PCCMARKETS.COM

Dedicated since 1961 to informing and inspiring the PCC community through the co-op's vision of advancing the health and well-being of people, their neighborhoods and our planet.

Issue No. 578

PCC COMMUNITY MARKETS

WINTER 2024

SOUND CONSUMER

Sound Consumer is moving online

Starting in March, look for *Sound Consumer* online at pccmarkets.com/sound-consumer.

The issue in your hands will be the last regularly scheduled print edition of *Sound Consumer*. Look online in March for our feature on the Rodale Institute Pacific Northwest Organic Center (pictured at right), an exciting new research center on the original site of organics pioneer Cascadian Farm—along with much, much more. Since 1961, Sound Consumer has informed and inspired the PCC community through the co-op's vision of advancing the well-being of people, their neighborhoods and our planet. We'll look forward to continuing that legacy in the digital world. Be sure to subscribe to a monthly email from *Sound Consumer* at pccmarkets.com/newsletters.

Photos by Meryl Schenker

Wallet Wellness: Learn about value and values at PCC

Our entire community has felt the impact of higher food prices lately. Customers and retailers alike are struggling to balance budgets strained by inflation, supply chain disruptions, extreme weather and other global crises spiking food costs over the past few years. At PCC, we know that our members and customers deeply appreciate the quality of the products we sell, and how we treat people, animals and the planet in getting those items from wherever they're made, raised or grown to our shelves. As we work hard to lower prices wherever possible, we are also committed to transparency that educates our shoppers about the true cost of the products we sell while also helping them know how to make the most of their budget when they shop with PCC.

For many years, we have received a steady stream of feedback and questions about prices. Most PCC customers understand that products meeting PCC's standards (see pccmarkets.com/r/5944) will often cost more than conventional products. For instance, organic products that are better for people and the planet typically cost more. All PCC bananas (the most popular fresh fruit in the United States) are not only organic but are purchased through Organics Unlimited's Giving Resources and Opportunities to Workers (GROW) program that supports education, clean drinking water and other benefits in the communities where the bananas are grown. The bananas taste great, they are a rare sustainable choice for a fruit commonly flagged for environmental and human rights abuses—but they are not the least expensive bananas available.

Similarly, Tony's Coffee, which supplies PCC's private label coffee, gets glowing reviews for its exceptional flavor. Backing that excellence is Tony's commitment to sustainability—its organic, fair trade, shade-grown coffee is purchased from small-scale farmer cooperatives and roasted in a carbon-neutral plant that uses renewable energy. The coffee's price tag is a good value given Tony's quality and policies, but companies that don't pay extra for quality ingredients and sustainability are able to charge shoppers less.

While our customers tell us that they appreciate the opportunity to purchase products that align with their values, we also know that we must find ways to offer great value across the stores to ensure that customers can manage their budgets while shopping regularly with PCC.

As the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic began fading and inflation rates started leveling, the co-op recommitted to rigorous and consistent efforts to offer fair and competitive pricing in all departments, said Gabrielle Taylor, PCC's senior manager of pricing and promotions. Staff members are reviewing our pricing item by item—with more than 16,000 products on PCC shelves—"to ensure that our prices make sense in the context of other grocers in the region and that we make the highest-quality food as accessible as possible to the greatest number of people."

Shopping for value at PCC:

- **Look and ask:** If you haven't comparison-shopped lately, PCC's recent price reductions might be eye-opening. The co-op has adjusted prices on hundreds of items recently, starting with top sellers in produce, meat and seafood. Scan the shelves and you'll also see new red price tags noting items on sale. If prices on a specific product seem out of line, shoppers should feel free to send the team a note at customerservice@pccmarkets.com. That specific price might be due to factors beyond the co-op's control—as a Pacific Northwest grocer with 15 stores, PCC doesn't receive the discounts that national corporations enjoy. However, in other cases, there are reasons behind an outlier high price that we can identify and change.
- **Be a member:** Join the co-op for a one-time $60 fee. PCC sends out regular, member-only discounts and deals totaling more than $250 each year. We offer discounts with dollars-off purchases for members who want to choose where they want to use the discounts and offer additional discounts and free offers for specific items. Members also receive discounts at dozens of independent community partners.
- **Shop sales:** Watch for "Deal of the Day" signboards outside stores spotlighting a deeply discounted item that is available for a limited time. PCC also lists dozens of weekly specials on its website at pccmarkets.com/r/6616 and mails coupons to shoppers' homes as well as offering occasional coupons in the *Sound Consumer*.
- **Case in point:** PCC offers a 10% discount on many items when purchased by the case (full cases of beer and spirits taken directly from the shelf are among items that do not qualify for the discount). Items can be pre-ordered by the case as well at any store. The exact number varies by the item; for wine, for instance, PCC offers the 10% discount when shoppers purchase any four bottles together.
- **Pick and choose:** While exact prices fluctuate, PCC is consistently a bar-

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PCC neighborhood locations

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BELLEVUE
11615 NE 4th St.
Bellevue, WA 98004

BOTHELL
22621 Bothell Everett Highway
Bothell, WA 98021

BURIEN
15840 First Ave. S.
Burien, WA 98148

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2230 E. Union St.
Seattle, WA 98122

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Kirkland, WA 98033

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FUTURE STORES

MADISON VALLEY

Visit **pccmarkets.com** for current store hours and more information.

[LETTERS to the editor]

Letters must be 250 words or less and include a name and hometown. Submission of letter grants automatic approval of publication to PCC, including name, in print and online. Submission does not guarantee publication. PCC reserves the right to edit content of submissions. Please email letters to editor@pccmarkets.com.

REMARKS FROM READERS

Dear PCC,

Thanks so much for the recent insert in the fall edition of the *Sound Consumer*, "70 Years of Feeding Community: Recipes and Stories from our Co-op." Being a member since the late '80s, I am familiar with a lot of the people that were highlighted and it was interesting to learn how they all fit together in the history of PCC. And all those wonderful recipes! Thanks so much.

— Christine Sannella

MUSHROOMS AND CHOCOLATE

Hello,

I just finished reading your Fall *Sound Consumer* from cover to cover. All of the articles are so well worth my reading time. I especially appreciated the extensive piece on mushrooms, which my husband and I LOVE!

The letter that caught my eye though, was the one about compostable chocolate wrappers. I immediately went to the garbage and retrieved all of my wrappers and placed them in my compost bucket. Seattle Chocolates are one of my faves. Thank you Seattle Chocolates, and thank you PCC for carrying them.

— Mary & Giff Jones
(member since 1984)

PCC responds: Thank you all for reading Sound Consumer, *for your kind words and for your long PCC memberships! We are fans of both mushrooms and Seattle Chocolates, too.*

CHICKENS AND EGGS

I am curious if PCC and organic standards allow the poultry that you sell to be washed in chlorine?

Also, I noticed that PCC private label eggs have very pale yellow egg yolks compared to other pastured free range brands. How does the yolk color reflect quality of the eggs?

Thank you!

— Ana Wilson

PCC replies: Thanks so much for writing and for your questions.

PCC's suppliers do not use chlorine washes on their chicken. Pitman Farms, the supplier of our PCC private label chicken, uses an organic vinegar solution.

However, chlorine washing is a common practice in the U.S., allowed by both U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified organic poultry regulations and regulations governing conventional poultry. Used after slaughter and before packaging, the intent is to remove contaminants that can cause food-borne illnesses such as salmonella and listeria. Some recent studies do question their effectiveness, among other concerns, but for now they remain the standard practice. One reason our suppliers don't use this practice is because their chickens are air chilled after slaughter, rather than submerged in cold water that would contain chlorinated substances.

Yolk color is generally a reflection of the pigments in a hen's feed rather than a sign of quality or nutrition. The Organic Valley co-op noted in an article on the topic that "Because most consumers in the United States prefer gold or lemon-colored yolks, yellow-orange enhancements may be added to light-colored feeds to darken the yolk's color. For certified organic eggs, like ours, these supplements have to be organic-approved and usually come from nature, such as marigold petals."

More information on both PCC's poultry standards and egg standards are online at pccmarkets.com/r/5944.

NON-GMO PRODUCTS

Is the beet sugar in the Olbas Black Currant Lozenges non-GMO? It doesn't list it on the packaging.

PCC replies: Good question! Yes, the beet sugar (ISOMALT) in Olbas Lozenges is non-GMO, according to the company. This product is manufactured in the European Union (EU). Since there are no GMOs allowed in most EU member states, the labeling is only required if GMOs are present.

Additionally, PCC has been a strong advocate for genetically engineered food and ingredient transparency for many years. In 2020, PCC joined the Center for Food Safety in a lawsuit against the USDA over the National Bioengineering Food Disclosure Standard on the grounds that it sets restrictive labeling rules for retailers and doesn't provide sufficient transparency for consumers.

PLASTIC CONTAINERS

I am concerned about the amount of plastic that is being used today. As of today, 14 millions tons of plastic end up in our oceans every year. It is on the beaches and sea animals ingest it, thus it ends up in the fish we eat.

PCC is my favorite place to shop. I believe that PCC should be a leader in using less plastic. I took a stroll through the store. In the dairy case I saw many kinds of milk in plastic containers. I was surprised to see PCC milk in plastic. Only the goat milk was in a paper carton (the kind I buy). There were many kinds of yogurt in plastic containers. Bulgarian yogurt was in a glass jar (the kind I buy). There were at least four kinds of Kefir and only Nancy's Kefir was in a paper carton (the kind I buy). Many brands of juice were in plastic. Adult beverages such as wine and beer come in glass, however so many beverages that our children drink are in plastic.

Many shoppers do not realize the harm that plastic does and that any food should not be in plastic.

I am hoping that you will urge the vendors to make some changes to avoid plastic.

Thank you,

— Donna Myhre

PLASTIC CLAMSHELLS

I read the article on plastic-free July in the summer *Sound Consumer* and would like to again suggest that PCC stop selling produce in plastic clamshell containers. We bought lettuce and strawberries for many decades without plastic containers and the PCC can exercise its strength by requiring suppliers to find alternatives. It pains me to see so much unnecessary plastic in the produce section.

— Sheila Farr

PCC replies: Thank you both for your comments regarding the environmental impacts of plastic and its usage in our stores. We share your frustrations and concerns.

On produce clamshells, PCC has been working for years on reducing the packaging in produce. While it does take time, we have seen improvements. Strawberries, snap peas, cherry tomatoes and potatoes all now use either smaller amount of plastic than before or a plastic-free container. We have made a commitment to support any product that comes in a more sustainable package by procuring it and also giving feedback to the supplier to make it more customer-friendly. For produce that is delivered to PCC in plastic containers, we will soon be working with a local vendor to return and repurpose that packaging.

On other plastic containers, we would like to share some of the positive changes we have made, though we agree there is always more work to be done.

In 2022 we expanded our plastic water bottle ban by discontinuing the sale of plastic bottled water sized below 1 gallon, which will eliminate the sale of roughly 100,000 single-use plastic bottles a year. We're providing more sustainable options such as bulk water, boxed water, and water in glass and aluminum. We are also working to roll out more bulk health and body care products (e.g., shampoo, dish soaps and a new liquid hand soap) in our stores. We're currently phasing in the elimination of full plastic wraps on our supplement bottles and replacing that with just a small safety band around the lid.

We continue to invest significant advocacy efforts into changing regulatory and policy hurdles that have prevented some alternatives and we have supported major local, state and national legislative initiatives to reduce plastic.

Many categories like yogurt, single serve drinks, milk and juice are heavily dependent on plastic packaging. Changing the natural food industry's deeply ingrained dependency on plastic packaging is a complex undertaking, one that is continually evolving, but we are committed on all fronts to identifying more sustainable solutions and pushing the supply chain to do the same.

PCC's Purpose Report also offers information about many of our initiatives, at pccmarkets.com/r/6473.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns and suggestions with us. This helps us better understand what is important to our customers and informs the steps we need to take to reduce our impact on the environment.

PALM OIL

Hi, I'm learning more about sustainable palm oil. I'm curious if PCC is a member of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (SPO) or something similar (I know some memberships/certifications like that can be cost prohibitive for smaller businesses). If not, what are PCC's plans for ensuring all the products you carry use only SPO? If you already have a recent article written on this, I'm happy for a link to that so you don't need to spend more time writing a response for me. Thanks for all the good you do!

— Happy PCC member and customer

PCC replies: Thanks for writing in to ask about palm oil, and for your kind words. We have indeed created a standard for Palm Oil in our stores and we partner with Palm Done Right for our sourcing. This link will take you to our full Palm Oil Standard and FAQ: pccmarkets.com/r/6811. We are happy to answer any other questions on the standard.

Wallet Wellness: Learn about value...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

gain on certain foods. PCC carries the Field Day brand of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic, non-GMO certified products. The value-priced line is a good choice for pantry staples. Other reliable bargains include PCC's private label organic milk, which at the writing of this piece is half the price of comparable quarts of organic milk at other regional grocery stores. The delicious whole organic pizzas at PCC delis, already cheaper than others in the region, cost the same regardless of the number of toppings or customizations. Exclusive offers in our beer, wine and spirits department often are far less expensive at PCC than other stores, as they are imported directly rather than going through distributors.

- **Buy bulk from our large selection:** PCC was founded in 1953 as a money-saving bulk buying club, and bulk ingredients and supplies remain a substantial and economical department in every store. PCC stores generally carry more than 400 bulk items at each location, offering bulk items that many other stores do not, from staples like grains and specialty flours and spices to body care items like liquid soap and Epsom salts. Again, while exact prices fluctuate, at the writing of this piece, bulk organic thick-cut oats cost $1.49 per pound in PCC bulk bins but $5.10 per pound in commercially packaged two-pound bags. Organic extra-virgin olive oil was $6.89/pint in bulk compared with $15.36/pint for a bottle of the same brand, an ounce of bulk organic cinnamon was 69 cents compared to $2.65 per ounce by the bottle.
- **Serving all shoppers:** We know that many people in our region and country have no option but to choose the price tag that's lowest. That's one reason PCC advocates for local, state and federal policies that will broaden accessibility to high-quality food. We want PCC standards to be the affordable norm, not the exception. As one of many practical steps toward this goal, PCC gladly accepts SNAP benefits the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps) at all 15 stores. All children, regardless of income level, are invited to enjoy a piece of free fruit on every visit to PCC.

Shopping your values

Most price tags don't show the true cost of food. A 2021 report by the Rockefeller Institute, researched even before the last few years of severe inflation and pandemic-related increases, pegged the real cost of food in the U.S. as triple the retail price. Diet-related disease, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity impacts, environmental effects, unlivable wages and safety costs all contributed to that gap.

"It's important to remember that PCC pays for the 'real costs' of the way that food is produced and gets to our shelves, and those costs are represented in our prices," said Justine Johnson, PCC's senior director of merchandising.

PCC invests heavily in local, organic, independent farmers and small local businesses. We bar products that are known to be harmful to the health and well-being of workers, consumers, animals and the environment. In just a few examples among hundreds, PCC banned high-fructose corn syrup from its products more than 15 years ago, before most conventional chains even understood the risks associated with it. The co-op doesn't allow harmful artificial preservatives, colors, flavors, sweeteners, or products of nanotechnology in goods it sells.

Value and values: PCC's private label coffee is produced by Tony's Coffee (roastery pictured above), a small-batch roaster focused on sustainability as well as excellence, founded in Bellingham in 1971. Many factors go into its pricing, but environmental protection, human rights and high quality are among them. The family-owned company—Roast magazine's Roaster of the Year in 2021—sources organic, fair trade, shade grown coffee from farmer-owned cooperatives. The organic, biodiverse farms it partners with are hugely labor-intensive operations, from applying organic compost to supporting pollinator habitat to absorbing the cost of lower yields due to canopies of carbon-sequestering shade trees. Additionally, small-batch roasting is labor-intensive and generally costlier than other methods, though it ensures optimal freshness and quality. The beans are packed immediately after roasting and delivered from the roastery to every PCC store multiple times per week through Tony's carbon-neutral fleet. Committed to both its Northwest and global community, Tony's has purchased 12 million pounds of Fair-Trade certified coffee and contributed $2.5 million in premiums to development projects around the world, such as schools, community gardens and health clinics. Its environmental advances include installing a high-efficiency roaster in its now carbon-neutral facility.

PCC only stocks chocolate from producers who do not use child slave labor (a consistent horror of the global chocolate industry). We bar the use of gestation crates for pigs, developed our own animal welfare standard for eggs, and worked directly with family-owned Wilcox Farms to introduce mobile hen houses (pccmarkets.com/r/6424) creating a new line of pastured eggs. We developed our own standard (see pccmarkets.com/r/6233) for Chinook salmon to help protect Southern Resident killer whales, and the majority of our seafood comes from the U.S. to avoid the exploitive, abusive and environmentally disastrous fishing practices that are standard in many other parts of the world. PCC does not allow aerosol sprays or microbeads, which have been linked to climate change and plastics pollution. See our full standards at pccmarkets.com/r/5944.

> As a co-op, we are accountable to our members and dedicated to serving our region: supporting local farmers and producers, food banks, environmental policies and much more.

It's important to note that "The price you'd pay at other grocers doesn't include externalized costs; those costs lie on the shoulders of the farmworkers that frequently aren't paid well, on the animals that are treated poorly, or through environmental impacts," Johnson said.

PCC prioritizes local, independent farms: an important source of food security and stability as well as an environmental benefit. However, these relationships can also be costly due to our region's high cost of living and ever-rising land prices. Once fair wages for workers and practices such as organic certification are added in, it adds up.

It is significantly less expensive to use chemical pesticides on crops, to pack animals into crates that don't allow them room to turn around, to not ask questions about where and how seafood is caught, to use cocoa linked to human trafficking and child labor. But PCC members have typically made a longer-term investment whenever they were able, knowing that good food is essential to good health, both for people and the planet.

Investing in community

As a member-owned co-op, PCC is deeply invested and involved in each of the 15 communities where we have stores.

Unlike the majority of grocery stores, which are owned by corporations that answer to Wall Street demands, PCC was founded in the Seattle area 71 years ago and remains independent and member owned. As a co-op, we are accountable to our members and dedicated to serving our region: supporting local farmers and producers, food banks, environmental policies and much more.

"When you spend your money at the co-op, you are supporting the community… your money stays here in our community," Taylor said.

One influential study by American Express concluded that 67 cents of every dollar spent at a local retailer will stay in the community, vs. 45 cents for each dollar spent at a national or global chain. In a phenomenon known as the Local Multiplier Effect, money spent at a locally owned and independent business recirculates through the local economy two to four times more than money spent at a non-local company. Since its earliest days PCC stores have prioritized local suppliers.

When we buy produce from a local farm or soap from a local producer, for just two examples, that money supports local jobs and businesses and farmland.

PCC prioritizes hiring locally and promoting workers from within the company, and its benefits include a generous medical, dental and vision insurance plan at a low cost to workers.

PCC regularly provides nutritious food to neighborhood food banks near each of our 15 stores. Our grant programs support farmers—especially those that have been historically disadvantaged—as well as organics. Many years ago, we founded the PCC Farmland Fund, now the statewide Washington Farmland Trust, and we remain a committed supporter.

Members and shoppers also directly support the community through donations of money and/or time to PCC's Purpose Program (pccmarkets.com/r/6411). This practice led to groundbreaking initiatives like the Growing for Good program, a partnership between PCC, Harvest Against Hunger, and the Neighborhood Farmers Markets Association. With more than 40 food bank and nonprofit partners, the co-op is steadily working on ways to ensure that good food is accessible to everyone in our communities.

As a triple bottom line business, PCC prioritizes social and environmental responsibilities along with economics. Members and shoppers are PCC's invaluable partners in these endeavors.

For more than 70 years, working together, we have saved farmland, supported organic foods and helped create a more sustainable world. We have used our collective voices and dollars to make a difference that none of us could make alone. We want to make it as easy, desirable—and affordable—for us to continue to create, support and serve thriving communities together.

Bite of a Better Life

Deborah Tuggle bakes people-centric policies into every cookie

By Naomi Tomky, guest contributor

Most of the week, Bite Me! Cookies produces about 15,000 cookies an hour. But the from-scratch baking and hand-frosting at the Tacoma bakery pauses on Wednesday afternoons, when the staff breaks for the in-house English as a Second Language class.

Photos courtesy of Bite Me!

Deborah Tuggle did not set out to create a de facto immigrant job-and-life-skills training program, but over more than two decades of running a bakery, her hiring practices and business ethos came together to do just about that. "What we want is, whoever we employ, when they leave here, they have a skill set, and they can take it somewhere else." That means the English classes, but also using grants to help employees take computer courses and train in lean manufacturing, supporting them as they navigate and build lives in a new place. "We don't want someone to work here, then go work at another cookie shop," scoffs Tuggle. "We want them to buy a house."

Tuggle's first employee, a teenager newly from Moldova, arrived at the interview escorted by her worried father. She left 14 years later, fluent in English, to move to Florida, along with her three children and a group of extended family members—many of whom also worked at Bite Me! Tuggle worried about how she would go forward without the people she called "the backbone of everything" at the bakery. But soon, she hired more workers. "The Lord just kept sending me the same type of people, who happened to be refugees, who happened to be from another country," Tuggle noticed.

After a while, she thought, maybe that was her purpose. "If this is what it is for us, then we're gonna take it and run with it. Because we want to make a difference." So, she leaned in, listening to her employees and trying to meet their needs. Paying for employees to attend ESL classes evolved into the current in-house lessons.

On-the-job training for new employees at Bite Me! includes fundamental skills, like learning how to request time off work for appointments, something there are many of in the resettlement process, explains Heather Sisson, Bite Me!'s director of sales and marketing. Sisson appreciates the flexible schedule because she spends time volunteering outside of work with local organizations resettling refugees. "What we focus on in our volunteer work is all about empowerment and that, of course, pours over to the workplace," she explains. The company's policies make the hiring process simpler for employees. Most companies ask for way more documentation than state law requires, Sisson says. By giving the broadest options and asking for the bare minimum of documentation required, they remove obstacles and deterrents to potential hires who might have different papers that make them equally eligible for employment. "Requesting specific documents or more than what is the minimum is discrimination and is not tolerated."

The company specifically requires no English skills or previous work experience and trains their employees on the job, and all of their documents are interpreted into every language active on the floor.

More than a few times people ask Tuggle why she does this, doesn't it just make more work? "We do it because we want to," Tuggle responds. "You want to be able to give someone a chance."

Multiple chances: along with the training and striving to pay her 30 employees a sustainable living wage, she works to promote from within—she points to the bakery floor, where all three of the leads started at entry level and worked their way up. "I don't want to hire someone from outside and bring them in to be a lead over these girls that have been here," she says. "I want to hire one of them to be the lead."

As she tells endless stories—about the man from Afghanistan who went on to work in food production, and the woman who went from speaking no English to a lead position, then left to work for the school district—it becomes clear how much Tuggle enjoys helping people. "It's not about me. But in any instance, if I can help someone…" she trails off. "It's just, like, 'Wow!'"

Tuggle didn't set out to help refugees and immigrants, but she also didn't set out to open a bakery. "I started baking cookies and selling them and people loved them," she explains.

In 2004 she acquired Bite Me! and merged the brands, tripling the company's business within a few months. "It is the grace of God that has me in business," she claims, marveling at what she's done, despite the lack of experience or education in the industry. But then she lets slip her true secret: "I'm smart enough to hire people that are smarter than me," she says. "They carry the load, they make my life easy. So as long as you honor people and meet them where they stand, they'll be good to you."

Tuggle didn't set out to run a bakery or job training for immigrants, but now she understands her mission. "We want to make a difference," she says. "We're trying to make it happen, one cookie at a time." She looks around at her team—hailing from Ukraine, Nicaragua, Guatemala and more—as they weigh out dough balls for cherry almond shortbread and frost seasonal cookie shapes. Over the years, she says, people suggested machines could take over these tasks, and that idea solidified her understanding of what she does. "We're a cookie company that empowers people," she declares. "If I become so automated that I can't empower people, then what the hell good am I?"

> Tuggle […] soon found herself on a mission to create great cookies

After eating a particularly impressive cookie at a birthday party for one of her son's friends, she asked the host why they were so good. The parent gave her a tip to use on any recipe: "Just add more flour than it calls for and double the chocolate chips." Tuggle followed the instructions and soon found herself on a mission to create great cookies—and on the receiving end of cookie compliments.

As a single mother attending court stenographer school, she needed extra money, and started selling her cookies on Fridays, which brought about the name of her first company, Friday's Cookies. She graduated and started an internship with the county but realized she didn't like her day job. She just wanted to make cookies. She had no formal baking background and no business background, but she knew she didn't want to look back in 10 years and think, "What if?" That was 25 years ago.

Naomi Tomky (naomitomky.com), author of "The Pacific Northwest Seafood Cookbook," writes about food and travel.

A bite of cookie baking

Bake with Deb Tuggle at a Bite Me! Cookie Party at the Columbia City PCC and the Green Lake Village PCC! Learn tips for decorating cookies, adding flavorful inclusions and how to frost with confidence. Sign up at pccmarkets.com/r/6812.

Cedar Grove turns food and yard waste to garden gold

After a visit to Cedar Grove, you might never feel the same about tossing a banana peel in the compost bin with the sticker still attached.

The company's composting facilities in Everett and Maple Valley are among the largest in the world, processing some 350,000 tons of yard waste and food scraps each year. Through time, air, microbes—and the heat generated by that mix—towering piles of green and brown materials are reborn as around 130,000 cubic yards of rich, dark compost destined for yards and gardens and landscaping. (Some even goes to Sound Sustainable Farms, the vegetable farm founded in Redmond by Cedar Grove. The company donates up to 10 yards of compost annually to schools who are their customers.)

The big compost bins at all PCC stores are processed at Cedar Grove, and its staff worked closely with PCC on sustainability goals such as developing a compostable deli container and sending food waste that's not fit for human consumption to the composter rather than a landfill.

The 28-acre Everett site opened in 2004 when Cedar Grove began accepting food waste (it started accepting organic materials like yard waste in 1989 in Maple Valley). On a recent tour, workers showed how those scraps go from bins of waste to bags (or truckloads) of soil enrichments.

"Contamination is one of our biggest barriers," said Sierra Arredondo, the company's outreach coordinator, speaking near the "tipping building" that's the destination for incoming deliveries.

"We like to say that our drivers are our first line of defense," she said. If drivers see compost bins full of black plastic garbage bags holding food scraps, for instance, they'll reach out to the business "to make sure it's removed and then assist in any way that we can" to make sure the right materials get in the bin the right way.

A contamination specialist looks at every load, said Jim Simpson, Cedar Grove's packaging specialist. "He can't look at every square inch of every load, because we get a lot of tonnage," but the specialist still finds enough contamination to fill up multiple loads of tall garbage totes every day. A magnetic band pulls out ferrous metal contaminants.

"We get a lot of yard waste, obviously. So we get garden shears, lawnmower blades. (From) restaurants we get forks, knives, stuff like that," said Gabe Morrelli, the company's operations manager.

That includes plastic utensils as well as the metal ones, though a new state law taking effect Jan. 1 actually requires compostable utensils to be tinted brown or green, to make it easier (on all sides of the issue) to distinguish compostable materials from non. At that point, Cedar Grove crews will know to pick out the standard white or cream-colored disposable forks and knives from the pile.

"We're just as good as our material…but we know people aren't perfect," Morelli said.

Just a few days earlier, the crew said, along with the usual Hefty bags, aluminum cans, rubber-banded produce and fruit stickers, they found an Everlast punching bag.

Yes, full-size.

Cleared of such contaminants, a ventilation system sucks air out from the tipping building and sends it through a custom biofilter four times per hour to reduce odors. Once screened for foreign material, workers make sure the loads contain the right proportion of green and brown materials—adding wood chips if needed, for instance, if the loads are heavy on summer grasses.

"You can't make compost grow out of just anything and everything, right? You can have too much carbon, you can have too much nitrogen—you have to have a mix," said Ryan Dwyer, Cedar Grove's director of business development and strategic partnerships.

Front loaders then move the piles to a grinder to make sure it's all broken down in pieces small enough to be exposed to the crucial added ingredients of air and water. Sprayers add that (recycled) water as the material travels to its next stopover, 21 days resting in a heap measuring 164 feet long by 26 feet wide by 10 feet high. The colossal round-edged berms are covered with a specialized breathable fabric to shield them from rain and snow while keeping warm air inside while the composting material heats up as high as 175 to 180 degrees F. (The goal is reaching 131 degrees F for three consecutive days, in order to reduce pathogens.) Computers measure the heat and oxygen content and a fan blows in extra air if needed for microbes to get their work done. "It's a very high-tech process," Simpson said, pointing out the probes and wires gathering data from the piles. "You probably wouldn't think so just walking around it."

After that first 21 days of decomposition, the compost-in-process moves on to another pile for an additional 14 days of decomposition, then to 14 days in a drying pile to reduce the temperature and moisture content.

Different temperature and timing goals have different purposes, including killing off potential pathogens like salmonella and eliminating weed seeds. Birds are interested in the first fresh loads that come into the plant, seeking out seeds and snacks, but they show no attraction to the later earthy, clean-smelling piles.

A final phase that lasts 12 to 18 months continues the drying and cooldown process, though the pile is still hot and still at work: "You've got all those good bugs. Everything's still working its magic," Dwyer said. And the long time period allows bits of plastic that weren't located earlier to become smaller and lighter and more brittle like a Shrinky-Dink toy. A final screening pulls out those dried bits along with blowing out and essentially vacuuming up whatever desiccated fruit labels remain.

Those labels are notoriously difficult to eliminate from compost piles—it's not the material in the tags that blocks the breakdown so much as the glue.

Material that's too bulky to make it through that final screening gets pulled out and tossed back in to the first phase. It's already full of composting microbes and actively breaking down; it acts like an inoculant boost, like yeast to bread dough.

"You gotta take the stickers off," Simpson said.

It's satisfying to see the circular nature of the business and to know that the work of sorting out food scraps and lawn trimmings on one end is worth it on the other.

As Dwyer said, "It's the only solid waste stream that does not have a waste."

PCC partners

PCC members get a free bag of Cedar Grove Compost with the purchase of any bagged products at participating Cedar Grove facilities. See details at pccmarkets.com/r/6250.

How Ridwell reinvented recycling for a new era

If one man's trash is another man's treasure, the Ridwell warehouse in south Seattle is a regional gold mine.

Chip bags and bubble wrap and Amazon Prime mailing envelopes are crushed into dense, neatly packed bales that weigh hundreds of pounds apiece. Dead batteries and dead light bulbs, Styrofoam and old clothes and older phone chargers fill tall bins to the brim, all awaiting new life.

Leaders of the Seattle-based company, now operating in eight states, estimate it's saved 15 million pounds of material from landfills since its creation in 2018. Originally dubbed Owen's List after CEO Ryan Metzger's then-six-year-old son, it began as a weekend father-son project in 2017 trying to deal with dead batteries piled up in their basement. They didn't want to throw potentially hazardous materials in the trash going to the landfill, so Metzger called—and called and called—until he found where to recycle them.

The pair started picking up extra batteries from neighbors, doorsteps in a sort of reverse newspaper route, including other hard-to-recycle items along the way, sending email alerts about which product they planned to collect that week and then how it was reused.

A mere five years later, Ridwell has added thousands of miles to its territory, more than 200 employees and more than 100,000 customers, with vans and 53-foot truck trailers replacing Metzger's family car and occasional rented U-Haul. For a monthly fee starting at $14 (discounted for PCC members), Ridwell now picks up all sorts of items that aren't accepted in municipal recycling bins. Workers sort and package them and send them to partners for reuse.

Plastic film from the Seattle region is transformed into Trex decking, batteries go to Northwest-based Ecolights for recycling and so on. The company tracks all pickups and regularly audits the results, listing on its website partners in each region who use the materials, what percentage of each category is contaminated in each city and with what (#60 cotton, the fluffy plastic-wrapped blocks that keep meal delivery kits cold in shipping, showed up in "threads" fabric pickups in Los Angeles and Portland, multi-layer plastics in Seattle had issues with food residues and—fitting for our location—foil coffee bags). The company's pledge is that "things go exactly where they should be going."

Such guarantees have become crucial in the world of recycling—and private companies like Ridwell have become meaningful adjuncts to government services, clearing roadblocks that previously seemed insurmountable.

Recycling rise and fall

While King County has long enjoyed one of the highest recycling rates in the country, rates have stagnated in recent years here along with unusual national turmoil and industry challenges. Typical problems include the trend toward single-bin pickups where all recyclables are mixed, which increases the odds of contamination. Then there's so-called "wishcycling," when households put items in those residential

bins that seem like they might be recyclable but really aren't. It's hard to blame individuals for a lot of the confusion; the Environmental Protection Agency even asked the Federal Trade Commission last year to stop using the familiar circular-arrows recycling symbol on most plastics, since only those labeled "1" and "2" are commonly accepted nationwide. (Seattle doesn't use the number system when determining what plastics are recyclable; municipal customers can look up which items can be recycled in their bins at pccmarkets.com/r/6813. King County also recently launched a new endeavor called Re+, aimed at reducing the amount of reusable and recyclable materials sent to landfills.)

Nationwide, the problems definitely also include economics—the fact that some items could technically be recyclable, but it costs much more to sort and recycle them than to dump them in landfills. And in recent years, the industry has also been shaken by a completely disrupted marketplace.

The chief blow to standard municipal recycling came in 2018 when China, the destination for the majority of U.S. recycled plastics, paper and scrap metal, stopped accepting 24 categories of recycled items and announced strict new contamination standards for others that most U.S. facilities could not remotely approach.

As a governmental task force in King County reported in 2019, China's policy change required that our area find new markets among "extremely limited" options for the roughly 214,555 tons of mixed paper and mixed plastics that was previously generated in King County and Seattle annually and sent to China.

Adding to those problems came a crisis in public trust about what happened to those recyclables after they left their recycling bins.

A 2022 Greenpeace report, for instance, said that when the U.S. exported plastic waste to China before 2018 it "counted it as recycled even though much of it was burned or dumped."

And an ABC news investigation last year tried to track plastic bags and other plastic films collected in some businesses for recycling. The investigation suggested much of the plastic was dumped or incinerated instead.

Greenpeace suggested in its report that, while metal, glass, cardboard and paper could be effectively recycled, the conundrum around recycling plastics could never be solved—that plastics are too diverse, too hard to collect and sort, too toxic, too expensive to recycle. The "reduce" and "reuse" sides of the sustainability equation seemed like the only responsible routes.

And yet—for an added price—Ridwell is making headway, for plastics and other materials once destined for the trash.

"Some categories are harder to find homes for than others. But that's basically what my team does," said Matt Waymire, Ridwell's partnerships program manager, surrounded at the Seattle warehouse by sorted bins that included thousands of plastic bread tags, old yard signs for political campaigns, old shoes and prescription pill bottles. "We do the research upfront, make sure that we find a suitable partner that can handle our volume, and then make sure that they can utilize the material to the best of its ability either for reuse or for recycling…

"We do a lot of warehouse visits…If we don't feel satisfied with how it's going to be used or where it's going, what it might be used for, then it's not a viable partner for us."

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Photos by Meryl Schenker. **Opposite page top:** Ridwell CEO Ryan Metzger surrounded by thousands of pounds of tightly baled multi-layer plastics. **Opposite page below and this page bottom left:** Bread tags and light bulbs are among the many Ridwell items typically not accepted in municipal recycling bins. **Top left, top right:** Ridwell employees work on the day's pickups from individual homes and transferring collected materials for recycling.

Trash to treasure

In the Seattle facility in Georgetown's industrial zone, 25 to 30 vans pull in each day after driving tightly plotted neighborhood routes where they pick up cloth bags of recyclables from the Ridwell-branded boxes that sit on front stoops like old-fashioned milk deliveries.

Every biweekly pickup includes plastic film, "threads" (old clothing and textiles), light bulbs and batteries, as well as the customer's choice of a category of options that include corks, cords and chargers, eyeglasses, plastic bottle caps and more. A higher-priced plan includes multi-layer plastics in every pickup as well. Add-ons like Styrofoam and latex paint are available for extra fees, and Ridwell also does occasional pickups to benefit community nonprofits, such as collecting diapers or unused toiletries.

"Our members are some of the most dedicated recyclers I have ever seen" Waymire said, with contamination in the Ridwell bags at "incredibly low" levels. (For multi-layer plastics, Ridwell says its contamination rate is 2.7% compared to an industry average of 25%.) That care from members is a valuable resource on its own: Food remnants on a few pieces of plastic film could contaminate an entire bag, for instance, while wet items in a clothing bag could mold and ruin the rest.

On that day, as with most workdays, warehouse workers checked for contaminants or misfiled materials as they emptied heaps of Ridwell cloth bags that had been delivered the previous evening. They emptied bag contents into larger bins, picking out the occasional red flag like the Ziploc bag holding one home's collection of batteries.

Batteries are removed from the bags and stored in barrels filled with Cellblock Ex, a granular material that looks "kind of like Dipping Dots mixed with kitty litter" as Waymire put it. Batteries, especially lithium batteries, have potential to cause fires. Cellblock Ex prevents fires, but also "if the battery heats up it will basically melt around the battery and encapsulate it so that it doesn't spread."

Once sorted and safely packed, the batteries are taken to facilities that separate them by chemical makeup, then sent on to even larger facilities around the country where they are ground up and melted down into their raw components and made into new batteries, or even other things like pots and pans or raw metal ingots.

A short walk from the batteries was the storage area for one of Ridwell's specialty categories, prescription pill bottles.

At most municipal recycling facilities, the machinery can't handle plastics smaller than a certain size—it varies from city to city, but generally the minimum size is three inches. "This would fall right through" Waymire said, holding up a standard translucent orange cylinder. "Most of the time they will fall through and then they just don't get recycled. They just get swept up at the end of the day and sent to trash."

Ridwell's recycling partner washes the bottles to remove any remains of glued-on labels. "The facility we send it to has a very sophisticated plastic sorting (system) and they'll separate it by type, like the number of the resin codes." Prescription bottles typically are made from #5 polypropylene, a heat-resistant plastic that many municipal facilities also don't accept. Ridwell's partner "will separate it by color, then it'll get fully washed, flaked, shredded up, and then they'll melt it down and pelletize it into these little plastic pellets that can be sold to make new plastics."

By volume, plastic film is the largest category processed in the warehouse. The stretchy material, pervasive in packaging, can't be recycled in municipal facilities and tangles up their production lines. At Ridwell it's baled into pallet-sized bricks that weigh 800 to 1,000 pounds apiece, loaded into a 53-foot trailer for their next incarnation as Trex planks.

Each community Ridwell serves has slightly different needs and opportunities, partly because of differences in what municipal recycling facilities accept along with different city codes. Each area has its own warehouse and regional partners.

"It's really (about) looking and really studying the communities," said Metzger, a former marketing manager who once worked at a Seattle venture capital firm, advising startups on how to scale up. He formed Ridwell with three partners; wife Erin, a marketing consultant and entrepreneur, was also on the founding team. (Now 13, Owen still takes an interest, even if he's not making deliveries anymore.)

"In Portland, for instance, the first members a few years ago said "if you could add clamshell (plastics), you'd be the most popular company in Oregon. And so that was the motivation we needed to do that and within a few months, we added it," Metzger said. "It's been a really big success and I can't even imagine the number of full truckloads of clamshells that are going to our recycling partner instead of the landfill."

One of the company's biggest wins was for a vexing material that's become ubiquitous in U.S. packaging, the light multi-layer plastics used in snack bags, candy wrappers, frozen food packaging, net produce bags and much more.

"Literally everybody has it, you cannot avoid it," Waymire said.

Its challenges: "Plastic film is a mostly homogenous material. When it is being recycled, it can all be melted basically at the same melting point," Waymire said. "Multi layer plastic has anywhere from three to 12 layers per bag (glued together). So you've got a layer for maybe like the outside color… you've got the layer for keeping in oxygen, you've got a layer for keeping sunlight out, you've got a layer for just general storage… all of those have different melting points and have to be handled at different temperatures, different recycling methods. And so it takes a lot of specialized equipment to be able to make this stuff, which is why it took us so long to find a couple great partners to be able to take it."

Pallet-sized stacks of the tightly baled plastics are now processed daily, dense as bricks, the occasional bright Cheetos or Butterfingers wrapper discernible in the outer layer. They're converted and compressed into potting and hydroponic gravel, colorful concrete-like building blocks and commercial and industrial drainage planks.

Ridwell's two main goals are to get to more areas and to make more of an impact, Metger said. They go together.

"As we have more people that we're serving in the Ridwell community, then we can do more. We never could have done multi-layer plastic three years ago, we couldn't have filled the truck, couldn't have had a baler."

It's a sharp curve for a home project that turned into much more.

"There was this massive unmet need. We were seeing that no one else was doing it. And at the same time, recycling was kind of going backwards," Metzger said.

After China's crackdown "the whole industry was saying, 'Well, what are we going to do? What are we going to do?' And yet there were people who wanted not only to keep what the industry was offering them, but actually to go forward and do a lot more.

"People are impatient for new ways to get rid of things that don't go to landfills."

A Conversation with Food FARMacia

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.

Photos courtesy of Food FARMacia

Sound Consumer contributor Tara Austen Weaver recently spoke with Sarah Benson, who facilitates a unique collaboration between anti-poverty agency Solid Ground and Sea Mar Community Health Centers, a community-based organization committed to providing quality, comprehensive health, human, housing, educational and cultural services to diverse communities, specializing in service to Latinos in Washington state. The nonprofit operates more than 90 community-based health clinics. Their Food FARMacia program provides free produce to patients at two south Seattle clinics, addressing food insecurity and promoting fresh local fruits and vegetables.

Various forms of Food FARMacia programs are becoming welcomed nationwide as an important component of community health. Food is medicine, according to that concept. A recent Columbia University study suggested that allowing parents to choose free, fresh, healthy foods for their families in this way "could be one part of the solution to the nation's growing food insecurity problem," according to the university, and measurably improve children's health.

Q: *Can you tell us how the FARMacia got started in 2021?*

A: The program started as a very basic collaboration between an urban farm that Solid Ground has in South Park [Marra Farm] and the health educators at Sea Mar Community Health Centers. As extra produce was available, the clinic health educators would pick it up and either give the produce directly to clients, or set up a table with free food. Solid Ground was able to get a grant from Healthier Here (a King County nonprofit focused on health equity) to fund the program, so the past three years we've grown and now work with more farms—all local or regional. It's like a cross between a farmers market and a food pantry. We work with two Sea Mar clinics—South Park on Tuesdays, White Center on Thursdays.

A big part of the grant was funding to buy produce—specifically from BIPOC farmers. We're working with an organization called Farmstand Local Foods, a food hub in Georgetown, and they've helped us connect with a number of different farms in the region. We work with Faith Beyond Farm in Kent and Alvarez Farms in Yakima, and get berries from Sidhu Farms in Puyallup. We've also been working with the International Refugee Committee, who has organized a collective of refugee farmers.

Q: *How do people hear about the FARMacia?*

A: A lot of it comes through word of mouth. One of the things the health educators do is screen for food insecurity, so they are able to let people know that this is a place they can come and pick up some fruits and vegetables. We set up in the clinic entryway, so we get some people who are just coming in for appointments. In the beginning, we would be there for several hours asking people if they wanted to take produce home, now people line up in advance.

Q: *How do you decide what sort of produce to offer?*

A: There's a large Latino population, so we try some things that are culturally appropriate and also introduce some new things. Basics are always popular—onions, garlic, lettuce, tomatoes, cilantro, herbs in general. Zucchini has been super popular, but some other things that grow well in our region, like kale and winter squash, have been difficult to get people to take. There's been a bit of learning on my end about what people want.

Q: *Do you do any education around ingredients people may not be familiar with?*

A: This summer we've developed some recipes and are doing a sampling and demo table. Each week we do a recipe of something we have a lot of. I'll make the recipe and people can taste it as they're standing in line—it's opened some people's eyes about things they might not have tried before.

We have been mindful of working with recipes that have low equipment and low ingredient needs. We do have some houseless people come through, so we want to make sure the recipes are accessible to everyone.

Q: *How has the FARMacia program evolved? Are you seeing changes?*

A: In the beginning of the summer, we were having to almost pull people over—"Hey, come check out our produce." But now, honestly, we're limited by our budget and the amount of produce we can buy. People are lined up and they just wipe stuff out. Most days we're serving 30-45 people, but if we could it would be a much bigger number. There's still a lot of potential to grow even more. It's really highlighted just how much of a need there is. Our line gets longer each week.

Q: *What sort of feedback do you get from Sea Mar? Are you able to collaborate with them?*

A: The health educators say there are a lot of people trying to schedule appointments on FARMacia days, so they can get food when they come in. It's a good opportunity for the health educators to have another check-in with their clients, to follow up on issues. And we've had a lot of opportunity to refer people who come in to other Solid Ground programs—for help with housing or transportation services.

Q: *What does the future of the program look like?*

A: As we've seen how much of a need there is, there's a lot of conversation about how we can make this a year-round program [Food FARMacia runs June to November]. One thing we're doing is using some of our budget to purchase refrigerators for the clinics. Sea Mar already has small food pantries with dry goods, but this is a way to be able to have fresh food. It's not on the same scale, but it's something. So, people can continue to get produce when they come in.

Our funding runs out this year, so we're in the process of looking for more. In the grand vision, it would be great to expand this to more clinics. The need is definitely there—I'm hearing so many people say, "This is the first time I've had trouble putting food on my table." And these are not the people you would expect—they have fulltime jobs, but it's hard with high housing costs and medical costs. The landscape of Seattle really has shifted; this can happen to anyone.

Q: *How can people get involved with helping to support the program?*

A: Volunteering is one of the best ways to be involved—we can always use helping hands to keep the produce stocked, or setting up and taking down, especially as the markets have gotten busier. And if anyone wants to financially contribute through Solid Ground, that is helpful too.

How to help

For more information on SeaMar see seamar.org. To volunteer with the Food FARMacia program visit pccmarkets.com/r/6821. Donations to the program can be made through Solid Ground at pccmarkets.com/r/6820. Please note on the donation form that it is intended for Food FARMacia.

The sweet and transformative success of Dragonfly Cakes

By Naomi Tomky, guest contributor

Odette D'Aniello started decorating cakes at age 10, a job she chose because it meant working in the only air-conditioned room at her cousin's bakery on Guam. It was an upgrade from slicing loaves by the hundreds in the tropical heat.

In the decades that followed, D'Aniello parlayed the skills she picked up as child labor for the family business into a thriving cake company.

D'Aniello's Dragonfly Cakes produces petit fours: tiny, intricate, beautiful cakes that are the opposite end of baking from her pre-teen days of frosting 50 cakes a day at fast-forward speed. When D'Aniello purchased Dragonfly in 2016, the name held special appeal. "Dragonflies are about transformation, and so is baking: the transformation of raw materials into this alchemy, this beautiful and tasty thing."

Dragonflies do what scientists call an incomplete metamorphosis, skipping directly from the pupal stage to adulthood—an all too apt metaphor for D'Aniello's own life.

Her great uncle, who she called Lolo Tinog, was the illegitimate son of a wealthy Chinese merchant on the island of Cebu and the first baker in D'Aniello's family, she said. Disinherited at his father's death, her great uncle apprenticed at a bakery starting at age 13. Years later, after World War II ravaged the Philippines, Lolo Tinog made an oven out of a gasoline barrel and combined the skills he learned at the bakery with U.S.-supplied rations to make bread, eventually building a thriving bakery of his own.

When her parents struggled to raise their three small children on rural teachers' salaries, D'Aniello's mother used what she'd learned at her uncle's bakery to make a light Filipino sponge cake called mamon, which she sold first to coworkers, then all over town.

Word of the woman baking amazing mamon in the provinces reached Lolo Tinog's youngest son, Ambrose, who had taken over his father's bakery. He reached out to try to buy the recipe, only to find out that the baker was his cousin. He hired her to come and make the cakes for his bakery. Not long after, he moved to Guam, leaving D'Aniello's mother to manage the bakery's 50 employees. D'Aniello grew up there, playing among the flour and big machines.

When D'Aniello was 10, Ambrose called again: he had a bakery on Guam and wanted D'Aniello's parents to come help him with it. That D'Aniello herself and her 11-year-old brother came, too, was icing on the cake. "First thing from the airport, they brought us to the bakery and said, 'Your job is to slice 200 loaves of bread,'" she remembers. "It was not very fun."

She went to school, came home, and sliced bread. While other kids played, she wrapped loaves and tried not to melt in the crippling heat of the afternoon. The cakes, she realized, didn't melt in the same heat, because they were kept in an air-conditioned room. She changed jobs, starting out by writing on the cakes. "I would try to make flowers and I'd get in trouble," she remembers. "Then they saw that I was pretty good." It was still not very fun.

But the family's hard work allowed her parents to open their own bakery and send her to good schools, then on to college at the University of Arizona. D'Aniello, like her parents, trained as a teacher, thinking she left her bakery days half a world away. She met her husband, also a teacher, and they moved to Lacey, Washington.

But they struggled to find jobs, and like her parents and Lolo Tinog before her, she returned to baking. "The power of resilience, the power of grit, transformation nd seeing things through," she says, "those are all gifts. Trauma comes with a gift, and what you focus on is your choice."

In 1999 they opened a café in Lacey, serving all-you-can-eat sandwiches on fresh bread with housemade desserts. "We would have a line out the door, but we couldn't make money," she laughs. But she had an infant and was desperate, paying her mortgage on a credit card.

Then, she happened by a wedding show at the Tacoma Dome. "Oh my god, people just make wedding cakes," she marveled. They didn't make the breads she labored on as a child and struggled to make profitable at her café. "They just do wedding cakes, all these big, gigantic wedding cakes that I learned how to do at age 12." She spoke with vendors and learned they were just baking them at home—no rent to pay—and made $300 on each. "That's like 60 sandwiches," she thought.

She spoke to the man who hosted the show, who told her if she did the show, she'd never have to worry about selling a three-dollar croissant again in her life, and she handed over her credit card. "I knew how to do the skills," she said, but she had no idea on the marketing. She copied pages from a book by Wilton, the cake supply company, and made a brochure. It worked.

"One day we were doing sandwiches, the following day, I said, 'We're turning our café into a cake studio.'" From there, things began to look up. When D'Aniello's sister, Mary Ann Quitugua, graduated college, she told her, "You'll never have a starter job at McDonald's." Quitugua joined the business, working her way up to her current role as partner and COO, along with another cousin, Wallace, now the head of production.

In 2004, eight months pregnant, her husband back teaching to support the family, and Quitugua and Wallace depending on her, D'Aniello bought the Celebrity Cake Studio in Tacoma. She moved the business and expanded it, too: it came with contracts already in place. "We said, 'Sure we'll do that,'" D'Aniello recalls. "We had no clue what it was to wholesale."

Top: Sisters Odette D'Aniello (r) and Mary Anne Quitugua of Dragonfly Cakes. **Bottom:** Intricate petits four from Dragonfly are now available at PCC stores. Photos by Meryl Schenker.

But D'Aniello figured it out, and also figured out her own strengths as a businesswoman. "It's all about pivoting for us, just adapting because we're immigrants and you just have to go with the flow. You just can't resist reality. This is what's happening, and we need to move forward."

In 2016, she bought fudge company Wax Orchards. "We've never shipped nationwide before so I was like, 'Well, I'm just gonna buy this little business, maybe I can learn how to ship nationwide. And what distribution is."

Six months later, she heard about Dragonfly Cakes, a petit four company originally based in Sausalito, California. The business fit well with her new national shipping capabilities and local baking facilities, and the name made her swoon. "Everything is about a move forward," she says. "It catapulted us into this level of scale."

D'Aniello's business celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, the culmination of a lifetime of hard work and struggles, with beautiful, pattern-breaking results.

D'Aniello's daughter, who graduated from the University of Arizona with a management and information systems degree and currently heads the company's marketing team, told her, "We can't call it generational trauma, Mom. Maybe we should just call it generational superpower or something?" Her son, in his third year of college, plans to go to law school and then join his sister at the company. "They want to run the business with my sister," D'Aniello smiles. "And I'm going to garden."

For three generations of D'Aniello's family, the baked goods that brought joy to so many represented child labor and a brutal battle against poverty. But her own children grew up seeing the bakery as a sugary heaven and an opportunity to build on a proud legacy.

Naomi Tomky (naomitomky.com), author of "The Pacific Northwest Seafood Cookbook," writes about food and travel.

Lifelong: How nutritious food became a community's medicine

By Tara Austen Weaver, guest contributor

Photos courtesy of Lifelong

Every week, grocery bags of food and frozen meals are delivered to homes in King, Island and Snohomish counties. They are made with care, an eye to nutrition and concern for culture—and in return they nourish those who are struggling. This is the work of Lifelong, an organization helping those who are low income, homebound or experiencing chronic illness; their efforts bring to life the idea that food is medicine.

Lifelong's roots go back to the 1980s, when the HIV/AIDS epidemic was raging and government agencies refused to respond to the crisis—leaving those who were infected to struggle on their own. In Seattle, community members came together to organize food deliveries, hospital visitations and more, determined that no one suffer alone.

Out of this effort came several nonprofit organizations—Northwest AIDS Foundation, Chicken Soup Brigade, and Evergreen Wellness Advocates, now operating under the name Lifelong. While the mission has expanded far beyond HIV/AIDS, the goal is the same: to remove barriers to health with compassion so that no one faces illness or injustice alone. They do this one bag of groceries and one prepared meal at a time—but these are not just any meals or groceries.

"All of our clients are low income and are either living with chronic disease, or are homebound, or are seniors," explained Morgan Feder, the agency's nutrition and client services manager. "Our meals are medically tailored—our team of dietitians have come up with standards so these meals can be used as medicine for people living with chronic disease."

The meals and grocery bags follow standards set by the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association, staying within targets for calories, sodium, fat, protein and more. "We want to take away the stress of having to figure out how to create healthy food when you're sick," Feder said.

"Nutritional knowledge varies, from client to client, and many don't necessarily get the needed education from their doctor…" Feder said. "So, our goal is to send meals to our clients that they can feel safe eating—that takes a weight off of their shoulders."

Devising such meals is complicated. There's a chef, a nutrition team, and a lot of back and forth. "They have to figure out how to adapt it (to nutritional guidelines) and still make it taste good," Feder said. The recipes also need to freeze well and be streamlined enough to work on an industrial scale. There's a lot to be balanced, but Feder says both teams enjoy the challenge.

Within the meal delivery program, there is further specification: some meals are tailored for kidney dialysis patients, or those who cannot digest well (many health conditions cause digestion problems). And any meal can be made "soft texture," as dental problems or some health conditions make it difficult to chew and swallow. There is also a Welcome Home Program: a month of meals for people who have been discharged from the hospital.

"Not everyone comes home to a support system," Feder explained. "To have four weeks of medically tailored meals you can just heat in the microwave and be able to focus on healing is really important."

A more recent effort has adjusted the offerings to reflect the cultural heritage of the recipients. Asian Pacific Islander grocery bags might feature soy milk, tofu, fish, rice, noodles, Asian greens and bananas. Another bag inspired by Latino cuisine offers beans and rice, beef, tortillas, tomatoes, peppers and limes. Groceries for the East African community include lentils, rice, leafy greens, sweet potatoes, chicken and oranges. "There's a lot of comfort in being able to eat food that is familiar to people," Feder said.

There also are bags for those without access to cooking facilities, filled with items that require little to no preparation or refrigeration. Part of Lifelong's mission is to assist those who are transitioning out of homelessness and their Housing Department administers several tiny house villages.

Responding to need is only one component. Prevention and mitigation are also addressed through nutritional therapy and a program called Pots and Plans, a six-week class teaching cooking and nutrition basics. Each week has a different nutritional focus and students take home groceries to prepare recipes they've learned. The goal is to leave them with skills to make healthy food on their own.

The classes, offered through partner agencies, are also tailored to the cultural background of the students. One partnership has been with Seattle Indian Health Board, who helped Lifelong pilot a series on cooking from a Native background. "They were lovely and gave us feedback on the recipes," she said.

The scope of Lifelong's work is significant. In 2022 the agency distributed 52,000 grocery bags of food and 427,000 meals—8,000 meals a week—all prepared in a warehouse in Georgetown. While a staff makes up the backbone of the operation, they are assisted by more than 1,200 volunteers annually, including family groups and corporate teams as well as individuals and schools.

Volunteers come from all walks of life—either helping to prepare grocery bags or meals in the warehouse or driving a delivery route (food prep volunteering can be a one-time event, but delivery drivers are asked to commit for three months). Corporate groups usually come in for a single shift, but some families and individuals stay involved for years.

"We have a father-son team who volunteers together," says Jeremy Orbe, Lifelong's corporate engagement manager. "They started when the son was in middle school, then took some time off, now they're back and he's a young adult; their delivery route is a way for them to spend time together."

The Chicken Soup Brigade was founded to bring food to people with HIV/AIDS. "Since then we've been able to expand to people who have other chronic diseases and need food support," Feder said.

After 40 years, the need is ongoing—and increasing.

"There is more of a need than we currently have funding for," she said. (Lifelong's funding comes from federal funding for HIV/AIDS known as the Ryan White Act, as well as senior nutrition funding through the City of Seattle and donations and other health care partnerships.)

As food costs rise and many other supports decline, "I don't see us slowing down any time soon."

How to help:

Volunteer: PCC will sponsor a week of meals at Chicken Soup Brigade in February. Volunteer with PCC staff from 1:30 to 4 p.m., Feb 13 and 14 at the organization's Georgetown facility. Email rachel.tefft@pccmarkets.com to sign up and for more details. See lifelong.org for other volunteer opportunities. Groups and individuals can sign up for volunteer shifts Monday to Friday.

Support: Companies and families can donate financially or sponsor a meal or grocery bag where the company or family name is listed on the label.

Learn more: Find more information at lifelong.org, or sign up for a Lunch & Learn presentation for your workplace or community group.

Shop: The Lifelong Thrift store (312 Broadway Ave. E.) welcomes shoppers and clothing donations.

Hunger Action Day

Interested in advocacy work to help fight hunger in Washington state? Join local organizations for Hunger Action Day in Olympia Feb. 1 to talk with legislators about priorities and to meet advocates statewide.

No previous experience is necessary and "you'll have plenty of company and support if you're nervous," according to the Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition website. Sign up by Jan. 19.

Northwest Harvest, a PCC partner and an organizer of the annual event, said in a statement that "Showing up and speaking out makes a difference for food-insecure families and children in Washington. Together on Hunger Action Day, February 1, we can send a clear message to legislators that no one in Washington should go hungry."

See pccmarkets.com/r/6818 for details.

Meet the farmer and advocate of the year

A food justice champion, a visionary farming leader and a tireless supporter of Washington farmers were honored for their work at the 2023 Tilth Alliance conference in Port Townsend. The annual awards honor "exceptional individuals contributing to a sustainable food system."

Nyema Clark (r) of Nurturing Roots holds her award next to presenter Diane Dempster (l), Tilth Alliance Board Chair. Photo courtesy of Watershed Productions.

Farmer of the year

Jenson, co-owner of SisterLand Farms in Port Angeles (with Eli Smith and Benji Astrachan), was named the organization's farmer of the year. The Alliance called Jenson "a true visionary leader on the North Olympic Peninsula, with their work having profound impacts on community far and wide." Highlights included the farmer's dedication and passion for no-till regenerative growing practices and habitat conservation, as well as forming a local farmers' collective, creating a kitchen waste and compost recovery program, and offering affordable food and education to the community.

Similar praise came earlier this year from the North Olympic Land Trust, which had selected SisterLand as its 2023 Farmer of the Year. "There's a tiny farm in Port Angeles, WA that grows enough food to feed around 45 families per week, processes tons of kitchen waste each year, donates fresh food to area food banks, and employs and educates a growing team of future farmers—each a minority in their field. And they do it all on less than one acre of regeneratively grown vegetable beds," the Trust's statement said. From compostable packaging to giving workers voting power in decision making, the queer-owned and operated farm "really exemplifies what this future of farming can look like in our community."

Originally from Tennessee, Jenson's local accomplishments include co-founding the Clallam Grower's Collective, a network of farmers, gardeners, and volunteers, which inspired a similar group's creation in neighboring Jefferson County.

Tilth presenter Mark Bowman, a neighboring farmer and sustainable agriculture coordinator for Clallam and Jefferson counties, said in the awards announcement that he finds it refreshing to see the farmers "get together and tackle issues at a grass-roots level." This included implementing the county's first compost pickup program. "They pick up food waste from restaurants and homes, bring it to the ranch, let it compost, and apply it to their beds as fertilizer. They also take the composted goat manure and wood chips from my ranch and apply it to their farm beds," Bowman wrote.

SisterLand, whose motto is "Grow Radically," also runs the Dignity Project, a nonprofit program that brings on one new agricultural laborer a season to learn the ins and outs of running a small agricultural business while being paid the same hourly rate as regular employees, Bowman wrote.

Jenson helped start the Port Angeles Food Not Bombs chapter, joined the public school's equity team and joined the farmers market board of directors, according to the SisterLand website.

"At the end of the day, Jenson is a grower of crops," Bowman wrote. "But more importantly, Jenson is a server of people, making it their priority "that each individual is treated fairly with love, care and dignity."

Advocate of the year

Nyema Clark, founder of Nurturing Roots farm, was named Tilth's advocate of the year. Clark was honored for "dedication to food justice, providing quality sustainable food free to her community, sharing her business knowledge, advocating for land access, and empowering her community to learn gardening, food preservation and cooking," the organization's statement said. "Nyema and Nurturing Roots have worked tirelessly to spread the joy and education of good food and to advocate for food justice."

Diane Dempster, who presented the award, said that Clark, who grew up in the Rainier Beach neighborhood, started working for her community at a young age.

"Ray Williams, one of her middle school teachers, remembers her as a good student, creative and driven. She now serves with him on the board of the Black Farmers Collective and the South Seattle Community Food Hub Advisory Council," Dempster said. Clark learned about the science of plants from her mother, sold herbal seasonings at Pike Place Market, and founded Avenue South, a culinary and body products company.

In 2016 she founded Nurturing Roots Farm on an overgrown P-Patch in Beacon Hill, "born out of her desire to create a space where people from diverse backgrounds could come together to learn about, and engage with the food system" and recognizing the lack of access to fresh, healthy and culturally relevant food. Nurturing Roots produced fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers, providing fresh produce to schools, food banks and community organizations, while also offering educational programs and workshops.

"Nyema is committed to enriching underserved communities; her strength and overall goal is founded in youth empowerment and community economic sustainability," Dempster said.

With very short notice, Nurturing Roots had to leave its original home, Dempster noted, and Clark is lobbying the city for a new location. With her drive and dedication, Dempster said, we know she'll succeed.

Lifetime achievement award

Kate Ryan, a "thought leader, a mentor and a rebel" who recently retired as an agriculture program coordinator with the Washington State University extension, was honored with Tilth's lifetime achievement award.

"Kate has worked tirelessly for over 40 years advocating for farmers in Washington and offering educational programming and experiences for established and beginning farmers in Snohomish County," the award read. "She was integral in helping to create and maintain the Cultivating Success, Growing Groceries, and Preserving the Harvest programs, which were adapted statewide. She thoughtfully provided resources to farmers, including helping link them to land.

"Kate has in-depth practical knowledge of farming and an ability to identify critical knowledge gaps within the farming community and create learning opportunities to address them. She has a love for agriculture and farming and has worked to share what she knows to support farmers. The work, dedication, help and honesty she has exhibited over her career is outstanding. She has created a lifetime legacy.

Tilth director Melissa Spear said in her remarks that Ryan's career "closely mirrors the remarkable growth of organic and regenerative farming practices in the Snohomish Valley, in Washington state and beyond.And this is no coincidence. She has been on the leading edge of these movements both as a teacher and a practitioner...

"Throughout her career, Kate has been unwavering in her commitment to supporting growers who serve the land, their neighbors, and their communities. This wasn't always a comfortable stand to take in our calcified institutional settings, but she has never been one to mince words or let anyone turn her around. I myself have been the beneficiary of her blunt critiques.

"She has been so effective precisely because she didn't let institutional barriers get in her way. She is an independent thinker, a curious learner, a tireless campaigner, and, above all, a doer."

A father and son reconnect for "A Very Chinese Cookbook"

By Rebekah Denn

Photos by Kevin White, America's Test Kitchen

With the help of a good meal, it's never too late to bring a family together.

That's what Kevin Pang found when his father forwarded him a video one day. The Chicago writer, currently editorial director of digital at America's Test Kitchen, had a "cordial and indifferent" relationship with dad Jeffrey then, strained by culture clashes and physical distance.

He opened the file to a close-up of the family kitchen in Seattle, and his mother Catherine's hands making his grandmother's recipe for Shanghainese green onion pancakes.

"My virulently anti-technology Chinese parents were starring in their own internet cooking show," Kevin recounted to an audience at Third Place Books in Lake Forest Park recently. One video turned into a few dozen. "And now, somehow, my retired then-65-year-old father has nearly a million views on his YouTube channel," he continued, reading from the new cookbook collaboration seeded in that moment, "A Very Chinese Cookbook" (America's Test Kitchen, $35), available at all PCC stores. They also star in a father-son cooking show, called Hunger Pangs, on making great Chinese food at home.

In the book, father and son share 100 recipes, from simple fried rice to scratch-made Shanghai soup dumplings, all stamped with approval from America's Test Kitchen's notoriously rigorous recipe testers. (Typical ATK recipes cost $11,000 each to develop, Kevin Pang said. Even the well-established family hits included in the book went through that process; the soup dumpling tester alone fine-tuned the details by making 251 dumplings in more than 30 batches.)

The recipes are delicious and doable, but the family story adds a lot to the book's magic. Magic being somewhat literal for Kevin Pang, who worked in the Market Magic Shop at Seattle's Pike Place Market as a card-trick-obsessed teen.

His family moved from Hong Kong to the Pacific Northwest when he was six, settling in Kent, where he wrote he was "raised as an American during the day and Chinese after school." Endless arguments with his father were fueled by those differences—not to mention their similarities. But when Kevin switched from the news desk to the food beat at The Chicago Tribune as an adult, they finally had a common passion.

"I had no experience, but I did have one advantage: I was Cantonese. We Cantonese have a love of eating that borders on mania," Kevin wrote.

The YouTube videos years later started out as Jeffrey Pang's way of preserving family recipes, as some from older generations had been lost to time before he and his wife thought to ask for them, Jeffrey told the Third Place crowd. A retired businessman, he had always loved to cook and teach; the book even shows a photo of him teaching cooking classes at Kent Commons in 2001.

In one sense, though, the project started even earlier: in the yearlong gap between the family learning they would leave Hong Kong and the day they actually left.

"This was pre-internet, this was pre-Food Network, there weren't really a lot of cooking shows or cookbooks" showing Cantonese recipes, Kevin Pang said. Even a long distance call lengthy enough to share a recipe would have cost a fortune back then. So his parents "furiously jotted down every single recipe that they had from their childhood, inside this blue notebook."

The recipes weren't specific, in the way such family treasures usually aren't. "Add a little of this." "Cook until done," Kevin Pang recalled—and, memorably, "buy $2 worth of cilantro." But after the family moved to Canada and ultimately the U.S., his parents would cook the recipes for family and friends and refine them over time, adding precision and altering details to their personal tastes.

The family still has the blue notebook—Catherine Pang brought it to the reading—but now that story and a lot more are captured between hard covers.

Jeffrey Pang's favorite recipe from the book, he said, is stuffed tofu, a dish ideal for family gatherings and Chinese New Year. "We're Hakka people, Hakka people love to eat tofu," he said. The nomadic families had migrated long ago from north China—where wheat and noodles were common—to the south with its emphasis on rice. Soybeans were common in the south, he said, so tofu stuffed with meat satisfied some of the longings for dumplings that were suddenly hard to find.

Kevin's favorite is deep-fried shrimp toast, a mashup from Hong Kong's years under British colonial rule. It's "unbelievably delicious," he said, and can be made in 20 minutes.

But for a recipe to start with, he recommends the cold sesame noodles, based on a dish from the old Green Village restaurant in Kent. When his father would pick him up at the airport for visits home from college, he'd always ask to stop at the restaurant for noodles with cold poached chicken on the way home. Eventually his dad would bring the to-go order with him and have it ready to eat in the car.

Kevin Pang said he looked up the restaurant a few days before his Seattle book appearances, and thought it wasn't there anymore. But a poke restaurant with a similar name—Green Valley—was in its spot, and when he took a close look at the menu he saw some other items on the list, including sesame noodles.

"I drove down there and I met the owner. Her name is Melissa. She told me that she is the daughter of the chef who cooked there for 40 some odd years and that the recipes are still exactly the same…" he said.

"I ate the bowl of those cold sesame noodles and it just brought me back to childhood again. So that recipe is meaningful. It's also the easiest recipe in the book."

Sesame Noodles

This dish is wholly satisfying as written, but you can add any topping. Poached chicken is a natural pairing. In Hong Kong you'll find deli ham, red bell peppers and sliced egg omelet on cold noodles.

Serves 4 to 6

5 tablespoons soy sauce
¼ cup Chinese sesame paste
2 tablespoons sugar
4 teaspoons Chinese black vinegar
1 tablespoon chili oil
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
1 pound fresh thin white wheat noodles*
½ English cucumber, cut into 3-inch-long matchsticks
¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves
2 scallions, green parts only, sliced thin
1 tablespoon sesame seeds, toasted

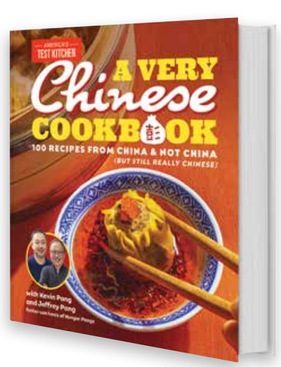
Process soy sauce, sesame paste, sugar, vinegar, 1 tablespoon water, chili oil, garlic and ginger in blender until smooth, about 30 seconds, scraping down sides of blender jar as needed; transfer to large bowl.

Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add noodles and cook, stirring often, until just tender. Drain noodles and rinse under cold running water until chilled; drain well.

Transfer noodles to bowl with dressing and toss to combine. Adjust consistency with extra water as needed until sauce smoothly coats noodles. Transfer noodles to shallow serving bowl and top with cucumber, cilantro, scallions and sesame seeds. Serve.

**If fresh thin white wheat noodles are unavailable, substitute fresh lo mein or 12 ounces dried wheat noodles. In a desperate pinch, spaghetti will work.*

— From "A Very Chinese Cookbook"



PCC CUSTOMER SERVICE STARS

GALE THOMAS
Cashier, Kirkland PCC

Gale joined the team at Kirkland PCC more than a year ago, after years of previous experience in the grocery industry. She loves interacting with people, greeting each customer that comes to her register with kindness, and prioritizing each connection she makes. She loves thinking about all the families over the decades that have been positively impacted by PCC's mission to bring healthy food to their tables. Gale loves supporting organic food and her favorite items to get at PCC are all the fresh, organic produce. You'll also find her exploring many different cuisines—she especially enjoys Indian dishes with fresh naan. In her free time, you'll find Gale doing yoga, biking, drawing, reading and keeping up with family. We know she will continue to bring joy to the Kirkland front end. Thank you for your kindness and wonderful customer service, Gale!

INDIA FLEMMINGS
Kitchen Manager, View Ridge PCC

India has been working in PCC Market Kitchens for four years. Her upbringing was centered on natural foods and, once she started working for PCC, she knew the clean products and passionate people would make it a great fit for her values. India is proud of the growth she's experienced within the co-op and plans to be with PCC for a long time. As the Deli Team Lead, she aims to create a calm, positive and collaborative work environment, always leading with excellent service. She loves so many of our deli items but especially looks forward to when the Blueberry Nectarine Caprese Salad is made each summer. Outside of her time at PCC, you might find India walking her dog Muffin, painting, indulging in some self-care or enjoying one of her favorite Jamaican meals. We are so thankful to have India as a leader in our organization and love her recipe for successful service: a big smile and a lot of gratitude.

SAM NIEHL
Deli Helper Clerk, Issaquah PCC

Sam has been a Deli Helper Clerk in our Issaquah store for about a year, but he's been a PCC shopper his whole life. As a kid, he would come to the co-op with his family (he loved picking out his piece of free fruit). Sam always assumes the best in people. Every day, he shows empathy to customers and brings a calm, positive attitude to the job. He has many favorite PCC products, but the Southwest Chicken and Smoked Mozzarella Pasta are his favorites. Sam appreciates PCC's commitment to local food and the local community and knows he'll be a lifelong co-op shopper. Outside of work, he enjoys going to the gym and playing the drums, and he recently traveled to Spain. Sam, thanks for modeling great customer service. We're so glad you're on our team!

MARK FRASHER
Point-of-Sale Store Specialist, Bothell PCC

Mark began working at the View Ridge PCC in college and has now been with the co-op for 32 years. While he initially came to PCC to pay his way through school, Mark stayed thanks to the co-op's vision, mission and values. He's been a vital team member for 14 new store openings, providing a high level of service to staff amid that exciting process. Currently Mark works as the Point-of-Sale Administrator for the Bothell store and is also the Point-of-Sale Store Specialist, helping to ensure consistent pricing and signage accuracy across the co-op. He's proud that PCC puts a high emphasis on pricing accuracy and enjoys working with multiple departments around the store. Outside of PCC, Mark enjoys being outside and gardening. Thank you, Mark! Your contributions to PCC are immeasurable.

PCC purpose stars

Two PCC staff members were honored by Progressive Grocer magazine for their groundbreaking work and community contributions.

Rachel Tefft
Senior manager, community food systems

Rachel Tefft was named a 2023 rising star for the publication's Top Women in Grocery award, which honors "the integral role women play across all segments of the North American food retail and grocery industries." Tefft was cited for her stewardship of the Growing for Good hunger relief program, advocating "for hunger relief organizations and farmers to cultivate a future for Pacific Northwest food security." (See pccmarkets.com/r/6688 for more on that program, a collaboration between PCC, Seattle Neighborhood Farmers Markets and Harvest for Hunger, bringing fresh produce from local farms to hunger relief agencies.) Tefft also drove statewide expansion of PCC's nutrition security initiative, Friends of PCC, helping food bank partners buy nutritious food that meets the needs of their clients (see pccmarkets.com/r/6631). The award also noted her contributions to *Sound Consumer*, which is dedicated "to informing and inspiring the cooperative grocer's community through a vision of advancing the health and well-being of people, their neighborhoods and the planet."

Rebecca Robinson
PCC's quality standards manager

Rebecca Robinson was named a 2023 Gen-Next winner by the magazine, celebrating individuals aged 40 and under who are "exceptional innovators who are taking the lead in their companies and their communities, and using their skills to transform the grocery industry."

Robinson manages the responsible sourcing program at PCC, with a focus on sustainability and public health. She oversees the development and management of product standards while developing educational resources for suppliers and staff. Additionally, she provides support for PCC's advocacy work and uses her expertise to help PCC make needle-moving policy recommendations.

Among her achievements were leading the standards codification project overhauling decades of old standards (see pccmarkets.com/r/6632), co-authoring PCC's new Inclusive Trade Standard (see pccmarkets.com/r/6633), and advocating that PCC stop selling colloidal silver after extensive research confirming there is no scientific evidence that colloidal silver is beneficial to humans and could even cause harm if used improperly.

Making the most of the Meyer lemon

By Tara Austen Weaver, guest contributor

Here in the Northwest, this time of year is often considered the glum season. It's wet, dark and cold. The holiday glitter is over and spring feels months away. There is one standout benefit of this time of year, however. It's citrus season. More specifically, it's Meyer lemon season.

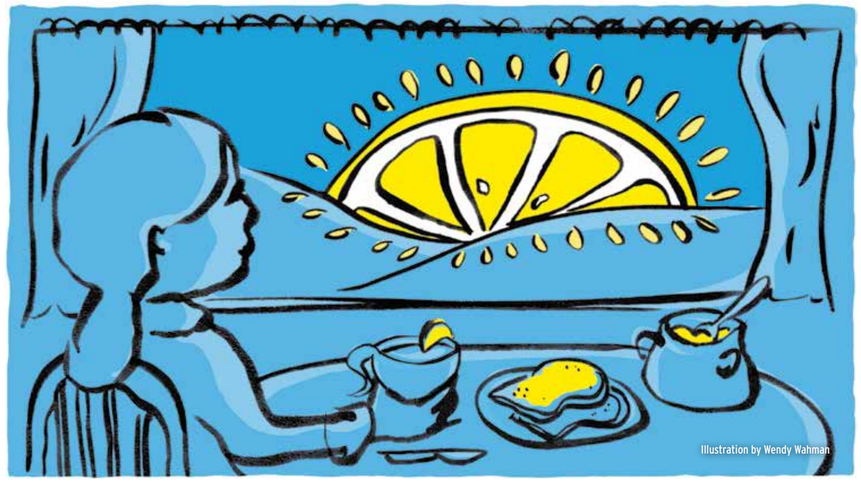


Illustration by Wendy Wahman

If you are not familiar with this cult citrus, Meyer lemons hail from China. They are named for Frank N. Meyer, a plant explorer from the early 1900s responsible for introducing 2,500 new plant varieties to North America, including a dwarf lemon tree from a small village near Beijing that bears his name.

What makes a Meyer lemon so special? The citrus is actually a cross between a lemon and an orange, a thin-skinned fruit with fragrance and flavor unlike other lemons. Meyer lemons are sweeter, juicy and slightly floral, with less acidity and more personality than we generally expect from a lemon. If you sent the standard lemon to charm school, it might come back as a Meyer.

And charm us they have. When Meyer lemons were introduced to the U.S. in the 1930s, it was with acclaim. The Los Angeles Times, in 1933, declared the Meyer lemon "a citrus fruit which should be widely planted in all California gardens." Not only was it suitable to various climates and could be grown in containers, it made "the finest lemonade."

Gardeners took heed, putting in Meyer lemon hedges and trees. For more than 10 years, Meyers were the belle of the citrus ball. In 1956, however, it was discovered the lemons were carriers of the citrus tristeza virus (CTV), which could spread to other citrus trees and threaten commercial crops.

The California Department of Agriculture declared Meyer lemons a menace. Orders went out, county by county, to remove and destroy them. Inspectors went door to door in some areas, telling residents to dig up their hedges and trees, then returned to make sure they had done so. Notices were sent to other citrus-growing regions, like Texas and Florida, to follow suit. Once embraced, Meyer lemons were now shunned.

But the qualities that made these lemons so appealing—thin skin, fragrance and flavor—were still in demand. It took two decades, but a virus-free "improved Meyer lemon" was developed by the University of California at Riverside and released to the public in the mid 1970s.

Even after reintroduction, Meyers remained chiefly a regional favorite, as commercial growers thought their thin skins wouldn't stand up to transport. They were still beloved by home cooks in California, but the majority of the country was unaware of them. This changed, in part, due to the influence of two women.

In 1988 Alice Waters, founder of Berkeley's groundbreaking Chez Panisse restaurant, included a Meyer lemon cake in a cookbook she wrote with Paul Bertolli, making cooks across the country curious. "Ask your friends or relatives in California to send you some," Waters suggested.

Martha Stewart joined the Meyer choir later, offering up recipes for everything from a Meyer lemon drop cocktail and lemon radicchio salad to a coffee cake incorporating slices of whole lemon. "Meyer is my favorite lemon because this thin-skinned fruit is much more flavorful than the ordinary store-bought," she wrote.

> If you sent the standard lemon to charm school, it might come back as a Meyer

Meyer's stock has since soared. They are now widely available in January and February—a bit more expensive, though arguably also more magical, than the Lisbon or Eureka lemons usually found in stores.

Because Meyer lemons are so precious, make sure to use every bit you can.

Take advantage of the fragrance and flavor held in the Meyer's thin skin and also preserve them for later use. They may be a consolation prize for the glum skies, but that's all the more reason to enjoy these gems of winter as often and as thoroughly as we can.

Salt-preserved Lemons

North African and Mediterranean cuisine has been using salt to preserve lemons as far back as the 12th century. The result is a deeply flavored pickled product that is often included in traditional tajine recipes, but is equally at home tossed into pasta or rice, in soups, stews, bean dishes and salad dressings—anywhere you want a savory hit of lemon brightness.

Yield: one jar

8 Meyer lemons
½ cup kosher salt
Additional lemon juice and salt, as needed

Thoroughly wash and dry the lemons. Trim ¼ inch off the tip and stem end of each lemon (until you can see the flesh of the fruit), then cut each lemon in quarters.

Wash and sterilize a glass jar with a tight-fitting lid (a pint canning jar is ideal). Place 2 tablespoons of the salt in the bottom of the jar.

Toss the lemon wedges and remaining salt in a bowl and begin packing the lemons in the jar, pressing each wedge down until juice is expressed. Layer with salt from the bottom of the bowl after each addition.

When all lemon pieces have been added and pushed down, check the level of liquid in the jar. If there are any bits of lemon that are not completely submerged, add extra lemon juice and salt (1-2 tablespoons). Screw on the lid and let sit at room temperature for three days, shaking the jar each day to mix and dissolve the salt. Make sure the lemon is fully submerged under the salty liquid each time. Refrigerate after three days.

Lemons will be ready to use after three weeks, when the white pith of the peel has turned translucent. You can use both the peel and the flesh, though they are generally used in different preparations, as the flesh will be very salty. Keep in the refrigerator for up to one year.

Lemon Curd

Yield: 5 cups

1 cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice
1 lb. sugar (2 cups)
1 stick butter (8 tablespoons)
8 eggs, lightly beaten
5 tablespoons lemon zest
Pinch of salt

In a heavy-bottomed sauce pan, add the lemon juice, sugar and butter and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until the butter melts and the sugar dissolves.

While the lemon mixture cooks, crack the eggs into a medium bowl and whisk until the mixture is a uniform yellow.

Once the lemon mixture is melted and smooth, remove from heat and use a ladle or plastic measuring cup to scoop up approximately one cup of lemon mixture. With a slow and steady hand, drizzle the lemon mixture in a small stream into the eggs while stirring steadily until fully combined. Repeat again with a second cup of lemon mixture.

Next, take the egg mixture and, scoop by scoop, repeat the same process to slowly add the egg mixture into the saucepan with the lemon butter, stirring steadily. Doing this slowly will prevent the eggs from being scrambled.

Once incorporated, return to a medium-low heat and cook until the mixture has thickened and coats the back of a spoon (15-20 mins, stirring regularly).

Strain the mixture through a wire mesh colander before adding the lemon zest and salt. Cool and refrigerate for up to a week, or store in the freezer for up to six months. Lemon curd is excellent on toast or scones, can be mixed into yogurt, used as a filling for layer cakes, or as a topping for waffles, pancakes or crepes.

Freezing

Meyer lemon juice is great for baking and can be squeezed and then frozen in an ice cube tray for later use (mix it with sugar and water for a speedy lemonade).

And don't throw out those peels! Juiced halves can be kept in a zip-top freezer bag for up to six months and grated into zest for a wide variety of dishes, from baking projects to soups and sauces. An added bonus: the hard, frozen rinds are much easier to grate.

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: Tulips, Peonies and Dahlias." Her latest book, "A Little Book of Hummingbirds," will be released in March.

[NEWS BITES]

Organic poultry standards

The final Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) regulation, announced (in the fall) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), creates clear standards for outdoor access for organic poultry including minimum indoor and outdoor space requirements, and further clarifies living conditions, health care, transportation and slaughter practices for all organic avian and mammalian livestock species. Most importantly, the rule clarifies that screened-in, enclosed porches do NOT qualify as sufficient outdoor space for organic chickens. Current organic poultry producers have up to five years to implement the new regulations. (*OTA.com*)

Endangered Oregon snail

In an ongoing legal battle with the Biden administration over a Nevada lithium mine near the Oregon border, environmentalists are poised to return to court with a new approach accusing U.S. wildlife officials of dragging their feet on a year-old petition seeking endangered species status for a tiny snail that lives nearby. The Western Watersheds Project said in its formal notice of intent to sue that the government's failure to list the Kings River pyrg as a threatened or endangered species could push it to the brink of extinction. It says the only place the snail is known to exist is in 13 shallow springs near where Lithium Americas is building its Thacker Pass Mine near the Oregon line. (*OregonLive.com*)

Food insecurity rises

More than 44.2 million Americans lived in households that struggled with hunger in 2022, according to a USDA report released (in October)—an increase of 10.3 million over the previous year. The new figures, from the agency's Economic Research Service, show an end to a nearly decade-long decrease in the number of families reporting food insecurity, at a time when food prices remain elevated because of inflation. The report paints a difficult picture for many households considered food-insecure—meaning they did not have consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living. (*WashingtonPost.com*)

Nutrition label designer

Carbs, protein, sodium and fat: if you're adept at scanning those nutrition facts on food and drinks packages, it's thanks in large part to Burkey Belser. But his work extended far beyond grocery aisles. The graphic designer died at age 76 in Bethesda, Md., on Monday, reportedly from bladder cancer. He famously did the (label design) for free: when Congress approved the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act in 1990 with a mandate for a new nutrition label, it didn't appropriate money to pay for creating one. (*NPR.org*)

California additives ban

For most people, consuming some amount of food additives is almost unavoidable, which is why the state of California is making it easier to navigate around certain harmful chemicals with a new ban. (In the fall) California Governor Gavin Newsom signed the California Food Safety Act, which will be implemented in 2027. It will prohibit the manufacturing, distribution or sale of potentially harmful food additives, including red dye No. 3, potassium bromate, brominated vegetable oil or propylparaben. (*FastCompany.com*)

BC forest protection

The British Columbia government took a significant step toward protecting old-growth forests and creating new protected areas with the announcement of a $300-million fund for Indigenous conservation. The provincial government will provide $150 million for the conservation financing fund while the BC Parks Foundation, the official charitable partner of BC Parks, will furnish the rest. The fund, managed by the foundation, will finance ecosystem protections, including Indigenous stewardship and guardian programs, capacity building and unspecified low-carbon economic opportunities. (*TheNarwhal.ca*)

2024 food trends

ADM (Archer Daniels Midland) has identified what trends in flavors and colors will affect product innovation for 2024. The four trends include "luxe self-expression," "dare to dupe," "health without stealth," and "breaking boundaries" of taste and color. "Luxe self-expression" enables consumers to express themselves through the food and beverages they consume. A few flavor inspirations that emerged this year included caramelized fruit, cinnamon sugar and sweet paired with umami, according to the study. (*FoodBusinessNews.net*)

FDA priorities

Jim Jones, the new deputy commissioner for human foods at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a statement outlining the FDA's three top priorities for the food side of the agency as it works to reorganize the entire program. The statement lists three key areas of focus: reducing foodborne illnesses, decreasing diet-related chronic diseases, and a greater focus on the safety of food chemicals. On the surface, this might not seem earth shattering—and it's not—but to me, this signals that FDA is trying to be clear about how it will focus its time and limited resources as the agency is under intense scrutiny to better protect the public on a variety of fronts. (*FoodFix.co*)

Olive oil prices

Like the oil that comes from the ground, olive oil is a globally traded commodity, with events in one part of the world reverberating far away. Drought in Spain, the world's largest olive oil producer, has devastated recent harvests, and bad weather has hit olive crops in other major growers including Italy, Greece and Portugal. The result is prices climbing to dizzying heights, well over $9,000 per metric ton, which filters through to pricier bottles of the oil that have become a fixture in many American households, used for cooking and drizzling on foods associated with a healthy Mediterranean diet. (*NYTimes.com*)

Sustainable packaging

Consumers increasingly demand an alternative to plastics and deadlines for local and state sustainability mandates are approaching, but finding something that isn't prohibitively expensive that also keeps fruits and vegetables fresh and appealing has been a struggle, speakers at (the) Global Produce & Floral Show produced by the International Fresh Produce Association in Anaheim, California, noted. "We all want to do better," said Jen Doxey, director of sales at Fox Packaging and Fox Solutions. "The long-term goal is we want a bio-based alternative, but right now today, that's really not the reality…Most of our consumer products are plastics-based." (*WinsightGroceryBusiness.com*)

Sustainability interest grows

Consumer interest in sustainability is becoming an increasingly important factor when choosing a brand, according to new research from data and analytics solution provider NIQ (formerly NielsenIQ). The company's "Green Divide" report, which examined consumer preferences, attitudes and behaviors around sustainability, found that 70% of consumers say sustainability is now more important to them when selecting products than it was two years ago. The growing perception that environmental issues are impacting consumer health is partially responsible for the increased focus on sustainability, said Sherry Frey, vice president of total wellness at NIQ. (*FoodBusinessNews.net*)

Salt cycle disruptions

Humanity is messing with the Earth's "salt cycle," with potentially dangerous consequences for drinking water supplies, crop production, and ecosystems. That's according to a new study published in the journal Nature Reviews Earth & Environment. It's the first time that scientists have documented the extent to which humans have changed the salt content of the land, water and air across the globe. (*Grist.org*)

Electric vehicle sales

Washington has been among a few states leading the EV transition, with 18% of its new car sales in the first half of 2023 being either fully electric cars or plug-in hybrids, which can be powered by both electricity and gasoline, according to a report by an energy research division of Bloomberg. Only California has sold a higher proportion—ballooning from around 8% of new car sales being EVs in 2019 to 25% in the first half of (the) year, said Corey Cantor, an EV analyst who authored the report. Nationwide, 9% of new car sales in the first half of 2023 were EVs. (*SeattleTimes.com*)

AI salmon counts

Spawning salmon (in rivers across British Columbia) are usually counted by teams of volunteers, or monitored with in-river video. Now, AI technology developed in partnership with conservation groups, Simon Fraser University, and First Nations on B.C.'s North and Central coasts is being used to sort through that footage to differentiate between species. The results of a pilot study, recently published in Frontiers in Marine Science, show that the computer vision deep learning model—which is being called "Salmon Vision"—was about 90% accurate when it came to detecting coho and 80% accurate for sockeye after reviewing more than 500,000 video frames. (*CBC.ca*)

Early bird dining

Consumers across the country are going out to dinner more often—and much earlier—than they were before the pandemic. "Our data indicates that fine-dining customers are eating earlier than they did prior to the pandemic," R.J. Hottovy, head of analytical research at Placer.ai told The Food Institute. "We've reviewed visitation trends by hour for some of the larger fine-dining restaurant chains in the U.S., and generally speaking, we have seen an increase in the percentage of visitors frequenting a restaurant from 4-7 p.m. and a decrease in the percentage of visitors who are coming in after 7 p.m.," said Hottovy. (*FoodInstitute.com*)

Europe's wine harvest

Europe's wine harvest fell this year as top producers like Italy and Spain grappled with challenging weather conditions. A dry winter, hailstorms, floods and a rainy spring season damaged vineyards in key wine regions, according to the Copa-Cogeca unions that represent European farmers. Italy lost its place as Europe's top producer for the first time in seven years after a 12% drop in output. (*Bloomberg.com*)

America's missing ingredient: Are beans "the new chicken"?

By Kim O'Donnel, guest contributor


Photo by Charity Burggraaf

The accolades and honors are many: High marks from the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society. Major billing in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. A United Nations "World Pulses Day." A key to longevity in the "Blue Zones" project promoting healthier lives.

On paper, beans (and peas and lentils, their leguminous kin) are nutritional heroes. They're affordable and environmentally sustainable.

But in the American kitchen, they remain unsung. Simply put, we don't eat enough.

A 2021 paper looked at how much we spent on average on legumes from 2017 to 2019: Less than five dollars per year.

In a similar timeframe only 20% of more than 4,700 people in the National Health and Nutrition Examination (NHANES) survey reported eating legumes within a 24-hour period.

The government's dietary guidelines recommend just 1½ cups of legumes a week. This is not a high bar. But if you never learned to cook beans, this amount must feel like a mountain.

Like so many other Americans, I grew up eating meat every day, an experience that I have shared previously in this space (pccmarkets.com/r/6780). That translated into zero beans in my early years. I remember the rare appearance of a can of chickpeas that my parents would scatter on top of an antipasto platter loaded with rolled-up salami and provolone. Otherwise, our house was a no-legumes zone.

In my late 20s, I was living in a basement apartment and working three part-time jobs. My weeknight dinner routine went something like this: Crank open two cans of black beans and scrape the sludgy contents into a pot. Add a few shakes of cumin and chili powder and stir it all together. Heat until bubbling and spoon over white rice. Add a few glugs of hot sauce for the finish and tuck in.

Beans and rice were cheap and filling, and that's all that mattered.

I had never considered cooking a bag of dried beans because I didn't know how. Even with culinary training a few years later, I remained a legumes philistine. That first pot of Hoppin' John (black-eyed peas) to ring in 1997 was so unevenly cooked I was convinced my chances of New Year's luck were doomed.

I gave beans another chance when I learned about Meatless Monday as a reporter. In Seattle, where we lived for 11 years, I learned to cook dried beans in earnest. When I discovered that area growers brought several varieties of beans to weekly farmers markets I had no more excuses. To have that kind of access felt like a gift.

Over a period of eight years, I wrote three vegetarian cookbooks, developing more than 300 recipes. Beans figure into each book. But as I look back, I can now see a progression—or maybe an evolution—of my knowledge, passion and appreciation.

I still like to whip up a pot of black bean-sweet potato chili, an old favorite from those early days of recipe development (see below). But now, my legumes life is expansive and varied, figuring into salads, cookie batter, a bean-y take on mac and cheese, even a lentil pate that tastes like the delicatessen original. I've freed myself up from the confines of one recipe and do more batch cooking of "naked" beans, which I divvy up for different dishes or culinary directions. Seeing beans waiting for me in the fridge has made me an even more inventive cook. I now think of legumes as the "chicken" of my cooking life; there are infinite ways to prepare them.

For years, I made sure to soak beans a few hours in advance for stovetop preparation. But more recently, I've become enamored with my multicooker, a development I didn't see coming. As the recipe editor for the forthcoming cookbook from Michael Solomonov and Steven Cook of Zahav restaurant in Philadelphia, I tested a few of their recipes in an Instant Pot.

Admittedly, I was skeptical at first. No soaking, really? No soaking, really! You program the cook time and let the machine do the work. Although I still enjoy the sensory experience of tending a pot of beans on the stove, the pressure cooker method is so efficient I don't think twice about cooking beans more than once a week. If I don't use those naked beans in a few days, I transfer them to the freezer for later.

I put off legumes for a long time. It's a relationship I didn't know I wanted or needed. Now I can't see it any other way.

Of course legumes are good for you—really, really good. But even more compelling, says this ride-or-die fan, they're one of the friendliest foods you'll ever come to know. A reason to celebrate.

Kim O'Donnel is a chef, journalist, and cooking teacher. Find her online at kimodonnel.com.

Black Bean-Sweet Potato Chili

©Kim O'Donnel

Makes 6 to 8 servings

1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes (2 to 2.5 cups)

3 tablespoons neutral oil

1 medium yellow onion, chopped finely

4 cloves garlic, minced

1 tablespoon ground cumin

1 teaspoon smoked paprika

1 teaspoon dried oregano

½ teaspoon ground cayenne

½ teaspoon fine sea salt

⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon

2 tablespoons tomato paste

2 to 2.5 cups tomato puree

2 chipotle chiles in adobo sauce, minced

4 to 6 cups cooked black beans (from 1 pound dried)

Possible finishing touches/toppers

Chopped fresh cilantro, chopped scallions, sliced radishes, sliced avocado, grated Monterey Jack or crumbled cotija cheese, sour cream

Have a bowl of ice water at the ready.

Place the sweet potato in a medium saucepan and add about 3 cups of water. Bring to a boil and par-cook for 2 minutes. With a skimmer or a spider sieve, remove the sweet potato and transfer to ice water to cool. Drain and set aside.

Set your favorite soup pot over medium heat and add the oil. Tilt the pan until the surface is coated. Add the onion, cooking until softened, about 6 minutes. Stir in the garlic, spices and salt. The mixture will be pasty. Add the tomato paste, stirring until evenly coated. Add the sweet potato, continuing to stir until coated with your flavor base.

Add 2 cups of the tomato puree and increase the heat to medium, bringing the mixture to a lively simmer. Stir in the chipotle chiles and cook until the sweet potato is fork tender, about 10 minutes. Adjust the heat as needed, stirring regularly to keep from sticking.

Add the beans, at first reserving the cooking liquid. If the mixture seems too thick, feel free to ladle in the remaining tomato puree and/or some bean cooking liquid. You're looking for the liquid to be at about the same level as the beans. Cook over medium-low until warmed through and seasoned how you like it, about 20 minutes. But there's nothing wrong with letting the beans continue to simmer over low heat.

Serve with any of the optional toppings, with rice, tortillas or corn bread.

How to cook a pot of naked beans

Stovetop Method

Soak 1 pound beans for at least two hours and up to 6. Cold water should cover beans by a few inches. When ready to cook, drain water and place beans in a large pot (enameled cast-iron works great, or a stockpot). Add 8 fresh cups of water and a peeled onion wedge (about one-fourth of a medium onion). Over medium-high heat, bring to a boil. Cook at a hard boil for 10 minutes. Cover and reduce the heat to low, cooking for 25 minutes. Add 1 teaspoon fine sea salt, cover, and continue cooking for another 25 minutes. Taste beans for doneness; if they aren't tender to the bite, check again at 10-minute intervals.

Instant Pot

Place the beans in a 6-qt or 8-qt multicooker such as an Instant Pot. Add 8 cups cold water, 1 teaspoon salt and a peeled onion wedge (as with Stovetop method). Cook for 55 minutes on the Pressure Cook setting; make sure the pressure is set to "high." Depending on the model of your Instant Pot, estimate 15 to 20 minutes for the pressure valve to seal and naturally release before and after cooking.

One timing exception: Chickpeas require more time in the IP. Set the timer for 1 hour, 10 minutes.

P.S. *Cook times can vary, depending on your stove top, age of beans and pressure cooker. The times here are based on my years of testing in my home kitchen.*