



LOCAL LOVE

Focus on local producers sets Co-op apart

Since the Cambridge Food Co-op’s founding more than 40 years ago, the local natural and organic grocery market has changed substantially, as the large grocery chains have moved into the market. The buying power of these large retailers greatly exceeds that of the Co-op and other small grocers, making it difficult for the Co-op to compete on price. But if there is one thing the Co-op can do better than the big guys, it’s in offering truly local products.

“We consider ‘local’ to be anything from Washington County up to Granville, along with nearby communities in Vermont, Rensselaer County, and Saratoga County,” explained Co-op Interim Manager Melissa Carll. “I think the Co-op’s definition of ‘local’ is very different from the large retailers’ definition.” The Co-op currently offers dozens of products made or grown by local producers.

One benefit to offering local products is that it keeps the community’s dollars in the community. “We benefit from keeping our food and our dollars in a closed loop system,” Carll explains. As an example, say a local farmer sells her spinach to the Co-op. She then uses that payment to pay her staff, or grab breakfast at Benson’s, or pick up some new tools at the hardware store. This keeps cash in Cambridge, instead of sending it off to Hannaford’s owners. And it keeps local folks in business, notes Carll. “It’s a matter of pride for us to be able to help keep local businesses viable.”



Long Days Farm, South Cambridge

It is difficult for small producers to access markets the way big producers do, so offering local products through the Co-op helps

local producers find their niche in an ever more competitive landscape. While the big guys demand uniform products delivered in specific quantities on a regular schedule, the Co-op offers local producers more flexibility. “With the Co-op, it’s easy to fit deliveries into our schedule,” explains local farmer and Co-op supplier Debby Jaffe of Long Days Farm. In South Cambridge. Long Days Farm produces asparagus, sugar snap peas, onions, garlic, herbs, and occasionally eggs for the Co-op, and has supplied the Co-op for going on 5 years.

But sourcing local products and selling local products to the Co-op is not without its challenges. “It’s hard for the staff to

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Frequently Asked Questions

You ask—we’ll answer!

Questions for this feature are asked or submitted at the Co-op or via email. FAQs will be archived on the website for reference. Keep those questions coming!

1.) Is the Co-op open to the public? Believe it or not, the myth that the Co-op is for members only still persists in our community, in spite of our big beautiful signs which say otherwise! The Co-op is not only open to non-members—the Co-op NEEDS its non-member shoppers. And the Co-op needs its members to keep working to dispel the myth that it is a members-only store.

2.) Is the Co-op connected in any way to local religious organizations? Believe it or not, this is another myth which still persists, in spite of our 40 year history in the community. The Co-op is in no way affiliated with any religious organizations, except in

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The Seven Co-operative Principles: What They Are, and Why They Matter

Cambridge Food Co-operators will likely know that our Co-op, and indeed all co-ops, can trace their roots all the way back to the Rochdale Pioneers, an early co-operative formed by weavers and other tradesmen to sell food and other items tradespeople could otherwise not afford to buy.

The first to offer a patronage dividend system, the Rochdale Pioneers formed their co-op in 1844 as a response to the In-



Founding Members of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers

dustrial Revolution, which was forcing skilled tradespeople into poverty. With the lessons of earlier failed cooperatives in mind, these enterprising folks set forth what eventually became known as the Seven Principles of Cooperatives, which form the basis of cooperatives—including the Cambridge Food Co-op—to this day.

Principle 1, Voluntary and Open Membership, means just what it says—cooperatives are voluntary organizations, and open to anyone willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination. At CFC, if you want to join, and are willing to participate in the management of the Co-op, you are in. And the dues? While they present a difficulty for some, the Co-op will always reserve the right to reduce or waive the dues requirement in certain cases. And yes, the part about no political discrimination means just that—our Co-op strives to be an open and wel-

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Your Co-op Needs You!

Board of Advisors Seeks Board Clerk, Offers Working Membership

The Co-op Board's commitment to effective and timely communication with members about its work requires frequent communication through various channels. To improve this communication, the Co-op's Board of Advisors is seeking a Board Clerk, and will offer a single working membership to the right candidate.

The Board Clerk is staff to the Board, and will be responsible for recording, disseminating and maintaining all official Board communication; setting and maintaining the schedule of Board & Membership meetings; announcing all meetings and disseminating agendas in accordance with the bylaws; and other related duties as required.

The position will report to the Board Chair and the Board Secretary, and will require a commitment of 3-4 hours per month. The right candidate will have the availability to attend Board (and other) meetings; ability to work closely with the Board chair & secretary; and excellent computer skills.

For a complete position description, or to express interest in this position, please contact Susan Sullivan at asusansullivan@gmail.com.



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accurately predict demand for products such as herbs,” notes Jaffe. “And when produce doesn’t sell, it gets discounted as it looks progressively worse,” she explained, which can create challenges for the producers. “We’d like our customers to see our produce at its best.”

Local products are also challenging for the Co-op to price. “Locally-sourced products are usually higher in price,” says Carll, who goes on to explain that the higher prices are not the producers’ fault. “The Co-op needs to be able to mark up the products to help us cover our costs, and as a result, it is very difficult to sell local products cheaply,” explained Carll.

Production can also be an issue, explains Shannon Woodcock, Co-op Shift Supervisor. “Small farmers may only produce the items our shoppers want for a short time, and then be out until next year,” she explained. This puts the Co-op in the position of having to fill that gap from further afield. Produce from larger suppliers further away are often substantially cheaper, which can cause “sticker shock” when compared with local produce.

Still, Carll believes that the benefits of a truly local economy can outweigh the challenges. “If we pay our producers a fair price for their products, and a Co-op shopper pays us for that product, then we are all supporting a local business. It’s hard for a small

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producer/buyer relationships. Again, the Co-op needs its members to help get accurate info about the Co-op out there.

3.) Does the Co-op plan to do away with the Member-Worker program? The Co-op has no plans to eliminate the Member-Worker program, however, the program may change in order to improve operational efficiency. Please keep in mind that if you are a member, YOU are the Co-op, and have a say in how the Co-op is managed, through your representatives on the Board of Advisors, and through your participation on committees and in member meetings. Being an informed, engaged Co-op member is a critical piece of the decision-making process, and the best way to ensure the Co-op is managed the way you want it to be managed.

4) What are ways to get involved with the Co-op if I don’t have time to be a working member? Committees are currently reforming, and would love extra help! Look for information on Co-op Committees in the next newsletter, and consider joining. Plan on attending any member meetings—we need to hear from you! And don’t forget to shop the Co-op—it seems obvious, but it’s a critically important way to support the Co-op.

“It’s a matter of pride for us to help keep local businesses viable.”

business to find a niche for their market, and the Co-op is helping them reach that market and sustain themselves.”

The more the Co-op can do this, the easier it becomes for the Co-op to differentiate itself from its big competitors. And the more the Co-op can help support other local businesses while keeping its own lights turned on, the more cooperative our community becomes.

Cambridge Farmers’ Market Seeks Vendors for 2018

The Cambridge Farmers’ Market is seeking vendors to fill several spots for summer season 2018: coffee, dairy products, prepared foods, and soap. Vendors must have all appropriate licenses/certificates and be able to provide proof of insurance. More information is available at <https://www.managemymarket.com/> The first Farmers’ Market of the 2018 summer season will be on Sunday, May 20.

Until then, please support our farmers at the **Second Sundays Makers and Farmers Markets** at the Depot Taproom. The next one is Sunday, March 11, from noon until 4 pm.





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coming place for all—even those who may be on the opposite side of the political divide from us. Our world needs a little more “open and welcoming” in it these days, don’t you think?

Principle 2, Democratic Member Control, refers to the fact that co-operatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who *actively participate* in setting their policies and making decisions. Without active participation of the members,



Workers at the Hebden Bridge Fustian Manufacturing Society, which formed in 1870.

our co-op is no longer a co-op at all. At CFC, active participation can take the form of shopping the Co-op regularly, maintaining a working membership, doing committee work, serving on the Board of Advisors—but really, what our co-op needs is what our country needs—an informed “electorate” which shows up to vote. If you do nothing else, please get informed, and come out to vote when needed!

Principle 3 requires “Member Economic Participation,” which means, in part, that members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. Members pay dues, shop, and otherwise support the co-op’s economic ends, and democratically determine how any surplus will be spent. In order to do this responsibly, it is critically important that members understand the Co-op’s budget, which is why the Co-op Board works so hard to get budget information out to the membership before any vote.

Principle 4, Autonomy and Independence, is all about democratic control of the organization by its members. Any agreements entered into by the Co-op must not threaten the autonomy of the co-op, and must do so on terms that ensure demo-

cratic control by its members. At CFC, an open and transparent decision-making process by the Board of Advisors is the key to CFC’s adherence to this principle. Remember—all Board of Advisor meetings are open to any member who wants to attend.

Principle 5, Education, Training and Information, requires that co-operatives “provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.” This is certainly something the CFC could do more of—to support new member recruitment, to offer as a member benefit, and as a means of generating support of the Co-op in the larger world. It may also inspire the creation of other cooperatives in our community. Which leads us to Principle 6.

Principle 6 is Cooperation among Cooperatives, which is defined “Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.” This principle is why the CFC purchases from other co-operatives, such as UNFI, FEDCO, and others whenever possible. It drives the co-op to support international producer-owned cooperatives like the ones which sell to Equal Exchange. When we support other cooperatives, we help to create a world in which the cooperative model becomes normal, and thus a viable alternative to the competitive capitalist model.

Principle 7, Concern for Community, officially reads “Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.” When we as cooperators follow this principle and all the others, we necessarily work towards the improvement of our entire community, even as we are strengthening our own organization.

