

The how's and why's of food buying clubs answered at Solanco

By SUSAN KAUFFMAN
Feature Writer

QUARRYVILLE - What is a food buying club? Who belongs to it? How does it work? Lancaster Farming went to the Solanco Food Buying Club, 4 West State Street, Quarryville, to find some answers.

James Barrett, operator of that club, explains that the Solanco Club is in part funded by the Community Action Program. "CAP set aside \$800 to set up the store site and an additional \$800 to stock it when it opened a year ago this week," says Barrett.

The parent organization to which this club belongs is the Lancaster County Federation of Food Buying Clubs. The Federation, whose central site is South Queen and Vine Street in Lancaster, also has another club at Columbia.

The Federation purchases staples such as sugars, flour, canned goods, fresh meats, cheeses, frozen fish, fresh fruits, vegetables, breads, and eggs from co-op supply companies and local producers at prices which will allow it to sell the goods with a small markup and still pass on a substantial savings to its members.

The 220 members at the Solanco Club have paid a fee of three dollars to belong. "But they soon get that back when they shop here!" Barrett remarked. An older couple in the store at the time of the interview quickly agreed. They left with a sizable package of sliced luncheon meat and cheese that totaled a thrifty \$1.75.

"Our clientele runs the whole gambit, from the very poor on welfare, to older people on social security, to everyday people," Barrett explained. "There is no doubt that we benefit the very poor, but more than that, the ones we really help are those people who are making too much money to qualify for welfare and food stamps but not enough to feed their families properly," he commented.

Continuing his description of the clientele, Barrett said, "We also have people who come in with large families, and people who can afford to pay higher prices for their food but who like the idea of what is going on here." In other words, they like the bargains.

Almost as these words were spoken and as if to prove the point, a correspondent from a local newspaper in Chester County came in to the store to do her weekly shopping.

She explained that she generally buys eight dollars worth of items at the club and then goes to a local supermarket to purchase the remaining \$18 or \$20 worth of groceries. She calculates her eight dollar purchase at the club would cost \$12 at the supermarket.

Her purchase included, in part: luncheon meat, cheese, eggs, bread, canned soup, and spaghetti.

The food stuffs in stock depend upon Barrett's judgment and customer requests.

"Certain canned foods, frozen fish, plastic bags, frozen orange juice, toilet paper, paper towels, and cold cereals are kept in stock, now, because of special requests," he says.

Members can order case lots of many items including canned goods, fresh produce, and paper products a week ahead of purchase, and institutional-sized commodities may also be ordered through the club.

On Tuesday of each week, Barrett goes to Lancaster to pick up the weekly order, but he also travels to local orchards and producers to stock the shelves and refrigerators in the store.

"It would be nice to have more local suppliers for the fresh produce," this manager explained. "Cauliflower, broccoli, apples, eggplants, potatoes, tomatoes, cantaloupes, sweetcorn, celery, and peppers, to name a few, are bought locally. We are looking for garden excess, says Barrett. The Federation buys from week to week and large quantities are not always a must.

"Anyone with extra produce can contact Debbie Stewart at the Lancaster Club," he adds.

In one year's time, the membership at the Solanco Food Buying Club has tallied 220 with a weekly volume of \$500.

Barrett has several goals he foresees in the club's future. One goal is to double or even triple the weekly volume to make the club self-sufficient and provide funds to hire help. Presently, the store is manned by Barrett and a few volunteers on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

A second goal is to expand the line to include a greater variety of canned goods, fresh meats (including steaks), and staples such as self-rising flour and whole



HOMESTEAD NOTES

James Barrett, operator of the Solanco Food Buying Club, slices meat for a customer.

wheat flour. The addition of frozen vegetables is planned for this month.

"I'd like to stock the store so that in the future, the members can get almost their groceries here," Barrett proposed.

Some items are not cheaper even through co-op buying says Barrett. Coffee is one of these commodities which the club does not carry.

"We keep the overhead down as much as possible," he explained. "We re-cycle bags, egg cartons, cardboard boxes and twist ties," he stated by way of explanation.

"What we save on overhead we can put into the groceries," he continued. "The people who shop here have to think about what they are doing. They change their buying habits and make a list. Usually, they come here first and buy at a savings,

then go to a local chain or independent store to buy the rest."

Periodically, Penn State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Lancaster County Extension Service send out posters and fliers to pass on information to customers about nutrition, menu selection, recipes, and food buying tips.

Prices are either marked on the products themselves or posted nearby. Food stamps are accepted. Meats and cheese, bacon included, are sliced to order, and fresh bread is sold below supermarket price.

James Barrett says he likes his job. He is enthusiastic about it, and he says his

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My Thoughts

And welcome to them

By JOANNE SPAHR
Assistant Editor

I knew it was going to be a bad flight the minute I couldn't get my seatbelt buckled

Of course it hadn't helped any that it was raining the morning I was to take off or that I was not near an emergency exit on the plane, or that my laminated card of "safety instructions" for emergency crashes was battered from excess use.

But, I philosophized to myself, what is death, anyway, but a final joyous resting point, and rest was one thing I could have really used just then (That same morning at 2 a.m. with one eye open and one eye shut I had just put the finishing touches on my last Fair story)

Plunking down beside my next door seatmate, I was greeted with just the thing I needed to hear

"Do you know if you feel anything when a plane crashes?" she asked, wide-eyed and white knuckled as she gripped the arm rest in an effort

to keep herself from bolting and running right out of the plane to safety

"I don't think anyone has come back to tell," I replied, slightly aggravated at her disquieting remark

Although I'd flown many times before and usually really enjoyed myself, I was always, nevertheless, queasy the first few minutes on board and always petrified if I heard a strange noise

So, the last thing I needed was a Nervous Nellie beside me to make matters worse

Thanks to her "this is the first time I've ever flown" babbling, by the time take-off rolled around, we were two classic examples of "the Bobbsey Chickens" with our eyes riveted to blurred magazine pages, one hand in our mouth

and the other poised and ready to grab a distress bag when necessary.

Amazingly enough, by mid-flight nothing had happened, and I had just relaxed enough to go for a walk for exercise when the plane bumped and some wise-guy up front yelled, "Oops, we hit a Piper Cub."

I dropped to my seat, and right below me the plane started making strange grinding noises.

"This is it," I thought to myself

I looked at my seatmate and asked, "Do you know if you feel anything when a plane crashes?" She didn't answer.

Instead, the steward came across the loud-speaker and said, "The captain has just put down the landing gear--we will be arriving at Madison in a matter of 10 minutes."

And, sure enough, 10 minutes later I emerged victorious to cover the World Dairy Expo and to return four days later to conquer my flight home.