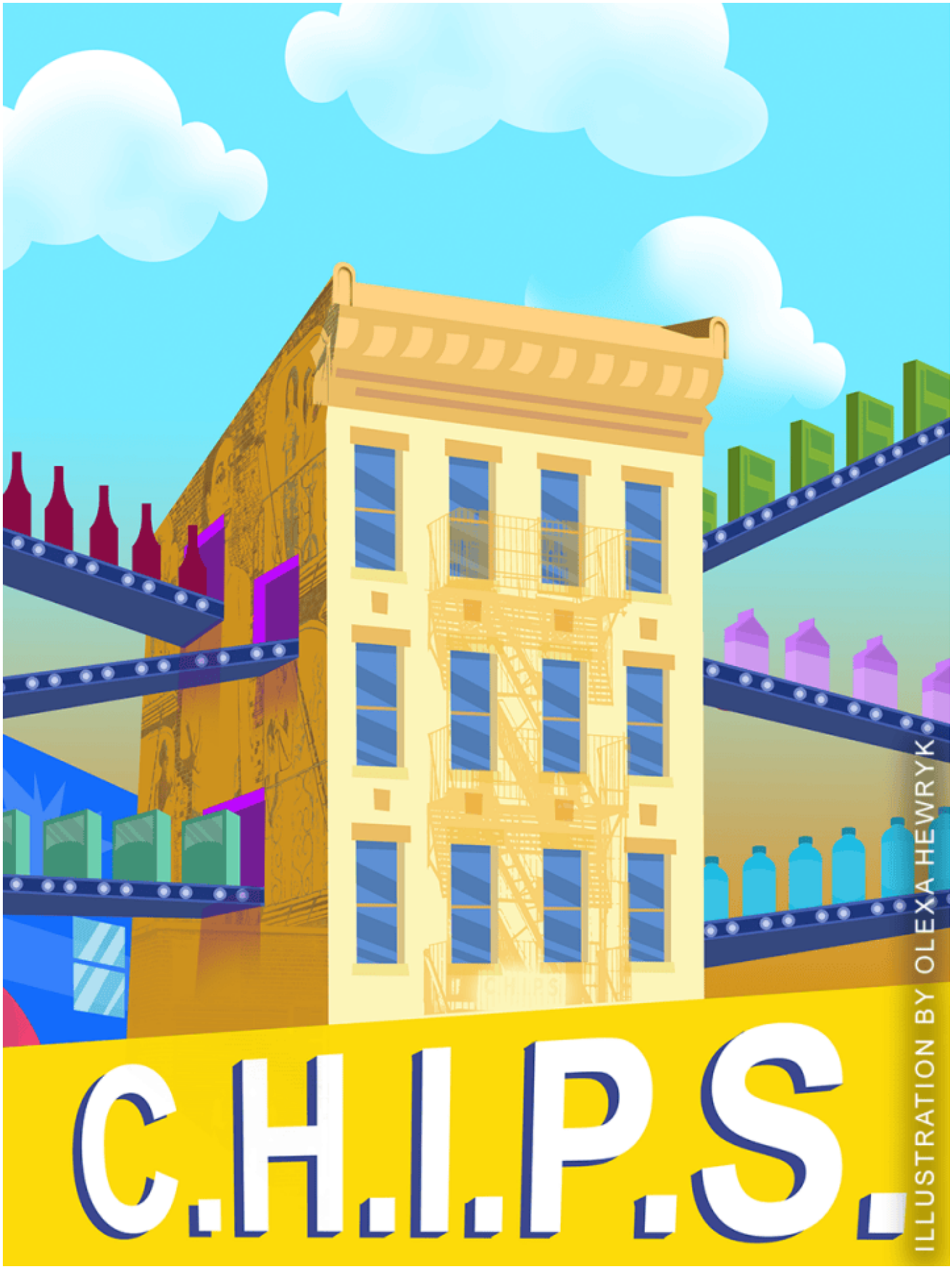
MEET MATTHEW CABAN, THE CHEF WHO SPRINKLES COOP PRODUCE INTO THE 400 MEALS HE PREPARES ON AN AVERAGE DAY AT CHIPS

March 19, 2024


C.H.I.P.S.
ILLUSTRATION BY OLEXA HEWRYK

By Liz Welch

Anyone who has ever worked the produce shift at the Coop has likely placed a slightly bruised piece of fruit or deformed but otherwise fine vegetable in one of the “soup kitchen” boxes. These receptacles are then delivered to CHiPS on 4th Avenue, the soup kitchen with whom the Coop has had a 50-plus year relationship.

But what happens after the produce is delivered a few blocks west?

Chef Matthew Caban, who has been running the kitchen at CHiPS since November 2022, might take those apples and turn them into apple sauce, possibly flavored with berries depending on what else was donated that week. Or he might make a cucumber and tomato salad to serve alongside baked chicken and rice, which was on the menu the Monday in February when I stopped by to interview him.

Curious to understand what it means to be a chef at a soup kitchen that serves upwards of 36,000 meals a year, according to the CHiPS website, I asked Chef Caban if I could help him with lunch service. His enthusiastic response was an indicator of what was in store: “I’d really appreciate an extra pair of hands!” he replied via email. “To really catch us in action, aim for 10:30 a.m. as we begin plating lunch. Wear a hat (unless you want to use a stylish hairnet) and clothes you can get dirty. Kitchen work gets real messy, real fast.”

When I showed up at the designated time, a line had already begun to form outside the mural-covered building. The ground floor houses a food pantry and there is a residency for single mothers one flight up. Once I was buzzed in, I walked down a hallway that led to the first kitchen prep room where a long stainless-steel countertop was lined with a dozen volunteers, six on either side. Some were slicing apples and placing them in Ziploc bags, others were making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Beyoncé was blasting on the stereo and everyone seemed happy to be spending their Monday morning helping prepare lunch kits (sandwich, fruit, snacks, and a hot entrée) for people in need. The number of recipients has significantly increased within

the last few months.



“When I first began, a little over a year ago, we would serve 150 to 200 hot lunches daily,” Caban said. “These days, we average 400 plates on any given day.”

Those numbers track with a City Harvest report that since 2019, there has been a 60% increase in people relying on soup kitchens in a city that already struggles with food insecurity. The NYC Mayor’s Office of Food Policy estimated that 1.2 million NYC residents were food insecure in 2022.

> “THIS FELT DIFFERENT. I LIKE THAT IT HAS REASONABLE HOURS DURING WHICH I ONLY HAD TO MAKE ONE MEAL, FOR LOTS OF PEOPLE WHO ALL DESERVE DELICIOUS FOOD.”

A big teddy bear of a man, Caban had just taken a large tray of baked chicken thighs and legs out of the oven when I arrived in the back kitchen where he prepares all the hot meals for CHiPS clients.

“Perfect timing!” he said with a big smile. “We’re about to start plating.”

Hall and Oates was blaring on his radio—part of a playlist he’s been curating for years that includes The Rolling Stones, The Eagles, Elvis, and Queen. His Monday crew of eight volunteers, all regulars, were stationed at a smaller stainless steel table that runs parallel to the stoves and ovens that line the back wall.

Caban asked me to peel apart the aluminum pie plates to ready them for the production line: the two men scooping rice were both Coop members, though neither was doing this as their shift. They come every Monday because they enjoy the work, they told me.

“I hear that a lot,” Caban said. “That’s the point.”

He then announced: “Okay people, it’s go time!” The plating began at 10:30 a.m. and continued until 400 meals were made.

“Two scoops of rice, one chicken leg, and a vegetable,” Caban said as the plates were passed down the line, ending with a ladle full of pan juices, and then finally covered with a plastic see through top before being loaded onto a trolley that, once filled to capacity, was rolled out to the front of the building where lunches are packed into plastic bags: hot plate, sandwich, and snacks.

“That looks and smells delicious,” I said, my mouth watering as the plates were being assembled.

“I’d never serve any meal that I would not eat myself,” Chef Caban replied with a big smile.

FOR HIS JOB INTERVIEW AT CHIPS, CABAN TRAILED THE INTERIM CHEF FOR A DAY. BY THE END OF IT, HE KNEW THAT HE HAD FOUND HIS DREAM JOB. “I WILL BE HERE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE,” HE SAID.

On this particular day, the vegetable side was a medley of sautéed yellow squash and zucchini for the first 200 plates. When that ran out, a tomato and cucumber salad emerged from the cooler.

“That was made with Coop produce,” Caban said. “Last week I made a really nice salad with radishes, red peppers, and shredded carrots. My volunteers were like, ‘can I get some of that?’ I was like, ‘if there’s any left.’”

A Sunset Park Native, Caban has worked in kitchens all over New York City. “I ran a brunch service in Crown Heights, a sports bar at Union Square, and a fine dining coffee shop there, too,” he says. “I also worked at a vegan restaurant in Williamsburg. But this is the best place I’ve ever worked.”



When I asked why, he said he got burned out (and literally scarred from burns) by working grueling hours, where he had to make upwards of 15 dishes on any given day, six days a week with head chefs who would “walk around angry all day,” he says. “They’d be furious and that seeps into their work and doesn’t make for a pleasant work experience. Their bad day becomes my bad day.”

For all these reasons, he was ready to leave the food industry—and then Covid hit: he was laid off and spent the next 18 months at home, teaching himself how to make wine in his kitchen. When the world opened back up, and he was ready to go back to work, he considered a job at FedEx.

“I love making food, but restaurant cooking is thankless,” he explained. “It’s also dangerous: we’re playing with knives and fire for a living. I have scars and calluses. I didn’t want to go back to it. Plus, my wife and I were talking about starting a family and the restaurant schedule is not conducive to that.”

But then, as he was looking for employment opportunities, he saw that CHiPS was looking for someone to run their kitchen. “This felt different,” he said. “I liked that it had reasonable hours during which I only had to make one meal, for lots of people who all deserve delicious food.”

For his job interview at CHiPS, Caban trailed the interim chef for a day. By the end of it, he knew that he had found his dream job. “I will be here for the rest of my life,” he said.

His work day begins at 8 a.m., with breakfast for 100 to 150 people. “Usually, we do cereal, a pastry or sometimes hot oatmeal,” he explained. “And always a boiled egg, for protein.”

Lunch is the main attraction, and Caban has become well known for his ability to get as much as he can out of his ingredients. “Last week, three cases of catfish were donated,” he said. “You can’t go wrong with lemon pepper or Old Bay seasoning.”

One of his favorite chef tricks is to confit garlic. “I slice the tops and bottoms off of the garlic head and roast them in a pan at 350 in olive oil for one hour,” he explained. “I use that with rice, or rub it over chicken. It makes killer garlic bread, which is another in-house favorite.

Rice is the most often requested starch—which Caban often seasons with sautéed onions and herbs. On the Monday I was there, he made 15 trays, or 60 pounds, a personal record. He also prepares potatoes, and pasta, staple items that are stored downstairs in the basement alongside rows of ramen, peanut butter, and tuna fish.

Caban’s chili is another crowd pleaser. “I try to stretch our proteins as much as possible,” he said. “It would be great to do burgers for 400 but I could do so much more with half of the amount of meat—so I add corn, potatoes, or mushroom, as healthy fillers.”

Not all food donations are welcome, however. “People mean well, but this morning, someone donated three trays of smoked fish,” he explained. “It was left over from a banquet, and everyone was excited because it was an expensive delicacy. I threw it out.”

Some people were upset as they thought it was wasteful, but food safety is Caban’s main concern. “I don’t know where that fish has been stored, how old it is, or whether it was refrigerated properly,” he said. “And it’s just not worth a food poisoning law-suit, or worse, we kill someone by accident.”

He added that while he appreciates the generosity of the people who donate, it is sur-prising how few people truly understand food safety. Even the produce donations from the Coop give Caban pause as he has to sort through all of it. On average, out of every twelve boxes donated, he composts three.

“‘Fresh’ is the operative word for produce donations,” he said. “It’s just not as fresh as it could be.”

When I asked what could make it better, he said, “Refrigeration. My concern is, where are these boxes being stored and for how long before they make it to my kitchen?”

Still, these are small complaints versus the overall joy he has running this kitchen.

My workday starts at 8 a.m. and ends at 2 p.m.—six hours compared to ten to twelve hour days I was working,” he said. “And my son, Caleb, was just born on January 5th, so that means I get to spend time with him. Plus, this kitchen has a skylight. I get excited every time I look up.”

He’s not the only person who finds joy working at CHiPS. “My volunteers love to come back,” he says. “It doesn’t feel like a day at work and yet we’ve pushed out over 400 plates. You can have fun while helping people all at the same time.”

In the end, this is what it is all about: making delicious and nutritious food for people in need. On that point, Caban days that the absolute best part of his job is a grateful clientele.

After he finishes the lunch rush, Caban likes to go outside and talk to the people being served.



“I get a genuine deep satisfaction out of feeding someone who’s hungry,” he said. “It’s such a simple thing. I’m not a religious person, but people often say I’m doing God’s work. I’m so happy that I get to do it.”

Liz Welch re-joined the Gazette *as a reporter in August 2023 after a hiatus. She is a longtime journalist and author/collaborator whose work can be seen at http://www.lizwelch.com.*

BOARD CANDIDATES: WHO THEY ARE AND WHY THEY'RE RUNNING

March 19, 2024



First, some background on the Coop's Board:

The Park Slope Food Coop Board of Directors plays a crucial role in running the Coop. The board makes its decisions based on the advice of members who attend the monthly General Meeting. There are five seats on this board, and each term lasts three years. Members submit their applications to run for open seats in March each year and candidate statements are published in the *Linewaiters' Gazette.* Nominees will have the opportunity to introduce themselves at the March 26 General Meeting.

All members can start voting online via a Coop-wide email that will go out in late May, and results will be announced at the Annual Meeting on June 25.

This year there are nine candidates for two open seats. Here are the 2024 candidates and their statements (in alphabetical order):

RICHARD ALVAREZ



I was a high school math teacher in the L.A. area for 12 years and am now aged 77 and retired. I am healthy and enjoy my membership in PSFC. I live in Brooklyn in convenient walking distance to the Coop or by subway or bicycle.

I have a BS degree (Duke University, 1967) and an MBA from U. Penn (Wharton) in 1971.

I think I could bring something positive to the PSFC Board and would certainly enjoy the association with the other Board members helping to keep the Coop the great place that it is.

TESS BROWN-LAVOIE



My name is Tess Brown-Lavoie and I’m running for the Board of the Park Slope Food

Coop. I love the Coop, and am eager to lend my background in agriculture, land justice, food policy and nonprofit management to Coop governance. Before I started teaching at Pratt, I was a farmer and community organizer for ten years, mostly in Providence, RI. My relationship with land and food still undergirds my writing and teaching.

As a farmer, I got involved with many farm advocacy and food policy groups. I ran the Young Farmer Network (YFN), which coordinated peer-to-peer learning for young and new farmers in Southeastern New England. YFN also initiated a Justice and Agriculture Working Group to study racial inequality in food and agriculture, and organize land-based mutual aid in the region.

Most of my past board experience is in agricultural policy. Most significantly, I served as a board member of the National Young Farmers Coalition from 2012-2020 (I was President from 2017-2020). I also served as the sole urban farmer on the board of the New England Farmers Union, and the Rhode Island Food Policy Council. These bodies enabled collaboration between individuals and institutions with drastically different food systems perspectives: large- and small-scale farmers, investments in organics and conventional agriculture, reps from food banks and fisheries, land conservation, state Departments of Ag and many more.

When I moved back to New York in 2019, I joined the Coop immediately (long-time guest, first-time shopper). I'm still looking for a community garden plot, so I see the Park Slope Food Coop as one of my primary investments in an ethical food system, and I am eager to contribute my perspective as a former farmer and farm-organizer to the board. Our food system is intrinsically imbedded in cultural, political and ecological concerns, and I value how co-ops encourage consumer buy-in, and prioritize ethical purchasing. We are lucky to have access to such good, local food, and to have the opportunity to consider how we eat and shop. I am indebted to the leadership that has envisioned this venue for food system engagement and empowerment, and look forward to contributing more.

Around 2008, I started farming at Eagle Street Rooftop Farm in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. I was an undergraduate literature student at NYU, and wanted to supplement academic study with more embodied knowledge around colonial histories of this land, alternatives to industrial food production and cycles of energy more broadly. In college I would bike from Windsor Terrace to Greenpoint with a bag full of frozen compost in my backpack, initiating what has been a lifelong commitment to pursuing the long route toward ethical investments in my food system. As a farm apprentice (in Brooklyn, Providence and Scotland) between 2008 and 2011, I exhausted myself in the dirt and hot sun, and was compensated with a bag of the most delicious vegetables I'd ever eaten. It was a stunning, simple logic. The alchemical directness of this system—in which I gave my energy to the land in sweat and muscle, and it gave energy back in an abundance of color, taste and nutrition—really touched me.

In 2011, I started Sidewalk Ends Farm in Providence, RI with my sisters. We grew food in abandoned lots in Providence for a 12-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Participation in the Little City Growers Cooperative enabled our small business to access restaurant sales, which were crucial to starting our business. This was one of my first experiences as a co-op member, and extended my sense of what is possible through collaboration. By 2019, Sidewalk Ends cultivated two acres of chemical-free vegetables for a 60-member CSA, sold at farmers markets and to local restaurants through Little City and ran educational programs for young people at the farm.

I made so little money as a farmer, but ate so well. I traded arugula for oysters, and collected compost scraps from the fruit trucks on my bike cart. Our vegetables tasted better as the soil quality improved. Through changes such as this, I became more sensitive to my environment, and the dynamics that produce conditions that make it more or less possible for plants, food systems, farm workers and food economies to thrive. I learned about the history of the land, indigenous and contemporary stewardship practices, soil ecology and the cultural prism of agrarian values. In New York, these values are largely expressed through my participation in PSFC. I look forward to applying my professional and personal experiences in food ecosystems to our coop.

JULIEANN BUZZANCA



My name is JulieAnn Buzzanca, I have been a member of the Park Slope Food Coop for a few years and am very interested in getting involved beyond my shifts. I really enjoy the diversity of products offered as well as having the confidence that the products are well sourced and well priced. I have worked on cashier shifts and stocking shifts where I have observed pricing models, restocking trends and the average price points for items that consumers tend to buy at accelerated rates. After working these shifts, I am interested in getting more involved in financial performance measures such as month to month stock purchases versus sales analysis, detailed deep dive in stocked perishable items monthly margin of waste, as well as nonperishable items rate of restock.

I am a CPA with over 10 years of experience in audit and internal accounting. I currently work at United Way of New York City as an associate VP of accounting and finance. Prior to this role I was the controller and acting CFO of Damian Family Care Centers, a group of 15 Federally Qualified Health Centers located throughout New York. I have extensive experience in financial statement preparation and analysis of financial data. I have developed a professional skill set in comparatively reviewing financial data, analyzing historical trends and enhancing efficiencies to eliminate organizational waste. I also have extensive knowledge of GAAP accounting and remain up to date with all new accounting standards by regularly attending continuing education courses as well serving as an adjunct professor at DeVry University.

I consider the Park Slope Food Coop as one of the culturally enriching cornerstones of the community I reside in permanently. Every time I have worked a shift and/or shopped in the Coop, the sense of community is overwhelmingly present. As a cashier I have had countless conversations with shoppers about the items they are purchasing and how they plan to prepare the food. As a shopper I have found myself walking through the aisles and picking up items I am unfamiliar with but eager to try. I have a great appreciation for the service the Park Slope Food Coop offers. I believe combining my passion for the organization as well as my passion and skill sets in accounting and finance can be a great asset to the Food Coop Board of Directors.

AVERY HOUSER



Hi, I’m Avery Houser. I joined the Coop in early 2017 to comply with Coop rules in light of a new romantic tryst. I had just started dating my then-housemate, and the development meant we’d be sharing food—suddenly, a household! Now, seven years and many Coop roles later, my romance has endured (we’re married) and I’m ready to deepen my commitment to this grocery store by joining the board. I believe in the importance of the board to represent the will of the members’ democratic decisions

while considering the most responsible financial and legal interest of the Coop. To me, board membership would be an opportunity to serve my cherished Coop community, as well as to apply the board-literacy I've gathered from launching and selling a beverage business.

In 2019 I started an all-natural hard seltzer company called Half Past that aimed to produce unexpected flavors, like a carrot margarita with fenugreek, or grapefruit and cardamom with sea salt. The Coop was where I found flavor inspiration and sourced many of the ingredients for batch upon batch of test recipes. More relevant here though, starting a beverage business meant I learned to navigate legal complexities and gray areas of things like state-by-state permitting, online alcohol sales and packaging labels that had to comply with standards set by both the FDA and the TTB (Tax and Trade Bureau). It came with the weight of financial responsibility to my investors and employees. In early 2023, after extensive strategizing and searching with the help of our own board, we sold the company to another drinks business. The process required, first and foremost, determining the best course of action for the business, which meant making hard and sometimes painful decisions. The most important thing for me during that time was to consider the wellbeing of everyone involved as much as possible in every choice and communication while steering forward.

Back to 2017—within a few months of joining the Coop, I transitioned from bright-eyed recruit to hardened squad leader when my receiving squad leader retired and no one else wanted to do the job. I loved the sense of community and the education that came with the role. At the time, the receiving squad was responsible for many aspects of closing the store. The mad rush to clean bread baskets, buff the aisles, and bail cardboard to get everyone home created a kind of frenzied team energy. The role afforded me a wider view of the functioning of the store; the mechanics work so well not because they are perfectly orchestrated, but because we have collectively grown into them and refined them together over the years. The beautiful way that the Coop functions is through a mixture of highly intentional design and people figuring out how to operate within it. I loved sitting between the team and the coordinators to shepherd items through their journey from basement shelves to the shopping floor to

bailed boxes.

Since member labor returned in 2021, I mostly do receiving but the new system has provided opportunities to work repair shifts that include disassembling fans in basement walk-ins, dusting rafters high above the office, fishing out tools from the roof shed; to walk carts and meet other members; to sometimes serve as a squad leader when needed. It’s fun to see my coordinator friends from the time before the pandemic and reminisce about the relative chaos we had to manage then. My many experiences interacting with the Coop would deeply inform and enrich my board service.

In the past seven years of romance, beverage businessing, and Coop membership I’ve learned over and over again how one of the most critical components of a successful ongoing relationship is the ability to conceive of and move towards a shared dream. At risk of overly belaboring this metaphor, I so appreciate how the organization of the Coop is a manifestation of the shared will and dreams of its members. It would be an honor to serve as a steward of this shared imagination for the future.

RAMON MAISLEN



My name is Ramon Maislen and I've been a Coop member for almost 13 years. Like many of you, my relationship to the Coop is profound but not without its ups and downs. When I first joined, I struggled to do my shifts and eventually was required to switch to the late-night shopping squad. Once I joined this squad I truly fell in love with the Coop. Each month we would meet and have a great time catching up regarding what had happened in our lives over the past month. When our squad leader retired, he asked if any of us would take over as squad leader. After surveying the room and realizing that nobody wanted to step up, I volunteered. I wasn't willing to let the magic of our squad potentially be changed.

As squad leader I made sure that we never stood around looking at the clock at the end, if we'd finished our work before 11pm then everyone got to go home early. My co-squad leader and I would need to bring the cash to the bank and lock up the Coop, so we never got to go home early. But this was a small price to pay to maintain our squad comradery. I also took it upon myself to make a new playlist for every shift and I tried to be as thematic as possible (think Halloween and other holidays). Sadly, the pandemic put an abrupt end to our shopping squad. Since then, I've gotten to do numerous jobs throughout the Coop and gotten to know even more of the staff and members. Despite my enjoying stocking, receiving, lifting, etc. I think I'm ready to take a more active role in the Coop again.

Well, that's quite the long introduction without even getting to the point. So, why should you vote for me to be on the Board of Directors? You should vote for me because I enjoy working amicably with those around me and I truly love the Coop and want it to continue to thrive and be a model for other coops around the country. Working in the field of construction within NYC has forced me to navigate a diverse set of personalities from irate contractors to stubborn design professionals (although for the most part both the construction teams and design professionals have always been lovely). I try to bring a positive and professional demeanor to every setting that I am a part of, and I would continue to do that within the Coop setting. At work I am heavily involved in risk mitigation and review financial and legal documents daily. Therefore, I think that I'll be able to bring my professional experience to bear in a positive

way to help the Coop.

The Coop is an amazing microcosm of NYC and the world at large and I would be honored to be a part of helping to ensure that the Coop continues in its mission and only goes from strength to strength as it embarks upon its next 50 years.

JIMMY ROYSTON



Greetings! My name is Jimmy Royston, and I have been a Park Slope Food Coop member for several years, since I moved a block away on Union Street. Over that time, I've grown increasingly invested in the role that the PSFC plays in cultivating my sense of rootedness in this neighborhood—and I'm excited at the prospect of dedicating more of my time, talents and passion to this organization, and the broader community we serve.

In my professional life, I'm a partner at a large global consulting firm, where I have spent the past 15 years working with food, beverage and home and personal care brands both large and small on their growth pursuits. Many of the brands we all stock during our shifts—or call for on the intercom during our shops—are among those I work with. In this role, I spend my time advising executives across a wide array of topics—by listening to their thinking, bridging divides within their teams, mapping out the impacts of different choices on their many stakeholders and bringing my own objective perspective to the decisions we're making.

Not only has this work afforded me a unique vantage point within the food industry to understand how the "sausage is made" (and consequently, how it is bought, sold, packaged, marketed and shelved)—but also a sharp appreciation of the many food inequities that make the Coop so essential, particularly in our current environment of rampant food price inflation. I believe that my deep expertise in the sector would be of service to the Coop's stewardship, and more importantly, to our continued efforts to bring healthful, affordable and culturally significant foods to our community.

In my Coop life, my preferred shifts are our much sought-after checkout and cart-walking shifts that allow me to meet and get to know my fellow members. My partner Adam prefers to dedicate his Coop time to CHiPS Soup Kitchen shifts just down the hill. Both of us deeply value the sense of community and service that comes from being a part of the Coop—walking through the Coop's sliding door is a palpable sensation for us both, and I inherently leave my shifts feeling more connected, more optimistic and more inspired to be in service of something larger than myself. It also feels particularly meaningful in today's society and economy to actively engage in a more

collectivist, participative approach to urban living.

The Coop has faced many challenges over the past few years that required bold decisiveness in the face of unclear information and divergent opinions across the membership. More of these challenges will certainly arise moving forward. As a representative on your Board of Directors, I would aim to bring the best of my Coop passion and professional expertise to serve you all—listening to and representing the democratic will of our membership community; and bringing my business experience to ensure both the continued financial success and community impact of the Coop.

Despite its storied history, the Coop continues to be both an experiment and a remarkable lighthouse around how we can reshape the ways we feed and serve our communities—puns only *slightly* intended. It would be a deep honor to dedicate my time and experience to ensuring our remarkable work continues.

I look forward to engaging with you at the March General Meeting, and thank you for your consideration!

SONDRA SHAIEVITZ



When I was considering which Brooklyn neighborhood to move to 30 years ago, the choice was easy. The Food Coop drew me to Park Slope. I had wanted to become a member since moving to Brooklyn years before and was so happy to finally join this amazing place. I treasure the Coop—the wonderful healthy groceries, glorious produce and fantastic prices. But what I value most is our community. To me, the Coop is an enclave of kindness, cooperation and shared values. The Coop feels like home.

The Coop plays a crucial role as a shining example of cooperation and self-governance in an ever cynical, increasingly divided society. In recent years, I have felt a strong pull to support this somewhat vulnerable and important ecosystem in a more direct and impactful way. I was inspired by the heroic efforts of the Board of Directors to keep us afloat during the pandemic. I will never forget when, during our first Zoom membership meeting, the Chairperson of the board was moved to tears when describing the hard work and dedication of the entire board to get us through that difficult and very precarious time. I was truly moved.

As a former corporate attorney who switched careers, I have enjoyed a thriving practice as an energy healer and teacher for over 22 years. I feel the intellectual, analytical and problem-solving demands of corporate law, combined with the compassion, patience and empathy developed as a healer would be a beneficial addition to our Coop board of directors. I see the board as the members' voice and source of support. Accordingly, as a board member I would always vote to uphold the members' decisions at our meetings.

I would welcome the opportunity to serve the Coop and the membership in a more meaningful and direct way, and would be very honored to serve on the board of directors if elected. Thank you.

KEYIAN VAFAI



My name is Keyian Vafai and I'm running to be your Park Slope Food Coop board member. I love our Coop because it is a bastion for community and for democracy in New York City. Of course I love the food, too. It's one of the only places in the city where I can get locally-sourced and organic food, rare ethnic specialties and weird mushrooms I've never seen before— all at affordable prices. But I see the carefully-sourced and diverse selection of food we carry as a blueprint for communities to take back our urban spaces. In a "normal" grocery store, customers don't know each other, and workers are invisible and not well rewarded. It's anonymous and lonely. At the Coop, everyone has buy-in, and as a consequence we have a home and community that we all contribute to every time we step through the door.

I understand that building community takes hard work. I've worked as a field organizer for State Senator Julia Salazar's successful 2018 campaign, and as a labor organiz-

er in the Teamsters Union. My current job is a web developer for a local magazine, but I still volunteer my time to community and labor organizing projects.

I love talking to people and finding common ground, what we can learn from one another and discovering what we can create collectively. As a Coop board member, I will focus on finding ways to make member participation in our community wider and deeper. As a younger newer member, I have fresh experience with joining the Coop community and a strong desire to make sure every new member can be welcomed into our community and find ways to contribute. Before I joined, I thought the Coop was just a place for cheap and interesting groceries. I quickly learned it was much more than that. My goal is to make sure all members can contribute to our definition as a collective—even if it's just expanding our sashimi selection.

I know we can make the Coop better. I've learned from longer-term members that the Coop has always been improving community engagement. The Coop didn't just become a community establishment overnight. From the start, members have come together to propose agenda items, campaign and vote to grow and change the Coop for the better.

We know the Coop couldn't even exist without our contributions and labor as members, and accordingly the more stake we have in how our sausage (pork, beef, turkey, chicken, tofu or rabbit) gets made, the better our Coop can be. As a board member, expanding this democracy would be my highest priority.

RALPH YOZZO



My name is Ralph Yozzo and I'd like to contribute to the Coop by serving the members as a member of the Board of Directors.

First, I'd like to thank the Coop founders and members for the now five decades of service to the community.

I've been a member for more than two of those decades. I've served as a General Meeting crew shift member and attended many, many General Meetings.

As the Coop bylaws state, the GM is “devoted to receiving the advice of the members.”

Over 20 years, I’ve served in many phases of the food service business thanks to the Coop. From checkout, to walker, to office, to lifting—I have to say that walking is my favorite.

As a director I would mostly listen to the membership and it would be my honor to serve. I would also promise to only serve one term to give everyone a chance.

COORDINATORS’ CORNER: BOYCOTTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATION

March 19, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

By Joe Holtz, on behalf of the General Coordinators

February 26, 2024

Over the past several weeks, a group of members have been on the sidewalk in front of the Coop, asking members to sign a petition supporting “boycotting products imported from Israel,” products from companies that have “a proven record of complicity with Israeli apartheid,” and that are “produced/manufactured by a company (Israeli or not) that is known to operate in the occupied territories in violation of international law.” The group, identifying themselves as “PSFC Members for Palestine,” were also in front of our January General Meeting (GM) venue distributing literature and asking members to sign their petition.

We felt it necessary to inform the membership of 1) the concerns we’ve heard and how we are trying to address them, 2) clarify the Coop’s position on this issue, and 3) explain the Coop’s history of boycotts and the interaction with the International Principles of Cooperation to which our Coop adheres. We were moved to write after many members expressed deep concerns to the Coop staff about the petitioning and we observed how this issue is dividing our Coop.

CONCERN #1

The petition campaign to boycott Israel makes some members feel unwelcome at their Coop because they hold a different position. Further, the methods and wording used by the petitioners in front of the Coop makes some members feel harassed when entering, leaving or standing/sitting in front of the Coop or space rented by the Coop.

It is legal to petition and hand out flyers on a public sidewalk or area in New York City as long as the activity does not block pedestrian traffic. The Coop has not, cannot, and will not do anything to stop the petitioning. The sidewalk is an acceptable place to petition. In contrast, it wouldn’t be acceptable in the Coop’s aisles, elsewhere in the building or in a rented space.

CONCERN #2

The petition gives the impression that the Coop—as an organization—is supporting and endorsing the campaign to boycott Israel.

One source of confusion is the name the group has adopted. Initially, the group called themselves “PSFC for Palestine.” After the General Coordinators (GCs) requested to remove Park Slope Food Coop/PSFC from their group’s name, the group changed it to “PSFC Members for Palestine,” contending that adding the word “members” clarified that they did not represent the entire Coop. However, a Google search for “PSFC Members for Palestine” lands on the website PSFC4Palestine.org. That homepage does not indicate that the website is not an official Coop or GM-approved initiative.

To address this issue, the GC team has made additional requests to the group to remove any variation of the Coop’s name from their name, URL, or social media handles, as they haven’t received explicit permission through the Coop’s governance system to use the Coop’s name in this way. However, the group has argued that there is no confusion or expressed need to change, despite being told their name is causing some people to think they are endorsed by the Coop. The Coop is a member-owned and -operated organization, and its name should not be used without explicit permission from the Coop’s governance system.

We are responsible for ensuring that the Coop’s name is not used in a way that could misrepresent its official actions or lack of action. We encourage this group to embrace the GCs’ request and help us maintain the Coop’s standing as a welcoming community for everyone.

THE COOP’S POSITION

The Coop—through its governance process—has taken no position on a boycott of Israel or related companies. The decision to boycott or not boycott must occur through the GM and the Board of Directors.

The GCs, in our role as Chief Administrative Officers, are obligated to support the Coop's democratic processes. How are we accomplishing that? We have resumed the search for a large space to hold a GM to discuss the agenda item submitted by the PS-FC Members for Palestine.

After the 2012 meeting of 2,000+ members at Brooklyn Tech HS to vote on holding a referendum to join the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement, the NYPD and the NYC Department of Education provided guidelines to be followed if this topic is on a future agenda:

1. We must disclose the agenda when asking to rent a venue.
2. We must inform the NYPD beforehand about the meeting's subject matter.
3. We must hire a private security firm to supplement the building's security.

We will continue to update members on the status of the search for a meeting venue.

BOYCOTTS AT THE COOP

Some may think this boycott proposal is no different from past boycotts. However, it is important to examine why and how this current matter differs from the history of boycotts at the Coop, and how that history fits in with the International Principles of Cooperation.

The Coop is a democracy that complies with the democratic rules in the NYS Cooperative Corporations law, the NYS Business Corporation law (where applicable), and the International Principles of Cooperation.

International Principal of Cooperation #1, "Voluntary and Open Membership," essentially states that coops welcome people from different ethnicities, races, genders, religious groups and political persuasions. Coop Principal #2, "Democratic Member Con-

trol," states that Coops should function democratically.

Members have a right to advocate for boycotts. Previous member-sponsored boycotts—such as the boycott of products from Chile, California lettuce/grapes, Nestlé's and Coca-Cola—had the support of close to 100% of the members, thus avoiding any potential problems between these two Cooperative Principles. Since the support was overwhelming, virtually no members felt unwelcome due to their political beliefs. Several years ago, the GM did take a step toward limiting the tension between these two cooperative principles. A GM proposal sponsored by a member was passed: Future boycott proposals required approval of 75% of those voting at the GM in order to pass.

> BALANCING INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPAL #1 AND PRINCIPAL #2 IS AN OBLIGATION OF ALL MEMBERS, NOT JUST THE GCS. CONCERN FOR THE COOP'S SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUED GROWTH FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS.

Boycotting Israel or Israeli products is the only proposed boycott that has numerous members in support of, opposed to, or neutral on the issue. Regardless of the vote's outcome, thousands of members could feel unsupported by their Coop and may choose to withdraw their membership. The GCs firmly believe that our cooperative must continue to be welcoming to all people who are willing to abide by the Coop's policies and procedures and expected cooperative behavior. We believe in diversity, and the diversity should extend to welcoming all groups of people, including encompassing people who have different political views.

We support the principles as expressed in the Coop's Mission Statement: The Coop is committed to diversity and equality and opposes discrimination in any form. We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and respect the opinions, needs, and concerns of every member. We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store and we welcome all who respect these

values.

Balancing International Principal #1 and Principal #2 is an obligation of all members, not just the GCs. Concern for the Coop's sustainability and continued growth for the next 50 years and beyond is also the obligation of all members.

Joe Holtz is a General Coordinator and the General Manager of the Park Slope Food Coop.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE DOMESTIC CHESTNUTS GONE?

March 19, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

By Anita Bushell

Ever wonder why chestnuts in the produce aisle come from, of all places, Italy? I did, when I spied them on a dull November day, while placing sweet potatoes in my cart. Late fall had officially arrived, and purchases of berries and melons had transitioned to root vegetables and, maybe, chestnuts.

As I lifted handfuls of the smooth brown nuts into a pale green bag, I thought that perhaps my spouse might roast them later that day. And that was when I saw the sign saying the chestnuts hailed from Italy.

“We sell between 50-150 lbs. at their peak,” John Horsman, a buyer for the Coop’s produce department says, “for a few weeks leading up to Christmas. We purchase our chestnuts directly from Hunts Point Market. Our current suppliers at the moment are

not offering an American chestnut but I have asked if they will look into it for next year. We have traditionally purchased our chestnuts from Italy since we have not seen chestnuts offered on any of our availability lists from local sources."

Why not local? There's a simple answer: blight. Beginning in the early 1900s, approximately three billion East Coast American chestnuts were wiped out, victims of the fungus Cryphonectria parasitica, discovered on the bark of a dying chestnut tree at the Bronx Zoo. Researchers traced the fungus to Japanese chestnut trees, which began arriving in the U.S. as early as 1876. By the 1950s, the number of American chestnuts lost to the blight was an estimated 4 billion.

Yet miraculously the chestnut, which is rich in vitamin C, antioxidants and calories, and whose leaves contain high levels of essential plant nutrients, has not died. Millions of American chestnuts, sprouting from old roots, manage to survive in forests in the Washington, D.C. region and in other locations in the eastern United States.

> UNTIL THE BLIGHT, THE MIGHTY AMERICAN CHESTNUT, WHICH COULD GROW AS TALL AS 120 FEET AND WAS REFERRED TO AS THE "REDWOOD OF THE EAST," POPULATED THE EAST COAST FOR 30 TO 40 MILLION YEARS.

Until the blight, the mighty American chestnut, which could grow as tall as 120 feet and was referred to as the "redwood of the East," populated the East Coast for 30 to 40 million years, thriving in forests from Maine to Florida, nourishing not only humans, but animals. Its benefits were so widespread that Indigenous peoples of the Appalachians, such as the Catawba, Chantah and Chikasha, cultivated the tree.

In addition, the chestnut was a valuable source of timber that was considered the single most American cut tree species in 1915. According to a 2020 *New York Times Magazine* article: "As railroad ties and telephone poles, where durability trumped aesthetics, chestnut helped build industrial America." Chestnut barns, cabins and churches

still stand today. When the blight began killing thousands of American chestnut timber trees, the *Times* called it “the most rapid and destructive fungus known to the world.”

These days the American chestnut is undergoing a transformation as multiple nonprofit organizations, including the American Chestnut Foundation, try to develop a blight-resistant American chestnut tree through research and breeding. The foundation refers to the state of the chestnut as one of demise, rather than extinction. According to its website, “The blight cannot kill the underground root system as the pathogen is unable to compete with soil microorganisms.”

As it turns out, the East Coast chestnut is once again available, just not in vast quantities. Thanks to the innovation and hybridization of folks like Kim and David Bryant, founders of Virginia Chestnuts in Shipman, Virginia, local chestnuts are available for purchase on certain specialty websites. However, they’re not yet available in the amount or at the price point that the Coop would need.

On a cold December afternoon, my spouse and I peeled the skins off those warm roasted Italian chestnuts. They were quite delicious, with a rich flavor and velvety texture. Still, I am looking forward to the day when my Coop spoils include the glorious American chestnut.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer and native New Yorker. She just published Object Essays*, and is currently working on her second novel. She has written for* Bristol Noir, the San Antonio Review, Friends Journal, Grande Dame Literary, Apple in the Dark, Motherwell, *and* Uncensored: American Family Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness*.*

MEMBER RECIPE: TWO-WAY MAC & CHEESE

March 19, 2024



By Greg Costikyan

I've cooked for years for both kids and adults. Naturally, kids like mac and cheese. It's gooey and bland—how could they not? And naturally, I am not really enthusiastic about eating undifferentiated cheesy glop. This recipe is a compromise—some regular old mac and cheese for the brats; and something rather spicier, with chorizo, for the grown-ups. Everyone walks away happy.

FOR THE BASE

- **12 oz macaroni** (3/4 of a 1 lb. package)

- **3 tbsp butter**
- **3 tbsp flour**
- **3 cups milk**
- **1/2 lb sharp cheddar cheese** (The Coop’s white cheddar is a little sharper than the orange stuff)
- **1 tsp salt**
- **Dash of hot sauce**

FOR THE SPICY PART

- **1/2 lb chorizo sausage**
- **1 tbsp olive oil**
- **1 medium onion, chopped**
- **2 cloves garlic, finely chopped**
- **2 tsp paprika** (I prefer the unsmoked variety in this recipe, but smoked is okay)
- **1/4 tsp red pepper flakes** (more if you’re a capsicum masochist)
- **1 tsp Dijon mustard**
- **1 tsp hot sauce**

DIRECTIONS

1. Cook the macaroni according to package directions, and drain.
2. Slice the chorizo into 1/4 inch rounds. Set a cast iron skillet over high heat for a minute or two. When hot, add the oil and then the chorizo slices. Brown them, about 90 seconds per side, then remove to a plate.
3. When the chorizos are done and removed from the skillet, add the onions and garlic to the skillet, cooking them in the same oil as the chorizos. Turn the heat down to medium, and stir frequently until slightly browned, about 5 minutes. Remove and add to the chorizos.

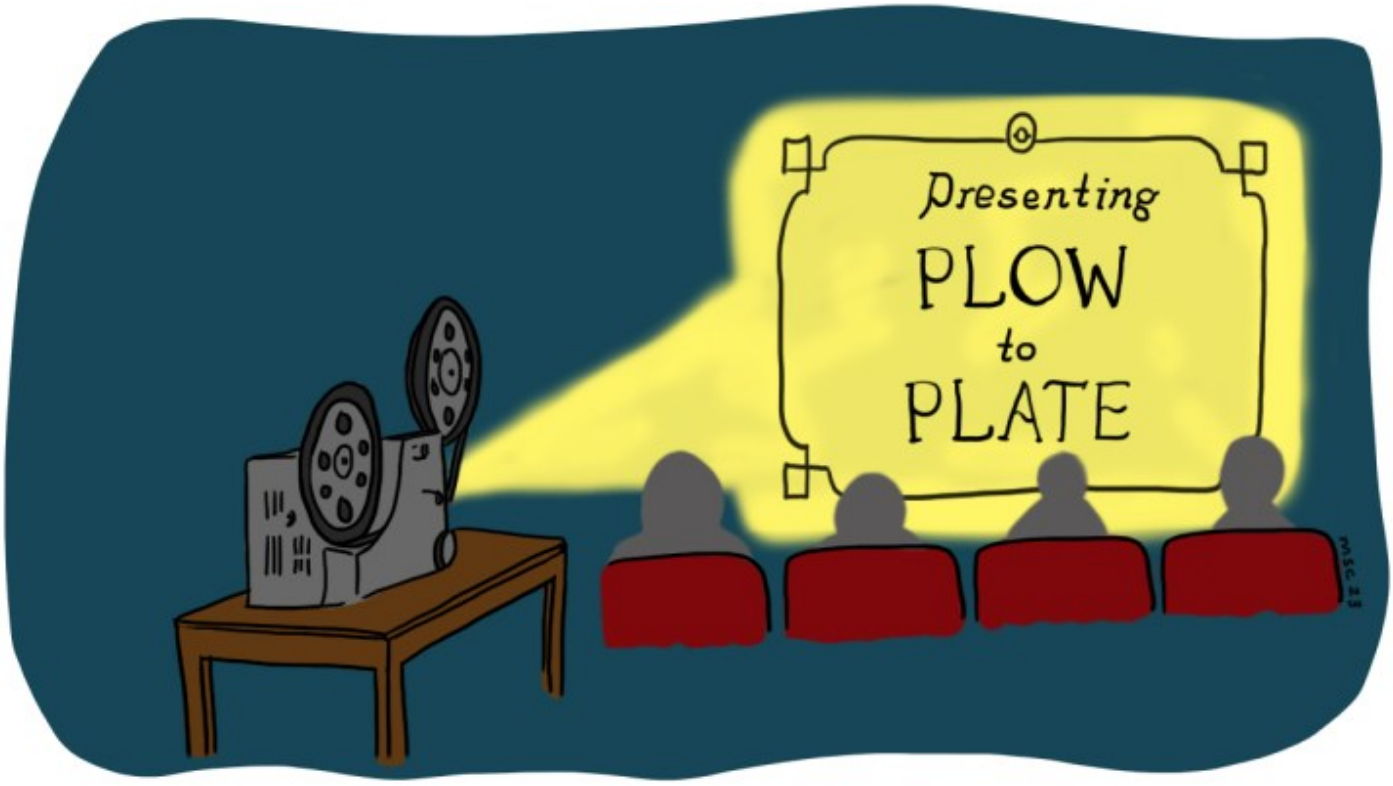
4. Grate the cheddar. Turn the oven to 400 degrees to warm up.
5. Take two oven-proof containers, and butter them both.
6. In a medium-sized saucepan, melt the butter. In the meantime, warm up the milk. (I pour 2 cups into a measuring cup, nuke for a couple of minutes, and use that, then warm up the third cup later as needed, because who has a 3-cup measuring cup?)
7. When the butter is melted, add the flour and whisk it into the butter. With the heat on medium, add the milk, a little at a time, whisking it in. Incorporate each batch of milk before adding more to avoid lumps. The last cup or so you can just pour in, because by that time the mixture is pretty liquid.
8. Add the salt and dash of hot sauce to the liquid, and continue to heat over medium, whisking occasionally, until the liquid thickens—about 5 minutes. (Be careful not to let it boil over when it does.)
9. Mix in the grated cheddar until it melts, and remove from the heat.
10. Mix together the cheese mixture and the macaroni. What you have now is the not-spicy mac. Transfer half to one buttered container.
11. To what's left, add the chorizo, onions, and everything else listed under "the spicy part." Mix thoroughly, then transfer to the other buttered container.
12. Bake both for about 20 minutes.

If you only want regular mac & cheese, skip steps 2, 3, and 11.

If you only want spicy mac, increase the quantities for "the spicy stuff" by a third, and don't bother making a separate container of non-spicy.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: NITROGEN 2000: THE DUTCH FARMERS' STRUGGLE

March 19, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

Most Coop shoppers are educated enough consumers to know that industrial farming is a major producer of gasses that contribute to climate change. Indeed, this connection has been a theme of many of the documentaries we have screened over the years. The solution proffered by these films has usually been the halcyon vision of an alternative system grounded in local, organic, sustainable aand small-scale agriculture. But *Nitrogen 2000* goes deeper and explores a specific solution pursued by many in the the Netherlands. What the film shows is that policy solutions can engender their own sets of conflicts, costs and benefits and winners and losers.

Surprising facts: About 60,000 Dutch cattle farmers own 70% of the land in Holland, some of which can be found immediately outside of the major cities like Amsterdam or Rotterdam. Farms have been in families for generations and many Dutch have friends or relatives who are farmers. The country is known for its cheese and milk production which forms part of its national identity. But Holland is also part of the European Union, and the nation has made promises, as did other EU members, to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. To keep its promises and climate mandates, the gov-

ernment pledged in 2019 to purchase 50% of the farms, cut the number of animals living on them in half and restore the farms' nature. To facilitate these actions, the government set up a 25 billion Euro fund to compensate the farmers and help them transition to other fields.

Compensation, however, has not allayed all the related concerns. Many fear the consequences will be abject poverty, a destroyed middle class, growing societal inequality, less opportunity for the next generation and higher food costs. Opponents view this as government overreach, anti-cow propaganda, and a blatant land grab to build houses, highways and factories. Some farmers agreed to give up their cows to keep their land but were told they still had to sell. At least six have hanged themselves in protest. As many political commentators, politicians and even scientists, echoed these concerns, farmers blocked bridges and highways with long convoys of tractors in mass protest and civil disobedience.

> HOW BIG A PROBLEM IS NITROGEN REALLY? CAN OTHER TECHNIQUES TO LESSEN THE IMPACT OF AMMONIA (THROUGH COW PEE, POOP AND BURPS) BE EMPLOYED WHICH WOULD BE FAIRER SUCH AS COW TOILETS, MASKS AND CHANGES IN THEIR DIET?

Nitrogen 2000 presents views from both the farmers and their supporters, and those who advocate for the nitrogen plans. The film uses black and white newsreel clips equating the Soviet land collectivization between 1928 and 1940 and Holland's current nationalization plans. It's no mystery where the film's sympathies lie. The audience will likely also take the side of the hard-working farmers whose livelihoods are at risk and who had little direct say in these decisions.

Some of the questions, to which I do not have the answers, but am glad were raised are: How big a problem is nitrogen really? Can other techniques to lessen the impact of ammonia (through cow pee, poop and burps) be employed which would be fairer

such as cow toilets, masks and changes in their diet? Or are the scientific studies upon which these major policy decisions are based valid? The viewer may also come to better understand why some believe that international alliances and climate treaties compromise national and individual sovereignty.

Nitrogen 2000 inverts some of the common tropes we have come to expect from the *Plow to Plate* film series. We expect to hear from filmmakers that Monsanto is evil. It is completely surprising, and a little bit alarming, to learn that many Dutch farmers and other commentators believe the environmentalists, a Dutch government pursuing green environmental policies, and the non-government organizations (NGOs) who will take over the relinquished farmlands are the villains.

This film, like our last two films, *From Food to Freedom* and *Plant Pure Nation,* emphasizes a populist impulse to control our own destinies free from strictures or distortions. *Nitrogen 2000* sometimes feels like it leans too heavily against the views and opinions of environmentalists. But it also challenges viewers to debate and question assumptions and beliefs that many films take for granted. It is easy to agree with the critiques of large-scale commercial agricultural interests and to take the side of the small-scale farmer. But what if that small-scale farmer is pitted against the Green Party or Green Peace?

Nitrogen 2000, *April 9, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.*

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

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife Dina and child Ana.