

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

October 5, 2021

Welcome to the re-imagined *Linewaiters' Gazette*. Over the past 18 months, the full *Gazette* squad logged nearly 1,000 hours (during a time when member labor was not required) to create processes and ultimately a platform for a 21st century *Gazette*. Nevertheless, this is a work-in-progress and one that will doubtless continue to evolve. Thank you for your readership and your support for this updated and more environmentally-friendly *Gazette*.

In cooperation,

Editors

THE COOP MAKING IT THROUGH COVID

October 5, 2021



By Travis Hartman

In the spring of 2020, after the city-wide shutdown, Coop members stood patiently, six feet apart, snaking around the block, waiting for their turn to enter the Coop. Members would often wait for over an hour, with short lines only occurring during poor weather or sheer luck.

Some members dealt with it well, while others did not.

LONG LINES

Paul Schickler, a member for 17 years, said, "I remember once the line was all the way down the street, around the corner and halfway down President Street." It did not deter him from waiting, though, and he carried a chair with him to sit in.

There were also members like Janet Gottlieb who, estimating the length of the line and the amount of time to wait, sometimes concluded it was not worth the wait. "If I saw that the line was down to the corner of President, I wouldn't wait," she said.

Many shoppers stayed away altogether due to concerns about long lines or fear of infection. Shopping hours were drastically reduced, and for a short period, around a half day was set aside for senior citizens, to comply with COVID-19 safety protocols. The reduced availability of hours for members increased safety for members and workers alike, and allowed workers to properly maintain the Coop, in a world of ever-evolving information about how to combat the virus.

HUGE DROP IN SALES

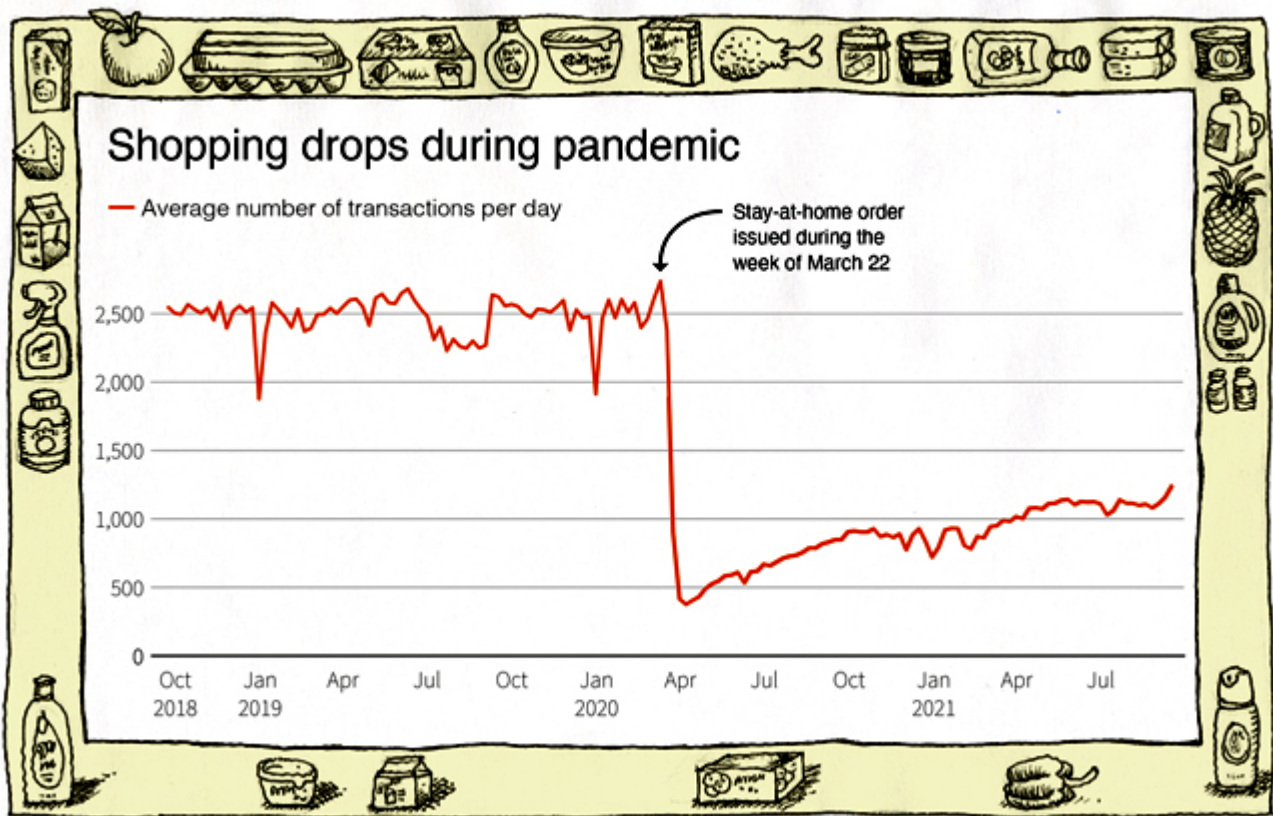


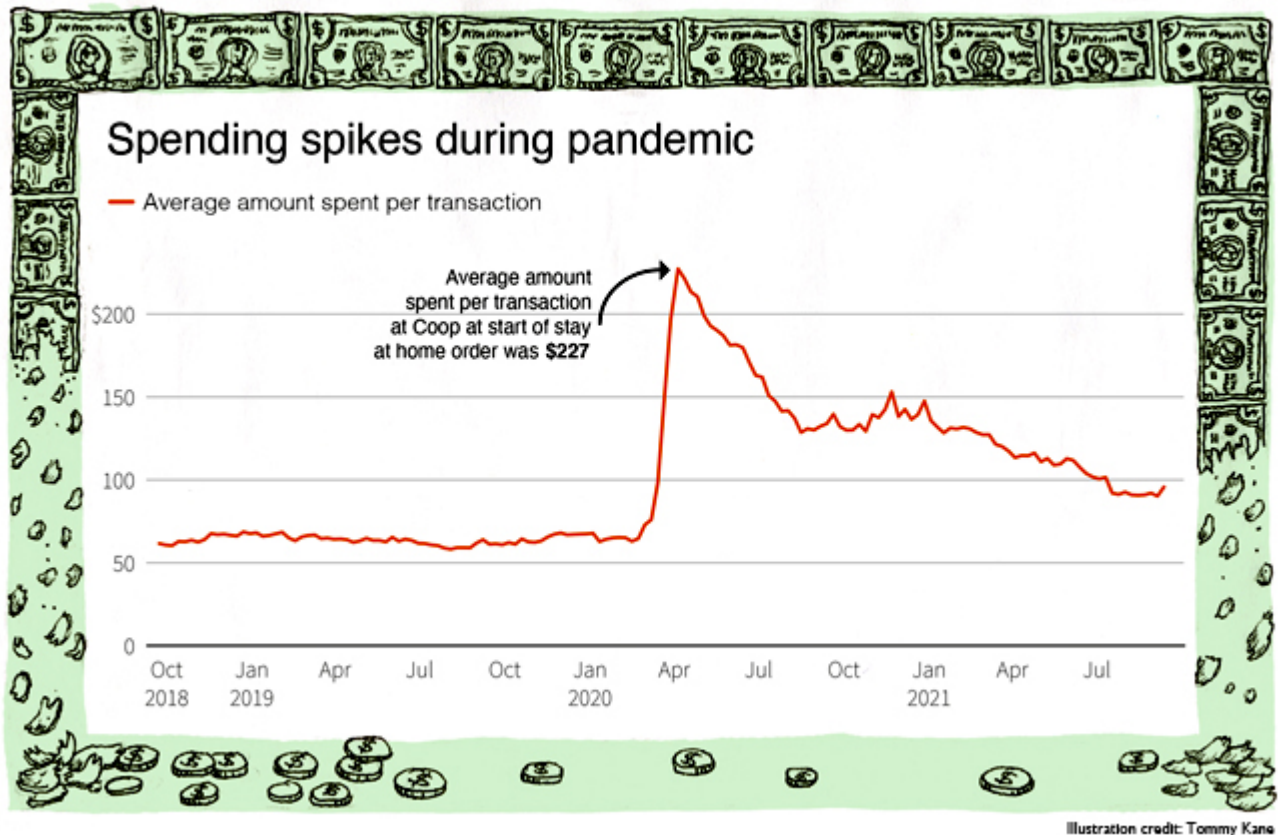
Illustration credit: Tommy Kane

Over the course of the first month of the New York State stay-at-home order, the average number of daily transactions dropped by 87%. It hit a low point of just under that figure, and the number of transactions has been rising steadily ever since, though tempered by lines, shortened shopping hours and a restricted number of members in the Coop at any given time.

Flora Wu said she would often stop by the Coop every day in pre-pandemic times, as she lives very close by, but the long lines kept her away initially, and she found other places to shop for various reasons.

“But I like that there aren’t so many people inside now,” she said, noting that not all the restrictions were without silver linings.

BUYING MORE STUFF



Despite the drastically lower number of transactions, the Coop saw a massive upsurge in the average amount per transaction. So while fewer people were shopping, they were spending much more. This resonates with recollections of stories about hoarding toilet paper and other sundries. Over the first month of the stay-at-home order, the average transaction tripled from \$76 to \$237. Since then, it has been returning to a more normal high, decreasing steadily to around \$95 as of mid-September.

BIG LOSSES

The reduced sales volume and hiring of temporary staff in place of member labor saw the Coop losing around \$100,000 per week in the beginning of the pandemic. In response, the Coop applied for and was granted a \$1.4 million PPP loan, as well as asked members to increase their voluntary investment in the Coop, which amounted to an additional \$800,000. Members also voted for a 4% mark up—which went into effect in August 2020—to improve financial solvency.



Coop members are back working their shifts, but it will take a while for membership to return to pre-pandemic levels.

RECOVERY

In some ways the Coop is still a shadow of its former self, but there are signs that it is recovering in significant ways. Currently, there are 84 shopping hours available in the week, compared to 100 in pre-pandemic time. 54 shoppers are allowed in the store compared to 35 or so when the pandemic began. There have been huge improvements in air filtration at the Coop to keep members safe, because as Coop manager Joe Holtz said, “We’ve taken great measures to make the air safe, and we’re gonna err on the side of keeping members safe.”

Two of the main drains on the Coop’s finances are currently in flux. The temporary pandemic support staff that was hired to work both full-time and part-time at the Coop was released when member labor came back online in mid-July.

“It was crucial that there were members willing and able to help, that was really im-

portant, and I thank them, they helped keep the Coop open—while we figured out how to have a safe return to member labor,” said Holtz.



General Coordinator Joe Holtz expressed his appreciation for the temporary labor that worked through the pandemic allowing the Coop to stay open.

SHRINKING MEMBERSHIP

The other financial drain is Coop membership, which is down an estimated 4,000 members, or around 23%. This equates to 23% of sales evaporating as well. Membership had been held at roughly 17,000 for the past few years, with about 2,200 members leaving each year for normal causes such as moving away. This was never a problem—every time a member left, there was a new one to replace them.

In terms of when we open membership back up at the Coop, and remove the financial drain of paying workers, Holtz said, “I don’t have an exact date; it’s an urgency and it should be as soon as possible, and we’re working towards it,” citing the logistics of balancing the safety of current members while devising a new orientation system. “The desire is there,” he said. “Inventing a new system is not finished.”

Overall, coordinators say the Coop is struggling because it needs more people to shop—and that the Coop needs more members.

HOW CREATIVE CHEFS SUSTAINED COOP WORKERS

October 5, 2021



Above: Chefs Kate Zuckerman (R) and Kim Pistone (L) cooked amazing lunches for up to 90 Coop staffers right through the pandemic.

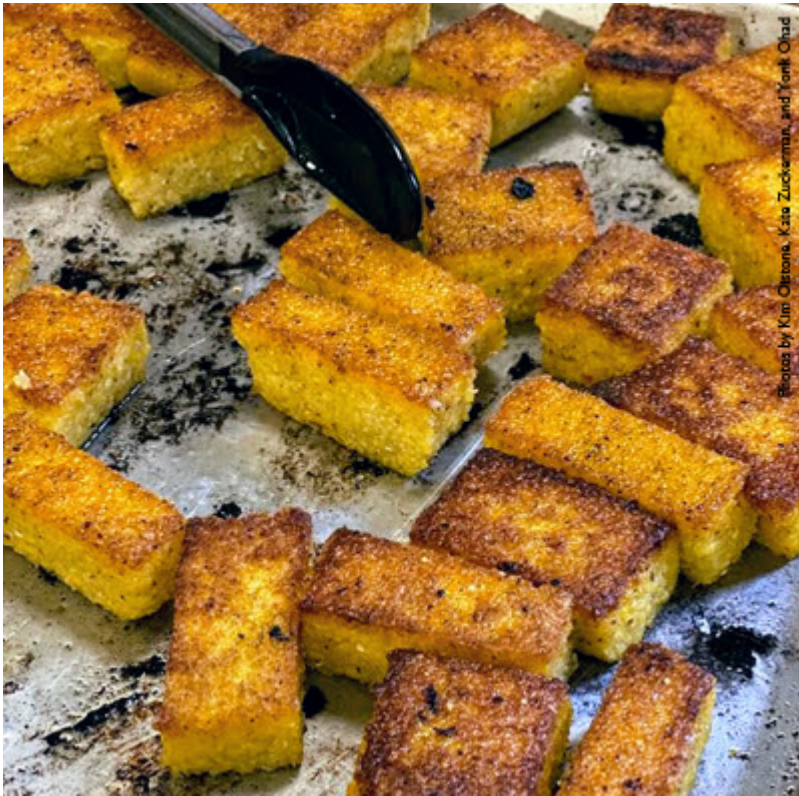
By Hayley Gorenberg

Chef and Coop member Kate Zuckerman surveyed banana boxes full of food that the Coop would, pre-pandemic, have donated to CHiPS soup kitchen. But it was April 2020; COVID had shuttered the kitchen, and with member labor suspended for the first time ever, the Coop was operating with temporary help and staff. And the staff was hungry.

Familiar with Zuckerman's professional culinary talents after years of her FTOP work creating festive meals celebrating staff milestones, Coop staff members hired her to help sort through the food and figure out how to whip up tasty lunches on a shoestring budget. The assignment lasted through the middle of July.

FLOUR, EGGS AND DENTED CANS

"It was like a puzzle," Zuckerman said. She sorted through boxes that included dented cans, slashed bags of flour and post-dated eggs. There might be a case of something mistakenly delivered that a distributor didn't pick up, or boxes of berries with a berry or two molding in each—not salable, but certainly salvageable.



JAMS AND CAKES

The inspiration flowed. “I made so many jams—blackberry, fig, raspberry. And endless cakes!” Not having a mixer, she poured olive oil from dented cans into a blender and frothed it with sugar, a process that began from necessity that she now uses intentionally—the whipping lightens the resulting dessert. Zuckerman rhapsodized about the fancy herb-infused brown butters on an endcap, and used them with bags of cocoa that were past their date to create a luscious dessert.

Word of sumptuous lunches got around. “When it started, it was, ‘Can you cook a meal for 30 people?’ And then it was 60. And then it was 90, every day.” The job couldn’t be handled alone for long. With numbers growing and emerging COVID regulations for food handling, the lunch squad grew to include another chef, Kim Pistone, as well as a helper, to assist with prep for a few hours and wash dishes afterward.

Pistone, a self-taught chef, had ended her own catering business with a well-timed event before joining the Coop lunch squad. “I did a beautiful wedding March 13. It was like a great send-off: ‘OK, I’m done now!’ Every single thing on my resume ended

in March 2020.” She rang up the Coop office and said, “Do you guys need any help, or what?” Her home situation also motivated her to reach out. With her husband and child at home, she said, “I thought somebody’s got to *not* be here. Too many people under one roof 24 hours a day!”

“I threw myself into being at the Coop,” Pistone said. “Physically it was really exhausting. But I think it kept me sane. I didn’t feel stuff other people felt—depressed—because I was working.”



MANY DRESSINGS

“Every day I would do a different vinaigrette. Sriracha lime toasted sesame! Raspberry red wine! I would mix it up so it would complement whatever we were serving,” Pistone said. “I tried to make as much comfort food as I could. It was a lot of sanity for a lot of people, the stability of having a place to go and having lunch and a community

of people you could talk to.” For safety, the Coop had socially distant meals and also built plexiglass carrels. “A lot of people are by themselves,” Pistone remarked. “I think it was a touchpoint for a lot of people to just have a meal with somebody once a day.”

“It was really fun for me,” said Zuckerman. “It was a race to make the best meal I could in an efficient way with whatever ingredients they were getting rid of, spending as little as I could.” No-knead focaccia with long fermentation, “allowing gluten to form and stretch and hold” was a new skill for her. Zuckerman and Pistone used new flours, learned to make egg substitute, baked gluten-free tahini cookies, and made their own cashew milk. They created vegan butter and “tons of things with chickpea flour and polenta,” Zuckerman said. A box of peppers yielded roasted pepper soup. “I made so many vegan soups—because I had to.” The chefs made stock from fennel tops, deteriorated onions and carrots—all boiled for six hours.

LOTS OF COUSCOUS

The food available was a daily surprise, including, at one point, two 50-pound bags of Israeli couscous! “I didn’t spend too much time at home thinking or stressing about it,” said Zuckerman. “I would just come in and see what was there and make something. It was always tasty and delicious. It was nice to be governed by what was there and what equipment we had, and just show up and know you were going to cook for eight or ten hours.”

INSPIRATION FROM MEXICO AND INDIA

They made custards with past-dated cream; Mexican lasagna with tortillas; curry and other Indian-inspired recipes, including a variation of saag paneer that substituted braised escarole and chard. There were lots of pasta, pesto, dips and sauces; along with fruit, fennel and lots of mushroom barley soup.



CURRIES AND COBBLERS

“Kate and Kim were the most amazing chefs ever,” said 23-year Coop veteran Alexandra Hodgson MacDonnell, who came to work as a temp, and is now a Membership Coordinator on staff. “I saw them cooking with food that was maybe not salable but perfectly good for cooking, and turning it into curries, an absolute delight. When I came to lunch I would see something I hadn’t used. In particular, they loved watermelon radish. I found everything to be so inspiring; it was amazing. Some days they would go the whole nine yards and make dessert. We’d come up and there would be a blueberry cobbler.”

UP ON THE ROOF

MacDonnell observed that many temporary Coop workers came to work because they lived alone and felt isolated, especially the case for artists and restaurateurs “completely out of work.” In contrast, MacDonnell shares her home with her husband and four sons, all of whom were working online. Working twenty-seven hours per week doing check-out at the Coop was “a little bit of an outlet.” (Though she hastens to add, “Don’t get me wrong! It was a lovely, great time to regroup with my teens and young adults!”) At the same time, she enjoyed taking an occasional rooftop break with a Coop member she thinks she’d never have met otherwise—over an excellent lunch.



Photos by Kim Otstona, Kate Zuckerman, and Yonk Ohadi

THE LUNCH BILL

The Coop staff went up to 205 employees at one point during the pandemic hiring period, and there wasn’t enough space to even store the staff lunches, let alone have

each person use the kitchen. Hiring a chef was the solution. According to Coordinators, it cost \$4,000 a week to feed the staff and that expense lasted for 65 weeks—and included ordering from restaurants occasionally. Coordinators also say it was important to have a plan like this for safety reasons: The staff members could easily grab a boxed lunch, then go off and eat on their own, since during the pandemic, staff members were encouraged not to eat together.

Check out the recipes: <http://www.sweetcyclebrooklyn.com/recipes-1>

HOW ABOUT THEM APPLES?

October 5, 2021

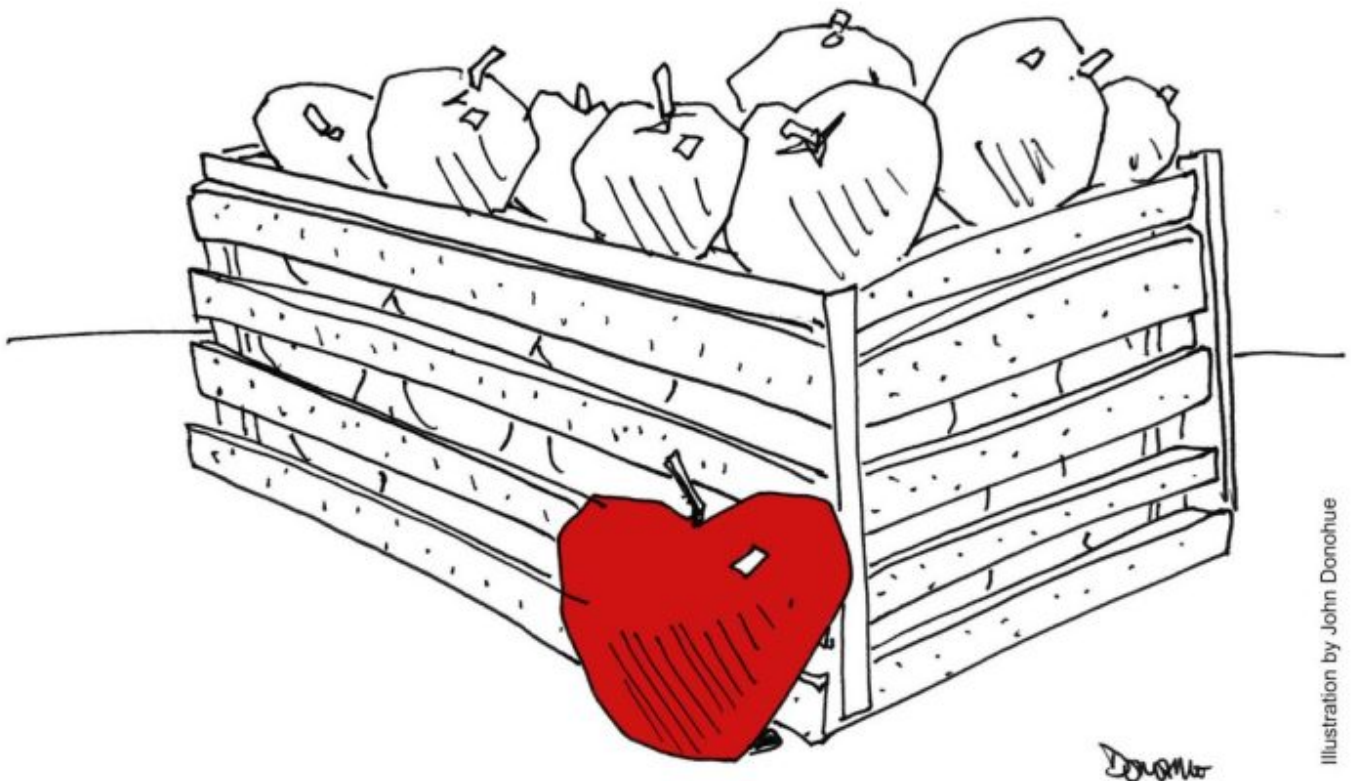


Illustration by John Donohue

By Marisa Bowe

The Coop is bursting with delectable autumn apples. Get ready to nerd out on an encyclopedic survey, from centuries-old heirlooms to present-day, patented and trademarked blockbusters.



Matisse Neal filling up the Coop's numerous apple bins

BEARS HELPED MAKE APPLES SWEET

The domestic apple is native to Kazakhstan, where the primary ancestor of most cultivated apples still grows wild. It was too sour for humans to eat. Bears are thought to be responsible for selecting (and spreading) the biggest, sweetest fruit. This resulted in apples that humans liked, which were probably domesticated as early as the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution.

An “heirloom” is an apple that was cultivated before WWII and the start of large-scale commercial farming. The Coop gets some of its most appealing heirlooms from Scott Farm in Vermont. Simon Renault, the farm’s general manager, points out that without human intervention, we wouldn’t have any of this variety. “An apple will never reproduce true to seed,” he explains. “They need to get pollinated by a different tree. So the apple will never give you the exact same variety. Grafting a variety you like onto rootstock—that’s the only way you can reproduce [it].”

APPLE HISTORY 101

“That’s the fascinating part about heirlooms,” he continues. “The apples we have today pleased somebody, somewhere, way back in the history of humanity. One day there’s a guy who walked by a hedgerow, grabbed an apple, took a bite and was like, ‘Oh my God, this tastes like pear. I bet you this would make a great sauce.’”

Just as Renault describes, the Gravenstein apple tree was discovered in 1669 in Denmark. Or was it Italy? Or Germany? Wherever it was and whoever discovered it, they knew what they were doing. The Gravenstein is renowned for its creamy, juicy flesh and distinctive, well-balanced sweet and tart flavors with a touch of tang.

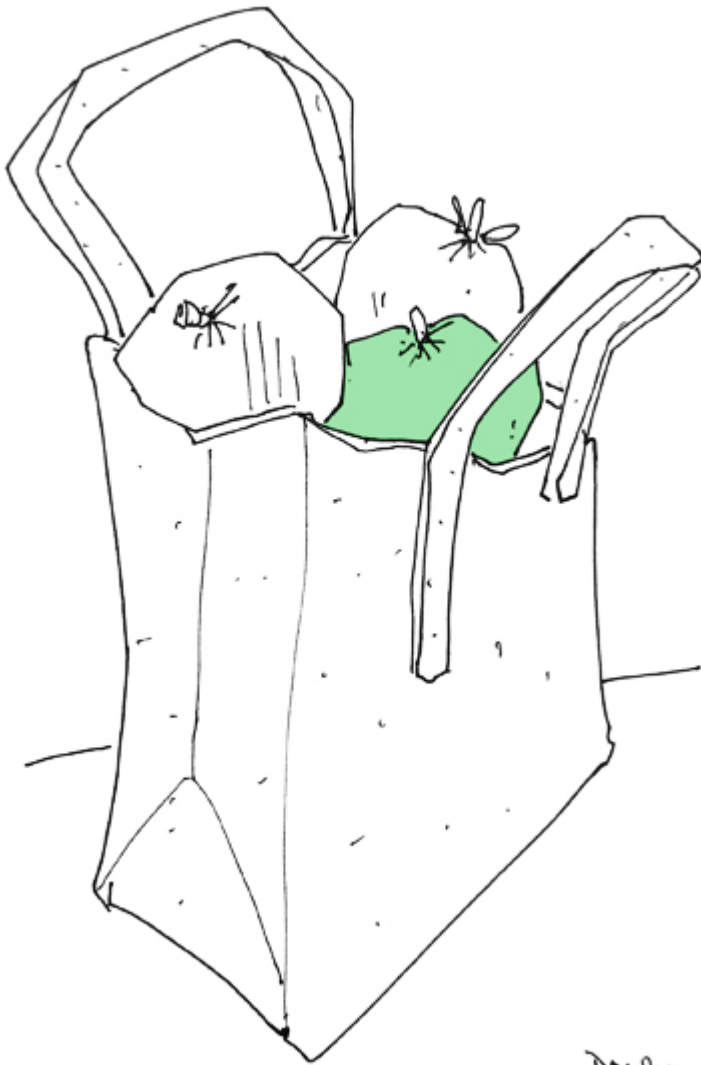


Illustration credit: John Donohue

Donohue

MORE APPLE "SPECIES"

The Reine de Reinettes, known as a dessert apple, also has a convoluted history. It became known in France, Holland and England around 1770 and was called something different in each place. It tastes as good by any of its names, with juicy, subtly crunchy flesh and rich, complex flavor with lush notes of citrus and tropical fruit.

The Lamb Abbey Pearmain apple is named after the place where Mary Malcomb discovered it in 1804, growing on a tree in her backyard garden in Kent, southeast of London. She was awarded a medal for it in 1819 by the Horticultural Society of London. Its firm flesh is intensely flavored with a good sweet/tart balance and pineapple notes.

John McIntosh bought a farm in Ontario in 1811 and discovered apple saplings with especially good fruit. He transplanted them to his garden, and only one survived—to become the parent of every soft, juicy, sweet/tart/spicy McIntosh you've eaten.

Maria Ann "Granny" Smith discovered the apple that bears her name. A midwife and orchardist, the British-born Australian transplant decided to cultivate an apple tree she'd noticed by a creek on her farm in 1868. She gained posthumous fame when it began to become widely grown at the end of the century.

The Golden Supreme was discovered in 1890 in West Virginia—or was it Idaho in 1960? Its soft but crisp flesh is mellow and sweet with a lighter, less complex echo of the Golden Delicious's honey and pear notes.

Cortlands were developed at Cornell University in 1899. Sweet and juicy with a hint of tartness, they're great for fruit salads because they're slow to brown.

Fujis aren't named for the mountain in Japan, but Fujisaki, the town where they were developed in the 1930s. The crisp, firm, juicy flesh has one of the highest sugar contents of any popular apple, and their taste confirms that. Their flavor brings to mind fresh-pressed apple juice.

The Gala was developed the same decade, in New Zealand. Its crisp, soft, juicy flesh is mild and very sweet.

The beautiful Pink Pearl was developed in 1944 in California. Crisp and juicy, it has stunning rosy-pink, tart-sweet flesh.

The Empire was half-discovered, half-bred at Cornell in 1945. It's firm, crisp and juicy, with a tart flavor, and doesn't bruise easily.

The Ginger Gold was discovered among the surviving trees of a Virginia orchard after Hurricane Camille in 1969. It has crisp, fine-textured flesh that's sweet with mildly

tart overtones, and is slow to brown.

Sweet Sixteens were developed over 31 years at the University of Minnesota, making its debut in 1978. Its crisp yellow flesh is very sweet, with a distinctive, complex, rich flavor that's sweet and spicy with vanilla, cherry, anise, bourbon and nutty notes.

The Honeycrisp was developed at the University of Minnesota over 31 years and released in 1991. The blockbuster fruit earned the university ten million bucks before its patent expired. With a juicy, snappy-crisp—but not hard—texture and a syrupy, slightly tart sweetness, it “changed the whole game,” said Fred Wilklow, the owner of Wilklow Orchards, another Coop supplier.

The Zestar!® (yes, the annoying exclamation is part of its trademarked name) was released in 1999 by the University of Minnesota. Crisp and light, its unique flavor is sweet and tangy with brown sugar notes.

SweeTango®, another patented University of Minnesota apple, has its own website. Released in 2006, its crunchy, juicy flesh is sweet and tart, with notes of citrus, honey, spice and maybe some brown sugar.

Sweeties, developed in New Zealand, were introduced in 2012. The firm, crisp, juicy and somewhat coarse pale yellow flesh is mild, very sweet and subtly spicy.

NEW HIRES SINCE COVID

October 5, 2021

From top: Kamila Nuritova, Gustavo Lopez, Tim Mahoney, Zili Wang and Moussa Thiam. They're all Receiving Coordinators, except Kamila, who works on membership, and Tim, who in addition to receiving, has maintenance and repair responsibilities.

Photos by Zachary Schulman.



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Kamila Nuritova



Kamila Nuritova



Gustavo Lopez



• Gustavo Lopez



• Tim Mahoney



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Tim Mahoney



• Zili Wang



Zili Wang



• Moussa Thiam



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Moussa Thiam

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