

This is what grocery shopping looks like if you're a member of the Brighton Food Cooperative Ordering Club. It's do-it-yourself food shopping.

"24086," Parrish called out a product number, handing a crate of juice to member Kelley Stott. Another member checks the product off a list on a clip board.

"Got it," she said.

"90852,"

"Got it."

"28988, You guys are a lot more awake this morning," the Iowa-based truck driver said.

Actually, the members of the Brighton Food Co-op were more awake than usual — the truck from Blooming Prairie food distributor usually arrives in Brighton at 7 a.m. every other Saturday, and the members have to unload, sort, keep accounts and pay up before they can take the week's groceries home. It's less expensive but far more complicated than shopping at the supermarket, but members say they enjoy being manager, stocker, clerk and shopper in the way they get their food.

In a very general definition, a cooperative is a group of people who pool their efforts and funds to obtain something less expensively and more efficiently. Communities have applied the idea to food for years.

The members of the Brighton Food Co-op, about 40-50 currently, are responsible for ordering food for the group and accounting for payment, as well as meeting the truck at the Father's House early Saturday mornings and stocking the food in the church gym, which the group rents for their weekly distributions.

"It's just a lot more fun than grocery shopping" said Ann Berger of Howell. She joined the Brighton Food Co-op about a year ago, but she's participated in other food co-ops for 20 years.

Every other Saturday, the truck from Blooming Prairie Warehouse delivers packages



Co-op member Ann Berger separates boxed quantities into individual family orders.

products, including cereals, juices, household cleaners, cosmetics, pet foods, coffee and tea. The alternating weeks, on Friday

evenings, several vendors come to Brighton to sell produce, cheeses, breads, bulk foods, organic meats, dairy products,

and even spices and books.

Berger said she gets all the food she needs to feed her family of six from the weekly food

from snacks, salty snack foods and carbonated drinks through Blooming Prairie.

"But these 'junk foods' generally manage to sneak real nutritive value into the product rather than just empty calories, and they avoid substances like pesticide residues and hydrogenated oils," he said.

Deam Kesik of Brighton said she trusts the organic products more than foods on grocery store shelves.

So do you have to be health conscious to get your food from the Brighton Food Co-op? Kathy Stott of Pinckney said you almost can't avoid it.

"You don't need to do aerobics," she joked, peeling off a fleece jacket on a break from hauling boxes into the gym. "So far, it's been worth it."

Members join the food co-op for the healthy foods, for the Saturday morning companionship and for the savings.

The one-time membership fee to join the Brighton Food Co-op is \$10. Brown said that \$300 worth of products through the co-op might cost him about \$400.

However, Brown serves as communications coordinator and Web master for the co-op and puts in 10-20 hours of labor to get those products through the co-op. But there's some attitude involved, as well.

"Even at less than minimum wage," he said, "I would see huge benefit in participating in a cooperative effort that thumbs its nose at the profit-obsessed commercial food establishment while offering both educational enlightenment and social enjoyment."

Members have to enjoy the food co-op activities, or they'll go back to the supermarket. Most members who stick with the co-op like the companionship of those early Saturday morning deliveries and the control they can have in the food they eat.

"I like the feeling of being part of the process of what ends up on your (plate)," Brown said.