NEW SEASONS MARKET
PREMIER EMPLOYER PROJECT
Fall 2012
Funded by THE HITACHI FOUNDATION
INTRODUCTION
In 1999 three families and 50 friends decided they wanted to create a grocery business that had a true commitment to its community by maintaining a progressive workplace and promoting sustainable agriculture. On Leap Day in 2000 the first New Seasons Market store opened in Portland, Oregon.

New Seasons Market is different than a typical grocery store. Every store is influenced by input from the neighborhood. It gathers input by talking to local residents and business owners and attending neighborhood and business associations meetings. Although the core product offerings are consistent, different stores often carry different product selections, such as the wellness department, based on customer requests. Each store also has a restaurant kitchen run by a professional chef that prepares its own deli and fresh-to-eat food on-site.

THE FRIENDLIEST STORE IN TOWN
To fulfill its promise of being to the friendliest store in town New Seasons Market has implemented many employee practices to ensure it has the friendliest employees who consistently and reliably deliver exceptional customer service. It knows that this trait makes the grocery store stand out among its competitors and that its employees are its competitive advantage.

EMPLOYEE PRACTICES AT A GLANCE
Taking good care of its employees starts during the application process and continues from that day until the employee exits the company.

GENEROUS COMPENSATION PACKAGE
Living wages, a profit sharing plan, a retirement plan, medical benefits, product discounts and free food help employees achieve a quality standard of living.
TRAINING AND EDUCATION
New Seasons Market provides ongoing training, mentoring and coaching to build up a pipeline of employees who provide exceptional customer service and are suitable for promotion.

STORE SUPPORT
New Seasons Market made the conscious decision to call its main administrative offices Store Support instead of ‘headquarters’ or ‘main office.’

LIFESTYLE SCHEDULING
New Seasons strives to provide employees stable, predictable schedules to increase their quality of life.

CONTINOUS IMPROVEMENT
New Seasons Market depends on employees to drive continuous improvement. They have implemented several initiatives to encourage this behavior, including Speak Up Cards and a Shout Out Board.

INCENTIVES TO GO ABOVE AND BEYOND
New Seasons Market has created several programs to help employees meet their personal goals and overcome personal challenges, such as a staff loan program, community service time off, home buying program, vacation donations and healthy beginnings for new moms and babies.

BUSINESS RESULTS
In just over 12 years, New Seasons Market has grown from one to 12 stores and currently has plans to open two more in the Portland Metro area. They are also opening a centralized kitchen center to prepare their ready-to-go food. Their employee practices have resulted in low turnover, recruitment, and training costs as well as high customer loyalty and continuous improvement in the customer’s shopping experience. The company has evolved into a
stable, agile, and resilient company as a result of its customer- and employee-centric operating commitment.

EMPLOYEE PRACTICES

GENEROUS COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

LIVING WAGES
All employees start at a minimum of $10.00 per hour, which is above the Federal and Oregon minimum wage rates. They receive an annual review with input from their peers. In addition to reviewing their progress, employees may receive a wage increase based on their performance. Employees and supervisors also use the annual review time to set goals and discuss the employee’s career path with New Seasons Market.

PROFIT SHARING PLAN
Twice a year, New Seasons Market distributes 20 percent of after-tax-profit as profit share. Rather than just decide the structure of their profit-sharing program, they asked employees to help design it.

Employees are eligible when their one-year anniversary falls within a six-month profit share window. The overall amount shared is calculated based on the whole company’s performance. The amount each employee receives is calculated based on their longevity with the company rather than their salary, sending a clear message that all employees matter regardless of salary.

RETIREMENT PLAN
New Seasons Market offers a 401(k) for employees over the age of 21 who have worked for the company for six months. Employees may contribute from 1 percent up to 75 percent of their pre-tax income, and New Seasons Market will match 50 percent of every dollar up to the first 5 percent of the employees deferred salary.

MEDICAL BENEFITS
All hourly staff members who work a minimum of one shift per week and who have successfully completed their three-month orientation are eligible for medical benefits. For employees who work more than 20 hours per week, New Seasons Market pays 80 percent of the monthly premium for the employee and for dependents. For employees who work less than 20 hours per week, but at least one shift, New Seasons Market pays 50 percent of the monthly premium for the employee and eligible dependents.
DISCOUNT CARD
Employees receive a 20 percent discount on almost all products that New Seasons Market sells. Full-time and part-time employees are eligible on their first day and receive a discount card that can be used any time the stores are open. Employees that work on-call and do not have a regular schedule can receive the discount on the days they work. Temporary and contract staff members are not eligible. Interns receive a temporary discount card that is good through the dates of their internship.

New Seasons Market recently calculated that the discounts employees receive average out to an additional 65 cents for every hour worked.

FREE PRODUCT
Typical of a grocery store, New Seasons Market often has perishable products that have reached their expiration date but are still edible and sample product that have been supplied to the company to try. Employees are encouraged to take these products free of charge.

To take these products from the store, employees must complete a Product Loss Form, also called a Blue Slip, acquired from the appropriate department manager. The employee then takes the product and the blue slip through the checkout line, which authorizes the employee to take the product out of the store and removes it from inventory.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION
NEW HIRE ONBOARDING
All new hires are put on a probationary period to give both New Seasons Market and the employee ample opportunity to see if the job and staff member are a good fit.

Orientation on the first day of employment covers topics common to most companies, including review of the employee handbook and benefits program and learning about the history of the company and its charitable giving program. Orientation also includes a tour of the store to learn the layout and slight differences that make their store unique. Because New Seasons Market strives to feel like a neighborhood store, each location has its own unique customer experience.
Unique to New Seasons Market is their version of Monopoly’s ‘Get Out of Jail Free’ card. All new employees receive a laminated card that encourages them to use their best judgment in providing great customer service. This allows employees to put New Seasons high customer service standards into action. The card sets the mood and tone for their employment with New Seasons Market as employees use their best judgment without fear of making the wrong decision or going overboard.

For the first few weeks, new employees mostly shadow other employees—chosen because they model exceptional customer service combined with high productivity—to get a feel for the tasks, rhythm and flow of their position.

During this time, their supervisor and co-workers observe them to better understand how they learn and adapt their teaching style as appropriate. Productivity expectations are placed on hold as the new employees are in a learning mode. New Seasons Market says they do not want someone learning a new job to feel like they cannot make mistakes.
ONGOING TRAINING, MENTORING AND COACHING

Ongoing training is available to all staff including a Supervisory Class Training program for any staff member interested in being a part of a management career path.

PROMOTING WITHIN

New Seasons strives to promote from within the company as much possible. It has found that promoting from within decreases onboarding and training costs and increases retention as the company and the employees have already determined they are a good cultural fit together. New positions are posted and it is not unusual for a supervisor or manager to encourage an employee to apply.

EMPLOYEE STORY: FORREST G., STORE MANAGER

In the decade since Forrest first started working for New Seasons Market, he has held seven different positions of increasing responsibility and worked at five different store locations.

Forrest was a recent college graduate when he started working in the overnight freight department. After six months in his first position, he applied for and was promoted to supervisor of the night shift. After six months in the position, an assistant perishable grocery manager position came open. He expressed interest in the position to his manager, who encouraged him to apply.

After eight months in that position, another store was looking for a perishable grocery manager. Forrest was recommended for that position and transferred to a new store. After eight months in that position, he was promoted to grocery manger at another store location, which meant managing a bigger department.

It was at about this time that Forrest realized what had started off as a temporary, post-college job was quickly turning into a career. He thought about his aspirations within New Seasons Market and expressed interest in becoming an assistant store manager. He applied for the next position
that came open, but was told he was not quite ready. Six months later, he was contacted by the Human Resources Manager about another, open assistant store manager position.

Now a store manager, Forrest attributes much of his success to the ongoing mentoring, coaching and training he received as an assistant store manager. In that position, he was groomed to take over as store manager. Years later when the store manager resigned, Forrest was promoted to run his first store. Based on his success, New Seasons Market moved him to a new store a year later.

Forrest says New Seasons Market has evolved a lot over the past decade. As the store has grown and matured, so has its employee development program. The company now offers leadership and supervisory training classes.

Forrest says that working for New Seasons Market is more than just a grocery store job. The possibility of growth keeps employees engaged and motivated. It’s a progressive workplace that gives him the opportunity to mentor and coach others the way he’s been mentored and coached.

STORE SUPPORT
New Seasons Market made the conscious decision to call its main administrative offices Store Support instead of ‘headquarters’ or ‘main ‘office.’ Customer service starts internally, which breeds superior external relations.

Almost everyone in leadership from Store Support, including the CEO, works in the stores during the holiday season, doing everything from bagging groceries, taking grocery bags to cars, cleaning messes in the aisles, and gathering grocery carts from the parking lot.

LIFESTYLE SCHEDULING
New Seasons Market operates in an industry in which sales fluctuate with the seasons and the needs of the business are constantly evolving. These factors can create unpredictable scheduling. It also knows the challenges employees face in planning for their personal or family expenses, as well as personal logistics—like childcare—when their schedules are unpredictable.

One of the ways New Seasons Market helps employees achieve a higher quality of living is through its Lifestyle Scheduling program. Although it does not apply to every position, it strives to provide as many employees as possible a stable, predictable schedule.

Conditions that could cause a change in schedules include a sustained decline in sales, a dramatic increase in sales, a department or position being eliminated, and/or a department being
reorganized to best meet the needs of customers or the business. In rare past instances when a department was phased out, New Seasons Market placed staff members in new positions and maintained their wages at existing levels. Even during the economic recession that began in the fall of 2008, New Seasons Market has not laid off any of its employees or cut staff hours.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

SPEAK UP CARDS
When employees see opportunities for improvement they can either go directly to their supervisor or remain anonymous by completing a Speak Up card, which are found in the break room. Upon receiving the information, supervisors respond to the questions directly if contact information is supplied or publicly on the staff board.

SHOUT OUT BOARD
Shout Out Boards are on the path from the break room to the sales floor. Employees use them to recognize other employees who did something amazing for a customer or did something to make the workplace better. It is also another place employees can place suggestions for store or company improvement.

INCENTIVES TO GO ABOVE & BEYOND

STAFF LOAN PROGRAM
When New Seasons Market observed that some employees were taking out expensive, small, short-term unsecured loans to cover unexpected expenses, they created a staff loan program. To participate employees contribute $1 each pay period—or $26 per year—to a loan fund.

Participating employees can apply to a peer review group for a small loan when in need. The group is made up of employees from the stores and Store Support. Funds are administered through a local credit union.

COMMUNITY SERVICE TIME OFF
All staff receives eight hours of paid community service time annually, which improves employee morale and loyalty. As many employees participate in group volunteer events, employee communications and camaraderie improves as well.
HOME BUYING PROGRAM
New Seasons Market is working with a local partner, Home Street Bank (HSB), to help employees buy their first homes.

VACATION DONATIONS
Employees can donate vacation to each other in times of need. The donation can be public or anonymous. Forms are readily available and can be turned in to the bookkeeper.

HEALTHY BEGINNINGS FOR NEW MOMS & BABIES
When a new mother returns to work, managers are encouraged to provide flexibility in their schedule when possible. Each store has an identified, quiet space for nursing mothers to pump breast milk during their shift. To make it as convenient for the mother as possible, New Seasons Market leases industrial grade breast pumps from Nursing Mothers Counsel of Oregon and is the first grocery store to be certified as a Breastfeeding Mother Friendly Employer.
OUR MISSION
We want to be the ultimate neighborhood grocery store. That means creating the best shopping experience possible. One that is easy, fun to shop, and genuinely friendly. It means providing you with the best mix of products, from Frosted Flakes to free-range chicken. It means building a market for local and regional products and supporting family farms. It means giving back to our community, and creating a progressive workplace where our staff can thrive.

OUR VALUES
We believe in taking care of our customers, and each other. We are champions of a healthy regional food system. We strive to build community inside and outside our stores. We embrace diversity and other points of view.

OUR VISION
Ten to 15 years down the road: we want to have more stores just like the ones you know and love us for today. We will always be your neighborhood grocery store, providing "friendliest store in town" service every day. We want to empower customers to vote with their dollars and support positive change. We want to be an active participant in a regional food shed that is healthy and economically viable. And we want to be one of best companies to work for in the Northwest.
ABOUT THE PREMIER EMPLOYER PROJECT
Northwest Food Processors Education & Research Institute (ERI) and the Hitachi Foundation jointly offered the Food Industry Premier Employer Awards for companies with facilities in the Idaho, Oregon and Washington. This award recognized employers whose successful businesses are built on developing economic advancement opportunities for their lower-income* employees in any part of the company (*earning less than $40,000 a year).

11 case studies of Premier Employers in the food processing industry have been written and are available at www.nwfpa.org and www.foodinnovationmarketplace.com.

ABOUT THE HITACHI FOUNDATION
The Hitachi Foundation is an independent nonprofit philanthropic organization forging an authentic integration of business actions and societal well-being in North America. Through 2013, the organization’s strategic focus is on discovering and expanding business practices that create tangible, enduring economic opportunities for low-wealth Americans, their families, and the communities in which they reside—while also enhancing business value.

ABOUT THE NORTHWEST FOOD PROCESSORS EDUCATION & RESEARCH INSTITUTE
Incorporated in 2007, Northwest Food Processors Education Research Institute (ERI) exists to enhance the overall economic health of the Northwest food processing cluster and the communities it supports. ERI provides research and support to the food processing industry.

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