

Cortes Natural Food Co-op: a Non Profit Community Food Co-op
Presenters: Mary Lavelle, Manager, and Amy Robertson, Board Member
March 27, 2025 at the HBI

Non Profit Community Food Co-op (consumer co-op)

Historically

- Began as a collective: initially they teamed up with the shellfishery: As the shellfish were shipped out, the truck returned with the bulk orders for the members
- The collective became incorporated as a member co-op with membership
- Without a manager, decisions were made by random staff as needs arose, and it was difficult to build consensus.
- Once they built a model with a manager, they were able to organize themselves and they purchased the building, renovated extensively and built the cafe.
- Currently the Co-op employs 24 staff during the winter season, and 34 in the summer.
- Funding primarily has come from private community donations: the community and the Co-op raised 78,000 for the down payment on the building and \$50,000 for the cafe.
- Members can own up to \$10,000 in shares, but each member, regardless of shares, gets one vote.
- The Co-op has developed Strategy Plans, Policies, Employment Manuals built on past experience to make the present more predictable and manageable and is willing to share these documents openly.
- Currently operates on the island with another vendor: both businesses continue to thrive.

Co-op as Community

- The Co-op supports the community and locals whenever possible.
 - Sells art by consignment- art hangs in the cafe in mini art shows, local producers sell their figs in season, their apples etc, local artisans can sell their lotions, creams and essential oils.
 - Use local food producers whenever possible, even if in small seasonal amounts.
 - When appropriate, the Co-op will trade for maintenance work.
 - Wages start at 19.00 /hour with a cost of living increase annually of 10%.
 - Staff receive 10% discount, supervisors receive 15%
 - Staff who work 20 hours or more per week receive benefits arranged through the Discovery Islands Chamber of Commerce.
 - The Cafe is 'the' social hub' and remains open to the community after hours so members can use the space and the wifi.
- Current membership is 1200-many members are seasonal residents.
- Currently, only 1 staff member sits on the board.
- Recently have become a Community Service Co-op:
 - Switched from a Profit to a Non-Profit
 - Now qualify for grants when they did not previously
 - Any \$ left over after expenses are reinvested back into the co-op
 - There are three rentals on the property: Harbour Authority, RMT, and Marnie's Books
 - Also host a Community garden on the property

Shipping

- Historically, the 2 ferry crossings can make food delivery challenging in winter weather and high traffic season. The island was left without food periodically. Their shipping trucks have finally acquired Assured Loading on the ferry.

- During the presentation, there was discussion around the possibility of increased buying power and perhaps shared shipping by both co-ops partnering if we are successful in implementing a Co-op on Quadra. The idea was raised that Co-ops could 'co-op'!

Membership Engagement

- The Co-op produces Newsletters, keeps a publicly available record of the Board meeting minutes, members are always welcome to attend any board meeting, and the AGM.
- The co-op continues to engage in discussion with members: members and the board hold each other accountable.
- The Co-op uses Robert's Rules for Motions and Votes
- They are currently working towards moving away from credit card use that costs the Co-op \$25,000 a year by offering pre-pay accounts to minimize the credit card costs.