



# The Shuttle

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Community-Owned Food Markets Open to Everyone

## Eden Foods Suit Raises Values Question for Co-op

by Jonathan Leeds, Weavers Way Membership Manager

BY NOW, you're probably familiar with the Eden Foods controversy that erupted after the natural foods company sued the Obama administration over the Affordable Care Act.

According to the Salon.com article that broke the news, Eden Foods and its CEO Michael Potter objected on religious grounds to the ACA mandate requiring employers to include contraceptive coverage in employee health plans. In its brief, Eden alleges its rights had been "...violated under the First Amendment, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the Administrative Procedure Act."

This was big news at Weavers Way Co-op. Eden Foods is one of the oldest natural-food companies around (and one of the few that hasn't been gobbled up by a giant corporation), and its soy milk and other products have been popular at Weavers way for decades. In addition, Eden's food-policy advocacy — such as pushing for clear consumer labeling on foods — has earned the company high marks and a high profile in the cooperative food culture. It seemed like a perfect fit: A small business holding its own against an ever-growing army of corporate behemoths, fighting for the consumer at every turn.

But with the ACA lawsuit, things suddenly didn't seem so perfect.

It started in late April with a sin-

gle member email with the subject line "Did you know about this?" Soon other emails were coming in, most from outraged members who saw Eden's actions as an assault on reproductive rights, and a step backwards in terms of social justice. Some suggested that the Co-op take an official stand. Some even called for a boycott of Eden Foods.

To get a sense of where Weavers Way members stood on this issue, we developed an online survey that posed four questions:

- 1) Do you feel strongly about this issue?
- 2) Will Eden Foods' actions influence your decision about whether or not to purchase the company's products?
- 3) Do you feel that Weavers Way should take a stand on this issue?
- 4) In general, do the views (political, environmental, etc.) of manufacturers and other companies affect your buying decisions?

No. 4 elicited the most unified response: More than 82 percent stated that their buying decisions are affected by the views of manufacturers and other companies. A majority (64 percent) of those who answered the first question felt strongly about the issue, although some added that they felt conflicted: They admired Eden Foods for their food activism, but disagreed with the company's stance on contraception coverage.

A slightly higher majority (about 67 percent) said Eden's actions would influ-

ence their purchasing decisions, and that they would either stop buying Eden products, or would only buy them when there was no alternative.

But respondents were more evenly split on whether the Co-op should take a stand on the issue, with only a little over 47 percent calling for an "official" Weavers Way stand.

In addition to the survey, the Co-op also invited members to weigh in through other channels, such as the Weavers Way Facebook page and the Shuttle. The feedback we've received through these channels is consistent with the survey: There's a wide range of views.

It appears it will ultimately be up to members to make individual decisions about whether or not to purchase Eden products. This will no doubt leave some members feeling dissatisfied. Yet there is no way around that. While we are, as members of the Co-op, united in our commitment to a common set of principles, we are, nevertheless, individuals with differing views on a multitude of issues.

One of the strengths of Weavers Way is that it encourages public dialogue around important issues, even when those issues might be sensitive or controversial, and even when there is little chance of a consensus. It is not when we all agree that makes the Co-op stronger, it is when we all have a voice.

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