

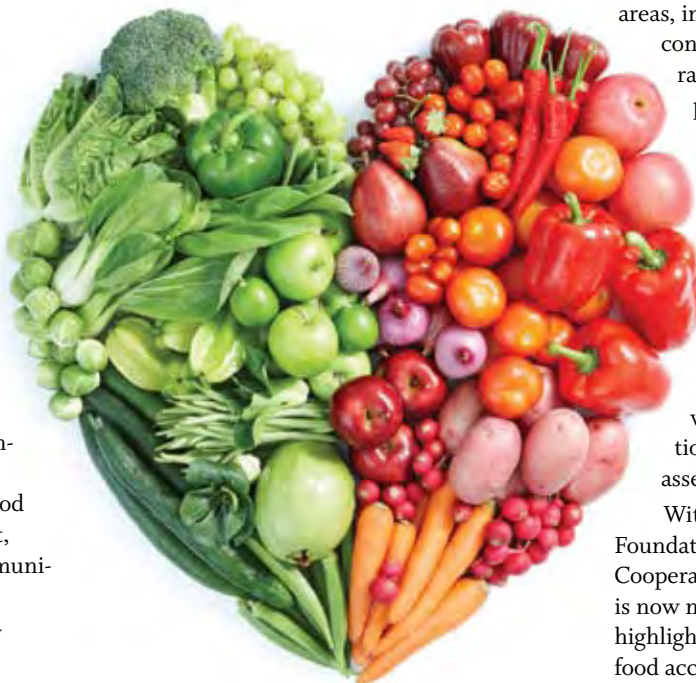
# Healthy Foods, Cooperative Communities

BY MICHA JOSEPHY

The national conversation around healthy food access has recently gained significant momentum and attention. While co-ops have pioneered many food system innovations, including organic and fair trade retail, engaging economically marginalized communities can still be challenging. This was reemphasized this summer when CCMA conference keynote speaker Mari Gallagher called on food co-ops to expand their healthy food access programs.

The Cooperative Fund of New England ([www.coopfund.coop](http://www.coopfund.coop)) and the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA, [www.nfca.coop](http://www.nfca.coop)) are partnering to help food co-ops address this challenge. The project, called “Healthy Foods, Cooperative Communities,” has three goals:

- increasing access to healthy, regionally sourced food and food co-op member/ownership among New England’s economically marginalized individuals;
- supporting information-sharing among food co-ops to this end; and
- raising the profile of food co-ops as vehicles to increase healthy food access.



The project has surveyed 23 NFCA member food co-ops and six others to identify obstacles to food access and co-op membership and to learn about programs that address these barriers. The survey focused on a few

areas, including product selection and pricing, consumer education, community collaboration, public subsidies, and membership programs.

The survey illuminated numerous exciting initiatives, including dedicating staff for community outreach, “affordability tours” to educate consumers about shopping on a tight budget, and co-op-sponsored food-subsidy programs. The survey also identified challenges such as the compatibility of government programs with food co-op priorities, the limitations of scale, and the lack of program assessment data.

With support from The Cooperative Foundation, CoopMetrics, and the National Cooperative Grocers Association, this project is now moving into the next phase, which will highlight examples of best practices in healthy food access, produce educational materials, and support program implementation. We will update the *Cooperative Grocer* readership on our progress as we move forward.

If you would like to complete our survey, please contact Micha Josephy ([micha@coopfund.coop](mailto:micha@coopfund.coop)). ■

## Lost customers?

**Cooperative Grocer’s online directory** receives thousands of visits per month. Potential customers may be looking for your store there.

Is your listing up-to-date? **You can make the changes yourself**, including adding your logo or store photos.

Send an email to [dan@cooperativegrocer.coop](mailto:dan@cooperativegrocer.coop) if you need your login information again or other assistance.

