



271 Wonder Street, Reno, NV www.greatbasinfood.coop

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

A Herstory of the GBCFC

by Amber Sallaberry

The 25 year-old Washoe Zephyr Food Cooperative closed its doors in Reno, NV around the time that two "higher end" natural and organic national food chains came to town. Trader Joe's and Whole Foods provided local consumers with organic goods from New Zealand to Hawaii. Their stores were bright, well labeled, well packaged, and inconveniently located in Reno's corporate South. Despite the magnificent glare that radiated off of Trader Joe's and Wild Oat's glossy image many Great Basin residents still longed for lacklusterness of real food dirtied by Nevada soil. Many desired a sense of community and equal ownership that can only be found within food co-ops. Fortunately and unfortunately food security issues were gaining awareness across the nation and with food traveling an average of 1,500 miles from farm to table, Northern Nevadans began to think of solutions.

Melissa and Eric Nixon spearheaded the movement by hosting a meeting on September 14, 2005 for a "Northern Nevada Natural Foods Cooperative". The turn out was impressive not just in sheer numbers but in diversity as well; local food zealots, health nuts, community healers and builders, and of course plenty of young Reno kids seeking social, political, and global food justice all showed up to initiate the movement. At this meeting the group went around the room introducing themselves along with their personal food interests and current understanding of cooperatives. At the end of the meeting we left our email addresses with Melissa and waited for the details of our next event together. It was at that following meeting that the co-founding group of The Great Basin Community Food Cooperative was formed; Pauline Hamilton, Melissa & Eric Nixon, Amber & Nicole Sallaberry, Sasha Verbillis-Kolp, and Genevieve Morgan.

We spent our first few months researching cooperative businesses, cooperative culture, and the steps we needed to take in order to open a cooperative storefront and incorporate in the state of Nevada. Our group learned about buyers club and local farmer Community Supported

Agriculture (CSA) programs and decided to try and organize both. We started out by hosting our first community potluck in December 2005 at the Grand Canyon Chicken house. The event was a huge success drawing in over sixty community members and a half a dozen Northern Nevada farmers. Everyone who attended got excited about the ideas of pooling together our resources for bulk ordering and weekly boxes of fresh local vegetables.

In January 2006 Black Hole Body Piercing donated their garage on S. Virginia St. and we moved in as "The Biggest Little Co-op in the World!!" It was at this disappointing point in time that our group learned that in order to have a wholesale account with UNFI, the West Coast's largest natural foods supplier, we also needed to have a business license and a resale license. Fortunately, we had immense support from two community businesses: The Pneumatic Diner and The Interpretive Gardens. Each local partnership donated enough of their time, space and credentials to help us build the co-op community and capital necessary to support our first Buyer's Club and Great Basin Basket CSA program, June 2006.

The community owned cooperative initiative was beginning to gain numbers in Northern Nevada and within a few more months of hosting potlucks and planning events our group connected with over 250 people who wished to participate in a democratically run local food store. By the middle of the Summer our core group was already talking about the possibility of finding a tiny shop where we could build DIY food-buckets and stock full a couple of domestic refrigerators. Our wishes were granted when two passionate Reno food activists, Joe & Mary Ferguson, offered the co-op a the back room of their punk and hardcore record store/collective (Sound & Fury Records). Joe and Mary's offering was amazingly generous as they refused to accept any rent money for the space until the co-op was well on its feet.

All that we had to begin business with in this back room was approx. \$1,800.00 and a donated cash register from Quincy Natural Foods. When word spread of a new Reno food co-op storefront, donations of all types and sizes poured in: domestic refrigerators, sinks, office supplies, paint, the painting of signs, cleaning and other volunteered manual labor were just a few.

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A Herstory of the GBCFC

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Thanks to Craigslist we found all of our bulk bins, metro racks, chip carriers, and grocery shelves from Carson City, NV to Folsom, CA. During the construction time period we also decided to accept nominations from the community for our first GBCFC Board of Directors and shortly there after our first governing body was elected. On October 6, 2006 we made fifty copies of our membership application and opened our doors in the back of Sound and Fury Records @ 271 Wonder St. The GBCFC finally got its own account with UNFI natural Foods and we also began purchasing food from our local Nevada Farmers to sell at the co-op.

By late spring of 2007 we were literally bursting at the seams. The art of shelving grocery items felt like an intense game of Nintendo's Tetris game... yet we had to pack everything in as tightly as possible in order to avoid running out of inventory by mid-week. Expansion became dire when we started to notice that there were human traffic jams beginning to form at our doorway every Tuesday that we opened for the week. In June 2007 Sound and Fury Record Store collective announced that it was ready to downsize and that the Great Basin Community Food Cooperative was moving into the front part of the store. For over a week the GBCFC co-op volunteers painted, plumbed, shelved, cleaned, constructed and beautified what is now our current site of operations. By not having to pay any rent until the point of our expansion, the GBCFC saved almost \$12,000.00 dollars that we used to purchase all new commercial refrigeration and freezer units. We planted a bunch of edible plants in the front of our store, purchased WiFi internet access, liability insurance, metro racks, and received a custom made register table from Darin Bue at Los Verdes Arborists... Did I mention that he made

it from local recycled wood?

In August of 2007 we legally incorporated as a Cooperative Association in the State of Nevada. To this day we are the only existing food co-op in the state and are proud to announce that this month, June 2008, we adopted the State of Nevada's first non-hierarchical member-owner worker's collective staff model. Yeah!!!



Dreams, Apologies & Misc. Thoughts for the Great Basin Community Food Cooperative

by Melissa Gilbert Kent,
member-worker-dreamer

Misc. Thought #1:

We need a nickname. GBCFC is too much of a mouthful. And not very catchy. Any suggestions? My current favorite is THE COOP. In honor of the chickens out back.

Dream #1 for the GBCFC:

That in the coming months we come together as a community and discover our common vision and help create a plan of action to make that vision a reality.

Apology #1:

This goes out to the 940 members who haven't heard from us in the last year. Our e-mail/membership list has been a

mess and we haven't been very on the ball communicating by phone or snail mail. Our deepest apologies for being out of touch.

Misc. Thought #2:

Whole Foods has arrived in all it's glossy corporate glory. May it truly help support local farmers. I know there are some of you out there who are deeply worried that the new WF is going to hurt the GBCFC--but to me they are just a piece in the puzzle of new food system. In this time of agricultural transition (and global warming) we need everyone's help. Even the corporations. I also believe that the basic difference between WF and the GBCFC is going to help us in the long term. WF is about profit and making their shareholders happy. The GBCFC is about creating a network of people who want to make affordable organic food available to all and to help create a sustainable future of food in the Great Basin. May we not only survive WF, but thrive in it's presence.

Dream #2:

A new location for the GBCFC that has a kitchen with at least 3 ovens, a cafe (with space for tables and couches and bookshelves and maybe a foosball table), a store with a gorgeous, functional vegetable cooler, plenty of shelves for dry goods and a bulk section that has everything a cook needs (maple syrup, honey, oil, vinegar, soap, shampoos...), and parking, plenty of parking. Oh, and space for a garden, picnic tables, a chicken coop, and a solar-wind power system. Did I forget anything?

So there are a few of my thoughts and wishes for the GBCFC. I look forward to hearing some of yours...at the upcoming July member meeting-potluck extravaganza or on-line on the discussion forum (let's talk about the mini-expansion that is about to happen at Wonder Street!).

The discussion forum can be found at:

http://www.greatbasinfood.coop/community/component/option,com_joomlaboard/itemid,27/

Non-Hierarchical Member Worker Collective (NON)-Management Model

by Amber Sallaberry

The Great Basin Community Food Co-op Board of Directors adopted Reno, NV's first non-hierarchical member-owner worker's collective on June 25, 2008. Why? Read on...

History of worker's collectives

The Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC) was one of the first worker's collectives in the world to form and find success. MCC is a group of manufacturing and retail companies based in the Basque Country and extended over the rest of Spain and abroad. It is one of the world's largest worker cooperatives and one important example of workers' self-management*. The MCC is now the Basque Country's largest corporation, the seventh largest in Spain. The term *self-management was first used to describe the member-worker collective model of management...or should I say non-management.

Worker self-management* (or autogestion) is a form of workplace decision-making in which the employees themselves agree on choices (for issues like customer care, general production methods, scheduling, division of labor etc.) instead of the traditional authoritative supervisor telling workers what to do, how to do it and where to do it.

Worker collectives rose to prominence in the United States during the industrial revolution as part of the labor movement. As employment moved to industrial areas and job sectors declined, workers began organizing and controlling businesses for themselves. Worker collective cooperatives and worker cooperatives (two different models of cooperative structure, see below) were originally sparked by "critical reaction to industrial capitalism and the excesses of the industrial revolution."

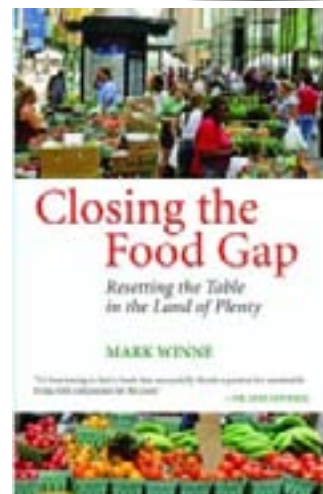
Political Philosophy of worker collectives within cooperatives

The advocacy of workplace democracy, especially with the fullest expression of worker self-management, such as within member worker collective cooperatives, is rooted within several intellectual or political traditions: The alleviation of alienation in the workplace, especially in regard to Marxist thought, the encouragement of Participatory or Direct Democracy, radical but popular-democratic strategies for the overthrow of capitalism, for example, several strains of anarchist thought, autonomy and self control, especially within anarchist thought. Member Workers collective cooperatives are also central to ideas of Autonomism, Mutualism, Syndicalism, Participatory economics, Guild socialism, and Libertarian socialism as well as others.

Decision Making process and Sharing of Roles

If exercised directly, all members of the collective meet regularly to make - and vote on - decisions on how the co-operative is run. Direct worker collectives sometimes use consensus decision-making to make decisions. Direct worker control ensures a formally flat management structure instead of a hierarchical one. This structure is influenced by activist collectives and civic organizations, with all members of the collective allowed and expected to play a managerial role. Some

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Book Corner: Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty

by Mark Winne - review taken
from amazon.com

In *Closing the Food Gap*, food activist and journalist Mark Winne poses questions too often overlooked in our current conversations around food: What about those people who are not financially able to make conscientious choices about where and how to get food? And in a time of rising rates of both diabetes and obesity, what can we do to make healthier foods available for everyone?

To address these questions, Winne tells the story of how America's food gap has widened since the 1960s, when domestic poverty was "rediscovered," and how communities have responded with a slew of strategies and methods to narrow the gap, including community gardens, food banks, and farmers' markets.

With tragically comic stories from his many years running a model food organization, the Hartford Food System in Connecticut, alongside fascinating profiles of activists and organizations in communities across the country, Winne addresses head-on the struggles to improve food access for all of us, regardless of income level.



(NON)-Management Model

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worker collectives within cooperative businesses also practice job rotation or balanced job complexes to overcome inequalities of power as well as to give workers a wider range of experiences and exposure to the different jobs in a work place so that they are better able to make decisions about the whole workplace. The Mondragon Bookstore & Coffeehouse is a good example of a workplace that does this:
<http://mondragon.ca/>

When the member-worker co-op operates as a collective and does not have managers, clear procedures for decision making are important. We need to clearly define what types of decisions can be made by individual workers, which can be made by work groups, and what kinds of issues should be addressed at bi-monthly meetings that include all members of the collective.

More Wonderful Reasons Why the GBCFC Board of Directors Adopted a Non-hierarchical Member-Workers Collective:

Worker collectives within cooperatives build local assets and increase economic stability for worker-owners and their communities. Participatory decision making, featured in most worker collective coops, can enhance productivity, improve product and service quality, and promote the development of workers' skills.

In a member worker collectively run cooperative, workers partially own their jobs as they are one member entitled to one vote within the organization, and thus have not only a direct stake in the local environment but the power to decide to do business in a way that is sustainable for us all. The member worker collective cooperative movement is increasingly recognized as part of the larger movement for sustainability.

Member worker collective cooperatives

linkages among different parts of the social economy. In addition to providing meaningful jobs and asset-building opportunities for workers of all income levels, member worker collective cooperatives can play an important role in building movements for economic justice and social change: as institutions where real democracy is practiced on a day to day basis, they are a model for the empowerment we will need to create the change we envision.

Social and Economic Justice within The Great Basin Community Food Cooperative

In order to promote economic justice and social change within our co-op, we will need to evaluate the cost of living in Washoe County so that we can begin to plan for and set goals of achieving "cost of living" salaries and benefits within The GBCFC collective. Ideally, it would be fantastic to offer health and dental benefits to any member-worker of the cooperative that is full-time (30+ hours) or above.

What I have learned

by Philip Moore

When I first joined the food co-op, I assumed that the goal was to share in good prices because I would be participating in a buying club with others interested in buying quantities of whole food without giving profits away to others. Then I met Amber Sallaberry, who taught me that the co-op meant more about sharing in the effort than reaping the rewards.

I then joined the board of the co-op and assumed I was there to help the co-op run like a business, so we could stay in business and expand. Then I met Miss Isha Echols, who taught me that connecting with all members of our community through food, both inside and outside the co-op, was more important than simply running a business.

I then assumed the responsibilities of treasurer. I once again tied my success as a co-op member to the financial success of the co-op and sought to increase sales to improve our bottom line. Then I got to know Mary and Joe Ferguson, who taught me that a food community is about supporting everyone in our community - not just those that can afford to walk into the co-op to buy their food.

As we went through the co-op incorporation last year, I assumed that we should develop our own unique processes to manage our co-op. Casey Robbins then joined the board and taught me that I need to educate myself on the workings of other co-ops and the cooperative principals in order to truly understand how to make our co-op successful.

As I have continued my work with the co-op, I continue to focus on how to manage the co-op finances. I have recently met Melissa Kent, who is busy teaching me about creating a collaborative organization where all members get a say in how our food community is to develop, rather than relying on a few people to control the organization.

I still have so much to learn. I am truly fortunate to be within the co-op community that includes so many amazing people who are willing to teach me what I need to learn.

Get creative and be part of Your Coop!

Have an interesting contribution? An article you would like to contribute? A story you want to share with all of us?

Here's the place to do it!

And we can use your help. Not just for the newsletter, but other volunteer opportunities abound at the Coop!

Please send your articles to newsletter@greatbasinfood.coop to be included in the next newsletter. Thanks!