

NCG Takes on Climate Change:

Shifting to regenerative agriculture

BY ALLIE MENTZER

July was the hottest month our planet has experienced since modern recordkeeping began in 1880. By its nature, climate change is a global challenge, and yet we each have a role to play. As environmentalist Paul Hawken has said, “With the exception of energy, no industry has a bigger impact on climate change than agriculture and food, both as a source of the problem and as a solution.”¹ This means that there is tremendous opportunity for food co-ops to inspire others within our industry to not only slow and adapt to climate change, but also to reverse it.

To this end, National Co+op Grocers (NCG) has embarked on a new advocacy priority to address climate change within the context of food-system sustainability and resiliency. During NCG’s fall annual meeting (held during September in St. Paul, Minn.), co-op leadership had a chance to hear more about the critical importance of the challenge of climate change and NCG’s anticipated approach to addressing it.

A collaborative effort

By partnering with others in the industry and the sustainable agriculture community, NCG can more effectively influence multiple areas of the supply chain—from production to distribution—all of which have potential to help mitigate climate change. For example, NCG has become an enthusiastic sponsor of The Carbon Underground (<https://thecarbonunderground.org>), an organization whose mission is to reverse climate change by inspiring a shift in how we grow food to what’s known as “regenerative agriculture.”

Regenerative agriculture involves methods already familiar to organic farmers, such as crop/livestock rotation, cover cropping, composting, and reduced tillage. Promising research shows that these farming methods

build healthy soils that support a natural cycle that draws excess carbon, a greenhouse gas, out of the atmosphere and delivers it into the ground, where it can be stored and used to grow food. The Carbon Underground’s role is to share this encouraging research with farmers, ranchers, academics, and governments, with the goal of facilitating the transition of farmland and grassland globally to regenerative agriculture, ultimately removing enough carbon from the atmosphere to reverse climate change.

Supporting The Carbon Underground and regenerative agriculture is just one way that changes to the food system can have a significant positive impact on climate change. NCG co-ops collectively represent more than 1.3 million owners, and by leveraging that relationship, they can empower people to take proactive steps towards solving the climate change challenge.

Resources for NCG co-ops

During the NCG annual fall meeting, attendees also had a chance to talk with NCG staff about two existing programs—Co+efficient and Co+op Forest—that help co-ops reduce their contribution to climate change. Co+efficient is a sustainability program that, in addition to many other features, allows co-ops to calculate their store’s greenhouse gas emissions. Co-ops that wish to offset those emissions can do so by participating in Co+op Forest, which is home to an estimated 1.4 million trees in the Peruvian rainforest.□

¹<http://www.newhope.com/news-analysis/>

food-companies-play-integral-part-climate-change-recipe

For more information on programs mentioned in this article, see ncg.coop/newsroom.

