

CO-OP Digest

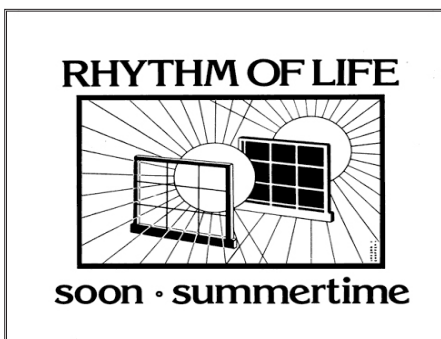
March/April 2011

North Country Food Cooperative

For the community. By the community.

What Happened to the Rhythm of Life?

by Peter Cadieux



"NCIS is on!" I called to our youngest daughter: Greta, 21 years old was upstairs in "Greta's World." "You'll miss it!" I reminded her. "I'll watch it on-line later" was the reply. What has happened to the events that controlled the rhythms of my week, and indeed, my life? If I wanted to catch the news, I had better tune in to WIRY on time, or be in front of the television at 6:00 p.m. If I wanted to vote, I had better be at the fire station while the polls were open. If we needed to do some banking, we had better get to the bank while it was open. Need some groceries from the store? Better get there before it closes. Time to renew the car registration? Get in line during lunch hour at the DMV. If I needed to get to work, but was waiting for an important call at home – I was between a rock and a hard place! Let's face it – my life was run by outside forces – controlled by the three big networks, bankers and the capitalist system in general.

Today we do our banking online 24/7, the grocery store (and that other big store that I do not patronize) is open 24 hours, the news is available from

thousands of sites on the "interweb" in a 24 hour news cycle, I can vote absentee, renew my license online and my phone is in my pocket everywhere, all the time. Any TV show I want to watch is either online or on the DVR to be watched at my convenience.

My daughters' generation does not need to jump to the deadlines and schedules that ruled my life. They control their own daily and weekly schedules. Slowly, I am adjusting to the procedures and possibilities that they take for granted. But one day, as I picked up the snail mail from our rural route box, I got to thinking, some things have not changed.

As the coldest days of the winter set in, and the frozen, canned and jarred bounty of last year's garden dwindles, the woman with whom I share this life starts to get, shall we say, "edgy." And just in time, hope arrives in the mailbox. The first seed catalog of the winter arrives, and an old familiar yearly rhythm has started once again. What joy she feels at the sight of these magazines full of colorful photos of fruit trees, vegetables, from the likes of Seed Savers, Fedco, the Maine Potato Lady, Seeds of Change and High Mowing, etc! Dreams formulate in her head as lists are started and diagrams fill previously blank pads of paper. As the weather warms, and the snow melts away, an age old rhythm of preparing the soil, planting the seeds, tending to the new plants, battling weeds, harvesting fruits and vegetables, and putting the garden back to bed begins once again, just as it always has. This is a comforting thought in a changing world.

While you, too, can order seeds for your garden online or from the catalogs, the Co-op will have a wide variety of seeds from Seed Savers (at a 25 cent savings per pack with no shipping and

handling), High Mowing (\$2.00 per pack) and Fedco. (\$2.00 per package or in bulk – buy as much or as little as you like) and Susan is happy to kibbutz for a bit about your garden dreams of 2011. Dream about your garden, and come in to the Co-op (during regular store hours only!) in the love of the Sun of 2011.

Starting the Garden and Saving the Seeds

by Melissa Hart



Itching to get digging? As garden season gets under way, I offer some tips for seed starting, courtesy of Master Gardeners with Cornell Cooperative Extension. I took these notes during some informal workshops I went to last spring, organized by the Plattsburgh Community Garden group. Master Gardeners with Cornell Cooperative Extension covered the basics on how to start seeds and then how to save them once the harvest is done.

Here are some tips on how to do it yourself:

Seed starting

NO DIRT: The best way to start plants from scratch is with a sterile seed-starting "soil-less mix," said Master Gardener Chic Forster. The blend of peat moss and other minerals ensures proper germination and inhibits the growth of

fungus, he said. Get it moist by spritzing with a water bottle and you are good to go.

CONTAINERS: Just about any plastic container will do for starting seeds. Just make sure you poke holes in the bottom for drainage, Forster said. He recommends cutting a milk or juice carton in half the long way and using the other half for a cover or tray, if needed. That way, you can label what types of seeds are growing with a marker on the side of the carton. Be sure to sow the same type of plant together, as different seeds have different growth rates.

HEAT and LIGHT: While you should always read the seed packet to find out what's needed, many seeds need warmth and light for a healthy start. A rubberized heat mat helps provide warmth, but if you want to be totally DIY, Forster recommended using a clear plastic over the top of the seeds to create a mini-greenhouse effect. The plastic retains heat and moisture. Just make sure you don't have too much wet or mold could grow, too. For lights, a simple 4-foot floor shop fixture with a 32-watt bulb is all that's needed, said Forster. Leave them on 14-16 hours a day, hovering right over the dirt, and adjust once the plants poke out of the soil.

TRANSPLANTING: Once the plants have 2-3 sets of "true leaves," many types are ready to be put in the ground. First they need to be "hardened off," which is to gradually introduce them to life outside. Set the seedlings out in a lightly shaded area for a few hours, increasing the amount of time and quality of light outside each day until they are ready for planting.

Seed saving

ONLY THE BEST: When saving seeds, select for traits you want to see continue and only those from the best-looking, well-ripened fruits, said Master Gardener Nora Teter in a recent workshop.

NO HYBRIDS: Most commercial seeds are not savable, as they are hybrids created for only one growing season, said Teter. Either grow heirloom varieties or buy veggies at the farmers' market, where you can ask the grower about the variety and know for sure that it is well suited for this climate, she said. If buying plants at a nursery, talk to someone there about what type of plant it is.

IDEAL CONDITIONS: All seeds are not created equal and there are many different techniques involved in saving them. But whether it's tomatoes, lettuce or beans, all seeds need to be completely dry before being put away, Teter said. Once dried, they can be tucked into envelopes or plastic bags, sealed in mason jars and stored in a cool, dark and dry environment. She uses the refrigerator or the basement.

For more information on these and other topics, go to the local Cornell Cooperative Extension office, 6064 Route 22, Plattsburgh, or look online at www.cce.cornell.edu

Growing the Cooperative Economy: Co-ops Seeding Co-ops

By Jeremiah Ward, Noémi Giszpenc and Lynda Brushett



We all know that our food co-op is special. It is a community owned and operated oasis amidst a desert of privately-owned and profit-driven big box stores.

What we often fail to ask ourselves, however, is: Why can't there be more oases? Food is one of many things we buy to satisfy our needs, and there is nothing inherently special about buying and selling food that lends itself exclusively to cooperation. From our housing and clothing to the media we consume, it is easy to imagine a world in which the benefits of cooperation that we experience every day at the North Country Food Co-op—such as having a greater say over how goods and services are provided, having people put ahead of profits, and having employees that are their own bosses, to name a few—extend to all areas of our lives.

Of course, what is easy to imagine is not necessarily easy to put into practice. This is especially so given these difficult financial times, and given that the membership that drives a robust co-op such as ours takes time to develop.

Yet, following the lead of other established co-ops—and especially food co-ops—perhaps we can utilize our co-op's existing members and resources to mitigate some of these obstacles. There's no need to reinvent the wheel. There's no need to venture out into the desert in search of seeds to plant another oasis. The seeds, water, and nutrients can all be found right here. Our co-op can seed other co-ops!

The following selection was written by my colleagues at the Cooperative Development Institute, Noémi Giszpenc and Lynda Brushett, and originally published in the National Cooperative

Business Association's Cooperative Business Journal. It provides a look at some of the best practices whereby established co-ops have successfully seeded other co-ops.

Strategies

Several co-op development strategies emerge from a review of what co-ops around the country are doing to expand the co-op economy, corresponding well to research by David Ellerman on "enterprise creation" that starts from existing businesses.¹

First, find what business or member needs could be met by a new co-op venture.

Go up or down the supply chain to improve sourcing of inputs, add value to services or products, enhance member benefits or solidify customer relationships. Organic Valley, a 1,630-member farmer-owned marketing and distribution cooperative for dairy, soy, juice, eggs, meat and produce, stepped in when dairy-farmer members in Maine lost the only organic feed mill in their state. Organic Valley contributed management time and expertise to help those farmers pull together and buy the mill and operate it for themselves as well as other organic farmers as Maine Organic Milling, a new cooperative.² Equal Exchange, a worker-owned fair trade marketer, connected directly to small farmer-owned producer co-ops by expanding into importing, then coffee roasting, and now is building customer awareness by starting cafés.

Spin off a business function to improve operations and increase opportunities for entrepreneurship. Worker-collective Inkworks Press³ found that with changing business demands it was having increasing trouble managing printing and design work under one roof, so two collective members left to start Design Action Collective. The new co-op benefited from industry connections and reputation, as well as tried-and-trusted institutional models. DAC still sends most print jobs to Inkworks, but it can also focus on design for the web and other new media. Inkworks, in turn, is more streamlined and efficient.

¹ See for example <http://www.ellerman.org/Davids-Stuff/The-Firm/Four Enterprise Creation Schemes2.pdf>.

² See <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/pub/sep10/sep10.pdf>, page 25.

³ Articles on worker-co-op creation featuring Inkworks Press and Design Action Collective, as well as the Cheese Board Collective's participation in the Arizmendi Association of Cooperatives, can be found in Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO) Newsletter, Volume 2, Issue 3, , <http://geo.coop/node/377>.

Meet member, community, worker, or customer needs related (or unrelated) to your co-op's business.

This strategy requires active listening to stakeholders, a strength of co-ops as member-owned democratic businesses. Weaver Street Market, a hybrid consumer- and worker-owned grocery store, helped form a co-op housing association in response to gentrification and rising housing costs. WSM also gave space and support to start the city's only community radio station. Consumer-members of the Hanover Cooperative Society need car repairs and gasoline as well as groceries, so the co-op acquired and runs a service station.

Next, see if an opportunity for growth, diversification or expansion could lead to a new cooperative enterprise.

Create a new product using the same technology. The Cheese Board Collective⁴ bakery spun off the Cheese Board Pizza Collective, which could focus on pizzas full-time. The two cooperatives are now two divisions of the same cooperative corporation, operating autonomously under the same financial umbrella. Beside developing different markets and focused operations, creating separate enterprises had unexpected benefits: when the CBC⁴ needed to renovate their premises, they were able to keep serving customers by using the Pizza Collective's oven, just down the block.

Find new uses (and markets) for the same service or product. CCA Global's remarkable growth to a complex of 15 cooperatives stems in part from the realization that back-office services for independent carpet stores could similarly be provided to different markets, from lighting stores to bike shops to child-care centers.

Reproduce. Create peers and partners for your business through "light franchising." Co-ops regularly contribute informally to the birth of similar co-ops by sharing their incorporation documents, by-laws, and histories, as well as mentoring new managers, sharing training, or even disclosing unused feasibility studies. The Arizmendi Association of Cooperatives engages in deliberate replication, or what they call "upside-down franchising," supporting the founding of five new collective bakeries since 1997 based on the Cheese Board Collective's successful model.

First Steps

Implementing any of these strategies can take many forms: funding feasibility and marketing studies; partnering with cooperative development organizations; providing management, legal, or technical expertise; sharing industry sector and co-op knowledge and networks; supporting member or staff

participation in steering committees and advisory boards; making supportive trade arrangements -- the list goes on.

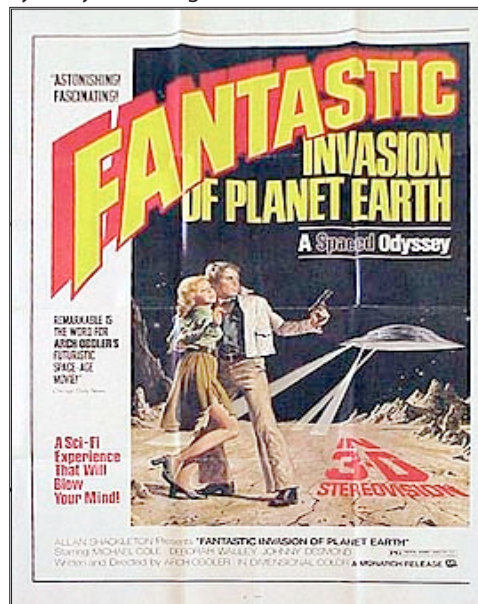
But a wise first step is to engage the Board, members, management and staff in a decision-making process to commit the organization to new co-op development. Encourage discussion of benefits and drawbacks and address concerns. Invite speakers with inspiring stories from other co-ops; study the success of cooperatives in co-op clusters or systems; write policy statements; and incorporate development into strategic planning by articulating benefits to the co-op and its members. With groundwork prepared and guided by your needs and opportunities, you can zero in on which seeds to nurture -- and go garden!

For more information on co-ops seeding co-ops, you can listen to a [National Cooperative Business Association webinar](#) presented by the Cooperative Development Institute. Cooperators from [Maine Organic Milling](#), [Hanover Co-op](#), [Weaver Street Market](#), and the [Arizmendi Association of Cooperatives](#) were in attendance and recounted their experiences in successfully seeding new co-ops. You can also download the [slideshow](#) for the event. We also welcome your questions or comments: info@cdi.coop.

Jeremiah Ward is a former staff member of the North Country Food Co-op and is one of the founding editors of the Co-op Digest.

Movie Nights @ the Co-op March/April Films:

by Andy MacDougall



Don't miss GREEN TEA 2012's Inaugural Banquet!

Recently christened Green Tea 2012 has taken a quantum leap in its mission statement's evolution. Originally conceived as a take-no-prisoners satirical savaging

of the Tea Party to its very marrow, Green Tea 2012 has now sheathed its sword for want of a much kinder, gentler approach.

In fact, no longer confrontational at all, thanks to a vintage STAR TREK episode informing our new direction. In THE ALTERNATIVE FACTOR, an inter-dimensional 'corridor' connecting parallel universes --- one matter and the other anti-matter --- is the only place where counterparts from each universe can meet without triggering a chain reaction that would blow up everything on both sides real good. Now enter life imitating art, once again.

On Saturday, March 26th, the Co-op's second-floor 'theater' will begin wearing a new hat, as a recreational neutral zone in which Tea Partiers and non-Tea Partiers alike can meet once a month and have fun riffing on cheesy movies together. Yep, Green Tea 2012 is now an outreach program extending a welcoming hand to regional Tea Partiers in hopes of seeing this conflict-neutralizing proposition bear fruit. Stranger things have happened, and nobody can say we didn't try!

Green Tea 2012's Inaugural Banquet, complete with potluck dinner-theater beginning at 6 p.m. on the 26th, will present the 1966 camp classic FANTASTIC INVASION OF PLANET EARTH on actual (16mm) film, not video. The event promises to be a joyous hoot in every way, including the scrumptily delicious irony of chowing down to a zombie movie in which the zombies themselves eat absolutely nothing, for a change! Still, a menu suggesting what we usually associate with zombies is recommended, e.g. properly smelly dishes like sausages, sauerkraut and kimchee. Lots of fermented things. Sound like a plan?

As for FANTASTIC INVASION OF PLANET EARTH, it's the ideal stage upon which to theorize that hateful rhetoric can be nullified, if only for 94 minutes, with Tea Partiers and non-Tea Partiers taking each other's Barack Obama and Glenn Beck jokes in stride, respectively.

So come one, come all! To put a benevolent spin on the words of STAR WARS' evil Governor Tarkin.....come join us for a ceremony that will make this 'battle' station operational. Grab the hand of a Tea Partier you know and (are trying to) love, and make a bee-line for Green Tea 2012's Inaugural Banquet. And if no one from the TP camp shows up, then we'll just have a ball anyway!

Oh, and not to forget April's creature attraction, the pulpy cheesecake-laden shipwreck thriller ISLE OF SIN (1960), on Saturday, April 24 @ 6 p.m. "A story of the Desperate and the

4 See <http://cheeseboardcollective.coop/History/CheesePizzaHistory.html>

Damned! Intrigue, Suspense & Lust fill the screen!" proclaimed the original theatrical poster. Essentially a remake of HORRORS OF SPIDER ISLAND (1959), ISLE OF SIN will be our "How's THIS for Holy Week?" special, demonstrating we can gently rib the Vatican just as readily as the Tea Party. As for that evening's potluck-dinner suggestions, the more decadent the better, e.g. desserts should be sinfully sweet. All in all, plenty to leave our 'spidey' senses tingling!

Questions? Contact serious_61@yahoo. Sound like a plan?

Warmth is Elemental

by Jennifer Patching



If you've ever heated your home with a wood stove, or have friends who do, you've stacked some wood in your life! Managing cordwood reflects life's challenges and rewards. Like the annual trek home for Christmas, there is something obligatory yet nostalgic about stacking wood. This chore is cyclical. Every spring: clean up, assess and rotate your ranks. Wood needs seasoning; ageing for a year to dry and burn efficiently. If you section and split your own, better get started early, take your time and split wood all summer. Stack in the fall. Burn in the winter. Beautiful metaphors come to mind. This cyclical rhythm exists on a smaller scale within each season. In the winter, splitting wood into kindling, moving armfuls from porch to living room and burning it becomes ritualistic.

There is something satisfying about stacking wood. I'm not alone in this. Others have said the same. While not always beautiful in the moment (thirty degrees below zero, just off work, dark and wishing you planned ahead better) there is something beautiful in the struggle. Perhaps it's the act of taking care of yourself and loved ones by providing warmth. Warmth is elemental. Maybe it's the satisfaction of completing a task start to finish. It could be what that pile of wood queued next to the stove signifies: security

and relief that at least for now, you're good and if it's thirty below tomorrow, you won't be stacking wood in the dark. It seems fair to say: stacking wood despite backbreaking pain serves as a tribute to persistence, love and self-preservation. Like others, I enjoyed my woodpile this year. If you've never heated with wood, it's a life experience not to be missed. Kinda' like shoveling the snow....

Spring Seeds & Local Bread

by Adrian Carr



Seeds:

It's time to start thinking about Spring – yes it is going to get here. I wish I could tell you when – I'm looking forward to getting out on my bike. In the meantime, you can have some fun dreaming about what you can grow this year! The Coop is one stop shopping for the best organic and high quality seeds from local seed coops. If you want things like Cosmic Purple Carrots, Sumo Long Cucumbers or Nasturtium Edible flowers (great for salads), The Coop is the place to come!

The Coop features:

High Mowing Organic Seeds is an independently-owned, farm-based seed company dedicated to supporting sustainable agriculture and providing farmers and gardeners with the highest quality certified organic seed.

High Mowing Organic Seeds' Spring Social! March 20. It will feature a Workshops, Tours, and a Potluck dinner. Call for more details Phone: 802-472-6174 76 Quarry Rd. Wolcott, VT. They are just off Rte 15, across from the Fisher Covered Bridge, between Wolcott and Hardwick

Another great seed company is Fedco, who provides cold-hardy varieties shipped in season, and gardening

supplies year-round. It might not be as feasible to go see them, but they're super friendly and you can always call them if you want recommendations or help in your planting plans.

Fedco Seeds, PO Box 520, Waterville, ME 04903 (207) 873-7333 or (207) 430-1106

Finally there is Seed Savers. Which is a national member supported organization that saves and shares the heirloom seeds of garden heritage, forming a living legacy that can be passed down through generations. Their seeds now are widely used by seed companies, small farmers supplying local and regional markets, chefs and home gardeners.

Bread:

The Italians have an expression that "bread is the life of man" At the coop we're fortunate to have to our area's best selection of bread. Here in Clinton County, Russ Lewis and his wife, Linda, have been running The Bakery at Conroy's Organics for almost two years now. Probably most of you have tried many of the organic and inventive breads. In a recent interview, Lewis said he learned the bakery business growing up in the New York City area. He moved to Vermont in 1991 and there baked European hearth-style breads while working for other bakers. After moving to the Chateaugay, Lewis started out using a wood-fired oven in the back yard until he was able to set up at Conroy's Organics. He is now baking 1,000-1,500 loaves a week in the steam-injected deck oven. "It's small by industry standards, but it's perfect for one person," Lewis said. We can really feel fortunate to enjoy his talents and efforts right here in the North Country.

So whether it's The Bakery at Conroy's or Organics, O Bread Bakery in Shelburne VT, Klinger's from South Burlington, or the Vermont Bread Company in Brattleboro, these are all local bakers making high quality, healthy products with soul! And you can buy these breads each day of the week right at the Coop. Slice into a wonderful, fresh loaf of bread and enjoy with your favorite cheese and olives. You can almost feel the warm Tuscan Breeze, as we all wait for spring in The North Country.

The North Country Food Co-op

is happy to announce the date for the

Annual Meeting and Potluck

join in with the staff, board of directors, and fellow members on

Sunday May 1, 2011

Please come share your dish -

and dish with us about the co-op as we wrap up our 54th year

we'll greet one another from **5pm till 5:30**

we'll eat delicious and delightful food from **5:30 till 6:30pm**

and we'll **meet at 6:30pm** about:

the year in review and what is to come

call for interested members to become board members

answer questions

hear ideas

the annual meeting will be held upstairs on the second floor of the co-op (stairs are through doorway in the rear of the bulk room)

come one – come all to this fun annual event. All are welcome!

See you there!