

# Expanding the Tent

BY ZAFRA WHITCOMB

Where do you go when you have a question related to your job at your co-op that your co-worker, owners, or board are unable answer? For years, it was probably the Cooperative Grocers' Information Network (CGIN) general listserve or one of its related listserves for operations, human resources, membership and marketing, and so on.

In attempting to bring CGIN (now renamed CGN) kicking and screaming into the new century, the CGN board made a decision to change the communication platform to an online forum using a social media model. In the words of Douglas Adams: *"In the beginning the Universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move."*

The challenges of interacting on the new platform proved to be daunting, and participation plummeted. Other avenues sprang up or gained traction for their ease of use or ability to meet the needs of the specific group they

served—Techhub bulletin board, CoCoPocketProtectors on Yahoo, Marketing Matters on Facebook—or people just reached out to trusted contacts with individual or group emails or text messages.

The problem with some of these methods is that they are, by their selectively inclusive nature, exclusionary. This is often appropriate for targeted or confidential conversations, but in general it doesn't help the larger community. The discussions happening on other platforms have been robust, but they are scattered and not accessible to many in the co-op world.

The CGN board and its executive director, Ellen Michel, have heard your concerns and spent several days in early March at our board retreat working on how CGN can best serve its members and the general co-op community. Reducing the friction in the communication platform was at the top of the list, along with enacting an equitable fee structure, and building on our partnerships with other co-op organizations.

By expanding the tent and minimizing the barriers to entry, we hope to bring together everyone in the co-op community to join the conversations, including questions they

wouldn't have thought to ask and people with answers we wouldn't have thought to approach. The CGN Board believes this inclusiveness is extremely valuable, as is the community-sourced and curated resource library, combining materials from hundreds of contributors, and the entire archive of *Cooperative Grocer*, which can be easily linked to forum discussions.

This is still a work in progress. Subspaces have been created on the CGN site for IT to join the existing space and, just recently, Finance as well. These parallel and expand upon the listserves from the old days. There are still issues with starting conversations from your inbox—a feature we recognize as important to many of you—and we are gathering feedback on the web interface and mail formatting.

When we attend gatherings like the recent Up & Coming conference, a Co-op Cafe, or the upcoming CCMA conference, we get to connect with many voices new and familiar, casually entering into discussions that occasionally turn into national conversations with major impact. Let's keep that excitement and connection happening year-round, in a venue where we can preserve our struggles and ideas for future cooperators! □

## Introducing Lock-Eat® Canning, Storage and Serving Jars

These innovative jars and carafes feature rust-proof, stainless steel clamps and natural rubber gaskets.

With easily detachable lids, meals can go straight from freezer to microwave to table to dishwasher.



800-234-5932  
downtoearthdistributors.com



Visit us online or call today for  
our New 2017 Catalog