

# 2020

*"Learn to see, and then you'll know that there is no end to the new worlds of our vision."  
The Teachings of Don Juan by Carlos Castaneda*

*What follows is our vision for the ZCoB for the year 2020. It began in the winter of 2006. Written by all of the organization's managing partners, reviewed and commented on by hundreds of 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 will create. This is Zingerman's in the year 2020.*

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

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In the Zingerman's Community of Businesses, we live our mission. Our guiding principles manage our day-to-day actions. People we work with and serve comment on our integrity. "You really do what you say you do. And when you don't, you make it right." We have developed a radical model of responsible business growth in concert with our guiding principles and inspired by a commitment to our community. Our work leads to positive change around the country and even across the world.

## **Zingerman's Guiding Principles**

Great Food  
Great Service  
A Great Place to Shop & Eat  
Solid Profits  
A Great Place to Work  
Strong Relationships  
A Place to Learn  
An Active Part of Our Community

# Zingerman's Vision for the Year 2020

## **Radical (radík'l)**

*definition 1 a) of or from the root or roots;  
going to the foundation or source of something;  
fundamental; basic*

## **better tomorrow than today**

### **Changing Our World**

*"Any invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come."*

Victor Hugo

We've successfully applied the model of sustainability to all aspects of our work. Today in 2020 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 better than they were when we embarked on this vision fifteen years ago. We have created a community of businesses where people willingly bring their whole selves to work. We feel free to express ourselves and tap into our deepest creative potential. We believe in what we are doing and integrate our sense of purpose into who we are.

Our work is driven from our guiding principles and focused on caring and cooperation. We empower and support each other and our workforce is representative of our community and its racial diversity. We've built thousands of strong, sustainable relationships and they nurture our growth.

We have a strategy for growth that is about the long-term economic health of our Community of Businesses and our local economy. When we talk about "great service" we refer not only to our customers, our community and each other, but also to our planet; we push ourselves to go beyond basic compliance on environmental issues.

We must be profitable in order to survive but our primary purpose is to contribute to a better life for everyone we touch. We do this by providing meaningful work, dignified employment, beneficial goods and services, and relationships of trust and caring that are the foundations of a healthy community. Through this work we have helped to create true prosperity, economic security and democracy in our larger community.

We know that we are a small presence in the universe; we make and sell food. Rather than focusing on a few grand gestures, we take hundreds and thousands of small actions with great passion and great love. We are changing the world with every transaction. Everyone who comes in contact with our organization—employees, customers, and suppliers, people asking for donations, journalists

and reporters, public officials—leaves with the perception that we exist in order to be of service. We invite you to join us.

## growing locally

### 12-18 Vibrant Businesses

The Zingerman's Community of Businesses (ZCoB) is more vital than at any time in its history. All 12 - 18 unique, food-related businesses are located in the Ann Arbor area. We are strongly rooted in the local *terroir* and our growth provides opportunities to individuals and to our whole community. The ZCoB is driven by people who bring their outsider ideas inside our business, follow the Path to Partnership and see their businesses flourish. Passionate managing partners are present in each unique ZCoB business making a big organization like ours feel small, nimble and close. People who shop with us know we listen and respond. While each business is world class in its approach to food and service, we feel like the corner store.

Each Zingerman's business is an exciting leader in its field and enhances the performance of the entire ZCoB. Each partner shares our organizational values and has passion and drive to develop their skills so their business contributes positively to all three bottom lines in sustainable ways. We are innovative, creative, and set high standards for the industry and for ourselves.

Together we work as a single organization, successfully navigating the challenges of interdependency. We know that while we operate our businesses independently day to day, our fates are linked financially and emotionally. Businesses push each other to become better, employees trade ideas and best practices more than ever. We've built a diverse community in which each member business shares a common vision, a common road map, a common set of guiding principles. We are strongly committed to each other's success.

Everyone here has embraced the reality that we all have multiple—and sometimes conflicting—roles to play, that we often change “hats” several times in a single day. Everyone takes responsibility for successfully leading us towards the ZCoB's mission, principles and bottom line performance. We feel a sense of connectedness to people in work environments very different from ours and a responsibility to support them. We act as a Community of Businesses to make the lives of everyone around us better.

## how does it taste?

### Radically Better Food

The food we sell here in 2020 is better than we ever imagined it could be back when we wrote this. In the same way that the “new” Zingerman's Bakehouse radically elevated the quality of bread we offered in 1992, we've found a host of

new ways to very significantly improve the flavor and authenticity of everything we serve.

Great food is everywhere you go at Zingerman's. Some changes have been large, some very small. Perhaps the hardest trick to pull off has been making every dish we serve fantastic. We're seeing guests do double-takes with every bite because they can't believe how good the food tastes. They're coming back again and again, often ordering the same dish because they just can't get enough of it.

We've achieved this level, in part, because we've never stopping asking, "How can it be better?" Meaningful improvements happen all the time, at all levels of the organization. We've been searching ever more actively, tasting more critically, learning with more enthusiasm and fiercely championing food producers we've encouraged and nurtured. We take pride in connecting more diverse foods with greater numbers of guests in ways we never thought possible. The call to radically better food led us to build ever-stronger relationships with every player in our food chain. And we've influenced businesses beyond ours—there's better food everywhere in Ann Arbor and our customers care about eating well more than ever.

Our goal has never been to invent the next great dish, just serve food with great flavor. Zingerman's isn't tracking trends to keep up with the food fashions. We're looking far and wide and often back in time, to cultures and continents that might not be getting a lot of media attention but that have been producing incredible food for centuries. Many times that means rediscovering and reinvigorating historical classics; it's a thrill to find old memories, foods our grandparents ate, then bring them to our customers and create a new generation of memories. We find and promote great food with passion, a mission to educate and a down-to-earth attitude. We know radically better food can come from simple, local ingredients. Or it can come from a spice imported from across the world. Whatever its source, you really can taste the difference.

## **crazy for customers**

### **Radically Better Service**

Even though our Community of Businesses has almost doubled in size since 2006, walking into any business in 2020 is as intimate an experience as walking into Zingerman's Deli in 1982. We're amazed that we've actually been able to increase the level of service while growing into a bigger business. We make it so natural and comfortable for everyone involved it doesn't seem like work at all. Great service happens everywhere: every element of Zingerman's is a great experience. We are as charming, selfless and accurate in our opening acts of hospitality towards a guest as we are when we recover from a problem. Our customers, our suppliers, our community, our fellow employees—everyone considers Zingerman's the standard bearer. We do the things everyone says a business can't do. We define great service.

Our commitment to serving others is inspiring, and it finds its way into everything we do. We make it happen in small but meaningful ways. A free brownie finds its way into a get well soon package. An accountant interrupts her regular work flow to go take out the kitchen trash. There are also extraordinary acts of service that surprise even seasoned veterans who thought they'd seen it all. A server volunteers to make things right by delivering a forgotten product to a guest's home. The cook smiles and happily makes something that's not on the menu and brings it out to the table personally.

Each of us recognizes that our work here is more meaningful because of the service we give to our guests and to each other. We really do make a positive difference in people's lives. Servant Leadership attracts individuals who thrive on giving exceptional service to everyone they come in contact with—staff, guests, the organization overall and the community—every day. Service here is so pervasive it's contagious. You can't help but being caught up in its challenge and thrill.

## **books wide open**

### **Radically Better Finance**

A rich, generous culture of responsible finance exists everywhere at Zingerman's. Inside all our meetings, from staff huddles to partner-level strategy sessions, we're successfully performing a difficult financial balancing act: to seek profit not for its own sake, but because it gives us the opportunity to make the world a better place. We achieve short-term profits that make us viable while building for a positive financial future. We use sound financial practices to make our businesses, our suppliers' businesses, our community and our employees' lives richer not just now, but for the long term. If someone working in the ZCoB has a personal vision of financial success and if it can be done within the context of our vision and values, we're committed to helping them achieve it. In fact, we use a measure of staff members' personal financial standing as one of the ways we measure our organizational success. The work that we do funds Zingerman's Community of Businesses Foundation, allowing us to give back more than ever to our community, making us a model for other businesses to learn how to increase their giving.

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.

We've found a way to share the growth and financial opportunity of the ZCoB at an organizational level. While back in '07 none of us could have guessed what the creative solution was going to be, it has worked out amazingly well. It supported the already high level of commitment from members of the ZCoB that

we had fifteen years ago and enabled us to share big, company-wide wins.

Our culture of finance has helped every person in our organization realize that numbers can be fun and we consistently get great financial results. Outside visitors are blown away by the level of involvement and understanding that frontline people of all ages, job responsibilities and seniority display in their work. They're also stunned that our open culture extends to folks outside the ZCoB—we share our “secrets” with other businesses and, in so doing, help others achieve financial success.

## science! (for food folks)

### **Intentional Technology**

We actively use technology to help support every part of Vision 2020. But let's be clear: “technology” in our world doesn't necessarily mean something fancy or high tech. It can be ancient stone milling methods—thousands of years old, but still the best technology out there to produce some foods.

We've successfully used technology wherever we could to enhance the Zingerman's Experience. It's been simple, proven ancient food technology that improves the quality of what we make. (If there's a tool that makes the food more flavorful, and more traditional in its taste, that's for us.) It's communication technology that helps us deepen and broaden supplier relationships and help improve the quality of our ingredients. It's marketing technology that allows us to sell more without wasting resources. It's educational technology that makes training easier and more effective, and helps us connect more smoothly with our customers and community.

We're guided by Webster's unglamorous definition of technology as, “a technical method of achieving a practical purpose” and it has led to great improvements in all aspects of our work. We have developed practical, time-tested technology that helps front line people provide better food and service, reduces menial tasks and mistakes, improves our financial contributions to the bottom line and let's everyone participate more creatively and actively in improving our work and food. Technology is a web that links our efforts in finance with service, food with education, and so on. It's something we pursue intentionally and actively, but it's never technology just for technology's sake.

## and now for a sidebar conversation

### **We Put The F U in Fun**

We have successfully quantified fun, measured fun, and improved our fun factor by at least 380% since 2007. We actively teach people how to have fun at work. We have games to increase the volume of fun we experience and reward

ourselves with added fun. Organizations from around the world come visit us for seminars, to take notes, to see fun in the works, to bring new ideas and techniques back to their own businesses.

When we're tired of having so much fun at work we all have the opportunity to escape to the Zingerman's recreation property—a small tract of land the Zingerman's Community of Businesses purchased to give us all a place to let our hair down and ignore fun for as long as we can stand it. It's become a great benefit for all our staff, a place to learn, relax, and sometimes to even share spreadsheets.

Putting fun in everything we do—from packaging to presentations—keeps us sane and healthy, and our customers happy and engaged. We're joking far too much to be considered food snobs or “corporate.” (We've even had at least two unfortunate minor injuries caused by excessive laughter in the workplace.)

## **a place of higher learning**

### **Zingerman's is an Education Destination**

People come from around the world to learn about almost everything we do: baking, cooking, cheese making, coffee roasting, service, open book finance, leadership, operations, marketing, facilitation, food-friendly technology, sustainable farming, community giving and more. Weekdays and weekends in Ann Arbor are filled with visitors learning about what Zingerman's is up to in settings casual and formal.

We're inventing and rediscovering ways to work, constantly teaching them within and outside Zingerman's. We teach people to learn so they learn to teach. Many employees have come to work here especially to further their education, be it about food, people or organizational development. There's a well-established internship program with local educational institutions and interested individuals who are passionate about learning and getting hands-on experience.

When employees move on it's with a sense of self-confidence and with experiences they can use to better the next organization they're part of. Zingerman's alumni—employees and students—have gone on to become successful leaders and teachers in their own settings. They've developed a strong network of support for each other, improving their respective organizations and sharing what they've learned at annual conferences, reunions, blogs, classrooms and offices around the world.

Half a dozen Zingerman's staff members have become published authors. We've established regular scholarships in the community for people in need that get them successfully into food careers. We offer shared work arrangements for hourly staff and managers with other like-minded businesses. We pursue educational opportunities at every turn: short courses, advanced degrees, sabbaticals, externships, entertainment shows, you name it. When the press lists

places around the country to learn food and business in an alternative but highly effective and fun setting, Zingerman's is always near the top.

Education is one of our passions. The more we teach, the more we learn. The more we teach, the more customers and staff are drawn to visit and shop with us. The more we teach and learn together, the more effectively we connect with each other, strengthen our culture, and improve the lives of everyone we interact with. We thrive on sharing information lavishly.

## opportunity and responsibility for everyone

### **Committed to Success Across the Organization**

We provide a wealth of opportunities for people at every level of the organization. No matter what position we hold, we all have both the opportunity and the responsibility to help create the organization that we want to be a part of. Similarly, we have the opportunity and responsibility to grow and prosper within it as individuals.

Opportunities abound, and we all take advantage of them. Many of us have visited suppliers around the country and the world to learn about our food and where it comes from. We have international exchange programs for staff, all developed by the people who want to experience them. Educational opportunities have multiplied. Hundreds of us at every level—from partners through to part timers—have gained U of Z degrees and we're teaching classes to each other and to the public left and right. Others have taken advantage of our scholarship program to further their learning outside of the organization. Financial opportunities abound in the form of gainsharing, performance bonuses, mini games, ZCoB-wide games, 401k plans, benefits and more. Our training on personal financial management—supported by the money that flows from great bottom line performance across the organization—has helped everyone enhance their personal financial health.

Each member of the ZCoB acts as an effective leader in his or her work. We take responsibility for ourselves, our actions, our feelings and our careers, always mindful to include others in our success. We're entrepreneurial, always treating our work like we own it. Since 2009 more than a few of us have moved up in the organization to become managing partners. But no matter what the position, everyone is actively learning and expanding their knowledge of food, service and finance, creating opportunities for themselves and others along the way as we build a better organization and more positive community.

A spirit of generosity infuses all that we do and all that we are. We have created something of significance that is inclusive, positive and life affirming. We believe that we have been successful because we have a vision and a strategy that seeks to promote the human potential that surrounds us.