

HOW THE LOS ANGELES WILDFIRES COULD HIT THE COOP

February 18, 2025



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By Anita Bushell

The Park Slope Food Coop contains a great many fruits and vegetables from Califor-

nia. As I walked down the produce aisle the week after the Los Angeles fires broke out, I wondered how the situation unfolding 3,000 miles away would affect the produce on offer at the Coop.

In the warmer months that constitute the Northeast growing season, the Coop mostly sources from nearby farms and growing cooperatives. Produce Manager John Horsman said, “We try to buy locally as much as possible,” noting that the California produce buying season usually lasts from the late fall through the early spring.

In the short term, the Coop doesn’t expect the Los Angeles fires to have a major impact on the availability of California produce. “Based on my experience, it will be minimal” said General Manager Joe Holtz.

STRONG SANTA ANA WINDS ARE CAUSING EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO AVOCADO GROVES AND VINEYARDS.

While exact figures are not available as to how much of the Coop’s produce comes from California, my walk down the aisle suggested that there are many items from the Golden State, from juicy oranges to super-fresh salad greens. Horsman said that this year’s California shipments, before the fires, were about the same as they were one year ago.

The State of California is around 250 miles wide and more than 700 miles long. While the effects of last month’s fires are localized to Los Angeles county, destruction has already been seen 100 miles southeast in the Pauma Valley, where strong Santa Ana winds caused extensive damage to avocado groves and vineyards. “Our farmers are our backbone of our local food system, and these fires remind us how fragile that system can be,” Alba Velasquez, the executive director of the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, told ABC News.

Horsman said that the Coop started purchasing produce from California “because California has been able to dominate nationally due to their many growing areas and micro-climates and economies of scale.” California is a major producer of grapes, lettuce, almonds, pistachios, strawberries, tomatoes, and carrots; all of which helped bring the state \$23.96 billion dollars in revenue in 2023.

According to Horsman, a number of the huge farms that supply greens and root vegetables to the Coop are in the Central Valley, which is located more than 100 miles north of Los Angeles. The Central Valley has been relatively unaffected by the current fires. On the other hand, the avocado and citrus crops closer to Los Angeles continue to be threatened by the smoke from the fires and the Santa Ana winds.

Farms don't have to be local to Los Angeles to feel the economic impact of the fires. Underwood Family Farms is located in Moorpark, 340 miles north of the city, but their staff could not sell at the Brentwood or Pasadena markets in January because of dangerous conditions and poor air quality. This resulted in few visitors and diminished sales.

Other farms local to Los Angeles are also feeling the economic impact of the fires, as well as poor air quality, flames and smoke. “Currently there are about 24 farms that are affected by the Eaton Fire, with numbers increasing every day,” Velasquez told ABC News.

The California environment has adjusted to moderate fires over the years. Many native trees, shrubs and perennials to the region are said to be fire-resistant, but were not cut out to withstand the ravages of last month. “While most native species have adapted to withstand smaller, naturally occurring fires, they aren't built for the high-intensity blazes the state has seen in recent years,” said Kevin Tidmarsh of local news outlet LAist.

CALIFORNIA IS A MAJOR PRODUCER OF GRAPES, LETTUCE, ALMONDS, PISTACHIOS,

STRAWBERRIES, TOMATOES, AND CARROTS.

A January 15 post on Farms.com stated: “The Santa Ana winds, infamous for their speed and intensity, exacerbate the spread of wildfires, and add to the challenges faced by farmers. These winds carry dust and smoke from the fires across coastal Southern California, further endangering crops and air quality.”

The Coop began buying California produce in 1973, the year of its founding, according to Holtz. The California items that sell the fastest are broccoli and oranges.

“Initially, in 1973, we knew relatively little about the dominance by the West Coast in providing fresh veggies and fruits to the New York City area,” Holtz said. “Produce from California was dominant during that time, even for items that could have been produced locally. But starting in late June 1975 we started an 11-year period where we went to the market ourselves and gained valuable knowledge about what items were possible to get from local farms, and where in Hunts Point Market we could buy them. That made a big difference in our effectively buying as much from the local growing area whenever the quality met our standards.”

As the current fires remain contained to the Los Angeles area, Horsman and Holtz see relatively little impact on the Coop’s California produce buying. Long term concerns, however, include future fires that could affect Central Valley crops.

“We will always try hard to look for food so that our members’ food needs are covered,” Holtz stated. “Beyond searching for sources of food that our members need, there is no exact plan. Example of a theoretical situation: Any day now the North American asparagus harvest should be starting. It starts in Mexico and after a little while it moves up into southern California. What if that pattern doesn’t pan out this year and there is instead a great reduction in asparagus from southern California? What would we do?”

Holtz contuned, “Might there still be Peruvian asparagus available which is what we are getting now? Would the price go sky high? Would we buy it even at a high price? Would some members buy less? Would some members buy more zucchini etc. instead? I have no answers, only questions. The important thing is that we will pivot and try to make decisions that make sense in making it as certain as possible that our members will have something good to cook and eat.”

When I walk down the produce aisle this winter, I’ll keep an eye out for changes in produce availability. And I’ll load up on my beloved Sumo Mandarins, from California’s San Joaquin Valley, for as long as I can.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer who has been published in Friends Journal, Ford Foundation Report, and Uncensored: American Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness. She just published One Way to Whitefish.

CONFESSIONS OF COOP CHEATERS—AND DIET COKE DRINKERS

February 18, 2025



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By Liz Welch

My husband, Gideon, has been a member of the Park Slope Food Coop since 2006.

When we first started dating, he took me as his guest to the Coop one Sunday morning, and I remember thinking, what is this nirvana? Blood oranges? Medjool dates? Grumpy coffee? Plus bulk oatmeal... and oat milk before it became trendy? I wanted to sign up immediately.

“It’s a commitment,” he warned me.

We moved in together, got engaged, and that was when I finally joined, thrilled to be part of this community and happy to stock gorgeous fennel and pluots on a monthly basis. Gideon was correct: it was a commitment! But so worth it, as I loved the

thoughtfully curated assortment of incredibly fresh and incredibly affordable food.

And then one day, I called my then-fiancé, and shared, “I just got the most gorgeous strawberries at the farmers’ market in Union Square.”

He grew quiet.

“Is everything okay?” I asked.

He said: “I just don’t understand.”

“Excuse me?” I said, confused.

“We work for our food,” he continued. “Why would you buy produce anywhere other than at the Coop?”

I laughed then, and we still laugh about it as he continues to be a more faithful Coop shopper than I am. I still occasionally buy produce at farmers’ markets—and have even, begrudgingly, bought marked-up apples or grapes at Union Market when the lines at the Coop can make a quick stop impossible. And glorious as our selection may be, it’s impossible to stock everything under the sun in our limited space.

GLORIOUS AS OUR SELECTION MAY BE, IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO STOCK EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN IN OUR LIMITED SPACE.

So when my *Linewaiters’ Gazette* editor asked me if I had “ever cheated” on the Coop, I said, “Hell yes!”

That led to this story:

I sent out an email blast to a few Coop friends that asked in the subject line, “Do you ever cheat on the Coop? Do you have a secret habit of buying bread or cheese or anything else anywhere else?”



Luise replied first:

“I go to Mozz Lab (502 Henry Street, Brooklyn) for mozzarella,” she wrote. “The Coop only sells tiny little pre-packaged ones, not the big juicy homemade Italian mozzarella that feeds an entire family!”

Maria, my Swedish friend, says she goes to Smor (437 East 12th Street, NY) for Danish bread, and Fabrique (348 W. 14th Street, NY) for other Swedish treats.

Linda likes Fei Long market in Brooklyn’s Chinatown (6301 8th Avenue). “It’s huge, so less crowded than elbowing through the narrow aisles of the Coop. It is inexpensive, has lots of fresh produce, all kinds of seafood and interesting frozen Asian food op-

tions. You can sit and eat at the food court which is great for people watching and soaking in the culture. In warm weather, it's also fun to leave the Slope to walk through the area and hang out in a different part of Brooklyn."



Excited by all these new places to try, I decided to cast a wider net, and made a post on Facebook's Park Slope Together, which elicited more than 70 comments.

Some took my tongue-in-cheek request, "has anyone ever cheated on the Coop?" a little too seriously:

"Your premise is off!" Riva said. "We don't pledge allegiance to PSFC."

She was not alone in her feelings as seven other people liked her comment.

Shoshana got the joke, and made me laugh out loud with her comment: "It's more that we are in an ethical non-monogamous relationship. When they had the Bell and

Evans breaded chicken cutlets and nuggets, we were okay. But once they stopped stocking them, the substitute was not up to par! I like Key Foods' (130 7th Ave.) fresh pierogies, the snacks and prices and variety at Trader Joe's (130 Court St.), and the convenience of picking up something wherever I am and for whatever I need!"

More than a few people admitted to going to Trader Joe's for a variety of things, including my pal Maria who gets "goat cheese, minced meat, ready-cooked bits of chicken and frozen meals" there.

Libby's post really summed up the allure: "I go to Key Foods for my toxic food needs: Rice Krispies, marshmallows, Chex Mix, packaged cake mix, cheese balls, red hots and even distilled water. Why? Because Rice Krispie treats don't work with healthy marshmallows (I've tried.) I have a Chex Mix lover in the family and sometimes I don't have time to bake a cake from scratch and I don't like the organic cake mix. Cheese balls are a special occasion (sleepover) item and I need red hots for my gingerbread people. Distilled water is for my iron. You can also buy a big container of toxic croissants for cheap and when you stick them in the oven, they are delicious."

Her honest (and hilarious) post emboldened other Key Foods "cheaters" to admit they shop at the supermarket for sugary cereal, powdered donuts and Diet Coke!

Diana agreed with the Rice Krispies comment, and added she happily picks up a rotisserie chicken at Union Market, and buys cakes from Ladybird Bakery (252 Prospect Park W). "I never feel like I am cheating, just utilizing neighborhood resources properly."

Kristen understands the nuance.

"My father is die-hard, pledge-allegiance to the Coop, and basically refuses to shop anywhere else, whereas my mother will opt for going to any farmers' market first before going to the Coop."

“SOMETIMES YOU NEED YOUR MALLOMARS.”

Alas! I am not alone! Though once our daughter came into the picture, Gideon eased up and would make allowances for last-minute runs to the Gowanus Whole Foods (214 3rd St.). (Another Diana shared that she particularly likes their frozen pizza selection, and Donna specifically shops there for Richard’s Sparking Rainwater “by the case because, it’s the best seltzer, in my opinion, and comes in glass bottles—no plastic!”)

Costco (976 3rd Ave.) got a shoutout for its competitive pricing—and, according to several commenters, its superior toilet paper. As did Mr. Lime (313 7th Ave.) for its cheap produce.

There were so many other wonderful suggestions, too many to include in one story, so I will wrap up with some highlights to consider:

Sahadis (187 Atlantic OR Pier 57 at Industry City) for the old-school Brooklyn experience as well as the Middle Eastern cornucopia, from dried Angelino plums to enormous glass jars of by-the-pound malt balls.

Japan Village (943 3rd Avenue) for all things Japanese, from a variety of furikake and onigiri to mochi.

Fish Tales (191A Court Street) for an incredible assortment of freshly caught fish and central-casting fishmongers.

Prospect Butcher Co. (665 Vanderbilt Avenue) got two shout outs for being an excellent source of high-quality meats. Its website also seems PSFC aligned, “Whole Animal, Worker Owned, Locally Sourced.”

All in, I have a whole new list of places to try, and a sense of relief that I'm not the only cheater out there. As one woman accurately summed up: "Sometimes, you need your Mallomars."

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist and book collaborator.

COORDINATORS' CORNER: SAFEGUARDING THE COOP'S FUTURE

February 18, 2025



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

February 18, 2025

By The General Coordinator Team

This is our third Coordinators' Corner of 2025, addressing concerns and highlighting the risks associated with a campaign led by members from PSFC Members for Palestine, who aim to have the Coop join a BDS-targeted boycott of Israeli goods.

THE COOP'S BOYCOTT HISTORY

The Coop has a long tradition of participating in boycotts. Since 1989 we've joined a number of boycotts, with an impressive 97% of members voting in favor across all boycott votes. This overwhelming support reflects the Coop's commitment to building consensus and aligns with the International Cooperative Alliance's Seven Cooperative Principles, which promote unity while embracing diversity.

SUCH SCRUTINY COULD RESULT IN COSTLY LEGAL BATTLES, GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATIONS AND MAJOR DISRUPTIONS TO THE COOP'S OPERATIONS AND STABILITY.

PSFC Members for Palestine are proposing to repeal the Coop's 75% supermajority requirement for General Meeting (GM) votes on boycotts and replace it with a simple majority to make it easier to approve a Coop boycott of Israeli goods. A boycott without broad member support undermines the Principles of Cooperation, weakens the Coop's cohesion and threatens its stability, as outlined in a previous Coordinators' Corner. Maintaining the 75% supermajority is a reasonable minimum, especially given that boycott votes have historically averaged 97% in favor. This threshold ensures that boycotts are only advanced with sufficient member support to preserve Coop unity and protect it from harmful risk.

PSFC BOYCOTT HISTORY (1989-PRESENT)

Date	Boycott	Yes Votes	No Votes	Approval %
January 1989	Chile, S. Africa, non-UFW grapes	19	0	100%
July 1989	All tuna fish	9	0	100%
December 1990	Bumble Bee Tuna	15	1	94%
August 1991	Non-UFW Grapes	30	7	81%
February 1993	Colorado	37	8	82%
May 1997	Garden Burger	36	1	97%
January 2001	Domino Sugar	38	0	100%
2004-2018	Coca Cola products	1,959*	41*	98%
November 2010	Flaum Appetizing	165	3	98%
August 2018	CamelBak products	175	5	97%

*Aggregate of annual votes

POLITICAL AND LEGAL RISKS TO JOINING BDS

We believe the Coop faces significant external risks by aligning with the BDS movement. Politically motivated initiatives such as Project 2025 and Project Esther explicitly target organizations engaging in boycotts or divestments against Israel. These efforts promote policies and legislation that could expose the Coop to legal, financial or other harm. Aligning with BDS could bring scrutiny under laws such as the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) or the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), as outlined in Project Esther. Such scrutiny could result in costly legal battles, government investigations and major disruptions to the Coop's operations and stability.

Our concerns are not unfounded. The broader goal of PSFC Members for Palestine is

to connect the Coop to the global BDS movement, as outlined on their website:

*The BDS framework offers us clarity around the particularities of our boycott demands, and **connects us to a global movement** while otherwise enabling us to work autonomously and independently to address our specific context here at the Coop. In committing to BDS, we follow the lead of Palestinian trade unions, which have unanimously declared their support to the movement. If we believe Palestinians are agents in their own liberation and that we should support them, then we should take up their call to endorse BDS.*

We maintain that aligning with the BDS movement exposes the Coop to significant political, legal and financial risks that could jeopardize its operations and stability.

THE GENERAL COORDINATORS' ROLE

Some members have asked why the General Coordinators (GCs) are speaking out on this topic. The answer lies in the GCs' responsibilities, as outlined by the Coop's by-laws, governance and history. As Chief Administrative Officers, GCs are obligated to act in the Coop's best interest. Our duties include overseeing daily operations, financial management, long-term planning, sustainability and risk management. Protecting the Coop by anticipating and mitigating risks is central to our role.

The GCs have been accused of fear-mongering for identifying these risks. We firmly reject this characterization. Assessing risks and providing honest evaluations is not fear-mongering—it is fundamental to our role as Chief Administrative Officers. By openly sharing information about potential challenges, we offer a perspective grounded in the Coop's operations and financial sustainability, ensuring that members have the knowledge to make informed decisions in the Coop's best interest.

Our duty is to keep the Coop strong and resilient, now and for the future.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Since our founding in 1973, Coop members have collectively worked over 4 million shifts. Each shift represents a vote for cooperation and the Coop's unique member-worker model. While political initiatives and boycotts have played a role in our history—accounting for just over 2,500 member votes on boycott related matters—they are a much smaller part of our identity compared to the millions of shifts worked to sustain the Coop's daily operations. It's evident that the Coop's strength lies in the collective work and dedication of its members to our participatory model, not in pursuing measures that lack broad support, and fail to build consensus.

The risks tied to the BDS proposal—whether legal, operational or otherwise—are too significant to ignore. Boycotting Israel could divert attention and resources away from the Coop's day to day work: ensuring smooth operations, financial stability and maintaining the cohesiveness of our diverse membership. Cooperation is at the heart of our Coop, and unity among members is essential to its success.

OUR DUTY IS TO KEEP THE COOP STRONG AND RESILIENT, NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE.

The General Coordinators emphasize that the Coop's longevity depends on our longstanding commitment to collaboration and our shared efforts. When proposals arise that jeopardize the Coop's stability, it is our responsibility to speak out. Our primary duty is to safeguard the Coop's ability to thrive, ensuring it continues to serve as a successful member-worker model for current and future members, and as an inspiration for others seeking to establish new member-labor food cooperatives.

We urge all members to act to protect our Coop:

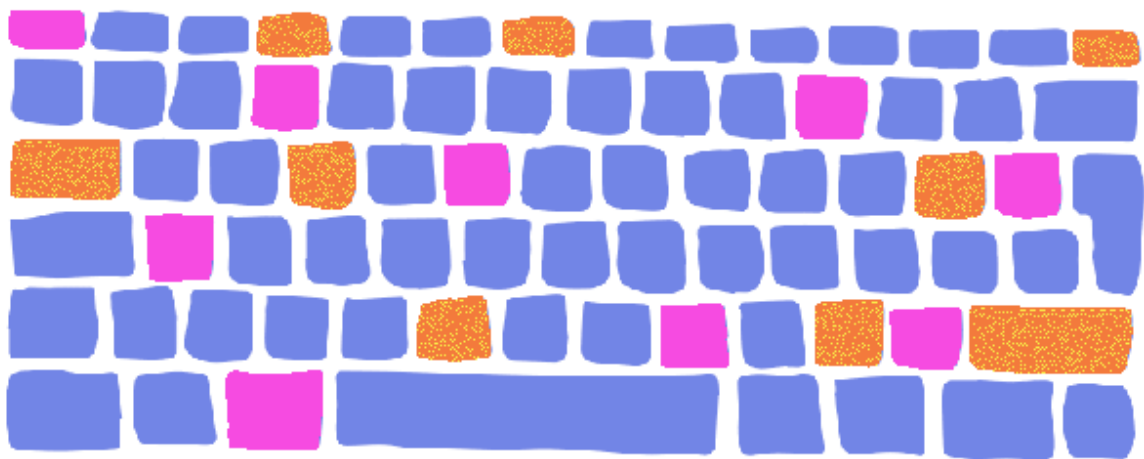
- Attend General Meetings to voice your concerns.
- Vote against lowering the 75% supermajority boycott threshold.
- Engage in respectful dialogue with fellow members about these issues.
- Write to the Gazette to share your perspective.

The General Coordinator Team

FEBRUARY 18, 2025

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



FINDING THE COOP ABROAD

Dear Coop Members:

This is in the “What are the odds?” department.

I am in Southern Mexico—Ciudad of Oaxaca. On a van trip to see and make paper,

and to see the work of artist Francisco Toledo I found myself in a group of 11 other ex-pats. Of the 11 of us seven of us were from Park Slope and five are Coop members! (Another revealed former Coop membership.)

Surprise!

Riva Rosenfield

EVIL ON BOTH SIDES

Greetings:

Having been a member since 1980, I have witnessed many conflicts in the Coop. A short letter regarding boycott of Israeli products. This whole issue is toxic for liberal and left organizations, creating divisions that interfere with other vital concerns. I find evil on both sides of the Hamas-Israel war.

Bill Miller

FEWER THAN TEN ITEMS AT THE COOP ARE ISRAELI

Dear Gazette Editor,

Coop members calling themselves psfc4palestine want us to boycott certain products from Israel, based on the “BDS targeted list” to “materially enforce economic pressure on Israeli companies complicit with apartheid.”

On January 7, 2025 the Coordinators said, “The Coop currently carries less than ten

items from Israel.” GM Joe Holtz gave me this list on January 22, gathered from July 2024 sales data:

Product	Average weekly unit sales
Ecolove (assorted)	14.84
Seed & Mill Tahini	6.17
Soom Tahini	13.0
Al Arz Tahini (assorted)	54.67
Osem Bamba	258.33
Total	347.01

Joe estimates that the Coop sells “over 400,000 units” of product per week.

Joe said, “Occasionally a fresh produce item comes from Israel. None at present. The BDS targeted list includes SodaStream, Sabra, and Israeli produce such as peppers, carrots, and clementines.”

“Sabra is now 100% owned by PepsiCo and is manufactured in the United States,” he said. “They want us to boycott SodaStream. SodaStream is no longer carried by the Coop.”

As of July 11, the Coop carried ZERO items from Israel that BDS is targeting, though sometimes we sell produce they’re focusing on.

The boycott ignores products we always sell! This makes no sense and so I question the entire boycott premise.

Could a boycott mainly represent a position statement?

If the Coop thought that Israel was treating the Palestinian people badly, now and throughout history, rather than joining a flawed boycott, let's think for ourselves and make a declaration, e.g.:

"We unequivocally support the right of Palestinians to live with freedom and dignity and the dismantling of all systems that propagate and empower discriminatory treatment of these people."

Some psfc4palestine supporters propose changing longstanding Coop boycott voting rules just for them, such that a simple "majority vote" activates their boycott. I object.

Andy Feldman

NO TO BDS

Dear *Gazette* Submissions:

I wholly concur with *The Linewaiters' Gazette* article, entitled "Stop Forcing Me To Shop, Vote, And Think Like You." Its closing sentence, "BDS needs the Coop. Not the other way around," is spot on. Our Coop has nothing to gain and everything to lose by linking itself to the BDS movement. I can't help but think of the BDS movement against the Israeli company, Soda Stream, that had been located in the West Bank, and employed hundreds of West Bank Palestinians, and then in the face of intense international pressure, moved its operations inside Israel proper; and with that move, the jobs of many of those West Bank Palestinians were lost. So yes BDS was successful in Soda Stream leaving the West Bank, but did so without care or regard for those Palestinian workers harmed by them. So too at our Coop, adopting hybrid meetings could potentially lead to the Coop adopting BDS. This would likely lead to loss of members (myself—a 23-year member included), loss of revenue, potential legal action,

etc. And then the bad press (and ethics issue) of having our Coop, via BDS, take the side of Hamas, a terrorist group that sanctioned the rape, murder and kidnapping of Israelis and foreign nationals.

I love the Coop, I love Israel (though not its current government), I support a peaceful, independent Palestinian State; but as seen in the Soda Stream example, BDS works against all of these entities.

Let's unify our Coop and get back to the business of being a Coop and not a platform for those who seek to divide us.

Murray Lantner

PS: I love that we have some really tasty shade grown coffee in the Coop, it tastes good and its good for biodiversity.

OUR GENERAL COORDINATORS ARE FALLING SHORT

Coop Members,

I was taken aback to read the GC's January 7 inflammatory, fear-mongering opinion piece "Our Coop At Risk," that opposed both a referendum on boycotting Israeli products and hybrid GMs. Their January 28 follow-up on preserving the 75% supermajority for boycotts simply reiterated those points rather than responding to new concerns.

My own opinion, while in favor of a boycott, is nuanced. It is straightforward to not stock Israeli-made products such as Sabra Hummus, but from working produce receiving and processing, I can see practical challenges in screening out produce deliveries at receiving, as they are variably sourced at the distributors' discretion. Those same challenges arise for any boycott, yet boycotts are in the tradition and history of the

Coop. I think it's worth exploring, planning, discussing and voting, to balance the commitment to preserving human life and rights with the effective functioning of the store.

In both articles, the GCs fall short of the Coop's founding principles of "respecting the opinions, needs, and concerns of every member" and seeking "to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store." Why should a boycott alone require a 75% supermajority unlike all other potentially divisive issues? The only reason I can see is the GC's blind spot on this one topic. However, the most critical democratic advance is hybrid GMs. Boycott-opposed members would also benefit from hybrid GMs.

How is it respectful and participatory to exclude members from GMs given a lack of evening childcare? It is highly unlikely that a referendum at a hybrid GM would lead to a mass exodus of thousands of members as threatened by these articles; what factual basis is there for that assumption? Some might leave if the boycott motion passed. There are many would-be members to join.

In Cooperation,
Eve Goodman

THE GENERAL COORDINATORS ARE NOT THE ENEMY

Dear Coop Members,

I'm writing because there are concerning developments at the Coop that may not be widely known. Unless you attend General Meetings (GM) or carefully follow the *Gazette*, you might be unaware that there is a group of members actively working against the General Coordinators (GC). In fact, I would call it a witch hunt.

These members, two of whom are on the Board, are making false accusations at GMs, sowing seeds of distrust and creating “gotcha” moments to cast the GCs in the worst possible light. Example one: An Agenda Committee member missed the deadline to place a new member recruitment ad in the *Gazette*; believing mistakenly it had been placed, GC Ann Herpel said as much at a GM. Though this was a simple human error, individuals have repeatedly used this negligible incident to publicly shame and embarrass the GCs. They’ve wasted valuable staff time by rehashing this and dragging the GCs through the mud. Example two: At the January GM, one of these Board members made bogus claims about labor violations against the Coop. This is just two of many similar incidents.

Why are they doing this? Maybe it is retribution because the GCs haven’t supported their political agenda. They want you to believe that the GCs are the enemy. In reality the GCs are doing exactly what we hired them to do. They work tirelessly to make sure our Coop continues to thrive, to get us the best food for less money, and to be a good employer. They are succeeding.

These people want you to lose faith in our GCs. Don’t fall for it. Please pay attention. The Board of Directors elections are just around the corner. It’s up to us to protect what we have built together. If you want to know more, just ask me.

Sincerely,
Karen Mancuso
Membership Coordinator

YES, WE’RE POLITICAL... BUT ALSO A COOP WHERE PEOPLE SHOULD CO-OPERATE!

Greetings:

Some Boycott, Divest, Sanction (“BDS”) opponents argue that introducing politics into the Coop is a bad idea, while some advocates defend their activity on the basis that the Coop is political with a history of boycotts. I think this discussion misses the mark.

If organizing a local community, with its own detailed rules & regulations, voting system, taxation (i.e. working requirements!) and support for local farmers, is not political... I don't know what is! So yes, the Coop is a political organization, and that is fine.

If political advocacy is part of the Coop's DNA, it is also a Cooperative run according to participatory principals which place open-minded cooperation at the center of our activity. Those who think all issues should be settled by voting perhaps believe that the Coop is a republic, where majority rules, damned be minority rights. But the Mission Statement is clear: “We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and to respect the opinions, needs and concerns of every member. We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store.” Past boycotts have been narrow in scope/impact, consensual, supported by the General Coordinators and did not personally impact many members.

BDS fails to be in compliance with our mission statement on several accounts: first, the organization is secretive, exclusionary and refuses to engage with opponents—not exactly cooperative behavior. Second, it is not consensual, and fosters tremendous divisiveness. Third, it is discriminatory against one country/group, and does not respect the rights of a substantial group of members; the atmosphere it fosters at the Coop may actually violate Title VII. And finally, it clearly jeopardizes the future of the Coop.

In Cooperation,
Bruno Grandsard

ENOUGH HIDING BEHIND “DEMOCRACY”

Hello,

Amazing quote from a letter-writer in the last issue of the *Gazette*. It was also refreshing:

“If there are Coop members who are against the principles of our Coop’s democracy, and would leave based on a strong majority of membership voting on any proposal, then they should not be Coop members.”

It’s astonishing for those people pushing BDS to hide behind “democracy” when it was clearly stated by the General Coordinators how every initiative the BDS people are pushing are far from “democratic.” It’s nice though to finally see how the pro-BDS members feel about us. They don’t want us there so it was good to hear someone - come out and say it.

We are not going anywhere and we will fight BDS until the end and call you out every step of the way.

Jonathan Tobias

THE LIE BEHIND “HYBRID” VOTING

Hello Coop,

The first time hybrid voting (online and in person) was floated as a feature of Coop governance was some months ago at a General Meeting. Joe Holtz was explaining to a BDS supporter why we can’t just adopt hybrid, that we need to change the by-laws. Their immediate response was, ‘How do we change the by-laws?’

People, people, people. Hybrid voting is not, never was, and never will be, about democracy, working families or the immunocompromised. Those buzzwords were trotted out later to sweeten the Big Lie.

BDS is merely a 'non-violent' arm of Hamas (who claims to represent Palestinians), a very violent militant extremist movement that terrifies and oppresses Palestinians, uses 'slave' to label those of African descent, caricatures African Americans as birthing monkeys, is itching to forcibly displace 6,000,000 Jews of Middle Eastern and European descent (genocide, anyone?) and is part of the Muslim Brotherhood who wants to colonize the world under a Caliphate. BDS itself champions Hamas, including the rape and kidnapping and infanticide of October 7, and wants to kick you out of the Coop if you disagree. BDS is nothing more than slogans spouted by the reckless. From the very start, a vote for hybrid has been a vote to open the door to voting for all of the above and it takes little effort to find it in their own words.

Don't be fooled into thinking this is a debate about democracy. Voting against the hybrid model is voting against a BDS faction who support everything you find repellent, including genocide. Drop everything. Show up to the General Meetings. Keep our Coop a cooperative.

BDS needs the Coop. Not the other way around.

Jesse Rosenfeld

THE GENERAL COORDINATORS' PATRONIZING TONE

Dear Coop Members,

In addition to my many substantive disagreements with the Coordinators' Corner column in the January 7 issue, I was offended by the patronizing tone taken by the GCs,

who wrote: “The broader membership may not fully understand the narrow perspective of this group [PSFC4Palestine] or the risks their actions pose to the Coop.”

First of all, why assume naiveté on the part of the “broader membership?” And second, what does it mean to frame as “narrow” the efforts of Coop members to help call a halt to Israel’s killing spree and the colonial occupation that gave rise to it? How is it “narrow” for Coop members who are themselves Palestinian, and/or Muslim, and/or Arab, to call out our Coop’s complicity with these horrors? How is it “narrow” for anti-Zionist Jewish Coop members to reject the cynical use of identity politics to shield Israel and its US partner in crime? How is it “narrow” for members who lack some obvious personal connection to the issue to nonetheless feel responsible for correcting blatant injustice that’s bankrolled and armed using our tax dollars?

In the January 28 *Gazette* issue, the GCs double down on their patronizing approach, admonishing the membership that the 75% supermajority requirement for approving a boycott must not be repealed, as this would “divide the Coop.” I would like them to explain what is “non-divisive” about allowing a small minority of voting members to block a boycott that is desired by a majority of up to 74%? Is that because, in the GCs’ eyes, those who desire a boycott are “narrow” by definition? Does each “narrow” opinion in favor of a boycott count as a mere fraction of each opinion against? Is that what the GCs are saying? Is this their vision of democratic decision-making?

In cooperation,

Jan Clausen

I LOVE THE COOP BUT...

Fellow Members,

A friend and I were talking about the recent Coordinators’ Corner piece. They asked

me how I felt about it. “Furious,” I replied. “I love the Coop but it keeps wronging me.”

Over and over I have expected our Coop to operate as it is described in its mission and in the documents that detail policies and procedures. I expect even-handed leadership and fairness. But over and over—just like the recent article, and the 2019 union busting antics—I have seen upper management using a heavy-handed, “we know what is best,” top-down style of leadership.

Of late, our General Coordinators have been openly anti-democratic. It seems they only support member participation in governance if it will bring about outcomes they approve of, and that they will stop at nothing to suppress proposals they disagree with. They’ve told us that hybrid meetings could result in a boycott of Israeli products (which they don’t want) so they also are unsupportive of hybrid meetings. If only they could take a broader view: hybrid meetings could create openings for participation for a wide range of Coop members, on myriad topics.

If this is truly a cooperative, then where are the General Coordinators’ efforts to cooperate—instead of dictate? Where is evidence of General Coordinators listening to members who do not agree with them. What I see in their article is open hostility—not cooperation.

Everyone who knows me knows I love the Coop, and cooperative models of engagement. Going into my 20th year of membership, I want more for and from the Coop than the limited perspectives imposed by management.

In Cooperation,
HanaKyle Moranz

SUPPRESSION OF FREE SPEECH

Dear Fellow Members:

I joined the Park Slope Food Coop more than 50 years ago and I was primarily attracted to it not only because it provides the community with good food at good prices, but also because of its willingness to take stands on numerous moral issues.

This latter tradition has prevailed for decades, until recently. The current actions of the Coop General Coordinators are not only at variance with our long history of support for moral issues, they constitute an effort to suppress free speech and must be strongly opposed.

Pressuring Israel, peacefully, to change its policies regarding the Palestinians is a moral imperative that none should shrink from...especially the Coop membership.

While some members may leave the Coop because of the BDS boycott effort, a larger number of people are likely to join.

John McGettrick

CAN THE COOP GOVERNING STRUCTURE EVOLVE?

To the editors,

I was disheartened to read the statement of the General Coordinators ("Our Coop at Risk") in the January 7, 2025 *Gazette* claiming, essentially, that the boycott of Israeli products would lead to the collapse of the Coop. I am not surprised by this support of the Israeli destruction of Palestine. The General Managers have done that before.

In the *Gazette* of March 8, 2012, Joe Holtz wrote that a vote against having a Coop-wide referendum about boycotting Israeli products would be a vote for the Coop. This tactic was and is, to spread fear among Coop members. The GCs now say if we oppose Israel's genocidal attack on the Palestinian people, we will destroy our Coop.

The GCs are our employees. They direct our paid staff. As the Coop has grown to more than 16,000 members, our decision-making process has placed more authority in the hands of the GCs. They have to keep the Coop functioning and they do it very well. But the governing structure of the Coop has not evolved with its burgeoning membership. We are still subject to a few decisions made by fewer than five percent of the members at monthly General Meetings. And the GCs make many other decisions for us.

That's why hybrid General Meetings are a better option.

Many members can't do more here than their work shifts and grocery shopping. They may rarely think about the political aspects of our Coop. But many members know that oppressive regimes and corporations can be challenged by boycotts.

The century-old war on Palestine continues, culminating now in the murder of tens of thousands of Palestinians. Hybrid meetings might bring greater member participation. It might show us that the vast majority of Coop members support a boycott of Israeli products.

Naomi Brussel

GENERAL COORDINATORS OVERREACH

Dear Editors,

I'm deeply concerned about the irresponsible and fear-mongering editorial posted by the Coop's General Coordinators in last month's *Linewaiters' Gazette*. Given their elevated platform and the placement of this letter, it seems that the general coordinators are using a bully pulpit to make it clear that they are in direct opposition to bringing a potential boycott of Israeli goods to a vote, and they are maligning the good faith efforts brought forth by PSFC for Palestine to bring this essential and timely question to the membership. It's disingenuous to use low-income members and Coop staff as a wedge and to use the potential of diminished sales to argue against bringing something to a democratic vote. The truth is that nothing at the Coop requires a 75% vote. Even changing the bylaws only requires a two-thirds majority. The general coordinators are "bringing divisiveness to the coop" and spreading misinformation by posting a letter like this one.

Best,
Nancy Mercado

PSFC AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

To the Editor:

With "hybrid" the PSFC would be in compliance with the second Principle of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA): Coops are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting the policies and making decisions. Coop members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote). PSFC did have democratic governance, in compliance with ICA's second Principle during the Covid--Zoom GM meetings.

ALL members could vote on the agenda items at the monthly GM Zoom meetings.

Mary Buchwald

UMBRAGE AT THE GENERAL COORDINATORS' INCONSISTENCY

Greetings:

I recall attending a General Meeting many years ago where a member spoke up about how the water bladders the coop was stocking were produced by a subsidiary of a corporation that also produced munitions and how there were alternatives available that were not owned by corporations that produced munitions. Maybe he suggested other brands? I then remember a staff thanking the member for the information and saying that they would switch manufacturers. It occurred without comment.

The Coop is a political project. We have values and we stand for things. I wish we stood for more things!! Where our money goes matters.

The Coordinators' Corner pieces of the last two issues proposes that the Coop won't be successful if a boycott of Israeli products passes without near unanimous support—a bar that is not even required to amend our bylaws, the agreement that makes us a cooperative. I think it is fine to *want* that level of agreement but ludicrous to demand it, especially when the vote we are considering is among the impassioned people who are able and choose to attend an in-person general meeting.

Finally, it saddens me that the General Coordinators have felt it necessary to weigh in on hybrid meetings (against) and a boycott of Israeli products (also against) but didn't feel it was necessary to weigh in on the proposal to remove masking at the coop, a policy that would endanger the actual physical health of vulnerable coop members.

Best,

Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones

WORDSPROUTS IS BACK!

February 18, 2025

February 18, 2025

By Sarah Schenck



Please join us to kick off our newly revived WordSprouts program in partnership with the Old Stone House.

WordSprouts is a long-running PSFC author series, where Coop authors share thoughts about their works and process. To get updates about WordSprouts events, check the *Linewriters' Gazette* or sign up for the WordSprouts mailing list at psfcword-sprouts@gmail.com.

Our next upcoming event:

Speaker: Christopher Hastings (PSFC member)

Literary Genre: graphic novelist/comic artist and creator

When: Wednesday, February 26, 2025, 7 p.m.

Where: Old Stone House, 336 3rd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215

Format: In-person only (no recording)

RSVP: bit.ly/february-wordsprouts

This event is a presentation of Christopher's comics work, especially his children's series *InvestiGators: Agents of S.U.I.T.*, and is an ideal event for children and families.

Christopher Hastings is a *New York Times* bestselling author specializing in graphic novels. In addition, he is a freelance writer for *Bon Appétit* and a longtime member of the Park Slope Food Coop. His titles include *Five Nights at Freddy's* graphic novels, *InvestiGators: Agents of S.U.I.T.* (co-authored with John Patrick Green) and *Adventure Time Comics* (issues 36-61). He is also the author of the text accompanying photos in *The Official Adventure Time Cookbook* (Jordan Grosser).

He enacts the voices of the InvestiGators characters Brash, Crackerdile, Security Guard, and Old Scottish Man in the InvestiGators audiobooks. His favorite Coop shift is pricing meat and his favorite Coop deal is Parmesan cheese.

To view examples of Christopher's work, please follow this link. Christopher's audiovisual presentation will be followed by drinks and snacks, courtesy of the Coop. Christopher will be available to sign copies of his books, and he will be bringing a selection of books for sale. Doors will open at 6:45 p.m. Event capacity is 50 people. Children under the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

WordSprouts' Squad Leader is Sarah Schenck and Squad Members are Susan Horwich and Ruthie Nachmany.

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT: GET TO KNOW COOP MAINSTAY KAREN MANCUSO

February 18, 2025



February 18, 2025

By Susannah Jacob

Karen Mancuso has been a steady presence at the Park Slope Food Coop for over two decades. She's often one of the first people who members see when they walk through the door, and though her official title is Membership Coordinator, she has a finger in seemingly every pot of Coop life—from DJing during shopping hours and stepping in as traffic cop when the lines get unruly, to working as the *Gazette* Staff Liaison. And yet, she keeps a strikingly low profile. We convinced Mancuso, 51, who is nearing her 23-year Coop anniversary, to sit down with us and spill some (herbal) tea.

When did you join the Coop?

I joined the Coop in 2001, right after 9/11. I had come to an orientation at the Coop as soon as I moved to Park Slope in 1997, but never got around to joining. I was working in publishing: I was a fact-checker at *Entertainment Weekly*, a freelance writer at *Time Out*, and a copy editor at Barnesandnoble.com. I was laid off when the big tech bubble burst [in 2000]. I was going to move to Seattle because my best friends had moved out there. I had a ticket and everything, I was leaving on September 12, 2001. And then 9/11 happened, and I reassessed. I thought: I want to stay in New York. And then one of the first things I did when I really decided I was going to stay was join the Coop. My first shifts were stocking shelves. And then I was hired as a Membership Coordinator six months later.

What do you recall about your first days as a Coop employee?

At the time I was hired, the office had a certain reputation. It was an intimidating place, where no one wanted to go. Other than the time I came to the orientation, I had never even been upstairs. As an outsider, I wanted to avoid it at all costs.

What was intimidating about it?

The reputation of the people who worked there, who would, of course, later become my colleagues and my friends, was similar to the Coop's reputation for rules and order. But I applied, and I got the job. And so there I was, now one of these "scary" people in the office. I think when I was hired, along with a few other new people, it was the beginning of a shift where the reputation that the office had for being strict started to sort of soften. A group of us helped shift the culture unknowingly. Ann Herpel, who is a General Coordinator now, and Alex Marquez, now in the IT Department. The three of us weren't interested in making people feel bad because they were suspended. We wanted to help them.

"AT THE TIME I WAS HIRED, THE OFFICE HAD A CERTAIN REPUTATION. IT WAS AN INTIMIDATING PLACE, WHERE NO ONE WANTED TO GO."

Tell me more about your different roles over the years.

Membership Coordinators work in administration. We help create and keep systems running. We help coordinate the labor of almost 17,000 members. One of the first things that I started helping with when I was hired was the *Gazette* because there was one general coordinator, Linda Wheeler, who has since retired—she was in charge of the *Gazette* and she wanted some help. I started out doing basic editorial assistant stuff for her. And eventually she retired, and I took over the *Gazette*. Some of my other responsibilities over the years were supervising the Orientation Committee and coordinating the Board of Directors elections. I also have done a lot of in-house writing—manuals, flyers, letters to members. And I've been the de facto Coop proofreader. I also help manage the Membership Office and I'm on the shopping floor several hours a week.

And how has the culture of the *Gazette* changed over the years?

Well, we still have reporters and editors, and we still have photographers and illustra-

tors. But the members work from home now that we moved from print to online. A lot of the art department used to come in on the weekends and work together at the Coop.

How have you seen the internal culture of the Coop change?

Fundamentally, the Coop is the same place it was when it started in 1973 and when I joined the staff in 2002—it's a group of people working together to save money on groceries. But I think the culture has changed a lot. There are a lot of members who disengage by using their phones—they're stocking shelves and they're listening to a podcast or to music. Some checkout workers are staring at their phones. In the membership office, we were certainly busier before we digitized everything, because people were calling on the phone all day, they were coming in with questions. Now you can manage your membership from home online. The office was a lot busier back in the day. And I'd say we probably all talked to each other a lot more. Now, in the downtime, people are staring at their phones. Listen, I have a wife and a kid and they text me a lot so I get it, but I do wish we could all put down our phones more. I still think the Coop is a special place where there is a lot of communication. You can be standing in an aisle shopping, and there could be someone standing right next to you, and you might start talking to them. You may not know them, but you might start talking to them because we're in the Coop together. You're not going to do that in Key Food.

How do you personally use the Coop as a grocery store?

Right now I work four days a week instead of five, because I have a toddler and I share childcare responsibilities, but I shop every day that I'm here. We have a lot of dietary preferences in my house. Whereas I eat everything, my wife doesn't eat meat or dairy, and then I have a soon to be four-year-old who only eats pasta and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Some of the things that I've been buying forever are probably some of the most popular things we sell, like Lacinato kale and dried mangoes. I do love our cosmetics department. Right now, I'm really into the Ursa Major products.

Do you consider yourself a Coop lifer?

I'm 51, and I started working here when I was in my late twenties. I think there's probably a good chance that I'm going to retire here. If you're a lifer, you feel really protective of the Coop. I really want it to succeed. I want it to continue. I want my son to grow up shopping here. I wish that maybe we could work on a second location. Unfortunately, that got squashed at a General Meeting, but I hope that in the next couple of years, that conversation could be picked up again, because there's no reason why our model can't be in other places.

“YOU CAN BE STANDING IN AN AISLE SHOPPING, AND THERE COULD BE SOMEONE STANDING RIGHT NEXT TO YOU, AND YOU MIGHT START TALKING TO THEM. YOU MAY NOT KNOW THEM, BUT YOU MIGHT START TALKING TO THEM BECAUSE WE'RE IN THE COOP TOGETHER. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DO THAT IN KEY FOOD.”

Where did you grow up and how did your upbringing inform your commitment to the Coop?

I grew up in suburban New Jersey. My parents were very conventional, and I think I rebelled against that. I always wanted to move to New York. My father grew up in Queens and my great grandfather owned a bookstore for decades in Murray Hill. New York City is in my blood. Growing up, my family shopped at ShopRite, but I had a good friend whose parents shopped at the local health food store, and I would go in there sometimes with them. I remember seeing a bar of Tiger's Milk, one of those old protein bars, and Tom's of Maine toothpaste, and being like, what is this cool stuff? And just wanting it, even at nine-years-old.

What creative work do you do outside the Coop?

The one thing that few people probably know about me is that I was doing stand-up

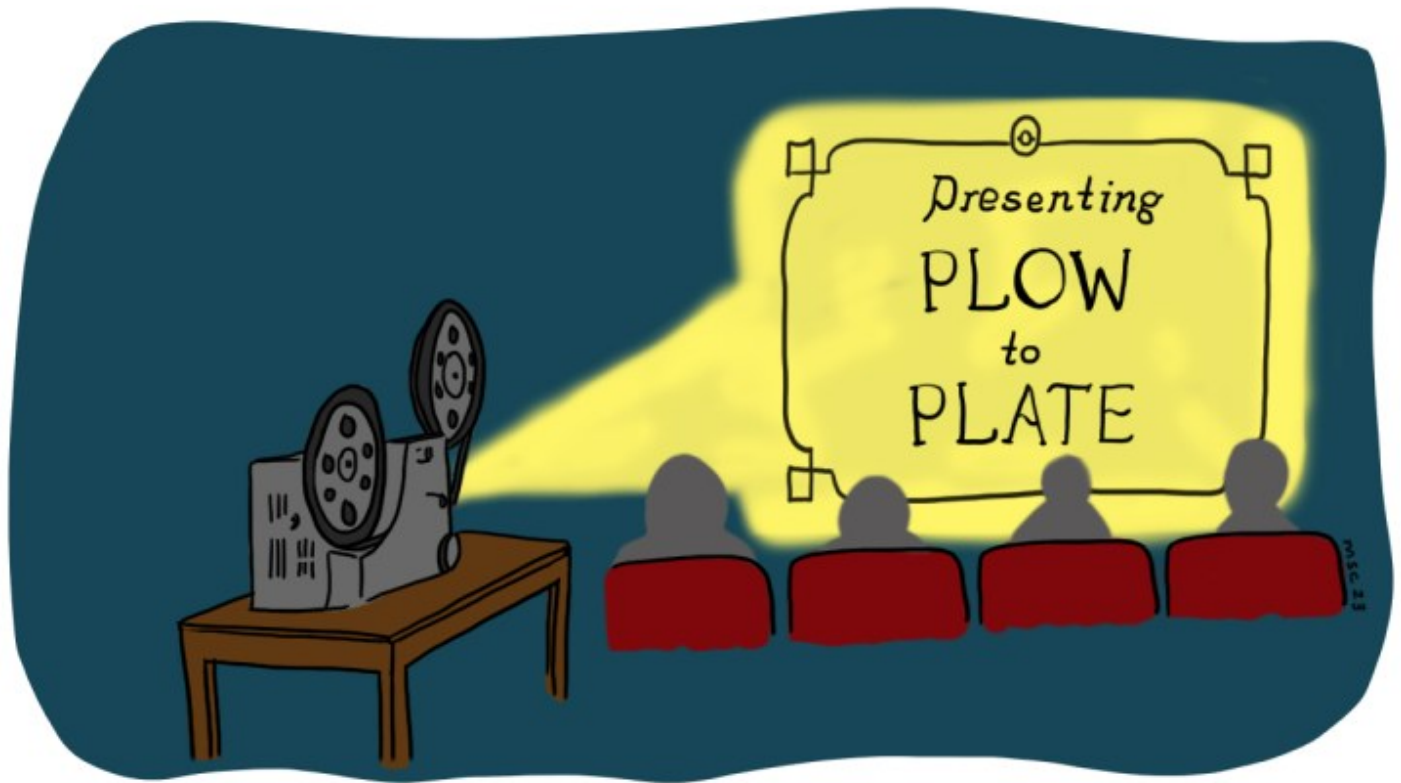
comedy for a while. I did it for a few years, sort of as a challenge from a good friend of mine. I had been writing satire for the *Gazette's* April Fool's issues and then I just started writing stand up from there. I took a class at Carolines, which is a way a lot of people got started. And then I was able to do a few nights there, and then some bars and restaurants, and a queer comedy festival. When Covid hit, that shut everything down, and then I ended up having a kid right after. Now that I'm a mom I have not really had the time or energy to return to it. But I've always been a writer.

This interview has been condensed and edited.

Susannah Jacob is a native Texan and PhD student of US history. She takes pride in her proficient operation of the slotted, plastic bag-taper machine in the Coop's bulk department.

PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: RED GOLD: THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE TOMATO INDUSTRY

February 18, 2025



February 18, 2025

By Adam Rabiner

Like many *Plow to Plate* titles, *Red Gold* purports to reveal some dire hidden secrets. Yet, unlike General Motors CEO Roger Smith who famously evaded Michael Moore in *Roger & Me*, here tomato traders, suppliers and middlemen freely discuss the industry, tomato titans boast of their accomplishments and factory managers are all too eager—even proud—to show off their facilities to French film-maker Jean-Baptiste Malet.

Though Malet's thorough examination of the industry is interesting, and reveals some unsavory practices, he does not find a smoking gun. What he does highlight, if not so much reveal, is that the tomato industry operates under the inexorable laws of globalized capitalism which means, of course, that some people get massively rich, others are found expendable and lose their livelihoods, a great many are exploited in the fields, and that consumers should follow that wise dictum, "caveat emptor."

The central paradox that drives Malet's years-long investigation was why a Chinese company was investing in French tomatoes. After all, tomatoes are not a typical part of the Chinese diet. The answer appears to be a combination of economic opportunism, industrial policy and control of the Uyghur people and the Autonomous Region Xinjiang. The area attracts laborers from China's poorest regions where a husband-and-wife team may earn 25 to 50 Euros a day picking and bagging tomatoes, depending on the field's yield. Child labor is also not uncommon.

On the other end of the spectrum Liu Yi, or General Yu, has been appointed by Xi Jinping, to turn China into a global leader in production of tomato concentrate, or red gold, which, like crude oil, can be further refined into tomato sauce, paste, ketchup and other branded products. Beginning in the early 2000s, China has emerged to join the U.S. and Italy as one of the big three producers. How it got there is another one of Malet's dirty little secrets. Essentially China struck a deal with Italy which agreed to supply machinery, technology and training in exchange for raw exports for a period of five years. Both countries were enriched by this bartering agreement and neither country is blameless in hoodwinking unsuspecting consumers. Italian suppliers attempt to disguise the fact that their raw material comes from China with brand-names like Gino's and green, red and white can labels resembling the Italian flag. And the Chinese eventually create their own brand, Gina's, with a similar label to compete head-to-head selling "Italian Style" sauce.

Malet films one Chinese manufacturer using soybean fiber as a thickener. The floor manager claims the government allows additions of the substance to 20 percent, though Malet cites information that in some cases the additives can be as high as 55 percent. This is done not simply to thicken the sauce, but to lower the costs and increase the profits. The importers and distributors are in on the game, but the end consumer is fooled. This is a far cry from the 1800s practices of diluting milk with water, dyeing it, spiking it with formaldehyde to preserve it or adding pureed calf brains to make it creamier. But it is still dastardly.

There is one revelation in the film worth noting. Value investor Warren Buffet is fre-

quently portrayed as humble because he lives in a modest home bought decades ago and does not collect luxury cars. But he did not become one of the world's richest men by accident. In 2013 he acquired Heinz and a year later shut down a plant in Leamington, Ontario that employed about 1,000 of the City's 28,000 citizens and had been operating for four generations since 1909. He subsequently closed five plants and cut 7,400 jobs, a quarter of the company's workforce.

By now, few people believe that unbridled capitalism is a good thing. While we may be impressed by highly efficient automated factories, we rightly are wary of robots, computers and AI potentially taking away our jobs and livelihoods. It is good to press pause and consider the negative effects of economic globalization. But the film's main takeaways are a bit more prosaic: Carefully read your labels and buy fair trade if you can.

Red Gold Tuesday, March 11, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link.

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.