

# co-opnews Nov. 2005

newsletter of the Dublin Food Co-Op

## **Dublin Food Co-op November 12/11/2005 Editorial**

Welcome to the November Co-op News. This news-sheet brings news of the disappointment that we did not manage to secure the new premises in time. Another interested party came along and the landlord found that they made a better offer. Obviously this is disheartening for many of us on the Co-ordinating Body (CB) and for those who worked hard behind the scenes, trying to make the move a reality. Many members will also be disappointed that the much discussed "move" has now fallen through. The letter from Anthony Harris (Co-op Chairperson) in this issue outlines this situation as he sees it and he gives his views on the future development of the Co-op and in particular the role of the C.B. within this. The C. B do still wish for the food Co-op to grow and develop and with this in mind we ask that we build on the progress we have made and we hope that the discussions and debates to date can serve as the foundations for future growth.  
Monica Haughey (Editor, Co-ordinating Body)

## **Letter From Chairman**

Dear Co-op Member,  
It is with great sadness and frustration that I must advise that, although the CB decided, following the recent SGM, not to reverse its earlier decision to move our operations to Blackpitts, that option is no longer available to us as the Landlord, frustrated with our long delays and prevarication, has let the premises to another suitor. We first viewed these premises in October 2004 and were facilitated by the landlord with many viewings and concessions since but eventually our inability to grasp the nettle within a reasonable timeframe was our undoing.  
There are many things that could be said about this situation and many lessons that need to be learnt but, although, this may be neither the time nor the place for such an exercise, some serious navel gazing is needed within the Dublin Food Co-op if we are not to repeat the mistakes of the past.  
The Co-op has been trying to acquire a new premises for as long as I have been a member and many AGM's have passed motions on the issue. In 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2005 the matter was dealt with by the

AGM in one form or another and the CB have long since been mandated to get us moved. The last board did Trojan work in developing a proposal to Temple Bar Properties about the Viking Centre and, when that failed, in searching out and advancing the Blackpitts proposal.

This year's Board took to the task with gusto and, although reluctant to rubber stamp the work of the previous board, eventually decided to proceed with a lease of Blackpitts on the 25<sup>th</sup> July last having commissioned, received and adopted a business plan for our move to and development within our new home. I agreed the final details with the Landlord's agent before the August holidays

That decision, which itself was made after careful and exhaustive deliberations, became the subject of much controversy and debate which eventually led to the calling of the recent SGM with the resulting consequences.

Was this process an exercise in democracy or was it yet another example of the suspicious and self defeating obsession with procedure inherited from the constitution laid out by our founding members?

What is certain is that the CB, which is mandated by our rules to conduct "the business and affairs of the Society" and which had the approval of several AGM's for so doing, made a rational decision last July to move to Blackpitts based on a good and workable plan. That decision was not taken lightly, as many Board members will attest. The enormous work and commitment of this and previous Boards in arriving at that juncture needs to be acknowledged and, far from raising suspicions, should have been praised and hailed. I also would like to acknowledge the enormous work put in by Roeland Van Elsen, Aodhagan O'Broin and Catherine Fitzgerald. Also, in preparing for our move we recruited over 260 volunteers to help out with whatever was needed and the spirit and dedication of those members needs also to be acknowledged and harnessed. So where do we go from here?

On the brighter side, the Co-op is a better organised, better resourced and more focused body than it has ever been heretofore, although there are still many areas where it would benefit from a re-examination of its procedures and structures. It has a highly active, dedicated and competent CB willing to drive change

and, of course, it has a solid and valid business plan to advance. All that is needed is for us to just add an appropriate home to the mix.

And the Board has decided to do just that. As you read, we are searching for an alternative premises to house our operations and in which to grow and develop as anticipated by our business plan. Any help from members in locating a suitable home would be greatly appreciated and any information on suitable premises can be sent to [cb@dublinfoodcoop.com](mailto:cb@dublinfoodcoop.com) or given to a Board or staff member at the Saturday market.

I hope that if a suitable premises comes that the CB will accept it without coming to the membership. We appreciate that some members will be uncomfortable with this prospect and there are, of course, mechanisms within the rules to address such concerns not least of which is to put oneself forward for election to the CB at the next AGM.

Anthony Harris Executive Chairman

### **Health and Safety in St. Andrews.**

We are trying to make the Dublin Food Co-op a safe environment for all its members and with that thought in mind we appeal to all parents to keep a watchful eye on their children at all times while shopping in the Co-op.

We are aware that conditions are quite cramped at times in Pearse St, and as you know we are keen to find more suitable premises that provide more space, that are safer and more comfortable.

In the meanwhile, as we are taking all issues of Health and Safety very seriously, we would appeal to all members to be vigilant, and to report anything that might concern them, or that might be a danger to others, and to bring it to the attention of myself or any member of the Coordinating Body, or a member of staff.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Miriam Hennessy CB Member

### **Special General Meeting 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2005 Holiday Inn, Pearse Street.**

A very well attended Dublin Food Co-op SGM was held on October 26th in the Holiday Inn. The SGM was called with two items in mind; one was an exploration of all our options with regard to moving to Blackpitts with a 4 year 9 month lease in Blackpitts, and the other was to remove the cap of 1500 on membership in the constitution.

The main focus of the evening was to allow members have their say on moving to Blackpitts and to listen to their words of concern and encouragement. The

facilitator for the evening, Barre Fitzpatrick, recorded notes of the questions and these are all listed below. Many of the valid concerns have been addressed in different fora previously but obviously the information hasn't gotten to all concerned. That line of communication needs to improve on all sides and, believe me, all volunteers on the Co-ordinating body (CB) are working to improve this.

The business plan is available on the web site, [http://www.dublinfoodcoop.com/docs/bp/Members\\_Briefing.doc](http://www.dublinfoodcoop.com/docs/bp/Members_Briefing.doc) and hard copies can be obtained if you contact the co-ops office. There's normally one or two doing the rounds on Saturdays so ask at the help desk.

The following points were communicated during the meeting:

1. A move has been on the agenda since 1999
2. We should keep the right to review the move while it is happening.
3. Will we be monitoring/evaluating the project?
4. What will the staffing levels be in the new operation
5. Full Business Plan required/wish to see it
6. Members have been insufficiently involved in this process.
7. What happens after 4 years 9 months?
8. The 4 year 9 month temporary nature of the lease is a worry for some.
9. What will be the opening hours/days in the new location?
10. Concern about Blackpitts as a location.
11. What is the parking and public transport situation like in Blackpitts?
12. Producer Members involvement in the move is key
13. Will there be a new competitive situation?
14. Moving to Blackpitts is an opportunity to develop new customers.
15. Length of lease is short, but there's no other option for this building which the CB feel matches the Co-op's needs and aspirations
16. Will the Co-op be seeking Organic certification? What are the consequences of this?
17. Will there be a change of ethos? Some feel this is happening already.
18. Moving allows us to be open to growth.
19. Dublin City council are interested in our plans and if we have a full time operation we will be viewed a lot more favourably.
20. Concerns in 2 letters sent in and delay in response. Also these letters expressed concerns about the move which were not recognised in a previous newsletter. These letters received detailed responses

in the fullness of time.

21. Why not move to our own property and not pay crippling rents?
22. Let's not lose our nerve as we come close to getting a new building
23. Why not hold on to St Andrews temporarily for fresh produce.?
24. Not enough room in St Andrews for people to shop comfortably.
25. No point in keeping market on Pearse Street if we move.
26. Producer members account for approx 52% of turnover
27. There's still room to grow in Pearse Street. We currently have no lease in St Andrews.
28. Hang on to St Andrews, and get a new premises.
29. Move will risk the atmosphere we have built up in St Andrews.
30. Not either/ or - let's multiply our outlets.
31. Hygiene and H&Sealth & Safety are real problems in St Andrews.

After these views were aired there was a brief adjournment and then the motion to remove the cap on members in the constitution was discussed. In accordance to the rules of the constitution, the matter was put to the floor. No consensus was reached and the matter was put to a public vote. As there were questions on the interpretation of the constitution in relation to those present at the meeting but not voting, it was decided that a secret ballot take place. The ensuing result saw that the requisite 75% was reached and the meeting agreed to remove the cap on members numbers in the constitution.

Niall Mc Guirk Co-ordinating Body

## Jobs Forum Started Up

We'd like to draw members' attention to a new section of the DFC website – the Jobs Forum. This has been set up as a way for the Coordinating Body (CB) to request help from volunteer members with specific tasks which need to be done to improve the operations of the Co-op.

CB members will post notices on the forum (which will form discussion "threads"), describing their needs for help with very specific tasks. Members may either reply publicly to the thread on the forum, or privately to the requesting CB member.

From the members' side, any members with a specific, worked-out task that they perceive as useful and are capable of doing or organising should contact the jobs mail address directly (jobs@dublinfoodcoop.com), unless they want to

address it to a particular board member dealing in that area. Members can also use the public forum to float ideas or projects before bringing them to the CB as developed suggestions for action.

Anthony Dillon Volunteer Coordinator

## Help Rota Teams and Dates

The Help Rota is the backbone of the Co-Op's functioning every week, carrying out the essential tasks of setting up the Co-Op on Fridays and Saturday mornings and taking it down on Saturday afternoons. There are seven teams the duty of which comes around every seven weeks, for a two hour shift Fridays (9-11am, 11am-1pm, 1-3pm, 3-5pm) and Saturday afternoons (3-5pm). Duties include such tasks as unloading pallets, stacking shelves, stock-taking, moving trolleys etc. As an incentive Help Rota volunteers receive a 10% discount on the Co-Op's goods. The Help Rota is always looking for new volunteers so if interested please get in touch via email to:

co-ophelprota@dublin.ie to Pauric Cannon (Help Rota Co-ordinator) or Anthony Dillon (Volunteer Co-ordinator). Alternatively ask at the welcome desk.

The timetable of teams for the remainder of the year are as follows:

Team	Dates 2005
F	12 Nov. 05
G	19 Nov. 05
A	26 Nov. 05
B	3 Dec. 05
C	10 Dec. 05
D	17 Dec. 05
E	24 Dec. 05

## Visit To Seikatsu Co-op, Japan

Pauric Cannon visited the Seikatsu Consumer's Co-op (SCC) Tokyo and Kanagawa, Japan in August past. This is an abridged version of his letter

Dear Friends,

The following is an overview of Seikatsu Consumer's Co-op (SCC), Japan. The co-op's main principles, its size and a brief reference to some of the historical reasons which led to women playing a leading role in the movement, are outlined below; Seikatsu is a co-operative movement of 250,000 consumer members. It is divided into 23 independent, autonomous co-ops, stretching from Hokkaido in the north to Aichi province in the south. It has established a secondary co-op, called Seikatsu Consumers Co-op Union, a type of 'umbrella' body. The 23 independent Seikatsu

co-ops, are members of SCCU.

Main operating principles.

1. The greater part (60%) of SCC's turnover comes through 'Han' groups. 'Han' in Japanese, means small group: roughly 4 to 8 households or individuals. 'Buying Club' might better explain the 'Han' collective order system. DFCo-op also began as a Buying Club in January 1983. This pre-supposes that the fixed cost-base of the co-op, is not over-burdened by high rents, mortgage payments, bank borrowings or other onerous financial commitments.

2. Members Capital Development Fund (MCDF).

Each member, on joining, agrees to pay 1,000 yen per month into the above. The fund is controlled by a trust of ordinary members.

- SCC does not borrow from banks or financial institutions. All of its long term capital development needs are funded by MCDF.

- SCC invests the loan capital provided by its members, in long-term capital projects, eg., freehold buildings, transport and other capital equipment required to operate the co-op.

- Members can withdraw the full value of their investment in MCDF when they leave the co-op.

- Members are expected to invest a minimum of 10,000 yen over the period of their membership in the co-op.

3 Prices fixed for one year!

SCC enters into supply contracts with many of its producers, specifying its own high quality organic and ethical standards. It has a narrow, high quality, product range compared to supermarkets. This policy enables product prices to remain fixed for one year. There are, a small number of exceptions to this policy.

4. GM foods excluded. For example, soya beans are imported from GM free sources in India.

5. The co-op has introduced its own lightweight glass recyclable bottles, for milk and liquid foods, achieving an average of up to 80 reuse cycles per bottle.

Pauc Cannon, Development Coordinator

## Events:

### Questionnaire Results

Suzanne Harkins, a member of the Co-ordinating body will present her final survey results in full on Saturday 3rd December upstairs in St. Andrew's. Please do come along and find out what interesting facts and views she gleaned from our members.

*(Full details of time and room number will be posted up in the Co-op closer to the time).*

## Dublin Food Co-Op Walk For November

WHERE: Glen of the Downs and the Little Sugarloaf. A woodland and hill walk, we will see the Autumn colours and many species of fungi and the views from the Little Sugarloaf are good. This is a moderate walk.

WHEN: Sunday 27th November

MEET: At the Glen of the Downs carpark (on the left off the dual-carriageway as you go through the glen coming from Dublin) at 11.30am.

BRING: comfortable footwear, warm clothes, raingear and some food.

For more details or if you need a lift, ring Larry Gordon at 2882957 (home) or 087-6832827 (mobile).

## Recently Arrived Products to the Co-op: "Soapods" –

If you would like to stop buying chemical products for washing your laundry then why not try this new product?. It is 100% organic, naturally biodegradable and effective too!

The **Soapods** are cultivated in India and Nepal –and for centuries have been used for washing clothes. In the western world, commercial industry uses "saponin" (found in the shell of the **Soapods**) to produce soap, washing products, detergents and other cleaning products.

Often using chemical additives, which are not necessary for the function of washing and cleaning and are of course damaging to the environment.

They are cultivated through sustainable agriculture, the trees are capable of changing wasteland into fertile soil, stopping and combating desertification. After the ninth year, the **Soapod** tree yields fruit, which can be harvested for the duration of their lifespan - up to 90 years. The foliage from the tree is used as cattle fodder. The wood is used for rural construction i.e. agricultural implements, oil and sugar presses.

According to the distributors, they work out 40% cheaper than most other washing powders.

Well worth a try!

## Co-Op News:

Layout and design of Co-Op News was done by Anthony Dillon Co-ordinating Board member.

Editor was Monica Haughey Co-ordinating Board member and Communications Officer. Thanks to Mike McGovern for additional help.

Co-op articles for inclusion in next newsletter should be sent to The Editor, Co-op News, 12 A North King St., Dublin 7 or e-mail to: mhaughey@iolfree.ie