



FOOD CO-OP INITIATIVE

New co-ops start here.

844-324-2667 | www.FCI.coop

News from the
world of start-up
food co-ops & those
who support them.



Up & Coming 2020

evades construction and dodges a pandemic... while still having fun!

The 2020 Up & Coming conference got underway just as everyone was recognizing the potential danger of public gatherings. Fortunately, we were able to have a safe and highly productive conference—possibly one of the last to be held before cancellations began. If that wasn't enough, renovations at the conference hotel were happening while we were there, adding some inconvenience and confusion, but nothing we couldn't overcome. The staff went out of their way to accommodate us as best they could, and active construction was halted during the conference. Putting obstacles aside (hey, that's what we do as co-ops!) we had a great time, great workshops and record registration.

264 attendees came from 63 different co-ops across the country—32 states were represented, from Florida to Alaska. In addition to the full calendar of workshops focused on startup development, this year saw the return of a training for "up and running" co-ops. Our Thursday sessions provided in-depth support specially designed for open co-ops seeking to strengthen their operations. Black co-op organizers also met on Thursday in a special session to discuss the unique needs of their communities and the resources they can bring to co-op organizing.

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Is something exciting happening at your co-op? We could feature it in our next issue! Email us at info@fci.coop

Co-ops in the News



Welcome to the brave new world

One where cooperation has become more important than ever and even co-ops that haven't opened for business are showing their communities what the cooperative principles mean. Here at FCI we were already working from home and have been lucky enough to stay healthy and engaged in our work. Many of you have probably not been as fortunate, yet we continue to hear stories of great service and inspired engagement. As Joel Kopischke reminded us on a recent webinar, we don't need Social Distancing, we need physical distancing. This is a time when we can expand and strengthen our social connections through love, care, and service. A co-op is more than a storefront. It is a group of people committed to high ideals, including but not limited to a locally-owned source of food and other essentials. Be well!

—Stuart Reid
FCI Executive Director
Stuart@FCI.coop



The **Gem City Co-op** in Dayton, Ohio reports that their site work is moving ahead, since construction of essential services (grocery stores) are exempt from stay at home orders. Their contractor is taking special precautions to protect the health of construction workers. Wet weather and inevitable "surprises" one encounters during construction have slowed things a bit, but nothing can stop a determined co-op — a determined co-op with an amazing 2,500 owners.

Fredericksburg Food Co-op in Fredericksburg, Virginia continues to impress. They have hired **Chris Roland**, formerly of the Sugar Beet Food Co-op in Chicago as their new General Manager. Floorplans are being finalized and they are targeting a 2020 opening. After raising a record \$1.7 million in owner loans in 10 weeks, the co-op has secured a \$1.4 million loan with National Cooperative Bank, *backed by the first known Small Business Administration loan guarantee to a consumer co-op!* They have now begun a second owner campaign with the goal of raising an additional \$750,000, reducing their reliance on additional outside capital. The Co-op has contracted with the National Co+op Grocers Development Co-op to support their Implementation and opening.



The **Dorchester Food Co-op** in Boston, Massachusetts has announced a site! With 807 owners on board, the co-op is ready to move into Stage 3.



Oshkosh Food Co-op in Oshkosh, Wisconsin has exceeded their \$1.6 million capital campaign goal. Over 500 owners have invested! Next up is getting their storefront ready in the Brio Building, a sustainably-built multi-use development with 53 residential units and the co-op anchoring the ground level.



Startup Leadership Transition Handbook Launches this Summer

The food co-op sector has a new resource on the way! To help startup co-ops prepare for their first General Manager, the *Startup Leadership Transition Handbook* will release this summer. Concepts from this new book were shared in March at the Up & Coming Food Co-op Conference, and the response from the startup and established food co-op community has been extremely positive.

Authors Jacqueline Hannah from Food Co-op Initiative (FCI) and Kaye Kirsch from Firebrand Cooperative describe this as a passion project, born from their own experiences and work with startup food co-ops. In the past three years, there have been approximately 15 food co-ops that have opened using FCI's model and support team services. Of those 15, *only one* has retained their start-up GM for longer than one year. The upheaval of losing a GM during the critical first three years of operations multiplies the challenges for new food co-ops, putting these start-up businesses at higher risk.

Hannah and Kirsch believe a significant number of GM failures can be prevented with better board training on the topic. Training will also better prepare a board to weather

failures when they *do* happen. Forearmed with *The Startup Leadership Transition Handbook's* training and tools, startup co-op boards will set their GMs up for long-term success and avoid their premature departure, building stronger and more resilient, successful co-ops.

The first 80+ pages are currently available as a free download (made possible thanks to financial support of the Cooperative Development Fund, the Up & Coming Conference and Food Co-op Initiative). The complete handbook will include exercises, tools, and an appendix of resources for co-op boards to use while preparing for working with a GM. Hard copies of the completed handbook will be sold online.

Firebrand will be offering board training and retreat packages based on principles in the handbook, to help boards navigate the startup leadership transition period, and be fully prepared to support their new GM.

Interested in a customized board training or retreat?

Reach out at info@firebrand.coop



Startup Leadership Transition Handbook
A guide for co-ops preparing for the complex dance of working with their first General Manager

Coming this summer

firebrand | Produced in partnership with Food Co-op Initiative and UP & COMING | Jacqueline Hannah & Kaye Kirsch

get book release updates + other great tools! → firebrand.coop/tools

Exactly what is needed...
I strongly recommend this training to start-up co-ops as they move closer to store opening and begin to navigate the transition toward being governing boards.

*Rich Larochelle,
Fredericksburg Food Co-op*

firebrand



2020 Up & Coming Award Winners

It is always a privilege to honor the co-ops and people that have gone above and beyond. **This year we recognized Suncoast Co-op in Imperial Beach California as “The Best of the Best.”** Not every co-op starts out as the best, but Suncoast has shown that the right effort and planning can make an amazing difference. In the fall of 2019, they decided it was time to take their efforts to grow ownership to new levels. Ownership growth had greatly slowed, and they decided to take a chance on hiring an outreach manager (a best practice we recommend in stage 2A development!) With a supportive board behind her, the new outreach manager, Shannon Ratliff, read up on every ownership growth best practice and put them in practice. The results speak for themselves. Since this co-op took the leap and applied these best practices they have more than doubled their monthly ownership growth, going from an average of 10 or fewer new owners a month to 20, even 40 new owners some months — and now, six months later, that growth is still speeding up and showing no signs of slowing down.

Not for the first time, **Prairie Food Co-op was recognized for their excellent work, this year with the “Startup Innovator Award”.** When the board of the Prairie Food Co-op saw that traditional lenders were getting harder to find for startup food co-ops, instead of seeing it as a setback, they took it as an opportunity to get creative. The entire board put their heads together to design an owner capital campaign where the goal would not be to raise half a million dollars, or even a million dollars in owner capital... they dared to ask the question, “What if we, as owners, could fund almost our entire co-op ourselves?” and then set out to build a detailed and ambitious plan to make it happen. On top of this, board member Jess Buttimer also developed a custom capital campaign app for startup food co-ops to be used to galvanize their efforts.



The “2020 Cooperative Citizen Award” was given to the Black National Food and Justice Alliance. This coalition of organizations, within their broader work for justice, has brought together Black startup food co-op leaders to learn from one another and together to identify challenges and build solutions to address their unique needs as Black coop organizers working for Black food justice and sovereignty. They have embraced bringing their talent and experience to the larger startup food co-op community with openness and generosity, while at the same time unapologetically creating space to build and empower a movement of Black food cooperation for and by Black people. In doing so, they have not just done powerful work to empower a movement of Black startup food cooperators, but that have also made our entire startup food co-op movement richer and stronger.

Startup Heroes? Aren't we all? This year we decided that this award would be better named the **“Startup Food Co-op Champion Award”** and since we liked the new name so much, we chose two very deserving co-ops for the award.

The Neighboring Food Co-op Association — What is truly visionary about the food coops of the northeast region is that they choose to work collectively to support the future of food cooperation through funding a part time position

We'd like to give a big shout out to National Cooperative Bank — not only a consistent funder of our work, NCB helped convene the group that formed our original pilot project and have had staff serving on our board ever since. Thank you Chuck Snyder, all the employees who have served on our board and everyone else at NCB for all you do for the cooperative community.

Working Together. Building Community.

In our current environment, cooperation and working together has never been more critical.

We are here to serve you and hope you are staying healthy and safe.

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within their organization to focus on supporting the unique needs of startup food co-ops. The Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA) very much honors that vision, and along with the strong leadership of their executive director, Erbin Crowell, this award specifically honors the work of Bonnie Hudspeth, the brilliant cooperators that has filled the role of co-op developer at NFCA for over seven years. In her work on behalf of NFCA, Bonnie started the innovative peer support calls that have done so much to strengthen food co-ops across the country. FCI saw the terrific support Bonnie was making possible for startups in her region and replicated her peer call model across the country. If an FCI peer call has strengthened your food co-op at any point in your development, you can thank Bonnie and the NFCA.

Renaissance Community Co-op — This startup in Greensboro, North Carolina inspired a new generation

of black-led startup efforts across the country. While the co-op ultimately closed, its board and organizers have selflessly shared their story, their lessons learned and their undying commitment to the cooperative model with the many co-ops they originally inspired. Refusing to see

their experience as a failure, RCC continues to share their story and help other co-ops to open stores that can be successful. For this deep commitment to true cooperation and inspiration to us all, Renaissance Community Co-op is a Startup Food Co-op Champion.

WANT FREE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT FOR COOPERATIVES?

20 pledges of \$150 from 20 co-ops will open up FREE content for cooperatives to use!

Katie Novak Cooperative Coaching
309-643-2176
Katie@coopcoaching.com



CCMA 2020 Moves Online

The annual Consumer Cooperative Management Association event will not be held live in Sioux Falls this year, due to the COVID-19 risks and travel restrictions. Organizers are planning to hold the 2021 conference in Sioux Falls, but in the meantime, work is underway to provide some web-based CCMA programming this summer. **We will be announcing the first ever winner of the new Bill Gessner Startup Award on a live video presentation the afternoon of June 11.**

Corona, Community and Co-ops

By Malik Yakini

The current crisis brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event in our lifetime. It has changed the way millions of people around the world work, play and interact with each other. The collective downtime that we are experiencing gives us the opportunity to witness and reflect on both the positive attributes and troubling tendencies within humanity.

It has been made crystal clear that racial and economic inequities are exacerbated in times of crisis. Black, Brown, poor and other marginalized communities are more vulnerable as communities scramble for valuable resources and public services. The pandemic has shined a bright light on the fragility and inequity of the system through which we acquire the vast majority of our food.

News reports of empty grocery store shelves a month ago, and more recently of thousands lined up to receive donations from food banks, have shocked many into seeking alternatives.

Interest has increased dramatically in small-scale urban agriculture and food co-ops. There is now tremendous interest in how we become more self-reliant and less dependent on a system that is deeply flawed and mired in anti-Blackness.

The shift in the consciousness of many in our communities provides us with the opportunity to engage more people in the long-term building of the infrastructure needed to sustain resilient, local, community controlled and community benefiting, racially just, food systems. We need to build a new future, not just patch up a badly damaged past.

Those of us committed to the development of food co-ops should, as the Black Panther Party often said, “seize the time” and do the following:

- Teach and explain why co-ops owned by community members and driven by a concern for the collective welfare are a more beneficial model for retail food distribution than the corporate, profit driven, environmentally damaging grocery store model.
- Recruit more member/owners to our food co-ops.
- Organize community members to realize and actualize their collective power.

“Food co-ops can serve as a symbolic microcosm of the society that we seek to bring into being: a society in which access to high-quality, nutrient-dense foods is a human right.”

- Build relationships with local and regional growers who can provide produce to our communities while reducing the distance that food travels from field to consumer.
- Engage in other mutual aid and self-help efforts that ensure that our communities survive and thrive even in the face of government inaction.

In a sense, food co-ops can serve as a symbolic microcosm of the society that we seek to bring into being: a society in which access to high-quality, nutrient-dense foods is a human right; a society in which the leadership of Black and Brown people and women is centered and intentionally promoted; a society in which community members work cooperatively to address the challenges that impact us collectively.

Times like this require us to take inventory of what is really important in our lives. Circumstances are causing us to focus our attention on the basics like having adequate food, water and shelter. Many of us are cooking more, eating less fast-food and reducing waste. We are forced by circumstances to live more simply, a practice that can serve us well long after the current crisis is over.

By all accounts, physical distancing seems to be an important part of slowing the spread of COVID-19, but it is important that we *maintain and increase* social solidarity. This pandemic brings with it tremendous potential for the transformation of our collective consciousness. In the long run this crisis will convince many of the need for cooperatives and community self-reliance initiatives, universal health care for all and an end to the great racial and economic disparities that have plagued this nation since its beginning.

We can't and won't go back to business as usual!

Malik Yakini is the executive director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network and a board member of the Detroit People's Food Co-op.

Organizing in Upheaval

COVIDeo SERIES

On Wednesday, April 1st, Food Co-op Initiative launched our COVIDeo series, free live video events to answer the questions, "How do startup food co-ops respond to this moment? What do we do now?"

By the week of March 23rd, FCI was experiencing a far higher number of emails and calls from startups than usual, all related to what next steps should be now that COVID-19 had transformed our world. That same week, consultants and experts began reaching out to FCI, saying they were getting the same flood of calls from startups. The FCI team realized our startup community needed to talk, to share ideas, and get advice now and they needed the connections of cooperative community to bolster them through these scary early weeks. In less than a week, the FCI team developed the concept for the series and put out the word about the first events.

Offering 3–4 one-hour sessions a week, all at no cost to attendees, the series has featured topics from how to lead as a board when the future is unknown, to how to raise capital in challenging times; from how to continue your startup's outreach work when no one can leave the house, to why cooperation is more important now than ever before and how to share that message. As of this writing, 19 sessions have been offered over the month of April and have featured speakers from FCI, Columinate, Dorsey & Whitney LLC, Firebrand

Cooperative, Fund For Democratic Communities, the Indiana Cooperative Development Center, Katie Novak Cooperative Coaching, the Neighboring Food Co-op Association, the seven roots group, as well as from peer startup organizers. We have had 20–50 or more attendees every live presentation. All sessions are recorded and made available afterward at no cost to startup organizers.

The series has proven so popular with both startup food cooperators and the presenters that it will be extended through May. New offerings include the potential future impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on feasibility, planning for leadership succession in these challenging times, and more.

"FCI's ability to hear our needs and support startup food co-ops during

the COVID-19 pandemic truly speaks to the cooperative spirit," shares Mikaela Randolph, board chair of SoLA Food Co-op in south Los Angeles, California. "SoLA, like so many of our startup colleagues across the country, was concerned about how to move forward in this climate. The COVIDeo series allowed us to build community and solidarity during this time and learn from experts and our peers about the steps we can take to advance our mission."

And while the series was created to meet the needs of startup food co-ops that are still organizing, leaders of startups close to opening and staff of established co-ops are often in attendance. "Kudos to FCI and the fine job they are doing on the COVIDeo series content," says Chris Roland, General Manager of the currently under construction Fredericksburg Food Co-op, who has made time to attend several of the sessions. "Thank you for launching the series so fast and for being there for startup food co-ops in these confusing times."

Stay up-to-date about upcoming COVIDeo sessions

Check our 'events' page on [Facebook](#):



Join our e-mail list at fci.coop/contact-us for weekly COVIDeo updates, new sessions, and links to recordings of past sessions.

Recordings will be added to the FCI website's Resource Library soon.

Watch past sessions on [FCI's YouTube Channel](#):





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Our Mission

FCI improves the success and sustainability of new food cooperatives delivering healthier food in diverse communities across this country.

Sponsor Shout-out: CoBank



CoBank, a cooperative bank serving agribusinesses, rural infrastructure

providers and Farm Credit associations throughout the United States, is a proud supporter of the Food Co-op initiative. CoBank's financial contributions support FCI's efforts to develop sustainable, cooperative grocery options in rural communities that have lost, or are at risk of losing, their local grocery stores.

"Local grocery stores play an integral role in small, rural towns and villages throughout the United States," says Tom Halverson, president and CEO, CoBank. "They provide sustenance, convenience and contribute to a sense of community. But, like many other main street storefronts, rural grocery stores are closing at alarming rates. The development of grocery cooperatives, owned by the local community, shows real potential to increase food access, retain jobs and strengthen communities."

CoBank's support of FCI is part of its corporate citizenship program, which in 2019, provided more than \$11.3 million in aid to charitable organizations throughout the country.



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