

AUGUST GENERAL MEETING: NEW APPOINTMENTS AND DEBATE OVER HYBRID MEETINGS

October 7, 2025



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By Dan Bergsagel

With the end of summer on the horizon, more than 100 Coop members attended the August General Meeting at the Picnic House in Prospect Park, where they approved a slate of new appointments. The Coop's board also debated a contentious proposal about moving toward a hybrid meeting structure next year.

OPEN FORUM

The meeting started with Open Forum statements. Some were straightforward, such as member requests to make the cilantro and parsley less wet and reinstate work credit for attending General Meetings.

Others were written statements that called on the General Coordinators to share the legal opinion that upheld the Coop's Board of Directors actions in the April 2025 General Meeting, when they voted to approve a referendum on hybrid meetings.

One member, Pam Thomas, presented an idea for a new kind of boycott, against LesserEvil popcorn, whose CEO, Charles Coristine, is the father of a staffer of President Trump's DOGE initiative, Edward Coristine.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Joe Szladdek, the Coop's new general manager, reported that the Coop's year-to-date sales through July 20 were up 9.3 percent over the previous year.

He attributed the increase to longer opening hours, growth in membership and inflation. The Coop's gross margin—the money left over after subtracting the cost of goods from sales—increased by about \$600,000. However, operating expenses have gone up a little more, by about \$700,000.

The increase in operating expenses is partly related to one-off expenditures, such as the roll out of the new electronic shelf price labels, which make it easier to update prices, for approximately \$50,000 and an increase in electronic payment service charges from our current provider of approximately \$40,000.

MEAT REPORT

Masha Bezlepkina, the Coop's meat and prepared food buyer, presented a summary of recent farm visits, which were an opportunity to review practices at our supplying farms.

Interestingly, she noted that she is a vegetarian.

"So I knew nothing about meat, but I can differentiate between steaks now," she joked. "These farm visits were very educational for me."

The Coop strives to source meat from small farms and small farm partnerships. Bezlepkina explained that "the idea is that when you support small family farms, you allow them to make more profit. If farmers are more profitable that means they will care about the soil, and that means the animals will be healthy and the meat that comes from these animals will be more nutritional."

Following a member vote in 2002, the Coop can sell only 100 percent grass-fed and grass-finished beef. Bezlepkina reported that this typically requires around one acre per animal in a herd. For example, Slope Farms—a longterm farm partner of the Coop—has a herd of 100 to 120 animals located on its 97 acre farm.

Bezlepkina said a new partner for the Coop, Hickory Nut Gap Farms, sources beef from farms in North Carolina, Georgia and a few other southern states, where they can graze the animals year-round by moving them between mountainous regions in the summer, and coastal regions in the winter.

The farm partnership is interested in better making the nutritional case for its 100 percent grassfed beef. "They talk a lot about nutrition," Bezlepkina said. "However, they are very interested in actually testing it. They submitted some of their meat samples to organizations for testing, and they would like to develop standard tests." These tests will aim to demonstrate the nutritional benefits of grassfed cattle.

Member Robbie Gottlieb asked about whether the Coop was also selecting farms based on how they treat workers. Bezlepkina stressed that the Coop sources meat from “super tiny” farms, often only run by one person, where “these farmers are fanatics. It is really hard, but they love their jobs.”

The least encouraging outcome from the educational visits was on the outlook for the price of beef. “Usually the markets go up and then they come down,” said Bezlepkina, “but this market is just going up and up.”

COMMITTEE REPORTS

International Trade Education Committee member Bart DeCoursy provided a brief narrative of what he believes are the negative impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its successor, the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA). He said the pacts have resulted in a “a dramatic increase in the agribusiness market share concentration and, as a result, small farmers were hit the hardest.”

NEW COORDINATING EDITORS FOR THE LINEWAITERS’ GAZETTE

The first agenda item was the election of Co-Coordinating Editors for the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*. Petra Lewis, an editor for the Gazette since 1999 and a member since 1994, explained the role. “Coordinating editors are responsible for overseeing the Gazette’s editors, writers, art directors, photographers, illustrators and production teams,” she said. “They play a crucial role in the quality, content and overall direction of the Gazette.”

Six candidates responded to a job posting in November, of which three were presented for election for the Co-Coordinating Editors roles: Eric Baldwin, Lily Rothman and Whitney Curry Wimbish. (Rothman is the managing editor of *Time* magazine.)

In response to questions about how the Co-Coordinating Editors would review guidelines for selecting submitted work for publication, Baldwin said they do not want to

“be the voice of the Gazette, but to guide that process. I believe that all of us are in agreement that that’s the role of an editor, to shepherd along your voices and make sure that this is a communal plural voice.”

All three candidates were elected.

ELIGIBILITY FOR POSITION OF TREASURER

Bookkeeping Coordinator Terry Meyers—along with Membership Coordinators Jana Cunningham and Yuwie Tantipech—led a presentation for the second agenda item: a vote to modify the language in the PSFC Guide to General and Annual Meetings to tighten the eligibility requirements to be elected as Treasurer of the Coop. The suggestion would specify that any candidate for the position “must, at the time of the election, be an upper-level management staff person who is chiefly responsible for the financial operations of the Coop.”

The item was presented as a common sense clarification of existing precedent: for the past 25 years of the Coop, the Treasurer has been an upper-level management staff person. Meyers said that “for the bookkeeping department in particular, having a member worker in the role of treasurer and thus not fully versed in all the financial aspects of the Co-op and only on site intermittently would be untenable. It would simply make the smooth functioning of the Coop impossible.”

Many members spoke in support of the motion from the floor; however, there were some comments with a note of caution. Adam Rosenberg was concerned that the candidate pool for treasurer would be overly restricted by the motion.

The proposed motion was voted by members to instead be considered an amendment to the Coop’s bylaws. It passed by a vote of 97 to 35, more than the threshold for a bylaw amendment, which requires a two-thirds majority.

HYBRID MEETINGS

Most of the drama occurred after the monthly meeting, during the board meeting that followed.

The procedural wrangling began with a complicated dispute between a Coop member and the Coop's corporate secretary about the previous monthly meeting's draft minutes, which led to those minutes not being approved.

The draft minutes will be amended and then presented again for a vote at the September meeting.

The discussion then turned to an issue that has roiled the Coop over the last year: whether to adopt a hybrid meeting format. Board President Brandon West took the stage.

"I know there's been a lot more conversation at the board meetings than usual, but I wanted to take this time to do this one more time and talk about something that's very pertinent and important to everyone at the Coop," he said.

West noted that a recent referendum about hybrid meetings reached a simple majority typically needed to pass motions, but fell short of the supermajority that would be needed to amend a bylaw.

West continued: "We need to be able to come to a decision about how we conduct a general meeting and it needs to not be weighed down by the conversation about BDS to the point that it shuts down our ability to function as a Coop."

BDS is the movement to boycott products from Israel, and questions have been raised at past general meetings about whether the hybrid meeting proposal is an effort to promote a BDS vote at the Coop.

West said that, after consulting with General Manager Szladek about the set of proposals, some Board members decided to make a motion to direct that general meetings be in hybrid format beginning in January 2026. West then explained a process for appointing a Hybrid Meeting Subcommittee to present the proposed details to the membership.

Szladek later clarified to the Gazette that his role was not in initiating or authorizing the decision, but in serving as a reference point for Board members on the governance lawyer's advice, as previously shared in an email to the membership sent on May 23 by Joe Holtz, Szladek's predecessor.

That email noted that such Board actions are legally allowable, though far outside the nearly 50 years of General Meeting precedent.

There was some confusion over the details for how this Subcommittee would be established, and concern about the limited consultation that the Chair Committee had in supporting this process. Members of the Chair Committee objected to the lack of consultation.

Fellow Board Members Tess Brown-Lavoie and Keyian Vafai, as well as Szladek, voiced support for the proposal, but collectively the Board agreed to continue discussion for another month and present the directive to a Board Vote at the next General Meeting, an approach suggested by Szladek.

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