

Pre-Meeting Goal Conversation Addresses Goal 4: Use Net Zero Energy, Create Zero Waste, and Promote Responsible Packaging

At the March pre-meeting WSM Directors met with owners and community experts to discuss Goal 4: Use net zero energy, create zero waste, and promote responsible packaging. Goal 4 reflects WSM's commitment to environmental stewardship, which includes drastically reducing energy use, installing commercial solar energy, ensuring that all our packaging can be reused or recycled, and keeping our waste out of the landfills. The evening's conversation focused on energy-efficient technologies and techniques as well as structural changes at the co-op's facilities. Even more than with the other three goals, it was apparent that owner participation would be critical to achieving this goal on many levels.

Net Zero Energy

The discussion began with the goal of achieving net zero energy. General Manager Ruffin Slater reported that WSM has already initiated energy-saving initiatives and others are being planned for the immediate near term. Renovation of the Carrboro store later this summer offers the first opportunity for the co-op and owners to make a significant impact toward net-zero energy consumption.

Walgreen's announced that it will build the nation's first net-zero retail store. The net-zero drug store will produce energy equal to or greater than it consumes by utilizing solar panels, wind turbines, geothermal technology, energy-efficient building materials, LED lighting, and ultra-high-efficiency refrigeration.

The GM identified three primary areas in which grocery stores consume energy: refrigeration, heating and cooling, and lighting. The proposed renovations to the Carrboro store address all three areas of energy usage.

- To reduce energy usage from heating and cooling, the renovated store will have vestibules, fewer doors, and a ground-source heat pump.
- To reduce energy usage from refrigeration, the most energy efficient technology will be installed, and refrigerated products will be sold through refrigerated cases with doors. The store remodel will also eliminate all global warming refrigerants, a step that has already been undertaken at the Food House.
- To reduce lighting energy, the remodeled store will have LED lighting.

The discussion about net zero energy centered on educating owners and shoppers about the immediate and long-term impact the energy-saving technology will have. One suggestion was to use bold signage to clearly indicate what's changing in the stores and why it matters. Another suggestion was to encourage owners to accept new behaviors—such as opening a refrigerator door to buy milk—by reminding them that they are actively participating in saving energy. In addition to educating owners, the GM noted that staff would need to be trained on using and maintaining new systems and technologies.



Zero Waste

The GM also identified a number of initiatives in place or in the works for the second area of Goal 4, zero waste. Energy-saving technologies, such as hand dryers in the bathrooms, were identified, but the majority of initiatives involved motivating staff and owners to participate in reducing waste. Making it easy to recycle and compost were critical to achieving zero waste. Recycling teams at each of the stores and at the food house have undertaken this challenge. Amy Lorang, coordinator of the food house team, reported that waste had been reduced considerably by labeling compost and recycling bins with easy-to-read signs with pictures as well as color coding signs to match the bins.



Other steps being taken at the food house include simple reminders like “These Come from Trees” stickers which have been placed on all paper towel dispensers. Wherever possible, reusable products have replaced paper products. For example, sugar dispensers and salt and pepper shakers have replaced packets of sugar, salt, and pepper.



The GM reported that a group of public health students are analyzing the food thrown away at the stores and food house. The intent of the study is to understand the whole food stream to see how it can be repurposed.

The discussion again focused on how to involve owners in the process. Jon McDonald, worker owner director, observed that it only takes a couple of people taking the initiative to grow the momentum of change. He pointed out that the work of recycling team led the WSM bread bakers to discover that almost 100% of the bakery trash was compostable.

Responsible Packaging

The GM described “responsible packaging” as looking at each product and asking how it can be sold in a responsible way. A number of initiatives are being explored: offering more bulk items, including bulk liquids; promoting bulk; providing bulk container systems; using paper trays for seafood; offering bulk salad greens in reusable containers; and encouraging farmers to reuse berry clamshells.

The co-op will launch a reusable checkout bag program late spring or early summer. The domestically produced, 100% recycled, 100% recyclable bag will replace the plastic and paper bags currently used. Details of the bag program will be revealed in the May *Owner News*.

As with the other areas, education and participation of owners and producers are seen as critical to the success of the initiatives. It was suggested that owners would be more likely to participate if the co-op provided help setting up a home system for using bulk, repurposing packaging, recycling, and composting. A director suggested color coding products red, yellow, and green for environment friendly packaging.



In a closing observation about Goal 4, worker owner Geoff Gilson suggested turning the stores into “living laboratories” in which children, their parents, and school programs made a game of achieving saving energy and reducing waste.

The goal conversations will continue at pre-meeting sessions in the fall. In the meantime, watch for updates in *The Beet* and on Facebook.