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## Consumers and innovation are feeding local industry

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Rigaud-based Coop CSUR began life as a grassroots alternative to major internet service providers who refused to provide high-speed internet access to rural sectors because of the infrastructure cost.

Since then, CSUR has branched out into community television and other initiatives. Its latest — an online grocery store to encourage local economic development. The members-only site is currently two weeks into its test phase, with around 35 families stocking their shelves via the web.

A glance at the average family's grocery bill these days is enough to make anyone reconsider conventional supermarket shopping. This is especially true for the growing contingent of all-natural locavores who scour the shelves for fair-trade and organic products.

Réjean Sauvé, CSUR's director general, says they want to offer a complete virtual grocery store.

"It's as local as possible," he said. "We'll supply ourselves from within the region with available products, and if there aren't any, we'll work with wholesalers who are all certified organic and eco-friendly."

While the project seeks to support local economic development, its underlying goal is to promote sustainable and organic agriculture.

"We will not do business with local producers who use pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers or who don't pay attention to their livestock. We're very demanding," says Sauvé.

On the virtual shelves one can find meats, fish, dairy products, fruits, vegetables, oils; even toilet paper and cosmetics are available during the test stage. Many products are from local producers and Sauvé is hoping to add even more when the program finally launches.

"We have around 10 local producers," he said. "We haven't yet contacted everyone, but it's coming. Everyone will have a chance to get involved with the site."

The concept eliminates the brick and mortar model by having members order online by Sunday night, for pick up at various drop-offs on Thursdays.

"We have four right now for the trial period," Sauvé explained. "When we launch it, we'll have drop-offs everywhere. We want all citizens in the MRC to be within 15 km from their drop-off."

"Once we're organized, it will be open to everyone. We have the names of 100 families that are ready to sign up, and we haven't even done publicity yet," he added.

The prices, if not unbeatable, are competitive. In fact, Sauvé said that some of the organic products available at the local grocery are 10-15 per cent less at the Marché CSUR.

With the addition of new members, better negotiating and buying power will mean better deals for the co-op.

Because of the growing interest in co-operatives and local producers, agricultural and food production industries in Montérégie are developing from the bottom up. By targeting consumers at one end and increased productivity and innovation at the other, Montérégie's food production industry generates 14,800 jobs and has sales reaching \$5.4 billion.

At the production and transformation end of the scale, businesses need more than loyal consumers to grow. Encouraging increased productivity, competitiveness and innovation is TransformAction, headed up by Johanne Tanguay.

Tanguay points out that while the industry is good, sometimes businesses lack the means to reach the next level.

"Businesses that want to build productivity or break into a new market, often they find themselves alone," she said, explaining that when three or more enterprises get together, they can use one consultant and exchange ideas. "The synergy gets them more for their money."

The Ministère des Finances et de l'Économie and the Ministère des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation de Québec fund up to 70 per cent of approved projects, which already require a much lower investment from individual business owners because they are working together.

With Montérégie's food transformation industry well in advance of other regions, second only to Montreal, Tanguay is optimistic about continued growth.

TransformAction is there to support large and small producers alike; Vaudreuil-Soulanges' Première Moisson and Vergers Labonté are two of 12 local enterprises that have taken advantage of the program.

"It's an extraordinary opportunity to have support like this," says Tanguay. "I can orient them and make sure the project gets done. We want businesses to know us better."

If you are interested in finding out more about Coop CSUR, you can call 450-451-2787, email [coop@csur.ca](mailto:coop@csur.ca) or visit [www.marche.csur.ca](http://www.marche.csur.ca).

For information about TransformAction, visit [www.transform-action.ca](http://www.transform-action.ca).

by Stephanie Azran

