

Food-op: stocked up and out of debt

By ALETA ZAK
Of the Emerald

At 4 p.m. on a sunny Tuesday, the University's Food-Op was doing a fairly brisk business. Half a dozen customers were crowded into the tiny wooden shack on Agate Street, selecting Genesis apple juice, packages of alfalfa sprouts, and Humble bagels. Three or four people browsed among the fresh fruit and vegetables displayed outside the front of the store. The girl at the checkout counter was busy waiting on customers who stood three deep in line juggling armfuls of purchases.

A successful business? Yes, but only recently has the Food-Op begun to take in more money than it spent running the corporation. After five years of rather shaky financial operation, the Food-Op has managed to climb out of debt and is now able to spend money on necessary repairs and additions to the store.

The Food-Op corporation began operating in 1975 as a store where fraternities, co-ops and other living organizations could purchase food in bulk for reduced prices, says Carol Hamilton, current director of the Food-Op. But it wasn't until June, 1978 that the store began carrying natural foods and produce, and during that summer the Food-Op gradually phased out the surplus sales to make room for more health foods and organically grown fruits and vegetables.

"The first nine months were anything but easy," recalls Hamilton. "We didn't have the money to reach people to let them know about us."

So until March, 1979, the store didn't actually make enough money to spend on promotional or advertising programs. "We're really making up for lost time," says Hamilton. "The way I look at it, we've been here for five years, and probably only about 10 percent of the University community knows about us."

But the Food-Op would like not only the University, but the entire community to be aware of its services. Interviews with the store's managers which have

Job service helps youth locate work

For teenagers looking for work or employers looking for help, a good place to start is the Help Employ Youth (HEY) office. The program is a job referral service provided by the Westmoreland and Amazon Youth Programs.

Shelley Campbell is the director and sole employee of the program at the Westmoreland Community Center. Her duties include talking to employers to see if they need referrals and referring youths to job openings. Most of the jobs now available involve yardwork, restaurant work, household work, or childcare, she said.

The Westmoreland Center is located at 1545 West 22nd Ave. The HEY program hours are 1 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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Photo by Jeff Patterson

An increase in business has enabled the Food-op to expand its selection of fresh fruit, produce and natural foods. Food-op management hopes to attract more customers from the local community in addition to the many students who already shop there.

been broadcast over KWAX have helped generate publicity, as have several stories which ran in the Emerald. The store ran a booth at the Oregon Country Fair, and set up a produce stand in front of the University Bookstore (the next bookstore stand is July 16).

The ASUO recently allotted \$3,000 to be used for future community education programs including a newsletter, a film

series on nutrition, and a SEARCH class on urban gardening and food options. Hamilton has plans to build a library of information on food issues, agri-business and year-round gardening, coordinating it with the Tool Library located next door to the store. Tool borrowers could then draw materials from the Food-Op library which would give them information and ideas on how to utilize the equipment.

This recent increase in publicity, combined with plain word-of-mouth advertising, has led to a substantial increase in sales. Last summer, says Hamilton, the store's owners were happy to be making \$150 a day. "And only yesterday, we had a \$1,000 day. It just blew everybody away."

Now out of debt, the Food-Op is free to spend the extra money it makes on things like new containers for foods and a much-needed water heater. Carol Chadwick, Food-Op manager, is working on redesigning the store's walk-in freezer to provide more space for juice, yogurt, and fresh vegetables. A large portion of the checkout counter was cut out to make room for a display case for bagels. And most of the containers of spices, tea, and pasta have been moved off the floor onto shelves.

The Food-Op has also been able to carry several new products because of its success. Several different varieties now stock the shelves, instead of just one brand in bulk. Golden Temple honey ice cream made its appearance last week, and frozen yogurt bars are coming soon. Cinnamon cashew granola is another new item which is fast becoming a favorite among customers, according to Hamilton. A new line of Hain products includes mayonnaise, fruit butters, mustard, imitation catsup and more honey.

New products aren't the only addition to the store, says Hamilton. The owners of the

Food-Op are working with an architecture student to design and build an extension to the front of the store — a shelter closed in on three sides, featuring natural lighting, to be used for displaying fresh produce. This project will be completed in late fall.

Of course, success in business never comes easy, and the Food-Op has had its share of setbacks. One problem was the county health inspector's regular visits — and the store's failure to meet his high standards of sanitation. "We've never passed any of his tests as long as I've worked here," complains Hamilton. "But we've broken our backs to try and fix things up before he comes again. We've done some painting, gotten the water heater and new containers, and just generally gotten things shaped up. He could close us down."

Once the necessary repairs are out of the way, says Hamilton, the store can spend more money and time on bigger, more ambitious projects, like sponsoring a day-long concert in the fall, or coordinating an ASUO symposium. She also plans to organize a booth at the annual street fair during New Student Week, and possibly give out free samples of nuts and dried fruits to dorm residents to make them aware of the Food-Op.

All these things are done with one goal in mind, Hamilton emphasizes: to serve the community. "The customers who actually walk into the store are anywhere from seven to 70. We want to serve everyone, not just University students."



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