



Businesses of Our Bioregion

Learn about some of the farmers and food producers in the Lake Superior Bioregion contributing to the local food system.

Whole Foods Co-op is proud to carry products from over 170 local vendors, with 104 vendors located in the Lake Superior Bioregion (the orange area on the map, below).

At Whole Foods Co-op, we believe that when our local partners succeed, we all succeed, seeing trickle down impacts throughout the communities we serve. As a part of our commitment to the success of our local vendors, over the years we have featured some of our vendors in local profiles in our quarterly magazine, the *Garbanzo Gazette*.

Inside, enjoy a handful of these articles that tell the inspirational stories of farmers and producers throughout Northern Minnesota and Northern Wisconsin who are contributing to our local food system in meaningful and sustainable ways.

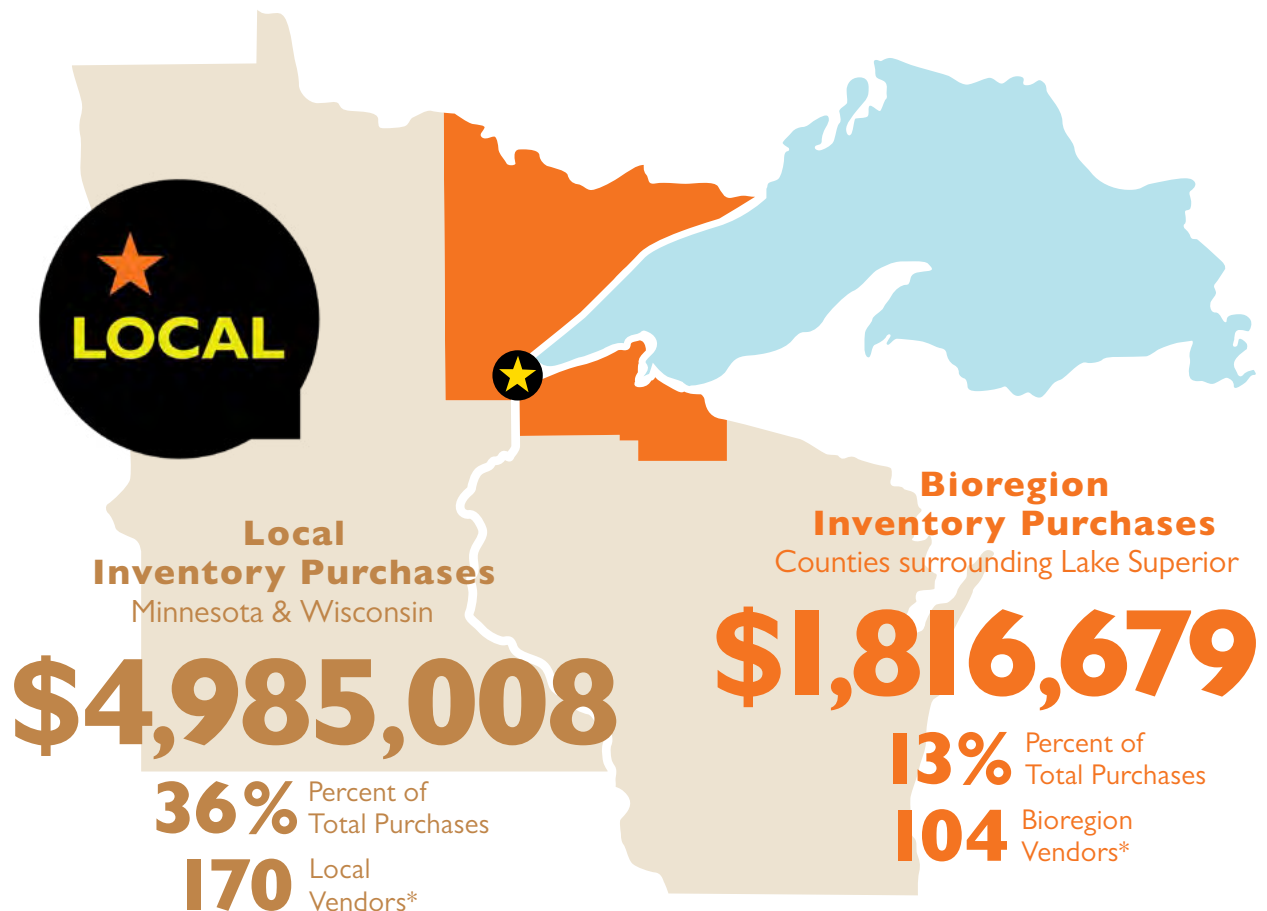


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Food Farm

A JOURNEY THROUGH FOOD FARM'S INSPIRING HISTORY

Originally published in the Fall 2023 Garbanzo Gazette

Imagine a late summer's day in August, where the morning rain has quenched the thirst of the soil, leaving glistening beads of water on lush produce greens. The fields hum with life as the broccoli and carrots, nurtured since early plantings, stand ready for harvest. Around the kitchen table, John, Janaki, and Dave gather, ready to weave a tapestry of stories that span five decades – stories of trials, triumphs, and transformation – stories that form the heart of Food Farm's rich history.

The narrative begins in the fall of 1975 when John and Jane Fisher-Merritt found themselves dreaming of a life intertwined with the land. Inspired by a back-to-the-land ethos and Wendell Berry's "The Unsettling of America," they left Oregon behind and arrived at Holyoke, Minnesota, a homestead John lovingly dubbed a "hippie hideaway in the woods." The early years were marked by humble



beginnings, laying the stepping stones for what would eventually become Food Farm. Picture large broccoli crowns, carefully piled high in ice-laden turkey roasters, destined for sale on consignment. Envision ripe red tomatoes fetching a mere 10 cents per pound, with a seasonal harvest yield of about 1500 lbs. Those tales and memories of the devastating 1976 Holyoke house fire couldn't extinguish the will to arise from the ashes. The Fisher-Merritts would make lemonade from lemons and salvage materials from the fire that would later become part of their home's porch, where Food Farm currently stands in Wrenshall, Minnesota.

John's voice resonates, "We moved from Holyoke to Wrenshall in 1988, guided by UMD Extension soil mapping insights." It was here that the Fisher-Merritts could fully embrace the radical notion of organic farming. In a landscape dominated by industrial agriculture, their commitment to growing healthy food in harmony with nature's rhythms was nothing short of revolutionary.



John and Jane Fisher-Merritt, 1988. Photos courtesy Food Farm.

Their dedication to living this way and to the Lake Superior region laid the bedrock for Food Farm's future.

Dave Hanlon, a steadfast presence for over 30 years, brings to life tales of John's creativity and maverick spirit. Picture the experimental construction of a hoop house – salvaged conduit bent with the weight of a tractor, shaped by ingenious curves. Another thread in the tapestry of resourcefulness and unwavering persistence.

By 1990, their dedication bore fruit, earning them certified organic status. This recognition solidified their commitment, established their leadership in the local organic food movement, and set the stage for their pioneering Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) venture. Janaki's voice adds depth, "In the 20 years my folks had been farming, they hadn't paid themselves a wage. We had a farm-direct arrangement called a Clientele Membership Club where people could come pick food at the farm for a lower price than retail." The shift to a CSA format was a natural progression, offering a consistent income source for the Fisher-Merritt family. In 1994, the CSA and the name "Food Farm" were officially adopted. On the farm name, Janaki said, "The farm never had a name until we started the CSA—produce signs at the Co-op always just read "John's" because everybody knew who he was, and he had worked at the Co-op since 1976. We chose the name Food Farm because producing basic sustenance for a community of people is actually very unusual in agriculture today." In the late 90s and early 2000s, Food Farm extended its roots and values, fostering new farms in the Northland through

mentorships, including relationships with Rick and Karola Dalen of Northern Harvest Farm and others.

Fast forward to 2010, when Janaki and his partner Annie Dugan assumed leadership, steering Food Farm towards new horizons. Their stewardship saw the completion of the root cellar in 2016, an embodiment of their commitment to preserving freshness with minimal inputs in Minnesota's harsh climate.

As time moves forward, Food Farm – now tended by Janaki, John, Dave Hanlon, Teri Sackmeister, and their dedicated seasonal team – thrives. As boxes brimming with fresh bagged carrots are prepared for Co-op delivery, Dave, Janaki, and John intertwine their stories with the laughter of the next generation of Fisher-Merritts and friends just outside in the yard. Food Farm and the Co-op take great pride in nurturing and strengthening our enduring partnership between each other and the community. Since that inaugural delivery of tomatoes in 1976, Food Farm and the Co-op's journeys have seen parallels of growth. Bringing local, organic food to the Northland is a remarkable achievement,



John, Janaki, and carrot crop, 1989.

Food Farm stands as an emblem of the enduring bond between land and community in a world that hurtles forward. Each harvest, each farmer uplifted through their mentorship, speaks to this timeless connection.

considering our short growing season. Food Farm stands as an emblem of the enduring bond between land and community in a world that hurtles forward. Each harvest, each farmer uplifted through their mentorship, speaks to this timeless connection.

Today, John and Jane's presence continues to grace the farm, offering support when needed. John imparts wisdom through farm tours and supports new growers, extending his knowledge to programs like the Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College Bimaaji'idiwn Extension Producer Training Program in Cloquet. As Janaki eloquently concludes, "In many ways, the commitment to continuous improvement and the desire to deepen our understanding of the land and the practices that support its productivity are more important than the milestones." Through their story, we find inspiration to strengthen our relationship with the land and with each other. 🥕



Top: Annie, Janaki, and their children, Ellis and Truman.
Bottom: Food Farm carrots. Photos by Katie Cannon, 2019.

Hermit Creek Farm

Originally published in the Summer 2020 Garbanzo Gazette

Located approximately 20 minutes south of Ashland, Wisconsin in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is the small, unincorporated town of Highbridge. This is the home of Hermit Creek Farm and owner operators Landis and Steven Spikerman.

Named for a nearby creek that is home to nesting Hermit Thrushes, this Certified Organic farm has been growing food in a “commercial” sense since 1993 when they began selling produce to Ashland’s Chequamegon Food



Co-op. In 1995 they expanded to offer CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) shares that included produce, pork, and lamb. Today, with a staff of four to five farmhands and “four hard working Border Collies”, Landis and Steven grow and raise enough food from April to

October to supply about 225 CSA shares, local grocers, area restaurants, and Northland College’s food service operations.

The Co-op began purchasing from Hermit Creek Farm in 2017; they’ve quickly become one of our strongest local growers. For the past two seasons they’ve been our primary grower for green beans, green-topped red beets, scallions, bell peppers, chard, green and red leaf lettuce, cilantro, and curly parsley. This makes their produce some of the first Local spring and summer veggies we share with shoppers – a welcome change from produce that has travelled many miles to make it to the Co-op shelves, and ultimately to our tables.

Steven and Landis find fulfillment in farming: “We really like growing food for people and get a deep sense of satisfaction knowing that hundreds of families across our region sit down to wholesome food from our farm. We also like the variety of daily tasks and the challenge of working with a living system (soil, plants, critters, chemistry, biology, weather, climate). All of these variables make for an infinite



Landis and Steven Spikerman, owners of Hermit Creek Farm.

set of challenges and likely scenarios that play out across our farm. With having farmed here for nearly 30 years, we feel we’ve seen nearly every challenge nature can throw at us from flood (our road closed for 4 years after the 2016 rain event and subsequent flooding), late and early freezes, hail, wind, drought, etc.”

Steven confesses that his least favorite aspect of the business is marketing, feeling that “selling themselves in a marketing sense just doesn’t seem to fit with the growing of food for some reason”, but we at the Co-op beg to differ. Hermit Creek Farm’s attention to detail carries all the way to the shelf. Their beautifully bundled produce is easily visible with their distinctive bright yellow and green labels.

As more and more Local seasonal offerings come to market, shoppers will find an extensive selection of Hermit Creek Farm offerings at both Whole Foods Co-op stores. Enjoy! 🥕



Northern Harvest Farm

GREAT FARMS, ALWAYS GROWING

Originally published in the Summer 2020 Garbanzo Gazette

Northern Harvest Farm, located in Wrenshall, Minnesota, spent the early part of the season working on a project that will sustain their business for years ahead. A new packing and storage facility increases their capacity and sets the farm up to continue to grow their business of growing fresh, healthy produce for the community.

The project began as the vision of farm co-managers Adam Kemp and Clara Salvesson, and farm owner Rick Dalen. Together they envisioned a space where they could easily and comfortably do all the work that comes after

the harvest – the cleaning, culling, bundling, packaging and storing of thousands of pounds of vegetables each season. In June, the 1400 sq ft facility was completed – just in time for the 2020 growing season.



The new facility includes a packing shed that is open on two sides. Here produce is cleaned and packaged. The space was designed with ergonomics and food safety in mind. The tables and tubs are readily moveable and height adjustable; and the antifungal and antimicrobial work surfaces meet all food safety and Organic handling standards. Once the vegetables

are cleaned and packed, they are moved into the adjacent cooler, which has the capacity to hold 30,000 lbs of produce and extend the season during which Northern Harvest can offer its fresh produce to CSA shareholders, area restaurants and local Co-ops.

Rick Dalen, owner of Northern Harvest Farm

The project was made possible in part by a grant from the Lakewinds Organic Field Fund. Similar to WFC's GIVE Program, LOFF is funded by the Owners and shoppers of the Lakewinds Co-op in the Twin Cities. According to Lakewinds General Manager Dale Woodbeck "This grant program allows us to support smaller organic farms, which is a key element in our effort to cultivate a vibrant and sustainable local food system." While Northern Harvest doesn't sell their produce to Lakewinds, LOFF supports projects that grow the capacity of food producers throughout the region.

The Co-op is excited to see LOFF's impact in our community and will begin to explore developing a similar program to support the growth of the local food economy in late 2020. 🥕



Northern Harvest Farm's new packing and storage facility.





Spirit Creek Farm

LOCAL FARMS COME TOGETHER TO CONTINUE SUCCESSFUL FERMENTING BUSINESS

Originally published in the Winter 2025 Garbanzo Gazette

Inside each jar of Spirit Creek's ferments are the combined efforts of three farms, four hardworking families, and years of experience. Fermented foods have a long history across many cultures, and Spirit Creek Farm has created a delicious line of ferments that highlight the flavor profiles of culinary traditions from across the globe, all while sourcing their raw ingredients from local farms.

Spirit Creek Farm was started in Cornucopia, WI, nearly two decades ago by Andrew and Jennifer Sauter-Sargent, who were searching for a way to live intentionally on the banks of Lake



Adam Kemp and Rick Dalen, owners of Spirit Creek Farm.
Photos courtesy of Spirit Creek Farm.



Superior while homeschooling their three children. Spirit Creek Farm emerged as the answer. According to Andrew, over the years, they have jarred about half a million "cornucopias of live cultured vegetables, bubbling with probiotics and lactobacilli to support digestion, health, and flavor."

Since its founding, Spirit Creek Farm has partnered with farmers in Wrenshall for their cabbage, including Northern Harvest Farm, Uff-Da Organics, and Food Farm. A strong relationship formed, and when the Sauter-Sargents decided to sell, Rick Dalen of Northern Harvest Farm and Adam Kemp of Uff-Da Organics did not ferment too long when considering the acquisition.



Spirit Creek Farm crew. Photo courtesy of Spirit Creek Farm.

"We are not only the kraut makers, we are also the farmers who grow the raw ingredients. We get to be part of each aspect of the process, which is pretty unique!"

– Rick Dalen, co-owner of Spirit Creek Farm

"The products themselves are of exceptionally high quality," Dalen remarked about Spirit Creek Farm's offerings. "We have worked very closely with the previous owners and successfully learned how to replicate the quality and consistency the Spirit Creek name is known for."

With the fermentation process now relocated to a new facility in Wrenshall, both growing and processing occur in the same location. "We are not only the kraut makers," Dalen explained. "We are also the farmers who grow the raw ingredients. We get to be part of each aspect of the process, which is pretty unique!"

Dalen shared that motivations for taking on Spirit Creek Farm included offering year-round employment to farmers as well as providing a stable and long-term market for the families who own the operation.

Spirit Creek Farm embodies the spirit of collaboration. Food Farm, which continues to partner with Spirit Creek, employed Dalen before he had his own farm. In addition, Kemp has been collaborating with Dalen as his co-manager at Northern Harvest for years. Like the jars of fermented goodness they create, every ingredient can stand alone, but when combined they also create something extraordinary.

Spirit Creek Farm highlights an all-star team of farmers dedicated to sustainable practices. These farms embody a vision for a more interconnected and responsible approach to food production and we are proud to showcase their passion at Whole Foods Co-op. 🌱



★
LOCAL

New Look!

Spirit Creek Farm jars will have beautiful new labels beginning in January.

Find these Spirit Creek Farm products in the refrigerated section at Whole Foods Co-op!



Farm Lola

Farmers Lucie and Jason grow honeyberries — oddly-shaped and conveniently-early fruit loaded with good-for-you vitamins.

By now, you might know of Locally Laid, the egg company featuring pasture-raised chickens and a brilliant marketing strategy. But were you aware of Jason and Lucie Amundsen's other project ... Farm Lola? That's right, in an effort to diversify their farm and create another income stream to help offset the cost of maintaining a farm, they added berry plants including blueberries, strawberries, and most importantly ... honeyberries! These oddly shaped, dark blue and purple berries are what you'd imagine



a blueberry mixed with a SweeTart would taste like ... utterly delicious.

Lucie explained that honeyberries come from the fruiting honeysuckle bush, also

known as Haskaps. They're popular in Russia where they thrive in Siberia. And yes, Duluth offers the same growing climate as Siberia!

Honeyberries are also full of health benefits. Not only antioxidants, they also have twice the vitamin A and four times the vitamin C as blueberries ... wow! Honeyberries have the highest content of phenolic acids and anthocyanin of the berries and contain significant sources of potassium, calcium, phosphorous, and iron.

Honeyberries are a conveniently early fruit typically ready in late June and early July. They're oblong and a little odd looking but what they lack in traditional looks, they make up in taste. There are different varieties, some finish sweet, making them great for table eating, and some tart, making them good for use in mixed drinks.

While our climate is perfect for growing honeyberries, it's not without its challenges. It has taken a lot of effort, time and expense to establish them on the farm. Another problem comes on the wing, particularly the Cedar Wax Wing, which will invite other Wax Wings to join the feast and eat the fruit right off the bushes. Jason came up with a great solution for that - he has an "alarm" which when activated will emit a recording of the bird's distress call which warns the birds to stay away from the field.

Additionally, climate change is definitely a challenge as the farm faces extreme heat and drought. Climate change is not a theory on Farm Lola - over the years they've noticed their berries ripening weeks earlier than they had in the past, a sure sign that our climate is changing. Other notable challenges are dealing with the heat, weeding, and, of course, the general worry about getting the crop in. "Farming is a high-risk venture and until all the fruit is off the field, it's hard to fully exhale" Lucie explained.

While it is challenging, there are certainly benefits that come from running Farm Lola. Lucie explained they get a great amount of joy from finding that people love this odd fruit they've planted, it's gratifying to take a chance on something different and see people really respond to it. They also enjoy seeing people come out to the farm, take in the beautiful fields and become enamored with the honeybees and the pollinator garden, and certainly with their flock of chickens, also known as the "Lola's" of Farm Lola!

The future of Farm Lola is to grow the berry business into a signature berry for the area. Ideally, it will draw tourists to the region as people come to Farm Lola to pick the berries and then head up to Duluth to stop into Love Creamery, Wild State Cider, Bent Paddle, and Ursa Minor to try delicious creations featuring ... you guessed it — honeyberries!

During the new season, go berrypicking at Farm Lola! Farm Lola is located at 840 Cemetery Road, (parking address: 852 Cemetery Road) Wrenshall, MN 55797. 🍷

Originally published in the Summer 2021 Garbanzo Gazette



Left: Lucie and Jason Amundsen, owners of Farm Lola and Locally Laid.

Below Left: Fresh-picked honeyberries at Farm Lola.

Photos courtesy Farm Lola



James Lake Farms

A BERRY SUSTAINABLE LOCAL MARSH

Originally published in the Fall 2023 Garbanzo Gazette

The cranberry is one of the most unsung heroes of autumn and holiday feasts. The bright red fruit, with a combination of sour and sweet invigorates the taste buds. When the mercury begins to fall, the cranberry harvest starts at one of our favorite cranberry farms, James Lake Farms. Just a couple of miles south of Three Lakes, Wisconsin, James Lake Farms is operated by John and Nora Stauner with their children, Ben and Sarah, and manager Tom Drozd, who pride themselves on their commitment to sustainable farming practices and providing the community with high-quality certified organic cranberries.

The team at James Lake Farms can be rightfully proud of their cranberry operation. From their exceptional care that fuels the cultivated fields to their masterful cranberry harvesting, they ensure the longevity of their farm. The cranberry marshes were started in the late 1940s, and many of the current cranberry beds date from this time. The Stauner family began the process of organic certification for their 189 acre farm in 2006, and achieved certified organic status in 2018. John informed us, "Converting to organic

was a business decision because we needed to find a value-added niche market, but it was also a decision driven by our desire to grow something that was good for people

and good for the land on which it was grown." James Lake Farms collaborates with MegaFood Vitamins, supplying them with the same great organic berries that we have at the Co-op. John let us know that MegaFood is also a company that values preserving the natural quality of food and the land it's cultivated on, making for a great partnership.

A good farmer does everything they can to produce a harvest every year. A great farmer gets a yearly harvest while improving the land and taking time to care for all who dwell on the land, flora and fauna included.

Pollinators, the little creatures that fly, buzz, and walk, transferring pollen from flower to flower, are necessities the farm can't do without. John shared a bit of his growing philosophy with us, "We use such things as composts for fertility and neem-oil-based products for pest control. I like to use the analogy that we are managing an ecosystem on the marsh in order to get as many cranberries as possible." Collaborating with seasoned beekeepers, the Stauners ensure the wellbeing of native pollinators, turning delicate cranberry blossoms into the beloved teardrop-shaped fruit.

There are different varieties of cranberries, called cultivars, each with unique characteristics. Cranberries can vary in size, shape, and even ripening time depending on their type. In 2022, James Lake Farms utilized over 12 cultivars of cranberries between their two marshes.

Cranberries grow low to the ground, with long trailing stems that root at various points. To maintain a healthy, upright growth ensuring good sunlight exposure, perennial cranberry vines must be replaced occasionally. The oldest



John and Nora Stauner with their children Ben and Sarah and their families.



Photos courtesy James Lake Farms.

vines at James Lake Farms have been replaced or "renovated" with industry-developed hybrids that grow harmoniously with organic farming practices. Three years of tending new plants are required before they develop a dense, even canopy that bears fruit.

Harvesting cranberries can be a complex process that relies heavily on the weather due to the season's unpredictability. A fascinating insight is that the reproductive buds of cranberries form on the plants in August of the previous year. This underscores the importance of sustainable farming practices. As the crew harvests the current crop, utmost care must be taken to avoid any damage to the following year's harvest. To ensure the best quality product, James Lake Farms conducts two separate harvests depending on the cranberry's destination, fresh or frozen. The first method involves gently plucking the berries directly from the vine, ideal for fresh produce markets. The harvester reaches into the vines and grasps a cluster of ripe berries. Ripe cranberries have air pockets that help them release from the stems. Plucking preserves the fruit's freshness for an extended period.

After collecting the first harvest of berries to sell fresh, the cranberry beds are then flooded, and the berries rise to the surface, creating a vivid crimson sea of berries to be collected by a floating harvester. Floating is a picturesque and efficient method for harvest. James Lake Farm utilizes this method for berries they freeze.

In 2022, James Lake Farms harvested over 2 million pounds of organic cranberries. For reference, an empty 20 foot shipping container typically weighs just under 5,000 lbs. If you imagine 400 containers stacked together, the total weight would be approximately 2 million pounds. That's a lot of cranberries!

During the unique and awe-inspiring harvest, James Lake Farms offers tours and sells freshly picked cranberries; John and his family love to see cranberry fans in person. On Saturdays during October, join John to explore the marsh and have your pollinator and cranberry questions answered. 🍷

Connect with James Lake Farm to learn more at jlfcranberries.com

Maple-Cranberry Sweet Potatoes

Ingredients

- ▶ 2 sweet potatoes
- ▶ 1 orange, juice and zest
- ▶ 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- ▶ 3 Tbsp. maple syrup
- ▶ ½ cup peeled and minced shallots
- ▶ 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- ▶ 3 ½ cups cranberries (fresh or frozen)
- ▶ salt to taste
- ▶ ground black pepper

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Pierce the skin of each sweet potato several times with a fork and place on a baking sheet. Bake for 45 to 60 minutes or until completely tender.
2. While potatoes are baking, begin heating oil in a small pot. Add shallots and ginger and sauté over medium-high heat for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the cranberries, orange juice and zest, maple syrup and a pinch each of salt and black pepper. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer on low for 10 to 15 minutes until the cranberries have broken down and the sauce is thickened. Remove from heat and stir in butter. Cut the baked sweet potatoes in half lengthwise, spoon warm cranberry sauce over each half and serve.

Recipe from Grocery.coop

Spirit Lake Native Farms

Originally published in the Spring 2020 Garbanzo Gazette

Bruce Savage is a member of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. He and his wife Tawny, together with their children, own and operate Spirit Lake Native Farms, producing handcrafted maple syrup and traditionally harvested wild rice—available in the bulk sections of both Whole Foods Co-op locations. The Savage family has been hand harvesting wild rice in the Great Lakes region for over 200 years and Bruce began harvesting as a child.

Wild rice (or Manoomin, meaning “good berry” in Ojibwe) grows primarily in the northern Great Lakes region. It has been a staple in the diets of Indigenous people for generations. To quote environmentalist and activist Winona LaDuke, “Where there’s rice, there’s Anishinaabe, where there’s Anishinaabe, there’s rice. It’s the first food of a baby, the last food for an elder. We simply can’t be a healthy people without our rice.”

In Indigenous culture, wild rice is regarded as a spiritual food and considered to be a gift from the Great Spirit or Creator. In accordance with this, tribal members never harvest wild rice without giving an offering of tobacco (Asema) and a prayer of gratitude.

First and foremost, wild rice is not rice at all, it is the seeds of aquatic grass. It is the Minnesota state grain and the only grain indigenous to North America. Native wild rice grows in lakes and rivers and requires just the right conditions to grow, ideally growing in water that naturally flows and fluctuates.

Due to high demand, most wild rice available in grocery stores is cultivated in rice paddies and is not grown wild or hand harvested. The texture and taste of wild rice is chewier with a distinctive roasted nutty flavor. Though less expensive, commercially grown rice is a hybrid that does not have these delicious, nuanced flavors found in naturally occurring wild rice.

The wild rice harvest lasts 4-6 weeks beginning mid-August through the end of September. Traditionally, the month of August (Manoominike Giizis) was referred to as “Ricing Moon”, the time when the Ojibwe left their homes to set up camps near the lakes for the harvest. There they would spend



Bruce and Tawny Savage of Spirit Lake Native Farms.
Photos by Andi Murphy/toasted sister podcast.

weeks gathering and processing as much wild rice as they could. These traditions continue and harvesting wild rice remains much the same as it was in the past.

Hand harvesting wild rice requires the work of many people, both on land as well as in canoes and boats in the rice beds. When Bruce was a small child he began working the shoreline bringing water to the workers and carrying canoes out to faraway rice beds.

The canoes usually contain just two people: the “poler” and the “knocker”. The poler stands in the back and uses a tall push pole, propelling the canoe through the rice beds. The knocker remains seated and using two cedar sticks (also known as flails), gently bends the rice stalks over the boat and taps the rice kernels off the stalk, into the boat. On a good day one boat can collect 400 pounds of wild rice.

Hand harvesting ensures only the mature ripe kernels are taken, leaving the remaining immature kernels to ripen and fall back into the water for the next year’s crop. The harvested wild rice is then taken to shore for processing and traditional methods include drying the rice in the sun, parching it over a fire, jiggling to separate the hulls from the seeds and finally winnowing and sorting. All Spirit Lake Native Farms’ wild rice is processed within a few days of being harvested to protect the flavor of the grain, which can begin to sour if not processed quickly.

Spirit Lake Native Farms combines traditional harvesting methods with modern machinery to process their wild rice. Using wood-fired tumbling machines for parching and hulling machines to remove the hulls. The use of modern machinery helps alleviate some of the more strenuous tasks and increases their production capabilities. 🥕

Duluth Flower Farm

Originally published in the Fall 2020 Garbanzo Gazette

We recently spoke with Brook Hoffbauer, who along with her husband Derek, are the Owner/Operators of Duluth Flower Farm (DFF), to learn more about their preparations for the upcoming Holiday season.

DFF offers gorgeous bouquets and arrangements throughout the spring and summer, as well as artistic decor in the fall like decorative corn stalks, colorful gourds, and dried floral bouquets. In late fall we begin to see their beautifully rustic balsam wreaths, swags and kissing balls, holiday porch pots and festive table arrangements (which all smell Ah-ma-zing!).

Quality and sustainability are of the utmost concern to the Hoffbauer family. While production of the bows and other ornaments for the holiday items begins on October 1st, they cannot actually make the wreaths until our area has seen two significantly hard frosts – this ensures the wreaths will last through the entire season (they've received photos from customers in the spring to show their wreath is still as beautiful as it was when first received!).

They harvest all of the materials for their orders as needed and with an eye toward forest management. Most of the materials they forage from their own land, the remainder not sourced on their property comes from land approved by the Department of Agriculture. For instance, the birch used in Brook's designs comes from land under power lines and would be mulched if not harvested with the proper permits.

Duluth Flower Farm is, like most farms, a family affair, with their four children pitching in when they can. In the busy season they employ an additional 10 to 13 full-time employees to fulfill all of the orders from both retail outlets as well as direct to customers. Brook mentioned how satisfying it is to see the same customers come back yearly, as their wreaths have become a part of that family's traditions. It's also fun to see how some of their customers are looking for more modern-themed designs. 🥕



Top photo: Derek and Brook Hoffbauer and family.
Photos courtesy of Duluth Flower Farm.

Native Wise

FROM WILD RICE TO BISON: NATIVE WISE'S COMMITMENT TO REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE



David and Patra Wise, owners of Native Wise, and family. Photos courtesy of Native Wise.



Native Wise is a Native-owned and operated family farm located on the historic 380-acre Dancing Crane Ranch on the Fond du Lac Reservation in Sawyer, MN. Owned by Patra and David Wise, they grow their products in a sustainable, chemical-free, pollinator-friendly ecosystem on land that has never been polluted with non-organic chemicals.

Native Wise produces wild rice, honey, maple syrup and beeswax candles, which are available at Whole Foods



Co-op. "Our goal has always been to create a profitable business while at the same time honoring our cultural heritage in all aspects of our business. We strive to utilize historical planting practices, heirloom seeds, and native varieties of everything we plant," said Patra.

In 2022, Native Wise added a herd of bison to their care. With Whole Foods Co-op's Grow Local Food Fund grant the same year, they purchased a refrigerated vehicle to aid in the transport of processed and frozen meats to outlet locations for sales. They also installed a set of freezers with enough capacity to contain all their processed meat. According to their website, they "intend to work with our partners at Dakota Pure Bison in South Dakota to supply top quality Bison products to our customers, continually improve our genetics and grow our herd here in Sawyer."

Native Wise also received a 2025 Grow Local Food Fund grant. This year they plan to install fencing on the ranch, which will allow them to add four new paddocks to their bison operation. This will increase the available forage for the bison, reduce the amount of hay brought in to feed the animals, and increase the capacity and number of bison in the herd. This will, in turn, increase the USDA-certified, processed bison meat available for sale to local restaurants and retail locations.



David Wise harvesting wild rice.

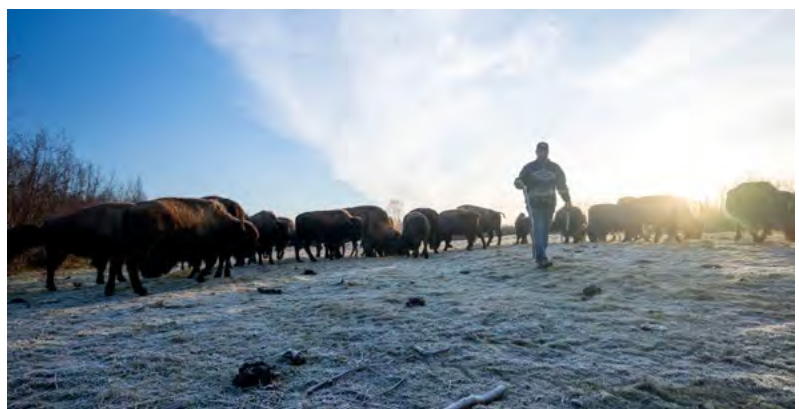


David Wise collecting sap with his son.

Native Wise will implement a rotational grazing schedule for its bison herd once it has completed the installation of the four additional paddocks. This system would closely mimic bison's natural grazing methods, having a positive environmental impact.

“By providing our bison herd with a natural forage source and rotating them across the landscape to allow for forage regeneration and incorporation of manure naturally, we will be creating an environment and lifestyle similar to what bison evolved with over centuries,” said Patra. “By creating this grazing system, we hope to maintain a healthy bison herd with no need for medications, antibiotics, or human interventions.”

Through their dedication to sustainability, cultural heritage, and environmental stewardship, Native Wise continues to grow in ways that honor both the land and their traditions. With the expansion of their bison operation and commitment to regenerative practices, they are not only providing high-quality, locally sourced products but also fostering a healthier environment. 🌱



Northern Waters Smokehaus

A LOCAL FAVORITE FOR SMOKED FISH SANDWICHES

Originally published in the Winter 2024 Garbanzo Gazette

Northern Waters Smokehaus is celebrated for its exceptional smoked fish, handcrafted sandwiches, and delectable delicacies. Founded in 1998 by Eric Goerdts, Northern Waters Smokehaus has consistently served the Duluth community with pride and dedication. Known for smoked fish, exquisite charcuterie, and fantastic sandwiches, the Smokehouse has been dedicated to using top-quality ingredients from nearby lakes and sustainable farms for over 25 years.

In November 2023, they turned the open sign off for the last time in the cozy little corner of the DeWitt-Sietz Marketplace. With a few flicks of the fins, they moved their operation to the lower floor in the same building, significantly scaling up in size.



Eric shared guiding principles the business brought with them from their first location to their new storefront: "We never underestimate our customers, we never abandon our co-workers, we never dumb our food or culture down, and we never let the dark side win. We always look to our food as the beacon—the answer to most questions, difficulties, and problems our business faces."

Situated near Lake Superior, Northern Waters Smokehaus is committed to sourcing fresh, high-quality fish. They partner with Duluth native and Co-op producer Dave Rogotzke and his company, Simple Gifts Syrup and Salmon, who catches King Salmon and Sockeye Salmon from Bristol Bay, Alaska.



Northern Waters new location in the DeWitt-Sietz Marketplace
Photos courtesy Northern Waters Smokehaus



"We never underestimate our customers, we never abandon our co-workers, we never dumb our food or culture down, and we never let the dark side win. We always look to our food as the beacon — the answer to most questions, difficulties, and problems our business faces."

— Eric Goerd, owner

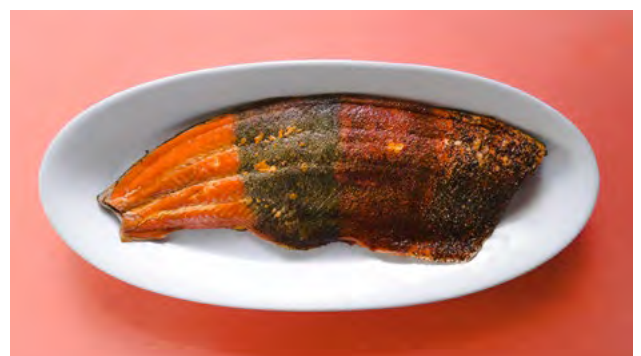
Additionally, they source wild Lake Trout, Whitefish, and Herring, from Lake Superior Fish Company in Knife River, Minnesota and Bodin's Fisheries of Bayfield, Wisconsin, which fishes the Chequamegon Bay on Lake Superior's South Shore. The Smokehaus adheres to core principles of curing, smoking, and packaging each product with meticulous attention to detail, ensuring customers experience the purest flavors of the region. Alongside their renowned fish, they offer handcrafted sausages, bison jerky, bacon, charcuterie, and more.

Northern Waters Smokehaus is dedicated to sustainability, incorporating environmentally friendly practices into their business. By collaborating with regional fisheries that prioritize the conservation of fish populations, this supports the local economy while safeguarding natural ecology. By choosing Northern Waters Smokehaus patrons can indulge in culinary delights while supporting a business that promotes the local economy and sustainable practices.

Recently, Northern Waters products were added to the Co-op deli section, allowing patrons the convenience to relish the same quality and culinary expertise that has made this Smokehaus a local favorite.

While the Duluth community adores Northern Waters Smokehaus, their off-site sales have earned them national recognition. Through online platforms, customers from across the United States can order and enjoy the distinct flavors by this Minnesota Smokehaus. Positive word-of-mouth testimonials and glowing online reviews bolster their reputation, attracting customers from near and far who seek the quality and authenticity embodied by this beloved Minnesota Smokehaus.

Whether strolling through Canal Park or planning a get-together at home, Northern Waters Smokehaus's commitment to excellence, sustainability, and customer satisfaction offers an unforgettable culinary experience that will leave you craving more. 🥕



Find Northern Waters smoked salmon and lake trout at the Co-op!



Y-ker Acres

A COMPASSIONATE APPROACH TO RAISING ANIMALS FOR FOOD

Originally published in the Spring 2025 Garbanzo Gazette

As society is increasingly focused on sustainable living and the ethical treatment of animals, Y-ker Acres stands out as an example of positive farming practices. Located in the heart of Carlton, MN, Y-ker Acres is more than just a farm; it embodies a philosophy that emphasizes humane animal treatment, environmental sustainability, and community engagement. Through their ethical farming method, Y-ker Acres contributed about 50 different pork and beef products to our local food economy last year, equaling roughly 80,000 pounds of meat.



Alison and Joshua, owners of Y-ker Acres, with their sons Jasper and Griffin.

The Stampers

In November 2021, Joshua and Alison Stamper became the proud owners of Y-ker Acres, having purchased the land and business from Matt and Sara Weik. The Stampers are dedicated to providing the highest-quality pork and beef products by raising their animals humanely and ethically. "Less than 1% of pork is raised outside with access to pasture," Alison said of the pork industry. "But at Y-ker Acres, animals spend their entire lives outdoors, living their best lives," Joshua added.

Joshua and Alison do not manage the farm alone; they share this journey with their young sons, Jasper and Griffin, who are excited to grow up on a livestock farm and learn everything involved in caring for the animals. Y-ker Acres is also supported by two year-round employees.

Animal Husbandry

Y-ker Acres' core philosophy revolves around the belief that animals deserve respect and compassion. This belief guides every aspect of their farming operations, from the animals' living conditions to the methods used for processing them for food. The farm operates under strict ethical guidelines and is deeply committed to raising animals in a manner that prioritizes their well-being.

The animals at Y-ker Acres have 80 acres of space to roam freely. "All of our animals have 24/7 access to open pasture at every stage of their lives post-weaning," Alison said. The animals always have access to this natural environment, as well as a vegetarian diet free from harmful additives.

One of the most critical tasks on the farm is 'Cozy Patrol,' conducted twice a day. Its purpose is to ensure that animals have everything they need, including food, water, shelter, and reassurance that they are being cared for to ensure their animals lead a 'full existence,' as they refer to their animals' daily lives.



Sustainable Practices for a Healthier Planet

Y-ker Acres recognizes that food production significantly impacts the environment. Their farming practices are designed to minimize this impact through sustainable methods that benefit both the land and the animals. This includes rotational grazing, which helps restore soil health and encourages biodiversity. By working with nature rather than against it, Y-ker Acres ensures that their practices are environmentally friendly and sustainable for future generations.

Additionally, the farm is committed to reducing waste. Animal waste is composted and used to enrich the soil, creating about 100 tons of compost each year to improve the sandy soil. This reinforces Y-ker Acres' commitment to environmental stewardship.



A New Kind of Animal Agriculture

Y-ker Acres employs a holistic approach that not only promotes the health of the animals but also contributes to the quality of the food produced. By treating animals with care and dignity, Y-ker Acres aims to foster a relationship between humans and animals rooted in respect rather than exploitation.

As they continue to grow and evolve, Y-ker Acres serves as a model for a new kind of animal agriculture that respects the natural instincts and needs of animals, prioritizes environmental health, and fosters a sense of responsibility within the community. Their philosophy serves as a reminder that raising animals for food can be done in a way that honors and respects their lives, ultimately leading to better food and a healthier planet. 🌱



- ▲ A selection of Y-ker Acres meat products is available at both Whole Foods Co-op stores, including brats, bacon, sausage, and more!



Photos courtesy Almanac Coffee



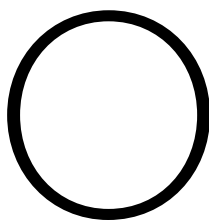
“I see business as a form of creative expression and an opportunity to share more broadly the values I believe in: sustainability, the wellbeing of our community, and a path to success that doesn’t come at the expense of people or environment.”

– Justin Wood, owner of Almanac Coffee

Almanac Coffee

A CAN-DO COFFEE ROASTERY

Originally published in the Winter 2023 Garbanzo Gazette



One of my favorite things to do is to watch the sunrise over Lake Superior with a freshly brewed cup of coffee in my hand. The vibrant colors spread across the sky, inviting us to a new day. It is a warm comforting feeling that starts the day out right. With a great cup of coffee, you can bring that feeling with you wherever you start your day, then you have something very special. Let’s take a closer look at that cup of coffee. I had the privilege to ask the owner of Almanac Coffee about their work and I am excited to share it with you.



Almanac Coffee has been around for about four years. It is nestled neatly in the back corner of Dovetail Café at the Duluth Folk School in Lincoln Park. The owner of Almanac Coffee is a charismatic young man named Justin Wood who recently purchased the business after working several years alongside the former

owner, Russel Crawford. The bright glass-encased roasting room invites onlookers to peer in. It is reminiscent of the lure of an old taffy puller, twisting and turning a delicious treat that builds anticipation with the aroma of a freshly roasted bean. Justin studied coffee in New Zealand and also has a background as a beer brewer. He tells us that “Much like the craft beer industry, coffee has undergone a renaissance with significant changes in how coffee is sourced, processed, and roasted. One positive trend that has come out of this is a greater transparency in farming practices, the relationship that bonds consumers with farmers who grow the coffee and the economics behind equitable trade.”

Living up to the name Almanac, an annual calendar, Justin points out that “Almanac (coffee) is a seasonal pursuit.” He emphasizes that Almanac does not really have a bean that sticks around all year. “Our beans are ever rotating. They follow the harvest cycle and by doing so, we try to select beans that are the absolute freshest.” Justin notes, “At any given time, we could have beans from Tanzania or even as far away as East Timor.” East Timor is a Southeast Asian Island nation between Indonesia and Australia. That is about 9,194 miles from the Co-op! Almanac beans are also sourced from a few fewer miles away, the Americas. This includes Columbia, Mexico, Honduras, and Brazil.

The beans might be from all around the world but the heart of Almanac is definitely right here at home! “The struggles that exist in our community are little different than those found elsewhere; food security, economic justice, environmental stewardship, corporate accountability, and a general adherence to a life with dignity. To that end, we have built into our business a dedicated budget which allows us to continue to

support causes we believe in. This winter we will be supplying warming shelters around Duluth with coffee. Starting in the spring, Almanac will be partnering with several community organizations to address issues of food security by donating planters made with the burlap bags our beans come in. Aside from the re-use of materials, my hope is that this project will allow participants to take satisfaction in growing their own food with minimal/no buy-in on their part. I really believe there is nothing more noble than the ability to grow one's own food," Justin iterates.

Some of the unique challenges Justin is up against, include green buying (the process of working with brokers and importers in purchasing coffee from farmers), getting to know the ways in which technology has changed the industry and in general, the many facets of running a small business.

Watching a Roastmaster work is really like watching an artist blend different hues onto a canvas. The beans must be selected, and having knowledge of the smell, texture, and color of the pre-roasted bean are indicators as to how the bean needs to be roasted. Once the temperature has been selected and the roasting begins, the Roastmaster needs to watch the beans carefully as they start to darken, and the smell and appearance go from hay-like to a chocolaty brown with notes of caramel. The roasting process takes about 15 minutes depending on the bean. Justin samples the freshly roasted beans, "The proof is in the taste." If satisfied with the roast, the beans will be dropped down into the motorized cooling tray to bring their temperature back to ambient as quickly as possible, and of course, fill the room with an intoxicating aroma.

Justin expressed, "I see business as a form of creative expression and an opportunity to share more broadly the values I believe in and that I feel most people care about; sustainability, the well-being of our community, and a path to success that doesn't come at the expense of people or environment. In a nutshell these are our values:

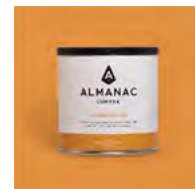
► **Seasonality:** We source and roast fresh-crop coffees that meet strict environmental, social, and quality standards. Our offerings change throughout the year to highlight a variety of growing regions, processing methods and farmers.

► **Single Origin:** Our coffees are traceable to cooperative and/or farm level, strengthening the global connections between us all. We are in the process of building long-term, sustainable relationships with growers and importers, and we invite all to be a part of this, so we know exactly where our coffee comes from.

► **Flavor Forward:** Every coffee we offer has a unique flavor profile. We roast each batch to highlight specific aspects of terroir, processing method, and variety. Our seasonal selections are carefully curated to include a diverse selection of coffee styles and attributes.

► **Community:** As an independent, small-business, collaboration is central to our work and we continually find ways to positively contribute to our local community. Beyond Duluth, we support the growth and success of specialty coffee throughout the Midwest by participating in making direct relationships between farmers, importers, roasters, baristas, and customers."

In the search for a more environmentally sound package, it seems that what is old is new again. For those of us who remember sorting through nuts and bolts or buttons and coins with a grandparent, they were almost always kept in a tin coffee can. Tin cans because of their reuse and 100% recyclability are the best option. The good old coffee can is said to be much better for the Earth and of course much better for the coffee. Look for Almanac's new tin can packaging at the Co-op in the New Year!



Justin tells us that "The cans are similar to that of a nut can and measure 4" in diameter and 4" tall. They have a foil lid with a vent and a plastic cap for reuse. They have a much smaller profile than the bags I had before which stood over twice as tall." This is a great step in keeping coffee bags out of landfills, not to mention my coffee will now sit properly in the cupboard. Updating packaging to create a more environmentally sound product speaks volumes about the business practices of Almanac Coffee. I would like to thank Justin for the opportunity to learn about his passion and Almanac Coffee.

Now, I am a lover of coffee but when it comes to communicating the subtle notes of the bean juice's bouquet my vocabulary is slightly anemic. I usually describe it as "it's hot", "this coffee is angry" or "Can I get a gingersnap with this?" So, to hear an expert give their description of a properly roasted and brewed cup of coffee is truly an experience. If you do get the chance to sit down with someone like Justin for a coffee flight, I highly recommend it. He described a coffee from Rwanda, "Like a tea, some black notes, a slight stone fruit, and some vanilla bean." Now, you might just be someone who fills the cup and drinks it, but when you do get a moment to sit back and enjoy a fine cup of coffee, stop. Breathe. Smell the coffee, taste it, and explore the different idiosyncrasies of each bean and the different roasts. Don't worry, gas station coffee will still taste the same as it did last week, but you will now have an appreciation for craft and skill that almost always goes unnoticed in our morning cup of coffee. 🍌



Underwood Coffee

SELF-PROCLAIMED SCRAPPY
UNDERDOGS LOOK TO MAKE
SPECIALTY COFFEE MORE
FUN, APPROACHABLE, AND
HONEST TO ALL



Jake Underwood and
Samantha Levine of
Underwood Coffee.

Photos courtesy
Underwood Coffee

Beginning a new company in the middle of a global pandemic is certainly not anyone's idea of perfect timing, but that's exactly what Jake Underwood and Samantha Levine are trying to accomplish with Underwood Coffee. Duluth's newest coffee roasters officially began their business in October 2020, but they are definitely not newcomers to the Minnesota coffee scene.

Jake, co-owner and Director of Coffee at Underwood has worked in the specialty coffee industry for close to 9 years, starting as a barista at Duluth Coffee Company.



During his three years at DCC he continued to grow his expertise, eventually becoming their Director of Education & Training. From Duluth he then moved to Minneapolis where he became the Production Manager/Head Roaster for Spyhouse Coffee Roasters.

After six years there he decided the timing was right to make the move back to Duluth and open his own coffee roastery. For Jake, starting Underwood Coffee has given him complete creative control of something he has a great passion for.

Sam, co-owner and Director of Retail at Underwood Coffee, was born and raised in Minneapolis and has worked in the service industry for six years, three in specialty coffee. Sam's passion for coffee stems from a duty to showcase the work of dedicated coffee producers while providing warm customer service that leaves people feeling at ease. Sam has always wanted to work for herself, and took the opportunity to move from Minneapolis to Duluth to open Underwood Coffee head on.

The two consider themselves to be the scrappy underdogs in the industry. Underwood Coffee was built from the ground up with very little startup money—in the midst of a pandemic— but they aren't letting that get them down. What matters most is their genuine care for the products they produce, as well as the people who buy them.

Their goal is to make specialty coffee more fun, approachable, and honest to all. In order to meet that goal Underwood only sources coffees from producers and importers they trust and respect. They roast their coffee with intention and care, and cup each roast making sure it meets their standards. Coffee cupping essentially means they take the time to taste every roast of coffee before it goes out the door to make sure it's up to their standards of quality. This ensures their coffees are approachable to all those pouring it, and comforting with each and every sip. If for some reason a roast doesn't pass their standards during evaluation, they donate it locally.



The long-term goal for the pair would be to build out their own roastery and tasting room open to the public.

One of the biggest challenges for Underwood Coffee currently is trying to find creative ways to grow a business with very little startup money, and get the word out during a global pandemic. Despite the challenges of growing a new business during trying times, there are still plenty of reasons to celebrate, one being especially personal to Jake. Later this year, Underwood Coffee will offer a coffee from a producer named Alfonso Cordova, who's farm he was fortunate enough to visit when traveling in Peru last Fall. Cordova is producing some of the finest coffees Jake has ever tasted and is an inspiring person.

The long-term goal for the pair would be to build out their own roastery and tasting room open to the public. It would be a space for the Duluth community to come see and experience what they're doing in a cafe setting. They hope to take they're doing and share it with as many people as possible. Several varieties of Underwood Coffee are now available at Whole Foods Co-op, and we are proud to support this dynamic Duluth duo! 🍌

Update: A new storefront will open soon in Downtown Duluth!

Originally published in the Spring 2021 Garbanzo Gazette



Brainstorm Bakery

BAKING UP BRILLIANCE

Originally published in the Fall 2024 Garbanzo Gazette

It all started with a giggle. While at a party with friends, Brian Strom asked, "What if we made a cranberry apple granola and called it Crapola?" His wife Andrea laughed along, but a seed was planted. Not having any experience in business at the time, the couple nearly flushed the idea. However, they persevered, and in 2007, the couple founded Brainstorm Bakery.

In a cozy, rustic, off-the-grid cabin, Brian and Andrea tested different granola recipes made with their wood-fired stove. They held granola-tasting parties, and after dozens of iterations, the original Crapola recipe was born. Their product from beautiful Ely, MN, was about to capture people's taste buds and funny bones nationwide. Brainstorm Bakery made its first sale in June 2007 at the Ely farmer's market.



Within a year, Crapola was on the shelves of local grocery stores, including Whole Foods Co-op. People loved the granola, and a local following was building. But their brand was about to have a significant growth moment: four months after launching, a sign created by one of the local grocery stores was featured on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno.

As sales increased, Brainstorm Bakery's rental kitchen's size hindered production. In 2009, they purchased a larger production facility. A few short years later, due to popular demand, they had again outgrown their space. Lacking



Brian Strom, owner of Brainstorm Bakery sampling at Whole Foods Co-op in 2015

the capital to support their expansion, Brian and Andrea turned to Kickstarter and crowdsourcing to secure the funds. In true Minnesota fashion, the community came through to raise \$40K to fuel the local business.

Although the team enjoyed running the business, they missed interaction with customers. While planning building

renovations, they incorporated a public retail space. This aspect of the business immediately began to thrive!

Increased success led to increased customers, and Brainstorm was moving again from The Crapola! World Headquarters to the Brainstorm Bakery that features a cafe/coffee shop.

Their current location has become a tourist hotspot and a meeting place for the local Ely community. Brian shared that the bakery is a happiness factory where they can "make the world a better place, starting with a fun little breakfast."



Andrea Strom, owner of Brainstorm Bakery at Crapola World Headquarters in 2018

Brainstorm Bakery, an anagram of Brian Strom, has proven that creativity and courage can lead to immense success, now offering four unique, gluten-free, and delicious granola flavors that showcase their trademark humor and small batch quality for its "regular" customers.



Crapola (The Original)

A delicious combination of toasted grains, seeds, and nuts provide an earthy flavor, followed by a light touch of honey. The granola is moderately sweet. The dried apple comes through, accented by crunchy and tangy dried cranberries. When served with ice-cold Johnston's Riverview Farm whole milk, it is a match made in heaven.



Colon-ial Times

Featuring a blend of oats, grains, and nuts sweetened with honey and a whisper of maple syrup, the enthusiastic flavors of strawberry and blueberry come through bright as fireworks on the Fourth of July. Combine it with your favorite yogurt to create a delicious parfait.



Number Two

Harkening to the granola profiles of the late 60s and early 70s, it features an intense cranberry flavor combined with hemp hearts, ground flax seeds, chia seeds, puffed brown rice, and baked oats. The essence of orange and cardamom adds to the experience. Number Two pairs well with the scent of patchouli and a cup of Rishi lavender tea. This variety is nut-free.



Kissy-Poo

Reminiscent of a sweet Valentine's Day, this granola combines classic flavors of chocolate and raspberry with oats, almonds, buckwheat, and puffed rice. Vanilla rounds out the flavors. It goes well with a cup of dark roast coffee. Kissy-Poo granola is vegan.

"What if we made a cranberry apple granola and called it Crapola?"

Reflecting on the journey of Crapola and Brainstorm Bakery, Brian warns "to be careful what we say in front of our wives. It could change your life forever." And change their lives it did. From a joke at a party, it has become a destination brick-and-mortar that employs 15 community members and is on track to distribute 80,000 lbs. of granola this year. Brian and Andrea Strom have been doing their part to add to customers' lives by lifting spirits and uplifting the community.

Find all four flavors of granola at both Co-ops stores. 🍌

Brian and Andrea Strom with their children. Photos courtesy Brainstorm Bakery.



Love Creamery

Handcrafted, small-batch ice cream made with love fuels Nicole's creativity and care for community

We all scream for ice cream! Especially when it's from Love Creamery! Nicole Wilde and her joyful team enthusiastically scoop their delectable creations for throngs of locals and visitors alike from their shop located in the Lincoln Park Craft District. For Nicole, Love Creamery sums up everything she believes in: environmentalism, sustainability, support of local businesses, ethically-sourced high-quality ingredients, and deliciously creative desserts!



The Love Creamery handcrafted ice cream shop has been doling out cones, cups, sandwiches, and more to their fans since it's opening in 2018, but the business actually began in 2014 with a small cart at local farmer's markets, events and festivals. An Instructor of Marketing at UMD, Nicole had

always wanted to own her own business which would enable her to be creative and live her values. Once settling on the idea for her business, Nicole spent several years studying about making ice cream and traveling to research exactly what she wanted her ice cream to be.

A farmer and gardener at heart, Nicole knew that she really wanted to support local as much as possible. Love Creamery sources a large majority of their ingredients from suppliers which readers will recognize: honey from Bar Bell Bee Ranch, fruit from North Wind Organic Farm, baked goods from Positively 3rd Street Bakery, coffee roasts from Duluth Coffee Company, syrup from Simple Gifts, and berries from Farm Lola to name a few! For Nicole, who's also very passionate about protecting our environment, it makes sense to buy ingredients as close to home as possible, which has the added benefit of supporting our local farmers and producers. Ingredients that cannot be secured locally are purchased through sustainable businesses to ensure their availability for years to come.

At Love Creamery, they are focused on making every ice cream flavor as delicious as possible using real, thoughtfully selected ingredients. All of their ice cream flavors start in small batches and each batch is crafted by hand to get the perfect mix of ingredients. They churn their ice cream on-site daily to deliver the freshest treats, with each recipe having a slightly different process. For example, recently they have been searching for locally-grown rhubarb which they will first make into jam or rhubarb crisp to add to the ice cream base to churn. Many of their concoctions need a great deal of attention, particularly their vegan and gluten-free treats!

Another long-term goal for Nicole is to continue growing her company into a strong local business with well cared-for staff (currently, 39 people work with Nicole at Love Creamery). A huge leap forward in realizing this goal is the opening of the second Love Creamery location in Canal Park! The opening of this second storefront will increase their ability to provide the tasty frozen treats we've all come to love!

When asked how much ice cream they produce in a week, Nicole laughed. "A LOT" was her reply, then elaborated that not only was it enough to serve over 80,000 patrons last year (during a pandemic!) but also enough to fulfill orders for their retail pints which are found at local businesses, including Whole Foods Co-op!

If you've been in their store over the years, you've no doubt noticed some changes, specifically the gigantic, whimsical mural created by local artist Shawna Gilmore (some readers may remember Shawna's past exhibits at the Co-op!). This mural is indicative of another passion and goal for Nicole, supporting local artists. Over time her plan is to feature many local art pieces and potentially incorporate some opportunities for philanthropy down the road to "celebrate goodness" within our community!

Find their wonderful desserts in our freezer section at your Co-op and enjoy! 🥕

Originally published in the Summer 2021 Garbanzo Gazette



Nicole Wilde, Owner and Founder of Love Creamery.



Lucky Charms ice cream from Love Creamery.



Lime ice cream with blueberry crumble from Love Creamery.

Photos courtesy Love Creamery

For Nicole, Love Creamery sums up everything she believes in: environmentalism, sustainability, support of local businesses, ethically-sourced high-quality ingredients and deliciously creative desserts!

Mike & Jen's Hot Cocoa

BUSINESS COMMUNITY ADDS WARMTH, SUPPORT FOR LOCAL HOT COCOA

Originally published in the Winter 2021 Garbanzo Gazette

Is there anything more nostalgic than a steaming mug of hot cocoa? Just one whiff and you are immediately transported back to childhood and wintry days filled with sledding, snow forts, rosy cheeks and chilly toes. Warming up with hot cocoa was a necessity after spending the day playing outside.

This was the case, and the moment of inspiration for Dean Packingham, creator of Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix. His daughter Jen had been playing outside their Duluth home. Upon entering the house, she asked her dad for some cocoa. Dean obliged, but while reading the ingredients on the label was dismayed to realize many of the ingredients were unpronounceable chemicals. Thinking back to his own childhood, Dean remembered his mom making a cocoa mix kept in a Tupperware



container and knew he could do the same for his own kids using all-natural, quality ingredients. This revelation soon became a quest to make the most awesome hot cocoa mix ever, one that was water based yet still rich and creamy. After eight months of obsessive trial and error, 70 different cocoa powders and numerous milk powders, Dean finally found

success. An all-natural, water based hot cocoa blend that contained only five ingredients which his children loved!

The first year they gave their cocoa mix to friends and family as gifts and were often surprised when asked if it could be purchased, thinking everyone was just being nice. That changed after a chance meeting with the owner of the Duluth Kitchen Company, Denise Kaitala. Dean mentioned his cocoa mix and Denise asked to try a sample, which she too loved. She helped Dean navigate the process of getting his product shelf ready and was the first to buy Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix for retail.



“To this date, I’ve never encountered someone in the business community that didn’t honestly want to help me.”

Soon, orders for his simple and delicious cocoa mix outpaced his one-man show production capability. Enter close friend and fellow trained scientist Amanda Cunningham. With her help they were able to increase production to meet the ever-increasing demand.

Another member of the Duluth business community was instrumental in keeping Dean's fledgling company going when he lost his first commercial kitchen space. Eric Faust, founder of the Duluth Coffee Company, gave Dean a key to his store so he could continue making his cocoa. Of this gesture Dean said, “Only in Duluth I believe that would happen. He told me I could come in any time after hours and make as much as I wanted. He even set me up with an area where I could store my inventory. I am forever indebted to him for believing in me.”



Photos courtesy of Mike & Jen's Cocoa.



Dean Pickerman and Amanda Cunningham.



Dean sampling Mike & Jen's cocoa at Whole Foods Co-op.



Dean, Jen, and Mike.



Mike & Jen's Cocoa Mix is available at Whole Foods Co-op.

Much of the expansion of Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix has been through word of mouth, and by attending events and trade shows. Though in school, both Mike (college senior) and Jen (high school senior) continue to work with their dad, helping out at shows and in the Cocoa Mobile — an old Star Tribune delivery van they repurposed to bring cocoa to the masses. According to Dean, "It's so fun for people to meet the names behind the company. The kids could not be prouder. They've learned so much about business from doing this, and I've tried to involve them as much as I could throughout the process. While they aren't always involved in the day-to-day operation, they go to as many shows as they can."

As much as it is a business venture, Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix is really about connection to family and community. Dean recognizes and deeply appreciates the tremendous support he's received. "Sometimes I can't even believe how lucky I am to be able to do this. I love the community that I was born in (Duluth), and I am so thankful to everyone for their warm support of what we do. To this date, I've never encountered someone in the business community that didn't honestly want to help me. I try to give that back to others as well, offering advice and support to help them. We're all in this together, and I truly believe Duluth/Superior 'gets it'. We are very lucky to be a Duluth, Minnesota success story!"

You can find Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix at Whole Foods Co-op, available in both canister and single-serve packets. 🍌

Positively 3rd Street Bakery

A SWEET SUCCESS STORY

Originally published in the Spring 2025 Garbanzo Gazette

Nestled in Duluth's Hillside neighborhood is Positively 3rd Street Bakery, a local establishment known for its delectable baked goods and commitment to employee ownership.

Founded in 1983 by a group of passionate bakers dedicated to a cooperative mindset, Positively 3rd Street Bakery was created to foster community spirit while producing high-quality artisanal baked goods. The bakery operates as an employee-owned cooperative, allowing employees to share in the business's profits. This commitment to employee ownership aligns with the bakery's mission to cultivate a positive workplace culture and provide quality goods to customers.



Currently, the bakery has thirteen worker-owners, with plans to add another this year. Working at a small, employee-owned business involves more than just submitting an application; every employee must contribute and be willing to take on various roles. "Everyone is hired in production," said Angi, one of the worker-owners, "but eventually finds their talent in business ownership."

The founders understood the importance of using high-quality, locally-sourced ingredients, a practice that is still crucial to the bakery today. "Our most important factors when considering an ingredient vendor are quality, locality, and cost," said Angi. This focus, combined with traditional baking methods, quickly garnered a loyal following among Duluth residents.



Positively 3rd Street Bakery worker-owners.

Different Cooperative Business Structures

While both 3rd Street Bakery and Whole Foods Co-op are both cooperatives, the two businesses reflect different structures within the cooperative model. Whole Foods Co-op is a consumer cooperative. In this model, the business is owned by its shoppers, who democratically elect a Board of Directors to guide its operations. In contrast, Positively 3rd Street Bakery is a worker-owned cooperative, which means they are owned and run solely by the workers, who have a controlling interest in the business and elect the governing body. While daily operations may differ, both businesses uphold the internationally accepted cooperative principles to direct their overarching missions.

Current Offerings

Positively 3rd Street Bakery is a vibrant hub for locals and visitors alike, offering an array of delicious options that include artisan breads, pastries, cookies, and savory items. The bakery utilizes some original recipes from 1983 while also creating new favorites, emphasizing sustainability by using organic ingredients whenever possible and prioritizing environmentally friendly practices.



A Unique Way to Give Back

In the spirit of community engagement, Positively 3rd Street Bakery focuses on local involvement and mutual aid. Historically, the bakery spends little to no money on advertising, redirecting those funds to support community organizations through donations and fundraisers. They actively participate in farmers' markets, food festivals, and community support initiatives, creating strong connections in the region through their mission of unity and support.

Looking to the Future

The employee-owners of Positively 3rd Street Bakery have ambitious plans. Given that the bakery has outgrown its current location, a two-story house, the group is actively seeking a more suitable space. "We have toured many potential buildings for a new location," Angi said, "but we love and are dedicated to the Hillside."

Despite the challenges posed by their limited space, they aim to continually innovate their product offerings by exploring new flavors and expanding the menu to attract a broader audience.

With a rich history rooted in artisan baking and a promising future focused on innovation and sustainability, Positively 3rd Street Bakery invigorates the local food scene. Find their fresh baked sweets and breads daily on the shelves at both the Hillside and Denfeld stores! 🍞



Positively 3rd Street Bakery at the Lincoln Park Farmer's Market.

Positively 3rd Street Bakery was created to foster community spirit while producing high-quality artisanal baked goods.

Co-op Staff Favorites: Positively 3rd Street Bakery



Blackbird Bread

Robert

Finance Clerk



Raspberry Bar

Brandon

Grocery Assistant Manager, Hillside



Eclipse Cookie

Lauren

Curbside Clerk, Hillside



Blueberry Scone

Warren

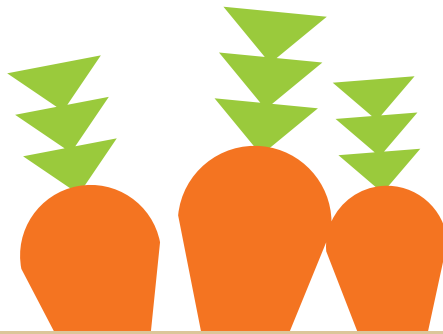
Produce Clerk, Denfeld



International Year of Cooperatives

Cooperatives Build a Better World

The United Nations has designated 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives. In recognition, Whole Food Co-op will be celebrating throughout the year! We'll be highlighting cooperatives we're in cooperation with in-store and here in the *Garbanzo Gazette*. We're excited to share the stories of co-ops that are creating quality products while having a positive impact on communities across the globe.



WHOLE FOODS
CO·OP
