MEDIA RELEASE

HUNTSVILLE, ONTARIO | November 2026

Muskoka North Good Food Co-op rises with renewed community commitment

Member-owners step forward to build a path toward recovery

The Muskoka North Good Food Co-op has a future worth working toward.

Inspired by a shared belief in local food, community connection and food sovereignty, a group of member-owners has stepped forward to help bring the Co-op's original vision back to life.

The initiative, known as Phoenix Rising, began with member-owners who believed that despite the challenges facing the Co-op, there was still something worth saving. They came together with a shared commitment to explore a responsible path toward recovery and allow the Co-op to move forward.

A vision rooted in Co-operative values

The Co-op was founded to connect people with nourishing food, to support local production and to strengthen the regional food economy.

Its mission was to serve as a community-owned, not-for-profit food Co-operative guided by the seven International Principles of Cooperation:

- Voluntary and Open Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Member Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Training and Information
- Cooperation among Co-operatives
- Concern for Community

Its vision was always about more than a grocery market.

For many, the Co-op meant caring service, locally produced foods, special events, food literacy, and connection. Its goal was to make good food as accessible and affordable as possible while

maintaining a sustainable operation. At its heart, it was something people belonged to, and that belonged to the people.

As outlined in its 2023 Strategic Plan, the Co-op is member-owned and member-driven. All decision-making is informed by **SIX CORE VALUES**:

- Community,
- Ethical,
- Educational,
- Innovation,
- Sustainable and
- Local.

In 2024, a shift in management occurred, and by 2026 the Co-op reached a critical point. Following the resignation of its Board of Directors on July 9, 2026, the Co-op closed, leaving it in a precarious position with lenders, food producers and service providers.

The Interim Board's immediate priority is to understand the Co-op's current position and develop a realistic recovery plan.

Work is underway in several key areas:

- **Financial review**: Examine available records, outstanding obligations, and the resources needed to develop a practical plan centred on the Co-op's position.

- **Recovery planning**: Develop an operational framework to advance viability, while engaging with all outstanding lenders, vendors, and collaborators to clarify obligations.

- **Stakeholder connection**: Reconnect with member-owners and local producers and suppliers. Re-establish member communications, providing relevant updates.

- **Protect capital and social assets**: Identify and assess capital equipment, records, relationships, and economic and social resources. ***Over the past 10 years, the Co-op invested over $1.5 million procuring capital assets to address community food security*.**

- **Governance**: Review bylaws, acts, policies, governance practices, and membership records; proposing changes towards rebuilding foundations for transparent, member-led governance.

While outcomes remain uncertain, meaningful work is underway.

The Co-op's mission remains

To cultivate a vibrant community through a local food ecosystem that supports small-scale farmers, provides a living wage for its staff, and promotes Co-operative values and participation.

Looking ahead

Immediate goals are to develop a realistic and ambitious recovery plan to establish a sound foundation and successful member-led recovery.

The Interim Board welcomes all member-owners, community members and organizations, local government, and food producers who believe in nurturing a strong local food system to connect and become involved as this work progresses.

"We stepped forward because we believe the vision that brought this Co-op into being matters more now than ever. It was founded on the belief that a community can come together to support local food, strengthen connections and create something greater than any one of us could achieve alone. That vision deserves more than to be remembered. It deserves our commitment, our hard work and every honest opportunity to find a way forward."

Muskoka North Good Food Co-op Interim Board: Marion Savory, Angee Pell, Bart Brusse, Sheri Renaud, Sayeh Zadeh, Brenda Muller

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