Northeast Cooperatives Membership Approves Proposed Plan of Merger with United Natural Foods

December 17, 2002

DAYVILLE, Conn., Dec. 17 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- United Natural Foods, Inc. (Nasdaq: UNFI) today announced that the membership of Northeast Cooperatives voted at a special meeting held Sunday, December 15, 2002, in Brattleboro, Vermont to approve the proposed plan of merger with United Natural Foods. Approximately 96 percent of the votes cast at the special meeting were in favor of the merger. Northeast Cooperatives' Board of Directors and management had recommended the proposal to its members as in the best interests of the company's members and customers. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

The proposed merger, which was previously announced on October 23, 2002, is tentatively expected to close on December 31, 2002, and remains subject to customary closing conditions.

"We are pleased that Northeast Cooperatives' members endorsed our enthusiasm for the proposed merger and recognize the benefits of a combined United Natural Foods and Northeast Cooperatives," said Steven Townsend, United Natural Foods President.

About Northeast Cooperatives

Northeast Cooperatives, headquartered in Brattleboro, VT, is a natural foods distributor that carries and distributes over 14,000 products to approximately 2,800 customers primarily in the Northeast. Northeast Cooperatives serves a wide variety of retail formats including conventional supermarket chains, natural product superstores, independent retail operators, cooperatives, institutions and buying clubs. Northeast Cooperatives had approximately $120 million in sales for the latest twelve months.

About United Natural Foods

United Natural Foods, Inc. carries and distributes over 30,000 products to more than 10,000 customers nationwide. The Company serves a wide variety of retail formats including conventional supermarket chains, natural product superstores and independent retail operators.

For more information on United Natural Foods, Inc., visit the Company's web-site at www.unfi.com .

"Safe Harbor" Statement under the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995: Statements in this press release regarding United Natural's business which are not historical facts are "forward-looking statements" that involve risks and uncertainties. For a discussion of such risks and uncertainties, which could cause actual results to differ from those contained in the forward-looking statements, including but not limited to general business conditions, the impact of competition and our dependence on principal customers, see "Risk Factors" in the Company's quarterly report on Form 10-Q filed with the Commission on December 13, 2002, and its other filings under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended. Any forward-looking statements are made pursuant to the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995 and, as such, speak only as of the date made. United Natural is not undertaking to update any information in the foregoing reports until the effective date of its future reports required by applicable laws.

SOURCE United Natural Foods, Inc.

/CONTACT: Todd Weintraub, Chief Financial Officer of United Natural Foods, Inc., +1-860-779-2800, or General Information, Joseph Calabrese, +1-212-445-8434, Analyst Information, Vanessa Schwartz, +1-212-445-8433, both of FRB Weber Shandwick/