

COOPERATIVE

FOCUS

SUMMER 2024

'Be the One'

Great River Energy
safety program puts
focus on stop-work authority

'Magna Carta of Cooperatives'

Minnesota's Andrew J. Volstead
co-wrote legal framework for co-ops



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It's possibility.**



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ON THE COVER:
Great River Energy powerline workers review safety protocols at a regularly scheduled safety meeting. Earlier this year, the cooperative launched a new safety campaign called 'Be the One' which places an emphasis on stop-work authority, particularly among employees who work in safety-sensitive positions.
(Great River Energy photo.)



44 East Mifflin Street, Suite 801 | Madison, WI 53703
ph. 608.258.4400 | www.cooperativenetwork.coop

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Cooperative Network



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Cooperative Network



Cooperative Network

Embracing Cooperative Principle Five: Education, training, and information



by **Sadie Frericks** Cooperative Network Board Chair

Principle Five of the Seven Cooperative Principles is *Education, Training, and Information*, a mandate that Cooperative Network's board of directors and staff take very seriously. As with all seven principles, we don't just talk the talk, we walk the walk.

Education, training, and sharing of information among cooperative members, directors, elected officials and civil servants, and even non-member consumers who purchase goods and services from cooperatives, are essential components of cooperative practice. Ongoing member training helps cooperatives develop, advance, adapt to new technologies, and become better business entities.

Cooperative Network serves as a forum for cross-sector collaboration among all cooperative business sectors, and as a platform for the sharing of information which supports co-ops in adjusting to changes, such as changes in laws, social trends, or the economy. The wide range of events we plan and host provide valuable opportunities for co-op staff, managers and directors to connect and share best practices, and our learning and development opportunities ensure cooperative boards, management and staff have the tools to function in accordance with relevant federal and state laws and regulations.

In December, 2022 Cooperative Network developed an on-line education video library geared towards educating new directors about cooperative governance, their roles and responsibilities, and the ins and outs of cooperatives.

Our two electronic newsletters, *Co-op Connection* and *Capitol Connection* provide members with up-to-date information on the member services we provide and the issues with which we are engaged.

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COOPERATIVE NETWORK TEAM



DAN SMITH
President & CEO

dan@cooperativenetwork.coop
direct: 608.258.4413
cell: 608.572.1258



DAWN BAUSCH
VP | Administration

dawn@cooperativenetwork.coop
direct: 608.258.4390
cell: 608.835.9273



RICK HUMMELL
Communications Specialist

rick@cooperativenetwork.coop
direct: 608.258.4405
cell: 608.347.6750



JENNIFER WICKMAN
Government Affairs Director-WI

jennifer@cooperativenetwork.coop
direct: 608.258.4402
cell: 608.669.6790



BENNETT SMITH
Government Relations Specialist
Fredrikson & Byron P.A.

bsmith@fredlaw.com
cell: 320.287.1371

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sadie Frericks, Chair
Land O'Lakes

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Levi Smith
lsmith@fredlaw.com
612.492.7489

Dan Mott
dmott@fredlaw.com
612.492.7322

fredlaw.com/cooperatives



Levi Smith



Dan Mott

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Archives reflect tireless efforts of those who built the co-op system



by **Dan Smith** Cooperative Network President and CEO

In a world that is constantly charging ahead, sometimes we can learn so much by taking a look back.

Cooperative Network did just this recently as we delved into some eight decades of cooperative history contained in our file cabinets and storage bins. It was a walk through time as we viewed photos, news clippings and minutes of cooperative meetings and position papers, some dating as far back as World War II. These artifacts, carefully preserved and catalogued by staff over decades, tell the story of the cooperative movement in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Brought to light were the countless hours yesterday's leaders dedicated to establishing cooperatives that today continue to provide essential goods and services to rural communities. Because of their tireless efforts, rural electric, communications, farm supply, marketing, processing, insurance, healthcare, and financial services became accessible to rural residents across the Upper Midwest. Our historical files tell the stories of late night board meetings, visits to legislators and governors in St. Paul and Madison, and the successful track record of the cooperative system in response to the emerging needs of citizens.

Within this history lies a long list of battles cooperative leaders fought – battles over regulation, taxation, cooperative governance, labeling, and rural economic development programs. Remember the controversy over oleomargarine? That hard-fought

battle is captured in black and white in the files we reviewed, along with others impacting cooperatives from credit unions, agriculture, mutual insurance, energy, and beyond.

Our archives also include numerous files and folders related to the very formation of the cooperative movement, including information about the Capper-Volstead Act, the landmark piece of legislation signed in 1922 which often is considered "The Magna Carta of the Cooperative Movement." This issue of *Cooperative Focus* includes an article about the legislation and Andrew J. Volstead, the U.S. Congressman from Minnesota who co-authored the legislation (but unfortunately is more known for his work related to Prohibition).

In a time before we could file loads of information with a handheld device, Cooperative Network staff clipped, catalogued, and preserved cooperative history for future generations. I am so glad they did.

So is the Wisconsin State Historical Society, to whom we have donated archival items from Cooperative Network for display in a *History of Cooperatives* exhibit planned for the new historical museum under construction on the Capitol Square in Madison. It is important that today's, and tomorrow's, citizens recognize the work that went into building the cooperative system, and the ongoing work and support Cooperative Network provides today.

Thank you for your support and membership.

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In March of this year, Cooperative Network teamed with Washington, D.C.-based National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International (NCBA CLUSA) to present the 2024 Cooperative Legislative Forum, a virtual discussion of federal and state issues important to cooperatives of all sectors and sizes. The new collaboration between NCBA CLUSA and Cooperative Network gives both associations an opportunity to share federal and state legislative priorities with a wider membership, and to further practice "cooperation among cooperatives," which, by the way, is Cooperative Principle Six.

We host a Cooperative Communicators Workshop each summer. This virtual event is designed to help cooperative communications staff fill their communications toolbox with skills they need to help their co-op thrive.

CN incorporates education to our membership, consumers and the public on a continual basis

through our communication platforms, public advocacy, and outreach.

We have eagerly embraced virtual platforms and new technologies to "educate, train and inform." This spring, we started hosting a series of monthly webinars on topics of importance to cooperatives, including challenges/changes in the insurance industry, employee benefit and attraction programs, risk management, and cooperative credit-related issues.

We plan on continuing to host webinars through the remainder of the year and beyond on such topics as cooperative governance, human resources, artificial intelligence, cyber security, and other topics.

All of these efforts are examples of Cooperative Network's overarching goal of providing education, training and information for our members, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives.

Please watch for upcoming announcements.

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Cooperative Network: Dedicated to strengthening the cooperative movement and building communities

by **Rick Hummell** Cooperative Network Communications Specialist

Committed to protecting and promoting cooperative businesses and their shared cooperative principles, Cooperative Network (CN) provides world-class legislative and regulatory advocacy, creative leadership in public awareness, and a wide range of learning and development opportunities for the organization's members.

Structured as a cooperative itself, CN has a long history of bringing together and strengthening cooperative businesses in Minnesota and Wisconsin, home to the largest concentration of cooperatives in the nation, across a wide variety of sectors including farm supply, grain, health, dairy processing and marketing, consumer, financial, telecommunications, electric, housing, and insurance.

Known as *The Trusted Voice for Cooperatives*, CN is dedicated to strengthening the cooperative movement by providing a means for co-ops from all sectors to collaborate on issues of importance to the cooperative business model.

Turning back the clock, the cooperative movement dates to the 1840s when a group of weavers from Rochdale, England who'd been facing poor working conditions and unfair wages established the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society. The Rochdale pioneers are credited with developing the "Rochdale Principles," which became the standard cooperative principles

of success for cooperatives around the world. The principles, which have been refined, adapted and reinterpreted over time, are known as the Seven Cooperative Principles.

A cooperative is a business voluntarily owned and controlled by its member-patrons and operated for them on a non-profit basis. Each cooperative member has an equal voice in the affairs of the organization, and profits earned by co-ops are returned directly to member-owners as dividends or reinvested in business operations. Either way, the money finds its way back to the local and regional economies, supporting businesses and creating jobs beyond the cooperative itself.

said Dan Smith, Cooperative Network president and CEO. "To the community of the cooperatives we represent, to the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin, and to the local communities we serve. Our passion is advocacy, education and awareness, along with providing resources to enhance the business model for future success. Every program we administer, every experience we provide, is designed to provide our members with top-notch service."

Governed by a board of directors made up of cooperative leaders from Minnesota and Wisconsin, CN members help identify the organization's legislative



Original members of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers' Society.



Images from the CN stock photography collection.

and educational priorities, and help develop and guide its strategies.

The benefits of CN's daily presence in the Minnesota and Wisconsin state capitols are evident in the organization's 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," said Smith. "In recent legislative cycles, we worked with our state legislatures to establish grant programs to help finance new cooperatives and expand existing co-ops, expand farm service CDLs, advocate for historic investments in broadband infrastructure funding, and support agriculture industry programs as well as state and federal exporting initiatives."

Membership in CN comes with many benefits at no additional cost, said Smith, including access to a stock photography collection of nearly 2,000 royalty-free photos for use in marketing, communications, and advertising.

Two electronic newsletters – *Co-op Connection* and *Capital Connection* – provide members with up-to-date information on member services and news, and CN also publishes *Cooperative Focus*, a bi-annual magazine featuring news and feature stories about CN members and the cooperative industry. CN also shares timely editorials, opinion pieces and news articles with media outlets, and through social media.

Throughout the year, the organization hosts a variety of online webinars and forums on state and national issues, as well as an annual Cooperative Communicators

Workshop designed to improve member cooperatives' marketing and communications skills.

Members also have access to six online Cooperative Director Education Videos on subjects vital to cooperative leadership, which can be played in the board room or office to instruct directors and staff.

CN members also have free access to graphics, logos and other materials to help celebrate National Co-op Month, held annually in October. Members can post job openings on Cooperative Network's Co-op Careers page, and they also have access to many other resources including a 'Co-ops are Everywhere' animated video and a coloring book.

In March, CN teamed for the first time with the National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International to present the 2024 Cooperative Legislative Forum, a virtual discussion of federal and state issues important to cooperatives of all sectors and sizes.

In recent months, CN hosted a series of monthly webinars on a variety of topics, including co-op credit issues, cooperative insurance, and cooperative mergers and acquisitions. Plans are in the works to develop a new Cooperative College, a series of virtual classes on cooperative governance, finance, succession planning and strategy, and other topics.

Funded primarily through dues paid by member cooperatives, CN launched a membership drive earlier this year.

"Cooperative Network's accomplishments benefit all cooperatives, yet only a fraction of cooperatives contribute financially to help the organization continue its work," said Smith. "We believe membership provides an excellent return on a cooperative's investment. Cooperatives who join Cooperative Network are investing in our cooperative community. Together we will continue to accomplish great things."

Cooperative Builder Award nominations accepted through August 23

Nominations are being accepted through Friday, Aug. 23, 2024 for Cooperative Network's (CN) Cooperative Builder Award, CN's highest honor for individuals who have made outstanding contributions at the local, state or national level to advance the cooperative philosophy and ideals.

Nominees may be cooperative members, employees or supporters. Previous winners and current board members are ineligible. Applications are kept in the selection pool for three years and may be updated with additional information. Submit a nomination by completing the Cooperative Builder Award Application.

Information about the award and the nomination form can be found at: bit.ly/2024CN_CBA.

Participate in Cooperative Network's resolution review process this summer

Cooperative Network members are invited to participate in the organization's resolutions review process this summer.

Each year, CN reviews one third of its member-approved resolutions, a process designed to guide CN's government affairs team in lobbying efforts on behalf of member cooperatives. Existing resolutions are revised and edited, and new resolutions are created in response to current issues.

The resolutions Zoom schedule is listed below. Pre-registration is required. Meetings typically last an hour.

- General resolutions: Tues., Aug. 20, 10 a.m.
- Ag/Dairy: Tues., Aug. 20, 2 p.m.
- Credit Unions/Farm Credit: Wed., Aug. 21, 10 a.m.
- Health Care Wednesday, Aug. 21, 2 p.m.
- Insurance: Thurs., Aug. 22, 10 a.m.
- Teleco/Electric Distribution: Thurs., Aug. 22, 2 p.m.
- ALL SECTOR Review Fri., Sept. 10., 2. pm.

Can't join a scheduled Zoom meeting?, email your comments to Jennifer Wickman, jennifer@cooperativenetwork.coop. Registration links and the 2025 Proposed Resolutions for review can be found at: bit.ly/2025ResolutionsReview.



in loving memory

Audrey Marie Hjelle
November 4, 1942 - June 13, 2024

Cooperative Network and the cooperative community recently lost a past board member and strong supporter of the cooperative way of doing business.

Audrey Hjelle passed away Thursday, June 13, 2024, after a courageous battle with cancer.

"Audrey was a dedicated director with a strong commitment to the cooperative model. We are honored to have worked with her on so many projects over the years. We are proud to have known her as a friend, and we will always remember her kindness, work ethic, and dedication to helping others," said Dan Smith, Cooperative Network President/CEO.

She left her mark with her community involvement. Audrey was awarded the Grant County Conservation Farmer of the Year, served as the Lutheran Brotherhood Branch president, and was involved in Grant County 4H, American Cancer Society of Grant County, KFGO Farm Radio Advisory Board, and the Barrett Parent Teacher Student Organization. Audrey was the first woman elected to serve on the Runestone Electric Association Board, and also the first woman officer on the Great River Energy Board. In 2023, Audrey was a recipient of the Cooperative Builder Award, Cooperative Network's highest honor.

Audrey was also known for her delicious rosettes at Christmastime, and her canned pickles. R.I.P.



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WE NEED YOU

COOPERATIVE NETWORK BOARD OF DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS ACCEPTED THROUGH SEPTEMBER 13

Nominations are being accepted until September 13, 2024 for three board of director seats to be elected at Cooperative Network's annual meeting in November, 2024. With the exception of Associate/Friend of Cooperatives members, current staff and members from Cooperative Network members in good standing are eligible for nomination.

As representatives of cooperative members throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin, Cooperative Network's nine-person board of directors helps guide future activities and priorities of the organization.

For more information, and to download the nomination form, go to: bit.ly/CN2024BOD.

Navigating Mergers and Acquisitions: Strategies for risk mitigation

By **Jen Pino-Gallagher**, M3 Insurance director of Food & Agribusiness Practice

The “Seven Cooperative Principles” of the cooperative movement are commonly displayed in the board rooms or vestibules of cooperatives throughout the country. Although the words ‘economic vitality’ do not appear in the official principles, every cooperative leader inherently prioritizes the economic stability and viability of their cooperative.

Many cooperatives turn to mergers and strategic business acquisitions as a viable path toward achieving these goals. According to the USDA’s Rural Development Report, the trend in agricultural cooperative mergers continues at a rapid pace. An October, 2023 USDA report states that the reasons for mergers include gaining economies of scale, operational efficiencies, and better positioning for future growth. In addition to mergers, some cooperatives look to acquire other entities to expand their member services and geographic reach.

Navigating the complexities of a merger or acquisition requires sound board guidance and a knowledgeable leadership team. Achieving a successful transition involves a full-team effort, often including trusted cooperative advisors such as accountants, lawyers, and banking advisors. From an insurance perspective, the property and casualty broker can also play a role in identifying and mitigating the risks associated with a transaction.

What factors should cooperative leaders and board members consider from a transactional risk

perspective to mitigate risks and ensure the success of their cooperative?

The first consideration as either a buyer or seller is whether the transaction should include only certain assets and liabilities of the selling company (asset sale), or whether it should include all of the stock or membership units of the selling company (stock / equity) sale. An asset sale minimizes the risk for the buyer because the buyer selects only certain assets to purchase and only certain liabilities to assume. A stock sale is attractive for sellers because the buyer assumes all liabilities of the seller from the seller’s corporate inception.

In recent years, several insurance products have emerged to address the unique risks associated with mergers and acquisitions. These solutions transfer risk to insurers, helping maintain a positive buyer-seller relationship post-transaction, especially when sellers continue working with the buyer for a smooth transition.

To minimize risk, it’s important for the buyer to consider having adequate protection for future undisclosed liabilities by setting aside some of the purchase money in escrow for a specified duration post-transaction. There are also very favorable insurance solutions to transfer risks for breaches of representations and warranties of the seller, tax risk, and contingent risk.

When forming an advisory team for a potential merger or acquisition, consider including the cooperative’s

Navigating the complexities of a merger or acquisition requires sound board guidance and a knowledgeable leadership team.

insurance broker as part of the team. And ask about the coverages designed specifically for the unique risks associated with financial transactions as well as their experience with mergers and acquisitions.

The right advisory team can ensure a successful financial transaction, allowing the cooperative to remain economically strong, and uphold its principles of supporting the members and community.

Based in Madison, Wis., and with cooperative clients throughout the country, M3 Insurance is a full-service, independent broker serving the property and casualty, employee benefits, and risk management needs across a wide array of industries and business sectors.

Sand County Environmental: Providing innovative, effective solutions for environmental issues

by **Nichole Good**, Project manager, Sand County Environmental, Inc.

At some point, cooperatives from all sectors may need to manage environmental risk, or address environmental contamination. When that happens, cooperatives benefit from hiring an environmental consultant.

Sand County Environmental, Inc. (SCE) is a Wisconsin-based environmental consulting firm with professional staff offices located in Amherst, Rosholt, Rhineland, and Plymouth. The SCE technical staff includes hydrologists, geologists, engineers, soil scientists, and biologists. Our charge is to understand environmental conditions and regulations, and to advise clients so they can make informed, cost-effective decisions.

Most of our projects include some degree of evaluation of geologic, groundwater, vapor, and stormwater conditions. Typical situations where cooperatives and SCE may work together include:

- **Property Transactions:** Assess the environmental risk associated with real estate using a Phase I and/or Phase II Environmental Site Assessment (ESA), or a Transaction Screen Assessment (TSA) for low-risk properties.
- **Construction:** Comply with stormwater regulations, delineate wetlands, design containment systems, and survey for the presence of lead and asbestos.
- **Sustainability:** Implement preventative strategies and reduce carbon footprint.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Address environmental requirements of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Wisconsin Department of Trade, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection (DATCP), and others.
- **Storage Tanks:** Assess and coordinate removal of underground and aboveground storage tanks.

- **Material Spill/Release:** Remediate and monitor the impacts to soil from released material such as fertilizer, pesticides, fuel, and chlorinated solvents.
- **Waste Disposal:** Land spread or properly dispose of contaminated soil, wastewater, and other waste materials.

Funding is available for some environmental work. For example, DATCP's Agricultural Chemical Cleanup Program (ACCP) reimburses approximately 75% of environmental investigation and remediation costs at agronomy facilities. There are also a variety of funding opportunities for "brownfield" sites, like the Site Assessment Grant (SAG) and Wisconsin Assessment Monies (WAM). SCE can help cooperatives apply to these programs.

The following project examples highlight SCE's innovative work for cooperatives and other businesses.

Phytoremediation at an Agronomy Facility

Phytoremediation is the treatment of pollutants using plants and soil microbes to degrade, remove, and/or stabilize released substances. SCE is an industry leader in the use of phytoremediation for areas affected with excess chemicals such as fertilizers, pesticides, and petroleum.

In one instance, SCE installed a phytoremediation system to treat nitrogen and pesticide-impacted groundwater at a facility with a long history of agricultural chemical storage. The remediation system consists of a 9,000-square foot planting of hybrid poplar and willow trees. The trees and the soil microbiome around the roots metabolize and/or break down excess nitrogen and pesticides and can

provide hydraulic control by taking up and transpiring impacted groundwater before it flows off-site.

The phytoremediation plantation consists of 56 hybrid poplar cuttings planted in augered holes filled with amended soil. Twenty-one hybrid willows were planted along the downgradient edge of the plantation directly in the existing fill and native soil. Hybrid poplars grow incredibly fast, with up to 10 feet of growth in their first year. Hybrid willows absorb lots of water, treating large volumes.

Until the trees fully mature, the plantation is being drip-irrigated with municipal water and impacted groundwater from monitoring wells. The solar-powered groundwater pumps provide water to the plantation 24-hours a day.

DATCP reimbursed the cooperative for 75% of costs associated with this project via the ACCP.

Fertilizer Distribution Terminal Stormwater Mitigation

State regulators required a large fertilizer facility to reduce the discharges of nutrients and sediments in its stormwater. SCE developed a plan to retain, test, and treat all stormwater on-site – all by irrigating the stormwater onto perennial vegetation. In doing so, SCE replaced an expensive process with a large carbon footprint process wherein stormwater was hauled off-site for treatment.

SCE designed and installed an irrigation system that pumps stormwater from a collection pond to a 10 acre field planted with switchgrass. Over time, this native prairie grass greatly increases soil organic matter, which feeds soil microbes and increases the stormwater treatment capacity. As a bonus, the switchgrass also provides carbon sequestration and habitat for native fauna.

The irrigated stormwater is treated via soil filtering, plant nutrient uptake, and soil microbes. Stormwater is discharged to the subsurface drip-irrigation system from mid-March through November. During the height of the growing season, a higher-capacity spray irrigation system is also used. SCE trained facility staff on system startup and basic maintenance.



Sand County Environmental Inc.'s services include working with issues related to stormwater irrigation and underground storage tanks.

Property Transaction Risk Assessment & Tank Removal

A client was considering purchasing a light-industrial facility built in the 1980s. SCE's Phase I ESA of the property identified a number of Recognized Environmental Conditions (REC) associated with underground storage tanks (UST) and storage of waste oil and drums. A purchase agreement was drafted with contingencies for a Phase II ESA and UST removal.

The Phase II field investigation consisted of collecting soil and groundwater samples using a Geoprobe® hydraulic probe. Samples were analyzed for a suite of compounds associated with petroleum and industry. Lab results showed only trace amounts of contaminants were present, except for one impacted location beneath a hydraulic lift. Since the contamination is limited and isolated beneath a structure, the risk to human health and the environment is low. The WDNR case can be closed with a "continuing obligation" to test and properly handle soil from that location if the building is demolished in the future.

As for the diesel USTs (20,000 and 10,000 gallons in volume), SCE coordinated their cleaning and removal, then our certified staff performed a Tank System Site Assessment (TSSA) as required by state regulations. The USTs were in excellent condition, and there was no evidence of petroleum impacts to the surrounding soil. No further action is required in the UST area.

Satisfied with the information and the efficient actions taken by SCE, the client purchased the property and expanded their business.

We encourage cooperatives to reach out to SCE with questions on potential environmental needs. Contact us at 715.824.5169 or info@sandcountyenv.com, and learn more on our website, www.sandcountyenv.com.

United Co-op acquires Marquis' Necedah ethanol facility

In April, United Cooperative and corn-based ethanol producer Marquis Energy announced the sale of Marquis' Necedah, Wis., ethanol facility to United Cooperative, with the sale effective May 31, 2024. The facility is operating under the new name United Energy Necedah LLC.

The Necedah facility, which procures 36,000,000 bushels of regionally-grown corn annually, is a vital asset to the local community's agricultural landscape. With an annual production capacity of 100 million gallons of ethanol, along with dried distiller grains, high-protein animal feed, and corn oil, the facility plays a vital role in supporting regional economies and meeting market demand. The ethanol facility employs more than 50 people.

"The purchase of Marquis' Necedah ethanol plant aligns with our strategic initiative of investing in agriculture, opening new markets, and providing value-added products for our member-owners," stated David Cramer, president and CEO of United Cooperative. "This type of diversification supports our mission, our local farmers, and the U.S. economy. Our investment also promotes our sustainability efforts by continuously improving the stewardship of the air, soil, and water, safeguarding our natural resources for generations to come."

In a press release, Mark Marquis, CEO of Hennepin, Ill.-based Marquis, said, "The sale of our Wisconsin



facility aligns with our commitment to strategic growth in developing the world's first carbon-neutral industrial complex in Hennepin. We extend our sincerest gratitude to our valued grain customers, the supportive Necedah community, and to the incredible and talented team of employees at Marquis Energy Wisconsin for their hard work and dedication. We look forward to the continued success of United Energy Necedah LLC under the stewardship of United Cooperative."

About United Cooperative

Incorporated in 1936, Cooperative Network member United Cooperative is a full-service, member-owned cooperative offering agronomy, grain, feed, and energy products to farmers and consumers in the Midwest. Headquartered in Beaver Dam, Wis., the company also is the managing partner of two other ethanol plants, United Ethanol in Milton, Wis., and Carbon Green BioEnergy in Lake Odessa, Mi.

Dairyland Power Cooperative demolishes Genoa #3 power plant

The demolition of the 500-foot stack and main building of Dairyland's retired Genoa Station #3 power plant was completed safely on March 19, 2024. The demolition of the stack and main building, located along the Mississippi River near the village of Genoa, Wis., marked the end of an era and was a major milestone in the final decommissioning and dismantlement of G-3 as part of Dairyland's energy transition plans.

Dairyland President & CEO Brent Ridge emphasized Dairyland's commitment to a low-carbon future, within the guardrails of safety, reliability and affordability.

"Dairyland is 100 percent behind renewable energy and carbon reduction, and 101 percent behind our commitment as a critical service provider to supply safe, reliable and affordable energy," said Ridge. "If you look back 20 years, we were basically a coal-based utility. This is a significant evolution for us."

The coal-fired 345 MW power plant was retired on June 1, 2021, following 52 years of providing power to the region.

Roughly 100 people gathered along a ridge overlooking the plant to watch the demolition. Dairyland contracted with Veit Co. on the demolition, in which some 400 pounds of explosives were utilized.

Following the successful demolition, Dairyland crews spent the months-long process of cleaning up the site and preparing scrap steel for recyclers.

The Genoa facility is the sixth coal-fired plant Dairyland has decommissioned as the cooperative continues to add to its mix of renewables. Currently, it's split evenly between coal, natural gas and renewables such as solar, wind, hydroelectric and battery storage. Dairyland anticipates the mix will be 20 percent coal, 30 percent natural gas and 50 percent renewables a decade from now.



Analysis reveals huge impact of electric co-ops on Minnesota economy

An economic impact analysis reveals the substantial contributions electric cooperatives make to Minnesota's economy. Between 2018 and 2022, electric cooperatives injected \$19.6 billion into the economy, fortifying the state's financial landscape and supporting an average of 20,800 jobs each year, according to the study, a partnership between the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, and Strategen Consulting.



"This study's findings underscore the indispensable role electric cooperatives play in our state's economic vitality," said Darrick Moe, CEO of the Minnesota Rural Electric Association. "We are proud to power our communities, provide meaningful careers and give back to our neighborhoods. As consumer-owned non-profits, our focus is on helping bring a brighter, more prosperous future to the places we call home."

The analysis also found that electric cooperatives support nearly 623,000 jobs in the United States with \$51 billion in pay and benefits each year. Furthermore, electric cooperatives contributed a staggering \$554 billion to U.S. Gross Domestic Product over the five-year period.

The study was released in October to coincide with National Cooperative Month, which celebrates the successes of the cooperative governance model. Minnesota was the first state to declare an official Co-op Month proclamation in 1948 and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, a former Minnesota

governor, first recognized the holiday nationally in 1964.

Some highlights of the Minnesota electric cooperatives economic impact analysis include:

- **\$27.3 billion** in capital investments
- **\$377 million** in capital credits paid to member-owners
- **\$9.2 billion** in labor income
- **\$1.4 billion** in federal taxes
- **\$3.8 billion** in state & local taxes

The study also determined that across the nation, electric cooperatives bring about \$75 billion in value annually to their local counties in which they serve.

"This economic impact study makes it clear that cooperatives boost the economic prosperity of their local communities, while electrifying the countryside," Moe said.

Sand County Environmental, Inc.

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‘Put on a seatbelt’: AI is accelerating system and data risks for co-ops

The rush to add artificial intelligence into software, systems, websites and applications is creating new data risks that merit updated policies and broader education and training at cooperatives, cybersecurity leaders told attendees at National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s (NCREA) Co-op Cyber Tech Conference held June 11-13 in Arlington, Va.

“AI will be more revolutionary than you think,” said Patrick Miller, CEO of Ampyx Cyber, at an AI-focused breakout session. “It will happen faster than you think. Adversaries are hitting the accelerator. If we tap the brakes, we will be behind. Put on a seatbelt, understand the risks, involve senior leadership.”

Carter Manucy, NRECA cybersecurity director, told the group that they may want to consider an AI policy and that NRECA is making a sample AI policy available to voting members and their attorneys to tailor it to their cybersecurity needs.

“This can give co-ops somewhere to start,” he said.

Miller said co-ops should assume that their staff, vendors and contractors are all using AI – knowingly or unknowingly – and that AI can be manipulated even if software or sites are marked “private.”

“AI is the golden retriever of the internet – it wants to come back with an answer,” Miller said.

Beneficial uses of AI, he said, include automated patch management that can streamline software repairs and security updates, prioritize fixes and terminate harmful processes that may create system



vulnerabilities. AI also excels at identifying patterns and anomalies.

But AI can also be used to create malicious scripts and slam firewalls tens of thousands of times per day, Manucy said.

“Phishing emails are getting really, really good” because of AI data mining and development, he said.

Miller and Manucy noted several considerations for co-ops as they seek to mitigate risks associated with AI, including:

- Setting up and enforcing robust data governance policies.
- Conducting phishing training focused on new AI risks.
- Updating AI models and systems to defend against new cyberthreats.
- Developing strategies for monitoring and auditing AI systems to meet cybersecurity regulations and standards.

“Someone in your co-op should be learning about AI; then they need to translate clearly what is happening,” said Miller. “You need an AI champion.”

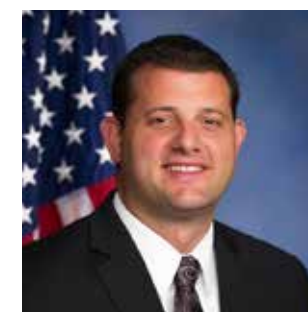
For more information on the NRECA sample AI policy, contact NRECA Assistant General Counsel Katherine Sargent at Katherine.Sargent@nreca.coop.

(Reprinted from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s RE Magazine.)

‘Strengthening Rural Cooperatives and Communities’ Act introduced

In December 2023, a bipartisan bill aimed at building on the successes of the Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) program was introduced to Congress. Called ‘The Strengthening Rural Cooperatives and Communities Act,’ the proposed legislation (H.R. 6661) is co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. Yadira Caraveo (D-CO-08) and U.S. Rep. David Valadao (R-CA-22), who said it will “help strengthen cooperatives that form the economic foundation of rural communities” by “reauthorizing the program and making key improvements to maximize federal dollars while building capacity for rural technical assistance providers.”

Caraveo’s office stated: “A cooperative is a business owned and controlled by the people who use its services, often for the mutual benefit of a community. This model empowers rural communities to collectively address economic challenges and meet common needs. For instance, a rural community might establish a cooperative to collectively purchase bulk goods like seed and fertilizer; sell members’ farm products to larger markets; or offer utilities like electricity which would otherwise be unavailable to individual families.”



Rep. David Valadao



Rep. Yadira Caraveo

The bill’s sponsors said in recent years “a decline in federal funding for cooperatives has made it impossible for some of these businesses to continue serving their communities.” The legislation addresses the problem by reauthorizing the RCDG program and prioritizing cooperatives. “It also cuts burdensome red tape, steers funding toward underserved communities, and measures progress on cooperative development,” according to Caraveo.

The bill would:

- Reduce regulatory burden and increase effectiveness of program delivery by allowing the USDA secretary to implement multi-year grants for applicants with a demonstrated track record of success;
- Allow under-resourced and often more rural applicants to compete within the program by removing barriers such as “scoring on a curve” within program match requirements; and
- Have the Interagency Working Group on Cooperative Development (authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill) submit an annual progress report and analyze data on cooperatives from the Economic Census.

The bill was referred to the Subcommittee on Commodity Markets, Digital Assets, and Rural Development, subcommittee within the House Agriculture Committee.

The subcommittee had not acted on the bill as of July 2024.

New legislative Act provides uniform guidelines for forming Minnesota housing cooperatives

by **Bennett Smith** Cooperative Network Contract Lobbyist-MN

Housing affordability and access is an ever-present concern for millions of Americans, and one tool that some communities are using to help address this critical workforce need is the formation of housing cooperatives. A new law passed this year by the Minnesota Legislature, taking effect on August 1, 2025, will govern the organization and operation of housing cooperatives, including powers of their boards of directors. Cooperative Network, in partnership with a wide coalition of other stakeholders like Northcountry Cooperative Foundation, was proud to lend support to this legislative effort to ensure more quality affordable housing in Minnesota benefits from the cooperative model.



other statutes in other chapters of state law. The Minnesota Cooperative Housing Act will consolidate all aspects under one chapter of statute (MN Statutes Chapter 308C).

If you don't currently live in a housing cooperative, you might be asking what the advantages are? For a start, cooperative housing models are member-controlled housing that are run through a democratic process. The residents of co-op housing are members, not "tenants." The resident membership elects a board of

directors that governs the co-op, and they make decisions regarding budget planning and building improvements, among other duties. Housing cooperatives are able to operate at cost and only raise rents enough to cover operating expenses each year, as decided by the board of directors. This historically leads to lower rents for residents.

Cooperative housing is no longer just for seniors and students. It has become a useful tool to help slow the curve of ever-rising costs for Minnesotans living on fixed incomes. The cooperative housing approach can be a smart option for many people in many different phases of life. Residents of manufactured home communities are also increasingly transitioning to cooperative ownership models in both rural and urban communities. The new law will create a consistent and supportive framework for cooperative models to grow, providing unique entry points to home ownership and greater community connectivity.

While certain cooperative housing models pre-dated the new Minnesota law, the Cooperative Housing Act, sponsored by Rep. Matt Norris (DFL-Blaine) and Sen. D. Scott Dibble (DFL-Minneapolis), was necessary to provide clarity with a new standalone statutory chapter under which housing cooperatives can be formed.

Even so, if circumstances require it, housing cooperatives in Minnesota could still be formed under previously established cooperative law in the state. The incorporation of housing cooperatives that had existed previously had been governed by agricultural and utility cooperative statutes. The daily operations of housing co-ops were also impacted by numerous

COOPERATIVE HISTORY BRIEFS

In 1857, Wisconsin farmers formed the Dane County Farmers Protective Union and built a grain elevator at Madison. It is recognized as the **first farmer cooperative grain elevator** in the United States. Two grain associations were organized in Illinois 10 years later.

In 1860, the **first association to market fruit** was organized at Hammonton, N.J., and one to market hogs through an auction was formed in Brown County, Ill. Both marketing associations were cooperative forerunners. In 1865, Michigan passed the **first law recognizing the cooperative method for buying and selling**. By 1867, more than 400 dairy marketing cooperatives were in operation in the United States.

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Chaotic conclusion to a legislative session producing a mixed bag of results

by **Bennett Smith** Cooperative Network Contract Lobbyist-MN

The 2024 session of the Minnesota Legislature started in February, a month later than usual. After passing a historic state budget increase into law in 2023, DFL legislative leaders and DFL Governor Tim Walz presented a plan to address a few lingering policy questions that had arisen from the new laws passed in 2023, and pass an ambitious capital investment infrastructure package paid for with the sale of state bonds, otherwise known as “the bonding bill.” Unforeseen political circumstances, partisan gridlock over new budget spending and a lack of serious negotiations on a capital investment package resulted in a mixed bag of results, with some surprising achievements and disappointments as the session closed at midnight on May 20, 2024.

The historic budget increases that DFL legislators had passed in 2023 should have left most of the conversation about state spending in the rear view with the focus for 2024 solely on the size and scope of the capital investment package that traditionally happens in the even year of the two-year legislative biennium. However, GOP legislators who disapproved of that new budget also drew a hard line on spending any new funds, even on public infrastructure.

Outside of capital investment, there was also considerable time spent making fixes to items passed in 2023. Several bills addressing education policy and funding, tax definitions and corrections, school resource officer clarifications, adult-use cannabis law modifications, and a revamp of the previously vetoed Uber/Lyft driver compensation bill all passed and became law in 2024.

Another issue that consumed considerable amounts of legislative time and energy was sports betting. An effort several years in the making made many Minnesotans optimistic that 2024 would be the year that online sports betting would become legal, but this effort also faltered in the final days of the session due to dissenting voices in both the DFL and GOP

caucuses. While sports betting did not become law, the legislature did pass a prohibition on wagering on historical horse racing that became law.

Many who observed the final hours of the 2024 session noted the chaos happening in both the House and Senate chambers. The end of the legislative session is always chaotic, but not to the extent witnessed in 2024. There were several contributing factors.

First, the nearly tied 34-33 Senate made moving any legislation complicated, but particularly in 2024 when members of the DFL majority were not always available for votes. In particular, the springtime arrest of Sen. Nicole Mitchell (DFL-Woodbury) for allegedly breaking and entering the home of her stepmother caused serious legislative delays. Many hours, over many weeks, of Senate floor time were dedicated to the serious ethics questions surrounding Sen. Mitchell. In addition, intense negotiations over the final details of the Uber/Lyft driver compensation bill prevented the Senate from conducting much work during the final weekend of session.

There were, however, numerous other significant pieces of new legislation passed into law in 2024. The legislature resolved the fiscal outcome of the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in ‘Tyler v. Hennepin County’ and paid \$109 million to counties for settlement of disputes around the sale of tax-forfeited property.

Other significant agriculture measures included the reauthorization of the Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation program, the extension of ag fertilizer research program funding, investments in biosecurity measures related to avian influenza, and broadband funding modifications that help state programs work well. Other changes include the MN Housing Cooperative Act, broadband installation safety requirements, increased penalties for straw purchasers of firearms, new energy transmission permitting reforms, and a law banning ‘junk fees’ included in final purchase prices for consumers.

Legislative session resulted in many positive gains for Wisconsin cooperatives

by **Jennifer Wickman** Cooperative Network Government Affairs Director-WI

During a session that made headlines for a record budget surplus, funding for the Milwaukee Brewers stadium, abortion rights, and redistricting, Cooperative Network also successfully advocated for several initiatives and bills important to all our members.

Repealing Wisconsin’s antiquated and anti-growth **Personal Property Tax** was at the top of our list. Eliminating this tax saves Wisconsin businesses over \$200 million in 2024 alone! Next, we joined our partner organizations in lobbying for more money for rural roads, which led to the passage of the \$150 million **Ag-Road Improvement Program (ARIP)**, a program designed to repair and rebuild rural roads primarily used by the agricultural industry. We also asked for increased **healthcare funding** and were pleased to see \$3.1 billion put into health services, including \$387 million more for hospitals, \$195 million for nursing homes, and \$41 million for mental health services.

We advocated for increased funding for **agricultural and environmental programs**. As a result, there were increases in three key areas: \$800,000 per year for meat processor grants; \$300,000 per year for grants to dairy processors; and an additional \$50,000 per year for the Ag in the Classroom Program.

After the state budget passed, we moved on to individual bills that benefit cooperatives:

Telecommunication & Electric Utilities – Wisconsin will receive \$1.1 billion from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for broadband expansion. We helped direct the Public Service Commission to prioritize grants for “underserved areas” of the state, meaning those that do not have reliable fixed wireless service with a minimum download speed of 100 megabits per second.

Electric utilities, like public utilities and municipalities, can now use **ATVs and UTVs** on freeways to conduct emergency repairs. Telecoms and electric

cooperatives also can now equip their ATVs/UTVs with **flashing green lamps** indicating the vehicle is being used to restore or maintain utility service.

Dairy & Farm Supply Cooperatives – The legislature passed several stand-alone bills. The period for **Farm Service CDLs** was extended from 180 days to 210 days. DATCP’s **Farmland Preservation Program** was improved by increasing the amount paid per acreage and decreasing the contract length from 15 to 10 years. **Liquid whey** was included in the 98,000-pound overweight permit limit for liquid milk, which will streamline whey processing into protein powder and other value-added dairy ingredients. Finally, farm supply co-ops can now sell **propane auto-gas** to the public. That means cooperatives can grow their propane business while increasing the use of this clean-burning alternative fuel.

Credit Unions – We supported our friends at the League of Credit Unions and helped pass three initiatives they have long supported into law. High school students (who graduate in 2028 or later) must have one-half credit of personal **financial literacy** to graduate. **Financial Protection for Vulnerable Adults** also passed, which means financial institutions can now act to protect adults they believe are being financially exploited. Finally, the **statutes governing credit unions** were updated. This mostly allows credit unions the same lending opportunities as other financial institutions, i.e. place ATMs and purchase real estate as banks do.

Health Care – The passage of licensure for **Dental Therapists** increased access to providers who can provide dental needs. By petitioning for a federal waiver for **Medical and Mental Health Assistance**, more adults have access to mental health short-term acute care. By joining a multi-state **Counseling Compact**, Wisconsinites can access more professional counselors. And, by creating a **Healthy Food Incentive**, more food-stamp recipients can access locally grown fruits and vegetables.



Great River Energy safety program empowers employees to 'Be the One'

by Rick Hummell Cooperative Network Communications Specialist

Launched earlier this year, the 'Be the One' safety campaign is part of Great River Energy's ongoing commitment to fostering a "safety above all else" attitude within the cooperative. 'Be the One' concentrates on stop-work authority, particularly among employees who work in safety-sensitive positions.

"We have always encouraged employees to speak up and stop work if something doesn't feel right and I am always proud to hear stories of employees stopping work for safety reasons," said Great River Energy President and CEO David Saggau. "There is no project, budget or timeline that is more important than our employees' safety, and this focus on stop-work authority illustrates that commitment." As an added element to the campaign, employees are being encouraged to support other employees when they speak up or stop work for safety.

Employees are also being encouraged to share stories on the cooperative's employee intranet site of times they spoke up or stopped work to keep everyone safe.

With hundreds of employees who work on power lines and in power plants and warehouses where there are higher risks of injuries, speaking up or stopping work at the right time can not only keep employees safe – it can save lives.

Great River Energy employees agree.

"I feel the safety values at Great River Energy are a result of our leadership continuously looking for ways to improve our safety culture," said Justin Wolfsteller, Great River Energy plant operator/technician and foreperson. "Empowering employees to contribute to that culture by knowing they can speak up when

a questionable situation arises, or that they have the power to stop work until a solution can be found to make a job safer, is second to none."

Added Wolfsteller, "The message from our CEO that 'there is nothing that Great River Energy needs from its employees that can't be done safely' is a powerful one that is a strong root to Great River Energy's safety culture."

Tom Huber, Great River Energy supervising manager, substation apparatus, said the campaign "encourages each of us to take ownership of our actions and commit to creating a safer workplace. Every employee has the power to make a significant impact by stopping work for safety concerns that may arise. As a managing supervisor for field technicians, with recent new hires, this campaign provides clarity to our organization's safety culture from day one."

Doug Goodale, Elk River Peaking Station foreperson, said, "We have had many talks about safety with

not just Great River Energy employees, but contractors also, about 'Be the One' to speak up and 'Be the One' to make sure everyone goes home safely to their family.

"When we have a lot of work to be done, speaking up can be viewed as slowing progress sometimes," added Goodale. "But we have created a culture to instead view this as making sure everyone goes home safe. We are never too busy to stop and evaluate the work that is being performed and if there is a better/ safer way of doing a particular job."

Great River Energy line technician Carl Settergren offered a recent example of the safety campaign in action. Arriving on scene with a bucket truck to take down an old transmission line at a structure with limited access, Settergren concluded the area wasn't safe. Because of the steep terrain, the bucket truck couldn't be properly stabilized.

"The truck was not letting us use all functions, due to the level of the truck," Settergren said.



Great River Energy's 'Safety Day' featured speakers and presentations related to best safety practices. (Great River Energy photo.)



Great River Energy's "safety above all else" attitude means many of the cooperative's communications, staff meetings, and events include a safety message. (Great River Energy photo.)

Settergren stopped work and discussed the situation with the crew. They expressed concerns as well. The crew found a new location to place the truck, but additional cribbing needed to be added to keep the truck level and secure. Work was suspended for a few days until the proper equipment was available. Then the crew was able to get the job done and do it safely.

Settergren said he didn't hesitate to speak up and stop work to keep the crew safe.

"I think safety is number one at Great River Energy and all the guys on the crew are on the same page. That makes it easy to stop work if needed," he said.

Great River Energy's commitment to safety is a "24/7, 365 days a year," and many of the cooperative's internal communications, staff meetings, and company events include a safety message.

In fact, in March, Great River Energy hosted a dedicated 'Safety Day' featuring Great River Energy safety administrators, safety training specialists, and invited speakers giving presentations on best safety practices and procedures, including the 'Be the One' campaign.

Approximately 200 Great River Energy employees who work in transmission, power supply, and businesses operations attended the event.

Freeborn Mower's Chevy truck converted to electric!

(Reprinted from Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative's July 2024 County Lines newsletter.)

What do a 1946 Chevy truck and an electric vehicle have in common? Nothing. Or so we thought. In partnership with Riverland Community College (RCC), Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) set out to imagine the impossible and embrace innovation by transforming the oldest truck in the FMEC fleet into an electric-powered vehicle.

Collecting dust in a back corner of the warehouse sat a vintage 1946 Chevy truck that was undrivable. The retired truck was a part of the Rural Electric Association's fleet dating back to the early 1940s. The "what to do with it" question lingered as it felt like the truck represented a small piece of FMEC history that was too special to scrap or offer to a collector. Now, with the help of an automotive professor (who is passionate about electric vehicles) and six students, the truck is fully operational and has the ability to drive a modest 50 miles on a full charge. It will be a great addition to FMEC's parade vehicle line-up this summer.

One might think that swapping out an old 80-horse gas engine for an electric-powered one was an easy feat, but not so much. The modifications necessary to adapt the truck to new modern engine components posed opportunities for the students to solve problems, think critically, and work as a team.

The students worked together on the vehicle for over nine months as RCC Professor Olle Gladso gave the students guidance and direction. "Essentially, we had to start from scratch by removing the old engine," he said. Gladso described it as the "most rewarding, challenging, and at times infuriating" process he has experienced in his teaching career.

However, the reward for the students' hard work and persistence has finally paid off, with the inaugural test drive successfully happening on the last day of school. "The students were thrilled, and it gave them a tremendous sense of accomplishment," he said.

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative was proud to partner with RCC on such an exciting project and looks forward to showcasing the transformed truck at upcoming parades and events around our communities this summer.



Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative's 1946 Chevrolet truck had its gas-powered engine replaced with an electric-powered engine.



Riverland Community College students who carried out the conversion pose with the truck.

Farmward Cooperative's Morgan, Minn. elevator expansion project adds safety, automation

Motorists on State Highway 67 may wonder what a 200-foot crane is doing at the Farmward Cooperative Morgan grain elevator.

It's part of a \$25 million elevator expansion project with safety and automation technology updates that will enable the elevator to operate more efficiently and safely.

Aided by unseasonably moderate winter temperatures and low precipitation, demolition and construction of the Farmward Cooperative Morgan grain elevator project was slightly ahead of schedule early this year.

Farmward Morgan Location Manager Dan Christensen said phase one of the project is scheduled to be complete late this year. Phase two with feed mill receiving and storage upgrades is planned to be complete in mid-summer of 2025. "Initial discussion about the project to determine the elevator future began at least 10 years ago before we decided to do it. The town is excited," said Christensen.

He said the project includes local contractors such as Schaefer Contracting of New Ulm and Mathiowetz Construction of Leavenworth and other firms from Sleepy Eye, Morgan, Springfield, Marshall and Ormsby.

"We'll have more speed and efficiency. Safety is another big aspect of it. Our new main receiving tower will be taller, 167 feet high," Christensen said. "The original (grain elevator) head house (that houses machinery that runs a vertical conveyor belt that

hauls grain up and down) was built about 70 years ago. Two annexes were built a bit later. They served their purpose, but to meet the needs of local patrons with the speed they harvest at nowadays, we had to make a decision to reinvest in our patrons," he added.



As part of the project, grain bins are being moved to new foundations, pictured under construction.

A bean shed was demolished and steel removed from the site early this year, making room for excavation of a boot pit (to house elevating equipment for a grain handling facility). Grain bin moving with the crane is set to take place in mid-June.

"We hope to be operational this year to be able to receive and store grain this year. We will have full automation for hazard monitoring, grain bin temperature sensors, and speed monitors for three million bushels of upright storage at one location. Right now we have to transfer grain between two locations in town," Christensen said. Three new 1,000-bushel receiving capacity pits will be more than two times faster, able to receive 60,000 bushels an hour.

Morgan Farmward Cooperative CEO John Husk ask that anyone interested in checking out project process not enter the construction site.

"We encourage all to park on the opposite side of Front Street or Vernon Ave. along side streets," Husk wrote on the Farmward website.

He explained why the project happened.

"Over the years, the agriculture industry has been an increasing trend of higher yields, larger equipment, and a faster rate of harvesting crops," said Husk.

"As Farmward Cooperative seeks to fulfill its mission of advancing farming for generations, an emphasis to cater to the trending demands in agriculture is vital. Therefore, Farmward Cooperative is excited to announce the construction and expansion of the Morgan grain elevator. Farmward is proud to invest in the community of Morgan and our growers with the Morgan elevator project."

(Editor's note: Reprinted from the June 13 edition of New Ulm, Minn.-based newspaper, The Journal.)



Grain bins in place after being moved to new foundations.

Top honors, growth, retirements, and more

National CooperativeRX marks 20th anniversary

Held in May, the 2024 National CooperativeRx Annual Meeting was a milestone event, marking the 20th anniversary of the organization. With nearly 150 attendees, in-person and virtual, the meeting brought together members, partners, and industry experts to recognize collective achievements, explore the future of healthcare, and discuss artificial intelligence (AI) and what lies ahead for the prescription benefits industry.

Based in Madison, Wis., Cooperative Network member National CooperativeRx is a not-for-profit cooperative providing pharmacy benefits to organizations with self-funded plans. National CooperativeRx works with member groups, traditional health plan sponsors, brokers, and employee benefit consultants to implement custom pharmacy benefit plans.

Minnesota Valley Federal Credit Union earns tops honors

Readers of *Mankato Magazine* and *The Free Press* in July voted Minnesota Valley Federal Credit Union as the Best Bank or Credit Union and 2nd Place in Best Place to Get a Mortgage. Established in 1934 as a member-owned, not for profit financial cooperative, MVFCU has nearly 40 employees, over \$283 million in assets, and provides banking services to nearly 18,000 members in Blue Earth, Brown, Nicollet, Le Sueur, Watonwan and Waseca counties.

ALCIVIA sells HVAC business unit to Action, Hurlburt

In March, ALCIVIA announced the sale of its Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) business unit to Action Plumbing, Air Conditioning and Electric and Hurlburt Heating, AC & Plumbing. The sale included existing operations located in Cottage Grove and Durand, Wis.

ALCIVIA officials said the sale of the HVAC business unit allows the cooperative to focus its growth in the core areas of agronomy, animal nutrition, energy, grain, information technology, and input financing. "Action and Hurlburt have extremely strong reputations in the industry for their expertise, quality of service, and customer care. This transition will

not only ensure the continuation of the high-quality HVAC services our customers deserve, but it will also provide a more focused and enhanced experience given that residential services are their core business," said Jim Dell, ALCIVIA CEO and President. "We are continually evaluating our business strategies to ensure that we provide the best services and products that align with our core business competencies that exceed our members' needs and expectations."

All existing service contracts, contracted installs, and warranties will be honored by Action and Hurlburt, company officials noted.

Norborne Soybean Festival is grand prize winner of 'Hometown Throwdown' contest

The Norborne Soybean Festival in Norborne, Mo. was the \$100,000 grand prize winner of the 'Hometown Throwdown' contest sponsored by Cenex, the energy brand of CHS Inc. The other two finalists, Hayward Musky Festival in Hayward, Wis. and Roseau Fall Harvest Festival in Roseau, Minn., each received \$25,000. The prizes will go toward bringing these unique celebrations to the next level. Launched in October 2023, the contest encouraged local pride by asking individuals and organizations to share what makes their hometown festivals unique. More than 500 festival submissions were received during the entry period from Oct. 3 through Dec. 15, 2023.

As the self-proclaimed "Soybean Capital of the World," Norborne has been celebrating its agricultural roots since 1982. Hosted each August, the Norborne Soybean Festival is a testament to the hard-working, generous, humble people of Norborne. The 100 percent volunteer-run festival features entertainment for all ages, including a soy coin hunt, soy donuts, ag in the classroom activities, and the naming of a new King or Queen Soybean.

Minnesota DOR launches e-Bike rebate program

Designed to reduce the cost for Minnesota residents to buy a new e-bike at eligible retailers, the Electric-Assisted Bicycle Rebate (e-Bike Rebate) program launched in July 2024. The e-Bike Rebate provides a discount of up to \$1,500 on a qualifying e-bike. The discount is 50-75% of a buyer's qualifying expenses,

depending on income. The rebate value cannot exceed the price of the e-bike.

Buyers and retailers must apply to the Minnesota Department of Revenue to take part in the program. Total rebates are limited to \$2 million per year in 2024 and 2025. For more information, visit: <https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/electric-assisted-bicycle-e-bike-rebate>.

The Alliance sees significant growth in membership

From January 2023 to January 2024, The Alliance saw membership grow to over 425 employer-members, an increase of more than 80 employer-members. Based in Fitchburg, Wis., the cooperative provides health coverage to more than 118,000 lives, encompassing 60,000 employees and their families. Alliance officials said employers are increasingly choosing self-funding to manage their healthcare costs while improving benefits for their employees. A wide range of organizations successfully self-fund with The Alliance, including businesses, unions, Taft-Hartley Insurance Trusts, municipalities, and school districts. In the last year, the company saw growth in the following sectors: Construction & Manufacturing, Finance, Professional & Technical Services, Warehousing, Wholesale & Retail, Trade, Public Sector & Schools, Healthcare, Administrative, Food & Other Services, Agriculture, and Mining & Utilities.

Wisconsin state-chartered credit unions report sound first quarter

Wisconsin's 107 state-chartered credit unions continued to exhibit sound financial performance as of March 31, 2024, according to data released by the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI). At the end of the first quarter, total assets for Wisconsin's state-chartered credit unions rose to \$65.5 billion, an increase of \$1.5 billion since year-end 2023. Over the same time period, loans outstanding grew by \$202.4 million, and shares and deposits rose \$1.1 billion. This resulted in a slight decrease to the loan-to-share ratio from 92.40% at year-end 2023 to 90.91%.

In the three months ending March 31, 2024, net worth to assets were at 10.41%; delinquent loan to total loan ratio was 0.69%, a decrease from the year-end ratio of 0.79%; net income was strong at nearly \$87.2 million, 0.54% return on average assets; and growth ratios were all positive. "Even with reduced earnings

through the first quarter, net worth, loans, and savings increased while delinquency experienced a decline to begin the year," said DFI Secretary Cheryl Olson-Collins. "Overall, Wisconsin's state-chartered credit unions are financially stable with a positive outlook, and they continue to serve their members' financial needs."

Co-op Credit Union ranked first in its peer group

Black River Falls, Wis.-based Co-op Credit Union reported in its Summer 2024 newsletter that the cooperative ranked first in its peer group for Return of the Member (ROM) results. The survey was conducted by Callahan & Associates, an independent credit union analyst.

ROM measures the value a member receives through rates received on savings, rate savings on loans, and the credit union's product penetration. Co-op Credit Union's peer group consists of 286 other credit unions within the same asset size range of \$500 million to \$1 billion. This is the third time CCU has been ranked first compared to their peers and is one of four Wisconsin credit unions listed in the top 100 credit unions within the same asset size range.

Boden retires as Blaze Credit Union president/ chief transformation officer

In May, Blaze Credit Union announced the retirement of President/Chief Transformation Officer Dave Dave Boden effective, July 1. The announcement capped Boden's 20-plus years serving Hiway Credit Union, first as its Senior Vice President/Chief Information Officer, then taking the helm as President/CEO in 2013. In January 2024, Hiway's merger-of-equals with SPIRE Credit Union became official, creating Blaze Credit Union. Boden then assumed the role of president/chief transformation officer to help develop and launch Blaze's technology integration projects.



"It's been a privilege to be part of Hiway Credit Union, and now Blaze, and the whole Minnesota credit union community," said Boden. "I have so much and so many people to be grateful for, and it's been an honor to be part of serving our members, and accomplishing some fantastic things working alongside our outstanding teams. My aim before retirement was to stay part of Blaze to assist with our transition, and just a few months in, there is still much

work to do, but we're in great shape! Going forward Blaze is in exceptional hands with our CEO, Dan Stoltz, our talented senior management team, and all of our amazing associates."

Under Boden, Hiway Credit Union experienced significant growth in both assets and members. In addition to overseeing one of the nation's largest mergers, Boden guided Hiway through many significant projects, including the launch of the Hiway Foundation, a branch network expansion, an organizational rebranding, and many critical technology initiatives. He also played a leading role in developing and supporting award-winning diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives; HYPE (Hiway's Young Professionals); and Hiway GPS (Hiway's service standards).

SouthPoint Financial Credit Union opening new location in Buffalo, Minn.

In April, SouthPoint Financial Credit Union broke ground in Buffalo, Minn. on the credit union's eighth full-service location. The new financial center will offer all services of the credit union, plus its three supporting divisions, SouthPoint Home Mortgage, SouthPoint Investment Center, and SouthPoint Insurance Agency. The location also will also feature a drive-thru with ATM, Integrated Teller Machine (ITM) and night deposit for credit union members.

"Today, the need for consumers and businesses to have choices for their financial products and services is great. They also want these delivered in ways relevant to their lifestyle," CEO Jay Gostonczik said. "Our members have built a strong cooperative and this new location in Buffalo will create value for existing and future SouthPoint members."

SouthPoint serves more than 31,000 members and is the 12th largest credit union in Minnesota.

Simplicity's Neillsville location receives Business of the Year honors

Simplicity Credit Union's Neillsville location was awarded Neillsville Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year honors earlier this year. The recognition is given to "a business that shows growth in the community, gives back as much as possible, and presents phenomenal service to anyone who walks through its doors."

Simplicity's first location in Neillsville opened in 2019 inside a renovated home. After three years at the location, the credit union opened a modern new building at the end of 2023 with a goal of providing more service options, including a new drive-thru, to members. Simplicity now has eight branches in Central Wisconsin.

WESTconsin CEO Benrud retiring after 40 years with the credit union

After 40 years at WESTconsin Credit Union, Chief Executive Officer Lora Benrud is retiring in September. Originally starting as a part-time teller in 1984, Benrud worked in several positions, including Vice President-Human Resources and Member Services, and Chief Financial Officer. She was hired as CEO in August 2014, becoming the fourth president in the company's history.



Jim Wookey will replace Benrud as CEO. Wookey began his WESTconsin career in 1994 as a consumer and mortgage loan officer in the River Falls office. He then served as office manager and vice president of the New Richmond and Hudson offices before being hired as chief operations officer in 2011.

WESTconsin Credit Union has 16 locations throughout Western and Eastern Minnesota.

Wisconsin Credit Union League President/CEO Thompson to retire

After nearly 23 years serving as The Wisconsin Credit Union League's (The League) President & CEO, Brett Thompson will retire in December 2024. The League's Board of Directors has begun a nationwide search for a successor.



Highlights during Thompson's tenure include the opening of The League's Credit Union House in Madison, the formation of The Wisconsin Credit Union Foundation, which has now provided over \$1.76 million to promote the wellness of credit unions and the communities they serve, and the development of Reach Business Lenders® to help credit unions source and originate commercial loans.

In addition, Thompson has served on the Boards of the American Association of Credit Union Leagues

(chair), Credit Union House (chair), and the National Credit Union Foundation, as well as CUNA's Executive, Corporate Governance, and Government Affairs Committees. He has received the American Association of Credit Union League's Farley and Eagle awards.

The League will remain an independent association, representing the interests of 111 Wisconsin credit unions and their 3.8 million members.

World Dairy Expo hosting Exporters Workshop on October 3

Cooperative exporters, breeders, veterinarians, and freight providers are invited to an Exporters Workshop at World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wis. on October 3, 9 a.m.-noon. Covering the global dairy outlook, export protocols, certification, financing, and order fulfillment, this event will feature experts from University of Wisconsin-Madison, USDA-APHIS, Export-Import Bank, and Livestock Exporters Association of the USA (LEA). This event is free, but registration is required. Visit <https://forms.office.com/g/ws9nZdCJTW> to register.

CoBank 'Sharing Success' program matches customer donations to charities

Cooperative Network member CoBank launched its annual Sharing Success program on April 1. The \$5 million fund, a cornerstone of CoBank's corporate citizenship efforts, matches donations by the bank's customers to nonprofit organizations in their respective communities.

CoBank established Sharing Success in 2012. Since then, the bank and its customers have together contributed nearly \$86 million to groups such as volunteer fire departments, local schools, and hunger relief programs.

Customers already registered for Sharing Success can log into their existing CoBank.com account to access the application. Those not yet registered will need to complete a brief registration. Once submitted, the customer will receive a verification code via email that will allow them to complete the registration process and begin submitting applications.

Sharing Success will run through September 30 or the point at which the \$5 million fund is exhausted. The electronic application is available on CoBank.com.

TruStage's philanthropic efforts surpass the \$25 million mark

Since 2018, the TruStage™ Foundation Inc. has invested close to \$25.5 million in more than 270 non-profit organizations and social impact projects across the country. The Foundation serves as the philanthropic arm of TruStage, formerly known as CUNA Mutual Group. Most of those dollars have gone to organizations in Wisconsin and Iowa – the states with the largest share of TruStage employees.

In 2023, the Foundation contributed close to \$4.5 million to community partners in Wisconsin and Iowa. Of that, almost \$2.4 million went to Iowa and Wisconsin-based organizations focused on supporting K-12 students through literacy, mentoring, and tutoring. In 2023, The Foundation focused its philanthropic efforts on economic mobility with an emphasis on supporting education and housing, two critical areas which prioritize the most vulnerable or impacted audiences. Roughly \$1.4 million went to organizations dedicated to affordable housing, addressing homelessness and rental assistance.

Allied Cooperative opens new C-Store in Augusta, Wis.

In March, Allied Cooperative announce the opening of a new Cenex convenience store in Augusta, Wis., along Hwy. 12 in front of Augusta High School.

The new store features two fuel islands with four fuel pumps, and traditional convenience store merchandise, plus food services. April Eisenberger, who has been with the co-op for 20 years and served as manager for the Fairchild Convenience Store for the past eight years, is managing the new Augusta store.

Wisconsin grant program supports development of new, existing co-ops

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) is offering grants to support the development of new and existing cooperatives in Wisconsin. Eligible applicants include existing cooperatives operating in Wisconsin; businesses looking to convert to the cooperative business model; and, any group of individuals actively working towards legal cooperative status.

Applicants may use grant funds to cover consulting fees for business planning, feasibility studies, legal

services, and accounting services to help new or existing cooperatives become established or further develop. There is a \$50,000 maximum per grant. A minimum 20 percent cash match of the grant amount is required.

To apply, contact your WEDC regional economic development director (<https://wedc.org/inside-wedc>) or the Office of Rural Prosperity (<https://ruralwi.com>)

Summit partnering in financial literacy program for jail residents

Cooperative Network member Summit Credit Union recently partnered with the Dane County Sheriff's Office and the Black Men Coalition of Dane County to offer financial literacy education in the Dane County Jail. The six-week program provides information on financial basics like budgeting, banking services, emergency savings, and establishing credit.

"A financial literacy program is another step forward in offering true criminal justice reform in Dane County," said Dane County Sheriff Calvin Barrett. "By working with our community partners, we will continue to expand opportunities for programming to provide our jail residents with the tools they need to succeed in the community."

Upon completion, each person receives a certificate and a check for \$240 to begin putting their knowledge to work. The funds are provided through a Black Men Coalition of Dane County grant.

"This program aligns perfectly with Summit's commitment to education and building a more equitable future through many innovative partnerships," said Summit Credit Union CEO/President Kim Sponem. "When you learn how to manage money, you have a life-long skill that can help break down barriers and build a better tomorrow for yourself, your family, and the community. That's empowering."

(Editor's note: The preceding news was compiled from Cooperative Network member newsletters, news releases, and media articles.)

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WISCONSIN PASSES NUMEROUS NEW LAWS BENEFITING COOPERATIVES



In March, Gov. Tony Evers signed legislation making propane autogas available for self-service dispensing by the general public. Previously, autogas could only be dispensed by trained and authorized employees of a bulk storage plant, container charging plant, service station or entity operating a commercial fleet of motor vehicles. Senate Bill 768 removes the restrictions and instead requires devices used for self-service dispensing of liquefied petroleum gases to display signage providing step-by-step directions for fueling a vehicle. SB 768 was one of numerous bills benefiting cooperatives that was backed by Cooperative Network.



Senate Bill 109 allows electric co-ops to operate all-terrain and utility terrain vehicles on most state highways in emergency situations, as other utilities are allowed to do. The law will help electric co-ops, particularly with storm restoration efforts when other roads are impassable by vehicle. Other new laws include: a provision allowing utility trucks to use green lights (in addition to amber lights) to alert drivers to proceed with caution; a bill related to community aid payments when a power plant is decommissioned; and a bill offering 50 percent grants for employers to help pay for Commercial Driver License (CDL) training.



New legislation paves the way for Wisconsin to build out electric vehicle infrastructure. Wisconsin Acts 121 and 122 enable the Department of Transportation to administer more than \$78 million in federal funds to build charging stations along the state's major highways. Federal funds cover 80 percent of the cost. The goal of the program is to ensure a fast-charging bank is available at least every 50 miles on most major highways.



The Wisconsin legislature also approved legislation helping offset costs for community partners to implement the Imagination Library program. Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services, which helped spearhead the legislation, is one of dozens of partners offering the Dolly Parton program, which provides books to children under five to promote reading skills. Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services currently provides books for almost 1,000 children.

(Wisconsin State Legislature photos.)

Infamous for Prohibition, his legislation made cooperatives possible

by **Rick Hummell** Cooperative Network Communications Specialist

As the author of the legislation which enforced Prohibition from 1920 to 1933, Minnesota Congressman Andrew J. Volstead endured years of hatred and scorn, including being labeled “The Father of Prohibition.”

Although his role in writing the legislation that established the nationwide prohibition of alcoholic beverages – legislation derisively known as the Volstead Act – skyrocketed him from congressional back-bencher to international infamy, his most enduring and consequential legislative achievement was the writing, along with U.S. Senator (Kansas) Arthur Capper, of the Capper-Volstead Act.

Passed by Congress in 1922, the Act, often called the “Magna Carta of Cooperatives,” established the legal foundation for cooperatives in the United States. The Act’s provisions remain in effect and unchanged to this day.

Basically, the Capper-Volstead Act gives agricultural cooperatives meeting certain requirements a limited exemption from antitrust laws. It allows producers to form “voluntary associations” to produce, handle, and market their products together, exempting them from antitrust laws. The act also gives the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture the power to prevent these associations from forming monopolies.

The key language of the Act is:

“ . . . persons engaged in the production of agricultural products as farmers, planters, ranchmen, dairymen, nut or fruit growers may act together in associations, corporate or otherwise, with or without capital stock, in collectively processing, preparing



Andrew J. Volstead

for market, handling, and marketing in interstate and foreign commerce, such products of persons so engaged. Such associations may have marketing agencies in common; and such associations and their members may make the necessary contracts and agreements to effect such purposes: Provided, however, that such associations are operated for the mutual benefit of the members thereof, as such producers, and conform to one or both of the following requirements:

“First. That no member of the association is allowed more than one vote because of the amount of stock or membership capital he may own therein, or,

“Second. That the association does not pay dividends on stock or membership capital in excess of 8 per centum per annum.

And in any case to the following:

“Third. That the association shall not deal in the products of nonmembers to an amount greater in value than such as are handled by it for members.”

Before passage of the act, marketing cooperatives were small and struggling; passage of the Act enabled farmers to jointly market their products. The Act, however, prohibits cooperatives from engaging in unlawful business activities such as undue price enhancements, predatory trade practices, and collusion with outside parties.

Volstead, the son of Norwegian immigrant farmers, was born in 1859 in Goodhue County, north of Rochester, Minn. Prior to his election to Congress, he served as Yellow Medicine County Attorney and mayor of Granite Falls, Minn. He served in the U.S. Congress from 1903 to 1923. Prior to his election to Congress he lived in Granite Falls, returning there in 1933 until his death in 1947.

Following fundraising and restoration, his Granite Falls home opened in 1979 as a museum, with displays developed by Granite Falls citizens, the Minnesota Historical Society, and the then-Minnesota Association of Cooperatives.

The museum dedication program reads:

“Although a Congressman for two decades, Andrew J. Volstead was poor at politics. He lacked

the necessary back-slapping qualities. When approached for an interview, he turned and ran from the press. Throughout his 87-year lifetime, he remained very much a private man in public life. But what he lacked in charm, Volstead made up for as one of the greatest legal minds of the country.

“His name personified Prohibition, an era lasting from 1920 to 1933, when the Prohibition enforcement act he wrote dried up saloons from Chesapeake Bay to Seattle. While distillers hired such bright lawyers as Clarence Darrow to battle the law, it proved impervious to challenge in the courts. Repeal to Prohibition took nothing short of a Constitutional amendment.

“Volstead’s greatest legacy as a lawmaker, however, is on behalf of farmers. Before 1922, they had no effective way of bargaining with flour millers and other trusts for fair prices. When wheat growers or dairy farmers got together to market what they had grown through their own cooperative elevators or creameries, they were thrown in jail. “Then chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Volstead assessed the problem and wrote a legal masterpiece, the Capper-Volstead Act, which permits farmers to join together and to bargain for price.” ‘If farmers are going to be successful, it is my judgement that must become successful that way,’ he said.”

In a press release announcing the museum dedication, Edward E. Slettom, executive director of the Minnesota Association of Cooperatives, said, “The Capper-Volstead Act is, without question, the most important piece of self-help legislation for farmers ever to be signed into law.”

The Grange helped pave the way for early U.S. cooperatives

by **Rick Hummell** Cooperative Network Communications Specialist

Founded in 1867, and considered America's oldest agricultural advocacy group with a national scope, the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, known simply as 'The Grange', "quickly became the major thrust behind agricultural and rural cooperatives in America," according to *Co-ops 101: An Introduction to Cooperatives*, a USDA publication.

Old English farm estates, each a complete community, were called "granges" – the basis for the name of the organization.

In 1874, a Grange representative traveled to Europe to gather information about cooperatives, and in 1875 the Grange published a set of rules for the organization of cooperative stores, based on the Rochdale principles. (The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, founded in 1844 in Rochdale, England, was an early consumers' cooperative, and one of the first to pay a patronage dividend, forming the basis for the modern cooperative movement. The Rochdale principles, following revisions, today are known as the Seven Cooperative Principles and they serve as the basis for the worldwide cooperative social and economic movement).

"Local granges organized stores to serve their rural members," according to *Co-op 101*. "They sold groceries and clothing as well as general farm supplies, hardware and agricultural implements. Granges in the South marketed cotton. Those in Iowa operated grain elevators. In Kentucky, they sponsored warehouses for receiving and handling tobacco. California Granges exported wheat and marketed wool.

"As the country recovered from the depression of the 1870s, fewer Granges were organized and many cooperatives went out of business, but the impact of the Grange cooperative movement survives. It demonstrated that the Rochdale type of cooperative, which handled goods at prevailing prices and distributed net savings according to use, offered a sound basis for cooperative efforts in America."

According to the USDA, cooperation flourished during the three decades from 1890 to 1920. As many as 14,000 farmer cooperatives were operating by the end of the period and "were engaged in marketing virtually every farm crop and furnishing supplies and services to their producer-members. Many of today's major farmer cooperatives were formed during this period."

Minnesota, Wisconsin early leaders in the Grange movement

Minnesota and Wisconsin both were early leaders in the Grange movement, thanks largely in part to the efforts of two men who played key roles in developing the movement in their respective states. According to the Minnesota Historical Society, Oliver H. Kelley was born in Boston, Mass. in 1826, the son of a tailor. He left Boston and eventually found his way to Itasca, Minn. where he became a farmer. In 1864, Kelley served as a clerk for the United States Bureau of Agriculture, and the following year he began a tour of the South, collecting facts to aid irrigation and agricultural reconstruction.

During this tour, Kelley began to develop the idea of a farmers' organization, one which would bring the North and South closer together. Meeting in Washington,

D.C., in 1867, Kelley and six associates founded the National Grange and Order of the Patrons of Husbandry. As designed by Kelley, the purpose of each local Grange was to educate farmers and their families, enrich their social lives, and share information on the growing of crops. Granges also offered advice on marketing crops and livestock and setting up producer cooperatives. Together, they aimed to create a social fraternity that united farmers across the country.

Organizing conditions were favorable in 1869, when prices paid to farmers failed to match production costs. Railroads kept the grain transport costs high. Grain elevators controlled the prices farmers received for grain. Kelley envisioned that the state and local Grange subordinates would fight against the railroads, elevators, and other exploiters of local farmers.

By February, 1869, Kelley personally had organized the first State Grange in Minnesota. He served as the first secretary of the National Grange from its founding in 1867 until 1878.

In Wisconsin, the Cottage Grove Grange, located east of Madison where the Grange established a meeting hall shortly after the Civil War, became a leader in the state and national Grange movement. As a community center, it became a significant cultural and social influence for pioneer farm families, according to the Wisconsin Historical Society. The spirited discussions held there focused attention on the expanding importance of agriculture, the rampant malpractices of railroad companies, and the growing national farmers movement.

William R. Taylor, local farmer and Master of this Grange, was elected governor of Wisconsin in 1874. He became a contributing force in the efforts to regulate railroads in the state. Ultimately from these efforts and with the support of Granges throughout the state, the Wisconsin Railroad Commission was established, later to become the Wisconsin Public Service Commission.

These achievements boosted Wisconsin to a preeminent position as national leaders in public utility regulation.

Over the years, many issues and government programs promoted by the Grange have been



"Gift for the Grangers", an 1873 print promoting the early U.S. farmers' organization.

successful including calling for women's suffrage, direct election of U.S. senators, direct primaries, graduated income tax, rural free mail delivery, better country roads, rural electrification, improved education for farm children and college students, extension service, federal farm credit policies, and parity price supports.

Today, the National Grange continues to lobby for farm policies from its headquarters in Washington D.C. The Grange community consists of 150,000 members in 1,700 local chapters across the nation that each serve as the center of rural life in their farming communities. Each local chapter offers a wide range of locally oriented programs and activities like potluck dinners, annual Grange fairs, and community service events. This charitable work is often the focus at local Granges with members giving thousands of volunteer hours and raising millions of dollars for important causes.



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THE SEVEN COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES

1 Voluntary and Open Membership

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2 Democratic Member Control

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are also organized in a democratic manner.

3 Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4 Autonomy and Independence

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

5 Education, Training, and Information

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders – about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6 Cooperation among Cooperatives

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7 Concern for Community

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.