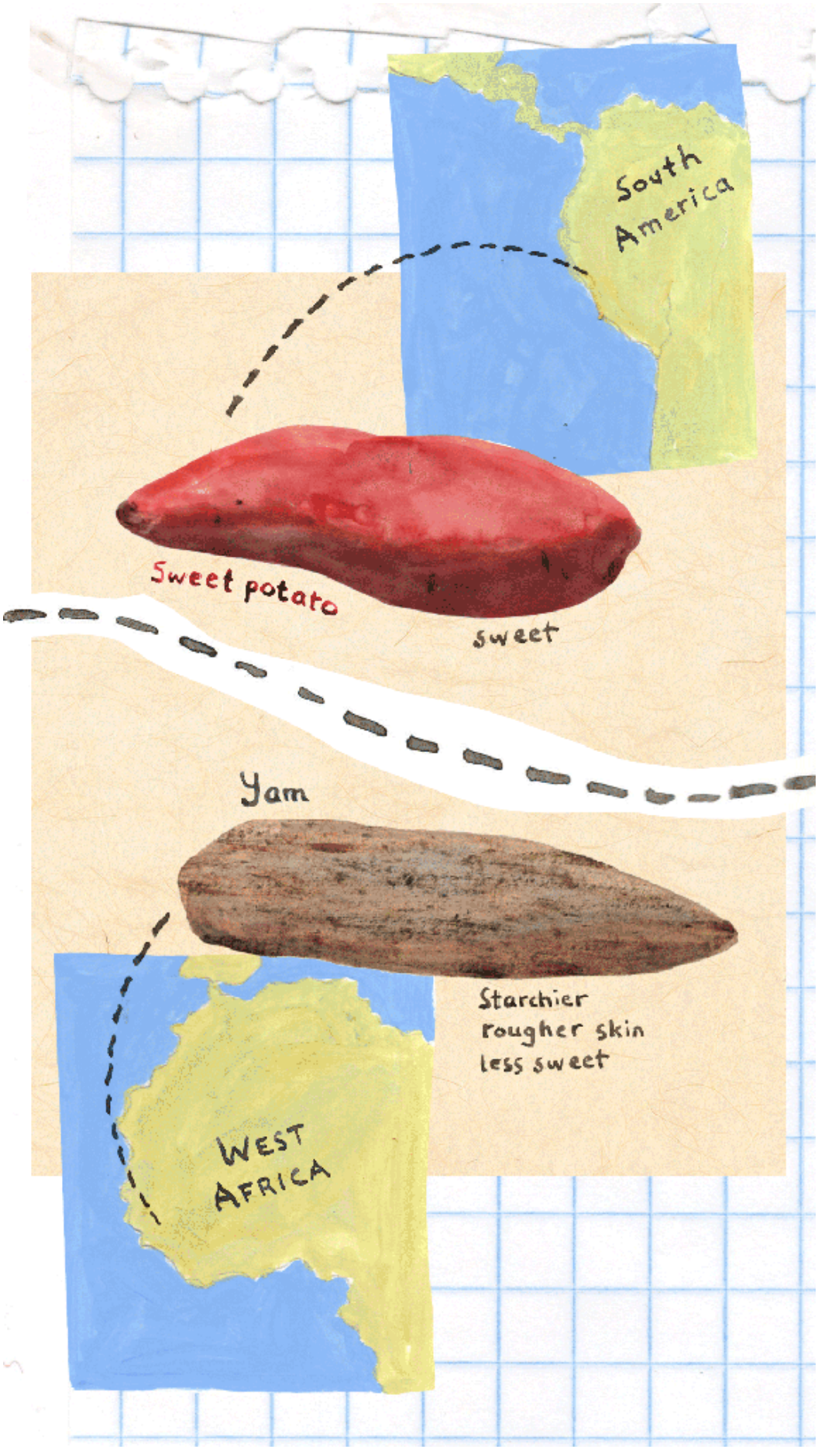
CROSSWORD: STOP

December 9, 2025



WANT TO TASTE BLACK HISTORY THIS YEAR? LOOK FOR SWEET POTATOES IN THE PRODUCE AISLE

December 9, 2025


South America
Sweet potato
sweet
Yam
Starchier
rougher skin
less sweet
WEST AFRICA

November 18, 2025

By Femi Redwood

When I walk into the Coop's produce aisle and see boxes of sweet potatoes, I see more than a root. I see history. The sweet potato's journey began in South America, became a survival food for enslaved Africans in North America and later found a lasting place in Black culture. And while pumpkin pies may define the holiday table for some Americans, sweet potato pies are at the heart of celebrations for many Black families.

"Sweet potatoes are almost the way to determine whether it's a Black Thanksgiving or not a Black Thanksgiving," says Tonya Hopkins, a Brooklyn-based food and drink historian, spirit strategist and Coop member.

Yams and sweet potatoes are often used interchangeably, but they're different. Yams are native to West Africa whereas sweet potatoes originated in Peru. When colonizers arrived in the Americas, they began exporting sweet potatoes to Europe and Africa.

> AS TIME WENT ON, ENSLAVED COOKS PERFECTED SWEET POTATOES INTO FORMAL DISHES FOR WHITE FAMILIES. ENSLAVED FAMILIES ALSO ATE SWEET POTATOES, BUT AS A NUTRITIOUS NECESSITY.

English royalty loved them, including Henry VIII, who often ate sweet potato tarts. Sixteenth-century Jesuit writings suggest they believed sweet potatoes were aphrodisiacs, which may explain their popularity.

In West Africa, yams were part of a regular diet and were used in soups and stews. Hopkins says Europeans assumed Africans would eat sweet potatoes because they resembled yams, but that wasn't the case. Locals didn't like the taste and only ate the

green, leafy part. Africans who were shackled on boats or enslaved on plantations had no choice. “They were given the fleshy, starchy potato part as this food ration,” Hopkins says.

In America, wealthy colonialists often followed English trends, so they, too, requested sweet potato dishes. As time went on, enslaved cooks perfected sweet potatoes into formal dishes for white families. Enslaved families also ate sweet potatoes, but as a nutritious necessity. “Enslaved people often grew sweet potatoes in their own garden plots,” Hopkins said. They lacked the tools in their own kitchens to make a dessert, but they were able to roast or boil a whole potato over a fire.

BLACK FAMILIES CONTINUED TO TAKE CULTURAL OWNERSHIP OVER SWEET POTATOES AS MANY MIGRATED NORTH. THIS CONTRIBUTED TO SWEET POTATO PIES, ESPECIALLY DURING HOLIDAYS, BECOMING A DISTINCTLY BLACK AMERICAN FOOD.

After emancipation, Black families gained greater access to ingredients like butter and sugar and had more time to cook in their own kitchens. While pumpkins were staples in the North, sweet potatoes remained a staple in the South due to their ease of growth. In fact, scientist and inventor George Washington Carver persuaded Southern farmers to plant sweet potatoes to help them transition away from their reliance on cotton. He even published a sweet potato guide for farmers and cooks.

Hopkins says Black families continued to take cultural ownership over sweet potatoes as many migrated North. This contributed to sweet potato pies, especially during holidays, becoming a distinctly Black American food.

“Sweet potatoes are probably the most recognizable food source in the South during the fall in the Black family beside collard greens,” says Howard Conyers, a pitmaster, family farmer and moonshiner in Manning, South Carolina.

While many of us are disconnected from how our food is farmed, Conyers says he wishes consumers understood how physically demanding it is to farm sweet potatoes. He remembers collecting sweet potatoes as a child after they were harvested with a mule plow pulled by a tractor.

“We used to pick up like a quarter acre to an acre by hand in buckets,” Conyers says. Sweet potatoes sold in stores today likely come from commercial harvesters, he says, but those are still physically demanding jobs for workers.

Conyers, who studied agricultural engineering at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University before earning an engineering doctorate from Duke University, grows the same sweet potato seed his ancestors did. “It’s an old seed that’s probably been passed down almost a hundred years,” he says. He continues: “Maybe I’m tasting the sweet potato pie that my grandmother made or my great-grandmother made going back as far into slavery,” he says. He notes it likely tastes different from anything you’ve ever tasted because it’s made from heirloom sweet potatoes.

> MOONSHINE, LIKE SWEET POTATOES, IS PART OF BLACK HISTORY, THOUGH BLACK EXPERTISE IN THE INDUSTRY IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED.

But while there is reverence for the past, many, like Conyers, are experimenting with sweet potatoes in new ways. Hopkins says they are a “great muse” for experimenting with recipes. Conyers has replaced carrots with grated sweet potatoes in his mother’s carrot cake recipe and uses sweet potatoes to make moonshine, another staple of Black history and African tradition.

In 2020, he and his father opened Backyard Distillery, one of the few Black-owned moonshine makers. Moonshine, like sweet potatoes, is part of Black history, though Black expertise in the industry is often overlooked.

Hopkins says the roots of moonshine-making can be traced back to African traditions, and in America, Black folks in the South were among its key makers. It was used for both medicinal and recreational purposes. Hopkins adds that moonshine was also a path to economic freedom for many, including her own family. Her grandmother ran a speakeasy in Camden, New Jersey, during Prohibition and afterwards.

For Conyers, moonshine isn't just a business; it's a continuation of Black creativity and survival. "It should be the spirit of Black people in America. We talk about bourbon and this other stuff, but moonshine is just as important to Black America," Conyers says.

Conyers hopes to expand how he shares these innovation stories and he's optimistic about starting tours next year of his family farm and distillery. "I hope people will come down and see what we're doing at our integrated farm distillery," he says. "So, you can see how we're trying to use the whole ecosystem to tell the whole story of the South through Black people's eyes," he continues.

> "SWEET POTATOES WERE HARDY ENOUGH TO SURVIVE THE MIDDLE PASSAGE, PRACTICAL ENOUGH FOR ENSLAVED PEOPLE'S GARDENS AND VERSATILE ENOUGH TO STRETCH ACROSS BOTH PLANTATION KITCHENS AND FREEDOM KITCHENS," - SAID TONYA HOPKINS.

Based on what Hopkins shared, whether sweet potatoes are used in moonshine, pie, cake or any other dish, their botanical persistence and durability mirror the resilience of Black people. "It stores well through hardship and regenerates year after year," said Hopkins. "It was hardy enough to survive the Middle Passage, practical enough for enslaved people's gardens and versatile enough to stretch across both plantation kitchens and freedom kitchens. Its very durability and ability to reinvent itself made it much more than a survival crop."

Want to taste Black history? Try one of these recipes this Thanksgiving. We suggest using Beauregard or Jewel sweet potatoes for the best flavor. You can also use Garnet sweet potatoes, but your pie will be slightly less sweet. At the time of publication, all three of those varieties are available at the Coop. The Coop also carries Japanese, purple majesty and purple sweet potatoes, but those are not recommended because they won't give you the sweet, creamy filling and color of traditional sweet potato pie.

CLASSIC SWEET POTATO RECIPE

- 2 pounds of sweet potatoes
- 4 ounces unsalted butter, softened
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup packed brown sugar
- 1 9-inch pie crust

Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Grease a baking sheet with your preferred oil or spray it with non-stick spray.
- Wash and dry the sweet potatoes. Pierce them several times with a fork, then place them on the baking sheet. Bake for 45 minutes or until soft.
- Remove the sweet potatoes and lower the oven temperature to 350 degrees.
- Once the sweet potatoes cool, peel and throw away their skin.
- Grease the pie pan with your preferred oil or spray it with nonstick cooking spray. Add the pie crust.
- Add the peeled potatoes to a large mixing bowl and blend. Add the softened butter and continue to blend. Add the eggs and continue to blend. Add both sugars and all the seasonings, then continue blending. Lastly, add the vanilla and evaporated milk and continue blending.
- Pour the filling into the pie crust. Bake at 350 degrees for 50 to 60 minutes, or until

the top is brown. You can also insert a toothpick or knife in the middle of the pie to check if it comes out clean.
- If your pie is done, remove it from the oven and let it cool for at least 30 minutes.

HOWARD CONYERS'S SWEET POTATO CAKE, MODIFIED FROM HIS MOM HALLIE'S CARROT CAKE RECIPE

- 1 ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 eggs well beaten
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup pecan
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tsp. cinnamon
- 2 tsp baking soda
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 3 cups grated sweet potatoes (peeled)
- 1 tsp nutmeg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 9-inch cake pans

Instructions for the cake

- Mix the oil and sugar, and beat well. Add eggs.
- Sift all dry ingredients, particularly the flour, two to three times. Add nuts and mix with the sugar mixture.
- Lastly, add grated sweet potatoes a small amount at a time.
- Bake in the pans at 325 degrees for 30 minutes.

Instructions for the cream cheese frosting

- ½ to 1 stick of margarine or butter
- 8 oz of cream cheese
- 1 box powdered sugar
- 2 teaspoons of vanilla extract

Mix all ingredients, beat well. Spread between layers and on the top.

If you want to support Hopkins' work and learn more about the intersection of food, drinks and history, you can join her Paetron platform.

To learn more about Conyers and his work and arrange a tour during your next southern visit, check out his website.

Femi Redwood is a Murrow Award-winning journalist. For over a decade, she has worked in prestigious newsrooms including VICE News and CBS Newspath, holding a range of roles from on-air correspondent to department manager. She lives in Crown Heights with her wife, Julie, and their cat, Leo.

HELPING COMMUNITIES BEYOND THE COOP'S WALLS

December 9, 2025



November 18, 2025

By Emmett Lindner

For decades, Lewanika Senghor worked at the Coop in different roles, pitching in with membership coordination, tech support and aiding members. But he and his family were also working tirelessly to help the communities beyond the Coop's walls.

Mr. Senghor, his wife, their daughter and others run the Village House Pantry, which distributes food donations from restaurants, bakeries—and, yes, the Coop—to people in need. They stock fridges around the city for people who need to focus on rent or childcare and can then think less about where to get a meal.

The work can be grueling: Mr. Senghor and his family finance the program but are hoping for funding to strengthen their efforts. At times, they pull 17-hour days, driving to Trader Joe's, Whole Foods, Eataly, movie sets and restaurants to pick up left-

over food and stock fridges so that New York residents dealing with disabilities, lapses in employment or other challenges can have a stocked kitchen.

Mr. Senghor and his family make sure that the food is quality and the fridges are clean and neatly organized. Residents who go to the Pantry's main location, on Midwood and Rogers, come so often that the food is often gone within the hour it's set out.

In an interview, Mr. Senghor discussed how he developed his passion for helping his neighbors, what goes into the wide network of food distribution and how he hopes to make an impact. This interview has been edited and condensed.

> "I ALWAYS WONDERED: WHY ARE THINGS THE WAY THEY ARE? IF WE HAVE MORE VACANT APARTMENTS, WHY IS ANYBODY HOMELESS? AND IF WE HAD MORE FOOD IN ONE STATE, WHY WAS THERE ANYBODY HUNGRY IN THE WORLD?"

How did all this start for you?

As we speak, I'm recalling all sorts of things—watching civil rights on television with Dr. King, and just wondering why the world wasn't the way it could have been.

I remember in the '70s and '80s finding out that the state of Wisconsin alone produced enough food to feed the world four times over, and New York City in the '70s and '80s had more vacant apartments and homes than it had homeless people.

I always wondered: Why are things the way they are? If we have more vacant apartments, why is anybody homeless? And if we had more food in one state in a big country, why was there anybody hungry in the world? To me, those are contradictions that don't make any sense.

You realize that if there was a desire and a will to do it, nobody should be hungry, nobody should be homeless.

What happened after that realization?

You start to look at the inequities or the things that were happening in this country. You juxtapose it against history: The great potato famine, when food was being exported out of Ireland to serve the British Empire and Americas, but people are starving inside of the country that the food is being taken from. That's happening all over the world.



At the Brooklyn Borough Hall greenmarket on Saturday, November 1.



At the Brooklyn Borough Hall greenmarket on Saturday, November 1.
Back in the ’80s, I was very involved in the student movement and community movements. You figure, if you input yourself, you could actually help to make change, and you put yourself out there hoping that your input would help.

You have a sense that an individual can make an impact.

Yes. Back then we thought that our involvement would help make changes, and yes, I still think that people can make changes. I think that is definitely shown in the Coop.

You can have people come together and work for food, keep the overhead low, because using member labor is great. That’s something that can happen throughout the country. And at times it did.

What do you focus on now?

Most of my time is spent doing food rescue and reallocation with my family, but we’ve been doing that for quite some time. Since COVID, it took on a whole different thing. For a while, we were dealing with about 100 families. In the past, we’ve taken food to people who were finding themselves going through difficult time periods. It expanded, and we moved into picking up food and taking it to community fridges.



The Senghors’ car trunk full of vegetables.

The fridges are all over. We have some people in Seattle and down in Baltimore. We have other friends that are involved in it as well. They call them to help start up fridges in different areas. It’s all Brooklyn, Manhattan and some places in Queens and the Bronx. There are fridges that are open to the public for people to come and take food.

We can put food in the fridge now and sometimes within five minutes, but usually within half an hour, a full fridge full of food is gone.

> “A LOT OF THIS HAS BEEN DONE ON OUR OWN DIME—PAYING THE TOLLS, THE GAS, THE REPAIRS TO THE VEHICLE THAT WASN’T INTENDED FOR THIS.”

How much of your time was that taking?

We were doing this probably about 17 hours a day. We were running around picking up food, because earlier on in the pandemic, we were getting calls for businesses that either their freezers were failing, their refrigeration was failing, or they were going out of business.

We were picking up a lot of food from places that knew about people who were rescuing food and reallocating it. And we would be filling the fridges up. We'd be picking up at 11 at night, filling the fridges up to 2 in the morning.

What does your work look like now?

We serve between 800 and 1,200 people a week. Combined, probably closer to 2,000 or more. We do a distribution every Thursday on the street, and about six to eight other groups pick up from us. They also do their distributions.

Sometimes we have people who take food to Prospect Park, and they'll give it out to the homeless there. And sometimes we'll have people who make the food, because we try to build out the organization as opposed to us doing everything ourselves.

What kinds of food do you distribute?

It varies from day to day. At one time we were getting so many bananas, and bananas are the type of fruit that you can't put in the fridge. But we've gotten all sorts of things—you name it. We've gotten fresh fruit and vegetables, we've gotten eggs, we've gotten milk, canned goods as well as frozen. We've got ice creams and cakes.



Community Fridge located at Union St. and Bond St. in Brooklyn.


¡COMIDA GRATIS!
Community
Fridge works
to connect,
empower
& engage the
LOVE
through
and
access

Stocking the community fridge.
We also do clothing. My wife gives out winter coats and shoes and gloves and hats and scarves. We've done medical supplies, like walkers and wheelchairs. We've been doing these types of things for years. This is just another phase of what we've been doing.

What's the reaction from the community?

The overall response has been: "Thank you." There are people who are working who still are not making enough to live comfortably. Some people have been able to utilize us to allow them to save so they can actually put a down payment on their home. Some people have been going through things where they didn't have clothes for their children or food for their children, and it helped them keep things going.

Sometimes people have been released from work and they find that this has been beneficial. Some people are living in their cars. Some people have health problems, cancers and other issues, and they find that being able to come and pick up food has been helpful.

What do you see as the next step for this work?

We're looking to get funding. A lot of this has been done on our own dime—paying the tolls, the gas, the repairs to the vehicle that wasn't intended for this. We want to expand, get a vehicle specifically for this, get a place where we can continue doing distribution even during the harshest weather.

> "I THINK THERE ARE BASIC LIFE REQUIREMENTS THAT PEOPLE NEED IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING AS A FAMILY IS WORKING TOWARD BUILDING COMMUNITY."

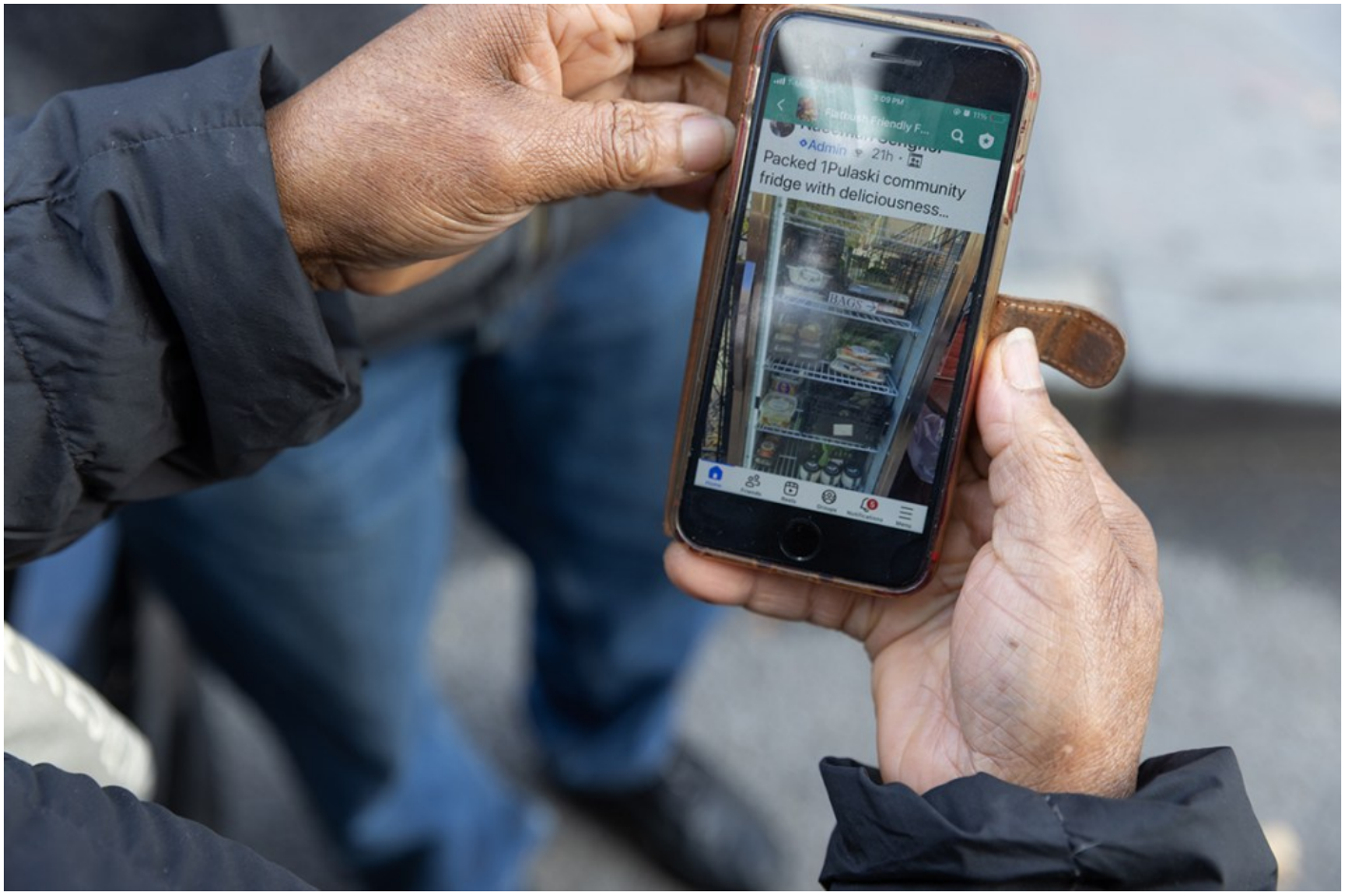
Right now we're doing distribution from the street, other than what we do from the home. We'd like some place where we can have people actually come through. We have visions where we could get food and have people who can prepare it, maybe a $5 meal or $10 meal, something low-cost.

We've had chefs bring food to give out. I have the vision that we can get a storefront and do something like that.

Have you discussed the SNAP cancellation with anyone who uses the fridges?

People who use the fridges aren't as concerned. What I find is people who have not been using the fridges have been contacting us. How do we set up a fridge? How do we get it stocked? I think people who use the fridges and who come to the distribution already understand that there are some resources out there. The question is, how do people change over from being used to going to a market and buying this stuff to now going to the various pantries that are out there?

One of the things that people would often say to us when we offer them food is, "I'm going to leave it for the people who are more in need," and now, when they find themselves being those people, many times people have a social consciousness as to whether or not it's right for them to take food, or whether or not it seems appropriate, or whether or not they want to be seen doing this.



Dropoffs are posted to social media to let neighbors know.

When I hear people say that, I often tell them, we don't necessarily provide food for the people who are "in need." We provide food for people who eat, because we find that a lot of people may be just a few dollars above what they consider the cut off level for receiving benefits, and they find themselves struggling to just make it, or they may be a little behind. Something like this will throw a person, and they find that unless they're far ahead, they can quickly be behind.

The fridges already run out of food quickly—do you expect that to increase?

Yes, and this is a challenge for people who do this type of work. Sometimes if we're there, people take a small amount, and they'll let the next people get a small amount. But we've gone to places where maybe 10 or 20 mangoes are in the fridge, and you'll have somebody who will come and take 15 of them. When we're there, we don't allow that, but it's not really something you want to do, policing how people receive food. We have found it necessary because some people are not necessarily con-

siderate of other people, but at the same time you have to weigh it — this person came first, this person came second. This person is an older person. It varies.

The government has emergency funds to deal with these things. Hopefully, the bill that's in Congress now will pass to provide people more services. But there's more than enough food to feed everybody. It's just that there has to be a mandate and an understanding that there is enough food, and it has to be made available.

What's the larger goal for you in all of this?

I think there are basic life requirements that people need in order to survive. What we've been doing as a family is working toward building community. Community, I think, is what we need. We have neighborhoods, but we have very few communities.

The difference is that in a neighborhood, you'll see people you recognize, but you don't have any real common supportive mechanism in place. I think that's what we need to build, not just here but all over the world.

That's why we call it the Village House Pantry. We have gatherings with friends and family to build what I call personal communities.

We need to build communities that are thinking of our common goals and objectives in which everybody can benefit. If we can do that—not just here, but every-where—we're in a better position. We achieve more.

Emmett Lindner works on the breaking and trending news desk at The New York Times*.*

A NEW SEASON OF THE COOP CONCERT SERIES SPOTLIGHTS MEMBER TALENT

December 9, 2025



November 18, 2025

By Leila Darabi

Photo story by Caroline Mardok

On a mild September evening in Park Slope, about 30 Coop members and neighbors filled ShapeShifter Lab, the music and arts space located diagonally across from the Coop. Inside, the lights were warm, the bar busy and the crowd ready for the first night of the new season of the Coop Concert Series.

This monthly series brings together member musicians and their friends to perform in a professional setting. Nearly everyone involved invoked the name of Bev Grant, who helped run an earlier Coop concert series at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture. It ran for more than 15 years, from the early 2000s until it paused in 2020. Grant's work in those years inspired many who are now reviving the idea with fresh energy and a new venue.

Organizer Alexis Cuadrado, a bassist and composer, described the reboot as both homage and expansion. "We wanted to revamp it in a bit of a different way than what it had been before and open it to a more diverse group of performers and more, you know, at all levels—music, origin, style—so like diversity with a capital D," he said.

> "THE COOP IS FULL OF MUSICIANS," ORGANIZER ALEXIS CUADRADO SAID. "WHY NOT TURN THAT INTO A REAL COMMUNITY PLATFORM?"

A MUSICAL COLLABORATION

The concerts take place at ShapeShifter Lab, founded by Coop members Fortuna Sung and Matthew Garrison. "It's special because it's really a partnership between the Coop and ShapeShifter," Sung said. "We provide the space, the sound, the bar; they bring the music and community. It's very organic."

Sung and Garrison lead operations and general coordination of the events, in addition to their roles at ShapeShifter Lab on performance days (at the September event, Sung could be found behind the bar). Singer-songwriter Annie Keating handles social media, Ave Carrillo serves as series producer, and Cuadrado and violinist Ludovica Burtone curate the series.

Each concert includes four short sets, about 20 minutes each, and the mix is wide-ranging: jazz, folk, cabaret, world music and experimental performances. Performers

can apply online and receive Coop work slot credit for playing. “The Coop is full of musicians,” Cuadrado said. “Why not turn that into a real community platform?”



The ShapeShifter Lab.



Food coop concert, September 2025.



Brad Shepik Trio Peace Light—Brad Shepik (guitar), Chris Tordini (bass), Allan Mednard (drums).

A NEW HOME ACROSS THE STREET

Keating remembers the earlier concerts vividly. “I used to play the series back when it was a partnership with the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture,” she said. “We had this, like, crappy little, not even a portable PA. It was basically one mixer thing and like two mics… Now it’s at a proper venue with an amazing sound and light system.”

Keating now helps run the revived version, promoting each event on social media. “We’ve had some really good numbers and exposure on Instagram,” Keating said. “But I think the majority of people at the Food Coop don’t know that we have a concert series. That’s the next step: getting the word out. It’s such a great opportunity, it’s across the street from the Coop and the sound here is amazing.”

> “WE HAVE TO NURTURE THE MUSIC SCENE AND PROTECT IT. SO, IT’S NICE THAT THE COOP IS INVOLVED IN THAT AND SEES IT AS VALUABLE,” SAID MUSICIAN BRAD SHEPIK.

FIRST NIGHT BACK

The September concert opened with the Brad Shepik Trio, featuring Shepik on guitar, Chris Tordini on bass and Allan Mednard on drums. Their set included a preview of Shepik’s recent album, *Human Activity: Dream of the Possible,* a ten-movement meditation on climate change.

“I think it’s great that this series is happening,” Shepik said afterward. “We need more live music, period. The number of venues that we’ve seen come and go over the last 30 years,” he reminisced. Noting that the music scene depends on community support, he added that “we have to nurture it and protect it. So, it’s nice that the Coop is involved in that and sees it as valuable.”

Other acts that evening included Brittain Ashford; the Department of Jazz and Human Services, whose set celebrated the first birthday of saxophonist Andrew Brin-Spicer’s baby; and Dolly Trolly closing the night with playful rock harmonies and inventive guitar work from Tara L. Mallon, whose bandmates shared that she became fascinated with unique tuning during the pandemic.

Photographer Caroline Mardok, Shepik’s wife, documented the night, weaving

through the small crowd that mixed longtime Coop members and the friends and families of the performers. The atmosphere felt friendly and informal—a family affair in every sense.



Brittain Ashford (acoustic guitar), Jay Chakravorty (piano, electric guitar).



Dolly Trolly—Tara L. Mallon (guitar), Gerard Kouwenhoven (guitar), Walter Boppert (bass), Lyla Vander (drums).



Chris Tordini (bass) and his daughter after the concert.

THE TEAM MAKING IT HAPPEN

Bringing the series to life each month depends on a small crew of professionals offering their time and talent to the Coop community. Sung and Garrison handle venue operations; Cuadrado curates performers; Keating manages social media and other promotion. “It’s like a small production every month,” Sung said. “We’re artists, too, so we know what performers need to feel comfortable.”

She and the team continue to push for inclusivity. “We really want to expand our di-

versity of the performers," Sung said. "We don't see a lot of Black musicians or performers. So this is one of the things we want to overcome and let people know: Hey, don't think it's just one genre. It's not just jazz. We want other things."

> "PLAYING MUSIC WITH OTHERS IS ONE OF THE MOST HUMAN THINGS THERE IS," SAID SHEPIK. "IT REMINDS YOU THAT YOU'RE PART OF SOMETHING LARGER THAN YOURSELF. THAT'S WHAT THE COOP IS ABOUT, TOO: COMMUNITY, COOPERATION, CONNECTION."

Cuadrado emphasized that goal, too. "The Coop is full of creative people," he said. "This is about celebrating that diversity—of music, of culture, of background. It's what makes the community so rich."



Matt Garrison, owner of Shapeshifter lab.



Audience members enjoying the show.



Food Coop concert, September 2025.

MUSIC AS CONNECTION

The concerts have become a way to rebuild community after years of restrictions and uncertainty around public gatherings. “There was a certain kind of isolation that we all had to contend with,” Keating said. “A lot of our in-person, real, not-Zoom connections to community were severed, and what we’re trying to do is rebuild that human connection. And I think this concert series is a beautiful avenue.”

Shepik agreed: “Playing music with others is one of the most human things there is,” he said. “It reminds you that you’re part of something larger than yourself. That’s what the Coop is about, too: community, cooperation, connection.”

Many attendees said the evening underscored just how much musical depth exists within the Coop. The musicians, sound engineers, photographers and organizers all came from the same cooperative, and collectively help keep the store running.



Department of Jazz and Human Services—Andrew Brin-Spicer (saxophone), Pete Martin (trumpet), Aidan Scrimgeour, (piano), Nathan Haselby (bass), Dan Sieber (drums).



Department of Jazz and Human Services.

WHAT’S NEXT

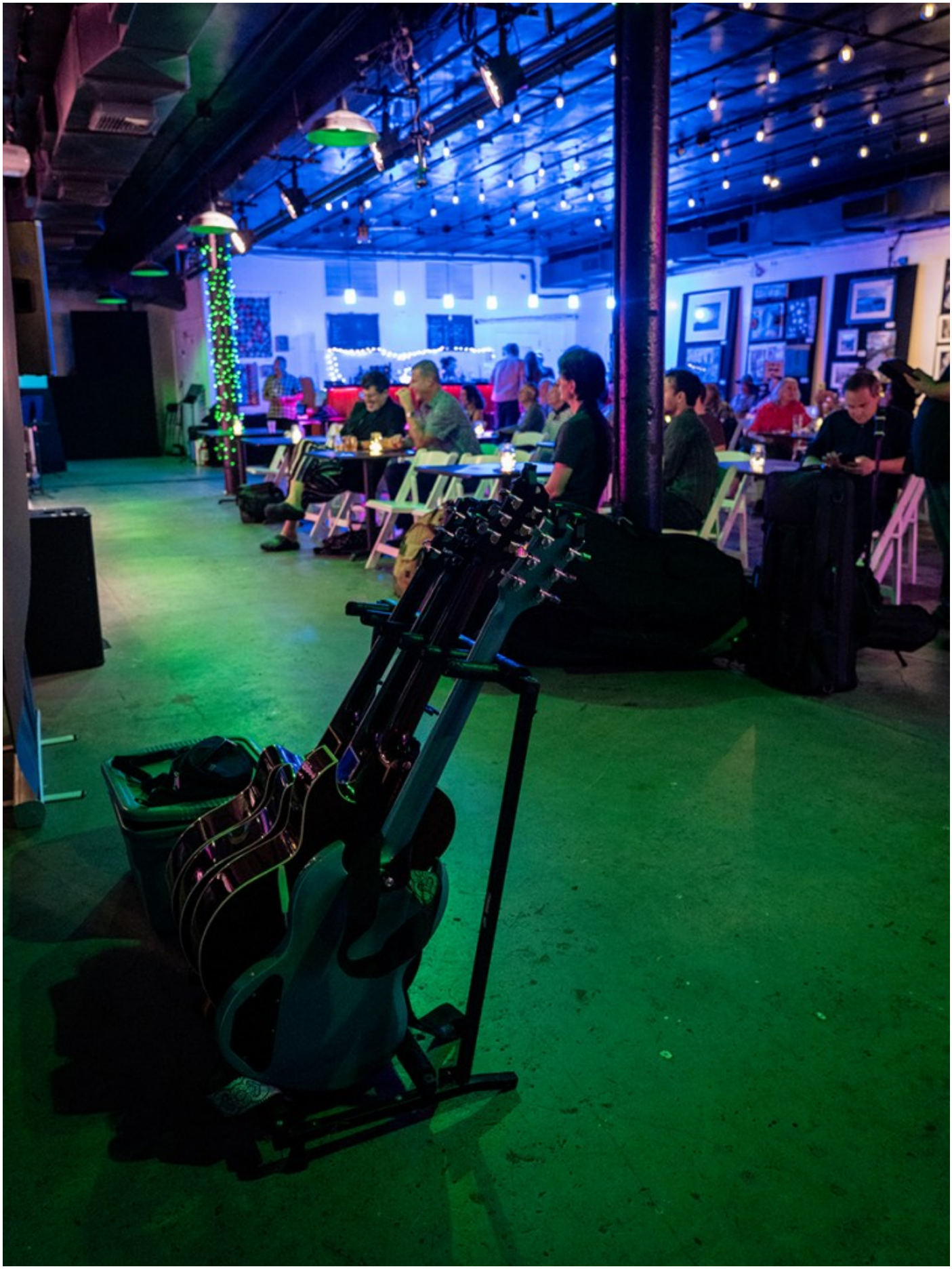
The series continues monthly at ShapeShifter Lab. The October show featured the Jameh Daran Ensemble, Stoddard Blackall, Maggie Carson and Paula T, an evening that ranged from Iranian traditional music to indie pop. The squad shares the lineup for future events on Instagram and their website. All shows are $10 and start at 6:30 p.m., with doors opening at 6 p.m. The next event is December 5.

Cuadrado added that the group is planning to include performance art and possibly a

children’s concert next year.

A STAGE FOR THE COMMUNITY

An idea once nurtured by Grant and other early members has found new life across the street from the Coop. The monthly concerts showcase the remarkable range of musicians who stock shelves, ring up groceries, and share shifts. The Coop Concert Series continues to grow, offering a space where members can share their art, build connections, and keep live music thriving close to home.



Food Coop concert, September 2025.

MEMBER-SUBMITTED ARTICLE: HELP OUR SISTER COOP IN SAO PAOLO!

December 9, 2025



November 18, 2025

By Joe Holtz

Through our practice of the International Cooperative principles, we have been giving advice to the group that has been trying to start the Gomo Coop in Sao Paolo, Brazil.

Over the last several years, we have Zoomed with them and answered many questions about what we do here and why we do what we do.

We have been impressed by their intent to practice participatory cooperation. Their commitment is strong. Successfully launching a new cooperative is financially difficult. Our dollars will go very far in Brazil, where the cost of living is much lower than here. Please seriously consider backing up the advice we have given by donating money to them through their online fundraising campaign.

Joe Holtz is one of the cofounders of the Coop and retired this year after 50 years of employment by the Coop. During that time he has emphasized our Coop's commitment to the International Principles of Cooperation.

Support Gomo Coop! Latin America's first participatory cooperative supermarket!

Inspired by **Park Slope Food Coop**, in the last 10 years, many food coops have been founded in Europe. And now it's Brazil's time.



First cooperative members
São Paulo, Brazil

For a big city like São Paulo, with its urban complexity, mobility challenges, and high levels of social inequality, a food coop is an especially important initiative. It offers a concrete alternative to address the common issues faced by large Brazilian cities: access to organic, healthy, and affordable foods; the valorization of local and sustainable production; and the reorganization of the distribution system, often dominated by large corporations and unsustainable supply chains. **Support our campaign today and help make this alternative a reality.**

Help us to open our doors

With your support at **PayPal**, we'll stock our shelves with fresh, high-quality, organic, and essential products, sourced directly from the producers. This is the final step towards opening our doors.

sites.google.com/gomocoop/eng



Gomo Coop's future store under construction



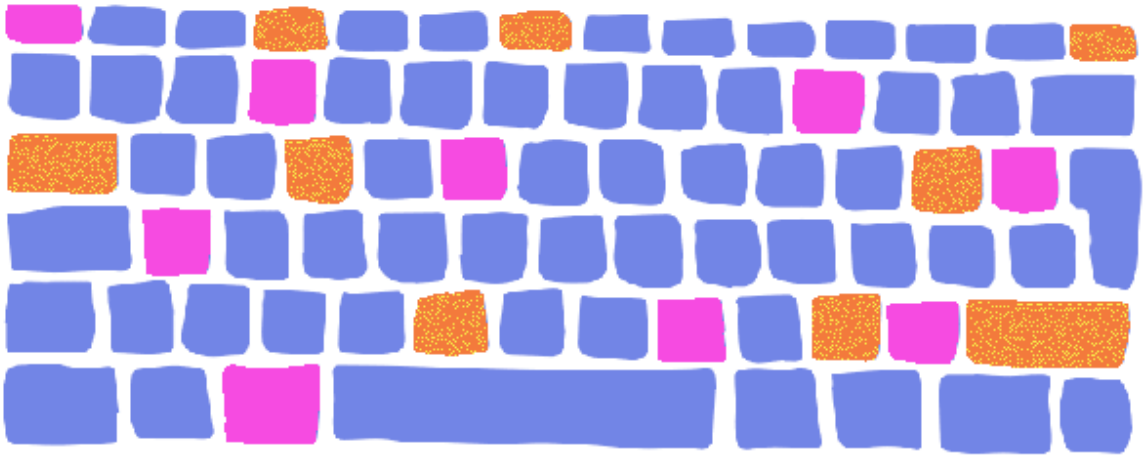
GOMO COOP

Courtesy of Joe Holtz.

NOVEMBER 18, 2025

December 9, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



CONGRATULATIONS COOP RUNNERS

Dear Members,

Congratulations to Coop members who completed the New York City Marathon on Sunday, Nov. 2. The marathon travels through all five boroughs from its start in Staten Island to the finish in Central Park, passing nearly right by the Coop on its route in Brooklyn along Fourth Ave. On Marathon Sunday, the whole city embraces the spirit of generosity, cheerfulness and bonhomie that I hope we all bring to our community year-round. I wish you all a speedy recovery, and I do believe we carry epsom salt in aisle four to help you along!

Barry Leybovich

FOOD COOP PRODUCT REVIEW

Dear Gazette and PSFC,

I think it would be highly useful for Coop members if the *Gazette* had a product review section with reviews provided by members. I have recommendations, good and bad, that I'd like to share, and would like to hear others' recommendations as well. It would also make members aware of products they didn't even know we sold—like cat-butt magnets or drying racks for plastic bags. Thanks!

Sincerely,
Michael Katz

DISCLOSE THE LEGAL OPINION NOW—"CONFIDENTIALITY" IS NOT A VALID EXCUSE

Dear Coop members:

The topic of the alleged legal opinion (a) stating that hybrid meetings can be implemented without amending the bylaws and (b) validating the practice of allowing the board to vote on matters that do not appear before it as member-initiated agenda items has been an ongoing topic of discussion. (See voluntary article, June 24, 2025, and letters to the editor and General Coordinator responses on Aug. 26 and Oct. 28, 2025.)

The General Coordinators have stated that the legal opinion is not in writing. On the basis of 20 years in commercial litigation in which I reviewed and drafted legal opinion letters, I say that that proposition is literally incredible. It calls into question (a) what question the GCs presented to the unidentified attorney(s) who rendered an opinion and (b) whether the attorney(s) examined the governing documents of the Coop and conducted an evaluation of the events of April and June 2025 in the context of New York law. The decision to change Coop practice on the magnitude of what is happening without a proper legal opinion is plausibly a breach of fiduciary duty.

In the Aug. 26 issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* I called for disclosure of the fabled legal opinion. GC Joe Szladek responded there that the opinion is confidential. That response is not valid. No law is stopping management from disclosing to the membership whatever shred of writing shows the legal reasoning—which they should do for an opinion that supposedly legitimizes the end of the Coop's historical governance structure and calls into question whether the Coop's bylaws and guidelines mean anything. Even if the legal opinion were confidential, nothing prevents management from making a limited waiver of confidentiality with whatever redactions are necessary.

Disclose the opinion now.

Sincerely,
Noah Potter

Editors Note:

Noah sent a version of this letter to the LWG *on Aug. 29, 2025, for inclusion in the Sept. 16, 2025 issue of the* LWG*, though it was not published. Noah intended to deliver a version of the letter to the Chair Committee at the Sept. 30 meeting but he was sick that night and, at his request, a fellow member delivered the letter to the Chair Committee to be read (in accordance with the meeting rules). The Chair Committee did not read the revised letter due to his absence. The report on the meeting in the* LWG *noted a comment during the meeting that he should submit the letter to the* LWG*.*

General Manager Response to Noah Potter's Letter

Dear Coop Members,

Following the April 29 Board meeting, the General Coordinators sought legal guidance from attorneys with extensive experience in cooperative governance. This was not a request for a single, formal legal "opinion," but part of an ongoing and broader dialogue about the Coop's governance practices and legal compliance. We have consulted these attorneys numerous times to clarify questions of authority, process and best practices under cooperative law.

We approach these consultations thoughtfully and thoroughly—asking questions from multiple angles to test the consistency and reliability of the attorneys' guidance. Our goal is to ensure that all perspectives and member concerns are represented in how we frame our inquiries, and that the resulting advice supports sound, transparent decision-making.

Based on advice from the Coop's governance attorneys, and as previously shared

with members:

• The Board has the authority under the bylaws to take the action it did on April 29.
• A bylaw amendment is not required to allow hybrid General Meetings.

Maintaining confidentiality in communications with legal counsel is both standard and essential. This confidentiality protects the Coop's ability to seek candid, independent advice and to meet its fiduciary responsibilities to the membership. While we share the conclusions of our legal consultations when they directly affect Coop operations or members—as we have done here—the underlying attorney-client communications are privileged and not disclosed. This approach is consistent with standard practices across cooperatives, nonprofits and other member-owned organizations.

Respectfully,
Joe Szladek
General Manager

I MET WITH A SAILOR FROM THE GLOBAL SUMUD FLOTILLA

Dear members,

On Friday, Oct. 10, 2025, at my local coffee shop in Gowanus, I met with a sailor from the Global Sumud Flotilla, an international civil-society maritime initiative aimed at challenging the Israeli blockade of Gaza. This person across the table from me shared that they were only a few days removed from having been taken from international waters at gunpoint by Israeli forces while attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinians, a mission they described as a moral and legal obligation under the Genocide Convention.

I was struck by this person’s bravery and could not help but reflect on the inertia of our cooperative over the last two years to not even table a vote for the boycott of Israeli goods. Have we become so numb that we fail to recognize the humanity of Palestinians? A better Coop and world are possible, just as the many boats sailing toward Gaza have inspired so many to believe.

Sincerely,
Damien Neva