

THE FRESH FEED

THE MARQUETTE FOOD CO-OP NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026



LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Learn more about the businesses that supply your favorite local products to the MFC



YOUNG MOUNTAIN TEA

RAJ VABLE

Young Mountain Tea began with a promise.

While working in India to bring renewable energy to rural farming communities, Founder Raj Vable asked a mentor, while sitting in her kitchen enjoying a cup of tea, “what if we grew tea alongside the textile crops?”

“I made a promise to her right then – if she could organize farmers to grow it, I’d organize a company to sell it,” he said.

While Raj can pin down the promise as an official, actionable starting point, the story of Young Mountain Tea is the convergence of many things – big ideas and value systems steeped over years and shared between friends. It is a hopeful move toward mending a broken capitalistic system that unfairly compensates farmers, a bid for shared joy and connection, and a genuine love for the simple magic of preparing and drinking tea.

“The number one value for me is balance – for both producers and consumers,” said Raj. “But I also look at joy as a value. We want this to be a positive experience for everybody. We’re making tea that brings joy to all involved.”

While it’s always been part of his ancestral history, Raj’s personal beyond-the-surface connection to India began when he was a senior in college. His older sister was teaching in their mother’s ancestral village and her school had invested in a computer lab. But it didn’t have electricity. Having studied electrical engineering at the University of Michigan, Raj thought it was a problem he might be able to help solve.

“My gears started turning. I had some ideas of how we might do this,” said Raj, who got the opportunity to visit the small village near Bangalore. “So I went, and it was my first time working outside of my family’s bubble, when I really began to develop my own Indian identity.”

While there, working in rural communities on renewable energy adoption, Raj said he met a lot of incredible folks and learned a lot about himself in the process.

“It was the first time that I leveraged my own privilege to create a different pathway for someone else,” said Raj, who was born and raised in the Keweenaw. “There is this unbelievable gulf of opportunity for people born in the US versus someone born in a village in India.”

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Like the promise to his mentor, there's another interaction he recalls, with an electrician he was working with on the renewable energy project. It's symbolic of many others that helped build the base of the value system he carries today, the foundation of Young Mountain Tea.

"He put a bracelet on my wrist, looked at me and said 'brother' and it just hit me. We are all connected and dependent on each other, whether we recognize it or not," Raj said. "India is the most populated country, and what are we missing out on when so many hundreds of millions of people who are talented and ambitious don't have access to opportunity? This desire to create more balance became part of a value system I began to form and appreciate, which is sorely needed if we're going to find a sense of harmony globally."

The renewable energy work eventually led to a connection with farmers growing textile crops, and the idea to grow tea started to come to fruition after recognizing the potential in the land that, many years ago, was used to grow it. It was on another visit, part of a Fulbright Fellowship, when Young Mountain Tea was founded.

What followed was anything but linear. Raj helped secure a grant to help farmers grow the tea, and he returned to the States to do the work of creating the company. He started a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds to buy the season's first harvest, which was successful.

But when Raj went back to India to collect the tea, there was none.

"It wasn't until I got there that I was told there was no tea, it wasn't ready."

The trees that produce tea are pruned to size of shrub and this takes seven years. Luckily, there was another locally led farmer movement a few valleys away. Raj talked to the leader, Desmond – a third-generation tea maker, biochemist, and community leader whose life's work had been devoted to reviving tea beyond its colonial estate model – and explained the situation.

"I drove four hours to bring a sample of white tea I had pre-sold and he said he could make it."

Together, they found alignment. If tea was to truly support farmers, the farmers also had to own the factory, where most of the value is created. Their partnership – unexpected, cross-cultural, and grounded in shared values – became the foundation of a farmer-owned, co-created model.

Between 2021-2024 a factory was set up, funded by a USAID grant, Frontier Co-op, Young Mountain Tea, and private investments.

"It was complicated to set up, we had to navigate some weird bureaucracy, but we did it," said Raj. "2025 was the first year the factory was up and running, which was a huge milestone for our work."

It's an exciting time in the tea business, said Raj. The desire by farmers in India to revive abandoned tea gardens aligned perfectly with growing interest from consumers in the US.

"We see a lot of potential," he said. "For the first time there's an interest in quality tea (in the US). Similar to how craft beer elevated us out of Bud(weiser) - we're seeing the same thing with tea. There's a demand for a wider variety so it's a good opportunity to connect our model with the growing interest. Tea is the second most consumed beverage, so the potential for scale is great if we get it right. The stakes are high."

Generally, people are not used to paying the real price for tea, said Raj. The general expectation from consumers is tea should be cheap, accessible, and convenient. So Raj is facing the ongoing challenge of meeting the consumer where they're at - balancing costs on both sides so that it doesn't become a niche product only enjoyed by those in a certain income bracket.

"We're used to paying the price where human labor is not properly recognized. There's a disconnect – it comes from a tree growing on the other side of the world, so it reaches our cups without us recognizing or appreciating the effort it took to get to us."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

TEA SAMPLING

JANUARY 16 • 11AM - 1PM



LOCAL SPOTLIGHT



Young Mountain tea is hoping to change that. The factory is designed to serve 500 farmers across 27 village clusters, many of them women, who are stepping into leadership roles for the first time.

One percent of all sales go back to this venture in India, giving back to farmers and strengthening the model.

"If we were just selling tea, I'd get bored quick," said Raj. "But this is bigger – it's a way we can make change that people understand. Tea is a great vehicle for change. There's something unique about the power and spirit of tea. Selling tea is not why we do our work; it's a very unique how."

The tea itself is 100 percent organically grown by small farmers, hand harvested from trees growing in the Himalayan Mountains. The processing is quick and simple, everything happens within 24 to 48 hours of harvest, ensuring all value addition remains local. Nothing is added, only removed. Tea is gently withered, rolled, oxidized, and dried, guided by ambient humidity and the intuition of a master tea maker. It's available either as loose leaf or in certified organic tea bags, which are made of sugarcane and also compostable. They're accepted locally as compost by Partridge Creek Composting.

There's an undeniable amount of power in something so simple, said Raj.

"It's literally the leaves of trees, plus time, pressure, and heat," he said. There's a vibrational quality (referred to as 'chi' or 'life energy') when you drink it – you get a lift from the antioxidants and caffeine but a centered and grounded feeling from L-theanine.

"Your first year with tea, it's a drink. The second year, it's medicine. The third year – magic."

As Young Mountain Tea continues to grow, Raj says the work remains rooted in that first promise – to build something that honors fairness, balance, joy, and connection.

Years after that first kitchen table promise, thousands of tea plants are thriving in once abandoned soil, cultivated by farmers who are proudly shaping their own futures and rebalancing how value is shared. And cups across the world are filled with the warm, comforting proof of that transformation.

The Co-op carries several loose leaf and individually bagged varieties from Young Mountain Tea.

ENJOY 20% OFF YOUNG MOUNTAIN TEA PRODUCTS THROUGH JANUARY

ROUND UP AT THE REGISTER



2025

TOGETHER, WE RAISED \$6,214.74

Thanks to everyone who donated and helped us exceed our goal of \$6,000. The proceeds will directly benefit 30 local and regional charity organizations across Marquette County that offer programming and services for our area youth and elderly, as well as those seeking basic needs such as food, shelter, and medical assistance.



Thank you!



JIM & LORRAINE KOSKI

MFC Owners since 2012

The Co-op is a safe space for so many different people. These days, that's not something that you can take for granted. You should be able to, but you can't always take it for granted. If you've never been there, don't be afraid to go in. You don't have to be a member to go into the Co-op and shop. I think some people think that it's kind of like a private club, but it's not. It's open to everyone — everyone is welcome. It's a nice alternative to the big box store experience and that's why we keep coming back. You get to walk through a very friendly, very homey place. You're not faced with this giant monolith of sterile lighting and shelves that have way too many things you'll never use. It's a great thing to be a part of.

ASK ABOUT OUR

OWNER REFERRAL PROGRAM



RECEIVE A		RECEIVE A
\$10	&	\$10
GIFT CARD		GIFT CARD
FOR SIGNING UP WITH THE FULL EQUITY PLAN		IF YOU REFER A FRIEND

OWNERS SAVE!

TAKE 10% OFF A SHOPPING TRIP OF YOUR CHOICE THIS MONTH!

Not an owner? Join today to get your 10% off and other owner benefits including:

- Owner Rewards - earn points on every purchase, redeemable on anything in the store.
- Save 20% on most special orders.
- Free or reduced admission to Co-op classes and events.
- Baker's Dozen Reward - purchase 12 loaves of Marquette Baking Co. bread and receive the 13th loaf for free.
- Potential yearly patronage dividend.
- Opportunity to vote and run for the Co-op Board of Directors.

CLICK HERE TO JOIN NOW!

MARQUETTEFOOD.COOP/OWNERS/OWNERSHIP

BECOME PART OF THE CO-OP COMMUNITY

Co-ops are owned and governed by the people who shop the store. When you become an owner, you support a thriving community-owned business that is committed to supporting health, sustainability, diversity, education, and the local economy.

There's a plan for everyone - It's easy & affordable!

1.

One-time payment of \$150.

Pay your equity in full and receive a \$5 Marquette Food Co-op gift card, valid at both locations.

2.

The 5/2 Plan.

Pay \$5 down to receive full ownership benefits. Then, each time you shop, \$2 is added to your bill until you have paid the full \$150 investment.

Your investment belongs to you. If you decide you no longer wish to be a Co-op owner and your account is in good standing you will receive a full refund.

For more information, ask a friendly member of our Customer Service Team or visit:
marquettefood.coop/ownership

Whether it's about improving your health, fulfilling a resolution, a system reset, or any other reason unique to you, Dry January is an opportunity to explore sobriety and kick off the New Year on a good note. If you're taking on the challenge of no alcohol this month, here's a few alternative options for beverages – all on sale!

DAY GROOVER SPARKLING HOP WATER

BLACKROCKS BREWERY

A hoppy nonalcoholic alternative to beer, Day Groover delivers "a crisp punch of fizzy bubbles and refreshing citrus/guava hop profile."



B. Nektar Sober

These ready-to-drink non-alcoholic mocktails are hand-crafted, low calorie, with a taste as close to the real deal as you can get. We carry several flavors: Classic Margartia, Grapefruit Paloma, Negroni, Tangerine G&T, and Zombie Killer Cider.



Athletic Brewing Co. Winter Seasonal

Athletic is a major leader in the non-alcoholic craft beer segment, producing consistent, high-quality craft brews. The Co-op carries several options from Athletic Brewing Co., but right now the recommendation is the winter seasonal. Winter Wonder is a light amber with warming notes of spice (cinnamon, cardamom), mulled apple, and orange peel.



Giesen NA Sauvignon Blanc

The classic flavors you expect in this non-alcoholic white wine, like tart passion fruit, lemon shortbread, and earthy blackcurrant. Made in from Marlborough grapes in New Zealand, this is one of Giesen's best-sellers.



Untitled Art FLVR Mango Dragonfruit Sour

Brewed and fermented with real mango, pink guava, and red dragonfruit. Packed with flavor and great alternative for those who love sours.



Mas fi Zero

Made from hand-harvested grapes in Southern Spain, this medium-dry sparkling wine is de-alcoholized by vacuum distillation with aroma recovery, then lightly carbonated. It's refreshing tropical fruit notes with hints of citrus make for a crisp, pleasant sensation on the palate.



MACA “COLADA”

Recipe from *Herb Pharm*

If you like piña coladas, you’ll love this mocktail version made with Maca liquid herbal extract. Maca lends a rich and sweet taste with a hint of butterscotch to the classic combo of Pineapple and Coconut. Since Maca is an herb that promotes healthy sexual libido and function, double this recipe for your next date night with your sweetie.

- **½ C organic pineapple juice**
- **½ C organic coconut milk**
- **0.7 ml Herb Pharm Maca liquid herbal extract†**
- **Ice**
- **Fresh pineapple wedges (optional)**
- **Finely shredded coconut (optional)**

Use a blender to combine the pineapple juice, coconut milk, ice, and maca liquid herbal extract.

Pour into your favorite glass and garnish with a pineapple wedge, if desired.

Sip & enjoy!

TIPS

Freeze your glass ahead of time for an extra frosty drink.

For a fun presentation, dip the rim of your glass in pineapple juice or coconut milk, then in shredded coconut before you pour your drink.

Don’t have a blender? In a 12-ounce jar with a lid, shake together the pineapple juice, coconut milk, and maca extract with ice until combined.

†One squeeze of the dropper equals 0.7 ml; provides approximately 1 serving of Herb Pharm liquid herbal extract.



LEMON BALM “DROP”

Recipe from *Herb Pharm*

This mocktail version of a classic “Lemon Drop” will leave you feeling refreshed, calm, and collected. Thanks to the addition of our flavorful and nerve-soothing Lemon Balm extract, you can enjoy the relaxation you deserve. Full of bright, lemony citrus flavor with a dash of sweetness and light bubbles, this mocktail can be savored any time of day.

- **1 t fresh lemon juice**
- **3 oz sparkling water**
- **1 t maple syrup**
- **0.7 ml Herb Pharm Lemon Balm liquid herbal extract†**
- **Ice**
- **1 strip fresh lemon peel (optional garnish)**
- **1 t grated fresh lemon zest (optional sugar rim)**
- **1 T granulated sugar (optional sugar rim)**
- **1 fresh lemon wedge (optional sugar rim)**



Add the Lemon juice, sparkling water, maple syrup, Lemon Balm extract, and ice to a cocktail shaker. Shake lightly or stir well to combine.

Strain the liquid into your prepared glass.

Add an optional twist of lemon peel as a garnish.

Sip and enjoy!

OPTIONAL SUGAR RIM

Mix the lemon zest and sugar together on a small flat plate with your fingers until well combined. The sugar will turn light yellow.

Press the sugar mixture flat on the plate.

Before straining your drink into your martini glass, rub a fresh lemon wedge around the rim and dip it into the sugar mixture.

TIPS

If preferred, you can use Lemon Balm, Alcohol-Free instead. Just lower the amount of maple syrup to 1/2 tsp.

Mixing fresh lemon zest with sugar makes for a lovely color and flavor but can naturally clump the sugar once rubbed on the glass. If you don't like the texture, you can omit the lemon zest for a classic sugar rim.

Use any kind of glass you desire, but we recommend a martini glass for a fun mocktail!

†One squeeze of the dropper equals 0.7 ml; provides approximately 1 serving of Herb Pharm liquid herbal extract.

PASSIONFLOWER “PALOMA”

Recipe from *Herb Pharm*

A modern and mocktail version of the classic, “Paloma.” With the uplifting scent of Grapefruit mixed with the calming support of Passionflower, you can’t go wrong adding this beverage to your day.

- **3 oz sparkling water**
- **1 oz grapefruit juice**
- **¼ tsp or to taste agave nectar**
- **0.7 ml Herb Pharm Passionflower liquid herbal extract†**
- **fine Himalayan pink salt or sea salt**
- **1 slice of fresh grapefruit for garnish**
- **ice (optional)**

Pour sea salt on a small plate.

Rub a grapefruit wedge along the rim of a glass.

Dip the rim of the glass in the plate of sea salt until the salt sticks to the rim.

Add ice to the glass, if desired.

Combine the grapefruit juice, sparkling water, passionflower extract and agave nectar into the glass.

Stir well to combine.

Garnish with a fresh grapefruit ring.

Sip and enjoy!

†One squeeze of the dropper equals 0.7 ml; provides approximately 1 serving of Herb Pharm liquid herbal extract.





THE COMMUNITY TABLE

CELEBRATING LOCAL FOOD & DRINK

Sunday, January 18th, 2026 | 1:00pm - 3:00pm

Join us for panel discussion with local business owners who bring people together through food and drink. Hear about the challenges and joys of their work, learn how the community can support the growth of local food vendors and entrepreneurs, and enjoy light snacks and beverages from the featured businesses.



Raj Vable
Owner of Young Mountain Tea Co.



Gabriel Caplett
Owner of Dukes Farm & Foolazul



Libby Nelson
Owner of BODEGA



Alex Palzewicz
Owner of Northwoods Test Kitchen



104 W. Ridge Street
Women's Federated Clubhouse



Get Your Ticket
ConnectMarquette.org

Call for
Candidates

FOR THE MFC | **BOARD OF
DIRECTORS**

INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING TO YOUR CO-OP?

You can help by sharing in the governance of our organization.

You can apply or encourage someone you know who could be an asset to apply. Watch for information on a Board Meet & Greet to learn more about the work of the board, our elections, and the Co-op.

Applications open
OCTOBER 15 - JANUARY 15

Learn more and apply at www.marquettefood.coop/board/join

Have questions now that the website didn't answer?
Send your question to board@marquettefood.org or call 906-273-2287

Scan the QR code to learn more today



ASK OUR DIETITIAN

ACCESSIBLE, TRUSTWORTHY, ONE-ON-ONE
NUTRITION GUIDANCE WHILE YOU SHOP
WITH AMANDA LATVALA, RD



THIRD TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH
3:30-5:30PM • AT THE MFC
FREE & OPEN TO ALL

**MFC EDUCATION COORDINATOR AND REGISTERED DIETITIAN
AMANDA LATVALA WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE STORE TO:**

- Answer quick nutrition questions
- Help customers read and understand food labels
- Guide customers to products that meet their dietary needs or preferences
- Provide tips on meal planning, portion sizes, and healthy substitutions
- Distribute handouts, recipes, and nutrition information

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY 2026

Wellness BOGO Sale

December 31 - January 20
See Co-op Deals sales flyer for info

Local Vendor Spotlight Sampling: Young Mountain Tea

January 16 - 11am - 1pm
In-store

Local Food Panel with Connect Mqt

January 18 - 1 - 3pm
Women's Confederated Clubhouse
See page 15 for details | Free | Registration required

Ask Our Dietitian

January 20 - 3:30 - 5:30 pm
In-store

Marquette Food Co-op Board of Directors Meeting

January 20 - 6 - 8pm
Co-op Classroom

National Hot Sauce Day: Sampling with Foolazul

January 22 - 11am - 1pm
In-store



THE FRESH FEED

This newsletter is digitally published
monthly for owners and friends of
the Marquette Food Co-op.

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Everyone is welcome to attend Board Meetings, held the third Tuesday monthly at 6pm in the Co-op Classroom. For more info: www.marquettefood.coop

Disclaimer

The views within this publication are as diverse as the 5,000+ households sharing ownership of our Co-op, and thus do not represent the store, its Board of Directors, or staff. The Co-op does not prescribe health treatments or products. We offer the extensive knowledge of our staff, and encourage you to prescribe for yourself—every individual's right.

