

THE CHRONICLE

JUNE / JULY 2003



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

SUBMISSIONS

Submissions may be sent by e-mail, to chronicle@karmacoop.org. Send your submission within the main body of the message or save it as a text-only file, then send it as an attachment. Submissions are also collected from the red box. Upcoming editorial deadlines are posted on the bulletin board and the box. All envelopes and articles must be clearly marked with the author's name. Please type and double-space your material.

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 credits (letters to the editor and announcements are not).

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BOARD LIASON

Jerry Lee Miller

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

SARAH FAIRLEY • EMAIL MANAGER@KARMACOOOP.ORG

MY FIRST FEW MONTHS ON THE JOB HAVE BEEN VERY CHALLENGING TO SAY THE LEAST. KARMA IS A SURPRISINGLY LARGE AND COMPLEX ORGANIZATION. DESPITE WORKING AT KARMA FOR TWO YEARS PRIOR TO BEING HIRED FOR THIS POSITION, I HAVE HAD TO SPEND MOST OF THE LAST FEW MONTHS JUST TRYING TO WRAP MY HEAD AROUND HOW THINGS GET DONE IN THIS ORGANIZATION. WOW, WE ARE A COMPLEX BUNCH.

CHANGES AT THE CHECK OUT

When your purchases are rung through at the till they are recorded as sales in one of 12 categories, ranging from taxable produce to meat. These categories were designed to provide us with sales data that can be used by department managers and myself to better understand how various products are selling. However, these categories are too broad to be of much use to us any longer. In April the department managers and I sat down together and further subdivided the current sales categories. We came up with an additional 7 categories that will allow us to better track sales of key products such as fluid milk and coffee. It will also finally provide separate categories for snack foods and body-care products, items which had previously been grouped together as taxable grocery.

These new categories are going to require some getting used to. Cashiers will need shopping members to be extra patient as they get used to the new keys on the cash register. Members who like to bring a list of their purchases to the cash (rather than the actual products) will have to familiarize themselves with the new categories. If you are one of these members please pick up a copy of the flyer describing the new categories. Shopping lists using the old categories will not be useful once the new categories are in place.

Finally! A new produce wet case. It has been in the works for years and now it is finally going to happen. The produce department will soon have a newly refurbished, 12-foot-long produce wet case. So long chronic drip that leaves pools of water in the middle of the store! Hello full range of leafy

greens! Four extra feet of display space will mean that Michael can carry a greater range of products and that the staff can put out a greater quantity of each product. The installation of our new produce wet case will require that the store be closed for a day. Hooking up the new produce case will take up to five days. During this time produce normally displayed in the produce wet case will not be available. Signs providing members with more information will be posted in the store once all the details are worked out.

STAFF UPDATE

Major staffing changes have occurred in recent months. I am told that the revolving-door syndrome has a long history here at Karma. The last few months have been no exception. We have many new people on staff at this time (including Eric Arner, who you will find most mornings in the produce department) and still more people to hire. The staff photos board will help you figure out who is who.

THE FINANCIAL PICTURE

It has not been a good year for Karma. Sales were below budget throughout the year. We have had to draw upon our savings to get through. Next year will be even more difficult if sales do not increase. Karma is a very financially sensitive organization. As a not-for-profit we do not budget for huge profits. That is why we are able to offer our

members the prices that we do. Karma members spent just 3% less at Karma this year than they did last year. That tiny reduction in sales is the difference between breaking even and losing \$35,000.00. Many members tell me that they shop at Karma because they want to make a difference in the world, even if it is a small one. The impact these members have on the world may be small, but their impact on our little store is huge. Karma is having difficulty this year because members bought just a little bit less (3%). Members can make Karma's financial situation better next year by buying just a little bit more. It is amazing what a difference 3% can make!

Letter to the editor

Jamie Ker makes the excellent point that the byline atop my article in the Feb/March issue of the Chronicle is misleading. I regret any confusion that was caused, and would like to reiterate that the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Food Issues Committee, nor were they intended to be representative of the views of the Karma membership. Yet Jamie himself misleads the membership when he implies that Karma's mandate does not challenge the capitalist system. While Karma does participate actively within the market economy (which should not be confused with capitalism), its very organizational structure defies capitalism insofar as a capitalist enterprise is characterized by private and not collective ownership. An anti-capitalist mandate can be inferred from Karma's socialist organizational structure.

— Micki Honkanen

BOARD REPORT FOR MAY 2003

BY ANIL REDDI—ORIENTATION COMMITTEE LIAISON

(THE KARMA CO—OP BOARD MET ON MAY 12, 2003, 7:00 PM)

We discussed a number of important issues. Many of these issues may affect Karma's future existence.

At new member orientations, the Orientation Committee is going to revamp the "script" to include reasons to shop. There will soon be a meeting of all Karma Committee Chairs.

New wet case and refrigerator purchase in progress

As we are facing the imminent failure of Karma's present wet-case and refrigerator, purchase of the new replacements are in progress.

Bulk Special Order discount stopped!

The board discussed Sarah Fairley's recommendation to discontinue the Bulk Special Order Discount because it is not profitable for Karma. The Bulk

Special Order Discount will be discontinued. Sarah will plan the withdrawal of the discount and report on it at the next Board meeting. The withdrawal of the discount will include an article in the Chronicle.

Keys on cash register reprogrammed!

Karma's staff is revamping the keys on the cash registers so those sales can be matched to purchases. This process will allow us to track purchases and identify items from individual departments. The cash registers need to be reprogrammed and this will be complete on June 1, 2003.

A staff person is taking time off because of an injury (not work-related). Sarah will be hiring a temporary clerk to cover these shifts as well as cover for upcoming staff vacations.

Sarah has proposed a change in store hours: opening at 11:00 a.m. Monday through Thursday. This

change is not expected to affect staff, but will affect member-labour shifts. It will be implemented in July to allow time to make adjustments in the member-labour schedule.

We discussed Sarah's recommendation to focus on promoting the co-op concept at Karma. How do we educate members about co-op principles and values? We have the opportunity to educate new members at orientation sessions, and Jerry Lee suggested reorientation sessions for existing members. The Promotions Committee will promote Karma's new food issues policy and the co-op concept. The Promotions Committee will plan information tables at upcoming events such as Bike Day and Plant Exchange. Committee liaisons will talk to their respective committees about how to promote the co-op concept as part of their committee activities.

**Spend a monthly
additional \$15
or so to put Karma
in the black!**

FINANCE/SURCHARGE:

Karma is still losing money but we do have savings in the bank. The Finance Committee is working on a revised budget. The Promotions Committee will initiate a campaign to ask members to spend more money shopping at Karma. The Finance Committee will

provide figures to determine a specific amount — perhaps \$15 additionally per month. Obviously, the ideal situation would be if members bought all their groceries at Karma.

The Karma Board of Directors has voted for a surcharge increase. Even though this issue will be settled at the next AGM, Karma members and committees (esp. finance) have been looking at the issue since the last AGM. With the information gathered and discussion at the last Board meeting, we decided to raise the surcharge.

**Non-working
surcharge increased
to 12%**

The board unanimously approved an increase in the non-working member surcharge from 8% to 12% effective September 1, 2003. John Bowers provided background information on the surcharge analysis. The board will examine his implementation plan at the next board meeting. (Please read John's article in this issue of the Chronicle for a fuller discussion.)

MEMBER LABOUR

Some board members expressed concern about the member labour system becoming punitive.

The Shop/Work cards appear to be difficult to decipher. Members find it difficult to understand their cards to

keep track of their labour hours. Anil and Lachlan will discuss redesign of the member cards to make it easier for members to track their hours. In the future, Karma may change its reporting mechanisms as part of larger efforts to evaluate and improve information systems. The board supports the ad hoc Member Labour Committee's efforts to improve the current member labour system rather than radically altering it.

ONFC (ONTARIO NATURAL FOOD CO-OP)

ONFC (where we get most of our food from) anticipated growth and expanded because of its new customer—Whole Foods. Sales however, did not increase as expected. To address its weakened financial position, ONFC is considering a number of options, including a merger. Karma has played an important role in creating ONFC, so we should keep informed and be involved in any decisions about ONFC's future as a voting member of ONFC. We need to understand the context in which ONFC and Karma operate. Caitlin will put photocopies of the presentation from the ONFC meeting in the board box and obtain the PowerPoint file from Wally Seccombe for those who want the electronic version. Caitlin will invite Wally to the July board meeting to discuss the ONFC presentation.

THE PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE

... is attempting to put together a list of member's current email addresses. This is for Karma use only. It will help improve internal communications, allowing everyone to be contacted in a timely manner for such exciting events as the AGM, the Plant Exchange, Bike Day, or Bread Baking Day.

As the Promotions Committee, our role within the family of committees is to offer support for events, and promote a sense of community; but we need member help to accomplish this goal. When you pay your Member Fee, please take a moment to insure Karma has your correct address, and telephone number. Alert Marilou of any changes by leaving a message in the Secretary's Box. Alternately, send us an email at: delucahoward@sprint.ca.

We are here for you!



A SUFFICIENT AND EQUITABLE CONTRIBUTION FROM ALL MEMBERS

BY JOHN BOWERS, MEMBER OF THE MEMBER LABOUR COMMITTEE

PRIOR TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING LAST FALL, I READ THROUGH KARMA'S ANNUAL REPORT AND BECAME CONCERNED ABOUT THE VIABILITY OF OUR CO-OP. STAFF AND DIRECTORS RAISED ISSUES RELATING TO THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF MEMBER LABOUR, AS WELL AS TO THE AMOUNT OF THE NON-WORKING SURCHARGE.

At the AGM, I decided that I would devote some of my time to help address these issues, so I joined the ad hoc Member Labour Committee. In November 2002, I began working with others to first understand the problems and then to come up with an organized plan aimed at solving some of these problems.

Thus far, we have been focusing primarily on reducing the number of unfilled member-labour shifts. In addition to these efforts, the Member Labour Committee has reviewed whether two hours per month and an 8% surcharge are both equitable and suffi-

cient, taking into account the numbers of working and non-working members and also sales to the two groups. Over a number of months, we gathered information, conducted analyses, had discussions, drew conclusions and drafted recommendations. These were passed along to the Finance Committee for their review and further action. The Finance Committee has since made recommendations to the Board, resulting in a motion that the Board passed unanimously at its meeting in May.

There will be no change to the current two-hours-per-month contribution

required from working members, as this is more than sufficient to meet our current member labour needs. As mentioned above, we are trying to increase the percentage of successfully completed work by our working members.

What will be changing is the non-working member surcharge. It will be set at a rate of 12% as of September 1, 2003. This new rate was determined with the intent to uphold the principles of fairness and equity, which are fundamental to Karma and its membership. When conducting the analyses, we were cognizant of a comment made at our last annual general meeting that went something like this:

When the Co-op decided to open its membership to non-working members (in 1989), the principle behind the surcharge rate was that it shouldn't make any (financial) difference to Karma whether a person wanted to be a working member or a non-working member. When a non-working member pays the surcharge (which at that time was 15%), in lieu of work, they would be entirely covering their proportionate share of the associated costs of running Karma.

In 1994, the Board members were somewhat split, but the majority decided that the rate would be lowered to

8%. At that time there were about 100 non-working members and the rationale for the decrease was to encourage these members to shop more, which would help our precarious financial situation at that time. These changes were well intentioned, although the principle of equity does not appear in the minutes of those meetings. This isn't really a surprise since this principle was less relevant in 1994 than it is today, given the change in our overall membership. In 1994, sales to non-working members made up only a small percentage of Karma's revenue, whereas today, sales to non-working members make up about one third of total sales.

I imagine that what everyone really wants to know is how was 12% calculated?

There were multiple methodologies used, one borrowed from the past and some new ones created to determine what an equitable surcharge rate ought to be. As it happened, the different methods tended to support one another in their final conclusions.

A Board-accepted method used in 1998 to review the surcharge is based on using the number of hours worked in the store and calculating the amount of the wages budget we would save if non-working members worked, and when



calculated as a percentage of non-working member sales, you get a surcharge percentage that covers staff wages. (This model is only meant to value the contribution from non-working members and does not resemble a feasible scenario for meeting our labour needs. I believe that this method is conceptually sound.)

This analysis takes into account the lower rate of productivity or efficiency when comparing the work done by members versus staff. A number of efficiency rates were used, but in the end two-thirds was felt to be a reasonable approximation. This method also factors in that only about three out of four working members consistently meet their two-hour-per-month commitment, that approximately 10 minutes of paid supervisory time is required for every one hour of member labour and that some of the higher paid (although this is a bit of a misnomer) positions are not easily replaced with member labour.

The number of net staff-equivalency hours that could be saved if a similar proportion of non-working members worked is about 5000 hours per year. These hours have a total cost of about \$60,000, which is approximately 12% of the sales to non-working members. Therefore a surcharge rate of 12% is:

1. an equitable contribution, in lieu of working two hours per month, and
2. able to cover the non-working members' proportionate share of labour costs.

Equity is a fine principle, but what will such a change actually cost? Well, the average spending by non-working members is about \$86 per month, before the surcharge. The difference between 8% and 12% is therefore about \$3.50 per month for this average level of purchases by a non-working member. Hopefully this cost can be put into the proper perspective and it will not deter anyone from shopping at the co-op, of which we all own a little piece. Keep in mind that Karma's prices plus 12% are still less expensive on average than almost all other natural food retailers, according to our recently completed price comparison survey. For more on this, read the article entitled "How Does Karma Compare?" in this edition of the Chronicle.

This analysis and conclusion also yield an appropriate work-shift cash equivalent, which is in the range of \$8.50 to \$9.00 per hour. It is currently \$7.50 for one hour. Recommendations have been brought to the Board that this rate be increased accordingly, based on the same principles of fairness and equity. (Due to time constraints, among other factors, this item will be on the Board's agenda in June.) The work-shift cash equivalent is used to convert a member's hours' debt, from unfilled work commitment into monetary terms, and is most often used upon resignation to determine the portion of the loan to be refunded.

To see all of the data, calculations and other methodologies, you may pick up a printed copy of this analysis from the bulletin board or you may download it from Karma's web site (www.karmacoop.org). These documents should be available upon (or soon after) the release of this edition of the Chronicle.

The implementation date of September 1st, 2003 was selected in an effort to provide a reasonable length of time to communicate these changes to the membership and to respond to any concerns or questions. We plan to provide further notice through store signage and possibly other mediums during the summer.

As an aside, perhaps I should elaborate a little about why I have led much of the above analysis, as one Board member wondered. I am quite driven by my own principles when it comes to my interactions with this world, so much so that it's often difficult to find businesses that I feel truly comfortable supporting. Co-operatives are an excellent fit for me from an economic, social and environmental perspective. I really really like Karma and wanted to lend my particular skills and time to help resolve a few issues in a fair way.

Thank you for your continued support of Karma. We all wish to have a viable food co-op that meets our needs on equitable terms. I feel we have taken another stride toward this noble goal through the forthcoming changes.

KARMA'S FOOD ISSUES COMMITTEE NEEDS YOU!

We are looking for a few good people to join the Food Issues Committee on a fulltime basis. The workload is heavy. The rewards are the feelings and experiences you gain by contributing to and impacting the way Karma operates.

Our current focus is to complete an implementation guide based on Karma's new Product Policy, which was adopted at the last AGM. The policy outlines Karma's values; the implementation guide will create the tools to deliver those values to the membership.

If you are interested in joining us, please complete an application form which can be found in one of two places: 1. On the Food Issues page of Karma's web site (www.karmacoop.org). The application is in "pdf" format. Please view it, follow the instructions and put your responses in the body of an email which can be forwarded to the committee at our email address, foodissues@karmacoop.org, OR 2. At the front of the store in paper-format near the Chronicle's information board, completed and returned to the Food Issues Box in the office.

We look forward to hearing from you.

SHELF ELF WIGS OUT

BY LOUISE LONGO

Yes Karmites, the Elf has lost it—intoxicated with the sights and smells of summer, he is resisting mightily the lure of the pen, and it was awfully difficult to get him off his bike and into the house to do this column. He wants all to know that he is doing this under protest, but with his customary goodwill.

Promises of brownies helped entice him, and my what good brownies they are! Karma is now carrying a new brownie from the charmingly named Friendly Foods company in Calgary, which they have called “I’ve Got to Have A Brownie Now”. And that’s exactly how you’ll feel after you taste ‘Orange Bliss’, which won the 1996 Gold Medal at the International Culinary Olympics in Berlin, Germany. It was the first ever totally vegan entry to do so—apparently the judges didn’t even realize it was vegan! Chef Ron Picarski and his buddy Rob Sinclair teamed up to create a brownie mix of this award-winning delight, later producing them as they appear on our shelves. They are alarmingly good; one might do some damage trying to get hold of them, though luckily that isn’t necessary. Don’t say I didn’t warn you, because as you no doubt can detect, I have tried these tasty morsels.

On a more down-to-earth note, as



some of you may already have discovered, Karma is now carrying fresh, certified organic chicken on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. At this point it is for the month of June, but it may be continued if there is enough interest. The whole chickens are being offered at a special price of \$7.78 per kilogram.

As well, our regular Rowe Farms’ naturally-raised chicken will still be available from Thursday to Saturday.

Two companies are offering new snacks based on brown rice that Karma is now stocking. Lundberg Rice Chips come in delicious flavours of Sea Salt, Sesame and Seaweed, Pico De Gallo Bean and Santa Fe Barbecue. All are vegan except the Sesame and Seaweed. They are very popular, according to Audrey.

And Nature’s Path, those people who give us the organic ecopac cereals, are now making organic crispy rice bars for kids under their Envirokidz label. They are gluten-free and come in Berry, Peanut Butter and Chocolate flavours so you just may want to try them for yourselves. They have a great kid friendly website at www.envirokidz.com and donate 1% of their sales to conservation groups like Wildlife Trust.

So, that’s it for now folks. Enjoy your summer.



THE EVERYDAY ACTIVIST: GET ACTIVE ONLINE—PART II

BY LIS SODERBERG

LAST ISSUE, I PROVIDED A FEW WEB RESOURCES RE: THE WAR IN IRAQ. THANKFULLY, THE BOMBING THERE HAS STOPPED, AND THAT SITUATION HAS NOW BECOME A MATTER MORE OF POLITICS THAN OF WARFARE (ALTHOUGH MILITARY CONFLICT SADLY CONTINUES THROUGHOUT MUCH OF THE WORLD). FOR POST-WAR COVERAGE AND ONGOING PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL ISSUES, CHECK OUT WWW.WORLD-NEWSPAPERS.COM, WHICH HAS AN EXTENSIVE LIST OF LINKS TO ALTERNATIVE NEWS SOURCES.

Of course, we also and always have local issues to grapple with. From homelessness to air quality, our immediate environment requires diligent attention, and many of the decisions that shape that environment are made by our local elected officials.

Do you know who your City Councillor is, or your Member of Parliament? Frankly, I didn't pay that much attention - until our neighbourhood became embroiled in a nasty feud with McDonald's over their plans to plop a drive-through in our midst (see www.welivehere.ca for details). At the same time, there was lively public dis-

course about Wychwood Barns, the old TTC yards between Wychwood and Christie ultimately destined to become a rich community resource (see www.anewpark.ca). In both of these situations, local residents have made their individual and collective views known to the very officials who can influence the outcome.

Your voice does matter, believe it or not, and politicians pay more attention than you might guess to the opinions of their constituents. A single phone call or letter, in their eyes, represents many dozens more similar but unvoiced opinions. Consider bookmarking the following sites for future reference:

To find out who your City Councillor is: <<http://app.city.toronto.on.ca>> (under “Accessing City Hall”, click on the word “Council” and type your street name and number).

Your MP can be located by providing your postal code at: <<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/house/PostalCode.asp?Source=SM>> (I tried to find some way to navigate to this page from within the Parliament site, but had no luck, so you’ll have to type in the whole link)

Last issue I also espoused giving email newsletters a try. The chief pitfall of these is the sheer volume of stuff that can end up on your digital doorstep. It is easy to be overwhelmed—or ultimately discouraged—by the endlessness of actions

requested or required (and, by implication, the endlessness of the problems that need fixing). But my personal experience, after some initial bleary-eyed burnout, has mostly been one of inspiration. I have finally realised that I can’t read it all or do it all, so I now read and do what I can, when I can, and use the delete button as necessary. I have been sent some real gems, both in email newsletters and from people forwarding articles, and have as a result felt myself

enlightened and part of a much larger world than the one I can actually see.

If you decide you want to forward some of the most inspiring and/or important messages you receive, keep these things in mind:

- be VERY selective; send only the best, and not too much of it—if you send too much stuff, the recipients may end up being more annoyed with you than grateful for the information

- send a copy to yourself, and put multiple addresses in the “Bcc:” (that’s “blind carbon copy”) instead of the “To:” field; this keeps everyone’s email address from being displayed for everyone else to see (a privacy concern especially if the message will likely be multi-forwarded), and also decreases the time spent scrolling down

past the junk to get to the content (my personal pet peeve)

- further to the above: don’t just forward the whole message if there’s a bunch of visual garbage before you get to the good stuff; clean up the subject line and cut and paste the relevant info into your outgoing email—your recipients will thank you for it

Now, digging for online gold and forwarding email wisdom do have their weaknesses, especially the ironic obser-



vation that sitting in front of one's computer seems like the very antithesis of "active"-ism. But email and the internet can be amazing tools, and a powerful testament to their potential as a catalyst for change is www.planetfriendly.net. Simply put, this locally-based website is indispensable for anyone who wants to learn more, see more, and do more things that make our world a better place. From workshops on sustainability, organic gardening and eco-housing, to Green Living conventions and Good Work listings (jobs, apprenticeships and volunteer positions), the dazzling array of choice makes an aspiring activist's heart sing with hope and hands-on possibility. (PlanetFriendly is currently looking for

volunteers and advisors for a variety of roles, creative, interpersonal and technical. Contact Peter at <people@planetfriendly.net> or see www.planetfriendly.net/help/ for some ideas.)

Besides the education and new perspectives gleaned, those who physically attend events, workshops, etc., have the chance to meet people who are interested in the same things—a great way to restore one's faith in humanity and find or reclaim a sense of community. And as members of local, global—or anything in between—communities, if we make even a small effort, the seeds of positive change are sown.



Which brings us to the last web resource for this column: the Nature Challenge at www.davidsuzuki.org/WOL/Challenge/. The David Suzuki Foundation has researched the top 10 ways Canadians can conserve nature; the challenge is to pick three and do them over the next year (there are PDF files available on the site that go into detail about the hows and whys of each). These are simple, tangible and backed with solid science, and the collective efforts of a nation can make a world of difference. (I would highly recommend forwarding emails to everyone you know on this one!)

Each of us has talents, skills, beliefs and inclinations. Each of us has choice. And, of course, there are times when our choices are restricted by life and circumstance. Can you do everything? No, but even if you make *some* choices and take *some* actions that contribute to your and other's health and well-being, the world will definitely—and sooner—be a better place. And if we do what we can, when we can, we not only improve the world around us, we improve ourselves.

If you have any comments or suggestions for The Everyday Activist, send an email to soderberg@goodmedia.com, or drop a note in the envelope at the Karma bulletin board.

SOPHIE'S CHOICE

[REPRINTED FROM "THE EATING FRESH MONTHLY", [HTTP://WWW.EATINGFRESH.COM](http://WWW.EATINGFRESH.COM)]

"IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO ASK, WHERE DOES THIS FOOD COME FROM? AND THEN ANSWER PIOUSLY, OH, IT COMES FROM GOD. WE HAVE TO ASK, WHO GOT IT AFTER GOD GAVE IT, AND HOW MUCH MONEY DID THEY MAKE ON IT, AND WHAT DID THEY DO TO THE EARTHLY SOURCE AND TO OTHER PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS OF PUTTING IT ON YOUR TABLE?" —WENDELL BERRY

Go local? Or go organic? More and more, home cooks and food buyers want to know the preferred hierarchy when faced with a choice between a head of lettuce from a local grower and one from 1,200 miles away that sports an organic label. So what's a salad maker to do? Buy local.

As evidenced by skyrocketing sales and considerable media attention—not all of it in support of organic—home shoppers across the United States have become sensitized to the benefits of organically grown and raised foods. Today new attention is being paid to where, and not just how, food is grown and raised.

The path from organic to local is one that Eating Fresh has followed since its beginning in 1998. During the mid 1990s, we became aware that organic farmers in our home state of New Jersey were being undersold by California organic farmers, many of whom could get their products into our stores faster and cheaper, even when those same products were in season in New Jersey. As the most densely populated state in the country—with real estate values that put it in the top five nationwide—keeping farmers farming was becoming a challenge. The Garden State was in danger of losing not only its agricultural heritage but also its

access to fresh foods grown on some of the most fertile soil in the country.

We deduced that residents—many of whom were just beginning to experience sprawl in addition to the predominance of large retailers and the devastation of local landscapes—needed to understand the difference between organic and local organic. But it also became evident that keeping in business all of the food-based farming operations in New Jersey was a priority. While organic farming is the preferred method for a number of economic and environmental reasons, it's ultimately easier to convert a conventional farm to an organic farm—or at

least a responsibly run farm—than it is to convert a parking lot into a farm. Once a farm's been lost to development, it does not revert back to farmland.

On the shelves in the produce section of the supermarket or in the beef and poultry area, those foods that carry certified-organic labels give only a narrow view of what you may want to know about your food. Before organic farming became standardized and industrialized, it incorporated certain

philosophical ideals that were essential to its definition: organic farming meant not only farming that was free of chemical inputs and pesticides but also farming that was community based, family operated, and small in scale. And it subscribed to fair treatment of farmworkers. Not anymore: Organic certification tells nothing about the size of a farm, its distance to market, or its own-

ership; or whether the farmer and farmworkers are being paid a living wage; or how the farmworkers are being treated. As the scale of organic agriculture grows, and as more production moves offshore, the organic label doesn't provide enough information

for consumers who care about the system their food dollars support.

Today organic is at a crossroads both philosophically and in practice. To be sure, organic farming improves the condition of the soil and protects the environment, whereas industrial-scale conventional farming has a deleterious effect on soil, waterways, and wildlife as well as on the farmworkers who handle pesticides. Organic products may cost more when you pay at the register, but they also cost more to



grow. Farming in this way requires a greater level of effort and commitment on the part of the farmer, even though organic farmers don't enjoy the federal subsidies that conventional farmers do.

Throughout the years, organic farmers have made a tremendous contribution to agriculture by working with nature and thinking in new and innovative ways to ensure a healthy future for agriculture. The same simply cannot be said of industrial-scale conventional farmers. So whenever possible, buying local organic supports a system that has innumerable benefits for you, your family, and your community. And it rewards the farmers in your region who are truly serving as stewards of the land.

As an industry, however, organic farming has taken an unfortunate turn in the past five to 10 years. Huge organic farms are shrink-wrapping their products and shipping them thousands of miles to market. Is that better for the environment than a responsibly run local farm that isn't certified organic? The certified-organic label offers a vital set of standards that explains how a product was grown and raised, which is especially important if it's grown and raised outside your region and especially overseas. It's just not as important if you know or have access to the source of your food. As the *Cooking Fresh* books point out, farmers who operate small-scale family farms, who sell direct to consumers, who engage in open dialogue with their customers, and who

invite their customers onto their farms are likely to be farming responsibly without necessarily farming organically. In an article published in *Local Palate*—a bimonthly newspaper that highlights food and wine, restaurants, chefs, and artisanal producers throughout the Midwest—Illinois farmer David Cleverdon confesses that having a direct relationship with chefs “makes us better and keeps us from growing crap.”

The value of organic is that it provides information about practices regarding growing, which helps us make informed choices about whether we want to buy products either grown with pesticides or raised on hormones or antibiotics. Most important, the organic movement has raised our collective consciousness about the impact conventional farming has had on the environment, the quality of food and soil, and the health of farmworkers. And it has set the ecological standard by which all farming is now judged. It has also helped us create a greater connection to the sources of our food. And that's where local comes in. When you know your farmer, when your food travels only a few miles to your table, and when you know your food dollars are going not only toward the production of healthful, delicious food but also toward development of a stable local economy, the choice becomes a lot easier.

So remember: eat fresh, eat local.

HOW DOES KARMA COMPARE?

BY JOHN BOWERS

This story started out as merely a release of the results of a recently completed price comparison survey. But I quickly realized that if all I did was write about our good prices, I might sound a little like Wal-Mart or Home Depot or just about every other big boring box store . . . ‘boring’ in terms of their intent to drill their slogans into our heads. If you’re going to try to sell something based on its price, then you should also be prepared to talk about product ethics and anything else of interest to conscientious consumers.

Okay, I’ll present the price comparison survey and then move on to considerations beyond price. On average, is Karma cheaper, more expensive or about the same as other food stores in the area? This was the question that some members of the Member Labour Committee were wondering about recently and so we decided to compare some prices between stores. Karma hadn’t done a price survey for a few years and it was now the time to do one. Not only would the results be of interest to our members, including the committees and the Board, but it would also enable us to gauge how our prices

would compare if the non-working surcharge were to increase.

The items in this survey were selected based on several criteria. The most important would be that the item is usually available at Karma. A diverse blend of the more common products were chosen, with an emphasis on organically grown, to ensure good representation, quality and comparability. Items were selected with the help of Grocery Manager James Van Bolhius, General Manager Sarah Fairley, and Brandy Humes, who was a closing manager at the time.

All prices were compared between similar items, and an overall straight average was taken to estimate the average difference between Karma and the other stores.* The results are shown below. On average, Karma’s prices, including the 8% surcharge, are lower than seven of the eight stores in our survey. Only Loblaws was cheaper, and only by 2.6%. This same result is still true, although to a lesser degree, when comparing prices to Karma’s with a 12% surcharge. As expected, working members enjoy considerable savings as a result of the two hours they contribute each month.

	Noah's	Loblaws
their average price versus Karma working member price	+ 18.3%	+ 5.2%
their average price versus Karma non-working price (i.e. + 8% surcharge)	+ 9.5%	-2.6%
their average price versus Karma non-working price at a 12% surcharge	+ 5.6%	-6.0%
number of 'compared' items**	46	23

Note: + X% means their price is higher than Karma's, and similarly, -X% means their price is much cheaper than Karma's.

* If you are interested in seeing the survey data and detailed analysis, please see it posted on the bulletin board or download this file from Karma's web site.

Well that's all very nice . . . knowing that Karma will often save you money on these quality products, whether you're a working member or a non-working member. But that's only the tip of the iceberg lettuce when it comes to reasons to shop at Karma.

Karma is a democratic organization, in which each member has one vote. Members guide policy through the co-op's committees and by electing a Board of Directors at the annual general meeting. Collectively, we are able to exercise control over the sources, quality and price of our food, which makes

us a real alternative to other grocery retailers. Our comprehensive Product Policy from October 2002 is one fine example of the way in which Karma chooses the products it stocks.

Shopping at Karma is a friendly experience, without the Muzak, "loss leaders" or other manipulative tactics of supermarkets. You can hang up your coat, go to the washroom, gain a sense of community and enjoy the refreshing quality of trust. And not having a profit motivation or a requirement to pay exorbitant bonuses to management or owners means we can keep prices low.

Fiesta Farms	Strictly Bulk	Essence of Life	Veg Kingdom	The Big Carrot	Whole Foods
+ 13.7%	+ 14.5%	+ 15.7%	+ 25.9%	+ 24.1%	+ 20.7%
+ 5.2%	+ 6.0%	+ 7.1%	+ 16.6%	+ 14.9%	+ 11.7%
+ 1.5%	+ 2.2%	+ 3.3%	+ 12.4%	+ 10.8%	+ 7.7%
19	6	35	29	43	40

** The degree of confidence in the average price comparison percentages increases as the number of items compared increases. Similarly, confidence in the results decreases where fewer items were compared. For example, less confidence or weight should be placed on the above percentages for the comparison to Strictly Bulk since there were only six items to be compared within this survey.

Karma members may also share in the daily work duties of operating the co-op. Some members consider this ‘work’ to be a privilege that adds positive value to their lives. Of course the other benefit to working is an effectively discounted price on all of your Karma purchases.

To the extent that Karma can be compared with others, it compares quite favourably. And where comparisons are difficult, Karma is a shining example of social and environmental responsibility. Where we spend our money does influence the world we are

creating. I think it was Gandhi that said “Be the change you wish to see in the world”. This is why I am a proud Karma member.

PEOPLE AND PLANET FRIENDLY LISTINGS

(A SAMPLING)



JUNE 17: Boreal Rendezvous Kick Off –
celebrate Canada's boreal forest with David Suzuki, the Rheostatics and Derek Miller!

Join us as we launch the Boreal Rendezvous, a nationwide celebration of Canada's boreal forest and northern rivers. Enjoy a keynote speech by David Suzuki, and musical performances by the Rheostatics, 2003 Juno Award Winner Derek Miller and guests, at Bambu by the Lake beginning at 7:30. June 17th. 245 Queens Quay West / Rheostatics, Derek Miller, and David Suzuki / \$10 at <http://www.cpaws.org/boreal-rendezvous> or call 1-866-510-WILD

JUNE 21: Whole Village Orientation Meeting

An Orientation for those interested in finding out more about this ecovillage/farm-based intentional community, held on the site. Tour the farm, meet some of the members and learn how you can become part of creating a sustainable world. Please call ahead to RSVP and for directions. Sat Jun 21, 2003, 1:00 pm–3:30 pm. / Alton/Orangeville / Contact Mary MacEachern info@wholevillage.org / 519-941-1099

JUNE 27–30: The Heart of Nature / The Spirit of Art

You are invited to join us for a guided journey into the sacred silent spaces of nature and art. Steven Martyn, founder of the Algonquin Tea Company will take you on a day long earth wisdom adventure where you will learn the many facets of wilderness survival (i.e. plant and tree identification, permaculture, and wild edibles. Build a fire and shelter, feel the healing energy of walking barefoot in the bush.) Dorota and Edwin Echavarry, founders of The Morning Star Centre for Healing and the Arts will help you creatively integrate the previous day's journey by providing you with a variety of artistic media (e.g. painting, sketching, sand casting, mask making, movement, journaling, printmaking, mixed media) with which to express your inner experience of nature's inspirations. Cost of workshop with vegetarian meals: \$200 Accommodations: \$50 for a lakeside campsite or \$150 for a room in a lakeside cottage (1 or 2 persons) \$240 for a private studio guest house (1-4 persons). Barry's Bay, Ontario / Morning Star Centre for Healing and the Arts 613-756-9030 / June 27–30 or August 1–4 info@morningstararts.com, <http://www.morningstararts.com>

JULY 7 TO DECEMBER 31: Conversation Cafes (weekly, at a cafe near you)

Southern Ontario locations include Toronto, Unionville, Guelph, Kitchener... Conversation Cafes are drop-in discussion groups - a type of community building - being held in neighbourhood cafes and restaurants, open to anyone who cares to come. Although they are ongoing on a weekly basis, the same people do not necessarily show up each week - but many do. "Why Conversation Cafés? Because when you put strangers, caffeine and ideas in the same room, brilliant things can happen. For that very reason, the British Parliament banned coffeehouses in the 1700s as hotbeds of sedition. Might we brew up a similar social liveliness now? With democracy, critical thinking and 'the ties that bind' all under siege, this may be the most radical cup of coffee you ever drink". To find a cafe near you, go to: <http://www.conversationcafe.ca> and click on "find a cafe". If there isn't one in your neighbourhood, click on: "Host Central" to learn how to host one.

JULY 25–27: Kyoto and Sprawl: Building Cities That Work

A Crucial Conference at Glendon College, York University, Toronto - The only way to confront climate change is to confront urban sprawl. This conference is about minimizing climate change and meeting our Kyoto commitments through changing the ways we plan and build our cities.

Kyoto and Sprawl is a crucial 3-day event that brings together a rich array of leading edge researchers, activists, developers, politicians, artists, architects and planners. This conference will demonstrate how municipal planning and decision-making are directly related to climate change and unsustainable environmental impacts. Kyoto and Sprawl will move us toward the realization of both livable and sustainable communities. The Conference is built around 7 Workshops that will meet throughout the weekend, to examine sprawl from different perspectives and to plan campaigns to reduce it. Sierra Club Executive Director Elizabeth May will be on hand with her workshop entitled "Doing It!" (de-activating sprawl). For details on workshops and speakers, please visit: <http://eastern.sierraclub.ca/events.asp?id=121> / Fri July 25 - Sun July 27, 2003 / Contact: Shannon Emmerton at semmer-ton@sympatico.ca

AUGUST 16: Don Valley Brickworks Tour

A tour with Friends of the Don East's Tom Brown, co-sponsored by Heritage Toronto: 1:30–3:00. The tour will look at the industrial plant, the history of the brickworks, significance of the Carolinian habitat, the geology at the Quarry face and the regeneration work being done at the site. Rain or shine. Please wear proper footwear. Sat Aug 16, 2003, 1:30 pm–3:00 pm. Contact: Erica 416-466-9153 / fode@web.ca, <http://www.web.ca/~fode>



MISSION STATEMENT

Our aim is to:

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

KARMA CO-OP STAFF

GENERAL MANAGER—Sarah Fairley; PRODUCE MANAGER—Michael Armstrong; BULK & GROCERY MANAGER—James van Bolhuis; NON-PERISHABLES MANAGER—Audrey van Bolhuis; HEALTH & BEAUTY MANAGER—Michel Sauve; ON-CALL MANAGER—Robin Easton; BOOK-KEEPER—Victoria Bale; MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY—Marilou Lawrence; OPERATIONS MANAGER & MEMBER LABOUR COORDINATOR—Sara Pulins; SHIFT MANAGERS—Shelia Bannerjee and Michel Sauve; CLERK/MANAGER—Paul Dixon; CLERKS—Naomi France, Eric Arner, and Jae Steele

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

KARMA CO-OP

739 Palmerston Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6G 2R3 416.534.1470

WWW.KARMACOOP.ORG