

1<sup>st</sup> anniversary



15<sup>th</sup> anniversary



**Viroqua**  
food **CO+OP**

FY 2020 Annual Report

July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

*It's our 25th Anniversary!*

1995 - 2020





FY 2019-20 VFC Board of Directors (L to R):Olive Reynolds, Peter Bergquist, Karen Mischel, Mike Link, Eric Snowdeal, Elizabeth Tigen, Aurora Boyd

## Our Mission

The Viroqua Food Co+op combines a commitment to natural foods, superior customer service and the building of a cooperative business. We emphasize organic and local foods and products to promote the long-term health of individuals and the environment. As member-owners and as a center for community, we offer the opportunity to create together a work of enduring value.

## Board of Directors

Mike Link, President  
Peter Bergquist, Vice President  
Elizabeth Tigan, Secretary  
Eric Snowdeal, Treasurer  
Aurora Boyd  
Karen Mischel  
[vfcbod@viroquafood.coop](mailto:vfcbod@viroquafood.coop)

## General Manager

Jan Rasikas  
[jan.rasikas@viroquafood.coop](mailto:jan.rasikas@viroquafood.coop)

# From the Board of Directors

## Michael Link, President

As we close the 2020 fiscal year and reflect on the previous twelve months we can be proud of what we, as the membership of the Viroqua Food Co+op, have adapted to, survived and continued to accomplished.

The year has been challenging and at the same time rewarding. The staff has done an exceptional job in continuing to provide the essential services to our community, good local food. While there have been many adjustments to get this accomplished, the end result has been warmly and thankfully received by our members, shoppers and the citizens of Vernon County.

The financial health of the VFC remains sound as we enter the third year of our seven-year economic plan that funded the expansion of VFC. Investment continues, membership has grown, and the shopping continues to meet and exceed our estimates, even considering the pandemic. We have a comprehensive program laid out in order to pay down our construction mortgage debt and retire the New Markets Tax Credit instrument, while continuing to provide reliably safe and wholesome food choices.

This year marks the Viroqua Food Co+op's 25th anniversary (1995-2020). Congratulations us! While our original plans for a big party are on hold, please enjoy our success and celebrate at home. Once social distancing allows, we will gather and toast our local food history together.

The accompanying Annual Report details our financial picture for the previous year ending June 30, 2020. It also details our progress in meeting our non-financial goals of giving back to the community, supporting our staff, our farmer/producers, our shoppers, and our owners. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Karen Mischel for stepping in to fill a board vacancy and thank the membership for allowing me to serve the VFC for the past nine years. It has been an exciting and rewarding experience and we have a beautiful community resource for the coming years.

For the Board of Directors I would like to thank you for your continued support and welcome your questions, comments and involvement in the democratic governing of our VFC.

# 25 years of good. local. food.

Jan Rasikas, General Manager

September 2020 marks our 25th year as a community-owned cooperative! In any other time, we'd be celebrating this milestone year with a huge celebration, with lots of good food, local music, local beer, cake, and family fun outside on the patio. We'll have other times to celebrate, and until then let's remember the good we've created together.

FY 2019-20 is the second year after the exciting expansion of our Co-op, and we started to feel our stride in the new, larger space. We saw the new Community Room take on a full schedule of VFC classes, film screenings, and meetings for area organizations. The Garden Center was huge success in its new spot. We had a blast with outdoor cook-out events and loved to handout samples to our shoppers; lots and lots of samples! Our Deli Hot Bar & Salad Bar was enjoying the number one top seller spot in the entire store (followed by bananas, usually!). We were ready to introduce a new deli program: the \$5 weekly meal, and the new catering menu was in the queue. We had our biggest holiday season in the history of the Co-op.

And then... March came, with the pandemic and all the activities around it, changing our Co-op in so many ways.

I am so grateful to our staff, who faced these challenges with courage and skill. As our community stocked their pantries for the unknown, VFC staff stepped up like the professionals they are, for two gigantic sales weeks without warning or preparation. We then quickly implemented safety measures, extra sanitizing, plexiglass shields, floor markers for distancing and so much more to protect our staff and shoppers.

Our community showered us with appreciation as we stayed open to serve them. We are proud to be here, supporting your health and well-being during this extraordinary time. I want to thank the businesses and members who brought us gifts. We enjoyed beautiful hand sewn masks, lovely individual soaps and lip balms, enough for all 65 employees. And to those wrote notes of thanks and sent encouraging Facebook messages, your kind words literally bolstered our courage to keep going. Thank you.

Because of our incredibly supportive community, VFC is going strong, able to put healthy fresh food, organic agriculture, local farmers, and food producers at the forefront of our cooperative. You are the co-op difference.

# Co-op Principle 1: Voluntary & Open Membership



2019 Annual Owners Meeting

**total VFC Owners**

**4,190**

**new owners 2020**

**176**

*“Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.”*

# VFC Mission

*“We emphasize organic and local foods and products to promote the long-term health of individuals and the environment.”*

## multiplier effect

Co-ops differ from conventional grocers primarily in the degree to which they source inventory locally and the amount that they spend on wages and benefits. The multiplier effect for co-ops shows us that every \$1 spent at a co-op generates \$1.63 in economic activity for that community.

What does that mean for VFC? In FY 2020, the Co-op achieved \$9.1 million in sales. Using the multiplier effect, VFC generated \$14.83 million in total economic activity. By choosing to shop local at the VFC, our community increased its total economic activity by more than \$5.7 million.

We also look at our impact on our local economy based on how much our sales of products come from food businesses operating out of the Vernon Economic Development Association’s (VEDA) Food Enterprise Center – a local food hub on the northside of Viroqua. We sell products from 12 different local producers who operate out of VEDA’s FEC. In FY 2020, we sold \$287,583 of those products. Per the multiplier effect, those sales generated \$468,760 in total economic activity!

Check out some numbers below for more encouraging and significant data on local VFC purchases!

## local purchases

**7,877**  
pounds



local tomatoes sold

**12,831**



housemade muffins sold

**44,895**  
ounces



local maple syrup sold



## local product sales

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**\$2.4M**

total local sales

**27%**

of all sales

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from over 200 local food & non-food  
producers located within a 100-mile radius  
of the Viroqua Food Co+op

## viroqua FEC\* product sales

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**\$288K**

total sales

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from twelve producers located at the  
Food Enterprise Center (FEC)  
1201 North Main Street in Viroqua



## Becoming Essential Workers

In March of 2020, we were no longer simply grocery store employees. Now we had a new name, “essential workers.”

Along with that new name came new responsibilities, ones that we had never done before. While we were hired to purchase and cook great food, to keep the store clean and the shelves stocked, and to deliver excellent customer service, we never envisioned all that would be required of us. It has been a very challenging time.

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, information about new Health Department requirements, CDC guidelines and State mandates came at us at a furious pace. Sometimes changes would be announced while we were meeting to discuss implementation of the ones from earlier in the day. Added to that was the intense amount of shopping in the store, creating product shortages and uncertainty in ordering. Who knew that toilet paper would be the new gold standard?

Away went the salad bar, the hot bar, the bulk section. No more sampling, no more events or classes. Staff hours had to change even as responsibilities grew. We had to package up more ready-to-eat food and find new uses for the hot bar and salad bar space. We stocked more product during less hours to allow customers to shop without exceeding our occupancy limit. The Co-op Community Room became the bulk repack section so customers could still get the products they typically would package themselves. Our meat department shifted into a new gear to keep our meat case full, finding new sources and cutting more product.





Plexiglass was added at the registers, along with social distancing floor graphics, and the responsibility to rigorously sanitize and enforce safety rules. Most shoppers were very grateful for these safety measures, some were not, and a very few were abusive.

Some employees left rather than risk exposure to the virus. Those that could, switched to working at home to give more space to those that couldn't. We wore masks early on to protect each other, smiling with our eyes and doing our best to give great customer service from six feet away.

We developed an online order and curbside pick-up option at our customers' request – another thing we had never imagined we could do. But we did it, and are now able to serve those who prefer not to shop in person.

In recognition of our hard work in challenging circumstances, VFC Management instituted a temporary “hero pay” of an additional \$2 per hour for hourly staff. The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) helped make it possible to offer this pay for 14 weeks.

Things have settled down a bit for us, a “new normal” has set in. But let's face it, there is nothing “normal” about it. We look forward to the day when we can see each other smile, have a staff party, and serve you, our owners and shoppers in a more personal and frankly, rewarding way. Until then, we'll do our very best to keep the store open and provide the good, local food that you count on us for.





## Co-op Principle 7: Concern for Community

*"While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities..."*

# \$27,003

**Give Where You Live donations**

VFC Owners vote annually for local nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to receive cash donations, customer round-ups, as well as a donation from VFC each month. This is called our Give Where You Live program and during FY 2020, it exceeded our expectations!

# \$10,247

**donations to 62 community groups**

Every year, Viroqua Food Co+op donates to community organizations in a number of ways – from small requests to larger event sponsorships. Priority is given to organizations involved in promoting health, sustainability and improving the environment. We also give consideration to donations that support our local community cultural life.

**community  
donations since 2010**  
**\$100,900**  
total amount VFC donated to  
community and cooperative organizations

## VFC Co-op Community Fund Grant

The **Viroqua McIntosh Memorial Library** was chosen to receive the \$500 VFC Co-op Community Fund (CCF) Grant in 2019. Their project was to expand their free “Culinary Literacy” programming in 2020. However, they were only able to complete 3 months of grant-funded programs before they had to close their doors due to COVID-19.

- January: Indian Cooking Class for Adults
- February: Maple Syrup Month. Youth Pancake-Making Class, plus an adult program with Bree from B&E’s Trees
- March: “Beginning Beekeeping” class with Jim Krause



## Fuel the Heroes

In gratitude for the services provided by essential workers in our community, the VFC Deli supplied breakfasts or lunches to essential frontline workers who kept our community afloat during tough times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Picture below includes VFC Staff Member Shana and available staff members at Vernon Manor. Deliveries were also made to the staff working at Vernon Memorial Healthcare, Viroqua United States Postal Service, Nelson Agri Center and Animal Tracks Veterinary Service.





# Environmental Impact

## electric vehicle charging stations

We have two Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations on the north end of our parking lot. These stations allow for two simultaneous, unhindered 50-amp charges using the standard J-1772 plug (Tesla cars need their own adapter). This speaks to our commitment to Ends Policy e1. *our community has access to socially and environmentally responsible products and services.*

**In exchange for charging up – we request that each EV driver offer a donation that day**, such as a can of beans or a bag of pasta, to our in-store food pantry donation box located at the front of the store.

**two charging stations open daily during regular business hours**



Visit [www.plugshare.com](http://www.plugshare.com) and search our location for more info on our EV station!

## solar photovoltaic power

Take notice of our solar kiosk-computer screen that sits at the Customer Service desk. It shows how many kilowatt hours of electricity our 132 solar panels produce in real time. Our ends statement, that has always directed the actions of the Co-op, states that *VFC exists so that our community is empowered*. These panels exemplify our commitment to Ends Policy e4: *Our community has a sustainable environment*.

**We are proud to announce these panels have generated 88,327 kilowatt hours of electricity since November 8, 2018!** Utilizing the EPA's greenhouse gas equivalencies equation (based on one-year quantities), look at the impact our solar panels have – for our business, our local community, and our global environment!

## 88,327 total kilowatt hours of electricity is equivalent\* to:

= 10.6 homes' electricity use



= 81.6 acres of forest worth of carbon sequestered



= 7,027 gallons of gasoline consumed



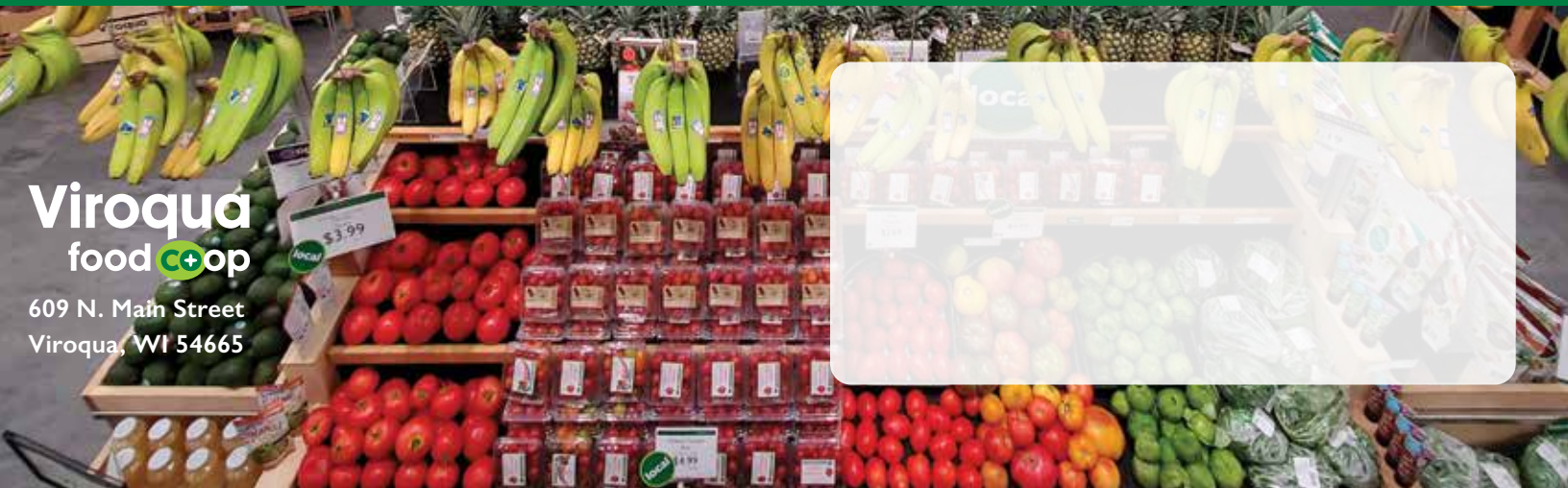
= 137,789 pounds of carbon dioxide removed from the atmosphere



\*Results based on one year of energy equivalence. More info here: [www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator](http://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator)



To VFC owners, board, staff and community partners – thank you for making it an outstanding year!



**Viroqua**  
food **co**op

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