

2014 Brings a Diverse Crop of New Food Co-ops

BY STUART REID



This year's new crop of food co-ops spans the country from Hawaii to the tip of Maine. Not surprisingly, there is as much diversity in the co-ops as in their geography.

Second Kitchen Co-op in Boulder, Colorado, began as a buying club and is starting its retail operations small, with a modest inventory of local and organic products and using member labor. In addition to the equity invested by its 120 members, Second Kitchen raised \$40,000 through a Kickstarter campaign to fund its opening. An "angel investor" is covering Second Kitchen's first nine months of rent. If you check out their Facebook page, you will want to stop by the store for their beautiful, mouth-watering sandwiches: www.facebook.com/thesecondkitchen.

In Columbus, Ohio, the **Near East Co-op** also emerged from a buying club, and in collaboration with Local Matters has opened a small retail store to provide greater food sovereignty and community food security in a

neighborhood described as low-income and a food desert. The co-op emphasizes fresh and healthy foods and strives to keep prices affordable. Unfortunately, as of this writing, the co-op is having financial difficulties, and unless new community investment materializes quickly they may have to close.

Founders of **Honey Creek Market**, in Plain, Wisconsin, formed a cooperative to convert a local store to community ownership. The co-op operates in a 6,400-square-foot facility that had been under private ownership since 1918. It features "healthy food at an affordable price," including many local products and a catering service. Check out the great historical photos on their website (www.hcmcoop.com).

Mitchell, Nebraska, suffered from the same fate as many other rural communities—there was no local grocery store. Now that **Home-town Harvest** has opened, a second, traditional grocery store has also come to town; but there seems to be room for both, with Home-town emphasizing local (preferably organic)

products. In addition to the many local volunteers who helped make the store possible, the **Big Hollow Co-op** in Fort Laramie, Wyoming, provided advice, encouragement, and hands-on startup support.

The **All Things Local Cooperative Market** in Amherst, Massachusetts, is more than a grocery store. With sustainable products from over 125 local producers of food and artisan items, they see themselves as a year-round, indoor farmers market. All Things Local is a consumer/producer co-op, and all vendors are also members of the co-op. Vendors choose which of their products (exclusively locally produced) to offer at the co-op and set their own prices. The co-op keeps 20 percent of all sales to cover overhead.

Hawaii has a new co-op on the island of Oahu. The **Waimanalo Market Co-op** came about when concerned community members purchased the former Mel's Market after it closed in 2012. Mel's Market, established in 1953, was about community, good food, and ►



Previous page, clockwise from top left: Purple Porch, Near East Side Co-op, Doylestown Food Co-op, and Honey Creek Market. This page: Hometown Harvest, Second Kitchen Co-op, Local First Grocer, and All Things Local Cooperative Market.

New co-op	Location	Web address	Opened
Near East Side Co-op	Columbus, Ohio	www.neareastsidecoop.org	Aug. 2013
Honey Creek Market	Plain, Wisconsin	www.hcmcoop.com	Aug. 2013
Hometown Harvest	Mitchell, Nebraska	www.facebook.com/HometownHarvestCoop	Aug. 2013
Second Kitchen Co-op	Boulder, Colorado	www.thesecondkitchen.org	Sept. 2013
All Things Local Cooperative Market	Amherst, Massachusetts	www.allthingslocal.coop	Nov. 2013
Waimanalo Market Co-op	Waimanalo, Hawaii	www.waimanalomarket.com	Nov. 2013
Doylestown Food Co-op	Doylestown, Pennsylvania	www.doylestown.coop	Jan. 2014
Purple Porch	South Bend, Indiana	www.purpleporchcoop.com	Feb. 2014
Market Street Co-op	Fort Kent, Maine	www.marketstreetcoop.net	Apr. 2014
Local First Grocer	Manitou Springs, Colorado	www.localfirstgrocer.org	May 2014
Dubuque Food Co-op	Dubuque, Iowa	www.dubuquefood.coop/	May 2014
Orcas Food Co-op	Eastsound, Washington	www.orcasfood.coop	June 2014

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◀“talk story.” Residents feared that the site would be taken over by a fast-food chain and acted quickly to preserve the local flavor.

Martha Ross, interim general manager, says that the co-op has drawn 36 local craftsmen and 31 growers—all from a community of about 10,000. The co-op is also the outlet for new farmers in the Windward Community College “GoFarm Hawai’i” program. The student-farmers use the co-op as an outlet and a place to test out new crop varieties. At the co-op, nearly 100 shoppers come through each day to shop and because they love gathering to share recipes, ideas, and small talk.



Doylestown is a Pennsylvania community about 27 miles north of Philadelphia. The **Doylestown Food Co-op** opened a 1,400-square-foot store last January as its “Phase 1.” The goal of Phase 1 is to supply local and healthy food to members and the community and to have the visibility to grow membership by increasing community awareness of the co-op’s brand and mission. Their long-term vision is to have a larger store with 5,000 or more square feet and room for meeting and education space. The current Doylestown Food Co-op was able to open with no debt and lots of help from volunteers.

The **Purple Porch** in downtown South Bend, Indiana, is named for the place where the co-op had its beginnings—the porch where neighbors sat together to talk about a better food system. The co-op evolved from a weekly market to a 3,400-square-foot store, although they continue to offer weekly “market” orders for those who wish to preorder from local producers. Café Max, the co-op’s in-house deli, prepares items from scratch, using local and organic ingredients, and is a clear favorite with shoppers.



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Manitou Springs, Colorado, sits at the base of Pike's Peak, where the **Local First Grocery** now offers a full line of groceries with priority given to locally grown and locally produced goods. Before the co-op opened, the town was dominated by businesses catering to the thousands of tourists who pass through every year—but there was no grocery store. The 1,200-square-foot co-op is all about promoting local and uses the slogan “Local Everything, But Let’s Start with Food.” Local First Grocer raised almost \$22,000 with a successful Kickstarter campaign and recruited 100 members before opening. The store hopes to keep food affordable through lower margins and volunteer labor and will use owner investments to help subsidize lower prices until the co-op gains strength.

Dubuque Food Co-op is one of the largest of this year’s new co-ops. The 6,000-square-foot store is located in the Dubuque, Iowa, historic mill district; it occupies a beautifully renovated former warehouse.

Market Street Co-op has opened in Fort Kent, Maine, just across the St. John River from Canada. The co-op is the second store to offer local products in a town of just over 4,000, demonstrating how committed the community is to its local economy. The small store is currently open three days a week from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. but expects to expand its hours as the business get established. In addition to the retail operations, Market Street also offers members a buying club for bulk purchases.

Looking at the number of smaller co-ops that have opened, you can see that there is tremendous interest in food co-ops, even in communities with low populations, as well as in urban areas with more obstacles to overcome. Co-ops are opening in downtown areas, rural areas, historic areas, tourism areas—almost anywhere people care about their food.

We welcome all of them to our community and wish them many years of successfully meeting their communities’ needs. ■

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