

September 2023

heart beet

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



Federal Farm and Food Policy Up for a Vote

Jan Rasikas, General Manager

"Now is your chance to advocate on a national level for the things we support locally."

At the Co-op, we emphasize organic and local foods and products to promote the long-term health of individuals and the environment. Owners of the VFC are united in this mission. Together we build and strengthen our local and organic food economy. The U.S. Farm Bill is integral to our mission, and now is your chance to advocate on a national level for the things we support locally.

The Farm Bill is a massive piece of legislation covering everything from farm subsidies to food safety and nutrition security. In Viroqua, many parts of this bill would directly impact our rural community, including the cost of food, environmental protections, equity in our food system, and local producers. Call Congress at 202-224-3121 or follow this link <https://grocery.coop/act-now-shape-five-years-farm-and-food-policy> to learn more about the Farm Bill, individual programs, and how to contact your legislators.

Here is an example of how some of the bills would affect our community if they were passed by Congress:

Local Farm Economy

The Local Farms and Food Act would reform the Farm Bill to better support local food economies.

Racial Equity and Food Justice

The Justice for Black Farmers Act would reform the USDA, provide debt

relief, and create a land grant program to encourage a new generation of Black farmers.

Hunger and Nutrition Security

The Opt for Health with SNAP, Close the Fruit and Vegetable Gap Act (O.H., SNAP) would significantly expand the successful Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), incentivizing low-income recipients to consume fruits and vegetables.

Organic Food And Farming

The Opportunities in Organic Act would facilitate transitioning to organic methods for farmers who wish to participate in organic's environmental and economic benefits.

Climate Action And Environment

The Agriculture Resilience Act, would set a bold vision of reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in U.S. agriculture by the year 2040 and gives farmers the tools they need to do so.

This is just a glimpse at the policies and programs up for a vote. Congress is drafting the Farm Bill now, and as a press of time, policymakers predict that a first draft could be released as soon as mid-September. Act before September 15th to make your voice heard!

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

Board Elections



Full candidate profiles, videos and Annual Owners Meeting information on our website: viroquafood.coop/annual-election

Owners Vote: September 5th - October 5th, 2023

It's election season! Contribute to the future of our Co-op by voting for our 2023 Board of Directors. This year we have two open seats up for three-year terms and have eight candidates running for election. If you missed our Meet the Candidate Ice Cream Social in August, it is important to review each candidates statements online or in-store and watch their introductory videos that are posted on our website:

viroquafood.coop/annual-election

Starting September 5th:

VFC Owners with a current email address on file receive a link via email to the online ballot. Voting opens September 5th, 2023 at Noon.

Owners may also find the link to vote on our website at: viroquafood.coop/annual-election

Paper ballots are available in the

store upon request.

Coming up:

All owners are invited to attend our in person, Annual Owners Meeting at 6pm on October 5th, 2023 at the Viroqua Food Co+op. **Please RSVP for the meal with your name and owner number by September 12th, 2023** at viroquafood.coop/annual-election.

Meet the Candidates



Rob Budworth



Ryan Cunha



Mike Link



Shana Meshbesh



Steve Tippins



Dustin Skelley



Doug Schreder



Joseph Meyer



Heidi and Julian Zepeda. The masks displayed represent different regions of Mexico.

Local Producer: Tortilleria Zepeda

If you haven't tried Tortilleria Zepeda's tortillas, you are in for a real treat. Locally made in Lone Rock, WI, with organic heirloom corn sourced from local Wisconsin farmers, Heidi and Julian Zepeda follow traditional practices to make authentic Mexican tortillas to share with customers.

When Julian Zepeda first moved from Mexico to Madison, WI, with his wife, Heidi, he enjoyed exploring new foods. Before long, he craved food from his homeland, particularly tortillas. Julian tried many kinds of tortillas from stores and Mexican restaurants and found them lacking flavor and consistency. "I didn't understand why the corn tortilla was doubled up in Mexican restaurants until I picked up my entrée, and the tortillas crumbled in

my hands," Julian said. A scientist by nature and biologist by training, Julian began to research. He soon discovered that most tortilla brands in the United States are made with widely available GMO corn. In addition, the lengthy but traditional nixtamalization process is often skipped in production, and tortillas are made instead with highly processed corn flour that is mostly carbs and lacks nutrition. He knew there was a better way and committed to learning it.

In Mexico, every neighborhood has at least one *tortillería*. Tortillas are used like we use bread in the States for everything from creating a sandwich to wiping your plate. When Julian and Heidi returned to Mexico to visit family, they began asking questions and learning from the experts, starting with Julian's grandmother.

The traditional tortilla making process called Nixtamalization has been passed down from generation to generation since pre-Hispanic times. First, the water is brought to near boiling, and removed from the heat. Then dried corn and pickling lime is added to the water and soaked overnight. The chemical reaction with the alkaline solution releases the vitamins in the corn, including niacin which makes corn easier to digest. After it is soaked, the corn is drained and ground into *masa* using a grinding stone made of volcanic rock and etched by hand. *Picador de Piedras* (craftsmen) go from town to town to carve the volcanic stone for *tortillerías* in Mexico. So Julian learned from them to cut the stone himself and became an expert *Picador de Piedras*.

Once ground, the pliable *masa* has a consistency like playdough. Then, it's fed into a hopper that feeds the tortilla maker, where the dough is gently stretched and then cut into perfect rounds. Next, the tortillas are cooked and flipped twice. They are pulled from the tortilla maker, hand stacked, and immediately vacuum-packed to preserve their freshness and extend their shelf life.



This process results in nutritious tortillas that taste like fresh corn and hold up when filled.

To source corn locally for their tortillas, Heidi, who grew up on a farm near Richland Center, WI, reached out to local farmers to find heirloom varieties of organic corn. She said, "In Mexico, corn is sourced locally. To make authentic Mexican tortillas in the States, we had to find a local source for the corn." They teamed up with Meadowlark Organics from Ridgeway, WI and Heartland Craft Grains from Lodi, WI, to source for heirloom and organic corn varieties perfect for tortilla production. This year, Keewaydin Farms in Viola, WI is also growing a heritage variety of corn just for Tortilleria Zepeda.

Corn is the base of everything in Mexico and is central to Mexican cooking. Julian and Heidi hope that you try their tortillas to experience and enjoy a taste of Mexican culture.

staff pick:

Have you ever gone to a place that reminds you of home? This is how it feels to visit Heidi and Julian. The nixtamal process is nostalgic for me. The senses and feelings are a window into our history. This all comes together when a freshly made tortilla inflates during cooking and a new tortilla is born. Corn is not only the base of the Mexican diet but also part of our traditions, culture and identity. It is exciting to see that the knowledge, flavors, colors and textures that accompanied our ancestors are still alive. The flavor and consistency of Tortilleria Zepeda tortillas are an indulgence for the stomach and the soul. Thank you, Julian and Heidi, for bringing this treasure to Wisconsin. *Sus tortillas son un apapacho para el alma y el estómago. Gracias Julian y Heidi por traer este tesoro a Wisconsin.*

Gabriela Marván, VFC Marketing





Chilaquiles Rojos

Serves 4. Total time: 45 min (active: 40 min)

- 12 corn tortillas
 - 2 tablespoons avocado oil, divided
 - 2 large Roma tomatoes, cored
 - ½ cup chopped onion
 - 1 large ancho chili, stemmed and seeded
 - 4 large garlic cloves, peeled
 - ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1 teaspoon dried oregano
 - ½ teaspoon black pepper
 - ½ cup crumbled queso fresco
 - 1 small avocado, cubed
 - Mexican crema (optional)
1. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Place stacks of six tortillas on a cutting board and use a knife to cut in six or eight wedges, then place in a large bowl. Drizzle with one tablespoon of avocado oil, toss to coat, then spread the wedges on two large baking sheets in a single layer. Bake for seven minutes, then turn with a spatula, rotate the pans and bake for

- seven minutes longer. Cool on racks.
2. While the chips bake, place the tomatoes, onion, ancho chili, garlic cloves and optional pepper flakes in a pot with one cup of water. Cover the pot and bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer for 10 minutes.
3. After simmering, strain tomato mixture, reserving the liquids. Place the tomato mixture in a blender and add one cup of the reserved liquids. Puree until smooth.
4. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, drizzle the remaining tablespoon of avocado oil. Pour the puree into the pan and add the salt, oregano and pepper. Stir in the remaining liquids, if needed, to achieve the right consistency, and scrape the bottom of the pan until the mixture thickens and darkens slightly, about five minutes.
5. Stir the baked chips into the sauce in the pan, turning to coat. Serve immediately, sprinkled with queso and avocado, and drizzled with crema, if desired.

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Calabacitas

Serves 4. Total time: 30 mins

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ½ cup diced yellow onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup small zucchini and/or yellow squash, cut in 2-inch chunks
- 1 cup corn kernels (fresh, frozen or canned)
- ½ cup diced green chilies (canned)
- 1 cup diced fresh tomatoes
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ pound queso fresco (or feta), crumbled

1. Heat the oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the onions and garlic and saute for 5 minutes until onion is soft. Add the squash, corn, green chilies and tomatoes and stir well. Cover the pot and simmer 10 minutes until squash is tender. Season with salt and pepper, top with the crumbled cheese and serve. oil and blend until smooth.

Serving Suggestion:

Add Southwest flair to a grilled chicken or fish with a size of calabacitas, serve over cooked grains or simply fold in a warm corn tortilla for a quick vegetarian meal.

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Roasted Tomato Salsa with Homemade Chips

Serves 4. Total time: 25 mins

- 4 large tomatoes, halved
- 3 large jalapeños
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 large onion, cut in 8 wedges
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 ½ teaspoons salt, divided
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 ½ teaspoons smoked paprika, divided
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, coarsely chopped
- 6 corn tortillas

1. Position the top oven rack 6 inches below the broiler, and turn broiler on to high.
2. Place vegetables on a large sheet pan with a rim and drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil. Toss to coat, then sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt. Broil for 5 minutes, remove pan from the broiler. Turn the vegetables over, and return to broil for about 5 minutes longer. When vegetables are blackened and soft, transfer the pan to a cooling rack. Once vegetables are cool enough to handle, remove stems and seeds from the jalapeños, and place the peppers in a food processor bowl. Add remaining vegetables and juices from the pan, and puree coarsely. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the cumin, a half-teaspoon smoked paprika, lime juice and cilantro.
3. To make the chips, heat the oven to 350°F. Cut each tortilla into 8 wedges, drizzle with remaining olive oil, toss to coat, then sprinkle with remaining salt and paprika and toss again. Spread on two sheet pans and bake for 12 to 15 minutes, rotating the pans halfway through. When the chips are lightly browned and crisp, cool on pans on racks. Serve chips with the salsa.



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

Round up in September for RedLou Library

RedLou Library is a nonprofit organization that provides literary opportunities for individuals living in the greater Viroqua area. They serve people of all ages from infants to the elderly and those with special needs.

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



The Viroqua Food Co+op Board of Directors

announces the

2023 Annual Owners Meeting

Wednesday, October 5th, 2023 at the Viroqua Food Co+op

Light Dinner at 6pm • Business Meeting at 6:30pm