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Stevens Point Area Co-op aims to lessen environmental impact

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The Stevens Point Area Co-op has been practicing sustainability since long before going green became trendy.

In addition to selling primarily local and organic products, this business, since its 1972 inception as a buying club, has worked deliberately through the years to minimize its environmental impact.

The co-op near downtown Stevens Point generates heat with wood and energy with passive solar panels. In the same building, Earthcrust Bakery recently installed photovoltaic windows as an alternative energy source.

"Any little niche. ... We're looking to lessen our impact any way we can," said staff member Anne Hylla.

Members and staff regularly use compost from the kitchen and produce section for gardening. All paper products are recyclable, and the office furniture is second-hand. Customers are encouraged to provide their own containers whenever possible and drop off paper bags to reuse.

The co-op avoids extra packaging whenever possible, partly through its ample bulk section. Not only is bulk often more affordable, Hylla said, it's more sustainable.

Customers also enjoy the co-op's glass milk bottle return program, so rather than throwing away endless cartons, the same sustainable and safe glass bottles can be used multiple times.

Stonyfield Farm Organic Yogurt, a popular co-op product, allows clients to return their yogurt containers, which then are reduced to malleable plastic and made into toothbrushes and razors, according to Hylla.

The Stevens Point Area Co-op is a valuable resource for Central Wisconsin residents, and Hylla said patrons from as far as Wausau visit regularly.

Even the building itself is sustainable. Constructed more than 100 years ago, staff have remained committed to updating the original building rather than creating a new one. In addition, the co-op is near the center of Stevens Point so many customers can bike or walk for their groceries.

"As a small business, we love dealing with other small businesses, so we're always looking to work more with local people," said general manager Norah Wienandt.

Wienandt said that while the co-op has many established practices, staff often think of new ways to go green.

In mid-July, Wienandt noticed staff members were bringing in their own cloth bathroom towels rather

than using the paper ones available.

"It's a little thing, but those little things add up," she said.
