

ORIGINS



FIFTH SEASON COOPERATIVE NEWS

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Celebrating Five Years in Business - HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

History...In the spring of 2009, information gathered through a regional 18 month food assessment process conducted by the Valley Stewardship Network indicated that there is a lack of coordination to market and distribute local food, including meat, produce and dairy that is produced in the region.

In the summer of 2009, Sue Noble, Executive Director of Vernon Economic Development Association, was meeting with institutional cafeteria food service buyers, such as UW La Crosse, Western Technical College, Gundersen Health System, Viroqua Schools, and Vernon Memorial Healthcare who wanted to buy local food but didn't know how to make it happen. It was obvious there needed to be a way to match producer supply with food service market demand, connecting what the growers are producing with what the cafeterias want to serve.

In January 2010, Vernon Economic Development Association submitted and was awarded a \$40,000 grant through the Buy Local Buy Wisconsin program to hire a part time coordinator and establish a cooperative business structure that would provide the missing link of coordination between producers, processors, distributors and buyers.

The first six months of the grant were spent developing the mission, bylaws, articles of incorporation and first board of directors. Margaret Bau, USDA Cooperative Development Specialist, was instrumental throughout the development of the cooperative. The Fifth Season Cooperative officially became a business on August 10, 2010. The seven-member interim board of directors, representing each of the classes of membership, met every two weeks for a year to work on policies, procedures and pricing, refine business plans, build memberships, establish an investor stock option, address staff needs and oversee all aspects of the start-up phase of the business.

In July 2011, they hired an operations manager as the first staff. Reinhart FoodService, a leading national food distributor based in La Crosse, also joined the co-op as a distributor member in 2011, providing critical distribution capacity and access to thousands of buyers in institutional foodservice markets.

In December 2012, a capital campaign "Help Us Grow" was launched, offering opportunities to help build equity for the business by investing in Fifth Season's Class B preferred stock. Community members who are interested in supporting Fifth Season's regional model and the businesses and communities it serves are welcome to participate in this investment option.

In December 2013, Fifth Season partnered with family-owned frozen food processor member Sno Pac Foods in Caledonia, Minnesota, to begin offering FSC's two frozen vegetable blends, "Winter Moon Blend" and "Wisconsin Potato Fusion". The cooperative's new direction and success received national recognition by the Wallace Center at Winrock International in Arlington, Virginia, on behalf of the National Good Food Network.

FSC's success at operating a regional food hub has also received other attention, both state and national. In May 2014, the local cooperative was chosen from almost 200 applicants to be among 11 food hubs across the United States to receive a \$75,000 Wallace Center Food Hub Development Grant. In August 2014, FSC received a \$197,696 grant through the USDA Rural Development's Value-Added Producer Grant program to expand its quick-frozen vegetable blends to institutional market channels.

The cooperative brings together farmer/producers, producer groups, processors, distributors, buyers, and workers within 150 miles of Viroqua. Its current membership, listed on the last page of this newsletter, includes 37 small family farms, 5 farmer/producer groups, 3 distributors, 21 processors, and more than 2500 buyers.

FSC aggregates and distributes locally grown produce, meats, dairy and value-added products through distributor members to hospitals, schools, and businesses in the greater Driftless Region, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Madison and Chicago. Some fresh produce is brought to the Food Enterprise Center in Viroqua and stored in a cooler for pickup by Reinhart trucks. Other local food products are shipped directly from various processors to Reinhart's distribution center and then to institutional buyers throughout the region and beyond.

"Our total sales have increased from \$40,000 in 2011 to \$130,000 in 2012, to \$230,000 in 2013, and to \$360,000 in 2014. We expect sales to hit \$475,000 in 2015," says FSC Board President Brian Wickert. He adds, "The cooperative continues to grow in 2015, bringing on new products and members and further developing value-added frozen vegetables geared toward institutional food service needs and expanding into retail."

The co-op is governed by a board of directors, elected from the membership, including distributor member Mike Dvorak from Reinhart FoodService, worker member Ben Eby as

FSC Sales Manager, producer member Toril Fisher from Second Cloud on the Left Farm, processor member Pete Gengler from Sno Pac Foods, buyer member Tom Thompson from Gundersen Health System, and producer group member Brian Wickert from EZ Farming. The Fifth Season offices are headquartered at the Food Enterprise Center in Viroqua with Office Manager Jamie Deaver, Sales Manager Ben Eby, and GAP/Food Safety Auditor Linda McCann. Sue Noble, Executive Director of Vernon Economic Development Association, continues to provide daily oversight and grant writing assistance.

Save the Dates

Plan to attend a Growers Meeting...Are you looking for another or new market for your produce? Would you like to explore the market potential before you plan your next season?

Fifth Season Cooperative is actively looking for more produce grower members to meet the high foodservice demand for produce. The co-op will be hosting informational meetings for growers on Wednesday, November 18 and Thursday, December 3 at the Food Enterprise Center, 1201 North Main Street in Viroqua from 1:00 to 3:00 pm. Current producer members or any growers interested in becoming a member and selling through the co-op are encouraged to attend whichever day is convenient for them.

Ben Eby, FSC Sales Manager, will discuss which produce items the co-op is looking for, projections for the 2016 season and the procedures he uses when sourcing produce and then shipping the items out through the Food Enterprise Center and the co-op's distributor members.

Steve Reints will present information from Reinhart FoodService regarding the advantages of selling through Reinhart, and also their quality assurance, packaging and labeling requirements.

Linda McCann will review the farm and food safety checklist she looks for when she conducts the on site farm audits with producers, which is required by the co-op and its distributor members.

Jamie Deaver, FSC Office Manager, will review the paperwork that is necessary to check in products, move them through the co-op and have the adequate information to generate invoices so payments can be made efficiently.

Annual Membership Meeting in February...Fifth Season Cooperative will hold its annual membership meeting on Wednesday February 24, 2016. The time and location are still to be determined but please mark it in your calendars and plan to attend. We will elect board members, provide a financial report and celebrate the past year.

New Members & Products

Welcome to our newest members...

Artisan Deli Foods – Produces sauerkraut with a one hundred year old family recipe from Switzerland, using white cabbage sourced from local farmers.

Country View Dairy – Makes all natural farmstead yogurt in both Original and Greek style, using the wholesome milk from their family's own dairy herd.

Driftless Meats & More – Local butcher and online meat market offering meat processing, beef and the best steaks to its customers in La Crosse and Viroqua, Wisconsin.

Fizzeology – Producer of five flavorful varieties of fermented foods such as Kimchi and Naked Sauerkraut, proving to be popular with our new retail co-op contacts as well as hospitals for its health benefits.

Heartland Fruit and Produce – Local produce trucking business that sells wholesale and retail fruits and veggies.

Just Coffee – Madison, Wisconsin based worker-owned cooperative coffee roaster dedicated to creating and expanding a model of trade based on transparency, equality, and human dignity.

Kettle Range Meats – Processor offering the highest quality, ethically raised and humanely slaughtered, USDA inspected grass fed beef and pastured pork, antibiotic and hormone free.

Scenic Ridge Farm – Grows cherry tomatoes from March to November in their hoop house on their farm near Mt. Hope, WI.

Urbal Teas – Locally based startup formulates and blends loose-leaf, dried herbs into healthy tea, packed with antioxidants and trace minerals.

White Jasmine – Madison, Wisconsin based company selling Pakistani and Indian fusion style spice blends and spiced Artisan crafted Wisconsin Gouda Cheese.

What's Happening in Sales?

By Ben Eby, Sales Manager

It's an exciting time in sales as interest in doing business with Fifth Season Cooperative continues to grow.

Expanding our Reach...Building on our strong relationship with the La Crosse division of Reinhart FoodService, we have also begun moving products through their Shawano hub, expanding our capacity to serve markets in northeastern Wisconsin.

In continuing to serve more hospitals, we spoke at the NAC Alliance meeting in September in Sauk Prairie, promoting Fifth Season to more than 20 hospitals that are trying to incorporate local food options in their menus.

We also attended a Healthy Hospitals and Clinics forum in Madison with more than 30 local hospitals attending. There is an increasing trend in hospitals to source local. As a result of the interest generated at that forum, Vernon Memorial Healthcare in Viroqua, Upland Hills Health in Dodgeville, Columbus Community Hospital in Columbus, St. Mary's Hospital in Madison, and Richland Hospital in Richland Center have signed on to Reinhart to have access to Fifth Season products.

Food Show season has started again! We attended the Fall Reinhart show in La Crosse and for the first time, the Grocer's food show in Milwaukee. This led us to some new grocery store contacts and potential new distributors that will help further expand our capacity to serve new markets.

New Members and Market Areas...We have several large new buyers coming online through Reinhart including Four Daughters Vineyard in Rochester, the new Hyatt Hotel in Green Bay and Canadian Honker in Rochester, Minnesota. Indianhead Foodservice, based in Eau Claire, also became a new distributor member this summer as we moved lots of produce into foodservice venues in

Northern Wisconsin and the Twin Cities areas. Two new meat processors, Driftless Meats & More from Viroqua and Kettle Range Meats in Madison, WI, have joined the co-op with huge interest from buyers.

We have updated the website to include the complete product list with corresponding Reinhart numbers and a link to apply for a Reinhart account. This has made it much easier for customers to find and use our products. We also added a new Buyer Member's page with links to their websites and a downloadable application to join. An updated product list with all our new member's products is also posted. We continue to expand our online presence to make it the sales tool it needs to be.

Increased Marketing...We expanded our online marketing with a "Mail Chimp" account which allows us to very easily send information and promotion coupons to hundreds of customers all at once. We can track who opens it up and who clicks through the links to see which customers we need to contact for best results. It has been a great success! Four potential new members are filling out paperwork to join the co-op. The tracking indicates people are reading the Mail Chimp and passing the information around. For example, one buyer in Madison forwarded the email and more than 195 people opened and read it, learning about Fifth Season's membership, mission and potential benefits for them. A major advantage to buyers is that FSC provides end-user sales tools such as posters, table tents, point of sale, stickers, and farmer stories to help market the products sourced through the co-op.

If you would like to receive marketing materials for our products and the cooperative, please email me at beby@fifthseasoncoop.com. Also check out our website at www.fifthseasoncoop.com.

2014 Food Hub Impact Report funded by the Wallace Center

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture worked with Fifth Season to conduct a survey of the food hub staff and members to evaluate the impact of the food hub. The full report may be found on our website at www.fifthseasoncoop.com. Key impacts include:

- Involvement with Fifth Season has helped 30% of farmer members to access new markets and 60% of farmers increased gross sales. 70% of farmers became food safety approved or certified.
- 30% of farmers indicated that selling to Fifth Season has helped increase cooperation with other farmers.
- 70% of farmers reported that selling to Fifth Season led them to purchase equipment or expand infrastructure.
- Farmer members sold 12% of their products to Fifth Season in 2014 and want to sell an additional 9% through the cooperative.
- Buyers purchased 21% of local food purchases through Fifth Season and would like to buy an additional 62% from the co-op.
- Buyers agreed that purchasing from Fifth Season Co-op better connects them to their community.
- Responding farmers use environmentally sustainable practices on a total of 325.5 acres.
- Farmers and buyers reported creating a total of 11 new jobs in 2014.

Our Current Member List



Our Producer Members

Austin's Rush Creek Farm Ferryville, WI
Bunker Hill Produce Chaseburg, WI
C&M Family Farms La Farge, WI
Coloma Farms Coloma, WI
Countryside Produce Westby, WI
Creek Farm Enterprises Darlington, WI
Ecker's Apple Farm Trempealeau, WI
EZ Farming Viroqua, WI
Gone Wild Acres Mindoro, WI
Green Pastures Sugar Maples Cashton, WI
Happy Hidden Acres Viroqua, WI
Harmony Valley Farm Viroqua, WI
Heirloom Acres Viola, WI
Hidden View Produce Fennimore, WI
Hillside Farming La Farge, WI
JRS Country Acres Lake Mills, WI
Justin Trussoni De Soto, WI
Kickapoo Beans and Greens Readstown, WI
Marshview Farm Wauzeka, WI
Miller Family Farm Cashton, WI
Mullet Family Farm Cashton, WI
Never Settle Farm Westby, WI
Pine Knob Asparagus Viroqua, WI
Quiet Valley Farms Coon Valley, WI
R&R Farm Cashton, WI
Ridgeland Harvest Farm Viroqua, WI
Rolling Acres Farm Belmont WI
Ru Ma Vale Farm Cashton, WI
Second Cloud on the Left Farm La Farge, WI
Scenic Ridge Farm Mt. Hope, WI
Shady Maple Acres Belmont, WI
Slabaugh Family Produce Viroqua, WI
Spring Valley Produce Westby, WI
Sweet Ridge Farm Rockland, WI
Sweet Springs Farm Gays Mills, WI
Valley View Farm Elroy, WI
Windy Hill Acres Darlington, WI

Our Producer Group Members

EZ Farming Produce Group Viroqua, WI
GROWN Locally Decorah, IA
Heartland Fruit & Produce Lone Rock, WI
Hill and Valley Produce Hillsboro, WI
Organic Valley/CROPP La Farge, WI

Our Distributor Members

Reinhart FoodService La Crosse, WI
Indianhead Foodservice Distributor Eau Claire, WI
Keewaydin Organics Viola, WI

Our Processor Members

Artisan Deli Foods Viroqua, WI
Chicken Creek Ranch Ridgeland, WI
Country View Dairy Hawkeye, IA
Driftless Meats & More Viroqua, WI
Driftless Sunflower Oil Soldiers Grove, WI
Fizzeology Foods Viroqua, WI
Haas Brothers Salsa Eau Claire, WI
Holmen School District Holmen, WI
Innovation Kitchen Mineral Point, WI
Just Coffee Madison, WI
Kettle Range Meats Madison, WI
Kickapoo Coffee Viroqua, WI
Lonesome Stone Milling Lone Rock, WI
Maple Valley Cooperative Cashton, WI
OM Boys Food Movement Madison, WI
RP's Pasta Madison, WI
Sno Pac Foods Caledonia, MN
Sun Ray Farmstead Meats Mindoro, WI
Urbal Tea Milwaukee, WI
Westby Co-op Creamery Westby, WI
White Jasmine Madison, WI

Our Class A Buyer Members

Gundersen Health System
Mayo Clinic Health System -
Franciscan Healthcare
Menomonie Public Schools
University of Wisconsin – La Crosse
University of Wisconsin – Stout
Upland Hills Health
Vernon Memorial Healthcare