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Borrower Profile: Local Sprouts Cooperative: Local, Organic, Creative

Are you looking for a local, community building food establishment that's democratically owned by the workers? You're in luck- Local Sprouts Café, in Portland, Maine, is all that and more!

Developed out of the Portland People's Free Space in 2007, the Local Sprouts Cooperative focuses on cooking local organic food and connecting people through sharing food, mutual support, and knowledge and developing local self-reliance. Local Sprouts reaches a wide range of people through utilizing multiple strategies, including operating café and catering businesses, school and community educational programs, and a community supported kitchen (CSK).

At the core of Local Sprouts' operation is the worker-owned cooperative. Internally, the democratic workplace means that, unlike in much of the food service industry, workers on the front line have a voice in the business and equitably benefit from its success. Externally, Local Sprouts provides a sense of inspiration and hope that businesses can be operated in a different way. "We can work together as a community in an ethical way that supports local farmers and workers and provides great jobs and great food for the community" says worker-owner Jonah Fertig.

Local Sprouts pairs their café and catering work with a strong community education program that expands understanding of the benefits and techniques to prepar-

ing and eating local foods. These programs, in schools and community organizations, allow Local Sprouts to reach deeper into the community with their message of sustainable local food systems. "Teaching about cooking- the flavors and cultures- impacts how youth grow up in this world" says Fertig.

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The community, in turn, supports Local Sprouts beyond just buying their food. Through Local Sprouts' Community Supported Kitchen (CSK), modeled on the popular Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, community members buy a membership that affords them discounts at the café. As of early 2011, over 80 community members were participating in this program.

Additionally, a significant part of the financing for Local Sprouts' café start-up came through loans from community supporters.

This might not have been possible without CFNE. "CFNE's support helped Local Sprouts leverage broader community support," says Fertig. "CFNE helped us solidify our business plan and financials, which was crucial to securing other financing and opening the café."

The next time you need to grab a bite or organize food for an event, contact Local Sprouts Cooperative. You'll not only eat great food, but you'll be supporting an important building block in the movement to a sustainable healthy food system. For more information,

visit: www.localsprouts.coop.



-profile by Micha Josephy