

# Making the Connection: College Conference on Cooperatives & Building Co-operative Futures Conference

Cathy Statz  
Wisconsin Farmers Union, USA

Association of Cooperative Educators (ACE) Institute  
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## Why Farmers Union?

- Founded in 1902 in Point, Texas, USA
- Farmers and rural people wishing to improve their quality of life through education, legislation and cooperation.
- In 1930, Farmers Union established a formal Education Program which included summer youth camps, conferences and workshops for members and the general public.

## A History of Collaboration – College Conference on Cooperatives

- About 25 years ago, a University of Minnesota-Waseca professor and Minnesota Farmers Union made the connection:  
**his students + their coach bus & support =  
a Twin Cities ag co-op tour**
- Led to success for both in meeting their missions to provide cooperative education to emerging and future cooperative employees and leaders.

## From Bus Tour to Conference

- 1996: with support from the Cenex Foundation (now the CHS Foundation), the program evolved into a three-day conference with students from several Minnesota schools
- Additional post-secondary schools added over time
- Speaker list expanded to include representation from food co-ops, credit unions, housing and other kinds of cooperatives

## College Conference on Cooperatives

- Today, 80+ participants are drawn from 8-10 states.
- 2006 conference participants hailed from:



Colorado  
Idaho  
Iowa  
Kansas  
Minnesota  
Montana  
Nebraska  
North Dakota  
South Dakota  
Wisconsin

## CCOC Participants: Both Audience and Presenters



- Participants who have taken part in youth leadership, ag-related or cooperative conferences or organizations have an opportunity to share their experiences.

## CCOC – NVNV Connection

- Since 2002, inclusion of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota-based New Visions-New Ventures (NVNV) monthly co-op luncheon & guest speaker event into the program.
- Networking between and among CCOC participants and metro area cooperators.



## College Conference on Cooperatives

- Agricultural co-ops as a starting point – most familiar to most participants
- Credit unions, food & other retail co-ops, housing co-ops, worker co-ops
- Development – rural, urban and international
- Tours, museum visit, dinner theatre

## CCOC Eligibility

- Seats allotted to participating states and/or post-secondary institutions or youth/ag organizations; often offered to students registered for co-op courses.
- Some seats set aside for youth identified outside the traditional course setting; i.e. AFA, FFA, co-op youth councils, etc.
- Number of participants is limited to maintain a quality experience and to facilitate effective tours.

## Drawing a Larger Circle

- Participants are introduced to a much wider world of cooperation – from cross-sector representation to the role of cooperatives in domestic and international development work.

*"We learned a lot of things we didn't even know about cooperatives...we had no idea that there were so many different cooperatives just right here in MN."*

- Ashley, Karen and Colin, 2006 CCOC

## Drawing a Larger Circle

- Career, internship and conference opportunities are presented and participants are encouraged to continue their learning.

*"Everyone I was talking to that worked for co-ops loved their job, and they all sounded very interesting to me"*

- Rachel, 2006 CCOC

*"The conference really made me think about the direction I want to go after graduation... I see co-op work as an effective way to help..."*

-Peggy, 2006 CCOC

## Drawing a Larger Circle

- Over the course of the weekend, a more meaningful understanding of co-ops - and cooperation - is developed.

*"Sometimes we take the co-ops for granted, and forget how important they are to the economies of our rural communities."*

- Students from Lake Area Technical College, SD, 2006

*"This helped us open up our eyes and think about what agriculture and cooperatives are all about."*

- Students from South Central College, MN, 2006

## From Minneapolis...to the World!

- Several College Conference on Cooperatives participants have gone on to attend the annual Building Co-operative Futures Conference (BCF).
- Started by Dr. Ian McPherson at the British Columbia Institute of Co-operative Studies
- First Building Co-operative Futures Conference was held in 2003, to coincide with Mapping Co-operative Studies in the New Millennium research conference.

## Building Co-operative Futures

building  
**co-operative**  
futures

4th Annual International Youth Conference

24-27 May 2006  
Manchester & Rochdale, UK

COOPERATING  
OUT  
OF  
POVERTY

**Co-operating Out of Poverty**  
Can Co-ops Save the World?

## Building Co-operative Futures

- Ages 18-30
- From those new to co-ops...to members, employees, directors, researchers, developers
- Program planned by steering committee and coordinated by host organization
  - Keynote Speakers
  - “True Stories” Workshops
  - Co-op Tours

Co-op Tours...  
for education, career development, & fun!



## Co-op Tours

- 2006 BCF in the UK included a much-anticipated trip to visit the Rochdale Pioneers' store.

*"A highlight...for me was a visit to the Toad Lane store...to stand in front of this tiny store and realize the enormity of its impact was probably the most humbling part of the trip."*

- Max, 2006 BCF,  
2005 ACE Institute attendee



## Connections that last...



## Building Co-operatives Futures A Hands-On Cooperative Experience



## Building Co-operative Futures

*"This conference is one the best I have attended and I left feeling truly inspired. I now have friends across the globe and want to work with them and others to expand the presence of co-ops and work to change the injustices of our world one step a time."*

- Bill, 2006 BCF,  
- 2005 ACE Institute attendee





## Building Co-operative Futures

The co-operative college

The Cooperative Foundation

UNITED

RICE

WPU

Co-operative Group

Saskatchewan Cooperative Association

## Connections that carry over...

- 2003 & 2005 BCF participants have had the option to stay on for research and/or annual meeting-related cooperative conferences scheduled to dovetail with BCF.



## Building Co-operative Futures

*"I attended the conference with an open mind to learn what cooperatives are all about and how they would relate to my career goals. Little did I know that I would be introduced into a world where cooperatives are a way of life, and that my views of co-ops would be changed forever.... The conference presented success stories of people organizing toward a positive, common outcome that affirmed my enthusiasm for the progression of cooperatives and that has inspired me to support cooperatives in my community."*

- Layne, 2005 BCF

## For more information:

Cathy Statz, Education Director  
Wisconsin Farmers Union  
117 West Spring Street  
Chippewa Falls, WI USA  
715-723-5561

[cstatz@wisconsinfarmersunion.com](mailto:cstatz@wisconsinfarmersunion.com)  
[www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com)

For Building Co-operative Futures info:  
<http://bcics.uvic.ca/youthzone/>