

April 2023

heart beet

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



Welcome, Spring!

Bjorn Bergman, VFC Board of Directors



This spring, the VFC Board is focused on reviewing and updating the Ends statement as the final piece of our policy review. This statement describes the values-based benefits that our Co-op provides to the community and sets the standards to gauge our success. Starting at the Board Retreat in November, we reviewed the current Ends statement with the VFC Management team. The Board takes all the input, then updates their direction to the management team with a revised Ends statement. We will share the final results in the coming months. Stay tuned!

There is so much to look forward to in April. For me I am finalizing my vegetable garden plans, planting pepper and tomato seeds under lights in my basement, and sowing the first planting of cold hardy crops like lettuce, carrots, beets, and seed

potatoes in the cool spring soil. For new to experienced gardeners, our Co-op has everything you need. We carry a great selection of organic seeds, soil, and compost to help get your plants off on the right foot. By the end of April, our Garden Center will be filled with locally sourced vegetable, flower, and prairie plants that are ready to pop into the ground. I hope to see you at the VFC gathering supplies to make your garden a success this year.

One of my favorite parts of April is Earth Day on Saturday, April 22! This year I plan on planting some seeds in my garden with my three-year-old son. How do you celebrate Earth Day? Are you going to: enjoy a locally made brew? Break ground on this year's garden? Cook a local foods meal and invite all your friends over? Make a pledge to go plastic-free for the next month? Thankfully, all the above (and more) earth-friendly activities are supported by our community-owned Co-op that has a strong commitment to lessening our impact on planet Earth.

On behalf of the VFC Board, I wish you all a happy spring!

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



love your body!

BUY ONE, GET ONE FREE
wellness deals

April 19th - May 2nd



This April you will find savings on products you love from brands you trust in our Wellness Department. Starting April 19th, look for the orange BOGO deals signs in aisles two and three. Find even more great ways to save in our Fresh Deals and Co+op Deals flyers.

Seven Healthy Habits of Environmentally Friendly Shoppers

and how your Co-op can help!

1. Shop the Bulk Aisle

We buy in bulk so you don't have to. Our bulk bins eliminate excessive packaging and food waste by inviting you to buy as much or as little as you need. Shop Bulk Like a Pro: bring your own reusable container from home to fill. *It's as easy as: tare, fill, and go!*

2. Eat Local and in Season

Eat fresh and local produce to stay in tune with the growing seasons, support the local food shed, keep valuable dollars in our community, support local farmers, and reduce the environmental impact of transportation and food packaging. You'll never see individually wrapped broccoli heads from our local farmers on our shelves!

3. Choose Certified Organic

We prioritize certified organic products because they are grown and produced without chemical pesticides,

herbicides, or fertilizers, making them better for you and the planet. We also love that organic farming methods promote biodiversity, conserve and protect waterways and build nutrient-rich, healthy soil.

4. Eat More Plants

It's no secret that eating more plants is not only better for you, but the environment, too! In a Harvard based study, healthy plant-based diets had lower greenhouse gas emissions which used less cropland, irrigation water, and nitrogenous fertilizer than diets that were higher in unhealthy plant-based and animal-based foods.*

5. Buy Sustainably Raised Meat

The way meat is raised makes a huge difference in its overall environmental impact. The Co-op sources humanely raised meat that is good for the planet. Like grass-fed beef that uses

holistic land management practices and grazing strategies called regenerative agriculture. This ensures good soil health, clean and safe water runoff, improved biodiversity and ecosystem resiliency. It also increases carbon drawdown, which is a process of capturing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere and locking it away for decades or centuries in plants, soils, oceans, rocks, or long-lived products like cement.

6. Find Eco-Friendly Brands

Many of our products come from brands that have environmental conservation in their mission, which aligns with ours, too.

7. Bring Your Own

Bring your own bags, utensils, and containers. Refill your water bottle. Reduce, reuse, recycle!

*Datz, Todd. "Healthy plant-based diets better for the environment than less healthy plant-based diets" Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. 2022. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/healthy-plant-based-diets-better-for-the-environment-than-less-healthy-plant-based-diets/#~:text=Participants%20who%20consumed%20healthy%20plant,based%20and%20animal%2Dbased%20foods>.



A Fleet of Foxes: Embark staff enjoying the mapley goodness
Pictured L to R: Justin M., Eric W., Bree B., and Laura W.H.

Local Producer: **Embark Maple** *from B&E's Trees*

Located in the hills of Driftless Wisconsin Bree Breckel and Eric Weninger of B&E's Trees celebrate new adventures with Embark, a maple syrup-based product for endurance athletes. Embark mixes pure organic maple syrup with simple, organic, and sustainably sourced ingredients to create an all-natural concentrated energy product.

Good Energy

As a long-time athlete, who competes in endurance mountain

bike racing and multi-sport adventures, Eric Weninger had the concept for Embark on his mind for over 12 years. He couldn't stomach the commercial energy gels he took to sustain himself on backcountry bike camping adventures and instead tried taking pure maple syrup for the quick energy boost he needed. The effect was like a high-performance energy gel with the added benefit of delicious maple flavor. Through research, he discovered that maple syrup had the natural electrolytes and

minerals that he needed plus, long-lasting energy. And the idea for Embark was born.

Maple farming is an adventure in itself. The season is dependent on things like spring weather, the integrity of tubing suspended in a forest filled with squirrels, and the singular moment when boiled sap reaches the syrup stage. During the pandemic Bree and Eric found solace in their woods. When they realized more people were gravitating outdoors to find a sense of normalcy they knew

it was time to make their move. They went into development mode finally figuring out how to make, package, and distribute their energy adventure packs.

When it came to developing flavors, they sought the advice (and palettes) of local foodies, including a collaboration with Wonderstate Coffee of Viroqua, Wisconsin. The result was three tasty varieties: Salted Maple, Coffee Maple, and Elderberry Maple. Their focus on flavor, and a reusable cap, makes Embark a multi-use product that can be enjoyed straight from the pouch, mixed in water as a hydration aid, added to coffee, or used in culinary explorations in camp cooking and cocktails.

The Embark team spent much of last year handing out samples at endurance bike races all over the Midwest. "People like the flavors," Eric said, adding that "the performance is there, but people are most excited about how good it tastes!"

For Bree and Eric, everything they do comes back to the trees. When it came to naming their new product line Bree says, "It came to me while I was chopping wood. Embark! It conjures our sense of adventure while paying homage to the trees."

Environmental Stewardship

Caring for the land and having a positive impact on the environment is central to Bree and Eric's

operation. Bree states, "We live & farm off-grid, which guides our personal and business philosophy of doing more with less. We focus first on energy conservation, then production." In addition to being 1% For the Planet members, B&E's Trees is the first maple tree farm that is certified Climate Neutral - and they hope to pave the way for more maple farms to get the certification.

Their commitment to conservation does not end with their woods. Bree and Eric are also concerned with their watershed. B&E's Trees 184 acre, off-grid certified organic maple woods is located in the Timber Coulee and Coon Creek Watershed. This area had significant damage in the 2018 and 2019 floods with continued impact in more recent years. The community around the watershed continues to rebuild but also knows they have to do

something different. To that end, they formed the Coon Creek Community Watershed Council (CCWC at cooncreekwatershed.org), a non-profit community group whose mission is the conservation and improvement of soil, water, and air in the Coon Creek Watershed. As active members of the CCWC, Bree and Eric work with other community members to adopt and adapt practices to make a more resilient watershed.

To find out more about Embark Maple, Bree and Eric's adventures, community events, recipes, and more visit their website at www.bandestrees.com.



The stages of maple syrup.



VFC solar panels installed by our friends at Ethos Green Power Cooperative

Earth Friendly Food Co-op

At the VFC, Earth Day is every day. Here's how the Co-op is committed to a greener planet:

When it comes to operating an earth-friendly business, the Viroqua Food Co+op starts with the big things. From the 23 trees in our green space and storm water management strips in the parking lot, to the solar panels on the roof, the intentional choices made in our building and site design lessen our Co-op's impact on the environment every day. The solar panels alone generated 59,167 total kilowatt hours of electricity in the past year which offset CO₂ emissions from 5.3 homes' annual energy usage equivalent to about 4,718 gallons of gasoline.

Inside the store, the Co-op invested in sustainably sourced rubber floor tiles installed with no VOC adhesives. The floor tiles are easily maintained with soap and water which eliminates the use of toxic cleaning chemicals.



Solar Panels

Our solar panels reduce our energy cost up to 17% annually. We reached our return on investment in just two years.



Parking Lot

With strategically placed green spaces and asphalt strips for stormwater management, we achieve Wisconsin DNR watershed requirements for our area. Our concrete sections also eliminate continual overcoating with petroleum products.



Earth Concious Building Materials

Using responsible building materials was at the forefront when we expanded in 2017. From no VOC paint on our walls to sustainable sourced rubber floor tiles to skylights and full spectrum LED lighting, we kept our impact as minimal as possible.



We recapture the heat from our compressor room to heat 85% of the Co-op's total hot water needs. Our refrigeration system was also upgraded to use alternate refrigerants three years before Freon was banned in 2020.

VFC's bright store features natural light from two skylights and full spectrum LED lighting overhead and in every fixture in the store. The ceiling of the Co-op features a peaked roof with six Air Pears installed to recirculate rising hot air. This reduces our energy bill up to 30% annually.

On an operational level, our Co-op continues its commitment to reducing single-use plastic as we find alternatives that meet both our customers' needs and food safety regulations. Here are some examples:

In 2006 we eliminated plastic bags at the registers. We offer paper bags and containers to fill in the bulk department. In produce, customers have the option of paper and compostable plastic bags. The Deli, switched many plastic containers to PFAS-free paper for grab-and-go sandwiches and wraps. We provide paper coffee and soup cups plus, hot bar and salad bar containers. Most recently, we switched out plastic-wrapped utensils for compostable cutlery made from 100% renewable material.

From green building design to products that feature local growers and organic agriculture, the VFC makes decisions every day to promote the long-term health of the environment.



Round up in April for Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School

A joyful education for head, hands & heart. Providing Waldorf education, preschool through 8th grade.

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.



celebrate earth day

April 22nd • 9am - 12pm

9 am to 11 am

Vernon County Energy District Electric Car Show

- At the VFC Parking Lot
- Explore electric vehicles, learn about charging stations and more.

9 am to 12 pm

Meet local CSA Farmers

- Learn about Community Supported Agriculture!
- Sign up for a CSA.

Giveaway

- Enter to win an Earth Day gift basket.

Ethos Green Power Cooperative

- Learn how the VFC is powered by solar.

Plant a Container Garden

- Wisconsin Master Gardener, Arwyn Wildingway guides a class on how to plant a container garden.

Earth Friendly Co-op Tour

- Follow the signs in store to learn how you engage in earth friendly practices just by shopping the VFC.

April 1st - 30th

Earth Day BINGO Cards

- Pick up a BINGO card at the Co-op to play! Turn it in by April 30th for a chance to win a prize.