Agricultural Cooperatives

A START UP GUIDE

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

BRITISH COLUMBIA | Ministry of Agriculture

Canada

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 1

WHAT IS A CO-OPERATIVE? 2

Overview of Co-operatives 3

Agricultural Co-operatives in B.C. 3

Co-operative Identity, Values and Principles 6

Co-operative values 6

Co-operative Principles 6

Co-operative Identify 6

Defining Features of Co-operative Businesses 7

Ownership 7

Control 7

Ownership 7

Liability 8

Why Do People Form Agricultural Co-operatives? 9

Types of Co-operatives 11

Types of Agricultural Co-operatives 12

Supply Co-operatives 12

Marketing and Processing Co-operatives 12

HOW TO START A CO-OPERATIVE 14

The Four Cornerstones of Co-operative Development 15

Step 1: Identify a Common Goal 16

Step 2: Determine Business Feasibility 20

Step 3: Develop a Business Plan 28

Step 4: Draft Legal Papers and Incorporate 32

Step 5: Implement the Business Plan and Begin Operations 36

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESS 41

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES 44

Technical Support and Services 44

Education 44

Funding Programs and Financing 44

References 45

Acknowledgements

The material in this booklet draws heavily from and builds on earlier works published by various organizations and government agencies in Canada and the United States. Without the leadership offered in these works, this material could not have been put together.

A partial list is as follows:

- *How to Start a Cooperative. Rapp, G. and G. Ely. United States Department of Agriculture.*
- *Incorporating a Co-operative. B.C. Ministry of Small Business, Tourism, and Culture.*
- *Starting an Agricultural Marketing Cooperative. Center for Co-operatives, University of California.*
- *Steps to Starting a Marketing Co-op. Zimbelman, K., E. K. Coontz and A. Malan. Center for Cooperatives, University of California and the Northwest Cooperative Federation.*

Complete citations of these works as well as additional references are provided at the end of this booklet.

The original publication of this booklet was funded by the Canada/B.C. Farm Business Management Program and was a part of the project entitled "Agricultural Co-operatives: An Information Package." The project also included a second booklet on co-operative finance entitled "Financing Agricultural Co-operatives: An Overview". The original material was prepared by Andrea Harris, MSc. In 1997.

Both booklets were updated in 2018 by Greenchain Consulting, a Vancouver-based local food and agriculture consulting firm that has worked extensively with Co-ops in developing local food enterprises. Valuable input for the 2018 edition was provided by Elvezio Del Bianco, Cooperative Portfolio Manager, Vancity, and Ben Hyman, Chair, BC Co-op Association.

Funding for this project has been provided by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership a five-year, $3 billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen the agriculture and agri-food sector.

Opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and not necessarily those of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and of the BC Ministry of Agriculture. The Government of Canada, the BC Ministry of Agriculture, and their directors, agents, employees, or contractors will not be liable for any claims, damages, or losses of any kind whatsoever arising out of the use of, or reliance upon, this information.

For more information or additional copies please contact:
B.C. Ministry of Agriculture
Email: *AgriServiceBC@gov.bc.ca*
Telephone: 1 888 221-7141
Website: *www.gov.bc.ca/agriservicebc*

1 What is a Co-operative?

"A Co-operative is an autonomic association of individuals voluntarily united to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise."

International Co-operative Alliance 1996

A co-operative is a type of business which is owned and democratically controlled by its members the people who use and benefit from the services provided by the business. Virtually any type of business can be organized as a co-operative. Indeed, co-operatives operate in almost every sector of British Columbia's economy, including financial, retail, housing, forestry, fisheries and agriculture. All are owned and controlled by the people who use and benefit from the services provided by the co-operative.

Agricultural co-operatives are owned and controlled by the producers who purchase goods andservices from, or deliver raw commodities to, the co-operative. Co-operatives provide groups of producers with the opportunity to own and control businesses related to their farming operations, enabling them to address common problems or develop market opportunities.

Overview of Co-operatives

Although co-ops have existed since the 1700's, the first formal co-operative, structured as most co-ops are today, was incorporated in Rochdale, England in 1844 by a group of weavers. The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers (RCEP) was founded so members could set up their own store and buy certain foods they wouldn't normally be able to afford. By 1854, over one thousand co-operatives were operating in the UK.

Today, co-operatives contribute to resilient employment, a sustainable economy and the well-being of workers, making up almost 12% of the entire workforce of the G20 countries. They are also major economic contributors. The top 300 co-operatives in the world generated revenues of $2.4 billion in 2015, a 9% rise from 2012[1].

The most recent national co-operative study indicates that in Canada in 2015, there were 7,887 incorporated, non-financial co-operatives. This study, which had a 63% response rate, reported over 101,000 full-time and part-time jobs filled within the co-operative sector[2] B.C. is home to over 700 co-ops, including 250 housing co-ops, 70 credit unions (including Canada's largest, Vancity), and the largest consumer co-operative (Mountain Equipment Co-op).
The co-op movement in B.C. is supported by the B.C. Co-operative Association (BCCA), which is a member of the International Co-operative Alliance. BCCA is the knowledge and resource center for co-ops in B.C.

They provide a platform for members to participate in programs and services, receive sector information and connect and share ideas. They also promote, advocate and lobby on behalf of co-operatives in B.C

1 *https://monitor.coop/*

2 *https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/106.nsf/eng/h_00151.html*

Agricultural Co-operatives in B.C.

In 2016, there were 73 co-ops in agriculture, forestry fishing and hunting in B.C. (about 10% of all co-ops)[3]. These range from large packing houses, food hubs, distributors, stores, buying groups, marketing and not-for-profits. The number of co-ops is surprisingly low considering the strong benefits for agricultural co-op enterprises in B.C. (see below). However, since 2010 there has been a slight increase, especially among smaller growers. In 2012, agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting B.C. co-ops generated $31 million in revenues[4]. A number of organizations support and advocate for agricultural co-ops, including BCCA, Young Agrarians, National Farmers Union, and various municipalities.

Running an agricultural enterprise in B.C. has certain challenges that can be addressed by co-operatives. These challenges include the high cost of land, fragmentation of land, reduction of extension services, aging farmers, younger farmers not having access to appropriate funds to farm, insufficient supply of farm workers, cost pressures, remoteness of some regions, limited processing facilities and lack of financial resources.

3 BC Co-operative Sector Labour Market Environmental Scan, Ference & Company Consulting Ltd. 2016

4 Co-operatives in Canada in 2012 (Archived online)

B.C. Farm Co-op Case Study: Glen Valley Organic Farm Co-op (GVOFC)

The Glen Valley Organic Farm Co-operative owns a 50-acre farm by the same name in Abbotsford B.C. Started in 1998, Glen Valley Organic Farm is a successful model of co-operative, organic agriculture. The farm has over 50 shareholders of varying backgrounds all of whom have strong interests in sustainable agriculture and preserving farmland for local food production. The mission of GVOFC is "Co-operatively preserving and stewarding organic farmland to support farmers in growing quality food for local communities." The goals of the Co-op, established in 1998, remain priorities today and are to:

- *Provide access to certified organic food for shareholders and the local community;*
- *Own and operate the farm co-operatively;*
- *Steward the entire farm for the mutual benefit of the land, wildlife and people;*
- *Be a model of sustainable living; and*
- *Create opportunities to learn about sustainability.*

Two farm businesses operate at Glen Valley Organic Farm: Close to Home Organics and Earth Apple Organic Farm. Both sell organic produce through Community Shared Agriculture programs. There is also an apiary on the farm, a flower garden and the farm hosts several community events each year.

SAMPLE OF B.C. AGRICULTURAL CO-OPS BY REGION AND TYPE (2018)			
VANCOUVER ISLAND AND B.C. ISLANDS	Merville Organics	Direct Marketing and Distribution	Comox Valley
	Vancouver Island Farm Products	Wholesale Distribution	Courtenay
	Island Pastures Beef	Beef Marketing and Distribution	Denman Island
	Farmship Growers Co-op	Direct Marketing and Distribution	Nanaimo
	Comox Valley Equipment Co-op	Equipment Rental	Comox Valley
	Growing Opportunities Farm Co-op	Non-profit Teaching Growing	Nanaimo
	Cow-op	Non-profit Online Store	Cowichan Valley
THOMPSON OKANAGAN	BC Tree Fruit Coop	Marketing, Packing and Distribution	Kelowna
	BC Livestock	Auction Stockyards	Kamloops
NORTHERN B.C.	South Peace Grain Cleaning Coop	Grain Cleaning Facilities	Dawson Creek
CARIBOO, CHILCOTIN, COAST	Cariboo Growers Co-op	Farmers' Retail Store	Williams Lake
	North Cariboo Agricultural Marketing Association (Farmed)	Non-profit Marketing Association	Quesnel
KOOTENAY ROCKIES	Kootenay and Boundary Food Producers Co-op	Non-profit Marketing and Distribution	Nelson
LOWER MAINLAND	Food Pedalers	Micro-green Growers	Vancouver
	Victory Gardens	Urban Growers	Vancouver
	BC Eco Seed Coop	Seed Wholesaler	Vancouver
	United Flower Growers	Flower and Plant Wholesaler	Burnaby
FRASER VALLEY	Glorious Organics	Direct Marketing and Distribution	Aldergrove
	Fraser Common Farm	Community Farm	Aldergrove
	Glen Valley Organic Farm	Organic Farm Plots	Abbotsford
	Abbotsford Growers	Fruit Processing	Abbotsford

Co-operative Identity, Values and Principles

The International Co-operative Alliance, in 1995, adopted the revised Statement on the Co-operative Identity, which contains the definition of a co-operative, the values of co-operatives, and the seven co-operative principles, which are described below[5].

CO-OPERATIVE VALUES

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

CO-OPERATIVE PRINCIPLES

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

- *Voluntary and Open Membership*
- *Democratic Member Control*
- *Member Economic Participation*
- *Autonomy and Independence*
- *Education, Training and Information*
- *Co-operation among Co-operatives*
- *Concern for Community*

CO-OPERATIVE IDENTIFY

Co-operative Identity is to become one of the best-known ethical marques in the world by 2020.

5 *https://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles*

Defining Features of Co-operative Businesses

Co-operatives exist to provide benefits in the form of goods and services to their members. This differs from the primary purpose of other types of business organizations—such as sole proprietorships, partnerships, and corporations—which typically exist to generate profits for the owners of the business. Other significant differences between co-operatives and other types of businesses have to do with ownership, control, and the way the benefits from operating the business are distributed.

OWNERSHIP

Co-operatives are financed by the people who use the services provided by the business. Investing risk capital in a co-operative business is a basic member responsibility and a function of owning the co-operative.

In a corporation, anyone with capital to invest may become an investor, regardless of whether or not they use the services provided by the business. Similarly, anyone may establish a sole proprietorship or participate in partnerships, regardless of whether they use the services provided or patronize the business. Sole proprietorships, partnerships, and corporations are often referred to as investor-owned firms when compared to co-operatives, which are member-owned, and, in the case of agricultural co-operatives, producer-owned.

CONTROL

Co-operative control is expressed through the principle of "one member, one vote"— each member has only one vote regardless of the amount of capital that member has invested in the business. Members' control over a co-operative is normally exercised through:

The election of a board of directors from the membership, the board represents the membership in providing direction to the business by establishing the overall goals and policies of the co-op. In a co-operative, the central issue of control typically focuses on determining the types of services provided by the business.

In corporations, shareholders normally hold control over the business in proportion to the amount of capital they invest. Shareholders elect a board of directors who guide the affairs of the corporation in the interests of the shareholders.

The directors may, or may not, be shareholders themselves. The central issue of control in corporations is typically the returns to the shareholders' investment in the firm compared to other current investment opportunities.

In a corporation, if individual shareholders cannot vote or choose not to, they may assign their voting rights to other individuals by proxy. In a co-operative business, voting by proxy is permitted under certain circumstances.

In non-incorporated private businesses, individual partners or proprietors exercise direct control over the business.

OWNERSHIP

In co-operatives, benefits are distributed to the members in proportion to their use of the goods and services provided by the business. Any surplus (gross income less expenses) generated through a co-op's business operations are either reinvested in the business to improve the services provided or they are redistributed to the members in the form of patronage refunds. Patronage refunds are calculated in proportion to a member's use of the services provided by the co-operative.

In investor-owned firms the profits generated from the operation of the business are typically distributed to investors in proportion to the capital they have invested in the firm. In corporations, this is done by paying dividends on investment shares.

LIABILITY

Co-operatives are incorporated. A member-owner of a co-operative has limited liability for financial loss. Therefore, like the stockholder in a corporation, a co-op member can lose no more than the amount of money that he or she has invested in the business. In contrast, in a sole proprietorship or partnership, the owner or partners are liable for all debts, operating losses or other liabilities incurred by the business.

COMPARISON OF CO-OPERATIVES AND OTHER TYPES OF BUSINESS

	SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP	PARTNERSHIP	CORPORATION	CO-OPERATIVE
PURPOSE	Profit for the Proprietor	Profit for partners	Profit for shareholders on investment of time or money	Benefits for the members (i.e. service, cost savings and/ or profits)
OWNERSHIP	By sole proprietor	By partners	By shareholders	By members
CONTROL	Controlled by sole proprietor	Controlled by partners, typically according to time or money invested	Based on the number of voting shares held per shareholder, directly or by proxy	One member, one vote. Proxy voting limited
DISTRIBUTION OF SURPLUS EARNINGS	Income to the sole proprietor	Allocated among partners, typically according to time or money invested	To shareholders paid in proportion to investment	To members in proportion to use of service
LIABILITY	Unlimited liability of sole proprietor	Unlimited liability of partners	Shareholders limited to share subscripted. Directors can be liable	Members limited to subscription. Directors can be liable.

Why Do People Form Agricultural Co-operatives?

The key features of co-operative businesses offer people distinct advantages in addressing a variety of market situations and issues. Agricultural co-operatives enable producers to realize economic benefits which they could not otherwise achieve alone. Some of the reasons why producers form co-operative businesses include:

TO IMPROVE BARGAINING POWER

Co-operatives can provide groups of producers with marketing power more comparable to that held by processors and other market players. Co-ops do this by gathering market information and sharing that information with their members or by acting as a bargaining agent on producers' behalf.

TO REDUCE COSTS

Pooling capital and resources through co-op enterprises can enable producers to access services, such as marketing expertise, that they could otherwise not afford alone.

TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIES OF SCALE

By handling large volumes of product, co-operatives can reduce the per-unit cost of marketing and processing for producers. Similarly, the cost of inputs and services can also frequently be lowered if larger volumes are ordered through a central agency. Co-ops allow producers to focus on producing goods, rather than on finding buyers and suppliers.

TO INCREASE RETURNS

Because the surpluses generated by co-operative businesses are returned to producers on the basis of patronage, co-operatives allow producers to capture additional profits beyond the farm gate.

TO IMPROVE PRODUCT AND SERVICE QUALITY

Co-operatives can allow producers to coordinate the timing of the delivery of commodities to markets. Co-ops can also enable producers to implement grading systems and standards. These activities can improve the services provided to retail and wholesale outlets and the quality of product available to consumers.

TO REDUCE RISK

Agricultural commodity prices often fluctuate considerably throughout the year. Co-operatives allow farmers to pool their production with that of other farmers to minimize price and market risk.

TO OBTAIN NEEDED PRODUCTS OR SERVICES

Often producers require certain services or products which privately owned companies are reluctant to provide due to the small potential sales volume or uncertain profits. Such producers may join together to form a co-operative to assure the availability of vital products and services. Agricultural co-operatives can allow farmers to address common problems, develop new market opportunities or expand existing markets. A co-operative can give producers access to a larger share of the earnings generated from business activities and can also keep these earnings circulating in the local economy. However, co-operatives are not a panacea — they require a group of individuals who are committed to working together to address a common economic goal or need. If this commitment is not there, a different business structure may be more suitable.

Co-operative Profile

The United Flower Growers Co-operative Association is a grower-owned and operated co-op established primarily to market the floral products grown by its members. Founded in 1963 by a small group of Canadian and European growers, the Co-op has become the primary merchandiser of floral products in British Columbia. The one-hectare facility is located in Burnaby and is the largest of its kind in North America.

The Co-op is managed under the guidance of an elected Board of Directors and currently employs 30 full-time staff. There are approximately 100 member growers of the Co-op and about 50 growers and wholesalers classified as guest shippers.

United Flower Growers conducts Dutch-style auctions four or five times weekly depending on the time of the year. On a typical auction day, growers bring their crops to the auction on specially designed display carts. Within the climate-controlled warehouse, hundreds of carts are lined up in numbered rows. The first row to be auctioned is randomly chosen by an impartial lottery system.

Potted plants and cut flowers are sold simultaneously in the same auction gallery. Each floral cart is exhibited beneath the computer-controlled clocks for viewing by the customers assembled in the gallery. The grower's number, a product description, and the number of lots available is displayed on message boards beneath the clocks. As the sale of product begins, the hand of the clock start at the highest estimated market rises and falls until a purchase is made by one of the customers. A Dutch-style clock auction is an auction in reverse. The first customer to stop the clock using an electronic keypad on each assigned desk will purchase the product on display. Purchasers have the option of selecting the number of lots they wish to acquire. The customer may buy the minimum amount required during each transaction or purchase everything currently displayed on the clock. As the auction progresses, warehouse staff consolidate individual purchases into single shipments. Customers make their own transportation arrangements. Prices vary daily depending upon the season, supply and demand. Selling is speculative. There are no assured prices, although growers have the option of removing their product from the clock if prices fall below an acceptable level. To ensure a high standard of quality, the Co-operative's inspectors check flowers and foliage for damage, dehydration, or other imperfections. Substandard crops are downgraded or rejected. Customers are encouraged to personally inspect all products before the auction. During a typical day's auction, the computer records some 2,500 transactions involving about 10,000 floral units with an average value of $17 per unit. Business is conducted on an established credit or a cash and carry basis.

By bringing diverse buyers and sellers together at the auction, growers can specialize in a select range of crops rather than attempting to fill the different needs of every customer. Growers also have collective access to those customers, saving time and money normally spent on merchandising their crops elsewhere. Growers also profit from the group advertising and other promotions. For retailers and wholesalers, the auction offers the chance to buy at a one-stop floral centre. The auction also provides the opportunity to purchase the exact assortment required for small or medium size outlets as well as orders for very large single-item lots from mass merchandisers.

Source: United Flower Growers Co-operative Association home page (*http://www.ufgca.com*)

Types of Co-operatives

B.C. legislation permits a variety of co-operative types. Although some co-ops may fit into more than one type, as defined by B.C. Co-operative Association, the following are the most common:

COMMUNITY SERVICE CO-OP – a designation recognized under the *Cooperative Association Act*. It has a similar status in B.C. law to that of non-profit societies. The co-op may also be eligible for charitable status (which must be applied for separately through the Canada Revenue Agency). Community Service co-ops require the inclusion of non-alterable clauses in their Rules that ensure that the co-op operates on a non-profit basis and that its purpose is charitable, or to provide health, social, educational or other community services. Members: Customers/clients.

CONSUMER OR USER CO-OP – Helps members to use their combined purchasing power to buy goods and services they need. Examples include farm supplies, food retailing and wholesaling, elder care, health care, housing, and funeral and burial services. Members: Customers/clients.

FINANCIAL CO-OP – Provides financial services such as insurance, loans, savings plans, and marketing services to their members. The owners are individual members in local communities or groups of organizations throughout the province or country. Financial co-ops include insurance providers, investment co-ops, credit unions and caisses populaires. Members: Customers/clients and stakeholders.

PRODUCER OR MARKETING CO-OP – Markets products or adds value to the products that members produce. Examples include agricultural products or the works of crafts people and artisans. Members: Amarketing co-op can meet many needs, but primarily its member-owners are those who will benefit from pooling their products to reach a market.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CO-OP – a new type and a hybrid in which a variety of member groups share control. For example, workers, suppliers and consumers may be represented on the board of directors. Some examples of multi-stakeholder co-ops are local food co-ops in which control may be shared by both producers and consumers, and health co-ops in which patients and health care providers are the member groups that share control. Members: Stakeholders.

WORKER CO-OP – Combines worker ownership and democratic control. Members provide themselves with employment while making goods and/or services available to the community. Examples of worker co-ops include lumber businesses, pulp mills, aboriginal food growers, bakeries, and print shops. Members: Workers.

NEW GENERATION CO-OP (NGC) – An agricultural co-operative introduced in the 1990's, which adds value to producer goods through the joint processing of raw commodities. Members are producers who purchase shares obligating them to deliver a specified volume of raw product to the processing facility. The benefit to the producers is giving them access to expensive equipment. The financial structure of an NGC is based on equity shares, which are tied to the right and obligation to deliver a certain amount of raw product to the processing plant, as long as it meets certain pre-established quality standards. With fixed supply commitments and quality controls in place, the co-operative can run its processing facilities efficiently, producing and developing markets for high-quality end products.

Agricultural co-ops are most likely to be producer or marketing co-ops or multi-stakeholder co-ops that include producer members. No new generation co-ops exist currently in B.C.

Types of Agricultural Co-operatives

Virtually any type of agri-business can be organized as a co-operative. Traditional types of agricultural co-operatives include supply, marketing and processing co-operatives.

SUPPLY CO-OPERATIVES

PURPOSE: ***To provide producers with inputs and services at competitive rates.***
MEMBERS: ***The producers who purchase supplies and services from the co-op. That is, the customers or patrons.***

Supply co-operatives sell a variety of goods to producers, including petroleum, feed and fertilizers. Services such as breeding, artificial insemination, and seed cleaning have also been organized on a co-operative basis. Depending on the needs of the producers involved, supply co-operatives can vary in complexity: ranging from simple buying clubs organized by producers to access bulk or volume discounts, to large wholesale and retail operations which provide a wide variety of goods and services to a broad range of customer-members.

Supply co-operatives may choose to either charge market prices for the services and products offered by the business or they may choose to price at cost plus an operating margin. In either case, any profits generated by the business are typically returned to members at the end of the year in proportion to their patronage. The members of supply co-ops can also decide whether or not to sell goods or services to non-members. Allowing non-members to purchase supplies or services can often increase the level of profits generated by the co-operative.

MARKETING AND PROCESSING CO-OPERATIVES

PURPOSE: ***To market and process producer goods.***
MEMBERS: ***The producers who deliver their products to the co-operative.***

Producers create marketing co-operatives to jointly market, distribute and process their products. By pooling their resources, producer-members can hire professional marketing specialists and have their products processed in plants in which they have an ownership stake. Many marketing co-operatives also facilitate producer investment in the development of brand names, market research and product development.

Co-operatives use many methods to account for and track the raw commodities delivered to their facilities by their members. Some co-operatives pay producers a market price upon delivery. Others pay producers a pooled price based on the average returns earned by the co-operative over a specified marketing period.

Still, other co-operatives simply facilitate the transaction between the producers and the final buyer, charging the producer on a per-unit basis for this service and never retaining ownership of the product. In each case, members may receive additional payments at the end of the marketing season based on the co-operative's earnings in excess of operating costs. Depending on their mandate, co-operatives may or may not market the product of non-members. Many co-operatives use marketing agreements as a way of specifying the terms under which products will be accepted, processed or marketed by the co-op on behalf of its members. This enables the co-operative to operate on a more efficient basis. Processing co-ops can save costs if they match the volume of their members' commodity production to their facilities' capacity.

Co-operative Marketing Arrangements

Marketing and processing co-operatives use a number of different methods to account for the products delivered to their facilities by their members. Two types of co-operative marketing arrangements include marketing pools and call marketing.

In co-operative marketing pools, producers of a specific commodity jointly pool their production to be marketed and/or processed by their co-op. Under this practice, ownership of the harvested commodity is transferred to the co-op and the co-operative's management determines the best time to sell, where to sell, and whether to subject the raw commodity to further processing. In return, the producers agree to accept the average return earned by the pool during the marketing season. In a typical pool, producers receive advance payments at the time their harvests are delivered to the co-op. The co-op then makes a series of progress payments as the product is marketed. A final settlement payment is made when all costs and revenues for the marketing season have been established. The final return paid to participants is adjusted according to the relative quality of the delivered commodity.

Pooling can provide real advantages to producers by placing the commodity in the hands of marketing specialists to be sold for the highest price available on any given day. Being in the market every day reduces the risks of failing to sell at the highest price offered by the market or selling all production at the market's low point for the year. Risk is further reduced by spreading it over a group of members instead of concentrating it in the production of one grower. No one participating in the marketing pool receives the highest price offered for a given commodity in a given year, but on an individual basis, each is protected from selling at the bottom of the market.

Participating in pools also carries some disadvantages. Some growers feel a real discomfort when they surrender control of the decisions regarding when to sell their production. They are willing to sacrifice the relative security of weighted average prices for the opportunity to control the sales of their crops according to their understanding of market conditions. Also, because the pool cannot be closed until the end of the marketing season, there are some delays in making the final settlement payments. These payments are normally a small portion of the total payments to producers participating in co-operative marketing pools and can be managed to prevent significant disruptions of cash flows to producers' individual business operations.

In a co-operative with a call marketing arrangement, ownership of the product delivered to the co-op remains with the member who produced it. At any time during the marketing season, the individual member decides when and how much of their production to sell. The co-operative's function is to sell its members' products and to guarantee the collection of the proceeds. The co-op may also allow members to set a minimum price at which the commodity may be sold. After the sale is completed a portion of the proceeds is withheld to cover the co-op's operating costs and to provide a contribution to equity capital. The remaining funds are paid to the member.

Co-operatives with a call marketing arrangement provide members with the right to determine the time of sale and essentially function as a broker between buyers and sellers. The co-op typically provides a marketplace where transactions between buyers and sellers are conducted in public. This serves to provide information on the most recent transactions to all members, thus giving members increased market power in the form of information about supply and demand, as well as the impact of the market situation on the prices being offered to producers for their commodities.

Adapted from Starting an Agricultural Marketing Cooperative, Center for Cooperatives, University of California, Davis.

2 How to Start a Co-operative

Starting a co-operative is a complex project which involves careful planning and thorough research. This chapter presents the four cornerstones of co-op development and an overview of five basic steps involved in the organization of a co-operative business:

- **STEP 1: IDENTIFY A COMMON ECONOMIC GOAL**
- **STEP 2: DETERMINE BUSINESS FEASIBILITY**
- **STEP 3: DEVELOP A BUSINESS PLAN**
- **STEP 4: DRAFT LEGAL PAPERS AND INCORPORATE THE CO-OPERATIVE**
- **STEP 5: IMPLEMENT THE BUSINESS PLAN AND BEGIN OPERATIONS**

Each step represents a point of evaluation where a decision must be made as to whether or not to continue with the co-operative based on research results and analysis. In order to build a strong foundation for the co-op, these decisions will require involvement and input from as many potential members as possible. Effective meetings are an important part of the development and ongoing operation of a co-operative business (see page 16 for additional information on conducting effective meetings).

The following pages provide general guidelines and suggestions for starting an agricultural co-operative in British Columbia. When developing projects, groups will need to supplement this information by accessing other resources, including those available from various levels of government, economic development organizations, private sector consultants, lawyers and accountants. Groups interested in starting a co-op are encouraged to refer to the resource list at the end of this booklet for further information.

The Four Cornerstones of Co-operative Development

THE "FOUR CORNERSTONES" in the Food Co-op Initiative Development Model[6], developed by Cooperative Development Services, are Vision, Capital, Talent and Systems. Each is critical to the success of a new cooperative and supported with the assistance of the program and use of the model throughout the process.

I. VISION	II. TALENT
THE ARTICULATION OF HOPES AND DREAMS OF A FOUNDING GROUP	**THOSE INVESTED IN THE CO-OP'S SUCCESS**
• *Broad, Long-term, Inspiring* • *Specific and Local* • *Refined as the emerging co-op moves through the development stages* • *Includes the co-op as a solution to a common problem or need* • *Core values and purpose* • *A vision of the process of developing a food co-op*	• *Champion(s)* • *Steering Committee or Taskforce* • *Board of Directors* • *Developer* • *Management (Development Project Manager, Facility Project Manager, General Manager)*
III. CAPITAL	**IV. SYSTEMS**
FINANCIAL RESOURCES NECESSARY FOR ALL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT	**ORGANIZED, INTEGRATED, COORDINATED, AND INTERDEPENDENT METHODS**
• *Organizing* • *Feasibility* • *Business Planning* • *Implementation* • *Sustaining (recover and reinvest)* • *Internal resources are used to leverage external resources*	• *Legal*[6] • *Governing* • *Planning and assessment* • *Communication and Marketing* • *Finance and Accounting* • *Operations* • *Commitment to continuous improvement* • *Systems become more complex through the stage*

6 *https://www.fci.coop/about-us/food-co-op-development-model/*

Step 1: Identify a Common Goal

PURPOSE: ***To clearly identify a common goal and assess the level of interest in the formation of a co-operative to address this goal.***

The catalyst for forming a co-operative business is a group of compatible individuals who share a common goal or goals and who believe that they can best achieve this goal or goals by working together. Due to unique nature of co-operatives, goals can be economic, social/cultural and/or environmental. Goals are normally the result of a shared problem or opportunity.

Economic goals – The group may lack a market for their products or a satisfactory source of farm supplies or they may wish to start an activity, such as processing, which allows them to develop their industry and provide new sources of income.

Social/cultural goals – a group of individuals with a shared social/cultural interest may want to work together to protect, develop or nurture that shared interest. Shared interests maybe historical or geographical, cultural or even individuals with barriers to employment. The co-op allows individuals to pool their resources to have a larger impact on their shared goal.

Environmental goals – Similar to social or cultural goals, the members may have a shared environmental interest they want to enhance. Shared interests could be protecting farmland or farming practices. The co-op allows individuals to pool their resources to have a larger impact on their shared goal.

CLEARLY IDENTIFY THE GOAL OR REASON FOR THE FORMATION OF A CO-OPERATIVE[7]

In most cases, a common goal will be identified by a group of prospective co-op members getting together to discuss the issues facing their farm business. These informal gatherings lead to further discussions and ideas of how a co-operative can address the issues common to the group.

To clarify the idea for forming a co-operative:

- *Research the issues facing your group, focusing on the biggest obstacles and identifying current options and potential alternatives;*
- *Collect general information on the structure and operation of co-operative businesses;*
- *Gather information about the kind of business that your group is interested in;*
- *Use the information collected to determine which goals a co-op can and cannot address;*
- *Discuss your findings with as many potential members as possible.*

7 Much of the material in this section is adapted from "How to Start a Cooperative", Rapp, G. and G. Ely, United States Department of Agriculture and "Steps to Starting a Marketing Co-op", Zimbelman, K., K. Coontz and A. Malan, Center for Cooperatives, University ofCalifornia and the Northwest Cooperative Federation.

Guidelines for Conducting Effective Meetings

Effective meetings are those in which the goals of the meetings are met and where the level of participation is high. Components essential to conducting effective meetings include adequate preparation, good facilitation, and the ability to develop and follow an agenda.

PREPARATION REQUIRES:

- *Selecting a time and location convenient for most people;*
- *Publicizing the meeting;*
- *Arranging for a facilitator and note taker in advance;*
- *Clearly defining the goals of the meeting;*
- *Preparing a written agenda outlining the goals of the meeting and the items of business to be covered;*
- *Distributing the agenda and specifying a contact name.*

THE ROLE OF THE MEETING FACILITATOR IS TO:

- *Provide leadership to the meeting;*
- *Remain neutral and ensure that the group accomplishes its goals in a democratic manner;*
- *Keep the meeting moving, on track, and on time;*
- *Encourage meaningful discussion;*
- *Help everyone to participate;*
- *Prevent and deal with disruptive behavior.*

AN AGENDA IS A LIST OF ITEMS OF BUSINESS TO BE COVERED IN A MEETING. IT SHOULD BE DISTRIBUTED TO MEETING PARTICIPANTS AHEAD OF TIME IF POSSIBLE. THE AGENDA:

- *Reminds participants of the meeting;*
- *Assists participants to identify important items and come to the meeting prepared to discuss them;*
- *Helps a meeting remain focused;*
- *Reduces the possibility of items of business being overlooked or forgotten.*

Adapted from Conducting Effective Meetings; factsheet published by the Co-operatives Directorate, Saskatchewan Economic and Co-operative Development.

HOLD AN INFORMATION MEETING FOR PEOPLE WHO MAY BE INTERESTED IN FORMING A CO-OP

The purpose of this meeting is to determine whether there is enough interest to start and support the ongoing operation of a co-op business.

Plan for an effective meeting by preparing an agenda and arranging for a meeting facilitator. Select a time and location that will be convenient for most people. Consider holding the meeting in conjunction with an existing producer assembly or conference. Publicize the meeting date, time and place via association newsletters and magazines, newspapers, telephone, letter or word of mouth.

Primary agenda items should include:

- *A description of the perceived problem or opportunity and a summary of how a co-op might solve the problem or allow producers to take advantage of the opportunity.*
- *A discussion around the following questions: What is the goal to be achieved through the formation of a co-operative? Do we share this goal? Does a co-operative make sense as a way of achieving this goal?*
- *A vote on whether or not to continue to research the idea of a co-op. If interest is positive, select a steering committee which is capable and willing to continue researching the co-op idea.*

Allow plenty of time for discussion and encourage prospective members to express their views and ask questions. All issues raised should be addressed, although the answers to some questions may be delayed until more information becomes available.

DECISION QUESTION: *Is there enough interest in the project to warrant continuing?*

SELECT A STEERING COMMITTEE

The steering committee is responsible for guiding the group through the development process. Specific responsibilities include:

- *informing potential members of the group's progress and coordinating further meetings;*
- *surveying producers regarding their needs;*
- *collecting market and financial information;*
- *assessing the feasibility of the business;*
- *overseeing the preparation and implementation of the co-op's business plan.*

The steering committee may undertake these tasks with other potential members or with the assistance of external advisors. When external advisors are consulted, the committee will need to act as a liaison between potential members and the advisors.

OBTAIN FUNDING

The development of a new co-operative can be quite costly. Money is needed to cover the costs associated with conducting a thorough feasibility study, developing a detailed business plan and hiring professional advisors and consultants.

Options for raising funds include:

- *Asking potential members to contribute directly. This can be done at the end of the first informational meeting. For example, potential members may be asked to sign a pre-membership agreement. The signer agrees to join, patronize, and furnish a specific amount of initial risk capital. The initial investment may be made in proportion to the intended use of the co-op or through a flat fee.*
- *Asking producer associations or other industry organizations to fund all or portions of the co-op development process. Many associations have a mandate to undertake research which can serve to stabilize the industry.*
- *Applying for government funding. A number of provincial and federal funding programs exist to help in the start-up of new businesses. Some of these programs are listed in the final section of this booklet. Most require some level of matching funds from the applicant group.*

The investment of money or time involved in fundraising is often an excellent way to test the level of producer commitment to the project. All money collected must be managed in a manner that assures members of security and fiscal responsibility. Make a plan to address how unused development funds will be used or redistributed if the co-op isn't formed.

Step 2: Determine Business Feasibility

PURPOSE: ***To determine whether the proposed co-operative business is economically viable.***

There are three main components in determining the feasibility of an agricultural co-operative:

- *Producer Survey: a survey will determine producer interest in the project. It will also help to clarify the products and services which the co-operative might offer.*
- *Market Analysis: a market analysis will determine if the proposed co-operative has an economic role to play in the marketplace and will clarify how it can best play this role.*
- *Financial Feasibility Assessment: The findings of the producer survey and market analysis are used to develop some basic operating assumptions, allowing for an assessment of financial feasibility. This assessment analyzes the costs associated with meeting the economic goals identified and estimates how much income must be generated to cover these costs.*

Allow the scale and the complexity of the proposed business to determine the time and effort that goes into examining the feasibility of the co-operative. Depending on your situation, a feasibility study does not need to be elaborate and costly, but it must address the risks, benefits, strengths and weaknesses of the proposed business. A good feasibility study will determine the potential for a successful business, but it will not provide any guarantees. There are no right or wrong answers in a feasibility study – only informed evidence that an idea will succeed or fail.

Much of the information collected to determine feasibility will also be used to develop a business plan. The major difference is that the purpose of a feasibility study is to research and analyze all of the possible options for action before a decision on a particular course of action is made. The business plan summarizes the plan of action after a decision has been made.

Throughout this step, be prepared to work with a number of external advisors who are familiar with your industry, agricultural markets and the co-operative development process. If the proposed co-op is intended to serve a large number of members or undertake complex business operations, you will want to hire or otherwise enlist a consultant to obtain an objective, independent assessment of the project's financial feasibility. An independent consultant can also help to preserve confidentiality when undertaking producer and market surveys (see page 25 for further discussion on the role of external advisors in starting a co-operative).

PRODUCER SURVEY

SURVEY POTENTIAL MEMBERS

Survey as many potential members as possible. Producer associations, industry organizations and government representatives are useful sources for identifying potential members. Use a questionnaire to survey producers by mail or in person. Surveys can also be conducted at scheduled group or association meetings.

Ask the following types of questions in your survey:

- *What goods or services do you have a need for?*
- *How do you feel about forming a co-operative and participating in it?*
- *How much business volume do you anticipate generating for the co-operative?*
- *Are you willing to invest in the co-operative?*
- *What are your location, business or service preferences?*

It is important that your survey be thorough, confidential and accurate. Survey results should indicate the level of producer support in terms of business volume and whether or not there is sufficient financial commitment to organize and successfully operate the proposed co-op. Results will also be used to plan for facilities and needed equipment.

EVALUATE SURVEY RESULTS

In analyzing the results of the survey, estimates of both membership and volume should be conservative. Not all of the producers who are interested in the project will join and some may wait to join later. Similarly, not all who join will make the fullest use of the services provided by the co-operative.

RESEARCH QUESTION: ***Are producers interested in starting a co-op? What services or products are they interested in having the co-op provide?***

MARKET ANALYSIS

COLLECT INFORMATION ON SUITABLE MARKETS, SERVICE PROVIDERS, AND/OR SOURCES OF SUPPLY

Collect market information by talking to people involved in each level of the marketing chain, including distributors, brokers, retailers, manufactures, suppliers, and consumers of products and services to be provided by the co-op. If the product or service intended by the co-operative is new to the market, research into who will purchase it must also be carried out.

Useful tools to gather market information include telephone surveys, personal interviews, sales figures on existing products, statistical information, and test marketing. Potential buyers and suppliers contacted should be asked about:

- *quantities purchased or supplied annually and average order sizes;*
- *prices paid at each level of distribution for these quantities;*
- *pricing variation for differences in quality and product attributes (such as grade and size);*
- *maximum lead times required for delivery;*
- *seasonality of demand, supply and prices.*

IDENTIFY AND EVALUATE POTENTIAL COMPETITORS AND BARRIERS TO ENTRY

Identify potential competitors operating in each of the markets in which the co-operative intends to operate. Critically evaluate the level of competition and the possible barriers to entering these markets. Possible barriers to entry include the inability to source needed supplies or production inputs, consumers' loyalty to an established brand name, government regulations, and the cost of acquiring market information or processing technologies needed to compete effectively.

CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES TO THE FORMATION OF A NEW CO-OPERATIVE

Contact other co-operatives which provide similar services and assess the potential for linking up with existing businesses. Even if starting a new co-operative is the best course of action, the search for beneficial links with other co-operatives and businesses should continue on an ongoing basis.

FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT

DETERMINE CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS

To determine the capital requirements of the proposed co-operative, you will need to make financial projections for the start-up and the first three years of operations. Cost estimates should be based on the expected business volume plus some allowance for future expansion.

Sufficient capital will be needed to cover:

- **START-UP COSTS** – *are those costs which are incurred before any revenues are generated. They generally include the cost of products required to start operations; initial operating and personnel costs incurred prior to starting operations; and the cost of preparing and implementing the business plan.*
- **OPERATING COSTS** – *include items such as employee salaries, utilities, taxes, depreciation, interest, and marketing costs (see page 22 for a checklist of operating costs).*
- **CAPITAL COSTS** – *include land, buildings, machinery and equipment.*

Consult with professionals and skilled technicians to determine the need for new facilities and assess the value of any existing facilities being considered. Investigate the possibility of leasing existing facilities and equipment as opposed to purchasing.

RESEARCH QUESTION: ***Does the proposed co-operative business have an economic role to play in the market place?***

ESTIMATE EXPECTED SALES AND REVENUE

Sales and revenue estimates for a marketing or processing co-operative should be broken down according to each commodity and quality grade handled by the business (including by-products). For a supply co-operative, estimate the sales and revenues for each type of service and product provided by the co-op.

DEVELOP FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Organize financial information in commonly used statements, including:

- *An income statement, which relates expected revenue to expenses;*
- *A balance sheet which outlines members' equity in the co-operative;*
- *A cash flow statement which records the inflow and outflow of cash.*

The information contained in the financial statements will be used to measure the likelihood of success of the co-op in comparison to similar businesses by prospective lenders and other stakeholders.

RESEARCH QUESTION: ***Can the co-operative efficiently deliver the intended services or products at a price people are willing to pay?***

Operating Cost Checklist

PRODUCTION COSTS

- *Labour, including payroll taxes and benefits*
- *Depreciation*
- *Interest on loans*
- *Lease payments*
- *Utilities*
- *Transportation*
- *Operations and maintenance expenses*
- *Materials and other expenses*
- *Rent on buildings, plant, property, and/or equipment*

MARKETING COSTS

- *Salaries, including payroll taxes and benefits*
- *Promotional, advertising, and entertainment expenses*
- *Discounts on brokerage commissions*

GENERAL AND ADMINISTRATION COSTS

- *Salaries, including payroll taxes and benefits*
- *Accounting and finance costs*
- *Business and director insurance, taxes, and licenses*
- *Travel, telephone, postage, and supplies*

DISTRIBUTION COSTS

- *Packaging, boxing, and palletizing*
- *Warehousing*
- *Transportation*

Source: Starting an Agricultural Marketing Cooperative. Center for Cooperatives, University of California, Davis.

CONDUCT A SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

An important part of the feasibility analysis is to review the sensitivity of financial projections to changes in operating assumptions. For example, what impact will a 25 percent decrease in product sales have on profitability? Other key factors might include wage rates, operating efficiencies, and interest rates. Include "best" and "worst" case scenarios in your analysis. Note that a co-operative's lowest possible operating costs generally occur when its members furnish it with the maximum amount of business it can handle.

EXAMINE FINANCING OPTIONS

Co-operative businesses finance their operations through a combination of member investment and debt financing. Investment of capital in a co-op by non-members is prohibited under the B.C. *Cooperative Association Act*.

- *The best source of financing for a co-operative is from members—member equity forms the basis for producer ownership of the business and is used to apply for debt financing. Ways in which members contribute equity capital to their co-ops include:*
  - *direct contributions such as membership fees or share purchases;*
  - *agreements to withhold a portion of net earnings from the co-op's business operations; assessments based on units of product or services sold or purchased. The more financing members provide, the less the co-operative business will need to borrow. A general rule of thumb for a new co-operative business is to meet forty to fifty percent of its capital requirements through member investment.*

HOLD A GENERAL MEETING TO REVIEW THE RESULTS OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

Once the three components of the feasibility study are complete, hold a general meeting of the potential membership to review the results. Prepare for the meeting by sending copies of the feasibility results to potential members along with a summary of the steering committee's recommendations. Encourage participants to bring other potential members.

- *Include the following items in your agenda:*
  - *a step-by-step review of the findings of the producer survey, the market analysis, and the projected financial feasibility of the co-op.*
  - *discussion about all aspects of the feasibility study including the level of producer commitment required, potential markets and competition.*
  - *a vote on whether or not to proceed. If the vote is positive, form subcommittees and delegate the tasks involved in completing the next steps in the development process.*

DECISION QUESTION: ***Are potential members confident enough in the results of the feasibility study to proceed with the formation of the co-op?***

Feasibility Study Checklist

The following factors will need to be addressed in order to determine the feasibility of the proposed co-operative business:

- *Market Opportunities*
- *Assessment of Competition*
- *Start-up Costs*
- *Capital Costs*
- *Operating Costs*
- *Personnel Requirements*
- *Management Requirements and Availability*
- *Member Investment and Debt Requirements*
- *Raw Product and/or Level of Patronage Needed*
- *Size of Membership Needed*
- *Potential Gross and Net Revenue*

The Role of External Advisors

Throughout the various steps involved in starting a co-operative your group will need to consult with a number of external advisors. For example:

- *Representatives from the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food and other government agencies can be valuable sources of support. As well as being an important source of industry and market information, they can help you to identify potential members, professional advisors, and sources of government funding.*
- *Accountants, potential leaders or other financial specialists should be contacted early on in the development process for financial advice regarding anticipated capital needs, methods of financing, and the preparation of loan applications. An accounting firm may also be hired to establish a bookkeeping system, maintain and file tax records, and develop a capital program for the new co-op.*
- *Business consultants and co-operative specialists can provide assistance in a broad range of areas, including feasibility assessments, the development and implementations of business plans, the development of educational and training programs, the design of appropriate governance and capital structures, and group administration.*
- *A lawyer can help to prepare and will be needed to review the legal documents required to incorporate and organize the co-op. Legal counsel should also be sought when acquiring property, borrowing money, and writing agreements and contracts.*
- *Technical advice may be needed periodically from a variety of technicians. For example, technical advice concerning equipment and facilities is often essential to developing a production plan and determining the capital requirements for the business.*

It is important to remember the calling on the services of external advisors cannot replace leadership from steering committee. The responsibility for starting a co-operative and seeing the project through to completion ultimately rests with the members of the proposed co-operative. The steering committee must continue to play an active role in each step of the general and committee meetings, and acting as a liaison between potential members and external advisors. Decisions regarding the co-operative must come from the potential members of the co-op – professional advisors should never be in decision-making positions.

When seeking out professional advisors, choose carefully. The advisor should understand the agri-food industry, as well as co-operative business structures and practices. Find someone with whom you feel you can establish a good working relationship. When searching for names ask business associates, members and staff from other co-operatives, government representatives, family and friends. For first meetings, be prepared to clearly explain your situation and what you are looking for. Ask what services the advisor or firm provides, how they can assist you and how much they charge for their services.

Step 3: Develop a Business Plan

PURPOSE: ***To document in detail how the co-operative will operate and how it will be organized and financed.***

Careful planning is one of the most vital parts of any successful business. A business plan outlines and defines every aspect of a business's operations—including who is involved, what its activities are, how it is organized, and how it is financed. Documenting these aspects in detail will help your group to discover potential problems before they happen, allowing you to plan and prepare to avoid them. Clearly outlining the features, goals and objectives of the proposed co-op on paper will also help to create a common purpose among members and will put them in a better position to explain the co-operative to others, including prospective members, lenders, customers and suppliers.

BUSINESS PLANS usually follow a conventional format. A sample outline for a business plan is provided on page 35. In general, all business plans contain the following five main components:

- *a description of the business;*
- *a marketing plan;*
- *a financial plan;*
- *a production plan;*
- *a human resources plan.*

Each planning component should cover a period of at least three years and should contain clearly defined goals, strategies and timelines for implementation.

The development of a business plan for a co-op is much the same as for any other business. Below are a few guidelines specific to developing a plan for a co-operative business.

DESCRIBE THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF THE PROPOSED CO-OPERATIVE.

In the business description clearly describe the governance structure of the co-operative, including the basis for director representation, voting methods, board officers and their terms. You will also need to define each of these aspects in the co-operative's rules, discussed in the following section. Note that the directors of a co-operative may be selected to represent geographical districts, commodities handled, or some other basis that provides an equitable representation of the membership.

DEVELOP A MARKETING STRATEGY

Describe how the co-operative proposes to gain and defend market share on an ongoing basis. You will need to develop a plan to address how the co-op will react to the various strategies that competitors may use to retain their business, such as price changes or better contract terms. Two basic types of marketing strategies exist:

- *sell the product or provide the service at a lower price than the competition; or*
- *invest in creating a product or service with qualities not currently offered in the market.*

Offering a product or service at a lower price than any competitor is the most effective approach to gaining and defending market share. This strategy demands that costs be held to levels lower than those achieved by others in the industry. Investing in creating unique products or services will likely increase costs. However, this can be an effective strategy if competitors have difficulty offering similar products or services at a lower cost. Regardless of your chosen marketing strategy, organize the co-operative to operate at the lowest cost, in the most efficient manner possible.

CAREFULLY EVALUATE CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS

Decisions regarding capital requirements will influence the co-operative's operations for many years. Avoid using so much capital for fixed facilities and start-up that cash flow is jeopardized.

To avoid elaborate or costly facilities, a new co-operative should initially limit the services or products offered to those absolutely needed by the members. If successful, the co-op can expand at a later date.

DEVELOP A PLAN WHICH ADDRESSES THE TREATMENT OF CO-OP SURPLUS AND MEMBER EQUITY

- *When developing the financial plan, seek the advice of an accountant or other consultants familiar with co-operative finance to ensure that the unique financial requirements of co-op businesses are addressed. In particular, the plan must address:*
- *the amount of net income (surplus) to be paid to the members as patronage refunds at the end of each fiscal year;*
- *the amount of net income to be retained within the co-op as equity which is allocated to the members (retained patronage refunds);*
- *the amount of net income to be retained within the co-op as unallocated equity;*
- *when and how will member equity be returned to the members.*

A systematic program for returning equity to members ensures that the people who own and finance the co-op are also those who currently use and benefit from the services provided. When the co-operative's equity needs are met, a portion of each year's income should be used to pay out the oldest patronage-based equity to members. This equity is replaced by funds retained from the current year's patrons.

For a non-technical introduction to co-operative finance, please refer to the second booklet in this series, entitled "Financing Agricultural Co-operatives: An Overview."

RESEARCH QUESTION: ***How will the co-operative gain and defend its market share?***

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM.

Ongoing communication and education are key aspects of a co-operative's human resource plan and training policy. When members are involved and informed about their co-operative, they are more willing to invest in and patronize their co-operative. Effective communication and education programs require financial support and must be backed by specific board and management policies.

Establish a director training schedule to discuss topics such as legal liability, co-operative finance, management supervision, and member relations. Plan to hold information sessions for the entire membership which cover topics such as member responsibilities, co-operative operating policies, and the tax treatment of patronage refunds.

HOLD A MEETING TO REVIEW THE BUSINESS PLAN.

The purpose of this meeting will be to evaluate the business plan, make adjustments and either approve or reject it. Prepare a report which summarizes the findings of the business plan and distribute to potential members before the meeting. Conclude the report with the committee's recommendation on whether to proceed with the development of the co-operative.

Include the following items on your agenda:

- *a step-by-step review of all aspects of the business plan;*
- *discussion regarding the proposed business organization, management structure, governance structure, financial needs, member equity arrangements and any adjustments which need to be made;*
- *a vote on whether or not to proceed with the organization of the co-operative.*

DECISION QUESTIONS: ***Is the business plan acceptable to the membership? Should the organization of the co-op continue?***

Sample Business Plan

TITLE PAGE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **BUSINESS DESCRIPTION:**
   - *Mission Statement: Business Goals; Business Background (History of the Business, New Opportunities, and Key Success Factors for the Business).*
   - *Business Structure (Management Organization Chart, Board of Directors, Member-owners, Business Advisors).*
2. **MARKETING PLAN**
   - *Product or Service Description (Specifications; Development Stage; Copyrights, Patents and Trademarks; research and Development Activities).*
   - *Market Research and Analysis (Industry Analysis; Target Market Analysis, Description and Size, Sales Volume Potential; Secondary Target Markets and Key Characteristics).*
   - *Product or Service Testing*
   - *Competitive Analysis (Description of Competition; Strengths and Weaknesses of Competitors; Competitive Advantage).*
   - *Political/Regulatory/Legal Factors (Trade and Tariff Regulations; Relevant Provincial/Federal Legislation).*
   - *Marketing Activities (Product or Service Strategy; Merchandising; Pricing Strategy; Price Determination; Risk Assessment of Price Strategy; Distribution Strategy; Communication Strategy; Sales Force Strategy; Market Penetration and Growth Strategy).*
3. **PRODUCTION PLAN**
   - *Land, Buildings and Facilities; Site Location; Equipment; Materials and Supplies.*
   - *Production, Procedures and Cycles; Production Strategies; Risk Management for Production.*
   - *Facility Construction or Expansion Schedule; Environmental Assessment and Safety Plan.*
   - *Political, Legal and Community Aspects of Production.*
4. **HUMAN RESOURCES PLAN**
   - *Employee Plan; Organizational Chart*
   - *Staff Hiring and Training Policy*
   - *Member and Board Education and Training Policy*
5. **FINANCIAL PLAN**
   - *Income Statement; Cash Flow Statement; Net Worth or Balance Sheet Statement.*
   - *Break-even and Sensitivity Analysis.*
   - *Source of Capital and their Uses; Loan Summary.*
   - *Financial Indicators.*

PLAN OF ACTION SCHEDULE
APPENDICES

Source: Rural Business Planner CD-ROM, Canadian Farm Business Management Council; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Step 4: Draft Legal Papers and Incorporate

PURPOSE: ***To prepare necessary legal documents and incorporate the co-operative.***

Incorporation gives the co-operative a distinct legal standing and limits the financial liability of its members. A co-operative can be incorporated under federal or provincial legislation. Most agricultural co-operatives in Canada are incorporated under provincial legislation. Members of the steering committee should be familiar with the *Cooperative Association Act* and the Companies Act to ensure that the requirements of the province of British Columbia are met. If it is the co-operative's intent to conduct business in more than one province, you should investigate federal incorporation.

Use the services of an attorney or advisor familiar with co-operatives throughout this step. Such services are important to ensure that all documents comply with provincial and federal laws and will not conflict with operating procedures of the co-operative.

SELECT AND REGISTER A NAME

According to B.C. law, a co-operative's legal name must contain the word "co-operative." You may also include one of these words: association, society, union or exchange. You cannot use the terms "company" or "limited." Note that it is illegal in British Columbia to use the term "co-operative" in the name of an organization unless it is incorporated under the *Cooperative Association Act*.

A Name Approval Request Form (available from the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations) must be submitted to the Registrar of Companies. A search will be conducted to ensure no other group is using the same name. The name search is a mandatory requirement for incorporation.

DRAFT THE MEMORANDUM OF ASSOCIATION

The Memorandum of Association is a legally binding, witnessed document. It sets out basic information about the co-operative and specifies:

- *The name of the co-operative;*
- *The co-op's registered office address;*
- *Business restrictions and restrictions of powers ;*
- *Value, type and number of shares;*
- *The names and addresses of the founding members.*

A minimum of five people are needed to incorporate a co-operative in British Columbia.

To belong to a co-operative, individuals must purchase at least one member share. In addition to member shares, different classes of investment shares can be issued to members, each with different values and rights attached.

For a complete description of the Memorandum of Association, see the *Cooperative Association Act*, Schedule A.

DRAFT THE RULES OF THE ASSOCIATION

The Rules of the Association state how the co-operative will conduct business. To incorporate in B.C., the rules must be consistent with the *Cooperative Association Act* which specifies which topics must be addressed. Important areas that require rules include:

- *membership requirements;*
- *the rights and responsibilities of members;*
- *the number of shares a member may hold;*
- *how shares are transferred;*
- *the grounds and procedures for member expulsion;*
- *how meetings are called and conducted;*
- *how directors are elected or removed, their duties, terms of office, and compensation;*
- *the dates of the fiscal year;*
- *the requirement to conduct business on a co-operative basis;*
- *how net surplus of the co-op will be distributed;*
- *the process for redeeming member equity;*
- *the handling of losses;*
- *how non-member business is treated;*
- *the dissolution of the co-operative;*
- *the process for amending the rules.*

A sample set of rules is provided in Schedule C of the Act. However, since no single set of rules fits every co-operative, the sample rules should be changed to reflect your co-operative's specific mission and objectives. Considerable care should be given to drafting the rules as they are legally binding on all members of the co-operative. Once they are filed and approved, the rules can only be changed by an extraordinary resolution. An extraordinary resolution requires a majority vote of not less than 75 percent of the membership present at a general meeting and the approval of the Registrar of Companies.

INCORPORATE THE CO-OPERATIVE

Incorporating a co-operative under B.C. legislation involves paying an incorporation fee of $250[8] and submitting the following documents to the Superintendent of Co-operatives in Victoria:

- *Memorandum of Association;*
- *Rules of Association;*
- *Notice of Registered Office;*
- *List of First Directors;*
- *Statement of Intent.*

The List of First Directors includes the names and the occupations of the founding directors (often the members of the steering committee). It must also state the period for which the directors will serve. The term of the first directors usually lasts until the first general meeting.

The Statement of Intent is a supplementary document and is not legally binding. However, the Superintendent of Co-operatives will request a copy and will use it to determine if the business will, in fact, operate on a co-operative basis. The Statement includes the following information:

- *the services the co-op intends to provide;*
- *the way in which the co-op proposes to provide those services to its members;*
- *any connection the co-op expects to have with other co-op organizations or businesses.*

Once the documents are approved by the Superintendent, the B.C. Registrar of Companies issues a certificate of incorporation and the co-operative is entered on the corporate register.

8 Fees for incorporating a co-operative may increase over time—check with the Registrar of Companies for the current amount.

DRAFT OTHER LEGAL DOCUMENTS

In addition to the documents required for incorporation, legal agreements between the members and the co-op, such as membership and marketing agreements, should be drafted at this point. You will need to ensure that such agreements are consistent with the co-op's rules and memorandum. These documents should, therefore, be drafted by (or, at a minimum, reviewed by) an attorney experienced with agricultural co-operatives.

Co-operative marketing agreements specify the volume of product members are obligated to market or deliver to the co-operative (see page 33). The following subjects should be specified in a marketing agreement:

- *the extent of members' obligation to market through the co-operative;*
- *the terms and conditions under which the products will be marketed;*
- *accounting procedures.*

For marketing co-operatives that choose not to use marketing agreements, these subjects should be addressed within the co-operative's rule.

HOLD THE FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING TO APPROVE THE RULES AND ELECT DIRECTORS

Within three months of incorporation, the board of directors must call the first annual general meeting of the co-operative. At the meeting, members will need to elect directors to the board and vote to accept or amend the rules of the co-op. Any amendments to the rules are subject to review by the legal counsel. Before the meeting, circulate a copy of the rules and a list of board candidates to all prospective and current members.

DECISION QUESTIONS:
Will the bylaws be approved? Who will serve on the board of directors?

Co-operative Marketing Agreements

Marketing agreements are contracts between the co-operative and its members which can benefit both the individual producer-members and the business. Producers benefit from knowing they have a "home" for a portion or all of their production – a particularly valuable asset when selling their perishable commodities in markets where there are few buyers. For the co-operative, they provide management the means to coordinate the volume of business with the size of available facilities, allowing the co-operative to achieve the lowest possible operating costs. Marketing agreements may also enable management to pre-sell members' produce on the basis of timing considerations included in these contracts.

Marketing agreements should be prepared with the help of an attorney and should include the following:

- *A description of the commodities to be produced, packed, processed, and/or marketed by the co-operative, specifying the quantity to be delivered to the co-operative. Depending on the particular circumstances, the quantity to be delivered can be stated in terms of weight or the production of a specific acreage. If the contract is on an acreage basis, the co-operative assumes the yield risk. If the contact is based on a delivered weight basis, the producer bears the risk of being unable to deliver the specified yield.*
- *A statement concerning the disposition of production grown in excess of the contacted commitment. Some co-operatives require that all crop produced in excess of the marketing agreement be destroyed to prevent it from flooding the market and depressing prices. Other co-operatives require member-growers to deliver all the commodity they produce, while still others allow members to market excess production at their own discretion.*
- *The time and place where legal title of ownership is transferred from the grower to the co-operative.*
- *A description of how and when the producer will be paid and the method of determining the value of the commodity.*
- *A provision obligating the grower-member to notify the co-operative if a lien (such as a claim securing a bank loan) has been placed against the crop covered by the marketing agreement.*
- *A statement of the rights and obligations of the co-operative and the member in the event that the member fails or refuses to deliver the commodity specified. This section specifically defines those actions that breach the contract and the remedies to be applied.*
- *The life span of the agreement and the time period during which the contract may be extended or during which either party may withdraw.*
- *An "Act-of-God" clause which holds each party harmless in the event of natural disasters or events beyond human control.*

Source: Starting and Agricultural Marketing Cooperative. Center for Cooperatives, University of California, Davis.

Step 5: Implement the Business Plan and Begin Operations

PURPOSE: ***To implement the business plan and prepare for the start-up of the co-op's operations.***

A number of important activities will need to be completed before the co-op can begin operations. These activities include: conducting a membership drive, acquiring capital, obtaining facilities, setting up accounting systems, hiring management and training staff.

To plan for the start-up of the co-op's operations, define and determine the sequencing of all the tasks connected with making the business operational and ready to serve the members. Assign directors individual tasks or committee responsibilities to implement the business plan. Use committees to work in areas such as membership, facilities and site selection, finance, and communications. Committees can include members, but at least one board member should be on each committee to enhance communication.

Committees can also be useful in the ongoing management of the co-operative. Additional temporary or permanent committees might include advisory groups for youth and young member activities, education and training, long-term planning, commodities and services, member and public relations, and legislative affairs.

HOLD A MEMBERSHIP DRIVE TO SECURE EQUITY AND PATRONAGE COMMITMENTS.

A new co-operative must have enough members to start operation and justify its existence. To encourage membership, it is important for producers to understand what their co-operative is and how it operates. Prepare a summary of the co-op's business plan and use it to outline the advantages of membership to potential members, such as the provision of services or the potential for increased returns.

If the co-operative is unable to solicit sufficient patronage and equity commitments from producers during the membership drive, table project and reassess the feasibility of the proposed business, its operations and its financial and organizational structure.

DECISION QUESTION: ***Do you have a strong enough commitment from producers to begin operations as outlined in the business plan?***

APPLY FOR DEBT CAPITAL

Once member financing is secured, it can be used as a basis to apply for debt capital. Lenders will insist on seeing certain key documents before considering a loan request, including:

- *projected volume of business;*
- *market information;*
- *projected cash flow information;*
- *operating statement;*
- *balance sheet;*
- *schedule of fixed asset costs and depreciation;*
- *a summary of scheduled financing needs and capital sources.*

This information should be readily available within the co-operative's business plan.

ACQUIRE FACILITIES

Facilities need to be conveniently located for members but should also enable the establishment of good distribution links with suppliers, markets, and other business services. Factors to consider in locating facilities include:

- *proximity to members and markets;*
- *transportation routes, highways and railways;*
- *availability of labour;*
- *availability of land and buildings;*
- *levels of taxation;*
- *environmental and other regulations.*

SET UP RECORD KEEPING AND ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS

Accurate accounting of money is critical to operating on a sound business basis and to avoid year-end losses. Requirements include:

- *developing and installing an accounting system;*
- *preparing financial reports, including operating and capital improvement budgets;*
- *reporting to the membership in a clear and timely manner;*
- *providing for auditing services;*
- *conducting long-term planning.*

In addition to the complete and accurate documentation of income and expenses for planning and tax purposes, a co-operative must keep exact member records. Member records account for members' initial and subsequent investments and track members' patronage. The information included in member records is needed to determine the amount of net earnings members are entitled to at the end of the fiscal year. Members will also need these records for their own personal accounts, particularly for income tax purposes.

An annual independent audit serves as an outside appraisal of the co-operative's financial condition, and as a check on business procedures and compliance with tax and other legal requirements. A professional independent audit may be required by the Superintendent of Co-operatives, particularly if the co-op has a broad base of membership. Other agencies may require an independent audit as well, such as government funding agencies or major lenders.

SELECT A MANAGER

Selecting the manager is one of the most critical tasks for the new board of directors. Begin the task by developing a position description. Include a supplemental statement outlining the relationship between the manager and the board of directors in a co-operative, and the responsibilities of each (see page 38 for a discussion of board and management responsibilities).

Qualities to seek in a manager include education, experience, and the ability to work with people. Judge these qualities from three perspectives: commodity expertise, management skills, and a knowledge of co-operatives. The candidate will need to understand the special nature of the co-operative's patrons because they are both customers and owners. This dual relationship adds a unique dimension to a candidate's requirements to work with people on a daily business basis.

Good managers are hard to find, especially for co-operatives. For leads, contact the managers of other co-ops, directors of co-op associations, the advisers who helped form the co-operative, and employment agencies.

PUBLICIZE THE CO-OP'S ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOP COMMUNITY RECOGNITION

PUBLICIZING THE CO-OP'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES WILL HELP:

- *create a positive image of the co-op in the community;*
- *increase awareness about the benefits of membership;*
- *keep current members appraised of the co-op's progress.*

WAYS TO DEVELOP COMMUNITY RECOGNITION OF THE CO-OP INCLUDE:

- *writing news releases for local papers and association newsletters;*
- *having board members do presentations for the chamber of commerce and other community groups;*
- *celebrating milestones such as opening a facility, installing major equipment, signing a contract or receiving a grant.*

Remember to involve local politicians from all levels of government. Their support can be critical to the co-operative's ongoing success.

Member Rights and Responsibilities

Members are the most important part of a co-operative – they are the owners of business and their needs are the reason for its existence. Just as the board and management of a co-operative have specific duties and responsibilities, members have certain responsibilities and rights which they must accept and exercise for the business to effectively meet their needs.

MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

- *Patronize and use the services provided by the co-operative;*
- *Be informed about the co-operative;*
- *Finance the co-operative through the purchase of shares and other forms of member investment;*
- *Attend meetings and participate on committees and in other activities of the organization;*
- *Assist in amending the rules and other legal documents as required;*
- *Evaluate the performance of the co-operative;*
- *Communicate complaints and suggestions to management and board of directors;*
- *Support the development of other co-operatives;*
- *Elect and evaluate directors.*

MEMBER RIGHTS NORMALLY INCLUDE:

- *Adopt and amend the Memorandum of Association and Rules of the co-operative;*
- *Elect, and if necessary, remove directors of the business;*
- *Dissolve, merge or consolidate the co-op or form a joint venture with others;*
- *Require officers, directors, and other agents to comply with the law under which the business was set up, and with its Memorandum of Association, Rules and membership and marketing agreements;*
- *Hold directors and officers liable for damage injurious to members;*
- *Examine the annual reports.*

Adapted from Understanding Cooperatives: Who Runs the Cooperative Business? Members, factsheet prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Services

Board and Management Responsibilities

Directors represent members and are legally responsible for the performance and conduct of the co-operative. Depending on the complexity of business operations, the board may delegate responsibility for daily operations to a hired manager. The manager, in turn, selects and manages the staff of the co-operative.

Questions often arise as to the division of responsibilities between the board and hired management. Sometimes they overlap and an exact division cannot be made. One factor to consider is the time period – long-term decisions are the responsibility of the board, while management makes short-term decisions. For example, decisions involving policy are the responsibility of the board, and day-to-day functions are handled by management. The use of policy and procedure manuals and job descriptions along with frank discussions of questions when they arise can help maintain an understanding of the division of responsibility in the governing and operating of a co-operative enterprise.

BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

- *Functioning as trustees for the members in safeguarding their assets in the co-op;*
- *Setting the goals, objectives, and general policies of the co-op;*
- *Adopting long-term strategic plans;*
- *Employing a competent manager and evaluating performance;*
- *Preserving the co-operative character of the organization;*
- *Establishing an accurate accounting system;*
- *Adopting an annual operating budget;*
- *Appointing an outside firm to perform an annual audit;*
- *Controlling the total operation;*
- *Authorizing the distribution of the co-operative's net earnings and the redemption of members' equities;*
- *Keeping the membership informed about activities in the co-operative.*

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

- *Managing or directing daily business activities;*
- *Carrying out policies set by the board;*
- *Setting goals and making short-term plans;*
- *Employing, training, and discharging employees;*
- *Organizing and coordinating internal activities in compliance with co-operative goals and objectives and board policies;*
- *Keeping complete accounts and records and developing an annual operating budget;*
- *Providing the board with periodic reports.*

Guidelines for Success 3

Several of the guidelines for the formation of a co-operative apply to more than one step of the process and are also critical to the continuing success of the co-operative's operations.

KEEP MEMBERS INFORMED AND INVOLVED.

When members are involved and informed about the co-operative, they are more willing to patronize and invest in the co-operative. Member responsibilities start with the conception of the co-operative and remain throughout the life of the business to assure successful organization, sound management, and operation (see page 37).

Ongoing communication and education programs (targeted to co-op members, directors, management and staff) are an integral part of the success of a co-operative business. Such programs require financial support and must be backed by specific board and management policies.

USE ADVISORS AND COMMITTEES EFFECTIVELY.

Effectively organizing human resources and using the expertise of advisors is central to the success of any business. Maximum participation by potential members is crucial to the success of a co operative.

Committees provide members with the opportunity to develop skills and to participate in the affairs of their co-operative—increasing their feeling of ownership and responsibility for its success. Committees are useful for both the start-up and the ongoing management of the co-operative.

MAINTAIN GOOD BOARD-MANAGER RELATIONS.

The differing responsibilities of the board of directors and the manager must be clearly understood and carried out. Directors represent members and are legally responsible for the performance and conduct of the co-op. Directors' three major responsibilities are to set policies, employ and evaluate the general manager, and secure adequate financing for the co-operative.

Management carries the responsibility for the daily operations of the co-op. The use of policy and procedure manuals and job descriptions along with frank discussions of questions when they arise can help to maintain good board and management relations.

FOLLOW SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES.

The major challenge to co-operative members, the board of directors, and operating management occurs after business operations begin. Operating on a sound business basis includes the implementation of an accurate accounting system, regular preparation of financial statements, reporting to the membership in a clear and timely manner, and keeping exact member records. It also involves a continual evaluation of costs and the productivity of labour, facilities, equipment and technology employed by the co-op.

Once the co-operative is organized and operating, members will need to consider how they want it to grow. This task requires both short-term planning and long-term strategic planning. Strategic planning looks three to five years ahead and involves developing a vision and mission statement, appraising the future, assessing the external and internal business environment, defining desired goals with stated objectives, and developing a course of action to achieve these goals.

CONDUCT EFFECTIVE MEETINGS.

A co-operative is a business and its meetings should be conducted in a businesslike manner. Parliamentary procedure is appropriate for orderly democratic group action. An effective meeting is the result of carrying out several successive steps: preparation, good facilitation, member participation, following an agenda, and following through on meeting actions.

FORGE LINKS WITH OTHER CO-OPERATIVES AND ORGANIZATIONS.

The search for beneficial links with other co-operatives, businesses and associations should continue on an ongoing basis. Alliances with other businesses can be valuable sources for supplies, marketing outlets, and related services. Membership in provincial and national associations can keep the new co-operative abreast of what others around the country are doing. These associations can be sources of education and training programs, and legislative and public relations support activities. They can also help to identify sources of special expertise.

COMMON VISION

A vision shared by the key stakeholders is key to any business, but especially co-operatives where all members have an equal say in the running of the co-operative. A common vision, defined early, will attract and motivate the right members joining the co-op. A common vision, that is clearly articulated and consistently referred to, normally results in more effective decisions.

SKILLED TEAM

While individuals or groups are brought together with a common vision, it is imperative that any skill gaps are filled. Just like any business, a co-operative cannot rely on the motivation of its members alone. Key skill areas such as financial management, governance, marketing, business development, operations and technical, all need to be covered by skilled and experienced members. If members lack any of the key skills required, then they will have to be found externally.

OBTAIN ENOUGH RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT FUNDING LEVELS

Co-operatives are unique in that there are multiple stakeholders all with a shared interest and equal say. For this reason, more resources are needed to develop co-operatives than other enterprises. It is therefore imperative that co-operatives read through these guidelines and make sure there are enough resources for each of the areas outlined. For example, to attract the right members and investment before its launch, a co-operative will need a comprehensive business plan.

DEVELOP EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

"One member, one equal vote" is the essence of a co-op, but this can cause issues if not managed properly. Challenges co-ops face with poor decision-making processes include decisions not being made, decisions taking too long for minor tasks or members feeling they aren't involved with key decisions. Consideration must be given to: when members are consulted on decisions or when staff or the board can make decisions without member input, how decisions are finalized (e.g. consensus or popular agreement) and when decisions are made.

Resources and References

Technical Support and Services

BC Co-op Association – The BC Co-op Association (BCCA) is the knowledge and resource centre for co-ops in BC, where co-ops and credit unions come together to collaborate, network, get support, learn, and contribute knowledge to shape BC's co-op movement.

Cooperatives First – Cooperatives First is a business development organization focused on increasing awareness and understanding of the co-op business model in rural and Indigenous communities across western Canada. The organization provides workshops and surveys and an online governance course as well as online resource lists to support community leaders to build new business, grow local economies and support community development.

Upper Columbia Co-op Council (UCCC) – The Upper Columbia Co-op Council is an association of co-ops and credit unions of the Kootenay and Boundary regions of Southeastern British Columbia. The Council was incorporated as a Community Service Co-op in October 2008, and has been formed in partnership with the BC Co-op Association (BCCA) to work locally with its members to strengthen and raise awareness of the region's vibrant co-op sector.

Education

Cooperate Now – a partnership between the British Columbia Cooperative Association and Vancity, Cooperate Now is an intensive, four-day co-op business education program, facilitated by leaders from BC's cooperative sector. The program covers history, values and principles, mission, vision and purpose, structure, opportunity assessment, co-op capital and financing, governance and management, marketing and member engagement and concludes with an interactive co-op business planning workshop. The program is offered in April and November.

Online Governance in Co-operatives Course – a collaboration between the University of Saskatchewan's Centre for Cooperative Studies and Cooperatives First, the online Governance in Co-operatives course covers the essential elements of good governance in cooperative enterprises. The three main topics include: ensuring people work well together, creating a successful view of the future, and building legitimacy.

CoopZone – The CoopZone Developers' Network Co-operative is a national network of people and organizations that support co-op start-up and development. The organization delivers online training programs on cooperatives, including an Introductory Course on the types and roles of co-ops and the basics of co-op development process, which runs from mid-October through April, and a two-year Advanced Program for those seeking to provide full development services to cooperatives. The website also offers lists of resources and cooperative developers to aid co-op entrepreneurs who are considering starting or expanding a co-op.

Cooperatives and Community-based Economic Development – a component of the British Columbia Institute of Technology's Sustainable Business Leadership Certificate, the Cooperative and Community-based Economic Development course provides students with the specific knowledge and skills needed to participate meaningfully and effectively in the decision-making, management and entrepreneurial processes of cooperatives and social enterprises.

Graduate Certificate in the Social Economy and Cooperatives – Designed for working professionals, the University of Saskatchewan Centre for the study of Cooperative's Graduate Certificate in the Social Economy and Cooperatives compares the governance structures in social enterprises, co-operatives and other organizations, evaluates the role of social economy organizations in delivering services and defines the policy conditions that support the development of social enterprises and co-ops. The course consists of a full year of part-time study.

St. Mary's University, Sobey School of Business – The Sobey School supports a number of co-op-management/business education programs, including executive education (three days to one week in duration), international study tours (four to 10 days), a Certificate in Co-op management (10 months, part-time), a Graduate Diploma in Cooperative Management (20 months, part-time) and Master of Management, Cooperatives and Credit Unions (three-years, part-time).

Funding Programs and Financing

B.C. Agri-Business Planning Program – offers two distinct streams of support for agri-businesses:

- Specialized business planning to enable producers and processors to make more informed decisions and strengthen their business.
- Disaster recovery planning to help producers implement

an immediate and long-term disaster recovery plan. Eligible applicants can access up to $5,000 for individuals and $30,000 for groups for business planning services from a Qualified Business Consultant. Funding for this project is provided by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership. A five-year, $3 billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen the agriculture and agri-food sector.

Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia (IAF) – The purpose of the IAF is to foster increased long-term growth, employment and competitiveness of B.C.'s agriculture and food industry. Strategic priorities of this program include: the increased potential of B.C. agriculture through competitiveness assessments, market research and analysis, new product development, and increased value-added processing. Funding is provided to legally recognized commercial and non-profit organizations, including co-operatives.

Vancity – Vancity provides a broad range of support for co-ops, from grants in support of co-op incorporation and business development, microfinance for start-ups, conventional financing and, in circumstances where co-ops can access neither conventional nor microfinance, patient capital via a Cooperative Capital Fund.

Other credit unions – a select number of smaller credit unions are adept at lending to cooperatives, these include CCEC, Mt. Lehman Credit Union and Union Bay Credit Union.

Canadian Worker Co-op Federation (CWCF) Tenacity Works Fund – The CWCF invests up to $50,000 in eligible worker co-operatives. The purpose of the fund is to create new and expand existing worker-owned co-operatives across the country. These loans are often used to leverage additional funding from traditional lenders. The CWCF also offers a separate small grant to co-op members of CWCF to hire professional help for technical assistance issues.

Canadian Cooperative Investment Fund (CCIF) – The CCIF invests in co-ops via loans, equity and quasi-equity investments. Focused primarily on supporting the growth of existing co-ops, CCIF also supports the conversion of traditional businesses into co-ops and start-up financing for new co-ops.

Co-operative Development Program (CDP) – The CDP administers grants to emerging and expanding co-operatives to encourage the viability and growth of existing co-ops that respond to the collective needs of Canadians. Grants can be used to cover costs associated with co-operative business development, member engagement, legal and financial supports.

BC Co-op Association: Momentum Fund – The BCCA Momentum Fund is a made-in-BC loan fund in which co-ops help co-ops. All contributions to the Fund are from BCCA member co-ops. The Momentum Fund provides fully guaranteed loans from $5,000 to $25,000. The loans are generally reserved for early stage co-operatives who are looking to grow and develop.

References

CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT GUIDES

B.C. Business Co-operatives – A Start-up Guide. Province of British Columbia. (Pamphlet)

Factors Critical to the Success or Failure of Emerging Agricultural Cooperatives. R. Sexton and J. Iskow. Giannini Foundation Information Series No. 88-3. Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics, University of California. June 1988. (Book)

How to Start a Co-operative. Rapp, G. and G. Ely. United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business/ Cooperative Service – Cooperative Information Report 7. Revised September 1996. (Booklet)

Incorporating a Co-operative. Province of British Columbia; Ministry of Small Business, Tourism, and Culture. (Pamphlet)

New Generation Co-operatives: For Agricultural Processing and Value-Added Projects, a Development Guide. Saskatchewan Economic Development. (Pamphlet)

Starting An Agricultural Marketing Cooperative. Center for Co-operatives, University of California, Davis. October 1994. (Booklet)

Steps to Starting a Marketing Co-op. Zimbelman, K., E. K. Coontz and A. Malan. Center for Cooperatives, University of California and the Northwest Cooperative Federation. 1996. (Booklet; also available in Spanish)

Understanding Cooperatives: How to Start a Cooperative. Rapp, G. United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business/Cooperative Service – Cooperative Information Report 45, Section 14. January 1995. (Pamphlet)

CO-OPERATIVE FINANCE

Co-operative Financing and Taxation. Rathbone, R. C. United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business/ Cooperative Service – Cooperative Information Report 1, Section 9. Revised January 1995.(Booklet)

Equity Redemption and Member Equity Allocation Practices of Agricultural Cooperatives. Rathbone R. C. and R. A. Wissman. Agricultural Cooperative Service – Research Report 124. October 1993. (Booklet)

Financing Agricultural Co-operatives: An Overview. Harris, A. Canada/B.C. Farm Management Program and BCMAF. 1998. Available at BCMAF district offices. (Booklet)

Understanding Cooperatives: Financing Cooperatives. Rathbone, R. C. United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business/Cooperative Service - Cooperative Information Report 45, Section 7. January 1995. (Pamphlet)

What are Patronage Refunds? Frederick, D. A. and G. Ingalsbe, United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Cooperative Service – Cooperative Information Report 9. Reprinted June 1993. (Pamphlet)

Working with Financial Statements – Guide for Cooperative Members. Wissman, R. United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business/Cooperative Service - Cooperative Information Report 43. Revised May 1996. (Booklet)

BUSINESS PLANNING

Preparing a Business Plan: a Guide for Agricultural Producers. A series of guides available for a wide range of commodities. Published by BCMAF as part of Planning for Profit. Available through BCMAF district offices. Copies can also be downloaded from the B.C. FBMI-net site at *http://FBMInet.ca/bc*. (Series of handbooks)

Rural Business Planner CD-ROM. A flexible and easy to use software package consisting of a business plan outline, definitions, examples, and a series of checklists. Also includes a searchable resource library. Available from: Canadian Farm Business Management Council. 75 Albert Street, Suite 1110, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5E7. Toll Free: 1-888-232-3262.

NEW GENERATION CO-OPERATIVES

New Generation Cooperatives and Cooperative Theory. Harris, A., B. Stefanson, and M. Fulton. Journal of Cooperation 11: 15-28. 1996. (Journal article)

New Generation Co-operatives: Revitalizing Rural Communities. B. Stefanson, M. Fulton and A. Harris. Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. (Booklet)

New Generation Co-operatives: Opportunities in Agricultural Processing. Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. 1997. (Video – 21 minutes)

MEMBER/DIRECTOR/MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Appraising Manager Performance. Rapp, G. United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business/ Cooperative Service - Cooperative Information Report 136. September 1994. (Booklet)

"***Conducting Effective Meetings***" factsheet prepared by the Co-operatives Directorate, Saskatchewan Economic and Co-operative Development as part of Co-operatives in Saskatchewan: An Information Series.

Introduction to Directors' Liability and Financial Accountability in Farm Organizations. Stinson, L. R. Canada/B.C. Farm Business Management Program, B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. (Handbook available through BCMAF district offices)

Legal Responsibilities of Directors and Officers in Canadian Co-operatives. Ish, D. and K. Ring. Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. December 1995. (Book)

"***The role of management behavior in agricultural cooperatives.***" Cook, M. Journal of Agricultural Cooperation 9: 42-58. 1994. (Journal Article)

CO-OPERATIVES - GENERAL

Agricultural Cooperatives As Effective Marketers of Value-Added Products. Hardesty, S. D. Centre for Co-operatives, University of California – Research Report No. 4. May 1992. (Booklet)

Analysis of Economic Motives for Cooperative Conversions to Corporations. Collins, R. A. Centre for Co-operatives, University of California - Research Report No. 1. May 1991. (Booklet)

Co-operatives in Saskatchewan - An Information Series. Co-operatives Directorate, Saskatchewan Eco- nomic and Co-operative Development. (Series of factsheets)

Co-operative Organizations and Canadian Society: Popular Institutions and the Dilemmas of Change. Edited by Fulton, M. University of Toronto Press. Toronto. 1990. (Book)

Farmer Cooperative Theory: Recent Developments. Staatz, J. M. United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Cooperative Service – Research Report 84. June 1989. (Book)

Make No Small Plans: a Cooperative Revival for Rural America. Egerstrom, L. Lone Oak Press, Ltd. Rochester, Minnesota. 1994. (Book)

Making Membership Meaningful: Participatory Democracy in Co-operatives. International Joint Project on Co-operative Democracy. Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. 1995. (Book)

The Nature of Co-operation. Craig, J. G. Black Rose Books, Montreal. 1993. (Book)

Journal of Cooperatives. Produced by the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives. 50 F Street N.W., Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20001. (Journal)

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriservice-bc

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

BRITISH COLUMBIA | Ministry of Agriculture

Canada