

Welcome to the new CGN!

BY ELLEN MICHEL

I'm pleased to say that the new Cooperative Grocer Network (CGN) platform is up and running at www.grocer.coop. We launched first to CGN Account Managers (guardians of the many Spaces in the CGN galaxy), and they've been reviewing their rosters and opening the gate.

It takes some time to become familiar with a new platform, but don't be shy—get in there, take a tour, and click around. It's now possible to initiate Discussions via email and to receive a digest of CGN notifications. The list of formats the site can upload is a wonder to behold—all the better to expand our resource collection as media tools evolve and become easier to use.

I'm very appreciative of the fact that so many co-ops and associate member organizations are deciding to join or renew their involvement with Cooperative Grocer Network. We are at the beginning of a new era, a critical moment for food co-ops—let's think about that.

There are more new co-op startups than ever working to get “doors on the store.” New stores are becoming familiar with the food co-op business model as they implement strategies they've learned from those who've been around for a while.

It's safe to say that all of our stores are running into the challenges of increased competition. Much of what we've worked so hard to achieve (good food for more people) has become a powerful idea embraced by the general public, including those who once were on the periphery of our movement. Conventional grocery stores have gotten smarter about marketing and promoting natural, organic, and faux-local foods. While many of our largest and most successful stores continue to thrive, they too face challenges.

What do we have as a competitive cooperative advantage? For one thing, we have a long tradition of organic sharing, of working together to find strength and inspiration. We communicate with our shoppers (including our owners) in ways that are often deeper, richer, and more significant with respect to the health of local communities. We know we have a powerful impact on people's lives—we see the results every day.

This is where CGN remains vital to our success. In providing a strong collaborative web platform, as well as a magazine (the one here in your hands!) to broadcast our evolving history, CGN is a place where we can

network every day as the good work moves ahead. It's a safe place to make vital connections, drawing on wisdom gleaned from experience. The voices at CGN reflect an array of strategies and perspectives. They include seasoned pros, board members, social media experts, and people who are emerging leaders. And, as you know, there's a vast repository of searchable resources at CGN, documenting our efforts.

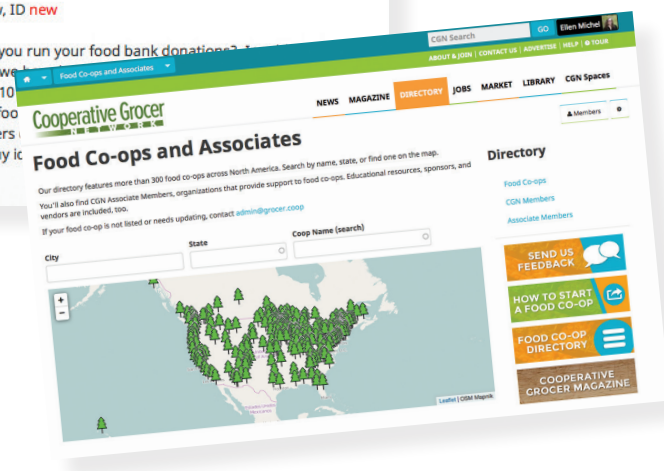
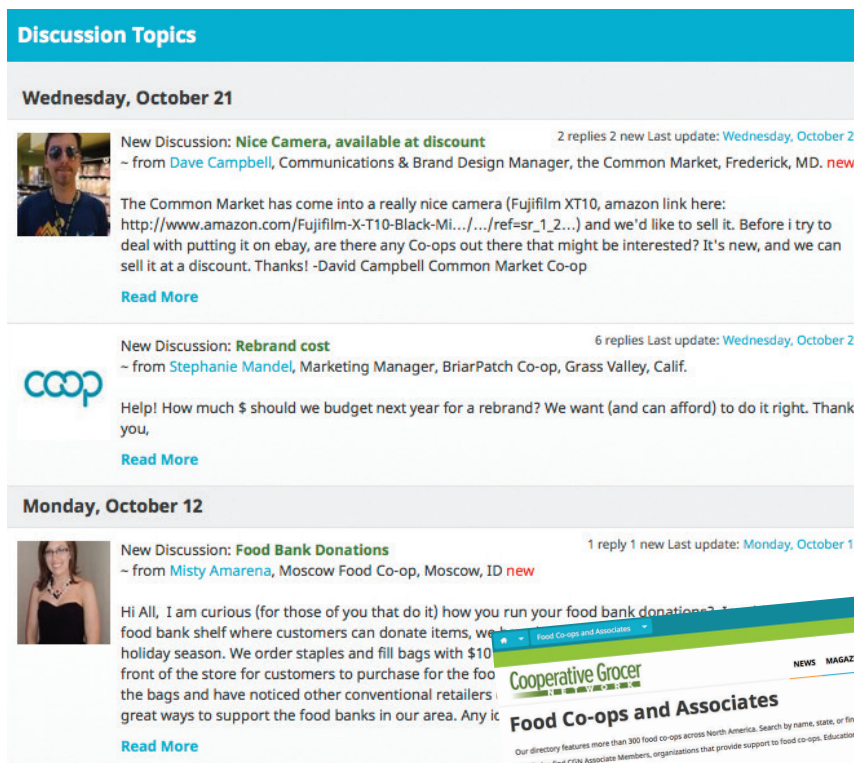
Together, using CGN as one of our many significant food co-op support organizations, we can expand our reach, improve our systems, identify sources of talent and capital, and find more enjoyment and ease as we take on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Special thanks are in order. Ben Nauman of National Co+op Grocers has moved on from the CGN Board after giving us amazing leadership and service, most recently as board president. I'm so grateful for the mentorship he offered in my first months on the job. Marc BrownGold, operations manager at Willy Street Co-op, said yes to the request that he return to the board to fill out the remainder of Ben's term. It's great to have him on the team. We're pleased to announce that

both Martha Whitman and Zafra Whitcomb will be serving for another term—we are wisely keeping our Whits about us.

Organic sharing—let's do this!

P.S. Please don't hesitate to contact me as you get familiar with the new platform. I look forward to building something remarkable with all of you in the years ahead. ellen@grocer.coop □





the downturn. Board and management must carefully consider what information is to be shared with the membership. It may be best to share information through only the annual meeting, a time when members are accustomed to hearing yearly sales figures and other such details. At no time should there be a cry of alarm from the co-op leadership.

The board must be proactive in its vision of how changes can be made through remodel, additional parking, and general store improvements. Key departments must be examined and improved. In tandem with store improvements, the board must support an increase in marketing expenses. An in-depth examination of the income statement may require a drop in margins where appropriate. A board must be open to hiring outside consultants to help where necessary.

FINALLY: Do your board members shop the co-op? It may sound goofy, but members like seeing directors shopping by example. A director's basketful of groceries is a simple, quiet message that tells members that leadership believes in the co-op, no matter what.



WATCH THIS!
"Being Really Great Grocers"

Kelly Wiseman addressed the question: What do you do when the competition is planning to move in next door? The Community Food Co-op of Bozeman took a hard look at its entire co-op to make sure it was fully meeting shopper needs and injecting excitement into the store every day. Here's an eight-minute video (click the green link in the title) of Kelly providing a summary of how the co-op created a new sense of urgency and an eye for continuous improvement, filmed as part of the CDS Consulting Co-op's Cooperative Café series.

A publication designed to promote visionary and forward-thinking discussions between and among the leadership of NCG co-ops

A Study Guide for Co-op Leaders
A Deeper Dive into Co-op Finances

IN THIS ISSUE

Building a Member-Based Financial Strategy for the Co-op — Paige Lettington, Page 3

The Capital Budgets: A Great Board Tool — Lucinda Berdon, Page 4

Cash Is King: Reviewing Cash-Flow Statements — Martha Whitman, Page 5

How Are We Doing? Let's Look at the Numbers — Gail Graham, Page 7

NEW: Stronger Together: Managing Risk within Our Co-op System — Karen Zimbelman, Page 8

STUDY GUIDE
Financial Analysis Using a Quartile Report — Karen Zimbelman and Cindy Owings, Page 9

A Deeper Dive into Co-op Finances

Financial statements offer a wealth of information. Yet all too often, board members find statements intimidating. The formatting can vary; the terminology can be overwhelming. And not all of us have confidence with numbers.

But we're here to say: Don't be intimidated! Financial statements are simply reports showing the co-op's financial status at a particular point in time. Taken in doses and framed within the kinds of questions that good directors need to have answers for, the information is there for you to see.

Break it down into terms you can understand; relate the statements to your own life and finances. If you don't understand something, ask for an explanation, and keep asking until you get the information you need. Work with the numbers again and again; even do some of the math to learn how it works and what the ratios are showing. Most of all, ask that financial statements be prepared in a way that helps you and the rest of the board see the big picture and key trends—the type of information that your job requires you to look at. Keep in mind that too much detail will make it hard for you to see the big picture.

In this issue, we take a deeper dive into key financial analysis. Our first issue about financials was published in Winter 2010. Available online, the material continues to get lots of attention and positive comments, so we thought it might be useful to go beyond the beginning level and look at financial information a little more deeply. Here we offer an article about quartile reports, which some boards find helpful. We also offer articles about budgeting, cash flow, and developing a financial strategy for your co-op.

Also in this issue we introduce a new feature: a series called "Stronger Together." The articles deal with aspects of NCG that will be of interest to co-op directors. In our first article of the series, we explain NCG's system of risk management. Watch for something from NCG each issue, and let us know what topics you'd like to hear more about.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and experiences, as well as your suggestions on other topics or resources you'd like to learn about in the LEADER.



◀ ◀ ◀ Find a collection of the LEADER at CGN. This electronic publication is published quarterly by NCG's Board Effectiveness Support Team (BEST)—an advisory group of co-op leaders (managers and directors). Look for it in CGN Spaces.

A Message from the CGN Board President

Having a place to ask questions, receive answers, give answers, and build relationships is an important part of our success as food co-ops and cooperators. An amazing wealth of information and resources is housed on our CGN website, and the new platform allows even greater possibilities for engagement and community building.

Each of you has a part to play in the future success of our new website and our organization as a whole. CGN is no better than the sum of its parts. It is at its core a P6 activity—cooperation among cooperatives and cooperators. It is also all about P5 since our contributions to the Discussion Groups or to the Resource Library serve to inform and educate us in a collaborative way. Plus, we get to know each other on a deeper level, so that when we meet again in the non-virtual world, there is less catching up to do, and we can get on with conversations focused on the expansive future ahead of us.

I personally invite you to rediscover CGN. Give the new site a spin, kick the tires, and post a question or share a resource you've developed. Renew your commitment to being an active player in the CGN community. It takes everyone and every voice to drive our success. Don't hesitate to give us your feedback or suggestions. CGN is here for you.

—Annie Hoy

CGN Board of Directors

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Douglas Walter – 2016
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Eric Struve – 2016
Outpost Natural Foods

Zafra Whitcomb – 2018
Belfast Co-op