



BY DAVE GUTKNECHT

Local to Global, It's All Connected

The food crisis at the forefront of the news has enough deeply determined elements to remain as the cover story for the future. What is certainly not going away: high prices and scarcity for the natural gas and petroleum that fuel most food production; and high prices and scarcity for grain and other crops that feed most of the world's population. Add to these conditions the growing consequences of global warming, which can be mitigated, not reversed.

The implications of the food and energy crisis include the right to eat and to survive. Therefore, an essential aspect of solutions is self-determination. Solutions based on sharing and distribution of wealth—of resources such as food and water and energy, regarded as the commons—are better than “solutions” that lead to greater concentration of wealth.

Food cooperatives have been discussing and acting on several of these global issues since their founding:

- expanding democratic ownership of food and essential services;
- recreating and strengthening local food supply and systems;
- supporting organic and sustainable food production;
- actively opposing the poisoning of our soil, water, and air.

In short, food co-ops and a million local actors around the globe have been promoting food trade that is frugal with regard to energy and essential natural resources.

Given greater public recognition of food dilemmas and possible solutions, cooperatives have more opportunity than ever to advance their values and their methods. Cooperatives offer a way of ensuring business operations that are based in services for members and the local community—or, in second-level cooperatives, for members that are independent businesses.

However, taking advantage of cooperative expansion opportunities also will require greater recognition of the changes underway in the economic life of communities and across the globe. We will need to think beyond former comfortable assumptions.

Broadly speaking, responding to crisis intelligently suggests a mix of efforts at prevention along with preparation for changed conditions. Everyone, including cooperatives, needs to model foresight, planning and public service. Emergencies are increasingly likely, and emergency preparedness remains essential

(“Disaster Preparation,” by Carolee Colter, on cooperativegrocer.coop). And since many shortages and disasters will be localized and seem distant to others, we must stress solidarity and responsibility for unseen neighbors.

This edition's cover section offers practical advice for food retailers on recession shopping, food budgets and truckload sales by co-op staff from California and Indiana and the National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA). Next, retail development strategies that support ambitious growth goals for co-ops are reviewed by NCGA development director C.E. Pugh. Finally, we present parts of a report from Italy by Elizabeth Henderson on global issues addressed at this summer's assembly of the international organic movement.

In the News section, public and private resources are summarized in a report on weather disasters that are challenging farmers, public agencies, cooperatives and consumers to provide assistance. Meanwhile, in the U.K., growth strategies for cooperatives have led to record business volume and greater market share.

Fair trade, where the producers often are cooperatives, also underscores key responses to global trade issues of social justice, business accountability and ecological restoration. Two articles detail the growth of fair trade and a relatively new campaign, Fair Trade Towns.

Ownership rooted in the community, based on the users of the services offered, is the cooperative model. Successful cooperative enterprise requires sound principles and practices for the distribution of earnings. Following an earlier review of fundamentals (“Patronage Dividends: A Primer” by Bruce Mayer and “Membership is Ownership” by Marilyn Scholl, which can be found on www.cooperativegrocer.coop), Elizabeth Archerd of Wedge Co-op reviews the administrative of patronage refund distribution.

Cooperative ownership also requires a board of directors that knows its responsibilities and how to exercise reasonable judgment on behalf of the co-op owners. Thane Joyal of Cooperative Development Services reviews how boards can provide such sound leadership.

In closing, I urge readers to recognize how fundamental conditions have changed. Here is the best line I have read on the confluence of challenges we face: The smart move, when you're worried about the end of the world, is to change it. ■

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PAGE 24

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