



**Presidents' Report  
November 2, 2015**

In our 2015 fiscal year, the Syracuse Real Food Co-op took important steps toward creating the “sustainable, thriving, cooperative commerce” envisioned in our Ends statement. Last year’s annual report reflected on the challenges faced by small food cooperatives in particular, in an environment where the natural foods industry is becoming more and more competitive, and how the cooperative movement is investing more resources and more creativity into cooperative development. The sustainability of small cooperatives and the cooperative model overall is not only close to our hearts and our ideals of shared ownership and democracy; it offers critical solutions in a world where economic resources and control continue to be concentrated in the hands of the very few, without regard for the many.

Our road forward is still coming into focus. The Board of Directors doesn’t have all the answers, but we have a well stocked toolkit: a committed and empowered staff, a network of resources and allies, a membership that is invested in our success, and a desire to make sure our processes and decisions reflect the interests and input of our fellow members.

The board is very proud of the results the store leadership team achieved in 2015, with General Manager Jeremy DeChario setting the course for improved operational performance and financial strength. Jeremy was promoted to the GM position in April 2015 after serving as Interim General Manager for about a year, and he earned that position by proving he could build SRFC’s equity, support a dedicated management team, and control costs while looking at both short-term and long-term strategies for growth. The challenges we face are real and complex, but at a recent strategic planning retreat with Jeremy as well as his management team, it was clear that SRFC is in the hands of a crew with both talent and vision.

Our participation in cooperative associations brings many advantages that are essential to SRFC’s success. As a member of National Co+op Grocers (NGC), we have continued to access cost-effective promotional programs and limit our cost of goods through their national buying co-op, which provides inventory over and beyond our selection of over 500 NY-made products. Cooperative Development Services (CDS) provides education, planning tools, and continuity in core governance skills to our board throughout the year with the Cooperative Board Leadership Development (CBLD) program. Both of these groups helped to form a

network of experienced food cooperative developers that can provide technical assistance to our growth and expansion plans, with an eye toward outside-of-the-box solutions.

This past fiscal year brought great progress, but one of the most important successes was having a record-breaking year for new member equity. The store report covers this in detail, but the board wants to appreciate 269 new members who bought into the Syracuse Real Food Cooperative in FYE 2015. A growing and supportive membership is the foundation of everything we are and everything we have the potential to accomplish, so the board greatly values not only our newest fellow owners but everyone who made SRFC a part of their lives last year. Once the time comes to raise expansion capital, we expect to request your support yet again through a member loan campaign.

As we come together for the annual meeting, it is the perfect time to recognize that members are not just vital for their economic participation, but for their democratic participation and engagement. The board welcomes SRFC members to get involved in our progress throughout the year by sending us your comments and questions, or by coming to any monthly board meeting. Every single monthly board agenda contains time, usually 20 minutes, for a forum when members can ask questions or share feedback. For example, in May 2015 we sat with a handful of members to discuss lack of accessibility at our Kensington Road store, brainstorm solutions to overcome financial and structural barriers, and identify resources that may be able to help SRFC create a physical environment that is more welcoming to people of all abilities. We are now following up on some “feelers” we sent out after that discussion, and hope to see this operationalized during 2016. The board often uses an iceberg metaphor to describe our work: so much is beneath the surface, hard to see from the outside, and we are always excited to provide a closer look.

In this spirit of member engagement, we have an exciting event to announce. The board will host Member Forums on December 1st and December 8th, at 7 pm, right inside SRFC’s store on Kensington Road. Members and customers can come out on either of these evenings to discuss our shared values, visions, and strategies for success. As the board and GM move ahead with scoping a market study, evaluating our expansion options, and considering how we can change our operations today in order to have more possibilities in the future, we want to pause and ask for your input. We hope you will lend your voices to this process.

The board doesn’t have all the answers, but we are trying to ask the right questions and move forward in a spirit of innovation, cooperation, and integrity. We thank the staff, customers and our fellow members for being part of the Syracuse Real Food Co-op community, and we look forward to more progress in 2016.