



BOARD STUDY / COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERIES NOTES

April 19, 2016

Prior to the beginning of the Board Study, all present introduced themselves. The Board President then recognized the contributions that the late Marshall Kovitz made as a co-op founder and long-time member of the Board, and invited others to share their memories.

Food + Tech: Improving Food Literacy, Education, and Transparency

Facilitated by: Jeff Hertz

Topic and Goals: In this Board Study, participants will explore the challenges and opportunities of using food information technology to improve food literacy, education, and transparency. Participants will discuss:

1. Ways in which increasing transparency surrounding food production, procurement, and marketing could increase sales.
2. How insights about transparency might apply to membership engagement, marketing, board development, education, communications, and sales strategies.
3. Infographics and other forms of visualization as both an educational and civic engagement tool.
4. The possibility of involving membership in the creation of La Montañita's own food consumer guide.

To access instructions and materials for this Board Study, visit:

<http://lamontanita.coop/directors/documents/>

Discussion (organized by theme):

Theme: Concern that technology would supplant staff knowledge

- I think the greatest thing about La Montañita is that I don't have to bring my smart phone in.
- La Montañita hires fabulous employees. They are well-informed.
- People are the true brokers of knowledge.
- Apps are not connecting people to people. The person that helped you is the memory you take with you when you leave the store.
- We used to have a demo lady, and she would print out recipes. I have many of them.
 - GM: There is a demo station at the Santa Fe store, and it is wildly successful. We are hoping to bring that model into our other stores.

- I'm not a person who is likely to whip out a phone. I have always counted on the co-op to be my screen between me and my food.

Theme: Technology could add to the shopper's experience

- The "second barcode" is a really good idea. You don't need a smart phone. Kiosks in the store or at the register would allow people to access the information without using the smart phone.
- The second barcode could allow customers to see the history and story of particular products.
- The great thing about the second barcode is that it is an opportunity to provide visibility and promotion for farmers.
- I walked through the store before I came here. There was a lot of food that I had never seen before. I have always wanted that kind of information in the store on what foods are and how I might use them.
- La Montañita is planning to put some monitors in the store that will loop video telling the stories behind the food.
 - This can provide opportunities for connections between staff and customers.
 - Yes, but these videos can also be manipulative.
 - Technology is not a bad thing if it is used to help people.
- Technology has the potential to generate sales and also to connect people to people. For example: having the demo person be the one to scan the barcodes.
 - How do we know it would work?
 - There is currently no data on how successful the "second barcode" strategy might be. It is not being used anywhere, except a little in France. But at this point it is an idea that Michael Pollen is putting forward.
- I'd like to be able to use the app outside of the store. I'd like to learn the story when I'm in the kitchen, cooking. I see the utility being on the educational part, not the snap judgment standing in line as to whether I want to buy a certain product.
- The co-op has a way of labeling food; colored tags indicate which products are local. For me that's very clear. Not that technology is bad in any way, but there is already a system in place. That system should be used to further the conversation. Is it not working?
 - I understand that we are conscious shoppers. But I think that we are trying to identify ways to expand La Montañita's community as well. There might be other tools we could use to broaden our customer base. Technology might be a helpful educational tool in that regard.
- I want to shop local. I want to know who the farmers are.

Theme: Transparency about food sources is important

- I appreciate the conversation about transparency. I felt up until recently, the co-op's food story was pretty well told. The story was word of mouth. We knew the produce, meat and cheese was organic and much of it was local. If we are now trying to increase transparency, are you also going to tell the stories of the conventional produce?
 - Why not tell the story? Let customers and member-owners make their choice and speak with their dollars.
 - Concern: Conventional produce takes away space from other produce.

- What if the co-op created a consumer guide that explained how we decide on the product assortment? Maybe use Michael Pollen's *Food Rules* as a model.
- NM produces only 23% of the food we eat. Only 7% of this is produce. Selling conventional food means that La Montañita is selling food from elsewhere, and the money is going out. Selling local is very important to strengthening our local economy.
 - GM: To all the local farmers. La Montañita is working on a program called the "Double Up Bucks" program, which is all local. All we are doing right now is searching corner to corner in New Mexico for local food. Some of that is organic, but a lot is not. It is food from New Mexico, local food. The program is in line with our Ends statement that is about creating access for more people.
 - When you say "local," that is deceiving. About 85% of agriculture in New Mexico is owned by entities outside New Mexico.

Theme: Two Competing Values – Organics and Access/Affordability

- I am from rural New Mexico. I understand the plight of the farmer, and of the poor family, because that is where I came from. I am also the co-op's IT director and see the numbers behind the scenes. And I am an owner. I am concerned about how we best serve the needs of the community. This is a multi-faceted thing. How do we attack all of these problems – how do we address one person's needs as a farmer and an owner, and another's need to have organic, local produce? A family making \$30K trying to raise children cannot afford organic produce. The reason we are branching out in the variety of produce we sell is to meet the needs of the community.
- I am a local producer. We help people with low-income by subsidizing their CSA share. We are also not just selling food. We are teaching them how to farm. This is not just about making business. We have to make a living but we have to teach the others how to do it. Conventional means "poison." We don't want to just give access to food but to good quality food.
- Most of us are here because we do not support the recent changes in the co-op in selling conventional products and in how staff are being treated.
- Bringing conventional produce might make for lower prices in the co-op, but there are other stores that are going to have cheaper conventional onions.
- I belong to La Montañita because it is a co-op. I can buy specialty and organic foods lots of places, but the thing that makes me go to the co-op is because I want to shop at a store where the shoppers own the store. Even if the co-op sometimes sells foods I don't like.
- About 5 years ago, a review was done of all the products in the Santa Fe store, and only 25% were organic. Having non-organic food in the co-op is not a new thing.
- I'm a member primarily. Also a grower. I didn't realize that the switch was happening. I was turned off when I went to the store and saw the Clean Fifteen table. Up until now, I trusted the co-op to do the "sorting" of produce for me. That way I don't have to go two different places to find avocados. I like convenience.

Theme: Importance of Education and Communication

- The co-op needs to communicate more to the membership about why the change was made to sell conventional produce.

- Education is a huge need. I have never thought that we have done well enough communicating about why we are doing what we are doing. Also education on how to use basic ingredients, reduce waste, cook healthy food.
- All of the materials for this Board Study (including a number we did not discuss today) are available online. I really like the fact that this conversation moved towards education and communication, because I think that's where this lies right now. We are experiencing a lot of change in the co-op so education and communication need to go alongside that. We are trying to balance economic and social concerns. We need to continue to have owners and staff come out to the meetings. I am glad we had this conversation.
- This was a rich, hard conversation. This world is hard. We are responding to a lot of pressures.