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Volume PP, Number 1

January 12, 2021

Yes to Fair Food, No to Wellness Audit: The PSFC November–December 2020 General Meeting

By Frank Haberle

On December 1st, more than one hundred Park Slope Food Coop members gathered virtually for the November–December General Meeting. Members voted to approve the renewal of the PSFC's participation in the Fair Food Program, an initiative sponsored by the Labor Committee to support farm workers. They then voted against a proposal to launch a member-led audit of all owner-members to determine their well-being and current needs.

A third proposal was introduced, which explored creating formal term limits for members of the Dispute Resolution Committee. Coordinator Reports touched on an improving financial outlook, holiday products and the gradual return to member labor.

The First Agenda Item: Renewal of Participation in the Fair Food Program

In July 2019, the GM approved a proposal by the member-led Labor Committee for a one-year trial participation in the Fair Food Program, a unique farmworker- and consumer-driven initiative to increase worker wages and improve safety conditions and human rights. The Labor Committee requested the Coop continue its participation in the program, based on favorable annual reviews and regular reports to the GM. The Committee also requested that participation be allowed to continue without an annual GM vote of approval.

Labor Committee Chair Eric Frumin presented and began by offering historical perspective on movements to protect and support workers in the food chain in the United States, and telling members of the accomplishments of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, who have created a successful collaboration between tomato farm workers, growers and customers. "They started with Taco Bell and it has since grown to include other companies—Walmart, Stop & Shop, Chipotle—who have signed formal binding contracts to enforce code of conduct, and who pay a penny extra per pound for tomatoes that is put directly into the pockets of workers. They have made remarkable progress in a time we don't expect to see progress."

The committee's original proposal asked for a small 6% mark up on tomato products, money which accumulated until the Covid crisis and sales at the Coop plummeted. "Even with the reduced sales, we were able to contribute \$4,500 to the program this year.

GM attendees asked why the Labor Committee sought to remove the annual vote on this issue, and commented that annually reviewing and voting on boycotts, protests and initiatives that involve increased markups helps

to educate members. The GM took a vote and approved PSFC's ongoing participation in the Fair Food Program with an annual review. The vote was 105 members in favor, and 18 against.

Audit of Member–Owner Status and Well-being

Proposed by member Marion Yuen, the second agenda item proposed the PSFC immediately conduct a members-wide audit of member-owner status & well-being, to be directed by a member-volunteer-labor team with pertinent skills, supported by staff. The proposal explained that "during the pandemic, many member-owners have not been able to access good food at low prices at PSFC and member-owner participation has otherwise become minimal. This proposal intends twin results: a) provide a human connection inquiring about fellow members' status & well-being, and b) gather information in order to better service member-owners." The proposal stated that "members working on the audit would receive up to 12 FTOP credits per member-owner and asked for 10 hours of staff time for a project that would take six months to complete, with a final report to the GM in six months."

In presenting the proposal, Marion said, "This is about cooperation and community. We will ask members about their health and finances, and what are barriers that are keeping them from shopping at the Coop." Questions and comments focused on what would be done with the information once it was collected. Marion stated that "the main reason for doing this is the human connection, but also to determine why certain groups or people with certain attributes aren't shopping. Calling members, and letting them know we care about them, is the primary result we seek." She added that "other committees can carry on the work, once we determine what work is needed."

General Coordinator Ann Herpel listed a number of concerns from the staff perspective, including that PSFC does not have permission to give out member personal information; and that the audit would require thousands of hours of member labor at a time we need to get members back working in the Coop. A vote was taken and the proposal was turned down, 36 votes in favor and 86 against.

Term Limits for Dispute Resolution Committee

A third proposal, scheduled as a discussion item and presented by Bisi Iderabdullah, asked the GM to consider a proposal enacting term limits for the Dispute Resolution Committee.

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OBITUARY

Zipporah Portugal

By Thomas Rayfiel

Zipporah Portugal, a longtime member and fervent believer in the Coop, died on November 11. She was 77. Zipporah joined the Coop in 1986, working primarily on a Shopping Committee before retiring in 2009.

Zipporah's professional life, as well as much of her personal life, was devoted to helping others. After college, she joined the Peace Corps, serving in Thailand where she made many lifelong friends. Here in New York, she worked for Care For the Homeless, an organization meeting the medical, mental, and behavioral health care needs of people experiencing homelessness. In retirement, she continued to serve the community, joining Good Neighbors of Park Slope, a group dedicated to helping local residents age in place. She also started a babysitting service. Her friend Mary Jo Strickland recalls:

"Her business card featured a whimsical pen-and-ink drawing of her and advertised her as someone who could be a substitute loving grandparent for kids who were living away from their extended families... She delighted in taking her charges to concerts and in finding special gifts that they would enjoy. One of her long-time friends has said that she believes caring for children was Zipporah's true calling."

Alex Villari, a neighbor and close friend, says Zipporah was "incredibly dedicated to the Food Coop. Always promoting it in her gentle way." She would often tempt non-members in her building by buying them watermelons and other produce, to show what they were missing.

Zipporah's niece, Jill Galt, says her aunt's passions included playing the piano (often duets with friends), photography, and gardening. "She had a beautiful fern and begonia garden outside her apartment that passersby enjoyed. She loved art and beauty." Zipporah also painted. Her work was shown at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden where she was a dedicated volunteer. She can also be seen featured rather prominently in Dolly Parton's music video "Jesus and Gravity."

Zipporah is survived by many loving friends and family members as well as her two cats, Lola and Carmencita. When the Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings are lifted, a memorial is planned in Prospect Park, where a tree will be planted in her memory. ■



PHOTO BY INGSU LIU

Nov-Dec GM

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The proposal argued that having the same members on one committee for many years can create a sense of a “clique” mentality and group coercion that can affect the outcome of decisions and the fairness of decisions.

Bisi shared an experience from several years ago when she responded to an ad seeking new members of the DRC. In the interview she was questioned by two longtime members of the DRC who repeatedly used inappropriate language in explaining how difficult the job is and how tough one needs to be; when Bisi was clearly uncomfortable with this language, the interviewers cooled and sent her a form rejection letter a few weeks later. Bisi cited this as an example of an “insider” group that had been working too long together, and compared it to her years living and working in war-torn countries in Africa. “You end up losing a democracy when people stay in positions too long and start to serve each other’s interests,” she said.

In questions and comments, Lucinda Wiley, a member since 1986, spoke in favor of this proposal, stating that “I extremely respect this item, because even in organizations like PSFC, these things happen.” Melinda, a DRC member, asked why her committee was being singled out. “We are elected by the GM every three years, and we have an internal review; we have members leave the committee and new members join us. If we are discussing term limits, it should

be for all committees, not just the DRC.” Helen of the DRC added, “when you were interviewed I was not there, and I’m sorry to hear that people were cursing at your interview. The DRC members are voted in by the membership every three years. I do not feel we’re cliquish—we have a high attrition rate.” Bisi replied, “I’m not singling out the DRC.”

Coordinator Reports

Prior to the three agenda items, General Coordinator Reports highlighted an improving financial situation and the move toward returning member labor. GC Joe Holtz broke out the four-week period of November (weeks 37-40 of the PSFC Fiscal Year) compared to the first 36 weeks and noted that, with slight price increases, improvements to the shopping floor (moving more shoppers into the store, more quickly) and the addition of some member labor, the Coop was now losing \$27,000 a week—compared to \$100,000 a week earlier in 2020—and is on its way to a balanced statement. Other GC reports came from Elinoar Astrinsky, who updated the members on items in the store for the holidays and spoke of the contributions of new shift workers unloading trucks and stocking shelves. Jess Robinson reported that 724 member-labor shifts were completed by 302 members in five weeks, and that plans are underway to more formally re-introduce member labor in the first quarter of 2021. Members may visit the virtual member office on the website for more information. ■

STATEMENT ON THE COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

DEFINITION

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

VALUES

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

PRINCIPLES

The cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice. The International Cooperative Alliance adopted the revised Statement on the Cooperative Identity in 1995.

They are as follows:

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

REFERENCE: ICA.COOP

Interested in Serving on the Coop’s Board of Directors? Nominations are now open!

Openings

There are two openings on the Board. Each position is for a term of three years.

Candidate Deadline

If you wish to place your name into nomination, you must declare your candidacy by submitting a statement of up to 750 words to: gazettesubmissions@psfc.coop. Candidates may also opt to include a small photo for online publication and in the member proxy mailing. **Deadline for candidacy submission is Monday, March 1, 2021.**

Deciding and Voting

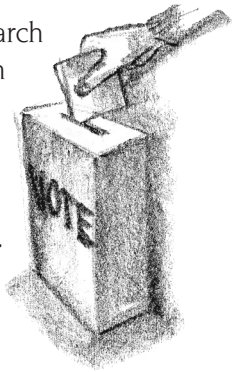
Candidates will have the opportunity to present their platform at the March 30, 2021, General Meeting. Every member will receive a proxy package in late May. The Annual Meeting will be held on June 29, 2021.

Duties of the Directors

The Board of Directors is comprised of five elected Coop members and the senior General Coordinator present. Members serve three-year terms. Members of the Board are expected to attend GMs monthly. They receive Coop work credit for their attendance.

The General Meeting & The Board of Directors

From our inception in 1973 to the present, the monthly General Meeting has been the decision-making body of the Coop. Since the Coop incorporated in 1977, we have been legally required to have a Board of Directors. The Bylaws of the Park Slope Food Coop state: “The portion of the Board of Directors meeting that is devoted to receiving the advice of the members shall be known as the General Meeting.... The members who gather to give advice to the directors may choose to vote in order to express their support or opposition for any of the issues that have come before the meeting”



PSFC JAN 2021 GENERAL MEETING Tuesday, January 26, 7:00 p.m.

- Meeting presented on Zoom. You must register for the General Meeting to receive the Zoom invite: <https://www.foodcoop.com/gmsignup/>
- You must be a Park Slope Food Coop member to attend the General Meeting.
- Times in parentheses are suggestions. The Chair has the discretion to change the order of the agenda or the time allotted to each item.

III. Treasurer Report (7:30-7:45)

IV. General Coordinator Reports (7:45-8:00)

V. Agenda (8:00-8:45)

Item 1: Establish GM Squad (45 minutes)

Discussion: Attendance at the 22 GMs in a two-year period will be for 22 work shifts. Other credit for attending GM will cease (except for those on the Chair and Agenda Committees). Members may still attend without credit.

This will create an experienced and knowledgeable GM that will be able to better advise the Coop’s board. Squad membership is voluntary and will be offered to all members on a computer generated random basis. There will be 22 different groups of members so only one group will be new at each meeting. Starting group size would be 10 members per group for a total of 220.

Pre-Covid 19 the majority of attendees at the Coop’s GM were there for make up credit or FTOP credit. At any given meeting many if not most attendees are distracted by their phones, computers or other reading. This proposal would strengthen the Coop’s governance by creating a squad that is devoted to attending to the Coop’s decision-making. By attending meetings for two years members will develop an understanding of the Coop and its processes, leading to more thoughtful consideration of agenda items.

—submitted by Rachel Porter

VI. Board of Directors Meeting (8:45)

Future Agenda Information:

For information about upcoming General Meetings, please visit foodcoop.com.