

Member Survey 2009

Results

Results describe the number of times each option was chosen, followed by a sampling of comments scribbled in the margins. We had 257 surveys returned (in 2007 it was 225); some customers chose to respond to only some of the questions. Of these 257 surveys, 29 were completed on-line. Comments related to specific staff members or Board members have not been included in these results. As this undertaking was clearly not designed or administered in a scientific way, the results do leave themselves open to a wide-variety of conclusions in some cases. All staff members with management responsibilities were given the opportunity to analyze the results, and we feel that the impressions reported take into consideration the diverse conclusions resulting from a collaborative analysis. Many of the impressions were formed based on looking at the relationship between individual responses to multiple survey questions, rather than based solely on an individual response to a single question.

Question: Of all your weekly food shopping what portion do you purchase at the Co-op?

- | | |
|---------------------------|----|
| ○ Just a few items: | 66 |
| ○ About 25%: | 68 |
| ○ About 50%: | 53 |
| ○ About 75%: | 27 |
| ○ About 90%: | 32 |
| ○ I don't shop elsewhere: | 11 |

- **Comments:** “I only shop elsewhere when I can't find what I need at the Co-op.”
- **Impressions:** 3/4 of our shoppers are doing 50% or less of their food shopping at the Co-op, up from 2/3 in 2007. It appears that more people are shopping here than there were in 2007, even if they are just picking up a few things. The increase since 2007 in the number of shoppers purchasing just a few items would suggest that many of our new shoppers are exploring what we have to offer by coming in for those few items. These results bring up the question “Why aren't they buying more? Are there some gaps in our offerings?”

Question: At what other stores do you often or sometimes shop for groceries? What percentage of your weekly food shopping do you do at each?

	<i>A few items</i>	<i>About 25%</i>	<i>About 50%</i>	<i>About 75%</i>	<i>About 90%</i>
Hannaford	43	55	65	49	20
Tozier's Mkt.	9	9	3	2	
Farmers' Markets/CSAs	22	9	5		
Other Co-ops	6	4	2		
Shaw's	5	7	1		
Walmart	4	5			
Buying Clubs	6	5	1	2	
Whole Foods	2	2			
Ocean State Jobs	13				
Convenience Stores	12				
Fresh off the Farm	12				

Other establishments that were written in with regular frequency included the other locally-owned groceries in the area (Edwards in Unity, Swan Lake Grocery, John Edwards in Ellsworth, Tobey's in China, Brooks Village Grocery, and French and Brawn in Camden.) Uncle Dean's and Natural Living Center weren't offered as options of significance.

- **Comments:** “I'm also a member of the Good Tern and Rising Tide Co-ops.” “I would do 75% of my shopping at Shaw's if there was one in Belfast.”
- **Impressions:** We find the information about the number of people shopping at Ocean State Job lots quite interesting and are surprised to see such a large figure. We were surprised that the number of people shopping at Wal-Mart wasn't higher, since they have aggressively marketed themselves as a source for organic food. The figures for Farmers' Markets and Buying Clubs was not so surprising given the present economic climate, as people are looking for less expensive ways to procure goods similar to what we offer. How are our members interpreting the word “groceries” and could this have skewed the results since people don't necessarily think of us as a “grocery” store.

Question: What are the main reasons you shop at the store where you spend the largest percentage of your grocery dollars?

- Quality/Freshness: 126
- Selection/Variety: 147
- Price/Affordability: 132
- Location: 116
- Co-operatively Organized: 85
- Hours of Operation: 55
- Friendly/Knowledgeable Staff: 101
- Offers Local Products: 128
- Cleanliness of Store: 48
- Supporting a Local Business: 125
- Convenience: 112
- Other: organics, social center of the community, purchase directly from local producers.

- **Comments:** “I just feel more comfortable at Hannaford's. At the co-op you notice the bad attitude more. They aren't friendly at Hannaford's either, but it is a bigger store so you don't notice it as much.” “Hannaford is never out of stock like the Co-op is. You were out of stock for at least a month on one item I need, so I switched to the supermarket and Fresh Off the Farm.”
- **Impressions:** The figure for price/affordability is way up from 2007, no surprise given the current economic climate. The figures for co-operatively organized and store cleanliness are down from 2007. It would appear that the folks who are doing their primary shopping at Hannaford are motivated primarily by pricing and selection, and the folks who are doing their primary shopping here are looking to support a local business, as well as purchase local foods. Our co-operative structure is not our strongest draw, but our selection of local items seems to be. It is interesting that selection beats out pricing as a motivating factor. Is it possible for us to develop more of a niche as the place for affordable, local foods? Seems like there is still plenty of room for customer education regarding our pricing structure, and how we compare on pricing relative to other area stores. The Out of Stock issue is out of our control, and is likely a result of our limited purchasing power as a small and independent business.

Question: Please tell us what departments at the Co-op you regularly shop and why (check all that apply):

	<i>Overall Selection</i>	<i>Not available elsewhere</i>	<i>Quality/Freshness</i>	<i>Local Offerings</i>	<i>Friendly/Helpful Staff</i>	<i>Price/Affordability</i>	<i>Organic (suggested category)</i>	<i>Marked, but no explanation</i>
Produce	86	58	117	162	72	15	1	10
Grocery	58	79	26	30	28	11	2	7
Bulk	104	102	63	47	31	78	1	11
Frozen	30	43	24	26	18	1	2	2
Dairy	47	59	50	58	24	6	1	5
HABA	60	88	27	23	46	13	2	8
Beer	92	40	13	13	36	34	1	6
Bread	44	47	51	59	18	5	1	12
Deli	52	56	68	41	56	8	1	9
Meat	56	69	89	98	76	14	1	12
General Merch.	40	35	13	16	18	10		2

- **Comments:** “I love the baked goods and potato salad. They are 100 times better than Hannaford's products.” “I enjoy finding items that I have never seen in other stores; I appreciate the unique originality of some items.” “The Belfast Co-op is a superb local organization; the envy of many who live in other areas. Long live the Co-op!” “You sausage, raw milk and cheeses are a real draw.” “Love the gardening section.” “All departments have friendly, helpful staff.”
- **Impressions:** We remain true to our roots, as we are still providing for needs that are un-met in other markets. The Produce, Bulk, Meat, and Beer Departments are our biggest draws. We aren't surprised about the low responses in the price/affordability category, but would have expected to see higher #'s in the friendly/helpful staff category. It is interesting to note, however, that the departments that did get high scores in this area are our service departments, where more staff is available to provide personal assistance, as well as our smaller departments. Looks like Bread sales are down from 2007. We should offer respondents the opportunity to respond without providing an explanation in future surveys. Good to see that the momentum for local eating is continuing to grow.

Question: How can the Board best communicate to you as a member?

- Semi-monthly column in the newsletter: 141
 - Frequent in-store surveys: 42
 - Frequent on-line surveys: 46
 - Annual Meeting: 35
 - Other meetings throughout the year: 11
 - Other—e-mail: 27
 - Other—bulletin board: 4
 - Other: mailings, suggestion box, occasional surveys, comment cards, personal contact
- **Impressions:** It appears that a regular column in the newsletter would be most effective. Are members all that interested in hearing from the Board? No option for “I don't care” was offered. How often would people be willing to respond to surveys? Twice a year? While the monthly Board meeting agenda is posted on the bulletin board, this may not be the most effective avenue for trying to communicate with the membership.

Question: For what reasons were you inspired to become a member of the Belfast Co-op? (question was fill-in-the-blank, responses have been categorized.)

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|---|----|
| ○ Support Co-op Principles/Mission (or some variation): | 88 |
| ○ Support local business (or variation): | 45 |
| ○ Support local farmers/find local food (or variation): | 73 |
| ○ Organics available/quality of food (or variation): | 83 |
| ○ Friends convinced me to join (or variation): | 5 |
| ○ Belonged to original buying club/co-op (or variation): | 14 |
| ○ Sense of community (or variation): | 39 |
| ○ For financial benefits offered (or variation): | 27 |
| ○ Other | |
| ▪ Great staff: | 6 |
| ▪ "Just made sense": | 14 |
| ▪ Great bulk department: | 7 |
| ▪ I work here: | 6 |
| ▪ You offer products not available elsewhere: | 11 |
| ○ Other: convenience, I got tired of being asked if I was a member at the checkout, reasonable prices, great sausage, I'm a vegetarian. | |
- **Comments:** "It's reputation preceded my move." "It's an anchor for Belfast." "I love the smell and feel of a 'real' grocery store." "I was able to get food I wanted to eat that was not available elsewhere."
 - **Impressions:** Many of our longer term members joined in order to find organic foods (presumably before there were other outlets), and it seems like access to local food is a motivating force for people who have joined more recently. The figure for the support co-op principles and mission is impressive. Both older and newer members continue to be motivated to join because of our mission. We seem to see a lot of potential members weighing how their joining will bring them personal benefits, so it is good to see that our principles and our mission are a motivator. We often hear from people that they were aware of our store before they moved to this area; its good to know we have a far reaching reputation.

Question: How has the present economic climate impacted your Co-op shopping habits? (Question was fill-in-the-blank, responses have been categorized.)

- | | |
|---|-----|
| ○ Has not (or some variation): | 117 |
| ○ Stopped purchasing luxury items (or variation): | 29 |
| ○ Purchasing things I used to buy at the Co-op elsewhere: | 29 |
| ○ Purchasing more bulk items: | 8 |
| ○ Looking for more sale items: | 3 |
| ○ Makes me more committed to purchasing local: | 11 |
| ○ Making fewer trips into town: | 10 |
| ○ Increased price consciousness: | 10 |
| ○ Buying/shopping/eating less: | 20 |
| ○ Eating fewer organic foods: | 2 |
| ○ Eating fewer prepared foods: | 6 |
| ○ Concerned about getting the most quality for my limited \$: | 3 |
- **Comments:** "I'm normally frugal." "I'm preparing more food from scratch." "I'm more frightened than ever by mega food conglomerates." "I'm more conscious of waste." "We started a buying club." "I feel even better that I am supporting an economic model that will survive despite failure everywhere else."
 - **Impressions:** Looking at this question in relationship to the question "where do you spend the

majority of your food dollars” reveals that both individuals who are doing a majority of their shopping here and folks who shop just for a few items marked “no change” in about equal proportions. These folks could be viewing co-op food as a “non-cutback” item, and/or they can continue to afford it. We're not surprised to see that folks might be going elsewhere to purchase items less expensively, nor that they are purchasing fewer prepared foods and luxury items. Do people still just assume that maybe our products are more expensive because we are a co-op, or do they know that many of our items are competitively priced, and in some cases less expensive, than they are in other stores?

Question: What are the top two reasons that you do not shop at the Co-op more often? (question was fill-in-the-blank, responses are categorized.)

- Pricing (or some variation on this theme): 108
- Too far away (or some variation): 63
- My needs are adequately met by other enterprises: 10
- You don't have everything I need: 50
- Uncomfortable shopping atmosphere: 11
- Frequent out of stocks: 2
- Poor customer service: 5
- More convenient to shop elsewhere: 12
- Brands I want are only available elsewhere: 4
- We grow most of our own food: 7
- Organics are not our first priority: 3
- Other: products are not the freshest available, not enough parking, purchasing more local foods directly, width of aisles, slow check out, not enough vegan selections.

- **Comments:** “It's too social. Sometimes I want to just get in and out quickly.” “I want to shop at a real co-op where members work.” “Better deals on pre-orders would encourage me to shop more often.” “You are perceived as a gourmet food store.” “We like the variety of shopping at two stores.” “Your prices are higher, but justifiably so.”
- **Impressions:** Reasons related to pricing continue to be the place where our members are asking us to improve; maybe our educational campaigns related to the true cost of food, the true costs of running a small business, and our efforts to overcome this sometimes mistaken image in our community could be more effective. Are our consumers really comparing apples to apples? We are unable to get some products because they are not available to us through the distributors that we use, but are there other holes in our inventory that could be easily filled? Many of our customers travel from far away, which seems to be evidence of prime opportunities for co-op development in Bangor, Augusta, and Waterville. Can we be more responsive to member concerns about pricing by improving awareness about pre-order discounts, or increasing the discounts on case purchasing? It's worth exploring.

Question: How effectively do you feel that we are meeting our mission? How could we be more effective? (question was fill-in-the-blank, responses are categorized.)

- Outstanding/Very Effectively: 64
- Fully Satisfactory: 92
- Okay, but I'm not shouting from the rooftops: 21
- Needs Improvement: 1
- Unacceptable: 4
- Too new to judge: 1

- **Suggestions:** label country of origin, give more priority to local, co-operate more with other groups with similar missions, more reasonable prices, provide more info about local growers, improve customer service, offer healthier foods, stop selling products with High Fructose Corn

Syrup, bring back worker-member program, offer more educational opportunities, use more sustainable packaging.

- **Comments:** “Balance Co-op ideals with customer service.” “You do better than your average volunteer organization.” “You have almost everything I need.” “Your staff is especially helpful.” “I think you are doing all you can to keep prices low.” “You're doing great.”
- **Impressions:** It is good to see high marks in the areas of fully satisfactory and outstanding. How many people are mistakingly under the impression that we are a volunteer organization? We appreciate the great suggestions offered. It would be worth doing more research into what people are looking for in a worker-member program.

Question: Do you currently have any needs that the Co-op could be in a position to help you meet? (question was fill-in-the-blank, responses are categorized.)

- No, or no answer: 185
- Better Atmosphere: 1
- Lower prices: 11
- More products for specific dietary needs: 3
- More local products: 8
- More bread choices: 6
- Specific product suggestions: bulk vanilla extract, bread slicer, more fresh fish, low carb selections, locally milled and grown organic flours, smaller bundles of fresh herbs, more variety of bulk noodles
- **Comments:** better discounts on pre-orders, disability access doors, all staff members better informed about your products, clearer signage re: organic, local, conventional, and away, worker member program
- **Impressions:** Members seem to be overwhelmingly satisfied, with the exception of the pricing issue. It is good to know that we are effectively meeting their needs. We're curious about what we didn't hear: what are the people who didn't choose to answer this question thinking?

Question: We've been experiencing a high rate of theft lately that is eating away at our bottom line. Would you support the installation of a video monitoring system as a means to deter theft?

- Yes: 172
- No: 45
- **Comments:** “That would be such a shame. Are there any other alternatives?” “I really hate the idea of being surveilled.” “Tough one, but what alternatives are there?” “I think it is a thing that is a necessity in the times we live in.” “Yes, get this installed ASAP—it's my money too!” “How about secret shoppers instead?” “Would not be conducive to Co-op values.” “I am dumbfounded. Tell me it's not true!”
- **Impressions:** Seems like there is support, albeit hesitant support, for the installation of a video monitoring system. While we can see that some respondents would feel that the installation of such a system is not conducive to co-op values, on the other hand co-op values also favor running sustainable businesses. A tough call, but now that we've seen a majority of support on this issue from the membership, we feel we can move ahead with researching the possibilities in this area.

Question: Would you support a discontinuation of the current practice of making bags available for grocery carry-out in favor of a “bring your own bag” policy?

- Yes: 149
- No: 67
- Charge for bags (offered as an option): 25

- **Comments:** “I frequently forget my bags and this would be a major inconvenience.” “I often drop in and don't have a bag with me.” “What about the summer people?” “This is a ridiculous idea.” “This system would penalize people and is therefore not co-operative.” “Bring back the recycled plastic bags.”
- **Impressions:** What a great suggestion to keep the system we have now, but adding a charge for bags. It would allow us to continue to provide bags for those in need, while also allowing an opportunity for education. We could also publicize that we have free boxes.

Question: The Co-op has chosen not to provide WiFi access in the deli seating area due to member concerns about EMT radiation sensitivity and limited seating. Would you support a change in this policy to allow public WiFi access in the Co-op?

- Yes: 62
- No: 149
- Don't care (offered as another option): 12

- **Comments:** “Would make already limited seating even more of an issue.” “There are plenty of other place in town with WiFi.” “We like the opportunity to interact face to face.” “You could charge a fee per hour to help offset the cost of food prices.” “The radiation is present regardless.” “I'd come more often and purchase more food.” “You could provide courtesy guidelines.” “It's nice to have some places that are free from techno distractions.”
- **Impressions:** It appears that WiFi would not be a welcomed addition to the goods and services that we offer. It seems like we do get a lot of requests to install WiFi, so it was somewhat surprising to see how many respondents were opposed to the idea. Charging for WiFi seems like a program that might be difficult for us to offer with our present Point of Sale configuration.

Question: Please choose which of the following statements most accurately describes your preference:

- It is more important that our Co-op commit to using environmentally sound practices even if it means that prices of certain products may go up: 196
- It is more important to sell products at low prices than it is to support environmental sustainability: 8
- Is there a balance (offered as another option): 17

- **Comments:** “It is important that we have high quality foods available for low income families.” “Are these choices mutually exclusive.” “If things are priced out of my range, I will shop there less.” “Costs will come down as more people make the choice to spend more for ecological and environmentally sustainable practices.” “Environmentally sustainable goods at reasonable prices would be my goal.”
- **Impressions:** A balance between these two options would appear to be the ultimate goal. It was impressive to see such a large number of people who are committed to buying “green.”

Question: Please name two kinds of packaging that come from our store or from products we sell that you throw away the most frequently. (question was fill-in-the-blank, responses are categorized.)

- Vitamin containers: 47
- Yogurt containers: 20
- Repack bulk bags: 21
- Cellophane bread bags: 15
- Cardboard: 4
- Egg cartons: 5
- Plastic deli containers: 49
- Veggie bags from produce: 21

- Cryovac bags from Meat and Cheese: 6
 - Plastic wrap from Deli or Cheese: 10
 - Wrappers (candy, energy bars, etc.): 4
 - Aseptic containers: 8
 - Plastic bags: 20
 - Paperboard: 19
 - Wax bulk bags: 5
 - All plastic that is not #2: 10
 - Plastic freezer bags: 7
 - Others: metal lids, glass bottles, cans, brown paper bags, tofu packaging, wine bottle corks, coffee cups, deli dinner plates, coffee cup lids, milk jugs
- **Comments:** “I buy mostly produce, meat, and deli items, so I don't throw away much packaging.”
 - **Impressions:** Many respondents seem to be using the terms “recycle” and “throw out” simultaneously. Wow! Food consumption generates a lot of different kinds of waste! Are vitamin containers a false positive since they were cited as an example? When people say “plastic” bags, are they referring to shopping bags, produce bags, re-pack bags? Would we be more effective in our efforts to reduce our contribution to the waste stream by lobbying for a change in city policy to increase recycling opportunities in multiple communities? Plastic containers continue to be a concern that we are working to address, while finding few acceptable and affordable alternatives. Maybe we should advertise that people can recycle plastic bags at Hannaford.

Question: Do you have any concerns that this survey did not address? (question was fill-in-the-blank, responses are categorized.)

- Unsustainable packaging in deli: 4
 - Would like to be a working member: 2
 - Increased store cleanliness: 3
 - Other: all similar to suggestions offered under the “how can we be more effective in meeting our mission” question.
- **Comments:** “Your store is a challenging environment for people with chemical sensitivities.” “Take away the New Chapter TV.” “Cheese in the Cheese dept. tastes like plastic.” “Can you look into composting deli waste?” “Outside drink machine wastes energy.” “Would appreciate being able to redeem my senior discount at my convenience.” “None-I truly love the co-op. It's a treat to go there.”
 - **Impressions:** Perhaps store cleanliness could be increased with the simple task of re-painting the customer bathroom, and refinishing the deli tables? Also replacing the floor. Is the re-institution of a working-member program a viable possibility for our store? People certainly seem to be interested in volunteering? Composting would be problematic for us with our present set up, but maybe once the City's green cone program might make it easier. Most of the compost that we create, deli and produce trimmings, go home with staff or customers to be composted on a home-scale.