

# CCMA Conference Highlights and Challenges

BY DAVE GUTKNECHT

Surrounded by the rolling hills of southern Indiana, some 360 co-op board members, managers, staff, trainers and others attended the 2010 Consumer Cooperative Management Association (CCMA) conference, held at Indiana University in Bloomington on June 10–12. Supplementing a diverse and resourceful program, local host Bloomingfoods Cooperative had planned stimulating tours of cultural and historic landmarks, local organic farms and a winery, and the co-op's three stores. Visitors who had been unsure whether the location could offer much of interest (Is that next to Bloomington, Illinois?) found an impressive campus, enthusiastic co-op hosts, and an outstanding schedule of presentations and diversions.

The CCMA program features a wide range of workshops and speakers for both board members and managers. It exposes attendees to challenges beyond their local housekeeping and offers leading perspectives from both inside and outside the cooperative sector. This year's CCMA audience responded with strong interest to keynote speakers, including Bruce Philp, a leader in branded marketing ([brandcowboy.blogspot.com](http://brandcowboy.blogspot.com)); Michael Shuman, author of *The Small-Mart Revolution*, from the Business Alliance of Local Living Economies ([small-mart.org](http://small-mart.org)); and retail food industry expert Michael Sansolo ([michaelsansolo.com](http://michaelsansolo.com)). Between these keynotes, eight different workshop tracks covered topics such as branding and marketing communications, financial planning and resources, department management, startup co-op challenges, and board governance lessons.

Sponsored by the National Cooperative Business Association, the CCMA conference currently is planned by Ann Hoyt at the University of Wisconsin–Extension's Urban Cooperative Initiative. This was the 54th annual CCMA conference, bringing together veterans and newcomers from across the country, with more than 80 co-ops and other organizations represented this year. However, noticeably few managers and directors from the West or from the National Cooperative Grocers Association were present to balance strong attendance from the Central and Eastern sections of the country.

Through these many perspectives, the state of co-ops was reviewed and debated. The potential for new cooperative enterprise generated much discussion, and how to build relationships with allies and



Bloomingfoods Co-op showed off its three stores, including a large outdoor garden center.



Left: How many cooperators does it take to free a stuck tour bus? Right: Bowling for Bowers.



The closing reception featured great food from Bloomingfoods, conversation and music.

meet more of this cooperative potential were recurring themes.

This year, a new website, [www.ccma.coop](http://www.ccma.coop), was introduced to help organize the conference and give it a lasting resource.

## Fundraising and awards

Fun, fundraising and awards of recognition also figured in conference activities. The Howard Bowers Fund, administered by Cooperative Development

Foundation (see sidebar), receives a generous contribution each year from CCMA attendees.

Howard Bowers Fund trustees are chosen from among food co-op leaders, and they decide on allocations. Moneys go to co-op startups, conferences, and scholarships for co-op training and education, including attendance at CCMA itself.

At CCMA 2010, auctions of three lovely quilts made from co-op T-shirts; bowling and billiards games; and a silent auction netted over \$40,000 for

PHOTOS BY DAN NORDLEY

the Howard Bowers Fund.

The Bowers Fund also oversees annual awards of recognition to leaders in the food co-op sector. This year, the following were recognized and applauded for their achievements:

**Wheatsville Co-op: Retail Excellence.** In the extremely competitive natural/organic market in Austin, Texas, Wheatsville continues to generate solid achievements, growing at double digits during each of the past four years. Led for 10 years by General Manager Dan Gillotte, Wheatsville undertook a very successful expansion and facelift in 2009 while continuing to post some of the best operating numbers in the entire food co-op sector. Gillotte is known for his enterprising and humorous character, while the co-op is known for its excellent service and its determination to “keep Austin weird.”

**Nancy Casady: Cooperative Service.** General manager for 14 years at Ocean Beach People’s Organic Food Market in San Diego, Calif., Casady has demonstrated dedicated leadership both within the co-op and outside it on such issues



Left: Dan Gillotte of Wheatsville Co-op accepts the Retail Excellence Award from NCBA's Paul Hazen. Right: Nancy Casady of Ocean Beach People's Organic Food Market (second from left) gathers with friends and colleagues after accepting the Cooperative Service Award.

as labeling genetically engineered foods, expanding the use of EBT for low-income shoppers, and strengthening regional and national cooperative grocers associations. Under her tenure the co-op relocated in 2002 to a new “green” building, and it has been profitable every year. She asked that the staff get special mention as a primary reason for the co-op’s achievements; some of them have gone on to become managers at other co-ops. ■

## CO-OP MILESTONES

Milestones are also announced at the CCMA conference, recognizing consumer co-ops that have successfully achieved their first year in operation or as many as their 75th year.

Following are food co-ops and their year of founding:

### 1935

Adamant Co-op—Adamant, Vt.

### 1970

Cleveland Food Co-op—Cleveland, Ohio  
Community Food Co-op — Bellingham, Wa.  
First Alternative Co-op—Corvallis, Ore.  
Good Earth Co-op — St. Cloud, Minn.  
Kokua Co-op Market—Honolulu, Hawaii  
Outpost Natural Foods—Milwaukee, Wis.  
Whole Foods Co-op — Duluth, Minn.

### 1980

Franklin Community Co-op — Greenfield, Mass.  
Takoma Park/Silver Spring Food Co-op, Md.  
Valley Food Co-op — Alamosa, Colo.  
Willimantic Co-op—Willimantic, Conn.

### 1990

Village Co-op — Leverett, Mass.

### 2009–2010 (opened since 2009 CCMA)

Dill Pickle—Chicago, Ill.  
Bread and Roses—Tallahassee, Fla.  
Mohawk Harvest Co-op Market—Gloversville, N.Y.  
Main Market—Spokane, Wa.  
Big Spring Co-op—Lewistown, Mont.  
East New York Co-op—New York, N.Y.  
Daily Market Cooperative—Walla Walla, Wa.  
Harvest Moon—Long Lake, Minn.

## Cooperative Development Foundation and Co-op Hall of Fame

The Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) is a charitable foundation that, for 65 years, has raised funds for global and domestic cooperative enterprise and solutions.

Over the past 20 years, CDF has given out over \$10 million to help cooperatives of many types.

CDF maintains several different funds, including a Cooperative Emergency Fund, and it is overseeing a 2010 campaign for Haiti relief and rebuilding of Haiti co-ops. According to CDF Program Director Terence Buen, as of June 1, U.S. co-ops had contributed \$63,000 to this campaign, and food co-ops have been especially generous. One hundred percent of these funds go to cooperatives that are in a position to help implement disaster relief and rebuilding.

CDF also administers the Howard Bowers Fund, which supports consumer food co-ops and gives recognition awards to food co-op leaders (see accompanying article).

The Co-op Hall of Fame is one of CDF’s major campaigns, giving recognition to cooperators who have made an especially significant impact in one or more fields of cooperative enterprise and development. The Co-op Hall of Fame’s commemorative plaques are housed at the National Cooperative



Cooperative Development Foundation

Business Association in Washington, D.C., and can also be viewed at [www.heroes.coop](http://www.heroes.coop). Funds supporting CDF domestic and international co-op development programs

are contributed in the name of Hall of Fame inductees; this year, the event generated \$212,000.

At the CDF annual dinner in early May, the cooperators inducted were:

**Larry Blanchard**, who had a long and illustrious career in credit unions and the Credit Union National Association.

**Glenn English**, former CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and promoter of rural utility co-ops.

**Werqu Makesha**, who helped revitalize agricultural co-ops and independent co-op development in Ethiopia.

**David Thompson**, activist and author in several fields, including as president of Twin Pines Cooperative Foundation, which has supported the establishment of co-op community funds by some 27 retail food co-ops. Many of these co-ops, along with credit unions that benefited from Thompson’s work, contributed to CDF in his name this spring.



successful. Co-ops with demonstrated capacity to expand have been able to quickly generate member investments and loans. Among many examples of such capital campaigns, a million dollars or more was raised in a matter of weeks by Willy Street Co-op in Madison, Wis., for its second store and Linden Hills Co-op in Minneapolis for its relocation. Such local roots and support, and the balance sheet equity that demonstrates the community's investment, may be the most important elements that will enable food co-ops to thrive in the future.

## An end to business as usual

Concerning the economy at large, many people follow the mainstream media and hope for a return to business as usual—and that is unfortunate since business as usual is what created the mess we are in. We face three worsening trends: economic breakdown, resource depletion, and climate disruption.

These crises, as well as possible remedial actions, are closely interrelated. So far, what persists is an attempt to repay ever greater debt through growth that is supported by cheap energy and by a faith in boundless resource substitution and technical fixes. Such beliefs help people avoid recognition of resource limits, ongoing environmental damage, and the need to change behavior. A “wake-up call” has not occurred.

Still, the biggest change in outlook lately, along with a declining economy and shrinking public revenues, is recognition of resource depletion and energy constraints. For farm and food businesses, petroleum and natural gas could hardly be more central nor conservation practices more urgent. Even though U.S. domestic oil production has been declining since the 1970s, this gets muted recognition on the part of public officials. To accommodate our oil dependence, we have embraced deeper denial, deeper debt, deeper off-shore drilling, and deeper military intervention. At the moment, widespread economic decline is lowering demand, giving us one more summer of low-tax/low-cost gasoline while we grieve for the Gulf Coast.

Cheap and easy access oil has ended. Globally, production has been at a plateau for several years,

and we are seeing much price volatility. In 2010, and earlier in the 2005 Department of Energy Hirsch Report, top U.S. and international bodies have forecast an era of supply constraints beginning as early as 2012. Somehow (avoiding panic), this doesn't make the headlines. Substitute forms of energy each have their set of financial and environmental problems. Other essential resources—soil, water, fish—also are being dangerously depleted, generating additional barriers to many growth projections, now obsolete.

Widespread denial and comforting dismissal of these issues extends to co-op members and colleagues, and necessary conversations are difficult. This column itself will not be widely welcomed. Nevertheless, in a spirit that promotes solidarity and cooperative approaches—call it the pursuit of happiness rather than the pursuit of consumption—we should embrace what we all face: reducing resource use on every level from household to national infrastructure, while we attempt to make critical investments in the future.

Once settled on this agenda, we will be able to identify the obstacles. Many of the first stages in radical resource conservation would be readily achieved because there is so much waste in the U.S., which has per capita energy use two to three times that of Europe (to take the next highest example). But this will require changes, and because it threatens business as usual and the comfort level of many, few leaders are willing to advocate such a direction. Consequently, instead of engaging in widespread preparation, we keep stumbling toward widespread disaster.

## Community initiatives

In the face of such social erosion, it's up to co-ops and many other community-based organizations to sustain a democratic culture that builds awareness and offers new directions—no small challenge! Just as shortcomings of capitalist enterprise have led to market opportunities for co-ops, the failure of political institutions calls for community-based initiatives. That is not merely an analogy, for the obligation proposed is an extension of cooperative

values—summarized as self-reliance, solidarity, and concern for community.

Earlier, I noted some common elements of successful co-op development and that we're getting better at it. But national consolidation of resources by itself does not ensure that food co-ops will secure growth in stores while also managing challenges they have not encountered before. Contrary to a mode of central control, in a situation of disruption and uncertainty, we may need to rely increasingly on ad hoc solutions. (Examples in this issue: startup co-ops being launched with unanticipated formats; and the Bozeman co-op countering a sales decline by expanding its storage capacity.)

Leaders often discourage ad hoc approaches. Yet in the best of circumstances—including those that are difficult!—when a solution is not predetermined, people draw upon more of their potential and resources at hand. Ad hoc solutions become enduring solutions.

The future is only partially determined, and much is up to us. This magazine has completed 25 years of reports on the best of food cooperative lessons and leadership. Its production has been gratifying, and I'd like to continue making these pages an important part of co-ops' conversation about the future. Thanks for all of your many contributions. With your help, *Cooperative Grocer* can continue to share vital stories in our cooperative community.

To conclude, here is a catechism I have learned:

**A cooperative rule:** The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

**A cooperative outlook:** Our uniqueness is of less weight than our commonality—we are all in this together.

**A cooperative ethic:** A cooperative is a gift from those who preceded us, and we have an obligation to share it and pass it on.

**A cooperative purpose:** In order to realize a cooperative outlook and ethic, we must extend democratic control of capital.

**A cooperative practice:** Keep learning! ■



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