

The Firestarter

Newsletter of The Tonasket Natural Foods Co-op

Summer - Fall 2023



We appreciate your patience as we work through the transition into scanning your purchases with our newly launched Point of Sale System!

Co-op Board of Directors

Peggy Tofte, *President*

Patti House, *Vice President*

Ron Jones-Edwards,

Secretary

Charlene Baka Rich,

Treasurer

Thom Speidel

Annie Kier

Your Name Here?

Store Manager:

Sabrina Sofia

Assistant Store Manager:

Melissa Calhoon

Tonasket Co-op Member Appreciation Day

3rd Tuesday of each
month

Members may
bulk-order from the
UNFI Catalog at 20%
above wholesale.

Co-Op Annual Membership Meeting Recap

The Co-op Annual Membership Meeting, held on May 7, was well attended and was, on the whole, positive and productive. Opening with the Store Report, our new General Manager, Sabrina Sofia, gave an account of operations and how the store is progressing. While we had a challenging few years due to the pandemic, we are now moving forward and are beginning to recover. Some of our challenges have been due to inflation and the increased cost of goods. Additionally, we had difficulty retaining employees during the past several years, which cost the store in training expenses. This dilemma seems to have resolved itself, and our staff is constant and robust. Sabrina and Assistant Manager Melissa Calhoon thank their "great teammates, volunteers, and the dedicated Board members, without whom none of this would be possible."

Sabrina also discussed some ideas for initiating more volunteer opportunities in the store. We will soon have a new Volunteer Coordinator who will be the go-to person for jobs, which will be posted on a whiteboard in the Garden Room. By incorporating volunteers, we will not only be able to save on payroll expenses but also allow members to become more involved and bring about a larger sense of community in our Co-op.

Another plan in the offing involves the suggestion box and

all the helpful ideas our members submit. These are read, and we do take them to heart! Soon a Suggestion Box Response Board will be posted with acknowledgments and feedback on your ideas. This is another way our new management intends to recognize our membership and the input you all offer.

The Co-op Café was a topic of discussion, and it has become one of the store's most significant revenue sources. For more on the deli, please see the article on page four of the newsletter.

Our new Point of Sale (POS) system is one of our most noteworthy developments. Originally thought to be up and running by July 1, we had some setbacks, but it is now fully operational. The system will simplify and speed up many of the mundane tasks carried out by our staff, help with accounting and inventory control, and guard against shrinkage. Thanks to our dedicated volunteers and staff for all their hard work and diligence, we will start to see the benefits very soon.

Diane Gasaway of the Northwest Cooperative Development Center was a guest speaker at the Membership Meeting. Coming to us via a grant, she will work with the Board to help update policies and develop future strategic planning. Part of her mission during the meeting was

interacting with members to identify the general feeling of what the Co-op's future should look like. The conversation included discussing our strengths and weaknesses, availability of healthy foods, our community, and more. Diane will return to the area to further work with the Board, helping us continue to serve our community in the best way possible.

Lastly, the Co-op membership approved the proposed by-law changes, which can be found posted in the store. These changes were implemented to ensure stronger operational management and comply with specific needs related to governing our nonprofit. In addition, members voted in two new Board members, Thom Speidel and Annie Kier, and approved the directors whose terms were about to expire.

Thank you to all who came out for the meeting. Our Co-op is much more vital because of the support of our members.

**We will have an info booth
at the Okanogan River
Garlic Festival
~ August 25th & 26th ~
at Tonasket's History Park
On the beautiful
Okanogan River
featuring locally grown
organic garlic, and more!
Don't miss this delightful
community event!**

Co-Op News and Office Report

What's been going on at the store lately? Plenty! Some great and some not-so-great.

We've already reported that we launched the long-awaited Point of Sale system, and while it took a lot of tinkering and perfecting, we're up and running. Please be patient with us while we adjust to this new process. Our cashiers are doing well with the system, and customers are also getting used to it. Please write the SKU numbers on your bulk items rather than the price per pound. You'll probably see some other minor changes, but overall, we're pleased with the outcome.

And now for the not-so-good news. In June, our walk-in compressor went down completely. It took a week and cost \$16,000 to get it working again. When we realized what had happened, the staff immediately stepped up, carrying boxes of food to the CCC and Grants, who graciously let us use their refrigerator and walk-in.

Pasquale Sofia, Reed Engel, Gary Davis, and Jim Wells donated countless hours to help get the new compressor set up and

running. Free! Refrigeration and Heating let us pay in three installments for their labor and materials, and we took \$5,000 out of our Improvement Fund to cover some of the costs. That, coupled with a loan from OCCF which we will pay back in monthly installments and part of the OFF grant, helped cover much of the balance. There are still a few thousand dollars outstanding.

We want to express our appreciation for all the help and patience from our members during this crisis.

We can't say enough about OFF for all their support. As Co-op Manager Sabrina Sofia said, "Every time things get tough, our supportive members always show up! Our Co-op is truly a labor of love that has lasted over 45 years." And that's something to celebrate!

Do you have a favorite product that you'd like to see us carry?

Feel free to make a suggestion. If it's available from our suppliers, and there's room on our shelves, we'll give it a try and see how it sells. Also, please know that we can special order items for you.

Talk to a cashier for more information on our policies and your bulk-order options.

MEMBERS

Look for the storewide SALES throughout the Co-op, displayed with red shelf tags below the items.

Current Tonasket Co-op members receive special discounts on these products – some are a one-time deal, some are monthly sales, & some are introductory promotions.

Price tags show member prices and non-member prices.

These specials also apply to visiting members from other Co-ops. Just show us your membership card!

The Co-op Café is open 7-days a week! & our deli window is open daily from 11-2.

Special order a hot Reuben Sandwich or our "Sandwich of the Week" when the deli window is open. "Grab and Go" sandwiches and hot soup available all day until they're sold out.

Look for our daily soup schedule and lunch specials on our Facebook page, updated weekly.

Announcing Green Okanogan's First Repair Café!

Repair Café is a Free Fix-it Event & Will Be Held
Saturday, September 2nd
10 am – Noon at the CCC

(More events will be scheduled over the next year.)

14 Fixers will be on hand to look at repairing or mending broken items:

- Electronics
- Small appliances
- General household items
- Jewelry
- Clothing repairs
- Repair zippers to make them work again
- Yard and garden items
- Lamps
- Minor bicycle tune-ups and repairs

Guidelines:

Item must be small enough to carry.

No leaking fluids or hazardous material.

No drop-offs. Customer must stay with the item being repaired.

There is no guarantee the item will be repaired. Some items may be diagnosed, the customer will then know what they need to do to finish the repair. Some items may be deemed unrepairable.

Extremely French Carrot Salad From Bon Appetit

Here's another delicious way to prepare everyone's favorite orange vegetable!

Combine:

3 Tablespoons olive oil
3 Tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon honey
½ teaspoon cumin
Salt to taste

- Add ½ cup coarsely grated carrots
- Stir in ½ cup coarsely chopped parsley or cilantro

Call it carottes râpées because grated carrots doesn't sound quite as elegant.

Dear Shoppers:

We encourage customers to bring their own clean containers for all your bulk items.

Under Washington State regulations, we must now charge for shopping bags. Please try to bring your own supply of reusable bags.

We also offer a great selection of lovely and practical reusable shopping bags to purchase.

Thank You!

For more information on the Co-op and updated news, past Firestarters, and other pertinent articles visit our website at <https://tonasketcoop.com>

Read This Before You Throw Away That Food!

Americans throw away an estimated 30-40% of the food we buy. Is that really necessary? If you are going by the dates stamped on products as your guideline, then you might be needlessly wasting food and money. But what do those figures actually mean? Let's decipher the numbers, and perhaps keep food in your pantry and money in your pocket.

Sell By or Pull Date: This date indicates when stores must remove the products. Food will be safe to eat after this date if it has been refrigerated. Dairy products will usually still be good at least one week longer than that date and eggs will keep 3-5 weeks beyond. Such products as packaged salad mixes and processed lunchmeats will usually keep for up to a week past their pull date.

Best If Used By Date: This date refers to a recommendation as to when the flavor or quality is at its best, not a safety or purchase-by date.

Pack Dates: This date may be found on canned foods, cookies, crackers, and spices. It's the way manufacturers and retailers track

inventory and rotate items for freshness. Also used in the unlikely event of a recall. However, most manufacturers use their own dating system so it may be hard to interpret what the numbers mean. Packaged foods will be safe long after the pack date but may not be as flavorful. Canned foods will be safe for many years after the date, but we might notice a difference in the taste and texture. If the can has bulges or dents do not eat it, as this could indicate dangerous spoilage. The same goes for questionable odors or a broken seal.

Use by Dates: This is the last date suggested by the manufacturer to ensure a product's peak quality.

Expiration Dates: These dates are printed on such items as vitamins, yeast, baking powder, cake mixes and pectin for jams and jellies. Also found on baby foods and infant formulas. It's important to follow the guidelines for these products, as they may not work the way we expect them to, and some may not be safe to consume. Leavening agents, baking mixes, and pectin will be



safe after this date but may not be as effective.

Quality Assurance Dates: Also known as "better if used by" dates, this information is used for foods that have a long shelf life but will begin to lose their quality. It's an estimate of how long the food will be of optimal quality, but this date is not an indicator of safety. Think of best before dates as suggestions about how long food will retain its freshness. It can be found on packaged foods, boxed soups, baked products, cheese, cold cereals, peanut butter, and mayonnaise, among others. If the product smells or tastes bad do not use it.

We hope this information can help consumers determine what food products are safe to eat, and which ones need to be tossed.

Source: USDA

Co-Op Garden News from Board Member, Charlene Baka

Just a note to talk about our garden:

Our beautiful garden continues to give pleasure to our customers and the many visitors who stop by. The shade is a blessing and offers a little bit of nature in our town.

Unfortunately, the extreme weather was tough on our trees this past year. The fall storms broke branches, the winter damage was significant, and now the severe heat has been a challenge. The Raintree and Mountain Ash are suffering the most; let's hope

they pull through and thrive for years to come.

On the positive side, we had fun with Alissa Weddle's class from Tonasket High School. They worked diligently pulling weeds, planting and refinishing our picnic tables and benches. We made new friends, and they did such a fantastic job. Hopefully, we can do it again in the spring. Thank you so much to the teachers and students; we worked so well as a team!

Jessica McNamara has joined me

with her expertise in gardening. Jessica was the gardener for several decades, planting most of the trees in our precious garden. Her love for growing things has given me so much inspiration. Thanks, Jessica, you are so appreciated!

Also, thank you to Miguel and Justin, who help with the heavy jobs that require chainsaws and muscles. We couldn't do it without both of you. I know there are folks who help when I'm not around, and I feel happy when I see the tables are clean and the

garbage picked up. You are also appreciated; it takes us all to keep the garden nice for everyone.

Come by the garden to chill a bit anytime you are in town.



*Supporting local farmers
and the
Community since 1977*

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.tonasketcoop.com

Spring & Summer Hours

9am-7pm Mon-Friday

9am-6pm Saturdays

11am-4pm Sundays

Newsletter editor:

River Jones

*The Co-op Board of Directors
meet on the 3rd Monday
of each month at the CCC.
Meeting starts at 3 pm.
Members are welcome.*

Follow the link on our website to submit an article to the Firestarter – the newsletter editor and store management will review all submitted articles to determine suitability for publication.

Thank-You!

to everyone who has continued to support the Co-op for over 45 years!

As a member-owned nonprofit business, this is your store. We encourage you to use the suggestion box. It is a great way to communicate with us about what you like about the Co-op & make kind recommendations. We take your suggestions to heart & do our best to provide what our members are looking for.

The Co-Op Café Grand Reopening Was A Grand Success!

The Co-op deli held its Grand Reopening event on July 25th. Actually a “renaming” celebration, the event commemorated our deli’s new name, now called *The Co-Op Café*. The outcome far exceeded our expectations, bringing \$1,980 in sales. This achievement couldn’t have been possible without the support and encouragement of our devoted members, customers, and dedicated staff and volunteers.

Preparations for the event began about five days prior, making sandwich fillings, soups, salads, and desserts. We offered 19 different lunch items, and some of our most

popular sandwiches, such as the Vietnamese Banh Mi and our Tempeh Ruben, were sold out that same day. There were lots of delectable desserts, too many to name them all. Still, some favorites were our New York cheesecake with cherry compote, Key Lime cheesecake cupcakes, and freshly baked blueberry and lemon scones.

One of the most impressive outcomes was how our Facebook reach went from 8,000 to 12,200, indicating robust community engagement.

So, friends, please continue to share our Facebook posts and comments. This is one of the best ways to get the word out

on a grand scale and spread the great news. We want the whole town to know that the Co-Op Café offers some of the best food in our area!



Some good news for our customers who like to order from Azure Standard

Did you know you can order your Azure products directly from the Co-op? We can get your goods for nearly the same price that Azure charges. This way you don’t have to be available at the delivery drop *and* you can use your SNAP benefits to pay.

Ask one of our cashiers for more details.

Staff Picks

Products Our Co-Op Really Likes and We Think You Might Too

Peggy enjoys our new
**Jackson’s Sweet Potato
Chips!**

The only other ingredients besides sweet potatoes are avocado and sea salt.
“They’re really tasty!”

Nerium’s favorites are our very own
**Bahn Mi Falafel
Sandwiches & Salads**

A new and very popular Café offering. Try one and see for yourself!

Sabrina says try our
**Goodculture Cottage
Cheese** snack size (5.3 oz)
With 19 grams of protein, it’s a winner!
She also likes our
Jonny Pop Watermelon Pops especially on a hot day!

*“I love the Ruby Jewel
**Lemon Lavender Ice
Cream Sandwiches!***

*They’re so decadent, unique and satisfying.”
Why not try one today?
– Lisa*

Courtney enjoys our
**Rosewater Facial
Mist from Heritage
Store.** It’s very light and refreshing for this time of year.

Tyler’s pick is our
**Trace Minerals Power
Paks**

“They’re great when you need an extra boost and come in many delicious flavors.”