

For Immediate Release

Gay Lea Food's "Co-opalooza" unites and celebrates co-operators from across Province

Guelph ON. September 6, 2016. Co-opalooza, the first ever co-op picnic and celebration, took place on August 27 and brought together co-operators and families from all parts of the province, including Toronto, Guelph, Kitchener, Stratford, London and even as far as Belleville and Thunder Bay!

"We were thrilled to be able to bring co-ops of all sizes and sectors together to celebrate and network. We couldn't have asked for a greater group of people, or a more beautiful day. It's a good feeling when those leaving a first-ever event say "sign us up for next year... something started here today," says Kerr Smith, Co-opalooza organizer and Co-operative & Dairy Heritage Educational Program Manager with Gay Lea Foods.

An initiative of [Gay Lea Foods Co-operative](#), the outdoor event was held at the site of their [Dairy Heritage Museum](#) in Aylmer ON. Participants were invited to tour the museum, classroom and meeting spaces, stroll the trails, play team games in the fields, make ice-cream, listen to live music, and connect with friends and other co-ops. There were also plenty of fun activities for children, including a gigantic bouncy cow, arts and crafts, bubble-making, as well as face and nail painting.

Gay Lea Foods Director Marie McNabb, who opened the event, as well as read a statement from Gay Lea Board Chair Steve Dolson adds: *"Gay Lea were proud to introduce this beautiful, multi-use site to the community. We're so looking forward to collaborating with other co-ops to create more events, programs, and trainings - as the potential for this space is limitless."*

A lot of great networking took place, with the event providing a platform for sharing stories and creating collaborative opportunities between co-operatives. Co-op vendors ran the gamut of business sectors and included [Libro Credit Union](#), [Community CarShare](#), [To Bean or Not to Bean Coffee Roasting Co-op](#), [London Brewing Co-op](#), [The Co-operators](#), [Avocado Co-op](#), [Coder's Co-op](#), [LIFE Co-op](#), [On Co-op](#), and [Meridian Credit Union](#).

Participants were also treated to a very special performance by international-touring, Canadian singer/songwriter [Ember Swift](#). Swift, who spent the past eight years as a star in Beijing, was back in Ontario to finish her soon-to-be-released twelfth album and extended her trip to be a part of Co-opalooza. A huge believer in co-operatives and herself a member of various co-ops while living in Toronto, Swift adds that she *"loves the sense of community and collective pride that is generated by one's involvement in a co-op. They're designed to build healthy local economies and serve their members directly, so no one ever feels like their needs are misunderstood by far-away and detached big corporate decision-makers."*

On Co-op was honoured to be part of this first ever event, that will only grow in size and scope each year. Thanks Gay Lea for bringing us together – we look forward to coming again next year!



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Kerr Smith at museum@gayleafoods.com. To learn more about Co-opalooza or the Gay Lea Dairy Heritage Museum, visit them [online](#).

The Ontario Co-operative Association believes that co-operatives build a better world. We are the trade association and capacity-building organization that develops, engages, educates and advocates for Ontario's 1,300 co-operative businesses. On Co-op is an information and resources network with a mission to *lead, cultivate and connect co-operatives*. Visit www.ontario.coop. facebook.com/oncoop. twitter.com/ontariocoops.