



2023 IMPACTS REPORT

OUR VISION

We envision a world where every community has the power and ability to build a thriving cooperative food system that provides them with the food they need and want.

OUR MISSION

Food Co-op Initiative partners with communities to build a more just food system, providing critical support as they organize and open community-owned grocery stores.

OUR APPROACH

- **Provide expert guidance** and resources on how to start a strong and sustainable food co-op
- **Facilitate opportunities** for food co-op organizers to connect with each other about challenges and successes
- **Co-create strategies** for overcoming systemic barriers to community-controlled food access with food co-op organizers experiencing the greatest barriers
- **Serve as an advocate** for the startup food co-op movement, ensuring startup needs and voices are present within the larger food co-op movement
- **Promote the food co-op model** as a tool for food sovereignty, racial justice, and equitable community development

Co-ops represented on our cover (clockwise from upper left):

Detroit People's Food Co-op; Assabet Community Market;
Lovettsville Cooperative Market & Friendly Food City Co-op;
Fertile Ground Food Co-op; Food Shed Co-op; Oshkosh Food Co-op



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear cooperators and friends,

2023 was a year of gathering and evolving, and of sharing. Leadership transition within FCI and the continued evolution of the startup food co-op movement created an important opportunity for us to build alignment around a vision for the future we want to co-create — and to develop a path to get there. We gathered up our own learnings and important insights shared by many of you. We explored our organizational history, our values, our collective vision, and FCI's unique strengths. Together, we considered ideas of community and of a startup food co-op movement.

From this, FCI is evolving. Our staff and board developed a new vision and a clear-eyed mission. We created a strategic plan that centers equity and will guide our work and decision making for the next five years. After laying this foundation in 2023, we are moving forward with passion, determination, and purpose. It has been invigorating to share our evolution with you all so far in 2024.

While we invested in reflecting, listening, and developing our strategic path forward, FCI — and the startup food co-op movement — did not hit pause, or even slow down. Our strategic planning process was bolstered by the energy and momentum in our community and in the demand for our programs and expertise. As you will read in this report, our programs deepened and grew in 2023. These programs are evolving, too, as we learn from all of you who are leading the way in developing new and innovative practices to support your co-ops' development.

We are truly grateful to all of you — cooperators, partners, donors, staff, and board — who are essential to our success and the success of the startup food co-op movement. Thank you for your collaboration and support. We are honored to share this report on FCI's programs and impact in 2023 and the stories of just some of the startups we work with and are inspired by. We plan to continue to gather, to evolve, and to share with all of you in 2024 as we strive to bring our vision of a just and cooperative food system to fruition alongside each of you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jaye C. Mack".

Executive Director



LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

An independent, volunteer board of directors, supported by FCI staff, governs Food Co-op Initiative. We are grateful to collaborate with such an experienced team of leaders whose innovation, philanthropy, and advocacy guide and advance our strategic objectives.

Last year, FCI's board and staff embarked on a robust strategic planning process that has resulted in an exciting way forward for the organization rooted in equity and justice. FCI continues to support startup food co-ops across the country with the essential tools and resources they need to organize in their communities. Through one-on-one support, peer groups, the wildly popular FCI Live, and the inspiring yearly Up & Coming Food Co-op Conference, we continue to do our work with energy and innovation. We do our work because you inspire us with the passion, creativity, and skills that you bring to the work of co-op development.

While the strategic planning process is completed, the work of the board is certainly not done. We look forward to supporting the sustainability and viability of FCI through change and growth. We are grateful for the work that Olivia Rebanal has done for FCI over her years of board service. We will miss her voice.

On behalf of the entire Board of Directors, thank you to the FCI staff, to donors, and to organizers for all you do to support the vision of creating food cooperatives in all the communities that wish to have one in the effort to one day have a just and equitable food system for all.

In cooperation,

Darnell Adams (she/her)

FCI Board Chair; Leadership Coach, Facilitator, Strategist, Firebrand Cooperative

2023 FCI STAFF

Faye Mack (she/her), Executive Director

JQ Hannah (ze/zir), Director of Programming

Mychaela Brandle (she/her),
Director of Community Engagement

CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS



Vice Chair: Anne Misak (she/her)
*Senior Program Manager,
Healthy Food Financing Initiative,
Reinvestment Fund*



Secretary: Jamila Medley (she/her)
*Organizational & Leadership
Development Consultant*



Treasurer: Val Roach (she/her)
*Executive VP and CFO, National
Cooperative Business Association
Cooperative League of the United
States of America (NCBA CLUSA)*



R.L. Condra (he/him)
*Vice President of Government Affairs,
National Venture Capital Association*



Steve Cooke (he/him)
*General Manager, Friendly City
Food Co-op, Harrisonburg, Virginia*



Richard Dines (he/him)
*Engagement Consultant,
America's Credit Unions;
2023 FCI Board Chair*



Gerardo Espinoza (he/him)
*Executive Director, Local Enterprise
Assistance Fund (LEAF)*



John Guerra (he/him)
*Business, Real Estate, and Store
Development Director, National
Co+op Grocers (NCG) Store
Development*



Richard Larochelle (he/him)
*A Founding Director of Fredericksburg
Food Co-op; retired Senior VP,
National Rural Utilities Cooperative
Finance Corporation*



amaha sellassie (he/him)
*A Founding Dir. of Gem City Market;
Co-ED of Co-op Dayton; Assoc. Professor
& Director of the Center for Applied Social
Issues at Sinclair Community College*



Jeanie Wells (she/her)
*Retail Grocery Specialist and
Organizational Development
Consultant, Columinate*



Additional board member serving in 2023:
Olivia M. Rebanal (she/her)
Chief Impact Officer, Ecotrust

OUR IMPACT

94

active startups
served by FCI
in 2023

70+

inquiries in 2023
from communities
interested in starting
a food co-op.

181

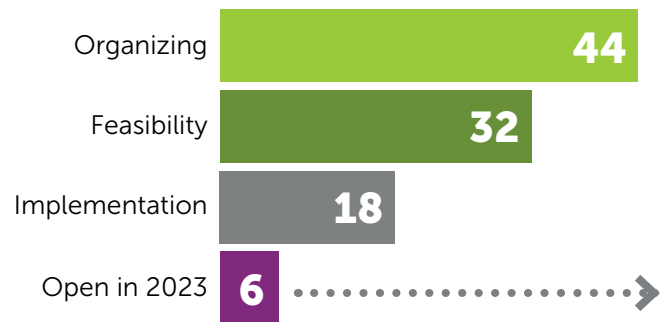
new startups
opened since our
work began

We've been
supporting startups
for **19 years**:
5 as Food Co-op 500
+
14 as FCI

**"You're my first stop in
gathering information on
forming a food co-op and
you are very informative!"**

- recent email inquiry

of co-ops by stage:



36

34

24

of active startups per corridor



Of current startups, about
40% are in USDA rural communities
and **60%** in urban areas.

6

startup food co-ops stocked their shelves and welcomed their community in to shop for the first time in 2023. FCI was honored to have worked closely with three of these startups: Assabet Co-op Market, Dorchester Community Food Co-op, and Hudson Grocery Cooperative. We have supported and learned alongside them since their start. Congratulations to all six co-ops, their owners, and their communities!



ASSABET CO-OP MARKET | MAYNARD, MA

"2023 was a year of major change and transformation for our co-op. Often it was tumultuous, raising the final amount of capital in the spring before we opened, having a wildly busy summer and then a slow fall. But the persistent hard work on the part of the staff and board to learn and grow through all of these things have resulted in a space that is starting to thrive. None of this would have been possible without the strong and persistent support from our co-op community, showing up with their lending and volunteer support continuously to help open the store, and then showing up and shopping, engaging with staff, giving feedback, and living into this space that is all of ours."



HUDSON GROCERY COOPERATIVE
HUDSON, WI



LOVETTSVILLE COOPERATIVE MARKET
LOVETTSVILLE, VA



RISE COMMUNITY MARKET
CAIRO, IL



NEW MELLE FOOD CO-OP
NEW MELLE, MO



DORCHESTER COMMUNITY FOOD CO-OP | BOSTON, MA

"After 12 years of organizing and planning, Dorchester Food Co-op opened our doors in October 2023. We are achieving the vision we dreamed about, including hiring a full staff from the immediate neighborhood that reflects the diversity of our community, and stocking products that celebrate the many cultures of Dorchester. Over 2,000 households are now member-owners of our co-op and we continue to partner with community organizations to distribute fresh produce to families who struggle with food insecurity, and supporting local food entrepreneurs and farms."

STARTUP HIGHLIGHTS



SOUTH LOS ANGELES FOOD CO-OP (SOLA)

South Los Angeles, CA (pop. 818,043) Stage 2B

Next milestone: Locating future store site, capital campaign

Organizing in diverse, historically under-resourced communities in South L.A., this Black-led startup aims to address healthy food access issues with a full-service grocery store selling natural and organic foods. In addition to empowering nutritional eating, SoLA will be a path for economic empowerment through the shared ownership model. With over 675 owners in an area currently facing gentrification trends, SoLA is about lifting up the community voices and representing their deep roots with passion and care.



MAG'S MARKET

Warrenton, NC (pop. 845) Stage 1

Next milestone: Financial feasibility study (pro forma)

The last full-service grocery store in Warrenton, NC closed in 2020, sparking a community conversation about food security. The Steverson family, partnering with others in the community, purchased a building in the heart of their downtown to house a future grocery store. They chose the cooperative model to allow the community to create food access, jobs, and financial empowerment. This Black-led startup is focused on building a full-service grocery, centering local farmers and producers.



CALEDONIA FOOD CO-OP

St. Johnsbury, VT (pop. 5,963) Stage 3A

Next milestone: Complete funding, hire a GM

After building a 700 member base over 4 years of organizing, the Caledonia Food Co-op decided to swing for the fences in 2023. A downtown building, (formerly a Walgreens) was about to be leased to a dollar store. The community rallied and the co-op raised \$350,000 in a matter of weeks. The co-op has since raised \$850,000 and secured bridge financing to acquire the 13,000 sq. ft. location, growing its membership by over 50% in just six months.



MAGDALENA FOOD COOPERATIVE INITIATIVE

Magdalena, NM (pop. 786) Stage 1

Next milestone: Launch membership drive

The village of Magdalena has been without a full-service grocery store since 2012. A group of mothers and residents envisions a full-service grocery store that works with local farmers and farmers' markets, delivers food to those without transportation, and more. The co-op formed in February, 2023, and successfully incorporated one year later!

UP & COMING

food co-op conference

The 2024 Up & Coming is happening September 12–14 in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Learn more at www.upandcoming.coop



292

attendees
(160 first-time)

65

co-ops from
28 states

44

workshops
in 6 tracks

58

presenters

"Thank you! Blown away with all my new cooperative friends. Conference was so impactful. I will definitely be attending next year!"

— first-time U&C attendee

The Up & Coming Conference was co-hosted by the Indiana Cooperative Development Center and Food Co-op Initiative. We were honored to partner with the **National Black Food and Justice Alliance** to host the third annual Black-led Day for over 105 Black cooperators.

"Great conference! Really appreciate the dedicated Thursday programming. Thanks for your commitment and for dedicating funds for the Black-led workshops."

— Black-led Co-op Day attendee





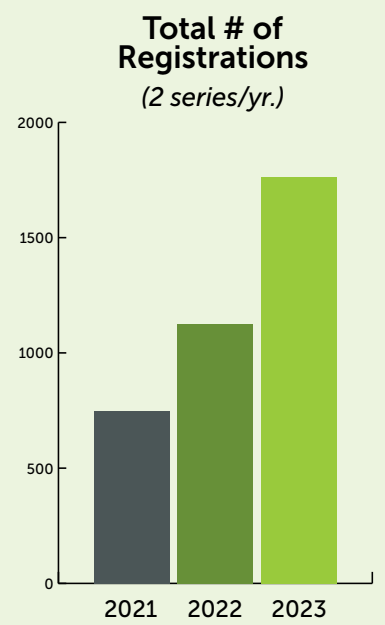
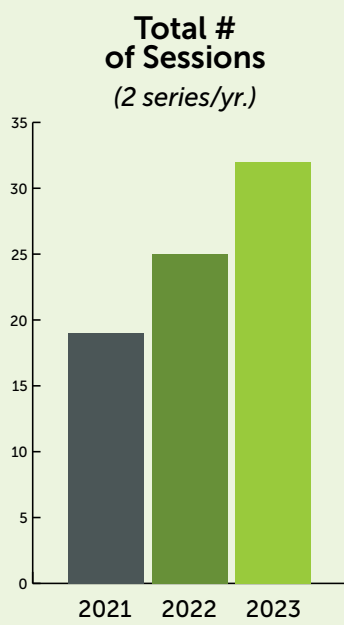
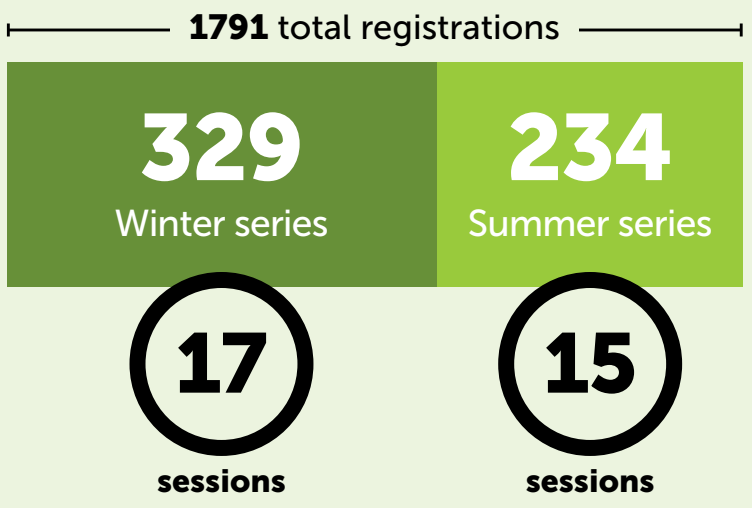
The FCI Live series showcased 32 sessions from cooperative experts and peer presenters. 2023 also saw a 57% increase in the number of registrations over last year — **the largest increase in the event’s four-year history!**



“I am particularly grateful for the practical advice and tips you shared on how to build a strong and engaged community around the cooperative, as well as the resources you recommended for further learning.

FCI's generosity and support have been incredibly valuable to me. I cannot thank you enough for your kindness and willingness to support us along the way.”

— Cassandra Loftlin,
Goodness Gracious Grocery





**average #
of attendees
per workshop**



Thanks to all our
presenters who
shared their skills
and knowledge!

PARTNER ORGS THAT PRESENTED:

- Assabet Co-op Market
- BLACK LABEL Consulting and Coaching
- CoEverything
- Columinate
- Cooperative Fund of the Northeast
- Detroit Black Community Food Security
- ECRS
- Firebrand Cooperative
- Gem City Market
- Illinois Cooperative Development Center
- Jamila Medley, Organizational & Leadership Development Consultant
- Katie Novak Cooperative Coaching
- Ladonna Sanders Redmond
- National Black Food and Justice Alliance
- National Cooperative Grocers
- Network for Developing Conscious Communities
- Rachel DB Creative
- The Rural Grocery Initiative at Kansas State University
- Sassy Facilitation
- seven roots
- Seward Community Co-op

PEER STARTUPS THAT PRESENTED:

- Chicago Market
- Detroit People's Food Co-op
- Dorchester Food Co-op
- Fertile Ground Food Co-op
- Food Shed Co-op
- Little Africa Food Cooperative
- West Georgia Farmers Cooperative
- Wild Onion Market Co-op

FCI CLASSROOM

QuickStart

Startup board training from FCI



startups

QuickStart was designed for the needs of new startup food co-op board members. It's intended to help newly elected startup board members get up to speed fast on the basics of the responsibilities of a working board of a startup food co-op and on the startup food co-op development model. In 2023, 13 different startups participated in the training — **a 30% increase from the previous year.**

"I am really grateful for this class as a way to ground and get some direction in the (wonderful) muchness of starting a food co-op."

— Jennifer Goodheart,
Board Member of Common Share
Food Co-op in Amherst, MA

FCI PEER LEARNING GROUPS

10

total peer groups

4–8 startups in each group, in a similar stage of development that gather monthly to learn together

55

startups participating

(which is 59% of all active food co-op startups that FCI is in aware of nationally)

2023 was FCI's third full year of offering the Peer Learning Groups Program. The 10-month long program launches in the fall and consists of peer cohort groupings of 4-8 startup food co-ops. Each month, they meet via Zoom to share updates on their progress, learn from one another, and have training or conversations on startup food co-op topics that are selected by them to meet their co-op's current needs.

This program is the beating heart of the support FCI offers to the startup movement — it connects the groups to learn from and with one another in a way that rapidly improves the organizing of all startup food co-ops across the country.

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 double* the number of Black-led startups participating in 2022!

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 meetups are an opportunity to gather startups together from different peer groups that may be in very different stages of development, but deeply connected in other ways. We offer meetups to discuss challenges/opportunities

that these startups uniquely share due to a unifying trait — such as being Black-led, organizing in a large city of half a million people or more, organizing in a rural community, organizing in a community with high ethnic diversity, and more. These are offered every few months, in addition to their regular peer calls, to connect startups across the country to brainstorm and share knowledge!

"FCI has enabled SoLA Food Co-op to move forward with confidence, by building a peer community of start co-ops that we can learn from and grow with."

— Mikaela Randolph, Bahni Turpin,
Mychal Turpin
SoLA Food Co-op

Bill Gessner

STARTUP FOOD CO-OP AWARD



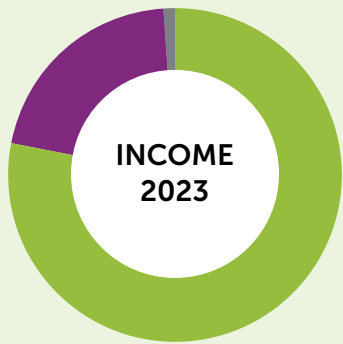
2023 AWARD WINNER:

HUDSON GROCERY COOPERATIVE

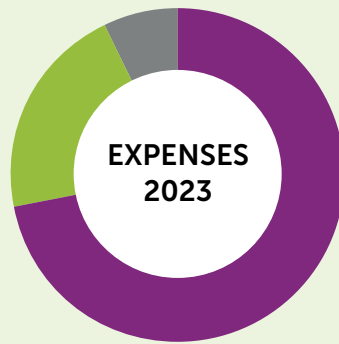
This award is granted in honor of the late Bill Gessner, who developed the '4 Cornerstones in 3 Stages' development model that has served as a development map for startups for almost two decades. The food co-op community would like to congratulate Hudson Grocery Cooperative for their impressive commitment to using the '4 Cornerstones in 3 Stages' Development Model, their outstanding community support, and the carefully assessed projection for a successful storefront.

"This award gave the Hudson Grocery Board and its owners a major boost just when we needed it. We are grateful for the funds as they came at an important time to help fuel our next critical steps and made our board more cohesive at key stages of our development. We were honored by the Gessner award presented by Mr. Gutknecht who attended our community gathering last spring which added extra excitement amongst those in attendance. We were honored to be additionally acknowledged at the Up & Coming conference in St. Paul last September and to be given a chance to share a bit about our journey during one of the track sessions. On December 1st, 2023, we opened our first store!"

— Joe Rouleau, Board President,
Hudson Grocery Cooperative



- Grants **79%**
- Contributions **21%**
- Other **<1%**



- Mgmt & General **21%**
- Programming **72%**
- Fundraising **7%**

LEGACY



ORGANIZATIONAL FUNDERS



We are grateful to the **60+ individuals** who donated to FCI in 2023, either as monthly sustaining donors or with an annual contribution. Every gift supports our work immeasurably, thank you!

Thank you to the **14 organizations and businesses** that sponsored FCI Live in 2023! Your support helps us keep FCI Live free and accessible to all.

DOWN

FULL CIRCLE 2023:

We are grateful to these 44 established food co-ops that are investing in the next generation of food co-ops. Thank you!

Ashland Food Co-op

Ashland, Oregon

Belfast Community Co-op

Belfast, Maine

Bluehill Food Co-op

Bluehill, Maine

Boise Food Co-op

Boise, Idaho

City Market/Onion River Co-op

Burlington, Vermont

Common Ground Food Co-op

Urbana, Illinois

Cook County Whole Foods

Grand Marais, Minnesota

East Aurora Co-op Market

East Aurora, New York

Eastside Food Co-op

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Erie Food Co-op

Erie, Pennsylvania

Fiddleheads Food Co-op

New London, Connecticut

First Alternative Co-op

Corvallis, Oregon

Flatbush Food Cooperative

Brooklyn, New York

Fredericksburg Food Co-op

Fredericksburg, Virginia

Friendly City Food Co-op

Harrisonburg, Virginia

Gem City Market

Dayton, Ohio

Littleton Food Co-op

Littleton, New Hampshire

Maple City Market

Goshen, Indiana

Menomonie Market Food Co-op

Menomonie, Wisconsin

Mississippi Market

St. Paul, Minnesota

Monadnock Food Co-op

Keene, New Hampshire

Open Harvest Cooperative Grocery

Lincoln, Nebraska

Outpost Natural Foods Co-op

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Park Slope Food Coop

Brooklyn, New York

People's Food Co-op –

La Crosse & Rochester

La Crosse, Wisconsin

Portland Food Co-op

Portland, Maine

Rising Tide Co-op

Damariscotta, Maine

River Valley Co-op

Northampton, Massachusetts

Roanoke Co-op

Roanoke, Virginia

Sioux Falls Food Co-op

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Skagit Valley Food Co-op

Mount Vernon, Washington

SLO Food Co-op

San Luis Obispo, California

South Philly Food Co-op

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Spiral Food Co-op

Hastings, Minnesota

Springfield Food Co-op

Springfield, Vermont

The Common Market

Frederick, Maryland

The Merc

Lawrence, Kansas

TPSS Co-op

Takoma Park, Maryland

Urban Greens Co-op Market

Providence, Rhode Island

Valley Natural Foods

Burnsville, Minnesota

Viroqua Food Co-op

Viroqua, Wisconsin

Whole Foods Co-op

Duluth, Minnesota

Willimantic Food Co-op

Willimantic, Connecticut

Willy Street Co-op

Madison, Wisconsin



total co-ops
donated
in 2023



first time
donors



increased
their donation
from 2022

GATHER. EVOLVE. SHARE.

Food co-ops are community. You're owned **by** your community, you grow **with** your community, you exist **for** your community. And collectively, food co-ops are also a community. Together, we can grow our food co-op community. Dedicated people across the country are working tirelessly to organize and open strong food co-ops. You know better than most that it's not easy, and they need your help!

At FCI, we provide accessible expert guidance and resources, facilitate peer learning and community building, and partner with co-op organizers and other co-op development experts to co-create best

practices and innovative strategies to help more startup food co-ops move forward to opening a vibrant store.

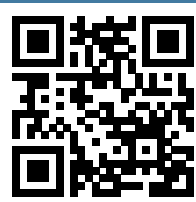
We invest in efforts that focus on startups led by communities facing racial and/or economic oppression and community disinvestment, knowing that helping to dismantle systemic barriers to success will build a more just and thriving cooperative food system for all.

Last year, 44 open food co-ops came together to invest in new food co-ops through the Full Circle Fund. **Will your co-op join the Full Circle Fund in 2024?**

“The deliberate FCI efforts to cultivate these safe and empowering environments serve as a beacon of hope for a more equitable and inclusive cooperative future. As we continue to collaborate and innovate, FCI is key to this transformative change — creating a legacy of opportunity for generations to come.”

— Allannah Hines (she/her/hers)

Weaver Street Market Board of Directors Chair
Chief Culture, Engagement, and Impact Officer (Manager of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)
E.Q.U.I.T.Y. Alliance co-founder



FCI.coop/donate

YES, your co-op can pledge now and be invoiced later!
Email Faye at **faye@fci.coop** and we'll take care of the rest.

GOAL: \$100,000

Three ways to give:

Your co-op's donation is helping communities across the country build a more just, cooperative food system. A Full Circle donation can fit any co-op's budget:

- 1. Make a direct donation.** You can give now, or pledge and give later.
- 2. Dedicate one month** of your co-op's Round Up at the Register program to FCI, helping your community pay it forward without impacting your co-op's budget.
- 3.** Name FCI as a beneficiary of **your owners' donated patronage rebate**. Some co-ops split their rebate between FCI and a local nonprofit, investing in the cooperative community *and* their local community!

***THANK YOU!** Together, we can make sure that new food co-ops have what they need to develop and open strong, vibrant stores that nourish their communities.*

"The East Aurora Co-op wouldn't be where it is today if it wasn't for the amazing efforts of FCI supporting our co-op in its developing stages. We want to give back to your organization by proposing a Round Up at the Register partnership for the months of

May and June, 2024. We're proud to partner with such a fundamental organization as yours."

—Zoë Sharp,
East Aurora Co-op
Marketing & Communications



"The work FCI does is so critical to all the communities that want to take food access into their own hands. We need FCI. This is why I became a monthly donor."

— Brad Lynch,
Sustaining Donor





FOOD CO-OP INITIATIVE

New co-ops start here.

PO Box 327,
Londonderry VT, 05148

844-324-2667

www.FCI.coop

"If it wasn't for FCI's support, I think we honestly might have given up long ago..."



"Opening a food co-op is not easy and not for the faint of heart. I can't imagine how any community could open a food co-op without FCI's guidance. FCI has identified each key milestone, given us the tools to reach each goal, and inspired us to keep going."

— Kim Frink,
SunCoast Market Co-op,
Imperial Beach, CA

(planning to
open in 2024!)

**FCI's FULL CIRCLE
campaign has launched:**

*Help FCI help more startups
like SunCoast!*