# Co-op Grocery Stores: More than Food | Building a Self-Determined Food Community in Detroit's North End

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**Purpose:**

Detroit is not a food desert; Detroit's food issue does not come from a lack of physical stores. Detroit's food issue is rooted in an unequal racial and economic system that produces the necessity for self-determined[1] communities. The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), a black food justice, is spearheading the development of a 7500 square/foot consumer cooperative grocery store in Detroit's North End neighborhood[2]. This project is particularly important in the majority black Detroit where residents do not own the majority of food retail stores. The North End is almost 98% African American and has a high concentration of "party stores" (liquor stores) and convenience stores serving as substitutes for grocery stores with affordable and quality food products. The area also shows the effect of government disinvestment, proof of Detroit's current land grab[3], and remnants of the war on drugs[4]. Though the North End's current context and history demonstrates the promise in alternative and creative solutions to encourage food secure communities. This report will examine how the North End is an ideal place for a co-op grocery store. The North End's history and present has the appropriate infrastructure for a store that specifically addresses the two-fold issue of ownership and quality food availability in the neighborhood. This report also offers a brief history on how Black communities have used the cooperative business model as a strategy for addressing economic inequality and injustice. Detroit's current plans to push development are consistently dislocating Detroit's masses from participation. This report discusses how cooperative businesses can be an alternative to the large-scale privatized development incurring in Detroit's city limits. Gentrification and land grabs continue to rapidly change the racial and economic experiences in Detroit's city center. Therefore community organizations and residents must continue to actively work towards self determined communities. DBCFSN's cooperative grocery store rooted in principles of community can be a solution and provide a blueprint for other Black neighborhoods in Detroit and the country.

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[1] Self-determined or self-determination is a term used by many people of color communities. For this report, "self-determination" will be the idea that communities have the right to define, control and benefit from the systems that effect their community, i.e. the food system.

[2] The North End is geographically located on the west side of Woodward Avenue, with the southern border being East Grand Boulevard, the eastern border being I-75, and the northern border being Arden Park Blvd.

[3] "Land Grab" is defined as the large acquisition of land facilitated by the governing and corporate elite. It also describes a system where land acquisition is more accessible and often subsidized to non-corporate entities.

[4] War on Drugs or Drug War is a term most recently recaptured by Michelle Alexander in her critically acclaimed book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. It refers to the deliberate government funneling of drugs into working class communities of color with the subsequent rise in police presence and incarceration rates.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION:

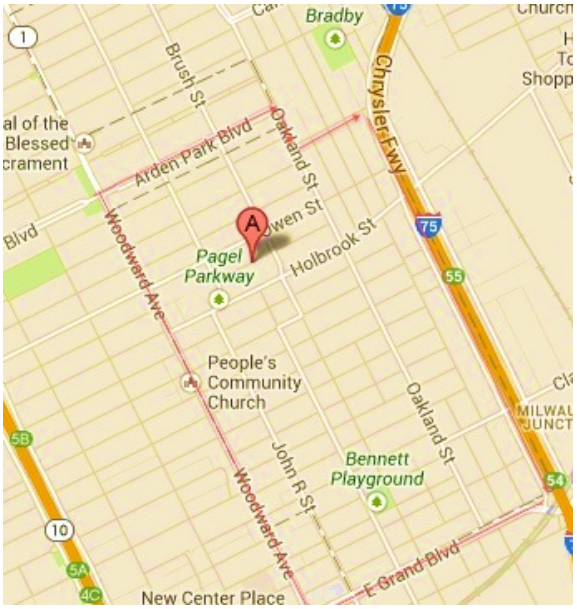
Data Driven Detroit (D3) in 2011 reported that over 115 full retail grocery stores existed in the city along with hundreds of "fringe food stores" like convenience and party stores that sell food items. Detroit's majority Black urban communities are often only consumers and laborers in Detroit's local food economy. This power dynamic has often led to a decline in quality food options and products at retailers within the city. For example, the majority Black urban communities do not see the dollars spent in local food stores circulated within their neighborhoods. Organizations like DBCFSN remain on the forefront of highlighting the racial injustices in Detroit's food system. Uprooting Racism Planting Justice, Detroit's Food Justice Task Force, Feedom Freedom Growers and Eastern Michigan Environmental Advocacy Council have also been instrumental in incorporating a racial justice focus in their food systems work. DBCFSN describes Detroit's Black food issues as the following:

1. Many Detroiters do not have a grocery store within a mile of the homes
2. "Fast food" has practically replaced home cooked meals in many Black households
3. Detroit's majority African population is dependent on others to feed it

The current situation encourages creative solutions from Detroit's activist community. DBCFSN and other food justice organization's answers to address food insecurity created a bustling and renowned urban farm and garden movement. Detroit currently has over 800 gardens (Colasanti, Litjens and Hamm 2). The city also has 4800 acres of publicly owned vacant land, some arguing that this is enough land to produce a substantial amount of produce to feed Detroit (Colasanti, Litjens and Hamm 3). The local urban farm/garden movement displays the complexities and interactions between race, land, food and class. Given the exponential growth of Detroit's urban agricultural movement, what are other ways a Black community controlled food system could manifest in Detroit?

**Detroit Community Garden courtesy of Detroit Community Garden**

DBCFSN started the Ujamaa Buying Club as a way to promote cooperative economics and self-determination through monthly collective online food purchasing. In 2012, DBCFSN completed a feasibility report detailing the desire for a retail co-op grocery store in Detroit. DBCFSN members and other stakeholders began to meet in the spring of 2013 and by the summer decided to open a brick and mortar store in the North End. The North End located on the main Detroit corridor, Woodward Avenue; in between two major highways and by the cultural center Midtown still seems like an unlikely choice.



Map of the North End

New Orleans Food Co-op courtesy of Hallie Clark

Co-op grocery stores are often found in white college towns, white suburbs, or white affluent neighborhoods. The majority of Michigan's twenty co-op food stores are located in predominantly white, educated and middle class localities. But food cooperatives have existed in Detroit's city limits and can exist in non-white middle class spaces. DBCFSN's vision for a cooperative owned grocery store in a predominantly people of color space is similar to other efforts across the country. Community organizers in Oakland, Atlanta, New Orleans, Albuquerque, and Philadelphia also identified the promise and possibilities in cooperative food projects in predominantly people of color spaces. This model can also be positioned as a response to the exclusionary development (i.e. gentrification) occurring in these same communities.

Black communities have used cooperative economics as a tool of economic resiliency since the Reconstruction era. W.E.B. DuBois sites at least 150 functioning co-ops at the turn of the twentieth

century (DuBois 2). Black communities continue to utilize cooperative economics as a tool for community resiliency on a smaller scale. Currently, many urban Black communities are looking for ways to promote economic resiliency during this time of unprecedented economic hardships. During the great recession, Black Americans lost half of their collective wealth connected to the predatory loan epidemic. With that context, the following questions will guide this report with the understanding that the North End co-op project, if successful, can be a blueprint for other Black urban neighborhoods.

**Freedom Quilting Bee Co-op courtesy of the New York Foundation**

- *Can cooperatives still serve as a tool to guarantee effective community power and wealth building during this current period of Black economic uncertainty?*
- *Will cooperative economic initiatives, specifically cooperative grocery stores led by Black people in Black neighborhoods, be enough to address the daily political realities of food consumption in the North End?*
- *Will cooperative grocery stores provide a strong alternative to development and white gentrification occurring?*
- *What other realities in the North End can bolster, challenge and possibly even produce a new model for co-op grocery stores that can be adopted in similar Detroit neighborhoods?*

This report will begin to gather and support the existence of bidirectional benefits between co-ops and neighborhoods like the North End. The North End's rich history, challenges, presence of community leadership and current food infrastructure highlights it as an ideal place for a food co-op. The history of co-ops in Black communities show that the vision of cooperative economics is often best utilized when it is most needed. Therefore DBCFSN's development of the co-op is apart of a longer historical trajectory of Black political movements for self-determined communities.

## CHAPTER 1: FOOD BUSINESS AS USUAL

*"When I look at this city's tax base, I say bring on more gentrification… I'm sorry, but I mean, bring it on. We can't just be a poor city and prosper."*
– *George Jackson, Jr. (Detroit Economic Growth Corporation) – May 16, 2013*

Detroit's current economic structure reinforces the need for businesses rooted in a vision for community. The majority of food businesses are privately owned and highlight the economic and racial inequities in Detroit (New Detroit: The Coalition 2) and non-Detroit residents own the majority of Detroit's businesses (Yakini). Detroit's majority Black population often only serves as consumers and laborers within the current system (Joyce). The current economic structure has therefore exasperated and intensified other racialized issues around food, housing, transportation, schools, employment, etc. Detroit's current food system is therefore only a portion of the problem.

The Detroit Food Policy Council (DFPC) describes Detroit's "grocery gap" when describing the current food retail business. Although Detroit has more than a hundred full retail grocery stores, stores are often smaller in square footage for the average shopper compared to other major cities (Pothukuchi 42). An underlying issue within this "grocery gap" is also a racial gap –


James Hooks courtesy of Metro Foodland

Metro Foodland continues to be the only Black owned full retail grocery store in Detroit (and the Midwest). Goodwells is also black owned and a small natural foods market and café in Midtown. Both of these stores serve as an exception to the rule. Detroit's majority Black populations are often at the whim of non-Native non-Black food storeowners when it comes to prices and quality of products. The DFPC also reports an approximate $200 million in leakage each year to the suburbs from lost food business (Pothukuchi 7). Detroit therefore loses that retail revenue yearly due to lacking food options within the city limits.

Outside food store chains have started to identify the possible profit of having more food business

within the city limits. The city currently has 10 grocery stores for every 100,000 people compared to Wayne County which has 26 grocery stores for every 100,000 people (Garry). An approximate 30% of Detroiter's total grocery spending is spent outside of Detroit (Social Compact 62). In the past two years, large chains like Whole Foods and Meijers have come to Detroit. But even with chains like Whole Foods attempting to address the economic inequalities by having a "lower priced" selection, Detroit residents are consistently left out of the development of a meaningful thriving food system. Whole Foods' agreement to meet with community organizers after the store already finalized their operational decisions displays this trend (Mutuma). Community residents that try to organize privately owned businesses are often left in disappointment. Food stores that don't intentionally provide an opportunity for community self-determination can only serve as a bandage to a larger issue of food injustice in the city.

Detroit's food system is also profoundly connected to issues of land ownership (J. G. Nembhard). Efforts to revitalize the local economy by dislocating Detroit's majority Black working class community started in the 1990s. The effects of predatory home loans have devastated many of Detroit's neighborhoods; the city's profound physical landscape is a product of the country's corporate elite and in recent a predatory lending epidemic. The pervasiveness of predatory lending in Detroit's African American communities will continue to gut neighborhoods of homes and resources (Gottesdiener). Corporate America's subsequent purchase of large amounts of land in inner cities further reveals a calculated assault on African American communities. The North End is only but one tale of a larger battle for homes and land in America.

Detroit's corporate elite's attempt to "revitalize" has already dislocated many Detroiters. Stories like the Henry Street Apartment evictions[5] and Hantz Farms/Woodland purchase of 140 acres have become normalized in Detroit's revitalization narrative. Detroit's governing elite's push for city bankruptcy has served as a rationalization for aggressive privatization efforts. Many remaining residents affected by privatization and gentrification are long time residents of the city. After 2009, Population dislocation and the land grab have increased. This has resulted in further land privatization and mass evictions. Hantz Farms purchase of 140 acres of public land for extraordinarily subsidized prices illustrates a pattern. The mass purchase of land in the North End

[5] On April 19, 2013, residents of the multi-apartment "Henry Street Apartments" complex were suddenly notified that they had to leave their apartments by May 20. Residents organized and successfully stopped the sudden mass evictions. Henry Street Apartments are located in the Detroit's Downtown area.

has also demonstrated this trend (Hart).

North End resident Dana Hart in a recent interview details that many North End residents are misinformed about land purchase due to heightened speculation in the area. Hart describes that trying to purchase land on her block has been a hassle. The unmaintained vacant corner lot is owned by non-Detroit residents and unavailable for sale. Hart was trying to convert the vacant lot into another community garden and natural healing space. Hart describes that Black residents feel like they are being cut out of the opportunity to own land in their neighborhood. The development of the M1 Rail also highlights power dynamics in the area. The city's plan to construct a light rail down Woodward with no proposed stop in the North End or plan for a community's benefits agreement is alarming. Detroit's developing efforts continue to exclude residents in the planning process.

## CHAPTER 2: A HISTORY OF THE NORTH END

*Vanguard Community Development Corporation and the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning completed a report, History's Future in the North End, in May 2013. The following history is gathered information from their report.*

The automobile industry encouraged the influx of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to the North End neighborhood at the beginning of the twentieth century. By the 1930s, the North End served as a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, and served as a home base to the infamous bootlegger Purple Gang (Woodward Corridor Initiative 15). The automobile industry also encouraged the mass migration of Southern Black laborers to the city. Oakland Avenue, a main street in the North End, became a hub of Black musical traditions and creativity. World War II brought an influx of laborers to the North End. A nearby plane factory brought jobs and maintained the North End as a middle class neighborhood. By the 1950s, Eisenhower's mass highway development encouraged white flight to Detroit's suburbia. Many of the North End's synagogues converted into African American churches. The North End became a bustling Black working/middle class neighborhood complete with a variety of grocery stores and black owned businesses.

The 1960s brought a period of heightened political awareness, activity and unrest in the nation's Black communities. Many Black urban communities became unsettled and increasingly disgruntled with American apartheid. The "Red Summer" of 1967 saw mass rebellions from Black urban communities across the nation. Detroit's rebellion ended in August 1967 with devastating effects to Oakland Avenue. The rebellion permanently transformed Detroit's urban landscape. The rebellion also paired with the completion of the Chrysler Freeway in 1970 fueled massive white flight. The Freeway's location cut off a portion of the North End hardening the economic blow to the area. By 1970, the North End lost half of its population (Woodward Corridor Initiative 17).

The North End, like the whole of Detroit, leans on a long history of dedicated Black community leaders. Community leaders like Delores Bennett especially arose in the absence of government investment. Her passion led to youth programs and other initiatives in the area. Her most memorialized effort brought a neighborhood park in 1977.

**"If you do something for others – it will sure make a brighter life for everyone."**

– **Delores Bennett**
**North End Community Leader**


Delores Bennett & Park courtesy of Detroit 20/20

The effects of mass economic disinvestment, predatory loans and a heightened war on drugs[6] became increasingly devastating to the neighborhood. The North End's vacancy, incarceration, unemployment, and dependency on fringe food stores would dramatically increase by the 1990s. North End resident Shirley Davis describes the change. When her family first moved in the neighborhood, block clubs still promoted block beautification contests. "This street used to win awards." The 1990s also witnessed a slight resurgence in economic investment in the neighborhood. Davis mentions that the North End was considered an "Empowerment Zone"[7] and their house received repairs due to that program. Large foundations continue to encourage economic development in the North End. Many residents participate in various neighborhood improvement programs. Some of this work developed into the *North End Neighborhood Investment Strategy* that called for new housing, family owned stores, employment and other infrastructure to strengthen the neighborhood. But the energy generated around this project deflated due to multiple reasons. The energy generated with those projects and their mistakes though provide a platform and framework for focusing a lot of the co-op's energy on intentional community involvement.

Projects that often feel heavily controlled by a perceived "outsider" agenda haven't had sustained success in the North End. A North End pastor explains that organizations not originally housed in the North End often come with an agenda and then ask for residents' involvement after the project's completion. Several residents interviewed for this report mentioned the level of mistrust

[6] War on Drugs or Drug War is a term most recently recaptured by Michelle Alexander in her critically acclaimed book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. It refers to the deliberate government funneling of drugs into working class communities of color with the subsequent rise in police presence and incarceration rates.
[7] Empowerment zones are federal government designated economically distressed zones in the US. Several of Detroit's neighborhoods were deemed as EZ's starting in 1994 that allows specific subsidies and tax credits for development in designated areas.

due to this historical trend of new projects. Residents offer this as an explanation of the perceived apathy in the North End. But the presence of block clubs, youth programming, community-led beautification projects, a re-emerging art scene and urban agricultural scene are evidence of community resiliency in the face of challenge (Mathis). Community residents have continued to organize their voices and power in conversations about Detroit's changing landscape. The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network will need to continue to build a collaborative vision with North Enders for the co-op.

**Oakland Avenue Community Garden courtesy of Jerry Hebron**

Detroit's neighborhoods including the North End have also joined a national movement towards urban agriculture. The North End has agricultural projects, gardens, and the Oakland Avenue Farmers market and a growing potential for more agricultural activity. The North End also has more than seven feeding programs/pantries including fresh produce giveaways from local gardens (Youmans). Community leaders like Jerry Hebron have tried to merge these two worlds through the North End Christian CDC's agricultural programs including the Oakland Avenue Community Garden and Greenhouse Coop. This displays the area's rich history of community activism in the neighborhood. Community leaders like Delores Bennett and others have worked for decades to maintain basic services and promote unifying community projects in the neighborhood.

## CHAPTER 3: COOPERATIVES: FOR US BY US

**"Co-ops address underdevelopment, economic isolation and marginality, and market failure – when market activities do not provide for the needs of a community."**

**– Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard**

What can cooperatives do for the North End – and more importantly vice versa – what can the North End do for the current state of cooperatives? The majority of cooperative grocery stores in the U.S. currently cater to a white educated middle to upper middle class population. Cooperative grocery stores are often located in predominantly white college towns that further maintain them as white middle class spaces. Besides the obvious issues of developing cooperative grocery stores in Black urban communities (lack of concentrated financial wealth, higher rent and food distribution prices), narratives around co-op grocery stores maintain their white washed image. Detroit for several decades debunked this narrative with the Cass Corridor Co-op. In the 1990s, the Cass Co-op had more than 2000 majority Black active members (Sturgis). Unfortunately, expansion into a bigger facility and corruption from upper management led to the Co-op's demise. Co-ops in other Black urban communities similarly closed in the early 2000s. But the rising food justice movement has reclaimed the cooperative movement back into the conversation of community development. The opening of Mandela Food Co-op in West Oakland demonstrates this trend. Mandela worker-owners expressed that, "business as usual in America isn't working." (Riemer 42) Cooperative food efforts in other areas also show that reclamation.

The Georgia Avenue Food Co-op Ministry in Atlanta formed in 1998. The six collective food coops grew out of a food pantry and gives members the opportunity to collectively negotiate with pantry providers. Members are charged $4 a meeting and receive 2 boxes of food (including seasonal produce) pre-chosen by the collective membership. The Co-op's six principles can provide a framework for thinking about what coops can do in specifically working class urban communities.

**Food Co-ops for low-income families:**

1. *Dignity*
2. *Community*
3. *Food Security*

4. *Fight Homelessness*
5. *Transform Lives*
6. *Education and Leadership Training*
7. *Faith is Strengthened*

The Co-op's ability to provide collective empowerment keeps members returning. The Co-op has a waiting list for membership (Georgia Avenue Community Ministry).

**A Brief History of Black Cooperative Activity in the U.S.**

Cooperative ownership can and historically has aided anti-poverty movements in American Black communities throughout the U.S. (J. G. Nembhard). Over 150 Black owned cooperative businesses were documented at the turn of the twentieth century. The Great Depression exploded the need and presence of Black cooperatives in the U.S. (Baker). That's because cooperatives served as more than a way to provide access to services, labor and consumer goods. Twentieth century cooperative thinkers like George Schuyler and Ella Baker believed cooperative activity would be the pathway towards Black economic and political liberation in the U.S. (Baker). Black cooperatives aimed at building collective power to serve the communities basic needs. The following examples highlight especially the linkage between food security, Black political and economic power and cooperative activity.

**Citizens' Cooperative Stores | 1918-unknown**

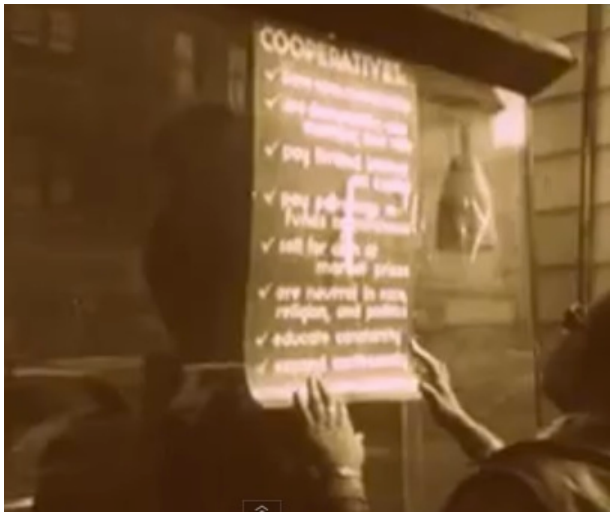
Formed in Memphis, Tennessee in 1918. Members could buy shares in installments and met monthly to study cooperatives and dialogue. Memphis' Black communities had a thriving business community as well as extreme challenges due to economic and racial oppression. The cooperative aimed to address the realities of the segregated South as well as the possibilities in Black self-determination. By 1919, the Citizens' Cooperative had five operating stores serving more than 75,000 people. The original members were reportedly excited to join the co-op because it served as a way to circulate wealth. Local Black producers could sell products at a Black community owned store that could reinvest in the local Black communities (D. J. Nembhard 11).

**Young Negroes' Cooperative League | 1930-1933**

Formed in Harlem, New York in 1930. The YNCL was created by Black public intellectuals George Schuyler and headed by Ella J. Baker. The League promoted the development of buying clubs and

co-op grocery stores in the Black community during the Great Depression. The YNCL strongly believed consumer cooperatives could bring "a revolution of Black economic and political power," and gained thousands of members. The YNCL was also influential in the development Harlem's Own Cooperative Store even after its demise (Baker 4).

**Newark Co-op Buying Club | 1967 –unknown**



Newark Co-op Buying Club courtesy of "With No One to Help Us"

Formed in Newark, New Jersey in 1967. Black mothers formed a buying club and later a storefront to address the rising inequalities in their local food stores. Newark's racial tension intensified further after the 1967 rebellion. White storeowners added to this tension by often discriminating and overcharging for products to Black mothers whom were often welfare recipients. Mothers successfully organized a buying club and later a storefront to provide access to quality foods through collective purchasing power (Club).

**Ujamaa Food Buying Club | 2008 – present**

Formed in Detroit, Michigan in 2008. The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, a Black food justice organization created the Ujamaa Food Buying Club to provide access to healthy bulk items through a natural food distributor. Ujamaa currently has over one hundred members in the Detroit metro area and runs on a four week ordering cycle. DBCFSN created the buying club to provide an alternative to Detroit's Black community. Currently a majority of city's residents purchase their food from fringe food retailers (The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network).

**Mandela Foods Cooperative | 2009 - present**

Formed in West Oakland, California in 2009. The store is a worker and consumer owned full service grocery and educational center. Oakland has been a historically Black enclave for activism and community work. Oakland currently battles hyper-gentrification pushing many long-term working class black residents out the neighborhood (D. J. Nembhard 17).

**"Our doors opened in June of 2009 after several years of community organizing around access to healthy food in West Oakland. A small group of women demanded** access **to fresh produce and healthy foods. They planted a vision that we are growing to fulfill."**

The store opened with eight worker-owners who use a non-hierarchical structure to manage store functions. The store utilizes local farmers, family farms, and works to provide access to fresh foods to low-income residents and cooperative development in West Oakland (Mandela Foods Cooperative).

Mandela Food Cooperative courtesy of Mandela Food Cooperative

## CHAPTER 4: DBCFSN & FOOD JUSTICE | GROWING COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AROUND FOOD

The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network started off as a group of parents from Nsroma Institute (2003) who collectively maintained each other's yards and collectively purchased seeds (Ifeoma). The organization worked off of personal funds maintaining several smaller communities plots until 2008. Their efforts blossomed into a seven acre farm, D-Town Farm, in Detroit's west side that continues to operate as a producer and healing space for Detroit's Black communities. DBCFSN founders also spearheaded the creation of the Detroit Food Policy Council in 2009. DBCFSN's work has consistently been multi-pronged but centrally focused on building Black political and economic power in the food system.

D-Town Farm courtesy of DBCFSN

For DBCFSN, it's never simply a question of food but about changing the culture, economics and politics of food in Detroit. DBCFSN would argue that building black political and economic power in the food system is at the heart of food justice.

**The Road to the Co-op**

The Ujamaa Buying Club began in August of 2008 as a four-week cycle buying club through a natural food distributor. The club intended not only to give folks access to natural/organic food products, but also start a food community based on cooperative economics. The name *Ujamaa* is a Kiswahili term for cooperative economics and family that also provides a vision and framework for the club.

The co-op was included in DBCFSN's strategic three year planning document from the years 2008 to 2011 which culminated in a feasibility study conducted by Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow Tavia Benjamin and Wayne State University. The study established the desire for a co-op in the city limits from almost 400 surveys completed around the city (Benjamin). After the Feasibility Study completed in February 2012, DBCFSN members began to meet with other co-ops in the Midwestern region. This period of knowledge building developed into the creation of the retail food co-op advisory committee in May 2013 (Mensah). The advisory committee is a mixture of local

development corporations, legal professionals, DBCFSN members as well as others apart of the food policy community. The committee was assigned with the task of doing the following to serve the vision of the store (Appendix 1):

*1) Decide the specific facility needs of the store*

*2) Explore possible existing facilities options and new construction*

*3) Decide on the price of member equity shares and what payment arrangements will be available*

*4) Decide on the name of the co-op*

*5) Determine the projected costs of the co-op's development with assistance from a business planner and financial advisor*

*6) Develop a timeline for co-op development and opening*

*7) Draft initial by-laws including criteria for board membership*

*8) Receive monthly reports from the co-op developer and co-op engagement coordinator*

These tasks have guided the progress and dialogue around the co-op. The North End became the top option for a location in the beginning formations of the committee. The Wayne State University site study included several possible options for the store (some located in the North End). But the bidirectional benefits of having a co-op in the North End have not been explicitly researched.

Since the creation of the retail food co-op advisory committee, the store has rapidly moved closer towards pre-development. The committee has done the following as of January 2014:

1) *Created a request for proposals for architects and market researchers*
2) *Explored possible existing facilities in the North End including the Police Stable on E. Bethune and John R as well as plots for new construction on E. Philadelphia and Woodward and E. Bethune and Woodward*
3) *Decided the price of $200 for member equity shares with a subsidized member equity share of $150 for individuals who qualify. Equity shares can be paid over a series of months and are non-yearly*
4) *Decided a name for a co-op and strategized a way to get the name incorporated. The community engagement coordinator will also run a slogan contest open to community residents with a cash prize & co-op membership*

5) *The advisory committee was assisted by David Sharpe, a business advisor through W. K. Kellogg Foundation to assist with pricing projections*
6) *The advisory committee projects pre-construction to begin by Summer 2014*
7) *The advisory committee drafted and approved by-laws including criteria for board membership*
8) *The advisory committee received monthly reports from co-op engagement coordinator*

**Community Engagement | Creating a Collective Vision for Community Controlled Business**

Since May 2013, DBCFSN hosted nine community engagement meetings with seven meetings being within a 2.5-mile radius of the North End (Appendix 2). More than 330 individuals have attended the engagement meetings with a reported 15 percent living in the North End. Other community engagement efforts include presentations at community meetings, door-to-door canvas, and meeting with block club leaders as well as youth engagement (Appendix 3). Further engagement will have to aggressively focus and strengthen North End's residents' involvement in the co-op development process. Community residents have shown demonstrated interest in a co-op grocery store coming to Woodward Avenue. The absence of retail grocery store as well as a community initiated food infrastructure exhibit awareness. Residents stress that organizations not originally located in the North End, trying to do work struggled to keep residents engaged could be for many reasons. Some residents detail a lack of seeing results and follow through with projects. The recent fallout between a local food pantry and community development corporation to open a client-choice food pantry highlights the lack of follow through. Some residents detail a lack of genuine outreach by new community organizations. Community engagement efforts will have to continue to actively address the failures of past organizations to effectively engage while coming up with meaningful and creative ways to get residents involved.

**The Whitewashing of Co-op Grocery Stores in the US**

*"#48 Whole Foods and Grocery Co-ops" – Stuff White People Like*[8]

Mainstream narratives about the historical development of co-ops often leave out the roles that African Americans continue to play in the movement. The twentieth century's greatest movements

[8] *Stuff White People Like: A Definitive Guide to the Unique Taste of Millions* by Christian Lander was published in 2008. The book discusses matter of class and race through a catalog type format.

for racial equity were always accompanied by influxes in cooperative economic activity (D. J. Nembhard). Now grocery co-ops are especially seen as entities solely beneficial to white educated middle class communities. It is hard to envision co-ops as a tool for economic resiliency and building people power when most co-ops are located in food secure communities. Even existing co-ops in predominantly working class communities of color have to heavily strategize to keep neighboring residents engaged.

Many of the existing grocery consumer co-ops grew out of a wave during the late 1960s and 1970s. The Cooperative League of the USA reports that upwards of 5,000 consumer co-ops formed during the 1970s (Cooperative Development Institute).

Bulk Food courtesy of Grocery 411

Many of the founders were young white educated individuals looking to support "countercultural" activities. Due to the founders' demographic, many co-ops had high access to capital including financial backings from universities (Cooperative Development Institute). This "alternative" (Alkon and Julian 265) food movement began to be coded as white despite African American's historical cooperative activities.

African American participation in the "alternative" food institutions is less than the general population for myriad reasons. Food co-ops resurgence during the 1970s as progressive white spaces only incorporated people of color communities under the guises that whites continued to control the space (Alkon and Julian 277). Many of these stores would fuel and support the "natural foods" industry; often only selling unrefined bulk foods (Cooperative Development Institute). The 1980s saw a subsequent decline in grocery co-ops that didn't show an increase until the mid-2000s (University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives). The 2000s failing economic times for a wider cross section of Americans put alternative based economies back on the forefront.

**The Cass Corridor Food Co-op | A Dream Deferred?**

The Cass Corridor Co-op established in Detroit's Cass Corridor in 1972. The co-op originally operated a 1700 square/foot space moving into a space double in square footage before it closed its doors in 2004. The store founders envisioned "people over profits" not only as a slogan but also as a mission


Cass Corridor Food Co-op courtesy of Cass Corridor Food Co-op

to provide affordable quality food products to Detroit residents. The co-op was small but had over 2000 members and African American community support. Cass Corridor members recall the experience as positive due to the friendliness of staff, the opportunities to volunteer, and the programs to buy food for less. By 1997, the Co-op was a multi-million dollar business that brought entrepreneurs to the area (Sturgis). But the decision to move the co-op into a larger space and alleged mismanagement and alleged embezzling of store funds led to the store's bankruptcy and demise.

**The Natural Food Movement?**

Larger non-cooperative grocery store chains recent shift to stock "natural foods" will inevitably hurt the co-op market. The closing of urban co-ops in cities like Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit display the growing irrelevancy of co-op stores in their current form. Chains like Walmart, Meijers and even Target have aggressively co-opted the natural food niche previously reserved to co-op stores focused. In the summer of 2013, Target launched the organic "Simply Balanced" brand with over 250 products (Associated Press). Target reports that around three quarters of the products are free of genetically modified ingredients and half the items are organic. Target plans to phase out genetically modified ingredients in their "Simply Balanced" brand by the beginning of 2015 (Associated Press). How will co-op grocery stores, currently more associated with natural foods than community power, stay relevant with the rising corporate popularity with natural products? Cooperative grocery stores may have the opportunity to rebrand themselves as more than a natural food provider but a community based entity. The possible rebranding may be especially salient in communities concerned with having access to quality food as well as reclaiming community power.

## CHAPTER 5: CO-OP IN THE NORTH END OR A NORTH END CO-OP? | RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

DBCFSN's experiences with community engagement around the co-op have been years in the making. DBCFSN's buying club and focus groups for the feasibility study all paved the way for the work completed Fall 2013 and Winter 2014. Since fall of 2013, the DBCFSN co-op has hosted ten community engagement meetings with over 300 attendees, maintains a co-op engagement database with over 300 individuals, has met with 17 North End community leaders, led a door to door canvas knocking on over 60 doors and maintains a Facebook page with almost 600 likes. But further community engagement must take into context promise and possibility in this project having a large membership base from the North End's majority black community.

Analyzing the numbers presented and community feedback, several questions arise that will frame the recommendations for further community engagement.

- *How can we get more North End residents empowered and involved in the project?*
- *How do we sustain engagement with folks on the spectrum of technological ability/access?*
- *How do we continue to attract folks not already connected with community activism work or specifically food justice work with the project?*
- *How do we sustain energy around the project in the next 12 months?*

The following recommendations come from community members, conversations with other co-ops, and research on other co-op engagement strategies. Recommendations are meant to promote heavy community ownership even before the store's open. The following recommendations also take into account the intersection of the following framework questions.

- *Hosting events that already fit the ascetic of the neighborhood including movie nights, dinner parties and block parties. This not only encourages engagement, but get folks involved who may not be immediately interested in a co-op grocery store*
- *Continue to position co-op as a unique project developing in the North End but that is apart of longer tradition of black cooperatives. Effectively distance the co-op from other development projects happening in the area*
- *Continue to develop relationship with Oakland Avenue Farmers market, Central Detroit Christian CDC, and North End Christian CDC and figure out plan to work cooperatively around food work in the area. Make sure residents understand separate entities are supportive of each others work*

- *Continue to research programs other cooperatives use to provide discounts on natural/organic/non-Genetically Modified Organism food products*
- *Develop separate website to centralize information about co-op development. Include FAQ that is regularly updated and based off of questions posed at community meetings, presentations, etc. Publish notes taken at community meetings on website*
- *Continuing to use North End caterers for co-op events and to demonstrate preference for hiring North End residents into this project*
- *Having a monthly blurb to insert into local block clubs newsletters, church bulletins, and school newsletters*
- *Completing a market research study for a grocery store in the North End*
- *Creating a community benefits agreement (CBA) with local organizations and residents. CBA should detail the amount of jobs, benefits and potential harm co-op could bring to the North End community. CBA could also serve as a blueprint for other organizations interested in doing work in the neighborhood*
- *Complete a report documenting the local food stores in the North End and include the average prices for milk, eggs, bread, cereal, and other staple products usually available to residents*
- *Create a survey for residents asking how much local residents will pay for staple food and non-food products*
- *DBCFSN gathering volunteers to help with neighborhood clean ups/board ups in the summer months. This possibly shows residents that DBCFSN is not only interested in the store but the initiatives already occurring in the neighborhood powered by residents*
- *Creating a short two-minute video that can easily circulate on social media showing how individuals benefit from cooperative enterprises. The video should also quickly demonstrate ownership structure, how decisions are made, and how profit is circulated within the neighborhood*
- *Intentional youth engagement with the help of Vanguard CDC, Youthville, North End Christian CDC, EMEAC, etc.*
- Create working groups around specific projects with tangible goals, i.e. planning a block party, etc.
- *Continue to rely on the International Cooperative Alliance's seven principles when explaining the benefits of the co-op. Specifically around questions of funder's influence on the project. The ICA's seven principles centralize control over the co-op on the membership and democratically elected board members*
- *Develop relationship with North End artist community. Brainstorm ways where co-op and local artist collectives can support each others work cooperatively*

**CONCLUSION**

The North End's budding agricultural activity as well as its social infrastructure to support community projects will be beneficial to the co-op. Except the North End food co-op will not simply survive under a vision of bringing good food to the neighborhood. It must strongly situate itself in a longer history of black cooperatives to keep it unique and attractive to its residents. The North End's future co-op grocery store will have bidirectional benefits with the North End. The North End's geographical location, need for employment, demonstrated community desire for an independent grocery store (Woodward Corridor Initiative) and alternative food sources will all add to the future's store success.

Creating a food co-op in the North End with a local Black community based membership has the opportunity to create a solid blue print for other Black urban communities. Areas with low access to quality food, high unemployment, and a hyper-industrialized food infrastructure have the opportunity to lead the "alternative" food movement if they stay true to the historical Black tradition of cooperative economics. Especially, in the current context of Detroit's "revitalization" – Black Detroiters demonstrated ability to resist could continue to funnel into food security projects. Black Detroiters also demonstrated energy around the urban agricultural movement will also inevitably funnel into the co-op's development.

Right now, Detroit is at a crossroads. Trends in economic development show a discouraging picture for many of Detroit's Black neighborhoods, however, the ability for Black Detroiters to resist and create development strategies that encourage self-determination will lead towards more food secure communities. Not only do grocery cooperatives provide the opportunity for members to own something in their community, it provides them the opportunity to make decisions on something so basic and vital as food. Black Detroit's ability to create community and power in its local food movement will be a testament to the city's history, the history of black cooperatives and a lesson to the world.

## APPENDIX 1: A Vision for the DBCFSN Retail Food Co-op

*In keeping with the principle of Ujamaa (cooperative economics) and the definition of a co-op provided by the International Co-operative Alliance, our Retail Food Co-op Store will be a community institution that has the following general goals:*

- To provide access to high-quality, healthy food options for Detroiters, particularly to those African-Americans most impacted by poor access.
- To model community-ownership and generate and circulate wealth in Detroit's African-American community.
- To model community-based food sovereignty and food justice strategies.
- To serve as an incubator for start-up community-based food businesses.
- To provide jobs for members of our community.
- To serve as a community education center for information on health, well-being, justice and resilience.

*The store will have the following components:*

**Retail Store**

A full service retail grocery store with the following departments:

- Produce
- Baked Goods
- Dairy
- Meat and Fish (sustainably raised)
- Frozen Foods
- Bulk Dry Goods
- Canned and Packaged Goods
- Vitamins, Herbs and Health Supplements
- Beer and Wine
- Household Items
- Pet Supplies

**Café with Indoor and Outdoor seating**

A vegetarian/vegan café with wireless Internet service capable of seating up to 50 people. Menu selections would include soups, salads, sandwiches, beverages and daily specials.

**Salad Bar**

Various cold items for salads including green leafy vegetables, beans, vegetables, pickled items, grains and dressings.

**Office Space**

Spaces for co-op staff including the general manager, department heads, and accountant. A meeting room for board, staff and membership meetings.

**Storage Space Including Walk –in Coolers**

Adequate storage space for the stores stocks, equipment, and tools.

**Community Meeting Space**

A large room that can be seat up to 100 people in either auditorium style rows or at tables.

**Incubator Kitchen**

A licensed commercial kitchen capable of producing various cooked foods for sale in the co-op and of accommodating up to three other food entrepreneurs at any given time

**Teaching Garden**

A 1,000 square foot teaching and production garden that grows items that are sold in the co-op and teaches various techniques associated with urban agriculture.

**Parking**

Parking for at least 50 cars.  Bike racks for up to 20 bikes

**Green Building**
Throughout the building, green technologies will be used, including natural light tubes, geo-thermal, solar, rainwater collection, repurposed and recycled materials, and permeable outdoor pavements.

**Part of a Community Hub**
Ideally the co-op should be part of a hub that includes other African-American owned, community-based businesses and institutions that have compatible purposes.  The hub would generate and circulate money and knowledge, and would build community.

**Additional Considerations**

- We tentatively estimate that we will need 7,500 sq./f facility with 3,500 s/f retail store space and 4,000 s/f offices, meeting space, kitchen, storage.

- In time, the co-op would also expand to "Satellite" locations. These "mini-stores" would be located in housing complexes and community institutions such as schools and churches. These locations would expand the reach of the co-op, and allow it to provide products and services to a larger group of people. The locations would also provide additional job opportunities, as well as entrepreneurial training opportunities for members of the community.

- A Member/owner equity structure, including various payment plans must be created that is affordable for Detroit citizens.  Funding sources should be explored that may offset the member/owner equity fee for low-income residents.

- The co-op should have a 7-9-member board. The initial advisory committee will give way to an elected board that utilizes a "Policy Governance" system of management.

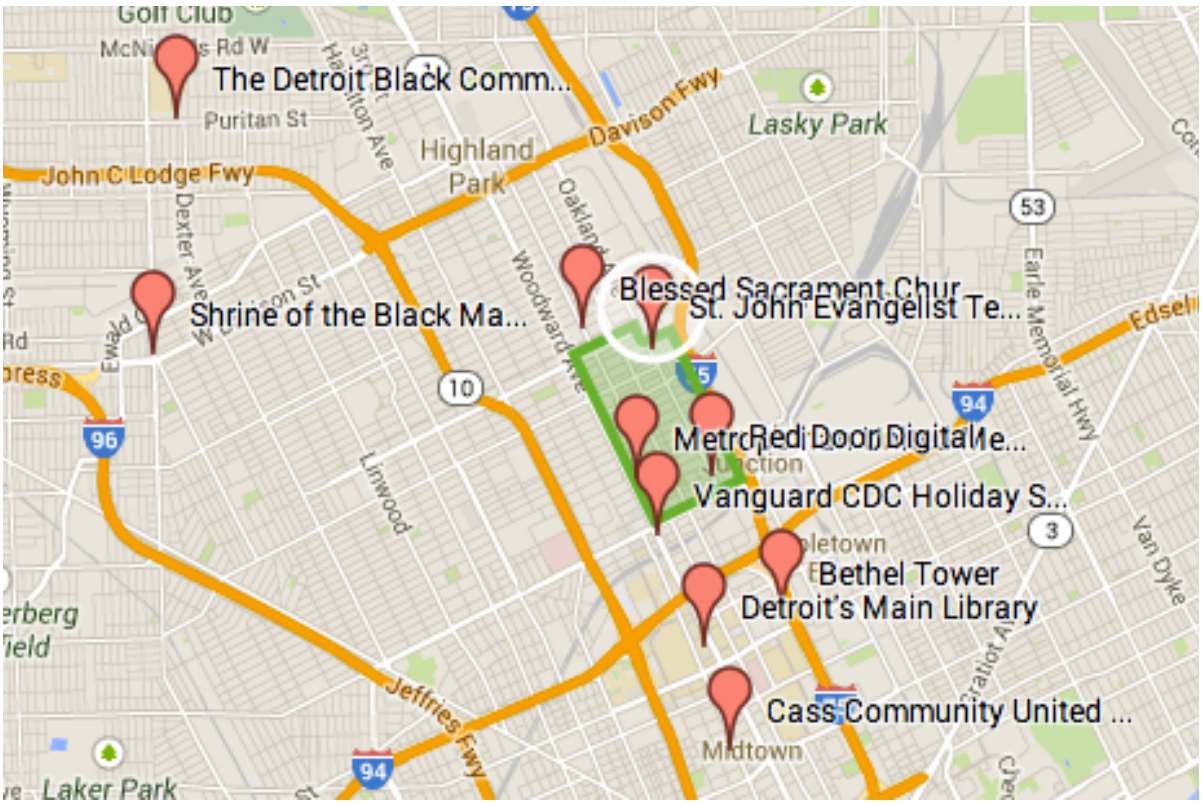
- We should obtain membership in the "National Cooperative Grocer's Association" for maximum purchasing power, mentoring and advice.

- The store should accept SNAP/EBT, credit and debit cards.

- Seniors should be offered discounts.

**APPENDIX 2:** Geography of Community Meetings

**(North End Neighborhood Highlighted in Green)**




**Meeting Locations:**

**1. Detroit Black Community Food Security Office – 3800 Puritan Street**
**2. St. John Evangelist Temple of Truth and School of Wisdom – 9354 Oakland Street**
**3. Red Door Digital Gallery – 7500 Oakland Street**
**4. The Shrine of the Black Madonna -**
**5.Vanguard CDC Holiday Stop Pop Up Shop – 6558 Woodward Avenue**
**6. Bethel Tower Apartments – 5203 Chrysler Drive**
**7. Cass Commons – 3901 Cass Avenue**
**8. Detroit's Main Library – 5201 Woodward Avenue**
**9. Blessed Sacrament Community Center – 150 Belmont Street**

**APPENDIX 3: Community Engagement in Quantitative Form**

## Community Meeting Attendance

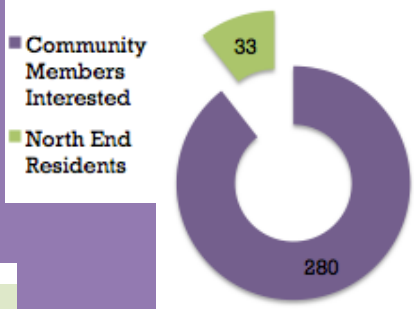
322

## Community Engagement

320

North End Info

65 Doors Knocked On




## Small Group Presentations Completed

15

## Supportive North End Leaders

19

10 Events Attended

10 Organizational Contacts

9 Churches

Social Media: Facebook Page


Page Shares: +60

Total Post Views: +7500

Average Views per Post: 493.8

## Community Feedback

"The meeting was very informative. People were allowed to voice their opinions and ask questions…About 50 people were at this meeting. It appears every one is ready including myself to get on board. This store is sorely needed... Count me in."

- Community Meeting Attendee

"It was very heavy on the group activities and talking about food. I would have liked more info on the co-op model that will be used and details about the plan."

- Community Meeting Attendee

"They [DBCFSN] are going to the community before they build the building. Usually groups build the building and go to the community. This is how things should be done."

- North End Pastor

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