

THE VIEW FROM HEPWORTH FARMS

November 15, 2021



Nearly end-of-season cherry tomatoes (and some heirloom tomatoes) from Hepworth Farms for sale on the shopping floor at PSFC.

COOP PROVIDERS REFLECT ON A RAPIDLY CHANGING MARKET

By Frank Haberle

We are just a few years away from the 50th anniversary of the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC). For almost as many years, the Coop has relied on Hepworth Farms, a 500-acre Hudson Valley agricultural farm that stood with us for decades, and continues today as our largest single farm partner. Through times of prosperity and economic downturn—and through climate crises like Superstorm Sandy and recent flooding—Hepworth Farms and PSFC have worked together to ensure that fresh, organic produce at affordable prices remains a privilege available to PSFC’s working members. In planning their growing season each year, Hepworth Farms’ “tell-us-what-y-

ou-want-and-we'll-grow-it-for you" relationship with PSFC has ensured that an amazing assortment of fresh tomatoes, zucchinis, lettuce and other produce—grown locally, organically, and lovingly—can be served to our families on our dinner tables, in some cases on the same day they were picked from the vine.



Stacks of Honeycrisp apples from Hepworth Farms, in the walk-in at the PSFC.

In the past 18 months, this balanced, mutually supportive partnership has been test-

ed by the onset of the COVID-19 crisis which, for the first time in our history, severely limited our members' access to our shopping aisles and decreased demand for fresh products. The same limitations were felt on the supply side, by every farm and business that brings products into PSFC. For Hepworth Farms, the challenges of the 18-month slowdown demanded that they quickly pivot to meet changing needs, supply shortages and a more limited market at PSFC and elsewhere, while also facing the urgent need to protect the health and safety of their workers. Much like PSFC, which is still struggling to get our members back in the habit of shopping in our aisles, Hepworth Farms faces a new business landscape that has shifted considerably. They have adapted to meet changing trends in the organic food market, the supply chain, the workforce, and the economy. However, like every other part of the food chain, they face a shifting market and an uncertain future.



Six 1/2-bushel boxes of Devoe Pears and one case of Cape Gooseberries, all from Hepworth Farms, in a walk-in at the PSFC.

COVID has taken a toll on both PSFC and Hepworth Farms, challenging both organizations to shift and adapt. “For years, PSFC has been a huge success,” Gail Hepworth, one of three co-operators of Hepworth Farms (along with Gerry Greco and Gail’s twin sister, Amy), observed. “Then, suddenly, the model was disrupted. The impact of COVID-19 was felt very deeply. Suddenly PSFC wasn’t able to cycle its members in like it used to. There were long lines and people didn’t want to wait in lines, and the member work shifts were suspended. Suddenly people were changing their habits and shopping elsewhere. PSFC needs to come back. It may need to make changes to be more appealing to a shifting market, but PSFC needs to come back and, again,

serve as a robust success model for the whole world.”

A RELENTLESS COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES

A seventh-generation farm that was first established in Milton, New York in 1818, Hepworth Farms transitioned in 1982 from traditional farming to dechemicalization and wholly-organic farming, under Amy’s guidance. Hepworth Farm’s methods are constantly evolving to ensure that the best practices in organic and sustainable farming are applied in each step of the food cycle. “For 40 years we have been building our understanding of what being a sustainable farm really means,” Amy said. “We’ve always been committed to a whole-farm-alive systems approach. This has only become more intensified in recent years with our commitment to biological farming [the creation of a sustainable soil system]. Today, biological agriculture teaches us to introduce microbes to improve the soil. It’s a steady, time intensive process to influence biology. It’s a complex dynamic that you have to navigate in the dark. You can’t see what’s going on in the soil beneath each plant, but you can see it in the health of the plant itself. Biological farming is going to take another decade to fully understand. For example, we’re now taking steps to introduce parasitic neomodes [tiny worms into our soil that attack beetles that harm produce. We’re introducing things into the soil to make it more balanced.”

“THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP MAY NEED TO MAKE CHANGES TO BE MORE APPEALING TO A SHIFTING MARKET, BUT IT NEEDS TO COME BACK AND, AGAIN, SERVE AS A ROBUST SUCCESS MODEL FOR THE WHOLE WORLD.”

As Amy put it, “This work is about the acknowledgement and respect of the life force and the interconnected reality of life itself.” Gail adds that “Amy’s practices are putting things into the soil that prevent disease, that create healthy soils and build protective colonies around roots that allow our plants to be as healthy as they can be. Our practices keep evolving alongside the latest science, so that we can deliver the

healthiest produce while taking care of and nurturing the soil. It's more expensive and time intensive to grow plants this way, but it's the right thing to do. We are committed to continuing the mission of organic farming: better soil means better food, which means healthier people. We still have a lot to learn about the evolving biology of farming this way. The more we learn about the soil the more we realize we don't yet know."



Devoe and Asian pears for sale at the PSFC.

NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Fewer members shopping at PSFC has meant lower revenues for the Coop and for Hepworth Farms alike. Hepworth Farms has had to face a range of challenges in order to survive the COVID-19 crisis, and now faces numerous questions on how to move forward in a new market and a changed world. For the first time in its history Hepworth Farms faced a labor shortage, in part reflecting—as Gail pointed out—the gener-

al devaluing of work in our society. “Through this pandemic, people should have become more aware of the amazing work that goes into their food systems, and the essential role that farm workers play in their food systems. But farm workers are still extremely undervalued in our society. As farmers we are now paying a living wage to our workers, but people still can’t live decently and fully independently on these wages. There’s been a big culture shift in the last couple of years where real work, the practice of working hard, is being undervalued. People should be more aware of where their food comes from and they should buy their food from places where workers are valued and supported. The relationship is important but people don’t seem to value it.”

Amy adds that the people who do come to work at Hepworth Farms—who can number up to 200 during the busiest seasons—quickly learn to appreciate the work and the role it plays in others’ well-being. “The best part of my day is getting to work with the beautiful people who work here. I am so thankful for them. We all share a collective mindset of doing good work for others. The workers here know that they are really a part of something special. I think it’s really important for people to understand where their food comes from, and it’s just as important for them to understand that the people who plant, grow, pick, pack, and deliver their food love doing this work for them.”

“ALL FARMERS ARE TRYING TO SURVIVE. WHEN YOU’RE IN SURVIVAL MODE, OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT DO FUNNY THINGS. BUT WE’RE NOT COMPROMISING WHEN IT COMES TO AMY’S PRACTICES.”

The economics of an independent farm are always challenging, especially during a pandemic. Amy said, “[PSFC General Coordinator] Joe Holtz once told me that ‘from seed to sale, you are the creditors of the food system. You bring us the food, we sell it, and then we pay you.’ We don’t get paid until food is in the consumer’s stomach. From seed to sale, we are creditors of food system.” Added Gail, “We begin working on producing the food in March. We plan what we’re planting and when. Then we

plant the seeds. Then we grow the product, pick it, and deliver it. But we don't get paid until 30 to 60 days after someone has eaten it."

Inflation and supply chain concerns that have impacted all levels of the economy have hit family-run farms like Hepworth Farms especially hard. "The cartons we needed for our cherry tomatoes, we could not get in time to sell them," Gail said, "When we need parts for a tractor that breaks down, it takes longer to find them." Inflation is creeping up, without changing the prices the farm can charge for its products. "Everything we have to purchase," Gail adds, "is more expensive. But the price of food we sell does not match this rise. The increased pricing is still not filtering back to farmers."

Amy added that "the worst thing this year was when we couldn't afford to glean for the food bank—everything became so financially stressful. We have felt so good about harvesting and giving food away in the past. We have to do what we can, but this was the most internally disruptive thing that happened on the farm this year."

"Right now, all farmers are trying to survive," Gail said. "When you're in survival mode other people might do funny things. But we're not compromising when it comes to Amy's practices, and our commitment to producing the healthiest produce possible. Three years ago we thought this was sustainable. But sustainability is expensive."



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

REFORGING CONNECTIONS

As the Coop continues its efforts to bounce back fully and resume our success as a model of cooperative partnerships, local farmers are eager to see members recommit to shopping and working here. “The great thing about our relationship with PSFC,” Gail said, “has always been that people had the opportunity to know who their farmers are, and where their food has come from. This relationship has been such an anchor for our farm, but the pandemic has separated us from you, and you from us. We want to partner with you, to reconnect with your mission, to have you reconnect with our mission. Be connected to our mission—you have a profile population that’s perfect. We need to reestablish relationship. Amy has taken our farm through many generations of changes. Tell us what you want us to grow and we’ll grow it!”

To learn more about Hepworth Farms and the work Gail and Amy Hepworth are doing in the Hudson Valley, please visit www.hepworthfarms.com.

LOOKING BACK TO 2016

November 15, 2021



PHOTO BY DEBORAH TINT

By Christopher Cox

With some founding members nearing their 50th anniversary at the Coop, it may

seem odd to interview the cohort that joined in November 2016—just five years ago. For the five members who agreed to talk to the *Linewaiters' Gazette* for this article, it's been an eventful half decade, stretching from an orientation that took place in the aftershocks of Donald Trump's election to the complete upending of the cooperative model during the pandemic.

Ryan Gellis said that, until member labor was suspended in the spring of 2020, he was an enthusiastic member of the “parm squad.” He took pride in his ability to lift and expertly subdivide the 80-pound wheels of cheese. “There’s a special technique for cutting them,” he said. “It’s rare to be able to say this about your not-full-time job, but I feel like I learned a craft on the job at the Coop.” He was eager to return to his parmesan-processing duties, but that workslot has been eliminated, at least for now.

“I WAS PRETTY DEPRESSED AFTER TRUMP GOT ELECTED, BUT IT MADE ME APPRECIATE MORE OF THE COMMUNITY SIDE OF THE COOP. WHEN PEOPLE ARE VERY ORGANIZED, THEY CAN DO A LOT OF AMAZING THINGS.”

Kate Gyllenhaal joined the Coop after she moved to Park Slope from Manhattan five years ago. She still remembers the demoralizing feeling of shopping in her old neighborhood: “I would walk into a store and look at the produce, and it wasn’t very good and I had to buy it for inflated prices. I would just get angry.” She knew she wanted to join as soon as she moved to Brooklyn—her brother was already a member—but her husband was more skeptical. That changed quickly, however, once they visited the shopping floor. “He just walked by the cheeses and he says, ‘Okay, that’s it. I’m in.’”



ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

Both Gyllenhaal and another five-year member, Paul Jarrett, praised the member-labor system for one particular benefit: in Gyllenhaal's words, "I enjoy it because it's so different from the rest of my life." Or, as Jarrett put it, "You can turn off a part of your brain and turn on a different part of your brain." Jarrett joined with his wife shortly after moving to Park Slope and talking to some neighbors who were members. It wasn't quite love at first orientation, though. "There seemed like there were a lot of rules, and there were people who were really interested in the rules. There definitely was a culture that I was not quite sure I fully understood," he said.

The experience of orientation—and that avalanche of rules—was a touchstone for several of the members. Theodore Theoharis, however, wasn't fazed. He joined the Coop after he got married since his wife was already a member. "The nature of the Coop was known to me," he says. He did feel some sympathy for the younger attendees at orientation, though: They were clearly overwhelmed by what they were getting into. "Maybe New York City was a new environment to them," he said. "Joining the Coop

was a layer on top of that strangeness.” Theoharis had spent most of his career in retail, so there was little in the building—from the workings of the baler to the squawk of the intercom—that surprised him.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

“IT’S RARE TO BE ABLE TO SAY THIS ABOUT YOUR NOT-FULL-TIME JOB, BUT I FEEL LIKE I LEARNED A CRAFT ON THE JOB AT THE COOP.”

Asked to recall a memorable moment from the past five years, several members talked about the regular satisfactions provided by working a shift and, maybe, bumping into an old friend on the shopping floor. But Jarrett had a more dramatic example at the ready. He was in the Coop when Joe Biden was declared the winner of the 2020 presidential election. “My wife texted me and then everyone else around us was getting the same messages and people were hooting and hollering,” he said. It felt like a

fitting place to mark the end of the Donald Trump presidency.



m. carson '21

ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

Others mentioned Trump's election as a significant part of their decision to join the Coop. Matt Cordeiro said that he was drawn to the cooperative model from the beginning, but that November, the work being done at the Coop took on a new significance for him. "I was pretty depressed after Trump got elected," he said, "but it made me appreciate more of the community side of the Coop, how it's persevered. When peo-

ple are very organized, they can do a lot of really amazing things.” He joined when he and his girlfriend moved in together. Now they are planning a wedding for next June.

The future of the Coop itself is perhaps less secure. Will full member labor ever return? How long will supply-chain woes last? Can cooperative structures survive in this new reality? Nonetheless, all the members interviewed here thought that, barring something unforeseen—and who knows what another five years might hold—they’d still be members when their tenth anniversary arrived.

NEW BOOKS BY GAZETTE REPORTERS

November 15, 2021



Coop author and Gazette reporter Frank Haberle.

By Lauren Mechling

It only takes so much exposure to the shopping floor loudspeaker to know that the denizens of the Coop are an articulate bunch. Our aisles teem with wordsmiths, some of them professional—if you think you recognize your favorite young adult vampire author or long-form journalist behind the cashier, there's a good chance your mind is not playing tricks on you.

The *Gazette* had a chance to catch up with two member writers (and *Gazette* reporters) who published books during the pandemic. Frank Haberle, who recently celebrated his 25th anniversary as a Coop member, just released *Shufflers* (Flexible Press), a novel in vignettes that follows Danny, a gig worker getting by in the 1980s. From New York City to Alaska and sundry points in between, Danny seeks out friends of friends and lines up short-term gigs, in a poignant work that reads like *Nomadland* by way of Raymond Carver.

Christopher Cox, whose name you might recognize from *The New York Times Magazine*, where he works as an editor, released *The Deadline Effect* (Avid Reader Press) earlier this year. Mixing his research in psychology and sociology and plain old engaging storytelling, this book unpacks the concept of a deadline and makes a case for a best-by date for work in progress. If you're a procrastinator, or simply operate under the assumption that, like that Indigo Girls lyric, "everything in its own time," this book just might change your life.

FRANK HABERLE, AUTHOR OF *SHUFFLERS*, PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER, 2021

What's your elevator pitch for your book?

Shufflers is a book about young transients trying to find a sense of place and purpose in the minimum-wage, spot-work world of the 1980s. The 48 interconnected stories follow its drifting lead character Danny cross-country while he scrapes by as a fry cook, factory worker, ski lift operator, dishwasher, carpet cleaner, fisherman, and in

other itinerant work settings. The characters he meets within and between these settings inspire him and build his resilience and fortitude as he pushes toward a life beyond the endless 'shuffle' of low-wage, seasonal work.

What were the hardest and best parts about having a book come out during a pandemic?

The hard part has been that, because of the pandemic, I couldn't organize and run live events and push my way into bookstore readings. But this is also the best part, because it took a lot of pressure off me. I've enjoyed pulling together alternative, creative Zoom events. For example, my friend at the Creative Center at University Settlement, where I run my writing workshop, staged a dramatic reading using real actors to recreate a segment from my book. This was a lot of fun and much more creative than a normal book launch, and the actors were amazing!

TODAY, IF YOU WANT TO TAKE A CHANCE AND GO SOMEWHERE NEW AND DIFFERENT, YOU CAN INSTANTLY LOOK IT UP AND KNOW EVERYTHING. BUT BACK THEN, WHEN YOU TOOK OFF FOR ALASKA, YOU REALLY TOOK OFF. YOU HAD TO RELY ON YOUR INSTINCTS, ON INTERNAL NAVIGATION SYSTEMS, ON YOUR ABILITY TO JUDGE IF THE GUY WHO PICKED YOU UP HITCHING IS A SERIAL KILLER, OR JUST CRAZY. EVERYTHING BACK THEN WAS A GAME OF RISK.

FRANK HABERLE

Why did you decide to set the book in the '80s?

I liked the feel of the Schaefer beer cans, the cassettes, the soundtrack of the time, and the absence of email and instant information. The '80s were a challenging time to be adrift, but it was also rich with possibilities. Today, if you want to take a chance and go somewhere new and different, you can instantly look it up and know every-

thing. But back then, when you took off for Alaska, you really took off. You had to rely on your instincts, on internal navigation systems, on your ability to judge if the guy who picked you up hitching is a serial killer, or just crazy. Everything back then was a game of risk.

Danny gets by, city to city, gig to gig. Have you worked a series of odd jobs, too?

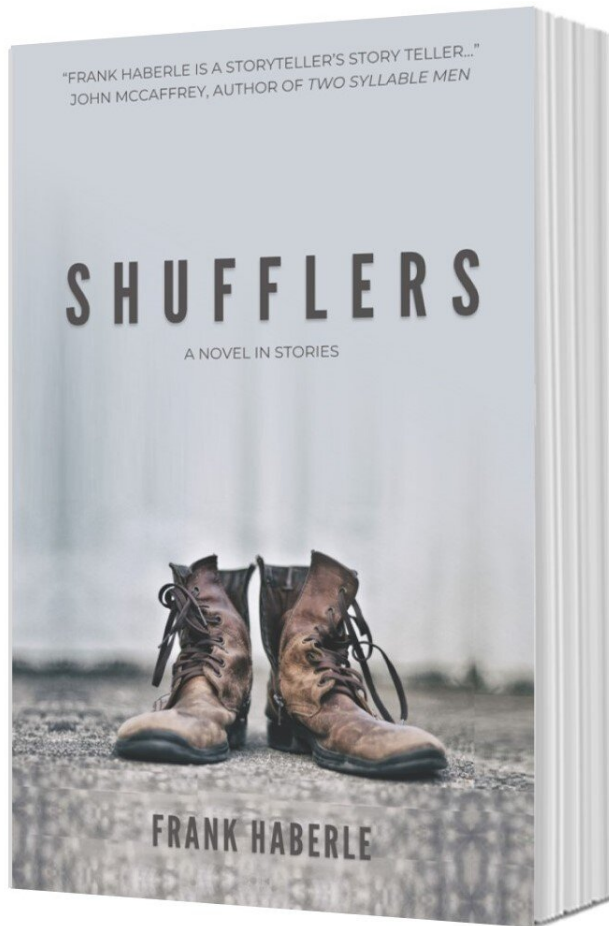
I had a lot of the jobs that Danny had—fry cook, loading docks, construction, auction house, dishwasher, ski lift operator. (I was never a Mall Santa—that story, thankfully, is fiction!) My favorite job ever, which I had twice, was carpet cleaner. It was very rewarding, and it prepped me for my first ten years at the Coop as a Sunday maintenance squad leader, taking out boxes and swabbing the deck.

What was the original inspiration for Danny, and when did it come to you?

A lot of these stories were originally first person, but when I strung them all together, I wanted a lead character—Danny—to have the characteristics of a lot of people I knew in the '80s. Danny emerged as a hybrid of a number of people I knew and admired back then—he is a lot cooler and even-keeled than I was.

There's a great line where somebody says to Danny, "I just don't think I've ever met anybody so busy doing nothing." I felt like that captured the beauty and success of the collection. It's in perpetual motion, and the reader is in a perpetual state of concern. Can you speak to that?

When I put the stories together and "ironed them out," it became more evident that Danny is running away from something, which keeps him moving. This "something" could be alcohol, or loneliness, or "fear of competence," or an inability to connect and belong—or all of these. I liked letting the "feel" of the stories tell that story, rather than state something obvious. I appreciate the reader's concern for Danny—I was concerned about him, too!



Haberle's collection of interconnected stories portrays transient workers in the 1980s. **One of the themes of your book (and Christopher Cox's book, actually) is the plight of getting by in America. How would you say "the situation" has evolved since the days the book takes place?**

I really appreciated learning about Chris's book and his tackling this issue from an entirely different angle. I would say that in the post-digital age, this kind of story is a totally different story. While a \$3.35 minimum wage seems unthinkable, it's a lot easier to "be adrift" when rent is \$55/month, a pitcher of Rheingold beer is a dollar, and cigarettes cost \$0.85 a pack. It's almost unimaginable to think of what it is to be stuck scraping by in today's service and gig economy. My heart goes out to people who are fighting their way through these jobs today.

How long did it take you to write the book, from start to finish?

15 years! I'm pretty sure I wrote one chapter, "T-Shirt Lady," fifteen years ago. I've

been writing and publishing stories since then. I pulled the book together during the first month of quarantine, and I wrote the long sequence in Gettysburg—when Danny gets caught up with the local meth industry, circa 1982—during the second month.

What is your worst habit as a writer?

In between flunking out of college (three times), I took classes in set design that I was really, really into. I worry that sometimes the scenes I create in fiction are a little too set-heavy.

What shifts have you held as a member?

I was a Sunday maintenance worker for the first 10 years; then I became a writer for the *Gazette* for the last 15 years.

How would you describe your family's Coop shopping strategy?

My wife goes one time a week and gets almost everything we need; I go three times a week, but I always forget everything we need.

What Coop snack was most important to writing of the book?

Chips and salsa, straight up.

What do you do when you're not writing books?

I've worked for 30-odd years as a grant writer and development worker with community-based organizations in New York, for the past six with New Settlement in the Bronx, which I love. It's a long ride by subway, but the community and the people up there are amazing. One program at New Settlement I identify with is our workforce programs for out-of-school, out-of-work youth. Although I grew up in a different world (Long Island, then Boston) I definitely identify with that feeling of disconnection they

start with.

You are donating 25% of proceeds to the NY Writers' Coalition. That's so cool! What is it about their work that you find most compelling?

I've worked with the NY Writers Coalition for 20 years as an advisor, then Board member, then workshop participant, then volunteer workshop leader. I'm totally committed to them and happy to support them. It's a remarkable nonprofit organization working here in Brooklyn and across the city that helps people from nontraditional backgrounds find their voices through creative writing communities. Beyond raising three kids, I'd easily say the workshop I lead, for people with lifetime illnesses, is the most rewarding thing I get to do every week.



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WORDPRESS EXPERIENCE WILL BE GIVEN PRIORITY CONSIDERATION.

SEND COVER LETTER + RESUME + LINK OF YOUR WORK TO ANNETTE@PSFC.COOP

We can best serve the Coop if our squad reflects the PSFC's overall diversity.
We strongly encourage applications from BIPOC and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

You've been on the Gazette team for how long now? What was your favorite story to report?

I think I've been reporting for the Gazette for 15 years now, and it's been through a lot of changes. I really enjoy reporting on Coop members working in programs and projects to better our community, and I'm joyous any time I get to write an article

about the farmers who supply our food. Especially the Hepworths, Gail and Amy, of Hepworth Farms. They are the coolest farmers in the world. They are my favorites. I can't help it.

Are you working on a new (non-Gazette) project?

I have another book coming out in February with House of Hash Press. It's called *The Biggest Slide in the World*, and it's about two orphaned boys sent off to a strange New England Boarding school in the 1970s. Like *Shufflers*, I wrote a lot of it during the confining first months of the quarantine. Quarantine was awful, but it finally pulled a few books out of me!



Coop author and Gazette reporter Christopher Cox.

CHRISTOPHER COX, *THE DEADLINE EFFECT*, AVID READER PRESS, JULY 2021

What's your elevator pitch for your book?

The book began with a question: Why are some organizations good at meeting deadlines and some hopeless? How does a magazine like *Harper's*, where I spent many years as an editor, not miss a single issue, month after month, for more than a century? It's not because *Harper's* is an inherently efficient organization (trust me). Meanwhile, a project like the Sydney Opera House can run millions of dollars over budget and ten years behind schedule. Why? As I looked into this question, ultimately embedding in nine different workplaces and reading thousands of pages of studies from psychologists and economists, I found the answer boiled down to two things: how seriously the organization took their deadlines and how interdependent the workforce was—that is, the more you have someone else relying on you to get your work done, the more likely you are to stay on schedule. Each workplace used those insights in slightly different ways, and the book explores those differences in detail.

What were the hardest and best parts about having a book come out during a pandemic?

It's hard to think of anything good about it! I did feel lucky, in the tiniest way, that the book came out at the beginning of July, during that brief post-vaccine, pre-Delta window. That meant I got to do a few in-person events before everyone hustled back to Zoom. I spoke to a crowd at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and it was by far the liveliest event of the whole publicity tour. People were just so excited to be out talking to each other again. Plus, Saratoga is such a strange, wonderful place—if you're into horses and water that smells like sulfur.

THE MATERIAL ABOUT PRODUCTIVITY IS REALLY JUST A TROJAN HORSE TO SMUGGLE IN AN EXAMINATION OF THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE NATION, FROM A LILY

FARM IN OREGON TO A JET ASSEMBLY PLANT IN ALABAMA. THOUGH THE PRODUCTIVITY TIPS ENDED UP BEING SURPRISINGLY USEFUL FOR ME AND, I HOPE, FOR ANYONE WHO READS THE BOOK.

CHRISTOPHER COX

In your book you talk about the A story (deadlines!) and the B story (the plight of getting by in America). Which would you say took on a new relevance since your completion of the book?

I turned in my first draft in March 2020. There was a period that spring and summer when I thought half of the companies I covered would disappear before the book came out. The workers I got to know were either laid off or furloughed. The truth is, Story B is the one I was most invested in from the beginning. The material about productivity is really just a Trojan horse to smuggle in an examination of the economic life of the nation, from a lily farm in Oregon to a jet assembly plant in Alabama. Though the productivity tips ended up being surprisingly useful for me and, I hope, for anyone who reads the book.

How long did it take you to write from start to finish:

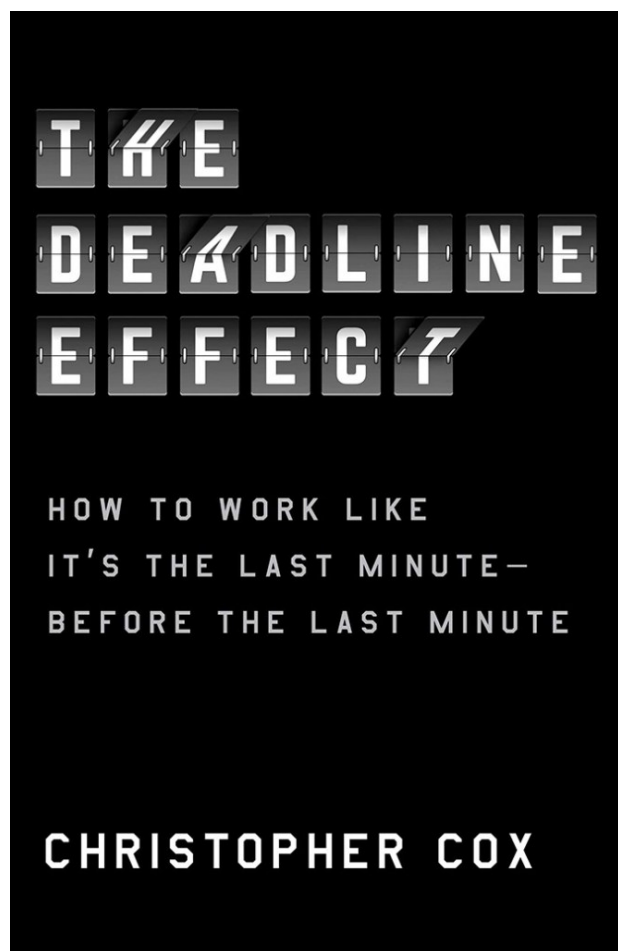
Thirteen months. I made a detailed schedule of when I wanted to finish each chapter and stuck to it. It was clear to me from the beginning that failing to meet my own deadline would not be an option for this book.

What is your own worst habit, the one that you were hoping to find the magic fix to via your reporting?

I'm capable of procrastinating like all the rest of us—though I do it much less now, thank goodness. It's not a magic fix, however: I have to remember to be deliberate about everything I learned while I was reporting or I slip into the same old bad habits.

How long have you been a Coop member?

I've lived within walking distance of the Coop for 15 years, but I didn't join until 2016. Something happened in November that year that made the idea of embracing cooperation and solidarity more appealing.



Cox prescribes using deadlines to improve productivity and enhance your life.

How would you describe your family's Coop shopping strategy?

My wife shops, mainly, because she knows I become paralyzed by abundant choices. I wore a uniform from kindergarten through high school, and I'm convinced that rule bumped up my GPA by a point or two. These days I'm good for a quick Coop run to get a single item (coffee, usually), but beyond that I'm useless.

Does a deadline come into play?

You know, we don't use deadlines to time our shopping trips, but obviously we should—we basically wait until we're running out of everything and then go for a big haul. If I were the regular shopper I probably would impose some sort of system on it, but I'm not, so I don't.

What Coop snack was most important to the writing of the book?

I wrote most of the book in the New York Public Library's Allen Room, famous (to me) as the place where Robert Caro wrote *The Power Broker* and Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique*. They don't allow snacks in there, though.

What do you do for work when you're not writing books?

I work as an editor at *Orion* magazine and *The New York Times Magazine*. Though I do consider "writing books" my main job right now. The next one is about flooding in California—a perverse choice of topic, I know, in the middle of a historic drought.

Has thinking about deadlines helped you wrap your head around getting your *Gazette* work done efficiently?

For sure. It's affected the way I do just about anything, from answering emails to writing book proposals, to booking vacations. Efficiency is the right word: I try to set an aggressive deadline and get the *Gazette* work done early and quickly. People think they hate deadlines, but what they actually hate is procrastination. The period in which you're actually working hard on a project is usually at least somewhat satisfying, if not outright pleasurable.

There's a section where you discuss the positive effect cooperation and teamwork can have on productivity. How have you seen this principle at play at the Coop?

The Coop is definitely a good example of interdependence in play. Pre-pandemic, it

was something of a marvel to watch this grocery store reassemble itself each day out of the unskilled hands of folks like you and me.

You write in the book: “If I had to summarize this book in seven words, I might choose: ‘Set a deadline, the earlier the better.’” For the Coop member whose livelihood does not depend on handing in writing assignments, what else can this apply to? (Bonus points if you can think of things relevant to the out-of-work and parents of young children.)

That mantra applies to anyone trying to get something done, whether it’s creative work, or your taxes, or filling out the forms from the DOE to send your kid to school. By setting a deadline that feels perhaps uncomfortably early, you’re both increasing the chance that you’ll actually finish what you started, and you’re eliminating the opportunity to procrastinate. If you do that, you gain something that’s more or less the opposite of procrastination: free time.

DOCTOR-TURNED-CHEF PRESCRIBES DELICIOUS FOOD

November 15, 2021



ILLUSTRATION BY CATY BARTHOLOMEW

By Leila Darabi

In April of 2019, Lenox Hill Hospital announced that it had hired a former physician as its new executive chef. Born in France, Georges Masraff served in Doctors Without Borders, treating refugees around the world before leaving to pursue another passion: food. He earned Michelin stars at two separate restaurants in Paris before pivoting careers again by moving to New York and eventually taking over the food program for Lenox Hill.

As Lenox Hill, like all of the city's health facilities, filled during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, patients at the Upper East Side hospital enjoyed an experience that ran counter to stereotypes around hospital food. I know, because my father was one of those patients.

Due to some complications from a surgery to improve his leg circulation and then a life-threatening antibiotic resistant infection, my father ended up eating more meals than not in hospital beds over the past year—in the ICU and then the cardiac ward at Lenox Hill and later in a series of post-op rehab centers.

We were incredibly lucky. My father never contracted COVID-19 and has now returned home, where he can cook and enjoy the fresh—and well-seasoned—foods he loves. His hospital experience served as a wake-up call for our entire family, driving home the privilege of access to fresh, organic produce. At the rehab centers in particular—which in New York State tend to be long-term nursing homes with short-term rehabilitation wings—the selection for a diabetic nearing 80 were not just slim; they were nonexistent.

With COVID-19 restrictions limiting visiting options, and long lines limiting our access to the Coop, healthy food took on new value. It became a precious commodity earned by standing in a long series of lines: the line to get tested, the online lottery to book visiting time, and finally, the line to get into the Coop.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE CAFETERIA TRAY

During his time in the hospital, as we worried about treating his infection and restoring his ability to walk, my siblings and I found ourselves also preoccupied with my father's diet and especially his access to foods that wouldn't send his blood sugar soaring. That's when we first read the story of Chef Masraff, a proud tale printed on the back of menus at Lenox Hill. During the brief stints when my father was out of the ICU but not yet carted off to a rehab facility, he received a new menu each day—and it made him nearly giddy.

LENOX HILL DESCRIBES CHEF MASRAFF'S MANDATE AS: "TO TRANSFORM TRADITIONAL HOSPITAL FOOD INTO WHOLESOME RESTAURANT-QUALITY FARE."

"I love his soups!" My father told me during a visit, trying to get me to taste a spoonful under my mask.

Lenox Hill describes Chef Masraff's mandate as: "to transform traditional hospital food into wholesome restaurant-quality fare." To be clear, the results are closer to high-quality room service than a high-end restaurant, but compared to traditional hospital food, it's a revolution. Patients order their meals room-service style from a menu coded with symbols like hearts to indicate a heart healthy option. In the cardiac ward, my father was only allowed foods with hearts and if he asked for two carb sides, they asked him to select again—a far cry from the mashed potatoes and fried chicken served daily at another facility.

The foods that arrived—chicken tarragon salad full of fresh herbs and grilled fish with roasted vegetables—were fragrant and well-balanced. They were colorful and fresh, just like the food we typically cook at home with ingredients from the Coop.

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THE SCIENCE

While the benefits of fresh and delicious food are anecdotally understood by any member of the Coop, research confirms that eating fresh, healthy and colorful food is good for both body and spirit.

A 2016 study published in the American Journal of Public Health reported that people feel better with each added serving of fruits and vegetables. The authors analyzed food diaries from more than 12,000 Australians and found that each serving increased people's immediate sense of happiness, and that over time a diet that included more fruits and vegetables led to greater happiness and satisfaction.

Similarly, the Cleveland Clinic recommends a diet of complex carbohydrates, lean proteins, and colorful foods to boost happiness and well-being.

And *The New York Times* reported earlier this year on two long-term studies published in the journal *Neurology*. These studies followed nearly 100,000 men and women over more than 20 years and found that eating colorful produce—including brussels sprouts, strawberries, winter squash and raw spinach—were associated with less cog-

nitive decline.

MEMBERS RETURN FOR FAVORITE FOODS

On a recent Sunday, the first truly crisp fall day of the year, a short line of members waited to enter the Coop. People in line expressed pleasure at the short line and excitement about the fresh food they planned to buy.

“Apples are in season right now, and pears. We eat them raw or sliced in salads,” said Tom Protos. “I’m trying to eat more salads because right now there’s an abundance of vegetables. And it’s better than snacking. We’re still working in a hybrid model, and I became too friendly with the refrigerator.”

Selene sat outside the Coop while her father shopped. “I’m excited about organic fruits and vegetables,” she said. “Especially strawberries.”



Ken, who shopped less frequently at the Coop during the peak of its long lines, said

she missed the vegetables and fruit most of all. “And those homemade [Court Street Grocers] sandwiches,” she added.

Nearby, Aga loaded bags onto her bike. “I just rejoined after being away for 15 years,” she said. I really missed the freshness and the quality of all the food that’s here today.” A new kind of berry ice cream topped her list of foods to boost the spirits.

For Emmy, it was organic cheese puffs. “Those definitely boost my spirits.”

“This time has made me especially appreciate a well-stocked pantry,” Emily Stone said. During the pandemic she cooked an entire Thanksgiving dinner for one, sourcing from the Coop and local farms. On this day, her boxes included traditional kettle-style tofu. “It feels very homey and comforting and safe and nutritious,” she said.

Over the past year-and-a-half, health and safety precautions—and daunting lines—have created obstacles for many Coop members to easily access the brain- and spirit-boosting foods we typically get at the Coop. Though our shopping lists vary, members agree that access to healthy, delicious and colorful food is at the top of the list of member benefits.

On my own list that day: cumin seeds, butternut squash, lentils, kale and haloumi cheese for a joy-sparking lunch I planned to enjoy with my father.

NO LONGER LOCALS, BUT STILL SHOPPING AT THE COOP

November 15, 2021



By Jess Powers

The Coop experienced a precipitous decline in membership during the pandemic, for a variety of reasons. But some members hold on to their ties to the institution despite moving out of the city. That sense of connection shows that there is more to Coop membership than good produce at fair prices.

General Coordinator Joe Holtz laments that there is a “problem in terms of the statistics,” regarding membership numbers and the attrition rate. The stats show membership rising throughout the pandemic, with people rejoining during the pause in member labor and others joining existing households. Interestingly, in the year before the pandemic, the Coop experienced historic lows in terms of people who departed

(12.3%).

Holtz believes that around 4,000 people left the Coop during the pandemic. That number will become more apparent with the return of member labor and people dropping off after not completing their shifts. Many left the city on or around then, as remote work and social distancing led to a desire for more space. But some members have hung on to their membership despite moving away.

ON THE NORTH FORK

Kendal Bayer never imagined living outside of the city. But after having a baby at 47, she realized that rather than juggling the logistics of childhood activities in Brooklyn, having outdoor space for her child to play was a priority. After living in the same apartment in Prospect Heights for 23 years, Bayer and her family moved to Mattituck, on the North Fork of Long Island. Even so, she says, there was “no way I could give up the Coop.”

Kendal and her husband Michael would drive into Brooklyn, and he would work their Coop food-processing and office shifts, while she would do their shopping for the month. They would spend roughly \$800–1000 and pack food into about 14 boxes. “I created a whole pantry system in our basement,” she mused.

When the pandemic hit, nearby Greenpoint Harbor Brewery in Suffolk County experienced an early outbreak. Suffolk County rates of infection were higher than those in Brooklyn. They “felt terrible,” but briefly put their membership on pause to “buy some time” and not risk exposing fellow Coop members.

After shopping at the local King Kullen and IGA, Kendal “came home crying, depressed at how the rest of the world shops.” They started driving to Whole Foods in Lake Grove. Kendal describes the experience as a kind of “scavenger hunt,” attempting to “piece together the Coop shopping experience.” She even called a beef supplier for the PSFC, who shipped directly to the Bayers as a one-off.

Currently, the Bayers both work individual office shifts. They are “thrilled to be back” to working and shopping at the Coop. Kendal enjoys running into people she knows and the energy of the place. She fantasizes about bringing the model out to Long Island.



A sampling of the Coop’s fresh local produce.

ON THE SOUTH FORK

For me, the pandemic and fully remote work provided an opportunity to realize a life-long dream and live at a house my family owns in Sag Harbor, on the South Fork of Long Island. It’s not as rural as it was during my childhood, and a favorite farm stand has since closed, but easy access to nature is a gift.

I BELIEVE IN THE VALUES OF COOPERATIVES, AND IT FEELS LIKE A COMMUNITY

WHENEVER I SHOP THERE.

I concur with Bayer's assessment of many of the local markets. Notoriously over-priced, they generally don't have the quality of the produce at the Coop, either. Here, local eggs cost \$9 a dozen and products such as the sprouted grain bread I purchase at the Coop cost \$2 more. It adds up. Acquaintances who live nearby and terminated their membership lament missing the reasonable cheese prices—and the smaller portions available for single-person households.

Prices aside, I lived in cooperative housing in college and joined the Coop decades ago. I believe in the values of cooperatives, and it feels like a community whenever I shop there. I lived in Gowanus for 20 years and used to shop at the Coop several times a week, depending on what I was inspired to cook. These days, the schedule and logistics are different.

I travel, to use the local parlance, “up island” to Brooklyn frequently. (Up island, derived from seafaring lingo, means traveling west, or “up” in longitude.) Adding shopping at the Coop when I'm already visiting friends and taking care of other business in the city makes sense to me. I fill in my larger Coop shops with items from local stores. I mainly buy local seafood out east.

Having a shift on the *Linewaiters' Gazette* means that I can do my work shift remotely, which is an added convenience. During the height of the pandemic, I reported on General Meetings that I watched over Zoom.

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IN NEW JERSEY

Taigi Smith and her daughter, Savannah, split their time between Prospect Heights and the New Jersey suburbs. Smith wanted to give her then-newborn daughter access to a less urban environment, as well as to Brooklyn. Now 10 years old, Savannah is “100% a Jersey girl,” Smith shares. But “she loves the pummelos, kale, and plantanos that she’s enjoyed from the Coop her entire life. Before she bites into a piece of fruit, she’ll often ask, ‘Is this from the Coop?’”

As a writer and editor for this publication, Smith reflects on a time when, without child-care, she brought her daughter to a disciplinary hearing that she covered as a reporter. “To this day, [my daughter] remembers all the details of the meeting, and at one point, used to act out the more salient parts of the hearing.” Watching someone defend themselves against accusations of theft for the first time and Coop’s system of democratic governance left quite an impression on Savannah.

“Time moves so quickly, and I find myself asking Savannah: ‘What job will you do for the Coop?’” adds Smith. Savannah is intrigued by the idea of working on the shopping squad doing checkout, at least at this time.

Since, unlike Savannah, new members generally hear about the Coop through word of mouth, rather than their parents, Holtz believes that it is important that the Coop remain a “compelling place to be a member of.” He’s invested in ensuring that people are “satisfied enough” that they help to spread the word.

Holtz stresses that onboarding new members is critical to the financial stability of the PSFC. He is optimistic that by the end of October there will be an interim system in place to admit new members.

Smith acknowledges that even though she still shops at the PSFC, with recent price increases at the Coop and decreases in prices for organics through big box retailers, it is less cost- and time-effective to make the drive. Holtz also wonders about the future of a brick-and-mortar store like the Coop, with the increase in home delivery competitors.

“BEING A MEMBER OF THE PSFC IS A CALLING. IT SOMETIMES SUPERSEDES LOGIC.”

TAIGI SMITH

And, yet, Smith and others—even those who have moved out of Brooklyn full time—continue to shop at the Coop.

Despite any doubts about practicality, she explains: “Then I get to the PSFC. And I see folks like Allen Zimmerman. And I talk to him about the difference between pummelos and grapefruits. I have a chat with the walker or listen to someone brusquely say, ‘Excuse me.’ And then it all makes sense.”

Besides the feeling of community, there is something intangible to membership. “Being a member of the PSFC is a calling,” Smith continues. “It sometimes supersedes

logic. At this moment, it all makes sense. I'm all in."

SEPTEMBER 21 GENERAL MEETING ROUND UP

November 15, 2021



Above: General Meeting Zoom Participants

By Meredith Kolodner

Rebuilding Coop community and making the general meetings more interactive

The Coop's General Meeting grappled with one of the central issues of our time – how do people communicate, feel connected, and make important decisions in the age of

COVID?

An informal group of Coop members who call themselves the “Coop Study Group” have been meeting for the past several months to discuss ways to improve member participation and to support the Coop. This group brought those questions to the September GM and asked for feedback on several concrete suggestions to improve communication and participation during the GM; they also sought new ideas to make the GMs more community-minded, transparent and democratic.

On the one hand, virtual meetings might have allowed more people to attend who lived far away or lacked child care, said the presenter, George Olken. At the same time, people who are less tech-savvy or don’t have stable Internet access have lost out. But the “Study Group” argued that all members—and the Coop itself—have lost something in the fog of Zoom. Overall attendance has decreased on Zoom versus in person meetings.

“Zoom is frustrating and isolating,” Olken said. He acknowledged that the in-person meetings had also sometimes been frustrating but that Zoom meetings lack the energy of being in-person. One can’t get a sense of the room, see how people are reacting or who’s stepping out for a side conversation.

The study group was not blaming the Chair Committee for the problems, and several members of the Chair and Agenda Committees said they appreciated the constructive tone of the presentation. Two suggested changes had already been made—there is closed captioning available during the meeting and speakers are told how much time they have to speak and everyone is kept to the same number of minutes.

Another suggestion, which garnered some support, was to change the meeting format from “webinar” to “meeting” format. In the current webinar set up, participants can only see the hosts of the meeting and the person speaking. In a meeting format, you can see the faces (or names if participants want their camera off) of everyone attending. It also allows for reaction icons (thumbs up, clapping, etc) that everyone can

see, and it allows everyone see who and how many people have their hands raised to speak. Break-out rooms are available, which facilitates smaller groups of people to meet and talk.

The other main suggestion from the study group was to turn the chat function back on to let members communicate directly with one another. One-on-one chats could be used to say hello to people you know, and the group chat would be another mode of communication among all members. The chat script could also be copied and made public, allowing more members to see what happened during the meeting beyond reading the official minutes.

“Democracy is messy,” Olken quipped, “but in the messiness is the joy.”



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Additionally, the study group suggested that members could volunteer to provide live technical assistance to anyone having difficulty with any of the Zoom functions, like voting. Another suggestion was to use slides for presentations to help people follow the discussion.

“These are ideas, just food for thought,” Olken said as he wrapped up his presenta-

tion. “Our goals are greater participation through transparency and expanded accessibility. Our hope is to create more feeling of community at our meetings. When we can see each other we feel less alone. And when we can see who is here we feel part of a community. We’d love to hear your ideas.”

Several speakers said they liked many of the ideas proposed by the group.

“I’m new to the Coop,” said one member, who identified herself as Mary. “I really like the idea of being able to see people.”

General Coordinator Joe Holtz agreed. “I really appreciate the suggestions,” he said. “I so miss being able to look out at the audience and see the reactions I’m getting, see how many hands are up.”

David, a member of the Chair Committee, said he appreciated the tone of the presentation and reminded members that they did vote on the meeting format and the creation of a committee to carry them out.

He wasn’t in favor of re-instating the chat. While most members are respectful, he said, there are people who are “trolls,” there’s hate speech and “brigading” which make moderating a chat very challenging. He suggested posting a link in the chat for a Slack or Discord channel (which are other messaging platforms) for member communication.

Another member suggested that the chairs use an alternative channel, since they’re familiar with the technology, and leave the chat to meeting attendees to make it more accessible to people who aren’t as tech-savvy.

Treasury still struggling but there’s hope on the horizon

The Coop has lost \$2.1 million in the last year, Joe Holtz reported. The IRS, however, owes the Coop \$2.9 million in employee retention credits, and it is hopeful some of

this will come in soon.

The number of paid staff went from 77 before the pandemic to more than 200 people during the height of the pandemic. On July 12, with the restoration of member labor, 80 percent of the temporary staff was laid off, and the goal is to no longer have temporary staff by the end of October, which will save the Coop an additional \$10,000 per week.

In response to a question about raising revenue by accepting more members, Holtz answered that the Coop is down 4,000 members since March 2020. By mid or late-October there should be an online onboarding system with appointments to visit to Coop to complete the joining process.

The Coop used to have 100 hours of shopping time, and it is now at 84. As the Coop adds more members, the General Coordinators hope to add more hours to keep the same limits on the number of people who are in the building.

Buyers report

If you've noticed some of your regular items missing in the cans aisle, it's not because your friends are suddenly buying all the same things that you are. The Coop's biggest dry goods distributor has been facing serious labor shortages. The Coop usually gets an 18-wheeler full of food five or six times a week, and they've been sending a quarter trailer or less. Buyers have been working very hard to find other distributors so even if your favorite brand isn't there, there should be a good substitute.

A bit of controversy

Members of the Hudson Valley Farm Coop Committee, which was formed to help launch an organization in the Hudson Valley with a goal to acquire and operate up to 15 farms, presented their structure and reporting proposal, which was required by the provisional approval granted at the April 2021 GM.

The goal of the group, said Teresa Santamaria, is to create “safer, saner and more sustainable food systems.” The committee said they would report quarterly to the GM, open the first half of committee meetings to all members, and post meeting notices in advance. The proposal sponsors will recruit and interview members with experience in agriculture, real estate, finance law and business management, and the new members will be approved by a simple majority of the proposal’s sponsors. Members will get credit for work on the committee, and committee members’ bios will be posted on the Coop website.

There were questions about committee members being able to benefit from the creation of the Hudson Valley Coop, and in particular committee member Jonathan Farber. (Farber has been a member of the Coop for 28 years and is a landscape architect and farmer.)

Farber answered that his company could help to get the company up and running, but that would be up to the committee.

The proposal was approved.

Committee reports

Paul Warren, from the Equity Access and Community Committee, requested space on the agenda to vote on collecting demographic information of new members to find out who the Coop community is.

The Labor Committee, the International Trade Education squad, and the Agenda Committee are all looking for new members. There are links to these committees Coop website if people are interested in more information.

Open Forum

One member requested that the text of complicated issues be distributed in advance

of the meetings so members had a chance to read and digest proposals. Coop staff said that they could provide link in the Google doc that has the agenda, which is posted in advance.

Another member asked when child care would be available. Joe Holtz said there weren't plans about when to bring back child care since the room is being used to package food so that Aisle 2 doesn't get too crowded. There is also a safety issue in terms of the virus. Holtz said he doesn't have answer as to how to make it happen but that the Coop is committed to bringing it back and that the issue needs further discussion.

One more vote

Two sitting members of the Hearing Officers Committee Election, which has had no hearings since the start of the pandemic, were overwhelmingly re-elected.

STOCK SHORTAGES AT THE COOP ARE LIKELY HERE TO STAY

November 15, 2021



Above: Sorry, there is no back-stock of papaya!

By John B. Thomas

With increased numbers of fully vaccinated individuals and the subsequent reinstatement of the member labor requirement, summer and fall of 2021 were supposed to bring a return to normalcy at the Coop—or if not normalcy, something close to it. Yet an email sent to the full Coop membership on September 22 punctured that bubble, putting words to a reality that has crept into Coop members' consciousnesses as many of us have resumed shopping and working our shifts: that the supply shortages that members had become used to during the pandemic appear to be here for the foreseeable future. Specifically, the email outlined that both grocery and household items are more out of stock than usual.

The email mentioned that widespread labor shortages across the country are a key driver of these issues. A shortage of warehouse workers and truck drivers appears to be affecting the grocery world acutely. Along with these issues are some fundamental limitations to the Coop's space, namely its ability to only store several days of groceries at a time, as opposed to several weeks for many other grocery stores.

The Coop's distributors appear to all be affected by the shortage of truck drivers. Ac-

cording to Coop Grocery Buyer Gillian Chi, most of the Coop sources' distributors have their own trucks and hire their own drivers. Now, those same distributors do not have enough drivers on staff, so they often have to outsource to a third-party trucking company, or otherwise cut back on orders—sometimes as much as 50%.

The Coop is not alone in facing this new reality. The Forbes article linked in the email to members identified four key factors that are driving these labor shortages. Namely, workers now have more leverage to push back against historically stagnant wages; there is a broader desire for better working conditions (some truckers work 70 hours each week and often spend weeks away from home); workers now prioritize a better work-life balance and scheduling flexibility; and there are increased child and family care responsibilities.

At least when it comes to the warehouse and trucker shortages, these four dynamics certainly seem to be at play. One trucking company is reported to have increased wages by 35% over the previous year, and this still may not be enough: the Bureau of Labor Statistics report that the trucking industry is still down 33,000 jobs from February 2020. The fact that so many jobs still need to be filled reflects the broader trend—"The Great Resignation"—where the pandemic seems to have shown low wage workers that they can and should demand more from their employers. This trend seems to be especially prevalent in restaurants and hospitality.

While these labor market dynamics in the U.S. may explain some of the stock shortages Coop members are seeing, supply chain issues may be more widespread and last longer than the Coop email suggests. This is due to a mix of COVID-related disruptions, but also policy choices that have created our highly interconnected, globalized, and (pre-pandemic) efficient economy.



Shortages in the bulk aisle.

On the COVID side, highly globalized supply chains are still adapting to a world reeling from a pandemic that is far from under control in most parts of the world, with the pandemic and its associated restrictions causing major disruptions to all transport sectors responsible for moving goods around the world. A recent letter by the International Chamber of Shipping to the United Nations General Assembly warned of a “global transport system collapse” if transport workers are not given freedom of movement and priority to receive vaccines. Consumers, too, have a role to play, with the reopening of economies increasing demand significantly, and supply chains being unable to keep up after more than a year of disruption.

While these global supply chain challenges may not seem directly relevant to food produced in the U.S., these shortages can build on each other. For example, if a truck

engine breaks down and the parts to replace it are stuck on a container ship at a port in Asia, then the trucking company not only can't pick up the goods to fix the truck, it also cannot deliver the original goods it was supposed to.



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Many of these fundamental challenges were created over decades by trade policy that prioritized producing cheap things abroad for consumers in a low-wage economy at home. Or, in the words of The Guardian, “policies that led to our supply constrained world are lax antitrust, deregulation of basic industries like shipping, railroads and trucking, disinvestment in domestic production, and trade policy emphasizing finance over manufacturing.” In the case of trucking, deregulation in the 1970s led firms to compete against each other—primarily by offering lower prices, which were then passed on to truck drivers in the form of lower wages, reduced safety, and unreasonable scheduling that crushed drivers—trends that continue to this day.

On top of these fundamental weaknesses in how goods are moved around is rampant inflation, with prices rising for consumers at the fastest rate in 30 years—without a commensurate increase in wages. The Federal Reserve appears to be deeply concerned that inflation will not just be a short-term phenomenon and that the supply chain disruptions causing it are far from getting better, and have few quick fixes.

All of this points to supply shortages becoming the new normal, not just a passing blip on the road to recovery as was predicted and desired by experts. These supply shortages are not just leading to empty shelves at the Coop and other grocery stores, but also to higher prices—and not just because of constrained supply. The Coop tends to get its best prices from large distributors. Due to the shortages, the Coop's buyers have had to begin buying the same number and quantity of goods across multiple smaller distributors. And due to economies of scale, those smaller distributors can't offer the same lower prices as their larger counterparts—sometimes by a significant amount. For example, switching to a smaller distributor increased the price of a case of black beans from \$19.73 to \$22.99, by 17%. This trend is not just for groceries. The price the Coop pays for Dr. Bronner's liquid soap has increased four percent, from \$8.96 to \$9.32, by moving to a smaller distributor. Even though these prices are higher, says Chi, "You're still going to get a good price, and less than you would likely pay outside the Coop."

The strategy the Coop is taking to address these shortages—approaching alternative distributors, ordering from different warehouses, and finding "best alternative" substitutes—may be a reality for the foreseeable future, as are the associated higher prices. Chi said, "the difficulties started with one distributor, and then it became one after another. It's only been about a month but the trend is worse, not better. I can't imagine how [these systemic issues] are going to be resolved."

In spite of all this disruption, this period may present some new opportunities, both for the Coop and for our globalized economy. It appears that policymakers have taken notice of these fundamental weaknesses and appear poised to invest more in domestic production in certain sectors. Corporations are increasingly seeing the need for greater regulation to bring stability and predictability back to their sectors, especially in the transportation industry. And workers now have some of the highest leverage with employers than at any time in modern history, with the prospect of real wage growth combatting years of stagnation.

And as for the Coop, some of these changes may have unseen upsides. For example,

many of the smaller distributors are more local which is generally good for reducing the carbon footprint of products as they have to travel shorter distances to get to consumers. But this switch comes with a cost, in the form of the time and logistical challenges associated with dealing with unfulfilled orders, smaller product volumes, and finding alternatives across multiple distributors. Said Chi, “we sell over 10,000 products at the Coop, and we’re switching like crazy—it’s very tedious work going through items one by one. We are trying very hard not to keep shelves empty.”

All of these dynamics suggest that members will need to get used to a new pandemic normal. Members may discover new products they hadn’t tried before, and the Coop will build new relationships with domestic producers. So while the pandemic is still causing widespread challenges, there may be some bright spots on the horizon—even if that horizon looks a little different than before. Said Chi, “what we’re managing is a global crisis, and we’re working with all the resources we have—including our own time—to make our way through it and keep the store full. I would credit my amazing coworkers for keeping our shelves as full as they have been. And I would ask members for patience, understanding, and flexibility with your purchasing choices.”