**Neighboring Food Co-ops’ 4th Annual Fall Gathering, 2014**

***Customizable Newsletter Article for NFCA Member Co-ops***

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**Neighboring Food Co-ops Gather in Hanover, NH**

Ten years after food co-op leaders in our region first gathered to discuss working more closely together, over 100 co-operators met in Hanover, NH, on September 27th for the Fourth Annual Fall Gathering of the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA). The meeting brought together representatives from more than 40 food co-ops, start-up initiatives, and partner organizations [including *add in your co-op, start up or organization name*]. The presence of representatives from 11 start-up efforts demonstrated the growing excitement about food co-ops in communities across New England.

“It was an exciting day when our food co-ops all signed the Middlebury Manifesto,” said Terry Appleby, General Manager of the Hanover Consumer Co-op, referring to the document that laid out the founding goals of the NFCA. “And the gathering last weekend seemed to really capture that spirit, helping us move away from the isolation of the past that prompted us to form the Neighboring Food Co-op Association.”

Keynote speaker J. Tom Webb addressed ‘The Co-operative Difference in Challenging Times,’ laying out the shortcomings of the mainstream economy business and the potential for co-ops to grow as we build a better world. “The values and principles of our co-operatives and credit unions are not a sea anchor dragging behind the ship and impeding its progress,” said Webb. “Rather, they are the main sail that provides its power and can ensure business success.”

The gathering included opportunities for dialog and networking on everything from food policy and healthy food access to member engagement and communicating the impact our co-ops have on the food system and economy.  Afternoon workshops addressed creating stronger alignment among boards and members, start-up development, and issues of competition and growth. Special guests Dave Blackburn of the NCGA Development Co-op and Michelle Schry, General Manager of People’s Food Co-op of WI and MN joined Hanover Consumer Co-op General Manager Terry Appleby to discuss the increasingly competitive environment in natural foods retailing and opportunities for food co-ops and start-ups to work together to support our success and increase our collective impact.

The gathering also had representatives from partner organizations and other co-ops, including Regina Beidler, organic dairy farmer and member of the agricultural co-op Organic Valley. “The co-operative model highlights the values of democracy, food and economic justice and a desire to see the benefit of the many over the benefit of the few,” she said, reflecting on the day. “This is exemplified in the efforts of the NFCA.”

***The Neighboring Food Co-op Association includes more than 35 food co-ops and start-up initiatives, locally owned by over 90,000 people across New England. For more information, please visit*** *www.nfca.coop.*

**(438 words)**

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