

Belfast Co-op News & Commentary

A natural food and products store serving Midcoast Maine since 1976

MAY/JUNE 2007

Co-op elects directors, holds annual meeting

Thank you to all the members who voted in our recent election. We were short 35 votes at our April 8 deadline, but after extending voting for just one week, we went well above the needed quorum (10 percent of members).

A big thanks also to our candidates and a warm welcome to our newly elected board members. They are:

Karen Aveni, who looks forward to helping keep our local food economy strong.

Debbi Lasky, who was re-elected and promises to support our cooperative venture as an alternative to standard capitalist economics.

Michael Marino, who brings lots of experience in the health food industry.

Kip Penney, who adds another term to his seven years of board experience.

Paul Sheridan, who moved to Belfast because he loves the Co-op.

Peri Tobin, who returns to the board and promises to contribute her familiarity and knowledge of the Co-op to the board's mission.

Paul was elected to fill a vacant term with two years remaining. The others were elected to full three-year terms. We hope you get to meet our new board members and share your thoughts about how to improve our Co-op.

Many of this year's candidates spoke to members at our Annual

Meeting on March 18 at the Belfast Boathouse. The meeting was a success, if a bit messy—the boathouse floor flooded during heavy rains the day before, leaving a heck of a lot of mud when the water receded. Thank you everyone who helped clean up the muck before the meeting and put up with dusty floors during it.

Our annual meeting speaker was Jane Livingston, cooperative consultant.

The meeting started with a talk by Jane Livingston, regional co-op organizer and a consultant to the Cooperative Institute. She spoke on: "Sustaining our commitment to our local community." Members also heard from our general management team and board committees. As always, the question-and answer session was a highlight.

Some comments/suggestions from members that day include: having staff wear name tags, revitalizing our working member program, having orientation for new members, and increasing the amount of information available to members at our web site.

In keeping with our mission to provide natural, wholesome and organic foods, a tasty potluck supper, with some dishes provided by the Co-op, wrapped up the event. If we didn't see you this year, we hope you can make it in 2008!

Safeguarding organic standards



Now that large corporations like Wal-Mart and Kraft are making more and more organic products available to more and more people, there is some question about how national organic standards will change in response to the growing pressure on our food chain for organics.

Consumer group leads effort

A movement is afoot to "Safeguard Organic Standards," courtesy of the Organic Consumers Association. To find out more about the association's "SOS" campaign, and more than you could ever hope to know about the world of organic agriculture and all the nuances of living organically, check out www.organicconsumers.org, the association's web site.

Free newsletter

To help you stay in the know, sign up for the association's free e-mail newsletter, Organic Bytes.

Some member sales now permanent!

We now have many products in the store that are on permanent Member Advantage Pricing, including Camp Trust Me Eggs at \$1.89 (members save 30 cents) and the entire line of GTS Kombucha drinks at \$3.59 (members save 30 cents). Just look for the yellow tags with the red apple throughout the store!

Belfast Co-op Store

123 High St.

Belfast, ME 04915

phone: 207-338-2532

fax: 207-338-5234

www.belfast.coop

e-mail: info@belfastcoop.com

Store Hours:

7:30 a.m. - 8 p.m. daily

Closed New Year's Day, Easter,

Thanksgiving and Christmas

General Management Team

Erica Buswell

Ronald "Goldy" Goldstein

Sanford "Pepper" Bush

Board of Directors

Kip Penney, board president

Bindy Pendleton, co-vice president

Debbi Lasky, co-vice president

Allen Ginsberg, treasurer

Susan Lauchlan, secretary

Jenn Hall, staff representative

Roger Quehl, staff representative

Karen Aveni

Richard Brown

Lorna Crichton

Scott Giroux

Wayne Kraeger

Paul Sheridan

Jerry Savitz

Peri Tobin

Newsletter

Editors: Erica Buswell, Mary Ruoff

newsletter@belfastcoop.com

Arts Shows at the Co-op

Are you a local artist? Interested in showing your art in our Café Gallery? Lots of folks will see your work! Contact Fran at education@belfastcoop.com to learn about our application process.

Members donate back \$2000 in patronage refunds to Co-op

A special "Thank You" to all of our members who have so generously donated money from their patronage dividends to our Equity Assistance and Capital Improvements funds.

The current balance on these funds at press time totaled: \$882 for Capital Improvements and \$1,205 for Equity Assistance, which would fund the equity contributions of 20 new members on limited incomes.

If you know of anyone who would like to join the Co-op but who is financially unable to do so, please encourage them to come apply for equity assistance. As of yet, we have no applicants and would love the opportunity to bring more members into the fold through the generous gifts of others.

GM reports will be posted monthly

Look for the monthly general management team report to the board of directors on the community bulletin board outside the front of the store. The report keeps the board up-to-date on current issues and challenges as well as the discussions and brainstorming that go on at our weekly meetings with department heads.

We are posting this to give members more in-depth and timely information than the newsletter always allows. The report will typically go up on the Tuesday before the board meeting (fourth Thursday of the month). Our hope is that it serves as another valuable tool for keeping our membership involved and up-to-date on what's happening in our cooperatively owned store. Check it out!

Newsletter News

Read the latest issue and check out back ones (all in color!) at our web site

If you haven't visited our web site lately, there have been small changes and improvements, thanks to our new webmaster Paul Eagle. Our newsletter is now accessible from the site, www.belfast.coop, and you can look at past editions as well as the current one in living color. We are also proud to announce that we can now e-mail our bimonthly newsletter. If you are interested in receiving our newsletter electronically, contact Fran at education@belfastcoop.com.

Co-op Events: May-June

Café Gallery Art Shows April: Art by Clarity: colorful, collaborative mixed media works.

May: Historic photographs of Midcoast boat building from George Jennings' archive.

Film: "The Global Banquet: Politics of Food" 7-9 pm Tues.

May 2, Belfast Free Library, 106 High St. After the screening of this award-winning film, Bob St. Peter of The Good Life Center at Forest Farm will lead a discussion. Free. Co-op is a sponsor.

Root Cellaring Talk 6:30-7:30 pm Thurs. May 10 in the Co-op Café. Join us as Shana Hanson shares her knowledge of creating and using a root cellar.

Belfast Co-op Board of Directors Meetings 6:30 pm Thurs. May 24 and Thurs. June 28 at Waterfall Arts, 256 High St., Belfast.

Wine & Food Tastings 7-9 p.m. Fri. May 18 and Fri. June 15 in the Co-op Café. 10% off wine purchases at tastings. You must be 21 or over to attend.

For more information contact Fran at the Co-op, 338-2532, education@belfastcoop.com

Putting co-op principles into practice:

Co-ops strengthen their communities

This article is part of a series on the seven Co-op Principles. We're spotlighting the principles as they relate to current issues affecting our members and staff.

By Erica Buswell, general manager

“Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.”

This seventh co-op principle speaks to our need to support other cooperatives. An important function of a co-op, when it comes to sustainable community development, is to promote the growth of other cooperatives as well as to support existing ones. All different types of co-ops have a shared history of growing out of a group of people who organize to provide for a need that has gone unmet by what mass markets have to offer.

Co-ops improve communities

There are countless examples of co-ops springing up in communities—rural and urban, rich and poor—where the presence of a co-operative has a direct impact on the quality of life in the surrounding community by providing goods, services and paid work that might otherwise be unavailable.

Simply put, having a co-op in your community makes life better! It keeps money in the local economy, provides for the needs of its mem-

bers and citizens, fosters community building, and offers opportunities for individual and community growth and education.

State cooperative group forms

The co-op model is not the primary business model that comes to mind when people are considering developing a business, and unfortunately so, as the community benefits of having a co-op in town are so tangible. A new group in Maine is setting out to change this by working to strengthen the connections between co-ops and community.

Co-ops keep money in the local economy and foster community building.

This new group, Cooperative Maine (cooperativemaine.org), had its inaugural meeting on March 25 in Augusta. In attendance were representatives from the Belfast Food Co-op, Fare Share Market, Portland Food Co-op, Justice Clothing, Stonington Lobster Co-op, groups working on the development of housing co-ops in Bar Harbor, Bath and Caribou, folks working to form a health care co-op in Appleton, and co-op scholars and supporters from around the state.

Upon discussing the International Co-operative Alliance's definition of a cooperative—“an autonomous

association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise”—the group agreed that the state needs more cooperative development.

Through our discussions, we identified a need for more inter-co-op networking, both locally and regionally, and a need to both educate ourselves about cooperatives and develop more educational materials to help us educate our communities about the benefits of cooperatives.

We are a community resource

The group also agreed that we could be a resource for helping to start more co-ops in the state and to help find development funding for existing co-ops. The group will meet again in June in Belfast. In the meantime, a co-op development subcommittee here will keep the ball rolling and continue to tap the great energy the state group generated. Check our web site to stay updated Maine Cooperative's work.

If you have energy, resources or ideas to share with the state group, or the subgroup developing in the Belfast area, please contact me (erica@belfastcoop.com). We welcome anyone who shares the goals of seeing greater cooperative and community development in Maine.

Survey Update

Thank you to everyone who took part in our recent membership survey (OK, it took longer than 10 minutes). At press time, nearly 225 surveys had been returned. Betty Hawkins won the \$25 gift certificate, drawn at random from participants. Look for survey results in the July/August issue.

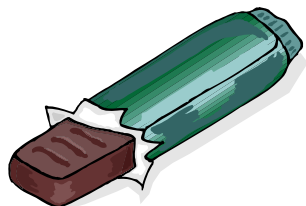
Co-op giving away storage buckets, bins

It's Spring Cleaning Time at the Co-op! Please come and take some of this stuff away! We have a bunch of 5 gallon plastic jugs with handles and caps. They are great for sap storage during maple syrup season, or as small heaters in a season-extending greenhouse when painted black. Best of all, they are free! Also available are our original bulk gravity bins at \$10 a piece or 2/\$15. They are handy for storage of things such as grains, pet food, nails . . . the possibilities are endless. Contact Phil, facilities coordinator, for more information, or ask for a floor manager next time you're in the store.

The darker the better Chocolate is good for you

Finally, something we have waited years to hear: "Eat That Chocolate!!"

Chocolate has many health benefits, and everyone deserves to indulge themselves now and again.



The next time you get the urge to nibble on a candy bar, re-

member this: cocoa contains epicatechin, an antioxidant.

The darker the chocolate, the higher the antioxidant levels. For maximum health benefits, always opt for dark rather than milk or white chocolates. Here are some other chocolate facts to bite into:

- Dark chocolate contains nearly twice the antioxidants found in red wine and over three times those in green tea!
- Researchers at Georgetown University have discovered that a natural compound

found in cocoa, pentameric procyanidin, deactivates the proteins that allow cancer cells to divide. Yeah!

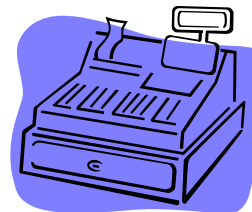
Chocolate fights cancer!

- Studies by the American Heart Association have shown that the flavonoids found in dark chocolate help blood vessels work more smoothly, improve the body's use of insulin, and lower "bad" cholesterol.
- Eating chocolate causes the body to release endorphins, which creates a happy, euphoric feeling. Chocolate also contains phenylethylamine, which excites the nervous system and slightly elevates blood pressure and heart rates. This reaction is thought to closely resemble the feelings experienced by a person who is "in love."

So enjoy and stop feeling guilty about all the Easter chocolate you ate!

CASHIER'S CORNER

By Cynthia Patterson, head cashier



Customers often ask, "What are the benefits of being a member?" I respond first by

saying membership isn't only about what you get. It's also about what you give.

Yes, it's nice to receive discounts and patronage refunds, but as new members, each person adds diversity and individuality to the Co-op family. This helps make the store a special and healthy shopping experience for everyone.

When you become a member, you bring a fresh perspective and perhaps new ideas that contribute to the success of the Co-op. You may have better view on how to keep the Co-op going forward while keeping its family feeling. Existing members should also think about what you can bring to the Co-op.

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local business people began exploring the idea of community ownership. Community response was enthusiastic. Residents with special expertise stepped forward to help when asked. "Nobody ever turned us down," Earhart says. The result of all their effort was The Mercantile, a community-owned store.

Local competition pro "The Merc"

Potential competitors already established in Powell were very supportive of the project, and all have benefitted from the presence of "The Merc." Earhart says people travel from as far as Billings, Montana—nearly 100 miles away and a city of 95,000 people. "All the malls are like cookie cutters, they all sell the same thing," she explains. "Here, you don't know what you're going to find, but

it will be something you won't find at the mall. People like that."

Within months of selling shares to local residents, The Mercantile raised \$400,000 in start-up capital. Profitable since opening in 2002, the organization in 2006 purchased the

Chamber leader from Wyoming to talk in Belfast about "The Merc" May 11.

store next door, doubling its size. "We've become a tourist destination, who'd have thought it!" Earhart exclaims.

Similar efforts are underway in a number of rural communities in Wyoming and Montana and are now sprouting up in the Northeast. One of the first towns to take a hard look at community ownership of a retail de-

partment store is Greenfield, Mass., where a group of citizens has been pursuing the idea for two years.

Mercantile store in works in Mass.

This past November, the group invited Earhart to share her town's success story. The Greenfield Mercantile has since been approved by the state of Massachusetts to sell shares, and recently it received a \$10,000 contribution to hire a coordinator.

On Friday, May 11, Sharon Earhart will be in Belfast to share her town's story and help us dream about opening a community-owned retail store of our own that would keep local dollars recycling in our community. She will speak at 5 p.m. at the Hutchinson Center Auditorium on Route 3 in Belfast. For further information, contact Lynn Doubleday (338-4792, threedogssmile@gmail.com).



Book Club Book Review:

"The Omnivore's Dilemma" by Michael Pollan

Read by the Co-op's inaugural Book Club

Reviewed by Andree Bella, Co-op Member and Book Club participant

"Perfect Timing"

Have you ever known you were reading just the right book at just the right time? That's how I felt when I read Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma," a book about food and agriculture in America.

Some major "ahaas"

This book had me hooked even before I read it. One afternoon, while reading an interview of Pollan in *The Sun* magazine, I found myself experiencing some major "ahaas." The one that grabbed me as I looked across my very green, very unused pasture here at Board Landing Farm was the concept of grass-fed beef. Here was Pollan saying that the rocky, hilly terrain of New England was perfect for raising grass-fed animals. Although for the last 20 years I have raised many animals on my farm, I had somehow missed the idea the animals could be raised without feeding them corn.

Inspired to raise grass-fed beef

My sense of Yankee thrift was now in high gear. Could I really put meat on my family's table by raising a steer on just grass? I finished the Pollan interview and called a neighbor who raises beef to ask for confirmation; this new insight seemed too good to be true. "Of course," he said, "That's what I do." So I ordered me up a beautiful Red Angus steer from my neighbor, spent a day extending my electric fence, and went to Amazon.com to order my copy of "The Omnivore's Dilemma."

A few days later I was pouring over this fascinating book and learning about "Rosie," the chicken who didn't lead a very rosy life on a CAFO (Confined Animal Feeding Operation). I knew that although "Sir Loin," my new steer, might live only a short life, he would never experience the horrors of factory farming or be part of a McDonald's "unhappy meal." As I watched "Sir Loin" grazing in the moonlight, I realized that for once in my life I wasn't just intellectualizing about something; I was actually doing it!

Food industry is energy glutton

After reading "The Omnivore's Dilemma," you may not find yourself raising a grass-fed steer, but I guarantee you'll be looking at your food from a new perspective. You'll be more knowledgeable about where it came from, how long it took to get to your table, and how much energy was consumed in the process.

A big eye-opener for me was the impact of corn on American agriculture. Pollan explains to us how oil, chemical fertilizers and corn are intricately intertwined. After you read this book, every time you eat something that lists corn as an ingredient, or every time you eat commercial meat, you'll feel like you're sipping oil.

Perhaps for many of us Pollan is "preaching to the choir," but what I loved about this book was two things. First, it affirmed for me that here in Maine we already are a hotbed (hot compost bed?) for

these ideas. We value organic agriculture, and we have a keen awareness of energy issues. Secondly, Pollan's book invites us to explore more fully that marvelous word, "local" . . . yes, food with a face, the face of your local farmer. He offers specific ideas on how to do what we do so well, even better.

"Organic" not always as it seems

Every reader will get hit right between the eyes by this book, whether you learn something about organic (it ain't always what you think it is, as in "the organic Twinkie") or commercial agriculture, hunting wild game, foraging for wild mushrooms, or local versus non-local agriculture. I'm sure you will agree with Caroline Casey, who said in a recent interview with Pollan (visionaryactivism.com), "If you eat, or know anyone who does, this book is for you."

Andree Bella can be reached at andree.bella@gmail.com

**Sign up now!
New Co-op Book Club
starting in June or July!**

There is still space in the upcoming Belfast Co-op Book Club, which will start this summer and run for several months. The group will read and discuss "Bringing the Food Economy Home: Local Alternatives to Global Agribusiness" by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Todd Merrifield and Steven Gorelick. The book explores the costs of our global food system and how we can shift direction to local food.

Group discusses membership, prices

By Fran Clemetson,
education coordinator

How can we increase Member Participation at the Belfast Co-op?

At our second "Quarterly Co-op Discussion Group" this past April, we took on the very broad and important question of how to increase member participation at the Belfast Co-op. We also discussed other questions posed by attending Co-op members. There were 14 participants in the discussion, with a nice mix of staff, members, interested customers and board members.

What if food couldn't be brought to our area? Most of our food is from away.

We spent a portion of the meeting discussing questions posed by the attendees. David Webb, a Co-op employee, brought up having a larger local food supply available in times of crisis. What if food couldn't be brought to our area? Some 80 percent of our food comes from away.

Storage and processing of local food is a hot topic on many a farmer's lips, and we are wondering what other ways, besides providing a market, that the Co-op membership

can support the community in building a better local food supply. Providing storage in our houses (with root cellars, pantries and freezers) would keep more local food around. What else can we do?

Another member brought up concerns about Co-op pricing. Our grocery manager, Caryn Knudsen, was there to give firsthand answers about our prices compared to the large chain grocery stores. This led to a good discussion about the Co-op being a locally owned business that keeps its money in the community and provides more for the customer than products.

It also came up that our pricing is very competitive on many products, especially given the fact that we can't buy the huge quantities that the larger stores buy. Caryn talked about her ideas on giving members special deals, like our ongoing Member Advantage Pricing, which gives members lower prices than non-members on selected items.

Carolyn Pressley wanted to know how the Co-op could help the community develop a merchandise cooperative. There is a group in Belfast working toward developing a store modeled after a community mercan-

tile in Powell, Wyoming (see article below.) Our co-op could be a supportive resource for helping a venture like this get off the ground and gain community support.

We talked about more product education such as providing produce recipes and cooking instructions. Ideas were shared about a member information exchange, working member program, member life and auto insurance, and discounts for members at local businesses.

Our next discussion group will happen in July and take up the same topic.

It is our hope to continue this discussion group because it provides an opportunity for a free exchange of ideas without judgment. An opportunity to brainstorm and listen to the different perspectives voiced by our membership is fuel for projects that get woven into the fabric of the Belfast Co-op.

Our next discussion group will happen in July, with the same opening question on the table, as it is warrants continuing discussion. Please stay tuned for details. We hope to see you there!

Store in Wyoming serves as model

Belfast explores community-owned retail

By Kate Harris, staff member

Across the United States, residents of rural communities are traveling 20-plus miles to satisfy basic shopping needs. Their locally owned department stores closed long ago, unable to compete with chain stores, which then faltered and faded as populations shrank or "big box" chains cut into their customer base.

Looking back, small town is relieved chains said "No"

Some communities tried to attract a large retail store to their town, but lacked the population base to lure one. This was the case in Powell, Wyoming. With a population of 5,500, the community—located 20 miles north of Cody,

Wyoming—simply did not offer the economy of scale sought by large retail chains.

Sharon Earhart, director of the Powell Chamber of Commerce, can laugh now as she remembers the situation. "I'm so glad that when we asked the big stores to come open up in our town, they said, 'Are you kidding? Get a life.' So we did! And a much better one. I'm grateful to them that they all said no, or we never would have started down the road of this great adventure."

Local business people started community retail effort

That adventure began several years ago when a handful of

(Continued on page 4)