

left the December general membership meeting feeling positively inspired. Was it because I had come straight from a nine hour shift at the coop to chair the meeting? Was it the excellent food? Or Thom's tofu demonstration? Was it due to our decision to allow a chicken buying club to store chickens in the coop freezer for 24 hours?

I'm sure that all of the above had some effect. But I think what really excited me was that 50 people came together; that the issues we thought we had come to discuss became tangential, and that we found ourselves immersed in the underlying nitty-gritty; the purpose, policies, and structure of our coop.

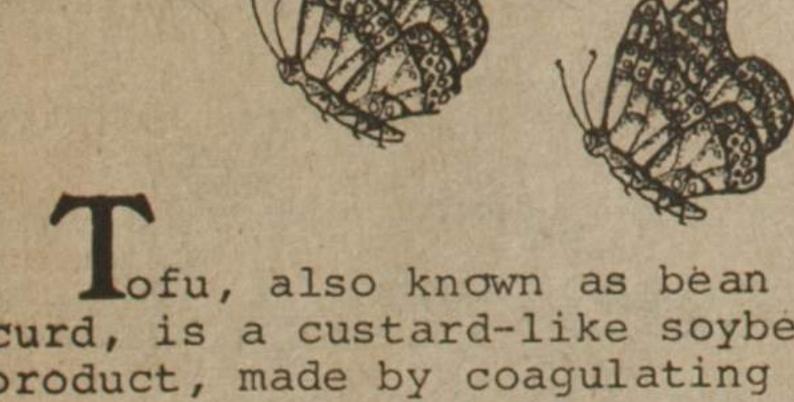
When the meeting closed, we had not even begun to establish/ revitalize/eliminate present coop methods and our enthusiasm could not wait until the next quarterly membership meeting. So we set up a membership meeting in January to continue our discussion.

Most coops that have come into existence in the last 10 years have structures derived from the Work Collective model or the "Participatory Coop" model. Our Coop—with a paid work collective, meeting weekly to make decisions; a voluntary steering committee meeting once or twice a month to provide guidelines; and a general membership fulfilling a work requirement and



Everyone buying oranges and grapefruits at the co-op lately has noticed the switch to unprocessed citrus. Hopefully, you've read the signs explaining the source of our new fruit and how it differs from what is usually available.

Due to problems arising for those procurring the fruit, we won't be enjoying a steady supply at this time. Updates will be posted on the produce case as new information comes in.



Tofu, also known as bean curd, is a custard-like soybean product, made by coagulating the protein in hot soymilk, and pressing the curds. Tofu is 8-11% protein, contains no cholesterol, is low in saturated fats, and is easily digestible. It can be used in soups, sauces, sandwiches, salad dressings; can be sauteed, broiled, deepfried, or eaten fresh. Recipes are available at the co-op.

Alchemy: The transformation of the elements (earth, fire, air, water, wood) one into another.

The universe is change; the ancients witnessed this change in the natural transmutation of the elements and sought to control and enhance these changes for their own benefit. A frac-

meeting every three months to set policy--is a hybrid form of these two models and therefore carries with it many of the advantages and disadvantages of both forms.

In its extreme form, the Work Collective model is a business owned and operated solely by the people who work there. It is based on the idea that workers should control their workplace. Who hasn't felt at one time or another that we could run our workplaces better than the people "upstairs"? A work collective requires and provides full-time commitment. For that reason it is usually more efficient than forms that depend upon voluntary labor. Because a work collective is small and tends toward consensus decision-

making, it eliminates hierarchical decision-making prevalent in forprofit businesses and some coops. Work collectives will create viable jobs in an alternative economy.

Critics would question how viable these jobs really are. Low wages are the rule rather than the exception, for two reasons:

1) To compete with high volume, for-profit businesses, overhead must be cut:

2) Most work collectives are attempting to set an example of non-materialistic living.

Unfortunately, low wages seldom attract those people that most food coops would like--low-income

or working neighborhood folks.
So, despite their advantages,
work collectives depend too
heavily on their workers' desire
to serve others and often result
in individual "burn-out."

Lastly, if we all did have control over our individual workplaces, how would we exert influence over other areas of our lives—those areas where we operate as consumers instead of producers?

The Participatory Coop model attempts to eliminate the split between the worker/producer and the consumer. In participatory coops, every customer is also a worker/producer, albeit only

2-3 hours per month. Investing one's buying power as well as one's labor guarantees everyone a part in decision-making. In addition to providing themselves with cheap and/or natural foods, most participatory coops come together to eliminate the alienation and powerlessness they feel as consumers.

But, while most coops start small, they seldom stay that wav. As they grow, the opportunity for participatory decision—making tends to decrease. If participatory decision—making is not maintained, higher food prices (resulting from the need for a paid staff, the stocking of a wide variety or higher quality of products, etc.)

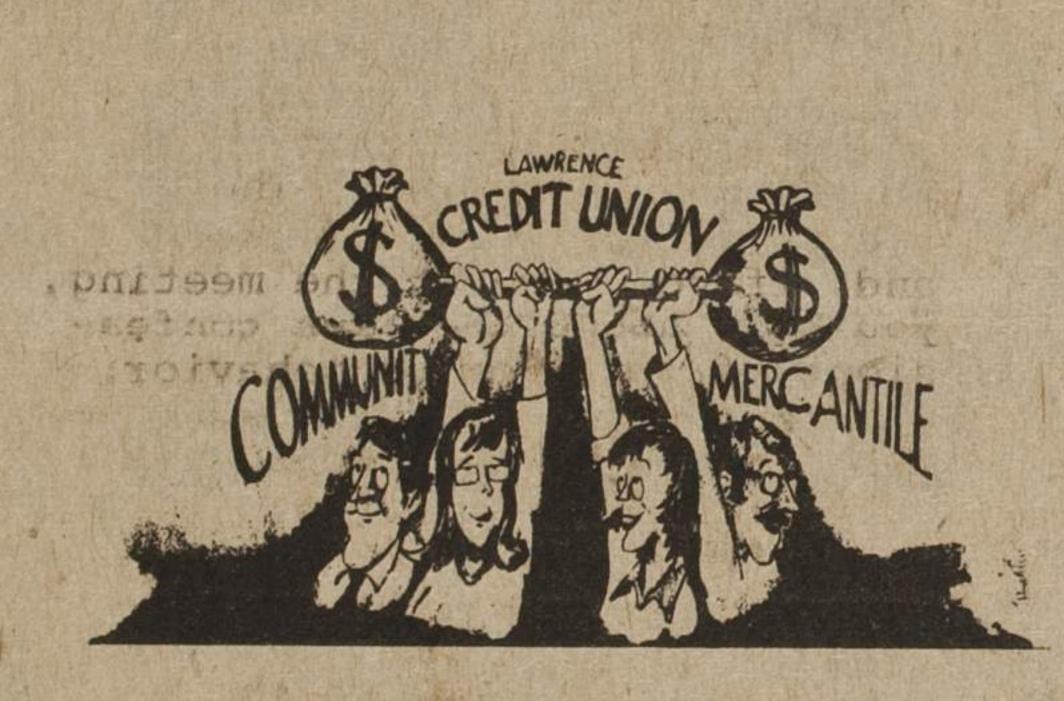
will spell a coop's demise. As in most other groups, there is a tendency for power to move toward the center and top of the organization.

Coops may form small pockets of cooperation and dedication to food purity form, isolating themselves from an oftentimes oppressive society. Communication and education are important in opposing these tendencies. At last we must ask ourselves this question: Assuming we all have jobs that take most of our time and energy, how much time and energy do we have left to participate fully in a food coop? Or a gas station coop? Or a hardware coop? The list of possibilities goes on, but our individual time and energy obviously does not.

Here is where we find ourselves:
Walking a tightrope between
expecting too much and not
getting enough from our coop
or ourselves as members. So
far, the Community Mercantile
has maintained its balance and
I hope will continue to do so
for some time. Come to the
General Membership meeting at
7:00 PM on January 25th in the
Community Building at 11th and
Vermont. It won't be the same
without you!

P.S. I am attempting to compile a bibliography dealing with coop structure, policy, and purpose. Contact me at the coop if you are interested in pursuing these topics.

## WHERE DO WE STAND?



he Community Mercantile Credit Union has continued to grow through the months, finishing the first year of operation with two hundred accounts. Looking over our first year, we handled one quarter million dollars in transactions in and out, with a loyal volunteer staff. Other statistics we've gleaned from our books are concerned with loans and loan recipients. Since last March, ninety loans have been completed, totaling forty-one thousand dollars. Forty-five percent of our loans were to women, fifty percent to men, and five percent to organizations. This is near-

ly identical to the ratio of our members as a whole, forty-six percent women, fifty percent men, and four percent organizations or businesses. While we are encouraged by the equitable number of loans to women and men, we would like to provide loans for more co-operative groups. Perhaps a tool rental co-op, a co-operative greenhouse, a clothes production collective, or any number of others could supplement starting capital with a loan from the Credit Union. If you're interested in an alternative banking service, visit our office at 1101% Massachusetts or call 842-5657.



COMMUNITY MERCANTILE
COOPERATIVE
615 Mass 843-8543
M, W, F 10-6
T, R 10-7 Sat 10-5

New Ways

The cool room is bigger and better, thanks to Vick Kennedy. Many other places need improvement in our store's envirospatial, functional set-up. Cooperative handypeople, stand up and pick your very own project. Right now, we need cool room finishing touches: like a patched and painted floor and shelves on the new walls. Other pressing needs include better lighting in both main rooms (we have fixtures), a new, safer basement door and stair, and a more weather-tight east entry (weatherstrips, storm door, vestibule?).

Other jobs exist varying in scope and importance: Seek them out. Major projects carry more work credit, sometimes sev-

If you have efforts or materials to offer, or a specific project, please call me or speak to a store coordinator. In the store a list of important "home-improvement" jobs will be posted. Look for it and respond. These changes are far more than physical ones.

--Edgar Boles (843-3427)

eral months worth.

## HOME & GARDEN

tion of what these people learned has been preserved in traditional agricultural and food preparation methods.

One of these ancients, who lived over 2000 years ago, the alchemist (also ruler, scholar, philosopher) Liv An is credited with the discovery of tofu. It is indeed magic to witness the transformation of dry, hard soybeans into three distinct products: a pale yellow sweet whey. fibrous okara; and custard-like tofu--and by simply manipulating the beans (wood) with water (they are soaked and ground with water) fire, and earth (nigari, a mineral, is used to curdle the soymilk). Easily as much magic in that as converting lead to gold--and certainly a more useful magic: more protein is

By Thom Leonard

available from tofu than from the same amount of soybeans if boiled whole. Tofu and Okara can add limitless diversity to a basically vegetarian diet.

Tofu can be sauteed with vegetables, deepfried, added to soup and stews, and transformed into creamy salad dressings, dips, sauces and even ice cream.

When cooking tofu, it is sometimes necessary to drain off excess water. Simply place in the refrigerator on a saucer, pouring off excess liquid as it collects; it's best to keep the saucer covered. This process yields slightly firmer texture than if the tofu were stored in water.

For firmer tofu, pressing expells even more water. The simplest

method is to wrap the tofu in a towel, set on a plate and refrigerate for a few hours or slice the cake into two thinner cakes and place on a towel covered cutting board, cover the tofu with another towel and another board. This second method is ideal if you plan to deep fry or stir fry the tofu.

Salad dressings, spreads, dips, and sauces can be made in a blender by combining tofu with your choice of herbs, oil, nut butters, garlic, onions, miso, honey, etc. and some water for blendable consistency.

Tofu is available at the Co-op.

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Coming next month = MISO