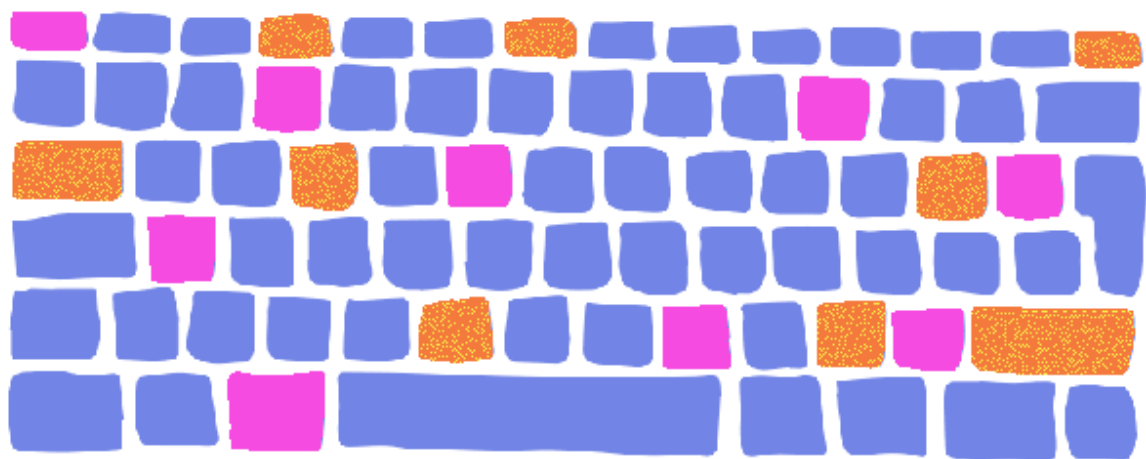


JANUARY 7, 2025

January 7, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Give more TLC to the Food Coop!

Greetings!

The Coop is amazing. For more than 50 years, this neighborhood community has out-competed corporate giants, offering better products at lower prices. But this success is fragile. The existence of this institution is truly miraculous and should not be taken for granted. Perhaps members have already forgotten our dire financial condition during the pandemic?

Good governance and the pragmatic business approach of the management team have been key to this success. Far from promoting rigidity, the Mission Statement and the Environmental Policy Guidelines are replete with language such as “will strive,” “we prefer,” “we try,” providing flexibility to buyers and GMs to ensure that they do good, without harming the business.

Sourcing of affordable, local and organic produce is prioritized. But there are also nonorganic and imports in our bins, including Mexican blueberries, Belgium endives, Israeli peppers, Peruvian mangoes. Plastic bags are not offered at checkout, but there is a choice of compostable and traditional produce bags, and even spinach in big plastic containers. And yes, we do carry products from multiple undemocratic or deeply flawed countries, and even from states which ban abortion.

A Coop that places ideological purity ahead of its mission statement, adopts non-consensual policies, tinkers with governance or pursues narrow partisan issues unrelated to its core mission is likely to experience what is typical for such businesses: decline and potential failure (think of X).

We are riding on the shoulders of 50 years of community effort. We should strive to continue improving the Coop, perhaps expanding to more locations, acting as a model to new communities, and thereby supporting our ecological transition while improving the health and pocketbooks of more people. At a minimum, let's not mess it up!

Bruno Grandsard

Time for a Hybrid Meeting Option

Dear Coop Members,

At the September General Meeting, there was a presentation about moving to hybrid meetings, which would give us the choice of either remote or in-person participation. This would open the way for so many more people to join in vital PSFC discussions and votes. It is an essential accommodation when, for various reasons, many who want to participate are unable to get to the Prospect Park Picnic House on Tuesday nights. (It's telling that at a recent GM I attended, the Picnic House was over capacity, meaning that if members *do* turn out in greater numbers, we don't even have a venue large enough to hold them!).

The presentation on hybrid meetings was clear and very well received. I expected the item to be on the agenda for a decision within a month or two. What happened? Assuming a positive vote, it will still take some time to implement this sensible proposal. Let's move ahead together!

Winston McIntosh

(B)ring in the Fun in 2025

To the editor:

A big thank you to the Fun Committee for the Happy Hour at BierWax on December 5.

They truly lived up to their name. It was just so much fun to be out and with friendly people. It was a wonderful reminder of what the Coop can be. Beyond just a grocery

store with good prices.

I'm looking forward to more events from the Fun Committee in 2025.

Barbara Mazor

Help for Coop Members Parenting Small Children

Fellow Members,

As COVID wound down, I was thrilled when our Coop reinstated member labor and returned to more familiar shopping procedures. Unfortunately, childcare, a long-standing support for families with young children, was yet another seemingly permanent casualty. We've been told that the Coop can no longer obtain affordable insurance for it.

If we cannot reinstate childcare, there are other ways to support families with young children, in particular, single-parent families. We can offer them longer than one year of parental leave from required work; I suggest at least three to four years, enough time for free daytime childcare in the form of 3K and Pre-K, to be available. I also suggest that this could be extended on a case-by-case basis, as needed. Perhaps a committee of members who are single parents could help us develop guidelines.

We can also offer an easy means for parents of young children (and so many others) to participate in Coop governance via virtual attendance at our monthly General Meetings. Currently, the only members who can take part in our GMs are those who can get to the Prospect Park Picnic house at 7p.m. on the last Tuesday of each month. For parents of young children (especially single parents), people who live far from the Picnic House, those with mobility issues or other caregiver responsibilities, there is no option to join these meetings, to offer opinions on important Coop matters, to bring pro-

posals to the floor, or to vote on others' proposals.

The Picnic House holds around 200 people, and our Coop has over 15,000 members. If we want to call our Coop a democratically run organization, we need to do much better in making its democracy more inclusive. Hybrid meetings would be a great start.

Cooperatively,

Alyce Barr

Conflict Resolution, Not Conflict Escalation

To the Editor:

Eight agenda items relate to the campaign to make the Coop part of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement.

I sponsored the seventh, item 901, which would “pause any member vote on items relating to a boycott of products associated with Israel pending four mediation sessions within six months from the vote on this item and issuance of a document containing a statement by each side.”

The proposal that the Coop declare its allegiance to BDS polarizes the membership. Joe Holtz wrote in the *Linewaiters' Gazette* on February 26, 2024, for the General Coordinators, that the Israel boycott is qualitatively different from other boycotts that have been proposed in the past, and the campaign could result in thousands of members withdrawing. The differences in beliefs about the Israel-Palestine conflict have reached the point of vilification and overt hostility between members. There is no mechanism for resolving member disputes arising out of political identities and other belief systems. The Dispute Resolution Committee is not equipped to deal with such

disputes—and there are now multiple cases before the DRC resulting from this conflict. It seems self-evident that an attempt at collective conflict resolution would benefit the Coop.

Agenda Committee guideline number 2 provides that “an item may be placed ahead of others submitted earlier if the item requires more immediate attention or its timely consideration at the GM is beneficial to the efficient running of the Coop....”

I requested that the Agenda Committee expedite discussion of item 901. The Agenda Committee did not do so, nor has it responded to my question how it applies Guideline 2.

To promote cooperative dispute resolution, I urge that the Agenda Committee schedule discussion of item 901 ahead of earlier pending boycott-related items or explain why Guideline 2 does not apply.

Noah Potter

Mission Statement in Support of Coop Culture

Dear members,

A BDS proponent approached me some weeks ago, asking me to support their proposal. I said it doesn't align with the Coop mission. “That's not really true,” she retorted. The word “really” is of interest here.

I'd like to share my POV regarding the BDS boycott proposal, informed by the Coop's mission statement. One could argue that the following sentences from the statement are relevant to their proposal:

“We seek to avoid products that depend on the exploitation of others.”

However, “exploitation of others” relates to the labor culture at the company and how it treats staff; those companies are presumably independent from the government of the country they’re in.

“We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and to respect the opinions, needs and concerns of every member. We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policymaking to running the store.”

This applies within the parameters of the aforementioned items in the mission statement, not losing sight of the first line of that last paragraph: “We are committed to diversity and equality. We oppose discrimination in any form.”

Yet...if there is a reason to exclude suppliers in Israel, it would be that “We prefer to buy from local...producers.” If suppliers in Israel would be excluded for that reason, it would be legit...*and apply to all suppliers in all faraway places, all politics aside.*

If it has to come to a vote, I’d suggest to appeal to Coop members as individuals and as allies of each other by way of Coop mission, no matter their backgrounds. Beyond that, I believe in the power of the individual consumer to forgo a product for whatever reason, political reasons included. It’d be a great thing if we did more of it.

Erik Schurink

Towards a Liberatory Coop

Dear Coop Members,

As we edge closer towards the end of the year, I’ve been reflecting on the ways in

which I show up in community and how the Coop and its values are an extension of my own. I feel an immense amount of gratitude for access to such an abundance of quality food, but also for the potential that the Coop has to become a liberatory space for the people. As a member, I believe that it's critical that we demand that the goods that we have on our shelves be reflective of our values. It's a radical act to choose not to purchase food from mega corporations and instead, to support small businesses and regenerative, family-owned farms.

In the same vein, I refuse to support a genocide and the occupation of stolen land. And I feel hopeful knowing that so many other Coop members share my commitment. I look forward to the day when we'll make it official, following in the footsteps of leaders at Olympia Food Co-Op in Washington state, as well as our neighbors at Greene Hill Food Co-Op. As an expression of their solidarity with Palestine, Greene Hill members voted in October to join the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, pledging not to stock Israeli products in their store until the end of the occupation.

If we are a collective that believes that the Coop is reflective of our values, then we must continue to decide how the millions of dollars that we spend on food every year will demonstrate what they are. Audre Lorde spoke truth when she wrote:

And I dream of our coming together

encircled driven
not only by love
but by lust for a working tomorrow
the flights of this journey
maples. uncertain
and necessary as water.

Taylor Pate