

# RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE: COOP MEMBERS SUPPORT SNAP RECIPIENTS DURING SHUTDOWN

December 9, 2025



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By Lora Kelley

On November 1, the Park Slope Food Coop posted on Instagram requesting donations to support members affected by disruptions to SNAP benefits. Within a week, members had given more than \$20,000.

The PSFC SNAP Assistance Fund was organized to provide relief to those who rely on benefits from SNAP, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, for their Coop shopping. During the 43-day shutdown of the federal government, which began on October 1, the nation's largest anti-hunger initiative was mired in uncertainty and legal

challenges that jeopardized people's ability to access groceries. While officials, lawyers and administrators were scrambling to figure out what was happening, and whether eligible recipients could continue getting benefits, people needed to eat. About one in eight Americans, or 42 million people, rely on SNAP benefits—that includes some 3 million people in New York state.



There was a lot of collective energy, both among Park Slope Food Coop members and the broader national coop community, to find ways to help people who rely on these benefits.

More than \$5,000 was distributed to Coop members registered for SNAP benefits in the first week after the fundraiser went live, General Manager Joe Szladek said in an interview, and about half of the fund was used overall. Now that the shutdown has ended and SNAP benefits have resumed, excess donations will be diverted to CHiPS (Community Help in Park Slope).



Now that the shutdown has ended and SNAP benefits are resuming, excess donations will be diverted to CHiPS (Community Help in Park Slope).

As it became clear that SNAP would be interrupted, Coop staff began discussing what to do, Szladek said. He noted that there was a lot of collective energy, both among Park Slope Food Coop members and the broader national coop community, to find ways to help people who rely on these benefits. (The United States Department of Agriculture forbade stores from offering discounts to SNAP recipients.)

“THERE WAS AN OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR THE COMMUNITY.”

*GENERAL MANAGER JOE SZLADEK*

Some of the staff's ideas included setting up a food pantry at the Coop, or asking members to purchase items to donate to food kitchens. The idea of creating a member-driven fund would be more complicated than those actions—but setting up such a fund seemed like the best way to “honor the dignity of those losing benefits,” allowing them to keep shopping as usual, Szladek said. So the team moved forward with the fundraiser.

“Members stepped up,” Szladek said. “There was an outpouring of support for each other and for the community.” In fact, within 48 hours, more than \$10,000 in donations had come in. The fundraiser was advertised through a single Instagram post and through announcements over the intercom in the Coop. The fundraiser didn't have a hard number goal, Szladek noted, but the aim was to cover average weekly spending for about a month for members who use SNAP at the Coop.

Many members were enthusiastic about the initiative. Rita Wenxin Wang, a member since 2021 who has interacted with SNAP recipients on their checkout shift, said that, as someone “deeply interested in the redistribution of wealth,” they were “glad that the massive Coop community could come together to support members.” Bryony Romer, a member of 30 years who saw the announcement about the fundraiser on Instagram, said that she “was excited to see the Coop leading to mobilize the vast resources in our community to help those at risk of starving.” She added that she loves the Coop because it is a “people-organized place where we all pitch in to make something good happen.”

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*BRYONY ROMER*

Once the fund started coming in, Szladek explained, the next step was to alert eligi-

ble members. Members of the Coop's information technology team wrote an email to about 450 people, letting them know that this was happening, and what amount they were eligible for. Eligibility was based on past SNAP usage at the Coop, and the amount of support available per member was determined based on that data. In other words, the Coop took the average amount a member spent weekly (based on sales data from prior weeks) and gave eligible members that weekly amount. Members were advised to shop normally, check out, and then suspend their receipt. Then, they could bring the receipt to a staff member, who attached a ticket, and the bookkeepers took care of things from there.



Members eligible for the PSFC SNAP Assistance Fund were advised to shop normally at the Coop during the lapse in SNAP funding due to the government shutdown. This fundraiser was the first of its kind for the Coop, Szladek said, as it "was driven by a gap in members' ability to purchase food." He added that, if in the future, another emergency like this arises, "this mechanism is there."



Szladek noted the Coop has long supported other efforts to keep participation accessible and help feed neighbors facing food insecurity. Each week, about 100 Coop members volunteer with CHiPS, representing 5 percent of overall member labor. Those efforts amount to about 14,000 total hours each year, he added. Szladek encouraged members to keep volunteering at and donating to CHiPS.

“It’s heartening to be part of a community where members will readily help members,” Szladek reflected.

*Lora Kelley is a freelance writer in Brooklyn.*

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Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

## A VISION FOR OUR NEW MAYOR

Dear Coop community:

Our new mayor has proposed building city-owned supermarkets to offer more afford-

able food to New Yorkers. Yet building, staffing and operating a supermarket is no small task (and no small expense). Might there be an opportunity for the Coop to assist?

As we have seen with coop ventures in New York and elsewhere, one of the problems with getting a coop off the ground is the difficulty of raising capital. As a shopper-owned institution, a coop has no equity to sell to potential investors, and without an ongoing business, raising money via loans is a nonstarter. New coops look to small investments by prospective members, but this is a hard row to hoe.

I recommend that the Coop approach the Mamdani administration and make a case for why they should invest in launching new coops—not in place of other efforts, but as a supplement. A strong case can be made: Rather than starting a new supermarket from the ground up, a new coop leverages the enthusiasm of supporters, and much of its start-up and ongoing costs are carried by working members, whose efforts also reduce the costs to shopping members. And our expertise in running a successful food coop for more than 50 years can assist new ones. For the administration, the attraction should be obvious: creating sustainable supermarkets at lower ongoing costs—and, you know, providing good food for shopping members since 2026. We already know our business model is superior to that of conventional supermarkets—the Coop does something like ten times the sales per square foot of shelf space, compared with typical supermarkets. The constraint on the growth of the coop model has been availability of capital. We can help the Mamdani administration reach its goals and also help spread our superior model across the city.

Regards,

*Greg Costikyan*

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## **A CALL TO ACTION**

Dear Fellow Member Owners,

The recent government shutdown has highlighted critical ongoing issues that I hope we, as Member Owners, can begin to address. First and foremost, I agree with others that we need to be offering more low-cost food options in order to attract low-income neighbors and enhance our community. As for me, a senior on a fixed income, I'm able to continue shopping at the Coop for fruits and vegetables and Field Day items, but I now go elsewhere to buy the rest, often for less, nearby. This is true for many of us and will be true for still more as health insurance and other costs spiral up. As the neighborhood has gentrified, I understand the impulse to offer more luxury goods to existing Member Owners but, truth be told, I miss the vibrant ethnic, class and racial diversity we used to have years ago.

In addition, I would be willing to pay a slightly higher markup on the (hopefully) increased volume of less expensive brands in order to more fully fund our current assistance to SNAP recipients and to institute an ongoing food drive for CHIPS. We're not "just" a grocery store. We're a beloved Brooklyn institution that needs to see our Mission Statement become an Action Statement in what are sure to be hard times ahead.

In cooperation,

*Carol Wald*

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## **A DILEMMA IN THE BREAD SECTION**

Dear Coop members:

This is a difficult conundrum that I believe members and Coop buyers should consid-

er:

- Dave's Killer Bread is owned by Flowers Foods.
- Flowers Foods, through their PAC and individual contributions, sent 95% of donation funds during the 2024 election cycle to Republicans and Marco Rubio's PAC "Reclaim America," according to OpenSecrets.org.
- Dave's Bread that the Coop sells is both organic and, in our family, considered tasty.
- Dave's Bread discusses their program called "Second Chance Employment." They hire regardless of criminal history.

Should we, as individuals, continue to support Dave's Bread by buying their products as they do good work? Or should we, as individuals, stop buying it because the money goes to some fairly despicable candidates that do not reflect the values my family holds? I am not advocating for yet another boycott, but perhaps members can choose another bread option, if the Coop carries one, or the Coop can carry another fresh organic bread. Then people can "vote" when they make their selection.

In Cooperation,

*Stewart Pravda and Cathy Monblatt*

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## **SUPPORTING LOW-INCOME MEMBERS IN OUR COMMUNITY**

Fellow members,

Perhaps you saw a Coop Instagram post (November 1, 2025) about donating money

to a SNAP fund for those currently eligible for the federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program. The post went up soon after Trump paused SNAP payments. News about SNAP changed daily, with states and the federal government arguing back and forth about whether or not SNAP would and could be funded.

SNAP replaced paper food stamps. Recipients' monthly benefits are electronically loaded on cards. In a pause, no funds are added. To be eligible for SNAP, a single person cannot earn more than \$2,608 gross per month, and a family of four, not more than \$5,358. Higher-income Coop members may not be able to imagine what it would be like to live on so little in New York City.

In this season of bounty and lavish tables and frenzied shopping, let's take time to think about what it is like to live with so much less. Let's also consider that people who earn even a tiny bit more than the cut-off don't get food assistance. If, as seems likely, Affordable Care Act health insurance subsidies end, many more New Yorkers will struggle to buy food, pay rent and stay healthy.

If you saw the Instagram request for donations, found the QR code at checkout and donated, thank you. I truly appreciate Coop staff and members who quickly put this program into action. I hope we can build on it, creating an enduring structure that does not depend on individual generosity. We can consider sliding scale mark-ups (with an option to pay more), making more members eligible for a lower markup, and offering more bulk and inexpensive products and fewer luxury goods. Together, we can do more.

In Cooperation,

*Alyce Barr*

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## **LETTER OF GRATITUDE TO ALL COOP MEMBERS**

Dear Park Slope Food Coop Members,

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all of you who generously contributed to the SNAP Assist program. Your willingness to share and to think of others reflects the true spirit of community and compassion that makes the Coop so special.

When I read the message about your donations, I felt deeply moved. It is heartwarming to know that in a world often marked by hurry and hardship, there are people who still pause to care—who see the quiet struggles of others and respond with kindness. Your support makes it possible for people who rely on SNAP benefits to shop for healthy food with dignity and relief, especially during times when every dollar matters.

Your generosity is more than financial help. It is a gesture of solidarity, empathy and hope. It reminds us that the Coop is not just a place to buy food, but a living example of what can happen when people choose to stand together.

With sincere respect, appreciation and gratitude,

*Olga Netchkassova*

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## **FOOD JUSTICE IS LOCAL AND GLOBAL**

Dear Coop,

During the recent government shutdown, the SNAP benefits crisis focused my attention on local food needs as never before. (Not that I should have needed the wakeup call.) A recent news article reveals that a government model known as the Thrifty

Food Plan requires SNAP recipients to survive on about \$6.30 per person per day. This reminded me that in 2008, long before the current horrors in Gaza, Israel “drew up a document calculating the minimum caloric intake necessary for Palestinians to avoid malnutrition so Israel could limit the amount of foodstuffs allowed into Gaza without causing outright starvation.” Despite obvious differences, both the Thrifty Food Plan and “putting Gaza on a diet” are policy tools that seem designed to keep large numbers of vulnerable people scrambling for bare survival.

In the face of such cruelty, how can we defend everyone’s basic right to good nutrition? The fact that our Coop’s mission links food with justice issues makes us a natural hub for action on this front. We already partner with CHIPS to help meet local needs. Individual members are doing amazing work, as documented in the November 18 *Gazette* article about Lewanika Senghor, whose organization the Village House Pantry, provides food to Brooklynites who might otherwise go without.

These are inspiring efforts, but more is clearly required. By finding creative ways to make better use of the PSFC’s extensive resources, we can become leaders in addressing this massive and growing problem in our own neighborhood.

When it comes to Palestine, we have much farther to go. By continuing to sell goods from the country that has been found by numerous experts to have imposed a hideous famine on Gaza—in defiance of international law—we remain complicit with Israel’s behavior. In the name of food justice and basic humanity, we must make a collective decision to boycott Israeli products.

In cooperation,

*Jan Clausen*

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## **PLEASE REQUEST MORE PALESTINIAN PRODUCTS AT THE COOP**

Dear Coop Members,

The holiday season has officially begun, which brings even more joy and chaos to the Coop as many of us fill our carts with a delicious variety of treats and ingredients for holiday favorites like pecan pie, eggnog and latkes. While walking through the buzzing aisles of the Coop, I feel blessed by abundance. At the same time, I'm reminded that in Palestine, this holiday season will be filled with tremendous pain and suffering for so many who have lost their homes, friends, families and symbols of normalcy that represent sacred memories.

It has been over two years since Gaza began to experience what human rights organizations have called, and people of conscience all over the world know to be, a genocide. The call for a Free Palestine remains more relevant than ever. Even in the midst of unspeakable cruelty, there are Palestinian people calling on the world to stand in solidarity. And while we organize a boycott of Israeli products, it is imperative that we support the many farmers, craftspeople and writers (to name a few) who call Palestine home. We can do that right here at the Coop by stocking our shelves with olive oil, hummus, soap and tahini made by Palestinians.

Research by Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine has identified several of those businesses. Their incredible products should be on our shelves:

- Huwa Premium Olive Oil
- Al'Ard Palestinian olive oil, tahini, za'atar, and more
- Nabulsi olive oil soap
- Palestinian Soap Cooperative olive oil soap

● *The Gaza Kitchen* cookbook

Buying products from Palestinian-owned businesses is a small yet powerful way to show up for Palestine. If you're curious about trying these products too, you can request these products at [foodcoop.com](https://foodcoop.com), navigating to Food > Product Suggestion.

In solidarity,

*Taylor Pate*

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## **DON'T SAY TRANSPARENCY UNLESS YOU MEAN IT**

To the editor:

I have now lost track of the number of times I have called for the General Coordinators to disclose the purported legal opinion that validates the end of member governance of the Coop. The response from the General Manager (hereinafter "the GCs' Response") to my demand in the November 18 edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* does not address anything I've said. It repeats what we have been told previously, which I paraphrase as: (1) the General Coordinators sought legal counsel after the April 29 monthly meeting, (2) experienced legal counsel (a) validated what I believe can only reasonably be described as the usurpation of the Coop's governance system by an activist faction and its representatives on the board, and (b) determined that implementation of hybrid meetings does not require a bylaw amendment, notwithstanding Article VI, paragraph 4 of the bylaws, and (3) confidentiality requires that the General Coordinators prevent the membership from seeing how the unnamed attorneys reached those conclusions.

However, the response contains some new propositions, such as:

1. Contradictorily, there is no legal opinion. There was just a discussion that is part of an “ongoing and broader dialogue about the Coop’s governance practices and legal compliance.”

2. The GCs’ goals include ensuring that all perspectives and member concerns are represented. I see no indication of an intent to represent members who want the rule of law to mean something.

3. The GCs’ goals include “sound, transparent decision-making.” I cannot fathom what that means. The conduct of the GCs is the opposite of transparent.

If they support transparency in decision-making, they will disclose whatever writing shows the basis for validating the conduct of the board on April 29 and for concluding that no bylaw amendment is necessary to implement hybrid voting.

Sincerely,

*Noah Potter*

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## **TIME TO MOVE ON**

Dear Coop members:

Folks, I continue to see back and forth over Palestine, and machinations to get things on the ballot about a boycott of Israel. At the same time there is a large group of people who feel the boycott idea to be unfairly and prejudicially applied to Israel. I think it is time to take this issue off the agenda. It arguably should have never been put on the Food Coop agenda to begin with, but it’s clearly not going to happen without a tremendous amount of damage to the Coop. For those who don’t like Israel, there is a way to make a statement: Don’t buy their products. There is no justification for mak-

ing everybody else in the Coop live by your positions when you and they can individually make their own choices.

Sincerely,

*David Sher*

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## **FEAR FOR OUR FUTURE**

Dear Fellow Members:

Fifteen years of Coop membership have saved my family thousands of dollars in food costs. In many respects, we can all thank each other for that. But if a fellow member retires after founding and serving the Coop for more than 50 years, I think throwing a celebration in appreciation of that member's essential work is utterly appropriate, and I certainly don't begrudge an earmark of less than \$2 per member to offer thanks, particularly for an event to which all members were invited and those who attended really enjoyed. So, I was dismayed when this expenditure, negligible compared to decades of member savings, was derided at October's General Meeting.

Maybe such derision, levied by members who don't let their scorn of the Coop's founder stop them from benefiting from what he built, is exactly why many fellow members are so worried about the Coop's future. In a recent *Gazette* edition, the Coop's long-serving board secretary tendered her resignation and suspended her membership. Perhaps to some, a loss this seismic is a minor snag along the road to advancing one particular agenda item. Some issues are just that important. To me, the Coop's top imperative is cooperation, regardless of viewpoint. Driving someone as thoughtful and devoted as Elizabeth Tobier away is antithetical to cooperation. As is selective empathy.

Pain is everywhere, and I used to think we all understood that. Is it recoverable?

*Brian Shuman*