



# COOPERATIVE FUND of New England

## Borrower Profile: Massachusetts Woodlands Co-op

New England is rich in woodlands and timber resources. Once felled, however, most trees are transported out of local communities and processed in huge mills elsewhere. That means that most of the value-added takes place in other states, or even in other countries. And the wood that is harvested rarely makes it back to the area where it was produced. In Massachusetts, for example, only 4% of the wood used comes from the state's own forests, despite estimates that the state could provide over 40% of its own wood needs.

### A COOPERATIVE ALTERNATIVE

"We turn the timber industry on its head," says Suzanne Webber, a member of the Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative. "By processing all of our wood within a 50 mile radius, over 35 businesses, representing hundreds of individuals, are supported in western Massachusetts." While many small saw mills in the region are shutting down, the success of the co-op has encouraged two local mills to expand their operations.

Founded in 2001 with the purpose of sustaining the working forests of the region, the co-op maintains high standards of responsible management on member properties, purchases its members' logs at harvest time, and coordinates value-added processing. Finished wood products are then marketed throughout the region as HomeGrown Wood™: Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified, locally grown hardwoods for flooring, timbers and lumber.

From the beginning, the co-op has benefited from collaboration with other organizations. In its organizing stage, for example, the co-op's steering committee worked closely with resource people from the University of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Massachusetts Forest Stewardship Program, the Hilltown Community Development Corporation, and the Cooperative Development Institute.

### THE CO-OP DIFFERENCE

"We have our members' interests at heart as part of our bottom line," says Susan Campbell, executive director. "Members play a part in deciding new directions for our business, and part of our mission is providing information and resources for our members."

The Massachusetts Woodlands Co-op has also partnered in various ways with other co-ops in the region. For example, the co-op provided the timbers for the entranceway to the recently opened River Valley Market co-op in Northampton, MA, and has worked with the Franklin Community Co-op in Greenfield, MA, to promote the cooperative difference.

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### GROWING COOPERATION

In 2002, the Woodlands Co-op had twelve members managing about 2,000 acres of forest. By 2008, this number had grown to 56 members with just over 12,000 acres. More recently, the co-op has been in dialogue land trusts about becoming members, which will substantially increase the land under sustainable management.

As the co-op has grown, so have its financial needs. By 2007, the co-op had reached a critical point and contacted the Cooperative Fund of New England for a loan. "CFNE made it easy and convenient to have access to a line of credit," says Susan. "And we are grateful for that help."

CFNE helps co-ops like the Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative grow and serve their members and communities, and you can too. For more information on the Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative and their products, please visit [www.masswoodlands.coop](http://www.masswoodlands.coop). To learn more about CFNE and how you can invest in cooperation, visit [www.coopfund.coop](http://www.coopfund.coop). —Profile by Erbin Crowell



*Massachusetts Woodlands Co-op timbers being raised at River Valley Market co-op, Northampton, MA.*