

# 2032

*What follows is our vision for the Zingerman's Community of Businesses (ZCoB) for the year 2032. It began in early 2018. Written by all of the organization's partners, reviewed and commented on by ZCoB staff members, revised, rewritten and improved many times to make it ever more inspiring and effective. It paints a picture of the organization that we're working toward creating.*

*Thanks to all of you who helped make it a reality.*

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It's our 50th year! That's right. The Big 5-O! And the Zingerman's Community of Businesses (ZCoB) is healthier, happier, and more financially sound than ever. We have continued to break creative ground in the worlds of progressive business, service, food, work experiences, love and care. In an era where electronic interaction is now the norm, our personalized, passion-driven, person-to-person connections set us further apart from the mainstream.

As we have for nearly 40 years now, since the 2009 vision was written in 1994, we operate as one coherent community, honoring the 15 to 20 Zingerman's businesses that are a part of the organization. All are located here in the Ann Arbor area. Some of the businesses are "big," others are small. All strive for excellence in their respective areas of expertise. Each business in the ZCoB has a managing partner or partners who own real shares in the business, have a deep passion for what that business does, and are charged with leading its work.

**food that's more flavorful than ever**  
And a host of other super fine stuff!

Great food is how we started in 1982 and it still drives us today. We love how much the entire Ann Arbor area food community has grown over the years—we're happily part of a very healthy culinary ecosystem.

Every dish we serve is fantastic. We've achieved this, in part, because we've never stopped asking, "How can it be better?" Flavor is consistently fuller and finishes are longer; the complexity of flavor has been taken to new heights.

The Great Food Group led the way to define our ZCoB-wide food philosophy, and each business in the ZCoB has found a way to make it their own. It starts with traditional and full-flavored, and gets much more detailed from there. We use our documented philosophy to evaluate each product and recipe. Is it full-flavored, traditional, local? Does it have a known identity? Is it "clean," sustainable, profitable, healthy, differentiating, fun, and so on? Our choices are super intentional.

We started by systematically questioning every choice we were making in our recipes and products from the big stuff down to the smallest details. We pushed aside our limiting beliefs and did what everyone says isn't possible. Are these the best onions? Is this the best butter to serve with our bread? How's the ketchup? When is it the right choice to make an item for ourselves? We found more flavorful options and we chose them. Then, with the ingredients in place, there's the precision and skill in making our food. Our systems and training are working to effectively reduce waste in its 8 different forms. Lean kitchens, we are!

History comes alive every day in our food. While much of the food world follows trends, changing focus every five or six months, we are still committed to re-discovering and educating about traditional, full-flavored foods. We are the experts people call for advice about ingredients, recipes, products, and food prep. We've been known for our historical approach and it continues. We've uncovered foods we never thought existed. Old school sources—little known or understood outside their home regions—are now standards of ZCoB fare.

We've engaged more deeply with our geographic roots. We've initiated the creation of the Great Lakes Foodways Alliance. It's on its way to becoming a nationally-recognized non-profit organization to study foodways, culture, and promote engagement with diverse cultures and cooking styles. It's enabled us to share many of the traditions of the Midwest, rarely understood in the mainstream food world: The really wild wild rice of the Ojibwe people, corn dogs, the African American farming tradition, Wisconsin cheese, Detroit Coney Islands, and Detroit-style Pizza, to name a few.

What else is at the core of our identity? Great Jewish food. It's still a critical differentiator for many of the ZCoB businesses. Originally we were focused on Ashkenazi Jewish food. Now the cuisines of Jews from the Magreb, South America and India, to name a few places in the Jewish Diaspora, are served and sold throughout the ZCoB. The variety and breadth is remarkable.

We teach the public what we do to make and sell food—baking, cooking, cheesemaking, coffee tasting, and loads more. People from all over come to learn the skills and techniques that underlie our craft. There's so much going on that Food Tours has six week-long ZCoB tours that are sold out each year. Guests are tasting, dining, learning, and making in all of our businesses. They're having a

blast while they're doing it. They leave very full, with more food for home, memories, and our many cookbooks.

## **Service that makes You Smile...**

Albert Schweitzer said, "The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." We are truly happy. Each of us recognizes that our work here is more meaningful because of the service we give to our guests and to each other.

The Zingerman's Experience in 2032 is as enriching and amazing as it was at Zingerman's Deli in 1982. We set the bar for service then and we are still setting the bar today. Great service happens everywhere: each element of Zingerman's is a marvelous experience. We are as connected, selfless, and accurate in our opening acts of hospitality with a guest as we are when we recover from a problem. The 3 Steps and the 5 Steps, in their simple elegance, live on and are serving us well. Our customers, our suppliers, our community, our fellow employees—everyone considers Zingerman's the definition of great service.

While other businesses are using technology to offer fast and easy transactions with little human contact, we are finding ways to use technology to provide the Zingerman's Experience. Our guests feel seen, known, and heard while still receiving easy and speedy service. Small considerations, small courtesies, and small kindnesses, habitually practiced, day in and day out, build the experience of great service in our many different business contexts. We make meaningful differences in people's lives, one interaction at a time.

Customization and flexibility are setting us apart. We create a space and service experience that honors people's dietary needs and choices. We are a favorite place to shop for customers with a variety of personal challenges, from life stage considerations like having young children with them while shopping, to being elderly and using a walker. We are known as good places to shop for people living with physical disabilities. We are well aware of the ever-evolving social norms in our community and provide service with sensitivity that reflects this knowledge. We are well known for our staff's empathy and attention to detail when helping people. We engage with each person, open-minded, ready to serve them as they would like, and honoring their uniqueness.

We are well aware that we can only give as good service to guests as we receive from each other. Internal service is foundational to our success. Servant leadership is lived and taught at all levels of the organization. Our Managing Partners, Managers, Supervisors, Shift Leads, and Staff all actively recognize the role they play in creating a culture of great service in the workplace. We have set up systems and events which support positive internal culture and recognition. Compassion and connection radiate across the flow of each day and shine through in our staff feedback.

## **Sustainable finance**

**It's about health, not about wealth**

Before we moved into opening any new businesses, we were intentional to focus inside, making the Zingerman's businesses financially healthy across a range of measures, from profitability to cash to debt. We've stayed that way ever since. As part of that, we developed—and still use—a robust system of engaging with each other about finances that is objective, and out in the open. It's like spell check for finances—when a business starts to show trouble signs in its operating numbers, this system kicks in to provide support. We wonder how we lived without it for so long.

What's changed in the last 12 years? We've made it possible for new startups to be nimble, tailoring our techniques to be good for bootstraps, while at the same time thriving as a mature organization that's hitting the half-a-century mark! The results are all around us. We have balanced growth across the ZCoB. Mature businesses and start-ups, producers and sellers—all work together to make a diverse, financially sound organization. Financial institutions fight for our business. We're in a strong cash position so we can self-finance ventures when it makes sense and manage the rainy days when they come. There are more opportunities for promotion and partnership than ever before.

There are now Zingerman's businesses that don't make or sell food. ZingTrain was the first, but now there are others. Like our food businesses, they make artisan products or offer services at a very high level of quality. This has given our loyal customers even more ways to enjoy the Zingerman's Experience, allowing us to enhance the diversity of our ecosystem for greater organizational health. Each new business enhances the whole of the ZCoB in a sustainable, dynamic way. This has also opened up new avenues for ZCoBbers who want to be Managing Partners here to pursue their passions by starting new Zingerman's businesses.

One of those ZCoB businesses, which we started some time in the 2020s after we'd become financially stable, was one that invests—relatively small at first—amounts of money in values-aligned, non-Zingerman's businesses that we want to support and be involved in, but not own or manage. This work connects us with socially-conscious activities that allow us to be supportive of folks we care about who aren't in the ZCoB, and allows the ZCoB to benefit from those businesses' knowledge and their profitability.

## **a Great Place to work**

**Bring our Whole Selves to Work**

The sense of being seen, welcomed, and appreciated starts on Day One in the ZCoB. We help new staff feel included more effectively and quickly than ever. Every person experiences from all others an acceptance and a rightful sense of belonging. We have achieved a level of trust in our organization that enables

individuals to be able to speak frankly and be confident that their contribution will be heard, acknowledged, and valued.

We feel honored and humbled that so many great people continue to choose to work at Zingerman's. Our environment supports personal and professional growth. Leaders in the organization are committed to helping each person who works here to be themselves in their own unique way in the world. We teach visioning as an integral leadership and life skill that's amazingly embedded in the ZCoB systems and culture. We support this process of development and self-discovery wherever it leads, whether that means folks make a career here or work with us for just a bit and move on to pursue their dreams elsewhere.

The work environment in the ZCoB is thriving, and every corner of the organization is connected, engaged, and creative. Our systems allow for flexibility, opportunity, and carving one's own path. More ZCoBbers than ever are working shifts across business and department lines, facilitating the exchange of ideas and dynamically moving resources to where they are most needed.

Our thriving culture is supported by a compensation package that leads our respective industries and stages of business development. We've figured out creative ways to pay more, charge more where we need to, use continuous improvement to cut costs where we can, and end up with healthy profits in the process. We're showing the world that one can pay staff more and also make more money! We design our benefits programs intentionally and use business resources in ways that are truly meaningful to staff and their families.

We creatively found a way to sell food at cost to every Zingerman's employee. The regularly offered ingredient marketplace pop-ups are extremely popular with ZCoBbers all around! Making our products and sources more accessible to our staff makes it easier to know our food deeply: what it tastes like, where it came from, and how to use it. People come to work with us knowing that life will taste better and feel better. Our workplace is notably healthier than ever—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

## **community roots**

### **Staying put in order to grow**

Our dedication to the Ann Arbor area is a huge piece of what makes us who we are. It challenges us to stay close, it excites us, it makes us creative. It's a powerful and paradoxical paradigm. By choosing to stay local, we have opened up opportunities we never imagined. We understand the wisdom of Zen poet Gary Snyder's words, "First, don't move; and second, find out what that teaches you."

We have become the community organization we always hoped to be. We know the people in the Ann Arbor area and serve them ever more personally. This dedication to working in the community in which we began is a big piece of what continues to draw attention to us and make us special. People visit us not

only for the food and service, but also because they can't get the unique combination of what we do anywhere else. We sell our food across America. But the Zingerman's Experience, delivered in full and in person, is available nowhere else.

We have strong connections with community groups across the area, from churches to senior centers, mosques to book clubs, synagogues to sports teams, hospitals to high schools. All kinds of groups who might not have thought about being connected to Zingerman's are part of our fabric. We looked honestly at ourselves and who we were serving and who did not feel connected to us. We asked why and how we could be appealing to more of our community and how to effectively engage with people. The result is deeper and broader spread roots throughout our community. It feels great and sales have increased, too. Generosity, it turns out, is a solid business practice.

Zingerman's is a point of pride for our neighbors and it's the place that everyone brings out-of-town guests. It's a community of businesses that people enthusiastically choose to work for, and that people choose to invest in. We continue to find creative ways to surprise and delight our guests, whether it's their first time at Zingerman's or they've known us since they were kids. Showing "love and care" in all our actions is part of our mission—and it's more than what we do, it's who we are.

## working with young people

Treating young people and children as valued customers has been core to how we give great service since the beginning. In the past decade, we have connected with the younger members of our community in new ways by developing and offering learning opportunities especially for them. We teach youth about food, visioning, finance, leadership and more. Staff members also love being able to share this Zingerman's experience with their own families.

Our philosophies and organizational recipes are taught from grade school to grad school. We have strong ties with half a dozen local schools, including the colleges and culinary schools that surround us. Each ZCoB business developed its own ways of being involved with kids, and together we've created new approaches to teaching. For students, this work allows them to experience these ideas in practice every day. We are not just telling stories; we are actively working alongside them and learning together! And what's more, we have incorporated what we've learned from these young people into our organization. We value their ideas, their creativity, their palates. This work has deepened our own beliefs about the importance of inclusion and treating everyone with dignity and generosity.

Many of the local learners have come to work in the ZCoB and build on opportunities right here. Even more are putting their studies and practices to work as they head to college or out into the world at large. Kids like to vision, they instinctively understand open book management, they thrive on

appreciations, they lead change. They can learn to think freely, pursuing their own passions while respecting those of their peers. Kids can run their own classrooms, start businesses and not-for-profits. It's energizing and inspiring to see young people actualizing their visions. We feel honored to have played a part in assisting them along their paths.

## *diversity, equity, and inclusion*

We are closer by all measurements to becoming an anti-racist organization with diversity, equity, inclusion and compassion at our core. We continue to seek advice from skilled DEI professionals outside of our organization, and every business participates in its own way.

We prioritize diversity by systematically and incrementally increasing the number of recruits, hires and promotions of candidates of color and candidates from a wide variety of socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Above experience, we value a candidate's desire to learn and receive training. We practice "calling in" (rather than calling out) each other when we encounter or sense the invisible manifestations of white supremacy with a specific protocol that is taught to everyone.

In order to optimize every person's success, we prioritize equity. We replace monolithic policies with those that can be and are regularly adapted to meet individual needs and abilities. Permission to practice this is given to all employees. We regularly share with each other the creative ways in which we have adapted policies in this manner so learning is continuous and widespread. We understand the tricky relationship of impact and intent, acknowledging that harmful impact is not reduced or excused by good intention.

We prioritize inclusivity by giving leadership responsibilities and roles to those whose identities differ from the historic Zingerman's leadership profiles. We have a class to learn and practice dialogue with each other to increase understanding of all points of view. We learn and practice productive ways to address implicit biases and we share our successes in unlearning biases. Throughout the organization, we consistently seek out and listen to the voices and ideas of people of color and those of other non-mainstream identities, ensuring that as many perspectives as possible are always at the decision-making table. We make an effort to habitually acknowledge and appreciate learning from one another.

We believe that we have a legal, moral, and ethical obligation to take risks if we want to change the game. This meant that over ten years ago, we radically changed our recruiting methods to actively search out different populations to apply for opportunities in the ZCoB. We measured the results of our efforts in a quantifiable way. We took those initial steps, and we created a policy-driven approach to guide us in our work. Our guide is a living document, and people are using it in their day-to-day work. We regularly evaluate our hiring practices, classes, and the methods we use to train our managers. We have systematized a

feedback loop to continue to address and drive out unconscious bias. We adjusted our application process to create a culture of equity. This culture guides us in all of our programming, processes, policies, and decision-making so that our practices are in alignment with our vision. When there is an opportunity for advancement in our organization, the path is clear, equitable, and objective. We have knocked down barriers in our systems and culture to allow for all levels of staff to participate in the 1+1 activities that enrich personal work experiences and benefit the ZCoB as a whole.

We have an expectation that everyone in our organization acts with the belief that we are richer in creative resources and energies because we function as a team of people from all backgrounds, orientations and experiences. We use every opportunity to show appreciation and respect toward one another. We reject the domination of white patriarchal beliefs and when invisible or subconscious signs of it show up, we help each other in a caring way to recognize it and address it.

Our daily efforts to prioritize diversity, equity, inclusivity and compassion in our work place have become part of our image as a business, have lowered turnover and raised productivity and creativity, have attracted new customers and increased sales, and have brought us closer to being the company we aspire to be.

## **how we work**

### **Collaboration and Autonomy, Freedom and Accountability**

We embrace the seemingly paradoxical principles of autonomy and collaboration. Each business in the ZCoB feels the benefit of being part of the whole while experiencing the freedom of being an individual. As a Community of Businesses, we truly are stronger together than we are apart. We value the knowledge and experience of our colleagues across department lines, business lines, in all levels of the organization. We have improved our communication methods as we have grown so that information flows throughout the organization seamlessly. Together, we seek out solutions that provide the most benefit to the largest contingent of our organization. When choosing between a path that is best for *one* of our businesses, or a path that is great for *multiple* businesses, we select the option that shares the positive impact amongst many. We've defined this synergy and made it visible: tracking it at ZCoB huddles, and building it into ZAP goals. These metrics have made it much easier to see how helping each other makes a difference. We actively teach and use the Collaboration Compact, which gives us a clear set of expectations and guidelines on how to do this work well. As a ZCoB, we regularly evaluate our organizational blindspots and make strategic plans to fill the gaps. We identify skill sets and functions that can benefit the whole, and we have found ways to put resources behind those efforts, leading to meaningful impact.

Success starts with each of us. We hold ourselves accountable for our own commitments. We also respectfully hold each other accountable by asking questions, providing feedback, and agreeing up-front on rewards and creative

consequences. We think of holding each other accountable as an act of service. We don't place blame; we offer to help. We acknowledge that no matter where we are in our career paths, we are all continually learning and developing as individuals.

## ***moving at the speed of yes***

### **Reflection and Action**

We keep our minds open to innovation. We champion a creative culture of possibility and invention. When someone shares a new idea, we ask, "How can we make that work here?" We engage in creative thinking and open communication to explore those ideas. We ask questions, seeking to understand. We learn and grow with eyes and hearts open. We lean towards freedom and experimentation. It's a delicate balance—stewardship of past practices and agreements and embracing new approaches. We are intentional about our decisions to change, and actively choose when it is best to stay the course. We are quick to engage in low-risk innovation opportunities that fit within the framework of our Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles. Sometimes we take big risks, knowing that our organization is strong, resilient, and that the risk of potential failure will not be catastrophic.

ZCoB Partners and leaders are practiced in the art of Followership. As Sir Kenneth Robinson said, "The role of a creative leader is not to have all the ideas; it's to create a culture where everyone can have ideas and feel they're valued." We believe that the people doing the work are the best equipped to make recommendations for improving that work. We all have both the opportunity and the responsibility to shape the organization that we want. Leading change at Zingerman's is a rewarding process that is accessible to everyone here.

We have established an Experiential Learning Lab and we teach its systems in Basic Orientation. We believe that hands-on learning, by trying things out, will illuminate solutions. We have seen how incremental changes create forward momentum. We approach everything we do in the spirit of learning and continuous improvement. This style of going for greatness has been put into practice in all facets of our work, from food to finance, from service improvements to internal operations.

## ***walking new Paths***

### **Succession and Continuity**

Over the last twelve years we've seen a successful transition from Ari and Paul as founders heading the ZCoB to a mode of governance that will last beyond the tenure of any individual. While long-time ZCoB leaders continue in important roles, a couple of new "generations" of insightful, collaborative folks have stepped forward. Past Partners are still involved and helping to guide us. The ZCoB has grown stronger through that transition.

Organizational governance processes are clear. We embrace the challenge of building freedom for all while holding ourselves coherently and caringly together. We cultivate decisions, getting people on board, and when we are all excited and behind an idea, the positive energy is palpable. We have chosen decision-making tools that balance leadership, followership, speed, and business need. We built this model with the belief that power and ownership should be shared, not hoarded.

Ownership is now spread more deeply and widely throughout the organization and into our community. Half our staff own Community Shares. Community Share Owners are more involved than ever in leading the ZCoB. In addition to their daily duties, they're teachers, leaders, systems designers, and culture builders who enhance the collective wisdom of Zingerman's. We added a second type of shares in our "brand"—Legacy Shares—which has provided another avenue for investing in the organization with all of the ups (and at times, some downs) of stock ownership. Many businesses have figured out their own forms of staff ownership as well.

## *working in harmony with nature*

We've successfully adopted a model of sustainability to all aspects of our work. A Guiding Principle of Sustainability describes the culture of our work as economically viable, socially responsible, and ecologically sound. We work to harmonize the many parts of our organizational ecosystem; people and place, the planet and our processes come together and all are better for the collaboration. Everyone and everything we engage with—in our personal and professional lives; our business and community; our customers and staff; our suppliers and environment—are working in harmony with nature. Whether it's gardens supporting our businesses; the traffic flow in our businesses; the way we organize meetings, design processes and job descriptions; how we create organizational structures, explore creativity, etc., we design with natural, sustainable systems in mind. All of our businesses across the ZCoB have taken to heart the Lean principle of waste reduction. Every business has found ways to both use less and create less waste in our production and service. Ninety-five percent of what we have left over is either upcycled, recycled, or composted.

We had to take a hard look at how we're moving around the city, and why we're doing it. We found we could travel in ways that are healthier, and build a better community than we ever could have thought. The impact was huge on the ZCoB. After we started tracking our mileage, we found that we have reduced our single person miles driven in cars by 40%, really helping to support the city. We also came up with more efficient routes for deliveries, and we've completely electrified our fleet of delivery vehicles.

We are stewards of—and also a part of—the planet. When we source each ingredient we use, we aim to make thoughtful and purposeful choices, keeping environmental sustainability, energy usage, and ethics in mind. We continue to find that great taste is connected to and reflective of the care the producer takes

in producing their products. We consider the production methods of the products we use and sell, and through our promotion of these products, we help highlight the benefits of sustainable and regenerative production methods. We have found ways to support working this way, knowing it may cost us more financially at the onset. We have found ways to balance and offset these costs by streamlining each area of our work, rarely needing to raise our prices in an effort to support our sustainability goals. Our customers care about being connected to this work we are doing, and we actively share our learnings with them.

There are improvements we have made that we couldn't have imagined back when we wrote this vision, in so many ways, large and small. We are flexible, creative, and responsive. With the lead of Planet Zing, we work each day with these key factors in mind: Food Choices, Our Waste Stream, Responsible Packaging, Lean Culture, and Facilities Management. We measure our energy production each month in each business. We have gone beyond Net Zero—we are Net Positive.

## **Love and Care**

Every act in the ZCoB is an act of love. Acts to care and connect. To take the implementation of our mission to greater heights than ever. We view everyone through the lens of a compassionate heart, choosing patience and positive beliefs. We pause to appreciate the beauty in everyone and everything we work with. We are mindfully conscious of how our decisions impact the people we work with, our customers, and the larger community. We understand that the energy we put into every interaction is essential. We are self-reflective and intentional in our work in this way.

Compassion is a deep understanding of the feelings and experiences of others. Working in this way allows us to demonstrate care, and genuine care for others creates real connections. It makes us authentic. These authentic connections create trust, cooperation, and eagerness to work together. We lead with compassion.

How does this look if disagreements or frustrations arise today? We engage and interact with each other from a place of love, knowing that welcoming discomfort can be key to our growth and better understanding of each other and ourselves. We first assume positive intent in our engagement. We have caring interactions even when we disagree—feeling heard, and having courageous conversations without contempt. We choose positive beliefs as we support each other on our paths of growth. We share this journey together.

We share the Zingerman's Experience  
Selling food that makes you happy  
Giving service that makes you smile  
In passionate pursuit of our mission  
Showing love and care in all our actions  
To enrich as many lives as we possibly can.