

CHEAP CROISSANTS BUT LIDL CHARM

January 20, 2026



ILLUSTRATION BY FRAN MENESSES

GERMANY'S BARGAIN-BASEMENT GROCERY CHAIN LIDL COMES TO PARK SLOPE

January 20, 2026

By Anita Bushell

An outpost of the German discount grocery chain Lidl opened to great fanfare on 5th Avenue on December 10. Shoppers lined up at dawn, and raced home to post their reviews on Reddit: “I was surprised at how big the store was, and also how much space they dedicated to anti-theft at the entrance/exit, since that means less space for things to sell,” shared one early visitor. Another Redditor posted a nostalgic lament for the grocery store that had once occupied Lidl’s location: “That Key Food had the best music,” they recalled. “Well-curated, 50s and 60s classics and deeper cuts played just a little louder than it needed to be.”

In addition to basic goods at affordable prices (most famously, a \$.49 freshly-baked croissant) and hard to find European products, Lidl is known for its rotating stock of specialty goods that won’t break the bank—think of it as a Teutonic Trader Joe’s. Or, given its small footprint and sterile aesthetic, think of it as a downgrade from the beloved and spacious Key Food that was demolished in 2021 to make way for the 184-unit housing development that encompasses Lidl.

Lidl was born in 1973 in Ludwigshafen, Germany. The original store had three employees and some 500 products. By the 1990s, the shop had grown into an international brand, with outposts in France and the UK. 2015 saw the establishment of its U.S. headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. The chain now operates 190 stores on the east coast of the U.S.

Its arrival in Park Slope comes at a time when households are getting more budget-conscious, and on the lookout for deals such as “seasonal apples” (no name mentioned) at \$1.39/lb. or a package of Lidl Preferred Selection cooked shrimp for the low price of \$6.99. But the Park Slope newcomer is going to have to work harder if it wants to lure shoppers away from the Coop or fill the shoes of Key Food, whose vast parking lot attracted shoppers from other neighborhoods.

LIDL IS KNOWN FOR ITS ROTATING STOCK OF SPECIALTY GOODS THAT WON'T BREAK THE BANK—THINK OF IT AS A TEUTONIC TRADER JOE'S.

In addition to being accessible to car owners across the borough, Key Food was known for the classic soft rock that pumped through the loudspeakers and a marvelous management team. In the era before Fresh Direct, this reporter remembers entering the store after days home with a sick child. "Where've you been?" one of the managers asked. When he learned the answer, he responded, "What's wrong with you? You could've picked up the phone and called. We deliver!"

Lidl, on the other hand, is comparatively small and utilitarian. With its gray tones, the street-level entrance has all the charm of a parking garage. The foyer is not warm or inviting, and there are no decorations or classic supermarket advertising posters. An escalator delivers a shopper from the lobby to the lower level, where she is greeted by a glass wall, adding to a sense of entrapment (one presumes the purpose of this barrier is to prevent shoplifting). After cashing out at a self-checkout station—no fun Coop conversations to be had here—said shopper exits through an opening in the aforementioned glass wall.

The store itself feels like a glorified mini-mart, with country music playing and offerings relying on marketing features such as "Monday Must-Haves," "Wednesday Weekly Deals," and "Weekend Super Sales." A myLidl app offers even more exclusive deals.

Should the Coop be nervous about the new kid on the block? Not a bit. To begin with, Lidl has a narrow selection of basic products. It's the kind of place where you might run in to get a carton of eggs or a container of milk, not whole cloves, which I tried and failed to find last week in the limited spice section. The Coop, of course, has an excellent spice section, with everything from Adobo to Zatar, and, all told, lower prices than I've seen anywhere in Brooklyn.

AN ESCALATOR DELIVERS A SHOPPER TO THE LOWER LEVEL, WHERE SHE IS GREETED BY A GLASS WALL, ADDING TO A SENSE OF ENTRAPMENT.

But there are bargains to be found at Lidl: a bag of mandarins costs \$2.78, less than half of the \$6.44 a similar bunch costs at the Coop. A loaf of Lidl multi-grain bread is priced at \$2.59, whereas a sliced loaf of Arnold's Multi-Grain bread costs \$5.03 at the Coop. Croissants are priced at \$.49. "Our famous 49-cent butter croissants are flown in from Europe and baked fresh daily in our stores," trumpets a company press release. "We dare you to find a flakier French pastry this side of the Atlantic!"

My family and I took them up on their challenge and embarked on a taste test, comparing the Coop's Colson bakery croissants available for \$2.11 with the version from Lidl. The Coop's treat won hands down, with a taller, flakier, and more subtle croissant. Lidl's iteration was smaller, heavier, and left a slightly fatty aftertaste.



PHOTO BY ANITA BUSHELL

A Colson Bakery croissant from the Coop, compared with Lidl's.

Depending on where you live, the newcomer is an okay option for last-minute dashes to grab basics. But if you're looking for a sense of community—or croissants that are better than technically edible—don't say I didn't warn you.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer and native New Yorker. She is the author of One Way to Whitefish (2024), and Object Essays: A Collection (2022). Her work appears in multiple publications online.

WHERE DOES THE COOP'S FOOD ACTUALLY COME FROM?

January 20, 2026



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

April 22, 2025

By Dan Bergsagel

You may think you know where the Coop's Brazil nuts and French couscous come from. But what about the English and Persian cucumbers? Or the Japanese eggplant and Jerusalem artichokes?

If you understand the origin of food and its journey from farms and other producers to the Coop's aisles, you may be able to better grasp the potential impact of tariffs during this tumultuous economic period.

Leila Darabi's insightful article from December 2024 outlined some of the potential overall impacts that the Trump administration's tariffs could have on the agricultural sector and, consequently, prices at the Coop. Here's a further exploration of tariffs and the Coop, based on an examination of the origins of the products lining the Coop's aisles.

BUYING STRATEGY

The Coop seeks out food using two complementary aims: to source the best and to source locally. This approach is clearest with fresh produce.

"We try to source the best representation of the item," explained Cecelia Rembert, the Coop's fruit buyer. But buyers also try to prioritize sourcing from producers who are local, which the Coop defines as being within a 500-mile radius—a one-day drive—of Brooklyn. Using local suppliers ensures products are fresh and supports the regional economy.

Of course, not all produce can be bought locally.

"The local growing season is from May to September or October. During the season a lot of the food comes locally from the North East," Rembert said. "Outside of the local growing season, a lot of our produce comes from California and Mexico. Certain items

are never grown in the United States, so we are always sourcing them from afar. Pineapples always come from Costa Rica. Bananas always come from Ecuador. Avocados come from Mexico almost all year round."

FOOD ORIGINS

What's more, even mapping the origins of the Coop's food is not easy.

"A lot of the data depends on what information is recorded when the food is received. Often we're more interested in getting it on the shelf and selling it than extra paperwork," said Ken Macdonald, a Receiving Coordinator who is involved in IT at the Coop.

Yet Macdonald provides a glimmer of hope for data enthusiasts: "We are in the middle of a big shift to a new database system right now, so probably in a year or two we will have more access to origin information."

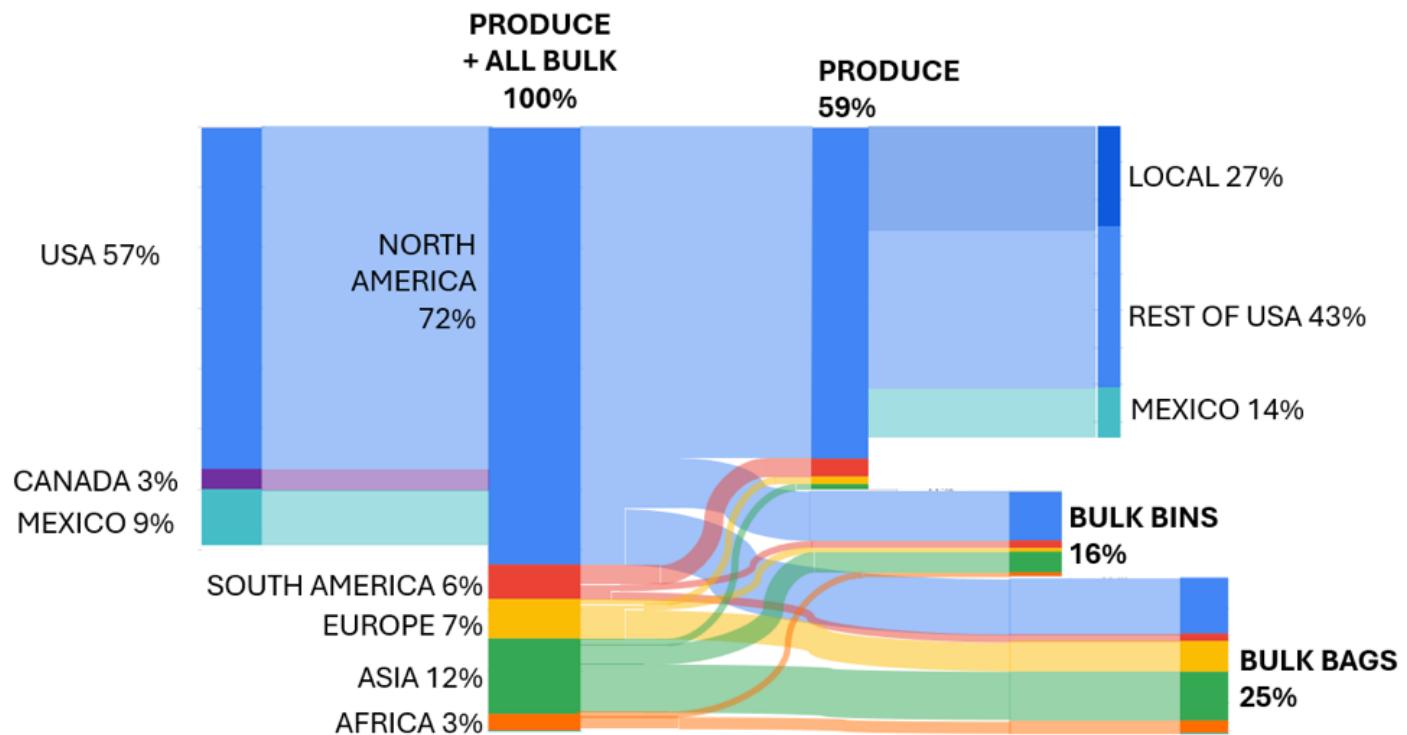
While not all origin data is currently accessible, the Coop does record and publish weekly information on the origin of produce as well as occasional updates on the origin of bulk items, both in bins and in bags. This does not provide information on many items on our shelves, but it does enable us to generate a snapshot of where we currently source the food placed in the aisles on the far right as one enters the Coop.

Produce and bulk items sourced from North America make up 72 percent of the total, with U.S.-grown food accounting for 57 percent of the total, Mexican-grown for 9 percent, and Canadian-grown for 3 percent. All other countries individually contribute less than 3 percent.

Even though we are not currently in the local growing season, 27 percent of our produce items are sourced within a 500-mile radius, while 92 percent of our produce comes from North America. Some current locally grown produce include famous New York apples and hardy root vegetables like beets, potatoes, turnips and celeriac.

Some items are even sourced from within a 5-mile radius, such as Brooklyn-grown Gotham Greens salad and basil.

The Coop's reliance on other countries and regions increases for bulk items, with only 58 percent of our bulk bin items and 36 percent of our bulk bagged items coming from North America. Additionally, 25 percent of our bulk binned items and 31 percent of our bulk bagged items come from Asia, while 20 percent of our bulk bagged items come from Europe.





The data presented here is based on the variety of items on sale, not on the volume of each item of food sold. Two Coop produce staples skew these statistics significantly when the quantities sold are considered instead of the variety. Rembert estimates that around \$13 million worth of produce is sold at the Coop each year, including \$500,000 of bananas and \$750,000 of avocados. These foods—both sourced almost exclusively from outside the US—together account for over 10% of produce sales by volume.

THE TARIFFS TODAY

Most of our produce and bulk items are sourced within the U.S., but certainly not all of them. Does this leave the Coop open to price volatility caused by tariffs?

Since President Trump has taken office, there has been significant confusion and instability associated with his tariff policies. Has there been any change in the Coop's food supply? "We haven't heard anything from our distributors," Rembert explained. "The produce business is pretty matter-of-fact. People just do their thing. The market will reflect the supply or the demand, but nothing has changed yet."

It is tempting to try and anticipate food distribution disruption based on prior experience. Does the COVID-19 pandemic offer any lessons?

For Rembert, the banana supply was an interesting case study in supply chain dynamics. “We get our bananas from Equal Exchange—a small cooperative importer. When there was high demand for cargo ships during the pandemic, as a small distributor, they were often bumped. So we had some trouble getting bananas.”

Rembert added that “the tariffs are different as there isn’t really any supply chain disruption—things are just going to cost more. We’re not going to do anything different. The price will go up, and we’ll continue to apply the same markup. That might affect member purchasing, and we may see that demand goes down.”

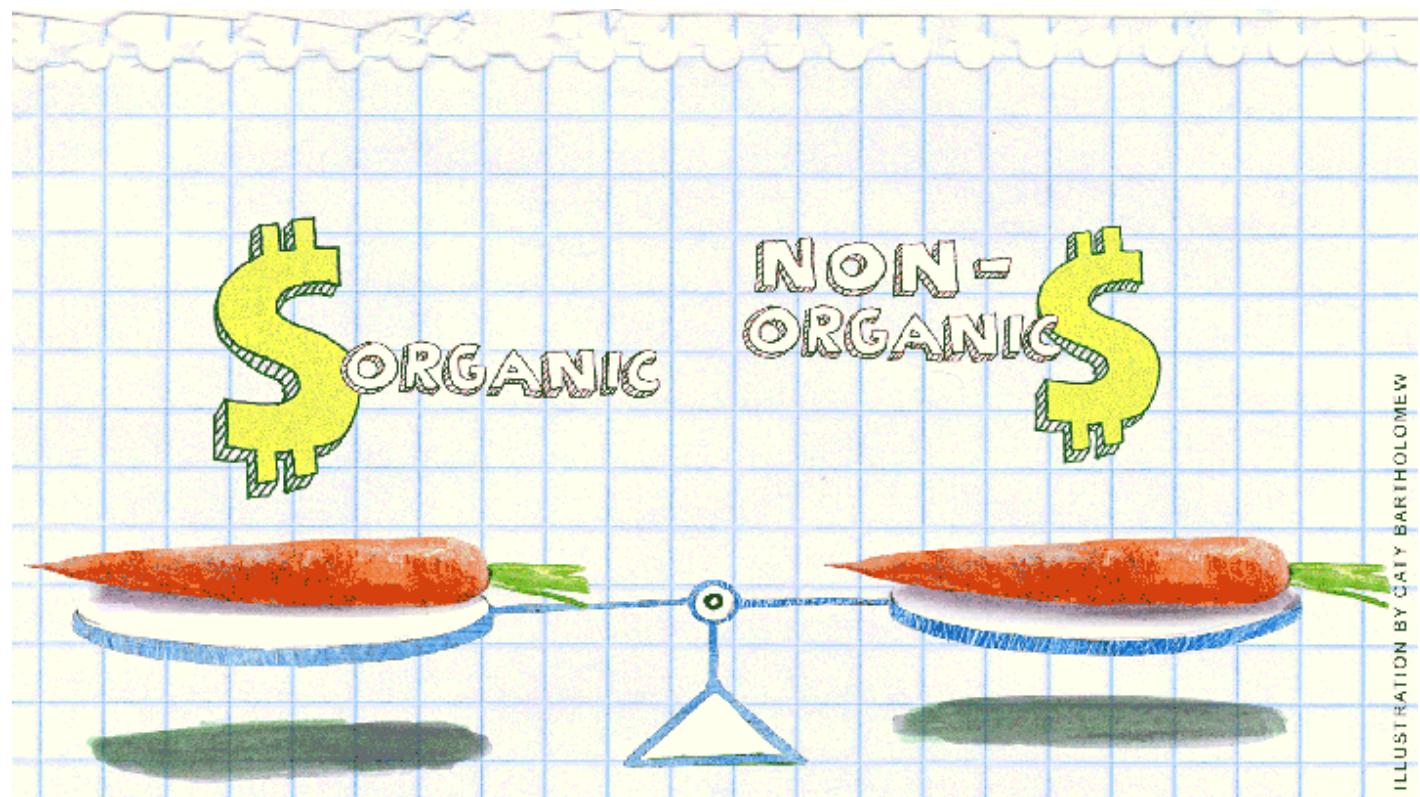
The recent headlines have all been about the impact of tariffs on exporting Kentucky bourbon and on importing European wine. Is it only a matter of time before they come for our fabled cheese case? Rembert, again: “It will be interesting to see what kind of impact this trade war—if it continues as a trade war for years—will have on reshaping what the Coop carries and what members are buying.”

And finally, for the trivia fans: Our Brazil nuts and French couscous come from Brazil and France, but the English cucumbers are Canadian, the Persian cucumbers are Dominican, the Japanese eggplant are Honduran and the Jerusalem artichokes are American.

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

WHY ARE SOME ORGANIC PRODUCTS SO MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE?

January 20, 2026



By Walecia Konrad

A recent stroll through the Park Slope Food Coop's produce section showed the beginning of summer's bounty and the usual wide variety of organically grown items, including locally grown strawberries, rhubarbaand greens.

There's also the dizzying array of produce prices, posted each day on the shelf labels, often showing organic and conventionally grown produce side by side. Invariably, organic costs more than conventionally grown—sometimes a lot more.

"I SHOP PRICE A LOT IN THE PRODUCE AISLE AND I OFTEN WONDER WHY THERE CAN BE SUCH A BIG DIFFERENCE IN ORGANIC AND REGULAR. IF IT'S SIGNIFICANT, I'LL BUY REGULAR OR SKIP IT ALL TOGETHER."

COOP MEMBER DEBORAH NOCELLA

Coop members, of course, are accustomed to higher prices for organics. They're also appreciative of the fact that organic produce is almost always less expensive at the Coop than other grocery stores, thanks to the PSFC's low markup.

But the price differential does make one wonder why organically grown is more expensive than conventionally grown produce. Even more mysterious, why is there such a dramatic difference for some items? On a recent shopping day, for example, organic red peppers were selling for \$4.73 a pound compared to \$1.87 for non-organic. And organic fennel bulbs were selling for \$4.30 each compared to \$2.20 for non-organic.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Organic red bell peppers at \$4.73 per lb and non-organic at \$1.87 per lb.

"I shop price a lot in the produce aisle," said Coop member Deborah Nocella. "And I often wonder why there can be such a big difference in organic and regular. If it's significant, I'll buy regular or skip it all together."

To get a better understanding of just how organic produce pricing works in general

and at the Coop, the Gazette contacted PSFC's produce-buying team, John Horsman and Cecelia Rembert. The pair are in charge of sourcing all of the Coop's produce—organic and otherwise.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Coop produce buyer Cecelia Rembert.

Pricing is a big part of their process. Prices for both organic and conventionally grown products can vary based on season, how far away the supplier is, the size of the supplier, the Coop's relationship with the supplier and growing conditions at each of the farms. The team strives to provide a huge variety of produce at as many price points as possible, to make sure high-quality fruits and vegetables are accessible to all members. Produce prices are a moving target, changing virtually daily.

WHY ARE SOME ITEMS SO MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THEIR CONVENTIONAL COUNTERPARTS? THE ANSWER IS SUPPLY, SAID COOP PRODUCE BUYER JOHN

HORSMAN.

GROWING ORGANICS COSTS MORE

To understand produce pricing at the Coop, it's important to start at the farm.

The reason organic produce costs more than conventionally grown boils down to one important factor: It costs farmers more to grow organic produce. Here's why.

- **More labor.** Because organic farms don't use pesticides or synthetic fertilizers, more labor is required to manage the more complicated and time-consuming organic farming practices, such as crop rotation, weeding, and alternate pest management techniques, explained Horsman.
- **Smaller scale.** In general, organic farms are small, making them naturally less cost efficient than the giant agricultural complexes that can focus acres and acres on one or two crops. "Small farms have to juggle the needs of harvesting many different crops, cooling and packing them and then shipping them in small quantities through regional distributors," said Rembert. By contrast, conventional agriculture is often engineered extensively towards lowering costs and boosting profit margins.
- **Regulation.** Organic farms, both large and small, incur the extra costs associated with becoming certified organic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and then maintaining that certification. To sport the certified-organic label, a product must meet USDA standards that maximize soil health, conserve water and reduce air pollution. Organic farms cannot use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides or hormones. Organic certification and compliance can add thousands of dollars to a farm's overhead.

"IF I KNOW I WILL BE EATING SOMETHING RAW OR BARELY COOKED—BERRIES, APPLES, PEACHES, PLUMS, BROCCOLI, CARROTS, CELERY, HERBS—I ALWAYS GO

WITH ORGANIC, EVEN IF IT'S EXPENSIVE."

COOP MEMBER LISA BRANCACCIO

HOW SUPPLY AND DEMAND IMPACTS PRICING

All of this explains why organic produce is more expensive in general. But why are some items so much more expensive than their conventional counterparts?

"With organics, there is inherently less supply," said Horsman. Organic farms account for less than 1% of the 911 million acres of total U.S. farmland, according to USDA statistics.

As mentioned, giant conventional farms have far higher crop yields, so they generate much more supply than smaller organic producers. They can often sell for far lower prices and still make a profit on the volume of sales.

That said, it's not uncommon for organic farms to have bumper crops too—especially large operations in California, Arizona and Mexico. What's more, smaller local farms can have a huge bounty in the heart of the growing season. That translates into prices that are closer to conventional. Zucchini in late summer is a good example.

"Now is the best time to be a produce buyer," said Horsman, who pointed out that he and Rembert strongly prefer sourcing from local suppliers whenever possible.

SOMETIMES PRICES ARE SO CLOSE, IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO STOCK BOTH.
FOR EXAMPLE, AT ONE POINT ORGANIC GARLIC WAS SELLING FOR ONLY 2 CENTS
MORE A POUND THAN CONVENTIONAL.

The buying team is constantly managing shifting supplies and prices with each pro-

duce order. In the winter, for example, the Coop buys organic broccoli from Four Seasons, a large organic producer in California, Horsman said. Because Four Seasons is big enough, it can focus a lot of acres on broccoli, so prices are usually relatively close to conventionally grown broccoli from California.

Sometimes prices are so close, it doesn't make sense to stock both types. For example, at one point organic garlic was selling for only 2 cents more a pound than conventional. So, the buyers decided to stop selling conventional and only stock organic until there was a bigger price differential.



Scallions: red twisties or plu \$.48bu; organic \$1.57bu.

Sometimes the buyers encounter organic and conventional prices that are so high they decide not to stock the product at all. This doesn't happen often, Horsman said, but he does remember having trouble finding decently priced broccoli rabe this past winter.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Offering Integrated Pest Management (IPM) produce is another strategy that keeps some prices lower. IPM farmers do not use pesticides, though they may use other farming techniques that are not considered organic, Horsman explained. Prices are usually somewhere in between organic and conventionally grown.

The Coop often stocks IPM apples, pears, peaches, strawberries, cherries and blueberries. Pest conditions in the Northeast make it difficult to grow these fruits organically and not lose a lot of the crop, the team explained.



Blueberries: pint little buck organic \$4.85ea; pint \$2.70ea.

GAUGING MEMBERS' PRICE TOLERANCE

Horsman and Rembert keep a close eye on what sells quickly and try to provide a variety of prices that will accommodate all shoppers' needs. The \$9 per quart local IPM strawberries that were recently in the aisle "sold like hotcakes," said Horsman. "They

PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

do not last long." Even so, the team was sure to provide lower-priced California organic strawberries at the same time for people who want less expensive berries.

How much members will pay for organic sometimes depends on the type of fruit or vegetable.



Carrots: bags regular \$1.69ea; bags organic \$1.24ea.

"If I know I will be eating something raw or barely cooked—berries, apples, peaches, plums, broccoli, carrots, celery, herbs—I always go with organic, even if it's expensive," said Coop member Lisa Brancaccio. "Although if it's too expensive, I may not buy it that week," she added.

"I FIGURE THE COOP SOURCING TEAM IS THOROUGH ABOUT THE KINDS OF GROWERS WE BUY FROM, SO I TYPICALLY ASSUME THAT THE NON-ORGANIC PRODUCE

MEETS MY STANDARDS”

COOP MEMBER JULIA KONRAD

Coop member Susan Buchsbaum follows the same rule, adding that if organic isn’t available or too expensive, she won’t buy conventional on some foods she knows have higher pesticide loads, such as green beans and berries. “And I know non-organic produce with thick peels such as citrus, bananas or avocados tend to be safer for the consumer, although not better for earth health.”



Lemons: organic \$2.31lb; 4958 or blank / #3 label \$1.31lb.

Member Julia Konrad (no relation to this reporter) said she rarely buys organic produce when it’s more expensive. “I figure the Coop sourcing team is thorough about the kinds of growers we buy from, so I typically assume that the non-organic produce meets my standards for quality well enough,” she explains.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Horsman and Rembert know they have the luxury—and challenge—of buying for a well-educated and organic-hungry shopper. Members have a high tolerance for the constantly changing landscape in the produce aisle, they noted.

Horsman also pointed to another great part of his job: “One of the best perks of being a produce buyer is sampling the amazing items that we purchase to insure we are buying the best produce for the members,” said Horsman.

Walecia Konrad is a freelance writer, editor and content producer specializing in personal finance. She has been a PSFC member since 2001 and on-and-off contributor to the Gazette for almost as long.

COOP SHOPPERS AND BUYERS FEEL IMPACT OF SURGING FOOD PRICES

January 20, 2026



By Leila Darabi

On a recent Tuesday evening in August, Coop member Sabrina Ramos stood in front of the cereal shelves in aisle seven, comparing her granola options. Any other week she might have made her own, but in 95-degree weather, she had dropped by the Coop to avoid turning on the oven at home. After careful consideration, Ramos selected a favorite variety of Early Bird brand granola, noting that the price, while still high-

er than pre-pandemic, seemed to have dropped from an all-time spike of around \$10 to just over \$8 per bag.

“MY SHOPPING BILL IS RIDICULOUS EVERY TIME I SHOP. I KEEP TRYING TO BE CONSCIOUS TO JUST DO TWO BASKETS, BUT I CAN’T GET OUT OF HERE UNDER \$250 A WEEK.”

COOP MEMBER SABRINA RAMOS

A lifelong Coop member whose parents joined in the 1970s, Ramos now shops for her own family of three and finds herself far more conscious of price tags in the past year. Like many Americans, Ramos has noticed a dramatic spike in food costs recently. The Consumer Price Index Report put out by the US Department of Labor recorded a 10.4 percent increase in overall food costs between June 2021 and June 2022, with more dramatic hikes in specific categories of food.

“My shopping bill is ridiculous every time I shop. I keep trying to be conscious to just do two baskets [instead of a full cart], but I can’t get out of here under \$250 a week,” Ramos said. “When I do come in below \$220, I feel somehow victorious.”

COOP BUYERS SEEK DEALS

Reflected in the ebb and flow of granola prices are a range of national and geopolitical issues, from supply chain interruptions to surging fuel prices to global conflict. As previously reported in the *Gazette*, the Coop buyers are the heroes keeping wholesome, affordable food on the shelves despite these intersecting challenges.

“WHEN THE SUPPLY-CHAIN ISSUES STARTED, IT HIT US RIGHT AWAY. ALL OF A SUDDEN OUR DELIVERY TRUCKS WERE NOT SHOWING UP. IT WAS ACROSS THE

BOARD, AND IT WAS DRAMATIC."

RECEIVING COORDINATOR GILLIAN CHI

Gillian Chi, the receiving coordinator and buyer for many of the store's shelf-stable items, recently crunched the numbers for the *Gazette*. They illustrate a startling trend in the costs of household staples:

- Cascadian Farm cereal is up 42%, from \$4.05 to \$5.75 a box
- King Arthur Baking Company flour is up 20%-30%, depending on the size of the bag
- Some varieties of Natural Sea tuna are up as much as 42%
- Bionaturae pasta is up 33%
- Rao's pasta sauce is up 25%
- Murray's Chicken is up 25%-30%, depending on the cut
- Slope Farms ground beef is up 12%
- Natural by Nature whole milk half-gallons are up 11%, from \$4.84 to \$5.39
- Grindstone eggs are up 7%
- Cabot unsalted butter is up 19%

A notable outlier, said Chi, are Alderfer's Omega eggs, the Coop's top sellers, which dropped by 6% thanks to the sharp negotiation skills of Chi's colleague, Receiving Coordinator Glorina Phillip.

A number of factors contribute to rising food prices, Chi explained.

"When the supply-chain issues started, it hit us right away," Chi said. "A few weeks before it was in the news, we were feeling it. All of a sudden our delivery trucks were not showing up. It was across the board, and it was dramatic."

The scramble to find a steady supply of food meant buyers looked less at the price tags and more at the availability of food staples. Now, with fewer stockouts, Coop buy-

ers are refocusing their attention on negotiating deals.

“The first thing is to compare prices across distributors,” Chi said. “A year ago, I would buy from whoever has [a given product]. Now it’s probably back in stock across three companies.” This availability frees her up to comparison-shop and negotiate discounted prices.

A COOPERATIVE OF COOPERATIVES

To keep costs down, Coop buyers rely on membership in the National Cooperative Grocers (NCG), a relationship that allows member coops across the country to collaborate on bulk purchases and buy into negotiated prices. By representing approximately 160 food coops of various sizes, NCG can bargain and lock in prices with the influence of a large national supermarket chain.

“DOMESTIC CHEESE HAS GONE UP CONSIDERABLY, BECAUSE THE PRICE OF SHIPPING AND MOVING THINGS AROUND FROM POINT A TO POINT B HAS GONE UP, AND THE PRICE OF MILK HAS GONE UP.”

COORDINATING RECEIVER YURI WEBER

The NGC relationship allows the Coop to purchase goods at lower prices through UNFI, a major wholesale distributor and, as previously reported in the *Gazette*, the Coop’s largest shelf-stable food supplier. These relationships help, but have not shielded the Coop from supply-chain stockouts and other price increases.

“NCG negotiates a great price, but UNFI doesn’t always have what we need, and if they don’t we have to find other options,” Coordinating Receiver Yuri Weber said.

Weber is responsible for buying for the bulk aisle, including grains, pulses, rice, nuts

and dried fruit. He also buys the Coop's imported cheeses, a category that was hit hard by Trump administration tariffs in 2019 but has remained fairly stable over the past year. Weber attributes this flat pricing to the strength of the dollar against the euro, which balances out any cost increase.

"Domestic cheese has gone up considerably, because the price of shipping and moving things around from point A to point B has gone up, and the price of milk has gone up," Weber said.

His colleague Lisa Hidem has similarly seen the rising cost of ingredients drive up the price of fresh-baked goods.

"In a lot of the very local stuff, we're seeing price increases. And we try to get bread [from suppliers] as local as we can," Hidem said. "I've seen bread prices go up anywhere from 5 percent to on average at least 15 percent. One went up 45 percent." She attributes the rising cost of bread and pastries to the Coop's supplier's commitment to locally sourced grains and the increased cost of butter, flour and milk.

Both Weber and Hidem noted that suppliers have started to add fuel surcharges as the price of gas has gone up. Makers of prepackaged foods, which Hidem also buys for the store, have seen increased expenses in packaging, driving higher prices. "A lot of [food packaging] is plastic; that's a petroleum product. And we all know the price of gas has gone up."

MEMBERS FEEL THE DIFFERENCE

"I've been amazed by how dramatically prices have risen," Coop member Clara Goetz said. "Not just by 30 or 40 cents, but by very significant amounts. My favorite bread, Runner and Stone buckwheat baguette, was \$3.84 (or something close to that) and is now \$4.49."

A member for 18 years, Goetz said the increased cost has affected her shopping. "In

the past, I would get one if I had bread at home or not. Now I'll pass it up if I don't really need it. Now I hesitate before buying what I consider inessentials. No chocolate-covered almonds, which are now over \$15 a pound. I just can't imagine how people on fixed incomes are managing."

Member Hilda Cohen has also felt the cost increase when shopping for her family of four. "I was just saying this to my kids, I feel like my Coop bill has increased about 20-25 percent," Cohen said. "It does affect the way I shop, but more that I am particularly sensitive to wasting anything, so I am simply getting less and we run out quicker."

FUTURE PREDICTIONS

Coop buyers predict further price increases before the bubble bursts. Citing recent articles on a chickpea shortage, Hidem notes that the premade hummus she buys for the Coop could soon become more expensive.

Weber acknowledges that prices of dried fruits and nuts have remained stable, but that could be because the current supplies may not yet reflect the increased costs of this year's crops. As he updates stock in the store, he anticipates having to pay more.

"I'm super-convinced that we're going to see [more price increases] once the new crop comes in that factors in some of the higher food prices and the shipping," Weber said.

Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She is the cohost of the podcast Cringewatchers and shares photos of the things she cooks with Coop ingredients @persian_ish on Instagram.

STOCK SHORTAGES AT THE COOP ARE LIKELY HERE TO STAY

January 20, 2026



PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

Above: Sorry, there is no back-stock of papaya!

By John B. Thomas

With increased numbers of fully vaccinated individuals and the subsequent reinstatement of the member labor requirement, summer and fall of 2021 were supposed to bring a return to normalcy at the Coop—or if not normalcy, something close to it. Yet an email sent to the full Coop membership on September 22 punctured that bubble, putting words to a reality that has crepted into Coop members' consciousnesses as many of us have resumed shopping and working our shifts: that the supply shortages that members had become used to during the pandemic appear to be here for the foreseeable future. Specifically, the email outlined that both grocery and household items are more out of stock than usual.

The email mentioned that widespread labor shortages across the country are a key driver of these issues. A shortage of warehouse workers and truck drivers appears to be affecting the grocery world acutely. Along with these issues are some fundamental limitations to the Coop's space, namely its ability to only store several days of groceries at a time, as opposed to several weeks for many other grocery stores.

The Coop's distributors appear to all be affected by the shortage of truck drivers. According to Coop Grocery Buyer Gillian Chi, most of the Coop sources' distributors have their own trucks and hire their own drivers. Now, those same distributors do not have enough drivers on staff, so they often have to outsource to a third-party trucking company, or otherwise cut back on orders—sometimes as much as 50%.

The Coop is not alone in facing this new reality. The Forbes article linked in the email to members identified four key factors that are driving these labor shortages. Namely, workers now have more leverage to push back against historically stagnant wages; there is a broader desire for better working conditions (some truckers work 70 hours each week and often spend weeks away from home); workers now prioritize a better work-life balance and scheduling flexibility; and there are increased child and family care responsibilities.

At least when it comes to the warehouse and trucker shortages, these four dynamics certainly seem to be at play. One trucking company is reported to have increased wages by 35% over the previous year, and this still may not be enough: the Bureau of Labor Statistics report that the trucking industry is still down 33,000 jobs from February 2020. The fact that so many jobs still need to be filled reflects the broader trend—"The Great Resignation"—where the pandemic seems to have shown low wage workers that they can and should demand more from their employers. This trend seems to be especially prevalent in restaurants and hospitality.

While these labor market dynamics in the U.S. may explain some of the stock shortages Coop members are seeing, supply chain issues may be more widespread and last longer than the Coop email suggests. This is due to a mix of COVID-related disruptions, but also policy choices that have created our highly interconnected, globalized, and (pre-pandemic) efficient economy.



PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

Shortages in the bulk aisle.

On the COVID side, highly globalized supply chains are still adapting to a world reeling from a pandemic that is far from under control in most parts of the world, with the pandemic and its associated restrictions causing major disruptions to all transport sectors responsible for moving goods around the world. A recent letter by the International Chamber of Shipping to the United Nations General Assembly warned of a “global transport system collapse” if transport workers are not given freedom of movement and priority to receive vaccines. Consumers, too, have a role to play, with the reopening of economies increasing demand significantly, and supply chains being unable to keep up after more than a year of disruption.

While these global supply chain challenges may not seem directly relevant to food produced in the U.S., these shortages can build on each other. For example, if a truck

engine breaks down and the parts to replace it are stuck on a container ship at a port in Asia, then the trucking company not only can't pick up the goods to fix the truck, it also cannot deliver the original goods it was supposed to.



The image is a job advertisement for 'Linewaiters Gazette Help Wanted'. The background is blue. On the left, the text 'Linewaiters' is written in a large, stylized, black serif font. Below it, 'GAZETTE' is in a smaller, all-caps sans-serif font. Underneath that, 'HELP WANTED' is in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font. In the center, there is a list of job requirements: 'Development Art Director • Photographers', 'Reporters • Proofreaders • Traffic managers'. Below this, a horizontal line separates the text from the contact information: 'WORDPRESS EXPERIENCE WILL BE GIVEN PRIORITY CONSIDERATION.' Another horizontal line follows. A black rectangular box contains the text 'SEND COVER LETTER + RESUME + LINK OF YOUR WORK TO ANNETE@PSFC.COOP'. Below this, two lines of text encourage diversity: 'We can best serve the Coop if our squad reflects the PSFC's overall diversity.' and 'We strongly encourage applications from BIPOC and members of the LGBTQ+ community.' To the right of the text, there is a graphic illustration. It features a megaphone with a black strap and a black handle, positioned above five stylized human figures of various ethnicities and gender expressions. The figures are holding a white banner with the text 'JOIN US' in large, bold, purple letters. Red lightning bolts are shown emanating from the megaphone.

Many of these fundamental challenges were created over decades by trade policy that prioritized producing cheap things abroad for consumers in a low-wage economy at home. Or, in the words of The Guardian, “policies that led to our supply constrained world are lax antitrust, deregulation of basic industries like shipping, railroads and trucking, disinvestment in domestic production, and trade policy emphasizing finance over manufacturing.” In the case of trucking, deregulation in the 1970s led firms to compete against each other—primarily by offering lower prices, which were then passed on to truck drivers in the form of lower wages, reduced safety, and unreasonable scheduling that crushed drivers—trends that continue to this day.

On top of these fundamental weaknesses in how goods are moved around is rampant inflation, with prices rising for consumers at the fastest rate in 30 years—without a commensurate increase in wages. The Federal Reserve appears to be deeply concerned that inflation will not just be a short-term phenomenon and that the supply chain disruptions causing it are far from getting better, and have few quick fixes.

All of this points to supply shortages becoming the new normal, not just a passing blip on the road to recovery as was predicted and desired by experts. These supply shortages are not just leading to empty shelves at the Coop and other grocery stores, but also to higher prices—and not just because of constrained supply. The Coop tends to get its best prices from large distributors. Due to the shortages, the Coop's buyers have had to begin buying the same number and quantity of goods across multiple smaller distributors. And due to economies of scale, those smaller distributors can't offer the same lower prices as their larger counterparts—sometimes by a significant amount. For example, switching to a smaller distributor increased the price of a case of black beans from \$19.73 to \$22.99, by 17%. This trend is not just for groceries. The price the Coop pays for Dr. Bronner's liquid soap has increased four percent, from \$8.96 to \$9.32, by moving to a smaller distributor. Even though these prices are higher, says Chi, "You're still going to get a good price, and less than you would likely pay outside the Coop."

The strategy the Coop is taking to address these shortages—approaching alternative distributors, ordering from different warehouses, and finding "best alternative" substitutes—may be a reality for the foreseeable future, as are the associated higher prices. Chi said, "the difficulties started with one distributor, and then it became one after another. It's only been about a month but the trend is worse, not better. I can't imagine how [these systemic issues] are going to be resolved."

In spite of all this disruption, this period may present some new opportunities, both for the Coop and for our globalized economy. It appears that policymakers have taken notice of these fundamental weaknesses and appear poised to invest more in domestic production in certain sectors. Corporations are increasingly seeing the need for greater regulation to bring stability and predictability back to their sectors, especially in the transportation industry. And workers now have some of the highest leverage with employers than at any time in modern history, with the prospect of real wage growth combatting years of stagnation.

And as for the Coop, some of these changes may have unseen upsides. For example,

many of the smaller distributors are more local which is generally good for reducing the carbon footprint of products as they have to travel shorter distances to get to consumers. But this switch comes with a cost, in the form of the time and logistical challenges associated with dealing with unfulfilled orders, smaller product volumes, and finding alternatives across multiple distributors. Said Chi, “we sell over 10,000 products at the Coop, and we’re switching like crazy—it’s very tedious work going through items one by one. We are trying very hard not to keep shelves empty.”

All of these dynamics suggest that members will need to get used to a new pandemic normal. Members may discover new products they hadn’t tried before, and the Coop will build new relationships with domestic producers. So while the pandemic is still causing widespread challenges, there may be some bright spots on the horizon—even if that horizon looks a little different than before. Said Chi, “what we’re managing is a global crisis, and we’re working with all the resources we have—including our own time—to make our way through it and keep the store full. I would credit my amazing coworkers for keeping our shelves as full as they have been. And I would ask members for patience, understanding, and flexibility with your purchasing choices.”