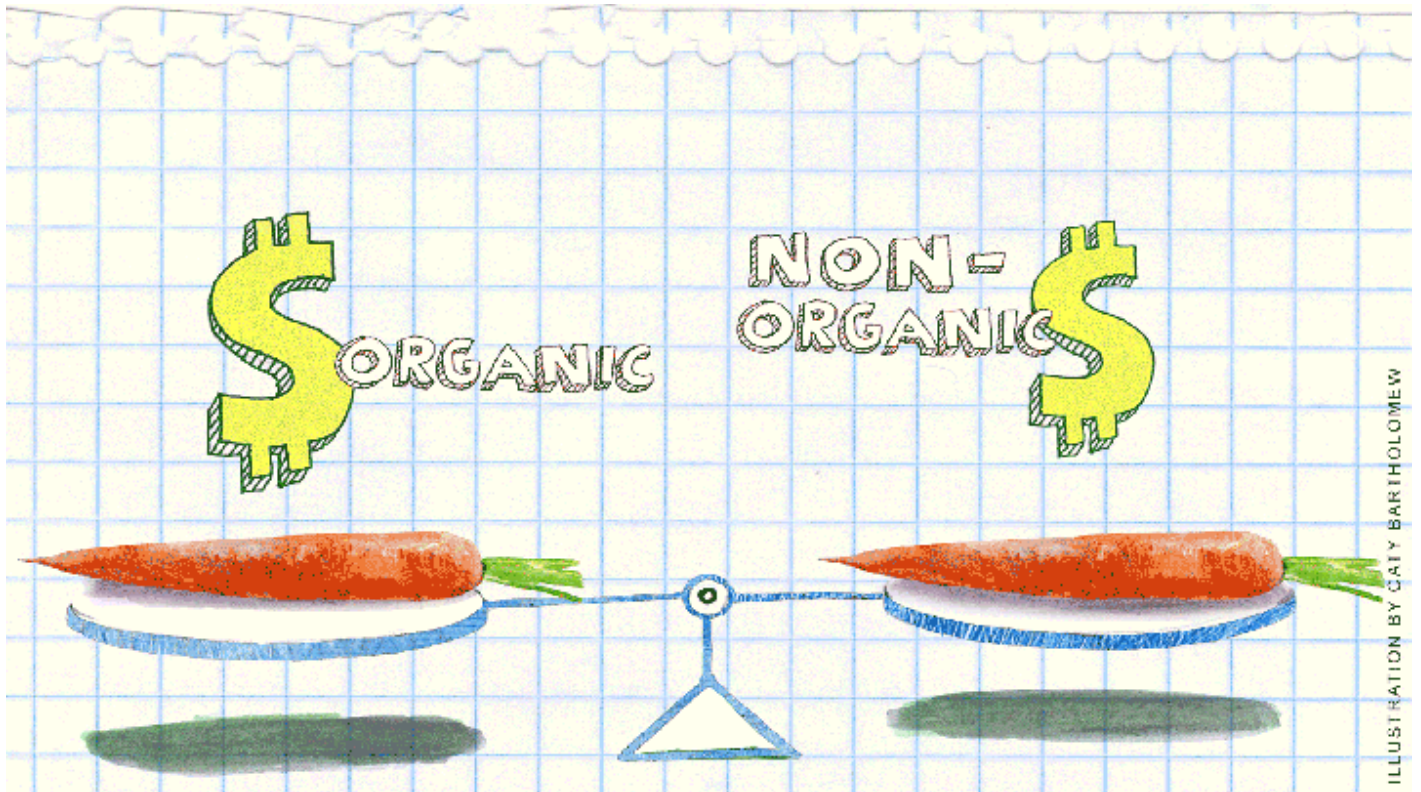


WHY ARE SOME ORGANIC PRODUCTS SO MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE?

July 25, 2023



By Walecia Konrad

A recent stroll through the Park Slope Food Coop's produce section showed the beginning of summer's bounty and the usual wide variety of organically grown items, including locally grown strawberries, rhubarb and greens.

There's also the dizzying array of produce prices, posted each day on the shelf labels, often showing organic and conventionally grown produce side by side. Invariably, organic costs more than conventionally grown—sometimes a lot more.

"I SHOP PRICE A LOT IN THE PRODUCE AISLE AND I OFTEN WONDER WHY THERE CAN BE SUCH A BIG DIFFERENCE IN ORGANIC AND REGULAR. IF IT'S SIGNIFICANT, I'LL BUY REGULAR OR SKIP IT ALL TOGETHER."

COOP MEMBER DEBORAH NOCELLA

Coop members, of course, are accustomed to higher prices for organics. They're also appreciative of the fact that organic produce is almost always less expensive at the Coop than other grocery stores, thanks to the PSFC's low markup.

But the price differential does make one wonder why organically grown is more expensive than conventionally grown produce. Even more mysterious, why is there such a dramatic difference for some items? On a recent shopping day, for example, organic red peppers were selling for \$4.73 a pound compared to \$1.87 for non-organic. And organic fennel bulbs were selling for \$4.30 each compared to \$2.20 for non-organic.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Organic red bell peppers at \$4.73 per lb and non-organic at \$1.87 per lb.

"I shop price a lot in the produce aisle," said Coop member Deborah Nocella. "And I often wonder why there can be such a big difference in organic and regular. If it's significant, I'll buy regular or skip it all together."

To get a better understanding of just how organic produce pricing works in general

and at the Coop, the Gazette contacted PSFC's produce-buying team, John Horsman and Cecelia Rembert. The pair are in charge of sourcing all of the Coop's produce—organic and otherwise.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Coop produce buyer Cecelia Rembert.

Pricing is a big part of their process. Prices for both organic and conventionally grown products can vary based on season, how far away the supplier is, the size of the supplier, the Coop's relationship with the supplier and growing conditions at each of the farms. The team strives to provide a huge variety of produce at as many price points as possible, to make sure high-quality fruits and vegetable are accessible to all members. Produce prices are a moving target, changing virtually daily.

WHY ARE SOME ITEMS SO MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THEIR CONVENTIONAL COUNTERPARTS? THE ANSWER IS SUPPLY, SAID COOP PRODUCE BUYER JOHN

HORSMAN.

GROWING ORGANICS COSTS MORE

To understand produce pricing at the Coop, it's important to start at the farm.

The reason organic produce costs more than conventionally grown boils down to one important factor: It costs farmers more to grow organic produce. Here's why.

- **More labor.** Because organic farms don't use pesticides or synthetic fertilizers, more labor is required to manage the more complicated and time-consuming organic farming practices, such as crop rotation, weeding, and alternate pest management techniques, explained Horsman.
- **Smaller scale.** In general, organic farms are small, making them naturally less cost efficient than the giant agricultural complexes that can focus acres and acres on one or two crops. "Small farms have to juggle the needs of harvesting many different crops, cooling and packing them and then shipping them in small quantities through regional distributors," said Rembert. By contrast, conventional agriculture is often engineered extensively towards lowering costs and boosting profit margins.
- **Regulation.** Organic farms, both large and small, incur the extra costs associated with becoming certified organic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and then maintaining that certification. To sport the certified-organic label, a product must meet USDA standards that maximize soil health, conserve water and reduce air pollution. Organic farms cannot use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides or hormones. Organic certification and compliance can add thousands of dollars to a farm's overhead.

"IF I KNOW I WILL BE EATING SOMETHING RAW OR BARELY COOKED—BERRIES, APPLES, PEACHES, PLUMS, BROCCOLI, CARROTS, CELERY, HERBS—I ALWAYS GO

WITH ORGANIC, EVEN IF IT'S EXPENSIVE."

COOP MEMBER LISA BRANCACCIO

HOW SUPPLY AND DEMAND IMPACTS PRICING

All of this explains why organic produce is more expensive in general. But why are some items so much more expensive than their conventional counterparts?

"With organics, there is inherently less supply," said Horsman. Organic farms account for less than 1% of the 911 million acres of total U.S. farmland, according to USDA statistics.

As mentioned, giant conventional farms have far higher crop yields, so they generate much more supply than smaller organic producers. They can often sell for far lower prices and still make a profit on the volume of sales.

That said, it's not uncommon for organic farms to have bumper crops too— especially large operations in California, Arizona and Mexico. What's more, smaller local farms can have a huge bounty in the heart of the growing season. That translates into prices that are closer to conventional. Zucchini in late summer is a good example. "Now is the best time to be a produce buyer," said Horsman, who pointed out that he and Rembert strongly prefer sourcing from local suppliers whenever possible.

SOMETIMES PRICES ARE SO CLOSE, IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO STOCK BOTH.
FOR EXAMPLE, AT ONE POINT ORGANIC GARLIC WAS SELLING FOR ONLY 2 CENTS
MORE A POUND THAN CONVENTIONAL.

The buying team is constantly managing shifting supplies and prices with each pro-

duce order. In the winter, for example, the Coop buys organic broccoli from Four Seasons, a large organic producer in California, Horsman said. Because Four Seasons is big enough, it can focus a lot of acres on broccoli, so prices are usually relatively close to conventionally grown broccoli from California.

Sometimes prices are so close, it doesn't make sense to stock both types. For example, at one point organic garlic was selling for only 2 cents more a pound than conventional. So, the buyers decided to stop selling conventional and only stock organic until there was a bigger price differential.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Scallions: red twisties or plu \$0.48bu; organic \$1.57bu.

Sometimes the buyers encounter organic and conventional prices that are so high they decide not to stock the product at all. This doesn't happen often, Horsman said, but he does remember having trouble finding decently priced broccoli rabe this past winter.

Offering Integrated Pest Management (IPM) produce is another strategy that keeps some prices lower. IPM farmers do not use pesticides, though they may use other farming techniques that are not considered organic, Horsman explained. Prices are usually somewhere in between organic and conventionally grown.

The Coop often stocks IPM apples, pears, peaches, strawberries, cherries and blueberries. Pest conditions in the Northeast make it difficult to grow these fruits organically and not lose a lot of the crop, the team explained.



Blueberries: pint little buck organic \$4.85ea; pint \$2.70ea.

GAUGING MEMBERS' PRICE TOLERANCE

Horsman and Rembert keep a close eye on what sells quickly and try to provide a variety of prices that will accommodate all shoppers' needs. The \$9 per quart local IPM strawberries that were recently in the aisle "sold like hotcakes," said Horsman. "They

do not last long.” Even so, the team was sure to provide lower-priced California organic strawberries at the same time for people who want less expensive berries.

How much members will pay for organic sometimes depends on the type of fruit or vegetable.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Carrots: bags regular \$1.69ea; bags organic \$1.24ea.

“If I know I will be eating something raw or barely cooked—berries, apples, peaches, plums, broccoli, carrots, celery, herbs—I always go with organic, even if it’s expensive,” said Coop member Lisa Brancaccio. “Although if it’s too expensive, I may not buy it that week,” she added.

“I FIGURE THE COOP SOURCING TEAM IS THOROUGH ABOUT THE KINDS OF GROWERS WE BUY FROM, SO I TYPICALLY ASSUME THAT THE NON-ORGANIC PRODUCE

MEETS MY STANDARDS”

COOP MEMBER JULIA KONRAD

Coop member Susan Buchsbaum follows the same rule, adding that if organic isn't available or too expensive, she won't buy conventional on some foods she knows have higher pesticide loads, such as green beans and berries. “And I know non-organic produce with thick peels such as citrus, bananas or avocados tend to be safer for the consumer, although not better for earth health.”



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Lemons: organic \$2.31lb; 4958 or blank / #3 label \$1.31lb.

Member Julia Konrad (no relation to this reporter) said she rarely buys organic produce when it's more expensive. “I figure the Coop sourcing team is thorough about the kinds of growers we buy from, so I typically assume that the non-organic produce meets my standards for quality well enough,” she explains.

Horsman and Rembert know they have the luxury—and challenge—of buying for a well-educated and organic-hungry shopper. Members have a high tolerance for the constantly changing landscape in the produce aisle, they noted.

Horsman also pointed to another great part of his job: “One of the best perks of being a produce buyer is sampling the amazing items that we purchase to insure we are buying the best produce for the members,” said Horsman.

Walecia Konrad is a freelance writer, editor and content producer specializing in personal finance. She has been a PSFC member since 2001 and on-and-off contributor to the Gazette for almost as long.

YOU GROW, GIRL!

July 25, 2023



By Liora Fishman

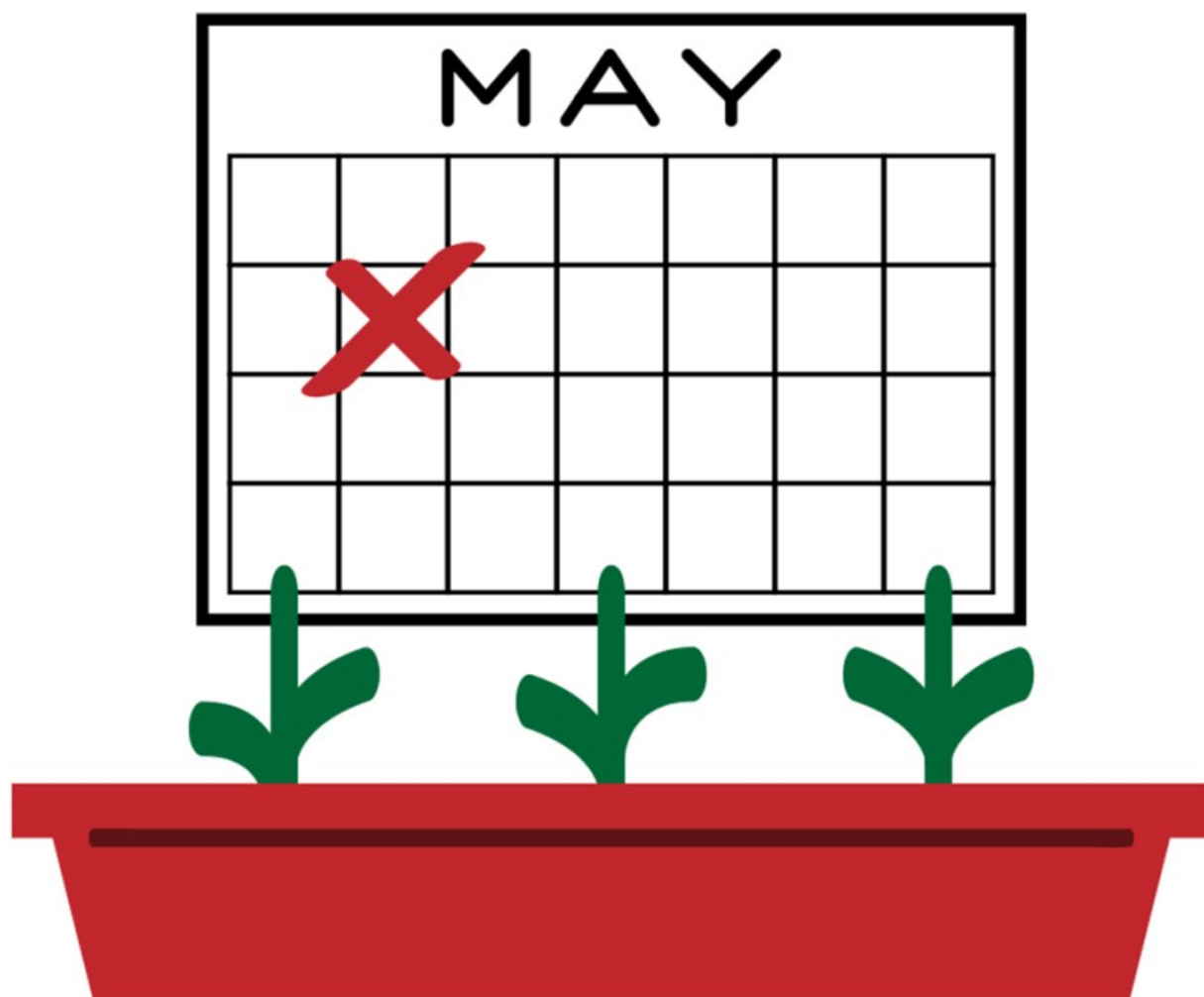
As a child growing up in the suburbs, gardening was a thing that my parents did for fun and a chore that I got roped into. My mom espoused the idea that there was “nothing better than the feeling of dirt beneath your fingernails.” On the contrary, I’d say, as I begrudgingly de-weeded flower beds in our backyard, there were quite a few things I could think of that were better than that: clean fingernails and air conditioning, first and foremost.

Then the pandemic hit. I was lucky enough to find myself in an apartment with outdoor space that looked particularly lonely without the greenery my mother championed. So I bought some flower beds and soil. I planted some seedlings. I was sure that in a couple of weeks I’d have my own little urban garden. It couldn’t be that hard, right?



A plant on a windowsill overlooks a city street.

I learned quite quickly that there was such a thing as too much sun for some plants—even for sun-tolerant outdoor plants. My lavender plant died within a week, though I refused to give up on it until I was quite certain I was watering decomposed leaves. For other plants, the New York sun would never be enough. After suffering a few plant losses, I decided to retroactively do some research, and learned about the importance of native plants and zone planting schedules.



Climate conditions are variable across the United States and there's a numerical zone system that dictates when one ought to plant, for example, squash versus broccoli. New York City is in Zone 7, meaning that most of the planting season spans May to September. Native plants are those that have, according to the National Wildlife Federation's website, "formed symbiotic relationships with native wildlife over thousands of years," and therefore offer the most sustainable habitat. "A plant is considered native if it has occurred naturally in a particular region, ecosystem, or habitat without human introduction." For New Yorkers, this includes strawberries, wildflowers like milkweed, dogwood and native sunflowers.

Luckily for Coop members, the Produce team considers both the local growing zones and native plants when it curates the plant selection each season. Coop Produce Buyer Cecelia Rembert explains, "This year we added a new nursery that we worked with for our plant selections, called Glover Perennials, 'a family-run nursery specializing in plants that are native to the Northeast and perennials, based in Long Island.'"

Not only are all the plants from Glover Perennials native to the New York City area, they are also intended for long-term ownership: "Everything we got from Glover Perennials is going to come back every year—that's what a perennial is," says Rembert. "We're in Zone 7 and all of the plants we got aligned with Zone 7, too."



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

That is, of course, contingent on you being able to keep your plants alive. And if you're like me, you've already killed your tomato and basil plants. "Gardening can be a real challenge in the summer in New York," Rembert said—a validating thing for a plant-killer to hear from a produce professional.

Despite giving off an air of leisure, gardening in New York City requires quite a bit of discipline and consistency. One must always take into consideration the sun exposure

your plants are getting. And if you got your plants from the Coop this year, it's likely that they need quite a bit of sun and regular watering. "Your plants need to be watered every day," explained Rembert. "When we were ordering the plants, we tended towards getting full-sun plants—so everything that everyone purchased from the Coop is sun-tolerant," which should, one hopes, last you through those 90+ degree days of New York summer.

Unfortunately, if you missed the early, cooler days of summer and spring, you may have also missed peak planting season. While that's not to say that you shouldn't try planting some sunflower seeds, the ideal time to do so is after Mother's Day, when the nighttime temperatures are generally above 40 degrees—why the Coop only offers plants for a limited time, beginning around April and ending in mid- to late June.



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

A pot of bright green herbs, including basil, sage, mint, thyme and lavender.

“You don’t leave anything outside overnight until after Mother’s Day in New York,” explained Rembert when asked about the timing of the Coop’s plant season. “We do offer seeds prior to that, but the small plants will start coming in towards the end of April and can go into the ground once the nighttime temperatures are above 40 degrees.”

So what to do if you’re hoping to try your hand at plants this year? “Spring is the time that you should plant new plants. Gardeners can plant again in the fall, but we probably won’t provide any more plants in the fall,” said Rembert.

Timing the purchase of these plants can be quite tricky. The Coop works with partner farms like Glover Perennials to identify when plants have reached a stage where they haven’t quite flowered yet, but are ready to be uprooted and sold.

Given the fleeting plant season at the Coop, I asked Rembert if she could tell us some favorites we should keep an eye out for next year—or perhaps a sneak peek into next year’s plant selection. “We had really great peonies, and clematis. Clematis is one of my favorites that we offered,” said Rembert, referring to a lesser-known, purple flowering vine.



Sunlight shines through the leaves of a small potted plant.

And while the Coop will continue to prioritize native plants, you may see fewer florals next year. “We were a little heavy-handed with the native flowers, like meadow flowers, and that was a learning experience,” Rembert reflected.

But some things will never change: herb garden staples like basil and cilantro will return each year, and in fact, can be grown in the same pot if you’d like all your cooking herbs in one place. Rembert herself says, “It’s nice to have a selection of herbs—I grow them all in the same pot, and they come back every year. I’ll snip them as I’m cooking.”

While this year’s growing season has certainly been a tumultuous one for me (Rest in Peace, My Basil Plant, early June 2022 to mid-June 2022), Rembert left me feeling armed with the knowledge to succeed next year, and make do with what I haven’t killed for the remainder of the summertime.

Here's the thing: whether or not I excel at it, I actually *enjoy* gardening and intend to continue doing just that. Come spring, you'll find me immersed in the plant selection of the Coop, while Googling just how difficult it is to kill whatever plant is in stock that week.

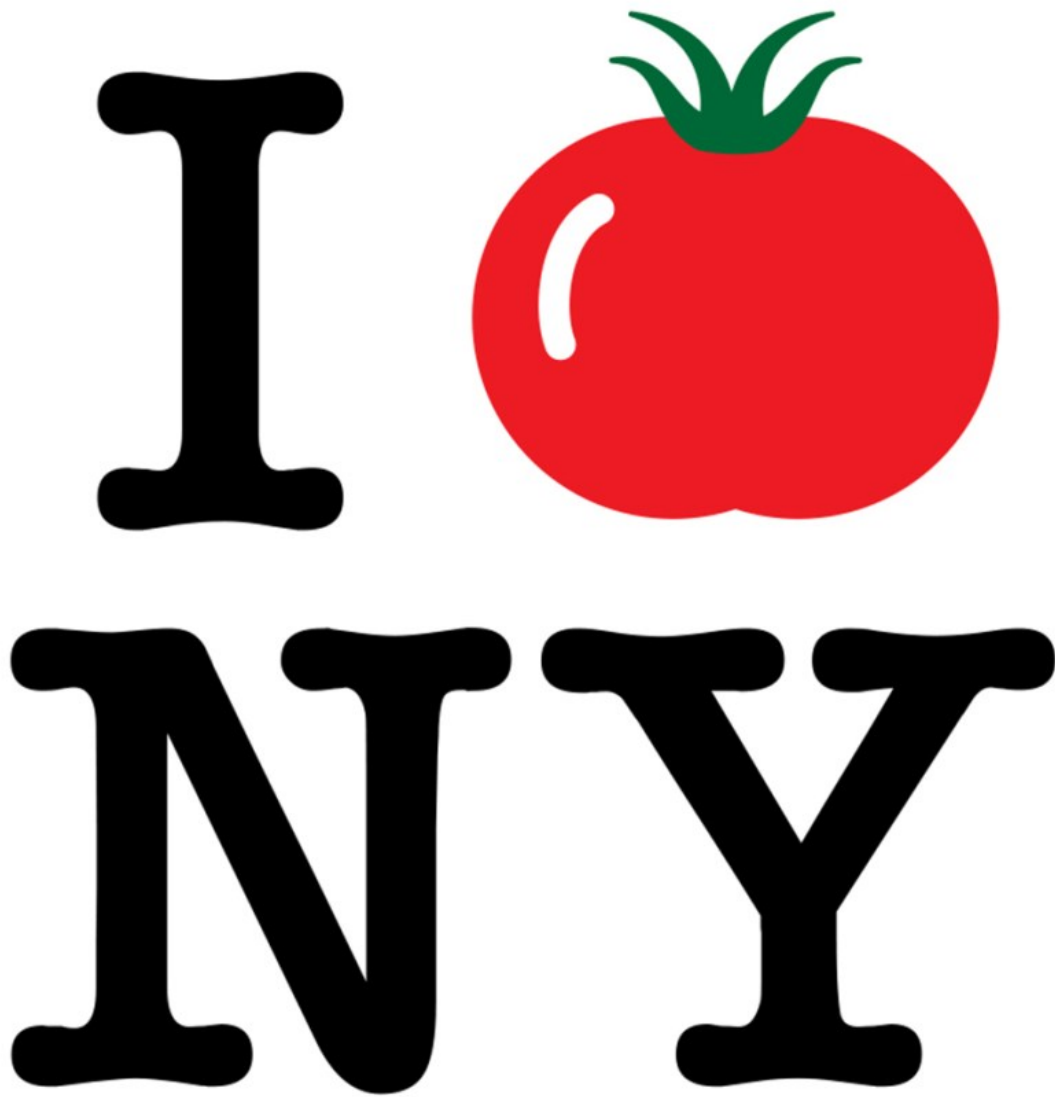


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

In a time when our phones demand more attention than the outdoors do, it's refreshing to have a project that requires patience and consistency. Planting and growing a

garden lacks the instant gratification of social media and requires a kind of jovial discipline and commitment that's become harder and harder to come by. This, of course, means that I have to speak the words that just about anyone with parents is loath to say: my mom was right.

Liora Fishman joined the Coop recently, in December 2021. She lives in Prospect Heights and has a wonderful dog, Ollie, whom she loves very much.

GUN IMAGERY IN THE PRODUCE AISLE

July 25, 2023

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Coop Community,

We were shocked and appalled to find, when trying to buy blueberries for our toddler, that we are stocking blueberries called “Bangin’ Blues” featuring a prominent label of two giant rifles over an American flag. The extreme gun violence in our country is unconscionable. We do not need to further promote this toxic culture with guns on blueberries, of all things. We implore the Coop to cease buying this product immediately

and redirect our purchasing power to farms that do not promote gun culture as part of their product.

With concern,

Brit and Jon Schoepp-Wong

COOP BUYERS: SUPPLY CHAIN SUPERHEROES

July 25, 2023



Meat buyer Margie Lempert is seeing trucking delays and higher prices for everything.

By Marisa Bowe

We've all read about supply chain snarls—including in the last issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. For the Coop's buying team, those snarls have become the new normal.

BULK GOODS AND GROCERIES



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Cheese, bulk and specialty buyer Yuri Weber is encouraging smaller distributors to meet the Coop's shortfall.

"We're just mad scrambling for things," said cheese, bulk and specialty foods buyer, Yuri Weber. "Playing this whack-a-mole game of trying to find who has food, and switching the distributor every week to try to find it. Our stress level is very high."



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Gillian Chi, groceries buyer, sees a shortage of supply across the whole store.

"My job is totally different now," said groceries buyer Gillian Chi. "I used to spend maybe an hour-and-a-half a day ordering. Now I spend four hours a day. There isn't really one particular item [in short supply]," she explained. "The problem for us is that it's across the whole store, and the out-of-stocks keep shifting."



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Keeping a huge seller like black beans in stock has been a major challenge.

“We sell a ton of canned black beans . . . All of a sudden I’m not getting any black beans delivered. And then I realize we’re going to run out if I don’t scramble and find a different brand or a different distributor. So I scramble and I find a replacement, and then before I finish dealing with that, it’s pasta. All of a sudden I can’t get La Molisana, a popular brand of pasta. It won’t just be one distributor; it’ll be that nobody has it,” said Chi.

“It’s this waiting game. Do I wait a few more days and see if it comes back in stock, or do I find a substitute? Then I find a substitute, I get a bunch of it in. I put it on the shelf, and then maybe the La Molisana comes back. And then”—with limited storage—“what do you do?” wondered Chi.

This scenario is playing out over dozens of items. “I’ll have a list every day of like 50, 60 different items that are now out of stock,” Chi said. Adding to the difficulties, UNFI, the Coop’s biggest distributor, has been rationing and cutting orders, adding a new word to the buyers’ vocabulary: “smoothing.” Smoothing, said Weber, “is just a euphemism for not sending us what we want.”

“We never used to have limits before,” said Chi. “We could order as much as we wanted,” but now there are limits to the amounts buyers may purchase. “Some days we would order 1,000 cases and get five cases. Some days we would order 1,000 cases and get 300 cases. It was really bad. It was very stressful,” recalled Chi.

It now takes Chi at least twice as long to compile the buyers’ orders each day. “I have to do it on a spreadsheet, add them all up, make sure they don’t go over the case count for that day. And if they do, I have to start making adjustments. It’s very tedious,” she said.



“The reason we order from UNFI,” Weber explained, “is that they’re huge. We sell a ridiculous amount of food for the size of the store that we are.” When the smoothing started, he said, “we were kind of scrambling to find replacements using our pre-existing distributors,” but there’s just one problem. “We clean them out because they’re just not equipped to deal with the kind of volume that we do,” said Weber.

“We’re trying to encourage these more local, smaller distributors to step up their game a little bit,” Weber said. “It’s probably about 40 distributors that we work with that sell cheese and pantry items and things that UNFI doesn’t sell. We had a good meeting with them a couple of weeks ago to try to make that happen. We’re also trying to find places that are kind of close because of the trucking problem.”

“We’re still trying,” he said, “to figure out long term how this is going to work.”

MEAT

Margie Lempert, meat buyer for the Coop, said some of her meat comes from afar, and she's seeing higher delays than usual because of trucking issues at various distribution sites. She has also noticed that local suppliers are affected, too, with the result being the same for both. "We've gotten cost increases across the board," Lempert said. "Chicken, pork, everything, really."

"We did have price increases from Aberdeen Hill not that long ago," she said. "And we did see some increases from McDonald, who's a local farmer we buy pork and lamb from. I asked Aberdeen about the cost increases, and he said everything has gone up: fuel, insurances, feed supplements, seed, repair parts, etc. The price of piglets has gone up almost 40%. There's increased cost to trucking and butchering, and processing fees, as well."

Hudson Harvest, a Germantown, New York, distributor, sells sausages and other meat products to the Coop. "We just found out they're shutting the processing plant down for two to three weeks because they can't get enough labor in to keep the ball rolling," Lempert said.

In an effort to get members the meat they desire, Lempert has come with a solution: "What I arrived at is ordering much more than we need and asking the distributor to freeze some of it so we can pull it later as a frozen product, and then we'll defrost it. It's not going to affect the quality."

PRODUCE



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

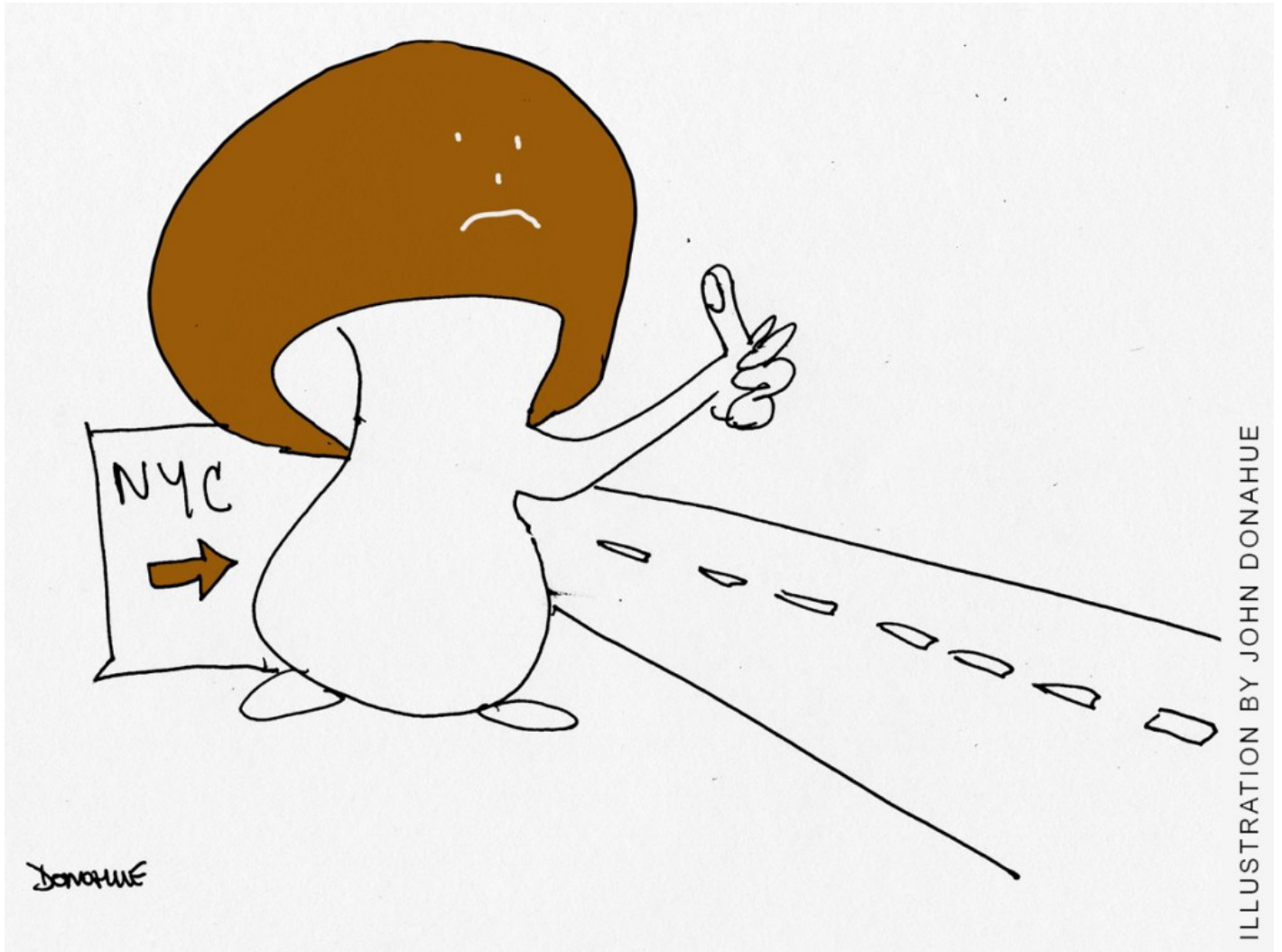
Cecelia Rembert, produce buyer, keeping a close eye on those hard-to-get mushrooms.

“We always scramble somewhat,” said produce buyer Cecelia Rembert, “because produce is always riding waves. Crops fail all the time. That’s just the nature of weather. One of the things that we pride ourselves on is hoping that the Coop membership never notices.”

This year has been different. “Through the summer and fall...from talking to our various suppliers, whether small-scale or large-scale, they had the produce in plenitude,” she said, but “they didn’t have the workers they needed to pack the pallets and drive the trucks.

“Delivery schedules became much more erratic, and there were many more of what we call ‘mispicks’—the wrong item was sent because the person working was new.”

“But,” Rembert said, “we have been recently seeing real genuine produce outages now as well. We get substitutions that we didn’t ask for—like we’d ordered five green kale, and instead we get five celery.”



“The only thing that kind of hurts my heart is not having the creminis,” lamented Rembert. “Mushrooms are very hard to get. We tried to order 50 cases of cremini mushrooms, and one of our suppliers wrote back that they’re rationing everybody to three cases each. They don’t have the people to grow them and pack them. So it’s likely we won’t have enough creminis for all of our members, which sucks. We really try hard for that not to happen,” she said.

DOCTOR-TURNED-CHEF PRESCRIBES DELICIOUS FOOD

July 25, 2023



ILLUSTRATION BY CATY BARTHOLOMEW

By Leila Darabi

In April of 2019, Lenox Hill Hospital announced that it had hired a former physician as its new executive chef. Born in France, Georges Masraff served in Doctors Without Borders, treating refugees around the world before leaving to pursue another passion: food. He earned Michelin stars at two separate restaurants in Paris before pivoting careers again by moving to New York and eventually taking over the food program for Lenox Hill.

As Lenox Hill, like all of the city's health facilities, filled during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, patients at the Upper East Side hospital enjoyed an experience that ran counter to stereotypes around hospital food. I know, because my father was one of those patients.

Due to some complications from a surgery to improve his leg circulation and then a life-threatening antibiotic resistant infection, my father ended up eating more meals than not in hospital beds over the past year—in the ICU and then the cardiac ward at Lenox Hill and later in a series of post-op rehab centers.

We were incredibly lucky. My father never contracted COVID-19 and has now returned home, where he can cook and enjoy the fresh—and well-seasoned—foods he loves. His hospital experience served as a wake-up call for our entire family, driving home the privilege of access to fresh, organic produce. At the rehab centers in particular—which in New York State tend to be long-term nursing homes with short-term rehabilitation wings—the selection for a diabetic nearing 80 were not just slim; they were nonexistent.

With COVID-19 restrictions limiting visiting options, and long lines limiting our access to the Coop, healthy food took on new value. It became a precious commodity earned by standing in a long series of lines: the line to get tested, the online lottery to book visiting time, and finally, the line to get into the Coop.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE CAFETERIA TRAY

During his time in the hospital, as we worried about treating his infection and restoring his ability to walk, my siblings and I found ourselves also preoccupied with my father's diet and especially his access to foods that wouldn't send his blood sugar soaring. That's when we first read the story of Chef Masraff, a proud tale printed on the back of menus at Lenox Hill. During the brief stints when my father was out of the ICU but not yet carted off to a rehab facility, he received a new menu each day—and it made him nearly giddy.

LENOX HILL DESCRIBES CHEF MASRAFF'S MANDATE AS: "TO TRANSFORM TRADITIONAL HOSPITAL FOOD INTO WHOLESOME RESTAURANT-QUALITY FARE."

"I love his soups!" My father told me during a visit, trying to get me to taste a spoonful under my mask.

Lenox Hill describes Chef Masraff's mandate as: "to transform traditional hospital food into wholesome restaurant-quality fare." To be clear, the results are closer to high-quality room service than a high-end restaurant, but compared to traditional hospital food, it's a revolution. Patients order their meals room-service style from a menu coded with symbols like hearts to indicate a heart healthy option. In the cardiac ward, my father was only allowed foods with hearts and if he asked for two carb sides, they asked him to select again—a far cry from the mashed potatoes and fried chicken served daily at another facility.

The foods that arrived—chicken tarragon salad full of fresh herbs and grilled fish with roasted vegetables—were fragrant and well-balanced. They were colorful and fresh, just like the food we typically cook at home with ingredients from the Coop.

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SEND COVER LETTER + RESUME + LINK OF YOUR WORK TO ANNETTE@PSFC.COOP

We can best serve the Coop if our squad reflects the PSFC's overall diversity.
We strongly encourage applications from BIPOC and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

THE SCIENCE

While the benefits of fresh and delicious food are anecdotally understood by any member of the Coop, research confirms that eating fresh, healthy and colorful food is good for both body and spirit.

A 2016 study published in the American Journal of Public Health reported that people feel better with each added serving of fruits and vegetables. The authors analyzed food diaries from more than 12,000 Australians and found that each serving increased people's immediate sense of happiness, and that over time a diet that included more fruits and vegetables led to greater happiness and satisfaction.

Similarly, the Cleveland Clinic recommends a diet of complex carbohydrates, lean proteins, and colorful foods to boost happiness and well-being.

And *The New York Times* reported earlier this year on two long-term studies published in the journal *Neurology*. These studies followed nearly 100,000 men and women over more than 20 years and found that eating colorful produce—including brussels sprouts, strawberries, winter squash and raw spinach—were associated with less cog-

nitive decline.

MEMBERS RETURN FOR FAVORITE FOODS

On a recent Sunday, the first truly crisp fall day of the year, a short line of members waited to enter the Coop. People in line expressed pleasure at the short line and excitement about the fresh food they planned to buy.

“Apples are in season right now, and pears. We eat them raw or sliced in salads,” said Tom Protos. “I’m trying to eat more salads because right now there’s an abundance of vegetables. And it’s better than snacking. We’re still working in a hybrid model, and I became too friendly with the refrigerator.”

Selene sat outside the Coop while her father shopped. “I’m excited about organic fruits and vegetables,” she said. “Especially strawberries.”



Ken, who shopped less frequently at the Coop during the peak of its long lines, said

she missed the vegetables and fruit most of all. “And those homemade [Court Street Grocers] sandwiches,” she added.

Nearby, Aga loaded bags onto her bike. “I just rejoined after being away for 15 years,” she said. I really missed the freshness and the quality of all the food that’s here today.” A new kind of berry ice cream topped her list of foods to boost the spirits.

For Emmy, it was organic cheese puffs. “Those definitely boost my spirits.”

“This time has made me especially appreciate a well-stocked pantry,” Emily Stone said. During the pandemic she cooked an entire Thanksgiving dinner for one, sourcing from the Coop and local farms. On this day, her boxes included traditional kettle-style tofu. “It feels very homey and comforting and safe and nutritious,” she said.

Over the past year-and-a-half, health and safety precautions—and daunting lines—have created obstacles for many Coop members to easily access the brain- and spirit-boosting foods we typically get at the Coop. Though our shopping lists vary, members agree that access to healthy, delicious and colorful food is at the top of the list of member benefits.

On my own list that day: cumin seeds, butternut squash, lentils, kale and haloumi cheese for a joy-sparking lunch I planned to enjoy with my father.

HOW ABOUT THEM APPLES?

July 25, 2023

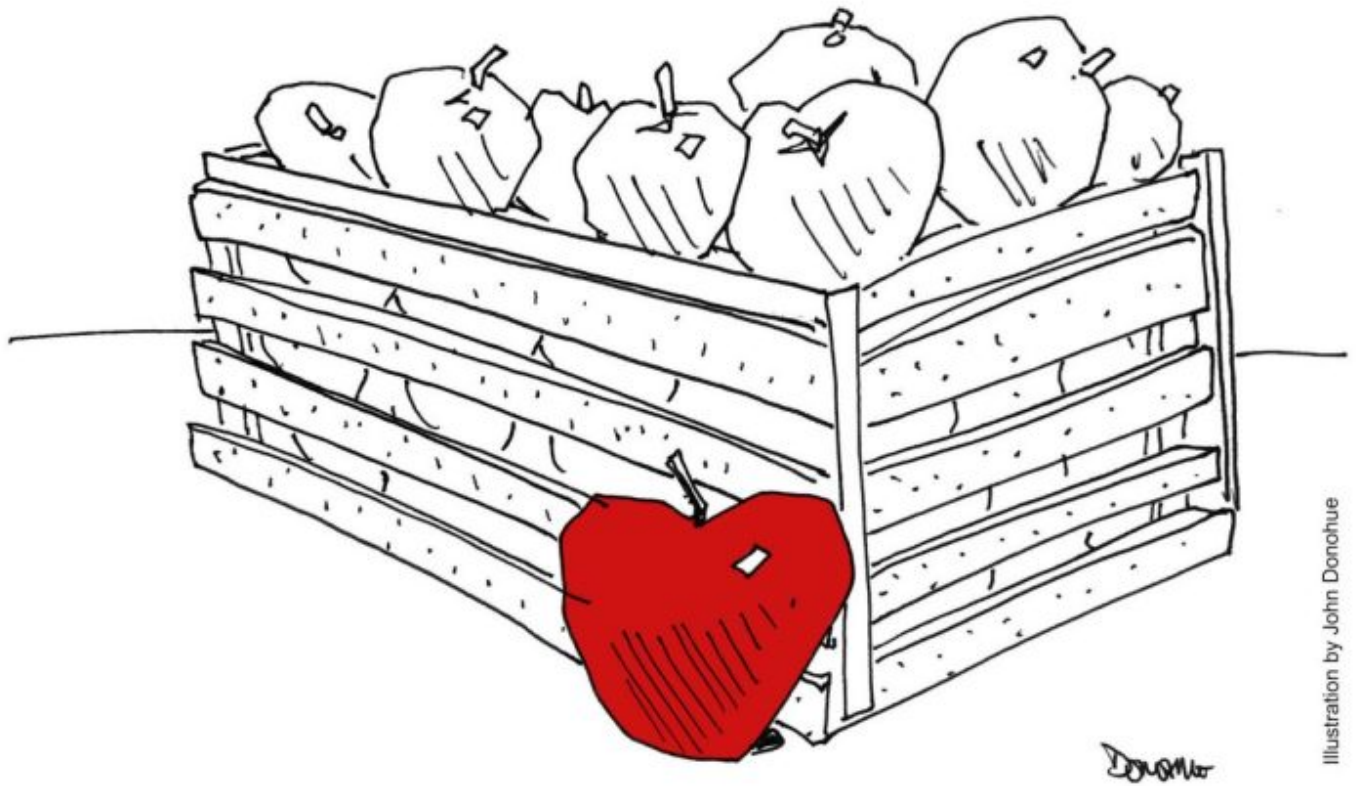


Illustration by John Donohue

By Marisa Bowe

The Coop is bursting with delectable autumn apples. Get ready to nerd out on an encyclopedic survey, from centuries-old heirlooms to present-day, patented and trademarked blockbusters.



Matisse Neal filling up the Coop's numerous apple bins

BEARS HELPED MAKE APPLES SWEET

The domestic apple is native to Kazakhstan, where the primary ancestor of most cultivated apples still grows wild. It was too sour for humans to eat. Bears are thought to be responsible for selecting (and spreading) the biggest, sweetest fruit. This resulted

in apples that humans liked, which were probably domesticated as early as the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution.

An “heirloom” is an apple that was cultivated before WWII and the start of large-scale commercial farming. The Coop gets some of its most appealing heirlooms from Scott Farm in Vermont. Simon Renault, the farm’s general manager, points out that without human intervention, we wouldn’t have any of this variety. “An apple will never reproduce true to seed,” he explains. “They need to get pollinated by a different tree. So the apple will never give you the exact same variety. Grafting a variety you like onto rootstock—that’s the only way you can reproduce [it].”

APPLE HISTORY 101

“That’s the fascinating part about heirlooms,” he continues. “The apples we have today pleased somebody, somewhere, way back in the history of humanity. One day there’s a guy who walked by a hedgerow, grabbed an apple, took a bite and was like, ‘Oh my God, this tastes like pear. I bet you this would make a great sauce.’”

Just as Renault describes, the Gravenstein apple tree was discovered in 1669 in Denmark. Or was it Italy? Or Germany? Wherever it was and whoever discovered it, they knew what they were doing. The Gravenstein is renowned for its creamy, juicy flesh and distinctive, well-balanced sweet and tart flavors with a touch of tang.

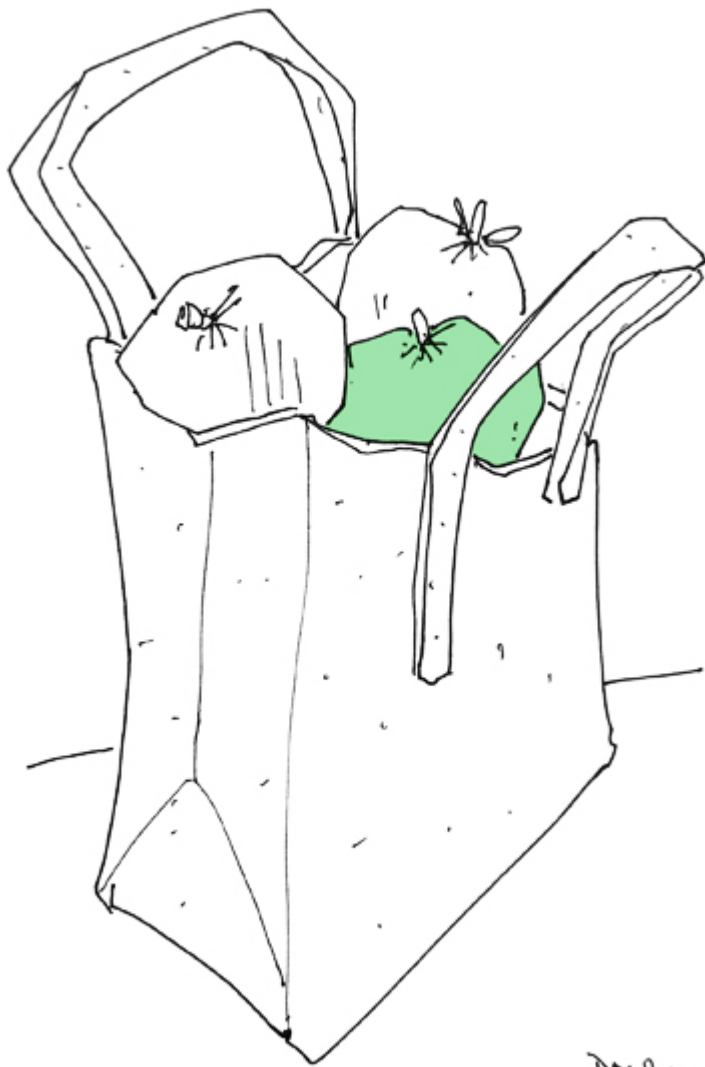


Illustration credit: John Donohue

Donohue

MORE APPLE "SPECIES"

The Reine de Reinettes, known as a dessert apple, also has a convoluted history. It became known in France, Holland and England around 1770 and was called something different in each place. It tastes as good by any of its names, with juicy, subtly crunchy flesh and rich, complex flavor with lush notes of citrus and tropical fruit.

The Lamb Abbey Pearmain apple is named after the place where Mary Malcomb discovered it in 1804, growing on a tree in her backyard garden in Kent, southeast of London. She was awarded a medal for it in 1819 by the Horticultural Society of London. Its firm flesh is intensely flavored with a good sweet/tart balance and pineapple notes.

John McIntosh bought a farm in Ontario in 1811 and discovered apple saplings with especially good fruit. He transplanted them to his garden, and only one survived—to become the parent of every soft, juicy, sweet/tart/spicy McIntosh you've eaten.

Maria Ann "Granny" Smith discovered the apple that bears her name. A midwife and orchardist, the British-born Australian transplant decided to cultivate an apple tree she'd noticed by a creek on her farm in 1868. She gained posthumous fame when it began to become widely grown at the end of the century.

The Golden Supreme was discovered in 1890 in West Virginia—or was it Idaho in 1960? Its soft but crisp flesh is mellow and sweet with a lighter, less complex echo of the Golden Delicious's honey and pear notes.

Cortlands were developed at Cornell University in 1899. Sweet and juicy with a hint of tartness, they're great for fruit salads because they're slow to brown.

Fujis aren't named for the mountain in Japan, but Fujisaki, the town where they were developed in the 1930s. The crisp, firm, juicy flesh has one of the highest sugar contents of any popular apple, and their taste confirms that. Their flavor brings to mind fresh-pressed apple juice.

The Gala was developed the same decade, in New Zealand. Its crisp, soft, juicy flesh is mild and very sweet.

The beautiful Pink Pearl was developed in 1944 in California. Crisp and juicy, it has stunning rosy-pink, tart-sweet flesh.

The Empire was half-discovered, half-bred at Cornell in 1945. It's firm, crisp and juicy, with a tart flavor, and doesn't bruise easily.

The Ginger Gold was discovered among the surviving trees of a Virginia orchard after Hurricane Camille in 1969. It has crisp, fine-textured flesh that's sweet with mildly

tart overtones, and is slow to brown.

Sweet Sixteens were developed over 31 years at the University of Minnesota, making its debut in 1978. Its crisp yellow flesh is very sweet, with a distinctive, complex, rich flavor that's sweet and spicy with vanilla, cherry, anise, bourbon and nutty notes.

The Honeycrisp was developed at the University of Minnesota over 31 years and released in 1991. The blockbuster fruit earned the university ten million bucks before its patent expired. With a juicy, snappy-crisp—but not hard—texture and a syrupy, slightly tart sweetness, it “changed the whole game,” said Fred Wilklow, the owner of Wilklow Orchards, another Coop supplier.

The Zestar!® (yes, the annoying exclamation is part of its trademarked name) was released in 1999 by the University of Minnesota. Crisp and light, its unique flavor is sweet and tangy with brown sugar notes.

SweeTango®, another patented University of Minnesota apple, has its own website. Released in 2006, its crunchy, juicy flesh is sweet and tart, with notes of citrus, honey, spice and maybe some brown sugar.

Sweeties, developed in New Zealand, were introduced in 2012. The firm, crisp, juicy and somewhat coarse pale yellow flesh is mild, very sweet and subtly spicy.

INEDIBLE ORANGES

July 25, 2023

TO THE *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE*:

This letter is not about politics, veganism vs. animal consumption, genetic modifica-

tion vs. anti GMO, Palestine, etc. It is actually about a particular food we sell! I have often bought organic Valencia oranges at the Coop. They were always juicy, very flavorful, the right balance of acidic and sweet, and generally small-to-medium sized. At my most recent visit I bought what were purported to be Valencias. They were enormous (the size of a typical grapefruit), with absolutely no flavor, no sweetness nor acidity, and were completely dried out. In short, they were literally inedible and had to be thrown out. Are these the same Valencias? Do we not have discretion when there is a truly awful batch of fruit to refuse the purchase? I am quite certain that the ones I purchased were not “bad apples” (i.e., bad oranges), since I have noticed for years that very large oranges tend to lack in flavor and juiciness. Admittedly that should have given me sufficient warning (*caveat emptor!*), but I didn’t see any navels or other oranges for sale. I understand that produce, especially organic, can vary considerably in taste quality, and I expect and accept that occasionally I might end up eating something that is not great. But when something is so bad that it literally cannot be swallowed, and there is a full tray of them for sale to other Coop members, it seems to me that some protocol should have prevented that.

Michael Esterowitz