

SKYHILL: A LOVE STORY

April 12, 2023



Member Submission By Louise Johnson

My love affair with laying hens began after I retired from teaching in Brooklyn and purchased 15 acres on a hilltop plateau an hour east of Albany. I lived alone, surrounded only by sky and distant trees. My goal was to model food as a key solution to pollution, chronic disease and climate change. And to model this by holding events and inviting PSFC members, etc., to visit this piece of nature I quickly named Skyhill. This was 2004.

I was a member of PSFC's Environmental Committee and became its upstate organizer, forming a loose coalition of upstate food coops around lobbying (we called it "informing") about problems with GM/GE/GMO food. PSFC joined with Albany's Honest Weight Coop to create NYSAGE (New York State Against Genetic Engineering), and for almost three years we worked with farmers, statewide coop members and some scientists, to repeatedly inform in every office in the state legislature about our three bills. Members of PSFC trekked to Albany for two lobby days and other events. The six

public events and resulting newspaper articles added to our outreach about GMOs. Three bills were passed in the assembly only. The Senate was a piece of work.

Our expectation was to inform, which we achieved. I learned enough about the corrupt and dysfunctional New York legislature and about the art of lobbying to realize why folks speak of the need for revolutions. That was 2007.

THIS IS AN APPEAL: URBAN RETURN-MIGRATION TO RURAL FARMLAND, THE ROOTS OF ALL AMERICANS, IS NEEDED TO PROTECT OUR WATER, SOIL, AIR, AND FOOD.

I built a barn and bought 25 laying hens which became over 300 hens in a few years. Hatching eggs led to 26 roosters in one season, and to 14 years of unique descendants of inter-bred heritage breeds. I continue to be stunned daily by the diverse beauty and “chickenalities” I live among.

I want to relate stories of chicken prowess, intelligence, problem-solving, social organization, playfulness, sharing and caring. My very out-of-date website still has a few photos. I also want to stay at Skyhill forever. But, as I approach 80 years, I have run out of stamina and am no longer able to lift and haul and run eggs to the Albany coop. I plan to take only a few hens and some fertile eggs to Maine where my daughter has moved and awaits me.



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



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I leave behind a legacy of two separate egg farms, with five new, unique and spacious chicken abodes (one, is also a greenhouse), a lovely stream and waterfall, more than a hundred new fruit and nut trees and shrubs, a large raised-bed garden, acres of woodland, solar panels, two passive solar homes and perhaps lots of hens in need of someone who will also love chickens.

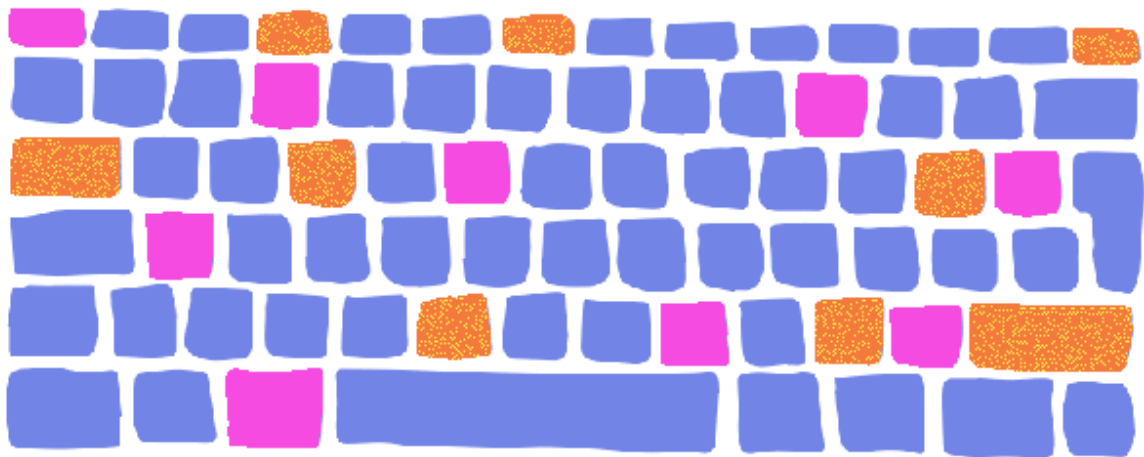
Both rural properties were transformed from wannabe suburban houses with ridicu-

lously huge lawns to model communities of chickens moving freely among extensive climate victory gardens. This is an appeal: urban return-migration to rural farmland, the roots of all Americans, is needed to protect our water, soil, air, and food. Meaningful and fun work for retirees, and all others.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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INVITATION TO JOIN “CIVIC SWEEP” ON EARTH DAY, APRIL 22

Dear Coop members:

Ever wish you could do something about unsightly graffiti on lampposts, stop lights and mailboxes? Well, now you can actually paint out the offending graffiti by joining

the Park Slope Civic Council's "Civic Sweep," to be held on Earth Day, April 22. Join us any time between 10:00 and 2:00 pm on the sidewalk on Fifth Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets (near the Old Stone House), and you'll be provided with cans, brushes, rags, and latex paint in appropriate colors to fan out across Park Slope to beautify the neighborhood. You can also pick up and bag litter out of tree beds and other spots the city doesn't clean. For more info on the Sweep and other sustainability initiatives (including how to join Park Slope's oldest and most prominent civic association for only \$40 a year!), google "Park Slope Civic Council" or go to www.parkslopeciviccouncil.org.

Hope to see you there!

*Timothy Gilles, President
Park Slope Civic Council*

MARIJUANA AT THE COOP

To the Editor:

Years ago, there was a big debate in the Coop: Do we want to carry beer? The members voted and now the Coop carries a truly amazing variety of beer, from crisp IPAs to malty stouts. The time has now come for another vote: Do we want to carry marijuana?

A walk down almost any street in Brooklyn now has stores that sell marijuana. The corner bodega sells it under the counter, and new places in Park Slope (like The Smokey Joint and Nice Guys DC), sell it in splashier digs. At the current time, the Coop does carry CBD products, so this is not a move that is totally off-base.

One of the Coop's suppliers of apples and other produce is Hepworth Farms. Last

week there was an article in the *New York Times* about how they are now cultivating marijuana as one of their products. I believe we should continue to support our local farmers—and to make Hepworth Farms Weed available to our members. We can even get them to specifically name strains: Cooperation Indica, Work Shift Sativa, or maybe a nice Joe Holtz Hybrid.

As the market for legal weed expands, it would be good to know that the Park Slope Food Coop's selection is organically grown and locally sourced. What do you think?

David Meltzer

MASKING OPTIONAL

To the Editor:

I was dismayed to receive notice that masking will be optional [at the Coop] as of March 20, with no consideration for those impacted. There are Coop members who have pre-existing conditions and/or who are vulnerable, and while they represent the minority of members, we are obligated to look out for their safety first, despite the vote. One reasonable solution is to set aside two or three weekday shopping/workshift slots that are fully masked. The Coop rose to the occasion when Covid hit, and I urge leadership to keep in mind that many members with limited income and resources rely on the Coop, and we should be able to make the small effort to wear a mask so that they may continue to shop and work without fear of being harmed.

Thank you.

Gary Winter

THE PUSH BEHIND THE COOP'S SWANKY NEW STREET CARTS

April 12, 2023



By Anita Bushell

Got a lot of groceries to cart home? You're in luck: The Coop has a fleet of bigger, shinier grey beasts to aid the journey back to your doorstep. The new models have a smoother glide and don't make as much noise on the sidewalk as the older street carts, but they have their downsides. Coop member Tom Paul, who does the walker shift, observes: "They aren't deep enough to carry heavier loads of grocery bags but they are lighter and have less rattle than the older, heavier carts."

We spoke with General Manager Joe Holtz, who oversees the cart supply at the Coop, about the need for new models, the replacement process and his favorite features of the new fleet. We also got to the bottom of a rumored "national cart shortage."

Let's start with terminology. What are the outdoor carts called?

The carts you are referring to are what we call street carts or walker carts or simply outdoor carts. The manufacturer of the old carts called them "Carry Out Carts." The company we're using now calls them "Grocery Bagger Carts."

How would you describe your role in overseeing our cart supply?

I have been ordering outdoor carts since we started using them in the early 2000's. Before I order new carts, I consult with other staff, in particular membership coordinators, as to whether the number of carts that we have are insufficient for the Coop's needs.

THEY HANDLE GREAT. THEY OPERATE MORE LIKE A SPORTS CAR. I HAVE NEVER DRIVEN A SPORTS CAR.

What was the problem with the old carts?

There was no problem with the old carts. The old carts were made by Technibilt, which was bought by the German company, Wanzl, in 2012. I believe we started buying them around the time we expanded into our third building in 2001 (the third building is where aisles four, five, six, and seven are, as well as all the checkouts). Then Wanzl/Technibilt decided to stop making them.

How long did we have the old carts?

The first carts we bought from Technibilt were around 2001. The first model we bought had wheels that were inset, meaning that the wheels did not add width to the cart. The problem was that many times people found that the wheels interfered with where one needs to place one's feet while walking behind the cart. Then a new model came out with the wheels on the outside and that problem was solved.

What are the features of the new street carts at the Coop?

They are a little wider. It's a little harder to hang bags from them due to shortness of the upper extension of the verticals. They handle great. They operate more like a sports car. I have never driven a sports car.

THE "NATIONAL CART SHORTAGE" WAS MENTIONED ON A LOUDSPEAKER ANNOUNCEMENT THIS WINTER URGING SHOPPERS TO BE PROMPT ABOUT RETURNING THEIR SHOPPING CARTS TO THE PARKING AREA WHEN THEY WERE NO LONGER NEEDED.



New cart on the left; old cart on the right.

Why did we need new carts?

Over the years, the main reason we need new carts is that they go missing. Occasionally a cart gets so old and so beat up that it can longer be repaired. But that is rare compared to carts going missing.

We heard there is a “national shopping cart shortage.” Have you heard of this shortage as well? *[Editor’s note: the “national cart shortage” was mentioned on a loudspeaker announcement this winter urging members to be prompt about returning their shopping carts to the parking area when they were no longer needed.]*

Not a “shortage” but rather a lag. It took about 18 weeks for the new carts to arrive after we placed an order. They arrived in October after having been ordered in June.

How many outdoor carts does the Coop own, and how many new ones did you order?

Based on input from other staff, we determined that we should have a minimum of eight carts. I was pleasantly surprised that we still had six old carts when the [six] new ones arrived. I expected that the old carts could have been as low as four based on historical attrition rates. As of last week, two of the new carts were missing, one was out service as it was in need of repairs, and three were in service. There were still six old carts last week. Sometimes missing carts come back.

How much do the new carts cost?

The price for each cart, including the cost of delivery, was about \$450.

What has feedback on the new carts been like?

I have not heard much from anyone except that it is nice to not have a cart shortage—but that is temporary. We may have to order more soon. The new carts are not as rugged as the old carts, in regard to the back wheels system. Our Facilities Coordinator, Crystal Goldenstein, is looking into improving the wheel system on the new carts so that they are more durable.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer and native New Yorker who just released Object Essays. Her work has been published in Friends Journal, Motherwell Magazine, and Grande Dame Literary.