



Co-operative Collaboration for a Thriving Regional Economy

Vermont Co-op Summit
14th Oct 2010, Burlington, VT
www.vtsummit.coop

Outline

- **Our Context**
- **The Neighboring Food Co-op Association**
- **Why the Sixth Principle?**
- **Exploring Co-operative Collaboration**
- **Discussion**

Thoughts for Discussion

- **What are some compelling arguments for cross sector collaboration?**
- **What are some challenges to collaboration in our region?**
- **What are some opportunities for collaboration?**
- **What are some strategies to address these challenges and opportunities?**

Our Context

- **Crisis of Global Economic System**
- **Unemployment & Inequality**
- **Shifts in Wealth**
- **Diminished Democracy**
- **Corporate Influence**
- **Instability & Change**

England in the 1800s

- **Dislocation of Local Economies**
- **Dramatic Shifts in Wealth**
- **Concentration of Control**
- **Poor Working Conditions**
- **Limited Democracy**
- **Globalization**

Rochdale Equitable Pioneers



- **Founded 1844**
- **Weavers, Unionists, Activists**
- **Member-Owned Store**
- **Principles for a Movement**

A Multisectoral Movement

The Rochdale Pioneers conceived in one association what now might make a multistakeholder co-operative movement. The complementary half of this multisectoral vision is that it was a localized vision: integrated co-operation within a geographically compact community.

Brett Fairbairn, *The Meaning of Rochdale*



VERMONT

- **Brattleboro Food Co-op**, Brattleboro
- **Buffalo Mountain Co-op**, Hardwick
- **City Market/Onion River Co-op**, Burlington
- **Hunger Mountain Food Co-op**, Montpelier
- **Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op**, Middlebury
- **Putney Food Co-op**, Putney
- **Rutland Natural Food Market**, Rutland
- **South Royalton Food Co-op**, South Royalton
- **Springfield Food Co-op**, Springfield
- **Upper Valley Food Co-op**, White River Jct

CONNECTICUT

- **Willimantic Food Co-op**, Willimantic

NEW HAMPSHIRE

- **Concord Co-op Market**, Concord
- **Kearsarge Co-op Grocer**, New London
- **Co-op Food Store**, Hanover & Lebanon, NH; White River Jct, VT
- **Littleton Food Co-op**, Littleton

MASSACHUSETTS

- **Berkshire Co-op Market**, Great Barrington
- **Franklin Community Co-op (Green Fields Market)**, Greenfield & **McCusker's Market**, Shelburne Falls
- **Leverett Village Co-op**, Leverett
- **Old Creamery Co-op**, Cummington
- **River Valley Market / Northampton Community Food Co-op**, Northampton
- **Wild Oats Market**, Williamstown

Organizational Partners



National Cooperative Grocers Association

Putting it all Together
For Food Co-ops

www.ncga.coop



COOPERATIVE FUND
of New England

Cooperative Fund of New England

Celebrating 35 Years
Growing Co-ops!

www.coopfund.coop

Food Co-ops & Innovation

- **Community Entrepreneurship**
- **Natural Foods**
- **Organic Products**
- **Fair Trade**
- **Relocalization**

Food Co-ops & Local Economies



Shared Economic Impact

At the end of 2007...

- **17 food co-ops, owned and democratically governed by over 64,000 members. ('09: 20 co-ops with 80,000+ members)**
 - 10 VT-based member co-ops have 30,000+ individual members ('09)
- **Shared Sales of \$161 million ('09: \$180+ million)**
- **Purchased \$33+ million in local products**
 - ...Including \$10 million in fresh farm products, \$18 million in locally-processed foods, and \$5 million in other products.
- **Employed over 1,240 staff ('09: 1,400+)**
 - Together, member co-ops in VT are among the top 25 employers in the state.
- **Paid \$28.6 million in employee wages...**
 - Average wage was 18% higher than the average for other food and beverage stores in the same states.
- **Supported local government through payment of taxes...**
 - Including \$7.3 million in sales, excise and other taxes, \$434,000 paid by employees, and \$500,000 in property taxes.

Vision

**Thriving
Regional
Economy**

**Focus
Areas**

**Collaboration
among
Co-ops**

**Healthy, Just &
Sustainable Food
System**

Strategy

**Network
Partnerships**

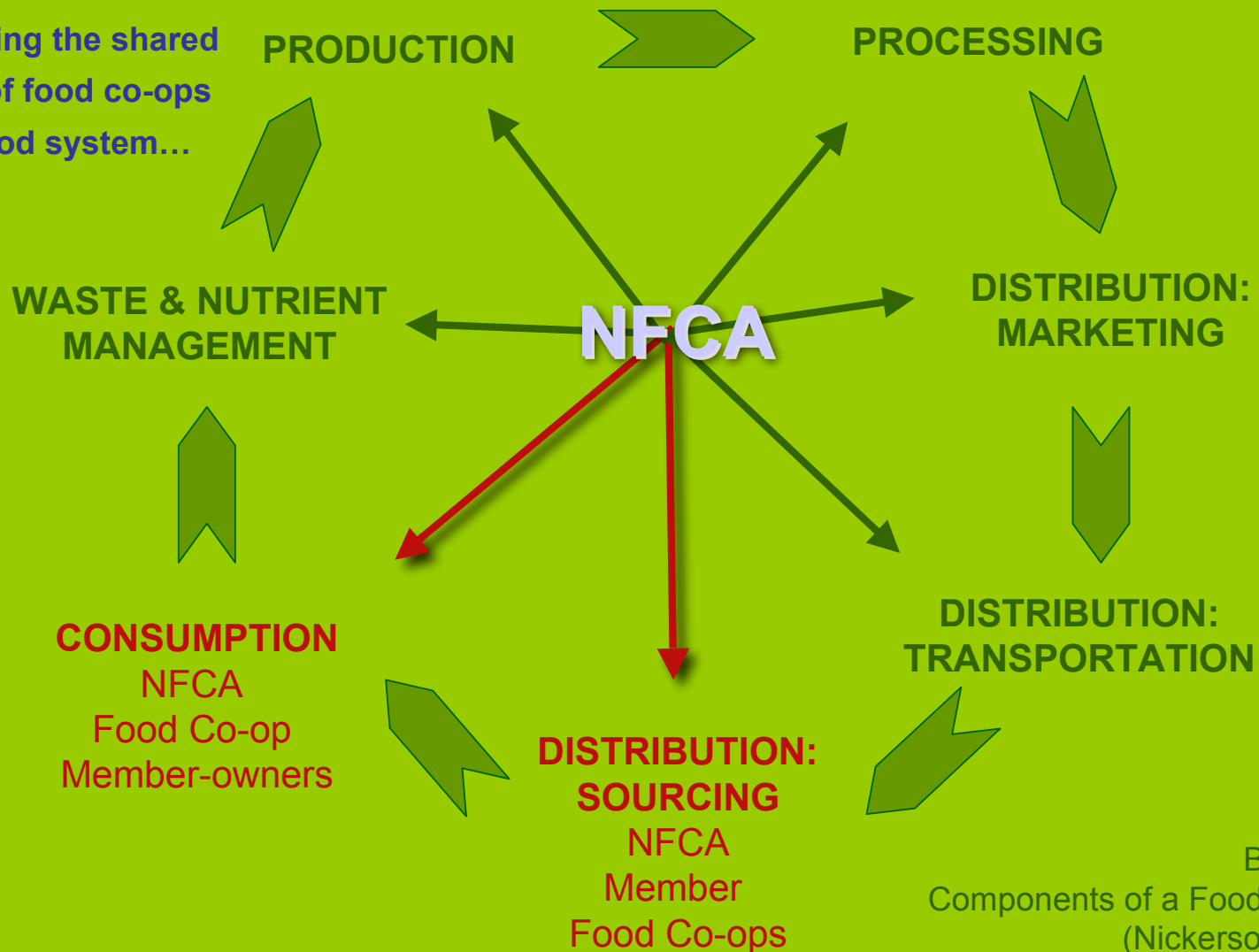
Network Partnerships

- **Northeast Organic Farming Association**
- **Transition Towns**
- **VT Regional Food Centers Collaborative**
- **Center for an Agricultural Economy**
- **New England Farmers Union**
- **Co-operative Organizations**



Components of a Healthy Food System

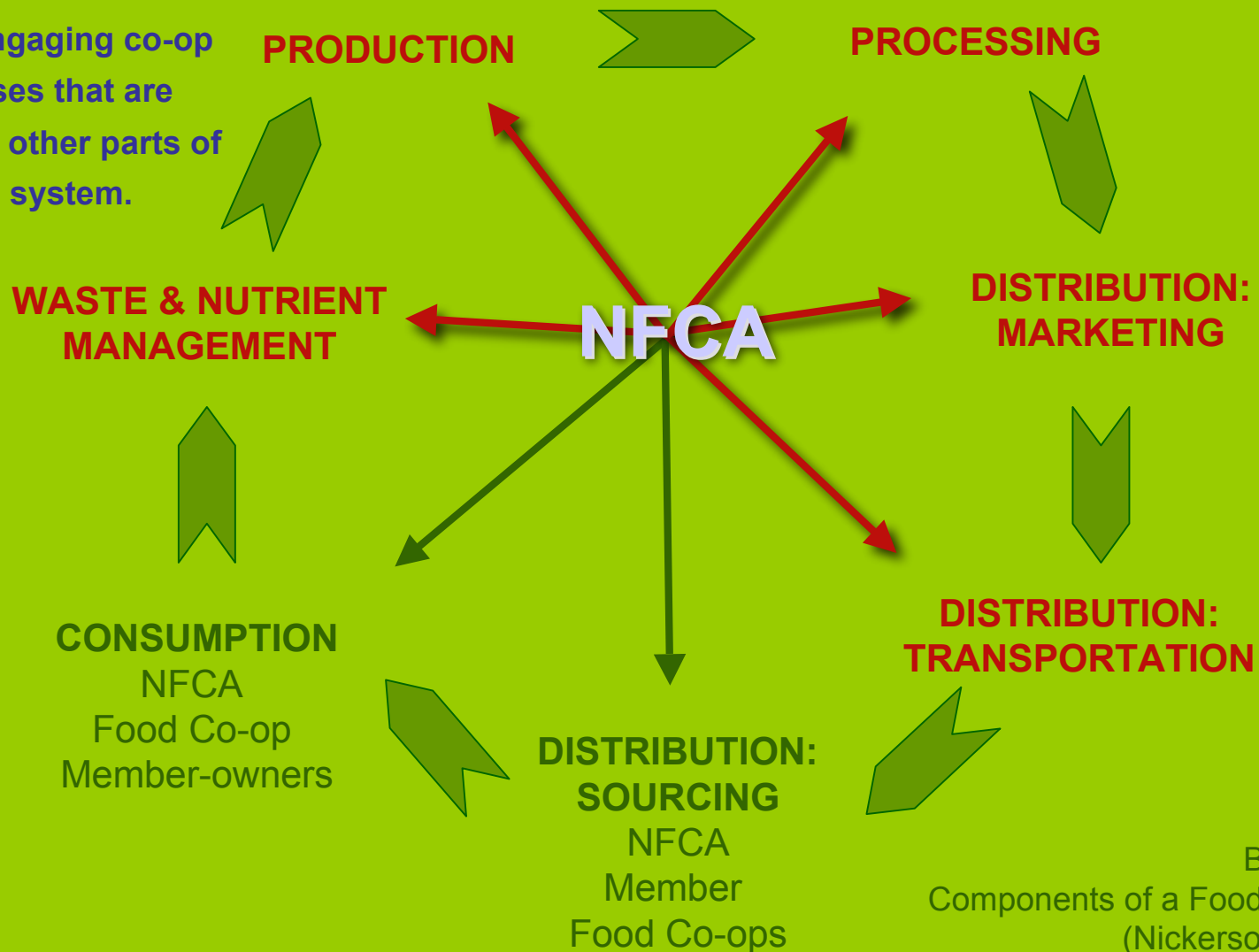
Leveraging the shared impact of food co-ops in the food system...



Based on
Components of a Food System
(Nickerson, 2008)

A Healthy Co-operative Food System?

...and engaging co-op enterprises that are active in other parts of our food system.



Based on
Components of a Food System
(Nickerson, 2008)

The Sixth Principle

Cooperation Among Co-ops

“Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.”

www.ica.coop

Shared Economic Impact

Table 1: Economic Impact of U.S. Cooperatives: Aggregate Impacts by Sector ¹

Sector	Revenue (\$M)	Income (\$M)	Wages (\$M)	Employment (No. of jobs)	Firms	Estab.
Commercial Sales and Marketing	201,207	37,737	13,810	422,505	3,463	5,695
Social and Public Services	7,525	2,213	1,690	424,505	11,311	11,311
Financial Services	394,363	100,661	51,176	1,133,353	9,964	50,330
Utilities	49,808	13,392	8,292	162,873	4,546	5,657
Total	652,903	154,002	74,969	2,143,236	29,284	72,993

¹ Analysis does not include housing cooperatives.

There are almost 500 co-operative enterprises in western New England, with nearly 100 in Vermont.



The Co-op Advantage & Regional Economies

- Community ownership & control
- Focus on service, meeting needs before profit
- Develop local skills & assets
- Ability to assemble limited resources
- Regional Economic Efficiencies
- Low failure rate & long-lived
- Difficult to move or buy-out
- Mobilize member, customer and supplier loyalty
- **Result: more stable food system, infrastructure, employment & services, and economy**

Why Collaborate?

- **Strengthen regional economies**
- **Reinforce shared economic impact**
- **Strengthen the “co-op” identity**
- **Ownership opportunities for members**
- **Articulate the co-op alternative**
- **Influence policy makers**
- **_____ ?**

Co-operative Collaboration

- **Identifying What Exists**
- **Promoting Shared Co-op Identity**
- **Sourcing Initiative as Opportunity**
- **Openings for Dialogue**

Identifying What Exists

- **Stories of Collaboration...**

- ...**Credit Unions:** e.g. Putney & Brattleboro Food Co-ops & River Valley Credit Union
- ...**Worker Co-ops:** Franklin Community Co-op, River Valley Market & Pioneer Valley PhotoVoltaics
- ...**Co-ops Innovating in Food System:** Organic Valley, Equal Exchange, Deep Root Organic Co-op
- ...**Energy Co-ops, Artisan Co-ops, etc.**

- **Measuring Co-op Purchases**

- Parallel to measuring local purchases



Promoting Our Shared Identity

- **Education**
 - Articles in Food Co-op Newsletters
- **“Go Co-op!” Initiative**
 - Promote Co-op Products
 - Focus in Regional Co-ops
 - Common Identity



Sourcing Initiative

- **Import Substitution**
 - Identify key products currently sourced outside region
- **Dialogue with Regional Co-ops**
 - What products could be supplied by co-ops in our region?
- **Co-operative Solutions**
 - Identifying bottlenecks and creating shared solutions

Opportunity for Dialogue

- **Shared Goals**
 - Identifying shared visions & priorities
- **Uncovering Challenges**
 - Identifying areas where dialogue is needed
- **Priority Projects...**
 - ...that support a shared vision
 - ...that demonstrate impact, innovation
 - ...that benefit members and their enterprises

Looking Forward

**As we look toward 2012, the UN
International Year of Co-ops...**

**How can we use our shared
resources to advance co-operative
regional economies?**

Priorities for Collaboration

- **Understand & promote shared identity**
- **Develop & communicate desired outcomes**
- **Measure & communicate impact**
- **Link your impact with other sectors**
- **Impact the system - Not just your sector**
- **Cultivate partnerships**
- **Adopt a regional approach**
- **Identify opportunities for innovation**

Questions for Discussion

- **What are some compelling arguments for cross sector collaboration?**
- **What are some challenges to collaboration in our region?**
- **What are some opportunities for collaboration?**
- **What are some strategies to address these challenges and opportunities?**



Erbin Crowell, Executive Director

Neighboring Food Co-op Association

erbin@nfca.coop // www.nfca.coop

www.facebook.com/neighboring