

## **Plenty of Room Under the Cooperative Tent**

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October is cooperative month and the time to celebrate the strong network of user-owned and user-controlled businesses that serve almost every sector of our economy. In rural communities agricultural cooperatives along with their rural electric and farm credit cousins are the face of the cooperative business model. These cooperatives have long been vital to rural communities. An individual producer is at a disadvantage in sourcing inputs and in marketing their commodities. Agricultural cooperatives were formed to allow farmers to pool their resources and have access to broader markets. Farm supply, grain marketing and cotton ginning cooperatives continue to serve that role both individually and through multi-cooperative alliances and regional cooperatives.

In urban areas the face of agricultural cooperatives is often focused on organic, locally produced or specialty food products. Just like the founding members of grain and supply cooperative,, small scale producers have formed cooperatives to pool their production, reduce transportation costs and gain access to the market. Small scale producers are increasingly examining processing cooperatives to collectively pursue value-added opportunities. Young professionals are forming worker owned cooperatives finding value in working for a firm democratically controlled by their fellow employees.

Cooperatives take many forms from grain elevators and cotton gins to rural electric cooperatives, credit unions and local foods suppliers. Every form of cooperative creates reasons to celebrate! Member owners have a say in the cooperative operation and share in the profits. Cooperatives operate with a local focus, giving back to their communities and cooperating with other cooperatives. Each sector of the cooperative industry tends to view their form as “a real cooperative” The truth is that any cooperative that is creating value for its members is a “real” cooperative. October is a great time to celebrate our cooperative business model. There is plenty of room under the cooperative tent for both traditional and new cooperatives!

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