

COOP NEWS

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The Co-op is having a logo contest. See a store coordinator for details.

Meet The Co-op Truckers ...

This article contains excerpts from a longer interview in Volume 4, Number 3 of *Hard Labor*, a journal of feminist news and opinion from Fayetteville, Ark.

HL: First question, who are you?

Oshun: The Trucking Collective is part of a cooperative food system that extends nationwide. The way we're connected with it is through the Ozark Food Cooperative in Fayetteville. The Co-op started about six years ago; it grew very fast and became a warehouse for the midwest area. They needed a way to get their food to the co-ops, and they had been using commercial trucking but a lot of the small co-ops cannot get food delivered, as they don't have enough weight, which is the way commercial shipping works, you have to have a minimum weight. They didn't have the weight or the money for a minimum, and so two men started trucking in a flatbed truck. They originally went to 3 or 4 cities - St. Louis, Columbia, Kansas City, right there - and they went once a month. It's grown to the size that it is now in two years. There are four women in the collective at this time. We have a 22 foot diesel truck, and we're on the road 4-6 days every week of the month. We go to 9 states and about 30 or 40 cities. We've increased deliveries to twice a month now, except for the far southern Louisiana, Memphis, and Dallas. Everywhere else gets twice a month delivery.

HL: You mentioned a nine state area. What are those nine states?

Collective: Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Tennessee... Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota... Iowa, Illinois (Laughter)...

HL: How does it work, does a co-op that wants delivery contact you?

Oshun: They contact the warehouse, to get an order. Technically, we work for the warehouse. There is a Federation, of which all the co-ops, and the warehouse, and the trucking collective are members, under one umbrella incorporation. And yet each one of the co-ops is also incorporated individually. Technically we are a private hauler for the warehouse, to the co-ops - which means we can also pick up food to come back to the warehouse. So we take out to the co-ops, pick up, and bring back to the warehouse, from the distributors that the warehouse uses.

HL: You don't have a minimum drop charge?

Oshun: Well, we have a minimum drop charge of \$15 on our route. Our rates are comparable if not lower than commercial rates. We have a refrigerated truck; the condition of our goods when delivered is much higher than commercial. The treatment the goods get in delivery is a lot more conscientious than commercial as far as breakage and working out, making adjustments about breakage. Our advantage over commercial is that we are delivering to places that would not be delivered to by commercial no matter how big their orders were because of where they are located geographically. The cycle that we go in: we pick up wheat from an organic farmer in Kansas, bring it to this warehouse, where it's ground into flour, and then we take that flour out and deliver it. It's a real integrated food handling process that we go through. Then we buy that flour and take it home and make bread.

HL: Let's talk about food - how do you see yourselves in terms of being a food trucking collective?

Oshun: A lot of our emphasis is for organic and small farmers, and one of the big advantages for the small farmer is that it eliminates the middle man. We go right out to the farm and pick it up and bring it in, and so they are getting a better price for their crop than they would if they had to go through a middleman to do it.

Patti: I think part of our goal is to get as much food as possible from the region, locally grown, organically grown. Right now we're not very close to that. We still get a lot of food from California, and we still haven't organic sources for everything. Things like beans are not all organic, though we're getting closer all the time.

And definitely one of our major goals is to try to get food to people as cheaply as possible, and to try to support new co-ops that are starting out. We're changing over the pricing system. The way it has worked in the past is that people who live farther away from Fayetteville pay more than people who live close, and that freight was charged per pound. Now we



Members of the Fayetteville Trucking Collective with their 22 foot refrigerated diesel truck, "D.D." (Left to right: Patti, Martha, Oshun, Boeth)

are changing it over to a system where there is a flat rate, based on the price of the food, a percentage of the food value, which means that basics like wheat and grains and beans will go down, and cheese and dried fruit will go up a little bit. We're trying to get the basics to people as cheaply as possible. And people who live farther away will not be charged more; everyone will pay the same price.

HL: Let's see, what have been and are major problems, lacks, and goals?

Patti: I feel in general I try to avoid truckstops.

Martha: That's exactly what I was going to say. I avoid them. We stop somewhere else. We gas at Ryder, they're getting to know us and they're pretty cool. As far as shower facilities and stuff like that, we stay with women in the cities, people we already know in the cities.

Boeth: Oft times we'll go into a truck stop and sit in the professional driver section and wait and wait and wait to be waited on. It's like we're not even there; meanwhile all the other drivers are eyeing us. But more women are trucking with their spouses so more women's facilities are being opened. It's an awful feeling to be ignored, when you feel you're doing a lot of work creating an alternative for women, and then have to wait to be waited on in a truckstop restaurant.

Oshun: One of the interesting things is working with women and lifting weights - because we do load and unload the truck. It's not just driving the truck. The weights go up to 100 lb. bags. It's a real consciousness-raising for some women. They'll come out and they say they can't lift it up. And I'll say to them, "Do you have a child?" And they'll

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