

# Co-ops Meet in the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection

BY DAVE GUTKNECHT

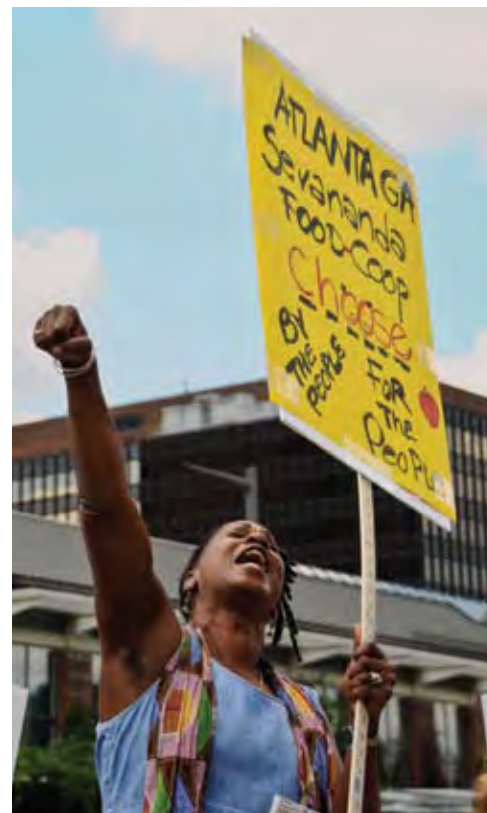
**T**he 2012 Consumer Cooperative Management Association (CCMA) conference on June 14–16 brought over 400 hundred cooperators to Philadelphia for speakers and training, friendship and celebration. Local sponsor Weavers Way Co-op showed off its two stores and extensive urban farming and gardening collaborations. Co-op board members made up the largest part of attendees, along with many general managers and department managers, plus other co-op leaders, trainers, and consultants. Along with many veteran attendees, a large number of participants were experiencing the intense CCMA environment for the first time.

Notable cooperators including Ben Franklin himself addressed the crowd. We still benefit from the legacy of Franklin, a fountain of wisdom and wit and founder of the first of our cooperative insurance companies and volunteer fire departments—then called “mutuals” or “contributorships”—along with the first lending library and many inventions. At a CCMA march to Liberty Bell Plaza for a rally, Franklin read our “Declaration of Independence” (find the text at [www.ccma.coop](http://www.ccma.coop)), while a downtown crowd read our signs in support of co-ops (photos at [www.facebook.com/CCMAConsumerCoops](http://www.facebook.com/CCMAConsumerCoops)).

## Sponsors and speakers

Primary sponsors of CCMA are its parent, the National Cooperative Business Association, and conference planner Prof. Ann Hoyt and several support staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Some 16 other co-ops and institutions provided additional sponsor support, and nearly 30 scholarships were provided by the Howard Bowers Fund and the UW Urban Cooperative Initiative. Six co-ops sponsored the Bowers Fund this year: Weavers Way, Outpost, NCGA, Equal Exchange, Cooperative Grocer, and CGIN. Many other co-ops supported scholarships for future attendees by contributing to an extended silent auction held at CCMA, including several co-op logo quilts. A total of about \$39,000 was raised, matching the previous year’s contributions.

Along with a clever impersonator of Ben Franklin, attendees heard from other food and cooperative industry veterans. Michael Sansolo, ▶



PHOTOS BY ELLIE SEIF

Ben Franklin (left) set the stage for the march to Liberty Bell Plaza to declare cooperative independence (right).

## CCMA milestones—June 2012

### 1937: 75th anniversary

Consumers Cooperative of Swarthmore—Swarthmore, Pa.  
Westminster Consumers Co-op—Westminster, Va.

### 1972: 40th anniversary

Ashland Food Co-op—Ashland, Ore.  
Bluff Country Co-op—Winona, Minn.  
Davis Food Co-op—Davis, Calif.  
Food Front Cooperative Grocery—Portland, Ore.  
Good Foods Co-op, Lexington, Ky.  
Hunger Mountain Co-op—Montpelier, Vt.  
Lexington Real Food Co-op—Buffalo, N.Y.  
Onion River Food Co-op—Burlington, Vt.  
Ozark Natural Foods Co-op—Fayetteville, Ark.

Port Townsend Food Co-op—Port Townsend, Wash.  
Seward Co-op Grocery—Minneapolis, Minn.  
Stevens Point Co-op—Stevens Point, Wis.  
Winooski Valley Co-op—Plainfield, Vt.

### 1982: 30th anniversary

Concord Co-op Market—Concord, N.H.  
Tidal Creek Food Co-op—Wilmington, N.C.

### 1992: 20th anniversary

Phoenix Earth Food Co-op—Toledo, Ohio  
Springfield Food Co-op—Springfield, Vt.

### 2002: 10th anniversary

Riverwest Co-op—Milwaukee, Wis.  
Root River Market—Houston, Minn.



May 2012

Dear Larry Blanford & Friends at Green Mountain Coffee,

At our recent meeting we learned that we have starkly different perceptions about the impact of recent splits and divisions that threaten the real gains Fair Trade has achieved for small-scale farmers and U.S. consumers over the last twenty years.

## Green Mountain Coffee is a leader in the specialty coffee industry,

the largest buyer of Fair Trade certified beans in the United States, and as a company, has long demonstrated genuine concern for coffee farmers. We at Equal Exchange wish to congratulate you for your past deeds—

## but now urgently request that you withdraw your support for the certification agency Fair Trade USA (aka Transfair)

in light of its unilateral decision to change the rules of Fair Trade.

Fair Trade was established over 25 years ago by organized groups of small-scale coffee farmers in conjunction with reform-minded Alternative Trade Organizations. Their objective was to remove the exploitation from international trade and build a new system to ensure fairness and market access for small-scale farmers. These early visionaries recognized the role co-operatives serve in representing the interest of small-scale farmers as they are best positioned to challenge local power structures that keep small farmers marginalized and perpetuate systemic poverty.

**Coffee purchased in this system has exceeded all expectations for success.** More small farmers have market access, improved living standards, and have achieved greater economic control and political power.

## Fair Trade, a product of years of sweat, sacrifice and risk, belongs to the farmers.

But Fair Trade USA has abandoned the legitimate international system, not paid its dues, and changed the rules to allow large-scale plantations and private estates into the coffee system. With this move, they threaten to reverse decades of hard-won gains while potentially putting at risk the very survival of the farmer cooperatives. Your continued support for and affiliation with Fair Trade USA undercuts your great fair trade contributions to this point.

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**We ask you to open your eyes and fully engage in the controversy raging around you. We ask you to leave Fair Trade USA and rejoin the international certifier in which small farmers have a true seat at the table and governance power.**

Sincerely,

Rob Everts  
Co-President

Rink Dickinson  
Co-President



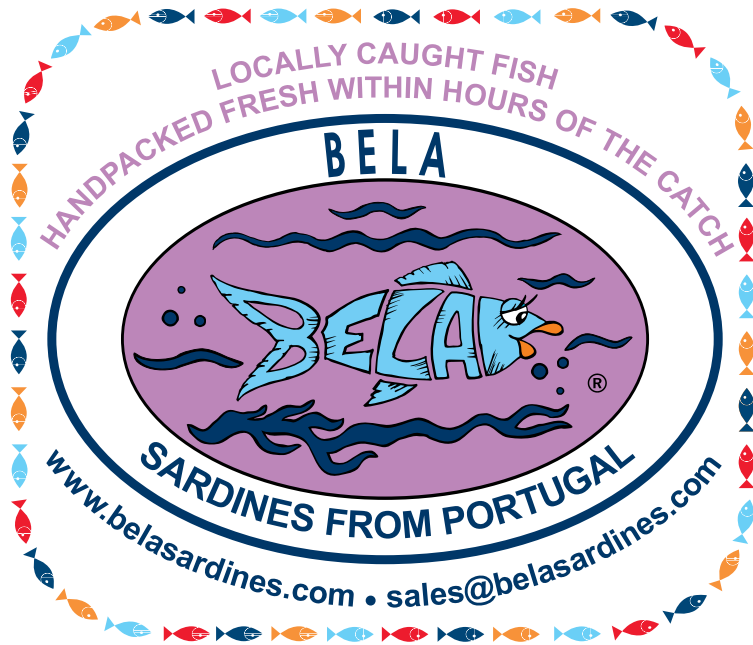
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Signs of a march to come.

former senior vice president at Food Marketing Institute, reminded the audience that our co-ops still lack ethnic diversity; he also urged us to utilize the rapid spread of social media for reaching our members and communities. Paul Hazen, former CEO of the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA) and now head of the U.S. Overseas Cooperative Development Council, reminded us that it was cooperation, not rugged individualism, that built the U.S.

Food co-ops are the most numerous kind among members of NCBA, and Hazen's successor there, Liz Bailey, was also present and had penned the above-mentioned "Declaration." Howard Brodsky, a recent inductee into the Cooperative Hall of Fame (see link below) and current CEO of CCA Global Partners, stressed that excellence and retaining loyalty in our business fields requires that we provide the unexpected. Marion Nestle, author of books such as *Food Politics* and *Safe Food* and a professor at New York University in the department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health, gave a blunt appraisal of the state of the corporate food supply and its weak regulation.

**Urban renewal**

After years of decline and depopulation, Philadelphia is working hard to recover. From Mayor Michael Nutter (who taped a welcome message to CCMA and offered the quote in the title of my report) to neighborhoods with proliferating farms and gardens to the local congressman sponsoring legislation in support of co-op development, Philadelphians are seeing improvements and giving greater recognition to co-ops and their contributions to better urban health.

CCMA bus tours visited several of those urban farms and gardens, ▶

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## Together: CCMA Every Day

To the delight of those at the Cooperative Grocers' Information Network's (CGIN) annual meeting, held at CCMA, it was announced that the National Cooperative Grocers Association had gifted *Cooperative Grocer* magazine to CGIN. The transfer was the highlight of plans for a complete reset of the trade organization as Cooperative Grocer Network, or CGN.

CGN's goal is to create a more humanized resource where food cooperators experience the energy, community, and learning of the CCMA conference. Its motto: CCMA Every Day!

CGN will take root in the current *Cooperative Grocer* website and add to it a visible community of cooperators who can connect with one another directly or through web-based groups and discussions. Discussions can be captured and added to curated content that will comprise an evolving library of wikis about the food co-op sector. Prospective changes in CGN membership eligibility seek to grow participation from smaller and emerging co-ops.

For more information, go to: [www.cooperativegrocer.coop/cgn2012](http://www.cooperativegrocer.coop/cgn2012).

◀ and later attendees learned more about Weavers Way's significant support of these projects and its manifestation of strong concern for community. Many Weavers Way staff contributed to a well-run conference, in particular Margaret Lenzi and General Manager Glenn Bergman. We also visited Mariposa Food Co-op and a new food co-op in Chester and elsewhere viewed some of the many public murals that inspire pride of place and culture. Across from the conference hotel, and the scene of a windup party, was the Reading Terminal Market, established in 1892 and now housing 80 local food producers and shops.

### Award winners

Outstanding contributors to food cooperatives, nominated by peers and chosen by past award winners, are recognized each year at CCMA.

Just a month before the conference, cooperators had honored and celebrated **Bill Gessner**, a longtime worker and trainer and consultant to food cooperatives, upon his induction to the Cooperative Hall of Fame. Images and details on these outstanding cooperators can be found at the Cooperative Development Foundation website: [www.heroes.coop/post/category/inductees/2012-inductees](http://www.heroes.coop/post/category/inductees/2012-inductees).

At CCMA, food co-ops gave recognition for **Cooperative Excellence** to two outstanding retail societies: 70-year-old Putney Food Co-op and 40-year-old **Ashland Food Co-op** (AFC).

AFC, one of the top 10 in sales among U.S. food co-ops, was the first grocer in Oregon to achieve organic certification for its entire operation. The co-op has over 7,700 owners in a city of 23,000. AFC is a leader in promoting organic farming and the campaign against genetically modified foods, models waste reduction and recycling, and provides extensive support of



**Carolee Colter (right) accepts the Cooperative Service Award from Kari Mitchell and Sharret Rose.**

PHOTOS BY ELUE SEIF

community organizations and other co-ops and trade associations. AFC, which was represented by its Outreach Director Annie Hoy, previously had been awarded recognition by *Oregon Business Magazine*, the Natural Products Association, the Oregon Organic Coalition, and by the Ashland Chamber of Commerce.

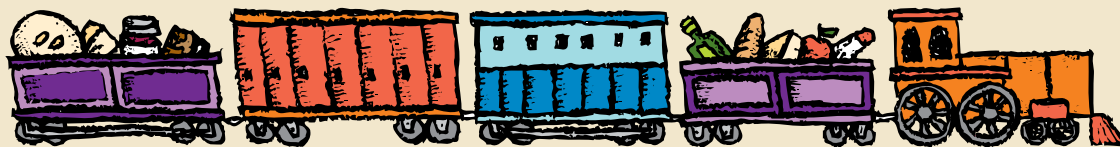
**Putney Food Co-op** (PFC) also models great food and community involvement, and it serves as a vital center for its entire community. In a town of 2,500, the co-op has more than 1,000 active members. PFC supports a lively farmers market across the street from its store, and the co-op initiated a program to ensure that all local elementary schoolchildren have access to a nutritious snack every day. Despite the economic recession, the co-op has continued its sales growth and maintained profitability, issuing patronage dividends in each of the past three years. PFC also is an active participant in the local and regional cooperative economy. General Manager Robyn O'Brien received the Cooperative Excellence Award on behalf of the co-op.

The award for **Cooperative Service** went to **Carolee Colter**, whose nearly 40 years of work with food cooperatives has had huge positive impact in lifting their standards in human resource practices. Many managers and others ▶

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◀ testified to the professional and operating improvements their co-ops have achieved under Colter's guidance and advice in developing HR policies, hiring and evaluating of managers, conducting employee-satisfaction surveys, and through her numerous articles. Among the 26 years' worth of articles posted in the [www.cooperativegrocer.coop](http://www.cooperativegrocer.coop) archives, her contributions get more visits than those of any other author. Following her early years of work in co-ops in the Seattle area, Colter established a national consulting practice and more recently joined the team at CDS Consulting Co-op.

Two awards were given for **Cooperative Board Service**. At Valley Natural Foods in Burnsville, Minn., **Richard Ellsworth** has provided service leadership for over 30 years. His contributions on the board of directors have helped this thriving suburban co-op grow through major expansions, professional board development, and excellent relations with its local business community. The co-op itself had received recognition previously for its excellence, and longtime General Manager Susan McGaughey enthusiastically supported Ellsworth's nomination.

At Eastside Food Co-op in Minneapolis, which opened in 2003, **Leslie Watson** has provided board leadership for 10 years, including three years as president. She has contributed pro bono legal work on the co-op's bylaws and articles of incorporation and loan documents, and has chaired the co-op's successful capitalization drives. Eastside's General Manager, Amy Fields, described Watson as an excellent communicator and planner. More recently, Watson joined with three area residents to form one of the country's first investment cooperatives, the Northeast Investment Cooperative. ■

## Bumper Crop of Startup Co-ops

BY JAKE SCHLACHTER

**S**ince last year's listing, another 19 new co-ops have opened! Nineteen startups is a bumper crop, the largest one-year total so far in this third wave of food co-op organizing. It represents new success—in the spread of the food co-op meme, in the methods of instruction, and in the sources of support for new startups. If your co-op has worked with a recent start-up, thank you for the investment you've made in helping a new community prosper and in growing this cooperative movement.

But is nineteen really the crest of this wave? At Food Co-op Initiative's (FCI) board retreat in May, Director Marilyn Scholl asked, "What if we're only seeing the first ripple—of the tsunami—of new food co-ops?" Will we be ready to support them?

FCI is a not-for-profit whose mission is to build and maintain the support system for new food co-op organizers. Someone from FCI is often the first friendly voice on the other end of the phone, welcoming a newcomer to this national community of food co-ops—or second, behind the nearby co-op that's inspiring the new effort.

Will FCI be ready to support a tsunami of new food co-ops? Its online startup toolkits and how-to videos can be downloaded by a thousand startups as easily as one. But advice isn't always heard until the authors have established trust and credibility, which depend upon the relationships that are built with new groups. How can these all-important relationships be scaled up?

It's going to take a village. One such example is the Neighboring Food Co-op Alliance (NFCA) in New England. NFCA is a partnership between mature food co-ops and

startups (which comprise one-third of its 28 members). Through NFCA, startups have the opportunity to cultivate relationships with nearby mature co-ops. At the recent groundbreaking in New Hampshire for Monadnock Food Co-op (Class of 2013), I noticed I was standing with five general managers of nearby co-ops—all of whom had been named as critical influences and sources of support by Monadnock's lead organizer, Bonnie Hudspeth. She has since joined the NFCA staff, building critical early relationships with startups all over New England.

NFCA is part of a trend by food co-ops to organize themselves regionally for fellowship and support, particularly in support of new startups. In the last couple years, it has been joined in the Mid-Atlantic by MAFCA, which has hosted a conference, regional meetings, and training workshops.

Then there's Bloomingfoods—a regional support system unto itself. George Huntington and the board have inserted support for startups into the DNA of the organization and its Ends policies. Bloomingfoods has hosted an annual training conference three years running, and Brad Alstrom makes Bloomingfoods the first food co-op to hire its own co-op developer.

The Twin Cities have long had a vibrant food co-op association, and the Pacific Northwest has the density of food co-ops to start one.

There's a good chance that a regional food co-op alliance is near your co-op (or could be). Is your co-op involved? What kind of organizational structures will need to be in place to provide coaching and fellowship and to build those critical relationships with a tsunami of new food co-ops? ■

### NEW co-ops from 2011 and 2012

**Green Market Co-op**—Glasgow, Ky. (March 2011, not listed last year)

**Local Beet Co-op**—Chester, Conn. (April 2011, not listed last year)

**Blue Hills Market**—Bruce, Wis. (June 2011)

**Citizens Co-op**—Gainesville, Fla. (July 2011)

**Stone Valley Market**—Poultney, Vt. (July 2011)

**Minnesota Street Market**—St. Cloud, Minn. (July 2011)

**Baltimore Food Co-op**—Baltimore, Md. (July/August 2011)

**Medford Food Co-op**—Medford, Ore. (August 2011)

**Tacoma Food Co-op**—Tacoma, Wash. (August 2011)

**Tallgrass Grocery**—West Des Moines, Iowa (September 2011)

**RiverLoop Public Market Co-op**—Waterloo, Iowa (September 2011)

**Placerville Natural Foods Co-op**—Placerville, Calif. (October 2011)

**New Orleans Food Co-op**—New Orleans, La. (October 2011)

**MOON Co-op**—Oxford, Ohio (November 2011)

**Elm City Market**—New Haven, Conn. (November 2011)

**Greene Hill Food Co-op**—Brooklyn, N.Y. (December 2011)

**Fertile Underground Natural Cooperative**—Providence, R.I. (2011)

**Vancouver Food Co-op**—Vancouver, Wash. (2011)

**Riverbend Market Cooperative**—Red Wing, Minn. (March 2012)

**Clayton Food Co-op**—Clayton, N.Y. (May 2012)