THE MISSION OF THE MARSH RIVER COOPERATIVE is to foster our local community and economy by offering affordable high quality, and locally produced food and goods in a welcoming space that strengthens our community social fabric.

MARSH RIVER COOPERATIVE
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Your Co-op
2022
Fiscal year 2021 - 2022
MESSAGE FROM YOUR BOARD

State of the Co-op 2022

We were very excited to celebrate our 8th birthday this year – in person – with a potluck, cake, ice cream, a kombucha tasting, and lots of visiting on the porch of the coop! I hope you were able to take part. It is hard to believe how far we have come in these eight years from our idealistic and humble beginnings when we opened a very sparsely stocked co-op staffed only by volunteers and financed solely through our founding member’s equity payments. We are now have a colorful coop brimming with products, and are closing in on $500,000 in gross sales this fiscal year (July through June). Adding shelving and rearranging, we increased our product line with 477 new items, with roughly 11% of them in guided by member request.

More and more of the community are seeing the value of the co-op and joining us, with 34 new members. New volunteers have stepped up for in-store and on various other tasks and for the first time since board elections began, it is looking like we will have a full nine member board! We are finishing this term with four returning members, one standing for re-election, one interim standing for her seat, and three new candidates. Please give them your vote of confidence. And many thanks to outgoing members, Dylan Brown and Terry Huber, for their service on the board!
A few of the highlights, happenings and achievements of the last year

In the community-

- **4th of July Parade with popcorn on the porch** - The co-op was well represented in the revived Brooks 4th of July parade; nine of us walking and carrying our signs, with Helena, our very own majorette twirling and tossing her baton! More of us served popcorn from our cart to the crowds from the porch.

- **Meet and Greet in the Park** - Our VP and Treasurer, Brenda and George, spread the word about the coop to all the newcomers to the area and networked with existing organizations on a very hot day in the Brooks Community Park.

Volunteer and Outreach Committee active with ideas and projects! -

- **MRC Little Library** - Very well received and stocked is our own Little Library on the porch, built by board member Terry Huber and stewarded by Brenda.

- **New newsletter!** - With the help of the committee, Brenda produces and edits a beautiful newsletter each month to keep us all engaged and informed about the cooperative (ad)venture and ours in particular!

In-store –

- **Expansion of our bulk offerings and Terracycle Program** - In keeping with our ethic for natural-organic – low environmental impact products/reduction in packaging, we have made some significant strides in continuing the expansion of our bulk section with plans for more! We very recently signed up with Terracycle who will take a number of types of otherwise difficult to recycle packaging from some of the brands we carry, including the big Earthborn pet food bags – look for info at the coop.

- **More coolers** - Though we lost Chow Maine for grab and go we now have a special cooler for other grab and go when we can source it (ideas are welcome), as well as another for different products in that genre.

- **New crafters** - We continue to receive great reviews on our local craft area and are pleased to have added some new contributors – including a potter and maker of recycled rope mats.

- **New road frontage configuration** - You probably noticed with mixed feelings and/or questions about the downing of the Linden tree that anchored the peninsula in front of the south end of the co-op building this early Spring and now finally, the reduced size and shaping of that area with new retaining wall. The previous configuration always posed a difficulty for the removal of the snow from the parking lot and the tree was contributing to the rotting of the porch deck. The upside is that we now more sun on the face of the coop, views of the river from seating on the porch, an area reserved for some new plantings this spring and a tentative plan for the expansion of the porch and possibly a sunroom/three season seating area at that end. Change happens and we make the best of it!
We are where we are today through a lot of donated time and extraordinary effort on the part of these among others –

- **our volunteers** who continue to staff the co-op a good third of the time, and those who, for years have been doing the pickups from numerous vendors, in-store stocking, repack of bulk items, work on the facilities, cleaning and so much more. And then there are those of us who, make up your volunteer board (many of whom do many of the above tasks as well), who help manage the business side of the co-op, as well as guide and grow the co-op as an organization.

- **our dedicated part time staff member** who has a high responsibility job for a low wage

- **our founding member landlord** who for many years accepted no rent for the space we occupy to allow us to literally “get our foot in the door.” Slowly, slowly, we have been able to up the rent and are finally getting close to paying market rate.

- **our manager**, last but not least, who takes care of everything from staff management, tech management, financial management – books, reports, bill paying and banking; marketing, merchandise strategizing, ordering, vendor pickups of local products; to staffing the store with all its myriad of tasks -checking us out at the register, stocking, cleaning etc. He is our ear to the community and is constantly working to progress the Co-op to better serve the needs and desires of everyone that walks through our doors. For the first years of his tenure, he worked at minimum wage, part time compensation, for more than full time work with countless unpaid hours dedicated. Though we pay him slightly more now, in the interest of continuing to shepherd the coop on a trajectory towards self-sufficiency, he has forgone channeling any resources into a more decent wage or the addition of benefits for himself, for yet another year.

- And of course, we wouldn’t be here if it were not for the support of all the shoppers, both members and the broader community.

We are so fortunate that all of the above have made it possible for us to function and grow toward sustainability.
Goals and Challenges -

Staffing - Be able to:
- hire more paid staff to -
  - cover all open times.
  - create a more stable schedule with people to fill in when needed due to illness or needed time off.
  - allow Matthew to focus on managerial tasks rather than run the register.
  - have knowledgeable backup staff who are familiar with the managerial operations.
  - reallocate available volunteer time for support tasks which increased business has made more and more difficult for one in-store person to manage.
  - allow us to be open more hours of the day.
- Pay a decent living wage with benefits to all staff, including time off which Matthew has never had!

Energy Sustainability -
- The rise in energy costs have taken a big tolle on our efforts to more forward towards fiscal sustainability and settlement at a manageable and desirous size.
  - Continue our efforts to install solar power for the co-op.
  - Continue our efforts to seek energy cost supports where possible.
  - See "Message from the Manager" on page 7.

Continue to increase volunteer time committed to -
- the co-op as a member "service" organization
  - either volunteers contributing in a committee format, on the board, or individually dedicating their talents and strengths to any of many aspects of the organization which are languishing.
  - See "The Coop Needs You" page 9
- the co-op store operations
  - See "The Coop Needs You" page 10

Resolve our insufficient septic capacity issues which -
- disallows a public bathroom, limiting use of our community space for both event participation, eating and socializing (We have made progress with plans for a commercial grade composting toilet, but are currently stuck at the state permit level)
- thwarts one of the co-op’s original important goals, creating a commercial kitchen space both for food to be served at the co-op and for the use of local producers for the creation of more local value added products. (We have helped initiate work at the town level on the creation of a municipal sewer system which is also in stasis due to volatile prices preventing estimates needed for grant proposals.)

Increase our outreach
- to the members, potential members and the community as a whole, to inform about the strengths and benefits of cooperatives in these challenging time and engage them in our own!
In conclusion - Food Co-ops today are facing serious challenges, with difficult financial times, a changing culture, lower engagement and volunteer rates, pressure to compete with the big corporate chains which in turn puts pressure on the coops to become larger and more "corporate " themselves, with decision making relagated to higher and more distant levels.

So, when we make the choice of where to make our purchases, we all can ask ourselves, is it just for the sake of the best price or the most variety, rather what is it worth to us to have a source of good food right here, supporting local producers, providing a hub for cohesion in the community, where it us that is making the decisions as to what we want to have available and how we want to function and not by some corporate entity somewhere were profit will always be the driving force.

We are, after all, not a business, just a pleasant place to shop, set up to earn money for investors, or even a livelihood for an owner, with decisions made based solely on profit, but a cooperative organization of people working and volunteering, forwarding a vision and fulfilling a mission to serve the community ethically, true to our values, with respect and caring.

So, even though we continue to face challenges, we are very excited that our beautiful little, well loved co-op has the potential to be around for a long time to come!
Our Current Financial Situation

Our Fiscal Year is from July 1st through June 30th

The Co-op continues to see growth in revenue year over year (Total Revenue was $471,861). In Fiscal Year 2021-2022 we saw a 10.7% growth in gross sales. There is a significant caveat to that growth figure however with inflation running significantly higher in the last quarter of our fiscal year, goods had to be adjusted to a higher price to maintain margins, though at the beginning we absorbed many of the increases. Also, most vendors started charging delivery fees which tightened margins even more.

Rising energy costs put a significant dent in our progress to self-sustainability with costs increasing 67% year over year (an extra $400–$900 per month depending on the month). While we were able to continue to expand slowly we were unable to make significant gains in wages and other operational areas in order to offset the increase. All that being said we were able to hold our own and continue to make progress on our long term goal of sustainability.

FULL PROFIT & LOSS STATEMENT IS AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS UPON REQUEST
Message From the Manager

In some ways the last year has felt a bit more back to normal than the previous few years. Folks have been able to gather together more, and we were able to celebrate our 8th birthday on the front porch (thanks to the volunteers who helped put this on). We’ve had a lot of successes this year and we continue to have a dedicated crew of staff and volunteers that make this small Co-op work day to day. These successes have been weighed against against quite a few struggles this year also.

From PFAS concerns at the beginning of 2022 (luckily none of our farms have been affected) to supply chain disruptions and upset/frustrated customers we have done our best to navigate the continuing challenges that have come our way.

The greatest challenge for this year has been the increased energy costs due to the significant delivery rate increase at the beginning of 2022. Pretty much overnight we saw our monthly costs jump an additional $400-$500 per month and in summer our electricity costs were double per month what they were over the previous year. This meant we had to make some tough decisions unfortunately. We had finally felt we were in a position going into summer to raise our wages and increase our rent payments but we ended up having to go back to the drawing board with the increase in energy costs. We were able to make incremental increases but not nearly what we were hoping to do. We looked at and applied for grants/low interest loans for help with efficiency upgrades and possibly a small solar array on the building but most of them require significant time to apply (one grant took 41.5 hours of work to apply) and/or the funds are earmarked for businesses that had Pandemic disruptions (we stayed open the entire time to ensure the community had what it needed) so we were ineligible to apply. In the interim we put as much of our equipment on timers and switches to reduce usage as much as possible but we have a significant amount of cooling equipment which is required to operate 24/7. We were hoping we...
would see some small relief in the fall with the passing of the Small Business Energy Reimbursement Program which was voted on at the end of the last legislative session but when we contacted our energy provider about the program we were notified that this applied only to "Medium General Service" and we are classified as a "Small General Service" so unfortunately the program excluded quite a few small businesses, us included. We have reached out to the Governor’s Office as well as our Local Representatives for support but to this date we have had no reply. I apologize for spending so much time on the energy issue but it is likely the greatest operational risk to the Co-op in the near future.

Despite all the challenges your Co-op continues to face (and we are not alone in these, most small businesses are facing them) we continue down the path to sustainability. We have a strong staff and volunteers as well as many wonderful local vendors who continue to provide so many great goods to the Co-op and through the Co-op to our community. This is the strength of the Co-op (along with our great membership) who continue to keep the Co-op moving forward so that it is available for the future to come.

We have weathered quite a few obstacles and storms in our eight years with our doors open and we will continue to weather any storms that come our way. A big thank is due to everyone that has made this Co-op possible throughout it’s time in the community.
The Marsh River Cooperative Needs You!

The Marsh River Coop is a member owned and volunteer run cooperative. As more and more people become aware of all we have to offer and as we are able to meet more and more of their shopping needs, we continue to experience rapid growth. While this is good, it is a challenge to keep up with the additional needs of the organization and operations. We are hoping for individuals who share our values and appreciate having the coop in existence, to volunteer their time and energy to keep the coop open and to become truly sustainable.

We have many different ways you can volunteer at the coop depending on your time, your interests and your talents.

Serve on the board:
Our volunteer board both governs the organization and helps run the operational side of the coop as an enterprise. Elections coincide with the annual meetings, but please keep in mind that if a seat should become open, members can be appointed to unfilled, interim positions at any time.

Serve on an existing committee, revitalize or head up a needed committee, or work in one of these areas on your own:
Usually there would be committees made up of board members, coop members and other from our customer base and community to facilitate many aspects of our mission and operations. We have been functioning with a minimum of committees. Many previously functioning committees are in abeyance due to lack of people. There are many interesting and fun areas that you could get involved in.

We could use your help in the areas of-
- Finance
- Fundraising
- Marketing
- Cooperative Education
- Events
- Management of our Consignment Art and Craft Area
- Volunteer Coordination
- Coop Policy
In Store Help:
We are grateful to have our inestimable manager, Matthew McKillop, and a wonderful part time employee, Mike Switzer (a founding member, former board member and long time volunteer) on as paid staff, as you can see from the chart above: we continue to rely heavily on volunteers to:

- Cover many of the daily shifts - running the register and doing everything else needed to be open
- Double up with the paid staff or with other volunteers to do many needed in-store tasks such as stocking, repack of bulk items, cleaning, labeling, etc.
- Make pickups from vendors - such as from our local dairies, our bread baker, and meeting the delivery of the Portland area vendor items
- Facilities maintenance tasks.

Consider how you might get involved in keeping your coop running!
Contact Kim Jacobs at volunteermarshriver@gmail.com or 722-3139
Thank you to our Volunteers!

**Board Of Directors**
Kim Jacobs (President)
Brenda Moot (Vice President)
George Callas (Treasurer)
John Purinton (Secretary)
Dylan Brown
Terry Huber
Cheryl Huber
Dakota McAdam (Interim since September)

**In Store Support/Repack**
Jen Albee
Laura Pines
Brenda Moot
Cathryn Harjung
Grace Johnston
Gusta Ronson
Christine Munroe
Adrienne Terrass

**Board Scribes**
Helena Malone
Nancy McAlley
Meredith Toumayan

**Register Volunteers**
Izzy McKay
Becky Weaver
Kim Jacobs
Ed Hamel
Brenda Moot
Jaime Hinsen
Grace Johnston-Fennell

**Flower Boxes**
Cheryl Huber

**Fedco Preorder Manager**
Ed Hamel

**Newsletter Editor**
& Little Library Steward
Brenda Moot

**Pickup Volunteers**
Bekki Devereaux
Nancy Quimby
Georges Nashan & Barbara Clement
Bob Klein
Autumn Cassity
Melissa Wilson
Leslie Gregory
Mick Wormersly
John McIntire & Nancy Rosalee
Cliff Hazen

**Recycling & Trash Disposal**
Izzy McKay

**Volunteer Coordinator**
Kim Jacobs

**Facilities Volunteers**
John Purinton
Bob Klein
Ed Hamel
Dylan Brown
Laura McLaughlin
Terry Huber
Lily Hockley
George Elgas
Dave Greeley

**Cleaning Crew**
Shaun Hamilton & Lauren Mapes

If we have forgotten to acknowledge you please forgive us!

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