

## Nebraska Cooperative Development Center Announces 2021 Cooperative Business Development Mini-Grant Recipients

**Cindy Houlden**

Cooperative Development Specialist  
Nebraska Cooperative Development Center

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In February, the Nebraska Cooperative Development Center (NCDC) announced the awardees of its 2021 Cooperative Business Development Mini-Grant program. They are Peru Grocery Store Exploration, Farm to Family Cooperative in Hay Springs, Emerson Grocery Coop, Farmers Market 365 and the Lynch Grocery Store Committee.

For over 20 years, The Nebraska Cooperative Development Center (NCDC) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has been dedicated to assisting people prosper in rural areas through cooperative business development. The Cooperative Business Development Mini-Grant program has proved to be a valuable tool for the successful realization of this goal.

These competitive grants provide up to \$2,500 to groups who are pursuing or exploring a multi-owner or cooperative business, or to incorporated cooperatives (or other business entities operating as a cooperative) in rural Nebraska.

Initial development assistance grants can be used by groups who are in the exploratory stages of development of multi-ownership or cooperative ventures. Advanced assistance grants are designed to provide incorporated multi-owner businesses or cooperative ventures the ability to hire professional services for the on-going development of their cooperative or multi-owner business.

While small, these grants have provided invaluable support for the awardees. Each awardee reported that the activities would not have been possible without the support of NCDC.

Elwood Hometown Cooperative Market reported that they used the grant monies to begin a Phase 2-member campaign. They were able to sell 22 new shares and realize \$20,000 in increased sales. They are currently in the process of a virtual fund drive, “Invest, Thrive, Strive,” to retire existing debt.

Stapleton Cooperative Market & Deli reported that the mini-grant funds were vital to the success of their Phase 2 Capital Campaign. Thanks to the materials that were created, the store realized some of its highest sales days and sold 32 additional shares, which allowed the cooperative to purchase the building they were currently occupying.

Market 23 in Columbus requested funds to use to train vendors to compete in the online marketing world. Two vendors began promoting items through Google and Grow Nebraska. This strategy proved invaluable during COVID-19 when storefronts were closed.

Wildflour Grocery in O’Neill reported that the funds were used to pay legal and accounting update fees; allowing funds budgeted for those items to be used for equipment upgrades. A window freezer was purchased for the front of the store for frozen breads, baked goods, ice cream, and any other foods coming from their kitchen. As a result, kitchen sales more than doubled in 6 months, a major sales milestone for the grocery.

Market 365 plans to use their award to expand their market reach through a web site and online sales platform. The remaining four grantees are focused on rural grocery store transition projects; grant funds will be used to pay legal fees, develop marketing materials, and fund feasibility studies.

Nine additional applicants were not funded. NCDC plans to offer assistance to encourage continued exploration of these cooperative ventures.

For more information, visit [NCDC.unl.edu](http://NCDC.unl.edu) or contact Charlotte Narjes, [cnarjes1@unl.edu](mailto:cnarjes1@unl.edu), or Cindy Houlden, [choulden2@unl.edu](mailto:choulden2@unl.edu).

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