

THE COOP'S FIRST 50 YEARS: HERE ARE 10 GREAT THINGS ABOUT THE PSFC

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By Liora Fishman

The Coop is approaching its 50-year anniversary. It's hard to believe that the Coop has remained an institution within Brooklyn for five decades, weathering all of the changes—global, economic, and local—that have come at us.

As a relatively new member, I've learned to love the Coop for all of its eccentricities. And eccentricities abound: I remember my first visit, looking aimlessly for eggs in the dairy section, only to find them next to the tofu, beside spices and racks of beer. In the swirl of Sunday shoppers, I shuffled into a line that I soon realized was Ex-

press—which I did not qualify for. As I weaved through the crowd, toward the regular line, I picked up a hyaluronic eye mask and thought: *They sell that here?*

Beginner's confusion aside, the Coop has brought many great things into my life: I've run into old friends with whom I've reconnected, have discovered some of my favorite snacks (the Hudson Harvest Cinnamon Applesauce) and learned that there are more kinds of cheeses than I'd ever imagined.

There are many more reasons to love the Coop, and while I'd love to list 50 things that make the Coop great, for brevity's sake, I'll keep it to 10:



1. **The “Next Member” sign:** Yes, *that* sign. As fickle as it may be, the flashing sign has become an endearing greeter, beckoning me inside as I hastily fish around my tote bag for my membership card. When lines are long and the weather is cold, I keep my eyes on the sign, knowing that the closer those flashing lights, the closer I am to the calming chaos of the Coop.
2. **The music:** I am someone who often gets stressed out by grocery shopping and, ad-

mittedly, the Coop is not a place that quells that anxiety—especially on its busier days. Yet, about 10 minutes into my shopping trip, I find myself scrolling through my grocery list on my phone, tapping my foot to the beat of a song that’s comforting, upbeat and nostalgic all at once. Carole King and Donna Summer are two of my favorite artists to shop to at the Coop.



3. **The bulk aisle:** Sure, other grocery stores have bulk aisles, but I’ve never seen one as thoroughly cared for, and with such diverse offerings, as the Coop’s. When I pass all the different kinds of rice, plus a multitude of other items, I inevitably leave with an additional five products that weren’t on my list. The figs (with stems) and Valrhona chocolates are often the culprits.



4. **The dogs outside the Coop entrance:** Perhaps this one is just as polarizing as the “Next Member” sign, but I love meeting dogs on my way in and out of the Coop. They’re often unbelievably well-behaved, patiently waiting for their owners. I love my dog, but she simply could never.
5. **Limited-time items:** Whenever I find my way to the shelves with seasonal or limited-time offerings, I find myself whipping out my phone to see what I could make

with an ingredient I've never heard of or a shape of pasta I've never seen. The section is often the source of inspiration for my Sunday night dinner.



6. **The plants:** Speaking of limited-time items, I'm a sucker for plants and seeds and just about anything garden related—and there's no better time for a gardening aficionado to be at the Coop than early spring, when the product aisle is blooming with

plants and seeds. Even though my small apartment does not have room for more plants, I know that more will still find their way into my living room this spring from the plant selection at the Coop.

7. **The Linewaiters' Gazette:** At the risk of sounding self-congratulatory, I think the very existence of the *Gazette* is a testament to the Coop being so much more than a simple grocery store. One glance through the *Gazette* and you'll see how much the staff and members care about the Coop and the community around it. In a culture of abundant apathy, it's heartening to be a part of a community that, put simply, *cares*.



8. **Shifts:** At first I found the concept of working shifts daunting as well as exciting. But I've come to appreciate the personal connection created between the Coop and the community within and surrounding it, which is established after working even one shift. Plus, there is truly something for everyone: An extrovert may prefer check-out, where they can converse about tonight's dinner recipes and new products. An introvert may prefer to put their headphones in and stock the produce aisle. What-

ever you fancy, there's a shift that can cater to that.

9. **Committees:** The Coop offers so many opportunities for involvement, and committees are a great way to get started. From the Animal Welfare Committee to the Environmental Committee, there is a place where each and every member can deepen their connection to the Coop by aligning their membership with their values.



10. **“500 Miles to Local”:** Perhaps my favorite thing about the Coop is the continuous assurance that the food we’re sourcing is local. The “500 Miles to Local” policy was one that prompted me to join the Coop in the first place. The Coop’s website says it best: “Buying local ensures two important benefits. The first is the benefit that our members reap: fresh product. The second is the support we give to our regional economy.”

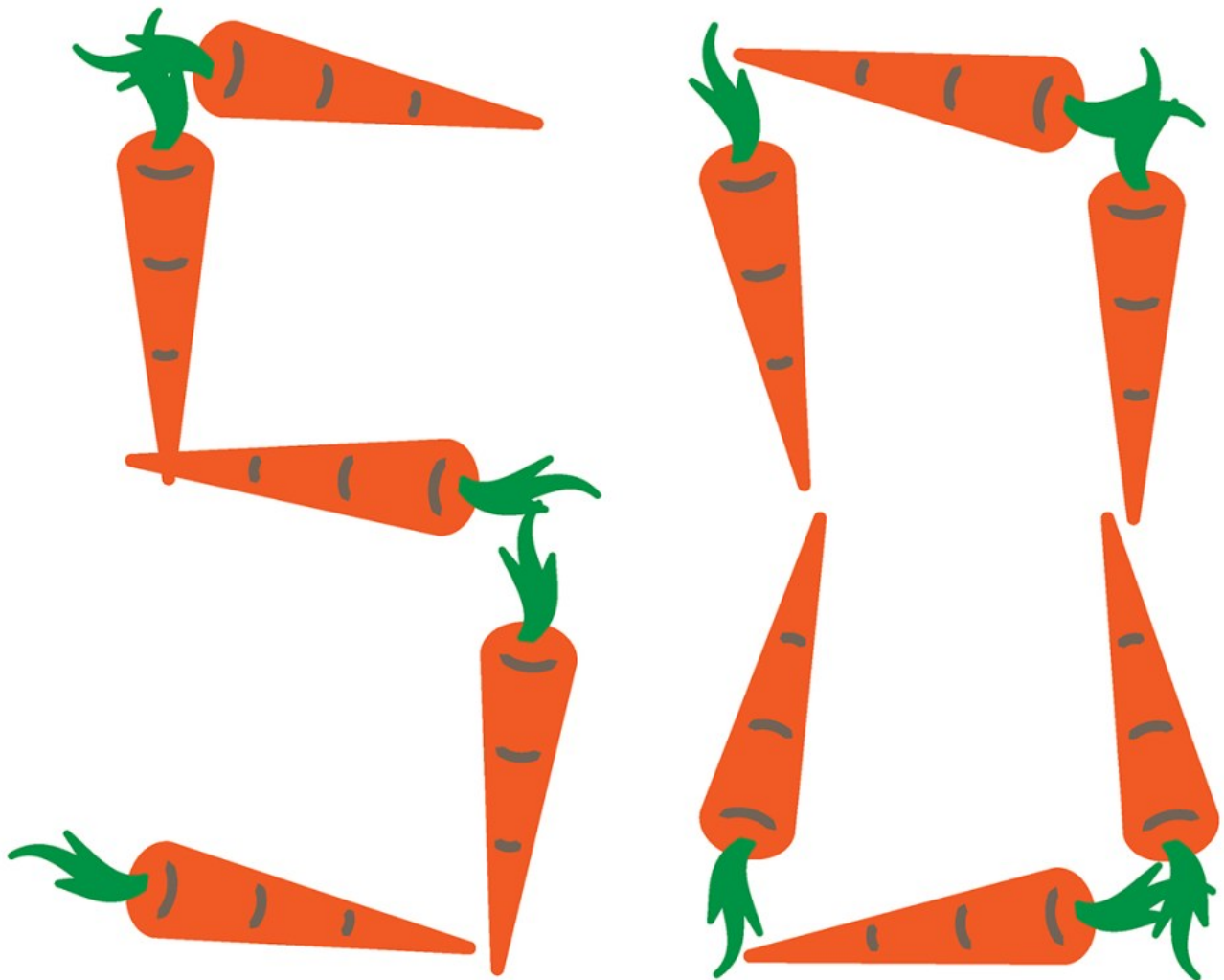


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

In an increasingly globalized economy, we're often taken further and further away from the source of our food. The Coop allows us to connect on a deeper level to the food we're eating, where it's coming from and how it's made. It allows us to shop more sustainably (in the bulk aisle, for example), and to foster a sense of community while we're at it. In 50 years, the Coop has created a thoughtful and invested community, built around a shared love of ethical consumption and—at the end of the day—great food.

Liora Fishman lives in Prospect Heights, and has a dog named Ollie.

Editor's note: This is part of an occasional series marking the Coop's 50th.