

# Farmers & Consumers Join Forces

## Like-Minded Organizations Band Together

By Erbin Crowell

*These days community action is all about collaboration. Organizations have realized, now more than ever, that strength in numbers is a real and powerful force. Two organizations to which BCM belongs have taken steps that will make all of us stronger by joining forces to achieve a common goal.*

Central to the vision of the Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA) is a thriving regional economy, rooted in a healthy, just and sustainable food system. As co-op members, we contribute to this vision every day through our own purchasing decisions and through the relationships our co-ops build with farmers and producers. Now the NFCA is working with like-minded organizations to influence the government policies that affect agriculture in our region. As part of this effort, our association has become an affiliate member of the recently launched New England Farmers Union (NEFU), a grassroots organization working to protect and enhance the lives and livelihoods of family farmers, fishermen, foresters and consumers.

“There is a gap in what is being heard at the policy level in Washington,” said Chandler Goule, Vice President for Government Relations at the National Farmers Union, referring to our region’s unique perspective. “Creating a strong New England Farmers Union can help you get your voice heard.”

Goule was speaking during a three-day whirlwind tour of Vermont and New Hampshire in August, cosponsored by the NFCA and attended by more than one hundred farmers, food co-op members and staff, activists and legislators’ representatives. The listening sessions, which focused on federal dairy policy but invited input on a broad range of topics, were hosted by NFCA member co-ops including Brattleboro Food Co-op, Concord Cooperative Market, Hanover Food Co-op, Hunger Mountain Food Co-op and Littleton Food Co-op. Supporters of the tour included farmer co-ops such as Cabot and Organic Valley.

NEFU’s mission is complementary to the vision of our food co-ops, and includes increasing the economic viability of family farms and fishing operations, fostering the development of sustainable food production, investing in nutrition education, and increasing connections between farmers and consumers. The National Farmers Union has also been a strong advocate of cooperative enterprise since its founding more than one hundred years ago, playing a key role in the passage of legislation in 1922 that protected farmers’ rights to join together through agricultural co-ops.

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## A Letter From Annie Cheatham

### President, New England Farmers Union

Farmers Union in New England? A new voice for New England farmers and fishermen in Washington, DC? What would it take to develop an organization for six New England states that would be relevant to the issues facing our farmers and fishermen? How would a New England Farmers Union chapter fit into the Farmers Union family, 108years old, and strong in the Midwest and Plains states? Could Farmers Union embrace fishermen along with family farmers? What could Farmers Union do for dairy farmers who are the anchor tenants for New England agriculture? And what could Farmers Union offer consumers in New England who are passionate about local and regional food?

First, we needed money to build. In December 2009, the National Farmers Union Board of Directors stepped up to that challenge. Board members voted to invest cash and business development in New England over the next five years. This decision made it possible for the New

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