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It's Time To Support Our Local Food Co-op

It has been almost two years since I wrote about the prospects of a food co-op being started in our area. Just in case you didn't paste that little journalistic gem into your scrapbook, allow me to summarize. A group of ambitious go-getters from the Monadnock Farm and Community Connection Program began the process by interviewing established food co-ops in the region. By July 2008 they were meeting monthly and raising money for an initial feasibility study. I interviewed Bonnie Hudspeth, who spoke about the strong support the idea was receiving as well as all of the benefits a food co-op can provide to the local community. I caught up with Bonnie again a few weeks ago at a rocking birthday celebration where she gave me a very exciting progress report and agreed to do another interview. Bonnie is the Project Manager for the Monadnock Community Market Co-op.

Green Monadnock: When we last spoke, you were still finishing a business plan and collecting data. Where are you now, almost two years later?

Bonnie Hudspeth: We are excited to announce the formation of the founding Monadnock Community Market (MCM) Co-op Board of Directors, and by the end of the month, we will incorporate and launch our Co-op Membership drive. We are also working to create a Web site and fundraise.

GM: Do you have a location selected yet?

BH: At this point, our Finance and Facilities Working Group is working to find the best location for the co-op in Keene.

GM: What has been the biggest surprise in the planning process?

BH: One of the biggest surprises for me has been the diversity of community members who have stepped forward and gotten involved – non-profit directors, teachers, accountants, students, farmers, business owners, local food enthusiasts, longtime community members... you name it.

GM: Explain the benefits of membership in the Monadnock Community Market.

BH: A food co-op differs from other private businesses in that they are user-owned and controlled, with benefits distributed to their members, meaning that our co-op will be locally owned forever and provide jobs for our community.

Some of the other co-op member-owner benefits include: cooperatively owning a business that benefits our community as well as local farmers and food producers, access to high quality food, democratic member control through the ability to run for the Co-op Board and eligibility to vote at the annual meeting, eligibility for member-owner appreciation day savings, a subscription to the co-op newsletter, and more.

Green Monadnock

with Richard Popovic



GM: What makes a co-op unique?

BH: Co-ops are guided by seven cooperative principles that help put values into practice:

1. Voluntary and Open Membership;
2. Democratic Member Control;
3. Member Economic Participation;
4. Autonomy and Independence;
5. Education, Training, and Information;
6. Cooperation among Cooperatives;
7. Concern for Community

GM: How do you see the Monadnock Community Market fitting into the burgeoning local food movement?

BH: Over the last two years, we have distributed 12 surveys throughout the region, and there has been an overwhelming response from community members wanting to support local farmers and producers, and an interest in more year-round access to locally grown food. As we move forward with developing the co-op, one of the next steps is working to build relationships with local farmers and producers.

GM: Where can someone sign up?

BH: You can sign up to be a founding member of the Monadnock Community Market Co-op at the Monadnock Earth Festival on Saturday, April 24th from noon until 4 p.m. at the Ashuelot River Park on West Street in Keene. We will also have the Co-op Membership Brochure available to download on our blog.

GM: Where can I find more information?

BH: E-mail: monadnockcommunitymarket@gmail.com. For regular updates visit: www.monadnockcommunitymarket.wordpress.com or become a Facebook fan of Monadnock Community Market.

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