



# The Cooperator

A NEWSLETTER OF THE NEBRASKA COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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## A MESSAGE FROM ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR JIM CRANDALL



Welcome to the first issue of the Nebraska Cooperative Development Center's newsletter, *The Cooperator*.

There are many great things happening in rural Nebraska with cooperatively owned businesses, and NCDC and its partners have been fortunate to have played a role in the development of several projects across the state over the past seven years. These groups have included cooperatives, limited liability companies, or other group business structures.

The message has been clear: People sharing their talents, their ideas, and their resources are creating economic opportunities for themselves and others. Cooperation works!

It is inspiring to us to see the hard work and dedication of key leaders in projects come to fruition in a new business enterprise with a shared ownership benefiting all who participate. That is the power of working together! In addition, we have been pleased with the training and continuing developmental support we have been able to provide groups that have been in existence for just a couple of months up to several years.

This newsletter will highlight the projects NCDC and our partners are working on, as well as provide resources for service providers, educators, entrepreneurs, and community leaders who are on the journey to create a cooperatively owned business. We envision this newsletter to be informative and helpful, so as always, we'd like to hear from you. Send us your ideas and comments by email, [crandall3@unl.edu](mailto:crandall3@unl.edu), or call 308-995-3889.

## Q & A

### What is a cooperative?

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

### When and where was the first successful cooperative formed?

The first successful cooperative was organized in the United States in **1752** when Benjamin Franklin formed the Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire — the oldest continuing cooperative in the U.S. Later outside of the U.S. in **1844**, the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society opened a cooperative store on Toad Lane in Rochdale, England. These pioneers wrote down a set of principles to operate their food cooperative which contributed to their success and spread to other cooperatives around the world. The successful establishment of the cooperative in Rochdale marks the beginning of the modern cooperative era.

Source: <http://www.ncba.coop/index.cfm>

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

MEET CORINNE KOLM	2
SUSTAINABLE FOODS	3
CALENDAR	3
FARM TO TABLE	4
NEW COOPERATIVES	5



## Our Mission

*To build a strong, engaged, and sustainable network of people with access to local, state, and national resources, dedicated to allowing people to prosper in rural areas by helping them to work together to increase their incomes via cooperative development, and to help facilitate "value-added" opportunities.*



Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society's cooperative store on Toad Lane.



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## Meet Corinne Kolm

Corinne is a Nebraskan native, originally from the town of Cedar Rapids. Corinne spent her senior year of high school as an exchange student to Mexico, and graduated first in her class at Lincoln High School. As the daughter of a farmer and a biologist, an interest in the conservation and the outdoors developed early. Corinne attended Wellesley College in Boston, with a major in biology. Summer employment included positions in agronomy and plant pathology at the University of Nebraska and administration and natural history education at the University of Nebraska State Museum. Corinne spent two years with the United States Department of Agriculture as a research technician in veterinary ectoparasitology before enrolling in graduate school. Corinne will receive her Masters of Science in Agroecology from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences in the summer of 2006. The international program (in which University of Nebraska professor Chuck Francis is adjunct faculty) included coursework on rural development, organics, and sustainable food systems in Norway, Denmark and Italy. Corinne's thesis project explored the potentials for increased agritourism along the middle Platte River in Nebraska. Corinne joined the Nebraska Cooperative Development Center in December of 2005 as the Buy Fresh, Buy Local Coordinator.



## Cooperative Principles

1. **Voluntary and Open Membership:** Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.
2. **Democratic Member Control:** Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions.
3. **Member Economic Participation:** Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative.
4. **Autonomy and Independence:** Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members.
5. **Education, Training, and Information:** Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public about the nature and benefits of cooperatives.
6. **Cooperation among Cooperatives:** Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.
7. **Concern for Community:** Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

## New Cooperatives

### Nebraska Woody Florals

Ever noticed those decorative woody stems in a fresh cut or dried flower arrangements? Now, small landowners will have an opportunity to market this decorative crop through the Nebraska Woody Florals Cooperative. The Center has been providing technical assistance to this new co-op, which has marketed its initial production in Nebraska and neighboring states.

A University of Nebraska-Lincoln study shows that 150 acres of production, sourced from various growers, could have a gross wholesale value of \$925,000 and generate 35 full-time jobs. Surveys of prospective grower members indicate a capacity to achieve this level of production in the near future. NCDC has assisted the co-op with its feasibility study, business plan, and marketing plan. Additionally the center and the co-op will partner to provide educational programs for growers to recruit more members.



Nebraska Woody Florals Cooperative harvests decorative woody florals from University of Nebraska research plots as well as from their member's land.

### Nebraska Food Cooperative: Farmers, ranchers and consumers working to increase access to local foods

Over a year ago a group of Nebraska farmers, ranchers and consumers began meeting to form a cooperative that would provide a new market for local foods, as well as a means to distribute products throughout the state. Nebraska Cooperative Development Center and UNL-Food Processing Center staff met with the group and helped them walk through the phases of development. Today they are a legal entity planning for their membership drive and first day ordering. Unlike many cooperatives in the state, Nebraska Food Cooperative members will be both Nebraska producers and consumers.

The Nebraska Food Cooperative is based on a model in Oklahoma. Last fall members of the steering committee visited the Oklahoma Food Cooperative to experience a delivery day and visit with their members.

The cooperative will primarily use a Web-based ordering system and deliver food to members' homes or a nearby drop point on one delivery day each month. Producers and consumer members from various geographic areas, who volunteer for delivery day, work together to bring products to the central sorting location where they are sorted into individual customer orders. Once sorting is complete, producer and consumer members return to their location and transport orders for their area's customers.

While many products will be offered each month, the variety offered in any given month will be determined by availability and seasonality. Examples include organic vegetables, grass and grain-fed beef and pork,



Nebraska Food Cooperative Board members visiting Oklahoma last fall. They helped Oklahoma Food Cooperative members load fresh Oklahoma products to be delivered to Oklahoma members.

pastured poultry, eggs, jams/jellies, cheese, and many others.

NCDC and FPC continue to work with the newly elected board of directors who are finalizing the logistics for delivery days and planning for member meetings. Their goal is to have their first delivery day early this summer. NCDC and FPC are also assisting the group with securing funds to begin planning for the expansion of the cooperative to other regions of the state. For more information and to become a member, visit [www.nebraskafood.org](http://www.nebraskafood.org).

# Farm to Table

## Buy Fresh, Buy Local

Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska is a new local food outreach and marketing initiative that launched May 2006. Through promotional material, media outreach and public events, the Buy Fresh, Buy Local mission is to increase the visibility, accessibility and viability of a locally based food system. The cornerstone of the campaign is a local food directory highlighting area family farmers, restaurants, grocers, farmers markets and institutions that sell locally produced foods. Additionally, an eye-catching Nebraska local food label helps local products stand out in the crowd and encourage Nebraskans to support their local farmers and independent businesses. Outreach efforts emphasize the economic, environmental and health benefits of local foods, while also promoting the wide variety of quality products grown and raised in Nebraska. The outreach campaign focuses on Butler, Cass, Douglas, Lancaster, Polk, Sarpy, Seward, Saunders and York counties and plans to expand throughout Nebraska in the coming years.

The Nebraska campaign is based on similar initiatives that have proven very suc-

cessful in other states, including an Iowa campaign that has seen sale increases for 85 percent of farmer members. Through collaboratively marketing with Buy Fresh, Buy Local, area farmers and businesses can reach a larger audience with a more cohesive message than would be possible individually. In addition, the slogans, graphics and other marketing materials for Buy Fresh, Buy Local were professionally developed based on exhaustive market research by our national partner, the FoodRoutes Network.

NCDC has been instrumental in the creation of Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska. NCDC provided the seed money necessary to hire a campaign coordinator and has contributed significant staff time to guide the initiative. Additional partners include the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society and Nebraska Great Plains Resource Conservation and Development. To date, the campaign has recruited nearly 40 farmer members and has received press coverage in several newspapers and radio stations across the state, including the major newspapers in Lincoln, Omaha and Grand Island.

For more information, call 402-472-5273 or visit [www.buylocalnebraska.org](http://www.buylocalnebraska.org).



Nebraska's "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" label, featuring products grown by farmers and ranchers in the state.

## Farmstead First Dairy

The idea for a cooperatively owned grass-fed dairy processing facility started with a few friends dreaming up ways to diversify their current farm businesses. Now their dream is becoming a reality. After many hours of putting together grant proposals, Farmstead First Dairy received a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Producer grant and an USDA Value-Added Producer Grant, all of which will assist in business planning, feasibility study, market analysis, education, and outreach.

NCDC assisted Farmstead First Dairy by providing education and initial consulting about business structures. The women of Farmstead First Dairy formed a cooperatively owned LLC which will provide each member the service of processing goat and cow milk from their farms. By summer 2006, the women plan to be fully

operational and selling butter, yogurt and cheese to the local community.

Farmstead First Dairy was formed not only to diversify the group's current farm businesses, but also to provide educational opportunities for others interested in on farm processing. NCDC awarded a travel scholarship for the women to attend an intensive cheese making session at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. This training is not only a benefit for their operation, but for all those thinking of farmstead cheese making. Farmstead First Dairy is committed to sharing with others what they learned. In fall 2005 the women hosted their first workshop at UNL, where a well known cheese artisans from Vermont shared their experiences in making cheese. Once they are fully operational they plan to host workshops, tours, and seminars at their own facility.



Farmstead First members and participants of their first artisan cheese making workshop at UNL paused to say "cheese."

# Sustainable Foods

## Good, Fresh, Local: The Nebraska Sustainable Food Project—Linking UNL with Nebraska's Farms

Imagine a nearly endless line of UNL students outside Cather Dining Hall waiting to load up their plates with Nebraska's best local foods. What was once a great idea is now a reality for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Nebraska's farmers and ranchers.

*Good, Fresh, Local (GFL): Nebraska's Sustainable Food Project* is one of the newest universities to join the growing college-to-farm programs in the country. Across the nation more and more universities are thinking local food and are changing their menus to reflect the seasonality of their region. According to the Community Food Security Coalition, an advocacy group in Venice, California, roughly 200 universities have begun incorporating local foods in their food purchasing budgets. GFL is focused on sourcing products that come mostly from small- to mid-size Nebraska farms/ranches, are produced using sustainable agricultural practices, include certified organic products, and are seasonal. When Nebraska products are not available due to seasonal availability, the program strives to purchase products mostly from small producers outside Nebraska.

Key partners: UNL Dining Services, Nebraska Cooperative Development Center, and UNL Food Processing Center have been working hard to develop the program with input from area farmers. Six meals were served during the fall semester 2005, averaging one meal per month. Student attendance at the meals has topped records. December's meal hosted over 900 students, their families, UNL faculty and staff, and local farmers and ranchers. There have been many challenges, but the commitment of all those involved has helped sustain the program, and has provided opportunities for growth.

The program continued into spring semester with the addition of everyday menu items. Students enjoy fresh free-range eggs, local jams on toast, hot oatmeal with local oats, and homemade granola with local oats and pecans. This summer will provide some downtime for menu planning and testing for fall 2006 when the program is expected to expand to the East Campus dining hall.



Over 800 pounds of turkey were served at the GFL Thanksgiving meal. Roasting and carving the turkeys was a huge task, but well worth the effort!



Students at UNL enjoy local Nebraska products featured at each GFL meal.

## Calendar of Events

- July 10-11 DED: Grant writing workshops, VFW Hall, Hartington, [www.grantwritingusa.com](http://www.grantwritingusa.com)
- July 26-27 RC&D Environmental education workshop, Axtell, Randy Gunn, 402-845-6678 or [randal.gunn@ne.usda.gov](mailto:randal.gunn@ne.usda.gov)
- August 10 Registration for August 18th "From Recipe to Reality" seminar deadline, Lincoln, Jill Gifford, 402-472-2819 or [jgiffordI@unl.edu](mailto:jgiffordI@unl.edu)