

ROOTSTOCK

the official newsletter of the BELFAST CO-OP

www.belfast.coop

CO-OP to CO-OP

ONE SIP AT A TIME



by Hannah Kreitzer • Belfast Co-op Worker-Owner

In Maine we're used to the gospel of locally-sourced, but there is no denying that one of the perks of participating in a global economy is the chance to sample what people are growing and crafting all over the world. One enticing example is the wine made by La Rioja cooperative, which hails from northwest Argentina.

In the 1940s, a group of Italian winemakers settled in the La Rioja province, where alluvial soil, warm arid days and cool nights promised ideal grape-growing conditions. Over the past 75 years, that promise has borne literal fruit. For many La Rioja members, raising grapes for the cooperative is a family tradition, as new generations step forward to continue the work that their parents began. More than 500 growers raise crops for La Rioja, many relying on less than 7 acres for production. Sheep provide weed control and fertilizer, which also enriches their supplemental production of olive oil and fruit juice. Cooperative membership entitles them to a range of privileges, including a guaranteed fair price for their harvests, crop transportation from farm to co-op, and a one-member-one-vote policy in cooperative decisions, scale of production notwithstanding.

La Rioja holds the impressive title of largest producer of organic-Fair Trade wine in the world. Since their Fair Trade certification in 2006 (the first such certified winery in Argentina), La Rioja has steadily increased production to the point that Fair Trade certified wines make up nearly a quarter of their total output. Organic wines make up about 12 percent of the 50 million bottles the winery generates each year, and that percentage is primed to climb steadily as more and more of their growers achieve organic status. This scale of production is no mean feat in the wine world- up till recent years, it was rare to find organic offerings in any wine department. One of the main obstacles hinged on what a wine can or cannot contain. Most conventional wines, for example, have added sulfites to prevent contamination and spoilage. Organic wine sold in the United States cannot contain these added preservatives, which has been an obstacle to both producers and retailers in the past. Nonetheless, organic wine sales are climbing across the globe, and La Rioja is at the crest of that wave. According to their website, the cooperative aims to more than double their organic production by 2017, and they expect to be 100% organic certified by 2025.

Currently working toward carbon neutrality, La Rioja eventually aims for carbon negative status. An ambitious goal for any agricultural operation- especially one so heavily vested in exportation- but thanks to the reinvestment of Fair Trade premiums, La Rioja is on its way to making that lofty aim an earthly reality. By exploring renewable energy sources, using ecologically-conscious packaging, and paying careful attention to water and soil management, the winery is making sustainability its cooperative watchword. As stated on the La Rioja website, "Sustainability is the capacity to endure. For humans it is the potential for long-term maintenance of wellbeing, which in turn depends on the wellbeing of the natural world and the responsible use of natural resources."

LA RIOJANA
ARGENTINA
500
FAMILIAS

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ROOTSTOCK newsletter by Kate Harris & Doug Johnson

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123 HIGH STREET BELFAST, ME 207.338.2532 7:30AM-8:00PM



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**MAY
12
6pm**

**ABBOTT ROOM
BELFAST FREE LIBRARY**

The board of director's Membership Committee cordially invites all Belfast Co-op member-owners to participate in our next quarterly Member-Owner Forum, taking place on Wednesday, May 11 at 6pm in the Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library, located at 106 High Street in downtown Belfast.

At this Forum we will be launching a short film about how the Belfast Co-op started, featuring interviews from people who founded, participated, and helped grow the Co-op. Following the film we will break into small groups and have member-owners discuss priorities for the future development of the Co-op. The ideas that come from this brainstorming session will be passed on to the Board of Directors.

The purpose of these forums is to encourage, welcome, and grow member-owner engagement in our Co-op community. Our goal is to provide our member-owners with a better understanding of our co-op, a venue where all can feel heard, and authentic opportunities for active participation in shaping our co-op. Please mark your calendars and plan to join this ongoing conversation and effort to engage our member-owners with their co-op! All member-owners are encouraged to attend and bring a friend; all are welcome.

Subsequent forums will be held quarterly with topics to be announced.

If you have any questions, please contact Emily, Membership Services Administrator at the Belfast Co-op, at 338.2532 or emily@belfast.coop.



for the next

BOARD OF DIRECTORS *meeting*

May 26 & June 23

6:30PM AT WATERFALL ARTS, 256 HIGH ST, BELFAST, ME

GENERAL MANAGER

Doug Johnson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ron Braybrook, president
Alessandra Martinelli, vice president
Zafra Whitcomb, treasurer
Andrew Watkins
Lindsey Schortz
Bindy Pendleton
Betsy Garrold
Patti LeClair
Judith O'Donovan, staff rep.
Justin Howard, staff rep.

BOARD COMMITTEES

Finance Committee
boardfinance@belfast.coop

Membership Committee
boardmembership@belfast.coop

Board Development Committee
boarddevelopment@belfast.coop

Elections and Nominations Committee
boardelections@belfast.coop

Annual Meeting Committee
Ad hoc

Public Interaction Committee
Ad hoc

Bylaws Committee
Ad hoc





GM CORNER

by Doug Johnson
Belfast Co-op General Manager

**“A leader takes people where they want to go.
A great leader takes people where they don’t
necessarily want to go, but ought to be.”**

- Rosalynn Carter

I recently traveled to Chapel Hill, NC to take part in the National Co-op Grocers (NCG) Spring Meeting. This meeting is designed to bring together leaders from all of the NCG co-ops to share information and encourage collaboration in our network. More than 150 Designated Representatives (DR) from NCG co-ops located all across the country came together to discuss the challenges that face our communities and the steps that we can take to build a sustainable future for food co-ops.

The central theme of this year’s meeting was the concept of “Courageous Leadership”. Courageous leaders are those that are willing to initiate positive change in the face of resistance or opposition. Courageous leaders are also those that are willing to question the status quo and make difficult decisions about fundamentally changing the culture and systems to ensure long term success. The qualities that make up courageous leaders can be found in the individuals that began the cooperative movement in Maine and across the nation, and it is those qualities that will ensure that our co-op can continue into the future. Presentations from co-op managers and NCG staff centered on three areas of focus that will define the success of the next wave of co-op leaders, and in turn the success of our co-ops: Pricing, Product, and People.

- In the “new normal”, the changing marketplace where the products that co-ops traditionally were the sole provider for are now readily available in commercial grocery stores, our attention to our pricing strategies will make or break our ability to thrive in a competitive environment. In order to further the values and principles that are fundamental to our co-op structure, we need to keep our doors open and not be saddled with the yoke of not meeting our customer’s needs in regards to pricing.

- Implementing a “good, better, best “ (GBB) strategy in our product sets is the recommended way to combat our perception as a “high end” retailer. We must appeal to a larger audience while retaining our unique and signature offerings, meeting people where they are and offering them the option of going where we want them to go. Offering only locally produced, raw, fair trade almond butter for \$20 a jar does not meet the needs of the dad who just wants to make a healthy breakfast for his kids and not lose his shirt doing so.
- To assert ourselves as a great employer, we need to be aware of and make efforts toward offering better pay for all of our workers. To offset this increase in wages, we need to work more efficiently and have fewer people making more of an impact. An invested, well compensated workforce focused on developing the next generation of co-op leaders will make us an attractive employer that stands out from the competition. Personnel costs will always go up, and they should if we are paying attention to the needs and performance of our workers, but we need to work smarter as the marketplace changes.

Neither are the challenges that we face in our corner of New England unique to our store, nor are we alone in feeling the anxiety that comes from rapid, unpredictable change. If there was another central theme to the meeting, I would say that it was the acknowledgement that this isn’t going to get any easier. It was humbling to hear seasoned GMs, people that I have looked up to for years, saying that they were struggling. It was hard to hear that GM turnover is on the rise not only from many career GMs retiring, but also from new GMs choosing another career path after a few months because the job was too hard. NCG is aware of all this pressure in the marketplace and the workplace, and that is why they are so invested in giving all of us the tools and development we need to succeed.

I often come back from these types of development activities super-jazzed and ready to take on the world. This one was not like that. It was a lot of difficult news to hear and difficult conversations to be had all in the span of three days. I ate meals with co-op managers who openly acknowledged that this could be their last meeting because they might be out of a job by this time next year. The silver lining is that we are not alone, though it may feel that way in the wilds of Waldo County. We have national support from NCG (our co-op of co-ops), as well local and regional support from the other Maine co-ops and co-ops in our Eastern Corridor. It has taken time to process all that was said and all that I experienced, but now moving into the summer months, I feel confident that we will take on the challenges of our changing marketplace, our evolving demographics, our physical limitations, and our inner-co-op politics together as a community, courageously.



current recipients
May – Avian Haven
June – Maine FoodCorps



BOARD CORNER

In life and in business you are faced with difficult decisions every day. How you respond to those challenges and how you interact with the individuals that you encounter during those challenging situations tests your conviction to your values. In this past year your co-op was faced with such a trial, and in our time of need we turned to our community partners at the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast for insight, empathy, and guidance.

There are few organizations that can boast inciting greater fundamental change in their communities than the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast. Grounded in the transformative principles of personal connection and community, they have been championing the movement to approach justice for wrong doers and their victims with compassion since 2005. Their response to offenders is to seek:

- Renewal and safety for the community
- Support and healing for the victims
- Accountability and reintegration for the offender into the community

Last fall the Co-op management became aware of inconsistencies in our financial accounts that prompted an investigation into certain practices. It became evident early on that all of the inconsistencies led back to a single individual, and that this employee had knowingly stolen money from both the Co-op and directly from a group of owners. When presented with this information, the person in

question could not offer any explanation, their employment was promptly terminated, and the authorities were notified. Throughout the process Interim General Manager Brittany Baird sought guidance from the board as formal charges were being filed, there was the potential for public outcry, and the victims in this case were Co-op owners. The known theft amounted to a felony charge. Both the board and the Co-op managers made it very clear throughout this difficult time that surrendering this individual to the traditional justice system would not be consistent with our values as an organization. We began to seek out a more holistic form of justice and healing and chose to reach out to the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast.

The now-former employee was arraigned in the court and plead guilty to a felony charge. At the request of the Co-op and the District Attorney's office, the judge agreed to employ the Restorative Justice system to support the individual and help heal the community members that were victimized. At the completion of the program and once all parties involved are satisfied that justice has been served, the offender can once again go before the court and plead guilty to a misdemeanor charge. Those harmed, including representatives from the Co-op management and the board as well as several of the individual owners, were asked to take part in a community circle. The purpose of the circle is to offer victims and offenders the opportunity to discuss the events that brought them to this place, as well as to come up with an agreement on how to repair the damage done. The list of items to be addressed, also known as the "repair agreement," is created by the victims and the perpetrator in order to rehabilitate and reintegrate the offender back into the community. Throughout this process, the offender meets weekly with a volunteer mentor as well as professional councilors to repair some of the causes that led to their unlawful actions.

This process is new to many of the Co-op leaders that have chosen to play a part. We are hopeful that this method will be successful for this individual and as an organization we are proud to support the Restorative Justice Project in their mission to give a voice to the victims and to give a path to justice for the offender that helps repair the harm that they have done. Obstacles are inevitable, but building strong relationships in our community and staying true to the cooperative values of self-help, self-responsibility, honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others will help us overcome those challenges.



Hi! My name is **Heather** & I work in the **Front End** here at the co-op. I just picked **Mrs. Myers Laundry Detergent** because I love the clean smell of the Mrs. Myers products. They have just the right amount of fragrance and it works!"



SNAP/EBT card participants who sign up for our program and purchase local foods will earn bonus local fruits and veggies! Learn more at:

maineharvestbucks.org/retail

FARMERS UNION Working Hard on GMO Labeling

by Kate Snyder

Director of Membership and Programs, NEFU

A bill put forward by Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS) that would have created voluntary labeling standards for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and preempt states' rights to require such labeling, failed in mid-March to get the votes it needed to move forward. Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee may rework the bill, referred to by opponents as the DARK (Deny Americans the Right to Know) Act II. A similar bill passed the House of Representatives last July.

The Belfast Co-op is a member of New England Farmers Union, which worked hard to convince New England legislators on the committee to reject the bill. New England Farmers Union supports mandatory, transparent labeling, as 90 percent of consumers say they want them. As part of its balanced, member-crafted policy, Farmers Union also supports farmers' right to use biotechnology.

Vermont's GMO labeling law goes into effect July 1, and federal lawmakers are scrambling to get a national standard in place by then. The legislatures of the six New England states have all taken up GMO labeling bills, but the level of support varies across the bodies. A federal standard that would require mandatory labeling would go far to address consumer concerns about genetically engineered food.

According to an article in The Hill (s.coop/antigmobill), Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) has offered a rival labeling bill that would allow manufacturers to choose one of four ways to label GMOs. They could:

- put the words "genetically engineered" in parentheses next to a relevant ingredient
- identify genetically modified ingredients with an asterisk and provide an explanation for the asterisk at the bottom of the ingredients list
- apply a catch-all statement at the end of the ingredient list stating the product was "produced with genetic engineering" ingredients
- use a symbol on the label, designed by the Agriculture Secretary, to disclose the presence of GMOs.

New England Farmers Union has been a regional leader on GMO labeling. We need the support of food co-ops and consumers who care about this issue. The more members we have, the better traction we have with lawmakers and within our parent organization, the National Farmers Union. Please join New England Farmers Union today! Visit s.coop/nefu to learn more. Together we are United for Family Agriculture!

The New England Farmers Union (NEFU) works to protect and enhance the economic well-being and quality of life of family farmers, fishermen, foresters, nursery growers, and consumers in all six New England states.

The Belfast Co-op is a business member of NEFU.

newenglandfarmersunion.org



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

JOIN US THROUGHOUT 2016 AS WE CELEBRATE 40 YEARS OF COOPERATION!

BELFAST
CO-OP

GLOBAL ENDS STATEMENT

**The Belfast Co-op exists so that our member-owners
and our community will have:**

A thriving, just, and sustainable local food economy

A source of healthy, affordable food

An efficiently managed, democratically governed cooperative retail store

A greater understanding of health, food systems, and economic & environmental sustainability

An invested, engaged, and empowered staff that thrive in a safe, respectful, inclusive, and equitable workplace.



Founding Member-Owner
Gary Skigan

by Betsy Garrold

ThePopulistFarmer.wordpress.com

For this edition of our interviews with early members we spoke with Gary Skigen who was General Manager of the Belfast Co-op for 22 years and saw the organization through both of its physical moves. Here is what he had to say.

How, when, and why did you become involved with the Belfast Co-op?

We had been involved with co-ops everywhere we lived. A pre-order buying club in New York state and West Coast co-ops like the Berkeley Co-op when we lived out there. When we moved to Orland, Maine I heard there was a food co-op in Belfast. We started coming down to shop and after a while I heard that John Bunker was leaving as the general manager, so I moved to Waldo County to work at the Co-op. It was Anna Dow, Tory Hatch and myself at that time. When they went back to college, I became the General Manager kind of by default.

Do you have a favorite Belfast Co-op story you'd like to share?

There are almost too many, after being at the Co-op for so many years. The staff was always such an interesting and eccentric bunch of people who wanted a freer working environment and that, of course, leads to a lot of interesting stories. I guess the move from the upper Main Street location down to the current Green Store location is one of my favorite adventures. We did it all by hand with lots of staff and volunteer help. We were rolling huge coolers down the street on carts. I think the Republican Journal may have some good photographs of that.

I also really appreciated the dedication of the staff, volunteers and members who kept the store open during some difficult financial times in Belfast. When we made that move down the street there were a lot of empty store fronts in town because of the economic downturn in the area.

The move to the newest location was interesting and challenging for me. I had to draw layouts for the store. We worked together with plumbers, builders and electricians who were all my friends. There was a lot of laughter in the store and a lot of intensity. I had a son born that same year. I kept a small recording device by the side of my bed in case I woke in the middle of the night with an idea so I could remember to deal with it in the morning.

How has your involvement with the Co-op enriched your life?

The strongest thing I gained through my years at the Co-op is the friendships I built working with such a varied group of people. People from different backgrounds, of different ages with different experiences. I remember a customer, Jose, who was a former Spanish ambassador and used to come into the store to discuss Spanish wines with me. I enjoyed the summers especially. Folks from all over the world would come into the Co-op because it reminded them of the places that they shopped back home. If there was diversity to be had in the community we would attract it. We were like a magnet store. I married someone from Belfast I met at the Co-op whose mother used to shop there regularly.

What are the biggest changes you have seen in the Belfast Co-op since it's early days?

The growth in size, monetary valuation and product diversity. It is now an established business in the community. The size of the staff from three at first, to twelve or so in the lower Main Street location to fifty at its largest during the summers when I was general manager.

It was a real community hub. That was what made the Co-op what it was. A place for people to go. We had a children's area with a castle. People gathered there as a community resource. For example during the Ice Storm of '98 we had power at the store because we were on the same trunk line as the hospital. People came in to fill their water jugs and network to help each other. My own electricity at home was out for two weeks and I had to use my chain saw most days to get out of my road to drive to work. One member/friend was going up to Bangor to stand in line for a generator and got me one and another member/friend who was an electrician helped me install it at home in the dark with flashlights held in our mouths.

What direction would you like to see the Co-op take in the future?

The store is doing a good job of keeping up in a competitive environment, but it needs something to keep it unique. I think the thing it has to offer is a friendly, accessible staff; workers who care about the shoppers and want to educate them about how to shop at the Co-op, buy good food, and save money. To do this you need to take good care of the staff. They are your ambassadors to the public.

I used to tour the store with my students from the alternative high school, kids who would not necessarily ever have been in the Co-op. Maintaining the warm welcoming environment will let the Co-op stand out from the crowd of natural food stores. It will help the bottom line to be a place where people are willing to make the trade off of prices over a good, friendly environment in which to shop.

YOUR VOICE counts

Your customer comments and Belfast Co-op Management responses

"I miss the materials that have been on the windowsill by the door, especially the Thursday stock of Free Press in the corner. It feels less "community" focused now, feels too empty. I feel disconnected, like the co-op is closing and this is the start of moving out. Often change is OK, this does not feel better. Maybe there could be some instead of none"

Thank you for your comment. The front sill has historically been a "catch-all" and a mis-managed eyesore as a result. A team of our workers spent the Easter holiday doing some much needed cleaning including the front window and we think it has never looked better! I do sincerely understand the feelings of loss when things change. Please note that we have opportunities for posting on the community bulletin board in our front vestibule and that many of the local periodicals, including the Free Press, are available in other locations in the store as well as in the cafe.

-Jeremy
Store Operations Manager

"Would you consider getting Lundberg Biodynamic short grain brown rice? Fairly new product. Previously, but no longer, exclusive to Whole Foods stores. Thank you!"

That sounds like a really great product, but unfortunately none of our distributors currently carry this item. I will keep an eye out for this item in the future. Thank you for letting us know that it is out there!

-Jesse
Grocery Buyer

thank you for your cooperation!

WOW! THAT IS A GREAT PRICE!



ORGANIC BANANAS 89¢

Over 300 value priced items throughout the store to help you meet your needs, every day!

LOOK FOR THE PURPLE TAGS!

COOP basics
great food | great price

Ordering straight from the producers has allowed co-op retailers to keep price per bottle at impressively low levels- many U.S. sellers have been able to sell it for less than \$8, a price tag you'll rarely see on any organic or Fair Trade product. Included in that cost is a set premium that returns to the cooperative, which can then reinvest those funds into cooperatively identified needs like amendments that will eventually allow all their farmers to achieve organic certification, and someday installing solar panels and pumps to sustainably nurture future crops. Other needs identified and addressed by cooperative consensus include healthcare, education and social benefits in the form of clinics, microloan opportunities, internet cafes, water wells, insurance for industry hazards like hail and frost, access to an emergency fund, large fertilizer and fuel orders, and recreational facilities.

As Walter Carol, Export Director of La Riojana Co-op explained in a written statement, premium reinvestments "give the small farmers not only the benefit of receiving a higher price for their grapes, but also the security of a long term supply, because the demand for Organic wines is growing...We plan to start the process 12 months after the launch of the wines with many co-ops in a big part of the US, and have the wine certified between 2 and 3 years after that, but the main costs will be fully paid during the first year. As a second stage of this project, we attempt to buy solar pumps and solar panels for [the village of] Pituil, in order to convert to more sustainable energy and also to use more efficient pumps that use less energy. The long term idea is to convert Pituil into a "green" sustainable village and make it more attractive for new growers and increase the quality of the grapes and the wines. This will also create better living condition(s) for the small growers."



Our own Jaap Helder with Walter Carol Export Director for La Riojana during Walter's whirlwind tour of Maine Co-ops



For more information on La Riojana Wines, visit their website; lariojanawines.com or Facebook page; facebook.com/RiojanaWines. There you'll find stories, photos and current projects, including their recent Co-op to Co-op Wine Tour. The Tour, launched in September 2015, made four La Riojana wines exclusively available to co-ops that belong to the National Co+op Grocers (NCG); a business services cooperative for retail food co-ops located throughout the United States (the Belfast Co-op is a member). During the Tour, Walter visited several food co-ops throughout Maine, including our very own Belfast Co-op store. Stay tuned for these conscientiously crafted wines, coming soon to our shelves! The Fair Trade certified Chardonnay, Malbec, Bonarda/Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon wines will all carry a \$6.99 retail price tag, which includes the Fair Trade Premium which will be directly reinvested in the growers' communities and vineyards. We're thrilled to help spread the sweet taste of cooperative, Fair-Trade and organic values, one sip at a time.

MAY

Common Cents: Avian Haven; avianhaven.org

Featured Artist: Patricia Shea; patriciasheadesigns.com

6th Annual Organic Field-grown Perennial Plant Sale with Rebel Hill Farm 5/2 order deadline; 5/7 9-11 am plant pickup

5/3 "The Maine Conscious Consumer" Tues. 6:30pm, Belfast Free Library – Co-sponsored with the Belfast Free Library and Our Town Belfast.

5/11 Member-Owner Forum Wed. 6-8pm, Belfast Free Library – free screening of a short video about the Belfast Co-op's early history in honor of our 40th anniversary. All member-owners are encouraged to attend

5/24 "Tick Talk" Tues. 6-8pm, Belfast Free Library – Co-sponsored with the Belfast Free Library.

5/26 Board Meeting Thurs. 6pm social time, 6:30pm meeting, Waterfall Arts, 256 High St.

5/27 Love LOCAL Day Fri. – 10% off all Maine-made products all day.

5/31 "Road Trip in Eastern Cuba, April 2015" Tues. 6:30pm, Belfast Free Library – Co-sponsored with the Belfast Free Library.

JUNE

Common Cents: Maine Food Corps; foodcorps.org/where-we-work/maine

Featured Artist: Mark Kelly

6/1-7 Member-Owner Super Sale Week; 10% off one transaction.

6/23 Board Meeting Thurs. 6pm social time, 6:30pm meeting, Waterfall Arts, 256 High St.

6/24 Love LOCAL Day Fri. – 10% off all Maine-made products all day.

For more event information, please visit our online calendar at: www.belfast.coop