

SPRING AT LAST! A GUIDE TO EATING IN A SEASON MOST FLEETING

April 14, 2026



ILLUSTRATION BY FRAN MENESES

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By Sam Mellins

There's a better way to know if spring is coming than observing Punxsutawney Phil's

shadow: watching the produce aisle at the Park Slope Food Coop.

When local green garlic and winter spinach appear on the shelves, it's a sure sign that the season is turning, according to produce buyer Cecelia Rembert.

"That's one of the signals of spring—the spinach is here," she says.

In the chilly northeast, most vegetables won't appear for several weeks after that, at least. But green garlic, which is harvested before the bulb forms underground, and winter spinach, which has been bred to withstand frigid temperatures and snow, can be ready at the first sign of warmth. Mâche, a loose salad green, is also one of the first crops of the season, beating full heads of lettuce by months.

Another of the earliest spring arrivals is purely decorative: the pussywillow, says Elise Gilchrist, of the distributor Myers Produce. These early bloomers, which Myers Produce buys from Old Friends Farm in Amherst, Massachusetts, are an important kickstarter for pollinators in the wild, telling the bees that it's time to get going. In the home, they can serve as understated decoration.

Though they're not local, other fruits like mangoes also signal the new season. The mango harvest in Mexico starts in February and runs through August, with supply becoming plentiful as the weather warms.

MÂCHE, A LOOSE SALAD GREEN, IS ONE OF THE FIRST CROPS OF THE SEASON,
BEATING FULL HEADS OF LETTUCE BY MONTHS.

The Coop once stocked Haitian mangoes, generating great excitement among shoppers, Rembert said. But recently, political instability in the country has prevented USDA inspectors from accessing the farms there, which has shut US retailers out of importing the crop.

The end of winter also means the end of citrus season in California, the source of most of the Coop's oranges. (Florida's orange groves have never recovered from a brutal blight in the early 2000s.) The last trees are picked in February, so by March and April, any remaining stock is coming out of storage.

Even for products that can be grown locally, the cornucopia of temperate California can beat northeastern crops to the market. California asparagus generally arrives before the local kind, for example.

And California's farms can scratch itches that ours can't. Rembert eagerly awaits the arrival of fuzzy, unripe green almonds in April, she said.

It can be tempting to grab local green as soon as it arrives—and certainly deserved after a winter as harsh as this one. But there can also be good reasons to wait.

THE COOP ONCE STOCKED HAITIAN MANGOES. BUT RECENTLY, POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN THE COUNTRY HAS PREVENTED USDA INSPECTORS FROM ACCESSING THE FARMS THERE.

When the spring produce first arrives, the prices are generally on the higher side, since only a small portion of the harvest is available. Farmers will race to see who can harvest earliest, and thus command the highest price for their momentarily rare commodities. As spring wears on and the rest of the crop arrives, prices fall. Paradoxically, quality also improves, since the produce has had more time to ripen in the field.

At the end of a crop's season, prices will rise as it becomes scarce again. But then, pickings are slimmer and quality is less certain.

Gilchrist suggests that Coop shoppers keep an eye out for spring parsnips. Most parsnips are harvested in the fall and winter. But spring parsnips spend all winter in the

soil, where the cold and frost makes them extra sweet and less bitter.

“Spring is short, and it’s a really unique moment to grab parsnips that will taste different than at any other time of the year,” Gilchrist said.

Don’t wait to grab them. Like many spring crops, their season is fleeting.

Sam Mellins is a New York City native and nationalist, Brooklyn transplant, local reporter, Coop member since 2024 and fresh fig enthusiast.

SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT: GOTHAM GREENS

April 14, 2026



December 30, 2025

By Dan Bergsagel

In July, the Gazette reported on the important role that one of our distributors, the worker-owned cooperative and Fair Trade advocates Equal Exchange, plays at the Coop.

This conversation with a like-minded distributor and our Coop buyers highlighted the stories of many Coop suppliers in our carefully curated supply chain. But it also underscored how most members don't know about these suppliers.

"I wish members knew more about what is going on behind the scenes at this lovely grocery store," said Britt Henriksson, one of the Coop's receiving coordinators.

This supplier spotlight aims to showcase where the Coop's food comes from: like-minded organizations that value workers' rights and sustainable, ethical practices, and produce healthy, delicious and fairly-priced products.



Gotham Greens is among the most local of the Coop's suppliers. The company grows leafy greens at farms in Gowanus (1 mile), Greenpoint (6 miles) and Jamaica (13 miles).

(Fun fact: the honor of the most local supplier appears to go to a beekeeper on Union Street, a block away, whose honey is sold at the Coop.)

Unlike a traditional farm, Gotham Greens grows lettuce in hydroponic, climate-controlled greenhouses that nourish plants with nutrient-rich water regardless of the season.

Gotham Greens utilizes regenerated former industrial buildings like the Greenpoint Wood Exchange and the Edward Langer Printing Company factory.

Hydroponics has historically struggled to shed its sci-fi connotations or—as the *New York Times* highlighted in a piece in 2011, when Gotham Greens' launched—its associ-

ation with illicit marijuana farming or a lack of flavor.

But Jodi Genshaft, a vice president at Gotham Greens, said the company has become a sought-after supplier to grocery stores and restaurants across the five boroughs “including Whole Foods Market, FreshDirect, Amazon Fresh, Wegmans, ShopRite, Union Market, and of course, Park Slope Food Coop!”



FRESH AND LOCAL

The Coop strives to source food locally. This prioritizes fresh food and reduces carbon emissions associated with transporting the food.

At the Coop, “local” is defined as a one-day truck drive (approximately 500 miles). Transporting fresh lettuce from Gotham Greens’ first Greenpoint facility should take about 20 minutes (of course, depending on the traffic on the BQE).

“It’s pretty impressive that they grow within just a few miles of the Coop. You don’t get that pretty much anywhere,” said John Horsman, one of the produce buyers at the Coop.

The Coop has been buying from Gotham Greens since 2013. While Gotham Greens is certainly the closest “farm” to the Coop, it remains relatively small.

“Gotham Greens are basically salads in a clam shell. So they don’t factor against the cases upon cases of loose salad greens that we sell. I would say it is under five percent of the total leafy greens we sell,” Horsman said.

Freshness is at the core of Gotham Greens’ business model, whether selling to the Coop or anyone else. “We harvest in the morning and it’s in the store in the afternoon,” cofounder and CEO Viraj Puri told Fast Company back in 2011. “Literally, they get it the same day. And we can do that year-round.”

This shorter supply-chain also helps reduce food waste. Reducing the time in transportation can lead to significantly longer shelf lives for their products. “Our packaged salads typically offer three weeks of shelf life while lettuce from California and Arizona typically has less than a week before it goes out of date,” Genshaft said.

GROWING CLIMATES

During warmer months, Gotham Greens lettuce is primarily competing with local loose salads from traditional organic farms in the Northeast, but during the colder seasons it becomes harder to source leafy greens locally.

Genshaft explained that “more than 90 percent of domestically grown leafy greens come from California and Arizona,” 2,600 miles away from the Coop.

Approximately one third of the packaged salad sold at the Coop in winter—including arugula, spinach and supergreens—come from Lancaster Farm Fresh in Pennsylvania

or Myer's Produce in Massachusetts, where greenhouses and polytunnels allow for lettuce to continue to be grown in winter.



This is true beyond leafy greens. “Most of the produce grown in the United States comes out of Yuma, Arizona and the Bakersfield area of California,” said Horsman. “It’s an ideal growing region, and it’s not easy to replicate the geography and climate. They have it down to a science out there with consistent near-perfect temperatures all year round.”

However, the remaining two-thirds of lettuce sold at the Coop—particularly the organic salad greens—is trucked in from these growing regions in the West. At the moment at the Coop, this includes some specific varieties, such as iceberg lettuce and romaine hearts. Gotham Greens provide crisp alternatives to iceberg lettuce grown much closer to home, such as their Greenhouse Crunch mix.

There are local farms, like Lady Moon, that geographically move by the growing sea-

son: “They grow out of Pennsylvania in the regular season, and then move down to Georgia and Florida in the winter months,” explained Horsman.

HOLISTICALLY SUSTAINABLE

The Coop strives to source food not just locally, but also sustainably in the wider context. Sustainability is often evaluated using the triple-bottom-line principles of people, planet and profit.

From the people perspective, Gotham Greens is a local organization bringing employment to the neighborhoods where we live. Their community partnerships with organizations like Green Bronx Machine promote childhood education into healthier diets through donated seedlings, and they donate fresh produce to the well-established charity City Harvest, which distributes free food to food pantries and soup kitchens.

By making productive economic use of the roofs of existing underused industrial buildings—and adding additional functional space—Gotham Greens helps preserve urban landscapes, retaining character in communities.

From the profit perspective, Gotham Greens is a smartly run enterprise. Its product is available in stores far beyond the Coop, and its Gowanus facility, built on the roof of the Whole Foods Market development in 2013, is a long-term partnership. Its expansion from short-life span products like leafy greens into more shelf-stable offshoots like pesto or spinach dip (delicious and also available at the Coop) diversifies its business while still aligning with its core product: fresh leafy greens.

Unlike the Coop, Gotham Greens does not operate based on a worker-owner cooperative nonprofit model. It was founded as a public benefit corporation (PBC), “a for-profit company legally committed to creating a positive impact on society and the environment, alongside shareholder profits, by balancing stakeholder interests (shareholders, community, environment) and reporting on its social mission.” Genshaft said.



However, its recent collaboration with Sesame Workshop—which brought beloved characters like Elmo and Oscar the Grouch to its leafy green packets—was perhaps a triumph of both people and profit: bringing genuine enthusiasm to salad-shy young kids (this reporter’s toddler included) and the associated benefits of healthier diets. Genshaft reported that Gotham Greens “saw this partnership drive sales, brand awareness and education about ways to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables at every age.”

A MORE COMPLICATED ENVIRONMENTAL STORY?

The “planet” perspective initially seems straightforward. Aside from the clear reduction in transportation emissions from such local produce, Genshaft and Gotham Greens’ promotional materials highlight what they say are the benefits of the company’s urban hydroponic approaches:

- They use “up to 90 percent less water than traditional open-field farms” due to the contained hydroponics method and the filtering and recycling of water.
- They use “up to 97 percent less land than traditional farming.”
- They use natural pest control in their greenhouse environments instead of chemical pesticides.
- The facilities are energy-efficient and some of their energy supply is from renewable solar and wind electricity generation.

By continuing to use existing buildings and extending their life, Gotham Greens avoids demolition and construction of replacement structures, reducing carbon emissions and extending the utility of the resources and carbon emissions that went into the initial construction.

Gotham Greens is active in reducing waste in the food supply industry, and its Ugly Greens product—often on sale at the Coop—is an example of action on this topic. These are bags of leaves that are not up to the aesthetic standards shoppers are accustomed to because of pests or excessive light. But aside from cosmetic defects, these greens are good for eating.

It’s worth noting that it is not clear whether the carbon emissions of climate-controlled hydroponic growing are lower than those of traditional farming.

Climate-controlled greenhouses are energy intensive—how sustainable they are depends on whether the energy source is renewable or fossil. Gotham Greens relies on energy it purchases from the grid. This could mean that the carbon emissions from growing its greens are higher than those grown in a naturally warm and sunny climate.

Still, that does not take away from the many innovations of urban farming reflected in Gotham Green’s operation, which allow us to enjoy salads plucked from over our own heads that very day.

MARCH GENERAL MEETING: SPRING PRODUCTS, BOARD CANDIDATES AND MORE

April 14, 2026



April 22, 2025

By Zach Schiffman

As attendees entered the Picnic House on March 25, the sidewalk was flanked with members advocating for various causes, handing out info sheets about hybrid meetings or QR code slips introducing candidates up for election. On one side of the immediate entry, members offered “halvah from Israel,” while on the other, a table with a handful of food options featured literature with voices from Gaza. The competing efforts outside the Picnic House foreshadowed what would come in the well-attended

meeting, with the issues spilling into nearly every aspect of the agenda.

OPEN FORUM



Members turned out for the March General Meeting.

The Open Forum began with a member asking the Chair Committee to clarify the policy around open forum rules, pointing out that past meetings have allowed topics unrelated to Coop operations, with speakers granted longer than one minute. Chair Committee member David Moss responded that the committee uses a document called the Park Slope Food Coop Guide to General and Annual Meetings, which does not limit topics to Coop operations. He added that the one-minute rule is interpreted flexibly, depending on the needs of a particular meeting.

While some brought up items of general interest to the membership—honoring the anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, increasing the amount of meetings eligible for work credit, a plea to stop members from eating while working the checkout shift—s-

peakers continued to challenge the transparency of the general meetings.

Coop member Josh Geller flagged how he was not on the ballot for the evening's dispute resolution community, while member Noah Potter questioned how his agenda item had not come up, despite requesting it to be expedited. "I've been ghosted. I think it's inappropriate," Potter said, in the first of many comments he would make throughout the meeting.

One member asked if the June 24 General meeting date could be moved to avoid conflicting with the New York State and City primary elections, but outgoing General Coordinator Joe Holtz said that wasn't possible due to the timing of the annual financial audit.



Member Adam Tager asked the candidates some questions.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Holtz, who also serves as Treasurer, reported on the four-week period ending 3/2/25, with a presentation of the top-line details and a full report sent to members' inboxes the previous week. The report compared the first four weeks of the current fiscal year to the same period last year, noting that the previous fiscal year ended in January 2024. Holtz pointed out that last year's gross margin for this period was unrealistically high due to error, ("The first four weeks last year had an unreasonably high gross margin that was unrealistic. So I didn't bother to write it down because it sorted itself out by the eight-week statement.") but that this year's data was more reliable, with a positive swing in bottom-line income from negative \$35,000 to positive \$33,000. He noted a rosy outlook, with sales up 10.4 percent, and an increase of \$182,000 cash on hand, the most vital asset in the Coop's finances. The overall financial stability of the Coop is underscored by the increase in base markup from 24 percent to 25 percent.

As of February 25, 2024, total liabilities were \$5.22 million, while total member equity—including member investments, paid-in capital and retained earnings—was \$8.64 million. He explained that member equity includes all member investments and the Coop's retained earnings, and that donated investments are categorized as additional paid-in capital. He walked members through other financial statements, including a cash comparison from the beginning of the fiscal year.

The final portion of the report introduced a new feature: comparing projections for the year with the annualized actual results for the four-week period. Holtz noted that the Coop had projected \$62.8 million in annual sales, but if current trends continue, sales could exceed \$63.8 million. Expenses and gross margin were also slightly better than projected. He clarified that these annualized figures are theoretical and could shift. "The slow summer months are not yet included and therefore the projected variance could be overstated," he said. Holtz closed by explaining how annualization works mathematically. A member then raised a concern about whether the financial statement had been received by email (it had), and another asked about the backlog of

new member applicants.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Joe Szladek, one of the general coordinators, began with a few announcements. He shared that the April General Meeting will be held at a new location: The theater at City Tech, located at 275 Jay Street in Brooklyn. The venue change was made “to accommodate the anticipated larger audience” for the discussion and a vote on the hybrid general meeting proposal. Szladek also announced two staffing updates: Guillermo Rojas Hernandez has started as a developer/programmer, and Eric Alger, a receiving coordinator, has left Coop employment. Szladek reminded members that the Coop’s hours had been extended.



Produce Buyer Cecelia Rembert asked for feedback.

Cecelia Rembert, one of the Coop’s two produce buyers, shared seasonal highlights: “The citrus season is wrapping up, so if you have been enjoying the California citrus,

do it now,” she said, highlighting the Oro Blancos and mandarins.

She mentioned that berries are “mostly out of Mexico except for some blueberries from Chile,” and while pricing deals aren’t yet available, “look forward to that in a month or two, maybe in April and going into May.” Apples are also winding down and will be replaced by New Zealand apples in the summer. Rembert also gave a grape outlook: Grapes are currently out of South Africa right now but will soon move to Mexican grapes, with California grape season beginning in June. Local vegetables are just beginning to arrive, including “some little gem lettuce from Lancaster next week,” and “head lettuces coming the week after that.”

She highlighted California-grown Delta Queen asparagus and noted they are “on the lookout” for sustainably harvested ramps: “There aren’t that many farms that do that that we feel comfortable with.” Fiddlehead ferns have arrived as “a good sign of spring,” and she reminded members, “Make sure to cook them.”

Rembert also shared that the Coop has seeds in soil right now, and a new pallet of soil will arrive mostly on Thursdays over the next six or seven weekends. The Coop will also be running its small plant program through the spring, which she described as “really fun.” During the Q&A, member Serko Artinian raised concerns about the freshness of the raspberries. Rembert explained: “Raspberries have the highest sugar content, and they mold the fastest; sometimes, there’s more age on them than we would like.” Another member asked about reduced plastic packaging and lower-quality organic produce coming to the Coop. Rembert responded, “No, I haven’t noticed that,” regarding suppliers dumping poor-quality items at the Coop.

Dory Kornfield, a member of the Equity, Access and Community Committee (EACC), announced the upcoming launch of the Coop’s first-ever member demographic survey. The goal is to gather basic information about the Coop membership through a quick 15-question, five-minute survey. She emphasized that this is “not a household survey,” it’s an individual survey for people 18 and over. The questions will cover neighborhood, household composition, disabilities status, as well as some general de-

mographic questions: age, race, gender and sexual orientation.

“The reason we are doing this is because the Coop doesn’t collect any of this information and we don’t know who we are or enough about ourselves to know if we are as diverse and welcoming as we say we are,” she said, noting that the data could help “inform and guide policy decisions, processes in the Coop.”

She cited childcare as an example: “Childcare has been a hot topic for a couple of years now, but we actually don’t know how many members have kids.”

Dan Weiss, a member of the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) since 2017, gave an overview of the committee’s role and process. “The Dispute Resolution Committee—our charge is to facilitate the resolution of disputes among members.” Weiss explained the committee handles “complaints of member misconduct,” including “conflict, goods, shopping for businesses, masking violations, violations of personal space, intimidation, harassment, incomplete work on shift.”

He described the work as consensus-based and guided by “GM-approved resolution procedures,” with two membership coordinators serving as liaisons. Weiss emphasized the committee’s standards: “Our members approach their work without prejudice. We set aside our political opinions to ensure the fair and equitable process for our membership.” He also addressed a recent development: “This month, we made a difficult decision to halt certain types of cases involving political issues at the Coop. We’re in the midst of legal proceedings related to these matters.”

Until a “reasonable framework” is developed, those cases will remain on hold, which he said has precedent: “We’ve had legal proceedings in the past involving civil rights issues, and we’ve had to pause on those cases.”

Bart DeCoursy from the International Trade Education Squad (ITES) reported that the group had signed on to a USMCA review organizational letter ahead of the mandatory six-year review of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement. He outlined their hopes for rene-

gotiation: “End the offshoring of good-paying jobs, raise wages, strengthen rural communities, stop abuses of big tech, make medicine more affordable.” DeCoursy also warned of the Trump administration’s announcement of “reciprocal tariffs” beginning April 2, including a “25 percent tariff on all goods from any country that imports Venezuelan oil.” He joked, “Almost by threatening one thing and walking it back, he could manipulate the market, but who’s to say—he also just might not know what he’s doing.” He encouraged members to follow the squad on Bluesky to keep up on all things international trade.

A representative from the Personnel Committee gave a brief update, noting that the committee currently has only five members instead of the usual seven. They announced that in the April 1st Gazette, there will be an ad asking for more members, and encouraged anyone with experience in employment law, general management, staffing or conflict resolution to apply. The committee is also continuing the search for a new general coordinator to replace Joe Holtz: “Four people have been interviewed, and there’s one or two more to be interviewed, and that’s ongoing.”

DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE ELECTION

Existing DRC committee member Christopher Cox presented two new members up for election, Dorothy Lund and Olivia Goldberg, and four members who are up for reelection: Deb Magocsi, Lee Bantle, Melinda Daniels and Grace Protos. Cox noted that the committee received dozens of applications for these spots, “definitely more than we could handle,” and emphasized that this was “just the first step in helping rebuild the committee to handle our caseload.”



Dispute Resolution Committee candidate Olivia Goldberg addressed the meeting. New candidate Olivia Goldberg shared her long-standing Coop connection: “My parents met at the Coop’s 16th anniversary party in 1989, so I might not actually exist without the Coop”—and cited her professional experience in early childhood education, the tree care industry and food service. Dorothy Lund, a law professor at Columbia University, touted her work studying how organizations manage conflict, saying her skills could help people “feel like they’ve been seen and heard.”

Returning members emphasized commitment, collaboration and deep Coop knowledge. Deborah Magocsi recalled joining when the committee’s name changed from “Disciplinary” to “Dispute Resolution” and said she strives to “listen with an open mind and an open heart.” Grace Protos said she valued being part of a process where “people feel as if they’re actually seen,” and noted that the work “comes in emails and phone calls and committee meetings” beyond standard shift hours. Melinda Daniels said she brings “patience, empathy and problem solving” and called it an hon-

or to continue the work. Helen Koh read a statement from Lee Bantle, who was absent, in which he said his goal was “to take down the temperature when members are in conflict.”

During the Q&A, members raised serious concerns about the committee’s recent decision to pause certain politically sensitive cases. One asked: “If a member punches me and said it’s because I’m calling for a boycott, will your committee decline to consider my complaint?” Other questions addressed transparency, the onboarding process, and whether incumbents disputed how only six candidates were advanced. In response, Magocsi explained: “We can only bring a couple of members on at a time because it is a lengthy onboarding process.” Current members of the committee emphasized their hope to grow the DRC to 16 members, doubling the current size. The vote followed, with all six unopposed candidates elected to the board.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES

The Board of Directors candidates all presented statements explaining why they should be elected. Dan Kaminsky submitted a video statement because he was attending “the biggest event in the pizza world... the Pizza Expo.” In his recorded statement, Kaminsky said he has been a Coop member since 2018 and is currently completing a master’s in social work: “Quite literally, my master’s degree is in the study and practice of Cooperation.” Other candidates introduced themselves in person, including Serko Artinian, who presented data from his informal poll of members, attempting to find out what percentage of people exclusively shop at the Coop and identifying pain points that members raised.



Board candidate Taylor Pate spoke at the meeting.

Lynn Husum, a Carroll Gardens resident who successfully sold her company last year, said she hoped to use her business acumen to serve the Coop. Taylor Pate highlighted her experience on nonprofit boards and at other food coops: "I believe that the solidarity economy and Cooperative movements are how we build community power." Brandon West, the current board president, stressed his "institutional memory," having the best record for GM attendance of any current members. He also hopes to make the Coop more democratic, easier to understand and less volatile. Ralph Yozzo advocated for term limits and listening to members. Noah Potter invoked our current president, saying he hopes to "Make the Coop Cooperative Again." Elizabeth Tobier, the current Coop secretary, emphasized the importance of attendance at the General Meeting in her statement.

During the Q&A, candidates were asked to share what makes their platforms unique. Pate noted her "deep knowledge of supply chains" and experience with leadership

transitions (something the Coop currently faces with the departure of Joe Holtz), while Potter sought to facilitate “intramembership communication” and update bylaws. Artinian proposed “building coalitions with other coops” and using tech to bring the Coop into the future.

Candidates also discussed Coop challenges. Tobier said the hardest part is learning “how to communicate Cooperatively.” West cited structural tensions: “There are now differing ideas about what the board should do.” Several, including Yozzo, stressed the importance of preserving the Coop’s Cooperative spirit: “It means we cooperate, not rip ourselves apart.”

Members also raised concerns about candidate affiliations. One member asked the candidates to disclose endorsements, with Potter and Yozzo confirming they were endorsed by Coop for Unity. Another member asked if candidates aligned with Coop Members for Palestine, which Tonier dismissed as irrelevant, adding that it “has nothing to do with being a board member.” Finally, candidates responded to a question about hybrid meetings. Most supported the idea, while Tobier reiterated her view that board members should remain neutral on any upcoming votes or agenda items: “Our personal feelings as members would not come into play.”

A question about favorite Coop products offered a reprieve: For Serko Artinian, the heirloom organic oranges and for Ralph Yozzo, the gluten-free bread that’s not frozen—“Literally my family went up to Chatham, New York where they come from and we bought it there and it costs less at the Coop than right at the warehouse.”

Noah Potter refused to answer, “Just one? I don’t know if I can do that.” Lynn Husum shouted out the chickpea salad and the quiches that are no longer sold—“What happened to the quiches?” Taylor Pate said the White Mustache yogurt. West and Tobier both highlighted the beer selection.

Zach Schiffman is a social editor and writer at New York magazine, comedian and Park Slope local.

WHERE DOES THE COOP'S FOOD ACTUALLY COME FROM?

April 14, 2026



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.

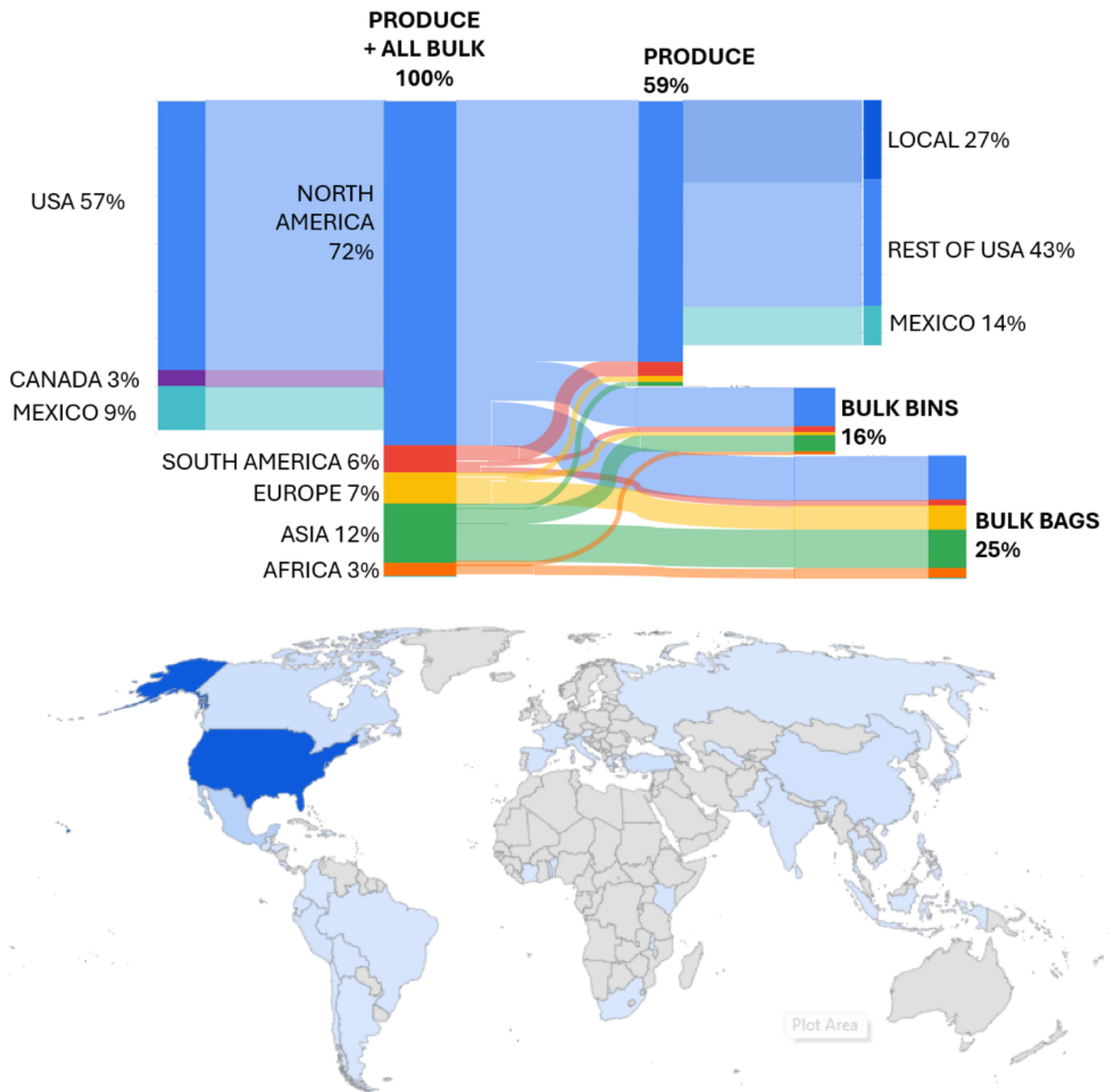
Yet Macdonald provides a glimmer of hope for data enthusiasts: “We are in the middle of a big shift to a new database system right now, so probably in a year or two we will have more access to origin information.”

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 Do-

minican, 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.

HOW THE LOS ANGELES WILDFIRES COULD HIT THE COOP

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ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

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By Anita Bushell

The Park Slope Food Coop contains a great many fruits and vegetables from California. As I walked down the produce aisle the week after the Los Angeles fires broke out, I wondered how the situation unfolding 3,000 miles away would affect the produce on offer at the Coop.

In the warmer months that constitute the Northeast growing season, the Coop mostly sources from nearby farms and growing cooperatives. Produce Manager John Horsman said, “We try to buy locally as much as possible,” noting that the California produce buying season usually lasts from the late fall through the early spring.

In the short term, the Coop doesn’t expect the Los Angeles fires to have a major impact on the availability of California produce. “Based on my experience, it will be minimal” said General Manager Joe Holtz.

STRONG SANTA ANA WINDS ARE CAUSING EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO AVOCADO GROVES AND VINEYARDS.

While exact figures are not available as to how much of the Coop’s produce comes from California, my walk down the aisle suggested that there are many items from the Golden State, from juicy oranges to super-fresh salad greens. Horsman said that this year’s California shipments, before the fires, were about the same as they were one year ago.

The State of California is around 250 miles wide and more than 700 miles long. While the effects of last month’s fires are localized to Los Angeles county, destruction has already been seen 100 miles southeast in the Pauma Valley, where strong Santa Ana winds caused extensive damage to avocado groves and vineyards. “Our farmers are our backbone of our local food system, and these fires remind us how fragile that system can be,” Alba Velasquez, the executive director of the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, told ABC News.

Horsman said that the Coop started purchasing produce from California “because California has been able to dominate nationally due to their many growing areas and micro-climates and economies of scale.” California is a major producer of grapes, lettuce, almonds, pistachios, strawberries, tomatoes, and carrots; all of which helped

bring the state \$23.96 billion dollars in revenue in 2023.

According to Horsman, a number of the huge farms that supply greens and root vegetables to the Coop are in the Central Valley, which is located more than 100 miles north of Los Angeles. The Central Valley has been relatively unaffected by the current fires. On the other hand, the avocado and citrus crops closer to Los Angeles continue to be threatened by the smoke from the fires and the Santa Ana winds.

Farms don't have to be local to Los Angeles to feel the economic impact of the fires. Underwood Family Farms is located in Moorpark, 340 miles north of the city, but their staff could not sell at the Brentwood or Pasadena markets in January because of dangerous conditions and poor air quality. This resulted in few visitors and diminished sales.

Other farms local to Los Angeles are also feeling the economic impact of the fires, as well as poor air quality, flames and smoke. "Currently there are about 24 farms that are affected by the Eaton Fire, with numbers increasing every day," Velasquez told ABC News.

The California environment has adjusted to moderate fires over the years. Many native trees, shrubs and perennials to the region are said to be fire-resistant, but were not cut out to withstand the ravages of last month. "While most native species have adapted to withstand smaller, naturally occurring fires, they aren't built for the high-intensity blazes the state has seen in recent years," said Kevin Tidmarsh of local news outlet LAist.

CALIFORNIA IS A MAJOR PRODUCER OF GRAPES, LETTUCE, ALMONDS, PISTACHIOS, STRAWBERRIES, TOMATOES, AND CARROTS.

A January 15 post on Farms.com stated: "The Santa Ana winds, infamous for their

speed and intensity, exacerbate the spread of wildfires, and add to the challenges faced by farmers. These winds carry dust and smoke from the fires across coastal Southern California, further endangering crops and air quality.”

The Coop began buying California produce in 1973, the year of its founding, according to Holtz. The California items that sell the fastest are broccoli and oranges.

“Initially, in 1973, we knew relatively little about the dominance by the West Coast in providing fresh veggies and fruits to the New York City area,” Holtz said. “Produce from California was dominant during that time, even for items that could have been produced locally. But starting in late June 1975 we started an 11-year period where we went to the market ourselves and gained valuable knowledge about what items were possible to get from local farms, and where in Hunts Point Market we could buy them. That made a big difference in our effectively buying as much from the local growing area whenever the quality met our standards.”

As the current fires remain contained to the Los Angeles area, Horsman and Holtz see relatively little impact on the Coop’s California produce buying. Long term concerns, however, include future fires that could affect Central Valley crops.

“We will always try hard to look for food so that our members’ food needs are covered,” Holtz stated. “Beyond searching for sources of food that our members need, there is no exact plan. Example of a theoretical situation: Any day now the North American asparagus harvest should be starting. It starts in Mexico and after a little while it moves up into southern California. What if that pattern doesn’t pan out this year and there is instead a great reduction in asparagus from southern California? What would we do?”

Holtz continued, “Might there still be Peruvian asparagus available which is what we are getting now? Would the price go sky high? Would we buy it even at a high price? Would some members buy less? Would some members buy more zucchini etc. instead? I have no answers, only questions. The important thing is that we will pivot

and try to make decisions that make sense in making it as certain as possible that our members will have something good to cook and eat.”

When I walk down the produce aisle this winter, I’ll keep an eye out for changes in produce availability. And I’ll load up on my beloved Sumo Mandarins, from California’s San Joaquin Valley, for as long as I can.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer who has been published in Friends Journal, Ford Foundation Report, and Uncensored: American Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness. She just published One Way to Whitefish.