

Highlights from Pre-Meeting Session of Weaver Street Market’s Board of Directors and WSM Owners

November 2012 Meeting

Board Pre-Meeting, Panzanella meeting room, Carrboro, NC on November 28, 2012, 6:15 pm to 7:30 pm

Board Pre-Meeting Session on WSM 2020 Goal 1: Making healthy eating accessible, tasty, and fun.

WSM’s Board of Directors initiated a four-part series of conversation about the four goals driving the co-op’s 2020 Vision. These conversations build upon the discussions of the WSM 2020 Vision, which began with owners at the annual meeting, unit meetings with all staff, and poster conversations in the three stores. At this meeting the Directors met with a dozen owners and community experts to discuss **Goal 1 of the co-op’s 2020 vision: Making healthy eating accessible, tasty, and fun.** The Goal 1 Conversation built upon more than 100 ideas from co-op owners and employees who participated in activities at the annual meeting, discussions at employee unit meetings, and poster conversations in the three stores.

Drawing upon the philosophy of Co-opSourcing—bringing together the experiences, creativity, and resources of the community—the Board also invited community experts in health and nutrition to participate in the conversation about Goal 1. Present at the meeting were Alice Ammerman, Director, Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, and Daniella Usan, Public Health Prevention Service Fellow at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Three themes emerged from the owner input, discussions with community experts, and looking at what other co-ops are doing:

- Improve healthy product offerings.
- Expand education.
- Reach more people.

The three themes closely align with what experts have identified as necessary for sustainable healthy eating habits:

Requirements for Healthy Eating	WSM Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy products—ingredients • Healthy products—already prepared • Great taste 	Product Offerings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge to choose/prepare • Do-able routine (enjoyable, easy) 	Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable • Accessible, convenient 	Reach

In the goal 1 conversation, long-term multiyear plans were discussed as well as high-impact ideas that could be implemented in 2013. Some of the long-term plans that participants were most excited about included allocating more space for selling fruits and vegetables, featuring healthier food offerings, educating employees on healthy eating, creating a facility for classes, making offerings more accessible to low-income shoppers, and reaching out to schools and other groups in the community.

The visiting experts identified some significant opportunities to consider while exploring this goal: health disparity and disease in lower income families; the lost art of cooking, which has led to lost skills and basic equipment in the kitchen; and a new understanding of healthy food that focuses on high-quality foods more than eliminating ingredients from the diet. Uslan encouraged the Board and owners to take an active approach, going into the community organizations to engage individuals.

Of the ideas discussed for 2013 implementation, the ideas that generated the most discussion were a juice seltzer fountain and healthy food training for staff. The juice seltzer fountain was seen as a fun and valuable alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages, which Alice Ammerman observed has been linked to an increased likelihood of obesity. Some highlights of worker owner input include:

- Remembering that employees are the number one ambassador to reach our customer base. Educating staff and building a solid curriculum is critical.
- Offering more education on how to shop at WSM, including being flexible in choices and buying what's on sale.
- Expanding co-op advertisements to reach more non-WSM shoppers by clearly demonstrating the affordability of products.
- Identifying a score that could be used to measure healthy food or to rank its nutritional quality. (Ammerman observed that it was important to consider how different foods in a diet fit together as well as the quality of the specific foods.)

At the end of the discussion the Board Directors considered how the conversation might inform future planning of the Board and its outreach to the community. Three common threads emerged in comments from the Directors: the need to communicate how the Board was building upon what it heard from owners and experts: 1) communicating with a broader audience about this goal; 2) continuing to solicit input from owners and community experts; and 3) the importance of identifying and measuring desired outcomes. Some highlights include:

- The need “to connect the information according to how people are communicating these days and using information.” (Social media and the website were identified as critical elements in communicating with owners.)
- The need for a faster cycle time in trying new ideas and also for a feedback loop that involved more and more people as the discussions progressed.
- The need for a clearly correlated, demonstrated result on people's life.
- A possible price matching program that would encourage shoppers to do all their shopping at the co-op.
- The need to focus price reductions on healthy food and the importance of tying owner involvement directly to each goal.
- The tremendous resource the Food House offers for producing healthier, high-quality foods.

The need for tolerance and inclusion when considering what healthy food means, especially when there is a huge continuum of what is considered to be healthy.