

MARCH 2007 PRODUCT SELECTION COMMITTEE REPORT(S)

Name of persons submitting report: Janet Welch and Joe Breskin, Co-Chairs

Date of meeting: Feb 28, 2007 (special meeting)

Committee members present: Joe Breskin, Deb Shortess, John Barr, David Goldman, Julie Jaman, Joanie Beldon, Dorn Campbell, Phil Dinsmore.

We held a special meeting to prepare for the presentation of our work in Progress to the Board. The assigned homework involved application of the Matrix to several products on our shelves. At this meeting we once again discovered significant discrepancies between various members' responses to the same matrix question for the same product. Some gave 2 others gave 5 ... And yet, when we polled one another around the table it was clear that there were not in fact disagreements about the product, but rather, about what the question "meant" and how a numerical answer (1-7) could/should be applied to it.

This outcome is not surprising given that the matrix was designed by a committee, based on the work of other committees and that it has evolved without much consideration of how it would be applied in the field. Because it was designed to capture our core values, a bottom-up design, not a top-down instrument crafted to be used as a rating/ranking tool. And in fact, it should not be surprising that our core values contain contradictions - even within each of us as individuals. And they do. The discussion was quite inconclusive until we got to the Tomatoes.

The discussion of tomatoes was surprisingly rich as there was considerable knowledge within the group about the business of growing, harvesting, processing and packaging tomatoes. Some of the really obvious data (for example: inconsistent portion size and dramatically different levels of sodium and calories across otherwise similar looking products) that was presented on packaging labels - something that many of us had totally missed - was turned into information and then knowledge within the group, as we came to understand what this information "meant" in the context of producing the products in this category.

This also lead to an observation that we needed a clear incontrovertible criteria and one was offered: how far has the product on the shelf evolved/diverged from the product on the vine or in the field to stuff barely recognizable as food. This approach (presented in the Committee's report to the Board last month) was pretty easy for everyone to apply and resulted in consistent rankings.

It must be noted that only one section of the Matrix was successfully applied at this meeting and that open questions remained, such as how the "clearly negative" questions on the matrix were to be scored: if something was clearly bad, like a toxic ingredient, and the badness was hidden, did that get a 1 or a 7?

This question must wait til the next meeting. The result of this meeting was to be David Goldman's presentation of our progress to date to the Board at March 6th meeting. In fact, presentation was developed AFTER the meeting via email communication and the document is available at <http://www.breskin.com/coop/documents/hereiswhatweknow.pdf>

Note: the March 7 meeting was cancelled due to schedule conflicts with many committee members.

Date of meeting: March 21, 2007

Committee members present: Joe Breskin, Deb Shortess, John Barr, David Goldman, Julie Jaman, Joanie Beldon, Dorn Campbell, Phil Dinsmore, Lisa Crosby, and Janet Welch.

DISCUSSION:

We discussed a core issue, the Coop's obligation to respect the right of the consumer to remain blissfully ignorant. And how this conflicts with the widespread assumption that the Coop is in fact "researching" and "pre-filtering" products and presents only safe, best-of-breed products for sale. Whereas in fact, the Coop is operated on a set of B policies that clearly state that the customers will educate themselves and make those decisions and that the store basically operates on a caveat emptor basis.

Which led to a discussion of the variety of ways that information might be presented to shoppers without giving so much information as to be overwhelming or irksome but in a form that would be easily accessible. We liked the idea of placing a simple symbol on the shelf - especially in the case where the product appeared to us to have real problems of one sort or another - a symbol that would direct members who wanted to know more about the issue to an information center where pamphlets or handouts or a binder specific to that product would be available.

The other fundamental issue discussed w/o clear consensus (and none is actually expected in this area) is whether the outcome of this process will in fact be a reduction of products carried, and the removal of the egregious violators of our stated principles or the elimination of our claim to being an operation based on principles. It was noted that our charter is clear: that we are expected to reconcile apparent contradictions between our behavior and our beliefs, and that until we do the work we will not know whether it is our behavior or our principles that have to give ground.

MATRIX

There was repeated discussion of the 1 -7 numerical rating used on the individual matrix questions, and concern over how there was in fact no system for ranking various aspects (questions) of a single Criterion and various criteria, and thus no

way to come up with an aggregate number that could drive a colored bar in a histogram. This concern was dissected several times until it was understood that there could not - at least with the current set of questions on the Matrix - be a single number that resulted in a single bar representing "Environment" or "Nutrition" or "Social" issues.

In order to learn how our matrix would be applied to a variety of products, we will apply it to 9 of the highest selling products in the store: Muir Glen diced tomatoes, Strauss plain whole yogurt, Organic Valley Ultrapasturized 2% milk, Westbrae canned black beans, Rice Dream original enriched rice milk, Bionaturae dry spaghetti, bulk regular rolled oats, Knutsen lemon ginger echinacea juice, and Village Baker multigrain sliced bread.

NEXT STEP

At the PSGC April 4th meeting we will finish the tomatoes begun at the March meeting, and we will attempt to do the canned black beans, and the rice milk as well. It is generally believed that reaching consensus within the group through our collaborative application of the Matrix questions to these products (which is still quite time consuming and may well involve revisions to the questions in the Matrix in an attempt to address the problems we have encountered in its application) will provide the basis for applying a revised/finalized matrix to similar products, to provide a comparative analysis useful to buyers and shoppers alike, if the results can be displayed to shoppers in an easy to understand format.

WEBSITE AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

We also discussed the new research that has come out about the toxicity of the lining used in canned products (esp. tomatoes, baby food, etc). We believe that the buying power that created through the 'coop of coops' UNFI contract should be used to pressure producers to address health concerns such as these by certifying that the products they are distributing are free of these toxics (similar to the certification UNFI gives to Whole Foods under their contract to not be sold any products which contain ingredients on their unacceptable ingredients list). We also discussed the terrific amount of information that exists on the committee's website and believe that it would serve members to have the coop website (in the section that refers to this committee's work) contain a link to the committee's website.

Request of the Board:

That the Board direct that operations add a link from the PSG committee section of it's website to the committee's own website <http://www.breskin.com/coop> which contains links to coop documents, committee work and important background material on the ongoing/emerging discussion of these and related issues in the world around us.