

S O U N D C O N S U M E R

The scoop on Seattle's queen of ice cream

By Rebekah Denn

In sunny summertime Seattle, it's hard to remember a time before scoops of Scout Mint and Honey Lavender and seasonal Balsamic Strawberry filled waffle cones around town.

When Molly Moon Neitzel opened a small Wallingford store in 2008, though, artisan ice cream shops were almost unheard of in our rainy region. Armed with dreams and spreadsheets, the 29-year-old convinced investors of three frosty facts: One, that Seattle had a shortage of premium ice cream producers but a huge appetite for the treat. Two, that the city needed fun all-ages hangouts. Three—chanciest of all—that Neitzel could devote Molly Moon's Homemade Ice Cream to sustainable, ethical business practices and still turn a profit.

Neitzel had no business school backing or restaurant management experience; she crunched the numbers on Business Plan Pro, a \$120 CD-ROM software package. Certain details were non-negotiable, from compostable spoons to paid employee health insurance. If the dollars didn't pencil out she would abandon the idea, not adjust her ideals.

"I'm very black and white..." Neitzel said recently at University Village, site of another of her now-nine retail shops, with a 10th in progress. Her ice cream is also sold at PCC stores.

"I wanted to see if I could do something where I made money and I lived my progressive values..." she said. "My mom is the one that said, 'You should open an ice cream shop,' because I had worked at this ice cream shop for four years in college. She's like, 'You know how to do that. Just put all your values in there and see if it works out.'"

Three weeks after opening day, the shop took in as much money as she had projected in a year. Six weeks in, she started planning branch #2.

In the 14 years since, Seattle's become a serious ice cream city, boasting multiple chains and indie shops focused on various specialties. (Full Tilt Ice Cream, which opened in White Center the same year as Molly Moon's, has expanded into a three-shop business focused on creative flavors, vintage sodas and arcade games. PCC also carries Full Tilt pints. And Frankie & Jo's, also carried by PCC, offers innovative vegan, gluten-free ice cream at three shops—see page 5 for more.)

From recession years to boom times, protests to pandemic, Neitzel's had to scoop out a unique place in the business world. The



Photo credit: Meryl Schenker

eternal guardrails: "Do I want to be the most socially responsible I can be to the humans that I employ and whose families depend on my company doing well? Or do I want to be as righteous as I want to be for the planet? And I've chosen the social good, with the acknowledgement that they're intertwined."

Music and politics

Neitzel was raised in Boise and attended the University of Montana in Missoula while working at the Big Dipper, a popular hangout for homemade ice cream and a sense of community.

Politics was in her family's blood more than desserts: Her grandmother was

chief of staff for one of Idaho's few Democratic congressmen. At age five, Neitzel was stamping campaign mailings, at 12 washing windows for car-wash fundraisers, believing as long as she can remember that "We need to vote, and lobby our government to provide for its citizenry, and we need businesses to step up—and show that taking care of people is good for society."

After earning a degree in journalism, Neitzel's work life went big fast. For most of her 20s she was executive director of Music for America, a national nonprofit aimed at getting out the youth vote.

Politics had rewards—a boss remains her mentor today—and downsides. Morals sometimes seemed unacceptably bendable.

Checks from some donors seemed about absolving guilt instead of igniting progress.

After some side explorations she researched the ice cream idea, and somehow convinced investors it was a smart concept for a city where summer highs averaged only the mid-70s.

The dollars were smaller than in national politics, but "it didn't feel small to me at the time..." she recalled. "I was like, I need to make this investment in me worth it."

The right people

Molly Moon's Homemade Ice Cream won fans immediately with local ingredients and intriguing flavors (and a name that was all the more perfect for being real), but Neitzel thinks now it wasn't as good as its first reviews. She quickly hired Dana Cree—then a local pastry chef, now a nationally acclaimed Chicago pastry chef and ice cream producer—for an upgrade.

"We rewrote all my recipes and made the ice cream way better. I think that's one of the things I've always been really good at, is finding the right person with the skills that I don't (have)."

Challenges also came before Day One, like finding those compostable spoons she'd committed to carrying.

"No one had a compostable spoon in the city of Seattle." The University of Washington dining halls began using them the same year, and they piggybacked on the same supplier.

Even now, hard-won logistics hold up what look like sunny bonuses, like Molly Moon's extra-large 18-ounce "scooper's pints."

"My director of operations so badly wants us to do a 16-ounce regular pint container. Everybody else's pints are 16 ounces, right?...Or they're 14 ounces, it's called a cheater pint." Hers are plus-sized because they are repurposed compostable soup containers. No one yet makes a compostable 16-inch ice cream container.

In another oddity in the retail world, each Molly Moon's branch makes its own ice cream, rather than distributing from a central factory. That gives each store a personal feel and allows the company to employ several pastry chefs—another step in a job ladder where she hopes even seasonal scoopers like her younger self might climb up to a career.

A North Star

Not every goal is reachable, and major costs that aren't baked in from the start are hard to add later, Neitzel noted.

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“I haven’t gone back on anything that I started but sometimes I don’t get to do things that I thought I would build.”

She expected to eventually make the business certified organic, for instance, but “it pains me to say this...that’s probably not possible.

“My recipe is basically two cups of cream, one cup of milk, three-quarters of a cup of sugar. The cost of organic cream is insane, and Washington state and Oregon state can’t even make all the cream that Washington and Oregon consume.” Switching to organic dairy would spike not just the price, but the environmental impacts of transporting ingredients from other regions.

Reconciling those goals is part of another signature commitment, Neitzel’s “Scout Mint Ice Cream,” which uses as many as 6,000 boxes of Thin Mint cookies purchased annually from the Girl Scout troop at Mary’s Place, the nonprofit shelter for families experiencing homelessness. Cookie sales fund camp scholarships for every troop member.

“I was a Girl Scout for 11 years, and that’s really important to me,” Neitzel said.

She’s maintained the flavor “even though the ingredient list of Girl Scout cookies is not my favorite” (PCC pints use an alternate Scout Mint brownie flavor, because brand-name Thin Mints contain ingredients not allowed under co-op product standards.)

Again, “I have just had to say, I need a North Star, or I need a consistent way to make decisions,” she said.

Milk and life

That trajectory sounds fairy-tale smooth: Girl makes ice cream, girl-boss finds success.

No human story cuts off at the happy ribbon-cutting, though. In one of the most tragic turns, Neitzel’s 22-year-old sister, who shared her studio apartment and worked at her store, was badly hurt in a motorcycle accident in 2009. Anna was in a coma and later died.

Beyond the essentials, “I really stayed in bed for like six months,” Neitzel said.

Finally, “pulling myself out of my grief enough to say, ‘What should I do to create a legacy for her?’ She was so young, and she could so easily be forgotten by the world, I just kept thinking about her generosity.”

Neitzel crossed the street to the FamilyWorks Food Bank, which she and Anna already knew through ice cream donations, and made plans with Executive Director Jake Weber. “My sister loved milk, we both grew up drinking a ton of milk. We didn’t have very much money, especially when I was really little, but milk was a thing that my parents would prioritize having in the fridge even when you couldn’t have other things.

“When my sister came to live with me in Seattle, from Idaho, when my mom would visit she would give me \$20 and be like, ‘Buy milk, because she’s expensive.’”

A lot of people who rely on food banks, Weber told her, get powdered milk instead of fresh pints.

So the Anna Banana Milk Fund, now a separate nonprofit, provides money for milk and other dairy products at food banks connected with each Molly Moon store.

Shops and social issues

Neitzel’s family has grown as well over the years; she’s married and had two daughters of her own since opening that first store.

Parental leave became an employee issue in the process, seeing how hard new parenthood is and how parents need to spend time with newborns. When Neitzel’s best friend, who worked with her, had a baby in 2009, it seemed like a village raising a child to say, “Yeah, you can come back to

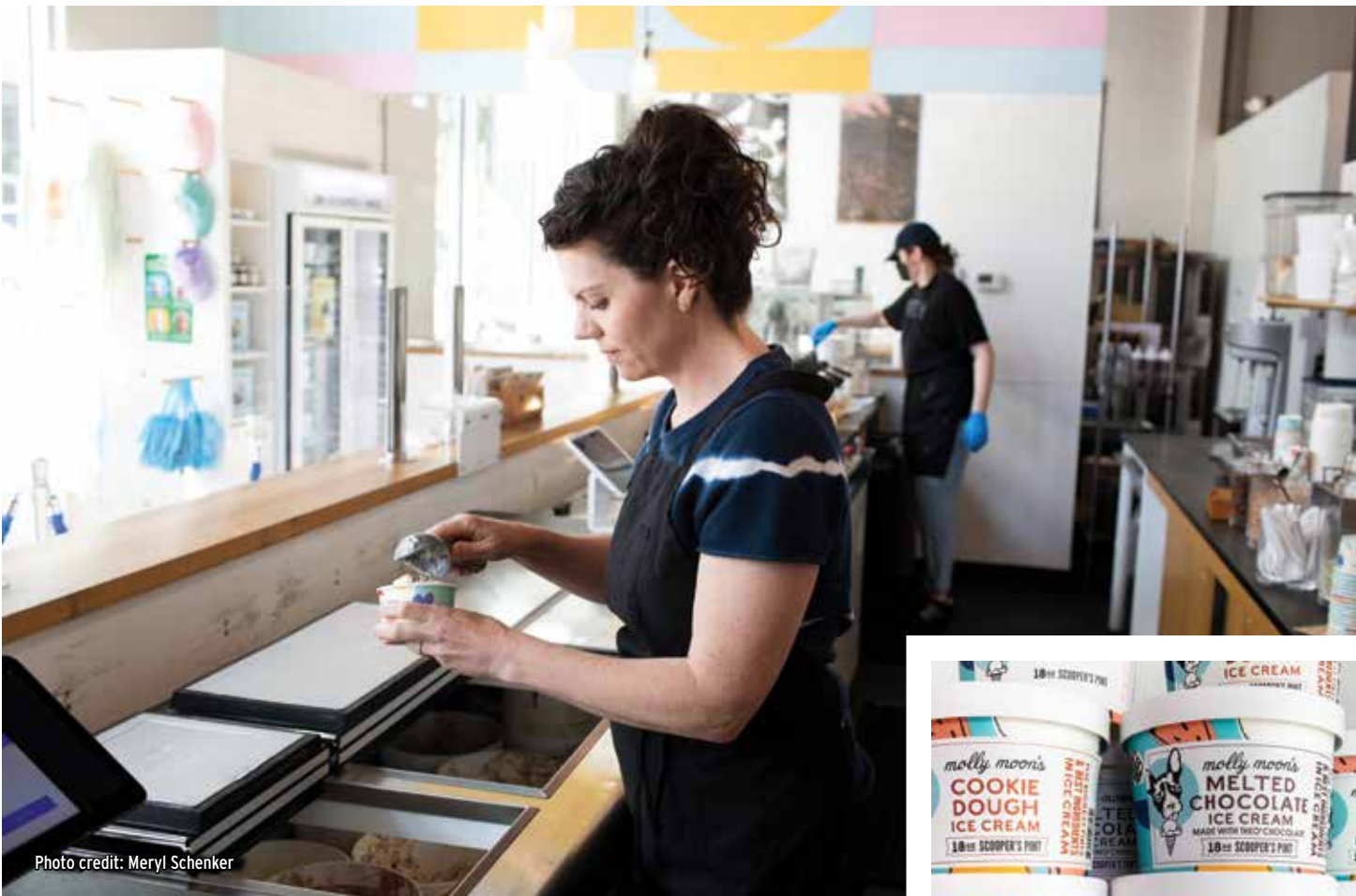


Photo credit: Meryl Schenker

work at eight weeks and bring the baby in the stroller...” she recalled. “I am so deeply ashamed of that now.

“That’s the only baby that’s been born at Molly Moon’s that didn’t come with a full 12-week 100% maternity or paternity leave.”

Soon after enacting the policy at her own store, she worked with Washington’s Economic Opportunity Institute to encourage the state legislature to pass paid family leave, one of several pushes she’s made for state and national worker benefits. Internally, her stores have eliminated tipping and added “pay transparency,” where all employees can see everyone’s salaries, with training guidelines on reaching the next level on the wage schedule (pay starts at \$18/hour).

Pay transparency is aimed at eliminating the national gender gap in wages, and at inspiring lower-paid workers to train for more senior positions. Tips could be affected by the wealth of the store’s customers or how busy it typically was on discrimination, factors beyond employees’ controls and tips also meant the greenest employees sometimes earned more than managers. The goal was better pay for jobs that required greater responsibility and experience. Neitzel met with each employee to show their salaries under the old and new system, backfilling the difference for a handful who faced steep cuts until they had time to train for promotions and raises. Eliminating tips is a controversial and evolving trend throughout today’s restaurant world. Few mid-sized businesses have made such a forceful move and stuck with it.

“There’s so much about the workforce in food and beverage and in hospitality that is changing right now...and we are right now figuring out, what is the right thing to do for the next season of our industry?” Neitzel said.

March 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic, of course, derailed all predictions and plans. Three factors—with public support—saved Molly Moon’s from going under as so many other favorite businesses did.

In March 2020 the company shut down and laid off most employees but kept all 88 on its health insurance. To finance the first two months of those premiums, they pre-sold cozy sweatshirts that read, “Stay home, eat ice cream.” The next premiums were paid by pre-selling “pint club” discount cards. “I figured even if I wasn’t going to

(re)-open, I would be able to get these people ice cream. I have a lot of ice cream shops and a lot of equipment, and there’s milk.”

Then, she said, there was PCC. “We called Noah (grocery merchandiser Noah Smith) and we were like, ‘Can we make pints for you?’” And he said, “Yes, we’ve already looked at your ingredient labels, they are clean. The shelves are empty, we have so much space for you.”

That cash flow, from PCC and then other outlets, helped re-open the shops and pay for pandemic-related safety upgrades before federal support was available.

Data-driven

With the region settling into a new sort of normal, Molly Moon’s is back on a smoother course.

The stores have always been peanut-free—“I used to be a nanny, and I knew what a big deal it was to families to be peanut-free”—and now have a dozen permanent flavors and rotating seasonal options. New flavors are taste-tested a year in advance, since many rely on seasonal ingredients and orders need to be placed accordingly—or planted, in the case of suppliers like strawberries from Viva Farms in the Skagit Valley.

A whiteboard at the quarterly tastings shows all the existing flavors and their percentage of sales. Consistent low-sellers drop out and are replaced with new flavors that are brainstormed, taste-tested a month or two later and sometimes adjusted and re-tested. “Sometimes we do three (rounds) until we really, really like it. Sometimes we’re like, ‘You know what, this idea didn’t work. It’s not a good concept,’” Neitzel said.

There is one flavor that’s virtually guaranteed a permanent menu spot even if its modest sales ever plummet: Honey Lavender. “It’s got a total cult following. And it’s so Pacific Northwest that I would lose sleep (if it was dropped).”

Beyond that exception, at work or at home, data is always her driver. “I love how a spreadsheet can just tell you the truth. And I use spreadsheets for everything. I cook 21 meals, dinners for my family. Every 21 days it’s the same thing. If we’re having spaghetti tonight, in 21 days on a Thursday night we’re gonna have spaghetti again. And those the recipes for every meal are in there, linked to a tab with the grocery list.” Collaboration and support also help; Neitzel said a fourth factor that helped the business stay intact is that her husband closed his



Photo courtesy of Molly Moon's Homemade Ice Cream

own coffee shop to stay home with their children when COVID hit.

Final scoop

Politics still infuses Neitzel’s actions, from offering free scoops to shoppers who vote on Election Day to joining a White House roundtable with President Joe Biden on vaccine mandates. She’s a founding member of the Main Street Alliance, a “powerful, self-funded, multi-racial, small business membership organization that can shift our economic narrative, wield political power, and win policy reform for small business owners, employees, and communities,” as its website puts it.

“I would say politics is like my hobby. It’s not a hobby, but the way other people golf, go to the gym, go out to dinner with their friends, all the things that people do outside of work.”

And she’s not done with working for change, either inside or outside her own company.

“Part of the reason that I can do this—and not everybody can do this—is, I have a frozen product. I have zero food waste. I am really meticulous about managing labor. I have a director of finance who is one of the most brilliant women with numbers I’ve ever met...”

“But I know it’s not possible for every company, and it shouldn’t be our responsibility.

“You shouldn’t have to win the boss lottery to have a good working life.”

PCC member partner

Molly Moon’s Homemade Ice Cream is a PCC member partner. Members can enjoy one free waffle cone or topping when you buy a scoop of ice cream at any Molly Moon’s location.

The cool, creative path to great vegan ice cream

Autumn Martin and Kari Brunson have brought fabulous, creative foods to the region for years, from decadent take-and-bake molten chocolate cake (Martin founded “Hot Cakes,” available in PCC freezer cases) to fresh-pressed juices and delectable salads (Brunson’s former Juicebox cafe). In 2016 Martin partnered with Brunson on Frankie & Jo’s, plant-based ice creams and sorbets in unique flavors like “beet strawberry rose” and “salty caramel ash,” sourcing the majority of ingredients from certified organic producers. The company, a certified B-Corp, is named for Martin’s late grandmothers, Frances and Joanne.

The business partners, who both were farmers market vendors in earlier ventures, now oversee three scoop shops and ship their ice cream nationwide. It’s carried at all PCC stores. *Sound Consumer* editor Rebekah Denn spoke recently with Martin about the business while Brunson was on maternity leave. An edited, condensed version of their conversation follows:

Q: *Why open Frankie & Jo’s instead of incorporating the ice cream into your previous shops?*

A: I wanted a company that was (entirely) vegan so that people can start to think more openly about vegan food for all of these traditional, heartfelt food moments. Ice cream is such a nostalgic treat, and I knew that for the future to be a little less dependent on animal products, we needed to start getting people to believe that it’s possible to have these new plant-based foods replace animal-centered traditions.

Q: *For ages people thought it was impossible to make good vegan ice cream. What made it so hard and why is it possible now?*

A: I think effort is number one. People weren’t putting a ton of effort into making a vegan ice cream that was going to be better than a cow ice cream. I don’t know that the focus was in the right spot. It was like, “If it’s good enough, then so be it,” which is how a lot of vegan food has been over the years. But I have really high standards when it comes to the food that I eat. Also, for the goal of wanting to change our food system, I knew that “good enough” was not going to cut it.

It’s also really, really, really hard. You have to use the right fats—fat in ice cream is huge. And you have to use the right milks. (When) I started working on recipes in 2012, with not a ton of success, I was using store-bought milk, and then I realized, “I’m going to need to make my own nut milks in order for this to work out.”

It’s more expensive, so I think people try and cut corners as much as possible to be competitive with the price point of a cow ice cream. And those corners are really important.

Q: *Your flavors are very distinctive. Is there one you think of as definitively Frankie & Jo’s?*

A: I think the California Cabin is like our signature flavor. It’s a smoked vanilla bean and pine ice cream flavor with pieces of cardamom-black-pepper shortbread throughout. It is this very nuanced flavor that you can’t quite (place), but it’s so beautiful and deep, it’s lovely to experience. We named it Cali Cabin because it really does put you in a place when you eat it.



Photos credit: A.J. Ragasa



It brings up these feelings and memories, which is the beauty of ice cream—of food in general. Whether somebody is aware of it or not, they’re tapping into their nervous system when they’re eating ice cream, and tapping into stored memory banks.

Q: *You worked at some top places early in your career (including head chocolatier at Theo Chocolate and pastry chef at fine-dining icon Canlis restaurant). What made you move quickly to owning your own businesses?*

A: For as long as I can remember, I’ve been like, “I want to support myself through my hands, through my creations, my ideas.” When I was in junior high school, I was making jewelry and selling it, and then in high school I started making glass beads and I would use my own glass beads for my jewelry and sell it to different shops in Seattle and California. And then I went to culinary school and I had a cake-making business. I love, love, love making something

with my hands or something that comes from my heart.

Q: *What brought you to food as part of that?*

A: I was going to go to art school right out of high school, actually, and study sculpture. My medium was glass and ceramic at the time. Before starting I took a year off and worked in Lake Tahoe and basically was a ski bum for a season. And then I was a beach bum in Hawaii after that for six months. But I worked at a fine dining restaurant in Lake Tahoe where I was the hostess, and I would find myself in the kitchen whenever there was nobody to seat, just staring at the line cooks and the chef...I just was so captivated by the work. And I will say I grew up cooking a lot with my dad...Cooking was not new to me, but being in the kitchen of high-end restaurants was new to me and I loved it. I got butterflies. It just moved me.

And then when I came back to Seattle to start art school, I got a job at the Honey Bear

Bakery, and part of their benefit package was they would pay a third of culinary school tuition for their employees. So I kind of took that as a sign, (but) I was torn. The other thing that really tipped it for me was the cake decorator at the Honey Bear. I would watch her and think “She’s basically an artist right here, sculpting these big elaborate cakes, piping colors.” And I was thinking “Okay, I could scratch my sculpting itch and be in food at the same time.” That’s why I went into pastry.

Q: *Frankie & Jo’s has scaled up a lot. Do you have a plan for what’s next?*

A: That goal, the mission and vision, has always been to get this ice cream in as many hands as possible, because I really truly believe that our ice cream is a vehicle for change.

It’s not just a tasty treat that happens to be made without cows. It is literally a vehicle to show people that they can have the same beautiful, connected traditions without relying on animals.

The local farmer who turned trash into a farm-saving treasure

How a vintage tractor and a YouTube channel revolutionized market farms

By Georgie Smith, guest contributor

If you buy locally grown vegetables and nursery plants in the Bellingham area, you might recognize Jason Weston as owner of Joe's Gardens, a 7-acre, pesticide-free farm. To a passionate niche of the nation's farmers, though, Weston is a legend.

He's "The Planet Jr. Guy," the person who recognized the value in a vintage walk-behind tractor that farmers cultivated their fields with in generations past. Through experience, experimentation—and ultimately the Internet—Weston connected the dots between piles of rusty old equipment parts on the East Coast and the needs of today's market farmers.

A self-effacing, soft-spoken fellow, Weston tells his story one day while transplanting lettuce seedlings. He never set out to become farmer-famous. Weston was just farming. And like all farmers big or small, the 50-year-old was constantly innovating more efficient ways to work, especially dealing with weeds.

"The technology and the information, it was all out there. It was just kind of forgotten," Weston says, showing me his original Planet Jr. tractor, the one he salvaged from the farm junk pile. It's a model Bp-1, manufactured around 1955.

"This tractor revolutionized farming for us."

Rise and Fall

The Planet Jr.'s themselves are unimpressive if you don't know better, compared to today's age of big tractor tires, big tractor motors and even bigger tractor implements, run with precision GPS and—coming soon!—self-driving capabilities. John Deere's fully autonomous new tractor, all eight tires and 14 tons of it, has an estimated price tag of a cool \$500,000.

Planet Jr.'s, on the other hand, are two-wheeled and human-sized. You walk behind them instead of riding on them. A single worker can pick them up and put them in the back of a beat-up old farm truck. A newly refurbished one, plus a tool setup, runs \$1,500 to \$2,000.

That's their beauty. Planet Jr.'s were made to fit the scale, size, crop diversity and economics of America's once prolific small farm industry. Farmers a lot like Weston.

Planet Jr. tractors were built by S.L. Allen & Co., a Philadelphia farming equipment manufacturer founded in 1869. Their target customer was the "one-horse farmer" of the early 19th century. Back then, the U.S. had between 6 and 7 million farms and 40% of the total U.S. population lived on farms, according to farm and agricultural economist Jayson Lusk. The average farm was about 150 acres.

S.L. Allen & Co. started in the wheel hoe business—human-powered, weed-killing tools. Planet Jr., first introduced in 1930, was a natural extension. The manufacturer simply built a frame for a small gasoline engine, added a second wheel so the tractor could straddle a row of plants and rigged up a detachable toolbar for cultivating tools.

Planet Jr. wasn't the only walk-behind cultivating tractor, but it was the most popular, especially in the Atlantic coastal states and the Great Lakes area, where market farming persisted for decades. As



Photo credit: Karen Ducey

the years went by, S.L. Allen & Co. added models and features. Wider wheelbases for wider plantings. Different cultivating hoes and implements to mount on the simple toolbar. They even added fertilizer hoppers and seeders.

Then came the industrial revolution. Americans moved off the farm and to the cities. Factories became the name of the game and farms went factory, too. Farmers no longer grew a diversity of market crops delivered fresh to small, regional wholesale markets and grocery stores.

Today the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) records just 2.02 million U.S. farms, averaging 444 acres. Less than 2% of Americans live on farms. Four crops—corn, soy, wheat and cotton—dominate America's farmland.

S.L. Allen & Co. and their Planet Jr.'s followed the small farmer out of business. They closed in 1968, just a few years before Earl Butz, President Richard Nixon's agriculture secretary, infamously told U.S. farmers to "get big or get out." As market farms disappeared, walk-behind cultivating tractors were forgotten.

The great Planet Jr. scavenger hunt

Since Weston could remember, an old Planet Jr. had collected dust in his farm equipment shed.

The business' founder, Joe Bertero, purchased the tractor back in the 1950s. Weston's dad, who worked for Joe before he bought the farm, even used it for a time. Weston tried it out as a kid, but the 1950s-era engine was an "absolute nightmare to get going." So, when Weston took over from his father in 2007, he left the Planet Jr. in the shed. Not impressed.

He readily admits now that he hadn't understood the nuances of weed management. He was tilling his soil, not cultivating.

Cultivation isn't a task to dominate, it's an art. Depth of cultivating tools, timing, tricks like burying weed seedlings under a small furrow of soil or just barely undercutting them at the root level—without stirring up the soil enough to expose weed seeds and encourage germination—all these



techniques can mean the difference between a harvestable crop and a weed-choked mess.

Put two experienced market farmers together and once they finish talking about the weather, they'll talk weed management.

By 2013 weeds were extra-heavy on Weston's mind. Hand-weeding took hours of labor time he and his crew didn't have. And he was jealous of larger neighboring farms with perfect, weed-free beds managed by equipment too big for his farm.

He got the idea to hook the Planet Jr. toolbar, sans the cantankerous engine, to the back of a Scott's riding lawnmower, and ran it through some rows. He immediately recognized the possibilities.

"I hauled it up to Bellingham Motors, Norm put a new motor on it, I took it back down here and I was just blown away by what it could do, how fast," Weston recalls. The narrow wheels and tractor height, plus light weight, were perfect for moving through his beds, straddling crops but pulling blades behind it to decimate weeds. He found a local welder to build him a new toolbar and ordered new, better shovels to use with it.

Weston was a convert, but he wanted more. There had to be more Planet Jr.'s laying around? More implements to fit the toolbars? And most crucially, more clamps. When you use cultivating equipment, the clamps that attach the cultivating tools to

toolbars are gold—especially when nobody is making the ones you need.

But Weston was stymied. Planet Jr.'s hadn't been as popular on the West Coast as in the East. So, he joined Facebook to find answers. Or rather, his wife made him.

"I wanted nothing to do with Facebook. I didn't get it and understand what the point of it was. Then she found this group, 'Planet Jr. and Similar Wheel Hoes.' I did a post, my first post ever," Weston recalls. He met a bunch of walk-behind tractor collectors, guys scrounging them out of auctions and yard sales just for sheer interest. Then Jason put up a photo of his refurbished tractor at work in his fields.

It was a light bulb moment. "We can actually be using these things."

Retooling old ideas

Weston and other farmers started posting YouTube videos of restored Planet Jr.'s back at work in their fields. Interest skyrocketed. The collectible guys started restoring and putting new engines in the old tractor frames and shipping refurbished Planet Jr.'s to enthusiastic small market farmers.

Mark Lovejoy, co-owner of Garden Treasures, a market farmer in Arlington,

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was one of those converts. Stopping by Joe's Garden one day, he was amazed at the "clean fields at the scale they were growing." He, too, became a Planet Jr. fan.

Meanwhile, Weston and some other farming fans wondered if they could use more recent cultivating equipment, like finger weeders, with their Planet Jr.'s. Finger weeders have flexible plastic fingers that move between plants, gently removing in-row weeds. He ordered a set and they worked like a dream.

"Once you got the in-row weeding along with all the other tools, then all of a sudden, you had a system that could do things that I never thought possible," Weston says. Cultivating tasks that had taken him a crew of 20 and days to accomplish he could now do himself, in hours.

The Planet Jr. fever grew hot enough that manufacturers took notice.

In 2019 Tilmor, an Ohio company, released a new version of the old Planet Jr. It was the first time a two-wheel, walk-behind cultivator tractor was commercially manufactured in decades. They had Weston beta-test their model. He's even featured in their marketing videos.



And even newly tooled, the concepts remain old school.

"If you took someone from the 1800s and brought them today...apart from people not using horses anymore, the tooling itself would be very, very familiar to farmers from 150 years ago," Weston says.

So that's the story of how a Bellingham farmer became famous in some circles. But set aside Weston's role in Planet Jr.'s revival, his farm nerd joy over his 20 toolbar sets, his love for chasing down old parts, manuals, and rooting out the history of a "mystery tractor" (a Planet Jr. prototype). For Weston,

Planet Jr.'s are about one thing—building back the market farm community.

"Small farms are great. But without efficiency, they don't have a chance to get into the grocery stores. They're not going to have a chance to change anything. The amount of stuff small farms are growing compared to the big farms? It doesn't even register," Weston says.

"If we want to see small farms coming back, we need to see more of the 20 and 30-acre farms. Then you can have warehouses again and local distributors. But if you don't have that infrastructure in place that was lost 70 years ago, there's not a lot you can do as a small farmer but compete with every other small farmer."

To do that, small farmers need the right tools to become slightly bigger small farms, Weston says. Even if that looks a lot like the tools their great-grandfathers used.

As Weston is testament to, even in our era of big ideas and next-gen technology, sometimes the best ideas aren't the new ones. They're the ones we rediscover.

Georgie Smith is a fourth-generation farmer on Whidbey Island. She writes about food and farming.

[COMMUNITY VOICES]

A Q&A with FEEST

What happens when a CSA farm box drop site is located at a cultural arts center? In the case of the Delridge neighborhood in West Seattle, the result is the Food Empowerment Education & Sustainability Team (FEEST) program. Started in 2008 as part of the King County Food and Fitness Initiative, which sought to address health inequalities in some of Seattle's most diverse and lowest-income neighborhoods, FEEST has grown into a nonprofit organization of nine full-time employees supporting youth leaders in transforming systemic inequalities. As its motto states, participants are "Making Justice Irresistibly Delicious."

Sound Consumer contributor Tara Austen Weaver recently talked with Cilia Jurdy, FEEST's development and operations director:

Q: How did FEEST get started?

A: We started as a community dinner program out of Youngstown Cultural Arts Program (in Delridge)—a space for youth to come together to learn about cooking, but also to talk and learn about each other's cultural background through food. From there we became our own nonprofit and started working in the schools. We would go to a school once a week, bring all the necessary ingredients, cook together with FEEST youth and anyone else who wanted to come, then enjoy a meal together. We would talk about anything on the youth's minds, but really focusing around racial, social and health equity—where we are at right now, and where we want to go. The communities we're working with are predominately low-income, Black, Brown, and Indigenous. We started in two schools and are now in five.

The dinners were a way to get youth interested in our programming—this joyful community space of cooking together and learning about one another's cultures and backgrounds and family recipes. Then we also had what we call our campaign team. We were filling a need by providing fresh, free, culturally relevant food for our youth, but how do we change the systems so they have access to that all the time, specifically in the school districts?

Q: Your program has really evolved over the past 14 years. How has it changed?

A: We did a pretty large community survey with focus groups and discussions to identify the issues that were important. The areas we're working in have pretty big food apartheid—and we use the term food apartheid rather than food deserts, because food deserts makes it seem like it's naturally occurring, when there have been very purposeful policies and systems put in place to make it so.

From these surveys we ran a few test programs. One was our Snack Box Program. We wanted to see, if we brought fresh, healthy snacks to youth and handed them out at the beginning of 6th period, when everyone's energy is waning a little bit, does their academic performance improve? And we found out that yes: fresh, healthy food really does increase energy and participation. From this research we really honed in on our goals to make sure that both Highline and Seattle school districts have fresh, free, culturally relevant food available for their students.

Q: What are some of the challenges you face in this work?

A: The folks we are working with only have so much power in these decisions, and these demands are very closely tied to budgets. In order to implement change, there would have to be a pretty big overhaul on where the money is allocated. System changes are tough to make.

Q: How has the pandemic impacted your work?

A: In the beginning of the pandemic, everyone was scrambling to figure out what the needs were and how to meet them. We cancelled our dinner program entirely, but there was still a need for food. So, for the first year and a half, the youth at our schools could apply for grocery assistance and we would do the shopping for them and drop food off. Later, when it was safer for people to go out, we switched to giving out gift cards so the families could shop for what they want.

Beyond the huge need for food in our communities, there was the murder of George Floyd—and we were seeing how that impacted our youth and their families. So, in summer of 2020, we joined with WA-BLOC (Washington Building Leaders of Change) and a student



Black Lives Matter group out of Chief Sealth International High School, to petition for Seattle Public Schools to terminate their contract with (the) Seattle Police Department.

From what we were hearing from our youth, those resource officers did not make them feel safe and weren't offering any of the resources they actually need. We petitioned for the funding for the officers to be redistributed toward more mental health support and food. We got over 20,000 signatures, from all over Seattle, and presented it to the school board and they severed that tie. This was a huge win and a big turning point for us seeing the power we have when we all come together.

Q: How can people who want to help support the work that FEEST is doing?

A: Financial support is always welcomed and encouraged, and we care less about dollar amount than we do about what the gift signifies. Each donation—whether it be five dollars or \$500—is someone saying they support our youth and our work and that is someone joining our movement. We also need community support. Our youth leaders are smart and strong, but they cannot vote. Our monthly e-newsletter is on our website—it's the best way to stay up to date and find out about action steps or particular needs.

Q: What are you working on now?

A: We've heard from our youth on a huge range of issues, but it boiled down to three top things: school food (still), needing more mental health resources, and how to implement restorative justice in schools so things felt less punitive and more growth based. So, we've broadened our mission. We are a youth-led organization, we will always go where the youth leads us—and now that includes taking a close look at mental health.

Our programs are virtual for now, but we really work to create a welcoming space. Our staff is very skilled at creating silly, fun spaces where everyone is encouraged to bring their whole selves and we work to

For more information visit
feestseattle.org

Fast, fun stir-frying with J. Kenji Lopez-Alt and “The Wok”

“Culinary nerd” J. Kenji Lopez-Alt has brought the science of great cooking to readers for years through his column in *SeriousEats.com* and his definitive cookbook “*The Food Lab*.” Since moving to Seattle with his family in 2020, he’s chronicled his home meals in a YouTube cooking channel and shared tips on great regional restaurant eats on his Instagram page. His latest book, “*The Wok: Recipes and Techniques*” (W.W. Norton, \$50) has been billed as the year’s biggest cookbook release, a 4.7-pound, 672-page—but approachable and friendly—guide to this phenomenally useful cooking tool. An excerpt from the book follows, and Lopez-Alt will teach a PCC cooking class in July (sign up (waitlist only) at pccmarkets.com/r/6164).

Many things can be called fast, versatile, and fun. My old Kodak Pocket Instamatic. Transformers.

Bo Jackson. But add delicious to that mix and suddenly your list gets a whole lot shorter.

Stir-frying is fast. Most stir-fry recipes take under half an hour start to finish, and that’s including prep time. The actual cook time of most stir-fries is just a few minutes.

Stir-frying is versatile. You can stir-fry meat. You can stir-fry seafood. You can stir-fry Asian vegetables or Western vegetables or tofu or rice or corn or mushrooms or lettuce or nuts or noodles or virtually anything that’s at least semisolid and edible.

Stir-frying is fun. I mean, I think it’s fun. If you enjoy activities that are simple enough for a first-timer to get good results, but also reward you greatly as you practice and improve your skills, you may think it’s fun as well.

Stir-frying is delicious. You know it, I know it, anyone who’s eaten at even a mediocre Chinese chain restaurant knows it. Stir-fried vegetables retain their bright, fresh crispness and color. Properly marinated, massaged and stir-fried meats are tender and packed with flavor. (We’ll talk more about the importance of massaging meat later.) Stir-fried noodles and rice pick up a flavorful char and, when you get really good, some of that elusive wok hei—the smoky aroma you find at good Chinese restaurants. (You’re gonna learn how to get it right at home, no matter what kind of stove you’ve got.) Stir-fries incorporate sauces, condiments, spices, pickles and aromatics that pack flavor into foods quickly and easily, which means you can build complexity and depth into a dish even on a busy weeknight.

Of all the techniques I’ve learned over the years from all over the world, stir-frying is the one I’d take with me to the desert island. It’s how the plurality of meals in my life have been cooked, and I imagine it’ll stay that way until I die.*

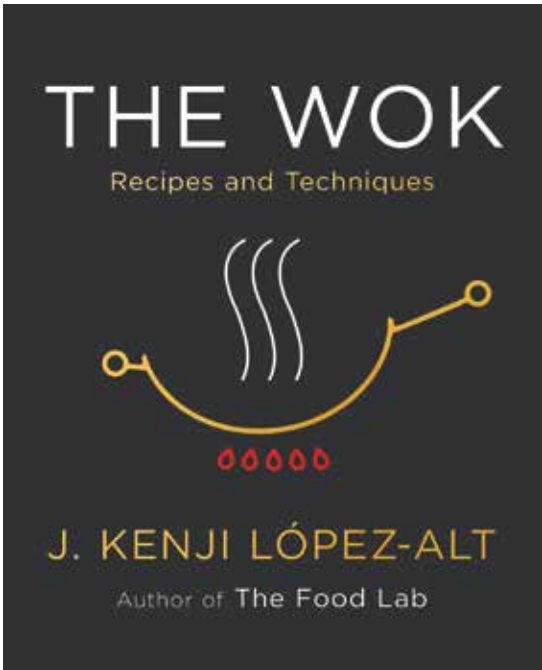
The Anatomy of a Stir-Fry

More than anything, stir-frying is about technique. In a November 2018 study led by David Hu, a professor of fluid dynamics at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Hu used computer software to track and model the motion of fried rice in a wok as it was tossed by professional Taiwanese chefs. What they found was that the motion of a stir-fry could be broken down into oscillations that last about a third of a second.

Within each of these oscillations, there are four distinct phases, each composed of translation motion (pushing and pulling the wok farther and closer) and rotational “seesaw” motion (pushing the handle up and down so that the wok pivots where it makes contact with the burner ring) that are slightly out of phase with each other, resulting in a back-and-forth rocking that causes



Photos credit to:???????



food in the wok to leap toward the chef in a cascade, effectively mixing it. Here’s what those phases look like in slow motion:

PHASE 1. With their hand firmly on the handle or the side of the wok closest to them, the cook pushes the wok forward while it is tilted downward away from them.

PHASE 2. As the wok gets close to its maximum distance away from the cook, the cook will begin to push down on the handle, causing the back edge of the wok to begin tilting back upward.

PHASE 3. While the back edge of the wok is still rising, the cook will begin pulling the wok back toward them. During this phase, the rotational motion and the rapid translational acceleration cause the food to leap. The food near the top lip of the wok will feel the greatest acceleration, while the food closer to the base of the wok will feel less. This is what causes the cascading waterfall effect.

PHASE 4. The cook continues to pull the wok toward them, catching the food. Just as the wok reaches its point closest to the cook, the cook lifts up the handle, tilting the wok downward again and getting ready to push the wok forward to repeat Phase 1.

So, in effect, each rocking motion occurs in slight anticipation of each translational motion. It is, in many ways, similar to the

way I try to teach my daughter to pump her legs on the swing: To do it effectively, you need to straighten your legs and lean back just before you reach the apex of your back swing, and you need to lean forward and bend your knees just before reaching the apex of your front swing.

What Happens When You Toss?

As Grace Young explains in her book “Stir-Frying to the Sky’s Edge,” the term stir-fry is misleading. Stirring, in the Western sense of moving things around the bottom of a pan using a spoon or spatula, is not what you want to do in a wok. “Tumble-fry” or “toss-fry” would be more accurate. Central to the technique of stir-frying is tossing food through the air. Why is this so vital?

The steam that evaporates off food and into your kitchen actually contains a huge amount of energy. Stir-frying takes advantage of this by recapturing some of that energy, which in turn speeds along cooking and helps develop intense flavors. In “Modernist Cuisine: The Art and Science of Cooking,” the authors demonstrate how a column of hot air and steam will rise up around the back of a wok. As you stir-fry, you toss the food through this steamy air. The steam condenses on the

surface of the food, depositing “formidable amounts of latent energy,” which rapidly heats it. As it falls back into the wok, which has now had a chance to recover some of its heat energy, that surface moisture is revaporized and the cycle continues.

This is why stir-frying is such a quick cooking process and why the shape of a wok is so important: it allows for dramatic tossing.

Does your food more often end up in your stove grates or on the floor when you try to toss it? Does it seem like no matter how vigorously you stir the contents of your wok, nothing seems to cook evenly? Don’t worry; you’re not alone! Like riding a bike or trying to plug in a USB cable, stir-frying is one of those things where you have to keep at it until it suddenly just clicks. If you stir-fry a few times per week, it should come quickly enough, but if you want to speed up the process (and perhaps save yourself from a few hot or greasy spills), the best way I know how is to fill your wok with a cup of dry lentils, beans or rice.

Here’s the basic process, though images and words can only get you so far—practice is the only way you’re going to get it.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

Fast, fun stir-frying with J. Kenji...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8



Excerpt and photographs from “The Wok: Recipes and Techniques” by J. Kenji López-Alt. Copyright © 2022 by J. Kenji López-Alt. Used with permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. All rights reserved.

MOVE 1 • Holding the handle of the wok, tilt the wok slightly away from you.

MOVE 2 • Push the wok forward in a smooth, relatively gentle motion, keeping it tilted away from you the whole time.

MOVE 3 • Just before you start pulling the wok back toward you, tilt it upward by pushing down on the handle. You should begin pulling it back toward you with a quick jerk about halfway through its upward rotation. This should send the food flying up into the air, with a parabolic trajectory that sends it back toward you.

MOVE 4 • Catch the food in the wok as you continue to pull it backward, then start to tilt it back down by lifting the handle just before you start pushing the wok forward again to repeat the cycle. As you practice, you’ll find a natural rhythm of tossing and catching that varies slightly depending on how much food is in your wok, but it’s typically two to three cycles per second.

**Or at least until I get one of those awesome live-fire grills they have at fancy restaurants with the pulleys on the sides that let you lift the grates up and down. Those things are so cool.*

[MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS]

PCC began as a food-buying club with 15 families. Now, it’s exceeded 100,000 members. To celebrate that milestone, we’re spotlighting several members this year who help make the co-op thrive. If you have a membership story to share in our letters page, let us know at editor@pccmarkets.com.



JARI PRESTON

Meet longtime co-op member Jari! She’s shopped at Kirkland PCC for 30 years and has kept coming back because of the co-op’s local connections, support of small farms and high product standards. Jari loves to grind her own coffee in-store, as the smell elicits fond memories of being a child and grocery shopping with her mother. Before she checks out, she grabs a few of her PCC favorites: PCC Walnut Beet Salad and Crab Cakes. Thank you for your decades of dedication, Jari! We hope you enjoy seeing the same familiar faces at the bigger and better Kirkland PCC that opened earlier this year!



SOLD OUT!

Cook with J. Kenji Lopez-Alt

Join J. Kenji Lopez-Alt for a PCC cooking class in July connected to his new book, “The Wok.” He’ll share techniques, stories and recipes for mapo tofu, cucumber salad and Chinese American kung pao chicken. The book is also available in all PCC stores. Sign up for PCC cooking classes at pccmarkets.com/r/6164.

PCC CUSTOMER SERVICE STARS



BEATRICE HOLBERT Deli Breakfast Cook, Bellevue PCC

Beatrice has been cooking up breakfast at Bellevue PCC since August 2020. Shoppers will often peek into the kitchen in hopes of seeing her working, which she considers an honor. As a Deli Cook, Salmon Chowder and Roasted Tomato Pasta Salad top her list of go-to PCC dishes. Her passion for serving good food overflows into every area of her life. When not at PCC, she runs her own catering company, which she has operated since 1986, and helps cook meals for Seattle’s homeless community through her church. In her downtime, Beatrice visits parks with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, dines out at Italian restaurants, plays tennis and enjoys horseback riding. It’s clear from her actions, words and overwhelming compassion that she loves helping people. Beatrice, we’re so glad you’re part of the PCC community — we appreciate you!



ANDRES BESA Grocery Clerk, Columbia City PCC

Andres joined the team at Columbia City PCC in 2020 after his brother, Pedro, recommended it as a great place to work. Spoiler alert: He agrees! Most of his time with PCC has been spent in the grocery department, but he’s also enjoyed opportunities to work in Beer & Wine and as a Cashier. Andres approaches each shift with a positive attitude, a willingness to help others and a smile. His goal is to make his coworkers and customers feel supported. When he’s in need of a treat, Andres reaches for an alfajores—a South American sandwich cookie filled with dulce de leche and dipped in chocolate—from Wooden Table Baking Co. A recent transplant to this region, Andres has fallen in love with all the nature Washington has to offer. On the weekend, you’ll find him filming outdoors for his YouTube channel or grabbing classic American diner food from Luna Park Café. Next time you see Andres, you will certainly receive a warm welcome. Thanks for all the collaborative energy you bring, Andres!



KATHLEEN YOW

Whether our members have been with us for days or decades, each one has a special relationship with our co-op. Meet Kathleen, a member who joined after her son was born back when our original Ravenna location was open and PCC didn’t sell meat. It was there that she built community and began learning about natural foods and quality standards. Our co-op played a large role in her personal and professional life — many of her wellness center’s customers came from her connection to PCC. Today, she works near Kirkland PCC and enjoys the Walnut Beet Salad, Hungarian Mushroom Soup and Mushroom Risotto Cakes from the PCC Market Kitchen. Thank you for your ongoing support, Kathleen!

The Cherokee Purple puzzle: Should we rename famous seeds?

By Rebekah Denn

What’s in a name? For seeds, an unintentional legacy of harm

The Cherokee Purple is one of the most popular varieties of heirloom tomato—big and bulgy, with a rich and beautifully balanced flavor. Craig LeHoullier, who introduced the variety to a wide audience, feels great pride about the dusky fruit, along with one serious regret: its name.

LeHoullier, a tomato expert and gardening author recounted at a conference recently how he opened his mail one day in 1990 to find a handful of tomato seeds from a fellow fan who thought he’d appreciate them. The man told LeHoullier that the seeds came from a neighbor whose family had grown them for more than a century after originally receiving them from the Cherokee tribe.

“I’m four years into seed saving, I’m very excited about discovering different colors and flavors and varieties,” LeHoullier recently recalled about his first contact with the plant. “And I had something that was just wonderful...I thought, this is great. I have to get it out there. People need to grow it, they need to try it. So I rather flippantly, I guess, gave it a name—Cherokee Purple—because it was a purple tomato and reflected what was stated in the letter.”

With hindsight and with more current cultural awareness, LeHoullier thinks the tomato shouldn’t carry that name without



knowing more about its origins. Was it, in fact, handed down from the tribe? Would members support or oppose the name? Did they have another name for the variety, and would they want it shared?

The Cherokee Purple is far from the only food carrying such complicated questions. LeHoullier and others discussed the issue at a session of the Organic Seed Alliance’s Organic Seed Growers Conference earlier this year on “The Power of Seed Names: Can We Do Better?”

While seed names can be a beautiful connection to identity, culture, worldview and history, organizers wrote, “many seeds have names that are derogatory in nature or simply incorrect.

“How do we as an organic seed community honor seeds, their stewardship history, and where they have come from while addressing seed names that may need to change?”

The seed question is one facet of a question that’s also been raised recently in other areas, notably place names. Washington state

lawmakers began a renaming process for state maps in 2015. Earlier this year the U.S. Department of the Interior announced candidates to rename more than 660 geographic features nationwide that had the name “squaw” after officially declaring it a derogatory term.

It’s a particularly fraught issue with seeds because by their nature they’re meant to be reproduced.

Kellee Matsushita-Tseng, assistant farm manager for the Farm Garden at the University of California at Santa Cruz, also works with Second Generation Seeds, a collective devoted to preserving and improving crops significant to Asian American communities.

Sometimes she and her colleagues can choose not to grow varieties that have objectionable names. But some they want to grow for specific educational or research needs.

“And so, if we use those varieties, I feel like I have no choice but to rename them...” she said at the Alliance meeting.

“For me the most dangerous risk is that if we do not rename then, or we do not make it clear (they are offensive), our learners and our students internalize these things, (thinking) that’s the way things are and that it’s acceptable.”

“The language we use, our naming, our choices, are all telling a story, whether or not we’re actually seeing that.”

For the alliance, it’s the start of a conversation, with more solid plans to follow.

“I think the humility part is me bringing these stories to you, essentially saying, Help. What do we do with this? Where do we go next?...” said LeHoullier.

“Can we complete the story that is so incredibly, disappointingly incomplete?”

[POLICY REPORT]

Policy wins spring up

By Aimee Simpson

While policy work can often seem slow and incremental, this spring we saw a rewarding series of genuine wins on issues PCC has supported. Organic cows, kelp habitat and composting all benefited from these final laws and rules:

Organic Origin of Livestock

More than two years ago, PCC and many other organic allies called for immediate action from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to fix a problematic loophole within the rules that specify how an organic cow becomes and stays organic. Vague sections of this Origin of Livestock (OOL) rule had been interpreted by some organic certifiers and producers as allowing them to sell milk as organic even if the cows had not been raised organically as intended under the rule.

The rule calls for cows to be raised organically literally before birth, from the last third of gestation. Initially, though, to encourage farmers to raise organic cows, the law had allowed a one-year process that would transition conventional herds to organic. Some certifiers and farmers—usually large-scale ones—kept this permanently in effect, saving those farmers money on the cost of raising “organic”

livestock and creating an unequal playing field for producers and certifiers who raised their herds as organic from the start—a more expensive route that was the organic rule’s intention and was best for the cow, consumer and planet.

(The only transitional period organic allies support for a conventional herd would be a one-time transition during the three-year waiting period it takes for aspirational organic farmers to wait before becoming certified organic.)

While the fix wasn’t immediate, cows, consumers, and a significant portion of the organic community finally did prevail. We are happy to report that the final origin of livestock rule and long-overdue correction to the continuous transition loophole was finalized on April 5. New rules that prohibit transition of a non-organic herd after organic certification took effect June 6.

Kelp and Eelgrass Conservation

On May 30, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee signed into law a bill known as the Kelp Forest and Eelgrass Meadow Conservation Initiative. Requested by the Department of Natural Resources, sponsored by Sen. Liz Lovelett (D-Anacortes), this was one of several bills PCC supported this state legislative session. The law aims to conserve and restore at least 10,000 acres of native kelp forests and eelgrass meadows by 2040 (SSSB 5619). Significant declines in both of these aquatic plant species have been recently documented and pose additional threats to the many marine species that depend on the habitat they provide for survival, such as young salmon and shellfish.



Compost and Food Waste

Those of us living in Seattle and its surrounding area are privileged to have collection services for “organic waste” (aka plant and food waste.) According to a report conducted by Zero Waste Washington, however, this privilege does not extend to a majority of jurisdictions across the state—and that is a big problem. A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report published in 2021 found that each year U.S. food loss and waste embodies 170 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (million MTCO2e) greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (excluding landfill emissions). And that doesn’t even consider methane emissions, which is a more potent GHG.

With the passage of E2SHB 1799 into law (another PCC-supported bill) and the signature of Gov. Inslee on March 25, 2022,

the state now has a number of new organic waste reduction targets and requirements, including a 75% organic waste disposal target by 2030 and a 20% increase in the volume of edible food recovery by 2025, both relative to 2015 levels. (These targets are in addition to the goal of a 50% reduction of generated food waste by 2030, passed in 2019 and also supported by PCC.) The new law goes on to require certain local governments to provide composting services, beginning in 2027, and to adopt compost procurement policies and in some locations to allow for compost processing facilities. There will also be new standards for compostable product labels and colors and a creation of a Washington Center for Sustainable Food.

Aimee Simpson is PCC’s senior director of advocacy & environmental, social and governance (ESG).

How to live gluten-free, joyfully

By Shauna James Ahern, guest contributor

“You cannot eat any food that contains gluten, ever again.” That’s your doctor talking to you, the one who has been unraveling the mystery of you for months.

You’ve been unwell, perhaps for years. You long for the ability to eat without a stomachache, or energy to make it through the day without a long nap. A life without joint pain, migraines or sudden-attack rushes to the bathroom sounds unimaginably free.

But no gluten? No baguettes slathered with butter? No warm doughnuts at your favorite local bakery after a long bike ride? No big bowls of cacio e pepe with your best friend from college?

This feels terrible.

But wait. Breathe.

Then, reframe that story.

Right now, the idea of a life without gluten sounds impossible. Your brain is shouting that this is an alarmed emergency.

That’s because humans are hardwired to see uncertainty as dangerous.

In this moment, you cannot imagine how you will ever feel well again. That feels like a mirage, shimmering in the distance.

Right now, embracing life without gluten feels like deprivation.

If that story sounds like yours, I understand. When I was diagnosed with celiac disease in 2005 (an autoimmune disease where eating gluten can cause damage to the small intestine, affecting an estimated 2 million people in the United States), I had been sick for months on end. Having an answer was a deep relief. But in the first month of being gluten-free, I fixated on the idea that I would never be able to eat a flaky, buttery croissant in Paris again.

Now, from the distance of 16 years—and hearing from thousands of people through my cookbooks and my former food blog, Gluten-Free Girl—I have some knowledge of how to live gluten-free, joyfully.

Step one: Accept this. After all, this is your body. If it’s built that way, then embrace it. Over time, this will change much of how you see yourself in the world.

Step two: Everything you thought about food you could eat? You have to change that. Yes, this is difficult, especially if your daily habits relied on anything from pizza and pasta to vegetarian sandwiches in whole-wheat wraps to cookies.

Be kind to yourself.

Sure, there are now a plethora of gluten-free baked goods, breads and frozen pizzas on the market. The grocery store looks entirely different than it did for me in 2005.

However, emphasizing convenience foods in your diet is not the ideal nutritional path even when they don’t contain gluten. Try to make those foods an occasional treat. *(Editor’s note: See pccmarkets.com/r/6178 for a guide to gluten-free nutrition.)*

Instead, flip the switch on this story. What CAN you eat? Make a huge list of foods you love that are naturally gluten-free.

Eat a peach so ripe that the juice dribbles down your chin. Make a salad of arugula and chichories, with soft goat cheese, pistachios and dried cranberries, dressed with Sicilian lemon dressing. Fry up some eggs until they’re crisp on the edges, with enough ooze in the yolk to spill over the sauteed spinach in the bowl. Top with smoked salt. Or try creamy yogurt with savory toppings, currently my favorite breakfast (recipe below.)



Photo credit to Shauna James Ahern

Every time you eat great food without gluten? You’re healing yourself.

Step three: You have to resist the temptation of eating gluten to fit in. Oh, a little can’t hurt me. Yes, it can. Every time you eat something with gluten, if you’re not supposed to eat it for your health, you’re damaging yourself.

Now, because my body knows how sick I get from accidentally eating even ¼ teaspoon of gluten, I think of traditional cakes and pies as a bottle of Drano. They’re lovely, of course, but they’ll eat a hole in my intestines.

Stand up for yourself.

Step four: Eventually, when you do start to feel better after living gluten-free, you’ll KNOW why you’re doing this. Eventually, this will become muscle memory.

In the meantime, get curious.

Instead of feeling sad because you can’t have that croissant, ask why that baked good means so much to you?

It’s human. No one wants to be thought of as an outsider. Remind yourself—uncertainty feels like danger. You don’t have to get stuck in that feeling, though.

Get curious about why you need to feel like you belong, and what constitutes taking care of yourself.

Here’s the secret—getting curious, staying persistent about taking care of yourself, embracing your body, and exploring everything you can do instead of focusing on what you can’t have?

Shifting to this mindset will affect the rest of your life, too.

So give yourself a week to feel sad. Have a goodbye gluten party. Feel it fully. Then, get curious about the foods you may not have discovered yet.

Have you ever tried umeboshi plum vinegar? Fermented salsa? Arepas? Chicken

adobo? Vietnamese salad rolls? Pistachio meringue cookies? Creamy polenta with pork ragu? Kabocha squash congee?

Truly, the possibilities are endless.

You’ll return to loving food again, in an even more grateful way, when you let go of the gluten and advocate for yourself.

I promise.

Oh, and that Parisian croissant I mourned for a month? I haven’t been able to travel back to Paris since 2005. But the next time I do go, I’ll hit one of the dedicated gluten-free patisseries first.

Everything changes. Help yourself by embracing this change.

Savory yogurt with kimchi, tamari-roasted almonds and gomasio

Makes 1 serving

You can go gluten-free joyfully when you try new foods and combinations of flavors that wouldn’t have occurred to you before. Savory yogurt may be unfamiliar, but once you try it, you’re going to want more.

The key is to think about texture and flavor. Creamy yogurt? We’re used to topping it with fruit. Instead, try a little mound of spicy kimchi. Instead of sweetened granola, try any chopped nuts you like. And salt the food with another flavor. Try gomasio, a Japanese sesame seed salt (we like a version that also includes seaweed; PCC carries both the plain and seafood seasonings).

With just four ingredients, this dish offers surprise and delight.

½ cup full-fat yogurt

¼ cup chopped kimchi

2 tablespoons chopped tamari-lime-chili almonds (or other nuts to your taste)

½ teaspoon gomasio

Spoon the yogurt into a bowl. Top with the kimchi. Strew the chopped almonds, then sprinkle with the gomasio.

Other combinations that work well together:

- Yogurt, sauerkraut, pistachios and smoked salt.
- Yogurt, pickled red cabbage, garlic-roasted cashews and rosemary-lemon salt.
- Yogurt, grated pickled carrots, toasted sunflower seeds and Cajun spiced salt.

Shauna James Ahern is the author of several books, including “Gluten-Free Girl Every Day,” a winner of the James Beard Cookbook Award for Focus on Health, and the memoir “Enough: Notes from a Woman Who Has Finally Found It.”

Cooking gluten-free

PCC offers many resources and ingredients for eating gluten-free.

We offer a wide variety of cooking classes with gluten-free recipes—to view upcoming courses visit pccmarkets.com/r/6165.

PCC’s standards for gluten-free products are online at pccmarkets.com/r/6168.

Our guide to gluten-free baking can be viewed online at pccmarkets.com/r/6167.

For some families, gardening starts with food benefits

By Hannah Weinberger, Crosscut

Home gardener Maggie Slighte was thrilled to discover that she could use food assistance program benefits to purchase seeds and food-bearing plants nearly 20 years ago. Slighte, who is lower-income and lives in Olympia with ADHD, autism and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, has been dialing in her strategy for growing food to feed herself and her family ever since.

Many people know that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, known colloquially as food stamps, makes it possible for more people to buy food at the grocery store. Households at or below 200% of the federal poverty level or making about \$4,400 per month for a family of four, can use their SNAP benefits to purchase milk, bread, vegetables and various other food products. Immigrants may be eligible for the State Food Assistance Program, which offers the same benefits as SNAP.

But fewer people know that these benefits can help them grow their own fresh produce, according to people involved in King County gardening nonprofits and the SNAP program itself.

More area residents have become eligible for food assistance in the pandemic, and even more are expressing interest in sustainable living practices, like home and community gardening. The number of King County households enrolled in SNAP increased from 10.7% of households in February 2020 to 11.6%, or 106,105 households, as of December 2021. The most recent demographic data, for applications between March and August 2020, show that 20% of applicants were new to the benefits. Many enrollees are people of color.

As locals look for ways to make their families and communities more resilient to economic and ecological stresses, it has become more important to highlight ways to acquire seeds and other gardening resources below cost, equitable gardening experts say.

Old but misunderstood option

Many of the ways people acquire seeds and plant starts below cost in King County are “grass roots, no pun intended,” says Missy Trainer, coordinator of the Haller Lake P-Patch Giving Garden. But the opportunity to use government assistance for gardening has been around since 1973, when the Food Stamp Act was amended to include “seeds and plants for use in gardens to produce food for the personal consumption of the eligible household.”

Supplementing your diet with home-grown food can be economical. “For the same price as a large tomato, someone could buy a packet of seeds or plant start that would ultimately yield more fruit,” says Kerri Cacciata, market programs director of the Tilth Alliance’s Rainier Beach Urban Farm & Wetlands.

Better yet, Tilth’s Laura Matter notes that once you’ve grown a fruit like a tomato, you can save its seeds for future use. The SNAP program “provides low-cost supplies for growing produce that is worth much more when fully grown and harvested. People are excited to eat what they grow,” Matter says.

Edible plant starts are for sale at area grocery stores like Fred Meyer in Greenwood. These plants, as well as seeds that produce food, are eligible for purchase with federal assistance through the SNAP program.

King County residents can use SNAP at food banks, grocery stores that sell seeds,



convenience and drug stores, as well as at farmers markets, where they can use the MarketMatch program to double the value of their SNAP benefits. They can also use their benefits at online retailers. (**Editor’s note:** PCC markets accept SNAP and carry plant starts and seeds.)

But it’s unclear how many people actually use or benefit from the SNAP program’s inclusion of seeds and food-bearing plants.

“I hope people know that they have that option,” says Angela Amico, a state Department of Social and Health Services-affiliated program manager of SNAP-Ed, a 30-year-old program that supports people eligible for SNAP benefits in eating healthfully and staying active.

Amico, who helps people make SNAP purchases go further, says she’s not sure the ability to use benefits to purchase seeds and starts is well known. Gardening is becoming more a part of the SNAP-Ed curriculum; SNAP-Ed also involves partners like Washington State University and the Lummi Tribal Health Center in gardening and seed distribution efforts.

Neither the USDA Food and Nutrition Service nor the state Department of Social and Health Services tracks SNAP-related spending on seeds and plant-bearing starts. The most recent USDA data for SNAP expenditures nationwide also do not include them as spending categories, but it does show 0.3% of assistance went to “miscellaneous” spending.

After years of growing food for food banks through the local Giving Gardens nonprofit, Seattle resident Alexandria Soleil DeLong found herself in a position to use SNAP benefits for 15 months and patronize food banks.

“I didn’t feel like there was like a ton of information about what I could purchase,” says DeLong, a soil health and food justice advocate who until connecting with Crosscut did not know that they would have been able to use their SNAP benefits to purchase seeds and starts.

Some groups that sell seeds and food-bearing plants say the option is being used. Through her work at Tilth, Cacciata says she has had a number of people purchase

edible plant starts—broccoli, beets, leafy greens and beyond—with SNAP benefits at events like Tilth’s annual Edible Plant Sale and the seasonal farm stand.

Locals like Slighte are so passionate about this option that they make instructional videos to share online as a way to expand awareness of it. Using online platforms like TikTok, Slighte—under the handle @NeurodivergentGranny—shows people how to double the value of their SNAP benefits at farmers markets, where she purchased tomato plants last year, from which she saved seeds for future harvest. Even during the winter, the foods she harvested and dehydrated from her first year of having a “major” patio garden provide about 10% of her food, she says. In the early fall, she was able to grow about 30% of her own food.

DeLong says the process of using SNAP at farmers markets can be awkward, involving tokens and Monopoly-style money. “I want to use the state’s money at the farmers markets to support local farmers. But it’s really just like a strange belittling interaction,” they said.

Not every seed and start retailer participates in this program, let alone realizes they might, which can add to the awkwardness of trying to use SNAP benefits for gardening. Cacciata says grocery stores are more likely than nurseries or garden centers to accept SNAP, since they already handle food purchases made with SNAP, but even grocery clerks might not know it’s a viable option.

“If you’ve got cashiers that don’t understand that you can do that, then you’re met with an immediate barrier, immediate judgment. And so all your plans are completely thwarted before you even start,” Slighte says.

Aimée Damman, director of marketing and communications at Swansons Nursery, says she doesn’t know of anyone who has used SNAP to purchase seeds or plants. While the nursery donates plants to the Ballard Food Bank and seeds to the Giving Garden Network, among other organizations, it doesn’t accept SNAP. “I don’t think [the option] is very widely known,” she says. “We haven’t had any demand.” If demand

arose, Swansons would need to adjust its sales technology, and may actually have to offer more food-related items to even become eligible to accept SNAP benefits.

Urban Feed & Garden in Beacon Hill doesn’t accept SNAP benefits, but General Manager Risa Wolfe says she thinks using the benefits on seeds and starts sounds like a great idea. Urban Feed & Garden donates seeds to community gardens, and donated about \$1,200 worth of seeds to Nurturing Roots last winter. She thinks her staff would be willing to accept SNAP benefits, but no one affiliated with SNAP has reached out to educate the staff on the business side of the program. “If somebody came to me with SNAP benefits, I wouldn’t know what to do,” she says.

Other hurdles to growing food

Once someone has seeds in hand, they need gardening maintenance supplies, time to garden and container space or land.

“Land access is the big one,” Matter says, stressing the importance of accessible community gardens. “Time to garden can be an impediment, but if folks have growing space at their home or nearby, this makes it more practical.”

“You could get a pack of carrot seeds, but if you don’t have land for the carrot to grow into it, then it’s not really worth much,” adds DeLong.

People in King County have unequal access to these resources. Backyards are increasingly scarce, not all multifamily housing residents are able to grow plants in containers or on roofs, and while Seattle’s P-Patch program makes many acres of land available to the community for gardening, including food gardening, the P-Patches can have years-long waitlists.

People also need educational resources to be successful. In addition to distributing fresh fruits and vegetables, a number of local organizations also provide gardening education, including Tilth Alliance, The Beet Box, Solid Ground, Nurturing Roots Farm, Black Star Farmers and the Black Farmers Collective’s Yes Farm.

The King County Seed Library system and Plant Based Food Share also share seeds and starts.

Bill Thornness, coordinator of the seed library, says the popularity of gardening during the pandemic reduced the seed library’s seed supply. “Because the seed companies have been so busy, we haven’t had as many donations. And part of our model includes holding seed swaps where gardeners can bring seeds to share, but we haven’t done that for two years. We are talking about holding an outdoor one this spring,” he says.

Some food banks also share seeds. Mara Bernard, the community farms and facilities manager of the White Center Food Bank, says the food bank last year distributed 4,000 seed packets and 2,000 plant starts.

In Slighte’s experience, growing any amount of food with whatever space and time people can find during a time of great anxiety is valuable for producing more than just fresh produce.

“When you use SNAP benefits for gardening, you’re experiencing a type of self-sufficiency that you don’t get to experience when you’re low-income,” Slighte says. “And it’s that nontangible benefit that is so incredibly helpful to your mental health.”

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From okra to amaranth, plants help new residents “grow home”

By Tara Austen Weaver, guest contributor

Imagine coming to a new country as an immigrant—or being forced to relocate as a refugee. So much would be different: language, culture and customs. Now, imagine you were a gardener. How would you find the seeds and plants you are used to growing? Would the new climate support the food you like to eat? How would you find a taste of home?

This is the problem that Tilth Alliance, Seattle’s long-time gardener support and education organization, seeks to address: how to provide culturally relevant edible plant starts for refugee, immigrant and low-income communities; how to help them grow the food they know and enjoy.

“A lot of the work we do is with underserved people in the community,” explains Laura Matter, director of Tilth’s Natural Yard Care Program. For years, the organization has offered organic gardening advice and support through classes and the Garden Hotline—a phone and email program to help gardeners gain the knowledge they need to be successful. Over time, however, a need for greater cultural sensitivity around who and what was growing became clear.

“In the refugee communities, a lot of people know what they’re doing,” says Matter. “They had farms and gardens where they came from, but they don’t know this climate.” With many recent arrivals coming from the global south, they may not be accustomed to our cool and wet climate. They also might not be familiar with the type of vegetables available in the Northwest.

“Rather than telling them, ‘No, you’re going to have to grow this,’ we asked what they wanted to grow,” Matter says. “And then we tried to figure out how we could make that happen.”

The figuring out part has been a journey of its own, one that has encompassed language, climate, horticulture, and a culinary and cultural education for the program organizers at Tilth.

“One of the issues is that we don’t have the same name for plants,” explains Matter. This makes accurate communication and sourcing difficult. When the pandemic hit and Tilth moved its educational programming online, however, they were able to share photos from gardening catalogs with participants over Zoom. This helped to zero in on the most-desired vegetables.

Among the most sought-after seeds are small white eggplant, hibiscus, amaranth and long beans. Okra is very popular, as are yams and bittermelon, a vine whose fruit is widely used in Africa, throughout Asia and in the Caribbean.

“Some of these plants would benefit from having a year-round growing space,”



admits Matter, so greenhouse space may be needed. This year Tilth is growing several types of okra and grains, to see which do best in this climate. Along the way, they are learning as well—that hibiscus leaves can be utilized, as well as the plant’s flowers, and the tender growth on squash vines is edible and much loved in various food cultures, including Italy, China, Thailand and Nigeria. “Our mission is really just to help people to be successful and to access the food they want,” says Matter.

While Tilth has been supplying plant starts on a small scale to a number of local organizations over the past few years, this is the first time it has received funding to specifically focus on growing culturally

appropriate seeds. The program is being sponsored by Seattle’s Food Equity Fund, Whole Cities Foundation, and The Port of South King County’s Community Impact Fund. Tilth has received seed donations from Kitazawa Seeds, High Mowing, Renee’s Garden Seed, Cornucopia, Osborne Seed and local Home Depot stores. This year the program plans to donate 2,000 plant starts.

One of the groups that will receive starts is World Relief of Western Washington (WRWW), which supports refugees, immigrants and other displaced people. They share the starts at their Paradise Parking Plots—a garden in Kent built to foster community and to insulate participants from food insecurity in an area with few grocery

stores. Built on a former 1-acre parking lot at Hillside Church that was de-paved, the garden now includes 50 plots—one in each of the former parking spots (thus the name: parking plots). This year, 22 different countries are represented amongst the gardeners: Bhutan, Palestine, Ukraine and more.

Lucas McClish, coordinator of the program, appreciates Tilth’s contribution. “Not a lot of these plants are available in western Washington,” he says—and even when the seeds can be sourced, they are often prohibitively expensive. McClish once tracked down a highly sought-after white eggplant on Etsy, but one small packet of seeds—shipped from Ghana, complete with agriculture inspection certificate—was \$35.

“Folks are really excited when we can source seeds—and they grow it and save the seeds and share with their friends and it filters through the community,” he says.

McClish takes the desire to grow food that is familiar seriously. “A lot of these plants are medicine for people back home. Having access to these plants is what they need to live healthy lives.” Currently he is trying to source seeds for molokhia, an herb from Jordan; a leafy green nightshade from Africa called menagu; and a spiky gourd from Nepal that he’s still trying to identify with the correct name.

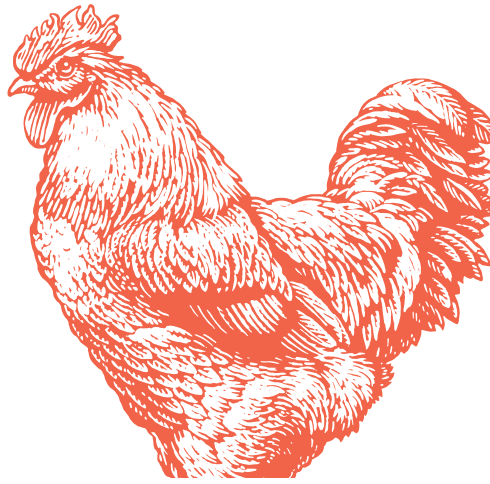
There could also be money made by growing these vegetables. “A few folks in the garden are ready to sell what they grow,” explains McClish. “There’s a real opportunity, especially for some of these culturally specific plants. They’re hard to find here—and if you can find them the quality is usually not good because they’ve been shipped from far away.”

While scaling up to market quantities would require additional land and some education around selling and developing a customer base, there may be gardeners who are ready and interested in feeding more than just their family. Most of those who receive the plant starts, however, are focused on smaller, more immediate needs—to feed both body and also spirit.

“When you’re somewhere that is new, and everything is different, the soil and the plants are the same,” McClish explains. “It’s a way of connecting to your culture and your home and keeping that alive.”

This year there will be 2,000 more opportunities to do just that.

Tara Austen Weaver is author of “Orchard House, How to Grow Berries and Fruit Trees in the Pacific Northwest,” “A Little Book of Flowers: Peonies” and “A Little Book of Flowers: Dahlias.” She lives in Seattle and writes frequently about food, agriculture and social justice issues.



New research on whole grains and health

By Erin Cazel, guest contributor

Whole grains are widely associated with decreased risk for several chronic diseases. The mechanisms behind those health benefits aren't fully understood, which has stalled consumers at a crossroads of conflicting recommendations: How much and how often should whole grains be eaten? What kinds of whole grains are best to consume? Is there an ideal way to prepare whole grains?

New evidence now provides some clearer direction, showing that the benefits of consuming whole grains are the result of an intricate dance of interactions between fiber, the gut microbiome (trillions of diverse bacteria living within the human digestive tract), and a group of bioactive compounds in grains called phytochemicals.

Partners in the dance

Many chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes, are at least partially connected to an imbalance of healthy and unhealthy bacteria in the gut microbiome. This can lead to oxidative stress (an imbalance between antioxidants and unstable molecules called free radicals) and a related increase in harmful inflammation.

Fiber, a component of whole grains, has received a lot of credit for the health benefits of the grains. While it might be tempting to reach for fiber supplements for an easy way to consume the recommended daily amounts of fiber (see below), optimal benefits can be derived by consuming whole foods. This allows fiber to function in tandem with other beneficial compounds, such as phytochemicals.

There are thousands of different phytochemicals. These compounds are produced by plants (“phyto,” derived from ancient Greek, means “plant”), and provide vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, spices, and herbs with their characteristic flavors, colors, and aromas. They also play a role in plant growth and defense from infection or predation. Phytochemicals are characterized as bioactive because of their potential capacity to impact human health, and many scientific studies seek to uncover these effects. Research shows associations between the phytochemicals in whole grains and antioxidant activity, reductions in inflammation, strengthened immunity and improved microbiome health. The ripple effects of these systemic changes are widespread, improving digestion, metabolism and mental and emotional health.



Complexity and complications

While these are exciting prospects, the picture is complicated. First, phytochemicals are often bound in the fibers of the bran layer of whole grains, the outer skin of the edible grain kernel. This limits the degree to which the phytochemicals can be absorbed in our bodies. It also makes it difficult to distinguish between the effects of fiber and phytochemicals. Second, unlike macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, fats) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals), fibers and phytochemicals are not directly incorporated into body tissues. Instead, their effects are often indirect. For example, phytochemicals can turn on or off the expression of different genes, as well as activate elements within the immune system.

Finally, fibers and phytochemicals can be metabolized by the gut microbiota. This both nourishes healthy gut bacteria and produces byproducts that are themselves health-promoting. The microbiome is incredibly dynamic: the types and quantity of bacteria change in response to foods consumed. This means that an individual's microbial profile is unique and evolves over time, making it difficult to measure a specific health impact, and also accounting for the wide range in individual response.

There's more. The composition of fibers and phytochemicals within a whole grain varies not only between species of grain, but also between varieties within a species. It is even influenced by the geographical location and season in which the crop is grown. Soaking, sprouting, and fermenting whole grains separates phytochemicals from fibers, increasing their availability and absorption. While these are often suggested as preparation techniques, current research reinforces the health benefits of whole grain

It is still beneficial to eat whole grains even without soaking, sprouting or fermenting

consumption with a variety of preparation techniques. While there are benefits to releasing the phytochemicals from the fibers, it is still beneficial to eat whole grains even without soaking, sprouting or fermenting.

As studies continue, specific compounds are likely to enter the research and popular-media spotlight. It's unlikely, though, to acquire extra benefits from any solitary chemical. Because the composition of a whole grain is vast and complex, health benefits are likely due to the synergy of many different compounds rather than a single one in isolation. The best way to optimize health benefits is to incorporate a wide variety of whole grains into daily food patterns. Try including a whole grain with every meal and experimenting with types that are new to you. Pay attention to how your body feels when eating various whole grains. Remember: you and your microbiome are unique, so listen to your gut.

Erin Cazel is pursuing a Master's in Nutrition at Bastyr University. Radical hospitality is Erin's life passion—she loves gathering community around a table filled with food and conversation, and cares deeply about using foods to nurture the body, heart and mind.

A pioneer in natural medicine, Bastyr University is a nonprofit, private university that is at the forefront of developing leaders in natural health arts and sciences for the 21st century. Bastyr offers graduate and undergraduate degrees in science-based natural medicine that integrates mind, body, spirit and nature. The University is also a leader in conducting cutting-edge research in complementary and alternative medicine and in offering affordable natural healthcare services in its local communities.

Whole grains and fiber

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends most adults consume 25 to 38 grams of fiber per day. Most Americans consume less than half that amount, from 10 to 15 grams per day.

Whole grains are an excellent source of fiber, with amounts ranging from a half gram of fiber to 3 grams of fiber per serving, according to the nonprofit Whole Grains Council. (Processed grains have typically had both the nutritious bran and germ layers of their kernels removed, including much of the fiber.) Higher-fiber sources of whole grains include barley, brown rice, whole wheat, oats, quinoa, amaranth, teff, sorghum and millet. Bulk bins are typically a budget way to stock up on many of these grains.



[NEWS BITES]

California's green grid

For a brief period (one) Saturday afternoon, renewable sources provided nearly all of California's power: Wind, solar and other emissions-free technologies met a record 99.87% of California's total 18.7 gigawatts of energy demand, according to a spokesperson for California Independent System Operator, the nonprofit group known as CAISO that oversees the Golden State's power grid. And as the numbers inch toward 100%, environmental advocates say it could soon be possible for clean energy to meet all of California's electricity demand on a daily basis. Tom Athanasiou, executive director of the activist think tank EcoEquity, called the record “unambiguously good news,” although he stressed the need to ensure that all Californians benefit from reduced reliance on fossil fuels. (*Grist.org*)

World Food Prize

A NASA climate research scientist who has spent much of her career explaining how global food production must adapt to a changing climate was awarded the 2022 World Food Prize. Cynthia Rosenzweig, an agronomist and climatologist, was awarded the \$250,000 prize in recognition of her innovative modeling of the impact of climate change on food production. Rosenzweig, whose win was announced during a ceremony at the State Department in Washington D.C., said she hopes it will focus attention on the need to improve food and agricultural systems to lessen the effects of climate change. (*WNYT.com*)

Culinary program saved

The Seattle restaurant community mobilized and helped save the landmark culinary school at Seattle Central College from the budget chopping block—along with the maritime, wood technology, and apparel and design programs—for the moment, at least. Details emerged in April that a budget committee for public Seattle Central was expected to recommend permanently cutting the Seattle Culinary Academy. Instead, the college has now announced that it will continue enrollment through fall 2022 and—it is hoped—going forward. (*SeattleTimes.com*)

Soil health program

Washington's soil health initiative started to amalgamate in 2019, and with full funding of \$2.1 million a year coming online last year, the state entered into a dramatic paradigm shift in the resources it invests in soil health research, outreach and incentive programs. Virtually overnight, the effort places Washington state as one of the preeminent leaders in state-supported soil health activities. The Washington state soil

health roadmap, available at: pccmarkets.com/r/6170, is a document with over 100 pages outlining what we know about soil health in the state's 14.6 million acres of agricultural land and what we hope to learn through this project. (*GoodFruit.com*)

Black farmers and wealth

Black farmers in the United States lost roughly \$326 billion worth of acreage during the 20th century, according to the first study to quantify the present-day value of that loss. Land loss is a contributor to the racial wealth gap in the United States and an issue that has marred the relationship between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and minority farmers. “Wealth and land is one way in this country that you're able to grow opportunity for your family,” said Dr. Dania Francis, professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts-Boston and lead author of the study published in the American Economic Association's Papers and Proceedings journal. (*Reuters.com*)

Bird-friendly beef?

Audubon will formally launch its “bird-friendly beef” campaign at the national level, offering its seal of approval to cattle ranchers who can prove their methods will bring the birds back. Historically, U.S. wildlife conservation efforts have focused on preserving habitat. But Audubon's new strategy is specifically geared toward improving the environmental value of working lands, implying that “nature” and “agriculture” are not mutually exclusive entities. (*TheCounter.org*)

Cropland control

Foreign investment in U.S. cropland has nearly tripled in the past decade, according to USDA data. The total cropland controlled by foreign interests in 2020 was 10.9 million acres, up from 4.1 million acres in 2010. This increase has been largely driven by foreign-owned wind companies signing long-term leases on a large number of acres, according to USDA. (*InvestigateMidwest.org*)

Plant fungus decoded

A protein that allows the fungus that causes white mold stem rot in more than 600 plant species to overcome plant defenses has been identified by a team of USDA Agricultural Research Service and Washington State University scientists. Knowledge of this protein, called a SsPINE1, could help researchers develop new, more precise system of control measures for the Sclerotinia sclerotiorum fungus, which attacks potatoes, soybeans, sunflowers, peas, lentils, canola, and many other broad leaf crops. The damage can add up to billions of dollars in a year of bad outbreaks. (*ars.usda.gov*)

Energy-efficient lights

The Biden administration is scrapping old-fashioned incandescent light bulbs, speeding an ongoing trend toward more efficient lighting that officials say will save households, schools and businesses billions of dollars a year. Rules finalized by the Energy Department will require manufacturers to sell energy-efficient light bulbs, accelerating a longtime industry practice to use compact fluorescent and LED bulbs that last 25 to 50 times longer than incandescent bulbs. The rules are projected to cut planet-warming carbon emissions by 222 million metric tons over the next 30 years, an amount equivalent to emissions generated by 28 million homes in one year, officials said. (*NPR.org*)

Microplastics concerns

Microplastics can pick up pollution in their travels and pose an even greater threat to human health, according to a new study. In the ocean, for example, toxic compounds can hitch a ride on plastic and make the material 10 times more toxic than it would normally be, according to the research published earlier this year in Chemosphere. Although the dangers of both microplastics and harmful compounds have been studied individually, few researchers have looked at their combined effect. (*ehn.org*)

Sustainable Yakima

The Yakima City Council is moving forward with a new board called Sustainable Yakima to help improve the city's sustainability efforts and address the adverse effects of climate change. Community members are preferred—but not required—to have experience or expertise in a related field, such as energy management, water conservation, solid waste management, climate science or forestry. Sustainable Yakima will be tasked with creating a Climate Action Plan within its first year, the council decided. (*YakimaHerald.com*)

Seed libraries sprout

At the public library in Mystic, Connecticut, a card catalog that formerly stored book due dates now holds endless packets of seeds. There's eggplant and kale, marigolds and zinnias; more than 90 different types of seeds available for anyone with a card to take home and plant. The seed library in Mystic is just one of a number that have sprouted up around the country over the last decade—including in Georgia, California, Colorado, Arizona and Maine—as libraries turn to seeds to help them meet the daily needs of the communities they serve in new ways. (*CivilEats.com*)

People's Gardens

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack planted a tree earlier this year to announce the reopening of USDA's People's Garden Initiative. People's Gardens across the country will grow fresh, healthy food and support resilient, local food systems; teach people how to garden using conservation practices; nurture habitat for pollinators and wildlife and create greenspace for neighbors. The garden at USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C. will be joined by 17 flagship gardens located in urban communities nationwide, including one in Portland Ore. (*usda.gov*)

Antibiotics in beef

When you see the claim “Raised Without Antibiotics” on a package of beef, you expect just that—the cattle weren't given antibiotics. But a study in the journal Science suggests that may not always be the case. Researchers at George Washington University and Food In-Depth, a company that's developed antibiotic tests for livestock, tested urine samples from 669 cattle raised under a “No Antibiotics Ever” program overseen by the Department of Agriculture. They found that 15% tested positive for at least one antibiotic. (*ConsumerReports.org*)

Insects in decline

According to a study conducted by University College London (UCL), the combination of rising temperatures due to climate change and land-use changes are directly linked to widespread losses in insect species around the world. The study, published in Nature, found that changing temperatures and “intensive agricultural land use” in the most impacted parts of the world (tropical regions, according to the research) are already responsible for a reduction in insect numbers. In areas with both high-intensity agriculture and substantial temperature increases, researchers found the number of insects was 49% lower than populations in natural habitats in areas without notable climate warming. (*ModernFarmer.com*)

Recycling rates drop

Americans are recycling far less plastic, according to (a recent) analysis, with rates falling below 6% in 2021. The research from Beyond Plastics and the Last Beach Cleanup aims to shed light on the state of recycling in the United States given a delay in federal reporting. Drawing on the most recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency data available and last year's plastic-waste exports, the new report estimates that Americans recycled 5 to 6% of their plastics, down from 8.7% in 2018. (*WashingtonPost.com*)

Count your chickens...and trade in unwanted roosters at this farm co-op

By Tara Austen Weaver, guest contributor

I don't remember the first time I heard of the chicken trade-in program at Monroe Farm Co-op. It's the sort of thing that gets whispered from one urban chicken owner to another—a fairly reasonable solution to the perennial problem of raising chickens in the city. In short: what do you do with unwanted roosters? Due to animal code restrictions, raising male chickens in the city is not allowed.

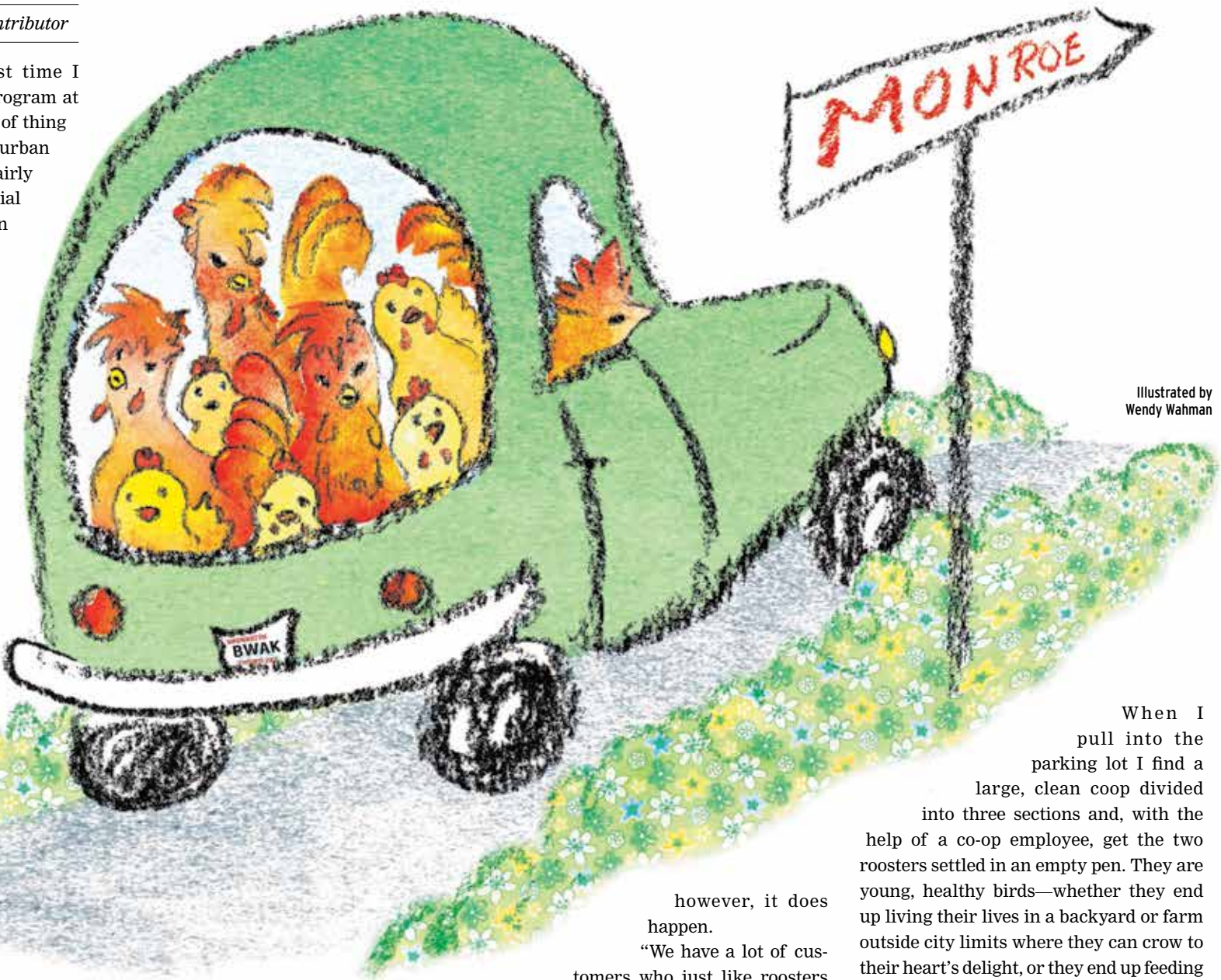
Most people purchase chicks at the stage when they are small and fluffy, when it is difficult to judge whether they will be an egg-laying hen or a noisy, flock-guarding rooster. The majority of baby chicks, whether ordered directly or bought from hardware or feed stores, start their lives in large hatcheries where chicks are "sexed" upon hatching.

This process reduces the number of roosters that are sent out into the world (if you order from a hatchery, they do indeed arrive in the mail). But chicken sexing is not an exact science and the hatcheries only guarantee 90% accuracy. In the spring of 2020, when we ordered 20 baby chicks from a hatchery to replenish our flock, we hit 90% exactly: 18 hens and two roosters.

We tried to keep all the birds. Raising baby chicks means you generally grow attached to them. We live on a block where four other neighbors have chickens, and there have been illegal roosters in our neighborhood before without complaint. Roosters can be noisy, but they play a role in a flock: good ones will help protect the hens, and give you fertilized eggs if you want to breed your own baby chicks.

Roosters can also take to bullying or harming hens, however, and two roosters in the same flock often does not go well. When our two roosters began to fight—with each other, and with the lower ranking hens—it was clear the time had come for a better solution. Enter the Monroe Farm Co-op and their chicken trade-in program.

The co-op is one of a pair of sibling stores (the other is in Snohomish) that cater to the farming communities in which they are located—selling everything from horse feed, fertilizer, bales of hay, and supplies for rabbits, chickens, geese and more. I had been there once before, to purchase feeders and watering equipment for our baby chicks. This time I was going back with grown chickens in tow—the pair of adolescent roosters, housed in a large dog crate in the back of my station wagon. While the boys were often rambunctious, in these new surroundings they acted docile, as if they knew it was their poor behavior that had landed them in the doghouse.



Illustrated by Wendy Wahman

We have a lot of customers who just like roosters and hens and think they're cute and pretty and want to save them

The chicken trade-in program allows you to re-home your hen, rooster, goose or turkey. The program started when the store was under previous ownership, a response to the number of people needing to offload various types of poultry (the store was purchased by the farm co-op organization in 2014 and renamed).

"We get a lot of birds coming through here," says Emma Anderson, who serves as store lead for the co-op. According to records, the prior six months had seen 951 chickens turned in (791 roosters and 160 hens), with additional turkeys and ducks.

When I first heard about the trade-in program, I assumed this was a way for city folks to get rid of their roosters—and those roosters would generally end up in soup pots on the stoves of families who were accustomed to slaughtering their own meat birds. The classic French dish coq au vin, after all, evolved as a way to make use of spare roosters, also called cocks or cockerels. It might be nice to think that birds who are traded in live out their days on a farm in the country, but it seemed unlikely given the circumstances. According to Anderson,

however, it does happen.

"We have a lot of customers who just like roosters and hens and think they're cute and pretty and want to save them," Anderson explains. She says a lot of the chickens they get are Bantams—a dwarf variety—because they are what is called a "straight run" (straight run breeds are impossible to accurately sex, so the chance of getting a rooster is 50/50).

"We also get a lot of people who are moving and want to get rid of their whole flock," she says.

While some of the turned-in chickens are indeed headed to the soup pot, the co-op charges a small fee for the birds—\$5 for a small rooster, \$10 for a large rooster or hen, and \$20 for a turkey or duck. It's not a free source of protein. When I point out to Anderson that the grocery store will sell you a hen for a similar price and without the effort of harvesting it, she explains that some people prefer the quality of fresh meat.

In the decade I've been tending chickens, I've had to put down a bird that was injured beyond repair, but harvesting my own meat is a step beyond what I feel comfortable with at this point—both emotionally, considering these are animals I've gotten to know, and logistically, as I don't have the gear or knowledge required to prepare the meat for consumption.

This is why I'm exceedingly glad to have a resource such as the co-op trade in program, for myself and others. During the urban farming boom that coincided with the beginning of the Eat Local movement and the 2008 recession, I heard stories from friends who live out in the country of waking up to find spare roosters wandering around rural areas where they had been dumped by city folks who were getting into backyard chickens.

The farm co-op seems a much better solution.

When I pull into the parking lot I find a large, clean coop divided into three sections and, with the help of a co-op employee, get the two roosters settled in an empty pen. They are young, healthy birds—whether they end up living their lives in a backyard or farm outside city limits where they can crow to their heart's delight, or they end up feeding someone and their family, it's a better end than I could currently give them.

Seattle writer Tara Austen Weaver is author of several books, including "Orchard House: How a Neglected Garden Taught One Family to Grow," "Growing Berries and Fruit Trees in the Pacific Northwest," and "A Little Book of Flowers, Peonies and Dahlias."



Chicken returns

The chicken turn-in program operates year-round, though occasionally shuts down in winter at times of extreme cold. The Monroe Farm Co-op is open daily (there is no chicken trade-in program at the Snohomish location).

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