

# CO-OP FACES OUTSTANDING OPPORTUNITY

## Seven board positions available soon

In an unprecedented move, none of the four remaining members of the co-op's board of directors, otherwise known as the Management Committee (MC), will renominate at this year's Annual General Meeting on Tuesday November 21. In previous years, at least two or three of the seven-member board would restand, but not this year.

Chairperson Motra Hayward said the retiring board would be available to smooth the transition. "It's a golden opportunity particularly for those with management skills and cooperative experience to help shape the future

direction of the co-op, which is arguably in the best position ever," she noted. "Sales are strong, membership continues to grow steadily, and we've put in some solid structures to ensure the co-op continues to meet that growth and the needs of its members."

Motra added that if members were interested in standing for the committee and wanted more information, they could email the MC ([alfalfa.mc@tpg.com.au](mailto:alfalfa.mc@tpg.com.au)) or the WHO ARE WE? page of the website.

■ The Management Committee's year in review is on page 7.

**Annual General Meeting**  
**Tuesday November 21, 2006 DETAILS PAGE 3**

## The year to October 2006

### ■ IT and computers

Work continued on improving the co-op's computer databases, particularly doing e-mailouts to members. In February, we began offering fully-itemised receipts upon request and setup a second till. Also in February, two computer keyboards were damaged by liquids, necessitating a policy restricting the use of liquids near the computers. Improvements were made to computer cabling in the office in March. In August, all keyboards were fitted with plastic keyboard protectors to keep them clean. Throughout August and September, the co-op's database program, which runs the till and manages the products' and members' databases, was overhauled and stabilised in preparation for upgrading the program. (Thanks to Hassan for his tireless work, particularly when the tills went down and it was back to calculators, pens and paper and shoppers calling out prices – memories of our pre-computer days not that many years ago. And thanks to Tanya for her work earlier in the year.)

### ■ Infrastructure

■ **COUNTER AREA REVAMP** The new two-till counter was installed in late December. There were bugs with the new design, and while some were fixed such as improving adjustability of keyboards, others stretched on for some months. In June, a WorkCover Improvement Notice led us to consult with OH+S-qualified co-op members (Leighanne and Josh) on a risk assessment of the current till layout. After a full staff consultation, the co-op decided on a stand-up rather than the current sit-down option at the counter. (The final modifications to allow for this are being undertaken in October.)

■ **WARM WATER FOR WASHUP** In April, warm water was made available in the outside sink for people to use after using the toilet.

■ **ELECTRICAL** In April, repairs were made to the fusebox, restoring power to part of the storeroom. Fuses were also labelled. In line with WorkCover Improvement Notices in June, major renovations to the electrical circuitry in the till area were made along with the installation of emergency exit signs at the

side and back doors. (Much of the labour – carpentry, electrical, plumbing – was done by volunteers.) Also in June, we installed a CO<sub>2</sub> fire extinguisher. In July, the single poorly-situated, horribly-bright fluoro in the office was replaced by two better-sited energy efficient compact fluoros.



■ **MANUAL HANDLING** Also in line with the WorkCover Improvement Notice, we undertook a consultation with staff on the risks associated with how we move goods around the co-op. The storeroom has now been rearranged so that stock is better placed from an OH+S perspective. This task is ongoing, with the next step to better manage stock currently housed under the two wooden tables.

### ■ Website

After being out of action for four months, the co-op's website went back up in mid-December. The re-designed website went up in May. A major revamp of the PRODUCTS page was done and continues to be updated as products come and go in the co-op. The NEWS page is also used to announce new and deleted lines. In July, the co-op's Rules (constitution) was made available as a downloadable file on the website.

### ■ Other

■ **POLICY** In February, the co-op's list of policies was made available on the co-op's computers as well as in printed form. In April, staff Job Descriptions were added.

■ **VISIT TO THE BLUE MOUNTAINS FOOD CO-OP** The two Stock Coordinators (Lisa and David) and I met with Blue Mountains Food Co-op stock buyer (Leanne) in May and exchanged information on new products; better and cheaper suppliers and buying together. We also discussed the changes they've made to their structure (rostering, day-to-day management) as they continue to manage their co-op's impressive sales growth.

■ **MEMBERSHIP** In September, we introduced new membership cards (type-written names and numbers) that are produced in-house, printed and laminated as needed. Membership continued to grow at an average 40 per month, with 455 new members added in the last financial year.

# **Annual General Meeting**

**6.30PM FOR 7PM**

**Tuesday November 21, 2006**

**Function Room Level 3  
@Newtown RSL**

**cnr Enmore Road and Station Street, Enmore**

Members and non-members of the RSL must first sign  
the Register in the foyer before they go into the meeting

## **Agenda**

- 1. Attendance and apologies**
- 2. Appointment of facilitator, minute taker**
- 3. Acceptance of minutes from the previous Annual General Meeting**
- 4. Office Coordinators' reports**
- 5. Directors' report**
- 6. Finance report**
- 7. Other reports**
- 8. Election of Returning Officer**
- 9. Call for nominations for the seven-member Management Committee**
- 10. Confirmation of the Auditor**
- 11. General business**

**All members are welcome to attend, speak and vote.**

I've been a Stock Coordinator for about eight months now, and in general, I find being around the co-op crew inspires me to grow and improve my work. I enjoy the feedback from customers. I'm heartened to hear the shop is looking good, is always well-stocked and that more and more shoppers find they rarely need to go elsewhere to complete their shopping.

Here's a glimpse of those nine months.

■ **STOCK POLICY** When deciding whether to stock or continue to stock a product, I'm guided by the co-op's objectives as well as customer needs and desires. I've often referred to the Suggestions Box in the shop as well as emails sent via the PRODUCTS page on the website for ideas. This year I discontinued two products that didn't meet those objectives. One was Iranian dates, because they're fumigated upon importation; an alternative is the Medjool date. The other was the carob buttons (standard as well as sugar-free) because they contain genetically-modified soy products. The standard buttons were also high in refined cane sugar. An alternative is our mostly organic and GE-free Carmel Valley carob treats and bars.

■ **OUR SUPPLIERS** I'm particularly conscious of how important it is to build better relationships with our suppliers. This has meant asking about where a product line comes from, how and who produces it, and its quality. I've also deliberately chosen smaller suppliers where appropriate, for instance Middlebrook Honey, Tregagle coffee and the not-for-profit Common Ground Bakery.

■ **CHANGE OF SEASONS** It's important I'm aware of how the seasons affect what people feel drawn to eat. With spring well and truly sprung, I've noticed shoppers moving toward lighter foods and so I'm keen to bring in more dips and condiments to accompany summer salads rather than winter soups and bakes.

■ **PAPER BARRIER** You might have noticed the unbleached paper liners we've placed inside the plastic bins in the shop. That's because nuts are high in fat and can absorb chemicals from the plastic bins. Similarly, the coconut oil no longer comes in a plastic drum; it's been replaced with a metal one.

■ **WHAT'S WHAT** Relabelling the shop has been long overdue and much needed. The new labels, which include country of origin and

status, are on almost all the bins and jars. More visual information is planned.

■ **THE WEB** The website now has a full list of products by category as well as what's new in the shop and what's popular. We plan to add more detail about each product and to keep it up-to-date. Shoppers can directly email the Stock Coordinators from this webpage.

■ **WHERE THINGS ARE** In the shop, I've been improving the placement of stock, so like is with like, for example, putting all the confectionery together, so shoppers can more easily find things. (I've done the same thing in the storeroom and organised it to improve access.) I've been determined to remove the last remaining bins from the shop floor, mostly by putting stock in smaller containers and thereby fitting more in. This has also improved shopper safety and ease of access. I've also made sure the attachments on the liquid dispensers are working properly.

■ **KEEPING IT SIMPLE** David and I have been simplifying the products database, which has sped up processing time at the till. I've also added a lot more information on when products are delivered so Shop Coordinators can better inform shoppers. I've also been keen to better verbally communicate product information with shop staff.

■ **GO WITH THE FLOW** How we order has an effect on spoilage, so to keep stock as fresh as possible, I've adjusted ordering to suit. My motto is to keep it flowing: ordering weekly where possible so that as few grocery lines as possible are more than a week old in the shop. If items don't sell quickly, I'm buying smaller quantities and displaying them in the shop in jars rather than bins.

■ **MAINTENANCE** I've also taken on lining up tradespeople for some of the maintenance jobs, such as to do with the fridges, pest control and garbage services.

■ **LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER** It's important the two Stock Coordinators work well together and know each other's jobs – I've been training David in grocery ordering – and to look out for each other's domains. I want to thank David for his vast product knowledge, his enthusiasm and his obvious love for this industry. It's a pleasure to work with him. I also want to thank my predecessor, Gavin Farley, for his commitment, integrity and generosity.

I have been working in this position for the past nine months, and despite its ups and downs, it's been rewarding. I'll take you through some of the key areas.



■ **SEASONALITY** When I began back in February there wasn't much emphasis on seasonal buying. What I've done is slowly change the focus to the extent that about 90 percent of our fruit+veg is now seasonal. This hasn't reduced sales and in fact many shoppers are now asking more about what's in season because they want to eat in-season. I've also helped Lisa and the Shop Coordinators better understand seasonality.

■ **BUYING AND SELLING** Initially, our only supplier of fresh produce was Back To Eden. To increase seasonally-based diversity I've expanded our supplier list to include Organics Direct and Eco-Farms. I set about this rather cautiously, because some wholesalers were getting a little touchy if we made orders with other distributors. Currently, Back To Eden is our primary supplier, with Organics Direct at times supplying the less well-known produce such as bitter melon, dragonfruit, various Asian greens, as well as a constant supply of much-welcomed fresh herbs and high-end fruits, such as certain apples, citrus and pears. Eco-Farms began supplying us again in May primarily with juicing produce, however, because they have a diverse range of exceptional quality, we've increased our orders with them, particularly for our weekend trade, complementing the order from Back To Eden.

■ **FARMER-DIRECT** I have also made a conscientious decision to buy direct from farmers. This has been motivated by both the co-op's objectives, and my own concerns with the quality and integrity of fresh produce, and its accessibility and availability. Farmer-direct means fairer prices for farmers and shoppers; it creates an avenue for direct feedback, input and support; it upholds and protects the integrity of edible flora; and encourages a strong and diverse agriculture as well as efficient delivery.

■ **FARM FIELD DAY** Earlier this year, I attended a farm-based field day on behalf of the co-op, and food co-ops collectively. This day was organised by a co-op member who works for

Liverpool City Council, with the purpose of 'planting a seed' in the Sydney basin for organic agriculture. Currently, there are only three known certified organic farms in the basin, so getting more local growers – who are primarily small market gardeners – up and running and certified organic could mean a great deal for Alfalfa House and the wider community. I wasn't so much interested in procuring new suppliers for now, but rather to build a long-term relationship with growers, with a view to buying direct one day. At the moment we buy direct from two farms.

■ **NORTH COAST PRODUCERS** Gunther Loel, who's based in Bellingen, initially began supplying us with Russian garlic and macadamias grown on his farm. As a trial, he then sourced other local produce to build a more substantial and diverse range, which now includes avocados, bananas, mandarins and oranges. Then three other local co-ops came on board – UTS, Sydney University and Thoughtful Foods at UNSW. Together, it has allowed us to receive regular deliveries. This has worked out well for all: the farmers, Gunther, the co-ops and reportedly their shoppers, with everyone enjoying the delicious, seasonal, well-priced produce.

■ **TOP FARM** Tilligery Organic Produce is located at Port Stephens, just north of Newcastle and has been supplying us since February. The Bartons grow non-hybrid open-pollinated cultivars in a true 'organic' context, i.e., treating the farm and its inhabitants as a whole organism. They utilise soil enrichment, diverse-cropping and other well-established procedures in harmony with the local biosphere and it shows. Due to intense local demand, supply has been sporadic, but when it arrives it's always warmly welcomed. So far we've bought coriander, mizuna, sugar snap and shelling peas, rhubarb, rocket, silverbeet, the odd duck egg and a range of lettuce that isn't usually available from the usual avenues – buttercrunch, butternut, cos, frilly pink, iceberg, purple oak and radicchio.

Look out for the farmer-direct produce in store now. It's clearly labelled. Also check out the PRODUCTS page on the website for what to look out for each month.

■ At the time of going to print, the Annual Report 2005-6 wasn't ready but will be tabled by me at the AGM. I will report on the Profit+Loss Statement and the Balance Sheet then. In the meantime, here are some pieces of financial information you may find useful.

## ■ Monthly net profits (+)/losses (-)

July 05	-\$1689
August 05	+\$740
September 05	-\$3614
October 05	-\$601
November 05	-\$8574
December 05	+\$2702
January 06	+\$11
February 06	-\$2773
March 06	-\$3722
April 06	+\$4051
May 06	-\$7223
June 06	+\$3579
PROFIT/LOSS	-\$17,113

## ■ Sales figures

July 05	up 43.9%	on Jul 04
August 05	up 43.2%	on Aug 04
September 05	up 32.9%	on Sep 04
October 05	up 35.8%	on Oct 04
November 05	up 41.3%	on Nov 04
December 05	up 22.6%	on Dec 04
January 06	up 33.9%	on Jan 05
February 06	up 26.1%	on Feb 05
March 06	up 19.9%	on Mar 05
April 06	up 11.3%	on Apr 05
May 06	up 9.5%	on May 05
June 06	up 7.3%	on Jun 05

This is not a pretty picture, mostly a string of losses, punctuated by the odd good result. Sales growth wasn't as strong as in the previous year. While in 2004-5, sales grew by 48% on 2003-4, this last financial year, they grew by 27% on 2004-5. We did expect meeting that kind of growth was going to be

a challenge. We clearly didn't do as well when the growth fell away in April. There were some months when over-ordering and subsequent stock loss particularly in fruit+veg, were a little high, although that has improved markedly since February.

Our wages bill was also high. A number of permanent part-time staff resigned earlier in the calendar year and were replaced by casual staff with a view to bringing in a permanent roster. The process took longer than anticipated and resulted in a blowout of about \$4000 in the budgeted wages bill.

The good news is that August and September posted sizeable profits, \$3209 and \$9629, respectively, helping to improve our cash flow. September sales resisted the trend in previous years when sales have levelled off after August and declined over the summer months, mostly because of the holidays and because people tend to eat less in summer. We're quietly confident we can continue to buck the trend.

## ■ Achievements

- We're finally paying off a long-term debt to a member for the materials he bought mostly for shelving in the shop, office and storeroom.
- We've developed a Financial Procedures Manual
- We've created an assets register
- We've prepared an Annual Budget we think we can stick to.

Sadly, Denis Bonner who had been an outstanding Finance Coordinator and only joined us in November 2005 resigned in September. Gabrielle Nicholson and Stevie Bee have been valiantly battling the books between them since, and with the short-term assistance of a contracted bookkeeper are doing a remarkable job.

## When's a good time to volunteer?

The obvious answer is almost anytime. The co-op can always do with more volunteers around the place. There's always plenty to do. Some days and times are better than others, so please call 9519 3374 to book in. Remember, volunteers receive the 25% Extra Discount when shopping.

# Certainly an eventful year

This past year has certainly been an eventful, challenging and productive one for the Management Committee (MC).

Since last AGM we've focused on:

- Managing rapid growth
- Keenly supporting that growth by upgrading infrastructure and IT systems and also securing professional IT support for the co-op's computer systems.
- Consultative decision-making, in liaison with staff and other members. The cooperative approach involves appreciating various points of view and perspectives.
- Improving internal and external communications, including record keeping
- Creating equity and accountability in the workplace
- Preparing employment agreements for staff, updating staff job descriptions and conducting staff reviews
- Updating policies and procedures, particularly relating to work practices
- Improving volunteer coordination
- Managing complex issues such as complying with OH+S regulations and other regulatory and legislative requirements.

In 2005-6, the MC voluntarily contributed their time, energy, experience and expertise to the broader management requirements of the co-op, and, where necessary, day-to-day management in consultation and with the much-appreciated assistance of staff and volunteers.

At the last AGM, seven were elected to the MC: Carolyn Watt, Roberto Rouco, Nick Penty, Jacqueline Jensen, Althea Mackenzie, Bruce Diekman and Motra Hayward. For various reasons, three resigned in the current term. We thank Nick, Carolyn and Roberto for their contributions and acknowledge their continued active involvement in the co-op.

This year, the MC came to realise that continuity in day-to-day management required a Manager. Although it had been envisaged that staff would work towards a group management structure, due to increasing growth and pressures, staff changes and the need to respond quickly and effectively to unforeseen demands, the MC

decided to employ a Manager.

We are very pleased to announce that member Sarah Cook has taken up the challenge. She will bring great experience and skills to the co-op – the AGM will be an opportune time to welcome her.

The three MC vacancies proved difficult to fill – for much of the year we were down to the minimum number required for a quorum, with ex-MC member David Mansfield deputising on one occasion. Our thanks to David for his ongoing support and advice, particularly on financial matters. As the four remaining MC members, we persevered honing our skills to match the challenges.

In addition to monthly meetings, MC held two strategic planning meetings, one in January focusing on Future Directions and in September on Financial Planning.

The MC were also involved in employing new staff: Lisa Durante (Stock Coordinator/Groceries), David Tilley, (Stock Coordinator/Fruit+Veg), Denis Bonner (Finance Coordinator); and Sarah Cook (Manager, from October).

## ■ Moving on

The current board won't be re-nominating for the MC at this AGM. After fulfilling the need for a highly hands-on management approach, it's time for others to undertake a more strategic role.

The MC would like to emphasise that it has been an extremely valuable and rewarding experience, and that under significant pressure, we discovered a strength and unexpected degree of support in each other that kept us going. We intend to continue working voluntarily for the co-op and look forward to offering our support and experience to the new committee.

We encourage members to nominate for the MC. Four is the minimum number required to keep the co-op as a co-op, seven is the maximum. The AGM is therefore a great opportunity for members with the time, commitment, skills and energy to volunteer at a time when Alfalfa is moving into what we're sure will be a bright future.

Motra Hayward, Bruce Diekman, Althea Mackenzie, Jacqueline Jensen

# TRADING HOURS

MONDAY	11am-7pm
TUESDAY	11am-7pm
WEDNESDAY	11am-7pm
THURSDAY	11am-8pm
FRIDAY	11am-7pm
SATURDAY	9am-6pm
SUNDAY	11am-6pm

## Other discounters

Co-ops in the Sydney region that give a 10% discount to Alfalfa House members.

- Manly (21b Whistler Street, Manly)
- Green Tucker Store (51 Arthur Street Forestville)
- Thoughtful Foods (Uni of NSW)
- Sydney Uni (Wentworth Building)
- UTS (Student Union area, University of Technology Sydney main tower)
- Blue Mountains (Halfpenny Arcade, Katoomba).
- Bower Reuse and Repair Centre, Addison Road Community Centre, Addison Road, Marrickville.

If undeliverable please return to  
113 Enmore Road ENMORE NSW 2042

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AUSTRALIA

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**Moving?  
or changing  
phone numbers  
or email  
addresses?  
Let the co-op  
know as soon  
as you do.**

## You can't put it back

The co-op is committed to keeping the stock as uncontaminated as possible. As such if you put food from the bins or jars into your own bags and you change your mind, you can't put all or even some of that food back into the bins or jars. It's yours to buy. The same goes for the unpackaged bread – use the tongs provided. If you touch the unpackaged bread (or any unpackaged product) with your hands, it's yours to buy.

**Don't forget  
to show your  
membership card  
when you shop.  
It avoids confusion  
and helps make  
life easier for the  
person at the till.**