VALENTINES TO THE COOP

February 10, 2026



February 10, 2026

By Leila Darabi

On a snowy day not long before Valentine's Day, the Park Slope Food Coop felt especially intimate, with shoppers' winter coats crowding the aisles and the familiar rhythm of work and shopping carrying on. Shopping at the Coop has always meant taking part in something larger than a simple errand. The Coop asks something of people who walk through its doors. It asks for time, labor, patience, and participation. Working shifts, navigating crowds, and learning the rules require commitment and staying with the Coop over years or decades requires real affection for the place in all its idiosyncratic charm.

That commitment turns everyday shopping into something closer to a relationship. Through shared work and shared responsibility, the Coop becomes a collective love letter to community, written and rewritten by the people who show up. The *Gazette*

spoke with members and staff across ages and experiences about how they found the Coop, how their relationships with it have changed, and what keeps them coming back. What follows is a collection of member Valentines:

THE THRILL OF TRYING SOMETHING NEW

Maura Hallisey has been a member for almost two years and works stocking produce. She joined after hearing about the Coop from friends.

“I had a lot of friends that were members, and they always talked it up,” she said.



Maura Hallisey

What keeps her excited is the constant possibility of discovery. “I love just finding new things to try. I was reading the makrut limes [label],” she said, pointing to the produce shelf. “I’d never heard of that, and I was like, oh, that sounds fun to try.” Makrut limes are also sometimes called kaffir or Thai limes.

Hallisey values both the range of ingredients and the people she works alongside. “Everybody’s very friendly and nice,” she said. “The shift coordinators have always been lovely to work with.”

RELIABILITY AND SMALL RITUALS

Erica Heinz joined the Coop about 15 years ago, after moving closer to the store.

“I finally moved down to Prospect Heights, and I was like, oh my God, I can join,” she said.

What she values most is consistency. “It’s very reliable,” she said. “It’s the one place you feel like you can get whatever you want.”



Erica Heinz
She also trusts the sourcing: “It’s all researched and good, good for you,” she said.

She also enjoys the social rituals that emerge around shopping. “My favorite is splitting watermelons in the summer,” she said. “Calling down and finding a watermelon partner.”

She recently discovered a favorite treat. “They’re these ginger biscuits, and they have black pepper in them,” she said. “They’re really buttery and really gingery.”

MISSING THE OLD MAGIC, STILL SHOWING UP

Mark worked his Coop shift for 45 years before earning his retirement. His relationship with the Coop reflects decades of memory and routine.

“In the last couple of years, I’m a little bit disappointed,” he said. “It’s gotten very commercial.”

Even with that complaint, Mark’s loyalty remains. “It’s a neighborhood place,” he said. “I like neighborhood hopping. I don’t like big places.”

He shops several times a week, deciding what to cook based on the day. “Today I woke up and I want to do a stir fry,” he said. “So, I’m buying for stir fry.”

FALLING IN LOVE THROUGH SOMEONE ELSE

Katie Deray joined the Coop through her partner and has been a member for under a year.

“Through love,” she said. “It was my partner who had been a part of it, and he wanted me to have better life habits.”



Katie Deray

She works flex shifts and enjoys the pace and energy of the work. “I love the mentality,” she said. “That fast-paced customer service level.”

She gravitates toward condiments and specialty items. “Banana ketchup is something that I can’t find other places, but I can find here,” she said.

She appreciates being able to take chances. “You have to be able to discover or take a chance on something,” she said. “Here, you can take a little bit more of a gamble.”

A LIFE SHAPED IN THE AISLES

Ulisse Narici-Porter is 21 and has been coming to the Coop since childhood. His par-

ents began shopping here in 2004, and he has had his own membership card for about five years. Although members under 22 are not required to work shifts, he chose to take on his own membership and responsibilities.

“I have a bunch of memories of coming in as a little baby and sitting on the chair here,” he said, indicating the seat of his shopping cart. “Watching my mom and dad go around shopping, asking for cookies.”



Ulisse Narici-Porter

Some tastes have stayed the same. “I really like the apples,” he said. “When I went off to college and got apples from regular supermarkets, they just weren’t as good.”

He also feels attached to the space itself. “We’re a huge Coop,” he said. “But we’re so tightly packed into this little place. It doesn’t look like a store where that many people shop. It’s very near and dear to my heart.”

On the day of the conversation, he was shopping for a surprise party for his father, who had just become a citizen after 35 years in the country. He mentioned picking up beer, crackers, and cheese to mark the occasion.

ACTS OF SERVICE AS A LOVE LANGUAGE

Marlen Tapia Jimenez is a receiving coordinator who became a Coop member before joining the staff.

“I came with a big pride of becoming a member,” she said. “It took me about two months to get the orientation.”



Marlen Tapia Jimenez

That pride grew once she joined the staff. “It just expanded that feeling,” she said.

She described the work as something done for everyone. “When we stock something,

it’s for you,” she said. “Five minutes later, you find what you need.”

For Marlen, the Coop feels personal. “It’s doing this thing for ourselves,” she said. “It’s like being in your own kitchen.”

SEEING THE STORE FROM THE CHECKOUT LINE

Barbara Lee joined the Coop in 2015, after being diagnosed with cancer and encouraged by friends to change how she ate.

“My friends said, you got to start eating better,” she said. “They said, join the Coop.”



Barbara Lee

She works office shifts and sometimes checkout. “I thought I was going to be scared to death to do checkout,” Barbara said. “But I love it.”

Checkout gives her a view of the store’s variety. “I get fixed on certain things,” she said. “Then somebody comes up with all this different stuff, and it’s like, oh, I didn’t know that was there. I gotta try that.”

That day, she was buying soap, body butter, and snacks. “Who’s going to treat you better than yourself?” she said.

LAUGHING AT OURSELVES

Sue Ragheb learned about the Coop through an article before moving to the neighborhood.

“It was that *New Yorker* article kind of mocking the culture of the Coop,” she said, referring to a piece by Coop member Alexandra Schwartz. “I thought it was really funny.”



Suzi Ragheb

Ragheb has been a member for about three-and-a-half years and appreciates the humor built into the place. “I think the PA system being open to everyone is hilarious,” she said.

One announcement stood out. “Someone got on there once being concerned about a chihuahua that seemed stressed out,” she said.

She also enjoys the *Gazette. “*The letters to the editor are very entertaining,” she said.

THE CHAOS OF THE BULK AISLE

Mike Zappitello joined the Coop in 2019 and is drawn to its “kookiness and weird

vibe.”

“The crowdedness of the bulk aisle,” he said. “That aisle always cracks me up.”



Mike Zappitello

He works early morning produce loading shifts. “You find out what the nice new produce is every day,” he said.

He recently had a memorable moment. “I had a blackberry a week ago that was really, really good,” he said.

A SHIFT THAT LIVES ON IN MEMORY

Colin Hooker-Haring joined the Coop through a coworker and was drawn in by his love of cooking.

Before the pandemic, he worked a cleaning shift that no longer exists. “It was one of the most fun jobs ever,” he said. “We would go through every corner of the building.”



Colin Hooker-Haring

He valued the continuity. “It was the same people four times a year,” he said. “You’d be like, how you doing this season? I haven’t seen you in so long.”

Now, he works stocking shifts. “I just schedule it whenever I can,” he said.

WHY THE LOVE ENDURES

Taken together, these conversations show many ways of loving the Park Slope Food Coop. That love manifests in habit and memory, in labor and care, and in the willing-

ness to keep showing up for a place that asks for something in return—a beautiful equilibrium of give and take.

Leila Darabi joined the Gazette *as a reporter in 2016. She posts photos of the food she makes with Coop ingredients on Instagram (@persian_ish).*

THE BLACK FARMER WHO SHAPED AMERICA'S COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO FOOD

February 10, 2026


KER-GANN
WG
WALTER

February 10, 2026

By Femi Redwood

Coop members volunteer our time and pay up-front membership fees because we believe these shared investments make our food systems stronger. Also, this makes our produce cost less than at traditional grocery stores, and farmers earn more profit than they would selling to large chains.

This is the same idea behind Community Supported Agriculture, commonly known as CSAs.

You might think CSAs started in the 1980s in affluent Northeast communities, but they were actually started by a Black horticulturist, Booker T. Whatley, who pushed this model decades earlier to help small farms. His vision continues to empower communities to make grocery shopping affordable, while also investing in local farmers.

Born in 1915 in Anniston, Alabama, a predominantly Black community, Whatley and his 11 younger siblings were raised on their family farm. “My granddaddy made all the syrup that came out of his community, castrated all the hogs, shoed the horses, built the doorsteps …he was one of those guys who could do everything,” he told *Mother Earth News* in 1982.

That early education in farming and self-sufficiency helped shape the rest of his life.

> AT TUSKEGEE, BOOKER T. WHATLEY DEVELOPED 15 VARIETIES OF MUSCADINE GRAPES, NAMING ONE “FOXXY LOTTIE” AFTER HIS WIFE.

After earning a B.S. in agriculture from Alabama A&M University, a historically Black college and university (HBCU), he was drafted into the army and served in the Korean

War, where he worked on a hydroponic farm. The scientist he worked under urged him to earn a Ph.D. in horticulture from Rutgers University, which he did in 1957. He then became the chairman of the horticulture department at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Later, in 1969, he was offered a professorship at Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University).

At Tuskegee, Whatley developed 15 varieties of muscadine grapes, naming one "Foxxy Lottie" after his wife. He also worked on sweet potato breeding, developing five varieties, and advocated that Southern farmers grow sweet potatoes to help them compete with the growing corporatization of agriculture.

"With sweet potatoes, Alabama could compete with the Midwest in carbohydrate production," he told *Neighbors* Magazine.

Throughout his life, he noticed that family farms were being replaced by large companies, and Black farms were declining. According to a collaborative report by the National Black Farmers Association and other organizations, 14 percent of all US farmers were Black in 1920. By 1964, less than 6 percent were Black.

> WHATLEY CREATED A PLAN AS EARLY AS THE 1960S THAT HE BELIEVED WOULD ALLOW FARMERS TO MAKE MORE MONEY WHILE USING FEWER RESOURCES.

One issue Black farmers faced was unfair treatment from the federal government. A 1965 report from the Commission on Civil Rights (PDF) found that the USDA discriminated against Black farmers when providing loans and conservation payments.

This impacted the financial stability of Black farmers and contributed to land loss. As a solution to this, and the increased competition from corporate-owned agriculture, Whatley created a plan as early as the 1960s that he believed would allow farmers to make more money while using fewer resources. A significant component of his plan

was a shopping model similar to contemporary CSAs, what he called Clientele Membership Clubs.

Members would pay an upfront fee for a season of produce. He suggested fees should be due at the beginning of the year, which is often a farmer's slow season. Families would pick their own produce. These clubs would guarantee that farmers would have income and that families would save 40 percent on food prices.

Clientele Membership Clubs wouldn't be limited to produce; some might have places for families to catch their own fish or buy slaughtered livestock.

WHATLEY BELIEVED SMALL FARMS COULDN'T COMPETE WITH LARGE ONES ON THINGS LIKE CORN AND POTATOES, BUT THEY COULD COMPETE IN OTHER WAYS, LIKE HAVING MEMBERSHIP CLUBS.

In 1982, he told reporters that his plan could make farmers $100,000 per year, and he later published a book detailing it. "The clientele membership club is the lifeblood of the whole setup. It enables the farmer to plan production, anticipate demand, and, of course, have a guaranteed market," he originally told *Mother Earth News* in a 1982 interview.

Whatley believed small farms couldn't compete with large ones on things like corn and potatoes, but they could compete in other ways, like having membership clubs. "You got to have a farmer who likes people and who has the knack of making that membership feel like his farm is their farm," he told *The Morning Call*.

He didn't believe farmers' markets would be competition because they were too expensive for most families. At both farmers' markets and grocery stores, the cost of picking and delivering produce is built into the prices. But with his membership clubs, cutting out the middleman saves everyone money. "The farmer now gets such a

small share of the housewife's food dollar. Under this plan, he gets it all," he told the paper.

Some farmers believed his plan would turn off potential members, because it would feel like farmwork. Whatley understood that not all farmers would embrace his ideas. "I'm not trying to change the spots on a leopard. I'm not wasting my time," he detailed in that interview.

But one person who didn't doubt his plan was Thomas Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza and owner of the Detroit Tigers.

In 1984, *The Wall Street Journal* wrote an article about Whatley (PDF), introducing readers to another Alabama farmer who was using his methods with success. According to published reports, Whatley received a call that same day from Monaghan, who loved his ideas and wanted to begin a partnership to build a farm that would provide toppings for some Domino's franchises and also allow Domino's employees to join its Clientele Membership Club.

In addition to offering produce, the pair planned a catch-and-own fish pond, a place where members could also buy freshly slaughtered lamb, Christmas trees and more.

> OVER THE YEARS, WHATLEY REMAINED A SOUGHT-AFTER SPEAKER BECAUSE HE OFFERED A MORE HOPEFUL OUTLOOK THAN OTHER ACADEMICIANS AND POLITICIANS.

According to *Mother Earth News,* the Booker T. Whatley Farm at Domino's Farm opened in 1987. They planned it in phases and hoped their efforts would save 100,000 of America's small farms by 2000. Unfortunately, their complete vision never came to fruition because Monagah sold his stake in the farm, and its operations shifted from the original plan.

Over the years, Whatley remained a sought-after speaker because he offered a more hopeful outlook than other academicians and politicians, who believed there was no commercial success for small farmers. Whatley, who died in 2005, disagreed, arguing that, while the government favored large farms that grow soybeans, cotton and nuts, it could solve the problem by subsidizing small farms that grow more niche crops, like purple cabbage.

“The research money has gone to those money crops,” he told the *Washington Post.* “We all think for anything to be good it’s got to be big.”

The next time you buy produce at the Coop, please remember Whatley, whose legacy continues through the many CSAs feeding our neighbors.

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.

BROOKLYN’S FOOD LANDSCAPE IS CHANGING

February 10, 2026


LIDL
WHOLE FOODS MARKET
Foodtown
PARK SLOPE
FOOD COOP
EST 1973
NYC
GROCERIES
PRICE

February 10, 2026

By Emmett Lindner

In the 1970s, Park Slope was a much different neighborhood. The area was not lined with luxury real estate or trendy cafes—it was transitioning out of a stretched economy. The streets were marked by urban blight, and residents struggled with a limited number of convenience options, including fresh, quality groceries.

The Coop set out to change that. From its beginnings in 1973 in a space leased by the Mongoose Community at 782 Union St., it aimed to provide good food through collective action.

> TO MEET DEMAND, AN INFLUX OF GROCERY STORES FOCUSED ON CHEAPER GOODS HAVE CROPPED UP IN BROOKLYN AND OTHER BOROUGHS AND PROPOSED GOVERNMENT POLICIES HOPE TO BROADEN FOOD ACCESS.

Over the decades, the Coop has grown into the largest cooperative with member labor in the country, with more than 17,000 members. But a need for affordable food persists throughout the city. About 40 percent of families with children in New York City need more money to meet their food needs, according to a survey published in November by The Poverty Tracker Report (PDF) released by Robin Hood and researchers at Columbia University,

To meet demand, an influx of grocery stores focused on cheaper goods have cropped up in Brooklyn and other boroughs and proposed government policies hope to broaden food access. While on the campaign trail, the newly elected mayor of the City of New York, Zohran Mamdani, said the city could open its own grocery stores to combat inflation and rising costs.

“The job of city government is not to tinker around the edges while one in four children across our city go hungry,” Mr. Mamdani said last year.

> LAST MONTH, LIDL, THE GERMAN DISCOUNT SUPERMARKET CHAIN, OPENED ON 5TH AVENUE IN PARK SLOPE TO MUCH FANFARE.

But the plan for city-run grocery stores could become mired in bureaucracy and has its share of detractors. A report in *The Atlantic* called Mr. Mamdani’s affordability plans detached from the reality of budgets, with his campaign showing a quality of “magic realism.” Local business owners have voiced concern about the ability of city-owned grocery stores to remain above corruption; others wonder how the math would work given many cooperative stores, like the Coop, already have competitive pricing.

While that proposal awaits its fate, and other affordable measures including free buses are put forward, some businesses have already come to town to meet the needs of city residents.

Last month, Lidl, the German discount supermarket chain, opened on 5th Avenue in Park Slope, to much fanfare. Many people lined up in the early morning light to be the first inside, walking beneath the friendly blue, yellow, and red signage to take advantage of relatively cheap groceries and home goods.

In November, Aldi, another German discount chain, opened in downtown Brooklyn to a similar reception. Bloomberg News reported on the “cult of Aldi,” interviewing devotees, some of whom even wore custom Aldi shirts as they waited to be one of the first 100 shoppers inside the store.

People have long been fanatical about discounts and couponing, but recent economic turmoil spurred by tariffs and inflation have greatly increased demand. Throughout

last year, more people were turning to value brands and even going into debt to afford necessities.

The combination of financial strife and seemingly unquenchable food deserts throughout New York and the country have prompted many grocers to reflect on their impact.

A recent price comparison survey by *Linewaiters' Gazette* indicated that Coop members save between 20 and 40 percent on weekly groceries. And the Coop carries a wide variety of products—more than 8,000 items—"to serve a diverse population with a variety of needs," according to its website.

Though the Coop is only available to members, some in the cooperative have said it's more accessible than other discount stores, like Costco. But retailers in Park Slope, members said, tend to price their goods for the neighborhood's economic profile. Even so, they said, the Coop does what it can.

> NOT EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO A CAR OR CAN MANAGE A GROCERY HAUL THROUGH BROOKLYN'S LABYRINTHINE PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEM.

"Within the model we have, it seems to me, the Coop tries to be conscious of people who have financial needs," said Ellen Winner, a member since 2017. She said that as a cart walker, she has guided people with their groceries to a bus stop, which they took to the subway station to get back home.

That amount of effort, she said, isn't feasible for everyone in the city. Not everyone has access to a car or can manage a grocery haul through Brooklyn's labyrinthine public transit system.

"The only thing I could think of is having more cheaper-line products," Ms. Winner

said. “For the quality of food that you get, the Coop is unbeatable, but not everyone can afford to eat at that quality level, even at the Coop’s prices.”

Ms. Winner added that some members might be unsure about more discount items, but that they would help to democratize the shelves.

“If we had more space I’d advocate for that,” she said.

Susan Y, who has been a member for 10 years, said that the Coop provides what she needs to shop for herself, and the prices beat other grocery stores in the neighborhood, like Union Market. The atmosphere, too, she said, is hard to find elsewhere.

SINCE THE COOP’S INCEPTION, ITS ETHOS HAS TRIED TO BE DEFINED, IN PART, BY COMMUNITY.

“It’s almost like my social life—everyone is so helpful and warm,” Ms. Y said. “I just find it lovely.”

Although the big discount chains like Lidl and Aldi have commanded a loyal group of devotees, some Coop members wondered if the appeal of a tight-knit community is not lost within the corporations.

Since the Coop’s inception, its ethos has tried to be defined, in part, by community. By 1981, there were movie nights and “June Moon” dances—some events featured the tagline, “The Coop—It ain’t just food.”

In 2026, there appear to be fewer events, and the politics of the cooperative’s monthly meetings have become increasingly divisive, capturing more headlines than the food. But many longtime members still enjoy the connections fostered within the Union Street walls. Ms. Winner said that although the aisles are narrow, it often gives

her the opportunity to bump into familiar faces.

“It is a priority of mine (and the Coop’s) to provide affordable versions (at everyday low prices) of as many products as possible throughout the store,” Gillian Chi, one of the Coop’s buyers, said in an email.

> “OUR SHELF PRICE IS DIRECTLY TIED TO WHAT WE PAY FOR A PRODUCT,” SAYS BUYER GILLIAN CHI . “IF A DISTRIBUTOR OR VENDOR SELLS A PRODUCT AT A DISCOUNT, OUR SHELF PRICE IMMEDIATELY GOES DOWN ACCORDINGLY.”

The Coop stocks Field Day, a popular value brand known for shelf-stable items, including beans, pasta, and olives. The Coop has only added a handful of new items by their label recently. Field Day products sell as well as other Coop items and have gone on sale before. National Co+op Grocers (NCG)—which describes itself on its website as “a business services cooperative for retail food co-ops located throughout the United States”—negotiates sale contracts with Field Day and that trickles down to the pricing members see on Coop shelves.

Last year, a November sale of Field Day products coincided with the disruption of SNAP benefits during the national government shutdown, but it was coincidental. Overall, prices of all items the Coop sells go up or down in accordance with the cost the Coop pays at wholesale.

“Our shelf price is directly tied to what we pay for a product,” Chi added. “If a distributor or vendor sells a product at a discount, our shelf price immediately goes down accordingly.”

Some members agreed that the Coop offers a wide range of items, many at an affordable price. But the consensus is that there might be more the Coop can do to aid Park Slope shoppers whose current alternative is Key Food instead of Union Market.

Michael Rieser has been a member of the Coop since 1979, the same year he moved to Brooklyn. He was drawn to the cooperative after having been a member of a coop in Madison, Wisconsin, and found meaning in the community that surrounded the organization. He has shopped at Aldi and appreciates that there are more cost-effective stores in the area for those who need them.

“People do need lower-cost options for shopping other than the Coop or Key Food, and the competition, I think, is good,” Mr. Reiser said. He added that it’s great that the Coop has supported the creation of other cooperatives.

PEOPLE WERE SKEPTICAL OF THE IDEA OF SHOPPING AT THE COOP, SAYING MEMBERSHIP WAS NOT FEASIBLE BECAUSE OF TRAVEL AND COST CONCERNS FOR MANY OUTSIDE OF PARK SLOPE.

Mr. Reiser was recently working with a community group in Red Hook, Brooklyn, and at one point, the Coop slipped into the conversation. People at the site were skeptical of the idea of shopping there, saying membership was not feasible because of travel and cost concerns for many outside of Park Slope, Mr. Reiser said.

“I don’t know if that’s going to be a challenge” for more interest in the Coop, he said. “I think it would be great if the Coop took on providing food [for those in need],” he added.

That idea is central to Mayor Mamdani’s proposals for city-run grocery stores. But, like the Coop, which also aims to provide for people of different income levels, there are practical hurdles. Mr. Mamdani has said the initiative would cost $60 million, and he banks on the city paying for rent, using new revenue from higher corporate and income taxes. His campaign website said that the city would work with neighborhoods on local product sourcing.

The new mayor is adamant that he can provide food for any resident in need.

“Everywhere I go, I hear New Yorkers talking about the outrageous prices of groceries,” Mr. Mamdani told *The New York Times*, then said of his city-run grocery proposal, “This is a bold and workable plan.”

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

TAKE OUR ACCESSIBILITY SURVEY

February 10, 2026


Have you ever encountered an accessibility barrier to attending the General Meeting?
The Hybrid General Meeting working group would love to hear from you!

February 10, 2026

Have you ever encountered an accessibility barrier to attending the General Meeting?

The Hybrid General Meeting working group would love to hear from you.

Please take a moment to fill out this short survey.

SAY CHEESE! ARTISANAL TASTING AND PAIRING AT THE COOP

February 10, 2026



The Park Slope Food Coop Cooking Squad Presents

SAY CHEESE!

Tastings and pairings from the Coop's own cheese buyer, Yuri Weber



Learn about cheese sourcing, seasonality, and selection.

Yuri Weber has been the coop cheese, olive, bulk, and fine foods buyer for 16 years. He enjoys cooking and singing (not always at the same time).

TO REGISTER:
foodcoopcooks.org/rsvp
IG: foodcoopcooks

Note: In-person attendance is limited to 30 seats.

Feb 18th
7:30 pm EDT

upstairs at the Park Slope Food Coop
$10 cash fee for
the in person class
(online is free!)

Courtesy of venue

Ever wonder how the Coop selects cheeses? Or, wish you knew how to shop the case like a pro? Join the PSFC Cooking Squad for **a practical, approachable cheese class** with our very own cheese buyer, ***Yuri Weber***, on **Wednesday, Feb. 18**, **at 7:30 p.m. EST** as part of the Coop's monthly cooking series. This Cheese 101–style session offers a behind-the-scenes look at sourcing, seasonality and selection, along with practical advice for choosing cheeses for different occasions and budgets.

The class will focus on artisanal regional cheeses with an emphasis on standout producers from Wisconsin and Vermont. From understanding flavor profiles to creating thoughtful pairings with what's currently available, Yuri will share tips for building a seasonal cheese board and delve into the many practical facets of cheese—like which ones melt best and how to avoid quesadillas that drip!

DID YOU KNOW THE COOP SELLS OVER 5,000 POUNDS OF CHEESE EVERY WEEK?

Join us for an hour filled with practical advice from someone who knows the cheese case inside and out. Class will be **in-person at the Coop** *and* streamed **online via Zoom**. For in-person attendees, there is a $10 cash-only fee taken at the door to help cover the cost of ingredients. Attendees will get to ask questions, meet Yuri and eat cheese! This class is perfect for anyone looking to elevate everyday snacking or hosting without overcomplicating things.

ABOUT THE CHEF

Yuri Weber has been the Coop's cheese, olive, bulk and fine foods buyer for 16 years. He enjoys cooking and singing (but not always at the same time). Yuri is also full of useful and interesting tips and facts about cheese! ***Did you know the Coop sells over 5,000 pounds of cheese every week?***

RSVP, PARTICIPATE, AND FOLLOW

Sign up for classes, download recipes and find shopping lists to cook along from home at foodcoopcooks.org. As classes are added, they will show up on the Squad’s home page. Check back regularly for updates! Follow the Cooking Squad on Instagram for more content, including shopping sessions with guest chefs!

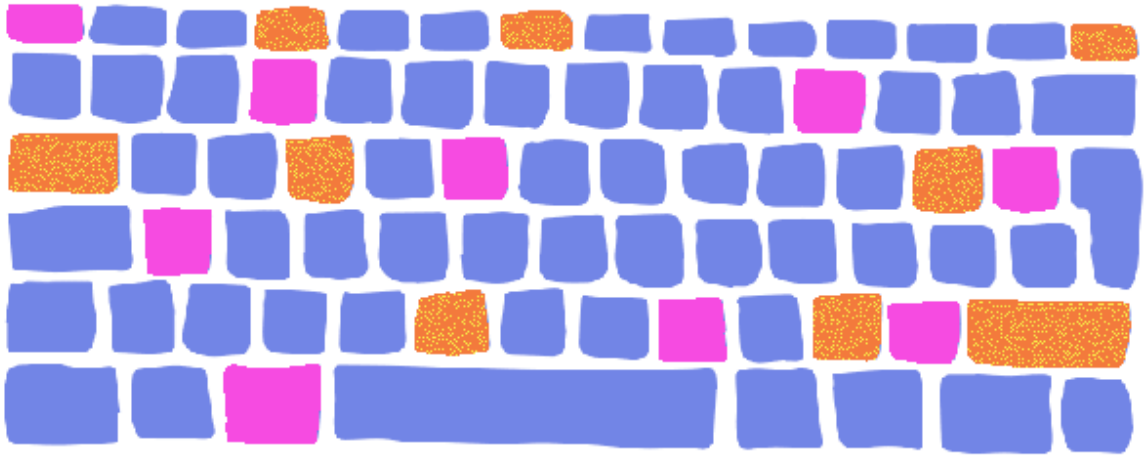
TEACH A CLASS

Though cooperation is at the heart of the Coop’s mission, so is food! The Cooking Committee is looking for guest chefs to share their food expertise, traditions, and special treats. Members receive FTOP credit for preparing and delivering classes. Tell us what you want to teach!

FEBRUARY 10, 2026

February 10, 2026

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



LIDL HIGHLIGHTS LACK OF COOP AFFORDABILITY

Dear Editor,

I appreciated very much Anita Bushell's January 20 article on the Park Slope branch of Lidl, a new German grocery story on of which I was unaware. Among other things, she

highlighted items in several categories that are more affordable at Lidl than they are at the Coop, including mandarin oranges, multigrain bread, and croissants. All but one variety of apple there are also on offer at a lower price. All this with no work requirement.

Bushell prefers the quality of goods and feeling of community at the Coop. I do too, but her survey highlights an important reality: Increasingly, we are a place less about affordable foods and more about elevated (or some might say snobby) preferences and responsible (or some might say politicized) sourcing.

Our markup was “temporarily” increased to 25% from 21% nearly six years ago and with spiraling health care and other costs, reporting out of the general meetings makes clear there is no return on the horizon to the original lower food prices. For the past year, I’ve found it cheaper to have coffee delivered from Finland than to buy it at the Coop, to give one example.

Meanwhile far more members seem interested in engaging in geopolitical debates than with costs and affordability. Instead of turning up our noses at Lidl, we should consider how to replicate their tight mission focus and efficiencies. Or we should at least be more honest about the fact that affordability, for those of us who don’t qualify for special programs, is slipping away at our beloved Coop.

In cooperation,

Ryan Tate
Receiving shift (Lifter)

REGARDING LIDL’S REVIEW

Dear Coop community,

Anita Bushell's January 20 article on the relative merits of Lidl and the Coop ("Cheap-Croissants but Lidl Charm") misses the mark. The Coop and Lidl are fundamentally different, but it hardly warrants pooh-poohing Lidl.

In truth, many Coop products are expensive, and Lidl is generally cheaper. As Ms. Bushell observes, the Coop wins on quality and variety. But many products at Lidl—like fresh breads—are actually superior to the Coop's. Lidl produce, while not as good as Coop produce, is decent and mostly cheaper than what's for sale at Trader Joe's. It's hardly fair to diminish it as "an okay option for last-minute dashes."

Frankly, I find Ms. Bushell's mockery of discount promotions as features of a "a glorified mini-mart" deeply out of touch when affordability is such an important issue. I also struggle to relate to her lamenting the loss of the semi-suburban Key Foods parking lot and ruing its replacement with housing units, many set aside for affordable housing. (N.B. It was community leaders who advocated for an affordable grocery store in the development.)

Lidl is not especially warm or charming; most groceries aren't. It employs the same antitheft gate system used across Europe. If this system reduces the shoplifting that chain supermarket operators often cite as reasons for avoiding certain neighborhoods, it's a reasonable trade-off. Lidl has been expanding across the city, often in neighborhoods lacking affordable alternatives. It's also open to anyone who walks off the street—unlike the Coop.

I rather like the Coop, which is why I'm a member, but that doesn't mean I look down on Lidl. I do however wholly disapprove of mocking a discount grocery store's food as "technically edible."

Sincerely,

Daniel Stone

PAGING COMPOSTABLE BAGS TO THE BULK AISLE

Dear Coop members:

As a newer member of the Coop, I've been impressed by the sustainable practices in place: a robust composting system, food donation to CHiPS and other food rescue organizations, reuse of delivery boxes for shoppers, and much more.

I'm curious about one, albeit small, area where we might be able to do better: the plastic bags used for pre-packaged bulk items and bread. I recognize there may be considerations I'm not aware of—cost or performance issues with compostable options—though given compostable bags are available in the produce section, I wonder if there's potential to transition these remaining plastic bags to compostable (or at the very least non-plastic) alternatives.

Part of my motivation for writing this letter is to see if this is something other members would support pursuing. The Coop's commitment to sustainability is a large part of what drew me to the organization, and I would love to help continue to drive this core part of our mission: "We strive to reduce the impact of our lifestyles on the world we share with other species and future generations."

Kindly,

Kristen Mashikian

FOOD HOLDS ENERGY WITH A MESSAGE

Dear Coop members,

In 2015, when my daughters were 5 and 4 years old, I joined the PSFC. Our family enjoyed all the organic goodies we are so blessed to have available. My friend Anna, also a PSFC member, pointed out how I would bring carrots and a peeler with me to the Children's Museum; my nephew would laugh at how my stroller would be full of food and called me a refrigerator.

We would not leave home without all our food.

In the book *Food Rules*, writer Michael Pollan observes how much of what he sees for sale doesn't "deserve to be called food." Instead, he prefers to "call them edible food--like substances."

Having growing up in Tunisia and in Switzerland, I was alarmed at the quality of food sold in the US. My studies confirmed what my intuition was telling me: food is more than calories and nutrients. It holds the energy of the farmer, the farm, nature, and the intention behind the making of that food. Food holds a message.

I started cooking for my community to have conversations on ethical food and why we need to know where our food comes from. When we eat local food, it's easier to know the energy it holds. We want to give money to people who are caring for our land and taking good care of their employees and animals. I don't want to eat anger and pain, do you?

Guided by that philosophy, I do not buy ingredients from Israel, and I'm in favor of boycotting all goods from there until Israel ends what an overwhelming number of human rights organizations and authorities on international law say is a genocide, and Palestinians live freely.

I am honored to serve the PSFC with my food. I offer a vegan Tunisian sandwich called LA TUNISIENNE, free of cruelty. Find it Sundays in the grab and go fridge.

Sincerely,

Nadia Ketoure

HAVE RACHMONES: IMAGINE MENSTRUATION WHERE IMPORT OF HYGIENE PRODUCTS IS BANNED

Fellow Members,

Perhaps you've heard someone ask: Why Israel? Why do thousands of Coop members demand a boycott of Israeli products, especially now that there's a ceasefire*? Let's take a closer look and use an Israeli newspaper as a source. On January 22, 2026 *Haaretz* reported a "shortage in basics such as beef, poultry and hygiene products, caused by Israel's decision to ban the entry of these products…".

These banned hygiene products include menstrual supplies and diapers. Last week, I received a charity request to fund period kits for menstruating women and girls in Gaza. I was ready to donate, but then wondered: would these even make it through the blockade?

In the Yiddish-English home of my girlhood, my mother would often tell me to "have rachmones" (empathy or compassion) for others. Whether or not you've ever menstruated, it should be easy to imagine how wretched it would be to have no products to absorb your menstrual blood, and how much more of a horror it would be if you were living in a freezing cold refugee camp with extremely limited toilets or clean running water, and let alone privacy.

Every time we member-owners stock, sell, and buy Israeli products, we contribute to the economy of a country that has chosen to keep Palestinians in Gaza without period products and diapers.

Have Rachmones,

Alyce Barr

* It's hard to understand what Israel considers a ceasefire, since Israeli forces have killed over 470 Palestinians during the current ceasefire.

SOME SEE UPSIDE TO A "LOOMING COLLAPSE"

Dear Members,

I read recently of a "looming collapse" of Israel's agricultural exports market. Whether or not we boycott Israeli goods at the Coop, this collapse could achieve what so many courageous amongst us have campaigned for: a better world.

Sincerely,

Damien Neva

KNOW THE FACTS BEFORE YOU VOTE

Dear Coop community:

As we gear up for what's sure to be a contentious discussion (and, finally, a vote!!) on

the boycott of Israeli products, it's essential that members reach out and learn the facts about previous and current organizing efforts.

Please DO NOT believe claims of antisemitism (I for one am proudly Jewish) and other emotional appeals to secure votes against a boycott. Some members weaponize such claims, and it behooves all of us to understand the facts and vote our consciences.

The Coop has a long, proud history of boycotting products from countries and entities that fail to act in accordance with our Mission Statement. I urge all members to familiarize themselves with that Statement and the importance of boycotts in the struggles worldwide for justice.

Yes, this issue brings "conflict" among us and, yes, discussions on these matters can be challenging, but I believe in the Coop, its Mission Statement, and the integrity of our members to proceed with the facts and in a spirit of cooperation

Sincerely,

Carol Wald

TRYING TO "JOIN THE CONVERSATION" WOULD BE EASIER WITH SOME TRANSPARENCY, PLEASE

Dear Coop members:

I'm writing with questions about the December 30 "Join the Conversation" memo announcing a facilitated conversation about conflict in the Coop community, capped at 12 participants, with work-slot credit for attending. The memo emphasized confidentiality and directed members to apply online.

I applied almost immediately, but wasn't selected. I understand that there was likely limited capacity, but when shift credit is offered for a limited-access event, the selection and approval process should be transparent.

Questions I hope the Coop can answer:

- Will there be additional sessions, and will members who weren't selected this time get priority or another clear path to participate?
- What were the selection criteria? Was it first-come/first-served, a lottery, or based on other considerations? If so, what were they? Was race, ethnicity, religion, or identity considered?
- Who approved this as eligible for shift credit, and under what policy or category? What safeguards ensured it was administered fairly and consistently?
- Where was this discussed publicly within Coop governance? I don't recall seeing it in General Meeting materials or minutes, but I'd appreciate a pointer if I missed it.

Sincerely,

Vivek Bhagwat

COOP WORK-SLOT CREDIT

Dear Editor:

On January 12, I participated in a Coop event for work-slot credit to discuss how conflict at the Coop "affected your experience as a Coop member." It covered "your experience as a Coop member during times of conflict, especially if it feels personal," and was not about making "decisions about a boycott or convincing anyone of a par-

ticular view.” (Quoted text is all pulled from the document from the moderators). Six people took part.

We agreed to no audio recording and no names. Moderators were asked what they were bringing back from this session to the Coop community. They said they were not providing any information to the Coop.

I argued that the Membership needs to obtain value for holding this session as the Coop provided the site and work slot credits to the participants. It is not a breach of confidentiality to provide a high-level report, which does not include names or direct quotes.

I noted that I could write a letter to the *Gazette*, following those guidelines. One participant was against any letter writing. The moderators who had advised that they were not decision makers, now ruled against my right to inform the Coop. At that point I left the session.

If the moderators want to hold this type of meeting under the “No Feedback” to Members rule, then it should not be held on Coop property. It is really a private activity. The Coop should not host or provide work-slot credits for something that doesn’t inform the Members and directly or indirectly, benefit the Coop.

I respectfully request that any future sessions be canceled.

In Cooperation,

Stewart Pravda

IN THE LAND OF "BROKEN LAND DREAMS" (WITH APOLOGIES TO THE BOSS)

Dear Coop members,

My magical realism novel, *Broken Land Dreams,* out in Kindle and print, mentions the Coop and Park Slope. It's not just for Boomers, guys in search of themselves, or Brooklynites, but those in need of a Hired Power, progressives, mindfulness types, literary mavens, utopian dreamers, and young superheroes with contemplative and critical thinking powers.

The book defies a conventional linear narrative. In Part I, Jacob Traum, a grumpy, retired high school social worker and meditating lefty boomer, tells us his wife Maya has left him and warns him he needs to recover from himself. He describes the puzzling and socially unjust things he broods and dreams about that contribute to his disposition and emotional absence.

In Part II, the surreal story begins. With the help of his dreamt-up, gender-fluid, hired power with superpowers from the future, Jacob embarks on a Dante-esque, pandemic-era personal journey. In Hell Inc. he's confronted by, then manages to escape three right-wing rats, leaders of the Ratocracy conspiracy—Ratty Ghouliani, Ayn Ratnd, and Pete the New York Pizza Rat. The rats seek revenge by infesting his former high school with Ratocratic values and plan to take over Brooklyn. With the help of his Park Slope (Purgatory) men's group, the Brooklyn Codgers, and his high school students' socially conscious meditation group, imbued with their own superhero powers, Jacob must face himself as well as the Ratocrats in a final showdown to reach Heaven (the Brooklyn Botanic Garden), save Brooklyn, and earn back Maya.

In our post-pandemic and Trump-redux era, this re-telling of Dante's cosmic journey will appeal to many of us facing an uncertain future and to those who appreciate how truth, love, and Brooklyn-style dreams triumph over meanness, greed, fake news—and New York rats.

Sincerely,

David Forbes

NOTE FROM THE GAZETTE EDITORS

February 14, 2026

To Gazette readers,

Inconsistencies occurred in applying the Gazette's Letters to the Editor policies in the February 10, 2026 issue. As a result, two letters from that issue have been temporarily removed pending a review of those policies.

As the Coop's publisher, the General Coordinators have a responsibility to ensure that published material aligns with institutional and legal standards and that policies are applied consistently. In this instance, General Manager Joe Szladek and General Coordinator Ann Herpel were involved in the decision to remove the content in order to address those concerns.

A review of the Gazette's editorial standards and policies is underway to ensure they are clearly defined and consistently applied.

We regret any confusion this may cause and appreciate Gazette readers' understanding as we complete this review.

Thank you,

Gazette Editors, Joe Szladek and Ann Herpel