

# Wheatsville's BIG Direction

*Making the Ends real*

BY DAN GILOTTE AND ROSE MARIE KLEE

In Austin, Texas, Wheatsville Co-op is taking a BIG Direction: "Business Is Good." Wheatsville's BIG Direction is the general manager's interpretation of our Ends policies, which act as a powerful, multi-faceted expression of our strategic plan.

The Wheatsville Ends policies are as follows:

*Wheatsville will be at the forefront of a transformed society that has:*

- A thriving community centered on hospitality, kindness, and generosity
- A robust cooperative economy
- Easy access to sustainable, healthy food solutions

How to make those Ends real? The BIG Direction translates the relatively dense language of our Ends into three concepts that are easy to remember; easy to communicate; and much easier to integrate into our everyday consciousness, behavior, and operations.

Through the general manager's interpretation, our Ends become:

- More happy people!
- More co-op economy!
- More local/organic/sustainable food!

The graphic on page 20 illustrates one interpretation and integration of the Ends, showing that as we grow the number of stores, (1) we grow our charitable giving (a component of happy people), (2) we grow our number of employees (a component of co-op economy), and (3) we grow the number of local egg producers.

## The staff perspective

There are multiple benefits that have come from creating the BIG Direction at our co-op. The BIG Direction:

- Is a vehicle by which the general manager can operationalize the board's Ends policies—it is a clear and understandable interpretation of the Ends and a plan to achieve those Ends.
- Has created organizational alignment from our owners to the board to management to staff to the entire community—everyone can understand what we're trying to accomplish at Wheatsville and, broadly, how we are



going to get there.

- Helps staff consider the Ends on a near-daily basis and make every-day decisions that move us toward Ends accomplishment—since launching the BIG Direction in 2011, we have found it to be a powerful and exciting way to organize our co-op.

Prior to the BIG Direction, our daily and even annual operating plans did not really reflect or meet our co-op's Ends policies. Honestly, there was no real way for our Ends to appropriately be operationalized. However, with the advent of the BIG, Direction, we can use it nearly every day to help us make decisions.

All new staff members are taught about the BIG Direction, and we refer to it frequently throughout our work. It's not uncommon to hear staff remark that by bringing in a particular product or by choosing to compost or by making a customer's day that we're effectively making progress on our Ends through the BIG Direction. All staff are very clear that opening additional stores is one of the main ways we plan to best achieve our Ends, and they understand how that will happen.

## The board perspective

The birth of the BIG Direction was a revolution for the board of directors, and we ►

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# 25 years of Cultivating Goodness



As Organic Valley celebrates its 25th anniversary, our farmer-owned cooperative looks ahead to many more years of saving family farm culture through organic farming. *Here's to another 25 years of cultivating goodness.*

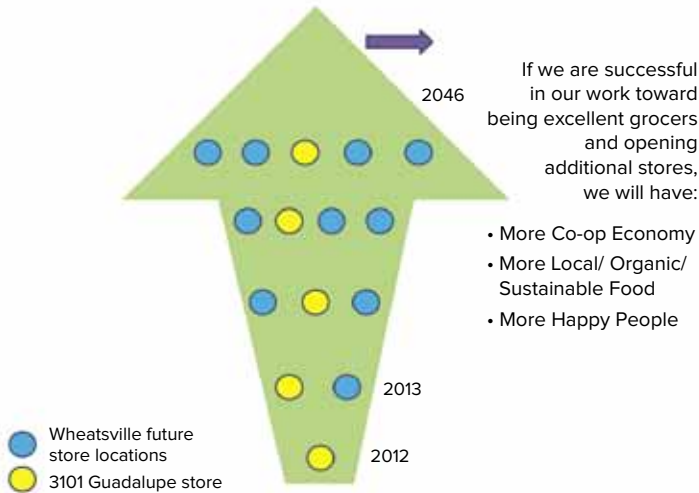
Visit [www.organicvalley.coop](http://www.organicvalley.coop) for coupons and to meet the farmers nearest you.

*The Silveira Family Farm*



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# Wheatsville Food Co-op's BIG Direction



## MORE Local/Organic/Sustainable Food

Local producers, humanely raised animal products and organic food all lead to a more sustainable world.

With three, four, or more stores in the future imagine supporting 10 or 12 or 15 local egg producers!

More Wheatsville stores would increase the opportunities for people to make better choices than their current grocer and increase the overall amount of local/organic and sustainable food produced and consumed.

But, no matter how good a job we do at selling local/organic/sustainable food, there are only so many people that will fit at one store.

The BIG Direction amplifies the amount of local/organic/sustainable food we can support!

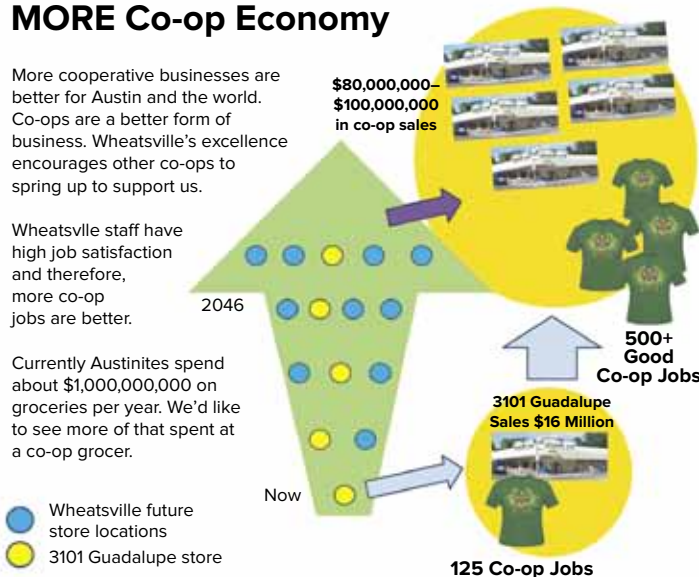


## MORE Co-op Economy

More cooperative businesses are better for Austin and the world. Co-ops are a better form of business. Wheatsville's excellence encourages other co-ops to spring up to support us.

Wheatsville staff have high job satisfaction and therefore, more co-op jobs are better.

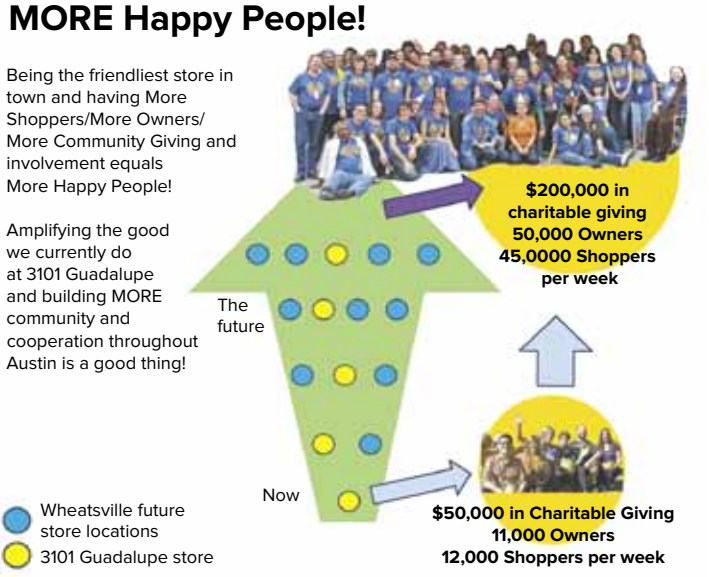
Currently Austinites spend about \$1,000,000,000 on groceries per year. We'd like to see more of that spent at a co-op grocer.



## MORE Happy People!

Being the friendliest store in town and having More Shoppers/More Owners/More Community Giving and involvement equals More Happy People!

Amplifying the good we currently do at 3101 Guadalupe and building MORE community and cooperation throughout Austin is a good thing!



remember well the meeting when our general manager first revealed his brilliant idea. (It was like an awesome TED Talk!)

The ways in which the BIG Direction is beneficial on the operations level were immediately apparent to the board. In addition, the advent of this vehicle was powerful for the board because:

- It exemplifies the servant-leadership quality of persuasion—the general manager made a thoroughly compelling case for interpreting our Ends policy to mean growth through additional stores (versus starting a farm, for example). This experience of persuasion has been a wonderful reference point for all of our discussions. Because we all want the same thing—for Wheatsville to have an amazing and powerful effect on our world—we approach each conversation as a way to build upon good ideas to make them great,

and we bask in the glow of whole-organization alignment.

- It is a coherent extension of some of our most powerful strategic learning conversations, most especially the discussion of, “Why do we want people to want to become owners of Wheatsville: because they love Wheatsville, or because they want to transform society toward cooperation, justice, and non-exploitation?” The narrative of the BIG Direction helps the board communicate to the community why our co-op matters.
- In addition to describing our trajectory, the plan includes a check-in point between each of our expansion projects (represented graphically as a squiggly line between the addition of new stores), wherein the leadership team has discussions to verify the arc of our trajectory—we do not merely assume that adding stores will always be the most

appropriate interpretation of our Ends.

The BIG Direction helps us focus our ongoing strategic learning as we delve into questions about our organization's role within our local food system. We deepen our understanding of cooperative economy. And we ponder the value (and how to articulate it in a non-squishy way) of happiness in our community.

### To hear more about it

As host for the 2013 CCMA Conference, we look forward to sharing more about the foundational work that evolved into Wheatsville's BIG Direction and more about how it comes into play in all aspects of our discussions, decisions, and actions. For example, we will be sharing the story of how our recent branding project has translated our original graphic device into the integrated new look that permeates our current (and forthcoming) store. ■