

Nearly a Decade of Up & Coming

BY DEBBIE TROCHA

About ten years ago I approached George Huntington, then general manager of Bloomingfoods Market and Deli, about partnering on a small regional conference for start-up food co-ops. We had both been receiving calls from start-up groups, and this seemed like a great way to provide much-needed support.

From that small 2010 gathering of 35 attendees emerged Up & Coming, the national conference for start-up food co-ops. Over the years, we've been very intentional about listening to the feedback of attendees and providing topics and access to resource materials and experts that are second-to-none. One example is the case studies track that was created in response to attendee feedback. And on the subject of online ordering, this year we included workshops such as "How to use NationBuilder to Manage your Data" and "How to Capitalize as THE local Grocer in a Digital World."

As the landscape of the grocery industry continues to change and the pace of change intensifies, the interest in starting food co-ops in all parts of the country continues to grow. We began introducing workshops to address interest in urban co-ops in 2016, and in 2018 a track, "Co-ops and People of Color," was designed to delve deeply into issues facing communities in urban areas wanting to start a food co-op. This year we also introduced the "Rural Co-ops" track, inviting speakers from small, rural communities to share their unique challenges in starting a grocery co-op.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TROY FREUND

Moving the Up & Coming conference from Bloomington, Ind., to Milwaukee, Wis., for 2017 was exciting and challenging, a big step but a necessary one. Enter Outpost Natural Foods—they have been an extraordinary partner. General Manager Pam Mehnert and the Outpost staff and board excel in demonstrating the power of the 6th Cooperative Principle: cooperation among cooperatives. In 2018, Outpost again served as conference host co-op. Attendees toured their stores, and over 32 Outpost staff and board members assisted with registration, participated as speakers, and monitored sessions of the conference.

A huge thank you to Outpost, the speakers, volunteers, and sponsors who made Up & Coming 2018 possible. We look forward to your continued support in 2019, when we will return to Milwaukee for our 10th Anniversary. Let the planning begin! •



Here's a sample of what participants are saying about Up & Coming

"Thank you for the warm and inclusive welcome! Really an essential conference for start-up cooperators looking to open new food co-ops. Thank you for the sessions that fed mind, spirit, heart over the weekend."
"Attending the Up & Coming Food Co-op conference was the best decision we made as a steering committee/board. It motivates us to keep going."
"Great job, and the growing attendance shows you are addressing startup co-op needs."
"This year ROCKED. It gets better every year!"
"I was so excited to come back the second year. I've learned a lot from all the sessions I attended."
"This conference has been eye-opening. As a board member, there is so much to do for my co-op and meeting/getting support from other co-op board members has been invaluable."
"This is an amazing resource for us in organizing and planning for our store."