

# SAFE FOOD COMMITTEE REPORT

December 26, 2022



PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: *THIS ORGANIC LIFE—HAWTHORNE VALLEY FARM*

*By Adam Rabiner*

*This Organic Life* is a television series found on HUDSY, a community-inspired app and media platform with a mission to bring the Hudson Valley “closer together online and in-person, fostering connection in innovative, collaborative and unique ways.” Episode one, hosted by Wen-Jay Ying, owner and founder of Local Roots NYC, focuses on Hawthorne Valley Farm in Ghent, New York. In the course of Wen-Jay’s visit to the farm, she talks to Executive Director Martin Ping, Field Vegetable and CSA Manager Todd Newlin, Dairy Herd Manager Jess Brobst and Creamery Manager Jeremy Shapiro. These conversations show that Hawthorne Valley Farm similarly fosters connection, community and innovation through its biodynamic and regenerative farming, farm store, Waldorf school and educational programs.

Ping, who oversees the whole operation, provides the big picture: a farm striving to create a balance between the land, animals, plants and people—all the more challenging due to climate change and COVID. He explains the need for imagination to attempt this balance. The farm seeks to foster connections among co-workers, consumers, producers and members of the community, near and far. Like our own Food Coop, Ping sees the exchange of goods and services as being about relationships, not simply transactions. When you personally know the farmers who produce your food, the nourishment you receive from a meal exceeds its nutritional value. Ping rejects the market-based paradigms of industrial agriculture focused exclusively on balance sheets and profitability, and looks beyond them to determine the farm's return on investment. Admiring the beautiful Berkshire mountains in the distance, he points to his favorite peak, spreads his arms and pronounces that he is among the one-tenth of one percent—one of the wealthiest men on the planet.

## THE CYCLE OF LIFE ON A FARM

Todd Newlin explains how the farm makes compost, laying piles of food waste and other organic matter in covered windrows. The compost is not for direct use on any vegetable crop but for cover crops which will eventually be plowed into the earth in preparation for the subsequent vegetables. The cover crop's purpose is not simply to strengthen the soil and hold the land in place, but also to enrich the soil by adding organic matter like nitrogen. Newlin is harking back to the farming practices of the original Native American stewards of the land, who respected and replicated the natural systems, which resemble a self-feeding circle. He concedes that it is tough but worth it: when achieved, the land is more resilient and the vegetables, with roots deep in the rich soil, taste better.

Wen-Jay was fortunate to visit Jess Brobst on the very morning that Bertha gave birth to a baby bull. Jess explains that the act of giving birth turned Bertha into a cow. Before that, she was actually a heifer. Bertha, who still has her placenta attached, is part of the B line. Her baby's name will start with B to better track its lineage. The placenta, which is nutritionally rich, will be left for Bertha to eat if she desires. Jess hy-

pothesizes that some cows do this instinctually, to clean up the birth site and keep predators away. If not eaten, it will be added to the compost heap. Jess points out a lame bull lying nearby who may be put down if he cannot recover. She then points at the newborn (perhaps to be named Billie) and says these two animals are a great example of the cycle of life on a farm.

## THE HUDSON VALLEY IS A MAJOR SUPPLIER OF OUR COOP

Jeremy Shapiro demonstrates how Hawthorne Valley milks its cows, with a mechanical suction device attached to the teats on the udder. Each cow can give anywhere from five to ten gallons a day, more or less, depending on the soil and grass or particular cow. He explains that smaller dairy farmers have a hard time competing with larger operations due to the cost structures and lack of economies of scale. He observes that the dairy industry as a whole is suffering from less demand due to changing dietary habits and the belief that cows contribute disproportionately to methane production and global warming.

One can only look forward to future episodes featuring Gopal, Kinderhook and Deep Roots farms. We are fortunate that the Hudson Valley is a major supplier of our Coop.

*This Organic Life—Hawthorne Valley Farm*, coming up on Tuesday, January 10, 2023, at 7 p.m.

*Screening link:* <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: WHEN TOMATOES MET WAGNER

December 26, 2022

# WHEN TOMATOES MET WAGNER



Safe Food Committee Report

*By Adam Rabiner*

*When Tomatoes Met Wagner* takes its peculiar title from a quirky experiment to see if the organic tomatoes grown by Alexandros Gousiaris in the tiny farming village of Ilia, in central Greece, will do better when exposed to classical music rather than the traditional Greek music that usually plays for them over several speakers arrayed in the fields. Alexandros, the central character and heart of this film documentary, is a tinkerer, entrepreneur and risk taker, which can be seen in his decision to return to his home village, a place most young people seeking economic opportunities had fled, after studying mathematics at the university in Heraklio in Crete. In 1996, he founded Odysea, Ltd. to produce and export honey, and added tomato production in 1998.

Alexandros works with a cadre of elderly women, two of whom, Agathi and Katina, are his aunts. The small team of employees democratically creates and tests a new sauce and other recipes, spending up to two years adjusting herb and spice ratios. Based on feedback received from a business trip to Brussels visiting local retailers, Alexandros decides to substitute more fashionable quinoa and barley for traditional rice in a stuffed tomato “meal in a jar.” He even considers exporting his tomato sauce to England in beer bottles to appeal to its pub-loving citizens.

Though his willingness to be dexterous as a businessman shows he is not held back by the way things have always been done in the past, in the main, Alexandros is hewing to tradition. His great-grandmother and grandmother both bred bees in their backyards and his family’s roots in beekeeping go back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As an organic and small-scale artisanal producer Alexandros’s production costs are higher than conventional larger-scale operations, and he struggles for profitability. In a town of only 33 residents, half of them working for the company, there is a lot staked to Odysea’s success.

The tensions between Alexandros’s desire to live, farm, and create community in his moribund ancestral town and the economic challenges he faces are the central theme of the film. He discusses these existential questions with a colleague and answers someone who asks why he returned to the village after college: “What does education have to do with a job?” Alexandros, who likes to regale his co-workers with stories

and myths, particularly one about Christopher Columbus's journey to America and return to Spain with tomato seeds, is himself a kind of mission-driven Odysseus, beset by travails, answering to a higher calling, and trying to reassert his place at home.

The village of Ilia has seen better days. It once had two coffee shops, but they have both been long shuttered. When Alexandros arranges a French student exchange and fills the local school with visitors (while giving the village a temporary dose of energy, youth, and life) we learn that the building had been closed thirty years earlier for lack of children. His aunt Agathi, the town's former top student, now always wears a widow's black attire. One of her friends comments that she has acquired a black soul by constantly dwelling on her memories and old times. When Agathi harvests with a sickle, she looks like the Grim Reaper. One of the ladies predicts that when the remaining older generation finally dies off, their children will also flee the town, as their grandchildren had done.

This remains to be seen. On that business trip to Europe, accompanied by several of his co-workers, Alexandros was informed by one manager that there was virtually no information on the labels. Discerning consumers want to know: what town is this from, what kind of tomato is it, who are the people that made it? A born storyteller and educator, Alexandros can easily and compellingly answer those questions. And once he does, Odysea may not simply continue to win awards for taste and quality in international and domestic competitions. With any luck, this food backstory could generate the same excitement in a new generation of Greek youth as it did for the curious and enthusiastic French visitors, or the back-to-the-land younger generation of farmers coming up in the United States, and spur much needed renewal, growth and economic development. Just like those tomato seeds Columbus brought back from the New World did.

*When Tomatoes Met Wagner*: Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com>

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## INTERNATIONAL TRADE EDUCATION SQUAD (ITES) REPORT

December 26, 2022

*By Willy Naess*

The squad's mission is to keep members informed about international trade issues and how trade agreements can impact our ability to maintain our values and realize the goals of the Park Slope Food Coop, as put forward in our mission statement. Members of the ITES take responsibility to study and share with Coop members information that can lead to individual and/or collective action.

The squad meets every four to six weeks and regularly writes articles for the *Gazette*, offers committee reports at the General Meeting, maintains an online blog and organizes four public education forums per year that are open to the public.

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## SECOND LOCATION STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT

December 26, 2022



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

## UPDATE AND CALL FOR NEW MEMBERS

*By Jonathan Farber*

The Park Slope Food Coop is unique in all our lives. It is also a very different type of business in the wider economy. For nearly fifty years we have been bucking the system and showing the world how we provide good food at low prices for working members. Our model challenges the status quo. To bring about positive change in our food and farming systems you would be hard pressed to find a more effective vehicle than the Park Slope Food Coop.

The Coop is also very successful. We are emerging from the pandemic battered but not diminished. Thanks to committed members and staff and to an infusion of millions of dollars by the federal government, we are still here. In fact, once the IRS pays us for the tax credits to which we are entitled, we will have more cash than when the

pandemic started. And, with folks returning to work their shifts and the Coop once again admitting new households at a rapid clip, there is every reason to believe we will rebuild our membership and sales.

Which leads us to the Park Slope Food Coop Second Location Study Committee (SLSC) and the upcoming release of our Draft Report and Recommendations. Approved by the General Meeting in 2016, we have been busy exploring whether we should open a new store in addition to the location on Union Street. The Coop members on the committee and the general manager of the Coop think it is now time to have a robust discussion about this important topic.

The SLSC is recruiting new members. Committee members receive PSFC shift credits for their work. This is an exciting venture and an opportunity to join a diverse team studying the next expansion of the Coop. We are especially looking for members with professional experience in community organizing, public relations, real estate, planning, business management, finance and marketing. PSFC members interested in joining the committee may contact us at [secondlocation@psfc.coop](mailto:secondlocation@psfc.coop).

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## SAFE FOOD COMMITTEE REPORT

December 26, 2022



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

## PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: *OUR FOOD CHAIN*

*By Adam Rabiner*

As the parent of two high school students who came up through the public school system, I know firsthand that school lunch in New York City is not that great. In elementary school they could occasionally be coaxed by the promise of chicken nuggets or pizza Fridays. Once they hit middle school, though, they went cold turkey and either packed something from home or discovered every deli, diner, or take-out restaurant within a two-block radius of their school. Though this has been hard on the family wallet, it is difficult to blame them. The average cost of a school lunch is about \$1.30, and it is extremely hard to make a tasty meal on that tight of a budget.

Yet, somehow the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) found a way, without an infusion of cash, to transform its school lunch program, making it healthier and

tastier at the same time. While New York City public schools served roughly 90 million meals during the pandemic as of February 2021, LAUSD has served more than 100 million, even though its student population is about 600,000, just over half the size of New York City's. The documentary *Our Food Chain*, Plow to Plate's screening from earlier this month, tells the story of how they made it happen and provides a useful blueprint for other school districts seeking to make similar changes.

A lot of factors came together to turn the system around. Leaders at the top wanted to make the change, introducing salad bars, breads and pastries made with whole grain flour, more fresh fruits and vegetables and fewer processed foods. But it was also necessary to get buy-in from the bottom. Teachers and even principals were enlisted to teach about healthy eating habits. Parents were also involved in the conversations around health and nutrition.

KIDS OF ALL AGES WHO PLANTED, TENDED, WATERED AND THEN HARVESTED THEIR OWN PRODUCE REALLY LIKED EATING IT.

Crucially, students were brought in, for example, through school gardens. Kids of all ages who planted, tended, watered and then harvested their own produce really liked eating it. They also liked salad bars that provided lots of à la carte choices or dishes that were familiar to many of them, like rice and beans or other Latino foods. Nutrition was incorporated into the language arts and history curricula, and some high schools instituted preprofessional culinary education courses and formed teams to compete against one another in a "Cooking up Change" challenge to create a typical school lunch. The winners of one of these competitions even had their recipes recreated at a UCLA cafeteria and served to students there.

LAUSD also partnered with local farmers and other businesses like packing houses, warehouses, manufacturing and distribution centers. One farmer, Bob Knight of Old Grove Orange, whose oranges were too small to be commercially viable, was a per-

fect fit for the district because students liked the smaller and sweeter oranges, and there were more of them by weight to distribute to the schools. These partnerships with suppliers and companies involved with product development, equipment and packaging eventually led the district to source more than 50 percent of its ingredients locally, benefitting not just the students but also the local economy. It also resulted in typical unappealing and unaesthetic school food being transformed into meals that looked like those one might find in any local supermarket, healthy but appetizing.

The results of all these changes were broader access to healthier food for students, parents and communities; a decline in obesity and hunger; improved attention, energy levels and academic performance; and a lot less food waste.

Here in New York City, Mayor Eric Adams is a big advocate for healthy foods. In 2016, he woke up blind one morning and learned from his doctor that he had diabetes. He made some radical changes to his diet by committing to a healthy, plant-based diet and was able to reverse the diagnosis. In September, he hired Rachel Ray and a small group of other celebrity chefs—known as the Chefs Council—to develop, with input from students and parents, more than 100 better-tasting vegan school lunches.

In soliciting input from all the stakeholders involved and testing the results in the five boroughs, it appears that the LA School district's inclusive model, demonstrated in *Our Food Chain*, is providing some useful guidance to New York City. Hopefully the city's Vegan Fridays, which debuted with bagged chips and burritos with non-vegan cheese, has a tastier future in store.

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## AGENDA COMMITTEE REPORT

December 26, 2022

*By Kate Spota*

The Agenda Committee compiles and finalizes General Meeting agendas using items submitted by members. A list of the items scheduled by the Committee in 2022 so far is below. The committee makes every effort to place items on the GM agenda in the order in which they are received. An item may be placed ahead of those submitted earlier if the item requires more immediate attention or its timely consideration at the GM is beneficial to the efficient running of the Coop, e.g., election of members to Coop committees. Read a complete discussion of the Agenda Committee's guidelines.

If you have an idea, a suggestion or a plan that you believe would make the Coop a better place, please submit an agenda item to the Agenda Committee! Feel free to download the GM Agenda Item Submission Form (PDF).

## **AGENDA ITEMS IN 2022**

### **January**

- Committee Requirements—Committee Oversight Committee

### **February**

- Election: Hearing Administration Committee
- Discussion: Allow one member of a two-adult member household with school age children to leave membership

### **March**

- Election: Interim Agenda Committee
- Election: Dispute Resolution Committee
- Presentation of candidates for the Board of Directors

### **April**

- Election: Interim Agenda Committee
- Election: Dispute Resolution Committee
- Committee Oversight Committee presentation

## **May**

- Election: Annual Revolving Loan Committee
- Discussion: Preparing for the return of squad leaders

## **June**

- Proposal: Renewing the services of the auditor
- Election: Officers of the Corporation—President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary

## **July**

- Election: Committee Oversight Committee
- Discussion: Current requirement to wear a mask

## **August**

- Collecting member input on GM agenda
- Returning childcare for member workers and shoppers

## **September**

- Reinstate Joe Holtz as GM/Treasurer

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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: RECIPE FOR CHANGE—AMPLIFYING BLACK WOMEN

December 26, 2022



Safe Food Committee Report

By Adam Rabiner

Typically *Plow to Plate* curated films reflect our committee's name and deal in one way or another with food safety. In last month's film, *The Pollinators*, one had to ask, how safe are the bees? Other times we may question, how safe is this ear of corn, or on a larger scale, how safe is our planet really?

This month's selection is also about safety, but in a different sense. In *Recipe for Change: Amplifying Black Women* we join three distinguished groups of influential Black women at separate dinner tables with different hosts eating delicious meals prepared by three distinct chefs. However, the conversation starters are uniform, and they prompt incredibly candid, honest, and at times painful discussions. The ease the guests feel in one another's company is palpable. I was reminded how good food and great company among friends provides comfort. While the conversations are incredibly serious, laughter and joy abound.

Mary J. Blige hosts Sara Jakes Roberts, Winnie Harlow, Chloe Bailey, Lynn Whitfield, and Roxane Gay. At another table, Saweetie is hostess to Kelis Rogers, Kelly Rowland, Angelica Ross, Hallease Narvaez, Elaine Welteroth, and Keisha Lance Bottoms. Finally, Tabitha Brown is mistress of ceremonies with Loni Love, Jackie Aina, Yaya DaCosta, Renee Montgomery, and Danielle Young. Everything about these meals is elegant, as if set for a fancy wedding or baby-shower. They are outdoors, on the rooftops of tall skyscrapers, at tables decorated with beautiful floral arrangements. The theme of each meal is "brunch at night." The women are dressed to the nines and in high spirits.

Before the women begin to share their stories, they bless the tables. After some delectable appetizers I cannot adequately describe due to the *Gazette's* article word limits, each host hands out scrolls with the first question, "Tell me you're Black without telling me you're Black." This prompt elicits a collective "ooooohhh" as those sitting around the table reveal a look or mannerism or expression such as "God is good," "We're living in the last days," "That's so real," that is met with recognition by the others. One guest strokes her braids and announces, "This is my hair, I bought it" to peals of laughter.

Scroll two asks, "What is your first reaction when you hear the phrase, 'strong Black woman?'" After an initial silence, the thoughtful and earnest remarks concern the pressure inflicted by this stereotype. "We don't get the luxury of being weak" was a common theme, "we are all strong." This expression was viewed as dismissive, a neg-

ative stigma making it sound like “I don’t need you.” While the consensus was that “It’s in our blood, we are strong, we have to be,” yet the feeling also was that Black women, like everyone else, also need at times to be frail and vulnerable and treated as individuals, to be weak, held, have others have their backs. “Don’t call me strong and don’t call me Black. Call me pretty, fulfilled, aspirational, inspirational.” In other words, the trope is a compliment, “but it can break you, it takes a toll. You never hear the expression, “‘strong, white, woman’... ‘strong Asian woman’ you don’t hear it.”

Other prompts included “How much history about Black women did you learn in school?”; “What is a look or saying that your mom used to give you to tell you to get yourself together?”; “How does the media shape your perception of Black Women?”; “What does showing up for Black women look like in 2022?”; “What were you taught that you need to unlearn about Black women?” There are more. “Tell us about your experiences with colorism, texturism, and featurism throughout your life”; “What has your experience been when it comes to mental health support?”; “How has your mother shaped you on how you show love?”; “How has code-switching affected you in your life?”; and finally, “Black women are often imitated. What’s your favorite thing about being a Black woman?”

These are all excellent questions, and the thoughtful and earnest answers are fascinating. After dessert the guests, and even the production crew, were asked to write down on a piece of paper an affirmation which was collected and made into a quilt. *Recipe for Change: Amplifying Black Women* is a reminder of why food need not always be a danger or warning but can also be a cause for celebration.

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*Recipe for Change*: Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>