

Belfast Co-op News & Commentary

A natural food and products store serving Midcoast Maine since 1976

NOV./DEC. 2007

In November take the . . .

Eat Local Challenge

The push is on to raise awareness about sustainable food choices: eat locally grown and raised foods whenever possible. It's a trend that is rapidly changing our natural foods industry.

One driving force behind it is the quest to reduce the number of "food miles" ingredients in our favorite meals travel (and hence cut the amount of petroleum it takes to ship these products and refrigerate them en route). Others include concerns about nutritional quality and freshness and a desire to strengthen our local economies. These are only some of the reasons this movement is growing.

Maine's agricultural roots

Historically, Maine grew enough grains and produce and raised enough meat and dairy animals to feed our population. The advent of

industrial agriculture and the creation of a national transportation network made it possible to supplement these products with foods from away, supplying us with such delicious things as avocados, citrus fruits and olive oil as well as products that could be produced locally but are available at lower prices because of the global economy.

But what would our meals look like if 100 percent of the ingredients in our pantries, cupboards, refrigerators and freezers were grown and produced right here in Maine? Would we be pleasantly surprised by the abundance of local food that surrounds us? Would we find that it takes a lot of time and effort to adapt familiar recipes? Would we be surprised that we can't find local sources for items that could be easily produced in



Eat Local Challenge:

Make an All-Maine Meal in November and describe it on a recipe card participants get at the Co-op.

our state? Would we find ourselves hungering for more or satisfied by what is available to us?

If you are curious about any of these questions, we invite you to participate in our upcoming Eat Local Challenge. Our goal is to

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Second article in a series

Shoppers: Food production costs often hidden

By Erica Buswell

Editor's note: This is the second article in a two-part series addressing concerns about Co-op pricing raised in our recent membership survey.

Our internal pricing structure, discussed in the first part of this series, is only one of a myriad of factors that influence the shelf price of goods sold at the Co-op. With Congress set to approve a new Farm Bill for 2008, it's a prime time to reflect on some of the other forces that shape the cost of food before it reaches our doors.

But first, this disclaimer: this newsletter can only accommodate 4,000 words! A detailed and nuanced analysis of federal food and farm policies requires an entire book. We're just skimming the tip of the iceberg on these issues, with a goal of bringing more consideration of the true cost of food into the larger picture of Co-op pricing.

It's no secret that at first glance, organic products carry a higher price tag than their conventionally produced counterparts. Research from the Organic Consumers Association

suggest that the cost of organic food is anywhere from 25 to 100 percent higher than its nonorganic counterparts. Reasons are many and varied, including higher production costs for organics, a lack of any federal aid in the form of farm subsidies, and more labor-intensive farm management practices.

Many organic crops require hand-weeding and cultivation. The cost of farm labor to tend an organic crop is usually more than the cost of spraying with a chemical fertilizer, pesti-

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Belfast Co-op Store

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Phone: 207-338-2532

Fax: 207-338-5234

Web site: <http://belfast.coop>

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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

Debbi Lasky, co-vice president

Bindy Pendleton, co-vice president

Allen Ginsberg, treasurer

Susan Lauchlan, secretary

Zafra Whitcomb, staff representative

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Happy Holidays

From the
Co-op staff

to all our members
and shoppers!

Customer Appreciation Day nets \$1,216 for local charities



Members made
fund-raising book
sale, raffle a
huge success

By Caryn Knudsen, grocery manager

During this year's annual Customer Appreciation Day in August we not only raffled off 15 wonderful baskets but held one heck of a huge book sale. The bills have now all been counted, the quarters, nickels and dimes all rolled . . . it's time to give yourselves a huge round of applause. Together we raised \$1,216.92!

On Thurs., Sept. 20 I had the great pleasure of presenting, on behalf of the Co-op, a donation to four awesome local organizations. I am so very proud to say that New Hope for Women, The Stone Soup Kitchen, Food for Maine's Future and Knox County Animal Shelter all received a check for \$304.23. Wow!

When the organizing began this past spring for August's event, we decided to try holding a book sale instead of last year's yard sale. We asked you to donate your used books to our sale. And donate you did! Big books, little

books, art books, music books, science fiction, history, mystery, and even a few Harlequin romances.

Little did we know just how generously you would contribute to this worthy cause. I stopped counting books when the number reached 1000 . . . and that was just the tip of the iceberg. My desk could hardly be seen in the weeks before the sale.

Not only did you supply the books, you then showed up on that rainy, blustery day to buy them back. The book sale alone raised over \$900. With so many of you generously buying raffle tickets, the baskets raised over \$280 and went to some very happy people, with one person winning more than one. Baskets were filled with Maine-made products, health and beauty items, pet goodies, tea and coffee—there was even one for the grilling enthusiast.

By the end of this whirlwind day, the sun was shining, the Blood Donation folks left with 16 pints, and we were left with a LOT less books

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Co-op Events: Nov.-Dec.

Café Gallery Art Shows Nov.: A photo exhibit of Maine farmlands by Maine Farm Trust. The photos reflect the trust's goals of protecting and preserving farmland. Dec.: Intuitive Expression of Robert and Su.Sane Working Together as Clarity. Based in Rockland, Clarity (<http://artbyclarity.blogspot.com>) also shows at Camden Public Library in December.

Wine & Food Tastings 7-9 p.m., Fri. Nov. 16 and Fri. Dec. 21 in the Co-op Café. 10% off wine purchases at tastings. You must be 21 or over to attend.

Belfast Co-op Board of Directors Meetings 6:30 p.m., Thurs. Nov. 15 and Thurs. Dec. 20, Waterfall Arts, 256 High St. (Both meetings are a week earlier than usual because of the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.)

Harvest Potluck Capping off our Eat Local Challenge (*see article on page 1*), a community potluck dinner and dance will be held Wed. Dec. 5 at the Belfast Unitarian Universalist Church, 37 Miller St. The dinner is from 5:30 to 6:30 and the dance from 7 to 8.

For more information call Fran Clemetson at the Co-op, 338-2532,
or e-mail her at education@belfastcoop.com

Financing help for N.E. cooperatives

By Patricia P. Lawler, for the Cooperative Fund of New England

The Cooperative Fund of New England (CFNE) has made a number of loans to the Belfast Co-op to help with expansion, store renovation and working capital. CFNE makes loans and provides technical assistance to cooperatives and worker-owned businesses.

Now the organization has a new way to help. It recently announced the creation of the Cooperative Capital Fund (CCF), which will provide equity-like financing.

Established in 1975 with an investment of \$25,000, the nonprofit CFNE, a U.S. Treasury certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), has made \$14 million in low-interest loans to 400 borrowers over the past 32 years.

Financing help is needed

According to CFNE Executive Director Rebecca Dunn, the financial environment for start-ups and other small businesses has changed dramatically. Even though many of CFNE's borrowers have become established businesses, many still find it difficult to access the money they need to compete with larger businesses or expand.

"We are trying to support the idea of cooperative businesses," said Dunn. "We've seen over and over

again that co-ops have the need, and there is no other source for this kind of money."

A separate organization affiliated with the CFNE, the Cooperative Capital Fund is a socially responsible fund that will invest in cooperative businesses in the form of "patient capital," which is similar to equity financing. The Fund will help New England cooperatives grow and expand by providing capital that acts like equity without requiring co-ops to give up control over their own management and destiny or pay high fees.

Building a just economy

In addition to providing equity-like capital at reasonable rates and terms, CCF intends to build a more just economic system by creating the possibility for system change that lifts people out of poverty and by supporting and sustaining cooperative businesses that provide environmental, economic and social benefits.

Although the CCF was officially unveiled on October 19, Dunn and her colleagues have spent the summer contacting private investors, foundations and traditional banks for the \$1.15 million investment needed to begin lending. So far they have raised several hundred thousand dollars from individuals and

organizations such as the New Alliance Foundation, Citizens Bank, Bank of America and the Pelham Fund for Economic Justice, which is part of the Episcopal City Mission.

In September, CFNE learned that the U.S. Treasury had awarded the organization a challenge grant that will match up to \$143,000 in investments and tax-deductible donations in CFNE.

Second grant in two years

"We were thrilled that the Treasury Department recognized the need for the CCF," said Dunn. "This is the second Treasury grant we have received in as many years, and we are grateful for the federal government's support of this effort. The challenge grant has been valuable in helping us raise the funds we need to become operational.

"We have a March 14, 2008 deadline to raise the remaining \$56,000 needed to satisfy the terms of the grant, and we are confident that the cooperative community will step up and help us meet this goal. We are also looking for investors for both funds, CFNE and CCF."

For more information on CFNE visit www.coopfund.coop; for more information on CCF visit www.coopcapital.coop or call 800-818-7833.

Web site revamped



Perhaps you have noticed that things on our web site are changing. Our webmaster, member Paul Eagle, has been working hard to organize existing information and has been encouraging us to add more to this potentially amazing resource.

As we continue to update old information and streamline our existing pages, we hope you are finding our site more accessible and the information easy to download. We continue to update our events page monthly to keep you in the loop about workshops, wine-tastings, board meetings and special events.

New additions to the site include a page where you can view the general managers' reports to the board of directors, an archive of past and present newsletters, information about store policies, and board reports, including the results of our most recent member survey.

We have also added a page devoted to cooperative living. This is part of our mission to be a resource for information concerning health and nutrition and our products as well as community topics and related issues. You'll find information about

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cide or fungicide. Farms that rely on crop diversity and crop rotation as methods for maintaining healthy soil also require more labor-intensive management methods and diversified farm inputs, which contribute to higher production costs.

There are higher costs associated with the care of organic livestock as well, including higher costs for organic feed and the cost of administering antibiotic alternatives should a herd become ill.

Few subsidies for organics

Very few organic farmers enjoy taxpayer support through federal farm subsidies. The subsidy program allocates virtually nothing for organics when compared to the monies doled out to conventional industrial farming. Organic farmers are left alone to shoulder the costs of production. Moreover, direct subsidies are available to farmers using chemical and biotech methods, which are not allowable management practices in organic agriculture.

Finally, there is the economy of scale issue: in a free market economy the price of goods is proportional to the volume of those goods that are on the market. While the demand is rising, organics account for only 2 percent of national food sales, resulting in higher prices for a type of food that is in less demand.

Corn, wheat and soy additives

If you look at any ingredient label for a processed (“not whole”) food, odds are good that most of the ingredients either come from corn, soybeans or wheat. These three crops are the most heavily subsidized in

our agricultural system. The subsidy program encourages an excess in production of these crops, which in turn means they get sold on the market at prices that are often less than the cost of producing them.

What happens to them? They then find their way into our food chain in the form of cheap food additives with little nutritional value and low shelf prices, as the bill for producing these refined foods has already been heavily footed by your tax dollars.

One goal of the Co-op’s food buy-

Very few organic farmers enjoy any taxpayer support through federal farm subsidies; the program allocates virtually nothing for organics.

ing policy is to find sources of pure, delicious whole foods. We strive *not* to buy foods that contain artificial sweeteners, colors, flavors, preservatives or additives; antibiotics or growth hormones, or cottonseed or partially hydrogenated oils.

Lower prices not all they seem

At first glance, it appears that refined and processed foods carry a lower price tag, but when you factor in the idea that you have already paid for it once as a taxpayer (not to mention the long term costs of caring for diseases like obesity, diabetes and heart disease), maybe the shelf price on whole or minimally processed foods looks more comparable.

Finally, we need to consider the costs associated with transporting food from “away,” whether its apples from New Zealand or lettuce

from California. The cost of oil continues to rise, and producers are certainly feeling the pinch as that cost gets passed from the producer all the way on up the supply chain until the product reaches the consumer, who ultimately ends up paying for it. Nearly every invoice we get now has a “fuel surcharge.” It’s rare that retailers can absorb these costs without factoring them into shelf prices.

Taxpayer’s burden

The taxpayer burden comes into play here as well: the costs of maintaining our national transportation network, as well as the cost of protecting our access to oil and even the costs of cleaning up the environment in the wake of unsustainable growing and production practices, are coming out of the citizen’s pocket

What kind of savings would we notice if all the goods sold at the Co-op were being grown locally and being delivered out of the back of the grower’s Volvo? Would prices start to fall if more people were buying locally and creating a more viable market for organic, wholesome and local foods? How would we then define the “true cost of food?”

Food economy resources

For more information about the economics of industrial agriculture check out the great read “Bringing the Food Economy Home” by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Todd Merrifield and Steven Gorelick (a recent Co-op Book Club selection). Also check out the web sites for the Organic Consumers Association, www.organicconsumers.org, and the Environmental Working Group, www.ewg.org.

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local food resources and links to local vendors’ and producers’ sites.

Tofu recipes anyone?

Looking for something more interesting to do with that tofu? You’ll also find links to sites that provide delicious recipes for local foods and special dietary needs. Do you want

to find out more about organics and sustainable agriculture or have questions about food politics and policy? Get answers by linking up with any number of the many organizations listed on this page. Learn about the benefits of cooperatives as a democratic economic alternative and link to other co-op web sites.

Site suggestions welcome

In the cooperative spirit, we want our site to provide for our members’ needs. If you’re hungry for information that isn’t there, please send your suggestions to us. E-mail ideas and web site links to our education coordinator, Fran Clemetson, at education@belfastcoop.com.

CO-OP BOARD COMMITTEES

Call the contact person listed below for more information and meeting times. Not all committees meet regularly.

Board Development Committee Oversees board orientation, training, handbook and meeting process. Susan Lauchlan, 338-0406.

Bylaws Committee Reviews Co-op bylaws. Kip Penney, 722-3112.

Charitable Giving Reviews charitable giving policy. Ronald "Goldy" Goldstein, 338-2532.

Community Interaction Committee Responds to communications, especially complaints and grievances, directed to the board. Bindy Pendleton, 338-4256

Deli Committee Advises on deli operations. Jerry Savitz, 338-1492.

Elections & Annual Meeting Committee Plans and carries out elections and annual meeting. Debbi Lasky, 589-4546.

Environment Committee Advises on the store's physical environment. Scott Giroux, 323-0609.

Finance Committee Serves as financial advisor to management, oversees Co-op's finances. Allen Ginsburg, 338-1757.

Long-Range Planning Steering Committee Guides long-range planning process. Richard Brown, 338-3408.

Management Oversight Committee Meets regularly with general management team and evaluates team members. Bindy Pendleton, 338-4256.

Membership Education and Outreach Committee Advises on membership policies and matters, including member education. Susan Lauchlan, 338-0406.

Purchasing Committee Reviews our purchasing policy and process. Richard Brown, 338-3408.

inspire you to eat like a "locavore."

Two groups are sponsoring the program along with the Co-op: Food for Maine's Future, a nonprofit organization that serves as an umbrella for groups and campaigns that share a common goal of building a just, secure, sustainable and democratic food system that benefits Maine farmers, communities and the environment; and the Green Sanctuary Committee of the Belfast Unitarian-Universalist Church, which helps the church identify ways that it can reduce its impact on the environment and encourage congregants to make lifestyle choices that are less damaging to the earth.

Share your Maine-meal recipes

Participation in our Eat Local Challenge is simple: make at least one All-Maine meal during the month of November (that's right, 100 percent local) and describe it on the provided recipe card so fellow Co-op shoppers can learn from your success. Sign up at the Co-op; we have what you need to make this challenge fun, educational and delicious.

We've worked hard to come up with recipes, a list of local products available at the store, a list of local vendors, producers and farmer's markets, and tips and tricks to incorporate into your meal planning so you can eat like a locavore at every meal! For those of you who are creative cooks, we encourage you to create and share your own recipes made from 100 percent local ingredients.

Co-op has new deli manager

We are pleased to welcome new deli manager Amy LoBiondo, who joins us after 11 years working at LaMontanita Co-op in Albuquerque, N.M. Amy shares a festive seasonal recipe that features two great local ingredients, butternut squash and maple syrup, dressed up with a little Southwestern flare. "This is a very popular dish served at LaMontanita Co-op," she says. "It has sweetness and spice that really are a nice addition to any fall dinner or holiday meal."

Amy's Festive Squash Dish: Caramelized Butternut Pecan

Ingredients: Two approximately 2-pound butternut squash; 3/4 cup maple syrup, divided in half; 1 cup pecans; 1 tbs. chili powder (or to taste); 1 tsp. salt; 1 tsp. pepper and 3 tbs. canola oil

Some participants plan to hold Locavore-a-thons, asking friends and family to sponsor them per meal, and raise funds to support Food for Maine's Future. Proceeds will support its work advocating for farmers' rights, sustainable agriculture practices, and a local food economy.

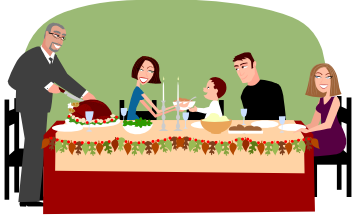
When the Eat Local Challenge is completed, the public is invited to join participants and local growers in a celebration of community and the bounty of our local harvest. A potluck celebration and community dance will be held Wed. evening, Dec. 5 at the Belfast Unitarian Universalist Church, 37 Miller St. The dinner will be held from 5:30 to 6:30 and the dance from 7 to 8.

Honor, celebrate local growers

The Eat Local Challenge has a broad mission: enhancing the general public's awareness of the possibilities of eating locally, deepening the Belfast Co-op's commitment to sourcing local food, and celebrating and honoring growers and producers in our "foodshed." By partnering with two other organizations that are striving to promote sustainable choices, we hope to strengthen the "eat local" movement and foster a network of shared resources.

More information about the challenge is available in the store and at www.belfast.coop. Also check out Food for Maine's Future's web site, www.gefreemaine.org. Get ready for a delicious and delightful opportunity. Please join us!

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HOLIDAY FOOD BASKET PROGRAM **FROM THANKSGIVING THROUGH CHRISTMAS, CO-OP SHOPPERS CAN DONATE FOOD BASKETS TO NEEDY FAMILIES FOR FESTIVE MEALS**

It's hard to believe, but the time of harvest and holiday celebrations is here again! Let the Co-op help you get into the spirit of socially responsible giving this year.

We will again sponsor donations of food items to local charities to help round out holiday feasts for families in need. For the upcoming Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and Solstice meals, we will be putting together bags complete with all of the fixings for a delicious, wholesome and filling holiday meal.

The bags will include organic pumpkin pie mix, organic turkey gravy, organic stuffing, and organic cranberry sauce as well as a bag of nonorganic sweetened cranberries from our bulk department. This year, thanks to the generous donations of some of our local farmers, we will also be able to include fresh, local organic produce such as carrots, onions, potatoes and apples.

For the bargain price of \$17.50, you can join this opportunity to build community through the celebration of harvest foods by purchasing a food bag for donation. We will collect all the bags as they are purchased by our members and customers and then give half to the Stone Soup Kitchen to become a part of the traditional meal served at their facility. The other half goes to the Waldo County Community Action Partners for distribution to families and individuals in need.

We are grateful to all our vendors and local producers who have donated items for free or at a reduced cost for this program, which helps many residents enjoy an abundant holiday meal. Please look for more specific details on bags once they become available for purchase. Bags can be purchased from Nov. 5 until Thanksgiving and from Dec. 3 until Christmas.

HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING

TUCKED IN A STOCKING, WRAPPED WITH A BOW, OR PILED IN A BASKET, CO-OP GIFTS HAVE SPECIAL MEANING



Looking to give a unique and meaningful gift this holiday season? Consider buying locally—at the Co-op. We offers an array of unique foods and goodies made right here in Maine with locally grown and harvested items. Not only will you be sharing the abundance of our great state with family and friends near and far, you will be giving a gift that helps strengthen our local economy and supports the livelihoods of friends and neighbors.

Our Maine products include cheeses, crackers, jams, jellies, maple syrups, candies, chocolates, baking mixes, honey, beer, wines, yogurts, meat, fish, pasta sauces, dipping sauces, dessert sauces, fruits and veggies. We even carry Maine-made cleaning products.

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than we had started with. Your dedication to helping us fulfill our mission of giving back to the community amazes us all. We are simply astounded by the tremendous outpouring of support. We thank you, we applaud you, we could not have done it without you.

Create your own gift baskets of Maine goodies. Smaller items like candies and jellies make great Christmas stocking stuffers—let the “Made in Maine” label peak out the top. Co-op Gift Certificates are also an excellent option—and another great stocking stuffer.

Finally, don't forget that a gift of Co-op membership provides a unique opportunity for ownership in a local, democratically-controlled enterprise. Investment shares in the Co-op are \$60 per individual, payable over 3 years. The gift of membership helps sustain Midcoast's unique quality of life by keeping profits local.

Happy Holidays, and thanks for supporting local businesses this holiday season.

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Slice the butternut in half and place cut side down on a baking sheet with a little water in the pan. Bake until soft. When the squash has cooled enough to handle it, scoop out the meat and place in a bowl. Add half the maple syrup and mash. Add salt and pepper and stir. Set aside. Pour canola oil in a skillet and add pecans, remaining maple syrup and chili powder. Cook on medium heat, stirring constantly. Place squash mixture in a baking dish. When pecans have caramelized (soaked up most of syrup, but there's still enough to pour), spoon them over the squash. Reheat in a low oven until hot and serve. Enjoy!