



FREE



SUMMER 2017

The Co-op as a Social Change Organization • Co-op Coins for Community
Habits of Health • Organic & Fair Trade Standards • Herb Profile: Yarrow
Easy Gardening • Hiking Franklin County • Bourbon Maple Syrup

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As the sights and sounds of summer finally start to bloom across Franklin County, I want to take a moment to say hello, and to thank all of you for your contributions to our co-op's newsletter throughout the years. *The New Beet*, much like our physical stores themselves, is a wonderful meeting place for our community--for new stories, new ideas, new points of connection, and the sharing of knowledge. I'm delighted to usher the publication into a new phase, as a seasonally-focused quarterly, and to be able to listen to, and share, even more stories that highlight ways in which our community celebrates cooperation. We hope you'll enjoy each new season of *The New Beet*, too, and we look forward to your contributions!

Best wishes,
Sarah Kanabay

IN THIS ISSUE

President's Report.....	3
Exploring GFM Expansion.....	5
Owner Input at the 2017 Annual Meeting.....	6
Letter from the Treasurer.....	8
The Co-op as a Social Change Organization.....	10
Short Hikes in Franklin County.....	12
Co-op Coins and Community Connections.....	14
Classifieds.....	15
Herb Profile: Yarrow.....	16
Forming Habits of Health with a CSA Program.....	18
The Standards: Organic and Fair Trade.....	20
Easy Gardening: Welcome Weeds!.....	22
Bourbon Maple Syrup.....	24

STAFF VIGNETTE

by Hazel Dawkins, Member



“My home away from home,” is how Kim Nyiri describes her time at Franklin Community Co-op's (FCC) Green Fields Market. Now the Manager of the Perishables Department (which includes frozen food, dairy, meat and cheese), Kim joined FCC in 1996, working in the deli. She started on the sandwich line and helped maintain the salad bar, the hot bar, the pastry case and made cappuccino (Yes, we used to have a cappuccino machine!) At the time, Kim also participated, with everyone else, in doing the dishes.

“Given the volume of customers now, staff have more specific duties,” Kim explains, “but we all still work as a team.” Kim also ordered and cut cheese, as well as making bread and morning pastries. A couple of years after starting work at the market, Kim accepted the responsibility of running the cheese end of things after the deli department manager left. Half the week, she baked and maintained the salad bar; the other half, she ran the cheese department. Eventually, Kim took on the task of maintaining the meat department, as well—all while still baking, something she enjoys and misses doing.

Kim is as fond of winter as she is of summer. When she has time, she's a fan of figure skating and cross-country skiing. During travels up and down the Caribbean area and the coast of California, Kim has enjoyed scuba diving, but her favorite spot to do so is right here in Massachusetts on the North Shore. At home in the Pioneer Valley, she enjoys hiking, especially forays that focus on flora and fauna. Kim has a special interest in growing and photographing wild orchids and has given talks and slide shows of her photos to the Amherst Orchid Society. She and her partner live in Greenfield and Kim finds time to grow herbs and other plants; in fact, some of the plants at Green Fields Market are hers.

WELCOME TO THE *NEW* NEW BEET!

It's an honor to have another opportunity to update you -- the owners of Franklin Community Co-operative -- on the "activities and decisions" of your elected Board of Directors, as required by our policies. This report will inform you of significant Board news since the Annual Meeting in March.

MERCHANDISE POLICY

Culminating a process that started in mid-2015, the Board in April for the first time adopted a Merchandise policy. GM John Williams had gathered input on the draft of this policy given to him in December 2015 -- from members as part of the Multi-Year Plan process and from staff -- and brought it back recommending minor adjustments. This policy largely overlaps with the Product Selection Guidelines management has had in place. The difference is that as a Board "Executive Limitation" (L) policy, compliance with the provisions of this new policy will be monitored yearly by the Board via reports from the GM.

GFM EXPANSION

The key recommendation flowing out of John's Multi-Year Plan, expansion of Green Fields Market has been identified as a strategy essential to enhancing the mid- and long-term viability of the organization. As such, it has been a focus of discussion at every Board meeting. We affirmed the GM's interpretation of policies relevant to an expansion process at the April meeting, and over the past two months we have been together reviewing the proposed process and timeline for moving toward potential expansion, focusing particularly on the first "feasibility" stage. A couple of Board members volunteered to help gather data for the market study that is part of this feasibility assessment. *(Please see the article regarding GFM expansion from the Membership Engagement Committee elsewhere in this issue for a summary and guidance how to become more informed and involved.)*

DISCOUNTS

As a follow-up to Treasurer Jeanne Douillard's call at the Annual Meeting for a year-long discussion about our discount system, the Board supported the creation of an Ad Hoc committee to further research this issue. The committee is comprised of members of the Finance Committee, Board members, and member-owners, and is chaired by Jeanne. After this group spent a couple of months gathering additional information relevant to this issue, the Board held an hour-long Strategic Conversation at the May meeting to explore and further educate ourselves on various aspects of this topic. The Finance Committee and the GM have been encouraging such an examination of our discount system, seeing its adjustment as another potential way to solidify the sustainability of the Co-op. (Please see Jeanne's article on this subject elsewhere in this issue for more background and details.)

Audit Accountant Joe Wolkowicz conducted a complete audit for FY2016 (he also had completed one for FY2014, and a less thorough financial review for FY2015). In his report to the Board at the April meeting, he offered assurance that the process this time went much smoother, noting a lot of improvements in the organization's accounting practices.

BOARD FUNCTIONING

Based on the results of Board self-monitoring (required by policy) and the observations of other owners attending meetings, there is consensus that the Board has overall been functioning at a higher level of effectiveness and efficiency. This is reflected in the quality of materials created for meeting preparation, the degree of focus and collaboration during the meetings themselves, and more productive delegation to committees. The Board recognizes the need to continuously strive for more improvement, one purpose of our day-long retreat in late June. *(continued on p. 4)*

Another Board-development opportunity is the national co-op conference (CCMA) taking place in early June in Minneapolis. This year the Board will be ably represented by Vice President Lynn Benander and Sonia Cruz (the first owner-employee Board member in quite some time!). *(The Board packets of meeting-preparation materials are available on the Member Forum -- please check these out, and consider attending a Board meeting in person. Good ways to determine if serving on the Board yourself might be in your future!)*

MPCIRCLE EVENT

In addition to encouraging you to watch for chances to participate at events organized by the Board's Membership Engagement Committee, I want to also note that the owner-created Member Participation Circle has a long tradition of offering opportunities to learn about and discuss issues relevant to co-op membership (their event in early May featured experts on the definitions of "organic" food and "fair trade"). On the evening of Wednesday July 19th at 170 Main St. they are hosting a forum entitled "The Co-op as agent of social change: What does the Co-op mean to us? What are we willing to do to sustain it?" -- a nice opportunity to gather together and reflect on co-op ownership and our organization's broad

impact in the community.

MEMBER FORUM

With the New Beet going to a quarterly schedule, this makes other modes of communication with owners all the more important as the Board strives to fulfill its responsibility to "act as the link between the member-owners and the cooperative business they own". As such, I want to put in a plug for checking-out the Member Forum on the Co-op website. If enough members sign up, this can function as a dynamic connection between owners, Board and staff, with lots of chances to access and share information and perspectives. Just go to the "Co-ownership" button on the homepage ... click on "Member Forum" ... sign-up (& wait a day to confirm your ownership status) ... customize your PIN -- you're good to go!

Recognizing you as a member-owner of this organization vital to the local culture and economy, I hope that reading this report and other materials in this edition leave you more empowered with information and opportunities for further involvement than when you opened this newsletter.

In service,

George Touloumtzis, Board President

A PERSONAL THANK YOU TO SUZETTE SNOW COBB

Suzette,

Thank you for the valuable opportunity to have worked with you over the past five years. When our family was new to the area, we chose to live in Greenfield, as other members have, in part because of FCC. Coming on board in a solo role in the full-tilt of mid-November, I benefitted from your exceptional logistical know-how. Over our five years together, most of it as the only Marketing and Membership staff, I was inspired by the wide range of how much you were so good at and by your deep connection to the community of cooperative businesses. Thank you for our exchange of ideas, our teaching and learning from one another, and for your profound dedication to the marketing work we did together for our co-op.

Amy Meblin, Demo Coordinator

EXPLORING GFM EXPANSION

Many owners have indicated support -- via feedback in surveys the last two years, input at last November's in-person forum, and comments at the recent Annual Meeting -- to proceed with exploring expansion of Green Fields Market. Expanding GFM could better assure that the Co-op remains viable and sustainable for years to come, by increasing buying power, production capacity, staff safety with more kitchen space, and product choices, as well as lowering prices.

General Manager John Williams is actively researching potential options for expansion on Main St. and bringing this information back to the Board. The first "feasibility" stage of the expansion process also involves a market study (data collection just completed). Some information from these efforts is expected **by the fall**, at which time **we plan to hold a member gathering to share updated information and hear your reactions** -- we'll get the word out about this event once it's scheduled.

In the meantime, here are several ways to be informed and involved:

- We're putting a couple of **resource documents on the Member Forum of the FCC website**: An Executive Summary of John's Annual Meeting presentation regarding expansion and a 7-page spreadsheet outlining the Roles & Timeline of the expansion process. The Forum format also allows for comments and dialogue. (The Member Forum is the first link under the "Co-ownership" button on the homepage; it will take a day to confirm your ownership status and give you a PIN, which you can then customize for easy access.)
- Additional **e-mail updates** will be provided (share your e-address with FCC to be included).
- We'll be holding **"Spend 5 minutes with a Board member" sessions** at both stores focused on this topic -- MEC members will also participate in tabling to increase opportunities for owners to learn about and discuss this important issue.
- Owners can always send questions/comments to the Board at: **bod@fcc.coop**
- Written question/comments to the Board can be put in the **Feedback boxes** at either store.
- Member-owners can attend -- and participate! -- at **Board meetings: 2nd Wednesday of the month, 6:30-9:30 @ 170 Main St.** (@ McCusker's in April, July & October).

Respectfully submitted, Membership Engagement Committee

(Bob Dolan, Shauna Lynn, Gary Seldon, George Touloumtzis, John White)

MEC meetings are open to all owners: 3rd Monday of each month, 5:30 at 170 Main St.

mec@gfm.coop



OWNER INPUT AT THE 2017 ANNUAL MEETING

Our Co-op Annual Meeting in March was marked by enthusiastic participation. This article summarizes member-owners' feedback, citing examples and themes raised during two small-group sessions—one after reports by the President, Treasurer & General Manager, and the second after the presentation of the Multi-Year Plan by GM John Williams. Also included are comments on meeting evaluation forms, and responses provided by John and Board Treasurer Jeanne Douillard.

MULTI-YEAR PLAN

There was a great deal of reaction to the Plan, with expressions of strong support. Participants mentioned that the amount of material in the presentation was too much to absorb, but also indicated reassurance at the comprehensive nature of the plan and the background research that went into its preparation. *(Note: John's entire presentation is now available in the Member Forum section on the Co-op website for more leisurely perusal.)*

GFM EXPANSION

In response to owners asking which aspects of the plan were being prioritized, John's response is clear: "Our top priority is the successful expansion of Green Fields Market." Numerous comments supported expansion to enhance the sustainability and reach of the organization. A few expressed caution about growth, with reassurance indicated that the process involves assessment of "feasibility" as part of a "thoughtful, deliberative process." Increasing staff safety by providing more work space resonated strongly with ownership.

Several comments expressed appreciation for the commitment to staying downtown, and some specified the importance of maintaining our presence on Main Street. Confidence was conveyed that we'd retain the "community feel" of the store, with specific ideas mentioned. There were a few suggestions to achieve expansion by splitting store functions (e.g. by separating food production from

retail) to enable different real estate options to work.

FINANCES

Financial issues generated a number of comments and questions. One question was why our cash level decreased. Jeanne responded: "Even though we were profitable, we used \$138k to purchase equipment and made a \$25k investment in a local business" (another co-op).

Linking expansion and finances, it was asked if borrowing from members would be considered to finance such growth. Jeanne: "If the Board determines that it's feasible to do a GFM expansion, it's likely we'll consider offering members a chance to make loans to help fund it. We'll organize a capital campaign to let people know about it." In response to "How do the financial reports impact the consideration of expanding GFM?" John says: "The reports show that we have enough of a cash cushion to keep doing what we're doing for another 1-2 years. By then, we'll need to have made changes that improve our profitability."

MCCUSKER'S

There was appreciation of continued commitment to McCusker's. There was also concern raised about its financial viability, with questions of how the Shelburne Falls community could support the store and how to increase sales. John: "This is the biggest question for us now. We're looking for all of our members to help bring in new customers and help increase sales."

There was appreciation and optimism expressed about the changes made to the store over the past year. One comment noted the "beautiful bulk room," and a couple offered observations that the changes have seemed to make a good impression on shoppers and "brought in more people." It was suggested that the changes have been "successful in creating a community feel."

OWNER INPUT AT THE 2017 ANNUAL MEETING

A few owners lamented the loss of custom-made sandwiches. John explained it was an “unfortunate reality” that due to labor and equipment expenses—it was not viable to continue without losing money. He added, “We’ve worked to expand our grab-n-go options at McCusker’s with daily fresh deliveries of sandwiches, salads, and bakery offerings to help offset this change.” More broadly, John emphasizes that he wants continued owner/customer input about the product mix, noting, “We appreciate your continued feedback about selection to make informed decisions about the products we carry.”

In response to other questions about our Hilltown store, John—while noting ongoing assessment of feasibility and liability for the organization—asserts that “we have reinvested in McCusker’s as a valuable Shelburne Falls community resource,” recently signing a ten year lease, with the hope that “McCusker’s can get to profitability within the next year or so.”

MEMBER DISCOUNTS

Many responses sought clarity and offered opinions about the member discount issue raised in Jeanne’s Treasurer’s report, which noted that the total of discounts over this past year was approximately \$240K, in the context of GFM making \$140K while McCusker’s lost \$118K, resulting in a net profit of \$22K. She concluded: “The Finance Committee believes a discussion of discounts is a fiscally responsible conversation for the Board and member-owners to have this coming year.”

Owner reaction asserted that “the [2%] discount is highly valued,” that it’s “...a contract I made when I signed up...” Concern was expressed about the impacts of its potential elimination, including that this would be “hard for elders and low income.” Jeanne acknowledges, “We understand this is a difficult conversation,” and stated “the Finance Committee is not proposing any changes to discounts for elders and people with limited income. The senior discount and Food For All program would remain the same in our proposal.”

Comments at the meeting indicated widespread owner support for the Food For All program.

One owner speculated about offering “the option of voluntarily opting out of the 2% discount?” Jeanne said the Board’s newly created Discounts Research Ad Hoc Committee (which includes the Finance Committee) “is currently looking into this question.” The alternative approach of a patronage dividend—an after-profit distribution of our collective funds—was brought up; as Jeanne noted, we already have that in place.

Another member wondered “What are the different options for doing member discounts?” John listed other at-register possibilities of a “variable” discount model: “We could have member appreciation days, member-only days, member-only sales, or ongoing seasonal discounts throughout the departments. The variable model would give us more ability to react to market changes; all these options will be part of ongoing conversations as we explore what works best for our co-op’s long term viability, and for our members.”

MEMBER FORUM

If you hover over the “Co-ownership” tab on the website homepage, the first selection that comes up is the Member Forum. This is a space for sharing and dialogue between member-owners, the Board, and the GM/staff. As it’s a member-only section, you’ll need to sign up, but it’s easy (after a one-day wait to verify owner status, you’ll get a PIN number. Annual Meeting reports have been posted there, as has the raw data from owner input—comments, questions, and responses to the questions. We encourage you to take a moment to check out the Member Forum, and to access these materials if interested, as well as future information and conversation opportunities.

**Respectfully submitted,
George Touloumtzis & John White
Membership Engagement Committee**

LETTER FROM THE TREASURER

At this year's Annual Meeting in March, I mentioned that the Board of Directors and member/owners would be engaging in a year-long conversation on our co-op discounts. I want to take this time to let you know what has been happening so far and what's coming up.

In late March, as Treasurer, I offered a plan for an Ad Hoc Committee to prepare the 2% discount for Board discussion. This committee, entitled the "Discounts Research Ad Hoc Committee," gathered together members and board members to take a look at the topic of FCC Discounts. An hour-long Strategic Conversation took place at the May 10, 2017 Board of Directors meeting. Board members and member/owners who were present asked questions and gave feedback. The Ad Hoc Committee met the following night (May 11) to come up with ideas on where to go from here. We want to engage more member/owners in this conversation, something we are now in the process of planning. *(By the way, our committee meets once a month on Thursdays. You can find our meeting schedule on the FCC website.)*

Many of you are aware of the financial difficulties our co-op has experienced over a period of years.

<p>FY 2013 Net Loss = (\$289,164) FY 2014 Net Loss = (\$180,001) FY 2015 Net Loss = (\$406,759)</p>
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By Fiscal Year 2016, the Co-op had a Net Income of \$23,845 but as noted at the Annual Meeting, the financial stability of the Co-op is fragile and unsustainable under current conditions. In fact in Fiscal Year 2017, we are already beginning to feel the effects of this. In the first quarter, the Co-op sustained a Net Loss of (\$23,548) and we are on track to have another loss in the second quarter. *(The Finance Committee will be reviewing second quarter financials at their next meeting, Thursday, May 25 at 6:30 pm at 170 Main Street.)*

There are a range of possible solutions for any cooperatives' (or any business') challenges to its sustainability. A great deal has already been done at Franklin Community Co-op (FCC) to increase labor efficiencies, reduce expenses, and increase revenues. Over the last few years, the GM and staff have done a lot to bring in new business and reduce prices on basic food items to make the Co-op better suited to serve all people in our community; expenses have been pared back to the bone. Since wages are tied to our "values structure," nothing has been done to decrease wages. Instead, we have increased them to sustain our commitment to paying a living wage. We have also embarked on an expansion plan for GFM that will increase our selection of foods, reduce our margins, and build our revenue base. Throughout the year, you will continue to receive updates on how this is progressing.

From FCC Corporation Bylaws, Article II Membership:

"Policies regarding discount structure, working requirements, and payment plans for investment requirements shall be set by the Board of Directors."

In order to set the stage, so to speak, for this "conversation" on the topic of discounts, let's start off by reviewing the discounts we currently have in place **(see tables on p. 9)**.

Why we are having conversations on the topic of discounts?

Every quarter, the Finance Committee reviews co-op quarterly financials. Over the past several years, this committee has been urging the Board of Directors to address the topic of discounts, most especially the 2% discount because this fixed expense item seems like the one remaining area we can potentially adjust to improve our co-op's economic health. We believe the Co-op is now at a point where we need to explore the following

LETTER FROM THE TREASURER

Discounts under the Supervision of the Board of Directors:

Basic Fixed Member 2%	no working requirements
Working Member (additional 8%)	2 hrs/mo/adult in household
Super Worker Member (additional 13%)	4 hrs/mo/adult in household
BOD and some jobs (additional 13%)	the job
Food for All (additional 8%)	if receiving EBT, SSI, or WIC

Marketing and Operational Discounts under the Supervision of the General Manager:

Member of another co-op 2%	Employee Benefit 15%
Senior Citizen (age 65 and older) 2%	Employee/Member 17%
Senior Supplements Day (10%)	Employee/working Member 23%

questions regarding our use of a fixed discount model (2% discount).

1. Is there a more efficient and effective discount structure that would currently better suit FCC (Franklin Community Co-op) at this point in time?
2. Are there other benefits we can provide members that would be valuable but not cost as much?
3. Would a flexible discount model work better for us?
4. What would this flexible discount schedule look like?

Over the next few months, the Board of Directors and committees will work hard to prepare member education and dialogue opportunities. **STAY TUNED!** We need your support and feedback in this endeavor so our co-op can move forward with hope and confidence into the future, renewed and revitalized in our understanding of the Co-op model and what it provides to us owners and to our communities.

Jeanne Douillard, Board Treasurer

Attention Members!

The Member Participation Circle is sponsoring a forum on
Wednesday, July 19 at 170 Main St

The Co-op as an Agent for Social Change:

What does the co-op mean to us?
 What are we willing to do to sustain it?

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity and the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. Co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1. **Voluntary and Open Membership**
2. **Democratic Member Control**
3. **Member Economic Participation**
4. **Autonomy and Independence**
5. **Education, Training, and Information**
6. **Co-operation Among Co-operatives**
7. **Concern for Community**

THE CO-OP AS A SOCIAL CHANGE ORGANIZATION:

WHAT DOES THE CO-OP MEAN TO US?
WHAT ARE WE WILLING TO DO TO SUSTAIN IT?

BY MARILYN ANDREWS

OUR MEMBER PARTICIPATION CIRCLE EVENT ON JULY 19 WILL EXPLORE WEIGHTY ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE TITLE OF THIS ARTICLE.

As owners of two food stores, we're part of a huge wave of change in natural and organic foods retailing which is strongly affecting our stores. More people want organic foods! Producers and retailers have rushed to supply this growing market with cheaper products. We may question the quality of some of their organic offerings, but they're out there. Never before has FCC had competition in Greenfield. Now Big Y, Stop and Shop, and even the Barn are selling organics at low prices. Nearby are more options for shoppers guided mostly by price. *(Note: See Treasurer Jeanne Douillard's report in this issue for details about the effect on our financial situation.)*

This is happening all over the country. One third of the National Coop Grocers' member co-ops are experiencing negative growth, and another third, no growth. Whole Foods is struggling as the biggest food retailers move strongly into organics. Walmart and SuperTarget are selling organic foods.

As members, we are challenged by circumstance to think deeply about our co-op. What does it mean to us? What can we do to sustain it? What changes are we willing to make?

Co-ops are sustained by members' commitment, which, in turn, is sustained by knowing clearly what needs are met for us and our community by our co-op. Our clarity about what the Co-op means to us is the source of energy we can bring to sustain it.

At times like these, we're likely to feel anxious,

even afraid. Our co-op is important to us because it's an energy source as well as a food source for us and our community. We need to think collectively about our response to the changing environment. In recognizing and understanding our fears, we can be open, flexible and energetic when we come together to dialogue— this is one of the skills of real democracy.

On July 19, 6:30 to 8:30 at 170 Main St., MPCircle will have digestible summaries on the walls about the shape of organic retailing today, about our co-op's contributions to the community, our current financial situation and the changing retail environment. This event has two aims: one is to provide members with information about our situation; the second is to offer members an opportunity to dialogue about what our co-op means to us and about an option for change at the member level that the Finance Committee is asking members to consider. This option is reducing member discounts to make more cash available to our business. Instead, the store would offer member-only sales at different times throughout the year. Such discounts are likely to increase sales.

MPCircle is coordinating our work with two Board committees, the Member Engagement Committee (MEC) and the Discounts Research Ad Hoc Committee. We want to help with a member-led conversation and thinking process based on the model our GM, John Williams, used for the Multi-Year Planning Process leading up to the Annual Meeting in March 2017. MPCircle sees this as part of our ongoing transformation as a co-op.

We now have nearly 2,800 members. When Franklin Community Co-op moved to Chapman

Street in 1987 we had fewer than 100. By 1993, when we moved the store to Main Street and called it Green Fields Market, membership had more than quadrupled to 444. Two years later we were at 673. By 2003 we broke 1,000.

The size of the business grew as well. From under \$250,000 in 1987, to over \$500,000 by 1992, to nearly \$2M by 1995 and about \$10M today. We're an important part of Greenfield's downtown and an vital source of local jobs. We work with and support many other community organizations striving for a more just and economically viable community.

When we opened the store on Chapman Street, members painted and built shelves and a walk-in cooler. When we opened Green Fields Market, the work was done by carpenters, electricians, and staff. The ways members can participate in and support the Co-op have changed as we've grown. . It's possible for even 100 people to mount a volunteer operation that can open a store. A group of 2,800 needs to imagine and practice participation differently.

BUT HOW?

Representative democracy was very close to pure democracy for us before 1987. Participation meant showing up and volunteering. That doesn't work for an organization with a large staff carefully assigned to do the many jobs involved in running two co-operatively owned stores.

WHAT KIND OF MEANINGFUL MEMBER PARTICIPATION CAN WE HAVE NOW?

The year-long participatory planning process facilitated by our GM, John Williams—that led to adoption of the multiyear plan—is a model we can continue to use. The work related to our response to the financial challenges of our new environment is an opportunity to create a member-led version of this model.

We might choose to add a component to our member governance structure based on the

Social Council developed by the now-famous Mondragon community to strengthen their member governance. Folks at Mondragon found they could not overcome the tendency for their Board to be dominated by managers. Workers on the factory floors were not truly represented. They developed the Social Council as a partner body to keep in close contact with workers and make sure this perspective was present for the Board.

Our issue is a little different. At least since the Co-op moved to Main Street, the Board's job has grown so large that an effective, ongoing Board connection with members is a challenge. Much of this work has been delegated to staff. With that delegation, however, we lose opportunities for members to learn to do this important part of democratic governance. Without the ability to handle the complexities of a public conversation that stimulates emotional heat, we tend to delay talking about difficult questions, thereby losing the chance to slowly build trust and understanding of the facts of our situation, and of and one another's perspectives. A vision council for our co-op as an advisory partner to the board could take on the work of connecting with members to keep our vision up to date. MPCircle is intending to work on developing a proposal for this sort of addition to our co-op.

This is the same kind of cultural innovation we're working on as citizens of our towns, states and country. In a multi-cultural community, we must make agreements about values that will guide us and value our differing perspectives. These are skills we can sharpen and take advantage of in our co-op democracy. This is exciting work, and we invite those who like this kind of challenge to join us.

The Member Participation Circle meets the first Wednesday of each month at 5:30 in the Green Fields Market meeting room. We welcome visitors and new members.

Email: mpcircle@franklincommunity.coop

Short Hikes in Franklin County

Looking for new ways to get outside as we head into summer? There are great hikes in Franklin County that are short on effort, but long on rewarding vistas to share! Treat your out-of-town guests to a beautiful view or give yourself a nature break after work. These quick trips are a great way to recharge!

SACHEM'S HEAD/POET'S SEAT

Pocumtuck Ridge Trail, Greenfield, MA

"The Pocumtuck Ridge Trail is a hiking trail that extends from South Sugarloaf mountain in Deerfield, MA northward to Rocky Mountain in Greenfield, MA. Approximately 15 miles long, it's accessible from many trailheads and features dramatic views from traprock cliffs. Much of the trail is on conservation land. Blue blazes mark the trail, with the addition of small blue square metal markers at certain locations."

For a quick tour of some of the delights of the ridge, park at the base of the Poet's Seat Access road and cross the street to the start of the Sachem's Head trail section. It's about one mile to the Sachem's Head lookout, with panoramic views of the Valley and nearby South Sugarloaf.

Visit <http://pocumtuck.org> for maps and directions.

HIGH LEDGES/AUDUBON WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Shelburne Falls, MA

High up on the hill in the historic Patten District in Shelburne Falls are the High Ledges, tucked into the Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary. Take a short, easy stroll down to the ledges themselves, or connect to a longer walk through five miles of trails within the sanctuary.

In all seasons, you'll experience breathtaking views of the Deerfield River Valley and, on a clear day, a peek at Mount Greylock. Visit <http://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/high-ledges> for maps, details, and directions!

BEAR'S DEN

New Salem, MA

A short walk to a scenic waterfall is just what the doctor ordered for summer! Enjoy this New England classic where, "...according to local legend, in 1675 the great chief, Metacomet (known to European settlers as King Philip), met here with neighboring chieftains to plan attacks on Hadley, Deerfield, and Northampton." Visit <http://www.thetrustees.org/places-to-visit/central-ma/bears-den.html> for maps, directions, and details.

We've got a great selection of trail-friendly, healthy snacks, refreshing beverages, reusable water bottles, and natural sunscreens and insect repellents that will keep you moving during outdoor adventures this summer!



Amazing Grass Superfood Bars are packed with protein and nutrients to fuel your adventure! Find them in the Wellness aisle.



Dried fruits are a great source of energy and are lightweight and easy to pack for a hike. Find packaged dried fruit in the Bulk aisle!



Turn your walk into a workout with a whole watermelon...or bring along a few slices with other fresh fruits in a reusable container!



While you feast on healthy trail snacks, make sure the bugs don't feast on YOU with natural insect repellents. Find them near the register.

CO-OP COINS AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



by Sharin Alpert

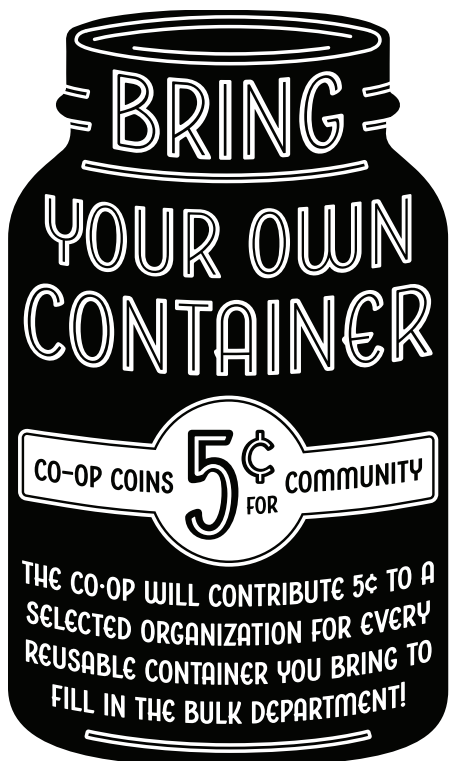
Co-op Coins For Community is a new way our co-op is acting on our commitment to our local community. In the past, shoppers who brought their own bags received 5¢ off their purchase. Since mid-April, for every reusable bag, bulk container, or reusable coffee or tea mug a shopper brings, they receive something even better than a nickel: a way to support a local non-profit group while creating less trash.

Say you bring in two canvas shopping bags and three containers for bulk purchases. When you check out, the cashier will give you five wooden nickels. Not far from the register you'll see two clear plastic boxes, each labeled with the logo and mission of a local non-profit group. Every wooden nickel deposited in a group's plastic box will translate to a 5¢ donation to that group at the end of the month.

Those wooden nickels really add up! In the first month we donated a total of \$170 to our first two groups—and we kept about 3,400 bags and cups out of the waste stream! The more we use our own containers, the less waste we put in the system, and the more our community benefits!

We want you to know where your donations are going. The groups we supported in the program's first month were the Firebird 5K Race Against Addiction and The Literacy Project.

The Fourth Annual Firebird 5K Race Against Addiction on Saturday, June 3, 2017 will help provide safe sober housing for women in recovery, in collaboration with Sage Housing, Inc. Proceeds from the first three years supported the Recover Project, Rides for Recovery, private recovery homes in Greenfield, and other recovery-related ventures.



According to Devon DeKorver, co-organizer along with Adam Mitchell, "While there is a great need for supportive safe sober housing in Franklin County for both men and women, the greatest gap is for women in early recovery, and we're working on a residence for women to be called The Next Door House. Eventually we plan to have transitional housing available for anyone who needs support." She explained, "I'm a person in recovery myself. That's why this is so important to me."

If you shop at Green Fields Market, you've probably met Devon – she's one of our cashiers. She added, "I wouldn't be able to do this without the Co-op's support. People here support you beyond just a job."

The Literacy Project provides basic education programs and opportunities for adults ages 16 and up, including building basic skills and preparing for the high school equivalency test, formerly known as the GED. They have locations in Greenfield, Orange, Amherst, Northampton, and Ware.

According to Executive Director Judith Roberts, "We'll use the funds raised from the Co-op's generous customers to purchase books and supplies for our classroom. With \$25, we can buy one science, social studies, or math book. We also purchase novels for students. Last year one entire class read *The Color of Water* by James McBride. Some students said it is the first book they had ever read start to finish and the first book they ever owned!"

She added, "The Literacy Project is not only an education program; we're also a safe space and a community center for our low-income students. The Franklin Community Co-op is not just two stores, it's also a place where the community comes together. We're all in this together and all working together to build a strong community."

In May, the beneficiaries of Co-op Coins for Community were Tapestry Health and Mohawk Trail Concerts. Our June recipients are the Stone Soup Café and The Center for Self-Reliance.

Do you know a local non-profit you'd like to see supported by Co-op Coins For Community?
Please contact our Outreach and Communications Manager, Sarah Kanabay, to add your suggestion to our list! You can reach her at (413) 325-8802 or sarah.kanabay@franklincommunity.coop.



CO-OP CLASSIFIEDS

VALLEY TIME TRADE—Saturday June 6, 2017 2:30pm Free orientation required to become a Valley Time Trade member. No registration required, but please arrive on time. Bring your laptop or tablet if you have one. Held at Green Fields Market Meeting Room, 144 Main Street in Greenfield. www.valleytimetrade.org

BE A FORCE FOR GOOD! 100 Who Care-Franklin County invites you to join us in giving collective donations to local non-profits. It's fun and easy! Next event: June 14 at The Arts Block. [Facebook.com/100WCFC](https://www.facebook.com/100WCFC).

HOUSEMATE WANTED: Older professional woman seeks same for lovely large 3+ BR apartment in Highland Park area of Greenfield, walking distance to downtown. \$650/month + gas, electric, and WiFi. Lynne, 772-8637

GREENFIELD APARTMENT FOR RENT: Charming 2nd floor furnished efficiency in owner occupied Victorian home. Walking distance downtown/Highland Park. Spacious LR/BR; eat-in kitchen/pantry; full bath; stove; refrigerator. Rental agreement/references, \$685/mo inclusive. Security deposit \$685. No smoking or pets. 773-9522

ABERFAN SEEKING FUNDS FOR RECORDING: At the crossroads of modern music, experimental media and environmental welfare—catapulting the 1966 man-made coal-waste disaster into the present—Aberfan is a sponsored project of New York Foundation for the Arts. www.laurasiersema.com

LICENSED MASSAGE THERAPY – Sarah Winfield Cornett, LMT in downtown Greenfield specializes in therapeutic, relaxation, and deep tissue massage, as well as Reiki energy healing. Discounts for Co-op Members and Military/Veterans. 413.376.5151 or sarah@swclmt.com

Yarrow

Herb Profile (*Achillea Millefolium*)

by Cathy Whitely/Member

Many people grow yarrow because of its feathery leaves and beautiful clusters of white (or pink) flowers that bloom from June to September and because it is a hardy plant that requires little attention. It grows just about anywhere from lawn grass, meadows and pastures to roadsides. Beyond its function as a garden ornamental, the leaves and flowers of white yarrow are used medicinally and uses range from stopping bleeding to helping with colds, the flu and fevers.

Its Latin name, *achillea*, as well as its common names like staunchweed and woundwort, speaks to one of its most common uses. *Achillea* comes from Achilles, who they say used it to staunch the bleeding wounds of his soldiers. Yarrow is rich in tannins making it astringent and accounting for its ability to stop bleeding. Other properties that contribute to its reputation as an excellent wound healer include volatile oils that are anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial (it will help minimize bacterial growth) as well as silica, which promotes tissue repair. Yarrow has pain-relieving properties which are an obvious bonus for its use on wounds. The best way to use it is to chew the leaf and/or flowers for about ten seconds and put it directly on any cut, however deep (including cuts all the way to bone). If you only have dried yarrow, it can be powdered and sprinkled on the wound. The tincture can be applied as well, although this may sting a bit due to the alcohol content. For toothaches just chew and keep on the affected tooth. For nosebleeds, chew and apply to nostrils. It is very helpful when applied to hemorrhoids as a poultice or a salve. For perineal tears after childbirth try a couple of sitz baths a day. Steep a large handful in a couple of quarts of boiling water until cool enough not to burn

yourself then strain out the herbs and sit in the infusion for twenty minutes. If you don't like sitz baths (I did not) you can soak a cotton cloth in the infusion and gently apply it to the perineum for about 20 minutes. Yarrow tincture, alone or with calendula and echinacea, makes an excellent first-aid antiseptic spray.

Yarrow's astringent and toning effect is felt throughout the body and can help the digestive system and uterus when taken internally as a tincture or an infusion. It is used to help regulate women's menstrual cycles and can decrease excessive menstrual bleeding and menopausal flooding yet also induce delayed menstruation, thus making it contraindicated in pregnancy, especially during the first trimester. As a digestive remedy yarrow is considered a bitter that stimulates the appetite, enhancing digestion and absorption. Here, as with women's reproductive systems, yarrow is an amphoteric herb (one which acts in seemingly contradictory ways). It can stop hemorrhage and also break up stagnant, congealed blood thereby helping sluggish bowels as well as ridding pelvic congestion (signs of pelvic congestion include clots and painful periods). This ability to break up stagnation and get things moving makes yarrow helpful for women experiencing tension, irritability and other symptoms of PMS before the onset of or during their periods. Also, because uterine fibroids are a form of stagnant blood in Traditional Chinese Medicine they may be helped with yarrow. Antispasmodic properties in yarrow make it useful for both intestinal and uterine cramps.

A traditional use of yarrow is in fevers, flu and colds. It is a cooling herb and should be taken as a hot infusion to increase peripheral circulation, open the pores and induce sweating to help clear toxins and reduce fever. It is specific for skin that feels hot and dry. A well known combination for flu or fever is equal parts yarrow, peppermint and elderflower. Steep one 2 tablespoons dried herbs in a pint of boiling water for 15-20 minutes

Wild yarrow is reputed to have more medicinal value than cultivated yarrow... remember it this summer when you're spending time outside.

and drink three to four cups a day. If using fresh herbs, the general rule is to use three times the suggested dried amount (so 6 tablespoons fresh herbs per pint of water). Yarrow also combines well with bon set, an excellent remedy for the aches and pains associated with the flu as well as for fevers. While not a primary use of yarrow, the ability to dilate and increase blood flow to the peripheral arteries suggests its potential for lowering blood pressure. The infusion or tincture may be used interchangeably except when trying to induce a sweat.

Yarrow flower essence is used to protect against negative influences from other people or the environment. It is especially indicated for people who are highly affected and easily depleted by others.

Besides being contraindicated in pregnancy, yarrow may cause a reaction in people with allergic hypersensitivity to other plants in the Asteraceae/Compositae family (such as chamomile, echinacea, and calendula). Prolonged use may also cause photosensitivity in some individuals.

Wild yarrow is reputed to have more medicinal value than cultivated yarrow, so check out a field guide or herb book if you're not sure what it looks like and remember it this summer when you're spending time outside. Your friends and family will be grateful when someone gets cut and you're able to help stop the pain and/or bleeding with this dainty little leaf or flower.

FRANKLIN FIRST FEDERAL CREDIT UNION OFFERS MASS CEC SOLAR LOAN **BY MICHELLE L. DWYER**

Solar energy has been researched and developed since at least 1839. In recent years, it has become popular as an alternative energy source. Advantages include the ability to help our environment and long-term cost savings in energy. Unfortunately, cost of purchasing and installation has put it out of reach of many consumers. But the good news is that Massachusetts has created a Solar Loan Program to enable state residents to make the dream of owning solar more realistic. The Solar Loan Program—run by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC)—has established an affordable option for residents, offering loans through participating Credit Unions and banks.

Franklin First Federal Credit Union (FFFCU) is one local lender that can help you explore the option of owning solar panels through this program. The process is easy; you choose a pre-qualified Mass Solar Loan installer and complete a contract for installation with them. The contractor completes the technical application to confirm your eligibility for the Solar Loan program. Once you receive technical confirmation, you just bring that to the Credit Union to begin the loan process.

Of course, there's a bit more to this program than other loans you may have taken out — mainly that the Mass Solar Loan Program requires the loan to be done in two pieces. The first portion of your loan is 35% of the total loan amount, and is put into an interest-only period until the completion of your solar installation (no longer than 12 months). Interest-only means you'll only be billed for interest accrued on the 35% loan funds disbursed at down payment to your installer, until the project is complete. After project completion, the additional 65% of the loan is disbursed for final payment to the installer; the loan then gets re-amortized, and you'll have regular principal and interest payments billed to you.

When the French physicist Antoine-Caesar Becquerel stumbled across a piece of science while experimenting with electrodes in 1893, he may never have realized the impact he would make. In 1941 Russell Ohl invented the first solar cell, and three Americans followed in 1954 with the creation of the first solar panels. The science and development of solar panels have allowed the efficiency of the panel's energy conversion to increase from 6% efficiency in 1954 to 34.5% sunlight conversion efficiency.

If you're considering solar panels for your house and looking at financial options, please visit www.massolarloan.com or FranklinFirst.org for more information on the Mass Solar Loan Program.

Forming Habits of Health

The power of a CSA farm share program that's accessible to all.

By Jessica Van Steensburg, Executive Director of Just Roots



Pictured: Director of Farm Operations Meryl LaTronica (left) and Executive Director Jessica Van Steensburg (right) at Just Roots Farm, Greenfield.

We've all heard the saying, "Old habits die hard." I recently learned that forming new habits is vastly more effective than attempting to break old ones. As the Director of a food access organization—where we understand the important linkages between the food we eat and health we build—I think a lot about the habits that help promote wellness and build health for our people and our community. Just Roots believes that a CSA (community supported agriculture) farm share promotes lasting habits that build health. More than a one-off decision to pick up fruits and vegetables at the local market, a membership in a farm share program is a weekly engagement in healthy food choices.

CSA membership makes us part of something larger: a community of people, part of a local farm coming together once a week to collect their bounty over the course of a growing season.

Members come and fill their baskets and pick from the garden; they dream up dishes and share recipes. This can lead to cooking a new food or creating a new tradition of cooking with kids or sitting down with family. As a CSA member, you can enjoy a meal and know where the peppers were grown or the potato was dug.

Can membership in a CSA farm share program build new habits? Can it build health? First, we must understand what a CSA farm share is. Members invest money (a share fee) in a local farm and receive a share of the harvest. Traditionally, membership is paid in spring, when farmers need the capital to invest in a crop. This model only works for those who can afford to pay in advance and await the future harvest. It doesn't work for many people who earn low or even middle income and cannot afford a cash advance. This problem leaves CSA farms struggling for a smaller pool of higher income customers and reduces opportunities for low and middle income customers to enjoy the rich local food economy that surrounds us in the Pioneer Valley. Just Roots, with its partners, has been working for the last four years to re-invent the CSA as a health intervention accessible to all people, regardless of economic circumstance.

Franklin Community Co-op was one of our earliest partners to invest in this vision. Supplementing member dollars (cash or SNAP) with community dollars will enable Just Roots to make farm share participation affordable for most. But as with most socio-economic challenges, dollars alone are not a sufficient—nor a sustainable—answer. So Just Roots partnered with the Franklin Community Co-op, our local low-income housing communities, the Community Health Center of Franklin County

and the Food Bank of Western MA, in an effort to explore and understand the barriers keeping low income members of our community from accessing local, healthy food and to work cooperatively to produce solutions to address the barriers. We expect this effort to lead to the redesign of our CSA farm share program as a health intervention. What will it look like in a year or two? What impact will it have on the health of our people and our community?

Here's one scenario: Carl, a first-time member of the Just Roots farm share program, carpools with a neighbor to the distribution and collects his share – carrots, beets, onions, herbs, garlic, lettuce, kale, tomatoes. "Now what?" wonders Carl. He's never cooked kale before and the beets he grew up with came from a jar. He's known of garlic primarily in its powdered form. He remembers that his grandma cooked but mom was always too busy. Carl stares down at his counter full of fresh, local produce and calls a friend, another farm share member he saw at the pick-up. She explains to Carl her way of preparing beets and reminds him to look at the recipes that came with his share. Carl locates the roasted garlic potato recipe and begins. Next time, he thinks, I'll invite her over for dinner. His kids get home from school and, prompted by new smells coming from the kitchen, roll up their sleeves and start helping. They sit down to the table and eat together. Over the weeks that follow, the kids start coming to the farm to select their share. Carl usually joins the cooking demonstrations while the kids visit with a bee-keeper or go on a bird walk. Will all of our CSA memberships bring such transformations, from cooking family meals to learning about the farm, and visiting regularly? Perhaps not, but just one of these changes can be transformative and habit forming. They are the kernel for a deeper sense of community to be nurtured throughout the growing season and beyond, creating habits that promote whole health for our people and our community.

NATURE NOTES

By Kathleen O'Rourke, naturalist/herbalist

HERBAL INFUSIONS are easy to make and a great way to get needed healthy fluids that are free of sugar. We can harvest fresh chickweed, lemon balm, peppermint, dill weed, horsetail, nettles and flowers of hawthorn, locust, and linden trees. To make an infusion, put a generous handful of chopped herbs (or a smaller handful, if using dried) into a quart canning jar, pour in almost to the top water that was boiled a few minutes earlier, cap and let sit for one to several hours. If you'd rather make sun tea, just use cold water and leave the jar outside in full sun for several hours. Strain, refrigerate, and enjoy this fresh, vitamin-packed, medicinal-strength tea within a few days.

ANTS are everywhere in North America—over a dozen species—including our familiar black ant, but also the troublesome imported fire ant, which will bite and sting. Other ants that bite are usually not a big problem and mostly provide interesting entertainment. I once spent half an hour sitting still and watching ants go about their business under Utah sagebrush. All ants live in colonies led by a queen, so if you absolutely have to destroy a large anthill because of a serious threat to humans or animals, wait until evening when most ants have returned from foraging, use lots of boiling water, flooding the hill to penetrate to the deepest part where the queen lives. But the best treatment of ants is letting them be and observing these fascinating workers. I have a large hill in the yard with a low fence around it; the ants and people are undisturbed and little children can happily enjoy their tiny friends.



The Standards Organic and Fair Trade:

How Did They Develop and How Have They Changed?

By Marilyn Andrews

Don Persons, a former organic farmer now working for Baystate Organic Certifiers, and Dean Cycon, development activist and founder of Dean's Beans, spoke to Co-op members about Organic and Fair Trade standards in May at an event organized by The Membership Participation Circle.

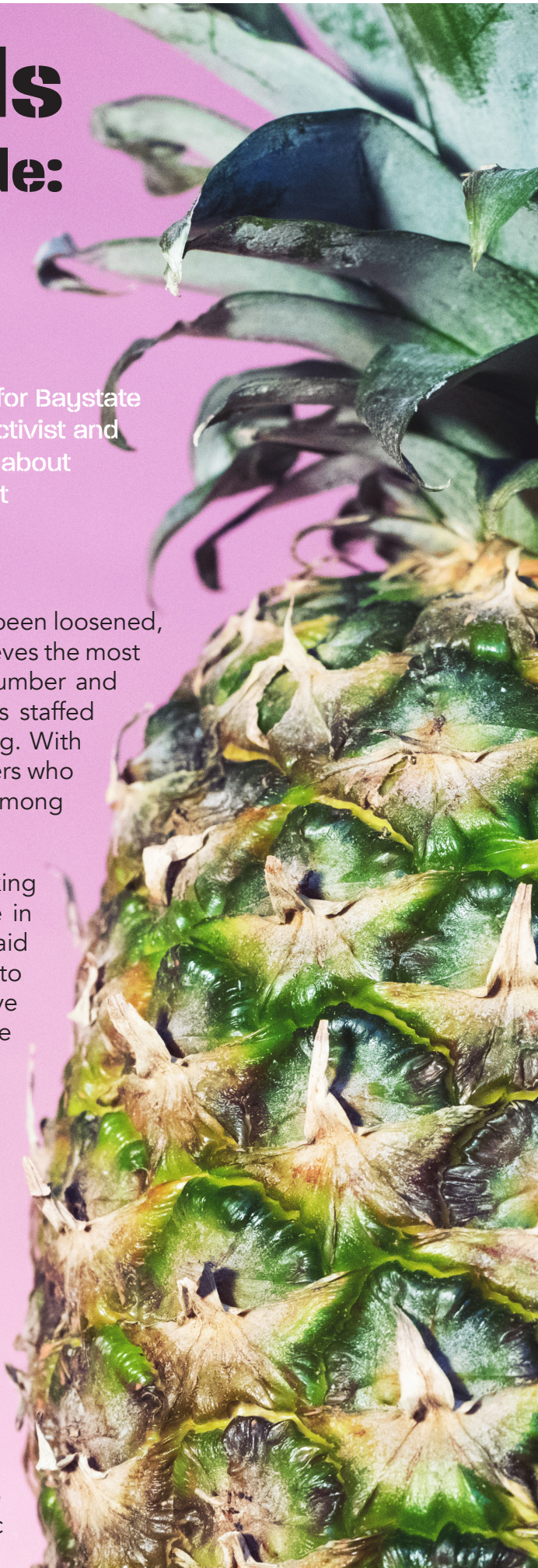
Organic:

Don said that although the U.S. organic standards have been loosened, the real issue of concern has been enforcement. He believes the most important development has been the growth in the number and kind of certifying agents. Baystate Organic Certifiers is staffed with people who are committed to organic farming. With the growth of organic production, there are more certifiers who have no commitment to organic, which is only one among many standards they certify.

When commitment to organic principles is low or lacking altogether, other structural factors play a stronger role in diluting the effect of the standards. The certifiers are paid every year by the organizations they certify; needless to say, large organizations pay more. The certifiers thus have incentives to keep certifying their customers and to value large customers.

A recent Washington Post investigation of Aurora Organic Dairy (a Colorado producer of "organic" milk for Walmart, Costco and others) showed they were certified as giving cows daily access to adequate pasture despite the fact that they weren't inspected during the grazing season—a violation of USDA inspection policy. Ten years ago the USDA found Aurora in "willful violation" of organic standards, but a settlement allowed Aurora to continue operating, and there have been no charges since.

Inspectors often work on contract for the certifiers. Because complaints from farmers make it less likely the inspectors will be re-hired, they have an incentive to evaluate leniently. And evaluation is more problematic



with livestock, where standards are more subjective (e.g. “adequate” pasture).

Another issue Don identified is the sourcing of organic ingredients for processed goods from overseas. There’s no information on labels about where ingredients are grown; products from different countries vary widely in quality. Processers have an incentive to buy the cheapest organic ingredients; these come from poorer countries, as well as China, where organic standards are not as well enforced.

Organic products from outside the U.S. are certified to U.S. standards. But the certifying agents the USDA accredits in other countries are fully inspected only every five years, with a partial inspection every two and a half years. Thus the integrity of products depends on local customs and practice. Don said that “organic” from China, India, South Africa and eastern Europe are not really organic and that Mexican “organic” is a mixed bag.

Fair Trade:

As with organics, fair trade products—especially coffee—have become popular; such growth has brought changes in what the term actually means.

Dean Cycon has long been involved with the fairtrade movement. He describes himself as coming from the perspectives of advocating for farmers and indigenous rights. He thinks of fair trading as a long-term relationship with farmers, working to strengthen farmer co-ops and communities, and dealing honestly with consumers. As the popularity of fair-trade labelled products has grown, the labels have proliferated and the standards they represent are not standardized.

Fair trade started with social movements. Among these were priests helping small farmers in the global south to organize in order to get a fair price for their coffee beans. The first fair trade label was created in 1988 by a Dutch church-based NGO working with priests in Mexico who’d been helping small farmers organize co-ops. The Max Havelaar label they used was so successful in the Dutch marketplace that similar initiatives began in other countries who used the Max Havelaar label (as in Belgium, France, Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland) or Transfair (as in Germany, Italy, the U.S., Canada, and Japan).

In 1997 these organizations formed the Fairtrade Labelling International to set fair trade standards. By

2002, the FLO had launched its Fairtrade Certification Mark. The organization now is called Fairtrade International. Fairtrade USA (formerly Transfair USA) was originally part of the international organization. It withdrew in 2012 when it wanted to certify plantations, and now operates its own certification program with the label FTC (Fair Trade Certified).

Dean said that FLO focuses on supporting small producers and their producer co-operatives. A minimum price is set, which is paid by certified buyers when the market price falls below it. Prices are negotiated in good faith between farmers and buyers. The farmers have power in the FLO organization.

Fairtrade USA chose to prioritize support for growth in the number and size of businesses selling fair trade products. In Dean’s view the result has been dilution of the standards and lack of support for farmers and their co-ops.

Dean’s Beans, Equal Exchange and others have left Fairtrade USA. They objected to a lack of transparency in governance and to changes in the licensing agreements which they thought favored big organizations like Starbucks, who carried 3-4% fairly traded coffee so that it could use the label to promote its business. They formed a new member of the Fairtrade International called Fairtrade America.

The labeling morass has become so thick that Dean’s Beans publishes a leaflet identifying the different certification labels and other seals you can find on coffee. Not only is there a profusion of labels to sort through, but reading about fair trade online showed me how hard it is to find information about who’s doing what in the politicized debate over the meaning of fair trade.

The value of real fair trade in coffee, Dean believes, is in supporting cooperatives formed by small farmers. These co-ops are not only a means for farmers to get a higher price for their coffee, they’re also a source of loans, health care, education and job training. He calls them “magnets for development” in their communities.

Dean said that if you want to buy from coffee companies who are committed to supporting small producer co-ops and the development they bring, look to Equal Exchange, the members of the Fair Trade Federation (who are peer reviewed), the members of Cooperative Coffees (which Dean helped found) and, of course, Dean’s Beans.

EASY GARDENING:

WELCOME WEEDS!

BY *KATHLEEN O'ROURKE*
FCC MEMBER

Growing vegetables in raised beds and adding compost to only the areas you'll plant makes for easy and efficient organic gardening. Make the beds as high or low as you like and wide enough so you can easily reach the middle from each side. I created mine by simply digging topsoil from the paths between beds and mixing in whatever good stuff I had in the way of compost and mulch over the years. It's a simple method; my beds are only about a foot high, and paths are layered with hay or wood chips over layers of cardboard and newspaper, which may need to be replenished yearly. These paths are wide enough for me and little grandchildren to walk, kneel, and harvest comfortably.

Once established, the soil will be light enough to work with a hand rake and shovel; no tilling is needed. It's possible to plant densely in this very fertile soil, and if mulching is needed, dry grass clippings, hay or more compost will help retain moisture and aid in soil building. As each crop is finished producing and pulled up, I thickly sow buckwheat seeds to enrich the soil and prevent unwanted weeds from coming in. It's a fast-growing, delicate airy plant with small white flowers that will often reseed, and dies back with first frost.

If you don't have a fence for peas and cucumbers to climb, you can use tall tomato cages and plant seeds in a circle around the base. Two wire cages will give a bit more support and room for the plants to travel along the tops.

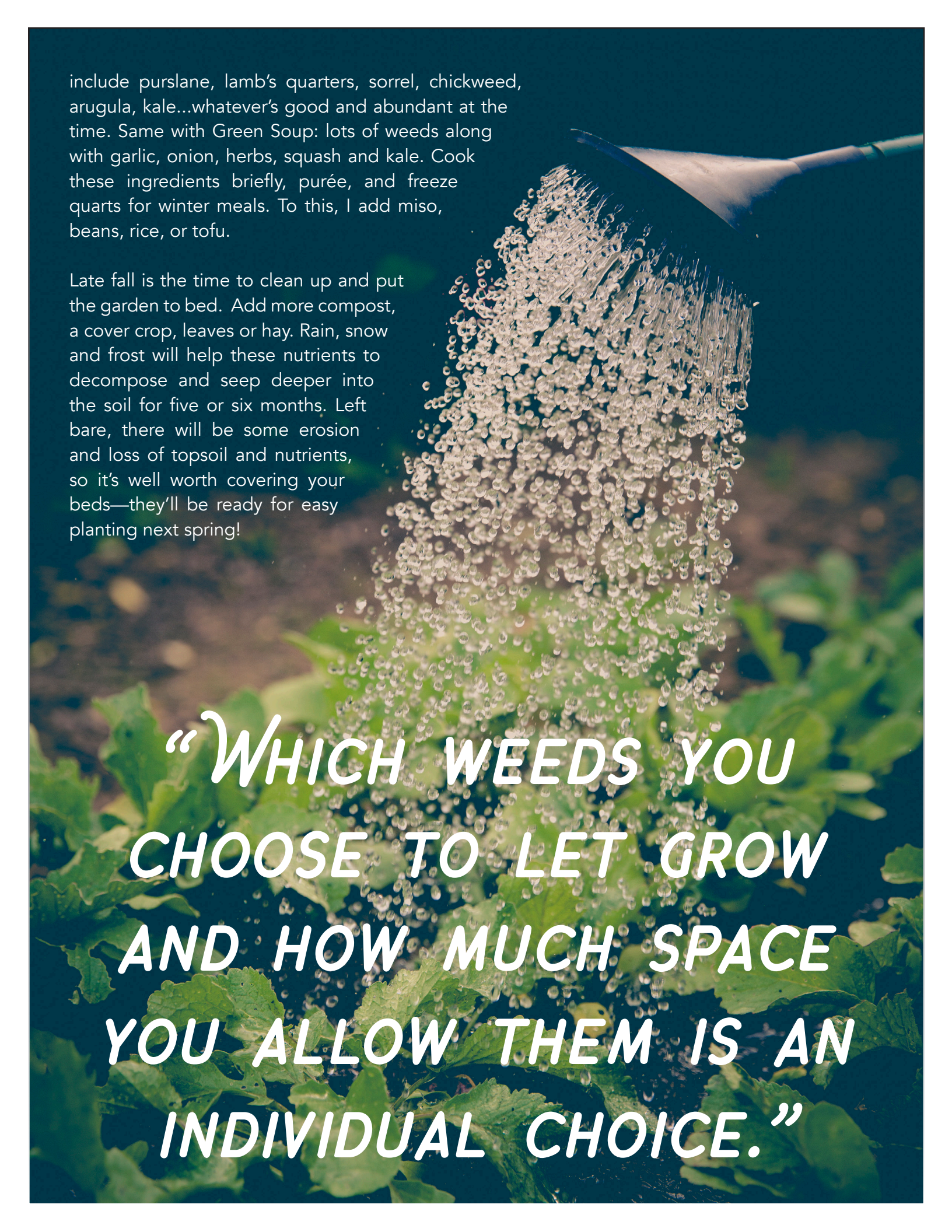
Once your plant seedlings come up a bit, start watching for the weeds that will also make a home in this rich, watered soil. I love seeing what will show up every year—sometimes a nice surprise I didn't expect, perhaps from seeds carried by the wind, birds, compost or hay. I'm always glad to see the return of my favorites: chickweed, and (a little later) purslane. Both are great raw in salads, added to soups or pesto, and also serve as low ground cover and mulch. I always encourage the growth and spread of these two "weeds" which, in other countries, are considered valuable vegetables due to high nutritional and herbal qualities.

Also look for lamb's quarters, sheep and wood sorrels, Asiatic day lilies, and purple or white flowered violets, which I usually transplant to the sides of the beds, for food, beauty, and to hold the soil. First-year growth of yellow dock and burdock are also welcomed, but only a few plants, as well as amaranth (pigweed) and dandelion, which in early growth can resemble shepherd's purse and wild lettuce; luckily these are edible, too.

Which weeds you choose to let grow and how much space you allow them is an individual choice. You may find yourself giving over more space each year for these nutritious and free foods as you grow more comfortable with the idea of gardening with volunteers mixed in, and enjoy eating, making herbal infusions and preparing food that contains lots of weeds. My pesto features basil and parsley, but I may also

include purslane, lamb's quarters, sorrel, chickweed, arugula, kale...whatever's good and abundant at the time. Same with Green Soup: lots of weeds along with garlic, onion, herbs, squash and kale. Cook these ingredients briefly, purée, and freeze quarts for winter meals. To this, I add miso, beans, rice, or tofu.

Late fall is the time to clean up and put the garden to bed. Add more compost, a cover crop, leaves or hay. Rain, snow and frost will help these nutrients to decompose and seep deeper into the soil for five or six months. Left bare, there will be some erosion and loss of topsoil and nutrients, so it's well worth covering your beds—they'll be ready for easy planting next spring!

A wooden funnel is shown pouring water into a garden bed. The water is captured in mid-air, creating a spray of droplets. The background is a lush green garden with various leafy plants. The overall lighting is soft and natural, suggesting an outdoor setting.

*“WHICH WEEDS YOU
CHOOSE TO LET GROW
AND HOW MUCH SPACE
YOU ALLOW THEM IS AN
INDIVIDUAL CHOICE.”*

Bourbon Maple Syrup

Better from the Bottom of a Barrel

If you're a craft beer fanatic, you've probably noticed the growing trend for aging everything in bourbon barrels over the past six years. The desire to add a certain smoky something to beverages, as it turns out, isn't limited to alcoholic liquids alone--it also makes maple syrup into something extra special!

Four years ago, local syrup-maker Joseph Berard started his sugarhouse in a small playhouse his father built for him when he was little—and has since grown it into a full-sized operation. Starting this year and available exclusively at our co-op (for now!) Berard offers two specialty varieties, in addition to the classic Grades A and B: Bourbon Barrel Aged Syrup, and Blueberry Syrup!

Berard says, "With a used 15 gallon whiskey barrel, Vermont's finest dark and medium grade syrups are mixed together and aged for eight to ten months for the ideal bourbon flavor. This small batch of aged syrup ensures a rich, smoky bourbon flavor," and recommends serving it warm, to capture all of the nuances of the unique flavors. We're pretty sure it would also make a stellar addition to a cocktail, spooned over Bart's Malted Vanilla ice cream, or drizzled over those outstanding Clarkdale peaches when they come into season!

For a savory spin on this new Co-op favorite, try this recipe for Bourbon Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Bacon! (This would also be delicious without the bacon, or made with squash or your favorite sweet potatoes and onions!)

BOURBON SYRUP ROASTED BRUSSELS SROUTS WITH BACON

1 lb. Brussels sprouts, trimmed
¼ c. extra virgin olive oil
3 T bourbon maple syrup
4 slices bacon cut into ½" pieces
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. fresh ground black pepper

1. Preheat oven to 400°F
2. Place Brussels sprouts in a baking

dish, single layer. Drizzle with syrup and olive oil; toss to coat. Sprinkle with bacon; season with salt and pepper.

3. Roast in the preheated oven about 45 minutes until bacon is crispy and brussels sprouts are caramelized, stirring halfway through.