

# HOW THE COOP CAN CHANGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO FOOD

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*By Liora Fishman*

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when I joined the Coop at my then-roommate's insistence, I was a skeptic. I questioned whether it could possibly be as wonderful as it had been described—particularly when there was a work commitment.

But after a few weeks of Coop shopping, I knew that I had been proven resoundingly wrong. My entire grocery bag had transformed, and with it my cooking habits. I looked forward to meal preparation on Sundays when I'd previously dreaded it. I tried new recipes and new products and paid attention to what was on the shelves, rather than blindly grabbing the same items each week.

My experience got me thinking about how joining the Coop has reshaped members' approach to food and cooking.

For Jenna Zucker, who joined in the summer of 2024, the Coop has been transformative. Zucker, who is dairy-free, felt stuck in repetitive eating habits due to limited options elsewhere.

“The Coop gave me so much more variety in the types of dairy-free options I had, and I was drawn to that—I wanted more variety in my eating habits and routine, and I really got that from the Coop,” Zucker said.

They now experiment with new recipes using cashew-based dairy-free cheeses, and have discovered favorites like vegan apple pie and Coop candies.

Gabriela Herrera joined the Coop in May 2024 and was surprised by the abundance of products beyond produce. “I feel assured that the products have been vetted for sustainable or organic standards, and I can confidently buy them knowing they align with my preferences,” she said. Herrera’s routine, already built around cooking, has expanded to include seasonal and local ingredients she hadn’t previously used.

For Sarah Slaton, who joined the Coop with her husband two and a half years ago, the access to seasonal produce has reinvigorated her approach to cooking.



“Before the Coop, I felt like I was constantly working with the same ingredients throughout the year,” she said. “Now I’m already looking forward to citrus in January and ramps in the spring. Every season there’s something to look forward to at the Coop, and it keeps cooking fun throughout the year.”

Barbara Weisfeld, a member since 2001, described how the Coop inspired her to focus more on high-quality, affordable ingredients.

“Even if I’m not the best cook, I know it’s going to be okay because the ingredients are amazing,” she said.

The Coop also encouraged Weis to take her health more seriously, noting that being surrounded by high-quality, healthy food options influenced her overall habits. “I was a smoker before I joined the Coop,” she said. “I think being a part of the Coop made me take my health more seriously.”

The Coop has also introduced members to new foods that have become staples in their diets. Avery Trufelman confessed that she was a staunch vegetarian before join-

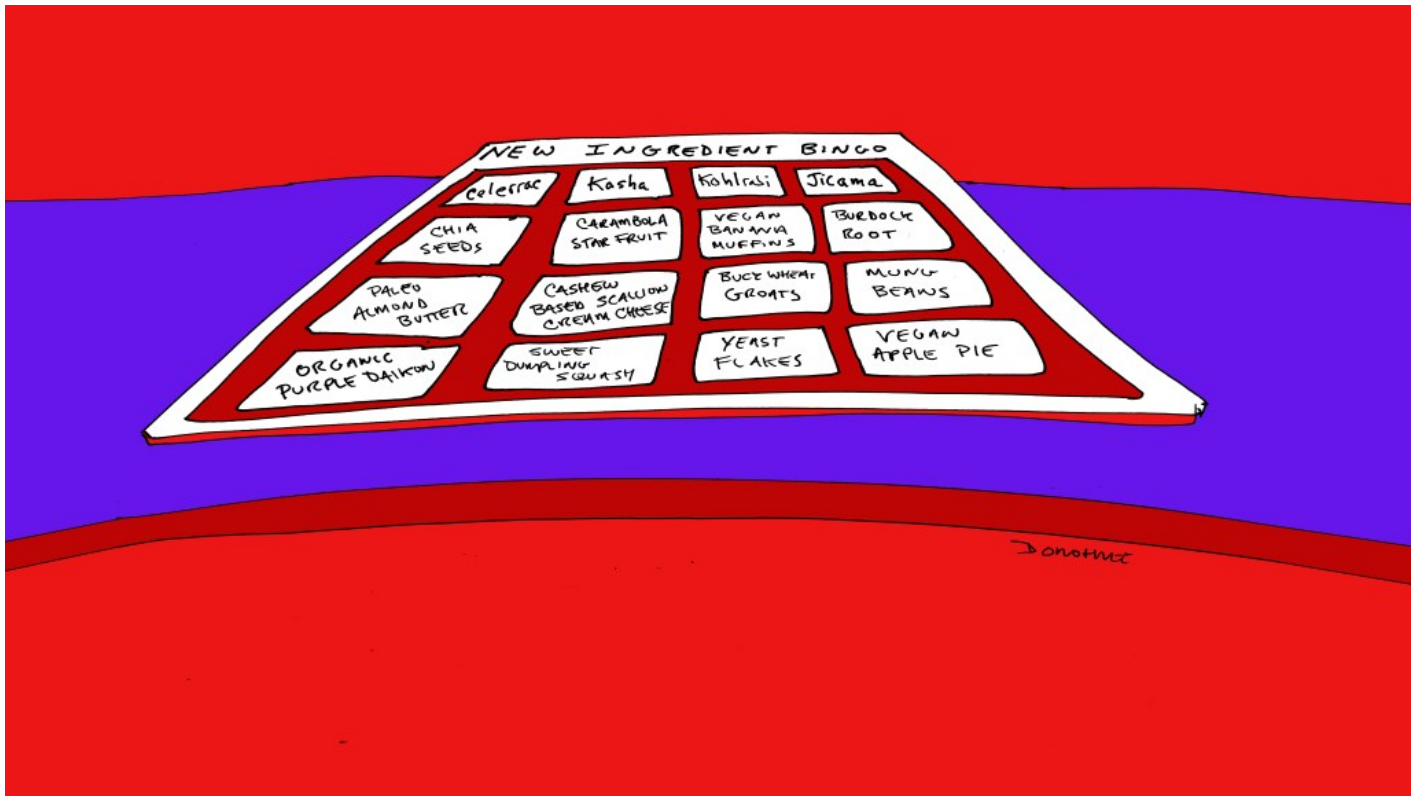
ing the Coop but was tempted by the array of tinned fish, leading her to adopt a pescatarian diet. “I blame the Coop!” she joked. Trufelman also uses Coop-sourced oats and almonds to make her own plant-based milks.

Herrera listed several new favorites, including Spicy Bjorn Corn, Keogh’s Irish Potato Chips and bulk teas, while Slaton now always has Rancho Gordo beans and jelly beans from the bulk section on hand. For Weis, vegan banana walnut muffins and paleo almond butter chocolates have become regular treats.

Beyond the products, members emphasized the community culture of the Coop. Zucker described it as a “home for food lovers” where conversations about favorite foods at checkout lines make the experience unique. “Food is not a thing that is shameful but rather really enjoyed,” they said. “That’s invaluable to me.”

Trufelman echoed this sentiment, highlighting the sense of purpose she feels volunteering through the Coop and how the community aspect has kept her involved even after she moved further away.

“I love volunteering at CHiPs, and my Coop membership ensures that I do it regularly,” she said. (CHiPs is a soup kitchen, food pantry and shelter for women with young children on Fourth Avenue between Sackett and Degraw Streets. Coop members can receive shift credit for volunteering there.)



Members like Zucker and Weisfeld said they appreciate how the Coop creates an intentional environment where food is valued and conversations about sustainability and health are normalized. As Zucker put it, “It’s a real antidote to what can often be a toxic culture about food pervasive in our society.”

Herrera was drawn to the Coop for its collaborative spirit. “I loved the aspect of community and the ability to contribute to the operations of the market,” she said. “It’s more than just a store—it’s a shared space that we all maintain together.”

Weisfeld noted that, overall, she has found a sense of comfort and belonging in the community: “There are some wonderful people in the Coop.”

When she first joined the Coop, she had inconsistent schedules and the shifts helped her establish a routine and sense of stability. “My work schedule varied all the time. I didn’t think I could do the shifts at first—but I actually found my niche,” she said. “It ended up being a gift.”

*Liora Fishman joined the Coop in December 2021. She lives in Prospect Heights and*

*has a wonderful dog, Ollie, whom she loves very much.*