

# Karma Co-op Staff

## GENERAL MANAGER

James van Bolhuis (interim)

## PRODUCE MANAGER/

ACTING INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER

Michael Armstrong

## GROCERY MANAGER/

HEALTH AND BEAUTY MANAGER

Audrey van Bolhuis

## GROCERY MANAGER/BULK MANAGER

Candace Cuss

## BOOKKEEPER

Victoria Bale

## MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Marilou Lawrence

## MEMBER LABOUR COORDINATOR

Betsy Carter

## CLERKS

Sheila Bannerjee

Sarah Fairley

Brandy Humes

Evan Kroeker

Scott Maynard

## ON-CALL MANAGER

Robin Easton

## Karma Co-op Hours of Operation

Monday	12-7
Tuesday	12-9
Wednesday	12-9
Thursday	12-9
Friday	10-9
Saturday	10-6
Sunday	11-5

## Mission Statement

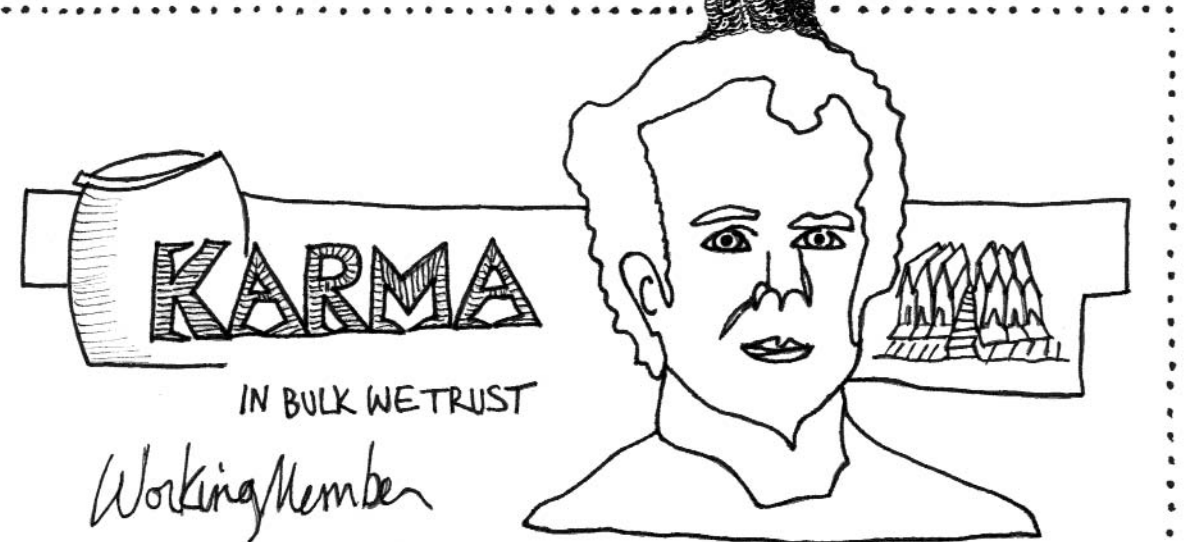
### Our aim is to:

1. create a community of actively participatin members;
2. foster a healthy connection to the food we eat, the people who grow it, and other organizations who share our beliefs;
3. co-operatively educate ourselves on environmental issues; and
4. exercise political and economic control over our food

**by operating a viable co-operative food store.**

# The Chronicle

April / May 2002



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*The Chronicle* is a link between members of this and other co-operative communities; the only viewpoints herein endorsed by Karma Co-op Inc. are those published as reports of the board of directors and its committees.

This newsletter is printed on recycled (but chlorine-bleached) paper.

### Submissions

Submissions are collected from the red box. Upcoming editorial deadlines are posted on the bulletin board and the box. All envelopes, articles and disks must be clearly marked with the author's name.

Submissions may also be sent by e-mail, to [karmachronicle@canada.com](mailto:karmachronicle@canada.com). Send your submission within the main body of the message. Please do not send attachments.

*The Chronicle* will publish any Karma-related material, subject to editorial policy guidelines. Letters to the editor must contain the writer's full name and telephone number, although names will be withheld at time of publication upon request. All published articles are eligible for work credit (letters to the editor and announcements are not).

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ucts that meet more of Karma's criteria.

All respondents have learned at least something about GMOs, with those claiming to know a little about as numerous as those claiming to know a lot. However, a great majority of the respondents (90 per cent) believes that GMOs are harmful, with 54 per cent wanting them banned. Only about 10 per cent of respondents said that they'd seek favourite but banned products elsewhere, and that 10 per cent was heavily weighted toward the respondents who had been members longer. Although a small majority of respondents want GMOs banned, most will be happy if they can at least be properly labelled, and only one-third of the respondents want the labels to indicate why Karma has decided to carry the products anyway. About one-quarter of the respondents say they're willing to pay any price to go GMO-free, but most wouldn't be willing to pay a premium of more than 20 per cent to avoid GMOs.

### Conclusion

There are issues on which respondents, especially those who have been at Karma for four or fewer years, have some strongly held views, but everyone seems to also understand the practical difficulties of taking action on all of those issues, especially where there are competing criteria on the same products. This suggests that Karma's future product policy should be written in a way that clearly states the importance we place on certain values but recognizes the need to keep the shelves full and the members fed while we continue to seek better alternatives. In terms of immediate GMO action, there is much support for an approach that actively seeks substitutes for existing products, up to a reasonable price difference, while clearly labelling all products that do not comply with Karma's food policies.

For further details, members can check the food issues committee section on Karma's Web site (<http://home.istar.ca/~karma/committee/food.html>), where the survey analysis and report (18 pages in PDF file format) is posted.



# Food issues committee survey results

Howard Kaplan and Suah Kudsieh

In the fall of 2001, Karma's food issues committee designed a survey to answer two questions: What criteria did members think should be used to assess the products we carry, and what immediate action could we take concerning GMOs while product policy is being developed?

The survey was administered in two forms, as a paper version in the members' room and as an Internet-hosted version on a commercial Web site. The survey was opened for member input from December 7, 2001, through January 5, 2002. Paper-based responses were entered onto the Internet version by members recruited for the purpose.

A total of 160 forms were available for analysis. Approximately half of the respondents joined before 1998, and half during or after that year, so the group was split in that way for reporting the responses of older versus newer respondents (older in terms of years at Karma, not personal age!).

## Highlights of the results

The vast majority of the respondents — 91 per cent — want Karma to have a product policy that issues general guidance to the board and managers about how to resolve conflicts among competing values. Of the 24 product selection values that the respondents were allowed to rate, the strongest single concern was, surprisingly, not genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The strongest single concern was values that had to do with labour practices, followed closely by the issues of complete labelling, GMOs, positive environmental practices, animal toxicity testing, and animal welfare.

Public concern over GMOs and their labelling has attracted great attention from the media, but finding adequate information about labour practices will be much more difficult to obtain, despite our members' strong feelings about them. Newer members are more likely than longtime members to support a policy that bans or strongly discourages stocking products that contain GMOs; have been tested for toxicity on animals; come from multinational corporations; are in nonrecyclable containers; have been boycotted elsewhere; or contain chemical additives or refined sugar, added salt, or

hydrogenated oils or fats. There is little difference on the issues of irradiation or labour practices. Similarly, larger proportions of newer members want to make local or Canadian production, small-business production, environmentally sustainable production and packaging, certified organic production, free-range production, and full ingredient labels mandatory or strongly encouraged. In other words, those who have joined more recently want a stricter product policy.

Most respondents (90 per cent) would like Karma to carry some expensive goods that help to subsidize the cost of basic goods, but the respondents are split about 50-50 about whether the markup on those goods should be higher to provide an additional subsidy. About two-thirds of the respondents want to raise the markup on conventional products to subsidize organic ones. About half of the respondents want Karma to make a special effort to carry products for special diets even if their sales don't warrant such treatment, but only one-third of respondents want such products to be exempt from our other criteria (such as GMOs or local production). Respondents realize that it may not always be possible for products to meet all of Karma's criteria; when the products don't, the respondents want the relevant information to be posted in obvious places.

About two-thirds want special-order products to be exempt from the usual criteria for products stocked on Karma's shelves. (It is important to note the difference between products for special diets that are on the shelves as normal stock, and special-order products that are not on the shelves.) Most respondents would be willing to pay a higher annual fee to support the gathering of information needed to implement Karma's product policy. About one-quarter would be willing to pay \$15 more (for a total of \$30) per year. Similarly, most respondents express a willingness to pay up to 25 per cent more to get the products that meet their criteria. Also, most respondents want Karma to set a cost limit for how much extra we'll pay before switching to prod-

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# Editorial

## Co-ops versus corporations

*The Chronicle* is, once again, under the gun. Without going into the gory details, our budget is tight, and this issue, like the last, is being printed on paper bleached with chlorine. We would prefer to use paper that is more environmentally friendly — we had been using paper that was post-consumer recycled, bleached without chlorine and dyed with vegetable inks — but it doubles the cost of each issue. This issue must come in somewhere around \$400; if we had used the better paper, we could have had only eight pages instead of 20. The members of the Chronicle committee feel there needs to be an open debate on whether it's worth spending the extra money for paper that doesn't add more chlorine to the Great Lakes. We have to balance that expense with others, of course. But the whole idea of Karma is that decisions such as these can be made after an intelligent discussion of pros and cons among the members, through the board and the committees.

Many of the articles in this issue connect to this dimension of our co-op. For example, after a tremendous amount of hard work, the food issues committee has analyzed the results of a survey of members' opinions and come up with a revised policy statement about the kinds of products we should carry. The statement rests on a careful weighing of members' preferences with respect to suppliers' labour practices, the use of genetically modified organisms, clarity of labelling, and commitment to organically grown food, among other criteria. (These preferences are summarized in the article on survey results, by Howard Kaplan and Suah Kudsieh.) This exercise illustrates why many of us believe it is so important to belong to Karma, where this kind of process is not unusual.

The article by member Greg Kelly is only the tip of the iceberg — we received a number of submissions for this very issue that expressed a sense of wonder that an organization like Karma existed anywhere, as well as gratitude for the participatory and friendly atmosphere around the store (see Sylvia Keesmaat on the plant exchange, and Louise Longo on member labour). Our policy of supporting local producers and of buying organic food where possible — even though it costs

more — is part of the store's culture. In this context, it's worth summarizing an exchange between George Southworth and Wally Seccombe that appeared in a special issue of the Ontario Natural Food Co-op's newsletter.

Southworth, the CEO at Northeast Co-operatives in Vermont, argued as follows: "In the U.S., the natural food industry is a \$32 billion subset of the \$450 billion conventional food industry. Over the long term, supermarkets will become the largest sellers of natural and organic products. As this 'mainstreaming' occurs, natural food distributors and retailers enter a mature marketplace with a few well-capitalized players who provide very similar services and product lines. In these circumstances, price and convenience become paramount. The profile of the average natural foods shopper will be largely a shopper in a supermarket or mass merchandiser such as Wal-Mart or Costco. In order to survive, we'll have to become much more efficient, so we can compete with the major players on price."

Seccombe, the ONFC's treasurer, disagreed, arguing that "we can never win in head-to-head price competition" with big players. Although efficiency is obviously important, Seccombe believes that "our survival depends much more on being able to define and enhance the organic food knowledge and service we provide to our co-op members and other customers who share our values (in their environmental, fair trade and local-produce concerns) while distrusting our cost-minimizing competitors on precisely those grounds." He asks Southworth for evidence that organic food shoppers value price above everything else. Seccombe believes these shoppers are defined by their resistance to "the full-scale commodification of food," because they "connect their families'" health concerns with a broader concern with the health of the "soil and freshwater systems that sustain agriculture." They are, in effect, paying for the trust they put in "dedicated organic food distributors and retailers."

That last bit sounds suspiciously like commodifying

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trust, but Secombe is getting at something that Southworth simply doesn't understand. His response indicates that as natural foods become big business and face-to-face trust impossible to maintain because of scale, that trust is replaced by — you guessed it — brand familiarity. So we're back to corporate logos. He also cites retail studies that tell us shoppers all want, in varying amounts, proximity, good price, wide selection, and "service" (which seems to mean — get this — sushi bars and cafes). Southworth feels that co-ops need to find their own "unique format," or a combination of those factors.

Pardon me, but we have a unique format, one with decidedly different elements. For example, member labour. This co-op has survived so far in large part because its members worked for it — cleaning the store, working on cash, staffing committees, ordering merchandise and stocking the shelves. When my wife, Shelly, and I joined 30 years ago, everyone was a working member. Even then, AGM minutes show problems with members who didn't fulfill their commitment to work. In 1989, Karma voted to permit members to pay a markup instead of working. In the 1980s, our staff was one full-time and one part-time manager. Currently, as Louise Longo's article describes, a bare majority of us are working members. And those of us who say we are don't show up to work a third of the time. We also have

four managers and five clerks on payroll. The report from the board also contains references to this problem.

It's important to notice how many of Karma's issues are being defined in terms of money — or, rather, commodification. We commodified our labour into an eight per cent markup on groceries. Mark Davidson, in the interests of fairness, is in favour of commodifying our members' inequalities (heterogeneities?) by proposing variable fees (see his article in this issue).

Brand names are an attempt to commodify trust. Many of us belong to Karma because we think it's a lousy idea to put a price on trust, or affection — or grace. We might even question just how realistically one can put a price on the value of food or of work. We work at Karma because we love it, not to avoid paying a markup. This participation generates not only trust and affection but also an understanding of the spiritual and social meaning of food, and knowledge about our suppliers and about how a store works. However, as fewer of us work, more of the interesting work is taken over by more staff. This makes the in-store work that is available less attractive, perhaps decreasing working members' motivation to work.

The very existence of Karma invites us to see these problems with member participation as a conflict between putting a price on everything and taking the time to relish the wonders of life — the tastes not only of authentic food, but also of the joys of cooperation, and of growing wisdom about how we are all connected.

## Announcement

Karma's 30th anniversary

Karma is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, and the events committee needs help planning a blowout anniversary party! Contact Stefani Brown at 416-787-3585 to get involved.

## Letter to the Editor

"How happy this place feels," I thought one afternoon this winter as I was puttering in the store. Was it someone singing as they reshelved? Was it chatter at the cash? Some mellow thing was there.

Congratulations to *The Chronicle*. A nice addition, those profiles of the new board members and liaison positions. And congratulations to [*Chronicle* illustrator] Gail Geltner — her illustrations are a delight.

Joanna Sworn

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- Products may be boycotted as part of an organized campaign to exert pressure on a corporation to change its actions by not carrying its products.
- Products may be not stocked because we stock better alternatives, because their negatives greatly outweigh their positives, because they lie outside of Karma's business area, or because they simply do not sell well enough to warrant stocking.

Among the products we do stock, we recognize several important distinctions:

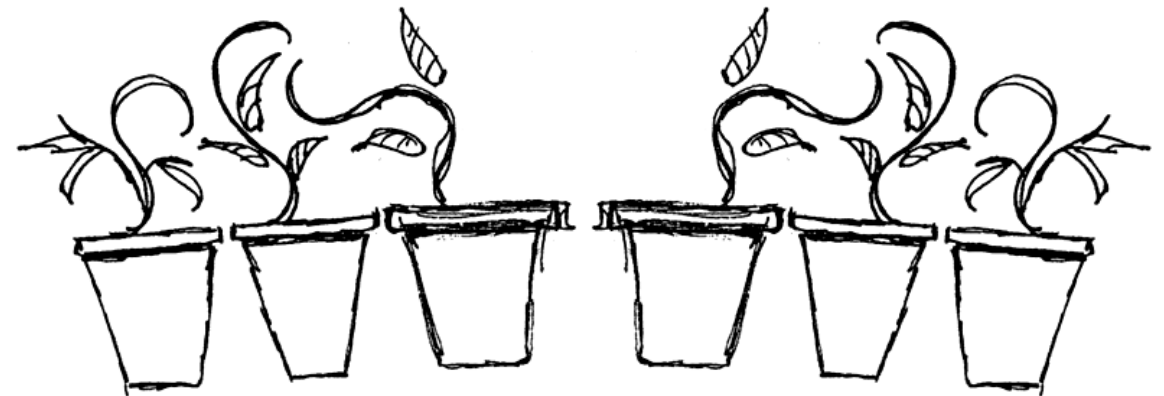
- Products may be de-emphasized if they have some important negative characteristics but some redeeming positive characteristics.
- Products may be emphasized, sold as part of regular stock but not promoted in preference to other products, if they have primarily positive characteristics and no strongly negative ones.
- Products may be specially promoted if they have a particularly favourable balance of virtues.

Products will be specifically de-emphasized or specially promoted through information, labelling, display, and pricing. Especially in the de-emphasized category, such information will enable members to make informed choices about whether to purchase individual

products. The decision to ban a product may be straightforward (if painful); the harder task is to balance a product's positive and negative characteristics in the decision about whether it is not stocked, de-emphasized, emphasized, or specially promoted. Although this policy sets out the principles for such decisions, the day-to-day practice must remain flexible and responsive, and so that practice will be determined by the board and the managers outside of the general meetings that set this policy.

We recognize our range of action on these issues is not limited to our decisions about whether and how we sell specific products. We can also take these further steps:

- Our managers can actively seek better alternatives to the de-emphasized products.
- We can encourage suppliers to change their practices.
- We can encourage public policies and practices consistent with our core values.
- We can educate members and prospective members about our core values and our practices.
- We can support other organizations, especially those in the co-operative movement, that share our core values.



### Our core values

**Political and economic considerations:** Our decisions to buy products are also decisions to support those who produce and distribute them, to ensure their continuing presence in our communities. Large, remote corporations can lose too easily the ability to balance business and community concerns; foreign businesses, however well intentioned, will not reinvest their profits in our own communities. Our own co-operative also must achieve such a balance, remaining both financially healthy and true to its principles. Accordingly,

- We strongly support local, regional, and Canadian producers.
- We strongly support small, co-operative, and community businesses, rather than large, multinational corporations or their subsidiaries.
- We strongly support stocking products that are affordable by members with limited income, while not rejecting products that, while affordable by only some members, contribute to the store's economic well-being.

**Environmental considerations:** Our decisions to buy products are also decisions to support physical systems of production and distribution, with consequences that can be destructive, benign, or beneficial to the natural environment. Organic production addresses these issues for the farmers, the primary producers, but similar issues arise at the stages of processing, packaging, and distribution, where there are fewer clearly accepted standards of conduct. Accordingly,

- We strongly support the principles of organic agriculture, especially from farms certified as such, but also from farms in transition and from those avoiding pesticides without seeking certification.
- We support environmentally and personally safe alternatives to the dangerous chemicals sometimes used for personal hygiene, household cleaning, and pest control.
- We support vegetarianism and other practices that minimize consumer impact on land, water, energy, and other scarce resources.
- We oppose wasteful packaging, especially when there is no effective way to biodegrade or recycle what cannot be reused.

- We strongly oppose the use of irradiation in food preservation.
- We condemn the genetic modification of plants and animals.

**Ethical considerations:** Our decisions to buy products are also decisions to support relationships with the human and animal inhabitants of our communities. Inexpensive, widely available products should not be obtained at the cost of exploitation and pain: those ends cannot justify those means. Accordingly,

- We strongly support other organizations with an explicit and positive social and environmental commitment.
- We strongly support the raising of the animals in free-range conditions without growth hormones or other unnecessary drugs.
- We condemn the raising of animals under inhumane conditions.
- We condemn testing products for toxicity by using animals.
- We condemn the exploitation of labour.

**Nutritional and health considerations:** Our decisions to buy products are also decisions to bring products and their chemical constituents, natural and otherwise, into our homes and our bodies. Whether we prefer traditional or modern diets, whether our bodies tolerate a wide or a narrow range of food, we require that food be of high quality, nutritious, and honestly described. Accordingly,

- We strongly support the provision of full, accurate information through ingredient labels and signs.
- We strongly support the production of minimally processed, whole foods.
- We oppose the use of artificial chemical additives or preservatives.

### Selection and marketing of products

Our purpose in articulating our core values is not just to express a wish for a better world; it is to help us evaluate products, to decide whether and how to sell them. These are some of the reasons why the co-operative might not stock a product:

- Products may be banned, i.e., not available for sale at all, if our core values condemn any of the methods by which they are produced or distributed.

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## Manager's Report

Michael Armstrong

As some of you may know, Karma continues its search for a general manager. James van Bolhuis, our interim GM, is currently on a much-deserved vacation. So I have volunteered to act as what you might call the interim-interim GM while continuing as the produce manager. At press time this has me writing a report for you.

There have been, as usual, some staffing changes. Anna Lee-Popham, who has worked as a produce clerk for many months, is off to work on a farm near Perth, Ontario. Clerk Erica Wilson has left us to work full time for Friends of the Don. Former grocery manager Justin McNabb now works for the Ontario Natural Food Co-Op — his former role here has been split up and passed on to Candace Cuss (who also handles bulk foods and perishable items) and Audrey van Bolhuis (grocery and health and beauty aids). Got all that?! A new collection of staff photos is perched on the bulletin board behind the shopping carts, which should help you recognize who's who.

On a sad note, Sophie the black cat has passed away after serving as a Karma cat for many years. She will be missed by all, and surely by Billy (the white and black cat).

After many years of not having a furnace, Karma is getting a new one, installed by Karma member/refrigeration expert Art Jacobs. Expect some minor disruptions in the store as this work proceeds.

For 30 years, Karma has endured the many ups and downs that co-ops everywhere experience. Check out [www.cooperativegrocer.com](http://www.cooperativegrocer.com) to see that our growing pains are not unique. As we continue to grow, adjusting to the resulting changes may take a toll on members, staff, committees and boards of directors. Fortunately, Karma has a vast resource of member knowledge and experience available, as well as many people who are passionate and dedicated to keeping Karma a thriving community.

See you in the store!

## Announcements

### We have a winner!

Congratulations to Anna Jarvis, who won a \$25 coupon to shop at Karma! Anna was selected out of over 160 Karma members who responded to the Food Issues Survey in December and early January. Thanks for responding to the survey, everyone.

### 2002 plant exchange

This year's plant exchange is on May 4, from 10 am to 4 pm. Come on out! If you have room in your garden but no plants, visit us and bring home some new perennials and veggies. If you're a gardener with extra plants, bring them in and help another gardener out (and take home some new stuff for variety). And don't forget to start a few extra seedlings for those who are unable to do so. See you there!

# Report from the board of directors

Jen Macdonald, vice-president

The new board held a half-day retreat-style meeting shortly after the very successful 2001 Annual General Meeting in October and assigned liaison roles (see the December 2001/January 2002 *Chronicle*). In March, however, two board members resigned. The board will miss Carole D'Aoust-Martin, the long-term planning and maintenance committees liaison, as well as Trevor Moo, who sat on both an ad hoc member labour review committee and the finance committee. (Trevor will remain on the finance committee, and Carole will remain on the hiring committee until a new general manager is hired.)

To fill the gap, the board welcomes incoming members Ed Fielding and Rebecca Gibbons. Ed has been a Karma member for about three years. He says he enjoys the non-corporate grocery shopping experience ("no junk/fluff/clutter"), selection based on discriminating tastes and value, an ethic of shared responsibility and the "under-the-radar atmosphere." He's an actor, painter, carpenter, gardener and "economic non-entity." Rebecca became a Karma member two-and-a-half years ago. She wanted a greater sense of community in her life, to make more of the personal political, and to put her money (literally) where her mouth is. Joining the board makes her even more proactive.

## Hiring a new general manager

The hiring committee interviewed and offered the GM position to interim general manager James van Bolhuis. Unfortunately, James decided not to take the job, although he will continue at Karma as an employee. The position was readvertised in NOW and on the Charity Village Web site. The committee received over 70 applications, including several from well-qualified candidates. The interview process is now underway, and we should have a new general manager in place by the end of April 2002.

## Goals for the year

The board held a retreat on March 3, 2002. The previous board had held two day-long retreats and developed a broad set of goals for a five-year plan. We examined these goals and focused on what we felt we could accomplish this year. We agreed to communicate better with

committees and the membership by putting regular reports on the Karma Web site and in the store (on the bulletin board located behind the grocery carts). We also set the following goals:

### 1. Establish a good relationship with new GM

Step 1: Update job description

Step 2: Establish what decisions the GM can make alone, and what decisions require consultation with the board

### 2. Make sure each committee has a mandate that reflects Karma's mission statement

Step 1: Ask committee members to provide us with a draft of their mandate

Step 2: Work with committees to modify mandates as necessary

### 3. Understand member labour system and identify problems and solutions

Step 1: Consult with member labour secretary, member labour coordinator and other people in Karma community

Step 2: Assess record-keeping practices

As part of goal three, Karma member and database/systems consultant Brad Cundiff will identify where and how Karma can improve its record-keeping, including member and member-labour databases, inventory, sales data, financial records and reporting, and archival methods. He is going to assess current practices, identify improvement areas and cost options.

The board is also setting aside time during each meeting to address member labour issues. Member labour coordinator Betsy Carter will consult with the board about the member labour system and how to improve it. New board member Rebecca Gibbons is the member labour liaison. If you have comments or ideas about the member labour system, please contact Rebecca at [rgibbons@trends.ca](mailto:rgibbons@trends.ca).

# Revised Product Policy now complete

Howard Kaplan and Graeme Burt, on behalf of the food issues committee

The food issues committee has now completed a draft version of Karma's new product policy. This draft is based on the our first policy, which was adopted 20 years ago, on the views expressed by members in the recent survey, and on ideas gathered from other co-operatives' product policies.

One of our goals in this work was to ensure a clearer distinction between the policy, which sets out our core values and principles, and the day-to-day implementation of that policy. The policy we have proposed does ban some products, such as those produced using poor labour practices or GMOs, but it also recognizes the need to make compromises and to balance competing goals. It leaves that balancing act to the board and managers. A policy like this one should be developed and reviewed only once every decade or two, a time scale much too slow for an effective response by the store to its members' concerns. Therefore, the policy concentrates on principles, not on operational practice.

Our plan is to hold a public forum, but not a formal general meeting, in late May, at which time we will discuss this policy proposal and its implications. Based on that meeting, and on any other submissions we receive by letter or e-mail, we will review the policy over the summer, amend the draft as necessary, and prepare some sample implementation guidelines. These guidelines will help the membership understand how the policy might work in practice, in order to make an informed choice about ratifying or rejecting the final draft at the Annual General Meeting in October 2002. These sample guidelines will also help the managers and the board get started on the work of implementing the policy once it has been adopted; our committee and other committees may be asked to help in that process.

We would like you, the members, in addition to reading these proposals and thinking about them in the abstract, to walk around with the policy draft in hand. We'll have some extra copies of the policy draft at the store, so you can take one with you. Please look at the products on the shelves and think about whether the policy properly addresses your concerns about those products. If the policy were implemented, and certain prod-

ucts were to disappear or have warning signs posted near them, would you be pleased or distressed? Does it go far enough to encourage us to stock those products we are not yet carrying? Does it go far enough to ban or de-emphasize the products we should not be carrying?

The food issues committee would like to hear from you by any of these methods:

- come to the forum in late May; the date will be announced at the store
- leave notes and letters for us in the food issues committee box in the office
- send e-mail to the committee chair, Micki Honkanen ([honkanenml@yahoo.ca](mailto:honkanenml@yahoo.ca))

We will be posting both the previous policy and this draft on our page at Karma's Web site (<http://home.istar.ca/~karma>). You may find it convenient to copy one or both into your computer and add your comments.

## **KARMA CO-OPERATIVE PRODUCT POLICY — DRAFT PROPOSAL: MARCH 19, 2002**

Members of Karma Co-operative wish to purchase good products at fair prices, while supporting suppliers whose presence and practices benefit the community. We believe that decisions about food are not only matters of cost, taste, and nutrition: food production and distribution also have major impacts on the environment, on social, political and economic systems, on labour, and on animal welfare.

While we would like to make positive choices in all of these areas with every product that we stock and buy, we recognize the need to feed ourselves in an imperfect world. Because we as members have a range of needs, resources, and values, we cannot impose a single ethical standard. Nonetheless, we share core values about how food and other products should be produced, distributed, and marketed. Therefore, we have adopted this product policy to express those values and to set a general framework for putting them into practice, while leaving the details of that practice to the board of directors and to the managers to implement, as described in guidelines that complement this policy.

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inevitably members will either leave the outstanding hours as owed to Karma or leave the co-op altogether. (Karma deducts \$7.50 per hour for each hour outstanding from the member loan, which is repaid upon leaving the co-op.)

It seems that some members are under the impression that if they don't show up for their monthly work shift, someone else will work it for them, or a staff member will cover it. The reality is, it is nearly impossible to find someone else to work these shifts, and staff aren't always available to cover shifts. If they do, it means juggling their regular duties and that ends up costing the co-op money in overtime wages. It also causes a lot of stress to staff.

Clearly, this raises a lot of issues for our membership. As detailed above, there were 272.5 outstanding member labour hours owed to Karma for the month of February 2002. Allowing for human nature, certainly we can expect a certain amount of slippage — say 15 to 20 per cent — but can we live with 35 per cent? And can Karma go on losing member labour at this rate?

Betsy feels optimistic about Karma. If we've survived 30 years, she says, then we're still doing pretty well. She feels that there may be a need, however, to reinfuse the membership with cooperative spirit, given that very longevity.

"Obviously, as a store we need people to buy things, but as a co-op we need people to help out and cooperate," Betsy says. She suggests that — working member or not — belonging to Karma means attendance at the AGM and an openness to helping out on an ad hoc basis when we're shopping.

### **Not just cheap food**

Rick Peterson, a longtime member and former board member, feels strongly that many members don't realize that a cooperative is an alternative model, both economically and socially, to other more conventional choices such as privately owned

health-food stores and large corporate-owned and -operated supermarkets. He points again to our mission statement and the necessity of member labour in order to run a viable co-operative food store.

Many members feel that if you have joined Karma, you have made a commitment, and it's something you "follow through on," in the words of one member. This member feels members should "tune in to the environment here." Ask yourself, Are the staff overstressed? Finally, she asks members to ask themselves, When was the last time I worked?

Marilou feels that member labour needs to be emphasized more strongly in orientation. Members who join need to know how much this work is needed within the co-op, and need to be prepared for that commitment.

Does Karma need to consider mandatory work shifts again? Or should we reinstate the requirement that new members work the first three months of their membership? This requirement might help new members feel more involved; more like the co-op is "theirs." Should Karma ask all new members, for the next six months, to work the first three months of their membership, after which they could choose to be non-working, if they wished? Perhaps we should put out an urgent call to all members who currently have outstanding hours.

I have called this article a "discussion" because there are more questions than answers, and I would like to encourage dialogue on this subject. Write in to *The Chronicle* and air your opinions about what's written here.

Karma members have a lot of history and a great deal of expertise to bring to this discussion. Many of us have become members for very individual reasons, but I would venture to say that all of us value what Karma stands for and offers us. So join the discussion. Give us your ideas. Karma needs them.

## **Mad over pesticides?**

A new look at mad cow disease

Mad cow disease, also known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), is generally believed to be an infectious disease of cattle characterized by neurological degeneration. This fatal disease is thought to be caused by abnormal proteins called prions, which are difficult to destroy and can easily slip through the meat-butcher and rendering process. According to mainstream sources, healthy cattle that are fed tainted animal products can become infected. Furthermore, we're told that these prions can also infect humans, causing the "human form" of BSE, known as new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (nvCJD).

In an effort to halt the spread of this disease, hundreds of thousands of animals have been destroyed and most countries have banned the import of animal byproducts from Britain. Curiously, many of the countries who received large amounts of tainted products prior to the 1988 crackdown have reported no cases of BSE. Other countries, such as France, are struggling with a sharp increase in cases despite a cleanup of animal feed throughout Europe. Furthermore, over 30,000 new cases of BSE have developed in cattle never once exposed to the diseased herds. Experimental animals, on the other hand, have remained BSE-free even after being fed infected meat and bone meal. In light of this evidence, the current theory clearly needs to be reexamined. A new theory, more compatible with the facts, is needed.

### **Pesticide link?**

We can be grateful that an alternative hypothesis has been offered by Mark Purdey, a British scientist and organic dairy farmer. Purdey claims that the emergence of BSE coincided with a British program intended to eradicate a warble fly infestation in cattle. This mandatory program, introduced in 1982, involved the application of organophosphate pesticides directly onto the backs of cattle. Three years later, the first cases of neurological problems in the animals began to appear. Purdey believes (and scientific evidence is mounting in his support) that the toxic effects of these pesticides, combined with additional

factors, paved the way for the epidemic that followed.

Purdey's model focuses on the abnormal prions implicated in BSE. Prions are proteins produced naturally by our bodies. They are found in abundance on the surface of neurons — the cells of the brain and central nervous system. Among other functions, prions act as antioxidants — neutralizers of cell-damaging free radicals. Any individual prion is continually being drawn into the cell, broken down, reconfigured, and finally recycled back onto the surface to resume its duties.

Crucial to its normal operation is the presence of copper in the prion's structure. Copper allows the protein to "fold" properly and is the source of the prion's antioxidant abilities. Research has shown that, in the absence of copper, prions will form using manganese as a substitute. These mutant prions, however, cannot be metabolized by the cell. Nor are they effective antioxidants. They tend to clump together, eventually bursting through neurons and creating protein "plaque" while free-radical damage continues unchecked. The result, as one can imagine, is a complete neurological mess.

From this understanding of prion function, along with supporting evidence from his own research, Purdey concluded that there were three main factors required for the development of BSE:

- Low copper and antioxidant levels
- High levels of oxidizing agents (sources of free radicals)
- High manganese levels

How do organophosphate pesticides factor in to all of this? The type of pesticide used in the campaign against warble fly, Phosmet, is known to bind to copper, in effect making copper unavailable to the body. It also exerts oxidative stress on the exposed animal, increasing the animal's need for antioxidant prions. An increased need for copper along with a decrease in its availability produces a highly unstable and potentially disastrous situa-

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tion. According to Purdey, all that was needed to tip the scales in favour of BSE was an unusually large source of manganese.

### **Why pesticides are bad**

Purdey proposes several such sources. Chicken excrement contained high levels of manganese and was often present in animal feed. (Chickens were supplemented with manganese in order to strengthen their egg shells.) Pesticides containing manganese and manganese cattle licks were also common. Purdey believes that these sources provided high enough amounts of manganese to alter the biochemistry of the prion proteins.

In support of Purdey's hypothesis, research done by professor David Brown of Cambridge University (now of the University of Bath), shows that high manganese-low copper conditions can indeed produce the very same prion mutations as found in BSE victims. Purdey's own studies have shown that even wild animals, after long-term exposure to naturally high manganese-low copper conditions, also exhibit a similar neurological condition known as chronic wasting disease. New variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Purdey believes, is merely the disease's manifestation in humans. Interestingly, Dr.

Brown has found levels of manganese 10 times higher than normal in brain tissue that has tested positive for nvCJD.

Purdey's theory is intriguing in that it explains the epidemiological data where the current model falls flat. His theory correctly predicts that countries with no history of organophosphate pesticide abuse can expect to be BSE-free, while others, who have slaughtered animals and eliminated tainted feed, continue to struggle with its constant reemergence. France, for example, has recently begun its own fly eradication campaign. This could easily explain the sudden rise of BSE cases there.

Organic farmers can rest easy (as can their cattle). No cattle born and bred on organic farms in Britain have developed BSE — even when fed allowable amounts of (inevitably tainted) animal products.

If Purdey's theory proves correct, almost every country in the world would be forced to reevaluate its current farming practices. Of course, a public admission of error of such magnitude on the parts of governments, scientists and industry leaders would not come easily. We are therefore reliant on the efforts of independent researchers curious enough to examine the facts to uncover the whole, unbiased truth.

For more information, visit [www.purdeyenvironment.com](http://www.purdeyenvironment.com).

## **Progressive fees (part 2)**

### **A reply to Lisa Simkins's letter**

Mark Davidson

Before I begin discussing the idea of progressivity at Karma, I should thank Lisa for her insightful and passionate response to my article a few months ago regarding progressive fees and dues at Karma. I was a bit surprised to read that Lisa was "disturbed" by my article. Reviewing it now, I can find nothing remotely "disturbing" about it: but of course, I wrote it and I still believe in the basic idea. Although I share some of Lisa's concerns with the technical points of my idea, I don't think technical points "disturb" people. It is changes in values that disturb us, not technical suggestions.

If you don't agree with my values, you'll find this article offensive. If you simply get angry as you read on, it's probably because you disagree with my value system,

and not with how I propose to implement it. Implementation involves a technical discussion about how to accomplish something that fulfills a value system. In this article, I am raising value questions, technical questions, and I'm also raising empirical questions.

### **Value questions**

The deep value assumption behind progressivity is that rich people should pay more than poor people for the same thing. This is the thinking behind public health care and education. Rich people pay more tax (ideally) than poor people but they all have an equal claim on public

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## **Membership labour: A discussion**

Louise Longo

Karma has survived 30 years and is the only food co-op left in Toronto. I believe that we're privileged to be members. Member labour is a very big issue, rooted in our reason for existence.

Karma's original membership (in 1972) opted for a mandatory labour commitment, but in 1989 a majority of 87 per cent voted in favour of creating a new non-working status. Non-working members would pay a surcharge, originally 15 per cent — later 8 per cent — on their grocery totals, as an alternative to two hours of volunteer labour each month. Inevitably, this led to other changes within the co-op. While members had originally been responsible for almost all aspects of running things, including ordering and pricing, more and more duties came to be undertaken by paid staff. This in turn led to the store becoming better run, with more items being ordered and sold and consequently more money being made. But there's more to a co-op than money.

### **Community, community, community**

The first point in Karma's mission statement states that our aim is "to create a community of actively participating members." For some members, the emphasis falls more on the community connection. One member (who asked not to be named) said that she doesn't mind staying on beyond her work shift to help out because "It feels good here. It's a good place and it feels good to be part of it." Another member (me) likes to be on cash because it's a chance to meet and interact with members, and in effect partake of the Karma community.

However, "actively participating members" seem to be a vanishing breed. Betsy Carter, Karma's current member labour coordinator, describes Karma as an oasis in the city. But she also sees how busy people's lives are now, and says this is one of the contributing factors to the current problems with member labour. Cancel-

lations have worsened lately: every day, two to three people cancel. And even if Betsy is given 12 hours' notice, she often can't fill that shift. It's also labour intensive to try filling a cancelled shift — 25 to 30 phone calls may locate someone who can fill in at the last minute, or it may not. Betsy says the monthly work schedule is never filled completely and that there are always holes in it. Add to that the no-shows and we really have a problem.

Just exactly how serious a problem becomes clear after Marilou Lawrence, Karma's membership secretary, provides some figures. As of February 28 of this year, Karma had 838 active households. Of these, 451 (53.9 per cent) were working and 386 (46.1 per cent) were non-working. (We have one corporate member.) This translates into 1,043 individual members, 550 of them working (52.7 per cent), and 493 (47.3 per cent) non-working. This means we have 550 members who can collectively volunteer 1,100 hours of labour per month. However, committee and board members' hours are deducted (188 hours), as are those of seniors (70 hours deducted). Also, members are allowed maternity leave of up to 15 months (62 hours deducted). That leaves 780 hours for in-store work. Here's the crunch: in February, only 507.5 hours, or 65 per cent of 780 hours, were worked, which means 272.5 hours (or 35 per cent) were outstanding. Even taking into account that February was a short month, I find this figure astounding.

### **What your labour 'costs'**

Marilou further points out that when working members get six hours behind on their labour requirement, they will be changed to non-working status (after a grace period of two months). Members are contacted before this happens, but

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The produce looked fresh and appetizing. It didn't have the medicinal air of things-that-are-good-for-you. They simply looked good. And since I love to cook, it seemed like a great source for buying quality foodstuffs.

I also found the atmosphere to be really inviting. And by this I don't just mean that people were friendly, although they were that. I didn't know it at the time, but I found myself reflecting on the way people weighed their own fruits and vegetables, and then "declared" them to the cashier. People actually employed the honour system, and it

## Experiencing grace at Karma

Or: Feel the love at this year's plant exchange!

Sylvia Keesmaat

I had listened to the song many times, and thought it incredibly profound: "Grace," on U2's latest album, *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. And I even agreed with the line "She travels outside of karma." Then it suddenly hit me. Maybe grace travels outside of karma in the theological sense, but grace certainly doesn't travel outside of Karma Co-op. In fact, Karma is one of those places where grace seems to abound.

Think about it: you're trying to shop while listening to your four-year-old's wisdom and juggling your one-year-old on your hip. She sticks out her foot. A jar of salad dressing crashes to the ground. As you bend to pick up the pieces without dropping the baby, two other members spring into action, get a mop, get a dustpan, and before you know it the mess is gone. Grace.

Or it is May. You've moved into a new place with a painfully bare yard and the landlady says, "Oh, by the way, you can do whatever you want with the garden." You'd love to, but it is too late

seemed to work! You didn't feel that you were simply in a checkout lineup. Rather, you had responsibility as a purchaser to others, who in turn had responsibilities to you. Given that it's a co-op, the business-customer relationship is rearranged, as every customer was also — at least theoretically — part owner of the co-op.

I'm glad I joined. My food tastes better. I feel as though I know what I'm getting. And the discovery process continues to be really enjoyable: I had no idea that magnetic balls could replace laundry detergent. And you can buy them at Karma! It's refreshing to live long enough to see your own preconceptions fall away.

for seeds, and you know you can't afford enough plants to make a difference. Then you come to Karma. And there are ferns, and sweet woodruff, and lilies, and lungwort. There are pepper and lettuce and tomato seedlings that thoughtful Karma members started way back in March. There are raspberry seedlings and even six red oaks for the ambitious.

"How much?" you ask.

"It's free," is the reply, "from the gardens of those with too much, for the gardens of those with not enough. Take and plant." And as you gratefully make your choices, you vow next year to bring your extra as well. Grace.

U2 may be one of the most profound groups around, but in Toronto, at least, grace operates very firmly within Karma.

The plant exchange is on May 4, from 10 am to 4 pm. Don't forget to start a few extra seedlings for those who are unable to do so.

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resources. If we stop providing public health care and let the market provide it, then rich people will have a greater claim than poor people on health services. That's how the pricing system works: it gives people with more money greater access to goods and services.

In today's right-wing environment, people find it offensive to think about charging the rich more than the poor for the same thing. But because I think we're all equal and should have equal access to goods and services, I like the idea of making things more affordable for the poor by requiring the rich to subsidize them. In fact, I like this idea so much that I want to see it at work everywhere. Even at Karma. Why not? Karma is a resource, and if we believe that all people, regardless of income, should have equal access to Karma, then we must restructure our financial system to make it easier for the poor to shop here. This is the deep value.

### Empirical questions

The first empirical question is, What is the proportion of rich and poor people at Karma? If most of our shoppers are rich, then it should be painless to get them to subsidize the poor. If most of them are poor, then the whole idea might not be worth further exploration. The point is that we have to find out what the demographics are and go from there. This could be done through anonymous surveys at the cash, or some other simple system. Getting information on this question is not difficult. We could also get information regarding family size and other relevant details if necessary.

The other empirical question is whether the rich spend more than the poor at Karma. Depending on the type of system we consider implementing, this question might be irrelevant. What I'm going to propose below makes this question irrelevant so I won't explore it here.

### Technical questions

This is the area that presents the most difficulty. I agree with Lisa that this could be an administrative nightmare. I think the easiest way to get the rich to pay more than the poor would be to charge them more. This is simple. We already have a markup button on the cash, and cashiers check members' cards before cashing them out. If we ranked members into, say, three "price-up" categories, and had three corresponding buttons on the cash registers, we could easily charge three different prices. Ranking would be based on a combination of family size

and household income. The category (A, B, or C, or whatever) could be marked on the card. Cashiers would know which price-up button to push when they examined the card. The price that would appear on the item would be the cost price, and members would know their price-up category, so everyone would know how much the item would cost for them. Non-working members would simply continue to receive an additional surcharge.

For the sake of argument, here's an example of price-up categories. Karma presently marks up all items by 30 per cent, so a price-up of 30 per cent would bring the item's cost up to its current price. The price-up for someone earning under \$30,000 a year could be 25 per cent; 30 per cent for those earning between \$30,000-75,000; and 35 per cent for those earning over \$75,000. These amounts would have to be established after the empirical questions have been answered, and they could be adjusted for family size (e.g., each child knocks off \$15,000 from your household income). I use these numbers only as examples. This system would not deter people from shopping, it would not penalize working members, and it would not create a bureaucratic nightmare. It would, however, make Karma more accessible to poor people.

### Privacy and responsibility

I find it ironic that Lisa would suggest this system approximates "Big Brother." George Orwell created Big Brother to exemplify grotesque inequality and the ability of the privileged few to supervise the poor majority. Many sellers of goods and services vary their prices according to the buyer's ability to pay: sliding-scale fees are common in today's economy. These require some vague, consensual, disclosure of one's income, but it is by no means a privacy violation: it's a way of improving equal access to goods and services in a highly unequal world. My suggestion replicates a sliding scale, and would only violate members' privacy to the same minimal extent.

I hope this article forces us to sharpen our reasons for maintaining a co-op. Do we want to become the Mountain Equipment Co-op of food stores (so expensive that many people cannot shop there)? Maybe we do, but at least let's be open about that.

Karma sells a sweater that proclaims "cooperation is revolution." Well, I hate to burst your bubble, but Loblaws also sells organic food, and donating one's labour to avoid a surcharge isn't exactly counter-ideological. But progressive pricing — now that's revolutionary!

# Shelf Elf

What's new on Karma Co-op shelves

Suzanne Molina

Greetings, Karmians. The days are getting longer and the wind is getting warmer, so strip off your fleece, open a window, settle in with *The Chronicle*, and read about the new stuff on Karma's shelves.

Audrey has reordered the **Prairie Naturals** line of shampoos and conditioners. Apparently, lots of you were asking for it. The Elf took a look at the Wild Rose shampoo and the Big Sky (with tea tree) conditioner; there are lots of long words, but sodium lauryl sulphate is not among them. (SLS is a nasty foaming agent and suspected carcinogen.) The conditioner does contain methyl paraben, a toxic preservative, and alcohol, which actually dries the hair, but they don't seem to contain colour or artificial scent, and don't seem as chock-full of nasties as drugstore shampoos and conditioners. (The Elf says "seem" because those long words are slightly troublesome.) The Prairie Naturals line lives (for now) on the sale shelf, just to the left of the archway as you enter the main part of the store.

If you turn to the right as you enter the store, you'll be in front of the puddings and cookies. Note that the **Provamel** individual ready-to-eat puddings have been renamed: they're now known as **Belsoy** organic soy desserts. It's the same company; just a different name. Karma's ex-general manager Linda says the Belsoy desserts aren't as good as the Provamel, so it seems as if the company has reformulated its recipe, as well. Try the new line for yourself — in flavours such as hazelnut and vanilla — and see what you think.

Belsoy also has a line of soy drinks, available in large (946 ml) and individual-serving sizes. Belsoy soy drinks are unsweetened, and, because they're made from organic soy, are also guaran-

teed non-GMO. If you buy the large size, you'll get the standard flavours (chocolate and vanilla), but if you pick up the snack size, you'll get a wider variety, including banana and strawberry.

Turn to the left and sidle over to the bread shelves, and you'll find some yummy new bakery products: Karma has started carrying the **Nature's Organic Goodness** line, made by the Nature's Own Bakery company. These breads are made out of potato flour and rice flour, for those folks who prefer to avoid wheat. The company also makes ezeikiel bread.

Also new in bakery products — but over in the freezer section — you'll find **Fillo Factory** organic whole wheat pastry dough. This product is vegan, and contains no preservatives.

Now that it's springtime, the produce section will soon be bursting with seasonal goodies. The **seeds** have arrived — they live right next to the produce cooler. So far, we have on hand the usual veggies and herbs and a few flowers, from Eco-Genesis, Urban Harvest and Terra Edibles. There is a list of seed stock below the seeds display, so if you want to place a special order, just check the list and fill out the appropriate form. As we enter the summer months, Karma will also stock **starter plants**, sourced from the folks at Urban Harvest. As a sideline to the seeds and starters, make sure to check out the **Terra Edibles plant and garden food**.

Finally, is there anything better than tender, young asparagus, flash-steamed and dusted with butter? The Elf doesn't think so. So watch for **Farmer Bob's asparagus**, which should arrive sometime in late April or early May. Yummy.

That's it for now. The Elf will be back next issue with more news.

# Joining Karma: A newcomer's perspective

Greg Kelly

I joined Karma, much to my own surprise, a little over a month ago. I was surprised because I had simply never foreseen myself joining an organic food co-op with "karma" in its name. Or a yin and yang symbol on its sign.

Allow me to explain my cynicism. I had somehow equated Karma with health-food stores — a mistake, I know, but there it is. And I have generally found the people who run and frequent health-food stores to be off-putting. There's a kind of sneering moralism I've encountered among staff at such places, an odd brand of snobbery that manifests itself in even odder ways.

"You're buying multivitamins?" he asked me dryly.

"Yes," I answered. "These look not bad."

I put the bottle on the counter. He brushed the bottle aside and rested his elbows on the space he'd just created.

"Uh huh. You're planning on taking these and these alone, or what?"

By now he wasn't even looking at me. He was just looking at the bottle. I didn't know what to say, because whatever came out of my mouth would be the wrong answer.

He filled the silence with a kind of lecture. About how multivitamins, he said, exhaling, combine their ingredients in different ways, depending on the product, another exhale, and that I may need a supplement or two to fill in the gaps the product I was buying may have. Exhale.

I wasn't bothered by the content of his explanation. But with all his exhaling, I could tell what he'd eaten over the last few days. And I didn't need to be lectured. Informed, yes, but not lectured.

The fact that I didn't know what he apparently knew was a class marker, of sorts, for him. He was

on the inside, and I was on the outside. After this exchange, I was indeed on the outside, having left my intended purchase on the counter where he could use it as a prop for his next unwitting student.

The patrons of health-food stores are often irritating to be around. I find them humourless and brusque. And there's something else that strikes me: why do they tend to look like death warmed over? I've never seen unhealthier-looking people than I have at health-food stores. It appears that they're relying on a magic bullet to save them from whatever's ailing them, whether it's garlic pills, or chromium, or dandelion tea. It's a ritual, and a sad one at that, given what people spend on these products.

I haven't been immune to the allure of the magic bullet approach myself. I remember seeing an ad for a "green" supplement, a powder you mix into juice or water a couple of times a day. It was supposed to give you a boost of natural energy. I have no idea what unnatural energy would be like, and I don't remember why I even wanted "natural energy" in the first place. But I do remember the taste — distinctly. I used to have a summer job mowing lawns, and once when I was dumping out the clippings bag, a gust of wind came up and blew them into my mouth. Grass and gasoline, that's what the powder tasted like. And after three weeks, I had no more discernible energy.

All of this is to say that I wasn't drawn to join Karma until I visited the co-op with a friend. The immediate impression I had was that there were all kinds of really interesting things to eat: miso pastes from Japan, organic dairy from local producers.

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