



**You Are the Co-op Difference**



# You Are the Reason We're Here

Food co-ops were formed by people in your community who wanted access to healthy, delicious food with reduced environmental impact and less waste, and we remain community-owned and operated to this day. You help us continue this proud tradition every time you choose to shop here, invest in ownership or tell a friend about us. You are the co-op difference.

Thanks to your support, local farmers and producers continue to have a market for their delicious food, organic agriculture continues to grow, local food pantries and nonprofit organizations have a strong partner and together we are making progress towards a fairer food system.

You make it happen. When you shop the co-op, your money makes a bigger impact in your local community than at a typical grocery store. At the co-op, your food dollars work to support a robust local economy, a vibrant community and a healthy environment.

*When you shop the co-op, you  
cast a vote for a robust local  
economy, a vibrant community  
and a healthy environment.  
Thank you for supporting your  
neighborhood food co-op.*

## You Help Create a Robust Local Economy

When you shop the co-op, you are supporting local farmers and producers as well as investing in supply chain transparency. We have made a commitment to empowering entrepreneurs and small business owners in our area by bringing their products to market — but you are the ones who keep them in business. Local products at food co-ops around the country average 21% of total co-op sales, compared with a national grocery store average of just 1.8%.

A stronger local economy is just one benefit. It's easy to support local producers; their products are delicious! Your demand for the good stuff results in the average food co-op being able to work with 185 local farms and producers, resulting in over \$283 million in combined sales of local products at co-ops nationwide.

In an increasingly consolidated food system, it's difficult to know where your food is coming from, let alone who is getting paid to grow, pack, ship and stock it. When you buy local products you are creating local jobs and can easily see who benefits from your purchases.

*When you buy local products, more money stays right here, making our community more economically resilient and sustainable. Thanks for supporting local entrepreneurs and small businesses. You are making a difference!*



## Local product sales at food co-ops\*

**283M**

in local sales

**21%**

of store sales



You support **185** local farms  
and producers\* when you shop  
at the co-op.

\*based on data and averages from food co-ops nationwide

## You Help Grow a Healthier Environment

Whether you buy a few organic products or many, that purchase helps support the current and future health of our planet. Organic farming methods have been scientifically validated as being not only more sustainable, but a potential answer to some of our most pressing environmental problems. On average more than 33% of the products co-ops carry are USDA Certified Organic and represent 42% of a co-op's total sales, compared with a national grocery store average of just 5%.

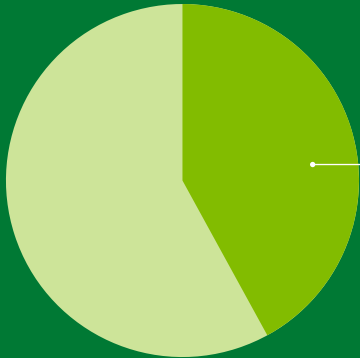
Certified organic food by law cannot be grown using toxic pesticides, synthetic fertilizers or GMO seeds. Beyond the benefit to individual shoppers is the positive impact organic agriculture has on natural systems. Organic methods are supportive of all levels of life from soil microbes to pollinators to the health of farm workers in the fields.

Nationwide, co-op shoppers demonstrate an inspiring commitment to the environment, with organic sales at co-ops totaling over \$415 million annually.

*Organic agriculture supports the health of our planet. Organic farming methods are more sustainable and have been identified as a key way to slow down climate change. Whether you buy one organic product or many, you are part of the solution!*



**1 out of every 3** products sold at the average food co-op is organic — your purchases make a difference!



**organic sales**

**42%**

of food co-ops' sales,  
on average, come  
from organic products



## You Help to Tackle Food Waste

Co-op shoppers love to eat fresh, with sales of fresh (perishable) foods at co-ops representing 35% of total sales, slightly more than your typical grocery store (32%). You support the production of fresh, organic, locally grown vegetables and fruits, humanely raised and grass fed meats, free range eggs, pastured dairy, wholesome deli food and bakery items, artisan breads and cheeses. Who's hungry?

The flip side of all that fresh goodness is that food spoilage is a perennial challenge for the food industry. Diverting food from the landfill is the key, and co-ops tackle that through donations to food pantries, composting and better utilization of cooking scraps.

Nationally, the average food co-op is donating 24,100 pounds of healthy, edible food to food pantries annually, with a total of more than 1.5 million pounds of food donated in 2016 alone. Similarly sized grocery stores divert an average of 12,500 pounds, about half of what co-ops do.

*You support the production of fresh, organic veggies, free range meats, pastured dairy, wholesome deli and baked goods; we make sure as little gets wasted as possible.*



# 24,100

pounds of healthy, edible food donated to  
food pantries by the average food co-op

# 1,500,000

pounds of food donated in 2016 alone



Fresh fruits, vegetables, meat,  
eggs, dairy and baked goods  
account for about **35% of**  
**store sales, on average.**

Co-op shoppers are committed  
to fresh food!

## You Help Bring People Together

As a co-op shopper, you can choose to invest in ownership. You don't have to be an owner to shop at the vast majority of food co-ops, but ownership is economically empowering and gives you a voice in how the co-op is run. Everyone is welcome to own a share of the co-op.

Our democratically elected board governs with guidance from seven international cooperative principles that apply to all cooperative businesses. These principles are designed to help directors and managers of the co-op make decisions based on a commitment to economic and social justice and equity for all stakeholders. Crucial among these is voluntary, open ownership without discrimination based on gender, social, racial, political or religious identification.

The principles that guide co-ops are in many ways responsible for the inspiring community, economic and environmental impact that sets us apart from conventional grocers. It is because of owner commitment to this vision and these values that a better way of doing business is possible.

*You don't have to be an owner to shop the co-op — but ownership is empowering and everyone is welcome. Thank you for investing in a better way of doing business.*



## You Help to Nurture Community

Co-op shoppers are incredibly generous — in 2016, food co-ops contributed over \$2.6 million to charitable causes in their local communities, in both cash and in-kind donations, thanks to your patronage and continued support of charitable programs.

As community-owned and operated organizations, co-ops are able to ensure that a higher percentage of revenue is donated than at typical grocery stores, a 44% higher rate on average, to be exact! Co-ops offer a variety of ways for owners and customers to donate to community organizations, whether by voting on recipients at the annual meeting or by providing customers the option of “rounding-up” purchases to the nearest dollar at the register, earmarked as a donation.

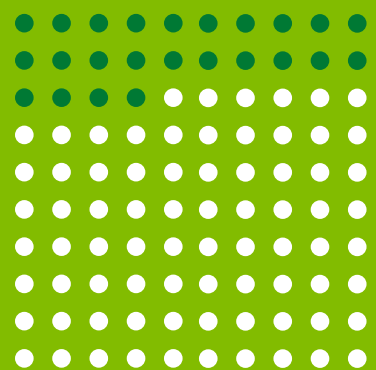
Your support also makes it possible to provide nutritional education, classes and community events at co-ops nationwide. With an average of 92 outreach events per co-op each year, there is almost always something going on!

*Co-op shoppers support the work of local organizations that are dedicated to making a better world for us all. Thank you for your generosity and participation. You are improving our community!*





As a percentage of revenue, co-ops donate to charitable causes at a rate **44% higher** on average than conventional retailers.



**76%** of food co-ops offer nutritional classes or community events — with an average of **92** engagements a year!





## You Help to Grow Fair Trade Business

At the co-op, you can choose to purchase fair trade certified versions of products you love like coffee, tea and chocolate. Fair trade certification means that the producers are getting a fair price for their products and their labor.

Co-ops sell a higher percentage of fair trade products than other natural and organic products grocery stores, and co-op shoppers' support of fair trade is huge. Combined co-op sales of fair trade products nationally top \$32 million annually.

Co-ops across the country routinely work together to raise awareness about and increase support for the great things fair trade businesses are accomplishing. In 2016, co-op shoppers raised over \$80,000 for La Riojana Cooperative in Argentina, whose fair trade organic olive oil and wines are exclusively available at co-ops. Your support is helping family farmers attain organic certification for their vineyards and improve operations.

*When you purchase fair trade products, you are contributing to the improvement of people's lives. Thanks to your support, co-ops are one of the best places to find fair trade products in the United States.*



## You Help to Support Sustainable Solutions

Since 2012, food co-ops have been working together to offset a portion of greenhouse gas emissions associated with business travel and utilities by growing a Co+op Forest in the Peruvian Amazon.

The idea behind this unique carbon offset program is simple: food co-ops, directly and through their national co-op, calculate their annual carbon emissions (from business travel, utilities, etc.), then fund the planting or protection of a corresponding number of trees to absorb (offset) that carbon. When trees naturally absorb carbon dioxide — a greenhouse gas — from the atmosphere, it effectively slows the rate of climate change.

As of 2016, Co+op Forest is home to an estimated 1.4 million trees, which will offset 2,738 metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e within their lifetimes. We are proud to report that due in part to co-ops' continued support, the region in which Co+op Forest resides was honored as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, to serve as a model of sustainable communities.

*Co-op shoppers demonstrate a deep concern for the environment. Co-ops take this commitment seriously and are working together to take on some of today's biggest challenges. Thanks for your dedicated support. You are the co-op difference!*



Co+op Forest contributes  
to a thriving community  
and sustainable economic  
opportunity in Peru.



**trees planted  
and protected**

**1.4M**

**2,738**

**metric tons of  
CO<sub>2</sub>e offset by  
Co+op Forest**

## About This Report

This report is based on a 2017 study commissioned by National Co+op Grocers and conducted by the ICA Group, a not-for-profit consulting firm with expertise in cooperatives, economic development and business research.

Our co-op is a member of National Co+op Grocers, (NCG) a business services cooperative for retail food co-ops located throughout the United States. NCG represents 146 retail food co-ops operating over 200 stores in 38 states with combined annual sales over \$2 billion and over 1.3 million consumer-owners.

As part of an ongoing commitment to demonstrate the value of the cooperative business model to local communities, NCG began measuring the social, environmental and economic impacts of food co-ops in 2012 compared to conventional grocers.





