



THE Co-op News

A bi-monthly publication for members of the Olympia Food Co-op and its surrounding communities

JUNE / JULY 2012

THE CO-OP CONVERSATION



Coop members, volunteers, staff, and board reconvene as a large group after having participated in smaller group conversations *photos by Alejandra Abreu*

By **Desdra Dawning**, Co-op Member

The Board of Directors for Olympia Food Co-op (OFC) asked the Member Relations Committee (MRC) to create a position statement that would give the Co-op direction into the future. As a result of this request, a synergistic process involving a broad spectrum of the OFC community has now come together in a series of facilitated conversations, aimed at determining how best to move forward collectively in fulfilling the values stated in our Mission Statement and meeting the diverse and critical challenges existing in our community and society.

The Co-op Conversation, as it has come to be called, grew from this idea and blossomed into a process designed on qualities of inclusivity and anti-oppression, and also on collaborative, deep democracy models. The purpose of this process has been to help the Co-op develop the tools necessary to meet the demands of a changing world, and to listen to and engage the entire Co-op community in a conversation in which all voices are heard, giving each member a chance to create and answer questions about the future of the Co-op. To achieve the goals of this engagement process, the Co-op has conducted extensive outreach over the past few months, enlisting volunteer members in frequent information tabling at both stores, to inform members and encourage their participation in the Co-op Conversation. Members were asked to register for the event in order for organizers to get a handle on attendance logistics. Participants were randomly selected from those who registered for the first two gatherings, the third being open to all members who had registered for the Co-op Conversation.

Because OFC is committed to creating and supporting anti-oppression systems, and to insure that all voices be equally heard and valued, the decision was made to enlist the help of a seasoned meeting facilitator. Bob Davis of People's Food Co-op in Portland was chosen for his years of extensive experience with cooperative and collective situations, his background in co-op development, community/union organizing, consensus/collaborative decision-making, his anti-oppression work and his knowledge of Open Space technology. As an exercise in deep democracy, Open Space is based on the ancient concept of community as a circle, within which all voices are heard. This was the model used as a foundation for the Co-op Conversation, which was held in three stages at the Olympia Community Center.



Staff Jackie Krzyzcek, Coop Member Kim Chaplin, and Board member Cezanne Murphy-Levesque, engage in lively conversation

■ **Read more about the three stages of the ongoing Co-op Conversation on page 8!**

Cooperativismo!

In February 2012, two staff members from OFC participated in an exchange with **CECOSESOLA**, a cooperative in Barquisimeto Venezuela. Read an excerpt from their blog on page 9!



Staff Member Alejandra Abreu carrying a shoulder full of leeks while working in Cecoesola's produce section *photo by Emily Van Kley*



Staff Member Emily Van Kley transporting produce waste after a long busy day at one of Cecoesola's largest food *ferias* *photo by Alejandra Abreu*

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Both Co-ops are open every day
of the year (except New Year's
Day, January 1st, for inventory).

The purpose of the Olympia Food Co-op is to contribute to the health and well-being of people by providing wholesome foods and other goods and services, accessible to all, through a locally-oriented, collectively managed, not-for-profit cooperative organization that relies on consensus decision-making. We strive to make human effects on the earth and its inhabitants positive and renewing and to encourage economic and social justice. Our goals are to:

- Provide information about food
- Make good food accessible to more people
- Support efforts to increase democratic process
- Support efforts to foster a socially and economically egalitarian society
- Provide information about collective process and consensus decision-making
- Support local production
- See to the long-term health of the business
- Assist in the development of local community resources.

Opinions expressed in the Co-op News are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Co-op Staff, Board of Directors, Co-op advertisers or anyone else. Co-op members are welcome to respond.

The Co-op News is published on a bi-monthly basis and comes out in February, April, June, August, October and December. Please contact the editor, Jennifer Shafer, at olycoopnews@yahoo.com or 360-789-7313 to discuss your article idea or advertising inquiry. You may also leave messages in the newsletter box at either Co-op or mail them to either store, Attention: Co-op News.

Acceptance of advertising does not indicate endorsement by the Co-op of the product or service offered.

<http://www.olympiafood.coop>

Blossoms photo by Desdra Dawning

Inset photo: Flaming Eggplant Staff Michael Snow, Cecosesola Staff Sneida Hernandez, Javier Rojas, Jesus Sanchez, Sascha Fischel, OFC Alejandra Abreu, Cecosesola Ricardo Gimenez

Rethinking Expansion

By **Jayne Kaszynski**, Staff Member

A downtown store, certified kitchen, food truck, distribution center, lunch counter, bakery, satellite locations, seeding other co-ops... These are just some of the expansion ideas blossoming from the Co-op Conversation and recent staff visioning exercises. Other visions have ranged as far as cooperative retirement communities and creating an educational institute to spread the word about co-ops, collectivism, and consensus.

The revitalized Expansion Committee (see the April newsletter for more details) is reviewing these ideas in pursuit of the Board's directive to use 2012 as a time to re-think expansion. The goal is to have a feasible expansion plan, fully supported by staff, with a workplan ready-to-go in 2013. With our yearly budget cycle beginning in the fall, we're taking advantage of every moment we can!

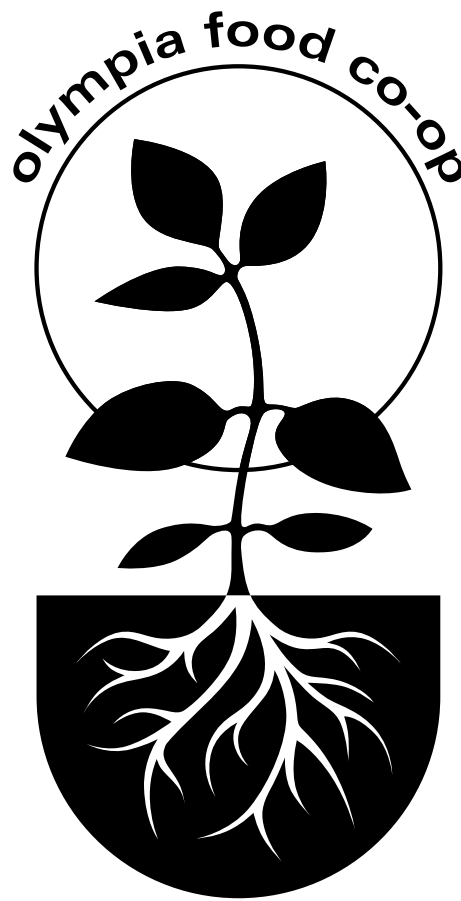
We've begun by working within the staff and Board to discuss what the Co-op should look, feel, smell, and taste like in seven years. This type of descriptive visioning is premised on the idea that by starting with a description of our future, we can better understand how to get there. When we asked staff to describe the Co-op in 2019, some words they used were: "Spacious aisles, bright, airy space, and clean and beautiful." Many also mentioned gardens, local art, meeting spaces, and classrooms. These are elements that we can focus on no matter where and how we choose to expand. Furthermore, they've been mentioned by staff, Board,

and members, so we know there is a great deal of unity behind them.

From these elements, we will create a draft of a unified vision statement that describes the experience of being at our stores seven years from now. Look for it on the blog and the next newsletter after we create a final version!

At the same time that we are pinning down the details of our collective vision, we're exploring the list of ideas mentioned above. Each of these ideas is exciting, and each connects to our mission statement. In narrowing the list down, finances and "workability" are our first priorities. From the Board, we know that it must be achievable within a reasonable timeframe. From members and staff, we know that it must result in a better shopping experience for members, and it should further our mission to create a healthier, more democratic and egalitarian community. Because of our shortened timeframe, we're beginning to evaluate these proposals at the same time that we are finishing up the vision statement. We expect to have narrowed it down to a few specific choices by the summertime.

Expansion – especially in a town our size and with a limited budget – is two parts planning and one part serendipity, so we're also keeping our eyes peeled for opportunities as they arise. At April's Board meeting, two members suggested a property for us to look into, and we've also received suggestion forms at the stores. If you have specific expansion ideas or know of properties that the Co-op should check



Expansion UPDATE

out, email us at expansion@olympiafood.coop. In expansion, as with all things we do at the Co-op, we know that the more heads we have involved, the better our outcome. Stay tuned for more information, and for more feedback opportunities as we move forward!

Theft from Eastside Store

By **Maureen Tobin**, Staff Member

It is with great sadness that I report on a recent theft at our Eastside store at the end of April. Sales deposits that were headed to the bank were stolen from our back office on Sunday, April 29, including some cash and a large number of checks. We are working with the Olympia Police Department and our insurance company to complete an investigation of what happened. If you shopped at the Eastside store on Friday, April 27 or Saturday, April 28 and used a check to pay for your purchases, those checks have

most likely been lost, and it is considered unlikely that the person who stole these will try to cash them or use them in any way. Some members have already contacted us with questions, as they noticed their checks had not been cashed. If you are one of these shoppers and are open to it, you are welcome to replace the lost check with another to cover your purchase and help us regain some of the lost money. You can come into either store with a replacement check and a staff person will assist you.

Our staff is working hard to investigate this loss, analyze our security measures, and implement changes as recommended by our insurance, alarm, and security companies. Theft of any kind feels like a loss to the entire Co-op community, and staff and Board members are taking this impact very seriously. If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact the downtown office at 357-1106 x 12 or customerservice@olympiafood.coop.

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Board Report

By **Cezanne Murphy-Levesque**, Board Member

Where is the Co-op going and how do we get there? The Board has been hard at work this spring finding answers to these questions. The Board's next steps bring the Co-op Conversation reports, the CECOSOLA exchange, and the revamped Expansion Committee and the Board together for a retreat early this summer for some long-range planning.

The Co-op Conversation events have wrapped up and the implementation of its results is about to begin. The Co-op Conversation's third and final event was held on March 24 in two sessions. The Board is especially appreciative to all of the Co-op members and staff that participated in these strategic planning meetings.

The Member Relations Committee and the Co-op Conversation facilitator, Bob Davis, have compiled all of the themes and ideas gathered in the Co-op Conversation events in a set of final reports. In May, the Co-op staff will have taken time to review and discuss these reports with a mindset towards implementation. The reports, with the staff input, will then come to the Board. At that point, the Board will begin to

decide what to do first and what the longer-term projects and goals will be.

To this end, the Board is planning a retreat in June to focus on long-range planning, expansion, and review of the structures and goals of the various Committees of the Board. The Board is eager to have a good amount of time devoted to developing a long-term strategic plan using the Co-op Conversation data, ideas generated from the exchange with CECOSOLA in Venezuela, and the recommendations of the Expansion Committee.

The Board is also going to use some of this time to review the various committees of the Board. Over the years, the Board has created several committees that carry out much of the work of the Board. Committees usually consist of a few Board members, staff and members at large; each committee has a charter and an assigned set of tasks. Some of these charters and tasks will be examined as the Board develops expansion and long-range plans to make sure that each committee is effective and efficient. The Board wants to ensure that the committees are structured in a way that will help keep track of, and carry out, the Board's new plans.

The Board is excited about this opportunity to create a reliable yet visionary plan for the future of our Co-op and, as always, we welcome continued member participation. Join us at a Board meeting or email us at ofcboard@olympiafood.coop.

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Olympia Child Care Collective

By **Desdra Dawning**, Co-op Member

The Olympia Child Care Collective began in the spring of 2010. Originally a part of Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights—POWER—this small group of dedicated people offered their childcare services to parents who wanted to join in community activism, but needed help with their children in order to do so. POWER paid for this most helpful service for some time, and eventually those involved decided to form a volunteer-based childcare collective that would offer childcare for free to other groups working for social, economic, political, and environmental change. Their all-volunteer crew makes sure that all of the children at these events get cuddled and played with while their parents are doing their best to make this world a better place for them to grow up and thrive.

Today, the Olympia Child Care Collective offers their services to POWER and the CIELO Project, social action conferences, and social forums. Last fall, they were there for participants of Occupy Olympia. And during Olympia Food Co-op's recent series of 3 meetings—The Co-op Conversation—their team was on hand to once again play with and care for the children of the Co-op members who participated in the conversation.

Laura Studebaker, a collective member, is one of five core members who do the logistical planning for events, along with Jamie Alwine, Chris Grande, Josh Elliott, and Charlie Hicks. She was very pleased that the Co-op contacted and asked them to be a part of the Conversation. They have a volunteer-based crew they can call on to help with events like this, although sometimes they are also part of the childcare crew themselves, as some were for the Conversation.

I met up with them on the last leg of the Conversation on March 24. I had participated in the first meeting in January and was delighted to be able to attend the final meeting. In the morning, in a room off of the main meeting room, Jamie Alwine and Charlie Hicks joined forces to play with Poppy, Aricin, and Oscar while their parents joined other Co-op members to discuss the many different concerns that arise with the running of a cooperative market. In the afternoon, Chris Grande and Charlie Hicks did the same. It wasn't a large group of children, but for all of us involved in the meeting, it was most helpful to have them so well cared for. Laura pointed out to me that she is the only collective member who is a parent. The rest do the work because they believe in the causes, and they love getting to hang out with the children.



Oscar and Aricin play with Jamie at The Co-op Conversation

photo by Desdra Dawning

If you are a part of a group that would appreciate the Olympia Child Care Collective's services, or are interested in joining their team—they would like to build their volunteer base and really need more volunteers—you can reach them by emailing olympiachildcarecollective@gmail.com

Check out their website too! <http://olycc.wordpress.com/>








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EXQUISITE N TRADITIONAL

By **Habib Serhan** May I introduce you to a fairly new company that has been supplying our two Co-ops with some really exquisite products for over a year-and-a-half. You may have already tried some of their delicious signature products, and if you have not, here is your chance for a quick introduction.

Exquisite N Traditional started out by supplying our Eastside Co-op with the delicious hand-crafted Baklava. Over time, and in meeting our guest's suggestions, the menu kept growing to include over six products that cater to a variety of tasty-food lovers. The product family currently includes the signature Babaghannouj, Baklava, Falafel, Green Bean Delight, Hummus, Rawmus, Spinach Delight and Tabbouleh. Ohhh, the taste in every bite!

Research is proving that the Mediterranean diet is one of the healthiest diets around; Dr. Kathleen Zelman wrote in her article *Benefits of the Mediterranean Diet*, on Webmd, that "a delicious Mediterranean eating plan can help protect against heart disease, diabetes, cancer – even help with weight loss" <http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/benefits-mediterranean-diet>.

Exquisite N Traditional focuses on producing a quality product and a healthy alternative. Products are hand-crafted using the freshest ingredients and contain no preservatives, except for what is a part of the organic filo that is presently used with making the Baklava and the Spinash Delight. Their products are made using fresh garlic cloves, real olive oil, squeezed lemon juice, as well as organic filo, organic butter, organic sugar, and organic tomato paste. The Falafel balls are baked to perfection! What a zesty treat!

Below, please find a detailed list of the ingredients that make up the various Exquisite N Traditional products we presently carry in our "Grab-N-Go" coolers:

The **BABAGHANNOUJ** is a hand-crafted treat that contains baked Eggplant, Tahini (Sesame Seed Paste), Lemon Juice, Fresh Garlic Cloves, Olive Oil, and Sea Salt.



Babaghannouj goes well on toast, vegetables, Falafel, and breads!
Ohhh...the joy in every bite...

The **TABBOULEH** is hand-crafted using the finest ingredients, which include Parsley, Tomato, Lettuce, Onion, Bulgur (Cracked Wheat), Olive Oil, Fresh Squeezed Lemon Juice, Sea Salt, and Mint.



Tabbouleh goes well with your BBQ'ed meats, on top of rice, with Hummus, and Falafel.

The **GREEN BEAN DELIGHT** is hand-crafted using the finest ingredients, which include Organic Green Beans, Tomato, Onions, Fresh Garlic, Olive Oil, and Sea Salt.



Serve it warm, or cold, on top of your favorite rice, toast, and chips.



Hummus, and its uncooked cousin, Rawmus, are excellent additions to your favorite vegetables, toast, chips, BBQ'ed meats, Tabbouleh and Falafel sandwiches.

The **HUMMUS** is hand-crafted using the finest ingredients, which include Garbanzo Beans (Boiled in Water), Fresh Squeezed Lemon Juice, Olive Oil, Fresh Garlic Cloves, Tahini (Sesame Seed Paste), and Sea Salt.

The **RAWMUS** is a raw spread that is hand-crafted using the finest ingredients, which include Garbanzo Beans (softened in water), Fresh Squeezed Lemon Juice, Olive Oil, Fresh Garlic Cloves, and Sea Salt.



Transform the humble Falafel into a succulent sandwich using Pita bread (or Tortilla), and dress it up with Tabbouleh, Hummus, and your favorite pickles.

The **FALAFEL** is hand-crafted using the finest ingredients, which include Fava Beans, Garbanzo Beans, Spices, Salt, Garlic Powder, Onion Powder, Baking Powder, Dehydrated Parsley, Corn Oil and Olive Oil.

The **SPINACH DELIGHT** is hand-crafted using the finest ingredients, which include Organic Filo Dough, and Organic butter. Other ingredients are: Spinach, Tomato, Onions, Lettuce, Craisins, Sea Salt and Sumac.



Spinach Delight is the perfect savoury pastry snack.

The **BAKLAVA** is hand-crafted using the finest ingredients, which include Organic Filo Dough, Organic butter and Organic sugar. The other ingredients are: Walnuts, Honey, Almonds, Vanilla Extract and Cinnamon.



A scrumptious dessert pastry, rich with honey and walnuts, Baklava is one of the world's most beloved sweets. What a treat!

Exquisite N Traditional is proud to serve our local community, and to provide, as its hand-crafter, Habib, likes to say, "a Healthy Alternative" that is really tasty! Why not indulge in traditions and support this local company? You (and your tastebuds) will not regret it!

Finance Update:

1st Quarter

2012

Budget Report

By **Corey**, Co-op Staff Member and Bookkeeper

BACKGROUND: Remember the mid-January snowstorm that caused so many power outages due to falling trees and branches? While the East-side store was able to remain open, the Westside store was without electricity for four days. We were able to keep our frozen and chilled food cold enough for the first three days, but by day four we ended up losing a lot of our frozen foods as well as the most fragile produce and chilled dairy items. While we did have insurance coverage for lost product and for business disruption, we were limited to the maximum amounts allowed under our policy due to a loss of power. The \$35,000 we received for disruption of business, due to lost sales potential, shows up as ‘Other Revenue.’

REVENUE: Referring to the accompanying chart, total sales revenue surpassed our budget by nearly \$100,000 even with four days of Westside store closure. Total purchases were correspondingly over budget as we had to buy more to sell more. As a percentage of actuals, purchases were over budget by a slightly greater degree than sales, which makes sense since we did not receive the full amount from our insurance to cover the value of all of the lost product. When all other forms of revenue are included, we made about \$45,000 more in total net revenue for the first three months of 2012 than we expected.

EXPENSES: Total expenses were about \$9,000 less than budgeted, or about 1% off. Specific expense lines vary by much larger amounts and are explained below.

Community and marketing expenses include our newsletter, advertising, outreach, donations and dues and subscriptions lines. Nearly all of these were under budget during the 1st quarter, primarily due to being behind on some of the projects we thought we would be working on. One change that just occurred beyond our control is that the annual dues for the NCGA (National Co-operative Grocer’s Assoc.) is now being paid in quarterly installments – we budgeted as if the entire annual payment would occur in January as it has in past years. That accounts for \$14,500 of the total amount that we are below budget in this area.

Labor budget (Staffing) expenses are only slightly over budget with the largest contributors being the

DISCLAIMER: In our last issue, we noticed that the chart presented with the Financial Report was incorrect – it contained information from the preceding issue. The year-to-date Income Statement that was referred to in the written report is available to anyone who would like to view it by contacting Corey at 360-357-1106 x12 in our downtown business office. We are sorry for the mistake and have created an easy fix to preclude it from happening again.

adjustments we make for total vacation and emergency sick leave. It is typical that most of our staff accrue vacation pay during the first two quarters of any year, using much of it during the last two quarters. We must then expense any increase in vacation pay liability to balance our books. The same process is used to balance our emergency sick leave liability account – at present more hours are being added to that account than are being accessed.

The most volatile labor expense is our medical benefits because we are self-insured and incur all expenses as they happen. The good news is that we continue to be under budget in this expense line, by \$15,500 so far this year. The medical benefit expense budget is created by taking the maximum possible amount we could owe and applying risk factors based on previous actual usage. There is always the possibility that we will have a really bad year, but statistically that occurs every 1 in 5 years. Staff wages and payroll taxes were a little over budget, which balanced out the savings in medical expenses.

Operations expenses include all supplies purchases, maintenance and repair expenditures and utilities costs. These seem to be right on track with our expectations. The depreciation expense should ideally match the budget – it is what it is. But we won’t know what it is until we receive an updated schedule from our accountant. The current budget contains an estimate for items added to the depreciation schedule during 2011.

BOTTOM LINE: Strong sales growth, coupled with holding expenses in check, have resulted in a profit of over \$87,000 for the 1st quarter of 2012. While budgeting for a profit of about \$32,000 we are currently nearly \$55,000 over our budget.

If you have any questions about this income statement or any other financial concern, you can reach either Harry or me at our downtown business office on Columbia Street or call us at 360-357-1106 x12.

Olympia Food Co-op Quarterly Budget Report				
– For The 3 Months Ending March 31, 2012 –				
		Current YTD	Budget YTD	\$ over Budget
Revenue:				
	Sales	3,714,345.59	3,616,917.65	97,427.94
	Discounts	(206,788.03)	(198,826.30)	(7,961.73)
	Purchases	(2,473,790.83)	(2,396,895.82)	(76,895.01)
	Gross Sales Revenue	1,033,766.73	1,021,195.53	12,571.20
	Other Revenue	40,168.90	7,437.50	32,731.40
	Total Net Revenue:	1,073,935.63	1,028,633.03	45,302.60
Expenses:				
	Community & Marketing	30,420.28	62,273.75	(31,853.47)
	Staffing	788,204.53	765,509.77	22,694.76
	Operations	152,528.39	150,955.99	1,572.40
	Depreciation	13,281.63	14,974.75	(1,693.12)
	Interest	2,773.15	2,700.00	73.15
	Corporate Income Tax	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total Expenses:	987,207.98	996,414.26	(9,206.28)
	Other Income & Expenses:	355.30	0.00	355.30
Total Net Income:		87,082.95	32,218.77	54,864.18

The Local Farm, Food & Products Committee

is looking for one member at large to join our committee... is it you?

Our purpose is as follows:

- To help strengthen ties between the Olympia Food Co-op and local/regional food and product producers as per the Co-op’s mission statement.
- To create a communication forum for local/regional farms and food and product producers and the Co-op.

- To support and promote the viability of local/regional farms, food and product producers by
 - envisioning and implementing projects that promote the sale of locally/regionally produced food and products at the Co-op.
 - identifying, evaluating and supporting opportunities for increased and sustained local/regional food and product production.
 - Encouraging the development of an ecologically and economically healthy local/regional food system.

- To increase the Co-op membership’s awareness about the benefits and availability of locally/regionally produced food and products and to be a conduit for membership support for local production.
- To serve in an advisory capacity to the Board and staff in policy development and implementation.

Interested members should email Erin or Eric at localfarms@olympiafood.coop for an application. We will be accepting applications until June 30, so email us ASAP if you are interested.

Construyendo la Confianza:

An excerpt from OFC's Exchange with Cecosesola

Note: This article was originally published as a blog entry at www.blogspot.ofccecosesola.com where you can access more posts about this exchange.

By **Emily Van Kley**, Staff Member

The night before our first reunion de gestión at Cecosesola, Alejandra and I are nervous.

In many ways, los reuniones de gestión resemble collective meetings at OFC: they are gatherings of the whole collective that happen in three different groups, during which collective members make decisions about everything from how to speed up the lines at the registers to whether or not to start a new education program to better fulfill their mission. In other ways, the reuniones are very different. Here at Cecosesola there is no agenda, for example, and no designated facilitator. Meetings last as long as they need to: sometimes 2 hours, sometimes 7, and the ferias are closed while people meet. In addition, workers from Cecosesola's affiliated co-ops are invited to attend meetings, and can bring up any concerns they may have from the point of view of production, etc. Additional reuniones de gestión are held weekly for new collective members, where they learn about the history and practices of Cecosesola as an organization and are invited to do their own research

about the history of the cooperative movement and present what they've learned. Another way Cecosesola's reuniones are distinct from OFC's is simple: size. Dividing Cecosesola's approximately 580 workers into three groups still equals a heck of a lot of people. This is the primary thing wreaking havoc with mine and Ale's nerves.



Large group reflection meeting at Cecosesola's School of Cooperative Development

photo by Emily Van Kley

We practice our short speech, Ale from notes, me from the miniature essay I've written with the help of the monstrous verb book and dictionary I thank my lucky stars I lugged here every day. It's not incredibly late, but we are exhausted from two days straight of absorbing new information. We mumble through what we've planned and head off to bed.

A little after 7 in the morning, people begin to arrive at the escuela, the site of the meeting and of the dormitorio where we've been staying. A particularity of this co-op in comparison with every other I've experienced is that people tend to arrive not only on time but early. By the time Ale and I head outside a few minutes before 8:00 (late, or so it seems) there are more than 150 people already

gathered in a circle several rows deep on the shaded patio outside the escuela. The meeting begins with news from one of the producer co-ops and moves to a discussion about the impact on the stores when many workers leave together for breakfast. Decision-making is discussed, and the effect boards of directors have on the collective process. Strong coffee is passed around along with sugar buns and a hard pastry that looks like a horseshoe. At times the low murmur of a hundred people listening and reacting to each other swells to a rumble, and the group is called back to attention by means of hand claps and piercing whistles. By the time Ale and I and several students from Evergreen, most of whom are working in Cecosesola affiliates, are set to introduce ourselves, some of my nerves have settled because I'm so interested in what's being said.

Our presentation goes smoothly. The compañer@s welcome us with warmth and ask thoughtful questions about OFC's involve-



Shoppers at Cecosesola's Feria del Centro line up as early as 6AM to get the freshest and most affordable produce in all of Barquisimeto.

photo by Alejandra Abreu

ment in the community and the relationship of our low-income membership to the economic crisis in the U.S.

We talk together about how to build confianza, a term that denotes a combination of trust and mutual support that is a central value among compañer@s at Cecosesola. And this is what sticks with me for the rest of the day.

I think about the ways I see confianza at OFC—like the fact that I know that if worst came to worst my co-workers and I would do anything for each other—and I think of the ways I think our confianza needs to grow.

One of the main themes Ale and I are here to investigate through our exchange with Cecosesola is how consensus-based decision-making works on such a large scale. At times we feel so stretched to come to consensus at OFC, and we often think it's because of our size. And indeed, how could it not be difficult for 76 people to agree on the best way forward in a given situation, when it can be exhausting just figuring out with a group of friends where to have lunch?

What is obvious to us almost as soon as we arrive, and certainly by the end of this first meeting, is that confianza is a huge part of what makes consensus decision-making possible at Cecosesola. With 580 people, it's crucial that each compañer@ be able to trust the other, that each have a deep respect for the others' opinion, and that each have as complete a picture as possible of what it means to think in terms of the good of the whole.

Once I'm thinking about confianza, I see examples of it everywhere.



Cecosesola's 3 large food Ferias generate over 100 million dollars in sales each year. Profits are reinvested in community projects, cooperative development, and mutual aid programs.

photo by Alejandra Abreu

continued facing page

Melons: *More Local Than You Think*

By **Jennifer Crain**, Co-op Member

Cantaloupe goes hand-in-hand with white paving stones and chlorine for me. I can't eat a slice without a moment of nostalgia for the pool in the back yard of my grandparents' Texas home on a hot summer day.

My people didn't grow their own food (Nana, my grandmother's mother, would say with a wry smile, that the local supermarket was her garden). And even if they had, we were living in a time and space when doing so would have been considered somewhat remarkable. No one thought about where food was coming from. So it's likely that the cantaloupes resting in my grandparents' icebox came from Mexico. Though being in San Antonio, they could just as easily have come from up the freeway.

In the Northwest, local melons aren't a reasonable assumption that way. But they're also not an impossibility either. Michael McMullan, a sourcing manager from Organically Grown Company (one of the Co-op's distributors), says by mid-July the melon sourcing chain will move up from Mexico to Northern California and Hermiston, Oregon. After that, they'll come into season in Washington, from farms in Eltopia (near the Tri-Cities) and Wapata (near Yakima). Eric Miller, from the Eastside produce department, says the Co-op is expecting cantaloupe, watermelon, honeydew, Charentais, Galia, honeyloper, orange honeydew, and Piel de Sapo.



Honeydew and watermelon

The latter is common in Spain, a football-shaped, knobby-skinned variety with sweet white flesh. Asked why this sweet melon hasn't become more widespread here, McMullan replies that the



Watermelon, a classic summer treat!

photos by Jennifer Crain

shipping-focused economy in the U.S. agricultural industry has kept heirloom varieties at bay.

True. But this is where we get very, very lucky. Piel de Sapo and a host of other rare melons are grown by the Agricultural Development Group in Eltopia, an operation started by Alan Schreiber who grew up on a farm, became an entomologist and professor, and then returned to the land as a farmer.

Last year, Schreiber experimented, growing 125 varieties of melon and getting opinions from distributors and others (he holds melon tastings). The result is a crop this growing season of the 13 best varieties, some grown from very rare seed. Before last year, Schreiber says they grew only two. In the fields are cantaloupe (technically known as American muskmelon), a variety of European cantaloupe, canary melon, honeydews (green, orange and white fleshed), Charentais, Galia, Piel de Sapo, Tuscan, Ananas, two varieties of heirloom watermelons, and his personal favorite, Magenta, a cross between Charentais and cantaloupe.

Once picked, melons are handled carefully by organic growers. First on everyone's mind these days is the deadly *Listeria* outbreak originating at a Colorado-based conventional cantaloupe grower's

packing operation last fall. The fruits, with their net-like skins creating pockets ideal for harboring bacteria, were possibly contaminated by *Listeria*-containing pools of water present at the packing site, tainted equipment, or improper drying of the fruits before shipment. To prevent contamination, Agricultural Development Group uses a dry method for cleaning and storage. Schreiber says he recently purchased equipment to cool melons in a waterless system. He adds that melons are cleaned by hand. Inaba Farms, near Yakima, has proper equipment to clean their melons with a water-based solution containing bacteria-killing sanitizers and dries them thoroughly before shipping. Both farms are certified organic.

Once you have a few melons on hand, try them in a granita or freeze wedges soaked in a margarita for a grown-up version of a popsicle. You can also freeze melon slices then whirl in a food processor with your sweetener of choice for a simple sorbet. Mix with berries and a honeyed dressing for a colorful salad. Though you may have all the color you need with the melons alone. Schreiber says one of those heirloom watermelons has a bi-color flesh, a "sorbet swirl" all on its own. Lovely. My kids may not have the Texas sun, but they'll grow up with some beautiful melon memories of their own.

Cecosesola continued from facing page



Cecosesola *photo by Alejandra Abreu*
staff eat together and have rotating teams that are in charge of preparing each day's meal. On this occasion, the team prepared fried fish, salad, boiled yucca, and broth.

For instance, the *compañer@s* at Cecosesola share food daily. Each feria has an attached comedor, or cafeteria, and a rotating equipo that cooks lunch on weekdays, as well as breakfast, lunch and

sometimes dinner while the ferias are open at the end of the week. A midday snack of fororo or chicha makes its way around the different worksites in the afternoon. Eating together may not seem directly related to building trust, but as the coffee was passed around this morning during our meeting, it occurred to me what a big deal it is that the members of this collective have made it a priority to meet one of each others' most basic human needs by providing delicious, home-cooked quality food, and by pausing together to share it. In so doing, it seems to me, they are saying to each other "your nourishment and well-being are important to me." And they are taking time together that is not specifically focused on work.

During the meeting, Gustavo, one of Cecosesola's long-time members, shares an engaging ten-minute documentary, Culto de Cerro, which analyzes the right to private property and its historical effect on the environment, women's rights, and society as a whole. Afterwards, there is a lively reflection which incorporates the video's societal critique with various collective members' work and life experience. This seems to me a crucial point—that as members of a collective, workers at Cecosesola regularly take time to discuss issues not directly related to their daily work, even, and perhaps especially, when these issues are complex and likely to illicit strong opinions. An incredible amount of trust is built when people are

willing to be vulnerable, and to reveal convictions that are of great importance to them, and when each person has a chance to be heard. Most importantly, workers at Cecosesola engage each other in such discussions when no immediate decisions need to be made. Over time, continued on page 10



Goats roaming *photo by Alejandra Abreu*
around Cecosesola's working farm. The farm produces organic compost, farmed fish, and also serves as a community recreation area

The Co-op Conversation continued from page 1

First Stage

Stage One, held on Saturday, January 25, gave voice to those who are not commonly heard in mainstream culture—their concerns and insights resonating throughout the entire process. The 23 members who participated were placed in seven constituent groups: Seniors and Disabled (because of group numbers, these two groups joined together) Low Income, Women, OFC Board, Volunteer Members, and LGBT. To kick off the conversation, each group was asked to explore, from their particular perspective, the following questions:

- *How is the Co-op different from a commercial grocery?*
- *What are the barriers for participation that you experience at the Co-op? How can these barriers be removed to enhance the mission and goals of the Co-op?*
- *What values do you want the Co-op to express in the future operations of the business?*
- *From a business perspective, how can the Co-op maintain and expand its share of the market place? Why is this important for the health of the Co-op?*
- *Who 'owns' OFC? Why? How and where will ownership be expressed in the future? Who are the deciders? How and why are they assigned these roles? How should decision-making roles be structured for the future health of the Co-op?*

From these sprang a lively conversation filled with years of experience, devotion, and concern about a business that is, for many of us, so much more than just a grocery store. After compiling the notes from each group, it was found that the themes emerging from this first meeting centered around:

Expansion: Participating members shared their ideas and concerns about the possible ways our Co-op can grow. Most saw change as a natural part of our future and offered suggestions on potential direction. Maintaining our consensus and collective values was considered primary in the process, allowing growth to come as a natural flow of our economic times. We looked at the possibility of a downtown store and the need to make necessary improvements to the two existing stores, including the future use of additional properties recently purchased. Ideas for creative use of our spaces was offered, with suggestions on ways to serve the community: as a community kitchen for food processing, as an educational center, opening up more jobs, and even offering



Coop Board member Joseph Webster connecting with other coop members photos by Alejandra Abreu

advertising, and the need for better communication with the larger Olympia community.

Communication: Many saw the importance of outreach, education, and advertising, and the need for better communication with the larger Olympia community. It was suggested that more staff and budget be committed to this, along with improved use of technology, and innovative ways to include underserved groups in our community. Ideas were shared about ways to improve member input to the staff collective, and overall membership communication, including the continued use of future forums like the Co-op Conversation to keep our creative ideas alive and vital. Of course, customer service was widely discussed, acknowledging room for improvement.

Education: The Co-op has always been seen as a center for education of cooperative values, and also social issues. Ideas evolved around this foundation, including: the creation of a basic info sheet on Co-op values, shopping instructions, and product info on why we boycott and why some items are carried and not others. Participants in the Co-op Conversation saw another valued purpose of the Co-op as that of educating members and the greater Olympia community on the economies of cooking and consuming healthy food, and how the packaging of food products affects us all.

Values: Of course, the above thoughts generated on how we serve as community educators reveal our Co-op values. Other ideas about our values centered on: store ambiance—improving our sense of community through even better custom-

er service, enhancing our stores by making them more kid-friendly and safe, wheelchair accessible, cleaner, more spacious and beautiful; social responsibility—acknowledging our support of democratic processes, health and wellness, local and conscious businesses, social justice and political awareness, and sustainability; and Co-op internal structure—supporting those who daily see to the smooth operation of both stores by offering consensus decision-making, good wages and benefits and retirement plans, and improved volunteer/staff/board communications.

Decision-Making: Consensus was discussed, admitting that it is a noble yet cumbersome internal process, and looking to ways to continue to use it while facilitating the smoother flow of time, information, and points of view. Participants in the Co-op Conversation identified the problem that some confusion exists on how working members can stay in the loop with decisions that arise, looking to more volunteer involvement in the decision-making process. Suggestions were offered concerning Board procedures, member forums before decisions are made, and the encouragement of representative democracy—looking at ways to attract unheard voices and create a different culture of decision-making between the Volunteers, the Staff Collective and the Board.

Reconciliation: Thoughts swirled around the Co-op use of boycott, particularly the need to hold a forum for conversation on the boycott of products from Israel. Discussion was made about how to include all voices, respect each other, move beyond 'either-or' conversation, and include divergent points of view. A need was seen for removing barriers, establishing better accountability, and taking responsibility. The Co-op was encouraged to honor the past, rather than bury it, and to open to further exploration of these sometimes divisive issues.

Finance: In these times of economic upheaval, concern arises over the need for future financial health for the Co-op, in order to insure its continued life in the Olympia community. Participants registered their concern over the importance in making wise, yet socially-responsible decisions about the future of the Co-op. Primary to our purpose, it was agreed, is the ability to supply all of our members with good, affordable organic food and other social-conscious products.

continued facing page



Coop volunteers, board members, staff, and members share a small group discussion about expansion

Co-op Conversation continued from facing page

Second Stage

These themes and the discussion around them were distilled from Stage One and brought to the 29 participants at Stage Two, held on February 25th at Olympia Community Center. They included: Communications/ Education/ Decision-Making/ Values/ Reconciliation/ and OFC as a Business (its role in the community) and Expansion. Placed in 6 random focus groups, these members were asked to report on what highlights from the Co-op Conversation would be taken to the third, and final meeting, also held at the Olympia Community Center, on March 24th.

Again gathering in the Open Space circle, then joining others, each of the 90-100 participants had the choice to be in one of 6 group discussions, the synthesis of Stage One and Two meetings, and were asked to discuss the following questions in their respective groups:

Communication: How can it be improved? How can all voices be heard throughout the Co-op structure?

Decision-Making: How can it be improved? What decisions should be made by which groups—Board, Staff, Membership, Board Committees, Staff Committees (Coordination Action Teams)?

Reconciliation: Why is it needed? How would it be structured? What outcomes do we want? Will it be used as a model for conflict resolution in the future?

What is Expansion?: How does the Co-op play a role in meeting the needs identified by the community? (Ex.: Co-op mall, health-care, commercial kitchen, food sheds, food mobile, jobs, etc.)

continued on page 10

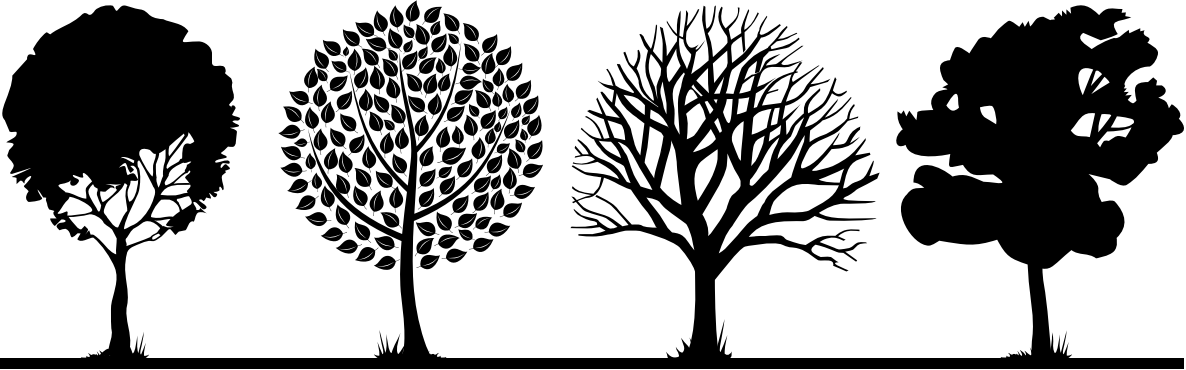
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MIJAS and the Co-op Conversation

By **Desdra Dawning**, Co-op Member

Hungry attendees of the Co-op Conversation were treated to some very tasty meals, provided by the Olympia Food Co-op. Hired to cater the first two of the three events was a very special group of women from a local organization called MIJAS (Mujeres Improving Job Abilities and Skills). Myself a transplant from Arizona and New Mexico, where south-of-the-border cuisine abounds, I can vouch for the incredible fresh taste of their offerings.

I was in attendance at the first Co-op Conversation held at the Olympia Community Center on January 28. What a surprise to find such a sumptuous feast laid out for us during our lunch break! Before our eyes lay a gorgeous green salad with roasted tomato dressing, chips, salsa, and guacamole, beans, chicken or veggie tacos, enchiladas and taquitos, and for dessert, flan. It was a gluten-free and/or vegan feast! And about as fresh as it gets! As often as possible, ingredients for their meals come from the Olympia Food Co-op and other local sources.

I met up with Christina Labra, one of the founders of MIJAS, recently at the Governor Hotel, where this amazing group of women work their culinary magic. Every

third Saturday of the month, they cook up a menu of appetizers, main courses, and desserts in the Governor kitchen, to be served at a sit-down dinner in an airy dining room overlooking Sylvester Park. Reservations are requested since all menu items are cooked right before serving—thus the freshness! The menu this time included appetizers of Cactus Tacos, Albondigas (meatball soup), Chicken or Green Cheese Quesadillas, and Chilean style creamy Squash Soup. Their main courses ranged from Pozole (a hominy pork stew considered Mexican comfort food), beef or cheese Chili Rellenos (stuffed poblano chilis), and a Green Tortilla (their own handmade tortillas smothered in sautéed collard greens and tomato sauce), to Drunk Chicken (marinated in dark beer and red chili). All served up with rice and beans, those good-old Mexican staples.

The women at MIJAS are an inspiration for their steadfastness and entrepreneurial spirit in the midst of adversity. Faced with the challenges that come with resettling in a new country (many are recently relocated from somewhere else in the Americas), and sometimes less-than-peaceful home lives, they have gathered, with the help and guidance from Christina Labra and com-



photo by Desdra Dawning

**Here are the MIJAS themselves:
Mujeres Improving Job Abilities and Skills!**

munity volunteers, to learn how to create financially sustainable lives for themselves and their families.

MIJAS started in 2009 through a Spanish Advocacy Training at Safe Place in Olympia. From a potluck of great food contributed by a group of women with social and economic issues has come an organization that now offers catering to many local non-profits and the dining experience mentioned above, served to 40-70 hungry and community-supportive folks, from 3-9pm every 3rd Saturday of the month. Their clientele has grown by word-of-mouth, through bulletin-board notices, Facebook, and their buffet catering business.

If you are supportive of good social justice causes (like so many other Olympians), consider a yummy Saturday afternoon or evening dinner with MIJAS at the Governor Hotel. Reservations or information on catering events can be made by calling 360-951-9982 or by contacting Christina at mijasrestaurant@gmail.com. Check out their website, too!

— <http://www.mijasrestaurant.org> —

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UPCOMING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Outreach and Education.....June 12 & 26, July 10 & 24
Member Relations.....June 27
Eco Planning.....June 8
Local Farm, Food and Products..... June 8 & July 6
Finance Committee.....June 19
Newsletter Committee.....June 21
Board of Directors..... June 21 & July 19

Committees of the Board meet monthly or bi-monthly and the schedule can change. If you are interested in attending one of these meetings, or have other questions, please email ofcboard@olympiafood.coop or call 357-1106 x12



Co-op Conversation continued from page 9

Is the Co-op an incubator of new co-ops and small businesses or does it create new projects under its own ownership and control?

Values: *What values as set forth in our mission statement do we still identify with? What new val-*

ues should be added?

New Ideas: *No participants joined this group, so it was integrated into the other groups.*

Third Stage

Now we come to the next step in the Co-op Conversation process. Notes from this final meeting were taken to the Staff Collective, who will in turn give their feedback—in terms of implementation—to the Board the end of May or beginning of June. The Board will then gather to look

over the results and determine long-term strategic planning.

What Comes Next

Once the report, including raw data, is ready, it will be submitted to the public/membership through the Olympia Food Co-op website: www.olympiafood.coop.

Any Co-op member who wishes to participate further in this conversation is invited to attend a Board meeting. These meetings are held monthly. You can look up

the agenda for each meeting beforehand by going to the Co-op website. All members are invited and welcome, particularly those who have already been a part of the Co-op Conversation, and would like to continue to give their input. All of the great insights and ideas brought forth by this process, and the strategic planning that will be formulated by the Board, are part of an ongoing conversation that can only be kept alive and moving by the continued support and contribution of Co-op members.

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Cecosesola continued from page 7

I think these regular conversations have helped Cecosesola's workers get to know each other in a truly multi-faceted way. They have helped pave the road for difficult discussions that eventually lead to decision-making, and they have helped the group as a whole evolve common values so that these decisions have a broad base of shared interest and language to draw upon.

And then, there's the granja. In the afternoon, after lunch, Ale

and I ride with Jesus to Cecosesola's farm 45 minutes out of Barquisimeto. We enjoy every minute of our leisurely tour from the baby goats just born that morning, to the wild chickens, the 4 lagunas where tilapia and cachama are raised for sale in the ferias, the beautiful blond-coated free-ranging cows, and the compost system where cow, goat, and sheep manure are mixed with coffee husks and produce waste in the ferias to create a rich growing mixture also to be sold. It is all so relaxing and beautiful. Alejandra asks Jesus if this is his favorite job in the co-op rotation. He says it is.

Then he takes us up a steep hill to a different section of Cecosesola's land. The farm dog runs in front of the truck in the late afternoon heat. Above the farm and the lagunas Cecosesola's workers have built un parque de recreo. Here there are swingsets and playground equipment. Spaces for bolla criolla, ping pong, billiards, and dominos. There's a salt water pool to cool off in, and in the center of the space a huge round building of indigenous design with a palm roof for reuniones. Set up so high, the area has a breathtaking view of the farmland that leads up to Barquisimeto and the mountains beyond. Workers at Cecosesola come here on their days off to relax with their families, and several times a year fiestas are held for the whole collective to attend.

And I realize this is another way to build confianza, a way for workers to enjoy time together without the pressure of work and deadlines, to see each other as whole people, to know each others' given and chosen families, and to deepen their respect and care for each other, both of which are likely to prove crucial later when difficult decisions need to be made.

Each of the previous examples could easily be seen as a waste of time and resources for an organization trying to survive on a budget, or to a worker who simply wants to put in their time and go home. And while we at OFC take seriously—as we should—the fiscal responsibility we have with the money members of our community entrust to us by way of their purchases and memberships, I would like to argue that our money and time might be well-spent investing in ways to build greater confianza among workers. That a stronger measure of confianza in OFC's worker collective might give us a stronger basis upon which to make informed, supportive, grounded and efficient decisions together, no matter how big we grow, and even when the going gets tough.



**Ale and Emily relax with new friends
(L to R: Ale, Conchi, Yenny, Emily, Jacob)**

photo by ?

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Co-op Community Classes Update

Summer Classes Series

It's summer time again and time as well for another exciting round of classes from the Co-op. None of the dates have been set yet as of the printing of this newsletter so none of the specifics are here. Check out all the new classes on our website www.olympiafood.coop or posted in the stores. This time around we've got more opportunities to learn mushroom cultivation, some great basic cooking classes, as well as an extravaganza of raw food classes that I have secretly nicknamed "The Summer of 'Rawv.'" Also be looking for two awesome opportunities to meet some of your local producers in the Olympia area. Co-op staff member Kim Langston will be leading a couple of day-long cycling tours of local producers that is sure to be a hoot!

Co-op Class Vouchers are here!

Have you ever wanted to give a Co-op class as a gift? Well now you can! Class vouchers are available for purchase in the stores. Pay for class registration at the register (\$5 per class) and bring your receipt to customer service to redeem for class vouchers.

Use Volunteer Member Credit Hours Towards Class Registration

Are you a volunteer member at the Co-op? You can now use working member credit hours towards class registration. A \$5 class can be reg-

istered for with 2 credit hours. You can use credit hours towards class vouchers as well. Ask a staff person at customer service for assistance.

Looking for ways to Volunteer?

Call Out for Instructors

The Co-op is doing a call out for more volunteer teachers for our Community Classes program. Do you have teaching experience and knowledge and passion for kitchen skills, nutrition, herbalism, wellness, or sustainable living? Email classes@olympiafood.coop to receive an application/interest form.

Be a Co-op Classes GRuB Docent

In collaboration with GRuB, the Co-op is offering a new volunteer position called the Co-op Classes GRuB Docent. Want to volunteer at the Co-op but can't commit to a weekly shift? Are you someone wanting to get involved with classes, but don't want to teach? Are you a great people person who loves speaking in front of groups? GRuB Docents help with registration, parking, and facility orientation, as well as assisting teachers. They also take a moment in each class to speak about GRuB and the Co-op and the awesome work they do. The next training for Co-op Classes GRuB Docents will be Thursday Jun 14th, 6-7pm at the GRuB Farmhouse. If you are interested and want to sign up for the training please email classes@olympiafood.coop.



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JUNE / JULY 2012



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KID'S CORNER

Last "What is it?" was: **Parsnips**

Congrats to last issue's winners:
Orin 4, Tobin 3, Fiona 9, Igra 4, Denali 8, Anaya 10, Lydia 10, Benjamin 9, Jasper 4, Ruby 7, Taydee 5, Kaya 7, Sadie 6, Jaden 6, Numi 6, Lucy 7, Rowan 6, Atalanta 9, Thaylo 8, Imani 10, Nayeli 4

If you're 10 or under, guess what's in this photo. Fill out the form and put it in the What Is It? box in the Co-op office, or hand it to a Staff person, by the deadline. Enter once per issue. Guess correctly, and you'll win a \$1.00 gift certificate to spend at the Co-op!



What is it?

What is it?
Deadline: July 1st, 2012

Name _____
Age _____
Guess _____

Please pick up your gift certificate at the store where you dropped off your entry.

Bienvenidos Companer@s de Cecosesola!



An Account of
OFC's exchange
with CECOSOLA

The Co-op Conversation Re-cap Melons: *More Local Than You Think* Re-thinking Expansion

Save the date! The annual

Harvest Party

will be

Sunday, September 9!

Interested in a food party that celebrates the incredible bounty of our local harvest and the wonderful local products we sell?

Join the fun at the Olympia Food Co-op's eighth annual Harvest Party Potluck, Sunday, September 9. This year also coincides with the Co-op's 35th anniversary, so we're planning some extra fun and hope to have lots of members join in.

Check out the next issue of the Co-op News for more details.

