



The Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC) facilitates the development of responsible policies that improve access for all Philadelphia residents to culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound, and affordable food that is grown locally through environmentally sustainable practices.

Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council Testimony in support of Cooperative Development

Thank you Chairman Jones and all members of the Commerce and Economic Development Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony. We as the Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council are grateful for the chance to express our support for cooperative development in Philadelphia.

FPAC was convened in 2011 to facilitate the development of responsible policies that improve access to “good food” – defined as local, healthy, sustainable, and fair – for all Philadelphians. We currently have 29 appointed members representing sectors of the food system ranging from agriculture to business to hunger relief, as well as ex-officio members who serve on FPAC as a function of their position in City government.

FPAC counts among its ranks several members who work for and with cooperatives such as Mariposa, Weavers Way, and the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives. We believe that coops have a vital role to play in the creation of a more just, sustainable, healthy, and local food system, and that support from the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation and the City for cooperative businesses would have tremendous environmental, economic, social, and health benefits.

A coop is a business that is democratically owned and controlled by its members. Coops exist across industries – such as food retail, child care, agriculture, finance, and more – and can be organized for the benefit of consumers, workers, or producers. We’d like to highlight some of the important work we’ve seen cooperatives doing in the Philadelphia food system and share our ideas for what City support for cooperatives could accomplish.

Consumer food cooperatives are grocery stores owned and controlled by their consumers. The cooperative model allows people to have a voice in the food available in their community, typically resulting in choices that are more local, healthy, sustainable, and fair than conventional grocers. Cooperative businesses are well-positioned to address community needs because they serve their members rather than absent shareholders, and for that reason they are also less likely than conventional grocery stores to abandon their community for a more profitable neighborhood. This is important especially in regards to the grocery industry, where profit margins are slim and the need for healthy, accessible food is high. In addition to Mariposa and Weavers Way, Philadelphia will soon welcome two consumer food cooperatives start-ups in Kensington and South Philadelphia. Further proliferation of consumer food cooperatives could serve neighborhoods with limited healthy food options and return control over food choices to communities.

Worker food cooperatives are food businesses owned and controlled by their workers. The cooperative structure allows people to use their collective expertise and assets to start a business that they may not have been able to open individually. Workers are their own bosses, so they control how they are treated and how the business is run. Worker cooperatives tend to create long-term, stable, dignified jobs that stay in the community, and the model has been successfully used to build wealth in poor and marginalized communities. In Philadelphia, W/N W/N Cooperative Coffee Bar promotes cooperation



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through worker-ownership, sources locally from area farmers, and uses ecologically responsible practices to build a sustainable future.

Producer food cooperatives are owned and democratically controlled by producer organizations, who may or may not be cooperatives themselves. The cooperative structure allows small agricultural and specialty food producers to share in the costs of purchasing, marketing, and distribution. In the Philadelphia area, Lancaster Farm Fresh Cooperative pools produce from over 100 organic family farmers, providing quality fresh fruits and vegetables to Philadelphia and area residents. A similar producer cooperative might be able to produce food at the scale that the City buys it, dramatically expanding the City of Philadelphia's capacity to procure local, healthy, sustainable, and fair food.

We know from our work and our partnership with the Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance that Philadelphia has rich soil for cooperative growth and development. For every food cooperative in existence today, there are several more in the process of forming. Longstanding community organizations are considering shifting to cooperative structures, and a group of 20 organizations are meeting in study circles to envision possibilities for new cooperative businesses. FPAC urges City Council to support this effort to grow Philadelphia's diverse network of cooperatives to address food access, return control of food back to communities, create high quality jobs, and expand Philadelphia's capacity to grow and procure local, healthy, sustainable, and fair food.

Thank you for considering our testimony. Please feel free to reach out with any questions you might have.