

LINWAITERS' GAZETTE

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Hepworth Farms: The Seventh Generation

By Brian Dentz

Imagine being able to go to a farm and ask them to plant exactly what you'd like to see end up on your dinner table. That's the kind of relationship the Coop has with Hepworth Farms, run by twin sisters in the Hudson Valley.

"That farm is a very big deal to us and we are a big deal to them," said Allen Zimmerman, a General Coordinator at the Park Slope Food Coop, which has been buying produce from Hepworth Farms for 30 years. Today, Hepworth is the Coop's largest local supplier of fruits and vegetables.



PHOTO BY BRUCE WEISS

(L to R) Gerry Greco, Amy Hepworth and Gail Hepworth.

Of the 230 produce items available at the PSFC, about 150 are grown locally during the peak of local growing season. And about half of those local items come from Hepworth Farms, Zimmerman said.

Hepworth Farms is in Mil- ton, NY, about 88 miles north of the Coop. The same family has farmed it since 1818. Twin sisters Amy and Gail Hep- worth are now the seventh generation on the farm. They work alongside partner Gerry Greco to make it all happen.

Gail joined her sister Amy to work full-time on the farm five years ago after a 25-year career as a biomedical engi- neer. "Mostly I did this because of Amy's talent and the demand" for her produce,

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Decreasing Your Feminine Footprint

By Taigi Smith

How many times have you perused the aisles of the Park Slope Food Coop and silently wondered, "What the heck is that?" For me, the most interesting section of the PSFC is the health and beauty aisle, full of notions and potions, oils and gadgets, balms and goo. And while I've purchased scores of oils and bath salts, I've never considered trying one of the many alternative feminine hygiene products available at our Coop. I often looked at them with curiosity but the buck stopped there. Unlike my veg- etables, I like my feminine products conventional. I want to use them and then throw them away. And evidently, I am not alone.

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ART BY PAUL BUCKLEY

Along U.S. coastlines, tampon applicators make up 2.2% of the total debris field, more than syringes, condoms and plastic six-pack rings combined.

Next General Meeting on July 30

The General Meeting of the Park Slope Food Coop is held on the last Tuesday of each month. The July General Meeting will be on Tuesday, July 30, at 7:00 p.m. at MS 51, 350 Fifth Ave., between Fourth and Fifth Sts. Enter on Fourth St. cul-de-sac. The Fourth St. entrance is handicap-accessible.

For more information about the GM and about Coop governance, please see the center of this issue.

ELECTION RESULTS

The election for two three-year terms for the Board of Directors took place at the Food Coop's June 25 Annual and General Meeting. The winners were Zoey Laskaris and Imani Q'Ryn.

Officers of the corporation were also elected. These are: President Bill Penner; Vice President Imani Q'Ryn; Secretary Jesse Rosenfeld; and Treasurer Tricia Leith.

Full story to follow in the next issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, July 11.



Laskaris



Q'Ryn

Coop Event Highlights

Tue, Jul 9 • Safe Food Committee Film Night:
Eat This New York 7:00 p.m.

Thu, Fri, Sat • See What the PAFCU Offers
Jul 25-27 4 - 6 p.m., Thu & Fri; 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., Sat

Fri, Sat • See What the PAFCU Offers
Aug 9-10 4 - 6 p.m., Fri; 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., Sat

Thu, Sep 5 • Food Class 7:30 p.m.

Look for additional information about these and other events in this issue.

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Shopping hours on Thursday, July 4:
8 a.m. - 7:30 p.m.



Hepworth

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Gail commented when talking about her career change. Regarding the challenges of running a business after working in the corporate world for so long, Gail said, "I like risk and owning my decisions. There's plenty of room for that in the farming business." It was the love of farming and family that made the decision easy, she explained. "Even though it cost me half of my salary."

Gail's title is production manager. "I plan our crops with Amy, 380 varieties of vegetables." She also is

in 1982, she began the difficult transformation of taking a farm that used standard farming practices and changing it to organic farming methods.

A Radical Organic Protocol

"When I took over it wasn't gradual, it was a sweeping radical organic protocol from that day forward," Amy said. "It's all about de-chemicalization and soil health, the workers, the land, the customer." It was not an easy road and took much trial and error to create the systems in place now.

Describing her twin sister, Gail says with enthusiasm,

early in the season when the farmer needs it. The consumer pays for the produce up front.

Hepworth Farms ships approximately one-third of all it produces to the Coop. It is a mutually dependent love affair between like-minded city folk and country folk.

Amy and Gail's mother ran the roadside market until she retired in 2000, and their grandmother and great grandmother before her did the same. Today, Gerry runs that end of the business in the form of a Saturday morning farmers' market.

Hepworth Farms also sells its produce to distributors, including Albert's Organics and Whole Foods. But there's more demand than they can fill, according to Gail. As a result, they have increased production by 50 acres a year for the last two years. This means more equipment and more costs. "The last few years' capital investments have been substantial," Gail said. As a result, they have not turned a profit for these last few years.

Other forces also strain the bottom line. "Farms are fuel hogs, they're very tire dependent," Gail explained. The increase in fuel costs has significantly impacted the cost of production.

Material costs have also increased. The cost of cartons rose 18% from last year. The price of plastic products used on the farm has also gone up. "How we try to make it up is through efficiency," Amy said on her cell phone while driving her truck back to the farm after dropping off produce at the PSFC.

In an attempt to be more energy efficient, they recently built a new packinghouse



PHOTOS BY ANN ROSEN

Coop members help Ivan from Hepworth Farms unload the truck.

underground, with a 16-inch thick cement roof, which helps keep it cool like a basement, using less energy for refrigeration. Three years ago they also installed solar panels on the farm.

Labor has been a big challenge as well for Hepworth Farms. The need for workers varies greatly throughout the year. There are five full-time employees. But by mid-June, they are up to 28 workers and then when it's time for harvest in August, they are up to 90 employees.

Hepworth Farms has a core team of farm workers whom they've trained in their techniques over the course of years and have become very close with. "People don't really understand the skill in farm work...it takes years to train them in Amy's techniques," Gail said. Attempting to hire the same core employees each year, they retain lawyers to deal with work visa issues on an ongoing basis.

A Passion for Farming

Amy is passionate about the potential for farming in the Hudson Valley despite the limited number of farms that survive in the area. The rich soil, regular rain and sun make it a great location to farm, Amy insists. The large population that demands fresh produce just a short drive south makes it a good place to sell the

bounty as well.

Amy's advice to a young farmer before starting out on his or her own farm? "The one thing I would tell every young farmer, work on a farm for at least five years. Because there is so much to it to be successful," she said. Regarding getting the organic label, Amy said, "I don't think the future is organic...I think it's a hybrid." Amy encourages new farmers to embrace organic principles but does not recommend being certified organic anymore. Amy preaches the need for her customers to think beyond the organic label and be open to other methods, which embrace healthy food and a healthy environment.

As the local fresh produce starts to arrive crate by crate at the Coop this summer, shoppers might notice some exotic Indian vegetables, bitter melon or a green called shiso. These exotic vegetables weren't shipped from California or from a farm in a far off country. They arrived on the Coop's shelves because of a vegetable wish list and a 30-year relationship between a Hudson Valley farm and the Park Slope Food Coop. ■



Hepworth Farms' delivery truck outside the Food Coop.

responsible for purchasing seeds, helping oversee the greenhouse and thousands of other details involving growing produce. "We grow every one of our plants from seed."

Of the five Hepworth siblings who grew up on the farm "Amy was always most interested in the farm and taking it over," Gail said. Amy studied agriculture at Cornell University, majoring in pomology, the study of growing fruit. When Amy took over the farm

"Amy has a 360-degree view of the farm... She has a feeling about what's going on, she just gets it."

Hepworth Farms has four ways of marketing their produce: CSA (community-supported agriculture), direct sales to the PSFC, local sales at a farmers' market and wholesale distribution.

CSAs have many advantages for the farmer, Gail explained. "We spend a lot of money until we sell a tomato." With a CSA, income comes in

The Coop Needs Planners & Workers for

Our 40th Birthday Party!

Every five years the Coop celebrates our birthday and this year we are 40 years old.

Earn FTOP credit to coordinate, plan and staff the Coop's Fall birthday party.

This year the party's theme will be "supporting new coops in our model."

Proceeds from the party will support the Coop's Fund for New Food Coops.

The party coordinator will work with the Loan Committee to select a venue, decor, food, entertainment and fundraising activities.

Party workers will help in planning and will help as needed the week before the party, the day of the party and cleaning up after the party.

We are looking for members who are willing to work alone and together to make this autumn party a success.

If you are interested, please send an inquiry specifying your interests and skills to loancommittee@psfc.coop.

THE GAZETTE INDEXES

If you are interested in the history of the Coop or in when and how particular subjects have been discussed in the Gazette...

Send an e-mail to Len Neufeld, Gazette indexer, at lenneufeld@verizon.net, to request PDF files of either or both of the following indexes:

- ◆ An alphabetized list of the titles of all articles published in the Gazette from 1995 to the present, with issue dates.
- ◆ An alphabetized list of all subjects (including people's names) discussed in Gazette articles from 1995 to the present, with article titles, issue dates, and page numbers.

Many of the Gazette issues referenced in these indexes are available as PDFs on the Coop's website.