



OWNER HANDBOOK

COOPERATIVELY
OWNED
COMMUNITY
GROWN

*Stay in
touch!*



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THANK YOU FOR BECOMING AN OWNER!

Welcome to Free Range Food Co-op!
The idea to start a food co-op in Grand Rapids has sprouted from the seed of an idea into an inspiring community-wide effort supported by hundreds of community members like you!

Free Range Food Co-op (FRFC) is a community owned and controlled, mission-driven cooperative grocery store which aims to build equity and strengthen our community through the power of democratic and cooperative action.

The International Cooperative Alliance defines a cooperative as "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise."

The co-op business model allows us as owners to work collectively to meet our common needs. For food co-ops like ours, this can mean supporting local farmers & producers, making organic food more available and affordable, and building a stronger local, cooperative economy.

FRFC seeks to thrive as a business, enhance the lives of people living in Grand Rapids and the surrounding areas, and reinvest profits back into the local economy.

This is the cooperative difference and the cooperative principles and values in action! Thank you for your support of this important mission. We look forward to building and maintaining a thriving food co-op with you!

In Cooperation,

Your board of directors
and fellow co-owners

“ *A food co-op is an opportunity for members of our community to come together around food, learn from one another about healthy eating, and support farmers and others involved in growing and distributing sustainably and responsibly grown food.* **”**

Greg Hawkinson
FRFC Owner #634

MISSION & VISION

(why we exist)

Our Mission

Free Range Food Co-op is a cooperatively owned grocery store committed to community well-being through access to local, wholesome, organic foods and goods.

Our Vision

Because of Us:

1. We have a thriving, cooperatively-owned grocery store which welcomes everyone and cultivates relationships with people in Itasca County and beyond.
2. We have engaged and involved owners who actively work to strengthen the co-op through cooperative ownership and collaboration.
3. We have a growing, resilient, regional food system through direct support to local growers and producers.
4. Our community has a leader that models and promotes sustainable business practices and environmental stewardship
5. We have a welcoming space where people come together to share ideas, learn, and empower each other through education and cooperation.

*“High quality nutritious foods for the community
while financially supporting local businesses.
Real food, real people, real business.”*

*Cindy Tuominen
FRFC Owner #604*

CREATING A MORE COOPERATIVE, SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM. TOGETHER.

Benefits of Ownership

- Own a local business with a mission to increase access to local, healthy, organic whole foods and products.
- Support local growers and producers right here in our region.
- Every owner has a vote and a voice! You can vote in annual board elections or run for the board yourself.
- Possible owner incentives and specials, bulk buying discounts, or patronage dividends during profitable years (as determined by the board of directors.)

Co-op ownership comes with many benefits as well as many important rights and responsibilities. As a co-op owner, you literally own a part of the business along with all the other owners! FRFC decisions are made through the actions of its owners, and your participation and engagement are vital to our co-op's success. Here are three easy ways you can support your co-op now:

Share

Positively promote the co-op to family, friends, co-workers and neighbors. Tell them why you became an owner and ask them to become an owner with you!

Engage

Owner involvement and control are essential aspects of a cooperative business. Attend meetings, vote in elections, read our newsletters, follow us on social media, and stay informed about the co-op. Engaged owners = successful co-ops!

Volunteer

There are many opportunities for owners to volunteer time and expertise to help build the co-op!
Keep reading for more info on how you can get involved!

IT'S YOUR TIME TO SHINE!

Because our store isn't in operation yet, we don't generate revenue through grocery sales to pay for things like consulting fees, supplies, advertising, and training. Currently, all of these costs are paid with owner equity which is dependent on steady owner growth throughout development. For this reason, having a core group of owner volunteers willing to commit their expertise and time is critical until the co-op is open and running with paid staff. We continue to need and welcome new volunteers at every stage of development.

Our organizing team includes people helping out once or twice, people doing work in the background, and those who are "all-in". It's an opportunity to share your skills while connecting with others who share similar values. FRFC volunteers help build community and a more equitable food system by helping open the only food co-op in Grand Rapids!

- Read newsletters & emails from the co-op.
- Fill out the short Volunteer Survey on our website. Help when you can, how you can!
- Attend board meetings & the Annual Meeting. Vote in elections for the board of directors.
- Staff our booth at an event for a few hours; have fun while chatting about the co-op with community members!
- Like, comment on, & share our social media posts.
- Visit our website calendar. Share co-op event info with a friend & encourage them to attend with you!
- Ask someone to become an owner. Try: *"I'm excited because I just joined as an owner of Free Range Food Co-op! Have you heard about them yet?"*
- Volunteer on the Community Investment Campaign team. The Campaign is important & we'll need your help!
- Attend co-op events, & visit our booth at community events!
- Learn about board service. If it is a good fit for you, run for a board position or fill a vacant seat.
- Invest during the Community Investment Campaign to contribute funds to build the store!
- Ask us about posting co-op brochures at your workplace or other community location.
- Join an ongoing team; use your skills to make a positive lasting impact on the co-op!

*Easy ways to
participate!*



COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES & VALUES

Principles

Cooperatives across the globe follow a set of universal principles known as the Seven Cooperative Principles. These principles are guidelines by which cooperatives (like FRFC) put our values into practice inside our communities:

1. VOLUNTARY & OPEN MEMBERSHIP

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

2. DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Members have equal voting rights meaning one member = one vote.

3. MEMBER ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control the capital of their cooperative.

4. AUTONOMY & INDEPENDENCE

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members.

5. EDUCATION, TRAINING & INFORMATION

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

6. COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Values

Co-ops (including food co-ops!) are mission driven businesses with a long history of commitment to a core set of social and ethical values:

- Self-help
- Democracy
- Equity
- Honesty
- Social Responsibility
- Self-responsibility
- Equality
- Solidarity
- Openness
- Caring for Others

FREE RANGE FOOD CO-OP STRUCTURE

It all starts with owners!

Food co-ops operate under MN Statute 308A & 308B which lay out how a co-op is organized, powers of the co-op, the role and requirements of the board of directors, and the rights of owners, among other details.

Our Bylaws state that FRFC can have up to nine board directors, each with a three year term. (Full bylaws can be found on our website or contact a director to request a paper copy.) Directors are co-op owners who are elected by other owners at each annual meeting, unless they are appointed to fill a vacant seat.

The role of the board of directors is to:

- Act in good faith on behalf of owners to represent the best interests of the cooperative.
- Set long range goals and perform strategic planning.
- Ensure proper management of all the co-op's resources.
- Work towards fulfilling the mission and vision.

The board is also responsible for creating meaningful and effective ways for owners to be informed and provide input into their co-op. We do this through regular board meetings, annual meetings, email newsletters, owner and community meetings, and listing contact info for current board directors on our website.



Board meetings are held monthly and all owners are welcome and encouraged to attend! Dates, times and locations for board meetings, team meetings, and other events the co-op is attending can be found on our website calendar at: freerangefood.coop

DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

Working our way to opening day!

FRFC is following a professionally created timeline developed by Columinate, a national consulting cooperative. It is a framework for organizing and planning the many lengthy steps involved in starting a new co-op, and has been used successfully by food co-op start-ups around the country.

Through the many years it takes to open a food co-op, the timeline helps us visualize what needs to be completed, and address critical tasks and ownership goals at each development stage. It also informs our annual Strategic Plan, which can be found on our website. A simplified version of the timeline is shown here:

