

# Grants Build Co-op Economy

BY ROSIE WEAVER

In September, Food Co-op Initiative announced grants to 10 new startup food co-ops. An additional four co-ops will receive scholarships for board and organizer training. All 14 awardees have demonstrated a focus on local economy, community building, and healthy food options to their communities.

Food Co-op Initiative is a 501(c)3 nonprofit dedicated to building a support system for new food co-ops, particularly during the early stages before startups have access to capital. Our grants, free consultations, training, and extensive online library of educational resources have helped dozens of co-ops get their start since Food Co-op Initiative's inception as the Food Co-op 500 partnership in 2005.

Among those receiving funding this year is Capital City Food Co-op in Juneau, Alaska. Juneau residents began organizing in May 2012 to bring a co-op to their remote northern city, which is accessible only by boat or airplane. "People are individualistic here," says organizer Evelyn Rousso, "but the frontier sense of looking out for one's neighbors is also a strong bond. Not many people could identify the Rochdale Principles, but openness to all, democracy, honest business practices, benefits to those who participate, cooperation with others, and the good of the community are all things that really do resonate here and are reflected in many, many ways in the daily life of our city."

Another grantee is Dorchester Community Food Co-op, located in one of Boston's largest and most diverse neighborhoods. More than just a grocery store, in the words of organizer Jenny Silverman, "Dorchester will be a community and worker-owned market and food hub that provides economic opportunity; healthy, affordable



Dorchester Community Food Co-op members gather for a community event.



food access and education around healthy food choices." The Dorchester Community Food Co-op hopes to be part of a network of social enterprises that reinvigorates their inner-city commercial district.

This is the second round of grants distributed by Food Co-op Initiative since it incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit. In 2011, \$100,000 was awarded to 14 rural co-ops. This year, both rural and urban co-ops were eligible, and \$50,000 was awarded in each category. However, Food Co-op Initiative Executive Director Stuart Reid says the financial support is only part of the package. "More important is the one-on-one mentoring we give our grantees. Along with regular contact through email and telephone, Food Co-op Initiative development specialists will make personal visits to each startup to provide educational workshops and organizational support."

Food Co-op Initiatives grants are funded in part by USDA Rural Development and Blooming Prairie Foundation. ■

## 2012 Seed Grant recipients

- Capital City Food Co-op (Juneau, Alaska)
- Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (Detroit, Mich.)
- Dorchester Community Food Co-op (Boston, Mass.)
- Fuquay-Varina Community Market (Fuquay-Varina, N.C.)
- Gateway Food Co-op (St. Paul, Minn.)
- Granite City Co-op (Barre, Vt.)
- Green Top Grocery (Bloomington, Ill.)
- Hub City Co-op (Spartanburg, S.C.)
- Many Hands Food Co-op (Binghamton, N.Y.)
- Wasatch Cooperative Market (Salt Lake City, Utah)

## 2012 scholarship recipients

- Deerfield Community Co-op (Deerfield, Wis.)
- Ellensburg Food Co-op (Ellensburg, Wash.)
- Hudson Grocery Cooperative (Hudson, Wis.)
- Local Roots Food Co-op (Buffalo, Minn.)

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