

CONFESSIONS OF COOP CHEATERS—AND DIET COKE DRINKERS

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By Liz Welch

My husband, Gideon, has been a member of the Park Slope Food Coop since 2006.

When we first started dating, he took me as his guest to the Coop one Sunday morning, and I remember thinking, what is this nirvana? Blood oranges? Medjool dates? Grumpy coffee? Plus bulk oatmeal... and oat milk before it became trendy? I wanted to sign up immediately.

“It’s a commitment,” he warned me.

We moved in together, got engaged, and that was when I finally joined, thrilled to be part of this community and happy to stock gorgeous fennel and pluots on a monthly basis. Gideon was correct: it was a commitment! But so worth it, as I loved the thoughtfully curated assortment of incredibly fresh and incredibly affordable food.

And then one day, I called my then-fiancé, and shared, “I just got the most gorgeous strawberries at the farmers’ market in Union Square.”

He grew quiet.

“Is everything okay?” I asked.

He said: “I just don’t understand.”

“Excuse me?” I said, confused.

“We work for our food,” he continued. “Why would you buy produce anywhere other than at the Coop?”

I laughed then, and we still laugh about it as he continues to be a more faithful Coop shopper than I am. I still occasionally buy produce at farmers’ markets—and have even, begrudgingly, bought marked-up apples or grapes at Union Market when the lines at the Coop can make a quick stop impossible. And glorious as our selection may be, it’s impossible to stock everything under the sun in our limited space.

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So when my *Linewaiters’ Gazette* editor asked me if I had “ever cheated” on the Coop, I said, “Hell yes!”

That led to this story:

I sent out an email blast to a few Coop friends that asked in the subject line, “Do you ever cheat on the Coop? Do you have a secret habit of buying bread or cheese or anything else anywhere else?”



Luise replied first:

“I go to Mozz Lab (502 Henry Street, Brooklyn) for mozzarella,” she wrote. “The Coop only sells tiny little pre-packaged ones, not the big juicy homemade Italian mozzarella that feeds an entire family!”

Maria, my Swedish friend, says she goes to Smor (437 East 12th Street, NY) for Danish bread, and Fabrique (348 W. 14th Street, NY) for other Swedish treats.

Linda likes Fei Long market in Brooklyn’s Chinatown (6301 8th Avenue). “It’s huge, so

less crowded than elbowing through the narrow aisles of the Coop. It is inexpensive, has lots of fresh produce, all kinds of seafood and interesting frozen Asian food options. You can sit and eat at the food court which is great for people watching and soaking in the culture. In warm weather, it's also fun to leave the Slope to walk through the area and hang out in a different part of Brooklyn."



Excited by all these new places to try, I decided to cast a wider net, and made a post on Facebook's Park Slope Together, which elicited more than 70 comments.

Some took my tongue-in-cheek request, "has anyone ever cheated on the Coop?" a little too seriously:

"Your premise is off!" Riva said. "We don't pledge allegiance to PSFC."

She was not alone in her feelings as seven other people liked her comment.

Shoshana got the joke, and made me laugh out loud with her comment: “It’s more that we are in an ethical non-monogamous relationship. When they had the Bell and Evans breaded chicken cutlets and nuggets, we were okay. But once they stopped stocking them, the substitute was not up to par! I like Key Foods’ (130 7th Ave.) fresh pierogies, the snacks and prices and variety at Trader Joe’s (130 Court St.), and the convenience of picking up something wherever I am and for whatever I need!”

More than a few people admitted to going to Trader Joe’s for a variety of things, including my pal Maria who gets “goat cheese, minced meat, ready-cooked bits of chicken and frozen meals” there.

Libby’s post really summed up the allure: “I go to Key Foods for my toxic food needs: Rice Krispies, marshmallows, Chex Mix, packaged cake mix, cheese balls, red hots and even distilled water. Why? Because Rice Krispie treats don’t work with healthy marshmallows (I’ve tried.) I have a Chex Mix lover in the family and sometimes I don’t have time to bake a cake from scratch and I don’t like the organic cake mix. Cheese balls are a special occasion (sleepover) item and I need red hots for my gingerbread people. Distilled water is for my iron. You can also buy a big container of toxic croissants for cheap and when you stick them in the oven, they are delicious.”

Her honest (and hilarious) post emboldened other Key Foods “cheaters” to admit they shop at the supermarket for sugary cereal, powdered donuts and Diet Coke!

Diana agreed with the Rice Krispies comment, and added she happily picks up a rotisserie chicken at Union Market, and buys cakes from Ladybird Bakery (252 Prospect Park W). “I never feel like I am cheating, just utilizing neighborhood resources properly.”

Kristen understands the nuance.

“My father is die-hard, pledge-allegiance to the Coop, and basically refuses to shop anywhere else, whereas my mother will opt for going to any farmers’ market first be-

fore going to the Coop.”

“SOMETIMES YOU NEED YOUR MALLOMARS.”

Alas! I am not alone! Though once our daughter came into the picture, Gideon eased up and would make allowances for last-minute runs to the Gowanus Whole Foods (214 3rd St.). (Another Diana shared that she particularly likes their frozen pizza selection, and Donna specifically shops there for Richard’s Sparking Rainwater “by the case because, it’s the best seltzer, in my opinion, and comes in glass bottles—no plastic!”)

Costco (976 3rd Ave.) got a shoutout for its competitive pricing—and, according to several commenters, its superior toilet paper. As did Mr. Lime (313 7th Ave.) for its cheap produce.

There were so many other wonderful suggestions, too many to include in one story, so I will wrap up with some highlights to consider:

Sahadis (187 Atlantic OR Pier 57 at Industry City) for the old-school Brooklyn experience as well as the Middle Eastern cornucopia, from dried Angelino plums to enormous glass jars of by-the-pound malt balls.

Japan Village (943 3rd Avenue) for all things Japanese, from a variety of furikake and onigiri to mochi.

Fish Tales (191A Court Street) for an incredible assortment of freshly caught fish and central-casting fishmongers.

Prospect Butcher Co. (665 Vanderbilt Avenue) got two shout outs for being an excellent source of high-quality meats. Its website also seems PSFC aligned, “Whole Ani-

mal, Worker Owned, Locally Sourced.”

All in, I have a whole new list of places to try, and a sense of relief that I’m not the only cheater out there. As one woman accurately summed up: “Sometimes, you need your Mallomars.”

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