



October 2023

heart beet

A Pulse on What's Happening at the **Viroqua Food Co-op**

Happy Co-op Month!

Elizabeth Tigan, VFC Board Vice President

It is time to hold our Annual Owners Meeting and to welcome new board members. It's exciting to have eight candidates running for the board!



I am pretty serious when I tell you this is my favorite time of the year! School is back in session, soup is on the stove for dinner, and the abundance of our summer efforts are filling our pantries. It is no wonder that we celebrate Co-op Month in October.

From the Board of Directors' perspective, it is time to hold our Annual Owners Meeting and to welcome new board members. It's exciting to have eight candidates running for the board! We are grateful to everyone who took the time to put themselves forward as candidates.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank exiting board members Julie Tomaro and Lizzy Hauke for their invaluable service.

Their insights as community leaders and innovative business owners were an asset to our organization while we moved through the recent challenges of the pandemic and into the present day.

While the VFC staff and management focus on the store's operations, the VFC board looks to the future. It leads through the lens of Policy Governance, maintaining a set schedule of policies we review during the calendar year. The board's role is to represent our member-owners to our General Manager and ensure that the Co-op's direction is secure in function and funding. The board does not manage the day-to-day operations of the Co-op - we have amazing people who are qualified to do that!

VFC owners, we have two seats open on the board. If you haven't had the chance – please find out more about the candidates and vote at viroquafood.coop/annual-election. Then join us at the Annual Owners Meeting on October 5th to celebrate cooperation and learn more about your Co-op!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Peter Bergquist, *President*
Elizabeth Tigan, *Vice President*
Lizzy Hauke, *Treasurer*
Olive Reynolds, *Secretary*
Andrew Anderson
Julie Tomaro
Bjorn Bergman

GENERAL MANAGER

Jan Rasikas

The Board meets at 6:30pm on the 3rd Monday of each month. Meetings are currently hosted in person and online. Changes are posted on the VFC website. To make a presentation or ask questions at a meeting, please contact a Board member 10 days in advance. Contact the Board at: viroquafood.coop/board-of-directors

The Heart Beet is intended as a vehicle for communication among VFC Owners and shoppers. Articles pertaining to health and nutrition are presented for informational purposes only. VFC recommends consulting a healthcare professional for medical problems and advice.

The Heart Beet is printed and available in-store monthly. A digital copy is available online at: viroquafood.coop/newsletters



We got the scoop!

We had a great turnout at the Meet the Candidates, Ice Cream Social! Thank you to all eight candidates and to those who attended.

We have two open board seats with eight candidates running. VFC owners can find information about the candidates and a link to vote at: viroquafood.coop/annual-election

Vote by October 5th, 2023 at 7pm.



VFC Co-op Community Fund Grant

Applications due October 31st

Now through October 31st, local non-profits can apply online at viroquafood.coop/ccf for a chance to be the recipient of our **2023 VFC Cooperative Community Fund Grant**. This grant is an endowment administered through the Twin Pines Foundation and is earmarked to grant funds for educational projects, development projects or events to local non-profit organizations that have a mission consistent with the Viroqua Food Co+op.

Together we raise money for the endowment through Give Where You Live every October. This year applicants can request up to \$1,000.

Priority is given to projects focused on:



2023 Annual Owners Meeting Thursday, October 5th, 2023 at the Viroqua Food Co+op

Light dinner at 6 pm • Business meeting at 6:30 pm



Equal Exchange



Aura Cacia



Pachamama

International Cooperative Principles

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community
8. *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

*The ICA (International Cooperative Alliance) is considering adopting an eighth principle, and we embrace this change at the Viroqua Food Co+op.

At the VFC, we know that when we prioritize other cooperatives, we all do better. Together, we strengthen a local, national and international movement that has the power to transform communities, trade, and the world.

October is a National Co-op Month! What better way to celebrate, than to participate in your local food cooperative. This month, VFC owners can participate by voting in our Annual Election (before October 5th at 7pm), attending our Annual Owners Meeting, nominating their favorite non-profits for Give Where You Live, and by shopping the store. Owner participation is the key to cooperation and is one of the powerful ways that co-ops are different than other, more conventional business structures. But what is a co-op?

By definition, a cooperative or co-op is an independent group of people who choose to

cooperate for mutual social, economic and cultural benefit. All co-ops are run by and for their owners to fulfill a common goal. For example, the mission of the Viroqua Food Co+op (VFC) combines a commitment to natural foods, superior customer service and the building of a cooperative business. We emphasize organic and local foods and products to promote the long term health of individuals and the environment. As member-owners and a center for the community, we offer the opportunity to create together a work of enduring value. This mission shapes the work at the VFC every day and helps fulfill our goals as a cooperative.

There are many types of co-ops. The VFC is a consumer owned co-op. Meaning we are owned by

look for these signs



the people who shop in our store. Credit Unions are also co-ops owned by those who use their banking services. There are producer co-ops, like Westby Co-op Creamery, Organic Valley and Maple Valley and electric and communications co-ops, like Vernon Electric and Vernon Communications. Did you notice that all of these examples are right here in Vernon County? With approximately 20 cooperatively owned businesses offering various products and services the cooperative economy here is strong.

Cooperatively run businesses are driven by values and guided by the Seven (+1) International Cooperative Principles. These principles help co-ops organize in a way that maintains the spirit of cooperation and democratic member control. By following

the Cooperative Principles co-ops not only help themselves, they have a positive impact on their communities while growing the cooperative movement.

This month, we will focus not only on our Co-op but on the producer co-ops that have products on our shelves. Look for the blue and green Co+op Trade signs around the store to identify products from producer co-ops.

At the VFC, we know that when we prioritize other cooperatives, we all do better. Together, we strengthen a local, national, and international movement that has the power to transform communities, trade, and the world.



Coffee cherries harvested by hand.



The Common Principles of Fairtrade



economic development



social development



environmental development

To learn more about Fairtrade visit fairtradeamerica.org

Fairtrade Coffee

Jen McCoy, Marketing and Outreach Manager

In 2004, I had the opportunity to travel to Northern Nicaragua to learn about Fairtrade. I was part of a delegation of retail co-op workers from around the United States brought together by Equal Exchange Coffee Cooperative. Here, I learned firsthand how Fairtrade works to bring equity and dignity to farmers and villages in developing countries while providing high-quality products to consumers.

On this journey, we spent a few days learning about the country's economy and challenges in Managua, the capital. We then went to a mountain village outside Matagalpa, where we learned about Fairtrade.

We traveled into the mountains on dirt roads to reach our destination, a co-op of coffee farmers found in the shady forest region. Our host family had no running water or electricity. We slept on pallets on the floor. We climbed the hillside to harvest coffee cherries by hand alongside our host. Then, we sorted out the rotten cherries and removed the pulp from the seed. The seed is the coffee bean that is dried and roasted before brewing.

While we worked and visited, we learned about the coffee farmers and the cooperative they belonged to, the conditions they faced before they began working through Fairtrade and how Fairtrade changed their lives.

Segundo, our host, told us that before Fairtrade, they would plant and grow coffee but had no reliable way to sell it. During harvest, they would look for trucks to come through their village to buy coffee beans. The farmers did not know when they were coming, the price they would get for their beans or even if their coffee beans would be sold. With a lack of infrastructure, they were at the mercy of middlemen to get their products sold.

Now, with connections made through Fairtrade, these trade barriers are removed. The security of having a stable market and a guaranteed price to sell their coffee is life-changing for small farmers. The direct business partnerships that Fairtrade supports help small farmers in developing countries plan for the future.

Farmers in the region are organized into coffee co-ops responsible for planting, growing and harvesting the coffee. They also belong to a secondary centralized co-op, CECOCAFEN. This co-op represents 2,600 farmer families from twelve community based

cooperatives. CECOCAFEN buys the coffee beans to dry, sort and package. They also have an export license to ship the coffee beans. Direct trade through cooperatives keeps profits in farmers' hands and helps to build the local and regional economy.

CECOCAFEN supports local development of their communities through eco-tourism initiatives, a microlending program for women entrepreneurs, youth education scholarships and many social and cultural activities. They sell directly to Equal Exchange, who sells finished coffee to retail cooperatives and church groups around the United States. As the trade relationship between all of these co-ops evolve, farmers can get help with quality issues and certification paperwork and processes for organic production. This results in high quality coffee for the consumer and environmental protection for the region.

The system of Fairtrade works at every level. Not all Fairtrade organizations work through co-ops like the one I experienced. Still, they all aim to positively impact developing countries' social, economic, and environmental landscape while bringing equity and dignity to trade.

While the agreed-upon Fairtrade price help farmers plan ahead, the Fairtrade Premium helps transform communities. Farmer groups vote to decide what to do with the Fairtrade Premium (in 2004, 2 or 3 cents per pound of coffee beans sold). For example, in the village that welcomed me, Premiums were used to build the infrastructure needed to bring fresh water from the mountain top to the village and to fix a decaying school structure so it was safe for kids.

When I left my mountain stay in Northern Nicaragua, Segundo said, "We are now friends, and friends help each other out. Please tell your friends in the States our story and encourage them to support Fairtrade. It makes all the difference for our community." I have told their story ever since.

The Viroqua Food Co+op carries Fairtrade coffee, chocolate, bananas, avocado, olive oil, baskets, body care, nuts, tea, wine, sugar and more! We are committed to carrying only certified organic coffee from companies that prioritize small farmers.





give where you live

Round up in October for Viroqua Food Co+op's Cooperative Community Fund

Established in 2016 with the specific goal of providing grant funding to local nonprofit organizations that have a mission consistent with the Viroqua Food Co+op. Priority is given to grant requests for educational projects, development projects and local events that match the VFC's mission and focus on, but are not necessarily limited to, food & food systems, nutrition, health & well-being, cooking education, sustainable agriculture, cooperative education, and social change.

Recipients based on VFC owner votes each November. Register round-ups plus the donations in the collection boxes at each register, combined with 1% of VFC's total sales on the 2nd Wednesday of the month make up our monthly Give Where You Live total donation. Learn more about GWYL on our website: viroquafood.coop/gwyl



Driftless Writing Center, 2022 CCF Grant Recipient

2024 Give Where You Live Timeline



OCTOBER NOMINATE

From October 1-31st, owners can nominate the local non-profit organizations of their choice for a chance to become a 2024 Give Where You Live recipient. To nominate, submit a form on our website at: viroquafood.coop/gwyl



NOVEMBER VOTE

From November 9-19th, owners with a current email listed with the co-op will be sent a notification to vote. Owners can also vote via a link on our website.



DECEMBER RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

The 2024 recipients will be announced in the December Heart Beet, in the store and on our website at: viroquafood.coop/gwyl

Nominate in October. Vote in November. Donate all year round.