# MARCH GENERAL MEETING VOTES TO KEEP INCREASED MARK-UP

May 2, 2023




*By Walecia Konrad*

At the March 28, 2023, General Meeting (GM) held on Zoom, Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) members voted on two agenda items and discussed a wide range of issues.

General Coordinator Joe Holtz gave the financial report, during which a new idea for home delivery was discussed.

Membership also voted to elect one new member to the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) and reelect four existing members. Attendees also heard reports from two General Coordinators and two member committees.

Importantly, after much discussion, members voted to maintain the Coop's 25% retail

price markup (which began during the onset of the pandemic) through fiscal year 2024. Attendees also heard from the sole candidate running for the Board of Directors.

## OPEN FORUM

Chairperson David Moss began the meeting with a 15-minute open forum. This is the portion of the meeting dedicated to questions and concerns from members.

Ben Matusow posed the first question, asking how the PSFC supports other coops and asking if we could help other coops by providing our members' labor to them.

General Coordinator Joe Holtz responded that PSFC has a long history of giving members work credit for working at other coops that use our member labor model, including Greene Hill and Windsor Terrace. Currently no Coop is asking for this help, said Holtz, adding, "We take it seriously to try to help other coops."

> "COVID MADE ME REALIZE HOW INACCESSIBLE OUR SPACES ARE FOR IMMUNO-COMPROMISED PEOPLE."
>
> *—MEMBER GEORGE OLKEN*

Several members brought up the issue of the recent change in Coop policy to end mandatory masking for shoppers and workers. "My perspective is it is an important accommodation for some members, including the elderly and physically disabled, and I think it should be discussed," said Coop member Kishi Taryan-Kigel.

Member George Olken agreed. "COVID made me realize how inaccessible our spaces are for immunocompromised people," he said. As a result, he suggested the Coop institute certain days or hours when masks are mandatory, "so folks can shop and work

their shifts safely.” He said that others are bringing a proposal to the agenda committee with that idea and that he is circulating a petition in support of designated masking times.

Members Gary Winter and Bhakti Sondra Shaye both agreed with the idea of designated times for masking. Sondra Shaye also spoke for a friend who couldn’t be at the meeting who works the food-processing shift. Her friend is concerned about being in a confined space near food without masking.

> “WHAT ARE THE PROCESSES OR POLICIES TO MAKE SURE OUR COOP LEADERSHIP IS DIVERSE AND REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COOP?”
>
> *—MEMBER CHEYENNA WEBER*

Holtz responded to these concerns. He said the coordinators changed the masking policy after conducting two member surveys and after considering that “we are no longer in an emergency situation.” However, he said that the coordinators assumed that the General Meeting would become a forum for deciding a different masking policy and that members were encouraged to submit an agenda item on this topic.

The final question of the open forum came from member Cheyenna Weber: “What are the processes or policies to make sure our Coop leadership is diverse and representative of the Coop?” She added she had heard a rumor that a staff person of color was asked to remove their application for the Board of Directors and was wondering if there is something in the bylaws that says staff can’t join the Board.

Holtz addressed the question saying he knew the person being referred to. The staff member wanted to run for the board then later withdrew their nomination, Holtz said. He added that not having staff on the board is probably something that should be in the bylaws. The board votes on what happens in the General Meetings, and the GM

votes for members on the Personnel Committee (PC). The PC is a group that is authorized to review the General Coordinators, and the General Coordinators have been authorized to supervise the rest of the staff. It might be strange for a person to be on the board and be a staff member, he explained. Holtz also pointed out that the Coop can't require staff members to work for free according to New York state labor rules, and the board is not a paid position.

## COOP FINANCES

Next, Holtz gave the treasury report. He pointed out the following highlights from the financial summary for the four-week period ending February 26, 2023:

- Sales are substantially higher year over year in the first four weeks of the fiscal year, $4.1 million, versus $3.6 million.
- Expenses for the same period were similar year over year—$782,000 versus $792,000
- Operating income was back in the black at $25,107 versus a loss of $44,701 the previous year.
- Cash presented the biggest difference. Cash was $7.1 million in the first four weeks of this year, compared to $4.3 million during the same period last year.

Holtz then explained why there was such a big difference in cash. Government aid of over $6 million over the course of the pandemic is the main reason. That money does not have to be paid back. Members voluntarily increasing their equity investment and the increase in markup are two other reasons for the jump, said Holtz.

Looking at the Coop's cash position raises a crucial planning question, Holtz said. "How much cash do we want to have to weather the next pandemic?" He pointed out that because most grocery stores made record profits during the pandemic, it's unlikely the Coop would get government aid again if another pandemic hit. "Is $7.1 million

enough? I don’t have the answer—what we can do is make sure we’re better prepared.”

To that end, Holtz reported that the General Coordinators are developing a home-delivery system and that the Coop has signed a contract with a company to get the system started in the near future.

## HOME DELIVERY DISCUSSION

The question period after the treasury report focused on the home-delivery announcement. Holtz explained to questioners that the outside company the General Coordinators hired is developing a software package that would put all of the Coop’s inventory online and deal with remote payments. Members would use that software to order from home. Member labor would then pick the food items from these orders. A third party would gather the orders at the front and deliver them to people’s homes.

> “WE GOT A LOT OF CALLS FOR HOME DELIVERY DURING THE PANDEMIC; WE HAD A LOT OF CRITICISM AND WE TOOK THAT TO HEART.”
>
> *—GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ*

The cost of home-delivered groceries would include the Coop food, the cost of the third-party to deliver, and the cost of the credit card transaction. “This would be the only time we’ll accept credit cards,” Holtz added. All members would be eligible for delivery, but those who live farthest from the Coop would pay more for delivery. He also said that the system would be sensitive to the fact that the Coop wouldn’t want member workers to gather food at times when the Coop is busiest. “Not everything is figured out” he said. “We’re going to have a trial and see how it goes. We got a lot of calls for home delivery during the pandemic; we had a lot of criticism, and we took that to heart,” Holtz added.

During her report, General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky gave a shoutout to staff who were preparing for the spring holidays. She also commended the staff member who has been dealing with getting enough eggs on Coop shelves at different price points, despite bird flu and other problems. By the way, Astrinsky explained, if you're wondering where the Grindstone eggs are, due to distributor issues, they are coming only every two weeks.

## WHAT'S NEW IN FOOD

She recommended several produce and gardening items to Coop members: fresh organic horseradish; Thai chili peppers; local greens; Dominican mangos; a new variety of Del Monte pineapples called Honey Glow; and, for gardeners, gardening gloves and organic soil and seeds.

## MEMBER COMMITTEE REPORTS

The meeting chair reminded attendees that a vote last year limits committees to giving only three general meeting reports per year to the GM.

Jonathan Farber, who is part of the Second Location Study Committee, reported that the group will have two informational Zoom meetings in April. It has also applied to the Agenda Committee to submit an item that would ask members to authorize a referendum vote to decide if the Coop should expand to a second store.

Farber was asked if he thought the home delivery-proposal would impact the need for a second location. He answered that he had not considered it because the meeting was the first he was hearing about it.

Next Teresa Santamaria gave a brief report on the Hudson Valley Farm Coop Committee. The committee is looking for help finding a pro bono lawyer and is reaching out to the membership for any ideas.

The Hudson Valley Farm Coop Committee is dedicated to acquiring, improving, and

operating 15 farms in the Mid-Hudson Valley by raising funds through a direct public offering. Members interested in helping with pro bono legal work, or helping the committee find someone who is, should email info@hvfarmcoop.com.

## DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE ELECTION

The meeting then moved to the first agenda item concerning the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC). After introducing themselves, stating their qualifications and telling attendees why they want to be on the DRC, five Coop members were elected to three--year terms.

Christopher Cox was the only new member elected with a vote of 59 in favor and 13 against. In addition, four existing DRC members were reelected to three-year terms. The four reelected members were Karen Kramer (winning by 68 votes to 4); Helen Koh (winning by 73 votes to 2); Michael Szeto (winning by 70 votes to 2); and Daniel Weiss (winning by 70 votes to 3).

Daniel Weiss reminded GM attendees that the DRC's purpose is to protect the Coop, its members and the Coop's fiduciary interests in a fair manner. It is responsible for reviewing and investigating reports of member misbehavior. He also said that there are still several openings on the DRC and the committee is actively seeking more members.

## MARK-UP PROPOSAL

During the next agenda item, General Coordinators Joe Holtz and Joe Szladek gave a presentation encouraging members to vote for a proposal that would maintain the Coop's current 25% mark-up through fiscal year 2024. The mark-up was increased from 21% in August of 2020—through fiscal year 2024, which ends on January 28, 2024.  The full proposal said:

Maintain base markup of 25% through FY2024, with the following exceptions:

- Starting on 5/1/23 a lower base markup of 21%, only available to members who qualify for reduced member owner equity investment (MOEI).
- In subsequent years, each year at October GM, General Coordinators will report on markup plans to lower or maintain the 25% markup for the next fiscal year. GM approval is required for a markup above 25%.
- Passage of this proposal makes void the August 2020 markup decision.

During the pandemic, members with financial need were allowed to pay the 21% markup without requiring proof of any kind of assistance, explained Holtz. Prior to the pandemic, low-income members applying for the $10 member owner equity investment (compared to the customary $100) qualified by showing proof of some kind of income assistance, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, Section 8 housing, Supplemental Social Security Income, Medicaid, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)'s Fair Fares, and other programs. Under the proposal, members would show similar proof of income assistance to qualify for the lower markup.

> "WE CAN GIVE OURSELVES MORE BREATHING SPACE BY HELPING TO ENSURE AS BEST WE CAN THAT OUR CASH DOESN'T GO DOWN THIS YEAR. IF WE LOWER THE MARKUP, THEN WE WON'T HAVE THAT CASH."
>
> *—GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ*

Holtz explained that by keeping the 25% mark-up, the Coop can continue to keep its strong cash position and remain prepared for the next pandemic. The coordinators are making those cash projections based on an estimated $53 million in annual sales and a 6% increase in operating expenses as the Coop continues to transition out of the pandemic.

“We can give ourselves more breathing space by helping to ensure as best we can that our cash doesn’t go down this year. If we lower the markup, then we won’t have that cash,” Holtz said.

Next, Joe Szladek  explained several reasons why the Coop needs to continue the increased markup, most having to do with staffing.

For instance, because the Coop continues to face supply-chain challenges, the staff is spending more time on purchasing than before the pandemic to find different vendor sources or similar items for products that are out of stock long term. On a related note, the Coop continues to have issues with suppliers arriving on time, he said. “Instead of coming at 8 a.m., when we have an army of lifters, they come at noon, and the staff ends up doing all the lifting,” he explained, adding that this is putting a huge physical burden on staff.

Staff leaves have also increased substantially, and the Coop is experiencing periods of member-labor shortages as the Coop continues to transition to a 6-week work cycle. “We do think these shortages are temporary,” Szladek said. “We haven’t quite nailed it yet, but we’re close.”

All of this adds up to the need for the Coop to hire more staff, which has a financial impact on the Coop.

Szladek then listed several improvements the general coordinators want to make, including upgrading the Coop’s outdated ordering and inventory system, converting to a more efficient electronic shelf-labeling system, and testing the online ordering and home-delivery feature discussed earlier in the meeting. “Keeping the markup higher allows us to explore those things more thoughtfully,” Szladek said.

During the discussion period, members showed concern that showing proof of income may add an unnecessary burden to low-income members. The coordinators responded that this can be as easy as showing a Medicaid card or the New York State app

used for assistance and that such proof is part of qualifying for the lower member investment and that has not seemed to be a problem in the past.

There were also two amendments proposed by members. One dealt with putting a specific date on when the markup would revert back to 21% and one concerning approval for the suspension of member labor. The first was voted down by the membership, 46 against and 26 in favor. The chairperson refused to recognize the second amendment, saying it was unrelated to the topic.

A vote was taken and the markup proposal passed as written, 63 in favor and 27 opposed.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATE

Earlier in the meeting, Timothy Hospodar, a candidate for the upcoming Board of Directors election, introduced himself to the membership.

Hospodar said he has been a Coop member for 15 years and joined when he heard about the PSFC at Brooklyn College. He said he has worked “upstairs, downstairs, inside, outside, offsite” and during the pandemic. He admitted he was currently suspended with a grace period until April 8, explaining he sometimes falls behind with childcare and work responsibilities, but he is looking forward to serving as a Board member. When asked what he could bring to the process, Hospodar answered: “Per the bylaws, I’m interested in echoing the majority or the consensus of the members at the general meetings,” adding that he understands his opinions will be left at the door. “I want to bring some levity. I feel like absurdity as an antidote to cognitive bias could benefit all of us,” he said.

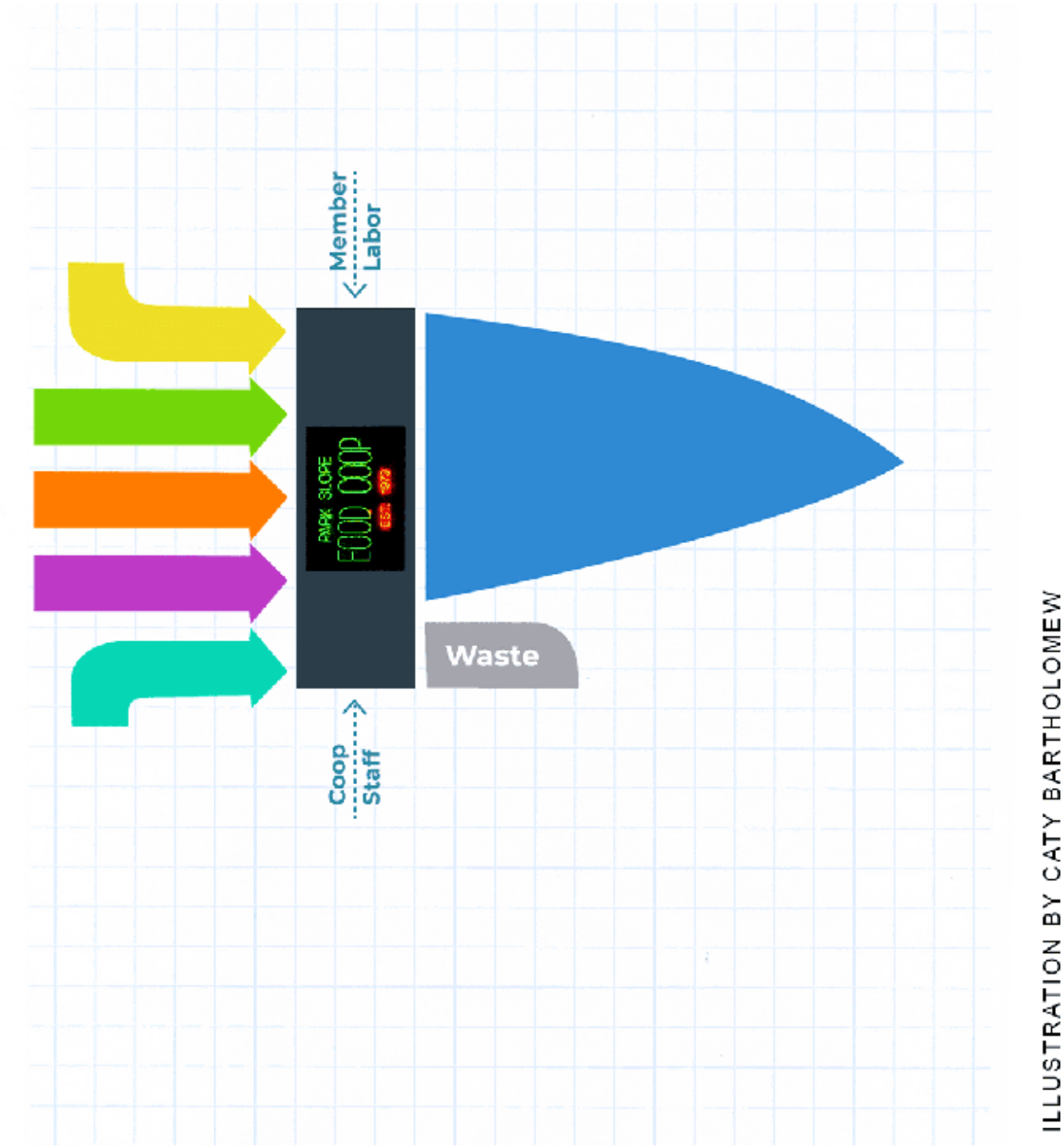
The Board of Directors votes to approve the advice of members who attend the monthly GM. There are five seats on the board and terms last three years. Hospodar is the only candidate for one open slot on the Board. Members can vote in the Board elections online via a Coop-wide email that will be sent in late May. Results will be an-

nounced at the Annual Meeting on June 27. For more information on Board elections, read the Coop’s bylaws.

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## THE COOP’S TRASH

May 2, 2023




*By Dan Bergsagel*

Trash—or, rather, waste—is inevitable at a food store. For example, waste is generated as large cases of goods are received and unpacked and if vegetables and fruit are damaged during their handling and sales. While the Park Slope Food Coop is a member-owned and operated food store, it is still a food store: The Coop generates waste too.

Waste is a particularly thorny challenge for the Coop, which operates in an impressively space-efficient way (four times more space-efficient than the best-performing conventional supermarkets), leaving no excess space for waste within its dense urban footprint. The members working in what is known as the baler room, where they're constantly compressing waste into neat cubes, are testament to this Sisyphean task of minimizing and controlling the Coop's waste.

But *what* types of waste does the Coop manage, and *how* does the Coop manage this waste so successfully? To understand this better, for each type of Coop waste—ranging from cardboard boxes to food waste scraps—we should try and answer the following three questions: 1) How much of this type of waste does the Coop manage? 2) Who takes the waste? and 3) How often do they take it?

To answer these questions, I sought the expert input of General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky and her information from the Coop's waste management contracts. Where information was still hard to confirm, I conducted my own observations and cobbled together some back-of-the-envelope calculations. Together we can present an overview of the Coop's total waste streams, and further categorize this into waste that is reused, recycled, composted or disposed of in landfill. These values should be seen as estimates to help us understand the total magnitude of waste and the relative contributions of each waste stream.

## CARDBOARD

The largest Coop waste stream is cardboard at an estimated 66% of the Coop's total waste measured by mass. Cardboard boxes are ubiquitous in facilitating freight transportation of food items from our suppliers to the Coop and also for packaging items for display on our shelves. Cardboard is collected in two large, wheeled containers in the baler room, and is regularly compressed using a pneumatic baling machine that produces neat cardboard cubes that are tied up with wire.

WHEN RECYCLED CARDBOARD VALUES ARE AT THEIR LOWEST, DISPOSING OF THE BALES CAN ALMOST BECAME A FINANCIAL BURDEN.




Bales of cardboard outside the Coop

Observing the number of bales outside, the Coop produces an estimated 10 medium cardboard bales per day, each weighing 350 lbs on average. The cardboard bales are stored outside the Coop, west of the main entrance, and are collected daily through the Coop's contract with Metropolitan Recycling. These cardboard bales have recycling value as a raw input for paper mills and are typically auctioned for resale. The value of waste cardboard has fluctuated significantly over recent years, from highs of $200/ton to lows of $20/ton. When recycled cardboard values are at their lowest, disposing of the bales can almost become a financial burden to the haulers. When recycled cardboard values are at their peak, waste haulers can use their projected income from the cardboard resale to offset their other hauling costs. To protect this valuable commodity from being collected by the city's late-night cardboard pirates, the Coop built ta lockable cage in which the bales are stored—also known as the "bale jail."

## WAXED CARDBOARD

Cardboard is a multifunctional packaging product, but it has an Achilles' heel: It is not moisture resistant. For fresh produce that requires ice or protection from external changes in humidity, waxed cardboard boxes are typically used. These have the advantage of reducing food waste, although the name is a little misleading—the "wax" is actually a polyethylene coating applied to the cardboard. Compared to conventional cardboard packaging, waxed cardboard is contaminated and typically unsuitable for being recycled as fiber for other paper products.

Waxed cardboard at the Coop is estimated at two bales per day, approximately 13% of the Coop's total waste measured by mass. Waxed cardboard boxes are temporarily stored in the front of the baler room, separate from other cardboard waste. It is also collected by *Metropolitan Recycling* and is disposed of in landfill.

## TRASH

Not all waste can be segregated and reused, recycled, or composted. In addition to the waxed cardboard waste stream, the Coop has a two cubic yard dumpster that Metropolitan Recycling removes six times per week. This dumpster sits outside the front of the Coop, discreetly camouflaged as a wooden shed. The waste stored in this dumpster is estimated at approximately 6% of the Coop's total waste measured by mass. However, the removal cost of this dumpster to the landfill constitutes around 60% of the Coop's total on-site waste-management costs. Landfill costs are directly related to the tipping fees paid at the landfill facility, paid by anyone who disposes of waste in a landfill. Typically this fee is based on the weight of waste per ton. These fees are highest in areas of the country where real estate is expensive and where state governments set them higher in order to incentivize alternative waste-management practices.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Stacked milk crates in the Coop’s backyard

## CUSTOM CONTAINERS

Much of the Coop’s food is provided in produce or milk crates. These are estimated to contribute approximately 5% of the Coop’s total waste measured by mass. This waste stream is a closed cycle, as these crates are collected on site and returned to the distributors for reuse. These containers are stored in many different places in the Coop—-such as the backyard, the dairy fridge, and across the basement—and are placed on pallets for return to the original food-distribution source, such as Hepworth Farms or Ithaca Dairy.

These specialized food containers take up significantly more volume on site than the food waste, since they are not squishy and malleable. Due to their storage in many locations throughout the Coop, their estimated volume averages three pallets worth daily.

## FOOD WASTE

Our vegetable and fruit waste, at approximately 4% of the Coop’s total waste measured by mass, is a frequently handled waste stream. Food waste at the Coop has been discussed in previous *Linewaiters’ Gazette* articles, such as *Are Biodigesters the Next Frontier in Food Waste?*, and *PSFC Helps Soup Kitchen Feed Hundreds of Migrants*. Before food becomes waste, the Coop donates edible but unsalable food to CHiPS Soup Kitchen. The remaining quantity of food waste varies depending on the time of year, with larger quantities of waste produced in summer than in winter. Food waste is stored in bins in the slim backyard behind the Coop, which is accessed by a door between the two cheese cases.

ON AVERAGE, THE COOP’S FOOD WASTE IS ESTIMATED AT THREE 65-GALLON BINS PER WEEK, WITH EACH BIN WEIGHING 487 LBS.

The Compost Committee hauls the bins to local community gardens for conversion into compost. A local waste firm, Mr T Carting, collects and composts some of it. On average, the Coop's food waste is estimated at three 65-gallon bins per week—two bins per week in winter and four per week in summer—with each bin weighing 487 lbs.

## PLASTICS

Plastics are a crucial part of the food-distribution supply chain, whether used as plastic wrap to contain and protect palletized products or as corrugated-plastic distribution boxes. Plastic is collected for recycling in clear bags and stored on racks in the Coop's backyard. In their uncompacted state, these bags can occupy an approximately 6-foot wide by 10-foot high by 20-foot long space at the end of the yard, and they are collected weekly to produce approximately two compacted bales. These plastic bales contribute 4% of the Coop's total waste measured by mass and are collected by Metropolitan Recycling.

## PALLETS

A small additional waste stream is that of surplus wooden pallets, at an estimated 1% of the Coop's total waste measured by mass. Many items are delivered on wooden pallets, the vast majority of which are returned immediately to the food distributors so that they can be reused for future deliveries. These immediately returned pallets are not considered part of the waste stream.

However, the return process occasionally involves leaving retained pallets unsupervised outside the Coop for collection. We can estimate that ten wooden pallets, each weighing approximately 40 lbs, are left each evening for collection by the food-distribution companies. We believe these pallets are occasionally not collected by the intended distributors, but instead by 'independent' collectors. Either way, the pallets are efficiently removed from the Coop site.

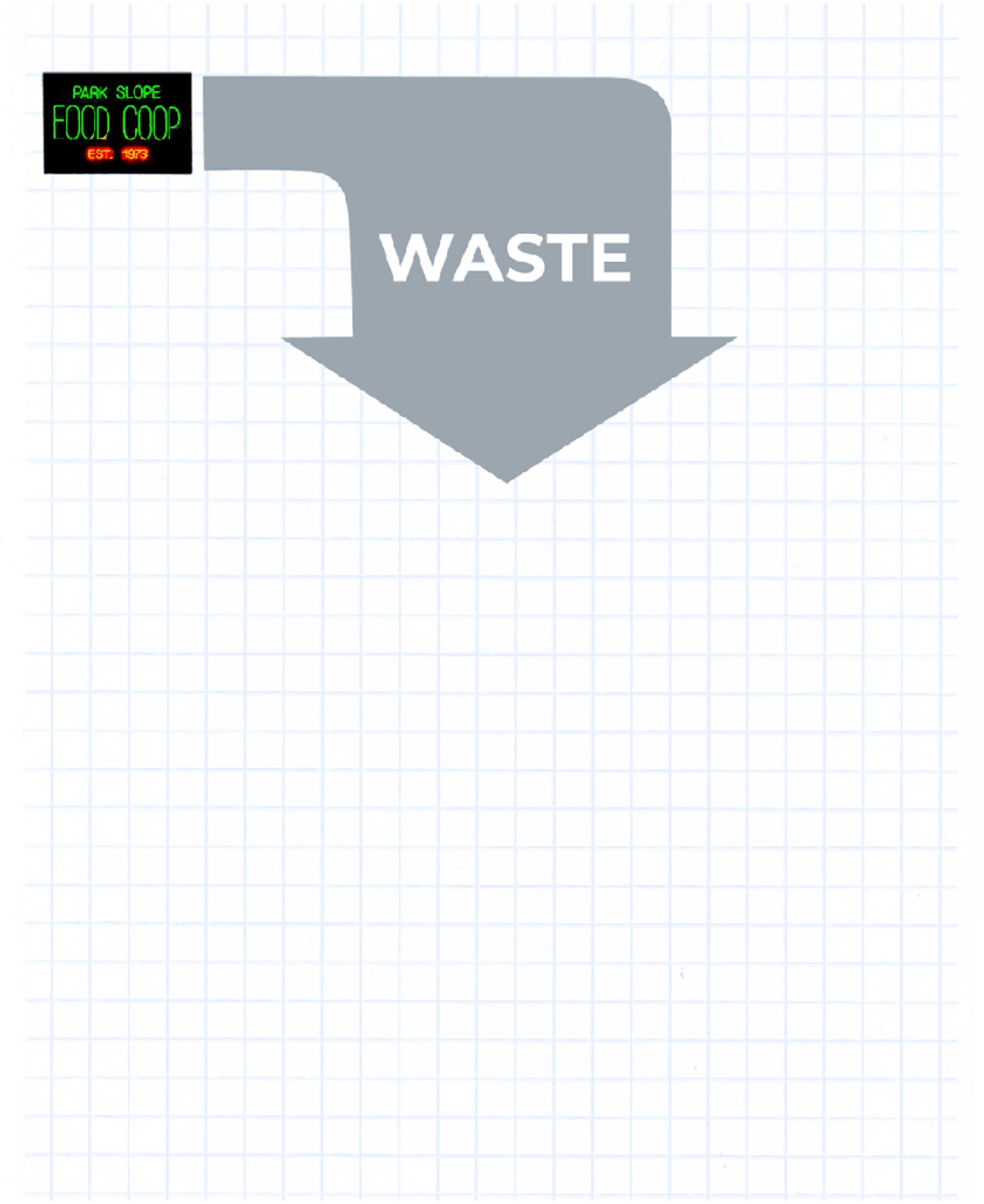



ILLUSTRATION BY CATY BARTHOLOMEW

## DOMESTIC RECYCLING

In addition to these clearly defined waste streams, the Coop also collects a small amount of mixed recycling, such as beverage cans and plastic bottles, and some food delivery containers, such as olive buckets. This gathered waste resides on the second floor outside the membership office and is collected on a bi-weekly basis by Metropolitan Recycling. It is estimated to constitute approximately 1% of the Coop's total

waste measured by mass.

## PAPER

Like any business, the Coop also requires administrative inputs to enable the system to function—such as the cashiers, membership office, and buyers' and coordinators' offices—which produce residual paper waste. An estimated up to 96 gallons of paper is stored in the second-floor copy room and collected by PROSHRED every two weeks. Assuming that loose office paper has a density of 320 lbs per cubic yard, one 96-gallon paper bin weighs 150 lbs. This paper waste stream constitutes approximately 0.2% of the Coop's total waste measured by mass. The paper waste stream is the smallest at the Coop and has already been reduced significantly in the last two years, since the digitization of all member services.

> THE EXISTING WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SEEMS ENCOURAGING: BY MASS, 71% IS RECYCLED, 6% IS REUSED, 4% IS COMPOSTED, AND 19% IS DISPOSED OF IN LANDFILL.

With all these waste streams combined, the Coop's total waste production is estimated at 5,300 lbs per day. Is this a little or a lot compared to the food that is being processed through the system and sold to members? If we assume that the Coop's sales are approximately $1 million per week, and we apply an 'average food value' of $3.5/lb (a value based on conventional US food stores), then this leads to just over 40,800 lbs of food being sold by the Coop each day. This suggests that approximately every 7 or 8 lbs of food processed by the Coop generates 1 lb of waste.

When we look more deeply at the end of life of each of the Coop waste streams, the Coop's existing waste management system seems encouraging: by mass, 71% is recycled, 6% is reused, 4% is composted and 19% is disposed of in landfill. Reusing, recycling and composting are well-received, best-practice waste management strategies;

only 1 lb of Coop waste is landfilled for every 40 lbs of food sold.

Circular economy principles encourage us to minimize the steps required to process waste so we can best take advantage of its intrinsic value without energy-intensive re-processing and any consequent impacts on the environment. Can the Coop further improve on the current waste management scenario within the spatial constraints of its site, maximizing material reuse?

Improving waste outcomes is not something that the Coop can do unilaterally. The sources of the largest waste streams to landfill and recycling by mass—waxed cardboard and regular cardboard, respectively—could feasibly be changed to reusable containers. However, this would require coordination with suppliers as part of a potentially larger systemic change in the industry.

The most expensive waste stream for the Coop to dispose of—trash in the dumpster—already constitutes a small percentage of the Coop's waste by mass. Improving on the current status quo may be hard. This dumpster currently contains miscellaneous waste from trash cans on the shop floor as well as debris from necessary maintenance and repairs. This maintenance and repair debris can include items ranging from small damaged lighting fixtures and ceiling tiles to large broken pop-up shading canopies. If the Coop had more space for waste, we could perhaps further segregate these trash streams to allow for longer-term collection of enough material from a single waste stream, such as plasterboard or aluminum studs. However, unless the opening between the Coop and 774 Union Street becomes part of an expanded Coop footprint, searching for this additional space may be a waste of time.

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## MEMBERS REACT TO REMOVAL OF COOP'S MASKING REQUIREMENTS

May 2, 2023




PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDON

*By Leila Darabi*

On a recent spring day, two weeks after the Coop lifted its requirement that all who enter must wear a mask, the *Gazette* visited the store to gauge member reactions and spoke to members calling for designated masked shopping days.

As reported in the Gazette, a poll conducted earlier this year by the General Coordinators found that more than two thirds of participants (68%) voted to make masks optional, with 32% preferring to retain the mask requirement for all working and shopping members.

> “AT THE DESK, I THINK I’M EXPOSED TO A LOT OF PEOPLE, SO I KEEP [MY MASK] ON WHILE I’M WORKING.”
>
> *—ALICIA VILLAROSA*

Alicia Villarosa, a shift worker for the entrance desk, estimated that about 40% of shoppers entering the store opted to mask, despite no longer being required to do so. Villarosa wore a mask as she checked members into the store.

“At the desk, I think I’m exposed to a lot of people, so I keep it on while I’m working,” she explained, noting that she “maybe, maybe not” wears a mask while shopping. “Depends how crowded the store is.”

## A CALL FOR DESIGNATED MASKED SHOPPING DAYS

One of those members checking in was George Sarah Olken, who shared with the *Gazette* that he and a group of other members had organized a petition calling on the Coop to reinstate masking two days each week, on Mondays and Fridays, to accommodate the needs of disabled and immunocompromised members.

“I think that it didn’t need to be an all-or-nothing decision,” Olken said of the poll. “Thirty percent of respondents to the survey wanted to keep masking, so we could spend 30 percent of the days of the week doing it.”

> “I DON’T THINK MATTERS OF MEMBER AND WORKER SAFETY SHOULD BE THE SUBJECT OF AN OPINION POLL. IT SEEMED [AT THE LAST GENERAL MEETING] LIKE THERE WAS THIS ‘BOTHSIDESISM’ THAT’S GOING ON.”
>
> *—JD DAVIDS*

Speaking by phone from his home in Brooklyn, Coop member and disability rights and public health advocate JD Davids questioned the Coop’s use of a poll at all in deciding to lift the mask requirement.

“I don’t think matters of member and worker safety should be the subject of an opinion poll,” said Davids. “It seemed [at the last General Meeting] like there was this ‘bothsidesism’ that’s going on.” He continued, “But actually, what I perceive is that there’s people who have preferences, and then there’s people who have needs…who have been medically advised to not be in spaces where there’s only one-way masking, because it is jeopardizing their lives or the lives of people they live with.”

Davids, the co-author of a set of social media tiles designed to educate the general public on inclusion of people with disabilities, also recognized the pressure put on the General Coordinators.

“We have all been put in harm’s way and that includes members of a cooperative grocery store,” he acknowledged, referring to both members and Coop leadership facing unprecedented challenges during a global pandemic. “So, the Coop has been put in a difficult position of appearing to have a different standard for public health than the bodies that are supposed to be responsible for the public’s health, and that’s not fair

to anybody."

Davids noted that his "privileged, moderately disabled family" now pays someone to grocery shop and run errands for them, noting that many disabled and immunocompromised members may not have this option.

"It's extremely high stakes for a small, but not tiny, number of people," Davids said.

## WHAT'S NEXT IN THE MASK POLICY DEBATE?

Coop General Manager Joe Holtz told the *Gazette* that in their discussions, the General Coordinators did consider reserving weekly shopping hours for disabled and immunocompromised members to shop. With the mask mandate lifted across New York City, Holtz said he and his colleagues no longer felt they could maintain a masking policy without involving member input.

"We look at this as something that's winding down, and we felt like our ability to make emergency decisions and defend the continuation of decisions [without inviting input from the full Coop membership at the General Meetings] was no longer tenable,"said Holtz. "There were people who said out loud at the General Meetings, 'What gives you the authority to continue masking?' There're two sides to the story. And the General Coordinators took those questions to heart. We also took to heart what people were saying about their disabilities and the disabilities of others."

## TO MASK OR NOT TO MASK

Holtz noted that the idea of designated shopping days with required masking had been submitted to the Agenda Committee and would likely be up for discussion at a future GM. He voiced support for this approach and noted discussions of masking.

The *Gazette* spoke with 12 other members on the same day, some wearing masks and others opting not to wear masks—all of whom said they would support designated mask-only shopping days. The following are excerpts from those conversations.

“I actually did a shift without a mask the day the mandate was lifted. It was stocking, but we broke down boxes. It was just me and another person but neither of us wore a mask. I’m fine not wearing a mask. I respect people who want to wear masks if that’s their comfort level.” —Julie Mashack, who was leaving the Coop after shopping




Julie Mashack

“I still wear my mask when I’m taking the subway or in a crowded place. I like to do the outdoor shifts or CHiPS, which requires a mask.” —Carolyn, who was working a

shift as a walker

“I wear a mask, especially when I’m working or know I’m going to be [in the Coop] for a while and it’s crowded.” —Sophie Davidson, who was waiting with her dog, Idgie, while her partner shopped

“I wear a mask, partially because of anxiety and partially because grocery stores are a space where immunocompromised people don’t have a choice. You have to go to the grocery store.” —Rebecca Chaisson, Sophie’s partner




Sophie Davidson and Rebecca Chaisson

“I feel like it’s where the city’s going. I still wear [a mask] if the subway’s crowded. And if [the Coop] was crowded, I would probably wear it to whatever degree that’s solid science or not, I don’t know.” —Darren, who was working a shift as a walker

“I continue to wear a mask because I believe it is the best choice for my own health

and for public health.” —CJ Holm, who was working a shift as a cashier




CJ Holm

“I’m visiting my father next week, and he’s elderly, and I’m just protecting myself in preparation for a trip. I’m wearing it anywhere where I’m indoors for more than 15 minutes.” —Susan Ohashi, who was shopping in the checkout aisle




Susan Ohashi

“I wear a mask just to be safe, just supermarkets. I’m kind of loose now.” —Kanne Ge, who was shopping for vitamins

“I’m fine either way.” —Alex, who was shopping in the bulk aisle

PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK

Kanne Ge

PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK

Alex

“I prefer the choice [whether or not to wear a mask] to be mine. For the common good, [I would be open to designated masking hours or days], because there are people who have conditions that I don’t have.” —Joseph Picciano, who was shopping in the bulk aisle




Joseph Picciano

“I have family members who are not well, so I have to be careful.” —Sahadra, who was shopping for her older parents




Sahadra

“I think we’re now at a point where everybody’s very informed and COVID is not the main problem. I think at one point, we have to go back to normal. I think the Coop kept the mandate for a long time, and that was a good idea. I teach, and at one point the mandate was dropped during the winter. I kept wearing one, but I feel now with the spring, [I no longer need to].” —Benoit Challand, who was shopping in the produce aisle




Benoit Challand

In addition to following the discussions at upcoming Coop General Meetings, members can refer to the Current Operational And Safety Procedures section of the Coop website for the latest updates on COVID-19 precautions, including instructions on how to authorize a non-member to shop on their behalf.

*Leila Darabi often posts photos of the food she makes with Coop ingredients @persian_ish on Instagram; she also cohosts Cringewatchers, a podcast about representations of sexuality on popular TV.*

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## PUZZLE: ZERO VISIBILITY

May 2, 2023

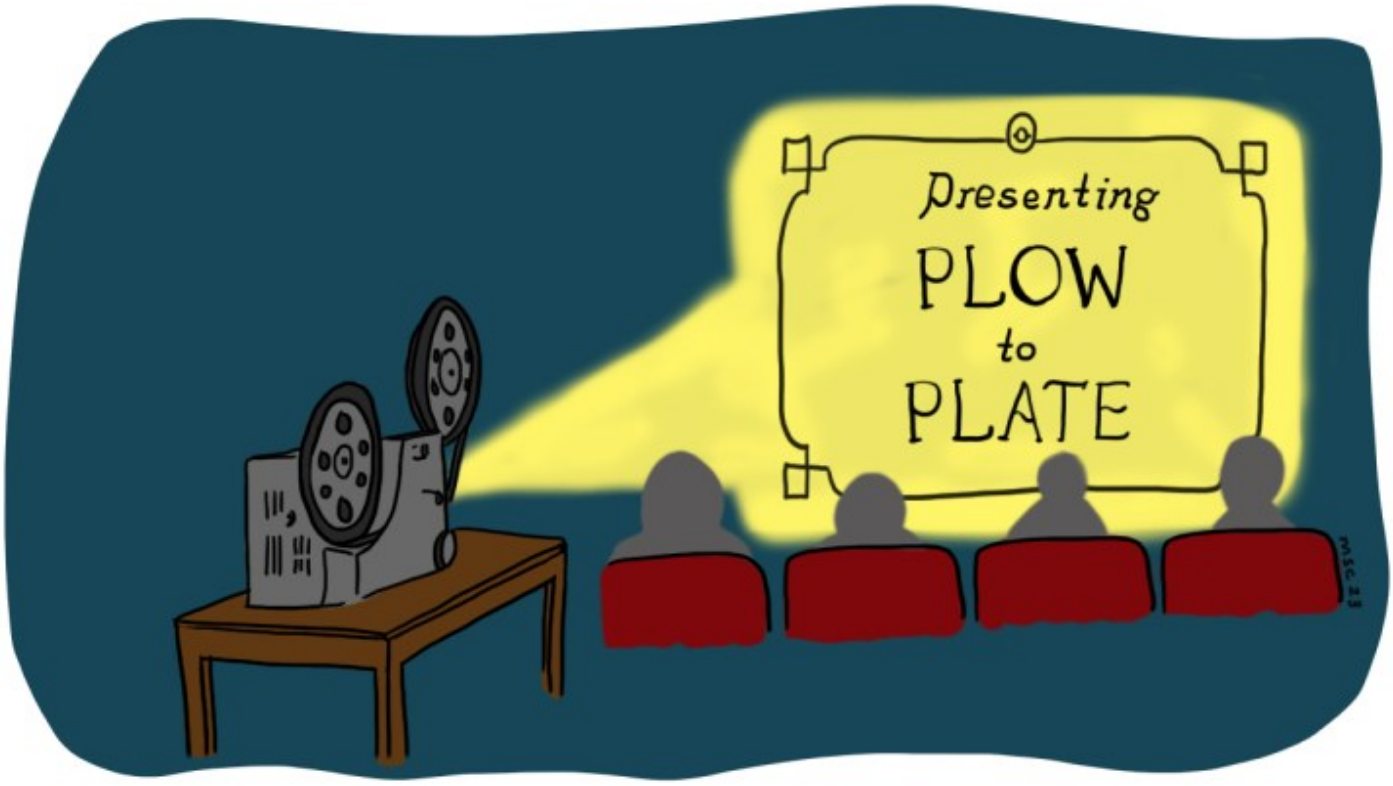



*By David Levinson-Wilk*

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PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

May 2, 2023




**More Than Honey**

*By Adam Rabiner*

Having worked as a beekeeper in the Central African Republic right after college as a Peace Corps volunteer, I know a fair amount about bees, but I still learned a lot from the documentary *More Than Honey.* The filmmakers flew around the world four times and covered a lot of ground, literally and figuratively. Besides honey, topics include: modern Western beekeeping in the U.S. versus smaller-scale examples in Europe; queen breeding; swarming and colony splitting; the respective roles of male drones and female workers; modern scientific studies on the brain and mind of a bee, as well as the intelligence of an individual bee versus that of the collective hive; bee communication; bee diseases, including Colony Collapse Disorder; the role of bees (and humans in China) in pollination; and a lot more.

MODERN-DAY FILM CAMERAS CAPTURE BEES MAGNIFIED HUNDREDS OF TIMES SO THAT THEY APPEAR BIRDLIKE IN SIZE.

As much as the film is a veritable fount of entomological information, what I found most astonishing about the movie was the cinematography, especially when paired with its soundtrack, the combination of which is simply jaw-dropping. Modern-day film cameras capture bees magnified hundreds of times so that they appear birdlike in size. The cameras get inside the inner recesses of a bee's secret lair, showing her feeding a queen, molding a queen cell, emerging from one or performing a waggle dance to convey the direction and distance of pollinating plants.

Similarly, cameras capture a drone and queen in flight, mating in mid-air and the drone dropping to the ground dead from his sacrificial (and one would hope satisfying) act of procreation. The world is seen from the bee's point of view, as if a mini camera were mounted on her back. In one particularly poignant closeup, you see a bee, perched on an almond flower, being sprayed with fungicide. She clings to her branch, withstanding this chemical shower, but eventually succumbs and falls to the ground.

> IN AN EXTREMELY SAD AND MOVING SCENE, WE WATCH BEEKEEPER FRED JAGGI, WHO HAS JUST BEEN TOLD THAT HIS COLONY WAS INFECTED WITH FOUL BROOD, SET ABOUT GASSING HIS BEES.

Apart from this technical virtuosity, cinematographer Jörg Jeshel captures all the natural beauty of the Swiss Alps and Austria. Traditional beekeeper Fred Jaggi looks like he could be a character right out of *The Sound of Music*. A genial beekeeper, Jaggi did not want to follow in his father and grandfather's footsteps because he did not wish to get stung. He decided he was "no sissy" only when his father told him he would sell the hives if there was no one to take over the family business. In an extremely sad and moving scene, we watch Jaggi, who has just been told that his colony was infected with foul brood, set about gassing his bees. He then then sweeps their carcasses into a pit, along with frames and other equipment, and sets it all on fire—a devastating emotional and economic loss.

Jaggi's counterpart is John Miller, owner of Miller Honey Farms in Newcastle, California. He, too, comes from a long line of beekeepers. But while Jaggi has kept things more or less small-scale, Miller has followed the capitalist imperative to grow the family business so that everything is ten-fold the scale it was in prior generations: the costs, the power used, the inventory, the number of hives, trucks, distances travelled, output, etc. Miller still cares about the bees, but he admits that he probably does not have the same emotional connection to them that he once did or that earlier generations of Millers did. They are more of a commodity to him. And given the devastation wrought to his bees by Colony Collapse Disorder, it would be too painful to take their deaths too much to heart. When listening to the buzzing of bees, he hears "the sound of money."

Toward the end of the film, we are introduced to a third beekeeper, another American, Fred Terry. Unlike Miller, who is a stand-in for the straightlaced commercial beekeeper businessman, Terry seems like more of a laidback Arizonan ex-hippy. He talks about getting to know and gaining respect for the Africanized (killer) bees who escaped from a breeding experiment in Brazil many years ago and eventually arrived at our borders. Terry likens the fear of these bees to Americans' distrust and suspicion of "the other," namely undocumented migrants. He admires the ability of killer bees to survive and thrive under conditions that thwart the more mellow European bees he had been accustomed to working with, and he surmises that long after human beings are gone from this planet, "there will be bees."

*More Than Honey*, May 9, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

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