

WHAT'S IN YOUR CART?

November 15, 2021



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

MANY MUSHROOMS AND TEA FOR GODDESSES

By Zoe Singer

If you've ever enjoyed working a check-out shift at PSFC you know the fascination of

seeing what other shoppers choose, from produce you've never tasted to chocolate bars and yogurts you might not have known were worth the splurge. As your intrepid reporter, I wandered the aisles of the Coop asking members **"What's in your cart?"**

On an autumnal weekday afternoon Coop members' carts seemed especially abundant and idiosyncratic. I talked to folks buying everything from long knobby green bitter melons to spiky round pink rambutans, multiple mesh bags filled with exotic fresh mushrooms, and a garden's worth of dried flower blossoms. Here's some of what I learned by asking members about their shops.



Bitter melon, umeboshi paste, and oyster mushrooms.



Jonathan Bines, bitter melon and rambutan buyer.

Member Jon Bines had some eye-catching bitter melons and rambutan in his cart. Why? His high school-aged son asked him to get something unusual! (You can learn more about these unusual fresh gourds [here](#).) I caught up with Jon's son Luca via email and learned that he likes to cut the bitter melons lengthwise, scoop out the seeds and pulp with a spoon, and cut them into half-moon slices, then stir-fry them with crumbled tofu, eggs, soy sauce, salt, and *katsuobushi* (bonito flakes). "It's just really good," he assured me, "and it's fun to eat something that's both so bitter and so mild." Also in Jon's cart, *umeboshi* plum paste, which is a puree of pickled, very salty Japanese plums. The pink paste, which was on the endcap near the fresh chicken case, is delicious on rice and has many health benefits. Jon and his family roll it into simple vegetarian sushi.



Satya Tisman.

I stopped member Satya Tisman near the bulk tea because her shopping list was so long, and her cart resembled a big sachet of potpourri.

Satya Tisman's shopping list.

What for? A goddess energy women's retreat tapping into pagan traditions and sisterhood, to be held outside on Halloween weekend. Satya was preparing for the event with her friend Stephanie, a private chef who had planned a Middle Eastern-inspired menu of vegetarian kabocha squash and chickpea tagine, basmati rice, *chermoula* (green sauce), harissa (hot pepper sauce) with preserved lemon, and minted yogurt. The many dried flowers, teas, and spices were destined for three libations: a warm mocktail based on tulsi (holy basil) tea with honey, lemon, and cardamom; a cooler of pomegranate juice and ginger kombucha muddled with rosemary and pink peppercorns (a riff on this cranberry version); and a beautiful concoction that Stephanie described as a "feminine herbal tea emphasizing the lushness of flowers," with rose petals, rose buds, rosehips, and chamomile.



Dried flowers, teas, and spices.

Meanwhile, members Chris Esposito and Leah Schwartz were all in on mushrooms. They grow mushrooms at home and were buying big oyster mushrooms destined for a delicious-sounding frittata as well as shiitake mushrooms to make into vegan bacon—and they kindly shared both recipes below.

These days, when we don't break bread with others as much as we used to due to the

pandemic, the sharing of ingredient tips and recipes feels especially meaningful. During a season when we traditionally celebrate the harvest and give thanks, asking fellow shoppers about what's in their carts reminds me how lucky we are to access beautiful food in a cooperative community.



PHOTO BY ZOE SINGER

Chris Esposito with his oyster mushrooms at checkout.

VEGAN SHIITAKE BACON

Serve these crispy, chewy, savory mushroom slices as you might serve bacon—as a side or topping.

Makes about 1 ½ cups

- 1 ½ tablespoons high heat vegetable oil, such as coconut
- 2 cups sliced shiitake mushroom caps
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup or to taste
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika or to taste
- ½ teaspoon salt or to taste
- ½ teaspoon liquid smoke (optional)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. In a 10–12 inch, oven-safe pan over medium-high heat, warm the oil. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, toss the shiitake with the remaining ingredients. Scrape the seasoned mushrooms into the pan and sauté until tender, about 5 minutes. Transfer the pan to the oven and roast, stirring every 5 minutes, until the mushrooms are crispy, 15–20 minutes.

MUSHROOM-LOVER'S FRITTATA



PHOTO BY CHRIS ESPOSITO

Mushroom frittata.

Resembling a baked omelette or crustless quiche, frittata is a savory egg dish you can enjoy at any temperature and any time of day. Chris and Leah like to use a variety of mushrooms.

Serves 2

- 1 ½ tablespoons unsalted butter

- 1 small shallot, diced
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 6 ounces fresh mushroom, such as shiitake or oyster, cleaned and sliced
- 2-4 farm eggs, beaten with salt and pepper to taste
- 1 ½ ounces grated cheese (Chris suggests sharp cheddar; Leah suggests goat gouda)

Preheat the broiler. In an 8-10 inch oven-safe pan over medium-high heat, melt the butter then add the shallot and a pinch of salt and sauté until softened, 2-3 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until they have begun to brown, 5-7 more minutes. Pour in the eggs, tilting the pan to distribute evenly. Turn off the stove and sprinkle on the grated cheese. Transfer the pan to the broiler and broil until the cheese has melted and the egg mixture has begun to puff and brown, approximately 4 minutes. Watch closely to avoid burning.

THE VIEW FROM HEPWORTH FARMS

November 15, 2021



Nearly end-of-season cherry tomatoes (and some heirloom tomatoes) from Hepworth Farms for sale on the shopping floor at PSFC.

COOP PROVIDERS REFLECT ON A RAPIDLY CHANGING MARKET

By Frank Haberle

We are just a few years away from the 50th anniversary of the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC). For almost as many years, the Coop has relied on Hepworth Farms, a 500-acre Hudson Valley agricultural farm that stood with us for decades, and continues today as our largest single farm partner. Through times of prosperity and economic downturn—and through climate crises like Superstorm Sandy and recent flooding—Hepworth Farms and PSFC have worked together to ensure that fresh, organic produce at affordable prices remains a privilege available to PSFC’s working members. In planning their growing season each year, Hepworth Farms’ “tell-us-what-you-want-and-we’ll-grow-it-for-you” relationship with PSFC has ensured that an amazing assortment of fresh tomatoes, zucchinis, lettuce and other produce—grown local-

ly, organically, and lovingly—can be served to our families on our dinner tables, in some cases on the same day they were picked from the vine.



Stacks of Honeycrisp apples from Hepworth Farms, in the walk-in at the PSFC.

In the past 18 months, this balanced, mutually supportive partnership has been tested by the onset of the COVID-19 crisis which, for the first time in our history, severely limited our members' access to our shopping aisles and decreased demand for fresh

products. The same limitations were felt on the supply side, by every farm and business that brings products into PSFC. For Hepworth Farms, the challenges of the 18-month slowdown demanded that they quickly pivot to meet changing needs, supply shortages and a more limited market at PSFC and elsewhere, while also facing the urgent need to protect the health and safety of their workers. Much like PSFC, which is still struggling to get our members back in the habit of shopping in our aisles, Hepworth Farms faces a new business landscape that has shifted considerably. They have adapted to meet changing trends in the organic food market, the supply chain, the workforce, and the economy. However, like every other part of the food chain, they face a shifting market and an uncertain future.



Six 1/2-bushel boxes of Devoe Pears and one case of Cape Gooseberries, all from Hepworth Farms, in a walk-in at the PSFC.

COVID has taken a toll on both PSFC and Hepworth Farms, challenging both organizations to shift and adapt. “For years, PSFC has been a huge success,” Gail Hepworth, one of three co-operators of Hepworth Farms (along with Gerry Greco and Gail’s twin sister, Amy), observed. “Then, suddenly, the model was disrupted. The impact of COVID-19 was felt very deeply. Suddenly PSFC wasn’t able to cycle its members in like it used to. There were long lines and people didn’t want to wait in lines, and the member work shifts were suspended. Suddenly people were changing their habits and shopping elsewhere. PSFC needs to come back. It may need to make changes to be more appealing to a shifting market, but PSFC needs to come back and, again, serve as a robust success model for the whole world.”

A RELENTLESS COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES

A seventh-generation farm that was first established in Milton, New York in 1818, Hepworth Farms transitioned in 1982 from traditional farming to dechemicalization and wholly-organic farming, under Amy’s guidance. Hepworth Farm’s methods are constantly evolving to ensure that the best practices in organic and sustainable farming are applied in each step of the food cycle. “For 40 years we have been building our understanding of what being a sustainable farm really means,” Amy said. “We’ve always been committed to a whole-farm-alive systems approach. This has only become more intensified in recent years with our commitment to biological farming [the creation of a sustainable soil system]. Today, biological agriculture teaches us to introduce microbes to improve the soil. It’s a steady, time intensive process to influence biology. It’s a complex dynamic that you have to navigate in the dark. You can’t see what’s going on in the soil beneath each plant, but you can see it in the health of the plant itself. Biological farming is going to take another decade to fully understand. For example, we’re now taking steps to introduce parasitic neomodes [tiny worms into our soil that attack beetles that harm produce. We’re introducing things into the soil to make it more balanced.”

“THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP MAY NEED TO MAKE CHANGES TO BE MORE APPEALING TO A SHIFTING MARKET, BUT IT NEEDS TO COME BACK AND, AGAIN, SERVE AS A ROBUST SUCCESS MODEL FOR THE WHOLE WORLD.”

As Amy put it, “This work is about the acknowledgement and respect of the life force and the interconnected reality of life itself.” Gail adds that “Amy’s practices are putting things into the soil that prevent disease, that create healthy soils and build protective colonies around roots that allow our plants to be as healthy as they can be. Our practices keep evolving alongside the latest science, so that we can deliver the healthiest produce while taking care of and nurturing the soil. It’s more expensive and time intensive to grow plants this way, but it’s the right thing to do. We are committed to continuing the mission of organic farming: better soil means better food, which means healthier people. We still have a lot to learn about the evolving biology of farming this way. The more we learn about the soil the more we realize we don’t yet know.”



Devoe and Asian pears for sale at the PSFC.

NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Fewer members shopping at PSFC has meant lower revenues for the Coop and for Hepworth Farms alike. Hepworth Farms has had to face a range of challenges in order to survive the COVID-19 crisis, and now faces numerous questions on how to move forward in a new market and a changed world. For the first time in its history Hepworth Farms faced a labor shortage, in part reflecting—as Gail pointed out—the general devaluing of work in our society. “Through this pandemic, people should have become more aware of the amazing work that goes into their food systems, and the essential role that farm workers play in their food systems. But farm workers are still extremely undervalued in our society. As farmers we are now paying a living wage to our workers, but people still can’t live decently and fully independently on these wages. There’s been a big culture shift in the last couple of years where real work, the practice of working hard, is being undervalued. People should be more aware of

where their food comes from and they should buy their food from places where workers are valued and supported. The relationship is important but people don't seem to value it."

Amy adds that the people who do come to work at Hepworth Farms—who can number up to 200 during the busiest seasons—quickly learn to appreciate the work and the role it plays in others' well-being. "The best part of my day is getting to work with the beautiful people who work here. I am so thankful for them. We all share a collective mindset of doing good work for others. The workers here know that they are really a part of something special. I think it's really important for people to understand where their food comes from, and it's just as important for them to understand that the people who plant, grow, pick, pack, and deliver their food love doing this work for them."

"ALL FARMERS ARE TRYING TO SURVIVE. WHEN YOU'RE IN SURVIVAL MODE, OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT DO FUNNY THINGS. BUT WE'RE NOT COMPROMISING WHEN IT COMES TO AMY'S PRACTICES."

The economics of an independent farm are always challenging, especially during a pandemic. Amy said, "[PSFC General Coordinator] Joe Holtz once told me that 'from seed to sale, you are the creditors of the food system. You bring us the food, we sell it, and then we pay you.' We don't get paid until food is in the consumer's stomach. From seed to sale, we are creditors of food system." Added Gail, "We begin working on producing the food in March. We plan what we're planting and when. Then we plant the seeds. Then we grow the product, pick it, and deliver it. But we don't get paid until 30 to 60 days after someone has eaten it."

Inflation and supply chain concerns that have impacted all levels of the economy have hit family-run farms like Hepworth Farms especially hard. "The cartons we needed for our cherry tomatoes, we could not get in time to sell them," Gail said, "When we need parts for a tractor that breaks down, it takes longer to find them." Inflation is

creeping up, without changing the prices the farm can charge for its products. “Everything we have to purchase,” Gail adds, “is more expensive. But the price of food we sell does not match this rise. The increased pricing is still not filtering back to farmers.”

Amy added that “the worst thing this year was when we couldn’t afford to glean for the food bank—everything became so financially stressful. We have felt so good about harvesting and giving food away in the past. We have to do what we can, but this was the most internally disruptive thing that happened on the farm this year.”

“Right now, all farmers are trying to survive,” Gail said. “When you’re in survival mode other people might do funny things. But we’re not compromising when it comes to Amy’s practices, and our commitment to producing the healthiest produce possible. Three years ago we thought this was sustainable. But sustainability is expensive.”



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

REFORGING CONNECTIONS

As the Coop continues its efforts to bounce back fully and resume our success as a model of cooperative partnerships, local farmers are eager to see members recommit to shopping and working here. “The great thing about our relationship with PSFC,” Gail said, “has always been that people had the opportunity to know who their farmers are, and where their food has come from. This relationship has been such an anchor for our farm, but the pandemic has separated us from you, and you from us. We want to partner with you, to reconnect with your mission, to have you reconnect with our mission. Be connected to our mission—you have a profile population that’s perfect. We need to reestablish relationship. Amy has taken our farm through many generations of changes. Tell us what you want us to grow and we’ll grow it!”

To learn more about Hepworth Farms and the work Gail and Amy Hepworth are doing in the Hudson Valley, please visit www.hepworthfarms.com.

LOOKING BACK TO 2016

November 15, 2021



PHOTO BY DEBORAH TINT

By Christopher Cox

With some founding members nearing their 50th anniversary at the Coop, it may seem odd to interview the cohort that joined in November 2016—just five years ago. For the five members who agreed to talk to the *Linewaiters' Gazette* for this article, it's been an eventful half decade, stretching from an orientation that took place in the aftershocks of Donald Trump's election to the complete upending of the cooperative

model during the pandemic.

Ryan Gellis said that, until member labor was suspended in the spring of 2020, he was an enthusiastic member of the “parm squad.” He took pride in his ability to lift and expertly subdivide the 80-pound wheels of cheese. “There’s a special technique for cutting them,” he said. “It’s rare to be able to say this about your not-full-time job, but I feel like I learned a craft on the job at the Coop.” He was eager to return to his parmesan-processing duties, but that workslot has been eliminated, at least for now.

“I WAS PRETTY DEPRESSED AFTER TRUMP GOT ELECTED, BUT IT MADE ME APPRECIATE MORE OF THE COMMUNITY SIDE OF THE COOP. WHEN PEOPLE ARE VERY ORGANIZED, THEY CAN DO A LOT OF AMAZING THINGS.”

Kate Gyllenhaal joined the Coop after she moved to Park Slope from Manhattan five years ago. She still remembers the demoralizing feeling of shopping in her old neighborhood: “I would walk into a store and look at the produce, and it wasn’t very good and I had to buy it for inflated prices. I would just get angry.” She knew she wanted to join as soon as she moved to Brooklyn—her brother was already a member—but her husband was more skeptical. That changed quickly, however, once they visited the shopping floor. “He just walked by the cheeses and he says, ‘Okay, that’s it. I’m in.’”



ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

Both Gyllenhaal and another five-year member, Paul Jarrett, praised the member-labor system for one particular benefit: in Gyllenhaal's words, "I enjoy it because it's so different from the rest of my life." Or, as Jarrett put it, "You can turn off a part of your brain and turn on a different part of your brain." Jarrett joined with his wife shortly after moving to Park Slope and talking to some neighbors who were members. It wasn't quite love at first orientation, though. "There seemed like there were a lot of rules, and there were people who were really interested in the rules. There definitely was a culture that I was not quite sure I fully understood," he said.

The experience of orientation—and that avalanche of rules—was a touchstone for several of the members. Theodore Theoharis, however, wasn't fazed. He joined the Coop after he got married since his wife was already a member. "The nature of the Coop was known to me," he says. He did feel some sympathy for the younger attendees at orientation, though: They were clearly overwhelmed by what they were getting into. "Maybe New York City was a new environment to them," he said. "Joining the Coop

was a layer on top of that strangeness.” Theoharis had spent most of his career in retail, so there was little in the building—from the workings of the baler to the squawk of the intercom—that surprised him.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

“IT’S RARE TO BE ABLE TO SAY THIS ABOUT YOUR NOT-FULL-TIME JOB, BUT I FEEL LIKE I LEARNED A CRAFT ON THE JOB AT THE COOP.”

Asked to recall a memorable moment from the past five years, several members talked about the regular satisfactions provided by working a shift and, maybe, bumping into an old friend on the shopping floor. But Jarrett had a more dramatic example at the ready. He was in the Coop when Joe Biden was declared the winner of the 2020 presidential election. “My wife texted me and then everyone else around us was getting the same messages and people were hooting and hollering,” he said. It felt like a

fitting place to mark the end of the Donald Trump presidency.



M. CARSON '21

ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

Others mentioned Trump's election as a significant part of their decision to join the Coop. Matt Cordeiro said that he was drawn to the cooperative model from the beginning, but that November, the work being done at the Coop took on a new significance for him. "I was pretty depressed after Trump got elected," he said, "but it made me appreciate more of the community side of the Coop, how it's persevered. When peo-

ple are very organized, they can do a lot of really amazing things.” He joined when he and his girlfriend moved in together. Now they are planning a wedding for next June.

The future of the Coop itself is perhaps less secure. Will full member labor ever return? How long will supply-chain woes last? Can cooperative structures survive in this new reality? Nonetheless, all the members interviewed here thought that, barring something unforeseen—and who knows what another five years might hold—they’d still be members when their tenth anniversary arrived.

COOP RESPONDS TO STORE CREDIT INQUIRY

November 15, 2021

DEAR DAVID,

In response to the question, “Why do store credits expire?” in the 10/18/21 issue:

Thanks for your question. You’re not the first person to ask it so I’m happy to have the opportunity to answer this question for you and other Coop members.

One of the ways the Coop keeps down its prices is by not creating extra work for paid staff. Refund slips are the quickest and easiest (and therefore cheapest way) for the Coop to give refunds. The members bear the responsibility of redeeming the slips within 30 days, which is why members are advised to use them the same day they are issued.

If the refunds never expired, and the member did not redeem the store credit, eventually the money would have to be forwarded to the NY Escheat Fund. Given the volume of refunds issued, and the time involved in sending money to the NY Escheat Fund, issuing refunds without an expiration date would end up creating a *massive amount* of

work, much of which would need to be performed by a paid staff member.

In Cooperation,

Terry Meyers

Bookkeeping Coordinator