



91 Valley Street  
Willimantic, CT 06226  
860.456.3611

WWW.WILLIMANTICFOOD.COOP  
INFO@WILLIMANTICFOOD.COOP

## STORE HOURS

10:00am - 6:00pm  
Every Day

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# THE COMPOST

Vol. 42, Number 2 Summer 2020

## Co-op Scoop *Alice Rubin*

**Where to begin?** The phrase that keeps coming to mind is ‘what a long strange trip it’s been...’ except that seems to imply that the trip is over - and I don’t think that it is. We have all been challenged to find our own paths forward through this pandemic and the Co-op is no different. We have been focusing on how to get food to the members and the community in the safest way for everyone. This is not as simple a task as you might think it is. In our pursuit of this goal, we have had to reinvent ourselves on what seems to be a daily basis.

The implementation of Curbside was no small feat and the brilliance of our staff (a HUGE shout out to Patty Smith our Operations Manager and Steve Murphy, fondly known as our IT Guy) was nothing short of heroic! It wasn’t your standard online shopping experience with pictures and prices, but given that we had no capability to do on line ordering one day, and did the next day...wow!

Like waking up in an alternative universe, we all had new jobs! And this phenomenon kept happening as we made changes to improve the Curbside efficiency and accuracy. New jobs with titles like Runner and Picker replaced Buyer and Cashier, although of course we still had to do most of our ‘old jobs’ as well. Our entire staff stepped right up and took every change in stride. The contributions that the staff made to our Curbside process were invaluable and demonstrated their incredible level of commitment to the Co-op.

Throughout this ‘strange trip’ has been a constant stream of appreciation and well wishes from our members and curbside shoppers. We received flowers, pizza, signs, letters, thank you notes, tips, smiley faces on curbside orders and more

Thank Yous than I have received in my entire life! I would like to send some of that Thank You energy back to everyone who placed Curbside Orders for your

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• **JOB OPENING** •  
at the co-op

*Financial  
Manager*

**Complete job description  
is on our website**



**General Manager**

Alice Rubin

**Management Team**

Penny Barton-Zuckerman

*Financial Manager*

Wendy Jakoboski

*Produce Manager*

Bruce Oscar

*Facilities Manager*

Patty Smith

*Operations Manager*

Marissa Ocegüera

*Front-end Manager*

Corry Elm

*Assistant Front-end Manager*

Chris Dubis

*Wellness/Merchandising*

*Manager*

**Staff**

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Vicky Bassett

Damien Bluto

Maxwell Calverly

Susan Chasin

John Clark

Ben Coggins

Kara Croce

Chad Dunnack

Eion Foust

Jaron Gaier

Mark Giangrave

Avery Gratton

Saige Johnson

Samantha Lee

Gabi Lopez

Nancy McMerriman

Cari Nadeau

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Joe Rodriguez

Steve Scanlon

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# Response to Member Survey

**Linda Brock**

Last month, Willimantic Food Co-op asked you how you felt the Co-op was doing in responding to the pandemic situation, and what steps you would feel comfortable with the store taking in order to reopen. Your response was tremendous! Over 1,250 people, mostly members, took the survey – nearly 15% of the Co-op's active membership gave feedback.

About half of you responding had used the curbside pickup program; 89% agreed or strongly agreed with being satisfied with the experience. We asked if the Co-op was providing what people need. Of the 1000+ people responding to those questions, 87% agreed it was providing the products and 82% agreed it was providing the services needed.

Your input about the reopening strategies being considered was invaluable, contributing to decisions to limit the number of shoppers in the store and to require masks, but not to schedule appointments to shop. Though many also supported having a "traffic pattern" to follow in moving through the store, it was judged not practical given the overall store layout.

By the numbers, agreement was lower for continuing online ordering and curbside pickup; but many wrote to say that in your individual situations, it was the only way you could safely shop and has been an invaluable service. Continued curbside pickup can

*continued on page 6*

**CURBSIDE**



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to everyone  
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## Willimantic Food Co-op Preorder Reboot!

*In response to member requests we will be once again taking preorders!*



***Going forward we will reboot our preorder program with the following changes and disclaimers:***

- We reserve the right to delay ordering any preorders if that order will compromise the ability of the coop to continue to serve its membership as a whole
- We may need to limit the number of cases anyone orders of any one product, depending on supply
- We will do our best to keep you informed when a product will be unavailable for a long time
- Preorders can be placed on Curbside orders, but know that they will take approximately 7 – 10 days to come in and will be processed separately.



**We had stopped doing them** after we closed the store to shoppers for a couple of reasons. One reason was that our access to many goods was limited. Do you remember that huge shopping spree that many people went on right as Covid came to town? Our average basket size went from \$35 to \$100 almost overnight! Manufacturers and wholesalers struggled to recover from that, leaving us with some empty shelves. Over the last 3 months, most of the supply problems have lessened, but we are not where we were in terms of

product availability. The other reason was the huge amount of work needed to keep the Curbside Orders getting filled didn't leave much staff time for processing preorders.

**We know how important preorders are to many of you. They offer value, convenience and sometimes the only way for you to get a product that we don't normally carry. Please email us [here](mailto:willimantic-food.coop/contact-us) (willimantic-food.coop/contact-us) if you have any questions or would like to place an order.** 🥕

**Hello dear Coop friends.** Last week I went inside the store for the first time in three months. I nearly cried, I was so happy to see the people who work there, the bountiful produce in its cooler, the clever ways the store has been rearranged to accommodate Coronavirus precautions. Let's hear it for the dedicated Coop staff who kept us in bulk foods, fresh fruits and veggies, and groceries while the store was closed! Thank you.

Just two items in this Food Review: Raaka Bananas Foster unroasted dark chocolate and Upton's Naturals Barbecue Jackfruit

Let's start with chocolate - Raaka Bananas Foster unroasted dark chocolate. The two words that immediately come to me in describing this bar are "fresh" and "plump." Now I'm not really sure how a chocolate bar could be "plump" although repeated consumption can make the eater quite plump. I'm imagining that it has to do with the cacao fruit before it was picked and then the seeds harvested from inside the fruit—healthy, full figured fruits and seeds. Raaka buys these seeds, fermented and dried (not roasted), directly from

grower cooperatives and "grower-centric organizations" who then ship the precious cargo to Brooklyn, NY, home of the Raaka factory. It's a pretty short chain from supplier to chocolate maker so, yes, the chocolate is fresh.

For those of us who crave a good, dark chocolate —this is it. Although only 66% cacao—ordinarily kind of insubstantial for my taste—Raaka Bananas Foster satisfies that bitter, buttery chocolate lusty need. This is one of those foods that reminds me that humans are really just two-legged mammals: I want to roll around in Raaka chocolate, the way my dog rolls around in smelly things that delight her.

Okay—wow—I got hypnotized for a minute there. Here are the rest of the details about this chocolate: it's made with cacao beans, cane sugar, cacao butter, bananas, vanilla bean – all organic. I tasted the bananas only vaguely but I was so enraptured I didn't care. The makers are clearly dedicated to their product and have an excellent web site where you can get the full low down on

the blow-by-blow of chocolate making. And it's true that unroasted cacao really is "good for you." It's loaded

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## Food Review *continued from page 4*

with minerals, has a high concentration of vitamin C and, if you are an ancient Mayan, can be used as currency. Enough said. We carry several varieties of Raaka chocolate. Try them all.

Upton's Naturals Bar-beque Jack Fruit prompted the completely opposite response – “this is not for me.” I regret that I did not inspect the ingredients list. Although found towards the end of this list (which includes jackfruit, tomato paste, molasses, vinegar and several other items), the chili powder effect immediately overwhelmed me. So....I did what I often do with food that is just too hot for me:

I gave it to my neighbor Joe. You may remember him as a previous guest reviewer. He's the guy who eats hot sauce on practically everything except dessert. Here's what he has to say:

This product is easy to use. It heats quickly and then breaks up easily into smaller shreds, making it great for sandwiches. The Jackfruit is cut shred/chunk style in quarter(ish) size pieces, and marinated in Upton's BBQ sauce - think typical smooth red/brown BBQ sauce. The sauce is just thick and plentiful enough to keep a consistent ratio of sauce and fruit together, meaning the sauce and fruit don't separate. First taste is awakening! The sauce is rich, flavorful, spicy, and definitely leans to a strong chili flavor, which for me was enjoyable! I really enjoyed this product - kinda reminded me of mom's old sloppy joe recipe, definitely great on a bun, toast, or wrap. To



*continued on page 7*

## Member Survey *continued from page 2*

co-exist with in-store shopping, so with the reopening you can now choose the option that best fits your needs.

What was abundantly clear was that overall, shoppers want the protection of safety measures to reduce the risk of virus exposure – both for themselves and for the sake of Co-op staff. We are not yet ready for “business as usual.”

As important as the numbers – or more – are your comments about what has gone well, and not so well; and about what is most significant to you about the Co-op.

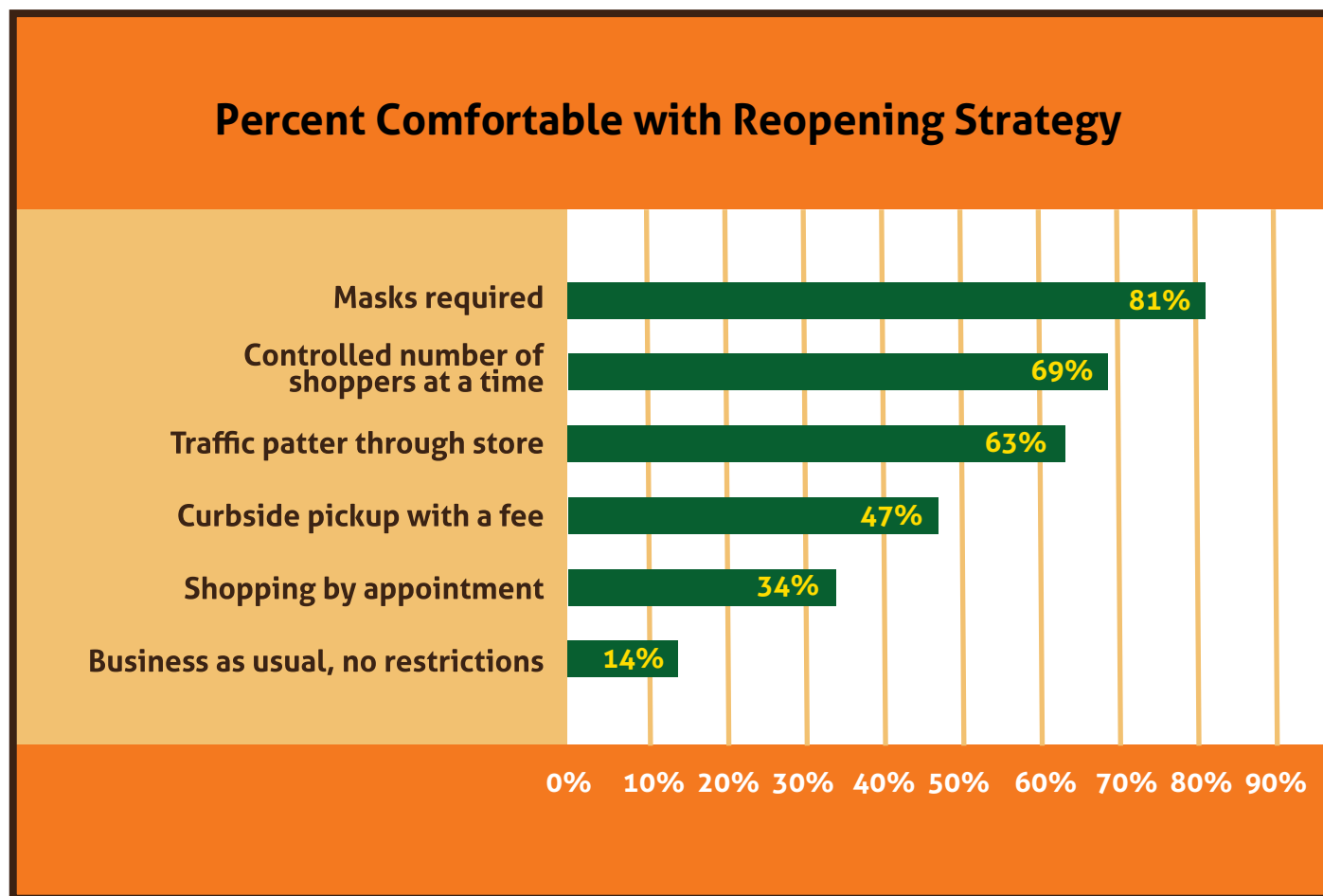
We heard that there is room for improvement: placing orders online is hard without a true web-based shopping system, where you can see which products are stocked and how much they cost. Early in the curbside program especially, long wait times between ordering and pickup were a problem. Sometimes shoppers received an incorrect item or produce that was not

fresh and in good condition. People were dismayed by increased plastic use, and of course missed having access to the store.

We also heard overwhelming gratitude: for the Co-op's rapid response in creating a way for customers to safely receive healthy, organic foods; for the care and hard work of the staff in taking and filling orders and working on steady improvement; for the Co-op's presence; its focus on health and quality; its emphasis on local products and service; and on caring, cooperation and community.

This feedback will inform and guide our planning as we recover from the COVID crisis and move forward.

We encourage you to see the website for “word cloud” representations showing what was most important to you about the coronavirus response and about the Co-op overall. 🌱



## Food Review *continued from page 5*

summarize: quick and easy prep, taste bud stimulating flavor, and a consistency that makes you wonder if this is really fruit. Thanks Joe.

You may be familiar with the unwieldy Jackfruit (the largest fruit from a tree, sometimes weighing up to 100 lbs) in its ripe, sweet form, tasting like a mix of mango and pineapple. This is not that. The unripe Jackfruit is used in many Asian cuisines and is increasingly being used in vegetarian and vegan cooking because of its adaptability, and its meat-like consistency. Upton's Naturals, based in Chicago, is independently owned and focuses "on meat alternatives and vegan values... Dedicated to simplicity and the use of real, recognizable ingredients." The Co-op carries a few varieties of Upton's jackfruit.

My heartfelt well wishes to all who have recently been affected by illness or loss of income. And my admiration to all who have been rebelling, in whatever is their way, saying no to the perpetuation of racism. These have been—are—extraordinary times. And it's extra important to take the best care we can of ourselves and one another. I'm sending love to all of us. See you at our store. 🌱

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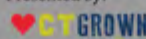
### "A Guide to Farm Fresh Food in Northeastern CT"

This guide provides the perfect opportunity to create relationships in YOUR community with local farmers and food producers.

Purchasing food locally highlights the flavor and freshness of products, while giving you the confidence of knowing how your food is handled and grown.

Find the guide online *now* at  
[heartctgrown.extension.uconn.edu](http://heartctgrown.extension.uconn.edu)

Presented by:



photos from left to right: Fox Meadow Farm by Molly Delany, Antakwaga Farm, and Apple Verde Farm by Erica Pagliuca



## Co-op Scoop *continued from page 1*

flexibility and ability to shop from memory and trusting us with picking out your groceries. That has been a real honor.

As challenging as this has been and as often as I have wished that I was one of the people that had to stay home, I have also felt fortunate to have my job, have this wonderful group of people to work with and to be part of feeding our community. Talk about essential! When we were finally able to make the decision to reopen the store, it was as if a spell had been broken. It feels good to be moving forward. Although we are still moving into the unknown, so far each step has felt right, and our Co-op's ability to be flexible and resilient is serving us well. 🌱



**STONE ROW** is where local means something. Over the past decade, our destination restaurant in Willimantic has become a community cornerstone — both as a gathering place for the neighborhood and as a showcase for regional farmers, foragers and fishers. Formerly known as Cafémantic, we start a new chapter by relaunching as **STONE ROW**, a brand that honors the tenacious spirit and industrial heritage of our region.

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## DOWNTOWN COUNTRY FAIR CANCELED

We are sad to announce that our fair will not be held this year. Many things have conspired to help us make that difficult decision – the construction of our new Senior Center/Community Center which has taken up the entire area, causing the Willimantic Farmers Market to move into the fenced in area, taking up more room because of the Social Distancing required by the Coronavirus...you get the idea.

But we will be back next year,  
better than ever!



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