



From the Board:

Jon Steinman's *Grocery Story*

by Verne Underwood – Board Member

From the GM:

Carrying On

by Anne Carter – General Manager

GROCERY STORY

THE PROMISE OF
FOOD CO-OPS
IN THE AGE OF
GROCERY GIANTS
JON STEINMAN



Jon Steinman, nationally syndicated food blogger and award-winning producer of the television series, *Deconstructing Dinner*, recently came to the Medford Food Co-op to promote his book, *Grocery Story*, which describes the origin and history of the Food Cooperative movement, from its early beginnings with the Rochdale Pioneers in 1844 to its evolution into the modern-day food co-ops. What interested me most about the book is its discussion of the big-box grocery stores and how they have changed the way our food is produced, what we pay for groceries, and even what we choose to eat. Right now, five large companies account for 67% of all the food we buy, with Walmart leading what amounts to a growing monopoly of our food supply. At the level of food production, this market power means these large corporations get to set prices for what they buy from farmers, and Steinman reports that as a result, “the prices many farmers receive are below the cost it takes to produce

the food... For every dollar spent on food, the portion that ends up at the farm (the farm share) is at its lowest point in history: 14.8 cents. In 1950, by comparison, farmers received considerably more of that dollar: 40 cents.”

The price of food and the low income of farmers is not the only control these companies wield; where and how that food is produced is another factor. Green tomatoes are harvested from distant farms and sprayed with ethylene gas to ripen them, but since the gas doesn't reach beyond the outer layer, you have a bright red tomato with a colorless, flavorless (and unripened) inside. Oranges are sprayed with miticide to eliminate “superficial blemishes” on the



The route that I drive to work is the same route that I have used for years. Like other spring mornings, flowers are



blooming, trees are leafing out, and the sun is soft and warm. Unlike every other spring, the streets are nearly empty. People who are out in public are avoiding others. Each day brings a sense of dread: what will I face today?

These are challenging times that none of us were prepared to navigate. We have been compelled to adapt and learn new ways of living. As the weeks drag on, sorrow for the loss of our previous life has given way to reluctant acceptance of the “new normal” way of doing things.

Is it possible for us to use the strategies for coping with the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for growth? We are spending more time alone that can offer us time for reflection on what really matters to us. We are spending more time cleaning and washing our hands. Daily walks with family members are now part of our routine. We are cooking more home made meals.



peel even though these blemishes (caused by mites) have no effect on the fruit inside. Farmers are held to unreasonable crop yields, which can only be achieved through aggressive use of pesticides.

Another thing I learned from this book was why in most grocery stores, the worst foods nutrition-wise are at eye-level shelving. I had assumed this was because these were in higher demand, but in fact, this is because these big grocery stores charge what are known as “slotting fees.” Large companies pay a fee to occupy



Fresh produce on display front and center at the Co-op.

this space. As Steinman notes, “Supermarket shelves are said to be the most expensive real estate on the planet... the shelves at eye level are the penthouse condo while the checkout aisle is beachfront property.”

I finished this book with a strong sense of urgency around the cooperative food movement – the need to pay fair prices to farmers for the hard work they do; the vital importance of cooperative membership, where a store’s members determine what food is sold to them rather than which corporation can afford to pay for space; and the way food cooperatives support their local communities rather than contribute to the profits of distant shareholders. We are the owners of our grocery store, and it’s important we shop at Medford Food Co-op for the sake of our local farmers and for the health of ourselves and our families. ■

Shop Local and Create a Better Future

by Halle Riddlebarger – Marketing & Outreach Manager

The future is not something we enter. The future is something we create. – Leonard Sweet

The pandemic has been a lot of things to a lot of people: a crisis, a pause, an opportunity lost, and for some, maybe an opportunity gained. In the midst of this pause to our “normal” routines, there has been a lot of time for reflection. As the quote above states, we do not enter into the unknown with a blindfold on – our choices and actions now pave the way to create our future. With deliberate choices and actions, we can create a better future.



As we reflect on the past and plan for the future, your Co-op envisions a vibrant, healthy community and a thriving local, organic food economy. You can help create that vibrant, thriving future with your current choices and actions. Shopping local makes a huge impact in our community. And we need to support local businesses now more than ever, as some have been forced to temporarily close or drastically cut back their offerings to maintain social distancing guidelines and encourage stay-at-home orders.

Supporting businesses owned by our friends and neighbors helps keep dollars circulating in our local economy instead of sending profits out of state. This is best explained by the “multiplier effect” – studies show that money spent in independently-owned businesses recirculates or flows through the local economy more times than money spent in chain stores. In regards to food co-ops, it has been calculated that for every \$100 spent here at MFC, \$160 is generated in the local economy.

The more you support local businesses – like purchasing directly from farmers at the grower’s markets, the more you keep dollars circulating and enriching the Rogue Valley. And local farmers and food producers need your help! Restaurant closures and panic buying have upended distributions chain, and challenges continue to surface for farmers and producers attempting to divert their goods to another supply chain without the logistics already in place to support such drastic changes to their business models. Milk has been dumped down the drain, eggs broken, and vegetable harvests left to rot in the fields. Our modern food system has sacrificed nimbleness for efficiency, and the costs have become clearer in the chaos of the pandemic.

Our dedicated staff have displayed courage, kindness, and loyalty by showing up each and every day to ensure our community has access to healthy food.



Thank you to all the staff, who are essential to the operation of the Co-op.

From the GM continued from page 1:

These are all healthy behaviors that are worth continuing after the crisis is over. Even more than learning healthy habits, we are working with others in our community to face a crisis, solve problems, and take care of others.

The Co-op was already looking toward a future that included growth and increased services for our customers and community. Now that new procedures to deal with



COVID-19 have been established, we can return to some of the long term projects that were abandoned in early March.

One such project was revision of our bylaws. Bylaws are the means by which the owners delegate authority to the board. Under that authority, the board ensures that the co-op meets owners' needs while remaining ethically, legally, and financially sound. To meet our needs, bylaws must be: 1) User friendly, 2) Comprehensive without being overly detailed, and 3) Consistent with applicable law. The board created a task force that worked diligently over the winter to revise our bylaws. An initial draft is currently being reviewed and will be presented to owners for review this summer.

We will emerge from this crisis changed: more resilient and with a renewed appreciation of life. Our community is successfully embracing staying at home and greatly reducing the rate of COVID-19 infection. I am grateful for the dedication and kindness of our staff and the support of our owners and customers. All of you have been essential in helping the Co-op meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing to offer healthy food to our community. ■

THANK YOU



to Andrea Warfield, Gail Breedlove Schatz, and De Rider for the beautiful, handmade masks you provided for staff members. #communityrocks

Shop Local continued from page 2:



It's easy to shop local at the Growers Markets.

Important Dates

Rogue Valley Growers & Crafters Market

The Growers Markets provide access to fresh, healthy food and offer growers a venue to feed the community. You can support their efforts by maintaining social distancing guidelines and shopping at the local markets:

- Medford Thursday Market in Hawthorne Park
- Ashland Tuesday Market at the Ashland Armory
- Ashland Saturday Market on Oak Street

Board of Directors Meetings

Third Monday of each month from 5:30pm – 7:30pm. Due to the pandemic, the meetings will be held online until further notice. If you are an owner who would like to participate in an online Board meeting, please email Board President Kellie Hill for an invitation to the online meeting: kellie@therightplan.com.

We want to encourage you to keep shopping local. Keep supporting your favorite farmer, local coffee roaster, beekeeper, and independent grocer. And if you have the means, find a new local business to support. Tell your friends about your favorites, and ask about theirs – let's encourage one another to grow and extend our local circles of support. If your favorite business is currently closed, look into gift cards to offer support right now. You can save them for when they open up again or you can give them as gifts to your friends and family who might discover a new local something to love. While everything is still slower than our pre-pandemic pace of life, let's take time to thoughtfully plan the future we want to build and start acting on it now. We can mutually support one another and build a better future for everyone in the Rogue Valley. ■