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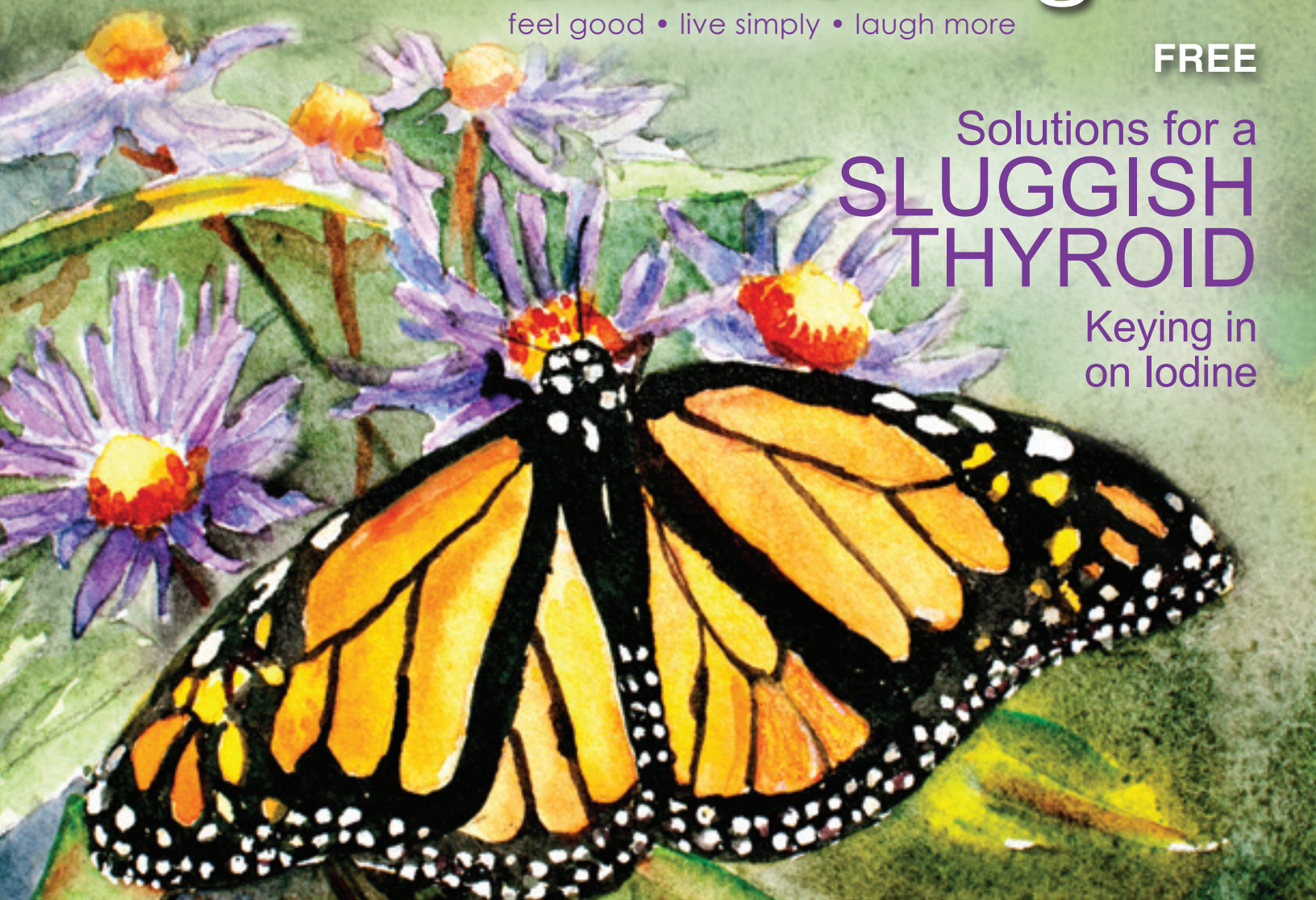
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Hub City Co-op First Food Co-op in SC Locally Owned, Locally Grown

By Diane Irving

Hub City Co-op is about to change the downtown Spartanburg community forever with a harmonious marriage between local citizens and farms. The co-op will have a big impact on the city and the area. It will help to create a healthier community, local farm utilization, local money circulation, job creation, housing development, and economic revenues. In the article *By The Numbers – Food Co-ops' Community Impact* by Mandy Catlette, it's evident why co-ops have become a successful grocery store movement. Chief Executive Officer of National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA), Robynn Shrader, says, "Food co-ops generate tangible social and economic benefits for communities they serve in ways that conventional grocers just can't."

The idea of a co-op began in 2009. A group of individuals saw a need in downtown Spartanburg for a grocery store. The idea was to increase growth and encourage more of a "walking" city, but they realized that a traditional grocery store would be too large. Excitement arose at the thought of starting South Carolina's first cooperative. Co-ops can fit in smaller places while luring in a larger population and facilitating business growth.

The big plan started small and grew to be a 2.7 million project. However, funding was the biggest challenge of the operation. While Hub City Co-op's Marketing Director, Keysie Maddox, and the team worked hard on selling ownerships, the city of Spartanburg provided a matching grant of \$350,000 for the project. Finally, the project raised enough money to begin, aided by owner equity, loans, preferred shares, and landlord investments. As of right now, there are over 1,500 community owners.

Maddox explains how the co-op works: "A co-op's goal is that everyone works cooperatively together toward a healthier economy and healthier populace. Co-ops strive to offer local, healthy foods and products to the community while supporting local vendors and farmers." The Co-op will source 3 times the amount of local produce a normal grocery store would. In fact, the Co-op uses 50 local vendors that are as organic as possible. And, about 40% of every dollar spent will stay local. Co-ops also offer more organic and natural options than traditional grocery stores. They offer no artificial ingredients or pesticides, are GMO-conscious, and provide clean products. The food isn't just locally grown, it's also locally owned by the city's citizens.

Maddox explains the ownership concept, "We have an open membership. Everyone can shop at the store and anyone can own a piece of the business." Non-owners can shop and become an owner at any time. Benefits of ownership far exceed the cost. Owners have a say in business operations at annual meetings, ownership days provide special discounts, and a profitable year means potential dividends to owners. It only costs \$150 to become an owner for the rest of your life. Family members can also use the ownership. There is no cap on the amount of owners Hub City can have. All non-owners have to do is sign up at the register.



Positive contributions trickle down to everyone involved. General Manager Garland McQueen gives us a deeper understanding of what a co-op can do. "We teach as much as we sell healthy products." They help raise health awareness, have health events and

classes, and they hire knowledgeable managers who are skilled in organics.

McQueen continues, "Now downtown Spartanburg has a place where the community can shop, eat, and get coffee." Finally, good food just got better in the neighborhood.

Hub City is located at 176 N. Liberty St., Spartanburg, and is open 7 days a week, 7 a.m. – 8 p.m. A café will provide breakfast, lunch, deli, grab-n-go options and a well-prepared fresh foods bar. Alcohol can even be consumed inside the store on Sunday! Go to HubCity.coop for more info on the store. To read more about co-ops, see Grocer.coop/articles/numbers and CommunityFood.coop/join/history. See ad, page 32.

Diane Irving is a contributing editor to Natural Awakenings Upstate.