



Newsletter

Common Cause Co-operative
Supporting a local sustainable food economy

Organic Farmer Networks

Following the workshops held by Common Cause on Co-operative Marketing (see pages 2-4), we have helped facilitate two new farmer networks in Sussex.

The West Sussex and Surrey Farmer Network met in December hosted by Andy Challis of Steepwood Farm and in January hosted by John Goodman of Rowner Farm. Both farms are located near Billingshurst. The producers attending this network are all livestock farmers with an interest in exchanging experiences and expertise and in marketing their produce directly and locally. The next meeting is Wed. 20th February, 7.30 pm at Richard Mortimore's Farm, Pease Pottage.

The Organic Vegetable Producer Network

met in December in Lewes. The producers attending this network are interested in regular meetings to exchange expertise and experiences, to visit farms locally, to visit the Riverford co-operative in Devon and to meet with growers in the Chichester area to explore opportunities for purchasing vegetables for box schemes.

To obtain the newsletters for these networks, or for more information about meeting dates or setting up a network near you please contact Topsy Jewell at Common Cause Co-operative on 01273 473351, E-mail topsy@commoncause.fsnet.co.uk.

January 2002

Volume 2 Issue 1

Inside this issue:

Co-operative Marketing	2-3
Co-operative Marketing Useful Contacts	4
About Common Cause	4

Farm Audit

Common Cause Co-operative is undertaking an audit of organic farms in East Sussex. The information will be analysed by a database that we have designed. The questionnaire has been developed with the help of a number of producers and will continue work undertaken by the High Weald Land Management Initiative. The aim is to support the development of the organic sector by collecting up to-date information about the production, processing and marketing capacity of organic producers in the area. The information will be made available to producers to help identify local farm inputs and markets.

We will be contacting farms to arrange a meeting to fill out the questionnaire which should take about 45 minutes. We realise that this will be a burden but very much hope that you will be interested in this project. The audit and database are registered with the Data Protection Act and information can remain confidential on request. For more information contact Katharine Rayner at Common Cause Tel 01273 470900. E-mail: katherine@commoncause.fsnet.co.uk

Meeting with R.O.S.E.

In January, Common Cause met with members of the Regional Organics South East, R.O.S.E. near Maidenhead, Kent. R.O.S.E. is a group of producer members of the Soil Association in the South East region who come together to promote production, distribution and consumption of locally grown or-

ganic food. With support from Kent County Council, they have produced a directory of Farm Shops, Producers, Box Schemes and retail shops selling organic produce in Kent and East Sussex. Common Cause and R.O.S.E. share a number of objectives and aim to collaborate where possible. As a start Common

Cause has put producers of organic vegetable box schemes in East Sussex in touch with vegetable growers in Kent.

For more information on the directory or to find out about entering your details in the next updated version contact Martin Mackey of R.O.S.E. on 01227 730898

Co-operative Marketing

Last Autumn, Common Cause ran two workshops on co-operative marketing. The workshops were led by Clive Peckham of East Anglia Food Link with speakers from local co-operative ventures. Clive presented a wide range of information and examples addressing the benefits of co-operative activity, models of co-operation as well as examples of informal co-operation such as farm walks and farmer networks that can benefit farms locally. The key findings are as follows:

Benefits of a Co-operative System

- ?????To advertise, publicise and market each other
- ?????To better afford to market and sell surplus and cosmetic grade outs
- ?????to develop local markets instead of competing for the same markets
- ????? ? better afford to employ marketing assistance
- ????? ? spend more time producing
- ????? ? achieve a recognised branding for produce
- ????? ? access more and further markets
- ????? ? Increase negotiating powers
- ????? ? better access grants as a group
- ?????To increase assets
- ?????Easier for a retail outlet to access your produce as can contact one desk rather than several
- ?????Can develop a delivery system to retail outlets, caterers, tourist trade, etc.
- ?????Can develop inter-regional marketing to access big common markets: eg London
- ?????Co-ops in different regions and countries can be members of each other and trade inter-regionally or internationally
- ?????Secondary co-ops – eg a vegetable and fruit co-op can join up to benefit from same admin and financial services and also to supply both types of products
- ?????Internet co-op – internet allows for credit card sales, producers can join together to sell over the internet and jointly manage system to reduce costs.

Types of Farming and Retail Co-operatives

- ?????Collective Farm management – independent farms usually growing similar products working as a single unit share machinery, labour and skills, buy inputs. Helps uneconomic farms to become financially viable. The Wealden Farmers Network is a good example of this model (see next page).
- ?????Marketing co-operatives – collective supply of new markets such as catering, village shops, tourist trade, etc. or collectively pay rent on a shop.
- ?????Producer/Consumer co-ops – eg the Dublin Food Co-operative holds a weekly market. Producer members sell direct to customers and pay a levy on sales to the co-op. Consumers pay a membership, run successfully for 17 years.
- ?????Farm worker co-operative – the co-operative owns the land and members are joint owners of the business. The best examples are in Spain. Could also be done with the County Farm networks.
- ?????Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) Customers invest in production at the beginning of the season and are paid back in produce. They share the risks of production. Examples include customer investment in orchards, vegetable box schemes, livestock, delivery vans, etc.
- ?????Bio-cops in France are a federation of organic consumer co-ops and locally owned shops. There are over 250 members throughout France with an annual turnover of £80 million. The Bio Co-ops are committed to a common standard or charter that includes purchasing local produce.

First steps to setting up a co-operative

- ?????Finding suitable partners
- ?????Formulating a ‘members agreement’
- ?????Formulating a profit sharing agreement according to value of farm or value of sales.
- ?????Commitment by members to stick to the agreement and market only quality produce through co-op.
- ?????Sharing a common objective
- ?????Trust between producers
- ?????Farmers control grading and quality control
- ?????Finding suitable markets – eg chartered markets may give co-ops the right to sell
- ?????Customer support – eg financial support to pay rent on shop/growing costs/etc in return for produce
- ?????Training in marketing very important
- ?????Developing the infrastructure
- ?????Training in financial, constitutional and management systems
- ?????Production planning
- ?????Clarity of contracts, who grades produce/ how divide profits etc/ guaranteed purchases?
- ?????Mentoring and exchange of expertise and information
- ?????Costs of professional advisors
- ?????Levy required to pay for co-op services
- ?????Requires a few years to mature, careful financial planning
- ?????Incentive to keep it working – by having a common goal, developing a brand and a reputation in the market having a focus for why the co-op was set up

Informal activities benefiting local producers

- Farm walks - visits by consumers and retailers can have a big impact upon sales
- Building farmer networking groups
- Building marketing infrastructure

Legal Structures for Co-operatives

Choosing the appropriate legal structure is very important. Most co-operatives are Industrial Providence Societies (IPS). Some are Companies Limited by Guarantee, although some feel that this type of structure can be problematic. It is best to get advice - eg from organisations that support co-operatives. See page 4 for the contact details of organisation that can give advice or support for co-operatives.

Marketing Co-operatives in Sussex

The Wealden Organic Dairy Group

By Stephen Hook

The Wealden Organic Dairy Group originally started as a discussion group for dairy farmers in Sussex and Kent wanting to know more about organic farming methods and standards. After a few farm walks, we invited organic milk buyers to speak to us. From this, we progressed onto our own discussions on marketing our own milk. This discussion group of twelve farmers formed a steering group of four farmers, plus a consultant, to look at the various processing and marketing opportunities. The groups objectives are;

- ? to sell our milk products as far down the retail chain as possible
- ? to add value
- ? to form our own brand.

Students from Wye College, part of Imperial College, London, carried out our market research in London, Bluewater, Tunbridge Wells and Hastings. The steering group has also had discussions with food processing experts at Reading University, market research and marketing consultants. The steering group has endeavoured to secure the services of the best person for the advice required at each stage. An ADAS business consultant has been contracted to undertake a feasibility study, business plan and grant

applications. The feasibility study will be completed shortly. It is a tremendously exciting project, which will give our group members a better income, and a branded product they can be proud of. The need for this type of vertically integrating group has been highlighted by the recent falling organic milk price. This is why we need to take more control! Exciting challenges ahead!

For more

information contact: Stephen Hook (Chair)
Longleys Farm, Harebeating Lane, East Sussex
BN27 1ER. Tel: 01323 80089
E-mail: hooksgranary@farmersweekly.net

The Wealden Organic Dairy Group found that marketing co-operatively together has brought the following benefits:

- ☞☞ Branding
- ☞☞ Better negotiating power
- ☞☞ More control over price
- ☞☞ Identifying marketing opportunities
- ☞☞ Sharing marketing costs
- ☞☞ Increasing production assets - adding value as members of the group
- ☞☞ Forming a buying group
- ☞☞ More likely to receive grant aid as a group than as an individual

The Wealden Farmers' Network

The Wealden Farmers' Network is a collective of five small Wealden farms in East Sussex sharing a cutting room and marketing vacuum and freezer packs of beef, lamb, and pork directly to local customers. Most of these farms would not be economically viable on their own. By joining together they can jointly plan production (to enable lambs to be available throughout the year), process the meat (butchering, sausage production and packaging), and market directly to reduce individual farm costs while at the same time maintaining full traceability of the meat and the identity of each farm. The farms are aiming as a unit to become self sufficient in inputs

to achieve greater environmental and financial sustainability.

Common Cause has run two visits to the cutting room since the co-operative marketing workshop with producers from East and West Sussex, Kent and Surrey.

For more information contact: Simon Bishop, Plumpton College Out Centre, Ivyland Farm, Netherfield, near Battle, TN33 9QB, Tel: 01424 838620 E-mail: simon.bishop@plumpton.ac.uk or if you are interested in a farm visit contact Topsy Jewell at Common Cause. Plumpton College manage two of the farms in the network, one of which is organic.

Ideas for Co-operation in Sussex

The following are activities and ideas identified by workshop participants:

- ????? Register of input and marketing co-operatives in the region – Common Cause is planning an Audit of organic farms starting in East Sussex which will include information about input and marketing co-operatives and machinery rings.
- ????? More regional support services for co-operatives
- ????? Co-op for small scale producers to enable better distribution and better access to local produce eg at farmers market, mobile van, etc. Look for grants for van or subscriptions from customers.

- ????? Co-op to market surplus and grade-outs to enable growers (eg those currently supplying vegetable box schemes) to diversify markets and access catering markets.
- ????? Meat co-operative in West Sussex Audit of retailers wanting to purchase local produce.
- ????? Farmer networks to enable producers to get to know each other
- ????? Visit to the Wealden Farmers Network Cutting Room
- ????? Campaign on local radio and TV to create demand for local brand (eg a "Local Food" brand comparable with Fair Trade brand).

For useful contacts on co-operatives see over page



Green Room
20 North Street
Lewes
BN7 2PE

Answer phone: 01273 470900
Fax: 01273 470900
Email: comcause@commoncause.fsnet.co.uk

We are on the Web
www.commoncause.co.uk

Common Cause Co-operative was established in 1991 in Lewes, East Sussex. It is a not-for-profit co-operative company limited by guarantee. Common Cause supports activities that have long term social, economic and environmental benefits. One of our objectives is to support sustainable food production for local consumption.

Common Cause has set up Just Trade, an organic food co-op, the Lewes Farmers' Market, and OATES (Organic Agriculture Training in East Sussex). OATES is a project that was initiated in 2000 in partnership with East Sussex County Council and Plumpton College to provide training in organic horticulture. We are currently researching the needs of the organic agriculture sector in the Sussex area, have run free training courses for producers, and facilitate farmer networks. Common Cause is a member of the Health Authority *School Food Action Group* and we are exploring the feasibility of linking Public Sector Catering with local organic production.

Useful Contacts on Co-operatives:

Common Cause Co-operative for: OATES newsletter, trainings, farmer networks, farm visits, etc. see programme of events on our web site: www.commoncause.co.uk or contact us at: The Green Room, 20 North Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2PE. Tel: 01273 470900, e-mail: comcause@commoncause.fsnet.co.uk

East Anglia Food Link (EAFL), Clive Peckam, 49a High Street, Watton, Thetford, Norfolk IP 25 6AB. Tel: 01953-889200, e-mail: eafl@gn.apc.org

Mutual Aid – a network of Sussex co-operatives founded in 1999. Mutual aid aims to support and promote new and existing social enterprises in Brighton and Sussex through mutual support, skill sharing and information. They will be producing a directory of social enterprises in the area. Contact: Mutual aid, c/o Secretary, Martin Groombridge, 48 Osborne road, Brighton, BN1 6LQ. Web site: www.co-op.org/mutualaid. Trainings in March?

South East Co-ops, Martin Groombridge, 40 Orchard Street, Dartford, Kent DA1 2DG, Tel: 01322 321200, email: martin.groombridge@co-op.co.uk, web site: www.co-op.co.uk The Co-op is encouraging local farming co-ops to supply local retail outlets and have given grant aid to fund farmer groups to meet the requirements necessary to sell to the Co-op.

The Co-op Community Dividend Fund for funding up to £5,000 to support co-ops. Contact South East Co-ops.

The Co-op Union Incorporating the Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM), Tel: 0161 2462959, e-mail: icom@icom.org.uk for phone advice and information on legal structures.

Plunkett Foundation – This is an independent charitable trust providing support to farmer controlled businesses. They offer training and advice and offer a subsidy scheme with DEFRA to cover 50% of their consultancy fees (this means that a days advice will cost £200 or £100 for half a day). This is a useful organisation for advice on how to structure and manage a co-operative. Plunkett Foundation, 23 Hanborough business Park, Long Hanborough, Oxford OX8 8LH, Tel: 01993 883636, e-mail: info@plunkett.co.uk

The Dublin Food Co-op, 12A North Kingstreet, Dublin, Ireland, Tel: +353 1873 0451
E-mail: dfc@clubi.ie

