

BY DAVE GUTKNECHT

A Call to Be Inclusive



In June, I was inspired once again by the annual CCMA conference of food co-op leaders, summarized elsewhere in these pages. I also have a few uneasy questions, but those too stem from

breathing in the ideas and enthusiasm of people dedicated to strengthening and extending cooperative values and practice.

Two conference keynote speakers challenged cooperators to embrace uncertainty and strengthen the use of our imaginations. In Brett Fairbairn's view, we need to engage in unconventional conversations, learn from outsiders, and think of governance as inclusive of additional stakeholders.

In light of these points on navigating our future, perhaps it is not ironic to observe some cooperative governance and planning issues bubbling to the surface. In two arenas, unconventional conversations and governance that is inclusive of other stakeholders seem to be lacking—at least in some eyes and according to conversations among conference attendees.

Some board members and managers and workshop presenters called for going beyond felt constraints of Carver's model of Policy Governance, the currently dominant system of board training and board-management roles. In addition, speaking from within two leading national organizations that are providing member services to food co-ops—Cooperative Grocers' Information Network (CGIN) and the National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA)—many board members expressed frustration with a lack of networking conversations among food co-op directors and identified a need to enhance a sense of common board challenges and opportunities.

Another planning issue manifests in a decline in CCMA attendance over recent years by key co-op managers. The NCGA, which formerly held its annual meeting at the CCMA conference, has grown rapidly and focuses its resources on the operational needs of retail general managers and department managers. CCMA is a virtual organization holding an event that addresses a broader set of needs: governance styles and challenges, strategic planning and board/management relations, startup and co-op development lessons, multi-stakeholder cooperatives, and big-picture discussions. Managers seem to be migrating to NCGA's in-depth focus while sending more board members to CCMA.

All of these needs are important. Yet instead of increasing collaboration among the parties involved, the content and planning of CCMA and

NCGA functions are diverging, even competing. These organizational turf issues offer opportunities to take up the call for greater imagination and more inclusive conversations among cooperative stakeholders.

Food co-ops' impact could be dramatically expanded if the current leadership and the more than 300 food co-ops pull together to catch the wave of cooperative development—the largest such wave since the previous Great Depression. For building a cooperative future with today's food co-ops, and for additional thinking outside the box, we have numerous institutional allies—also summarized in this issue. ■

New Co-ops Add to Milestones

A dozen new co-ops opened in the past year, the largest such annual total in many years, and they were celebrated at CCMA 2011. Along with the newest members of the food co-op community, the conference crowd applauded milestones for established food co-ops, in decades ranging from 10 years to 70 years.

Newly opened food co-ops since June 2010:

- Berkeley Student Food Collective (Berkeley, Calif.)
- Chester's Community Food Co-op (Chester, Pa.)
- Company Shops (Burlington, N.C.)
- Friendly City Food Co-op (Harrisonburg, Va.)
- Goodside Grocery Co-op (Sheboygan, Wis.)
- Old North Grocery Co-op (St. Louis, Mo.)
- Pogues Run Grocer (Indianapolis, Ind.)
- Proctor General Store (Proctor, Vt.)
- Ridgway Natural Foods Co-op (Ridgway, Colo.)
- Riverbend Market (Redwing, Minn.)
- Sierra Vista Food Co-op (Sierra Vista, Ariz.)
- Troy Community Food Co-op (Troy, N.Y.)

Milestones were noted for the following veteran food co-ops, listed by their year of opening:

- 2001: South Royalton Food Co-op (Vt.)
- 1981: Berkshire Co-op (Berkshire, Mass.)
- Common Market (Frederick, Md.)
- Three Rivers (Knoxville, Tenn.)
- Questa Food Co-op (Questa, Calif.)
- Whole Foods (Erie, Pa.)
- Wild Oats Co-op (Williamstown, Mass.)
- 1971: Food Conspiracy (Tucson, Ariz.)
- Fort Collins Food Co-op (Ft. Collins, Colo.)
- GreenStar (Ithaca, N.Y.)
- Harvest Co-op (Cambridge, Mass.)
- Marquette Food Co-op (Marquette, Mich.)
- New Pioneer Co-op (Iowa City, Iowa)
- People's Food Co-op (Ann Arbor, Mich.)
- 1961: Puget Consumers Co-op—PCC Natural Markets (Seattle, Wash.)
- 1941: Putney Consumer Co-op (Putney, Vt.)

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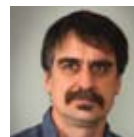
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