

Skagit Valley Food Co-op

Vision 2020

Firmly Anchored: To Our Community and Our Values

The year is 2020 and with the support of its 20,000 member households, the Skagit Valley Food Co-op has grown into a strong, stable anchor at the north end of downtown Mount Vernon. The Co-op is Skagit County's premier source for organic and local foods. We have always believed in healthy, delicious food, supplied through the cooperative model, to nourish us and strengthen our community. Our support of local farms is intrinsic to our identity and helps ensure that locally grown food will continue to be available in the Skagit Valley for generations to come.

Although the Co-op is known throughout the Northwest as a destination grocery and deli, from Seattle to Vancouver BC, from the San Juan Islands to the Cascade Crest, we are much more than a great place for food. There is a wonderful tapestry here, our warm, friendly, community gathering place interwoven with our collective voice calling for a sustainable future . . . both locally and globally.

We take pride in knowing we serve as a gathering place, where our customers return often for inspiration, education, and a sense of community, as well as for good food. Our employees are proud of their knowledge of products and cheerfully foster friendly social interactions.

In the broader community, we are recognized and respected as a thriving educational resource for healthy lifestyle choices and as a voice for environmental, social and economic sustainability. We are seen as a primary contributor to a vigorous local economy and a vibrant downtown culture. We are known as activists for change. We are strong because our membership shares our philosophy and mission: our dedication to healthy food, our support of local farmers and ecologically friendly agriculture, our suggestions for low impact shopping, our support of like-minded organizations, and our commitment to the cooperative economic model. Our business is a successful, working example of how the Cooperative Principles can build a robust economy, improve the well-being of owners, workers and our community, and by example, help to change the world.

The Co-op is in sound, stable financial condition, allowing it to give out patronage refunds for the tenth consecutive year and to continue to support programs like 4% Friday. We are making a difference—with over \$20 million in annual sales that stays local, with our support of local farmers and sustainable agriculture, with educational programs that inform and inspire thousands of people each year, with contributions to help address local social needs, and with meaningful, quality employment for 200 members of the community.

Skagit Valley Food Co-op

Vision 2020

Our Place: Where Our Ideals Are on Display

In 2020, the Co-op and downtown Mount Vernon are much different places than they were even a decade ago. Downtown Mount Vernon has finally “gotten over the hump” and is bustling with lots of pedestrian activity, and a minimal car presence.

The Co-op has acquired adjacent property and has developed the “grounds” as well as adding some additional parking. The site is greener than ever, with demonstration gardens, a composting site and a small, but effective, vermiculture installation. Banks of solar collectors on the Co-op building roof, a windmill, recycling stations, and the urban gardening landscaping are all proof that we are living our ideals.

Alternative transportation is encouraged and has helped to ease parking problems and circulation. Parking is available in a satellite lot a few blocks away, connected to the store by a free tram. A drive-through lane allows folks to pick up their groceries if they have chosen to park a distance away. A covered bike rack sits outside the store, and a transit bus connecting far-flung areas of the county makes frequent stops at the corner. Buildings, pedestrian pathways and access points for e-cars, bikes, buses and trams are linked by a deliberate plan to incorporate environmental sustainability into a footprint teeming with activity, people, and products

Utilizing other space in Mount Vernon for production, storage and offshoot businesses has allowed the Co-op to continue to prosper in its downtown location. The Co-op’s presence brings thousands into the city center. Our commitment to “local” values, as well as our financial security as an anchor business, was key in boosting the confidence that others had to move forward with a sustainable and environmentally friendly downtown revitalization, including the recently completed “river walk” and mixed-use development.

Because of the additional annexes, the Co-op has also been able to dedicate more space to continuing education and community use. A large screen display of Co-op happenings lists seminars on topics ranging from handmade tortillas, to artisan vodka, to beekeeping, demonstrating how the store has become increasingly familiar with the resources and interests of our multi-cultural community. With classes appealing to a wide range of ages, the Co-op maintains a connection across generations of owner members.

The Co-op may have changed physically, but thankfully, it still has the “feel”-- warm, friendly and busy, busy. And the smells—just-baked chocolate chip cookies, freshly roasted ground coffee, sizzling sausages, pungent spices, and greenly fragrant herbs. The signage and graphics have been kept lively and bold. Walking through the produce department is like walking through an illustrated children’s book about growing fresh food, with informative tales and pictures both of local farmers and produce ranging from Daikon radish to raspberries. Things are a little more “techy”, but in a good way: new register/checkout stations, some interactive flat screens for product location and information, and a noticeable commitment to high efficiency lighting. The Co-op continues to blend innovative ideas and alternative approaches with wholesome, homey tradition.

Skagit Valley Food Co-op

Vision 2020

Our People: Still the Heart of the Co-op

People are the heart of the Co-op: from the front-line staff to those behind the scenes, to owners and shoppers, to farmers and artisans who provide their products. Diverse in every way, they share a commitment to good food, the local economy, environmental stewardship, and a healthy community.

The work of the Co-op is carried out by staff who are not only knowledgeable about what we sell and the issues involved, but passionate and dedicated to furthering the Co-op's mission. Staff is drawn to the store not only for its living wage and respectable benefits but because of a commitment to the Cooperative business model, to assist in the strengthening of our food shed and promoting the use of fair and environmentally sound farming practices. Because of this, staff commitments often go beyond what the job requires. Many staff are active outside the doors of the store, fostering collaborations with like-minded organizations to strengthen our community, participating in events and continuing education opportunities to help support the growth and success of our local and regional agricultural community, and helping to ensure the stability of healthy food choices for a sustainable future for all.

And, while knowledge and passion about our inventory and food issues are paramount, the staff is also recognized for providing the friendliest, most responsive, and most genuine customer service in the area. Our staff reflects Co-op values every day in serving our customers. They are dedicated to creating a shopping experience that brings people back time and again. We are also proud of our staff diversity, which reflects the growing diversity of our community. Our staff comprises people of all ages, putting at least three generations to work under the same roof.

Co-op owner members are also active participants in the life of the Co-op: learning and teaching about local and global food issues, supporting the Co-op's enrichment and outreach programming, and participating in the governance structures of the Co-op. The Co-op is open to everyone, but we are proud that more than 75% of our customers have chosen to become owners of the Co-op, putting their dollars and support behind the Co-op's mission, committed and engaged to the Co-op's success. Co-op owner members support the Co-op's role as a hub of the community. Partnerships with schools and organizations extend the reach of our mission and provide collaboration on projects and events that build a better future for residents of Skagit Valley and beyond.

Our Products: Demonstrating Our Passion for Goodness

The people of the Co-op are the heart of who we ARE. And the products of the Co-op are the heart of what we DO.

We know that the community trusts us to provide wholesome, nutritious fare and we do not let them down. The product guidelines that have been used for nearly fifty years keep the products clean, while the ongoing mission of the Co-op to "support a low-impact, non-harmful approach to the environment" moves the benefits of the Co-op's food beyond the

Skagit Valley Food Co-op

Vision 2020

table. The Skagit Valley Food Co-op has the greatest breadth and depth of local, organic, fair-trade, minimally packaged and non-GMO products around. Because they know each item is consciously selected by knowledgeable buyers, customers trust that any purchase at the Food Co-op is safe. We are vigilant about sourcing and make it our mission to be on the forefront of the food frontier.

Setting, and maintaining, the bar for product integrity is not an easy task. We continually communicate with our owners about the threats imposed by corporate agriculture and food production. We rally thousands of supporters when our ability to provide wholesome, nutritious foods is challenged. We are fighting the good fight against the tides of industry.

Meeting the on-going challenge to provide high quality products in keeping with our mission statement is only part of what we do at the Co-op. Equally important is our passion for food. We know and love food at the Skagit Valley Food Co-op. The flavor of a tree-ripened peach . . . the smell of a fresh-baked scone. We relish the knowledge that we all have emotional bonds to food, and we excite in locating and creating new offerings. We produce many of the finest signature products in the North-Puget region, including our deli-roasted Coffee, our own sausage, over 1000 homemade dishes from our kitchen, fresh baked goods, and our renowned home-made ice cream. We support new artisan food producers, and we fully appreciate our location in the middle of the fertile agricultural community of the Skagit Valley. The colorful abundance of locally grown produce and other local products meeting our strict requirements testifies to our support of and reliance on our community of producers and farmers.

The Skagit Valley Food Co-op is a community of stores within a store—a marketplace in the heart of Mount Vernon. The demands we place on the food we sell are also reflected in the scrutiny we place on our many non-food departments. Our Wellness department follows rigorous screening guidelines and keeps abreast of ongoing product research. Our garden department procures plants from local growers and provides seeds acclimatized to the local environment. In the Mercantile department the Co-op provides child-friendly lead and phthalate-free products and there are many products crafted by independent artisans, locally and around the world, who are receiving fair wages and working under favorable conditions. Premium wines and beers; green cleaning products; a complete line of premier vitamins, minerals and beauty products; healthy baby products; organic animal care; and a full line of household goods for the conscientious consumer help make the Skagit Valley Food Co-op THE center for thoughtful shopping.

Full Circle

It is 2020, and the Co-op is thriving; both as a destination stop on the I-5 corridor for hungry pilgrims who value quality and as an essential in the lives of Co-op member-owners and the broader community. For almost 50 years, the Co-op has stayed true to its roots and to a mission which has proved remarkably resilient, while being responsive to the ever-changing, complex landscape of food--nutritionally, agriculturally, ecologically, politically and aesthetically. In the end, it still comes down to this: a place with open doors, people with heart, and good food, in every sense of the word.