

OLIVE OILS AT THE COOP: PRESERVING QUALITY AND FAIR PRICES IN THE FACE OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES

October 15, 2024



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON



ILLUSTRATION BY ROD MORRISON

By Jess Powers

October 15, 2024

If you suspect that recent increases in olive oil prices are due to climate change, you are correct. But, happily, the Coop carries many interesting, tasty olive oils at fair price points even with a global market that's in the pits.

The Climate Crisis' Effects on the Olive Oil Market

Southern Europe, in particular, has experienced numerous conditions related to climate change that have limited olive oil production: drought, scorching temperatures, wildfires and flooding. Aging olive trees, which typically can't be shaken by the harvesting machines that resemble Edward Scissorhands and need to be hand picked, produce far less fruit and require additional labor costs. Kevin O'Sullivan, a receiving coordinator for 19 years, purchases the non-specialty olive oils at the Coop from natural foods distributors. He notes that prices are currently 30-50% higher and that some buyers might therefore have "sticker shock."



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Chosen Foods Avocado Oil prices have hardly changed. Mintec, a firm that provides commodity price data and analysis, notes online that an “uptick in production estimates for Spain’s 2023/2024 season” and “beneficial rains in March and April” led to declines in olive oil prices on the commodities market relative to the shortages in the previous years. But they also point out that there are “dwindling [olive] oil reserves” which producers use to blend their oils. Greek olive production, meanwhile, has faced additional burdens due to heat and the olive fruit fly pest,

causing production to drop, sometimes dramatically. And Turkey has extended its olive oil export ban, further limiting supply.



Coop's Olive Oil Team: Britt Henriksson, Yuri Weber, Kevin O'Sullivan

California producers' prices have also gone up. O'Sullivan notes that there are two big companies in the state, California Olive Ranch and Cobram. Like many producers, many of the oils from California Olive Ranch are 90% blends from Argentina and North Africa purchased on the commodities market. They also produce another, California Olive Ranch 100% California Olive Oil, that is made exclusively with California olives, and is described on their website as "complex with floral, grass, and fresh herb notes." It's "quite expensive," says O'Sullivan, at \$35 for one liter. Cobram, meanwhile, didn't sell well and was dropped from the Coop's roster.

IT'S LIKELY THAT CHANGES IN THE WORLD MARKET FOR OLIVE OIL ARE LESS OF AN ISSUE AT THE COOP, WHERE SHOPPERS PAY LESS OF A MARKUP.

While Mintec expresses concerns about consumers choosing alternative oils, including sunflower or rapeseed, due to comparatively high olive oil prices, it's likely that changes in the world market for olive oil are less of an issue at the Coop, where shoppers pay less of a markup. Sales of Chosen Foods avocado oil at the Coop, for example, have remained steady. O'Sullivan notes that a Sicilian olive oil that costs \$25 for a 750ml bottle at the Coop retails for \$45 in nearby shops.



Single producer olive oils are on the endcap opposite the chicken Cheese, Bulk, Coffee and Fancy Foods Buyer Yuri Weber, who has worked at the Coop for 23 years, purchases the four or five brands of single producer olive oils located at the back end cap across from the chicken case with colleague Britt Henriksson, also a receiving coordinator and buyer. Weber agrees that “prices are really going up.” But, he adds, “considering what you’re getting, hand pressed, good product for a little ex-

tra money,” it’s still a very good value.

Specialty Olive Oils at the Coop, Including Mentis Estate, Produced by a Coop Member



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Mentis Estate comes direct from the producer, Anastassios Menti Spain produces just under half of the world’s olives. Historically, olive trees were planted and cultivated by the Romans; later, Muslims brought their irrigation exper-

tise. Millenary olive trees (those over 1,000 years old) in Catalonia have been formally recognized as a world heritage agricultural site. Olives grow in many of the same regions as wine and different microclimates affect their taste. Spanish olive oils are known for being more yellow in color than Italian versions, which tend to be more green. The former tastes fruity and nutty while the latter is said to have a grassy, herbal profile.

According to General Coordinator Joe Holtz, during the 1980s it was very difficult to find extra virgin olive oil (EVOO). When he noticed a truck delivering the product, however, a sourcing relationship was established. Today, as part of their work to ensure that the Coop carries the best olive oils, Weber and Henriksson meet with distributors, taste oils and learn about the products the Coop sells. Henriksson is even scheduled to travel to Portugal at the end of October to visit olive estates.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

California Ranch Olive Oil is 100% domestically produced. Among the Coop's wide selection of olive oils are several notable brands by smaller producers, including Casa Pareja, a certified organic and biodynamic olive oil producer in southern Spain. Their oil is made from a blend of varieties—Weber describes the flavor as “dynamic, peppery, everything you want from cooking to finishing, and reasonably priced.” It is available in a 750ml bottle and a 3-liter tin. Two others are from Portugal, CARM (Casa Agrícola Roboredo Madeira) and Esporão. CARM also produces

wines in the Douro region. Weber describes CARM as a “great olive oil” and Esporão as “full flavored, round, spicy,” produced on a small farm.

Anastassios Mentis, a Coop member since 2016, is a photographer and olive oil producer who emigrated to Astoria in 1996. An eastern Mediterranean olive farm that his great-grandfather founded and planted in the 1870s used to sell “bulk” olive oil. But a photo shoot with a distributor and a desire to help the local economy after the financial crisis led Mentis to obtain permits to import and bottle the green gold from Greece. He now works with his mother—who is 89 years old and manager of the estate—and is able to cut out the middleman by manufacturing and selling directly to stores and consumers. They also produce a locally hand-harvested sea salt.

Mentis Estate grows Atheniola olives: “In mythology, Athena gave olives from this region, formerly known as Sparta, to the city of Athens,” Mentis explains. Estate labels on olive oils signify that all of the olives are sourced from that specific location. Weber describes Mentis Estate olive oil as “warm and buttery.” Marketing materials describe a “subtle aroma of artichoke” and creaminess. This is a pure, unblended olive oil.

“IN MYTHOLOGY, ATHENA GAVE OLIVES FROM THIS REGION, FORMERLY KNOWN AS SPARTA, TO THE CITY OF ATHENS,” MENTIS EXPLAINS.

Weber notes that there are members who look forward to the annual sale of freshly pressed olive oil in November and December. Organic Tonda Iblea Olio Nuovo from Sicily will be available just before Thanksgiving and last year’s harvest was described by distributors as having “green tomato aroma and fruity flavor.” The freshness of these EVOOs may have added health benefits associated with high-polyphenol (or high-phenolic) oil’s peppery tasting, beneficial compounds with antioxidants and other properties.



Member, Patrick Porter, stocking the olive oil shelves

Bad Actors in the Olive Oil Market

In addition to high prices and supply issues, the olive oil market has been the subject of concerns publicized in a *60 Minutes* episode titled “Agromafia” that aired in 2016. The episode described counterfeit olive oil (diluted with sunflower or canola oil and with added chemical flavorings and coloring) and other food frauds that generate \$16 billion in profits per year.

The Coop decided to source olive oil from California, notes Holtz, because of the “recurring news articles about cheating taking place by some European olive oil purveyors.”

According to Weber, however, the Coop works with “smaller, reputable producers.” He pointed out that the product we get from California is unadulterated, free of pumice, rapeseed and other impurities. It is pure EVOO. Holtz adds that Casa Pareja Miti-

ca is imported by Forever Cheese, a “company [that] has deep ties to many Spanish producers.”

The Coop’s well-established relationships with producers, built on trust, make the Coop’s olive oil selection different — and more reliable — even as climate and market forces continue to challenge this centuries-old industry.

Jess Powers is a former chef who works in emergency management. IG: @foodand-fury.

COORDINATORS’ CORNER: A MESSAGE FROM JOE HOLTZ

October 15, 2024



October 15, 2024

Dear Members,

In 1972, I was part of the small original founding/planning group that worked on launching the Coop during the latter part of that year, and then managed the official opening in February 1973. In early June 1975, at the age of 25, I became the first Coop employee. In late June 2025, after 50 years on the job as a General Coordinator, I will retire.

The recognition of the Coop's 50th anniversary, in 2023, helped me conclude that my 50th anniversary of becoming our first employee was a fitting time for this difficult decision. I stayed all these years because of how special the Coop is and because of the difference the Coop makes in so many people's lives. I have stayed because of the overwhelmingly positive energy and thoughts so many of our members have about the Coop. I have stayed because of how much our members care for the Coop and feel connected to their Coop.

And I have stayed because of the Coop's great staff. Over the years, I have been, and continue to be, fortunate to have wonderful, dedicated, hard-working, thoughtful and caring employee-colleagues. They understand how special the Coop is, and it has been an honor to have worked side-by-side with each of them in this interesting, challenging and exciting endeavor of serving the membership and making the Coop strong.

I also stayed because every year I could answer the following question with a "Yes": Is the job still interesting and challenging? To this day my answer remains: Yes. Nevertheless, it is time for the Coop to forge into the future without me as an employee. I feel that responsible planning includes retiring while I can still walk, talk, think and be available to the Coop.

I've been privileged to have had the opportunity to help both members and staff build

a democratic institution that welcomes people from all walks of life into the community and practices cooperation through genuine participation in running our communally owned store. I have loved helping to build a community success in a society that is so focused on individual success.

My sister and I grew up in a three-generation household of seven. My home had nearly constant visits by a ton of relatives and family friends. There was always conversation and interaction. As a kid, I asked questions about how businesses worked, partly due to an instinctive love of numbers. The Coop job included both elements: lots of interactions with people and lots of numbers. As an adult I never saw myself working for a profit-making business. However, a member/owner cooperative business was the right fit for me. People who want to cooperate are precious to me.

My dad told me time and again that people “should not rest on their laurels” and not base their actions on past successes and not rest because of any positive “newspaper clippings.” I incorporated those lessons into my life at the Coop. I came to understand that a killer of businesses was overconfidence. I came to understand that we must always carve a path toward success and avoid the paths that could put us into a downward spiral. This was integral to my approach to good stewardship of our Coop.

I am grateful for having the opportunity to do this job for this community, this “local society,” for what will soon be 50 years. I’m confident that the staff and you—the thousands of members who make up this local society—will continue caring for the Coop, ensuring that it continues for generations. Thank you all for caring.

Joe Holtz

General Coordinator, General Manager and Co-Founder

PS: I hope to write more articles for the *Gazette* in the coming months about the parts of the Coop that most resonate with me and that have contributed to building this vibrant and vital cooperative of ours.

IN MEMORY OF MAITEFA ANGAZA

October 15, 2024



By Thomas Rayfiel

October 15, 2024

Maitefa Angaza, a journalist, activist, filmmaker and spiritual leader who co-founded the Coop's Diversity & Equality Committee, died August 8, 2024. Maitefa joined the Coop in 1989. As Jasmina Nikolov, her friend and fellow committee member, recalls:

"The committee formed partially in response to a change that Black members of the Coop community had been feeling. As the neighborhood gentrified, the Coop had be-

come less friendly to its Black and Brown members and more incidents occurred. Maitefa was one of those who felt the shift and wanted to bring about positive changes to ensure that all Coop members felt protected and included.”

Lewanika Senghor, former membership coordinator and liaison to the committee, praised Maitefa’s commitment to this mission. She did not live near the Coop. Despite pressing demands on her time at home, she would take a bus, then a train to attend meetings, supplying fellow members with vegan snacks such as Uncle Eddie’s Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip Cookies and Cocomels. A consistent thread running through the reminiscences of those who knew her was Maitefa’s empathy and resourcefulness in solving the often difficult problems this committee was presented with. Senghor emphasized her strong desire to contribute to the community and “help the Coop become a better version of what it could be.”

Outside of the coop, Maitefa led an extraordinarily productive life writing for *Essence Magazine*, *Black Issues Book Review*, *The Network Journal*, *The New York Amsterdam News*, *Nu Origins Magazine*, and *Black Star News*, as well as serving as senior writer and copyeditor for *Our Time Press*. She also co-produced the documentary *In Our Heads About Our Hair*, in which Black women (and girls) talk about their hair and its relation to identity, politics and self-expression. In addition to her professional accomplishments, Maitefa was co-founder and one of the High Priestesses of Shrim Sa, an Afro-Kamitic spiritual organization. Kamta is a shamanic tradition based upon ancient Egyptian theology, Kongo-Angolan philosophy, Caribbean Spiritism and Afrikan American Spiritualism.

She is survived by her husband, Menshemsqa Angaza; her brother, Bradley Barton; her sons, Osayande Angaza and Hemamset Angaza; and her grandchildren, Tuji Foxworth, Kayson Fox, Maati Angaza, Annura Angaza and Senmeri Angaza.

Maitefa was also an author. Of her book, *Kwanzaa: From Holiday to Every Day*, a reviewer for the African American Literature Book Club wrote: “Her aim is not only to encourage folks to observe Kwanzaa during the seven days of the holiday’s season, but

also to inspire observers to keep it alive year-round by finding ways to put the seven principles (Unity, Self-Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity, and Faith) into practice on a daily basis,” principles Maitefa clearly embodied in her own life.

Member Thomas Rayfiel is the author of eight novels. He has also written “living obituaries” for VICE TV.

MEMBER SUBMISSION: A NEW COOP DEMOCRACY

October 15, 2024



By Jason Weiner

October 15, 2024

When the Coop was a small community, the town hall format worked. These days, it doesn't serve our membership.

We currently have a selective, not a representative democracy: the members who always attend General Meetings, people directly connected to an item and those just there for credit (the unfortunate way to bulk up participation). Members involved in the initial discussion are a completely different group from those who only have about 45 minutes to decide how to vote at a following meeting.

Our main decision-making body is an incomplete composition of approximately 2% of membership. A common complaint we hear is that members weren't aware a vote or discussion was happening, even with all the ways we promote and disseminate. We should allow everyone to have a voice, be part of our democracy, and stop limiting to a time and format that doesn't allow full participation at the GM.

It's time to have all members vote.

I understand the desire to modify the system by going hybrid, which attempts to address some of these issues. However, it doesn't fix our systems:

- It's not representative and maintains the selectiveness that is inherently inequitable.
- It's attempt to be more inclusive actually disenfranchises those without the technology resources to participate and maintains the time constraint that prevents many members' involvement.
- It creates more work for staff (who will be the ones to bear the burden of managing costly systems that still don't allow for maximum participation).

We need a change that honors the fundamental right for all members to be heard, if we want to continue this type of governance.

It's time to make the GM a discussion-only format.

GM credit should be like jury duty (where it becomes your work responsibility for the entire year so members build a greater understanding of these items and it's not just about increasing participation).

After each discussion, the full membership could access:

- The full recording of the discussion
- A detailed summary
- A pro and con list on any item
- Additional discourse through an online forum
- And most importantly, an opportunity to hear how the hourly paid staff feel on any topic. This Coop belongs to ALL OF US, but it's the staff's livelihood and future that is affected by every decision that comes out of the meeting. True community-based governance centers those most impacted within the community.

All this could be online, in the office and even in paper format if needed, so that all members can access. This could be achieved with minimal work (and cost), unlike attempting to manage in-person and online simultaneously with the myriad complications and oversight that a hybrid system would require.

Members need time to actually understand items coming up for vote.

We shouldn't have to incentivize voting, but I get it. Maybe if members participate in every vote in a calendar year we could give them a bonus credit?

It's time to bring voting to all. It's time to change to full accessibility.

Jason Weiner is Membership Coordinator at the Coop.

FILM NIGHT: GIRLS STATE

October 15, 2024



By Jennifer Miller and Gabriel Rhodes

October 15, 2024

FROM THE EMMY® AWARD WINNERS BEHIND BOYS STATE



An Apple Original Film

★ **GIRLS STATE** ★

One nation. Under girls.

Girls State follows 500 adolescent girls from all across Missouri as they come together

for a week-long immersion in a sophisticated democratic laboratory, where they organize a Supreme Court to consider the most contentious issues of the day. The film won Best Directing and Best Cinematography at this year's Emmy Awards.

Amy Foote is an Emmy Award-winning documentary editor based in Brooklyn. Some of her editing credits include Laura Poitras's most recent film *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* (Neon/HBO), Golden Lion Venice Film Festival; *Father Soldier Son* (Netflix/New York Times, Tribeca Film Festival Jury Award for Best Editing, News and Documentary Emmy for Best Editing, Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Sound); *Hail Satan?* (Magnolia); *The Work* (Grierson Awards for Best Single Documentary and Best International Documentary, Grand Jury Prize SXSW 2017, Gotham Award nominated for Best Documentary); Peabody award-winning *Mavis!* (HBO); *Fauci* (Nat Geo/Disney Plus); the Emmy-nominated and James Beard Award-winning film, *A Matter of Taste: Serving Up Paul Liebrandt* (HBO, BBC); *For Once in My Life*, (PBS Independent Lens, SXSW Audience Award 2010, IDA Best Music Documentary); and the Emmy-nominated film, *Finishing Heaven* (HBO). She lives in Sunset Park with her wife and daughter and has been a coop member for nearly 23 years!

Peter Bowman is a documentary editor from North Carolina. He was an additional editor on *Girls State* and has worked on features and series for Netflix, PBS, and Facebook Watch. He joined the Coop last year.

This documentary will be screened by Zoom on **Thursday, October 24th at 7pm.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82073135562>

Meeting ID: 82073135562

Editor Amy Foote will be present for a Q+A after the screening.

To be added to our email listserv for future screening announcements, please send a request to jlymiller@me.com

Jennifer Miller and Gabriel Rhodes live in Brooklyn and have been coop members for

20 years plus.

OCTOBER 15, 2024

October 15, 2024

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

October 15, 2024

PACKAGED BREAD

Dear Editor,

The last two times I shopped at the Coop there wasn't much available in the packaged bread section. No organic breads of either Arnold or Dave's.

I have noticed that shortages in this section have been a problem for some time. Once I asked the delivery person why the organics are often not available. He said that he only delivers that bread once a week.

I asked the front desk person about the lack of bread, and she called a buyer on the second floor who said that the distributor sets the delivery schedule.

I don't work as a buyer nor do I know the industry. I am not criticizing the staff on this. But I would suggest that the Coop explore other options — perhaps UNFI carries bread or we have some unused clout due to our membership in a National Coop buying organization.

Having bare shelves in packaged bread is a sign that something's wrong. I hope a fix can be found.

Perhaps a Coop staff will reply in the Gazette.

In Cooperation,
Stewart Pravda

RESPONSE FROM RECEIVING COORDINATOR LISA HIDEM:

Hi Stewart,

As the bread buyer, I was asked to respond to your letter.

There are several things at play here regarding the stocking of the breads in aisle 2. The first is that these breads are brought by drivers who own the route. This means that I don't actually place an order for them from a distributor. We are supposed to be on their route 2 or 3 times a week, usually for Monday, Thursday, and Saturday deliveries. Since I don't actually place an order with them, they deliver whatever quantities of the breads they have available. Despite the fact that we sell not insignificant quantities of these breads, because we are a single store as opposed to a chain store (like Key Foods) we're considered lower on the totem pole regarding what we get (and get higher pricing to boot!).

The drivers also seem to short us when we most need it—like the beginning of September. They apparently had emergencies and couldn't deliver, hence the shelves were bare. I've told them on numerous occasions that our shelf space is too valuable to be sitting empty. Unfortunately, we have no space to be storing stacks of bread trays so that more is available, and no space to be storing empty bread trays until the next delivery.

I did check to see if our biggest supplier, UNFI, carries any of the breads and it seems that they only carry about three SKUs of the Dave's Killer bread line, and it's frozen. If we were to sell it stacked out, this would mean that technically we should put a sell-by date on it (which in all honesty, probably wouldn't happen and the bread wouldn't get rotated and you'd end up with moldy bread on the shelf). Currently the drivers take an inventory of their shelves, pull and give us credit for short-dated product still on the shelf, and stock the shelves themselves—all of which is tremendously helpful.

I know it's not the same thing, but all of the Bread Alone bread is organic and made just a few hours away in the Hudson Valley.

Hopefully this gives you a little more perspective on the bread in aisle 2, and be assured that I find it equally frustrating when I see those shelves bare for days. I will try

to turn the screws tighter on these drivers and try to get them to deliver more often, but I could only threaten them with discontinuing their lines altogether, which I don't think is what you want.

Regards,

Lisa

IN DEFENSE OF OPEN STREETS

Dear Editor,

On 9/24/24, the *Gazette* published an article from a member titled "Open Streets Not for All," decrying the open street on Vanderbilt Avenue in Prospect Heights, and claiming that it has had a deleterious impact on local businesses.

More than 64% of residents in Prospect Heights do not own a car, according to some sources. Studies show that repurposing city streets for bike lanes and other uses actually improve sales for local businesses. In NYC in general, more than 90% of street space is devoted to the movement or free public storage of ecologically catastrophic death machines, despite the fact that we are in a global environmental crisis, and the emissions of both global warming gasses and microplastics (which mostly come from car tires) mean we need to drastically shift toward more sustainable means of transportation. In the meantime, Gov. Hochul's "pause" on congestion pricing has resulted in a loss to the MTA of more than \$240 million in revenues, so far, that could have been used to improve public transit in our region, as well as estimates of more than 3 million hours in traffic delays.

We don't need fewer open streets, we need more. We don't need fewer bike lanes, we need more—and indeed an integrated protected network for cyclists to support the shift away from motor vehicles. In general, we need to repurpose our streets to

support people, rather than cars.

Regards,

Greg Costikyan

IN SUPPORT OF HYBRID MEETINGS

Dear fellow members,

As a member of the Coop since 2020, I've never felt so optimistic about the future of Coop democracy as I did during the September GM's discussion of a proposal to institute hybrid meetings. The presenters, CJ and Morgan, began by stating what we often hear at GMs: "participating in the GMs is the best way to have your voice heard." Solely in-person GMs limit participation from members who may be: immunocompromised or disabled, parents or caregivers, working too late to make a 7 p.m. meeting, or living far away from the Picnic House. Given that the GM is where we make major Coop decisions, we must work to ensure that these common situations do not block members' participation in discussion or voting.

The presence of a hybrid meeting does not take away from the in-person component that we love, it merely increases the amount of seats at the table. The Picnic House holds 255 people at max capacity, but think about who else, at our Coop of over 16,000 members, could have a voice on an online platform! A concern voiced by some in the GM discussion is the potential security risk a virtual meeting holds. However, multiple members of the Chair Committee mentioned that during peak-Covid, these issues were solved through individualized voting links, watermarked Zoom screens, and email registration. As one CC member said: "I'm confident that we can solve any technical challenges."

In the year 2024, we should be fearless in embracing the hybrid nature of our world,

which has changed radically since the 20th century, when our bylaws were written. As the presenters noted, “If even one extra person who is normally not able to attend GMs can participate, vote, and make their voice heard, we’re working towards a more inclusive and democratic Coop.”

Alexandra Gaynor

BOYCOTT NEXT STEPS: A MODEST PROPOSAL

Dear fellow members,

I’d like to propose a simple, hopefully modest proposal as we look to individually express our views on a boycott of Israeli goods—in short, let us all vote with our wallets as we see fit.

To those that support a boycott: Create a list of all products that you believe should not be purchased, publicize that list in a central location (perhaps on a social media page dedicated to the effort), and encourage those that agree with you to not buy those products.

Others that do not support the boycott can continue to purchase products as they see fit.

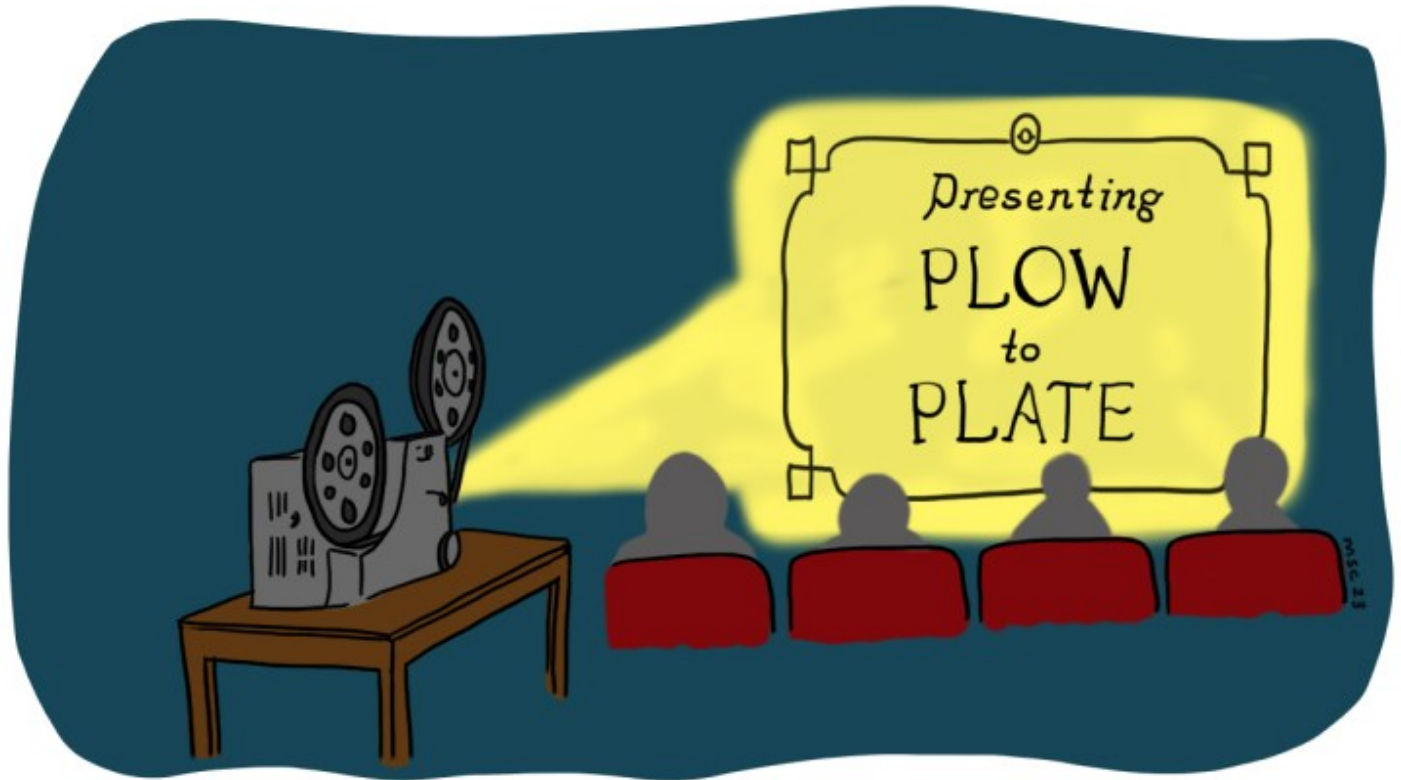
There is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution to complex issues, especially those as nuanced and emotionally charged as this, and pushing for an entire community to adopt a set of principles is divisive and unnecessary. Let us all be informed and take individual action that aligns with our own personal outlook.

In cooperation, even when we disagree,

Paul Blachar

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: THE INVISIBLE EXTINCTION

October 15, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

October 15, 2024

The Invisible Extinction is a documentary about the germs that live inside us, the tiny organic microbes, bacteria, viruses and fungi that constitute our microbiome. Though germs have a bad reputation due to their association with disease, a more recent “scientific revolution” has discovered that most of this stew is crucial to bodily functions such as digestion, metabolism, vitamin production, the immune system, response to pain and mood.

However, in recent years up to 50% of our internal biodiversity has disappeared. And though this change is little known and unheralded, some believe it is as dire as the ongoing climate disaster. In the 2014 book, *Missing Microbes: How the Overuse of Antibio-*

otics Is Fueling Our Modern Plagues, microbiologist Martin Blaser sounds the alarm by associating the overuse of antibiotics with rising levels of obesity, asthma, diabetes, food allergies, celiac, autism and other conditions.

While there may be other reasons for the rise of these conditions than increased use of penicillin, antibiotics and other medicines—including increased hygiene, chlorinated water, processed foods, environmental chemicals, pasteurization, medical treatments such as chemotherapy and even the increased use of cesarean sections which eliminate the need for newborns to pass through the vaginal canal—diminished internal biodiversity has caught researchers' attention.

Other scientists featured in this film have built upon Blaser's hypothesis with their own research and clinical studies. Most prominently featured is Blaser's wife, Maria Gloria Dominguez-Bello. Dominguez-Bello, who was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, returns to the Amazon to collect stool samples from the inhabitants of jungle villages, such as Kanarakuni, whose traditional lifestyles and lack of exposure to the modern destroyers of our internal ecology has blessed them with rich biomes teeming with microbial diversity as well as extremely low incidence of chronic disease. For many years, Dominguez-Bello was single-handedly responsible for the storage and preservation of these stool samples containing trillions of microbes. However, as the scientific community came to realize the precarious situation of her priceless collection and prize its value, she received funding to permanently store her samples in a microbiota vault (more informally known as the "poop vault"), a repository for the future health of humanity, modeled on seed vaults.

Just as seed vaults preserve and protect plant biodiversity that can enhance food production as climate conditions change, the hope is that these rich stool samples may someday provide remedies to chronic diseases. In fact, stool-based medical procedures have already begun. Fecal Microbiota Transplantation (FMT), for example, is a treatment by which a healthy person's feces are injected into the colon of a sick patient suffering from the drug-resistant gut pathogen *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. diff*) in order to restore gut balance.

IN RECENT YEARS UP TO 50% OF OUR INTERNAL BIODIVERSITY HAS DISAPPEARED.

An Israeli study led by a pair of researchers, Eran Segal and Eran Elinav, investigated whether fecal capsules could pinpoint the actual microbiome bacteria and combination of foods that contribute to weight loss and normalize blood sugar levels. This work seeks to develop the next generation of targeted probiotics and has led to personalized diets for diabetics and an app used by two of Israel's largest HMOs. Ground-breaking research is also taking place in China, where Dr. You Xin is treating autistic children with a combination of diet, fecal pills and FMT, to promising results. Meanwhile back in New York City, Dominguez-Bello is conducting a study to determine if swathing newborn babies delivered by caesarian sections with maternal birth canal microbes leads to healthier biomes; elsewhere in the United States, doctors are attempting to discover if fecal capsules can combat obesity.

All this research has led to improvements in how and when to use antibiotics and new microbe therapies for Alzheimer's, bacterial vaginosis, kidney stones, Parkinson's, MS, cancer and even Covid. It has also led to a resurgence in popularity of certain probiotic foods and beverages, such as naturally fermented sauerkraut, kimchi, pickles, yogurt, kombucha, cheese and dietary supplements (many whose effectiveness has not been verified).

It is safe to say that Blaser's best-selling book, resulting podcasts and films like this have put a spotlight on the lowly microbes. Hopefully, this greater understanding and appreciation for the complex worlds within our bodies has helped shed their invisibility, halt their extinction, and even restore them to their prior glories.

The Invisible Extinction was screened on October 8. [Click here](#) for more information.

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a re-

quest to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

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

MEMBER SUBMISSION: BDS DOES NOT BELONG IN OUR COOP

October 15, 2024



By Barbara Mazor

October 15, 2024

Members 4 Palestine (M4P) is a group of members who want the Coop to “enact a targeted boycott of Israeli products as called for by the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divest-

ment, Sanctions (BDS) movement.” As written on their website FAQ page, they want the Coop to commit to and endorse BDS. “The BDS framework offers us clarity around the particularities of our boycott demands, and connects us to a global movement.”

The BDS demand is for the elimination of Israel. It is endorsed by a consortium of terrorist organizations. It is part of the “Free Palestine” movement responsible for the numerous occurrences of vandalism and violence accompanying the demonstrations in North America and Europe since October 7, 2023 when thousands of Hamas terrorists burst into Israel in a spree of rape, mutilation and murder, massacring 1,200 people and kidnapping 250. These acts of cruelty surpassing ISIS were dubbed “heroic” by the BDS Movement.

M4P promotes support for BDS by attempting to vilify Israel and its supporters. They make false accusations, systematically subverting the definitions of legal terms.

For example, in January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a ruling in the case brought by South Africa against Israel. The purpose of the ruling was to declare that South Africa had a right to bring its case against Israel and that Palestinians had “plausible rights to protection from genocide.” The court did *not* say the claim of genocide is plausible.

In the March 19 *Gazette*, Jan Clausen wrote the court found “a credible case that Israel is committing genocide” and M.J. Williams claimed the court “held [Israel] is plausibly committing genocide.” Both statements are untrue.

The legal definition of genocide is “a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part.” The key word is “intent.” The intemperate statements made during the days following the October 7 atrocities by non-decision makers and mistranslations of statements referring to Hamas, not Gazans, do not qualify as intent. There is no equivalence between the intentional and gruesome murders of non-combatants, and the inadvertent deaths of civilians during lawful military operations in a defensive war. It is morally reprehensible to character-

ize Israel’s war to rescue the hostages and ensure an October 7 is never repeated as a “genocide.” Yet, at least 12 times the *Gazette* has published letters by M4P supporters making this false characterization.

I could go on, but *Gazette* submissions have a word limit.

The BDS Movement is not pro peace. It is not pro co-existence. It is not pro universal human rights and dignity. It is not pro democratic values and development of civil society. Its purpose is to provide political support and moral cover for the actions of genocidal terrorist organizations, like Hamas, and to further their maximalist, eliminationist goals. The BDS Movement does not belong in our Coop.

MEMBER RECIPE: LENTIL STEW

October 15, 2024



By Greg Costikyan

October 15, 2024



This is kind of a staple in my household, partly because it's easy to vary, cheap and pretty easy to cook. It can also be totally vegan or served with additions that make it less so—the hot dog version works with the kids, but I've often cooked it for myself as a vegan dish. The recipe below is for four, but you can easily reduce or increase the ingredients if cooking for more or fewer people.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 carrot, diced
- 1 celery rib, diced
- a cup of diced onion
- a garlic clove, chopped
- 1 tbsp oil
- 1 cup lentils
- 2 cups vegetable broth or water (the broth does add some flavor)
- salt to taste
- pinch of red pepper flakes
- ½ tsp oregano
- a ripe tomato (large if cooking for 4, a Roma is enough for 2), diced

DIRECTIONS

1. Cut up the vegetables, then fry them (except for the tomato) in a medium saucepan with the oil, stirring occasionally, until the onion is translucent and the other vegetables have softened a bit (about 5 minutes).
2. Add all the other ingredients except the tomato, bring it to a boil, reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook for 35 minutes.
3. Test to see if you need to add more salt—don't give it too much at start, but make sure it's tasty.
4. Stir in the tomato.

Variations

Tex-Mex Version: Add 1 tsp of cumin and ½ tsp of chili powder to the oregano. Op-

tionally, delete the pepper flakes, and add a jalapeno to the vegetables when frying (cut up, seeds removed).

Indian Version: Replace the oregano and red pepper flakes with 1 tsp of garam masala or curry and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp of cayenne pepper.

Provençal Version: Replace the oregano with tarragon, and add in a quarter cup of black olives and a tsp of capers.

In general: Almost any spice mixture can be used. I vary them so it's not always the same-old, same-old. Also, replacing the tomato with corn or peas is good.

Non-Vegan Options

1. Use butter instead of oil.
2. Use chicken stock instead of vegetable stock.
3. Roast (at 400 degrees for 20 minutes, turning half way through) or fry four hot dogs or other sausages until nicely crispy, then slice them into rounds, and stir in at the end with the tomatoes. My kids always sigh when I say, "Tonight we're eating vegetarian," but eat up this version with gusto.

What Kind of Lentils Should I Use?

Normally, standard green lentils. You could also use split peas. Lentils de puy (which the Coop labels as French Indigo lentils) are also good, but could use another 5 minutes cooking time. I do not recommend red lentils for this recipe because they turn to mush—if you do use them, reduce cooking time to 20 minutes.

Sides

This is a meal in its own right, but a side salad or a bit of bread and cheese is nice. If going for vegan, here's a bonus recipe for a bread dipping sauce:

Vegan Dip for Bread

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 chopped garlic clove
- ¼ tsp rosemary
- Salt and pepper to taste

Mix it all up and serve on the side.

Greg Costikyan has been a Coop member since 2009 and is a member of the Men-shemsaqa Angaza. He has designed more than 30 commercially published games, and has written four sff novels.

HALLOWEEN AT THE COOP: THE TRICK OF TREAT

October 15, 2024



By Kim Velsey

October 15, 2024

Every Halloween, the Coop sets aside small apples donated by Hepworth Farms to give out to trick-or-treaters, a tradition that reflects the Coop’s commitment to healthy, fresh, seasonal foods. The holiday is generally a low-key affair at the store, but members enjoy celebrating it—it’s common for staff and shift workers to show up in costume that day—and the Coop carries a number of seasonal items for decorating, eating and giving out to trick-or-treaters.

“We bring pumpkins in for the three weeks before Halloween, starting around October 7,” says Cecelia Rembert, a receiving coordinator and one of the Coop’s produce buyers. “We don’t want to get them too soon because they get kind of gross. And we try

not to have any left over. Turns out no one wants them on November 1.” Last year, the Coop sold nine bins (or 5,850 pounds) of carving pumpkins, mostly from Hepworth Farms, one of the Coop’s oldest produce suppliers. There are also pie pumpkins, which many people like to paint for Halloween, and a variety of gourds to decorate. You can find turnips and potatoes in the produce department as well, the root vegetables that were traditionally carved at Halloween. Pumpkins, a new world vegetable, didn’t make their way to Europe until the 1500s, and it was several centuries after that that they became associated with Halloween.

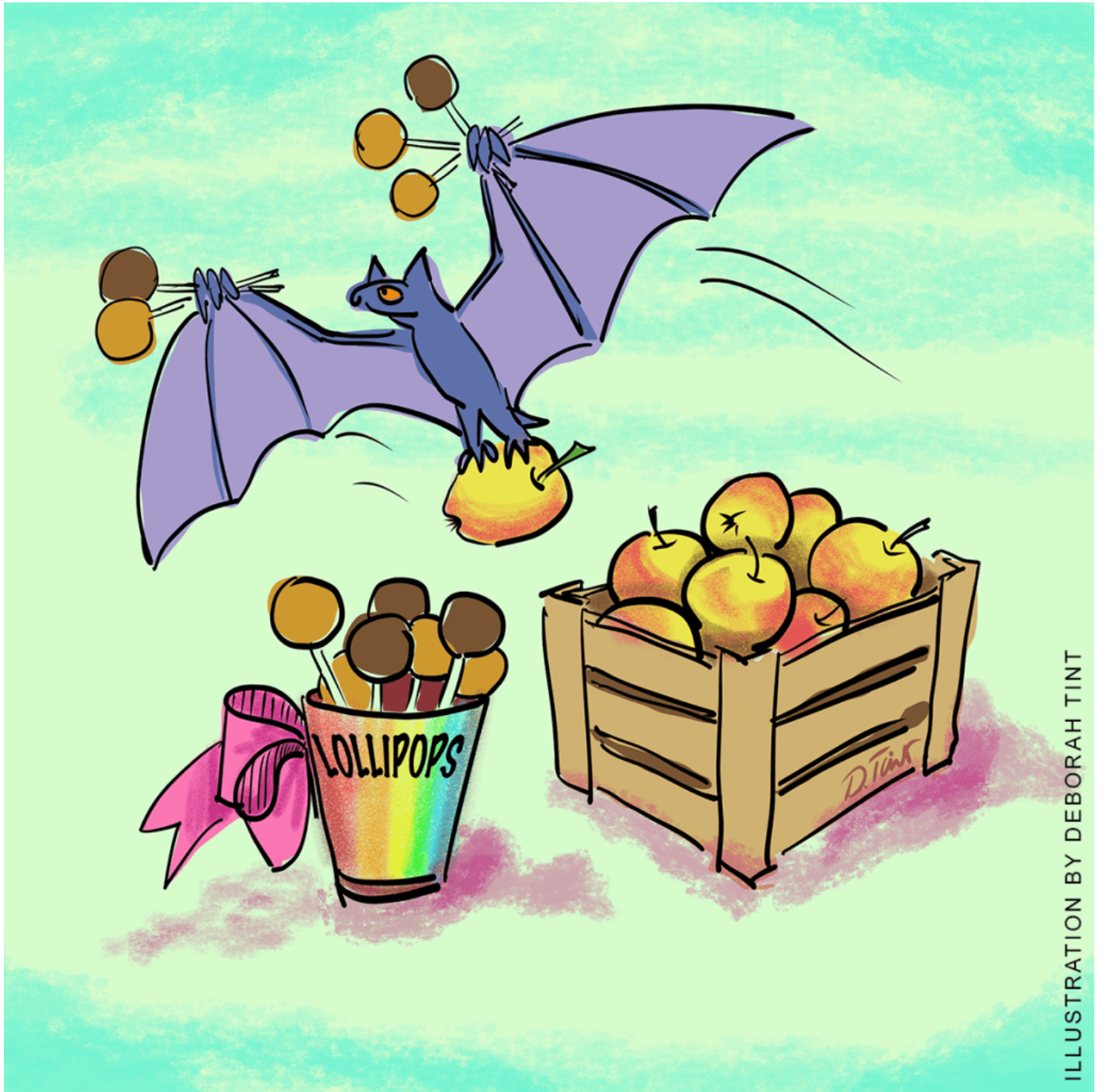


ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

There is also, of course, candy. Although this year, there may be fewer options than in years past. Gillian Chi, a receiving coordinator and buyer who handles the Halloween candy, says that many of the pre-orders she put in early this summer for Halloween-themed products from member favorites like YumEarth, Ocho and Tony Chocolonely have been canceled because those products are out of stock. It's not clear why the distributor, UNFI, one of the Coop's largest suppliers, hasn't been able to fulfill the orders (requests for a comment from YumEarth, UNFI and Ocho were not re-

turned), but it's been a problem during the past few years. Chi says she's had luck in years past reaching out directly to contacts at those companies, but that hasn't yielded any success so far this year.

CANDY PRICES HAVE SHOT UP SINCE THE PANDEMIC, INCREASING 27.5% FROM 2021 TO 2023, ACCORDING TO THE BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS.

When Chi first started working as a buyer, she focused on increasing the organic candy offerings: She could see there was a need for organic Halloween candy and it sold well. Popular items in the past have included the YumEarth lollipops in Halloween wrappers—they also made an organic candy corn, the first on the market, but since discontinued—and individual bags of gummy bats and spiders. Tony Chocolonely's individually-wrapped Halloween chocolates were a hit as well. Apparently, anything in a Halloween shape or with a Halloween wrapper sells well. Hard candy does not. "For the last eight years or so, I've tried to have Halloween candy take over the entire end cap," says Chi. "But for the last few years it's been so hard to get stuff [that] it's just been a couple of shelves."



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

So what can shoppers expect to see on those shelves soon? Snyder's pretzels in Halloween pouches, Endangered Species Not So Spooky milk chocolate mix, Pirate Booty trick-or-treat puffs, Good Crisp Creepy Crisps and Torie & Howard Halloween lollipops. It's also possible that the gourmet candy buyer may score some Halloween-themed items, if they are buying for themselves (or really trying to impress the neighborhood kids). But stocking up on even the non-gourmet products will be pricey. Candy prices have shot up since the pandemic, increasing 27.5% from 2021 to 2023, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Cacao and sugar prices both went up after disappointing harvests brought on by bad weather, which have continued to be an issue (while there were early fears this might lead to candy shortages, in the end candy just became a lot more expensive). A seven ounce bag of individually wrapped YumEarth gummy candies cost \$3.90 in 2019; last year it cost \$7.64. This year, the Coop hasn't been able to stock it at all.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

If shoppers are disappointed in this year's candy selection, however, they can always follow the Coop's example and stock up on a few cases of apples to hand out. After a late frost last May devastated upstate apple orchards, farmers are reporting a bumper crop this season.

Happy Halloween, shoppers!

Kim Velsey has been a Coop member since 2020. When she's not writing for the Line-

waiters' Gazette, *she's a staff writer at New York Magazine.*