

## Food For Change – Annotated Script

FROM TWO HUNDRED MILES UP, THE PLACE I COME FROM, THE ONE THAT CREATED ME, AND YOU, LOOKS PEACEFUL AND FRAGILE.

ON THE SURFACE, IT'S MAGNIFICENT, WILD, AND ABUNDANT, EXPLODING WITH MILLIONS OF DIFFERENT LIFE FORMS, EACH ONE EXQUISITELY ADAPTED TO ITS HABITAT . . . EVER-SPINNING AND CHANGING, WITH ITS INHABITANTS COMPETING, AND COOPERATING.

THEN THERE'S US – THE ROGUE SPECIES, WITH OUR POWERFUL, IMAGINATIVE, AND INTELLIGENT BRAINS, CAUSING THE WHOLE ENTERPRISE TO BUCKLE UNDER THE WEIGHT OF OUR ASCENT.

SINCE WE LEFT OUR FIRST HABITAT, SIXTY THOUSAND YEARS AGO, WE'VE MADE SOME CHANGES, MAKING NEW HABITATS THAT SEPARATE US FROM THE LAND AND FROM EACH OTHER, WHILE OTHER LIFE-FORMS ARE PUSHED TO EXTINCTION. EXCEPT, OF COURSE, BEDBUGS, PIGEONS, AND STINKWEED.<sup>1</sup>

LIKE ORPHANS LEFT ON THE EARTH'S DOORSTEP AFTER A FIERCE STORM, WE KNOW LITTLE ABOUT OURSELVES, OUR NATURES – CREATING, AT TIMES, CONDITIONS OF SUBLIME BEAUTY, AND AT TIMES, OF UNTOLD SUFFERING.

OUR GOOD BRAINS HAVE EVOLUTIONARY FLAWS, WHICH CAN ONLY BE FIXED BY OUR GOOD BRAINS. IT'S A DILEMMA.

WE NEED TO SETTLE DOWN AND FIGURE OUT HOW TO LIVE HERE. THERE'S NO OTHER CHOICE. THE NEAREST PLANET, VENUS, IS EIGHT HUNDRED DEGREES FAHRENHEIT AND SMELLS LIKE ROTTEN EGGS. NEXT CLOSEST IS MARS, WHERE THERE'S LESS ACTUAL WATER ON THE ENTIRE PLANET THAN WE HAVE IN ONE STALK OF CELERY.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most widely accepted position on modern human origins within paleoanthropology today is the popularly named "Out of Africa" theory. Based on analysis of mitochondrial DNA, scholars believe anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* emigrated out of Africa some 70,000 to 60,000 years ago, though more recent genetic studies, and some archaeological evidence found in Southwest Asia, may suggest that the migration began up to 125,000 years ago. Martin Meredith provides an excellent analysis of the development of the "Out of Africa" theory. Martin Meredith, *Born in Africa: The Quest for the Origins of Human Life*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The Mars rover Curiosity recently discovered that Mars soil could contain up to 2% water, much more water than what was previously believed to exist on the Red Planet, but nevertheless still much less than what currently exists on Earth. Michael Lemonick, "Where's the Water on Mars? Everywhere!" *Time* 26 Sept. 2013. Accessed September 29, 2013. <http://science.time.com/2013/09/26/wheres-the-water-on-mars-everywhere>.

WE CAN PROTECT OUR HOME PLANET AS A PLACE OF ENDURING BEAUTY, AND EXHILARATION, BY ADAPTING OUR NEEDS TO OUR HABITAT.

David Thompson: The only way in which I think we are going to be able to create a planet that has a future is we are going to have to have a much more cooperative society. To build better communities, and for the Earth to be treated better, we're going to have to change the structure of how we do business.

### Title: **Food For Change**

A GOOD PLACE TO BEGIN TO CHANGE THE STRUCTURE OF HOW WE DO BUSINESS IS TO EXAMINE THE WAY WE GROW AND SELL FOOD – AN ACTIVITY THAT HAS CHANGED MORE IN THE PAST FIFTY YEARS THAN IT HAS IN THE PAST TEN THOUSAND.<sup>3</sup> THIS SYSTEM, NOW DOMINATED BY LARGE CORPORATIONS, USES ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF ENERGY AND TOXIC CHEMICALS WHILE CREATING AN ARRAY OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS.

COMPANIES THAT EXPERIMENT WITH THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF LIFE, WITH THE GOAL TO CONTROL THE WORLD'S FOOD SUPPLY, FROM THE GENE TO THE GROCERY SHELF. PROMOTING A VARIETY OF FOOD-LIKE SUBSTANCES . . . FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

THE SELLING OF FOOD IS ALSO CONTROLLED BY FEWER AND FEWER LARGE SUPERMARKET CHAINS. THIS SYSTEM IS DESIGNED FOR EFFICIENCY, TO PRODUCE CHEAP FOOD AND REAP ONE MAJOR PRODUCT: MAXIMUM PROFITS.

David Thompson: You take the top ten retailers in the United States and they scoop up, you know, some huge amount of the food business.<sup>4</sup> And those monopolies are controlling all of the aspects of the distribution system,<sup>5</sup> to the detriment of all of the farmers, the pollution. And that is all a system that brings employment

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<sup>3</sup> Statement by Michael Pollan in the 2008 film *Food Inc.*

<sup>4</sup> In 2012, the top ten supermarket operators in America brought in 57% of all food retail sales. "The Super 50 – Introduction/Methodology." *The Progressive Grocer* May 2012. Accessed September 29, 2013. <http://www.progressivegrocer.com/inprint/article/id2735/the-super-50-introduction-methodology>. "Supermarket Facts." The Food Marketing Institute. <http://www.fmi.org/research-resources/supermarket-facts>.

<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Dimitri, Abeyayehu Tegene, and Phillip Kaufman, "U.S. Fresh Produce Markets: Marketing Channels, Trade Practices, and Retail Pricing Behavior." *Agricultural Economic Report No. (AER-825)* Sept. 2003: 23. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer-agricultural-economic-report/aer825.aspx#UkmDeVoo5dg>.

opportunities down, it brings income opportunities down. It really stretches all parts of our society.

OUR INDUSTRIALIZED FOOD SYSTEM, INTENDED TO PROMOTE COMPETITION LOOKS MORE LIKE CENTRAL PLANNING – WHICH IS THE REASON WE OPPOSED OTHER SYSTEMS, SO THAT WOULDN'T HAPPEN HERE.

David Thompson: People have less in their pockets than they used to. They have less savings for the future. The future looks bleak for the majority of Americans. As a result, we have a race to the bottom, and what cooperatives are is a means of raising everybody to the top.

MOVING AWAY FROM A MONOPOLY-CONTROLLED SYSTEM, TO ONE THAT STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES AND PROTECTS THE ENVIRONMENT, IS THE REASON I JOINED A FOOD COOPERATIVE. MY CO-OP, LOCATED ON MAIN STREET IN GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, IS ONE OF OVER THREE HUNDRED FOOD COOPERATIVES ACROSS THE COUNTRY,<sup>6</sup> EACH ONE OWNED BY PEOPLE WHO WANT GOOD FOOD, AND WHO CARE ABOUT HOW IT'S GROWN AND THE PEOPLE WHO GROW IT. IT'S DEMOCRACY IN ACTION – AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, WHERE IT CAN HAVE A BIG EFFECT – WHICH MAKES ME WONDER WHY IT HASN'T CAUGHT ON MORE, AND HOW, DURING THE LAST THREE DECADES, GIANT CORPORATE-OWNED SUPERMARKETS MANAGED TO GAIN CONTROL OF OVER EIGHTY PERCENT OF ALL U.S. FOOD SALES, WHILE THE COOPERATIVE SHARE IS LESS THAN ONE-HALF OF ONE PERCENT.<sup>7</sup>

TO FIND OUT THE ANSWER, I HAD TO GO BACK IN TIME TO LEARN WHAT FORCES WERE AT WORK BEYOND WHAT I WAS SEEING.

THE FIRST THING I LEARNED IS THAT CO-OPS BEGAN IN THE EARLY 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. THEY WERE STARTED BY ENGLISH WEAVERS WHO WERE FORCED INTO SERVILE LABOR UNDER A NEW INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM.

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<sup>6</sup> 341 listed in the National Co-op Directory, 2014, pages 7-9

<sup>7</sup> Food cooperatives had an estimated \$2 billion in sales out of the almost \$600 billion dollars in U.S. grocery sales in 2009. University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, *Research on the Economic Impact of Cooperatives* Mar. 2009. Accessed September 30, 2013. <http://reic.uwcc.wisc.edu/groceries/>. The top 50 supermarket corporations control 82% of the retail grocery market. "The Super 50 – Introduction/Methodology." *The Progressive Grocer* May 2012.

David Thompson: But they were people who said we want to be in control of the mechanism whereby we feed ourselves. The idea of cooperation will be better for us in the long run, and we will not need charity if we're able to succeed in self-help.

THEY SAVED WHAT LITTLE WAGES THEY EARNED AND OPENED THE FIRST FOOD COOPERATIVE, SELLING FLOUR, OATMEAL, AND CANDLES. THEIR IDEA OF OPEN MEMBERSHIP AND SELLING WHOLESOME FOOD IS THE LEGACY WE FOLLOW 170 YEARS LATER.<sup>8</sup>

BY GOING BACK, I HOPED TO LEARN THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMPETITIVE AND COOPERATIVE SYSTEMS. BUSINESSES THAT WANT TO DOMINATE IN CONTRAST TO THOSE THAT SEEK TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS.

THIS IS THE KIND OF BUSINESS THE FOLKS WHO STARTED MY CO-OP WANTED. AND A PLACE TO BUY TOFU TURKEY.

BUT IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING A SOCIETY BASED ON COOPERATION, I HAD TO MOVE AWAY FROM MAIN STREET, TO A DIFFERENT ERA AND ANOTHER AMERICAN STREET . . .

TO A TIME WHEN ONE PERCENT OF THE POPULATION OWNS FORTY PERCENT OF THE NATION'S WEALTH. TWO HUNDRED CORPORATIONS CONTROL HALF OF ALL AMERICAN INDUSTRIES. LEADERS TOUT THE VIRTUES OF INDIVIDUALISM AND FREE ENTERPRISE, WHILE THE VAST MAJORITY HAVE FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES. RECKLESS, UNREGULATED CREDIT SCHEMES CREATE A MOUNTAIN OF DEBT. INFLATION SOARS, CONSUMER SPENDING PLUMMETS, AND THE BUBBLE BURSTS.<sup>9</sup>

Sean Doyle, General Manager, Seward Co-op, Minneapolis, MN: For me what's at stake with the co-ops is ultimately about a new way of organizing society. Our economic system is set up in such a way

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<sup>8</sup> "History of Cooperatives." Cooperative Development Institute <http://www.edi.coop/historyofcoops.html>. For an in-depth look at the early Rochdale Cooperative, see Holyoake, George Jacob, *Self-help by the people: The history of the Rochdale pioneers*, London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1893.

<sup>9</sup> There have been several interpretations of the origins of the Great Depression. However, Robert McElvaine provides a thorough discussion of the multiple economic conditions emerging in the 1920s that would help lead to the economic collapse. Robert McElvaine, "Who Was Roaring in the Twenties? – Origins of the Great Depression" in *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941*. New York: Times Books, 1984. Another good book on the subject is John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Great Crash, 1929*.

that really is unjust. And without other explanation, it just really isn't, not a just society because it really favors the concentration of wealth. It really harkens back to the founders of our own co-op: wanting to create an alternative economic system was one of the driving factors of what they were doing forty years ago. We may not look like what they envisioned, 'cause we changed to stay in business, but what drives my motivation is that we're building a society that has the goal of no exploitation in it. And that's really, I think, at the root of what a co-op, the co-op business model is. It's really taking democracy and bringing it into an economic environment.

FOLLOWING THE STOCK MARKET CRASH OF 1929, PRESIDENT HERBERT HOOVER ASSURES THE NATION THAT A MINOR QUIRK HAS OCCURRED IN AN OTHERWISE SOUND ECONOMIC SYSTEM. HIS CLAIM THAT A RETURN TO PROSPERITY IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER IS A STARK CONTRAST TO REALITY.<sup>10</sup> AS HARD TIMES SPREAD, AN INCREASING NUMBER HOLD BUT ONE LIMITED ASPIRATION: SURVIVAL.

Coal Miner: It's impossible for me to get a job anywhere. Nobody will hire me. Any help that I have at all is two dollars a week on federal relief.

THE DEPRESSION TAKES AWAY PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOODS, AND WITH THEM, THEIR DIGNITY AND SENSE OF SELF-WORTH. BY 1933, 13 MILLION AMERICANS HAD LOST THEIR JOBS, 10,000 BANKS HAD FAILED. TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS UNEMPLOYED, WHILE ANOTHER TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT, THOUGH COUNTING THEMSELVES LUCKY TO HAVE WORK, SUFFERED SEVERE CUTS IN WAGES.<sup>11</sup> PEOPLE WHO HAD LIVED PRODUCTIVE LIVES FIND THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES LIVING HAND-TO-MOUTH, OR WORSE, TOSSED TO THE STREETS TO BEG FOR FOOD.

Soup Kitchen Man #2: The poor unfortunates like myself are on State Street, begging for a bowl of soup and for a sandwich. We

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<sup>10</sup> Though it is debated whether President Hoover ever said specifically "prosperity is just around the corner," he frequently insinuated that better times were "just around the corner."

<sup>11</sup> McElvaine, 1984; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957*. Washington, D.C., 1960; "The Great Depression and the New Deal," *Digital History*. <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/us34.cfm>.

haven't got no work. We can't get no work. We're looking for work.  
We can't get no work. But we will by some day in the future.

AS WINTER DESCENDS ON CHICAGO IN 1932, HUNGRY, COLD AND  
JOBLESS CITIZENS TEAR UP THE WOOD-PAVED STREETS IN A DESPERATE  
ATTEMPT TO HEAT THEIR HOMES.<sup>12</sup>

FOR THOSE WHO DO WORK, LOW WAGES BRING MOUNTING  
CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND LABOR. WITHIN A  
THREE-YEAR SPAN, TEN THOUSAND STRIKES ERUPT ACROSS THE  
COUNTRY. HIRED COMPANY AGENTS WORK WITH THE POLICE TO  
OVERPOWER PROTESTERS.<sup>13</sup>

RESPONDING TO THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION, THE FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT STARTS WORK PROGRAMS.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt: This is no unsolvable problem if we face  
it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished, in part, by  
direct recruiting by the government itself. Our greatest primary  
task is to put people to work.

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT'S WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
BUILDS RAILROADS, PARKS, AND OTHER PUBLIC FACILITIES. BUT  
RECOVERY IS SLOW AND HAS NUMEROUS CRITICS.<sup>14</sup>

Herbert Hoover: The cost of the New Deal threatens to exceed that  
of the Great War. The folly and waste must be cut out of this  
expenditure and the federal government budget balanced or we  
shall see one of three horsemen ravage this land: taxation, or  
repudiation, or inflation.

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<sup>12</sup> Unemployment in Chicago soared to nearly 50% by 1932. During the winter of 1932-33, Chicagoans ripped up the wooden pavers for fuel. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/542.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970.

<sup>14</sup> The Depression continued throughout the 1930s, with unemployment never dipping below 14%. FDR and the New Deal had an endless number of critics, with large business interests and Republicans being the obvious opposition, claiming that New Deal legislation had gone too far and become too socialistic. However, FDR had many critics on the left, too, like Huey P. Long, Charles Coughlin, and Upton Sinclair, claiming the New Deal did not go far enough in helping the "forgotten man." For a thorough discussion of some of the most significant New Deal opposition from the left, see Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982.

WORK PROGRAMS ARE CUT, DECLARED UNCONSTITUTIONAL BY THE SUPREME COURT. UNEMPLOYMENT REMAINS STUBBORNLY HIGH, AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION CONTINUES.<sup>15</sup>

WHILE DISCORD RIPPLES ACROSS THE COUNTRYSIDE, A MOVEMENT SWELLS WITHOUT FANFARE IN THE MIDWEST.<sup>16</sup> PEOPLE HIT BY HARD TIMES COME TOGETHER TO SHARE THEIR PROBLEMS, THEN DECIDE TO TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS. FOR THEM, THE SOLUTION IS IN A SYSTEM THAT EMPHASIZES COOPERATION INSTEAD OF COMPETITION – THROUGH DEMOCRATICALLY-RUN, COLLECTIVELY-OWNED, INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES.<sup>17</sup> CONVINCED OF THE SIMPLE, PRACTICAL WISDOM OF THEIR APPROACH, THEY LABOR FOR OVER A DECADE TO MAKE IT WORK, THEN SET OUT TO TELL THEIR FELLOW AMERICANS WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED.<sup>18</sup>

THE MIDDLE PATH BETWEEN CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM IS THE WAY OUT OF THE DEPRESSION. COOPERATIVE ECONOMIES, THEY BELIEVE, PROMISE A MORE STABLE FUTURE, LED BY CONSUMERS AND STRENGTHENED WITH EACH PURCHASE.

BY 1938, 15 REGIONAL WAREHOUSES ARE SUPPLYING HUNDREDS OF CO-OP GROCERY STORES.<sup>19</sup> WITHIN THE CO-OP SYSTEM, FARMERS, FREE

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<sup>15</sup> On May 27, 1935, the Supreme Court unanimously declared the National Recovery Administration (NRA) unconstitutional in *United States v. Schechter Poultry Corp.* Though the work relief program of the NRA, the Public Works Administration (PWA) was not deemed unconstitutional, the destruction of the NRA meant the end of the PWA. Curiously, the destruction of the NRA was beneficial to Roosevelt, because it freed him to implement new, restructured programs like the Works Progress Administration, which was much more successful. However, led by the Warren G. Harding-appointed Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, the Supreme Court and the majority conservative federal court system was a constant threat to New Deal legislation, which led to FDR's attempts to "pack" the court in early 1937. McElvaine, 259, 283.

<sup>16</sup> A 1938 Census by the US Bureau of Labor statistics reported that cooperatives had grown in numbers from 1,577 associations with 288,000 members in 1929 to 3,600 associations in 1936 with 678,000 members. States with the largest number of cooperatives were Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kansas, Illinois and Nebraska. "Cooperatives on the March." *Consumers' Cooperation* 24.5 (1938): 76-78. <http://fax.libs.uga.edu/HD2951xC776/co38/javavu.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Co-ops began in the 1840s in the US largely as worker-owned co-ops, culminating with the expansion of the Knights of Labor, but declined in the late 1800s and with it the worker co-op movement in the US. Furlough, Ellen, *Consumer Against Capitalism?* Oxford, England: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999: Chapter 3, Leikin, Steven, *The Citizen Producer: The Rise and Fall of Working-Class Cooperatives in the United States*. Beginning at the turn of the century, ethnic co-ops grew in the mid-Atlantic states and were established by immigrants from Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Germany. Florence Parker, *The First 125 Years: A History of Distributive and Service Cooperation in the United States, 1829-1954*. Superior, WI: Cooperative Publishing Association, 1956: 39.

<sup>18</sup> The decade of the 1930s was a period of unparalleled coordination of cooperative activity in the US, therefore for purposes of this narrative, we emphasize this large increase in co-ops in the 1930s, culminating in 1941. Florence Parker, *The First 125 Years: A History of Distributive and Service Cooperation in the United States, 1829-1954*. Superior, WI: Cooperative Publishing Association, 1956: 153. 1941 was the year that "The Co-ops are Coming" was produced.

<sup>19</sup> Florence Parker, *The First 125 Years: A History of Distributive and Service Cooperation in the United States, 1829-1954*. Superior, WI: Cooperative Publishing Association, 1956: 158.

FROM THE CONTROL OF LARGE CORPORATIONS, BEGIN TO GET A FAIR PRICE FOR THEIR LABOR. AS THEIR POWER INCREASES, THEY BRANCH OUT INTO MANUFACTURING THEIR OWN EQUIPMENT.

IN COLUMBUS, OHIO, COOPERATORS START THEIR OWN DEPARTMENT STORE, WHICH GROWS TO EIGHT REGIONAL STORES. INVESTORS IN THESE BUSINESSES COME NOT FROM WALL STREET, BUT FROM THE CONSUMERS' COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION, WITH 125,000 MEMBERS IN NINE STATES.<sup>20</sup>

THROUGH THESE EFFORTS, CO-OPS SEE A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN EMPLOYMENT. THIS NEW METHOD OF WEALTH CREATION BEGINS TO GROW EXPONENTIALLY, AS PEOPLE WHO WORK IN CO-OP BUSINESSES DEPOSIT THEIR CHECKS IN COOPERATIVELY-RUN BANKS, WHICH IN TURN INVEST IN COOPERATIVELY-RUN BUSINESSES.

MOST IMPRESSIVE OF ALL ARE CO-OPS' EFFORTS TO DISRUPT BIG BUSINESS MONOPOLIES BY DRILLING, PUMPING AND REFINING THEIR OWN OIL – SELLING GASOLINE IN OVER 200 SERVICE STATIONS IN NINE STATES.<sup>21</sup> AS THE CO-OP MODEL PROVES EFFECTIVE, THERE SEEMS TO BE NO LIMIT ON ITS CHALLENGE TO CORPORATE CONTROL.

David Thompson: A large number of consumer cooperatives were established in the 1930s all across the country, by people who had something that they felt they could achieve. There was something that they could create. There was something that they could build. And they didn't wanna give up hope; they wanted to make that hope come alive. And it came alive in the many, many thousands of cooperatives that were created.

CO-OP LEADERS SEE THE SUN RISING ON A NEW SPIRIT OF AMERICAN COOPERATION, WHICH THEY TOUT AS THE DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM, LEADING THE WAY TO A MORALLY-BASED ECONOMIC SYSTEM THAT IS OPEN TO EVERYONE, PRINCIPLED, AND FAIR – A CLEAR STEP FORWARD FROM THE MISERIES BROUGHT ON BY HUMAN EXPLOITATION.

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<sup>20</sup> Gilbert Fite, *Farm to Factory: A History of the Consumers Cooperative Association*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1965.

<sup>21</sup> Jerry Voorhis, *American Cooperatives: Where They Come From, What They Do, and Where They Are Going*. New York: Harper, 1961: 104.



AFTER A DECADE OF HARD TIMES, THIS PEACEFUL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MOVEMENT IS HEADING TOWARD A FUTURE OF SHARED PROSPERITY – A COOPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH WHOSE TIME HAS FINALLY ARRIVED . . . BUT THEN IS ABRUPTLY HALTED.

THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR ALTERS THE PATH OF CO-OP DEVELOPMENT. COOPERATIVE IDEALS TAKE A BACK SEAT TO MORE PRESSING NEEDS.

Narrator, WWII film: Training to develop muscles, to toughen and harden men for any job assigned. Training that teaches quick thinking, speed, balance, and timing.

ON THE HOME FRONT, ONCE-DORMANT FACTORIES NOW RUN AROUND THE CLOCK, FUELED BY A MASSIVE INCREASE IN GOVERNMENT SPENDING. THE GREAT DEPRESSION ENDS. ANYONE THAT WANTS A JOB HAS ONE, MAKING BOMBS, GUNS, AND RELATED WEAPONS.<sup>22</sup>

Narrator, WWII film: The battlefields of America are the production lines. The sweat and muscle and brains of men and women pounding out the tools of victory. Slugging out more and more and more.

David Thompson: All of the effort that went into the war immensely weakened all of the effort that was going on in cooperatives. The various efforts that people were doing at the local level, building a better society, went out of the window.

WITH FORTY PERCENT OF THE NATION'S PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY ALLOCATED TO WAR, CORPORATE LOBBYISTS HEAD TO WASHINGTON TO OBTAIN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS. SOON THEY ATTAIN SEVENTY PERCENT OF ALL WAR-RELATED MANUFACTURING, UP FROM ONLY THIRTY PERCENT TWO YEARS EARLIER.<sup>23</sup> SENATOR HARRY S. TRUMAN, AS HEAD OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM, WARNED THAT THE EMERGENCY OF WAR HAS CREATED THE

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<sup>22</sup> By 1944, unemployment in the US was at 1.2%, a historical low to this day. Samuelson, Robert J., "Great Depression." *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., ed. David R. Henderson, 2002. Accessed September 30, 2013. <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/GreatDepression.html>.

<sup>23</sup> James Mead, Harry Truman, Carl Hatch, Monrad Wallgren & Harley Kilgore, Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, *Investigation of the National Defense Program*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1943-44.

BIGGEST BUSINESS MONOPOLIES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD. SMALLER COMPANIES ARE DRIVEN OUT OF BUSINESS AS THE COUNTRY IS AGAIN ON A COURSE OF MAJOR INDUSTRIES CONTROLLED BY A FEW LARGE CORPORATIONS.

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, HAROLD ICKES, GIVES A DIRE WARNING TO THE RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION:

Dramatic Reading of Harold Ickes quote: If the ultimate result of our enormous sacrifices of this war shall be to solidify the hold of the monopolists upon this country . . . if these are the things we are sweating for . . . and shedding our blood for, then my advice to you would be to seek an immediate peace with the enemy . . . there is no difference ultimately between an economy dictated by fascism and one imposed by concentrated wealth.<sup>24</sup>

FARMS, ALSO, CONSOLIDATE, AS FARMERS LEAVE THE FIELDS TO FIGHT ON THE FRONT LINES OR WORK IN THE FACTORIES. FARMS GROW LARGER IN SIZE AND FEWER IN NUMBER.<sup>25</sup> CHEMICAL COMPANIES, WITH BACKING FROM GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, PRESS GROWERS TO USE INADEQUATELY-TESTED PESTICIDES, HERBICIDES, AND CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS TO INCREASE YIELDS.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Wall Street Moves to Washington." *Consumers Cooperation* 29.3 (1943): 40.

<http://fax.libs.uga.edu/HD2951xC776/co43/javavu.html>, or  
[http://fax.libs.uga.edu/HD2951xC776/1f/cooperation\\_1943.txt](http://fax.libs.uga.edu/HD2951xC776/1f/cooperation_1943.txt), number 40

<sup>25</sup> USDA Agricultural Fact Book, Chapter 3 <http://www.usda.gov/factbook/chapter3.pdf> "The number of farms fell dramatically...after 1935. Because the farmland did not decrease as much as the number of farms, the remaining farms have a larger acreage." Chart illustrating this fact on p. 24

<sup>26</sup> DDT, a pesticide developed in 1939, was used effectively during World War II to kill disease-carrying mosquitoes in the Pacific theater. Farmers quickly adapted the chemical to agricultural use. The creation of DDT also showed chemists the way to develop many other new chemicals such as the herbicide 2,4-D. In 1947, the USDA, Congress, farm groups and chemical manufacturers constructed the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) to regulate the use of these new and ill-studied chemicals. Rather than focusing on the public's protection from long-term effects from exposure to chemicals, the regulations focused on the safety of farmers and securing control of the market by established chemical companies. Long-term effects of exposure to DDT were not considered, and studies that did question the chemicals' safety were disregarded. The stated goal of the bill was to protect "the users of economic poisons [farmers and] the reputable manufacturer or distributor from those few opportunists who would discredit the industry." The negative effects of these chemicals would be widely ignored until Rachel Carson published her famous study on the dangers of DDT, *Silent Spring*, in 1962. Even then, there were no major changes to agricultural chemical regulations until 1972. Bill Ganzel, "Farming in the 1940s." *LivingHistoryFarm.org*. [http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/pests\\_01.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/pests_01.html). For an in-depth study on the use of chemicals in agriculture after World War II, and the development of corresponding government policy, please see: Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962; and John Bosso, *Pesticides and Politics: The Life Cycle of a Public Issue*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987. Bosso's book provides a thorough history of agricultural chemical policy, including more recent attempts in the 1980s to deregulate the industry.

OTHER SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGHS CHANGED THE FACE OF WARFARE WHILE CONTINUING AN AGE-OLD PATTERN OF THE HUMAN CONDITION.

AMERICANS AWAKE TO A NEW CHAPTER IN HUMAN HISTORY. KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHAIN REACTION THAT POWERS THE SUN IS NOW AVAILABLE TO ANNIHILATE LIFE ON EARTH.<sup>27</sup> NO ONE IS SAFE.

AND THERE IS NO ESCAPE FROM ANOTHER POWERFUL NEW FORCE: MODERN ADVERTISING.

AFTER THE WAR ENDS, CORPORATE RETAILERS LAUNCH THE LARGEST ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN IN THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION.<sup>28</sup>

AMERICANS ARE HEADED DOWN A FRESH-PAVED HIGHWAY TO A STRANGE NEW DESTINATION, IN THE PROCESS DISCOUNTING THEIR ROLES AS CITIZENS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES FOR THEIR NEW ROLE AS CONSUMERS IN A MASS MARKET.

THE DREAM WORLD OF UTOPIAN CONSUMERISM SURPASSES CO-OP IDEALISM FOR A BETTER SOCIETY. THE COOPERATIVE APPROACH OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT TO ADDRESS LOCAL NEEDS SEEMS OF A BYGONE ERA.

David Thompson: During the 1950s, cooperatives were not as attractive to the user as the changes in the marketplace happened. Most cooperatives were in the centers of the cities, and the population out-migrated. The chain stores came along, and they did a lot of advertising. The whole focus was on the single-family home, and the tract outside of the center of town, and the car, and the individualism, and the whole advertising gamut, created this kind of individual. It was an era in which interest in consumer cooperatives in particular, was reduced. And the cooperatives themselves, there were less of them.

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<sup>27</sup> The process that fuels the sun is fusion, opposed to the process that fuels an atomic bomb which is fission. However, the hydrogen bomb uses fusion and “unlike the fission (atomic) bomb, derives its power from the fusing of nuclei of various hydrogen isotopes into helium nuclei.”  
[http://inventors.about.com/od/nstartinventions/a/Nuclear\\_Fission.htm](http://inventors.about.com/od/nstartinventions/a/Nuclear_Fission.htm)

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Frank, *Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; also John Kenneth Galbraith, *The American Economy: Its Substance and Myth*, 1949

AS LARGE CORPORATIONS GROW EVEN LARGER, APPEALING TO THE MASS MARKET, THEY DEVELOP SOPHISTICATED TACTICS, HIRING ACTORS TO SERVE AS PITCHMEN FOR THEIR CONSUMER PRODUCTS.

Actor Ronald Reagan: Well, that's part of living better electrically.

THEY ALSO BREAK NEW GROUND WHEN GENERAL ELECTRIC CEO CHARLES WILSON IS APPOINTED HEAD OF THE OFFICE OF DEFENSE MOBILIZATION. WILSON ADVOCATES FOR A PERMANENT WARTIME ECONOMY, WHICH HE CLAIMS IS NEEDED TO WARD OFF ANOTHER DEPRESSION.<sup>29</sup> REAL AND IMAGINED THREATS ARE PROMOTED BY DEFENSE DEPARTMENT-SPONSORED FILMS, WARNING OF A NEW MENACE, JUSTIFYING A PERPETUAL INCREASE IN MILITARY SPENDING.

Woman: Who elected you to run this community? By what right do you tell us what to believe in and where to live? And what to read? We're Americans. And we believe in the freedom of the individual to make up his mind for himself. It's not the state that comes first, it's the people in it. And if you don't recognize the rights of the people, you don't belong here. Take your hands off me! Let go of me! Let me go! Let me go!

David Thompson: People who were organizing cooperatives during that period were always accused of being communist; even though there are very few links between cooperatives and the Communist Party, they were exploited by the enemies of cooperatives, And I think that it depressed a lot of interest that would normally have come into cooperatives during that era because people did not want to be accused of being a communist.

CONSUMER AND MILITARY SPENDING BECOME THE TWIN ENGINES THAT POWER THE U.S. ECONOMY. SOON AFTER WORLD WAR II ENDS, MORE THAN HALF OF THE FEDERAL BUDGET WOULD GO TOWARD CURRENT AND FUTURE WARS.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Charles E. Wilson was appointed as the first head of the Office of Defense Mobilization in 1950. While Executive Vice-President of the War Production Board during World War II, Wilson had spoken out about the need for a permanent war economy to stave off another depression. Merlin Chowkwanyun. Interview with Noam Chomsky. *Counterpunch*, July 2004. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2004/07/31/five-questions-with-noam-chomsky/>.

<sup>30</sup> Seymour Melman, *The Permanent War Economy: American Capitalism in Decline*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

UNDER THE CLOUD OF COLD WAR PARANOIA, CO-OPS ARE ATTACKED BY BIG BUSINESS AS UN-AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS. SETTING UP A FRONT CALLED THE NATIONAL TAX EQUALITY ASSOCIATION, THEY CLAIM THAT CO-OPS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FREE MARKET AND DO NOT PAY THEIR FAIR SHARE IN TAXES.<sup>31 32</sup>

David Thompson: It was part of the front that felt that cooperatives had some relationship to communism and we should stop them in every particular way in which we could. The fact that we share our profits with our members is one of the things that is really, really good. You wanna share your profits with your customers? You'll get a tax reduction as well.

BY THE EARLY 1950s, IT'S CLEAR THAT CO-OPS HAVE POWERFUL ENEMIES.

National Tax Equality Association Spokesperson: Now, I don't object to co-ops being in business, but I think it's only fair that they pay an equal share of the tax note. That's why I'm going to do something about it, today. I'm writing to the Representative in Congress from my district, and the two Senators from my state, saying that I think that cooperatives and mutuals should pay their fair share of income taxes right along with the rest of us. But how about you? What are *you* going to do about it?

CO-OPS LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF GAINING POLITICAL SUPPORT AND FIND A STELLAR CHAMPION IN CALIFORNIA CONGRESSMAN JERRY VOORHIS. VOORHIS HELPED FORM AND FINANCE MANY CO-OPS DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

David Thompson: He was concerned about the little guy. The little businessman, the little grocer. He was very concerned about the impact of bigness on Main Street America. He talked about what we should be afraid of, what we should be concerned about, what we

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<sup>31</sup> The National Tax Equality Association (NTEA) argued that cooperative businesses were unfairly tax-exempt and sought to abolish tax laws that protected coops. The NTEA posed as a grassroots organization of small businesses when in fact it was led by bankers and large agricultural firms. Their attacks on cooperatives often played on Cold War fears in which cooperatives were depicted as un-American, and in some instances as outright Communistic. Voorhis, 192-193; "How Local Co-ops Can Help Combat NTEA Robombs." *Co-op Magazine* Mar. 1945: 9. The NTEA tactics are frequently noted in postwar *Co-op Magazine* issues. Richard Giles, "Co-op News o' the Month." *Co-op Magazine* Nov. 1946: 20. <http://fax.libs.uga.edu/HD2951xC776/co46/javavu.html>.

<sup>32</sup> *Coops: In Center of Political Fight*, New York Times, August 31, 1947

should encourage, and what we should try not to encourage. He actively attempted in every way possible to build the kind of society, through cooperatives, that he felt would be the best to serve America.

IN 1946, JERRY VOORHIS IS CHALLENGED BY A YOUNG LAWYER FROM WHITTER, CALIFORNIA.

IN HIS FIRST RUN FOR OFFICE, RICHARD NIXON DISPLAYS A DISTINCT APPROACH TO POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING.

David Thompson: He tied Jerry Voorhis into different little, sort of, you know, well, you know this person and that person and that person, and that person is a communist. And he made it sound like Jerry Voorhis was an active communist and against everything that the United States stood for, and none of it was true.

THE TACTIC WORKS, AND LAUNCHES NIXON'S POLITICAL CAREER. HE IS ELECTED SENATOR, THEN VICE-PRESIDENT, AND EVENTUALLY PRESIDENT. NIXON WOULD LATER GET INTO TROUBLE CONFUSING HIS PRESIDENTIAL POWER WITH THAT OF THE KING.

JERRY VOORHIS IS APPOINTED HEAD OF THE COOPERATIVE LEAGUE OF THE USA.<sup>33</sup> HE CONTINUES TO ADVOCATE FOR CO-OPS FOR THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS DURING A TIME OF FADING PUBLIC INTEREST.

WHILE THE COUNTRY EXPERIENCES UNPRECEDENTED WEALTH AND ABUNDANCE, IN RURAL AREAS AND IN THE INNER CITIES, IT'S AN ECONOMIC SYSTEM OF NEGLECT. BY THE END OF THE 1950s, FIFTY-FIVE MILLION AMERICANS ARE POOR. HALF OF ALL AFRICAN-AMERICANS LIVE IN POVERTY.<sup>34</sup> THE PERSON WHO STARTS MY CO-OP WANTS THAT TO CHANGE.

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<sup>33</sup> Jerry Voorhis served as executive director of the Cooperative League of the USA from 1947-1965 and as its president from 1965-1967.

<sup>34</sup> US Census Bureau, "Historical Poverty Tables." *US Census Bureau*. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/people.html>. For a qualitative analysis of the poverty crisis of the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1962.

Tom Tolg: I saw people who I felt were oppressed and not given a fair shake for no, no good reason. That wasn't right. So we had to try to change things.

Tom Tolg: I went down to Atlanta, Georgia. We lived in a house that was provided for us called Freedom House. We did various kinds of activities that would confront the white racist establishment. Boycotted places that were discriminating against black folks. We were kept busy.

TOM'S PARTICIPATION IN A SIT-IN LANDS HIM IN THE FULTON COUNTY JAIL AND INCREASES HIS COMMITMENT TO DEAL WITH THE CRUCIAL UNDERLYING ISSUE.

Tom Tolg: Well, I got involved in the war on poverty in 1964 when my wife and I joined VISTA, Volunteers in Service to America, where we worked almost completely with black, migrant kids. The school where I taught in VISTA, they got the used books from the white school while the white school got the new books. What kind of, what kind of crap is that? But that's what it was like.

Tom Tolg: Then after VISTA, came up north, and then I got a job as a community organizer in Turners Falls.

TURNERS FALLS IS THE GRAND VISION OF INDUSTRIALIST ALVA CROCKER, WHO IN 1870 ENTICES INVESTORS AND FACTORY OWNERS TO BUILD THEIR PLANTS ALONG THE CONNECTICUT RIVER.<sup>35</sup> WATER POWER AND CHEAP RURAL LABOR FUEL THE PRODUCTION OF PAPER, COTTON, AND CUTLERY TO CREATE A THRIVING AND VIBRANT COMMUNITY. WITH THOUSANDS OF CITIZENS GAINFULLY EMPLOYED, TOWNSPEOPLE BUILD LIBRARIES, HOSPITALS, A THEATER, SCHOOLS, AND PLAYGROUNDS. FUELED BY AN EQUITABLE ABUNDANCE, MAIN STREET MERCHANTS AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS GENERATE CIVIC PRIDE AND GOODWILL, TAKING MOST SERIOUSLY THEIR PRIMARY CHARGE: THE RAISING OF THE NEXT GENERATION.

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<sup>35</sup> "Village of Turners Falls." *Town of Montague, Massachusetts*.  
[http://www.montague.net/Pages/MontagueMA\\_WebDocs/turners](http://www.montague.net/Pages/MontagueMA_WebDocs/turners)

BUT POOR PLANNING AND THE LURE OF CHEAP LABOR ELSEWHERE BRING THE VISION TO A SUDDEN HALT.<sup>36</sup> COMMUNITY, AS IT TURNED OUT, WAS A MERE BY-PRODUCT OF WEALTH CREATION, NOT CENTRAL TO IT. SIXTY YEARS LATER, THE TOWN THAT WAS ONCE HERALDED AS ONE OF THE MOST PROSPEROUS IN THE STATE IS NOW ONE OF THE POOREST.

Tom Tolg: We tried to get poor people involved in programs that would be helpful. We got a food and nutrition grant. And we had to write up a program for how we would spend the money, and having a food coop was one of them. It was funded by a poverty program. A lot of low-income people were eating over-processed food at fairly high prices. They didn't have much control over the quality, or much of anything else. And so we worked with those people to see if we could do some good. The idea was to get good food at low prices.

Tom Tolg: I had hired an organizer. And he came up with ten or fifteen households that said they'd be interested. He volunteered his apartment to be the, the drop-off place. It was really hard on the space. And as more people were interested, it was much more difficult to, to distribute the food and all. And somebody had learned about a building that was vacant which was really a much better location. And then we started really expanding the co-op's activities.

Tom Tolg: I like the idea that we had full-time working members that came in and would put in three or four hours every month, and they did various things to keep the co-op going.

SELF-HELP PROGRAMS PROMOTED BY PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON'S WAR ON POVERTY SPRING UP IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY. IT IS THE BEGINNING OF A SECOND WAVE OF CO-OP DEVELOPMENT, THIS TIME CENTERED ON FOOD.

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<sup>36</sup> In 1936, a great flood destroyed much of the John Russell Cutlery Company factory, Turners Falls' largest manufacturer of the time. The company chose to consolidate operations in Southbridge, MA. Peter Atwood, "Welcome!" *John Russell Cutlery Blog*. <http://johnrussellcutlery.blogspot.com/2007/07/welcome.html>; [http://www.memorialhall.mass.edu/people\\_places/view.jsp?itemtype=2&id=202](http://www.memorialhall.mass.edu/people_places/view.jsp?itemtype=2&id=202).

The later fate of Turners Falls' remaining factories followed the pattern of most of the Industrial North, with companies moving their manufacturing facilities to southern states that offered new facilities and cheap, non-unionized labor. Don Sherman Grant II and Michael Wallace, "The Political Economy of Manufacturing Growth and Decline across the American States, 1970-1985." *Social Forces* 73.1 (1994): 33-63.



THE MULTIFACETED ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS BRING AN IMMEDIATE AND DRAMATIC REDUCTION IN POVERTY BY EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO SOLVE THEIR OWN PROBLEMS.<sup>37</sup>

Merchant: How many bags do you need?

Black Woman #1: Well all right, how much?

Merchant: Six dollars, for twenty-four, twenty-four twos.

Black Woman #1: Twenty-four for two bags?

Merchant: Yeah. It's twenty-five cents a bag. I'll charge you twenty.

Black Woman #2: Well you're not giving any bargains around here. When is bargain day down here?

Merchant: Everyday in the week.

Black Woman On The Street: You go in there one day, the price is fifty-nine cent. The next day you go in, it's gone up ten cents more. Toilet tissue is fifty-five cents a roll. Soaps and things and powders: 89 cents a box. Everything you buy, butter, eggs, a dollar nineteen. You go to other stores, further out of the neighborhood, you can get them for eighty-nine cents.

Black Woman #1: Could I have a little bit of peace and quiet, please? Instead of going shopping up to Jack's store or Durans (?) store, we're going to a co-op place and buy these foods at wholesale prices. The same thing they pay for, and this way we don't have to pay any more for the food.

ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS HELP START HUNDREDS OF CO-OPS LIKE MINE. THEY ALSO HELP FARMERS.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The poverty level hovered around 19% when the Economic Opportunities Act passed in 1964. By 1968, poverty levels had dropped to 12%. US Census Bureau, "Historical Poverty Tables." *US Census Bureau*. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/people.html>. It is argued that Nixon's attempt to transform and terminate the Office of Employment Opportunities (OEO) was motivated by the OEO's effectiveness in politically empowering decentralized local and poor communities. Curt Lamb, *Political Power in Poor Neighborhoods*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975: 29-53.

Albert Turner (Southwest Alabama Farmers Cooperative Association): In the last ten years, mechanization of the farms created a situation where quite a few of these farmers were without anything to do. So this co-op was organized to be able to provide income for the small farmer on a small amount of land. So we chose to go into what we call a vegetable-producing co-op.

THIS ALABAMA CO-OP JOINS WITH OVER A HUNDRED OTHER PRODUCER CO-OPS TO FORM THE FEDERATION OF SOUTHERN COOPERATIVES – AN ELEVEN-STATE ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING OVER THIRTY THOUSAND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES. BY HELPING PEOPLE TO WORK TOGETHER, CO-OPS ARE AGAIN CHALLENGING THE ESTABLISHED ORDER.

The people here came out of the Civil Rights movement and believe in the cooperative movement.

Tom Tolg: It was the idea that we were masters of our own destiny. We did control what all we had and at what prices we sold them at and how we distributed what little money we made.

Tom Tolg: The original members, they were conservative, low-income and low-middle-income people. As things evolved, I think more and more of the folks that were, or the type of folks that were original members, tended to either leave the co-op or be subsumed by other members that had a more, a different kind of a lifestyle than the normal one.

Court Dorsey: It was a coming together of people who were a part of that quote-unquote “hippie movement,” but were also much more politically focused, much more economically focused, social change focused.

Court Dorsey: That was one of the beautiful things of coming of age in the sixties. We just felt that we could make a huge difference. Young people raising their voices and opposing the Vietnam War had an impact and eventually it, it came to a stop. So

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<sup>38</sup> A large cooperative movement emerged in the black rural South during the Civil Rights movement and later grew along with a larger national movement of cooperative development with the help of loans provided by the Office of Economic Opportunity and Title III of the 1964 Economic Opportunities Act. Lamond Godwin & Ray Marshall, *Cooperatives and Rural Poverty in the South*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971: 38-40.

why not also take on other huge, monolithic cultural phenomena with the same intention, which is to bring them back to a simpler, more peaceful, more holistic, place. And what more important than food?

WHILE CO-OPS ATTEMPT TO GAIN A FOOTHOLD IN THE LARGER ECONOMY, THE FOOD INDUSTRY IS ENGAGED IN A RUTHLESS COMPETITION FOR CORPORATE CONTROL. WITHIN A DECADE, TWO MILLION FAMILY FARMS GO OUT OF BUSINESS – SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND ARE TAKEN OVER BY GIANT AGRI-BUSINESSES.<sup>39</sup>

THE DRIVE TOWARD CONSOLIDATION IS LED BY THE THIRTY-SEVENTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. NIXON'S APPOINTMENT OF EARL BUTZ TO HEAD THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IS A WATERSHED EVENT FOR THE COUNTRY'S FARMERS.

Earl Butz: Unless there is some profit in food, there will be no food for people. If you want to eat well, and if you want your sons and grandsons to eat well, we're gonna make this industry pay.

A SPIKE IN FOOD PRICES SETS THE STAGE FOR THE TRANSFER OF BILLIONS OF DOLLARS FROM FAMILY FARMS TO A FEW CORPORATIONS. EFFICIENCY THROUGH MECHANIZATION IS THE STATED OBJECTIVE FOR A CHANGED INDUSTRY'S CENTRAL GOAL.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> From 1950 to 1970 there was a decrease of 2.65 million farms in the US, or 50% of the 5.4 million total of farms in 1950. From 1970 to the early 1980s, farm numbers decreased by another 500,000; however, that decrease does not include the loss of many farms sold to new corporate owners, while also including the creation of small part-time "hobby" farms and the once full-time farms that reduced production and shifted to part-time farms in which owners sought their primary income outside of agriculture. B.F. Stanton, "Changes in Farm Size and Structure in American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century." *Size, Structure, and the Changing Face of American Agriculture*, Arne Hallan, ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993: 42-70. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, farm exit rates were about 10 percent or 200,000 a year. Robert Happe and Penni Korb, United States Department of Agriculture, "Understanding US Farm Exits." *Economic Research Report No. (ERR-21)* June 2006: 7. In the early 1980s, during the height of the "Farm Crisis," it is estimated that 300,000 farmers were forced out of business for financial reasons. In this period, farm foreclosure rates were the highest they had been since the crisis years from 1926-1939. Bruce Gardner, *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century: How it Flourished and What It Cost*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002: 86. Many of these farmers sold to larger corporations or went into foreclosure and were most often bought up by agribusinesses. Many farmers that did not sell chose to enter into contract farming with agribusinesses, an unbalanced business relationship where, in return for stable minimum prices and retaining "ownership" of the farm, the farmer becomes a de facto employee of the agribusiness, which dictates what is grown and how it is grown. Agribusinesses avoid the obligations of paying the farmer as an employee (minimum wage, Social Security, health insurance, etc.) and paying property taxes. Ingolf Vogeler, *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of US Agriculture*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981: 138.

<sup>40</sup> For a thorough study on the consolidation of U.S. agriculture and the technology, government policies, and corporate influences that pushed this consolidation, see Arne Hallan, ed., *Size, Structure, and the Changing Face of American Agriculture*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993; Hugh Ulrich, *Losing Ground: Agricultural Policy and the Decline of the Family Farm*. Chicago: Chicago Review, 1989; Lauren Soth, *The Farm Policy Game Play by Play*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989; Vogeler, 1981. Also, for a look into the larger effect of farm closures and consolidation

Earl Butz: It's spelled P-R-O-F-I-T.

WHILE AT THE SAME TIME, THOUSANDS OF INDEPENDENT GROCERY STORES AND REGIONAL CHAIN STORES ARE DRIVEN OUT OF BUSINESS BY GIANT CHAINS.<sup>41</sup> WHEN THE DUST SETTLES, THE POWER IS IN THE HANDS OF A FEW REMAINING COMPANIES THAT DEMANDED PRICE CONCESSIONS FROM THEIR SUPPLIERS. CENTRALIZED CONTROL REAPS LARGE PROFITS AND INCREASES MARKET SHARE, WHICH CONSOLIDATES CORPORATE POWER.

Court Dorsey: The agribusiness and the food industry were doing to food what corporate American capitalism was doing in almost every aspect of the American economy. It was centralizing the means of production in order to enrich those who could control the means of production.

Court Dorsey: When you have to package food for mass distribution, you have to add a lot of chemical preservatives, you have to, you know, pump up the yields and production, which involves using lots of pesticides. The grains weren't whole grains, so if you're eating a loaf of bread, you're not getting anywhere near the nutrition that you would get as if you had a whole loaf of bread made from whole grains. It was a question about America being off track.

Marilyn Andrews: Economic issues seemed to me to be the most important thing going on. Economic motives were underneath things that people talked about. They were underneath the way the communities were structured. They were underneath what wars we chose to involve ourselves in.<sup>42</sup>

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on the deterioration of entire rural communities, see Art Gallaher & Harland Padfield, ed., *The Dying Community*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980; Osha Gray Davidson, *Broken Heartland: The Rise of the America's Rural Ghetto*, The Free Press, 1990.

<sup>41</sup> Regional chain supermarkets grew quickly during the 1950s, taking over the majority of retail sales from "mom & pop" stores. By the 1970s, nearly a dozen multi-state food chain retailers such as Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A & P), Safeway, Winn-Dixie, and Kroger had become billion-dollar businesses. John Shover, *First Majority – Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America*. De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976: 178-190. Retail grocery consolidation picked up again in the late 1980s and early 1990s with large-scale national mergers of large regional chains and the buyouts of smaller chains and independent stores. Alan Barkema, Mark Drabenstott, and Nancy Novack. "The New U.S. Meat Industry." *Economic Review* 86.2 (2001): 33.

<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/doc/RetailConcentration-web.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Superimposed title states that the War in Vietnam ended the War on Poverty:

<http://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/885>; Bruce Orenstein, Writer/Director, *American Idealist: The Story of*

Marilyn Andrews: The co-op felt like a truly nonviolent pursuit that was trying to change the society in the direction that I wanted to see changes happen: greater economic justice and healthier food. Rather than letting some corporation organize it for you, um, which seemed like it was, was beginning to look like it was disastrous to structure your way of life that way, this seemed an alternative. You get together with the people you know, the people around you in your community, you figure out what you wanna do, and you do it.

Co-op Person 1: We saw a need for distributing food at a low price and to not energize big agribusiness and the produce terminals, which only serve to rip off the people and the farmers who grow the food. We see ourselves as an alternative to doing that, um, because we deal with small farmers and we try to get good quality stuff and organically grown.

Mark Kramer: Agribusiness is taking over farming not by buying up the land and making the farmer a hireling, but by taking over all the inputs that a farmer has to buy, and by taking over all the marketplaces that a farmer has available to sell to.

WITH AN EXPANDING INDUSTRIAL FOOD SYSTEM COMES AN ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS. PETROLEUM-BASED FERTILIZERS, HERBICIDES, AND FUNGICIDES THAT CORPORATIONS PROMISE WILL FEED THE WORLD INSTEAD DEVASTATE ECOSYSTEMS AND TURN NUTRIENT-RICH SOILS INTO A LIFELESS SUBSTANCE.

AN INFORMED PUBLIC IS GALVANIZED TO TAKE ACTION, AND CO-OPS ARE SEEN AS PART OF THE SOLUTION.

Cameraman: How do you see the store fitting into the community?

Co-op Person 2: I see it as something unusual and rare.

DURING THE 1970s, FOOD CO-OPS SPRING UP ACROSS THE LAND LIKE MUSHROOMS AFTER A SPRING RAIN. MY CO-OP IS ONE OF THOUSANDS OF

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*Sargent Shriver*, Chicago Video Project, 2008; Martin Luther King, Jr., *Beyond Vietnam: A Time To Break The Silence*, speech delivered on April 4, 1967: <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article2564.htm>.

STOREFRONTS AND BUYING CLUBS.<sup>43</sup> THE GOAL IS TO ADDRESS THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS THROUGH HEALTHIER FOODS AND COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS.

Man from Brooklyn Co-op: The Whole Food Co-op was started by men and women from this community who were concerned about the low level of, uh, quality of food that we receive in our community, who wanted to bring a higher level of, uh, nutrition and nutrition information and education to the people of our community.

Woman from Brooklyn Co-op: Our specialty is the whole grains, the whole products: millet, bulgur, chickpea flour, all kinds of soy products, soy powder, soy milk.

THE RAPID INCREASE IN CO-OP GROCERY STORES CREATES THE NEED FOR MORE CO-OP SUPPLIERS. IN RESPONSE, OVER THIRTY DISTRIBUTION CENTERS AND WAREHOUSES ARE STARTED.<sup>44</sup> IN PLACES LIKE ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN; MADISON, WISCONSIN; EMERYVILLE, CALIFORNIA; TUSCON, ARIZONA; AND BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT, THESE BECOME OF THE HUB OF ORGANIC AND WHOLE GRAIN DELIVERIES TO HUNDREDS OF NEW CO-OP STORES IN EVERY REGION OF THE UNITED STATES.<sup>45</sup> THE GOAL TO ESTABLISH AN ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC SYSTEM, CENTERED AROUND FOOD, MAKES A BIG LEAP FORWARD.

David Thompson: There was a cooperative warehouse in San Francisco, there was a cooperative warehouse in Los Angeles, there was one in Tucson. Hundreds of thousands of people began to involve themselves. I really did think for a moment that perhaps we might just change the world that we were in because people were starting to talk about cooperatives and to create cooperatives and buying clubs and you know, It, it seemed to be everywhere. It seemed to be in every community.

Suzy Polucci: I thought, how can I be involved in some kind of social change situation that everybody needs? And I thought, ah-ha. Voilà

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<sup>43</sup> Anne Meis Knupfer, *Food Co-Ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013: 134.

<sup>44</sup> Gutknecht, Dave. *Good News and Old News*. Co-operative Grocer Network, July-August 1999.  
<http://www.cooperativegrocer.coop/articles/2004-01-08/good-news-and-old-news>

<sup>45</sup> Ronco, William. *Food Co-ops: An Alternative to Shopping in Supermarkets*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1974: 143

- Food! Food. Everybody needs food. Church ladies, the farmers, the hippies, and so I thought, "Oh, this is cool. We can do this!"

Suzy Polucci: I thought it would be so simple. But when I got into it, I realized, oh even with something as simple as food, everybody had a different idea about it. Some people wanted it to be a church. Some wanted it to be a daycare center. Some wanted it to be a political alternative. Some wanted it to be an educational thing. We used to have, I'm talking all-night meetings about whether or not the co-op should carry pet food. That's something that we want. We just want people food. What do you mean? My cat is, is a person, and, you know, oh my god. The board was sort of the manager and everybody was in on the decision-making, and even though it was still small, it was cumbersome.

David Thompson: Some people thought that you could have a store where you could tell people to take what you need and put in the cash register what you can. Some of the stores required everybody to work three to five hours a week. It was quite a struggle in a lot of the cooperatives allowing for there to be a general manager when before it was collective management.

Terry Plotkin: The managers we had weren't as skilled as we would have liked, but they were under difficult circumstances because they had employees who didn't really recognize them as managers. There was pressure from the workers, saying, "I want a cooperative workforce. I don't want to have any managers, I don't want anyone telling us what to do." It's almost like we were figuring it out as we went along.

San Francisco Guy 1: The store has to play its part in overcoming the ego through cooperation and selfless service. Cooperation sort of reinforces the group, and, uh, over the single individual. And that's a very important thing when you're dealing with egotism.

San Francisco Guy 2: You work down here and you get worn out. You know, that's a fact. It's just a matter of time when you realize that you're doing this gig, you're doing it a lot, and you're not getting anything out of it. And once you realize you're not getting anything out of it, you say, "Well, what the hell am I doing it for?"

You know? I mean, all right, you get the satisfaction of giving people food for a cheap price, but then you realize that's all you're doing. You know, you're giving. You're giving and giving and giving.

San Francisco Guy 1: We don't get paid salaries because we are working selflessly to overcome our ego-consciousness and to work towards a better world. And I think the movement is facilitating a new society, a new consciousness. It's not just cheap food. It's, it's a new, it's a new, uh, era of time, the Aquarian Age.

David Thompson: We had very idealistic ways in which we could build this new society. But a lot of those idealistic ways weren't grounded in true economic principles. And, um, regretfully, although a lot of cooperatives were founded in the 1960s and '70s, many of them passed away over time.

OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED CO-OPS STARTED,<sup>46</sup> ONLY TWO HUNDRED REMAIN. OF THE THIRTY CO-OP WAREHOUSES, ONLY TWO SURVIVE.<sup>47</sup>

Marilyn Andrews: The business decisions began to challenge the ideology that we had been working on. We had to think about what we were doing in terms of how it would play out economically.

IN A WORLD DOMINATED BY GROCERY CHAINS, CO-OPS FACE GRAVE CHALLENGES. THEIR PATH TO SURVIVAL IS IN THE GROWING MARKET OF WHOLE AND NATURAL FOODS THAT THEY PIONEERED, BUT BY HEADING DOWN THAT PATH, THEY WOULD FORESTALL THEIR MISSION TO SELL LOW-COST FOOD IN LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS.

A PLAN IS PUT FORWARD AT MY CO-OP TO MOVE TO ANOTHER TOWN – ONE WITH A LARGER POPULATION AND A HIGHER PER CAPITA INCOME.

Marilyn Andrews: Everybody understood that in moving to Greenfield, there would be more people who would shop at the co-op. The kinds of foods that we were using were becoming more popular.

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<sup>46</sup> “Probably only 5 percent of the nearly one thousand cooperatives...existed before 1970.” Ronco, William. *Food Co-ops: An Alternative to Shopping in Supermarkets*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1974: 109.

“By 1979, nearly 3,000 cooperative food stores or buying clubs were retailing food...in the United States and Canada.” Hoyt, Ann. *The Renaissance of Consumer Food Cooperatives: Sources of Growth, 1960-1980*.

<sup>47</sup> Two remaining warehouses are Co-op Partners Warehouse in St. Paul, MN and La Montanita in Albuquerque, NM



Court Dorsey: I didn't want the co-op to move to Greenfield. Turners Falls had a lot of people who needed it for economic reasons and were using it as, as a source of cheap food.

Suzy Polucci: I wanted to move it and, and some people really did not. And some of the older people that had built it up.

Marilyn Andrews: The decision about moving to Greenfield split the community. That's why it was so traumatic because it wasn't just a business decision. It was a community decision.

Terry Plotkin: The whole store was on the line since it was a barely-salvageable operation. There was no room for error, really. We had to get this right. We had to get this right if we were gonna survive as a co-op.

Tom Tolg: It reacted to reality. The economic reality, the cultural reality. The original vision may have been flawed. But just because that vision wasn't met is no reason to say, well we'll throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Terry Plotkin: After a series of meetings we just took a vote. And, uh, I think we lost some people when we took that vote.

Suzy Polucci: It's one thing to make your own mistakes in your life and pay the consequences. But what if you make a decision for a community store and blow it? Then you've just lost everybody's money and hard work and their trust and, and it felt it felt really scary. And that we still didn't exactly know how to run a grocery store.

TEN YEARS AFTER THE MONTAGUE CO-OP BEGAN SELLING WHOLE GRAIN FOODS OUT OF SOMEONE'S APARTMENT, MEMBERS TAKE A BOLD LEAP OF FAITH TO REVIVE THEIR FRAIL ECONOMIC VENTURE BY CHANGING LOCATIONS. BUT UNABLE TO PAY MAIN STREET RENTS, THE BEST THEY CAN DO IS TO FIND A PLACE ON A SIDE STREET. THEY ALSO CHANGE THE CO-OP'S NAME TO DISPLAY A MORE REGIONAL APPEAL.

Terry Plotkin: Business started increasing immediately the moment we moved to Greenfield. The store had more products in it, started adding a couple of employees.

Suzy Polucci: Sales just went up whatever, fifty, sixty, seventy percent. It was like, oh, my gosh. But trying to ride this beast: what do we do now? We gotta come up with new systems to be able to have more employees, and more keys, and who's gonna schedule these cashiers? What happens when somebody's sick? And the ordering became more complex.

Terry Plotkin: Some people thought getting bigger was getting badder. It meant more impersonal, more profit, more, and there were other people who said, what's wrong with profit as long as we share it amongst each other? What's wrong with getting bigger? We'll have more jobs, more food, more everything. And others say we'll lose our sense of community. Through that process, we had managers who quit, we had workers who quit, we had board presidents quit.

Suzy Polucci: There came a time where they had to, uh, let me go. And I just thought, "You dirty rats. After all I've done for you." And so there goes my part-time job. There goes my income. Well I didn't come in here for two years because I was so mad. But in the end, really, I couldn't run a multimillion-dollar grocery store. I'm a clown! I mean, the financial things were getting so complicated. I couldn't figure this out.

Suzy Polucci: What I've made meaning out of this is that there's a part that different kinds of people play in an organization. And I see myself as an overthrunder, a person that comes in with a blast of energy, can see certain things: "We gotta get to Greenfield. Let's go!" And then there's the people that are gonna put their head in one of many available yokes and pull, pull for the long term of, you know, mortgages and financial statements and personnel policies. And a lot of time the overthrunder, more visionary people got to go because they're, they're not gonna stay there for the steady pull of it. And I thought it was meant that I wasn't valued, and I wasn't needed. But I was needed for that part of it. And then other types

of people are needed for the other parts of it, which they really have talent and time and skill that I didn't have.

WHILE MY CO-OP GAINS FINANCIAL STRENGTH ON A SIDE STREET, MAIN STREET IS ABANDONED BY CHAIN STORES THAT FAVOR MALLS OVER VILLAGE CENTERS. THE COLLAPSE OF A TWO-HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD DOWNTOWN SEEMS IMMINENT WHEN A PLAN IS PUT FORWARD FOR A NEW SHOPPING AREA, TWO MILES NORTH OF MAIN STREET, AND LARGER THAN THE ENTIRE DOWNTOWN, BUT THIS ONE DOESN'T GO AS PLANNED.

THREE WEEKS AFTER RESIDENTS REJECT WALMART'S PROPOSAL, THE FRANKLIN COMMUNITY CO-OP MAKES ITS RISKIEST MOVE EVER WHEN IT TAKES OVER AN ABANDONED J.C. PENNY STOREFRONT.<sup>48</sup>

Gary Seldon: Well, it was a J.C. Penny store, and we turned it into a grocery store. All of the shelving and all the coolers, all that had to be brought in. We added bathrooms, added the office upstairs and downstairs. We built a kitchen. Everyone was working for a reduced wage. It's because it's ours and we're running it ourselves, there's a huge different, uh, emotional content.

THE FRANKLIN COMMUNITY CO-OP, ALSO CALLED THE GREEN FIELDS MARKET, MOVES INTO A SPACE TEN TIMES LARGER THAN ITS PREVIOUS LOCATION, EXPANDING IN ALL AREAS AND ADDING A DELI AND A BAKERY. THE CO-OP HAS A LIVABLE WAGE POLICY AND EMPLOYEE PROFIT SHARING, PROVIDES A COMMUNITY MEETING SPACE, AND A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER, AND HAS BECOME A CENTER OF COMMUNITY LIFE.

Marilyn Andrews: We are beginning to appreciate the fact that we had created a business that was community-owned, it was owned by the people who used it, and was helping Greenfield survive economically. Our cooperative business was becoming an important part of the vitality of the community as a whole.

MY CO-OP'S STORY IS SIMILAR TO WHAT HAPPENED IN HUNDREDS OF COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES. USING THE PRINCIPLES OF

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<sup>48</sup> For a thorough investigation of the proposed Greenfield, Massachusetts, Wal-Mart and its ultimate rejection by the community, see the documentary *Talking to the Wall: The Story of an American Bargain*. Steve Alves, Greenfield, Massachusetts, Hometown Productions, 2003.

COOPERATION, PEOPLE STARTED SMALL GROCERY STORES, WHICH THEY NURTURED INTO MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR BUSINESSES. THEY DEVELOPED BUSINESS SKILLS AND BROUGHT NEW PRODUCTS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES.<sup>49</sup>

SINCE THE MARKET CRASH OF 1929 THAT LAUNCHED THE GREATEST ECONOMIC CRISIS IN U. S. HISTORY, WE'VE HAD FOURTEEN RECESSIONS – ONE EVERY SIX YEARS ON AVERAGE.<sup>50</sup> THE MOST RECENT MELTDOWN NEARLY BROUGHT DOWN THE ENTIRE WORLDWIDE ECONOMY. THE ONLY THING THAT PREVENTED ANOTHER GREAT DEPRESSION WAS THE INFUSION OF BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF PUBLIC FUNDS<sup>51</sup> – A SHOCKING CONTRADICTION OF HOW THE “FREE MARKET” IS SUPPOSED TO WORK. UNSTABLE SEISMIC FAULT LINES APPEAR TO BE BUILT INTO OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM. IN SUCH SELF-CONTAINED, SELF-ABSORBED, UNREFLECTIVE SYSTEMS, WITH FEW CHECKS AND BALANCES AND A FEVERISH INTENSITY TO BUILD INDIVIDUAL WEALTH, IT'S EASY TO LOSE YOUR MORAL BEARINGS. GOOD PEOPLE BEHAVE BADLY, WHICH AFFECTS NEIGHBORHOODS AND COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

David Thompson: When our economy came close to collapsing, where everything that once worked seemed for a moment like it might not work, I think as a result of all of that, people have been looking at what society should we build that won't have those kinds of mistakes happen, where our money can be safe, where our jobs can be safe, and I think that there's been a huge amount of focus on local. What are we doing locally, what can we do as individuals together? How can we help create jobs in the local economy? How can we keep our savings in the local economy? And every time that

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<sup>49</sup> Along with there being around 300 consumer food co-ops around the country, some have grown to significant sizes, such as the PCC Natural Markets cooperative, having nine stores in the Puget Sound region of Washington state, owned by over 49,000 members while supporting thousands of non-members that choose to shop at their stores. <http://www.pccnaturalmarkets.com/about/>.

<sup>50</sup> “US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions.” *The National Bureau of Economic Research*. <http://www.nber.org/cycles.html>

<sup>51</sup> The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 authorized the United States Secretary of the Treasury to spend up to \$700 billion dollars to supply cash directly to the bank to purchase distressed assets: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency\\_Economic\\_Stabilization\\_Act\\_of\\_2008](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency_Economic_Stabilization_Act_of_2008). The Bush and Obama administrations followed with stimulus spending. Dylan Mathews shows that a majority of the leading studies point to the stimulus spending as a factor in reducing the threat of the Great Recession. Dylan Mathews, “Did the Stimulus Work? A Review of the Nine Best Studies on the Subject.” WONKBLOG, *Washingtonpost.com*. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/post/did-the-stimulus-work-a-review-of-the-nine-best-studies-on-the-subject/2011/08/16/gIQAThbiBJ\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/post/did-the-stimulus-work-a-review-of-the-nine-best-studies-on-the-subject/2011/08/16/gIQAThbiBJ_blog.html)

you ask those kinds of questions, the cooperative comes up as the most capable form of economic organization.

IF FOOD CO-OPS ARE TO HAVE AN AFFECT ON THE LARGER ECONOMY, THEY WILL NEED TO INCREASE THEIR SHARE OF THE MONEY PEOPLE SPEND ON FOOD.

TO SEE WHAT THAT MIGHT LOOK LIKE, I WENT TO THE MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL REGION OF MINNESOTA. IN A STATE WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF FOOD CO-OPS IN THE COUNTRY, THE TWIN CITIES HAS ITS GREATEST CONCENTRATION.

Gail Graham: In Minnesota, co-ops are really a part of our life because this is a really rich area for cooperation. Everybody around here knows what a co-op is. They just say the co-op, you know, and they know you're talking about a food co-op, even though, of course, there's many other types of co-ops. But the food co-ops have a high presence. We do business with not only local producers and local growers, but other people in the community, and so we're circulating dollars in our community. The co-op builds wealth for the community, not for any individual person.

Gail Garham: For stable communities, we need to be able to do that, and that it's important to do it on a regional basis, on a small-scale basis, if it's really going to stick. We became incredibly successful on this very slow, gradual track. When this store opened 12 years ago, this lot had been vacant for over 20 years, and it was a very blighted corner in the community. We were able to hold true to our values of delivering great service and great food, focusing on the natural and organic, the local products, and build commercial success, and build our communities.

IN A 25-MILE RADIUS OF THE TWIN CITIES, TWELVE FOOD CO-OPS TOTAL SEVENTY THOUSAND MEMBERS, THIRTEEN HUNDRED EMPLOYEES, AND GROSS SALES OF OVER 151 MILLION DOLLARS A YEAR.<sup>52</sup> THEIR

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<sup>52</sup>Twin Cities Co-op data were derived from 2011 Gross Annual Sales, membership and employees for the following co-ops:

1. Grassroots Co-op, Anoka
2. Lakewinds Natural Foods, Minnetonka
3. Eastside Co-op, Minneapolis
4. Linden Hills Co-op, Minneapolis
5. The Wedge, Minneapolis

## COLLECTIVE POWER IS PERHAPS MOST CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED BY THE LARGEST OF THE GROUP.

Lindy Bannister: I worked in the conventional grocery business for over twenty years, in a conventional chain. The pressures are about putting the money on the bottom line. And so if you don't have your numbers in line, your gross margins, your labor percents, your sales, you're not really important. In a conventional world, it's all about profits, the less people you have working and the less benefits you're paying. In the co-op world, we're doing the opposite. Seventy-five percent of our staff are full-time, twenty-five are part-time. In a conventional world, that's reversed. We've got two hundred and sixty people working here in this store. We've never cut back our workforce. In 2008, when the economy went in the tank, we didn't lay off anybody.

Lindy Bannister: So that's a different kind of stress than you have in a conventional chain, when somebody is hammering you on a Friday morning, that's picking up the phone and saying you're point zero one off your labor dollar. Can you explain that to me and tell me what that is?

Lindy Bannister: Pressures here are self-induced to make sure that we never lose the trust with our members, that we are what we say we are. Because we're very successful and we have this incredible growth, um, it gives us the opportunity to do projects that we might not be able to do otherwise. We have our own distribution center. It's our growth department. We expanded our warehouse about five years ago from fifteen thousand square feet to forty-five thousand square feet, added a ninety-one-pallet space freezer; we've expanded into more dairy products.

Rhys Williams: We purchase product to sell to our co-ops. The Wedge guides us a little bit. They know what they need, but we also talk to the other stores to find out what they need, and then

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6. Seward Co-op, Minneapolis
  7. Hampden Park, St. Paul
  8. Mississippi Market, St. Paul
  9. Spiral Natural Foods, Hastings
  10. Just Foods, Northfield
  11. City Center Market, Cambridge
  12. River Market Community Co-op, Stillwater

we talk to the growers to find out what they need. I farmed vegetables for eleven years, and when I was farming, price was the number one thing that the larger stores wanted from us. They had all the cards, all right. They dictated the price, and so what you have is system where, depending on how the buyer feels that way or what pressure he's getting from his stores or from his customers, he can knock you down pretty fast. And here at Co-op Partners and in the co-op world, that doesn't happen. What we like to do here is set our pricing with our farmers in the winter, and then we stick to it unless it's a bad year, and then we can negotiate and we can go up. It's important that we pay enough for what their product is. If you have a set price as a farmer, you're spending as if you're going to get that money, and so it can be a killer if somebody drops price on you. The co-ops will allow us to spend a little bit more to support a small grower because we have to make sure that they can afford to stay in business.

Lindy Bannister: There's been this huge consolidation of grocery distribution centers in the natural food world. That's, um, food for thought.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE GROCERY BUSINESS, BY A FEW MAJOR CORPORATIONS, IS AFFECTING THE ENTIRE U.S. FOOD SUPPLY – A TREND KNOWN AS THE HOURGLASS EFFECT. ABOVE ARE TWO MILLION FARMS, BELOW ARE THREE HUNDRED MILLION AMERICANS WHO EAT THE FOOD THEY GROW. DURING THE LAST TWENTY YEARS, THE CHANNEL BY WHICH FOOD IS DELIVERED TO GROCERY STORES HAS BECOME SMALLER AND SMALLER. CO-OPS ARE ONE OF THE FEW BUSINESSES FIGHTING TO OPPOSE THE GROWING CONTROL OF BOTH OUR FOOD AND OUR ECONOMY.<sup>53</sup>

Superimposed title: 26% of all retail food dollars go to Wal-Mart.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>William Heffernan, "Consolidation in the Food And Agriculture System."

<http://www.foodeircles.missouri.edu/whstudy.pdf>; Philip Howard, "Visualizing Food System Concentration and Consolidation." <http://www.ag.auburn.edu/auxiliary/srsa/pages/Articles/SRS%202009%2024%202%2087-110.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup>Stephen Leeb, "Wal-Mart Fattens Up On Poor America With 25% of US Grocery Sales." *Forbes* 20 May 2013.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2013/05/20/wal-mart-cleans-up-on-poor-america-with-25-of-u-s-grocery-sales/>; Wal-Mart is the biggest grocer in the country — according to estimates from Janney Capital Markets, it has about 33 percent market share in the United States, cited in New York Times article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/25/business/25walmart.html? r=0>

Sean Doyle: When you have agricultural systems that are just exploiting at the lowest per cost unit possible to make the price low, the inputs that are used to keep that land productive are such that there are costs to the system that aren't accounted for, that we're paying for. Rivers full of silt, Louisiana has a dead zone that's huge,<sup>55</sup> and you can't drink well water in the state of Iowa.<sup>56</sup> So there's human health, there's planet health, that are also at stake. The thing that often gets lost in economic activity is the human element, and I think that's really what the core of fair trade is about, both domestic and international, is to not lose track of the people involved in the economy.

IN THE TWIN CITIES, THE HIGH PRESENCE OF CO-OPS TRANSLATES INTO THE MARKET POWER NEEDED TO OPPOSE CORPORATE CONTROL BY SUPPORTING AN INCREASING NUMBER OF REGIONAL FOOD SOURCES AND NURTURING A NEW GENERATION OF FARMERS.

Lindy Bannister: This will be our fifth season of operating the farm. Our farm is a teaching farm, and so we're always looking to make sure that our farmers that are working there are getting the knowledge that they need so that when they make their big decision to go out and farm on their own, we've given them the tools to be able to do that. And that's a different kind of farm than just hiring people to be farm workers.

David Thompson: In Minneapolis-St. Paul, it is the clustering of cooperatives that tend to bring a second level of energy to the cooperative world, by coming together to do projects together, to support secondary activities such as education.

Uli Koester: Most of us would not like to eat it like an apple.

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<sup>55</sup> Above-average low oxygen Dead Zone covers 5,840 miles along LA Coast; [www.nola.com](http://www.nola.com) July 29, 2013

<sup>56</sup> Study: "Nitrate Contamination in Private Well Water in Iowa", American Journal of Public Health, 1993;83:270-272. "Approximately 30% of all wells in southern and western IA exceed the health advisory limits (of nitrate)." <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1694569/pdf/amjph00526-0112.pdf>; 2013 Sierra Club Report stating nitrate levels in 2013 in twelve IA rivers were higher than EPA standards, some twice as much. "The concern extends to well water since wells can be contaminated with nitrates." <http://iowa.sierraclub.org/WaterQuality/DrinkingWater.pdf>; *Iowa View: Water Customers Pay When Others Pollute*. Des Moines Register, May 16 2013.



Lindy Bannister: Mississippi Market and the Wedge started a non-profit educational organization that taught kids in the elementary schools about food. And they really have the kids excited about eating fresh food.

Uli Koester: I was hired by the two co-ops, Mississippi Market and the Wedge, to do the work. And then, starting in 2000, other co-ops jumped on board. So the Linden Hills Co-op in south Minneapolis, Seward Co-op came on board at that time, and now we're up to six. And so, the six food co-ops that give between fifteen and thirty thousand dollars a year to our program. So we hit around six, seven thousand kids a year now, at forty or fifty schools.

Steve Alves: Well, what do you like about having a garden?

Jacob Jones: We can get a lot of stuff from there, like, lot of food, and maybe some fruits from there, so we don't have to buy it from the store, and we can just grow it fresh.

Steve Alves: How's it taste? Is it any different?

Jacob Jones: Not that much.

Christina Jennings: The environment with multiple co-ops creates a dynamic. There are new co-ops starting, older co-ops that are expanding and adding membership and moving into new stores. There is a real excitement about what the co-ops can bring to the community. The successful co-ops are really looking for opportunities to support new co-ops, seeing what can they do to support the success of co-ops not just in the Twin Cities but in the surrounding area.

Amy Fields: Eastside Co-op opened in 2003. We had two co-ops loan us money, and one co-op just outright give us money. We were opened by community members who had been told that this neighborhood didn't have the demographics to support a co-op. These folks, this band of cooperators knew that that's what they wanted. They wanted a natural food store, they wanted it on

Central Avenue, which is the Main Street of northeast Minneapolis, and they wanted it community-owned.

Amy Fields: Like a lot of Main Streets, the big box outlets that came in really wiped out a lot of the storefronts. And if you drive up and down Central Avenue, you'll see that. And we decided we were not only going to build our store out here, we were going to buy the property, we were going to plant a flag on Central Avenue, we were gonna stay here. We own a twelve thousand square foot-building, so from the very beginning we were thinking about growth and expansion. Right now we're going to do about five point seven million sales this year. When we opened eight years ago, we were a two million-dollar store, so we're growing pretty fast. We have thirty-six hundred members, and we started with twenty-six employees, and now we're at fifty-six employees. Our board has a commitment to living wage, health insurance for all employees.

Amy Fields: You know, it's a way to sort of, again, take back the community. There's all those businesses out there that just want to take what they can out of the community and walk away, because their shareholders and their stakeholders are elsewhere. Ours are all right here. When we opened, the two co-ops closest to us both had double-digit growth that year. We didn't take away any market share of those, and from what I can tell, none of the co-ops do. We all grow, and we don't cannibalize each other. We just get our message out and have more and more people want to be a part of that.

Christina Jennings: One of the things that we see is food co-ops supporting not just other food co-ops, but more and more producers of local foods, small-scale producers and processors who can transform our food systems by putting not only their capital, but directing the attention of their members to that work.

Sean Doyle: What we're trying to do is to sustain a community of shared values. Values that are dedicated to clean environment, equitable economic relationships, socially responsible business practices. Groceries are the means in which we're accomplishing our mission. But ultimately, the real cost of food is such that if you want to have a situation or an economic system that doesn't

exploit individuals, there has to be fairness in that price so that the farmer can stay on the land, and gather the price that's higher than they might find in a mass-produced environment. And all that's really driven by just the fundamental need for equitability in the economy. And trying to make sure that throughout that chain that individuals who are part of that making food, all are benefiting fairly.

IN THE SAME WAY THAT CO-OPS INTRODUCED ORGANIC FOOD TO THE PUBLIC IN THE 1970s, THEY ARE TODAY TRYING TO ESTABLISH LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS AND ECONOMIC FAIRNESS. THE GOOD NEWS IS, THEY DON'T NEED TO TAKE OVER THE MARKET TO DO IT. BY ATTAINING ONLY TWO PERCENT<sup>57</sup> OF THE GROCERY BUSINESS IN THE TWIN CITIES AREA, CO-OPS HAVE SET A HIGHER STANDARD FOR THE ENTIRE REGION.

David Thompson: When cooperatives become a certain proportion of the trade in a community, then all of the other retailers begin to do a lot of what the cooperative is doing, repeat what the cooperative is doing, support what the cooperative is doing.

SO APPEALING IS THE IDEA OF PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD LOCAL ECONOMIES, THAT CO-OPS ARE AGAIN ON THE RISE. SEVENTY FOOD CO-OPS HAVE OPENED IN THE LAST SIX YEARS, AND OVER 100 ARE IN DEVELOPMENT IN 32 STATES.<sup>58</sup>

Bonnie Hudspeth: I got involved with starting this food co-op just about four years ago. I was a student at Antioch University of New England and I was trying to think about a project that would be meaningful and give back to the community. I liked the farmland, I was drawn here for that reason, and then I realized that it would be really amazing to have a food co-op in our area.

Bonnie Hudspeth: I was looking at what was happening nationally in terms of distribution of wealth and power, and a strong need to take back more control. To me, looking around and feeling often powerless in even the local government system and certainly the

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<sup>57</sup> According to the Minneapolis' Wedge Co-op TCCompetitive\_Analysis\_2011 Report, "the estimated natural foods co-op market share in the Twin Cities is about 2 percent"; also see footnote # 49

<sup>58</sup> 72 co-ops have opened in the last six years (as of 2014); 109 are in development, across 32 states, according to Stuart Reid at Food Coop Initiative, [www.foodcoopinitiative.coop](http://www.foodcoopinitiative.coop)

national government system, I was like, wow, this is a way where a group of individuals can come together and work democratically to achieve something that meets their needs. And we got together a co-op committee back in April 2008. I had no idea what I was getting into. Co-ops face different challenges than they have in the past because there's so much more competition in the natural food industry that there has to be a different niche for co-ops. And I think that niche is local food.

Bonnie Hudspeth: How do you create a business that represents a thousand people? How do you provide food at an accessible price while at the same time compensating farmers at a fair price? It relates to community and society in a model that brings together doctors, lawyers, community organizers, farmers. To me, that's how co-ops and corporations really differ, is that democratic control. Giving power back to the people.

Bonnie Hudspeth: If you ask me what I've done for the last four years, it's community organizing, and it's relationship building. When you look out and see all these people working together with different ideas, that spirit of joy over the work that we're all doing together. True relationships and friendships have been built, and that is pretty exciting work.

Ed Guyot: I've never been involved in a co-op before. I came out of that more traditional capitalist model. The idea of what I would consider to be competing organizations getting together to benefit the overall movement is totally foreign to me. We've had the Brattleboro Co-op, the Hanover Lebanon Co-ops, Putney Co-op, other co-ops down in Massachusetts and Vermont, reach out to us as a start-up co-op and say what can we do to help you. That's very unusual from the normal capitalistic approach to business because you're just strengthening your competitor. Your mission is to beat them. Co-ops are different than that because it's about having co-ops cooperate with each other, is just better for the movement overall. Everyone wants to bring good food at the local level.

Bonnie Hudspeth: I think co-ops elevate people to care, to become active where they can see a tangible benefit right before their eyes.

It doesn't surprise me at all that there's this new wave of growth in co-ops because it's so much more than a food store.

Co-op Lady: Welcome to our first ever annual meeting for Monadnock Community Market Co-op.

Bonnie Hudspeth: This time last year in August, we had a hundred and one founding member owners. We now have seven hundred and sixty founding member owners. So to see that growth happen and to see the type of people that joined and the diversity of people coming to the table, I don't see anything else that exists like that. We're just waiting for our building plans to pass, and we'll break ground to build a thirteen thousand square foot-food co-op right in downtown Keene.

TO SEE WHAT NEW CO-OPS ARE ACCOMPLISHING, I TRAVELED FIFTY MILES SOUTH OF THE MONADNOCK CO-OP TO ONE OF THE FIRST OF THE NEW WAVE CO-OPS.

Rochelle Prunty: The people that started this store were wanting to support a strong local economy based on food. We started five years ago, our first year our sales were eight point one million, and we're on track this year for nineteen point seven million in sales. We have about a hundred and fifteen employees, about a hundred and ten of those are full-time. Last year, we spent three point two million dollars purchasing products from three hundred and thirty-five local vendors. Between purchasing from local farmers, local employment, we've got over seven million dollars going back into the local economy.

Tom Bradbury: Capitalism does work, but it tends to funnel the wealth into just a few people. And then, a lot of people that are producing and doing the work, they're actually struggling just to have a living wage. In a cooperative, we don't want to do that. Rather than just taking the money and funneling it, and then funneling it away from other people, we want it to be equal, more equal, more on a level basis, so everybody can live, so everybody can eat well, so everybody can be comfortable and feel safe.

IN MY PART OF THE COUNTRY, NEW AND ESTABLISHED CO-OPS ARE EXPANDING THEIR CONNECTIONS WITH LOCAL FARMERS AND FOOD PROCESSORS IN AN EFFORT TO DEVELOP A REGIONAL FOOD-BASED ECONOMY.

David Thompson: If we want to have ideals, that's fine. But if we want to have a commonwealth, we've got to build a cooperative system that creates that commonwealth because that is what will give us the strength to be more effective in the marketplace, to serve more people, and to have our ideals mean something.

Sean Doyle: By creating structures that are based on a commonwealth model, you're building a structure that's going to be here for many generations. It's not at the whims of what stock prices happen to be, CEOs' decisions around what's going to make a good bottom line in this financial quarter. It really is driven by the commitment of a community towards a common purpose.

Sean Doyle: It's an ongoing challenge, ah, to continue to keep the association aligned towards a common vision of what we're trying to accomplish, and at the same time be a strong and vital business.

IT COMES DOWN TO THE ISSUE OF POWER AND CONTROL: WHO OWNS WHAT, AND WHOM DO THEY SERVE. A SOCIETY THAT SQUANDERS ITS WEALTH PRODUCING WEAPONS FOR WAR AND UNHEALTHY FOOD WILL NOT HAVE A LONG SHELF LIFE. SO I SEARCH FOR THE ALTERNATIVE. LIKE ANY INFORMED SHOPPER, I WANT GOOD VALUE FOR MY MONEY: HEALTHY FOOD, AN EMPHASIS ON PEOPLE OVER PROFITS, AND THE ONGOING OF CARE OF LAND, WATER AND AIR. IF WE WANT TO CHANGE HOW WE DO BUSINESS, AND HOW WE LIVE, FOOD IS A GOOD PLACE TO START.

Phil Maddern: Started growing sprouts in my cellar. It's an easy thing to do if everything goes right, it's easy. You, you can talk to a lot of my customers, all of them in fact, ask 'em what I am. I'm not only the sprout man, I'm their good friend.

Co-ops and I have got along very well, very well. I have never ever had, had a problem with 'em.

We started when the market was on Chapman Street. It was a very small store. It was like a one-room schoolhouse. It was not a big deal. They were a, a touchy-feely operation. I mean, it was, it was, it was like a love, a love. They were more involved with people than they were with making money. They, they, they, they made money as an aside as far as I could figure out.

That everybody was gonna have a say in how they operated. But they had no idea what the hell they were doing. They were definitely a hippie operation. I can remember going into to deliver, and there was nobody around. They were they were all in the office doing whatever.

They could come there and they could, they could bring their babies in and, and nurse 'em while they were, were doing their, their, their shopping and nobody gave a shit. And I and I, I remember breaking in when I shouldn't have a couple times. But, but now they're married and, and, and they are one of the, uh, the movers and the shakers of this whole operation.

Then when they came onto Main Street, you get into high gear then. They, they had something to sell in there, good food. They wanted to have it as reasonable as possible. And they wanted everybody to get in on the act. The people are the ones that are saying what we're gonna do about this whole operation.

A co-op, that's why it's a co-op. Kids had ideas. The people owned the, the, the, the business, but they're active in it. It's a different concept altogether.

Oh you wouldn't think so if you went in there to buy something, unless you knew what I'm telling you and, and I'm right. The whole thing is, is, is, I like it. Brattleboro Market is the same way. Brattleboro Co-op is one hell of an operation up there now. Every co-op that I know, they all were hippies. They all started as hippies. Every damn one of 'em. And I found out that they weren't different at all. They were the same as I. So all, all these places now are, are getting big. And I tell you I never I never have, if I were a bettin' person, I never, I never ever woulda bet that, that it would.

Twenty years later, they, they, they, they bought McCuskers. They just built, built that. Opened it this week.

And I don't know, I wouldn't be surprised if there's something else out in the in the background that they're gonna do. I don't believe this thing has ended at all. I think it's just starting.

END CREDITS



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