

FOR foodthought

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Local Producers Martha, Will,
Read, Ruth, and Malah of
**Dwight Miller and
Son Orchards**
Dummerston, Vermont



Deep Root Organic Co-op: Growing Co-operation

by Erbin Crowell

Founded in 1986, Deep Root Organic Co-op was growing and marketing organic vegetables on a regional level before it became a national trend.

Now, with demand for fresh, healthy, regionally-grown produce on the rise, the co-operative is connecting more consumers with their farmer members. Based in Johnson, VT, Deep Root Organic Co-op is made up of nineteen members, including farmers across Vermont and the eastern townships of Québec.

Chris Poshpeck, who joined the co-op as general manager in 1998, links members with distributors and retailers across the Northeast. On a weekly basis, farmer members send him a list of what they're harvesting — everything from tomatoes, cucumbers, corn, peas and fennel to several varieties of lettuce, kale, chard, cabbage, broccoli, and collards — and Chris in turn contacts buyers to negotiate orders and arrange delivery.

Deep Root members offer a broad range of products year 'round. But thanks to the northern climate, the co-op may be best known for root crops such as carrots, parsnips, beets, rutabagas, potatoes,

burdock, black radish, and a large variety of winter squash.

You can find Deep Root's products, including organic potatoes, this month in the produce section at Brattleboro Food Co-op, and on the shelves of many of the member co-ops of the Neighboring Food Co-ops Association, including Putney Food Co-op (VT), Willimantic Food Co-op (CT), City Market Co-op (Burlington, VT), River Valley Market Co-op (Northampton, MA) and Franklin Community Co-op (Greenfield and Shelburne Falls, MA). Sales continue to grow, but Deep Root is clear in its purpose as a member-owned and controlled co-operative. "We're not here to accumulate money," says Chris. "We're here to help our members be more successful."

Being organized as a co-op enables members to focus on their individual farms, while negotiating with buyers and marketing their products as a group. Deep Root is always looking for new ways to strengthen their members, such as improved value-added and distribution systems. As co-op member Tony Lehouillier, of Foote Brook Farm in Johnson, VT, points out, "We can do a lot better with a little more control over our destiny."

A line of credit from the Cooperative

Fund of New England helps Deep Root manage the seasonality of the business. "We've worked with the CFNE for years," says Chris. "And as we continue to grow our co-op, we'll be coming back to the Fund."

Co-operation among co-operatives is a basic principle of the co-op movement, and you can help support the members of Deep Root by choosing their products when you shop at the Co-op. For more information on co-op member farms and their products, please visit their website at www.deeprootorganic.com.

You can also support Deep Root and other co-ops like them through your investment or charitable contribution with the Cooperative Fund of New England. For more information, please visit www.coopfund.coop.

Erbin Crowell is a member of Brattleboro Food Co-op and serves on the board of the National Co-operative Business Association. He works with the Cooperative Fund of New England and in collaboration with organizations such as the Neighboring Food Co-ops Association and the Valley Alliance of Worker Co-ops. He may be contacted at erbin@cooperativefund.org.

above photos from left to right: tomato grower Fred Lawler and friend checking out the crop, tomatoes ripening on the vine, and Foote Brook Farm in Johnson Vermont