

PROPOSAL OF THE CAMBRIDGE COOPERATIVE FOOD STORE COMMITTEE

One of the pressing needs of the low-income consumer is to be able to obtain fresh, nutritious food at affordable prices. With food prices skyrocketing over the past year, and expected to continue rising, this problem is becoming constantly more severe for the lower-income consumer, who spends proportionately more on his food budget than middle- or high-income consumers.

We believe that consumers' cooperatives accomplish the goal of allowing the low-income consumer to buy better food more economically. The basic idea of such cooperatives is that consumers democratically control the economic institution which serves them. Most co-ops subscribe to the following principles: 1) open, voluntary membership, (2) democratic control based on one member/one vote, (3) none or limited interest on membership capital, (4) equitable refunding or application of surplus or savings, (5) political and religious neutrality, (6) reduced overhead through contributed work.

There are presently about 10 small food co-ops operating throughout the City of Cambridge. All of these are organized on a model of people taking turns at collecting orders for food and at purchasing in bulk such items as fresh fruit and vegetables from the New England Produce Center in Chelsea and other items from local retailers. The members collect, divide, and distribute the food once a week at their homes on a rotating basis, or use a small storefront rented by several co-ops. Prices are 25-50% less than at conventional markets and the quality is higher, since fresh, nutritious food is selected and distributed immediately. However, many people in Cambridge, particularly working people, do not wish to pre-order food, do not have the time (particularly during the day) to work for the co-op, and want items such as meat, perishables, grains, paper, and canned goods, which a small co-op cannot provide.

These considerations led people in Boston to establish a co-operative

store in 1971. The Boston Food Co-op (BFC) quickly became a thriving store, with a present membership of 5000 and an annual turnover of \$1 million. Its members are interested in helping new cooperative stores. A number of them are presently lending technical assistance and equipment to a new store in Jamaica Plain. Some members of the BFC who reside in Cambridge are included in our Committee for a Cambridge Cooperative Food Store. This store, like the BFC, would be patterned on a model of democratic decision-making and contributed work. The co-op would be open to the public; each member who is physically able to, would be expected to sign up for two hours of work per month. "Work" for the co-op covers a wide range of jobs: members can drive trucks, stock shelves, bag grains, cut meat, and sweep floors. They can answer questions and sign up new members, run nutrition seminars, do filing and bookkeeping, and more.

The store would include and serve those who most need it, the low-income and elderly citizens of Cambridge. Positive action programs to involve these groups have been proposed, and contacts with representative community groups and organizations have been established. One particular service for the benefit of shut-ins would be delivery of their food orders by the co-op.

Obtaining the initial investment capital for inventory, equipment, and rent is the most difficult step in starting a cooperative. The experiences of the BFC and other consumers' cooperatives across the country demonstrate that, once established, cooperative stores become economically viable and self-sufficient. In setting up the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1964, the U.S. Congress recognized the obligation of the government to help low-income Americans cope with and surmount the difficulties they face. With particular relevance to cooperative food stores, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was extended in 1972 to include development of projects that would assist

low-income persons to lower the price of their goods and services. Unfortunately, under the Nixon administration's downgrading of OEO, funds for such programs are very scarce. Nonetheless, in order to preserve some semblance of a balanced diet, the low-income consumer needs a less expensive source of healthful food. In the absence of assistance from the Federal government, the need exists now, even more than before, for local government to assist the community in setting up cooperatives for the benefit of the public, and especially of low-income families, who have to spend a disproportionate percentage of their resources on the greatest necessity, food.

Accordingly, we hereby request that the Cambridge City Council and City Manager consider extending initial assistance to a non-profit corporation called the Cambridge Cooperative Food Store. This could take the form of financial assistance (our start-up budget is \$11,800) and/or use of an appropriate city-owned building.



Theodore R. Live

(for the committee)

Cambridge Co-operative Food Store
29 Chauncy Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

March 28, 1974

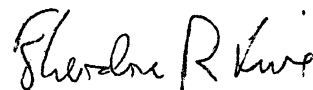
Cambridge City Council
City Hall
Cambridge, Mass. 02139

Honorable Members:

The Cambridge Co-operative Food Store Committee would greatly appreciate the opportunity to make a brief presentation at your meeting of April 8 regarding possible assistance of the City in establishing a co-operative food store for Cambridge residents of lower income.

Thanking you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Theodore R. Live".

Theodore R. Live
For the Committee

TRL/crw

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Communication from the Cambridge Co-Operative
Food Store Committee requesting to be heard
on April 8, 1974.

4/1/74

Meeting set for

April 8, at 7pm

In City Council,

April 1, 1974

4/8/74

Referred to the
City Manager.

copy sent to City
Mgr. 4/11/74 DJ