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COOPERATIVE FUND of New England

Borrower Profile: Deep Root Organic Co-op

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 cooperative 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 and beyond. 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, burdock, and black radish, and a large variety of winter squash. More recently, the co-op has also begun offering a line of fermented and packaged spiced carrots, grated beets, onions with miso, and sauerkraut.

Deep Root's products can be found in the produce sections of food co-ops across the region, including Brattleboro Food Co-op (VT), Willimantic Food Co-op (CT), City Market Co-op (Burling-

ton, VT), River Valley Market Co-op (Northampton, MA) and Putney Food Co-op (VT), as well as a growing number mainstream grocery stores such as Whole Foods Market. Sales continue to grow, but the co-op is clear in its purpose as a member-owned and controlled enterprise. "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

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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."

You can help support the co-op by asking for their products where you shop. For more information on Deep Root Organic Co-op, member farms and their products, please visit their website at www.deeroot.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. —Profile and photos by Erbin Crowell.



Blue heron at a Deep Root member farm.



Organic Collards at Foote Brook Farm, a Deep Root Organic Co-op member.



Organic tomatoes ready to be shipped.