

# 2012: International Year of Cooperatives

“Cooperative enterprises build a better world.” This has been adopted as the official slogan of “2012: International Year of Cooperatives”—a United Nations declaration and a global campaign to educate the public and public officials about the benefits and potential of cooperatives. The International Year of Cooperatives (IYC) campaign presents a unique opportunity to build awareness of cooperatives in all fields of enterprise.

Across the globe, local and national cooperatives are being assisted by the International Cooperative Alliance in highlighting inspiring co-op stories. In the U.S., the campaign is being led by the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA), and its action plan is available at [www.ncba.coop](http://www.ncba.coop). In Canada, the Canadian Co-operative Association has launched [www.canada2012.coop](http://www.canada2012.coop) for this campaign. Co-ops UK is posting statements and resources at



[www.s.coop/ukguestblogs](http://www.s.coop/ukguestblogs).

NCBA has prepared a communications toolkit for cooperatives that can adapt for local use the national and global messages being developed for the campaign. It includes a resolution

that cooperatives can adopt at the annual meetings, a mayoral proclamation, and template press releases. The IYC Program Manager, Eric DeLuca, can be reached at [edeluca@ncba.coop](mailto:edeluca@ncba.coop) for more information.

Highlights of the U.S. action plan include:

- Raise the profile of cooperatives so that more Americans understand the value of joining cooperatives and doing business with them.
- Improve access to cooperative businesses by making it easier to find co-ops of all types.
- Educate and engage senior government leaders to improve legislative and policy conditions for cooperative businesses.
- Support studies that demonstrate the economic value of cooperative enterprise.
- Reach out to youth, cultivating new cooperative leaders. ■

## Food Co-op Initiative Awards \$100K in Grants

In July, Food Co-op Initiative (FCI) announced the award of 16 grants to new retail food co-ops organizing in rural communities across the United States. Fourteen of the co-ops received Seed Grants, FCI's development support program that is made possible by USDA's Rural

Cooperative Development Grants. Two additional grants were made to the Placerville Co-op in California and the Old Creamery Co-op in Cummington, Mass., to provide similar support for communities organizing to acquire and convert a privately-owned business. FCI will follow these co-ops' progress closely, document the unique aspects of co-op conversion, and create resource publications for future such efforts.

“The public interest in food co-ops is at an all-time high,” reports FCI Executive Director Stuart Reid. “In many rural areas, grocery stores have closed, and chain operators are not interested in the smaller markets. However, by owning and controlling their own cooperative store, communities are able to ensure stable access to healthy food, provide meaningful jobs, and support local producers. Rural food co-ops can become both an economic anchor and a social hub for the community.”

Award winners were selected based on the strength of their steering committee, quality of their business planning, the potential for successful



operations, and the potential impact made by the grant funds. The awards will be used to help pay for professional business development, market studies, and membership recruitment. Co-op organizers are required to raise matching funds in their community and will collaborate with FCI throughout their development process.

“This is a very select group,” said Reid. “We have had contact with over 300 communities that are interested in starting a food co-op, and over half are in rural areas. Although we were only able to provide funding to a limited number of rural co-ops, FCI provides free resources, training, and advice to all food co-ops, using an online approach, which allows easy access on demand and provides mentoring and advice through live training events and a lot of email.”

The Seed Grant program is made possible through a USDA Rural Cooperative Development Grant awarded to FCI to promote new co-op development. Primary funding for FCI work also comes from the Blooming Prairie Foundation and the food co-op community. ■

### 2011 Seed Grant Award Recipients

Allegany Harvest Market .....	Houghton, N.Y.
East Aurora Community .....	East Aurora, N.Y. Market
Fairbanks Community .....	Fairbanks, Alaska Cooperative Market
Fresh Connections .....	Algona, Iowa Cooperative
Kitsap Community .....	Silverdale, Wash. Food Co-op
Lake County Community .....	Clearlake, Calif. Co-op
Lovettsville Cooperative .....	Lovettsville, Va. Market
Macomb Food Co-op .....	Macomb, Ill.
Monadnock Community .....	Keene, N.H. Market
Spiral Foods Cooperative .....	Graton, Calif.
Blue Hills Market .....	Bruce, Wis.
Willmar Community-Owned ...	Willmar, Minn. Grocery
Great River Co-op .....	Walpole, N.H.
Riverbend Market .....	Red Wing, Minn.

More information about Food Co-op Initiative can be found at [www.FoodCoopInitiative.coop](http://www.FoodCoopInitiative.coop).