**News Release // NEIGHBORING FOOD CO-OP ASSOCIATION // Dec 2012 - Jan 2013**

**For use in NFCA member co-op newsletters and electronic media.**

**NOTE**: *This article is intended to help your co-op raise awareness of the International Year of Co-ops and the International Co-operative Alliance’s “Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade. Please send us a copy of any reprints.*

(578 words)

**From the Year of Co-ops to the Co-operative Decade**

***By Erbin Crowell***

The past year has been an extraordinary opportunity for our food co-ops. In the context of a devastating global recession, co-operative enterprise has shown itself to be an effective and resilient business model. When the United Nations declared 2012 the International Year of Co-ops, it brought unprecedented attention to co-operative enterprise as an effective tool for poverty reduction, employment, participation, and food security locally and around the world.

An important outcome of the Year is that co-ops began to better understand our shared impact on the economy. Around the world a billion people are members of co-ops — more than directly own stock in publicly traded corporations — and here in the US, more than 1 in 4 Americans are members of over 29,000 co-operatives.

At its historic General Assembly this past October, the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) approved an ambitious vision for the future. The “Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade” builds on the momentum created by 2012 by promoting co-ops as leaders in social, economic and ecological sustainability. By focusing on our core co-operative identity, mobilizing member participation and communicating our difference, the document argues, co-ops can become the fastest growing form of enterprise by 2020.

Over the past year the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA), a network of 30 food co-ops and start-ups in our region, has been making the case for the vital role of food co-ops in building sustainable local economies. Locally owned by more than 80,000 members, we have a powerful impact in our region, employing more than 1,400 people and purchasing over $30 million in local products annually. We have also worked with farmer co-ops, worker co-ops and credit unions to help people understand how our business model is relevant not just in food retailing but in all aspects of their lives, whether as consumers, producers or workers. By putting people before profit, co-ops are able to think beyond the bottom line and invest in the future of our communities.

In New England and New York alone there are nearly 9,000 co-ops with 9.5 million members. What could we accomplish if even a small portion of us came together around a shared vision for the future? To achieve the ICA’s vision of becoming the fastest growing business model by 2020, we will need to move beyond rhetoric of “cooperation among co-ops” to policies that put this ideal into action, prioritizing the purchase of goods and services from one another, mutual investment in development and collaboration on legislation. Working together is not only the right thing to do; it also makes business sense. In doing so, we raise the profile of our co-ops and reinforce our relevance in a challenging economy. We strengthen our success and our ability to serve our members in more aspects of their lives. And we shift the dialog on government policies that affect our ability to grow and help more people help themselves and their communities.

The International Year of Co-ops was an important opportunity for co-ops to tell our story to millions of people hungry for an alternative to business as usual. The Co-operative Decade is our chance to demonstrate the potential of our movement and to build a more just, resilient and sustainable food system and economy at home and around the world.

*Erbin Crowell is Executive Director of the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (*[*www.nfca.coop*](http://www.nfca.coop)*) and serves on the board of the National Cooperative Business Association.*

### END ###

For Images to use with this story, see page 2.

IMAGES FOR USE WITH STORY



