

Co-op Food Stores 2008 Sustainability Report

Summary

Staff from all parts of the company participated in the Co-op's sustainability efforts during 2008. Judging by progress made during the year, many – if not most – staff are actively contributing to the Co-op's environmental bottom line – and are doing so with enthusiasm and optimism. With this solid foundation, we created a 5-year vision for Co-op sustainability and established a set of goals to help us achieve our vision.

Electricity usage remained constant in 2008; fuel usage appears to have increased. We worked to improve our fuel tracking methods in 2008 so that records from 2009 forward will allow us to better assess where fuel usage is changing and why. A comprehensive energy audit of the food stores in 2009 will provide a good launch of that effort. As compared to other grocery retailers, the energy performance of our stores is quite high; it appears that we could easily pursue the Energy Star designation for all three stores in 2009.

Co-op staff made great progress diverting materials from the waste stream during 2008. We offered new recycling opportunities to our shoppers and established recycling service at all Co-op work locations. Trash production declined as a result of higher recycling rates and increased food waste diversion.

Through substantial outreach efforts – to staff, shoppers, and the community – we established ourselves as a proactive institution poised to provide strong environmental leadership in our community over the coming years.

Energy

Electricity Usage

Total electricity use for the company exceeded 3 million kWh¹ in 2008. As a company, electricity usage did not change significantly from 2007.

- Hanover store usage has remained *unchanged* for three years in a row.
- Lebanon store usage *declined* for the second year, decreasing 5.3 percent from 2007.
- Usage at the Service Center *increased* about 5.3 percent.
- Usage at Chiron Springs *increased* 13 percent.²

Location	2008 Usage (kWh)	Cost	Notes
Lebanon	1,515,300	\$207,313.28	Primary meter only; 364 days
Hanover	1,221,920	\$166,505.54	Primary meter only; 363 days
Commissary	191,223	\$ 28,925.00	Estimated
Chiron Springs	93,658	\$ 14,249.12	Ground floor spaces only
Service Center	59,622	\$ 9,080.87	362 days
Community Market	27,286	\$ 3,468.37	Through April only
Total	3,109,009		

Fuel Usage

Fuel usage for buildings and cooking increased approximately 11 percent over 2007.

Location	2008 Usage (MBTUs)	Notes
Lebanon	4.20	Store and annex
Hanover	2.30	
Commissary	Incomplete data	
Chiron Springs	.06	
Service Center	.31	
Community Market	Incomplete data	
Total	6.87	

Energy Efficiency Investments

The Co-op solicited proposals for comprehensive energy audits of the two food stores in August. Chris Hebb of Dynamic Integrations Corporation, Thetford, VT was selected in October. He will begin work in January 2009. Funds were budgeted for both the audit and follow-through during 2009.

Energy efficiency investments in the design of the new Community Market included:

- A geothermal heating and cooling system that is hooked into the refrigeration and domestic hot water system to share waste heat
- Skylights and automatic dimming of main floor fluorescent lights

¹ The total electricity use reported here does not include data from the Hanover parking lot lights or the Lebanon store annex. The Community Market opened in December; the electricity usage had not yet been reported at the time these numbers were tabulated.

² All electricity comparisons are based on 365-day totals (estimated) for each location.

Materials

Solid Waste Stream - Trash

Normal Co-op trash generation declined in 2008. Municipal solid waste volume for the stores was:

- 222 tons in *Hanover* (down from 243 tons in 2007)
- 213 tons in *Lebanon* (down from 240 tons in 2007)

Both stores showed a downward trend in trash production across the year. The Lebanon Store's weekly average fell below 4 tons in August and remained there. In Hanover, the weekly average dropped below 4 tons in September and remained there. In general, the drop in solid waste generation mirrored an increase in food waste diversion for human and agricultural use.

The *Commissary* sent approximately 1000 cubic yards of trash to the landfill in 2008 (down from 2007). Diversion of food waste saved about 26 tons of material from the Commissary's dumpster. The *Service Center* generated about 140 cubic yards of trash in 2008, down from 260 cubic yards or less in 2007. Trash production at *Chiron Springs* is not tracked.

The demolition of the *Community Market* on Lyme Rd contributed a significant volume of trash to the Lebanon landfill. Although a few items like trash barrels, chairs, and shelving could be reused within the company and most metal was salvaged for recycling, all other materials were landfilled. Oil-contaminated soil was removed from the site for remediation.

Custodial staff became involved in waste reduction efforts during 2008. Most notably, Custodian Chip Blodgett took the initiative to reduce *trash bag* waste in the stores. After attending the Sustainability portion of new staff orientation, Chip was empowered to take a close look at his work and do what he could to improve both the environmental and financial bottom lines of the company. With the help of the Sustainability Coordinator, he inventoried trash bin sizes throughout the Hanover store and worked to identify bags of appropriate size and weight to match the trash generation at each bin. By the end of the year, Chip succeeded in sizing-down the trash bags in almost all bins throughout the Hanover store, including recycling bins. He also worked with Bulk staff to reuse *all* bulk granola and nut bags. The bulk program had been underway since 2007, but Chip worked to maximize its potential. The savings to the environment because of these custodial changes are significant, as are the savings to our financial bottom line. Cost savings per bag under the new system run from 75-100 percent. Chip's enthusiasm carried over to his work in the Lebanon Store so that, by year-end, changes were undertaken there as well.

Other notable achievements:

- The Hanover Break Room went disposables-free in the fall. This effort was spear-headed by the Front End department.
- Acquired durable, washable tablecloths for the Merchandising department to use for events.
- Joined United Natural Foods' reusable totes program in May. The Co-op's participation saves about 500 cardboard boxes per month.
- Initiated a reusable totes program with local produce growers.

Solid Waste Stream - Food

Donations to Willing Hands increased in 2008. Willing Hands estimates that they received:

- 64.4 tons, Hanover (27 percent increase over 2007)
- 67.9 tons, Lebanon (14 percent increase over 2007)

The Hanover Meat Department began giving its leftover daily ground meat to Willing Hands in 2008. Most of that product benefited WIC recipients through the Women's Health Resource Center in Lebanon.

In addition to their work with Willing Hands, the Produce Departments of both stores began diverting waste for pig feed in June. In September, a policy was written to require tracking of the waste. Each department saved, on average, 2.5 tons of trash from the landfill per month by helping local farmers feed their livestock. Each Prepared Foods Department contributed an additional 50-225 pounds per month in day-old bagels for the animals.

The Commissary continued to send non-meat, pre-consumer food scraps to Raycin Farm in Wilder. The farmers pick up the food scraps at the Commissary on a daily basis and use it for feed. Their partnership reduces the amount of solid waste in the Commissary's dumpster by about 30 percent.

To further reduce organic waste in the Co-op trash stream, the Sustainability Coordinator explored options for composting food and floral waste. She attended the 2nd annual Vermont Organics Recycling Summit on April 1st. Out of that conference, an Upper Valley working group was founded. The Co-op provided leadership in organizing a first meeting of the group in June and assisted with the group's first project – providing on-line information to waste generators seeking to divert their waste toward agricultural use and away from the landfill.

Solid Waste Stream - Recycling

Improvements were made to collection bins and signage throughout the company. New bins were purchased for the Service Center, the Lebanon Café, Lebanon PFD, and the Hanover lobby.

In Lebanon's PFD department, new bins have made it possible to sort all 5 streams of recyclable materials within their workspace. Staff created a mini-game to track recycling; during the fourth quarter they saved more than 225 pounds of material from the landfill.

Cardboard continues to be the Coop's most voluminous recycling item. It is collected in bales at the Hanover store and recycled through Associated Grocers. Volume is not tracked in Hanover. In Lebanon, Northeast Waste made about 82 pickups of cardboard from the 40-yard compactor on site. If, on average, the compactor were 95 percent full at the time of pickup, then about 3,116 cubic yards were recycled. The Commissary recycled about 1000 cubic yards. Service Center staff walk their cardboard waste to the Hanover Store baler in a grocery cart several times per week for recycling. Total volume is unknown. Cardboard is recycled at Chiron Springs in combination with other businesses in the complex.

For materials other than cardboard, pick-up service was contracted *for the first time* at the Service Center in April, Chiron Springs in June, and the Community Market in December.

The Commissary increased its recycling contract in order to accommodate the staff's improved diversion rate of recyclable materials from the trash.

General office recyclables (glass, plastic 1, plastic 2, mixed paper, and tin/aluminum) are *collected* at all locations. Glass is *picked up* at the Hanover and Lebanon stores only. The Service Center, Chiron Springs, and Community Market transport their glass recycling to the stores as needed. The Commissary does not produce enough glass waste to make recycling cost-effective. The market for recycled glass is very weak in our region, making it the most expensive item to recycle. Therefore, we have limited glass pickup to the food stores only.

The Co-op expanded recycling opportunities for its shoppers in 2008.

- In May, the Service Desks began collecting *compact fluorescent light bulbs*. Bulbs are recycled by Complete Recycling Solutions in Fall River, Massachusetts. The Hanover Service Desk shipped 27 bulbs in September (Lebanon mailed its first shipment in January 2009). The Co-op also recycled 185 of its own fluorescent bulbs in 2008.
- The Front Ends began collecting *EcoPak containers* from shoppers in May.
- The Service Center began collecting mixed *beverage containers at the pumps* mid-year.
- In December a *#5 plastic* recycling program was announced. Collection will be offered on a monthly basis beginning in January 2009. The first shipment of internal recyclables was sent in December. The new program saves much of the Co-op's dairy and cheese departments' packaging from being buried in the Lebanon landfill.
- We continued to offer recycling for *rechargeable batteries and cell phones*.

The Service Center continued to recycle automotive materials. They recycled 446 tires, 24,320 lb of oil, 980 lb of oil filters, 1518 lb of antifreeze and 148 car batteries.³ The Service Center also recycles scrap metal.

Packaging

Work continued in 2008 to reduce the volume of Co-op-generated packaging materials sent out from the stores. Rigid PFD/re-pack packaging and shopping bags were areas of focus.

In rigid packaging:

- Chose a new EcoPak alternative for the PFD departments. EcoPak continues to be the default package. The alternative package is a lightweight, recycled paper take-out box. It is the only take-out container to be certified by the Green Restaurant Association.
- Worked with Northeast Waste to provide recycling of EcoPak containers through the food stores.

In shopping bags:

- Front End departments continued to track and display Bag Reuse totals for shoppers.
- The Sustainability Team surveyed members in June about bag reuse and their support for new bag-reuse incentives
- A Sustainability Team mini-team was formed to follow-through on the survey results.
- The Sustainability Coordinator asked Management Team to consider the possibility of charging shoppers for shopping bags. Management Team expressed strong customer service concerns.

³ Source: Safety Kleen. Oil and antifreeze recycling figures may not be accurate.

- Worked with the Delivery department (at their request) to explore the possibility of reusable bag use in the Home Delivery program. That idea was ultimately put aside because of food safety, financial, and logistical concerns.
- Worked with Kids for a Cooler Planet on next steps for their bag reuse campaign. Work will continue into 2009 and will include a survey of Co-op shoppers on the question “If stores in this area began charging for shopping bags, what would you think of that?”
- Worked with Hanover High School’s Environmental Club to brainstorm about how to decrease high schoolers’ consumption of plastic Co-op shopping bags. Work will continue into 2009.

Shopping bag statistics (Hanover and Lebanon stores):

- Reuse credits: 785,000 (53 percent increase over 2007)
- Co-op bag purchase: 1,493,200 paper and plastic bags
- The Co-op purchased 492,400 fewer bags in 2008 than in 2007
- Ratio of new bag use to reused bag use in Lebanon: 2.1:1, down from 4.9:1 in 2007 and 7.25:1 in 2006
- Ratio of new bag use to reused bag use in Hanover: 1.7:1, down from 3.4:1 in 2007 and 4.95:1 in 2006.

The Sustainability Team’s mini-team is working on ways to keep this spectacular trend going through 2009 and beyond. Their goal is for the two food stores to give out fewer than *1 million* shopping bags in 2009. By 2013 they project that the Co-op could be disseminating no more than *100,000* new bags per year.

Other

In April, staff in Accounting, Information Technology, and Member Services formed a group called TRESAT (Technology Resource Equipment Sustainability Action Team).

TRESAT’s mission is:

- To assess practices relating to technology resource equipment and supplies use, purchasing, and disposal of such
- To implement change in practices that lead to actions that include reduction in: waste, expense, and disposal of such equipment and related supplies.

Along those lines, several improvements were made in 2008:

- 6.5 reams of paper per year will be saved because Terry Appleby, Steve Miller, and Randy Gage chose to forgo daily department reports on paper. They access them electronically instead.
- Ken Davis saved approximately 1400 pieces of paper in Communicator publication by paying attention to layout. The Communicator will be available electronically in 2009.
- The Education Department hired a company called Emma to help the Co-op put the Co-op News in electronic form. Emma planted five trees when the Co-op signed on as a new customer. The first electronic issue will be the Jan/Feb 2009 edition.
- Genie Braasch began printing Board packets double-sided instead of single-sided.
- The Accounting Department tracked its paper-saving efforts from September 6 – December 31. They saved 11,360 sheets; that is 22 reams at 500 sheets per ream.

Education and Outreach

Sustainability Team

- Met monthly February – August
- Approved a vision statement, a mission statement and an organization statement in August
- Going forward, the team will meet at least once a year, but not more than four times. Mini-teams may be created for progress on specific issues (two were active in 2008). Mini-teams meet monthly or as needed. The Sustainability Team keeps in touch through its Weekly E-News publication, posted on the Co-op Intranet.

New Staff Orientation

- A Sustainability module was added to new staff orientation in March. Each new staff member receives 45 minutes of sustainability training covering what the Sustainability Coordinator does, how staff can contribute to the environmental bottom line, and how to recycle at the Co-op.

Seafood

- The Co-op's Seafood departments became FishWise certified during 2008. The Co-op is the first New England grocery retailer to subscribe to the FishWise service. The program provides staff training, consumer education, and assistance with sourcing sustainable seafood. All products in the Co-op's fresh seafood case are labeled according to sustainability (by color) and catch method (by symbol).
- In December, Greenpeace gave the Co-op a score of 78.3% for its seafood sustainability, as high as any other retailer that was evaluated. The score was based on the Co-op's seafood policy, labeling and transparency, and number of "red list" species sold. Adoption of the FishWise program was crucial to the Co-op's high marks. The Co-op was one of 15 companies listed as a "retailer showing great promise in the area of seafood sustainability."

Energy-efficiency

- The Co-op continued selling compact fluorescent light bulbs and rechargeable batteries at low cost in order to encourage adoption of these environmentally friendly technologies. In response to shoppers' concerns about the mercury in CFL bulbs, the Co-op provided clean-up fact sheets at each bulb display, an article in the Co-op News, and information by phone. The Co-op also began collecting bulbs for recycling.

Co-op Classes

- Winter session: Four-session Vermont Earth Institute course on global warming. Seven staff participated in a daytime offering. One staff person participated in the evening course along with seven shoppers.
- Fall session: Partnered with the Upper Valley Land Trust to offer a Vermont Earth Institute course about food system sustainability. About twenty people participated – 8 in an evening class at the Co-op and 12 in a noontime class at the Land Trust offices. Two employees participated.
- To complement the fall discussion course, a field trip to Four Corners Farm in Newbury, VT was offered on October 18. About 15 people attended, nearly all of them through the UVLT rather than the Co-op. Farmer Bob Gray gave a top-notch tour.

Continuing Education

- Staff attended 56 hours of Building Operator Certification training.

Transportation

- Installed better bike racks at Hanover and Lebanon stores. Moved old racks to Commissary for staff use.
- Hosted a drop-in session about earth-friendly commuting in April. One-hundred fourteen staff members attended the drop-ins. Forty people participated in the Green Commute Challenge. Staff saved over one ton of carbon pollution during the Challenge. Some participants were new to green commuting, others were recognized for what they were already doing.
- Hanover store manager Steve Miller stepped off the Upper Valley Transportation Management Association board mid-year. However, we remained in contact with the UVTMA's director and have been asked to sit on a panel in January 2009 during a workshop for Upper Valley employers titled "Addressing Employee Transportation Challenges." In the invitation, the director called the Co-op's approach to employee transportation issues, including environmental impacts, "thoughtful and innovative."
- Sent a service increase request to Advanced Transit based on staff feedback during Green Commute drop-ins in April. The service increases would improve access to AT services for Hanover and Lebanon store staff during their commutes. In May, met with AT's Executive Director to discuss our request.
- The Co-op participated as a sponsor and breakfast site for the Upper Valley Bike/Walk to Work Day in May. Also invited UVRS to conduct outreach to staff and shoppers on 3 separate occasions in each of the food stores.

Water

- Published a Co-op News article about bottled water in June.
- Co-hosted an educational display about water at Co-op Safety Days with the Co-op's dietician. Ran a taste test of bottled and tap waters. Promoted the message that bottled water and tap water are equally safe, but tap water is the environmentally preferable choice.

Air quality

- Distributed NH Department of Environmental Services no-idling key chains and in-vehicle reminders to Delivery department.
- Worked with Delivery department manager to prepare for fuel tracking in 2009.

Systems Thinking

- Gave presentations at the spring Supervisors' Meeting and at Managers' Quarterly Meeting in April. Led both groups in Systems Mapping exercises. One system map that came out of the Supervisors' mapping exercise eventually led to the Co-op signing onto United Natural Foods' reusable totes program in May.

Brochures

- Worked with the Co-op dietician on a new initiative to provide educational materials for staff by the time clocks. Provided handouts on the following topics: CFL bulb safety,

EcoPak recycling, How to Seal and Insulate Your Home, VT Master Composter Course, Myths and Facts about (Vehicle) Idling.

- Prepared a brochure for new member packets about Green Shopping at the Co-op. Will launch in January 2009.

Community engagement

- Developed a relationship with the Environmental Stewardship leader at King Arthur Flour.
- Spoke at *Sustainability at Eastman* inaugural event in June. Event attracted about 25 attendees; good opportunity to dialogue with members and to make non-members aware of what makes the Co-op a unique local business.
- Spoke at the UV League of Women Voters fall membership meeting on the topic of “Diet for a Warming Planet.”
- Provided feedback to the UVCCC on its proposed “local carbon credits” plan.
- Served on the Sustainable Hanover steering committee, convened in October. The committee will serve through 2009.