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**Putney Food Co-op Receives Cooperative Excellence Award**

(Friday June 15, 2012) - CCMA, the annual conference of over 400 retail cooperators from across the nation, was held in Philadelphia over the weekend of June 14th. Each year awards are given based on peer selection, to honor individuals and stores for their service to the wider co-op community. This year the Putney Consumers Cooperative in Putney, Vermont was presented with the Howard K. Bowers Fund Award for Cooperative Excellence, the gathering's highest honor.

This prestigious award was accepted by Robyn O'Brien, general manager of the Putney Co-op. For the past ten years, under O'Brien's leadership, the store has come from the brink of closing its doors to achieve profitability, increase membership, and become an outstanding resource in its community.

Governor Peter Shumlin (a Putney Co-op member) wrote, in his award nomination letter, "You might say the Co-op is a microcosm for our great state. We're in the middle of an agricultural renaissance in Vermont because more and more Vermonters care about where their food comes from, what's in it, and who grew it. The Putney Food Co-op is an obvious partner in this movement. I congratulate the Putney Food Co-op for its many successes over the years and for its continued growth. Although the Co-op is small, its impacts are innumerable...."

Vermont State Representative Mike Mrowicki (also a co-op member), wrote in his recommendation: "While economic viability is essential for any business, the community actions of our Co-op-- from regular community suppers, connections with our local schools and organizations such as Transition Town Putney-- translate into a positive business model....our Putney Co-op indeed walks the talk on how to be economically successful and do business, like (E.F.) Schumacher wrote, 'as if people mattered.'"

The award comes at an auspicious time for the co-op, as it celebrates its 70-year anniversary, making it one of the oldest food co-ops in the country. Worldwide, the United Nations has declared 2012 the International Year of the Cooperative, and co-ops across all sectors are raising awareness of their economic and social impacts in their communities.

Collaboration among co-ops is something the Putney Co-op continues to cultivate. Peg Nolan of the National Co-op Grocers Association (NCGA) wrote: "This co-op has been and continues to be a leader in building the future of our co-op sector by continually fostering the spirit of cooperation, working with others to grow their local and regional economy, continually building community, cultivating a knowledgeable and engaged membership and running a great cooperative business."

Erbin Crowell, director of the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA), had this to say: "The co-op has played a key role in the development of our network of 30 food co-ops and start-up initiatives as well as our regional sourcing activities, which are focused on new product development and collaboration with farmers and their co-ops in the Northeast."

The following is taken from the text of the award itself, which will be displayed inside the store:

*Putney, Vermont has a population of under 3,000 but the impact of* *Putney Food Co-op there and throughout the food co-op sector is* *significant. It is a leader in building the future of the co-op sector by* *fostering the spirit of cooperation, working with others to grow their* *local and regional economy, building community, cultivating an* *engaged membership, and running an outstanding business.*

*Celebrating 70 years in operation this year, Putney Food Co-op is not* *only one of the oldest food co-ops in New England but one of the most* *dedicated to its community. This is shown through initiatives such as* *farmers’ markets, community gardens, the Transition Town collaboration,* *sponsorship of co-op events, organization of community events, and school snack program.*

*Putney is also committed to the wider co-op movement and has helped* *build cooperation among cooperatives on a regional and national basis.* *NFCA’s programs are evolving and growing, thanks in large part to Putney.* *Putney has mentored other food co-ops and is an active member of NCGA.*

*Ten years ago Putney was close to collapse but now it is a great example* *of what can be done with vision, dedication, and constant commitment to* *bringing value to the community.*

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