

**Non-narrated Audio Profile: SCRIPT**

**Heather Blersch, Worker-Owner, Local Sprouts Cooperative, Portland, Maine**

**4 minutes, 41 seconds**

**Written & produced by Justine Denny © 2011**

**Heather Blersch, worker/owner:** (Ambient sound, bottles clanging)

It's funny I have a customer who buys that cranberry juice just because it's in a glass jar, and it feels like he's buying moonshine or something, which I think is so funny! (Laughs) Getting some lids... (Walks into kitchen and comes back to the front of the house with lids). Now, I'm stocking root beer, so that it's cold for lunch! And then I'm going to cover up our cranberry juice and put it out.

My name is Heather Blersch and I'm the newest owner at Local Sprouts Cooperative Café in Portland, Maine. Local Sprouts is a new café in Portland. We are dedicated to local foods movement and the social justice movement.

After 20 years in the restaurant business and a degree in Sociology from the University of Southern Maine, I realized that combining the two was not an impossible dream. Local Sprouts has given me an avenue to combine my education and my love of learning and teaching with my love and passion for fresh and local food.

How many owners are there? There are four, currently, work-owners, we call ourselves worker-owners because we all work at the Café, and within the business, and every worker here has a chance to become an owner through um, a buy-in and some sweat equity and making a two year commitment.

My family came to Maine when I was, I was about seven. I was raised in Woolwich, Maine, um, my mother's from England. My parents divorced when I was really young.

She's like a worker, she was raised in poverty and worked in like factories or jobs that you know, I guess when I was a kid I was kind of embarrassed of that my mom was like a worker, you know? She worked in a fish factory for a while, and how ungodly is that for a teenager to have, you know her mom show up in her fisherman gear (laughs) and now I look back, that's where I get a lot of my strength and my, my determination to work hard and create stuff.

And I feel like lit up when I talk about this place because it's...

**"Cat," regular customer:** You're practically glowing!"

**Heather Blersch, worker/owner:** ...well, it's a great mission!

**"Cat," regular customer:** It's a gorgeous place!

**Heather Blersch, worker/owner:** I mean what other restaurant can you have the farmer bringing cabbages in through the front door, and someone's sitting and eating cole slaw, "That guy made my food happen, as well as that guy!" You know, to be able to look people in the face and say "Hey, you worked hard, and your sweat and labor, you know, is directly affecting us, is like, it's pure magic, you know, how can you not? Especially, in this age of like faceless corporations and frozen foods it's, it's unique.

Yes, eventually maybe if we make a profit, we'll get profit-sharing or paid vacations or that sort of stuff, but right now what we get is a connection, we get a connection to our community, we get a connection to our food, we can feel proud, and I can feel proud bringing every single thing that I serve to a customer.

I know that the farmer that is raising the cattle that goes into our meat is passionate about what he does, he's 76, he's been farming all his life, he loves those animals. They're not tortured, they're not living this life of like, um, you know, I don't know how cows feel, I can't say that they're happy cows, (laughs) what is that? But they're healthy, they're not raised

under torturous practices. I think I get that, I get that satisfaction at the end of the day, that um, I'm connecting people to that.

I love our regular customers. I think that they're all really great. What I love more is the guy or the woman that walks in here, maybe with their kid, and you know they look around, and think what is this hippie place, but I talk to them about the food, and I say like just try this grilled cheese, or just try this burger and you know that they would typically be the person who would walk to MacDonald's and get the \$5 value meal, and they have our potato wedges that are farmed in Maine, and they have a burger that is grass fed and affordable for them, maybe a little bit more expensive than MacDonald's, but not that much, and,...and they come back, and they say, "Wow! that was really good!" and I think that means everything to me.

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