

Karma Co-op Product Policy

Summary of Changes

- The Economic Considerations section has been updated to include consideration of suppliers that are aligned with food justice and food insecurity, and to emphasize consideration for members' desire for variety while balancing economic viability for the store
- The Environmental Considerations section has been updated to emphasize Karma's commitment to products that are low-waste, package-free and have a low environmental footprint
- A statement has been added to reflect our approach to carrying foraged food products
- The Ethical Considerations section has been updated to include equity in product availability and support for LGBTQ2SA+, BIPOC, Indigenous or women's rights as factors in how we choose products
- The Selection and Marketing of Products section has been expanded to provide more details on how these activities are carried out, including the addition of how carrying conventional produce is considered
- Statements have been added to reflect how the Product Policy is part of how Karma adheres to the Rochedale Principles for Co-operatives
- Definitions have been added for clarity
- Additional revisions were made for language clarity and tone

Karma Co-op Product Policy

Adopted: [date]

Definitions

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Colour

EWG Clean 15: a list of the top 15 conventional produce items with the lowest amount of pesticide residues, as determined by the Environmental Working Group, an American activist group that specializes in research and advocacy in the areas of agricultural subsidies, toxic chemicals, drinking water pollutants and corporate accountability

Food Insecurity: inadequate or unreliable access to food due to financial constraints or other social factors that affect availability and access

Food Justice: communities and grassroots movements exercising their rights to grow, sell and eat nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food in response to the issues surrounding food insecurity

Food Sovereignty: the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems rather than the demands of markets and corporations

LGBTQ2SA+: a term encompassing lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, two-spirit, asexual and other gender and sexual identities

Product Decision Matrix: a decision tool used by staff to assess the suitability of products for sale in the store according to Karma's core values

Rochdale Principles: a set of ideals adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance for the operation of co-operatives. They were first set out in 1844 by the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in Rochdale, England and have formed the basis for the principles on which co-operatives around the world continue to operate.

Product Policy

Members of Karma Co-operative wish to purchase good products at fair prices, while supporting suppliers whose presence and practices benefit the greater community. We believe that decisions about food are not only matters of cost, taste, and nutrition: food production and distribution also have major impacts on the environment, on social, political and economic systems, on labour, and on animal welfare. While we would like to make positive choices in all of these areas with every product that we stock and buy, we recognize the need to feed ourselves in an imperfect world.

Karma's shared core values about how food and other products should be produced, distributed and marketed reflect the core communities of our membership. The seventh Rochedale Principle for Co-operatives also states that co-operatives must have concern for their communities and work for the sustainable development of these communities through policies approved by their members. This policy expresses those enduring values and outlines a general framework for putting them into practice.

Complementing this policy is a Product Decision Matrix, which is intended to act as a simplified tool to help buyers determine how well a product adheres to our values and the Product Policy guidelines. As circumstances change, the Board and the Managers may include additional considerations to the Matrix that are not yet incorporated into this policy. However, any such changes will not become part of this policy – the members' formal statement about product choice – until approved by the members at a General Meeting.

There are three major sections to this policy. **Our Core Values** identifies the practices or principles that we support with respect to the production, distribution and impact of food and grocery products. These values also reflect practices that we choose not to support. **Our Selection and Marketing of Products** outlines how we research and evaluate products based on our core values, what range of action we can take concerning those products, and how we communicate results to the larger membership. Finally, **Our Commitment to Action** outlines important steps that complement the day-to-day decisions about specific products.

Our Core Values

Political and Economic Considerations: Our decisions to buy products are also decisions to support those who produce and distribute them, to ensure their continuing presence in our communities. Large, remote corporations can too easily lose the ability to balance business and community concerns; foreign businesses, however well-intentioned, will not reinvest their profits in our own communities. Our own co-operative also must achieve such a balance, remaining both financially healthy and true to its principles. The sixth Rochedale Principle for Co-operatives also states that co-operatives should co-operate with each other to serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement. Accordingly,

- We strongly support local, regional and Canadian producers
- We strongly support small, co-operative and community businesses, rather than large, multinational corporations or their subsidiaries
- We strongly support stocking products that are affordable by members with limited income, while not rejecting products that may be affordable by a smaller number of members but that contribute to the store's economic well-being
- We strongly support providing product options at a fair price for producers but that maintain economic competitiveness

- We strongly support maintaining product variety in order to fulfil our memberships' grocery needs
- We strongly support producers and businesses who actively promote food justice and provide opportunities for those facing food insecurity

Environmental Considerations: Our decisions to buy products are also decisions to support physical systems of production, processing, packaging and distribution that minimize negative environmental impacts and, where possible, support sustainability for the natural environment. Accordingly,

- We strongly support products and businesses whose method(s) of production carry a low carbon and environmental footprint
- We strongly support the principles of permaculture and organic agriculture, not only from farms certified as organic but also from farms in transition or from those avoiding pesticides (low- or no-spray) without seeking certification
- We strongly support the principles of low-waste by prioritizing bulk and package-free products, while opposing those with wasteful packaging, especially when there is no effective way to biodegrade or recycle what cannot be reused
- We strongly support environmentally and personally safe products for personal hygiene, household cleaning and pest control
- We strongly support the prioritization of locally produced products over those that rely on transportation from distant sources
- We support stocking produce according to seasonal availability
- We support the sale of foraged foods provided they have been gathered safely and according to sustainable methods that do not infringe on any rights to land or conservation
- We do not support the use of irradiation in food preservation
- We do not support the sale of foods containing genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or other ingredients where the production of that ingredient is deemed to have a disproportionately negative environmental impact

Ethical Considerations: Our decisions to buy products are also decisions to support relationships with the human and animal inhabitants of our communities. Inexpensive, convenient products should not be prioritized at the cost of exploitation and pain: those ends cannot justify those means. Accordingly,

- We strongly support other organizations with an explicit and positive social and environmental commitment
- We strongly support initiatives to ensure that primary producers are paid fair prices for their products
- We strongly support the raising of animals in free-range conditions without growth hormones or other unnecessary drugs and antibiotics
- We strongly support equity in product availability through the sale of products produced by or that support BIPOC and Indigenous producers and organizations
- We do not support the raising and slaughtering of animals under inhumane conditions
- We do not support testing products for toxicity by using animals
- We do not support businesses that engage in the exploitation of labour
- We do not support businesses whose practices contribute to the exploitation, suppression or oppression of LGBTQ2SA+, BIPOC, Indigenous or women's rights

Nutritional and Health Considerations: Our decisions to buy products are also decisions to bring products and their chemical constituents into our homes and our bodies. Whether we prefer traditional or modern diets, whether our bodies tolerate a wide or a narrow range

of food, we require that food to be of high quality, nutritious and honestly described. Accordingly,

- We strongly support the provision of full, accurate information through ingredient labels and signs
- We strongly support the production of minimally-processed, whole foods
- We do not support the use of artificial additives or preservatives. Natural preservatives will be supported where necessary in the absence of preservative-free options

Our Selection and Marketing of Products

Our purpose in articulating our core values is not just to express a wish for a better world; it is to help us evaluate products, to decide whether and how to sell them. We recognize that there are challenges in finding products that align perfectly with our values and the need to approach these buying guidelines as a continuum towards best practices rather than strict rules.

Selection of Products

Before a product can be stocked, responsible staff or Managers will review it according to the Product Decision Matrix. Each product will be researched through available product details on a supplier/product website, direct contact with the supplier and/or other reputable sources with relevant information on how the product is produced and distributed. Products will be evaluated according to how strongly they align with Karma's core values. The decision to carry or not to carry a particular product will be documented and the information made available to members upon request.

Where several suitable options exist, emphasis on the following features will be made for each product category:

- Produce: local, fresh, organic, high quality, package-free, seasonal, with suitable availability of a strong variety of foods throughout the year
- Grocery: quality (taste, texture, shelf-life, utility), minimally processed, bulk
- Personal Care: no animal testing, effective, environmentally and personally safe, produced and distributed according to the principles of environmental sustainability
- Meat: local, humane, organic, free-range, free from unnecessary antibiotics/hormones, good value for money

Due to fluctuations in product availability and pricing, at times it may be considered necessary to purchase conventional produce over an organic or no-spray alternative. The following guidelines should apply when selecting a conventional product for sale at Karma. We will:

- Choose low-spray alternatives grown by small-scale producers
- Prioritize products known to have low amounts of pesticide residue (e.g. EWG's Clean 15)
- Choose conventional when necessary to keep a staple items in-stock (e.g. tomatoes)
- Consider discontinuing stock of a particular produce item until a suitable alternative can be found if available options strongly conflict with our core values

Re-evaluation of Products

Products carried in the store may require re-evaluation for several reasons:

- Issues with the production, distribution or sale of a product that put the product in conflict with our core values come to the attention of members, Board or Managers
- Sales of a product are low
- Alternative product options become available that may better align with our core values

Re-evaluation of current products may be conducted in cooperation with the Food Issues Committee. Research on product issues that have come to Karma's attention will be documented and shared with staff and the membership. The decision to continue carrying a product, to replace it or to discontinue its sale will be made by the Managers or staff responsible for buying decisions.

Promotion of Products

Products may be specially promoted through information, labelling, display and/or pricing. Products may be specially promoted for several reasons:

- They have a particularly favourable balance of virtues
- Announcement of new products
- Seasonal features
- To pass savings on to members

Discontinuation of Products

There are several reasons why we may decide not to carry or to discontinue carrying a product:

- Products are ordinarily banned or not available for sale at all, if they do not align with our core values in terms of any of the methods by which they are produced or distributed
- Products are boycotted when we decide to participate in an organized campaign to exert pressure on a corporation to change its actions, by not carrying any of its products
- Low demand
- A better alternative may have been sourced
- The negatives of stocking the product outweigh the positives of carrying it

Although a product may not be stocked, that does not necessarily mean that it is unavailable for purchase. Provided a product aligns with our core values then the ability to special order an item may be available.

Bans and Boycotts

The decision to ban a product may be straightforward; other times it may be a harder task to balance a product's positive and negative characteristics in the decision about whether it is to be not stocked or banned from continued sale. Although this policy sets out the principles for such decisions, the day-to-day practice is weighed by staff in accordance with the Product Decision Matrix.

The Board and Managers may establish an explicit procedure so that, under special circumstances, a product which would ordinarily be banned will instead be stocked with the strongest possible de-emphasis, providing a full accounting of the factors considered in arriving at such a decision.

Both the Product Decision Matrix and the records of actions taken under its use are public documents, available to all members.

Our Commitment to Action

We recognize our range of action on these issues is not limited to our decisions about whether and how we sell specific products. We can also take these further steps:

- Encourage suppliers to change their practices
- Encourage additional public policies and practices consistent with our core values
- Educate members and prospective members about our core values and our practices
- Continuously evaluate our processes and policies to ensure we are able to meet the needs and provide adequate options and food security for members at the different stages of their life

Beyond these direct actions related to Karma's suppliers and internal practices, we also recognize the need to have our decisions reflect our values in the larger Toronto, co-operative and food justice communities. We commit to engaging, where possible and practical with store operations, with other organizations to:

- Contribute to local food justice, food sovereignty and food security movements
- Leverage co-operation between other co-ops to further our mutual goals and shared values
- Promote environmental and climate justice
- Promote products produced by traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups within our community

To fully implement this policy requires extensive research into products and the institutions that create and distribute them.

- We commit ourselves to providing the resources necessary to conduct this research
- We seek to coordinate and share such research with other organizations, especially those in the co-operative movement, that share our core values
- We commit ourselves to preparing an annual sample audit of our progress in fully researching the essential criteria, those critical to our decisions about whether products may be stocked

*The text above is the Product Policy passed by the Karma members at the Annual General Meeting on **Monday, October 19, 2020**, including any amendments accepted by the meeting. As the text states, the policy requires work, led by the Board and the Managers, to put its principles into action, and the members have committed themselves to supplying the necessary resources for that. At the time this document was printed in **September 2020**, it was too early to report on any formal steps that had been taken to create or follow the Product Decision Matrix promised in the policy.*