

Leveling the Playing Field

What Expansion of the Littleton Food Cooperative Means for Local Healthy Food Access

Since its conception, I have supported the Littleton Food Cooperative by becoming a member, purchasing a significant amount of my personal groceries there, and volunteering to sit on the board of directors. Working in the public health sector for the past 14 years as a nutritionist has made me aware of the large barrier that many of the families in our local community face - food insecurity. While previously working for a federally funded nutrition program (WIC), and currently, a Federally Qualified Community Health Center (ACHS), I have seen many families have to make decisions that many of us take for granted. Hopefully few of us never have to choose between feeding our families healthy foods and making a car payment or paying the heating bill. But for many families in the North Country, this is an unfortunate reality.

In my nutrition counseling interactions I have met individuals trying to make a food budget out of \$200 per month. This can be an overwhelming experience for anyone, especially those who are raising children. Assistance programs become a bridge to these families, helping with education and resources that otherwise would be out of reach.

Not only do I believe in the Littleton Food Cooperative's commitment to offering an increasing amount of locally raised, whole foods, but I also support and believe in the Co-op's mission to support the environmental and societal aspects of our local community. One example of this commitment is the Partner of the Month program, which currently supports local non-profits and brings awareness to their individual causes. Another example is a program just getting off its feet – the Healthy Food Access program. Families who receive supplemental assistance can apply for this program, which provides a year's worth of eligibility to receive a 10% discount on groceries. This program strives to level the playing field a little and provide members an opportunity to save on healthy foods for their families.

The Healthy Food Access program will hopefully grow as more families become aware of the possible benefits of participation. With our mission of expanding the Littleton Food Cooperative in the very near future, programs like this will become more marketable as a result of the physical growth of the produce section and the designation of additional space for educational events and programming. With the space to buy and display more local produce items, prices often improve as a result. This contributes to more buying power for everyone, regardless of income. And with space for educational opportunities, everything from classes on food budgeting, meal planning, and food preparation will become more prominent at the Littleton Food Cooperative, supporting its mission and elevating its status further as a hub of community connectivity.

I, for one, am excited and anxious to see how food access in the North Country will be improved as the benefits of an expanded Littleton Food Cooperative come to fruition.

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