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## AG CO-OP IDEA DRAWS LARGE CROWD

**COOP Meeting a Success**  
**By HOWARD SWITZER**  
**Special to the REVIEW**

The meeting to found an Agricultural Cooperative to provide jobs, proposed by a local citizen, brought more than fifty people to the Community Center last Thursday, October 1.

Ed Pitts presented his idea for a member owned Coop to bring healthy, locally-grown vegetables, meats, and herbs to market, along with how and why it could be profitable. He quoted a study by the CATO Institute that the wave of the future—due to energy costs and other issues—will see most food produced within 75 miles of the market.

Ed noted that to build a local economy we need to use our own resources to produce something we can sell, and that growing food, because it is a basic need that will always have a market, is inflation-proof.

Pitts also explained the advantage of getting in on the front of this wave. Establishing a member-owned operation that can market directly to retail outlets, as well as directly to the public via the increasing trend toward farmers markets, growers will be able to maximize the return on their produce. Such a Coop would reap the profits normally going to middlemen.

Pitts explained that growing vegetables was a good place to start because it doesn't require a lot of processing and, if grown organically, could demand double the conventional food price. It was soon pointed out, however, that the government has made it difficult to use the term "organic" to describe produce unless you get government certification—a complicated and daunting process designed to severely restrict producers.

Someone noted that this is not a significant stumbling block because growing food naturally without using chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or preservatives does not require certification, and one can brand a name that people will know and trust as healthy and be willing to pay extra.

Pitts asked for three things from the group: a steering committee, a coordinator who would also chair that committee, and people to collect signatures on a petition to the state for \$2 million in funding to build the necessary facilities.

He explained also how we could start out smaller by just buying a couple of reefer trucks and first growing sweet corn, but that a permanent facility would greatly expand possibilities.

The proposed building is a truck terminal and cooling, grading, and packing facility, as well as a brokerage for local produce. Because Ed and his wife run a solar installation company, and have a great deal of experience in the industry, all of the electricity for the facility would be provided by a solar power plant.

After a few questions and supportive comments, a coordinator and a steering committee stepped forward and established a

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schedule for regular meetings.

The petition seeking funding for the terminal will be circulating throughout the region for the next few weeks for those interested in supporting or participating in this cooperative. Those who do will be eligible to be charter members of the Coop, with voting privileges.

Ed said that such an investment by the state in this Cooperative would be a sustainable stimulus package for our local economy, offering numerous fringe benefits, and spurring other local industries as well as giving our children a future in Perry County.