

WHO GIVES A CRAP? THESE GUYS, PROUDLY.

July 28, 2026



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By Emmett Lindner

In July 2012, Simon Griffiths had been on the toilet for a while. Like, 50 hours a while. By the time he finished doing his business, he had earned \$50,000.

Griffiths did not need to seek medical attention—the feat of immobility was part of a crowdsourcing effort to fund a venture he cofounded: Who Gives A Crap, a mission-driven toilet paper company. The Coop recently began selling this brand, which is more than just your average roll of squares: Who Gives A Crap, it turns out, actually gives a s—.

Its two toilet paper varieties are made from 100 percent recycled fibers or bamboo. The company donates half of its profits to sanitation initiatives around the world. According to the Who Gives A Crap website, to date, the company has raised more than \$14 million for water, sanitation and hygiene partners who work to give access to clean water and toilets for people globally. The company verifies the donations through an external auditor.

REPRESENTATIVES FOR WHO GIVES A CRAP DECLINED TO BE INTERVIEWED FOR THIS ARTICLE. PERHAPS THE ONLY THING THEY DO NOT GIVE A CRAP ABOUT IS LOCAL PUBLICITY.

“We take something that everybody needs and use the proceeds to help people in need,” Griffiths said in a 2012 YouTube video that introduced the company. He added, “And that feels really, really good.”

But it’s not only the mission that gives comfort—reviews of the product have been good, too. While some users have noted the bamboo version holds up better than the recycled, the brand has received positive feedback from professional testers.

“I happened to get an Instagram ad for Who Gives A Crap,” one review said of the toilet paper brand in Wirecutter. “I’ve had a subscription to Who Gives A Crap ever since. And I’m never going back.”

Representatives for Who Gives A Crap declined to be interviewed for this article. (Perhaps the only thing they do not give a crap about is local publicity.)

As the company’s founders tell it, the mission of Who Gives A Crap came before its push to bring consistent wipes to the masses.

Who Gives A Crap was founded in Melbourne, Australia, by Simon Griffiths, Danny Alexander and Jehan Ratnatunga. After the success of Mr. Griffith’s Indiegogo fundraising campaign (the test of toilet endurance), Who Gives A Crap delivered its first products for sale in March 2013.

“We never wanted to be toilet paper moguls when we were kids—it was the sanitation problem that brought us to this,” Griffiths said in a 2020 profile in *Financial Review*.

According to the Who Gives A Crap’s website: To meet the global demand for toilet paper, nearly 2 million trees a day would need to be cut down.

There are other products on the market that also use alternative sources but, based on conservative estimates by Who Gives a Crap studies, more than half the world’s population still uses traditional toilet paper.

Griffiths grew up in Perth, Australia, and backpacked through developed countries while he was studying engineering and commerce at the University of Melbourne.

AS SUPERMARKETS HAD TROUBLE KEEPING TOILET PAPER IN STOCK, WHO GIVES A CRAP BEGAN TO POP UP ON THREADS AROUND THE INTERNET FOR ITS ONLINE ACCESSIBILITY AND ALTRUISM.

“We spent a lot of time in Malaysia, and as a young kid all you want to do is play with other young kids. It didn’t matter if you did not speak the same language, you could still have fun,” he said in the *Financial Review* profile.

“I became really interested in social mobility and how being born on one side of the border versus the other would ultimately result in a very different course of life for those people,” he added. “Why is that, and then how can you shift it?”

He later found a statistic stating that 40 percent of the world’s population did not have access to a toilet, and he began to map out his mission.

Who Gives A Crap took off in earnest during the pandemic. During that time when sanitary products like toilet paper were flying off shelves, causing shortages and inspiring frenzied searches for more, Who Gives A Crap experienced a boon. As supermarkets had trouble keeping toilet paper in stock, Who Gives A Crap began to pop up on threads around the internet for its online accessibility and altruism.

“Our customers essentially sent us viral when people were sharing photos of empty supermarket shelves, and they were saying: ‘Why are you buying from the supermarket? You should be buying from Who Gives A Crap,’” Griffiths shared in *Financial Review*.

The company began to sell in a day what it would usually sell in a month, and at its pandemic peak, it was selling 28 rolls of toilet paper a second.

At that time, Griffiths said, his company was “not able to deal with fluctuations in volume that big, so we had to turn the website off to make sure we’ve got enough stock for our subscribers and business customers.”

Who Gives A Crap sold out around the world, and the company’s waitlist quickly reached more than half a million people.

Once the logistics were settled, that meant more resources for its mission, too. By July 2020, Who Gives A Crap was able to donate nearly \$6 million from its global sales—its largest donation at the time.

By 2020, the company had a staff of about 100 and began to ship its rolls to 36 countries, with warehouses in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands. The company received about \$50 million in investments in 2021, according to *Financial Review*.

Who Gives A Crap has, by all accounts, used its popularity to bolster its charitable mission. A letter of donation confirmations signed by Pitcher Partners, an independent accounting and tax agency, said that the donations for the fiscal year 2025 were greater than 50 percent of the profits before donations during that same period.

Who Gives A Crap has moved beyond the toilet paper roll business.

In May of 2025, the company partnered with Erewhon, the food store that gained notoriety for its celebrity shoppers and jaw-dropping price tags. Example: Less than 13 ounces of olive oil for \$43, a price point antithetical to that of the Coop. Even at Erewhon, a four-pack of Who Gives A Crap remains relatively well-priced, coming in at \$9.99, according to the store's website.

The partnership resulted in limited-edition digestive smoothies, named C.R.A.P. (Coconut, Raspberry, Aloe Vera and Probiotics—Who Gives a Crap, if you couldn't tell, sticks to a theme.)

The company has diversified, now selling disposable tissues, "Dream Cloths" (hyper-absorbent Swedish dishcloths made from plant-based materials), scrub sponges (also fully from plant-based inputs) and trash bags (made from 100% recycled materials). It also sells fully recycled bags for when your dog gives a you-know-what on the streets of New York.

Emmett Lindner works on the breaking and trending news desk at The New York Times.

MEET THE COOP'S WINDOWSILL WARRIORS

July 28, 2026



Cathy and Bradley Stroll used to bake quiches for the Coop. Then they bought a farm and grow greens for our home gardens.

LOUDSPEAKER LORE

July 28, 2026



PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

THE BANANA TRADE HAS A SORDID HISTORY. WHY THE COOP'S BANANAS ARE DIFFERENT

July 28, 2026

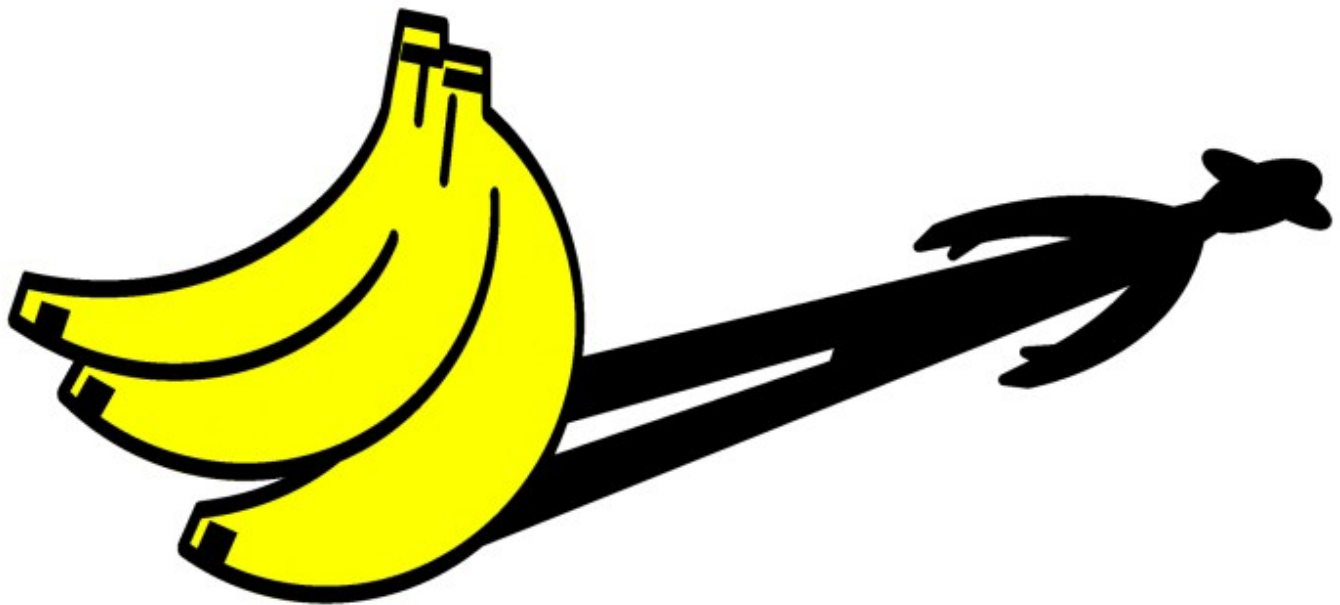


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

June 16, 2026

By Dan Bergsagel

In the United States, we eat a lot of bananas. Each year, over 5 million tons of bananas are imported, about 27 billion bananas in total.

That's 25 to 30 pounds per person each year, the equivalent of each of us eating one banana every four or five days. Nearly all the bananas eaten in the United States are grown in a handful of Central and South American countries, with 40 percent import-

ed from Guatemala, and 50 percent imported from Ecuador, Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico.

The weird and wonderful story of how bananas get from boats to the grocery stores of New York City has been covered by *The New York Times*, but what is the story of the Coop's bananas?

Not all bananas are grown and harvested under the same circumstances.

The banana-growing industry "is rooted in power imbalance" according to Equal Exchange, the Coop's banana distributor. Historical practices that abuse laborers in banana-growing regions have included granting tax-free land to foreign multinational corporations, forced labor under paramilitaries and the promotion of farming chemicals dangerous to humans.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

The term “Banana Republic” described the consequences of a small state, usually authoritarian, becoming economically dependent on the export of bananas, to the detriment of its population.

Where the Coop buys our bananas is crucial if we wish to avoid this tarnished supply chain. For 20 years, Equal Exchange has been sourcing organic fair-trade bananas, importing 37 million in 2025 (approximately 1 in every 730 bananas imported to the

US).

According to Jessie Myszka, Equal Exchange's National Sales Manager for Fresh Produce, 782,880 of its bananas were sold to the Coop in 2025, a 7 percent increase on our banana purchases in 2024. At just over 2 percent of the total bananas Equal Exchange distributes, the Coop is its largest single-unit customer.

If, like me, you struggle to visualize what 780,000 bananas look like, it's nearly 10,000 cases, filling 204 pallets. That is four packing pallets of bananas per week. "That's a lot of bananas for one store," Myszka said.

Of the bananas consumed by the Coop, around 250,000 are grown by Cooperativa Rio y Valle (RyV) in the northwestern Piura region of Peru.

Bananas are weird. They are not the fruit of a tree, like an apple, but technically the berries of an herb. Commercial bananas are sterile—they do not reproduce from seeds, but are instead propagated from offshoot stems, much as you might grow a house plant from cuttings.

"The little sprouts at the base of the banana plant are referred to as babies and the big one is the mother," said Myszka. "When they prune the plant they take away all but two of the babies."

When bananas are prepared for export, layers of foam or newspaper are placed between the layers of hands in a bunch, and this bunch is covered with a plastic bag for weeks to protect it from spores.



Carrying bananas in a cradle. (Photo courtesy of Equal Exchange.)

The bunches are then cut down when they are still green and put carefully on a large cushion (referred to as a cradle). The bunch is then hung, sprayed and trimmed to the group of 5 or 6 bananas that we see in the store. They are washed in a big tank and then packed in cases for export.



Packing bananas. (Photo courtesy of Equal Exchange.)

Because banana plants are sterile, “once the mother’s fruit is harvested, the mother has to be cut down,” explained Myszka. One of the babies will grow in her place. Banana plants require moist soil to grow, with the soil staying within a goldilocks moisture range that is neither dry nor waterlogged, but evenly and consistently damp. And in death, the mother can still provide for her babies.

“The plant stem holds a ton of water in honeycomb-like cells, so after they cut down the mother they slice open the trunk and put that on the ground face down so it can drain. In an area where there is not much water, that’s really important,” Myszka said.

With this unusual growing and harvesting cycle, it can be hard to manage the quality of banana produce. This is one of the key traits of Rio y Valle, and why it is one of only three primary banana-supplying cooperatives trusted by Equal Exchange.

RyV has been commended by Equal Exchange’s third-party quality oversight for its superior banana quality. At RyV, after harvest the bananas are carefully transported from the fields to a local packing facility, “either through limited cableway systems or manually by workers carrying bunches on their shoulders,” described Edgar Talledo, a banana grower and Certifications Manager at RyV, “before being moved in cooperative-owned trucks to a central palletizing site. There, the bananas are packed into containers, sealed and transported by road to the port.”

The quality was attributed to a “work ethic that ... is difficult to replicate,” he said.

“The cooperative faced serious quality issues during its early years, even receiving ultimatums from buyers that threatened to halt exports,” Talledo said. “In response, the entire organization—from leadership to field workers—committed to raising standards through continuous training, close supervision and a shared sense of responsibility among producers and staff.”



A meeting of Rio y Valle co-op members. (Photo courtesy of Equal Exchange.)

RyV is a cooperative formed by 343 small producers. Unlike large commercial banana plantations of hundreds of hectares, or even regional fair trade cooperatives formed of producers with an average of 7 hectares each, the farmers within RyV each manage less than 2 hectares. This collaboration of many small farmers is particularly important for managing the water resources in the region.

“Río y Valle’s name reflects the landscape where it was born: the Chira River and the Chira Valley in northern Peru. This region offers particularly favorable conditions for banana production, with a warm, stable climate that supports consistent growth and good yields,” Talledo said.

Yet the land was not always like this. The President of RyV, Juan Ovieda, described the land when they established the farms in the mid-1980s as “dusty, dry and not productive.”

Water management is crucial, but it’s hard with a collection of small farmers. “At that scale, it’s not practical to address the water needs of a plot. Together, this modest group of growers successfully requested permission to install an irrigation system,” explains a blog on the Equal Exchange website.

Exporting bananas requires a lot of plastic—both between the layers of hands of bananas and to enclose the bunches. RyV now operates a plastic recycling factory.

“The co-op coordinates picking up the plastic from the individual farmers, and it goes to a little factory where it gets pelletized and extruded into pallet corner boards,” Myszka said. This is a win-win outcome, where the cooperative is reducing waste in its environment and producing an item that its members need for shipping bananas, allowing them to buy from their own facilities at a much lower price.

Cooperativa Rio y Valle’s work is inspiring, but there are broader problems with the banana trade.

“All the bananas that get exported are the same variety, called Cavendish. The local market has many types of bananas, but only the Cavendish can travel,” said Myszka.

Cavendish bananas are grown as a monoculture, and because they are sterile and propagated from other plants, they are essentially clones. Without genetic diversity, they are susceptible to pests and disease.

This is not a hypothetical concern. Up until the 1950s, the export banana trade dealt with a different cultivar, Gros Michel, until swathes of plantations were destroyed by a fungus causing a wilt called Panama Disease. Gros Michel was replaced with Cavendish, a variety that was resistant to the fungus.

Today the Cavendish is under threat from two fungi. In Ecuador, banana plantations are being affected by Black Sigatoka. In Peru, the threat is a fungus called TR4, which is a strain (Tropical Race 4) of the same Panama Disease that finished Gros Michel.

“The scary thing about TR4 is that it gets into the soil and stays there for a very long time, decades. It kills the banana plant and stops you growing new banana plants on the same land,” said Myszka. Climate change is not helping. Plants that are under water stress are weaker and less able to resist the fungus.

As a consequence of TR4, “a different group near to Rio y Valle has decreased from shipping well over a dozen container loads of bananas per week to just one. They used to be the strongest banana coop in the region and that is no longer where they are.”

There is a small silver lining for organic fair trade co-ops.

“Even the general banana industry is saying there is no conventional spray pesticide solution for TR4,” Myszka said.

Organic techniques that maintain good microorganisms in the soil are the best re-

sponse to TR4, which lends itself to organic co-ops, particularly those who receive a fair trade premium for their produce. “We are applying large amounts of liquid biofertilizer and beneficial fungus Trichoderma; this is helping us significantly, as are applications of guano and compost. These measures are helping to extend the lifespan of our plants just a little bit longer” explained a banana grower named Santos Gutiérrez.

“We aren’t going to eradicate it—no, the plants will still eventually die—but with the right management, we can at least delay that outcome for a little while longer.”

“I don’t know what the future holds—I can only hope, and pray to God, that the plants eventually develop some form of resistance—but as of now, there isn’t a single plant variety that is either resistant or tolerant to it. Unless a resistant plant variety emerges, this whole operation will come to an end within a couple of years.”

Dan Bergsagel is often mistaken for someone else.

THE NEW MEMBER WHO JUST OPENED A STANDOUT NEIGHBORHOOD PIZZERIA

July 28, 2026



PHOTO BY AZIKIWE ABOAGYE

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By Zach Schiffman

Ben Wexler didn't grow up in Park Slope, but he might as well have. A born-and-raised New Yorker, he spent the pandemic years running a seasonal pizza business on Peaks Island, off the coast of Maine—all while his girlfriend held down an apartment here and a Coop membership going on 10 years.

But the city kept pulling him back. So this past November, after a long hunt for the right space, he opened Il Leone just around the corner from the Coop on Seventh Avenue: a sit-down wine bar built around long-fermented sourdough Neapolitan pizza, with the produce treated as the main event.

That obsession traces back to a stint on a small organic vegetable farm, where picking what he'd cook each morning rewired how Wexler thinks about food. It's a philosophy that lines up neatly with the Coop's, which makes his timing perfect: after years of circling, he's finally an official member. We caught up with him just as his first New York tomato season comes into view, to talk Maine, Naples, the heirloom seeds in his backyard and how to shop the Coop like a chef.

How did Il Leone come to be on Seventh Avenue?



PHOTO BY AZIKWE ABOAGYE

Ben standing in front of Il Leone.

I started the business on Peaks Island, off Portland, Maine, during the pandemic. I'm a born-and-raised New Yorker but went to college in Maine, then moved back and was mostly working on political campaigns. In between campaigns, I did various things in the food business, including working on a small organic vegetable farm.

Right before the pandemic, in about 2019, I was burnt out from living in the city and wanted to move to Maine and start this business. At first I was looking to start it on a farm up there, partnering with a farm, and then when the pandemic hit, that fell through. So I started it on the island instead and lived up there for a few years, running it as a seasonal business, and I just really started to miss the city. The native New Yorker in me was pulling me back.

My girlfriend was living here in Park Slope, so I'd spend some of my off-season time down here in the winter, exploring what the business might look like in the city. After a few years of looking at spaces, I found the one we're in now. Having spent that off-season time in Park Slope, it just felt like a really great fit. There was a dearth of restaurants in the neighborhood, and not a lot of people doing conceptually what I was trying to do. So that's how this all came about.

How much of your business is local repeat neighbors versus people from all over the city?

I'd say we're about 75 percent Park Slope right now. I started this to first and foremost be a place for the neighborhood, and the reception's been really positive. People are just looking for another restaurant to go to, whether it's with their kids or without. They love that we emphasize sourcing as locally and organically as possible, and that we offer a sit-down wine bar experience alongside the pizza and the food. They love that we're doing the sourdough with a really long fermentation, putting a lot of love, care, and intention into the food. It's been a really positive first six months.

Have you been aware of customers who are Coop members?

I haven't asked, so that's hard to say. But a lot of the Park Slope community are members. My girlfriend has been a Coop member for 10 years, so I'm very familiar with it, and there have definitely been customers who've mentioned they work there. I'm sure many members have come through our doors.

Living in Maine, with your girlfriend being a member—what was your awareness of the Coop as you were going back and forth?

I've known about the Coop for years, just from being a New Yorker. Right out of college I had a sublet in Park Slope and I was on the verge of joining about 10 years ago, but didn't, because I ended up moving out of the neighborhood. Growing up here, I've always respected what it does—both as a community model for increasing access to affordable, quality fresh produce, and just as a great grocery store. The foodie in me loves a grocery store that has a lot to offer, and the Coop clearly stands out as one of the better ones in the city.

How does your experience working on farms change you as a restaurant owner?

The most fulfilling part of working on that small organic vegetable farm was getting to pick what I'm cooking with that day. It really drew me back to the roots of not just Italian cuisine, but Neapolitan-style pizza making—because in Naples, where pizza was invented, there's such a profound emphasis on simplicity, the quality of ingredients, and sourcing everything as locally as possible.



PHOTO BY AZIKWE ABOAGYE



PHOTO BY AZIKIWE ABOAGYE



PHOTO BY AZIKIWE ABOAGYE



Ben in his restaurant backyard planting basil, which he uses for his dishes.

I came to realize more and more that what makes the best food, particularly the best Italian food, is not overdoing it—using just a few really great ingredients. That’s how you make the best tomato sauce: just tomatoes, olive oil, and sea salt. You don’t need oregano, you don’t need garlic, you don’t need all these add-ons. The best pasta in the world, arguably, is just a simple spaghetti pomodoro with in-season tomatoes and some fresh basil. That’s what Neapolitan pizza has always been about.

So as a pizza maker, I was really excited to bring that philosophy to my pizza. There are some people doing Neapolitan-style pizza, and some doing sourdough Neapolitan specifically, like Anthony Mangieri of Una Pizza Napoletana, who I’ve always looked up to. But I feel like there aren’t that many people in the city really offering a “farm--to-pizza” experience, focused on the quality of the produce. That’s an area I’ve focused on since working on that farm.

How are you feeling about your first tomato season in the city?

We opened in November, so we haven't had a tomato season yet. This'll be my first one open in New York. I'm so excited. For the last five years in Maine, I've done a pizza I call the "l'estate," which means summer in Italian. It's literally just peak in-season heirloom cherry tomatoes from a small organic farm, ripened right on the vine. When you harvest cherry tomatoes at peak ripeness, there's just nothing like it—they carry so much flavor, unlike any tomato you'd find in a grocery store. I'm so excited to get that pizza back on the menu.

There's another we do in summer called the "Fiore," with squash blossoms and local organic zucchini—also really special. And there's one we'll be doing shortly with in-season garlic scapes from the farmers market.

In Maine I got all my produce from one or two small organic farms, and those partnerships let me develop a lot of these pizzas. They rest on traditional Italian ingredient combinations, but they also work because we're able to get such great produce. We're just getting into farmers market season here, and I'm so excited to start putting some of these seasonal pizzas on the menu—that's part of the challenge of launching in late fall and early winter, not being able to do quite as much with in-season produce as we traditionally have.

Is there anything you're considering trying here that you never did in Maine?

Of course. We love to try new things. We've got a few things in the works with some really special heirloom tomato seeds that I'm actually growing in my backyard at the restaurant right now. I won't announce it just yet, until the tomatoes are ready, but there's some fun stuff coming.

I'm a big believer in walking through the farmers market, talking to farmers, and seeing what looks exciting and what's going to work on a pizza. One we're doing right

now that's been a big hit is organic asparagus with fresh lemon spritzed on top, fresh mozzarella, pecorino, and black pepper. As we transition out of asparagus season, we'll start doing the garlic scape pie I mentioned, and some others as the summer heats up.

As we head into summer-produce season, do you have any advice for people shopping at the Coop?

I always like to shop as much as possible day-of when I'm cooking. You generally get the freshest stuff that way. I keep an eye out for what looks really perky and fresh, what was truly just harvested that day or the day before. That always makes for the best meals in my experience. So use your eyes and follow your heart, and see what's truly poppin' on those shelves. That's going to lead to a lovely dining experience.

Zach Schiffman is a social editor and writer at New York magazine, comedian, and Park Slope local.

THE SHELF WHERE EVERYTHING IS HALF OFF

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PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

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By Kayla Levy

There are many places to begin a shopping trip at the Coop. Some people beeline for the produce section or go straight to the bulk aisle. Others begin filling up a cart at the meat freezer. Others still walk directly back to the end of aisle four, where there's a shelf—called an endcap in the shopping business—full of discounted goods.

"I've had a lot of shoppers tell me this is the first thing they look at when they come into the Coop," said Receiving Coordinator Gillian Chi. "When I stock the sale endcap, people come and grab items before I even put the price label up." Chi would know, as she is the one who started—and is responsible for maintaining—the sale endcap, where all items are half off.

It all began with an email. In 2021, Chi received a message from KeHE, one of the Coop's main distributors, with a spreadsheet highlighting hundreds of half-off items. The cost of groceries was skyrocketing, and Chi thought the discounts would benefit shoppers, so she placed an order for an endcap's worth of items (the end of aisle four had just been cleared of extra supplements). Everything sold quickly.





PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN



“I called my sales rep to understand why she sent the discounted list in the first place, and she said, ‘Oh, we have one every week,’” said Chi, recalling her surprise. “I asked her to start sending it to me weekly.” From there, the sale endcap was born.

Every week, Chi receives the half-off list via email and sorts through to find about 20 items to purchase. She starts by removing frozen or refrigerated goods, as well as anything with artificial ingredients or an expiration date less than three months away. From there, she’s left with about 100 products.

“It’s a gamble, but I’ve gotten pretty experienced at having a gut feeling about what people will buy,” said Chi.

She typically buys 200 units of each product (the most that can fit in the basement), hoping the supply will last a week—but that rarely happens. Turnover on the endcap is quicker than in other parts of the store, and there are fewer items in backstock, Chi

explained. Chips and chocolate are usually the first to go, she said.

Coop member Robert Berkman shops the sale endcap all the time but is disappointed when items sell out. “The only problem is buying something really good and then going back and they’re all gone. Forever,” he said.

Other members said they have a hard time finding predictable products or flavors they like on the endcap. “I’ve mostly found unusual snacks there,” said Sophie Pugh-Sellers.

In some cases, sale items are products that exist elsewhere in the store or are staple goods. Once, Coop member Mo Christ discovered a shelf-stable curry from the endcap that they now purchase at full price. “It’s a perfect office lunch,” they said.

For her part, Chi tries to stock the shelf with pantry staples when possible. “The other items are impulse purchases, but buying a pantry staple makes me feel good because it’s a chance for shoppers to save money on an item they’d be buying anyway,” she said.



One member noted that the best item they'd ever bought on the endcap was a Graza olive oil refill for just \$9.

The endcap at aisle four isn't the only place where shoppers can find sales in the Coop. When the Coop gets an extreme deal from KeHE or another distributor, the team tends to put it elsewhere on the floor—like in shopping carts with a special sign.

Distributors regularly put products on sale from 10% to 25% off for the month, and the Coop passes those savings along, but unless you're someone who buys the same item regularly or closely tracks your receipt, you might miss them. "We have no way of indicating that on the shelf, so it's kind of like a hidden sale," said Chi.

In recent months, bolstered by continuing demand, the discount initiative has expanded into the side of aisle four. Chi tries to divide products, putting non-edible goods next to the supplements, and edible treats on the endcap itself. "It's a very random selection, but it's fun," she said.

“This week we have noni juice. I’d never heard of it before, but we’ve almost run out.”

Kayla Levy is a freelance contributor covering housing and culture for New York Magazine. She’s been a Coop member since 2019.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND EDUCATION SQUAD REPORT: WHY PRICES KEEP CLIMBING

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By Sarah Z. Canner & Stephen I. Klein

If grocery prices at the Coop feel like they keep edging up, they are. A lot of what we buy starts as a commodity—basic items like wheat, corn, soybeans, coffee and oil—and those prices are set in global markets, not at the neighborhood level.

Wars, droughts, tariffs, labor shortages and shipping problems all ripple through the food system quickly. Fuel plays an enormous role, too, because diesel powers nearly every step of getting food from farm to shelf: planting, harvesting, processing, trucking, shipping and stocking.

Right now, the biggest pressure point is the U.S.-Iran conflict and the Strait of Hormuz crisis, which has closed the strait and prevented transport of petroleum and fertilizer. That waterway carries 20 percent of the world's oil, so when shipping there gets disrupted, energy prices jump. Gasoline in the United States is up sharply, even with some recent easing.

A lot of the world's urea and ammonia, essential ingredients for fertilizers, move through the same region, so those prices have surged as well. That matters because fertilizer is one of the biggest costs for farmers, especially in the spring planting season. If farmers use less fertilizer, that can mean lower yields later on—and higher food prices down the road.

These are new pressures on an already strained system. Prices never really came back down after Covid, and recent tariffs and poor crops have added to the strains. So the Coop isn't dealing with one big shock—it's facing several at once.

Even so, the Coop has been able to maintain fairly stable prices in this volatile environment. Britt Henriksson, Receiving Coordinator and Buyer of Bulk and Gourmet Foods, said: "We have been seeing higher price hikes since Covid—there were not enough drivers and port workers and the cost of containers for shipping increased. After Covid eased, there were not enough workers across the board (prices

never did come back down to pre-Covid prices). The most recent hikes were from tariffs and bad crops. I believe one or two small companies have said they will start charging a small fee per invoice or increase their fuel pricing for transportation due to rising fuel prices.”

So yes, prices are still climbing—but a lot of work is going on behind the scenes to keep the Coop as steady as possible.