

# Co-ops Rock!

## Appealing to a younger generation through music

BY KELLY SMITH



The National on stage; below, members of the band with NCGA's Robynn Shrader.

**H**ave you looked at the demographic profile of your co-op membership lately? Even co-ops in college communities may find that their membership is aging. In fact, it should come as no surprise that as today's co-ops celebrate their 30-plus year anniversaries, their founding members are celebrating somewhat older birthdays.

Attracting new members is critical to co-ops' future viability. In particular, we must find ways to appeal to a younger generation—those who can carry the co-op message forward in an increasingly electronic world. Luckily, members of Gen Y (also known as Millennials) share many similar traits with the boomer generation that founded food co-ops more than 30 years ago. They have high rates of volunteerism. Although



they take a distrustful and cynical view toward advertising in general, they support social and community causes. They also value family, country, and planet over things like income and status. This is a generation that truly works to live.

Appealing to Gen Y is not about reaching the masses; it's about building a community and creating an emotional connection at the grass-roots level. What better way to connect to this group than through music? That's the premise behind the experiment NCGA has dubbed "Co-ops Rock!"

Co-ops Rock! is intended to be an ongoing music series. Our objective is to raise money to support sustainable food initiatives while creating a strong link between music and food co-ops in a way that elevates our appeal to a younger generation.

Our first event was held at The Moore Theatre in Seattle on September 19, 2008. Brooklyn-based The National headlined the event, in addition to music by opening act Menomena. In light of this year's flooding in the Midwest, the beneficiary for this inaugural event was the Cooperative Disaster Relief Fund, which provides assistance to impacted farmers.

We're pleased to report that over 1,500 people attended the show, raising more than \$30,000 for farmers. More importantly, we demonstrated that co-ops are a thriving community whose members and shoppers realize the importance of seeking cooperative ways to help others when they need it. This message was reinforced with a video played for concert-goers, which can be viewed at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5C6YVbiQKTW](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5C6YVbiQKTW)

We're excited about the potential for Co-ops Rock! to bring a younger audience together to celebrate their love for music and community, and to reinforce the cooperative advantage. ■

## CO-OPS ROCK!

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