

COORDINATORS' CORNER: SAFEGUARDING THE COOP'S FUTURE

February 18, 2025

COORDINATORS' CORNER



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

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By The General Coordinator Team

This is our third Coordinators' Corner of 2025, addressing concerns and highlighting the risks associated with a campaign led by members from PSFC Members for Palestine, who aim to have the Coop join a BDS-targeted boycott of Israeli goods.

THE COOP'S BOYCOTT HISTORY

The Coop has a long tradition of participating in boycotts. Since 1989 we've joined a number of boycotts, with an impressive 97% of members voting in favor across all boycott votes. This overwhelming support reflects the Coop's commitment to building consensus and aligns with the International Cooperative Alliance's Seven Cooperative

Principles, which promote unity while embracing diversity.

SUCH SCRUTINY COULD RESULT IN COSTLY LEGAL BATTLES, GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATIONS AND MAJOR DISRUPTIONS TO THE COOP'S OPERATIONS AND STABILITY.

PSFC Members for Palestine are proposing to repeal the Coop's 75% supermajority requirement for General Meeting (GM) votes on boycotts and replace it with a simple majority to make it easier to approve a Coop boycott of Israeli goods. A boycott without broad member support undermines the Principles of Cooperation, weakens the Coop's cohesion and threatens its stability, as outlined in a previous Coordinators' Corner. Maintaining the 75% supermajority is a reasonable minimum, especially given that boycott votes have historically averaged 97% in favor. This threshold ensures that boycotts are only advanced with sufficient member support to preserve Coop unity and protect it from harmful risk.

PSFC BOYCOTT HISTORY (1989-PRESENT)

Date	Boycott	Yes Votes	No Votes	Approval %
January 1989	Chile, S. Africa, non-UFW grapes	19	0	100%
July 1989	All tuna fish	9	0	100%
December 1990	Bumble Bee Tuna	15	1	94%
August 1991	Non-UFW Grapes	30	7	81%
February 1993	Colorado	37	8	82%
May 1997	Garden Burger	36	1	97%
January 2001	Domino Sugar	38	0	100%

Date	Boycott	Yes Votes	No Votes	Approval %
2004–2018	Coca Cola products	1,959*	41*	98%
November 2010	Flaum Appetizing	165	3	98%
August 2018	CamelBak products	175	5	97%

*Aggregate of annual votes

POLITICAL AND LEGAL RISKS TO JOINING BDS

We believe the Coop faces significant external risks by aligning with the BDS movement. Politically motivated initiatives such as Project 2025 and Project Esther explicitly target organizations engaging in boycotts or divestments against Israel. These efforts promote policies and legislation that could expose the Coop to legal, financial or other harm. Aligning with BDS could bring scrutiny under laws such as the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) or the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), as outlined in Project Esther. Such scrutiny could result in costly legal battles, government investigations and major disruptions to the Coop’s operations and stability.

Our concerns are not unfounded. The broader goal of PSFC Members for Palestine is to connect the Coop to the global BDS movement, as outlined on their website:

*The BDS framework offers us clarity around the particularities of our boycott demands, and **connects us to a global movement** while otherwise enabling us to work autonomously and independently to address our specific context here at the Coop. In committing to BDS, we follow the lead of Palestinian trade unions, which have unanimously declared their support to the movement. If we believe Palestinians are agents in their own liberation and that we should support them, then we should take up their call to endorse BDS.*

We maintain that aligning with the BDS movement exposes the Coop to significant political, legal and financial risks that could jeopardize its operations and stability.

THE GENERAL COORDINATORS' ROLE

Some members have asked why the General Coordinators (GCs) are speaking out on this topic. The answer lies in the GCs' responsibilities, as outlined by the Coop's by-laws, governance and history. As Chief Administrative Officers, GCs are obligated to act in the Coop's best interest. Our duties include overseeing daily operations, financial management, long-term planning, sustainability and risk management. Protecting the Coop by anticipating and mitigating risks is central to our role.

The GCs have been accused of fear-mongering for identifying these risks. We firmly reject this characterization. Assessing risks and providing honest evaluations is not fear-mongering—it is fundamental to our role as Chief Administrative Officers. By openly sharing information about potential challenges, we offer a perspective grounded in the Coop's operations and financial sustainability, ensuring that members have the knowledge to make informed decisions in the Coop's best interest.

Our duty is to keep the Coop strong and resilient, now and for the future.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Since our founding in 1973, Coop members have collectively worked over 4 million shifts. Each shift represents a vote for cooperation and the Coop's unique member-worker model. While political initiatives and boycotts have played a role in our history—accounting for just over 2,500 member votes on boycott related matters—they are a much smaller part of our identity compared to the millions of shifts worked to sustain the Coop's daily operations. It's evident that the Coop's strength lies in the collective work and dedication of its members to our participatory model, not in pursuing measures that lack broad support, and fail to build consensus.

The risks tied to the BDS proposal—whether legal, operational or otherwise—are too

significant to ignore. Boycotting Israel could divert attention and resources away from the Coop's day to day work: ensuring smooth operations, financial stability and maintaining the cohesiveness of our diverse membership. Cooperation is at the heart of our Coop, and unity among members is essential to its success.

OUR DUTY IS TO KEEP THE COOP STRONG AND RESILIENT, NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE.

The General Coordinators emphasize that the Coop's longevity depends on our longstanding commitment to collaboration and our shared efforts. When proposals arise that jeopardize the Coop's stability, it is our responsibility to speak out. Our primary duty is to safeguard the Coop's ability to thrive, ensuring it continues to serve as a successful member-worker model for current and future members, and as an inspiration for others seeking to establish new member-labor food cooperatives.

We urge all members to act to protect our Coop:

- Attend General Meetings to voice your concerns.
- Vote against lowering the 75% supermajority boycott threshold.
- Engage in respectful dialogue with fellow members about these issues.
- Write to the Gazette to share your perspective.

The General Coordinator Team