

# Keystone Development Center Newsletter

Cooperating Throughout the Mid-Atlantic

## In This Issue

[KDC Elects New Board President](#)

[Coming Soon: Composting Co-ops](#)

[View From the Doorstep of TOG](#)

[New Directors for KDC](#)

[PASA Conference Huge Success](#)

[KDC Website](#)



## Featured Article



Tuscarora Organic Growers explain the TOG secret to successful cooperation.

Dear Friends of Keystone Development Center,

Happy Spring! The Keystone Development Center (KDC) has been busy all winter assisting cooperatives in the region, collaborating with the Pennsylvania Resource Council on a soil-building co-op model and attending the Farming for the Future Conference organized by the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture. We have also seated two new board member and elected a new board President since last you read our email. Updates on all of these activities are featured in today's newsletter.

This month we are pleased to highlight an interview with Jeff Taylor and Jim Crawford, one of the mid-Atlantic region's most successful produce cooperatives, Tuscarora Organic Grower's. TOG is a fine example of how farmers can achieve better market penetration through cooperative endeavors.

If you have co-op news you would like to share with people across our region, please send an email to [Smith@kdc.coop](mailto:Smith@kdc.coop). We would love to hear from you. If co-op-oriented newsletters are really not your thing, you can opt off the list simply by clicking the "SafeUnsubscribe" button at the bottom of this page.

KDC, as many of you know, provides technical assistance and cooperative education to folks in the mid-Atlantic region, including Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey. If you are thinking of starting any kind of co-op, or if your co-op is interested in taking your development to the next level, please free to contact us at (814) 687-4937 or email [Smith@kdc.coop](mailto:Smith@kdc.coop). You are the reason we are here.

Please read on!

## → Keystone Elects New Board President

The Keystone Development Center's Board of Directors has elected a new President. Diane

Mintus Sheets. Diane has been a Keystone Development Center (KDC) Board member since 2003, serving as Vice President prior to being elected President.

Diane has been the Executive Director of the Community Development Corporation of Butler County since 2005. She joined the organization in 1998 as Manager of Operations and was named Deputy Director in 2000. A Magna Cum Laude Graduate of the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in Public Administration, Ms. Sheets has also completed her graduate degree at the University of Pittsburgh at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

Ms. Sheets is an active participant in regional initiatives including: representative for Butler County on the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission Loan Review Committee, member of the Sustainable Development Network, and an economic development partner of the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance. She recently was elected to a full term on the Board of the Pennsylvania Economic Development Association.

## → Building On-Farm Composting Cooperatives



A surprising fact is that nearly two-thirds of human consumption waste is compostable, yet 90% of that potentially soil-building material goes to landfills or is incinerated. Of the compost currently made for market, very little goes to where soil-building is most needed: toward assisting farmers in transition to sustainable-intensive farming or toward building healthy soils on industrially degraded lands. Last Spring, KDC teamed up with Pennsylvania Resources Council ([www.prc.org](http://www.prc.org)) to help develop a pilot program of farm cooperatives composting farm waste and compostables from businesses and institutions. The pilot was designed to tap this resource frontier.

We saw several clear benefits for farmers in launching a composting enterprise:

- Effective nutrient management of own waste;
- Tipping fee income from waste generators;
- Significant volumes of quality compost for own farm to
  - build soils,
  - increase productive land area;
  - wean from dependence on commercial fertilizers;
  - serve as high-quality growing media for greenhouses

- Income from sales of any surplus compost.

After discussions with veterans in other states, we came to see that composting *based on small clusters of cooperating, closely neighboring farms* has several distinct advantages:

- Sharing of viable hauling routes without exceeding the annual DEP limits of food-waste per farm.
- Provision of emergency back-up by fellows in cluster in cases of unexpected labor bottlenecks, to avoid jeopardizing the integrity of the hauling route;
- Sufficiently low weekly and annual labor requirements to allow/encourage continuation, even diversification, of current farm operations.
- Sharing of equipment, both current and future, including shared application for equipment grants and loans.
- Sharing of distribution and marketing strategies for finished compost.

In June, we introduced the pilot to farmers in SW Pennsylvania, via farm newsletter notices. 51 farmers responded with inquiries. We invited them to attend one of three informational meetings hosted at Co-op Extension offices. Each meeting included an introduction to composting operations, given by Nadine Davitt, the manager of Penn State's composting facility; an overview of the proposed pilot, including estimated costs and benefits; and an introduction to cooperative organizations. Thirty farmers attended these meetings.

Funding limited the number of farmers and clusters we could work with over this past year. One cluster met the following criteria (near Darlington, PA, in NW Beaver County):

- Five farmers expressed interest in participating who were within 10 miles of each other.
- Most knew each other, some quite well.
- They met on their own a couple of times, and appeared to get along.

The first task was to begin the process of applying for the DEP on-farm food-waste composting permit. We guided farmers through the paperwork, and obtained the *pro bono* services of a Civil Engineer to review proposed sites and certify their applications, required by DEP. Completed applications were mailed in March. We hope to obtain permits sometime this summer.

Meanwhile, we have scheduled field trips for the farmers to visit other composting operations and are guiding them in site preparation and planning. We have contacted food-waste generators within 20 miles of these farms, to pique their interest in participation. We have begun to arrange deliveries of leaf/yard waste. We have contacted two independent haulers that work in Beaver County, to introduce the pilot to them. Both are potentially interested in servicing the route to these farmers.

PRC and KDC have applied to USDA and PA DEP for funding to expand this pilot to an ongoing, state-wide program. We are hopeful that we will receive good news over the next couple of months, so that we can begin this work with other clusters of interested farmers.

If this program interests you, and you want to learn more, please contact Nick Shorr at (412) 488-7490 or at [nicks@ccicenter.org](mailto:nicks@ccicenter.org).

## View From Our Doorstep: An Interview With Jeff Taylor and Jim Crawford of TOG

Keystone Development Center has been developing cooperatives in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey for about ten years. But long before there was a co-op development center in Pennsylvania there was a produce co-op by the name of Tuscarora Organic Growers. KDC caught up with Jeff Taylor and Jim Crawford of TOG this first week of Spring to get the TOG perspective on



TOG Facility in Hustontown PA

cooperation, marketing and the trends in local food. Jeff is the General Manager at TOG and Jim and Moie Crawford own New Morning Farm. Jim is President of the Board; he was not able to be with us for the entire interview, but stopped in for a comment or two.

KDC: Thanks for agreeing to the interview. First question, which you probably know by heart, what is the mission and purpose of TOG?

Jeff: I would like to get that for you verbatim, hold on...

"Mission Statement of the Tuscarora Organic Growers Cooperative"

"The purpose of this association is to provide services for the mutual benefit of its member patrons, on a cooperative, service-at-cost basis, which relate to the production and marketing of certified organic produce or any products derived therefrom."

"Within this mission, the cooperative shall whenever possible work to support small scale, family run, regionally based sustainable farms and encourage cooperation and mutual aid among farmers."

KDC: Tell me about the beginning of TOG, how did the co-op start, who was involved, when did it start? How many farmers were there in the beginning?

Jeff: The co-op started in 1988 among 2 or 3 farms who at that time were all going to [Washington] DC to farmer's markets. They were getting increasingly called upon by co-ops, groceries and restaurants to bring their fresh, local organic produce into the city. So they decided to hire someone to coordinate the supply, then they also decided to cooperate on both marketing and production. In addition to sharing the market they also decided to coordinate the production of vegetables. One raises

tomatoes for the co-op and shares with the others, another raises potatoes, and so on.

KDC: Who were those first three farmers who started TOG?

Jim: One was me. There was also Tony Ricci, who is to this day still here, a neighbor and a member. And also in the beginning there was Bert DeLeeuw who died some 20 years ago, soon after we founded the co-op. In the first season there were [three organizers, and] 7 growers total. I can't remember the names of all seven growers; some have remained co-op members and some have not.

KDC: How many co-op members does TOG have today?

Jeff: There are currently 34 members. This season there will be an additional 20 to 25 farms that grow for us.

KDC: Geographically, where do your farmers come from? Also, where are you marketing to?

Jeff: The majority of TOG farms are in south central Pennsylvania, some are in the south east and some are in northwestern PA. One is in Martinsburg West Virginia which really isn't all that far away. Ninety percent of our produce goes to the Baltimore-Washington market directly through the co-op. Most of the balance goes to same area but through our growers. The growers are also customers of TOG, they buy [from each other through the co-op] and sell the produce through farmers' markets in the city.

KDC: How do you market TOG produce?

Our competitive advantage is that this is our 23<sup>rd</sup> season in same market. We are well established in what we do and in where we do it in terms of restaurants and retailers. Also over years we have developed a substantial availability list. We offer over 1,200 unprocessed produce items per year, all packed at the farm level.

TOG is not a processing facility or a packing house. We serve 3 primary functions, marketing, production coordination and quality control. We don't do much advertising because we are well established. People know us. Twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays orders are called in, emailed or faxed to us and whoever we don't hear from we call. Its a relationship based business. The list changes as often as twice a week depending on availability.

KDC: How do you coordinate TOG produce?

Jeff: Season planning begins in November for the following season. We have a commitment chart. A grower signs up to commit to X number of Y produce per week for Z number of weeks. If they meet or exceed their commitments then we continue in this way, and if growers can't do it then other farmers take their place. For example, take heirloom tomatoes; there is an early season, a middle season and a late season. Early and late seasons draw higher revenue, so those are choice commitment slots. But the farmer has to be able to deliver on his [or her] commitment to keep the slot.

When the commitment chart is done, within the next week or so, I will be able to tell you with a fair amount of accuracy that on July 15<sup>th</sup> I will have X number of tomatoes. The system is not 100% accurate, but we have years of data to back up our predictions and barring extraordinary weather we are pretty accurate. This helps us also to not over-produce. We want to produce as close as to what we believe the market needs. Our season planning is market driven.

KDC: What is the value of TOG to the farmer members of the co-op? What difference does TOG make to their farm businesses?

Jeff: Those crops which a grower produces and commits to grow for TOG, TOG will do its best to sell every case, which we usually do. Also, we can predict how much of each item we can sell and the approximate price. So the benefit to the farmer is that he or she has a guaranteed outlet for their produce and knows more or less the price it will bring. Another benefit is that we specialize in selling organic produce and we have established ourselves in a market willing to pay good dollars for good stuff. Another benefit to the farmers is service at cost. We only hold back enough cash to operate the co-op. Farmer are always paid for their produce within 2 weeks of selling it and they are paid 75 % of the total value. Finally, because we can manage the through-put and have a good idea of what we need when we need it, we don't run into too much excess and therefore have very little waste. We are effectively managing production flow with multiple growers.

KDC: You guys have been on the cutting edge of Buy-Fresh-Buy-Local since long before it was cool. That makes you something of a forward thinking company. Where do you see the local-foods movement going in the next phase?

Jeff: I heard a comment from the film, "Fresh" last week. A retired Ag Economist said that in his lifetime we have gone from a local food system to a system of supermarkets and it will take another lifetime to go back. My perspective is as long as we keep working toward establishing local food systems, making it more common, more accessible, more reasonable, and more sensible we are moving in the right direction.

I saw the movie "Fresh" last week by Michael Pollan. Definitely read Michael Pollan. His ideas pretty much sum it up. In *Defending Food* he says stick to the outside aisles at the grocery store, don't shop in the middle.' And what he means by that is that all of the fresh food, all of the produce, fresh meats, grains and dairy, these are always place around the perimeter of the grocery store. And what you have in the middle is the processed food.

KDC: Where in Baltimore and DC would a person go to be find TOG produce on the menu in a restaurant or in the aisles of a grocery store?

Jeff: Hopefully everywhere. Typically we are in those restaurants that celebrate the local seasons, high-end restaurants, natural-food coops, grocers, and some big box retailers like Whole Foods.

KDC: Can you name some of those establishments for our readers in those areas?

Jeff: In Baltimore you will find us at Dogwood. Woodberrv Kitchen. the Mill Vallev

General Store, and Planet Produce. In DC our produce is found at Dino's, Coppis, MOMs, Roots Market, Bethesda Co-op Silver Springs Co-op, Bastille, Tosca, Restaurant Eve, Addies...those are just a few. We have between 150 to 200 clients. We ship over 100,000 cases of produce a year.

KDC: Do you have a CSA and if so, what areas do you cover and how do people get involved?

Jeff: We don't have a CSA, we sell to CSAs. Some of our CSA customers are our growers and some are the people with CSAs in the area. We are a through-put [wholesale] operation not a packing house, so we are not set up to handle our own CSA.

KDC: What is next for TOG in terms of market growth?

Jeff: I think that we want to continue supporting sustainable family farms growing certified organic produce and meeting the desire for local seasonal organic produce in our market. Demand continues to grow every year and we continue to strive to meet that demand.

KDC: What would you recommend to any farmers who are thinking of starting a similar cooperative?

It needs to be a completely cooperative effort in terms of quality and consistency from grower to grower, and in the sharing of diverse production.

KDC: This interview column is entitled A VIEW FROM OUR DOORSTEP. What do you see, Jeff, from the door step of the co-op facilities at TOG?

Jeff: We are located right next to some of the original TOG farmers. I see green fields, budding trees, and a clean stream.

TOG can be contacted through their web site located at <http://www.tog.coop/>.

## → New Directors for KDC



Kenny Bounds



Marilyn Anthony

The Keystone Development Center (KDC) is pleased to announce that Marilyn Anthony and

Kenneth Bounds have been elected to its Board of Directors for a three-year term.

Marilyn has served as the SE Regional Director of Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), for the last two years developing innovative and successful initiatives such as Bike Fresh, Bike Local; a 100% grass-fed beef cook-off; and a series of PASA Master Classes for intensive learning of sustainable agricultural practices. Previously she worked in the hospitality field, served as CEO for White Dog Café and owned and operated a local foods restaurant, Summerhouse Grill.

Kenny has worked in the Farm Credit System for over 32 years and is currently Vice President/Government Affairs Officer for MidAtlantic Farm Credit, ACA. He is President of LEAD Maryland Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to identifying and developing future leaders for Maryland's agricultural and rural communities. Kenny also worked closely with past Delaware Secretary of Agriculture Michael Scuse, to create a LEAD program in Delaware. He currently serves as 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President for Pennsylvania RULE; Pennsylvania's agriculture and rural leadership program. Kenny serves on the Maryland Governor's Intergovernmental Commission for Agriculture and in November 2008 was asked to chair Delaware Governor Jack Markell's Transition Team - Agriculture Sub-committee.

### PASA Conference Huge Success

In spite of taking place during a dramatic blizzard, the 19th Annual Farming for the Future Conference, the premier East Coast conference for sustainable food systems, was a fantastic success. The conference, which has been held every year since 1,992 in State College, drew 1,980 participants this year, breaking last year's attendance record of 1,815. Of those 1980 participants 1,706 are PASA members and 931 are farmers. Those 931 farmers represent 43,000 acres of sustainable food production!!

Participants came from 30 states including Alaska, California, Oregon and New Mexico and from five countries: Canada, Italy, Bermuda, Mexico and of course the US. One hundred and seventy-nine scholarships were given out and 35 colleges and universities were represented by 180 student participants.

If you would like to become a member of PASA or to check out more information about the Farming for the Future Conference, visit the PASA website at: <https://www.pasafarming.net/membership/registrations/register>.

That's a wrap for February and March KDC News! Look for our next newsletter in mid to late May. We will be reporting on the formation of an Eastern regional food co-op network which will take place in Swarthmore at the end of April. Food co-ops are also budding like daffodils this Spring in Pittsburgh. We will turn out another fantastic interview with someone in the mid-Atlantic who has made a difference in the cooperative movement. Also, we will provide a list of the many cooperative conferences that will be going on around the country this summer and links to conference web sites. Finally we will be starting an editorial column on topics of particular interest to cooperatives in the mid-Atlantic.

**Wishing you a successful and happy planting season!**

Cathy

Smith

## Keystone Development Center

Keystone Development Center is a cooperative development center providing technical assistance and education about cooperatives in the mid-Atlantic region. The Keystone Development Center Newsletter is conceived by Executive Director Cathy Smith in Flinton PA and edited by Lisa Stolarski in the Pittsburgh field office.

### [Forward email](#)

#### **SafeUnsubscribe®**

This email was sent to lisa.stolarski@gmail.com by [smith@kdc.coop](mailto:smith@kdc.coop).

[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Email Marketing by



Keystone Development Center | P.O. Box 4 | Flinton | PA | 16640