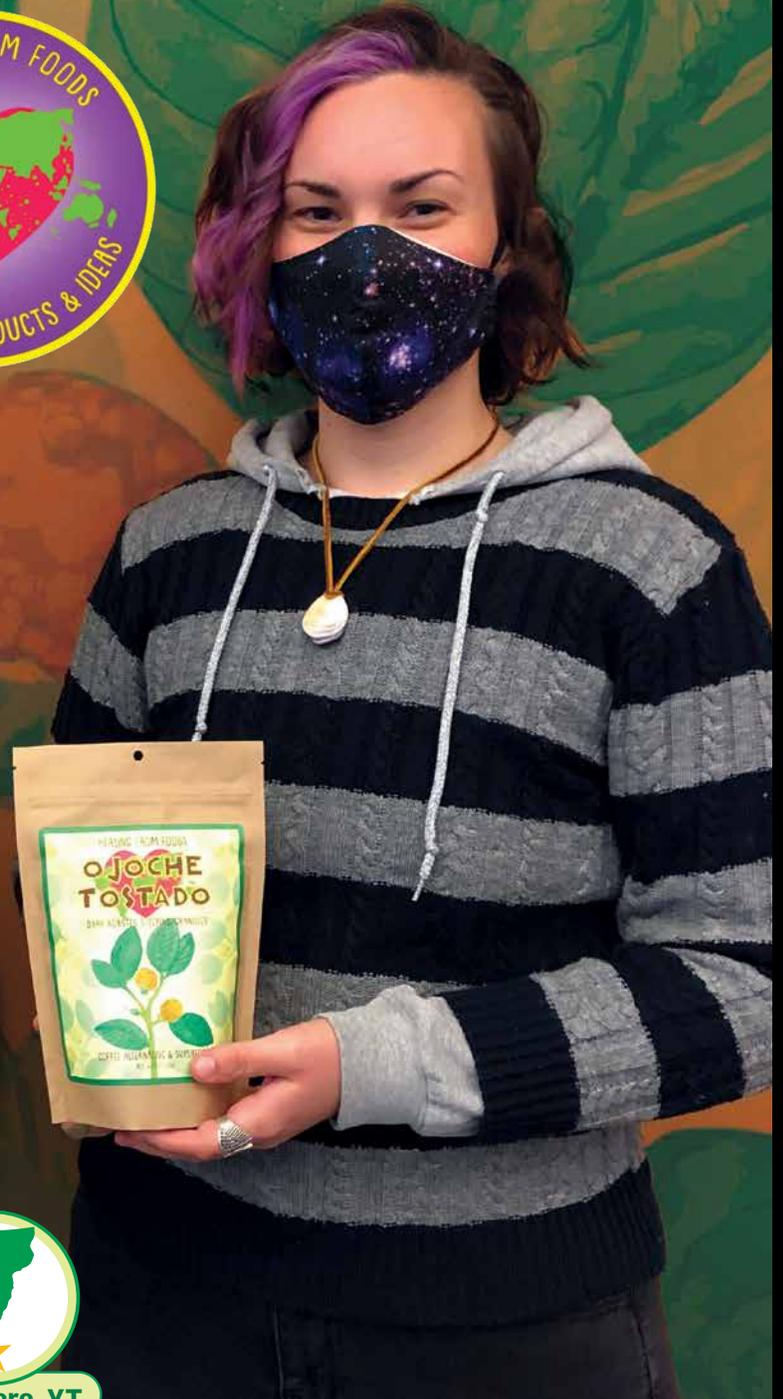


Healing From Foods



Producer OF THE *Month*

JANUARY 2021



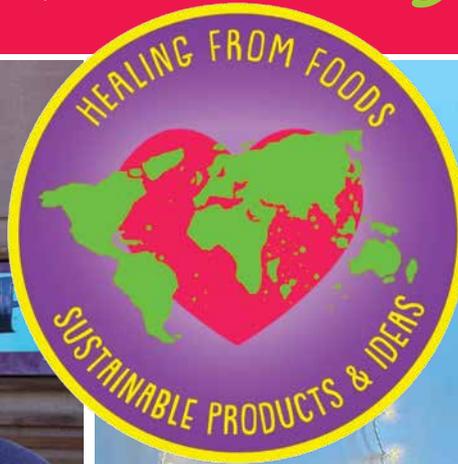
BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

Producer OF THE Month

by Jon Megas-Russell, Sarah Dal Balcon,
and Rebecca Dixon



Rebecca Dixon



Sarah Dal Balcon

An inspirational story is brewing in Brattleboro, VT, from Healing From Foods, a company that centers around sustainable products and ideas rooted in the mantra “food is medicine.” Healing From Foods imports, markets, and sells Ojoche Tostado, a superfood coffee alternative sourced from women’s collectives in rural Nicaragua.

So what is ojoche? Ojoche (oh-HO-chiey) is an ancient Mayan superfood seed that grows on the Ojoche tree native to Central America. You can compare it to an acorn growing on an oak tree. The seed is encased in a sweet green skin that is porous like citrus skin. When roasted, ground, and steeped, ojoche makes a brew that is nutty, bold, earthy, robust, and very similar to

coffee but containing no caffeine or stimulants. Instead, ojoche gives you a natural energy boost by giving your body the nutrients it craves. With potassium and calcium for heart and bone health, prebiotic fiber for gut and immune support, and B vitamins and tryptophan that help stabilize and uplift mood, ojoche is a powerful beverage. This is why Healing From Foods calls it a superfood coffee alternative.

Rebecca Dixon and Sarah Dal Balcon, the co-founders of Healing From Foods, met in 2014 in California working at a sheep dairy called Garden Variety Cheese. Both Sarah and Rebecca had a passion for sustainability, food, organic farming, and nutrition. Sarah had spent most of her career as a chef, but had also studied medical assisting and

nutrition. Rebecca, originally from Massachusetts, had mostly worked for small farms but went on to work in the culinary industry as well. After leaving the sheep dairy, they went on to live and work in the Santa Cruz mountains. After several months of both working full time and still not being able to make ends meet, Sarah and Rebecca were drained and exhausted. This stress led to gut health issues for both of them, and caused Sarah to have a full-blown Crohn’s flare-up. Among other things, they had to give up coffee as it became too acidic for their systems to handle. This was difficult, as they both loved the flavor and ritual of coffee, but necessary for their healing. The pair moved back to Sarah’s hometown of Cloverdale, CA, where they began their healing process.



Sarah utilized a holistic approach to healing, combining Western medicine, herbalism, diet and nutrition, and spiritual healing. It was here that Sarah formulated Happy Belly herbal tea blend to help combat issues with gut health. The tea helped both Rebecca and Sarah, and friends and family encouraged them to produce it on a large scale and start their own business.

After about a year, Sarah was back on her feet, but the pair was struggling to find housing in the over-populated California housing market. After six months of searching and finding nothing, Sarah and Rebecca took this as a sign that it was time to move on. Sarah had been working with a shamanic counselor who connected with the spirit of their new unknown home. The counselor said she saw a big red barn in the middle of rolling green hills, and also said that owls would be the sign telling them they were home.

During a trip back east, suddenly owls were everywhere. In stores there would be a whole display of owl themed merchandise. Finally, upon visiting Rebecca's family farm in Putney, they heard owls in the trees and knew they were home. As soon as they landed back in California they packed their bags for Vermont. After living in Putney,



they met Ian Diamondstone, owner of New Forest Organics, who introduced them to ojoche. Ian works to cultivate relationships with micro-producers of herbs and spices around the world. Having been forced to give up coffee back in California, Rebecca and Sarah were floored and thrilled at how similar ojoche was to coffee, and asked Ian where to get more. He told them it wasn't really possible to get ojoche here in the States, but that he would bring them more in his suitcase on his next trip to Central America. Ian



had worked closely with women in Nicaragua for many years trying to create a market for their product in the States. He had even worked with a team and raised the money to get the FDA to do a study on the seed. When Ian saw how excited and enthusiastic Rebecca and Sarah were, he offered to let them take charge of the project and show them the ropes. And thus, Healing From Foods was born.

Aside from ojoche's flavor and health benefits, Rebecca and Sarah were drawn to ojoche for its environmental and socio-economic benefits. Healing From Foods sources all of its ojoche directly from women's collectives in rural Nicaragua. These women wild-harvest, wash, and sun-dry the ojoche seeds, and then roast and grind them. Because ojoche does not have any oils or sugars in it, it has a 5-year shelf life even after it has been roasted. Finding work in Nicaragua is difficult, but for the women and families who live in rural areas with little to no transportation, it is even harder. Harvesting ojoche is a good way for them to make an income as they don't have to invest money up front as you do with farming; they can just go collect what already grows around them. Though ojoche is native to Central America, it is largely forgotten as an ingredient and



therefore no longer consumed very much at all. The women who harvest it use some of the raw ojoche to make tortillas, bread, and cookies, but since it is so abundant, it is an excellent opportunity for income. Supporting prosperity in this region was the main passion behind Ian's goal of trying to create a market for ojoche in the U.S., and Sarah and Rebecca are now taking this dream forward and actively working to expand the popularity of Ojoche Tostado as a superfood coffee alternative.

Ojoche is a hardwood tree and has been over-logged in many parts of

Guatemala and Costa Rica. Maritza, one of the women who spearheads the collectives, is extremely passionate about reforestation and replanting hardwood trees. She started a project in which they save some of the collected ojoche seeds and sprout them, caring for the saplings until they are big enough to replant in the forest. Once the pandemic settles down and it is safer to travel, Sarah and Rebecca hope to visit Nicaragua regularly to stay in touch with the producers and help plant ojoche trees.

To make a cup of Ojoche Tostado, steep 1 tablespoon of ojoche in 10

ounces of boiling water for 5 minutes. You can do this in a French press, or directly in your cup. Enjoy like you would coffee—with cream, oat milk, maple syrup, honey, or just black. Ojoche also makes a killer cold brew. And don't throw away the grounds once they've been steeped! There's still lots of nutrition left. Add grounds to brownies, cookies, pancakes, smoothies, chili, marinades, mole—the list just keeps growing.

Stop by the Wellness Department today and grab a bag of Ojoche Tostado.

