

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND EDUCATION SQUAD REPORT: WHY PRICES KEEP CLIMBING

June 16, 2026



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By Sarah Z. Canner & Stephen I. Klein

If grocery prices at the Coop feel like they keep edging up, they are. A lot of what we buy starts as a commodity—basic items like wheat, corn, soybeans, coffee and oil—and those prices are set in global markets, not at the neighborhood level.

Wars, droughts, tariffs, labor shortages and shipping problems all ripple through the food system quickly. Fuel plays an enormous role, too, because diesel powers nearly

every step of getting food from farm to shelf: planting, harvesting, processing, trucking, shipping and stocking.

Right now, the biggest pressure point is the U.S.-Iran conflict and the Strait of Hormuz crisis, which has closed the strait and prevented transport of petroleum and fertilizer. That waterway carries 20 percent of the world's oil, so when shipping there gets disrupted, energy prices jump. Gasoline in the United States is up sharply, even with some recent easing.

A lot of the world's urea and ammonia, essential ingredients for fertilizers, move through the same region, so those prices have surged as well. That matters because fertilizer is one of the biggest costs for farmers, especially in the spring planting season. If farmers use less fertilizer, that can mean lower yields later on—and higher food prices down the road.

These are new pressures on an already strained system. Prices never really came back down after Covid, and recent tariffs and poor crops have added to the strains. So the Coop isn't dealing with one big shock—it's facing several at once.

Even so, the Coop has been able to maintain fairly stable prices in this volatile environment. Britt Henriksson, Receiving Coordinator and Buyer of Bulk and Gourmet Foods, said: "We have been seeing higher price hikes since Covid—there were not enough drivers and port workers and the cost of containers for shipping increased. After Covid eased, there were not enough workers across the board (prices never did come back down to pre-Covid prices). The most recent hikes were from tariffs and bad crops. I believe one or two small companies have said they will start charging a small fee per invoice or increase their fuel pricing for transportation due to rising fuel prices."

So yes, prices are still climbing—but a lot of work is going on behind the scenes to keep the Coop as steady as possible.

COST CUTTING, THE BULLETIN BOARD, AND A \$4,000 QUESTION: NOTES FROM THE FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

June 16, 2026



April 1, 2025

By Nikia Dawkins

At the start of February's General Meeting, Chair David Moss announced that the Dispute Resolution Committee election would be postponed, which left just one issue on the official agenda. It was an issue that elicited excitement, frustration and personal accusations, an issue near and dear to the hearts of many—the Coop bulletin board. During an evening spent discussing hybrid meetings, unexpected financial loss and the search for a new general manager, the most hotly debated issue of the night was where this hypothetical bulletin board should be located.

But first, the open forum began with an impassioned plea from member Spike Kahn about the need for hybrid meetings. While wearing a mask, Kahn argued that hybrid meetings would allow more accessibility for members like herself who are immunocompromised or otherwise unable to attend in person, adding that they would also be more democratic because Prospect Park's Picnic House is not large enough to accommodate the entire Coop community. Later, during the General Coordinators' Reports, Joe Szladek addressed concerns that the GCs are fundamentally against hybrid meetings. "We are not opposed to considering it," he said, "but are concerned about the impact and how it will be implemented." He went on to raise the following questions: How do we ensure that only Coop members have access and that no one video records or screenshots the meetings? How do we determine who can be remote and who must be there in person? And, finally, how much will it cost? Szladek advised that one tech company gave him a quote of \$4,000 per meeting. "And when I asked if we could DIY, they laughed," he said. Szladek floated the idea that we could, perhaps, purchase equipment and use skilled member labor instead of a third party, but right now there are more questions than answers. He bemoaned that a lot of these issues weren't properly addressed by those who initially proposed the idea. "Yes, they were!" said Carol Wald from the audience, after which a few other members raised their hands to speak on the topic, but Chair Moss determined there wasn't enough time left for discussion on the matter.

General Manager Joe Holtz presented the Treasurer's Report, in which he compared

the financial projections from 2023 to the financial actualities of 2024. It had been projected that the Coop would have a positive gain of \$25,000, but the Coop actually lost \$420,000. Sales last year were up 6.68%, but income was down due to a lower markup and higher-than-expected expenses, including health benefits, electronic payment fees, and business insurance. The unexpected portion of the expenses totaled \$438,000, with the bulk of that being the unexpected increase in health benefits, which cost \$312,000 more than projected. However, despite these negative variances, the Coop still ended the year with \$247,000 in positive cash flow. So, overall, there was an increase in cash despite a loss of income. A few members requested more information about the unexpected increase in expenses. Holtz explained that health insurance rates are skyrocketing across the country, adding that the Coop did tweak the employee health plan to save a little money, and now it is more expensive to seek treatment out-of-network. With regard to insurance, he wanted to make sure the Coop could be rebuilt if it were, say, hit by an asteroid or otherwise demolished, so coverage had to be increased. Finally, Holtz shared that he's working on getting into a program that will lower fees for electronic payments and that the newly extended shopping hours will also help improve Coop finances.

Later, during the General Coordinators' Reports, Elinor Astrinsky outlined several ways that members can also help to cut costs. She said that members are now being used for front end support on the shopping floor, a decision designed to decrease staff hours. She suggested that members sign up for squad leader roles and repair shifts to further decrease the Coop's expenses. Most of the repair work requires skill and expertise (so if you *are* experienced, please sign up!), but some of the work can be done by almost anyone, such as painting. She stressed that using member labor instead of hired help saves a lot of money, and that many squad leaders are aging out or retiring, so we need a new generation to step up. On a similar note, Chairwoman and Board Member Imani Q'ryn informed the crowd that she would be retiring in June, which means that we will need a new chair committee member and a new board member to replace her.

Valerie Vadala from the Personnel Committee said they were still reviewing candi-

dates for the new General Manager and had whittled the pool down to four people who would be interviewed in the coming weeks. She said that replacing Joe Holtz, who's been with us for 50 years, won't be easy. They're looking for someone both innovative and with the appropriate level of experience, who can handle the volume and intensity of the Coop.

Speaking on behalf of the International Trade Education Committee, Bart DeCoursy reported that Trump's tariffs would begin on April 2, raising U.S. inflation by 0.8%. He encouraged members to visit BlueSky for more information as the economic impact will be ongoing and extensive.

At this point, the meeting moved to the official agenda, and Keyian Vafai gave a presentation explaining the history of the Coop bulletin board, from its initial creation in the 1980s to its removal in 2020 due to Covid precautions and fire code regulations. There is now an official Coop-business-only bulletin board in the corner entrance, and he proposed that members should be allowed to use it as well. His presentation was followed by that of Katheryn Keller, who argued that reinstating the bulletin board would foster connection, provide access to trustworthy local resources, and encourage non-digital engagement. A small-business owner herself, she said that over the years, she was able to find a pet sitter, a subletter and multiple clients via the old bulletin board, and she believes that reinstating it would create a lifeline for service providers and freelancers, as well as a shared information hub for events and opportunities. She also presented the results of a member survey she created to determine the level of interest in the bulletin board, and although she was only able to survey 375 out of 17,000 members, the response was overwhelmingly positive.

Almost everyone seemed excited about the bulletin board—so excited, in fact, that there was a flurry of ideas. For every idea, however, there was an opposing idea, and for every point a counterpoint. The main issues revolved around the location of the bulletin board and the supervision of its content. Two members were extremely concerned that Vafai, who is a vocal supporter of Palestine, would weaponize the bulletin board to promote and organize the BDS movement. Vafai calmly replied, "I won't be

running it,” which left members arguing over whether anyone needed to run it. As for its location, members were divided on whether it should be located in the corner entrance (which is, perhaps, too small for such use), in the stairwell (where it originally existed but which may not meet fire code regulations or provide enough accessibility), just outside the Coop (which could exacerbate the Coop’s current litter problem), or in place of the lockers near the entrance. The animated discussion was ultimately ended by Chair Moss because it was “really in the weeds.”

The Board then voted to approve the minutes of the January GM after no one had any suggested changes, and the meeting disbanded.

Nikia Dawkins is a creative writer, journalist, and night owl.

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING REPORT: HIGH TENSIONS ON A COLD NIGHT AND A COOP DIVIDED

June 16, 2026



March 11, 2025

By William Doran

Coop members warmed themselves around pots of soup outside the Prospect Park Picnic House, awaiting entry for the January General Meeting (GM).

Once everyone was settled inside, the evening's agenda hovered above gathered members on a large projection screen. While there were other topics discussed, three contentious issues took up most of the two-and-a-half-hour gathering: boycotts, hybrid general meetings and committee elections.

OPEN FORUM

Several members spoke in favor of boycotting Israeli products and expressed disappointment in two General Coordinators' articles published in the January *Gazette*.

Some members who spoke that night chose to only give their first names.

A Coop member, Jim, argued that, “When the Coop was founded in the ’70s, we boycotted products from apartheid South Africa, despite the fact that the United States, under multiple presidents, had official policies protecting South Africa.”

Another member, Judy, pushed for open discussion: “The Coop is a member-led organization dedicated to democracy and to making the world a better place. Members need to be able to have this discussion. It’s been put off and refused to be discussed for over 10 years.”

Aaron, a member, labeled the General Coordinators’ stance in the *Gazette* as fear-mongering: “The place to mediate disagreements is at these general meetings. As a Jew, I’m pretty familiar with fear-mongering rhetoric around the non-violent protest movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS).”

A self-organized group, Coop 4 Unity, spoke against the boycott, calling for unity among members and extending an invitation to engage boycott supporters in dialogue. Another member, Barbara, directly criticized boycott supporters, saying: “You don’t understand the movement you’re promoting, or you are willfully lying to all of us. And to this group I’m going to ask you, do you value the Coop more than you hate Israel? And to everyone else I ask, if you value the Coop, then please, we have to do something to stop them.”



Aaron



Hana



Hima

Boycott supporters have also self-organized as PSFC 4 Palestine, publishing a zine called *The Olive Press*, which they distributed outside before the meeting, along with the aforementioned soup.

Members criticized the 75% majority voting threshold for boycotts, citing important decisions regularly made via simple majority, such as board elections and markup increases. To applause and laughter, a Coop member, Hana, sardonically identified several other things that could become policy with a simple majority: “We could allow suspended members to shop, but only if they wear a scarlet ‘S’ around their neck. We [could] make all Coop general meetings black-tie only. We could even refrigerate beer.”

Another member, Hima, criticized the concept of in-person-only general meetings: “This group of people here, we represent 2% of the membership. Why should we be the only exclusive club that gets to vote on any issues?” Hima continued, “During

COVID, we saw that technology is definitely available and accessible. It's exploitative that 100% of us work, but only 2% of us can actually vote."

"I CAN'T MEASURE THE IMPACT. IT WOULD BREAK MY HEART FOR PEOPLE TO LEAVE THE COOP JUST BECAUSE THEY DON'T AGREE WITH A COOP POLICY," SAID JOE HOLTZ, REGARDING THE PROPOSED BOYCOTT.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Coop's net income dropped by about \$525,000 from the previous year, due largely to a 1% reduction in the base markup, which returned to 25% at the start of the 2026 fiscal year in February. In 2020, members voted to increase the markup from 21% to 25% to combat pandemic losses. It was later reduced to 24% to alleviate some of the pressure on members.

Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz stressed of the decrease, "You can't eat the markup, but you can eat the food." He highlighted cost of goods sold (the value of goods prior to markup) as a better indicator of how the Coop performed which was up roughly \$3 million over last year. He noted that member equity—the value of what we all own together, minus debts—stayed consistent from 2023 to 2024 at \$8.73 million.

Member questions shifted the focus back to boycotts, requesting financials to support the General Coordinators' stance against the boycotts that were published in the *January Gazette*. The January 7, 2025, piece, with a byline from the "General Coordinator Team," titled, "Coordinator's Corner: Our Coop at Risk," warned, in part: "Financial fallout from a boycott could force tough decisions such as raising prices or laying off staff."

Holtz responded, "I can't measure the impact. It would break my heart for people to leave the Coop just because they don't agree with a Coop policy." Calling attention to

thousands of members on both sides of the issue, Holtz said that taking a stance is a risky prospect, and that the Coop cannot afford to lose members. “I believe that cooperators are precious, and I don’t want to lose any of you.”

GENERAL COORDINATORS’ REPORTS

General Coordinator Lisa Moore validated member complaints about adherence to election protocols, citing that the Agenda Committee missed the deadline to publish an announcement in the *Gazette* prior to elections last year, and it did not announce the opening at the September 2024 GM.

She quieted doubts, however, about the legitimacy of the election in question, saying: “There’s no evidence suggesting that these committees intentionally omitted their announcements from the *Gazette*. Nor should the omission cast doubts on the validity of the elections.”

She called for an update to the Coop’s Guide for General Meetings and Annual Meetings to include guidelines on vacancy announcements and potential consequences for omitting the required steps mentioned. Moore noted, “All committees should be held to the same standard to ensure transparency, cultivate trust and encourage participation among all members.” She invited interested members to submit their information to psfcac@gmail.com, reiterating that there are still openings on the Agenda Committee.

Lastly, she indicated that the Coop has identified several 800-seat (or larger) venues for in-person voting on hybrid meetings. The Agenda Committee will reach out to the proposal’s presenters to select a date.



Lisa Moore



Joe Szladek

General Coordinator Joe Szladek closed the presentation of GC reports by reminding everyone of the Coop's early closing on February 1 for annual inventory.

EIGHT MEMBERS PROPOSED A NEW COMMITTEE TO SHRINK COOP RELIANCE ON PLASTIC. THE COMMITTEE WOULD SOLICIT COOP-MEMBER PARTICIPATION AND WORK WITH STAFF TO IDENTIFY AND IMPLEMENT CONCRETE CHANGES.

MEMBER COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Pension Education and Reporting Committee solicited members to submit questions for the Committee's upcoming annual report in the *Gazette*.

The Personnel Committee shared progress on its search for a new General Manager

to replace Joe Holtz, who will retire in June of 2025. The committee anticipates selection by late spring of this year. The job posting and salary are publicly available on the Coop's website.

The International Trade Education Committee highlighted potential impacts of Trump Administration tariffs and encouraged members to read "What New Trump Tariffs Would Mean for the Coop," published in the *Gazette* last December by *Gazette* reporter Leila Darabi.

PLASTIC REDUCTION

Eight members proposed a new committee to shrink Coop reliance on plastic. The committee would solicit Coop-member participation and work with staff to identify and implement concrete changes.

Fifteen-year-member Jessica Roff supported the need for such a committee by sharing some staggering statistics: "Of all the plastic produced [in the U.S.] since 1950, 91% has never been recycled." She continued, "Many of the things that make plastic problematic to recycle are the same things that harm our bodies and the environment. There are more than 16,000 chemicals in plastic."

Roff and many of the other presenters advocating for the committee's creation combat environmental hazards in their professional lives. They outlined opportunities and challenges while acknowledging the Coop's significant history of environmental advocacy and valuable insights that could come from Coop members and staff.

Members expressed gratitude for the group's work and posed questions about how to forge ahead. Things like reuseable, member-provided containers came up, as well as frustration over the lack of plastic-free options for some food items, like milk. Presenters emphasized that this must happen in community to be successful. Members can submit questions and ideas to reduce.plastic.psfc@gmail.com.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Meeting Chair Imani Q'Ryn announced that this may be her last meeting, after serving the Coop for 20 years. Many cheered and offered standing applause, expressing thanks for her service.

The Board of Directors voted to accept the advice of the general membership. Director Tim Hospodar addressed how the Coop's board of directors meets, acknowledging that this portion of the GM is the one time that the board is mandated to meet, however brief.



Imani Q'Ryn seated at left



Tim Hospodar

He suggested leveraging this time as an opportunity to more adeptly engage general membership and discuss important issues. Hospodar proposed, "...Perhaps we can maximize this chance to discuss topics that the board finds concerning or disconcerting. He continued, "The Board of Directors does not have a dedicated part of the meeting to report out or raise our concerns."

Ironically, the discussion was cut short for the sake of time, and the GM adjourned.

William Doran is a licensed architect, educator and food writer based in Brooklyn, NY. Though originally from New Orleans, LA, he has been a Coop member and New York City resident since 2022. He has taught cooking classes for the Coop (foodcoopcooks.org) and publishes a free quarterly newsletter at adventurouscooks.com.