

# Rye Reflections

## ***In the grocery store it is decisions, decisions, decisions***

*Thoughts about purchases of food as we move on into winter*

*Bill Pappou Drew*

### ***Article II: A quest for nutritious, healthful and tasty foods; The local grocery store***

Last month's [article](#) described my pursuit of healthy foods utilizing locally grown produce and investigating their sources. The upcoming winter months will make this distribution system from family farms and farmers markets unavailable. So I move reluctantly to the convenience of the local grocery store.



*This original wagon was refurbished for a company celebration and is currently owned and for sale by the Frost Family of Charlotte Vermont.*

*Price: # 4,500 - Craigs List, Item # 805554076*

*(Photo, courtesy of the Frost Family)*

During World War II, while visiting my grandparents on Kent Street in Portsmouth, I was in awe to see relics of past generations. In the attic, there were many old parlor stoves, trunks, and furniture. Outside, one, necessitated by the unavailability of gasoline, was a grocery wagon drawn by a single horse that came down the street looking for business. Within, were a variety of staples used in the cooking process; salt, sugar, flour, potatoes, vegetables, herbs and other fresh produce. Another vision is a space in the cellar where there were many shelves, each loaded with all sorts of preserves from the family garden.

My grandfather, brought up on a farm in Maine in the late 1800's, was well versed in agrarian skills. His small plot on Kent Street produced a large volume of lettuce, carrots, pole beans, tomatoes, greens and ever tasteful and close at hand, raspberries and blackberries.

There was a shed, long since vacant, attached to the garage used to raise chickens. It retained the strong odor of farm life which undoubtedly was underneath. This passion for working the soil in providing food for the family went from father to son. In the "war years," he too had a plot in the suburban village we lived in. It was a vacant lot where he grew vegetables. He called it, "A victory garden." Naturally, or is that organically? Our hometown's name is [Garden City, N.Y.](#)

The name on the side of the grocery wagon, pictured above, brings back vivid memories of another bygone era, the late 1940's. Prevalent in the local landscape were names on signs like Grand Union and Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, later abbreviated to A & P. Storefronts usually double or triple in size dwarfed those of the adjacent butcher, the delicatessen, bakery, candy store and others. Personally delivered to the back door of homes were dairy products of milk, cream, eggs and butter. Portsmouth had its grocery stores, the A & P, First National and Pic'N'Pay. The latter was an outlet for a large wholesale grocery distribution company in Maine named [Hannaford Bros. Co.](#), and they eventually acquired this retail space.



As the years moved on, stores became considerably larger and now have an extensive diverse product line. Seen high above floor level at the local Hannaford store are these signs. They say the same as those from the 1940's, but are now all under one roof.

#### **THE CHALLENGE: What to buy?**

With my new diet program, granddaughter Christina has counseled, "Be ever alert and watchful for natural and organic foods."

As pointed out in my September article, a story titled, "A confused guide to eco friendly products" relates: "Organic simply means that the botanical product was grown in a chemical-free environment. Natural on the other hand means that the final product has been made solely from botanical resources without any use of additives (fillers) or preservatives."

Natural products can sometimes be assisted in the growing process with the aid of some chemical support. In addition, Natural foods are not regulated and do not meet the same criteria for the growing of products that organic foods do.

As the availability of locally grown fresh produce decreases in the fall months, produce from farms further south in the United States fill the shelves. As winter arrives, the source of supply is even farther south, from Central and South American countries. Although extensive measures are taken to provide a fresh product, to me, diminished taste and texture give way to effects of high volume production and the time necessary for transportation north.

Last month's article touched on the increased demand and availability of natural and organic foods. This has moved the industry to accommodate to the situation. As Michael Norton, director of corporate communications, Hannaford, describes it, "An evolution is going on rather than a revolution."

At this time of year many local farms shift to products of the root variety. As Abby Wiggin of the Wake Robin Farm in Stratham relates, their products will include turnips, carrots, potatoes, rutabaga, daikon, radish, celeriac, sun chokes, beets, garlic, kohlrabi, onions and others. (Are there any more?). These can be planted, mature, harvested, and sold well into the winter months. Because of their ability to withstand deterioration, they become a staple of the winter diet and a cash crop for the year-round farmer. These products, most of which I have never had before, will undoubtedly be in my diet program in the upcoming months. The experience should be interesting.



In talking with Mark Woods of the produce department at Hannaford, a fifty-year employee at the same store, he says over the last ten years he confirms the big shift to natural and organic type products.

To study the situation, I conducted an extensive and exhaustive analysis. First, I purchased two, six-ounce containers of raspberries, one natural and the other labeled organic. Notice I said labeled. I sampled each one.

My taste experiment results: The larger berries, the organic ones, seemed to be moister, but I like the taste of the small "natural" berries better. Perhaps because of only change in my pockets, there may have been some bias involved.

For my second test, I purchased two types of bananas. My experiment results showed no discernible difference in taste, but a doubling of the price? Can bananas really be organic?



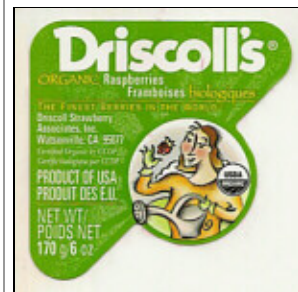
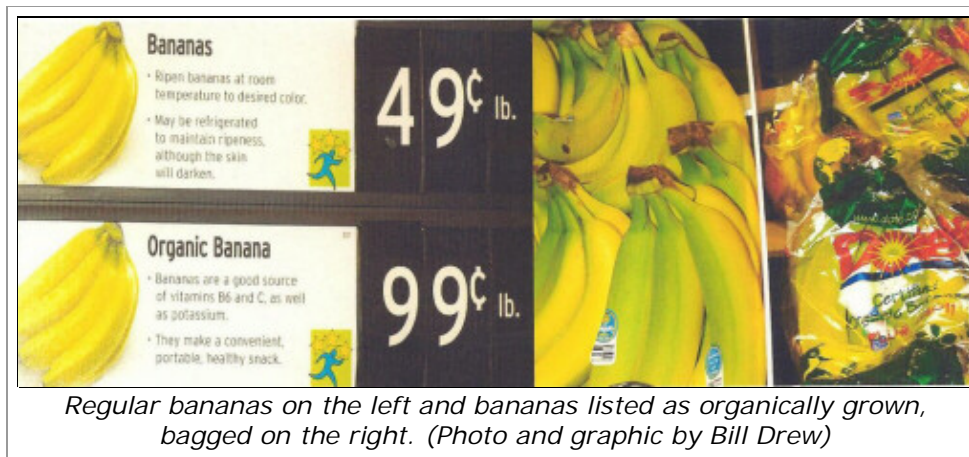
Mark Woods of the produce department at Hannaford shows various signs depicting certified organically grown products.



Michael says Hannaford has instituted a number of programs to help the customer make wise selections. They have created [Nature's Place](#) where shoppers can obtain excellent products with good value and a fair price. Milk, crackers, apple juices, kids friendly products and many more are involved. There are 400-500 items within the store, both natural and organic products.

Large conglomerates have a policy of buying locally grown products. That makes sense, or is that "cents"? ... probably both. When availability of supply dries up, they have to turn elsewhere to obtain their merchandise.

Brian McElroy, Organic Business Manager at [Driscolls](#) (their quote, "the finest

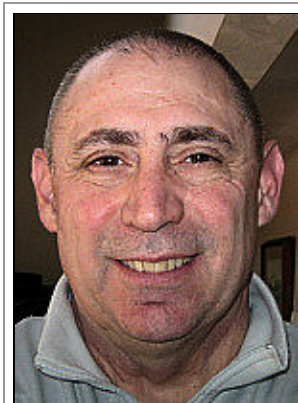


*Driscolls label*

berries in the world”), the supplier of my \$ 5.00 6oz container of raspberries, was in Mexico where I reached him, checking on the authenticity of organic operations there and evaluating new sources of supply. His comment was that large organizations like themselves have to secure the best product possible, as its being marketed at a premium price to wholesalers and in turn by retail outlets. If it does not match up to certification standards, then adjustments are necessary. I asked him, “Are these Driscoll Organic berries I purchased, with the label stating, ‘Product of USA,’ really from the USA and organic, and not some substitute product originating in Mexico?” He speaks for the company and says, “YES, they’re organic.”



*Naturipe Label*



*David Moisan*

Mr. Robert Verloop, VP Marketing, of [Naturipe Farms](#), says, it’s our reputation we stand on. The product I purchased for \$ 3.00 per the 6 oz pack did NOT have the organic label on it. He says, “It is of the highest quality and they stand behind their product.” He does point out that, “It is a living product. There will be some variations with weight and taste. The effects that Mother Nature deals us also come into play. Take it back to the store if there is a bad experience.”


I like to prepare and have fish in my diet. I called on my friend David Moisan of Stratham. He represents the U.S. Government in the area of assurance of the origin and processing methods of fish. He travels internationally in fulfilling his responsibilities. He says, “The USDA has a verification process whereby the country of origin of a product must be labeled as such. It’s called [COOL](#); “Country of Origin Labeling.” This applies to all food products coming into the United States. In a side point he points out that for restaurants this COOL verification is not required

David goes on, “The label as to where the product comes from and whether it is organic or not, is up to the honesty, integrity and knowledge of the supplier, broker and wholesale operation. From this point on, the retailer can only attempt to verify the labeling. It is left up to the governments, federal, state, and local, to have some clout with groups to meet the standards.” Case in point: apple cider, sold by the Barker Family Farm in Stratham, is legally prevented from selling their product

in Portsmouth. In some cases, it is not so much a safety issue, rather one in providing information so the consumer can make an appropriate buying decision. A final question posed by David is, "Should fish, caught in the wild, be labeled, organic?" Hmmm.


Clay Ward, an MIT graduate and innovator has come up with [an approach](#) where, with a hand-held unit scanning the UPC bar code of a product, it then searches a database that provides information from others who have experience with the product. "I liked it," or "It didn't meet MY standards." Again, it is a high tech way of providing the customer with the most up-to-date information.

As I have mentioned before, it comes down to availability and interest. For people who love to cook, it is a taste factor. They feel these type products have more to offer. For the concerned parent, there is more security in fresh locally grown produce than that from unknown distant locations, domestic and foreign. For some it is an environmental and economic issue. It is "support the local farm community" as the beautiful natural environment is diminishing and becoming locations for up-scale housing projects.



*Registered label*

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*Granddaughter Kianna*

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*Under her everwatchful  
eye, she's my soul,  
keeping me  
on track and thinner.  
"Pappoouu.....NO."*

Michael at Hannaford goes on. "Another initiative taken by Hannaford to educate the consumer is [Guiding Stars](#). About 22% of the store items are involved and marked with an icon depicting a blue man with stars above it. In the cereal aisle, about 50 percent of the products have stars. In another aisle nearly 100 percent of the products receive the designation. Its purpose is quick recognition of good value with regard to vitamins, fiber and nitrous ingredients, or lack there of, without the necessity of reading the label."

So, what does it all come down to? In my selection process, some parameters are beyond my control, namely, the weather and time of year. If I am able to purchase locally grown foods from Bob and Abby Wiggin, Shawn Stimpson, Gordon and Edie Barker and other local growers, then I will treat that as frosting on the cake and enjoy the experience. I know where it comes from, and I feel more confident with it than similar foods obtained during the middle of the winter. Plus, I am supporting the local farm environment. The frosting will be enjoyable and nutritious for me unlike the previous type, which was extremely tasty, but went on to find a permanent home in my stomach. (Previous profile picture under "WHO WE ARE" has been removed)

Then, is my selection for plain, natural or organic? It is decision time. As always, it's *caveat emptor*, so as Yogi Berra usta say, "When you come to a fork in the road, TAKE IT."

*October, 2008*

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