

2008 Grants and 2009 Plans at the Howard Bowers Fund

BY ELLEN QUINN

Training and education are critical to the success of any co-op, and the Howard Bowers Fund helps provide them for staff, management, and board members of food co-ops. Since its founding in 1993, the Bowers Fund has given \$220,165 in grants, invested \$50,000 in both Northcountry Cooperative Development Fund and Cooperative Fund of New England for loans to food co-ops, and has built its endowment from \$50,000 to over \$250,000! All this has been possible because of the generosity of individuals and cooperatives in the food co-op community. Thank you!

The grants have supported education and programs that include board training for individual cooperatives, scholarships for CCMA participants, the Traveling Co-op Institute, the “How to Start a Food Co-op” manual, the Manager on Contract program, a CoCoWorks produce workshop, the Livable Wage model, the flow chart section of Food Co-op 500, and a regional seminar on starting a food co-op.

In 2008, the Fund made 12 grants: \$14,136 to UW-Madison for CCMA scholarships, \$1,000 to Plainfield Co-op for board governance, and \$14,200 in Bowers Day grants to Yahara River, Mandela Foods, Fiddleheads, Miami-Oxford, Harvest Moon, Sierra Vista, Friendly City, Community Market, Company Shops, and Vancouver food co-ops. In early 2009, the Fund made a \$5,000 grant to NCGA to update the “How to Start a Food Co-op” manual.

To support Food Co-op 500, in 2007, the Bowers Fund trustees decided to dedicate the Howard Bowers Day contributions to co-ops that are new or about to open. That year, 10 new or almost-open co-ops received grants of \$1,700 or \$1,000, and this focus was maintained for Howard Bowers Day 2008. The following organizing co-ops will receive grants of \$1,000 each for management and board training:

- Big Spring Co-op in Lewistown, Mont.
- Canaan Community Co-op in Detroit, Mich.
- Chatham Real Food Market Co-op in Chatham, N.Y.
- Harvest Moon Natural Foods Co-op in Long Lake, Minn.
- Indy Food Co-op in Indianapolis, Ind.
- New Orleans Food Co-op in New Orleans, La.

In 2009 the Bowers Fund will recruit new trustees, oversee the awards at the CCMA conference, and continue to strengthen the food

co-op sector through raising contributions and disbursing grants. CCMA (held in June) will feature a silent auction, another fun fund-raising event for the Bowers Fund that will include local and regional specialties, co-op products, and unique items. In October, co-ops participating in Howard Bowers Day donate 1 percent of their sales that day to the Bowers Fund.

The trustees of the Howard Bowers Fund are: Alex Gyori of Brattleboro Food Co-op, Paul Harton of Briar Patch Co-op Market, Annie Hoy of Ashland Food Co-op, Mari Niescier of Outpost Natural Foods Cooperative, Bob Noble of Weavers Way Co-op, and Karen Zimbelman of NCGA. The Bowers Fund is managed by the Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF), a national community fund for cooperatives.

For more information, or if you are interested in being a trustee of the Bowers Fund, please see www.cdf.coop or contact Ellen Quinn at equinn@cdf.coop or 202/383-5474.

In Memory of Eric Kindberg

BY CISSY BOWMAN

Eric Kindberg, 66, a longtime advocate of cooperative development, organic farming, and integrity in organic regulations, died Dec. 11, 2008. Originally from Arkansas, Eric died in China, where he had been living and farming for several years. His death was reportedly due to bile duct cancer.

He was a man with an incredible ability to talk with other farmers about laws, politics, and his vision of establishing programs and farmer-based organizations that would serve their needs.

Eric was an activist in more than just organic farming. Whenever he saw a problem of any sort, he took it upon himself to be part of the solution. He was an advocate of civil rights and worked with Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960s. He became an advocate for the family

farmer as well, especially those who called themselves “organic.”

He taught folks how to write effective public input and how to get to the National Organic Standards Board meetings. When the 1997 Proposed Organic Rule was published, he and others wrote an analysis of the rule and created a public comment form that was distributed on the internet, in retail stores, and even under car windshield wipers. This outreach generated thousands of public comments, resulting in a completely rewritten 1997 Rule. The current National Organic Program has been greatly shaped by public input, encouraged by Eric.

Funded by a USDA cooperative development grant, Eric—via the Ozark Small Farm Viability Project—spearheaded the National Organic Marketing Cooperative Feasibility Study. Under his leadership, 12 meetings were held across the U.S., bringing organic farmers together to discuss the problems they faced and how to solve them, including: production coordination, market coordination, pricing coordination, infrastructure development, and the need for continued public advocacy—all things a cooperative can help supply. Eric taught us about the Capper-Volstead Act of 1922, which gives qualifying farmers the right to organize to price their products. The study resulted in the formation of the Organic Farmers Marketing Association, which led to the creation of the Organic Farmers Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM)—an “organic marketing agency in common”—which now is comprised of a number of organic cooperatives and professional marketing associations. OFARM and its member associations are the fulfillment of Eric’s farmer cooperative dream.

Eric taught us and others how to find our voices in government policy making and cooperative development. I hope we are able to take these things forward in our lives and that, in doing so, we will carry on his great spirit and passion. ■

Cooperative Grocer

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