



Thanks to all who attended the owner-member forum last Thursday March 1<sup>st</sup>. It was great to see over 100 passionate owner-members gather to share their ideas and visions for Bloomingfoods. We tried to accomplish a lot in two hours and that meant we weren't able to get into any topic in depth, which I know was frustrating at times. The board is striving to be transparent without being overwhelming. Here is a quick recap of the meeting.

The board gave a brief presentation about our current situation, followed by a Q&A session (see a selection of questions and answers following this article). We have essentially run through our cash reserves so our biggest challenge is surviving the summer months when sales typically drop. Using models from NCG and records from past years, the board estimates a shortfall over the summer of roughly \$200,000 if we continue with business as usual. This shortfall can be addressed in two ways – decreasing expenses and increasing income. So far the board and senior leadership have addressed expenses by decreasing administrative payroll 27%, streamlining purchasing, temporarily suspending return of owner-member equity, reducing board stipends by 25%, and generally working to improve operational efficiency.

The next suggested expense to reevaluate is owner-member discounts. Discounts (10% owner appreciation day and wild card discounts) cost the co-op roughly \$54,000 quarterly. So we are looking at various options to scale back discounts without alienating owner-members. Forum attendees were polled about their thoughts on various options – choosing owner discount days or wild cards, but not both, rewards system based on sales, etc. (Results

from the survey coming soon!) Additionally, member-owner coupons must be implemented in a way that rewards owner-members but does not negatively impact our bottom line.

On the income side, there are three general strategies – increase sales, solicit donations, and attract investment. Forum attendees brainstormed an impressive list of ideas including restructuring membership to attract more student owner-members, partnering with IU to increase sales opportunities, asking members to make donations at the register, marketing more aggressively to downtown apartments, getting UFCW to help promote us to union supporters throughout the community, developing a comprehensive marketing plan, reaching out through neighborhood e-mail lists, and selling ads in our newsletter. One concrete idea the board is already pursuing is the idea of using the Positive Change “Round Up” program for Bloomingfoods one month.

Ultimately, if we want to attract new customers, donors, or investors, we need a compelling story and marketing campaign. For investors in particular we need a solid (and attractive) business plan.

This leads to the million dollar question that we just barely touched at the member forum: Why do we exist? What do we offer? Why should people patronize Bloomington Cooperative Services?

It is both a difficult and easy question to answer. For many of us, it simply boils down to loving the co-op and its values. However, how can we articulate that clearly and succinctly in a marketing pitch? How do we play to our strengths? Owner-members have shared some of our current strengths, which the stores can continue to improve, including:

- Our compact stores offer a cozy shopping experience where you won't get lost.
- We have friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable staff
- Our stores provide access to local products that are not available elsewhere and we help small local producers scale up their businesses.
- Our business is owned by local people who support our community.
- Money spent at Bloomingfoods stays in the local economy.
- We focus on offering healthy, sustainably- and ethically-produced food and wellness options.
- Our prepared foods are created in house, unlike most other grocery stores.

Is this enough? Are we doing it well enough to compete? If we could only focus on one aspect, which should it be? Clarifying our core values and what we offer the community will help us determine how to move forward. Do we work to recapitalize and relocate on the East side and if so in what format? Do we consolidate to just the West store? Should we reinvent ourselves completely? These are the larger questions we will need to tackle over the next 6-12 months. Please think about them and share your thoughts with other owner-members. It is time for our community to decide what we want Bloomingfoods to be and for all of us to actively support our future.

Our next member forum is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, May 1<sup>st</sup>. If you

require accommodations such as sign language interpretation, please let me know. (And if you have ideas for a large venue that could accommodate 300+ people with the option for breaking into small groups, please let me know!) In the meantime, please Think Bloomingfoods First.

Thank you for your ongoing support,  
Maggie Sullivan, Board President  
[maggie@bloomingfoods.coop](mailto:maggie@bloomingfoods.coop)  
(812)-345-1592 (cell)

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## QUESTIONS FROM THE FORUM (AND SOME ANSWERS!)

We received many more questions than are listed here and will work to provide answers over the next month through the e-newsletter and the website. Answers to the listed questions can be found by clicking the button below the list. Feel free to send additional questions to [maggie@bloomingfoods.coop](mailto:maggie@bloomingfoods.coop).

- How many owner-members do we have and is ownership increasing or decreasing?
- What is our general financial situation?
- What is our debt load?
- Is there a way to clear the slate and start over?
- Is bankruptcy an option?
- Could we create another micro-business to subsidize Bloomingfoods?
- Do we own the West store?
- What is the status of the East store lease?
- What happens to staff at the East store if it closes?
- Could Bloomingfoods survive with just the west store?
- Is recapitalizing an option, given our current debt?
- What are other co-ops doing?
- Show me the numbers! Balance sheet, income/expenses, store level details, etc

[Read the Answers](#)

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Pictured above: Shane Gibson, Abby Henkel, Natascha Buehnerkemper Jacob, Christian Freitag, & Susan Haislip Daleke.

In the month of February, Bloomingfoods shoppers chose to support the restoration and preservation of the natural heritage of southern Indiana by rounding up a whopping \$7,632.47 for the [Sycamore Land Trust](#)!

The campaign continues at all three Bloomingfoods locations. For the month of March, the co-op is raising funds for [Bloomington Meals on Wheels](#).



Bloomington Meals on Wheels works to provide nutritious meals to home-bound people who are unable to cook for themselves. Last year BMOW broke our very first round-up record with \$8,690 - can we beat that this year?

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**March Local Focus Vendor**  
**Broad Ripple Chip Co**  
**Indianapolis, IN**

We love our local vendors! Celebrate LOCAL with us every Saturday in March and enjoy 30% off [Broad Ripple Chip Co](#) products!

Broad Ripple Chip Co, based out of Broad Ripple Village in Indianapolis, crafts the most delicious potato chips you'll ever try! Every step of the process is done by hand and the chips are made in small batches and delivered fresh to the co-op.

Come enjoy free samples on Saturday, March 24 at the following times:

Near West - 9:00 am

East - 11:00 am

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*Thank you for paying  
with cash!*

Did you know that the co-op spends \$200,000 annually on credit & debit card fees? That's a huge expense! One thing you can do to directly impact this line on our financial statements is to pay with an alternative to credit or debit. A simple option is to pay with cash when you shop - there is an IU Credit Union (yay co-ops!) ATM at both East and Near West. Another great option is to purchase a gift card using cash - help the co-op save money on credit card fees while using the gift card to set and follow a grocery budget!

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## Bloomingfoods Welcomes Back Deep Roots Garden Center!

Deep Roots opens its second season on March 24 with an expanded "showroom", exciting new perennials and grasses, lots of native trees and shrubs, and an expanded lineup of organic veggie, herb, and flower starts. Pansies, potatoes, and onions are among its new offerings this year. Check out the great selection of high quality gardening tools, organic fertilizers, books, and other resources for enhancing your yard and garden.

Deep Roots will be open from 10-6 Tuesday through Sunday, closed Monday.



Bloomingfoods is excited to announce the winner of the first ever Cooperative Community Fund (BCCF) \$1000 award! Congatulations to the Healthful Food for All Fund, a rock star organization that really aligns with the co-op's core values.

We love the Healthful Food for All Fund, a project of the Center for Sustainable Living, because they focus on making healthful, fresh, local food available to members of our community who are food insecure. A small but mighty group of

volunteers works to provide excess food from the Bloomington Winter Farmer's Market to The Rise, Community Kitchen, and Mother Hubbard's Cupboard during the winter months.

[Learn more about BCCF](#)



Don't forget to come check out our Artist Spotlight at the Near West store deli seating area! Claire Woods is our featured artist through March. If you're interested in purchasing any of her gorgeous outdoors-inspired works, contact Natascha B Jacob at [natascha@bloomingfoods.coop](mailto:natascha@bloomingfoods.coop).



Are you a visual artist looking for a new space to display and sell your work? We're on the search for artists to help us fill the roster for the rest of the year. If you're interested in a slot in our new quarterly Artist's Spotlight, click the link below to read the guidelines and apply!

[Apply Now](#)

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## Upcoming Board of Directors Meetings

Regularly scheduled monthly board meetings are held the last Thursday of the

month at 6:30pm. Board Meetings are open to co-op owner-members and guests of the board. Familiarity with the Bylaws, Policies, and the Policy Governance Method will enhance your understanding of the board meeting process.

Meetings are held at Noodles & Company Conference Room, Eastland Plaza,  
2560 E Third St

Thursday, March 29th

Thursday, April 26th

Thursday, May 31st



Bloomington Winter Farmers' Market - Saturdays @ Harmony School,  
December 2 - March 31

Parks & Recreation Gardening Classes



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