

Connections

NORTHWEST COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Fostering community economic development through the cooperative business model



Building Virtual Food Co-ops

Building access to local foods is a challenge for rural communities. More and more people are asking themselves about the food they are eating, where it came from, how it was produced, and what it does to the planet. For various political and economic reasons communities of all sizes are looking for ways to have more control over their food choices. Unfortunately, when looking for solutions, rural communities often feel economically marginalized. Providing increased opportunities to access locally grown food will help eliminate this inequity.

Explosive growth in the organic market has resulted in greater competition for smaller growers as large organic corporate farms enter the market. What once was a niche market for small scale food producers has been lost. Since the few remaining individual producers of local, organic and value-added products in the Northwest are responsible for marketing and distributing their products, it has become very difficult to retain their competitive edge.

Recently, a small but growing number of entrepreneurs have begun forming virtual food co-ops that provide producers the ability to set prices and receive a majority of the purchase price via an online store front. Customers are finding significant benefits through easy access to fresh, locally-grown produce at reasonable prices.

Idaho's Bounty Cooperative (IBC) was born out of this new movement to link producers and

customers directly through the internet. A co-op comprised of both producers and customers, IBC seeks to identify producers, create an accessible market for their products, guarantee that ethical and quality standards are maintained, and ensure the food that reaches the consumer is healthy, affordable and safe.

IBC works to educate members, who are

equal owners in the business, about their responsibilities for upholding Co-op standards and determining future direction of the business.

Like any other business, IBC must be financially self-sustaining. As an online Co-op, IBC is able to sell to many different outlets, customers, and regions.



No storefront means no rent, low overhead, and little risk of unsold inventory. The online model allows total flexibility to sell local with no need to fill shelves with non-local products.

In just two years, IBC has exceeded its membership goal of 800. NWDC and IBC together hope to document this success in comparison to other similar ventures throughout the United States. By sharing their story, creating a "how-to" manual, establishing networking forums, and further refining the current open source software, a basis for replicating their success will be created. Grant funding to accomplish this goal has been requested. Upon award, NWDC will notify all parties interested in this co-op business model. If you would like to be on this list, please send a request to: diane@nwcdc.coop.

NWDC is a 501(c)3 providing development services for co-ops. Founded in 1979, we serve WA, OR, ID and HI

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NW Co-op Development Center
1063 S. Capitol Way # 211
Olympia, WA 98501
360.943.4241
www.nwcdc.coop

Lost River Valleys Marketing Co-op

In October 2007, over 25 artisans, crafters and product manufacturers from throughout the Lost River Valleys, Idaho attended a first meeting to explore the concept of forming a marketing co-op. Attendees brought an amazing variety of products to display: photography, cards, leather work, forged knives, frames, shaker boxes, watercolor artwork, sewn quilts & clothing, candles, jewelry, metal, custom toys, salsa, and much more!



NWDC facilitated a meeting to decide if there was enough interest in moving forward the idea of a marketing co-op and to gather information from the group. Attendees answered questions like: What were their marketing challenges? How did they see a co-op helping?

Participants interviewed each other and recorded their answers. Through this process possible marketing tools were discussed including a quality website, a store front, and special events.



The large turnout clearly indicated there was strong interest in a co-op and volunteers formed a steering committee to take the next steps toward forming such a business. Throughout the

coming year next steps involved surveying potential members, other local businesses, and the target markets; drafting vision and mission statements, providing information for a cost analysis depicting various marketing scenarios, drafting bylaws, creating policies, and

other activities required to create a co-op business.

Periodically general meetings were held to present findings and to give potential

members an opportunity to assess the direction of the co-op. In April 2008, the group decided to focus their efforts on marketing cooperatively through events and on testing its viability at two pilot events. The events proved successful and now, more than 10 events later, the co-op has incorporated, boasts a membership of 14, including a junior membership, and co-op members continue to see increased revenues from participation in their co-op.

This talented group of artisans and crafters proves that with initiative and

determination, working together can increase your marketing power.

For more information please contact the Co-op President, Julie Buckwalter, 208-681-2980 or www.nwcdc.coop/LRVMC

Yellowstone Sustainable Transportation Co-op

A pilot project to explore the feasibility of a co-op regional transportation system in rural America is underway. The Yellowstone Business Partnership (YBP) is a tri-state organization of businesses dedicated to protecting the health of the environment and shaping a prosperous and sustainable future for communities in the Greater Yellowstone area.

YBP has engaged a diverse group of stakeholders, volunteers and advisors to help guide the project. The initiative is linking public and private operations of transportation services into a comprehensive service network to meet the needs of local citizens and visitors to the region.

In 2005, civic, business and government leaders came together at the Grand Targhee Resort to analyze these issues and discuss the prospects for a regional transportation system. Since then, all three states have been working to advance the concept. As a result, in 2008 YBP conducted regional roundtables, funded through the Idaho Transportation Board, Partners for Prosperity in Eastern Idaho and USDA Rural Development, to produce a recommended concept for a regional transportation system.

The final report outlined a plan to connect communities and neighboring national parks. It recommended creating:

1. A transportation cooperative, a proven business model that will maximize use and integration of transportation resources
2. A process for closing service gaps and matching modal interfaces
3. Visibility and accessibility through a diversity of information sources
4. A way to Embracing the concept of Complete Streets and Pathways for transportation corridors and



5. An ongoing process for funding transportation infrastructure

Through the Idaho Transportation Dept., YBP secured \$535,000 in rural transit stimulus funds to design, and if feasible, demonstrate how a multi-state public transportation network could operate under a co-op.

Equipped with a central communications and online reservation system, co-op advocates believe that willing public and private providers could readily

connect major cities, rural towns and recreation destinations across state lines and two national parks.

The area of the study and possible pilot encompasses the 27+ counties in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming that surround Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks. These counties have an aggregate population of over 700,000, with only four counties in excess of 50,000. Within this region its estimated there are 28,000 businesses with employees.

YBP and its partners realize there are many social, economic and environmental reasons to enhance mobility and improve the overall travel experience in Greater Yellowstone.

Businesses will have much to gain if workers can commute more reliably and safely; if visitors with a variety of travel options decide to extend their stay; and if residents can benefit from a regional system of public transportation services that connect to a network of recreational trails.

NWCDC, Montana Cooperative Development Center and the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Cooperative Development Center are providing co-op development guidance to this initiative.

For more information please visit YBP:
www.yellowstonebusiness.org



NW Cooperative Development Center

1063 Capitol Way #211

Olympia, WA 98501

www.nwcdc.coop

360.943.4241

Cooperative Event Calendar

August

NCBA Webinar

Food Co-ops 101 - Aug. 13

Preschool Co-ops 101 - Aug. 20

www.ncba.coop

Federation of Southern

Co-ops 42nd Anniversary

Aug. 13-15

Epes, AL

www.federation.coop

Stevens Co. Special Forest

Products Co-op

Educational Presentation

Aug. 18

Colville, WA

Monica McMackin

509.685.0937x118

September

Stevens Co. Special Forest

Products Co-op

Malo Grange in Ferry County

Sept. 8

Curlew, WA

509.685.0937x118

Western Worker Co-op

Conference

Sept. 7-10

Breitenbush Hot Springs, OR

www.west.usworker.coop

Manufactured Home Owners

Assn. 2009 National Convention

Sept. 11th & 12th

Seattle, WA

kelly@allparksallianceforchange.org

or 866.361.2722

NCBA's 15th Annual Conference

for Purchasing Co-ops

September 13-16

Austin, TX

[www.ncba.coop/purchasing/](http://www.ncba.coop/purchasing/index.cfm)

[index.cfm](http://www.ncba.coop/purchasing/index.cfm)

WA Credit Union League Annual

Convention

Sept. 16-18

Seattle, WA

Stacy Augustine

800.552.0680x121

Port Townsend Food Co-op

"Tomato Daze" - Sept. 19

Farm Tours - Sept. 20

360.385.2831x308

www.foodcoop.coop

October

Co-op Month

Credit Union Day, Oct. 15

November and Beyond

7th Annual NW Regional Joint

Co-op Council Meetings

Nov. 11-13

Boise, ID

rcwaitley@spro.net

208.888.0988

Manufactured Homeowner's Day

at the Capitol

Jan. 14

Olympia, WA

Kylin Parks

425-772-5174

Co-op event submissions and articles are welcome please send to: ben@nwcdc.coop