



Neighboring Food Co-op Association: Five years later

BY ERBIN CROWELL

As we celebrate our first five years since incorporation, the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA) is looking forward to welcoming the co-op community to New England for the 60th annual CCMA (Consumer Cooperative Management Association) conference—hosted by the NFCA and our local members Franklin Community Co-op and River Valley Co-op and held at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

A concrete expression of the Sixth Principle of Cooperation, which recognizes the benefits of collaboration through "local, national, regional, and international structures," the NFCA builds on the vision of its founding members, who sought to "provide

occasions for collective action to build a cooperative economy in our geographic region."

Today, the NFCA is a federation of 35 food co-ops and startup co-ops across New England that are working together toward our vision of a thriving cooperative economy, rooted in a healthy, just, and sustainable food system and a vibrant community of cooperative enterprise. With a staff of two, the NFCA focuses on supporting member success through peer collaboration, marketing and education, regional sourcing, and organizational partnerships.

Successes include our peer training events and Healthy Food Access Project (profiled on adjacent pages); encouraging consumers to "Go Co-op" in our stores and at regional

conferences; and our exclusive line of Northeast-grown frozen fruits and vegetables, distributed through regional distributor Associated Buyers.

We are thankful for partnerships that have helped us increase our impact, such as our collaboration with the Valley Alliance of Worker Co-ops and the Economics Department at the University of Massachusetts to develop a Certificate in Cooperative Enterprise; promoting co-ops and influencing food system policy with New England Farmers Union; partnering with Food Co-op Initiative to expand our support of startups; and working with NCBA CLUSA and other partners in organizing CCMA 2016.

For more information, visit www.nfca.coop.

Key to the USDA's statement were two requirements: ensuring that the program was available not only to SNAP or WIC recipients but more broadly to low-income households; and that co-ops provide the discount regardless of payment method (EBT card for SNAP and WIC benefits, or other payment forms such as cash or credit cards). Since there is more than one way to demonstrate financial need, and participating co-ops assign the discount by member numbers and not by payment method, Food For All complies with federal law.

Next steps

We are excited by how this collaboration has helped food co-ops across New England change perceptions, address food security in their communities,

and increase their collective impact. That said, we have far to go, and we welcome other partners in this effort. We documented the Food For All model for easy replication and encourage co-ops to use the tools we have developed.

Finally, we will present our experience at this year's national co-op conference in Amherst on Friday, June 10. Please join us at the workshop to continue this discussion.

For a copy of the Food For All structure document, an explanation of the framework, and other resources, please visit: <http://nfca.coop/hfaprograms>. □