



Fiddleheads Natural Food Cooperative Newsletter

fall 2009

Fiddleheads QUARTERLY

Fiddleheads Quarterly is a publication of Fiddleheads Natural Food Cooperative, 13 Broad Street, New London, Conn. 06320, 860-701-9123, www.fiddleheadsfood.coop.

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The Quarterly is published on November 1 (Fall), January 1 (Winter), April 1 (Spring) and July 1 (Summer). We welcome story and photo submissions. Please contact the editors at lpaigeg@gmail.com (Laurie) or noki85@gmail.com (Mary) for more information.

Printing courtesy of Bob Stuller. (Thanks, Bob!)

Dear Readers,

Happy Fall! This is our first issue of the *Fiddleheads Quarterly*. We're just getting started, but we have lots of fun ideas for future issues, including news from the board, features on our local suppliers and profiles on Fiddlehead's volunteers. Though we hope to eventually publish bimonthly, right now we're a quarterly publication with issues in November, January, April and July. We appreciate feedback and ideas, so please contact us at lpaigeg@gmail.com (Laurie) or noki85@gmail.com (Mary).

Cooperatively,

Mary Howard and Laurie Gorham,
Fiddleheads Quarterly coeditors



Laurie Gorham



Mary Howard



News from the Board

- Average store sales are approximately \$25,000/month with only 50% (plus or minus some percentage points) coming from coop members.
- At the end of October, there were 998 member households.
- Directors Sheila Herbert and Ellen Anthony attended the annual conference of the Consumer Cooperative Management Association in Indiana in June.
- The Board purchased a track lighting system worth \$60,000 in a going-out-of-business sale from Colonial Markets in Niantic. Our cost was \$8,000.

“Finishing the Store: More Product and a General Manager”

Fiddleheads has come a long way towards realizing its goal of becoming a fully functional, self-supporting coop. With current sales at more than \$25,000 a month, and our member households at 998, what is left to do? The board divides Fiddleheads’ expansion activities into two areas: providing more products, and hiring a general manager to coordinate the activities of the store.

The Day recently ran an article announcing that Fiddleheads will soon carry locally brewed beer. This is part of Fiddleheads’ effort to answer the needs of as many consumers as possible, while adhering to our cooperative principles. It is vital that we grow our consumer base so that we can pay off long-term debt and eventually bring on paid employees.

The store is now open five days a week. This requires a huge expenditure of volunteer time. It is truly amazing what we have accomplished with the efforts of volunteers alone, but as Board President Dick Virgin attests, “We cannot run the store solely on volunteer power forever.” He expects that a general manager will be hired within the next six to eight months.

Cooperative Fund of New England Loan

To achieve its goal, the board is in the process of applying for a loan from the Cooperative Fund of New England (CFNE). The board applied for a \$500,000 loan; as of this writing, the CFNE is considering a loan of \$250,000. The loan, according to Virgin, will be used to go toward the costs of paying a manager for 18-24 months. A capital campaign is being organized to

raise additional funds to finish the store and to obtain the loan. (CFNE will only lend the \$250,000 if we raise at least a matching amount). Funds from the campaign will be used to renovate the front and rear entrances and compression parts for yet-to-be installed coolers for milk and produce.

Community Outreach

The Board of Directors has representation on the following organizations: New London Main Street, New London Local First, The Regional Chamber of Commerce and Groton Chamber of Commerce, New London Farm to City, St Francis House and the Connecticut Chapter of the Northeast Organic Farmers Association.

Ideas for outreach to New London’s elderly community (some of whom live within walking distance to Fiddleheads) continue to evolve. Director Allen Longdyke hopes to reach an agreement with an organization that provides senior transportation in New London to include Fiddleheads on the bus-stop list. In addition, the board has discussed a senior breakfast to introduce seniors to Fiddleheads. The LedgeLight Health District issues permits for such events and requires volunteers to have training in food handling and preparation. Board President Dick Virgin and member Laurie Gorham completed the Safety in Food Handling and Preparation course earlier this year and are working on a plan to train the rest of the store volunteers.

– Laurie Gorham

Fiddleheads

Natural Food Cooperative

13 Broad Street, New London, Connecticut 06320

www.fiddleheadsfood.coop



Art Exhibits at Fiddleheads

LOCAL ARTISTS now have the opportunity to exhibit their work at Fiddleheads. At the back of the store, a wall space has been dedicated for hanging two-dimensional artwork. Since last May, exhibits have been rotating on a monthly basis. So far, the artwork has ranged from nature photography and abstract oil painting to pencil drawings and glass mosaics. The artists have been varied, too. Exhibitors are longstanding professionals as well as emerging, young artists. One show featured student work from the ISSAC School, a charter middle school and neighbor to Fiddleheads, in New London.

The October show included Glicée prints by award-winning artist Angie Falstrom. Angie is a Lyme resident and a graduate of Connecticut College. Her miniature landscapes feature scenes of

southeastern Connecticut. To see more of her work, visit <http://perennialdesigns.net>.

— John Sargent

Glass mosaics by Fiddleheads member, New London artist Gwen Basilica.

Inventory Report

LAST FALL, Director Sheila Herbert asked me to help with the first coop inventory, to be taken on January 1.

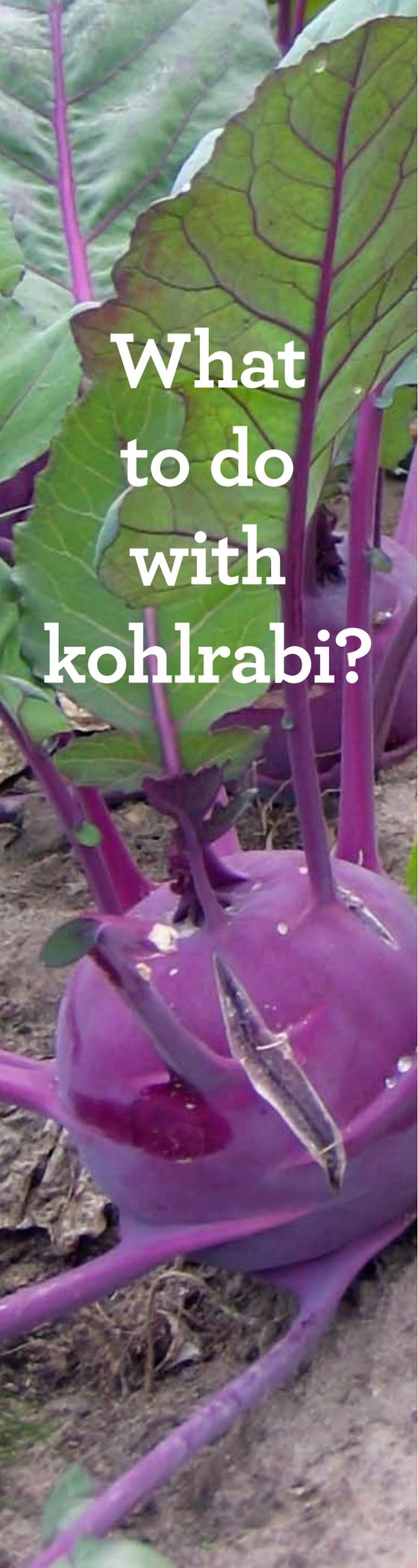
Inventory takes a good deal of time but provides valuable data. The first step is to make a list of the items in the store. It helps to have the list in the same order as the items are shelved in the store. I used one page for each four-foot section of shelving, so that I could stand in front of that section and have an ordered list of everything the section contained. Items were listed with their brand, name and size.

Next, a team was assembled to count every item in the store. Volunteer coordinator Laura Cordes

sent a request for coop members to help on inventory day. This took three hours. In all, 20 people assisted with the inventory.

When everything was counted, I entered the information, including prices, into a database. The price per item was multiplied by the number of items. When this was done for every item, the totals were added together, equaling the retail value of everything that was in the store on January 1. The database part of the project took three weeks of my spare time when I was home from college on winter break.

On July 1, I coordinated our second inventory. — Claire Anthony



What to do with kohlrabi?

THE FIRST TIME I tried kohlrabi, it was one of several choices for taco fillers. My friend, a semi-vegetarian, was very excited when she noticed the kohlrabi. “There’s grated carrot, grated daikon, grated turnip and *kohlrabi*,” she said, as if she’d just shown me her greatest treasure. I was in my mid-20s, not yet a gardener, and my taste for organic, healthful food had not yet been awakened. “Where’s the meat?” I wanted to ask. The kohlrabi left me unimpressed.

Then, I became a gardener. Remembering my friend’s wild love for kohlrabi, I planted it and watched in amazement as the leaves sprouted and the stem swelled at ground level into a green bulb shaped like a tennis ball! What could look stranger than a kohlrabi with its perfectly round head — each leaf stem emerging straight up from the bulb — topped with a wavy edged leaf? I swear the plant looks like an alien that’s been electrocuted, its green alien hair all standing on end.

Fun to watch grow, but as for eating it, I guess my taste buds were still not well developed, because I don’t remember cooking or eating kohlrabi at that time.

Last summer was my indoctrination. Kohlrabi entered my kitchen in grocery bags full of imperfect produce from a local farmer’s CSA. Hmm, what does one do with kohlrabi? I consulted cookbooks, in particular one of my favorites, *Uncommon Fruits & Vegetables*, by Elizabeth Schneider. Following her directions, I cut off the leaves with their stems, chopped them up and cooked them. Then I peeled the bulb, sliced it into rounds, and cut the rounds into matchstick shapes and sautéed them.

Oh! Now, 20 years later I understand my girlfriend’s loyalty! The leaves, chopped and steamed are like the best chard you’ve ever had, with a thicker, meatier texture. The bulb, skinned and sliced, as Elizabeth Schneider writes, tastes like “the freshest, crunchiest, broccoli stems, touched with a hint of radish and cucumber ...

Preparation & Cooking

Kohlrabi is a member of the Brassica family, along with broccoli, kale, cauliflower and cabbage. Although not hugely popular in America (yet!), Schneider writes that kohlrabi is eaten extensively in Hungary, Germany, Russia, northern France, Italy, Austria, Israel and China.

Both the leaves and the “bulb” of kohlrabi are edible. The leaves can be prepared as you would any other leafy green. The kohlrabi bulb is actually a swollen section of stem and must be pared first to remove the outer fibrous part. With experience, you will know how deep the fibrous part extends.

Once the bulb is peeled, it can be sliced into rounds, grated, or cubed and diced. Either way, once you have the shapes you want, you can steam, sauté, or just eat them raw. You can toss them with your favorite dressing or mix them with your other favorite vegetables. Here is one recipe for you to try:

Salad of Kohlrabi and Grilled Red Pepper

Grill one medium red pepper directly over a gas flame or under a broiler until it is blackened all around. Cover with a damp towel and set aside for 10 minutes to cool. While the pepper is cooling, take about 1-1/2 pounds of kohlrabi (about 4 medium-sized bulbs), remove leaves, and peel. Slice into thin rounds, and then cut the rounds into thin strips.

For a dressing, blend together 3 tablespoons light olive oil with 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Scrape off the blackened skin on the cooled red pepper and cut open to remove the seeds and white ribs. Cut the flesh into ¼-inch dice. Combine with kohlrabi strips and toss with dressing. Serve as is or over a bed of lettuce. Makes 4 servings. Enjoy!

— Laurie Gorham

Meet the Farmer

A former CL&P employee finds his calling down on the farm

DON HESS IS A HAPPY GUY.

Though he works from sunrise to sunset and laughs when asked about his hobbies — “There’s not much time for anything else,” he says — Don has found his calling growing certified organic fruits and vegetables for the New London Farmer’s Market and Fiddleheads. With his wife, Nancy, a nurse practitioner, he owns Valchris Farms in Oakdale, Conn., which they started in the mid-80s. “It was nothing but woods,” says Don, of his 16-acre property. “I had no idea what I was getting into.”

Don and Nancy cleared one acre for farming and initially planted blueberries, losing 50-percent of their crop the first year to birds. “I learned quickly that I needed to put up netting to keep the birds out,” says Don. A six-and-a-half-foot high fence keeps the neighboring deer at bay. As for insects, Don confesses to being a “pick and squash guy.”

The 61-year-old thrives on the life of a farmer. “I’m busy, but it’s a good busy,” he says. Don loves being outside, being productive and hearing the “thank yous” from his customers, who return week after week for fresh blueberries, delicious “Sun Gold” cherry tomatoes, and many other vegetables, from potatoes to eggplants.

Even a bout with cancer a few years ago didn’t bring him down. He kept up the farm through surgery, radiation and chemotherapy with help from his family and Emily Lerner from FRESH New London, who took his surplus produce. “The farm gave me a purpose during that time,” he says.

Don worked for CL&P for 35 years, retiring in 2005. He had several different positions with the



company. As an environmental technician, his work took him 500 feet up a tower and 100 feet below the ocean. As a “trouble shooter,” he was a problem solver and the guy people vented on. Now Don enjoys seeing a different side of the public. His customers are always happy to see him, often stopping to chat. The Hess’s, who both love to cook, have received many recipes from their customers.

Don has been a gardener all of his adult life, and before his retirement from CL&P, he worked toward building Valchris Farm, named for his parents who deeded him the land. After he retired, he gave himself three years to turn a profit, and by the third year he was in the black.

Though many farmers find the organic certification process frustrating, Don says certification is important to him. “I like having someone looking over my shoulder. I learn a lot from every inspector.”

Valchris Farm is certified by Bay State Organic Certifiers.

Don is as committed to local food as he is to organics, and he considers New London County a food-lovers paradise. “It doesn’t get any better than this,” says Don. “Within a 15-mile radius of New London, you want for nothing. There’s fresh seafood, locally farmed meats, cheeses, fruits, wine ...” He was one of the first vendors at Fiddleheads’ indoor farmer’s markets, and loves seeing the coop grow. “I hope [the current] site becomes too small for Fiddleheads,” he says.

To meet Don and Nancy and sample some of their amazing produce, visit the New London Farmers Market in the Fiddleheads parking lot on Tuesdays and Fridays, from 10 until 2. Or stop at the store on Saturdays for Fiddleheads inside market. You won’t be disappointed.

— Mary Howard

Product Reviews

Aloe 80 Organics Daily Conditioner

EVER SINCE I outgrew my tomboy days and discovered a mirror, I've hated my hair. Coarse and dry, my thick locks have always been prone to "frizzies." I tried everything to get soft, smooth hair — rinse-out conditioners, leave-in balms. I once got a perm, thinking that forcing my wild hair into curls would make it more manageable. I was wrong.

Over the years, I discovered how to deal with it. Ponytails and baseball caps helped, and so did a popular silicon-based conditioner. But when I made a vow to use only natural, ethical beauty products, I was stumped. Conditioners from health food stores allowed me to get a comb through my wet hair but did little else.

By sheer luck, I plucked a bottle of **Lily of the Desert's Aloe 80 Organics Daily Conditioner** off the shelf at Fiddleheads. (I was in a rush, and it was the first conditioner I saw.) The bottle promises to "leave your hair shiny, silky and luxuriously soft." What a surprise — it did! The light, creamy conditioner significantly changed the texture of my hair. And I loved the fresh, rosemary scent.

Lily of the Desert is the largest certified organic grower of aloe vera. Their Aloe 80 Organics line — which features products for hair and skin — contains a minimum of 80 percent organic aloe vera plus wheat protein, vitamins A and E, and essential oils of lemon and rosemary.

I knew aloe vera was soothing to the skin — I've kept a pot of it in my kitchen to treat burns for years — but I was surprised how it soothed my cranky hair, and subsequently my cranky ego. Best of all it does this without harmful silicon, artificial colors, formaldehyde donors, parabens, petroleum by-products or synthetic fragrances.

— Mary Howard



Tofu Scrambler

TOFU, THAT WONDERFOOD: it's high in protein and low in fat. The only problem, it's not that appealing. A block of tofu, naked on a plate, is

just not tantalizing to any of the senses. Enter **Tofu Scrambler**, a spice mix that promises on the box to be a "Delicious Seasoning for Tofu." Produced by Fantastic World Foods, a company that makes a line of boxed grain dishes, soups and vegetarian entrees, Tofu Scrambler is a blend of herbs, spices and dehydrated vegetables that you add to mashed up tofu to make it, well, more palatable. I have passed by this product in grocery stores for years, always thinking of eggs, because the photo on the box features sliced oranges and strawberries on a plate with a generous serving of what looks very much like eggs. I was eager to try it.

So, following the instructions on the box, I mashed up a 14 oz. block of tofu in a large bowl. I then emptied the packet of tofu scrambler seasoning into the bowl, mixed everything well and fried the mixture on medium heat for several minutes, until heated through.

The result? First of all, the turmeric does color the tofu a beautiful, scrambled-egg yellow. (Turmeric is a mild tasting Indian spice that colors everything it touches, including your counter top, a deep golden yellow. It's what gives curry its yellow color.) Second, the texture is very close to eggs, soft but somewhat chewy. With flavors of onion, garlic and green pepper, spiced with celery seed, jalapeno and chili powder, it makes an appealing tofu entrée. It's tasty and makes a fine meat substitute.

But does it taste like eggs? I can't really say yes or no, and I'm not trying to be coy. It's just that the texture and appearance are so egg-like, it brings up all sorts of ponderings about the taste. You'll have to see for yourself. Let me know what you think.

— Laurie Gorham



Don't miss the Winter Farmer's Market Festival at Fiddleheads.

Nov. 14, 2009
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

We'll be celebrating the
opening of the Winter
Farmer's Market with
music, door prizes, food
samples and more!

The following vendors will be there:

18th Century Purity Farm

Breads 'n Cookies

Brown Paper Bag Harry's Farm

Cold Spring Alpacas

Four Mile River Farm

Glenn Cheney

Hidden Brook Gardens

Lazizah Bakery

Maria's Country Kitchen

Perennial Harmony

Shayna Bs and The Pickle

Urban Eden

Wayne's Organic Garden