



91 Valley Street  
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WWW.WILLIMANTICFOOD.COOP

# THE COMPOST

Vol. 48, Number 1 Spring 2026

## STORE HOURS

8:00 am - 8:00 pm

Every Day

## From Church Basement to Community Cornerstone

Patty Smith

### ☆THE 7 COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES☆

- 1. Voluntary and Open Membership:** Cooperatives are open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept membership responsibilities, without discrimination.
- 2. Democratic Member Control:** Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions.
- 3. Member Economic Participation:** Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative.
- 4. Autonomy and Independence:** Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members.
- 5. Education, Training, and Information:** Cooperatives provide education and training for members, elected representatives, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperative.
- 6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives:** Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.
- 7. Concern for Community:** While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities.

**What does it mean to be a community owned, cooperatively run grocery store?**

The remembrances of Co-op founding member Larry Goodheart in this issue highlight the core of what a food co-op is and how meaningful community cooperative ownership can be. The bumper sticker co-op meme, “I own a grocery store with my friends” really captures what Larry, Ellen, Bruce and all the other founding members of our Co-op were up to back in the late nineteen seventies – social gatherings to divide up bulk food orders, member volunteers running the store before the Co-op had employees, potluck dinners, tag sales, and church basement environs.

Today, owning this grocery store with your friends means sharing ownership, success, and challenges with over 6000 actively shopping members. In 2025, 6010 individual members shopped at the Co-op, and we have many more on our books who have invested some amount of equity over the years. Member purchases comprised 85% of our sales last year, while the other 15% came from what I like to think of as prospective members

– those who haven’t quite decided yet that co-op ownership is for them but value what we offer enough to spend their money in the store. The Co-op provides living-wage jobs with benefits to 47 employees, operates in a large, well-lit space with (mostly) modern equipment, and brings in over \$8 million in annual revenue.

All of this growth makes the daily operation and experience of the Co-op somewhat different than it was in the “old days”, but the heart of the Co-op remains the same as it was in the beginning: we put people before profit, we use any profit we make to sustain and improve the Co-op, and we are guided in all of our decision-making by the seven Cooperative Principles\* and the six Cooperative Values: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity.

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## WILLIMANTIC FOOD CO-OP

### General Manager

Patricia Smith

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Corry Elm

Rebecca Figueroa

*Assistant Front-end Managers*

Marissa Ocegüera

*Front-end Manager*

Willow Cordy

*Assistant Grocery Manager*

Matthew Woodward

*Grocery Manager*

Kara Croce

*Merchandising & Promotions Manager*

Wendy Jakoboski

*Produce Manager*

Nancy McMerriman

*Wellness Manager*

### Staff

Kate Abbatemarco

Jessie Bance

Gabi Lopez Barreto

Hunter Blakeslee

Shydel Boyd

Maxwell Calverly

James Cashmore-Everton

Susan Chasin

Seraphin Cutter-Nokomis

Ailin Cuevas Gonzales

Tom DeWolfe

Chad Dunnack

Dani Finnerty

Kathe Gable

Mark Giangrave

GG Gonzales Aleluya

Kate Greenwell

Catherine Hahn

Bob Jennette

Earnest Marcotte

Brandon Johnson Nickson

Andy Kish

Christine Klaben

Kasia Korwek

Bianna Lopez Garcia

Richard Mann

Sarah Medeiros

Gabrielle Nedweden

Karla Negron-Rodriguez

Vanessa Ortiz

Levi Quakenbush

Melissa Robichaux

Ninoshka Robles Solano

Richelle Strimple

Christopher Swift

Julio Velez

### Board of Directors

Brock Alosky

Matthew Coolbeth

Kathe Gable (*staff director*)

Katherine Gavin

Tomasyn Goode

Peter W. Kirk

Hannah Moore

Stephanie White

### Manager Representative

Patricia Smith

### Newsletter

Amy Kalisher

Patricia Smith



## Willimantic Community Fridge Finds New Home at the Co-op

*Juan Pablo Yepes Tobón*

The new Willimantic Community Fridge has been unveiled, as of March! Managed by CLiCK, and hosted by the Willimantic Food Co-op, you can find it right outside the Co-op on Church Street! It's open 24/7 to everyone, no questions asked.

Support your community directly!

Receive the gifts of food from your neighbors!

Drop off the extra goods you don't need, and pick up a little extra help when you could use it!

This community has so much abundance; there's more than enough to go around. Let's strengthen the bonds of our mutual aid, and our care for our neighbors! Giving and receiving gifts, helping those in need and accepting help when we need it – these are the visions of the Community Fridge.

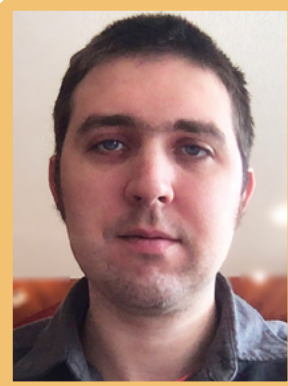
This project originated at Willimantic's Whitewater Park back in 2023. Now, Whitewater Park has begun its renovation, and so the Community Fridge has found a brand new home at the Co-op, with a brand new shed, brand new shelves, and a brand new fridge!

We give our thanks to the folks in our community that keep the fridge full:

- Everyday residents like Dick Mozzer, Nick, Sarah and Chris, and everyone who has already donated anonymously!
- The folks at Genesis Church, who donate rescued food weekly — often loads of yummy baked goods!
- Local farms across eastern Connecticut, like BOTL Farms and Kindred Crossings, who stock the freezer with frozen animal parts so nothing goes to waste!
- The youth and coordinators at GROW Windham, who have consistently donated the fresh food they grow in their community gardens at Lauter Park!

• And a special thanks to Tammy, a community advocate here at CLiCK who has been restocking and looking after the Community Fridge every week for the past year! 🌱





## Board Doings

Matthew Coolbeth, Board Chair

Over the winter, our Board has spent a lot of time focused inward, on questions of governance:

- How do we

interpret the mission of the Co-op, as described in the Ends statement in our Policy Register?

- Are the Ends, as stated, a satisfactory expression of our organization's values?
- What governance practices will best enable the Co-op to develop and follow a long-term strategy to achieve its Ends?

This has involved a long series of full-board discussions, as well as the formation of an ad hoc committee to review our Ends statement. We also welcomed a



Gabby Davis, NCG's Equity, Inclusion & Community Engagement Manager

guest speaker, Gabby Davis, from National Co+op Grocers, who delivered an enlightening presentation about the relationship between inclusivity and healthy eating. In the coming months, we will build on this foundation to more concretely work on the project of strategic planning.

Over the last few months, we've also continued to keep up with our policy monitoring schedule. This past quarter, the Board has monitored the General Manager's compliance with:

- B.8 Membership
- B.2 Financial Planning
- B.3 Financial Condition & Activities Q4 2024
- B.4 Asset Protection

The Board has also evaluated its own compliance with:

- D.4 Board Meetings
- D.6 Officer's Role
- D.8 Governance Investment
- C.1 Unity of Control
- C.2 Accountability of the Manager

This work represents just a few months of our Policy Monitoring Schedule, which continues year round, and covers our entire suite of policies in order to make sure that the Co-op is staying true to its mission and continues to follow good governance practices. If you are interested in learning more about the Co-op's mission and model of governance, you can find the latest version of our Policy Register on the Board page ([willimanticfood.coop/about-the-co-op/our-board/](http://willimanticfood.coop/about-the-co-op/our-board/)) of the Co-op's website.

Now that Spring has arrived, the Board must also devote time and attention to our annual Spring activities: publishing the Co-op's Annual Report, running the election for new Directors, and organizing the Annual Meeting, which all members of the Co-op are invited to attend on June 3rd. Details for the event will be announced soon.

As always, if you are interested in the Board's work, please feel free to attend a meeting or reach out with questions or feedback. Use the "Contact Us" link on the website, or leave your name and contact info at the store, and we will be in touch!

Board Meetings: First Thursdays, 6–8 p.m. at WorkMode, 109 Valley St., Willimantic 🥕

## COMING SOON *Updates to Member Benefits!*

While we hope people decide to join the Co-op simply to be a part of our mission-driven, community-owned grocery store, it is nice when membership comes with a few additional perks. The board and management are currently reviewing our member benefits and discount programs to ensure that the benefits of membership are meaningful, equitable, and sustainable. We expect to announce exciting changes to our member benefit programs later this year.

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MEET Nancy McMerriman



*"I want everyone to feel like they are seen, heard and valued"*

Nancy has worked in the wellness department for over nine years and has recently moved into the role of Wellness Manager. Nancy replaces Kara Croce who has also moved into a new role – Merchandising and Promotions Manager. When Nancy's not guiding you in Wellness she's busy rehabbing opossums. Nancy is proud to be a CT licensed wildlife rehabber. It's been a passion of hers since she was a little girl. Nancy is a big animal lover and has three rescue dogs, Mindy, Dollie and Tuck, and lots of chickens.

**What's one thing you've learned and loved about working at the co-op for 10 years?**

I love working and collaborating with a group of awesome people. I can't think of a better work environment. Everyone enjoys the work they do here which says a lot about our Co-op. We work together and help each other – that's what Co-ops do! – it's what makes it so special. I've had interesting work through my career and have owned my own businesses, but as far as

work environments, the Co-op is hard to beat. We work hard every day to make the Co-op run smoothly and be a welcoming spot for all who step through our doors.

**What excites you most about stepping into this role at the Co-op?**

I love to learn new things, and I'm excited about taking on all aspects of the department. We work with over 60 different vendors in our department; about 30 on a weekly basis. I'm looking forward to the challenge of keeping track of everything, staying current with the supplement and body care industry, and building on vendor relationships while continuing to offer the best customer service possible.

**What's one thing you hope every Co-op member feels when they walk into the Wellness department?**

I want everyone to feel like they are seen, heard and valued. When people walk into the Wellness department, they are taking a step towards their health or helping someone close to them. We can't advise or prescribe but we can help guide people deciding on a product, and that's important. We listen, and we give one-on-one attention and our best guidance. This sets us apart from other stores because we are really helping people instead of just pointing to a product.

**What's a small wellness shift people can make that actually makes a big difference?**

Drink lots of water; it's key and it's free! Reducing your stress and getting enough sleep are simple practices that often get forgotten or overlooked.

**How do you support yourself when the world feels overwhelming?**

Getting outside is a must; being in nature is critical for my mental health and well-being. Whenever I'm stressed, just getting outside with my dogs is a game changer.

**What's your current favorite item in the Wellness department?**

Magnesium with Ashwagandha by New Chapter is an all-time favorite of mine because it's just one tab, you get a whole dose, and it's great for sleep.

**Finish this phrase...**

**"Wellness doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be..."**

...consistent. 🥕



*interviewed by Melissa Robichaux*



## Blue Skies and Healthy Vegetables

Bryan O'Hara

**Ah vegetables, yes vegetables, and health** – combine to make my favorite: healthy vegetables. As a vegetable grower who supplies the Food Co-op with large volumes of vegetables, it is very important that these vegetables be of great health.

It is important for me (the farmer) because of production efficiency and satisfaction. It is important for the Co-op because they sell so many (and are a pleasure to work with). They are important for the customer because they taste excellent, look beautiful, and bring health to the eater. Satisfaction for all.

Let's take a look at what a healthy vegetable looks like. Life is a combination of the four basic elements of sun energy, air, water, and minerals in the soil. It is the farmer's job to combine these ingredients in the most effective way. If done well, a crop will grow in a state of vitality which imparts things like insect and pest resistance, great flavor, vibrant pigmentation, long storage life, and high sugar content, among many other beneficial qualities. When a crop grows well, you get the whole package. Conditions like pollution, bad weather, weather modification, and incorrect farmer decision-making get in the way of nature's movement towards vitality. As farmers we do well when we ally our agricultural processes with this natural movement. This alliance has the capacity to create a greater abundance of life and vitality than nature without human involvement. Thus human life has much meaning with a whole lot to do.

Ah, but things do go wrong in agricultural production so often these days. So many farmers are challenged to produce vital crops under such atmospheric disturbances. Though this has resulted in many farmers trying to learn and improve their production practices, which is a very encouraging sign for humanity, there is still a long way to go. Unfortunately much food produced these days lacks vitality and thus is produced with pesticides in order to be brought to market. The consumer of these foods is therefore consuming a product of low vitality along with

a package of pesticide, which leads to health problems. Thank you, in a big way, to the Co-op for bucking this trend and helping keep the people around here healthier.

In future articles I hope to be able to impart some of the nitty gritty details of crop production but for now let's take a look at general principles. Plant growth is based on photosynthesis, the combination of sunlight energy, water (H<sub>2</sub>O), and CO<sub>2</sub> (air) to form the simple sugar glucose: C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>12</sub>O<sub>6</sub>. This sugar is then used as both the building block and energy source for further metabolic building processes. Simple sugar → complex sugar → carbohydrate → amino acids, protein, cellulose, enzymes, waxes, vitamins, anti-oxidants, pigments, etc. – kind of like a pyramid of increasing molecular complexity. If the plant lacks energy or the appropriate enzyme, certain processes cannot be achieved. If this occurs towards the base of the pyramid a skewed metabolic profile results and leads to insect and disease with crop loss. If this occurs at the top of the pyramid only minor disturbances result.



Fortunately, humans are endowed with the ability to sense quality. When plant metabolism is fully functioning, significantly increased volumes of pigments, sugar, vitamins, antioxidants, and flavor compounds are formed. We can see the intensity of pigmentation, we can taste the sugars and flavor compounds, and our bodies respond to the vitamins. We are walking quality meters. It is best when our foods taste delicious!

The good news continues this year with much improved weather conditions and a conspicuously blue sky, leading to greatly improved vitality. The fall tree leaf pigmentation was greatly improved, the overwintering evergreen trees have fuller canopies with better green pigmentation than in many years. The sugar maples have been pouring out sap with a very high sugar content. Many early insects are present in volumes we haven't seen in a decade or more! Regular snow patterns, temperatures, rain, clouds, etc. all point to a productive bright year ahead.

May your gardens be full of abundance and vitality, may love and the joy of life be with you.

\*Bryan O'Hara owns Tobacco Road Farm along with his partner Anita Johnson 🌱

## In Memoriam : Larry Goodheart

**The Co-op community lost a great friend and supporter** when Larry Goodheart died on February 10, 2026. Larry loved everything about the Co-op, starting with the guiding Rochdale Principles which date back to 1844



democratic member control. He supported these ideas while also enjoying the camaraderie and fun of working with like-minded folks. He was strongly motivated to seek healthy, ecological and sustainable alternatives

(there have been periodic updates). These principles include values such as community improvement, profits used to benefit the cooperative, sense of duty and service to others, education, training and

to the offerings of agribusiness companies. He supported the Co-op in so many ways: prepping orders in the early days of the Buyer's Club, helping develop the by-laws, twice serving as a board member, as an



*continued on page 7*

## Larry Goodheart *continued from page 6*

inventory worker for many years, and as a link on the human chain for moving inventory when the store moved. Plus, he was the ultimate loyal customer.

In talking with Bruce Oscar, who was a coordinator for the Buyer's Club and later, a long time Co-op department manager, we placed Larry's earliest involvement in the Co-op around 1978. That was also about the time I started. The Buyer's Club had members pre-order food, which was bought in bulk, delivered, broken down and picked up by members every Friday at St. Paul's Church in Willimantic. Everyone had a job, and Larry helped with prepping orders. My job was egg pickup, driving to Coventry to pick up 75 or so dozen each week. There were also annual meetings and dinners, when every department gave a report, even me, the egg guy – all I could report was the estimated total number of eggs, about 45,000 annually! The pickup times were very social as everyone showed up around the same time. Larry enjoyed the friendships and club activities but was also passionate about the purpose and mission of the group.

Larry was a man with strongly held values which he would never compromise. His faith and trust in the Cooperative Principles was accompanied with a distrust of corporate and establishment institutions which were motivated solely by profit. He was a supporter of public transportation and demonstrated it by taking the bus to Hartford to his teaching job for many years. Organic gardening was his passion and his main activity. He strove to do all things simply, quietly and thoughtfully, and he gave up his rototiller to work his heavily mulched, no-till garden by hand. I happily took the tiller off his hands and still use it now, 25-plus years later.

Larry and I served on the Co-op Board together in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The storefront was doing well but Larry and I were both a little out of step with some newer members who were planning for expansion while we were still focused on economic survival, which was a very real concern throughout the early years. Fortunately, the optimists won out, and the paths chosen put us on the road to the vibrant and viable business our Co-op is today. But it is important to remember the early days and to thank dedicated members like Larry and his wife Ellen Embardo, who did whatever they could, for over 45 years, to improve the Willimantic Food Co-op. Thanks for everything, Larry.

—Ed Adelman

Dear Larry,

Thank you for your time in the world. Throughout your lifetime, your beliefs and actions made a difference and will continue to do so even now that you are gone.

Your teaching, your writing, and your dedication to your community and the land have all had important and positive impacts.

Very near and dear to me is your dedication to the Food Co-op – organizing in the early days, several stints on the board, a short time as a worker, and your unwavering support of me as the manager – have all meant the world to me.

I will always remember and treasure the times we have spent together. Garden tours, hikes in the woods, watching the solar eclipse on your deck.

I am a better person for having known you. The Co-op has flourished because of your hard work. And the world is a better place. Larry Goodheart, the man who truly had a good heart.

Rest easy.

Love, Alice

—Alice Rubin 🌱

*"Find the balance within the chaos"*  
—Melissa Robichaux,  
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Integrative Nutrition Coach

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- Reiki Energy & Sound Healing
- Personal parties & gatherings
- Community Events

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## Introducing: Co-op Ambassadors

In 2025, the Co-op and our amazing staff and members showed up all over town, attending and hosting more than a dozen community events! From the lively 3rd Thursday celebrations, where the frog made their first debut, to the Earth Day event at Eastern Connecticut State University and Veggiestock, we kept busy spreading the Co-op spirit. We even started a new tradition, throwing two unforgettable garden parties in the stunning Co-op garden, because what's better than good food, good people, great music, and a little sunshine? Now we're gearing up for another exciting year and we'd love to have some more members jump in and join the fun.

What to expect:

- Earn a Co-op discount
- Show off your Co-op pride
- Meet other members & make new friends
- Build community bonds
- Express creativity
- Get involved with planning and organizing events
- Coordinate kids activities
- Be a part of the Co-op family

Bring your smiles, your community spirit, and maybe your dancing shoes. Come hang out, meet your neighbors, celebrate local community, and earn those discounts while you're at it. Let's make this year's community events the most fun yet!

If this sounds like something you'd like to do, please apply for our Co-op Ambassador Program on our website. [bit.ly/4bSRVqH](https://bit.ly/4bSRVqH) 🥕

## Save the Date Annual Meeting of Members

Wednesday, June 3rd, 6-8 pm

First Congregational Church

199 Valley St, Willimantic, CT

06226



## Springtime Wellness Renewal *Helen Scanlon*



### Springtime Wellness Renewal: Let's do this!

Winter 2026 was relentless. Gray days, bitter winds, ice, LOTS of snow. ... Well, now it's over! Time to recharge and renew with a field trip to the Co-op's AMAZING Wellness department.

Winter did a number on you so grab a basket and load up. Bring a friend! Make it a real outing, and enjoy a cup of tea in the Co-op's café when you're done. Okay, that sounds like a good time. You're welcome.

Check out the supplements, lotions, shampoos, soaps, oils, and more. The Co-op has many all-natural, sustainably-sourced, locally-produced, environmentally-friendly products—how lucky are we to have this wonderfulness right HERE?

Let me tell you all about self-care: it is not a luxury, it is necessity. It is for every day. It is for when we feel that we don't have the time. It is for when you need to decompress and re-discover your spark.

It is surrounding yourself with joy. Peace. Safety.

It is about saying no to the things that hurt us.

It is about choosing products that are kind to us and to the planet.

The aisles in the Co-op's Wellness department are full of products that are designed to help you to reclaim your health. Sounds pretty great, doesn't it? I encourage—no, implore—you to take your time and discover the products that speak to your tired soul.

I have reviewed quite a few of the Co-op's Wellness items over the years, and let me just say—the staff truly care about what they put on the shelves. They know the products and will happily help you to find the perfect item. Pretty special—and rare.

It's more than just “treating” yourself—it's about showing yourself compassion and care.

I reviewed two new amazing Wellness products for this issue:

### 1. Treefort Naturals Rose and Bamboo Face Polish

We all know and love Treefort Naturals products, and this item is FANTASTIC. Treefort Naturals is based in Colchester, Connecticut and they use only non-irritating, natural, simple ingredients. The Rose and Bamboo face polish is an exfoliating champion— I daresay the best I have ever tried. It is so effective I would recommend using it on your elbows and your feet as well. As a face scrub, a little goes a long way. Put a small dab of face polish in the palm of your hand, add some warm water, mix, and apply it to your face, avoiding your eyes. Very gently smooth the polish over your skin—use a light touch—and rinse. My goodness, say goodbye to those dead skin cells and hello to brighter skin. Perfect. Use it every other week to give your skin a joyful lift. Put this one in your Co-op basket!

### 2. Lady May Soap and Suds Lavender Mint Tallow Soap

A gorgeous smelling soap in a pretty box – it doesn't get any better! This soap is a moisturizing boss featuring the emollient power of grass-fed beef tallow. Why tallow, you ask? Tallow is “nature's original moisturizer and is rich in vitamins A, D, E, and K, and its structure mirrors our skin's natural oils.” ([ladymaytallow.com](http://ladymaytallow.com)) I used it as a face soap and it didn't leave a film—hooray—and it didn't leave my skin feeling dry and tight. I have a new favorite. And hey, I mixed some of it with the Treefort Naturals Face Polish and I swear I heard angels singing as the gray winter clouds parted. Heck yes, I recommend it! In the basket it goes!

But wait, there's more—spring means that we break out the fresh veggies and indulge to our heart's content.

*continued on page 10*



**Helen's Reviews** *continued from page 9*



I sampled **Brianna's Avocado Oil Caesar Dressing** in my chopped salad and it was a perfect balance of smooth with a touch of vinegary spark. It's dairy-free with just the right amount of garlic zing. Brianna's is a popular brand for a reason—it has that small-batch flavor that delights the palate.

Then I tried **Cindy's Kitchen Roasted Veggie Dip** and quickly discovered that a yogurt-based veggie dip can be stupendously delicious. Small-batch and made with organic ingredients, serve this at your springtime get-together with a tray full of carrots, celery, cauliflower, peppers, and broccoli. Be sure to load up from the Co-op's fun and friendly produce department!

Now, take a deep breath. Your Co-op is here for you. Make it a happy, healthy spring! Enjoy! 🥕

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## Community Cornerstone

*continued from page 1*


What a beautiful thing that the work of Larry and friends 5 decades ago is still going strong – it's bigger, busier, and more digitized, sure – but that lovely Co-op smell still delights when you walk through the front doors! More importantly, the Co-op is still owned and used by its members and is therefore fulfilling its purpose. It is truly a social and economic organization that puts the needs of members, employees, and the community first.

The world surrounding the Co-op has changed significantly since the days of the Willimantic Buyer's Club and the Co-op's first storefront on Main St.; running an independent, mission-driven, not-for-profit grocery store has become increasingly complex. We are not insulated from market forces and we are subject to regulatory agencies like the departments of labor and consumer protection. These external forces affect our decision-making and impact our ability to be a fully autonomous and independent entity. Additionally, retail grocery is a notoriously low-margin industry, and even the natural and organic foods that were once unique to the Co-op and other small "health food" stores are now ubiquitous. We operate in a market where the Co-op is competing with Walmart and other big box stores and global retail behemoths like Amazon to sell organic food, natural vitamins and supplements, and other Co-op staples at competitive prices.


While the cost of goods continues to rise, so does the cost of living for workers, Co-op member-owners, and the local farmers and producers we buy from. All of our other costs – energy, fuel, insurance, supplies, etc. – also continue to go up, putting pressure on a small business like the Co-op from all directions. Thankfully, the Co-op is financially strong and sustainable thanks to decades of careful leadership and stewardship – not to mention love, devotion, blood, sweat, and tears – by our Co-op board directors, managers and workers, volunteers, partners, and other supporters. All of these stakeholders contribute to the Co-op's success, but at the end of the day, it is the member-owners who ARE the Co-op – without you, from founders like Larry and Ellen to the member who just joined yesterday, the Co-op would not exist. And that is what it means to be a community-owned, cooperatively run grocery store. Thanks for being a member! 🥕



**Patty Smith**



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