

OCTOBER 2007

Alfalfa House

COMMUNITY FOOD COOPERATIVE LIMITED ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

AGM

[Annual General Meeting]

6.30PM FOR 7PM

Tuesday November 20, 2007

Function Room Level 3

@Newtown RSL

cnr Enmore Road and Station Street, Enmore

Members and non-members of the RSL must first sign
the Register in the foyer before they go into the meeting.

AGENDA

- 1. Attendance and apologies**
- 2. Appointment of facilitator, minute taker**
- 3. Acceptance of minutes from the previous Annual General Meeting**
- 4. Coordinators' reports**
- 5. Directors' report**
- 6. Finance report**
- 7. Other reports**
- 8. Election of Returning Officer**
- 9. Call for nominations for the seven-member Management Committee**
- 10. Confirmation of the Auditor**
- 11. General business**

All members are invited and encouraged to attend, speak and vote.

REPORTS: Co-op Manager and Co-op Coordinator

Co-op Manager's Report Nov 2006-Jul 2007
from Sarah Cook

Having come from a corporate environment, I walked in through the doors of Alfalfa House just before the last AGM not knowing at all what to expect! Twelve months on I can honestly say that my experiences as Co-op Manager were some of the best in my life.

I came to the role with skills in communication, process, team building, team management and customer service and left with so much more. I learnt the delicate beauty that is consensus decision-making, the process of 'not always being right', the true dynamics of a team that is filled with amazing staff and volunteers from literally all walks of life. My biggest lessons though were learning how to care for myself and others through the food I eat and the nourishment I take. Alfalfa House is certainly a melting pot of ideas, passion, commitment and love and I have appreciated every moment that I had the pleasure to be a part of the staff crew!

The challenges I faced were in trying to build a balance between surviving as a business in the world and staying true to our objects and our non-profit status. I tried to actively engage the staff, volunteer and general membership in improving all parts of the co-op and was pretty successful in my pursuits although quite often I did just need to sit back and watch change unfold without applying too much of my own will. What an amazing and hard and beautiful and frustrating and altogether outstanding place to be a part of.

The coming year will bring a new set of challenges and I have no doubt our new Co-op Coordinator Warren McLaren will face these with vigour.

Co-op Coordinator Report Aug-Oct 2007
from Warren McLaren

Building on the solid platform left by Sarah has made my arrival at Alfalfa so much easier. That, and the dedication and professionalism of the co-op staff, which is simply exemplary. With three staff moving on to greener pastures, as it were, we have taken the opportunity to employ four new recruits, who with great training have settled in well, and aside from a recent rash of sick days, it

seems rosters are running pretty smoothly.

From an infrastructure point of view, Sarah oversaw the installation of new desk space in the office and a stainless steel work bench in the storeroom. We have since erected two shade cloth sails in the backyard to provide respite from the summer heat for both staff and deliveries. Before the AGM we hope to have installed a new hot water system to service the storeroom and external toilet as well as provide hot water for cleaning. Investigations continue into making the till counter more ergonomic for Shop Coordinators.

We are working to make our FileMaker Pro program work harder, with new databases for contacts, policy, procedures, OH+S and banking all getting in on the act. We also hope to have an enhanced membership database underway soon. Already we have it printing automated receipts and membership cards. In the near future, we aim to use it to track permanent and casual extra discounts, so that we will be able to quickly report on the level of volunteering at the co-op. And while on that score, a huge thank you to those members who currently help out and to the 500 members who've joined since last November. Your incredibly valuable contribution allows staff to remain focussed on customer service. Thanks also to all those members who completed the survey. We are in the process of collating the results and will soon, we hope, inform you of your collective thoughts about the operations of Alfalfa House.

Projects like the side wall mural have slowed considerably as the focus went more into the nitty gritty of the job, employing new staff, and covering for staff away on leave. But I trust we can get the ball rolling again very soon. We also have plans for a new batch of educational signage in the shop, as well as more reusable signs for much of the shop stock.

Thanks to the support of the Management Committee for giving me the opportunity to work here. To Stevie Bee for imparting his years of wisdom and experience (and keeping the website spick and span). To members for suffering through my slow keyboard work at the till, complete with my daggy L-plate. But mostly I wish to thank the impassioned staff of Alfalfa for their understanding, and patience, as the co-op moves through yet another period of transition.

REPORTS: Management Committee

Alfalfa House has had a wonderful year. A lot of good practices have been put in place, our balance sheet is nearly out of the red for the first time in many years, the quality and range of products continues to grow, and the general atmosphere is very positive. The Management Committee (MC) has overseen a lot of consolidation, building on the work done by the previous board, and we have established a platform that will stand Alfalfa in good stead into the future.

As an MC we have focused on policy/process re-engineering, embracing change, building a customer/member service priority and working on communication across MC, staff, members and customers.

Over the year there have been important staff changes:

■ Sarah Cook, in her eight months as Alfalfa's first manager, addressed long-term issues and began developing an administrative framework.

After Sarah left, Warren McLaren came on board in the revised position of Coordinator and is building on Sarah's work. Both Sarah and Warren have brought a lot to Alfalfa. Sarah has now joined MC, and Warren's experience and skills are ideal for Alfalfa.

■ David Tilley left for Taiwan in August and Dominika Grossy has taken over as Stock Coordinator (Fruit+Veg).

■ Gabrielle Nicholson has kept the finances running smoothly.

■ There has been a lot of staff turnover, which in our case is often healthy.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

■ The MC undertook a members' survey that

is now being collated and will help establish a strategic direction for the co-op.

■ Alfalfa participated in Live Green and Feastability.

■ The Registry of Co-ops carried out an inspection in response to Alfalfa reporting negative equity.

There are a number of issues we need to address:

■ Our greatest resource is our membership, and we need to re-invigorate member participation. Staff costs make up more than 75% of our expenses, and more active member participation will help us keep our prices lower.

■ Our current location is ideally situated, but it is too small. We need to consider alternatives. Our financial situation, whilst historically good, does not allow us to easily consider capital expenditures required, for example, to move to larger premises or to renovate our current site. MC will consider building up some working capital.

MC MEMBERSHIP

Vivienne Murray, Ursula Scott, Paula Quigley and Elmarie Pareezer were elected to the MC at the last AGM. Ursula resigned and Rick Shaw joined in December 2006. Paula resigned in August, and Sarah Cook and Cecilia Jensen joined in September. Nick Penty stood in at meetings when we lacked a quorum.

Throughout the year we have just had the required quorum of four. It would be ideal to have seven MC members and with some MC members not renominating, we encourage interested members to stand at the AGM.

It would be good to have seven.

There are seven members on the Management Committee, Alfalfa's board of directors.

Why not join the team and help shape the direction of Sydney's oldest food co-op now in its 20th year? Come along to the AGM or email mc@alfalfahouse.org or visit the WHO ARE WE? page on www.alfalfahouse.org for more info.

REPORTS: Stock Coordinator (Fruit+Veg)

I've been working in the position for two months, although I have worked closely supporting the previous Coordinator, Dave Tilley, the year before.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

■ I have established a current list of available fresh produce on the website. My thanks to Stevie Bee for his enthusiasm and ongoing support on this project.

■ I have also introduced information on such things as culinary uses and seasonality instore, in the eNews and on our website, especially for the less well-known varieties.



supply more locally, however, when they do deliver on the odd occasion, it's a real surprise and there's often plenty of it.

■ I am keen to expand farmer direct buying. There are a number of advantages:

■ The produce is grown from open pollinated, non-hybrid seed, going a long way to ensuring greater biological diversity.

■ The farmers use older varieties, such as the Albert broccoli, which unfortunately has a

shorter season, but makes up for that in taste and nourishment. This helps protect heirloom varieties and agricultural diversity.

■ The produce is picked the day before delivery, meaning fresher supplies.

■ These farms are closer to us, so food miles are much reduced.

■ These farms are smaller than other commercial farms. While this precludes them from supplying produce in the quantities required at, say the Flemington Markets, their smaller scale does allow for better farming practices. It also means we are supporting small independent growers who are more connected to their farms, and so is a more ethical way of doing business, in line with Alfalfa House objectives. Buying farmer direct means we all have greater control over the food we eat.

BUSINESS AWARD

■ This year Alfalfa House won the Inner West Local Business Award in the Outstanding Fruit and Vegetable Store category.

THANK YOU

■ I'd like to wholeheartedly thank Dave Tilley for sharing his incredible wealth of knowledge and experience and a big thank you to Groceries Coordinator Lisa Durante for her ongoing support, advice, encouragement and love.

Dominika Grossy

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BUYING AND SELLING

■ We have two Sydney Markets suppliers, Back To Eden and Eco Farms. Back To Eden remains our primary supplier, delivering three times a week. Eco Farms delivers the more unusual and specialty produce, such as globe artichokes and the Swiss brown mushrooms from CERES Eco Village. I am very grateful for the considerable energy Dave spent developing strong working relationships with both suppliers.

FARMER-DIRECT

■ Dave has left a considerable legacy with this initiative. It is a delight to speak with our producers directly each week, building relationships and trust, and connecting on a deeper level with the food we eat.

■ We are currently supplied by Belinda Atkins, Gary Branch, John Cassimere and Al Parker from North Coast Organic Growers Inc., a farmers' cooperative in and around Rollands Plains on the mid-north coast. They supply most of our fresh herbs and an ever increasing portion of the veges. Colin Amos, from Comboyne, supplies us with kiwifruit, plums, kale, yakon and most of our citrus. Tilligerry Organic Produce in Port Stephens prefers to

PHOTO WARREN MCLAREN

■ What's available in fruit+veg is now updated every week under **WHAT WE SELL** on the **PRODUCTS** page of www.alfalfahouse.org

REPORTS: Stock Coordinator (Groceries)

This is my second year as Groceries Coordinator and I have learned so much and not only about food. I've learned the importance of communication and the value of working in a team, both with my immediate co-workers and with the Shop Coordinators. It's a pleasure to know them.

STOCK POLICY

■ In line with our object of giving members more control over their food supply,

I've continued sourcing more of our stock direct from Australian farms, for example, pepitas, macadamias, dried cherries, almonds in shells, pecans in shells and apricot seeds.

■ I've undertaken more research on the farms that supply our dairy products. I've asked about their farming practices and the ratio of animals to the size of the farm to ensure they're in line with our objects. I hope to visit some of the local ones soon.

■ In the last 12 months, I've added about 20 new suppliers, most of them growers and producers, rather than distributors. While it has increased my workload, the information I've gleaned from the people who grow and produce the food has been invaluable. I've also been able to persuade suppliers to better their packaging (calico rather than plastic) or use less packaging (bulk rather than packaged). In fact, I've been able to increase the proportion of bulk to packaged stock, as more foods, such as lecithin, psyllium husks and Cocolo dark chocolate, become available in bulk. As such, we've been able to pass the savings on.

■ Bulk ordering for members has become more popular and made easier with the improved shelving in the office.

■ I've increased our emphasis on high quality, nutrient-dense foods that are part of a live-food diet, for example, incan berries, goji berries, cacao, chia seeds, dehydrated crackers



(from Conscious Choice), mesquite meal, raw agave, bee pollen, Botija olives. Many of these items are now quite popular.

■ I've been able to replace imported and conventionally-grown foods, such as dried beans and lentils, with locally-sourced organic equivalents.

LABELLING

■ The relabelling of all stock has now been completed. Next up is Nutritional Information Panels for the bulk

foods. And info panels for the herbs and spices. Shop Coordinator and herbalist, Nat Jurdeczka, is compiling their effects and uses as well as suggestions on blending different herbs.

PACKAGING

■ We're returning more and more of our packaging. Olive oil and honey containers are returned to their suppliers as are the 25kg Demeter plastic bags and Demeter calico bags are washed and made into bags with drawstrings by a member for resale. Tahini and roasted muesli plastic tubs are cleaned and used internally or available for sale to members. Incidentally, they're ideal for compost, laundry soaking or general storage.

■ We've switched to paper bags made from 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

INFORMATION/PUBLIC FACE

■ There's now more information about products stored on the computerised point-of-sale system, which means if shoppers have a question about a product, a Shop Coordinator can refer to the products database for help. There's also more information on the website and it's regularly updated. Shoppers can view on line what we usually have in stock.

■ We've had two really positive pieces in the mainstream media, one in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on August 28 and another in *The Sun-Herald's* Sunday Life on June 3. Both saw hits

LATEST ADDITIONS

- Raw agave from Mexico ORGANIC
- Kibbled carob from Australia ORGANIC
- Wild persian figs (baby) from Turkey ORGANIC. They have a vanilla/caramel flavour.
- Bath salt, a mix of Himalayan pink rock salt and lavender, from Nepal ORGANIC
- Dehydrated crawkers from Conscious Choice, including, spinach+herb, pizza, and Mexican from Australia ORGANIC. More info next column.
- Buckwheat grawnola from Conscious Choice ALL ORGANIC. Ingredients: sprouted buckwheat, chia seeds, sunflower seeds, pepitas, figs, sultanas, oranges, coconut oil, cinnamon, ginger, cloves and Himalayan salt; produced in small, hand-made batches in a five-day production process; buckwheat, chia and sunflower seeds are soaked, sprouted and dehydrated to minimise nutrient loss.
- Wild nut mix from Conscious Choice
- Wooden toothbrushes, handles are handcrafted from scraps of maple, 100% biodegradable, even the glue breaks down, and should last at least 12 months.
- Nori condiment, a complement for stir-fries, salads, steamed veg from Japan
- Orange and beetroot relish ORGANIC
- Maple syrup-flavoured almonds, almonds from Australia, maple syrup from Canada BOTH ORGANIC
- Billy Goat's Soap liquid from Australia

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Stock Coordinator (Groceries) FROM PAGE 5

on the website jump dramatically; the shop was extra busy in the following weeks; and we even added two new suppliers.

■ I've been reporting a lot more directly to members via the eNews as well. I'm replying to suggestions members place in the wooden Suggestions Box in the shop and via email. My replies are also posted on the products page of the website. I'm also adding new products and listing out-of-stock or unavailable-at-the-supplier items on the site's News page.

■ Last but not least, I want to thank former Fruit+Veg buyer, Dave Tilley, for his passion for food, his incredible openness in sharing his knowledge, which inspired me to learn more and give more, and also his warm hugs.

Lisa Durante

Chia Crawkers

from Conscious Choice

Sprouted Chia Crawkers are dehydrated at a very low temperature to preserve enzymes, vitamins and minerals. They are rich in Omega-3 EFAs, and high in fibre and protein, contain no artificial flavours or colours and are wheat-free, gluten-free and sugar-free. The perfect snack or addition to any meal, great with salads, soups and dips.

Chia seeds contain five times more calcium than cow's milk by weight. They are also an excellent source of phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, iron, zinc and copper. Chia has three times more iron than spinach, and 15 times more magnesium than broccoli.

AVAILABLE IN

Mexican: organic chia seeds, sun-dried tomatoes, sunflower seeds, coriander, cumin, ginger, chipotle chili, paprika, lemon juice and Himalayan salt.

Pizza: organic chia seeds, sun-dried tomatoes, pepitas, sunflower seeds, marjoram, rosemary, onion, garlic, thyme, savoury, lemon juice and Himalayan salt.

Spinach and Herb: organic chia seeds, spinach, parsley, basil, thyme, marjoram, sage, lemon juice and Himalayan salt.

About Conscious Choice. Conscious Choice is a Sydney-based organisation promoting foods made entirely from vegetarian and live foods. Foods prepared by Conscious Choice are mainly vegan, congruent with the philosophy that our food choices help to promote a vibrant and sustainable future on our planet. The foods are fresh, uncooked, genetically-integral, organic and local, wherever possible. The range includes in-season fruits and vegetables, sea vegetables, sprouted and germinated seeds and nuts, along with some fermented foods, properly combined for easy digestion. The group believes the foundation of a healthy mind, body and spirit is derived from what we eat. And what we eat is more satisfying when it is in its whole, natural state.

MORE INFO www.conscious-choice.com

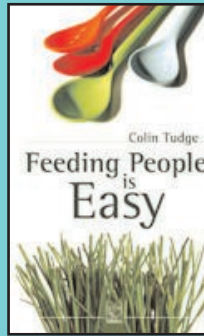
So Shall We Reap
Feeding People is Easy
by Colin Tudge

Review by Nat Jurdeczka

For the first time in recorded history, the majority of the world's people are living in urban areas. If this trend continues, by 2050 barely a third of the population will be eking out an agrarian existence. Who then will be growing the food that helps sustain us?

This is but one of the questions Colin Tudge asks. Tudge is a British science writer and the author of a number of books, essays, lectures and broadcasts on food, agriculture, genetics and species diversity. His book, *So Shall We Reap: what's gone wrong with the world's food and how to fix it*, is an informative critique on modern food production, particularly on how food is really grown and the price we're really paying for it.

His latest book, *Feeding People Is Easy*, furthers his argument that modern farming methods are unsustainable not only environmentally and economically but also in terms of human health and societal



structure. It's a far shorter read than *So Shall We Reap* and he's backtracked a little and paired some of his ideas down over the last three years, particularly on genetic modification (GM) because he's seen that the promise of GM is driven by big business rather than in the interest of feeding people.

He demonstrates that through a commitment to 'enlightened agriculture': "We can feed ourselves forever – without cruelty to livestock and without wrecking the rest of the world. If we do the job properly, we will create human societies that are truly agreeable, cooperative and at peace in which all manner of people with all kinds of beliefs and aspirations can be personally fulfilled."

It's a bold claim, indeed, and fortunately Tudge supports it with a bevy of data.

So Shall We Reap ISBN 041 00950 0 (Penguin)

Feeding People is Easy ISBN 978 88 0901960 8 9 (Pari)

See also *The World Food Club: A People's*

Cooperative to create a new Food Supply Chain

www.paricenter.com/library/papers/tudge01.php

RECIPE OF THE MOMENT *from Nat Jurdeczka*

Broad bean pesto

Vegan

- 1 cup broadbeans (pods only)
- 3 tbsp pine nuts
- 5-6 small sprigs sage
- 1 small clove Italian garlic
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 tsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp tamari
- 1/2 Eureka lemon

Non-vegan option: add parmesan/pecorino (1/4 - 1/2 cup depending on taste) and take out tamari.

■ Liberate the little broadbeans from their flannelette slumber inside the pod.



- Cover with water in a small-medium size pot and boil until soft.
- Drain and remove/squeeze out inner bean from opaque outer skin.
- Place with pine nuts, garlic and sage in blender or mortar

and pestle and mix/pound until slightly wet and chunky in consistency and the pine nuts are mealy like in form.

■ Add olive oil slowly until consistency is moist without being too wet. (Add parmesan/pecorino if desired)

■ Add balsamic and tamari to desired taste and moisture content.

■ Serve with pasta or spread on toast.