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“Cooperatives Build Leadership” through annual Co-ops Yes! Youth Leadership Conference

Eau Claire, Wis. [March 13, 2017] – Over 100 high school students from Wisconsin and Minnesota attended Cooperative Network’s 2017 Co-ops Yes! Youth Leadership Conference in Eau Claire, Wis. last week. The two-day conference, held March 6-7, offered attendees a variety of cooperative and leadership learning opportunities and focused on the theme: “Cooperatives Build Leadership”.

“Cooperative Network is committed to providing our future cooperative members and leaders with educational opportunities to learn about the cooperative business model, co-op membership benefits, career opportunities and personal leadership development,” says Ethan Giebel, Cooperative Network’s government and educational services director.

On the first day, attendees heard a Co-ops 101 presentation by Jesus Lucero of the USA Co-op Youth Council, “Co-Labbing Cooperative Style” from Margie Hylkema and Mickella Geary of Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative and “Directing my Career in Cooperatives from Beth Oliphant from FCC Services. These sessions were followed by a “Breakthrough Leadership” seminar from Craig Hillier. On the second day, students were allowed to choose from the following breakout sessions: “There’s a Co-op Career for That!” – Kristen Henning and Fawn McNamara, Harvest Land Cooperative; “Lifelong Financial Fitness: An Interactive Panel Discussion” – Bridget Petersen, SPIRE Credit Union and Amanda Kissner, Wakota Federal Credit Union; and “Leadership Through Cooperation” – Lisa Konkkel, Big Foot High School. Alison Wedig concluded the speaker program with a presentation on “Building Your Leadership Blueprint”.

Each year, participants elect a panel of their peers to serve on the Youth Board. These individuals will attend additional sponsored learning events throughout the year, tour area cooperatives and aid in planning the next year’s conference. The 2017-18 Co-ops Yes! Youth Board members are:

- Jacinda Hustoft from Luverne, Minn. (Sponsored by Sioux Valley Energy)
- Lauren Laphorn from Pipestone, Minn. (Sponsored by Sioux Valley Energy)
- Clarissa Simonsen from Sleepy Eye, Minn. (Sponsored by Harvest Land Cooperative/Ag Quest)
- Jenna Stott from Tomah, Wis. (Sponsored by Oakdale Electric Cooperative)
- Paige VanderWerff from Dane, Wis. (Sponsored by InSight FS)
- Devon Weiland from Colby, Wis. (Sponsored by Colby High School FFA)

The program was provided with support from the CHS Foundation, AgStar Fund for Rural America, Heartland Credit Union, Organic Valley and Badgerland Financial.

Cooperative Network serves approximately 400 Wisconsin and Minnesota member-cooperatives by providing advocacy, education, public awareness, and development services to a wide variety of cooperatives including agricultural marketing and processing, credit unions, dairy, electric, Farm Credit, farm supply, health care, mutual insurance, housing, service, telecommunications, worker-owned cooperatives, and more. For more information about Cooperative Network, visit www.cooperativenetwork.coop.

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