

## **Agricultural Cooperatives Lag in Diversity**

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Women make up around 19% of the board members at S&P 500 corporations, with around 2 women directors on each board. In 2014 nearly 24% of new directors at S&P 500 firms were women. Data on board composition in cooperatives is limited. The best source I have found is a 2014 study by the Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives which examined board composition in 12 cooperative sectors. Women made up just over 3% of board members in agricultural cooperatives the lowest representation of any cooperative sector. Seven percent of the directors at Farm Credit cooperatives were female while women accounted for 9% of the directors at Rural Electric Cooperatives. Both of those cooperative sectors operate in rural America beside agricultural cooperatives. Women account for almost a third of the board members at credit union cooperatives while grocery cooperatives have a higher representation at almost 47%. Arts and Craft cooperative had the highest female representation at 71%,

Cooperatives trail investor owned firms in terms of gender diversity in the board room and agricultural cooperative are clearly behind all other cooperative sectors. As I have discussed in previous newsletters, there are three potential benefits to agricultural cooperatives from increasing diversity in their board rooms: increasing the talent pool, improving strategic management and increasing credibility in relating to the membership.

In my next newsletter I discuss some possible barriers to board diversity.

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