



BY DAVE GUTKNECHT

Weathering the Storm, Greening the Store

The steep decline of the economy is impacting every community, and most food co-ops are encountering flat or declining sales. At the same time, cooperatives are led by both economics and organizational mission to recognize an imperative to reduce energy use. These two themes are joined in this edition's cover section on "Adapt and Sustain."

After years of strong growth, food co-ops are adapting to the slowdown, re-examining their operations and plans, and looking to each other. The section's lead article, from Mel Braverman, addresses adaptability in this environment of rapid change. Relying on extended comments by several retail co-op managers from around the country, "Staying Healthy in an Unhealthy Environment" offers a wealth of information and ideas in the areas of marketing, merchandising, margin management, labor management, and communication. It is sure to give readers valuable information about co-op practices during a time of change.

Energy conserving design and operations can have both immediate and long-term paybacks. Conservation practices also embody a cooperative attitude of shared responsibility and a shared investment in the future. Some specifics are featured in a report by Elizabeth Ferry on Hanover Co-op in New Hampshire, which highlights planning and implementing green design in a small retail facility. Paula Gilbertson offers an overview on "green" and on examining your co-op's practices for ways in which management of materials and other resources can reduce its carbon footprint.

Your editor closes the "Adapt and Sustain" section with reflections on trends in the economy and the food supply. Business as usual no longer exists, unemployment keeps growing, and additional economic disruption is a certainty. Recall the succession of forecasts and bailouts accompanied by assurances that the damage would be contained to one sector or one type of debt. We can continue to believe official promises and then be caught unawares by further breakdowns, or we can analyze and prepare, recognizing the inevitability of deep change. As before, cooperatives will be central to our ability to keep our communities intact while reconstructing local food systems and

Cooperative solidarity will be central to our ability to keep our communities intact while reconstructing local food systems and building food security.

building food security.

However, such cooperative solidarity, if it is to succeed in providing expanded services, requires translation into capital in order to sustain the business enterprise. Capital formation has been a conundrum for co-ops, and among consumer co-ops in particular, the need for investment often gets short shrift from the member-owners themselves. The previous edition carried an article by attorney Joel Dahlgren on new co-op laws, which give greater flexibility to cooperatives seeking investment capital. His advocacy provoked an exchange found in the present edition, a disagreement revolving around whether these new co-op investment structures are a welcome direction. The debate is far from academic, for the flexibility allowed in these new co-op structures may be key to expanding the scope and impact of cooperative enterprise.

Other contributors examine aspects of store operations. Tim Bartlett of Lexington Co-op describes that store's successful bread program. Robert Duncan of Sacramento Co-op reviews the monitoring of meat department numbers, a third and final installment in his series. Doug Walter follows up the previous edition's report on space-saving remodeling at Davis Co-op with comments on planning for ongoing renovations while the store is open.

A noteworthy additional contribution to the "Operating Excellence" section is by Bruce Palma of Co-opportunity, a Santa Monica co-op that hired him to succeed a general manager who had been in place for many years. His report provides insights into bringing change to a well-established co-op's organizational systems and culture—instructive challenges for other businesses as well, since they, too, may need some shaking up.

The ground is shaking already. You may as well take a good look at your co-op's foundation, its plans and its resilience. ■

Correction

Apologies to author **Mary Courteau** for the misspelling of her name in the previous edition. Mary can be reached at marycourteau@cdsconsulting.coop.

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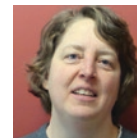
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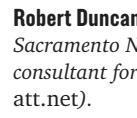
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