



Growers Guide 2013

The North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc. is a wholesale agricultural cooperative that markets a variety of locally grown or processed products to regional outlets and promotes sustainable and safe agricultural practices.

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Introduction

What is the North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc.?

North Country Grown Cooperative (NCGC) is a farmer-owned and operated cooperative that pools local seasonal produce from its members and markets to local colleges, restaurants, schools and hospitals. NCGC returns to farmers a large share of the food dollar, delivers fresh, healthy seasonal produce to its customers, usually in less than 24 hours from the time of harvest, and supports environmentally sound farming systems. A member-elected Board of Directors governs NCGC, and the manager handles day-to-day operation.

NCGC currently has 28 members and seven non-member farmers selling to over 30 wholesale customers. NCGC supplies local foods year round, providing vegetables, fruits, herbs, sprouts, meat, honey, maple products, and winter storage crops. Since it's founding, NCGC has had \$ 631,725 in sales –as of May 2013-and returned \$518,79 to its growers.

NCGC was established as a cooperative corporation established February 2, 2005 by St. Lawrence County producers through New York State Cooperative Corporation Law and filed with New York State Secretary of State. Its purposes as stated in its Articles of Incorporation, are:

...assisting its members, including other cooperatives with which it is affiliated, by performing services connected with the purchase, financing, production, manufacture, warehousing, cultivation, harvesting, preservation, drying, processing, cleansing, canning, blending, packing, grading, storing, handling, utilization, shipping, marketing, merchandising, selling, financing or otherwise disposing of the agricultural and food products of its members or of any byproducts thereof, including livestock waste or other organic agricultural wastes, or connected with the acquisition for its members of labor, supplies and articles of common use, including livestock, equipment, machinery, food consumed by the members, their families or guests; and for any other purposes permitted under the Cooperative Corporations Law.

NCGC markets and delivers to colleges, restaurants and other regional institutions. Products offered by the cooperative include seasonal vegetables and fruits, as well as meats, maple syrup, and honey that are offered all year.

How it Began...

PACES Dining Services at SUNY Potsdam began regularly purchasing locally grown food in 2002. In 2003 and 2004, area agencies and individuals together with local farmers expanded the sales to other schools by establishing the Farm-to-School Support Project (FTSSP). Financial assistance for the FTSSP came by way of sales to schools, donations through GardenShare, and a Small Farms Educational grant through the Cornell Small Farms Program. As well use of facilities, staff time and support came from SUNY Potsdam PACES Dining Services, St. Lawrence University, the Ganakee Group, Clarkson University faculty, St. Lawrence County's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, Cornell University's Agriculture Innovation Center and other area schools. The members of the FTSSP planned the formation of the cooperative.

Who Benefits

Farmers, customers and the community alike reap benefits:

- NCGC members are able to access market opportunities not available to them individually, and receive 75 cents on the dollar for produce marketed through NCGC. (On the conventional market, farmers are paid 21 cents on average for every dollar spent on food at supermarkets (USDA).)

Members can also receive education and training, insurance, materials, and labor and equipment exchange.

- Customers are able to purchase local products from multiple farms efficiently, interacting with one delivery person, receiving one invoice and writing one check. For a competitive price, they receive a fresher, higher quality product that is healthier and lasts longer. Purchasing produce from local farmers also helps institutions meet their social and environmental goals.
- NCGC supports the wider community by generating income and keeping dollars in the local economy, creating and maintaining jobs, increasing access to fresh, healthy food, contributing to food security, providing new markets for family farms and helping to preserve (or recreate) rural community based on a viable, vibrant farm sector.

NCGC subscribes to the seven principles of cooperatives: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for community. (See appendix)

How to Participate in North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc.

North Country Grown, Inc. is open for membership and seeks additional members. Small and large growers, producers, and farmers are welcome. Full membership in the cooperative, including voting rights, is a one-time shareholder fee of \$100.00. This fee can be paid out of product sales through the cooperative.

Occasionally, producers may be asked to participate in an educational or community event or work with a student intern, etc. Care will be taken to ensure that time demands are minimal. These events are opportunities to reach out into the North Country. By educating students, parents, and other community members about the benefits of buying local produce, the visibility of the cooperative and its marketing opportunities will increase.

Membership:

Membership in the cooperative is not required. However members have additional rights and privileges. Membership in the cooperative is granted according to the bylaws of the cooperative. All producers will be required to sign the Producer's Agreement annually, provide a tax number (upon request) and to agree to abide by the following guidelines.

Collection and Advance Reporting-- in Season: See Appendix for new online procedures)

Producers may bring their produce to the central collection facility twice a week, on Tuesdays and/or Thursdays between 8:00 AM and 9:30 AM. The collection facility is the Cornell Cooperative Extension Lab facility on Rt. 68 approximately 3 miles south of Canton. It is the responsibility of the producer to bring the produce to the collection facility.

You must report in advance what produce (and how much) you will supply for the next collection. You must make this advance report to the cooperative manager by 10:00 AM on Tuesday for the Thursday collection and by 10:00AM on Thursday for the following Tuesday collection. You may make the report in person on collection days or by phone (769-5061 or cell 323-0850), by e-mail (manager@northcountrygrown.com) or by postal mail (178 Fayette Road, Massena, NY 13662). You do not need to provide produce for every collection, but only produce reported in advance will be accepted and you are obligated to provide what you offer in the advance report.

If for any reason you are unable to provide the produce offered in your report, you must contact the manager **immediately**. The manager will try to replace the produce through another producer.

Collections and Advance Reporting--Off Season:

During the winter months and any slow periods the procedure will vary depending on customer needs. The deliveries are typically made once a week and the day of the week may change. The producer may be asked to deliver the product themselves if it is a small volume. The manager, customer and producer will work together to plan the time and implementation of deliveries to ensure efficient use of resources.

Preparing Your Produce:

During growing, harvesting, and packing, you must follow the North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc.'s policies and guidelines for food safety practices. All of your produce must meet food service requirements for size, ripeness and cleanliness. All produce must be fresh and clear of breaks, bruises, dents, stems, leaves, roots, and all soil. In addition, your produce must be packaged according to food service requirements for count or weight and must be packed in the required bags or boxes (see packing guidelines chart). All containers must also be labeled with the farm name and date packed. Growers must supply the required boxes, which will not be returned. Growers can acquire boxes themselves or purchase them from the cooperative at a discounted price. The cooperative will try to have enough boxes available, but may not always be able to

provide all boxes. The price for a box will be \$0.50/each. Regular onion bags will cost \$0.20/each other large net bags will be \$0.25/each.

Tally Sheet: (See Appendix for new online procedures)

Each time you provide produce, you must fill out and sign a tally sheet, showing exactly what items and quantities you are providing. The manager will verify what you are providing and must initial the tally sheet. These tally sheets will provide the basis for determining your payment. You will not be paid until your properly completed Tally Sheet is received.

Pricing:

In order to keep produce prices competitive, the cooperative charges buyers in keeping with national supply and demand. The prices change weekly and cannot be known in advance. Prices are set by the manager. Current market prices and the past NCGC prices are taken into consideration. Producers are encouraged to make the manager aware of the price that they need to receive in order to cover their costs and make a profit. Without this information, the manager cannot know whether the set price meets the needs of the producer. Please contact the manager for a current list of prices.

Oversupply:

If the supply of produce is greater than the food services can use, the cooperative will accept such products from growers on a rotating basis. The order of preference will be 1st Cooperative members who have provided forecasts, 2nd Non-members who have provided forecasts, 3rd Cooperative members and 4th Non-members. New cooperative members joining after the official start of the season (August 20, 2013) would be considered in the third category. (See Appendix for new online procedures)

One member will not be allowed to fill the entire need for a product if other producers also offer the same product. Up to 50% of current sales, at the maximum, are reserved for a member with greatest seniority. Up to 10% of sales every year will be reserved for development of new members.

Forecasts: (See Appendix for new online procedures)

Growers have been asked to give yearly Forecasts in the past. Now the customers will give us Projections of their needs, and growers will give us Forecasts of what they expect to harvest. All of the yearly planning and budgeting will be done from this information. Our crop Specialist has been gathering this information for this year. The basic list of products and units that will be used to create the Projections and Forecasts is on the website.

Definition of Terms:

Many customers are inquiring about production practices used by growers. These include seed sources, fertility, herbicides and pesticides. To inform customers accurately, crops may be divided into categories. NCGC will have three categories of crops and it is up to the producer to inform the cooperative about which category their product falls into. The three categories are Organic (ORG), Earth Friendly (EF), and Conventional. If a crop is not marked ORG or EF, then it is assumed to have been grown using conventional practices. These categories are not meant to value one category over the other. They are for information only. However, they will affect sales as the customers will choose and receive the desired category. The definitions are below.

Organic (ORG): Producer of this crop has had it certified organic through the National Organic Program. The producer will submit a copy of their organic certification annually and will inform the cooperative if their certification status has changed.

Earth Friendly (EF): Grower has stated to NCGC that the crop was grown without Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) or treated seeds, and that any herbicides, pesticides and fertility used

are not prohibited for organic use. If a question arises about their practices, the producer will be asked to share their procedures with the board.

Conventional (C): Crops not specified as Organic or Grower Friendly.

Payment and Handling Fee:

The cooperative's customers will provide payment to the cooperative only. The cooperative in turn will pay the individual producers after payment is received from the customer. The cooperative will deduct a 25% handling fee for members and non-members. This fee will be used to pay the expenses of the cooperative. Any leftover amount may be distributed at the end of the year by a vote of the members.

Policy on Grievances and Conflicts:

(This policy was approved by unanimous vote of the NCGC Board of Directors on 1 March 2012)

Normally, issues can be resolved by a simple call to the manager before they become conflicts.

If conflicts arise among and/or between any of the parties involved with the cooperative, such conflicts will be met with responsible, respectful, and thoughtful resolutions, so as to achieve as close to consensus as possible. Conflicts should be resolved at the lowest level possible. All communications regarding conflicts must be in writing and may be transmitted by mail or email.

If a conflict between two members can be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties, then it shall be done. If a member has a conflict with another member, it shall be put in writing to the board, which will refer it to the grievance committee. The grievance committee will review all facts in the case and present their findings to the board. Whatever decision is made by the board at that time will be binding, and both parties will agree to abide by it prior to this meeting, by the original signature on their member agreements.

If a grower has an issue regarding the handling of their product by the manager, or reason to believe that the co-op manager is not correctly following cooperative policy, or some other issue with a decision by the manager, it is the grower's responsibility to submit a written notice to the manager detailing their grievance. If the grower feels uncomfortable contacting the manager directly, the grower may submit a written notice to a board member detailing their grievance. The board member may not attempt to mediate or resolve the issue, but will convey the grower's written notice directly to the manager. When the manager receives notice of a grievance directly or indirectly from a grower, the manager will contact the member directly to resolve the issue. If the member and the manager are unable to come to a resolution that is satisfactory for both parties, the matter will be brought to the board in writing and the grievance committee will be asked to review all the facts of the case and present their findings to the board. Both parties will agree to accept the decision of the board prior to the meeting.

The manager or a board member will document conflicts in writing and record the issue, actions taken, and any other pertinent issues. These will be reported at the next monthly board meeting, and recorded in the files of the cooperative for at least seven years.

Policy on dealing with delinquent members:

Members who fail to meet the terms laid out in the Producer's Agreement will receive a letter reminding the member of their responsibilities to the NCGC. The letter will be signed by the President of the Board and delivered by hand or by mail. It will reiterate the terms of the Producer's Agreement where lapses have been observed and request that the member increase their attention to these requirements. Following delivery of the letter, the President will meet with the delinquent member. If little or no improvement is observed following these steps, the Board will rule on suspension or termination of membership in accordance with Article 1, Section 2 of the Bylaws.

Food Safety Practices

Water Tests:

It is the policy of NCGC to require an annual test of water used in the production and packing of crops from all producers. Producers with a municipal water supply are exempt. In addition, NCGC recommends that the source of water used to irrigate crops also be tested at least once a year.

Farm Food Safety Plan:

All growers are encouraged to develop a farm food safety plan. We anticipate that some of our customers will require this in the future.

Microbial Contamination:

All producers selling through the North Country Grown Cooperative are required to follow all applicable state and federal regulations for production and sale of farm direct products. All new producers will be given a copy of *Reduce Microbial Contamination with Good Agricultural Practice* at the time that they receive the first copy of the Producer's Agreement to sign. That publication presents recommended food safety practices for fruits and vegetables. Additional copies can be acquired through Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County.

Pesticide Use:

All producers selling through NCGC who choose to use pesticides must do so in accordance with state and federal law. All pesticides are regulated by state and federal laws for the purpose of protecting both user and consumer.

Read labels carefully. Follow instructions. Most pesticides are poisonous to humans and animals. Handle them with care. Store them in closed, plainly labeled original containers, out of the reach of children and animals. Keep pesticides in locked storage facilities. When handling, do not allow pesticides to come in contact with the skin. Do not apply on a windy day. Do not smoke while handling pesticides. Do not inhale dusts, sprays, or vapors. After handling pesticides, wash hands and face before eating or smoking. To avoid accidental injury to susceptible plants, avoid drift of sprays and dusts. Use separate equipment for applying hormone-type herbicides such as 2,4-D. Dispose of empty containers so that children cannot play with them. St. Lawrence County holds a free collection of hazardous waste materials and containers twice a year (see county website for dates).

In New York State, pesticides that are highly toxic or that are persistent and accumulative are placed on a restricted-use list and may be sold to and used only by certified applicators. "Restricted-use pesticide" or "restricted pesticide" means any pesticide listed in Section 326.2 of Part 326, according to the criteria of Environmental Conservation Law, Section 33-0101(42), or any pesticide whose labeling bears the statement "Restricted-Use Pesticide."

Commercial applicators of pesticides as well as private applicators that use restricted-use pesticides must be certified. Certification exams and re-certification credits are given through the state; consult your Cornell Cooperative Extension agent or regional pesticide specialist if you have questions concerning certification.

Please refer to New York State Department of Environmental Conservation circular 865, part 325, *Rules and Regulations Relating to the Application of Pesticides*, for further information relating to the use of pesticides in New York State. In addition, the book *2003 Integrated Crop and Pest Management Guidelines for Commercial Vegetable Production* is available in print from Cornell Cooperative Extension or online at <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/recommends>.

Resources for Water Testing:

the farm

Life Science Laboratories

103 St. Lawrence Ave
Waddington, NY 13694
315 388 4476

Donna Gokey

501 Tracey Road
Lisbon, NY 13658
315 386 2757

Converse Labs*** Will pick up on

800 Starbuck Ave, Suite B101
Watertown, NY 13601
315 788 8388 or 800 427 5227

Appendix I: New Procedures for Online Ordering and Forecasts

Online Ordering:

An online ordering system will solve issues related to customers and growers. For example, customers will not have to worry about double ordering (when two customers order the same item). The system will subtract products from the inventory as soon as an order is placed.

There is a schedule for ordering, so growers should know what products and how much of each they have sold sooner. Automatically tracking of inventory and sales in the online system will simplify accounting and speed up payments to growers.

Procedures for online ordering:

These procedures are being written before the online ordering system is implemented. There will most likely be several changes as we use the system and find areas that need adjustment. It will be VERY helpful if growers give feedback to the manager as we institute this change. If a grower encounters difficulty with any part of the new online ordering and tracking system, he or she is urged to contact the manager. The system will continue to be improved and upgraded as we use it and identify problems. It is recognized that everyone is not at the same level of computer comfort. One-on-one training will be available for both growers and customers.

Forecasts:

Customers will be asked to give the cooperative their purchase Projections by the end of December. A list of all the products that NCGC sells with units will be available on the website. Based on this list, customers will make their projections for the coming year online. Each customer will fill in how many units of each product they will need biweekly for the entire year. This information will be totaled and given to all growers.

After receiving the customer Projections, each grower will forecast what they will grow for the next season by product and in biweekly intervals based on the same list of products and units that the customers use (available on online and in hard copy for those who do not use email). A section of the website with Planting and Harvesting records will compliment the Forecasts and be a tool for growers to keep their records in a very accessible form. The growers will have their Forecasts done by January 31st. *These Forecasts will determine the selling order*, so every grower needs to submit the information on time. (See Oversupply above). Both customers and growers can update their information during the season. Growers without computer access will submit their Forecasts in writing.

In Season Delivery:

It is critical to delivered items to the facility on time. We have customers who close in the early afternoon, and facility workers need time to sort and deliver before these customers close.

On Farm Pick-up:

For growers who have NO other way of getting products to the facility, NCGC is working on a limited farm pick up system to be paid with a collection fee that is in addition to the 25% fee paid by all growers. Initially this service will be available to growers who have NO other way to get products to the facility. NYS ARC has buses and has agreed to do custom runs to collect produce. Collection services could be expanded in the future.

Tally Sheets :

The Tally Sheet will go away. The online system will generate a printable report for each grower for each delivery day. It will list the items and amounts sold and the customer who bought them. The manager will check the accuracy and in the beginning send them by e-mail, and have a hard copy at the facility. When everything is in place, growers will be able to access and print their own sheets. These sheets will be updated upon delivery. There is a column for products offered for the next delivery. The grower will be responsible to make sure that information is given to the manager at delivery or by 10:00AM on delivery day (same as with a Tally Sheet). When all is in place, the grower will enter their next offer online themselves. These sheets when updated will become your Purchase Order and will have all the data used to pay you in a simple form.

Growers who do not have online access will give their information to the manager and it will be entered for them. The hard copies listing the items sold, will be e-mailed or available at the facility, and will be the basis of sharing this information.

Appendix 2: Cooperative Principles

Copied from the International Co-operative Alliance website <http://www.ica.coop/>

Statement of Cooperative Identity

Definition

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

Values

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Principles

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organized in a democratic manner.

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter to agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

5th Principle: Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public -

particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7th Principle: Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Appendix 3

North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc.
Producer's Agreement 2013

Name(s): _____

Farm: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____, NY Zip: _____

Telephone with Area Code: _____

Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

1. I agree to abide by the policies and guidelines of the North Country Grown Cooperative, as outlined in the Grower's Guide 2013.**
2. I agree to allow North Country Grown Cooperative to deduct a handling fee from my gross sales, to cover operating expenses.
3. I agree to sell only those foods grown on my own fields, through my own farm operation.
4. I agree to grow and harvest my crops in keeping with applicable state and federal regulations and the food safety practices described in *Food Safety Begins on the Farm*.
5. I agree to report in advance, prepare my produce, deliver it to the collection center, complete tally sheets, and receive payments as outlined in the *Grower's Guide 2012*
6. I agree to support the North Country Grown Cooperative by welcoming visits to my farm, participating in training and orientation opportunities, and sharing information with other growers and participating organizations as needed.
7. If I am unable to maintain participation in the North Country Grown Cooperative as outlined above, I agree to withdraw from the organization and/or work with North Country Grown in order to fully participate again.

Producer's Signature: _____ Date: _____

North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc. Signature: _____

(Print Name & Title): _____

Date: _____

**Members who fail to meet the terms laid out in this Producer's Agreement will be notified in writing by the President of the Board and subsequently visited in person by the President. If little or no improvement is observed following these steps, the Board will rule on suspension or termination of membership in accordance with Article 1, Section 2 of the Bylaws.*