

Make a Resolution to Improve Your Annual Meeting

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One of the reasons we don't keep our New Year's resolutions is that we make too many of them. With that in mind, let me suggest just one resolution for your cooperative in the New Year: Make your annual meeting more engaging! You can start with a better build up. Don't just publicize the meeting time, date and place, give the members a reason to attend. Write a short "tickler" article telling members about something new or interesting which will be discussed at the annual meeting. Take steps to get members involved both before and during the meeting. Consider conducting a simple survey before the meeting with a couple of questions of general interest. For example, ask them they expect weather, commodity prices or insects and disease to be their biggest challenge in the coming year or ask about the age of the oldest running piece of farm machinery. You can also throw in a question you would like to know such as "What is the main reason you attend the annual meeting?" or "What annual meeting format would you find more convenient? During the meeting, hand out index cards and ask a simple question such as "How can the cooperative save you time?" or "Describe what the cooperative can do for you in five words".

Presenting a slide with the survey results or highlighting some of the index card results is a great way to emphasize to keep the meeting focus on the members. You can carry that theme throughout the meeting. Frame the reports around the questions that will engage members. For example, begin the board chair report by summarizing the two biggest challenges facing the cooperative and the two most important accomplishments of the board. The CEO report can begin with the most significant operational change. The key is to emphasize a few key take home messages that the will be of most interest to the membership. Providing members the opportunity to ask any question of the Board and CEO is always a good idea. In case there are no questions, be prepared with a trivia question and answer about the cooperative's history or operations.

Don't forget the follow up publicity. Post some photos from the annual meeting on your webpage, Facebook page and Instagram account. Include a report about the meeting in the cooperative's newsletter. That might be a great place to recap an item from the survey results or index card exercise. You can also thank the members that attended the meeting, remind the non-attendees of what they missed and highlight the next opportunity to be engaged.

With a little imagination, improving your annual meeting is one resolution that you can keep!