

STORE HOURS

8:00 am - 8:00 pm

Every Day

Explaining Member Benefits

Patty Smith

On Monday, August 3 we announced the exciting launch of our new Member Benefits package, which will start on October 1. This new package marks an important step forward in delivering greater value, equitability, and an even better member experience. The message to members included the announcement of three major changes to member benefits:

- The start of Member Loyalty Points
- The start of Ramp, a need-based discount program and equity assistance
- The end of the everyday 5% senior discount

Following the announcement, I heard from several members, some of whom were excited and grateful for the new programs, and others who were disappointed with the loss of the senior discount. We truly appreciate hearing from our members, especially when they take the time to tell us how a decision affects them. Thank you to everyone who reached out to share their thoughts.

Over the past several years, the Board and management have spent a great deal of time researching, gathering member input, and exploring how we could create member benefits that are easy to understand, equitable for all members, and sustainable for the long term. Following the end of the 10% upcharge for non-members during Covid, we have been eager to introduce a reward system that benefits all of our member-owners.

The new member benefits structure includes the addition of two new programs designed to help members save money and to incentivize new members to join. Co-ops are owned by their members and rely on member equity to stay strong and independent (e.g. minimizing the use of debt for capital expenditures). While the very existence of the Co-op is the primary benefit of member-ownership, it is always nice to

provide a little extra perk to those who have chosen to support the Co-op with their \$120 equity investment (usually paid in six annual installments of \$20). That's where the new Member Loyalty Points program comes in. Members will be automatically enrolled in Loyalty and will earn 1% back on every dollar spent at the Co-op (and 2% on local purchases). Shop the Co-op, earn points, and start redeeming them against purchases as soon as you've accumulated \$1.00 in points, or save them up for that big special occasion shop (points expire one year after they are earned). This is a member-only benefit and has proven to be very popular at other food co-ops.

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Become a Co-op Ambassador

We're looking for enthusiastic members to get more involved in Co-op events and help build our vibrant community! Become a Co-op Ambassador and represent what makes our Co-op so special. Join us at exciting events like 3rd Thursday, our garden parties, and more. It's a great way to meet new people, share your passion, and make a positive impact. Come be part of the energy!

What to expect:

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



Board Message: Member Benefits

Dear Members,

The Willimantic Food Co-op Board of Directors is pleased to welcome the new member benefits package – Member Loyalty Points and the Ramp Program – which launches on Oct. 1. This program will enhance the Co-op shopping experience by rewarding member owners and will incentivize new Co-op membership.

With the introduction of Member Loyalty Points, all members will receive 1% back on purchases, plus an additional 1% back on local purchases (double points on local!). Furthermore, the new Ramp program – a need-based discount and equity assistance for members – will expand equitable access to shopping at the Co-op. The Board is proud of this new member benefits program that supports the Co-op's long-term vitality, aligns with the Co-op's core values, and furthers the Co-op's newly updated Ends policy.

With the introduction of new benefits, we are also saying goodbye to the 5% senior discount. While this may be disappointing to some, we believe that this change supports the goal of having an equitable benefits structure. The total amount of available discount dollars will now be spread more evenly amongst all members, correlated



to how much they spend (a core cooperative principle), while also ensuring that members of any age can apply for a little extra assistance while they are experiencing financial hardship. The new benefits will not do away with other occasional discounts. Members can expect to enjoy the continuation of some favorite promotions such as seasonal discounts and Wellness Wednesdays.

The Board unanimously supports the new member benefits. We would like to thank the Co-op staff and management who have put in so much thoughtful work over such a long period of time to develop these new programs. The work has been done with care for our members and community, with an emphasis on equity and business sustainability.

In Cooperation,
WFC Board of Directors

A collection of handwritten signatures in black ink. The signatures are arranged in three rows. The first row contains three signatures: "Jeelva", "Katie", and "Kathryn". The second row contains two signatures: "Rt" and "Stephanie". The third row contains two signatures: "Matthew" and "Monica".

For more information on member benefits, visit
willimanticfood.coop/membership/ 🥕

A vertical advertisement for "The Cornerstone to Wellness". It features a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white sweater, holding a black feather. Surrounding her are several hands holding various items: a small brown bowl, a green apple, a wooden bowl with red beads, and a small wooden figure. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

"Find the balance within the chaos"
-Melissa Robichaux,
Energy Healing Practitioner,
Integrative Nutrition Coach

- Holistic Health Coaching
- Reiki Energy & Sound Healing
- Personal parties & gatherings
- Community Events

Scan to book

A square QR code located in the bottom right corner of the advertisement.

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT: Sarah Winter (Then and Now)



How does it feel returning to the Co-op as a staff member after so many years?

This feels so familiar and so new and different at the same time. It's so nice to be around people, and some things are very familiar to me. When something is new, I've really had to be pretty humble to ask. Some people don't know my history with the Co-op (I started working at the Co-op when I was 20 years old for about 12 years, I'm 67 now), so it's humbling to ask new younger staff how to do things with the new systems in place. I'm more mature now and so I don't ever take anything personally. I just really appreciate when they tell me how to do it the right way.

You've been working with the Co-op in one way or another since the beginning – what keeps you motivated to do so?

I really like the Co-op principles. I like that we're here to improve the economy. I love that we reach out to all people, regardless of income, sexual orientation, or their background. I just like co-ops in general and that form of ownership. I also love that every dollar you spend at a co-op stays in the community. Through

all the transitions over the years, our co-op principles keep us grounded. I'm looking forward to introducing our new benefits program to potential new member-owners. I like highlighting what it means to not just be a member of the Co-op but what ownership means as well.

What do you do for fun when you're not at the Co-op?

Lately I've been doing a lot of hiking, walking and biking. I like staying active. I recently joined the gym and I teach Thai Chi. I also like to cook, read, and I'm learning Spanish right now too!

If you were a superhero at work, what would your superpower be?

Smiling at people and making them feel welcomed. The other thing I'm pretty good at is attention to detail. It may seem a little meticulous but I really enjoy checking all the products and making sure the dates aren't expiring and keeping the shelves looking nice and tidy. I try to set the example of not rushing; I think meditating and practicing Thai Chi helps with that. When I first started, I noticed myself rushing a bit and then quickly realized – wait, we shouldn't rush, things will happen as they should. So I guess my superpower would be a Super Smiler or the Chill Out

Enforcer.

What's one fun fact about you that surprises people?

Not many people know this – I donated a kidney. If anyone is thinking about doing that, it was mostly painless and a rewarding feeling. The only thing that's different now is that I have to drink a lot of water. I came up with the plan to stop and drink water every 40 minutes when I'm working at the Co-op.

What would be your theme song be entering into the Co-op?

"Good Day Sunshine" by The Beatles or "The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)" by Simon & Garfunkel.

Pineapple on pizza? Yes or no?

If you were to order it, I'll eat it. Doesn't bother me. 🍍



interviewed by Melissa Robichaux



Choosing Local Products Supports the Land and Small Businesses

Susan Mitchell, Owner, Cloverleigh Farm (Columbia, CT)

As consumers, we spend a lot of time looking at labels of all kinds, particularly when it comes to things we put in our body. When you start a farm, you get to choose exactly what you want to grow and how you want to grow it. Each farmer

has their own set of ideas that contributes to these choices, which can certainly change over time. Change is a constant in farming.

Often at the Co-op we see produce labeled as Certified Organic, Local or No-Spray. Many folks believe that if you see the USDA Certified Organic seal, you've got nothing to worry about as a consumer. Yes and no. It's true that there are set standards that a farm must meet in order to be able to use the term organic and use the USDA Organic seal. Many of our local farms choose to farm in an ecologically responsible way and follow the practices laid out by the National Organic Program but not pay for the certification and annual inspection. Choosing to be certified is a decision made by the farmer and could be impacted by factors such as marketing channels, cost of certification, personal viewpoints, and more.

I would argue that buying produce from a Connecticut farm is a good idea whether it is organic or not. In doing so, you are supporting a small business, an individual or family, keeping more of your dollars in the community, and supporting working land (i.e., farmland that is still used for farming). I would rather buy food from a local farm regardless of their growing practices (organic or conventional) than buy a product that was shipped across the globe. Ultimately, I love to see local and organic, too! The freshness alone of local product makes a big difference in nutrition.

There is a huge difference between a small diversified vegetable farm in Connecticut and a large-scale organic producer in California, in terms of ecological footprint. The difference could look like 100 acres of lettuce versus one tenth of an acre of lettuce mixed in with twenty other crops. There is simply no comparison between these two farms,

even if both are certified organic. This is just an example of how organic in name may not actually look like the kind of landscape or farm you might want to be supporting.

Just as there are many reasons for a farmer to choose how they want to deal with disease and pest pressure on their farm, there are as many reasons why consumers choose to buy what they buy. Spending money on locally made food of any kind is a vote with your dollars for a healthy environment, clean water, the importance of a local economy, and the ability to feed ourselves. Who are the first people ready to supply food to the region after a severe weather event, pandemic, or power outage? It is the local farmers. They work incredibly hard seven days a week to grow and raise the best possible product they can provide.

As a farmer, it is a privilege to be able to feed people that I know, who buy produce from me routinely, and provide them with high quality certified organic produce. I choose to pay for the certification, annual application, and annual inspection. A third party comes to my farm to verify, independently, that we are following the rules outlined by the USDA. To me, that means something. It also adds my farm's acreage to the [national database of certified organic acres](https://www.ams.usda.gov/integrity) ([organic.ams.usda.gov/integrity](https://www.ams.usda.gov/integrity)). Food is political, and if we do not show our representatives that organic is important, then it will not get funded, in terms of research, resources for farmer training, or organic seed development. In so many ways, how we grow produce and what we grow is highly influential in the political landscape.

So, let's vote with our dollars for local food, for organic food, and for small-scale farmers throughout Connecticut and New England. 🌱



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Helen's Reviews *Helen Scanlon*

Hello dear Co-ops!
Nancy and Willow gave me the “way” good stuff to try out for this issue of The Compost!

I have a bounty of wonderful items to share with you.

First, let's take a Wellness department trip and see what's new: NEW skin care products? YES PLEASE!

Wild Carrot Love in A Mist Facial Toner

Check out this new item on the Co-op shelves—it is poetry in a bottle. Spray the fine mist on your clean face and let work its skin-balancing and hydrating magic. BONUS: It does double-duty as a toner and a fragrance thanks to the delicate fragrance of the Love-in-a-Mist flower. Wild Carrot describes the scent as a warm summer rain, and I must agree. Rain is pretty much the only thing I love about summer, so yes, please! The fragrance is a little bit of glimmer, a little bit of earthiness, a little bit of green, a little bit of blue. Stop me with the poetry!

This toner also features sake, the Japanese rice wine, for added moisturizing and balancing power. Gentle and all-natural, it's a real treat for the skin and the senses. Wild Carrot is a woman-owned company in Oregon that focuses on sustainability and connection with the land. Check out their website for their story: wildcarrotherbals.com

Wild Carrot Botanical Brilliance Bakuchiol Serum

Okay, I am really loving the Wild Carrot line—thank you to Nancy, our wonderful Wellness manager, for bring this great product to the Co-op. This serum contains Bakuchi oil, a renowned retinol alternative that has been shown



to reduce the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines. Regular use may result in smoother, more balanced skin that glows with health. I have been using Wild Carrot Botanical Brilliance Bakuchiol Serum every day since Nancy gave me my sample—and my summer-weary face responded with a hearty “Thank goodness!” Also, a little goes a long way, so get yourself this little bottle of wonder and watch your skin come alive.

Now, let's take a little stroll down Grocery Lane...

Gymkhana Green Tikka Mild Marinade

I tried this marinade with chicken and served it over basmati rice, and it was a mild yet flavorful experience featuring a chill of mint, a pop of cilantro, and the deep-green goodness of spinach. Gymkhana is a Michelin-starred restaurant in Mayfair, London, and they captured their amazing recipes in a jar so you can enjoy them at home and WOW dinner guests! Another shining star on the Co-op shelves!



Gymkhana Butter Masala Mild Simmer Sauce

I slow-cooked chicken in this sauce and OH BOY was it GOOD! You know when you sample something delicious and your tastebuds actually start singing an aria? Yeah, that. Tomatoes, cream, butter, green chili, cardamom, and cashews mingle to create authentic aromatic Indian sauce.

Trust me, this sauce is a delight. Serve with a homemade [mango lassi](http://mango-lassi.com/mango-lassi) (teaforturmeric.com/mango-lassi) – you can get those ingredients on the Co-op's shelves, too. Nothing like a cool and sweet yogurt drink with a spicy entrée. I figured out tonight's dinner for you – you're welcome!

Fishwife Albacore Tuna in Olive Oil

How can I even begin to describe this wonderful tinned treat? On a cracker, on a fresh-



continued on page 7

Helen's Reviews *continued from page 6*

baked baguette, or in a salad—this delicate, line-caught tuna is a wonder to behold. Plus, it's awash in olive oil. How can it get any better?

Here's how: "Fishwife is a woman-founded and led food company aiming to make ethically sourced, premium, and delicious tinned seafood a staple in every cupboard." (eatfishwife.com)

Fishwife Smoked Rainbow Trout

Oh my. Grab a tin of this the next time you shop at the Co-op. Just trust me on this. Responsibly raised in Denmark, smoked rainbow trout in olive oil is as delicious as it sounds. Slow-smoked over beechwood with a touch of garlic. You're hearing me—it's just that amazing.

I recommend enjoying Fishwife Smoked Rainbow Trout on a crusty bread or just straight from the tin. I found a new favorite!

Oh, and the Fishwife packaging is SUPER fun and joyful!

Until next time, remember to take good care of yourselves and each other. Protect your peace, follow your joy, reclaim your health, be grateful, and do more of what makes you happy. You are resilient and brave. Breathe. You are awesome.

...and browse those Co-op shelves and find the items that speak to you!

With gratitude, Helen 🌱



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Explaining Member Benefits *continued from page 1*

The other new program, Ramp, is designed to provide some extra assistance to those experiencing financial hardship and who may be at risk of food insecurity. For qualifying Co-op members, it includes both an everyday 10% discount on purchases and a 50% discount on the annual \$20 equity payment, up to the full \$120 member share price, thanks to our Go Ask Alice Solidarity Fund (willimanticfood.coop/go-ask-alice). To be eligible for Ramp, one must be a Co-op member and demonstrate need by qualifying for programs such as SNAP, WIC, housing assistance, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Insurance, and Connecticut Energy Assistance (CEAP). For a full list of program eligibility, visit willimanticfood.coop/ramp. If you don't currently qualify for any of the programs listed, contact us at willimanticfood.coop/ramp-info/ to discuss your situation. Participants need to reapply for Ramp each year. Many food co-ops run similar food assistance programs to support the part of their mission associated with addressing food insecurity in their communities.

The changes to member benefits also include the end of the everyday 5% senior discount, understandably the least popular change. We know this change is disappointing, particularly for members who have become accustomed to receiving the senior discount. Please know it was not a decision we made lightly. Because there is a limited amount of funding available for member benefits, we couldn't introduce these new programs while continuing the senior discount. Instead of having the majority of member benefits go to a single group of members, we decided to provide a program that all members can benefit from - the Loyalty Points program does that. In addition, we have added the Ramp program (willimanticfood.coop/ramp) to support those who are most in need.

We know that doesn't make losing a benefit any less difficult, but we hope it provides some clarity around the decision. Our hope is that longtime members will find value in the new Loyalty program and, for those who qualify, the Ramp program. We believe this approach better reflects our cooperative values by ensuring every member shares in the benefits of ownership while

directing extra assistance where it can have the greatest impact.

Members can also expect to continue saving money when buying case sizes of products with our pre order program (15% off shelf price) as well as special member-

only promotions such as Wellness Wednesday and seasonal discounts. Our everyday low prices on Co-op Basics items (look for the purple signs) provide high-quality, low-cost, often-organic options, and shopping the bulk aisle has proven to be an effective way to manage your grocery budget.

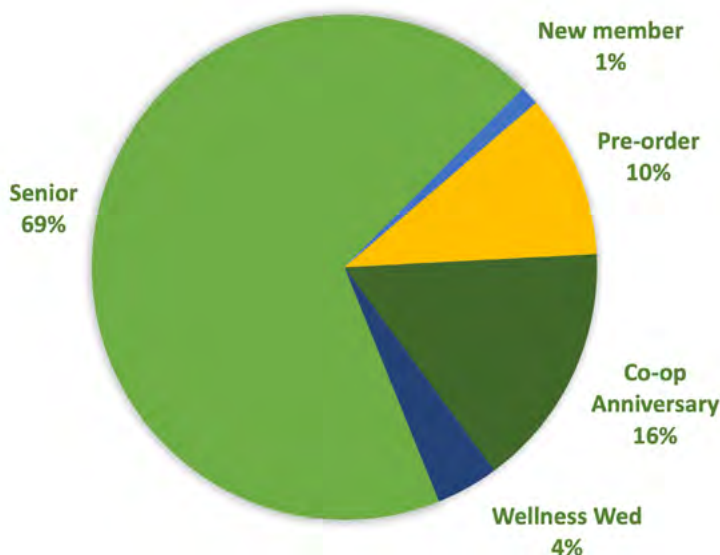
Responsibly managing our discount programs can help the Co-op keep prices as low as possible for everyone – this has only become more challenging as all costs continue to rise throughout our food

systems, supply chains, and the economy at large. Times are tough and many people, sometimes invisibly, are struggling. The Co-op's purpose is to rise to those challenges and strive toward our goal of providing our members, shoppers, and the greater community a cooperatively owned grocery store with quality food that meets their needs. Our new member benefits structure is designed to help us do just that. Thank you for being a member. 🌱

Patty Smith



**MEMBER DISCOUNT BREAKDOWN
JANUARY - JUNE 2026**



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