

CO-OPS ARE ALL AROUND US

A cooperative day in YOUR life

So how did you spend your day? Chances are cooperatives were a big part of it from dawn until bedtime. Take a moment to read this quick overview of how co-ops might be impacting you every day.

Your morning orange juice might have come from Florida's Natural, a producer-owned cooperative based in— you guessed it—Florida, but distributing throughout the United States. If your morning coffee came from Equal Exchange (www.equalexchange.coop), you get bonus points because they source their coffee from farmer-owned co-ops in developing countries, and they are a worker-owned co-op. If you like milk in your coffee or cereal, check this out: More than 86 percent of all fluid milk flows through a co-op!

The wheat in your muffin or toast was most likely processed through a farmer-owned grain elevator in the Midwest. If you had cranberries in that muffin, or you washed it down with cranberry juice, the cranberries likely came from Ocean Spray, a producer-owned co-op. Perhaps you topped your toast with Land O'Lakes butter or Welch's Concord Grape Jam—also producer-owned cooperatives.



**Richland Electric
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Did you catch up on the morning news as you ate breakfast? You probably read

stories produced by the Associated Press, a news cooperative owned by its newspaper and broadcast members.

After that big co-op breakfast, it is time to start the day. Working parents might drop off their young children at one of the over 1,000 pre-school co-ops that operate throughout the United States.

Perhaps this is the day to make some improvements to your home. Ace Hardware, True Value, and Do It Best are all examples of purchasing co-ops. These are small businesses that come together to form a co-op so that they can compete with big box retailers that are not owned by people in the local community.

You might need to stop by the credit union for a loan or pick up some cash for that home project from one of the 25,000 ATMs in the credit union network. More than 100 million people in the United States are members of a credit union, and yep, you guessed it, credit unions are co-ops.

On your way home, you may stop at one of the 300 community-owned cooperative grocery stores in the country. Many of the meats, cheese and other dairy products, and




vegetables sold at those stores are also sourced from co-ops. If you choose organic food, chances are you're eating food that was produced at a co-op such as Organic Valley.

If you are in a hurry, maybe you swing by KFC, Taco Bell, or Pizza Hut to pick up dinner. The franchise owners of these fast food restaurants are all members of a purchasing co-op, just like the hardware stores listed earlier. So are the owners of Dunkin Donuts and many other franchises.

After dinner, perhaps you settle in to watch TV from one of the more than 1,000 small cable companies serving rural America that have come together to form a co-op that helps keep costs as low as possible. Or maybe you surf the Internet through services provided by your local telecommunications co-op.

Travel plans? If you are on a business trip or vacation and staying in a Best Western—that is also a purchasing co-op!

And when it's time for "lights out," you can flip that switch knowing you're receiving safe, reliable electricity from your local electric cooperative, your friends at Richland Electric Cooperative. From morning until night, you can have a very cooperative day. 

Source: Adam Schwartz, founder of The Cooperative Way a consulting firm that helps co-ops succeed. He is an author, speaker and a member-owner of the CDS Consulting Co-op. You can follow him on Twitter @adamcooperative or email him at aschwartz@thecooperativeway.coop.

Illustration on page 15 is from "What is a Co-op?," a 90-second animated short from Cooperative Network. In this short, viewers accompany co-op member "Jane" as she walks through a day in her small town. Watch the full video on Cooperative Network's website, www.cooperativenetwork.coop.

What do these well-known brands have in common?



PRINCIPLES + VALUES = COOPERATIVES

“A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.”—Dwight D. Eisenhower

All cooperative businesses around the world operate in accordance with the following seven cooperative principles.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Cooperation among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

Less known is the fact that cooperatives have also adopted a set of values that helps to put these principles into practice.

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

Let’s take a closer look at these values and see how they impact us here at Richland Electric Cooperative.

The founders of Richland Electric created it to serve the members who use the electricity and other services we provide, and we continue to do that today. This embodies the values of self-help, taking action and doing what needs to be done. We also know we must embrace the value of self-responsibility and be accountable to you, our member.

Each member has one vote, no matter how much electricity you use. This ensures that democracy is practiced the way it is intended with equality for all members. This is a key difference between co-ops and investor-owned companies where the number of votes you have depends on the number of shares you own.

For co-op members, equity has two meanings. We strive to treat all of our members fairly. It also means that, as a member, you have equity (ownership) in the co-op.

While each co-op is autonomous, we do act in solidarity with other co-ops and our community. We know that we can do more for you by partnering with other co-ops and like-minded organizations.

Your parents were right when they said, “honesty is the best policy.” As an owner, you have the right to expect us to act with openness and in a transparent manner. We welcome your active participation in our co-op.

Cooperatives have long (and correctly) been identified as the original socially responsible business, meaning we care about the impact we have on the community while ensuring we are economically viable.

We try to demonstrate our concern for community through caring for others every single day whether it is through donations to community organizations or by providing safety

demonstrations to the local EMS personal and to elementary age students attending our local schools.

By using our values in support of our principles since our founding, we’ve been able to serve you for the past 77 years and will continue to do so long into the future.

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RULES TO LIVE BY:

When I was growing up on the farm, we had several rules, many of them unspoken. My brothers and I knew what they were; we also knew the consequences if we broke one of them. Here are some examples:

- Don't talk back to Ma or Pa.
- Don't leave food on your plate.
- When visiting relatives and offered seconds at the dinner table, refuse—the first time.
- Don't leave the table until everyone has finished eating.
- Take off your cap when you come into the house.
- Never sit at a table wearing your cap.
- Leave your dirty boots on the porch.
- Don't tattle on your brothers.
- Never cuss, or if you do, make sure Ma can't hear.
- Don't listen in on party-line phone conversations—that is for Ma to do.
- Always wear clean underwear to town.
- Don't whistle when you can't think of anything else to do.
- Never start a fight you can't finish.
- Learn to run fast—a good way to avoid fights.
- Never make fun of someone who is different from you—especially if he is bigger than you.
- Don't complain about going to church; it doesn't do any good because you are going to church no matter what.
- If the teacher punishes you at school, expect more severe punishment when you get home.
- Don't speak unless spoken to.
- Comb your hair before going to school.
- Stay off the barn roof.
- Don't shoot holes in the windmill fans.
- Keep at least one blade of your jackknife sharp.
- Don't try to break up two dogs in a fight.
- Never let a barn cat into the house.
- Don't make a pet of a pig. It will spoil your taste for bacon.
- Never turn your back on a Billy goat.
- No matter how difficult the job, don't complain.
- Do more than is expected of you.
- Don't climb the windmill.
- Never be late for anything. There is never an excuse for being late.
- Don't tell the neighbors what happens at home.
- Learn how and when to say “thank you” and “you are welcome.”
- Keep your shoes tied.
- Never curse the rain.
- If it looks like someone needs help, drop what you are doing and help them.
- Avoid arguments, unless you know you are right and have the facts to prove it.
- Don't slouch. Stand up straight. Sit up straight.
- Keep your mouth shut when you eat.
- When you speak, don't mumble.
- Don't speak until you have something to say.
- Be ready to help those who have less than you.
- Be willing to share what you know—some skill, some bit of knowledge—but not until you are asked.
- Smile, even when you don't feel like it. Your smile may be what it takes to get someone else to smile.
- Learn how to tell a good story—but try to stick to the facts, mostly.

Did you have unwritten rules in your family? Have you written them down?



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