

COVID-19 ATTACKED AND UNDERMINED THE COOP

October 5, 2021

We can't fit working and shopping members and maintain safe social distancing. The results are financial and social. We are losing money and members.

Coop finances depend on required member labor—whose value in dollars is never counted in the budgets—to sell elite health-food store products for commercial super-market prices. We're built on equity and solidarity of member/owner/worker/shopper; the same privileges and same responsibilities for each member.

Our traditional squad system fell apart as about 4,000 of 17,000 members (18%) left. Under emergency conditions, the management collective (General Coordinators) hired members to run the store for minimum wage. More expenses; less income.

In mid-July, the GCs instituted a new system of member labor. Members sign up for shifts doing different tasks on different days under the supervision of a different paid staff person who is under the supervision of the GCs. Less social cohesion.

Many of us want to restore the traditional system of squads with member leaders. We created a process to identify, recruit and prepare member leaders (over several months) to step into place and then to organize members into squads if/when it is safe and feasible. The item was discussed at July General Meeting. The vote will be at the October 26 GM.

A QR Code to the complete text will soon be available.

Those registered will receive the document in an email.

Please study the plan, comment and vote at the Oct GM.

Susan Metz

Editor's note: Please see "The Coop Making It Through COVID" for Gazette reporter-researched information on the percentage of members who departed the Coop during the pandemic.

INEDIBLE ORANGES

October 5, 2021

TO THE *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE*:

This letter is not about politics, veganism vs. animal consumption, genetic modification vs. anti GMO, Palestine, etc. It is actually about a particular food we sell! I have often bought organic Valencia oranges at the Coop. They were always juicy, very flavorful, the right balance of acidic and sweet, and generally small-to-medium sized. At my most recent visit I bought what were purported to be Valencias. They were enormous (the size of a typical grapefruit), with absolutely no flavor, no sweetness nor acidity, and were completely dried out. In short, they were literally inedible and had to be thrown out. Are these the same Valencias? Do we not have discretion when there is a truly awful batch of fruit to refuse the purchase? I am quite certain that the ones I purchased were not "bad apples" (i.e., bad oranges), since I have noticed for years that very large oranges tend to lack in flavor and juiciness. Admittedly that should have given me sufficient warning (*caveat emptor!*), but I didn't see any navels or other oranges for sale. I understand that produce, especially organic, can vary considerably in taste quality, and I expect and accept that occasionally I might end up eating something that is not great. But when something is so bad that it literally cannot be swallowed, and there is a full tray of them for sale to other Coop members, it seems to me that some protocol should have prevented that.

Michael Esterowitz

TEMP WORKERS WERE MEMBERS

October 5, 2021

LET'S JUST START HERE:

All Temp workers were members. Not everyone knew this information. A lot of Coop members would come in to shop during the height of the pandemic and complain about “us.” As if we were outsiders, who somehow infiltrated the Coop, and changed it into something else, something different. In actuality, we were the members who lost our jobs, lost our source of income, lost our benefits (if we had any); who reached out in an uncertain time during the bleakest time in our immediate history—a world-wide pandemic—and helped the Coop to survive. We came in and worked eight-hour shifts, killing our bodies, but also happy to have the work so we could pay some bills and put food on our tables. We bonded with each other, laughed, shared our struggles, and shared our love for food, music, art—whatever we were interested in—with each other. The Coop was quieter than before the pandemic, the world was quieter. That meant that we could see each other in a new and different way. We met people that we didn’t meet when the world was busy with its business. I will always look back at this time, and think about the people I met and worked with, with the utmost respect and fondness, as we all move into the future. I know some I will see again and some I probably won’t. It’s just the way the world works. I think some of my lasting thoughts are these: Is a community built on great food at cheap prices enough? Or do we need and want something more than that? The Coop brings us together. I guess it’s up to each one of us as members to decide what we value in a “community.”

Lisa Martin

(former Temp worker)

TIME FOR A VACCINE MANDATE AT THE COOP

October 5, 2021

DEAR *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE* EDITORS,

It is time for the Coop to implement a vaccine mandate for its members. I understand that not everyone is able to get a vaccine, including those with autoimmune disorders, those receiving chemotherapy, etc. However, the vast majority of people, including the vast majority of Coop members, do not fall into these categories. For those of us who are able, the time to hesitate is through.

It was heartening to see, during the pandemic, how Coop members eagerly adopted public health best practices: social distancing, masking, limiting the number of members in the Coop at a time, etc. The Coop did a much better job than most other institutions at keeping its members safe and healthy.

Now the Coop must take the next step: require members, who are able to receive a vaccine, to be vaccinated if they intend to remain members.

While I understand indoor masking will be the norm for some time, if we are ever to return to a world without masks, we must be vaccinated. It is not fair that the majority of members must continue wearing masks on their shifts indefinitely because a few holdouts refuse to get vaccinated. Life must eventually return to normal. The best way to accelerate that process is to require all Coop members who are able to get vaccinated to do so.

Sincerely,

Taylor Wofford

AN INVITATION

October 5, 2021

HELLO EVERYONE,

I am part of Rockycorner.org, a cohousing community in Connecticut, and a long-time PSFC member. Quite a few of us at Rocky Corner are also members of the PSFC, and we would like to invite the Coop community and their families to events that we are planning on our property and the surrounding area in rural Connecticut.

A Special Event for PSFC members & families: the Rocky Corner Cohousing community is planning some foraging and herb walks / hikes on some of the nice weather weekends we have left in this summer/early fall. We would like to extend a special invitation to the members of the Park Slope Food Coop and their families to come and spend a day in rural Connecticut with us.

Social distancing is easy at Rocky Corner; our property is situated on 33 acres of mostly farmland and is adjacent to a hiking trail that leads down to Lake Chamberlain, Connecticut's largest reservoir.

We have a few knowledgeable members ready to guide us as we forage and identify the herbs and edible wild plants that grow on our land.

We invite you to bring a picnic basket. There is plenty of space in our "outdoor living room" to organize some fun activities and games for all ages.

If you have a portable instrument, feel free to bring it along. The musically inclined among us are always ready for a jam session!

Since these events are very much weather-dependent and can not therefore be sched-

uled far in advance, we invite you to check our website regularly for updates:
www.rockycorner.org/events. We only ask that you dress appropriately for a walk/hike
(sturdy shoes and long pants!) and bring a smile to the event!

All of us at Rocky Corner Cohousing look forward to welcoming our friends at the PSFC
to these events and to celebrate outdoor living with all of you.

Be sure to RSVP for the event of your choice by emailing info@rockycorner.org a few
days before the event so we can plan appropriately for the ages and abilities of atten-
dees. Rocky Corner is a respectful and inclusive community and ALL ARE WELCOME!

Lori Schumann

PROPOSAL TO REINSTATE MEMBER LABOR WILL NOT GO TO A VOTE

October 5, 2021

DEAR COOP COMMUNITY,

At the August GM I tried to present a proposal to restore voluntary member labor for
discussion. The response to my presentation was so overwhelmingly negative that I
have decided not to request a vote. But I do want to address a few points as they
bear on the state of our Coop.

First, although the General Coordinators knew about my proposal and I had written to
them about the matter several times, and although I have had a cooperative relation-
ship with them for many years, including as Committee Chair on the Loan Committee,
they did not tell me that they intended to present the return to member labor as an
apparent *fait accompli*, during their report at the beginning of the GM. I believe that
there had been no earlier public proposal from the GCs to restore member labor. Had

the GCs informed me of their intentions, I would have withdrawn my proposal.

Second, several comments suggested that my motives for wanting to restore member labor were political. One person explicitly said I was “screaming like Trump’s girl-friend.” Ouch. Without trotting out my progressive *bona fides*, I assert that people can legitimately disagree on which precautions are science-based and which are fear-based. Contrary to comments during the meeting, I had thought a lot about the issue, discussed it with other Coop stakeholders (staff and members), and spent considerable time reviewing health research and guidelines. I was motivated entirely by caring about the cooperative model and financial viability. I am concerned that liberals are becoming as reactionary as the right. I hope we are not going to meet disagreement with disparagement, either within our Coop or in the broader community. I tried to present as coherently as I could, within the limits of the Zoom meeting, a response to whatever concerns I could anticipate. I don’t think anyone should be dismissed or mocked for suggesting alternative approaches. That does not strengthen us, it weakens us.

Third, the Chair of the meeting said that the Chair committee members are not receiving work credit. He also noted that they are working more than average to make the GM happen. I think that the Coop should grant work credit to members who provide essential functions, such as running the GM and the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*. For essential functions we should not depend on members’ willingness to donate their time.

Finally, I had requested that my presentation be made available, but I don’t think that happened. Unfortunately, because my time was cut short and I had technical difficulties with my Zoom connection, the presentation was rushed, and I could not introduce myself, respond to questions, or provide clarifications. I am a public school special ed teacher; I used to be a social scientist; I have been a member of the Coop for about 25 years, and I was the chair of the Revolving Loan Committee. If anyone is interested, here is the link to the presentation:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1UdZdpijqqvhxaK_06NjrTyqeOM8jAvnQSe-

ablaLbIKc/edit?usp=sharing

*In Cooperation,
Rachel Porter*

BOTH MEMBER + SHOPPER, NOT EITHER/OR

October 5, 2021

PSFC's mission reads: "The Park Slope Food Coop is a member-owned and operated food store ..."

At the 7/28 GM, members were asked to be our Better Selves in considering and approving the Black Lives Matter statement. Then, the Coordinators asked us to consider a markup increase to help PSFC's economic recovery. This proposal felt like an austerity measure asked of me as a shopper-customer.

We each are both a member and a shopper. As "an alternative to commercial profit-oriented business," our PSFC challenge is to hold and practice Both aspects vs. Either/Or. At the GM, a small yet significant symbol was that the Coordinators remembered the dollar amount of fresh MOEI recently infused into PSFC but not how many members/member-households made those investments.

I cherish PSFC as a nugget in our collective endeavor towards Another Future that is Possible. At a time when many are receiving packaged food distribution, the psychological and nutritional value of even a modicum of fresh produce cannot be overstated. So, when Coordinator Joe S characterized the proposed markup as affordable since folks are no longer going to restaurants, I asked myself: How many members who currently don't shop at PSFC or shop infrequently might be receiving boxed food distributions and/or standing in a food-pantry line?

Money is critical for PSFC to operate as a store. At the same time, PSFC would have lost its soul if certain members could no longer come to the Coop or afford to shop in it.

I am a Chinese-Asian American, self-identified as POC. A member since 1988 and a Park Slope resident for 18 years (until 2004), I have experienced many phases of PSFC.

Proposals:

- Immediately re-institute the member-labor arrangement in whatever manner feasible.
- The first order of business should be an Audit (not a survey) to look into the well being of each member in each Squad/Committee as well as unattached members, prioritizing those who have not shopped since early March.
- An Audit will show members who have transitioned, recovering from COVID-19, grieving losses, or struggling to cover rent, food and other necessities. It likely find Black and Brown members who have not shopped recently residing in clusters/areas due to Brooklyn's segregated housing.
- Since the PSFC process requires two GMs to approve a proposal, the audit should be started by a team of volunteer members with pertinent skills and necessary staff support.
- PSFC proactively uses its vendor relationships and buying power to join forces with mutual-aid groups, pantries and smaller food coops. By leveraging PSFC capabilities, we can expand collaborative buying and allow fresher produce to be more accessible.

Black Lives Matter because not everyone has mattered under the euphemistic "All Lives Matter" approach to which the business and institutional sides of PSFC have often succumbed too easily. However, PSFC has too much history and potential for us to give up. Let's actively work towards Both aspects in a wholistic PSFC.

Respectfully,

Marion Yuen

VOTING AT THE ZOOM MEETING

October 5, 2021

Thank you to the people who organized the Zoom General Meeting held on Tuesday, July 28, 2020. It is good to keep an open forum so that Members can be informed about operations at the Coop. This is a useful tool to provide updates via committee reports, on financial matters and general information regarding the Coop. However the technology is not robust enough to allow for replacing the in-person discussion and voting on proposals and issues.

While we were able to participate via Zoom video last month, this month we were not able to sign on. Another person during the meeting described the identical problem we had, where Zoom did not accept our email address and/or password.

Without the video we could not see the poll questions or polls, and following the issues by voice only was more difficult without seeing people and their faces or even the simple name in a screen box. When it came time to vote, we were not able to vote in confidence on the phone, it was confusing to determine if we were voting on an amendment and how to cast a Yes or No vote. For households with a single computer but multiple Coop members, only one member can vote and not in private.

We suggest that until a robust viable solution is available for people using video and/or voice to attend, that future meetings restrict the agenda to committee reports and operational issues. Voting seems especially problematic using only a non-video connection.

We urge the Coop to continue to explore how to hold a remote meeting while Covid restricts our physical attendance. But we firmly believe that this not a replacement for attending and voting in-person and especially for those that use non-video means to attend.

Again thanks to those that worked hard on finding and implementing a technological solution. As retired Network Engineers, we understand the challenge. We just don't believe that the current solution supports the ideals of Coop democracy at this time.

In Cooperation,

Stewart Pravda and Cathy Monblatt

MEMBER LABOR

October 5, 2021

Dear Members,

At the August General Meeting I hope to propose to restore a modified, voluntary and temporary member labor system. I had hoped that the General Coordinators would do this, but since they have not, I hope that we, the members and owners of the Park Slope Food Coop can convince them with our collective vote. There are two reasons that this is important to our Coop. First, the current system of only paid labor is eroding our culture of cooperation and turning our unique Coop into a regular store with all of the spoken and unspoken alienation between staff and customers that we have so beautifully avoided for almost 50 years. Second, because we do not have member labor, we have hired a huge number of new, temporary staff and we still are not open for our full hours, consequently we are losing an incredible amount of money each week—according to Joe Holtz, our General Manager, about \$90,000/week. We are paying only minimum wage to the temporary staff, thus going back on our values to be

an excellent employer. We are also jeopardizing our permanent staff's job security as our financial condition worsens.

I will propose that member labor is returned to solve both problems. I will propose that each area of labor is examined with key staff to make sure that public health and safety protocols are established and easy to follow; the protocols for check out and shopping will no doubt be different from receiving for example. Initially, members will still be able to shop without working and we will offer modest incentives to members to bank work shift credits, for example, credit for 2 full shifts in the future for every 4 hour shift worked voluntarily. I will try to anticipate as many issues as I can in my presentation, but the agenda item specifies that restoring member labor will involve co-operative revision.

My usual work slot is leading the Loan Committee and in that capacity I regularly interact with groups wanting to start a Coop using our model. I had two such conversations this week, one with a group in Connecticut and another in upstate NY. I sent them each a couple of videos that are on YouTube about our Coop. I urge you all to look up these short videos to be reminded of how special and functional our model is. Let's bring it back. Please sign up for the GM and consider voting to restore our model.

*In Cooperation,
Rachel Porter*

FASTER COOP VOTES

October 5, 2021

I'm gonna keep shopping at the Coop because the groceries are great but our collective core is taking a bad hit if the June GM is any indication. The agenda item to make

a public statement of support for the movement for Black Lives should have been voted on, and not stalled via process designating it a discussion-only topic. This is not a new problem.

[REDACTED]

PLAN TO SAVE THE COOP

October 5, 2021

Coordinators and some members have now suggested that member labor could indeed safely resume, something which would benefit the bottom line of the Coop. This is significant because the Coop is still losing money every week the pandemic, which shows no sign of abating, continues.

[REDACTED]

STAFF AT THE COOP

October 5, 2021

Like so many, I appreciate the Coop's staff who, like many workers across the city, keep coming to work. Unfortunately, the members are not working now, but this does not mean we are any less a member labor coop. I think we should return to the model of member labor (adjusted as needed for safety) that has served us so well for 47 years. Two pages I heard when I shopped this week led me to think that some of the staff at the Coop have forgotten about that model now that it has been only staff running the Coop for almost three months.



THANK YOU NOTE

October 5, 2021

Thanks, you guys—board, staff, temporary staff, General Coordinators—tonight was a great meeting that provided us all with the deep reassurance that we are in excellent hands moving forward—whatever happens. How wonderful to get to feel that about something these days.

Take care, continue being safe, and stay well.

Blessings,

Heidi Oleszczuk

A Very Proud Coop Member

TO THE EDITORS:

October 5, 2021

Had the Coop in its 47 or so years of operation thought to meet the needs of its senior and disabled members and had a shopping delivery program in place, instead of first floating a plan in late 2019, the Coop would be meeting the needs of those senior and disabled persons. 