

JUNE 2004

Alfalpa House

COMMUNITY FOOD COOPERATIVE LIMITED NEWSLETTER



CHECK OUT www.alfalpa.org FOR THE LATEST ON THE CO-OP

I've been acting Admin Coordinator since last September, since which I've reorganised our filing system; revamped the co-op's inhouse signage, including section signs and food handling signs; updated the Shop Coordinators' Manual; and helped redesign the office. Other office improvements include new shelving and a new coat of Biopaint for the walls. In the shop there's now a new clear perspex unwrapped bread box complete with hatches. The store room is also being regularly redesigned to improve the fruit+veg delivery service and to allow for the better management of stock.



system had been written by five members in the lead-up to the introduction of the GST in July 2000. They worked long and hard on it. And it was fine for a few years. But like a lot of things those five drifted away and the system started to corrupt because it wasn't maintained. So the new one (written in a different program and a much better one at that) was put together over a few long nights and is still having the glitches ironed out. Soon it will be thoroughly rewritten and ready to go. And more to the point it will be maintained.

One of the new computers is a donated Mac (quite old but very reliable). It means we are now able to easily design and produce all the forms and signage we need inhouse.

■ **W4TD.** We're now into our fourth Work for the Dole Retail Project, which continues to be important to participants and the co-op alike. In fact, a couple of the participants in the last two projects have gone on to get till shifts as well as other paid work in the co-op. Others have found paid work elsewhere. For the co-op, participants have helped maintain stock levels in the shop, organise and maintain the storeroom, and occasionally staff the till during breaks. This is especially so when there have been fewer member volunteers to do the work. We've also been able to complete tasks, mainly administrative and financial, that have gone begging in the past. It means the co-op now runs a lot more smoothly.

■ **Website.** The co-op's website (www.alfalahouse.org) has been thoroughly updated, after remaining idle for a number of years. Check it out sometime.


■ **Membership.** Since the change in membership in February 2003, the number of new members joining at the monthly Intro Tours has grown 50%. For each of the four tours we've done this year, as many as 20 people have crowded into the front of the shop. The tours had become unwieldy; it was very difficult to show them anything in one go. Besides, there was an increasing number of potential new members who just couldn't make the tours – we could only effectively run them on a Tuesday night from 7.30pm. In April, the Management Committee changed the way people join the co-op. Now people can collect an info sheet and application form from the co-op, read the info sheet and pretty much join on the spot or by mail. Since the change, membership signups are up dramatically.

■ **Computers.** All the co-op's computers, including monitors, have been upgraded and fully networked. A new point-of-sale computer program has also been developed after the old one fell over one Thursday in March and had to be reinvented at very short notice. As so often happens, just before it fell over we had our first meeting to draw up a new and improved till system. We were going to take four months to do it and then come the new financial year install it. Seamlessly. Well, that was the plan. And then the old system collapsed and couldn't be recovered. There's a lesson in there, of course. The old

New projects for the rest of 2004

1. New labelling for the bins and jars in the shop.
2. A docket printer (for receipts) and a second till in the shop.
3. An almond butter making machine.

Moved house?
or changed
phone
numbers?
Let the co-op
know as soon
as you do.

Alfalfa  **House**
The co-op is seeking members willing
to loan \$100 each to buy a nut-butter
making machine to make fresh
organic almond butter. If you'd like to
help, talk to Ian or Stevie in the office.

Don't forget to
show your
membership card
when you shop. It
avoids confusion
and helps make life
easier for the
person at the till.

Welcome to the first Stock Coordinator's report for this year – and my personal first. Here's what's been happening over the past few months.

■ **Groceries/fruit+veg split.** Since March, we've split the ordering of groceries and fruit+vege. Elise Cole looks after fruit+vege, while I order the grocery lines. A greater total number of hours are being devoted to these tasks as the co-op grows in sales and members, with better results in the store, less stock loss, and improved sales figures.

■ **Directions in ordering.** Stock ordering is always determined by the co-op's ethics – especially our commitment to organic, bulk (unpackaged), locally produced, wholefood (unprocessed) and vegan products as the core of the stock. We also have space limitations and must stock what sells most to maximise available shelf space. Apart from keeping existing products stocked, my work includes eliminating 'double lines' – where we have both organic and standard (slightly cheaper) versions. I've been able to find new lines like basmati rice, peanut butter, brown/green lentils, hazelnuts all from organic suppliers. This also opens up space for new lines. Although prices may be higher it's investing in what we are all about, rather than supporting questionable farming practices, including pesticide use. Wherever possible a local source is also preferred over the imported one.

■ **New products and trial.** You may have noticed a number of new product lines being trialled over the past few months. Some sell slowly so they're not reordered, others are instant winners. I appreciate your feedback on new products; if you feel passionately about these new lines please leave a note in the suggestions box (near bread stand) . . . the more requests the more likely we'll stock a product. Also remember the more information you have on suppliers of products you'd like the co-op to stock the better and easier it is to find. Some of the recent trials and new products include:

- **Mangrove Mountain Water** (bulk): for those of us uncertain about Sydney's tap water quality, there's a considerable saving in plastic bottle waste when you refill rather than buy new bottled water.
- **Dairy Milks:** we've been able to source some reliable supplies of organic and biodynamic dairy products including: Baranbah milks, Pauls Biodynamic, Organic Valley (regular and low fat), Aust. Own Longlife organic milk.
- **Cashews** (organic): from a new supplier of



cashews with organic certification standards that don't permit the unethical treatment of workers usually found in the cashew industry.

- **Smoked tofu** (organic)
- **Marrook Farm BD yoghurts:** Maple vanilla, Lemon Myrtle, Greek and Plain in reusable glass
- **Wattleseed:** a range of native plant foods and spices, all wild harvested from native bushland – more to be trialled soon
- **Carob powder** (organic)
- **Chocolate, bulk** (organic): dark, milk, white Rapunzel chocolate
- **Carmel Valley chocolate and carob bars**
- **Yellowbox and BrownBox Honey**
- **Organic Dry Roasted Macadamia nuts.**

■ **Food handling.** You may have noticed the co-op introducing changes to improve hygiene and food handling – notably a new unpackaged bread display; a recommendation that shoppers hand wash before shopping; and the removal of 'wet' self-serve fridge items. While we want to reduce packaging waste by continuing to sell products not packaged in plastic, we also want to sell products free of contamination. Please keep this in mind when handling food: use the scoops and tongs provided when filling containers and use the tongs when handling unpackaged breads. Clean standards today make for less plastic tomorrow.

■ **New containers policy.** While we now have new jars for sale, we still urge shoppers to bring their own containers for refill every time they shop and to use the donated containers for non-food products.

■ **Waste minimisation.** While we're ahead of other food retailers in terms of waste reduction, we're continually looking to improve things. For example we may prefer a yoghurt in glass that can be reused 50 times (GO TO PAGE 4)

The 2003-04 financial year has seen many changes in the co-op. When I first came on board in November 2002 the accounting procedures were in quite a shambles. I realised from day one that I was going to have my hands full to help bring in more consistent and accurate accounting. Having said that though I have enjoyed both being a part of the co-op and the challenges that it has presented.

Firstly, an upgraded version of the accounting program was introduced together with a complete overhaul of the recording of all transactions. Regular and tighter banking procedures have allowed for more accurate recording of assets. Payments are now done online – no more cheque payments – which has given the co-op a much better credit rating.

Procedures in accounting for sales have also improved. All financial transactions are dealt with in the office rather than by shop coordinators leaving them to concentrate on looking after customers.

Currently I am working on an Accounting Manual, which will put in writing the co-op's accounting procedures.

Over the last few years the shop, office and storeroom have been refitted with new shelving – all done without charge by co-op members. I'm pleased to report that over the last month the co-op has begun to repay these members for the cost of materials used.

As to the financial health of the co-op, have a look at the Balance Sheet, which provides an indication of the current financial health of a business. As you can see, the co-op's financial picture is much improved over 2002-03. Our

Balance Sheet as at March 31

| | 2004 | 2003 |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| ASSETS | | |
| Current Assets | \$49,330 | \$50,377 |
| Property Plant & Equipment | \$16,819 | \$4,606 |
| Total Assets | <u>\$66,149</u> | <u>\$54,983</u> |
| LIABILITIES | | |
| Current Liabilities | \$14,509 | \$39,842 |
| Long Term Liabilities | \$12,700 | \$704 |
| Total Liabilities | <u>\$27,209</u> | <u>\$40,546</u> |
| NET ASSETS | <u>\$38,940</u> | <u>\$14,437</u> |
| EQUITY | | |
| Retained Earnings | \$21,977 | \$26,516 |
| Current Year Earnings | \$16,963 | -\$12,078 |
| TOTAL EQUITY | <u>\$38,940</u> | <u>\$14,438</u> |

sales are up 40 percent overall, and while costs have risen since we began employing paid staff on the till last April, our total equity has improved from \$14,438 in 2003 to \$38,940 in 2004. In the nine months to Mar. 31, 2003, we ran a loss of \$12,078 and that was with grant money from Work for the Dole of around \$42,000. Without it we would have posted a loss of more than \$54,000. This was clearly not good. A lot of the changes that have been introduced to the co-op in the last year are a direct result of this difficult situation. In the nine months to Mar. 31, 2004, we posted a profit of almost \$17,000, with a Work for the Dole grant of around \$22,000. This is quite a dramatic and important turnaround.

THE STOCK COORDINATOR FROM PAGE 3

before recycling, over a yoghurt in plastic that breaks after being reused once before recycling.

I'm currently looking at our incoming stock (excess packaging that arrives at the coop) to reduce the amount of plastic and other waste we end up throwing out. When we buy a product we ultimately want the product and not whatever container it arrives in. We are working on getting this message across to our suppliers.

Some of our waste that is currently being successfully returned or recycled includes:

- honey buckets
- shampoo and conditioner liquid dispensers
- polystyrene boxes (many are now being returned for reuse to our fruit+veg supplier)
- waxed cardboard (all of which is now being returned for reuse to our fruit+veg supplier)
- cardboard boxes (all are being reused in

fruit+veg delivery and customer reuse or they go to VISY for recycling).

The main waste that accumulates in the co-op is plastic bags (approx. 1m x 1m in size); polyurethane woven flour/rice sacks; plastic liquid containers (from the Herbon range, although Herbon have been contacted through our supplier, Pagle, there's still currently no refill system in place).

If you'd like to help out on waste reuse or a returns policy – be you a reuse artist, corporate lobbyist, or someone with a little regular free time – see me on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Well, that's it from me. Feel free to tell me your ideas on any of these topics. After all the co-op is all about control of your food supply and putting your money and mouth where your ethics are. See you in the shop soon.

Easing those end of the month blues



The following dietary guidelines are ideal for continuing well-being for all women, but particularly for those who suffer from any menstrual problem including premenstrual syndrome (PMS), endometriosis and dysmenorrhoea, fibroids, cysts, PID and an irregular cycle.

It's important to remember that each person's needs are unique. No one diet fits everyone, but there are some useful guidelines.

Many women ask me: "How long do I have to be on this diet?" This is like asking: "How long is a piece of string?" It's a difficult question for me to answer, partly because I would never recommend going back to a poor nutrient deficient diet.

You may in the future be able to enjoy foods on the "to avoid" list, but they would be occasional rather than a regular feature of your diet. It also greatly depends on what your overall health is like. So how long you stay on the diet depends on each individual woman.

As a general guideline, you need to give yourself at least three months on your new diet to allow for any health changes. Give yourself longer, say five or six months, if you are a bit on again/off again with the diet.

No matter how small the changes you've made to your diet, you may have days when you can't do it. This is perfectly normal, so don't beat yourself up for eating inappropriate foods - enjoy eating them, and then continue again the next day with the healthier plan. Do it consciously, plan treats for yourself, rather than furtively react to that "damn diet".

If life without chocolate, for instance, feels unbearable, treat yourself occasionally to a small amount of the best! Consider also buying organic chocolate with unrefined cane sugar - it's delicious. My only word of caution: try not to break the health rules in the few days before and during your period.

Foods that promote health

- Wholefoods and minimally processed foods
- Fresh food
- Organically and biodynamic food
- Vegetables, particularly root veges and the green leafy varieties
 - Whole grains and whole grain cereal, including brown rice, corn, oats, rye, millet, buckwheat, quinoa, amaranth and wheat, although wheat can worsen bloating and gas, a

sign you could be allergic to it. In your quest for menstrual health, I would even go so far as to say that wheat be one of the foods you consider giving up first.

- Legumes. These include lentils, kidney beans, azuki beans, chick peas, haricot beans, lima beans, black-eyed beans, black beans, split peas.

- Seeds and nuts. Avoid peanuts and peanut butter, as well as pistachios, as they usually contain mould. Store in the refrigerator to prevent them from becoming rancid and eat them within a few weeks of purchase and only buy from shops where there's a high turnover of stock. Avoid stale nuts and seeds at all costs.

- Seasonal fruits.

- Cold-pressed, unrefined oils. Olive (virgin only) and sesame are the best. Avoid canola oil. Don't even think about buying the de-odourised, sanitised (hydrogenated) versions you find in supermarkets. Hydrogenation creates an immune-damaging fat so these oils have no goodness left in them.

- Essential fatty acids. Rich sources include flaxseed (linseed), evening primrose, raw goat's milk and the oil in fatty fish.

- Tofu. (Tofu is not fermented, so if you have severe health problems or very poor digestion, avoid it.)

- Shoyu or tamari.

- Miso.

- Tempeh.

- Seaweeds

- Water. Essential for all chemical processes in your body, water also helps memory and flushes toxins from the body. I suspect that premenstrual headaches have a lot to do with dehydration. Because of the many chemicals used in our water supply, a water filter is recommended. A reverse osmosis filter is the best, but initially buy whatever you can afford. Or buy bottled water in clear plastic or glass bottles only.

ALEXANDRA POPE

Edited from *The Wild Genie* by Alexandra Pope (pictured above), a psychotherapist, educator and a prominent figure in menstrual health. Alexandra has run menstrual health workshops at Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women for eight years and guest lectured at the chiropractic school, Macquarie University. Currently she is guest lecturing and doing workshops at Australasian College of Natural Therapies and Nature Care College in Sydney.



Resistance to GM crops grows in the US

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by DAVID KUPFER

More and more American communities are saying no to genetically modified (GM) seeds and crops as evidence rolls in about the dangers and the extent that American diets have already been significantly contaminated.

On March 2, the citizens of California's Mendocino County approved a countywide measure that prohibits the "propagation, cultivation, raising and growing of genetically modified organisms." The vote has shaken the establishment far beyond their small north coast community.

CropLife America – which lobbies on behalf of such agribusiness giants as Monsanto, DuPont, and Dow – pumped nearly \$US700,000 into the campaign to defeat the initiative. The proponents of spent less than \$US100,000, raised mostly in small local contributions.

"This victory means the people of Mendocino County saw through the bullying of multi-billion dollar corporations that were trying to undermine the democratic process. These corporations underestimated our savvy citizenry," said Els Cooperrider, a retired medical scientist, a community leader who spearheaded the campaign, and co-owner of the certified all-organic Ukiah Brewery and Restaurant.

"Mendocino County is the first GMO-free county in the nation," says local vintner Katrina Frey, co-owner of Frey Winery. "I'm sure this will motivate many other counties nationwide to mount comparable efforts."

Mendocino is a sparsely populated county that grows no GM crops. However, it's home to a number of wineries and vineyards, including Fetzer Vineyards, the largest grower of organic grapes in the US.

The biotech industry is expected to challenge the ban.

On the other side of the US, Vermont senators voted 28-0 to support a bill to hold biotech corporations liable for unintended contamination of conventional or organic crops by GM plant materials. Seventy-nine Vermont towns have passed measures calling on state and federal lawmakers to enact a moratorium on GMOs, and 10 percent of Vermont's conventional dairy farmers have pledged not to plant the crops.

More than 10 states currently have proposals for legislation against GM crops. Perhaps the most important antibiotech action is taking shape in the Dakotas, where Monsanto plans to sell wheat that withstands the company's flagship weedkiller, RoundUp™. A proposal to ban GE wheat was defeated in the North Dakota Senate in 2001, but residents and farm

groups are pushing a new ballot initiative.

The last year has seen a surge in GE activism across the Hawai'ian Islands, with groups working on legislative initiatives, market campaigns, Right-To-Know efforts seeking the location of field experiments, and the creation of GM-free zones. Experimental GMO testing has been going on in Hawai'i for over a decade. Hawai'i is home to the highest concentration of experimental plantings of GM crops anywhere in the world.

The biotech industry has its sights on California, which produces more than 350 crops and is currently GM-free, with the exception of cotton grown in the Central Valley. Californians for GM-Free Agriculture is a growing coalition of farm, environmental, and consumer organisations united to prevent GM agriculture in California. The coalition is helping to form groups throughout the state that will help keep California GM-free and organise locally to promote a sustainable food system.

This year, the main thrust of their campaign will be stopping GE rice. In September 2003, the US EPA gave regulatory approval for Bayer's Liberty Link™ GE rice. Liberty Link rice is engineered to be tolerant to glufosinate, a broad-spectrum herbicide similar to Monsanto's Roundup. Liberty Link rice could be planted as soon as 2005.

A landmark report by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) released in February shows that federal regulations have failed to prevent contamination. The report documents widespread genetic contamination of corn, soy, and canola seed stock in the US. In lab reports commissioned by the UCS, over two-thirds of 36 conventional batches of the three crops were found to contain traces of DNA from GM crop varieties.

If federal rules and farm practices are not tightened, UCS predicts that the US may soon find it impossible to guarantee that any portion of its food supply is free of gene-altered elements, a situation that could seriously disrupt the export of US foods, seeds, and oils.

The biotech industry and US government maintain that genetic engineering is a benign tool that can be used to reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides, and to improve crop yields.

Sceptics say the technology is too young for anyone to be sure of its safety, so its adoption should be slowed and monitored more closely. Evidence shows that GM foods increase the likelihood that new food allergens and toxins will be introduced into our food supply. GM crops often boost pesticide use, harming beneficial insects, earthworms, and birds. Moreover, GM crops threaten both conventional and organic farmers through genetic contamination.

US farmers have already lost billions in markets because of contaminated food exports and an unwillingness of foreign customers to buy GM food. It's meant that the US government has had to pay out to different farmers who make up that shortfall in agricultural subsidies from the USDA – which means US taxpayers are in essence subsidising the biotech industry.

The first biotech crop went to market in 1994. Today, 67 million hectares worldwide are planted in biotech crops, chiefly corn, cotton, soybeans, and canola engineered to produce their own insecticides or withstand treatment by herbicides. The US is the world's top biotech crop producer.

Earth Island Journal Summer 2004

Organics fastest-growing food sector

Organic production is now the world's fastest-growing food sector. The Australian retail market for organics, worth between \$250–300 million in 2002 (the latest figures available), is expected to reach \$400 million in 2005. Global organic production is expanding at the rate of 10–15 percent a year – production in 2002 was estimated at \$29.9 billion, with forecasts predicting it to hit \$60 billion by 2008.

In 2000, there were about 850 certified organic operators in Australia; by 2003, there were 2500, says Denise Miller, program manager for organic systems at the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

Catriona Macmillan, publisher of the Organics Directory, says: "Since 1997 [the first year of the directory's publication], retail and

home-delivery entries have doubled. Even more importantly, existing businesses have grown and vastly improved the quality and variety of products offered."

The growth is being driven by people concerned about the safety of the food they're feeding their families and the increasing number of dedicated organic growers, retailers and cooks providing better and better products.

Make sure it's certified. There are seven accredited certifiers (ACO, NAASA, BFA/Demeter (biodynamic produce), OFC, OGA, SFQ and TOP). All have logos that appear on certified produce. Certification means that the producer, manufacturer or retailer has complied with the guidelines laid down by the certifying body.

Sydney Morning Herald April 20, 2004

It's all good news in the fruit and vegetable delivery department. It seems that the word really is getting around that this fantastic service is available, because we have been run off our feet with enquiries and new customers of late.

Monday is definitely a buzzy day at Alfalfa House. Certainly there have been some challenging times with the installation of the new computer system and at times we were given opportunities to brush up on our handwriting skills again. Thankfully we've all survived writer's cramp and are enjoying the new swift system.

A very gracious thank you to the team of helpers who continue to make the whole process possible each week – you are indeed amazing in your dedication.

Also to our customers, some of whom have been with us for several years now; it's nice to see the familiar names each week. We do feel like we know you all. Thank you.

To those of you who may not already know about the service but like the sound of a box of fresh organic fruit and vegetables delivered to your door, just call either of us on a Monday for more details.

Good health to you all.

POSITIONS VACANT **Directors of Alfalfa House**

The Management Committee of Alfalfa House calls for expressions of interest from members to fill two casual vacancies on the Management Committee. The committee is responsible for policy decision-making in the co-op and meets monthly. There are seven directors, who work a minimum eight hours a month for which they receive the permanent Extra Discount. For more info talk to Stevie at the co-op (Tuesday and Thursday afternoons 2–7pm) or leave a message in the orange Admin Correspondence tray in the office.

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0401 929 196 for
an appointment.



ALFALFA HOUSE'S *organic* **FRUIT+VEG** Delivery Service

Alfalfa House runs an organic fruit and vege home delivery service every Monday evening. Box prices start at \$40 (incl. packing and delivery) and you choose exactly what you want (depending on availability and what's in season). To find out if you're in the delivery area (2.5km radius from the co-op) or to get more info, call the co-op on 9519 3374 on Mondays preferably before 12noon.

Also, ask about our list of GST-free extra goodies that you can add to your order.