



## FOOD CO-OP INITIATIVE

New co-ops start here.

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



# Co-ops Respond to Crisis

In Imperial Beach, California, the **Suncoast Market Co-op** is moving to open a new store, where neighbors are a diverse mix of White, Latinx, Asian and Black people, many living well below the median household income. Back in April, Co-op members were invited to participate in two task forces set up by Imperial Beach's mayor — one for high-risk populations and one for small business preservation. The experience "...was a real eye-opener on how much food insecurity existed in our city," according to Co-op Outreach Manager Shannon Ratliff. When it became clear that community members were having trouble finding and paying for healthy food, the 550 owner-members stepped up — despite not having a staff or location.



*continued on p. 4*

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

# Co-ops in the News



## A message from Stuart

Here we are, in the midst of a pandemic holiday season. It has been a long, stressful year for most of us, but I am continually inspired to see how co-ops — including those that are not even open yet — are responding with love and care for their staff and communities. Recent announcements of effective vaccines give hope that by this time next year, we will be able to gather safely with our families and friends. Here's wishing good health and good friends for everyone while we ride it out. Thanks to everyone who has risen above and showed the world that cooperatives truly are community assets.

Right now, FCI is working with 97 startups across the country who will make a difference in *their* communities. **We rely on donation from cooperators like you to fund our work. Please consider an end-of-year donation to FCI today: [www.FCI.coop/donate](http://www.FCI.coop/donate)**

—Stuart Reid  
FCI Executive Director  
[Stuart@FCI.coop](mailto:Stuart@FCI.coop)

The **Assabet Co-op Market** announced that Sam McCormick has been hired as their new General Manager. Sam's first big job will be to secure the right site for the co-op. With \$1.3 million already raised in their capital campaign, things are moving in Maynard!



**South Philly Food Co-op** has held in there for ten years and a pandemic, but their co-op will finally celebrate its grand opening in early December. Only a co-op could harness that much love and commitment! (For the rest of you, don't take this as permission to go slow.)

**Gem City Market** in Dayton, Ohio has windows on their new building, a new GM — Leah Behan-Harris — and a tentative opening date in February 2021. Community support? How about 2,750 owners and counting!



With 738 member-owners and growing, **Bethlehem Food Co-op** in Bethlehem, PA is in the final stages of negotiation on a site with a developer and expecting to make an exciting announcement about where their store will be built by the end of 2020. They anticipate opening the estimated 6,500 sq. ft. store in 2022.

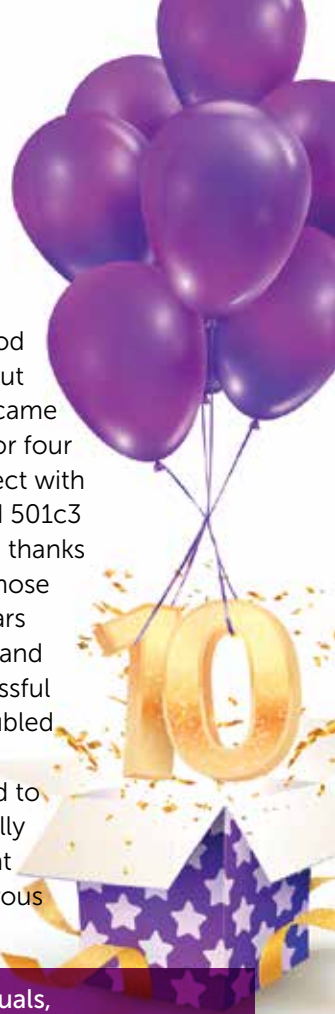
**North Flint Food Market** in Michigan has nearly reached their capital goals with successful fundraising from a variety of public and foundation grants. Their inspiring success includes:

- The Ruth Mott Foundation @ \$250,000
- The Community Foundation of Greater Flint @ \$550,000
- The State of Michigan @ \$506,000
- The City of Flint (CDBG) @ \$200,000



**Oshkosh Food Co-op** In Oshkosh Wisconsin is thrilled to introduce their new General Manager, Jeffrey Thouron! Jeffrey and his family will be relocating to Oshkosh from Rapid City, South Dakota where Jeffrey worked at the Breadroot Natural Foods Co-op, where Jeffrey has been the general manager since 2013. With almost 1400 owners, Oshkosh is on track for opening late summer next year.

# FCI Celebrates 10 Years!



On August 31, BriarPatch officially acquired **Central Square Food Co-op's** assets in exchange for memberships in the existing and future BriarPatch stores. This is an exciting development toward a multi-store future that grows beyond Nevada County. This feels less like an 'acquisition' and more like a merger of two like co-ops coming together for a common good.



**Silverton Food Co-op** in Silverton Oregon has launched their \$800,000 owner loan campaign. Volunteers have already made over 1,000 calls with a goal of reaching every owner by November 20.



It's true — FCI has been supporting food co-op startups for ten years already. But wait... before we incorporated and became Food Co-op Initiative, we were here for four years as Food Co-op 500, a pilot project with a staff of one. We became a registered 501c3 nonprofit development center in 2010 thanks to the Blooming Prairie Foundation whose grant of \$200,000 for the next five years ensured that we could begin growing and offering more programs. With a successful grant application to the USDA, we doubled our budget and hired our second staff person. Since then, we have continued to grow (three staff, now!) and successfully obtain Rural Cooperative Development Grants plus having ongoing and generous support from the co-op community.

Because of the food co-ops, individuals, organizations, and foundations who give generously each year, we are able to offer our services at no cost to food co-op startup community organizers.

## Growing the cooperative economy

Proud supporter of Food Co-op Initiative and startup co-ops for over 10 years.



NCG exists so that member co-ops are successful, and the total cooperative grocery sector grows in size and scope.



Suncoast Market Co-op contacted a produce distributor that purchased from area farmers and offered a seasonal box program. For a modest price, consumers could order a box of fresh seasonal produce and pick it up through a contactless drive-through. The co-op announced the program and solicited donations to cover the cost of boxes for families in need. Expecting 10–20 orders when they started last March, co-op staff were overwhelmed with 75 orders the first week. The program grew until Suncoast Market was providing about 150 boxes of food each week. Eggs and honey from local farms and staple items from local businesses such as bread, meat and dairy products could be purchased as add-ons. Each week, 10 to 15 co-op members volunteered to make this possible, having set up a drive-through, no-contact pickup site in the parking lot of a local church. Owners' children even got involved by handing out co-op ownership information through car windows.

The positive visibility has inspired new owners to invest in the co-op and will give the co-op a head start when it is ready to open its storefront. When local COVID cases eased

and the lockdown was relaxed, the co-op suspended the program, but stand ready to begin again if needed.

**The Little Africa Food Co-op** formed in Cleveland, Ohio after the police killing of an unarmed Black man in the summer of 2016. When the coronavirus began ravaging Cleveland's Black population in neighborhoods where food insecurity was already a crisis, Mikki Smith, vice president of the co-op board and outreach coordinator, was not going to sit back and wait for "someone" to take care of it.

Under Smith's leadership, the co-op worked with the Feed the Soul project and other community partners to identify the community's essential needs and who was most at risk of not having what they needed during the pandemic. Staff identified youth, seniors, and the homeless as most at risk. The co-op created a strategic plan to provide emergency crisis kits, containing food, first aid supplies, activities for families during lockdown, contact lists for services, and suggestions for local sources of food.

With a solid strategy, Smith's team approached community organizations that had access to funding and resources.

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*Little Africa cooperators delivering meals to seniors in May.*

they have already made a name for themselves and an amazing reputation for community engagement.

These are just two examples of dozens of the community outreach and support initiatives that startup food co-ops have provided. Every community has different needs and resources and the co-ops have created programs that meet those needs. From something as simple as calling trees to check in with owners to make sure they are alright and have what they need, to partnerships with local farmers to get fresh food to people in need — food that would have been sold to restaurants that were now closed or had limited patronage.

**By stepping up in their communities, these startups have established their reputation of service and living the cooperative principles. What better way to show the importance and value of co-ops?**

The co-op was adamant that partners follow its plan to ensure the effort was properly focused and geared toward success. The collaboration has been responsible for feeding 350 families since late March. After this success, Little Africa received a grant award, making it possible to assist more communities beyond Central Kinsman. Throughout this project, Little Africa has built a true community of support by listening to what people needed, responding effectively and engaging both volunteers and community organizations to back their work. As they move forward with their plans to open a retail grocery store,



*Fresh produce meal prep kits: veggie medley, cabbage/kale, fresh cilantro*

# Cooperative Wisdom

*Shared expertise from our development partners!*

## How can co-ops effectively maintain community engagement during the pandemic?

Authenticity and community connection are key co-op differentiators. Keep folks' spirits uplifted by showing that their patronage allows for great outreach to happen and reminds them that we're all in this together. Slow down on product and store promotion and focus on a strategy of the co-op modeling generosity, positivity and stewardship. Showcase Principle 7: Demonstrating the co-op's commitment to providing its community its support, resources and gratitude can speak volumes, as well as shore up shopper loyalty and social capital in the future. Use the co-op's donation budget to provide lunches or gift cards to staff or volunteers working at nonprofit organizations, and promotions money for local community heroes like urgent care clinic staff, COVID testing site workers, local farmers supplying food and those providing services at essential government agencies that can accept gifts of gratitude for their services. Take photos and share them on social media and through the co-op's enews. Food co-ops are grocery stores that have a purpose, and a silver lining of this pandemic is this is an opportunity to demonstrate that tangibly and meaningfully.

*Rebecca Torpie  
Marketing and Communications  
Consultant, Columinate*

# Thank YOU startups

for making us part of your team in 2020



**We're looking forward to working with you in 2021:**

**Facilitation**

- Board retreats & board training
- Community Conversations
- Owner Input Process

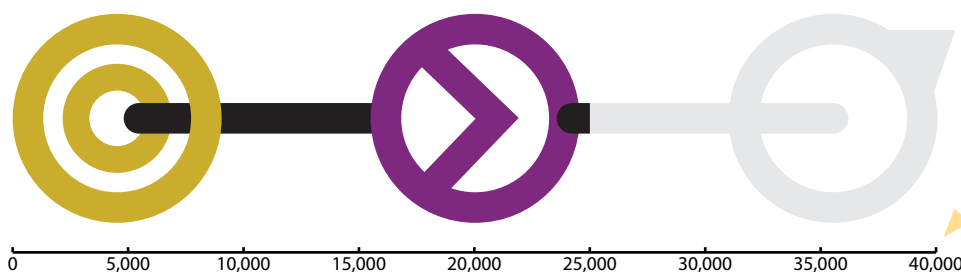
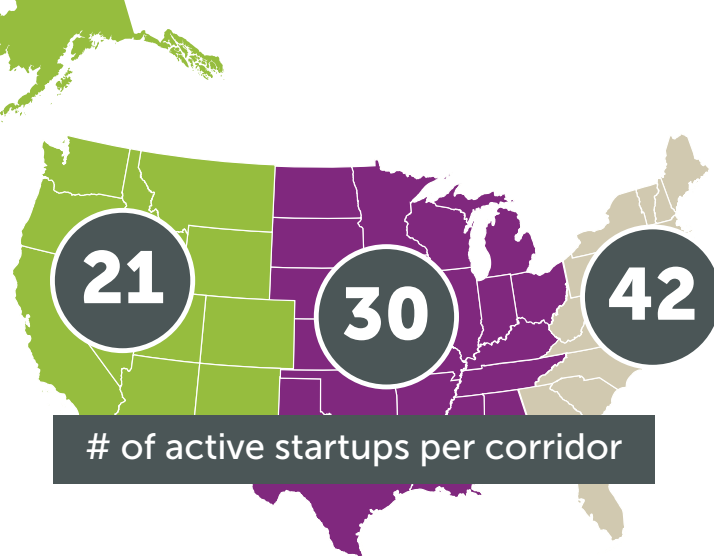
**Project Strategy & Management**

- 360 Feasibility Process



firebrand  
firebrand.coop

# Startups *need* FCI. And FCI needs you!

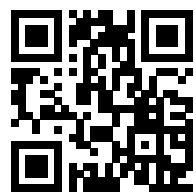


Help us reach our end-of-year fundraising goal of \$40,000! Visit [www.FCI.coop/donate](http://www.FCI.coop/donate)

The challenges facing us in 2020 have been unlike anything we've seen before — we are working to carve out donation space among many worthy non-profits asking for your support. But as we close out 2020 just \$15,000 away from our year-end goal, we need your help.

## Why should you donate to FCI?

Funding from cooperators like you means our services can remain free to the hundreds of food co-op startups all over the U.S. The peer calls. Trainings. Workbooks. Professional guidance. *All these valuable materials startups need to successfully open a food co-op in their communities — that's what your donations fund.*



Help FCI continue *our* journey so startups can continue *theirs*.

Donate today with the QR code at left, or at [www.fci.coop/donate](http://www.fci.coop/donate)

**THANK YOU!**



**"10 years of Friendly City Food Co-op, 10 years of donating to FCI — because we believe that food co-ops are a better way for today and the future!"**

— Steve Cooke,  
GM, Friendly City Food Co-op, FCI Board Member

[www.FCI.coop/donate](http://www.FCI.coop/donate)

# Thank you to our 2018–19 donors:

“FCI continues to provide the Silverton Food Co-op board with valuable support and is always available when we have questions or concerns regarding our next steps. Their videos, documentation, and phone support have been invaluable. Providing opportunities for connections with other co-ops is monumental for us as we continue to move towards opening our doors. We cannot imagine opening our store without FCI.” —*Kelly Hilton, President, Silverton Food Co-op*



“When we first started, FCI was the resource we learned from. We cut our teeth with FCI.

“What really catapulted us was FCI’s sponsorship of our first trip to Up & Coming — we got informed, it got us into the

network of co-ops, helped us establish a relationship with the National Black Food and Justice Alliance and increased our capacity of understanding the dynamics of opening a co-op grocery store.”

—*amaha sellassie, Board Chair, Gem City Market*



“FCI has been an invaluable lifeline for us — offering tailored guidance at every step of our development, connecting us with professionals in the co-op world, coordinating monthly peer calls with other start-ups, and offering encouragement and support through the tricky times. FCI’s dedication to building a cooperative community equipped with strong governance, successful business planning and well-developed community support comes through in everything they do.”

—*Kingston Food Co-op*



“Thank you for all you do to support initiatives like ours. The resources and info you provide are so helpful as we continue our long journey toward a storefront operation.” —*Lauren Greer, Grand Rapids Food Co-op*

“The Food Co-op Initiative has provided us with invaluable guidance, data, mentorship and encouragement over the years. Please consider donating to them now, as we are incredibly grateful for their (free) services.”

—*Oshkosh Food Co-op*



[www.FCI.coop/donate](http://www.FCI.coop/donate)

Do you need to be invoiced instead?  
Email us at [info@FCI.coop](mailto:info@FCI.coop)

Boise Food Co-op, Boise, ID  
Briar Patch Food Co-op, Grass Valley, CA  
Chequamegon Food Co-op, Ashland, WI  
City Center Market, Cambridge, MN  
City Market, Onion River Co-op, Burlington, VT  
Cook County Whole Foods Co-op, Grand Marais, MN  
The Co-op Natural Foods, Sioux Falls, SD  
Cultivate Community Food Co-Op, Benicia, CA  
Eastside Food Co-op, Minneapolis, MN  
Flatbush Food Co-op, Brooklyn, NY  
Friendly City Food Co-op, Harrisonburg, VA  
Littleton Consumer Coop Society, Inc., Littleton, NH  
Maple City Market, Goshen, IN  
The Merc, Lawrence, KS  
Menomonie Market Food Co-op, Menomonie, WI  
Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op, Middlebury, VT  
Mississippi Market, St Paul, MN  
Monadnock Community Market Co-op, Keene, NH  
Monadnock Moon Food Co-op, Keene, NH  
Oneota Community Food Co-op, Decorah, IA  
Oryana Natural Foods Market, Traverse City, MI  
Outpost Natural Foods, Milwaukee, WI  
Ozark Natural Foods, Fayetteville, AR  
People’s Food Co-op La Crosse, La Crosse, WI  
Seward Community Co-op, Minneapolis, MN  
Skagit Valley Food Co-op, Mount Vernon, WA  
Sugar Beet Co-op, Oak Park, IL  
Three Rivers Market, Knoxville, TN  
Valley Natural Foods, Burnsville, MN  
Wedge Co-op TCCP, Minneapolis, MN  
Wheatsville Food Co-op, Austin, TX  
Whole Foods Community Co-op, Duluth, MN  
Willimantic Food Cooperative, Willimantic, CT  
Willy Street Co-op, Madison, WI  
Ypsilanti Food Co-op, Ypsilanti, MI

And thank you to everyone who has already donated to FCI in 2020. You make our work possible!

# FCI Welcomes New Board Members

FCI is proud to welcome three outstanding new members to our board of directors — Olivia Rebanal, Amaha Sellassie and Richard Larochelle will be joining us in January of 2021. We would also like to recognize the service of Leslie Mead, Sohni Black, and Arnold Montgomery who have contributed greatly during their service and will be leaving us soon. Sohni will continue to support FCI as an advisory member of the board.



**Olivia M. Rebanal**  
*Director of Inclusive Food Systems at Capital Impact Partners (CIP)*

Olivia manages the strategy, initiatives and partnerships related to Capital Impact Partners' work in building equitable food systems.

Through innovative programs like the Michigan Good Food Fund, CIP coordinates collaboratives to build an ecosystem of support designed to increase access to affordable healthy food and create opportunities within the food economy, especially for those who are historically excluded. Olivia also oversees the development and implementation of the organization-wide social justice strategy at Capital Impact Partners, a multi-year effort to strategically embed equity and justice into all facets of the organization's work. Olivia is a thought leader and advocate in the CDFI industry for strategically embedding inclusion and equity into programming, frequently invited to lead panels on racial justice.



**amaha sellassie**  
*Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of Center for Applied Social Issues, Sinclair Community College, Dayton, Ohio*

amaha sellassie is a peace builder, social healer, freedom fighter, network weaver and lover of humanity. He's an Associate Professor of Sociology and director of Center for Applied Social Issues at Sinclair Community College in Dayton Ohio. He is co-founder and board chair of the Gem City Market, a community driven effort to address food apartheid through a food coop dedicated to increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables within west Dayton.



**Richard Larochelle**  
*Retired Senior Vice President, National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation*

Rich Larochelle has spent his life championing the cooperative business model. During a 40-year

electric cooperative career including nearly a decade with the federal Rural Electrification Administration (REA) and later senior leadership posts with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) he demonstrated his passion for helping cooperative consumers by fighting to improve the quality of rural life. His lifelong service to cooperatives earned him a place in the Cooperative Hall of Fame.

Since retiring from CFC, Rich has been a key player in the formation of the Fredericksburg Food Cooperative in Fredericksburg, VA, serving in various capacities including board chair. He chairs the Cooperative Development Foundation and teaches a cooperatives course at the University of Mary Washington.

**STARTUP SUPPORT** HOW CAN WE HELP?



- > Site feasibility
- > Store design
- > Equipment
- > Prepared foods planning

*...and more where that came from!*

**sevenroots** [sevenrootsgroup.com/startups](http://sevenrootsgroup.com/startups)



## Columinate

**Contract on management services for co-ops in transition. Bringing experience, passion, and expertise to create financial and cultural shifts within co-ops.**

**Learn more at [Columinate.coop/IGM](http://Columinate.coop/IGM)**



# Calendar

## FCI CLASSROOM

### Our new FCI Classroom launches this month!

The FCI Classroom is an online portal that will offer a series of classes for startup food co-op organizers on a variety of critical organizing topics. Our first FCI Classroom offering, QuickStart startup board training, launches in December and is based off our wildly popular webinar class of the same name. All FCI Classroom offerings can be taken whenever you want, at your own pace. Registration is free, but donations are suggested. Information and registration links will be available soon, so be sure you're on our mailing list and follow us on Facebook: [facebook.com/FoodCoopInit](https://facebook.com/FoodCoopInit)

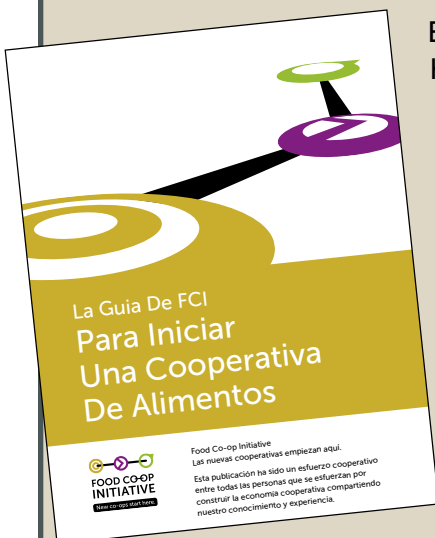


### Up & Coming 2021 goes virtual

The Indiana Cooperative Development Center and Food Co-op Initiative are happy to announce that we will be hosting our first ever virtual conference in early May 2021. We will all miss the in-person experience but promise that the opportunities to learn and network will be there — along with a healthy dose of fun. As plans firm up we will update everyone on our mailing list and on the Up & Coming website, [upandcoming.coop](http://upandcoming.coop)

### New Resource!

#### La Guia De FCI Para Iniciar Una Cooperativa De Alimentos



Esta publicación ha sido un esfuerzo cooperativo entre todas las personas que se esfuerzan por construir la economía cooperativa compartiendo nuestro conocimiento y experiencia.

MEETING THE EVOLVING  
*needs of cooperatives*

Our firm has a dedicated, expert team that services co-ops exclusively and stays up-to-date on trends, challenges, and best practices. Learn more and view COVID-19 resources and resources we have developed for co-ops at [wegnercpas.com/industries/cooperatives](https://wegnercpas.com/industries/cooperatives).

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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 Spotlight: NCG

FCI would like to recognize one of our most important supporters, the National Co+op Grocers. NCG was at the table when the idea for FCI was first laid out and has provided the financial support to make that idea a reality from the start. Over the years we have worked together to create resources and opportunities for new food co-ops to grow and thrive. *Thank you, NCG!*



**Cooperative Board Leadership Development  
training for startups & emerging and  
established co-ops. Join us in 2021!**

**Learn more at [Columinate.coop/CBLD](http://Columinate.coop/CBLD)**



## The Abolitionists Challenge

**Hosted by LaDonna Sanders Redmond**

**Anti-Oppression Readings, Discussion,  
and Education for Cooperators**

**Sign up at [Columinate.coop/challenge](http://Columinate.coop/challenge)  
Next Series Starts February 2021!**