

PRINCIPLE
COOPERATION
AMONG
COOPERATIVES

EMPOWERS • CULTIVATES
ADVANCES • EMBRACES
FOSTERS • PRIORITIZES

6

2023

YEAR IN **REVIEW**

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Cooperative Network Members,

It is my pleasure to present to our members the 2023 Cooperative Network Year in Review. Through the support of our members, Cooperative Network has accomplished its core mission of cooperative advocacy, legislative representation, director education, and cooperative communication.

The benefits of Cooperative Network's daily presence in the Minnesota and Wisconsin state capitols are evident in our track record of legislative accomplishments, earned through countless hours of attending committee meetings, public hearings, and conversations with policy makers. Cooperative Network makes certain the voice of cooperatives is heard when important decisions are being made.

Our communication platform extends that voice across the public square to ensure consumers recognize the difference between a cooperative and other forms of business. Through articles, social media, and interviews, we honor the heritage of Minnesota and Wisconsin cooperatives across all sectors. We educate and advocate for strict adherence to cooperative governance and the Seven Cooperative Principles. We believe cooperative success is like a muscle – it must be exercised to stay strong and healthy!

None of this would be possible without the support and engagement of our members. Thank you for supporting the need for a “cooperative for cooperatives.” And thank you to the Cooperative Network board of directors, who contribute their time, experience, and expertise toward the success of the association. I would also like to thank my staff for their dedication, hard work, and for making Cooperative Network a wonderful place to work.

Over the past year, I have participated in conversations with cooperative leaders from across the nation on the state of cooperatives in a constantly changing world. Time and again, these leaders have expressed their admiration for Cooperative Network and the concept it represents. They ask how they can create in their regions what we have here with Cooperative Network – multi-sector collaboration of cooperatives working together for their mutual benefit.

This year's annual meeting theme, *Cooperation Among Cooperatives*, as stated in Principle Six, is not only a worthy value to hold, but also essential for the continued success of the cooperative model. Cooperative Network is committed to this goal. Thank you for your support!

Cooperatively,



Daniel Smith, President and CEO

EVENTS & COMMUNICATION

Cooperative Network’s communications portfolio gives members the tools they need to effectively communicate the benefits of operating as a cooperative.

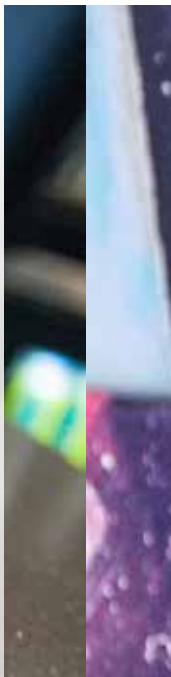
Cooperative Network provides a robust slate of communications platforms such as e-mail blasts, newsletters, press releases, blogs, social media posts, *Cooperative Focus* magazine, and events such as the Annual Meeting, Co-op Day at the Capitol, and the Cooperative Communicators Conference.



01

Co-op Communicators Workshop

Four professionals from varied communications fields shared strategies and tips for becoming better communicators during Cooperative Network’s 2023 Cooperative Communicators Virtual Workshop. Presenters discussed how they amplify objectives and brands through marketing efforts and platforms such as social media, engagement initiatives, and the “art of storytelling.”



03

Media Outreach

Cooperative Network President and CEO Dan Smith was a frequent guest on radio programs such as WBGR-FM and Wisconsin Public Radio, where he talked about issues facing cooperatives. Cooperative Network also shared many cooperative-related editorials, opinion pieces and articles with media outlets throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin and via social media.



02

Co-op Day at the Capitol

Cooperative Network leaders met face-to-face in small groups with Wisconsin and Minnesota legislators and government officials during Co-op Day at the Capitol events held once again this year after a two-year lapse due to the pandemic. The grassroots lobbying events provide an opportunity for members to share priorities and concerns with lawmakers.



04

Cooperative Focus, Social Media Engagement

In an effort to expand its communications portfolio, Cooperative Network launched *Cooperative Focus*, a biannual magazine featuring news, feature stories, columns and editorials about Cooperative Network members and the cooperative industry. Cooperative Network also expanded its communications outreach through increased social media engagement.





MINNESOTA LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Cooperative Development Grants

Cooperative Network worked with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the legislature to establish a grant program to help finance new cooperatives for agricultural purposes, such as operating a processing facility or marketing an agricultural product or service. This year, Cooperative Network advocated for these grants to receive funding, and were able to secure \$400,000 in the budget for the biennium, as well as have the grants be funded through the AGRI program in future budgets. These grants can be used by individuals seeking to form a co-op for anything from product development to site analysis for a potential future facility.

Minnesota State Competitiveness Fund

Cooperative Network, along with our cooperative partners, advocated for the Minnesota State Competitiveness Fund, which provides \$115 million from the general fund to match the federal grant dollars available from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for new energy infrastructure. Hundreds of millions of dollars are available in federal investments, and states around the country are setting up matching fund allocations through state funds. Setting up a state fund would allow smaller entities to provide the technical assistance resources necessary for them to compete for these federal grant opportunities.

Rural Broadband Funding

Cooperative Network was a part of a coalition that asked for and received a historic investment in broadband infrastructure to the tune of at least \$210 million of both state and federal funding. This year, Cooperative Network's push for continued funding resulted in the largest state investment in history of \$100 million, breaking 2021's record of \$70 million in state funding.

Personal Finance Class Requirement

Cooperative Network supported language that requires high school students to take a personal finance course to graduate. Along with our credit union partners, we advocated in favor of this important legislation because it promotes the type of financial literacy required to fully understand the tools that institutions like credit unions provide. The required coursework will have an impact on these students at an age where they gain the necessary financial knowledge prior to reaching adulthood, where they can put this information to use.



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Ended Personal Property Tax

Cooperative Network worked hard to achieve the full elimination of this unfair and outdated tax. The personal property tax was the oldest tax in the state, originally covering everything from wedding rings to chickens. Over the years it had been significantly curtailed until only small businesses and cooperatives were left paying this \$250 million/year tax on their office furniture and fixtures. Nearly all legislators from both parties were interested in eliminating the tax, but because it was a significant source of revenue for local governments and municipalities, a replacement had to be found. Fortunately, it was rolled into the "shared-revenue" deal, which will send 20% of the state's sales tax collections (or one penny of the five-cent sales tax) to local governments.

Created Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP)

Similar to the existing Local Roads Improvement Program, the new \$150 million "ARIP" initiative will reimburse local governments for repairs to roads, bridges and culverts that are used by farms and would likely not receive other state aid. ARIP prioritizes projects that serve the largest number of farms and it will require that improved roads eliminate weight restrictions! This issue was one of the main topics discussed during this year's Cooperative Day at the Capitol and illustrates the power cooperatives have when they work together and engage in grassroots advocacy.

Cooperative Development Grant renewed

Cooperative Network worked with Governor Evers and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to renew a new round of Cooperative Development Grants. A total of \$400,000 is available over the biennium, with maximum grant amounts of \$50,000 available to help establish new cooperatives or help existing cooperatives expand.

Broadband

Expanding broadband throughout all of rural Wisconsin continues to be a top priority for Cooperative Network. We advocated for more funding and worked alongside the Land O'Lakes Inc.'s American Connection Project, which is largely responsible for bringing \$1.1 billion in Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) funding to Wisconsin. Cooperative Network also worked to streamline how the Public Service Commission administers broadband expansion grants, mostly by giving priority to projects that have a 25% match.

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Federal ‘Communities in Action’ priority list: broadband, infrastructure, transportation
Cooperative Network was invited to the Biden Administration’s “Communities in Action” event at the White House earlier this year, where attendees were briefed about programs and priorities designed to strengthen and revitalize rural communities. Attendees also had an opportunity to the present their own respective “priority lists” for helping rural communities.

Topping Cooperative Network’s priority list was broadband expansion, an essential requirement to drawing new residents and business investment and for supporting existing enterprises in rural areas. In a press release, Cooperative Network stated: “Telecommunication cooperatives are partnering with electric cooperatives to expand broadband access. This essential first step leads the way for precision agriculture practices which increase efficiency, lower costs, and protect the health of our water and soil. It expands telehealth access, education, workforce training programs, and more. At its core, it builds and connect communities – economically, socially, culturally.”

Although Cooperative Network made it clear to the current administration that rural revitalization begins with broadband expansion, it does not end there. “The production of our farms and rural businesses relies on the movement of goods and services over our roads and bridges, up and down the Mississippi River, and through ports in Milwaukee, Superior and elsewhere,” said Cooperative Network President and CEO Dan Smith.

“Rural farms, businesses, and communities must be connected not only virtually but physically through trucks, trains, ships, and barges. Reinvestment in our transportation systems is not an option, it is a requirement,” he said.

FRIEND OF
COOPERATIVES

The following members have proclaimed their support for cooperatives while helping Cooperative Network continue to serve as *The Trusted Voice for Cooperatives.*

ASA
Agri-Services Agency
Leaders in Agricultural Insurance

APPLEWOOD POINTE
COOPERATIVE COMMUNITIES

CliftonLarsonAllen

DORSEY
DORSEY & WHITNEY LLP

FCCS
FORWARD. THINKING.

Fredrikson

GARDINER + COMPANY
Certified Public Accountants

MB
INSURANCE

NCF
Northcountry Cooperative Foundation

PARAMARK
Real Estate Services

RESTORATION
PROFESSIONALS

Wegner CPAs
→ Building you. Beyond the numbers.™

MEET OUR STAFF



Daniel Smith
President
& CEO



Dawn Bausch
Vice President of
Administration



Rick Hummell
Communications
Specialist



Jennifer Wickman
Government Affairs
Director-WI

Executive Committee

Sadie Frericks
Chair
Land O’Lakes, Inc.

Christa Hoffman
Vice-Chair
GENEX

Marie Barry
Secretary/Treasurer
Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative

Directors
Michelle Gubser
ProVision Partners

Roger Hildebrandt
United Cooperative

Audrey Hjelle
Great River Energy

Amanda Hoefling
Dairyland Power Cooperative

Amber Horn-Leiterman
Land O’Lakes

Jeff Lyon
FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative

Sponsors

Champion



Best Ever



Gold Statue



Blue Ribbon

GENEX



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