

The Chronicle

June/July 2005



KATHERINE DOLEY LUDWIG: Contrapuntal Summer Star © 2005



INSIDE...

Why Have a Business Plan?, Caucus Results, Board Bios, Bill C-27, Kicking the Rice Habit, Letters Letters Letters, Summer Events Listings, and *UrbanWilds* Book Review

The Chronicle

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The Chronicle

The Members' Newsletter of Karma Food Co-op
June/July 2005

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Submissions

Submissions may be sent by e-mail, to chronicle@karmacoop.org. Send your submission within the main body of the message. Please do not send attachments. Submissions are also collected from the red box in the store. All envelopes, articles, and disks must be clearly marked with the author's name. Upcoming editorial deadlines are posted on the bulletin board and the box. *The Chronicle* will publish any Karma-related material, subject to

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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor,

We are responding to the article by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in the February/March issue of *The Chronicle*, which pointed to Karma's potential to move forward in addressing issues of exclusion that still exist in our very own co-op. Karma is undergoing significant changes as it attempts to expand while maintaining some of its core values. We feel strongly that these changes should integrate values of anti-oppression. This means developing explicit policies that promote diversity within the store, and taking a firm stand against practices that allow racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and ableism. Until such policies are implemented in practical terms, the store will not truly reflect the diversity of Toronto.

For instance, we suggest setting up staff- and member-oriented anti-oppression trainings, hiring more staff of colour, stocking food items that appeal to more culturally diverse tastebuds, and exploring options for sliding-scale membership loans/fees. Perhaps the board would be interested in striking an Equity and Diversity Committee to review, develop, and implement policies and practices. The board and the general manager would need to be active promoters of this process in collaboration with the new committee.

We look forward to hearing from the board regarding this issue.

Sheila Banerjee & Ishwar Persad

Board member Todd Parsons responds:

I am very happy to see your suggestions for concrete actions to promote diversity and equity within the co-op. Since I have become involved with the board, I have had a number of discussions with my fellow board members and with general manager Graeme Hussey about issues of diversity and exclusion within the co-op and about the actions we need to take to ensure that Karma has the highest standards of social inclusion. The board has already begun to move on a couple of specific proposals. We are currently looking at how we can make anti-oppression and diversity training available for board members, staff, and committees. The next Karma member survey will include optional questions regarding members' ethnic and other identities. Answers to these questions will enable us to determine how the composition of the staff, board, and committees of the co-op reflects the diversity of the membership at large, as well as how the membership reflects the communities around Karma. We hope that these will be two first steps toward an even more inclusive co-op. They are only the beginning of what can be a much broader diversity strategy at Karma.

We are committed to developing such a strategy, while acknowledging that it will be a difficult task requiring skills, knowledge, and experience that the board will not always be able to provide. We hope that members like Sheila Banerjee and Ishwar Persad will be available to assist the board in this work. I personally feel that the

striking of an Equity and Diversity Committee is an excellent idea, and I intend to table it at an upcoming board meeting.

Thank you so much for your letter, and I look forward to working with you in the future.

To the Editor,

So the board has a draft policy about the proper way to complain! You publish part of the draft policy, which runs to seven lines (100 words?). Here's my feedback: the policy is odious! I'm amazed it's even made it this far.

The Chronicle has a long-standing policy about how to handle mail that may be contentious. It gives the editor discretion in how such submissions are handled and includes provision for the criticized party to reply when the complaint is published, if the matter gets that far. Please publish the existing policy in the next edition of *The Chronicle*.

If the board persists in this idiocy, its authority is worthless. Who deems any complaint "unacceptable"? With what authority? On which grounds? Who decides what "unnecessary" or "negative influence" means? I'm shocked that such a demonstration of ethical bankruptcy should appear on the pages of *The Chronicle*, and I'm embarrassed by what this says about our board and our co-op. Shame!

Jamie Ker

Editor's note:

There is no existing Complaints Policy. The notice in the last issue made it clear that what was published was an excerpt from a draft.

What follows is an edited version of an e-mail exchange between Jamie Ker, Melissa McDonald, and Jason Diceman on the subject, followed by this editor's comments, which were posted on Karma's Web binder:

Melissa McDonald, board liaison to The Chronicle, replies:

Thanks for your letter. Let me assure you that no decision has been made about a complaints policy as yet. The board is using a new Web tool called the Web binder to work on documents. The way the board has been working on policy is that one or two individuals will take the initiative to draft something and then post it on the Web binder for comments by other board members. The idea was to try to progress on issues in the time between board meetings. What the board has

omitted to do is to provide some sort of disclaimer to say that any given draft does not reflect the board's position – it is simply a starting point. There is definitely a tension between wanting to be transparent (by sharing things at a very early stage) and putting something forth that represents a draft that has been vetted by the board. I hope that a disclaimer in the future will help to explain the process better.

I personally disagree with the part of the draft Complaints Policy that, in effect, stifles dissent, and I hope to see it gone. I think a complaints mechanism and the opportunity for someone to air an opinion to the broader membership are two very different activities. But the board discussion, unfortunately, has not yet taken place.

Editor's note: Melissa McDonald's proposal for a complaints policy is now posted on the Web binder: <http://karma.icoop.ca/tikiindex.php?page=Suggested+Revised+DRAFT+Complaints+Policy>

Jason Diceman, president of the board, replies:

The main challenge is ensuring that complaints are addressed by the best people able to do so in a reasonable amount of time, and that if a member is not satisfied by the result that further recourse be available.

Do you think members should start by making public complaints and then see who answers? Or should they seek and be directed to the appropriate person? What effects do you think either option could have? Can you suggest options? Who should decide what is appropriate to publicize: the GM, the board, a jury of members, an ombusperson, the editor of an issue of *The Chronicle*, or no one (i.e., no censorship at all)? What do you think would be most democratic, practical and constructive for our community? I'd like to hear your ideas to help inform our discussion.

You can post your comments in the Web binder: <http://karma.icoop.ca/Complaints+Policy-DRAFT>

Jamie Ker replies:

I think the board's intention is good, but the effort is counter-productive because complaints are so varied no policy can cover how to direct them to the "best" person. Glitches, as Terry calls them [see Editor's Note, below], will occur, probably with complaints that are ill-

spirited, but, again, a policy can't help if the spirit of the complaint or complainer is not guided by respect for community members, and by trust that the relevant authorities will do their best to respond appropriately.

The intent as reflected in the excerpt of the draft policy that was published in *The Chronicle* was not as you put it here. It was more directed at preventing people from causing distress. You write of the challenge of handling complaints properly, with the intent of preventing inefficiency. That's less odious but no more practical or sensible in my view.

I think the board's decision to shift reporting of work teams from board to manager is a very positive step. It will help with the complaints issue because the place to go with complaints is not usually to the board, which is concerned with strategy, planning, and high-level administration.

I certainly don't want the board to be out of range of complaints, just recognized as a body that delegates detail. If directing complaints to the proper source is such a challenge in a community as small and localized as ours, then something's amiss. But improving communication is the answer, not adopting a policy that is awkward to articulate and enforce. That would be counter-productive, as I said.

Jason Diceman replies:

Thanks for your input, James.

Without some kind of policy, we as a board are left to our own devices to make reactionary decisions every time. This can often take much discussion time and does not promote fair and equal treatment of each issue as it arises.

That said, trying to craft a policy that addresses every situation is impossible. The best we can do is to draft a policy that makes clear to the member the essential plans that are in place for addressing situations in general but that still leave us room to make a decision appropriate for a specific issue.

Jamie Ker replies:

My dot-mocracy dot would go to a communications team, reporting to the manager – not to a formal Complaints Policy. Empower the communications team with a process that includes showing complaints to our lawyer if there is room for legal error.

Editor's note:

I understand that deciding to formulate a complaints process was prompted, in part, by several controversial letters and opinion pieces that have been published in The Chronicle over the last year or two. However, it is worth noting that a healthy democratic culture depends on disagreements freely expressed, in a spirit of tolerance for each other's views.

We at The Chronicle ordinarily receive quite a number of letters. We believe the newsletter is a splendid forum through which to express member concerns as long as the communications do not attack individuals, are factually correct, and are not libelous. Periodically we do turn down letters that do not meet these criteria. If the letter is acceptable but controversial, our policy is to solicit responses to the letter (properly edited) in the same issue. I think this process – whose success rests on the intelligence of our editors and on the goodwill of all concerned – should not be legislated out of existence. In fact, it is probably impossible to make hard and fast rules about such a process. Let us indeed try to minimize the glitches. I'm not sure the detail of this document (in some places) will accomplish that, although this discussion we are having may well do so.

As for articles and opinion pieces, the same sort of give and take among the initiator(s), the editor, and the respondent(s) should take place. To work properly, the whole process requires mutual respect for each other and for the procedure. I do not think The Chronicle, which is committed to such a procedure, should be lumped together with actions such as posting notices in the store. The newsletter deserves an independent role in helping to air issues of general concern to members. And, as Melissa McDonald notes in her latest proposal, there is quite a difference between such issues and a "complaint," which implies something much more specific.

Report From the Board of Directors

By JASON DICEMAN

THE BOARD AND GENERAL MANAGER ARE NOT EVIL

There have been rumours floating around, claiming that the current board and general manager have plans to steal the equity of the co-op, turn it into a corporation, undermine democracy, or at the very least kill the heart in Karma through policy and structure change. While these claims are entertaining, they are far from true. We realize that our current work to clarify reporting relationships, implement policy, and refine governance structures may sound corporate and bureaucratic, but please understand that we are making these changes for practical purposes that are sensitive to Karma's unique culture and mission. Our only aim is to help Karma succeed at achieving the goals of the membership. We are here to support the revolution, not sell it off. And of course, the heart of Karma is the community, and this will exist with or without any upgraded governance system.

COMMITTEES TO WORKING GROUPS

The kick-up of dust around our decision to change some committees to working groups seems to be settling. I met with the newly named Orientation Team and they agreed that working with staff made sense for their needs, and that some written policy and operational guidelines would be useful for promoting consistent activities that are in line with what the membership wants. The Food Issues Working Group has made great headway in developing metrics to give practical application to Karma's Product Policy. The Web Team has expressed the view that they too are comfortable with becoming a working group, with a closer relationship to the general manager. We still have to figure out the future of the Promotions Committee, but I'm glad to see that member initiatives such as the Plant Exchange and Bike Day are being carried out.

CAUCUS RESULTS

You can read all about the caucus in Terry Fowler's article in this issue of *The Chronicle*. From the board's perspective, we were quite pleased to build a better understanding with the concerned members present and to hear support for the expanded use of policies to promote transparent and consistent decision-making. We also recognized that member consultation must be a priority for board decision-making. We look forward to sharing more detailed results and organizing further member meetings.

PARTICIPATORY POLICY GOVERNANCE

I have written a discussion paper entitled "Participatory Policy Governance," which is available at the check-out in the store and on the Web binder. This concise document is my interpretation of Karma's governance goals and current direction. Here are some of the paper's main ideas:

1. We inform members about various topics using posters, *The Chronicle*, the e-mail list, etc.
2. We gather input from members via dot-mocracy, surveys, and open meetings.
3. We craft policies based on recognized member preferences and publish the drafts on the Web binder and in print to solicit member feedback.
4. Approved policies are used by staff and members to direct their activities and to promote accountability to the membership.

There are still lots of questions and details to be resolved, but we will get there. We're not rushing to make any radical changes, as we continue to experiment and discuss our various options for improving governance at Karma.

I look forward to your comments on the Participatory Policy Governance discussion paper. Please note that the paper also appears on the Web binder at KarmaCoop.org/binder.

See you in the store!

Report From the General Manager

By GRAEME HUSSEY

The End of Another Fiscal Year

The end of May is the end of Karma's fiscal year, so we have been very busy with our annual audit, budget, and inventory. This past year has in many ways been a very successful one. We expect that Karma will have a small positive net income, the first one in three years. This success is due to the cooperation and strength of our 1,100 members.

Karma History Project

At the 2004 Annual General Meeting, members overwhelmingly supported the idea of better documenting Karma's history. We are in the process of developing a comprehensive history of Karma, to be published on our Web site and in print. If you would like to help us with this project, we would love to hear your Karma stories. Contact Heather at history@karmacoop.org to share your stories about Karma history.

Bike, TTC, Auto, or Your Own Two Feet?

In the grocery business, transportation is essential to members, suppliers, and staff. We are in the process of drafting a transportation plan for Karma. The purpose of this plan is to reduce the environmental impact of Karma transportation, improve health benefits, and to promote Karma through transportation initiatives. One initiative that we hope to pilot in the fall is a home grocery delivery service via bicycle. Do you have a transportation idea to share? Contact Ian at transportation@karmacoop.org to tell us your ideas.

Member Labour for Square Pegs

Do you find that regular member labour jobs don't work for you? Do you have a special talent that Karma doesn't know about? Let Karma staff know how you could better contribute to Karma while receiving member labour credit. Karma is a community, and we need people to contribute in many different forms.



Why Have a Business Plan?

The Work of the Business Planning Committee

By NINA BREGMAN

As a longtime Karma member but a newcomer to Karma governance, I am quickly learning how this little shop of ours keeps running year after year. Since I joined the co-op, in 1994, I have been shopping regularly, blindly appreciating Karma's continuing availability to me day after day, week after week. Last fall, when I decided to get more involved and joined the board of directors, I got a quick and dirty education about what goes on behind the scenes to keep this place on its feet.

Now, as board liaison to the Business Planning Committee, I am faced with important questions: How is Karma doing? What's keeping it afloat? What kind of external pressures are we facing and what can we anticipate for the future? Do we want to see any changes at Karma? How do we make sure that future initiatives represent members' views? Do we need a business plan? And, finally, have these questions been asked before?

Reinventing the Wheel

The answer is, yes, they have. Did you know that our library — contained in the members' room — is laden with stacks of organizational reviews, long-term planning summaries, and expansion committee reports? Every five years or so, motivated members work tirelessly to provide the co-op with guidance and direction on how to improve and perhaps expand the store. Important questions are raised, professional consultants are hired, comprehensive surveys are conducted, and meaningful debates are generated. A lot of time, energy, and money is spent, and yet, in the end, most recommendations get shelved, discussions are left unresolved, and the practice of not deciding guides our actions.

It seems to me that without some kind of strategic direction, our business solutions are too often of the Band-Aid variety. In the absence of members cooperatively creating a clear vision for Karma, issues arise and are resolved in an ad hoc manner. I am struggling with how to fulfill my role of facilitating and leading long-term planning for the co-op's ongoing viability and success. Change is all around us, inevitable and ongoing. Even maintaining the status quo requires good planning. The question: Where do we want to see Karma in the next five years?

Much talent and effort has gone into this kind of exploration before. I don't want to Business Planning Committee to start from scratch, or reinvent the wheel. Most important, I don't want to waste time developing suggestions in a vacuum, when we all own this co-op and need to support its advancement. The Business Planning Committee is willing to take on the challenge of gleaning the wisdom from past efforts and taking the pulse of current needs and feelings. I will write more, in future issues of *The Chronicle*, about the ways in which we plan to make this project more successful than past initiatives. In the meantime, we will be working hard to find out where you want Karma to go, what you want it to do, and how to make it happen. Watch for our recruitment drive (we need people to participate in focus groups), invitations to town hall meetings, updates on the Web binder, special editions of *The Chronicle*, surveys, and dot-mocracy questions.

We are interested in how members feel and what they think, and we'll be watching out for you — reading your letters, responding to e-mails, and engaging in conversations about the long-term vision of Karma. A business plan will only be as good as we make it — together.

Caucus on Karma's Governance

By TERRY FOWLER

"What do you like about Karma's decision-making processes? What don't you like?" asked facilitator Mohsen Ahmed at the start of the May 15 caucus on governing processes at the co-op. In all, 24 members attended.

In answer to Ahmed's question, board president Jason Diceman said that he was troubled that the opinions of all members about board decisions as well as about the general direction of the co-op were not being effectively solicited. Board member Amy Stein agreed. After the meeting she told *The Chronicle* that "The board may not be not receiving opinions from a broad range of Karma members, [and may instead be] hearing from fewer members multiple times through the various communication channels."

Harry Koster, Deborah Cherry, Anil Reddi, and Michelle Webb all remarked that, indeed, the boards of 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 have not sought feedback on a number of significant initiatives they have made over the last calendar year. Suzanne Molina said that once feedback is solicited, it is not clear what happens to it. "Member involvement has been devalued," she added. Cherry thought this was a significant problem, since members are owners with equity in the co-op.

'Participatory Policy Governance' at Karma

The meeting was held in part to address members' concerns about the transformation of several of Karma's committees into "working groups" reporting to the general manager, decisions taken by the board with respect to the Orientation, Property Management, and Food Issues committees last fall. These were moves that, in turn, were related to a "governance proposal" being considered by the board at that time. Webb told *The Chronicle* after the caucus that there had been "a year of planning for policy governance." When the process of converting the Promotions Committee to a working group was started in January, a number of members began to object to the direction the board was taking in this regard, includ-

ing Promotions Committee member Webb, who made a presentation to the board in March. As board member Christie Stephenson put it to *The Chronicle* after the caucus meeting, "We realized we'd better consult with members before moving ahead with any changes and take the opportunity to consider governance more broadly."

One of the documents on governance reorganization currently being discussed is "Participatory Policy Governance," prepared by Diceman this past winter, a version of which was handed out at the caucus. Right after a section listing the goals of reorganization is a section called Policy as Decision-making. "Policies," it reads, "are proven to promote clear, consistent, and transparent decision-making within not-for-profit organizations."

'Participatory Policy Governance' Defined

Policy Governance is a system developed by consultant John Carver to improve the efficacy of non-profit and co-op boards. The Institute on Governance (www.iog.ca) describes the system as follows: "The board governs through policies that establish organizational aims (ends), governance approach, and management limitations and define the board/CEO relationship. The CEO has broad freedom to determine the means that will be used to achieve organizational aims. The CEO reports to the full board. It does not use committees but may use task teams to assist the board in specific aspects of its work."

Diceman told *The Chronicle* that, despite his use of the term policy governance, "To quote the [above] description of Carver would be quite misleading, and I think the word 'CEO' alone would upset many members." He stressed that what he wrote draws on many other authors who advocate highly participatory governance. His document incorporates a number of features not contained in Carver's model. These features include member input through surveys, meetings, and dot-mocracy; transparent policy develop-

ment by using Karma's Web binder to publish policy drafts; and "using committees to support board work."

Member Labour is Part of Governance

Participants at the caucus had contrasting views on how to approach the whole subject of Karma's decision-making structure. For some, including several current board members, effective government seemed to be defined in terms of a well-defined policy-making process and excellent communication between decision-makers and the rest of the co-op's members. Diceman's concerns centred on what he called "the relationship of ownership to decision-making," a relationship that he felt was unclear. Stein suggested that the co-op might consider allowing members to vote by proxy at the AGM, that is, casting their vote on a resolution without attending the meeting.

Other members saw decision-making at Karma as something that was not limited to a small group but involved co-operative yet independent initiatives in all kinds of situations. These members stressed that Karma has been unusual — up to now at least — in that "member labour is part of the government," as former board member Koster put it.

"If members do the pricing" (putting pricing labels on groceries in the store), added Webb, "then that's governance. Belonging to Karma means being involved in its government. You're not just a consumer." This system worked, according to Koster and some others at the meeting, when the co-op was smaller, but not after it grew to its present size.

The Pros and Cons of Karma

Howard Kaplan asserted that not enough information was available about candidates for the board, which made intelligent choices among them difficult. He was similarly disenchanted with the dot-mocracy process recently introduced at Karma. He felt that not enough background is provided for each question for it to be properly evaluated.

On the positive side, board member John DeLuca Howard said that he was especially impressed with the trust among members at Karma in such common,

day-to-day activities as weighing and pricing our own food. Charlie Lior was critical of the fact that policies such as the Product Policy are not accompanied by a well-defined implementation process. Accordingly, members are not well informed on how effectively the policy is being carried out.

As the pros and cons of our governing system were discussed, a list of them was made on flip-chart paper and taped to the walls of the room. Participants were then asked to talk about what needed improving in the co-op's decision-making structure.

Debra Hayes, a current member and a manager in the early 1990s, urged Karma not to adopt outside models such as policy governance. She said, "Devolution of committees such as Food Issues and Orientation into working groups was inadvisable and it happened without member input."

Learning About Participatory Culture

Working membership is not being promoted by the new brochure, which literally invites new members to "avoid the commitment of a working member," said Hayes. "Everyone used to have to work three months before choosing between working and non-working status. That way they had an inkling of what Karma was about. I'm not even sure when this policy was changed."

Hayes felt that fewer working members meant less understanding of the co-op's participatory culture. Like Koster, she saw no advantage to the continuous expansion of Karma — she wanted to keep it a workable size and encourage the development of other, new co-ops.

Several participants were distressed about negative experiences at the store such as rude or unpleasant behaviour by staff and members (experienced when they were in the store as shoppers and as members doing their work shifts). Claude Miles cited some examples of the long-term unresponsiveness of staff — over the tenure of several managers — to member proposals (such as painting the floor). He said he even offered to provide the paint.

Ahmed and others suggested that such concerns,

though legitimate, were not really on the agenda. However, as Koster and Webb noted, the importance of members' work and their participation ethic are part of the definition of Karma's government. In the same vein, Diceman said he admired the number of initiatives made by autonomous groups within the co-op. In fact, several people agreed with Hayes that our committee structure was one of the best things about our governing system.

A Shift in the Agenda

The agenda had called for a division into breakout groups at about halfway through the meeting, but Karen Kaplan spoke up in favour of continuing to meet as one large group. At Ahmed's suggestion, instead of considering the revised draft of the board's policy governance model, the meeting in the last hour turned to a more general discussion of how "policy" should be defined, how and by whom policies should be developed at Karma, and how once made they should be communicated to members.

Howard Kaplan started off the last hour of the meeting with a short history of policy-making processes at Karma. He said policies concerning such matters as membership or products carried were customarily set in motion by the board, who would give a mandate to a standing or ad hoc committee to develop a draft policy. With the board's help, the draft would be presented to a meeting of members, refined, and then put to a vote at a general meeting, he said. In this process, the board's job was to ensure that the policy was implemented properly.

A distinction should be made, Kaplan said, between policies — broad statements that define member values — and "standard business practices" that cover smaller issues such as abuse of the trial-shop privilege. Both policies and practices are "attempts to deal with issues on better than an ad hoc basis, but only the former have traditionally been developed with intensive member involvement."

Bylaws, Policies, and Other Creatures

Karma's organizational structure was then the sub-

ject of a broad-ranging discussion. Andy Summers stated that the bylaws occupied the highest level of authority and that these were approved by members at the annual general meeting. Below that level came the board, but there was no "third level" of policy making. Molina said that *The Chronicle* has policies, but they were, she supposed, approved by the board. Cherry said that the bylaws state that committees are creatures of the board, which affirmed a point made earlier by Stein — that the board has the authority to create, modify, or disband them.

Stephenson wanted to know whether the board should have sought members' opinions before deciding to make the Food Issues Committee into a working group. Howard Kaplan and others answered that it would be appropriate to draft a policy on the issue of such conversions. But, he added, policies such as these should always be open to revision.

Hayes said the Food Issues and Orientation committees "have been two of the defining features of Karma, and represented the goals and visions of the members. Without these committees the board would lose touch with what members are thinking." In the past, she noted, staff sat on these committees.

'My Karma Includes Working'

Koster asked whether members should be delegating all their decisions to the board for a whole year or involving themselves in the day-to-day operations of the store. Answering his own question, he said that "I feel no connection with the first system. My Karma includes working."

Throughout the meeting, several board members said that it was unfortunate that many of Karma's policies had not been written down. Howard Kaplan pointed out that at least some of these unwritten policies were what he would call business practices. Nevertheless, some participants felt that oral traditions had made significant contributions to the co-op culture at Karma. In the first place, Koster remarked, just because a policy is written down does not mean it is observed. Molina made the point that, from her experience, oral communications are no more subjec-

tive or unreliable than written documents. In correspondence with *The Chronicle*, she said, "A balance between oral and written has always served Karma well and will continue to serve Karma, as long as people take responsibility to learn the oral traditions — by working in the store, attending meetings, etc." It's not that written documents are unnecessary, Molina said, "but as Deborah Cherry said at the caucus, knowing the culture at Karma is something that cannot be gleaned entirely from written documents — you need to orient yourself to it, or be oriented."

Cherry said at the caucus that she felt the current board had not been oriented properly.

Toward the end of the meeting, it was decided that the pros and cons of Karma's government listed on the flip chart should be typed out and forwarded to the board.

After the meeting, caucus participants told *The Chronicle* that having a chance to air their opinions and grievances had been a positive experience and had made them more optimistic about the co-op.

By the end of the meeting, there was a consensus that another caucus on Karma's decision-making structure should be held at the end of June, and that Howard Kaplan would be involved in organizing that meeting. This meeting is intended to start an 18-month-long process of clarifying a number of governance issues, leading to formal policy development on the matter and to resolutions on policy at the October 2006 AGM.

Editor's Note:

As The Chronicle went to press, board president Jason Diceman informed us that the June members' meeting was cancelled, because three board members would be away. "If many members feel that another open meeting to discuss governance would be constructive, we can help arrange it. . . . To be super honest, I thought the May caucus was constructive for building better understanding between the board and members present. But I did not feel that we [gained] useful guidance on how to do good governance. There are many resources available for co-ops interested in improving their governance (e.g., www.cgin.coop/indexpages/index_topic.asp). . . . I feel that this is where we should be focusing [the board's] limited volunteer time."

Parkdale/Roncie Car Pool

If you live in the Parkdale/Roncesvalles neighbourhood and would be interested in obtaining a ride to Karma, please call Amy & Michael at 416-588-2110 to discuss how we might work out an informal car pool.

Next Meeting of Karma's Board

**Thursday, July 14
6 – 9 pm**

**St. Alban's Boys' and Girls' Club
843 Palmerston Ave.**

**Note:
*This meeting is a combined meeting, serving as the June and July board meetings***



Kicking the Rice Habit

By ELIZABETH NYBERG

Spelt and kamut are good substitutes for Karmians who are allergic to wheat. Both spelt and kamut are grown in Canada.

But many Karma members seem to be stuck on one grain in particular: imported rice. Every week we scoop approximately 23 kilos of brown, short- and long-grain rice from the tall gravity-feed bins alone. We also buy pre-packaged bags of basmati and sushi rice. According to grocery manager James van Bolhuis (whose name rhymes with rice), Karma sells only a kilo or so of northern rye and spelt kernels in one week. The point is this: we stock only two kinds of Canadian whole wheat — bulgur and couscous — but we stock 11 kinds of whole rice. And except for our basmati rice (which comes from Texas), most of our rice comes from California.

Why do we buy so much rice? First, rice is recommended for people with wheat allergies and for celiacs, people with gluten intolerance who can't even eat kamut or spelt. Second, it's traditional in a lot of southern dishes. Finally, for northerners it's what we always have instead of potatoes, eh?

But I think we can eat less rice and more Canadian

grain with our dahl or beef and still thrive. Not to mention experience a giddy adventure.

Not A Water-Friendly Crop

What ticks me off is that since at least 1992 California has been drawing water from Arizona and Nevada because the state won't stay within its lawful 5.28-trillion litre share. The lawful amount is about one-317th of Lake Ontario per year! California is also the beneficiary of the All-American Canal, which diverts most of the Colorado River away from the Gulf of California to irrigate grains and vegetables grown conventionally in the southern California desert. The state is also planning a barricade along the canal, which will deprive 2,500 farmers in Mexico of seepage water.

This is where we come in. It takes about 634 litres of water to grow one kilo of rye, 594 for oats, 584 for wheat, 540 for buckwheat, 361 for corn, and 274 litres for millet — but about 1,364 litres to grow a kilo of rice. Just because we're hosers doesn't mean we should encourage Americans to use more water.

Rice Substitutes

If you must avoid wheat, consider trying Ethiopian teff, which is drought-tolerant, gluten-free, has 25 per cent more protein than brown rice, and is successfully grown in the Canadian prairies — although mostly for

forage. Celiacs can also eat quinoa and amaranth. Unfortunately, Canadian-grown teff, quinoa, and amaranth are still expensive. Quinoa matures late and succumbs to frost and insects, while harvesting tiny amaranth or teff seeds requires farmers to adapt their combines. So our suppliers import amaranth from Peru. Quinoa (“a big seller at Karma,” says van Bolhuis) comes from either Peru or Bolivia, both of which have low labour costs and shaky human-rights records.

But celiacs can also eat cornmeal, millet, and buckwheat, of which Canada grows plenty. Some celiacs may be able to try Canadian oats, too, although many celiacs have an oat allergy. Karma’s yellow whole-ground cornmeal costs less than our brown rice and has more iron. Buckwheat and millet both have more protein than brown rice, and millet has almost as much vitamin B6. One Karma member told me that she likes to use millet in tabouleh, a Middle Eastern salad usually made with bulgur.

If wheat, not gluten, bothers you, then have a go at barley or rye. Barley has 34 per cent more protein than rice and rye kernels 69 per cent more. And if you can eat wheat after all, bulgur has slightly more iron than brown rice and 17 per cent more protein, plus it cooks in just over half the time.

Cooking Grains the Easy Way

Speaking of time, van Bolhuis agrees that the best way to cook grains is in a pressure cooker. Canadian Tire at Davenport and Yonge has them starting at about \$40 (smaller stores such as College Maple Leaf Hardware usually want around \$75). But the expense is worth it. In a saucepan, buckwheat kasha takes 20-30 minutes to cook, but in a pressure cooker it takes only five to 10 minutes.

I like my cornmeal in corn bread best (see sidebar), but some Canadian grains are easy to nuke in a cereal bowl. Put in half a cup of dry grain, pour on 1 1/2 cups of water, shove her in the microwave for 10 to 15 minutes (couscous or bulgur) or 25 minutes (buckwheat or millet), set the power at 30 per cent, and go back to watching the Tim Hortons Briar. Chop the grain with a knife and fork if you want it fluffy.

Van Bolhuis is painfully attuned to what members

buy and don’t buy. He has to consider price points — the prices above which our consumption drops like a puck — and that’s one reason why our organic bulk rice is cheaper than, for example, our organic bulgur. (The U.S. rice yield in 2004 was about 6 tonnes per hectare, while Canada’s bulgur yield was 2.5 tonnes. That’s why rice is cheaper.)

Van Bolhuis tried buying Chinese millet once, when our supplier could no longer get the type of millet Karma members had been buying for years. “It was a disaster. Some people brought it back saying, ‘This is awful, it doesn’t cook properly, it’s your fault, give us our money back.’ We lost a bunch of money. So I spent months trying to find alternate sources of millet.”

Put on yer maple leaf apron: our millet is now Canadian.

RECIPE

Hoser Corn Bread

1 glass loaf pan, 13 cm by 23 cm or larger
1 c. cornmeal
1 c. buckwheat flour (or grind rolled oats in a blender to make oat flour)
1 tbsp. baking powder (a celiac neighbour of mine uses El Peto gluten-free baking powder)
1/4 c. oil plus enough to grease the pan
1 c. milk or soy milk
1 egg (or 1 tsp. egg replacer plus 2 tbsp. milk)
1/3 c. maple syrup

1. Oil the pan.
2. In a large bowl, mix the cornmeal, flour, and baking powder.
3. In a small bowl, mix the oil, milk, egg, and maple syrup.
4. Pour wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and mix.
5. Scrape the batter into the loaf pan.
6. Microwave method: nuke for 18 minutes at 60 per cent power. Let it stand for 10 minutes before removing from the pan.
7. Oven method: Place in preheated toaster oven at 350 degrees F and bake for 30 minutes.

Book Review

Review by LEAH LAKSHMI PIEPZNA-SAMARASINHA

Urban Wilds: Gardeners' Stories of the Struggle for Land and Justice

Edited by Cleo Woelfle-Erskine

AK Press, \$15.95 US (www.akpress.com)

The second edition of *Urban Wilds* is an inspiring collection of writings about urban gardening, packed with info about the different ways in which people are resisting corporate control of food and taking back the earth to feed themselves.

I was totally rocked by this book and cannot gush about it enough. It is full of beautiful stories about ordinary people feeding themselves and creating beauty and community in the middle of locked-down cities. Readers will find out about city-dwelling Cubans and their almost total reliance on intensive urban organic food gardens (with chickens and goats penned on roofs and pumpkins on the sidewalk). Readers will also learn about residents in Oakland who broke up their sidewalks with sledgehammers to plant fruit trees in the middle of the night, and about decades-old food and herb gardens in low-income neighbourhoods in The Bronx, Detroit, Philadelphia, Boston, Seattle, and many other places.

There is lots of how-to information in this book that is really inspiring. You can learn how to do everything from urban beekeeping to do-it-yourself (DIY) backyard grey-water systems to catch and reuse rainwater and water from washing and bathing. There are even instructions on how to grow potatoes in a shopping cart on your apartment balcony! And there is none of the vagueness around details that sometimes mars DIY projects. All the instructions — for example, how to create a mini-wetland to process grey water in an old bathtub filled with cattails and other marsh plants — are both precise and written in understandable language. There's even fascinating information about bioremediation, which uses plants, mushrooms, and compost to clean up areas contaminated by lead and toxic dumping.

Urban Wilds also contains valuable conversations about how gentrification is challenging and sometimes destroying many of these projects. Many participants note that the creation of gardens has made formerly abandoned neighbourhoods more attractive — so much so that developers move in to erect parking lots where gardens once were. There's lots of discussion about the valuable strategies folks are using to resist displacement and yuppiefication.

Urban Wilds will remind readers that you don't have to leave the city to go back to the land — there's plenty of land right here, waiting to be unearthed, as those people in Oakland showed us.

In 2002, FoodShare established a 7,000-sq.-ft. urban market garden, the Sunshine Garden, on the grounds of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at 1000 Queen Street West in Toronto. It's still going strong in 2005, and CAMH expansion plans include a new location for the Sunshine Garden.



Meet Your Board of Directors

THEY'VE BEEN AT IT SINCE LAST FALL'S AGM, BUT SOME PEOPLE STILL DON'T SEEM TO KNOW WHO THEY ARE. KARMIANS, MEET YOUR BOARD:

Andy Summers

I've been a Karma member for five years, and since November 2003 I've been vice-president of the board. I've been a health-care worker for 22 years, 10 of them in Canada. I've been the regional vice-president of the Ontario Nurses' Association, a union representing 51,000 RNs and allied health-care workers, since early 2004, and also serve as vice-president responsible for Human Rights and Equity. A proponent of organic food, animal and human rights, environmental friendliness, social compassion, public health, and labour rights, I believe in active participation and exercising control through activism. I'm a proponent and believer in the cooperative movement, as it allows me to exercise control over the services I need and prevent the homogenization and corporatization of my neighbourhood. I'm busy and never spend enough time with my family.

Melissa McDonald

A new board member serving a one-year term and the board's Chronicle Committee liaison, this is my first time serving on a board. I am a relative newcomer to Toronto, leaving my neighbourhood ONFC buying club and the cozy greenspace of the nation's capital just four years ago. Though I still yearn for green Ottawa (and my even greener roots in Nova Scotia), I was quite pleased to have discovered in Karma a suitable replacement for my buying club. I joined Karma in 2003 because of its cooperative nature and the environmental principles for which it stands. Active in various environmental and social justice groups in Ottawa while working as a physiotherapist, travelling, and studying law, I am currently working as a lawyer with Ontario's Ministry of the Environment.

John DeLuca Howard

I have been a member of Karma Co-op for about 11 years. I did not join, but married into the family, so to speak. My partner, Marina, and I now have three boys, Rowan, 9, Martin, 5, and Crispin, 2, who are the terror of the candy section every time we shop. An educational assistant in special education, I work for the Toronto District School Board and as a relief residential counsellor for Community Living Toronto, and served a term on the executive of the union there (CUPE local 2191) as part-time/relief representative. I'm an information officer for CUPE local 4400 (TDSB support staff) for our current work-to-rule action, and I was also a "cluster organizer" during our last strike action. I have an interest in woodworking, and I hope someday to make and sell custom furniture, with a focus on cabinets, from a basement workshop I am setting up.

Jason Diceman

I joined Karma in January 2004. I'm an internationally educated Web and participatory democracy geek who likes to play music. As founder of Co-op Tools, I spend much of my time helping progressive organizations improve their group communications through dot-mocracy and Web binder services. My partner and I are proud to support alternatives to the capitalist state and we look forward to the coming cooperative revolution.

Nina Bregman

Having been both a working and non-working member of the co-op since 1994 (I used to work cash), I am now the liaison to the Business Planning Committee. I work full-time as a clinical social worker, providing therapy to children and families with mental health issues, and part-time as a yoga instructor. I have travelled widely around Canada, Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the U.S., and Central America. I decided to serve on the board of Karma in the hopes of making a meaningful contribution to a worthy organization, and to help combat my capitalism-fatigue.

Amy Stein

I have been a member of Karma for nearly four years, with my husband and two young children. I work part-time as a financial consultant to social enterprises (often non-profits with earned revenue, like Karma), helping clients with business planning and cash flow. Previously I worked in investment banking and the electricity sector. I have an MBA from the Wharton School, and an MA (economics) and BA (environmental studies and economics) from the University of Toronto.

Christie Stephenson

I've been a Karma working member since 2002, and did clean up and inventory before joining the board and serving on the finance/AGM committees. Outside Karma, I'm a research analyst at the socially responsible investment research firm Jantzi Research and have had work published in Corporate Governance Review, Corporate Knights magazine, the book 50 Best Ethical Stocks for Canadians, and Report on Business Magazine. My previous board experience includes a credit union, a union local, a real estate company, a travel agency, two university senates, and several non-profit organizations. I love the fact that Karma is a co-op, socially responsible, and a positive and empowering alternative to the food industry.

Todd Parsons

Currently working on my doctoral thesis in mathematical ecology at the University of Toronto, I also teach mathematics there. I provide research and consulting services to diverse groups that have included the North Toronto Green Community and Pro Bono Law Ontario, and I sit on the Business Planning Committee at Karma Food Co-op. I've campaigned for the conservation of Ontario's wilderness with Earthroots and was a co-founder of BikeShare, Toronto's (yellow) bike-lending library. I am interested in the places where local economic renewal, social justice, and ecological sustainability meet to create vibrant communities.

Grif Cunningham

I was born into a peach and asparagus farm family on the Niagara Peninsula. We helped pioneer the cooperative movement among fruit farmers and other farmers. As a student at the University of Toronto, I became an active member and employee of the Campus Co-operative Residence. I spent 10 years in Tanzania (1961–1971) promoting co-op-style nation-building with Julius Nyerere. Back home in Canada, I became a faculty member at York University and a founding member of Karma (#99!). My teaching at York University had a sensible connection to co-op-style African and Canadian nation building.



Keep Canadian Food Inspection System Independent, Say Scientists

OTTAWA—CANADIAN NEWSWIRE TELBEC

Canada risks losing its ability to adopt independent testing and the inspection capacity it needs to protect the health and safety of Canadians if Bill C-27 — the Canadian Food Inspection Agency Act — is passed, say prominent Canadian and U.S. scientists. The scientists addressed the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Agriculture in May.

Dr. Lester Friedlander, former USDA veterinarian and meat inspector, says, "rules and regulations are broken every day in the United States because the government is not enforcing them, allowing, for example, animal protein to be fed back to cattle." He has seen this occur in the U.S. and believes it is a growing problem in Canada.

Warning Canadians against adopting U.S. inspection rules and practices, Dr. Friedlander says, "The public must insist that the food safety regulatory function be separated from the governmental agency promoting corporate agribusiness. We need a genuine, separate department of consumer protection."

Dr. Gerard Lambert warns against relying on other countries' testing. "If food is not tested properly it will contaminate our food chain very rapidly. Testing after the fact is too late." He added, "Bill C-27 is about harmonizing with U.S. regulations. It is not about protecting the health of Canadians."

Bill C-27 would allow the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to accept testing and certification results from other countries. The government has said this legislation will make Canada's food and agriculture regulatory system more similar to the American system. However, the U.S. system currently permits irradiation of meat, which is not allowed in Canada. It has also failed to meet World Health Organization guidelines for preventing BSE, and relies on voluntary compliance when companies are found in violation of its regulations. Furthermore, U.S. whistle-blower scientists who act in the public interest are not protected.

"This government's 'Smart Regulation' legislative renewal project, which includes Bill C-27, is what I describe as the corporatization of knowledge — instituting private interests ahead of the public good," says Dr. Shiv Chopra, who along with colleagues Dr. Margaret Haydon and Dr. Gerard Lambert blew the whistle on conflicts of interests in Health Canada's drug approval process.

Events Listings

Everdale Open House: Home Alive In 2005!

Saturday, June 25, 10 am – 5 pm
Hillsburgh, Ontario

Come see the integrated photo-voltaic and wind systems in action. Drink from the rain water catchment system and witness the greywater system digesting waste. Elements of the permaculture ecological landscape, house design, construction materials, energy production, appliance selection, and more will be discussed with a descriptive tour and lots of opportunity for your questions. Ongoing tours of the Home Alive! and Everdale Farm.

Fee: General Admission to Everdale

To register: www.everdale.org or (519) 855-4859

Medicinal Herbs: Identification and Preparation

Sunday, June 26, 10 am – 5 pm
Hillsburgh, Ontario

With Janice Canning, a registered herbalist with the Ontario Herbalists Association. Learn to identify herbs for medicine, food, and magic according to the Western herbal tradition. In the afternoon, make remedies and tinctures or salves.

Fee: \$55

To register: www.everdale.org or (519) 855-4859

Meeting the Challenge of Farming in the Urban Shadow: Farmland Preservation Conference at the University of Guelph

Tuesday, June 28

Registration fees are \$75 for Ontario Farmland Trust members and \$125 for non-members. The fee includes lunch and dinner. With the financial support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation we are able to offer financial assistance to individuals who find the cost of attending this event prohibitive.

To register: www.farmland.uoguelph.ca or Ontario Farmland Trust, Richards Building, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1 or (519) 824-4120 ext. 52686; (519) 824-5730

The Buzz on Bees

Saturday, July 23, 10 am – 5 pm
Hillsburgh, Ontario

With local beekeeper extraordinaire Jay Mowat. This is an introductory seminar on bees and beekeeping. Learn the roles and responsibilities of the queen, drones, house bees, and foragers. Take a look at a year in the life of a hive: how the colony gets through a winter, builds up in the spring, and prepares for summer foraging. Get suited up in veils and gloves and take a tour of the actual hive to look for eggs, larva, nectar, honey, and pollen.

Fee: \$55

To register: www.everdale.org or (519) 855-4859

Everdale Red Skies Music Festival

Saturday, August 13, noon – midnight

A day of music, organic food, mini-workshops, tours, and fun for the whole family. As well as music on the main stage we'll have activities, crafts, and games for the kids and events that will bring out the kid in all of us. So bring out a chair and some blankets or better yet come camp for the weekend.

Fee: TBA

Check our Web site for details as they develop: www.everdale.org, or call (519) 855-4859



Mission Statement

Our aim is to:

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

Contact Your Co-op — AND GET INVOLVED!

Food Issues Working Group: foodissues@karmacoop.org

Events and Promotions Committee: promotions@karmacoop.org

Member Labour Committee: memberlabour@karmacoop.org

Web Team: web@karmacoop.org

Chronicle Committee: chronicle@karmacoop.org

Board of Directors: board@karmacoop.org

Member labour coordinator: Sara Pulins 416-534-1240 or mlc@karmacoop.org

Hours of Operation

Monday 11am – 7pm

Tuesday 11am – 9pm

Wednesday 11am – 9pm

Thursday 11am – 9pm

Friday 10am – 9pm

Saturday 10am – 6pm

Sunday 11am – 5pm

Staff List

General Manager: GRAEME HUSSEY

Grocery Manager: JAMES

Produce Manager: MICHAEL

Health & Beauty Manager: SARA PULINS

Shift Managers: PAUL, LISA

Bookkeeper: VICTORIA

Membership Secretary: MARILOU

Member Labour Coordinator: SARA PULINS

Clerks: CHRISTINE, MIKE, GREG, KEVIN