

Chicken or Egg: Is La Montañita's primary differentiator its product selection or its economic model?

While democratic principles and local control have always been a guiding principle for cooperatives, many second-wave food co-ops started as an economically viable way to bring organic and healthy foods to its member/owners. The market for these foods was simply too small to interest the mainstream retailers.

Over the past 40 years, co-ops (along with other independent 'natural food' stores) have had a huge influence: local and organic are mainstream, and the market for those products has grown exponentially.

The mainstreaming of organic and local has also meant the mainstreaming of La Montañita – casual shoppers could easily miss that they are in a co-op. It also means that there are many other options for the kinds of foods that were previously only available at La Montañita.

Meanwhile, other economic models are springing up to bring products to market that are otherwise unavailable, from farmer's markets for hyper-local foods to cow-shares and CSAs for (otherwise illegal in NM) raw milk.

What is the place for consumer food co-ops in general, and for La Montañita in particular? Should we remain a big fish in a small pond, 'solving' access to the current 'fringe' products (that may be big business in 20 to 40 years)? Or do we put aside that role, in favor of having a bigger impact on our local economy and the ability to accomplish more towards our Ends?

Do we attract member/owners with what we sell or how we sell it?

Instructions:

There is no reading this month, though Terry's June 2014 *trends* presentation is good background information.

Do spend some time thinking about what the tradeoffs are for each of these directions, as well as what each means for long-term strategy.