VISIT TO BLUE HERON FARM

By Robin Ostfeld and Lou Johns, interviewed by Debbie Leung

[Blue Heron Farm, located in the Chehalis River valley south of Olympia, is operated by Robin, Lou and their two children, Lisa and Sharon. The farm has supplied the Co-op with fresh organically grown produce for the past five years. Robin is a former Co-op staff member. They have made numerous contributions to local agriculture.

They will be leaving the area a year from now to start farming in the Northeast, somewhere between Maine and Virginia, where Robin's family has offered to invest in a farm that moves them close enough to visit more often! Many of us will miss them.

The following are their ideas and feelings about farming and organic agriculture.]

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DEBBIE: How did you get into farming?

ROBIN: By working at the Co-op and meeting farmers, we found out about Blue Heron Farm. When the people who were farming there before left, I called up Lyn, who owns the land. I had a personal interest in farming. There was farming on my mother's side of the family. When I was at Evergreen, I started developing more of an interest in small-scale farming. Meeting Robin and other people set up the circumstances for us to be here.

LOU: Working at the Co-op and living in the city, I realized, wasn't what I wanted to do. I came here and started farming in '81.

D: How is farming full-time different?

R: The outside jobs demanded more than what we could give to make the farm viable.

R: We found that if we were going to do the amount of acreage we wanted and do a good job, we had to stop working elsewhere and hire help. It was kind of a breakthrough to realize that we couldn't do it all ourselves. Last year we had at times five people working harvesting, and we really needed all of them.

D: Has farming been profitable?

R: We're comfortable, but we don't pay a lot for rent or for food. Our living expenses aren't very high. Each year is getting to be more profitable. Our sales have increased a lot from year to year.

D: To what do you attribute your sales increases?

R: A big part of it was expertise. We found out what we could sell,
Editorial Changes

By R.J. Healy

An editorial board was recently formed to clarify the scope and direction of the Co-op "News". The board consists of Grace Cox, staff member, Steve McLellan, board member, Robin Downey, representative of the general membership, and Cher Stuewe-Portnoff, editor. Two of the four members will change in the near future. Stuewe-Portnoff has resigned as editor, and will be replaced on the board by her successor. Downey, who is also editor of "Family Times", was appointed because of her experience and interest; she will serve an interim term until a process for selecting a general member rep is in place.

According to Stuewe-Portnoff, the board is needed to clarify issues and formulate policy on specific aspects of the "News" function and style. The board is formulating policy on what does (and what does not) belong in the newsletter. One of its purposes is to alleviate friction among those interested in the "News", and to maintain the newsletter as an effective voice of our cooperative food store.

Co-op Distributor decisions upcoming

By Tim O'connor

With the bankruptcy of Pacific Rim Natural Foods in September, 1984, the Co-op has shifted its purchasing of basic natural foods to a number of long-standing and newly-created distributorships.

Starflower Natural Foods from Eugene and Applegate Natural Foods from Portland continue to serve the Co-op, as they have for a number of years. Never on the scene are two Seattle-based distributors, West Coast Natural Foods opened for business in November as an offspring of Lifestream Foods from Vancouver, B.C. NutraSource opened in early February as a partnership of Puget Consumers Co-op (PCC in Seattle), Associated Co-ops (Richmond, California) and two private investors from Alaska.

Co-op staff and board have been discussing the longterm need to consolidate our purchasing from one or two main suppliers. To date, no strong preference has surfaced.

Mailing Policy: The "News" is mailed to members quarterly. We mail one copy to each address on file, unless additional copies are requested. To receive your personal copy in the mail, leave your name and address (including correct zip code) at the Address Change desk. If this is in addition to another copy for your household, state the name of the person whose name is on the current mailing label. Otherwise, that label will be canceled automatically during a computerized mailing address check.
Blue Heron Farm

how we could sell it, how to produce it efficiently, and what equipment we needed. The other part of it was the Farmer's Wholesale Co-op (FWC) marketing our produce so we didn't have to run around making phone calls and deliveries during our busiest time of year. Increasing our acreage was secondary. Learning how to get the most out of the same acreage we'd increased our production.

D: Who do you grow for?

R: We sell a little at Pike Place [in Seattle]. We'll probably sell more flowers there this year. We sell a lot at the Farmer's Market and the Farmer's Wholesale Co-op. We also sell herbs to a company in New York. We inherited the business from a friend last year. He had the plants started, then decided he didn't want to do it. He came by and said, "Do you want to buy my herbs? I'll give you my contact in New York." We took him up on it, and it has worked out great for us. We're growing thyme, oregano, chives and a kind of sage called clary sage that's used for garnishes. We just cut and bag them, pack them in ice and ship them Federal Express.

L: I've been considering marketing the herbs locally for retail stores like the Co-op by packaging them in mixes for different recipes like a pizza mix, spaghetti mix, soup and stew mixes, salad dressing mix...

D: There's a recipe book at the Co-op you might get some ideas from. What is happening at the Farmer's Market?

L: Both of us have been members and I've been semi-active in policy-making for several years. Last year, I was elected to the Board of Directors and given the position of Vice-President. That Board made some fairly strong decisions around one of the directions of the Market. We decided to restrict Eastern Washington produce.

R: The Farmer's Market is trying to organize itself to really support local farmers and be more of a direct grower market rather than a buying-reselling market.

L: It's a real touchy situation. Do we want the Market to be a viable business for local private food haulers and peddlers? Or do we want it to be a viable business for local farmers? That's why I'm on this Board — to represent the farmer's side. We effectively, through the bylaws, restricted our membership to farmers and crafters and kept out people who haul and sell Eastern Washington fruits and vegetables. As you let peddlers in, these people are going to want more say in how the market is run. Too often, in Farmer's Markets, farmers aren't able to spend the time keeping themselves organized. They start losing a say in how the market is run, and then find themselves with less space and less advertising.

D: Do you think the Market's move toward being a direct grower market will be longterm?

L: I hope so.

D: Do you like to sell for the Market or for wholesale?

R: It's really fun to sell direct at the Market. It's a lot more rewarding to make a really pretty display and personally show off our produce. People tell us how much they enjoy their carrot juice or spinach salad or say, "Your finger potatoes are out of this world!" The disadvantage is that it's time-consuming. We're harvesting smaller amounts and spending a lot of time driving and selling; whereas in wholesaling, we harvest a whole bunch at once, put it in boxes, drop it off and we're done. Wholesaling is a more efficient use of time. You get a lower price, but you sell more and make it up that way. That's why we do both. We like both ways.

L: We're looking at U-pick when we go back east. If you can locate in a good area, that's probably most viable. It's questionable whether it would work for us here because of our distance from town.

D: How do you grow for a wholesaler like the FWC?

R: We pick some main crops for wholesaling, mainly green leaf lettuce, spinach, zucchini, slicing cucumbers, carrots, jerusalem artichokes, beets. It's more complex than growing for Farmer's Market. We figure out how much we want to produce each week and how many row feet we need to plant to get that much. We have to be consistent with our successions because we have to have a steady supply for as long as we said we'd have it. It's not a contract, but we make a commitment.

The quality has to be much more consistent. We have to keep the varieties uniform with other growers. The lettuce has to be cut at a certain stage of maturity; the cucumbers have to be a certain length and width. There's a lot more waste. We are concerned about the keeping quality more. We have to harvest at the proper time of day and get to refrigeration quickly. We have to use new boxes this year because the FWC will be selling to regular commercial accounts, not just food co-ops. The boxes are expensive.

D: What's your favorite thing to grow?

L: Slicing cucumbers.

R: Potatoes.

turn to page 4
L & R: For wholesale, cucumbers are great. They're a great money maker. They're easy to grow and pick, dependable, and produce like crazy.

R: I like potatoes because it's fun to dig them up. I think potatoes are the vegetable I eat most. At the Market, that's what we sell most. We sell a lot of finger potatoes. They're small and narrow, yellow, and real popular, unique. Everyone raves about them.

D: What's your least favorite?

R: Probably something we stopped growing a long time ago. Patty pan squash. Nobody wants to buy it and it produces a lot.

L: Peas come second or third. They're terrible to pick. I like selling them, I like eating them, passing them out to people, watching them react. "Wow! These are real good. My grandmother used to grow these. I haven't had them since I had them from her garden!" But they're pretty difficult to pick.

D: How is farming important to you, farming organically?

R: I like working for myself. I like the freedom that gives me. I think it's a basic, important issue to produce food in a way that doesn't ruin the soil and poison the water. We're part of the generation that is showing it can be done, that we can feed ourselves that way. It's catching on, and it could really change this country's agriculture. Even starting small, at least we know we're trying.

L: We grow food organically so that when you consume those products, you're not ingesting chemicals of questionable toxicity. I want to give people the choice to buy food chemical-free. When you go to the Farmer's Market, you get produce that's fresh, organic and often cheaper than the store.

That's the real issue to me, from the consumer point of view. For society, it's far-reaching. There's no downstream pollution from what we're doing. There's no workers in our fields being exposed to toxic chemicals. I'm not exposed, my children aren't exposed. When they're out playing in our fields, I don't have to worry.

D: Do you get a sense that more people are willing to pay for organic produce?

L: Not really. We get low prices for almost everything. It's questionable if the return is there for doing it organically. More is involved. Labor cost is higher because we pay people to weed since we don't spray.

D: But you don't pay for spray.

R: It doesn't balance out. I waver back and forth, whether organic agriculture is getting more organized and there's a demand, or whether it's kind of stagnated.

A fear I have is that it's becoming a thing only rich people can afford. Average-income people aren't impacted by organic produce. We're forced to sell at prices competitive with standard commercial produce. People say that's how to impact the market. That's kind of a tough one.

D: I think education is the key.

L: Yes, but farmers don't have time for that kind of educating. We're so wrapped up in the business of farming, we don't have time.

D: Last words?

L: I encourage people to support the Farmer's Market and U-pick operations as ways of supporting local agriculture. Also support the Co-op. The support it has given the Farmer's Wholesale Co-op has been great. By purchasing produce from FWCC, the Co-op has been a total support of the operation. It has really been a benefit.

"Lou, Lisa, Sharon and Robin at Blue Heron" 
Photo by Leung
CHOICE OF FOOD IMPACTS HEALTH

By Cyrus Appell, M.D.

Is the choice of either organic or non-organic food going to have a significant impact on your health?

There isn't a scientific answer, but there is a definite possibility that eating food contaminated by chemicals endangers your health and increases your chances of developing cancer. This sounds like heresy coming from a physician, but the medical school professor who taught me about cancer would agree with this statement.

Dr. Arthur Upton's credentials are unassailable. Not only has he written one of the most authoritative texts on cancer, but he later went on to head the National Cancer Institute. He considered about 15% of the cancers to be known, and felt that for the rest, environmental pollution, especially the chemicals involved in food production and processing, could be responsible for the transformation of human cells called carcinogenesis.

Attempts to prove that chemicals can induce cancer have been inconclusive. Whether the experimental design consisting of giving animals megadoses of suspected carcinogens applies to human cancer risks is debatable. Even when the results are incriminating, they seem to be leniently interpreted by the FDA whose upper echelon executives often have backgrounds in the food chemical industrial complex.

One disturbing example of a likely carcinogen that has not yet been banned is nitrates. Nitrites in water form nitrous acid. For decades, nitrous acid has been one of science's most potent mutagens. It is used extensively to induce experimental mutations in bacteria. Mutations are the means by which species evolve in order to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Mutations are also the necessary step in the creation of cancer cell lines.

With oceans, air and soil so polluted, is it possible to grow truly organic food? Probably not — but minimizing the chemical content in our food seems like a common sense decision.

There are many other issues involved when you make the choice between organic or non-organic foods:

Chemical fertilizers and pesticides tend to destroy living organisms in soil. Is food grown on living organic soil more nutritious and healthful than food grown on land devoid of microbiologic life? Probably so, but it's hard to prove.

Should we continue to contaminate our water sheds with nitrate fertilizers (e.g., the San Joaquin Valley) while some of our water supplies verge on becoming undrinkable?

Should we continue to lose vast amounts of topsoil to the elements as soil structure breaks down with chemical farming methods?

Organic farmers have taken significant risks in bringing us their produce -- should we give them our support?

Cyrus Appell is a Co-op member and physician concerned with the environment as it relates to health. If you would like to address specific questions to him, send your request to Dr. Appell, c/o "News", at the Co-op. Include your name and phone number.

Bulk Order System Improved

By Debbie Leung

Co-op shoppers have long enjoyed the advantages of discount prices for quantity purchases. In March, the Bulk Order System was changed, improving efficiency at the cash register and creating consistency in discounting.

Buying through the Bulk Order System results in savings of at least 5-10% (figured on the shelf price). Some items are discounted more, but the following minimum discounts are applied to bulk purchases: less than $25.00 - 5%; $25-50.00 - 8%; more than $50.00 - 10%. Working member and senior discounts, and non-member surcharges, apply after the bulk discounts are computed.

Bulk order discounts apply to purchases ordered in advance in "lot sizes" -- the quantity in which the product is received by the Co-op from the wholesaler (for example, a case of juice or produce, or a 50-pound bag of grain). Anything sold at the Co-op can be bulk ordered. Most items can be picked up in less than a week. Some products are more difficult to obtain, or come from wholesalers who deliver infrequently; bulk orders for these products may be delayed a month or more.

The order is placed with a staffperson in the store. Only a few items can be ordered by phone. A deposit is paid, usually about $5.00, when the order is made. The deposit is forfeited if the order isn't picked up within about 10 days.

Many people feeding large families, living a long way from grocery stores, on special diets, or who cook for events and organizations find bulk ordering convenient and economical.
Goodies and sweets! Why do most of us, especially kids, crave them? Sweets appeal because they are immediately pleasing to the taste and offer a quick energy boost. However, a drastic drop in blood sugar often follows this boost, leaving one feeling 'blah' and unenergetic, setting up a cycle of craving more sweets.

Excessive sugar consumption is not advisable. Sugar is a major contributor to dental caries (cavities), and refined sugar offers only nutrient-empty calories. Sweets made with healthful ingredients offer an opportunity to satisfy your sweet tooth while building in good nutrition. Save even these for special occasions, however; eat in moderation, and always brush your teeth well afterward!

The Co-op carries several ready-made goodies for those too busy to cook. Blue Heron's baked goods, Panda brand licorice (made with molasses), fruit leather and various dried fruits offer energy and a significant amount of iron. (Iron is especially important to women, athletes and growing children.)

The Co-op also carries several cookbooks with recipes for wholesome desserts and snacks. Two favorites are "Laurel's Kitchen" and "Uprisings"; for decadent desserts, try "Moosewood". A baking tip — for any recipe using flour, add the following into the measuring cup before adding the rest of your flour, to increase vitamins, minerals and protein: 1 Tbsp. each of soy flour, non-instant dry milk and wheat germ.

Children will want the same snack foods as the adults around them are eating. Use this to their advantage. Let them see that you enjoy raw fruits and vegetables, cheese cubes and other wholesome treats. But when only sweets will do, try these simple, quick recipes. Involving children in food preparation helps develop personal confidence and encourages good eating habits. You won't have to encourage them to join in with the eating, but afterward, remember to round out the project with a toothbrushing session!

HEALTHY SWEETS

"Who is that kid with her hand in the cookie jar?? (Writer Jean Westerlund, that's who!)"

CAROB MILK PUDDING

2 C. milk
3 Tbsp. roasted carob powder
2 Tbsp. arrowroot powder, dissolved in 2 Tbsp. milk

Heat milk nearly to boiling. Stir in carob and arrowroot paste. Continue heating, stirring, for 5 minutes until thickened. Serve warm or chill. Serves four.

FRUIT AND JUICE GELATIN

1 Tbsp. agar-agar or unflavored gelatin
2 C. unsweetened fruit juice
(cherry cider is good!)
1 C. sliced fruit (optional)

Mix 1/4 C. juice with agar-agar. Heat remaining juice to boiling. Add to agar-juice mix. Stir thoroughly and refrigerate. After it begins to set, stir in fruit. Refrigerate until firm. Yields 4 servings (3/4 cup each); 95 calories per serving.

FANCY FROZEN BANANAS

1/4 C. liquid barley malt
1/2 C. carob powder
4 ripe bananas
1/2 C. finely chopped nuts or unweetened shredded coconut

Mix malt and carob. Place sticks in bananas, and roll bananas in carob mixture. Then roll bananas in nuts or coconut. Freeze on waxed paper.
Membership Records Get Attention

By Bonnie Jones & Cher Stuewe-Portnoff

With over 2,000 members, about 75% of them active, maintaining even the simple records necessary to keep membership affairs running smoothly is a two-person job.

Bonnie Jones has been the membership 'clerk' for over three years. She spends six or seven hours a week, maintaining current card files, and making new cards for members who are joining or reactivating memberships, or who have lost their cards or graduated to 'Paid-Up' status. She trouble-shoots for members whose sign-up errors suggest misunderstanding of member terms or whose membership records have gone astray. She also maintains records for inactive members.

Bonnie funnels all changes in member information to Cher, who then updates the computer membership records. The computer is used primarily for generating mailing labels for the Co-op "News". But it also produces a quarterly updated listing of all members—including those who are not on the "News" mailing list—to comply with the state law that requires our Co-op to maintain current addresses for all voting members.

On the computer, members are coded as voting members according to the new bylaw: "a voting member is an active member who has a current address on file at the cooperative." An active member is defined as one who has paid dues within the past year or is paid-up. Members can also be selectively listed if they chose to have their names included on other mailing lists (although we haven't yet used it in that way).

Since the Co-op hasn't always kept track of members' addresses, older members may not be on the list. If we don't have your address, register it next time you come in, in order to preserve your voting member status. You can choose not to receive the newsletter, if you prefer, by adding a note to the address form.

Now that we are being so conscientious about maintaining our membership roles and abiding by our new bylaws, some interesting dilemmas have come up. For example, members who haven't used the Co-op in the past year are considered inactive, for voting and mailing purposes. But the only members for whom this can be monitored are non-paid-up members, whose cards are stamped each time dues are paid. "Pink cards" and "Senior cards" offer no clues about the owner's activity.

Another bylaw allows the co-op to absorb dues which are not refunded after a member has been inactive for two or more years. But with the present card system, all members who aren't in the process of paying dues appear to be permanently active, unless we know for some reason that they have gone.

For the sake of consistency and fairness to all members, some solution is needed before these issues become relevant. Bonnie has some ideas of possible solutions. She would like to know what other members and staff feel can be done. Responses can be left in the front office in Bonnie's box.

WHAT IS IT?

Under age 10? Leave your guess along with name and phone number in newsletter box at the Co-op.

MILY DONAHE AND MATT POWERS correctly guessed last quarter's "What is it?" photo as...PINEAPPLE! If Mily and Matt check the newsletter box in the Co-op next time they're there, they'll find a little something with their names on it.
SOIL FERTILITY:

By Gary Kline

When you look out onto the hills at stands of Douglas fir and other trees, you see an example of a perfected and highly efficient recycling system involving plant species adapted to the climate, soils and native fertility. These have existed since the last glacier and have evolved together over the eons. No one is out there spreading fertilizers on the forest to make the trees grow properly. Then why should the plants in your vegetable garden or landscaped yard need fertilizing?

Well, for starters, nearly all our vegetables originated on other continents in different climates and growing conditions. What you don’t see in the forest are the species and individual plants that didn’t make it. Vegetables and many ornamentals have been selectively bred for certain traits and carefully protected for decades and even centuries from what is now a hostile, "natural" environment. Part of the pampering they received involved increasing nutrients to sustain showy flowers, or extra fleshy and tasty fruits, roots, stems and other parts of culinary interest. Harvesting removes nutrients from natural cycling at the site, another reason vegetables require recurrent fertilizing.

Heavy rainfall affects soil balance, leaching certain elements from the topsoil, leaving others which promote acidity. In our humid climate, one of the best things you can do for your vegetables is to adjust our typically acid soils (pH 5.5-6.0) by adding limestone (calcium carbonate). About a fourth of your limestone should be dolomite, which contains magnesium. A soil test is needed for specific application rates, but generally a 40-50 lb. bag every fourth year is in the ball park. This covers an area equivalent to 25’ x 40’ (32’ square) which serves as a standard unit for fertilizer application rates.

Vegetables are about the most nutrient demanding plants. Synthetic or ‘chemical’ fertilizers generally contain concentrated, highly soluble nutrients plus alien salts that are detrimental to your soil and, in turn, to your vegetables. They tend to destroy organic matter, earthworms and microorganisms, all of which are essential to creating soils that favor plant growth. These living soil components make both added and latent nutrients more available in the proper form; humus retains them in the topsoil for plant roots to take up.

For those (and many other) reasons, growing by organic methods is most sound. Add lots of organic matter (unsprayed leaves, grass clippings, straw, compost, etc.) to your garden. Include composted manure, working a two-inch layer into the soil annually. Manures and other organic matter or humus condition the soil, giving it good tilth and feeding soil biota.

In themselves, manures and unfertilized compost are not at all high in nutrients. You get less mileage from manures where soils are low in native fertility, especially for the many plants (for example, pole beans, beets, broccoli, cabbage, corn, cucumbers, peas, potatoes, spinach, tomatoes and strawberries) that demand high amounts of one or more of the macronutrients nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

The bulk of a plant is water; but even when dehydrated, 94-99% of a plant consists of carbon, oxygen and hydrogen which it gets from the air and soil water. These elements are abundant and freely available in decent growing soils.

Eight of the 17 essential nutrient elements for plant growth are known as trace elements, required in small quantities and naturally present in most soils. Calcium, magnesium and sulfur, known as secondary macronutrients, play a dual role. Besides their use as nutrients within plants, they govern soil pH, affecting the availability of other nutrients and levels of free elements that could otherwise reach toxic levels. Acid Northwest soils usually contain sufficient sulfur. If you added limestone and dolomite in proper ratios, you’ve provided enough calcium and magnesium. If you don’t want to change your soil pH with limestone, gypsum and epsom salts may be prescribed for adding sulfur and magnesium.

Nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P)
and potassium (K) are the primary macronutrients, so called because they are needed in quantity and are most often deficient for growing crops. Actually, the nitrogen is used by plants in nitrate or nitrite form, phosphorus in phosphate form and potassium in potash form. Natural fertilizers seldom occur in 'balanced' NPK form, and unlike the manufactured or artificial fertilizers, vary widely in nutrient analysis.

The inserts provide more detailed information on the various nutrients for serious gardeners. But proper fertilizing really boils down to using plenty of organic matter together with proper ratios of lime, selected sources of N, P and K, and a dash of trace elements. That is the unembellished low-down on fertilizing.

Mary Kline owns Black Lake Organic Farm and Garden Store, which is open evenings and weekends, or by appointment. He welcomes your questions about organic growing. Call 357-6236.

MACRONUTRIENTS FOR HEALTHY PLANTS - THE "NPK" STORY

Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are the most familiar elements to most gardeners. They are needed in quantity and usually must be added by the grower.

Nitrogen is responsible for green growth, governing bud, shoot and leaf emergence and development. Too much, particularly in synthetic, highly soluble forms, can "burn" plants, causing soft, overly lush and disease-prone growth; it delays or suppresses flower and fruit stages. Nitrogen also doesn't stick around long. It leaches from the soil easily and needs annual replenishing. Its only natural source is formerly living matter. Less concentrated sources are plant residues, manure and "green manures". Concentrated nitrogen is available in plant and animal meals, including cottonseed, soybean, sunflower and various meat and fish meals. Cost generally corresponds with the concentration of actual nitrogen or protein. Liquid forms are more soluble and faster-acting.

Phosphorus is the "master element", essential to all phases and parts of plant growth, but particularly for healthy root and fruit development. It tends to stay in the soil, but is chemically tied up, difficult for roots to extract. Manures, earthworms and microbes help release it. Our Maritime Northwest soils are usually deficient; along with lime, it is the most important soil amendment for us. Several of the meals provide phosphorus. For a more concentrated, less costly source, you can choose between 'fast' and 'slow' (more concentrated, but slow-releasing) forms. In your first year, you may want to apply both. Expensive seabird and bat guanos reportedly are high in P. Steamed bonemeal is about 20% P, and relatively quick acting as natural sources go; apply 25 lbs. annually, unless you are growing high-demand legume crops, which could use 35 lbs. Raw bonemeal is slower acting, about 15-18% P; apply 40 or 60 lbs., respectively. The slowest, most economical forms of P are mined minerals -- rock and clay phosphates. Rock phosphate runs up to 35% P, depending on deposit sources. Clay phosphate runs 18-25%. Apply high-analysis rock phosphate at 50 lbs. per year, or (better) 150 lbs. every four years, until soil test results indicate sufficient available residual. Low-analysis soft rock and clay phosphates are applied at twice that rate, more frequently. They are faster-acting, higher priced and shorter lasting.

Potassium is necessary for sturdy stems, hardiness and disease resistance. Woodash, depending on tree species and other factors, sometimes contains as much as 6% K and can be used in place of lime; apply 25 lbs., but don't overdo! Kelp meal (5% K) is another source. Greensand, from sea deposits on the East coast, contains 7% K and 12 trace minerals, is high in iron and helps retain moisture; apply at 50 lbs. every four years in typical MNN soils. A newly available fast-acting source of soluble K is Sul-Po-Mag, containing 22% K, 18% magnesium and 27% sulfur. It is mined in the Southwest; apply at 30 lbs. every other year. As a new product, this one needs soil testing to monitor the effects of the relatively high amounts of soluble nutrients.

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IRRADIATION: answer to world hunger or nuclear boondoggle?

By Cher Stuewe-Portnoff

According to a county extension agent in her regular column for the Wednesday "Food" section of the "Olympian", people's fears about irradiated foods are groundless; the process has been proved "absolutely safe".

Not so, says the Public Citizen Health Research Group. According to the Washington D.C. based group, government-funded test results were questionable, at the least; some presented significant negative results.

Irradiation is a sterilization process, in current use on medical instruments, which uses by-products of the nuclear energy industry. According to proponents, the process is the answer to a number of food preservation and processing problems: it kills insects and eggs in grains and fruits, lengthens shelf life (and therefore shipping times) without refrigeration, and preserves meat and poultry.

Originally, the FDA treated irradiation as an additive (because of the possibility of residues following treatment). More recently, however, the FDA has moved to call it a 'process'. This change in status removes the requirement for toxicity testing under the auspices of the FDA. It also opens the door for retail sale of irradiated food without labeling.

Margaret Heckler, Secretary of HHS (whose former congressional district in Massachusetts received millions of dollars for irradiation research) is a strong backer of the processing, and expressed her belief that labeling would arouse unwarranted public concern.

According to research results, consumers may indeed have reason to be concerned, in spite of Ms. Heckler's assurances. The Public Citizen reports that a review of internal FDA memos and the results of both published and unpublished research support consumer reluctance to have this multi-billion dollar industry imposed upon them. Among their findings:

---An internal FDA review in 1982 found that of 413 studies of toxicity in irradiated foods, 84% were inconclusive or inadequate; 1% appeared to support safety; others showed adverse affects. The details of that report are a mere of falsified results, inadequate testing and expenditures in the millions to known disreputable labs.

---More recent studies sponsored by the USDA found significant problems in test animals fed irradiated foods, including testicular tumors, reduced survivability, cancer and other lesions, probable chromosomal damage and immune kidney disease. These findings are consistent with results of testing in other countries.

---Although irradiation is promoted as the alternative to EDB and other dangerous pesticides, in fact, other non-toxic methods are already working well: heat and cold treatment for fruit and grains, and fly-free zones and detection techniques.

---Irradiation has had an adverse affect on some fruits, and does not appear to be practical for extending shelf life.

---Irradiated vegetables and grains produced more aflatoxins than non-irradiated samples, when exposed to the offending fungi.

---Finally, the group questions the motives for and the legality of changing the status of irradiation to circumvent testing and labeling.

In Washington State, Group Health Cooperative will be considering two resolutions at its annual membership meeting on April 27 at the Tacoma Dome Convention Hall.

Resolution #5 declares that GHC should oppose legislation that promotes the irradiation of food until unbiased research establishes the safety or danger of such treatment. According to Goldie Coughlan, Consumers United for Food Safety, irradiation does produce radiolytic products that were not in the foods before processing.

Resolution #6 requests that GHC go on record as demanding labeling of irradiated foods at wholesale and retail levels. According to Coughlan, both Senators Evans and Gorton support sale of unlabeled foods to prevent consumer resistance. The GHC Board voted to support this resolution; they took no clear position on Resolution #5.

A survey of our Co-op distributors revealed that they are extremely aware of the irradiation issue. Jeri Marie Bennett of West Coast Natural Foods says they want to know immediately if anyone is aware of unlabeled irradiated foods; "West Coast's goal," she says, "is to keep their food business at a high quality."

Applegate also intends to refuse irradiated food products, if they become available. They would use the same monitoring techniques, according to Mark Lenetsky, that are used for maintaining chemical-free foods. Applegate
IRRADIATION...

depends on longterm relationships with suppliers and the conscientiousness with which natural foods business people communicate with one another about questionable producers. Applegate is also involved in developing more regional production, to increase their ability to oversee the quality of the foods they distribute.

Ellen Knepper, Starflower, says that although no anti-irradiation policy exists, they would avoid such products. Even if irradiated foods weren't labelled, she believes the close scrutiny given new products would turn up such processing.

NutraSource has been active in watching developments. Jonathon Ryweck said NutraSource doesn't have a formal position on irradiated foods, but wouldn't want to carry them. He considered the possibility of irradiated foods not carrying labels a problem for distributors.

The Co-op actually is fortunate to have distributors who are conscious of the questions surrounding irradiation. Members might consider looking further into the issue, and letting their concerns be known, since at least two of our Congressmen are active backers of the irradiation proposals. If the processing technique is approved and labeling is not required, we consumers will have lost an important right to know and to choose what we want to put into our bodies.

Meanwhile, this writer's concerns about those non-refrigerated soy drinks were alleviated! According to NutraSource's Ryweck, they (and the boxed fruit juices, among other things) are heat-treated and vacuum packed. The containers are called "soft cans", and although the nutritional content is affected by the high heat, the products aren't being irradiated...at least, not yet.

All the representatives from the Co-op distributors were generous with their time and knowledge when contacted for this article. Thanks to each of them, and especially to Mark Lenetsky, who mailed a copy of the complete Public Citizen report to me.

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Look at us!

BY SAM AND SHER

Maybe it's spring fever. We really "saw" the co-op recently, and realized how much it has changed. If you were around a few years back, you remember...mercantile piled onto spare, dusty shelves; the old-fashioned dairy cooler with the wood-slat shelves, (wasn't it fun skinning your knuckles reaching for flavored yogurt?); the freezer which self-defrosted periodically without warning (built before self-defrost was an intentional function)...but look at us now!!!

Isaac Mayes, along with parents Sandy and Ron, are new members. They've recently arrived in Olympia from Arizona. Isaac can check out the vegetable, herb and flower starts, ready for spring planting.

KEEP ON LOOKING
If you were a working member in the good old days, and you handled produce, your favorite improvement is probably the new produce coolers. Remember how in the old ones the cold water pooled in the bottom and had to be regularly sponged out by hand? Ah, nostalgia! The temperature fluctuated and they weren't very energy efficient, either. The new coolers (along with constant care from Debbie and her staff and member workers) keep the co-op produce department one of the finest in Olympia.

Coffee drinkers were pleased when the co-op began offering a selection of whole and ground beans.

If you haven't been in for awhile, you'll find all kinds of changes. The bulk dispensers and pasta bins, an expanded gardening supply section, new products on the shelves... If, on the other hand, you're an old-time regular, just remember what it was like a few years ago. We had a lot going for us; but in the past few years, haven't the staff and member workers accomplished some pretty amazing things?!
Inside Information

The first three months of 1985 have presented the board with a number of interesting and challenging problems. Some of these issues include controlling the labor budget effectively, adjusting the 1985 budget (see Finance Report), monitoring the work of the Personnel Committee and the Editorial Board, chartering a new Building Committee and responding to a legislative "organic bill". As always, copies of minutes, proposals and reports are available for reading at the Co-op.

The board reviewed applications for the Personnel Committee and appointed Sally Whiteside as working member representative and Sally Trimble and Margaret Clarke as member-at-large representatives. They join Karen Berkey Huntsberger (Personnel Manager), Gerard Sidorowicz (board member) and Harry Levine (general staff representative). The board also set the spring general membership meeting date for May 8th, at 7:00 p.m. in the Timberland Library. Come out and get involved, impassioned or intense.

Board elections will be held May 15 through June 15. Applications for interested board candidates are available at the Co-op from April 10 to May 1. Candidates can make presentations at the Spring Meeting. The election will be for three one-year positions (July 1985-June 1986).

Remember, the board of directors represents the members. Let them know how you feel about Co-op issues. All board members have mailboxes in the Co-op office.

Submitted by Harry Levine, Board Secretary

INCOME STATEMENT

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<tr>
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<th>4th QUARTER</th>
<th>1984</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(JUL.- SEPT.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>$217,839.11</td>
<td>$849,553.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gross Margin</td>
<td>48,025.10</td>
<td>182,368.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Revenue</td>
<td>(22.13%)</td>
<td>(21.58%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Revenue</td>
<td>1,560.06</td>
<td>2,022.29</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$ 49,585.16</td>
<td>$184,410.84</td>
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Expenses:

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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>$ 2,028.41</td>
<td>$ 7,443.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>659.07</td>
<td>1,275.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training/conferences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>750.00</td>
<td>11,390.00</td>
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<td>Utilities/phone</td>
<td>3,133.81</td>
<td>9,717.24</td>
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<td>Maintenance/repair</td>
<td>718.52</td>
<td>4,491.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depreciation</td>
<td>2,562.91</td>
<td>7,527.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
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<td>14,425.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff cost</td>
<td>43,797.36</td>
<td>138,367.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>1,387.82</td>
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<td>Insurance</td>
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<td>Professional services</td>
<td>321.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest expense</td>
<td>2,165.92</td>
<td>2,316.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>All other expenses</td>
<td>2,527.68</td>
<td>5,735.36</td>
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</table>

Total Expenses        | $ 53,716.69 | $183,353.70 |

Net Income/(Loss)     | ($ 4,131.53) | $ 1,057.14 |

Northwest. Some of our current financial problems could threaten that reputation unless the problems are squarely faced and dealt with. Fortunately that is happening.

The central problem is operating losses in the second half of 1984 which could persist in 1985. We finished the first half of 1984 with over $12,000.00 in net income. Second half losses brought that figure down to just over $1,000.00 by the end of the year. It's normal for the Co-op, due to seasonal variations, to earn money during the first half (Jan.-June) and to lose money during the second half (Jul.-Dec.). But the size of the loss in 1984 and some of the trends that contributed to it give cause for concern.

Labor expenses far exceeded the budget in the fourth quarter. The main reason was the cost of training three new staff members. Productivity figures (sales per hour worked) were very low during the period. In January and February, 1985, productivity figures rose to prior levels, but declining sales may leave us overstuffed by the end of first quarter.

To ensure that we won't continue going over the labor budget in the short run, the staff has changed to a salary system from an hourly wage system creating an absolute ceiling on labor costs. Meanwhile, we are taking steps to determine the cause of the growth decline and to turn it around.

Another area where the staff is doing active problem-solving is in gross margin and shrink. Gross margin (GM) is the measure of what we realize from sales (sales minus cost of goods sold). It provides all of the money we have available to cover operating expenses and is usually expressed as a percent of sales for analysis. The main things that affect margin are pricing (mark-ups) and shrink. Shrink is the cumulative loss that results from goods not being sold at their initial retail value.

For example: a certain proportion of perishable food is sold at reduced price or discarded because of spoilage. Some food is spilled or taken without being paid for. All of these contribute to shrink. Our shrink in 1984 was 5.5% of total sales. If this can be reduced by 1% in 1985, the increase in GM will be the same 1% (about $9,000.00) additional revenue without raising prices or increasing volume above projections. The merchandising staff has made shrink control a priority for problem-solving in 1985.

To summarize, the Co-op began 1985 with some financial problems in need of solutions: labor expenses, sales growth and margin/shrink. The staff and board have prioritized problem-solving in these areas. Steps are being taken and further measures are being planned to keep the Co-op a viable business, a necessity for its long-term survival.

-Submitted by Beth Hartmann, Finance Manager

If you have questions about the Co-op's budget or finances, contact Beth at the store.

PRODUCT INFO/SELECTION COMMITTEE

No report was submitted by the Committee.

turn to page 14
Interview by Debbie Leung

Marcela Abadi has been a working member of the Co-op for four years. During that time, she has worked several of the jobs available for weekly shifts.

***

Marcela: I really liked it a lot when I first started working. I thought it was great. The stocking and cheese cutting was the same shift then. I liked cutting cheese more. When stocking and cheese cutting became two shifts, I became a stocker. I didn't like that much. There were always so many things that needed stocking.

During my first summer, I got tired of stocking. I wanted a change. Produce needed people. I thought this was a great opportunity. I learned a lot while doing produce. I learned that things had to look a certain way, that the prettier they were, the more people would buy it. I had never really thought about that before. It was pretty to me and I would buy it, but I never really thought about it consciously, you know? And also the colors. Red produce would be put next to greens so that it's not all the greens together. Things that you would eat together are displayed together to give an idea of how you can eat them together. I also saw how cleanliness was really important.

Debbie: Now you make the salads that are in the produce cooler. Did you start doing this after Amiel was born to have more flexibility?

M: Yes. I had thought about it before. There was all this great produce that couldn't sell because of a few small spots that were bad. This produce is really good and fresh, but people won't want to pay the price for it with the spots. Even though it isn't thrown away (it is given to Bread and Roses House), it could still be used here. I cut out the spots and make the salads with the good part. And salads are good for you.

Now I could work in produce again. I don't need that flexibility any more, but I like what I'm doing.

D: How long will you continue to be a working member?

M: I think that this is something I must do while I'm in Olympia. I've always worked at the Co-op except when Amiel was born and he was really little.

***

Inside Information

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The board approved the formation of a Personnel Committee at the February board meeting. The purpose:

1. To research and recommend personnel policy on request of staff or board;
2. To act as an intermediate level between staff and board for hearing grievances;
3. To define hiring policy and process, subject to board approval, and to administer the hiring process;  
4. To act as intermediate level of appeal in firing;
5. To handle special personnel-related tasks as requested by board, staff or other representative contingent of membership;
6. To evaluate management and staffing systems, including working member system, but not individual employees;
7. To make recommendations with Finance Committee regarding wages and benefits;
8. To stay abreast of legal developments regarding working member systems nationally.

At the March board meeting, Sally Trimble and Margaret Clarke were selected to work with Karen Berkey Huntsberger, Sid Sidrowicz and Harry Levine (see board report).

-Submitted by Karen Berkey Huntsberger, Personnel Manager.

Co-op Scores High
With Health Department

Co-op working members, staff and shoppers have met the ultimate co-op challenge, earning a perfect 'O' on a recent Health Department inspection!

Co-ops are naturally harder to keep clean. Much of our food is in bulk, instead of packaged. Responsibility for cleanliness is shared by dozens of people. Workers are especially conscientious about sanitation; staff train and oversee member workers, and fill in as needed. Shoppers contribute by cleaning up spills, using utensils for removing bulk foods from containers and teaching children not to put hands into bins.

It has often been an uphill struggle to coordinate all these factors successfully. But the recent inspection means our mutual efforts are working. In particular, the inspector noted the new dispensers as a major improvement.

In a recent "Olympian" article, the Olympia Food Co-op was noted along with other local businesses who had achieved perfect scores.

##
Member Forum

YOUR FOOD DOLLARS SUPPORT CO-OP

I am writing in response to a letter printed in the last issue of the "News" which expressed concern about how to support the Co-op. As one of the Co-op's staff members, I personally feel that the most important way that a person can support the Co-op is to shop there. Ultimately, the Co-op can offer its goods and services only as long as money exists for it to continue. The money comes completely from people choosing to spend their food dollars at the Co-op. I feel that we should never put down the value of the support from members who simply choose to buy their food at the Co-op.

Those with the time, desire and energy to be more involved can take advantage of one of the unique aspects of Co-op membership by becoming a working member. This can take many forms: training and working in one of many 3 hour a week shifts, serving on committees or the Board of Directors if elected, helping in short term projects and special workdays. Although this kind of involvement is important and encouraged, many members are unable to participate this way and I feel this is okay. I feel a great deal of support for the Co-op from its members and see that support take on many forms, especially members choosing to spend their valuable grocery money there. I am grateful for the support, concern and faithfulness of the Co-op membership that has made this Co-op one of the best.

Sincerely,
Debbie Isung

EDITOR SAYS 'BYE TO "NEWS"

'Bye.

I'm celebrating this anniversary issue, after eighteen months as a volunteer editor, by handing down my blue pencil to a yet-unknown successor. (At the moment, said successor is still in the bush; maybe by the time you read this, she or he will be in hand.) I began wearing out on small conflicts and miscommunications with some staff members over policy and procedure three issues ago. An effective antidote was the helpfulness from some staff, the appreciation expressed by many members, and most of all, the work and contributions of the regular "News" staff. Thanks, Penny, Thanks, Jean and Sam. Thanks, Eva. Thanks, Co-op staff and board contributors. Thanks also to all members who have taken time to write articles and letters to fill the pages quarter after quarter with good reading. You have been an editor's dream.

At last you have a fine Editorial Board on duty; I'm confident the "News" will continue to grow and improve. I'm looking forward to reading the next issues, incorporating all of their (and the next editor's) ideas and energies. I'm also looking forward to using the time away from my "real" job (Adult Learning Coordinator at Evergreen) to get into the moutaine, start a garden, paint the house, direct the summer Elderhostel program at TESC, take a trip back to see family in the Midwest...instead of harassing people about deadlines, copy, etc.

I hope to write a few articles, and will continue to "typescript" on the trusty Kaypro-Thranetar machine team for the present, both of which are nice part-time ways to stay involved.

A word to Kristin, who wrote last quarter asking how non-working members could do their share for the Co-op, and others who share her concern: a consumer co-op's integrity does depend upon each member's informed concern. If everyone wanted to be working members, I don't know what Karen would do with you all! But if all members could 1) take note of information posters, and take home and read flyers about current ballot issues and elections, 2) VOTE your preferences, 3) let staff, Board, committees and other members know your thoughts and feelings (don't be concerned that you 'don't know enough about the Co-op'), and 4) let those same people and other working members know often that you appreciate the work they do for you, all of these take little time, but carry tremendous power...and we'd REALLY be a model of co-operative consumerism.

Yours in cooperation,
Cher Stuewe-Portnoff

Cyclists Aid Nicaraguans

One of the aspects of Nicaragua's struggling economic situation is the shortage of oil supplies and spare parts for machinery and in particular cars and trucks. This has impeded progress in literary and health care improvements, doctors and teachers frequently having to walk 20 miles to reach towns and families. These difficulties are a direct result of U.S. supported military aggression and economic sanctions.

In response to this situation, a coalition of bicyclists and environmentalists opposed to the U.S. sponsored intervention have formed a national organization called BIKES NOT BOMBS. We are in the process of organizing an Olympia chapter whose main function is to mobilize support in the form of donated bicycles, bicycle parts and community education programs.

We are in our early stages of development and welcome anyone who might be interested in helping out. Please call 754-7844 (Lois) or 943-9025 (Todd).

Lois M. Mackey

Reader's Forum welcomes letters on any subject of general interest to Co-op members. Letters need to be signed and should include an address or telephone number. Please limit the length to 250 words. Readers interested in writing longer articles can contact the editor. Send to "Member Forum, Co-op News, 921 N Rogers, Oly, WA 98502", or bring into store.

To encourage reprinting, Co-op News is not copyrighted EXCEPT that some photos are copyrighted and the exclusive property of Sam Van Fleet.
Construction skills workshop for greenhouse series

By Lois Mackey

For the third time in Olympia history, a group of women are organizing a series of basic construction skills workshops designed just for women. The culmination of the workshops will be construction of an attached greenhouse on the home of an Olympia resident.

The classes will meet during April, and construction will take place over the first two weekends in May.

SCHEDULE:

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Weatherization &amp; Heat Loss</td>
<td>7-9:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/17</td>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>7-9:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20</td>
<td>Construction Workshop</td>
<td>9-12:00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; Greenhouse Tour</td>
<td>1-3:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/24</td>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>7-9:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>Greenhouse Design</td>
<td>7-9:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/4-5</td>
<td>Greenhouse Construction</td>
<td>9-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/11-12</td>
<td>Greenhouse Construction</td>
<td>9-5:00</td>
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Our goal is to provide women with practical construction experience in a supportive environment. Most workshops involve no fee; others include a modest materials fee, which can be bartered for labor if needed. No one should stay away because of lack of funds!

For more information call 943-4595.

Our thanks to the Co-op for its sponsorship and moral support.

DATEs TO REMEMBER

April 10-May 10: Applications accepted for board candidates

May 8: General Membership Meeting, Timberland Library, 7:30 p.m.

May 15-June 15: Board elections.

May 4: Organic Gardening tips with Gary Kline
10am-noon, Co-op

May 4: Macrobiotic Cooking Workshop, 2-5pm, TESC Organic Farm

Olympia Food Co-op

921 N Rogers
Olympia, Wa. 98502
(206) 754 7666
Open 10- 7:30 daily

direction correction requested