

AFTER MANY YEARS OF SHIFTS, A GOLDEN REWARD: COOP RETIREMENT

May 21, 2024



By Zach Schiffman

Dolores Natividad had been a Coop member for more than 31 years. Hitting three decades of shifts marked an important milestone for her: retirement. She recalled being at the Coop on a Saturday, thinking to herself, “It’s been a really long time since I’ve been working here at the Food Coop. Since I am 65, how much more time do I need before retiring?”

Natividad went upstairs to the Membership Office and gave her member number. She soon learned that she had earned that golden ticket, Coop retirement, which offers her a well-deserved privilege: membership for life without having to do shifts.

The retirement program has an almost mystical air about it, which was made clear in discussions with several members.

“I hope I can afford to live in New York long enough to make it to Coop retirement,

whenever that is,” one member remarked.

Early in the Coop’s existence, members could only ask to stop working when they reached 75. But in 2008, a new program was established with a sliding scale, granting retirement status to members based on a formula that takes into account their age and the number of years they have been a member.

Members who are 60, for example, can retire if they have been a member for 30 years, while members who are 70 or older can retire if they have at least 10 years of membership.

Walecia Konrad, a former reporter and editor for the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*, recalled that she realized that she might be eligible when she turned 64, given that she had been a Coop member for 22 years.

“I was just looking on the website, and I was really surprised,” Konrad said. “My husband is younger than I am; he was like, ‘Oh, you should look for the formula. I think you might be able to retire.’”

After applying through Member Services, approved members receive a phone call congratulating them on retirement.

“It had become really hard to get shifts,” said Sandye Renz, 66, who has been a Coop member for 19 years. “So I thought, ‘Hmm, maybe I won’t have to do any more.’ So I went to the office and was told I could retire, but I still owed one shift. And I still couldn’t get a shift.”

Renz, who primarily worked office and checkout shifts, later got a call clarifying she no longer owed that shift, along with congratulations on her retirement.

The retirement program is voluntary, as many long-time members enjoy their shifts and elect to keep contributing to the Coop. Renz said she “won’t miss doing shifts,”

but she looks back fondly on working days like Halloween. “We did costumes,” she said. “That was always fun. One year I was the tag for vegetables—I just wore it as a mask on my face.”

Retirement can spark a lot of reflection, as it does outside of the Coop. As a reporter for the *Gazette*, Konrad attended countless General Meetings, and she remembers votes that have changed the Coop over the years, from approving benefits like walking shifts and daycare to things we may take for granted now, such as the ability to purchase meat or beer.



Dolores Natividad in front of the Membership Office

Natividad recalled the days before the Coop accepted debit cards as payment.

“I used to do the new member orientation shift, and I remember getting tired of saying, ‘Debit cards coming soon!’ Every month, over and over,” she said. “If you didn’t have enough money, you’d have to run to the bank and get money or use a check.”

Major world events have shaped the membership experience. Many retired members mentioned the pandemic, which made it more difficult to feel a sense of community at the Coop. Others recalled the time on Union Street after 9/11, when a wooden sculpture was erected outside the firehouse next to the Coop. “Having that sculpture right between the firehouse and the Food Coop, it was very emotional,” Natividad said.

Over decades of membership, retirees worked a diverse array of shifts. The office shifts were a favorite. “I started doing the office for a while, because my daughter was little and she didn’t like staying in child care, so it was easy for her to run into the office all the time and hang out with me,” said Renz, whose children are now grown. “But when the office got more computerized, I started doing checkout, and then I did everything. I have done every shift pretty much.”

Way back when, Natividad said, she did some grueling shifts. “The first was helping to unload at the wee hours of the morning—helping get the food off the truck and put it on the gurneys—because I liked lifting heavy things. It was satisfying. It was like a workout,” she said.

She also served on the Coop’s Diversity Committee and gave new member orientations, though her favorite shift was serving food at CHiPS, the pantry and soup kitchen nearby on Fourth Avenue.

Natividad believes that her Coop shifts, specifically her time working on the Diversity Committee, informed her own field work as an exercise physiologist.

As an over-three-decade member, she said, the Coop has been involved in the fabric of her life. “Even when my husband asked me to marry him, I said, ‘The household needs to be in good standing and you need to join the Food Coop.’”

HOW COOP MEMBERS NURTURE THEIR URBAN GARDENS

May 21, 2024



By Liora Fishman

On the first sunny day of April, as I was enjoying the warmth, it dawned on me that my favorite season was fast-approaching—not, as some might suspect, summer, but a season far more exciting: gardening season. My apartment has a narrow balcony where I use pots that hang haphazardly off the railing (facing inward, of course, to avoid garden-related hazards to pedestrians).

Every summer my little garden becomes a test kitchen of sorts, where I see exactly

how much produce I can, well, *produce* courtesy of the Coop's gardening offerings. I've grown kale, basil, cherry tomatoes, peppers, cilantro and strawberries—all to varying degrees of success.

And I'm obviously not alone. I surveyed a bunch of Coop members on how they turn the Coop's seeds, seedlings and other gardening items into sprightly spots of urban greenery.

New Yorkers have long sought to master creative gardening in cramped spaces, and as the warmth of summer approaches, there's no better time for Coop members to embark on an urban gardening adventure.



Seedlings sprout in moss-covered grow bags.

Gardening season at the Coop kicks off as early as February and extends through

May, offering a diverse array of options for both seasoned gardeners (how I like to think of myself) and beginners (what I am, in reality).

The season commences with the arrival of seeds, encompassing a range of cool-weather crops like peas and kale, suitable for direct outdoor planting at the onset of spring. Additionally, delicate warm-weather plants such as tomatoes and peppers are made available for indoor cultivation, ready to be transitioned outdoors as the weather warms.

The Coop sources its seeds from three reputable suppliers: Fedco, Artistic Gardens and Hudson Valley Seed Co., ensuring a broad selection catering to various gardening preferences.

As the season progresses into April, the Coop sees a surge in seed packet sales. For those preferring live plants, an abundance of options is provided, eliminating the need for extensive indoor seed starting. (I myself have killed many a basil plant from the Coop's live plant selection.) Later in the season, a variety of tomato starts and other warm-weather edibles like eggplants and peppers become available.

Recognizing the challenges inherent in urban gardening, the Coop caters to member needs with a focus on affordability and suitability for local growing conditions. By offering plants and seeds zoned for the area's climate, the Coop is hoping to nurture gardening success, given factors like extreme summer heat and soil quality issues.



PHOTO BY John Midgley

It doesn't have to be edible to be worth growing.

Additionally, initiatives such as selling compost and partnering with environmentally conscious nurseries like Gowanus Nursery underscore the Coop's commitment to sustainability and community. Whether on a sunny brownstone balcony or a fire escape, the Coop's gardening offerings empower members to embrace gardening regardless of their space, fostering a culture of green living and self-sufficiency in an urban landscape.

For some Coop members, windowsills are transformed into miniature gardens, hosting herbs like basil and mint, ready to jazz up any dish. These herbs thrive in sunny locations, so placing pots on south-facing windowsills ensures they receive necessary natural light.

One Coop member, Rishi Shah, got particularly creative in his approach. "Starting my Coop seeds on a windowsill with a radiator has been the perfect mix of warmth and sun," he said. "After being covered in plastic wrap for a few days to trap humidity, my basil, zaatar, zinnias, and tomatoes are all germinating, waiting until it is warm enough to go in the ground." When they're ready, Shah will transfer the plants to his plot in the Prospect Heights Community Garden.

"I used to think growing from seed was impossible, but it isn't as intimidating as I once thought. Squirrels and pests remain intimidating, though," he said.



Stakes help tomatoes grow tall and thrive.

Shah feels a real affection for gardening season at the Coop.

“The Coop has a strong commitment to sustainability that makes me proud to buy most things from it, but especially plants,” Shah said. “Their focus on selecting seeds and plants that thrive in our local climate not only ensures gardening success but also aligns with my environmental values.”

He added, “The reasonable prices often lead me to buy more seeds than I initially planned.” Despite occasionally purchasing more than necessary, Shah has no regrets. “Each year, I find myself buying an abundance of seeds, and every year, it becomes a gardening adventure.”

His sentiments echoed those of many members who value the Coop’s efforts in pro-

moting sustainable and budget-friendly gardening practices.



Perennials like thyme reward gardeners year after year.

Some members said they took up gardening only because they came across the Coop's offerings.

"I probably wouldn't have taken such an interest in gardening if it weren't for the Coop's selection and prices," Brett Krasner said. When he moved to Brooklyn several years ago, plants were something for which he had fondness but little experience.

"I got so excited leafing through all of the types of seeds, imagining what would be possible to grow," he said. "Obviously, not every seed has turned into a success story, but it's given me the confidence to expand my garden each year."



A canine assistant supervises the planting.

Now, Krasner is building a garden bed on his front lawn. “I’ve only ever grown plants on windowsills, or fire escapes,” Krasner explained, “so this is definitely a larger undertaking for me.”

Krasner mentioned that this year he’s focusing on growing plants native to New York. Native plants are essential components of ecosystems, playing a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance.

Some examples of native plants in New York City include Eastern Butterfly Weed, a favorite of pollinators like butterflies and bees, which can be plucked from the selection of seed packages from Hudson Valley Seed Co.

“It’s important to me that my garden incorporates most—if not all—native plants,” ex-

plained Krasner, as he and I leafed through the seed packets in the Coop's produce aisle. "Native plants help support the ecosystem they are intended to be in. It feels like you're contributing to the community when you plant them."

Liora Fishman joined the Coop in December 2021. She lives in Prospect Heights and has a wonderful dog, Ollie, whom she loves very much.

HOW MUCH CHEAPER ARE COOP PRICES? WHAT OUR SURVEY FOUND

May 21, 2024

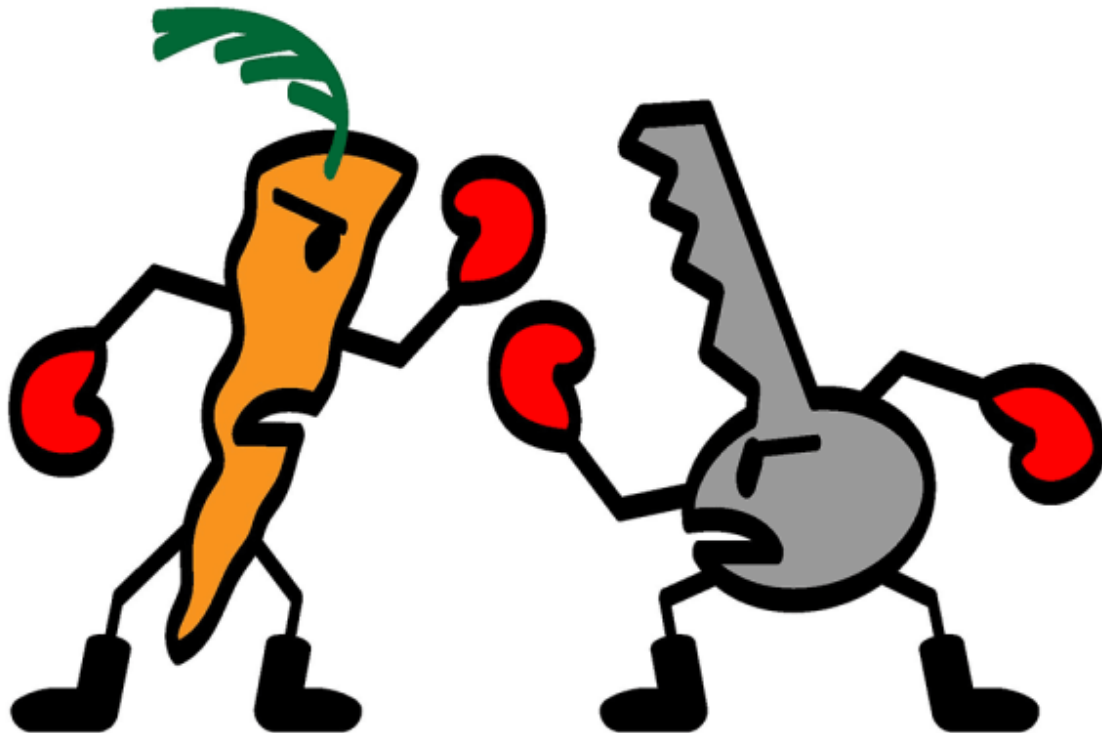


illustration by Stephen Savage

By Dan Bergsagel

Browsing the carefully curated vegetables at the Coop, you pick up an English cucumber, priced at 73 cents. The quality is great, as always, but you wonder: How much would it cost at a nearby supermarket?

The answer can be instructive, providing insight into why the Coop has long been such a draw for residents in Brooklyn and even farther afield.

At the Key Food around the corner on Seventh Avenue, the English cucumber costs \$1.99, meaning Coop members save 63 percent. Many other products at the Coop offer savings as well, according to our analysis, though not always as significant.

A loaf of Arnold's 100-percent whole wheat bread is \$5.15 at the Coop and nearly the same price at Key Food: \$5.29. On the other hand, eggplant was \$2.73 a pound at the Coop, while \$1.69 a pound at Key Food, though the Coop eggplant was organic, unlike Key Food's.

The *Linewaiters' Gazette* completed an item-by-item comparison of dozens of products between the Coop and Key Food. Our overall result: Coop members typically enjoy an average 25 percent savings on items.

There are caveats to this informal survey. The main one, of course, is that the Coop's buyers prioritize quality and sustainability. They care deeply about how produce is farmed and products are manufactured—and how everything gets to the Coop's shelves.

Meat prices, for example, are relatively similar at the Coop and at Key Food, but the quality of the meat is much higher at the Coop, whose buyers seek providers that treat their animals humanely, focusing on items like pasture-raised, grass-fed and grass-finished beef.

Similarly, for produce, the Coop sells only organic, Fair Trade bananas and organic eggplant, while Key Food sells cheaper non-organic varieties. These variations can re-

duce the apparent savings in a price comparison, even though the Coop items are more attractive to many shoppers. For example, an apples-to-apples comparison of Granny Smiths (\$1.84 a pound at the Coop to \$1.99 a pound at Key Food) is hard, as the Coop apples are organic and the Key Food apples are not.

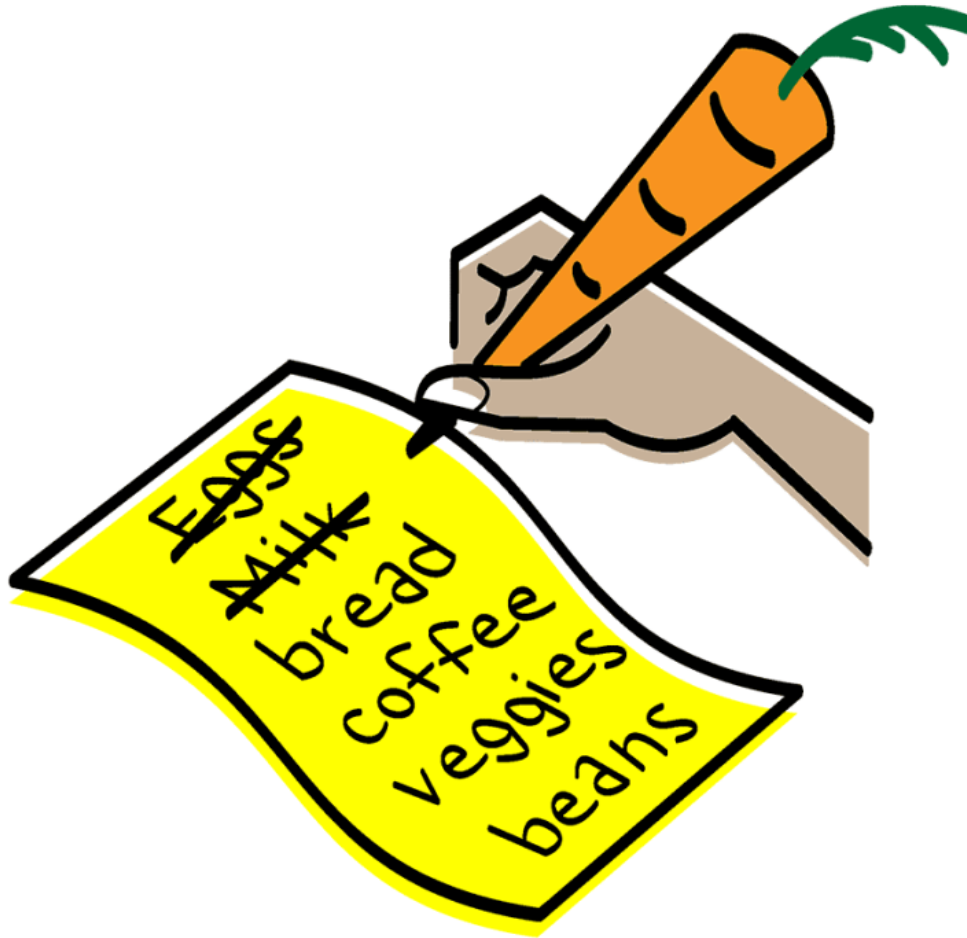


illustration by Stephen Savage

Overall, the savings were not uniform. The largest gaps were in household items, and the smallest gaps were in meat.

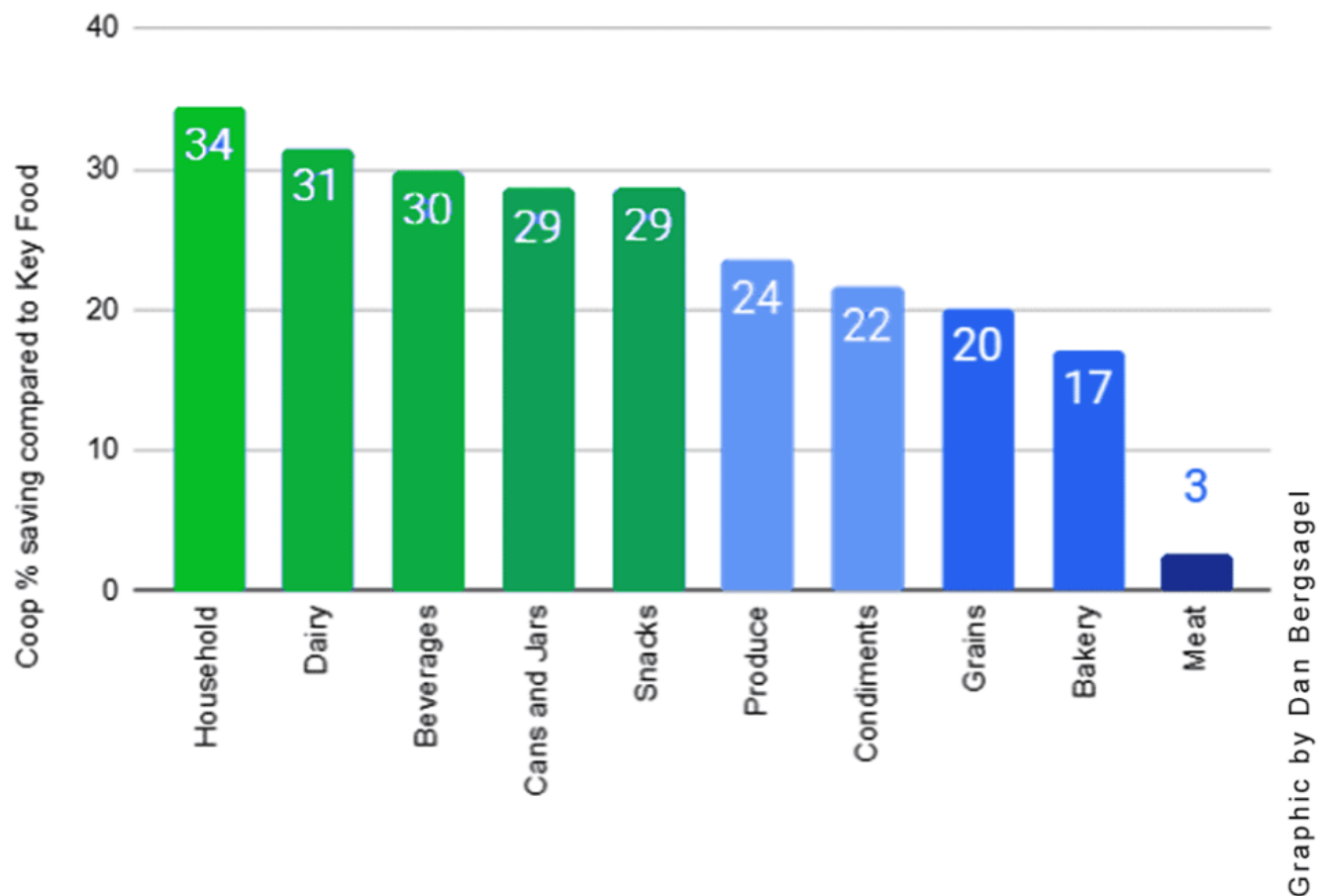
According to our survey, these are some items with the biggest savings:

- A bag of three romaine lettuce hearts at the Coop costs \$4.02, while at Key Food, the price was \$7.99.
- A box of 20 bags of Celestial Seasonings herbal tea was \$2.87 at the Coop, but

\$5.49 at Key Food.

- Savings on cheese were especially notable. Eight ounces of Parmigiano Reggiano were \$7.45 at the Coop, compared to \$17.99 at Key Food. Eight ounces of BelGioioso mozzarella were \$3.10 versus \$5.49, and mature British cheddar was \$9.48 a pound at the Coop, compared to \$18.26 a pound at Key Food.

Here is a chart that showed how the overall comparisons ended up:



It's worth recalling the Coop's official pricing structure. Products are generally sold at a 24 percent markup over the wholesale price, a policy that explains why Coop prices are often cheaper than those at nearby supermarkets.

For our survey, we looked to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics's Consumer Price In-

dex (CPI) as inspiration to identify 70 items across 10 categories—produce, grains, bakery, cans and jars, condiments, meat, dairy, snacks, beverages and household goods—that represent a range of purchases members might make at the Coop.

On April 13, we walked the aisles of the Coop and Key Food, jotting down prices. We tried to compare the same items, but that was not always possible. At times, we chose the same brand in a different size (e.g., a box of 120 sheets of Kleenex and a box of 160 sheets of Kleenex), with the price per equivalent unit calculated.

Where the same brands were unavailable, a closely matching brand was chosen (e.g., bulk-packaged quick oats and Quaker quick oats). Where the same item specification was not available, a comparison was made to the closest available specification (e.g., organic eggplant to non-organic eggplant).

One issue in comparing prices is the shopping floor footprint. The relatively small size of the Coop means it chooses not to stock a wide range of options for products, focusing instead on quality over quantity.

This has a particular impact on staples. If we compare pasta at similar levels of quality between the Coop and Key Food, the prices are close. However, this does not capture the fact that Key Food also sells more basic brands of pasta at lower prices.

For many common staples, such as rice and bread—where issues of animal welfare and pesticide use are commonly prioritized less in a shopper's decision-making—the Coop's focus on quality means that it would not necessarily be the penny pincher's choice.

One other complication is in how the Coop deals with price fluctuations, which are most apparent at the Coop in the produce section, where growing seasons and the impact of weather on crops can affect supply and demand.

Coop prices vary significantly week to week, given that they're generally the whole-

sale price plus the 24-percent Coop markup. For example, three weeks after the initial price survey, the grape tomatoes at the Coop had dropped from \$1.99 to \$1.28 for a dry pint. The Coop organic eggplant cited earlier in this article had dropped from \$2.73 a pound to \$1.86.

At other stores, the price for the shopper does not necessarily change as wholesale prices fluctuate. This factor can also lead to a misleading comparison of products when an item is compared on only a specific day.

Interestingly, this is not the first time that such a comparison survey has been completed. A letter to the *Gazette* in 1992—uncovered in the *Gazette* archive at the Center for Brooklyn History—presented the results of a similar price comparison, using the same Key Food as a reference.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

To satisfy my curiosity, I recently did a comparison between Coop prices and those at Key Food (Seventh Ave.) and Back to the Land. As it turned out, this was a fairly time-consuming project, so I thought I would save other members the effort by sharing the results in the newsletter.

The following is a limited list of grocery items, based only on what happened to be in my kitchen on the day I was inspired to do this! It is definitely not comprehensive; in fact, whole categories of items, such as produce, spices, oils, etc, are not included. In some cases, I was not particularly interested in comparing prices, as I was certain that the Coop offers a much better deal (i.e., spices, bulk items). But for the most part, this was simply a random effort. Members can use it as a base for their own comparisons. Also, it is important to

remember that the total savings reported may not represent the savings in a typical Coop shopping spree, as my list does include a fair number of high-priced staple items (i.e., tamari sauce, maple syrup, mayonnaise, sesame oil) which might not be purchased very often, and for which the price differential tends to be quite high.

The following prices reflect my shopping around the week of January 6, 1992. In only a few cases, the comparison is not between exact items, as they were not available. All Coop prices include the 16% mark-up. Prices in the "Other" column refer to Key Food prices, unless marked by a "BL," indicating Back to the Land prices.

Enjoy!

Sincerely
Deborah Melamed

Items	Coop (16% mark-up included)	Other
San-J Lite Tamari, 20 oz	\$3.11	\$4.59 BL
Grey Poupon Mustard, 8 oz	1.90	2.45
Heinz Ketchup 15 oz	1.00	1.15
Hecker's unbleached white flour, 5 lb	1.29	1.99
Annie's Shells/Cheddar-white, on sale	.82	.99 BL
Arrowhead Multi-grain pancake mix	1.70	1.89 BL on sale
Arrowhead Peanut Butter 18oz	2.29	3.79 BL
Land o'Lakes Tub of butter	1.04	1.65
Maple syrup, organic, 16 oz	4.15	6.79 BL
Linguini, Grano di Sole	.52	-
Linguini, DeCecco	-	1.69
Bearito Org. Cornchips, no salt, 1 lb	1.62	2.79 BL
Redpack crushed tomatoes, 1lb 12oz	.95	1.19
Hunt's tomato paste	-	.53
Redpack tomato paste	.37	-
Hunt's tomato sauce, no salt, 8 oz	.31	-
Delmonte tomato sauce, no salt 8 oz	-	3/\$1.00
Progresso roasted peppers, 7 oz	1.25	1.83
Goya Black Beans 16 oz	.60	.75
Goya Chick Peas 10 1/2 oz	.48	.45
Starkist solid white tuna in water	1.47	-
Starkist Solid white tuna in oil	-	1.55
American Prairie organic oats, 13 oz	1.33	-
Quaker Oats, per 13 oz	-	1.51
Golden Fresh boneless chicken breasts, per lb	2.88	4.49
Raisins, bulk	1.39	1.39 BL on sale
Red Zinger tea, Celestial Seasonings	1.72	2.49

Continued...

In 1992, the Coop price markup was 16 percent instead of the current 24 percent, but the overall price comparison outcome was remarkably close: a similar set of items established that Coop items saved an average of 24 percent when compared to equivalent items at Key Food.

The distribution 32 years ago was a little different. For example, condiments at the Coop were even cheaper—a 32 percent saving, as compared to 22 percent today. And household goods were in fact more expensive at the Coop—a 9 percent increase, as compared to a 34 percent saving today.

Only seven branded items from the 1992 comparison are still available today in the same size at both the Coop and Key Food: Annie's prepared pasta shells/cheddar white, Hecker's all-purpose flour, Annie's salad dressings, Philadelphia cream cheese, Celestial Seasonings Red Zinger herbal tea, Edensoy soy milk and a roll of Bounty paper towels.

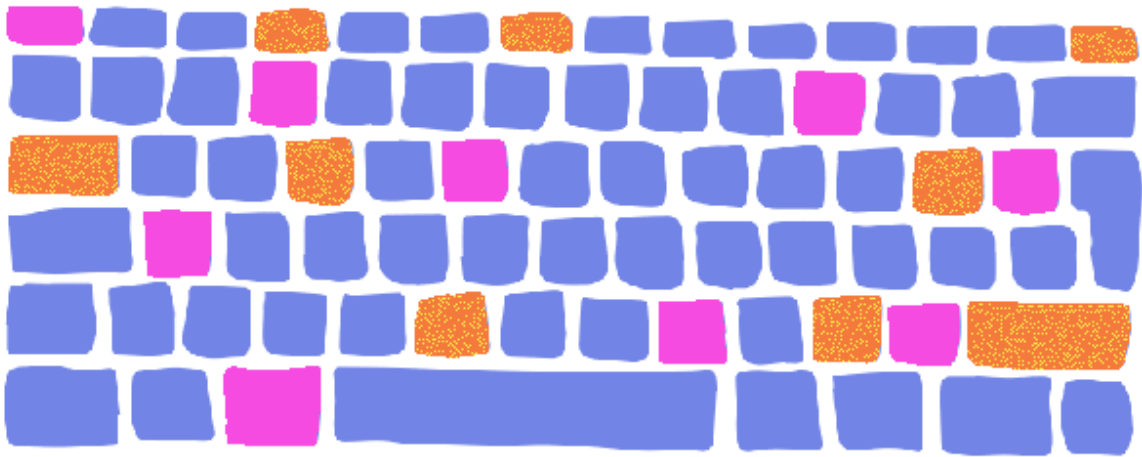
These seven items at the Coop were 19 percent cheaper than at Key Food in 1992, but today are 34 percent off the Key Food price.

Dan Bergsagel is a structural engineer from London. He likes to talk about the unexpected things hiding in plain sight.

MAY 21, 2024

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Editor's note: The Gazette acknowledges that a math error was published in Morgan Vö's April 30th letter and in Dena Beard's letter below. Both letters claim that only .015% of members can assemble at our General Meetings, when in fact the correct number is 1.5%.

Keep Our Ramps Wild and Wonderful

FELLOW RAMP ENTHUSIASTS,

Ramps are an exciting and fleeting marker that warm weather has finally arrived and harvest season is around the corner. The fact that they are a native species that can only be foraged, and their season is so short, makes each bunch special.

However, I noticed that the ramps the Coop sells come with the bulb and root intact.

The bulbs are like the heart of a ramp—they're what make them grow. Harvesting the entire bulb and roots prevents the plant from regenerating in future years.

According to responsible foraging practices, ramps should be snipped from the leaves only to allow the bulb to grow a new plant in future years. Some botanists also recommend taking only one of the two leaves of the plant—leaving the remaining leaf to photosynthesize.

It takes several years for ramps to mature. If you couple bad foraging practices with over-harvesting due to extreme demand, there's a real risk that patches will be depleted and ramps will become extinct.

I'm concerned our current supplier may not be engaging in sustainable and conservation-minded foraging practices. According to my research, NJ-based Meadows and More, which is carried by Farm to People and Fresh Direct, offers responsibly foraged ramps. Perhaps there are additional suppliers.

Shouldn't we be leading the charge in demanding responsible foraging practices? If we want ramps on our plates each spring, we've got to give them a fighting chance to regrow.

Together, we can ensure that ramps stick around for generations to come.

In cooperation,

Return Policy

DEAR MEMBERS:

The Food Coop allows returns of certain products within 30 days of purchase, provided that you have the Paid-In-Full receipt. This **MUST** be presented, per policy.

I use a debit card to pay for items and after reconciling my receipt, recycle the receipt.

Some items, like a product in a glass jar or can, may not have an apparent problem until you use it. In my case, two glass product jars had caps on too tight to open, even after using hot water, grip cloths, and jar openers.

I have no problem with the time limitation. But I asked the Office if they could provide a copy of the paid receipt and the answer was no.

I am curious if it is the case that the Office doesn't store paid receipts or perhaps could store the receipts to assist members with returns.

Perhaps the Coop would consider elective electronic receipts so that we don't have to print out receipts for members who don't need the paper. The electronic receipts could be sent to a member's email. Many stores have this option. This can save a lot of paper.

Thank you for your consideration of the above.

*In Cooperation,
Stewart Pravda*

Contra Assertions of Coop Leadership, Its Bylaws Do Not Bar Hybrid General Meetings

DEAR MEMBERS,

At April's General Meeting, a member led a welcome discussion about making the Coop more accessible to working families and other members who are less able to fulfill work requirements and physically attend General Meetings. Her proposal was met with spirited approval. Several members shared encouraging ideas. Everyone in the packed Picnic House agreed that more of our nearly 16,000 members should be "in the room" for Coop General Meetings.

And then the Coop's General Manager took the mic to temper enthusiasm for a hybrid meeting option (i.e., in-person and online). "Read the bylaws," he admonished. General Manager Joe Holtz reminded us that our bylaws, written in the 1970s by a lawyer-member, require all votes be cast "in person." And so, he intimated, the Coop cannot simply approve holding its meetings online.

Well, I have read the bylaws. And the Coop's meeting guide. I've also consulted with a fellow lawyer who advises New York cooperatives like ours.

Our bylaws state: *"All votes shall be cast in person and no proxy voting shall be permitted...however...the Board may...direct that a mail ballot be taken"* In other words, all votes must be cast personally, not by "proxy," and during the General Meeting—except when the Board directs voting by mail.

New York law, which governs the Coop, agrees. State law specifically says that "in person" presence at board meetings is fulfilled via any technology that allows everyone participating to hear each other contemporaneously, i.e., conference calls, Zoom, etc.

Though they were drafted in the 1970s, the Coop's bylaws continue to serve us well - today. The good news is state law and our bylaws tell us that our "in person" voting requirement is met equally by physical *and* online presence at General Meetings.

Onwards,
M.J. Williams, Esq.

Hybrid Meetings Will Provide True Inclusion

DEAR ALL:

I'm writing in support of the proposal to allow hybrid (online and in-person) General Meetings, which at the time of my writing has been obstructed from being heard for several months. As a Coop member-owner with disabilities, this proposal is personally important to me, as well as important to the health and vibrancy of the Coop as a whole.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, disability communities noted that schools, workplaces and other organizations, which had previously balked at providing virtual and hybrid options as disability accommodations, suddenly found ways to make that approach work. Many, including myself, hoped organizations would learn from this—and many have continued to provide hybrid options. It's disheartening to see that the Coop has backslid and, despite clearly having the capacity to conduct virtual meetings, the Agenda Committee and General Coordinators are digging in heels rather than embracing the opportunity to truly include all members of our community.

It's also worth noting that, as a place of business, the Coop may have obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure equal access and communication for members with disabilities. I wouldn't want the Coop to run afoul of the law; and even

more so, as a community that purports to care about its members, I would hope the Coop wouldn't want to be in violation of the spirit of the law and of inclusivity.

This proposal is deeply important to members with disabilities, as well as parents, caregivers and many others. All of us deserve to participate in the Coop's General Meetings and policymaking. I hope the Coop will finally allow members to hear the hybrid proposal at a General Meeting, and I urge everyone to vote in favor.

*In cooperation,
CJ Glackin*

Bullying and Mockery at General Meeting

TO THE EDITOR:

I attended the April General Meeting and wanted to share something I heard there. I have been a Coop member for 5 years, but have not attended a GM previously. What I heard was a group attending the meeting laughing at multiple speakers. The laughter was not at jokes or awkward pauses. They were laughing with derision. They were laughing over people with whom they disagreed. I find their behavior unacceptable and creating a hostile atmosphere at what is supposed to be an inclusive community meeting. I also worry that their bullying will discourage members from speaking at the GM.

I ask that in future meetings if this or other groups attempt to menace our fellow members, those running the meeting do not tolerate it. I plan to be at my second meeting as soon as possible and hope to not see this behavior again.

*Thanks,
Nathalie Hirschtritt*

Is the Coop a Welcoming Environment for Its Muslim Members?

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Last month, while walking aisles of the Coop, my young daughter asked, “Why are there no things for Ramadan at the Coop?”

I turned to her, surprised.

She pointed to the endcap. “Here—where the Coop always puts the Christmas and Easter and Hanukkah stuff... you know.” I gave her a response about how Ramadan isn’t a consumer holiday (yes, she understands what that means), and we moved on to croissants.

See, growing up Muslim in NYC, I never expected my Muslimness to be affirmed, represented or even acknowledged positively in spaces like our grocery store.

In fact, a few weeks earlier, the night before the first of Ramadan, the Coop didn’t even have any dates on the shelf, let alone anything else that acknowledged the start of Ramadan. Yes, maybe there were some in the basement. Yes, maybe there were lots of other Muslim Coop members shopping for their Ramadan dates that night, but still: The night before Ramadan, there were no dates on the shelves.

That night, I realized that the Coop was a place that maybe didn’t want me—or at least didn’t know me, or didn’t care to.

This Ramadan, as I watched Muslims across the sea be slaughtered, I wondered: Is the Coop, whose ethos is about community and cooperation, concerned at all for its Muslim members and whether they feel safe and welcome in its climate of silence, erasure and “neutrality”?

My daughter's question was a hopeful one. She didn't see any reason why Ramadan items wouldn't be displayed prominently in her grocery store where the Christmas and Hanukkah items go.

She's right. We deserve to feel welcome, safe and affirmed in our Coop, too. I thank PSFC for Palestine for their advocacy that makes us feel less alone.

With hope,

A fellow Coop member

(The author of this letter has requested their name be omitted for safety reasons.)

Let's Stick to Our Mission: Trust and Respect for All!

FELLOW MEMBERS,

I have been a member of our cherished Coop for about 8 years. I value our cooperation. I love being a part of a trusted neighborhood institution. Our Coop works because we work together, despite our differences. The mission statement reads: "Working together builds trust through cooperation. We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and to respect the opinions, needs and concerns of every member."

However, since some members reignited efforts to join the BDS movement I have not felt trust or safety in the building. On the eve of Passover, I visited the Coop to pick up some last-minute things for my Seder, one of which was matzah. As I placed the box of matzah made in Jerusalem in my cart, I had an overwhelming wave of fear pass over me. What if someone were to challenge my purchase because I chose the Israeli matzah? Was I prepared to discuss and defend my purchase? No one should experience fear of confrontation within our Coop walls, especially when purchasing a

food needed to celebrate one's religion.

This issue is far too divisive and will rot our precious community. Let's preserve trust and safety. Can we please put the BDS talk to rest? Each member can make their own informed choice of what to purchase. Let's practice what we preach!

Abigail Greenbaum

My Bamba, My Choice

DEAR EDITOR:

I buy EcoLove Shampoo and Conditioner at the Coop. They are beautiful, environmentally-sound, Israeli products. As an Israeli, I am proud of the innovation and to have them at my Coop. The movement to stop selling Israeli products at the Coop is profoundly triggering to me and it makes me feel like I do not belong at the Coop, that there is no room for an Israeli person among its members. I am not alone. The message is, "If it's from there, we don't want it here."

I wonder, when US governmental policies led to the separation of children from their parents at the US/Mexico border, and toddlers were subsequently held in cages, how many Coop members deeply opposed this policy, and how many were horrified by the actions of the first Trump presidency, and how many still had the privilege to continue to earn a livelihood notwithstanding the actions of their government, and their deep opposition thereto?

The privilege of being psychologically troubled without an actual disruption to your life is not lost on us. If you think that ending the nightmare in the Middle East will be the result of a Bamba boycott and it makes you feel better not to buy it, then don't. I'd like to, though.

Discovering Joy in Al Arz Tahini: A Delicious Recipe Inside!

FELLOW SHOPPERS,

I hope this letter finds you well and within arm's reach of the delightful creaminess of one of my favorite Coop products: Al Arz Tahini! There's something about its smooth texture and rich flavor that brings my palate great joy.

If you have yet to discover this gem while browsing the aisles, you can find it nestled near the nut butters. Not only does it satisfy my cravings, but it also carries a meaningful story of inclusivity and support for human rights. Did you know it's made by an Israeli Arab who champions LGBT rights? It's truly inspiring to see a product that not only tastes great but also stands for something meaningful.

Now, onto a delicious and quick tahini recipe that's one of my favorites, a Date Tahini Smoothie:

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of your favorite milk
- 1 frozen banana, sliced
- 4 pitted frozen dates
- ¼ cup of Al Arz Tahini
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Dash of sea salt
- Ice cubes

Instructions:

1. In a blender, combine the milk, banana, dates, tahini, vanilla extract and sea salt.
2. Blend until smooth, adding ice cubes as desired for thickness.
3. Pour into a glass, take a sip, and savor the creamy goodness of standing against BDS and supporting products that promote unity and understanding.

I hope you give this product a try! Here's to spreading love, inclusivity, and delicious flavors with every jar of Al Arz Tahini.

*In cooperation,
Tali Rasis*

On Antisemitism

DEAR FELLOW COOP MEMBERS:

To all those labeling the BDS campaign as antisemitic, your accusations are contributing to an international campaign of dangerous misinformation and fearmongering. You endanger Jews by degrading the meaning of antisemitism, which everyone should take seriously. In 2021, a distinguished group of Holocaust, Jewish studies and Middle Eastern studies scholars convened in Jerusalem to craft a comprehensive definition of the term—a corrective to definitions of antisemitism which wrongly conflate Judaism with Zionism.

The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism states: “Supporting the Palestinian demand for justice and the full grant of their political, national, civil and human rights” is NOT antisemitic. Neither is “evidence-based criticism of Israel.” Also included in the declaration: “Boycott, divestment and sanctions are commonplace, non-violent forms

of political protest against states. In the Israeli case they are not, in and of themselves, antisemitic.”

Disingenuous rhetoric forces us to clarify language when it is weaponized in bad faith. Accusing PSFC Members for Palestine of being “violent” or “antisemitic” is akin to reducing the brave students currently protesting on their campuses against genocide to “outside” and “violent” “agitators.” There is no violence in demanding divestment from complicit institutions, no violence in demanding justice for a state that has murdered over 40,000 Palestinians in less than seven months. However, it is harmful and dangerous to falsely accuse such movements of threatening the safety of others, as when our fellow Coop members coordinated a campaign threatening the Brooklyn College Tow Center with violence if they rented it to the PSFC for a boycott discussion. Such campaigns produce a dampening effect on our ability to engage in genuine debate, and bring a carceral logic into our community that enables the kinds of violent crackdown on peaceful protest that we are seeing all across the world.

Read more on the JDA [here](#).

From Jewish Coop members,

Harry August, Alyce Barr, Anya Bernstein, Mischa Berlin, Naomi Brussel, Allison Chomet, Jesse Daniels, Susanna de Martino, Moriah Engelberg, Andy Fidoten, Naomi Fischer, Tal Frieden, Aaron Friedman, Caroline Friedman, Claire Glass, Sophie Glickman, Willa Glickman, Hannah Gold, Maurice Goldberg, Phoebe Helander, Rachel Levenson, Madeleine Levin, Jake Lichter, Julian Meltzer, HanaKyle Moranz, Mallory Muratore, Willy Naess, Todd Neufeld, Aaron Posner, Bob Rosen, Gemma Sack, Djuna Schamus, Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones, Mai Schotz, Zachary Schulman, Monroe Street Schostal, Hillela Simpson, Adam Thoma-Perry, Jess Wachtler, Carol Wald, Fay Walker, M.J. Williams

Coop Unity

DEAR FELLOW COOP MEMBERS:

If you are reading this letter, then you already are aware there is a group of members who are exploiting Coop resources to promote the highly divisive and controversial BDS Movement. This movement includes the unlawful, destructive and violent demonstrations at US college campuses that occurred at the end of April 2024. The BDS Movement's goal is to eliminate the State of Israel and return Jews to a condition of powerlessness.

If you agree the Park Slope Food Coop should not be used as a forum for BDS, you are not alone. We have joined together to preserve the Coop community's cohesiveness. We are Pro-Peace, Pro-Coexistence, Pro-Coop.

We are Coop Members for Unity. You can join us and learn more at this link.

Barbara Mazor

Coop Members for Unity

Let the Coop Be Unified Against Genocide

TO THE EDITOR:

Recent letters have called for a unified Coop—one that values diversity and welcomes all. Disguised by these familiar terms for progressive values is an underlying demand to support Israel by purchasing its products. According to those who call for unity, this support must be unconditional. If not, the Coop will be disunited, uninclusive, even anti-Semitic. If we follow this logic, this support must continue while Israel commits

genocide against Palestinians, killing over 30,000—including over 15,000 children; it must continue while Israel allows and fosters illegal settlements on stolen Palestinian land; it must continue while Israel blocks virtually all food and medical aid from entering Gaza and creates famine; it must continue while Israel denies equal rights to its Palestinian citizens, keeping them under military rule; it must continue while Israel surveils and arrests and imprisons Palestinian children and adults without charges; it must continue while Israel remains a separate and unequal state where Palestinian Israelis cannot even travel on the same roads as Jewish Israelis.

Is there another country that supplies Coop products, a country that is committing similar atrocities? Is there another apartheid state that sells its goods to the Coop? If so—we must immediately unify to boycott products from such countries, just as we must now unify to boycott Israeli products.

May we use our cooperation to repair the world,
Alyce Barr

Consistent Foreign Policy

DEAR FELLOW MEMBERS:

Not that I'm in favor of the Coop having a foreign policy, but if we have one, we should be consistent about our beliefs.

If a boycott of Israeli goods should be adopted, the Coop should also boycott all goods from:

1. The People's Republic of China, because of their genocidal treatment of the Uighurs and Tibetans, and its repression of the people of Hong Kong.
2. The Russian Federation, because of its unnecessary war of aggression against

Ukraine, their illegal annexation of Crimea, and their continued occupation of portions of the Republic of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, in defiance of international law, and their bans on LGBTQ+ movements and imprisonment of LGBTQ+ activists.

3. The Kingdom of Morocco, because of their continued occupation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, in defiance of international law, and its imprisonment of LGBTQ+ people.
4. The Republic of Turkiye, because of its continued oppression of its Kurdish minority.
5. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, because of its treatment of its only legitimate opposition party, including barring its candidate from the next election on no legitimate grounds.
6. The Republic of Azerbaijan, because of its ethnic cleansing and oppression of its Armenian minority in Nagorno-Karabakh.
7. The Republic of Serbia, because of its continued denial of independence to the ethnic-Albanian inhabitants of Kosovo.
8. The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, because of its military coup and refusal to accept the results of its democratic 2021 election.
9. Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, because of their direct assault on international, including American, shipping in the Red Sea.
10. Iran, Iraq and Pakistan, because they level the death penalty for LGBTQ+ relationships.
11. Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Liberia, Senegal, Mauritania, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for imprisonment of LGBTQ+ people.

Greg Costikyan

Let's Give Institutional Neutrality Its Due

DEAR *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE*,

Institutional neutrality will keep any issue which offers no tangible benefit out of the Coop. BDS is one such issue. They have turned up the heat but offer little light in the discussion. Union Street is not the Middle East.

Iran and Hamas have no intention of making peace and mostly foment terror. Don't - make the Coop a battleground. There are plenty of places to go for that game.

The Coop is a beacon of how sensible management works. Politics can spoil the fruit of years of patient and loving labor. The best way forward is keeping outside issues outside the Coop.

Rodger Parsons

Democracy, Guardrails and the Coop

DEAR COOP MEMBERS:

One thing I find so interesting about the Coop is that it serves as a social experiment in democracy, testing how democratic principles can be effectively implemented. Different countries and organizations apply democracy in various ways, but at its core, it emphasizes the rule of the majority, ensuring decision-making reflects the collective will and is grounded in equality and fairness. In other words, merely calling yourself a democracy doesn't make you one; you need to stay true to its core principle. This principle is that every member's vote contributes equally to shaping our policies and laws, balancing majority interests with protections for minority rights.

In our Coop, applying democracy means not just following majority rule but also installing guardrails to protect the basic rights of all community members. For example, a decision to boycott certain products should consider the impact on members who

find these products a core part of their identity. This raises a difficult question: What is more important in democracy, the basic rights that should never be compromised, or majority rule? Ideally, when these work together, democracy is at its best.

We should strive to achieve this balance if we are truly serious about democracy. This is indeed a process, but to move in that direction, I suggest adding a guardrail to avoid boycotting products based on ethnicity.

Sincerely,
Yuval Inselberg

A Practical Solution to the Coop's GM Venue Issue

DEAR MEMBERS,

Considering that less than .015% of our membership can assemble at our current General Meeting ("GM") venue, it's discouraging that the Coop's administration has given up on finding a larger venue for GMs with popular agenda items. Instead, it's using difficulties with renting a venue as a means to prevent popular agenda items from being presented to our membership.

I invite the General Coordinators ("GCs") to prove me wrong, but I have particular insight into this issue.

As readers might recall, I direct Brooklyn College's Tow Theater, which the Coop sought to rent for two different Coop meetings. Because one of these meetings concerned a boycott of certain Israeli goods, a dozen Coop members, opposed to this boycott, falsely claimed Brooklyn College would witness violence if it hosted the meeting. These threats worked, and Brooklyn College will no longer rent to the Coop. Still, I offered to assist the GCs with finding another venue, as long as they would ensure

Coop members would not harass another institution. The GCs rebuffed my offer. Moreover, the GCs have clarified that they will do nothing to prevent members from engaging in intimidation tactics that interfere with Coop business and democratic processes. Since October 2023, the GCs have managed to find only my venue, will not accept help with finding another location and will permit Coop members to sabotage future rentals with violent threats.

As a result, when the Coop administration tells a member that their GM proposal requires a larger venue, the administration is really saying that the member proposal will not be heard.

We should reject suppression of our democratic process and demand the Coop administration place all member proposals onto GM agendas. A practical and productive solution that circumvents this censorship is holding online or online/live GMs. Let's do it!

Dena Beard

DEAR COOP MEMBERS,

I attended the April GM, where I heard several comments referencing a letter from Dena Beard in the April 30th issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. I am extremely disturbed by the incident reported in that letter and would like to alert my fellow members to the urgency of correcting the problems it highlights. In brief, following Joe Holtz's announcement at the March GM that the Brooklyn College Tow Center was a possible venue for a future GM involving a BDS proposal, Coop members who oppose the proposal contacted the Brooklyn College administration and used scare tactics to scuttle the arrangement. As a result, Brooklyn College will not rent to us.

In other words, Coop members who are afraid of the results if we follow the democratic decision-making process mandated in our bylaws successfully intervened to sabo-

tage that process. This sets a very dangerous precedent, especially if this serious breach of cooperative principles goes unchallenged. Making a bad situation even worse, the episode caused negative professional consequences for Dena herself.

When one member raised this matter at the April GM, General Coordinator Ann Herpel replied that people are free to file a complaint with the Dispute Resolution Committee. She then spoke of a recent email in which she cautioned members against contacting potential meeting venues, either to facilitate arrangements or to lobby against a rental—as though the two sorts of “infraction” were somehow comparable.

I had hoped the GCs would offer more constructive leadership in this situation by making clear that threats of violence and obstruction of Coop operations are unacceptable and uncooperative. Absent that messaging, we the members are still faced with the pressing task that Dena’s letter outlines: “It is essential that we find ways to renew the Coop’s democracy.”

*In cooperation,
Kumru Toktamis*

One Response to Allegations of a “Coordinated Campaign” of Intimidation regarding BDS Discussion

DEAR EDITOR:

In a letter titled “Coop Members Engage in Intimidation Campaign” (Apr. 30, *Linewaiters’ Gazette*) Dena Beard writes she “received 11 voicemails and was forwarded an email sent to senior Brooklyn College leadership that urged them to deny rental requests by the PSFC.” The rental request was for discussion of BDS. Ms. Beard further implies that she initiated the availability of her workplace, The Tow Center, stating “I offered space to help the Coop carry out its member-driven operations.”

Ms. Beard states she believes the communications were a “coordinated campaign” and “each message suggested that violence would occur if the college rented to the PSFC.” She does not state which party the callers indicated could be violent. She does not produce any quote from the email to support her claim. She provides no evidence for what she describes as “being bullied and harassed,” “intimidation tactics” and “adversely affected professionally.”

If Ms. Beard feels intimidated by a few voicemails, then surely she must understand how some Coop members feel about using Coop resources to promote the annihilationist BDS movement. In light of the recent violent campus pro-BDS demonstrations, concern about violence coming from the BDS side is not unreasonable. Brooklyn College is a publicly funded institution and New Yorkers have a right to voice their opinion on how it is used.

Avishay Mazor

Ignore a Boycott's Impact on Members at Our Own Peril

DEAR MEMBERS:

The rise of antisemitism in Brooklyn should concern everyone in our community. The suggested boycott of Israeli goods is a divisive issue, unsupported by many members. The divisiveness is causing unnecessary personal anguish to many members of our community. Ignoring the impact is a deliberate choice.

It is critical that we abide by the Coop's democratic model and debate this issue in a civil way, in accordance with our rules and bylaws. I have personally witnessed and heard about the harassment of members of our community. For example, a member was yelled at in line simply for being Israeli and not supportive of the BDS movement. Though I believe that people should promote the causes they believe in, the intima-

tion of other members is unacceptable and not in line with the spirit of the Coop.

I am against this boycott, aligned with BDS, which not only targets Israeli products but also organizations and grassroots initiatives like Peace Now. I don't believe the ideas promoted by BDS are aligned with the Coop's values. Israeli products are a small part of the wonderful international offerings of our local Coop and part of why I love shopping here. I also value the diversity of the Coop community, which has members from all over the world and borough.

Though, of course, individual members should remain free to make buying choices that align with their values, I opposed implementing this on a Coop-wide level. There are atrocities happening globally; to single out Israel seems unjustified. While I understand the intent behind the boycott is a peaceful protest, bringing this debate to our Coop seeds division. We should engage democratically, respecting each other's viewpoints and following cooperative principles. Cooperation is at the core of our community, not confrontation and shouting at people you disagree with.

Diana Chase

Let's Build Community, Not Destroy It

DEAR FELLOW COOP MEMBERS,

Since joining the Coop just two years ago, one of the things that I have found most striking is the true diversity of thought, which seems to exist in fewer and fewer spaces as our world becomes more divisive. If we adopt BDS, we will alienate member-owners who may not agree with the movement's tactics or objectives. Our Coop should strive to be inclusive and welcoming to all members, regardless of their political beliefs.

BDS unfairly singles out and demonizes Israel, undermining efforts towards peace and dialogue. By endorsing BDS, the Coop would take a stance on a highly complex and contentious issue, potentially polarizing our community and detracting from our shared goals of sustainability, social responsibility, and creating community.

Instead of endorsing BDS, I believe our Coop should focus on fostering dialogue and understanding around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Let's work together to build a more inclusive and united community, where diverse perspectives are respected and celebrated.

Aaron Karas

Community, the Antidote

FELLOW MEMBERS,

These past several months have been some of the loneliest of my life.

Jews are 0.2% of the world's population. Our voices are easily drowned out by the masses, and many of us are afraid to speak up. We watch our neighbors stay silent as antisemitism rages throughout our city and our world. But the loudest voices are not always the right ones.

So, today, I am using my voice. Maybe it will reach beyond the noise.

Most of my family lives in Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people. They are not monsters targeting civilians and committing genocide as several Coop members have stated, as if their libel is decided fact. My Israeli family members are good, loving people. They left their families to fight in a war they did not start or wish for. They fight to protect their children from terrorism and to return our community's kidnapped people.

I walk the streets here, surrounded by antisemitic graffiti on lampposts and buildings. I watch as Jewish students around the country are intimidated and harassed at school, while “peaceful” student protestors are thanked by Hamas and the Islamic Republic of Iran. And I see the insidious rot of antisemitism taking root in our beautiful Coop under the guise of the BDS movement.

I wonder—is this community, this neighborhood, this city, this country, a place where I belong? Should I abandon my home here?

But then, I remember the resilience of the Jewish people. The antidote to the hatred is more community, more connection, and more togetherness, not less. We will lean on our non-Jewish community members who see truth past deception and seek unity over division.

And as Jews have done for over three thousand years, we will lean on each other.

Jonathan Aranov

Taking Issue with Selective Fact-Checks

DEAR EDITOR:

I was disappointed to read the following in an article covering the February GM:

“[Member Jesse Rosenfeld] stated that the BDS website itself describes ‘armed resistance’ and ‘any action, whether one considers it legally or ethically justifiable.’ [Note: This reporter’s review and fact check of the BDS website did not find these words; rather, ‘non-violence’ and opposition to ‘discrimination, including anti-Semitism.’]”

Since the reporter did not fact check any other member statement quoted, it’s surprising to me that Rosenfeld’s line was singled out. It’s doubly surprising to me that the

reporter was unable to find support of armed resistance on BDS's site!

One search of the phrase "BDS armed resistance" led me to the statement put out by BDS on October 7th. The statement does not mention the mass kidnapping and murder of civilians, including infants, nor speak out against brutality and violence, but instead venerates the "powerful armed reaction" of that day, regardless of "how international law regulates it"—exactly as Rosenfeld said.

I encourage members to search and read for themselves. The statement is not hard to find, and it speaks clearly to BDS's perspective on violence and whether Jewish lives should be valued.

There is something uniquely upsetting about reading BDS's statement and knowing that, while it existed in plain sight, the *Gazette* reporter chose to ignore it and instead highlighted BDS's ostensible stance against antisemitism (which, even if it were true in practice, is irrelevant to their stance on armed resistance.)

If I may suggest: *Gazette* readers understand that quotes of members' statements and opinions are just that—statements and opinions. There's no need to fact check what members are saying, especially if fact checkers can't check without bias.

In cooperation,
Tamar Lindenbaum

The Board of Directors Failed Us on April 30

DEAR COOP MEMBERS:

My name is Ramon Maislen, and I'm running for the Board of Directors to ensure that the Coop is not put in legal or financial jeopardy.

Unfortunately, recent General Meetings (GMs) have put us at risk. The actions of PSFC Members for Palestine are detrimental to the Coop and prioritize personal agendas over Coop welfare. They are encouraging members to vote against Coop interests even when they are unrelated to a boycott.

Discussion at recent GMs has been devoted to discussion of boycotting a handful of products out of the thousands we sell rather than actual Coop issues.

At the April 30th GM this had real consequences. The General Coordinators spent months working on policies to strengthen the HR policies after it became apparent that the current policies were outdated and leave the Coop open to litigation. Joe Holtz made a compelling case as to the importance of passing agenda item: "Personnel Policies: Personnel Committee, and General Coordinator Roles." Despite the lack of credible counterarguments, the PSFC Members for Palestine voted as a bloc against the agenda item.

Sadly, what we've seen over the past few months is that a vocal minority is dominating the conversation. I encourage more members to come to the GMs and make sure that your voice is heard.

Critically, I believe that the Board of Directors (BOD) made the wrong decision in voting with the majority on April 30th. The BOD had an obligation to vote in favor of the Personnel Committee agenda item to ensure the Coop doesn't face potential litigation. I hope that you'll vote for Sondra Shaevitz and me (45 years of collective Coop membership) so that we can ensure that voting on agenda items is never tainted by political ideology.

Ramon Maislen

Want to Join Coop Members in an Upstate Summer Community?

DEAR MEMBERS,

Just want to give a shot out to my summer community upstate, a parallel universe to the Food Coop with lots of dual cooperators. Two hours out of the city, Lake Huntington Summer Community is retro (as in salsa and potlucks) and a great place to benignly neglect your kids while reading a good book or napping on a chaise. We're a loosely situated group of bigger houses and cottages on a communal 17-acre property in Sullivan County, a ten-minute drive to the Delaware River and the site of Woodstock. We have a great pool with lifeguard and gated shallow section; a beautiful lake for swimming, boating, and fishing; tennis courts; woods to roam; baseball and basketball; a playground; and, most importantly, a revolving cast of fun-loving kids, from toddlers to teens.

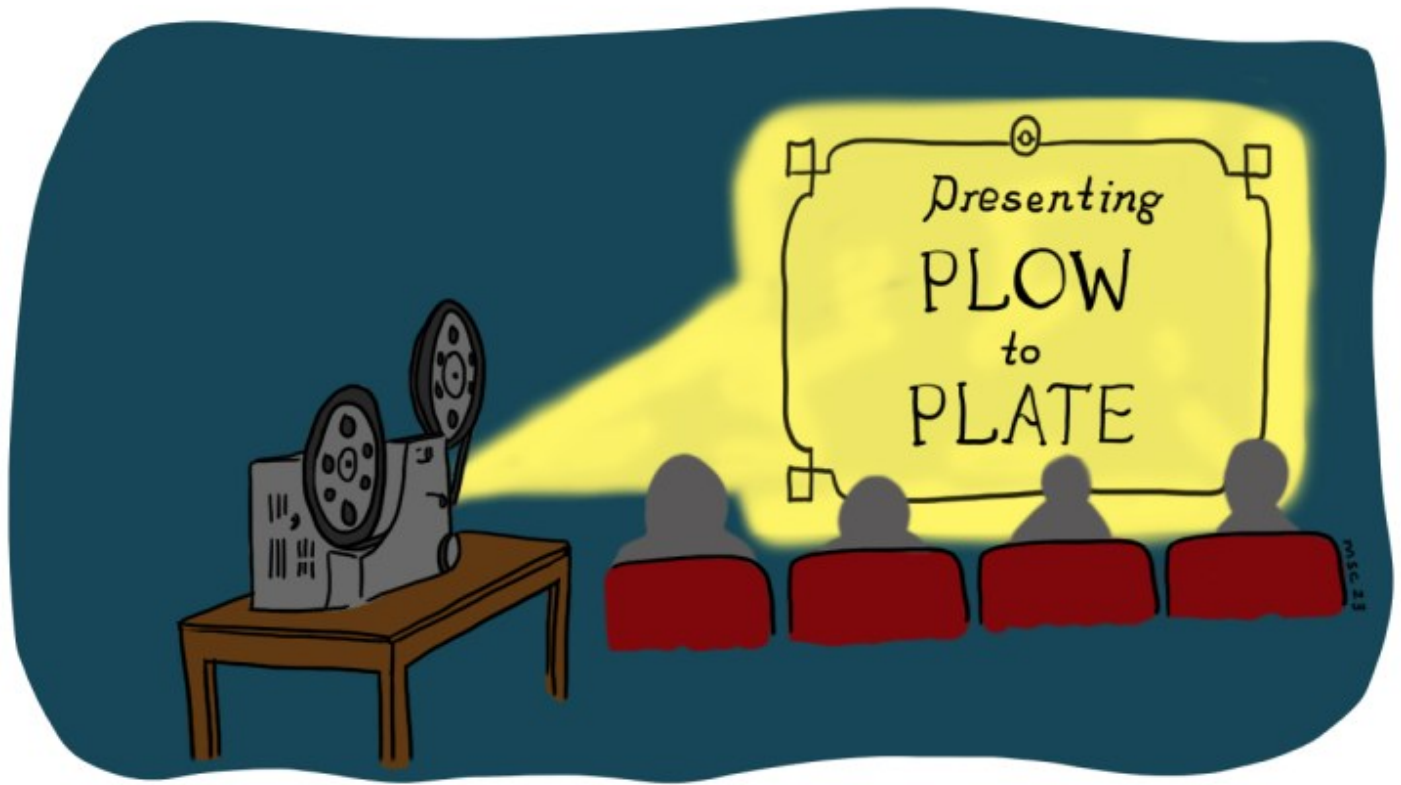
Check us out online at this link.

Hope to see you this summer!

Allie Pennell

PLOW TO PLATE FILM REVIEW: THE BIGGEST LITTLE FARM

May 21, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

Molly and John Chester were like many young people participating in the Back to the Land movement. She was a chef, he was a cameraman and a documentary filmmaker. They entertained an unrealized pastoral fantasy. Their dog Todd was a Los Angeles rescue pet with high anxiety and a tendency to bark incessantly when left alone—a deciding factor in the decision to raise funds to buy the two-hundred-plus acre Apricot Lane Farms in Moorpark, California.

The Plow to Plate film series has portrayed the reality that farming is difficult—long days of hard physical labor, often unprofitable and beholden to the whims of the elements. Yet somehow, many remain drawn to the idea, if not the reality, of working their bones and muscles in the great outdoors, surrounded by greenery and natural beauty, caring for and communing with the farm animals, even while they prepare them for slaughter.

The Biggest Little Farm, more than any other documentary Plow to Plate has screened chronicling farming life, lays bare the myth of this portrayal and disabuses one very

quickly of the romantic idea city folk may have of running a small farm. The film walks the viewer through several years in the life of Apricot Lane Farms, at first a dusty and derelict patch of dead soil to an eventual lush and verdant oasis and hive of life. The film is the story of that transformation and what it took in time, energy, commitment, luck, perseverance and skill. Molly and John had a clear vision and dream, but in the beginning, they lacked practical experience and skills. They wanted to create a holistic organic farm and grow fruits and vegetables without chemicals. They desired a physically beautiful farm that would retain water, restore the health of the soil, and produce an abundance of things, unlike a nearby defunct operation called Egg City that had once housed 3.5 million chickens producing 2 million eggs a day. They envisioned an ecosystem and a virtuous cycle.



"MOTHER NATURE
has never been more INSPIRING!"
- Alice Waters

the Biggest little Farm



MEON PRESENTS: A ASSOCIATION WITH LD ENTERTAINMENT IMPACT PARTNERS AND ARTEMIS RISING FOUNDATION. A FABRILORIE FILMS PRODUCTION "THE BIGGEST LITTLE FARM" A ASSOCIATION WITH CHESTER FILMS AND DIAMOND JONES
A FILM BY JOHN CHESTER ***JEFF BEAL*** AND AMY OVERBECK ***JOHN CHESTER AND MARK MONROE*** LAUREL DANTO AND ERICA MESSER ***PALLI CORTINAS AND JESSICA CORTINAS*** JOHN CHESTER AND SANDRA MARR



COMING SOON

LD

Their neighboring farmers thought they were crazy. To realize this type of farm they hired a consultant, Alan York, a leader in the biodynamic viticulture movement. Blowing the first year's budget in six months, Alan immediately put his shared principles into play, insisting on constructing a state-of-the-art worm composting facility, ripping up fifty-five acres of old trees, restoring an old pond, and fixing over five miles of irrigation pipes.

In addition to the worms whose poop was brewed into compost tea to feed the soil, Alan added catfish to the pond and new trees and cover crops and culverts to prevent run-off, then chicken coops. Before year one ended they had one hundred baby ducks, a bull, livestock-guarding dogs, sheep and a pig named Emma. The goal was to create the highest level of biodiversity possible as each animal had a purpose and unique contribution. His mantra was “diversify, diversify, diversify.”

In year two, Alan complicated things further by insisting on planting seventy-five varieties of stone fruit trees—plums, peaches, nectarines, cherries and apricots. Soon they were farming over two hundred different things. Alan kept promising that diversity would eventually lead to simplicity. He likened their project to building a self-perpetuating and self-regulating flywheel with everything integrated and working in harmony. But Molly, and John especially, who was becoming quite the farmer, had doubts.

Though wildlife was returning to the land, a positive sign that it was healing, the promised balance was elusive. In a modern-day version of the Ten Plagues of Egypt, coyotes kept killing their chickens and ducks, Emma came down with a sickness that threatened her life, flocks of ravenous birds and insects ravaged seventy percent of the fruits, gophers were killing their trees and snails bred exponentially until they covered everything, even the sheep. The farm suffered from drought, then flooding and brutal windstorms, the pond underwent a toxic algae bloom and a California wildfire threatened everything. In their moment of most dire need, Alan was not returning their calls.

But he had taught John and Molly to observe, and the important lesson that each animal and insect has a role to play. Soon they put owls to work and Todd lent a helping paw, as did the gophers, the snails and coyotes.

The Biggest Little Farm, June 11, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child Ana.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE: TRIPLETS

May 21, 2024

