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To say that local food means a lot to me is an understatement. I started helping local farmers when I was only five years old sell their produce at the Green Bay Farmers Market. I quickly learned where good food comes from. When I was seven, I helped my father turn half an acre of our yard into a garden. Thirteen years ago my husband Richard and I started Olden Produce, LLC now Olden Organics. We are a year round Certified Organic fresh produce farm located in the Town of Rosendale. We sell our produce and line of Veggie Creations at local farmers markets, privately owned local grocery stores, and to other WI Food Co-ops (Outpost Natural Foods & Willy's Street Co-op). Richard and I live on our farm with our 3 Australian Shepherds, Adelaide, Brizbane, and Sydney. I also proudly serve as a member of the Oshkosh Farmers Market Board of Directors.

What would I bring/offer to the Oshkosh Food Co-op Board? Besides being a local producer myself, I am extremely connected to many other local producers in WI and the Midwest. In 2013 we opened WI's first 100% locally grown & produced, food only small grocery store in Appleton. The store carried over 70 different producer's products. We had been frustrated that there was not a local co-op in the area and decided to open one ourselves. After 1 year we realized that we are farmers and not grocers and closed the store. In that short year, we learned a lot about the grocery industry. I am very educated on the Food Safety regulations on a state and now federal level with the new FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act) rules.

What is your dream for the Oshkosh Food Co-op? My dream is for Oshkosh to have a thriving food co-op that will stock its shelves with locally sourced foods. I envision a salad bar and other grab and go prepared items all made with locally sourced products. I want the co-op to have a community room where groups can gather for meetings as well as space for people to hang out and have a cup of coffee or a glass of tea and check emails. I hope that we can use the meeting space to offer classes on cooking, canning, fermenting, and so much more.

Why do you think the Oshkosh Food Co-op is important to the greater Oshkosh Community? Co-ops are fundamental in creating community. This co-op will be the bridge that brings everyone together for what better reason than food. Being a member of other food co-ops, I have been a part of the local economic impact that they play in their communities. Co-ops offer job opportunities, hands on learning environments, and ways to give back to the community through fund-raisers, food drives, etc. I want all of these things for the people in and around Oshkosh.

Why Cooperatives? We are always better together. That is what my husband and I have built our farm on. For small businesses to succeed in the world of huge corporations we have to do what they are not. That is work together. Cooperatives are exactly that.

Additional thoughts.... Oshkosh and the Fox Valley area need a Co-op. I want to help make that happen.