

# Collaboration Among Co-ops

## Supporting Successful Food Co-op Start-Ups

**Starting a new food co-op is both a rewarding and challenging effort. It's good to have the support of friends along the way.**

The Sixth Principle of the Co-operative Movement promotes collaboration among co-ops and recognizes that “co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.” Indeed, the most successful co-operative systems in the world are those that are linked together by formal associations and a shared vision of a co-operative economy.

### The Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA)

The NFCA is a co-operative network of more than 20 established and start-up food co-ops in western New England with a combined membership of more than 80,000 people and over \$185 million in annual revenue (2009). Together, we are advancing a shared vision of a *thriving regional economy, rooted in a healthy, just and sustainable food system and a vibrant community of co-operative enterprise.*

Associate Membership in the NFCA is currently available to start-up food co-ops in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island that share our vision, contribute annual dues and provide representatives to our regional gatherings. Some of the benefits of membership in the NFCA include:

- **Shared Marketing & Education** including the promotion of your effort on our website, in advertising, press, printed materials and social media such as Facebook.
- **Network & Peer Support** such as lessons learned, advice on community outreach, job descriptions, fundraising and loan campaigns, etc., from member co-ops and organizational partners.
- **Stronger Credibility** when you approach potential members, funders and other organizations and are able to point to examples of successful food co-ops and their contribution to local communities and the economy.
- **Collaboration** with other food co-ops in areas of strategic planning, regional sourcing, education and outreach, and community engagement.
- **Food Policy Education & Advocacy** through NFCA's affiliate membership in the New England Farmers Union (NEFU) and discounted membership for your co-op and your individual members.
- **Special Programs** such as our Regional Sourcing initiative, Low-Income Access project, and educational efforts around Co-op Month and the International Year of Co-ops.

NFCA representatives are also available to present to your group and leaders in your community on our work, the co-op movement, and the role of co-operative enterprise in creating a stronger, more resilient regional food system and economy.

***"As an emerging food co-op, one of our greatest support systems has been the other co-ops in our region.***

***Joining the NFCA gave us the opportunity to connect with food co-ops with a wide range of experience and assets, and has greatly helped us in our development process.***

***Membership in the NFCA has also been a valuable tool in education and recruitment efforts as we have been able to illustrate the success of the co-op movement in our region and its impact on the food system and economy."***

**Bonnie Hudspeth, Project Manager  
Monadnock Community Market Co-op, Keene, NH**

### Cross-Sector Collaboration

In addition to the benefits of food co-ops working together, the NFCA recognizes that one of the most effective ways to grow the co-operative economy in our region is through partnership with other co-op sectors — including agricultural co-ops, credit unions and worker co-ops. For ideas and information on how other co-ops in your area can be allies in your outreach, fundraising and development efforts, please see the other side of this sheet.



**Erbin Crowell, Executive Director**  
**Neighboring Food Co-op Association**  
PO Box 93, Shelburne Falls, MA 01370-0093 USA  
c: 401-419-0381 • e: erbin@nfca.coop  
www.facebook.com/neighboring • w: www.nfca.coop

Countdown to 2012



As your start-up conducts education, outreach and organizing efforts, working with other co-ops in the region can be a powerful way to help prospective members understand the co-operative model, communicate the breadth and impact of the co-op movement, and strengthen the co-op “brand” in the community. Below are a few examples of co-ops that provide products and services to food co-ops and that have specific programs that can support your efforts.

### Fundraising & Events

As your start-up initiative plans special events and fundraisers, other co-ops can help. There are a number of co-ops in our region that offer products for fundraising and donations for special events, including:

- **Cabot Creamery Co-op**, founded in 1916 and owned by a regional co-operative of 1,200 farm families in New England and New York. Cabot offers their award-winning dairy products for special events and for fundraising. For more information, visit: [www.cabotcheese.coop/pages/community\\_and\\_you/donation\\_request](http://www.cabotcheese.coop/pages/community_and_you/donation_request) [www.cabotcheese.coop/pages/community\\_and\\_you/grants\\_and\\_fundraising.php](http://www.cabotcheese.coop/pages/community_and_you/grants_and_fundraising.php)
- **Equal Exchange** is a worker co-op and pioneer in Fair Trade that offers coffee, tea, chocolate and other products. They offer tools for fundraising and can help with the planning of your co-op’s Fair Trade offerings such as bulk coffee systems as you plan your store. For more information, visit: [www.equalexchange.coop/fundraiser](http://www.equalexchange.coop/fundraiser)
- **Organic Valley** is a national co-op of more than 1,600 organic family farmers — including over 175 in New England — producing a broad range of organic dairy products including milk, butter, and cheese. For more information on donations and fundraising, visit: [www.organicvalley.coop/about-us/donations/](http://www.organicvalley.coop/about-us/donations/)

*“Our food co-op is in the process of converting an existing rural grocery to community ownership. As we were on a steep learning curve regarding co-ops, we found the regional relationships and networking through NFCA to be very valuable.”*

*Michael Kalagher  
Old Creamery Co-op, Cummington, MA*

### Internet Hosting, Web Design & Communication Services

As your start-up develops an online presence, there are co-ops in our region that offer everything from website design to hosting services and can help you work together and communicate your co-operative identity.

- **Gaia Host Collective** offers website and e-mail hosting for individual e-mails, e-newsletters, and listservs for discussion groups and outreach. For start-up co-ops, Gaia Host offers a 10% “Co-op Ally Discount” on all rates, an additional 10% off rates with “Link Discount”, 1 year free “.coop” domain registration (for new registrations), and free WordPress installation (\$35 value). For more information, visit [www.gaiahost.coop](http://www.gaiahost.coop).
- **Ronin Tech Collective** offers internet services including development of user-friendly websites using Drupal or Wordpress Content Management Systems (CMS), e-commerce websites, Facebook and social media integration, custom website development in Ruby on Rails, and a special “co-op discount” off of their usual rates. For more information, visit [www.ronin.coop](http://www.ronin.coop).

### Printing & Promotions

As your start-up conducts education and outreach, consider using a co-op for materials such as pamphlets, flyers, newsletters, meeting packets, posters and other materials.

- **Collective Copies** offers printing, copying, and document finishing services for all of your printing needs. Files can be uploaded to their website and delivered to you. Collective Copies offers a 10% discount on their services to other co-ops. For more information, visit [www.collectivecopies.coop](http://www.collectivecopies.coop) or e-mail [florence@collectivecopies.com](mailto:florence@collectivecopies.com).
- **Red Sun Press** provides offset printing and copying services, with a special focus on co-operative and social change organizations. Files can be electronically uploaded at their website and delivered to you. For more information, visit [www.redsunpress.coop](http://www.redsunpress.coop).

### Membership & Outreach

Other co-ops in your area can be partners in member recruitment and may be willing to share information on your initiative with their members and customers through newsletters, events or other venues. Examples include credit unions, energy co-ops, co-operative schools or preschools, and networks such as state credit union leagues, worker co-op alliances and other co-operative associations. As we build models for food co-op development in our region, we welcome your ideas and experience with collaboration among co-ops.

*“My hope is that through our combined power our co-ops can work together in a determined and efficient way to be one of the foundational forces in building a healthy and sustainable regional economy.”*

*Sheila Herbert  
Fiddleheads Natural Foods Co-op, New London, CT*

For more information on cross-sector co-op collaboration, please visit [www.nfca.coop/go](http://www.nfca.coop/go).