



Positive Change At the Cusp of “What’s Possible”

by Halle Riddlebarger – Marketing Manager

Spare change really adds up! Our new [Positive Change program](#) launched on January 1st, and is designed to raise money for local non-profit organizations working to better our community. We believe in the power of change and the power of community – Positive Change combines these two beliefs into one powerful program. The Positive Change program is one of the many ways MFC fulfills the [seventh cooperative principle: Concern for Community](#).

Positive Change raises funds from community members who choose to round-up the total of any MFC or Café purchase to the nearest dollar. Each month, a selected non-profit organization receives 100% of the funds collected during the month. This program allows everyone to participate in creating positive change in our community.

To get the program started in 2019, the Outreach Committee, composed of MFC staff members, carefully selected 12 local non-profit organizations based on our previous outreach efforts. The Outreach Committee gives priority to organizations promoting local, organic food, food related issues, or community health concerns. We look forward to offering community support to the following organizations in 2019: [Community Works](#), [Medford Food Project](#), [Pollinator Project Rogue Valley](#), [Children’s Miracle Network](#), [Maslow Project](#), [Sanctuary One](#), [CASA of Jackson County](#), [Southern Oregon Land Conservancy](#), [Rogue Valley Farm to School](#), [Rogue Farm Corps](#), [ACCESS Nutrition Programs](#), and [Family Nurturing Center](#).

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An interview with Jon Steinman, author of Grocery Story – The Promise of Food Co-ops in the Age of Grocery Giants

1. You interviewed scores of people in communities all over Canada and the USA. What did people value most about their local co-op?

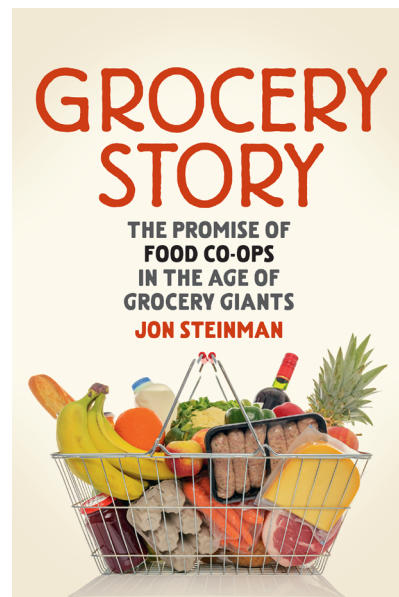
People love their food co-ops because they offer an experience of community –an experience often void in the lonely aisles of chain retailers. Walking into a food co-op can feel like walking into a bustling community center. This is certainly the case at the most successful of co-ops. The sensation is not so dissimilar to what draws people to farmers’ markets... however, ‘drawn’ might not be the best word... it’s more of a ‘hunger’ –an innate human craving for face-to-face connection and social gathering with our ‘tribe’. The hunger is particularly strong in this very young and experimental age of so-called ‘social’ media. I’ve walked into no other type of grocery store that comes anywhere close to offering the joy that is so often found at farmers’ markets.

2. Consumer Co-ops like you feature in “Grocery Story” probably only account for 1% of total grocery store sales. What explains their out-sized influence on the food retail business? How does that influence affect the overall food industry?

It’s like the famous quote from [Margaret Mead](#) –“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”. This is the history of food co-ops –always having been on the cusp of ‘what’s possible’. The dominant grocers on the other hand are not always that thoughtful –it’s not really the business they’re in. They’re really really good at influencing consumer demand, supplying that demand, and doing it at the lowest possible cost and the lowest price. They’re also highly ‘committed’ –committed to the bottom line and satisfying their shareholders through the maximization of profits.

Thankfully, ‘thoughtful’ is an intoxicating trait –it’s the mind hearing what the heart has to say. And the voice of the heart put into action is powerful –so powerful that for every step food co-ops and their suppliers take toward more conscientious food systems, the hearts and minds of all eaters transform with it. This shifting consciousness and the resulting changes in consumer expectations are loud enough

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**positive
change**
January 2019 recipient

The Outreach Committee, with the assistance of both the front end and Café counter staff, are currently narrowing down a list of potential 2020 recipients. Once the organizations have been vetted by staff, we will ask MFC's ownership to choose the 2020 Positive Change recipients when they cast their ballots in the annual Board of Director's election in May. We hope these first two years of the program are a great success!

For the third year of the program, we will begin asking interested organizations to apply to be considered for the Positive Change program. All Positive Change applications will be vetted by MFC's Outreach Committee and front end staff, and selected recipients will be democratically chosen by MFC's owners in the annual election. At MFC's discretion, the recipient calendar may be preempted to raise emergency or disaster relief funds.

When considering recipient organizations, we will give priority to organizations that:

- Are registered 501(c)3 non-profit organizations
- Use funding for work related to food, food related issues, or community health concerns
- Are based in the communities served by Medford Food Co-op
- Reflect the cultural and racial diversity of our communities
- Are nonpartisan and do not advocate a particular religion
- Use funding for a specific project (instead of general operation costs)

We look forward to growing community and growing support for important projects that have the power to transform our community for the better. Thank you in advance for your help creating Positive Change in the Rogue Valley! ■

that the grocery giants can't ignore it. There's much to celebrate when the largest grocers stock more and more shelves with organic food or when they commit to doing away with eggs from caged hens. No question, the work of food co-ops has been pivotal in these systemic changes within the dominant food system. Our co-op here in Nelson, BC is well aware that folks from nearby grocery giant Save-On-Foods visit our store regularly to see what we're up to. It's fascinating to watch how the chain stores try to learn from food co-ops. Particularly because they often seem to trip over themselves quite regularly. They may very well be improving their product offerings, but their actions may also be harming the very intentions that the original idea had set out to achieve. As an example, when a chain grocer markets a product from 700 km away as "local", they're undermining the actual local foodmakers who are producing the same product. The ability of truly local foodmakers to market their product as "local" carries far less value when the chains push heavily to expand the 'local' definition. This is what I communicate extensively in the book. It's a really important distinction that sets food co-ops apart from all other grocers. Food co-ops genuinely value their local suppliers. It's why the [Kootenay Co-op](#) refers to all local products as "True Local". It's why being or becoming a member-owner of a food co-op is so important. Shopping at food co-ops brings our food purchases into integrity.

3. My experience has been that co-ops like those you profile are owned by the consumers who shop there but the most committed individuals are the people who work there. What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of that dynamic?

If by 'committed' you mean committed to participating in the democratic underpinnings of the food co-op, I think you're probably correct. Employees are generally more engaged than shoppers. They often make up a notable contingent of the members who attend our annual general meetings of the Kootenay Co-op. I see this as a promising sign as I'm pretty sure one of the reasons many employees are so engaged with the democratic processes of their co-op is that they really truly understand how special and important their co-op is. How could they not, they're immersed in it day-to-day. This is what I try to achieve in the book –to share what makes food co-ops so important and to inspire the wild enthusiasm that I know I myself have towards my own food co-op.

4. What was the most surprising thing you learned in doing research for your book?

It was certainly a surprise to learn of just how extensive the resistance was to the rise of chain grocers in early to mid-20th century America. Louisiana Governor, [Huey Long](#) might have captured it best when in 1934 he said, "I would rather have thieves and gangsters than chain stores in Louisiana." In the same way we are witnessing today the raw impact of online retailers on the future of brick-and-mortar retailers, or the impact of online media on the future of print media, early-mid 20th century business-owners and civic-minded folk were the first to witness the raw impact of chain retailers and their distant headquarters on the heart and soul of 'main street' and on the well-being of food- and farm-based businesses. The efforts that were made at the highest levels of government to either prevent or restrict the growth of chains is astounding. You'll just have to read the book to learn more!

[A version of this article first appeared in the newsletter for Camino (La Siembra Cooperative –Equal Exchange's sister co-op in Canada), December 5, 2018]

JON STEINMAN is the author of **Grocery Story: The Promise of Food Co-ops in the Age of Grocery Giants** (New Society Publishers, May 2019) and is the past-President of the Kootenay Co-op in Nelson, British Columbia. Jon will be on tour with his book throughout 2019. www.grocerystory.coop ■

Staff Spotlight

Get to know the staff!

Cierra Gorman

How long have you been cooperating?

I have been working at the Medford Food Co-op for about 8 months now.

What do you do at the co-op?

I am the Bulk Department Lead, also do some cashiering, and I also have experience in the Produce department. I am on the Outreach Committee, helping to make decisions about local events and donations. I just try to fill in wherever I can to help the store exceed its potential and further my skills and expand my knowledge.

What brought you to the co-op?

I graduated from an environmental college in Upstate New York, traveled across the country with my lovely partner and landed in Southern Oregon. I applied for jobs that fit in with my values of environmental consciousness and local production services. I did not expect I would be working in the food business, as I have a degree for Sustainable Energy Management. But every day I learn more and more about how everything is biologically connected, and every action has a reaction. Sustainably sourcing food is one of the most important ways to cut back on our excessive carbon footprint, which is a personal goal of mine.

What do you like best about your job?

I love that every day I learn something entirely new. Whether it's from our amazingly conscious customers and owners, or my hardworking, knowledgeable coworkers. I also make decisions about the sources for our food in the Bulk department, which gives me the opportunity to purchase from local producers and carry out the Co-op's, as well as my own, mission and values.

Tell us your co-op favorites:

Thai Curry Cashews (from the Bulk section!)
Uncle Eddie's Vegan Cookies
Live Soda Doctor Kombucha

How has working at the co-op affected your life?

It has improved my eating habits and reminds me of the importance of taking care of my body. The world is more toxic now than ever in our human history and we need to change our ways and have discussions together. The people at the Co-op have those discussions and I think it is very important and I find myself pleased to share the same ideas as others, as far as wanting to live a healthy, happy lifestyle.

Tell us something we don't know!

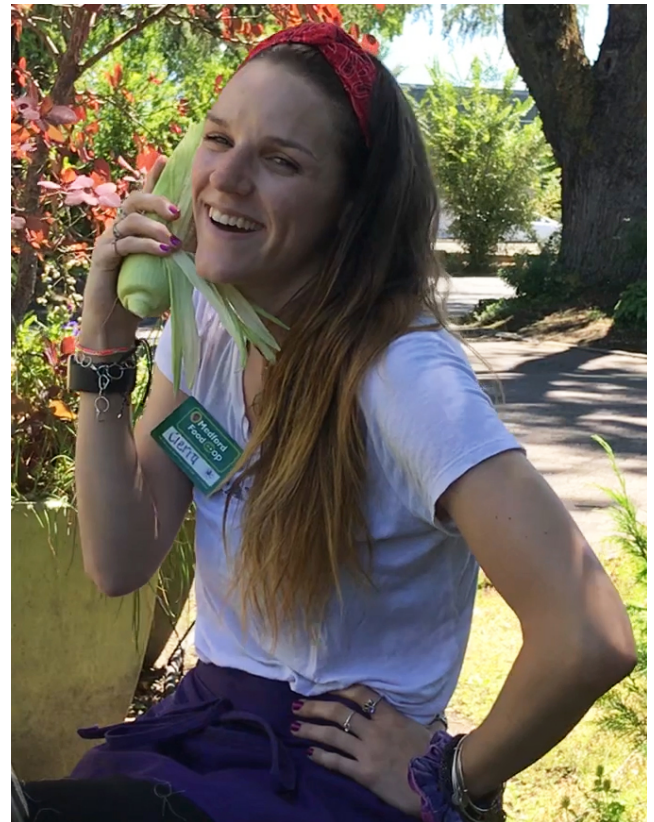
I was Young Hunter of the Year in 2010 and won a scholarship to hike the Teton Mountains in Wyoming for two weeks.

What do you like to do outside of work?

Spend time outdoors, exploring the area with my love Ryan. I practice yoga, and enjoy spending time at home just cooking and dancing. I also spend a very significant amount of time FaceTiming various family members, as I am far from home (NY) and I have family all over the world.

Where did you grow up/where have you lived in your life?

I was born in Upstate New York, but was raised in Memphis, Tennessee, and spent some time in Mississippi. My family moved back up north, where I spent middle school through college, and later moved to Oregon. ■



From the GM:

Shopper Survey Results

by Anne Carter – General Manager

In August 2018, the Co-op conducted a survey of our owners and customers. The goal of the survey was to provide the Co-op with information to help us better understand our customers and improve services for owners and shoppers. Input was sought in four key areas: satisfaction with Medford Food Co-op (MFC), shopping patterns, thoughts about expansion, and owner characteristics.

We worked with the Survey Research Center (SRC) of the University of Wisconsin, River Falls to adapt the National Cooperative Grocers customer satisfaction survey to meet our specific needs. Identical surveys were sent out to two different groups. The first invitation-only survey was sent out to owners via email. The second open-access survey was available to anyone via social media. We received 666 responses to the first survey and 79 responses to the second survey for a total of 745 responses from owners and shoppers. It was encouraging to have so many responses.

The SRC did a complete statistical analysis of the data and created a report of the results. The report also included national benchmarking analysis based on studies conducted at 49 other food cooperatives from around the country. Here is a summary of the report:

Owner Satisfaction

- The majority expressed overall satisfaction with MFC – 58% responded that their needs were met well or very well and 79% responded that they are satisfied or extremely satisfied with MFC.
- More specifically, 80% responded that fresh fruits and vegetables met their needs well or very well. However, respondents were less satisfied with our other product categories. Half or less were satisfied with brand availability, selection and variety of products, and prices.
- Other store characteristics: 90% said that store cleanliness, knowledgeable and friendly staff, product quality/freshness

and store hours met their needs well or very well.

Shopping Patterns

- About 25% of the respondents listed MFC as their primary grocery store. The list of stores respondents listed as their primary grocery store is broadly distributed. Medford has a crowded grocery sector, and shoppers pass other stores to get to MFC.
- 52% of the respondents said they spent one-quarter or less of their grocery budget at the Co-op. 22% said they spend more than half of their grocery budget at the Co-op.
- Just over 40% of the respondents said they shop at MFC at least once a week. Another 25% shop there every other week.
- Things that would influence shoppers to spend more of their grocery budget at MFC: lower prices, improved product selection and variety, and a better location.

Expansion

- 69% of the respondents were strongly in favor of expanding MFC in the next 3-5 years.
- Respondents were almost equally split in terms of preferring to expand by relocating the store (29% of ranked votes) and expanding in the current location (27% of ranked votes). This was a surprising result given the concerns that many respondents had about the current location and parking.
- Top outcomes expected from an expanded Co-op: more local/organic products, increasing the Co-op's purchasing power resulting in lower prices, and increased visibility in the community.
- Top design features for an expanded Co-op: additional parking, green technology/building, green space/garden.
- About half or more of the respondents said they travel weekly on Highway 99, Interstate 5, Riverside Ave and Barnett Road. A store near the intersection of two of these arteries would likely be seen as a convenient location by many Co-op shoppers. The second tier of roads commonly traveled includes Biddle, McAndrews and Central Ave.

Owner Characteristics

- 74% of the respondents said that the fact that MFC is community-owned increases their patronage of the store.
- 96% reported that they are proactive about their health and do things to lower health risks and prevent disease.
 - Owners reside in a large geographic area. Only about half of MFC owners live within 5 miles of the cooperative, and at least 20% of owners live more than 10 miles away.
 - The profile of the typical owner and customer at MFC is changing. Respondents who have been owners for less than 3 years or who responded to the open-access survey are closer to the age distribution and ethnic diversity of Medford as a whole than respondents who have been owners for more than 3 years.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to provide us with feedback. The MFC board and management is working to create a Co-op that better serves our owners and that continues to attract customers from the broader community. Your valuable input helps us make sure that future plans for MFC closely align with the various needs of our owners and the community as a whole. ■

Important Dates

Rogue Valley Growers Market

[Rogue Valley Growers Market](#) is now open for the WINTER! Hosted at the Fry Family Farm Store at 2184 Ross Lane in Medford on Thursdays from 8:30am to 1:30pm through February 28th.

Beginning in March, markets will resume outdoors:

Medford Thursday Market at Hawthorne Park
Ashland Tuesday Market at Ashland Armory
Ashland Saturday Market at Oak Street

Board of Directors Meetings

Third Monday of each month 5:30pm-7:30pm Medical Eye Center. Please check our [online calendar](#) for any location and/or time changes. If you are an owner planning to attend a meeting and would like a specific topic to be addressed, please email the General Manager: gm@medfordfood.coop.