

## MEET THE COOP'S WINDOWSILL WARRIORS

July 7, 2026



CATHY AND BRADLEY STROLL USED TO BAKE QUICHES FOR THE COOP. THEN THEY BOUGHT A FARM AND GROW GREENS FOR OUR HOME GARDENS

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*By Liz Welch*

I was doing my weekly Coop shop one Wednesday morning in June with my usual list: berries, bread, pasta, salad fixings, etc. And then I walked into the produce aisle and did a double take. It had been transformed into a veritable nursery!

There were U-boats filled with plants, ranging from vegetables and herbs to perennials and annuals! I've never wanted a backyard Brooklyn garden so badly! And then I spotted the racks of herbs, and thought, "I could grow my own herb garden on a sunny windowsill..."

I picked a green basil, and a purple one, too. A small pot of thyme was likewise irresistible. The rack of vegetable plants beckoned, and I considered the cherry tomatoes, with visions of growing ingredients for my favorite summer caprese salads (just add fresh mozzarella and presto!)

As I considered more herbs—lemongrass, rosemary, and chamomile!—I wondered, where do all these beautiful plants come from?

Receiving coordinator and plant buyer, Cecelia Rembert, had the answer. Fresh Meadow Organic Farms, based in Middletown, N.Y., is one of two suppliers the Coop works with, and the one who grows all the herbs and vegetables that I had purchased that morning.



Cathy and Bradley make a delivery to the Park Slope Food Coop.

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“They started under the business name Food Gems making quiches and pies which we sold for years,” she explained. “But then they pivoted to become full-time farmers.”

Rembert buys the herbs and edible plants from Fresh Meadow Organic Farms, which also grows specialized produce, like stinging nettles, baby bok choy, and a green called “Callalou,” which is also called Caribbean spinach and sells out at the Coop every fall when it is harvested. As it turns out, I am not the only member seduced by the

green basil—last year, 300 plants were sold, according to Rembert, and this year they are on track to hit that number again.

Cathy and Bradley Stroll were first covered in the *Linewaiter's Gazette* in 2013, when they were focusing on their quiche business, based in Ozone Park, Queens. “I come from a long line of bakers,” Bradley says. “We go back five generations.”

The couple met at the Culinary Institute in Hyde Park, married, started a baking business and raised two daughters. When their youngest went to college, Cathy had an idea. “We should get a farm!” she said. “That will be our retirement!”

Bradley was up for it. “I’m never going to the beach or playing golf.” They both would much rather be harvesting potatoes. (p.s. the Coop also sells their spuds!)

“WE DON’T NEED TO GO TO ATLANTIC CITY! THIS IS OUR KIND OF GAMBLING.”

The 56-acre farm in Middletown, two hours north of NYC in Orange County, that they founded in 2009 was larger than what they originally wanted. But they fell in love with the property and surrounding community. The goal from the start was to be certified organic, and since the land had previously been used to cut hay, it was a relatively straight shot. “People don’t spray hay, so we got certified quickly,” Cathy explains. “Plus, we have been restoring the land for the last 15 years with regenerative practices.”

This spring, it paid off. “We did a soil analysis with Cornell,” Cathy says.

Bradley interjects, “I don’t have a nutritionist for me, but I have one for my soil!” “It’s a detailed test, looking for organic matter and valuable nutrients, and the ability to hold water and what is extractable from it,” Cathy explains.

The result?

“We got a 90 [percent]!” Cathy reports, elated. “They said keep doing what you are doing! This was the goal from the beginning: to farm in a way that was healthy for us and for the land.”

What had started out in 2010 as a passion project became their full-time job a decade later. “The pandemic changed a lot of things,” Bradley recalls. “It was harder to keep the business going.” After 30 years of quiche-making, they closed Food Gems in 2020 and began to focus entirely on farming.



Cathy and Bradley chat with Receiving Coordinator Jorge Jimenez.

“We had a small farm stand, but there was a lot of food uncertainty,” Bradley recalls. “People kept calling us, asking if we did a CSA! I kept saying no. And then one day I said yes.”

Those weekly boxes, available from April through November at their farm, and at farmers markets in Chappaqua and throughout Orange County, may contain blue potatoes, purple carrots, garlic scapes, lettuces, or whatever else is being harvested that week. The Coop carries many of those items from Fresh Meadow farm, as well as more bespoke vegetables, like Asian greens, purslane, and stinging nettles. (Wear gloves, Cathy says.). And of course, kale.

“My old joke was that you have to sell kale to be in the farmers market,” Bradley adds. “We grow lacinato—or dinosaur—and curly red kale.”

They make dedicated Coop deliveries every Wednesday morning, leaving the farm at 3:30 a.m. to drop off the weekly harvest by 6:30 a.m. These visits often end with a trip to visit their daughter and grandchild who live on Long Island.



PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

Cathy and Bradley at the Park Slope Food Coop.

Cathy starts all the plants from seed in a hot house that the couple built on the property. While Cathy says she is also the “queen of paperwork,” Bradley says his title is “director of continuous improvement.” As such, he spends an inordinate amount of time making sure all the machinery is running.

It was Cathy’s idea to try selling potted plants in addition to the produce.

At first, Bradley was not sure it made sense.

“Why should I sell them the plant? Then they won’t buy the vegetables?” he says. “But then an older farmer said, ‘Don’t be stupid! Someone will sell them plants. Why

not you?”

They started with basil: “Most people want green basil for tomato salads,” Cathy explains. (Guilty as charged!) “But my favorite is Holy Basil, also called Tulsi, which when dried makes an excellent tea.” A quick search also suggests it is believed to aid with stress reduction and heart and blood vessel support.

Then they added tomatoes, specifically with Coop members in mind. “I found these Dwarf Tomato plants and thought that would work for Brooklyn gardeners,” Cathy says. “They grow well in containers.”

Rembert was in agreement, and placed an order. She started buying plants for the Coop in 2020 because she had a home garden at the time and looked specifically for plants that urban gardeners could use. She buys a wide range of the potted herbs, and vegetables, including those baby tomatoes I purchased that day, with the urban gardener in mind. Window-sill and container gardening is distinctly different from what’s happening up at Fresh Meadows, where the couple currently has 20 acres planted.

Like all retirement plans, running a farm comes with its ups and downs. This past winter was particularly rough. “The weather has been insane,” Bradley says. “We had a 20-degree day in May, which hurt a lot of farmers, including us.”

But they would not trade it for anything in the world. “We don’t need to go to Atlantic City!” says Bradley. “This is our kind of gambling.”

Cathy agrees, “I love nature and being outdoors. We have the redtail hawks and the turkey vultures! Plus, farming forces you to get exercise. My brother started running marathons a few years ago. If I’m getting hot, sweaty, and exhausted, I want to dig up some potatoes!”



*Liz Welch is a writer, book collaborator, and Coop member since 2010.*