BUUE AUGUE

Frontier Cooperative Herbs: Owned by You

by Diane Luber

Deep in Iowa corn country lies the source of the Co-op's popular selection of pungent seasonings and fragrant teas as well as its link with ancient folk remedies and the topher Columbus were looking for exotic world spice trade. Shop ping around, the Co-op ordered from several large spice and herb distributors before getting down to business with this relative newcomer - Frontier Cooperative Herbs of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Rick Stewart, one of the two founders of Frontier, stated, "When we started out in Colleen's cabin in May 1976, we intended to be a part of Blooming Prairie Warehouse." (Blooming Prairie is the cooperative warehouse in Iowa City serving the federation of Iowa and Nebraska co-ops - similar to our own Ozark Co-operative Warehouse in Fayetteville, Arkansas). The business soon grew too big (or the cabin too small) and Frontier moved its operation into the basement of Good News Co-op in Cedar Rapids. Limiting trade to Iowa co-ops made it hard to be companies and at the same time pay those working a decent wage. So in the fall of 1977, they decided to expand beyond the boundaries of their state. The Comnunity Mercantile's alliance with

The spice and herb trades are distinct in terms of their historical development, Rick said. The spice trade is centuries old. We know that Marco Polo and Chrisnew sources of spice, for example, or a new route to the old sources. Now as then the Spice Islands are a major source. And while the Third World and Eastern European countries are major producers of herbs, Germany is the unrivalled distributor of them.

Frontier relies on the traditional sources, Rick said, but they would like to support local individual growers ("Kansas is local when compared to Madagascar."). But profitable herb growing is a long range goal, he warned. Someone with that goal needs to develop methods of growing and picking; some of the process may even have to be mechanized. While Rick was not pessimistic about the future of local herb production, he pointed out that no one who has approached Frontier with plans to sell herbs has delivered even a pound. "There is a man in Caliprice competitive with other herb , fornia who, after much effort and perseverance, produces high quality comfrey on a large scale."

> Rick had a few words of advice for those of us who are happy just using spices and herbs. Keep them

OOLONG too; the flavor halfway

once a year. Whole herbs and spices stay fresh longer than processed ones but you still need to know how long to keep them. Oils, which give flavor to such herbs as peppermint, evaporate and alkaloids, which give some herbs such as gotu kola their medicinal properties, weaken over time.

Since our fateful meeting in Herman last fall, Frontier's collective has grown to four. Everyone .who works at Frontier gets paid the same but the collective carries more responsibility. Rick says, "We are actively looking for collective members."

They have also made it possible for their customers to become part owners/members of their cooperative venture. Members fall into five categories: 1) Co-ops, 2) Buying clubs, 3) Non-profit organizations, 4) Worker-owned and controlled stores, and 5) final consumers (individuals). Frontier now serves about 130 members and 130 non-members in an area extending from Main and Florida to Washington and California.

Through loans and deposits, members and friends have made it possible for Frontier to buy a building of its own into which it will be moving in a month. This onetime grocery store will serve as warehouse for Frontier's \$25,000 inventory. They would like to increase that figure to \$30,000 by expanding their selection of herbs and ground spices as well as adding cosmetic items such as soaps,~ clays, etc. A costly inventory is orders for 50 pounds of goldenseal, 500 pounds of peppermint leaves, and 100-500 pounds each of other herbs and spices at one time!

If your interest in herbs has gone beyond the selection of little metal boxes or glass bottles found at the supermarket or your taste in spices demands the freshest and most flavorful for each dish, include the Co-op's wide assortment in your next shopping trip. You can buy just the quantity you need. You'll probably find something new to try. And you'll be able to take advantage of the low prices that cooperative efforts such as Frontier Herbs and the Community Mercantile make possible.

CO-OP NEWS is partially funded by:

THE COMMUNITY MERCANTILE INC.

700 Maine 843-8544

HOURS: Mon. thru Sat. 10-6 Tues. and Thurs. til 8

Anyone can shop at the Community Mercantile, but members can save 10-40% on their purchases. To find out how to become a member, attend an orientation session held at 7:00 PM every Wednesday at the store or talk to one of the store's coordinators. We feature farm-fresh dairy, eggs, and produce, plus our own bakery products and a wide variety of staple and specialty foods.



P.S. We take food stamps!



leen attended our quarterly federation meeting in Herman, Missouri last September.

Frontier began when Rick and Col- away from moisture, light and heat. inevitable since Frontier places To insure freshness and flavor, only buy ground spices in small quantities when you need them and throw away what you accumulate



