

Community Assistantship Program

Pomme de Terre Food Co-Op

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Pomme de Terre Food Co-Op

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**Internship for the Pomme de Terre Food Co-Op:
Through the UMM Center for Small Towns
by Alison Hartke**

When my work with the PDT Co-Op first began, I was given a list of research subjects that would become the basis for my semester long internship. That list included the following questions:

- What foods *can* be grown or produced in Minnesota?
- What foods are *already* grown or produced here?
- Which farms might the Co-Op be interested in working with?
- Are farmers willing to grow new Minnesota crops?
- What dairy products are being produced in the Midwest?
- Which dairy producers might the Co-Op be interested in working with?
- How are the Co-Op's current and prospective suppliers organized geographically?
- How can the Co-Op transport foods in an efficient and cost-effective way?
- How can we increase awareness of the Co-Op, and what kind of marketing techniques might be useful?

I started answering these questions systematically, beginning with the **list of edible crops that can be grown in Minnesota**, using information from several sources including the Northern Crops Institute (<http://www.northern-crops.com/crops/crops.htm>) and crop profiles from Integrated Pest Management (<http://www.ipmcenters.org/cropprofiles/ListCropProfiles.cfm?typeorg=state&USDARegion=National%20Site>). The crops can be found in the document "MN Crops" and include:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| • Barley | • Durum Wheat | • Lentils |
| • Canola | • Wild Rice | • Millet |
| • Rye | • Kidney Beans | • Chick Peas |
| • Corn | • Navy Beans | (Garbanzo Beans) |
| • Oats | • Pinto Beans | • Jerusalem Artichokes |
| • Soybeans | • Golden Flax | • Mungbean |
| • Hard Red Spring Wheat | • Sunflower | • Mustard |
| • Hard Red Winter Wheat | • Buckwheat | • Popcorn |
| | • Field Peas | |
| | • Fababeans | |

- Quinoa
- Spelt
- Triticale
- Syrup Sorghum
- Sugarbeets
- Hops

Next, I compiled a **list of producers within approximately 200 miles of the Co-Op** that shared PDT's sustainable and local values, supplied the crops listed above, and/or have other products that the Co-Op would be interested in stocking. There were many helpful sources for local food, including the Sustainable Farming Association's Marketing Directory and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Locally Grown Directory (both found in the saved documents). I then attempted to contact the farms that carried the products that PDT was interested in, and worked with them to establish a first order. These farms and their contact information can be found in the document "Selective Product Options," and include:

- Buffalo Pass Ranch
- Bruns Montadales
- Misty Meadows Bison Farm
- The Lamb Shoppe
- Bar 5 Meat and Poultry
- Camp Aquila Pure Maple Syrup
- Acorn Ridge Farm
- Ames Farm
- Lake Country Lambs

I also talked to Carmen Fernholz, the owner of A-Frame Farm, who said that he may be willing to grow new crops for Pomme de Terre. His contact information is listed in "Selective Product Options," and he is most conveniently reached by telephone.

The Co-Op also wanted to look into artisanal cheeses and other dairy products. I compiled a **list of dairies that created the kind of cheeses PDT was interested in**, and presented the findings to Margaret Kuchenreuther; the Co-Op's cheese specialist. Research for this portion was more widespread, and focused on the cheeses that were sold in other co-ops, as well as cheeses recommended by PDT customers. These dairies and their contact info can be found in the document "Prospective Dairy Producers," and include:

- Stony Creek Dairy
- Cedar Summit Creamery
- Poplar Hill Dairy Goat Farm
- Shepherd's Way Farm

- Green Pastures Dairy
- Carr Valley Cheese
- Bass Lake Cheese
- Prairie Hollow Farm

In November I drove down to the Twin Cities to Lunds & Byerly's in Burnsville and Kowalski's in Minneapolis to figure out what kind of local and international cheeses were sold commercially. Having taken notes on products while in the store, I went back and looked into each one, tracing it through import and transportation companies to producers and creating a **list of commercially sold cheeses**. This list of producers and their contact info is saved as the document "ByerlysKowalskisStock" and it includes:

- Sartori Food Corp.
- Ermitage
- Coombe Castle International
- Widmer's Cheese Cellars
- Kradjihan Importing
- Emmi
- Kerrygold
- Tillamook Cheese
- Alouette

The next logical step was finding out how to get these products to the Co-Op in Morris from their various locations. I began by **mapping out the local producers** that PDT was already using, as well as the producers I had contacted who would be finding ways to ship their first order.



The producers marked on this map are listed in the “Selective Product Options” document, and are as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1) Honey and Herbs | 8) Glacial Ridge Dairy |
| 2) Earthrise Farm | 9) Lake Country Lambs |
| 3) Moonstone Farm | 10) Camp Aquila Syrup |
| 4) Dry Weather Creek | 11) Buffalo Pass Ranch |
| 5) Pastures A’Plenty | 12) Misty Meadows Bison |
| 6) J+L Bison | 13) Pomme de Terre Co-Op, Morris |
| 7) Whole Farm Co-Op | |

Two producers that do not appear on this map because of the allotted space are “Whole Grain Milling” and “Native Harvest.”

There are several options when it comes to **transportation for the Co-Op**. I explored the most sensible ideas, and have come up with three that seem plausible.

- 1) *Work with producers who live in the same area to coordinate drop-offs* – This is more or less the system that PDT is currently using, which requires someone from the Co-Op to talk to three or four producers who are willing to take turns picking up loads and driving to Morris. This is a cost-effective system, but has proven to be rather unreliable. Unfortunately, when one producer misses a deadline or can’t take a turn driving, the rest of the system goes down as well.
- 2) *Hire a company to drive a truck around the route for pick-ups* – This option would be reliable and helpful for the Co-Op and producers in terms of time spent, but would be costly. There are several trucking companies in the Morris area who are willing to give quotes, including:
 - Kevin M. Johnson Trucking, Appleton – (320) 289-1523
 - Sandberg and Sons Trucking, Long Prairie – (320) 732-2113
 - Midwest Transport Inc., Willmar – (320) 235-9742
 - Stantex Inc., Wadena – (218) 631-1555
 - Eames Distributing, Morris – (320) 589-2879
- 3) *Set up a Co-Op network similar to the Southeast Minnesota Food Network* – This option would benefit the most people in the long run, but would probably require

one employee to take on the responsibility of organizing the Ortonville, Dawson, Willmar, Long Prairie, Wadena, and possibly St. Cloud and Litchfield co-ops (contact info found in the document “Co-Ops”) to collaborate, as well as organize the interested producers of each co-op. I’ve been made aware that grants exist for the purpose of starting these networks, including grants available from the Community Design Center of Minnesota, and possibly from the Regional Sustainable Development Partnership. There are a couple people to be in contact with if PDT decides to pursue this possibility:

- Claudia at Southeast MN Food Network – (507) 251-9773
- Lori at Co-Op Partners – (651) 644-7000
- Terri Van Der Pol at the Land Stewardship Project – (320) 269-2105

The last thing I was asked to look into had to do with **marketing and possible ways to increase awareness of the Co-Op**. There were several questions to address here, including brainstorming topics which are as follows:

1) What kinds of promotional items do other co-ops use, and which ones might be useful for PDT?

I went in to the Just Food Co-Op in Northfield, MN to find out what kind of promotional items were sold at other co-ops, and found that the highest selling marketing products were T-shirts, bumper stickers, buttons, coffee mugs and bags with the Co-Op’s logo and information, with bumper stickers selling out within the first three weeks. Through some online research I realized that bags and T-shirts were big sellers for many other co-ops in Minnesota. Based on comments made by University of Minnesota, Morris students, I believe that T-shirts and bumper stickers would probably be the highest selling items.

2) How can we increase awareness of the Co-Op?

Most co-ops in Minnesota, provided they have the resources, put out a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter which is either mailed to the members, distributed with the local paper, or both. The newsletter may include member submissions, information about new products or services, coupons, advertisements, information about the co-op’s meetings, etc. I think this would be a great tool for PDT if enough members showed interest.

Classes are another great way to get people into the co-op, whether they would regularly shop there or not. Cooking, baking, and craft classes (such as knitting, crocheting, etc.) are big hits at co-ops just a little larger than PDT. Just Food Co-Op, for instance, holds a knitting night once a week and the class is comprised of members and non-members of all ages.

A rather old addition to many co-ops is being shown in a new light as members share their recipes online over the co-op website. This gets people familiar with the co-op, first of all, and often the recipes include ingredients that can be bought at the co-op itself. Granted, this effort would be most appreciated by people who already shop at PDT, but it's a great way to get the community together.

3) How can PDT get members involved more regularly?

Most co-ops offer a discount for their members, and include them in voting about issues concerning food, revenue, etc. Unfortunately this doesn't do much good if the members don't come to the meetings. An interesting idea to get members into the co-op for these events, whether they be for business or pleasure, is the old idea of a punch card. Say, for instance, you're a member who only comes to the monthly meetings every three months. You get your Co-Op card punched every time you show up, and for every three holes punched you get an extra five percent off throughout the next month. You may be interested in getting those extra punches if it means getting the good food you love for a little less. The key is incentive, and no matter what way the co-op might choose to work a system like this, I believe it would prove beneficial.

4) How can we get more college students into the Co-Op?

As a student myself, I can say confidently that for the 18 to 22 crowd, money and transportation are the leading factors when it comes to grocery shopping. Keeping this in mind, I think the two biggest things PDT could do to bring in the students is 1) to offer a student discount, and 2) to talk to the Morris Transit about creating a permanent stop on their route right in front of the Co-Op. Beyond that, I think it would be a good idea for PDT to work on campus advertising in order to let people know where the Co-Op is. It's very likely that your average Joe Student doesn't know where PDT is located in the first place. Fliers, posters, etc., might change that, and if the Co-Op can stay affordable on a college budget I know many people who would rather shop there than anywhere else.