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SEATTLE GROCER LEADS INDUSTRY IN IMPLEMENTING \$15 ENTRY LEVEL WAGE
Central Co-op and UFCW grocery employees approve contract with \$15 per hour entry level wage and strong benefits package

(Seattle – Jan. 22, 2015) -- Seattle's Central Co-op, a community-owned grocery store in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, today signed a contract with its grocery employees. The Co-op and its employees, represented by UFCW 21, agreed to an entry-level wage of \$15 per hour, which goes into effect after completion of a 60-day trial period.

Central Co-op believes that this contract sets the highest entry-level wage and one of the best benefit packages for any group of grocery employees in the nation. According to Payscale.com, the 90th percentile starting wage for grocery store employees is \$11.10 per hour.

"We are very proud to take a leadership position on wages within our industry along with our partners from the UFCW," said Central Co-op General Manager Dan Arnett. "Ensuring real living wages for all staff and exceptional benefits is a testament to our cooperative identity. Many will say we have taken a bold risk. I think we have simply shown the courage to live up to our community ideals."

The governing documents of Central Co-op contain a foundational commitment to offering high quality jobs and a living wage. Central Co-op's implementation of a \$15 per hour entry-level wage comes seven years ahead of the deadline laid out in Seattle City Minimum Wage Ordinance (no. 124490.)

"Seattle's Central Co-op's commitment to improved wages and benefits for their staff members is exemplary," said C.E. Pugh, Chief Operating Officer at National Cooperative Grocers (NCG). "We are very proud of Central Co-op for investing in those who contribute so much to the co-op's continued success—their employees. This is a clear demonstration of the way that food co-ops understand the connection between the quality of life of the staff and the life of the business."

In 2012, the NCG conducted a study in which they found that, on average, co-ops across the country offered wages and benefits packages that were higher than their conventional counterparts -- \$14.31 per hour at co-ops compared to \$13.35 at conventional retailers.

Ninety-two percent of Central Co-op employees are union-represented. The new UFCW contract covers about 89 percent of the Co-op's union-represented employees, and Co-op leadership has decided to extend the same entry-level wages to the rest of its union employees at the same time.

The rates are retroactive to November 1, 2014. This puts the Co-op's average hourly wage at \$20.45 per hour today.

The contract also provides health, dental and vision insurance for employees who work 20 or more hours per week, setting them apart from the majority in the grocery industry. According to the NCG report, only 56 percent of employees at conventional retailers are eligible for health insurance.

Other benefits in the Central Co-op/UFCW 21 contract include:

- Employees who on average work 20 hours or more per week are eligible to apply for medical and dental coverage, including vision coverage, with 100 percent coverage for those averaging 28-40 hours per week and 60 percent coverage for those averaging 20-28 hours per week.
- Dependent child and Spouse/Domestic Partner coverage is also available for employees averaging 28-40 hours per week. The co-op will pay 80 percent for a dependent child, and 70 percent for a spouse/domestic partner.

About Central Co-op

Central Co-op is a community-owned natural foods cooperative located at the top of Seattle's Capitol Hill. A complete grocery store dedicated to sustainable practices and the Washington food economy, Central Co-op features an organic produce department, sustainably raised and harvested meat and seafood, an in-house deli and juice bar, a large selection of bulk goods and herbs, an extensive health and wellness section and unique gifts. Open to everyone, seven days a week. More information is available at www.centralcoop.coop.

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