

BCDI receives grant from the Grassroots Fund

When was the last time you heard of a town getting together to buy a farmer a tractor?

Well, when was the last time you were in Bowdoinham, Maine? Citizens there also put up money for three greenhouses, fencing and pasture enhancements for sheep, materials and equipment to launch two online businesses, and \$12000 to put a new roof on a local business. They did it through their own local, revolving loan fund, one part of a unique partnership, the Bowdoinham Community Development Initiative (BCDI).

The success of BCDI at helping local businesses, with a focus on farming and food, expand or get off the ground is what prompted the New England Grassroots Environment Fund (Grassroots Fund) to provide the group with a “Grow grant” to support a variety of initiatives, including an active farmland inventory and an economic viability study for the Bowdoinham Country Store. The funds will also support administration of the ongoing community revolving loan fund effort that, in 2012, provided \$58,000 in funds like the ones mentioned above with money raised from Bowdoinham residents.

The Grassroots Fund, which uses stories, tools and dollars to fuel local activism and social change, has funded better than 1,700 different community groups in more than 60 percent of New England’s cities and towns with more than \$4 million since its founding in 1996. According to Julia Dundorf, the Fund’s executive director, the Grassroots Fund hopes the BCDI grant will help “broaden and

strengthen its capacity to provide local capital to address local needs and to support enterprises in a number of ways.

“First, we want to help expand the successful neighbors-investing-in-neighbors loan fund. We also intend the money to make the inventory of active farmland possible and to help develop community engagement in transforming the Bowdoinham Country Store into a sustainable community asset.

“Finally, we hope to support a tremendous opportunity in linking Bowdoinham’s burgeoning organic farming community with the multiple food system initiatives in mid-Coast Maine.”

“BCDI works to connect local business owners with resources that can help establish or sustain their business, and this grant is obviously very important in supporting our efforts,” said BCDI Chair Kathy Gallant, herself a local business owner. “But it’s about more than money.

“For example, loan recipients have been connected with accountants, website developers, and other community or regional resources. In addition to the loan program, BCDI has been working to connect the expanding Bowdoinham farming community with the Local Farms–Local Food Program and others interested in helping increase the availability and consumption of quality local food,” Gallant said.

BCDI also received a Grow grant in 2013 to support operational costs and to help the group establish sustainable multiple-stream income sources, Dundorf said. Gallant notes that is still a work in progress, which the new grant will help as well. “Our current budget for operating BCDI is \$14,500. We received \$5,000 through the town’s 2014-15 budget, and that supports roughly one-third of BCDI’s 2014-15

operational costs,” she points out, adding that the grant funding from the Grassroots Fund is a very important part of organization’s overall fundraising efforts.

To find out more about the grant-making activities of the New England Grassroots Environment Fund, visit grassrootsfund.org; for more information about BCDI, visit bcdi.us.