

History of the Manual

HWFC was established as a buying club in 1976 to provide natural foods at low cost to its members. On March 1, 1977, a store at 112 Quail Street opened as a community owned and operated retail food store, providing products to the general public. At a General Membership Meeting on May 16, 1977, an official food policy was adopted. This Food Policy was incorporated into the first Bylaws adopted in 1980. With small adjustments and interpretations by referendum, this food policy continued to guide buying practices for the store for many years.

In 1995, HWFC moved to a much larger store at 484 Central Avenue and within four years had become a \$4 million business. A committee of members tasked to update the bylaws in 1999 felt that the natural foods industry had so changed that the food policy was no longer sufficiently detailed to provide generally agreed upon guidelines. The store had expanded sales far beyond its original core constituencies. New and dubious agricultural and food preservation practices such as biotechnology and food irradiation threatened the availability of basic food products. Natural foods had become a growth industry and mainstream food manufacturers with lower standards rapidly absorbed many of the original producers. The food distribution system consolidated in the same way and by 2001, almost all of the cooperative warehouses had closed and retail co-ops were purchasing from a single publicly traded company.

In response to this changing environment, the food policies in the new bylaws were reduced to core concepts and it was stipulated that a Food and Product Manual be written for approval by the membership. Although identifying these core concepts was essential, our task is made more difficult by the various mandates which may be in conflict when evaluating a product on an individual basis. Our mandate is grounded in a number of governing documents, including the Mission Statement, the Bylaws, and our Statements of Purpose. The product selection guidelines below are used to inform buyers when making difficult decisions regarding the product line.

OUR VALUES**Honest Weight Food Coop Mission Statement**

Honest Weight is a member-owned and-operated consumer cooperative that is committed to providing the community with affordable, high quality natural foods and products for healthy living. Our mission is to promote more equitable, participatory and ecologically sustainable ways of living. We welcome all who choose to participate in a community that embraces cooperative principles, shares resources, and creates economic fairness in an atmosphere of cooperation and respect for humanity and the earth.

Bylaws of the Honest Weight Food Cooperative, Inc. (Revision Approved June 30, 2003)**100 Purposes of HWFC**

The purposes for which HWFC was formed are:

- .1 To provide food products, family products, and other household products and personal supplies for its Members, their families, or guests as authorized under Article 2 of the Cooperative Corporations Law of New York State;
- .2 To perform services connected to the purchase, storing, distribution, and selling of whole, unprocessed food products in order to supply such food products at low cost to interested persons in the community;
- .3 To provide a forum for health and nutrition education;
- .4 To support local, small-scale farming and local producers through our purchasing practices;
- .5 To encourage sound ecological practices;

- .6 To practice and encourage fair employment policies;
- .7 To promote cooperatives as viable economic alternatives;
- .8 To provide additional services and support to progressive community projects when feasible and appropriate;
- .9 To bring people together through cooperative action; and
- .10 To allow members an opportunity to contribute talents and abilities in a cooperative effort.

150 Food and Product Policy

- .1 HWFC is committed to providing the most nutritious food obtainable at the lowest price and to educating its Members and the community about nutrition and health.
- .2 HWFC shall offer for sale in the store natural, whole, and pure foods, avoiding whenever practical foods that contain white sugar or artificial ingredients or foods that are over-refined and over-processed in ways that destroy nutrients. Preference shall be given to organically grown food and to food and other products that are produced in environmentally and socially responsible ways.
- .3 Priority shall be given to ordering, displaying, and selling food in bulk to protect our environment from excessive packaging and to conserve natural resources.
- .4 HWFC shall maintain a Food and Product Manual that contains an explanation of the guidelines used for foods sold at HWFC and reasons particular foods are not carried

How Buying Decisions Are Made

Overall policies on food and products to be sold at HWFC are reserved to the Membership, who are entitled to vote on the Bylaws, in Membership Meetings, and on Referenda. On a day-to-day basis, decisions on selling products in the store are made by the store buyers or Department Managers who are guided by the values expressed in the documents above. There are other factors that play an important part in their decisions.

- **Customer demand.** Our buyers attempt to satisfy customer requests that are within our guidelines, can be provided through our suppliers, and can be accommodated within the limited space available in the store. Customer requests vary, reflecting individual needs, family and cultural situations and personal taste. The definition of dietary need may not always appear the same to all customers. Individuals may make a request directly to the staff or by a written request in the suggestion box. Answers to suggestions are posted on the bulletin board at the front of the store beside the public telephone.

HWFC is committed to making every effort to provide to individuals on limited diets, those products that are not readily available elsewhere. Examples of such products include: unsweetened, low-salt, lowfat/nonfat, gluten free, specific allergen free, and vegan.

Items for which there is not enough shelf space may be special ordered if carried by our suppliers.

- **Store requirements.** HWFC has 5,500 to 6,000 sq ft of retail space. We are attempting to convert more of our warehouse space. In the meantime, we are restricted by shelf space, particularly in the area of refrigerated and frozen products. In planning, we are attempting to balance increased space needs for Produce, Health and Beauty Aids, Bulk, and our Deli. The main focus of HWFC is not to make a profit but we need to remain financially stable.
- **Natural Food Producers.** Natural foods are vital to the mission of HWFC but we face challenges in matching our buying practices to that mission. The natural foods industry is progressively consolidating under mainstream conglomerates. As this consolidation takes place, producers alter ingredients and eliminate or add new products without notification. It is difficult for buyers to adhere

to the same standards in this setting. HWFC is committed to sharing with customers information on ingredients, processes, and business practices of natural foods manufacturers. It is also committed to participating in collective efforts to curtail or examine practices that are harmful to the environment and the food supply.

Although our buyers make regular efforts to monitor products to ensure compliance with our mission, customers must be responsible to reading the labels of the products they buy.

- **Natural Food Suppliers.** HWFC now has one major supplier, United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI), which is a publicly-traded company. Our previous supplier, Northeast Cooperative Warehouse, was purchased by UNFI in 2002. As a result of this change, some products are no longer available to us. Department managers actively seek out local farmers and producers, regional distributors and other supply lines.
- **Cooperative Networks.** HWFC belongs to the Cooperative Grocers Association. In cooperation with other coops, we negotiate supply agreements and we participate in the Cooperative Advantage Program (CAP). CAP provides and advertises monthly sales, distributed in a sales flyer. Sales items are determined collectively and not all cooperatives have the same mission or product lines. Department Managers reserve the right to carry or not carry individual items on this flyer.

What We Promote and Why

- **Whole and minimally-processed foods.** Universally recommended by nutritionists as the basis of a healthy diet
- **Local, small-scale farming in season and local producers** because local foods tend to be of higher quality as they are typically fresher and better tasting; the cost of transporting products long distances is detrimental to the environment; and local production strengthens our local economy. In addition to showcasing local producers, the co-op supports local organic CSA's (Consumer Supported Agriculture pre-orders)
- **Organically grown foods** because these foods are produced without the use of chemical fertilizers, hormones, antibiotics, pesticides, irradiation or genetically modified organisms, because these are known to be harmful to humans, animals and the planet
- **Environmentally sustainable products such as paper and cleaning supplies** because these products have a lighter environmental impact by being biodegradable, incorporating recycled materials, and using more environmentally-friendly materials and chemicals.
- **Ordering, displaying and selling food in bulk** in order to protect our environment from excessive packaging and to conserve natural resources
- **Affordable Price.** HWFC is committed to providing the most nutritious food obtainable at the lowest price by stocking whole, unprocessed foods and offering the opportunity to contribute time to the store for discounts on purchases.
- **Fair Trade and companies that practice fair employment practices** because unfair labor practices show a disdain for human welfare
- **Health and nutrition education** because we believe that people can make better dietary and lifestyle choices if they are well informed.
- **Minimal packaging.** HWFC has consistently invested resources in maintaining a substantial volume of products in bulk, so that customers can serve themselves, use their own containers, and avoid the use of prepackaging. The co-op also recycles packaging for customers where possible, investing time and resources into finding outlets and in sorting. The coop has also avoided where possible single-serving packaging. The increased presence of these items in the store is reflective both of changing lifestyles among our customers and items introduced to the store through the CAP program, which is collectively run with other co-ops who have differing priorities. Emphasis is placed on customer education and the debate is ongoing.
- **Co-operative activities** because acting in cooperation gives people control over their lives.

What we try to avoid

- **Irradiated foods.** Studies continue to show that irradiation may have harmful effects on health. Irradiation is often used where more stringent butchering and food handling processes would be effective. All whole irradiated foods must be labeled except teas and herbs from China. Irradiated ingredients in processed foods do not have to be labeled. Therefore we cannot monitor processed foods. Customers are advised to look for organic ingredients.
- **Products containing Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).** Studies have shown that bioengineered crops are detrimental to wildlife, threaten biodiversity, and produce resistant weeds. *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT) is a microbe which acts as an insecticide when used judiciously in organic farming. Organic farmers are concerned that BT bio-engineered into major crops will lead to resistance in the target pest population through overuse. Over 70% of our food supply in the US contains GMO corn or soy. The federal government opposes labeling, so it is not always possible to determine that a product is GMO free unless it is labeled as organic and we are attempting to be as diligent as possible. Buyers give preference to organic products when available. The co-op also hosts letter-writing and other events to support NYS anti-GMO legislation and to influence producers.
- **Heat processed oils.** Refining oil at high temperatures destroys nutrients. HWFC stocks cold-pressed oils and attempts to stock a wide variety and grade of prepackaged and bulk oils, and in particular olive oil. Plans to expand the store include better storage and dispensing for oil.
- **White refined sugar.** White sugar is an overly refined product devoid of nutrients. Our bylaws stipulate that we will avoid selling products with refined white sugar whenever practical. In 2000, the membership authorized the inclusion of minimally refined sugars. Changes in food production and the substitute of sugar as a cheaper sweetener have made it increasingly difficult to monitor. There is also no consistent term for sugar used on package labels. Department Managers attempt to stock products with a variety of sweeteners as well as unsweetened products to satisfy a variety of dietary needs. We promote alternative natural sweeteners through recipes in the Coop Scoop and in cooking classes.
- **White refined flour.** Refining removes important nutrients. HWFC no longer actively discourages products containing white refined flour, because of customer demand for those products. However, the co-op continues to promote whole grains, whole grain flours, whole grain breads and pastas by stocking those items, conducting cooking classes based on those products and including them in deli offerings.

What We Do Not Knowingly Stock

- **Tobacco** Although additive-free sources of tobacco are available, smoke contains many carcinogenic compounds once combusted. The use of tobacco is implicated in a variety of cancers, emphysema and asthma. The EPA ruling on its secondhand effects on health has resulted in the gradual phasing out of smoking in public places.
- **Alcoholic Beverages** HWFC cannot sell alcoholic beverages without a license.
- **Food containing artificial preservatives, artificial food coloring and artificial sweeteners.** Conflicting studies bring into question the safety of many commercially developed food additives. Political interference in regulatory agencies further complicates this issue. These additives are often used to extend product shelf life, avoid refrigeration or to compensate for or disguise the use of inexpensive, inferior ingredients. For these reasons and those listed below, Honest Weight has chosen to avoid artificial preservatives, artificial food coloring and artificial sweeteners in favor of products with high quality ingredients and natural additives and attempts to rotate stock quickly.
 1. **Artificial preservatives:** Several artificial preservatives, such as sulphites, nitrites and salicylates, are allergens that can cause severe reactions in susceptible individuals or are suspected carcinogens. Natural preservatives are available and effective. Examples are salt, hot pepper, vinegar, ascorbic acid, and and sugar.
 2. **Artificial food coloring:** Most artificial colorings are synthetic chemicals that do not occur in nature. Critics charge that they have been inadequately tested. Yellow #5 has recently been implicated along with the sulfites as an allergen creating responses from hives to death (through anaphylactic shock). Effects in the developing nervous system are now being studied, as a

potential cause of Attention Deficit Disorder. Artificial colors are often used in non-nutritional food without real fruit. [CSPI Chemical Cuisine]

3. Artificial sweeteners: Artificial sweeteners include aspartame, saccharin and sucralose (Splenda). Original aspartame studies showed that the drug triggered brain, mammary, uterine, ovarian, testicular, thyroid and pancreatic tumors; new studies show that the toxin increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. Studies on animals have shown that saccharin can cause cancer and it is listed by the World Health Organization as a carcinogen. Congress intervened in the US to permit its use with a warning label. Splenda, the brand name for sucralose, has not been subjected to long-term health studies in humans. There are natural low calorie alternatives available. Examples are the sugar alcohols (maltitol, sorbitol, mannitol, and xylitol), which contribute less calories than sugar but may have a laxative effect if consumed in large amounts. For those interested in more information refer to the resources in appendix-----[Reference Gustav's book]

- **Dairy products from cows that are given growth hormones .** rBGH is used primarily to increase milk production. Its use results in increased mastitis in cows who in turn are given antibiotics. There is a public health concern that antibiotics are becoming ineffective because of their overuse in the treatment of animals. Our milk and dairy suppliers advise us that growth hormones are not given to their cows. It is difficult to determine the source of dairy ingredients in processed, packaged products.
- **High fructose corn syrup.** High fructose corn syrup is a highly refined product, devoid of nutrients. It may unfavorably alter blood lipids, notably triglycerides, raising the risk of heart disease. There are also detrimental environmental effects from growing corn to produce corn syrup, including soil depletion, nitrogen runoff and use of GMOs.
- **Hydrogenated oil.** Scientific studies have confirmed that trans fatty acids (hydrogenated oils) are harmful to health. Expert recommendations for intake of trans fats are currently zero, or extremely low. HWFC currently stocks an hydrogenated oil margarine that we have carried for many years. Hydrogenated oil will soon be outlawed and this product and others will disappear.

Issues of Concern

This is a new section in the manual, encompassing social and political issues that cannot be immediately determined from food labels but are of concern to the co-op. This section is being written.

- **Exploitative business practices.** HWFC has increasingly less choice in the business and environmental ethics of manufacturers as the industry continues to consolidate. Information on questionable business practices including lack of fair compensation to farm laborers, employing child labor, marketing products unscrupulously to children, and/or using lobbying power to manipulate or dispel scientific findings that might otherwise damage market share is passed on to customers through the Coop Scoop and on bulletin boards so that they can make informed buying decisions. The Nutrition and Education Committee serves as a forum for members who would like to learn more and help to educate others.
- **Misleading or confusing product labeling.** Examples are artificial vs. natural flavors; hidden ingredients which may be allergens.
- **Global conglomerates in organics**