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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **CO-OP MARKET PARTNERS WITH AHFC TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD**

*New "Shop & Share" Program Allows Shoppers to "Pay It Forward" to Families in Need*

September 27, 2016

Co-op Market Grocery & Deli and the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) are working together to address food insecurity in downtown Fairbanks through a new initiative called "Shop & Share."

Starting October 1, Co-op Market shoppers can purchase a staple food item and "pay it forward" to a family in need. Families will be selected by AHFC from participants in its JumpStart program. Shop & Share will initially target families with children, who are most at risk due to a lack of access to affordable, nutritious food.

Cathy Stone, AHFC's Public Housing Director, says the JumpStart program currently serves around 470 families across the state. Many of these families have extremely low income and face food insecurity.

Shop & Share includes seven staple items that are basic building blocks for good nutrition. These include a pound of organic rolled oats, a pound of ground turkey, a dozen organic eggs, frozen organic fruits and vegetables, organic grassfed whole milk yogurt, and a serving of house-made hot soup from the Co-op Market Deli.

Shoppers who wish to participate will select an item from a menu at the register and pay for it along with their own groceries. Co-op Market will generate vouchers from these purchases and give them to AHFC to distribute. The recipient families can then come into the store to exchange the vouchers for the pre-purchased groceries.

"We chose to open in the old Carr's Food Land building not only because of its history. We wanted to locate downtown because it was considered a 'food desert,' a place where healthy food isn't readily accessible to the people who live there," said Mary Christensen, Co-op Market General Manager. "Opening the store put good food within distance, but not necessarily within reach of everyone's

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pocketbook. Shop & Share will help us serve our neighbors who sometimes have trouble making ends meet.”

As a cooperative, Co-op Market was founded on the [7 Cooperative Principles](#). Like its popular register round-up program, [Lend a Hand](#), Shop & Share fits Principle 7: Concern for Community. (Lend a Hand, which offers shoppers a chance to round up their change at the register and donate the difference to a local nonprofit, has raised nearly \$30,000 for 19 community organizations since its start in 2013. Recipient nonprofits are chosen by co-op Owners and change monthly.)

Co-op Market has other programs that can benefit families in need.

- **Co+op Deals:** As a member of National Cooperative Grocers, a cooperative of more than 200 retail grocery co-ops, the store is able to offer Co+op Deals, with sales prices that match or beat prices on the same items at big box stores and in the lower 48.
- **Co+op Basics:** Under another NCG program, Co-op Market recently cut prices on more than 100 staple foods, most organic. These new prices are everyday low prices, not sales, and are available to everyone.
- **Co+op Deals Coupon Book:** Available in the store, this bi-monthly publication offers discounts up to \$5 off many popular items.
- Co-op Market wants to extend co-op **Ownership** to our low-income families. To make it easier for them to invest, we are offering a \$5 starting investment (rather than \$25) to families who can show proof that they are enrolled in a program that serves low-income people (e.g., SNAP, Social Security Disability, AHFC housing programs). These families are still expected to pay the full \$200 investment, but can do so in smaller increments.
- And Co-op Market welcomes **SNAP benefits**.

Shop & Share is modeled on the “Suspended Groceries” program pioneered by Williams College students at Wild Oats Market, a sister cooperative in Williamstown, MA. One of the Williams students, Catharine Parker, served as an intern at the Breadline’s Stone Soup Café in 2015. She and Jennifer Jolis, Stone Soup’s Executive Director, approached Co-op Market about adapting Suspended Groceries to work in our community.

The JumpStart program is available to participants in Alaska Housing Finance Corporation’s rental housing program. JumpStart provides case management and incentives to help families overcome barriers to employment and achieve long-term economic stability, enabling them to become financially independent. This family-driven program addresses common barriers such as a lack of job training and financial literacy.

Shop & Share will kick off on Saturday, October 1. Members of the Co-op Market Board of Directors and staff from AHFC will be available at the store from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday to answer questions and provide information on how this new program serves our cooperative’s mission to provide good, healthy food to everyone in our community.

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For more information on Co-op Market and Shop & Share, contact Kristin Summerlin, Marketing & Owner Services Manager, at [marketing@coopmarket.org](mailto:marketing@coopmarket.org) or Mary Christensen, General Manager, at [gm@coopmarket.org](mailto:gm@coopmarket.org).

For more information on AHFC’s JumpStart in Fairbanks, contact Ruth Thorum at (907) 452-6203 or [rthorum@ahfc.us](mailto:rthorum@ahfc.us).

Information is also available on the Co-op Market website: <http://coopmarket.org> and on AHFC’s website: [www.ahfc.us](http://www.ahfc.us).