

# Producer OF THE Month

OCTOBER 2021



Greenfield, MA



**REAL PICKLES**

FERMENTED & RAW



**BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP**

# Producer OF THE Month

by Jon Megas-Russell

## REAL PICKLES

FERMENTED & RAW



Every October cooperative businesses from around the world celebrate National Co-op Month. As our fellow cooperators at the National Cooperative Business Association state, “National Co-op Month is an annual opportunity to raise awareness of a trusted, proven way to do business and build communities. Under the theme, “Build Back for Impact,” this year’s Co-op Month is also a chance to leverage our shared cooperative identity in the face of some of the biggest challenges we face: a global pandemic, climate emergency, and systemic racism. As we build back an economy that works for everyone, our biggest impact comes from embracing the values and principles that make us truly unique.”

This month we are featuring Real Pickles as our Producer of the Month. Real Pickles is a worker-owned cooperative located in Greenfield, MA, that produces naturally fermented vegetables. A worker-owned cooperative is, true to its name, owned by the people who work there. Many of them serve on the Board of Directors and help steer nearly all decisions, with the goals of workplace democracy and building community resilience. The folks that work at and own Real Pickles shape their own jobs, as well as how they contribute to and help to make the organization thrive. “Their goal is to the workers,” said Addie Rose, one of the 13 owners of Real Pickles—with a focus on wages and benefits. Yes, that is correct—Real Pickles seeks success so that

they can offer ever-improving wages and health benefits. Additionally, Real Pickles wants to create equity and transparency within the business. This can be accomplished with leadership training, education about the philosophy of a worker-owned cooperative, as well as governance and co-op history lessons.

Real Pickles started after co-founder Dan Rosenberg participated in a fermented veggies class at the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) conference in Massachusetts in 1999. He always had a love for local, organic, and healthy traditional foods and this class sent him on his way to experiment with naturally fermented vegetables over the next few years. As he began to hone his craft, he



and Addie Rose (his partner) realized that naturally fermented veggies were not available at natural food stores. Identification of this niche food product inspired them to make a go of it. The first step was finding a more aligned place for them to live and ferment vegetables. They looked no further than Greenfield, where they had already built relationships with many farmers through their contra dance community. In their first year as a business (2001), they fermented vegetables in their home kitchen and made deliveries themselves to their first store clients, such as the Brattleboro Food Co-op. By 2002, they were working out of the kitchen at the Franklin County Community Development (FCCD) incubator in Greenfield.

They produced their pickles at FCCD until 2009, when their growth pushed them to look all over the region for a new location. Coincidentally, they purchased the building across the street from FCCD and have been located there ever since. Since that time they have even installed solar panels and produce most of their energy needs on site. By 2013 they were beginning to consider whether the business model for Real Pickles was sound for their long term success in Greenfield. They wanted to intertwine a social mission with great jobs that could thrive based on thoughtful business growth. Knowing that many successful natural food companies end up being sold to the highest bidder, they were seeking a way to

avoid such a scenario. As they did some research, a worker-owned co-op felt like the best fit for their long term solidity. So, in 2013 Dan, Addie, and three other staff members wrote up the bylaws and processed all the documents to transition to a worker-owned co-op.

The name Real Pickles was straightforward during their first year of business as they only made cucumber pickles. As they fermented new varieties of vegetables, the name was intended to reference pickles in the broader sense—sour pickled vegetables. They now offer a broad range of products, all of which are organic and utilize only northeast-grown vegetables. Naturally fermenting vegetables has been their approach since 2001 and



is a time-tested and centuries-old method. This method relies on organically grown vegetables that have naturally occurring microbes on their skin due to being grown in healthy living soils. The combination of these microbes with water and salt transforms the vegetable into a simpler, more easily digestible, and nutrient-rich offering. This process produces and utilizes lactic-acid fermentation to preserve the vegetable, which allows them to last for long periods of time when jarred. From cabbage to cucumbers to green beans to carrots and beets, they love to pickle all sorts of vegetables.

Eight core farms within 40 miles produce most of their vegetables for pickling: Atlas Farm, Harlow Farm, Chamutka Farm, Old Friends Farm, Kitchen Garden Farm, Next Barn Over Farm, Red Fire Farm, and Riverland Farm. At times the local growing season can bring challenges, and thus Real Pickles must supplement from organic farms in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. Distribution of their products reaches only as far as the states in which they source their vegetables. With this northeast-focused

sourcing and distribution, thoughtful growth is their approach, and Real Pickles has no intention of expansion beyond their current region. During our time together they mentioned that cabbage can be grown in every state including Alaska. When they get a call from a customer outside of their distribution region, they explain their sourcing, fermentation, and distribution approach, plus wanting to promote fermenters from that region to help them thrive. Nearly every time someone calls, they learn to love the approach of Real Pickles and thank them for their thoughtfulness and support of a secure regional food system.

Moving forward, Addie Rose considers the silver tsunami of our food system. This realization of the ever-approaching retirement of many entrepreneurs and food growers without a solid succession plan in place. This saddens her and creates a yearning to want to support the next stage of owners within our food system. She wants people to continue growing healthy food on our lands in the northeast and to keep that going for generations to come. She believes that the worker-owned cooperative model could

be a significant path forward for many organizations. It would offer owners seeking to retire a way of ensuring their farm or food company would live on. Succession planning is huge, and she wants to be involved with supporting the transition of organizations to worker owned co-ops. The music shop Downtown Sounds is another great local example of how it is possible to transition to a worker-owned model and benefit the staff, community, and local economy. In the future, Real Pickles will continue to experiment with new recipes, seek new ways to build a better staff, and continue their yearning for more worker owners. Try their delicious, pickled veggies on your next shopping trip.



We'll be giving away a **jar of Sauerkraut** and a **jar of Kimchi** to one lucky person.

**We are taking online entries only for this giveaway from October 1-10.**

Read our online **Producer of the Month** article for **Real Pickles**, click the link at the end of the article, and enter to win!

