

OWNER'S MANUAL

“PLAN V”

DUKE'S CO-OPERATIVE VEGETARIAN EATING CLUB

Welcome! You are now one of the proud owners of Plan V, Duke's Co-op vegetarian eating club. Although much of the knowledge needed to operate Plan V is passed down orally from old members to new in the course of cooking, cleaning, shopping, and dining, this *Owner's Manual* is a way to make available to all members a comprehensive collection of the knowledge and ideas evolving in Plan V.

Introduction

Plan V is a cooperatively-run student eating club created in order to provide good vegetarian food for students at Duke. Each Saturday the cook(s) for the week, aided by the president or copresidents, shop for meal ingredients at the Durham Food Co-op and, when necessary, Whole Foods. Cooking starts at 5:00, and all members are encouraged to help prepare the food, regardless of kitchen experience. The meal is served at 6:30. All meals are vegan and, when possible, organic, though a member of Plan V is not required to be vegan or vegetarian. Other bonuses Plan V provides are a friendly, social dining experience as well as cheap meals, the ability to use Food Points at the Durham Food Co-op, and cooking experience.

What is a co-op?

The idea of a cooperative is that people with a common need can organize together to create their own enterprise to meet that need. So Plan V is essentially a business that we own, operate, and buy from. The members do all the necessary work, democratically make all the policy and management decisions, and buy the product—dinner. In this case, the common need is for good, vegetarian food as well as a friendly dining experience and cheap meals.

Unlike in situations that have “employees,” “bosses,” and “consumers,” in a co-op the members democratically decide the actions that need to be taken, and who shall carry them out. Each member is equally responsible for the success of the enterprise, and they depend on one another, and each member is responsible for making sure the others carry out their commitments.

Occasionally members of Plan V slip into “employee” or “consumer” attitudes, and this causes problems. They assume that those members who seem most on top of things must be “in charge”, so they don't take responsibility for making sure that the next meal has been planned or that they themselves are signed up for a job. They slip into a passive and dependent mode, which means they are not fully carrying their weight in doing all that needs to be done to keep everyone happily fed. Also, what members of a

co-op have to keep always in mind is that they are *writing* the rules; Plan V works the way it does because the members made it up. If you want a change, make that up, too.

Plan V is actually the first student co-op in the Old South. But student co-ops have been sprouting up around the rest of the country for a hundred years. The first were eating clubs in Florida and Texas in the 1890s. The first student housing co-ops were created in Berkeley, Ann Arbor, Toronto and elsewhere as a response to the Great Depression. During the 50s, 60s and 70s dozens of student co-ops developed from Maine to Kansas and on the West Coast. In 1968 they formed a network, the North American Students of Cooperation. They span from co-op eating clubs to a 1500 member housing co-op association.

Responsibilities

The basic work needed to operate Plan V is shopping, cooking, cleaning, writing up menus, and group decision making. Originally, PlanV members were divided into cook-crews which were responsible for assigned meals. More recently, after a revamping of students' meal plans by the administration and how they could be used in conjunction with PlanV, the division of labor has shifted. Now, members sign up individually or in small groups to head a meal. This group plans the meal and purchases the ingredients, with help from the (co)president(s) when necessary. Other members sign up to help in the kitchen during the preparation of this meal, headed by the planning group. All members are responsible for clean-up, and it is expected that each member assist in at least two meal preparations per semester.

POSITIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PLAN V MEMBERS

A democratic cooperative depends on the full participation and contributions of its members. Although there are no guidelines dictating "duties" and "chores" for members, a cooperative cannot function without the fulfillment of responsibilities. Below is a list of various positions of responsibility within PLAN V. The descriptions after each responsibility are flexible and subject to modification as members find more agreeable and efficient methods.

- **MEMBERS:** Members are the crux of the group. Without member participation, PLAN V deteriorates to club or service status. The member is most of all responsible for offering an active mind, voice and hands. This may include anything from raising concerns, offering opinions and advice, and lending skills

- **MEAL LEADERS:** A meal leader(s) is responsible for planning, shopping, and cooking for a meal.

- PLANNING:** planning a meal may involve browsing through cookbooks, brainstorming, etc. A meal could have a theme, such as going around the world, or could simply focus on the availability of vegetables and time of year.

---SHOPPING: usually one shopper is sufficient. A shopper is also responsible for finding which items (spices, bulk items, etc.) are already available in the PLAN V cabinets. It is important that a shopper familiarize themselves with PLAN V buying policies. Generally, most items are bought at the Durham Food Coop, and thus shoppers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Food Coop as well.

---COOKING: generally, preparing meals requires around four cooks. These cooks include the meal planners, who additionally oversee the cooking, and other members who sign up to help with that meal. Cookers usually show up at 5:00, 1.5 hours before mealtime, though for more intensive dishes, an earlier time may be set or they may do some cooking beforehand as seen fit.

---CLEANING: Cleaning includes washing dishes, surfaces, sweeping the floor, and throwing out garbage and compost. Also in the interest of sanitation, cleaners need to dry dishes and cookware before storing in cabinets; otherwise the wet dishes support mildew colonies in the warm, stagnant, cabinet air. Usually two or three cleaners suffice; cleaning can be facilitated by asking members to pre-wash their dishes in a pot of hot, soap-water. In the interests of conserving water, cleaners can wash their dishes in pots of hot water rather than in running water.

- OFFICERS: There are certain tasks that not everybody needs to do in Plan V, but which *have* to be done nevertheless, so we created officer positions of responsibility for these tasks:

President:

The most critical job of the President is to get the club back together again after winter and summer breaks. This means convening the first meetings of each semester, organizing a table at the student activities fair, getting ads in the Chronicle and fliers up.

Additionally, the president must ensure that each meal has a meal leader and people assigned for clean-up.

Other administrative tasks include:

Reserve kitchen and dining space from the Union Facilities Committee.

Register Plan V as a voluntary student organization with OSAF.

Make any budget requests to OSAF.

Place an ad in the *Blue Devil's Advocate* if desired by members

If possible, place an entry in the Frosh Orientation Guide.

Recruit a faculty associate when needed.

Treasurer:

Do any necessary negotiation with the head of Auxiliary Services regarding members' ability to buy food at the Durham Food Co-op, as well as the payment of members' food points to PlanV. Ensure that the Durham Food Co-op receives payments from PlanV's funds.

Members:

In addition to the tasks described above, one-time responsibilities, which generally depend on volunteerism of enthusiastic PLAN V'ers, include end of the year clean-ups, inventory, recruitment, literature assembly (like this), and whatever the hell comes to mind that needs some doing.

Food Policy

When students asked the head of DUFS to switch from Styrofoam dishware to paper, he said he couldn't because it would cost more. Whenever there is a separation of management from consumer as in DUFS, the only ethical concern the manager feels mandated to deal with is cost. In the case of co-ops like Plan V, the consumers are the owners and managers, and so our decisions can reflect the full spectrum of our human interests.

Although the basic "ground rule" of Plan V is that it serves vegetarian food, this still leaves many choices we must make. The following are some of the usual issues that arise:

- Will we have milk and eggs? Milk and eggs are good sources of protein and some minerals, are important in the aesthetics of numerous dishes, and are a part of mainstream diet. While in principle it is possible to obtain them without harm to animals, in practice they involve factory farming and the slaughter of males. Grain is fed to livestock which would more efficiently feed people directly. Additionally, some members are vegan, and using milk and egg products in the meals could alienate them from being able to eat as members.
- Should we buy food at a supermarket, Whole Foods, the Food Co-op? Issues involve prices, wasteful packaging, the diversion of profits to capitalists, support of a community economy, and the kind of products available.
- Will we have refined products or whole products, in our grains, pasta, flour, and sweeteners? Refined foods are part of the mainstream diet, and in some cases may be aesthetically preferred. But refining removes many nutrients (in fact thiamin was

discovered when white rice became available to the Chinese masses and they suffered an epidemic of deficiency diseases). In “enriched” foods some of these are added back, but other components that are left out, such as fiber, and selenium, are discovered to have important nutritional value.

- Do we buy organic or chemically grown foods? Organic foods are usually, though not always, more expensive than chemically grown food. But organic food is free of pesticide residues, does not contribute to contamination of ecosystems, and its purchase helps develop the sustainable agricultural sector.

- Do we stick to staples or have more deluxe dishes? Pleasure is a culturally contended issue, and some people prefer to eat austere, while others like to make a feast. While not a cause of great strife within Plan V, the issue enters in more subtle decisions about meal planning.

- Do we honor different boycotts? Different groups call for boycotts of certain products because of ecological, labor, health, or political concerns. Even without organized boycotts, what we buy affects other people’s well being and the environment. Some of the issues include: exploitation of farmworkers; diversion of agriculture in third world countries from growing food for their people to growing food for sale to the first world; destruction of rainforest for export agriculture; killing of dolphins in fishing; profiting the economic strength of tyrannies (e.g. Chile, S.Africa).

- What health concerns should we deal with, e.g. fat, protein, aluminum, salt, macrobiotic, etc.? Many mainstream culinary practices have been found or are suspected of causing disease. Known hazards are high dietary fat, and low fiber. Aluminum from cookware has been suspect in several neurological diseases, including Alzheimer’s. See Nutrition for more on this.

- Should we buy only produce that is in season, or grown locally? Incredible as it may seem, plants, which is where Plan V’s food comes from, are tied in their growth patterns to the seasons, so that getting certain foods out of season requires more technological intervention, with its attendant problems. Technology includes canning, shipping food from the southern hemisphere, hydroponic gardening, and cold storage. Storing and shipping food requires more pesticide and energy use. Buying food that is not grown locally entails the same costs.

- Do we buy in bulk or in packaging? Packaging is a large part of the solid waste problem. Sometimes it is convenient but sometimes it is only part of marketing. Only the Food Co-op has much available in bulk.

In DUFS, it is impossible to steer its food policy from mainstream American dietary habits. In Plan V we can do as we please. But even in Plan V, the mainstream still has the power of habit. Also, our institutions do not make information about all these various consequences of food choices available to us, so we have to dig in order to raise these issues.

The Quaker idea behind consensus is that each person can have a piece of the truth. So if your desires regarding food buying conflict with what is done in Plan V, it is very important that you raise the issue with the group. When someone makes a proposal that may seem way out, it is important not to rush to judgement, but to put some care into investigating the factual validity, or moral importance of what they are saying. Most concerns can be accommodated by being more thoughtful in purchasing or cooking, or adding diversity to what Plan V cooks. Some issues, however, may require in depth discussion or changes in cherished habits. A willingness to deal with such issues will greatly enrich what you get out of Plan V.

Finances

Plan V is financially independent of Food Service.

To allow students to become members of PlanV, we submit to Joe Pietrantonio (head of Auxiliary Services) a list of the members of Plan V, as well as their Duke Card numbers. Then the administration begins the paperwork of withdrawing PlanV dues from students' dining accounts as well as registering their Duke Cards to function at the Durham Food Co-op.

If any money is left over at the end of the semester, after having paid all our bills, the membership can choose to do whatever it wishes with it. It is usually used for buying new equipment, and leaving some money for starting up at the beginning of the next semester. Additionally, PlanV usually requests club money from OSAF, which affects the purchasing of equipment and advertising monies.

Governance

Plan V is intentionally non-hierarchical-- there is no head honcho who runs it; we all do it together. For maximum consideration of each person's needs, we have made decisions by mutual agreement, i.e. consensus, rather than having a majority overrule the minority. That way, we make decisions the way a group of friends usually decides things, rather than how a political group does. There are two distinct positions of responsibility we decided on: the President and Treasurer. The President is responsible for dealing with the administration and for starting the group up at the beginning of the year. The Treasurer handles finances, receiving payments, disbursing cash for shopping, and maintaining an inventory of equipment.

Nutrition

Sound vegetarian nutrition is pretty simple: the bulk of one's calories and protein should come from whole grains (rice, wheat, corn, millet) and legumes (beans, peas, lentils, tofu, tempeh, etc) with possible dairy supplements; for getting vitamins and minerals one should get plenty of vegetables and fruits. Some vegetarian recipes lack the grain/legume complements and are deficient in protein (e.g. a potato centered dish), so care should be taken to make a balance of dishes. Refined products (white rice, white

sugar, white flour) have had major components of the nutrients removed, and are not suitable staples for vegetarian diets.

How to Plan Meals

Sanitation

In spite of all the wonders of medical science, people can still give each other diseases and be poisoned by rotten food. If you have a cold, the flu, or intestinal flu, you should find a substitute if you are on cook crew, out of consideration to others who you can infect through food preparation. If you have mononucleosis or hepatitis A, not only should you *never* handle the group's food, but you should bring your own dinnerware and utensils to eat with, since these are much more serious diseases, transmitted mainly through saliva, and more difficult to sterilize from the dinnerware. This is a standard hygiene policy for student eating co-ops. In general, be sure to thoroughly clean dishes and cookware.

By not handling meat, you eliminate most hazards of contamination from food. When plants and dairy become contaminated from decay, you can usually see and smell it. It may go without saying, but you should not use moldy products, because molds produce a variety of toxic chemicals, including neurotoxins and carcinogens, especially aspergillus, which grows on grains, corn, and peanuts. The only other health hazard is from pesticide residues on foods. Always wash vegetables before using them, buying organic when feasible.

COOK-CREW TIPS

1. Planning a Meal—This is best done one week in advance, by the meal leader(s) gathering 15 min. before dinner is served and deciding what the menu will be, and who will do shopping and cooking. Rotation of jobs is good so that everyone gains the knowledge for each part of the operation.

- If you use a recipe book or find recipes online, make sure to multiply the amounts of ingredients to the numbers you need. Be sure there is a protein source in a main dish (legumes, tofu, or dairy)—tofu can often be added to a sauce or dish if protein is lacking in the recipe.

You can always make dairy recipes non-dairy by substituting soy cheese or tofu for cheese, or leaving the eggs out or using egg replacer.

- A typical meal includes: a “main” dish or combination, vegetables, green salad, dessert.

2. Shopping—The best source for groceries is the Durham Food Co-op, 512 Broad Street, 286-1511.

- Shopping takes around an hour, sometimes more, so best to start in the early afternoon (no later than 4) on the day of the meal.

- Be careful to note if the recipe calls for beans; these need to start soaking the day before if they're dried.

- The Treasurer should give you a budgetary target; try to stay under it if you can, but it's not absolute; if you are way under it, think of goodies you can get to spice up the meal—fruits, dessert, wild stuff.

- When you go to check out at the Co-op, tell the checker this is for Plan V; ask for the ledger notebook, and record the purchase amount, sign and date it; the checker should leave a note of the amount in the cash register, but bring the receipt back to the Treasurer.

- Buy in bulk rather than in small packages where possible. It's best to get whole grains rather than white, with flour, rice, pasta, bread. If it's not too much more money, try to get the organic alternative.

- You can buy just the amount of spices you need from the bulk jars.

- Leave the groceries in the kitchen, with the shopping list or menu sheet.

3. Cooking—It takes 1 ½ to cook, though sometime more. Try to be on time, so as to be fair to the others cooking, especially if you are the shopper, since starting depends on the ingredients.

- Get the cupboard key from the president ahead of time, if (s)he won't be a cooking participant. Unfortunately, we've had people break into the cupboards in the past, and need to keep them locked.

- You may need to poke around the cabinets to find the utensils or food stuffs you need. Creativity may be needed in adopting our equipment to the needs at hand.

- Get any large amounts of water you need to boil heating right away, since it takes a long time on the burners.

- Find out what will take the longest to cook and begin working on that. Look for times when you will be waiting on one thing to work on another. Pie crusts should always be started first. Watch out for any scheduling conflicts with different dishes using the oven. You may need to get creative in shuffling items on the stove and oven for complex meals.

- Fill up the pitchers with water and refrigerate.

- The large, thin pots can easily burn food on the bottom, as can the BIG POT (a REAL bummer), so keep the heat lower, stir often, and watch closely.

- Many recipes call for much more oil (unhealthy to eat much of) than you need, so try making due with less oil.

- Wash all produce.

- Chopping vegetables can be a major bottleneck if you do it one slice at a time; usually it is good enough to just put the whole amount on the chopping board and chop at it till the pieces are small enough.

- Spinach is full of dirt, and needs to be washed out by a bath, not a shower: break off the pieces, fill a bowl and dunk the leaves, pull them out, and look at the water to see if there is grit. Repeat until no more grit comes out.

- To use garlic, squish a clove lightly with the side of a knife blade—then you can pull off the paper; squish it further and then dice it.

- Pour away the water that beans are soaking in, and refill with fresh water to cook them. This is the secret to reducing our contribution to the greenhouse effect.

- Never cook with tap hot water—it is likely to have lead contamination from solder in the heater. (Alternately, it takes less time and energy to heat once on the burner).

4. Serving—Just a few hints: Check to make sure everything is out of the oven, and don't forget things you may have been chilling in the fridge, e.g. water pitchers, ice cream.

- Make sure to bring out serving utensils for everything.

5. Cleaning Up—Clean-up time will depend greatly on how thoroughly members have pre-washed their dishes, as well as the dishes cooked, equipment used, and whether anything was left to pre-soak during the meal.

- Thorough cleaning is critical in protecting our health. Mono and hepatitis-A can spread through contaminated dishes. Clean and rinse with hot water and scrub everything thoroughly.

- A workable system: wipe off dishes into the trash can (regrettably, we don't have a compost option); put the big pot in the right sink to hold the soapy water; one person washes the dishes and puts them in the left sink; a second person rinses and puts them in the dish rack. Make sure to wash the sinks with soap and hot water before putting clean dishes in them. Let everything air-dry as much as possible before towel-drying.

- Don't throw out plastic utensils or containers that are reusable.

- Put things away in their labeled place, or the next cook crew will be confounded.

- Wipe the serving table, the counters and the stove. Sweep the floor, too. We can be fined for leaving any mess, and it causes ill-will among the other users of the kitchen.
- Rinse out the dish towels and drape them to dry in the cupboards. If they need to be washed, notify the president, or take them home and wash them.
- It is very important to lock all the cabinets when done.

NOW THAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN COOKING, TAKE A MOMENT, RELAX, AND ENJOY! YOU ARE EMBARKING ON A MOST ANCIENT HUMAN CREATIVE PROCESS. BEFORE YOU ARE THINGS THAT CAME OUT OF THE GROUND. IN A COUPLE OF HOURS, YOU WILL HAVE MADE THEM INTO A FEAST.

The Story of Plan V

Plan V was organized by Lee Altenberg, a postdoc in Zoology, Spring semester 1989. As an undergrad he had lived in Lothlorien, a vegetarian co-op house of 57 students at UC Berkeley, and as a grad student, at Synergy and Columbae Co-ops at Stanford. He had wanted to start a vegetarian co-op ever since arriving at Duke in Fall 1987, but could not find a facility. Rob Clough of Epworth told him about the East Campus Center's kitchen in Fall 1988, and he looked into getting it for a vegetarian co-op eating club. The administration waffled on letting it be used, because it questioned the condition of the kitchen, but they eventually o.k.'d it.

Lee recruited interest from the circles he knew—the Student Activist Co-operative, ECOS, Students for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the Vegetarian Club, and advertised on campus. Lee originally thought of naming it “Plan G” since DUFS had Plans A-F, but Art Clemente suggested “Plan V” for “vegetarian”. Two co-op alums from Brown U., Bruce and Karen Baker, responded to a flier Lee put up at the Durham Food co-op, and they cooked lasagna for the organizational meeting at which about 20 people showed up. The first dinner was cooked at Gilbert Addoms (as permission for the East Campus Center hadn't yet been given). After that it was in ECC. The first semester's membership stabilized at 14.

The most famous dinner was when a storm knocked out the power for the whole campus. The quiches had just been put in the oven. The cook crew took them out, poured the custard back in a bowl, and trucked it and the crusts over to Lee's apartment to bake. They picked up wine, French bread and candles at the market. Nobody could study anyway in the darkness, so people just hung out. Finally, by 8 o'clock or so, the dinner was ready, and the power came back on. But people turned all the lights off, and everyone sat down to an elegant candlelight dinner. For the last meal of the semester, the last day of classes, Plan V had a “bread baking study break” open to the campus. They started baking bread at 7pm, using the “sponge method” of the *Tassajara Bread Book*,

with people studying while the bread was rising, and at 1am, 8 loaves of bread came steaming out of the oven, and people feasted and said sentimental good-byes.

In the fall of 1989, we recruited at the "Potpourri of Student Life" and Plan V increased its membership to 24. At the organizational meeting people were rearing to go, and the first dinner was that week. Bruce the Treasurer had left, and nobody else was enthusiastic about doing it, and it was a much bigger job now. So the members decided to give compensation in the form of free board to the Treasurer. The number dropped to about 20 in Spring semester, with some going to Beaufort or doing sports. For some reason, Tuesday crew had problems getting its act together, and one day, no one showed up. So the rest ordered pizza from Pizza Peddlers. The show must go on.

At the end of Spring 1990, enough members were going to be around over summer that they decided to continue Plan V through the summer. They were able to recruit several friends as new members, and even some American Dance Festival students.

Since the 1990s, Plan V has gone through a lot of evolution. A lot of this has been born through changes to eating and living policies at Duke University. First, East Campus was designated as a freshman campus, changing the dynamic of meal plans and social dining. No longer is it possible to *substitute* parts of the meal plan with Plan V, though food points can be used to pay for Plan V meals. Additionally, the location of Plan V has changed from the no-longer East Campus Center to apartments on Central to, more recently, the GA kitchens and possibly Southgate. Because of changing member dynamics over the years, the meals per week have gradually gone down to one, on Saturday, as of 2000. With member cooperation, though, these could be re-increased to two meals per week.

VEGETARIANISM:

The reasons for eating meals without meat are widely varied, but I will try to condense them here.

1) BIOCENTRISM

Animals have inherent rights to fend for themselves in a natural, non human-centered world, and they should not be subjected to factories where they have sometimes very limited movement and where they live only to get "beefed up" for slaughter. This particular view does allow that humans who naturally hunt and kill animals in "the wild" for food are within their proper natural place. It is only unnatural "factory farming" which is unnecessarily cruel that a biocentrist objects to. If it wasn't for large-scale factory farming the types of cows and chickens we see today would not even exist. They

have been bred strictly to suit human desires, and this is clearly an alteration of natural evolution.

2) COMPASSION FOR ANIMALS / ANIMALS' RIGHTS

Strict believers of this view hold that all killing of animal life is unnecessary and cruel in itself, whether it be in slaughterhouses or in the jungle. A trip to a slaughterhouse (possible Plan V field trip? - who said we didn't know how to have fun?) would quickly convert many to this view. The ability of animals to live free from the threat of being confined in a cage for life or from being blown away by a rifle is the primary consideration. Meat is murder, basically.

3) ENVIRONMENTAL / WORLD HUNGER IMPACT

A meat-centered diet is very inefficient in terms of land usage and an overwhelming amount of grains and soybeans grown in the developed nations goes for animal feed instead of human food. The return on that investment in grain is very low, with the animals yielding in the products no more than a small fraction of the nutrients they consume ("Vegetarian Question and Answer," Animal's Agenda, October 1986). A lot of beef also comes from Central America, where the cattle industry has been involved in the wholesale destruction of tropical rain forests. Huge tracts of rainforest are cleared by bulldozers to make way for grazing pasture for cattle which is then sold to the United States. Rainforests are a key factor in world ecology and are being destroyed simply for cheap burgers. ("You Are What You Eat," Animals' Agenda, March 1986). This is why there have been recent protests against such fast-food giants as Burger King, which has been buying large quantities of cheap, Central American beef.

4) HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

We've all heard the warnings about the dangers of eating too much fatty red meat. But few have considered total vegetarianism as the healthiest option. But, according to some, "a vegetarian diet based on vegetables, grains and fruits is the optimal plan for nourishing the human body. This program provides ample nutrients while keeping the cholesterol intake nil, total fat consumption low, and protein ingestion adequate but modest . . . Countless studies have shown that vegetarians - vegans [non-dairy eaters] in particular - have lower blood pressures, lower cholesterol levels, and less obesity than comparable omnivores. There is less incidence of heart disease, kidney failure, adult-onset diabetes and several types of cancer (breast and colon in particular) among vegetarians; and the life expectancy of vegetarian groups studied - Seventh Day Adventists, Trappist monks and others - is generally graced with precious extra time" ("Healthy and Humane", Animals' Agenda, July/August 1986).

Of course, any vegetarian diet must be planned to ensure proper nourishment and balance of foods. A vegetarian diet of twinkies and potato chips won't quite cut it. So the menu manager should have at least a minimal knowledge of food balancing in a vegetarian or semi-vegetarian diet. For instance, over-reliance on dairy products could

spell trouble health-wise. Some vegetarians have gone a step further and eat a vegan (pronounced vee-gun) diet which excludes dairy products. Soybean products, such as soy milk, are a good, healthy substitute for most dairy products. The vegan diet is also based on different views - from the health perspective to the animal rights perspective which points out that many cows that produce milk and chickens that produce eggs live horrid lives in small, disease-ridden pens. And that's no fun.

DECISION MAKING AND CONSENSUS

Don't be afraid to have workshops on decision making. The process will work much better if it is well understood.

(The following is lifted from the 1978 edition of Living In Syn, which, in turn, lifted it from the now-dunct Stanford manual called Organize)

No matter what the process, it is important that everyone in the group knows exactly how the decisions are made. Once they are made it is invaluable to have someone repeat the decision to the group so everyone really knows what has been decided. It's not a bad idea to write down decisions, nor is it bad to have a minute of silence so everyone can think over the decision after it's made and see if they still feel good about it.

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING does not mean that everyone thinks the decision is the best possible one or even that it will work. What it means is that in coming to the decision, no one felt that her/his position was misunderstood or that it wasn't given a proper hearing. It also means that the final decision doesn't violate a member's fundamental moral standards because if it did they would be obligated to block consensus. Consensus only works if there is a high level of shared assumptions and if the people involved understand the process and are willing to accept decisions they don't necessarily find to be the best because they trust in the collective judgement of the group and they believe that everyone has heard and understood their reservations.

Voting is a means of choosing one alternative from several. Consensus building, on the other hand, is the process of synthesizing elements together. It is ideally the synthesizing of the ideas of every member of the group into one decision. We see it as a higher level decision-making process than voting. By higher level we mean not only that it will achieve better solutions, it will also promote the psycho-social growth of group members and of the group as a whole.

Voting implies a certain model of human nature. People are seen as antagonistic. It is a win/lose model. Some people inevitably lose and sulk away until their next chance to get back at the winners and become winners themselves. Voting is based on the will of the majority, or whatever fraction is chosen. It is in essence a quantitative mode . . .

Consensus is based on a different theory of human nature. People can work together. People can bridge distances and synthesize contradictory ideas. People are able to peacefully talk out their differences and reach mutually satisfactory positions. It is the opposite of voting because it is qualitative. One person's strongly held beliefs can sway the entire group. No ideas are lost. Each member's input is valued as possible solutions.

Consensus has one other valuable aspect. The goal of every decision making process is not just to decide on a solution, but to carry out that plan of action. Without subsequent action decisions are totally hollow. This is often overlooked . . . It has been shown that a person's commitment to any decision is in proportion to their sense of ownership or investment in that decision. Consensus attempts to develop investment from all members of a group, not just a majority . . .

There are a number of real potential problems with a consensus model of decision making. Achieving consensus should never be covert or assumed. Consensus must always be checked in a direct manner. Otherwise it can become much more repressive than voting.

Consensus clearly takes more time than a simple vote. But the added time can be viewed in relation to the increased understanding each member of the group will have about the issue and the increased probability of the decision being carried out . . .

Most deadlocked situations are mixed up with a set of emotions . . . The group must learn to deal with all levels of conflict, personal as well as ideological. If this does not happen, then those unaddressed feelings will continually block progress . . . So as a last resort, safety mechanism, the collective should establish a back-up decision making method if consensus cannot be reached in some pre-determined length of time.