



THE FOOD CO-OP OF INDIANA PA

Quarterly Newsletter, Vol 1
Winter Solstice, 2015

WELCOME!

Welcome to the Food Co-Op of Indiana, PA's first newsletter. The goal of this newsletter is to keep in contact with all of those interested in supporting the development of our own food co-op in Indiana. In this newsletter, we will introduce you to our vision for a community-owned food co-op, explore what the Food Co-Op Steering Committee has been working on, and learn more about this exciting project!

Visit us on the web at:

<http://indianapafoodcoop.weebly.com>

Visit us on Facebook at:

<http://www.facebook.com/indianapafoodcoop>

Sign up for our mailing list by sending an email to: indianapafoodcoop@gmail.com



OUR MISSION, GOALS, AND VALUES

Mission: We are a group dedicated to bringing a community-owned full-line grocery store to Indiana, PA. In opening a food co-op, our values and goals are to:

Enhance access to local, sustainable, and bulk food and other goods for Indiana area visitors and residents

Invest in our local economy by supporting local and regional food producers/growers and by supporting local businesses by offering retail and commercial kitchen space for food and products

Increase access to cost-effective, healthy food for all income levels

Address food insecurity through education, access, and supporting a regional food system

Create a mixed-use space for food education, meetings, and community empowerment

Our Motto: Develop economically viable yet socially conscious food co-op emphasizing 3Ps: people, planet, and purpose.



OUR FOOD CO-OP: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

By Colleen Donovan

Longtime residents speak nostalgically of some of the family-owned grocery stores that existed in the Borough long before the big-name stores came to town. Over the years, the Borough of Indiana has lost even the big-name supermarkets. Most recently, while it wasn't a full-service grocery, the Giant Eagle Express provided convenient access to some limited groceries and ready-made foods. Its closing in March 2015, after fewer than two years in business, left more than a hollow building, an empty parking lot, and vacant café tables. It left a significant number of the residents of the Borough, especially college students, without convenient access to a grocery store of any kind.

Now, Indiana Borough lacks a place to shop for healthy food. While the Borough might not qualify as a food desert, it does meet the definition of low access which is, according to USDA, "defined as more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store in urban areas" (What is a food desert? 2015). So, while a number of grocery stores exist outside the Borough, they are all at least a mile from downtown. Low access to high quality and healthy food means a lower quality of life for many Borough residents. The Center for Community Growth represents a group of community members who have coordinated a number of projects meant to raise awareness of social justice issues—in our case, food justice.

In August 2015, the Center organized a meeting to gauge interest in forming a food co-op. More than fifty area residents attended the meeting. From that initial meeting, a steering committee has developed the goal of establishing a full-service, member-owned grocery store in Indiana, one that would increase access to high-quality, locally-grown, food within walking or biking distance for many area residents.

The Food Co-op of Indiana, PA will establish our town as one among others that have worked cooperatively for the benefit of the community's needs. In *Food Co-ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy*, Anne Meis Knupfer (2013) discusses the history of food co-ops in the US. For Knupfer, food co-ops are "stores collectively owned by members who pool their monies and resources, sometimes their labor, and make decisions democratically about their businesses' policies, products, and work structures" (p. 2). In the organizational structure of food co-ops, all members make major decisions; thus, cooperation is a means to an end.

Traditional stores and food co-ops have some major differences. Unlike traditional stores, a food co-op gives community members the chance for participatory democracy. Food co-ops promote support for local farmers and food producers. In addition to sustainable practices, co-ops have a long history of consumer education including advocating for environmental and agricultural reform. Food co-ops emphasize cooperation among businesses in the community especially small businesses that would benefit from having a market for their goods. These and other differences allow community members the power to make food and community choices that affect their budgets, their health, and the economy. A food co-op is organized on the principle of the common good for its members and all those involved the local food economy.

A food co-op can give and grow as long as its members contribute to its existence. A full-service member-owned grocery store in Indiana that emphasizes locally-grown food and locally-produced food products gives all members of the community the opportunity to participate in an alternative economic model. It also allows us to practice a form of consumerism that emphasizes sustainability and healthy food for the economic health of our community. Together, we can make this happen; cooperatively, we are making this happen.

Resources

Definition of a food desert. (2015). United States Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service.http://www.ers.usda.gov/dtaFiles/Food_Access_Research_Atlas/Download_the_Data/Archived_Version/archived_documentation.pdf

Kupfer, A. M. (2013). Food Co-ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY.



How can you help?

Spread the word! Tell your friends and family about the co-op, share this newsletter, and help generate a buzz in the community.

Volunteer to assist with membership, fundraising, and planning our co-op.
How much time you donate is up to you!

Donate! We will be doing a fundraising drive starting in the early part of 2016—every bit that you can donate will help make this co-op a reality.

CO-OP NEWS AND UPDATES FROM THE COMMITTEES

Our top priorities at this time are raising awareness of the project, gauging community interest and support, and conducting a feasibility study to determine whether this is a realistic possibility here in Indiana. While the store would be owned by its members, everyone will be welcome to come and shop. Membership is voluntary but is the cornerstone of a cooperative, and members will receive additional benefits.

Our current fundraising goal is to raise \$10,000 by May. This initial goal will help us cover the costs of incorporating, purchasing needed supplies for marketing, outreach, and additional fundraising efforts, and raising matching funds for future grant opportunities.

News from the Planning Committee

In our first four months of work, the Planning Committee recommended several mission statements to the Steering Committee; the mission and vision is printed in this newsletter. The Planning Committee is currently working on developing a business plan (with the help of Tony Palamone from the Small Business Development Center at IUP) and choosing an organizational structure that will best fit the economic and legal needs of the co-op.

News from the Fundraising Committee

On November 18th, the fundraising committee hosted our first event, a foodie trivia night at Spaghetti Benders. It was a fun and successful evening. We registered six teams, a total of 27 participants, and brought in \$275 for the co-op. The winning team went home with a \$40 Spaghetti Benders gift card, and a good time was had by all! In addition to trivia, Jenna did a brief presentation about the co-op to help raise awareness, and we collected contact information and feasibility surveys from many of the participants.

Thank you to Spaghetti Benders for donating the space as well as a portion of the prize, Alaina Stango for donating toward the prize, and to everyone who volunteered or attended the event. The fundraising committee will now begin our next fundraising events for January or February, as well as looking at other ways of raising funds to reach our \$10,000 goal by May.

News from the Membership Committee

People from Indiana PA are motivated to organize a member-owned food cooperative. Acquiring members is key to the financial success of this organization. To achieve these ends, the membership committee of the Food Co-op of Indiana PA is working to attain member equity.

The membership committee meets once a month. Members include Colleen Donovan, Ed Stancombe, Beth Rettig, Quintina Thomas, and Liz Cook. Since September, members have discussed principles based on standard practices outlined in the Food Co-op Initiative Website which provides best-practice



Feasibility Study Update

- The first step for us to consider is whether or not a Food Co-Op in Indiana is “feasible,” that is, is it economically viable and can our community support it. We are working with the Keystone Development Center (<http://www.kdc.coop>) to conduct a feasibility study for our Co-Op. As part of the feasibility study, we are conducting a survey of individuals interested in the co-op.
- Please take our Feasibility Survey at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/IndianaFoodCoop>

principles for fledgling food co-ops. Other sources of information include the Pittsburgh Chamber of Co-ops as well as Keystone Development Center.

Presently, the membership committee is devising a plan for establishing membership because our initial financing will come from member investments. Two plans are in the works: Plan A establishes a flat fee (\$50-\$100) for membership. The advantage of this plan is in its simplicity: only 50 people need to be approached for membership in order to raise the matching funds for the \$10,000 Food Co-op Initiative Grant. Plan B works on the principle of (\$20.00) shares. This plan is more equitable because more people would be able to contribute, but we would probably require more contacts to raise \$10,000. Ultimately, once the membership committee has finalized various plans, the steering committee will discuss, devise, revise and vote on the plan best-suited for our community. This process will eventually demonstrate the organization’s commitment to participatory democracy, the values of our community as well as members’ interest in investing in this project.

Still, the membership committee needs to work out more details about member equity and other matters. We need more information about specific laws regarding memberships for co-ops in PA. In addition, members will require legal agreement that outlines member responsibilities and benefits. Sound accounting principles that insure transparency are necessary. All of these details require more research to develop the soundest system. Advice from professionals at the Keystone Development Center will prove integral to this plan.

We found some answers to our questions about membership principles and other matters after meeting with Ron Gaydos of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Co-ops on Dec 6th. This meeting provided an opportunity for the Food Co-op of Indiana, PA the opportunity to become aligned with other cooperatives in the Western PA region.

Members of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Cooperatives take a variety of forms and purposes from bookstores, to artists ‘collectives, to ministries. However, it is certain that, according to Cooperate Pittsburgh, all these co-ops adhere to core principles that ensure “voluntary and open membership” with “democratic member control” as well as other basic values such as cooperation and “concern for community” (para. 2). The Food Co-op of Indiana, PA is also dedicated to these principles. Devising the best membership plan for the Food Co-op of Indiana, PA will take time, patience, and commitment. Much research is required, but that information is available on the Food Co-op Initiative Web site as well as other resources such as the Pittsburgh Chamber of Cooperatives and Keystone Development Center. Steering Committee members and members of the membership committee are dedicated to working cooperatively to the best outcome. Eventually, the real reward occurs when the doors to the Food Co-op of Indiana PA open to a market of healthy, local foods for all members of the community.

Resource: Cooperate Pittsburgh. (2015). Cooperatives. <https://cooperatepgh.wordpress.com/listings/cooperatives>

IUP ANTHROPOLOGY STUDENTS HELP CONDUCT CO-OP RESEARCH

By Cole Kedzierski, Amelia Eggan, and Nancy Lopez

During the fall 2015 semester at IUP, we—Cole Kedzierski, Amelia Eggan, and Nancy Lopez Sosa—have teamed up with the Indiana Food Co-op Steering Committee to conduct research for our Applied Anthropology class. The purpose of our research was to explore the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) student demographic and their food habits. Applied anthropology uses anthropological methods such as ethnographic interview and forms of observation to help solve real world problems and facilitate progress. We aimed to benefit the Indiana Food Co-op in their efforts to supply IUP students with food products that are produced with environmental, ethical and health conscious practices. Between the three



of us, we surveyed 61 students asking questions about their knowledge, habits and opinions, and we conducted 17 interviews in total. The interviews were divided into three sections: Where do students get their food health information? Where and why do students shop for groceries?, and What kinds of food do students buy and do they cook? We also talked with students to understand what they thought about the idea of a food co-op close by the IUP campus. We found that because there are so many unhealthy food options on and around campus, student must to try really hard to eat healthy, and that the practice of healthy eating is somewhat of a counter-culture for students. This is why IUP students will benefit from a food co-op; for greater access to healthy food and more opportunities to learn about and experience it. We look forward to presenting our findings early next year to the steering committee.

INTRODUCING THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Our Steering Committee is helping shape the vision and coordinating our efforts in starting the Food Co-Op. Steering Committee members volunteered to serve after our initial August 2015 meeting. Here are our steering committee members:

Eric Barker (Secretary) is on the board of the Center for Community Growth, is a member of the Indiana Rotary Club, and focuses on various voter engagement initiatives. He's interested in a community-run mixed use space that can serve sustainable food and goods.

Peter Broad moved to Indiana in 1986. Fresh food has always been central to his outlook on life. He and his wife were members of a food co-op in Vermont that was a recent start-up and were impressed with what they were able to do. We need a grocery store where people can walk to it or ride the bus.

Colleen Donovan (Co-Chair) has lived in Indiana since 2004. She enjoys backyard gardening and especially loves cooking with vegetables from her garden. When she can't have those, she would prefer to have local, organic vegetables. She is happy to help contribute to the development of a food co-op in Indiana, PA because it would be good for so many people.

Dana Driscoll (Co-chair) is a Western Pa native who recently moved to Indiana to join IUP's faculty. Prior to moving to Indiana, she was involved in community organizing for sustainable living and permaculture practices. As a certified permaculture designer, traditional western herbalist, and wild food enthusiast, she firmly believes in the ethics of people care, earth care, and fair share as guiding principles for living. The food co-op embodies these ideals.

Zachary Jobe believes that creating opportunity starts by active participation. He's interested in seeing local producers having the opportunity to provide quality food to local communities.

Erin N. Rice Petrillo is an Indiana native and an attorney at Bonya Gazza and Degory, LLP who graduated from the University of South Carolina and the University of Pittsburgh Schools of Law and Katz School of Business. Erin is interested bringing locally sourced, sustainable food and goods to the Indiana community. Erin is married to Joseph Petrillo and they are expecting their first child in January. She enjoys horseback riding, spending time with their four dogs, and making handmade soap.

Beth Rettig moved back to Indiana two years ago. After living in Vermont and having access to multiple food co-ops, she would love to have one here in Indiana. She wants to support local growers and produce and provide healthy food to the community.

Rich Rinkus is a long-term resident of Indiana, PA.

Ed Stancombe was born and raised in Indiana and lives in Indiana. He's interested in improving the quality of life within our community.

Alaina Stango has lived in Indiana county since 2000. She's interested in a healthy, organic, and sustainable grocery store to improve our community.

Laura M. Thomas (Secretary) resides in Indiana, where she is raising three teenagers. She holds master's degrees in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia. Previous good experiences with food co-ops in other towns and a desire to cook healthy locally sourced foods inspired her to become involved in our effort here.

Quintina "Q" Thomas came to Indiana as a student and now lives here as a community member and activist. She believes the Food Co-Op is a great way to bring cultures together and consume quality food. She's looking forward to everyone from all backgrounds benefiting from the co-op.



CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS!

Our subcommittees are in need of additional members to be involved with planning, membership, and fundraising in support of the co-op.

The **planning committee** focuses on the business structure and is currently beginning work on a business plan.

The **membership committee** is exploring possible membership structures for the co-op, including membership benefits and fees. In the coming months, this committee will also be planning and coordinating a membership drive, along with ongoing outreach efforts.

The **fundraising committee** is responsible for bringing financial support to the co-op. The committee is currently planning events to raise awareness and money, including a bake-off to be held in February. Grant writing and other fundraising strategies will begin this spring, as well.

If you want to volunteer, but are not interested in joining a committee, we will send volunteer requests from time to time for help with projects or events. We can also use help in specific areas, including publicity, social media, and accounting.

If you would like to join a subcommittee or offer other help, please contact Dana and Colleen at indianapafoodcoop@gmail.com.

How much time you give is up to you, but we hope you will be involved at some point in the future!

About this Newsletter

Articles and information were created by members of the Steering Committee unless otherwise noted. The newsletter was edited and laid out by Dana Driscoll. Photo credits: Page 1, The Rambling Traveler (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ramblingtraveler>) using a Creative Commons License found here: (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>). All remaining photos are courtesy of Dana Driscoll. Questions about this publication can be directed to Dana at danalynndriscoll@gmail.com.

