

# THE NOVEMBER GM: MEMBER MISCONDUCT, GLUTEN-FREE LABELS, AND THE NEED FOR A ROOMIER ROOM

January 16, 2024



*By Dan Bergsagel*

The November General Meeting (GM) was livelier than expected. The agenda promised and delivered two “leisurely” discussion items on member misconduct procedures and gluten-free labeling. However, the GM opened with an unusual “extraordinary action,” an accompanying discussion on bylaws, scrutiny of the Coop’s investment strategy, and an impressive account of the food purchased over Thanksgiving.

## AN EXTRAORDINARY ACTION

The General Coordinators (GCs) took an “extraordinary action” this month: They re-

moved an item from the GM agenda. The Agenda Committee had placed an item on the agenda that read, "Requesting a zoom meeting, or other venue, to discuss the possibility of boycotting Israeli products in the Coop."

BASED ON PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH MEMBER DISCUSSIONS OF ISRAEL BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS, THE GENERAL COORDINATORS KNOW THAT A VENUE THAT CAN ACCOMMODATE AT LEAST 2,000 MEMBERS IS REQUIRED.

The primary reason the GCs removed this item from the agenda was that, due to the high level of member engagement with the issue, a larger venue than the Picnic House would be needed to accommodate those interested in participating in the discussion. As GC Ann Herpel explained, "Any discussion or decision that occurred in a space that did not let all who wanted to participate *to participate* could possibly delegitimize the discussion or decision, regardless of which side you stand on."

It isn't easy to find a suitable venue. Based on previous experience with member discussions of Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), the GCs know that a venue that can accommodate at least 2,000 members is required. In addition, any prospective venue would need to be informed of the meeting agenda in advance, and this can narrow the list of available venues. The Coop is currently searching for a suitable venue. Once this search is successfully completed, they will inform the Agenda Committee to bring items from the pending list to the next GM agenda.

Member Liz Latty raised that in the memo from the GCs explaining the "extraordinary action" an additional justification for postponing the agenda item was that the New York Police Department (NYPD) would also need to be notified. "Is this something that would still need to be considered?" Herpel clarified that this was direct feedback from the NYPD following a 2012 meeting that discussed BDS and that the Coop is obligated to communicate with them about similar meetings in the future. This requirement did not result from behavior inside the meeting, but from activity in the public space out-

side the venue, which is the responsibility of the NYPD.

#### BYLAW: NO VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Meeting Chair David Moss asked Herpel to explain why such a meeting could not be held virtually? Herpel acknowledged that, after the GM was held virtually for nearly three years during the pandemic, it seems counterintuitive that meetings can't now be held virtually.

NOW THAT THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY AND ACCOMPANYING LOCKDOWN ARE OVER, THE BYLAWS THAT MANDATE THAT MEETINGS ARE HELD IN PERSON MUST ONCE AGAIN BE FOLLOWED.

This is due to the Coop's bylaws, which require the Board to meet in person at a time that members are invited to join them. All public spaces were closed in March 2020, so, in consultation with a member who gives legal advice to the Coop upon request, the Board confirmed that the bylaws mandating in-person meetings could be temporarily set aside. Now that the public health emergency and accompanying lockdown are over, the bylaws that mandate that meetings are held in person must once again be followed.

Member Morgan Vo asked "What does it take to amend by-laws?" Herpel quipped that this takes an in-person meeting, before elaborating that the process would require an amendment to be placed on a GM agenda, discussed, and voted on. If the amendment passes, then it would be in effect until the next annual meeting, where it would need to be presented as a ballot to members through the annual meeting mailing, with the results of the ballot then ratified by the Board to continue to be in effect. The current by-laws can be viewed on the Coop's website.

## UNDERUTILIZED INVESTMENTS?

Holtz shared the treasurer's report, which indicated that the Coop's finances are healthy. Member Cynthia Payne questioned whether the Coop should expect a better rate of return on their \$7 million investments, and asked for clarification on how investment decisions are currently made. Holtz explained that the current low return of \$113,000 on the \$7 million investments could be attributed to some investments having been made before interest rates rose to their current rate, and that interest income is expected to rise to over \$200,000 in the next fiscal year.

Holtz personally makes the investment decisions in consultation with a financially astute individual Coop member, and keeps the GCs informed of his decisions. These investments are made with socially-minded community organizations that are divesting from fossil fuels, and with investment safety as the primary goal.

LEADING UP TO THANKSGIVING, THE COOP SOLD 629 TURKEYS, WEIGHING A TOTAL OF 7,161 POUNDS.

## A LOT OF FOOD

As if to reiterate the healthy finances of the Coop, GC Elinoar Astrinsky gave a Thanksgiving-themed food report that summarized the impressive quantities of produce sold in the single week leading up to the holiday. Astrinsky estimates that the pumpkin, eggs and cinnamon purchased at the Coop in the week before Thanksgiving would have made three or four pies each equal in size to the Guinness World Record largest Pumpkin Pie ever made: a 20-foot diameter and 3,699-pound pastry beast created in Ohio in 2010. This would be nearly 1,000 square feet of pie—larger than many Brooklyn apartments! The Coop also sold 629 turkeys, weighing a total of 7,161 pounds. This is the equivalent of one enormous turkey the size of a female African elephant.

## MANAGING MEMBER MISCONDUCT

After an hour of the meeting had passed, the chair introduced the two “leisurely” member-raised agenda discussion items. The first item was brought by Deborah Magocsi, Grace Protos and Helen Koh from the Dispute Resolution Committee, regarding “revisions to the procedures that govern the Coop’s disciplinary process.” The proposed changes to the procedures are to: create more accessible language, better define what constitutes member misconduct, elevate mediation as the first option for all cases, and replace the 15-member hearing group with a 3-member panel selected from the Hearing Officers Committee. The goal is to make the disciplinary process “clearer, simpler, less legalistic, more transparent and more humane.”

THE STRICT RESTRICTIONS ON FOOD PROCESSING NEEDED TO ALLOW FOR GLUTEN-FREE CERTIFICATION MAKE IT EXCEEDINGLY CHALLENGING FOR THE COOP TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS.

## BETTER SERVING CELIACS

The final discussion item was brought forward by Coop member Andrew Winfrey to discuss the possibility of including gluten-free labeling on items in the bulk aisle. Winfrey is impressed by the breadth of well-labeled gluten-free products available throughout the Coop, with the exception of the bulk aisle. Winfrey suggested that of the 82 products available in the bulk aisle, 54 of these products—such as almonds—are unlikely to contain gluten but are not labeled as gluten-free.

Members at the meeting attempted to clarify some of the challenges they saw, and offer a range of practical solutions. GC Joe Szladek noted that staff member Elly Dittmar has been working on an ingredients list for all items in the Coop, and that this would be available on the Coop website soon. It currently does not flag gluten-free items, but this could easily be added to the list in a later revision. Szladek also noted that the Coop operates in a very small space and with a very high turnover of prod-

ucts. The very strict restrictions on food processing needed to allow for gluten-free certification make it exceedingly challenging for the Coop to meet the requirements.

A member suggested a common-sense solution could be to label suitable items as *mostly* gluten-free, so that gluten-intolerant people could consider those items even if they did not meet the strict requirements necessary for celiacs.

*Dan Bergsagel is a structural engineer from London. He likes to talk about the unexpected things hiding in plain sight.*

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## FARM.ONE SPRINGS UP ON BERGEN STREET

January 16, 2024



*By Hayley Gorenberg*

After an overwhelming sensation of saltiness, my mouth buzzes like it's filled with Pop Rocks candy. I'm chewing a nubby, bright yellow bud of the *Acmella oleracea* flower, which is popularly called the toothache plant—and sometimes dubbed the “electric daisy.”

I crunch on the flower courtesy of a botanical tasting tour of the local urban hydroponic gardens that constitute Farm.One, located within walking distance of Barclays Center. The vibrant tour also featured a superhot mustard green that made my eyes water, as well as other tamer but ultra-flavorful—and frankly gorgeous—edible petals and microgreens.

FARM.ONE RECIRCULATES 700 GALLONS OF FILTERED CITY TAP WATER TO CULTIVATE ABOUT 150 VARIETIES OF HERBS, LEAFY GREENS AND EDIBLE FLOWERS AT A TIME.

Several times each week, the Prospect Heights facility welcomes groups of visitors to don blue shoe coverings and hairnets for a look at—and a taste of—myriad plants grown year-round indoors, using a water-based nutrient solution rather than soil.

The tours give participants a close-up of the hydroponics facility, which bristles with full-spectrum LEDs above 3,000 feet of growing space. Farm.One uses inert “grow media” and recirculates 700 gallons of filtered city tap water to cultivate about 150 varieties of herbs, leafy greens and edible flowers at a time.

After beginning as a membership-driven, subscription-based system, Farm.One converted to a direct retail approach. Neighbors can buy boxes of greens, herbs, flowers and other products online or at the farm, either as single purchases or on a recurring schedule. Farm.One is open 3–8 p.m. most days, and customers can purchase and sip

on botanical beverages in the front room, alongside rows of growing plants.



Inside Farm.One's hydroponic gardens. Photo by Caroline Mardok.

Farm.One boasts hard-to-beat freshness, tempting individual customers to purchase just-harvested greens and flowers in sturdy, reusable containers, barcoded and requiring a deposit to incentivize return. Bri Fronczak, an experience guide at Farm.One, tied freshness to maximizing health benefits, remarking that harvested plants lose nutritional value over time. "Once you cut a plant, it wants to decompose," Fronczak said. Farm.One buyers are practically grazing when they visit. "If you look and say, 'I want that plant!' we will go and cut it for you," she said.

In addition to working with seed outfits to select hundreds of different plants at a time, Farm.One also maintains relationships with bug dealers. The facility purchases ladybugs and assassin bugs to release within the building, naturally combating pests like aphids. Even with a biosecure space, pests get in—especially when relatively warm winters don't kill them off. Staff clean the space regularly and preventively, and

they wear designated clothing and shoes that don't leave the building.

A bicycle delivery service ferries orders from Farm.One—located at 625 Bergen Street, only a few minutes' walk from the Coop—to restaurants and bars within a four-mile radius. Farm.One advertises that they have “supplied the best restaurants in New York with edible flowers, rare herbs, micro and salad greens,” since 2016, and offers a “sample drop,” visit or discussion about products to any restaurateur looking to connect.

For business accounts, “everything is grown to order,” which means “there's very little waste,” according to Farm.One's Front of House Manager, Francesca Santos-Vargas. Local establishments order perhaps three or four weeks in advance, in “continuous conversation” with Farm.One, she said. “We're thoughtfully growing—not just growing random stuff that's going to get tossed.”



A worker holds an edible flower. Photo by Caroline Mardok.

Renato Poliafito, owner of the café Ciao, Gloria, at 550 Vanderbilt Avenue, delights customers by spreading toasts with avocado, hummus and ricotta, then topping them off with Farm.One microgreens. “They’re very peppery, bright, citrusy,” he said. “Not only do they taste interesting, with a dynamic flavor profile, they’re also really beautiful and colorful. When presenting the toasts and dishes, you’ll get a lot of ‘oohs’ and ‘ahs.’”

Poliafito, who also caters some events at Farm.One, feels the two ventures share similar philosophies. Farm.One advertises that the farm was built “to be sustainable to the highest standard, equitable in employment, beneficial to the community, and, most importantly, *delightful*.” Poliafito echoed these sentiments when describing Ciao, Gloria. “We’re a daytime café, we’re trying to use fresh, local when possible, and I can’t imagine it getting any more local than around the corner,” he said. “It’s a great match for us. We have the same outlook on business, trying to support community and be well-received.”

## WORKING THE FARM

In the course of maintaining an indoor, vertical farming facility that grows food with “zero pesticides,” Farm.One professes an ethos of hiring for “long-term careers, not ‘gigs’... with health insurance, dental, vision, life insurance and other benefits” and advertises “a unique experience for people looking to start a career in urban indoor agriculture.”

PART OF ADDRESSING FOOD AND CLIMATE NEEDS WITH HYDROPONICS INCLUDES TAKING ADVANTAGE OF URBAN SPACES THAT CUT THE DELIVERY MILES AND CARBON FOOTPRINT FOR FOOD.

The farm’s employees have often previously worked on outdoor farms, and share a keen interest in sustainability. Farm.One’s Kate Ginna grew up in New York and “had

no relationship to where [her] food was coming from.” Her background now includes having worked on a saffron farm in France.

Fronczak, who has experience with a community supported agriculture (CSA) operation that works with family farms, wanted to work “in a climate-positive, forward-thinking job.” She acknowledged that climate news can be “devastatingly sad,” but also opined: “It doesn’t have to be that way!”

Part of addressing food and climate needs with hydroponics includes taking advantage of urban spaces that cut the delivery miles and carbon footprint for food. Indoor urban hydroponic gardening also allows more food growth year-round, since, as Francesca Santos-Vargas, Farm.One’s front of house manager, said, “Weather doesn’t really exist here.”



A worker at Farm.One. Photo by Caroline Mardok.

Hydroponics and other alternatives to soil-based farming often spur debates about

commitment to soil health. Santos-Vargas, who has experience in environmental engineering, suggested that a facility on Bergen Street avoided such tensions, though, since “there was never going to be dirt on this plot of land.”

Santos-Vargas arrived at Farm.One after “a decade working in, and opening, some of New York City’s premier cocktail bars and restaurants.” Farm.One heralded her arrival as an employee whose “love of all things sustainable started in the New Jersey highlands, back when [she] was an engineering student, volunteering as a beekeeper and growing [her] own plants and wildflowers for the first time.”

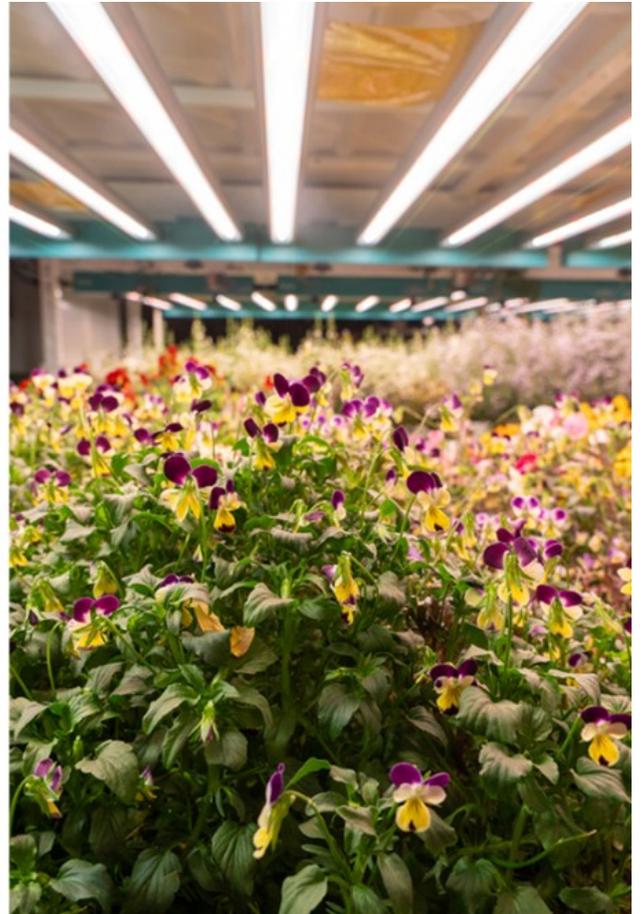
FARM.ONE’S HYDROPONICS SETUP HAS ATTRACTED VISITORS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING ONE FROM THE MIDWEST INTERESTED IN FARMING INDOORS ABOVE A BASEMENT COMPUTER FACILITY.

Santos-Vargas maintains the experience “opened [her] eyes to the importance of biodiversity and supporting the development of more thoughtful farming practices in order to help mitigate global problems, like climate change and food security.”

In general, hydroponic systems with indoor grow rooms allow for precise control of temperature, humidity, light and other environmental factors. Growers who optimize these conditions can promote faster growth and higher yields. With sensors to monitor factors like pH, nutrient levels and temperature, hydroponics facilities aim to provide a stable, optimized growing environment.

Farm.One’s hydroponics setup has attracted visitors from around the country, including one from the Midwest interested in farming indoors above a basement computer facility. The envisaged aquaponics facility there would, ideally, use heat generated by the computing machinery, averting energy waste.

## LEARNING AT THE FARM



Mizuna, sweet alyssum flower and other edible plants. Photos by Caroline Mardok. Farm.One also hosts workshops and events on-site. A free Music for Plants event recently offered “ambient and luxurious music in a welcoming space surrounded by plants” and non-alcoholic botanical drinks to sample. A “plant-cutting swap” invited New Yorkers to bring their “rare and unusual plants to swap” and featured Farm.One plants. The Farm.One free “holiday mart” in December boasted bud vase arranging, card making with pressed flowers and other craft activities, as well as mini-tours.

A two-hour introduction to hydroponics class covers principles of hydroponics and hydroponic systems, climate and nutrients, overall management of the crop from seed to harvest, addressing pests without pesticides, and best practices for pruning and harvesting. A dozen participants at any level of experience can learn about growing herbs, greens and flowers indoors in a controlled environment with artificial light. “This introduction to the high-tech world of indoor growing will open your eyes to the

possibilities of year-round, pesticide-free, high-quality, high-yield agriculture suitable for any size,” the course description suggests.

The small class offers hands-on experience “from seed to harvest,” guided by Farm.One’s director of farming, Kate Lodvikov, who is also an instructor at the New York Botanical Garden. It’s next offered on January 25 at 6:30 p.m., for \$150, luring participants with descriptions of how their “entire class will be actually inside the hydroponic farm—there is no other hydroponic learning space like this!”

Farm.One offers wheelchair-accessible, small-group tours each week, tempting visitors to “taste herbs [they] guarantee you’ve never, ever tried before” and learn about leading hydroponic technology. The farm’s street-level pavilion also serves as a showroom and event space for receptions or discussions, a non-alcoholic bar class and brew lab, a site for kids’ cooking classes, and offers a view through “a glass garage bay door so people walking by can see the beautiful space.”

*Hayley Gorenberg has worked in environmental justice and trained this spring with the Climate Reality Project.*

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## CHEF AIMS TO CREATE MOST SUSTAINABLE RESTAURANT IN AFRICA

January 16, 2024



*By Leila Darabi*

Although foodie culture is evolving, the consensus in cities like New York, London and Paris has historically been that fine dining means European food—not non-Western immigrant cuisine. In 2016, the popular food podcast *The Sporkful* produced a six-part special series titled *Other People's Food*, covering several themes, including why we expect Mexican and Chinese food to cost less than Japanese and Italian food.

“MOST OF THE BIG RESTAURANTS IN AFRICA AREN'T AFRICAN. EVEN IN AFRICA, THE AFRICAN FOOD IS NOT PRESENT, IS NOT VALUED.”

*CHEF MICK ÉLYSÉE*

Even in countries like Ghana, European cooking techniques often eclipse indigenous food culture. Congolese-born chef Mick Élysée is on a mission to change that—and to elevate African ingredients and cuisine in the eyes of the world. His restaurant Nsuom-Nam in Accra, Ghana, showcases sustainable seafood, local ingredients and traditional methods of preparation.

“Most of the big restaurants in Africa aren't African,” he said in a video interview. “Even in Africa, the African food is not present, is not valued.”

## A CHANCE RECOMMENDATION

Before diving into Élysée's culinary history, let me first explain why I requested an interview from him. In October of 2023, members of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* squad gathered for the first-ever “Gazette Fall Mixer.” The event brought together editors, reporters, photographers, illustrators and Coop staff who had worked together remotely for years—many without ever meeting in person.

Upon receiving my invitation to the mixer, I immediately reached out to my developmental editor at the *Gazette*, Petra E. Lewis, to see if she would be attending the gathering. Lewis, a member of the *Gazette* since 1999, has edited my articles since I joined in 2016. I had hoped to finally connect live, but she informed me that she was headed out of the country to a wedding in Accra.

“I FELT SOMETHING WAS MISSING. AFRICAN FOOD WAS NOT VERY ON THE MAP. I DECIDED TO CREATE MY OWN STYLE, INTRODUCING AFRICAN CUISINE TO NEW AUDIENCES.”

*CHEF MICK ÉLYSÉE*

Lewis’ destination piqued my interest, in particular because I myself have spent time in Ghana through my day job in global health. As luck would have it, I had seen friends in Accra post mouth-watering photos of seafood on Facebook that same day.

Knowing Lewis to be a fellow foodie, I sent her the name and Instagram account of the restaurant my friends had tagged on the off chance she would have time to check it out during her trip. That restaurant was NsuomNam, which Élysée heads.

While in Ghana, Lewis did eat there—twice. When she returned, she suggested that the *Gazette* feature NsuomNam and Élysée.

INTRODUCING AFRICAN CUISINE



Photos provided by NsuomNam Seafood and Fish Restaurant.

Born in Brazzaville, Congo, Élysée left in 1993 at the age of 13 when his family fled the first Congolese civil war and relocated to Toulouse in southern France. At 16, he entered culinary school, where he gained a foundation in classical French technique. At 22, he opened his first restaurant, as he put it, “not because I love to cook, but because I love to eat.”

Three years later, he sold that restaurant and, still only 25, set out to travel the world and explore what it has to offer. He lived and cooked in London, Japan, Brazil and Canada, before returning to London to work under master chefs at well-known institutions, including Soho House and the Haymarket Hotel.

For 12 years he worked as a consultant, helping restaurateurs open new establishments. Yet, despite the professional success, Élysée remained frustrated with the culinary world.

“IN AFRICA WE HAVE SOME OF THE OLDEST GRAINS. I BARELY USE WHEAT. I USE SORGHUM FLOUR TO MAKE MY PASTRY AND MY PASTA.”

## *CHEF MICK ÉLYSÉE*

“I felt something was missing. African food was not very on the map.” To rectify this, he explained, “I decided to create my own style, introducing African cuisine [to new audiences].”

He began to experiment with applying his classical culinary skills to preparing menus featuring African staples. “I had popups and local events [in London], so people could start to understand what my mission was.”

It was in London that he met Edwina Akufo Addo, daughter of the current Ghanaian President, Nana Akufo-Addo, who was interested in the growing Ghanaian food scene. With Akufo Addo as lead investor, Élysée relocated to Accra and launched Nsuom-Nam, which means “food from the sea.”

FARM AND SEA TO TABLE



Gazette editor Petra Lewis (left) with Chef Élysée and friend. Photo provided by NsuomNam Seafood and Fish Restaurant.

When Lewis visited NsuomNam for the first time, she was struck by the restaurant's open layout. "The ceiling was very, very high. And a large, spacious, grass-filled outdoor lounge dotted by chic, modern outdoor furniture appeared to be a happening scene," she said. The day her dining party ate there, Lewis described "a young, well-heeled crowd dining and enjoying each other's company in the yard, including a group that were Black and British. The crowd that night was an African diasporal mashup."

Her party sat inside, on high-back chairs in the restaurant's large dining room. "The service was fantastic—impeccable." Lewis said. "We had prawns, kelewele [a spiced plantain dish that's a Ghanaian specialty], jollof rice, and the best calamari I've ever tasted in my life."



Photo provided by NsuomNam Seafood and Fish Restaurant

When she returned a second time, Lewis and a friend had sorbet served on a bright red bed of reconstituted millet, a form of alchemy that reminded her of wd~50, the New York restaurant that popularized molecular gastronomy in the early 2000's, where Lewis and members of Chew, the dining club she founded, had once eaten.



Photos provided by NsuomNam Seafood and Fish Restaurant.

“In Africa we have some of the oldest grains,” Élysée noted, via Zoom. “I barely use wheat, he added. “I use sorghum flour to make my pastry and my pasta.” His menu features what Élysée calls smarter cereals: sorghum, millet and fonio, all gluten free, rich in iron and budget friendly.

Élysée speaks English with a Francophone West African accent, slipping between English and French when searching for the most vibrant possible descriptions of his food. He is quick to laugh, and, as evidenced by his personal Instagram feed, well-coiffed and a sharp dresser. A recent post featured the chef taking followers behind the scenes as he sourced millet from a local farm and transformed it into a starter on the menu.

The clip starts with Élysée visiting a rural setting, milking a cow, pounding grains in a traditional pot and interacting with men, women and children in traditional dress. It ends with Élysée back in his kitchen in the capital, dressed in his chef's uniform, using tweezers to position elements of the final dish—including edible flowers—to put the

finishing touches on the plate. The value proposition of NsuamNam lies in connecting - worlds: traditional African cuisine and staples with European and Asian culinary techniques.



Photo provided by NsuomNam Seafood and Fish Restaurant.

When asked about his intended clientele and whether Ghanaians or Western tourists make up the majority of his lunch and dinner crowds, Élysée is quick to insist that he attracts a diverse crowd. He prides his restaurant on being “in the middle—” not as inaccessible as fine dining in London or Paris, but also intentional in its mission of “elevating African cuisine.”

“When they see the design, it looks a bit too posh and people are scared,” he said, noting that most are pleasantly surprised by the prices, especially for seafood. Being owned by the Ghanaian President’s daughter has also prompted some accusations of high prices at NsuomNam, though a Google News search found an equal number of reviewers who called the prices fair.

“I WANT PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THAT IT’S NOT JUST A PLACE WHERE YOU COME AND EAT. THE RESTAURANT HAS A MISSION.”

*CHEF MICK ÉLYSÉE*

Élysée is also clear that in elevating African cuisine, he aims to stress local ingredients and traditional methods of preparation, not fancy food for the sake of fancy food.

“I cook my fish in banana leaves, using the old technique. And I use a lot of smoked fish, which we prepare a lot in West Africa,” he clarified. “I want people to understand that it’s not just a place where you come and eat. The restaurant has a mission [to showcase local ingredients and African cuisine].”

A recent post on the restaurant’s Instagram features a tantalizing plate of locally sourced prawns served on a traditional clay platter. Local pride is just one part of the values Élysée seeks to advance. His restaurant features local seafood in part to promote environmental sustainability. From the relationships he has built with local fish-

ermen to highlighting locally grown produce, each item on the menu serves Nsuom-Nam’s multi-pronged mission—ranging from sustainability, to locavorism, to furthering the reach, and appreciation, of African cuisine.



Left: char-grilled organic and wild lobster with spicy pasta. Photos provided by Nsuom-Nam Seafood and Fish Restaurant.

“I’m hoping that more Americans, and non-Ghanaians, will get hip to him,” Lewis said of Chef Élysée, “because he really needs to be in that class of people who are called upon as international culinary thought leaders.”

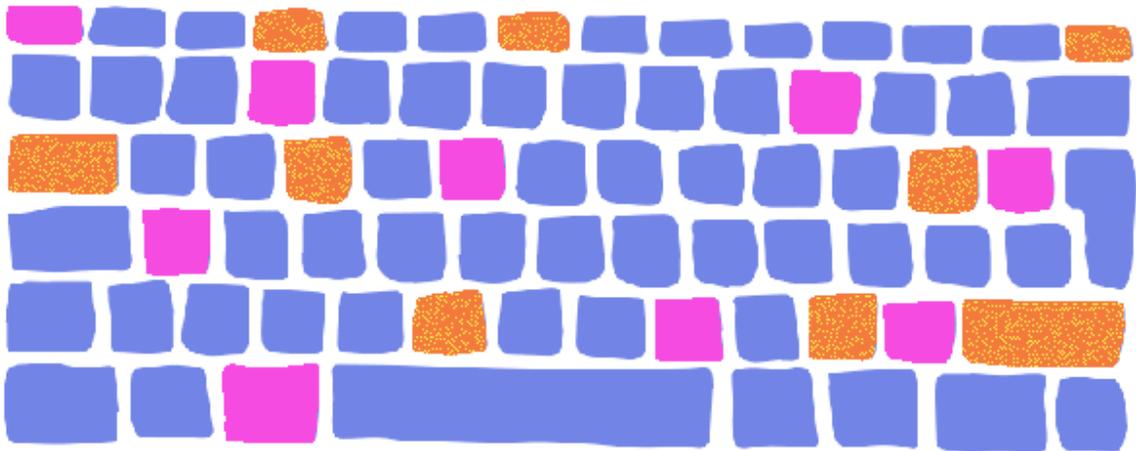
*Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She is the cohost of the feminist TV podcast Cringewatchers and shares photos of the things she cooks with Coop ingredients via @persian\_ish on Instagram.*

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## LETTERS

January 16, 2024

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



## CURRENT POLITICS

Dear Coop,

The current politics in this nation have reached a critical mess. The right and left battle it out in a tone-deaf contest of wills. The conflict frequently takes on a somber

tone. It sometimes seems more like a war. Troubles in the Middle East have a similar ring. Bringing either conflict into active debate will do nothing for the Coop but sew consternation and conflict. We've got a great crew; the ship is steady.

As a successful progressive institution, we have kept ourselves above the fray. Taking the high road is always difficult. Allowing the Coop to remain free from choosing a side will permit peace to prevail.

There is a better path for America, and Israel and the Palestinians. Keeping the little store on Union Street free of such political matters is best. If we put our love and energy into the store, it will come back to nourishing us. As does the crew; keep us on course—in spite of storms.

With Hope,  
*Rodger Parsons*

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## BDS WRONG FOR THE COOP

To the Editors,

I am a retired area coordinator and current member of PSFC. I'm a fourth generation American and I don't belong to any religious congregation. I've never been to Israel. My ancestors came to America to escape antisemitic persecution.

I simply cannot take part in an organization that singles out the world's one and only Jewish state for special condemnation. There is plenty of uncooperative extremism all over the world including Palestinian suicide bombers. It is repugnant to me to think that the prestige of the Coop is being used to glorify one side versus the other in the Middle East.

The continued publicity that BDS would receive, if we hold a referendum, is an embarrassment to me, your retired employee. Further, if the referendum were to pass, I would have to resign my membership. I wonder how many other employees and members would be driven away too. Antisemitism is wrong even in the name of free speech and democracy.

*Bonnie Q. Kaplan*

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BDS

Dear Editors,

BDS, and their statement on October 7th, makes it a movement unfit for a community that embraces the background of all of its members.

Supporting a movement that attempts to justify violence on a day when people were massacred because of their religion is not aligned with the Coop's mission statement to "make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all."

That being said, it is not appropriate for the *Gazette* to be publishing letters supporting the BDS movement or for it to be considered for adoption by the Coop.

*Jackie Loeshelle*

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SUPPORT OUR COOPERATIVE SPIRIT

Dear Editors,

From 2010 through 2015, the Coop was engaged in a controversy that could have destroyed the Coop. A small group of members set out to have the Coop endorse a political position that had no connection to the Coop's core mission. The effort ultimately failed. The costs to the Coop were high: countless member and coordinator hours; thousands of dollars for meeting space rental; loss of precious GM time; and irreparable damage to the Coop's reputation.

Prior to the murders, beheadings, rapes, and kidnappings committed by the genocidal terrorist organization Hamas on October 7, the matter appeared to have been put to rest. But following the October 7 massacre, some members reintroduced this controversy. It is ill advised, toxic, and pernicious. We cannot allow the social fabric of the Coop to be torn asunder again. Our highest priority must be the well-being and preservation of our Park Slope Food Coop.

But shouldn't Coop members be allowed to use our resources to promote causes dear to them? Yes, within the limits, as noted in *Gazette* submission guidelines. BDS violates those guidelines. BDS is part of the anti-Israel movement that seeks to deny the Jewish people the right of self-determination in a portion of their historic homeland. Hamas and multiple additional terrorist organizations endorsed BDS as the "Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine." The anti-Israel protests have been violent, engaging in harassment and vandalism. They make false accusations against Israel and call it "legitimate criticism." The anti-Israel movement is discriminatory, violent, and hateful.

The Editors must abide by *Gazette* guidelines and cease publishing letters on this topic. There is no shortage of sources of information and misinformation for anyone interested.

*Barbara Mazor*

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## BDS

Dear fellow Coop Members:

I am very concerned with the impact that the BDS movement is having on the Coop community, particularly given the brutality of the Oct. 7 terrorist attack on civilians and the massive spike in anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attacks around the world since the Oct. 7 attacks.

I will also share an observation. I used to see a significant number of clearly religious Jews shopping as members of the Coop. I have not seen them since the BDS movement became active in our community. I feel like this has driven away members, and its resurgence after the Oct. 7 terrorist attack is making remaining Jewish members, myself included, *highly* uncomfortable, possibly even unsafe.

I am sympathetic to both Israel and Palestine. I believe in a sound, two-state solution. But the Coop is a community where people have differing views and for the Coop to boycott one side will split our community and feed into a growing insecurity of Jews in our community. I think this is harmful to the Coop. It is more important for the Coop to fight anti-Semitism and, I will add, Islamophobia, in our own community than to target a foreign nation.

I think an isolated boycott aimed at Israel is the wrong way to handle this. If the Coop is going to boycott entire nations (I am not convinced we should), we need to establish clear criteria of what would trigger such a boycott and apply that unbiased set of criteria to every nation we import from. To target one nation and ignore every other nation is biased and problematic. Make it a simple rubric that is used without bias and apply it to all nations or do not boycott any nations.

Thank you,

*David Michaelson*

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BDS

Dear Editor,

As members since 2010, my husband and I are heavily invested with untold hours of work, in the PSFC.

We are appalled that the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, the official organ of the PSFC, has been publishing letters of support for BDS. It is no secret that wherever BDS takes hold, violence ensues. This is a fact and it is part of the BDS mandate.

Are we now to stop our membership at the because it will become a dangerous, or at best, uncomfortable place for us?

There are many venues where people who want to engage in political debate can go. The PSFC should not become one of them, and must certainly not give platform to one side of the Israel-Palestine conflict, where passions run high and, to many of us, are deeply personal.

Please stop publishing letters that create a climate of hostility in the PSFC for so many of its members who come in good faith, to work and to shop in peace.

*Baila Olidort*

*Lubavitch International*

*Editor-in-Chief*

*[www.lubavitch.com](http://www.lubavitch.com)*

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## FILM NIGHT: SEEKING FILMS FOR THE 2024 PROGRAM

January 16, 2024



Calling all directors, producers, editors, cinematographers and screenwriters!

We are now accepting submissions for films made or crewed by Coop members. Films of any length (features to shorts) and any genre will be considered for screening. The films are screened via Zoom, and we hold a Q&A after every screening so Coop members can engage with the filmmakers to learn more about their process and work.

**If you'd like to submit a film, please send a link and a short synopsis to [gabrielrhodes@me.com](mailto:gabrielrhodes@me.com).**

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IN MEMORY OF PAUL MILKMAN

January 16, 2024



*By Thomas Rayfiel*

Paul Milkman—one of the Coop’s earliest members—died December 6, 2023. He was 75. Before retiring, Paul and his wife, Cathy Kaczmarek, usually worked a shift together, she as squad leader, he as a cashier. Paul was passionate about the Coop’s mission. He was also a serious cook. His friends Donnie Rotkin and Linda Ellman recalled how he:

*...took great joy in using high-quality, fresh ingredients. Over the course of many, many meals we can envision Paul, standing at the stove spatula in hand, regaling us with the excellent recipe that he usually adapted using food from the Coop.*

Paul’s professional life was long and varied, including running the progressive Camp Thoreau, famous for its coed skinny-dipping and left-wing songbook, as well as directing summer programs for the American Society for Jewish Service, where he led groups of teenagers who built housing for people in need.

But his most lasting and significant impact was as an English teacher at Midwood High School. Former students saluted him as being, “a memorable and inspiring teacher,” “a legend,” “literally my favorite teacher of all time,” and “a key feature in my intellectual development.”

Paul was a swimmer, a walker, a musician, a traveler, a historian, and a Mets fan. His death came after a long-planned 75th birthday celebration where, in his wife Cathy’s words:

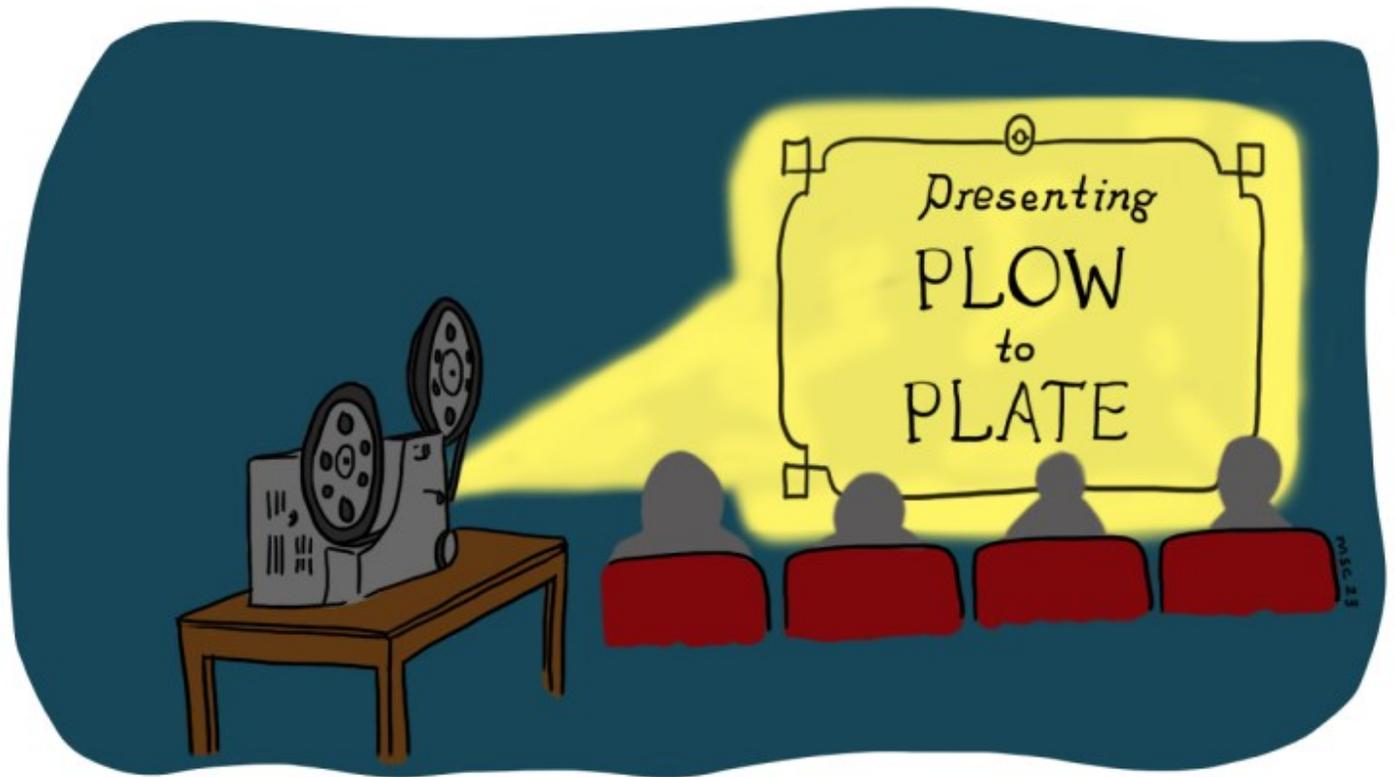
*...he was showered with tributes to his passion, intellect and devotion. He spent two more days communing with family. Tuesday morning, he took his regular nine-mile walk with his dog, Roxie, before becoming unresponsive. He died less than eighteen hours later surrounded by those very loved ones he had recruited for celebration, having magically ensured not to be a long drawn-out bother to any of us. He died happy and loved as infinitely as he loved us all.*

Paul is survived by his wife, his children Rebecca and Jesse Alson-Milkman and Caitlyn Milkman, son-in-law Craig Thomas, daughter-in-law Lauren Raab, grandchildren Elliot and Celia Thomas, sister Marilyn Milkman, brother-in-law Adam Gordon, nephew Joshua Meer, in addition to, in Cathy's words, "countless other cousins, friends, loved ones, campers, and students who constituted his private republic over the years."

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## PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: KISS THE GROUND

January 16, 2024



*By Adam Rabiner*

*Kiss the Ground* begins with an unnamed narrator grimly intoning about fires, hurricanes and other natural disasters caused by climate change, as news reel footage graphically illustrates these catastrophes.

With six mass extinction events already underway, the bad news about our planet is

overwhelming, and the fear that we're headed for a cliff puts most of us in a state of paralysis.

After this proclamation, the camera alights on the narrator, who is speaking into a microphone in a darkened studio. "The truth is, I've given up..." the man says while grimly biting his lower lip, "...and, the odds are, so have you." Then the camera then cuts to a picturesque forest, with a coastline in the background. "But what if there was another path?" the voice asks. This is Woody Harrelson, and his message is anything but cheery.

This other path, the subject of *Kiss the Ground*, is restoring healthy soil that has the ability to sequester vast amounts of greenhouse gases that could balance the climate, replenish fresh water supplies and feed the world.

THE MODEL GISELE BÜNDCHEN AND HER FORMER HUSBAND, THE FOOTBALL STAR TOM BRADY, DISCUSS THEIR HEALTHFUL EATING HABITS.

*Kiss the Ground* focuses on several key strategies of sequestration, the primary one being regenerative agriculture. Regenerative agriculture focuses on improving the health of soil, which has been degraded by the use of heavy machinery, fertilizers, and pesticides in intensive farming. Ray Archuleta, who works for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is a proponent of regenerative agriculture. He travels the country teaching ranchers, farmers and other producers the basic scientific principles of soil.

Most of his students have been practicing industrial-scale agriculture for years but do not know how soil works. As Ray makes efforts to reduce chemical spraying and tilling, which harm the soil and contribute to erosion, he discovers that educational and social issues precede ecological issues.

Just as Ray seeks to persuade farmers that they can still farm productively and profitably without pesticides and herbicides and using no-till drilling, *Kiss the Ground* challenges other common misconceptions about modern-day agriculture, such as the belief that methane-burping cows are always bad for the environment.

In another segment, the actor Ian Somerhalder visits Allan Savory, the Zimbabwean ecologist and livestock farmer who originated Holistic Management—a system of restoring parched African savannah to fertile and healthy grasslands through a controlled system of cattle grazing. Doniga Markegard, a rancher who uses the innovative, carbon-storing methods of regenerative ranching in the depleted San Francisco Bay Area, has also achieved soil preservation through similar methods.

But it is not just producers who can improve the soil—everyday consumers can contribute by carefully choosing what they eat. For example, a vegan or vegetarian has a smaller environmental footprint than a meat eater. However, even carnivores can lessen their impact by choosing local, grass-fed animals rather than those mass produced on feedlots. These points are highlighted by the model Gisele Bündchen and her former husband, the football star Tom Brady, who discuss their healthful eating habits.

Cities can get into the action as well. For example, San Francisco has an innovative composting program that could serve as a national and international model. The system penalizes restaurants and citizens for contributing to the waste stream and rewards them for diverting food waste into compost, which is then given to local farmers.

One of the biggest successes highlighted by *Kiss the Ground* was the restoration of China's 140,000 square mile Loess Plateau between 1994 and 2009. In this span, a team of scientists worked with communities to turn a dusty and dry landscape into a verdant one that supports agriculture and has lifted 100 million people out of poverty. The plateau had been completely devastated, but through a lot of cooperation and hard work, both its biodiversity and economy were restored.

PERHAPS THE MOST DIRE AND DEPRESSING STATISTIC CITED IN THE FILM IS THE UNITED NATIONS' DOOMSDAY ESTIMATE THAT THE WORLD'S REMAINING TOPSOIL WILL BE GONE WITHIN 60 YEARS.

Counterbalancing these positive narratives, the film cites some hard facts that harken back to those early, scary images of destruction. For example, we've lost one third of the world's topsoil since the 1970s, and two-thirds of the world is currently in the process of desertification, which is causing 40 million people to be pushed off their land every year.

One estimate suggests that there will be one billion soil desertification refugees by 2050. Perhaps the most dire and depressing statistic cited in the film is the United Nations' doomsday estimate that the world's remaining topsoil will be gone within 60 years. That is only 60 harvests left.

While *Kiss the Ground* bounces between fatalism and optimism, with an upbeat soundtrack by singer-songwriter and guitarist Jason Mraz, it seems to ultimately take the side of hope. After all, between the two potential paths facing our small green planet, what choice, really, do we have?

*Kiss the Ground* screened on October 10, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@mail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@mail.com).