Cooperative Communications

FARMER COOPERATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES
COOPERATIVE INFORMATION REPORT 1
SECTION 11

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SERVICE

Cooperatives are beginning to use satellite technology to communicate with members, promote products, and to beam educational television programming to rural areas.

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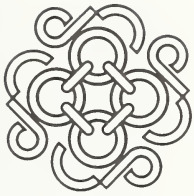


Communications activities in cooperatives differ little from those in other businesses in terms of methods, media, and technology. Most audiences are similar, and the objective is the same when the fundamental purpose of communications efforts is to support and enhance business success.

The distinctive nature of cooperative communications surfaces with the added function and emphasis of educating various audiences, including member-owners, on the uniqueness of the cooperative itself.

Education has been viewed as an essential function of the cooperative business since 1844 when the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers listed it among the 14 principal features that described how the Society would conduct business. Though the Rochdale pioneers weren't the innovators of cooperative thought, their subsequent business success drew attention to the features they used as a blueprint to follow. Their emphasis on education as a principle was widely publicized and has formed the foundation for the inclusion of it in the organization and operation of many cooperatives today.

The Pioneers saw the cooperative as an instrument of both economic and social reform. "Devoting 2-1/2 percent of all profits to education to promote the improvement and efficiency of the members" was viewed as necessary to deal with illiteracy and lack of a general education among the poor. Though the Pioneers saw a role their cooperative could play in education as a distinct social concern, they were well aware an educated membership was essential to successfully running a business.

The educational emphasis of cooperative communications has changed over time as public education systems developed. The focus has narrowed to developing a better understanding of the unique characteristics

of the cooperative business by member-owners in particular and the public in general.

The need continues for cooperative business education, simply because it is not being adequately addressed in the traditional public and private educational systems. Discussion of cooperatives is usually absent or quite limited in business and economic courses. Perhaps one reason is simply the rarity of cooperatives as a business type in the makeup of our competitive private enterprise system. Though numbers of cooperatives are increasing, in the late 1980's, they totaled only about 42,000 out of nearly 17 million businesses of all types.

SCOPE AND STATE OF THE ART

Cooperative communications activities cover traditional business communications but extend to the educational dimension associated with the unique operating characteristics of the cooperative enterprise. Though nearly everything that occurs in a cooperative involves some form of communications, this publication focuses on those activities normally identified as information and member and public relations functions. Necessarily, discussion overlaps promotional activities, government relations, and education and training—the latter two areas presented in detail in Section 10 of this series of publications describing farmer cooperatives.

Discussion is limited primarily also to communications activities carried out by cooperative organizations (figure 1). A publication of larger scope would have to include cooperative communications such as books, pamphlets, and articles that developed the cooperative concept. In many cases, such discussion—and specific publications—led to the formation of cooperative organizations.

Agricultural cooperatives as a group employ state-of-the-art strategies, techniques, and technologies in business communications activities. They are occasionally innovative industrywide.

Informational, educational, and promotional printed materials have been used the longest and are most widely used. Nearly every cooperative has at least a newsletter going regularly to members. As cooperative size and sophistication increased, the printed materials increased in variety, format, quantity, and quality. Cooperative materials issued by the larger organizations favorably compare with the best in corporate communications and periodically win awards in professional competition. A handful of publications have circulations in excess of 100,000 copies, with the largest in excess of 330,000.

Sponsorship of radio and television news and entertainment programs is widely used by cooperatives for product promotion and for improving the understanding of the cooperative institution itself. Cooperatives are major network advertisers. Several are among the top 150 agricultural advertisers in terms of dollars spent. Additionally, they regularly support special events ranging from those sponsored by local communities to those with national prominence.

Just as the Industrial Revolution changed how the human race labored to produce goods and services, the Electronic Revolution is changing how we communicate. And cooperatives are among the early adopters of this television-computer technology. As examples, in the mid-1980's, three cooperatives and two other firms set up a joint venture

Figure 1

The Cooperative Communications Sphere

Adapted from Cooperative Communications Handbook, University of Wisconsin.

to electronically beam information in a text format to farmers' television sets.

Sunkist Growers, Inc., Sherman Oaks, CA, in 1984 conducted the first food-oriented international videoconference, which tied health education with product promotion. In 1985, Southern States Cooperative, Richmond, VA, became the first cooperative to use videoconferencing by satellite to beam its annual meeting to members.

Several regional cooperatives provide videotapes to member cooperatives on a variety of subjects.

Cooperative communications efforts have produced some dramatic results—but with an ironical twist.

Many cooperatives' brands of food products are household names and highly respected, even internationally in a few cases. Examples are Sunkist, Welch's, Ocean Spray, Blue Diamond, Land O'Lakes, Sunsweet, and others among some 350 brands of processed foods offered by more than 100 cooperatives. The irony is that the general public is almost totally unaware these product brands come from farmer cooperatives.

A further contradiction is that Gallup polls taken in 1976 and 1981 indicate a decline in public awareness of cooperatives, along with favorable attitudes. Perhaps most serious is the continuing modest support of cooperatives by farmer-members themselves. Though use is steadily increasing, farmers at the first stage beyond the farm still purchase only a fourth of their major production supplies and market a fourth of their products through their own cooperatives.

EARLY METHODS

Formation and operation of the earliest cooperatives were essentially exercises in oral communications. Farmers kept in personal touch to coordinate the buying and selling of their products.

Rural Free Delivery (RFD) and the rural telephone offered the first alternatives. A Midwest livestock cooperative used a "postcard ring" to coordinate marketing. Farmers let each other know by postcard when they were ready to ship hogs to city markets.

An early use of the telephone was a "long ring" on the country line to alert farmers to the arrival of their cooperatively bought rail car of feed or seed.

The "little red schoolhouse" played its part in facilitating early communications by serving as a meeting place for member and board meetings.

Those early written and oral communication methods enabled

farmers to coordinate purchasing and marketing activities to get lower freight rates through carload shipping, volume discounts on purchases, and larger volumes of products attracted greater interest among buyers.

As cooperatives became formal businesses with permanent locations, other communications methods were initiated. These included issuing their own newsletters, newspapers, and magazines; advertising in community newspapers and on radio; and mailing "penny postcards," manager personal letters, and flyers with product and meeting information to members.

Little information is recorded on which cooperative first adopted which communication technique or program. One of the better records of a cooperative's communications strategy over time is contained in *The Sunsweet Story*, published by Sunsweet Growers, Inc., San Jose, CA, in 1967 (table 1) and subsequently updated.

Table 1—Sunsweet Growers historical communications profile

1915—Growers Information Bureau established to provide members with semimonthly reports on crop and market conditions.

1918—California Prune and Apricot Growers, Inc., formed a year earlier, selected Sunsweet as its trademark and retained Honig-Cooper Advertising Company to prepare a national advertising campaign.

1919—Conducted first national advertising campaign in magazines and newspapers.

1920s—Early, used booth displays.

1923—Used a major New York City radio station to broadcast information about the nutritive value of prunes.

1926—Launched a billboard advertising campaign for Sunsweet prunes.

1928—Hired a newspaperman to provide press services.

1936—Established membership magazine, *Sunsweet Standard*.

1936—Produced 40-minute film, a dramatized lecture on dried fruit marketing.

1938—Produced a motion picture, "The Purple Harvest," for the first Golden Gate International Exposition at San Francisco.

1939—Sponsored CBS radio show and aired a series of six talks on industry problems.

1947—Published an educational booklet, "A Story of a Successful Grower Cooperative," for high school students.

1949—Developed "Sunny Sweet," a cartoon figure for cartoon film commercials used for theater showing.

1950—Sponsored a television program on the CBS eastern network.

1951—Began distributing a teaching unit to home economics teachers and home economists.

1954—Jointly sponsored with Sun-Maid Raisin Growers of California a special advertising and sales promotion project, "Sun-Maid-Sunsweet Dried Fruit Carnival."

1955—Distributed nationally a booklet, "The Valuable Prune," to doctors and nutritionists.

1956—To reach new and different consumer audiences, promoted products on the Art Linkletter House Party on the CBS radio network, aired on 205 stations coast to coast.

1962-63—Joined with Sun-Maid in an expanded five-phase promotion program involving joint efforts with other businesses, elaborate displays, and magazine and television advertising.

1964—Joint Sunsweet-Sun-Maid "checkerboard" magazine advertising promotion, estimated to have been seen by 225 million people, received special award from the Magazine Advertising Bureau.

1965—Expanded educational materials, developing an eight-page classroom study unit, "Visions of Sugarplums," and sending it to 50,000 home economics teachers.

1967—Began extensive use of television networks for product advertising.

1977—Poster-size handout, "The Story of California Prunes," developed for schools and the public.

1979—Member magazine, *Sunsweet Standard*, combined with *Diamond Walnut News* and renamed *Diamond/Sunsweet News*.

1980—*Diamond/Sunsweet News* becomes the *Sun-Diamond Grower*, reflecting the merger of Sunsweet Growers, Diamond Walnut Growers, and Sun-Maid Growers of California to become Sun-Diamond Growers of California.

1981—"The World's Favorite Prune," film produced in English and foreign language versions.

1982—"Sunsweet, the World's Favorite Prune," a four-page brochure produced to describe the California prune industry and Sunsweet's prune products.

1985—Another poster-size handout, "In Pursuit of Dried Fruit," issued.

California Fruit Growers Exchange, later to become Sunkist Growers, Inc., has been a historical innovator in merchandising techniques. The cooperative began its uninterrupted consumer advertising with a full-page ad in the Des Moines Register on March 2, 1908. Further, the newspaper ad was one of the first to use color—oranges were orange and the leaves green.

Also in 1908, a magazine was established that led to the formation of a cooperative that continues to publish it today. William Hirth founded *The Missouri Farmer and Breeder*, then changed the name to *The Missouri Farmer*. The publication led to the formation of Missouri Farmers

Fortieth anniversary issue of Missouri Farmers Association rolls off the press in 1954.

Association, now called MFA, Inc., which subsequently renamed the magazine *Today's Farmer*.

MFA's membership magazine may be the oldest continuously issued cooperative publication, though more than a dozen have been around for at least 50 years (table 2). Other publications still issued have a long history under different names as the result of mergers over the years.

Table 2—Oldest cooperative publications

Publication	*Date started*
Today's Farmer MFA, Inc. Columbia, MO (Started as Missouri Farmer and Breeder)	1908
Dairynews Dairylea Cooperative, Inc. Syracuse, NY	1916
Michigan Milk Messenger Michigan Milk Producers Association Detroit, MI	1919
Almond Facts California Almond Growers Exchange Sacramento, CA (Started as "The Minute Book")	1922
Colorado Potato Grower Colorado Potato Growers Exchange Denver, CO	1922
Staple Cotton Review Staple Cotton Cooperative Association Greenwood, MI	1923
California Fruit Grower Blue Anchor Sacramento, CA	1924
MFC News MFC Services (AAL) Madison, MS	1927
Calavo News Calavo Growers of California Los Angeles, CA	1927
Equity News Round-Up Equity Cooperative Livestock Sales Association Milwaukee, WI	1930
Farmland News Farmland Industries, Inc. Kansas City, MO (Started as "The Cooperative Consumer" published by Consumers Cooperative Association)	1933
Farmer Cooperatives Agricultural Cooperative Service U.S. Department of Agriculture Washington, DC (Started as "News of Farmer Cooperatives," published by Farm Credit Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture.)	1934

Cooperative Partners, which just began in 1988 as a joint magazine for Land O'Lakes and CENEX members, has a history dating from 1913. Equity Cooperative Exchange began publishing *Cooperators' Herald* that year. In 1927, it was combined with the *Farm Market Guide*, published by Producers Alliance, after the co-ops merged. The combined publications became the *Farmers Union Herald*, which was renamed *Co-op Country News* in 1974. *Cooperative Partners* is the result of combining the *Co-op Country News* with Land O'Lakes' *Mirror*.

Sun-Diamond Grower evolved from combining the *Diamond Walnut News*, begun in 1917, and the *Sunsweet Standard*, started in 1936.

By 1940, formal publications were still rare among cooperatives. Of 11,000 cooperatives, only 100 reported "house organs" in a survey by the Farm Credit Administration's Cooperative Research and Service Division, now known as Agricultural Cooperative Service.

Joint efforts at funding publications have been numerous. One such effort in 1940 was *Producer-Consumer Magazine*, published by Producer-Consumer Publishing Company, Inc., jointly owned by 90 cooperatives in the Texas Panhandle and used by 200 cooperatives.

Only a few cooperative publications with a national orientation have been tried. Most were short-lived, but some made significant contributions. Cooperative historian Dr. Joseph Knapp wrote of the value of the *Cooperative Marketing Journal* serving as communications link between the collapse of a national cooperative organization and the organization of a new one:

"One very significant legacy of the National Council was the *Cooperative Marketing Journal*, which evolved out of the experience of Robin Hood and Walton Peteet (Hood had been director of information and Peteet the chief executive officer for the National Council) who came to see the need for a journal of this kind to solidify and strengthen the cooperative marketing movement."

"The *Journal* was the link between the old Council—The National Council of Farmers' Cooperative Marketing Associations—and the new Council—The National Cooperative Council (now the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC), which was formed in 1929, and of which Robin Hood became the general secretary in 1930."

In subsequent years, Knapp said the *Journal* "served a useful purpose in keeping its member associations informed and united on common problems, while it also brought to the government the views of the cooperatives."

The National Cooperative Council evolved from discussion at the

fourth annual meeting of the American Institute of Cooperation (AIC), formed in 1925, and which published its proceedings in book form under the title of *American Cooperation*. The publication has become known also as the "Yearbook of Cooperation." Published almost continuously since 1925, the publication can lay claim to being the oldest and most legitimate national cooperative publication in the private sector.

Another longstanding communications effort of a different nature is represented by the monthly periodical, *Farmer Cooperatives*, published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Published since 1934, the magazine began as an 8-page mimeograph newsletter called *News for Farmer Cooperatives*. It was part of an effort to "intensify the research and service work now being carried on to aid farmers' cooperatives by the Farm Credit Administration," said Frank W. Peck, Cooperative Bank Commissioner. In the first issue, FCA announced the organization of a research section and a service and education section.

Down through the years, the magazine has served as a major vehicle to carry out the information and education functions contained in the Cooperative Marketing Act of 1926.

Providing for a division of cooperative marketing in the Department of Agriculture, the act included provisions for the "acquisition and dissemination of information pertaining to cooperation" and "to promote the knowledge of cooperative principles and practices."

Farmer Cooperatives continues to serve as a cooperative management magazine with a focus audience of professional management, farmer directors, and academicians interested in cooperatives.

As cooperatives grew, they were able to expand their overall communications activities. More cooperatives began to add professionally trained employees to improve the quality of internal publications, such as employee and membership publications, annual reports, and merchandising materials. In 1952, a public relations guide, *The Nation's Leading House Magazines*, contained eight cooperatives' publications among 1,400 major ones listed.

As the number of communications employees increased, primarily print media specialists formed communications professional organizations in the late 1940's and early 1950's. These organizations (discussed later) have played a significant role in improving the communications skills of members and providing a forum for exchanging ideas and keeping current on emerging technology.

AUDIENCES

Early cooperatives essentially directed communications efforts to members and, in the case of marketing cooperatives, to consumers of their products. As cooperatives grew, became more complex, and their areas of influence broadened, a more targeted communications strategy developed.

Specific information, educational, and, depending on the audience, promotional materials were directed to members, directors, management, employees, legislators, key opinionmakers, and the general public. Further refinements have produced materials directed to youth, young farm couples, and teachers.

Members

A cooperative's existence and its degree of success depend directly on the effectiveness of communications with members. CENEX, St. Paul, MN, sums up why member communication is vital with an advertising slogan: "The customer is the company." It is a unique relationship among businesses.

The member must be informed as a user and an owner. Ownership information needs to stress that benefits are derived from use. Patron information needs to emphasize that the benefits from use depend a great deal on members taking an informed and active role in decisionmaking as owners.

Patron Information. Information directed to the member as a user of the cooperative is much the same as for any other business. The cooperative, however, must conduct a program recognizing that most of its patrons are also owners. Some information, therefore, explains the importance of using the cooperative in a way that contributes to operating efficiency. An example in a purchasing cooperative is future booking programs that enable plant managers to spread production more evenly throughout the year rather than having to operate around the clock during seasonal peaks.

In marketing cooperatives, a major underlying concept of marketing orders and membership agreements is to provide information so members will use the cooperative in a way that evens the flow of product to market, establishes quality standards, and sets other conditions that fulfill market demand. So, marketing information of this nature is beneficial to the member and to the customer who buys the member's products through the cooperative. The information should contribute to marketing efficiency

that benefits the member as an owner and benefits the customer who gets a quality product at a reasonable price.

In purchasing cooperatives, member-owners, like any other customers, need to know what products and services are available, the price, and an understanding or guarantee of quality. Members are not "loyalty-bound" to buy from their cooperative when it has inferior products and services or prices are not competitive. However, they are responsible as owners to correct the situation, rather than simply take their business elsewhere.

A good member product/service information program could include:

- A leaflet generally describing the products and services the cooperative offers, particularly useful for new members or contacting potential members;
- Announcements of new products and services, including in-store notices, mailed flyers, newsletter items, and advertising through print, radio, and television;
- A member newsletter, newspaper, or magazine that carries information on changes in products and services, price specials, and other use-related information;
- A leaflet on credit policies;
- University or manufacturer information regarding product research, use, quality, and safety aspects;
- Member product information seminars;
- Promotions that take advantage of supplier discounts or cost-sharing merchandising;
- Surveys to determine customer opinion of products and services and desires for changes;
- On-farm demonstrations or test plots of products and services; and
- Appreciation days, or similar events, to say "thanks for cooperating."

The desired result of a successful customer-type information program is for members to be as familiar with their cooperative's products and services as they are with their farm machinery and farm products.

Investor-Owner Information. The thrust of information going to a member of a cooperative as an investor-owner is considerably different from information directed to investors in other types of businesses.

Cooperatives promote participation in decisionmaking, encouraging members to attend district, regional, and annual meetings. It is common for other businesses to send an annual meeting notice to stockholders

with an enclosed proxy voting card complete with suggestions of the board on how to vote.

Investor-oriented company communications focus on the performance of the organization in terms of its ability to produce a high return on the stockholder's investment. Cooperative communications focus on the organization's success in serving its members' needs, thus fulfilling the purpose for which they joined.

Cooperatives have a more stable ownership and know better who their members are. Consequently, communications in the form of weekly or monthly publications and various other methods are more frequent. Investor-oriented businesses have a constantly changing ownership, sometimes concealed by third-party brokerage firms. Communications usually are limited to quarterly and annual reports, occasionally supplemented with quarterly general interest magazines.

Good communications programs with members as investor-owners include:

- Assuring each member has easy access to a copy of the cooperative's articles of incorporation, bylaws, and mission statement;
- Making available information on what a cooperative is in terms of its distinguishing operating principles and important practices;
- Distributing an "ownership manual" outlining the cooperative's functions and operating policies;
- Seeking members' opinions periodically regarding the cooperative's present activities and future direction; and
- Demonstrating the most effective means of specific benefits derived by participation in a cooperative.

Wisconsin Dairies, Baraboo, has developed one of the more elaborate and comprehensive member relations manuals. Assembled in a looseleaf binder, the manual is a model as a combination user/owner communications device. Various sections deal with a description of the cooperative, history, mission statement, operating policies, products and services, benefits distribution, and member involvement activities.

Additionally, the cooperative's magazine carries a regular insert form so members can ask questions and express opinions.

The Well-Informed Member. A handbook, "Cooperative Communications Techniques," published by the University of Wisconsin, lists the benefits of an effective member communication program:

"A well-informed member who understands the organization, its policies, and actions generally will remain more loyal, have fewer complaints, take a greater interest, patronize the cooperative when given a choice, and will stay with the organization when the going gets rough."

Such a member will "offer more constructive criticism and

suggestions, promote new products and services, meet obligations and pay bills, stop rumors, and defend the cooperative.''

The well-informed member, continues the handbook, will ''promote a progressive attitude; develop a favorable climate of understanding among members, employees, and directors; and build member confidence in the cooperative and its management.'' Further, the member will ''inform the community of the cooperative's contribution to the local economy.''

A summary result, therefore, is that the well-informed member will ''develop pride among members and the community in the cooperative as a business organization.''

Directors

Certainly, directors need to be the best informed members. Directors are the most critical link in the cooperative communications process. They are the communications translators between the people who own the business and those who are responsible for day-to-day operations. They speak in behalf of the cooperative to other audiences.

As representatives of the member-ownership, directors convey to operating management what members want their cooperative to do. Directors hear from operating management the strategies and requirements necessary for the cooperative to fulfill those needs, and upon approval are responsible for conveying them to the membership.

A director's pledge developed by W. H. Dankers of the University of Minnesota challenges directors to ''Do everything possible to inform members and patrons as a means of better shaping the policies of the association. . .'' and to ''Be a good listener to the reactions of members and patrons as a means of better shaping the policies of the association.''

Directors are responsible for setting communications policy. They decide what information they need to make intelligent decisions related to carrying out their responsibilities as directors. They develop broad guidelines concerning communications from the cooperative to all other audiences.

Agway Inc., Syracuse, NY, includes several specific statements related to communications throughout its corporate publication, *Agway Policies*. As examples:

—Under membership, a purpose of ''enhancing a two-way flow of communications and thereby making Agway responsive to the wants and needs of members''; and

—Under product performance, ''product information, advertising, and promotional materials are to clearly and accurately position Agway products. . .''

A major policy category is public and governmental relations, which carries these statements:

—"Agway will strive to maintain positive relationships with all publics with whom it is involved...

—"Agway will work to foster improved public understanding of issues that affect the Agway basic purpose; and

—"Agway will actively communicate with members, employees, and the public, as appropriate, and in keeping with corporate communication plans."

Directors are receivers and/or transmitters of both operational and educational information.

From operating management, they get periodic financial statements, proposals, and various other types of reports on operations. In most cases, this type of information is received several days prior to regular board meetings. General information is also received by mail in the form of various types of publications issued by the cooperative's communications division.

Most regional cooperatives issue specialized publications for their own directors and those of member cooperatives. Examples are *Vision* from CENEX/Land O'Lakes, *Leadership* from Farmland Industries, and *Farm Credit FOCUS* from the Farm Credit Banks of St. Louis.

Directors are exposed to a wide variety of educational information aimed at helping them do a better job. This information may come from their own cooperative, regional cooperatives, farm credit banks, State cooperative councils, national cooperative organizations, land-grant universities, and agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Educational information comes in the form of publications, seminars and workshops, videotapes, correspondence courses, computer-programming, and formal classroom instruction. For a detailed discussion of special programs for directors, refer to *Cooperative Education and Training*, CIR 1, Section 10.

Directors are often called on to deliver educational and operational information to other participants in a cooperative, including operating management, employees, members and prospective members, new directors, young farm couples, and youth. They are frequently involved in explaining cooperatives and cooperative issues to other businessmen and legislators.

Operating Management

Operating management carries out the communications policy of

the board. Key executives may contribute to the planning process, but usually the cooperative's communications executive and staff are responsible for developing a communications plan. In small cooperatives, this function may be handled by the member relations staff member or by the manager.

Continuing education has been a critically important practice since the earliest days of cooperatives. The uniqueness of the cooperative enterprise requires more attention to maintaining a well-informed membership. Therefore, communications activities in cooperatives have been given a higher priority than is usually the case for investor-oriented corporations.

Communications Planning. Management generally has accepted the tenet that "communications is a cornerstone for cooperatives' success," but bottom-line oriented managers often need to be "sold" communications ideas, believes Bill Matteson, director of public affairs for Farmland Industries.

His advice to communications professionals is that "Selling communications to top management calls for the same precision in planning, organization, budgeting, and implementation that management expects in other functions."

Six steps in translating programs into management terms, he says, are:

1. Develop measurable communications objectives.
2. Write a one-sentence message statement. Ask yourself, "If I have only one thing I can communicate, what will that be?"
3. Define your audiences and rank according to importance.
4. Budget your projects realistically and manage prudently.
5. Select the media channels that will most effectively satisfy your plan's objectives.
6. Describe research and follow-up plans to determine program effectiveness.

Other suggestions in developing the actual plan include:

1. Select a planning team involving key staff members from those areas that would be most affected by the plan.
2. Develop a sequence of events or phases of action.
3. Provide for checkpoint evaluations and the flexibility to alter the original plan.
4. Develop and/or update a separate communications plan for handling a crisis situation.

Crisis Planning. A particularly important consideration for any cooperative, but especially for larger ones with scattered facilities, is a crisis communications plan. A crisis has an impact on all participants in the cooperative and the general public. The board of directors sets overall communications policies, but it is management and employees who are responsible for developing a crisis plan and carrying it out effectively.

A specific plan needs to anticipate all potential crises that could develop. Questions to be considered include:

1. How is the seriousness of the crisis determined and who is directly responsible for the assessment?
2. How does management develop a response and who is involved?
3. Who will coordinate the release of information?
4. What communications media will be used?
5. Who will be informed, what information will they be given, and what will be the release priorities?

"Nothing is as imperative as preparation and anticipation," says Daniel R. VanTassel, director of corporate communications for CF Industries, Inc.

The elaborate plan for CF, a fertilizer interregional, offers a few do's and don'ts.

Among the do's:

- Do permit media access to company property within the limits of safety while not impeding emergency operations.
- Do take control. Do it your way within the guidelines of your cooperative's policies.
- Do maintain your own pace. Avoid getting caught up in the pace of the questioner.
- Do reflect the proper concern. First impressions are critical. Bring discussion to a positive nature as soon as possible.
- Do present your most important statement clearly and directly in simple language. Repeat it the same way in summing up.
- Do be absolutely sure of the accuracy of facts you give.
- Do be willing to say you don't know.

Among the don'ts:

- Don't stonewall the media. That only forces them to rely on

speculation and rumor. The best way for your story to be presented accurately is by you.

- Don't lie to a reporter. A lie will eventually come back to haunt you. Reporters let each other know who can and who can't be trusted.
- Don't be annoyed by a reporter doing what he or she is paid to do. Horses eat oats; reporters ask questions.
- Don't be antagonistic or defensive, and, above all, avoid losing your temper. Arguing is particularly futile. Reporters always have the last word, either during interview or in the editing room.
- Don't use spectacular terms and words in relaying information.
- Don't speculate about the cause of the incident, amount of damage, or impact on those affected.
- Don't go "off the record" with a reporter. If you wouldn't say it in front of 3 million people, don't say it.

The CF crisis communications plan is presented in looseleaf fashion for easy updating. It begins with a letter from the chief executive officer. Major sections are:

—News Media Relations, spelling out who is authorized to speak for the cooperative and how news media requests are handled;

—Crisis Communications, outlining notification procedure and advice on handling the crisis;

—Media kit, providing key information about the cooperative; and

—Flow diagrams, illustrating notification procedures for several types of crises that could occur, and several levels of seriousness.

Communications Avenues. Management receives and delivers information through nearly every conceivable communications process. Major avenues are similar to those described for directors, though management information is far more pervasive in business literature. Special programs for management are described also in *Cooperative Education and Training*, CIR 1, Section 10.

Larger cooperatives issue specialized publications for managers, such as *Cooperative Management* from Land O'Lakes, Inc., *Pacesetter* from Southern States Cooperative, Inc., and *AMP Magazine* from MSI Insurance.

A unique publication aimed at the leadership of cooperatives, both directors and operating management, is *Farmer Cooperatives*, mentioned earlier, issued by Agricultural Cooperative Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. The monthly magazine reports statistics and trends,

opinions of cooperative leaders on current and potential issues, results and analyses of cooperative-related economic research, legal decisions and issues, significant developments and actions among cooperatives, and various other types of management information.

Employees

Employees can be the dominant, or only, image many people have of the cooperative. In some cases, members' attitudes toward their cooperative may be most influenced by their acquaintance with a few employees. By their numbers and their area of influence, employees have many opportunities to contribute—positively or negatively—to the cooperative's image. Consequently, the caliber of employee communications has a direct and significant impact on the effectiveness of a cooperative's entire operations.

What They Should Know. Employees need to be well informed about the cooperative. They should know: (1) how it is different in operating principles from other businesses; (2) its basic mission or function; (3) its history; (4) its organization and scope of operations; (5) special programs and goals for the year; (6) who members of top management are; and (7) a general idea of status of operations—good or bad.

Depending on size of organization and workforce, cooperatives fulfill these employee communications needs in a variety of ways. In small cooperatives, a pamphlet and employee meetings suffice. Larger cooperatives provide a handbook or publication that covers the cooperative's history, organization, operations, and personnel policies. Other cooperatives conduct formal orientation seminars for new employees.

Most cooperatives issue a periodical, ranging from a typewriter-produced newsletter to complex and high-quality newspapers and magazines. These periodicals may cover several audiences or be targeted just to employees.

Examples of employee publications are *Inside Farmland* from Farmland Industries, Inc.; *Statesman* from Southern States Cooperative, Inc.; and *The Twelfth Page* from the Farm Credit Banks of Spokane.

Employees are a particularly important group in crisis communications.

They have a considerable economical and psychological stake in the well-being of the cooperative. What happens to it, in differing degrees, happens to them. They have a right to know what's going on in an emergency. In a crisis situation, they can either mitigate or compound the situation.

Crisis communications planning could be appropriately discussed also under public communications. The same questions need to be addressed concerning the release of information to the public. But assuring employees are well informed ahead of time or at the same time can help minimize confusion and the initial impact and duration of the crisis, particularly when a situation such as a catastrophe becomes public knowledge immediately.

Legislators and Opinionmakers

An important practice for cooperatives, as a collective entity, is to be neutral in politics. Members may have differing political opinions, often divisive, but they can work together for mutual economic benefits. And economics is the common ground on which a cooperative business can be built and operated successfully.

Neutrality with regard to alignment with a particular political philosophy, however, does not exclude activities connected with the political process. In fact, as agriculture becomes a smaller and smaller part of total U.S. economic activity, farmers and their cooperatives have had to take an increasing role in political action.

Legislators and key opinionmakers such as church and civic leaders, other businessmen, and activists having influence on agriculture are key target audiences.

Summarized, the general objectives of communications efforts to these legislators and opinonmakers are to:

- Educate them on the cooperative form of business and its legitimate place in the private enterprise system;
- Keep them informed on key issues affecting agriculture and cooperatives;
- Seek their help in ways that will protect or improve the business climate for farmers and their cooperatives;
- Establish creditability by building a reputation as an unbiased source of information on farm and rural matters; and
- Establish an image of beneficial performance in the public interest.

Reaching Opinionmakers. Cooperative communications activities with key opinionmakers are varied but not as formalized as methods used to reach legislators.

Cooperatives may send their publications to a selected list. Board members and key management are encouraged to participate in local civic and business associations and to take part in community affairs. Key

opinionmakers are often invited to attend or participate in cooperatives' annual meetings or other events.

Larger cooperatives and organizations representing cooperatives use institutional advertising in printed media, radio, and television to reach both legislators and key opinionmakers.

Legislative Activities. Legislative communications activities are quite varied but generally are carried out through: (1) individual effort by directors and members, and senior executives and legislative specialists on the cooperative's staff; (2) lobbyists retained by individual cooperatives; (3) cooperative associations with lobby functions working at both State and Federal levels; (4) joint efforts with other organizations as part of membership in commodity or selected-industry trade associations, or simply short-term ad hoc alliances.

Directors and individual farmer members often have the most effective influence on legislators through letter-writing or testimony at State and Federal levels. Most regional cooperatives use this technique on a regular basis. Directors and members may testify at formal hearings or meet with individual legislators. The cooperative may hold one board meeting a year in Washington, DC, or schedule a special fly-in, so directors can meet with legislators.

Claire Sandness, former chairman of the board of Land O'Lakes, Inc., stated in an issue of the cooperative's membership magazine, *Land O'Lakes Mirror*, why legislative communication is important:

"Decisions made in Washington—either favorable or unfavorable—can have a far greater impact on our farming operations than anything that appears on the Land O'Lakes profit and loss statement. It is for this reason that we devote a great deal of effort, on our own and through our trade associations, to protect and lobby for the interests of farmers—in the Nation's capital and in State capitals throughout our membership area."

Cooperatives needing special expertise or more frequent contact may hire a lobbying firm to represent them. These firms function to keep their cooperative client informed about governmental issues and actions that could be damaging. Further, they attempt to influence decisionmaking in ways that either protect or enhance the business climate in which the cooperative operates.

Lobby firms will develop legislative strategy, collect data and prepare informational materials, distribute information to key legislators and appropriate public media, meet with legislators, testify at hearings or arrange for key people from the cooperative to testify, and generate grassroots support. They also may provide ongoing public relations services, such as preparing newsletters, writing news releases and feature

articles, or creating advertising campaigns.

Forty State cooperative councils or committees are operating with an underlying information and public relations function. These organizations focus on their respective States but also help coordinate and supplement national activities.

These State organizations range in structure from a committee without permanent location and operating part time to councils with several staff members working full time with budgets in excess of $100,000.

An example of one of the larger and more active councils is the Agricultural Council of California. Other States having councils with similar organizations and scope of activities are Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Wisconsin.

The Agricultural Council of California classifies its tasks in four areas in this order: governmental relations, education, public relations, and member services.

In carrying out governmental relations functions, the Council:

—Promotes and protects the interests of farmer-owned cooperatives and their grower members before the California legislature;

—Works closely with the California Department of Food and Agriculture and other State agencies to make sure the best interests of farmer cooperatives and growers are being pursued;

—Teams up with a broad spectrum of farm and nonfarm groups in an effort to create awareness and coordinate legislative strategy.

Several national associations of cooperatives, ranging from representing one industry, selected types of cooperatives, to cooperatives of all kinds, have legislative communications activities.

Examples are National Milk Producers Federation, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, and National Cooperative Business Association. Though legislative communications activities are primary functions, these organizations also provide a wide range of other services.

Typical functional statements for these cooperative trade associations state:

National Cooperative Business Association "represents the cooperative business community in Washington, DC, through legislative, policy, and regulatory advocacy before Congress and Federal agencies."

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives "promotes actively and persistently the interests of farmer cooperatives; impresses on various Government and other agencies the importance and potential of cooperatives in agriculture; provides an avenue through which

cooperatives may be advised quickly of current developments significant to them; and serves as a forum through which better understanding may develop.''

Cooperatives often join with other businesses in commodity or functionally oriented trade associations, or with businesses generally, to help formulate or influence national policies.

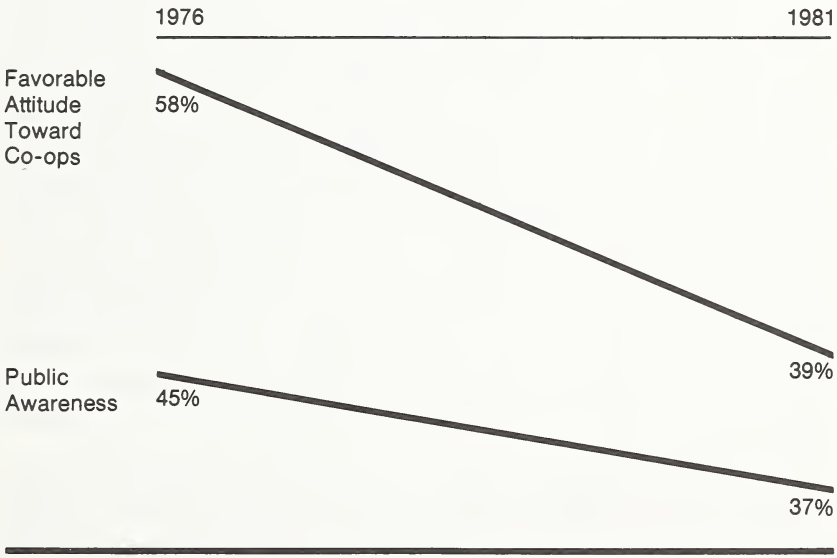
General Public

Gallup polls in 1976 and 1981 substantiated the long held belief that the general public was largely unaware of cooperatives and that the situation was deteriorating (figure 2). Concern for the decline in awareness was based on the direct relationship of awareness with favorable attitude. And favorable attitude has a direct bearing on public policy toward cooperatives.

Over the years, cooperatives have used the same range of activities to create a good public image as other businesses. They have produced quality products, developed informational and educational literature on how the organization was serving the public, sponsored and took part in community affairs, supported charities, carried out institutional advertising campaigns in printed media, radio, and television, and on and on.

Figure 2

Gallup Poll on Cooperatives



However, the missing communications link has often been the key information that the organization is a cooperative. Additionally, messages going to the public have failed to explain what a cooperative is and how it operates.

One theory for this deficiency is that ignorance bred myths about cooperatives that in turn caused people to shy away from publicizing their involvement—from top management and employees to members—for fear of inviting economic retaliation against the cooperative and acquiring a social stigma individually.

The myths were that cooperatives were "something apart" from the private enterprise system and that they enjoyed certain tax and antitrust advantages over other businesses. Business people who viewed cooperatives as a real or potential competitive threat took advantage of public ignorance and often labeled them socialistic and communistic.

Whether a coincidence or fact supporting the theory, it is interesting to note a common characteristic of the larger, more successful cooperatives whose names and consumer brands are held in high public esteem. In nearly every case, neither their names nor their branded products reveal their cooperative character.

Improved knowledge about the cooperative form of business has long been a recognized need. The Cooperative Marketing Act of 1926 directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture, among other things, to "promote the knowledge of cooperative principles and practices and to cooperate, in promoting such knowledge, with educational and marketing agencies, cooperative associations, and others."

This mission has been delegated in USDA to Agricultural Cooperative Service and its predecessor organizations.

In 1964, Frank Hussey, an official in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was assigned the responsibility to strengthen the farmer cooperative movement with action programs. Hussey, who later joined Farmer Cooperative Service (now ACS), and George Jacobsen suggested to Secretary Orville Freeman that USDA promote the cooperative concept through a month-long event.

The Secretary accepted the idea and sent a memo to all USDA agencies to gear up and carry out a cooperative month program in October. Farmer Cooperative Service organized and ran the event and its administrator, Joseph G. Knapp, served as the first chairman.

Co-op Month, observed as a national event since 1964, is discussed further on page 37.

Though USDA provided the early leadership in coordinating Co-op Month as a mechanism to publicize the role of cooperatives, support came from a national advisory committee on cooperatives. Roles gradually

reversed, and by 1970, national cooperative organizations assumed leadership with continuing support from several Government agencies primarily serving agriculture.

TYPES OF COMMUNICATIONS

Cooperatives use the same types of communications activities that other organizations or businesses use. Differences surface in frequency, content, and purpose.

Major types widely used in order of use, and perhaps importance as well, are meetings, printed media, radio/television, other audiovisual, electronic, and special programs. Understandably, several types often are used in a single activity. Some uniqueness of application by cooperatives can be found in most of these types.

Meetings

A distinction needs to be recognized first between internal and external meetings. Cooperatives' internal meetings, such as those with management staff and various employee groups on subjects ranging from strategic planning to productivity and morale, aren't much different overall from those of other businesses. The key difference that does influence the focus of these meetings is the awareness that management and employees, in most cases, serve a ''special customer'' who also is an owner of the cooperative.

External meetings between cooperatives and other firms related to traditional business transactions also are similar. External cooperative meetings become distinctive when they involve participants as both owners and users.

These user-owner meetings, though cost is increasing in time and money, are the communications lifeblood of a cooperative. They bring the owners face to face with management and employees of the cooperative. Regardless of purpose—financial reporting, education and training, product information or promotion, elections and decisionmaking, or just social encounters—no other form of communicating is equally effective.

Cooperatives, because of their service orientation and democratic control, must attach far greater importance to meetings than is necessary, or desired, by other types of businesses. For example, few cooperatives provide for proxy voting. Rather, member-owners are encouraged to attend meetings, particularly the annual meeting, to voice their opinions, express their needs, and take part in decisionmaking. The long-term

vitality of the cooperative is tied to awareness and fulfillment of members' needs.

Democratic control, usually interpreted as one-member, one-vote, means that a majority of the membership—rather than a few stockholders with controlling stock ownership—must be well informed. A majority of the members must be able to make enlightened decisions that enable the cooperative's management to operate it in a beneficial and progressive manner.

Cooperative meetings range in size from one-to-one to congregations in the thousands. Format variation is limited only by imagination. The most important is the annual meeting. A valuable planning guide is "Organizing and Conducting Cooperatives' Annual Meetings," Cooperative Information Report 21, published by Agricultural Cooperative Service.

The largest known cooperative meeting was the annual meeting of Associated Milk Producers, Inc., San Antonio, TX, in 1971 drawing 40,000 to McCormick Place in Chicago. Over time, Farmland Industries, Inc., Kansas City, MO, is known for holding large annual meetings for cooperatives and probably for all types of businesses. During the decades of the 1960s, 1970's, and halfway through the 1980's, Farmland's December 3-day annual meeting in Kansas City regularly drew between 15,000 and 20,000 people representing the regional's 2,000-plus member cooperatives.

Other businesses pretty much limit annual meetings to reporting investor-oriented financial information to the relatively few stockholders who show up in person. In contrast, cooperatives often combine events, such as dinners and entertainment, elaborate product and equipment displays and demonstrations, informational and educational sectional meetings, and outside feature speakers on economic, political, motivational, or just entertaining subjects. Sessions may be oriented to a specific audience—youth, young farm couples, women, or directors; or to a specific commodity or function—petroleum, finance, member relations, or governmental affairs.

The same or similar peripheral events—barbecues, open houses, and demonstrations—are coupled also with other types of meetings.

Summed up, cooperative meetings are more than just for business; they're a social occasion.

Print Media

Cooperatives use print media in all its forms in much the same way other businesses do—internal administration and operations,

advertising, public relations, education and training, and political influence.

Depending on the size of the cooperative, it may issue a membership magazine, newspaper, or newsletter. Publications in varying formats may go to directors, managers, and employees. Other publications may target a particular type of farm enterprise, such as hog producers. And annual reports range from typewriter-reproduced to the most attractive and sophisticated of any to be found among the Nation's largest corporations. But the membership periodical is the major communications media for most cooperatives.

Periodicals. Major differences are in the role and scope of periodicals directed toward cooperative members and their elected representatives. The underlying purposes of these periodicals are to: (1) explain cooperatives as a way of doing business and encourage patronage; (2) inform members about the cooperative's products, services, and financial condition; and (3) educate members on their ownership responsibilities, particularly in electing representative leadership.

Periodicals range from 2-page, typewriter newsletters to elaborate multicolor newspapers and magazines. Most are issued monthly, some are quarterly, and a few twice monthly. Depending on the size and type of cooperative, a periodical's circulation may range from a few hundred to several hundred thousand.

The largest-circulation publications are issued by the statewide rural electric cooperative associations. The 1987 directory reports a combined circulation of 5.6 million. Table 3 lists 21 such publications with circulations above 100,000. In some cases, a statewide association will publish for adjacent States as well. For example, the Oregon *Ruralite* also covers Alaska, California, Idaho, Nevada, and Washington.

A few publications issued by agricultural marketing and purchasing cooperatives have substantial circulations, also. The top 10 are listed in table 4.

Several national organizations serving cooperatives issue magazines or newspapers. They include *Rural Electrification*, circulation 34,700, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association; *Cooperative Business Journal*, circulation 16,000, National Cooperative Business Association; and *Farmer Cooperatives*, circulation 7,500, Agricultural Cooperative Service, USDA.

Typical content categories for cooperatives' publications include:

- Manager's or chief executive officer's column;
- Articles on the cooperative's products, services, programs, operations, and performance;

Table 3—Statewide rural electric publications with the largest circulation

Publication	*State association*	*Circulation*
Carolina Country	North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperatives, Inc.	330,000
Texas Co-op Power	Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc.	316,137
Living in South Carolina	South Carolina Electric Cooperative Association	312,000
Rural Kentuckian	Kentucky Association of Electric Cooperatives	300,000
Rural Missouri	Association of Missouri Electric Cooperatives	298,000
Tennessee Magazine	Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association	280,000
Mississippi EPA News	Electric Power Association of Mississippi	271,000
Electric Consumer	Indiana Statewide Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives, Inc.	263,000
Oklahoma Rural News	Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives	232,985
AREA Magazine	Alabama Rural Electric Association of Cooperatives	230,000
Rural Arkansas	Arkansas Electric Cooperative, Inc.	230,000
Ruralite	Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association	228,000
Rural Living	Virginia, Maryland and Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives	225,000
Rural Georgia	Georgia Electric Membership Corporation	220,000
Country Living	Ohio Rural Electric Cooperatives, Inc.	209,401
Louisiana Country	Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives	160,000
Illinois Rural Electric News	Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives	157,000
Michigan Country Lines	Michigan Electric Cooperative Association	148,500
Penn Lines	Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association	140,000
Iowa REC News	Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives	126,000
Florida Rural Electric News	Florida Rural Electric Cooperative Association	113,000

Table 4—Largest circulation publications issued by marketing and purchasing cooperatives

Publication	*Cooperative*	*Circulation*
Partners	CENEX/Land O'Lakes	240,000
Farmland News	Farmland Industries, Inc.	216,155
Cooperative Farmer	Southern States Cooperative, Inc.	182,000
Tennessee Cooperator	Tennessee Farmers Cooperative	100,000
Harvest States Journal	Harvest States Cooperatives, Inc.	90,000
MFC News	MFC Services (AAL)	75,280
Agway Cooperator	Agway Inc.	70,165
Equity News Round-Up	Equity Cooperative Livestock Sales Association	51,500
Today's Farmer	MFA, Inc.	42,555
Countrymark	Countrymark, Inc.	40,000
Dairymen's Digest	Associated Milk Producers, Inc.	38,000[1]
Mid-Am Reporter	Mid-America Dairymen, Inc.	18,851
Dairymen News	Dairymen, Inc.	13,940
Equity News	Union Equity Cooperative Exchange	12,000
Milk Marketer	Milk Marketing, Inc.	10,000

[1]Combined circulation of three regional magazines of the same name.

- Legislative reports;
- Features on individual members;
- Agricultural economic and technical information;
- Household and farm business information;
- Reports about other cooperatives;
- Features of general interest, usually in the cooperative's territory;
- Editorials and others' opinions, usually related to cooperative activities;

Other common characteristics include:

—classified and display advertising, but with varying limitations associated with competing products and space percentage relative to editorial matter (Some attempt to pay the cost of the publication with advertising, but many do not accept any advertising);

—free or subsidized circulation rates and sometimes dual rates for members and nonmembers; and

—usually in-house content development and preparation and contract production (although differing combinations are numerous).

Joint-venture or cooperative publishing, though not pervasive, nevertheless has met with some success. Most notable is Co-op Printing, serving more than a dozen cooperatives and an equal number of other organizations in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area. Co-op Printing,

organized by CENEX more than 50 years ago, operates like an in-house printer for its cooperative owners.

When Midland Cooperatives, Inc., merged with Central Cooperatives, Inc., in 1963, CCI's publishing arm became a separate corporate entity to print the two organizations' membership newspapers and the Wisconsin REC News. The arrangement was discontinued at the end of 1977.

Another type of arrangement involves the publishing of a newspaper to jointly serve two cooperatives. GTA (now Harvest States Cooperatives) and CENEX began such a joint venture in 1927 with the *Farmers Union Herald*. It carried the trademarks of both cooperatives and went to their combined memberships. The name was changed to *Co-op Country News* in 1974. CENEX assumed total responsibility in 1981. The *News* was then combined with the Land O'Lakes *Mirror* in January 1988 under the new title of *Cooperative Partners* for distribution to members of both regional cooperatives.

MFA, Inc., Columbia, MO, operated American Press, Inc., as a wholly owned subsidiary in the 1960's and early 1970's printing its own *Today's Farmer* monthly magazine and Farmland Industries' twice monthly membership newspaper, *Farmland News*, along with a variety of other business publications.

A few contract publishing houses specialize in designing and printing smaller cooperatives' newsletters. One such organization is Maynard Printing, Inc., Des Moines, IA, which produces more than 100 newsletters for cooperatives in Iowa and surrounding States.

In addition to membership magazines and newspapers, cooperatives issue periodicals directed to other specific groups. As examples:

Spirit is for the staff of Growmark, Inc., its member cooperatives, employees, and directors.

Leadership is for managers and directors of Farmland Industries' member cooperatives.

Beef Update is published quarterly by the feed division of Harvest States Cooperatives.

Pacesetter is the publication for retail managers issued by Southern States Cooperative.

Ocean Spray Life is for employees of Ocean Spray Cranberries.

Other Information Forms. Nearly every cooperative issues news releases to the public press, radio, and television. The annual meeting usually generates several types of promotional materials ahead of the meeting and news releases before, during, and after. Regional board meetings and special-audience meetings (young farmers, for example) also generate releases. Talks, legislative testimony, and position papers

by key executives are distributed.

Special public relations or member relations campaigns may be developed. For example, GROWMARK publicized the "World Champion Corn Grower," who had used the cooperative's hybrid seed variety. Also, Milk Marketing, Inc., mounted a member relations program to publicize, explain, and encourage participation in its political action committee (PAC) fund.

Advertising and Promotion. Cooperatives often use their own publications for advertising, but most promotional expenditures go to outside publications. In a typical year, a half-dozen cooperatives will appear in a listing of the 150 largest agricultural advertisers. Additionally, a wide range of printed materials are developed expressly for advertising and promotional purposes, for both institutional or product purposes.

Advertising may be a single advertisement or a multimedia campaign, black and white or full color; or promotional pieces may take the form of booklets, leaflets, tabloids, flyers, posters, catalogs, promotion kits, package designs, etc.

Subject matter is limited only to the imagination. As illustration:

- "Turn a Pound of Feed into a Pound of Pork," advertisement, GROWMARK;
- "Institutional and Brand Awareness Campaign," CENEX;
- "Dog and Cat Care" booklets, Farmland Industries, Inc.;
- "How To Corner the Flea Market," leaflet, Agway;
- "We Turned Grapefruit," promotional kit, Ocean Spray Cranberries; and
- "Welch's Orchard Juice-in-a-Box," package design, Welch Foods.

Occasionally, advertising and promotional messages will play on the unique owner-patron relationship of a cooperative, usually for production supplies in internal publications and direct mail. Outside advertising, either for supplies or product marketing, is no different from that of other businesses.

Radio/Television

Cooperatives have a long history of using radio and television to communicate information or advertising to both members and the general public. Table 1 on page 5 illustrates use was innovative at times but not necessarily unique because of cooperative origin.

However, in the Midwest in the 1930's, Howard A. Cowden, founder of Farmland Industries (then Consumers Cooperative

Keep them on the *Sideboard*

For Cheerfulness—*and Health*

PLACE upon your sideboard every day this summer a full-to-overflowing bowl of fresh, sweet, juicy, cooling, thirst-quenching Sunkist Oranges.

Tempt every member of the family with this constant, bountiful supply. For the orange is world-famous for its healthfulness—especially the *summer* orange. Sunkist Oranges, because they ripen in California every day the year 'round, can be *purchased fresh* all summer from *any dealer*.

NATURE'S germ-proof package—the orange skin—*protects* the goodness, and *insures* the healthfulness of *Sunkist Oranges*. What summer fruit, therefore, is equally desirable for *children?*

What is good for children is also good for grown ups, so henceforth make Sunkist *your* family's summer fruit.

DON'T say merely "oranges" when you order—state plainly that you want *Sunkist*. Sunkist Oranges are hand sorted, reliable, uniformly good. They should be delivered in the original tissue wrappers stamped "Sunkist."

Sunkist

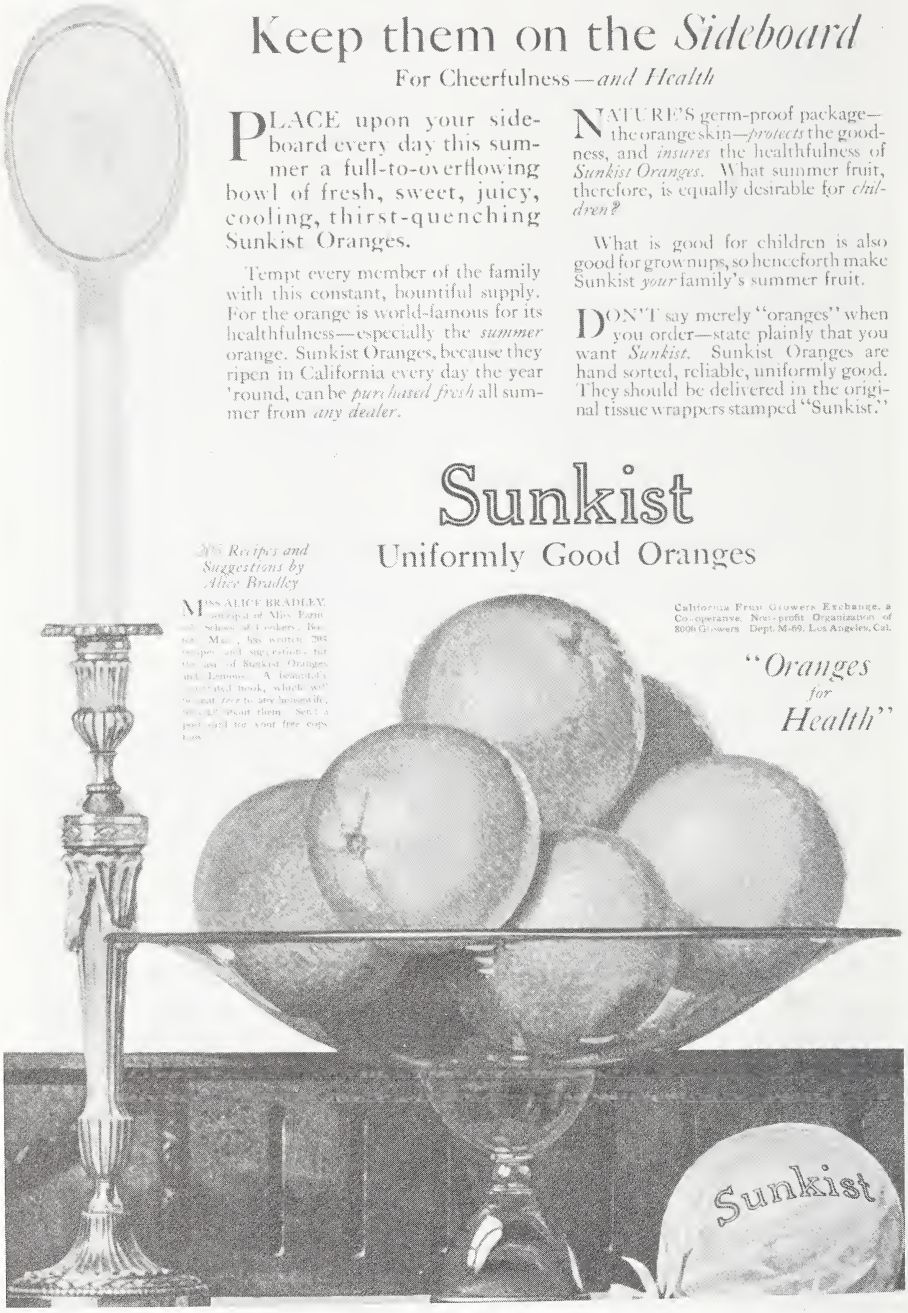
Uniformly Good Oranges

Recipes and Suggestions by Alice Bradley

MISS ALICE BRADLEY, principal of Miss Farmer's School of Cookery, Boston, Mass., has written 200 recipes and suggestions for the use of Sunkist Oranges and Lemons. A beautifully illustrated book, which will be sent free to any housewife, who asks about them. Send a postal card for your free copy now.

California Fruit Growers Exchange, a Co-operative, Non-profit Organization of 8000 Growers. Dept. M-69, Los Angeles, Cal.

"Oranges for Health"



This Sunkist full-page advertisement, printed in two colors, appeared in The Ladies' Home Journal in June 1917.

Association), used radio extensively to promote cooperation and build membership in CCA. In one membership drive, he made 26 speeches over 6 radio stations in the regional's territory that added 12,000 members to local associations.

Land O'Lakes, Inc., has sponsored "Headlines in Agriculture," a weekly 5-minute radio program, since 1972. It is used in more than 80 stations and reaches an estimated 14 million listeners in a six-State Upper Midwest region.

Radio, as a communications medium, is generally used more often on the production side of agriculture simply because it can reach producers while they work. Television is the more important medium for consumer product marketing.

Cooperatives' television advertising is no different from that of other businesses, ranging from spot advertising to sponsoring special programs with either product or institutional messages.

While it is often difficult to document "firsts" without question, two cooperatives have registered their claims in the use of space age television by applying satellite technology.

In March 1984, Sunkist Growers, Inc., conducted the "first international video teleconference on food, fitness, and health." The satellite broadcast linked a broad range of specialists in the field in an interview setting with communications specialists and before a television audience. The 3-hour seminar linked 30 cities in the United States and Canada.

In November 1985, Southern States Cooperative was first in conducting its annual stockholder meeting as a videoconference, including interactive audio capability. Using communications satellites, SSC beamed its program to 10 locations in the regional's 5-State territory. The technique was repeated in six States in 1986 and 1987.

Audiovisual and Electronic

Cooperatives have kept pace with other organizations and businesses in visually enhancing oral and written communications. Whether a cooperative was a slow adopter or at the cutting edge of new technology has been largely determined by the organization's economic health and staff members with the interest and expertise.

Visual enhancement to printed materials through more photographs and color inks received a significant boost in effectiveness when offset printing methods became common in the early 1960's. Printing costs were not substantially higher, but reproduction quality was vastly improved. Cooperatives had used spot color for advertising and publications logos

for many years. Offset printing enabled processed, or ''living-color,'' reproduction at a reasonable cost, even on newsprint-quality paper. Farmland Industries, after switching to offset printing for its membership newspaper ''Farmland'' in 1961, began using full-color photographs on editorial pages in June 1964.

Marketing cooperatives usually have been at the forefront in using audiovisual technology to influence consumers to buy products. Color advertising was common in the 1920's. The first commercial broadcast from California to the East Coast was sponsored by the California Fruit Growers Exchange (now Sunkist) in the late 1920's. The campaign used motion picture stars on its radio programs. The Exchange made its first educational motion picture in 1920.

Motion picture use by cooperatives spread rapidly, becoming an important communication tool. More than 100 films were listed in a catalog published by Farmer Cooperative Service in June 1956. Two-thirds indicated they had sound and were in color. Subject matter varied from the philosophical (''What Is a Co-op?'') to commodity or functional topics (''Testing CO-OP Tires'').

Slide/tape shows and motion pictures became common for annual meetings, sales meetings, and various other occasions related to product use and promotion. Multiscreen audiovisual slide presentations, sometimes using a battery of a half-dozen or more projectors, were in vogue in the 1970's, However, their use was limited because of the difficulty in transporting equipment, setup time, and the need for highly trained operating technicians.

The 1980's ushered in the era of video and electronic communications for larger cooperatives. However, with the same period bringing a severe downturn in agriculture, some were forced to curtail this promising medium or place it in mothballs until better times.

A keyword listing in a video library established by CF Industries for the Advertising Council of Cooperatives International indicates some videotapes were produced as early as 1978.

In 1982, CF installed an inhouse television studio, CF Video, to serve its training and communications needs. By 1983, it expanded to Serve its 15 member regionals and other companies.

Agway Inc. began producing videotapes in 1983, using inhouse production and featuring its own employees.

Farmland Industries established CO-OP Video Network in 1984, and by 1985 had 300 member cooperatives subscribing to its CVN network.

By 1984, Southern States Cooperative had distributed 244 video playback systems to retail and wholesale locations to show its library

A production crew prepares to shoot a videotape for Farmland Industries.

of videotape programs that now number several hundred, some of which were produced inhouse.

Growmark, Inc., began a Video Information System (VIS) program in 1985. Member companies subscribe to the service, which involves four tapes per year and each having four programs. But VIS is broader than the member service, says Jerry VerSteegh, communications production director. "We view videotapes as a communications vehicle," he said. "We use the magic of video to make communications more effective."

Computers rank among a handful of inventions that have significantly changed society. In agriculture, the impact of computers is approaching that of mechanization. Having more mental than physical impact, however, computers probably will result in greater long-term change.

Interestingly, computer application to production agriculture has been the reverse of that for other businesses. A major reason was the initial high cost of computers and the relative small size of the typical farm. In most industries, the computer entered through the business office to perform primarily accounting functions. In contrast, computer influence on agriculture entered through the service door of businesses supporting agriculture. Early-adopter farmers installed farm computers to take advantage of computer-generated information and communications systems rather than just to handle the bookkeeping.

Cooperatives, like other firms, put computers to work first in accounting. But as service organizations to agriculture, they also have been at the cutting edge of technology to link members, locals, and regional cooperatives. An early regional/local communications link was established in the early 1970s between FAR-MAR-CO, Inc., Hutchinson, KS, and its 600-member locals. Though the principal function was accounting recordkeeping and financial services such as payroll check writing, it also was used to communicate commodity prices.

Another pioneering electronic communications system was Grassroots America, a joint venture of Agway Inc., CENEX, and Southern States with Videotex America, initiated in 1984. Grassroots linked participating farmers electronically through their television sets or computer screens with a vast array of agricultural-related information covering news, weather, market information, and advertising. The venture was shortlived because of a downturn in the agricultural economy and was dissolved in 1986.

In August 1986, the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives formed the Cooperative Communications Network (Co-op Net), to provide electronic communications services to its members. Co-op Net's major

functions are to (1) track legislation affecting cooperatives, (2) provide access to data on international trade, (3) create subnets of information services for members, and (4) serve as an electronic mail system among members.

The National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative (NRTC), using satellite technology, broadcast its first program October 22, 1986, in service to rural electric cooperatives. Fostered by the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, NRTC has identified 12 areas of application: data processing, power system monitor and control, electronic banking, rural electric bulletin boards, database services, material supply applications, credit history database, electronic mail, facsimile, voice, video, and future applications such as storm management and field crew communications.

GROWMARK's territory analysis contact management program (TACM) is a forerunner of developing database and communications systems with members. Though data is collected and entered into the system by traditional means, the computer can massage the data and communicate member business information in seconds.

Southern States Cooperative exemplifies another type of electronic communications with its computer-based retail register system for all SSC-owned stores and member cooperatives.

Special Programs

Whatever a cooperative does communicates something to someone, intended or unintended. But some programs are designed with the underlying objective of creating a positive image of the cooperative to its members and/or the general public. These programs may be labeled as member relations, public affairs, institutional advertising, or community service.

These programs, whether carried out individually or jointly, are so varied they defy classification. A few examples best illustrate this kind of important communications activity.

Most cooperatives, large or small, conduct one or more of the following: open house, tours, appreciation days, neighbor nights, field demonstrations, equipment and trade shows, patronage incentive awards, contests, scholarships, and sponsorship of a wide variety of activities.

Co-op Month is easily the longest running event that is intended to raise the level of public awareness of cooperatives and to build a favorable image. Jack Liukku, general manager of Co-op Training, Inc., Waukegan, IL, is credited with holding the first Co-op Month in 1924.

Liukku's early Co-op Month featured parades, rallies, and sales programs. In the process, the cooperative concept was promoted, and new members were signed up. The initial event was so successful that it was continued. Co-op Month was held in March until 1930, when it was changed to October to coincide with the Biennial Congress of the Cooperative League of the U.S.A. (now called the National Cooperative Business Association).

The idea caught on and grew in other Midwest States. The Minnesota Association of Cooperatives persuaded the Governor to sign the first State proclamation. Co-op Month became a national promotion in 1964 when Orville Freeman, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and former Minnesota Governor, accepted the suggestion of department officials Frank Hussey and George Jacobsen to declare a National Co-op Month with USDA's public support.

Co-op Month reached the peak of its national prominence in 1965 when President Lyndon B. Johnson spoke at opening ceremonies.

Leadership in sponsoring the event was shifted from USDA to cooperative organizations in 1970. Co-chairmen were Kenneth Naden, president of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, and Stanley Dreyer, president of the Cooperative League.

Co-op Month has grown in sponsorship over the years with broadened support from cooperatives beyond agriculture. By 1988, nearly two dozen national cooperative organizations and Federal agencies were working together in a national planning committee. Implementation of events largely take place in State and local areas, but a Washington event is usually carried out by the national committee. Several national awards recognize individuals and organizations for cooperative activities.

Individual cooperatives have found ways to tie product and institutional promotion through creative public relations.

Sunkist Growers, Inc., can probably claim the largest audience recognition for its special programs. A heavy promoter of athletic events, Sunkist is noted for its sponsorship for many years of a float in the annual Rose Bowl Parade and the Sunkist Invitational Track Meet. Sunkist orange juice was the "official drink" of the 1984 Olympics. And in 1986, Sunkist sponsored the Fiesta Bowl featuring the No. 1 and No. 2 college football teams playing for the national championship.

Marshall Farms Cooperative, Greenville, SC, sponsored "The Great Pigeon Race" in 1971 to promote egg sales. Supermarket managers sent in orders using homing pigeons.

Buckeye trees do grow in Buckeye, IA, thanks to the Buckeye Cooperative Elevator. The cooperative's management noted that no trees existed in 1970, so the cooperative bought 12 trees and donated them

to the town. The cooperative followed up with the purchase and donation of 200 seedlings in 1972.

Interstate Milk Producers Cooperative (now Atlantic Dairy Cooperative) and Dairymen, Inc., co-sponsored the East Coast milk jug regatta in 1984. Young people built and raced sail boats made out of milk cartons.

The Cooperative League (now NCBA) established the Cooperative Hall of Fame in 1974, which presents the opportunity to recognize outstanding individuals in cooperatives and to publicize their contributions.

ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

Because of the unique nature of a cooperative, organizing and staffing for communications is generally more complex. One complicating factor is dealing with the dual role of members as both owners and patrons. Another is the continuous need, beyond normal business communications, of dealing with the lack of public understanding of what a cooperative is and how it is different.

Other factors influencing the organizational configuration and staffing expertise include (1) size of the cooperative; (2) operational level, i.e., local or interregional; (3) organizational structure; (4) commodities handled; and (5) function—marketing, purchasing, and service. To a lesser extent, the communications function may be stronger in some cooperatives than others because of historical emphasis, CEO orientation, corporate communications strategy, or the performance of the communications staff.

Organizational Structure

An organization chart for communications for some cooperatives may be no more than a listing of functions. In others, it may be composed of several departments of specialized operations.

In cooperatives with sales of $15 million or less, communications usually is viewed as everybody's job. As size increases, one person may be assigned communications functions along with other responsibilities. Then as other factors affecting communications strategy come into play, additional personnel with specialized expertise are hired.

No typical communications organization chart exists. The communications function in an interregional supply cooperative, for example, may largely focus its efforts on internal communications. In contrast, a marketing cooperative with branded products usually engages in mass media communications. The size and composition of the communications staff may be determined by whether the CEO's nature

is to avoid publicity or is public relations oriented. Some cooperatives emphasize printed-material communications; others, radio and television, the result perhaps of just the skills, experience, or training of the communications staff. A cooperative with a good photographer will give pictures a strong role in its communications activities. Other cooperatives' operations may be more heavily affected by Federal policies, so these organizations will be strong in legislative affairs. Therefore, figure 3 is an attempt to give a composite organization chart for a large and small cooperative.

In structuring for communications, two issues emerge: (1) Where does communications fit in the overall corporate organization chart; and (2) Which services should be provided by an in-house staff and which should be purchased.

In many cooperatives, the top communications officer reports directly to the chief executive officer. Otherwise, reporting will be to the executive responsible for administration or staff services who in turn reports to the CEO. Advantages for a close front office relationship include:

- Coordination and control of communications activities are easier and can better be attuned to the tone the CEO sets for the cooperative.
- Communications is more likely to be an integral part of total management strategy.
- Every action by, or affecting, the cooperative needs an image assessment by a communications professional; and
- By meeting regularly with top management staff, the communications officer is at the cutting edge of cooperative activity and better able to provide communications support for overall operations.

Cooperatives essentially have three alternatives for obtaining communications services—providing them with an in-house staff, purchasing needed expertise, or employing a combination of the two. Many cooperatives pursue the latter strategy; few rely totally on outside sources.

Advantages of in-house staffing include:

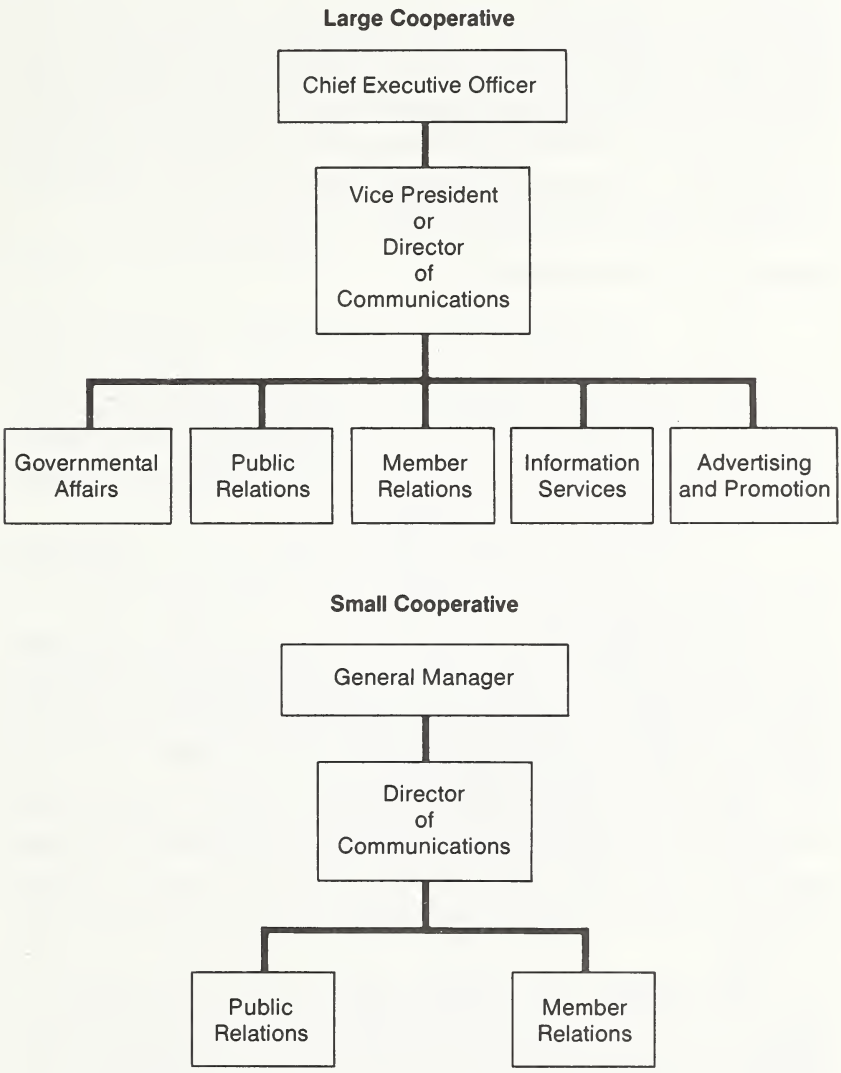
- Continuity of communications products and programs;
- Staff understanding of the cooperative's purpose and goals; and
- Flexibility and responsiveness in special situations or emergencies.

Some disadvantages are:

- Potential decline of fresh ideas and new approaches;

Figure 3

Organization Chart for Cooperative Communications



• Not getting projects done or done poorly because of insufficient staff to handle peak workload periods; and

• Lower quality products when the staff takes on assignments—willingly or otherwise—requiring expertise different from individual members' training or experience.

It is rare for a nationally advertised consumer products cooperative

not to have an advertising agency, even if it has an in-house advertising department. The expense of market research and of the specialized talent associated with successful advertising programs, which an agency can spread among its many clients, is too great for any one organization. Cooperatives contract for services needed only for special occasions or just periodically. Examples are videotape and motion pictures products, communications research and consultation, printing and typesetting, special graphic design and photography, and for work the in-house staff is unable to do in peak work periods.

Staffing for Communications

Getting the right talents, training, and experience for a communications department is just as important as staffing the legal, accounting, engineering, and computer departments. Trained professionals are needed. Additionally, management must recognize that the competence of its communications staff—and to a degree the cooperative's image—is exposed to public view on a regular basis.

A membership survey conducted by the Cooperative Communicators Association reveals the following profile of a communications specialist:

The average age of CCA members is 38. Of its membership, 58.8 percent are male (though women are rapidly gaining ground in the field). Concerning education level, 51.9 percent had a college degree, with 23.5 percent reporting postgraduate work. Fifteen percent earned a master's degree and 1.4 percent, a doctorate.

Of those with a college background, 70 percent reported courses of study in journalism. Other disciplines included: English, 11 percent; agricultural education, 6 percent; agricultural economics, 4 percent; sociology, 3.5 percent; agricultural science, 3.5 percent; and psychology, 1 percent.

The average CCA member had 12 years' communications experience of which 8 years were cooperative communications experience. Multiple talents are required. The percentage of respondents handling a particular type of function follows: Editing, 93; writing, 90; news releases, 75, budgeting, 65; member relations, 61; media relations, 60; audiovisual, 56; annual reports, 54; advertising, 49; supervising, 46; meeting planning, 42; and government relations, 25.

PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Communications specialists stay on the cutting edge of their profession through membership in organizations, matching abilities in competition, recognizing outstanding performers through special awards programs, and various other continuing education and workshop programs.

Professional association membership ranges from general business communications organizations to those specific to cooperatives, and even specific within cooperatives.

Cooperative Communicators Association (CCA)

Nearly 300 communications specialists working for cooperatives or cooperative-related organizations in the United States and Canada hold membership in the *Cooperative Communicators Association (CCA)*.

Its overall objective is to keep members abreast of trends, techniques, and technology so they can continually upgrade the overall effectiveness of cooperative communications programs.

The organization was formed as the Cooperative Editorial Association in 1953 at a communicators' conference at the University of Minnesota. In 1985, the name was changed to reflect the broadened scope of responsibilities that many cooperative communicators have today.

CCA's main event is an annual working institute, offering professional evaluation and awards and a variety of workshop sessions. With the help of grant money, CCA offers student scholarships to the institute. Other benefits include regional workshops, a newsletter, a communications handbook, and a job bank service.

Rural Electric Communicators Associations

Several different types of associations have been formed within the more than 1,500 rural electric communicators.

Membership of the *National Electric Cooperative Editorial Association (NECEA)* is composed of editorial staff members and publishers of publications owned and controlled by statewide associations of rural electric cooperatives. These publications have a combined circulation of more than 5.6 million subscribers.

NECEA, established in 1963, fosters continued improvement of the professional skills and techniques of publications staff members and encourages improvement in member and public information programs. Statewide publications staffs match their skills in annual competition

among themselves, as well as in industrywide competition.

The *National G&T Communicators Association* is specialized for those professionals working for generation and transmission cooperatives.

A unique organization is the *Council of Rural Electric Communicators*, established in 1982. The 10-member council is composed of representatives from every segment of the rural electric program. It is charged with conducting a voluntary certification program. The council appoints a 10-member board to conduct the certification process.

Certification is described in a national directory as "an opportunity for communicators to obtain an objective evaluation of their skills and knowledge, discover their communications strengths and weaknesses, and be recognized for having achieved a certain level of excellence." J. C. Brown, editor and manager of association publications at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and member of the council, sees an important result of certification as the "identification of rural electric communicator as a profession—which it truly is."

The *Advertising Council for Cooperatives International*, by its name, readily indicates the nature of the association. Its semiannual meetings focus on trends, techniques, and success stories in various kinds of advertising and promotion programs, conducted by U.S. and Canadian cooperatives. The ad council has sponsored polls on public awareness and attitudes concerning cooperatives. It provided early leadership in coordinating videotape production aimed at reducing costs.

Other Professional Enhancement Programs

In addition to skills competition sponsored by professional communicators' organizations, two trade associations serving cooperatives sponsor competitive events in conjunction with annual meetings.

The largest strictly cooperative communications competition is the *Cooperative Information Fair*, sponsored by the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives since 1946. The Council's public relations committee provides direction. The fair's purpose is to "encourage cooperatives to improve the techniques by which they promote their business, inform their members, and disseminate information to the general public."

A typical fair will include several hundred entries in three dozen classes, covering all communications types and media. Judging is usually conducted by the teaching staff at communications schools of major universities.

The National Milk Producers Federation sponsors dairy communications competition, with displays and awards integrated with its annual meeting. Judging of the dozen and a half classes is performed

by other communications professionals.

In addition to matching skills among themselves, cooperative communicators enter general business competition through membership in a variety of communications professional associations.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Information is becoming more and more like the weather. Everybody talks about it but no one is able to control or manage it effectively. Technology is producing and transmitting information in such volumes and speeds that we face a usage difficulty comparable in magnitude of trying to select and catch a few raindrops out of a hurricane. We are, however, learning more about both the weather and the information process so we are better prepared and able to react quicker to what they bring.

The impacts on the world by the video-electronic inventions of our time are greater than all previous inventions combined, including the wheel. That's an opinion that cannot be proved or disproved. Nevertheless, television and computers, the principal inventions, are destroying the myths we've used as crutches and bringing reality to our imaginations.

The volume of new information and the speed of communicating it is forcing planners to consider the increasing liquidity of public attitude. They must recognize that more information is becoming obsolete faster. Businesses can no longer be built on solid ground, or a fixed basis of information. Rather, they need to be built with the flexibility to rock and roll yet stay afloat upon an ocean of wave after wave of new information and rapidly changing public attitudes.

From Art to Science

Communications trends as they specifically apply to cooperatives can best be described in terms of what is happening and will continue to happen:

- Communications is becoming more of a science and less of an art. Madison Avenue promotion rhetoric is being replaced with targeted messages based on systematic fact and opinion research. Stated another way, it is becoming increasingly difficult to fool anybody for any length of time.
- Computerized databases are developing rapidly and with startling accessibility to nearly everyone. Cooperatives, like all businesses, are

changing their emphasis from information delivery only to information analysis and effective use.

- Technologies of the computer, television, and space satellites are taking the perceived lethargy out of the democratic control characteristic of the cooperative enterprise. Cooperatives with large numbers of member-owners can reach them almost instantly with information about their off-farm business—or learn about their farm business. Videotapes available for home viewing or beamed directly via satellite are opening up new opportunities for cooperative education.

Governmental affairs, as a focus for communications efforts, is getting increasing attention at both the State and Federal level. These activities have the objective of improving the legislative and regulatory climate for cooperatives. Keeping communications lines open with Federal agencies concerning trade issues and problems is particularly important as cooperatives increase their role in international trade.

- Electronic networking among cooperatives, their national trade and commodity organizations, Federal and State agencies, and increasingly with their members will become a business necessity.
- Print communications are changing in content and production. Information previously sent in weekly and monthly newspapers and magazines, when timeliness is critical, will be increasingly sent by electronic mail systems. At the same time, print materials are being turned around faster with desktop publishing systems, in many cases increasing both quality and timeliness.
- Computerized production of overhead transparencies and 35mm slides is increasing the effectiveness of education and training presentations.
- Vast amounts of information previously stored in printed or photographic hard copy will be transferred to full text or picture in laser videodisc systems. Online searching software will enable users to find specific pieces of information from the database and print out hard copies.
- Personal computers and network systems, as communications devices, will become as common and used as often as the telephone receiver.
- Teleconferences and videoconferences will replace many of the physical meetings, within the cooperative itself, with other businesses and organizations, and with members.

The technology is present today for cooperatives to be in touch with their members, regardless of the number, constantly and almost instantly. The challenge posed by these trends is mastering information selectivity and using it effectively. . .the ability to find and catch the specific raindrop in the hurricane necessary to get the job done.

Communicator of Tomorrow

Farmers have often been described as being multi-professional, or having to wear many different business hats. The same can be said about business communicators and particularly those working for cooperatives. Characteristics of the successful cooperative communicator include becoming:

- A technologist, to master effective employment of communications tools, particularly computers, television, and other video-electronic devices;
- A business expert on the cooperative and its area of activity;

Dairylea Cooperative is among the early adopters of desktop publishing. The technology, combining computer-generated typesetting and graphic design, is being employed to increase quality and reduce production time and cost.

- An educator, using communications skills to reduce ignorance about the cooperative form of business among other employees, management, the cooperative's owners, and the general public;
- A strategist, to acquire the respect and recognition that communications is indeed a profession.

The success of every human activity that involves more than one person rests on the effectiveness of communications. That truth is well recognized. Less well recognized are the elements necessary for successful communications. Those elements include having the right information, forming it into a clear message, directing it to the correct audience at the right time, determining if the message was received, and evaluating whether it generated the expected action. Successful managers will recognize these elements of effective communications and will use the skills of trained communications specialists.

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Agricultural Cooperative Service (ACS) provides research, management, and educational assistance to cooperatives to strengthen the economic position of farmers and other rural residents. It works directly with cooperative leaders and Federal and State agencies to improve organization, leadership, and operation of cooperatives and to give guidance to further development.

The agency (1) helps farmers and other rural residents develop cooperatives to obtain supplies and services at lower cost and to get better prices for products they sell; (2) advises rural residents on developing existing resources through cooperative action to enhance rural living; (3) helps cooperatives improve services and operating efficiency; (4) informs members, directors, employees, and the public on how cooperatives work and benefit their members and their communities; and (5) encourages international cooperative programs.

ACS publishes research and educational materials and issues Farmer Cooperatives magazine. All programs and activities are conducted on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, creed, color, sex, age, handicap, or national origin.