

## COOP FINANCES IMPROVE, GM OVERHAULS COMMITTEES

February 7, 2022



*Joe Holtz stated that the overall picture of the Coop's finances is good.*

*By Hayley Gorenberg*



Donohue

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

The January General Meeting learned that Coop finances have taken a significant turn to the positive—no thanks, unfortunately, to some members snatching pricey coffee. The GM also passed significant new transparency and accountability requirements for committees.

## **OPEN FORUM**

The Coop's compliance with New York City's vaccine mandate for workers (including Coop members who work without pay) drew enthusiasm and curiosity during the free-form Open Forum that opened the GM. "I feel super positive about working and going into the Coop knowing we are doing this, and I'd love to know some more of the details," said a member seeking information on any exemptions the Coop is considering.

## **VACCINATIONS**

About 275 members have requested exemptions and accommodations, according to General Manager Joe Holtz, working with a handful of experienced Coop members to assess the requests, their bases, potential grants, and the possibility of any appeals of denials. Holtz predicted decisions within the next few weeks, and forecasted a requirement that anyone granted an exception from the vaccine requirements would have to present a negative PCR result from a test completed no more than 48 hours before each shift. "That's the basic plan, the way the Coop is complying with this basic safety initiative from New York City," Holtz said.

## **BAGS & COFFEE**

Exchanges about plastic bags occupied the remainder of the open forum, after a member raised concern about proliferating plastic bags, particularly in the bulk aisle, which had previously included far less plastic packaging. In particular, she noted an expanding selection of pre-bagged coffee beans.

The Coop started pre-bagging items in the bulk aisle early in the pandemic to speed shopping in the aisle, which can get quite crowded, explained General Coordinator Joe

Szladdek. With regard to coffee in particular, Szladdek noted that the Coop had increased stocks of pre-packaged pricier coffees, leaving less expensive coffees in bulk dispensers, after noting that members were mismarking bulk bags filled with expensive beans, tagging them with PLUs from cheaper options—to the tune of the Coop “losing hundreds and hundreds of dollars a week.”

MEMBERS ARE MISMARKING BULK BAGS FILLED WITH EXPENSIVE BEANS, TAGGING THEM WITH PLUS FROM CHEAPER OPTIONS - TO THE TUNE OF THE COOP'S "LOSING HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS A WEEK," SAID GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE SZLADEK

## **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Credits, loan forgiveness, and increased sales buoyed recent Coop finances, according to Holtz. The Coop recently received over \$850,000 from the IRS for 2020 Employee Retention Credits, and Holtz predicted that the Coop's \$1,677,000 Paycheck Protection Program loan forgiveness application would succeed. Additionally, Coop supplier United National Foods made a dent in \$36,000 of credit that accrued over the course of five months for goods the Coop paid for and never received.

The company was hit hard by labor difficulties during the pandemic and didn't have staff to process returns and paperwork for routine misdeliveries, Holtz said, giving an example where the Coop might order “10 cases of a certain tomato sauce, but instead you delivered to us a cereal we have no interest in carrying.” These mixups averaged around \$7,000 each month and with months of credits stacking up the Coop contacted National Cooperative Grocers, which “put lots of pressure on them...so they started paying attention and started devoting labor to it,” Holtz said. “Essentially they were out of labor, they were overwhelmed. It wasn't malicious, but it was bad.”

THE RECENT BOTTOM LINE SHOWED THE COOP FINALLY CLOSE TO STAUNCHING ITS OPERATING LOSS, WHICH DROPPED TO ABOUT \$1,000 A WEEK

The recent bottom line showed the Coop finally close to staunching its operating loss, which dropped to about \$1,000 per week. That said, Holtz warned that the pandemic price increase, from the previous 21% markup to the current 25%, helped to close the operating loss short-term by bringing in an additional \$25,000 per week. At the same time, the price increase might undermine Coop growth and sales long-term, in an increasingly competitive grocery world. Holtz said, “Nevertheless, the overall picture I’m trying to paint is, the good news overwhelms the potential bad ‘news’—significantly!”

## **MORE MEMBERS**

For the first time since the pandemic hit, the Coop in early December started admitting new members with a new process. Membership is “finally approaching 13,000” Holtz said, with about 100 people per week self-certifying their reviews of a video and materials, followed by enrollment sessions several times per week. Meanwhile, about 40–50 members are leaving each week, and staff are working to devise ways to add members faster.

## **SOMETHING SWEET**





PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON



Jaffa clementines are amazing!

Szladek promoted in-season citrus “that is really quite amazing,” including “Jaffa clementines with a floral flavor,” tasty Algerian clementines, heirloom navel oranges, and complicated tangerine crosses.

Szladek also drew attention to Vanessa’s Dumplings in the freezer case, which he called “quite excellent, nice quick dinner—taste quite good.”

With supply chain issues improving, Szladek said any existing, temporary “holes” were filled with trial items, to see if they gain popularity.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Paul Warren, of the Equity, Access and Community Committee (formerly the Diversity and Equality Committee), previewed that the members were looking to develop on-line complaint forms, working to improve language access “so people can actually become members in their primary language,” and planning a demographic survey.

## **COMMITTEE REQUIREMENTS**

## A Partial List of Coop Committees



Animal Welfare  
Bike  
Diversity and Equality  
Fun  
Hudson V. Farm  
International Trade Education  
Labor  
Revolving Loan  
Safe Food  
Second Location  
Terracycle

Agenda  
Chair  
Dispute Resolution  
Energy Efficiency  
Hearing Resolution  
LGW  
Advisory  
Personnel  
Signage  
Video

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

By a 68–38 vote, the GM passed a measure authored by member Rachel Porter to re-vamp committee selection in several ways. Porter proposed listing all committees and names of members (behind a firewall) on the PSFC website, with a brief description of the purpose and activities of the committee, updated at least annually. For any committees deemed “non-essential,” the new rule generally limits credits for committee work to a maximum of 13 shifts per year, unless more shifts are approved by a staff liaison.

The new policy did not specifically identify the “non-essential” committees that will be affected, and an amendment removed the requirement of elections and terms for such committees.

Additional requirements include having all committees report to the GM annually—and at least twice each year, for committees deemed essential to PSFC functioning. Committees also must provide updates on their activities in the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* at least twice each year. Members at the GM modified the proposal to remove a requirement that committee elections occur at the GM, after many participants expressed concern that elections would consume too much GM bandwidth—e-



specially given a new three-year term for committee membership. (No term limits were specified.)

In her initial presentation, Porter discussed the impetus for her proposal, which she said stemmed from her “alarm” at the lack of centralized tracking for committee work or reporting, with unlimited banked shifts permitted. She pressed for accountability and oversight, asserting, “The Coop shouldn’t be in the business of making work, when we have a lot of work we need to get done.”

At the close of the GM, the Board voted to ratify the GM decision-making.



ILLUSTRATION BY ROD MORRISON

*Hayley Gorenberg is a journalist-turned-civil-rights-lawyer and Floridian-turned-Brooklynite.*

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# COOP REFLECTIONS ON 2021 HOLIDAY FOOD SALES TRENDS

February 7, 2022



*By Marisa Bowe*

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE



Joe Szladek expected that Coop members would return to being festive over the holidays.

As General Coordinator Joe Szladek was comparing pandemic holiday season sales, like so many of us, he lost track of COVID time. "How many years into this are we?" he asked, pausing a moment to think. "It'll be two in March," he remembered. "So this was the second holiday season."

"Last year [2020] was really hard," he continued, "because we had no idea what people were going to do; if they were going to get together or not. We didn't have the vaccine yet. Should we get a lot of small turkeys because everyone's going to be doing individual things? Or are people even going to buy turkeys?"

"People were kind of bunkered down," said produce buyer John Horsman.

"This year, we expected more people to celebrate in groups that were beyond their immediate pod. We felt like people were really in the mood to be festive with other



people,” Szladek said.

“We figured it would be significantly busier than last year,” said groceries buyer Gil-lian Chi. “I figured whatever last year was may be increased by 10%, so that’s how we ordered. And for Thanksgiving, that was pretty spot-on.”

“It’s pretty consistent, Thanksgiving, if you’ve been doing it for a while,” said Chi. “It’s the same items over and over again. You know how much stuff people are going to buy, how much stuffing and how much cranberry sauce, so that was pretty straightforward.”

But, Chi said, “When it came to the Christmas and the Hanukkah holidays, we sold far more than expected.”

“You pre-order a lot of these holiday products in June or July. And in June and July we had no idea what it was going to look like, so we probably were pretty conservative with our orders. And then December came and things were flying off the shelves,” said Chi.

“Things were selling at double the rate we expected,” she said. “We kept running out of whatever we ordered. Basically, whatever we put on the shelves, people bought, so we just kept having to find new items to order. The things that were available, we grabbed,” Chi added.



Gillian Chi noted that in June and July we had no idea what the holidays were going to look like.

## **TURKEYS**

Szladek said that turkey sales were high as well this year, but specific types were - more popular than others, "What didn't sell as well as expected were the more basic birds, the typical antibiotic-free. The pastured ones, the organic ones—you know, the ones that they read a book to at the end of the night—all sold very well. We - could have ordered more, and that's on our list for next year."

GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE SZLADEK SAID THAT TURKEY SALES WERE HIGH AS WELL THIS YEAR, BUT SPECIFIC TYPES WERE MORE POPULAR THAN OTHERS.

Before the holidays, “We were nervous,” he said, “because the prices have gone up on so many things, including turkeys. When price increases occur, grocery stores try to avoid increasing the price of their turkeys because they want to signal to people that they have low prices throughout the store, even though they are increasing the prices on other things. Turkeys are used as a loss leader—they lose money on them or just break even. Whereas we just mark everything in the store up 21%, now temporarily 25%, including turkeys.”

“So as a result,” he explained, “the gap between our turkey prices and other stores was a bit bigger this year. But a lot of the higher priced specialty birds, whether pastured or fed non-GMO or organic feed, they all sold really well.” Szladek agreed that it’s possible these birds are less expensive at the Coop than at other stores.

## **CHEESE AND GIFTS**

Another unexpected change: “People bought expensive things this year as compared to previous years,” noted cheese, bulk and specialty buyer Yuri Weber. “I felt like people maybe just had extra money, or what, I’m not sure.” Some economists are pointing to the stimulus checks.

“Usually we sell maybe double the amount of cheap panettone to expensive panettone,” he said. “This year it was the other way around, like three to one expensive panettone to cheap panettone.”

In general, Weber said, the top-selling items were “more on the gifty side than on the party side.”

“All of the gift tins of stuff, I bumped that pretty hard, and we sold out really quickly. And we sold a lot of gift sets. I couldn’t even keep them on the shelf. I got in those little hot sauce gift packs and some other gift pack things and they just flew out of here. I literally could not keep them in stock, like sometimes I’d put them on the shelf and they’d be gone the same day,” he said.

“PEOPLE BOUGHT EXPENSIVE THINGS THIS YEAR AS COMPARED TO PREVIOUS YEARS.”

*BULK AND SPECIALTY BUYER, YURI WEBER*

Weber added, “We sold a lot more of what I consider super-expensive cookies, like a 10-ounce thing of cookies for 10 bucks. We sold tons of those types of things. They were in a cute little tin. I don’t think people were taking home and opening and eating all of them. They were a gift item.”

On the other hand, he said, “We definitely sold a lot less expensive cheese than we have. We sold a lot more expensive cheese over Thanksgiving than we did New Year’s, which is really unusual. New Year’s is one of those times when I can’t keep triple cream cheese on the shelf to save my life. I could stand there all day refilling Mount Tam and whatever other triple cream cheeses we have, and I couldn’t keep up. But this year, we sold some, but not nearly like we normally do.”





ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

## PARTIES

In that way, Weber said it was “similar to last year. We didn’t sell a lot of super-expensive party cheese like we did in 2019. Christmas and New Year’s, it just didn’t move.”

“I kind of thought that that might not be the case this year. I thought maybe things would be returned more to normal, but we did not sell a lot of the things you would bring to a party or have at a party,” he added.

“I don’t think there were very many dinner parties at all,” said Weber. “There were definitely many fewer cheese plates this year. I feel like people maybe compensated [for not having been able to gather the year before] and then maybe retreated [because of Omicron].”

Using himself as an example, Weber said, “We had people over for Thanksgiving and

then that was it. That was our thing we did at home. There weren't any other people coming over to our house after that. Everything seemed to kind of shut down after that."



Yuri Weber recalled that the Coop sold tons of expensive cookies in cute tins as gift items.

*Marisa Bowe is a Williamsburg-based writer who wishes she lived closer to the Coop.*

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## OFFAL AT THE COOP—EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT ORGAN MEATS BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

February 7, 2022



*Above: Taco de Oreja, a taco made with pig ears.*

*By Travis Hartman*

Offal, the butcher's term for organ meat, has fallen out of favor with Americans overall despite its affordability and incredible nutrition potential. Some say it would be more popular if only cooked properly, while some find the concept of eating organs and other non-typical animal products dispiriting. As the old one-liner about eating tongue goes, "I never came around to the idea of tasting something that might be tasting me back."

The Coop offers a wide range of offal in the freezers, with an array of sheep, beef, and chicken organs available year round. "We never have a problem selling offal," said Coop Meat Buyer Margie Lempert, "In general, livers are popular, particularly in the



winter and around the holidays.”



Frozen beef heart in the Coop's basement freezer.

Offal was a popular part of Americans' diet through much of the country's history. The historic reasoning behind many Americans' negative attitudes arrived with the rise of mass-produced meats in the first half of the 20th century. The meatpacking industry created much easier access to the muscle meats of animals, which are, in some sense, easier to prepare in a tasty manner. Organ meats, which tend to require a little finesse in preparation, became less popular over the decades, and their prices dropped. And over time the low prices have associated offal with poverty, lowering their reputation even further across the country.



## PSFC offal offerings

The co-op offers many types of offal in the meat coolers as well as in the freezers. Organ meat offers a variety of flavors and often a much higher nutritional density than standard muscle meat.



### Chicken

Gizzard  
Heart  
Liver



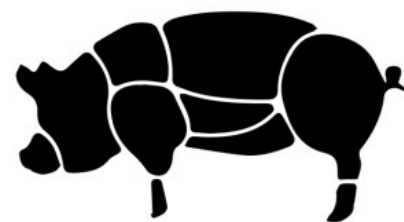
### Beef

Liver  
Heart  
Marrow bones  
Tongue  
Oxtail



### Lamb

Liver  
Heart  
Tongue  
Kidneys



### Pork

Jowls  
Shank  
Trotter

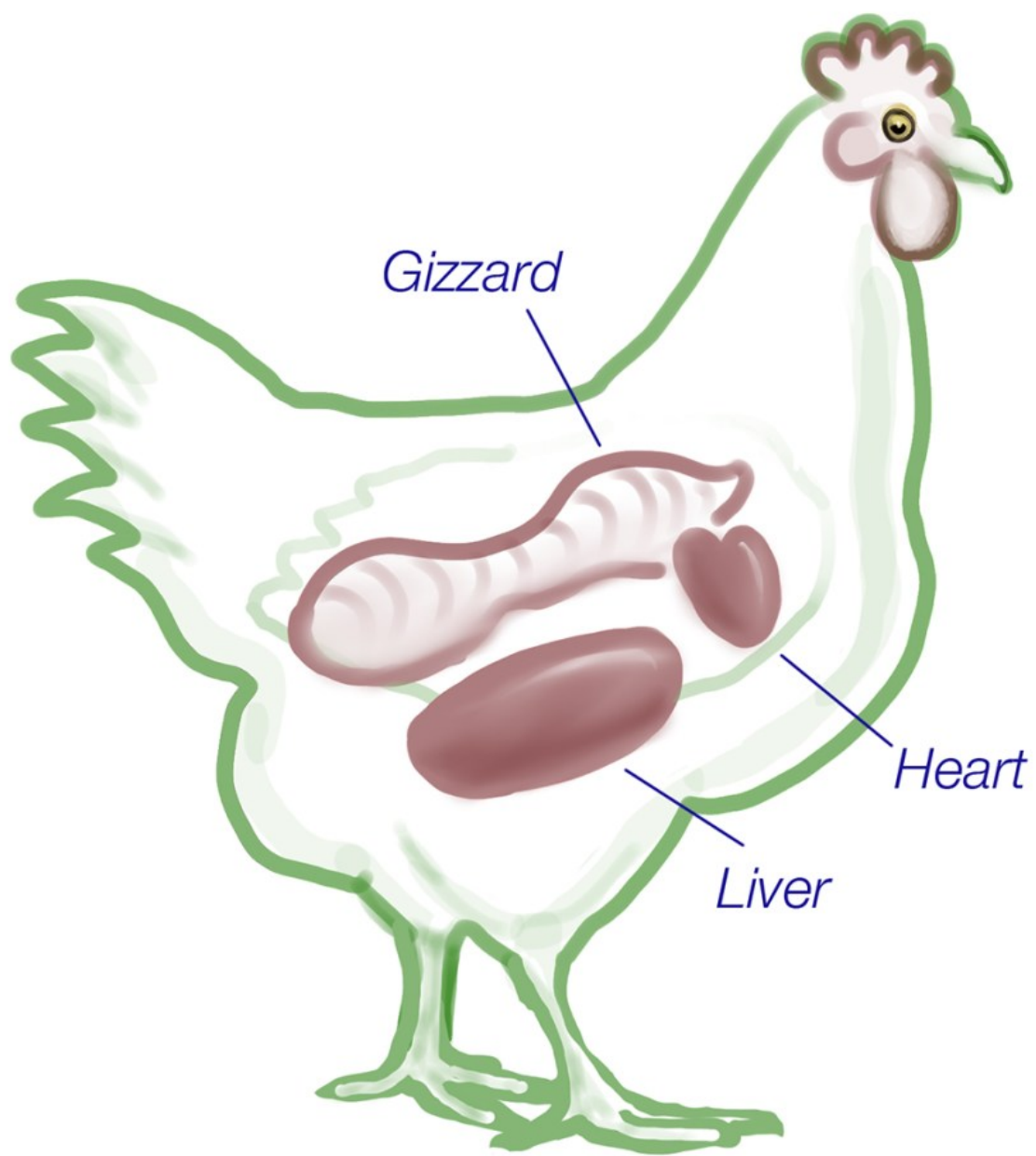
ILLUSTRATION BY TRAVIS HARTMAN

But the U.S. is a bit of an outlier with this attitude. In other countries around the world, these cuts are better understood and valued.

OFFAL WAS A POPULAR PART OF AMERICANS' DIET THROUGH MUCH OF THE COUNTRY'S HISTORY.

According to the most recent United Nations data, the United States was by far the largest exporter of edible offal meats, with the cuts largely landing in China (31%), Japan (25%) and Mexico (18%).

Today, offal remains a powerhouse of nutrition and is still generally much cheaper than muscle meats. While certain offal cuts have seen increased U.S. menu presence in the last decade by chefs espousing nose-to-tail eating, offal has always been firmly lodged in many cultural food traditions across the world, including Latin American, Asian, Russian, French and Polish.



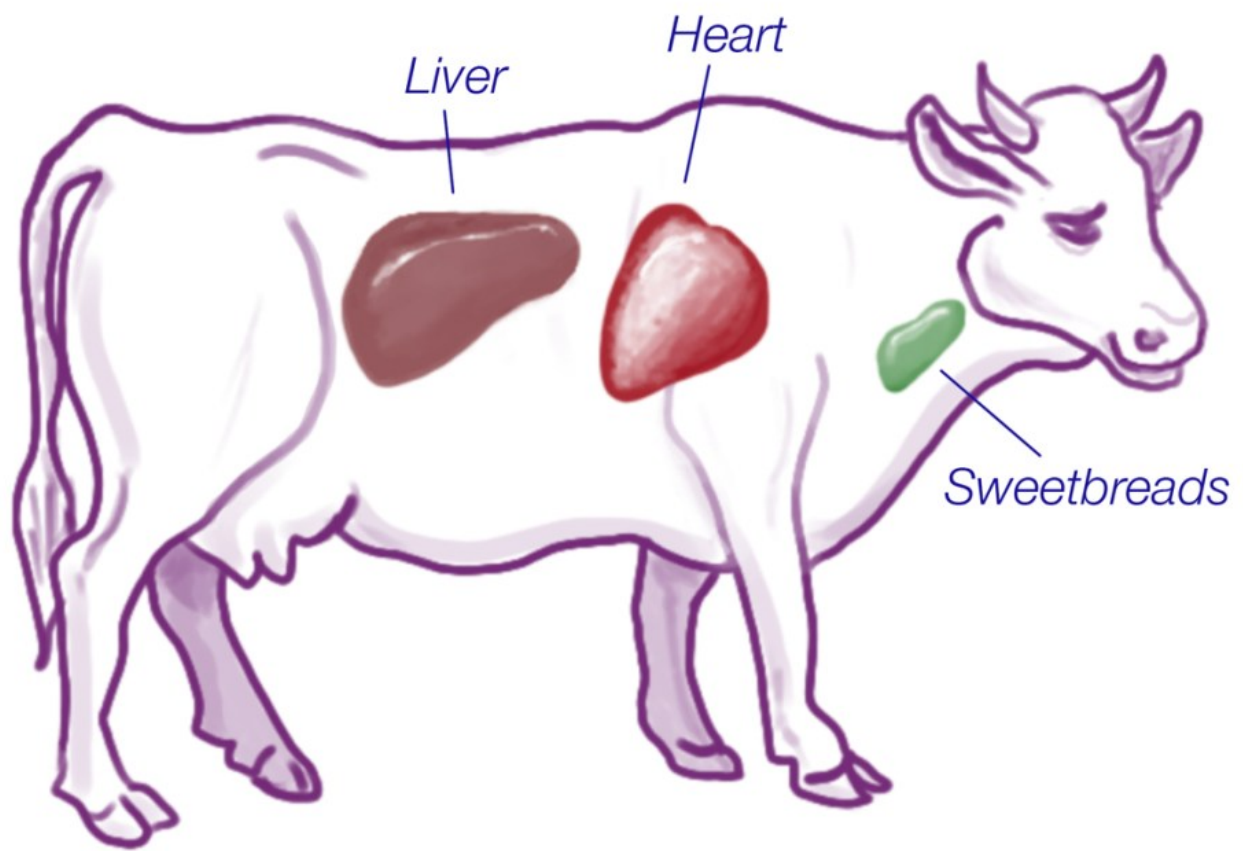


ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

## WHAT IS AVAILABLE AT THE COOP

Offal comes in as part of the delivery of two whole steers a week and three whole lambs a week, with livers and other chicken organs as needed from Snowdance and Murrays. Lempert says there haven't been any significant changes in purchasing habits, noting Coop members are pretty consistent with their offal consumption.

ORGAN MEATS ARE IN GENERAL MORE NUTRITIOUS THAN MUSCLE MEATS; THEY VARY IN TASTE FROM RICH AND SUCCULENT TO LEAN.

## **TONGUE**

Offal cuts are in general more nutritious than muscle meats, and vary in taste from rich and succulent to lean. Tongue is relatively high in fat content and is a common taco filling when gently braised with onion, garlic and other spices until tender, then seared or shredded when added to the tortilla.

## **HEART**

Beef heart is a much leaner meat and has a distinctly beefy flavor with a hint of game. It is low in fat and can be either quickly cooked like a steak (some say it's best to leave on the rare side of medium rare to keep it tender) or mixed into meatballs or hamburgers. One possible guideline: use it for no more than a third of the mixture, as it's very lean meat and you'll need fat to flavor the burger or meatball.

## **LIVER**

Beef liver is one of the most nutritious foods on the planet, being high in protein, low in calories and having more vitamins and minerals than vegetables and fruits. The liver works to remove toxins from the bloodstream, but toxins are not stored in the liver, which is a common misunderstanding. It is, however, high in cholesterol, but despite that can be considered one of the most nutritionally dense foods on the planet.

*Travis Hartman has been a Coop member for over a decade and is still finding new things to eat every time he shops.*