

SEA & SOIL, A WORKER-OWNED SANDWICH SHOP, TAKES ROOT ON ATLANTIC AVENUE

July 28, 2026



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By Liz Yap

Every customer who steps into Sea & Soil, a cheery worker-owned cooperative on a busy stretch of Atlantic Avenue, has two choices to make: what sandwich they'd like to order and how much they'd like to pay for it.

The sandwiches, with inspired combinations like cumin-paprika roasted chicken and aji verde ("The Wren") or roast turkey with cheddar, peach habanero jam and creamy cilantro slaw ("The Lulu") are made with ingredients cooked from scratch and bread baked in-house.

"WE LEAVE THE CHOICE UP TO YOU FOR WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD AT THIS TIME AND WE RECOGNIZE THAT THIS MAY SHIFT FROM DAY TO DAY," THE MENU READS.

They're also priced on a sliding scale. The range is from \$13 to \$24, with suggested prices of \$16 to \$18. A note on the menu gives a brief explanation on what the model makes possible: high-quality ingredients, accessibility for as many as possible and just compensation for each hour of labor worked.



Sandwiches are cooked from scratch and made with bread baked in-house. Photo courtesy of Sea & Soil

The lower end of the range enables Sea & Soil to sustainably offer well-made food to a wider range of customers; the higher end helps them move closer to their goals of providing health care benefits and pensions for all their workers.

“We leave the choice up to you for what you can afford at this time, *and* we recognize that this may shift from day to day,” the menu reads. “Every option is a good option. No matter what, you are supporting our worker-owned co-op.”



Gabby Gignoux-Wolfsohn and Noah Wolf started their worker-owned coop during the pandemic. Photo by Rod Morrison.

As a worker-owned cooperative, Sea & Soil is built around shared labor and profit, shared decision-making and shared ownership. It began as a pandemic-era project for worker-owners Noah Wolf and Gabby Gignoux-Wolfsohn. Wolf (who uses “he/they” pronouns) had always been interested in working in food, but the restaurant industry’s structural issues never sat right with them. “The existing ownership models felt inevitably exploitative,” Wolf said. “I wanted to do something worker-owned—where every person whose labor was involved had agency in the project and could benefit from any profits we’re able to generate.”

The pair, along with another founding partner no longer involved, started out making sandwiches and selling them in Prospect Park and Grand Army Plaza on weekends

while juggling their regular jobs.

SANDWICH CARD

SUBSTITUTIONS & ADJUSTMENTS

and let's
written in querry for
adjustments or changes!

the WREN *half chicken, half turkey, no onions, oak, olive oil, garlic, hot sauce.* QTY ☐

the NICO *chicken, single pork, fermented cheese, pineapple, oak, turkey, salsa, white de tomatoes, arbol green onion, lettuce.* QTY ☐

the LUCY *smoked trout, fermented pepper jack, pickled red onions, ranch, chili, greens on focaccia.* QTY ☐

the FIONA *two eggs, spinach, jam, oak, hot sauce, olive oil, olive oil, focaccia.* QTY ☐

the ISAAC *cumin & paprika, red chili, red onions, all fresh, greens on focaccia VEGAN.* QTY ☐

the IZ *curry, fresh tomatoes, squash, ketchup, chili, all fresh, greens on focaccia VEGAN.* QTY ☐

the ELLIOT *house roast turkey, cheddar, pickled cucumbers, mango, fermented cucumber, all fresh, greens on focaccia.* QTY ☐

Saturday & Sunday only

the RAFA *sautéed eggs, tomato, oak, all bread, VEGAN.* QTY ☐

the VEGAN RAFA *spicy red scramble, all bread, olive oil, olive oil, VEGAN.* QTY ☐

Sliding Scale Price

Mark below the price you'll pay to be applied per sq. ft.

(*suggested)

\$13 \$14 \$15 \$16 \$17 \$18 \$19 \$20 \$21 \$22 \$23 \$24

Sliding scale pricing is in their DNA. Photo courtesy of Sea & Soil.

To keep the business viable and ensure prices remain within reach for their community, sliding scale pricing has been part of Sea & Soil's DNA from the start. The twin pillars of affordability and accessibility are at the core of what they do. "We really wanted to build those values into the foundation of what we were doing," Wolf said. "It had to be in the roots; otherwise, it couldn't take hold."

Wolf continued: "We're always trying to square the circle, sourcing ingredients as ethically as possible. How local can we get this thing? How seasonal can we be?" They added, "How conscious can we be of the labor standards of the companies we work with, while also providing just compensation for workers?"



Loaves baked by the Sea & Soil team. Photo courtesy of Sea & Soil.

In July 2023, Sea & Soil opened its first brick-and-mortar location, a small shop in Red Hook. Despite loving the neighborhood and the community they'd formed there, they eventually realized that they needed more space to truly grow. Running a tiny sandwich shop on a shoestring budget, the team began looking for a way to finance their next step.



The Working World, who provide funding for worker-owned businesses,
provided funding.

In a moment of serendipity, someone from The Working World, an organization that funds worker-owned businesses, dropped by the shop and encouraged them to get in touch if they ever needed financing. Its mission, Wolf explained, is to help create

more cooperative businesses by addressing one of their biggest barriers: access to capital.

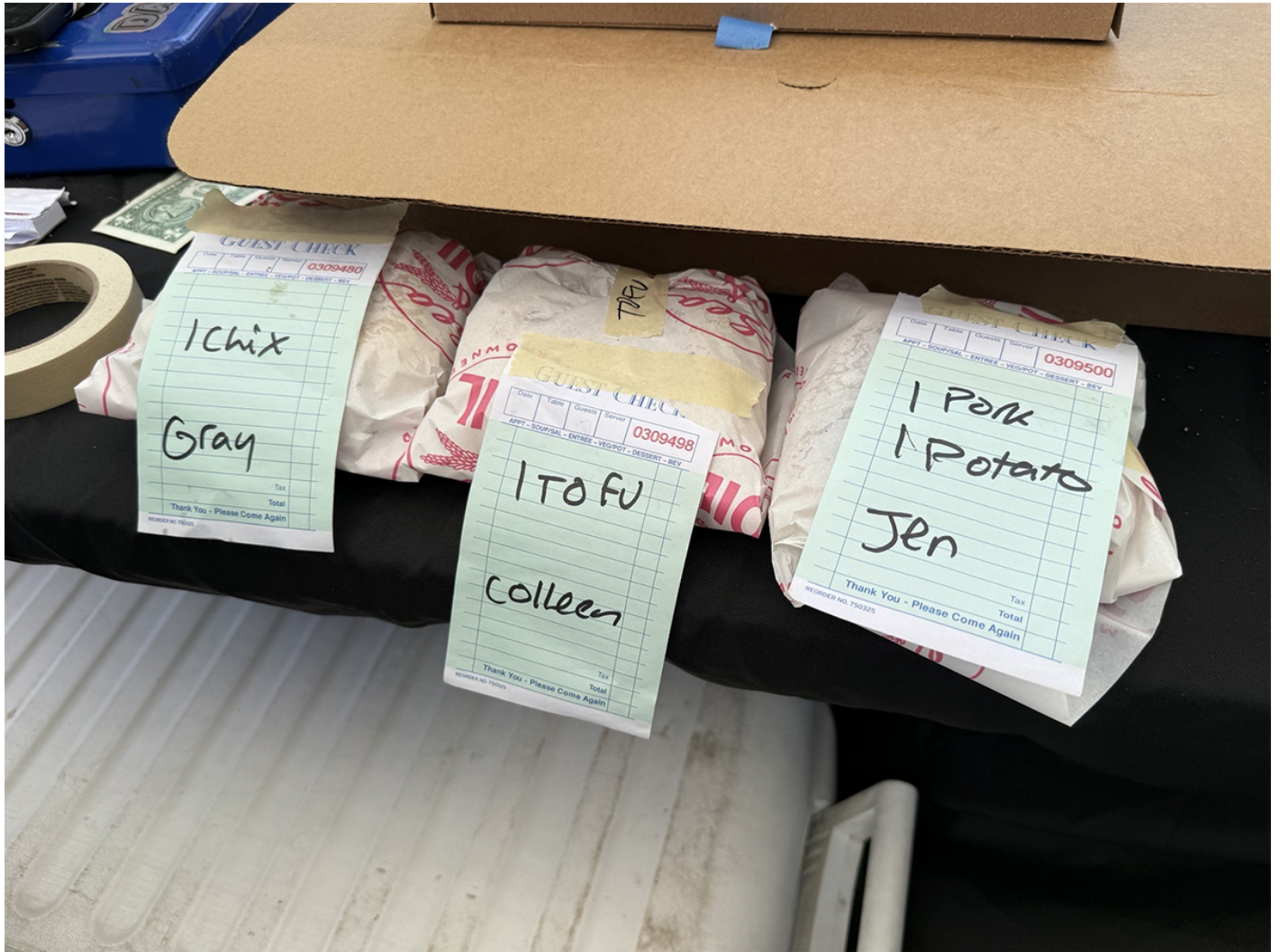
THE GOAL IS TO MAKE OWNERSHIP THE NORM AND NOT THE EXCEPTION, INSTEAD OF MAINTAINING A HIERARCHY IN WHICH A SMALL GROUP OF OWNERS HOLDS POWER OVER A LARGER GROUP OF EMPLOYEES.

Their application was accepted and, along the way, they learned that Seed Commons, a national network that provides financing and support to worker-owned cooperatives, which The Working World is part of, had recently purchased a building on Atlantic Avenue in Boerum Hill for their headquarters. The building's previous owner had run a small café on the ground floor before closing it during the pandemic. It required some work to transform it into what Sea & Soil needed, but the space was there.



"The Iz" sandwich. Photo courtesy of Sea & Soil.

"It's easy to remember the difficult moments, when things don't feel like they're going your way," Wolf recalled. "But it also feels important to remember the moments when everything clicks—when hard work, luck, collaboration and shared values all come together."



Pre-orders awaiting pick-up. Photo by Rod Morrison.

The Working World offers non-extractive loans, which means Sea & Soil is not required to begin repayment until it is profitable. Rather than prioritizing immediate returns, the model is designed to help worker-owned businesses become sustainable, supporting them for the long term. “It creates a collaborative relationship,” Wolf said.



Their Atlantic Avenue store opened in April 2025. Photo courtesy of Sea & Soil.

Since opening their doors last April, this new space has laid the foundation for Wolf, Gignoux-Wolfsohn and fellow worker-owner Nilda Ortiz to build a more equitable, empowered workplace. Full-time hires enter a year-long candidacy process as worker-owners in training, during which they and the existing worker-owners decide whether the relationship is the right fit. After the candidacy period, employees are expected either to become worker-owners or to move on.



Working owners Gabby Gignoux-Wolfson, Nilda Ortiz and Noah Wolf.
Photo courtesy of Sea & Soil

The goal is to make ownership the norm and not the exception, instead of maintaining a hierarchy in which a small group of owners holds power over a larger group of permanent employees.

Building this kind of workplace is not without its growing pains. Wolf said Sea & Soil is

learning in real time how to make decisions collectively, communicate across different roles and unlearn the practices of conventional work environments—all while handling the constant day-to-day pressures of running a business in New York City.

“It’s really beautiful, and it’s also really challenging,” Wolf said. “It’s easy to make mistakes. You’re figuring it out and navigating. It’s cool and exhilarating and difficult.”



Noah on the grill at their Pioneer Works pop-up stall in Red Hook. Photo by Rod Morrison.

For Wolf, that willingness to adapt is one of the strengths of worker-owned cooperatives. As a Park Slope Food Coop member, Wolf appreciates that it’s always changing and looking for better ways to operate and work together, in conversation with its community. “We’re always generating new ideas and trying new approaches. There is

not one fixed right answer. You can keep experimenting, and there may always be a better solution down the road,” they said. “The Coop has been around for 50 years, yet people are still finding new ways to work within a relatively small space.” (The Park Slope Coop has its own non-extractive loan fund as well, helping food coops that rely on member labor start and sustain their businesses.)



“The Lucy” sandwich. Photo courtesy of Sea & Soil.

Sea & Soil wants to bring that same spirit of experimentation, iteration and collaboration to what they do. Beyond sandwiches, they envision the space as a venue for building community. Having recently hosted a worker-owner happy hour, they hope to make the space a home for classes, readings, pop-ups and other events—a place where people can gather, exchange ideas and grow together.

The goal is to become part of the fabric of both the neighborhood and the broader worker-owned community in New York: where people can get good food at a price they can afford, and where the people making it can build sustainable lives in a city that's becoming increasingly out of reach for many of its residents.



"The Isaac" sandwich. Photo courtesy of Sea & Soil.

The name Sea & Soil, Wolf shares, takes its name from the Pablo Neruda poem "Ode to Bread." The sea is the salt in each loaf, and the soil is the wheat. It's a fitting name for a shop trying to make something humble and essential—good food, shared work and profit, and community—more available to everyone.

Liz Yap is an editor-turned-strategist with a focus on naming and verbal branding.

She has been a member of the Coop since 2021. lizyap.com

HOW EQUAL EXCHANGE CONNECTS FARMER COOPS TO OUR COOP

July 28, 2026



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

July 15, 2025

By Dan Bergsagel

Coop members can learn about the source of their food from labels or from the produce and bulk information on the Coop website. However, we only occasionally hear about intermediaries—the distributors who buy food from farms and sell it to the Coop. They come to our attention when something new happens, such as the expansion of Field Day products on our shelves, or when something goes wrong, including the June 2025 cyberattack on UNFI, which led to temporary shortages on the Coop’s shelves, as UNFI accounts for 32 percent of the Coop’s purchasing.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

Intermediaries are the unsung heroes of the Coop’s supply chain. They make it possible for the Coop to sell a wide range of produce. “Distributors are extremely important,” said Britt Henriksson, one of two receiving coordinators and buyers for bulk and specialty foods at the Coop. “Working directly with suppliers is not common, as each supplier has an invoice and the paperwork can quickly add up to take a lot of a buyer’s time. More distributors also means more deliveries to be coordinated.”

Many of these important distributors are fellow travelers—cooperative organizations themselves with clear mission statements, guiding principles and a parallel trajectory which complements the Coop’s. Equal Exchange is one of the most important and

closely aligned with the Coop.

You may recognize Equal Exchange's logo—two red arrows joined together—on labels on your bananas or bulk coffee. What does not fit on their label is their mission statement:

"...to build long-term trade partnerships that are economically just and environmentally sound, to foster mutually beneficial relationships between farmers and consumers and to demonstrate, through our success, the contribution of worker co-operatives and Fair Trade to a more equitable, democratic and sustainable world."

Equal Exchange was founded in Massachusetts in 1986, importing coffee from Nicaragua in defiance of a Reagan administration trade embargo. Equal Exchange later expanded to sourcing coffee from farmer groups across Latin America and Africa, and tea from India, Sri Lanka and South Africa. Today, it distributes chocolate, bananas, nuts, dried fruits and olive oils, all sourced from small farmer cooperatives.

The groups and cooperatives all view themselves as democratically organized.

Leah Madsen, sales manager at Equal Exchange, explained: "We have set up governance and capital structures to mitigate some of the most oppressive forces of capitalism. We're trying to feed people, support people who produce food and support ourselves. We prioritize people over profit."

Equal Exchange and the Coop go back a long way. "Back in the 1980s, we were excited about the founding of Equal Exchange. I am certain that we were buying their products in their first year," said Joe Holtz, one of the founding members of the Coop, who just stepped down as general manager.

Since then, Equal Exchange has grown to become one of the Coop's most important distributors. Madsen said the Coop is equally important to Equal Exchange. "PSFC is our largest single-store revenue partner for bulk coffee. Coffee represents more than

half of our sales and an even higher percentage of our gross margin,” she remarked.

According to Madsen, over the past year the Coop sold 44,879 pounds of Equal Exchange coffee. (This is equivalent to covering the entire ground floor of the Coop with coffee beans two inches deep). The second largest mover of bulk coffee for Equal Exchange was a six-store chain that purchased 41,690 pounds of coffee. After that chain, the next largest single store sold less than half of the Coop’s annual volume.

This relationship holds sway beyond the hard numbers. “I love working with Park Slope,” Madsen said. “At an organizational level, the food coops we sell to are very important for Equal Exchange, and the Park Slope Food Coop is an important leader within the national food coop scene. PSFC is the only member labor cooperative still going, and it is a valuable example of anti-capitalism. It is valuable to have an ideological and philosophical partner.”

Equal Exchange and the Coop can have a real impact on small-scale farmers’ livelihoods. The bulk coffee bought by Coop members in the last year is approximately equivalent to the total coffee output of 22 family farms. The 729,520 bananas that Coop members purchased in 2024 paid \$125,660 directly to small-scale banana farmers in Ecuador and Peru.

There are also other, less tangible effects, Madsen explained. “There is so much global upheaval—state violence, militias, civil war, genocide—that we can support farmers operating in these areas to have some economic and social platform through trade and solidarity by bringing them resources. Money flows in, but the organizational impact of allied neighbors as part of civil society is also important.”



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

“Coops can be more of a positive organizational force than the state in some cases and have been a vehicle for peasant farmers to build political power,” she added. “Farmer cooperatives can use the dollars earned through fair trade premiums. The money we spend with our growers is used to build things like roads and health clinics. We provide access to capital that helps them avoid predatory interest rates.”

In 1994, Equal Exchange became a worker-owned cooperative. Today, each of the 110 to 120 worker-owners has an equal voting share and equal profit share, whether they work in senior management or at entry-level.

While the worker-owners can vote equally, not all decisions are voted on. Madsen explained that “much of the governance and general decision-making is delegated to management or different working groups and committees. Worker-owner votes primarily focus on board elections, bylaw changes, charitable contributions and major changes to operations.”

Equal Exchange initially focused on promoting fair trade in the global south through coffee, and the mission and guiding principles were easily interpreted. In many cases, this trade supports the transition from a commodities trade rooted in colonial histories, and seeks to increase solidarity and transparency when connecting producers and consumers.

Fair trade does not encompass products sourced from the U.S., yet conventional agricultural trade practices here can also be problematic, and small-scale farmers that implement best-practice growing procedures, such as almond farmers in California, need support.

As a result, Equal Exchange management now says that its mission is supporting “fair trade in the global south, and alternative trade in the global north.”

Decisions are not always universally popular. Equal Exchange went through a period of selling single-serve coffee pods (like the ubiquitous K-cup). There was debate among worker-owners about the quality and environmental impact, yet the decision was made by one of the sales teams to proceed. The team had autonomy to make that decision within the guiding principles, on the basis that if people insist on drinking single-serve coffee, then it would be best to drink fair trade higher-quality single-serve coffee.

While the guiding principles of Equal Exchange are often motivated to mitigate the impacts of broader societal challenges, the procurement strategy is much more granular and individualized. Equal Exchange visits its growers, building its network by vetting a farm’s structure and ability to reduce the negative impact of agriculture on the planet.

Equal Exchange sources olive oil from the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC) in the West Bank and from Sindyanina of Galilee in Northern Israel. The suppliers of these oils were chosen not based on their political geography but for their alignment with democratic fair trade practices.

PARC promotes the sustainable economic development of 41 farmer cooperatives, improves water supply and critical infrastructure and provides social services for women, children and families in the West Bank. Sindyanna of Galilee is “a female-led non-profit that actively promotes the concepts of ‘business for peace’ and fair trade in Israel. The organization sells olive oil from Arab small farmers and then channels all of the profits back into Arab women’s education and other economic activities.” Both olive oils are sold at the Coop.

Closer to home, the Coop has sold pecans from New Communities Inc., a Black-owned small farmer collective in southern Georgia that operates a land trust which developed from the Civil Rights movement. Yet Coop members don’t always buy these high-quality products from mission-aligned organizations.

“We love their story and what they’re about,” recalled Receiving Coordinator Henriksen. “The problem here at the Coop is shelf space, and member dollar spends really dominate that. I loved the product, but the members weren’t buying enough of them.”

This suggests an information gap. “I wish members knew more about what is going on behind the scenes at this lovely grocery store,” Henriksson said. That may be the next challenge: offering the Coop’s buyers a way to share the motivating stories of where the food comes from with members in the aisles.

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