

Finding Aid to the Plain Foods Co-op Records

Plain Foods Co-op

Plain Foods Co-op Records, 1975-2002

1 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 308

[History](#)

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OVERVIEW

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Martha Berryhill, 2004 (Acc. 2742)

Property rights: The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

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Citation: [Identification of item]. Plain Foods Co-op Records, MS 308, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

HISTORY

Plain Foods Co-op was founded in 1974 and known initially as the Plain Foods Buying Club. The co-op was one of the first Fargo-Moorhead retailers of natural and organic foods. Its membership peaked in 1985 at about 600; by the late 1980s, though still fully functional, membership had dwindled to less than 200. The co-op fell on extremely hard times in the very early 1990s, going through several proposed and actual organizational changes and eventually closing its store location in 1992. There was discussion on opening a store across the Red River in Moorhead, Minnesota, but that did not materialize.

The concept of the co-op is best captured in a 1980s brochure: “Basically, we’re a group of people who would rather organize our own food distribution system than pay the chain stores to do it for us. We started out as a preorder club in 1974, pooling our shopping lists to buy in quantity directly from the wholesalers. As we grew, we rented a storefront, bought coolers and a mill, and purchased an inventory. Now, we can probably best be described as a store that is owned and operated by its own customers.

In many ways, we are not quite like your typical supermarket. Our selections are limited to nonperishable staples—flours, beans, teas and spices, oils, dried fruit, powdered milk, etc.—plus fresh produce, cheese and eggs. These are the items where we can generate the most savings for our members, allowing them to buy basic food items at prices far below their process, prepackaged counterparts and the grocery stores. And, as you might expect, shoppers do a bit more of the work. They sever themselves out of the bins, do all the weighing and pricing, and take their turn behind the counter.”

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Plain Foods Co-op records document the activities of the store from 1975 to 2002, though the majority of the collection dates from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the collection consists of documents reflecting all aspects of the business, of primary significance is the nearly complete run of newsletters, published monthly from 1975 to 1991. The collection is divided into eight series: Bylaws, Membership, Operations, Correspondence, Meeting Minutes and Reports, Finance, Subject, and *Plain Talk*.

The [Bylaws Series](#) consists of the co-op’s bylaws and revisions made to the bylaws at various times over the course of the co-op’s existence.

The [Membership Series](#) includes rolls of members over the years. Most of the rolls are undated, but give a general idea of the size of the co-op.

The [Operations Series](#) includes documents relating to the structure and activities of the co-op. Among these are business strategies and plans from the early 1990s when the co-op’s closure was imminent, as well as participation in the Fargo-Moorhead Street Fair.

The [Correspondence Series](#) includes most of the correspondence of the collection. Correspondence specifically relating to a particular situation or activity in another series can be found in that series; the vast majority of the collection’s correspondence, however, can be found here.

The [Meeting Minutes and Reports Series](#) contains documents relating to meetings and committee reports from a handful of years. Of primary significance are those from 1990 to 1992.

The [Finance Series](#) contains the financial records of the co-op. Of interest are a sampling of the wholesale items which the co-op purchased for retail purposes, as well a folder relating to an embezzlement issue. Also found here are income tax statements and other related information.

The [Subject Files Series](#) includes brochures explaining and advertising the co-op, as well as newspaper clippings and a handmade timeline from 1974 to 1992 representing the co-op's major accomplishments.

The [Plain Talk Series](#) consists of the monthly newsletters of the co-op. Almost entirely complete from 1975 to 1991, the newsletters provide outstanding insight into the activities of the co-op and its successes and failures.

SEPARATION RECORD

1 album containing photographs of various events and scenes at the co-op
44 loose photographs and accompanying negatives
2 boxes of slides

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
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1/1	Finding aid, and Historical information
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Bylaws Series

1/2	Bylaws and Bylaw Revisions
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Membership Series

1/3	Membership
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1/4	Membership
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Operations Series

1/5	Co-op Descriptions
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1/6	Business Strategies
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1/7	1990 Business Plan
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1/8	Annual Fargo-Moorhead Street Fair
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1/9	Food Stamps
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1/10	1984 NDSU Health Fair
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1/11	Common Health Warehouse Cooperative Association
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1/12	Common Health Warehouse Cooperative Association
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1/13	Common Health Warehouse Cooperative Association – Moorhead Store Plans
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Correspondence Series

1/14 Correspondence
1/15 Correspondence

Meeting Minutes and Reports Series

1/16 1975
1/17 1989
1/18 1990
1/19 1990
1/20 1991-1992

Finance Series

1/21 1986-1990
1/22 Embezzlement Issue, 1990-1991
1/23 1991
1/24 Workman's Comp, 1991
1/25 1992
1/26 1997-1998
1/27 Taxes, 1981-1989
1/28 Taxes, 1990
1/29 Taxes, 1991
1/30 Taxes, 1991
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1/33 Purchase Orders, 1986-1987
1/34 Purchase Orders, 1988-1990
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1/38 Purchase Orders, 1998
1/39 Purchase Orders, 1998
1/40 Purchase Orders, 1999
1/41 Purchase Orders, 1999
1/42 Purchase Orders, 2000-2002

Subject Files Series

1/43 Brochures
1/44 Certificates
1/45 Newspaper Clippings
1/46 Timeline

Plain Talk Series

1/47	Newsletter Guidelines
1/48	1975
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1/50	1977
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1/52	1979
1/53	1980
1/54	1981
1/55	1982
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1/60	1987
1/61	1988
1/62	1988
1/63	1989
1/64	1990-1991