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Cooperatives - An Integral Part of Our Local Economy

Madison, WI. [September 26, 2018] – October is National Cooperative Month, a time to celebrate and honor the important role cooperatives play in building communities. One in three Americans is a member of a cooperative, an organization that is equally owned and controlled by their members. Unlike corporations, the sole purpose of a cooperative is to maximize benefits to its members rather than maximize benefits to its shareholders. The range of products and services cooperatives offer is wide, from electricity and groceries to healthcare and insurance. Cooperatives are especially important to the local economy as they generate local jobs, reinvest their profits locally, and pay local taxes.

Today our local cooperatives are facing unprecedented challenges. As the President and CEO of Cooperative Network, a trade organization dedicated to the success of the cooperative business model, I've had the opportunity to hear directly from our members about the issues they face. Even though our members come from a dozen different business sectors, when asked what keeps them up at night, a common theme emerged - in a world where one can access just about anything on a smart phone, how do we maintain value in the local community, in collaborative efforts, in personal communication?

Fortunately, the Upper Midwest has a strong network of cooperatives, rich in heritage, offering diverse products and services, deeply embedded and involved in their communities. Cooperatives have supplied the inputs and marketed the production of generations of Midwestern farmers. Cooperatives supplied the electricity, communication systems, credit, insurance and other pillars of business that built our communities. Cooperatives are uniquely positioned to meet the needs of their members in the local community. And all follow the cooperative business principles of returning value to their members.

Today, cooperatives remain positioned to meet the common needs of their members. They are emerging in new forms such as senior housing cooperatives, an exciting form of cooperative housing for an aging population determined to stay engaged and active. Worker cooperatives are being formed to meet the needs for health care, social services, child care and transportation. Where government services, private enterprise or declining entrepreneurship fail to fully address community needs, cooperatives have arisen to fill that gap.

The cooperative system is well-equipped to overcome the challenges they face today. By continuing to put their members first, adapting to change and committing to their local communities, cooperatives will continue to thrive. Cooperatives prove we are all better together.

Joining a local co-op is a great way to support your community – [click here](#) to find Cooperative Network member cooperatives near you.

Cooperative Network serves 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.