

October is Co-op Month – Celebrate Co-ops!

Erbin Crowell

Recent research has suggested that the success of humankind is rooted in our ability to collaborate, to recognize our interdependence and that the best route to our own well-being is to work together for shared benefit. The modern co-operative movement, which emerged in response to industrial globalization, reflects diverse cultural traditions around the world, and an expression of the ideals of mutual self-help, participation, and sustainability. As businesses that are owned and democratically

governed by the people who use them to meet their shared needs, co-ops offer an alternative vision for a more inclusive and sustainable economy that puts people and our collective future before profit. In 1948, Minnesota was the first state to celebrate Co-op Month, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued the first national proclamation in October of 1964, reflecting the importance of co-operatives to America's family farmers and rural communities. Since 1971, the National Co-operative Business Association (NCBA CLUSA) has continued this tradition, promoting co-operation as a model for inclusive economic development.

For example, farmer co-ops such as Organic Valley and Cabot Creamery Co-op play a key role in the survival of family dairy farms that contribute so much to the character of our region and the vitality of rural communities. More recently, Deep Root Organic Co-op, founded in 1985, has enabled a new generation of farmer-members to market fresh, organic produce across the Northeast and beyond.

A survey by the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA) found that grocery co-ops across New England and New York play a key role in supporting our regional economy, selling more than \$112 million in local products annually — or an amaz-



ing 25% of total sales. Taken together, the more than 40 food co-ops and start-ups of the NFCA are locally owned by 173,000 members and provide employment for over 2,465 people, more than 60% of whom are also members, sharing in the ownership of their local grocery store.

Co-ops also show up in some less familiar places. Acorn Renewable Energy Co-op in Vermont, for example, was founded in 2008 to help transition area communities from dependence on fossil fuels to a greater reliance on renewable energy. Real Pickles in Massachusetts, which transforms produce from Northeast family farms into fermented foods such as organic dill pickles, sauerkraut, and kimchi, converted to a co-operative in 2013, demonstrating the potential for a more sustainable path for business succession that roots wealth, jobs, and infrastructure in our region over time.

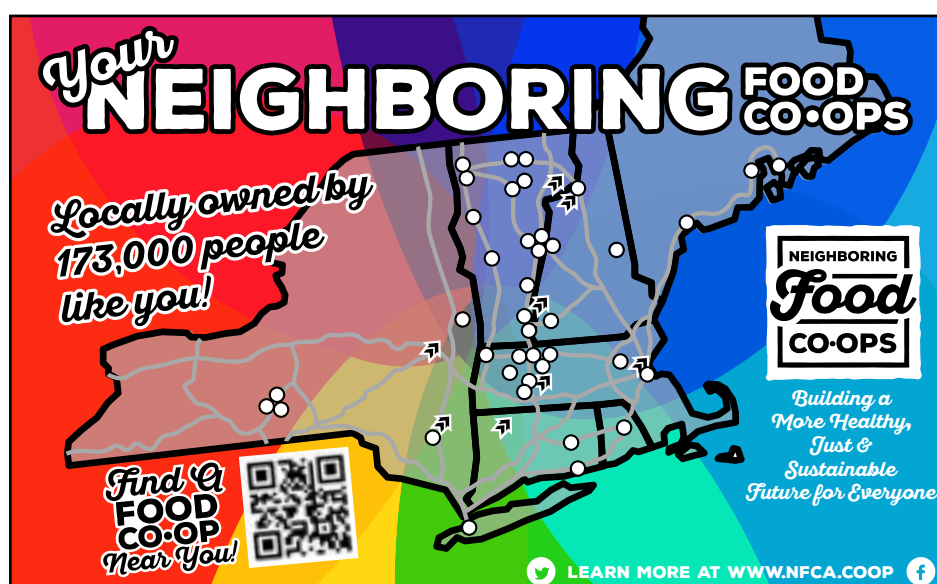
Credit unions, with more than 393 million members in 118 countries, will be celebrating the 75th annual International Credit Union Day on October 19. As not-for-profit financial co-operatives, these community based financial institutions are owned by their members, the people who use them for savings and checking accounts, loans, and retirement funds. This year's observation will focus on the proud history of the movement and its

continuing efforts to building financial inclusion around the world through the co-operative business model.

As we enjoy summer's bounty and prepare for the arrival of fall color in our region, Co-op Month offers an opportunity to learn more about the many co-operatives that are part of the fabric of our communities. From farmer co-ops to food co-ops, worker co-ops to credit

unions, housing co-ops to artisan co-ops, co-operative enterprise empowers people to meet their needs together, growing stronger, more inclusive and resilient local economies, and building a more sustainable world for everyone. For more information on Co-op Month and resources on co-operatives, visit <https://nfca.coop>.

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Sustainable Products

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more renewable materials, less fossil fuel, and no chemicals of concern.

Over 400 plant-based home organization products include certified compostable food containers, bio-based industrial supplies and medical packaging, and services. They can be purchased from wholesale, direct to business, and retail channels. The company is focused on making plant-based products more readily accessible to people as a means to create meaningful environmental and social impact (<https://goodnaturedproducts.com/>).

Ok, I guess I need to leave this on a yummy note. I must tell you what I learned about the Good Karma Bakery after all. Their vegan bakery offers a wide range of treats, all made with plant-based, gluten-free ingredients. And it is delivered to your doorstep in as little as three days. They bake, wrap and send your treats in sustainable packaging. How good does it get? Check them out at www.karmabaker.com.

Watch for another product review in our October edition related to our feature about composting. ♻️

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with the struggles of neighbors throughout the region.

McKibben's warning is clear, "This is what climate change feels like -- still in the earlier stages since we're less than halfway to the temperature our current trajectory will produce." And he lays out the importance of our continued action to respond to these challenges: "The current horrors are not a reason to stop working. The next round of mobilizations has got to be bigger and it's got to come soon."

Thanks to the dedication and commitment of so many, SolarFest made arrangements to reassemble key pieces from the planned 2023 festival. On Saturday, October 28th, SolarFest will present an incredible one-day festival of music and workshops in the historic Grace Congregational Church in Rutland, Vermont.

Titled, "A Climate of Change -- Preparation & Action for Our New Future," the activities focus on different ways we can create a meaningful impact in the fight against carbon pollution, while identifying resources for adaptation and building resiliency to the worst impacts of climate chaos in the future.

The workshops begin at 11:00 am with a powerful cross-section of entertaining and

inspiring speakers. Singer-songwriter Dar Williams discusses her book, "What I found in a Thousand Towns: a travelling musician's guide to rebuilding America's communities," and Vermont State Representative Robin Chesnut-Tangerman and Renewable Energy Vermont (REV) Executive Director Peter Sterling combine to lay out, "Getting Vermont to a 100% Renewable Energy Future."

Humorist and stunt memoirist extraordinaire Eve O. Schaub describes what she and her family found with the story behind "A Year of No Garbage: Recycling Lies, Plastic Problems and More," while VEIC Senior Engineering Consultant Li Ling Young explains the carbon and climate implications and future grid effects of cold-climate heat pumps.

And there's plenty of urgently useful information in the explanation of the Inflation Reduction Act from Paul Lesure, president of Green Mountain Solar and the roundtable discussion of career options for women in renewable energy.

Following a video message from Bill



McKibben, founder of Third Act (which organizes people over the age of 60 for action on climate and justice) the musical performances will begin at 5:00 pm in the beautiful church hall kicked off by the Caribbean percussion of Gammy Moses, followed by celebrated singer-songwriters Louise Mosrie Coombe, Pamela Means, and Lara Herscovitch & the Highway Philosophers, concluding with headline performances by Dar Williams and the Ray Vega Band.

Complete details and tickets are available at www.SolarFest.org.

Mike Bailey is a sustainable energy consultant and a trustee of SolarFest, Inc. ♻️