

Values-based food supply chains: Co-op Partners Warehouse

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April 2013



This series of case studies examines values-based food supply chains—strategic business alliances formed between primarily mid-sized farms/ranches and their supply chain partners—to distribute significant volumes of high-quality, differentiated food products and share the rewards equitably. Farmers and ranchers function as strategic partners rather than easily replaced input suppliers. All participants in these business alliances recognize that creating maximum value for the product depends on significant interdependence, collaboration and mutual support. These supply chains attach importance to both the values embedded in the production of the food products AND the values that characterize the business relationships.¹

Historical development through 2010

Introduction. Co-op Partners Warehouse <www.cooppartners.coop>² is a certified organic wholesale distribution warehouse that serves retail stores, food service businesses and buying clubs throughout the Upper Midwest. It was initially established in 1999 by the Wedge Natural Foods Co-op <www.wedge.coop> to provide more storage space for the produce department. Co-op Partners Warehouse, which continues to be wholly owned by the Wedge, is an important link between customers and local suppliers of produce, dairy products and other perishables. In 2007 the Wedge acquired Gardens of Eagan <www.gardensofeagan.com>, a 100-acre certified organic vegetable farm and major supplier to Co-op Partners Warehouse.³

Strategic and philosophical goals. The Wedge is a consumer-owned cooperative located in the Uptown neighborhood of Minneapolis that carries out the goals and strategies set forth by the multifaceted interests and preferences of its 14,500 members. Wedge members, in turn, influence strategies and goals for Co-op Partners Warehouse. Similar to any other produce distribution business, Co-op Partners Warehouse's business model focuses on capturing efficiencies in sourcing, warehousing and distributing perishable product. At the

Co-op Partners Warehouse is a certified organic wholesale distribution warehouse that serves food businesses in the Upper Midwest

¹Values-Based Food Supply Chains: Strategies for Agri-Food Enterprises-of-the-Middle explains the terminology and general characteristics of values-based food supply chains: <www.agofthemiddle.org>.

²All websites referenced in this document were accessed on 9/6/12.

³This case study describes Co-op Partners Warehouse operations in the autumn of 2010, with some additional updates from late 2011 provided in footnotes.



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same time, its mission also includes fostering markets for small growers:

The early impetus for forming Co-op Partners Warehouse was the belief that no other wholesaler in this region was adequately representing product from small, quality-focused organic growers. We wanted our sourcing to include smaller farms as well as larger, name-brand organic labels, both locally and throughout North America. <www.cooppartners.coop/about_history.php>

The Wedge’s 2007 acquisition of Gardens of Eagan, a 100-acre certified organic farm established by Martin and Atina Diffley, added a new dimension to the strategic mission of Co-op Partners Warehouse. It became part of a consumer-oriented “... unified model of a cooperatively owned farm, wholesaler and retail store.” <www.cooppartners.coop/about_history.php>

Organizational development. Co-op Partners Warehouse started operations in 1999 under the management of Edward Brown, then produce manager at the Wedge. The original facility was 15,000 square feet of warehouse space in an industrial district on the west side of St. Paul, Minnesota. The warehouse has expanded in the same location twice since 1999 and currently has 45,000 square feet of space.

At the time Co-op Partners Warehouse was established, there were two other cooperatively owned distribution businesses operating in the Twin Cities: Blooming Prairie Cooperative Warehouse and Roots and Fruits Cooperative Produce. Blooming Prairie was a broad-line distributor that served natural food cooperative and buying club members in the Upper Midwest and Great Plains. In 2002 Blooming Prairie members voted to demutualize the cooperative and sell its assets and businesses to United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI). Roots and Fruits was a worker-owned and -operated produce distributor. In 2005 it was acquired by Albert’s Organics, a subsidiary of UNFI.

Co-op Partners Warehouse Manager Tom Rodmyre had more than 30 years of experience in the produce business when interviewed in September 2010. He left Roots and Fruits in 2003 to take his current position. The key Co-op Partners Warehouse mission at that time was to serve other natural foods cooperatives in the area, and it was envisioned that it would eventually be owned cooperatively by these retail businesses. After UNFI purchased Blooming Prairie, the Wedge considered selling Co-op Partners Warehouse to UNFI or converting it from a subsidiary of the Wedge to a cooperative owned by the Wedge and other natural foods co-ops. When Lindy Bannister joined the Wedge as General Manager in 2005, she expressed concerns about Co-op Partners Warehouse’s ability to make business decisions quickly in a rapidly changing environment if it were cooperatively owned by its customers. Lindy made sure

that the Wedge retained sole ownership of Co-op Partners Warehouse. Because other natural foods cooperatives that are supplied by Co-op Partners Warehouse have a mutual membership arrangement with the Wedge, however, they receive patronage refunds on net margins earned by Co-op Partners Warehouse that reflect the share of its gross sales accounted for by their purchases.

The Wedge's 2007 acquisition of Gardens of Eagan led to other organizational changes at Co-op Partners Warehouse. Prior to the purchase, Gardens of Eagan was already a major supplier to the co-op and also sold direct to other natural foods cooperatives in the area. During 2008, the two entities operated independently, with Co-op Partners Warehouse continuing to buy some produce from Gardens of Eagan. In 2009, Co-op Partners Warehouse did all the trucking for Gardens of Eagan, but Gardens of Eagan still took orders independently. In 2010, Co-op Partners Warehouse purchased Gardens of Eagan's entire production. This created new opportunities and challenges, discussed in this case study, for the managers of these two once-independent business operations.

In September 2010, Co-op Partners Warehouse had 30 employees, including a sales manager, buyers and sales representatives, a bookkeeper, warehouse operations staff and drivers. It served 160 accounts in five states. Co-op Partners Warehouse owned five trucks and leased one. It also worked with several common carriers for product deliveries to locations more than 100 miles away.⁴

Historical growth indicators. In the early years of its operations, Co-op Partners Warehouse sales were approximately \$1 million annually, with the bulk of those sales being made to the Wedge. By 2010, annual sales had increased to \$16 million, with sales to the Wedge accounting for just 23 percent of that total. The other natural food cooperatives in the Twin Cities metropolitan area are responsible for a large portion of the remaining sales. Co-op Partners Warehouse specializes in buying from smaller producers and carries more locally produced, value-added specialty products than its most significant competitors, J&J Produce and Albert's Organics. Co-op Partners Warehouse maintains relationships with growers around the country, but between mid-June and the end of October approximately 70 percent of the product moving through the warehouse is locally produced, primarily from Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Dynamics as of 2010

Creating and marketing differentiated, higher value food products. Co-op Partners Warehouse has been instrumental in the development of a vibrant market for locally grown organic produce



Co-op Partners Warehouse had 30 employees in 2010 including warehouse staff and drivers.

⁴Zuidema, Lori. "Co-op Partners Warehouse" Presentation at Conference on Scaling Up Local Sustainable Foods, Madison, WI, September 28 and 29, 2010 <fyi.uwex.edu/aic/files/2010/09/Zuidema.pdf>.



**Co-op Partners
Warehouse “... has
allowed us to exist
and get to our
current scale.”
—Jack Hedin,
Featherstone Farm**



in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. “This is the best market in the nation, and Co-op Partners Warehouse is a big part of that,” says Jack Hedin, farmer/owner of Featherstone Farm, a 250-acre certified organic farm near Rushford, Minnesota <featherstonefarm.com>. Co-op Partners Warehouse has found innovative ways to partner with farmers like Hedin. It has also let these partnerships evolve as its farm suppliers have grown. Featherstone Farm has been selling through Co-op Partners Warehouse since 2001 and, as described later in this case, has had an office and leased warehouse space and has based trucks at Co-op Partners warehouse since 2008. Hedin notes that Co-op Partners Warehouse is “... a values-based business. They understand the dilemma and reality of local produce.” He appreciates the good, consistent, direct communications and the long-term relationships he has fostered with people at Co-op Partners Warehouse. He goes on to say that Co-op Partners Warehouse “... has allowed us to exist and to get to our current scale. It gives Featherstone Farm huge reach and regional recognition.” (Jack Hedin, interview, 12/14/10).

Co-op Partners Warehouse has also played an important role in the development of Hoch Orchard and Garden <www.hochorchard.com>, a small, certified organic family fruit farm and value-added processing business near La Crescent, Minnesota. Owners Harry and Jackie Hoch started doing business with Co-op Partners Warehouse in 2002. This made it possible for them to increase the efficiency of deliveries to Twin Cities retail outlets, especially to smaller stores that did not order large quantities of apples. Over the past several years, they have expanded sales of fresh fruit to the point where they now do much of their own distribution rather than moving product through the warehouse, but Co-op Partners Warehouse has been supportive and flexible in continuing to work with them in new ways. For example, the cooperative has played an especially important role in growing markets for Hoch Orchard and Garden’s value-added products that include apple cider, fruit sauces, jelly, jam and juice blends. Retail outlets order smaller quantities of these products, and they place orders year-round rather than during the fresh fruit season when the Hochs make frequent store deliveries. This makes direct delivery of these products uneconomical, but working through Co-op Partners Warehouse has made it possible for Hoch Orchard and Garden to offer these products year-round in more stores (Jackie Hoch, interview, 12/8/10).

These two examples illustrate how Co-op Partners Warehouse represents its approximately 30 local farmer-suppliers in the marketplace: providing a mechanism for farms to convey their identities and values to consumers, as well as take advantage of the logistical efficiencies in working through an intermediary. Co-op Partners Warehouse is essentially invisible to the retail customers who ultimately buy the food it distributes, but it has developed

strong ties with its direct customers—natural food cooperatives and restaurants.

One Co-op Partners Warehouse customer is Mississippi Market Natural Foods Co-op <msmarket.coop>, a two-store, consumer-owned cooperative in St. Paul with 10,000 members and 180 employees. General Manager Gail Graham observes that Co-op Partners Warehouse is especially effective in representing local growers. While Co-op Partners Warehouse is not her only supplier for fresh produce—Mississippi Market also purchases directly from farmers and other distributors—she values the fact that it is a locally and cooperatively owned business (Gail Graham, interview, 9/7/10).

Common Roots Café <www.commonrootscafe.com> is one of Co-op Partners Warehouse’s food service customers. Located just a few blocks from the Wedge, Common Roots features food prepared from scratch with local, organic and fair-trade ingredients. Owner Danny Schwartzman sources flour and cream cheese through Co-op Partners Warehouse for Common Roots’ signature, baked-on-site bagels. While Schwartzman prefers to buy direct from farmers, he values the services Co-op Partners Warehouse provides. He notes that the cooperative is easy to work with, its minimum order size is small and it makes frequent deliveries. He also notes that Co-op Partners Warehouse and Common Roots have overlapping standards and values (Danny Schwartzman, interview, 9/7/10).

Creating effective internal organizational forms. In many respects, Co-op Partners Warehouse is a typical produce distribution business. On the surface, its facilities and day-to-day operations do not differ dramatically from other produce warehouses in cities around the country. On closer examination, however, it becomes clear that Co-op Partners Warehouse has developed some unique business practices, such as the drop-ship program described below, that are well-suited for fostering the distribution of local and regional foods. In addition, the Wedge/Co-op Partners Warehouse/Gardens of Eagan structure is unique and innovative, especially in the sense that it is driven by consumer demand rather than producers’ supply.

Co-op Partners Warehouse’s drop-ship program allows smaller producers to take advantage of the logistical efficiencies that larger food suppliers enjoy. Under this program, producers take orders directly from customers. They consolidate the orders, packing them in cartons or on pallets on the farm and then deliver them to Co-op Partners Warehouse with invoices or shipping documents. Co-op Partners Warehouse does not take title to the order but stores it until it can be delivered to the customer with the next regular shipment. The invoice serves as the customer’s bill, and payment for product is sent directly to the producer. After the delivery is completed, Co-op Partners Warehouse bills the producer, typically at a rate of \$20 per drop. This program helps reduce transportation costs and fuel use, since the producer makes one trip with product



On the surface, Co-op Partners Warehouse’s facilities and operations do not differ dramatically from other produce warehouses, but it does have unique business practices and partnerships.



Co-op Partners Warehouse sources eggs and chickens from local farmers.

for multiple customers and Co-op Partners Warehouse transports the product along with other regular deliveries. For example, Hoch Orchard and Garden used the drop-ship program to deliver fresh fruit to retail outlets until they expanded sales to a level that made it economical for them to deliver directly to retail customers. In contrast to most distribution models, this program allows small producers to maintain and manage direct contacts with their retail and food service customers.

In a variation on this program, Featherstone Farm leases space and maintains an office in the Co-op Partners Warehouse facility. The farm delivers packed produce and CSA boxes to Co-op Partners Warehouse in a large truck three or four times weekly during the growing season. Featherstone Farm has two smaller trucks that operate out of the warehouse facility, delivering product to retail outlets and CSA drop sites in the Twin Cities. Featherstone Farm also does contract hauling to the Twin Cities for three other smaller farms located in southeastern Minnesota. Product from these farms travels to Co-op Partners Warehouse on the large truck and then is either purchased by the cooperative or distributed to customers through the drop-ship program. Finally, Co-op Partners Warehouse works with Featherstone Farm to facilitate the return of empty wholesale and CSA boxes so they can be reused. All of these arrangements help economize on transportation resources and give small growers easier access to markets. They are concrete examples of the flexibility, trust and effective communication that are hallmarks of Co-op Partners Warehouse's business practices.

In addition to these organizational innovations in Co-op Partners Warehouse's relationships with suppliers, the integration of a farm, distribution business and retail store under ownership by a consumer cooperative is truly noteworthy. As the local and regional food movement develops and evolves, business entities across the food system have struggled with challenges in understanding and responding to consumer demand, accessing capital and efficiently coordinating the flow of product from producers to consumers. In many cases, the supply chains that accomplish this have been led by producers, producer organizations or aggregators who serve as intermediaries. It is very unusual for a supply chain to be led by consumers. The Wedge is an example of this unique structure, and the resulting values-based food supply chain gives consumers voice and a vehicle for investing in a food system that reflects their values and interests. In effect, this structure pulls the products consumers demand through the food system rather than pushing the products producers want to supply through the system.

Selecting markets and values-based food supply chain partners.

The notion of shared values, such as organic certification, emerged repeatedly in the interviews conducted for this case study. Lindy noted that the Wedge has been certified organic since 2002 and

that all departments are also certified (Lindy Bannister, interview, 9/8/10). This ensures traceability and establishes an environment of transparency and accountability. The Wedge sells some products that are not organic, and Co-op Partners Warehouse carries some non-organic products, but many of the relationships in this supply chain are based on a common interest in and commitment to organic certification. In some respects, this supply chain is a community that is growing and thriving apart from the mainstream food system.

Commitment to local ownership and local sourcing is another shared value in this supply chain. Unique features of the cooperative model make it possible for the people who ultimately consume the food to own a share of the Wedge, Co-op Partners Warehouse and Gardens of Eagan. It is highly unlikely that it would be legally possible for this supply chain to be sold as a unit to outside interests, though joint ownership of stores and distribution facilities is common. Other supplier, retailer and food service partners in the supply chain also value local ownership and control. This can be a strength and a weakness. It fosters a sense of cohesiveness, but it places limits on the extent to which this supply chain can expand.

Finally, there is a shared commitment in this supply chain to transparency and open communication, and an emphasis on a fair allocation of revenues and costs across the chain. For example, the Wedge is the eastern-most customer of Country Natural Beef, a unique cooperative of ranchers in the Pacific Northwest that is the subject of another case study in this series <www.agofthemiddle.org/pubs/cnbcasestudyrevo12711.pdf>. The business relationship between these two cooperatives is clearly based on shared values as well as commercial interests.

Developing effective supply chain logistics. In serving its suppliers and customers, Co-op Partners Warehouse uses a variety of business practices. These include traditional wholesale purchases from growers, the drop-ship program and leasing warehouse space to a major supplier. In addition, the cooperative is exploring opportunities to pick up produce on empty back hauls from deliveries to stores outside of the Twin Cities area. When local produce is not available, Co-op Partners Warehouse works with a broker who arranges for pickup and transport from growers in California.

In contrast to Red Tomato, the subject of another case study in this series <www.agofthemiddle.org/pubs/rtcasestudyfinalrev.pdf>, Co-op Partners Warehouse does control warehouse space and transportation equipment. Similar to Red Tomato, however, the cooperative has been flexible in its relationships with suppliers and has supported stable, season-long, cost-of-production-based pricing for growers.



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Problems with information flows and internal organizational incentives are not uncommon in businesses that expand across segments of a supply chain



Achieving economic sustainability. Co-op Partners Warehouse and the Wedge play a key role in determining prices for locally grown organic produce in the Twin Cities area, and the prices are high enough that farms can be profitable. Lindy states that “Co-op Partners Warehouse does not dicker down ... and when there is a shortage they will dicker up.” (Lindy Bannister, interview, 9/8/10). Jack Hedin confirms this, noting that Co-op Partners Warehouse and the Wedge drive prices and expressing concern that the price structure is so favorable for farmers that it makes it difficult for them to expand by selling into conventional markets at much lower prices (Jack Hedin, interview, 12/14/10).

Future dynamics as envisioned in 2010

Internal organizational issues. The evolving relationship with Gardens of Eagan had created some challenges for Co-op Partners Warehouse by the autumn of 2010. From the perspective of Linda Halley, farm manager of Gardens of Eagan, the commitment to sell all of the farm’s production to Co-op Partners Warehouse had put pressure on the revenue side of her operation (Linda Halley, interview, 9/8/10). Prior to 2010, Gardens of Eagan took orders directly from its customers and often delivered directly to them at a wholesale price. When Co-op Partners Warehouse purchased from Gardens of Eagan during the 2010 growing season, the normal 18 percent warehouse margin was deducted from that wholesale price. The fact that the cooperative did all the trucking for Gardens of Eagan lowered costs for the farm, but this did not fully offset the revenue losses. This relationship also created challenges for warehouse operations, as more produce was moving through the warehouse. Until 2010, Co-op Partners Warehouse staff had been relatively passive in taking orders from customers, but now they needed to proactively find markets for the increased flow of product. Manager Tom Rodmyre responded by hiring a new employee with responsibilities for outside sales.

Problems with information flows and internal organizational incentives are not uncommon in businesses that expand across segments of a supply chain. In this case, enterprises that once had a supplier/customer relationship are now part of the same organization. While it should be possible to achieve efficiency gains through closer integration of these enterprises, it takes time to develop systems for transparent communication about fast-changing circumstances on the farm and in the marketplace. In addition, managerial incentive systems that were appropriate when the two enterprises were independent may need to be adjusted so that rewards for efficiency gains realized through integration are equitably shared, even when the financial impacts are realized by only one of the enterprises. For example, Co-op Partners Warehouse should be able to improve its operating profit due to the increased flow of lower priced product

from Gardens of Eagan, but mechanisms need to be developed to redirect some of this increased operating profit back to the farm.⁵

Issues with supply chain partners. Integration of Co-op Partners Warehouse and Gardens of Eagan within the Wedge has created some tension with other natural foods cooperatives in the Twin Cities area. Gail Graham, General Manager of Mississippi Market, values her store's relationship with Co-op Partners Warehouse and with the Wedge, though she also purchases produce directly from growers and from competing distributors Albert's Organics and J&J Produce. She has concerns, however, that the Wedge may get preferential treatment from Co-op Partners Warehouse when a product is in short supply (Gail Graham, interview, 9/7/10).

On the upstream end of the supply chain, there are some food hubs emerging in the region that will aggregate product closer to the farm and transport it efficiently to customers in the Twin Cities. A food hub is "... a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand."⁶ These new food hubs will reduce demand for some of the services Co-op Partners Warehouse has to offer. Nevertheless, Co-op Partners Warehouse has shown that it can work effectively with hub-like organizations such as Featherstone Farm, as described earlier in this case, and the cooperative seems well-positioned to adapt to this new development in the market.

Economics and efficiencies. Co-op Partners Warehouse is large enough to achieve the operational efficiencies that are necessary in a highly competitive marketplace. It has developed unique capabilities in managing relationships with distant growers that allow producers to maintain their identities and links with their products all the way to Twin Cities' consumers. It will be difficult for competing produce distributors in the area to replicate these capabilities. Co-op Partners Warehouse also has the advantage of being owned by a natural foods cooperative. This gives them a direct link to retail store operations and a dedicated base of consumers committed to growing the market for local, organic produce. The relationship with Gardens of Eagan may be the question mark in this system. On the one hand, there is the potential for considerable growth and efficiency gains through this relationship, but these can only be realized if Co-op Partners Warehouse puts in place effective communication and carefully aligned incentive systems. While



Co-op Partners Warehouse carries a variety of organic and locally made products, like this Kombucha.

⁵With input from the Wedge accounting staff, a procedure was developed to represent the impact of the price adjustment on enterprise profit and loss statements, and an on-paper income adjustment would be made at the end of the fiscal year (Linda Halley, interview, 11/7/11).

⁶Barham, James, Debra Tropp, Kathleen Enterline, Jeff Farbman, John Fisk, and Stacie Kiraly. *Regional Food Hub Resource Guide*. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Agricultural marketing Service. Washington, DC. April 2012, p. 4 <www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5097957>.



As is the case for many emerging values-based food supply chains, one of the biggest challenges for the future will be to develop a growing workforce



the adjustment to this new, vertically integrated structure was still in process when interviews were conducted in 2010, the prospects were positive.⁷

Strategies for increasing markets and growth. Co-op Partners Warehouse and the Wedge were well-positioned in 2010 to take advantage of the growing markets for local and organic food. Over the next four to five years, members of the management team at the Wedge and Co-op Partners Warehouse planned to continue helping small producers access the Twin Cities market. They hoped to increase the use of the warehouse's drop-ship program and also planned to make more direct purchases from small organic farmers. They believed that growth would come through increasing sales to institutional food service operations. Finally, they recognized that the size of their consumer market was limited by the single location for the Wedge. They dreamed of being able to serve underserved urban markets through sales from refrigerated trucks and wondered if there is a market for fixed-price bags of produce offered for sale at transit stops to people on their way home from work (Lindy Bannister, interview, 9/8/10).

A mature Co-op Partners Warehouse. A mature supply chain including Gardens of Eagan, Co-op Partners Warehouse and the Wedge will have worked through challenges in its internal organization and will continue to have positive relationships with both suppliers and customers. As is the case for many emerging values-based food supply chains, one of the biggest challenges for the future will be to develop a growing workforce. Replacing the current Co-op Partners Warehouse management team when they retire will be especially difficult. This is a business that requires a combination of creativity, flexibility and the ability to work in teams, along with a willingness to do hard physical work that is repetitive and sometimes narrowly focused. The key to this challenge may be in making employees throughout the system feel engaged in an exciting, dynamic enterprise that is having significant impacts on the way food is produced and consumed.

Policy note

Co-op Partners Warehouse and its complex organizational structure offer multiple opportunities to tap into policies and programs at the local, state and federal levels. In December 2011, then Wedge Co-op General Manager Lindy Bannister discussed options related exclu-

⁷With input from all parties — Co-op Partners Warehouse, Gardens of Eagan and the core customers who have historically purchased from the farm — Gardens of Eagan would return to a more direct sales relationship with all of its customers in 2012. A variety of delivery methods would be employed, including drop-ship procedures used by other growers, contract delivery and direct delivery by Gardens of Eagan. Co-op Partners Warehouse would continue to purchase some product directly from Gardens of Eagan for sale to customers who did not wish to purchase directly from the farm (Linda Halley, interview, 11/7/11).

sively to the warehouse sector of the business for this policy note (Lindy Bannister, interview, 12/9/11).

At the federal level, Co-op Partners Warehouse only participates in the food safety program. They have a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan, and they are certified by the Midwest Organic Services Association (MOSA) as an organic handler. Co-op Partners Warehouse does not use any state or local programs but complies with all mandatory regulations.

Lindy said they do get involved in some agricultural policy issues and if asked to notify co-op members on particular issues, they do so. In the recent past they have talked to Congressional members about Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&Ds), cooperatives, the organic task force and Small Business Administration (SBA) lending. In 2006 the Wedge played a major role in a lawsuit that successfully prevented an oil pipeline from being routed through the Gardens of Eagan farm <atinadiffley.com/pipeline-documents/>.

Co-op Partners Warehouse would like to see organic certification accepted as a major component of compliance with food safety regulations.

Credits

Lindy Bannister, Linda Halley and Tom Rodmyre provided the primary interviews upon which this case study and the policy note are based. The policy note was authored by Kate Clancy, University of Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture.

This project was supported by the National Institute for Food and Agriculture of the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA, Grant #2010-85211-2057.

Organizations involved with this report:

The National Initiative on Agriculture of the Middle is concerned with a disappearing sector of midscale farms/ranches and related agrifood enterprises that are unable to successfully market bulk commodities or sell food directly to consumers. See www.agofthemiddle.org. The initiative has three areas of emphasis: new business and marketing strategies; public policy changes; and research and education support.

The Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) is a research center for sustainable agriculture in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison. CIAS fosters multidisciplinary inquiry and supports a range of research, curriculum and program development projects. It brings together university faculty, farmers, policy makers and others to study relationships between farming practices, farm profitability, the environment and rural vitality. For more information, visit www.cias.wisc.edu or call 608-262-5200.

Many thanks to the organizations and individuals who provided the information for the case studies.

Edited by Lisa Bauer and Cris Carusi, CIAS. Publication design by Ruth McNair, CIAS.

Reviewed by Larry Lev, Debra Tropp and Laura Witzling.

Photos from Co-op Partners Warehouse.