



Cooperative Development Institute *2020 Year in Review*

We'll remember 2020 as a year of resilience, community, and clarity on what really matters. We are stronger, better, and healthier together! Our 2020 Year in Review celebrates the ways in which co-ops in our region faced a global pandemic with resourcefulness and heart.



Stronger Together - Rebuilding Together

A letter from our Executive Director Noémi Giszpenc

As strange and unstable as 2020 was, one of the scariest things is that it was predictable. We know and have known for years that human incursion into and destruction of wild habitats *will* lead to outbreaks of human disease, which *will* spread and become pandemics and *will* cause the poor and vulnerable to suffer the most. Just as we know that unchecked climate change will cause more and more catastrophic wildfires, floods, droughts and human misery.

There are other things that we know, though, and perhaps know more deeply now than we did a year ago.

“ We are better, stronger, and more in tune with our values together than apart. Cooperatives and cooperation are the ways that we can show up for each other to get our needs met whether for food and housing or for personal protective equipment and paycheck protection loans.

Co-ops respond to hard times with compassion and equity.

We also know that we are irrevocably in the same boat. The plight of a refugee, or a prisoner, or an unemployed parent impacts us all. None of us is free unless all of us are free. And the COVID-19 pandemic has starkly laid bare the inequalities faced by low-income, underserved, and B/I/POC communities, in particular.

So, it is time to use what we know to build a better, more equitable future that can be predictably full of good things for all people. We have seen what happens when we grab and snatch and waste. And we have seen what happens when we share. So as we pick ourselves up from this murky year, we know that we need to rebuild together, holding each of us as a precious and irreplaceable member of our community.

CDI dedicates itself anew to troubling the waters. “Normal times” brought us the woes of a fiercely unequal pandemic. We don’t want to go back as if pre-pandemic times were OK. They weren’t. We want to go forward into a time of mutual help, collective liberation, and clear-eyed accountability. Come make beautiful trouble with us, in 2021 and beyond!

In cooperation,

Noémi Giszpenc



Postcard from the journey toward racial equity

2020, our Freedom and Justice for All working group changed its name to the Collective Liberation working group. It also grew to include 8 members of our staff and board. As 2021 dawns, we are placing Collective Liberation at the heart of our strategic planning. Everything we do flows from and leads to collective liberation.

In practical terms, this means we are educating ourselves on how to dismantle oppressive organizational structures and build liberatory practices instead. We are supporting our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (B/I/POC) staff with a caucus and mentorship. We are investing in a diverse board that better represents our regional constituency.

In our programs, we are concentrating on leadership development and ecosystems that support and sustain co-ops through the long haul. Helping co-ops to make connections across historic divisions will make each enterprise stronger. And building partnerships that bring together strength and resources will change the game for co-operators throughout our region.



[Watch this video of the Principle Six Conference presentation by Suparna Kudesia of CoFED, Beyond Equity & Inclusion](#)

2020 Infographics



168 NEW
cooperatives formed



5,100 UNITS
of affordable housing preserved



16,400 PEOPLE
participating in training programs



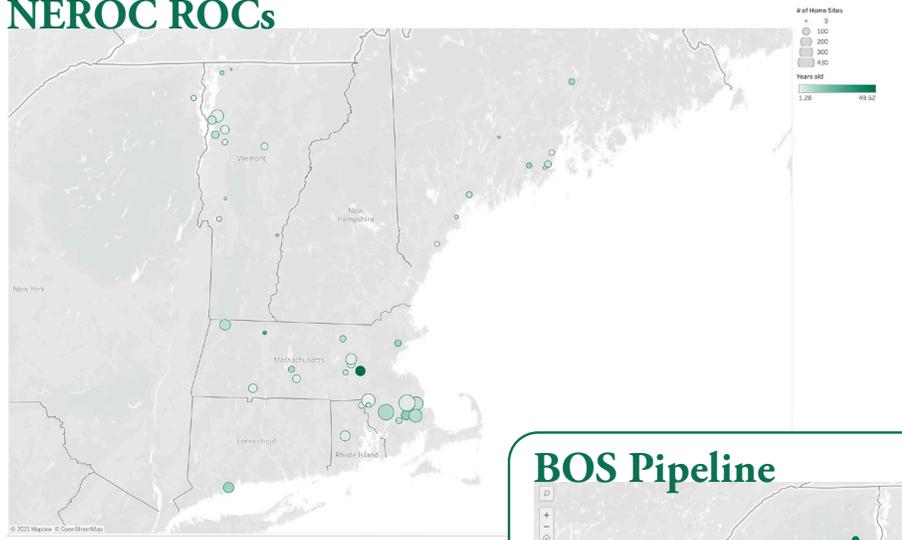
78%
of new co-ops profitable in 4 years



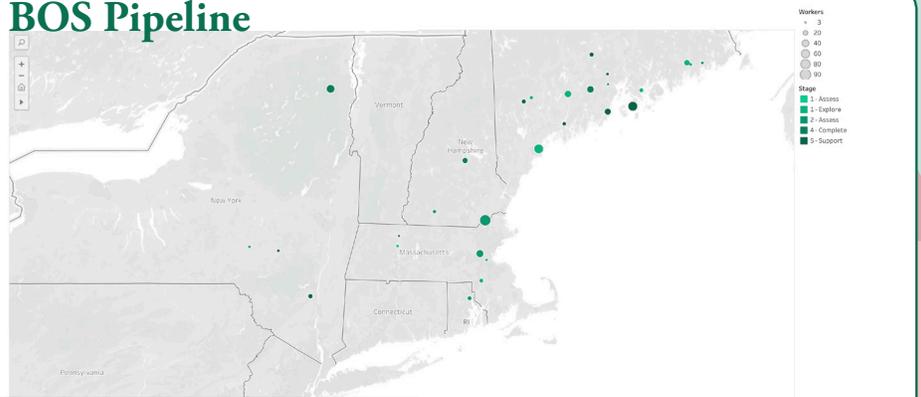
8.6 out of 10
Client rating of CDI

sewing group • native co-op educators • indigenous medicine growers • forest managers • data managers • business network • herbal medicine sellers • housing & farming group • sustainable, eco-friendly farm • blueberry farmers • cafe workers • teachers • druid cultural association • caterers • purchasing co-op • green funeral service • rural housing group • real estate brokers • farm and housing group • startup grocers • land conservationists • chef's collaborative fighting hunger • agriculture consultants • forest managers • housing co-op developer • grocery store • farm labor co-op • statewide network of co-op advocates • teacher collaborative • women's wellness center • children's art co-op • birthing instructors • arborists • clothing store • book shop • seaweed farm •

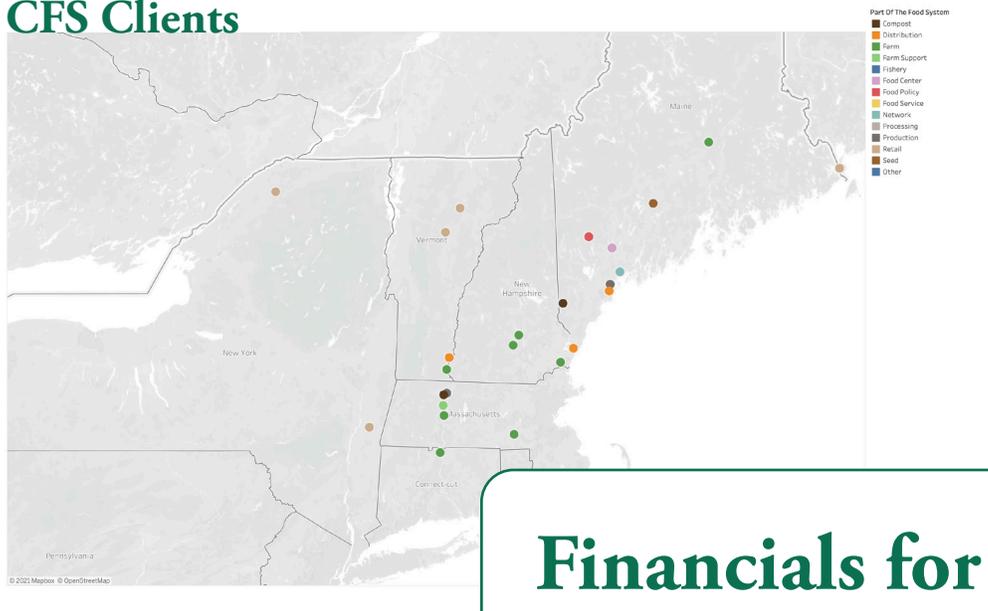
NEROC ROCs



BOS Pipeline



CFS Clients



Financials for FY 2020

CDI 2020 Revenue: \$2,414,162

Fiscal Sponsorship: \$76,944

BOS: \$175,884

CBS: \$186,434

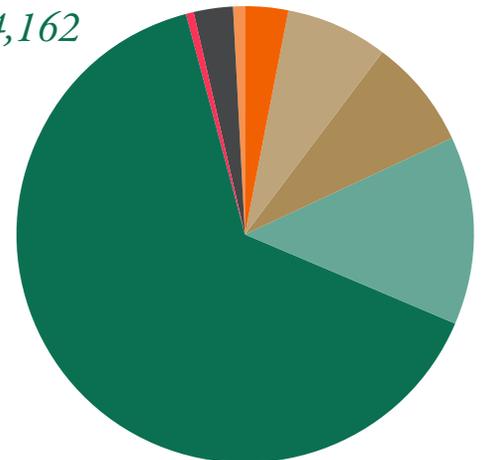
CFS: \$320,931

NEROC: \$1,554,409

Fundraising: \$14,184

Communications: \$65,692

Other Income: \$19,684



The Future is Here -

Cooperatives Turn to Solar to Save Money & Combat Climate Change

In 2020, CDI in collaboration with the Pine Tree Village Cooperative, a resident-owned manufactured housing community in Carver, Massachusetts, welcomed their first Zero Energy Modular (ZEM) home. The project represents a unique partnership between the public and private sector to advance quality housing that is eco-friendly in the time of climate change. Supporters of the project hope that this is the housing of the future for these communities. ZEM homes are factory-built modular homes which are installed on a permanent foundation. These homes are constructed to be highly efficient with the goal of providing homeowners with both low operating costs and reduced environmental impacts.

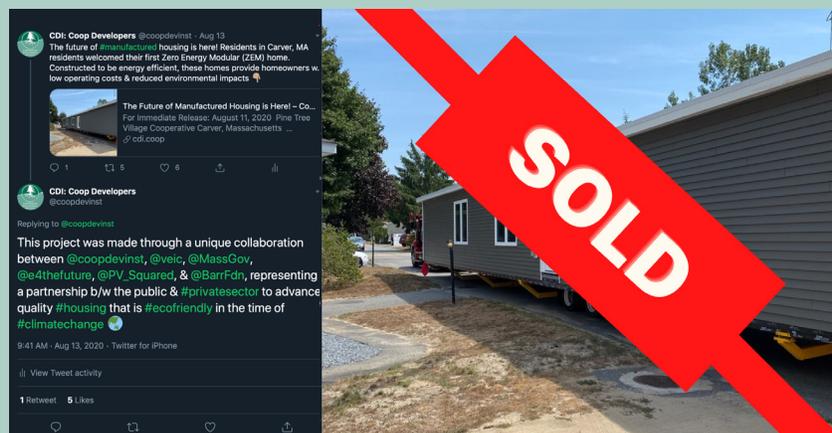
The project is made possible through a unique collaboration between the CDI, the Vermont Energy Investment Corporation, the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, E4TheFuture, PV Squared, and the Barr Foundation. Through the Zero Energy Modular Affordable Housing Initiative 6 more homes will be installed in Resident Owned Communities across Massachusetts.

Colleen Preston, Cooperative Development Specialist with CDI, has been working with the residents and stakeholders to bring the project to fruition.

“I’m very proud of everyone who contributed to making this possible. It really does take a community to build a community. For too long manufactured housing communities have suffered from bias. We are committed to changing that. Our communities are democratically controlled, as a community we are looking to the future as we welcome new housing that can help eliminate our carbon footprint.” COLLEEN PRESTON – CDI SPECIALIST

“We are so excited to have this home coming into our community. For years, we had a reputation for being somewhat of a rough place. We worked hard to fix that and now we are an up-and-coming place with people clamoring to live here. This Vermont ZEM home is exactly what we need to showcase our progress and our commitment to exciting, affordable housing.”

Jeanne Seaton, Acting President of the Pine Tree Village Board of Directors



In addition to installing the Zero Energy Modular at Pine Tree Village Cooperative, in Carver, Massachusetts, CDI is collaborating with Coastal Enterprises, Inc., Insource Renewables—an employee owned cooperative—and a private impact investor, to create the Maine Energy Efficiency fund to install solar arrays at cooperatives in Maine. With \$200,000 from this investor and a grant of \$200,000 from the Opportunity Finance Network, CEI can leverage \$2.5 million of investment in solar energy directly benefiting low-income residents and workers.

“PV Squared is proud to continue its collaboration. We’re proud to continuously collaborate on high performance building projects like this one that utilize on-site solar electricity generation to off-set the energy needs of the building for the decades ahead.”

JON CHILD – PVSQUARED WORKER-OWNER

These projects are a prime example of the power of building an interconnected cooperative ecosystem across multiple sectors, in partnership with value based lenders, foundational support, and private progressive investment. This project and the Zero Energy Modular are also great examples of how cooperatives can use clean energy technology installed by a worker owned cooperative, to address climate change, save money, and support the solidarity economy.

“Programs like this offer an opportunity to transform affordable housing for low and moderate-income Massachusetts residents... zero energy modular homes have the potential to serve populations that are disproportionately affected by high energy costs, while also contributing to an affordable clean energy future.”

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY RESOURCES COMMISSIONER PATRICK WOODCOCK.

Cooperative Food Systems

Creating a More Resilient Local Food System Through Cooperation & Ecosystem Development

In 2020, one thing remained certain: we all needed to eat! And our Cooperative Food Systems program continued its mission to build a cooperative ecosystem that delivers healthy, accessible food across the Northeast. This year, Jonah Fertig-Burd handed off leadership of CDI’s Cooperative Food System program to Katherine Bessey as Coordinating Director, who will be more closely integrating the start-up and ownership transition work done by CDI in our regional food systems work.

Over the course of the year, CDI assisted new and ongoing projects with 39 different farm and food businesses and organizations throughout the Northeast. Some top highlights and celebrations from our food system work this year included supporting the Compost Co-op in Greenfield, MA in its business expansion planning and efforts to acquire affordable worker housing (donate here), and supporting Diggers Cooperative and Tootie’s Tempeh in their journey to become incorporated. We also deeply appreciate new and exciting relationships we have established with the Young Farmers Coalition and burgeoning Black and Indigenous Farming groups in Vermont and New York. We assisted four cooperative farms to attain land access, and two immigrant cooperative farming groups in Maine in purchasing their land.



The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for the Cooperative Food System groups we work with as important retail markets, such as retail stores and farmer's markets, were shut down early in the season. Food co-ops were faced with unprecedented challenges in keeping doors open and adjusting to CDC guidelines. We continued to assist New American Farmers in Maine, New Hampshire, and western Massachusetts to adjust their business plans to sustain their wholesale markets and expand their Community Supported Agriculture programs with funding from the USDA and the John Merck Fund. We supported existing food businesses in New York, Maine, and Vermont navigate the COVID economic landscape, supporting groups in accessing many emergency funding opportunities to mitigate the financial impact of the COVID crisis, and the adjustment of business plans to accommodate new and more resilient business models that account for Pandemic-related risk. Additionally, we were able to support clients by supplying PPE distributions, emergency bulk buying opportunities and the setup of online stores, and by providing COVID-19 safety training to keep businesses open and state certified.

At year's end, none of the cooperatives we assisted went out of business despite unprecedented challenges, and at New Roots farming cooperative, sales actually increased when the farm was able to adapt and expand their CSA offerings. By early summer 2020, New Roots Cooperative Farm completely sold out of all their available shares! New Roots Cooperative Farm and Isuken Co-op, along with Sustainable Livelihoods Relief Organization and emergency relief funding from the Seawall Foundation and the Healthy Neighborhoods Coalition, were able to make significant contributions to the local emergency food system in reaching the Immigrant/Refugee communities in central Maine.

The pandemic put into sharp relief the need for our clients to own their farmland to solidify land tenure security. A successful crowd-sourced campaign by Liberation Farms and the Somali Bantu Community Association involved over 1,500 donors and raised \$367,000 to purchase a 140-acre farm in Androscoggin County, Maine. We are currently assisting New Roots Farm with a similar effort that has been boosted by a \$50,000 grant from the Elmina Sewall Foundation's Twin Pandemic Grant Initiative, designed to address the economic impact of COVID-19 on BIPOC communities. An anonymous donor with the Maine Community Foundation also supported the effort with a \$30,000 gift, along with many other community and philanthropic supporters. Thank you to all who have collaborated to make dreams a reality in 2020, despite the many challenges faced.

“Every year we are improving and continuing to develop ourselves and every year we are giving out more food to more families. This year alone we sold out our CSA and more than 40% of our food went to pantries, and having ownership of the land will help New Roots help others!” **MOHAMED ABUKAR - NEW ROOTS FARMER OWNER**

“Having ownership changes everything for me and for the community I serve. It's really an amazing feeling that our kids have a chance to inherit a unique farmland right here! Nothing makes me happier.” **JABRIL ABDI - NEW ROOTS FARMER OWNER**





Nationally, of the country's 3.4 million total farmers, only 1.3%, or 45,508, are black, according to figures from the US Department of Agriculture released in 2019. Black farmers own a mere 0.52% of America's farmland.

[Please support the effort of New Roots Cooperative Farm by contributing here.](#)



Grants to New Roots farmers aimed at tackling systemic racism, COVID-19 challenges
December 23, 2020

Mainer *New Roots Spreading In Rocky Ground*
Aug 4, 2020



New Mainers group raises \$367K to purchase Androscoggin County farm
August 31, 2020



In 2020, we finalized a video series that highlights the story of Maine's cooperative food ecosystem, from seed, soil to market. The videos reached over 90 thousand people. The series was turned into a 24 minute documentary that was aired during this year's virtual Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners (MOFGA) Common Ground Fair. We look forward to deepening our partnership with MOFGA and other new and beginning farmer networks and land access groups in 2021 through our Cooperative Development Training Program.

[View the series and the documentary HERE.](#)

CDI thanks all of our collaborators across the Northeast who are helping to build a regional cooperative food ecosystem. They include: AORTA, Agrarian Trust, All Farmers, American Farmland Trust, Bates College Harward Center for Community Engagement, Center for an Ecology Based Economy, CoFED, College of the Atlantic, Cultivating Community, Equity Trust, Farm Smart, Food Solutions New England, Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn and the Maine Network of Community Food Councils, Good Shepherd Food Bank, Immigrant Welcome Center, Kestrel Land Trust, Land for Good, Land in Common Community Land Trust, Maine Farmland Trust, Maine Food Strategy and the Maine Food Convergence, Maine Initiatives, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Minnesota Indigenous Business Alliance, Northeast Farmers of Color, ORIS, Open Buffalo, Prosperity ME, RSC Consulting, Roots and Mustard Seeds, Slow Money Maine, Somali Bantu Community Association, Soul Fire Farm, St. Mary's Nutrition Center, Sustainable Livelihoods Relief Organization, The Cooperative Fund of New England, Toolbox for Education and Social Action, University of Southern Maine Food Studies Program, Wabanaki REACH, and Young Farmers Coalition

Business Ownership Solutions

Expanding Opportunities for CDI's Business Ownership Solutions program

For BOS, 2020 started with tremendous opportunities to advance our work to transition businesses to worker-owned cooperatives as a strategy to preserve businesses and jobs and help workers build wealth through ownership.

Numerous companies were moving quickly to complete worker cooperative transitions, and legislative advocacy in Maine was on track to secure substantial public support. Existing worker cooperatives we work with were growing and getting stronger. Our partnerships with and training for economic and workforce development entities across the Northeast was strengthening and diversifying the supportive ecosystem and generating new interest from business owners.

Then, as the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing collapse of jobs and business activity swept the nation, all that progress came to a screeching halt. We pivoted immediately to assisting the many businesses we work with to understand and access the resources available to support businesses and workers. We also saw worker buyouts as a promising strategy to stave off widespread liquidation and closure of otherwise viable small businesses, and worked closely with the Democracy At Work Institute, US Federation of Worker Cooperatives and many other partners on policy advocacy at the national and state level.

By late summer, all of the businesses we had been working with to complete worker cooperative transitions had adapted as best they could to the “new normal” and wanted to get those transitions back on track. While they all started the year thinking they would complete a transition in 2020, the economic crisis pushed all but one into 2021.

Regenerative Design Group (RDG), a 10-year old landscape architecture and design company based in Greenfield, Massachusetts, had been working steadily toward a transition for nearly two years, and completed it in October of 2020. RDG specializes in designing integrated landscapes that engage communities, manage stormwater, build healthy soils, create pollinator habitat, grow food, and enhance stewardship. Transitioning from a 3-owner LLC to a 7-owner cooperative will set RDG on surer footing for sustainable growth as well as provide a competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining the skilled talent they need. “CDI was a pleasure to work with. “CDI



OWNERSHIP TRANSITION INITIATIVE
Ensuring your business legacy. Ensuring our economic future.

Progress so far:

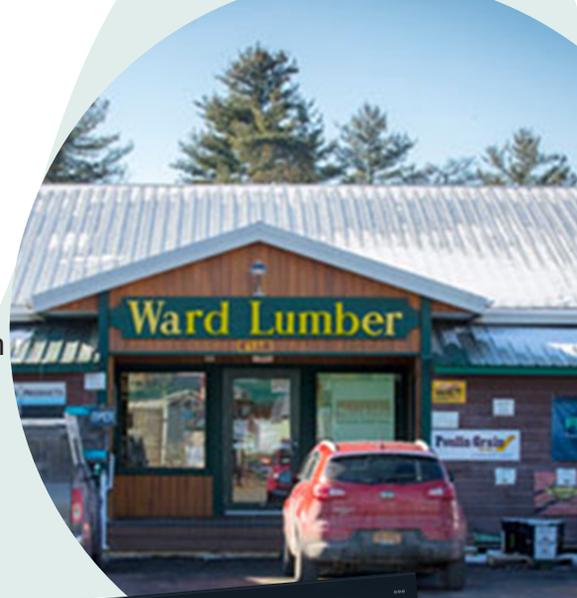
- 130 business owners received exit planning education
- 23 attended workshop series, workforce trainings, and received 1-on-1 TA
- 7 developed documented exit plan
- Partner training program has created permanent capacity and expertise

COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

made sure we knew all the steps and that everyone was on board with the transition and kept us moving forward" said Sebastian Gutwein, Designer, Principle with RDG.

Ward Lumber is among the companies that were delayed but are now back on track. Ward is a 4th generation lumber/building materials business with 55 workers and two locations in NY's North Country. Numerous partners, including Adirondack North County Association, Cooperative Fund of New England, Capital Impact Partners and SUNY Canton Small Business Development Center at Clinton Community College, have worked closely together to support the cooperative design, business development and financing for this transition, which will now happen in early 2021. This coordinated support has paid off in many ways, not least of which in securing a \$250,000 grant from Empire State Development Corporation so the workers have the necessary starting equity to purchase the business.

Paul Mintz, a longtime employee of Ward Lumber's Pro Sales team, shared his experience working with the Institute. "CDI has been instrumental in guiding our company through the process of converting to a worker cooperative. To say they have helped us navigate these uncertain waters is an understatement; without them, I'm not sure we'd have ever understood why we wanted to leave shore at all".



Cooperative Business Solutions

Always Looking Ahead

CDI's Cooperative Business Solutions provides both cooperative development technical assistance to various enterprises outside of our delineated program areas, but also serves as the hub for CDI's leadership development, and serves as an incubator for exciting new opportunities where cooperative development can be applied to find a solution to a community identified need.

Like CDI overall, CBS is a community engagement partner that listens and learns about the needs of individuals and communities, and then acts in partnership as a systems change agent that applies cooperative business solutions to build, connect and expand the cooperative ecosystem in the Northeast.

Support in Times of Crisis

PPE Donations Initiative

In the midst of the pandemic this past year our CBS program coordinated donations of gloves, hand sanitizer, liquid hand soap, and masks to 16 client groups located across Maine and Massachusetts in 2020. We collaborated with Maine organizations like Fare Share Co-op and American Roots as well as River Valley Co-op in Massachusetts to ensure adequate supply to meet demand throughout months of PPE scarcity.



Leadership Development

Training the Trainers

CDI has been utilizing USDA funding to support cooperative development in two regions of the state of Maine: Lewiston/Auburn, and Washington County. The USDA's Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) grant utilizes a "train the trainer" model and allows CDI to teach cooperative development techniques and business development strategies to community based organizations, so they in turn can provide technical assistance to address the community needs of the clients they serve.

"I have a better understanding of cooperative development and can help business owners/employees realize why they should consider it. I also have a better understanding of who can provide assistance in cooperative development."

JEN PETERS OF THE SUNRISE COUNTY ECONOMIC COUNCIL.

The Sunrise County Economic Council, is a partner in the Ownership Transition Initiative working with CDI to educate aging business owners in Washington County about converting to an employee owned cooperative as a succession plan for local businesses, preserving the business, and securing jobs in rural Maine.

"The RCDI training was a great experience, I was able to better understand how cooperatives work and to have a clear picture of the project I wanted in my community. There was so much support in terms of resources and research to find a better childcare model that would work for my community. Now I feel more confident about sharing the childcare cooperative with others all because of the support that RCDI funded CDI training offered."

AZENAIDE PEDRO OF THE RAISE OP HOUSING COOPERATIVE

Two New Organizations Join the Training Cohort

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association and the Root Cellar will be joining the next two year USDA RCDI funded “Cooperative Training Program” cohort. The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), formed in 1971, is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. MOFGA is a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. MOFGA works with hundreds of Maine farmers annually to develop and certify organic farms, and will be able to provide cooperative development training in conjunction.



“MOFGA Farmer Programs staff look forward to developing their professional knowledge and skills in cooperative development, structures and strategies in order to support the expansion of Maine’s cooperative food system. We will be able to incorporate cooperative frameworks into our education and technical assistance for farmers seeking creative and resilient solutions to marketing, ownership of land, equipment, and other resources.”

RYAN DENNETT — FARMER PROGRAMS DIRECTOR, MAINE ORGANIC FARMERS AND GARDENERS ASSOCIATION

MOFGA & CDI: Intro To Ag Co-ops
from Co-op Development Institute

American Cooperatives

- Mutual aid societies in the (18th century)
- Mutual insurance companies
- Buying clubs
- Collective farming
- Colored Farmers' National Alliance and

25:05
...ative Union (1891 had a million members)

Part of co-operative shopping is knowing your produce prices

vimeo

Listening to the Community

Meeting the The Need for Immigrant Led Child Care



Through our engagement with the communities of Lewiston and Auburn, Maine and through the engagement of community members who participated in the USDA cooperative training cohort, we learned that access to child care, especially among new immigrant families, was an identified need that needed to be addressed. The COVID-19 pandemic, and Maine's existing decline in family child care has made it nearly impossible for many low income women in Maine, especially women of color, to access safe care during the pandemic so they can return to work.

In response, in 2021, CDI will help launch a dynamic child care operation in Lewiston to provide New Mainer immigrant families with more accessible, affordable and culturally appropriate care.

CDI is collaborating with Coastal Enterprises Incorporated, Maine Roads to Quality, and the community to create the Lewiston Childcare Pod Co-op which will provide a new approach to collective care in Maine, specifically for and led by New Mainer women. In.

This approach creates a learning community, or community of practice, among small center directors that can be a culturally/linguistically responsive way to promote workforce entry into childcare. This approach creates a learning community, or community of practice, among small center directors that can be a culturally/linguistically responsive way to promote workforce entry into childcare.

This business model will promote equity, inclusion, and resiliency in the face of the pandemic by optimizing cost saving structures, supporting a safe space for a community of practice for learning and credential building, while offering the kind of care desired among New Mainers. This project further helps protect against economic crisis, disease, and racism by modeling ways childcare can increase access to ownership and quality jobs and training for women of color and create safer "family style" centers working in collaboration. Our goal is for this initiative to lead the way towards a more comprehensive, resilient, community-based approach to cultural care and support for workforce development in the childcare sector.

We hope that this pilot project will be replicable in other communities with immigrant populations across the Northeast. The initiative was recently awarded a \$60,000 grant from the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation to support the effort.



Cohort Members Helping to Create New Co-ops

Serving the Community in the Time of COVID-19 Spoke Folks

Spoke Folks began as a community bike sharing cooperative in Norway, Maine to assist with waste hauling and composting sustainability. During the COVID-19 state shutdown, the cooperative refocused its mission and partnered with the local food pantry to deliver food to community members in need who needed to shelter in place. On one day in April, Spoke Folks delivered 40 meals to a senior housing facility. They are now a worker cooperative.

“

Work shopping our cooperative idea throughout the USDA RCDI funded training, provided by the Cooperative Development Institute, gave us confidence that we had a good idea and that we could take it through to becoming an operating cooperative. The process of going from idea to forming a cooperative business instills confidence to be able to help others start businesses in the cooperative model. Being in a cohort of other developers helped us see other possibilities and strengths and pitfalls of various approaches.”

SCOTT VLAUN, OF THE CENTER FOR AN ECOLOGY BASED ECONOMY, WHO HELPED TO DEVELOP THE SPOKE FOLKS COOPERATIVE

Expanding Cooperative Housing Opportunities to Urban Areas



CDI: Coop Developers
@coopdevinst

Our Portland housing co-op will help address the housing crisis in Portland, ME, specially for those who don't make enough money to buy a house in Portland, but make too much money to qualify for low-income housing 🏡 via @Mainebiz 🗳️



Proposed Portland co-op development addresses housing 'missing middle'
The city's first cooperative housing development, planned for Lambert Street in the North Deering neighborhood, is a way to provide home ownership to peopl...
🔗 mainebiz.biz

1:02 PM · Aug 27, 2020 · Twitter Web App

CDI is exploring and supporting the development of more cooperative models in the housing sector. This builds upon our well developed, large scale rural model of manufactured home park conversions to cooperatives. As more communities, residents, and policymakers consider cooperatives as a long-term, affordable solution to urban housing challenges, CDI is working to increase the resources and capacity of the sector in New England.

The first major investment of 2020 was in Portland, Maine, where CDI is collaborating with Maine Cooperative Development Partners to develop residential cooperative housing on property recently owned by the City. The awards consist of two parcels: the Douglass Commons project will provide for the development of 108 units, 56 of which will be cooperatively owned. A second project on Lambert Street in Portland was also approved. It will consist of 46 single family homes that will be part of the cooperative. Special thanks to Andy Reicher and the Urban Housing Assistance Board who consulted the partners throughout the process.

“The beauty of this project is that we are talking about creating affordable housing for new Americans, teachers, firefighters, people who can’t afford to buy a house in Portland.

BRIAN ENG, PRIVATE DEVELOPER AND MEMBER OF THE MAINE COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

“The City Council’s vote to proceed with the Douglass Commons cooperative housing project is a vote to support vibrant communities and long-term affordable housing ownership for Portland families who would otherwise be pushed out by market-rate rentals.”

JULIAN ROWAND, CDI

[Read more about this exciting project!](#)

Cooperative Maine Business

Alliance

Our Cooperative Maine Business Alliance program has grown its membership by 53% in 2020, offering a newly launched mentorship program, co-op sector conversations, state level advocacy support and its 7th annual Principal Six networking conference, which went virtual in 2020. A collaboration effort between CMBA's steering committee and CDI's Collective Liberation Group introduced impactful Equity and Inclusion trainings to the P6 conference. Suparna Kudesia of CoFed brought a powerful Racial Equity perspective and the Collective Liberation Group established an accountability practice for attendees. The three-day conference also featured co-op governance training and facilitated a personal interaction with members of the press.

CBS Responds to COVID-19

During COVID-19, communities of color were the hardest hit. With health and safety for our communities as our utmost priority, we began exploring the possibility of utilizing CDI resources to donate Personal Protection Equipment to our clients in food processing, production, and retail. The USDA supported our effort by approving the reallocation of over \$6 thousand dollars of grant funding, giving us the ability to continue to support our clients' needs.

We reallocated our resources to purchase PPE equipment specifically from Black-owned cooperatives being hardest hit by the pandemic, and shared resources with our clients and partners on **how to purchase equipment in bulk from manufacturers of color.**

Client Services

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Cooperative Ecosystem Development through Public Policy



Everything we learn as cooperative practitioners is connected to our broader ecosystem work which builds networks, shares resources, and informs public officials.

In Massachusetts, we collaborate with advocates and providers to promote public information and resources for cooperative businesses and housing, including advocacy for the Tenant Right to Purchase Act.

In 2020, CDI's state level policy advocacy work was focused on Maine in an attempt to enact **LD 1520** – An Act to Create and Sustain Jobs Through Development of Cooperatives and Employee Owned Businesses, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Nate Libby. Carried over from the previous legislative session, the proposed legislation supported the development of more employee-owned businesses and cooperatives by providing tax incentives for a business or property owner transferring the business or property to employee or resident ownership. It provided similar tax incentives for financing

entities facilitating the transfer, and would have established a Maine Employee Ownership Center.

The legislation had tremendous bi-partisan support. It was passed out of the Taxation Committee unanimously. The Maine House and Senate were also unanimous in their support, and it was placed on the Special Appropriations table. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the Maine Legislature was shut down, and further action could not be taken. The legislation died as the Legislature was forced to adjourn. CDI intends to reintroduce the legislation in the future, and to use the bill as a model piece of legislation for other states in the region.

CDI Board Perspective

An Interview with Maria Fernandes-Dominique



ANY BACKGROUND ABOUT YOURSELF THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

My family emigrated to the states in the late 80's from Cape Verde, the ten islands off the west coast of Africa. I was raised one of six kids by a single immigrant mother who made the journey to the U.S. to give her family a better life, and the significance of that is that African women don't typically make the journey to the United States, it's usually a man's job. And my mom – who couldn't read and write but who had grit, hustle and heart did that for her family. She didn't rely on a man to do that for her, she worked hard, got her papers and sent for us – she set an example for me. She is my Shero – she is my ancestor, the woman who taught me that you do what you've got to do, you get it done and if you don't have a blueprint you create your own. I'm so thankful that because of her journey I was the first person in my family to go to college. I was able to go to a college that she would never have had access to unless she was cleaning the toilets and making the food – and I say all that to say that my identity is very much as a black immigrant woman – someone from the inner city; someone who has been housing insecure, someone who has had a public education, a bilingual education, that in some ways I was underserved with. All those parts of my identity have helped me cultivate my values which are: radical inclusion (so many parts of my identity make up people who are not part of the conversation/decision making), compassion (I have been there and have compassion for people because I've benefited so much from the generosity of people, and I've given so much back to my community, all with equal parts rage at the system and love for my people), and equity. These values are a constant theme in my life and so the resident leadership and representative work that I do is my small way of dismantling racism and challenging white supremacy.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO BE PART OF CDI'S LEADERSHIP? WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO CDI'S BOARD?

What brought me to CDI was the resident leadership work. I met a current CDI staff member at the NEROC conference and it was there we connected over what was my work at NeighborWorks America, my former employer, around community building and engagement. And this CDI NEROC staff member saw in me this orientation around racial equity and thought I would be a good board member- at the time CDI was lacking in board members of color, and in addition to my resident leadership development/racial equity work, this staff member saw my experience of working with residents in urban settings and



thought it would be a nice combination to the board predominately with folks who have worked with groups in a more rural setting. Now being on the board since 2018 I have had such an interesting journey. I have gone from board member to now being treasurer and clerk, I raised my hand to add value. My fiduciary responsibility to the board is something I take seriously and I wasn't feeling comfortable about my understanding of our finances and how I was interpreting that so I really did the work with Noemi and Alex, CDI's finance director, to really get myself to grow into this treasurer role – it's new for me, I'm excited about it, and I'm excited to add value in that way. Finance as a person of color is not something you are usually taught, and when you come from a low income household too, parents are not trying to teach you how to balance a checkbook, it's how to get food on the table. In my home with my Mom I did not see a woman saying "here's our budget for the week," I saw a woman praying to god that she could make rent, feed us, make transportation to get to work. So this moving up from board member to board treasurer is both personal and professional – it's confronting my fear of money and finances and financial literacy and owning my responsibility to this organization. On another level being at CDI has grounded me and oriented me around opportunities that CDI has in MA – I find that we focus a lot on ME, NH, VT and we have such an opportunity to advance cooperative economics in MA as well. I want to see CDI get to the statehouse, influence folks at the statehouse, amplify our work and the work that the Center for Economic Democracy and the Boston Ujima Project and others are doing in MA. And lastly I'm really excited about the collective liberation racial/social justice equity group and staff committee at CDI and the work that our Executive Director Noemi is doing to get the board at the same level around racial equity.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHANGES YOU'VE SEEN AT CDI SINCE YOUR TIME COMING ON HERE?

Definitely the racial equity work CDI is doing, and definitely our storytelling thanks to Tory Rosen and Jasmine Jacobs. We have gotten much more sophisticated and strategic about storytelling and about showing our impact. I'm so proud of Jasmine, Tory, and Doug, and where we've taken that department to the next level and are continuing to take it. I also think when I first came on there was a lot of turnover – I know it's because with our non-profit setup we don't pay as much as other types of orgs might but I've started to see ways that Noemi has owned that and has started to compensate people in more creative ways. I'm excited about how we're finding solutions to that. I'm also excited that we have a board chair that's a woman and a woman of color (that's exciting because when I first got here we had a white man who was board president and that's an important change). I would identify, lastly, having Alex Fischer be our finance director. Alex has brought a level of accountability around our finances that has really helped the board to really follow the budget on a quarterly basis and

to feel empowered and informed and to feel like we get it and we know what's going on. Those are the changes I see that keep me inspired and excited to be with CDI for a long time.

IF YOU COULD CONVEY ONE VITAL THING TO PEOPLE ABOUT THE WORK CDI DOES AND WHY IT MATTERS AT THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY WHAT WOULD THAT BE?

I would say that we're capitalizing on this moment that the cooperative economy is having, but it's sort of like when we say an artist is "having a comeback," and they say, "it's not a comeback, I've always been there, you're just seeing me in a different way!" We have continued to do this important work of redistributing wealth and now people are getting more hip around it and we are taking the opportunity to show that impact to people that are noticing and we're speaking to them and amplifying the work. It's not that people are noticing us with a dog and pony show, we've always been doing this but now we're being more creative about how we amplify it thanks to our strategic storytellers and others at CDI. And right now, more than ever, cooperative economics may be the only way we get close to reparations in this country. Since COVID has laid bare how capitalism fails and is a failure we need to amplify it, because people need to see a different more equitable model and realize that it can be successful. Now is the moment, now is the time, and CDI has the opportunity to amplify the work we've been doing all along – and then also to think about the region and how to amplify our impact as holistically and comprehensively as possible.

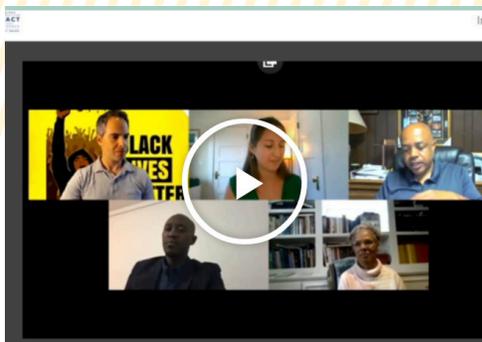
WHAT ARE CHALLENGES YOU SEE CDI WORKING TO OVERCOME? WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT FOR THE FUTURE OF CDI?

Lots of goals we have – two for me is that at the board level we start and get in a place where we have even more diversity (at the board level) and for staff as well. CDI staff are a great group of people that do very high achieving work, but having a predominately white staff, we need to get in a place where people are thinking about what their white privilege looks like – even when the majority of staff are white and living in rural communities. That means getting folks to look at that and say, "we still have privileges, what does that mean working in this organization looking at that privilege?" We support predominately white people and also support people of color that work in rural settings. Being a predominantly white org serving predominantly rural communities does not give us an out but challenges us to think creatively about what our racial equity looks like. I am also most excited about our racial equity journey as well. We're doing it at the staff level in terms of the Collective Liberation Group, and at the board level – the staff committee has been doing a lot of work, and we need even further synergy with them. I'm really wanting to see us come together and look at what it looks like to put our resources and capacity together to continue to do that work jointly.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE WHO WAS CONSIDERING SUPPORTING CDI, BUT WASN'T SURE WHAT IMPACT THEIR CONTRIBUTION WOULD HAVE?

I would say yes, you should support CDI, absolutely. Being in the state that we are now with racial and economic reckoning across this country, because of CDI and the model that CDI has shown me around business development and supporting African refugees starting their own businesses, for example, tending the land and starting their own organizations, of giving resident leaders greater tools and empowerment—we are really disrupting and challenging white supremacy in getting low income folks to own their communities and making sure that businesses don't go into the hands of big corporations. We're serving residential communities across the Northeast, we're serving refugee populations and New Americans like the Somali Bantu community in Maine and Massachusetts to help them tap into the work they've done in their native countries—as an org our programing is very comprehensive and holistic. Noemi our Executive Director says, “you know we're actually helping to turn these businesses over to employees,” and the silver tsunami is so great too, it's a small dent in a huge problem, but we're still doing it, and we need the support of folks who want to get on our board, who want to amplify our work, who want to give us financial support – we need all of that because though it is a lot of work, and though the challenge is great – we are still chipping away at it little by little and making an important impact. It goes back to what I said—that we may never truly achieve reparations in this country, but cooperative economics is the next best thing for building wealth in our community, and because of CDI I have truly become a strong believer and supporter in cooperative economics.

NCBA CLUSA Impact Panel 2020



Moderator: Alex Stone
Executive Director, CooperationWorks!



Cornelius Blanding
Executive Director, Federation of Southern
Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund



Arthur Sabiti
Cooperative Developer, Cooperative
Development Institute



Laress Lawrence
Community and Equity Learning Partner,
Elmina B. Sewall Foundation



Jason Wiener
Principal, Jason Weiner | p.c.

If this last year has taught us anything, it is that we are stronger together. Our systems are broken and inequality has seeped into all of them. As a result, our systems are failing working families and communities across the nation. People want change. They want to see their governments, institutions and the private sector commit to helping us create an economy that is resilient in the face of an economic depression, natural disaster or a global pandemic. They want an economy where equity, resilience and inclusion are rooted in the workforce. The cooperative model has proven time and again to be the economic model that is both deliberative and flexible in responding to community needs and underserved populations in an empowering and liberatory way. We believe the time is now to bring that model to scale, but what will it take?

This fall, CDI organized a panel entitled, “Bringing the Cooperative Model to Equitable Scale,” for NCBA CLUSA’s Impact conference to help answer that question. The session highlighted an emerging strategy that focuses on combining federal, state and private funding to create place-based, multi-sector cooperative ecosystems to build more equitable economies that address the needs of underserved communities. The panel brought together representatives of private philanthropy, state government and cooperative developers who are harnessing these resources and coordinating targeted cooperative projects to meet vital community need. CDI’s own Cooperative Developer Arthur Sabiti discussed how we are using this strategy to support New American families and businesses like the Somali Bantu farming community in Maine and our plans to replicate that model across the Northeast. He spoke alongside Laress Lawrence of the Elmina Sewall Foundation, Cornelius Blanding, Executive Director of Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Jason Wiener, a lead member of the Colorado Governor’s Task Force on Employee Ownership, and Alex Stone, Executive Director of CooperationWorks!

Check out [this link](#) to view the details of the Impact Panel discussion and to hear from some of these thought-leaders about ways of growing and expanding successful cooperative ecosystems across the country.

NCBA CLUSA Impact Panel 2020

Once again CDI saw growth in our staff, with five new people starting in 2020.

Early in the year, **Emmy Anderson** joined Cooperative Business Services as a co-op developer and network coordinator for the Cooperative Maine Business Association. Emmy brings a wealth of experience as a food co-op manager. And just before the close of 2020, Cooperative Food Systems and Business Ownership Solutions welcomed **Analise Sesay** as an assistant project manager. Analise is an innovative entrepreneur sure to bring discipline and heart to our work.

Our New England Resident Owned Communities program brought on three new staff this year. **Elise Greaves** joined us at the start of the year in the Vermont team, bringing top-notch leadership development experience. **Cristian Feliciano** jumped in as NERO Administrator during the pandemic outbreak, immediately helping the team use technology to connect with co-op members. And we're thrilled to have Aliza Levine, a seasoned labor organizer, start in our Massachusetts team.

We were sad to bid goodbye in 2020 to **Jonah Fertig-Burd**, our first Cooperative Food Systems director, and a tremendous creative force for cooperation and just food systems. He hasn't gone far, though, and we will continue to work together with him in his new role as the Community Partner at the Sewall Foundation in Maine leading their Food Systems Programs. Similarly, 2020 marked the end of **Jeanee Wright's** tenure at CDI, but we will still be in touch as she carries on working with Resident-Owned Communities at our sister organization, New Hampshire Community Loan Fund. Both Jonah and Jeanee were huge contributors to the development of a cooperative ecosystem in Maine. Thank you!

The whirl of activity precipitated by the pandemic brought board service out of reach for a few of our board members, including Rev. Michael Scarlett and Josh Daly. Our intrepid Treasurer Emma Yorra ([see p. 12 of our 2018 Year in Review](#)) wound up her board service in 2020 as well, so she could focus on other projects, but will stay on our Collective Liberation Working Group. Many thanks for your service!



Looking Ahead to 2021

As CDI looks ahead to expanding cooperative development in areas that have been identified by the communities and clients we serve, we are mindful of the challenges and sufferings of so many in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has touched all of our lives, and many have lost loved ones. The pandemic has also laid bare the vast inequities in our society, especially among BIPOC communities. Economic inequalities. Health care access inequalities. Affordable housing inequalities. Inequalities in having access to healthy, locally grown foods. Unfortunately, the list is endless. The effects of climate change are also disproportionately impacting the clients and communities that are the most vulnerable.

Our challenges are great, but by acting cooperatively and collectively, we have the opportunity to rebuild our economy from the ashes of the old, in a way where we can not only envision, but create a democratically owned and just economy where everyone can fulfill their needs and aspirations. Now is the time to have deep conversations with our communities, listen to the needs and challenges they identify, and to work together to apply cooperative solutions to address them. We must also educate our policy makers at all levels of government to support policies and initiatives that will foster cooperative development.

It has been said that in times of great crisis, there is also great opportunity. We are in a time of great crisis, now we must work together to seize the opportunity for change and the rebirth of an economy grounded in equity and fairness, where our small businesses are employee owned rather than lost as aging entrepreneurs face retirement without a succession plan for their businesses, where housing is affordable and democratically governed, where our food systems are local and also democratically controlled.

In 2021, CDI will seek to expand our community partnerships across the region, secure additional resources, and build upon our work of the last twenty six years to increase capacity to expand the cooperative

model to meet the needs of the communities and clients we serve.

We have exciting opportunities on the horizon.

Building on the experience we have gained through our New England Resident Owned Communities, we will be expanding our work in Portland, Maine to develop residential cooperative housing on property awarded by the Portland City Council to the Maine Cooperative Development Partners, of which CDI is a founding member, and the Szanton Company. The awards consist of two parcels of city owned land. The Douglass Commons project will provide for the development of 108 units, 56 of which will be cooperatively owned. A second project on Lambert Street in Portland was also approved. It will consist of 46 single family homes that will be part of the cooperative. Special thanks to Andy Reicher and the Urban Housing Assistance Board who consulted the partners throughout the process.

“The city council’s vote to proceed with the Douglass Commons cooperative housing project is a vote to support vibrant communities and long-term affordable housing ownership for Portland families who would be otherwise be pushed out by market-rate rentals,” **JULIAN ROWAND, CDI**

“The beauty of this project is that we are talking about creating affordable housing for new Americans, teachers, firefighters, people who can’t afford to buy a house in Portland.” **BRIAN ENG, DEVELOPER AND MEMBER OF THE MAINE COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS.**

[Read more about this exciting project!](#)

Thanking our funders

CDI would not be able to do the work that we do without the generous support of our funders and the United States Department of Agriculture grants that focus federal resources on cooperative development. In 2020, we were able to secure \$624,892 in USDA funding to enable CDI to continue to expand economic opportunity across the Northeast.

Our goal is to help communities and regions develop interconnected cooperative ecosystems that are economically resilient, democratically controlled, and mutually self-reliant.

Using support from the USDA, combined with support from private state-based foundations, state and local government, and the private sector, CDI leverages its ability to partner with rural communities and organizations across the region to find solutions to community identified needs and challenges. CDI then focuses and applies our unique technical assistance to address those needs and challenges through cooperative development and continued community engagement. The cooperative model and the networking of place-based cooperative ecosystems has proven a successful and resilient model during times of economic distress, especially among underserved communities.

To help celebrate Co-op Month, acknowledge the importance of USDA support for cooperatives, and acknowledge the great work of our clients and partnering organizations, we held a live press event at the New Roots Cooperative Farm in Lewiston, Maine that was COVID-19 compliant. The event featured the USDA State Directors for Rural Development from Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire, representatives from Maine's congressional delegations, Maine Senate Majority Leader Nathan Libby, Lewiston City Councilor Safiya Khalid, and a special congratulatory video from

U.S. Senator Angus King. The event also marked an important milestone for CDI as we were able to live broadcast the event on our Facebook page! You can view a recording of the event [here](#).

Support from the USDA, private foundations and donors allows CDI to assist a diverse group of clients across multiple cooperative sectors. Here is what they have to say.

"This funding is an investment in the future of rural cooperatives in partnership with CDI to provide them with the tools and resources they need to become vital, self-sustaining, and impactful in their missions for the people they serve." **USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT MAINE STATE DIRECTOR TIMOTHY P. HOBBS**

"Investing in cooperative initiatives is an important part of our mission to improve the lives of rural Americans. We are proud to support the work of CDI, which provides socially disadvantaged groups and rural residents the essential job training, affordable housing, crucial infrastructure and access to quality food that strengthens our small communities." **USDA VERMONT STATE DIRECTOR OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT ANTHONY LINARDOS.**

Additional funders that support CDI's work include The Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, the John Merck Fund, New Visions Foundation, Maine Community Foundation, Robert Rottenberg, and individuals just like you! If you'd like to support the work of CDI, please contact Doug Clopp, Director of Development at dclopp@cdi.coop.

