PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: FOOD COOP: THE MOVIE!

April 29, 2025

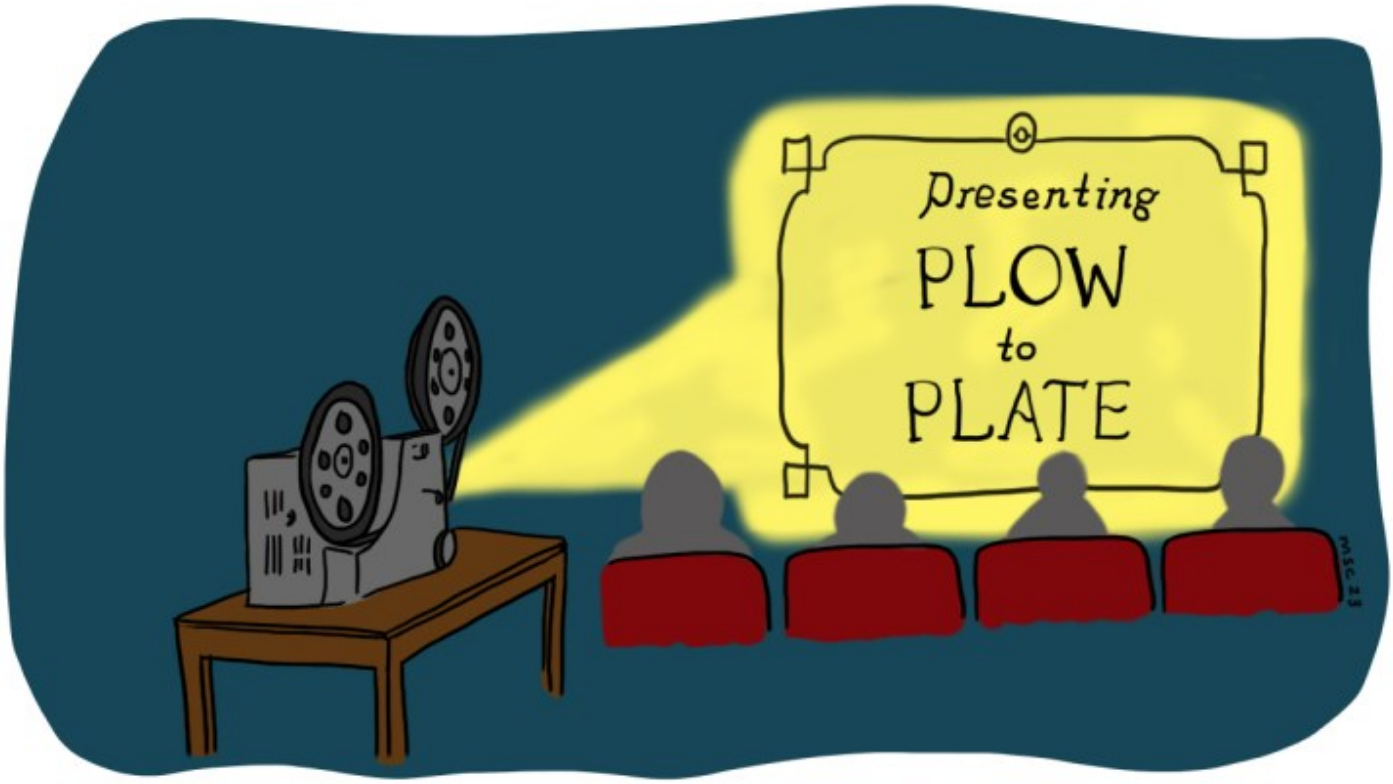


Illustration by Maggie Carson

June 3, 2025

By Adam Rabiner

The Park Slope Food Coop is as well-known as its iconic green and red “EST 1973” neon sign. With over 17,000 members, it’s a successful food cooperative, recognized for quality products, low prices, industry-leading metrics and, perhaps most famously, its founding principles of cooperation and a unique member-based work model. This almost one-of-a-kind standing drew the attention of filmmaker Thomas Boothe who profiled our beloved shopping haven in his 2016 film, *Food Coop*.

Food Coop’s quirky, informal, spontaneous and familiar tone and personality often reflects its subject. Little of the film is formally scripted. The movie’s verisimilitude will immediately be obvious to members intimately acquainted with the sights and sounds of 782 Union Street: the traffic noise and sirens, the beeping machines, the

crowded aisles and the long checkout lines.

Tom Boothe highlights the unique volunteer culture by walking around and asking workers, “Can I ask you a question, what do you do for a living?” A stocker teaches pre-school, a guy breaking down boxes in the basement is an animator, another at checkout is in social services. There’s a psychoanalyst and a pair of filmmakers. Some of these faces, like founder Joe Holtz, may even be familiar to you.

Food Coop is also very much a Brooklyn film. A worker with a walker shift, the head of the Working Families Party, is interviewed heading into equally recognizable territory down Union Street to 7th Avenue then towards Flatbush Avenue. In another scene, a bicyclist, disappointed by his local deli and Key Food, pedals to his home in nearby Gowanus recounting how the Coop helped him meet fellow foodies. A food activist takes us to Bedford Stuyvesant, a food desert, where she contrasts the Coop’s merchandise and prices with those of a local bodega where a moldy lemon costs $.50. A couple welcomes us into their home in what appears to be Windsor Terrace or Kensington, displaying their week’s shopping and contrasting how much less each item is than at Whole Foods.

> *FOOD COOP* DEPICTS A UNIQUE INSTITUTION WHOSE MESSINESS AND DIVERSITY HAVE INSPIRED A PASSIONATE AND DEDICATED COMMUNITY

The camera also ventures into the Coop’s more hidden spaces, offering discoveries for members only familiar with the shopping floor. We visit a cheese packing squad in the basement grooving to the mix, *Music to Process Food By—Volume 43*. We spend time with a worker in the frigid and claustrophobic dairy cooler. We also learn some surprising things, for example, long-time apple supplier Amy Hepworth does not put a dollar amount on her invoices but leaves it to a General Coordinator to be fair or that organic chocolate does not necessarily mean better quality.

Food Coop jumps around, alighting upon things familiar to members. It features interviews with bulk and cheese buyers, office staff, childcare workers and a couple who do composting. We see new members being briefed at their orientation and choosing which squad to work on. The film examines the workings of the Disciplinary Committee, the Environmental Committee's campaign to eliminate plastic bags and the Coordinators' resistance to this proposal. It tags along with Dan, a squad leader, and his beleaguered team during a closing shift at the height of the holiday season on Christmas Eve. We follow a shopper heading home by subway and bus, a nearly two-hour trip, undertaken, understandably, only once a month.

What kind of crazy person schlepps bulky grocery bags halfway across New York City by public transportation, even if only ten to twelve times a year? *Food Coop* depicts a unique institution whose messiness and diversity have inspired a passionate and dedicated community willing to go to just those great lengths.

Food Coop

Tuesday, June 10, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child Ana.

Author's Note: A slightly lengthier version of this review appeared in the January 31, 2019, issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. *Food Coop* was originally screened as Part of the *Plow to Plate* series on February 12, 2019.