37th Annual NOFA Summer Conference
Set for August 12-14 at UMass Amherst
by Ben Grosscup, Conference Coordinator

Having served in different roles on the NOFA Summer Conference Committee since 2005, it is an honor to take on the new role as Conference Coordinator for 2011. I have big shoes to fill, as I take on a key leadership role in a conference that Julie Rawson and Jack Kittredge guided for twenty-four years. I know that I speak for the entire Interstate NOFA community when I say, thank you, Julie and Jack, for the leadership you’ve provided all this time! Your example and vision have helped us become more effective at what we each do in the many roles we play in what 2009 NOFA keynoter, Will Allen, called “The Good Food Movement.”

Coming into a well established position like this involves negotiating between tradition on the one hand and innovation on the other. For many people the Summer Conference has become a cherished vacation that they enjoy each year with their families. Traditions like the Saturday Fair, the Local Meal, the dancing, and the many wonderful workshops are part of what supports our commitment to what we do, so we make a commitment to keeping these traditions alive.

At the same time, each and every one of us – NOFA Summer Conference committee members and attendees alike – bring our own visions for a healthy ecological food system to the conference, hoping to see them reflected in the experience we share together in August. Every year, the Summer Conference Committee works to make the conference a fuller (and better organized) experience. As people bring up their own ideas for discussion – through written evaluations, phone calls, and meetings – the conference can incorporate them and maintain the dynamism for which it is known. Innovation, too, is on this committee’s agenda.

Our committee met in October, 2010 to recap what we had learned from the past year’s conference. I felt lucky to be working beside such a committed and experienced group of people. One thing that someone pointed out to me was that the average age of people in the room seemed to have dropped by about 15-20 years compared to some committees in previous years. Nobody actually did a precise analysis, but I think that elders of the organic movement can feel confident that young people are taking on roles to carry on the work that they helped start many years ago.

With youthfulness and wisdom combined in every committee member, regardless of age, we are still making adjustments based on the evaluations we’ve received, and we’re also generating new ideas from within our group.

One change involves the organization of Work Exchange volunteers who put in 20 hours during the conference, hoping to see them reflected in the experience we share together in August. Traditions like the Saturday Fair, the Local Meal, the dancing, and the many wonderful workshops are part of what supports our commitment to what we do, so we make a commitment to keeping these traditions alive.

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by Jack Kittredge

Farming is the one profession where one buys retail but sells wholesale. Working collectively with other farmers on either side of that equation can make a huge economic difference. Buying as a group, farmers can take advantage of volume discounts. Selling as a group, farmers can avoid distributors or transportation monopolies and take their products directly to final markets.

But farmers are an independent and proud lot. It is not easy to get them to associate in business ventures. The cooperative form of organization makes such association more palatable. For one thing, co-ops are usually formed for a very specific purpose. The cooperative form of organization makes not easy to get them to associate in business ventures. The cooperative form of organization makes it difficult to associate in business ventures. The cooperative form of organization makes it difficult to associate in business ventures.

In addition, co-ops avoid the hierarchical nature of the more prevalent form of business model – corporations. Corporations are owned by stockholders, some of whom own more stock and thus have more votes. Cooperatives are owned by members, each of whom has only one vote, no matter how big or small that member’s operation.

In this issue we explore how co-ops play a role in agriculture, and look at some of the ones that are active in organic food and farming in the Northeast. We look at the history of cooperatives, their form of organization, and how economically significant they are.

We illustrate these points by examining various co-ops from small and informal ones to those that are huge and dominate an industry. We look at how in some ways cooperatives are innovators, and in other ways they are bound by market forces to behave much as other businesses do.

Co-ops have a long and honored tradition in American agriculture, and during the last generation have played a large role in connecting organic farmers and consumers in the region and have been crucial to the viability of many of our farms. We hope you enjoy this issue and learn more about how cooperatives can be helpful to you.
editor and bring it up to date. The opening message from Wendell Berry – “Tell the Government to Get Out of the Way” – is a popular one these days, but look at what is going on this weekend in DC. [ed. Note – she is referring to the Glenn Beck Rally] I don’t think we should yell this out without providing some context and reflection about what parts of the government we mean. Beld, this message plays into reducing social security and medicare, cutting back on welfare and other parts of the safety net for the poor and weak. The ‘get rid of government’ talk also comes out of the mouths of people who want to increase some parts of the government – our military presence on the borders with Mexico and Canada, our buses for defense against “terrorists,” etc.

To get back to Jocelyn – she is worried about FDA and the labeling of supplements. There is a load effort to prevent this – much of it supported by the large scale manufacturers of supplements who also have other motives. Some of the viral messaging against the Food Safety Bills have come from these folks and made the small farm message sound really stupid because of the admixture of semi-and untruths. Jocelyn makes a big deal out of the NAIS – which is now dead. An editorial note could have pointed this out. The huge outcry from small-scale farmers and their advocates did have results.

While I agree with many of Jocelyn’s points about what is needed – the list on p. 12, her conclusion – “Let’s get rid of the farm bill” plays into people’s ignorance about what that bill contains. A major part of the bill and its funding covers all the nutrition programs. It is stupid to call for its elimination without some better analysis. I find Jocelyn’s rhetoric facile – and unenlightening.

Your piece on Red Fire Farm is excellent, as your reporting usually is!

Then we come to Winton Pitcoff. I suspect his problem is that he is using Joel Salatin’s writing as his template. Salatin may have some delightfully creative energy. Do you agree to that? Yet you print Salatin’s points about government regulation, and will not lead to good policy for farm interns. Salatin thinks organic certification siphons off creative energy. Do you agree to that? Yet you print this piece with no editorial comment. As editor, you might have asked Pitcoff for better writing and let him know what you think. We are active players. The reason many of us entrepreneurs sweep government involvement with a broad brush is because we have the wisdom to realize that bureaucrats sweep with a broad brush. It would be nice to have regulations that work like a scapula on only universally-accepted nasty things, but that is not the way government works. It always moves toward a one size fits all mentality. Part of that is because by the time the regulations actually get implemented, they’ve been vetted through the sieve of large interests who have the political clout to wine and dine the officials. Finally, he does get to a NE example – Morse Pitts, but the quote from him is also idiotically one-sided – “ideally, says Pitts, there would be no regulations dictating how he raises, processes and produces his greens.” – Pitts is selling on government owned land, at a farmers market constructed and maintained by public dollars. The City of NY has every right to ensure the safety of the food sold there – but their regs must be appropriate to the scale of the farms involved.

Pitts’ statement on the contradictions of USDA policy deserves further analysis. USDA is not a single person with one mind. It is a complex agency where the battle between industrial ag and organic, small-scale ag is taking place – a very interesting dynamic where the NOFA’s and NSAC and NOC are active players. Salatin is clever about pointing out the contradictions of government policy on young people working on farms – but short on useful analysis and how to deal with this. The regulations protecting farm workers have been earned by the blood of many people. Those regs provide a few meager protections for migrant and seasonal farm workers in a system that exploits them, takes advantage of their lack of power and then tosses them out when they get too old or sick to produce at top speed. Eliminating the few laws that govern conditions for farm workers is throwing out the baby with the bathwater and will not lead to good policy for farm interns. Salatin thinks organic certification siphons off creative energy. Do you agree to that? Yet you print this piece with no editorial comment. As editor, you might have asked Pitcoff for better writing and clearer thinking. How about asking him to explain to the rest of us why Salatin does not certify.

But the conclusion takes the cake. Pitcoff quotes Salatin as saying: “Culturally the movement has grown out of the liberal background in which the government is considered benign, he says, but now that more conservatives are getting interested their tendency to oppose over-regulation could ultimately strengthen the movement. We’re not going to turn a corner on this until it’s so serious that all the foodies start not being able to get what they’ve been getting.”

I’m sorry, Jack. Either you agree with this – and then we need to have a really long talk at the next IC meeting. Or you were asleep at the wheel as editor! We are living in hard times. TNF is a bright light in the darkness. It is your responsibility as editor, and our responsibility as the NOFA policy folks, to make sure we provide clear thinking and good energy for our members and whoever else has the good luck to read our excellent publication!

For Peace in Our Lifetimes,
Liz Henderson

Aug 31, 2010
Hi Jack–

I guess not everyone liked that issue of The Natural Farmer on Government Regulation!

Along with your supporting email, I was going to run this critical letter from Liz Henderson in the next issue as letters to the editor. I plan to answer some of her criticisms, but since she uses your name I thought it proper to give you a chance to respond too. So if you want to weigh in, feel free and I’ll be glad to print it.

Jack Kittredge

August 31, 2010
Hi Jack–

Thanks for the chance to respond. I’ll be brief. Interesting that while Ms. Henderson accuses me of shallow conclusions and accuses Kittredge of not being up-to-date, she creates a lie out of thin air that at Polyface women don’t drive tractors: they cook. I invite anyone to come and visit the farm. You will not only see women driving tractors, you will see men cooking. In fact, one of the farms we lease is completely operated by a former intern, single woman subcontractor who moves cows, drives tractors, builds fence . . . and cooks. Ms. Henderson could not be more wrong. Goodness, I even had the ladies out running a chainsaw two weeks ago. How about that?

The reason many of us entrepreneurs sweep government involvement with a broad brush is because we have the wisdom to realize that bureaucrats sweep with a broad brush. It would be nice to have regulations that work like a scapula on only universally-accepted nasty things, but that is not the way government works. It always moves toward a one size fits all mentality. Part of that is because by the time the regulations actually get implemented, they’ve been vetted through the sieve of large interests who have the political clout to wine and dine the officials.

Please help us thank these Friends of Organic Farming for their generous support!
The Natural Farmer
Winter, 2010-11

When the FDA puts in writing its legal position that citizens have no fundamental right to choose what food to eat, what kind of regulations do you think the agency will promote? The so-called safety net is actually a straight jacket for freedom. I for one don’t want social security, medical care, worker’s protections or housing regulations. Social security is the worst investment of any money anywhere. Medical care: I resent the fact that I have to pay to care for myself. The reason why I have young people begging me to come and learn how to farm, and they say they’d be glad to live in tents for the oppor- tunity. But if the government finds out about that arrangement, I could lose the whole farm. Anyone who has not faced these bureaucratic police has no idea how unreasonable they are—and how intimidat- ing and powerful. After all, they have the full power of the U.S. military behind them. That’s scary.

The bottom line: government officials are just as sneaky, untruthful, and greedy as any average citi- zen or business person. To assume that something about drawing a government paycheck suddenly creates internal morality and ethics is both naive and foolish. The question is: do we centralize the propensity for human depravity in the hands of government officials, or do we decentralize it in the hands of thousands of citizens? This is the differ- ence between tyranny and freedom. Concentration of food production and processing leads to arro- gance and abuse. Decentralization creates checks and balances. It’s the same in politics, religion, education, medication, retirement, and recreation. Society does change without government intrusion. Much of it within 6 months or 1 year of the article’s first being published, industrial meat consumption in the U.S. dropped by 30-50 percent, depending upon which historian you read. That was devastating to the troublemakers. And they would have gone out of business had it not been for the creation of the Food Safety and Inspection Service which give them a government target. The troublemakers have their own marketplace credibility. Now, a century later, plants are dirtier, more centralized, and more worker abu- sive — we’ve come a long way. If the information marketplace had been allowed to work and destroy those terrible meat packers, today we would have a much more safe, decentralized, professional indus- try. People who believe in that government have no faith in their neighbors. And that’s a shame. And certainly no way to build a vibrant community. Best regards,

Joel Salatin, Polyface Farm
October 31, 2010

Hi Liz,

Thanks for your critical but thoughtful letter on the Summer 2010 issue on Small Farms and Gov- ernment Regulation. I don’t get a lot of feedback on the paper, so any feedback indicates people are read- ing it is good news to me.

I’m sorry a couple of the articles upset you, but I’m happy to tell you why I chose them. As I indi- cated in the lead editorial, government regulation is controversial and almost all of us would call for it in some instances, and reject it in others. But I think the need for regulation is stronger than the public demand, etc. – is constantly made in our schools, newspa- pers, public halls. I thought it would be educational to examine the other side, particularly as it affects small and organic farmers. That is why I chose the Yes, the Jocelyn Engman piece was written a couple of years ago, but I thought it expressed very eloquently the view of many small farmers that the regulation is stacked against the little guy. Failure to regulate GMOs or regulatory efforts to suppress vol- untary testing for mad cow disease can only benefit the corporate hegemon of agribusiness. So also do efforts to require licensed commercial kitchens for you to do something your grandmother did over her woodstove. Do we see a pattern here?

Just because there are businesses that oppose FDA regulation of supplements does not mean everyone who feels that way. Lots of people feel that traditional herbal and natural products should be available for consumption on the basis of individual decision. As far as Wendell Berry telling the government to get out of the way we do not want to be socialized and attract young farmers, I think he is right on target. As the two features in that issue illustrated, unreasonable regulatory burdens can stifle farm profitability and possibly even destroy the farm. No one is calling for anarchy here, but just a better bal- ance between government authority and individual freedom – a right with nutrient dense organic food grown as close to the consumer as possible. That is what we need without necessarily empowering small and lo- cal farms.

I appreciate your support for The Natural Farm- er. I hope to continue to raise issues and promote disc- ussion and get a spectrum of coherent, thoughtful articles in the paper, without necessarily agreeing with all of them. I figure our readers are plenty able to sort out what makes sense to them.

Respectfully,

Jack Kittredge
November 7, 2010

Dear Jack,

Thanks for giving me a few days to respond again.

The sentence in Pitcoff’s conclusion that made me scratch my head was this one: “Culturally the movement has grown out of the liberal background in which the government is considered benign, he says, but now that we are faced with the pressure by the interested their tendency to oppose over-regulation could ultimately strengthen the movement.” What exactly does this mean? As the government – we need the welcome conservatives who will straighten them out! The organic movement has never identified as ‘liberal,’ nor have we made the assumption that the government is “benign.” Labels like these just add to the atmosphere of misunderstanding and conten- tion that turns most people off from civic discourse. I like the German Green Party assertion – “We are not right or left, we are ahead!”

I also like your idea for redesigning the Farm Bill to separate out the nutrition programs and re- direct them to provide the same level of service as a right with nutrient dense organic food grown as locally as possible for everyone. Let’s cut the subsi- dies that support GMO corn and soybeans and big cattle and figure out how to end food insecurity and hunger.

In these days of the Tea Party funded by the Chambers of Commerce and the Koch brothers, we need to be very careful to explain what we mean when we call for “less government.” The Kochs want less government so that they can go on pol- luting the environment. We need a government that is controlled and only government has the power to do that. No government leaves the big boys to control themselves. That is how the meat supply became the story of Full Circle Farm and its 12,000-member member production delivery service indicates, I think the organic movement needs to be more clear about what they want without necessarily empowering small and lo- cal farms.

Best regards,

Liz Henderson

On Winton’s article, I think he is accurately reflecting the views of many farmers around the country about food safety regulations – that they do not necessarily have the effect of ensuring safe food. But, as you admit, those institutions are battle- grounds “where the battle between industrial ag and organic, small-scale ag is taking place.” We need to get to the point that industrial agriculture is the troublemaker. And they would have gone out of business had it not been for the creation of the Food Safety and Inspection Service which give them a government target. The troublemakers have their own marketplace credibility. Now, a century later, plants are dirtier, more centralized, and more worker abu- sive — we’ve come a long way. If the information marketplace had been allowed to work and destroy those terrible meat packers, today we would have a much more safe, decentralized, professional indus- try. People who believe in that government have no faith in their neighbors. And that’s a shame. And certainly no way to build a vibrant community. Best regards,

Joel Salatin, Polyface Farm

The mark of good government is that it controls not big corporations but us, the people.

Best regards,

Alex Arau
207-236-3283
alexarau@gmail.com

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The Natural Farmer
Winter, 2010-11
NOFA Exchange

Assistants for 2011 - NCOF www.natickfarm.org looking for 2 assistants for:

- * Crops: experience in diverse vegetable growing from planting to marketing.
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You have 1 to 2 years experience in farming, like to work with children (we run a summer program mid-June to end of August), and are ready to juggle with farming and education. Common sense and humor absolutely needed. June to September. Work week: 5 days 8:30-5 with flexibility. Remuneration according to experience. Housing possible. Resume: lsimkins.ncorganic@verizon.net, jcbourruit.ncorganic@verizon.net

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Wanted: Summer internship position for an undergraduate student on a small, diverse organic operation in CT, MA, NH, NY, or VT. Ideally, the farm would include an orchard and raise some livestock as well as vegetable crops. An AgriTourism-minded operation would be nice as well. I don’t have much experience, but I work hard and I’m a fast learner. In terms of compensation, I am looking for room and board at minimum. Available between June 10 and August 15. Contact Kristina Runde at krunde@rams.colostate.edu.

Positions at Tracie’s Community Farm: 3-4 Field Workers, Assistant Farm Manager: We’re in our 13th year of diversified vegetable and fruit production with a 270+ family Summer CSA, Fall CSA, spring CSA, onsite farm-stand, farm-store and restaurant sales. Looking for hardworking, enthusiastic, self-motivated team players, serious about farming, with a positive attitude, stamina to work 10+ hour days, move 50# bags, while having a good time. Knowledge of equipment repair, chainsaw, carpentry and a desire for long-term employment a plus. We provide long-term employment opportunities, hourly pay, potential housing, farm produce, and hearty lunches Mon-Fri. Contact Tracie, (603) 209-1831 www.traciesfarm.com.

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Our future depends upon your choice between death forces and life forces; upon whether or not we will return in humility to the soil.
— Ehrenfried Pfeiffer

The Innerfence processing app on a smartphone lets you take credit cards without a terminal.

Smart Phones and Credit Card Processing

New applications for iPhones and some other smart phones enable a farmer at a farmers market to take credit and debit cards right on her cell phone without benefit of things like phone lines or credit card terminals. One Washington DC farmers’ market farmer says accepting credit cards increased his sales by 30 percent. The apps require a processing service, which entails a monthly service fee as well as a transaction fee, as is necessary for any card processing. Innerfence is compatible with the iPhone, iPad, Mac and Android – transactions are keyed in manually, without swiping technology. PAYware Mobile from VeriFone includes a swipe attachment for an iPhone. Intuit’s GoPayment has card reading and even printing options, which reduce the transaction cost from keyed in sales. PayPal’s Send Money allows cellphone login to PayPal account, where

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Conflict of Interest in NY Times Report of Colony Collapse Disorder Cause

Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), a disease that causes honeybees to become disoriented and die far from their hives, has kept scientists desperately seeking for the cause. One suggested culprit has been pesticides, particularly neonicotinoids, which kill insects by attacking their nervous systems. Their leading manufacturer, Bayer Crop Science, has been fined for lawsuits from angry beekeepers for years now. But recently, a front-page New York Times article pointed to another solution. Running under the headline “Scientists and Soldiers Solve a Bee Mystery,” the article reports that a new study claims the cause is actually “a fungus tag-teaming with a virus.”

However, one fact that the Times article did not mention is the relationship between the study’s lead author, Dr. Jerry Bromenshenk, and Bayer Crop Science. Bromenshenk has received a significant re-search grant from Bayer -- and failed to disclose the conflict of interest to the Times. As Fortune Magazine reports:

“The Times reporter who authored the recent article, Kirk Johnson, responded in an e-mail that Dr. Bromenshenk “did not volunteer his funding sources.” Even more suspicious, Bromenshenk was reported all set to serve as an expert witness in 2003 for beekeepers involved in a class-action lawsuit against Bayer. He dropped out without explanation, however, and subsequently received the grant from Bayer.”


Environmental Contamination Role in Cancer Risks From 10% to 70% - 90% in Under a Year

Famous epidemiological work by Doll and Peto in the early 1970s concluded that exposure to chemicals in the environment might account for up to 10% of human chronic disease, such as cancer. This 10% number became, and persisted for 40 years, contrary to the longstanding practice of the Patent and Trademark Office, as well as the practice of the National Institutes of Health and other government agencies that have in the past sought and obtained patents for isolated genomic DNA,” the brief said. It is not clear if the position in the legal brief, which appears to have been the result of discussions among various government agencies, will be put into effect by the Patent Office. If it were, it is likely to draw protests from some biotechnology compa-nies that say such patents are vital to the develop-ment of personalized medicine, in which drugs are tailored for individual patients based on their genes. In the early days of the Human Genome Project, some scientists suspected that our genes play the dominant role in predisposing a person to either succumb to, or successfully combat cancer and other chronic diseases. So some geneticists speculated that environmental factors might not even account for 10% of chronic diseases.

In May, 2010 the President’s Cancer Panel re-port stated bluntly that the contribution of chemicals in the environment, including pesticides, to the can-cer burden of disease is “significant” and has been, for years, underestimated. They called for more focus on avoiding such exposures as one of many necessary steps in the long-overdue shift toward cancer prevention as opposed to cancer treatment. In an October 22, 2010 commentary in Science, the nation’s most respected scientific journal, two ex-perts in the etiology of disease write: “Although the risks of developing chronic dis-eases are attributed to both genetic and environ-mental factors, 70 to 90% of disease risks are probably due to differences in environments.”

The scientists making this case cite several new studies involving use of advanced tools that can screen human DNA for genetic twists indicative of exposure to certain chemicals, some from the envi-ronment, others manufactured inside the body. They see evidence in the new data leading them to con-cluded that 70% to 90% of chronic diseases, includ-ing cancer and diabetes, are triggered by environ-mental factors via complex interactions between a person’s genes, health, lifestyle, and early life and ongoing exposures to chemicals and pathogens.


High Quality Managed Pastures Reduce GHG Emissions per Gallon of Milk Produced

A team of scientists in Ireland studied the impact of pasture quality on milk production, dry matter intake from forages, and methane emissions from Holstein cows. High quality pastures with younger growth and less herbage volume per acre/hectare provided grazing animals forage that is more readily digestible. As a result, high quality forages reduced methane emissions by 42 grams per day, or by about 10% based on typical enteric methane emission rates, when compared to the same cows grazed on nearby pastures with about twice the per acre/hectare volume of herbage. Methane emissions from cows consuming high quality forages were reduced by 3.5 grams per kilogram of milk, representing about a 25% reduction from typical baseline levels of enteric methane emissions per kilogram of milk.
Organic Systems Show Great Promise in Reducing GHG Emissions in California

Organic farming systems in California and row crops in California’s Central Valley have the potential to reduce net GHG emissions from soil by 3,496 kilograms of CO2-equivalents per hectare per year, compared to conventional management systems with standard tillage. The “standard tillage” system in the “Long-term Research on Agricultural Systems” (LT-RAS) experiment generates net GHG emissions of 1,081 kg CO2-equivalents per hectare per year. Accordingly, the organic system brought about an approximately 4,500 kg reduction in CO2-equivalents per hectare per year.

In the quest to reduce agriculture’s contribution to global warming, the most prominent and powerful coalition of agribusiness companies are promoting the combination of conservation tillage, GE seeds, and precision farming-guided fertilizer applications as the best way to reduce net GHG emissions. This study, conducted in cooperation with others, shows why this combination of practices will bring about little or no change. Conservation tillage, and even no-till doesn’t do enough, because organic farmers manage weeds and certain insects, but have marginal, if any impact on net GHG emissions. Precision farming can bring about marginal gains in nitrogen use efficiency, but if there are some reductions in nitrogen oxide losses, but will do little to build soil organic matter and sequester substantial levels of carbon.

The big gains from nutrient management come from incorporating cover crops plus animals manures in the soil profile. Cover crops plus additions of compost and/or animal manures are core practices on organic farms in California, and indeed around the world. This California study shows that this combination of practices has the potential to turn significant GHG emissions into substantial reductions.

Innovators Producing Non-Petroleum and Non-GMO Packaging

Increasing consumer demand is providing a market for three new producers of packaging. The first produces a number of bags from a bioplastic composed of Non-GMO corn starch and a copolymer. The second announced that they will fund enough non-GMO corn crops to accommodate the amount of non-GMO plastic coming, Stonyfield Farm is working with the University of California, Berkeley, to produce their own hormone, and grow year-round, instead of just in the summer.

A spokesman for the biotechnology trade association BIO says, however, that the milk issue and the salmon issue are completely different. “There’s no growth hormone added to the fish,” she says. The fish are given DNA from an eel pout that allows the fish to produce their own hormone, and grow year-round, instead of just in the summer.


Stonyfield Cupps Going Green

New Hampshire based yogurt maker Stonyfield Farm has upped the going-green ante, recently announcing it’s switching its yogurt multi-packs to a corn-based, bioplastic. The first also announced that they will fund enough non-GMO corn crops to accommodate the amount of non-GMO plastic coming, Stonyfield Farm is working with the University of California, Berkeley, to produce their own hormone, and grow year-round, instead of just in the summer.

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Farms’ Market Numbers Growing

In one more indication of the popularity of the local food movement, the USDA has reported that the number of farmers markets has grown 16% in the last year, from 5274 to 6132. The top ten states with the most markets are California (580), New York (461), Illinois (286), Michigan (271), Iowa (229), Ohio (227), Massachusetts (222), Maryland (220), Missouri (216), and New Mexico (182).

The increase in market numbers is due to the considerable success of farmers markets in delivering fresh, high-quality produce and in providing a venue for local farmers to sell their goods direct to consumers. The increased use of local food has changed consumer behavior, and now the local food movement is gaining steam in a big way.

SOURCE: The Organic and Non-GMO Report, July/August 2010
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Cooperative efforts have occurred throughout history. Since early man cooperated with others to help kill large animals for survival, people have been cooperating to achieve objectives that they could not reach if they acted individually. Cooperation has occurred throughout the world. Ancient records show that Babylonians practiced cooperative farming and that the Chinese developed savings and loan associations similar to those in use today. In North America, clearing land in preparation for the planting of crops, threshing bees, and barn raisings all required cooperative efforts. In the United States, the first formal cooperative business is assumed to have been established in 1752, almost a quarter-century before the Declaration of Independence was signed. This cooperative, a mutual insurance company called the Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire, was organized by Benjamin Franklin and others, and it is still in operation today.

The cooperative as a modern business structure originated in 19th century Britain. The Industrial Revolution had a profound effect on the way business was organized and on the working conditions and economic situations of many people. In response to the depressed economic conditions brought forth by industrialization, some people began to form cooperative businesses to meet their needs. Among them was a group of 28 workers who were dissatisfied with the merchants in their community. They formed a consumer cooperative known as the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in 1844. They began by opening a cooperative store that sold items such as flour and sugar to members, and the Society quickly grew to include other enterprises. The founders also established a unique combination of written policies that governed the affairs of the cooperative. Among these rules were: democratic control of members, payment of limited interest on capital, and net margins distributed to members according to level of patronage. Based on its success, the Rochdale set of policies soon became a model for other cooperative endeavors, and became known as the general principles that make a cooperative unique from other business structures.

Agricultural Cooperatives

Agricultural cooperatives are typically classified according to the three major functions they perform: marketing, supply, and service. Many cooperatives combine all three types of functions in their operations.

Marketing cooperatives

Marketing cooperatives help to sell their members’ farm products and maximize the return that they receive for these goods. Their operations can be quite diversified and complex. Some marketing cooperatives perform a limited number of functions, while others vertically integrate their operations so that they perform more functions that add value to their members’ products as they move from the farm to the consumer. Some cooperatives even sell products in grocery stores under their own brand name; Land O’ Lakes and Ocean Spray are two prominent examples. Marketing cooperatives can serve their members in many ways, including bargaining for better prices, storing and selling members’ grain, and processing farm products into more consumer-ready goods. In the United States, agricultural cooperatives handle about 30 percent of farmers’ total farm marketing volume.

Supply cooperatives

Supply cooperatives (sometimes referred to as purchasing cooperatives) sell farm supplies to their members. Products include production supplies such as seed, fertilizer, petroleum, chemicals, and farm equipment. American farmers purchase about 28 percent of their supply needs through cooperatives.

Service cooperatives

Service cooperatives provide various services to their members. For instance, cooperatives may offer services such as pesticide applications, seed clean-
Service cooperatives also include organizations such as the Farm Credit System, a network of borrower-owned lending institutions that provide credit and other financial services to farmers, and rural electric cooperatives, which provide electricity to rural areas.

The first formal farmer cooperative to form in the United States occurred in 1810. However, agricultural cooperatives were not really perceived as a viable business organizational structure until after the Civil War. Several farm organizations helped to promote cooperative development. The Grange, a farmer organization established to improve the economic and social position of the nation’s farm population (National Grange), began to engage in cooperative marketing and purchasing. In 1875 it adopted the Rochdale system in carrying out its cooperative activities. Other farm organizations, including the Farmers Alliance and the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union of America (known as the National Farmers Union), also began to promote cooperative development. Farmers not affiliated with any farm organization also began to establish cooperatives. By 1900, at least 1,223 cooperatives were active in the United States.

By the early 1900s the United States government began to pass laws that provided a favorable environment for cooperative development. A commission established in 1908 by President Roosevelt noted that the country lacked adequate credit for the agriculture sector, and their findings helped lead to the passing of the Federal Farm Loan Act in 1916, legislation that led to the creation of the Farm Credit System. The Capper-Volstead Act of 1922 was crucial for agricultural marketing cooperatives, as it provided limited antitrust immunity for farmers and ranchers who join together in cooperative marketing associations.

Government encouragement for agricultural cooperatives was highest during the 1920s and 1930s. Most state legislatures established agricultural cooperative acts during this time. America’s agricultural sector went through a difficult period as prices collapsed after World War I ended. As part of the response to the adverse economic conditions, Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover all strongly endorsed the use of agricultural cooperatives. The Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929, which included the establishment of a fund for cooperative loans, also helped to strengthen the cooperative movement.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the largest number of agricultural cooperatives occurred during 1929-30. At that time, the USDA recorded 12,000 farmer cooperatives. Although the number of agricultural cooperatives has been decreasing since then, total business volume has been rising. In its 1997 survey, the USDA reported that 3,791 farmer cooperatives generated a net business volume of $106 billion, equal to the record high set in the previous year. The net income was near the record high of $2.36 billion reported in 1995. The number of farmer cooperatives has decreased through various activities including dissolution, mergers or consolidations, and acquisitions as cooperatives, like other businesses, adjust to a changing economic environment.

This is extracted from a larger document called New Generation Cooperatives on the Northern Plains on the University of Manitoba website.
Park Slope Cooperative: Voting for Local and Organic with Dollars

by Jack Kittredge

Park Slope is a neighborhood in Brooklyn, the most populous borough in New York City. The name comes from being on the western slope of Brooklyn’s Prospect Park. Fifty years ago Park Slope was a booming working class neighborhood – Irish, Italian, Puerto Rican and Black – all together in one area. But its many natural advantages have attracted upscale residents over time, however, and it has now become one of the most desirable places to live in all of New York City. It was recently ranked #1 in New York by New York Magazine, citing its quality public schools, dining, nightlife, shopping, access to public transit, green space, quality housing, safety, and creative capital, among other aspects.

One of the features that many would mention is that it is also the home of the Park Slope Food Co-op, the largest wholly member-owned food co-op in the country. The co-op is located at 782 Union Street, a bustling area just a block or two off of Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn’s main thoroughfare. That is the same building in which it was founded 37 years ago.

“There were about ten of us who founded the co-op,” recalls Joe Holtz, who is still employed there. “There were about ten of us who founded the co-op at 782 Union Street, in 1972. My knowledge was limited, but we knew we wanted to change things. We really wanted to get good, affordable food. We wanted to start a food co-op, sell things, and finish by late afternoon for more than two years, but finally grew to the point where they could hire Joe in June of 1975. He took control of fruit and vegetable buying and started buying local produce.

“We had been getting California romaine lettuce,” he explains, “but when I went to Hunt’s Point, I saw that we could be buying local romaine. A few houses in the market had only local produce. But come December, of course, they’re not there! They’ve rented out their warehouse to their neighbor for grapefruits from Florida! But come late March or April, they’re back again. So we rented a truck for over $100 for one day and went to the Hunts...
Park Slope Cooperative (yellow dot in center) considers anything coming from a radius of 50 miles to be local. Here is where their local suppliers are located.

Point market. The truck wasn’t refrigerated, but we went in the middle of the night so it was okay.”

The owner helped them get it out with his chain saw and they stored it in Joe’s parent’s garage over the winter until they could install it in the spring of 1976.

Because of the cooler they could store produce and not ask people to preorder exactly what they needed. This brought in more people and the co-op could be open more days. So they added Thursday and Saturday, and then, starting in 1978 or 1979 they opened up on Friday as well.

When the bottom floor became available the co-op was in a position to sign a lease for the whole building, including an option to buy at a set price to be exercised within 2 years. They renovated the downstairs space in 1979, moved into the whole building, and by the fall of 1980 they decided to buy the building!

“We started asking members for a $10 investment for the first time,” Joe remembers. “We got about $10,000, which is what we needed for a down payment on a $50,000 building. So we bought it. But this building is only 22 feet wide. So I said to our neighbor: ‘If you ever think of selling your building, we’re your neighbors and we might be interested.’ Sure enough, in 1988 we bought the second building and added another 22 feet. Then I went straight over to our other neighbor, who ran a rug cleaning business, and said: ‘Don’t forget, you’re our neighbors. If you ever think about selling your building, keep us in mind.’ Eventually, in 1999, after a six or seven year struggle during which we voted down buying the building and then reconsidered, we bought the third building and added another 40 feet of frontage. In 1976 we had about a thousand members. Now we have 15,000.”

Park Slope was originally a low cost place to live (it was even red-lined at one point and banks wouldn’t lend there, so some buildings were abandoned.) But it is very close to Prospect Park, close to the main branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, very close to the Botanical Gardens, close to the Brooklyn Museum, and close to 4 subway lines! So as the co-op grew, young people who didn’t grow up in Park Slope started moving in and renting apartments. Now any building there is worth over a million dollars.

The co-op draws customers from a large area, not just Park Slope. Joe reports that of them pass many supermarkets on the way to the co-op. That is unusual behavior for a city dweller and speaks to the high quality, diversity of product, good prices, and values that members receive.
Unlike some organizations that call themselves co-ops, Park Slope takes the principles of cooperative organization seriously.

Allen Zimmerman, the primary produce buyer, explains: “For starters, you have to be a member to buy anything here. Also, members have to work 2 and ½ hours every 4 weeks. Since members usually will work the same jobs each time they work, they get experienced at doing that task. Collectively, this is a tremendous help. It amounts to about 75% of the work necessary to run the Co-op. Thus prices can be less. Studies show they are more than 20% less than at comparable stores.

“Our co-ops criticize us for our labor requirement,” he continues. “But they’re open to only those who can afford them. We’re open to anyone who is willing to save on their food by helping with the work.”

The member investment, which is the basis for the co-op’s capital, is $100. If you leave the co-op you get it back. There is also a one-time joining fee of $25 you don’t get back. But if you get income-based assistance through some program the co-op reduces the joining fee to $5 and the investment to $10. They also let anybody pay as slowly as $5 a month to build up the investment. They calculate that members are saving a lot more than $5 every week by buying there.

Membership meetings occur once a month, at which well over 200 members attend. The co-op offers work credits to come to meetings up to twice a year. There is also a newsletter in which members are encouraged to write letters. Generally, Allen says, when people have an issue with how things are run, the staff hears about it: “Remember, our members are members, not customers. They vote, and work hard for what they want. If we don’t have our fingers on the pulse, they have their fingers around our throats!”

Only about 2 or 3 percent of the co-op’s gross income comes in as food stamps, indicating not a lot of members are low income. Although it takes cash, food stamps, or debit cards, Park Slope will not accept credit cards. The cost of credit for the business accepting the cards is too high. The co-op is active in the community and hosts many class trips of elementary school kids visiting to see all the strange vegetables. Saturdays are the busiest, with long lines snaking throughout the store waiting to check out.

An important break for the co-op came when, in 1988 they got a call from Finger Lakes Organic Growers Cooperative asking if Park Slope would like to get deliveries from them each Monday morning. Joe said: “Of course. That’s fantastic. Thank you for figuring this out!”

“Sitting here in the city,” he explains, “we don’t do vehicles. We’re not vehicle people. If you can find a place to park you probably have to pay hundreds of dollars a month to keep it there. A commercial truck on the streets of New York is illegal overnight. You get tickets! So we had been renting vehicles to pick up and produce it was a huge hassle.”

One other benefit that dealing with Finger Lakes Organics brought to Park Slope was that FLO really enforced standards among their farmers. “There were some who were lagging behind,” Joe recalls, “and the FLO managers would say: ‘No, I won’t take that. I’ve told you not to have any yellow leaves in the chard, and no random bunches. It’s ½ pound minimum, not one bunch being a pound and a quarter and the next a half pound. This is the standard. Take it back to your farm and do the right thing!’”

“Quality always depends on the farmer,” agrees Allen. “When I started out as substitute produce buyer in 1988, organic had a lot to learn about quality. But as farmers got more experience the quality went up. When we got stuff from Robin Osterfield and Lou Johns at Blue Heron Farm there was no reason to look inside the box except to admire it! But there were also local farmers who were more primitive. We just had to learn farm by farm who was better at it. The organic and local stuff is now more uniform and fits better in a store.

It’s one thing to throw stuff on a stand in a farmers market, but a store has to have more uniformity. Most farms are conforming to some kind of presentation that makes it easy for a store to handle its produce.”

One of the biggest farmers markets in New York is a few blocks from the co-op. Allen loves to go there to checkup on what is new and interesting – both farmers and produce. One of their largest distributors, the Lancaster Family Farm Co-op, actually found Park Slope by driving past on the way to the farmers market. They barely had enough business to come to the market, but with orders from the co-op they could pool produce from 20 farms and find an economy of scale.

Julie Gabriel has handled much of the produce buying with Allen for the last five years. She feels that there is a lot more local stuff, more variety, than there used to be. The quality is much better.

“But because there are more farmers and groups of farmers asking us to buy from them, we have to sometimes disappoint people. The more farmers there are the more we have to turn down and not buy all they would like us to. We have to juggle quality, price, relationships and loyalty.

“Joe and Allen had an early and close relationship with Amy Hepworth,” she continues, “which is why we buy so much from her. Her vegetables and berries are all organic. Finger Lakes Organic is probably our second largest supplier of local produce, although we are getting a lot now from the Lancaster Farm Cooperative. They are Amish and certified organic – even some of their apples. We get some produce from Canada. That usually comes through Albert’s Organics.”

Park Slope puts a very high priority on carrying local foods, as long as they can generate the volume necessary to get it delivered.

Members cut, wrap, price and label cheese in the co-op basement as one of many possible member jobs. The man in the Tshirt wearing a headband has been cutting cheese here as his member job for 7 years.

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“We define local as within 500 miles,” says Allen. “Half of that circle is the Atlantic Ocean. So now we’re talking about a semicircle with a radius of 500 miles. We think any farm in that radius can pick produce on one morning and have it to us the next morning. If you are living in the heart of the urban monster, you have to go a ways to get to the farms. Probably in Minnesota local is something you can hit with a rock! But here we have to have a bigger circle. So we think a day’s drive is a reasonable distance.”

“At one point in the 1970s,” says Joe, illustrating the point, “someone went on vacation in the Adirondacks and came back and said: ‘I met this honey farmer. Here is his card. He really wants to sell to us. If we buy $2000 of honey he’ll deliver to us. He has good prices and good honey.’ We called him up and he started delivering. We would store honey by stacking it up to the ceiling! But we would run out and order again.”

Then in the 1970s there was a federation of 15 co-ops called ‘The People’s Warehouse’. It didn’t last long, but through it Joe got access to local apple cider for the first time.

But the choices are not easy. Local is almost always more expensive. One of his current dilemmas is having to decide between $28 kiwi berries from Oregon or $38 ones from Pennsylvania.

“The reason we created a movement to support local food,” says Allen, “is that it is a challenge. You do need to say: ‘Okay, California lettuce is $20 a case and local lettuce is $28. But we’ll buy local.’”

Increasingly some local farms, especially big ones, can pump out both quality and price, he agrees, and cites Pedersen Farm in the Finger Lakes area as an example. When Pederson grows something he grows so much that no local or California farm can compete with him!

Joe, checking their inventory at the time of my visit in mid October, finds that the co-op has approximately 225 items of produce on the shelves.

Of those, 153 are local. That is actually a record for them. Of course that ratio shifts throughout the year and this is just an autumn snapshot.

Organic food is also a high priority for Park Slope, of course. Of the 153 local items on the shelf at the time of my visit, Joe reports that 148 are organic.

“Of course we have a diverse membership in terms of economics. Not everyone can afford organic, so we buy some organic and some not of some produce. We’ll double market lemons, for example, or baby carrots.”

“I think somewhere between 75% and 80% of the overall fruit and vegetable volume is organic,” adds Allen. “Of course that is the members speaking with their dollars. When we got to the point that we were buying in 20 cases of organic kale and 1 of conventional, we dropped the conventional because we couldn’t keep it fresh.”

Normal food diversity is certainly evident at Park Slope Cooperative. High quality vegetarian and vegan options are important to many members.

There is not yet a lot of interest in ‘Nourishing Traditions’ dietary items like animal fat and organ...
meats, says Bill Malloy, meat case manager: "But

contribute to the diversity goals of UVM, current CV and three references by January 1, 2011; however, #033425 to see complete job description. Attach a letter of intent that

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The University of Vermont recently identified three "Spires of Excellence" in which it will strategically

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Apply on-line at www.uvmjobs.com. Search for the position under Extension or by Job Requisition #033425 to see complete job description. Attach a letter of intent that also outlines how you would contribute to the diversity goals of UVM, current CV and three references by January 1, 2011; however, applications will be accepted until the position is filled. Review of applications begins January 2, 2011.
Cooperative firms account for a significant portion of economic activity in U.S. agricultural and food markets, both as providers of key inputs and as marketing and processing agents for farm output. According to USDA statistics, marketing and input supply cooperatives account for about a third of both total farm sector revenue and input purchases. Cooperatives play a key role in agricultural markets not only because they account for a significant fraction of economic activity in this sector, but also because they are believed to generate a pro-competitive effect in imperfectly competitive markets. Cooperatives play other socially beneficial roles in the agricultural sector. They provide an opportunity for farmers to share risk and to control managerial decision-making for their direct benefit. Additionally, they offer a credence attribute—farmer ownership—which can be attached to farm commodities, thus providing additional value to some consumers. Cooperatives perform a wide variety of functions in agricultural and food markets. Often these functions are grouped into the two broad categories, “marketing” and “supply.” Some marketing cooperatives are household names: Sunkist, Ocean Spray, Sun-maid, and Sunsweet, for example, have created national recognition with their branded products. These firms provide processing and marketing services to farmers, and also the necessary logistical support to aggregate farm supply. Other marketing cooperatives
are much leaner organizations, providing only marketing services to assist farmers, get their product to market, to pool risk, or to negotiate sales as a group to a single buyer or a small number of buyers. Supply cooperatives provide service and inputs to farmers to help them produce their goods. Many farmers purchase basic inputs such as seed, fertilizer, and farm chemicals from a cooperative. In other words, farmers collectively establish a firm to negotiate better terms of purchase for basic agricultural production inputs. Less common, but still widely observed, are cooperatives that provide information services (e.g., record keeping and performance evaluation) to farmers.

History

Formalization of group efforts among farmers into well defined and legally sanctioned cooperative business organizations occurred gradually during the mid- to late nineteenth century, in the U.S. Authors of early cooperative incorporation statutes modified standard stock corporation statutes to reflect Rochdale operating principles. Passage of the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890 forced cooperative leaders to further formalize and distinguish the cooperative business model. The Sherman Antitrust Act was designed to prevent groups of corporations from combining by granting their stock to a trust. With control of all the corporations vested in the trust board, the trust would then work to eliminate competition, create a monopoly, and thus raise prices. As independent farm businesses working together to enhance prices, farmer marketing cooperatives were subject to prosecution under the anti-trust laws that were established as a result of the Sherman Antitrust Act. In a quest to establish a unique form of organization that would be exempt from anti-trust regulations, numerous states created new “non-stock” cooperative statutes.

In addition, the Clayton Act of 1914 exempted from the Sherman Act those organizations (“agricultural or horticultural organizations instituted for the purpose of mutual help and not having capital stock or conducted for profit”). The Clayton Act created some confusion, however, because at the time many farmer cooperatives were still incorporated under older stock-based cooperative statutes. The Capper...
Volstead Act was passed in 1922 to resolve this confusion and applied broadly to associations of agricultural producers, both capital stock and non-stock associations. In addition to anti-trust exemptions, farmer cooperatives have benefited from educational and research support from the USDA and from the establishment of the Farm Credit System.

**Industry Niche**

Cooperatives in the agricultural sector provide basic marketing and supply services, and are more prevalent among farmers who cultivate crops than among those who raise animals (dairy being a notable exception where cooperative firms hold a dominant market share). Marketing and processing services are typically organized around a single commodity. Supply services are restricted to basic variable inputs—agricultural chemicals, fuel and fertilizer, seed, and crop consulting services—and operate much like a “buying group,” except in the production of feed for animals. That is, farmers tend not to own the physical assets that are used to produce these inputs, but rather negotiate their purchase collectively. Less common, but still widely observed, are cooperatives that provide services (e.g., information services for record keeping, and processing services such as cotton ginning and walnut shelling). Cooperatives rarely produce farm machinery and generally are not involved in basic research to develop new production technologies.

**Organizational Structure**

Farmer cooperative are typically organized under state incorporation statutes, but sometimes they are also organized as limited liability companies when a need arises for significant investment participation by individuals who do not use the firm’s services. More recently, some states have established “hybrid” LLC/cooperative statutes that sanction cooperative organizations with greater outside participation than permitted in existing cooperative statutes (but that still maintain patron control). The National Conference of Commissioners for Uniform State Law (NCCUSL) recently issued the Limited Cooperative Association Act, which is intended to provide a uniform version of hybrid statutes for po-
tential adoption across states that do not currently have one.

Farmer cooperatives typically require all members to be active farmers. Many cooperatives provide services to non-member farmers, though incorporation statutes typically place restrictions on the amount of non-member business. Some farmer cooperatives are “open” in the sense that anyone who does business with the firm may also choose to become a member. Other farmer cooperatives are “closed” in that membership is rationed according to the availability of processing or marketing capacity. Some farmer cooperatives elect boards of directors and make major decisions such as mergers and acquisitions or dissolution on a one-member(one-vote) basis, while others make voting rights proportional to the level of service use for each member. Many farmer cooperatives proportionally “allocate” all or most earnings to patrons, but then retain up to 80% of these allocations for working capital and reinvestment. Firms that operate on such a basis pay patrons for the use of their funds in future periods with a formal “equity redemption” program. Most farmer cooperatives claim Subchapter T status for Federal tax purposes, which allows pass-through taxation. Only the patrons pay tax on earnings allocations, even if they are retained for use by the firm.

Population Discovery and Data Sources

The USDA’s Business and Cooperative Programs Unit within the Bureau of Rural Development conducts a periodic survey of cooperative business in the agricultural sector. Contact information is compiled through a network of industry and government contacts who make note of existing, new, and dissolved cooperatives. The most recent year for which data are available is 2006. We rely entirely on this USDA data to conduct our analysis of economic impact. All governance data (no random sample) comes from survey work undertaken by the UWCC. The survey response rate for agricultural marketing and supply cooperatives was 35%.

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My Experience with Organic Grain Coops

by Julie Rawson

I am not sure when I first got interested in cooperative buying, as I don’t remember my parents ever doing it growing up. But it always seemed like such a no-brainer, the social aspect of it, the counter-cultural aspect of it and of course the savings that are gained from practicing cooperative buying.

I started my foray into coops when I was in college at the University of Illinois. There I lived in a co-operative house and we cooked cooperative meals, shared all the housework, etc. In 1977 I joined my first food coop, the Mission Hill Food Coop in Boston. Now, 33 years later, I still am a food coop member, at Top Tip Country Store in Brookfield, MA. That is where I got my “chops” on how coop really work. When we moved out to Barre in 1982 I was all set to go. I had Walter Anair’s first seed ordering coop through Fedco Seeds in 1985 and then moved onto the bulk order around 1986. That still happens. I work with friends to put together bulk purchases of things like beef or fish straight from the Ocean, and when not involved with others tend to buy things in bulk to get the discounts.

When we started raising animals in 1982, Jack and I realized very quickly that accessing organic grain for them was not going to be easy. In those early years we bought our grain from Crowe of Innvesme Farm in NY state and I worked with my brother who is a veterinarian to access mineral packages that we could add to the grain recipes to make them nutritionally complete recipes. I think we must have put the grain coop together around that in the mid 80s. We bought minerals from a company called Xtra Factors in Ephrata, PA http://www.manta.com/c/cff92971/extrafactors-inc. In those early years we made the minerals available through the NOFA Tri-State Bulk Order. The grain that we got from Bob was certified organic by NOFA-NY.

Slowly organic grain became more available and one of the early companies to manufacture it was Vermont Organic Grain Company. Our coop bought from them, but when their business fell on hard times the quality plummeted and we switched to Kreamer Feeds (Nature’s Best Products) in Kreamer, PA.

I don’t remember when we started working with Walter Anair of Horse and Buggy Feeds in Winchendon, MA, but it must have been around the time we went with Kreamer. This relationship has been one almost made in heaven, Walter and I confer on what is out there, share industry gossip, and he brings grain to our farm for our coop every 4-6 weeks during the heavy times. He gives us as a 3% discount on the grain, I ask folks to order 2 weeks in advance of a delivery day and charge a 1% over head fee for managing the coop. These days we set the order on or before a Thursday at 9 am. Walter arrives in the driveway with dog biscuits in hand for Jimbo, Franzy and Zooky and all of our coop members come with their vehicles and checks in hand to unload and reload for each other. We share a 1/2 hour of conviviality and then all go about our ways.

Last winter, in response to customer demand for soy free feeds, Walter and I worked closely with Lakeview Organic Grain in Penn Yan, NY http://www.lakevieworganicgrain.com/ to put together number of rations that were soy free. Along with the Kreamer Feeds, Walter offered Lakeview grains for layers, meat birds, hogs and turkeys. It seems that this industry is still on a learning curve with some successes and some failures, particularly for turkeys, in ration balancing.

Unlike in the mid 80s, for the would be purchaser of organic grains, whether they be premixed and ready to feed or component parts for the farmer/ homesteader to mix on their own, there are a lot of choices out there now. It is important to product test and shop around until you find the ration that most serves your animals’ needs. Paying attention to your animals’ sense of well being will give you clues long before slaughter when slaughter weight and texture and flavor of meat will tell more of the story.

How do the yolks look on eggs, and how is their flavor? Of course a certified organic animal must have access to pasture also, and all the extras that your livestock receive on pasture and homestead or farm raised extras will complement the grain that you choose.

I alluded to this earlier, but the best grain coop is one with clear rules and understandings about what is expected of cooperers and what isn’t. Our grain coop has been a no frills, for the farmer to bring their questions regarding feed rations to Walter at Horse and Buggy or to check the Kreamer website, and to show up with check in hand and be ready to help unload at the designated time. This is cooping at its best. We all get to touch base with one another, we all save money, delivery is relatively convenient for all, and we have access to a high quality product for our animals’ health.

One final word on the affordability of certified organic grain. Many people who will eat organic produce and run the rest of their operation in a certifiably organic fashion will say that organic grain is “too expensive” and they can’t afford it. It has been my experience here in Central Massachusetts that people will pay the difference that one needs to charge in order to have organic meat. Back before the early 90s when you fed conventional grain, you might have had pesticide and herbicide residue in it. This, of course, is no light matter, but now when you buy conventional grains you are feeding GMOs to your animals and to yourself and your customers. The best way we can end the use of GMOs in farming is to be strict in our refusal to buy them into our farms and homesteads. And in the end, this is for our health as people and our planetary health. Use the certifiably or certified organic resources. They are proliferating and the farmers who use these practices in their grain growing need to be supported with our dollars.

A younger Jack fills home-made pig feeder with bags of organic grain from Bob Crowe of New York’s Inverness Farm. After the right proportions of corn and soy are mixed together, he shovels a mineral mix into the feeder and swirls it around. Studying the operation are Dan, Chuck, Ellen and Paul, also younger.
Working Together Works in the Northeast Food and Agricultural System

by Brian M. Henehan

There are a large variety of cooperative business approaches occurring in the food and agriculture system in the Northeast. There are very successful, existing cooperatives that operate up and down the food value chain. Various types of cooperatives have been formed by virtually all of the key players in the food value chain and at every level of the food and agriculture system. Cooperatives have been organized by: farmers, brokers, distributors, processors, wholesalers, food service franchisees, retailers and consumers. One might ask why we don’t hear about all of these cooperatives? Given that cooperatives primarily exist to serve members, non-members aren’t always aware of their existence. Cooperatives are typically closely held by the members and are not publicly traded, which is another reason the public doesn’t always know much about them.

For example, a purchasing cooperative of Subway sandwich shop franchisees was formed less than fifteen years ago and has grown into a multi-billion dollar purchasing arm serving most Subway locations across the U.S. and Canada. The cooperative is now responsible for procuring all of the Subway food, packaging, equipment and services for the US and Canada through negotiating price, supply, and distribution terms. In addition to negotiating the items themselves, the cooperative enters into contracts at all levels of the supply chain to bring cost efficiencies to Subway franchisees. Rather than several companies purchasing smaller quantities, the cooperative sets up one large master contract which results in a lower cost end product. After studying the potential opportunity, the cooperative https://www.ipcoop.coop/en-us/2/Page.aspx?p=31 board of directors, which is comprised of franchise owners, decides if the investment is worth the return to franchise members. For more information see their website at http://www.ipcoop.com.

A large number of farmers in New York and New England market a significant share of their farm products through cooperatives. These farmer-members produce: juice grapes, cranberries, processed fruit and vegetables, fresh apples, dairy, field crops, and livestock for cooperatives with familiar names like Ocean Spray, Cabot, and Welch’s.

A majority of farmers in the region receive their loans from credit cooperatives as part of the Farm Credit System. Farmers and rural residents purchase their electricity through a network of successful rural electric cooperatives in the Northeast. And so, the cooperative form of business plays a key role in moving the region’s farm products to consumers.

Many of these cooperatives were organized during the depression. Tough economic times can force farmers and consumers to create alternative businesses to create economic value for members and for the rendering of mutual service. Now there is also increased interest in economic alternatives during these times of financial distress and political uncertainty. More new cooperatives are being formed to improve the economic and social well-being of members. Today, there are many resources available to those considering the formation of new cooperatives as well as education about the cooperative model in general.

Resources and related websites:
The Cornell Cooperative Enterprise Program (CCE) http://cooperatives.aem.cornell.edu/
A network of cooperative development centers across the U.S. - Cooperation Works www.cooperationworks.coop
The development center for NY and New England Cooperative Development. Institute http://www.cdi.coop/

A new educational resource through extension on Cooperatives http://www.extension.org/pages/Cooperatives_Community_of_Practice_Description

The Northeast Cooperative Council (NECC), a nonprofit aimed at serving the educational and informational needs of cooperative members: http://cooperatives.aem.cornell.edu/partners.htm#one

Brian M. Henehan is senior extension associate and program leader for the Cornell Cooperative Enterprise Program and welcomes comments at bmh5@cornell.edu
Finger Lakes Organic Growers Cooperative: Going With the FLO

by Jack Kittredge

Finger Lakes Organic Growers Cooperative (FLO) was established as a not-for-profit marketing co-op for small family farms in 1986 with the help of a grant from New York State’s Department of Agriculture and Markets. The co-op was organized to supply certified organic produce to natural food stores, co-op markets, processors, and restaurants in New York State.

FLO markets only certified organic produce, and all member farms agree not to sell their produce on their own to FLO customers. There is a one-time membership fee of $100 to join the co-op. Members are required to attend the annual meeting, have the right to vote, and be elected to serve on the 11-member board. Board meetings are open to all members of the co-op.

In 1987 FLO hired a sales manager, bought a truck, and member farmers took turns driving it to deliver to accounts, mostly in the Ithaca, NY area. In 1988 they started sales and deliveries to New York City. In 1989 the co-op rented space at a local distributor, Regional Access (RA), and hired them to make the deliveries. They were already going down to the city to pick up produce -- pastries and ice cream and products like that -- and part of RA’s attraction to FLO was to not go down empty. In 1990 FLO began marketing in other parts of upstate New York. For 22 years FLO continued to arrange its own sales, but in 2009 it began a joint venture with Regional Access. Under this arrangement, called FLORA, the company does both the sales and the deliveries of FLO produce. In 2008, the last year it employed its own sales manager, FLO grossed about $200,000 in sales.

Janet Cawley, who works at Rose Valley Farm and Abundance Co-op, Syracuse, is very involved. Carol Stull, whose farm is right outside Ithaca, is the manager of FLO. Janet Cawley, who works at Rose Valley Farm and Abundance Co-op, Syracuse, is very involved. Carol Stull, whose farm is right outside Ithaca, is the manager of FLO.

All FLO growers have to be certified organic. Most are NOFA certified, but at least one Amish farm uses Pro-Cert Organic Systems, Ltd., which does a lot of Canadian farms. Member farms vary in size from 4 acres up to Rick and Laura Pedersen’s 150 acres of certified organic produce. Some sell all their crops through the co-op, some have other markets as well. There is regular interest in joining FLO from new farmers. They are invited to come to a meeting where they discuss what they can grow. If it fits in with the co-op’s needs, they are invited to join.

“We did a per box fee to RA for delivery back then,” Janet relates, “and FLO got a percentage to pay the manager and freight and bills. Then at the end of the year our Treasurer would see what profit we had left over, and decide whether we could give some back to the farmers as a ‘patronage refund’ in proportion to their sales. That happened in February, after we had closed out the year.”

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FLO operates out of the Pedersen farm in Seneca Castle, NY. Behind the brick farmhouse is the large red refrigerated warehouse that stores the co-op’s produce until it is picked up by a distributor, Regional Access.

“So far it seems to be working,” Janet says. “We have a little over 20 farmers now. When people join they are in for several years at least. Sometimes really small farmers join, but then they decide they are better suited for farmers markets. Regional Access doesn’t want someone who has two cases of this and one of that. They want people with ten cases of a product. But even the small farmers gain while they are with us – with learning about the standards and talking to bigger farmers. Mostly the FLO growers are young people in their thirties. We need more fruit growers -- organic fruit is very popular!”

David Schoonmaker, who has been in FLO since 2003, tills 90 acres in Seneca County. “I’ve been farming since 1977,” he says. Our farm is the oldest organic farm that I know of. My father started farming organically in 1954. He was considered a weirdo! I think FVO was first with the certification. Anne Mendenhall and John Myers would come out and look us over. It was pretty informal. Then it got more involved. It was FVO first, which the buyers paid for, then I was with NOFA, then I started selling beets to Japan but the broker didn’t accept NOFA. So I was with OCIA for awhile, but that was a big mess so I went back to NOFA.”

David provides FLO with produce from six or seven acres, mostly beets, turnips (he loves Hakurei, a salad turnip sold by Johnny’s), radishes, garlic, squash, and beans. He grows a cash crop of wheat, soy and clover seeds on the rest of his land. He worked a full time job while farming until 2002. When he was ready to go full time on the farm, in 2003, he joined FLO.

He says marketing through FLO works very well for the farmers. “Twice a week, on Wednesdays and Sundays, we drop off our produce here. For Wednesday deliveries we call in on Sunday with what we have and then they call us back or Email us on Tuesday mornings with what is ordered. For Sunday deliveries we call in on Wednesday. We used to have to take the produce to the Regional Access warehouse near Ithaca. Now we bring it here to Rick’s. We used to have to build our own pallets for each account there. Now we don’t. We just put our stuff on pallets loosely and then it goes to Regional Access and they break it down for the stores. It used to be that we made the sales and they would ship for us. We would pay them a per box fee. Now they buy it and keep 20% on the item. FLO gets 3.75% to cover our expenses. We still have Janet as a manager.

“Out there are growing pains, of course,” he continues, “but I like it. Things are going pretty good. We can ask the price we want. If they can’t sell it, of course,
Ken Leuze shows his beautiful carrots and cabbage. He also grows tree fruit – apples, pears, peaches and plums.

Most of Ken’s carrots go to Park Slope Coop and Angelica Kitchen in Manhattan. “There have to be 30 stops Regional Access makes in the city now,” he says. “But that is where the money is. You have to sell it there. Price is no problem – they can charge whatever they need to in the city!”

Leuze also raises cabbage, kale, and other cole crops for FLO, as well as tree fruit – apples, pears, peaches and plums, all organic.

“Do we do everything by hand,” he says. “It’s just me and momma and one other fellow working our farm. We use Surround for the curculio and neem for codling moth and insects that Surround doesn’t work on. We spray just like a conventional farmer.

Ken and his wife Karen prune their thousand trees all winter long. She does the bottoms and he does the tops. He likes trees on G7 rootstock. That is the next size up from M26 – the last rootstock with which you have to use support. G7 gives a 9 or 10-foot tree.

Leuze believes that any tree that is dwarfed to the point that you have to stake it to stand up is a pain in the butt. If you get 10 years out of your立项, they don’t mind ladders if the trees are properly pruned.”

Willow Grove’s apples sell for $56 for a 35 pound case. “Of course the shipping and FLO’s percent comes off our $56,” Ken advises. “Still, that is where the money is. You have to do most everything by hand. We use Surround for the curculio and neem for codling moth and insects that Surround doesn’t work on. We spray just like a conventional farmer.

“We do most everything by hand,” he says. “It’s just me and momma and one other fellow working our farm. We use Surround for the curculio and neem for codling moth and insects that Surround doesn’t work on. We spray just like a conventional farmer. We have a spray rig for that, but everything else is hand labor – thinning, trimming. We have about a thousand trees. This was going to be our big year. We have projection meetings every year and plan on what we’re going to grow (laughs). This year I figured I’d have close to 3000 bushels of apples. I ended up with about 200. It got warm early, things started pushing, the buds started moving out, and then all of a sudden it got down to 24 degrees three nights in a row. That took care of pretty much everything – apples and peaches. They were so damaged from the cold they would start to grow and then fall off the tree. We thought we were going to have to have the crop of the year. They were hanging like grapes. Then all of a sudden, after a couple of weeks, they started dropping. The frost did that.”

Howry, he says, “are down to planting trees 18 inches apart! All on wire! Thousands of dollars worth of wire! I don’t mind pruning from a ladder. If we are going to have a good crop we’ll get pickers in. They don’t mind ladders if the trees are properly pruned.”

“Now some people,” he says, “are down to planting trees 18 inches apart! All on wire! Thousands of dollars worth of wire! I don’t mind pruning from a ladder. If we are going to have a good crop we’ll get pickers in. They don’t mind ladders if the trees are properly pruned.”

Willow Grove’s apples sell for $56 for a 35 pound case. “Of course the shipping and FLO’s percent comes off our $56,” Ken advises. “Still, that is not bad per pound. It makes it worth it when you get a halfway decent price. Like I said, everything is hand labor. You have to polish these to get the Surroung off. If you don’t get it off all it leaves a haze. Sometimes you’ll have to be out there in the middle of the night, polishing apples.”
Another cost to the farmer is produce boxes. New, colorful produce boxes can cost as much as $3.65 each. So many growers who are delivering hundreds of cases a year will recycle old boxes and slap on a FLO label.

David Stern and Janet market all their 10 to 12 acres of produce from Rose Valley Farm through FLO. They do a lot with brassicas – David planted a whole field to Red Russian kale. They also have chestnuts, blueberries and table grapes – Concord and Steuben.

Rick and Laura Pedersen, who have been farming in Seneca Castle for 30 years, have by far the largest farm in FLO. They farm 1500 acres in all, with 600 of them organic. About half of their land is in grain and soy, and half in vegetables. One hundred and fifty of those acres are in organic produce.

Rick was a newcomer when he started in FLO. So he ended up being given the crops to grow that nobody else was doing. Everybody does hard winter squash, so his mostly goes to processors. For FLO he raises cauliflower, asparagus, zucchini, tomatoes, and broccoli raab, among other vegetables. But only a portion of his organic produce goes through FLO. He sells 250 tons of squash, for instance, to Hains for baby food.

“Some of our vegetables go to Wegmans,” Rick says, “or Whole Foods. I used to sell to Beechnut in Canajoharie. They used to take produce from all the local guys. But then a Swiss company bought them out – Hero. They got state money to put up a brand new plant and as soon as they got the plant put up they said: ‘We don’t need you local growers any more’ and started getting it aseptic from God knows where. Mexico or wherever.

“I’m different from most of the members,” Rick continues. “Most don’t have much or any hired labor. I’m at a larger scale. I have ten full time workers, year-round, not counting me or my wife. Then there’s a whole pile of seasonal people. The other farms can only do what they can do with one person. That’s fine. But I can do a different thing. I’m more for wholesale and processing and that sort of thing. It has been my salvation to be diverse. Every year something fails, and they take turns. Hopefully they don’t all take the same turn! My pumpkins are not very good this year. Last year they were perfect! Last year the cauliflower wasn’t very good but so far this year it is okay. Tomatoes I got totally wiped out last year, this year I had a crop – a nice crop – but the market is flooded so you can’t sell them! I left half my crop in the field because I just can’t sell them. The heirloom price should be $25 or $30 retail for a case of 25 pounds, and it should get down to $18 to $20 to me. But at one point I had to go down to $9. At that point I said: ‘The hell with this. I’m not doing it anymore. And I’m not going to grow them next year!’”

Rick would raise more soy and grain, for which the market is a little more stable, but is stymied by weeds. His acreage in corn and soy is already so large that he has trouble cultivating it all in the narrow two week window available for his equipment to do the job. If it was wet during that time, the weeding doesn’t get done and then the crop suffers. He figures you can at least afford to weed vegetables by hand.

FLO operates at the Pedersen Farm in Seneca Castle, NY. Rick and Laura Pedersen own the largest farm in FLO by far, and it is equipped with a 32’ by 56’ refrigerated warehouse and forklift equipment -- which makes loading so much easier. Here some of Rick’s cauliflower is unloaded from the pickup bringing it from the field.
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Pedersen mixes his own fertilizers (all of it is organic now, including hog manure from his pig operation) so it can be tailored to each crop, and has overhead irrigation everywhere he raises vegetables. He gets water out of 7 irrigation ponds. The couple had a big barn behind their house, but it burned and in 1993, to get some storage space for their vegetables, they built a 32 by 56 foot cooler in its place. This turned out to be an ideal facility for FLO to use to assemble their loads for RA.

The issue of produce standards is a controversial one. Although FLO has been instrumental in establishing high standards for the uniformity and beauty of local produce being distributed from NY farms, those standards continue to evolve. This is especially true for tomatoes.

“The tomato standard,” Rick explains, “is set by the greenhouse tomato. They are absolutely blemish-free. Obviously you can’t be as perfect as that if you’re growing in the field. You have to deal with the environment – rain, wind, mud, disease pressure, insects. You can even put in artificial light in a greenhouse. It’s tough to get field tomatoes past the rejection masters at the warehouse. They have to have everything perfectly blemish-free. I gave up on Wegmans a couple of years ago. They can kick a $10,000 delivery back for a couple of bad items.”

He is also concerned that the farmer gets so little of the final produce dollar. “A lot of the value in produce when it gets to the customer,” he says, “is trucking, packaging, labeling, and the markup, which is 100%. When you take all that stuff out and get back to the farmer, the farmer might not have had to be so cheap as it originally sounded. The grocery stores like to have at least 100% markup, or twice what they pay the farmer. Sometimes it is more, as much as 5 times what the farmer gets!”

It was just 7 or 8 years ago that the Pedersens began their switch to organic growing. Part of Rick’s motivation was that he was sick and tired of major corporations like Monsanto and the plant breeders constantly getting in his pocket. He only grew 30” soybeans, for instance. But it got so he couldn’t buy bush beans anymore. The breeders all went for thin line straight beans, solely for the purpose of making

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Photo by Jack Kittredge

Rick Pedersen, whose farm warehouse is the collection point for FLO produce twice a week.
Janet Cawley, FLO manager until FLO’s joint venture with Regional Access.

growers buy more seed because they had to have a higher population to fill the field.

“They then started adding all the GMOs to it,” he adds. “It got to where you couldn’t even buy a non-GMO bean anymore. I just didn’t want to be controlled that way. That’s part of why I wanted to be organic. Certainly the economics were part of it. Back then it was highly profitable. The profit has decreased in organic over what it was three or four years ago. And it’s better for the environment. If you do things like you are supposed to, with nutrition and rotations, your insects and disease just naturally go down. I would never have thought that 10 years ago. A lot of people who grow conventionally still don’t believe that! It’s a wide swing. You’re either going to grow down. I would never have thought that 10 years of building pallets! That gets old. I’m just pick up our stuff. I can’t say how great that is after ten years of building pallets! That gets old. I’m just overjoyed they want to do it.”

Pedersen, who feels that FLO farmers produce very high quality vegetables and fruit, would like to see more sales through the co-op. He realizes that there are a lot of bottlenecks in selling to New York City. “Getting in there is one,” he admits. “I call it the ‘produce mafia’ down there. You don’t just go down there and sell. Each of these guys has his own little lieffdom. The Hunt’s Point guys have everything all set up and they’ve been dealing with Florida, Texas and California and have their deals. Here comes New York with their 3-month season and they don’t even want to talk to you.”

But the Co-op can take produce farther than Rick would want to deliver, and in smaller quantities than any of the members can economically ship. There really. It’s a whole different way of thinking.”

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ra. We have tried to figure out why we haven’t become really big,” Janet offers. “Like Tuscarora in Pennsylvania, or Deep Root in New England. I don’t know how big they are, but Albert’s Organics buys from Deep Root. FLO was a small time operation when I joined it and that is what I’m comfortable with. Maybe what they would have to do to get a lot bigger is hire a manager with a business background. But there is a lot of competition out there now. Cooperative markets usually buy from farmers right beside them. There are clusters right around towns with coop markets. So we would only be able to supply the odd thing like daikon, if no one is growing that, or the burdock root.

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“I think Regional offers us a lot,” she continues. “They have a larger customer base than we have. People ask for things, particularly fruit, and if they can add that on to an order it is nice. They like to know what we have and if they can offer it to customers. Having us in-house gives them more control. But we’re a small percent of their entire business. It is wonderful that Regional Access is able to pick up our stuff. I can’t say how great that is after ten years of building pallets! That gets old. I’m just overjoyed they want to do it.”

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The Neighboring Food Co-op Association: Collaboration for a Thriving Regional Economy

by Erbin Crowell

On December 21, 1844, the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers opened a humble grocery store in the north of England. The offerings of the store were not impressive, being comprised of butter, flour, oatmeal and some candles. The vision of the Pioneers, on the other hand, was audacious at a time of dramatic economic upheaval. Often cited as the founders of the modern co-operative movement, the members of the co-op envisioned a new way of doing business that was rooted in community and put the control of enterprise in the hands of the people who used its services. Key to the growth of the co-operative model was the establishment by the Pioneers of a set of principles that have guided the movement ever since.

At a time when access to nutritious food was limited and adulterated products were common, the most urgent need was for pure, wholesome and affordable food. But the vision of the Rochdale Pioneers encompassed more that just retailing. Their goal was a transformation of the economy, and early co-operators also set about the development of agricultural and manufacturing co-ops to supply their stores and support employment, and housing co-ops to provide shelter. The co-op at Rochdale operated continuously until 1991 and is now merged with the Co-operative Group, a national co-op comprised of 5.5 million members across the UK and, reflecting the operative Group, a national co-op comprised of 5.5 million members across the UK and, reflecting the.

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One of the more than 20 co-ops involved in NCFA, the Upper Valley Food Co-op serves Vermont’s White River Junction area. Growth of the movement also had another important result. As these stores grew, other merchants began to alter their own practices in response, creating ripples of change that reached across the economy. As co-ops have spread around the world, the movement has found many different expressions and has been a catalyst for the transformation of the economies around them.

True to this legacy, food co-ops in our region have been pioneers and innovators, promoting natural foods, supporting organic agriculture, and helping to build the Fair Trade movement. In addition to creating economic relationships that reflect their values and serve member needs, co-ops have also influenced the mainstream food system. As they demonstrated demand for natural, organic and fairly traded products, these goods soon began to appear on the shelves of conventional grocery stores and even multinational, investor-owned supermarkets.

The commonalities between co-operative principles and values and those of the Fair Trade movement have supported collaboration with movements for trade justice. In the last few years, food co-ops and organizations such as the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) have been active participants in dialogs around the shared challenges of family farmers and farm workers in our own country and those in the developing world. The National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA) and co-ops in our own region, including Berkshire Co-op Market, Franklin Community Co-op and Honest Weight Food Co-op, were founding members of the Domestic Fair Trade Association, which seeks to bring the principles of the international Fair Trade movement to bear on agriculture here at home (for more information, visit www.thedfta.org).

Food co-ops have also been leaders in strengthening local economies, supporting local producers and rooting wealth and infrastructure in our communities. And as “buying local” becomes more mainstream, co-ops are collaborating with other stakeholders in the food system to ensure that re-localization contributes to change that is also just, participatory and fair.

Stronger Together At the same time, food co-ops have not always been proactive in telling their story, in working together...
to measure and promote their impact, and in leveraging their shared strength. With this in mind, Brattleboro Food Co-op first convened a group of co-op managers and board members in 2004 to explore closer collaboration. In 2007, participants at a subsequent gathering in Vermont approved the Middlebury Manifesto, a document establishing what was then called the Connecticut Valley Neighboring Co-ops and expressing the desire to “further the ideals of democracy, cooperation, autonomy and education as enshrined in the International Cooperative Principles”. The document goes on to state the intent of participating co-ops to “reorient the economy from one dedicated to maximizing individual wealth to one calculated to advance the common good,” to “promote regional autonomy in food production and other goods essential to human existence.” An overarching goal was to “provide occasions for collective action to build a cooperative economy in our geographic region”.

Building on this momentum, a representative steering committee was established with organizational support provided by the National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA) and the Cooperative Fund of New England (CFNE). The group then embarked on a process of scenario planning in which it explored potential outcomes of recent trends in the economy, culture and politics of the region. What might our region’s economy look like in 2020? How could food co-ops work together with like-minded organizations and networks to create more resilient communities as we look toward a post-petroleum economy? How could we avoid duplication of effort in order to support other initiatives, focus on our core strengths and advance a shared vision for the future?

A central focus for the group was the development of the co-operative economy in our region. But parallel to this process of deciding where we wanted to be in the future, we needed to understand where we were now.

Measuring Our Impact
The members of the NFCA are member-owned, democratically governed community grocery stores ranging in size from large, multiple storefront retailers with thousands of members to smaller markets with just a few hundred. Most of these co-ops have been in operation for more than 20 years though some, such as the Putney Food Co-op and the Co-op Food Stores (Hanover Consumer Co-op), have been active since the 1930s and ’40s.

Most of the food co-ops in our region emerged during the 1970s and ’80s, as people worked together to access healthy, organic, and bulk foods, and began to advance new ideas such as Fair Trade. Food co-ops also supported the early development of farmer co-ops such as Deep Root Organic Co-op, a regional supplier of organic produce, and worker co-ops such as the Fair Trade pioneer Equal Exchange. Area food co-ops have also been early examples of economic relocalization. The Buffalo Mountain Food Co-op in Hardwick, VT, for example, was founded...
The Co-op movement has grown stronger through the willingness of members to hear each other out and try to find solutions that work for everyone. In 1973 and has been quietly laying the groundwork for more recent activism that has put this town on the national map of local foods activism.

In 2008, the NFCA took a major step in gaining a better understanding of the economic impact of co-ops in the region. With support from the Brattleboro and Hanover Food Co-ops, independent economic analyst Doug Hoffer was hired to undertake a study of member co-ops in Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut to collect and analyze data about their impact on the regional economy. The study revealed compelling data, including that the 17 co-ops of the NFCA had a combined membership of 64,000 people and aggregate annual sales exceeding $161 million. Further, these co-ops also had a dramatic impact in the regional economy, including:

- **Support of Local Economies**
  - Median revenue for member co-ops was $3 million and the average was $9.5 million. The median growth rate of co-ops in the network over the previous three years was 14%.
  - Member co-ops purchased more than $33 million in local products in 2007, including $10 million in fresh farm products, $18 million in locally-processed foods and $5 million in other products. (For the purposes of this study, “local” was defined as being sourced within the state or within 100 miles.)

**Stable Employment and Services**

- $28.6 million in employee wages, with the average wage being 18% higher than the average for food and beverage stores in the same states.
- Co-ops had lower staff turnover (36%) when compared to supermarkets (59%) and more staff employed fulltime (62% compared to 43% in supermarkets).
- Taken together, member food co-ops in Vermont would be among the top 25 employers in the state.

**Support of Local Government and Infrastructure**

- Including $7.3 million in sales, excise, and other taxes, $434,000 by employees, and $500,000 in property taxes.

Further analysis, using data from the U.S. Commerce Department and input-output software (IMPLAN), enabled an estimate of “multiplier effects”, including indirect impacts such as the circulation of money in the local and regional economies. Co-ops buy from farmers, wholesalers, and service providers who spend some of the money locally for their business inputs, including payroll, equipment, supplies, utilities, and taxes. Some of the wages paid to co-op employees and to workers down the supply chains are spent locally as well. These are called “induced” effects.

For example, the $161 million in sales by member co-ops in 2007 generated an additional $118 million from indirect and induced economic activity, resulting in a total of $279 million in direct and indirect impact. In terms of employment, including full-time, part-time, and self-employed, money circulating in the regional economy resulted in 1,049 jobs in addition to the 1,240 direct jobs provided by member co-ops. Total compensation for these 2,263 jobs is estimated to be $75 million. According to this model, the direct, indirect, and induced fiscal benefits of the co-ops equal $13.7 million in tax revenue for host states. (For a copy of this study, please e-mail the author at erbin@nfca.coop.)

Since this study was completed, the NFCA has continued to grow. Together, the now more than 20 member food co-ops operate 26 storefronts, have a combined membership of over 2,000 individuals, employ 1,425 people and have annual revenue of $185 million. While this growth is partly due to additional co-ops joining the organization, further analysis shows that individual co-ops have been growing even during this challenging economy. For example, if we remove the data from new members, we find that between 2007 and the end of 2009 the 17 co-ops included in the original study grew about 8% in revenue, 4% in employees, and 17% in members.

Some examples of these trends include Brattleboro Food Co-op, which is in the process of an ambitious expansion aimed at better serving the community and includes affordable housing in its plans, and the Co-op Food Stores of New Hampshire, which has recently opened a new location in nearby Vermont. Meanwhile, new stores such as River Valley Market in Northampton, MA, have opened their doors in just the past few years. And new food co-ops are in various stages of start-up across the region, from Fiddleheads Food Co-op in New London, CT, to the Old Creamery Co-op in Cummington, MA.

**Envisioning the Future**

Analysis of our economic activity has helped our individual co-ops to better understand and communicate their impact in the region, and to reach out to organizations with similar goals. More importantly, perhaps, it has encouraged our association to articulate a vision for the future and to begin to use its shared strength to advance that vision. In beginning this process, we soon realized that our impact in the region — while impressive — only represented a beginning when considering the potential of a cooperative economy. A study by the University of Wisconsin, for example, found that there are more than 29,000 co-ops in the U.S., operating across industries and services, with more than 500 in the NFCA’s membership area of western New England (http://www.uwec.wisc.edu/impact.html). Recent reports have also shown that co-ops have been more stable during the recent upheavals of the global economy, offering tools for communities seeking more stable employment, services and infrastructure. (See, for example, Birchall & Ketelson, “Resilience of the Cooperative Business Model in Times of Crisis”, International Labour Organization, 2009. A pdf may be downloaded at www.ilo.org.)

Recognizing our shared impact, the NFCA has identified further analysis across co-op sectors and throughout regional co-op supply chains as a future priority. The Northeast is home to many successful farmer co-ops and credit unions, as well as worker co-ops that have begun to work together through networks such as the Valley Alliance of Worker Co-ops. Additionally, we have recognized that we might also draw lessons from places around the world where co-operatives play a vital role in regional economies.

One source of inspiration is Emilia Romagna in northeast Italy. Italy is known as the home of the Slow Food movement, and this region is home to vibrant artisanal traditions, including the production of Modena-Reggiano cheese, balsamic vinegar, local pasta dishes and cured pork products. Agriculture is central to the regional economy and is dominated by family farms. The local food sector is small and less powerful than the larger, multinational food companies. Italy also has more co-ops per capita than any other country in the world, and the contribution of co-ops to the local and regional economies is more significant. The study reveals that 35% of Italy’s food retail sales are spent locally as well. These are called “induced” effects.

For a map of member co-ops, please visit www.nfca.coop. One of the NFCA’s future goals is to create a regional organization and sustainable food system. Recognizing the contribution of co-ops to strong, resilient regional economies
members, we envision collaboration among a variety of co-operative enterprises. Our approach to achieving this vision is to actively reach out to likeminded organizations including food system activists, economic development agencies and farmers’ organizations. For example, the NFCA has opened dialogs with NOFA-VT and other state chapters, organizations such as the community involved in Sustainable Agriculture (CISA) and Vermont’s Farmer to Plate initiative, as well as farmer co-ops in the region. The NFCA has also become a charter affiliate member of the New England Farmers Union (NEFU), recognizing the need for farmers and consumers to collaborate in supporting sustainable farming and rural communities, and in making our voice heard before policy-makers.

Regional Sourcing
Food co-ops in our region have served as laboratories for new ways of thinking about food, from organic and fairly traded goods to systems for the distribution and retailing of bulk products. More recently, co-ops in the region have also served as important incubators for new local products. “We’re the kind of place local entrepreneurs bring their new products for early marketing,” Annie Gaillard of Buf-falo Mountain Food Co-op says in a recent article for Cooperative Grocer. Many member co-ops work closely with producers in their area to share information and plan production for the growing season.

As part of our effort to contribute to a healthy, just and sustainable food system, the NFCA has been working to identify products that are feasible to grow and process in our region but are currently unavailable or difficult to source on the local or regional levels. “Local” is defined as the New England states plus New York and adjacent areas of Canada. The NFCA’s area of membership currently includes Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut. Our goal is to work together with farmers, pro-ducers and likeminded organizations to begin to fill these gaps, developing sources for products in a manner that advances our vision.

In January of 2010, NFCA member City Market (Onion River Co-op) in Burlington, VT, undertook a store-wide analysis of local product gaps – determining products that are feasible to grow in Vermont but where a local source is currently unavailable. Using this as a starting point, the NFCA sourcing committee compared notes among member co-ops in the region to select the most common, high volume gaps. This reduced list of items was then sent out to the broader co-op membership.

NFCA members were asked to identify the sourcing priority of these items from high to low. The items selected as highest priority for sourcing work included dry grains (e.g. oats and popcorn), dry beans, single serving yogurt, frozen fruit and vegetables, and chicken (chicken was eventually removed from the list due to variations in tracking).

Member co-ops were then asked to run sales move-ment reports for the 2009 calendar year on these products. We also surveyed member co-ops to find out what price premium they’d be willing to pay for products sourced on a regional level. The NFCA is now sharing this preliminary data with agricultural agencies and food co-op representatives, farmers and their organizations, and community economic development groups across the region. Our goal is to begin a dialogue on how we might work together in the future and will be collecting feedback and contacts in hopes of building understanding of shared goals and identifying areas where we might work together with likeminded organizations.

A key question is how can we collaborate with farmers and food system advocates to support pro-duction, processing, marketing and distribution of infrastructure that will be rooted in our region and accountable to our communities over the long term.

Looking Forward
The modern co-operative movement was launched in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. In re-sponse to economic upheaval, dislocation of local economies, competing ideologies and conflict, and globalization, people began to work together to create a viable economic alternative that would be based on member ownership, democratic control, and meeting community needs.

In the wake of more recent economic challenges, in-terest in the co-operative model has increased dra-matically. Once largely ignored by the mainstream press, food co-ops have gained attention in the news media and among community development activists and organizations.

Across the region there are efforts to establish new food co-ops oriented toward economic development and relocalization. There is also a growing recognition that co-operative enterprises – including food co-ops, farmer co-ops, credit unions and worker co-ops – have been remarkably stable in the current economy. In addition to their advantages as mem-ber-owned, democratically-controlled enterprises that are guided by member priorities above the accumulation of private profit, co-ops bring some distinct strengths to the movement for relocalization and the regional economies. For example, food co-ops:

• tend to develop local skills & assets rather than importing them into the region, creating leadership and professional development opportunities.

• are able to assemble larger financial resources to create vital community enterprises (most food co-ops in the region are based on member shares of less than $200).

• have a low business failure rate and tend to be long-lived, resulting in lasting economic and social infrastructure.

• are member-owned community economic institu-tions that are difficult to move or buy-out.

• create regional efficiencies through the pooling of purchasing power and other economic activities.

• support vibrant, participatory and engaged com-munities.

As a result of these factors, food co-ops and co-ops in general – contribute to a more stable food system, infrastructure, employment & services, and economy.

Looking forward, the NFCA is working to demon-strate the role of co-operative enterprise in building more vibrant and resilient communities, supporting the growth and development of member co-ops and the launch of new efforts, and reaching out to farmers and their organizations and likeminded groups such as NOFAVR and our shared goals of a healthy, just and sustainable food system. In doing so, we hope to build on the extraordinary vi-sion of generations of co-operators, linking their ideas with the imagination of our members to ad-dress new challenges and opportunities as we build a thriving regional economy.

Statement on the Co-operative Identity

Definition: A co-operative is an autonomous as-soociation of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democrati-cally-controlled enterprise.

Values: Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their found-ers, co-operative members believe in the ethical val-ues of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Principles: The co-operative principles are guide-lines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership. Co-operatives are voluntary organizations, open to all who can benefit from membership, and able to accept and reflect their members’ wishes to acknowledge the contribution of the many food co-op staff and board members, and past proj-ect manager Eric DeLuca, to development of the NFCA community and vision. He may be contacted at erbin@nfca.coop.

For more information on the NFCA, please visit www.nfca.coop.

Erbin Crowell is executive director of the Neighb-orhood Food Co-op Association and serves on the board of the Domestic Fair Trade Association and the National Cooperative Business Association. He wishes to acknowledge the contribution of the many food co-op staff and board members, and past proj-ect manager Eric DeLuca, to development of the NFCA community and vision. He may be contacted at erbin@nfca.coop.
Organic Valley: America’s Largest Organic Farmer Co-op Has Faced Tough Decisions

by Jack Kittredge

Representing 1624 farm families in 34 states and 4 provinces of Canada, and projecting 19% growth to gross $630 million in sales this year, Organic Valley is a historic success story in the long tradition of farmer co-ops. Having built themselves a brand new state-of-the-art headquarters in La Farge, Wisconsin only six years ago, they now find that they have to add another three-quarters of an acre of space to the tune of $6.1 million just to keep up with their growth. For 22 years now the organization has been adding farmers and farm products to its mix. The co-op sells only organic products, among which now are milk, yogurt, soy, cheeses, butter, spreads, creams, eggs, produce and juice, sold under the Organic Valley label, and a full range of organic meats sold under the Organic Prairie label.

The co-op was organized in 1988 by a handful of farmers in Southwestern Wisconsin’s Coulee Region. (A coulee is a geological term referring to a...
organic milk in the nation!

Reinventing Dairy, Organic Valley-style

As a farming cooperative, Cooperative Research and Production Project (CROPP) prefers to be known as a "coop," which stands for cooperation. CROPP was founded in 1988 by an informal meeting of six farmers in the northeast region of Wisconsin. Each farmer had “field farms” that either produced specialty crops (primarily vegetables) or raised livestock. An informal dairy cooperative, CROPP, was founded by the farmers to pool their resources, which included land, labor, and capital. The goal was to diversify income sources through selling specialty crops and organic dairy products. CROPP was later incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1991.

In the late 1980s, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources reached out to CROPP to learn more about the co-op and the challenge of growing specialty crops on field farms. CROPP members agreed to work with the department to develop a microtillage practice that would reduce the need for heavy equipment on field farms. This microtillage practice was later tested on a CROPP field farm in a project funded by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

In 2006, CROPP received a $568,529 grant from the Federal Agriculture Market Order Program (FAMPO) to extend this microtillage practice to other specialty crop producers. The goal of the project was to develop a microtillage system that would reduce the need for heavy equipment on field farms and increase profits for the farmers.

In recent years, CROPP farmers have worked with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension to develop a microtillage system that reduces the need for heavy equipment on field farms. The microtillage system has been tested on a CROPP field farm and has shown significant cost savings for the farmers.

In conclusion, CROPP farmers have worked with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension to develop a microtillage system that reduces the need for heavy equipment on field farms. The microtillage system has been tested on a CROPP field farm and has shown significant cost savings for the farmers.
In the past few years the co-op has begun to look deeper into what really qualifies as “sustainable fuel.” They wanted to identify non-food, non-GMO, organic oil seed crops to use as candidate bio-fuels and have established a system for farmers to grow, harvest, press, convert and run a variety of contend- ers without ever leaving the farm.

The co-op has so far invested two seasons growing and researching camelina (a small false flax) and sunflowers. Both of these crops have shown strong promise in test fields. For example, farmers are see- ing not only a high yield of oil (80–110 gallons per acre) but also 1200–1500 pounds of feed meal per acre as well. Feed and fuel are produced in one pro- cess from the same field. Even in these early stages, this approach is helping farmers cut both their fuel and feed costs.

Organic Valley completed a mobile biodiesel sys- tem in 2008 and successfully created biodiesel from crops of sunflowers and camelina to power some vehicles and equipment which are now used for demonstrations on farms and at events.

Recycled Content
CROP has consolidated corrugated carton needs with one company, realizing cost savings because of the increased volume in business and is also able to create cardboard cartons to ship packaged products that contain a minimum of 81% recycled content—72% of which is post-consumer waste.

Controversial Issues
Despite its values, innovations and cooperative structure, three decisions made by Organic Valley over the years have proven controversial among a number of consumers and raised questions about the inherent differences between cooperatives and private companies. All three decisions appear to be based on the operating requirements of a dairy busi- ness functioning at a national scale and would have been the same whether the business were a co-op or a private corporation. These three decisions were:

1) to ultra-pasteurize some of their milk,
2) to amend the Organic Foods Production Act in order to overturn the Harvey decision, and
3) to prevent member dairies from actively selling raw milk.

Ultra-pasteurization
Pasteurization is the process of heating a food, usu- ally liquid, to a specific temperature for a definite length of time, and then cooling it immediately. This process slows microbial growth in food. The process was named after its creator, French chemist and microbiologist Louis Pasteur. The process was originally conceived as a way of preventing wine and beer from souring.

There are two main types of pasteurization used today: High Temperature/Short Time (HTST) and Ultra-High Temperature (UHT or ultra-heat treated). In the HTST process, milk is forced between metal plates or through pipes heated on the outside by hot water, and is heated to 71.7 °C (161 °F) for 15–20 seconds. UHT processing holds the milk at a temperature of 135 °C (275 °F) for a fraction of a second. Milk simply labeled “pasteurised” or simply “UHT” has been treated with the UHT method.

Pasteurization is the main reason for milk’s extend- ed shelf life. High Temperature Short Time (HTST) pasteurised milk typically has a refrigerated shelf life of two to three weeks, whereas ultra-pasteurised milk can last much longer, sometimes two to three months. When ultra heat treatment (UHT) is com- bined with sterile handling and container technology (such as aseptic packaging), it can even be stored unrefrigerated for 6–9 months.

Ultra-pasteurization means that enormous quanti- ties of milk can be processed much more quickly than any other pasteurization (or safety regulation) process. The milk is also shelf-stable for several months. On the other hand, many consumers feel the treatment changes the taste and texture of the milk. They feel the high heat inactivates many of the flavor components in raw milk and adds its own cooked flavor. The process also affects whey pro- teins that contribute to the thick creaminess of dairy.

Organic Valley uses HTST pasteurization for all its regionally branded gallons and half-gallons of organic milk. The cooperative was built on the con- cept of regional milk production. But they began to offer ultra pasteurized milk and cream in 1998 in response, they say, to strong consumer demand. Many people, both consumers and retailers, prefer the longer shelf life offered by the UHT process, and they have also received some consumer feed- back stating a preference for the taste of the ultra pasteurized milk.

The longer transit time for milk in the national pool, and the fact that organic milk is less in demand than conventional so often sits on a shelf longer before being sold, also make the business advantages of milk treated with UHT clear: less spoilage and waste.

Ultra pasteurized Organic Valley milk is offered in non-regionally branded half gallons, as well as quarts and aseptic (shelf stable) liters and 8 oz. single-serves. Note that both varieties are avail- able in half gallons. The process used to pasteurize the milk is printed on both the gable top and on the
front of the package. The ultra pasteurized milk is clearly defined as “Ultra Pasteurized.” Traditionally pasteurized (HTST) regional milk is defined simply as “Pasteurized” and includes a moniker for your region below the logo; e.g. “Heartland Pastures,” “Northwest Pastures,” etc.

Organic Valley says that, in terms of nutritional value, the primary changes that occur in pasteurization include a negligible loss of vitamins A, C and B, and Folic Acid.

Amending the Organic Foods Production Act

In 2005, the US First Circuit Court ruled in favor of Maine blueberry farmer Arthur Harvey. He had sued the National Organic Program alleging that multiple provisions of the National Organic Program Final Rule were inconsistent with the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990. In brief, the court found that:

- nonorganic ingredients not commercially available in organic form but used in the production of items labeled “organic” must have individual reviews in order to be placed on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances;
- synthetic substances are barred in the processing of products labeled “organic”; and
- dairy herds converting to organic production are not allowed to be fed feed that is only 80% organic for the first nine months of a one-year conversion.

When the Harvey decision came down many small organic farmers and consumers were jubilant, feeling that the loose standards promulgated by the NOP were finally being addressed. But this third court finding delivered a blow to Organic Valley’s supply situation. Although the law clearly said 100% of feed must be organic, the USDA had allowed transitioning farmers the 80% exemption because of the high cost of organic feed, and many had taken advantage of it. When it was yanked out from under them, many dairy farmers felt they could not continue in the program.

“All of a sudden they were facing 4 times the cost,” explains George. “Most were producing their own forage, and buying in grain. Under the 80/20 rule, the grain was the 20% of the ration that was conventional. After Harvey all that grain had to be organic. For some that meant paying four times as much for feed.”

As a result Organic Valley found itself supporting the OTA in its controversial effort to amend the OFPA in the fall of 2005. While not asking for a return of the 80/20 rule, the dairy part of the amendment allowed transitioning farmers to feed their own transitioning feed during the third year as organic, avoiding a four-year transition. The amendment was passed without serious debate or public notice and both the substance and the manner of handling this amendment bitterly divided the organic industry.

Siemon was not happy to be involved in this, and wanted to prevent such an event from happening again. In order to avoid it he felt two things needed to be done:

“First, we need to educate the consumer,” he said at the time. “We need to talk about the quality of the food but also about the kinds of farms it comes from. We need consumers who care about keeping family farms alive, who want to buy locally and support farmers markets and CSAs. I’ve served on the NOSB, we talk about these issues on our product packaging panels, we regularly put money into consumer education.

“Second,” he continued, “farmers need a face in Washington DC. We may not think its necessary, but if you are not at the table, someone else will be. Farmers need their own voice. We have tried to help farmers get organized, supporting groups like NODPA. We’ve put aside money to deal with this. It’s hard, but things in this country are controlled by the membership, board, committee and management team levels for well over a year now, with the hope for a win-win solution. During this year volumes of information—research studies, illness cases, legal precedents, nutritional information and so on were brought forth. Each side was convinced that the information they brought to the table would sway the other side. It is correct to say that we are deeply familiar with both sides of the issue… and we are still divided. So why did the Board finally vote not to allow its members to be in the raw milk business? The synopsis below may help explain the decision:

- Most CROPP farmer-owners drink raw milk and many believe in its benefits. The decision is not because we are “against raw milk.”

- Preventing Members From Actively Selling Raw Milk

On May 26, 2010 Organic Valley/CROPP explained the board’s raw milk decision:

In March of this year, Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative’s Farmer Board of Directors endorsed a statement supporting the legalization of raw milk in the state of Wisconsin that was sent to Governor Doyle. This was in keeping with the cooperative’s long standing support of consumer choice. So why in May did the CROPP Board vote to not allow its farmer-owners to sell raw milk? Is this a reversal of the position?

The raw milk issue at CROPP is one of the most deeply debated topics tackled by the cooperative in its 22 year history. The debate has been active on the membership, board, committee and management team levels for well over a year now, with the hope for a win-win solution. During this year volumes of information—research studies, illness cases, legal precedents, nutritional information and so on were brought forth. Each side was convinced that the information they brought to the table would sway the other side. It is correct to say that we are deeply familiar with both sides of the issue… and we are still divided. So why did the Board finally vote to not allow its members to be in the raw milk business?

- Most CROPP farmer-owners drink raw milk and many believe in its benefits. The decision is not because we are “against raw milk.”
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The Natural Farmer

Winter, 2010-11

An unknown minority of our 1600+ dairy farmers sell raw milk as a side business. Some simply sell small quantities to neighbors, while others market it more actively.

Raw milk is growing in popularity and is truly a local product. We believe consumers should have the choice to purchase it directly from the farm and consume it expeditiously.

CROPP’s mission is to serve its farmers. We do this by being in the business of selling pasteurized organic milk under our brand, Organic Valley. This is a complex endeavor. Our model is to have regional milk going to regional markets. Our board wants its farmer-owners to stay focused on our model.

Since our founding in 1988, when a farmer-owner signs up to become a member, they agree to deliver all of their milk to the cooperative, with the exception of milk used for calves and their own families. This policy simply requires that members uphold that agreement.

We have encountered challenges in managing our milk supply. When the cooperative counts on and plans for a farmer’s entire supply, but then the amount of milk delivered is unexpectedly less due to raw milk sales, this creates difficulties in supply management and planning, which affects all of the cooperative’s farmer-owners.

We are taking a cautious approach in order to keep our cooperative and brands strong for future generations of organic family farmers.

At the request of the membership at the co-op’s most recent annual meeting, the farmer board wanted to end this drawn out raw milk debate, and they took the more conservative route to prohibit the farmer-owners from being in the raw milk business. This decision will require all of our farmer-owners who sell raw milk to choose one business or the other. This may end up being a boon for the raw milk movement in the states where it is legal.

CROPP Cooperative is not against raw milk. We have let our farmers sell raw milk on the side for two decades. We have gone through a well vetted, inclusive process. It is now time for us to stand by our board’s decision.

We are currently working on policy implementation plan and timeline for our farmer-owners.

So what do these decisions suggest about cooperatives? To me it is that they are ultimately in business and succeed or fail according to the same rules as other businesses: Do you serve the demand? Do you do it efficiently with your resources? Do you end up making money for your owners? Whether your company is owned by a sole proprietor, a group of peers with equal votes, or stockholders based on their investments, it seems that it ultimately has to act in certain ways if it wants to survive.

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Produced by New Hope Natural Media, a division of Penton Media, Inc.
Deep Root Organic Co-op: Growing Co-operation

by Erbin Crowell

Founded in 1986, Deep Root Organic Co-op was growing and marketing organic vegetables on a regional level before it became a national trend. Now, with demand for fresh, healthy, regionally-grown produce on the rise, the co-operative is connecting more consumers with their farmer members. As sustainable food system advocates explore systems for the distribution of produce, Deep Root’s nearly 25 years of experience has demonstrated the potential of the co-op model to support the viability of family farms. Based in Johnson, VT, Deep Root is made up of nineteen members, including farmers across Vermont and the eastern townships of Québec. The co-op serves wholesale customer across the Northeast, including food co-ops and mainstream grocery stores.

Chris Poshpeck, who joined the co-op as general manager in 1998, links members with distributors and retailers across the Northeast and beyond. On a weekly basis, farmer members send him a list of what they’re harvesting — everything from tomatoes, cucumbers, corn, peas and fennel to several varieties of lettuce, kale, chard, cabbage, broccoli, and collards — and Chris in turn contacts buyers to negotiate orders and arrange delivery.

Deep Root members offer a broad range of products year-round. But thanks to the northern climate, the co-op may be best known for root crops such as carrots, parsnips, beets, rutabagas, burdock, and black radish, and a large variety of winter squashes. More recently, the co-op has also begun offering a line of fermented and packaged spiced carrots, grated beets, onions with miso, and sauerkraut.

Deep Root’s sales have grown from around $50,000 in its early days to more than $3 million dollars in 2009. The co-op’s products can be found in the produce sections of food co-ops across the region, including Brattleboro Food Co-op (VT), Willamantic Food Co-op (CT), City Market Co-op (Burlington, VT), River Valley Market Co-op (Northampton, MA), Putney Food Co-op (VT), and Springfield Food Co-op (VT), as well as a growing number of mainstream grocery stores such as Whole Foods Market. Sales continue to grow, but the co-op is clear in its purpose as a member-owned and controlled enterprise. “We’re not here to accumulate money,” says Chris. “We’re here to help our members be more successful.”

Recent efforts to build more sustainable regional economies have focused on systems for the efficient and effective aggregation and distribution of produce from family farmers. Being organized as a co-op enables Deep Root members to focus on their individual farms, while negotiating with buyers and marketing their products as a group. By pooling their production, members can also provide a more reliable source of high quality, diverse produce to their customers, while benefiting farmers. And because the co-op is farmer-owned, it is rooted in the region and accountable to its members, rather than to the priorities of external owners or investors.

Deep Root is always looking for new ways to strengthen their members, such as improved value-added and distribution systems. As co-op member Tony Lehouillier, of Foote Brook Farm in Johnson, VT, points out, “We can do a lot better with a little more control over our destiny.”

A line of credit from the Cooperative Fund of New England (CFNE), a regional loan fund for co-ops, has helped Deep Root manage the seasonality of the produce business. And with an additional loan from CFNE, the co-op recently completed the construction of a warehouse facility in Johnson, VT. This building will allow the co-op to have more control over the storage and distribution of its products. It also provides much needed office and meeting space for the growing co-op and its employees.

You can help support the co-op by asking for their products where you shop. For more information on Deep Root Organic Co-op, member farms and their products, please visit their website at www.deeprootorganic.coop.

An earlier version of this article was published by the Cooperative Fund of New England. For more information, please visit www.coopfund.coop.

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Full Circle Farm: Organic Produce Delivery Service A Threat or Boon to Local Farms?

by Stephen A. Sherman

Bright sunshine, an October treat in the Pacific Northwest, has lured cyclists from bustling Seattle to the unbarred country roads of Carnation, Washington. A small, hand-painted sign on Route 203 points down Northeast 8th Street to Full Circle Farm.

Resting just across from the farm's greenhouses is an early model Allis-Chalmers cultivating tractor. Rows of greens and late season crops extend beyond the red barn to the hills of the Snoqualmie Valley.

The quiet property belies the 12,000-member produce delivery service at the heart of Full Circle Farm's operations.

Full Circle is one of a new breed of farm-based businesses garnering admiration and controversy in the western United States. In a radical departure from traditional Community Supported Agriculture, farms like Full Circle and Capay Organic in California supplement their own certified-organic produce with that of other producers to fill boxes year-round for thousands of subscribers. At Full Circle, subscribers can be found as far away as Arctic Alaska.

The model offers the popular CSA-style box scheme to those who do not wish to eat exclusively what is in season locally. “People want peaches and nectarines in months when they’re not available in Washington,” said Frank Paganelli, Chief Operating Officer at Full Circle.

From CSA to “Farm-to-Table”

Full Circle Farm began in 1996 as a small CSA in North Bend, Washington. After splitting from their partner in 2000, farm founders Andrew Stout and Mary Munroe moved Full Circle to Carnation and expanded the business rapidly.

In order to provide a year-round CSA program, Full Circle started supplementing their own winter and storage crops with items grown on organic farms further south. The farm began letting customers specify some of the items in their boxes. Long-haul trucking and air transport allowed the farm to expand its delivery area throughout Alaska and the Puget Sound region.

“We want to extend the [CSA] model into a more custom-approached program,” said Paganelli.

Today, Full Circle employs about 140 people and earns over $11 million in annual sales. In addition to its subscription program, Full Circle sells to retail outlets in the eastern United States. In addition to its 12,000 member subscription program, Full Circle sells to retail outlets like Whole Foods Market.

A Complex Operation

After a bracing plunge in the frigid Arctic Ocean, a family of four in Barrow, Alaska could enjoy a warming plate of roast organic vegetables from their Full Circle Farm box. It is a complex operation that brings these vegetables from the soil to this northernmost town in the United States.

The origins of the items in the box vary seasonally, but on average 65% of produce is purchased by Full Circle from other farms. Source farms vary in size from dozens to hundreds of acres. “We try to source as locally as possible,” explained COO Frank Paganelli.

For crops unavailable in Washington State, Full Circle may purchase from dozens of certified-organic farms in California, the Pacific Northwest, Mexico, or tropical areas like Hawaii and Ecuador. Farms are listed and routinely featured in the weekly Full Circle newsletter.

“We try to tell their story. We think a fundamental part of our mission is to support local farmers,” said Paganelli.

Once produce has been harvested, it is processed and moved to a distribution center south of Seattle where it is custom-packed into boxes. Each customer is offered a basic set of items based on availability. Using an online e-commerce platform by phone, subscribers can then customize their basic box and specify additional items they would like included. Boxes destined for Alaska may be shipped to a facility in Anchorage and supplemented with any Alaskan product the subscriber has requested.

Completed boxes are loaded onto pallets and processed for transport. Local deliveries are made using Full Circle’s own fleet of delivery trucks, while long-haul transport is outsourced to trucking and air freight companies.

Full Circle offers home delivery to Anchorage and Western Washington from Everett to Olympia. Other subscribers must collect produce at one of hundreds of designated pick-up sites. In Alaska’s rural communities like Barrow, one host subscriber may pick up dozens of boxes on the unpaved runway of the local airport and distribute them from home.

Eating in Season

Within Seattle’s local food movement, Full Circle has inspired debate about what it means to eat locally.

“Some Seattle residents believe passionately about eating locally and are not deterred by the winter months,” reported Alex Moore, program manager at the Seattle-based non-profit Cascade Harvest Coalition. “Other consumers, myself among them, begin to round out our local diet with products from California as root vegetables begin to dominate the year-round CSA menu.”

Moore believes Full Circle’s model allows access to “second tier” customers who would be otherwise uninterested in a traditional CSA. “Several local entrepreneurs, like Dan Hulse of Terra Organics and Andrew Stout of Full Circle, have taken the CSA model to a new level of growth and profitability. By sourcing wholesale and integrating vertically they have been able to both increase margins and crack open a whole new tier of consumers – those who value the convenience of home delivery,” he wrote in an email correspondence.

Alaskan Criticism

The process of expanding the traditional CSA model into an international system of organic produce delivery has been controversial in Alaska. Susan Willsrud is co-founder and farm director at Calypso Farm and Ecolodging in Fairbanks, Alaska. She has seen her non-profit suffer from competition with Full Circle’s service. This year, she had trouble for the first time filling her CSA of 70. Four former shareholders explicitly stated they were switching to Full Circle.

In the greater Fairbanks area, Calypso Farm promotes concepts like Alaskan food security, food miles, and eating seasonally. Willsrud says that Full Circle’s presence undermines the educational work of her organization. Though it operates in a similar manner to her own CSA, Willsrud sees Full Circle’s service as an “industrial organic” choice because of the transport distance of its produce and the size of its source farms.

Eating local is not an easy choice, she asserts, and often means an altered diet in exchange for benefits to community and environment. “The important part of CSA is that the community is invested in a local farm and that the CSA builds local food security,” she said. “It hurts the local food economy here because regardless of what [Andrew Stout] is intending, the choice is between a local CSA and Full Circle.”

Full Circle Farm is aware of the criticisms of Alaskans growers like Willsrud, but COO Frank Paganelli disagrees. “We offer different products,” he maintains. “She offers a locally-grown CSA product. In Alaska, we try to source from local farms, but we primarily have to bring produce from out of state.”

“They’re probably one of the worst things that’s happened to the local farmer’s market,” said Arthur Keyes, owner and operator of Glacier Valley Farm in Palmer, Alaska. Keyes said sales at his market stand decline in 2007 and 2008. Customers he knew by name told him they were buying less produce because of their Full Circle boxes.

Keyes currently operates Glacier Valley CSA, a produce delivery service in Alaska of 100-200 members. He sources only from his own and other farms in Alaska as long as the season allows and then switches to out-of-state organic farms.

A Future in the Northeast?

Keyes’ assessment of Full Circle’s role is grim.

“If the Northeast ever gets an operation like this, local farmers at the farmer’s market will get hurt,” he said.

Though no farm-based model similar to Full Circle exists in our region, Boston Organics provide organic produce and groceries to subscribers in the Boston metropolitan area. Customers lose some of the benefits of a traditional CSA in exchange for convenience, selection, and often lower cost. As the local and organic markets continue to expand in the Northeast and across the country, the question will be if consumer demand can support both types of produce delivery.

Frank Paganelli provided an example as to where he sees Full Circle within the larger organic movement. A consumer can get a stalk of organic celery from Amazon.com’s grocery delivery service, from a Full Circle Farm box, or from a traditional small-scale CSA.

“We might have some overlap,” he said, “but by and large we have a different value proposition.”
that place pretty images of birds outdoors on the consumer packaging. “They should put pictures of their operations on the label,” he said. “Any lies hurt us all,” he added.

The board, impressed and sympathetic, and especially respectful, of the farmers who traveled to testify, committed to refine their proposal by their next meeting for strict stocking densities and other benchmarks that will assure organic livestock production meets the letter of the law and consumer expectations.

On organic hops, the NOSB voted unanimously “to require organic beer to include 100% organic hops beginning January 1, 2013.” Organic hops producers and brewers turned out a strong contingent arguing in favor of the resolution during two days of public hearings on various organic issues.

The NOSB also decided not to proceed with efforts to raise the profile of the “made with organic” label that is part of the USDA organic system. Retailer and consumer groups strongly encouraged keeping the current organic labeling regime, and testified that more prominence for the made with organic label could lower consumer demand for products made with 95-100% organic ingredients.

“We were concerned that a more prominent front label message concerning made with organic ingredients, including the proposal for language that would say the products were ‘certified to USDA standards’ would have created a cheaper ‘organic light,’ actually jeopardizing the continued growth of truly organic products, said Will Fantle, Codirector for The Cornucopia Institute.

Perhaps the most divisive issue was Corn Steep Liquor and determining whether or not the fertilizer representing various food industry and commercial non-synthetic material. Members of the NOSB would remain a part of organic production. But the NOSB, after considerable debate, ultimately decided to seek additional technical information to make a more informed decision, possibly at its next meeting. The fertilizer debate pretty much split clearly across a divide of agribusiness interests on the board and other members who work for nonprofit organic groups.

The NOSB also removed roadblocks to the use of organic yeast, an issue that had been debated for a number of years. Yeast’s unique characteristics had led it to be considered a nonagricultural non-synthetic substance. It is now been categorized as an agricultural product.

The board elected Tracey Miedema (of Earthbound Farms) as its next chair, over Jay Feldman (of Beyond Pesticides), and Joe Dixton (of Whole Foods Markets) as vice-chair. The spring 2011 meeting of the NOSB will take place in Seattle, Washington on April 26-29.

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Winter, 2010-11

by Larry Siegel

Full disclosure here: among my responsibilities in my former life was to push numbers around. And, while nothing else from that former life persists, I continue to push around numbers, especially if they relate to matters agricultural. Say what you will about numbers (they are rather drab) they do serve one unequivocal purpose: they quantify. When I ask a fellow grower or farmer how potatoes fared, he or she invariably responds with “it was a good year” (or a so-so year or a lousy year). Nothing is simpler than the determination of quantified potato performance. It is pounds planted as a ratio of pounds harvested and are summarized in the chart below. The results were not striking but interesting nonetheless and are summarized in the chart below. The eight-across quadrant provided the lowest return per hundredweight, and the smallest bulbs but the highest yield and the largest monetary return.

The conference features workshops for adults on a full range of topics: Alternative Energy and the Environment; Animal Husbandry; Crop Specific workshops; Farm Economics and Management; Farming and the Community; Farm Tours; Food and Family; Food Preservation and Cooking; Fruits, Nuts, and Trees; Garden and Greenhouse; Herbs and Flowers; International Agriculture; Land Care; Marketing; Nutrition and Health; Of the Spirit; Politics and Policy; Practical Skills; Soil Fertility; Social Justice; and Urban Agriculture. If you would like to submit a workshop proposal contact Ben Grosscup at ben.grosscup@nofamass.org or call 413-549-1568.

There will also be a Children’s Conference (ages 2-12) and a Teen Conference (ages 13-17), which explores many themes in common with the adult workshops in a manner that is appropriate for each age. If you want to submit a proposal for the Children’s Conference, contact Valerie Walton dallspice@aol.com or (978) 689-0716. If you want to submit a proposal for the Teen Conference, contact Jenn Caron at jenn69@gmail.com or (978) 544-3646.

The sooner you submit your proposal, the better. We need your workshop proposal submitted by December 31, 2010. The vast majority of decisions on accepting workshops will be made by the end of January 2011.

All workshop presenters receive free conference registration and a $50 honorarium for presenting a 90 minute workshop.

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Larger level sponsors also receive exhibit space and registration. Businesses and farms are also welcomed to simply exhibit and advertise in the Program Book. For more information, contact Bob Minnucci at bob@nofamass.org or 617-236-4893.

NOFA-NY Awarded One-Year Beginning Farmer & Rancher Grant
NOFA-NY has announced that the National Institute for Food and Agriculture recently granted funding through the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program for an initial phase of a one-year pilot project has three goals.

• NOFA-NY will offer a beginning farmer workshop track at their annual conference (held in Saratoga Springs from January 21-23, 2011) and will be providing scholarships to qualified beginning farmer applicants.

• NOFA-NY will provide opportunities for experienced farmers to provide relevant and valuable learning experiences to beginning farmers.

• NOFA-NY will support on-farm practical educational opportunities and social events for beginning farmers to learn new skills, to forge supportive friendships and to create lasting working relationships with other beginning farmers.

Stay tuned at www.nofany.org or by contacting Rachel Schell-Lambert at (585) 279-1979 x 511.

Garden Notes

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That being said I generally embarked on one mini-trial or another over the course of the growing season and being the primary liaison with UMass staff on all issues food related. If you have a good lead on a source of food donations, contact her at mel.q.shaw@gmail.com.

Another new person on the Committee staff this year is Siedeh Rezaei-Kamalabad, a work exchange volunteer for the past two conferences. She will serve as Registration Co-Coordinator, working closely with Kathleen Gears to process your registrations and tell you what you need to know about each detail pertaining to your registration.

PS – For those who attended the workshop series led by our 2010 keynoter, Sally Fallon, we posted to our website a group of recipes she gave us titled “Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner.” You can find them here: http://www.nofasummerconference.org/pdfs/BLDRecipes.pdf.

Call for Workshops
Every year the NOFA Summer Conference recruits creative and enthusiastic presenters for workshops for adults, teens, and children. In November 2010, the call for workshop proposals for the 2011 Conference – complete with a Workshop Proposal Form – will be sent out to previous workshop presenters and the ever growing list of presenter prospects that I am building. It will also be posted on the website: www.nofasummerconference.org.

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PS – For those who attended the workshop series led by our 2010 keynoter, Sally Fallon, we posted to our website a group of recipes she gave us titled “Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner.” You can find them here: http://www.nofasummerconference.org/pdfs/BLDRecipes.pdf.

Call for Workshops
Every year the NOFA Summer Conference recruits creative and enthusiastic presenters for workshops for adults, teens, and children. In November 2010, the call for workshop proposals for the 2011 Conference – complete with a Workshop Proposal Form – will be sent out to previous workshop presenters and the ever growing list of presenter prospects that I am building. It will also be posted on the website: www.nofasummerconference.org.

Since 1988

NOFA-NY has announced that the National Institute for Food and Agriculture recently granted funding through the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program for an initial phase of a one-year pilot project has three goals.

• NOFA-NY will offer a beginning farmer workshop track at their annual conference (held in Saratoga Springs from January 21-23, 2011) and will be providing scholarships to qualified beginning farmer applicants.

• NOFA-NY will provide opportunities for experienced farmers to provide relevant and valuable learning experiences to beginning farmers.

• NOFA-NY will support on-farm practical educational opportunities and social events for beginning farmers to learn new skills, to forge supportive friendships and to create lasting working relationships with other beginning farmers.

Stay tuned at www.nofany.org or by contacting Rachel Schell-Lambert at (585) 279-1979 x 511.
Book Reviews

It’s a Long Road to a Tomato: Tales of an Organic Farmer Who Quit the Big City for the (Not-so) Simple Life
by Keith Stewart with illustrations by Flavia Bacarella, published by Marlowe and Company, New York City, $18.95, 323 pages.
reviewed by Larry Siegel

I have a soft spot for those highly-educated, urban folks who have experienced an epiphany and dramatically changed their style of living. Keith Stewart fits the bill precisely, climbing down from the corporate ladder and re-inventing himself as an organic farmer. (A successful organic farmer, I might add, at least in respect to the bottom line and, apparently, job satisfaction.) He seems to have succeeded as a writer as well, as these collections of essays illustrate. Disparate though they be, they all revolve around life on the small farm, with the joys and the hardships of that lifestyle, with the joys and the hardships.

Still others address matters of economics, a subject often avoided by the organic community (How many years did it take to devote an issue to farm economics?). These essays were well thought out, and, in their own way, as practical of advice as how to plant garlic. And Stewart is not so thought out, and, in their own way, as practical of the essays relate directly to production on the farm (garlic, potatoes, mesclun, tomatoes), but most of the essays do not. Some pay homage to the critters, both domestic and wild (chickens, barn swallows, percy-pines, rabbits, cattle, beaver, and, especially, dogs for whom Stewart has a close attachment). A fair number are concerned with peddling the product. Since Stewart does his peddling at Manhattan’s Union Square Greenmarket, it can get decidedly more complicated than setting up a card table at the end of the driveway. Still others address matters of economics, a subject often avoided by the organic community (How many years did it take to devote an issue to farm economics?). These essays were well thought out, and, in their own way, as practical of advice as how to plant garlic. And Stewart is not so occupied with thinning the carrots that he does not have time to mull over some of the larger issues of the day, be they political or social or environmental.

The book is illustrated throughout by Flavia Bacarella’s wood-cuts, though I have the impression that the reproductions do not do justice to the originals. A nice touch, I thought, was the inclusion in the acknowledgments of the names of all the farm workers over the course of the twenty-one year history of the farm. None of this takes place without them.

Regardless of the subject matter, all of these essays have the stamp of personal experience and deeply-held convictions, the reflections of one person who took the time to reflect. It is reason enough for me to recommend this book to others.

Gemmotherapy: The Science of Healing with Plant Stem Cells
by Roger Halfon, MD
published by Healing Arts Press, Rochester, VT
reviewed by Julie Rawson

Gemmotherapy, according to the author, is the medicinal use of plant buds and young shoots. It harnesses the healing power of trees and shrubs at the peak of energetic activity in their annual cycle, capturing powerful nutrients, vitamins, plant hormones, and enzymes. Gemmotherapy is primarily aimed at draining the body of toxins and acts by gently stimulating and promoting elimination. The potency of these plant “stem cells” also enables gemmotherapy remedies to treat far more ailments than just those for which these plants are prescribed in traditional herbalism. This therapy can be used to treat many common conditions, such as asthma, osteoporosis, kidney stones, and anxiety, and is especially effective at alleviating allergies. An adjunct to both traditional herbalism and homeopathy, gemmotherapy offers an all-natural path to detoxification and healing with no side effects.

This book is an easy read. It is well-organized. Though I thought the explanation of gemmotherapy and its history was a little light, it did the job of laying it out there for a person who wants to do more research and thoroughly understand the principles behind it. What I did like about the book is that it is really a very accessible reference book that offers the neophyte student of gemmotherapy a guide for how to proceed and which plants to choose to work with.

I know a fair bit about herbs, fruits, and vegetables and their healing properties, but nothing about trees and woody bushes and how they can be used for enhancing healing with no side effects. Gemmotherapy, according to the author, is the medicinal use of plant buds and young shoots. It harnesses the healing power of trees and shrubs at the peak of energetic activity in their annual cycle, capturing powerful nutrients, vitamins, plant hormones, and enzymes. Gemmotherapy is primarily aimed at draining the body of toxins and acts by gently stimulating and promoting elimination. The potency of these plant “stem cells” also enables gemmotherapy remedies to treat far more ailments than just those for which these plants are prescribed in traditional herbalism. This therapy can be used to treat many common conditions, such as asthma, osteoporosis, kidney stones, and anxiety, and is especially effective at alleviating allergies. An adjunct to both traditional herbalism and homeopathy, gemmotherapy offers an all-natural path to detoxification and healing with no side effects.

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The Natural Farmer
Winter, 2010-11

This book explains how geomotherapy harnesses the vital energy of plant buds for detoxification and rejuvenation. It catalogues the uses and healing properties of 34 tree and plant buds. It also catalogues many more than 30 common ailments with in depth protocols for their remedies. It provides resources for obtaining the remedies and preparation guidelines.

I am a dyed-in-the-wool anti-drug person – be they over or under the counter or on the grocery shelf. I enjoyed reading about a very old approach to healing that I can add to the therapies I turn to when one of my family members is in need of a rebalancing. And for the price, one can hardly go wrong to get a copy of this book. It is heartening to know that natural therapies are taking on more and more credence. As with the move toward organic by the general populace, a reinvestment in these old and simple and cheap therapies is going to do nothing but good, in my opinion, for the health of us all.

Saving the Seasons; How to Can, Freeze or Dry Almost Anything by Mary Clemens Meyer and Susanna Meyer reviewed by Julie Rawson

The book includes 4 main sections. • Guide to the Harvest includes a cataloguing of each fruit and vegetable with a description, when it is in season and recommended preserving methods. It also gives the page numbers of all the recipes for that item. • The Canning Section is broken down into a how to, tomatoes, fruits, vegetables, meats, soups, herbed vinegars, pickles and relishes. • Freezing is broken into general info, vegetables and herbs, fruits, meat, poultry and fish, and baby food. • Drying breaks out into basics, fruit, vegetables, herbs, and meats. Additionally there are indices on Troubleshooting and Helpful and Inspirational resources I am a food preservationist from birth. My mother and grandmother used to write letters to each other in the summer time with each boasting about how many packages of frozen peas they did, or strawberry jam jars. My sister to this day reports to me on how many canned tomatoes or jars of sauerkraut she has put up. I still have vivid memories from when I was a small child of a kitchen full of corn and the table loaded with green beans – all for us to tip and “Trench.” My worst food preservation memory was of me as a teenager standing at the sink using a Bobby pin to pit sour cherries so they would be in perfect shape for mom’s frozen cherries. The aspect of this book that most grabs my attention is the beautiful photographs. My food preservation “bible” Stocking Up is mostly text, so this aspect is quite enjoyable.

This book is reasonable thoroughly. It can be used as a reference guide, which I feel is essential in a book of this type. For example, the freezing chart on page 141 completely and concisely lists vegetables and their blanching time. I learned something here. Blanching in steam takes 50% more time than blanching by immersion in boiling water. And I learned that steam blanching is ideal for broccoli, greens and other delicate vegetables. Each section – canning, freezing, drying – shows one example with step by step instructions and pictures. It is ideal to learn how to preserve food in the presence of one who does it, but this is the next best option for those who don’t have the live person as a resource. There are some great tomato product recipes. As we move toward more processed farm products we will find these useful. I also enjoyed the short write up on herbed vinegars.

Disappointments for me with the book included the tremendous use of sugar in all of the jams, jelly and spread recipes. Also I was hoping for some use of alternatives like agar powder for jams. Lacto-fermentation was not listed or explained at all. As we move into an age of wanting more live food and less sugary food in our diets, I think the author missed the boat. Overall, I felt the book was a bit too conventional in approach. For my preserved food I want it to be as unadulterated as possible with the goal of highest nutritive value in the finished product. I left this book not trusting that the author was keeping that as her highest priority.


John Carroll’s lively, optimistic, wide ranging and comprehensive look at the future of agriculture in
Pastures of Plenty

It includes five pages of detailed maps based on the soil studies of New Hampshire. Carroll weaves together from his wildly inclusive kaleidoscope of sources, of farming that, while obviously drawing much from conservation biology and the of farm scenes and animals, Carroll’s text has the feeling of a heartfelt celebration of his homages to Leopold, though, is just the starting point for this eclectic compendium. The central focus of Pastures of Plenty is on the potential for a revival of grazing—specifically, intensive, rotational grazing on pasture—as the cornerstone of a new, more efficient, sustainable and productive agriculture for our region. But Carroll’s book makes its case by presenting the ideas and actions of alternative food and agriculture advocates and reinterpreting them in the context of present day northern New England.

Included among those whose writings and programs Carroll cites and discusses are Joel Salatin, Fred Kirschenmann, Masanobu Fukuoka, Andre Voisin, Sir Albert Howard, Wes Jackson, Borealis Bread’s Jim Amaral, New Hampshire’s Trauger Groh (one of the founders of Community Supported Agriculture), Vermont’s Bill Murphy (“It’s a lot better to just let the livestock go to the feed and spread their manure themselves”) and a score of other food and ag luminaries whose thoughts are skillfully blended in support of Carroll’s thesis that northern New England is ideally situated, ripe and ready for the emergence of a new agriculture that is diverse, ethical, environmentally sound, local, mainly organic and marketed directly to a savvy new generation of eaters who increasingly care about how their food affects both them and their communities.

Pastures of Plenty includes useful background on the history of New England agriculture—how mixed farms and livestock grazing were replaced by industrial monocropping and confinement production of livestock—and includes chapters on grazing and grasses, the soils of northern New England, the key role Carroll sees for dairying and grasslands in cropping and confinement production of livestock—and includes pages on pastures and dairying still anchor a viable statewide family farm based economy, leads the region for soils that are suitable for pasture grass production: green shading covers fully 90 per cent of that state’s area. These impressive maps are supplemented by Sidney Pilgrim’s notes on the identity and characteristics of the various grazing-appropriate soils found in various parts of the four northern New England states, after which Carroll points out that Pastures of Plenty presents “what is likely the first effort, at least in modern times, to map the (soils) of central and northern New England for the purpose of identifying...the best and highest potential grazing soils in the region.” Carroll shares some relevant information about himself, mentioning his New York City upbringing as the son of an accountant for the International Harvester Company. “It is truly ironic,” he says, “that my own career and work is critical of the large scale industrial model of agriculture”—that system that the Farmall tractor (and the other products of his father’s employer) made possible. In his prologue Carroll mentions how a “prescient” 1979 New Hampshire study of food security, “Who Will Feed New Hampshire’s Residents Five, Ten, Fifteen Years From Now?!” gathered dust on university shelves through nearly thirty years of American consumer and academic apathy, a result, he says, of “cheap food, fueled by cheap energy (and) full supermarket shelves at the lowest food prices in the world.”

There are some weaknesses, I think, in Dr. Carroll’s thesis about the imminent renaissance of a pasture-based eco-agriculture. His approach in Pastures of Plenty is so inclusive and enthusiastic that sometimes he seems intent on including almost too many streams of evidence and support. A bit of editorial tweaking and a solid index of his varied sources might be able to corral his wide-ranging vision without reducing the impact of this book’s important message.

Professor Carroll’s optimism about the future of food and agriculture in our region is infections and well justified in this unique report, and he can’t be blamed if his predictions about a future for farms and food that’s focused on grazing and dairying may be challenged by current diet trends and a younger generation who are eating less meat and dairy and turning in substantial numbers to vegetarian and vegan fare.

And, perhaps more important, if, as Carroll believes, more young people will be drawn to more holistic, ethical and sustainable ways of farming, how will they get access to the land they’ll need? As Carroll is no doubt aware, secure access to productive land can be a serious barrier to farm entry for young people who aren’t lucky enough to inherit farmland from their folks. Perhaps this question needs more answers before the prediction from urban planning critic James Howard Kunstler that appears at the close of Pastures of Plenty is repeated in large letters on its back cover) can come to full fruition. “Agriculture”, Kunstler tells us, “is going to come back to the center of American life in a way that we couldn’t imagine.”

This caveat aside, Pastures of Plenty certainly gives readers many reasons for imagining the dimensions and encouraging the emergence of a new New England agriculture, one that can and—as this book helps us understand—must be planted on the sure foundations of our region’s fertile soils and the productive farms and pastures these soils, if they are cared for carefully, can sustain.
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Massachusetts: Low-Income $25, Individual $35, Family/Farm/Organization $45, Business $75, Supporting $150
Contact: NOFA/MA, 411 Sheldon Road, Barre, MA 01005, (978) 355-2853, or Rebecca@nofampa.org or join on the web at www.nofampa.org

Contact: Barbara Sullivan, 4 Park St., Suite 208, Concord, NH 03301, (603) 224-5022, barbara@nofanh.org

New Jersey: Student/Intern $20*, Individual $40*, Family/Farm $70*, Business/Organization $150*, $10 additional per year for subscription to The Natural Farmer
Contact: 334 River Road, Hillsborough, NJ 08844, (908) 371-1111 or join at www.nofanj.org

New York: Limited Membership $20*, Gardener/Consumer $40*, Family/Farm/Nonprofit Organization $50, Business $115, Lifet ime $1,000
Contact: NOFA NY, 249 Highland Ave., Rochester, NY 14620, Voice (585) 271-1979, Fax: (585) 271-7166, email: info@nofanyc.org, www.nofanyak.org

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Calendar

Thursday, Dec. 9: New Entry Sustainable Farming Project’s Farmer to Farmer Conference, Sturbridge, MA, for more info: www.farmer2farmer.org

Thursday, Dec. 9: NRCS workshops on EQIP and GIG programs, Duke Farms, Hillsborough, NJ, for more info: www.nofanj.org


Saturday, Jan. 8, 2011: Direct Marketing Conference, Vermont Technical College, Randolph, VT, for more info www.nofavt.org/upcoming-events-calendar/

Wednesday, Jan. 12 – Friday, Jan 14 and Tuesday, Jan. 18, and Wednesday, Jan. 19, 2011: 10th annual NOFA/MA Mass-5 day Accreditation Course in Organic Land Care, Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, Newburyport, MA. for more info: Kathy Litchfield, kathy@nofarma.org, (413) 773-3830 or online at www.organiclandcare.net

Saturday, Jan. 15: NOFA/Mass Winter Conference, Worcester, MA, for more info: we@nofama.org or www.nofama.org


Friday, Jan. 21 – Sunday, Jan. 23: NOFA-NY Winter Conference, Saratoga Springs, NY, for more info: (585) 271-1979 ext. 509 or visit our website at www.nofany.org


Saturday, Feb. 12 – Monday, Feb. 14, 2011: NOFA Vermont’s 29th annual Winter Conference, University of Vermont in Burlington, for more info: Olga Moriarty at olgamoriarty@gmail.com or: http://nofavt.org/annual-events/winter-conference

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New from the 2010 NOFA Summer Conference:

1001 Whole Farm Organism Dairying 1 Jack Lazor
1002 Whole Farm Organism Dairying 2 Jack Lazor
1003 Keynote Sally Fulton Moorel
1004 Hardy, Delectable, Pest-free Fruit Lee Reich
1005 Farmers Rights Pete Kennedy
1006 Red Fire Farm Tour Ryan Violand
1007 Keynote Catherine Murphy
1008 Biodynamics: What’s it All About? Mac Mead
1009 Backyard/Winter Vegetables Danielle Andrews
1010 Small Grass Cliff Hach

Now in DVD!

Now in DVD!
This issue contains news, features, and articles about organic growing in the Northeast, plus a special supplement on Organic Farming and Co-ops.