lend support and pass on their work in a caring way.

This model of supported transition can be found at our Co-op as well. On the VFC Board, seven seats have staggered terms. Each year there are two or three seats up for election. This practice allows seasoned board members to orient new members to our cooperative business. Each election adds new ideas and experiences to the board table. With a built-in model of supported transition, and board members elected by our owners, we grow a cooperative business with integrity that best represents everyone it serves.

The VFC Election season has begun. We are excited to have eight VFC Owners ready to volunteer their time and energy to serve on the Board of Directors. Check out their candidacy profiles on our website and come to the Co-op on August 29th from 5 to 7pm to meet the candidates!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Peter Bergquist, *President*
Elizabeth Tigan, *Vice President*
Lizzy Haucke, *Treasurer*
Olive Reynolds, *Secretary*
Andrew Anderson
Julie Tomaro
Bjorn Bergman

GENERAL MANAGER

Jan Rasikas

The Board meets at 6:30pm on the 3rd Monday of each month. Meetings are currently hosted in person and online. Changes are posted on the VFC website. To make a presentation or ask questions at a meeting, please contact a Board member 10 days in advance. Contact the Board at: www.viroquafood.coop/board-of-directors

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/newsletters

Turning a new leaf?

Apply at the Viroqua Food Co+op Today!

JOIN US FOR OPEN INTERVIEW DAYS IN AUGUST

Do you love fresh food? Are you seeking an exciting career opportunity in the heart of the picturesque Driftless area? Look no further! Viroqua Food Co+op currently welcomes talented individuals to join our dynamic team. As an organization committed to providing exceptional service to our community, we take immense pride in the work we do and the people who make it possible.

If you're ready to embrace a fulfilling career and take advantage of exceptional work perks at the VFC, join us for walk-in style interviews in August and learn why the Co-op is such a stellar place to be. Join our team today and be a part of something truly special!

View job openings and apply online:
viroquafood.coop/employment



**flash
sale**



**back
to
school**

August 18-20

Board Elections



VOTING OPEN SEPTEMBER 5 - OCTOBER 5

The Viroqua Food Co-op's Board of Directors represents all 4,500+ owners and shapes the vision for the co-op while evaluating the performance of the business. Use one of your most powerful rights of ownership and vote in our 2023 Board of Directors election in September.

How to Vote

All co-op owners with shares paid in full are eligible to vote. Voting takes place through a secure

portal that is accessible through our website and emailed to all owners who have a email address with the Co-op. Not getting our emails? Update your email at: viroquafood.coop/owner-updates before September 1st to vote online at home.

Meet the Candidates

Voters can find out more about the candidates by attending our Meet the Candidates Ice Cream Social on August 29th, or by reading their full candidate statements and viewing their introductory videos on our website at: viroquafood.coop/annual-election.

Election Timeline

August 1st

Get to know each candidate and view their introductory videos and candidate statements on our website.

August 29th

Join us at the Meet the Candidates Ice Cream Social from 5-7pm.

September 5th - October 5th
Annual Election - *voting open!*

Wednesday, October 5th

Annual Owners Meeting and Board Election results finalized.

Thursday, October 6th

New Board Members Announced

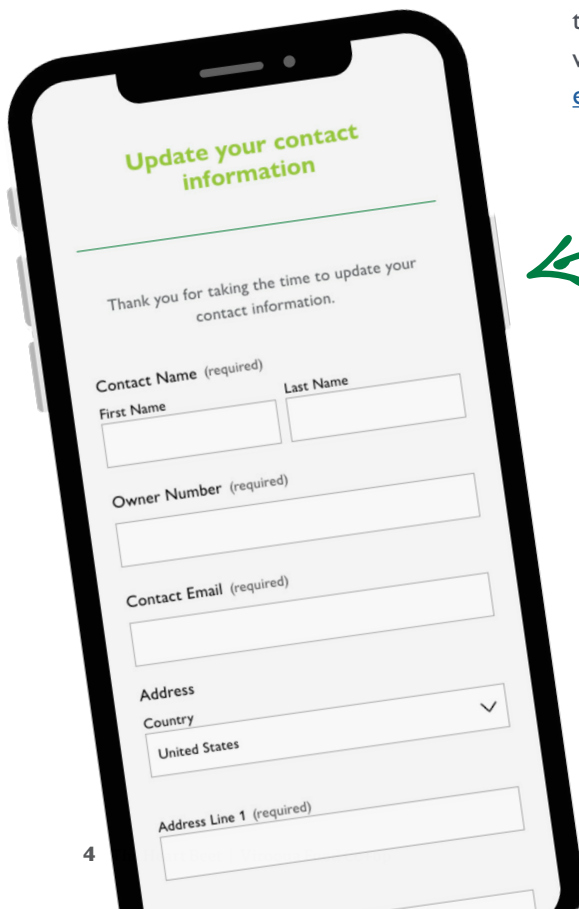
Questions

Election/Voting

Contact Jen McCoy, Marketing & Outreach Manager at (608) 637-7511 or outreach@viroquafood.coop

Board

Contact the Board of Directors through our website at: viroquafood.coop/board-of-directors



OWNERS:
Update your contact information on our website before Sept. 1st.

Connect *With the* Candidates

View each candidate's introductory statement on social media and on our website.

viroquafood.coop/annual-election

Save the Date: Join us on August 29th at the Meet the Candidates Ice Cream Social!



Rob Budworth



Ryan Cunha



Mike Link



Shana Meshbeshier



Joseph Meyer



Doug Schreder



Dustin Skelley



Steve Tippins

Local Producer:

Hidden Springs Creamery



Hidden Springs Creamery is a farmstead sheep cheese producer in the Driftless hills outside Westby, Wisconsin. The farm features 74 acres of pasture, a milking parlor, a cheese production and packaging area, an aging room, a manufactured underground aging cave, and two barns. Two herds of approximately 300 sheep each provide the milk for some of our favorite cheeses, including Driftless soft sheep cheeses, Wischago, Ocooch, and Bohemian Blue. Amy and Travis Forgues recently bought the farm and business from Brenda Jensen, the original owner and award-winning cheesemaker.

Amy and Travis both grew up on family farms in

Vermont. Amy's family ran a maple syrup farm, while Travis started on a dairy farm. In their early 20s, Amy and Travis moved to the Forgues family farm and transitioned the conventional dairy farm into an organic operation. When their local organic dairy processor sold to a larger company, Amy and Travis contacted Organic Valley in La Farge, Wisconsin, to explore becoming an Organic Valley Farm. Then CEO George Siemon asked if they could find enough neighboring farms to fill a milk truck. Amy and Travis found 60 neighbors willing to transition to the farmer's co-op, and together they started the first Vermont Organic Valley Farmers Pool. Years later, they moved to the Driftless area to work

at Organic Valley and support farmers like themselves. Travis as the head of Organic Valley Farmer Pools, and Amy working with upcoming farmers in the Young Farmer Program. When a friend told them Brenda was selling Hidden Springs Creamery, they took a look and made another big life decision. It was time to get back to the family farm. While Travis remains at Organic Valley, Amy is now full-time on the farm.

While not new to the dairy business, the Forgues are new to wholesale cheese production. As Amy works on becoming a Wisconsin-certified cheesemaker, she makes cheese under Brenda's guidance, who moved off the farm but still lives nearby to help with the transition. To add continuity, the Forgues also hired two 10-year employees of Hidden Springs Creamery, Rigo, a cheesemaker, and Jonas, a neighbor and herdsman.

The Forgue's intend to keep making the same award-winning cheeses and have a few ideas of their own. They now offer their hard cheeses in retail-ready packaging, a convenience immediately embraced by staff and customers at VFC! And they added a delicious new soft cheese flavor, Driftless Garlic and Herb.

Amy is also looking at ways to diversify and expand their business. She hopes to make ricotta from the whey (yes, please) and to find a use for the sheared wool.

When asked how things are going so far, Amy said, "It's so natural, such a good fit – we raised our kids on a family farm, then quit farming for 10 years. My kids are grown, but they all want to help. Their memories of life on the family farm draw them here, making us so happy." While others may feel overwhelmed with a new house, business, and two brand new herds of sheep, Amy and Travis Forgues feel right at home at Hidden Springs Creamery.



Garlic & Herb soft cheese



Junebug, the newest addition to the farm



Rigo, making feta on the farm



Amy Forgues with flock of sheep



Nominate in October. Vote in November. Donate all year round.

Round up in August for Living Faith Food Pantry

Every week, Living Faith Food Pantry helps 160 local households in need by distributing approximately 6,000 pounds. In addition to providing essential food items, they also offer recipes and samples to help participants learn how to use seasonal and organic produce.



Recipients based on VFC Owner votes each November. Register round-ups plus the donations in the collection boxes at each register, combined with 1% of VFC's total sales on the 2nd Wednesday of the month make up our monthly Give Where You Live total donation. Learn more about GWYL on our website: viroquafood.coop/gwyl

★ 2023 ★ Board of Directors Election

Meet the candidates Ice Cream Social



Tuesday, Aug 29th
5 - 7 pm
at the VFC



*For election and voting information view pages 4 and 5.