

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

Trimming costs for holiday meals

By Kim O'Donnel, guest contributor

Festive holiday meals don't have to break the budget. We have tips for a sumptuous celebration that's still mindful of your wallet.

The suggestions that follow are both practical and psychological, a mix of dollar-stretching tricks and tough-love guidance for anyone who has a hard time adjusting to change (whether that person is you or the lone guest at your table who insists on—and is the only one to tuck into—the creamed onions 20 years and counting).

To be clear, there is no singular solution for shrinking your grocery bill in a festive season, or any season. Do whatever makes sense for you and your family and be aware of the tradeoffs.

For one tradeoff, time is money. If buying a pumpkin pie (versus making one) saves a few hours you don't have, is that pie still expensive? Then again, can you put a price tag on an afternoon making pie dough with your kid or a neighbor?

Nostalgia also has its price. Why do we spend money on out-of-season green beans to recreate a casserole from 1955? (The original version was created that year in a Campbell's Soup Co. test kitchen.) If the tradition is invaluable to your family, more power to you. If not, see below for potential substitutes.

Stating your priorities is the most important first step: What are the must-have items on your menu and what is negotiable? Write it all down and spend time with your list. This step is critical to getting clear about what makes the meal special. You'll know when you know. And when you do, consider the following ideas:

About that turkey...

Turkey is typically the highest-ticket item on Thanksgiving tables. Beyond inflation, an outbreak of avian flu earlier this year introduced added uncertainty about supplies and price tags.

Turkey diehards, keep an eye on sales as the holiday nears if you're flexible.

For a guaranteed savings, though, consider downsizing. Smaller parties of two or three could go for a turkey leg/thigh combo—or opt for a whole chicken instead.



Illustration by
Wendy Wahman

Go team squash

Consider taking a year off from poultry altogether and explore the multicolored world of winter squash. Sliced in half lengthwise, many varieties make terrific entrée-sized boats, which you can stuff with your favorite grain. Pumpkin shapes can be roasted whole and filled with your favorite bread stuffing or oozy cheese.

For newbies, my pick is the delicata, a small, oblong variety that tastes like a mashup of sweet potatoes and corn. Weighing in at about 8 ounces, the delicata is as long as most kitchen knives (6 to 8 inches), dimensions that make it easy to hold in one hand (a rarity among winter squash). Its thin skin means it's easy to pierce with a knife, making prep a breeze. Those boats roast up in about 30 minutes. I love the color contrast when they're filled with red rice (see recipe below).

Check out substitutions

Some simple swaps can maintain the table's abundance without a painful price tag.

Rather than mixed salad greens, for instance, consider raw options like a vinegar slaw of red or green cabbage, or a massaged kale salad. Those hardier greens are often easier on the budget and will also provide longer-lasting leftovers, another form of savings.

Green beans and asparagus are both out of season in November, which means they too are traveling great distances to get to your holiday table and are usually priced accordingly.

Plan B? Brussels sprouts. Not cabbage-cheap by any means, but this cabbage relative is a good value and a Northwest fave with plenty of festive ways to dress them up (see pccmarkets.com/r/6266).

Just say yes to...

Soup as a first course, especially one that is pureed (and can be made ahead and frozen, saving another valuable resource: time). Vegetable purees are an elegant and filling way to kick off a feast—and typically affordable, especially since you can often choose among several ingredients for the lowest-cost option of the week. Use the fall bounty as your muse; carrot-fennel, potato-leek, apple-turnip and broccoli-ginger are among my favorites.

Do it yourself

Stock up on stock!

Poultry people: Get a freezer bag going and when you get about five pounds of chicken backs, wings and feet, you're good to go. Make the stock ahead and freeze; it's one less thing to do the week of Thanksgiving.

The same rule applies for the veg set: Get a stash going of onion skins, parsley stems and woody parts of leeks and keep in a freezer bag until full. There is a certain thrill about making something from scraps, especially when the bill amounts to zero.

Get another freezer bag going for bread cubes. Loaf remnants that are too small for sandwiches can be cubed and stored until you're ready to toast and ready them for stuffing.

Speaking of bread, this is me shouting from the rooftops: Make your own dinner rolls! It's fun, it's easier than you think, and it feels like a true accomplishment. I loved the results of my inaugural batch of the Parker House rolls from Coyle's Bakeshop in Seattle. I took owner Rachael Coyle's advice and baked them a few weeks in advance and made more room in the freezer. Not only did the rolls reheat beautifully; they kept well for months after the holidays (see recipe on page 3).

Make your own veggie tray. Cutting a few carrots and celery stalks is a fraction of what a catered party platter will charge you. What you are paying for is someone else's knife skills. You decide. Cover the crudité with water and store in the fridge to keep super crisp. Drain when ready to serve.

Meet pie's cousins

If making your own pie dough still creates anxiety and you can't afford pre-baked shells or pies, why not fruit cobbler or buckle or crisp? They're all in the same

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Cooking with cast-iron skillets

Cast-iron skillets are amazingly useful, surprisingly simple... and frequently misunderstood. Jackie Freeman, a longtime PCC recipe developer and cooking class teacher, is helping home cooks season their skillets and sharpen their skills with her new cookbook, "Cast Iron Skillet One-Pan Meals: 75 Family-Friendly Recipes for Everyday Dinners" (Sasquatch Books, \$22.95).

Freeman's recipes and recommendations apply to her own kitchen as well. While she cooks for a living, "when I'm cooking for my family (ranging in ages from 4 to 47), my goal is get in and out of the kitchen as quickly as possible, with the minimum amount of work, and hopefully make something that everyone will enjoy (at least a little bit)," she said.

Her background includes cheesemaking, food styling, catering, working as a private chef and writing three cookbooks. She talked with *Sound Consumer* editor Rebekah Denn about the joys of cast-iron pans (they do take a little work, but so do most things that are worthwhile), the do's and don'ts of the skillets (don't ever put them in the dishwasher!), and shared a favorite recipe.

Q: *How did you start cooking with cast-iron yourself?*

A: "I actually don't remember when I started using cast-iron pans, they were just always around our house. We inherited my grandmother's pans (which were poorly abused and we continued to abuse them for years). We would cook with them, wash them with soap, never dry them, and honestly...they still worked fine! I do remember when I started to appreciate cast iron and use it correctly, however. When I began my career in the restaurant world, I finally learned how to actually take care of cast iron. I was amazed at how efficient and easy it is to cook with and clean up afterwards. Our mistreated old cast iron still worked great, but once you learn how to really use it correctly, it's even better!"

Q: *Why should people cook with it...and when?*

A: "I almost exclusively cook with my cast iron skillets (when a skillet is called for in a recipe). It is a great natural, healthy, nonstick pan option that does just about anything you need. I don't recommend it for simmering sauces and soups for long periods of times but it's great for searing protein, making a stir-fry, cooking an egg, deep or shallow frying, even cooking grains in a pinch!"

Q: *Cast iron has a reputation for being tricky to use and/or clean. Deserved?*

A: "Like most bad reputations, it usually comes down to lies, rumors and misunderstandings. It's funny, because cast-iron cookery has been around longer than almost any other form of cookware (nonstick/Teflon/stainless steel are recent developments) and has been used successfully for generations (and passed down for generations). Cast iron is surprisingly easy to use and very forgiving. Once you have a nicely seasoned skillet it takes little more than a quick rinse with warm water to clean, maybe a gentle scrub, and a quick reheat on the stovetop to dry. It is a heavy pan, so you may not be flipping pancakes or eggs into the air, but that's why we have spatulas. It does retain heat for a long time (which is just one of the reasons it's such a great cooking material), so always make sure to have a potholder on hand to move the pan around, even when you're done cooking."

Q: *Do you recommend any particular brand or pan?*

A: "Nope! All cast iron is good cast iron."



Charity Burggraaf photo courtesy of Sasquatch Books

I have a whole range of skillets in my kitchen: a 60-plus year-old skillet from my grandmother; a newer cheap, online purchase; and a super-pretty, locally forged, silly-expensive fancy-schmancy skillet I got as a birthday present. They all work exactly the same."

Q: *What do you wish more people knew about cast-iron cooking?*

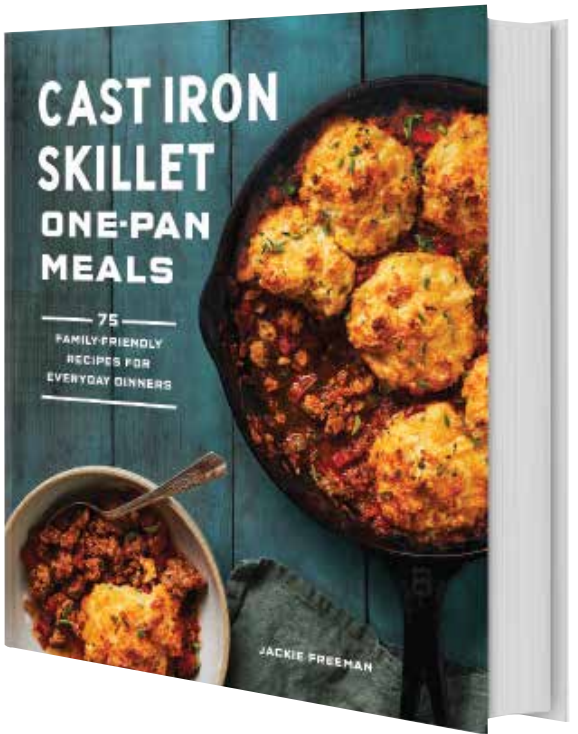
A: "The pans are cheap and easy to purchase (sometimes free if they are passed down from family/friends), easy to cook with, easy to clean, last forever (literally), and can do just about everything you need in the kitchen. They are the perfect cooking companion."

Q: *Why focus on one-pan recipes?*

A: "Don't get me wrong, I love cooking for my family, but most of the time I would rather be efficient and make something as quickly and easily as possible than spend hours prepping, cooking, using lots of pots and pans, AND THEN still have to clean the whole mess up! The idea behind one pan cast-iron cooking was to get the whole dinner kit-and-kaboodle cooked in one single skillet, so that dinner (including the main component and side) is cooked at once and has minimal cleanup afterwards. Cook quickly, clean quickly, and get to eating before the kids (and myself) have a hangry meltdown."

Q: *Anything it is NOT good for?*

A: "Because cast iron is made of, well... iron, it can leach a little bit of color and flavor into food if it is left too long to simmer or store. (Note: ironically, this is a bit of a health benefit for those who need a little iron in their diet!) Simmer soups and sauces in your enamel-coated cast iron (or stainless-steel pots) and store your food in proper containers but use your cast iron for just about everything else."



Q: *Favorite recipes from the book?*

A: "Ooh, that's like picking a favorite child. Yes, we may have one, but we will never actually tell you which one it is :) However, some of my favorites from across the chapters include: Cauliflower and Eggplant Masala, Pasta e Ceci, Pan-Seared Salmon with Braised Lentil Salad, Thai Red Curry Rice with Halibut, Chicken Tagine with Spiced Fennel Quinoa, Dijon-Roasted Chicken with Italian Sausage and Brussels Sprouts, Meatballs with Caramelized Onions and Pine Nut Lemon-Rice, Spiced Beef and Chickpea-Stuffed Pitas 'Kawarma,' Pork Ramen with Bamboo and Mushrooms, Sesame Pork Cutlets with Warm Mustard Greens. OMG, I'm hungry now."

Thai Red Curry Rice with Halibut

The flavors and colors of this dish are bright and bold: red curry paste, bell peppers, and fresh herbs. But it is somehow simultaneously super comforting and warming, thanks to all of that coconut milk and rice. Play around with how much red curry paste you add: If you like it mild, start with a tablespoon. If you like to spice things up, add a touch more. I always opt to spend a bit more money on fresh halibut, but if you're just looking for a cheap weeknight dinner, it's perfectly acceptable to buy frozen cod.

Makes 4 Servings

1 (14-ounce) can unsweetened coconut milk
1 to 2 tablespoons red curry paste
4 (6-ounce) skinless halibut fillets, about 1 inch thick
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon sesame oil
2 medium red or yellow bell peppers, finely diced

4 green onions, white and green parts separated and thinly sliced
2 teaspoons minced peeled fresh ginger
2 medium cloves garlic, minced
1 cup long-grain white rice, such as jasmine or basmati
1½ cups chicken or vegetable broth
½ cup unsalted roasted peanuts
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Thai or regular basil leaves
Lime wedges, for serving

In a small bowl, whisk together the coconut milk and red curry paste until smooth; set aside.

Pat the halibut dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper; set aside.

Heat the oil over medium heat in a 10-inch skillet. Add the peppers and green onion whites and cook, stirring often, until the peppers soften, about 5 minutes. Stir in the ginger and garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute more. Add the rice and cook until the edges start to turn translucent, about 1 minute. Stir in 1 cup of the curry sauce, all of the broth, and a generous pinch of salt. Bring to a boil.

Carefully place the halibut, skin side down, on top of the rice mixture. Drizzle with a little bit of the curry sauce. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, covered, until the liquid is absorbed by the rice and the halibut easily flakes apart when gently pressed with your finger, 12 to 15 minutes.

Remove the skillet from the heat. Sprinkle the rice with the remaining green onions, the peanuts and basil. Drizzle with the remaining curry sauce to taste over the fish and rice and serve with the lime wedges for squeezing.

From "Cast Iron Skillet One-Pan Meals: 75 Family-Friendly Recipes for Everyday Dinners" by Jackie Freeman (Sasquatch Books).

Soda tax funds support food equity programs

A tax on sweetened beverages will help 22 local programs provide nutritious, affordable and culturally relevant food to their communities.

The "soda tax" on distributors passed by the Seattle City Council in 2017 was intended to reduce consumption of soda and other sugary drinks, while improving public health. The tax of 1.75 cents per ounce was controversial for several reasons, including concerns it would disproportionately affect lower-income residents.

In a recent study, though, University of Washington researchers examining such taxes in Seattle, Philadelphia and San Francisco concluded that worry did not become a reality. "Most of the revenues were raised from higher-income households, and most of the revenues were invested in programs that benefited lower-income households," James Krieger, an author of the study, told Axios.com.

The impacts are complex, though, and the study warned that such taxes could still overall "place a greater economic burden on people with lower incomes." (To read the full report see pccmarkets.com/r/6258.) Additionally, a 2021 study in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that the tax reduced consumption of sugary drinks, reporting a 23% drop in grams of sugar sold from taxed beverages.

The funds have benefited various programs, from supporting children with developmental delays to expanding the Fresh Bucks program subsidizing fruits and vegetables for lower-income residents. Most recently, according to the city's Department of Neighborhoods, \$2.8 million was distributed to community groups. The money came from the Food Equity Fund established on the recommendation of the city's Sweetened Beverage Tax Advisory Board "to increase investments in community work led by those most impacted by food and health inequities." Here's an abbreviated list of recipients with descriptions from the Department of Neighborhoods; the full version is online at pccmarkets.com/r/6279.

- \$150,000 to Food for All Youth Leadership Program for a community-based, youth-led food distribution and education project focused on engaging and developing leadership among BIPOC youth ages 14-17. Participants will source and distribute approximately 15,000 pounds of culturally relevant produce from Black and Brown farmers and ethnic grocers to BIPOC communities in eight neighborhoods.
- \$150,000 to Cultivate South Park for Urban Fresh Food Collective to produce locally grown vegetables with intergenerational groups of South Park residents at Marra Farm (see Marra Farm article on page 12).
- \$150,000 to African Community Housing & Development for Delridge Farmers Market to grow and expand the market for two years to increase food security for the neighborhood and build prosperity for BIPOC food producers. (The market also received a 2022 PCC grant, see pccmarkets.com/r/6260.)



Photo credit Dene Diaz

- \$150,000 to Black Star Farmers for The Black Star Farmers Mutual Aid Food Distribution Network to funnel organically grown produce to underserved communities in Central and South Seattle.
- \$150,000 to Chief Seattle Club for 24/7 Café to create a space for community to gather and connect with Native food and events.
- \$150,000 to East African Community Services for Project F.E.E.D: The East African Community Food Equity & Education Drive to improve the long-term food security and health outcomes of East African refugee and immigrant communities in South Seattle.
- \$150,000 to Community Roots Housing for the Lowell Elementary Community Hub Food Pantry to distribute healthy and culturally relevant foods and offer food delivery services to low-income and food insecure community members. (The pantry also received a 2022 PCC grant, see pccmarkets.com/r/6260.)
- \$150,000 to FamilyWorks for Culturally Responsive Appropriate Food Procurement for All to make food bank programs more responsive to the cultural needs of families and support underserved neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by food inequity.
- \$150,000 to Friends of FEED for FEED Our Native People in Seattle to increase access to culturally relevant foods through partnerships with Native-led hunger relief organizations and initiatives.
- \$149,850 to Wa Na Wari for Love Offering: Community Meal Program to promote economic stability for BIPOC caterers, increase access to nourishing meals, and cultivate a sense of belonging around cultural dishes.
- \$144,000 to Beacon Food Forest for the BIPOC Community Garden to expand opportunities to exercise food sovereignty and grow culturally relevant foods at the Beacon Food Forest.
- \$139,800 to A Legacy of Equality, Leadership, and Organizing (LELO) for Building the Beloved Community Through Food Equity to bring East African, Pacific Islander, Asian American, Latinx and African American communities together to develop relationships on food equity issues.
- \$119,185 to Khmer Community of Seattle/King County for Khmer Garden to Plate Extension to expand their current intergenerational community gardening program.
- \$116,400 to Villa Comunitaria for Salsa De La Vida to increase food production and provide food and nutrition education in South Park (see Marra Farm article on page 12).
- \$109,298 to White Center Food Bank to increase access to fresh produce and culturally familiar foods for roughly 80,000 annual customer visits.
- \$109,194 to Lifelong Aids Alliance for Culturally Relevant Meals and Groceries to increase access to culturally appropriate, medically tailored meals and groceries that support the long-term health of people living with food insecurity, chronic health conditions and acute health diagnoses.
- \$105,700 to Byrd Barr Place for Farm to Table to build relationships with local farmers to increase the quantity and diversity of food available to their clients. (For more on Byrd Barr Place, a PCC partner, see pccmarkets.com/r/6261.)
- \$100,000 to Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) for Seattle Community Farm to hire a contracted Farm Coordinator to help with managing the farm through 2023.
- \$99,500 to Tongan Community Food Pantry to provide cultural food that meets nutritional requirements for sustaining good health for people in the Tongan Community.
- \$96,599 to Empowering Youth and Families Outreach for Children's Garden and Outdoor Classroom to increase opportunities to learn about, grow, and eat healthy and culturally relevant food for low-income, South Seattle residents, especially BIPOC youth and their families.
- \$85,474 to Rainier Valley Steering Committee for Seedlings to Consumption to produce virtual and in-person workshops for youth ages 13-21 to learn about food production and create their own indoor/outdoor garden.
- \$75,000 to United Indians of All Tribes Foundation for The Way of the Buffalo to intertwine food sovereignty with cultural teachings and cooking classes.

PCC SEEKS BOARD OF TRUSTEE APPLICANTS

Help guide the future of the largest community-owned grocer in the country! PCC Community Markets is seeking diverse candidates for its Board of Trustees, which oversees the operations of the co-op. Our ideal candidate is passionate about PCC, collaborative and can dedicate the necessary time to Board service, with prior for-profit board experience and executive level experience in one or more of the following areas:

- grocery operations
- supply chain management
- development and oversight of e-commerce systems
- equity and inclusion in food systems

PCC is committed to building a Board that represents and celebrates our diverse communities. Candidates who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color and LGBTQIA+ are strongly encouraged to apply.

PCC has 16 stores in the Puget Sound region. The co-op's sales exceeded \$400 million in 2021, and we have more than 106,000 active co-op members. In 2019 we were named Progressive Grocer's "Outstanding Independent Grocery for Sustainability."

Moreover, the co-op operates on triple bottom line, always balancing our economic, social and environmental impact and results. While the Board oversees the co-op, its work is anchored in our vision, mission, and values.

Our Vision

To inspire and advance the health and well-being of people, their communities and our planet

Our Mission

We ensure that good food nourishes the communities we serve, while cultivating vibrant local, organic food systems

Our Values

We foster high standards
We act with integrity
We embrace stewardship
We take action because we care

Trustees serve three-year terms.

Applications will become available on December 1, 2022, and the application deadline is December 31, 2022. For more information or to request an application, please email boardapplications@pccmarkets.com. Learn more about the Board at pccmarkets.com/r/6278.

Our members elect Trustees at the Annual Members' Meeting in May 2023.



RECIPES MAKE *great* DIY GIFTS

Some of our favorite holiday gifts are handmade, budget-friendly—and delicious. We’ve selected three recipes from PCC’s “Cooking from Scratch” cookbook (Sasquatch Books, \$24.95) that make thoughtful, pretty presents for everyone from family members to holiday hosts to colleagues at work.

Best of all, they can serve double duty: You can skip the portioning and attractive packaging and serve them at your own get-togethers or for an anytime treat.



CORNMEAL, PARMESAN AND THYME CRACKERS

Tucked into a cellophane bag and tied with a ribbon, these make an excellent homemade gift for the holidays, a generally sweet time of year when savory snacks can earn extra appreciation. Note that they can be baked up to two weeks before you plan to serve them, so you can have plenty of time to make multiple batches and get them wrapped.

When you're ready to serve them, their grainy cornmeal crunch is a lovely companion for creamy fresh goat cheese, but they offer so much flavor they can hold their own served alongside nothing but cocktails.

Makes 50 to 60 small crackers

- 1 cup medium-grind cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ¾ cup warm water
- ¾ ounce (¼ cup) shredded Parmesan cheese
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme or ½ teaspoon dried thyme, divided

In the work bowl of a food processor (or a medium bowl), combine the cornmeal, flour, water, Parmesan, butter, 1 teaspoon of the salt and pepper. Blend until the mixture forms a ball (or you can mix by hand with a pastry blender or your fingers). Remove the dough from the processor and wrap completely in plastic wrap. Let rest for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 400° F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.

Divide the dough into 4 portions, covering the pieces you are not working with in plastic wrap.

Lightly dust a work surface with flour and roll out one piece of dough to ¼ inch thick. Sprinkle the surface with one quarter of the thyme and ¼ teaspoon of the salt. Gently roll the dough two or three more times to embed the toppings.

Cut the crackers to your desired shape and size. Try using a chef's knife, wavy-edge pastry cutter, pizza cutter or cookie cutters. Repeat with remaining balls of dough.

Put the crackers fairly close together (just so they don't actually touch) on the prepared baking sheet. Depending on the shape of your crackers, you may need to line a second baking sheet to bake all the crackers at once. Bake until the edges turn golden and crisp, 15 to 18 minutes.

Cool completely; store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 2 weeks.



SPICY HERB-ROASTED NUTS

It boils down to just how greedy you are, or more nicely, how much you like sharing: these nuts make a lovely gift wrapped in a small cellophane bag, or a fantastically nutritious and flavorful snack just for yourself to enjoy over the course of a few weeks. Starting with raw nuts lets you determine exactly how much salt you want to add, while the maple syrup offers a sweet, earthy base for the spices to cling to. The house will smell fantastic as these bake; make sure to keep an eye on them as they approach the final cooking time—they can scorch. To avoid this, it's best to set the timer for the lesser amount of time until you know for sure just how your oven will treat them.

Makes 5 cups

- ½ cup maple syrup
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper (for spicier nuts, use up to ½ teaspoon)
- ¼ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon dried sage
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon dried rosemary
- ½ teaspoon dried marjoram
- 1 to 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 1½ cups raw almonds
- 1½ cups raw walnuts or raw unsalted cashews
- 1 cup raw hazelnuts
- 1 cup raw pecans

Preheat the oven to 325° F.

In a large bowl, stir together the syrup and oil. Add the cayenne, oregano, sage, thyme, rosemary, marjoram and salt, and blend.

Add the nuts, tossing with a broad silicone spatula or wooden spoon to coat them evenly. Spread the coated nuts in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet.

Bake for 35 to 50 minutes, stirring every 10 to 15 minutes to break up the clumps, until all the moisture is absorbed and the nuts are fragrant and nicely toasted.

Cool completely. Store for 3 days in an airtight container at room temperature or up to 1 month in the refrigerator or freezer.



FLOURLESS CHOCOLATE CRINKLES

This gluten-free riff on a holiday cookie classic is an ideal treat for chocolate lovers. They're rich, they melt in your mouth like your favorite flourless chocolate cake, and they bring out the pure flavor of the chocolate you've used (so use good chocolate!).

Makes 2 dozen cookies

- 8 ounces (1 ½ cup) chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup almond flour
- Powdered sugar, for rolling

In the top of a double boiler over barely simmering water, melt the chocolate. (If you don't have a double boiler, make one by setting a small, heatproof glass bowl on a saucepan that has a few inches of simmering water in it. The bottom of the bowl should not reach the bottom of the pan and should sit above the water, not in it.)

Remove the chocolate from the heat. Cut butter into a few pieces and stir into the chocolate until no yellow streaks remain. Set the mixture aside at room temperature.

In a large bowl, use an electric mixer to beat the eggs on medium-high speed, gradually adding the granulated sugar until ribbons form when you lift up the beater and the mixture is thick and pale yellow, 5 to 10 minutes.

With a spatula or wooden spoon, gently fold in the chocolate-butter mixture just until no streaks of yellow remain. Gently fold in the flour. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight.

Preheat the oven to 325° F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Scoop dough into 1-tablespoon balls. Roll them in powdered sugar, place on baking sheet about 2 inches apart, and immediately put in the oven. For a softer cookie, bake only until the edges are set and centers no longer wet, 13 to 15 minutes; for a crunchier cookie, bake 16 to 18 minutes. Let cool on baking sheets for 5 minutes, then transfer to wire rack to cool completely.



HOLIDAY COOKING CLASSES

From festive small gatherings to family feasts, PCC has cooking classes for every aspect of holiday meals. See our schedule online (pccmarkets.com/r/6252) for the complete lineup from pierogies to pie.

Highlights include:

TURKEY FOR TWO (OR 4)
[ONLINE pccmarkets.com/r/6254](https://pccmarkets.com/r/6254)

ELEVATED THANKSGIVING SIDES
pccmarkets.com/r/6253

BUTTER, FLAKE, BAKE, PIE
pccmarkets.com/r/6255

THANKFUL FOR DESSERT
pccmarkets.com/r/6256

HOLIDAY PIEROGIES
pccmarkets.com/r/6268

BUILD YOUR OWN GINGERBREAD HOUSE
pccmarkets.com/r/6267

JEWISH FAMILY FAVORITES
pccmarkets.com/r/6270

HOLIDAY COOKIES WITH HELLO ROBIN
pccmarkets.com/r/6271

BÛCHE DE NOËL WORKSHOP
pccmarkets.com/r/6269

PCC holiday fundraiser

Generous donations from PCC members and shoppers raised \$284,500 to support community food access this past year. Programs this supported included Growing for Good, allowing local farms to sell produce directly to food banks, Food Access Grants, and expanding the Friends of PCC program for our food bank partners. Thank you for making this work possible—when we come together every dollar has a huge impact!

You can contribute this holiday season at store registers or online at pccmarkets.com/r/6262.

PCC CUSTOMER SERVICE STARS



DEBORAH MATTINGLY
Deli Clerk, Kirkland PCC

After being a loyal co-op member for many years, Deborah joined the Kirkland PCC team when its new location opened in March. The opportunity to stay active and present drew Deborah to work in the PCC Market Kitchen. Each shift, she commits to sharing positivity and joy with everyone she meets. She appreciates how unique each customer is and tries to make a personal connection whenever possible. In her downtime, Deborah loves to play golf, spend time with family, enjoy chocolate treats and go on long walks to explore Kirkland. When we say Deborah enjoys chocolate, we mean it! If she could eat only one type of food forever, “all things chocolate” would be her choice with Alki Bakery’s Chocolate Raspberry Mousse being at the top of the list. What shines through above all else is Deborah’s resiliency in remaining positive. Thank you for always serving the Kirkland community with kindness, Deborah!



JAMES DICKEY
Meat Wrapper, Green Lake Village PCC

After retiring from his longtime career, James moved to Seattle seeking a new adventure. He started working at Pike Place Fish Market and soon found his way to PCC. He helped open our Ballard location and has now been a Meat Wrapper at Green Lake Village for just over a year. Every day, James arrives to work with the intention to do things just a bit better than the day before. His goal is to ensure shoppers feel as though he’s done everything he can to help. In addition to his service to shoppers, James loves to cook for his coworkers, preparing Cajun-inspired meals like tacos and gumbo, with a Pacific Northwest twist. On the weekend, he enjoys fishing, shooting aerial photography and exploring nearby landscapes. Thanks, James, for your generosity and willingness to always go the extra mile!

[POLICY REPORT]

Big federal gains for climate and organic agriculture

By Aimee Simpson

Federal policy often appears unclear and dysfunctional when addressing pressing concerns around climate change and climate-smart food production, such as organic agriculture. Thankfully, 2022 brought some much-needed focus and progress on both of these critical issues in the form of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)’s Organic Transition Initiative:

Inflation Reduction Act:

The name of this new law may seem like it has little to do with climate, conservation, food systems, or anything concerning environmental progress. However, this legislation, which stunned the policy world when it rose from the partisan ashes in phoenix-esque fashion and crossed the legislative finish line, will likely be one of the most significant steps toward meeting global greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals in our lifetimes. Some of the most exciting provisions include:

- **Expanding clean energy accessibility**—Many of us would love to install solar panels or support zero emission energy production but can’t afford these green-inspired advancements that benefit the broader community but are seen as luxuries. By expanding clean energy tax credits, investing in domestic clean energy manufacturing (i.e., making these items more available in the marketplace), and providing funding for low-income families to electrify homes, more individuals, families and communities will be able to make the clean energy shift.
- **Boosting zero-emission transportation**—Achieving the U.S. goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions requires a significant shift toward zero-emission transportation. From a \$3 billion investment to help electrify the U.S. Postal Service fleet, to renewing and refining electric vehicle tax credits, the IRA provides an essential surge of green transportation support.
- **Addressing disproportionate impacts**—We know all too well that communities of color and low-income communities face even greater threats than others from pollution and climate change. The IRA will reinstate the Superfund Tax (an excise tax on common sources of contaminants previously collected from 1980 to 1995) to make industry pay for toxic cleanups. It will also invest in air monitoring and community-led improvement and adaptation projects for affected communities.
- **Expanding climate-smart agriculture**—While most organic crop producers already practice climate-smart agriculture such as crop rotation and cover-cropping, most conventional agricultural producers need support to shift their practices. The IRA will invest \$20 billion to help with these transitions and also invest in additional research to determine best climate-smart agricultural practices.
- **Conserving and restoring climate-change-fighting resources**—We need healthy forests, soils and oceans to combat climate change. IRA funding will expand protections for old growth forests, restore coastal communities and ecosystems, and improve environmental review processes.



- **Enabling stronger greenhouse gas pollution enforcement**—Most of the provisions of the IRA are meant to incentivize green energy and climate-smart practices, but a couple key provisions gave federal regulators important new enforcement tools to fight climate change. First, Congress sent a clear message that greenhouse gasses, such as carbon dioxide, are considered pollution under the Clean Air Act (CAA) and can thus be regulated. (These changes to the CAA were in response to the Supreme Court’s recent ruling in *West Virginia v. EPA* that curtailed the federal government from setting GHG emission caps.) Second, certain gas and oil producers will now face a methane emissions fee of \$900 per metric ton. (Methane is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere.)

Some have criticized the IRA for its compromise provisions (driven primarily by Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV)), such as support for carbon sequestration projects, the opening of some federal lands to oil and gas development, and leasing preferences for oil and gas before wind and solar, but for most climate advocates the compromises were worth making.

Organic Transition Initiative:

One of the greatest challenges organic certification and production advocates have faced in recent years has been ensuring that the federal government recognizes organic practices and certification as a necessary climate-smart tool and program in its fight against climate change. In late August, USDA announced the details of its \$300 million Organic Transition Initiative (OTI), bringing a strong sense of accomplishment to many an organic advocate.

The program aims to reverse the trend of declining organic certification through three key actions:

- **Organic transition technical support**—Believe it or not, most organic certifiers aren’t allowed to provide technical assistance and training to the farms they certify, as it would create a conflict of interest. Because making the change to organic farming can be challenging for those used

to conventional practices, a lack of mentoring and technical support can mean the end before many have even truly begun. The OTI aims to build out a more robust framework of mentors across the country partnering with local organizations.

- **Direct farmer assistance**—Organic farming is more expensive, and farmers incur those higher costs for three “transitional” years before earning organic certification and the ability to reflect those costs in their sales prices. It can be tough to weather those three years of increased costs. OTI will include the development of a new (Transitional) Organic Management conservation practice standard through the National Research and Conservation Service (NRCS) and offer financial and technical assistance to producers who implement the practice. This will not only expand the knowledge base of those experienced in organic farming practices, but help support those farmers seeking certification during the less lucrative transition period.

- **Organic market development support**—Every part of the food supply system is essential, a fact that became more apparent than ever during the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic. For organic producers, a lack of full-food supply system support has been a challenge since long before the pandemic. The OTI will invest in shoring up some weaknesses in both specific organic markets (think domestic grain and legume production) and the organic food supply chain (think lack of organic food processors and distributors).

These advancements are well worth celebrating as we close out 2022, but there is still work to be done. Look for opportunities through our PCC Advocates emails (pccmarkets.com/r/6263) in 2023 to help shape these significant investments in climate and organic and achieve additional clarity for other policy issues.

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

In the Bag: What’s the best way to pack groceries?

By Sean Vale
Photos by Karen Ducey

Some guidelines are clear for the best way to bag groceries. (General rule #1: Don’t let eggs get smashed on the bottom!) Others are more nuanced. Add in the different puzzle pieces making up every shopping list and the time pressure of a long line, and it’s a real skill to pack balanced bags in a fast and friendly and food-safe way.

As a lead-in to the Best Bagger competition sponsored by the Washington Food Industry Association Educational Foundation—and as a way to have fun and honor our expert staff—each PCC location held a store-wide bagging competition earlier this year. The store winners then gathered for a co-op championship. The 22-item challenge for each contender included an avocado, a pint of hot deli soup and a replica pint of ice cream, three plums and four bananas, a bottle of wine and a glass jar of salsa, a replica whole raw chicken, hot dog buns, a 5-ounce bag of potato chips, a box of cereal, a pound of bulk split peas, a bunch of kale, a bar of soap and a round of soft Brie.

Setting the stage

The 16 competitors met at the spacious Bellevue store early one late-summer morning, the uneasy silence of the room indicating the tense anticipation of the event—or possibly that their coffee hadn’t kicked in yet. Despite the trepidation of that start, the mood was almost raucous after the first round.

The contest was organized into three rounds (plus a special surprise addition to let store directors show their stuff). To assure equal footing, all the contestants had that same 22-item assortment laid out in exactly the same way. Even the selection of bags—one paper, one reusable—was identical. Judges were Nick Novak, Bellevue’s assistant store director, Darryl Pittman, PCC’s senior director of operations, Leah Quigley, receiving and inventory program manager, and Tim Tackett, director of store operations.

Making the grade

Contestants’ scores were based on four criteria: proper building technique, distribution of weight between bags, customer experience and efficiency.

PCC staff training goes beyond some of the don’t-smash-the-eggs basics, especially when it comes to food safety (and quality) issues. Some tips that may be useful if you bag your own:

- Proper building technique is the foundation of every good bagging experience. Place square items on the sides of the bags to help with structure.
- The golden rule: Heavy items on the bottom, crushables on top.
- Keep cold and hot items far apart.
- Separate glass items so they don’t bang together.
- Separate cleaners and scented items from food.
- Ensure meats and seafoods aren’t at risk of dripping onto other items.
- Slip small items into available spaces.
- Treat soft fruit with particular care.
- Weight distribution helps to make sure that a shopper isn’t burdened with one extremely heavy bag and one that is under-packed and too light. Canvas bags can be extra-large and it’s important not to make them too heavy.



(Top) Contest winner Amanda Benson from the Green Lake Village PCC (middle l) Riley Pierce from the Burien PCC was buttoned up for the competition (middle r) John Lilley, store director at the Issaquah PCC, holds a sign behind Quincy Van Steenberg (bottom) Kiera Parnell from the Redmond PCC

- Don’t snap open paper bags—it can break off the handles.
- Communicate with customers and know their preferences (this one comes automatically if you’re bagging your own!).

While all of those more technical aspects of bagging are to be expected, the friendliness, engagement with the customer, appearance and self-confidence are also important ingredients that go toward making a great bagger. While it’s an entry-level job for some (though not all), it has outsized importance: The final interaction a shopper is likely to have with a store staff member is with the person bagging their groceries.

How well each competitor mastered each of these skills, all as efficiently as possible, determined who moved on to the next round.

Best of the best

After a great day of competing, learning new things, and getting to know each other, our competitors greeted their new champion, Amanda Benson from the Green Lake Village PCC.

As Novak described it, “Amanda was cool, calm and collected during her championship run.”

The prize was bragging rights and a reusable canvas tote packed with goodies and gift cards. (The winner would have represented PCC at the statewide bagging competition, but it was canceled this year.) Second place went to Jordan Carrasco of Green Lake Aurora, third to Riley (R.J.) Pierce from the Burien store, and fourth to Quincy Van Steenberg of the Issaquah store.

Ever the humble and gracious winner, Benson had a few tips to share with her

fellow competitors and anyone wanting to up their bagging game.

“For me, it’s all about building walls,” she said. “I try to get the sturdy items on the exterior of the bags, so I build some structural support. Then other, sturdier items to fill out the middle, and crushable items on top. That’s my strategy.”

Benson’s ability to bag quickly and efficiently was key to her success, but so was keeping her cool and having fun. Say hello and congratulations if you see her or our other champions at the store.



We think all PCC’s staff members are stars in their own right, but those below are the official champions of their store bagging competitions, judged on criteria that include efficiency, customer experience, and the ability to best protect the groceries and distribute their weight between bags. In some cases a runner-up attended the co-op competition; those names are in parenthesis.

- BALLARD:**
Chloe Carlson
Alternate: (Julaine Hall)
- BELLEVUE:**
Ali Post
- BOTHELL:**
Mia Barber
- BURIEN:**
Linda Lamsen
Alternate: (Riley Pierce)
- CENTRAL DISTRICT:**
Sayed Hussain
- COLUMBIA CITY:**
Christien Roberts
- DOWNTOWN:**
Steffan Cham
- EDMONDS:**
Molly Brogan
- FREMONT:**
Laurae McIntyre (*also a PCC board member*)
- GREEN LAKE AURORA:**
Jordan Carrasco
- GREEN LAKE VILLAGE:**
Amanda Benson
- ISSAQUAH:**
Quincy Van Steenberg
- KIRKLAND:**
Tony Carlson
Alternate: (Alyssa Strobele)
- REDMOND:**
Kiera Parnell
- VIEW RIDGE:**
Casey Smith
- WEST SEATTLE:**
Meg Wickersham

Harvesting skills, community—and crops—on a rare historic farm

By Tara Austen Weaver, guest contributor

Tucked away in the South Park neighborhood, mere blocks from two different freeways, plump squashes grow beneath prickly green leaves. On a sunny, fall day, beans vine up trellises, tomatoes blush, and corn silk waves in the breeze. In the distance, over the steady hum of bees and other pollinators, carries the voices of children. This is Marra Farm, one of the few remaining pieces of Seattle’s agricultural history, now growing a new future.

The farm—and the Marra-Desimone Park in which it is located—is named after two Italian truck farming families who stewarded this land from the early 1900s to 1980, when they sold it to King County. The farm then lay fallow for nearly 20 years, until volunteer efforts began to clean up the refuse that had accumulated (12.5 tons of garbage, by one report). In the late 1990s, city and nonprofit partners came together with the hope of planting something new.

The park had been laid out with an area for a P-patch community garden, but there was enough space on the four-acre plot to experiment with growing on a larger scale. “It was called the Seattle Farms Project,” explained Julie Bryan, who coordinates community gardens for Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods. The initial plan was seeing if small-scale farming could be commercially viable in the city (the conclusion: it’s hard to clear a profit on the amount of space that was available). Instead, Marra became a place to grow farmers as well as produce, to develop skills and community.

Over the last 25 years, Marra has given a number of new groups the space to get up and running. “It gives people the opportunity to ramp up and test their skills,” Bryan said. “Often, in an urban setting, people don’t have the skills needed for growing on a commercial scale.”

Overseen by the Marra Coalition, which includes representatives from the groups involved, the farm is currently home to three nonprofit organizations, who garden their own areas but share knowledge and resources to help each other.

Solid Ground

“We grow produce for people who are struggling to afford it,” said Maia McCoy, farm coordinator for Solid Ground, the anti-poverty nonprofit who currently tends a quarter of the farm space (see related Q&A on page 13). “We distribute it to Providence Regina Food Bank, South Park Senior Center, and through the Sea Mar Health Clinic in South Park and White Center.”

Nearby Concord Elementary School visits frequently and Solid Ground provides inventive farm programming for other student groups of all ages, primarily from underserved communities and schools.



Participants in Young Women Empowered, a program at Marra Farm “cultivating the power of diverse young women to be courageous leaders and changemakers in their communities.” Photos courtesy of Y-WE.



“We try to think about how each sense can be engaged,” said Bela Sanchez, Solid Ground’s Bilingual Youth Food Educator. “With the vegetables, they’re engaging their sense of taste, and we teach them about smelling with herbs and flowers. There is a creek next to Marra Farm, so we’ll teach them about using their ears and listening to the wildlife. And we engage their sense of touch by digging in the dirt or touching a leaf or holding a worm from the vermicompost bin.”

Cooking demos with farm food is an important part of the program. Younger students help prepare a corn and tomato salad with cucumbers and lots of herbs, while older kids make black bean and vegetable quesadillas, which allows for chopping practice and uses different types of veggies.

Sanchez feels strongly about not making kids eat things they don’t like. At the same time, sometimes kids surprise themselves.

“We did a lesson with five and six-year-olds,” Sanchez recalled, “where we made pesto and there was this kid who was like—‘I’m not eating that, it’s green and I don’t want to’... And he was the kid who wanted three servings, and then took some home!”

In the past, Solid Ground’s plot at Marra has yielded up to 15,000 pounds of produce a year, but recently that number has been

smaller. “We rely heavily on volunteers,” said McCoy, “and with COVID it’s been hard to get super consistent volunteers. We always encourage people to come help.” (Sign up at solid-ground.org.)

Salsa de la Vida

On the south side of Marra Farm, under a sign decorated with colorful paintings of vegetables and flowers, lies the farm plots tended by the women of Salsa de la Vida. Calling themselves Promotoras—a term used for community members with special training to help educate, particularly around health issues—Salsa de la Vida started out as a group of mothers looking to grow vegetables.

Hailing originally from Mexico and Guatemala, the Promotoras currently stand at four members (a fifth is on maternity leave). They were originally thinking of creating value-added products—like the salsa they are named after. When the pandemic hit, however, they focused instead on feeding the community. As managing member Amanda Zenteno said, through translator Diana Hernandez Machuca, “We are trying to make sure everyone has a meal.”

Salsa de la Vida operates as a sponsored program of Villa Comunitaria (formerly

South Park Information and Resource Center). Through grants and funding, each of the Promotoras is now paid for the gardening they do, with the resulting produce offered to the community for free—through a CSA box, given to Little Free Pantries, and gifted to friends and family.

One of the things that makes Marra so enjoyable is that “it’s different communities,” said Zenteno. “Not just one race—different races, and we all come together on the land to help ourselves but also to help each other.”

The Promotoras are also learning. A series of visiting educators taught topics like growing mushrooms, how to set up a compost system, and how to test garden soil (and, if needed, build raised garden beds to fill with new, uncontaminated soil). At the same time, they are drawing on their own cultural knowledge to grow a medicinal garden with herbs and flowers—like the marigolds used to decorate for Día de Muertos; chamomile, which can be used for stomach and eye irritation; and culinary herbs like epazote and hierba mora, also called black nightshade.

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Harvesting skills, community—and crops...

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We all come together on the land to help ourselves but also to help each other.

Young Womens Empowered (Y-WE)

Under a stand of golden sunflowers, the raised garden beds grown by Young Women Empowered or Y-WE (pronounced Why-We) are bursting with herbs and vegetables. Fat dark-green zucchini laze in the sunshine while nearby a large “Three Sisters” bed features the traditional planting of squash, beans and corn.

“We focus on cultivating the power of diverse young women to be courageous leaders and changemakers in their communities,” said Neli Jasuja, Y-WE’s environmental justice program manager. “The program at Marra Farm is our GROW program—and our goal with that is to disrupt racism and injustice in the food system.” (Y-WE is a former PCC grant recipient, see pccmarkets.com/r/6264.)

Jasuja, who first came to Marra as an Americorps volunteer with Solid Ground, explains that another goal is helping the BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, and People of Color—communities who participate in the GROW program to heal. “Just the youth being there—and being in their bodies and connecting to the food that they grow and eat—that in itself is disrupting racism,” she said.

Mutual aid is another goal. “All the food we grow goes back into the community,” Jasuja says. Produce goes home with participants and is given away for free at El Mercadito, South Park’s first farmers market. During the summer season, GROW participants set up a stand every Tuesday.

“We want to prepare youth and support them in developing different skills,” said Jasuja—“how to preserve food beyond

the season, how to grow and make plant medicine, how to do woodworking” (the participants built the heavy-duty raised beds in their plot). “They also learn chicken care, and fruit tree care with City Fruit, and this fall we’re going to work on cultivating mushrooms. It’s very much driven by the youth and what they’re interested in.”

GROW is as much about growing participants as produce. “At the core of everything we do is cultivating a community of belonging,” Jasuja said. “The first day is always about connections and learning about each other and building community agreements—what do you need to show up as your full self—before we get to anything about gardening.”

Tending to the future

As rewarding as the growing program at Marra Farm has been—for the community it feeds and the participants who tend to it—it has challenges.

“Marra Farm has had some serious issues with theft, with vandalism, with people behaving very poorly,” said Bryan. “We’ve had someone just slashing the greenhouse. We’ve lost three consecutive years of beehives—at first they were just destroying the bees, but now...it’s very focused on taking the bees to be used elsewhere.” But, Bryan points out, the good far outweighs the bad.

Bryan is also looking to the future. “We have a really solid group now [on the Marra Coalition] and there is a lot of active interest.” Considering the next chapter, she thinks back to a wish list created over the years. “There could be an amphitheater for performances, an educational structure where there can be classrooms and also storage—maybe cold storage for food—a commercial kitchen, and places where food can be distributed back to the community. We need to work together to find the funds to build that, to find the funds to help us dream about it.”

For the participants, much of the dream of Marra Farm has been realized. Each fall the coalition works together to plan a festival with cider pressing and tamales to eat, live music and cooking demos, a garden scavenger hunt and children playing and learning and community roots being planted.

As Salsa de la Vida’s Zenteno put it, “We are growing, the same as the plants are growing.”

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.”

[COMMUNITY VOICES]

A conversation with Solid Ground

PCC’s mission is to ensure that good food nourishes the communities it serves, while cultivating vibrant, local, organic food systems. We’re proud to partner with organizations throughout the region and share their stories. *Sound Consumer* contributor Tara Austen Weaver recently spoke with Kyle Kuhn, senior grant writer for Solid Ground, a long-established Seattle agency with a mission “to end poverty and undo racism and other oppressions that are root causes of poverty.” The organization started out as an emergency food bank, clothing bank and employment program; decades later its 22 different programs and services help some 67,000 households per year.

Q: How did Solid Ground get started?

A: We were originally founded as the Fremont Public Association in 1974—so we have 48 years of experience at the forefront of housing and homelessness prevention, as well as developing programs that nurture community-based skills and resources for participants throughout Seattle and King County. Our mission is to solve poverty and undo racism and the oppressions that contribute to it.

Q: Your mission is quite broad. Can you tell us about the scope of the work you do?

A: Solid Ground Transportation is where the largest part of our funding is—and that is in cooperation with King County Transit. We operate a lot of the Access busses, as well as the downtown commuter that goes between medical facilities to connect people and get them to their appointments. We also have advocacy efforts—our advocacy partner Statewide Poverty Action Network does a lot of great work advocating for policies. We have housing services, like Sand Point Housing and Broadway. We have a Domestic Violence

shelter. We also have our community food education and stabilization services—we partner with the Seattle Food Committee to help with delivery to local food banks. Our stabilization services also include our housing stability project and two rapid rehousing programs. This has helped disperse rental assistance throughout the pandemic, which has been tremendously helpful to a lot of people. It’s easy to assume that Solid Ground is just housing, but it’s so much more. Very broadly, it’s human services.

Q: How has the pandemic impacted your programs and services?

A: Many of our case managers shifted their work to online spaces, but with our housing services people live there—so we have to pay attention to COVID numbers and King County guidance and continue to serve our participants the safest way we can. There’s been increased need, especially in areas like rental assistance, and we’ve had to make sure we weren’t cutting off access by going virtual. We’ve increased our technology support by providing broadband benefit access and hotspots and other equipment and technology needs. For some people it’s made access easier, if they have the technological abilities, but we still need to figure out that perfect mix to help people who still need in-person service aspects as well.

Q: There’s been an increase in food needs during the pandemic, can you tell us a little about your participation in Marra Farms, in south Seattle?

A: We’re part of the Marra Coalition—we maintain a pretty large plot there, along with other coalition members, and they do amazing work in the South Park community donating food to the Providence Regina House Food Bank and the South Park Senior



Photo by Michael B. Maine, courtesy of Solid Ground

Center. We have another project, in conjunction with SeaMar Health Clinics—they started something called the “Food Farmacia,” which provides free produce for their patients when they meet with their health educators as a way to make that connection between produce and nutrients to help them manage their health conditions.

Q: What do you wish more people understood about Solid Ground?

A: We’re more than just housing. We can help in other ways—anything from connecting people with resources to case management and housing search assistance. We have tenant services, which can help with landlord-tenant issues and education on renter laws in Washington State. I would recommend anyone who is experiencing hardship to reach out, because we do offer so many services. And if we can’t help, we pride ourselves in our partnerships and we will refer them to the organization that can meet their needs.

Q: What does the future look like for Solid Ground?

A: We continue to get the input of people who are actually experiencing poverty and homelessness—so often the people making

very impactful decisions around homelessness have never experienced it. The need is always changing, so we will continue to adapt to meet these needs. Right now, that means helping the community continue to recover from COVID, as many people are still experiencing the economic effects of it.

Q: How can people get involved in helping or supporting your programs?

A: We recommend people check out the volunteer section of our website, if they find themselves with time they can donate—because time is very valuable. We do receive generous public funding for our programs, but private funding is invaluable because of the flexibility it allows us to adapt to client needs (government funding often comes with restrictions as to how it can be used). And you can check out our blog, which covers some of the measures we support that we believe will help people in our city.

Learn more

For more information visit solid-ground.org.

Sugar and the immune system

By Erin Cazel, guest contributor

Whether you take pride in a top-secret family cookie recipe or enjoy experimenting with new desserts, sharing sweet treats is a favorite tradition in the festive lineup of holiday parties and family gatherings. Unfortunately, we often share sickness as well at this time of year, with seasonal reports of colds and other illnesses spreading predictably among communities.

Many environmental and individual factors influence whether someone gets sick, including the amount of time spent in close contact, the ventilation of the space, the virulence of the specific viral or bacterial strain, and the susceptibility of the individual. But what if sugar adds to that equation? Could our uptick in eating sweets also contribute to a higher risk of getting sick?

We know that consistent high sugar consumption over the long term can lead to the development of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease. Emerging research shows that those extra seasonal servings of your aunt’s pumpkin pie may also increase your odds of being under the weather short-term. The reason for this has to do with a molecular process called glycation. But let’s zoom out for a moment before we focus on the molecular level.

Your body is a very busy place: each body system responds to and influences every other system through an intricate web of communication. Their collective goal is to make moment-by-moment, fine-tuned adjustments in order to stabilize your body in the midst of an ever-changing environment. In the immune system, specialized dendritic cells are stationed at key points of entry throughout the body, such as your skin, and the linings of your nose, lungs, stomach and intestines. Dendritic cells sample the foreign substances they encounter and present pieces of those substances (called antigens) to other types of immune cells. These immune cells respond by increasing their numbers and building up an arsenal of antibodies to target the foreign intruders. Dendritic cells therefore are key players that initiate and strengthen your body’s immune defense system.



Gift yourself the time and space to savor your dessert

As you eat foods that are high in sugar, sticky sugar molecules enter the body. Some of these sugar molecules bump into and stick onto proteins on the surface of the dendritic cells. This unintentional process is known as glycation and impairs the ability of dendritic cells to either sample foreign substances, present the antigens to other immune cells, or both. Decreased function of dendritic cells is what researchers believe causes the immune suppression associated with high sugar consumption.

Fortunately, your amazing body has built-in mechanisms for removing these unwanted sugar molecules. But reversing glycation takes time, and the immune system can remain suppressed for several hours after consuming high-sugar treats.

During this time, you may be more susceptible to the opportunistic bacteria and viruses lurking at the holiday buffet.

But wait! Before you throw up your hands (or throw out this paper) and despair of participating in your neighborhood cookie exchange, there are some simple ways you can mitigate the impact of sugar.

- Moderate sugar intake. The higher the influx of sugar, the more opportunity for glycation, and the

longer it will take your immune system to recover. Let yourself luxuriate in the sweet experience: notice the colors and aroma, the texture of the bite in your mouth, and the complexity of the mingled flavors. When you gift yourself the time and space to savor your dessert, you may find your sweet tooth more readily satiated than if you were to quickly consume multiple servings.

- Reduce or replace sugars in your recipes. It’s possible to simply reduce the amount of sugar used in most recipes without dramatically affecting its taste or structure. If you’re feeling more experimental, unsweetened applesauce, puréed bananas, or softened and puréed medjool dates can be used to sweeten baked treats. The sugars naturally occurring in these whole foods are bound with fibers and absorbed more slowly through the digestive tract. This slows the rate of sugar exposure to dendritic cells, reducing the rate of glycation. Fruits also contain vitamins and minerals that actually support your immune response. In contrast, refined and processed sugars such as cane sugar, agave nectar or high fructose corn syrup are stripped of fiber and other supportive nutrients, and are absorbed rapidly into the body, resulting in a spike in blood sugar. Maple syrup, raw honey and coconut sugar are popularly used as replacements for refined sugars. These sweeteners are minimally processed and do contain some beneficial vitamins and minerals. However, because they lack the fiber of whole food options, they can also result in a blood sugar spike and are best consumed in moderation. Similarly, the sugars contained in refined grains such as white flour are more rapidly absorbed than those in whole grains. Try replacing a portion of the white flour in your holiday baked

goods with 100% whole grain flour. Whole wheat is a great standby, but other whole grain options include teff, sorghum and rye flours.

- Add a healthy immunity boost. We nourish our bodies not by what we restrict but through what we consume. Vitamins C, E, A and folate are particularly important for supporting immune cell growth and function, as are the minerals zinc and magnesium. Good sources of these nutrients include brightly colored whole foods (such as sweet potatoes, oranges, strawberries, red bell peppers, dark leafy greens), nuts, seeds and legumes. Spices such as turmeric and ginger contain phytonutrients that help reduce inflammation and encourage immune health. Consider the balance of your whole plate at the holiday buffet and think creatively about adding some immune-supporting seeds or spices to dessert time. Perhaps it’s a sprinkle of hemp seeds mixed into your baked treat, or maybe you pair your dessert with a turmeric-infused tea.

Each person processes sugar differently depending on a multitude of factors that may shift seasonally, and even from day to day. Keep in tune with your body to gauge your own response in the moment. Whatever way you slice it, may you delight in the sweetness of connection this season, and may your celebrations be nourishing in body, spirit and soul. Who knows, the experimental dessert you test out this year may become the cherished family recipe for years to come.

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.



[NEWS BITES]

Future farmers

Yelm High School’s Future Farmers of America chapter in Washington state had the most enrolled members in the nation during the 2021-2022 school year, with 1,280 members. This marks the second time the chapter has achieved the honor. Yelm was previously the top chapter during the 2015-2016 school year. (*CapitalPress.com*)

City Fruit grant

Seattle-based City Fruit has received a \$35,000 grant from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to explore more ways to divert locally harvested fruits that are not ready to eat from being wasted or composted. The nonprofit is considering a program to take harvested fruit that cannot be distributed to food banks—bruised, pest-damaged or windfallen—and process it into fruit-centered, culturally relevant foods such as salsas and jam. The grant will allow the nonprofit to assess its fruit supply and the demand for fruit products at partner food banks to see how it can sustainably meet their needs, and then see whether a portion of product can be sold at local businesses to create a sustainable future source of revenue for the program. (*NIFA.USDA.gov*)

Tree canopy

Last year, legislators in Washington state passed a law to bolster the urban forestry work of the Department of Natural Resources. The agency’s urban and community forestry program, which had just two staffers in 2020, will grow to nine positions once the department finalizes new hires. Those new staffers, along with a new state-funded grant program, will supercharge the department’s efforts to inventory tree canopy in Washington’s communities, help cities maintain their trees and determine where to plant new ones. (*pewtrust.org*)

Local farm support

King County farms and related businesses will soon have professional support to boost their operations through Business Impact NW, an organization dedicated to supporting local entrepreneurs through coaching, classes and access to capital. As the new King County Farm Business Support Specialist, Devra Gartenstein will provide direct one-on-one navigation and coaching for King County farm and food business owners through the Business Impact NW’s Food Business Resource Center (FBRC), which is expanding with the support of King Conservation District. Gartenstein has owned and operated small food businesses for over 30 years, including Patty Pan Grill, Seattle’s oldest farmers market concession, which specializes in

creating value-added products from local agricultural ingredients. In 2013 she worked with employees to convert Patty Pan to a worker-owned cooperative, and since then she has been involved with small business coaching and mentorship, as well as cooperative development. (*KingCountyGreen.com*)

“Marine-safe” plastics?

Researchers at the Seattle Aquarium have designed a simulated gray whale stomach in order to test plastic alternatives that claim to be marine safe. They’re eager to know what might happen to plant-based plastics if eaten by whales or other sea life—and they know that whales are a smart way to draw attention to the planet’s massive plastic problem. The project is part of the Tom Ford Plastic Innovation Prize, an international contest to discover and promote environmentally friendly alternatives to single use plastic film used to make items such as produce and dry cleaning bags. (*Geekwire.com*)

Agave crops

The University of California at Davis has established a fund to focus on agave plants and their viability as a low-water crop in the state. The initiative began after two Central Valley farmers, with their own 1.5-acre test plot of 900 agave plants, donated \$100,000. The funds will be used to study how to optimize agave crop production in California relative to Mexico, where labor costs are lower and farmers rely on rain rather than irrigation for water. (*Modern Farmer*)

Pesticide research

Building on years of research that shows links between agricultural chemicals and cancer, researchers say they have found fresh evidence tying certain pesticides to cancers in children and adults in 11 western U.S. states. Analyzing federal pesticide data and state health registries, the research team reported a close association between the use of pesticides called fumigants and the development of cancers in people living in the states analyzed. The study, published in the journal *GeoHealth*, is the first to analyze the geospatial distribution of cancer incidence with pesticide use in the Western United States. (*TheNewLede.org*)

Organics inspiration

According to statistics from Organic Denmark, three out of four Danes buy organic food every single week, and in 2020, 12.8% of Danes’ food purchases were organic products, the highest organic market share in the world. Even more impressive is how organic has made serious inroads in the public sector: 89% of the food consumed in the City of Copenhagen’s public canteens,

such as day care centers, nursing homes and schools, is organic. Seeking inspiration and education, several members of the U.S. House Agriculture and Appropriations Committees—including Chellie Pingree (D-ME), Cheri Bustos (D-IL), Shontel Brown (D-OH), Stacey Plaskett (D-USVT), Lois Frankel (D-FL) and Alma Adams (D-NC)—recently visited Denmark to learn its strategies for success. (*OrganicInsider.com*)

Climate change poll

People imagine that a minority of Americans want action (on climate change), when it’s actually an overwhelming majority, according to a study recently published in the journal *Nature Communications*. When asked to estimate public support for measures such as a carbon tax or a Green New Deal, most respondents put the number between 37% and 43%. In fact, polling suggests that the real number is almost double that, ranging from 66% to 80%. (*Grist.org*)

E. coli and lettuce

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists have begun to uncover details underlying a pattern of seasonal *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreaks linked to bagged romaine lettuce. That *E. coli* O157:H7 infection outbreaks connected to romaine are more frequently associated with lettuce commercially grown and harvested at the end of the growing seasons in California and Arizona has been recognized for several years. One of the most significant findings of this study is that *E. coli* survived on average 5.6 times better in cold-stored packaged romaine harvested in the fall than on the same varieties harvested in late spring. (*ars.usda.gov*)

Certified bee campus

Western Washington University (WWU) is now a Certified Bee Campus. This means WWU is now recognized by the Xerxes Society, an organization dedicated to global pollinator conservation. The Bee Campus USA program helps pollinators by increasing the number of native plants, protecting nest sites and limiting pesticides on campus. (*King5.com*)

Non-GMO labels

Non-GMO Project Verified items saw much steeper growth rates than other products between 2019 and 2021, according to a report from the Non-GMO Project and SPINS. Sales of frozen products with the Non-GMO Project’s butterfly seal grew 41.6% during the last two years, almost twice as much as those with no non-GMO labeling. Sales of products with the Non-GMO Project’s butterfly label have grown more than those with the USDA Organic certification seal, but items with both saw the most growth—19.8% over two years. (*FoodDive.com*)

Skagit farmland preserved

Skagit County has finalized a conservation easement on a 57-acre farmland property to permanently protect the land for agricultural use. The protected property, six miles west of Interstate-5 between La Conner and Mount Vernon, is owned by 104-year-old Joyce Johnson, who expressed her commitment to the viability of local agriculture by protecting her family farm into perpetuity. “My brothers and uncle were farmers, but they never owned their land. They would be so happy to know that I own this land. And now it’s protected.” The newly protected Johnson farmland boasts a long history of growing a diversity of crops, including tulips, iris and daffodils. (*SkagitCounty.net*)

Roundup lawsuits

Bayer AG has won its fifth consecutive trial over claims that its weedkiller Roundup causes cancer. A jury returned the verdict in favor of the company in St. Louis, Missouri state court after a month-long trial involving three plaintiffs. Its recent string of trial victories comes amid legal setbacks, as it has unsuccessfully sought to overturn past multimillion-dollar verdicts and court rulings in an effort to avoid potentially billions of dollars in liability. (*Reuters.com*)

Sea otter reintroduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced in an assessment that returning sea otters to Oregon and Northern California is feasible and would also bring likely—if unequal—economic benefits. Scientists and tribal leaders say reintroducing otters would restore balance to degraded kelp forests, boost fish species, protect shorelines, generate tourist dollars and even capture carbon. But concerns remain in communities where otters would compete with humans for shellfish, and among some tribes that fear their self-governance is also at stake. (*HCN.org*)

Salmonella regulation

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is announcing that it will be declaring *Salmonella* an adulterant in breaded and stuffed raw chicken products. By declaring *Salmonella* an adulterant in these products, FSIS will be able to ensure that highly contaminated products that could make people sick are not sold to consumers. Since 1998, breaded and stuffed raw chicken products have been associated with up to 14 outbreaks and approximately 200 illnesses; continual efforts to improve the product labeling have not been effective at reducing consumer illnesses. (*USDA.gov*)

Holiday gift picks from PCC's staff

Illustrations by Wendy Wahman

Happy holidays! The season means different things to different people, whether it includes family gatherings or Friendsgivings, special recipes, community support and/or exchanging gifts. For those looking for presents, we asked PCC staff for their top gift picks from store shelves.

Ideas included cookbooks (sometimes adding on a PCC cooking class or ingredients for a favorite recipe), from J. Kenji Lopez-Alt's "The Wok" to *Sound Consumer* contributor Kim O'Donnel's "PNW Veg." Popular suggestions are artisan jams, chocolate, wine or spirits, a gift card, fancy soaps, good olive oil and other treats, even DIY granola with the dry ingredients layered in a mason jar and the recipe written on a gift tag (find PCC's recipe at pccmarkets.com/r/6265).

Staff members in any store can tell you their favorite items, but here are a few nominations to get you started:

SWEET SOMETHINGS

Lanier's Fine Candies are a top pick from Taylor Hasson, PCC's community and purpose manager.

I LOVE the cashew and pistachio flavors," she said. Plus, "they have beautiful packaging are made in Seattle, make a beautiful gift and are absolutely delicious!"

LIGHTING UP

Carissa Moreno, a human resources specialist, highlights Big Dipper "Spice" candles, one of many varieties of pure beeswax from the Seattle-based company. "The smell is so comforting and really makes the home feel like the holidays."

WARM WISHES

Cute socks were the top picks of both Charlotte Zelz, a PCC Cooks assistant, and Chelsea

Solomon, a deli clerk at the Green Lake Village PCC. Solomon favored the super-cozy "sheep" style from Socksmith, while Zelz wrote "I knew I had become an adult when I started getting excited about getting socks for Christmas. But there's nothing mundane about Socksmith's colorful and quirky designs, from adorable corgis to tropical fruits." Bonus: "The company uses eco-friendly manufacturing practices and donates a portion of their proceeds to nonprofit organizations."

CLASSIC CONDIMENTS

Assorted jarred goodies are welcome as stocking stuffers or on a holiday spread. Human Resources Administrator Patrick Sutherland swears by Oregon-based Mama Lil's peppers, "a tropical vacation for your tastebuds on a rainy Seattle day." He elaborates: "These peppers pack a punch and can be used in a plethora of recipes. Is your lunchtime sandwich lacking in flavor? Mama Lil's. Do you need to change up your charcuterie board repertoire? Mama Lil's. Is your pasta dish missing that special something? Mama Lil's. There is nothing these peppers can't do!"

WILD APPLAUSE

Skin-care products from Wild Chick, a small Northwest company based in Milwaukie, OR, are favored by Emily Weisenberger, Health and Body Care clerk at the Issaquah PCC, for herself and for gifts. "I love the Wild Chick Immortelle Organic Face Oil Serum and the Organic Face Cream," she wrote. "The serum is a simple concoction of jojoba oil, helichrysum and frankincense essential oils," while the cream, floral without being perfume-like, has aloe, shea butter, ylang ylang, and raspberry seed oil ("to name a few,") to nourish the skin. "I feel pampered when I use the cream and my skin reflects the good care."

Dorie Holden, a Health and Body Care coordinator at the Green Lake PCC, also recommended HBC products, going the practical route of Cannabis Basic Soles Desire Cream, which is moisturizing and protective and great for "everyday aches and pains."



PAMPERING PRESENTS

Valerie Summers, a deli helper clerk at the Redmond PCC, has a pile of recommendations for a "pamper me" gift: "Pick up one of our varieties of eco-bags & add our Everyday Shea lotions, a loofah & bath/skin brush, OOLiva 100% pure bath bombs, Shepard Moon bath salts & of course that natural beeswax candle."

Other staff members were partial to botanically based soaps, lip balm and other body care items from Island Thyme, based on Orcas Island. Holiday offerings include a lavender lovers' assortment and a Pacific Northwest collection.

