YOUR CLOTHES HAVE A LITTLE WEAR AND TEAR? SHE’LL REPAIR!

May 13, 2025



MEET SUSTAINABILITY SEAMSTRESS LIBBY FEARNLEY

May 13, 2025

By Liz Welch

I was cooking dinner when it happened—a big splotch of oil leapt from the pan onto my brand new sweatshirt. One that I love—for its fit and feel! Also, my first hemp clothing purchase! (Jungmaven for those who want to know.) To say I was bummed would be an understatement. I did not want to throw it away (even though it was biodegradable), and I certainly did not want to donate a stained top to Goodwill.

And then I had a thought: The splotch was smack dab in the middle of my chest.

What if I found a way to turn into an even cooler sweatshirt? I went onto Etsy and found an embroidered patch that looked like a black and white version of the Cheshire Cat from Alice in Wonderland. I texted my friend and fellow Coop member since 2010 (food processing shift, to be exact), Libby Fearnley, who takes sustainable fashion to a whole new (literally and figuratively) level.

I have a job for you!

Libby started her Instagram account @TheBigKeep in June 2023. Her first post was an image of her sewing machine and the caption, “Keeping is part of who I am. It’s not hoarding. It’s not clinging. It’s a respect for the life and energy embedded into every fiber of our lives.”

PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

Seamstress Libby Fearnley

The first example of what she meant by “keeping” was a tunic that was given to her by a friend who no longer wore it. It was the perfect style for Libby’s then postpartum body. She shared two images: the knee length, sleeveless button up pale gray chambray tunic, then the chic crop top she turned it into. The Instagram caption reads: “I removed about six inches from the midsection, added a waist seam, taking in the excess at the center front placket and adding a center back seam, because I like the curved hem.”

With her spitfire imagination and years-long commitment to fighting everyday waste, Libby has made it her mission to reincarnate beloved items—as well as those that have been spilled on, munched on by moths, worn through, or worse.

This is not your typical tailor drop off: Libby brings life to beloved items. Another few items that she has lovingly repaired: her husband’s favorite jeans, whose back pocket was rendered nearly nonexistent by his wallet; her baby’s worn out romper, retrofitted. (She removed the scratchy collar, fixed the crumpled applique and replaced the spent elastic in order to give it to a relative’s newborn.)

Libby was out for a run one day when she dreamed up Keep. The mother of three boys, and a former fashion designer for labels including Aeropostale, Express and Jones New York, Libby was looking for a way to marry her expertise and her passion for sustainability.

WITH HER SPITFIRE IMAGINATION AND YEARS-LONG COMMITMENT TO FIGHTING EVERYDAY WASTE, LIBBY HAS MADE IT HER MISSION TO REINCARNATE BELOVED ITEMS.

After graduating from Syracuse University with a degree in fashion, Libby got a job designing women’s sportswear and sleepwear for the May Department stores in St

Louis. That gig had her crisscrossing the globe, to Hong Kong, Korea and India working with partners in each place to make samples. She moved to New York with May, and there found a new job at a smaller leather company called Bernardo. For this role, she visited the factories where the clothing was made. “I remember going to one in mainland China in December, and it was freezing cold,” she says. “Everyone had their puffer coats on—I could not imagine working these industrial sewing machines with frigid fingers.”

Eventually, she began working as a freelance designer in the world of fast fashion, which she found depressing.

“Old men were discussing what 14-year-old girls should be wearing,” she recalls. “It was gross. They had no interest in my input.”

At one job, she was called a diva for not wanting to move into a new department, when she was eight-months pregnant with her first child. “My boss said, who do you think you are? J.Lo?”



It was during her maternity leave when she began to reconsider her career.

“There was so much stress around making something that was not having a positive impact on the world,” she explains. Plus, the pressure-cooker life was not conducive to new motherhood. Working with factories in Asia, where their morning was her evening, often meant returning home at midnight.

The final straw was when a woman she was working for said: “Libby, I think you’re forgetting that our customers are followers. We’re designing for the follower, not the leader.”

Instead of returning to that thankless world, Fearnley stayed home and had another son. When her husband, a professor of organic chemistry at CUNY, took a sabbatical, the family went to Cambridge, England for a year. “I wasn’t working,” she recalls, “and so instead of buying new clothes, I bought a needle and thread.”

A seed was planted.

Fearnley first learned to sew in a middle school home economics class—and then honed her practice in college. During her junior year abroad in London, she interned for the designer Sonia Nuttyal. “I sewed lots of buttons, hooks-and-eyes by hand sewing,” she recalls. “And lots of hems, too!” Being back in England with her family all those years later reminded her of her love of hand sewing—this time, she was mending her family’s clothing instead of designer clothes.

And then, when she returned to New York, she received a mailer for “Sustainable Fashion Entrepreneurship” classes at FIT. Six three-hour classes for $115 each lead to her certificate in sustainable design. “It was 2013, so the term was still new,” she says. “The more I read about it, the more I thought, this makes so much sense!”

One of her biggest struggles in the corporate world of fashion was the practice of over-sampling. “I’d design one style, and they’d sample it from four or five different factories in four or five different colors,” she says. “That meant 25 samples for one style. And if you did a long-sleeve version, that meant 50.” In order to save on paying duty taxes, the samples were “mutilated”—either by ripping, or cutting the item before being shipped overseas. “It was painful,” Fearnley recalls. “After we were done, we had to throw them all out.”



At FIT, she submerged herself in this growing field that focused on making clothing not just more environmentally conscious, whether by recycling textiles, or making fibers out of bacteria. She also learned about workers' rights. "There are factories that hold on to migrant workers' passports—so they're trapped because they don't have the documentation to leave," she explains. "Some places use forced child labor. It's hideous."

The more she learned, the more impassioned she became, and even began teaching a course in the Sustainable Fashion curriculum called "Current Events and Innovations in Sustainable Fashion" as the field was evolving so rapidly, there was always a new technology to report on. By this point, she was raising three children on her husband's income in a one-bedroom apartment, supplementing with teaching and a few writing jobs.

All the while, her sister was passing along hand-me-downs from her two boys, for Libby's to wear next. "I learned how to mend out of need, not out of desire—and I found

it to be really satisfying.”

Fast forward to the fateful run in Prospect Park in the spring of 2023. Libby was wondering how she could make more money in the field she loved. “While I market myself as a sustainability expert in fashion, finding work in corporate sustainability requires a Master’s degree,” she explains. “I’ve probably applied for over 100 jobs over the past five years—and have had two interviews and not made it past that point. The universe was sending me a signal.”

PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

Reporter Liz Welch holding her “patched” sweatshirt

As she was wondering what else she could do, she ran past a sign that read KEEP RIGHT—and had an epiphany.

“‘Keep’ has so many meanings,” she says. “To hold on to something. Or, ‘how are you keeping?’ Like, ‘how are you doing?’ Also, the company you keep is key. There was something about that word that resonated.” On that run and many others, she continued to meditate on this idea as it related to sustainable fashion. “I’d be running and would stop to take notes on my phone,” she says. She kept coming back to the idea that she wanted her next venture to be about more than fixing clothes.

“Tailors can hem and mend things,” she explains. “This felt bigger to me. It’s about taking the time to figure out what material things are important to us. What is worth putting energy into? Fixing the broken things that matter.”

Like my hemp sweatshirt! The one that I brought to Libby and she turned it into my now favorite top—and made a terrific reel about the process with the caption, “This keeper didn’t give up on this cozy @jungmaven sweatshirt when it got stained! Instead, they asked me to sew this rad cat patch over the stain. Consider it kept!”

> “I WASN’T WORKING, AND SO INSTEAD OF BUYING NEW CLOTHES, I BOUGHT A NEEDLE AND THREAD.”
>
> ***LIBBY FEARNLEY***

I was so pleased—with the item, the concept and the video—that I shared the reel with a bunch of friends. Word has gotten out that Libby will repair your favorite moth eaten cardigan, or patch your beloved blue jeans. She gets a lot of puffer coats with annoying tears, as well as baby blankets. She can also do more elaborate repairs—-

like a pair of tapestry slacks.



Cheshire Cat patch

She often makes reels of her repairs, and last December, one of them went viral. It happened to star another keeper: her father.

“I tried to order my dad a replacement of his favorite Scottish flat cap and learned that it was going to take 16 weeks, which was not enough time before his 80th birthday,” she says. “So I found a pattern online but still couldn’t get our family tartan fabric in ample time.” Instead, she used her kids’ tartan ties they had outgrown. As she was dissembling them, she discovered that they were moth eaten.

“I threw them in the freezer for a few days, then took them apart and patchworked together the flat cap,” she says. It was sentimental as she remembered her dad buying that cap when she was studying abroad in London. “We made a trip to Inverness,

where our people hail from," she recalls. It was on that trip that he bought his beloved hat, which he wore for more than a decade before absentmindedly leaving it on top of his car and then driving off."

Libby's video entails her process—starting with her son's tartan ties—and then ends it with her dad opening her gift. When he realizes she made it for him, he gets emotional. He puts it on and smiles wide, "I love it! I love it!" he says. "What's lost has been found!"

Libby has recently launched a workshop series so she can share her skills. So far, she has taught a basic mending class, a denim workshop and another about sock darning. A visible mending workshop is upcoming.

For more information about Keep and upcoming workshops, go to: www.keepmending.com.

Liz Welch is a writer and book collaborator. She worked with designer Prabal Gurung on his new memoir Walk Like A Girl*.*

THE CHALLENGES—AND SUCCESSES—IN MAKING THE COOP MORE ENERGY EFFICIENT

May 13, 2025



By Dan Bergsagel

January 28, 2025

The Coop has long been a trailblazer in trying to save energy and operate as a responsible citizen in a world where the climate crisis has become increasingly urgent.

Way back in 1991, the Coop installed an energy efficient gas-powered air-conditioning system that avoided using ozone-depleting CFCs. The Coop started buying electricity generated only from solar and wind farms in 2005. All lighting was replaced with LEDs in 2019. Those new fixtures use 75 percent less energy and last 25 times longer, saving $40,000 per year.

LUNDBERG
CONTAINS 6
RICE CAKE BAGS
Stacy's
4
PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN


ROBUR
ROBUR
ROBUR
PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN



There is more that can be done, but those ambitions run up against the challenges of the very nature of the Coop itself. The Coop is open nearly every day of the year, the turnover of groceries from the shelves is high, and members are constantly coming in and out to shop or work. There is very little time for repairing or replacing equipment because everything is constantly being used. The doors and loading bays are often open, letting heat out during the winter or heat in during the summer.

“We are a huge energy user,” explained General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky. “We have refrigeration on 24/7, and we have lights on pretty much 24/7.”


PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP
PARK SLOPE
FOOD COOP
RAYMOND
PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

EXIT
PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN


BEEF CUTS
PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

Still, the Coop has a commitment to doing things better.

“We want to reduce our energy consumption—not just for costs but to be good environmental stewards,” Astrinsky said.

The Coop operates two energy systems. The first, powered by natural gas, regulates the internal temperature—heating, ventilation and air conditioning. The second is powered by electricity from the local grid, and operates the refrigeration systems that keep food chilled or frozen, the lighting and computer systems, and the network of elevators and conveyors that lift and lower food and people around the building.

Improving these systems is not straightforward, but it is the role of Astrinksy and the Energy Efficiency Committee.

Previously, low energy-consumption equipment that did not draw from the local electricity grid—including the 1991 gas-powered AC system—was favored over all-electric systems. Today, local NYC laws and national trends have led to a push to reduce fossil fuel use in favor of renewable electricity.

Some energy decisions are common sense. The motors that power the refrigeration cases in the Coop have recently been changed to so-called electrically commutated ones, which are costly but three times more efficient.

The open refrigeration display cases have been fitted with night curtains—screens which are pulled down when the Coop is closed—to reduce energy loss.



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

Night curtains on open fridges reduce energy loss.
Historically, the changes adopted by the Coop have been effective.

In 2008, the Coop's energy performance was rated in the top 25 percent when compared to grocery store peers as part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Energy Star program. (At the Coop's entrance, there is a small plaque to the right of the main doors, bearing the familiar Energy Star logo, which is more often seen as a blue sticker on a new appliance.)

The certification was received under the stewardship of Bob Sauchelli, a former E.P.A. employee and Coop member. "Energy Star is not a recipe," explained Sauchelli. "It is not a prescriptive based rating system. It's a performance-based one. You could put perfect technology into a building and then mismanage it completely—overheat it in winter, overcool it in summer." In other words, the Coop performed well because it had made sensible decisions in choosing cooling systems—and then used the systems wisely.

The Coop also performed well due to its success as a grocery store. "The busier the store, the higher the energy budget," Sauchelli said. The number of people passing through means that the Coop is being compared to stores with equivalent customer bases, which are much larger and need to heat and cool larger volumes.



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

The front door and loading doors are often open.
In 2024, some improvements to reduce energy loss were considered and rejected. A reconfiguration of the entrance vestibule to reduce air flow and heat loss when the doors are open was deemed impractical due to the exceptionally high shopper traffic at the Coop. Additional plastic film glazing on the inside of all windows was deemed undesirable because it would hinder their use.

In early 2025, additional glazing (a plastic laminate) is scheduled to be added to the large skylight above the shopping floor to reduce heat loss. With 17 years worth of energy consumption reduction efforts now completed since the last Energy Star certificate, is it time for the Coop to renew its status, and see how well it is performing? Sauchelli said he “would love to see the plaque updated” and would happily assist with the process.

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

MEMBER SUBMISSION: TRASH TO TREASURE: COOP WASTE INSPIRES ARCHITECTURAL STUDENTS’ CREATIONS

May 13, 2025



By Tim Shields

January 28, 2025



In November 2024, the bustling basement of the Park Slope Food Coop became an unlikely muse for creativity. Twelve first-year architecture students from Pratt Institute descended on the Coop, but not for groceries—they were there to collect stacks of discarded cardboard and onion bags for an ambitious final project.

Under the guidance of PSFC member and sustainability architect and educator, In Cho, the students were tasked with transforming recyclable materials into prosthetic devices capable of supporting the human body in motion. The project wasn't just about sustainability; it was a challenge to reimagine the potential of humble packaging waste as structural, weight-bearing objects.

Joseph Gordon, a receiving coordinator, played a key role by carefully stockpiling materials for the students. The Pratt group marveled at the Coop's behind-the-scenes operations, particularly the sheer volume of packaging involved in food distribution.

The students' designs culminated in innovative prosthetic devices that supported

two-person interdependent movements, blending engineering, architecture, and sustainability. The result? An experiment that turned waste into art, function and inspiration.

“It’s amazing how these everyday materials challenged us,” said one student. “We learned to see them not as trash but as opportunities for design.”



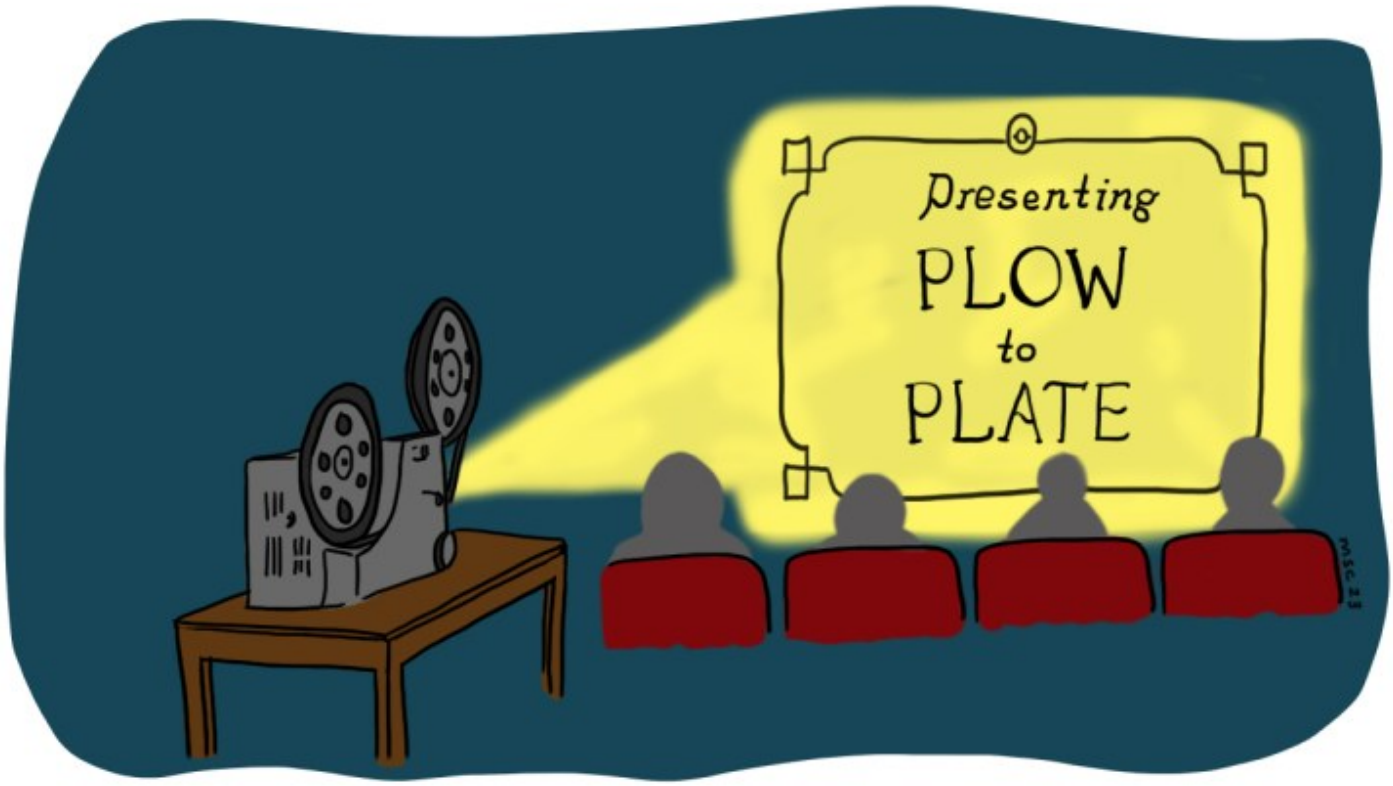
Students showcase one of their creations. Photos by In Cho.

This collaboration showcased the creativity of Pratt’s budding architects while highlighting the importance of sustainable practices and rethinking waste as a resource. Big thanks to PSFC Receiving Coordinators Joseph Gordon, Marvin Pique and Dominique Esser, and fellow guests, who attended the final presentation, inspiring the next generation of architects.

Tim is a longtime Coop member who enjoys his 5:30 a.m. lifting shift at the top of the belt.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: SUSTAINABLE

May 13, 2025



By Adam Rabiner

In this time of false narratives and misinformation, it is something of a balm to find a movie with a straightforward title, *Sustainable*, which is exactly as it says it is: a documentary that explores in all its nuances precisely what this word means in the context of the food system. The film does this, in part, by answering the major questions that news reporters ask when reporting a story: who, what, where, when, how, and why? Beyond answering many of these basic questions with short stories and explanations, the film follows one major narrative: a year in the life of Spence Farm outside of Chicago.

> SUMMER IS AN EXPLOSION OF GREEN, SUNLIGHT, LONG DAYS, SHORT NIGHTS, INTENSITY AND BOUNTY.

The farm, founded in 1830, is now run by Marty Travis, a seventh-generation farmer; his son, Will; and his wife, Kris. Marty narrates the film and describes the feel of each season: Spring is a time of energy flows and rebirth marked by baby plants emerging from the soil and tree buds sprouting from branches. Summer is an explosion of green, sunlight, long days, short nights, intensity and bounty. Fall forecasts the end is near and that the game is over once the ground freezes; it is also a time of abundance. In winter, the main imperatives are keeping warm and ensuring the animals are well fed.

To Marty, the main characteristic of sustainability is the relationships he cultivates and the connections he makes. There are many. Most immediately, he's blessed to work closely with Kris and Will on the farm. Extending from there, he delivers his food to over 30 Chicago restaurants. He considers the chefs to be his friends. To him, it is about "more than rutabagas, more than selling."

Marty also organized a farming cooperative with his neighbors, Stewards of the Land, to plan and sell their products through a single collective channel. Deemed a "visionary leader" by some, he invites his chef friends to his farm for teachable moments. He is an avid student of those he can learn from, such as his friend Greg Wade, a young and talented commercial bread maker, or Gary Reding, a consultant with Advancing Eco Agriculture, a company focused on promoting proper and balanced plant nutrition and soil health.

These "alternative," or non-conventional, agricultural practices and beliefs are a hallmark of sustainability. Reding explains that plants have immune systems, just like animals, and those with strong systems can better resist pests, which target the weaker and compromised plants. But, according to John Kempf, a self-taught Amish farmer and the founder of Advancing Eco Agriculture, before we can have sustainable agriculture, which requires healthy soil, we need to have regenerative agriculture, as too much of the land is too damaged.

MARTY SAYS THAT HE HOPES TO HAVE SPENCE FARM CONTINUE TO FLOURISH, NOT FOR SEVEN FUTURE GENERATIONS, BUT FOR 70.

Just as plants, like humans, have immune systems, they also have relationships, including with molecules in the air and chemicals and microbes buried at their roots in the soil. In an animated segment, the film presents carbon sequestration clearly and straightforwardly. Plants take carbon dioxide from the air into their leaves and turn it into a sugary liquid, which they exude into the soil, where it feeds microorganisms.

If the soil is not destroyed by tillage or chemicals, the carbon becomes part of the microorganisms' molecular structure, potentially for generations. This long-term thinking and perspective is a hallmark of sustainability. Marty says that he hopes to have Spence Farm continue to flourish not for seven future generations but for 70.

If, for Marty, the hallmark of "sustainable farming" is his various relationships, the movie fleshes out the phrase in all its complexity and meanings. Other notable words and concepts the film covers include local, seasonal, small-scale, healthy, organic no-till, traditional, non-conventional, community-oriented, regenerative, fruits and vegetables vs. commodity-based, diversity vs. uniformity and monocrops, cover crops, chemical-free, nitrogen fixation, natural, externalities, soil health, moisture retention, variety, seed preservation, compost, subsidies, scalability, yield vs. quality, culture, way of life, efficiency, ethics, seed preservation, genetic diversity, nutrition, carbon sequestration, resiliency and quality of life.

Perhaps the word *sustainable* gains meaning through time spent selecting fruits and vegetables in the produce aisle of the Park Slope Food Coop or chatting with a seller at the Grand Army Plaza farmers' market. The word is variegated, but the film *Sustainable* is a good place to contemplate what the word truly means to you.

Sustainable *July 9, 2024 @ 7 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.

FARM.ONE SPRINGS UP ON BERGEN STREET

May 13, 2025



By Hayley Gorenberg

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

daisy.”

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

Renato Poliafito, owner of the café Ciao, Gloria, at 550 Vanderbilt Avenue, delights customers by spreading toasts with avocado, hummus and ricotta, then topping them

off with Farm.One microgreens. “They’re very peppery, bright, citrusy,” he said. “Not only do they taste interesting, with a dynamic flavor profile, they’re also really beautiful and colorful. When presenting the toasts and dishes, you’ll get a lot of ‘oohs’ and ‘ahs.’”

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

WORKING THE FARM

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

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

The farm’s employees have often previously worked on outdoor farms, and share a keen interest in sustainability. Farm.One’s Kate Ginna grew up in New York and “had no relationship to where [her] food was coming from.” Her background now includes having worked on a saffron farm in France.

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

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



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

Hydroponics and other alternatives to soil-based farming often spur debates about commitment to soil health. Santos-Vargas, who has experience in environmental engineering, suggested that a facility on Bergen Street avoided such tensions, though, since “there was never going to be dirt on this plot of land.”

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

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

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

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

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

LEARNING AT THE FARM





Mizuna, sweet alyssum flower and other edible plants. Photos by Caroline Mardok.

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

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

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

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

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

MEMBER CONTRIBUTION: PLASTIC-FREE ALTERNATIVES SHOW PROMISE

May 13, 2025



COOP MEMBERS WEIGH IN ON PLASTIC-FREE HEALTH AND BEAUTY PRODUCTS



Garbage piled on the sidewalk.
By Jasmine Chiu

We've all heard that plastic has become one of the most pressing environmental issues of our lifetime. How pressing? Research has shown that we ingest about a credit card's worth of plastic every week! In addition, we are seeing massive garbage patches twice the size of Texas in the ocean. And although recycling can give the material a second life, the reality is almost none of the plastic that you put in the recycling bin gets recycled. A recent report from Bennington College puts the percentage of plastic waste that's actually reused at 5 to 6 percent. Addressing the plastic crisis starts by putting less plastic into the system.

For this year's Earth Day, the PSFC Health & Beauty Department launched an awareness campaign for plastic-free options in Aisle 5, encouraging members to make plastic-free swaps to their daily routines. In addition to a social media series and an in-store featured endcap, we reached out to member volunteers to sample select health

and beauty products and write about their experiences.

Below are some highlights of plastic-free products you will surely grow to love as environmentally-friendly additions to your day-to-day!

HAIR



A shampoo bar is a plastic-free alternative to liquid shampoo.

J.R. Liggett's Original Formula Shampoo Bar: I chose this shampoo bar because it's completely sulfate-free with a very short ingredient list: saponified olive oil, coconut oil, castor oil, plus rose, lavender and spearmint essential oils. It builds a nice soapy lather that's slightly thinner than that of a traditional shampoo. One of the great things about this shampoo is that I've found I don't need conditioner (I have straight hair that's on the thin and fine side) and I can go longer between washes (with this shampoo bar, I wash 1–2 times per week). It does take your scalp some time to get used to it; I'd estimate a few weeks. *—Hannah Bae, Coop member*

FACE

Attitude Natural Care Sensitive Skin Mineral Sunscreen Face Stick: I was pleased to find that this zinc oxide sunscreen stick did not leave a chalky white cast behind on the skin. It blends easily and smoothly into the skin and wasn't irritating to me at all. It is a pretty heavy moisturizer that leaves a tactile residue on the face, so if you can't stand that, it's not the sunscreen for you. But I didn't mind, and I plan to use up this entire 1 oz. sunscreen stick. So far, I haven't experienced the bar melting, so this feels like a stable formula, but probably not one you want to accidentally leave in a car. *—HB*

Take Haven Rosehip Face Oil: This facial oil feels so nice on the skin. I use it after a shower, so the oil can reach the depths of my skin. It's a thicker liquid but it goes on easily, and I let it soak in overnight; when I wake up, my skin looks super refreshed and clear! *—JC*

BODY



These deodorant sticks come wrapped in cardboard rather than plastic.

Attitude Leave Bar Paper Packaged Deodorant Stick, Herbal Musk Scent: The earthy and fresh scent smells great and lasts all day long. Also, the packaging is beautiful and a durable cardboard material that can handle a lot of shuffling. My only warning: it's a little flaky when you first start, so you really want to let it warm up on your skin, and then it'll apply more easily. *—JC*

BAR SOAP



Body wash bars can replace liquid body wash.

Brixy Solid Body Wash, Mint Eucalyptus: The Brixy solid body wash foams nicely and has a great and mild fragrance. My bar lasted me about a month with regular showering. I think it was a very good deal. I was a little skeptical of labeling of bar soap as solid body wash, but overall really enjoyed the bar. *—Alex Walsh, Coop member*

ORAL CARE



Toothpaste tablets offer an alternative to toothpaste in a tube.

Hello Toothpaste Tablet: Loved this toothpaste! It foams just like conventional toothpaste and gives your mouth a nice minty flavor. The supply does run out faster, and they don't have refill packs, so you would accumulate a lot of metal tins. If you want a toothpaste tablet alternative, I'd recommend Huppy toothpaste—it's my favorite, and their refills come in compostable packs! *—JC*