



Hampden Park Co-op Mission: The corporation exists to serve its member stockholders and the surrounding community, promoting wholesome, healthful and ecologically sound food consumption, and permitting member involvement both in the procurement of that product and the operation of the corporation.

Hampden Park Co-op News

April/May 2007

Volume 18 Issue 2

In this issue

	Page
Cooperating for a Living	1
Have You Tried...?	8
Mayfest	5
Membership Information	2
Membership News	2
<i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> : Review	3
The Siltation Situation	6
Under My Hat	10
Welcome, New Members!	3
Worms at Work in Your Kitchen	9

Co-op Hours:

Monday–Friday 9:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.
 Saturday 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.
 Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

The co-op will be closed on Sunday, April 8, and Monday, May 28.

Board Meetings:

The Hampden Park Co-op Board of Directors meets monthly. See its bulletin board in the entryway for meeting dates and locations.

Newsletter Deadline:

The deadline for the June/July issue is May 3. If you wish to write an article for the newsletter, contact Naomi Jackson at naomijx@juno.com, or leave a note in the Membership Coordinator envelope in the entryway.

HPC Web site:

<http://www.hampdenparkcoop.com/>

Cooperating for a Living: How HPC keeps the shelves stocked

—by Anne Holzman, HPC member

If we wanted to understand the business of Hampden Park Co-op down to the last detail, we'd need a window into the brain of General Manager Helen DuFault.

With no such window, though, the store has relied for many years on DuFault's steady presence, overseeing employees, welcoming shoppers, keeping a mental list of customer requests, and constantly checking on everything from soup to nuts.

Helen works with two assistant managers and a membership coordinator, plus 20 or more part-time employees. "There's a lot more going on behind the scenes than people probably realize," Helen said recently.

Managing a co-op grocery requires attention to detail plus an eye on long-range planning, like any other business. Where it departs from business as usual, though, is in the participation of members, who treat the store as if they own the place—for better or for worse—and also contribute as volunteers.

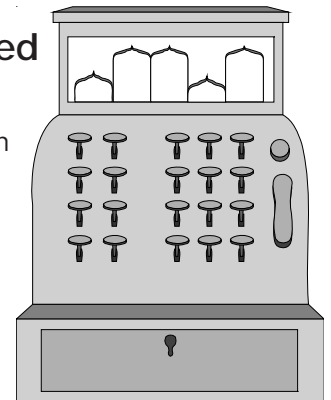
The details of grocery have grown on Helen over three decades of participation in Hampden Park Co-op. She's been involved since the 1970s, when the young co-op was one of many in the Twin Cities. (It is now one of very few still relying on member-volunteers.)

The manager's role has changed along with the business over the years, she said, but "I'm still ordering some of the things I did then."

The politics have calmed down a bit, though. Take the phrase "white sugar," for example. "This was a word you didn't even mention in the co-op" in the early days, she said; she also remembers the shunning of Cheerios™.

Food choices "became a big, big issue," although compared to some of the other area co-ops, this one (then known as St. Anthony Park Foods and located across the street from the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus) was "a bit more sheltered," Helen said.

For those interested in the Twin Cities era of "co-op wars," Craig Cox's *Storefront Revolution: Food Co-ops and the Counterculture* (Rutgers University Press, 1994) is still available from the St. Paul Public Library. Among other tales, it recounts that SAP Foods stayed in the communist-warehouse camp after some others had joined a rival faction, then became disillusioned by some bomb-throwing associated with the communists, and switched suppliers.



(cont. on p. 4)

Membership News

—by Naomi Jackson, Membership Coordinator

This is an exciting time for our co-op, as we experience a growth spurt. It's also a challenging time, as staff decides how best to handle this new growth. One of the effects of this growth is that current volunteers are finding that the shift they usually sign up for is already filled, while hopeful volunteers are waiting patiently for a chance to go through orientation.

Here are the changes that we've made that will affect you as a volunteer. Some are temporary, intended to slow down the influx of volunteers for a short period of time. Other changes are aimed at streamlining and expanding the role of volunteers in our day-to-day operations.

- 1) We will have one orientation per month, through the end of May.
- 2) There will be a set number of openings for volunteers at the 21% and 28% levels. All new volunteers will start at the 15% level. When there is an opening at the higher discount levels, volunteers may move to another level on a first-come, first-served basis.
- 3) All changes in discount levels will be made through me to avoid confusion.
- 4) If you haven't volunteered for more than four months, when you return you will need to start at 15% and work your way up. (This does not apply to people who have informed us that they will be away for a specific period of time and plan to return on a specified date.)
- 5) Shifts have been added to the volunteer calendars. There are early morning cook's helper opportunities every weekday; and weekday afternoons now regularly include three shifts. Remember that you need to come at the time specified on the calendar, unless you have cleared any changes with that day's coordinator.
- 6) We are setting up a rotating schedule for food demonstrations and heavy-duty cleaning. Talk to me if you are interested in either of those. Thanks for your patience as we assess the needs of the store and fine-tune our volunteer program. If you have questions or concerns, you can talk to me; to our general manager, Helen DuFault; or to one of our assistant managers, Kathy Vaughan and Marcia Hanson.

Note: You can dedicate yourself to a specific shift(s) each month, and you will be automatically signed up for that shift. Just contact Naomi Jackson. Also, if you have a block of free time, call the co-op and see if there have been any last-minute cancellations or no-shows. There is a sign-up sheet in the kitchen if you are willing to be called last-minute to fill a shift.

Membership Information

Membership in Hampden Park Co-op involves a one-time purchase of one share of stock per household. The cost of a share is \$30. Stockholders can be eligible for dividends at the end of each fiscal year. You may sell back your stock share if you move away.

Volunteer Discounts

One or two non-senior adults in a household may earn:

- 15% discount for 3 hrs./month
- 21% discount for 6 hrs./month
- 28% discount for 12 hrs./month

Seniors

All seniors receive a 15% discount on the first Wednesday of the month. Senior members always receive a 15% discount. Your membership includes you and your spouse or significant other. If you are 65+ and would like a senior card, talk to any coordinator. Senior working members start with a 15% base, plus time worked.

Food Shelf Contributions

Any shopper, member or non-member, receives a 28% discount on food shelf items. When you get to the checkout counter, let the cashier know that you have food shelf purchases.

Non-discountable Items

Certain items in the store are non-discountable. These include milk (quart and larger), eggs, non-organic frozen orange juice, baby food, brewed coffee, HPC hot soups, gift certificates, and some sale items. There is no discount on these items because the mark-up on them is intentionally low.



Welcome, New Members!***The Omnivore's Dilemma:
A Natural History of Four Meals*
by Michael Pollan**

—A Book Review by Katie Dahl, HPC Member

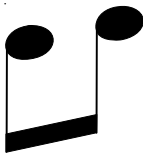
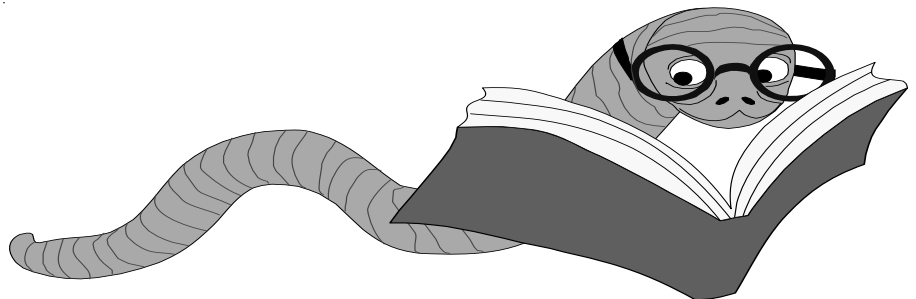
Are you more likely to choose a vegetable labeled “certified organic” or “locally grown”? Would you pay a little extra for grass-fed beef? Would you risk eating a mushroom from the wild or play it safe in favor of a mushroom from the produce aisle? If you expect Michael Pollan's book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, to tell you how you should answer these questions, you'll surely be disappointed. But if you're looking for an author who addresses the omnivore's dilemma with a critical yet honest eye, the book is well worth the read.

Pollan's approach is relatively simple—he traces various aspects of the human's role in the food chain. He looks at the corn industry, revealing the enormous amounts of corn fed to livestock and processed into high fructose corn syrup. Pollan compares the life and slaughterhouse death of a steer on a factory farm to that of a steer on a family-owned, sustainable farm. And he evaluates the cost (environmental, social, and financial) of feeding his family ultra-processed, cheap, fast food versus big business, grocery-store-labeled organic. I felt as if Michael Pollan was inside my brain as he weighed the pros and cons of each situation.

Pollan's book also elaborates on his 2004 article in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled “Our National Eating Disorder.” If you've ever watched daytime television or sat in a food court for an hour, you've likely seen this disorder in action. It's ironic, in fact. On the one hand, our nation is obsessed with fad diets and celebrity workout plans. On the other hand, we're in too much of a hurry to prepare healthful meals at home, so we succumb to the ease of calorie-packed burgers and fries. Pollan notes that unlike most other countries around the world, the United States lacks a staple diet or cultural food tradition. “Instead of relying on the accumulated wisdom of a cuisine...we rely on expert opinion, advertising, government food pyramids, and diet books, and we place our faith in science to sort out for us what culture once did...” (p. 303).

The final section of Pollan's book describes his own journey of growing, hunting, foraging, and preparing a meal. He surrounds himself with experts—those who have hunted wild boars and gathered chanterelles for years—and he realizes how much knowledge and time are needed to be not only successful but also safe in providing food for his family. Pollan's writing is witty and creative at times and disturbing and blunt at others, but it gets at the heart of the dilemmas omnivores face.

[*The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin Press: 2006) is currently available in hardcover in local bookstores. A co-op book discussion is planned for late summer or early autumn, after the book is available in paperback.]



Looking for a few good Web sites that can keep you up-to-date on food and environmental issues? Try these:

Grist: Environmental News & Commentary

<<http://www.grist.org/>>

The Newsletter of the Science and Environmental Health Network

<<http://www.sehn.org>>

Union of Concerned Scientists

<<http://www.ucsusa.org>>

Organic Consumers Association:

<<http://www.organicconsumers.org/>>

(*Cooperating* cont. from p. 1)

The motivations of customers and members have shifted noticeably in the intervening decades. Nowadays, Helen said, "Rather than the idealism in the '60s and '70s, it's more like 'How can I get good food at a reasonable price?'"

Daily details occupying her attention revolve largely around keeping the shelves stocked with items that customers will buy. "For some orders, we use an inventory management system called ScanGenius™. For others, we have lists of items for ordering; for others we order as needed," she said. She and the other managers juggle many needs in their heads. "A lot of it is just observation," she said: noticing which items sell out faster and listening to customers' requests.

She admits some of this is "gut feeling—what has sold and what hasn't sold." She watches for empty spots on shelves, then keeps mental notes as to whether shoppers are asking for the missing items. "People are not afraid to ask for something!" Other staff and volunteers also report customer requests, and the comments come in via notes and phone calls, as well.

Helen and her assistant managers split the store's departments among them (two examples of departments are vitamins and tea), and each keeps track of the orders within her areas. "The paper turnover is tremendous," Helen said. "In one day I can put in five orders or more," each listing multiple items.

And they arrive in a wide variety of cycles. There are items reordered only for the December holidays; on the other end of the scale, produce gets delivered six days a week. She said the number of companies from which HPC orders runs into the hundreds, but there's no finite list.

The list is long partly because the co-op tries to sell products from local vendors, people who make or grow things themselves and are often tiny businesses. "I would rather buy from a local guy who's going fishing in

Alaska for salmon" than get it from a national distributor, she said. The co-op's entire stock of meat comes from nearby producers, located in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

When space does open up on a shelf, the managers have an opportunity to place something they've seen in a catalog or on a warehouse visit, or to accept a product from a farmer or artisan who happened to stop by the store looking for just such a niche. Among their other duties, the managers do a lot of tasting to determine whether they think a locally produced food will please HPC shoppers.

Any prepared food that the co-op sells does have to be made in a state-certified kitchen, to comply with health standards.

Once a product is ordered, it might arrive within hours or take as long as 10 days, Helen said, and the managers track those cycles "mainly in our heads." When it arrives, it's checked in by staff, stashed in the storeroom, and eventually placed out on the shelves, often by volunteers.

The co-op's commitment to sustaining a volunteer program means that cancellations can make a manager's day more difficult. "If a volunteer doesn't come, we do our best," she said. Trained volunteers also cut and package cheese, operate the cash registers, and perform other vital functions during all hours of the store's operations.

While staff guides volunteers, they also try to meet social as well as nutritional needs for shoppers. "We're a smaller, little bit more intimate store," Helen said, and that

means some folks come in almost daily for a chat along with their soup or their box of cereal. That can be a good thing, and at the same time it can add to the challenge of a busy day: "We sort of feel like mothers here," she said.

Stepping back from all these details when she can, Helen considers the long-range priorities for the co-op. When a major purchase must be made, such as a new refrigerator, she gathers estimates and tries to predict its financial impact. She reports to the co-op board, which is a body of elected members, and to the annual meeting.

She said she feels good about the co-op's slow and steady growth over the years. "We're not growing so fast that we can't handle our growth," she said. There is always pressure toward wider aisles and more selection, but, in the limited space available, "we cannot provide that," she said.

Helen said she's fond of a quote from Garrison Keillor: "If you can't find it at Ralph's [Pretty Good Grocery], you can probably get along without it." That guides her own philosophy: "I think we have the basics."

Given changes in the neighborhood due to development and new transportation options, how viable is a small co-op grocery store? "If this community wants it, then they need to continue to support us with their shopping," Helen said.

"The dedicated membership is going to keep us viable."

Mayfest Plant Sale

May 11, 12, & 13, 2007

Vegetables, Annuals, & Perennials
Herbs & Hanging Baskets

Mayfest Mini-fair

Saturday, May 12, 2007

After you've chosen your plants, wander around the parking lot and enjoy the music, snack on free food samples, browse the booths, and chat with our board of directors.

Volunteer for Mayfest!

Sign up in the co-op entryway to help with:

- Tending plants
- Setting up/taking down tents and tables
- Running a children's booth
- Serving food samples
- Lending tables or tents for the event
- Cashiering
- Providing live music

Local Vendors & Craftspeople:

Booth space is available at the Mini-fair. It is free to Hampden Park Co-op members and vendors; otherwise there is a space fee of \$15. A limited number of tables is available; bring your own chairs. If you would like booth space, contact Helen DuFault or Naomi Jackson at the co-op.

The Siltation Situation, BMPs, and You (or, Why It's Bad to Hose Down Your Driveway)

—by Kathy Ahlers, HPC Member

A few months ago, Naomi Jackson did a great job of explaining why chemicals and excess nutrients are bad for lakes and streams (August/September 2006). Another major surface-water pollutant getting lots of national regulatory attention in the last few years is one that at first glance seems harmless: silt. If you value the natural world and enjoy seeing fish, ducks, and turtles, then you need to be concerned about silt and siltation. This is a big issue on which you can have a direct personal impact.

What is silt?

Many of us first heard about silt in conjunction with the Mississippi River Delta. Mineral particles called silt, carried by flowing water, gradually settle out and fill up the waterway; eventually, barges no longer can pass, inconveniencing humans. But silt—in size, between clay particles (smaller) and sand grains (bigger)—is more than an inconvenience. Sediments are causing widespread damage to aquatic ecosystems throughout the country, including in Minnesota.

Siltation is a form of so-called “nonpoint source” pollution because there is no single source for it, as there often is for an industrial discharge, for example. Sediments come from many locations. That is why each individual has a part in preventing water-quality problems associated with silt, and why the federal government suggests that cities educate citizens about ways to reduce the siltation crisis.

Where does silt come from?

Much of the silt in Minnesota was produced by glaciers. Mile-deep oceans of ice once sat on top of this area, moving slowly southward while scraping off and pushing along everything in their path, until the climate became warmer and the glaciers began to shrink. As they melted, the glaciers left behind deposits of gravel, sand, boulders, and finely ground rock dust—clay and silt—in large mixed-up hills of glacial till. Lakes and rivers that formed from the glacial melt slowly carried this till downstream. Plants and animals moved into the area and adapted to surface-water environments (streams, lakes, rivers, and wetlands), including the slow, natural silt deposition that occurred in them.

Fast-forward to the post-World-War-II time period. Record housing development, involving bulldozing of established prairie, shrubs and trees, left barren areas vulnerable to washouts. More and more land was also put into plowed agricultural use. Besides being ugly, washouts began a siltation crisis that continues and now threatens the underpinning of the web of life.

In springtime, snowmelt and rainfalls wash salt, road sand, and soil into nearby bodies of water via storm sewers. Nature has always carried particles of minerals into waterways; but humans have accelerated this process with paved surfaces that gather and transport quantities of silty runoff water quickly to lakes and streams during storms. As street-drain stencils sometimes tell us, the storm sewer basically “drains to the river (or lake).”

The trouble with silt

But why would silt, which seems to be harmless, inert mineral particles, be bad for surface waters? Let's pretend you are an aquatic insect larva (incidentally, a nice morsel of food for a fish) hanging onto a piece of submerged vegetation. You eat microscopic organisms gathered from the passing water. All of a sudden, there's a crack of thunder and a downpour begins. Runoff from a nearby parking lot funnels into a culvert and begins to course into the stream that you call home. Soon, what used to be a trickling brook is a raging torrent.

Help prevent siltation! As a concerned citizen, you can:

- ◆ prevent silt from getting into storm drains by sweeping—not hosing—driveways.
- ◆ sweep up deposits of gravel or soil in the gutter of the street in front of your house or apartment building, and place them on soil where they will not wash away.
- ◆ wash cars when they are parked on grass, not on driveways, or at least where water will not wash into the street.
- ◆ protect streams from channelization, damming, and erosion through social activism.
- ◆ restore native lakeshore and riparian, or streamside, vegetation (prevents erosion).
- ◆ consider a permeable pavement surface when replacing a driveway.
- ◆ talk with local officials to keep up with new Best Management Practices (BMPs).
- ◆ talk with relatives, neighbors, and friends about this issue.

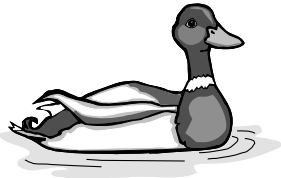
Resources:

- < <http://www.cleanwatermn.org/> >
- < <http://cgee.hamline.edu/watershed/> >
- < www.metrocouncil.org/Environment/Watershed/bmp/CH3_STReTerWetPond.pdf >
- < www.epa.gov/305b/2000report/factsheet.pdf >

St. Anthony Park's Kasota Pond Cleanup

Saturday, April 21, 2007
9:00 am – 12:00 noon

- ◆ Gloves, litter pickers, trash bags, and refreshments provided.
- ◆ Volunteers of all ages welcome! Aquatic exploration for children!
- ◆ Please join in the annual spring cleaning to remove the trash in the Kasota Ponds area. RSVP to the SAPCC office or just show up. Come to the parking lot west off Hwy 280 on the south side of Kasota Avenue, just beyond the RR tracks.
- ◆ For questions or to sign up, please contact Nina at 651-649-5992 or <nina@sapcc.org>.



Merriam Park Living at Home/Block Nurse Program to host Clean-a-thon

- ◆ Teams of volunteers will clean the homes of elderly residents of Merriam Park on April 28, 2007, at no cost to the senior. Cleaning services will be paid for through pledges from community members.
- ◆ If you wish to pledge, you may write a tax-deductible check to "Merriam Park Living at Home/Block Nurse Program" and send it to:
Merriam Park Living at Home/
Block Nurse Program
1895 Laurel Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55104-5938
- ◆ For more information, call Sharon Overbaugh at 651-645-5088 or Diane Raff at the Block Nurse Office, 651-646-2301.
- ◆ This non-profit organization has been serving seniors in the community for over 14 years, providing nurses and volunteers to help seniors continue living in their own homes.

(Siltation cont. from p. 6)

The roiling, silty water tears at tenuously rooted aquatic plants; and the bottom of the food chain—your microscopic food, you and other tiny insects, other small animals, and plants—washes away. In a one-two punch, what few organisms remain are buried under the sediment that settles out when the storm subsides. Often, their populations do not have time to recover between storms; and besides, most of the plants that provide oxygen and shelter are gone. With the foundation ripped away, the web of life collapses, and the stream essentially is dead.

Over time, with few small critters to eat, the larger animals—frogs, turtles, fish, and so on—die or migrate away. As habitats decrease, so do populations of animals both in the bodies of water and in surrounding areas that depend on them. With increased urbanization (including more pavement and fewer absorbent vegetated surfaces), volumes of runoff have grown tremendously, leading to rapid degradation of streams and lakes.

Sediments also cause heightened levels of suspended solids (turbidity) in streamwater that, by decreasing light penetration through the water, stunt growth of "good" aquatic plants and encourage overgrowth of algae.

What can be done about siltation?

Federal agencies have moved to protect the nation's waterways with new regulations and voluntary programs. We can't stop development, but we can stop runoff. Some current buzzwords are "No Net Runoff," which means that the measured runoff after developing a piece of land can be no more than the water that was running off the land naturally before development. Developers also must prevent runoff during the construction process.

Whenever you see landscape fabric staked in droopy fences around road or building construction sites, it is to prevent silt from washing away. This is just one of the best management practices, or "BMPs" that are being

implemented nationwide. Other controls focus on slowing runoff water in holding ponds (such as wetlands, or human-constructed NURP [Nationwide Urban Runoff Program] ponds) so that sediments have a chance to settle out before the water drains into the river.

[Kathy Ahlers has studied water-quality issues for five years or so, taking classes at the University of Minnesota; training as a wetland, stream, and lake water-quality volunteer; and attending Rice Creek Watershed District and WaterShed Partners meetings from time to time.]

BUY THE CHANGE!

Check out the Co-op's online Community Board and Forum:

- ◆ Visit the co-op Web site: <<http://www.hampdenparkcoop.com/>>
- ◆ Click on the "Community Board" link.
- ◆ Post goods or services for sale.
- ◆ FREE items can be posted FREE.
- ◆ 70% of the posting fees come back to the co-op!
- ◆ Share your thoughts in the discussion forum.
- ◆ Search co-op listings, or the entire **Buy the Change** network.

Have You Tried...? The HPC Aisles Revealed

—by Katharine Holden, HPC Member

Hampden Park Co-op is packed with products you may not have tried before. Here's the squawk on a few of them:

Amore® Hot Pepper Paste and Amore® Italian Garlic Paste

These concentrated squeezable tube products are invaluable when you are making hors-d'oeuvres for a crowd. Get yourself some good crackers, spread them out on a chop plate, and squeeze out a large dot of the hot pepper or Italian garlic paste on each cracker. The hot pepper paste (peppers, olive oil, soya oil, salt) can add oomph to stews, soups, and spaghetti sauces. The garlic paste (garlic, olive oil, salt) is fantastic on homemade pizza. Or for a quick side dish: Boil pasta until al dente, drain, add a dash of olive oil and a large squeeze of the Amore® garlic paste, and mix lightly.

A. Monteux Orange Flower Water and Rose Flower Water

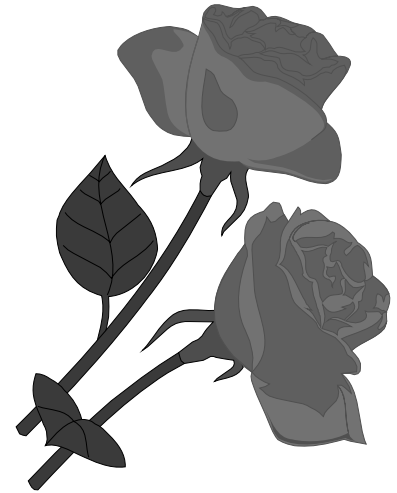
These tiny bottles of distilled flower water made in France have several uses. A drop or two will add aroma to cocktails such as the gin fizz. Or dab it around the rim of iced tea glasses just before you serve. Recipes for elegant tea cookies call for orange flower water, as does the recipe for authentic French chocolate mousse. For a subtle and affordable perfume, dab rose flower water on the pressure points of your neck and between your breasts. To use as a skin tonic, fill a spray bottle with mineral water and two dashes of flower water.

Cap-M-Quik™ capsule filler machine and empty capsules

Herbal supplements are expensive. You may save money by buying herbs in bulk or growing your own, and then filling your own capsules. The Cap-M-Quik™ is a nifty little plastic tray. It allows you to fill 50 capsules at once. You will find HPC's stock of Cap-M-Quik™ machines and capsules located on the shelves near the baking powder. For more information and a demo of the filling machine use, visit <www.cap-m-quik.com>.

Meat

Okay, let's talk meatballs. My personal recipe has a short ingredient list: Ground meat and spices. Have you ever looked at the ingredient list on a package of frozen meatballs at the big-box supermarket? Chances are it's a longer list than mine. Some supermarket brands contain MSG, a flavor enhancer to which many people are sensitive, as well as wheat, corn flour, whey, starches, and other filler products you would never dream of mixing into your own recipe for meatballs. In HPC's meat case, you'll find packages of meatballs that are more like what you would make at home—no fillers. HPC has a good selection of meats you won't find at your local supermarket, including organic beef and buffalo roasts. Beef is always available. The availability of other meats varies (last week I bought elk steaks). Most HPC meat is frozen, so you'll have to plan ahead.



Flower Water Room Deodorizer

- 1 bottle of A. Monteux Orange or Rose Flower Water
- 1 liter of Perrier Mineral Water
- 1 liter-sized spray bottle

Pour the bottle of flower water into the spray bottle. Slowly fill the spray bottle with Perrier. Use the straw-like part attached to the nozzle to stir the ingredients thoroughly. Screw the nozzle cap on the bottle. Drink the leftover Perrier so it doesn't go to waste. You can spray this room deodorizer directly into the air to "freshen" your living room. Lightly spray over dog beds and inside stinky sneakers and gym bags.

[Katharine Holden wants a job as a marketing communications manager, a man who does not live with his mother, an acne-free chin, and world peace (in that order).]



Vermiculture Resources:

Making a worm bin:

<<http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/worms/neighborhood/index.html>>

Supplier of vermicomposting supplies, including redworms:

<<http://www.wormwoman.com/>>

Research and information on the effects of invasive earthworms in Minnesota:

<<http://www.greatlakeswormwatch.org/>>

Worms Eat My Garbage, by Mary Appelhof. This is the definitive book on setting up and maintaining a vermicomposting system.

Quick Fact: How much fossil fuel is in your food?

An average of over seven calories of fossil fuel is burned up for every calorie of energy we get from our food. This means that the average 2000-calorie daily diet requires approximately two quarts of crude oil to produce, process, package, and transport.

The processing of just one pound of coffee requires over 8,000 calories of fossil-fuel energy—the equivalent energy found in nearly 30 cubic feet of natural gas, or around two and a half pounds of coal.

To reduce the amount of fossil fuels consumed and greenhouse gases generated by the foods you eat, buy locally grown organic products, choose foods with minimal packaging, and avoid highly processed foods.

source: <<http://www.organicconsumers.org/btc/fossilfuel060326.cfm>>

Worms at work in your kitchen!

—by Dan Hernández, HPC Member

Composting is a great way to supply your garden or house plants with nutrient-rich soil and reduce your organic food waste. However, if you live in an apartment or want to compost during the winter here in Minnesota, your options are often limited. Vermicomposting, composting using worms, is a great way to compost your organic waste that takes up little space and, because you can do it indoors, provides a year-round option in cold climates. Vermicomposting is also fun and easy to maintain—good worm bins are odor- and insect-free even with thousands of worms in them!

Setting up a worm bin is easy. All you need is a container with holes for ventilation, shredded newspaper for bedding, water, and worms. There are many commercially manufactured worm bins available, but you can make your own for a fraction of the cost. I made my worm bin out of a 10-gallon plastic storage container. There are lots of great “how-to” Web sites with step-by-step instructions for making a worm bin. The best site I have found (and most kid-friendly) is listed in the sidebar at left.

The most difficult step is getting the worms. Not just any type of worms will do. Most earthworm species you would find in your backyard burrow deeply into the soil, and they do not do well in the conditions of a worm bin. The only worms recommended are called redworms (*Eisenia fetida*). These worms are great composters because they eat large amounts of organic matter, live comfortably at high densities, and thrive at room temperature. There are no year-round local distributors of redworms, but you can order them online (see resources in sidebar), and have them in about a week. You can feed your worms anything you would normally compost (no meat or dairy). One thousand worms can consume ½ pound of food or more per day. The only maintenance of the bin is to keep moisture conditions constant and add food regularly. Other than that, the worms do all the work!

One little-known fact about worms is that all earthworm species in Minnesota are invasive. There are no native earthworm species in the state (including redworms), and there has been a lot of research on the effects of invasive earthworms on Minnesota forests. Invasive earthworms consume the “duff” layer (the thick layer of leaves and organic matter on the forest floor). The duff layer provides necessary habitat for many understory plant and insect species, and removal of this layer has drastically changed many of Minnesota’s forest ecosystems.

This brings up some concern about what to do with redworms and compost from a worm bin. While redworms are not able to survive a Minnesota winter, they do survive as far north as Iowa. Therefore, experts recommend that if you are going to use the compost from a worm bin in your garden you should freeze it for at least a week (longer is better) before putting it in your garden. This could be accomplished by saving your compost and storing it in a container outside during the winter before you use it the following spring. Another safe alternative is to use the compost for your house plants and not put it outside.

There are numerous Web sites and books on vermicomposting. I have listed just a few of them in the sidebar. A quick Internet search will provide many more sources of information, including activities for kids and descriptions of how to build more sophisticated worm bins.

