

# More than food

YAHARA RIVER  
GROCERY COOPERATIVE  
229 East Main Street • Stoughton, WI  
608-877-0947 • [www.yaharagrocery.coop](http://www.yaharagrocery.coop)



Fall 2008

## YRGC's new business plan

YRGC's new business and marketing plan is moving the store forward toward success. Based on member feedback, survey results and market research, the plan was developed in consultation with many grocery and cooperative experts. It looks at the issues that YRGC faces and lessons learned.

The plan, which can be downloaded from [www.yaharagrocery.coop](http://www.yaharagrocery.coop), focuses on the following objectives:

**Product mix** – Increase inventory with locally produced items, expand conventional grocery, produce and meat departments by 20%; expand “grab-and-go” deli items; insist upon total quality from the produce department.

**Pricing strategy** – Maintain a core selection of staple products at competitive prices; maintain sustainable margins on organic produce, specialty, bulk, and deli departments.

**Operations** – Hire a general manager to train with interim manager from Willy Street Co-op; develop a variable margin analysis of products to produce a 35% gross margin; recruit more volunteers to work at the store.

*(continued on page 2)*

## STORE HOURS

Mon. to Fri. – 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Sat. and Sun. – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Call 608-877-0947 to place a grocery order and for delivery.

## Contribute to keep Co-op on new path to success

The Yahara River Grocery Cooperative has been on a hard and bumpy road for several months. The Co-op's financial situation is not good, and the time for action is now.

A lot of great things have been happening since the October 28 membership meeting, and, with your help, we are steering YRGC on a new path to success. Willy Street Co-op has loaned us the expertise of Wynston Estis to serve as interim general manager.

Wynston is developing and implementing operational systems in the store. She is listening to you and ordering the products you request as much as she can. Staff is being trained on new procedures and better customer service.

YRGC developed a business and marketing plan that incorporates many of your ideas. Wynston is implementing this plan in the store now. We applied for a \$60,000 loan with Dane County Planning and Development and are hopeful that it will be approved.

That loan comes with a requirement of matching funds to be raised by YRGC and its members. And we need to do that quickly! The store is in need of an immediate infusion of cash to pay vendors, purchase product and maintain those critical relationships. If we cannot put product on the shelves, we cannot increase our sales volume. Your support will help ensure that we offer quality products at the best price and that we are able to offer the products that you want.

We are kicking off the Yahara River Grocery Co-op capital campaign – to keep the store on the road to success for our

community. The contributions and support you already have given to YRGC are valued and appreciated. We are asking everyone to step up once more to make this new plan a success. If 400 members contributed \$100, we'd be well on our way – imagine what we could do if every member contributed! That may not be possible for everyone, especially in these hard economic times.

### Ways to contribute

**Contribute as much as you comfortably can.** Use the form on page 3 and mail or bring your contribution to the store today.

**Invest in your store with a certificate of investment.** Certificates are available for an investment of \$200 or higher. There are many options to choose from – select a 3-, 4-, 5- or 6-year certificate and select your simple interest rate between 0% and 3%. The form is available in the store or online at [www.yaharagrocery.coop](http://www.yaharagrocery.coop).

**Cap Up the next time you shop.** The Cap Up program will temporarily replace SNAP. When you check out, the cashier will ask if you'd like to “Cap Up.” When you say yes, the amount is rounded up to the next dollar or to any amount that you wish to contribute. The difference will go to the YRGC capital campaign. Every little bit will help!

**Purchase holiday gift cards.** This helps generate cash flow, and you will have a nice holiday gift for a friend or family member.

**Create a house account.** Start a house account for you and your family by paying in advance for your grocery needs. Draw down on your account as needed.

## **October 28 membership meeting a testament to YRGC members who believe in the store**

More than 100 YRGC members attended a special meeting October 28, to discuss the store's finances and review the new business and marketing plan.

Although the Co-op is going through a difficult time, it was heartening to see the interested and involved reactions of the members who could attend and to read the emails and speak with those who could not.

At the meeting, YRGC Board members reviewed the financial situation and gave a history of how the store reached its current situation. The new business plan was

reviewed, and members heard that YRGC is applying for a loan with Dane County Planning and Development.

It was announced that a new capital campaign would start soon and several members contributed \$1,500 on the spot! It's a great start and there's a lot more work to be done to make the store a success for Stoughton. Several members and volunteers spoke about what YRGC means to them and its importance to the community.

For the final hour of the meeting, members brainstormed ideas for the five main facets of the business plan. Working in small groups, everyone shared some great ideas, many of which have been incorporated into the business plan or will be considered for future store growth.

The meeting was a testament to YRGC members who believe in the need for the store and want it to succeed. Together, the members, staff and Board can make that dream a reality!

### **Business plan** (cont. from page 1)

**Raise capital** – Increase membership to at least 1,200 members; promote contributions and certificates of investment; continue to sponsor fundraising and community events.

**Shopping experience** – Create a customer experience through product and vendor education and exceptional service; emphasize staff training in product knowledge and cordial customer relations.

**Community presence** – Maintain commitment to community events and sponsorships; continue community initiatives such as SNAP (Stoughton Non-Profit Assistance Program).

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#### **HOLIDAY HOURS**

Thanksgiving Day – Closed  
Christmas Eve – 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Christmas Day – Closed  
New Year's Day – Closed

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#### **More than food**

is published by the Yahara River Grocery Cooperative, 229 East Main Street, Stoughton, WI 53589

#### **INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER**

Wynston Estis

#### **YRGC BOARD OFFICERS**

Myra Hajny, President  
Norma Sampson, Vice President  
Warren Kmiec, Treasurer  
Deb Piper, Secretary  
Marlene Widra, Member-at-Large  
Homer Howard, Senior Liaison

### **DEAR MEMBERSHIP:**

I am writing to introduce myself and to inform you of recent changes at the Yahara River Grocery Cooperative (YRGC) which, with your support, will establish this organization again as a cornerstone in your community.

My name is Wynston Estis, and I am an employee of Willy Street Grocery Co-op currently serving as the Interim General Manager for YRGC. My primary goal is to increase sales at YRGC. In my 17 years working for Willy Street, I have been involved in every area of sales and operations of a grocery co-op. This includes many years focused on product sales management, such as buying, responding to customer requests, inventory, merchandising and promotions. Additionally, I have experience overseeing Willy Street's IT department and register system as well as directing the maintenance staff and contracts.

Aside from my personal experience with nearly every aspect of running a successful grocery co-op, I have the backing of all of the resources at Willy Street Co-op. That support ranges from the use of marketing, cooperative services, human resources teams and other staff expertise.

We will be drawing on Willy Street staff to come down and assist us with a full-scale reorganization on November 20. These changes will help us increase ease for shopping and thereby increase sales. Also in the works is a new pricing strategy in which we will adjust nearly all of our prices on products to ensure they are priced competitively. This is the first phase of improving our store and is the most direct way to impress upon our community that we are ready to serve your needs and earn your shopping dollar.

I cannot overstate the importance of the community during this time of transformation. For those of you who are our loyal customers, we hope you continue to choose Yahara River and appreciate our upcoming improvements. For those who haven't been back in awhile, we hope you'll give us another chance to be your neighborhood grocery store.

Understanding that the economy is difficult at this time, I know every dollar counts during this transition for all of us. We hope, as you do your holiday grocery shopping, that you will stop in to see the changes we are making and choose to spend your grocery dollar with us. We look forward to establishing ourselves for a long and successful future in your neighborhood.

In cooperation,  
Wynston Estis  
Yahara River Grocery Cooperative Interim General Manager

# A new look – inside and out – for Yahara River Grocery Cooperative!

Because of the generous support of several members, other cooperatives, and the community in general, there have been some changes inside and out at YRGC.

## Storefront gets new look Nov. 4

Painting the storefront signifies change is underway at YRGC. A big thank you to Fred Hundt and his Sensible Painting crew who worked election day to transform the Co-op's exterior. And thank you, Judy Bills, for

letting us know your husband was willing to donate his business' services to paint the Co-op. Also, thank you to Amy Ketterer and Mary McNaughton for picking the perfect colors.

This is a job that the Board has been wanting to do since the store opened. In fact, Board members Myra and Jon Hajny, Deb Piper and Norma Sampson donated the stain.

## Meanwhile inside the store

Since interim store manager Wynston Estis began managing YRGC at the beginning of November, there have been some changes, many of them not obvious inside the store: auditing prices and product selection systems, meeting vendors, and getting acquainted with the staff and community.

Starting November 20, however, the changes will be more obvious. A team of experts from Willy Street Cooperative will work with Wynston, YRGC staff and volunteers to re-merchandise the store. The store will be open November 20, but might be a little chaotic! After the 20th, shoppers will encounter what is essentially a new store.

Product prices will change, being reduced to reflect what is in line with other grocery stores. Some new products that customers have requested will be added. Plus, product locations will change so that it will be easier to find items in the store.

Another change at the Co-op is that the number of member-volunteers has grown to 12 to 14 people.

YRGC Board, staff and members are hopeful that these changes – inside and out – will turn things around for the Co-op. The Board has heard the suggestions from members about what should be done to improve the Co-op and is making many of those changes. We hope that anyone who has shopped at the Co-op in the past and has been disappointed will give the store another chance.

## Lessons learned during the first 8 months of operations

YRGC's membership has raised good questions about the store's current financial situation and how it got there.

We have put together a list of some of those questions that have been commonly asked. You can find a complete list on the web at [www.yaharagrocery.coop](http://www.yaharagrocery.coop). Here is a sample of what you will find:

### Q: Why wasn't the membership notified about the financial situation sooner?

A: The Board was optimistic that the financial condition would improve (in fact, we still are) and didn't want to panic the membership unnecessarily. We tried to communicate that sales were not meeting operating expenses in past emails and in the newsletter that was mailed in the summer, and encouraged members to shop at the co-op weekly, invest money, tell friends, volunteer and

buy gift cards. We were hopeful to a fault that things would turn around soon.

### Q: What took the Board so long to act to replace the manager?

A: The General Manager was released 7-1/2 months after YRGC opened. The Board depends on its manager for the daily operations of the store and although it was clear the co-op was losing money every week, we believed the manager was doing his best to reduce costs. When we really understood that many of the problems were due to management, the Board began to meet weekly and provided instore oversight. It finally became apparent that, although the manager's skills were suited to opening the Co-op, the management style was not what was needed to keep YRGC open. Those actions should have taken place sooner than they did, and the Board recognizes that.

## CONTRIBUTE to the success of *your* grocery.

### YES, I would like to help keep YRGC on the path to success.

I understand that my contribution will count toward matching funds for the Dane County Planning and Development loan and will be used to pay vendors and purchase product.

Name (first, last) *Please print clearly on the line above.*

Address

City

State

Zip

Phone

Email

I am enclosing:

\$50       \$100

\$\_\_\_\_\_ (What I can comfortably contribute at this time.)

All amounts will help! Also, consider a Certificate of Investment for contributions of \$200 or more. A form is available at the store or can be downloaded at [www.yaharagrocery.com](http://www.yaharagrocery.com).

Make your check payable to YRGC and mail to 229 E. Main Street, Stoughton, WI 53589 or drop it by the store today.



## SAVE THE DATE:

### 2nd annual membership meeting set for Jan. 27

6 to 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Stoughton Area Senior Center  
248 W. Main Street, Stoughton WI

Mark your calendar for YRGC's 2nd annual membership meeting. Held in accordance with the organization's bylaws, members will hold an election and vote on proposed changes to the bylaws and proposed membership benefits.

- **Brief business meeting.** Members will hear reports from the president and treasurer and review proposed revisions to the bylaws and membership benefits.
- **Election of Board of Directors in accordance with bylaws.**

### Get involved

If you are interested in running for a position on the Board or have an agenda item for the business meeting, contact Laura Anderson at 873-5074 or email [membership@yaharagrocery.coop](mailto:membership@yaharagrocery.coop) before January 13.

Watch for updates and proposed changes to the bylaws in upcoming weekly email updates and instore notices.

## Tis the season: Holiday happenings at *your* grocery

### Get your turkey before they're all gobbled up!

YRGC has a limited number of all-natural, grain-fed turkeys for Thanksgiving. Bell & Evans turkeys are free to roam and raised on a grain-based diet with no antibiotics or hormones. The USDA confirms them LITE, with 55% less fat and 25% fewer calories than other raw turkeys.

The turkeys are frozen and weigh between 12–16 pounds. YRGC's holiday price is \$2.19 per pound. Reserve your Thanksgiving turkey with a \$10 deposit.

### Yahara River Variety Show Nov. 22

A special radio-theatre variety show returns to the Opera House Saturday, November 22. Hosted by Sid Boersma, this holiday-themed show will feature comedy skits and local performers such as Stoughton High School JazzCor, the Stoughton Chamber Singers, the Lamp Post Bell Ringers and many more.

A fundraiser for both YRGC and the Opera House, tickets are \$10 and on sale at the Co-op and Opera House box office.

### Warm up at Dickens of a Run & Walk

Sunday, December 7, YRGC is sponsoring the Dickens of a Run & Walk as part of the Stoughton Chamber of Commerce Victorian Holiday Weekend. Bring your family and your pet for a 5K run/walk or a 2K fun run/walk that starts at 10 a.m. in the Evergreen State Bank parking lot. Join the Victorian festivities and dress up in holiday gear!

Prizes will be awarded for the top three finishers in the 5K and for Best Dressed.

Proceeds from the Dickens of a Run & Walk will benefit both YRGC and the Victorian Holiday Weekend Fund. Here are some fun ways that you can help:

- Raise at least \$50 in pledges and your entry fee is waived.
- Raise at least \$200 in pledges and you'll qualify to win a prize. The top three pledge-getters will win one of these great prize packages: Night on the Town, Golf Outing, or Stoughton Shopping Spree.
- Don't be a scrooge. If it's too cold for you to take the run/walk, challenge or make a pledge contribution to someone who will!

Register online at [www.active.com](http://www.active.com) or visit the YRGC web site or store to get your entry and pledge forms. The early registration deadline is Monday, November 24, but you can also enter the morning of the race.

We need volunteers the morning of the race. If you can help from about 9 a.m. to noon, please email [volunteer@yaharagrocery.coop](mailto:volunteer@yaharagrocery.coop).

### Father Christmas visits Dec. 7

With a mix of stories, poems, myths and facts, Father Christmas will amuse, educate and leave you with a refreshing view of our holiday traditions. Stop by YRGC at 3 p.m., Sunday, December 7, to visit with Father Christmas who will be dressed in colorful 16th century garb and a fur-lined forest green cloak.

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Contribute  
to the success of *your* grocery!