

# 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 Szladek, 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.*

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COOP BUYERS: SUPPLY CHAIN SUPERHEROES

October 7, 2025



*Meat buyer Margie Lempert is seeing trucking delays and higher prices for everything.*

*By Marisa Bowe*

We've all read about supply chain snarls—including in the last issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. For the Coop's buying team, those snarls have become the new normal.

**BULK GOODS AND GROCERIES**



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Cheese, bulk and specialty buyer Yuri Weber is encouraging smaller distributors to meet the Coop's shortfall.

"We're just mad scrambling for things," said cheese, bulk and specialty foods buyer, Yuri Weber. "Playing this whack-a-mole game of trying to find who has food, and switching the distributor every week to try to find it. Our stress level is very high."



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Gillian Chi, groceries buyer, sees a shortage of supply across the whole store.

"My job is totally different now," said groceries buyer Gillian Chi. "I used to spend maybe an hour-and-a-half a day ordering. Now I spend four hours a day. There isn't really one particular item [in short supply]," she explained. "The problem for us is that it's across the whole store, and the out-of-stocks keep shifting."



Unit Price	RETAIL PRICE
\$1.27	\$1.19
LB	15 OZ
0 104256 380000	Rows
Field Day Beans Black Organic	

PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Keeping a huge seller like black beans in stock has been a major challenge.

“We sell a ton of canned black beans . . . All of a sudden I’m not getting any black beans delivered. And then I realize we’re going to run out if I don’t scramble and find a different brand or a different distributor. So I scramble and I find a replacement, and then before I finish dealing with that, it’s pasta. All of a sudden I can’t get La Molisana, a popular brand of pasta. It won’t just be one distributor; it’ll be that nobody has it,” said Chi.

“It’s this waiting game. Do I wait a few more days and see if it comes back in stock, or do I find a substitute? Then I find a substitute, I get a bunch of it in. I put it on the shelf, and then maybe the La Molisana comes back. And then”—with limited storage—“what do you do?” wondered Chi.

This scenario is playing out over dozens of items. “I’ll have a list every day of like 50, 60 different items that are now out of stock,” Chi said. Adding to the difficulties, UNFI, the Coop’s biggest distributor, has been rationing and cutting orders, adding a new word to the buyers’ vocabulary: “smoothing.” Smoothing, said Weber, “is just a euphemism for not sending us what we want.”

“We never used to have limits before,” said Chi. “We could order as much as we wanted,” but now there are limits to the amounts buyers may purchase. “Some days we would order 1,000 cases and get five cases. Some days we would order 1,000 cases and get 300 cases. It was really bad. It was very stressful,” recalled Chi.

It now takes Chi at least twice as long to compile the buyers’ orders each day. “I have to do it on a spreadsheet, add them all up, make sure they don’t go over the case count for that day. And if they do, I have to start making adjustments. It’s very tedious,” she said.



“The reason we order from UNFI,” Weber explained, “is that they’re huge. We sell a ridiculous amount of food for the size of the store that we are.” When the smoothing started, he said, “we were kind of scrambling to find replacements using our pre-existing distributors,” but there’s just one problem. “We clean them out because they’re just not equipped to deal with the kind of volume that we do,” said Weber.

“We’re trying to encourage these more local, smaller distributors to step up their game a little bit,” Weber said. “It’s probably about 40 distributors that we work with that sell cheese and pantry items and things that UNFI doesn’t sell. We had a good meeting with them a couple of weeks ago to try to make that happen. We’re also trying to find places that are kind of close because of the trucking problem.”

“We’re still trying,” he said, “to figure out long term how this is going to work.”

## MEAT

Margie Lempert, meat buyer for the Coop, said some of her meat comes from afar, and she's seeing higher delays than usual because of trucking issues at various distribution sites. She has also noticed that local suppliers are affected, too, with the result being the same for both. "We've gotten cost increases across the board," Lempert said. "Chicken, pork, everything, really."

"We did have price increases from Aberdeen Hill not that long ago," she said. "And we did see some increases from McDonald, who's a local farmer we buy pork and lamb from. I asked Aberdeen about the cost increases, and he said everything has gone up: fuel, insurances, feed supplements, seed, repair parts, etc. The price of piglets has gone up almost 40%. There's increased cost to trucking and butchering, and processing fees, as well."

Hudson Harvest, a Germantown, New York, distributor, sells sausages and other meat products to the Coop. "We just found out they're shutting the processing plant down for two to three weeks because they can't get enough labor in to keep the ball rolling," Lempert said.

In an effort to get members the meat they desire, Lempert has come with a solution: "What I arrived at is ordering much more than we need and asking the distributor to freeze some of it so we can pull it later as a frozen product, and then we'll defrost it. It's not going to affect the quality."

## PRODUCE



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

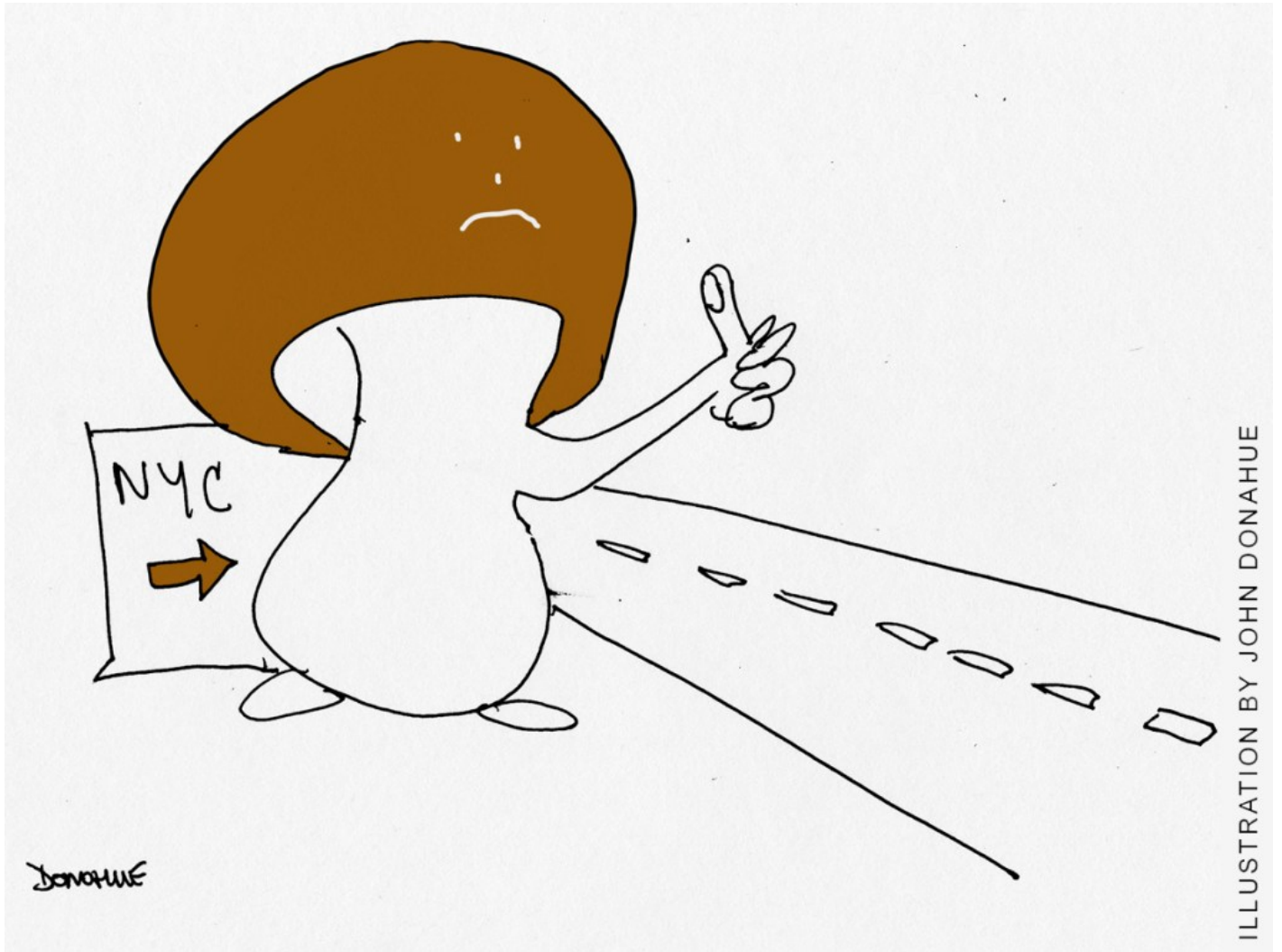
Cecelia Rembert, produce buyer, keeping a close eye on those hard-to-get mushrooms.

“We always scramble somewhat,” said produce buyer Cecelia Rembert, “because produce is always riding waves. Crops fail all the time. That’s just the nature of weather. One of the things that we pride ourselves on is hoping that the Coop membership never notices.”

This year has been different. “Through the summer and fall...from talking to our various suppliers, whether small-scale or large-scale, they had the produce in plenitude,” she said, but “they didn’t have the workers they needed to pack the pallets and drive the trucks.

“Delivery schedules became much more erratic, and there were many more of what we call ‘mispicks’—the wrong item was sent because the person working was new.”

“But,” Rembert said, “we have been recently seeing real genuine produce outages now as well. We get substitutions that we didn’t ask for—like we’d ordered five green kale, and instead we get five celery.”



“The only thing that kind of hurts my heart is not having the creminis,” lamented Rembert. “Mushrooms are very hard to get. We tried to order 50 cases of cremini mushrooms, and one of our suppliers wrote back that they’re rationing everybody to three cases each. They don’t have the people to grow them and pack them. So it’s likely we won’t have enough creminis for all of our members, which sucks. We really try hard for that not to happen,” she said.