

Open Harvest — natural, quality foods at low costs

By Martin Koster

When I first walked into the building, I was greeted by familiar smells — home-baked, whole-wheat bread, natural grains and fresh fruits and vegetables.

With those aromas the Open Harvest Whole Foods Cooperative and Bakery, 2637 Randolph, is about as close as you can get to home.

"We want to make sure people are healthy and don't have to pay an exorbitant amount of money to maintain their health," Open Harvest Member Coordinator John Ellick said.

The co-op does this by providing high quality, nutritional foods at a reasonable price, he said. Prices are kept low by dealing in unpackaged, unprocessed bulk foods, and by offering discounts to co-op workers.

For working three hours a month, volunteer worker-members receive 20 percent off in exchange for working three hours per month at the store. The worker can receive a 40 percent discount if he works weekly, Ellick said.

By definition, a cooperative is a retail store owned and managed by consumer-customers who supply the capital and share in the profits.

But, because Open Harvest is a non-profit organization, there are no dividends divided among the members.

The real benefits of membership are found in the food.

"We're really careful about the foods we buy in respect to additives and preservatives," Ellick said. "Most of the foods are organic and free of chemicals."

The co-op purchases most of its foodstuffs from Blooming Prairie Cooperative Warehouse in Iowa City, Iowa.

The co-op also has a steady supply of organic produce shipped from California and Arizona.

"We buy much of our organic grains from farmers here in Nebraska," he said.

Open since November, 1975, Open Harvest "is posed as an alternative to the kind of corporate structure which offers products and services at an inflated cost and questionable quality, while overlooking the personal, human element in its commercial transactions," states an Open Harvest pamphlet.

Along the store's walls, small bins and five-gallon buckets hold dry foodstuffs like wheat, cornmeal, lentils and edible beans.

The bucket lids label contents, give worker and non-worker prices and state nutritional information.

In the back corner, past the refrigerators filled with natural cheese and yogurts, are shelves lined with gallon jars containing herbs and spices.

To teach people how to use the unprocessed foods, the co-op has recipe cards, health books and its own Open Harvest Cookbook that explains in detail how to cook with natural, unprocessed foods, Ellick said.

The co-op also sponsors benefit meals and ethnic dinners to acquaint members with food preparation methods.

For students who don't need to prepare meals, Ellick said the store stocks whole wheat pretzels, fruit juices and natural potato and tortilla chips.

The bakery makes various types of breads, cookies and cakes, all baked without sugar. Instead, the bakery uses honey and molasses to sweeten its goods.

Although co-op members are from all age groups, Ellick said, students are encouraged to join because they still are forming their dietary habits — habits they will have the rest of their life.

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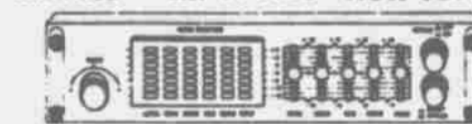
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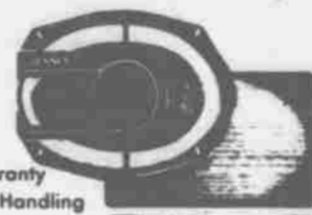


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