

## **BACKGROUND: WHERE WE'RE AT**

Cooperative enterprises are formed to meet the needs and aspirations of their members.

In past meetings together steering committee members have discussed some of their personal needs and assets. However members have not yet found consensus on shared needs and aspirations that they can come together around and develop a co-op to facilitate.

Steering committee members feel there are many urgent and existential needs they have and are enthusiastic to get started on problem solving. Before diving into business planning discussions steering committee members must answer the following questions:

1. Who (or what groups) are the potential co-op members?
2. What need(s) is the co-op designed to address?
3. What aspirations can members achieve by working together cooperatively?

## **PAST MEETINGS**

[November 18, 2021](#)

[January 10, 2022](#)

[February 28, 2022](#)

[March 28, 2022](#)

[Co-op Structures Presentation](#)

## **BACKGROUND: PATTERNS FROM PAST MEETINGS**

*These are some personal needs, challenges, and aspirations that have been shared by steering committee members and have a history of discussion in this group.*

- Challenge of managing and executing many different kinds of labor to run a business.
- Challenge of accessing skilled and culturally competent labor.
- Challenge of paying competitive wages to attract and retain labor.
- Challenge identifying solid sources for farm inputs including compost.
- Experience of geographic and social isolation.
- Desire to be networked with intentional community for advice and support.
- Require logistics support to scale: transportation, aggregation, and storage of product.
- Interest in shared services and backend office support: bookkeeping and marketing.
- Interest in continued education and technical assistance to refine operations.
- Interest in unique branding and/or certification of farm and farm products.
- Interest in collective bargaining and understanding and setting market rates.
- Interest in achieving wholesale pricing rates on materials and equipment.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT WORK

Due April 25, 2022

The goal of this independent work assignment is for each steering committee member to make headway on thinking through the following questions before the next full group meeting.

1. Who (or what groups) are the potential co-op members?
2. What need(s) is the co-op designed to address?
3. What aspirations can members achieve by working together cooperatively?

Each steering committee member has a set of labeled slides to work in. The slides are set up with questions to reflect on and respond to. Click into the box with the question you are responding to:

- Rafa Aponte: slides 4-7
- Allison DeHoney: slides 8-11
- Alison Espinosa: slides 12-15
- Julian Mangano: slides 16-19
- Wil Moss: slides 20-23

## Who (or what groups) are the potential co-op members?

Identity - who (or what groups) owns and makes decisions about the co-op?

Black agricultural producers, land stewards, and agricultural/food businesses of NYS with minimum 50% ownership by black identified members

An elected or appointed committee or board with member votes to approve or veto operational purchases and decisions

Background & Priorities - describe what is important to the member.

A understanding of the history and present conditions for black growers/producers in NYS

## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 1.

What types of challenges does the potential co-op member experience?

The need to aggregate goods, provide supply chain support, and market directly and effectively across NYS

Under-resourced communities and markets, discrimination from existing resource professionals and market channels, the historic non-existence of an cooperative entity for Black producers in NYS

How are those challenges connected and/or related to each other?

Historic and ongoing disenfranchisement of black communities and systemic racism

## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 2.

Is there a root challenge? (I.e.: If we don't solve this one we can't move forward on anything.)

Collective values and needs

What gets in the way of addressing the challenge? Why does it persist?

Lack of agricultural business support for cooperative models and a shared understanding of barriers and opposition

## What aspirations can members achieve by working together cooperatively?

What benefits do you imagine co-op members will experience by organizing together?

Collectively accessing market conditions and opportunities for sale and marketing of black products in NYS. The ability to aggregate and freight products at larger scale across NY.


Lowered costs, a shared platform for commercial and political interests and policy, and continuing the legacy of collective organizing of black communities and enterprises

What are some potential impacts of the co-op on members broader communities?


A dent in health disparities and food access in urban and rural communities, positive net environmental impacts from reduced food miles and shared infrastructure, and resiliency and security in local food chains from shared capital resources and support

## Who (or what groups) are the potential co-op members?

Identity - who (or what groups) owns and makes decisions about the co-op?

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Background & Priorities - describe what is important to the member.

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**What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 1.**

What types of challenges does the potential co-op member experience?



How are those challenges connected and/or related to each other?



## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 2.

Is there a root challenge? (I.e.: If we don't solve this one we can't move forward on anything.)

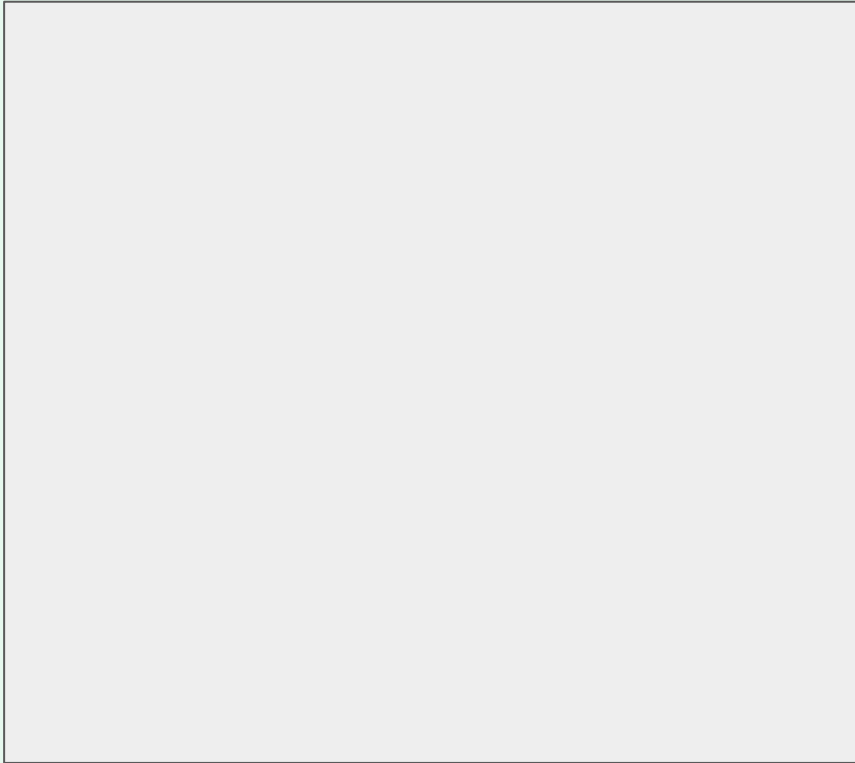


What gets in the way of addressing the challenge? Why does it persist?



## What aspirations can members achieve by working together cooperatively?

What benefits do you imagine co-op members will experience by organizing together?



What are some potential impacts of the co-op on members broader communities?



## Who (or what groups) are the potential co-op members?

Identity - who (or what groups) owns and makes decisions about the co-op?

Farmer Members  
Agricultural specialists (cultivars of mushrooms or other specialty production)  
Consumers of goods  
Both perspectives necessary for the “cooperation”

Background & Priorities - describe what is important to the member.

Increasing Black farm ownership and improve farm businesses through cooperative buying, marketing, and production.  
Production of high quality goods/services  
Serving the community in a meaningful, viable and sustainable fashion

## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 1.

What types of challenges does the potential co-op member experience?

Labor AKA "Good Help"  
Capital to hire Labor  
Infrastructure  
Business planning/Grant writing assistance  
Production  
Marketing

How are those challenges connected and/or related to each other?

Lack of access to resources

## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 2.

Is there a root challenge? (I.e.: If we don't solve this one we can't move forward on anything.)

Historically, cooperatives have been categorized into 3 groups: Marketing, Supply and Service.

There are a plethora of challenges underneath each of these categories. The essential question before naming the root challenge would be to identify which of the 3 categories the cooperative will be designed to address, or if all 3 will be addressed.

What gets in the way of addressing the challenge? Why does it persist?

Well established blockages and stagnation of movement towards equity in the Agricultural sovereignty space

## What aspirations can members achieve by working together cooperatively?

What benefits do you imagine co-op members will experience by organizing together?

Ability to grow their farm business through mutual buying & selling.  
Sharing of labor and mutually assisting with ensuring viability of independent farm businesses.

What are some potential impacts of the co-op on members broader communities?

Grassroots leadership in the community  
Training of future leaders  
Providing of a broader variety of goods in central location, simplifying the “Support Black” model  
Improving the community health via consumption of organic healthy goods  
Inspiring new joint ventures and co-ops

## Who (or what groups) are the potential co-op members?

Identity - who (or what groups) owns and makes decisions about the co-op?

- I like the idea of producer and consumer owned cooperative models. Giving decision making power to those involved in the entire supply chain, provides more holistic equity and accountability towards the mission of the cooperative effort.

Background & Priorities - describe what is important to the member.

- In the context of a producer/consumer member cooperative related to food production, there would be overlapping priorities for each class of member.
  - Both would prioritize the access to nutritionally rich foods.
  - Being able to make a living off production, would be important to producing members.
  - Diversity of product choice and knowing who is growing their food, would be important to consumer members.



## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 1.

What types of challenges does the potential co-op member experience?

- Consumer members may experience lapses in access to desired food items, resulting from the regional seasonality of the product.
- Producer members may confront adverse conditions that inhibit volume of production.
- Finding balance and cohesion with individual needs. Considering the dynamics of the whole cooperative model.

How are those challenges connected and/or related to each other?

- Climate variability impacts production and product availability. Farms spread throughout a region can help mitigate losses that may be incurred in one area.

## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 2.

Is there a root challenge? (I.e.: If we don't solve this one we can't move forward on anything.)

- Finding consistent time to devote to outlining and refining how we can develop a model for an effective co-op.
- Bridging the distance that currently exist between steering committee members.

What gets in the way of addressing the challenge? Why does it persist?

- Not having a streamlined way to communicate strategy and implementation plan.
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## What aspirations can members achieve by working together cooperatively?

What benefits do you imagine co-op members will experience by organizing together?

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What are some potential impacts of the co-op on members broader communities?

## Who (or what groups) are the potential co-op members?

Identity - who (or what groups) owns and makes decisions about the co-op?

- Farmers
- Overseeing Board members
- Producers of goods
- Consumers of goods
- Independent individuals (completely separate for the the co-op)

Background & Priorities - describe what is important to the member.

- Providing affordable goods to consumers
- Providing fresh, nutritious & safe produce & delivering superior goods
- Engaging & supporting local communities
- Mindful, promoting & actively involved in being environmentally safe and sustainable
- Being efficient in production of goods/produce and the logistics of delivering end products to consumers
- Being clear and transparent of co-op operations to all involved (reporting)
- Having proper and accurate accounting/bookkeeping

## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 1.

What types of challenges does the potential co-op member experience?

- Getting/Having members who are committed, accountable to sustain the existence of the co-op
- Financial and funding to start-up and sustain the co-op
- Working together and coordinating the operation of co-op and the logistics of delivering goods/produce

How are those challenges connected and/or related to each other?

- Boils down to the integrity and commitment of co-op members to work together to achieve the goals and missions of the co-op
- All hands on deck; each co-op member accountable and supporter of each other
- Necessary discussions/meetings about ways to improve/evolve the co-op to be efficient & to support/accomplish the mission of the organization

## What need(s) is the co-op designed to address? Pt 2.

Is there a root challenge? (I.e.: If we don't solve this one we can't move forward on anything.)

- A definite commitment from all start-up members to move forward with establishing a co-op and to see it through
- Securing funding to begin/sustain the co-op

What gets in the way of addressing the challenge? Why does it persist?

- Non committed members
- Members not being realistic and honest about establishing a co-op, i.e., their time/effort and availability to see the co-op through
- The inability to secure financing to establish the co-op

## What aspirations can members achieve by working together cooperatively?

What benefits do you imagine co-op members will experience by organizing together?

- The co-op being more profitable for the “greater good”; for everyone: affordable (lower cost) & more variety of goods/produce to consumers
- Coordinated effort; efficient logistics to deliver goods/produce
- Collaborated (joint effort) of all members & individual businesses to be more efficient and productive (as a whole - “co-op”)

What are some potential impacts of the co-op on members broader communities?

- Positive impact: to realize greater success of co-op members: individual businesses; being more profitable by “moving - selling” more goods/produce
- Getting more goods to end users; especially underserved families/individuals, who otherwise would not have access or be able to afford goods/produce
- Promoting environmental friendliness and sustainability