

Co-operatives For The Future

By Maggie-Jo Hickson

Co-operatives exist to serve and accommodate their members; fittingly, each member of a co-operative is also an owner. As a member of a co-operative you not only receive quality products and service, but the right to contribute ideas and opinions regarding the business as well. This ensures that the mutual needs of its members are met and supported. In addition to taking care of their members, co-operatives also value the communities they are based in. They support other community organizations and movements in an effort to convey and share their values and principles. These characteristics have helped define co-operatives for generations, therefore it is fitting that the same priorities and values are shared as they move forward. To demonstrate their value to upcoming agriculturalists it is important that co-operatives continue to support the organizations that help develop them as well as continue to expand their markets and serviceability.

To begin, many agriculturalists develop their passion and skills through organizations such as 4-H and Junior Farmers. By supporting these organizations co-operatives have the ability to work directly with their future members and instill their values and knowledge into them. One co-operative that has already begun to work with these organizations is Growmark; Growmark's support for the 4-H Ambassador program in Ontario has been helping develop strong, principled agricultural leaders for over 10 years. By supporting programs like this, Growmark has had the opportunity to share what makes them unique and successful. Therefore, if more co-operatives were directly

supportive of organizations that shape their members, they would be able to demonstrate how they contribute to agriculture and their values.

In addition, improving markets and serviceability will help demonstrate the importance and value of co-operatives to their future members. By building strong markets and high demand for the products of co-operative members, the co-op is showing that they are beneficial to the producer. The Gay Lea co-operative's creation of Nordica Smooth is a great example of expanding markets to increase demand for a product. Nordica Smooth is a cottage cheese that has a yogurt like consistency; this type of product is very unique on the market and is very popular with younger generations. By doing this Gay Lea capitalized on a modern health movement and created a new opportunity for Canadian dairy farmers to sell their product and increase production. Actions like this demonstrate the benefits of a co-operative's ability to work with their members and make things happen. Co-operatives can also use modern technology to improve their service to their members. A great way to do this is through online communication. The ability to use an app or website to keep up to date with the latest stats and share opinions makes co-operatives much more accessible and efficient for younger agriculturalists. Movements like these would connect co-operatives with the next generation of agriculture.

In conclusion, to demonstrate the value of co-operatives to the next generation, it is important to support the youth and continue innovating and improving connections.

Works Cited

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