



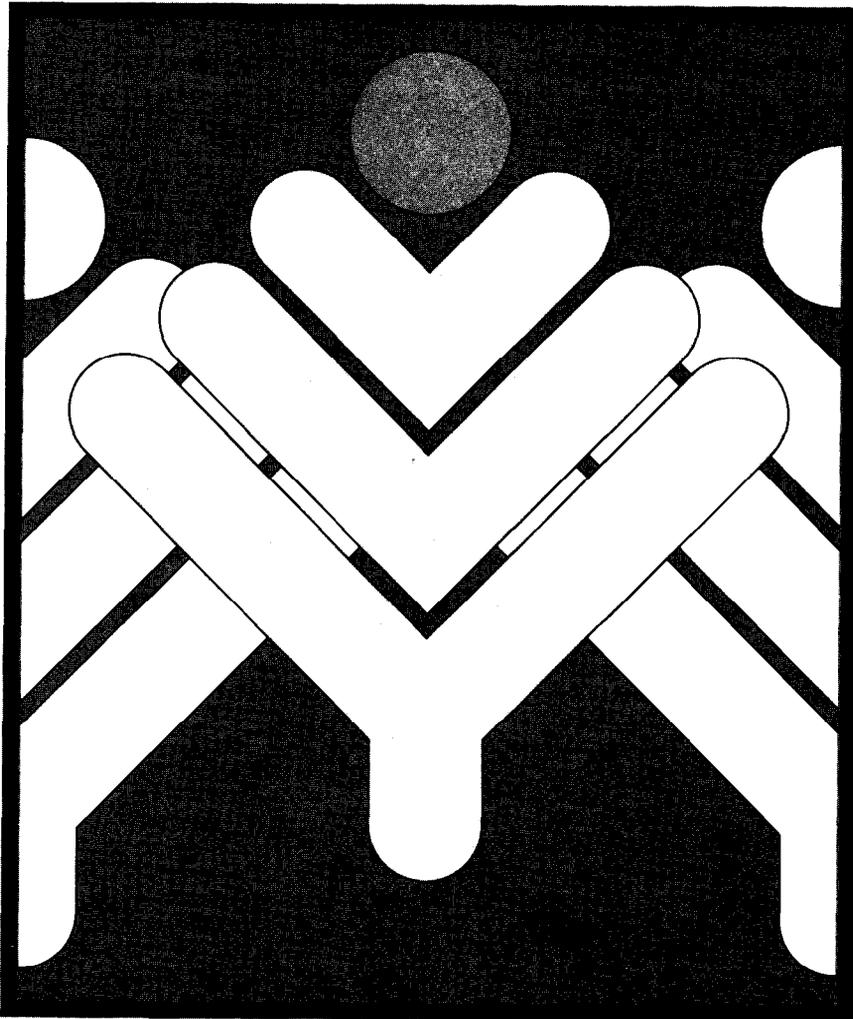
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Cooperative Education Survey: Cooperatives' Version

Summary of Findings



Abstract

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Preface

This special report presents a summary of the findings from the recent survey of cooperative organizations regarding cooperative education. The survey was conducted by the joint effort of the Agricultural Cooperative Service and the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives as one component of a multi-faceted examination of the needs and priorities for contemporary cooperative education. Materials contained in this special report should not be viewed as the final results of the broader task force study, rather as inputs to the process.

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Cooperative Education Survey: Cooperatives' Version

Summary of Findings

This survey was conducted in early 1992 to obtain the opinions of people working with operating cooperative businesses who had knowledge and experience in cooperative education. Of the 350 surveyed, 209 provided usable responses. The original list of recipients was drawn from the suggestions by the education staff of Agricultural Cooperative Service (ACS), the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC), the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA), and leaders from most of the State cooperative councils throughout the United States.

The recipient group was not intended to represent a random sample of cooperative organizations or educators within cooperatives. Rather, it was drawn to solicit opinion from a broad range of persons known to be familiar with and involved in cooperative education in cooperatives.

Respondents represented 36 States and all regions of the country (table 1). The majority, about 62 percent, were from the Midwest and Plains regions, where the bulk of agricultural cooperatives are located.

Table 1-Distribution of survey respondents, by State.

South 42	East 26	Midwest 61	Plains 45	west 14
AL 2	DC 2	IA 13	co 5	CA 5
AR 2	MA 2	IL 12	KS12	ID 5
FL 2	MD 2	IN 7	NB 3	WA 3
GA6	NH 1	MI 4	ND12	UT 1
KY6	NJ 1	MN 12	OK 5	
LA 3	NY 9	MO 7	SD 5	
MS3	PA 9	OH 16	TX 3	
NC7		WI 10		
SC 3				
VA 6				

More than half of the respondents represented agricultural marketing, farm supply, or services cooperatives (table 2). Twenty-five respondents were from rural service cooperatives, including telephone, electric, and water cooperatives. **Thirty-one** represented financial institutions, primarily Farm Credit System representatives, although some credit unions are also included. Consumer, housing, health care, and insurance cooperatives each had a small number of respondents. For purposes of analysis in this report, consumer and housing cooperatives are combined into a single group. Those from the health care, insurance, and “other” groups are included only in the totals for all respondents (table 2).

ATTITUDES AND GOALS FOR COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

Survey recipients were asked to indicate how important they felt cooperative education was to the success of their cooperatives (table 3). All indicated at least moderate importance, with 75 percent believing cooperative education to be critical. This proportion was relatively consistent across the different types of organizations. Thus, at least in terms of expression of basic attitude regarding cooperative education, the view was strongly supportive.

Those polled were asked to identify three goals from among a list for cooperative education programs they felt

Table P-Distribution of respondents, by organization type

Type of organization	Number of respondents
Marketing or supply cooperative	133
Rural services (telephone, electric, etc.)	25
Financial	31
Consumer	6
Housing	5
Health care	1
Insurance	2
Other	6

were most important. Results are shown in table 4. Each proposed goal was also placed into one of three composite priority categories (high, moderate, low), based on the frequency of its selection. The goal of improving member relations was by far the most frequently selected.

It is useful to distinguish between the types of goals in this list. Certain ones are quite pragmatic, relating directly to how education can affect the business success of the organization. Most notable were those “to increase business volume” and “to increase membership.”

Others could be considered more altruistic, done in support of the cooperative concept. These include “to understand

Table &Importance of cooperative education to the success of the organization.

Type of organization	Not Important at all	Important, not critical	Extremely important
	<i>Number</i>		
Marketing/supplies services	0	38	95
Financial	0	6	19
Consumer/housing	0	7	24
	0	3	8
All respondents	0	54	154

Table 4-Rating of alternative goals for cooperative education, all respondents.

	Number	Priority ¹
Improve member relations	121	high
Understand co-op principles	77	mod
Increase business volume	76	mod
Enhance co-op's public image	74	mod
Improve member decisionmaking	71	mod
Provide information	70	mod
Nurture leadership skills	53	low
Improve climate for cooperatives	52	low
Increase membership	31	low

¹Priority levels defined by frequency groupings of responses.

basic cooperative principles” and “to improve member decisionmaking.” The more altruistic goals, while contributing to the economic success of the cooperative, do so in a less direct fashion. We would expect to see organizations’ approaches to cooperative education vary considerably according to whether their goals are pragmatic or altruistic. What remains unclear is which approach is more effective in building strong cooperatives.

Marked difference could be seen in the goals for cooperative education expressed by respondents from different types of organization (table 5). Improving member relations was a high priority for all groups except consumer and housing cooperatives. The goals of consumer and housing cooperatives tended to the more altruistic side, reflective of their social philosophy.

Education goals of service cooperatives tended to be related to their public role as sole providers of services. The goals of marketing and supply cooperatives tracked quite closely to financial organizations, reflecting perhaps the increasing convergence of philosophies of lenders and their customers.

Table 5—Indicated priority of goals for cooperative education by type of respondent.

Education program goal	Mktg/ sup.	Service	Fin.	Cons/ hous.
	<i>Indicated priority</i>			
Improve member relations	high	high	high	low
Understand basic co-op principles	mod	mod	mod	high
Increase business volume	mod	low	mod	low
Enhance co-op’s public image	mod	high	mod	low
Improve member decisionmaking	mod	low	mod	high
Provide information	mod	high	low	low
Nurture leadership skills	low	low	mod	mod
Improve climate for cooperatives	low	mod	mod	low
Increase membership	low	low	low	low

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION BUDGETS

Ninety percent of survey respondents indicated that their cooperative spends money for cooperative education. However, of the 185 who spent money on education, only 55 had a specific budget line item for it. Thus, for the vast majority of respondents, spending on education was not clearly defined. It typically fell within the budget of an organization's member relations or public relations department. This held true for both the traditional marketing and supply cooperatives and other groups. As a result, data collected regarding

Table 6—Average spending and distribution of spending on cooperative education for all respondents and marketing/supply cooperatives.¹

	All respondents	Mktg/sup co-ops
Average spending	\$57,923	\$65,777
Number of co-ops in each spending amount:		
Less than \$10,000	69	46
\$10,000-29,999	31	21
\$30,000-99,999	22	12
\$100,000 plus	19	12

¹ Includes only those organizations indicating positive spending amounts.

Table 7—Average spending and distribution of spending on cooperative education for all respondents and marketing/supply cooperatives having specific budget line items for education.¹

	All respondents	Mktg/sup co-ops
Average spending	\$90,763	\$122,000
Number of co-ops in each spending amount:		
Less than \$10,000	16	10
\$10,000-29,999	12	6
\$30,000-99,999	14	7
\$100,000 plus	6	5

¹ Includes **only associations** with positive spending amounts.

cooperative education budget amounts must be used with caution (tables 6 and 7 on previous page).

Of the 141 respondents reporting spending levels, the average organization spent \$57,923 on cooperative education. Marketing and supply cooperatives tended to spend a little more. Most respondents had quite modest spending levels of less than \$30,000. A few notable organizations, with education expenses of \$1 million or more, drove up average spending figures.

A more meaningful measure may be seen in table 7, which reports data on only those organizations having a specific line item for cooperative education in their budgets. Most interesting about this data is that the average expenditure was considerably higher for this group than indicated for the full group—\$90,763 for all types and \$122,000 for marketing and supply cooperatives. This suggests that formal recognition within the context of the budget is associated with a higher degree of dedication and commitment to education.

Nearly 25 percent indicated their organizations spent much more on cooperative education than 10 years ago. More than 68 percent said spending increased at least moderately. Only 8 percent said these expenditures decreased. Looking ahead for the next 5 years, most respondents felt education spending would remain static.

Seventy-five percent thought their organizations would spend about the same amount, but 24 percent felt spending would significantly increase. Returning to an earlier theme, for those cooperatives having a specific budget line item for education, 79 percent at least moderately increased education spending, while 35 percent expected big increases in the next 5 years.

Cooperative members, directors, and employees were the three most important target audiences for education spending (table 8). Education for members and directors each accounted for roughly one-fourth of that budget. This allocation is expected to remain about the same for the next 3 to 5 years.

However, there was some indication that we could expect a slight shift in emphasis toward more general membership, employee, and young adult programs.

In addition to allocating education expenses by target audience, organizations also choose how to deliver education to the audiences. They can put on their own internal programs, join other organizations in sponsoring specific programs, support programs through membership in various groups that perform educational functions, or encourage individual participation in cooperative education by providing scholarships (table 9).

Respondents were relatively satisfied with this general allocation among delivery approaches. Regarding future intentions, data indicated education would see moderate shifts of emphasis to internal programs or those jointly offered

Table &Percent of cooperative education budget spent on various target groups.

Audience or group	Percent of education budget
Directors	24.2
General membership	26.6
Employees	16.8
Youth	9.5
Young adults	12.7
General public	6.5
Other	1.7

Table g-Allocation of cooperatives' education spending, by delivery system.

Delivery system	Percent of spending
Internal programs of organization	47.0
Joint programs with other organizations	25.4
Donations, dues, or payments to educ. orgs.	21.4
Scholarships	5.0
Other	1.2

with other cooperatives. Strongest indications came from marketing and farm supply cooperatives.

Only 22 respondents said their organizations had full time education directors. Of these, 12 also had additional staff assigned to education. Typically, education program duties were assigned on a part-time basis to member relations or communications staff. Seventy-four organizations used this approach. Forty-nine respondents said education responsibilities were assigned to various staff on an “as needed” basis. Forty-five indicated that responsibility rested with the general manager. Nine organizations had no personnel assigned to education.

For most, education was not formally assigned to specific staff. While the survey does not indicate how accountability and responsibility for education are assigned within organizations, education for many might easily fall through the cracks.

AUDIENCES AND TOPICS

Members, directors, and employees were the three top- priority audiences for cooperative education (table 10). Therefore, the major target audiences are already within the cooperative fold.

Table 10 Priority rating of various target audiences by all respondents for cooperative education.

	Number	Priority ¹
Cooperative managers	36	low
Cooperative directors	104	high
Cooperative members	142	high
Cooperative employees	103	high
Youth, students	59	moderate
Young adults	72	moderate
General public	46	low
Educators	21	low
Potential members or patrons	48	low

¹Priority levels defined by frequency groupings of responses.

As was the case with the goals for cooperative education, the priority target audiences of marketing and supply cooperatives were quite similar to financial institutions, with one exception (table 11). Respondents from the financial organizations saw a greater need to educate cooperative managers than did respondents from other groups. Because of their public service role, service cooperatives placed more emphasis on customer education.

After determining priority audiences, respondents were asked where responsibility for educating various audiences should lie- with the individual cooperatives or outside groups such as school systems, trade associations, or Government agencies. Respondents felt individual cooperatives should accept that responsibility for certain audiences. These included cooperative members, employees, and potential members or patrons. For certain other audiences, those polled had a strong preference for outside groups handling education. These included educators, youth, and the general public.

Education of managers, directors, and young adults was considered a shared responsibility between individual cooperatives and outside organizations. This view was quite consistent across the types of organizations represented.

Table 1 I-Priority rating of various target audiences for cooperative education.

Education program goal	Mktg/ sup.	Service	Fin.	Cons/ hous.
<i>Indicated priority</i>				
Cooperative managers	low	low	mod	low
Cooperative directors	high	low	high	high
Cooperative members	high	high	high	high
Cooperative employees	high	mod	high	mod
Youth, students	mod	mod	mod	low
Young adults	mod	low	mod	low
General public	low	mod	low	low
Educators	low	low	low	low
Potential members or patrons	mod	low	low	low

Priority target audiences were also examined by asking respondents to provide a ranking within each of four broad categories of target audiences. For the within-cooperatives category, members, employees, and directors were the three highest priority groups, consistent with the findings in the earlier question. There was little divergence in these findings among the types of organizations. Only service cooperatives, which placed high priority on reaching potential members or patrons, varied from the overall norm.

Among several subgroups provided in the “general public” category, consumers, elected officials, and the media were considered the three highest priority target groups. Again, there was great uniformity among organizations.

Within the educator category, Cooperative Extension agents and secondary school teachers were indicated as the highest priority audiences. Selecting agents for priority was particularly significant in light of the diminished capacity of the Cooperative Extension Service in providing cooperative-specific assistance during the past two decades. Each organization type had its own priority ranking, reflecting individual education goals (table 12).

High school students were consistently identified as the top-priority student audience for cooperative education (table 13). Post-high school students, either at universities, junior colleges, or community colleges, were the next highest priority. Apparently, the consensus of most respondents was that

Table 12-Priority ranking for various educator groups.

Educator group	All sup	Mktg/	service	Fin.	cons/hsg
<i>Priority rank</i>					
Extension agents	1	1	2	3	1
Secondary teachers	3	4	1	2	3
Elementary teachers	6	6	3	6	2
State Co-op Council Staff	2	2	6	1	4
Post-secondary instructors	5	5	4	5	6
University professors	4	3	6	4	4

the best time to reach students is as they are about to become adult decisionmakers.

Respondents ranked items in an extensive list of cooperative education topics to receive priority attention. The top seven, in priority order, were:

- Cooperative principles and practices.
- Director roles and liabilities.
- Cooperative management and operations.
- Cooperative philosophy.
- Board-management relations.
- Cooperative finance.
- Rights and duties of cooperative members.

Several other topics were also considered important for cooperative education. Many suggestions focused on the business operations, environment, and decisionmaking aspects of the cooperative. There was strong indication of the need to upgrade business skills and acumen of cooperative education recipients.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Only 11 respondents indicated they relied exclusively on their own cooperatives for education materials and resources. Thus, the role of outside providers is obviously quite important. Three quarters of the respondents obtained materials from outside sources, while two-thirds looked to programs put on by outside groups. More than 60 percent brought outside

Table 13—Priority ranking for various student audience groups.

Student group	All sup	Mktg/	Service	Fin.	Cons/ hsq
<i>Priority Rank</i>					
High school students	1	1	1	1	1
Jr. College, Community col.	2	2	3	3	2
University students	3	3	5	2	4
Adult education	4	4	4	5	3

experts in to play roles in their cooperatives' education programs. Ninety respondents got advice from outside experts in planning their organizations' programs. Ninety also indicated using basic program designs from outside sources.

Forty-seven respondents said their organizations developed educational materials for other groups. Service and financial organizations were more heavily involved in development of materials than other groups. However, much of the materials developed by service cooperatives were oriented toward the more technical aspects of their internal operations, such as power plant safety, rather than discussing the cooperative organization.

Cooperatives turn to a wide variety of sources to obtain educational materials, such as trade associations, State cooperative councils, and other cooperatives. Federal agencies, universities, and Cooperative Extension were also significant providers of materials. While a smaller total number of respondents indicated using outside sources for program planning and advisory assistance, the same sources or providers tended to dominate as with materials.

Cooperative respondents were asked to indicate which types of programs they wanted from other organizations. Director training was mentioned most frequently as being provided by State cooperative councils. Regional cooperatives, universities, and the NCFC were also frequently mentioned as providers of director training programs.

State councils were the leading providers of youth education programs, with NCFC and regional cooperatives as distant seconds. Staff or employee training was received from State councils, regionals, and trade associations, but by far fewer respondents. Other audience groups were mentioned by respondents, but no dominant patterns emerged. Other providers mentioned included USDA's Agricultural Cooperative Service (ACS), financial institutions, farm organizations, consultants, and Cooperative Extension.

Among outside sources, trade and professional associations, including State cooperative councils, other cooperatives, and Federal agencies were the primary sources for educational program materials (table 14).

In addition to materials, cooperatives looked to outside sources for assistance in planning and conducting educational programs (table 15). Trade or professional associations and state cooperative councils were the two most frequently used for this purpose.

WRITTEN MATERIALS USED MOST

Respondents were asked to indicate what types of materials or educational tools they used most frequently. Most used traditional written materials and videos (table 16). Reflecting the widespread cultural change brought about by video technolo-

Table 14—Sources of Cooperative Education Materials (in ranked order).

- | | |
|----|------------------------------------|
| 1. | Trade or Professional Associations |
| 2. | State Cooperative Councils |
| 3. | Other Cooperatives |
| 4. | Federal Agencies |
| 5. | Universities |
| 6. | Cooperative Extension |
| 7. | Financial Institutions |

Table 15—Sources of program planning and advisory assistance for cooperative education (in ranked order).

- | | |
|----|------------------------------------|
| 1. | Trade or Professional Associations |
| 2. | State Cooperative Councils |
| 3. | Other Cooperatives |
| 4. | Universities |
| 5. | Federal Agencies |
| 6. | Cooperative Extension |
| 7. | Consultants |
| 6. | Financial Institutions |
-

gy, its use has clearly become an integral component of cooperative education programs.

Traditional displays and promotional material remain a vital component of many programs. Prepackaged teaching courses and self-training courses are of growing importance as an educational delivery strategy. Surprisingly, given the widespread use of personal computers and computer networks, relatively few organizations have incorporated these technologies into their education programs. The groups recognize how computers could be used in cooperative education, but they lack software and applications packages designed for this specific use.

Respondents identified which educational materials and tools should have priority in future development (table 17). While use of traditional written and audio visual materials will continue, changing technologies and methods for the 1990s and beyond dominate priorities. This is widely recognized. Seventy-five percent felt video production should be emphasized. More than five times the number of respondents who used computer-based tools felt priority should be given to computer technologies in developing future educational tools.

Table 17. Materials and tools most frequently used in cooperative education programs.

Type of material	Frequency of response
Written materials	160
Videos	144
Displays, promotional materials	72
Teaching packages	47
Prepackaged training courses	41
Self-instruction packages	23
Computer software	14
Training network systems	11
Television programming	1

Respondents rated available tools and materials used in cooperative education for four different audiences-youth, directors, members, and employees. The set of available materials were rated on the following eight criteria:

1. Adaptability to many audiences,
2. Cost of materials,
3. Availability of materials,
4. Coverage of topic areas,
5. Format/presentation of information,
6. Ease of use,
7. Effectiveness in conveying information, and
8. Applicability to “real world” situations.

Table 18 shows the resulting assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each set of materials. Assessments were overall impressions of the entire inventory of available tools and materials, rather than a comment on the qualities of a specific offering. These assessments provided insight into the qualities needed in developing new materials and tools.

Strengths were indicated in the cost of materials and ease of use. Adaptability of materials to a variety of audiences and their applicability to real world situations were indicated as weaknesses. These two criticisms of materials may be seen as conflicting, however, because actual application often requires

Table 17—Priorities for future materials development.

Type of material	Frequency of response
Videos	149
Computer-based learning tools	74
Written materials	72
Self-contained teaching packages	66
Traditional visuals (slides, overheads)	58
Displays, promotional materials	36
Interactive communications systems	32
Self-instruction packages	27
Workbooks	26

relating materials to the specific and unique types of situations faced by individual audiences. This can limit use of the materials for many audiences.

AVAILABILITY A PROBLEM?

Perhaps the most troubling findings from these ratings is the apparent agreement that availability of materials is a problem. Respondents perceived poor availability of nearly all types of materials. This appears to be a result of a combination of holes in the range of materials needed and a lack of success among providers in promoting the availability of their materials.

In written comments, the need to relate cooperative education messages to practical conditions was continually stressed. This has implications for the design of materials, both in format and in content. Case study approaches and interactive simulation software would be highly consistent with these themes. Audiences weren't receptive to general materials or philosophy-oriented "preaching." Audiences must relate to the materials and see how they may be affected in their daily lives by what they are being taught.

Respondents gave a wide range of written suggestions regarding how each set of education materials for groups could be improved. Several themes common to improvements needed for each audience were presented.

Table 18—Indicated strengths ("S") and weaknesses ("W") of cooperative education materials targeted for each of four major audiences.

	Youth	Directors	Members	Employees
Adaptability to many audiences	-		W	W
Cost of materials	S	S	S	
Availability of materials	W		W	W
Coverage of topic areas		S	W	
Presentation of information				S
Ease of use	S	S	S	W
Effectively conveys information	-	W		
Practical application	W	W		

They related to the need for practical businesslike approaches, accommodating severe time constraints and/or short attention spans of various audiences, use of contemporary images and themes, use of video technologies, and creation of a more generic (i.e., not just agriculture) focus. Availability of materials was frequently stressed as needing improvement. Many are unaware of just what is available.

Suggested improvement of youth education materials focused on making materials more contemporary and in tune with today's urban or urban-influenced youth culture. Emphasis was placed on a fast-paced, visual-oriented approach with practical application and personal involvement in the learning process.

Director education materials also need a more contemporary approach, according to several respondents. They wanted more case studies and hands-on exercises dealing with realistic situations that relate to their cooperative's businesses. Several others felt the need for far more director training regarding the proper execution of their roles, both as cooperative decisionmakers and as representatives or members. This included training in decisionmaking, cooperative basics, current issues, and communication skills.

Written suggestions regarding member education materials paralleled director education suggestions. Practical focus was stressed, with emphasis on how cooperatives provide direct benefits to members. The most critical element suggested improving the appearance of materials to make them more attractive and appealing to audiences.

DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Cooperatives were asked to indicate which delivery systems or methods they used most often in their educational programs. They were then asked to indicate which delivery systems, from a provided list, were most effective in reaching

each of seven primary audiences: members, directors, employees, managers, board officers, young adults, and youth.

Seminars or workshops, newsletters and other mailings, and conferences were by far the most common delivery systems used by cooperatives (table 19). The top two most frequently used methods can be combined or tied in with other materials or events. They need not be stand-alone programs or approaches. Seminars and workshops, typically conducted for an hour or a day, may be combined with other events such as the cooperative's annual meeting of its board of directors. Education through newsletters or mailings may be tied in with other promotional, informational, or business mailings.

GENERAL OPINION STATEMENTS

Recipients measured their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements designed to elicit their opinions on a range of cooperative education issues. Each statement was rated from 1 to 5, with "1" indicating strong agreement and "5" strong disagreement. Average agreement ratings for each statement are provided in table 21.

Major respondent groups were quite uniform in their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The biggest difference was found in statements regarding where responsibility for education of different groups should rest. Consumer and housing cooperatives much more strongly felt

Table 19-Delivery systems and methods used.

Delivery method	Frequency of use
Seminars/workshops	174
Newsletters, mailings	156
Conferences	135
Retreats, camps	37
Correspondence, self-instruction	29
Private consulting	26
Teleconferences	6

they had prime responsibility for educating various audiences. Whether this opinion results from differences in underlying philosophies or from functions of the far less developed

Table 20—Most effective delivery systems or methods for selected cooperative education audiences.

Cooperative Members:	
Newsletters, mailings	177
Seminars, workshops	86
Conferences	83
Cooperative Directors:	
Conferences	134
Seminars, workshops	117
Retreats, camps	61
Cooperative Employees:	
Seminars, workshops	123
Conferences	100
Correspondence, self instruction	66
Newsletters, mailings	61
Cooperative Managers:	
Conferences	114
Seminars, workshops	109
Private consulting	49
Teleconferences	49
Board Officers:	
Seminars, workshops	105
Conferences	102
Retreats, camps	53
Personal counsel	44
Young Adults:	
Conferences	97
Seminars, workshops	94
Retreats, camps	86
Newsletters, mailings	80
Youth:	
Retreats, camps	108
Seminars, workshops	87
Conferences	86

cooperative education infrastructure available to consumer cooperatives compared to other types is problematic.

Respondents agreed that more resources are needed for cooperative education. They also saw value in acquainting the

Table 21-Average ratings on opinion statements, from 1 to 5.

There is a public value to education about the cooperative form of business.	1.57
Cooperative scholarships should be available to undergraduate students.	1.89
Internships and cooperative work-study programs should be encouraged.	1.78
More financial resources should be devoted to education about cooperatives.	2.09
More funding for university research on cooperatives should be available.	2.17
Public resources should be used for education about cooperatives.	2.62
Most current cooperative education is out of step with modern business.	2.72
Public education about the cooperative form of business should be conducted by institutions other than cooperatives themselves.	2.77
Cooperative employees' education should be left to the cooperatives.	2.87
There is too much overlap among groups involved in cooperative education.	3.26
Education of members should be left to the cooperatives themselves.	3.29
Education of directors should be left to the cooperatives themselves.	3.47
Providing education about cooperatives is less important than it once was.	4.29

general public about the cooperative form of business. But, they rejected the idea that cooperative education was less important than it used to be. They believe more resources are needed for various educational programs at the university level. Less clear was whether these additional resources should come from public sources. Marketing and supply cooperatives tended to be less supportive than other groups for spending public funds on cooperative education.

While the average respondent did not feel that contemporary cooperative education was out of step with modern business, present programs don't have much support. Many perceived cooperative education as being out of touch or felt neutral about it. Given anything less than strong endorsement, it is fair to interpret this response as indicating a problem area.

The question then becomes one of identifying ways cooperative education can be brought into closer alignment with the needs of cooperative businesses today. Respondents offered several general suggestions, many of which focused on the need for a better understanding of the complexities and requirements of operating businesses in the current economic environment. The perception appears to be that cooperative education fails to provide an understanding of those business operations and decisionmaking skills needed to guide a modern organization.

DON'T SEE MUCH OVERLAP

On the question of whether there is too much overlap between groups providing cooperative education, a slight, though not significant disagreement was indicated. Opinions on this issue were widely distributed, however, indicating the perception by many that such overlap exists. This perception seems to be one of the continuing myths of the cooperative education system.

Responsibility for educating various groups, whether it rests solely with the cooperatives or if other organizations and institutions should be involved, was an issue that had the greatest variation in opinion. While the assignment of primary responsibility for cooperative member, employee, and the general public audiences seemed clearly assigned in an early question, sole responsibility seems to be another matter. Education for each audience needs to be a collaborative effort. Various groups need to play the primary delivery role and others a supportive role, depending on the particular audience.

For example, cooperatives strongly prefer to have primary responsibility for employee education, yet many could not agree that responsibility should be left with the cooperative alone. This suggests a mix of contribution by outside sources to provide quality basic education materials. They could be customized to the needs of the individual cooperative, which, in turn, provides the resources and takes the lead in conducting the employee training program.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions based on survey findings alone must be tempered with the understanding that the cooperatives' survey was merely one component of the overall education task force effort. However, it is an extremely important component, for it is the operating cooperatives themselves which represent the manifestation of the goals for which we undertake cooperative education in the first place. We must, therefore, be extremely sensitive to their needs and perceptions.

The perception clearly exists among survey respondents that cooperative education should be increasingly emphasized. While its importance has not diminished, a drawing-in has occurred. Educational efforts by cooperative organizations are focused on those programs or activities directly benefiting their individual organizations by contributing to operating objectives.

More emphasis is being placed on cooperatives' own programs or those they sponsor. There is less emphasis on programs aimed at audiences outside the cooperative's primary area of interest. Educational programs benefiting the cooperative indirectly, such as improving the public environment for cooperatives, are receiving less support than those benefiting the cooperative more directly. Therefore, it is important that institutions offering education programs do a more effective and rigorous job of identifying and measuring the concrete benefits to cooperatives generated by these educational programs.

Critical to improving the commitment of organizations to this effort is recognizing education's importance to operating cooperatives. Education can then gain a firmer foothold within individual cooperatives. This will require an effective sales job directed at key decisionmakers in each cooperative. It will involve creating an education advocate able to influence an organization's commitment of financial and human resources. Most typically, this translates into the board chairperson or the general manager.

It is disturbing that given all the materials and programs available for cooperative education, and the number of organizations and institutions involved, there is still considerable ignorance about the breadth of available materials. Given that the respondents were active participants in the education process and often unaware of programs and materials, it is discomfiting to project the level of ignorance that must exist among those not as well connected to the cooperative education process.

The best programs and materials are only as valuable as their actual use. In promoting that use, or even an awareness of its availability, it would appear that the cooperative education establishment has fallen far short. Mechanisms and approaches must be put into place to greatly expand an awareness concerning availability of materials and programs.

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Agricultural Cooperative Service**

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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, marital status, handicap, or national origin.