

**Best Practices for Starting Sustainable Food Cooperatives
in University Communities**

Christina Oatfield

ABSTRACT

This study makes recommendations for starting new student-run food co-ops (grocery stores, cafes, delis and other eateries), based on the findings of an investigation on seven co-ops in university communities and participant observation in the start-up process of one student food co-op. This included a review of documents (such as policies, financial statements, member handbooks) and interviews with members of the already existing co-ops. The co-ops studied included the Maryland Food Collective, Earthfoods Café at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the San Diego Food Co-op (at the University of California), Kresge Natural Foods at the University of California at Santa Cruz, Food for Thought at Portland State University, the Flaming Eggplant at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, Sprouts at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and the start-up Berkeley Student Food Collective at the University of California. The recently-founded Berkeley Student Food Collective's experience is a foundation for many of the recommendations, especially regarding the start-up process, as the author is a co-founder of that organization. The recommendations address the following issues: building the sustainable food movement in a community, fundraising, business planning, legal status, decision-making structures, managing an organization without a boss, food purchasing policies, bylaws, membership contracts and other policies, advisory boards, choosing the right storefront, educational and community building programs, working with paid staff and volunteers, handling turnover, and, university relations.

KEYWORDS

student-run, co-op, collective, food purchasing policies, business planning

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Methods.....	6
Results.....	7
Data Summary.....	7
A Brief History of Each Co-op.....	8
Maryland Food Collective.....	8
Earthfoods Café.....	8
San Diego Food Co-op.....	9
Kresge Natural Foods.....	10
Food for Thought.....	11
Flaming Eggplant.....	12
Sprouts.....	13
Berkeley Student Food Collective.....	14
Recommendations for Starting a Sustainable Food Co-op.....	16
Summary of Recommendations.....	16
Full Recommendations.....	18
Building the Sustainable Food Movement in the Community.....	18
Fundraising.....	19
Business Planning.....	20
Legal Status.....	21
Choosing the Right Storefront.....	22
Decision-Making Structures.....	25
Managing an Organization Without a Boss.....	30
Food Purchasing Policies.....	32
Bylaws and Other Policies.....	35
Advisory Boards.....	36
Educational and Community Building Programs.....	38
University Relations.....	38
Labor Force: Working with Paid Staff and Volunteers.....	39
Turnover: How to Handle It.....	40
Conclusion.....	41
Acknowledgments.....	42
References.....	42
Appendices:	
A. International Cooperative Alliance’s Statement of Cooperative Identity	
B. Interview Questions Used	
C. The Real Food Challenge Criteria for Real Food	
D. San Diego Food Co-op’s Food Purchasing Policy	
E. Data Summary	
F. Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of the Berkeley Student Food Collective	
G. Member Handbook of Earthfoods Café	
H. Member Handbook of Sprouts	
I. Helpful Organizations	

INTRODUCTION

The Case for Student-Run Food Co-ops

Student-run cooperative¹ groceries, delis and cafes have operated successfully on college campuses for decades, and many of them have been on the cutting edge of providing their members and customers with sustainable and healthy foods. There are student run food co-ops on at least eleven college campuses in North America, though no formal inventory has been taken. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst has two student co-ops and four other student-run businesses supported by a consulting program for student-run businesses through the campus business school. A student-run food co-op on or near a university campus can be a valuable hands-on educational tool. In such organizations, students learn about managing a business, cooking, food safety procedures, food politics, group decision-making and leadership skills. Since most existing student run food co-ops have a sustainability, health and/or social justice focus, food co-ops offer opportunities for exposure to and discussion of the many social, environmental and global issues tied to food systems. Additionally, as increasing numbers of colleges and universities attempt to mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions and overall environmental impact as institutions, these food co-ops are often at the forefront of responsible purchasing practices.

The Cooperative Model in a Broader Context

There is a curious connection between the student-run food co-op movement and the sustainable foods movement. All the student-run food co-ops examined in this study emphasize environmental stewardship in their mission statement and/or food purchasing policies. One of the universal guiding principles of cooperatives is a “concern for community,” as first articulated by the Rochdale Principles in the 1930’s and currently by the International Cooperative Alliance’s (ICA) Statement of Cooperative Identity (see Appendix A). Thus, a focus on sustainable foods is one way of exercising this value as a food co-op. Sociologist Leslie H. Brown asserts that “cooperatives correspond to a substantial degree to the characteristics of organizations needed

¹ The difference between the terms ‘cooperative’ and ‘collective’ are often misunderstood. A cooperative is usually a business or other organization run democratically for the economic benefit of its members. ‘Collective’ is a more open-ended term. A collective is democratically run by its members, but can also be an organization or shared space that does not necessarily benefit its members economically. In many states the term cooperative has a very specific legal meaning and there are barriers to nonprofits using the term ‘cooperative’ in their name, whereas almost any type of organization or business could call itself a collective. Some student “co-ops” are not legally considered cooperatives since they are public benefit corporations (nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations), though on a daily basis their members may call the organization a ‘co-op.’

for sustainable community development and [...] have many of the organizational features said to be needed by the contemporary economy” based on a review of other literature on new social movements and organizations (Brown, 1997). The cooperative model is recognized by many progressives as an organizational model that provides a better alternative to traditional businesses that see financial gain for the individual owners and/or stockholders as the primary bottom line.

Nobel Prize laureate Elinor Ostrom argues in *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, that Garrett Hardin’s concept of ‘the tragedy of the commons’ has often been taken out of context by other academics and economic leaders. She provides numerous examples of how the collective management of natural resources in various parts of the world has led to more sustainable use of those resources than a completely privatized market system or a socialistic government’s oversight of those resources would otherwise provide (Ostrom, 1990). Craig Cox explains in *Storefront Revolution* (1994) how new social movements of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s led to the emergence of many cooperative households and businesses, including co-op grocery stores and cafes to provide an alternative economic model and alternative, or “revolutionary” foods, that were less processed, healthy, made by co-ops or small, community-oriented businesses and organic foods. Cox makes the case for how community organizers from a variety of liberal social and environmental causes turned to the cooperative business model as a way to further their causes in a more transformative way than taking to more traditional forms of protests and demonstrations. The cooperative business model, being heavily rooted in a community and formed to serve that community’s needs, can be used as a tool to further the sustainable foods movement.

Challenges that Food Co-ops Face

Operating a cooperative requires careful coordination between stakeholders, especially when compared to more traditional nonprofits and businesses. Leaders of cooperatives have responsibilities towards the board of directors, members, employees and the community (Wadsworth, 2007). Achieving a balance between efficient operations and pleasing all of those stakeholders can be a challenge for some co-ops. Cooperatives that are run by students face the additional challenge of having many or most of these stakeholders change very frequently. Most students leave the university community within about four years, and may choose to divide up

their time at school for extra curricular activities on campus such that their involvement in any one organization can last as little as a semester or a year.

There is a significant lack of literature on starting and operating student food cooperatives, which this study seeks to help fill. In the process of starting a food co-op in the UC Berkeley campus community, I and several other students found that most of the strategies students implemented to start these organizations elsewhere are not well documented. There is a considerable amount of gray literature and some academic literature on the subject of start-up cooperatives of all kinds, including the Cooperative Grocer's Information Network's 70-page manual on "How to Start a Food Co-op," (Zimbelman, 2002) and Henehan and Anderson's 2001 Guide for New Cooperative Development, among other resources that have been developed by veteran co-op members and leaders (Baldwin, 2004 and Cropp, 2005). There are also organizations that support developing co-ops, such as Food Co-op 500, North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO), California Center for Cooperative Development (CCCD), the Center for Cooperatives at the University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Grocers' Information Network (CGIN) and others. They provide consultations and trainings and hold conferences, which can be extremely valuable to both starting and already established co-ops. The kind of networking and sharing of resources, or "cooperation among cooperatives" as the ICA (Appendix A) calls for, has been noted by academics as a potential strength for the cooperative movement to develop further (for example: Smith, 2001). However, there is very little peer-reviewed literature about best practices for consumer cooperatives and worker collectives. Most of the academic literature available discusses the broader philosophical, political and social implications of the cooperative model, and not the actual development and operations of cooperatives. Furthermore, the availability or resources for starting student food co-ops in particular is sparse, even among the gray literature about co-ops, yet student co-ops face unique obstacles. Some student-run food co-ops have poor record keeping, some have only minimal training for new workers, some face turbulent relationships with their universities and some lack the financial capital to move into more appropriate locations. On the other hand, some student co-ops have practices in place that successfully address these kinds of challenges and this study seeks to highlight the best practices to replicate and the pitfalls to avoid in the process of creating a student run food cooperative.

METHODS

My methods were multifaceted. First, I analyzed existing literature about how the cooperative model fits into sustainable development. Second, I collected by-laws, member manuals, financial statements and other relevant documents from existing food co-ops to learn details about their organizational structure, financial flows and guiding principles. Third, I interviewed at least two people each at seven student-run food co-ops in the United States, and one in Canada, including the San Diego Food Co-op, Kresge Natural Foods, the Maryland Food Collective, Earthfoods Café, Food for Thought, The Flaming Eggplant, Sprouts and the start-up Berkeley Student Food Collective. This produced the bulk of the data and basis for recommendations presented in this study. These interviews were semi-structured, using a set of base questions, but allowing for follow up questions. I chose people to interview based on recommendations from members of the organization and based on a person's willingness to be interviewed, so the interviewees are generally people who stand out as very involved and/or are long-standing members of the organization. Appendix B includes the full list of interview questions I used.

My own personal experience as I participated in creating the Berkeley Student Food Collective (BSFC) contributed greatly to my analysis of the food co-op start-up process. Students at UC Berkeley have been working since early 2009 to open the BSFC, and hope this will happen by Fall 2010. This start-up is an important case study for this research on sustainable food cooperatives since most other student food co-ops currently in existence were created long ago and with poor documentation about their start-up stories. This food collective will also be unique because in addition to operating a café and produce market, it will emphasize its role as community center for education about sustainable food systems and it will have a strict food purchasing policy based on the Real Food Challenge's 'Criteria for Real Food' (Appendix C). I have tried to do my best to objectively evaluate my work and be conscious of my own personal biases that I may bring to this study as both a researcher and as a leader of a start-up food co-op simultaneously.

RESULTS

I offer merely a small taste of the world of student run food cooperatives in existence and in development. The recommendations provided here are based on interviews and my personal experience working to start the Berkeley Student Food Collective. The appropriateness of these recommendations can vary depending on the culture of a particular campus community, the university administration's support for such an operation and the individual philosophies of the people starting the co-op. Every co-op is unique and one cannot create a mold that will work perfectly for all others to follow. The Data Summary (Appendix E) is a quick reference table to help orient the reader. The Brief Histories (p. 9) discuss the most unique features of these co-ops, their start-up stories and how they work in a nutshell. The Recommendations for Starting a Sustainable Food Co-op (p.17) is a set of recommendations for how to approach the different elements of starting and maintaining a co-op and the Summary summarizes the recommendations only and not the individual co-op narratives.

All of these co-ops share a concern for the global food system, its effects on human health and the environment and a sense for the need to be proactive around it. Interviews concerning individual students' motivations for being involved in their co-op reveal that these co-ops offer a strong sense of community for their members. In every case, these co-ops were founded by students wishing to take the matter of feeding themselves and fellow students into their own hands because their needs could not be met by the established eateries on campus. For example, students at Portland State University founded Food for Thought in response to food services on each of their campus being monopolized by a large private corporation that provided low quality food and did not address students' concerns about environmental sustainability. Students founded the Maryland Food Collective in the 1970's in response to the university's contract with a major corporate food supplier, which offered little to no healthy and vegetarian food. Over the next few decades, the collective incorporated environmentally conscious principles into their organization and food purchasing.

DATA SUMMARY

See Appendix E for a summary of all the co-ops discussed in this paper, including location, decision-making structure, number of members, legal status, revenue, occupancy, food purchasing policies.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EACH CO-OP

Maryland Food Collective

The Maryland Food Collective began as a ‘guerilla sandwich stand’ in 1975 that was launched in protest of the campus eateries that offered primarily heavily processed food and little to no healthy food options. The campus had a contract with a major corporate food service entity that had a monopoly over campus food service. One of the founders of the collective describes a typical example of the cafeteria’s vegetarian lunch entrée as “essentially Wonder Bread with American cheese on it.” In its first week of operation the guerrilla sandwich stand had trouble keeping up with the demand for its food and avoiding the police who were coming after them for selling food on campus without a permit. Within a few weeks there were demonstrations against the university for not offering better food on campus and the administration negotiated with the organizers of the sandwich stand for a more permanent space to open a student run co-op.

Students created a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit public benefit corporation and signed a lease for a space with the university. They also secured a \$20,000 grant (in 1975 dollars) from the student union body to make renovations to their new space and began selling sandwiches and other foods out of this space. The Collective has since moved several times to progressively bigger locations and currently operates out of a shop in the basement of the Stamp Student Union Building. Despite its tucked away location, the co-op offers food that cannot be found in the food court upstairs, which, consists entirely of nationally branded fast food chains. The Collective serves a wide variety of student customers to this day.

Of all the co-ops studied here, the Maryland Food Collective is most comparable to a professional business, in that some of its members are non-students, but they play the same roles and have the same rights and responsibilities in the co-op as students. It pays the university (the landlord) a very respectable monthly rent, has by far the highest annual revenue of all the co-ops I studied and has relatively strict disciplinary rules in place to address slack among its members.

Earthfoods Café at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Earthfoods is one of six student-run businesses on campus (not all of them are co-ops, however). Its 23 co-managers offer a constantly changing and diverse cafeteria-style hot menu with a different soup, salad, entree and dessert everyday. Additionally, a staple offered daily is

“the Holy Trinity” rice, beans and kale dish which is not found at other campus eateries that consist primarily of the university’s large cafeterias. Earthfoods’ food purchasing decisions are made by different subcommittees that focus on different ingredients (fresh produce, dry goods, beverages, etc.) though the co-op, as a student organization, is constrained by some of the university’s food purchasing contracts with major distributors. “There are obstacles to trying to be a socially, environmentally aware business and operating under a huge institution and having to answer to it,” as one co-manager put it.

Earthfoods has a very well organized committee and decision-making structure, and its handbook, which is included in Appendix G, details this and many other elements of their organization. Earthfoods also has a partnership with the campus Victory Garden, which supplies a limited amount of fresh produce for the café.

The San Diego Food Co-op at the University of California

This co-op is part of a coalition of student-run co-ops on the UC San Diego campus, which also includes the General Store (which sells textbooks, school supplies, university apparel, etc.), Groundworks bookstore and the Che Café (which also acts as a musical venue). The Food Co-op, was started in 1978 with the assistance of the already existing Groundworks books. The Food Co-op was once a thriving student organization with its own 501(c)3 status, which now suffers from large debts and tensions with the university.

A note on this co-op’s history: different members of the co-op that I spoke with recall the history of the co-op and how it got into a financial downturn slightly differently. All referred to essentially the same events that caused the downturn, but different members recall the order of events differently and put emphasis on which ones were more severe differently. I have attempted to summarize here what happened, but I must acknowledge that this history, in order to be most accurately portrayed, would need to be more thoroughly researched.

In 1991 the university turned the co-ops into auxiliaries of the university, meaning they became university departments, under the university’s control, but as auxiliaries, their business operations would have to maintain the financial sustainability of the department. In the early 2000’s the co-op decided to open a satellite store on the other side of campus. The initial intention was for the satellite to be incubated by the original food co-op and then eventually break off and become its own separate co-op. However, the debt that the “mothership” incurred

was never completely paid off. This was exacerbated when poor management and financial oversight led to a lapse of payments to multiple vendors that the co-op purchased from regularly, thus racking up further debt. Additionally, due to a miscommunication with the university, the food co-op stopped paying rent and was later informed by the university that it did still have to pay rent, and owed to university many backed up rent payments.

From winter of 2006 through summer of 2007 there was heavy construction in and around the student activities building which housed the Food Co-op, resulting in temporary loss of the co-op's kitchen space, poor visibility and a tenfold decline in revenue. In 2008 the Price Center East, the new student activities building, opened, thus moving most student activities to a new building, but leaving the student co-op businesses behind in the old student activities building, resulting a dramatic decline in foot traffic and in revenue.

In 2008 the San Diego Food Co-op had to make some drastic decisions in order to survive. The satellite was closed and payroll for all workers ended, resulting in half of the members at the original co-op leaving and the other half staying on as volunteers to operate it.

Due to the abovementioned challenges, the San Diego Food Co-op and its sister organizations have faced so much financial downturn that they are in the process of renegotiating their leases with the university to reduce or eliminate their rent so that they can stay afloat.

Kresge Community Natural Foods at the University of California at Santa Cruz

'The Kresge Co-op' (KCNF) as this co-op is often called, is located in Kresge College at UC Santa Cruz and sells a variety of bulk dry goods, packaged foods and grab-and-go lunch items to students mostly from the co-op but also some other students. It began sometime during the 1970's (all current members I spoke with did not know the exact date it began, nor how to find that out) as a little bulk foods buying club that set up in a tipi on a campus lawn.

Many student co-ops face tensions between political ideology and the realities of running a business, and such tensions are very evident at this co-op. As Shannon Claire, long standing core member of KCNF, writes in her unpublished paper about the co-op, "[t]he tension of running KCNF as a business is that many members do not see KCNF as a business and do not believe it should function as a business." Some members resist the concept of money and sometimes make arbitrary decisions when pricing goods, irrespective of the price for which the co-op purchases the good. According to Claire, "[s]ome members indulge in the fact that

procedures are not followed because it makes KCNF less business-like, even if it means weakening the power and ability for social change identified not only in the mission statement but amongst members as valuable....Finances are rarely spoken of at KCNF.” Some members also frown upon other standard business practices. For example, there is resistance among some members of the co-op to transition from shelves of binders and boxes of yellowing papers to more electronic systems of record keeping. The broken cash register at the front desk has had most of its buttons replaced with a variety of other hand drawn icons instead of numbers. Another example is the unreliable hours of operation. There are multiple different sets of posted hours of operation, and these are still inconsistent with the hours of operation in practice. Sometimes the co-op is not open at times when it should be open according to its posted hours of operation and sometimes its open when it is not scheduled to be open. The co-op also owes the state \$2,300 in taxes, a debt that has been standing for numerous years.

Yet the low prices the co-op offers and its emphasis on local and organic foods helps it maintain a loyal following of students. Though the UC Santa Cruz campus dining halls have received much recognition for moving towards serving more local and organic foods, the Kresge Co-op provides a small, intimate community space run entirely by students and therefore is in an arguably better position to foster dialogue and education about food.

Food for Thought at Portland State University

Food for Thought (FFT) also began in protest to the large corporate food service monopoly at PSU that dissatisfied many students. Students protested a pending contract between the campus and Sodexo, and succeeded in preventing it from going through, only to be faced with a signed contract with another corporate foodservice giant, Aramark such that Aramark would have the exclusive right to operate food businesses on campus. A group of students organized to start their own café to compete with Aramark after one of them, a law student, discovered a loophole in the contract language that would allow for a group of students, as a registered student organization, to serve food to other students on campus. While some of its founders hoped that the café would make enough sales to significantly cut into Aramark’s profits, Aramark continues to operate the rest of the campus eateries besides Food for Thought.

While most other food co-ops that serve prepared food have either a buffet style or grab-and-go method of serving, FFT serves typical breakfast items like pancakes, eggs, baked goods,

muffins and various specials of the day a la carte (made-to-order). FFT is well known for its home made baked goods, many of which are vegan. The quality of the food is definitely a highlight of this student-run café, probably because of the freshness of ingredients used, but also because most menu items are made to order. The café has an exceptionally large seating area that holds 150 people, which students and faculty use for studying, meeting and socializing. FFT's student group status helped secure facilities at no cost to the organization, thus despite the labor intensive food, prices are still relatively appropriate for a student budget.

However, Food for Thought also has tens of thousands of dollars in debt and lacks a specific method for pricing food among other financial management strategies. As a student organization, they have university staff members to advise them, but being a student-run food business, FFT is very unique, and currently university staff and FFT members are discussing ways of bringing in more appropriate professional advising services to the café.

The Flaming Eggplant Café at Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington

The Flaming Eggplant Café currently operates out of a trailer parked in a plaza at the center of campus, and is supported by a storage closet, a prep trailer and two small offices, scattered around the campus. By Fall 2010 the Café is set to have a customized space in the newly remodeled student center, which should allow for smoother operations because everything will be in one location. The greatest challenge that several members of this collective café identified was the hassle of constantly moving goods between the vending trailer, prep trailer and storage closet. The campus student fee board even gave the collective a grant to purchase a small electric truck to move food and supplies from one trailer to another. However, a lot of time and energy is still spent taking inventory of what items are in the different locations and coordination to make sure that items are in the correct location, etc. Accidental overproduction has happened before, in instances where, for example, falafel batter had been made and taken to the vending trailer, but someone in the prep trailer was unaware of this and made an additional batch.

The Flaming Eggplant is the only student food co-op currently in operation that I found which has its own full-time professional staff member, called the Flaming Eggplant Café Adviser, to support the collective administratively, ensure clear communication among members, to provide institutional memory and to act as a liaison between the student members of the collective and the university administration. This Adviser attends all meetings of the collective,

but does not act as a voting member in the consensus-driven decision-making process. Of the 5 student members of the collective I spoke with, all of them said they felt that the Adviser's contribution to the collective was invaluable and that they made the right choice in hiring a full-time, non-student staff member. It is important to note that the current Advisor respects the student-run nature of the café, and clearly understands her role as an adviser—not a decision-maker—and advocate of the café in the face of the university, despite legally being a university employee.

The Flaming Eggplant is also fortunate to have an extremely supportive campus; a student referendum and various campus student and administrative committees provided all the start-up funds necessary for the café, including the cost of the two trailers, electric truck and Adviser's payroll for the first year of operation (with the option to reapply for future years).

Sprouts at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Sprouts began in 1997 as a bulk food buying club for members only, and then in 2003 it opened a small public storefront. Since most students commute to campus and weren't interested in buying groceries on campus, the store had to close down, and then re-open as a café with a small grocery section in 2007. The little café tucked away on the bottom floor of the Student Union Building serves coffee, tea, soup and baked goods, Monday through Thursday. Everything is organic and most imported goods are fair trade. Produce comes from the campus farm. On Fridays the café opens up for the "Community Eats" program, which serves meals made from food that would otherwise be discarded by a major corporate food distributor (generally not organic or otherwise adhering to any environmental/social criteria) that donates the food to Sprouts, and volunteers prepare a meal sold at a suggested donation of \$1/plate. The lines are generally out the door on Fridays. Sprouts also has a bicycle delivery program that delivers a standard box of produce and groceries to customers who live on campus.

With many dozens of other quick-service food booths and restaurants in the Student Union building, Sprouts faces steep competition and does not move as many goods as most businesses in the building.

Sprouts also shares a kitchen with the student government's catering services, and therefore has very limited access to it, especially because the catering services generates revenue

for the student government and Sprouts does not. This and the all-volunteer structure of the co-op limits the variety of prepared foods that Sprouts is able to offer quite significantly.

The Berkeley Student Food Collective, a start-up at the University of California

The Berkeley Student Food Collective (BSFC) was founded in the Spring of 2009 by myself and a group of other student leaders of a campaign which prevented a Panda Express from entering UC Berkeley's student union. The possibility of having a nationally branded fast food chain on campus highlighted the need for more education around food system issues and more access to healthy, sustainable and ethically produced food at affordable prices on campus. In March, 2009 the *New York Times* reported, that "While the idea of sustainable food is creeping into the mainstream, the epicenter of the movement remains the liberal stronghold of Berkeley, Calif," yet most of the many cafes and restaurants on and near campus do not emphasize healthy and sustainable foods. Many of Berkeley's restaurants that are famous in the slow foods and sustainability movements are too far away for students to go to in the middle of a busy day and many are cost-prohibitive for a student budget. The few campus cafes that offer organic snacks are over-priced. However, the proximity of the UC Berkeley campus to this 'epicenter' of sustainable foods movement allows for many resources for the BSFC in the form of mentors and advisers, spreading the word about the co-op and fundraising opportunities.

One unique feature of the BSFC is the large amount of money it was able to secure before opening—a total of \$134,000 in one year. This began with a \$91,000 grant from The Green Initiative Fund (TGIF) at UC Berkeley, which is a pool of money for projects that promote the environmental sustainability of the campus paid for a student-initiated fee. The BSFC also received a grant from another campus fund for student projects, and the local student housing cooperative. The BSFC continued to fundraise by asking friends and family for money and then held a formal dinner and silent auction.

Having presented our collective as an alternative to a large, nationally-branded business, we've made great efforts to ensure that our co-op is very professionally-run. We hired a Program Director as a full-time, non-student staff member a few months after securing our first round of grants in order to keep ourselves organized and accountable and to reassure campus administrators that the organization wouldn't dissipate once its founders graduated. Like the students at the Flaming Eggplant, we've found that while it comes at a high price for a small

student organization, having our Program Director, who is committed to our mission, including youth empowerment, has made many of our own members and external stakeholders much more confident about the organization's long-term success and stability.

Currently, the BSFC sells sandwiches on campus once per week thanks to a partnership with a local business that lets the collective use its kitchen during non-peak hours. This has allowed the collective to test different prospective menu items, get feedback from students about them and generate data on sales, cost of ingredients, labor required to make them, etc. before full, daily operations begin. The BSFC is currently in discussions with the university about opening up, and both parties are optimistic that the grand opening will be sometime in Fall 2010.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STARTING A SUSTAINABLE FOOD CO-OP

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Building the Sustainable Foods Movement in the Community [start-up phase] The first step in bringing a student-run food co-op to a campus is to identify the interest among students (and faculty and staff) for such a service. Depending on how much engagement in food systems issues a campus culture has already, the campus may or may not be ready for a student run food co-op that seeks to offer sustainable foods.

Fundraising [start-up phase]

Download *Raise the Funds: Campus Action Toolkit* at campusinpower.org.

Ask friends, family and campus community members for donations, hold fundraising events.

Seek on and off campus grants and loans.

Business Planning [start-up phase] A business plan summarizes the business/organization's objectives, plans of operation and financial projections for all costs and revenues. Some financial factors to include in the business plan are: how many customers per unit of time will buy certain items, the amount of labor that will go into the business, the selling price of a good compared to the cost to the business of that good, insurance, rent, payroll, utilities et cetera. The business plan does not need to show profits within the first year, but within a few years projected revenues should exceed costs. Conduct a market study by surveying students and other campus community members about what food options are lacking on campus and what criteria they are concerned about when it comes to food (cost, health, sustainability, etc.).

Legal Status [start-up phase] Most student food co-ops are either student organizations that are part of the university or a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit. The advantage to nonprofit status is having more autonomy, however, the process of attaining this status is lengthy and requires professional legal assistance. As a student organization, a co-op is sometimes eligible for more campus grants/loans and administrative assistance like bookkeeping and advising.

Choosing the Right Storefront [start-up phase] Some student co-ops started out small and grew into larger and more permanent spaces over many years. If start-up capital is limited or if university officials are weary of the co-op's proposal, starting as a weekly food stand, operating out of a small space or out of a cart can be a first step that leads to more options later on.

Decision Making Structure [ongoing] Making decisions by simple majority or super majority is perceived to be more efficient and ensure that a tiny minority does not hold anything up. Five of the co-ops I investigated use consensus and its proponents argue that it creates for a more inclusive working environment. Make sure that everyone is well trained in consensus process and philosophy before implementing it; see Butler and Rothsetin's *On Conflict and Consensus*. Regardless of consensus or majority rule, delegate responsibilities to committees whenever possible to reduce work and stress load for everyone. See full recommendations for examples of committee structure.

Managing an Organization Without a Boss [ongoing]

All members of the co-op should agree to, preferably in writing, what their responsibilities are when stepping into their role, what the repercussions are for breaking these agreements, and how conflicts are to be resolved in the organization.

Have meetings run by a trained facilitator and train other members to be strong facilitators.

See Adams, Means and Spivey (2007) for more advice on running meetings.

Food Purchasing Policies [ongoing] all co-ops studied incorporate sustainability into their food policy, but different co-ops do so in the following different ways:

Overarching principles are stated in a mission statement or similar document, individual food buyers try to uphold these principles when ordering food

There is a document that explains very specifically what should/should not be bought (see Appendix D for an example)

Members make decisions democratically before the co-op purchases from a certain vendor

Bylaws, Membership Contracts and Other Policies [ongoing] Create a subcommittee to draft policies, as some people really like writing policies and some do not. However, policies that affect most members regularly should be discussed and approved by the larger group because it is crucial for everyone to be aware of and agree to them. See Appendices F, G and H for sample Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and member handbooks.

Advisory Boards [ongoing] Advisory boards are made up of working/retired professionals and community leaders who can provide practical advice, connections and help with fundraising. Keep the entire Advisory Board up to date frequently on progress made and consult with individuals when matters pertaining to their area of expertise come up.

Educational and Community Building Programs [ongoing] Some co-ops have programs around food issues, which include holding events at the co-op such as community meals, hosting student organization meetings, etc. The former Consumer Co-op of Berkeley (not a student-run co-op) had staff who researched products sold in the store, educated customers on their nutritional value, made recommendations to the purchasing department and lobbied policy makers on food labeling laws. See Black (1992, p. 33-37) in *What Happened to the Berkeley Co-op?*

University Relations [ongoing] It is important to build strong relationships with university administrators, but decide democratically on which matters the co-op is and is not willing to make compromises. Some co-ops receive generous benefits from their universities, including subsidized rent, funding and assistance with bookkeeping and payroll administration. Growing too distant from university administrators can make lease negotiations difficult and can consume a great deal of time and energy from co-op members.

Labor Force: Working with Paid Staff and Volunteers [operations] Volunteer co-ops can offer lower prices and attract primarily members who are passionate about food and food systems issues. Co-ops run by mostly paid staff tend to sell more food and have more reliable hours of operation, due to greater accountability from paid staff.

Turnover: how to handle it [operations]

If funds permit, hire a full-time, non-student professional staff member to work with students, to provide institutional memory. This staff member should be committed to student/youth empowerment and advocating for the co-op in a professional manner in the face of university administrators.

Conduct elections/hirings early enough such that members who are leaving the organization can begin training their replacement months before they leave. Have departing members leave exit documents.

Make time for well-planned trainings at the beginning of every year/term for new members. Maintain written job descriptions and other procedures. See Appendices G and H for good examples.

FULL RECOMMENDATIONS

Building the Sustainable Foods Movement in the Community [start-up phase]

Different campuses are at different stages in terms of providing real food (food which is ecologically sound, humane, fair and local/community based; see Appendix C details) and fostering discussion and activism around food and sustainability, health, social justice. Many campuses have vibrant student grassroots movements around real food, where students tend to organic vegetable and herb gardens on campus and eateries offer plenty of fresh, seasonal, mostly organic and minimally processed food. On the other hand, some universities still offer little to no courses that discuss sustainability. Taking a survey of existing student organizations, courses, programs and other initiatives related to food politics, sustainability and social justice at your university to determine how enthusiastic it would be to a sustainable foods co-op is the very first step to take. If there are little to no existing student organizations or other collaborative initiatives between students, faculty and staff working on sustainability, health, nutrition or other related issues that indicate an interest in food on your campus, you may have to rethink whether starting a food business is the first step you want to take; you may need to begin with building a movement around food issues on your campus by launching an educational campaign. The Real Food Challenge is a great organization to approach for help in building such a movement on your campus, as are many of the other organizations listed in, Appendix I, 'Helpful Organizations.'

There are also often resources in the community outside of the campus that can be of assistance in building this movement. Figure out where the nearest food co-ops are to your university and give them a call or visit them. If there are environmental, health or community development organizations in the city or county in which your university is located, contact them to find out what kind of ideas, connections, funds or other resources they can provide. Meet your local city government leaders and find out what kind of resources they can direct you to; some local governments have grants for economic development, sustainability projects, nutrition programs, et cetera.

Henehan and Anderson (2001, p. 11-12, 14) and Zimbelman (2002, p. 19-20) emphasize the importance of identifying the opportunity or the feasibility for a co-op in your community. It is important to identify, early in the process, what the gap in services available to your

community are, and not assume that the co-op will be really popular just because a few individuals are excited about the idea.

If the campus climate seems ripe for a student food co-op, building momentum for this specific idea can entail holding gatherings of representatives from student organizations interested in supporting the endeavor, potluck brainstorming sessions and other events that bring various stakeholders together. Also, some student co-ops build momentum by protesting university contracts with large corporate foodservices. Other strategies including writing op-eds and making short YouTube videos about food system issues and how the food co-op can help address them in a local context.

Fundraising [start-up phase]

There are numerous fundraising strategies for starting a co-op, however, fundraising to start a student co-op is very different from fundraising to start a co-op in a community of working professionals. A student organization is less likely to get loans or be able to sell shares in the co-op, but there are a lot of grants available to student organizations, educational organizations and environmental organizations that a student start-up co-op might be eligible for. A list of ideas is provided below as a starting point. Make a timeline that includes internal goals and deadlines for grant applications. I recommend starting with the sources that are most likely to contribute and then working through the list. The Berkeley Student Food Collective found that grants have a rippling effect, such that after receiving its first grant, it was easier to get private donations because the first grant gave the co-op legitimacy and gave the donor greater confidence that the organization was on the right track.

Apply for grants from your university and student government.

If your campus has a green fee, your co-op might be exactly what that's meant to fund (if there's not already a green fee in place, see Campus In Power's *Raise the Funds* for information on how to start one).

Grassroots fundraising: call or write to friends and family, asking for small donations.

Host events: the Berkeley Student Food Collective had a lot of success with a formal dinner and silent auction for family and community partners, as well as smaller-scale events for students. Keep in mind that the amount of money to charge for entrance to a fundraiser should be adjusted based on what your target audience is for the event. Contact

local businesses and ask them to donate food, printed materials and auction items for your event.

Loans: depending on the state of the economy, corporate banks may or may not be willing to provide loans to you. Cooperative banks and credit unions might be a better target. Also, some student governments will be willing to make loans.

See Campus In Power's *Raise the Funds: Campus Action Toolkit*, a guide developed specifically for students trying to raise money for sustainability initiatives on their campus, including student fees, administrative and campus funds, endowments and internal and internal campus banks, outside grants and alumni funds. It walks readers through a step-by-step process for seven different methods of securing funds for campus projects.

Business Planning [start-up phase]

A business plan is a report that documents how the co-op is going to work, from a financial and operational perspective, what niche in the market it will fill, its founding team's strategies for success and potential weaknesses. It also should include financial projections that detail how much it will cost to operate the business and how much revenue it is expected to make over time (generally 3-5 years) using basic assumptions like how many customers per unit of time will buy certain items, the amount of labor that will go into the business, the selling price of a good compared to the cost to the business of that good, etc. To make educated guesses here, one can look at other comparable organization's business plans, local statistics from you city's economic development department or comparable agency, or do some customer counts at nearby eateries. Businesses rarely follow their business plans exactly, but the process of piecing together this information is an important exercise for leaders of an organization in the start-up phase to make sure that all facets of the business have been thought out. Documenting all of this will help structure your organization internally and it will show campus officials, grant foundations and other potential donors, lenders and supporters that the organization has a thorough plan.

Business plans often contain analyses of how the new business will fit into the market by using surveys of what the local community wants and what nearby competition exists. Student food co-ops can survey randomly selected students or contact a variety of student organizations for input on what food options they want on campus and how concerned they are with different

factors such as cost, sustainability, health, vegan/vegetarian, locally-owned, convenience, ambiance, et cetera. Furthermore, conducting a survey of what existing food operations are on campus is essential in making sure the food co-op will offer something that is unique or something that there is more demand for than is currently met.

A note on timelines; the Berkeley Student Food Collective grossly underestimated how much time it would need to start-up. Organizations should factor into their start-up timelines extra room for matters that are out of the organization's control, like time for negotiations, securing permits, deliberations, waiting for contractor estimates and other unforeseen obstacles.

Some other perspectives on writing business plans for food co-ops can be found in Zimelman (2002, p. 39) and Henehan and Anderson (2001, p. 22-23).

Legal Status [start-up phase]

Most student co-ops are either student organizations that operate under the legal framework of their university, or are their own public benefit corporation, also known as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. Below is a more comprehensive list of the possibilities for student food co-ops to pursue, but I elaborate most on the student organization and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization because these are by far the most common. Note that a co-op can be both a student organization registered with the campus as well as its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit or other separate legal entity.

Campus-affiliated student organizations receive the benefit of generally the most support from their campus. Just as most student organizations that use office/meeting/practice space on campus don't have to pay for it (or if they do, it is heavily subsidized), these student organizations often can receive free/reduced rent based off of that precedent. Additionally, at most universities, student organizations registered with the campus received some free advising and assistance with bookkeeping. However, some of these co-ops, as student organizations, must abide by certain university policies, which wouldn't apply to external entities. The Flaming Eggplant has faced red tape restrictions in attempting to purchase certain goods because the university has contracts with some businesses such that a certain percentage of, for example, furniture that it purchases needs to be from that business.

These types of contracts vary from university to university, and should be investigated before a co-op determines its legal status.

Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs) are the most generic type of corporation and allows for the most flexibility in terms of decision-making.

Nonprofit public benefit corporations are eligible to receive many grants and accept tax-deductible donations and are exempt from some income taxes that a regular business would have to pay. However, the IRS has strict parameters surrounding what qualifies an organization to receive this tax-exempt status. A co-op seeking tax-exempt status needs to make a strong case to the IRS that it co-op either exists exclusively to cater to students and faculty or that the educational components of the organization are so central to its purpose and day-to-day operations that it should receive this special status which most cafes, markets and grocers (including most co-ops) are not eligible for. A co-op pursuing nonprofit status from the IRS should not only sell food, but also put on many educational programs such as workshops, member research on food products being sourced in the store, trainings or other events and integrate these into the day-to-day activities of the co-op. Pursuing nonprofit status requires the services of a lawyer who is familiar with nonprofit law to help with the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and application for tax-exempt status to be filed with the IRS. Also see the Bylaws and Other Policies section on p. 36-37.

Cooperative businesses can have their own legal status in some states, but the regulations can vary from state to state.

Van Baldwin (2004) provides a thorough explanation of the process of becoming incorporated and the different options for doing so, but is geared towards general co-ops and specific to California. It does not address situations unique to student co-ops, however, organizations seeking to create a legal entity that is completely separate from the university may find this resource helpful.

Choosing the Right Storefront [start-up phase]

The Consumer Cooperative of Berkeley operated several grocery stores and other retail stores for decades until its collapse in the late 1980's. Some former leaders and members of the Berkeley Co-op, as it was generally called, blame the collapse of the co-op on the board's faulty

decisions to expand to new storefronts without adequate membership input and thorough investigation of the prospects of these new storefronts (for example, Rauber, in *What Happened to the Berkeley Co-op?* 1992, p. 11-17). Choosing the right storefront is essential to the success of any retail business.

Internal Logistics

Having an idea of the co-op's menu is important before searching for a location. If the menu does not call for food prepared on a stovetop or grill, the storefront will not require a hood and ventilation system nor gas inputs. According to most local laws governing food businesses (both for grocers and foodservice eateries), the storefront will need at least one hand-washing sink, and separate sinks for dishwashing and produce washing on site. It is possible to prepare food in one location and transport it over to a different location where it will be sold, as long as it remains covered and maintains proper temperatures. Transporting food and supplies requires extra labor and can cause mishaps, such as over or under ordering of ingredients because keeping inventory of multiple locations is harder than just keeping track of one, so splitting up operations between multiple locations should be avoided if possible. However, some student food co-ops start out dividing operations between different rooms or even different buildings (Sprouts currently, Flaming Eggplant is about to consolidate its four different points of operation into one, San Diego Food Co-op formerly used kitchen space elsewhere and now has its own), and work to build up the funds and credibility over time to afford a space that has everything in one place.

The Storefront and its Relationship to the Campus or Neighborhood Landscape

Location can be a huge factor in how many customers the co-op can attract. The San Diego Food Co-op (see the co-op's profile) used to have enough funds to pay all of its workers well above minimum wage and offer free meals to them during their shifts, but after the bulk of student activities moved out of the building where the food co-op was located and into another building, foot traffic decreased dramatically and so did sales. The San Diego Food Co-op is now unable to pay its workers and has spent two years struggling financially.

However, as a unique service, a food co-op can market itself in ways in which another business would not be able to. The Maryland Food Collective is in a corner of the student union building's basement on campus, but because it offers unique, high quality food at very

reasonable prices, there are lines during lunch everyday, the collective is open on weekends, it generates enough revenue to pay workers well and it pays a non-trivial amount of rent to the university. So location with respect to the rest of the campus community can be an important factor in the success of a co-op, but it is not necessarily more important than factors like quality of food, price, campus culture and competing foodservices.

Many Co-ops Start Small and then Expand as their Customer Base and Revenue Grow

The Maryland Food Collective began as a guerilla sandwich stand and the first formal space it operated out of was smaller than the spaces they later occupied after the organization grew. Similarly, Kresge began as an informal bulk buying club which exchanged goods out of a tipi on a lawn before securing its more permanent storefront space. The Flaming Eggplant is transitioning from operating out of a trailer kitchen to a permanent space in the campus student activities building. Beginning with small-scale operations can allow the organization to test its menu, generate revenue, build a reputation and convince donors, grant foundations and university officials of the viability of the organizational model.

Strategies for Identifying the Right Storefront and Negotiating a Favorable Contract

Do not assume the co-op will find the right storefront immediately; it may have to look for a while and/or wait until a new space becomes available

Be persistent and politely aggressive; many universities, especially large, public universities, have large bureaucracies and securing a storefront may require many steps; find out what those steps are and follow up with administrative entities often to make sure the co-op's proposals and plans are moving along

If no spaces typically used for foodservice are available, explore turning a non-commercial space into commercial space; the university may be more flexible with rent for spaces that would not normally generate revenue

Be realistic with what a start-up organization can handle in terms of finances and institutional capacity; many student food co-ops had humble beginnings in less than ideal locations before building up the funds and credibility to secure a bigger space

Develop a plan B, and a plan C, and maybe even a plan D

Identify supportive administrators (even if they are not the ultimate decision-makers) and ask them for suggestions on a location and strategies for winning support from other administrators

Bring in a professional contractor and real estate agent (independent from the university) to help you determine what a space is worth and how much it will cost you to move into it before making any offers to rent it

Before entering negotiations for a space, develop a list of questions or concerns you have about the space for the university or landlord and make sure all of these are addressed in the final contract before agreeing to it

Before entering negotiations for a space, decide, confidentially, as an organization what is the maximum amount of money you are willing to pay for that space any other minimum terms (such as a minimum contract length, improvements or maintenance that the landlord must be responsible for, etc.) and then delegate a few individuals to negotiate for the best deal without crossing any limits decided upon collectively

Decision Making Structure

The satisfaction of your members is very dependent on having a board that makes decisions considering the long-term sustainability of the co-op and that engages members in a meaningful way. The decision making structure of your co-op in the start-up phase will most likely need to be different than once the co-op is steadily up and running. Lots of major decisions need to be made in the start-up process, and sometimes in short periods of time; opportunities for grants and leases come up and don't always allow for weeks of deliberation. Many young and idealistic co-ops assume that in order to be a truly egalitarian and democratic organization, every member needs to be involved in every decision. It is important to acknowledge that there will be some people involved in a start-up organization who want to be heavily involved and carry a large load of the responsibility for the success of the co-op on their shoulders. There will also be members who are interested in being involved and informed but may not wish to take on a lot of responsibility based on differing level of skill and other commitments. Different members will have different areas of interest as well.

Consider breaking up into committees to take care of different elements of the project and only have the entire organization make decisions together on the most important matters that

everyone is likely to be able to have input on, such as the location of the storefront, the name of the organization, the mission statement, key policies and any overarching principles or values that should guide the rest of the organization's actions. Elect a Board of Directors or a Steering Committee to handle other important matters like working with business and legal advisers, finalizing a menu, making sure that all logistics are taken care of, etc. For a discussion on how many board members to have and what their responsibilities should be see Cropp (2005).

Whenever possible, delegate work to a specific subcommittee with a clear goal of what the group needs from this subcommittee. In some cases committees can make decisions and in other cases committees can thoroughly investigate an issue and come to the Steering Committee or general membership with a solid proposal to vote on. This can prevent painfully long large group meetings which can overwhelm and frustrate people, causing declines in membership.

For Example, the BSFC start-up has the following committees:

Fundraising: applies for grants, puts on fundraising events, teaches other members how to approach people for individual donations

Policy: works closely with legal counsel to draft and submit Articles of incorporation, Bylaws, nonprofit application to the IRS, other internal policies, job descriptions

Outreach & Publicity: recruits new members, builds relationships with other like-minded organizations and brainstorms ideas for collaboration, maintains a website, facebook page, blog, keeps community informed on the co-op's developments

Food Planning: develops the menu, builds relationships with local farmers, artisans, bakers, chefs and other producers, estimates costing of various food items for business plan, organizes taste-tests at general membership meetings

Food Sales: runs weekly outdoor local produce stand and/or sandwich stand to test out menu and begin selling real food while the rest of the organization plans for the long-term

Garden: developing a proposal for an on-campus garden that would compliment the collective's educational efforts

Education: develops the curriculum for educational events to be organized by the collective, including a student-taught seminar, volunteer opportunities in local garden

and at other food organizations, workshops, lectures, etc. and designing visual educational materials to be posted at the collective

Membership: maintains a mailing list, keeps track of who has been attending enough meetings to have voting rights, helps new members figure out what committee they want to get involved in

Storefront: researches possible storefront opportunities and logistics (permits, access to electricity, water, gas) and write proposals or letters of intent

EarthFoods Café co-managers each sit on one to three committees and each of the committees elect representatives to sit on the steering committee in addition to the committee they represent. Most of these committees are broken up into subcommittees that take care of specific tasks [operations]:

Financial: bookkeeping, deposits money, maintains payroll logs and authorizes checks

Buying: places orders, keeps inventories of food, sets the menu (including portions), explores cost cutting measures, keeping inventory on equipment and works with other student groups who want to use the kitchen,

Organizational: mediates conflicts between co-managers, keeps track of attendance at meetings and missed shifts, brings co-managers up for termination who have missed too many shifts or have other conduct issues and maintains organizational handbook

Maintenance: acts as a liaison between the café and the health inspector, makes sure the café passes health inspections, fixes equipment, educates other co-managers about health/safety protocol (eg. how to reheat leftovers) and composting/recycling procedures, conducts periodic cleanings of the kitchen and equipment, keeps inventory on equipment and works with other student groups who want to use the kitchen

Start-up: recruits applicants, hires and trains new co-managers, sets all co-managers' work schedules for the term

Outreach: advertises the café, maintains the eating area, invites students to display art and perform in the eating room, maintains webpage and other promotional materials (t-shirts, cookbooks), organizes workshops and discussions on anti-oppression, organizes catering and includes liaisons to the other student-run businesses and the Center for Student Business

Steering: an eight person committee that acts as the meeting point of all other activities and has one or more representatives from all other committees plus a consultant from the student government's Center for Student Businesses. This Committee vets all proposals and puts them on the agenda for the weekly all-staff meetings, sets broader organizational goals, sets elections timelines and gives feedback to other committees.

A fledgling co-op needs strong leaders. Starting a business organization is far more complex than just about any other type of campus student organization, and therefore it takes particular dedication and skill. Some organizations that resist hierarchy to an extreme hinder some individuals from taking more initiative than others and this can be detrimental to making progress. An organization can have a healthy balance of strong leadership and linear decision-making power. Both in the start-up and operating phases, a co-op can implement checks and balances to ensure that these leaders are keeping the best interests of the rest of the members at heart by setting limits to their spheres of responsibility. Certain individuals can be empowered to negotiate for a lease within certain financial and other parameters determined by a larger group, for example. The elected leadership or general membership can determine that it is comfortable offering up to a certain amount of money for a prospective location and empower one or a few individuals to negotiate with an external party, within that limit.

Democracy Gets Complicated: Consensus, 2/3 majority and simple majority

Different co-ops make decisions in different manners. Most co-ops I studied work by consensus, with just a few exceptions. The Maryland Food Collective approves proposals by a 2/3 majority in most cases. Sprouts on paper works by simple majority, but has an informal policy of working to achieve consensus at meetings. The Berkeley Student Food Collective's 8-member Board of Directors currently makes decisions by consensus but its general membership elects the board and makes other major decisions, such as the location and name by simple majority. The BSFC, upon instituting this decision-making structure, decided that it would be reassessed once the storefront opens and fewer decisions need to be made in short timeframes, thus making it more feasible for a larger group to be engaged in more decisions.

The decision-making process during the start-up phase is very different from the decision-making process of an established co-op. The BSFC found that the decision-making

structure of a start-up needs to allow for greater flexibility and that it was more pragmatic to instill much more power in its 8-member board and let the rest of the membership elect the board. This was because in negotiating leases, for example, there were often a lot of decisions to be made in a short-period of time based on confidential information. Furthermore, the amount of dedication and accountability required of individuals to start a business organization from scratch was so great that it was unrealistic to expect that kind of dedication from more than a small group of individuals.

Some proponents of the consensus model that I spoke with explained that they felt it was an important part of making the co-op inclusive and unique from other businesses. Many acknowledged that it was sometimes a less efficient way of making decisions but that it was important to make sure that all voices are heard and that every member of the co-op is empowered to block a motion if they think its not in the best interest of the organization. Members of Food For Thought were trained in consensus decision-making by C.T. Butler (co-author of *On Conflict and Consensus*), which some members said was extremely helpful in adopting this method of decision-making.

The consensus decision-making process can be hard to comprehend from a perspective that is accustomed to simple majority or super majority decision-making processes. As Butler and Rothstein, explain, “when a group votes using majority rule or Parliamentary Procedure, a competitive dynamic is created within the group because it is being asked to choose between two (or more) possibilities.” In the consensus decision-making process, members of the group need not to see each other as competitors, but rather see someone else’s comfort with the decision as integral to their own comfort with the decision. In other words “everyone works to improve the proposal to make it the best decision for the group” and not necessarily any individuals (Butler and Rothstein, 2007).

On Conflict and Consensus describes the philosophical difference between consensus and more traditional democratic processes, plus provides some very practical recommendations for meeting facilitation. I highly recommend any co-op that is considering using consensus to review this handbook and have new members read it or be trained in consensus decision-making based on its content.

Managing an Organization Without a Boss

Working in a cooperative environment often requires extra effort to ensure clear communication because there is so much shared responsibility. In a more hierarchical organizational model, there is a person (or a small group of people) in an executive leadership position whose job it is to communicate with everyone and hold people accountable. In a more linear cooperative organization, these responsibilities are often more spread out, and can require more systematic methods of organization.

Holding Effective Meetings

Holding an effective meeting begins with setting an effective agenda; the agenda should include a list of topics to be discussed and clearly specify which ones the group will take action on (make a decision regarding that agenda item, preferably include a specific motion or proposal with the agenda), which ones are discussions (no decision to be made yet) and which ones are announcements (updates on the progress of important matters or upcoming opportunities for involvement, etc.)

Many co-ops have a rotating facilitator such that every meeting is facilitated by a different member, in order to share responsibility and give everyone the opportunity to learn a new skill. Make sure that new facilitators are first trained by someone experienced, or if a particular agenda item is expected to be contentious or otherwise complicated, appoint an experienced facilitator for that section until others have practiced this skill more. New members can be discouraged or lose focus by a poorly facilitated meeting that runs too long.

For basic guidelines on 'Holding Successful Meetings' and 'Guidelines for Meeting Chairs for Facilitators' see Zimbelman, (2002, p. 14-15). For a more in-depth guide on meeting and project facilitation see Adams, Means and Spivey (2007).

Tips for Maintaining communication outside of meetings

Often, the most productivity happens outside of meetings if roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated in meetings. Use meeting time to coordinate who is doing what on a macro scale, and formalize important decisions, in order to maximize your time actually getting work done. Avoid using meeting time to coordinate logistics between only a few individuals present at

a meeting; this can be done later. However, maintaining communication is always key; many group conflicts stem from poor communication.

Create listserves for different committees or different elements of the project. One master email list can include everyone the co-op has ever made contact with for the purposes of the occasional announcement about very major developments. Another email list can include everyone who is actively involved to announce meetings, opportunities for involvement and requests for help. The elected leadership body can have its own email list and each committee can have an email list.

Call each other. An enormous sea of food co-op related emails can be overwhelming sometimes and hard to digest completely. If there's something urgent, important or complicated you wish to discuss with members, pick up the phone!

Follow up with each other. When someone says they will do a task, call or email them a few days later to remind them. Some co-ops begin each meeting with a task check-in where the facilitator or appointed homework checker reads through a lists of tasks assigned at the past meeting and asks individuals to report on progress.

Take advantage of technology. There are many web-based tools for helping groups stay organized, including Google Docs, Google Sites ("wikies"), Google Wave, Doodle polls for scheduling meetings, Survey Monkey, file sharing websites, social networking sites, and more.

Accountability

It is important to have a system of accountability in place that the members agree to and enforce collectively. Maintaining effective communication (see previous section) is a vital basis for accountability, but some co-ops have implemented additional strategies to hold their student members accountable. Here are some strategies that other student food co-ops use:

At the Maryland Food Collective, every member-worker, once offered a paying job in the collective, spends their first two weeks on the job under 'review,' such that they have to informally speak to every other member-worker individually and ask for feedback on their performance and then after two weeks the rest of the collective votes on whether to hire them permanently. At any time after that, any collective member may request that any other member be put on review, in which the process is repeated, even if the individual has been working there

for a long time. After two weeks the collective votes on whether to keep the member in the collective.

At Earthfoods there is a large poster of a tree and each branch is assigned to one of the co-managers. Each co-manager's branch should have 4 leaves. Any co-manager can choose to praise one of their peers by putting a fruit on their branch, or to criticize their peer by putting a bug on one of their leaves. Too many bugs on a leaf result in the loss of that leaf, which equates to docking that person's pay by one hour. Some behaviors automatically lead to bugs or loss of leaves. Coming in late or inadequately completing a shift gets a bug, and someone who misses a shift altogether loses a leaf. Upon losing one or more leaves a co-manager reports to the Human Resources Committee to develop a plan for catching up or improving. A certain number of lost leaves or blown shifts results in automatic termination and any three co-managers can recommend that other co-managers be considered for termination. One long-standing co-manager reported that there's approximately one termination motion per semester, acknowledging that the system is not perfect because people can be considered for termination due to personal grudges sometimes.

A co-op should have a specific system in place for holding members accountable, and recognize that enforcing community agreements is vital to the co-op's viability.

Food Purchasing Policies

As previously noted, all of the student food co-ops I studied are based upon progressive food policies surrounding nutrition, the environment and social issues, but the nature of the policies and the way they are carried out varies dramatically between co-ops. All of the co-ops have individual members (or sometimes pairs of members) who are each responsible for placing orders for a category of products. For example, most co-ops have a produce buyer, a dry or bulk goods buyer, a dairy buyer, et cetera. The amount of discretion that these buyers have, however, varies greatly. Some of these co-ops simply have a mission statement or other pronounced principles and allow the individual who places the orders to determine which sources to use (Earthfoods, Kresge, Flaming Eggplant). Others have additional rules governing how purchasing decisions are made, such as Sprout's all certified organic rule or the San Diego Food Co-op's long list of rules and regulations encompassing concerns around nutrition, packaging and the

environment (see Appendix D). The Maryland Food Collective and Earthfoods require new vendors and sometimes even individual products to be approved collectively by their members. The Berkeley Student Food Collective has chosen to follow the Real Food Challenge's Criteria For Real Food but is still open to developing more specific policies or allowing members or the board to weigh in on decisions when the Guidelines allow for many options.

Some co-ops have food purchasing systems limited to overarching principles about sustainability and ethics, but leaving specific decisions up to the specific buyers (eg the produce buyer, the dry goods buyer, the dairy buyer, etc.). Earthfoods, Kresge Natural Foods, Food for Thought and the Flaming Eggplant all work like this. For example, Food for Thought's mission statement reads as follows; "Food for Thought is a student run organization that seeks to promote sustainability through our café and educational activities," and furthermore, one of the organization's stated goals is to "work with universities and businesses interested in using all or part of FFT's model to inform their own food service goals, and will challenge businesses and universities to adopt more progressive, sustainable foodservice practices." Their produce buyer told me that he strives to buy all the café's produce from primarily Oregon and California and that he pays close attention to the food distributors he purchases from and is willing to make changes based on environmental impact of different farms that they source from. Though their food purchasing policy is similarly limited to a general mission statement, students at Kresge Natural foods emphasize that the co-op is important to them because it also creates opportunities for discussions of various food systems issues that arise in meetings and informally around the store between co-op members and other customers.

The San Diego Food Co-op has a written food policy (Appendix D) which specifically prohibits the co-op from sourcing food with preservatives, GMOs, food coloring, brown sugar, white sugar, or other extremely refined sweeteners, and also addresses some issues by listing priorities, for example unsweetened products are preferred over products sweetened with fruit juice which are preferred over products sweetened with honey which are preferred over products sweetened with fructose. While some of these policies are very specific, others could perhaps be better clarified, such as the rule against purchasing foods "processed with chemicals." Overall, these food purchasing policies provide a thorough guide for food buyers at the co-op to follow without forcing endless conversations about food purchasing decision every time a prospective new product or company is considered.

In group decisions about sourcing from particular vendors, at Maryland generally one or a few members will research that vendor's history and products in regards to their environmental and social impacts and report to the rest of the co-op before the decision is made. The danger with bringing specific items, vendors or distributors up for consideration by a board or the membership is well acknowledged by the larger community co-op grocery stores (personal communication with managers with Briar Patch and Davis Food Co-ops in California and What Happened to the Berkeley Co-op contains several articles that discuss the challenges of having a board too involved with food politics) as it creates the potential for the decision-making body to become polarized around controversial food politics. However, students at the Maryland Food Collective and Earthfoods don't see polarization due to discussions about food purchasing decisions as a particularly problematic issue in their co-ops. Perhaps in a co-op with very high turnover there is less opportunity for polarity to develop. An advantage of having all members discuss a vendor or product before purchasing it is that the discussion around a controversial item is an opportunity for education and part of what makes the student run food co-op so valuable to a campus community.

The BSFC chose to adopt the Real Food Challenge's Criteria for Real Food (see Appendix C) as its overarching food purchasing policy. The Real Food Challenge defines 'real' food as food that is ecologically sound, fair, humane and local/community-based. The interpretation that the BSFC is using requires all food purchased to fall into the green section under at least one of the four categories, and not at all in the red. So for example, the collective could sell a bar of chocolate if it were fair trade certified, without it needing to be certified organic, as long as it did not contain any corn syrups, hydrogenated oils or other ingredients in the red sections of the guidelines. Many university dining services are working with the Real Food Challenge to incorporate real food into at least 20% of their food (as measured in dollars spent) and the Berkeley Student Food Collective wishes to push the envelope by proving that a 100% real food system is feasible according to these guidelines. Because other institutions are recognizing these criteria and using them as a tool for their food purchasing policies, these criteria are now part of the national dialogue about food purchasing policies. Members of the collective have begun experimenting with these policies in crafting the collective's menu and testing it out through weekly campus sandwich stand sales and miscellaneous catering events,

but more business planning and actual implementation of the full operations of a business that uses these criteria is still needed to assess the feasibility, benefits and drawbacks of the policy.

It is important for a food cooperative to take into consideration the social and environmental impacts of its food, since a concern for community is one of the fundamental and defining characteristics of a cooperative, according to the ICA (see Appendix A).

Bylaws and Other Policies

All co-ops need written policies to help maintain accountability and organization. Some co-ops that I studied had well documented policies and others had many informal policies, which are not well documented. Because all the student co-ops that I studied are either 501(c)(3) nonprofits that are separate legal entities from the university or are registered student groups that are part of the university, I discuss only these two routes in this section.

For 501(c)(3) nonprofits

Most food co-ops would not normally qualify for federal tax-exempt—also known as 501(c)(3)—status because they are retail businesses. However, as a hands-on lab for students wishing to learn about running a business and food systems, and as an organization providing a service to an educational institution, some student-run food co-ops can qualify for this status. For more discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of 501(c)(3) status and requirements for qualification, see the section on Legal Status (p. 21-22). Upon deciding to pursue nonprofit status, a co-op will need to write Articles of Incorporation and file them with the secretary of state of their state, then file bylaws with the secretary of state and then submit as application to the IRS for nonprofit status, which needs to include proof of incorporation at the state-level, the organization's bylaws and Form 1023. The materials in the application need to make a strong case for why the organization should receive nonprofit status and I highly recommend consulting with a lawyer before completing bylaws and Form 1023. Appendix F includes the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of the Berkeley Student Food Collective. Note however, that many of the clauses in these documents are to comply with California state policies, which may need to be revised to incorporate and comply with laws in other states.

In addition to these legally-binding policies and other documents, most co-ops have other internal policies. Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws are legally binding documents, and whenever an organization wishes to amend them, the secretary of state must be notified and be given a copy of the revised version for public record. These documents need to have a lot of clauses that are required by law, but difficult for most people to read through and fully comprehend. Most co-ops I studied have additional written policies pertaining to their day-to-day operations, which are very direct and practical.

For 501(c)(3) nonprofits and student organizations

A student organization may need to have a constitution or other written policy statements filed with the university to be recognized as a student group. Regardless of whether a student co-op is part of the university or legally independent, there are many model policies I came across which may be of use to other co-ops. Appendix G and H include the Earthfoods and Sprouts member handbooks respectively. These handbooks give the reader a picture of how these co-ops work on a daily basis and how decisions are made among other organizational aspects. Having a regularly updated handbook like these can be a useful tool in maintaining institutional memory for any student-run business.

Advisory Boards

Why Have an Advisory Board?

Many community co-ops have an advisory board while in the start-up and early phases of development in order to ensure that expertise that its members may be lacking is made up for by individuals willing to lend their expertise for developing specific parts of the co-op, but not necessarily being involved in as full of a capacity as the main organizers of the co-op. It is especially helpful for a start-up student co-op to have an advisory board because chances are that a team of students, regardless of passion and enthusiasm, will not have all of the skills or knowledge necessary to start a café, deli or grocery store. It is also often healthy to have your advisors play devil's advocate with the co-op's leaders to help identify areas for improvement.

How to Create an Advisory Board

Henehan and Anderson (2001, p. 7-8) provide a discussion of the role of an advisory board and how to create one for a start-up cooperative. Students also often have a wealth of expertise available to them in the form of faculty, graduate students and administrators on campus. The BSFC has been able to access a tremendous amount of very helpful guidance from UC Berkeley's Boalt School of Law and Haas School of Business. Faculty in the natural and social sciences can also be helpful in developing educational programs for the co-op to enhance student engagement in food systems issues.

Many regional small business associations provide free or low cost consulting to small businesses and nonprofits. Local restaurants that feature sustainable and healthy foods may be willing to share business planning advice, cooking demonstrations and recipes. Your food co-op can invite them to sit on an advisory board. You don't necessarily have to see yourselves in competition with other cafes, restaurants, delis and groceries that feature sustainable foods; they generally may be very excited that a like-minded student co-op is opening because it increases the interest in sustainable, healthy and ethical foods in the area which is good for their business too, as long as your two eateries aren't offering the exact same types of foods within very close walking distance.

How to Effectively Engage and Get the Most Out of Your Advisory Board

Ideally, the various members of your advisory board will have very different areas of expertise, so a co-op will generally want to contact them with specific questions accordingly. However, it may be useful to hold a quarterly (or as needed) gathering of your most involved members and Advisory Board members for few hours to update them on the overall progress that has been made and to solicit input on some bigger picture issues that the organization is facing, such as the co-op's mission statement, location decision, organizational structure, fundraising strategies, etc. Keeping your Advisory Board members engaged and excited can lead to a snowball effect where they become excited about your organization and introduce your members to other experts in the field and/or potential donors. Advisory Board members generally work with your co-op because they really believe in the organization's mission and want to help, so it's important to show appreciation for their time and effort.

Educational and Community Building Programs

Some student co-ops enhance their contribution to the campus community by organizing educational programs, events and campaigns. For a wonderful example of the types of educational programs and services that a co-op can have see Black (1992, p. 33-37). The Berkeley Co-op had Home Economists on staff who conducted research on the products that the store bought and provided advice to purchasers and customers about the nutritional value of the products. They also participated heavily in the lobbying of state and national legislators, which led to the passing of numerous nutrition and health-related regulations into law.

Sprouts runs Community Eats and a bicycle delivery service (see Sprouts' profile). The Maryland Food Collective used to host movie nights and other events in their store. The BSFC intends to incorporate educational programs such as lectures, cooking classes, shared garden space, field trips to farms and others as a major component of its organizational identity.

University Relations

It is important for co-ops to do long term planning and maintain relationships with university and student government officials, so that as the campus landscape changes over the years, the co-op can stay current and make plans to adapt accordingly. Even though you and your peers may not be a part of the co-op ten years from now, its important to think about how every action will impact the co-ops members in the future.

Some individuals I interviewed requested to speak anonymously about university relations. As much as I can say is that different student food co-ops can have vastly different relationships with the university administration. Some have amicable relationships that result in generous grants and loans to the co-op and access to other resources such as free or reduced cost facilities to operate in. Other food co-ops entered campus as part of a political campaign which was adversarial to the university's existing food contracts, such as Maryland, Food for Thought, UC San Diego, and the Berkeley Collective, however some of these co-ops have been able to dramatically improve their relationships with campus administrators over time while others would describe their relationship with the university less favorably.

Emphasizing the educational and professional training opportunities that a co-op provides to students can help win university support in the form of grants, loans, rent subsidies, advice, inter-organizational and inter-departmental collaboration opportunities, publicity,

securing a good location, et cetera. Protesting university food policies or contracts does not have to be mutually exclusive from building positive relationships with campus administrators to achieve common goals. One student leader of Portland State's sustainability program noted how many administrators really like Food for Thought because it can attract positive publicity around the campus because the café offers so much local, organic and healthy food. While starting a co-op, consider what elements of it would be appealing to a wide variety of students and administrators, because their support could be very valuable. These advantages may not necessarily be environmentalist-oriented, but can also include the economic advantages of providing jobs and stimulating the local economy. See Zeuli (2002, p. 2) for a list of general strengths that a co-op provides to its local community, including community interest, flexible profit motives and financial advantages. Overall, many co-op and collective organizations form as part of leftist and counter-culture movements (Cox, 1994) and it is important to evaluate the benefits and challenges that this organizational identity poses and be ready to be an organization of integrity and acknowledge the risks associated with this identity.

Labor Force: Working with Paid Staff and Volunteers [operations]

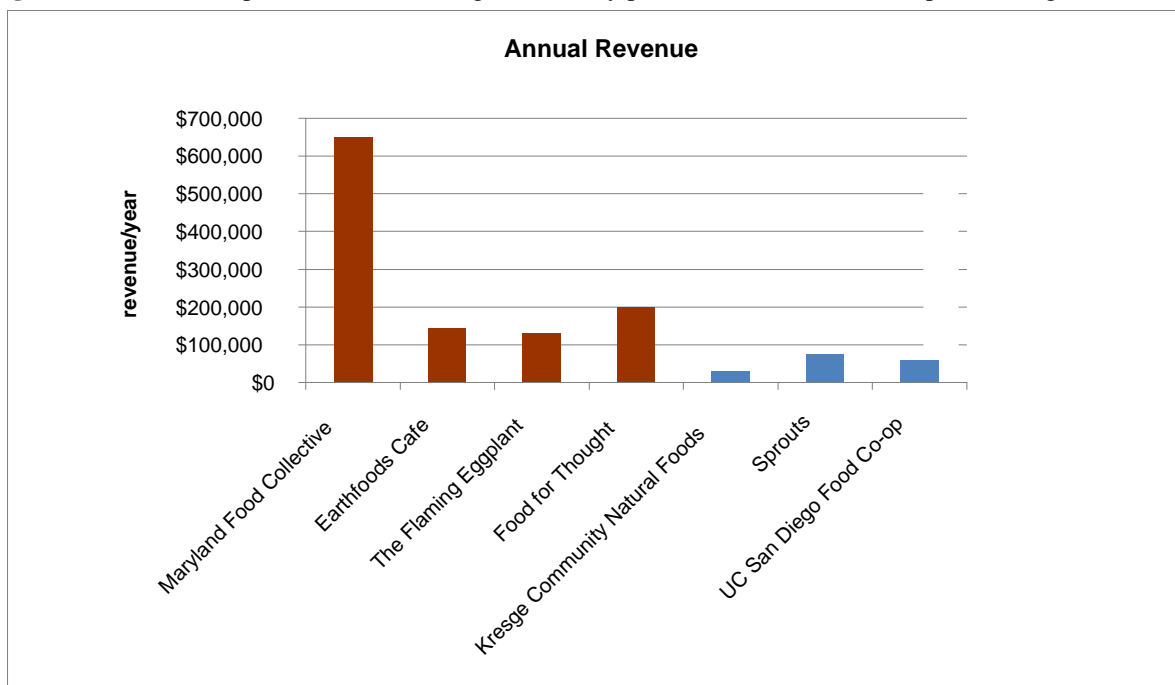
Powering your co-op with a mix of volunteers and paid staff can be an optimal way to ensure reliable service but also keep costs low and engage a larger group of people in the co-op if such a labor force is organized properly. Internal structure is crucial (Cook and Iliopoulos, 1999).

The all volunteer-run co-ops discussed in this paper are all limited in scope compared to their counterparts, which have some or all paid employees. An all-volunteer labor force may make it extremely difficult for a student food co-op to compete with other eateries in terms of number of customers and selection of food. Of the co-ops I studied, all the volunteer-run organizations have lower annual revenue than any of the co-ops that pay staff. I only studied seven existing co-ops so it is impossible to draw hard conclusions from this information, but it is certainly an interesting pattern to note (See *Figure 1*). However, one member of the UC San Diego Food Co-op who was involved both before and after this co-op switched to an all-volunteer structure noticed a big difference in the culture of the workforce. She noted that when workers were paid, there were more workers, but many of them openly admitted that they were part of the co-op first and foremost to get paid, whereas the workers in the all volunteer era of the

co-op tend to be motivated by a more genuine passion for building community around sustainable and healthy foods.

A paid labor force also offers the economic benefit of providing jobs to students and allowing the co-op to be an organization that students who need to work to make their way through school can be very involved in. This does mean that the cost of labor needs to be factored into the cost of goods, however, so this is where the volunteer labor helps; it keep costs lower, especially for the volunteers themselves who generally receive a discount or store credit for their contribution. The reliability and quality of service that a paid labor force is also important because this helps make the co-op a place that a wide variety of students want to depend upon for food.

Figure 1. The four co-ops on the left (in orange) are run by paid staff and the three co-ops on the right (in blue) are



run by volunteers. Note the difference in annual revenues between the two groups. These annual revenues can vary, so I attempted to use rough averages and more recent figures.

Turnover: how to handle it [operations]

Numerous sources cite inadequate training of employees as an ongoing problem, including Robert Neptune, a former General Manager at Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley, which no longer exists (see Neptune in *What Happened to the Berkeley Co-op?* 1992 p. 20). A

long-standing member of Food for Thought mentioned training as an ongoing issue due to high turnover rates.

Some co-ops try to continually train younger co-op members and foster gradual transitions. The San Diego Food Co-op requests that its members begin stepping back and training younger members of the co-op two quarters before they leave the co-op in order to ensure smooth transitions, a process they refer to as “disciplined withdrawal.” Similarly, Kresge Natural Foods at UC Santa Cruz has a “new egg” program, which is a process for newer members to gradually become core members by doing certain tasks with a core member and gradually taking on more responsibility until the core group consents to consider the new egg a core member.

Having clear and regularly updated member handbooks that include job descriptions, committee roles, step-by-step instructions, et cetera is very helpful (see Appendices G and H), but in person training for new members is crucial. Many student organizations have departing members leave exit documents with advice for how to do their job well and note any loose ends that need to be tied up still.

The Flaming Eggplant Café and the Berkeley Student Food Collective both chose to hire a full-time, non-student staff to help maintain continuity and act as a resource for incoming members.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations in this report are just recommendations based on what appears to work well or not well with the eight co-ops I studied. Every community is unique, as is every group of people who come together to start a co-op and some of these recommendations may work better or worse in different situations. The most important recommendations I can make are to do research, to solicit advice from people with experience and to recruit intelligent, talented and highly motivated critical thinkers to be involved in your co-op, especially in the start-up phase. Though I cannot prove this with any research data, from my experience in organizing around food, sustainability and social justice as a student for four years, I have a strong intuitive feeling that motivated members are the most important ingredient in a successful food co-op.

The cooperative model is currently being used on several college campuses across North America to offer more healthy, sustainable and ethical food options to students and the greater

campus community. Nearly all student food co-ops in existence incorporate sustainability into their mission statement or other statement of goals and values. They are opportunities for building community around real, sustainable food systems, exploring ethical food purchasing policies and increasing access to healthy and sustainable food options in university communities.

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Student Co-op Documents

Earthfoods Café: *Handbook*

San Diego Food Co-op: *Constitution, Red Docs* and *Green Docs*

Food for Thought: financial statements provided by a finance committee member

Flaming Eggplant: financial statements provided by Café Advisor

Sprouts: *Member Handbook* and annual budget provided by the President