***Making a Splash in 2012:***

***The International Year of Co-ops***

***Co-op Profiles for Food Co-op Newsletters***

*As part of our celebrations of 2012: The International Year of Co-ops, the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA) is working with partners to provide our member food co-ops with a range of resources, including articles on co-ops in our region for use in newsletters, e-newsletters and on websites. These materials help communicate how co-ops build a better world and, in the spirit of collaboration among co-ops, encourage food co-op members to consider their role in the wider co-operative movement. For more resources, please e-mail Bonnie Hudspeth at* *bonnie@nfca.coop* *or visit* [*www.nfca.coop/iycresources*](http://www.nfca.coop/iycresources)*.*

**(550 words)**

**Co-op 108: Really Great Stuff, Made by Really Good People**

**By Kristin Howard**

The United Nations has declared 2012 the International Year of Co-ops (IYC), recognizing the contribution of co-operative enterprise to community resilience, human development and food security.  As a member of your local food co-op, you know the difference that co-ops make in your community.  And as part of our celebrations, the Neighboring Food Co-op Association is profiling other co-operative businesses that are helping to build a thriving regional economy.

This month, we’re featuring Co-op 108, which got its start when three of its five members learned about the co-operative business model when they were in graduate school together. “Co-ops weren’t really on anyone’s radar at the time,” says co-founder Anasuya Weil. “But we saw it as this great democratic business model and were really inspired by that idea.”

The three invited a couple other friends and family members to a series of meetings over the next several months, considering how they might go about creating a new business. With Anasuya’s training in aromatherapy and her daughter Mira’s experience in herbal medicine, body care products were a logical choice and Co-op 108 was born.

The co-op makes all of its natural body care products — salves, body oils and lip balms — in a small studio in Haydenville, MA. They’ve become known for their geography-themed body oils, including the popular “Morocco” with sandalwood and cardamom and “France” with lavender and geranium. Co-op 108 notes that, unlike lotions, which contain water that eventually evaporates off your skin and leaves it dried out, oils are absorbed into your skin, leaving it soft and velvety.

Whenever possible, Co-op 108 purchases ingredients for their oils and other items from local sources, including beeswax from Warm Colors Apiary in Deerfield, MA. They also work with other co-ops in the region, including the Valley Alliance of Worker Co-ops (www.valleyworker.org), a network of worker co-ops in Western Massachusetts and Southern Vermont. They note that this network has played an important support role as they’ve worked through issues of organization, growth and member participation at the co-op.

“Most of us at Co-op 108 have other jobs but we all get together once a month for a business meeting - an update on sales, marketing ideas, new products, that kind of thing.” says worker-owner Erica Goleman, designer of Co-op 108’s distinctive packaging. “We’re still sometimes feeling our way around what it means to be a co-op but we always have a good time when we are working together”.

Co-op 108’s way of working together may be as important as the quality of their products.  “Does the world really need another skin care product?” Co-op 108 asks on its website. “Probably not, but we were making the stuff for ourselves anyway and were determined to start a company that, as an employee-owned co-op, would set an example of ethical and socially progressive business practices.”

Co-op 108 products, including body oils, salves and lip balm, are available at many of our region's food co-ops, as well as by mail order through their website. To learn more about this member of our co-operative community, visit [www.co-op108.com](http://www.coop108.com/).

 *Kristin Howard works with Franklin Community Co-op (*[*www.franklincommunity.coop*](http://www.franklincommunity.coop/)*) in a variety of capacities, including coordinating events, writing for the newsletter, board administration, special projects, and marketing.*