



2025 Cooperative Impact Report

Building a Better World Through Cooperatives



Cooperatives are Built for Impact

“We’re dedicated to providing safe, reliable and affordable electric service. We’re connected to the communities we serve.”
Rappahannock Electric Cooperative

“Today, we’re over 24 million members strong. Our people still bring joy, value and a shared love of the outdoors to each other and the world. And members still are at the center of our organization, meaning each and every one of us has a voice in shaping the outdoors for today, tomorrow and the next generation.”
Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI Co-op)

“Since our founding in 1934, we have been singularly focused on one thing: providing world-class personal service and financial security to California school employees and their families.”
SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union

“As an integral member of the Farm Credit System, our mission is to serve as a relevant and dependable provider of credit and other value-added financial services and support to agriculture, rural infrastructure and other related industries for the benefit of rural America.”
CoBank

“CHCA stands behind its mission and its ongoing commitment to provide quality care to the residents in the NY Metropolitan area requiring home health care. We strongly believe it is accomplished by investing in the workforce.”
Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA)

“ROC USA was launched in 2008 to make quality resident ownership viable nationwide and to expand economic opportunities for homeowners.”
Resident Owned Communities, ROC USA®

Our mission is to develop, advance and protect cooperative enterprise.

National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International (NCBA CLUSA)



Introduction

The Year of Cooperatives comes at the right time. The United States, along with the rest of the world, is facing new and accelerating dynamics that pose great opportunity, but also great risk. Fortunately, cooperatives, or co-ops, are a community-driven, time-tested and shovel-ready solution to tackle many of today's biggest challenges. As people-centered businesses that operate at the heart of their communities, co-ops are tools people have used for generations to participate in their economies and bring stability and resilience to turbulent times.

When the U.S. economy was shifting toward industrialism in the late 19th century, farmers formed cooperatives to make sure they had access to markets and could own and control more of the value chain. As a result, farmers now own and control some of the most critical businesses that determine their own operations' viability, including electricity and broadband services. In the 1930s, 90 percent of urban households had access to electricity while only 10 percent of farm households did. With a knowledge of the cooperative business model and in partnership with the federal government,

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
.....	
THE POWER OF COOPERATIVES	5
Impact Highlights	6
The Cooperative Business Model	7
Cooperative Values and Principles	8
The Broad Reach of Cooperatives	9
.....	
WHAT CAN WE DO TOGETHER?	14
Access	16
Community Enrichment and Engagement	21
Democratic Governance and Empowerment	24
Fairness and Inclusion for All	27
Growth and Innovation	31
Stability and Resilience	35
Sustainable Development	39
Advocacy Guide	43
.....	
LEARN MORE	45
About NCBA CLUSA	46
About This Report	47

within a generation 90 percent of rural Americans had access to the modern economy through electricity. And within the last 100 years, cooperative financial institutions, including credit unions, have burgeoned. Today, credit unions count more than 140 million Americans in their ranks, ensuring that one in three people in the U.S. have access to affordable, reliable credit.

For generations, Americans have used cooperatives to take control of their economic life. It is time once again for more people and policymakers to turn to the cooperative business model to provide economic opportunity and resilience. Many ordinary Americans—particularly those left behind by a shifting economy and facing the greatest economic and societal barriers—are finding it increasingly difficult to capture opportunities in the face of big businesses that advantage outside investors.

Co-ops offer the potential of scale and ownership so that all people can compete and are included in today's economy. Meanwhile, today's dynamic landscape—whether the changing

nature of work, AI and data ownership or threats to food production—introduce new risks such as economic instability or increasingly severe weather-related disasters. Because cooperative businesses take the long view on behalf of their members, co-ops can provide the security, stability and resilience needed most in this environment. Co-ops are built for this moment.

By showing the power and impact of today's cooperatives, this report points the way toward the role of cooperatives in tomorrow's economy. Based on the sustainability and impact statistics from 70-plus cross-sector co-ops in the U.S., along with impact stories from our members and stakeholders, this report provides new perspectives for public awareness and advocacy work on behalf of cooperatives in 2025 and beyond.

As more people in the U.S. and around the world use cooperatives to meaningfully participate in their economy, we can bring stability, resilience and opportunity to a world full of change. It is time for the cooperative community to come together to ensure more people understand the power of the cooperative business model.



COOPERATIVES BUILD A BETTER WORLD

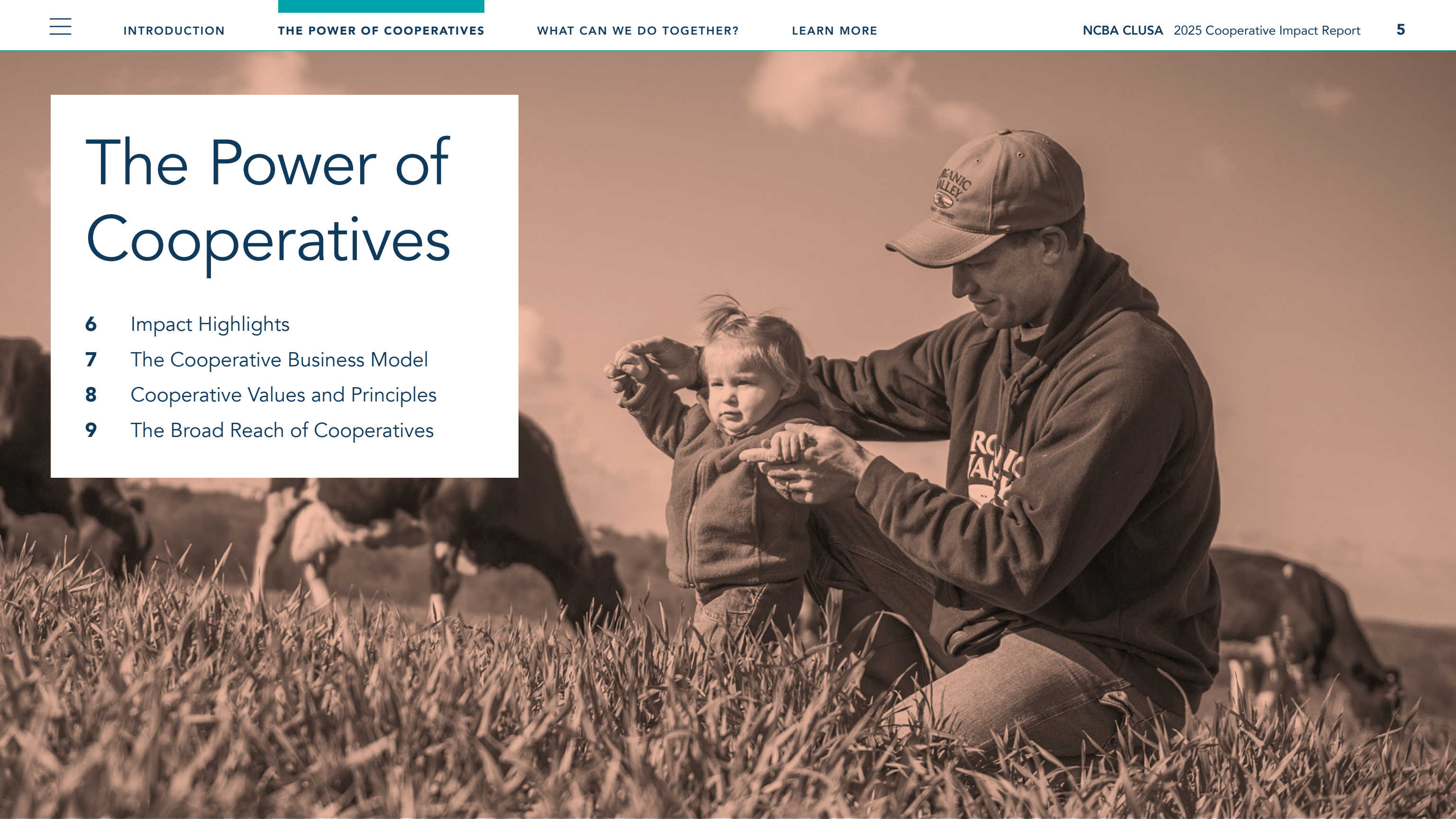
The United Nations named 2025 the International Year of Cooperatives under the theme, "Cooperatives Build a Better World," recognizing the role cooperatives play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. These 17 goals—including zero hunger, gender equity and affordable and clean energy—offer a blueprint for global peace and prosperity by 2030.

Join us during the Year of Cooperatives as we:

- Raise public awareness about cooperative impact.
- Advocate for supportive legal and policy frameworks that enable cooperative entrepreneurship.
- Promote cooperative growth and development through capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and collaborative partnerships.
- Inspire the next generation to join and support cooperatives.

The Power of Cooperatives

- 6 Impact Highlights
- 7 The Cooperative Business Model
- 8 Cooperative Values and Principles
- 9 The Broad Reach of Cooperatives



Impact Highlights



U.S. Cooperatives

65,000+
U.S. co-ops¹

1 in 3 Americans
are members of co-ops²

\$324+ billion
in total revenue from
America's top 100 co-ops
in 2023³



Global Cooperatives

3+ million
total co-ops worldwide

1+ billion
people are members of
co-ops worldwide

\$2.4 trillion
in revenue from
global co-ops



Greater Household Income

Compared to traditional banks, in 2024 credit unions achieved financial benefits off⁴:

\$13.1 billion
in higher savings yields

\$11.2 billion
in lower loan interest rates

\$1.5 billion
in fewer and lower fees

1:1.45
pay ratio in worker co-ops
between lowest and highest
earning workers⁵



Increased Access

250+
electric cooperatives are
leveraging record levels of
federal funding to deliver
broadband to rural schools,
businesses and households

Electric cooperatives
provide electricity to 92%
of the country's persistent
poverty counties

https://www.electric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Strategen_Economic_Powerhouses_Final.pdf

Housing co-ops provide
permanently affordable
housing for more than 1.5
million Americans

<https://betterworld.coop/sectors/sector-housing/>

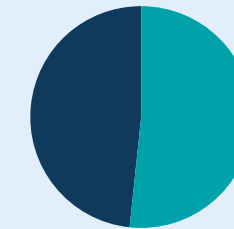


Including Everyone

52%
of Credit Union CEOs are women, 10 times higher than the rate of women CEOs at Banks⁶

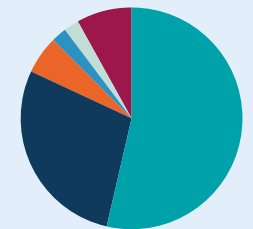
Worker cooperatives show high rates of ethnic, racial and gender diversity⁷

ETHNICITY



■ Hispanic or Latine 51.7%
■ Not Hispanic or Latine 48.3%

RACE



■ White 53.74%
■ Black or African American 28.35%
■ Asian or Pacific Islander 5.42%
■ Native American 2.45%
■ Middle Eastern or Arabic 2.05%
■ Another Race 7.99%

Image source: <https://issuu.com/wearedawi/docs/sots-3> pg 3

¹ <https://ncbaclusa.coop/>
² With 142 million members of credit unions in 2024 within a total population of ~335 million, we estimate that at least 1 in 3 Americans are members of a cooperative.

³ <https://impact.ncb.coop/hubfs/Co-op%20100%202024%20Report%2010.15%20Spread.pdf>
⁴ <https://americascus.widen.net/view/pdf/5ac3d0be-aba6-47c5-8875-aedd7d4e421f/>
⁵ <https://institute.coop/resources/2023-worker-cooperative-state-sector-report>

⁶ Credit Union National Association, "Credit Unions and CEO Gender," Policy Analysis Issue Brief, 2018.
⁷ <https://issuu.com/wearedawi/docs/sots-3>

The Cooperative Business Model

Cooperatives generate long-term positive economic and social impacts in their communities, thanks to their member-owned business model.

What Is a Cooperative?

At its core, a cooperative is a business jointly owned and democratically controlled by a group of people who voluntarily come together to solve a problem or capture an opportunity.

Ways Cooperatives Differ from Other Business Models

Cooperatives put their member-owners at the center of every decision, yielding positive results for co-op members and their communities, ultimately making these businesses more resilient.

MEMBERSHIP AND VOTING⁸:

- Cooperatives are controlled democratically, meaning that each member has one vote, regardless of how much the member uses or invests in the cooperative. The members elect their board of directors and vote on major business decisions.
- Control of other corporations is typically determined by how much a stockholder owns. So, if an outside investor (or a small number of outside investors) owns a majority of the business, then they will control decision-making and reap the majority of the profits—even if they do not actually use the business.

JOB CREATION AND PROSPERITY:

- Members can vote for their own and community interests.
- Decision-making centers on issues such as job creation, living wages and accessible pricing.
- Cooperatives can limit economic inequality and curb inefficient allocation of funds. This ensures a maximum amount of money is invested in the local workforce.

REINVESTING PROFITS:

- Cooperatives share profits at a higher rate than for-profit corporations through patronage dividends to member-owners who live in the community.
- Cooperatives can also choose to reinvest profits into their business or support local suppliers and initiatives, keeping money circulating within the community where the co-op operates.



Cooperative Values and Principles

In 1995, the members of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) adopted the definition, shared values and seven core principles that underpin cooperative businesses. Today, this identity unites 1 billion cooperative members globally.

Cooperative Values

Cooperatives are rooted in the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-op members are also guided by the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Cooperative Principles

The cooperative principles⁹ are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice.

PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION
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. People 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. When cooperatives generate excess revenues, these earnings are returned to members in proportion to their use of the cooperative as patronage dividends or reinvested into the business.
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 cooperative. They inform the general public—particularly young people and opinion leaders—about the nature and benefits of the cooperative model.
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 long-term development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

COOPERATIVES ARE GOING BEYOND THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Some U.S. cooperatives have embraced additional principles that promote fair representation and policies and inspire inclusive work environments. For example, many credit unions,¹⁰ food co-ops¹¹ and worker cooperatives recognize an 8th principle that aims to engage a broader set of members in governance, management and representation.

⁹ <https://ncbaclusa.coop/resources/7-cooperative-principles/>

¹⁰ <https://www.americascreditunions.org/about-us/diversity-equity-and-inclusion>

¹¹ <https://www.ncg.coop/cooperative-values-and-principles>

The Broad Reach of Cooperatives

Cooperatives operate in every sector of the economy, often working together to deepen their impact. In this report, we explore seven common types of U.S. cooperatives. The tables below highlight their main characteristics, impacts and reach, along with representative examples. Together, these businesses positively impact communities across the U.S. and create a network of resources and best practices that can benefit startup cooperatives.

Common Types of Cooperatives

CONSUMER

Overview:

- Businesses owned and controlled by customer-members.
- Food co-ops are a common example. They are independent, community-owned businesses that focus on building regional food systems, creating sustainable jobs and investing in their communities.
- Consumer co-ops operate across various industries, including retail and services.



Impacts:

- Focus on increased competition with higher quality and/or lower prices.
- Offer an enhanced product variety and higher-quality goods.
- Support a more robust local economy through job creation and supporting local producers.

Reach:

- REI is the largest U.S. customer-owned retail co-op with 24+ million lifelong members.¹²
- The 240 food cooperative members of National Co+op Grocers are supported by 1.3 million consumer-owners in 39 states with combined annual sales of more than \$2.6 billion.¹³



ELECTRIC AND UTILITIES

Overview:

- Electric, water and telecom cooperative utilities¹⁴ all operate similarly: their customers are member-owners.
- The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) represents U.S. electric cooperatives.

Impacts:

- Often reinvest their profits into infrastructure to promote affordable and reliable service.
- Partnerships with local organizations support small businesses and create new jobs.



- Leads industry standards for innovation and investment in areas historically not served by private corporations.

Reach:

- About 900 consumer-owned electric co-ops deliver power to 42 million Americans in 48 states, spanning 56% of the nation's landmass and 42% of U.S. electric distribution lines.¹⁵
- Electric co-ops make up 33% of the U.S. electric utility industry, support 623,000 jobs¹⁶ and power more than 22 million homes, businesses and schools.¹⁷
- Electric co-ops contribute approximately \$111 billion to the U.S. GDP annually.¹⁸
- About 260 telephone co-ops in the U.S. serve 31 states and more than 1 million people with \$3.9 billion in total revenues.



¹² <https://www.rei.com/impact>

¹³ <https://www.ncg.coop/about-us>

¹⁴ <https://ncbaclusa.coop/resources/co-op-sectors/utility-co-ops/>

¹⁵ https://www.electric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Strategen_Economic_Powerhouses_Final.pdf

¹⁶ https://www.electric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Strategen_Economic_Powerhouses_Final.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.electric.coop/electric-cooperative-fact-sheet>

¹⁸ https://www.electric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Strategen_Economic_Powerhouses_Final.pdf

Common Types of Cooperatives

FARMER AND INDEPENDENT SMALL BUSINESSES

Farmer cooperatives overview:

- Market or source products on behalf of member-owners who are farmers and small business owners.
- Add value to raw products for economic benefit.
- Sell farm supplies and provide services to their member-producers at competitive prices.
- Receive economic benefits in the form of patronage refunds and redeemed equity.

Independent small business cooperatives overview:

- Negotiate favorable prices, provide marketing campaigns and materials, and offer back-office services.
- Offer cost and quality not available to an independent business.



Impacts:

- Often the main source of community agricultural goods and services in rural areas.
- Create local jobs and improve food security.
- Engage in partnerships with member-owned entities such as electric utilities.
- Pooled resources and experience help achieve higher crop yields and better market prices.

Reach:

- 2 million American farmers are members of more than 2,100 ag and retail purchasing co-ops.
- Farm co-ops generate about \$297 billion in total gross business volume each year.¹⁹
- Nearly 200,000 people are employed by farmer co-ops.²⁰
- Dairy co-ops produce 85% of milk sold in the U.S.



HOUSING

Overview:

- A form of shared equity housing.
- Housing co-op models that own and/or manage real estate include market rate, limited equity and group equity cooperatives.
- Member-residents in market rate and limited equity cooperatives jointly own housing by purchasing shares in a cooperative corporation to secure long-term occupancy rights.
- Limited equity cooperatives restrict resale values and establish income limits for new members, providing permanent affordability.
- Group equity cooperatives are owned by a cooperative corporation that leases units to members who benefit from affordable, flexible housing.



Impacts:

- Reduce the individual costs and risks of members.
- Preserve home ownership affordability, access and stability.
- Improve financial and social capital within historically underserved communities.
- Agency and control of housing management.

Reach:

- 190,000 units of affordable Limited Equity Cooperatives (LECs) in the U.S.²¹
- Co-op City in the Bronx, New York, built in 1973, houses 15,000+ families in 35 buildings, as the world's largest affordable housing co-op.
- 1.5 million families supported with financially stable housing.
- 20+ universities offer student housing co-ops, typically through group equity cooperatives, near campus with a 50% average reduction in annual boarding costs.
- ROC USA® and its affiliates have supported the purchases of 334 manufactured housing communities, preserving 23,161 homes.²²



¹⁹ [RBCS Bulletin 2023_AgCo-opStatisticsOverallSummary.pdf](#)

²⁰ [RBCS Bulletin 2023_AgCo-opStatisticsOverallSummary.pdf](#)

²¹ <https://www.uhab.org/>

²² <https://rocusa.org/our-impact/>

Common Types of Cooperatives

WORKER

Overview:

- A form of employee ownership.
- The business is owned and controlled by worker-owners of the cooperative.
- Workers actively participate in governance, decision-making and management.
- Worker-owners contribute labor and have board voting rights (one worker, one vote).
- Worker-owners have a say in operations.
- Span multiple industries.

**Impacts:**

- Competitive wages and benefits.
- Typically distribute profits based on common factors like job title, hours and salary.
- Transparency in advancement opportunities.
- An average of 4% to 5% higher productivity levels, and more stability and potential for career growth.²³
- Keep benefits in communities, especially when traditional for-profit businesses transition to a worker-owned co-op model.

Reach:

- The number of worker cooperatives has tripled in the past decade.²⁴
- 751+ U.S. worker cooperatives generate over \$483 million in annual revenues.²⁵
- While typically including 5-10 members, some are much larger: New York-based Cooperative Home Care Associates employs 2,000 home care workers.²⁶



MUTUAL INSURANCE

Overview:

- Mutual insurance policyholders/customers are member-owners.
- The National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (NAMIC) represents U.S. mutual insurance cooperatives.
- Mutual insurance cooperatives are at the forefront in shaping industry standards for financial performance, customer service and sustainability.²⁷

**Impacts:**

- Often serve as the backbone of rural economies, providing insurance solutions tailored to small businesses, farms and local enterprises.²⁸
- Excel in claims responsiveness during crises, showcasing their capacity to support recovery efforts swiftly and effectively.²⁹
- Typically pay out a higher share of each premium dollar in claims and claim-related expenses reflecting their dedication to policyholder claims, even in changing market conditions.³⁰

Reach:

- Mutual insurers operate in all 50 states, serving millions of policyholders with coverage across personal, commercial and specialty lines.³¹
- Mutual insurers hold policies for 68% of homeowners, 56% of automobiles and 31% of business insurance sectors in the U.S.³²



Nationwide®



TruStage™

²³ <https://www.nceo.org/articles/research-prevalence-effects-employee-ownership>

²⁴ <https://issuu.com/wearedawidocs/sots-3>

²⁵ <https://institute.coop/resources/2023-worker-cooperative-state-sector-report>

²⁶ <https://www.fastcompany.com/40572926/more-u-s-businesses-are-becoming-worker-co-ops-heres-why>

²⁷ NAMIC, The Mutual Factor 2023 Report

²⁸ <https://www.namic.org/resource/2024-mutual-factor-midyear-review/>

²⁹ NAMIC, The Mutual Factor 2024 Midyear Update

³⁰ NAMIC, The Mutual Factor 2023 Report

³¹ NAMIC, The Mutual Factor 2024 Midyear Update

³² <https://www.namic.org/resource/2023-mutual-factor/>

Common Types of Cooperatives

CREDIT UNIONS

Overview:

- Not-for-profit financial cooperatives serving member-owners.
- Benefits include reduced fees, higher savings on interest and lower loan rates.
- Membership is open to anyone within the institution's field of membership: by employer, geographic location, etc.

Impacts:

- Help meet the needs of people in underserved communities.³³
- Prioritize meeting members' financial needs over maximizing returns for external investors. Revenue is returned to members through dividends and lower interest rates.
- Longer-term focus helps credit unions weather financial uncertainty and economic downturns.

Reach³⁴:

- 4,600+ credit unions serve 142 million U.S. customers.
- Located in almost every congressional district in all 50 states.
- More than 1 million people work at U.S. credit unions.



COOPERATIVE BANKS

Overview:

- Like any other businesses, cooperatives require capital for startup, stability and growth.
- Cooperative banks like National Cooperative Bank (NCB) and CoBank fill this gap. NCB is the only bank in the U.S. dedicated to delivering nationwide banking products and solutions to cooperatives and other member-owned organizations to help communities thrive.
- As an integral member of the Farm Credit System, CoBank provides credit and other financial services that support agriculture, infrastructure and other industries that benefit rural America.

Impacts:

- In 2024, National Cooperative Bank originated \$1.1 billion in new loans serving cooperatives, their members and socially responsible organizations nationwide.³⁵
- CoBank's Co-op Start program has provided nearly \$3.3 million in loans, leases and grants to 32 startup companies and seven cooperative development centers.³⁶

Reach:

- The Farm Credit System provides 46% of financing for the ag sector, including \$121.8 billion for Young, Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged farmers³⁷ and \$18.9 billion in new loans in 2023 to small farmers and ranchers.³⁸



33 [https://media.americascreditunions.org/ext/resources/NewsNow/2022/05-2022/CUNA_WP_CUs_Lead_Improving_FWBFA_May_2022-\(1\).pdf](https://media.americascreditunions.org/ext/resources/NewsNow/2022/05-2022/CUNA_WP_CUs_Lead_Improving_FWBFA_May_2022-(1).pdf)

34 <https://ncbaclusa.coop/resources/co-op-sectors/financial-services-co-ops/>

35 <https://impact.ncb.coop/hubfs/assets/resources/2023%20Mission%20Report.pdf>

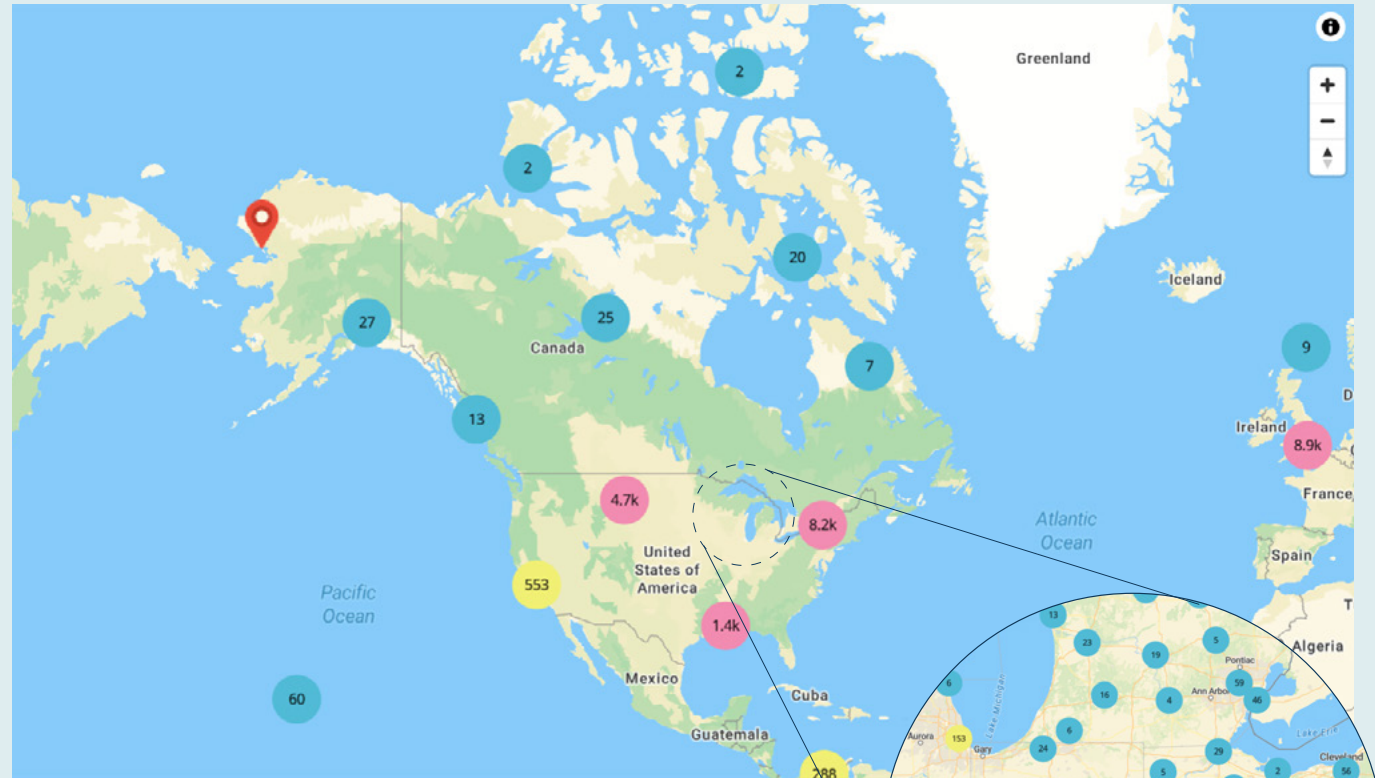
36 <https://www.cobank.com/corporate/sustainability/sustainability-report>

37 https://www.fca.gov/template-fca/about/2023AnnualReport.pdf_pg_48

38 <https://farmcredit.com/about>

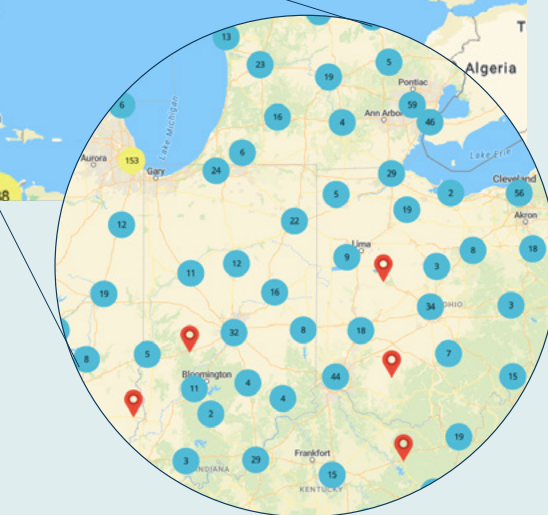
Global Directory of Cooperatives

Estimating the number of cooperatives and their collective impact is getting easier thanks to a new global map of cooperatives developed by DotCooperation. Launched in late 2024, the Cooperative World Map already includes 15,000 cooperatives in North America, and this number is growing as more cooperatives participate. Browse the interactive directory at worldmap.coop, and become a member of NCBA CLUSA or get a .coop domain to be included.



COOPERATIVE ECONOMIC IMPACT IN 2023

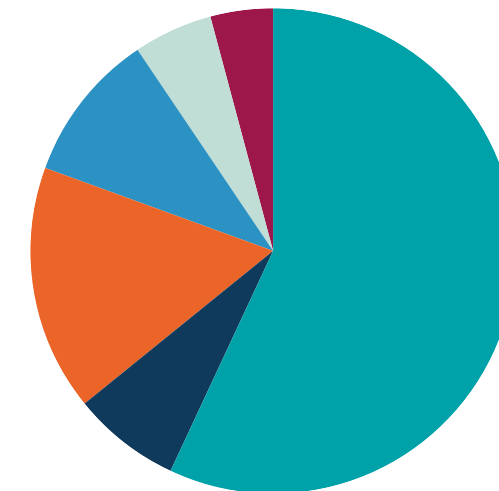
Each year, the National Cooperative Bank publishes its list³⁹ of the top 100 revenue-earning cooperatives in the U.S. based on its membership data. In 2023, these cooperatives earned a total of \$324+ billion in total revenue, which benefited members and their communities.



Cooperative Economic Impact in 2023

Each year, the National Cooperative Bank publishes its list³⁹ of the top 100 revenue-earning cooperatives based on its membership data. In 2023, these cooperatives earned a total of \$324+ billion in total revenue, which benefited members and their communities.

INDUSTRY REVENUE BY SECTOR:



Agriculture (50)	\$183.9 billion	56%
Energy (19)	\$22.9 billion	7%
Finance (18)	\$54.3 billion	16%
Grocery (7)	\$32.9 billion	10%
Hardware (3)	\$17.3 billion	5%
Other (3)	\$13.6 billion	4%

Organizational Support for Cooperatives

Numerous industry-focused associations and other organizations help cooperatives form, grow, address gaps and/or access resources to further scale their impact.

INDUSTRY-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS

- [America's Credit Unions](#)
- [Farm Credit Council](#)
- [Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#)
- [Inclusiv](#)
- [National Co+op Grocers](#)
- [National Association of Housing Cooperatives](#)
- [National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies](#)
- [National Rural Electric Cooperative Association](#)
- [National Council of Farmer Cooperatives](#)
- [National Farmers Union](#)
- [Resident Owned Communities, ROC USA®](#)
- [Urban Homestead Assistance Board](#)
- [US Federation of Worker Cooperatives](#)

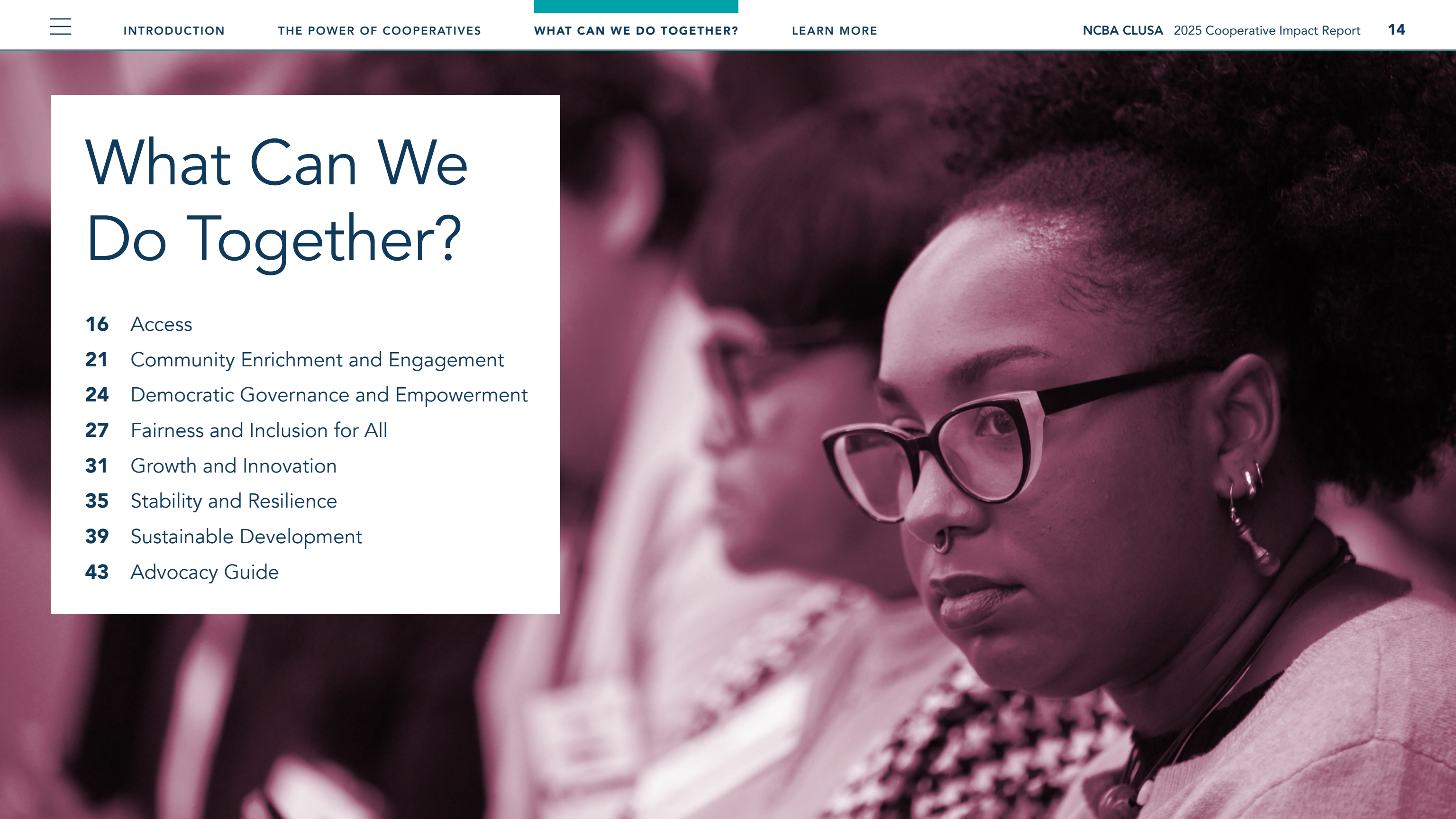
OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

- [CooperationWorks! — The Cooperative Development Network](#)
- [Food Co-op Initiative](#)
- [Start.coop](#)

³⁹ <https://impact.ncb.coop/hubfs/Co-op%20100%202024%20Report%2010.15%20Spread.pdf>

What Can We Do Together?

- 16** Access
- 21** Community Enrichment and Engagement
- 24** Democratic Governance and Empowerment
- 27** Fairness and Inclusion for All
- 31** Growth and Innovation
- 35** Stability and Resilience
- 39** Sustainable Development
- 43** Advocacy Guide

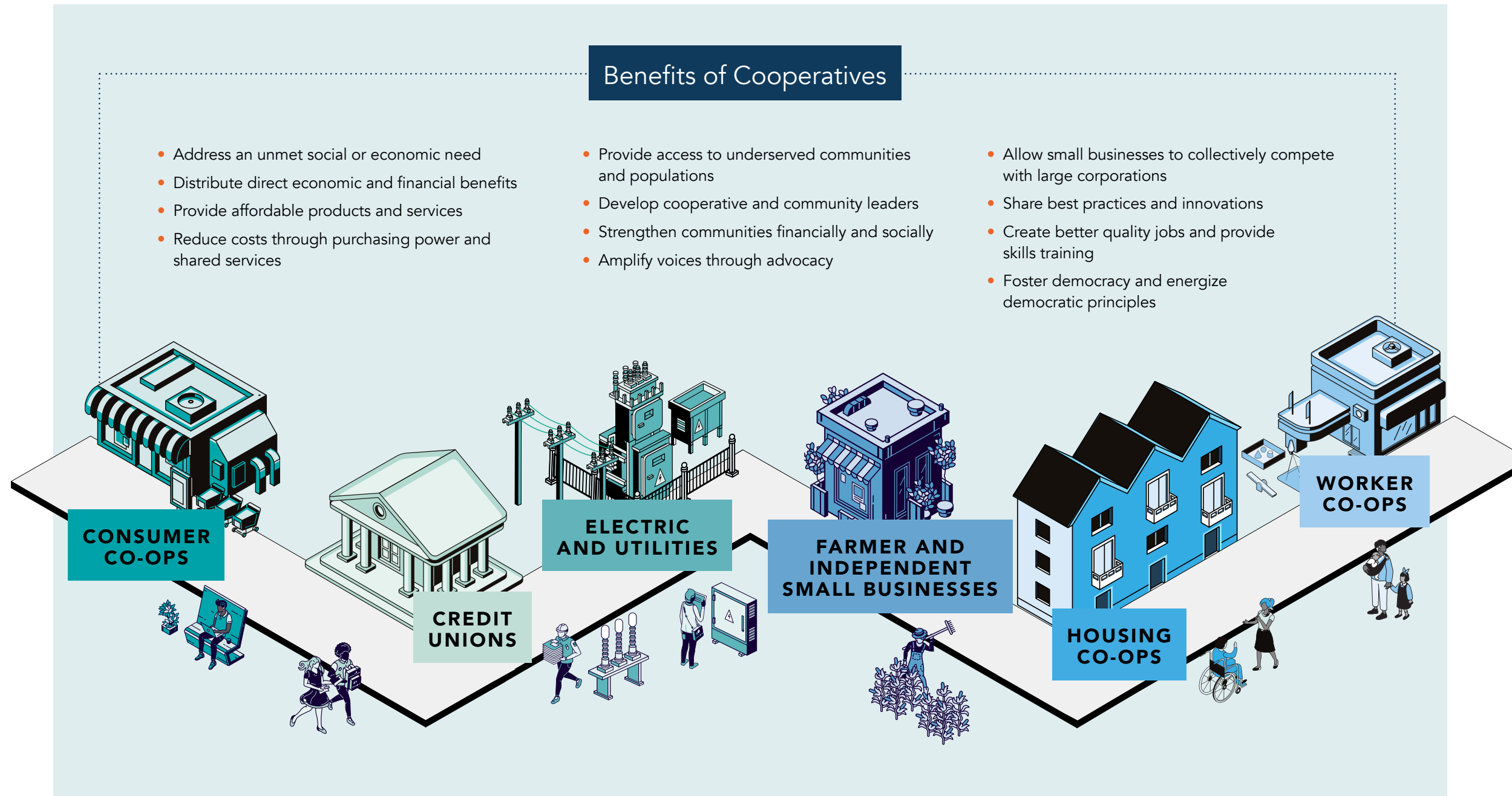


Cooperatives Build Lasting Value

Cooperatives utilize their network of resources, knowledge and services to deliver lasting value to their communities and the economy. Member-ownership prioritizes long-term success and efficient operations, as cooperatives reinvest in their core business operations and communities.

Cooperatives operate effectively in areas with limited access to resources or business networks. They pool resources across cooperative networks, building strength in numbers. Cooperatives help overcome societal challenges, advance long-term prosperity, and develop innovative solutions for job creation, community resilience and protecting natural resources.

In the following pages, we describe the key benefits and positive impacts of cooperatives. In each impact category we highlight a few key sectors that support American livelihoods and prosperity in our communities. We also highlight how cooperatives help achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Led by their principles and values, cooperatives are hard-wired to build a stable and resilient future.



Access

Access ensures broad availability of products and services and affordability to meet universal needs. These include:

- jobs
- food
- energy
- housing
- care
- education
- financial services and lending opportunities, and
- capacity-building in underserved regions and populations.



Introduction: Cooperatives Provide Access Where It's Needed

Co-ops excel at providing access to underserved communities and populations, addressing physical and economic circumstances that limit access. For instance, utility cooperatives provide access to critical electric or broadband services to remote rural areas, while worker-owned cooperatives extend access to jobs for underemployed populations, such as returning citizens, veterans or residents in rural and deindustrialized areas.

Communities benefit from affordable food, housing, childcare, capital and financial literacy, broadband and more thanks to co-ops. In providing this access, co-ops advance global targets defined by the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), contributing to **SDG 1: No Poverty**; **SDG 2: Zero Hunger**; and **SDG 3: Good Health & Well-Being**.

Cooperatives can also access resources from their cooperative networks that wouldn't be available for many individual producers. Agriculture, independent small businesses and purchasing co-ops⁴⁰ pool their resources to help members purchase necessary equipment, inputs and energy. Agriculture co-ops can access specialized financing through the Farm Credit System. Below, we highlight examples of replicable, scalable and measurable impacts.

Electric Co-ops

U.S. electric cooperatives began to address the need for rural electrification in the 1930s.⁴¹

- **1930s:** 10% of rural U.S. population could access electricity.
- **1953:** 90% of rural U.S. population could access electricity.
- **Today:** 99% of farms are connected to power grids.

Policy intervention from the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) led to the Electric Cooperative Corporation Act in 1937, enabling states to establish not-for-profit consumer-owned electric cooperatives. The REA is now the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) headed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Access to broadband internet is a new challenge affecting rural America. In 2022, the FCC adopted a new standard for reliable broadband speeds 100/20 Mbps.⁴⁸

- **Rural areas:** 28% of residents lack 100/20 Mbps broadband internet coverage compared to 7% nationally.
- **Tribal areas:** 23% of people lack the same broadband access.

Once again, electric cooperatives are closing a critical rural access gap by deploying or developing broadband service in their communities.⁴³ Significant investments in broadband have led to record levels of funding for rural broadband expansion, for which cooperatives are eligible.



IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- **250+** electric cooperatives are working to deliver broadband services for rural schools, businesses and households to thrive
- Centranet, a subsidiary of Central Rural Electric Cooperative, was the first broadband provider to test high-speed internet (**50** gigabytes per second) in a Tribal nation home in rural Oklahoma
- Funding opportunities cooperatives qualified for:
 - **\$65 billion** authorized in new resources for USDA broadband deployment through the 2022 Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act⁴⁴
 - **\$350 billion** of Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery funds, including **\$10 billion** in broadband Capital Projects Fund money made available by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP)⁴⁵

Key Impacts: rural access, Tribal access, electricity access, broadband access

⁴⁰ <https://ncbaclusa.coop/content/uploads/2020/09/Farmer-bifold-final-2.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.electric.coop/our-organization/history>

⁴² https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-24-27A1_Rcd.pdf

⁴³ <https://www.electric.coop/issues-and-policy/broadband>

⁴⁴ <https://www.electric.coop/house-passes-infrastructure-bill-with-billions-for-broadband-energy-rd>

⁴⁵ https://www.cooperative.com/programs-services/government-relations/regulatory-issues/Documents/Memo_Amer.Rescue.plan_Cap.Projects.Fund.10.01.2021.pdf

Food Co-ops

In 2023, 13.5 percent of households in the U.S. faced food insecurity.⁴⁶ To prevent rising food costs due to inflation on consumer goods, consumer cooperative grocery stores provide membership benefits that improve access to affordable food.

Consumer cooperatives have historically improved access to quality foods that were unavailable or costly in conventional grocers. In 1844, a group of 28 artisans working in cotton mills in Rochdale, England pooled their resources to access flour and other basic goods at an affordable price. In the 1960s and 70s, cooperatives introduced natural and organically grown foods to consumer markets and jumpstarted access to fair trade products.

Food access issues also stem from a low-density of available food in rural America. Cooperatives are addressing this issue by ensuring locally produced agriculture serves local and rural communities, where the food is grown.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS⁴⁷

- About **3 million** Americans participate as members of approximately **5,000** food cooperatives⁴⁸
- **98%** offer everyday low prices on high-quality groceries⁴⁹
- **39%** of National Co+op Grocer member cooperatives offer needs-based discounts
- **\$5.8 million** total local products sold each year by the average food cooperative (**22%** of sales)
- **169** local farms and producers, on average, supply each food cooperative
- **50** food co-ops support farm-to-school programs in all 50 states and in U.S. territories

Key Impacts: *affordable food, healthy food access, food choice access, local food access, food access in schools, reduced food insecurity*

⁴⁶ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=109895&eType=EmailBlastContent&id=44444444-4444-4444-4444-444444444444>
⁴⁷ <https://www.grocery.coop/article/2023-food-co-op-impact-report>

Credit Unions

Credit unions are champions of working households and small business owners by offering lower fees and interest rates on loans than investor-owned banks. These benefits add up for cooperative members as well as non-members. Credit unions' cumulative financial benefits totaled \$34.7 billion in 2024 with a total benefits-to-tax ratio of 15:7, exceeding the value of the credit union tax status.⁵⁰

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- Compared to traditional banks, in 2024 credit unions achieved financial benefits of⁵¹:
 - **\$13.1 billion** in higher savings yields
 - **\$11.2 billion** in lower loan interest rates
 - **\$1.5 billion** in fewer and lower fees
- Customers can use a network of **30,000** surcharge-free credit union ATMs, a higher amount than at any other bank⁴⁶
- A total of **2,644** credit unions serving limited income customers were reported in 2023 (Q3)⁵³

Key Impacts: *affordable interest rates and fees, financial services access, loan and financing access to limited-income and small business customers*

⁴⁸ <https://consumerfed.org/consumer-cooperatives/>
⁴⁹ <https://www.grocery.coop/article/2023-food-co-op-impact-report>
⁵⁰ <https://www.cuna.org/advocacy/credit-union---economic-data/credit-union-impact-dashboard.html>

Housing Co-ops

Housing co-ops expand access to affordable housing ownership, particularly for limited-income residents. Multiple cooperative members can access a single underlying mortgage. Shared or individual financing opportunities are available, depending on the cooperative housing model. Shared financing of improvements and repairs can also distribute the financial burden of property ownership.

The housing co-op model demonstrates lower loan repayment delinquency compared to traditional mortgages. When compared to single family and multi-family housing loans provided by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, borrowers of National Cooperative Bank housing share loans and co-op blanket mortgages show significantly lower loan payment delinquency rates.

	90+ DAYS DELINQUENT	60+ DAYS DELINQUENT
	Single Family	Multi-family
Fannie Mae	4.08%	0.46%
Freddie Mac	3.50%	0.31%
	Share Loans	Co-op Blanket Mortgages
NCB Co-op Loans	1.88%	0.008%

Source: <https://www.nasco.coop/>

Key Impacts: *housing access for limited-income residents*

⁵¹ <https://americascus.widen.net/view/pdf/5ac3d0be-aba6-47c5-8875-aedd7d4e421f/>
⁵² <https://ncbaclusa.coop/content/uploads/2020/09/CU-bifold-final.pdf>
⁵³ <https://ncua.gov/files/publications/analysis/quarterly-data-summary-2024-Q3.pdf>
⁵⁴ <https://www.schoolsfirstfcu.org/globalassets/pdf/sffcu-community-brochure.pdf>



SCHOOLSFIRST OFFERS SCHOOL EMPLOYEES TAILORED SERVICES

SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union⁴⁸ offers services and loans to address the budgeting requirements of school employees. In 2022, SchoolsFirst ensured members' personal and classroom needs were met through its custom offerings:

- **238,536** members participated in the Summer Saver savings plan, created to help employees set aside money for the summer.
- **13,114** members received Uniform Loans to help purchase uniforms, equipment and other special gear to successfully do their jobs.
- **8,342** members received Classroom Supply Loans to help provide students with educational material they wouldn't otherwise have.

SCALING FINANCIAL RESOURCES THROUGH THE CO-OP NETWORK

The credit union owned Co-op Shared Branch network reaches over 5,444 locations across the U.S., making it the second largest network of financial institution branches in the nation. The Co-op Shared Branch network allows members of one credit union to perform a wide range of transactions at another credit union.

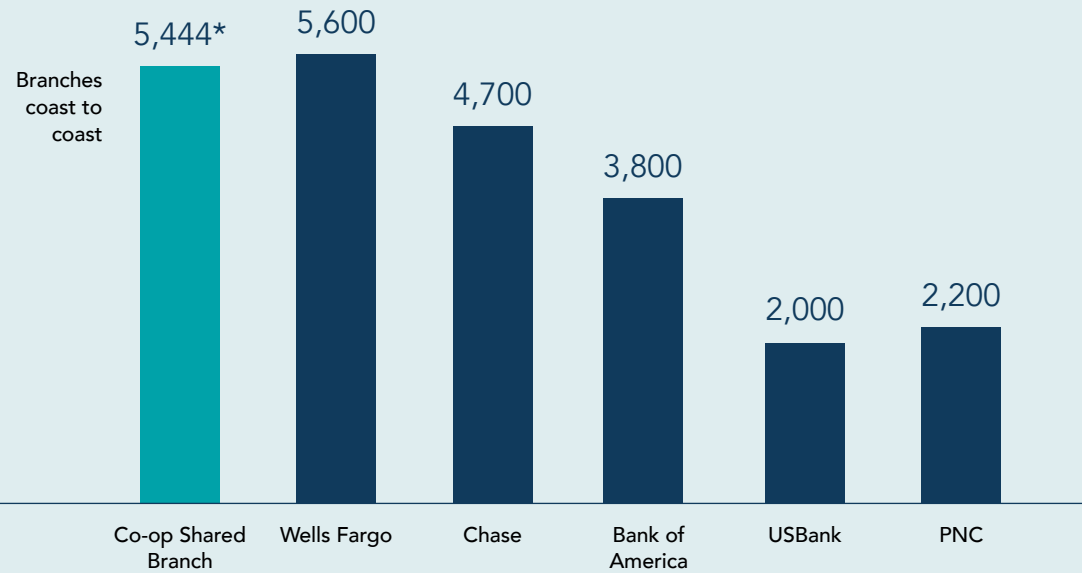
EXTEND YOUR REACH WITH BRANCH TRANSACTIONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY



Approximately half of credit union members have access



62 million credit union members from 1,688 participating credit unions



OUR CALL FOR POLICY ACTION

As businesses owned by and responsive to community needs, cooperatives are a time-tested model to build capacity and close access gaps to universal needs. Policymakers should prioritize cooperatives in new initiatives and existing programs to support locally led economic development.

Cooperative improvements to access and affordability create thriving communities. Policy measures, such as offering direct funding for cooperatives and designating them as eligible entities for technical assistance programs, are key strategies.

*Includes 18 Co-op Shared Branch express self-service locations. July 2024 comparison based on claims located on fdic.gov.

Source: <https://www.coop.org/Solutions/Engage/Co-op-Shared-Branch>

Uplifting the Community: Detroit People's Food Co-op

After a journey of 14 years, Detroit's Black community has a grocery store to call their own—literally. And while the purpose of the Detroit People's Food Co-op is to build power for people of color in the Motor City, all are welcome there.

The co-op opened in May 2024 with hugs, cheers and a few tears of happiness shed at the realization that the long-awaited moment had finally arrived. The community had done it together, with the help of the Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network (DBCFSN) and its executive director and Detroit, Malik Yakini.

Access to affordable, nutritious food is a major issue for Detroit residents, with 69 percent of residents identifying as food insecure in 2020. The number of grocery stores has been on the decline for decades. And in a city where more than three-quarters of the population identifies as people of color, none of the grocery stores that remained were owned by members of the Black community.

The time had come for action, spurred by the vision of Malik Yakini and the DBCFSN. "We decided on the north end because it's predominantly Black and predominantly lower-income, and so we wanted a community that actually had a need, not just a community that had a lot of wealth," Yakini said.

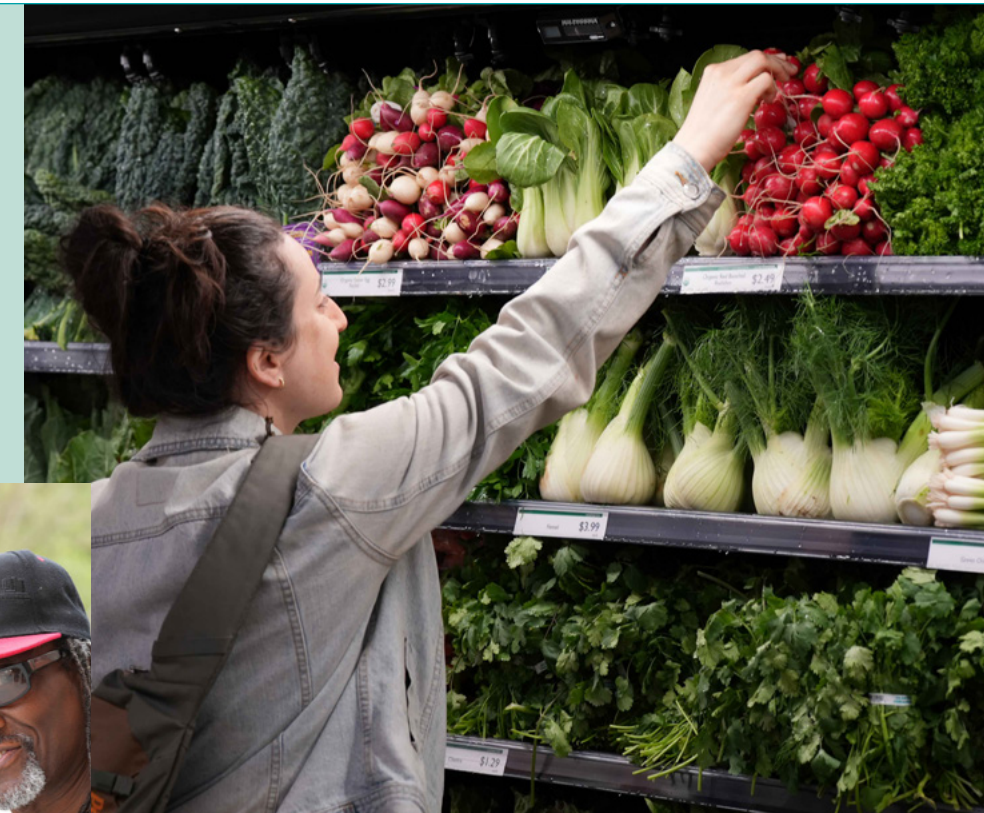
Those circumstances required partnerships: the Detroit People's Food Co-op is housed in a \$22 million building owned by Develop Detroit Inc. and the Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network. Funding for

the co-op includes \$6 million from grants and local philanthropy, \$1 million in gifts—including a notable contribution from a former professional Detroit athlete—and the remainder from loans, including a direct loan from National Cooperative Bank and New Market Tax Credits. Support also came from National Co+op Grocers (NCG), whose 164 member co-ops operate more than 230 storefronts in 39 states with combined annual sales of \$2.5 billion. DPFC is a proud new member of NCG.

"Everything that we're doing is about empowering and uplifting Black people," Yakini said. "Working together is the way we can galvanize our power and our wealth."

Totaling more than 30,000 square feet, the building that houses the supermarket, known as the Detroit Food Commons, does more than just sell good food. Upstairs, there are offices for the DBCFSN, a banquet hall available for community events, and four commercial kitchens suitable for small business owners looking to rent space for food prep.

"Our mission is to help our community become more self-reliant. It's not rooted in making money," Yakini said. "We have to make money to accomplish the mission, but the purpose is not to make money. The purpose is to uplift our people."



"Our mission is to help our community become more self-reliant. It's not rooted in making money."

Joining Hands for Light Up Navajo Project

Allen Bryant waited nearly 70 years for electricity to come to his modest wooden home in the sagebrush-covered Chuska Mountains foothills of Navajo Nation.

Thanks in part to volunteer lineworkers from Colorado's Delta-Montrose Electric Association, a member of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), seven miles of poles and lines now stretch across the lonely landscape to reach the isolated homes of Bryant and eight other families, bringing life-changing power to U.S. citizens who have lived in darkness for decades.

"My mom and dad, they would have really loved it," Bryant says, beaming from beneath his white cowboy hat as he sits on a tiny front porch that shields him from the storm. "There were a lot of promises made to my parents, but my dad lived to be 110, and he never did get electricity. Now, I'm old and gray, and it's finally here. My life just got a whole lot easier."

Bryant and other tribal members in the remotest corners of Navajo Nation would have had to wait at least a decade longer for power if it weren't for the lineworkers from Delta-Montrose and other utilities who came from around the country to volunteer for a project called Light Up Navajo, says Deenise Becenti, the government and public affairs manager for the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA).

Beginning in 2019 as an initiative of NTUA and the American Public Power Association, the project has brought power to about 900 homes in Navajo Nation, an area the size of West Virginia where more than 13,000 of the approximately 56,000 homes do not have electricity.

The number of volunteer crews has grown each year, with 48 utilities—including 16 electric cooperatives

from five states—participating in 2024. Co-ops came from Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Wisconsin. The Navajo utility calls it "mutual aid without a storm."

Tim Brandon, a line foreman for the Montrose-based co-op, says the experience has given him more appreciation for the conveniences of his own life. He has volunteered twice and vows to "come back every year as long as they'll let me."

"You take so much for granted back home, like having power," he says. "It's pretty amazing to be able to help the people out. When we're done, there are people who won't have to haul wood anymore to burn for heat in the winter. They can have electric heaters. It's very emotional to see their reactions when the lights come on after they've been waiting so long."

Sheila Brown, 37, wept as she thanked the Delta-Montrose crew for bringing power to the small house she shares with Allen Bryant's son, Derrick, next door to the family patriarch.

"We watched them putting up poles and hooking up the lines to the house," she says. "That was when we knew it was really going to happen. We're speechless. We're so grateful for the volunteers who left their homes and families to do this and for all the sacrifices that were made to bring this power to us."

"Bless the hearts of these volunteers, who have traveled from all parts of the country to be a part of this initiative that brings such positive change to families," says Becenti, who grew up on Navajo Nation using propane lanterns. "It's for today, tomorrow and the day after that. And for generations to come."



"When we're done, there are people who won't have to haul wood anymore to burn for heat in the winter."

Community Enrichment and Engagement

Community enrichment and engagement means supporting communities in ways that integrate local knowledge, networks and priorities through two-way communication. Support for communities may include job creation, economic growth and providing local cultural or educational resources, as well as assistance through volunteering and donations.

Introduction: Cooperatives Prioritize Local Communities

As member-owned businesses, cooperatives support local economies. They also support local jobs either directly or through their role in preserving Main Street businesses. The impact of those local jobs is amplified with earned dollars flowing back into the communities in which cooperatives operate and their employees reside.

Reinvestment may occur through purchasing agreements with local suppliers, profit sharing or patronage distributions. For example, REI has 24+ million members and invests more than 70 percent of its annual profits back into communities.⁵⁵

Cooperatives also support their communities through their charitable contributions, grants, volunteering and other forms of giving back through initiatives beneficial to their local areas. These initiatives often serve civic, cultural and needs-based purposes within local communities, and support historically underserved communities. Through community reinvestment, the work of co-ops also creates **Decent Work and Economic Growth** (SDG #8) and **Reduced Inequalities** (SDG #10).

Worker Co-ops

Worker cooperatives are often mission-driven organizations with a social, cultural or environmental purpose, often aimed at economic advancement in their communities. Worker-owned cooperative employees⁵⁰ are much more likely to volunteer in their community compared with the general population. The Democracy at Work Initiative (DAWI) estimates that “more than half of worker cooperatives in the United States today were designed to improve low-wage jobs and build wealth in communities most directly affected by inequality, helping vulnerable workers build skills and earning potential, household income and assets.”

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- **1:1.45** pay ratio in worker co-ops between lowest and highest earning workers, compared to **1:344** in large U.S. corporations⁵¹

Key Impacts: *community volunteering, quality jobs, community wealth building, vulnerable community development*

Electric Co-ops

Electric co-ops provide safe, affordable and reliable electricity to their consumer-owners, and they provide electricity to 92 percent of the country’s persistent poverty counties.⁵⁸ Electric co-ops’ core purpose is to provide reliable electricity, which anchors business development and stability within the community. Moreover, their business activities, capital investments and operational expenditures have significant economic impacts on their communities by providing local jobs and safeguarding local investments.⁵⁹

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS (2018-2022)⁶⁰

- **622,832** total jobs per year at the national level, **423,728** of which are local jobs in counties served by electric co-ops
- **\$257 billion** in total labor income nationally, with **\$166 billion** accruing to workers in co-op communities
- **\$111 billion** in contribution to U.S. GDP annually, including **\$75 billion** per year towards gross regional product in local co-op areas
- **\$41 billion** in total federal tax revenues, **\$8 billion** annually; **\$95 billion** in state and local taxes, **\$19 billion** on an annual basis

Key Impacts: *local job creation, community labor income, local GDP, local tax contributions*

Food Co-ops

National Co+op Grocers (NCG), a network of 165 food co-ops in the U.S., donated more than \$12 million to local community organizations in 2023. One of the primary aims of this giving is to address access disparities within the food system. Other ways food co-ops enrich their communities include sourcing from local producers and creating stable, rewarding jobs.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- For every **\$1,000** spent at a food co-op, **\$1,604** is invested back into the local economy⁵⁵
- Food co-ops create **9.3 jobs** per **\$1 million** in sales, compared to **5.8** at traditional grocery stores⁵⁶
- Food co-ops pay employees about **7%** more than grocery stores for the same work⁶³

Key Impacts: *local reinvestment, job creation, quality jobs*

55 REI Co-op, “Who we are,” 2020, rei.com/about-rei

56 Laura Hanson Schlachter, University of Wisconsin, “White Paper: Preliminary Analysis of the Worker Co-op Census Data”, Democracy and Work Institute, November, 2017.

57 <https://institute.coop/resources/2023-worker-cooperative-state-sector-report>

58 https://www.electric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Strategen_Economic_Powerhouses_Final.pdf

59 <https://www.electric.coop/electric-co-ops-support-nearly-623000-jobs-contribute-111-billion-to-u-s-gdp-annually-report-finds>

60 https://www.electric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Strategen_Economic_Powerhouses_Final.pdf

61 “You are the Co-op Difference.” ICA Group, 2017. Commissioned by National Co+op Grocers.

62 “You are the Co-op Difference.” ICA Group, 2017. Commissioned by National Co+op Grocers.

63 Ibid.

Housing Co-ops

Data shows that housing co-op residents participate in neighborhood organizations more and live in neighborhoods longer compared with low-income renters, giving them a vested interest in the vitality of their communities.

A survey⁵⁸ of almost 500 buildings in New York City found higher levels of social capital in co-ops than in any other form of affordable housing. Housing cooperatives in the study were also consistently found to provide the safest, highest-quality housing.

Key Impacts: *community stability and safety, low-income community housing*

Credit Unions

Credit unions support financial literacy and economic advancement within their communities through tools, resources and lending opportunities. Many credit unions focus on engaging vulnerable populations within their membership, such as immigrants or young people, helping them enter the workforce.

Through credit unions, members enjoy higher home ownership rates for lower-income members and stronger credit scores resulting from credit builder and other capacity-building programs. Credit unions provide over \$34.7 billion in financial benefits annually while generating more than \$36 billion in federal and state tax revenue.⁶⁵

Key Impacts: *financial literacy engagement, engagement with vulnerable populations, community focused capacity-building*

OUR CALL FOR POLICY ACTION

Cooperatives are innovative and nimble businesses owned by members of a community. In line with cooperative principles, they reinvest in local economies while contributing to shared prosperity. The federal tax code recognizes the direct economic benefits cooperatives provide to their member-owners through patronage dividends.

As policymakers look to incentivize and spur growth in communities, they should support federal and state tax initiatives that recognize how cooperatives are meeting the needs of today in areas such as cooperative conversions to preserve Main Street America, energy reliability, broadband deployment, financial services, agriculture and housing.



LENDING CAPITAL TO LMI COMMUNITIES

In 2023, National Cooperative Bank (NCB) made loans and investments totaling \$558 million to benefit low-and moderate-income (LMI) families and communities. Around 42 percent of NCB's portfolio is comprised of loans serving low-and moderate-income communities and co-op development.

CHICAGO WORKER COOPERATIVE DEVELOPER COHORT

Each year, DAWI's Chicago Worker Cooperative Developer Cohort equips 12 cooperative leaders with the essential tools, knowledge and networking to foster long-term sustainable cooperative growth and enrichment in underserved and low-income communities. In collaboration with the Chicago

Community Wealth Building Initiative at the University of Illinois in Chicago (UIC), the program prioritizes strengthening the local cooperative ecosystem and wealth-building.

SILVER TSUNAMI: SMALL BUSINESS CONVERSION TO WORKER CO-OPS

Small businesses across the U.S. are experiencing a wave of ownership changes as their aging owners retire.⁶⁶ There are 2.9 million U.S. businesses generating \$6.5 trillion in revenue each year with owners aged 55 and above, and they support 32.1 million at-risk jobs, since owners may need to close or sell their businesses to new ownership. The worker-owned cooperative model is a sound succession strategy by providing employees the opportunity to become worker-owners and ensuring small businesses continue to support their local communities.

64 <https://ncbaclusa.coop/content/uploads/2020/09/Housing-bifold-final.pdf>

65 <https://www.cuna.org/advocacy/credit-union-economic-data/credit-union-impact-dashboard.html>

66 <https://project-equity.org/impact/silver-tsunami/>

Serving Economic Security: ChiFresh Kitchen

ChiFresh Kitchen, a food service business in Chicago,⁶⁷ harnessed the worker cooperative model to address food insecurity, prepare healthy meals and enhance the economic security of its formerly incarcerated members. Despite opening during the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis, they promptly began paying a living wage (\$18/hour and a minimum of 32 hours per week) and benefits.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the longstanding problems that marginalized, low-income communities have faced for generations. For returning citizens—especially those who are Black women—economic hardship is even more severe. Even before the pandemic, 43 percent of formerly incarcerated Black women were unemployed. That’s compared to 35 percent for formerly incarcerated Black men, 23 percent for formerly incarcerated white women, and 18 percent for formerly incarcerated white men. In addition, the vast majority of formerly incarcerated women experience homelessness or return to unsafe housing with abusive partners.

To minimize risk during a recession, the founders of ChiFresh Kitchen wanted to specialize in an industry that was relatively recession resistant. Food and food service provision has historically been one of these industries, so ChiFresh Kitchen’s strategy was to specialize in preparing and delivering daily meals for schools, nursing homes, after-school programs and community organizations.

They modeled the business after City Fresh Foods of Boston, a Black-owned social enterprise. They also drew

inspiration from Spain’s Mondragon Corporation and lessons from initiatives like the Evergreen Cooperatives of Cleveland and the Arizmendi Cooperatives in the Bay Area of California.

ChiFresh also adopted the “anchor institution” approach used by the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland. Put simply, they are using a business model that primarily contracts with large, local institutions with significant purchasing power. However, unlike the Evergreen Cooperatives, which focused primarily on hospitals and some universities as its primary anchors, ChiFresh contacted an expanded list of anchors, including the YMCA, city and county government agencies, Meals on Wheels, and more.

The innovators of ChiFresh saw numerous problems in the way that local food is sourced and in an economy that unjustly excludes people from earning enough to live the dignified lives they deserve. By advancing meaningful change for formerly incarcerated Black women, they open up opportunities for everyone. We all benefit when barriers to employment are removed.

“It has been a life-changing event,” says worker-owner Kimberly Britt. “I was told I would not have opportunities upon release. But now I’m a business owner.”



“It has been a life-changing event. Now I’m a business owner.”



⁶⁷ Excerpted and adapted from a story by Greg Irving, with research by Camille Kerr and collaborators

Democratic Governance and Empowerment

Democratic governance involves transparency and representation of a broad constituency in decision making, while democratic empowerment enables individuals to make informed voting decisions and actively advocate on behalf of their communities or other shared interest groups.

Introduction: Cooperative Principles Lead to Advocacy

Founded on democratic principles, cooperatives empower their members to actively participate in cooperative governance and/or broader local, state or national advocacy. Cooperatives use their strength in numbers at the membership association level to effect policy changes that advance their goals.

Member-owners of cooperatives are more likely to be civically engaged, participate in co-op governance (board service, etc.) and vote in local and national elections—qualities that strengthen their businesses, communities and ultimately American democracy. Cooperative development in the U.S. and around the world illustrate what democracy looks like in action.

By promoting democratic governance and empowerment, cooperatives contribute to **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions** (SDG #16), while cooperative training in leadership, governance and other skills contributes to **Quality Education** (SDG #4).



Electric Co-ops

The Co-ops Vote⁶² initiative by America's Electric Cooperatives is a non-partisan project designed to inform co-op voters on key issues facing electric co-ops, promote voter registration and encourage them to support their co-ops and the communities they serve when they cast their ballots. The initiative focuses on eight issues that are important to communities served by electric cooperatives⁶³:

- rural broadband access
- hiring and honoring veterans
- low-income energy assistance
- cybersecurity
- water regulation
- rural health care access
- affordable and reliable energy
- renewable energy

Key Impacts: *civic engagement*

Food Co-ops

National Co-op Grocers (NCG) advocates for federal policies that ensure more people can participate in the food system—whether they be small farmers or low-income families. In 2023, NCG coordinated a consumer call-to-action campaign to ask Congress to include 35 pieces of legislation promoting food co-op priorities related to local food and farming, equity and food justice, hunger and nutrition, climate action and organic agriculture.⁷⁰

Key Impacts: *policy engagement and advocacy*

Farmer Co-ops

Farmer cooperatives have a long-standing history of policy advocacy led by the National Farmers Union (NFU).⁷¹ Founded in 1902, NFU was founded by ten family farmers as the Farmers Educational Cooperative Union of America in Point, Texas. Throughout the 20th century, NFU advocated for numerous policies that have been adopted including:

- 1940s: championed permanent school lunches
- 1966: founded Green Thumb (now known as Experience Works) to secure employment for low-income and older workers
- 1970s: advocated for expanding rural health systems
- 1982: advocated to shift a portion of the military budget to humanitarian aid
- 1990: advocated for the standardization of organics
- 2002: helped establish country-of-origin labeling as part of a coalition of 165 farm and consumer groups

Today, it represents 220,000 family farmers and ranchers in 33 states through 24 state and regional divisions, and NFU continues to embrace cooperation as one of its three core principles.

Key Impacts: *policy engagement and advocacy*

68 <https://vote.coop/>

69 <https://otsegoec.coop/co-ops-launch-non-partisan-voter-engagement-program>

70 https://partnerconnection.ncg.coop/download/file/NCG_Food_Co-op_Impact_Report_2023.pdf

71 <https://nfu.org/about/>

Worker Co-ops

The U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives⁶⁶ acts as the national advocacy vehicle on behalf of all worker cooperatives. Its mission is to represent the interests of worker cooperatives and promote workplace democracy before federal agencies and elected officials. In 2021, it launched its Worker Ownership State Advocacy Fellowship (WOSA) to equip and support worker-owners as advocates and spokespeople for worker co-op initiatives, particularly in their home states.

Key Impacts: *policy engagement and advocacy*

Housing Co-ops

Boards of directors in housing co-ops are democratically elected. This gives their directors a much greater ability to make and enforce house rules than boards of tenants' associations of renters, or even condominium association boards. This democratic governance approach has proved meaningful, especially for low- and moderate-income residents who may otherwise have limited influence, depending on the protections for tenants in their local area.

Key Impacts: *democratic board elections*



CENSUS ENGAGEMENT BY CO-OP CITY IN THE BRONX

In 2020, just 49 percent of New York City residents filled out the census, about 10 percent lower than the national average of 60 percent. But in Bronx's Co-op City, 70 percent of residents participated.⁷³ Co-op City is the world's largest cooperative housing complex with 15,000+ residential units and approximately 50,000 residents.⁷⁴ It even runs its own TV station and publishes a newspaper, the Co-op City Times. Active civic engagement through these channels encouraging residents to fill out the census likely contributed to the high turnout. Filling out the census is important for receiving governmental funding designated to groups of people based on the specific needs of their communities.



BOARDREADY LEADERSHIP TRAINING AT AFRICAN AMERICAN CREDIT UNION COALITION (AACUC)

In 2022, AACUC launched an annual leadership development program opportunity for its members: BoardReady Training.⁷⁵ By supporting the leadership development of young professionals, mid-career professionals, employee resource groups, emerging leaders and mentorship programs, among others, the training prepares participants to serve with impact on credit union and other nonprofit boards within their communities.



ADVOCACY THROUGH REI'S PEOPLE POWER NETWORK

REI has leveraged its strength in numbers to advocate for political causes that align with its mission-led purpose.⁷⁶ It seeks to advance climate action, protect the outdoors and national monuments, and close access gaps to nature and outdoor spaces. In 2023, 230,000 people in REI's network sent 800,000 messages to elected officials across federal, state and local governments, helping to secure eight historic wins for the outdoors, including:

- Protecting nearly 1 million acres of Tribal lands in the Grand Canyon National Park
- Local e-bike incentives in Minnesota and Atlanta, Georgia
- More than \$1 billion in funding for parks and conservation in Texas and South Carolina

⁷² <https://www.usworker.coop/programs/advocacy/>

⁷³ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2020/05/19/co-op-city-succeeds-with-census-while-much-of-nyc-struggles-what-s-its-secret/>

⁷⁴ <https://www.coopcity.com/aboutus/#history>

⁷⁵ <https://www.aacuc.org/boardready-training/>

⁷⁶ <https://www.rei.com/impact/society#government-affairs>

Democratic Worker Control: Cooperative Home Care Associates

Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA) was founded in 1985 as a worker cooperative with 12 home health aides in the Bronx, New York.

While the average worker cooperative is small, worker co-ops range in size. With more than 2,000 employees, CHCA is the largest worker cooperative in the U.S. The co-op was established to give home care workers a chance to maximize wages and benefits, access training opportunities and build ownership equity. Along with all of that comes a tremendous sense of empowerment in an industry where workers are typically caught in the care sector's cycle of race-to-the-bottom.

Ninety percent of CHCA's worker-owners are women of color, and workers reside primarily in the neighborhoods they serve. Workers earn about twice the market rate and enjoy guaranteed hours. This makes for a turnover rate that is typically a third or less of the rest of the industry's staggering turnover rate, which reached nearly 80 percent in 2024.

With their voice assured in the cooperative's governance structure, the worker-owners are empowered not only to own and run the company, but also to assert their right to negotiate with their managers and public agencies from a position of power. To ensure access to benefits and establish a grievance process, CHCA joined the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1199 in 2003. Together CHCA and SEIU have put pressure on the broader care industry in NYC, raising wages and training standards across the board.

Empowerment and education often go hand-in-hand. Together with Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI), a nonprofit founded by CHCA in 1992, CHCA offers free training for over 600 low-income and unemployed women annually and serves as a significant driver of employment in the Bronx. PHI also works to raise standards of care and to advocate for better policy.

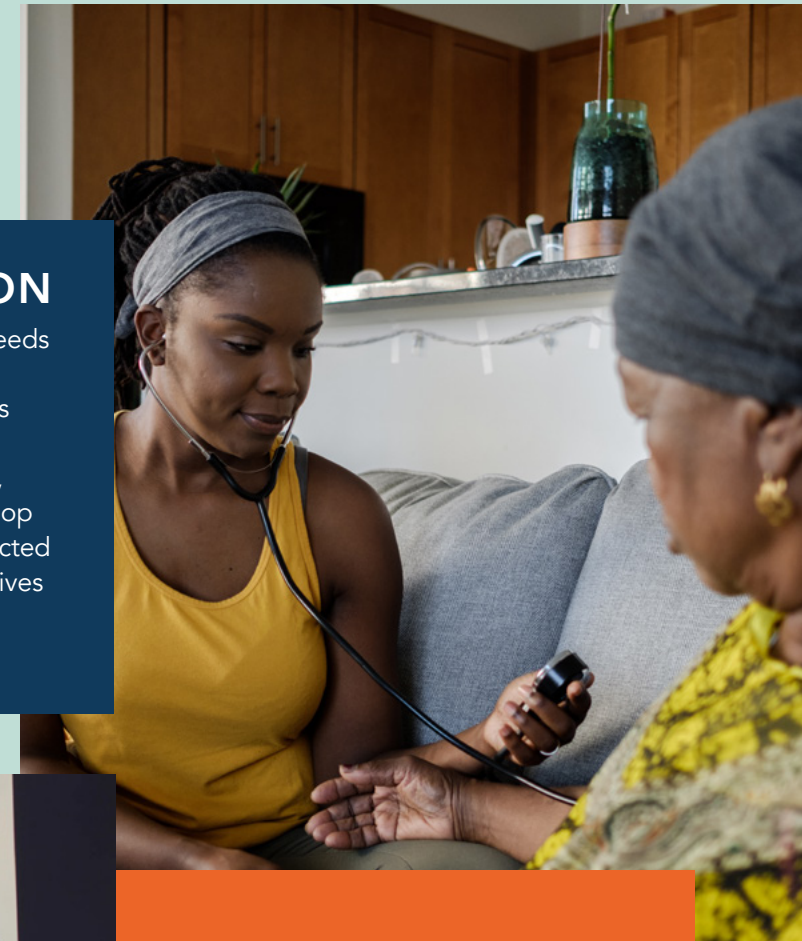
CHCA workers, in fact, receive twice the legally-required hours of training, have case managers who can help them navigate childcare and other needs, and are assigned a peer mentor to help them manage the complex in-home needs of their clients.

At a recent event celebrating the co-op, when caregivers were asked to think about what worker ownership meant to them, their responses included empowerment, democratic control and a sense that their voices matter.

CHCA's initial 12 home care providers believed that the happiest workers in the business could provide the best care in the business. As CEO Adria Powell, whose mother was one of those original founders, says, "If you create a quality job, that's the way you will create quality care."

OUR CALL FOR POLICY ACTION

Cooperatives are deeply invested in representing the needs of their communities and reflect this through their civic engagement and policy-focused advocacy. Policymakers should prioritize co-ops because evidence suggests member-owners are more likely to be civically engaged, vote and pursue democratic governance principles. Co-op members form strong and fruitful partners with their elected officials by bringing their community-centered perspectives to help policymakers find and implement solutions to challenges locally and nationally.



"If you create a quality job, that's the way you will create quality care."



Fairness and Inclusion for All

Fairness ensures people and communities have the same opportunities, regardless of their background—especially when it comes to ownership, decision-making and employment. Anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies, as well as fair competition between small businesses and large corporations, further support fairness. In the workplace, fairness and inclusion for all involves creating a culture where everyone feels welcome and respected and has the tools they need to succeed. More broadly, it means an economy in which everyone can fully participate.



Introduction: Reducing Inequalities Through Shared Purpose

Cooperatives often promote greater economic participation through mission-led activities serving communities and members who have faced economic or other discrimination. Many cooperatives have a mission to serve rural areas, Tribal lands or low-income communities.

Whether Amish dairy farmers in Wisconsin or Latin American families in the Bronx, the democratic control of cooperatives ensures that all voices are heard through members' active participation. This is often reflected in the demographics of cooperative workforces and leadership. In their efforts to build a better world, cooperatives directly contribute to **Gender Equality (SDG #5)** and **Reduced Inequalities (SDG #10)**.

Resource pooling is another strategy cooperatives use to promote economic fairness. For instance, small farmers face significant challenges competing with large, global agriculture businesses, but the co-op business model helps them pool resources, share risks and access bigger markets. This helps farmers reduce costs and improve efficiency, while fostering stability.⁷⁷

Credit Unions

Community Development Credit Unions (CDCUs) target communities that are underserved by other financial institutions. CDCUs fight inequality through high-impact products such as payday lending alternatives, microloans, credit builder loans and financial counseling. There are more than 300 CDCUs serving over 10 million members in the U.S., concentrated primarily in locations where poverty rates exceed 20 percent and/or median incomes are below 80 percent. All credit unions count at least some low-income communities among their membership, and many have followed the lead of CDCUs by adopting more inclusive policies and products.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- **52%** of credit union CEOs are women, **10 times higher** than the rate of women CEOs at banks⁷⁸

Key Impacts: *servicing low-income customers, women's representation in leadership*

2023 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE GRANT RECIPIENT HIGHLIGHTS⁷²

- **Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (RMFU)** – Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) recipient (\$200,000).
 - **Objective:** Provide technical, financial and educational assistance to new and existing cooperative businesses and projects.
 - **Regional focus:** Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming
- **Keystone Development Center (KDC)** – RCDG recipient (\$200,000).
 - **Objective:** Advance KDC's mission to improve the economic condition and quality of life of rural communities through cooperative development.
 - **Regional focus:** Rural Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey and Maryland
- **North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives** – RCDG Recipient (\$200,000).
 - **Objective:** Provide technical assistance to local food systems and healthcare providers, and leading economic and cooperative development.
 - **Regional focus:** Rural communities in North Dakota
- **Montana Cooperative Development Center (MCDC)** – RCDG Recipient (\$200,000).
 - **Objective:** Support rural cooperatives and mutually owned businesses with technical assistance.
 - **Regional focus:** All 56 of Montana's counties and eight sovereign Tribal nations

⁷⁷ <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/the-crucial-role-of-farmer-cooperatives-and-why-active-participation-matters>

⁷⁸ <https://ncbaclusa.coop/blog/usda-announces-2023-rural-cooperative-development-grant-and-socially-disadvantaged-groups-grant-awardees/>. The recipients highlighted are members of NCBA CLUSA.

⁷⁹ Credit Union National Association, "Credit Unions and CEO Gender," Policy Analysis Issue Brief, 2018.

Food Co-ops

Food co-ops' Inclusive Trade Program promotes products from companies certified to be at least 51 percent owned, operated and controlled by women, veterans and other underserved groups. In 2023, National Co+op Grocers added and promoted 35 more Inclusive Trade partners in their Co+op Deals program. In total, 47 Inclusive Trade brands were featured in Co+op Deals, generating \$8.4 million in promotional sales.⁸⁰

Key Impacts: *inclusive trade*

Worker Co-ops

The Democracy at Work Initiative (DAWI) has committed to surveying worker cooperatives on their diversity. Its 2023 Worker Cooperative State of the Sector Report shows that worker co-op membership is more than 51 percent Hispanic/Latino, 28 percent Black or African American and 17 percent other non-white racial origins. Meanwhile, women make up 74 percent of worker co-op membership.⁸¹

With noticeably higher gender, racial and ethnic diversity compared to national averages, worker co-ops are advancing pay equity across demographics. The largest worker-owned cooperative in the U.S. has a workforce (and ownership base) comprised almost exclusively of Latina and African American women, a population not otherwise highly represented in business ownership.

Key Impacts: *equal pay, diverse membership, diverse ownership*



HOUSING CO-OPS REDRESS REDLINING IN NEW YORK

The Urban Homestead Assistance Board (UHAB) in New York City began in the 1970s to address racism in the housing rental market and by property developers.⁸² It preserved 30,000 units of affordable housing to reorganize as resident-owned cooperatives. UHAB's work almost exclusively serves Black and Latino households. Despite living in some of the lowest income neighborhoods in New York City, these cooperative members govern some of the city's most successful, affordable housing projects, providing high quality, affordable resident-controlled housing for decades.⁸⁴



PATH AHEAD VENTURES INVESTS IN FOUNDERS OF COLOR

REI's Path Ahead Ventures provides full-spectrum support to startups and accelerate entrepreneurship. Since 2021, it has focused on founders of color, recognizing the unique challenges they face in the outdoor space. REI has committed \$30 million by 2030 to empower founders of color who face significant disparities in funding. Meanwhile, just 0.13 percent of total capital allocated to U.S. startups went to Black founders in Q3 of 2023 and less than 1 percent of total venture funding in 2023 went to Latino-founded companies.⁷⁸



NCB LOANS \$3.25 MILLION TO INNOVATIONS FINANCIAL CREDIT UNION

In 2024, the National Cooperative Bank (NCB)⁸⁵ closed a \$3.25 million subordinated debt loan to Innovations Financial Credit Union. Innovations is a low-income designated (LID) credit union and community development financial institution (CDFI) established in 1952 in Panama City, Fla. NCB has been providing subordinated debt loans to low-income credit unions for the past nine years, as part of its mission and vision of "people helping people," said Bill Stewart, NCB's senior vice president and credit union market leader.

⁸⁰ <https://www.grocery.coop/article/2023-food-co-op-impact-report>

⁸¹ DAWI, 2023 Worker Cooperative State of the Sector Report. 2023.

⁸² <https://www.uhab.org/about-us/history/>

⁸³ <https://ncbaclusa.coop/content/uploads/2020/09/Housing-bifold-final.pdf>

⁸⁴ <https://techcrunch.com/2023/10/20/black-founders-received-0-13-of-capital-this-q3/>

⁸⁵ <https://www.thenews.coop/us-national-cooperative-bank-loans-3-25m-to-florida-credit-union/>

Halal Meat Production in Sight: Five Pillars Butchery

A new halal meat production and processing food system in Maine is one step closer to becoming a reality thanks to the support of the Cooperative Development Institute (CDI) and new funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Rural Development.⁸⁶

There are two components behind this new halal meat food system in the state: 1) developing a cooperative of local livestock producers and 2) building Maine's first, exclusively halal-certified, USDA-regulated slaughter and processing facility.

In December 2023, the USDA awarded CDI \$65,150 to help Five Pillars Butchery, an immigrant-owned business based in Unity, Maine, form a cooperative of local livestock growers. CDI used the funds to provide training and technical assistance including developing consistent pricing schedules to generate enough cash flow to grow and meet processing requirements, outreach to confirm state and federal food safety requirements, and working with a consultant called FarmSmart to conduct market and feasibility studies.

In July 2024, the USDA Rural Development agency awarded Five Pillars Butchery \$2.7 million to build a halal slaughter and processing facility in Unity to process the meat produced by the cooperative. The butchery estimates that the facility will process 20 cattle and up to 60 sheep and goats per week, once it is at full capacity.

Five Pillars Butchery expects to reach full capacity by 2028. Once at full capacity, they estimate that more than \$2 million in sales will flow back to farmers in the cooperative. This growth will increase farmers' ability to reinvest in farm infrastructure, hire more employees, and contribute to a viable and sustainable agricultural sector in Maine.

"This investment demonstrates the continued commitment USDA has made to build a better, more inclusive food system," said USDA Rural Development Maine State Director Rhiannon Hampson. "We recognize that food is fundamental to creating 'home' for so many. This award helps us to be more welcoming to new neighbors, and to support generational Mainers in accessing culturally appropriate food and markets—a win all around for the state of Maine."

"We are motivated to not only supply the Muslim and immigrant communities of Maine and Northern New England with quality local products, but we are happy to support regional farmers in gaining access to the rapidly growing halal food market, which has a projected growth rate of over \$8 billion dollars by 2028. We see it as a win-win for both our community and Maine farmers," said Kathryn Piper and Hussam Al-Rawi, owners of Five Pillars Butchery.

"Despite the recent growth of Muslim and other immigrant populations in the region, there are no local sources for these culturally relevant processed meat products," said Katherine Bessey, Director of CDI's Cooperative Business Services Program. "There is a need to develop an equitable local food production system in Maine that provides access to culturally relevant food, such as halal slaughtered meats. Maine farmers need a variety of tools to create a sustainable industry. By forming a cooperative to pool resources and expand markets, Maine's farmers, producers, sellers and consumers will all benefit."



"We see it as a win-win for both our community and Maine farmers."



⁸⁶ Story by CDI, reprinted with permission: <https://cdi.coop/five-pillars-butchery-unity-maine-usda-rural-development/>

Reclaiming Rural Black Wealth: Federation of Southern Cooperatives

Land is one of Black farmers' most significant and valuable assets. Black farmland ownership peaked in 1910 at 15-19 million acres and has decreased to fewer than 3 million acres today. The causes of rural Black land loss are numerous and complex, but none is more notable than heirs' property.

Heirs' property is land or real estate that is passed down through generations without a will or other formal estate planning, or land inherited with a will that divides real estate equality among all heirs. It's often considered an unstable form of ownership because heirs may not have clear titles or marketable rights to the property. Today, it is estimated that over 60 percent of all Black-owned land is heirs' property.

The Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund is a cooperative association of Black farmers, landowners and cooperatives in the U.S. South with a focus on cooperative economic development, land retention and advocacy. Today, the federation represents 20,000 families through 75 cooperatives and community-based groups.

"We're the only African American organization—or any organization—focused on cooperative development and land retention through organizing co-ops and maintaining the land base," says Cornelius Blanding, who serves as executive director of the federation.

For over five decades, the federation has provided education and technical assistance to thousands of heirs' property owners across the South, reversing the trend of Black land loss and encouraging land-based economic development.

Shared Capital Cooperative, a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) loan fund that provides financing to cooperative businesses and housing throughout the U.S., has partnered with the federation on the Heirs' Property Relending Program. With more than four decades of experience making loans to cooperative enterprises, Shared Capital focuses on businesses organized by low-income and other economically marginalized communities that have been excluded from access to capital from other sources.

"This kind of collaboration doesn't happen every day, in other organizations," Blanding emphasizes. "The cooperative principle of cooperation among cooperatives is a key ingredient in creating an inclusive economy."

The work is crucial. "In 1910, there were 218,000 Black farmers who owned around 15 million acres of land," Blanding says. "In 1992, the Census Bureau counted only 18,000 Black farmers, owning a little over 2 million

acres of land. A Civil Rights Commission report said that we were losing Black land at a rate of 1,000 acres a day, and if that pace continued, there would be no more Black-owned land by the year 2000."

"The Federation set out to make sure that prediction did not come true," Blanding concludes. "We have really been dealing with land loss in our community as a matter of economic justice, and using the co-op model as a tool for that."

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS⁸¹

In 2023, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund:

- worked with **10,000** Black farm families
- helped **124** landowners retain **8,019** acres worth more than **\$27 million**
- assisted **2,892** Black farmers, landowners and cooperative members and community stakeholders with agricultural and financial literacy training

Key Impacts: *servicing low-income communities, land retention*

OUR CALL FOR POLICY ACTION

Cooperatives exist across all facets and sectors of our nation's economy and, by design, serve the needs of their members and communities. They allow small players to compete with large corporations by aggregating their purchasing power, provide higher wages and training opportunities for workers, and create opportunities to meet basic needs where individuals would otherwise be unable to access resources.

As policymakers look to support underserved groups such as rural communities, veterans, low-income and working-class neighborhoods, people leaving incarceration, parents with children or families with aging members who need of affordable, high-quality care, the cooperative business model should be prioritized.

Growth and Innovation

Economic growth describes how an entity increases the amount and improves the quality of the goods and services it sells. Innovation relates identifying, developing and scaling new solutions in the form of products, services, processes, technologies and more.

Introduction: Cooperatives Spur Growth and Innovation

Cooperatives show historic economic growth trends similar to their for-profit counterparts. Economic growth, however, is not their sole impact. Alongside economic benefits, cooperatives grow community capacity and networks by innovating. These innovations include adaptive capacity, new financing models, product diversification, partnerships and advancements in technology.

Many cooperatives are launched to respond directly to needs within a given community. Through this targeted approach, cooperatives enhance economic growth, infrastructure and community well-being in rural America and other underdeveloped communities. By contributing to **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG #9)** and **Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG #8)**, cooperatives are leading solutions-oriented entities.



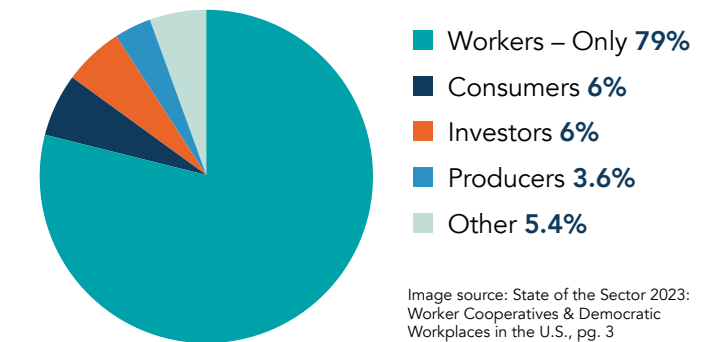
2024 CO-OP INNOVATION AWARDS RECIPIENTS⁸²

- **Commongrounds Cooperative** (Traverse City, Mich.) (\$50,000)
- **Community Purchasing Alliance Cooperative** (Washington, D.C.) (\$50,000)
- **Montana Cooperative Development Center** (Great Falls, Mont.) (\$20,000)
- **Red Emma's Cooperative Corporation and Red Emma's Education Fund** (Baltimore, Md.) (\$50,000)

Launched in 2015 by Capital Impact Partners and sponsored by National Cooperative Bank, the Co-op Innovation Awards⁸³ invest in cooperatives that are transforming their communities into strong, vibrant places of opportunity.

Worker Co-ops

The Democracy at Work Institute (DAWI)'s 2023 Worker Cooperative State of the Sector Report⁸⁴ shows that worker cooperatives are innovating their business models. In the most traditional sense, worker cooperatives are businesses designed to provide direct benefit to their worker-owner members. However, one in five worker cooperatives reported having multiple member classes, indicating innovation within the field. They are including new member classes to broaden their stakeholder groups to producers and consumers as well as including investor members to allow for additional financing.



IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- **60%** of worker co-ops have formed since 2000, and 31% formed since 2010⁸⁵
- Worker-owned co-ops are two-thirds more likely to succeed than the average U.S. company⁸⁶
- Worker-owned co-ops enjoy **5%** higher productivity levels than traditional businesses⁸⁷
- Converting to employee ownership from for-profit models boosts profits by as much as **14%**, while also improving wages⁸⁸

Key Impacts: innovative business models, for-profit conversion to employee ownership

88 <https://impact.ncb.coop/hubfs/Co-op%20100%202024%20Report%2010.15%20Spread.pdf>
 89 <https://www.capitalimpact.org/programs/co-op-innovation-awards/>
 90 <https://issuu.com/wearedawi/docs/sots-3>
 91 <https://institute.coop/sites/default/files/resources/Ecosystem%20Report.pdf>

92 Abell, Hilary. "Worker Cooperatives: Pathways to Scale" The Democracy Collaborative, 2014.
 93 "Investing in Worker Ownership." Democracy at Work Institute
 94 <https://cleo.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Employee-Ownership-Research-with-Cover-Page.pdf>

Housing Co-ops

Housing cooperatives provide an array of innovative financing and shared equity ownership models that can address low-income housing shortages. These include market rate housing cooperatives, leasehold cooperatives, limited equity cooperatives, community land trusts, resident-owned communities (ROCs), and hybrid arrangements.

The benefits of innovation within housing cooperatives are diverse. One study found that cooperative ownership was positively associated with building quality, better safety and security, and more evidence of pro-social norms. Members reported improved social capital, life satisfaction, sense of personal safety and happiness after moving into a housing cooperative, all of which contribute to their economic well-being.⁹⁵

Key Impacts: *innovative home financing models*

Credit Unions

Credit unions experienced a wave of small business loan growth from 2007-2018, including growth in the number of small business owners who used credit unions to start or acquire their business. This share grew from 2.4 percent in 2010 to 6.3 percent in 2016.⁹⁶ In 2019, the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) and U.S. Small Business Administration signed a memorandum of understanding, highlighting the importance of collaboration between credit unions and small businesses.⁹⁷ Continued interest in ensuring small-business friendly loan policies is underway at the NCUA, as it entered a three-year agreement with the Export-Import Bank of the United States to raise awareness about opportunities for small businesses.⁹⁸

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- Credit unions⁹³ doubled small business loan volume from 2010 to 2020

Key Impacts: *small business loan growth*

OUR CALL FOR POLICY ACTION

Cooperative growth and innovation produce ripple effects in the form of lasting economic benefits. Policymakers should support the growth of cooperatives through capacity building and flexible funding measures for cooperative development. Extending and expanding enabling legislation such as tax policies or direct funding opportunities for cooperatives ensures the positive, targeted impacts they produce are economically viable while preserving a fair, competitive landscape with for-profit peers.

⁹⁵ https://web.archive.org/web/20180425023515id_/http://reic.uwcc.wisc.edu/sites/all/REIC_FINAL.pdf

⁹⁶ <https://www.cuinsight.com/the-important-partnership-between-credit-unions-and-small-businesses/>

⁹⁷ <https://ncua.gov/newsroom/press-release/2019/ncuasba-partnership-will-help-credit-unions-support-small-businesses>

⁹⁸ <https://ncua.gov/newsroom/press-release/2020/ncuaexim-bank-partnership-will-help-credit-unions-support-small-businesses>

⁹⁹ <https://ncbaclusa.coop/content/uploads/2020/09/CU-bifold-final.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ <https://greatriverenergy.com/power-generation-resources/co-ops-register-virtual-power-plant-in-regional-capacity-market/>



VIRTUAL POWER PLANT INNOVATION AT GREAT RIVER ENERGY

Great River Energy and its 27 cooperative members have launched programs to improve the energy efficiency of its existing energy resources. This technical approach to minimizing energy consumption uses data analytics and machine learning to deliver the right amount of energy from the right source at the right time. It involves stabilizing energy demand and supply imbalances that can lead to excessive energy consumption peaks. Using load-shifting approaches with a “virtual power plant,” or digital electricity demand forecasting and planning technology, the electric co-op added more than 140 megawatts to the Midwest capacity market in 2023.⁹⁴



RESOURCE POOLING FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT: CCA GLOBAL PARTNERS

Formed in 1984, CCA Global Partners helps independent businesses pool resources for purchasing, marketing, insurance and financing. Today, CCA Global members have over 2,800 locations and 14 different business lines from carpeting to bicycles, making them one of the largest cooperatives in the country. The CCA Global family includes Carpet One Floor & Home®, Lighting One® and Flooring America.

Innovative Purchasing Cooperative Model: CARE Pharmacies

CARE Pharmacies is committed to representing their members' interests, supporting their growth and helping them provide superior patient satisfaction. A member-owned and operated cooperative of independent community and retail specialty pharmacies, CARE offers a full range of programs and services designed to meet the dynamic needs of the independent owner-operator. Their goal is to create unparalleled value for their members.

The company was founded in 1960 when a group of like-minded community pharmacists decided to work collaboratively to leverage their collective size and clinical expertise. The group called themselves Circle Drug and it would take nearly four decades for the CARE Pharmacies of today to emerge.

The secret to CARE's success lies within its unique operating model—a purchasing cooperative that enables CARE members to take full advantage of the logistical and operational efficiencies of a chain while maintaining their unique identity as an independent owner-operator.

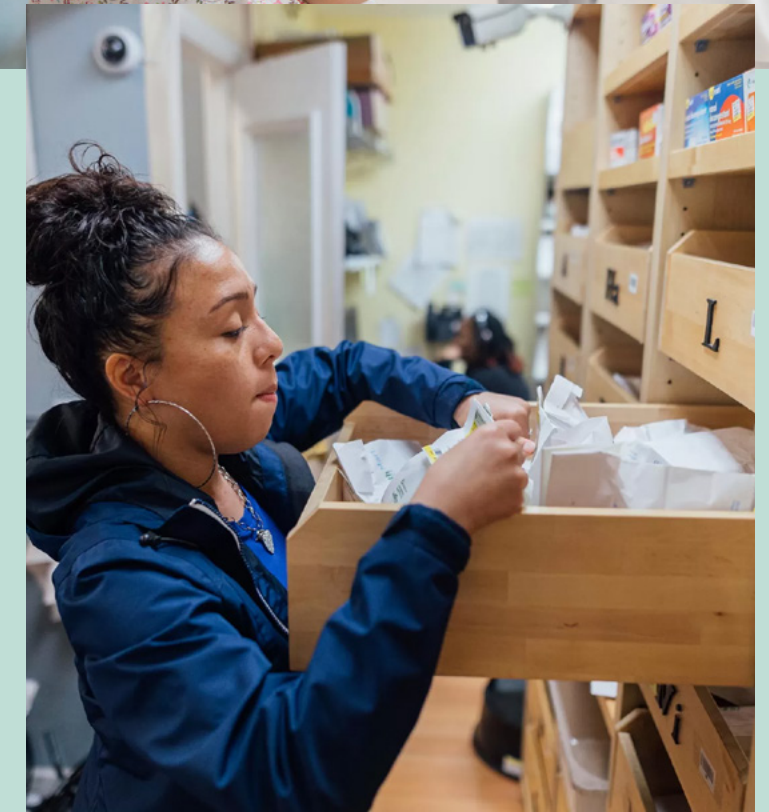
CARE Pharmacies has built a strong foundation with over 130 locations in 23 states, including Washington, DC. CARE Pharmacies has been one of the fastest growing drug chains in the U.S. and Canada over the past 10 years.

The model used by CARE Pharmacies is replicated in other sectors in which groups of businesses in the same industry form a collective unit to buy supplies and services. Individual retailers own the purchasing co-op—not outside investors—so they make decisions based on the co-op's interests. Member organizations share purchasing contracts to acquire the goods and services needed to run their independent businesses.

Cooperative purchasing helps members reduce costs and offer competitive prices compared to retail chains. Members also enjoy a voice in the co-op's operation. As owners, they receive a vote they can use to influence product selection and quality, and elect leadership.

As part of a purchasing co-op, independent businesses thrive in a world of big box stores. They serve their local communities by offering quality products at the best prices, as well as expert advice. By joining forces in a purchasing co-op, organizations achieve lower prices, greater efficiencies and increased market power.

There are more than 250 purchasing co-ops in the U.S. Ace Hardware, a cooperative of independent hardware stores, has a total revenue of \$12.5 billion. CCA Global Partners, the largest privately held purchasing co-op with more than 3,000 locations, includes independent and family-owned carpet and flooring businesses.



“Our mission is in helping our community become more self-reliant. It’s not rooted in making money.”

Vividly Brighter Program at Rappahannock Electric Co-op

Organized for the purpose of distributing electric power to its member-owners on a cost-effective basis, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative (REC) serves approximately 170,000 meters across 22 counties from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the tidal waters of the Chesapeake Bay between Richmond, Va., and Washington, DC.

As a member-owned rural utility co-op, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative listened when members requested money-saving solutions and innovations for community needs now and in the future. The Vividly Brighter program was the answer to that call.

Vividly Brighter is a suite of innovative products and services designed to improve lives and strengthen communities, reflecting the cooperative's commitment to providing affordable and reliable energy sources.

Homeowners and renters can take advantage of energy-efficient upgrades and other optional services to help save energy and money. Members looking to install solar panels can partner with REC—and members who aren't quite ready to install a system at their home or business can participate in a community solar option. Electric vehicle (EV) owners can take advantage of charging during off-peak hours when energy costs are lower. Plus, REC offers useful tools to help anyone considering purchasing an EV make an informed decision.

The Vividly Brighter program is helping members and their communities in other ways, as well.

For the first time in March 2024, electric vehicle drivers were able to access public dual-port charging stations in Louisa, Va., thanks to an effort led by REC's Vividly Brighter, in partnership with The Louisa Chamber of Commerce, the Louisa Forward Foundation, the Town of Louisa and Dominion Energy.

Speaking on REC's pivotal role in the partnership, Peter Muhoro, Chief Strategy, Technology & Innovation Officer, said, "We take great pride in delivering reliable electricity to over 13,000 residents and businesses in Louisa County. We are focused on the needs and expectations of our members, and it's our vision to bring sustainable options to the community—including options for transportation."

"We really wanted to make EV charging come to life for the town of Louisa," added Casey Hollins, Managing Director of Communications and PR with Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and life-long resident of Louisa. "For over a year now, the Louisa Forward Foundation has been embarking on a Main Street initiative to revitalize our town and to bolster the local economy. This program is the first effort of that Main Street initiative to come to fruition. So, we're very excited about the impact that it's going to have here in our community."

Muhoro noted that by 2036, it is projected that there will be more than 1,180 electric vehicle drivers in Louisa and more than 31,500 in REC's 22-county service area. Public charger installations, like the two locations in Louisa, are innovative and impactful ways to support a brighter future for local communities as electric vehicle adoption grows.



"It's our vision to bring sustainable options to the community"

Stability and Resilience

Stability is the ability to maintain prosperity and well-being amid changing circumstances. Resilience is the ability of organizations and communities to overcome and endure disruptions, whether they are from natural disasters, economic shocks, social crises or supply chain disruptions.

Introduction: Cooperatives Prioritize Long-term Resilience

Economic stability and resilience are ingrained in the cooperative business model, helping co-ops and their communities withstand economic volatility, weather natural disasters and make long-term investments that build long-term resilience. Leveraging their collective power, cooperatives mitigate community risks, build capacity for business continuity and provide local aid for those who need it most.

By bringing stability and resilience to people, businesses and communities, cooperatives advance **Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG #8)** and contribute to the overall **Good Health and Well-Being (SDG #3)** of communities. And by modeling effective, accountable and inclusive business practices, cooperatives contribute to **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG #16)**.

Agriculture Co-ops

The total number of ag co-ops has significantly consolidated from a peak of 12,000 in 1929⁹⁵ to 1,647 in 2023.⁹⁶ At the same time, total business volume has mostly increased over time, reaching a historical peak of \$300.6 billion in 2022. Today, co-ops in this sector generate a high business volume and demonstrate staying power: 78 percent have been operating for more than 50 years.

This stability is critical for rural areas. Unlike traditional investor-owned agriculture firms, which transfer wealth away from rural communities, cooperatives reinvest in their rural communities, closer to the region of production and supply. In 2023, four states had 100 or more ag co-ops: Minnesota (139), Texas (134), North Dakota (107) and California (100). Iowa led in total business volume at \$30.6 billion generated by 98 co-ops.

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF AGRICULTURAL CO-OPS & BUSINESS VOLUME

1913 - 2022 | Business volume in \$ billions

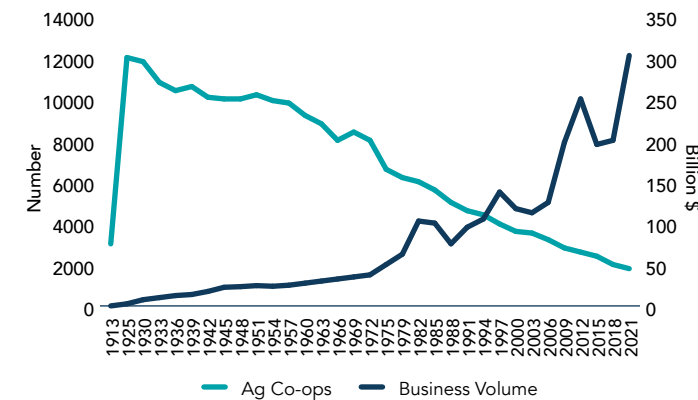


Image source: <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/the-crucial-role-of-farmer-cooperatives-and-why-active-participation-matters>

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- **78%** of ag co-ops are 50 or more years old
- **1,647** ag co-ops operated **9,531** locations across all 50 states in 2023⁹⁷
- Member equity for the top **100** ag co-ops was a record **\$38.6 billion**, of which 56.5% (\$21.8 billion) was equity allocated to members in 2023⁹⁸

Key Impacts: co-op longevity, rural economic stability



101 <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/the-crucial-role-of-farmer-cooperatives-and-why-active-participation-matters>

102 <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDARD/bulletins/3baf0e3>

103 <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDARD/bulletins/3baf0e3>

104 <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDARD/bulletins/3bb05da>

Housing Co-ops

One Chicago-based survey shows that in housing cooperatives, positive economic impacts for tenants include their longevity and resulting community stability. Another survey of middle income senior cooperative members had similar results. Members reported improved social capital, life satisfaction, sense of personal safety and happiness after moving into a cooperative.¹⁰⁵

Housing accessibility challenges differ by affinity group and age, creating shared residential needs unique to given populations. Recognizing these needs, housing cooperatives often serve segments of the population based on such affinities. Here are a few examples cited in the Industrial Commons survey on housing cooperative models:¹⁰⁶

- Senior housing: In limited equity housing cooperatives, seniors have more control over property management decisions, compared with a senior rental. The selling price is transparent, and members have assurance they can quickly sell their units in the event of a health-related need to move.
- Student housing: Like seniors, students greatly appreciate the control over decision-making they have in a housing cooperative versus renting.
- Artist housing: Cooperatives are popular for creating affordable live-work spaces for creatives and working artists who have lower incomes and unique needs for space, ventilation and equipment. Artists also frequently have difficulty qualifying for conventional home mortgages because of their status as independent contractors.
- Workforce housing: Penn South in Manhattan and Amalgamated Housing Cooperative in the Bronx are two of the largest and longstanding affordable housing cooperatives in New York City. They were initially developed by unions for their members working in the garment trades.

Key Impacts: *community stability, shared interest communities, social capital*

Worker Co-ops

The home care industry provides vital healthcare services for people who need in-home care. However, poor working conditions and low wages give the industry a high turnover rate. Worker cooperatives have identified key obstacles to job sustainability in this field and they are proving that progress is possible. Compared to 64 percent of caregivers leaving the industry on average, workers in cooperatives leave at a much lower rate: 36 percent. Reasons for the lower turnover rates include higher pay and better training: U.S. co-ops pay \$1.93 more per hour than non-cooperative care agencies, while offering higher quality job training and other benefits.

Elevate Cooperative, a new resource pooling co-op in the home care industry, enables business growth, professional development, peer networking and knowledge exchanges. The co-op also offers technical assistance and policy development. The home care industry provides an excellent example of how cooperatives can grow stronger together.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- Home care cooperatives experience at least **20 percentage points** less in caregiver turnover than the overall industry¹⁰⁷

Key Impacts: *raising industry standards, low turnover rates, resource pooling*



ORGANIC VALLEY'S STABILITY-FOCUSED PRICING MODEL

Organic Valley¹⁰² started out in 1988 in Wisconsin with stability as a key pillar of their pricing model for organic milk products, ensuring prices yield a fair and living wage for family farmers. In the conventional dairy world, price fluctuations push risk and insecurity onto the individual producer. In contrast, Organic Valley opted to take on and share that market risk at the cooperative level, paying a steady and predictable price to farmer-members. By transparently setting prices based upon actual costs, Organic Valley communicates the pricing risks directly to consumers. Combined with the environmental and health benefits of organic milk, this messaging supports a strong consumer base at a higher price point.



WACIF CHILDCARE GRANTS BENEFIT WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURS OF COLOR

Through its significant business grants and direct grants for childcare, Washington Area Community Investment Fund (WACIF) ensures women entrepreneurs of color can access affordable childcare. These efforts help families maintain household stability and support small business development. In 2022, WACIF partnered with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to disburse the DC Childcare Stabilization Grant providing approximately \$38 million to licensed child development facilities in the District.¹⁰⁹ The grant helped facilities cover business costs, stabilize operations and preserve childcare resources for children and families.

¹⁰⁵ https://web.archive.org/web/20180425023515jd_/http://reic.uwcc.wisc.edu/sites/all/REIC_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰⁶ The Industrial Commons, "Cooperative Housing for Rural Communities: Options and Opportunities for Burke County, NC" 2021. <https://www.theindustrialcommons.org/housing-cooperative>

¹⁰⁷ https://icagroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/5470_HC_2022-BenchmarkingReport_R10_8.2.23.pdf

¹⁰⁸ <https://ncbaclusa.coop/content/uploads/2020/09/Farmer-bifold-final-2.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ https://wacif.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ImpactReport-Digital-LO_FinalDraft_4-WACI-23-06-2.pdf_pg_25

Natural Disaster Resilience: Resident-Owned Communities

Hurricane Harvey brought strong winds and months' worth of rainfall to the Texas shoreline in 2017, prompting disaster declarations, billions of dollars of damage and countless dramatic rescues caught on film and broadcast to the world.¹¹⁰

While Harvey was certainly a storm for the record books, devastating hurricanes are frequent visitors to the region. That's why when the residents of Pasadena Trails, a 105-site manufactured home community (aka "mobile home park") just southeast of Houston purchased their neighborhood from an Arizona company, they made a list of improvements they wanted to make. Near the top of that list was finding a solution to the poor drainage in their community that left pools of water at both community entrances and the school bus stop every time it rained.

That came as a surprise to Michael Sloss, ROC USA® managing director. ROC USA financed the resident purchase at Pasadena Trails and made capital improvement loans to the cooperative that residents formed as well.

"They are certainly one of the few borrowers to make drainage and storm water management a top priority for capital improvements," Sloss said. "As Harvey showed us, that was incredibly smart forethought on their part."

Pasadena Trails is one of more than 330 resident-owned communities, or ROCs, nationwide that work with ROC USA. Most manufactured home communities operate on a land-lease model, where residents own their homes but rent the land beneath them, leaving them vulnerable to rent hikes or displacement. ROC USA's limited-equity cooperative model helps residents collectively purchase their communities and the land beneath them, ensuring affordability, stability and democratic control. This approach preserves housing security in a sector prone to speculation and exploitation.

Co-op leaders from Pasadena Trails stayed in contact with ROC USA throughout Hurricane Harvey. Mary O'Hara, ROC USA's EVP for ROC Movement, worked closely with Pasadena Trails and had coached the co-op leaders there through the capital improvement planning.

"Everybody at ROC USA was concerned about Pasadena Trails," O'Hara said. And residents "were afraid what they were seeing on the news would happen to them."

Instead, the drainage system they invested in kept standing water from building up. Meanwhile, the co-op's tree maintenance in previous years kept Pasadena Trails safe. Two homes reported leaky roofs, and board members dispatched volunteers to cover them with tarps. With no immediate needs of their own, residents were able to reach out to their less fortunate neighbors who did not come through the storm dry.

"As the storm progressed, I got a lot of texts with angel emojis and praying hands," O'Hara said. "In the end, everyone felt blessed."

A recent study¹⁰⁵ shows that living in a resident-owned community can improve resiliency to natural disasters and impacts such as physical property damage. The research shows that ROC USA's model "supports communities' adaptive capacity by increasing access to financial resources, bridging formal and informal knowledge and skills, and improving social and institutional capacity."



"As the storm progressed, I got a lot of texts with angel emojis and praying hands. In the end, everyone felt blessed."

¹¹⁰ Adapted with permission from a story by Mike Bullard, ROC USA: <https://rocusa.org/news/texas-rocs-forethought-keeps-harvey-flooding-bay/>

¹¹¹ Resident-Owned Resilience: Can Cooperative Land Ownership Enable Transformative Climate Adaptation for Manufactured Housing Communities? - Scientific Figure on ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Growth-of-resident-owned-communities-ROC-USA-affiliated-cooperatives-by-year_fig1_358683849 [accessed 18 Nov 2024]

Community-Focused Collaboration: Amicus Solar Cooperative

Amicus Solar Cooperative is jointly owned and democratically managed by its member companies—PV installers, integrators, EPCs and developers—who benefit by collaborating to lower customer acquisition costs, streamline project financing and drastically improve operational efficiencies.

Amicus was founded in 2011 with a plan to support regional solar companies and help counter climate change. In the early days, the solar industry was rapidly evolving. Local independent solar installation companies found themselves competing against large, national, publicly-held or private equity-backed firms. Their economies of scale threatened to overshadow the smaller, local, community-based values-driven solar businesses. It was clear that something needed to change.

The idea for Amicus Solar Cooperative was born out of necessity and a deep-seated desire to maintain the independence and integrity of local solar businesses. The spark came from other cooperative organizations like Equal Exchange, that champion collaboration and community impact.

Guided by a shared vision, a small group of pioneering companies like Namasté Solar began laying the groundwork for what would become Amicus Solar Cooperative. The founding values centered around ethical business practices, community impact and a commitment to doing the

right thing. These principles were not just aspirational; they became the DNA of the cooperative, influencing every decision and action from the very beginning.

Initially, the co-op focused on leveraging collective purchasing power to reduce the costs on solar panels and other equipment. However, as the cooperative grew, so did its purpose. Today, Amicus is not just about purchasing; it's about sharing best practices, advocating for fair federal and state policies, and building a community of like-minded businesses dedicated to making a positive impact.

Looking back, the most significant achievement of Amicus is in the collaborative culture it has fostered. It's in the connections made, the trust built and the collective impact on the lives of everyone involved—from the business owners to their employees, and the local communities they serve and call home.

In a piece for Solar Power World, Amicus and Namasté co-founder Stephen Irvin spoke to the birth of Amicus: "There's no third party involved. There's no one who is there in the background trying to make a profit. It's us. We own it ourselves and still do today. Amicus is owned 100 percent by its members."

Since its founding, Amicus Solar Cooperative stands as a testament to the power of unity, proving that when independent companies band together with a shared purpose, they can not only survive but thrive, bringing honor and integrity to the solar industry.



"There's no one in the background trying to make a profit. It's us. We own it."

OUR CALL FOR POLICY ACTION

Stability and resilience are key features of cooperatives, as their members are vested in the long-term, local interests of cooperatives. Increased data on the long-term viability of cooperative businesses will further scale their impact. Policymakers can help by ensuring cooperatives are included in key federal surveys such as the U.S. Census Bureau's Economic Census and leveraging this data to inform a whole-of-government approach through the Interagency Working Group on Cooperative Development (IAWGCD) and other collaborative efforts. Expanded research and resources are needed to support the resilience of cooperatives and ensure their longevity.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs by balancing economic and social outcomes, while preserving and maintaining supplies of natural resources to meet long-term societal needs.



Introduction: Cooperatives Spearhead Sustainability Action

In cooperatives, environmental sustainability overlaps with social and economic sustainability, maximizing opportunities for impact. Many cooperatives are early adopters of sustainability actions, and they shape trends for others to follow.

Rural electric cooperatives directly contribute to **Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG #7)** by ensuring access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy across the U.S. Many other cooperatives advance **Sustainable Communities and Cities (SDG #11)**, **Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG #12)** and **Climate Action (SDG #13)**.

Electric Co-ops

Electric cooperatives face challenges as they transition to more renewable energy. Due to their cooperative mission to serve low-income rural communities, electric cooperatives do not always have the investment capacities to rapidly transition their assets. This is starting to change with greater access to grants and shifting views of members who increasingly want to see a greater diversification of energy sources. Some electric co-ops are now advancing their impact by investing in renewable energy sources. Other cooperatives have also upheld long-standing commitments to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of their primary energy sources, such as coal.

Key Impacts: remediation, energy choice

Food Co-ops

National Co-op Grocers' food co-op members are tackling sustainability through management systems. All 165 use sustainability tracking software to set targets and reduce their carbon footprint.¹¹² NCG itself is a B Corp-certified business by B Lab—a nonprofit organization dedicated to using the power of business to solve social and environmental problems. NCG first earned B Corp certification in 2011, and the cooperative's commitment to B Corp goes well beyond the certification process. In 2022, NCG's food co-ops sold more than \$121 million of products from fellow B Corps. "Cooperative businesses, like NCG and the retail food co-ops we serve, are intrinsically aligned with many of B Lab's positions on governance and social impact," said C.E. Pugh, NCG CEO.¹¹³

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- Certified Organic products make up **38%** of food co-ops total sales compared to 25% in natural retailers and **2.5%** in conventional grocery stores¹⁰⁸

Key Impacts: energy management, consumer labels, sustainability certification, organic food

112 <https://www.grocery.coop/article/2023-food-co-op-impact-report>

113 <https://www.ncg.coop/newsroom/national-coop-grocers-celebrates-12-years-b-corp-certification>

114 <https://www.grocery.coop/article/2023-food-co-op-impact-report>

KAUA'I ISLAND UTILITY COOPERATIVE LEADS IN CLEAN, RELIABLE ENERGY

Founded in 2002, Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative (KIUC) achieved 57.9 percent clean electricity generation in 2023, making it the state leader for the fifth year in a row.¹¹⁵ KIUC's clean power generation surpasses the state's requirement for electric utilities to reach 40 percent clean energy generation by 2030. KIUC's strategy leverages solar energy in its energy mix, sourcing a third of its solar power from members' rooftop systems.¹¹⁶ KIUC's current strategic goal of reaching 100 percent renewables by 2033 is over a decade ahead of the state's goal to achieve 100 percent clean energy by 2045. Their strategy has stabilized energy costs, enabling the co-op to offer Hawaii's lowest residential electricity rates from May 2022 to July 2024.

LAND O'LAKES INVESTS IN INNOVATION FOR SOIL HEALTH

At the Land O'Lakes WinField United Innovation Center, a 55,000-square-foot hub in River Falls, Wis., cooperative members test and develop new technologies to help farmers' crop production and efficiency.¹¹⁷ This allows them to harvest more food while focusing on sustainability. They are conducting field research trials designed to identify best practices for healthy soils that support resiliency. Precision science fuels their innovative approaches, such as drone technology and high-tech wind tunnels to help farmers make accurate crop applications that optimize yields and reduce waste.

WORKER-OWNED TEXTILE RECYCLING IN MORGANTOWN

Opportunity Threads is a worker-owned cut and sew factory in the Carolina Textile district of The Industrial Commons in Morganton.¹¹⁸ Morganton, N.C., was once a busy manufacturing center for the garment industry until globalization pushed its industries overseas in the 1990s. Today, a network of businesses and community leaders led by The Industrial Commons (TIC) are crafting a model of place-based rural economic development using circular economy principles.¹¹⁹ Many Opportunity Threads' workers are from the Guatemalan community and come from rich histories of sewing and weaving. They specialize in upcycled and sustainable production for clients from their local region and across the U.S. Here is a snapshot of their sustainability impacts:¹²⁰

- upcycling more than 13,110,720 t-shirts in partnership with Project Repat
- recycling over 250,000 pounds of textile waste annually in partnership with Material Return



¹¹⁵ <https://www.thenews.coop/kauai-island-utility-cooperative-wins-energy-management-award/>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.thenews.coop/kauai-island-utility-cooperative-achieves-57-9-renewable-generation-for-2023/>

¹¹⁷ Land O'Lakes, 2023 Community Impact Report, pg. 15 <https://www.landolakesinc.com/getmedia/5f7c6a73-ab53-45b4-8c6c-210764e7914e/2023-community-impact-report.pdf>

¹¹⁸ <https://www.opportunitythreads.com/story>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2024-06-05/a-small-towns-comeback-how-the-industrial-commons-leveraged-local-assets-for-rural-economic-development/>

¹²⁰ <https://www.opportunitythreads.com/sustainability>

Co-op Start Program Finances Small and Beginning Farms: CoBank

The United Nations named 2012 the first International Year of Cooperatives, with the objective to increase awareness about co-ops and their contributions to socio-economic development, and to promote the formation and growth of cooperative businesses. Fittingly, that same year, CoBank launched the Co-op Start program.

With approval from the Farm Credit Administration—the independent regulator of the Farm Credit System—CoBank set up a separate risk pool that allows more flexible financing for eligible small and beginning co-ops with loans up to \$250,000. This has been particularly important as small farmers have turned to cooperatives for distribution and marketing, and U.S. consumers have shown increased demand for local foods and specialty crops.

In 2013, CoBank provided a Co-op Start Loan to Our Harvest Cooperative—a multi-stakeholder co-op in Ohio that sought to empower local farmers and increase access to fresh produce in their communities. As the co-op has grown, Our Harvest has partnered with the local Health Department to double grocery benefits of low-income community members, invested in direct-to-consumer food boxes and donates excess produce to local food banks.

To date, Co-op Start loans have supported 25 small and beginning agricultural cooperatives across 14 states, totaling over \$2.5 million.

Shortage of equity is often a challenge for emerging cooperatives, especially in a capital-heavy industry like agriculture. Recognizing these challenges and committed to meet the evolving needs of producers, in 2020, CoBank expanded Co-op Start to also include a grant program. The grant program is a dollar-for-dollar match of equity raised by the cooperative up to \$50,000. In addition, CoBank provides a grant to the cooperative development center supporting the co-op.

CoBank provided 7+ Organic Farms Co-op a grant of \$19,200 in 2023. The co-op is composed of seven Latino farmers who collectively own 75 acres of farmland across the Central Coast of California. Like many small farmers, the now-farmer-owners of 7+ Organics faced unprecedented challenges during the pandemic. In response, this group of farmers organized themselves into a cooperative to gain the economies of scale necessary to reach new markets in their region. Together the farmer-owners grow and sell a wide range of fruits and vegetables including strawberries, chiles, snap peas, kale, celery and a variety of lettuces.

With CoBank's help, the co-op has invested heavily in their operating systems, business management and marketing. The grant has helped 7+ Organic Farms Co-op set up a webpage to provide updates on inventory, manage logistics and process sales; invest in marketing materials used at farmers markets and throughout their communities; and contract business development support services. As a result, the co-op has secured wholesale buyers, signed contracts with local schools and city government agencies and established a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm-to-door delivery service.

In 2024, CoBank received a record number of applications to the Co-op Start grant program, and ultimately awarded over \$350,000 to eight co-ops ranging from flowers to produce to meat processing. Since 2020, Co-op Start has provided over \$1.1 million in grants to co-op applicants and the co-op development centers providing technical assistance. CoBank is eager to continue to support the diverse, innovative and growing agriculture economy for decades to come.



Farmer-Owners Embrace Regenerative Approaches: Dairy Farmers of America

Dairy Farmers of America farmer-owners like Mary Kraft are working to improve the lives of people everywhere. As a dairy ambassador through Global Dairy Platform, an organization that promotes dairy's contribution to global livelihoods, Kraft advocates for dairy on the international stage.

Last year, she participated in the subcommittee on livestock that contributed to COP28, the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference—the world's highest decision-making body on climate action.

Attending meetings like these “takes a tremendous amount of time from daily operations on our two dairies, but it is vital,” she says. “My dad always said, ‘the world is run by those who show up.’”

Along with her husband, Chris, and their son, Stratton, she runs two dairies in Fort Morgan, Colo., where they're proud to produce nutrient-dense milk full of essential vitamins and minerals like their fellow dairy farmers across the country.

“I hope my small contribution helps someone a world away live a healthier life and helps the planet continue to produce at a sustainable and prolific pace,” Kraft says. “I also hope to inspire my granddaughters to grow up to manage dairies and advocate for high-quality animal proteins in the diet and in our economy.”

Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) farmer-owners are leading the way to climate-smart dairy products in other ways, as well. Recognizing there is no single pathway to a sustainable future, DFA knows dairy can be a part of the solution. Through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity, DFA is implementing a pilot project that focuses on maximizing opportunities for dairy farmers to deliver climate-smart solutions from farm to table.

The project focuses are:

- Accelerating regenerative agriculture (conservation practices like cover crops and no-till or reduced tillage farming)
- Accelerating regenerative agriculture (conservation practices like cover crops and no-till or reduced tillage farming)
- Optimizing manure management (storing, treating and applying manure in ways that reduce gas emissions and maximize manure's nutrient and organic matter benefits for soil)

DFA's pilot project has a big goal: to create a self-funding circular rural economic model, where DFA's farmer-owners are incentivized to adopt practices that may reduce on-farm GHG emissions. In turn, the reduced emissions lead to the creation of sustainable dairy products for consumers to enjoy.

OUR CALL FOR POLICY ACTION

Cooperatives pursue sustainability initiatives as a core part of their mission-centered business models. Policymakers can support these initiatives with conservation and resilience programs, tax incentives to facilitate cooperative development, and by platforming cooperatives for their important contributions to sustainable development. Key departments that can enact supportive policy related to sustainable development include the U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Energy.



Advocacy Guide

This guide presents details about NCBA CLUSA's advocacy and our guidance to policymakers on how they can support cooperatives through policy that enables **fair tax treatment, employee ownership through cooperatives, access to capital, affordable housing, rural economic growth and international development.**

These government agencies are well positioned to ensure their programs support cooperatives:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)
- U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC)
- U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)
- U.S. Domestic Policy Council and (DPC)
- U.S. National Economic Council (NEC)



Cooperative Impacts

THEME	POLICY MAKER PRIORITIES
ACCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for cooperatives within local economic development strategies • Funding and technical assistance programs • Collect data on cooperative impacts related to access and affordability
COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT AND ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for cooperatives through federal tax code • Prioritize conversions to cooperative models • Preserve community benefits across cooperative industries: energy, broadband, lending, agriculture and housing
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND EMPOWERMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize cooperatives for their civic engagement and advocacy • Bipartisan partnerships with cooperatives and elected officials
FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage and prioritize cooperative support for underserved groups
GROWTH AND INNOVATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building to improve cooperative growth opportunities • Flexible funding for cooperative development • Supportive tax policy for cooperatives
STABILITY AND RESILIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying cooperative businesses in the Economic Census • Data collection through the Interagency Working Group on Cooperative Development • Resources and research to support cooperative development
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation and resilience programs • Tax incentives to facilitate cooperative development and growth • Support for digital platform cooperatives

Our Work Has Contributed to Key Historic Advocacy Wins

MAPPING CO-OP IMPACT

NCBA CLUSA helped secure the inclusion of a question identifying cooperative businesses in the 2017 and 2022 Economic Censuses, helping to quantify the scope of co-op economic impact and drive more support at the federal level.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) program is dedicated to building and sustaining vibrant rural communities in the U.S. Our advocacy encouraged the preservation and modernization of this program.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Our work led to the Main Street Employee Ownership Act of 2018. This legislation aimed to help cooperatives across sectors access the SBA 7(a) loan program and support conversions to cooperative ownership.



HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR 2024 ADVOCACY



Met with

130+

congressional and administration offices



80

cooperators met with

42

congressional offices during Hike the Hill



Preserved funding for the Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) Program

\$5.8 million

and Cooperative Development Program at

\$18.5 million



Secured introduction of **Key Farm Bill**

Marker Bills to reauthorize programs that impact cooperative development



Learn More

46 About NCBA CLUSA

47 About This Report



About NCBA CLUSA

The National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International (NCBA CLUSA) is the primary voice in the United States for people who use cooperatives to build a better world.

Mission

Our mission is to develop, advance and protect cooperative enterprise.

Vision Statement

NCBA CLUSA works to build a better world and a more inclusive economy that empowers people to contribute to shared prosperity and well-being for themselves and future generations. By leveraging the shared resources of the cooperative movement, we seek to engage, partner with and empower people from all walks of life—particularly those left behind by a shifting economy and facing the greatest economic and societal barriers. We achieve this vision through collaborative partnerships in development, advocacy, public awareness and thought leadership.

Our Four Lines of Work

NCBA CLUSA leverages the power of cooperatives by amplifying their impact. We support our cooperative membership through four main work pillars:

- Advocacy
- Public Awareness
- Thought Leadership
- Development



ADVOCACY

NCBA CLUSA's advocacy team works to educate, differentiate and keep cooperative priorities top-of-mind before policymakers, stakeholders and the broader public. These efforts help ensure that co-ops are recognized, supported in the budget and eligible for federal programs. Our key advocacy priorities include fair tax treatment, employee ownership through cooperatives, access to capital, rural economic growth, affordable housing and international development.



PUBLIC AWARENESS

Our communication team works to increase awareness and understanding of the cooperative business model and cooperative identity among policymakers, thought leaders and the American public while building NCBA CLUSA's brand and credibility as the primary voice in the U.S. for people who use cooperatives to build a better world and a more inclusive economy.



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Our thought leadership work seeks to establish NCBA CLUSA as an authority, subject matter expert and influencer on the social and economic impact of cooperatives in the U.S.



DEVELOPMENT WORK

For more than 70 years, NCBA CLUSA has worked in 100+ countries in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, building resilient communities, creating economic opportunities and strengthening cooperatives and producer groups. Our work empowers smallholder farmers, women and youth in the areas of food security and nutrition-led agriculture, sustainable agriculture, market access, natural resources management, inclusive development and enabling legal environments.

Become a Member

As a member of NCBA CLUSA, your organization actively joins our ongoing work to develop, advance and protect cooperative businesses that build a better world. [Join today!](#)

COOPERATIVE MEMBERSHIP

A cooperative membership strengthens the role of cooperatives within NCBA CLUSA and demonstrates leadership of and investment in both your organization and the broader co-op movement.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

NCBA CLUSA's Associate Member program is designed to provide key business and educational resources to non-cooperative service provider that serve and do business with co-ops.

About This Report

Purpose of This Report

This report aims to offer members, policymakers and our broader community of stakeholders a snapshot of the collective socioeconomic impact of cooperatives. It aims to provide helpful capacity-building resources, knowledge sharing and inspiration for improving sustainable development in our activities and communities as well as examples through case studies of best practices and highlights.

Reporting Period

This report offers a benchmark of activity in 2024 and recent preceding years in the U.S. We aim to produce similar reports every few years to keep members up to date with the current impact progress among cooperatives.

Data and Accuracy

This report includes information compiled from across published, publicly available sources containing statistics and case studies about our members and stakeholders. Report sources include members' annual impact reports, our NCBA CLUSA website and publications from research organizations and industry organizations aiming to further the work of cooperatives. We cannot verify the full accuracy of data contained herein, but we have linked to the original data sources throughout the report.





We thank our sponsors for supporting our work leading up to and during the Year of Cooperatives, including the production of this report.





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