



FOOD CO-OP INITIATIVE

New co-ops start here.

844-324-2667 | www.FCI.coop

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

November 2023



STARTUP MILESTONES: A Focus on Ownership Growth

While announcing a site, breaking ground on construction, or hiring a first general manager are all very exciting and visible milestones in a startup food co-op's development, none of these milestones will lead to a startup's success if it isn't meeting the most important milestone of all – ownership growth. The number of owners needed to show strong community support varies by the startup, depending on both the size of the community and of the overall grocery store they plan to

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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



Faye Mack
FCI Executive Director

A message from Faye

Dear cooperators and friends,

As I wrap up my first year as FCI's Executive Director I am filled with gratitude and with pride. I am grateful to have been welcomed into this community of people passionate about co-ops, food, and the power of community ownership and organizing. I have learned so much from so many of you this year, from the seasoned co-op organizers getting ready to open their stores, to our fellow co-op development experts, to the individuals reaching out to FCI for the first time with a vision for a co-op in their own community. And, I'm so proud of FCI and all we have accomplished with you this year. In this newsletter you'll learn about our record FCI Live attendance, this year's Up & Coming Conference, and the 55 startups who signed up for our Peer Learning Groups this year. You'll see that more open food co-ops than ever before have stepped up to support the startup food co-op movement through our Full Circle Campaign. And, to cap off the year, we're wrapping up our first-ever formal strategic planning process. Thanks to the feedback shared by over 80 individuals and organizations, and thoughtful reflection by our staff and Board, we're finalizing our plan right now and can't wait to share it with you in 2024!

I am inspired by the startup food co-op community's vision and drive. Startups are building just and equitable access to food in their communities, dismantling the impacts of structural racism, historic redlining, and disinvestment and abandonment by supermarkets in communities from small rural towns up to our country's largest cities. And there's momentum building — over 70 different communities have reached out to us for the first time in 2023 so far! In particular, we are hearing from more Black-led startups and more startups in very small rural communities than ever.

Together, startups are redefining what a food co-op can look like, feel like, and be like. We're learning from them and committed to providing the support and tools they need to open a grocery store that's fully supported by their whole community. This has been a banner year, and I can't wait to see where FCI and the startup food co-op movement goes in 2024!

In Cooperation,

Faye C. Mack



On the cover: Building ownership for Fertile Ground Food Cooperative and Village Co-op Market

UP & COMING

food co-op conference

of Attendees:

292

(from 29 states)

of startups:

65

of First Time attendees:

160

of attendees for Black-Led Day:

105



This year's Up & Coming Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota was called "dynamic," "energizing," and "an amazing experience" by attendees and we couldn't agree more. Thank you to everyone who attended and made this event as enriching as it was. A big thank you to our conference co-host, the Indiana Cooperative Development Center, and to the National Black Food & Justice Alliance who organized Black-Led Day. We can't wait for next year!

"Thank you! I am so excited about the topics presented here and the **contacts we have made**. I can't wait to get home and share with the rest of the group."

"This was my first time, I loved the way you promoted the community for black led, and also for all. **The vibe of the whole weekend was amazing**. I believe in this movement and want to keep going hand in hand. Thank you for creating this space to grow and confirm we can open our store successfully."



startup

MILESTONES

A focus on Ownership Growth

continued from cover

open, but one thing is consistent — a startup's success is directly connected to whether there is steady and strong growth in the number of community members that believe in and join the co-op.

A startup food co-op can raise all the money to open their store, find a terrific site and hire the best construction team, and still fail upon opening if the ownership growth momentum isn't there. Why? Because individuals are already finding ways to meet their food needs, even if they're not the ways they'd like. And the co-op will never be the only, nor the absolute cheapest option available. Ownership growth shows the mission and values of the co-op speak deeply to the community and that the community will act upon the important needs the co-op

will meet — for self-determination, for a strong local economy, for space that builds connection — as much as for their desire for access to good food.

Congratulations to all the startups that have met important ownership growth milestones this year! Here's just a smattering of some of the co-ops that are celebrating key milestones this year:

Village Co-op Market of Williamsville, Williamsville, NY — They hit their 1,000 owner milestone in September, just after publicly announcing their future store location in June of this year. Keep that momentum going, VCMW!

Free Range Food Co-op, Grand Rapids, MN — With a population of just over 11,000, this rural Minnesota community passed the 1,000 owner milestone this past September! This accomplishment becomes more amazing when you realize they have not yet publicly announced their future store location yet!

Fertile Ground Food Cooperative, Raleigh, NC — They reached the 800 owner mark in early 2023 but didn't rest on that accomplishment! They then thrilled their 800-and-growing owner base by announcing their future store location in April of this year!



◀ FCI's JQ Hannah celebrating with Wild Onion.

Whitewater Grocery tracking owner growth on social media. ▶



“Thank you FCI for all your support over the years. **We wouldn’t be here today without the amazing resources FCI has shared with us** for free over our 10+ years of development.”

— Lori Burge, GM South Philly Food Co-op



Detroit People’s Food Co-op, Detroit, MI — After struggling with ownership growth in their early organizing years, DPFC is now setting the bar! They reached 2,000 owners in September and have for most of 2023 been adding new owners at the rate of about one owner per day, a pace that is rare and shows immense community support!

Kicking off owner shares — Before offering ownership shares, a startup food co-op must first pull together a clear vision, a strong steering committee, get incorporated, raise public awareness... and *then* they can start selling ownership shares!

Congratulations to all the startups who reached the first major milestone of ownership growth by launching owner shares in 2023, including Mimbres Cooperative (Mimbres, NM), Mountain Provisions Co-op (Lake Arrowhead, CA), Goodness Gracious Grocery (Georgia).

Celebrating the FIVE new co-ops that have opened in 2023!

- Assabet Co-op Market, Maynard, MA
- Dorchester Food Co-op, Boston, MA
- Rise Community Market, Cairo, IL
- Lovettsville Cooperative Market, Lovettsville, VA
- New Melle Food Co-op, New Melle, MO

To the 7,000+ owners, staff, and communities of these new co-ops: **Congratulations on opening your beautiful stores this year!**



FCI's Year-End Campaign is running now through December 31!

startups need FCI



**TOGETHER,
LET'S GET
NEW CO-OPS
OFF THE
GROUND.**

Communities are hungry for stable access to good food. They're hungry for food justice. And, they're hungry for food co-ops: **we've heard from over 70 new communities** looking to learn more about starting a food co-op this year alone!

Starting a food co-op is more expensive and more complicated than ever. This is where FCI comes in. We provide trainings, conferences, workbooks, customized guidance, peer calls, and more. With 55 startup food co-ops enrolled in our Peer Learning Groups Program this year, it's clear that startups need FCI. And we need you. Our work relies on donations from cooperators like you. Help us serve startups by donating today!



Go to our donation page at fci.coop/donate or use the QR code.

FCI's Year-End
Campaign is
happening
NOW!

FCI needs YOU
Campaign goal: \$20,000

Full Circle Campaign Update:

Open Co-ops Are Showing Up for Startups

Established food co-ops are making sure the next generation of food co-ops have the support they need to organize and open their own stores. More food co-ops than ever supported FCI through the Full Circle Campaign. Thank you to each co-op who donated to FCI this year. You make our work possible!



Total number: **45**

First Time Donors: **12**

Round Up Programs: **11**

Patronage: **Flatbush Food Co-op**

Co-ops that increased donations: **16**

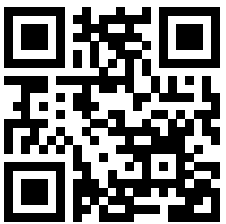
“FCI is the ‘glue’ that holds food co-ops together”

— Rusty Foszcz, Food Shed Co-op, Woodstock, IL

“FCI has been a huge sounding board to ask questions from the beginning of our journey. Everyone at FCI has been helpful and provided great information for our co-op. We greatly appreciate each one of you!

— North Flint Food Market, North Flint, MI

Do you believe in the future of startup food co-ops? We do and we need your help to make it happen!



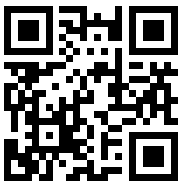
100% of your donation funds our work, so don't wait — make your donation now!

FCI.coop/donate

**DOUBLE
YOUR DONATION**

This year, the FCI Board of Directors is matching all year-end donations up to \$10,000! **Help us raise \$20,000 by December 31** — donate today!

Special thanks to the many donors who continue to show their belief in FCI by supporting our work throughout the year, including our monthly sustaining donors!



FCI.coop/donate

donate now!

COMING SOON

Sneak Peek into 2024:

FCI's programs, including Peer Learning Groups, FCI Live, DeepDive, and the Up & Coming Food Co-op Conference all help startups learn from (and with) each other, innovate together, and learn the latest from food co-op experts. Mark your calendars for what's coming in 2024!

FCI Live Winter Series: Jan. 22– Feb. 1

Registration opening soon!

New Tools & Resources

Spring 2024

Deep Dive Training Series:

Summer 2024

Up & Coming Food Co-op Conference:

Fall 2024

(Dates and location to be announced soon!)

FCI PEER LEARNING GROUPS

Three years of learning, Three years of growing!

We've kicked off our third 10-month cohort of startup food co-op peer groups this fall! Started in 2020, this is our third year of the program and the third year in a row we have a record number of startup food co-ops participating!

Number of startups participating:

60 (a 20% increase over last year)

Number of peer groups:

13 groups of 4–8 startups that are in a similar stage of development that gather monthly to learn together

New trends

42% of all participating startups identify as Black-led with the intention of serving a predominantly Black and/or significantly racially diverse community. *That is almost 2x the number of Black-led startups participating last year!*

New offerings

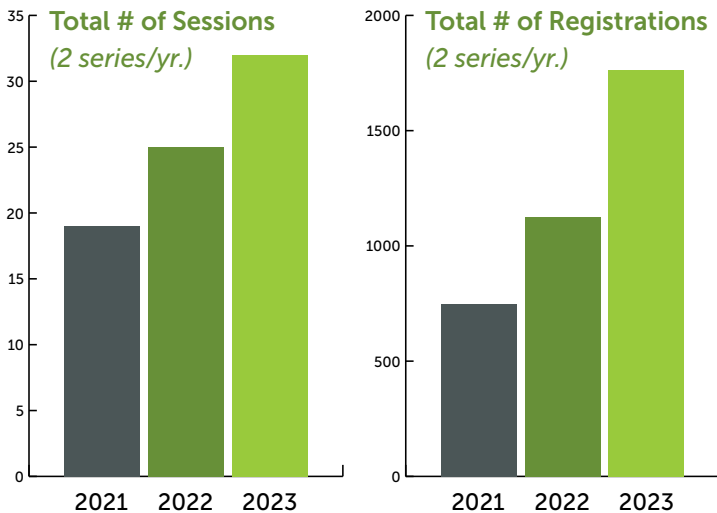
In addition to the monthly peer learning calls that have always served as the core of the program, we've made an exciting addition to the program this year — **Peer Learning Meetups!** These are now offered quarterly to all participating startups as an opportunity to gather on a more informal basis and meet startups outside of those in their peer group, building additional connections and learning throughout the entire national startup food co-op movement!



is growing...
and evolving!

in 2023:

The FCI Live series showcased 32 sessions from cooperative experts and peer presenters. 2023 also saw a 57% increase in the number of registrations over last year — *the largest increase in the event's four-year history!*



in 2024:

This twice per year event will transition to a once-a-year signature event. What does this mean for you?

- We are **increasing** the number of sessions
- We are **adding** new topics and several new speakers
- The series will run for **two weeks**, Monday–Thursday, January 22–February 1



“This series never disappoints! It’s always great info presented in an understandable fashion, and always timely for our startup’s needs. We appreciate that it is both ‘how-to’ and also meaningful sessions on the larger cooperative movement.” — Summer 2023 FCI Live attendee



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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.

*FCI is an equal opportunity provider
and employer*

STAY IN THE KNOW THROUGHOUT THE YEAR!



So simple!

Keeping up to date with startup food co-op news became much easier we launched our e-newsletter earlier this year. Sign up today to join over 2,300 of your fellow cooperators to read about startups reaching major milestones, new resources and tools, upcoming events, trends and emerging best practices, and more! We send our newsletter every 4–6 weeks, with occasional short updates in between.

or you can go to: fci.coop/news-events