

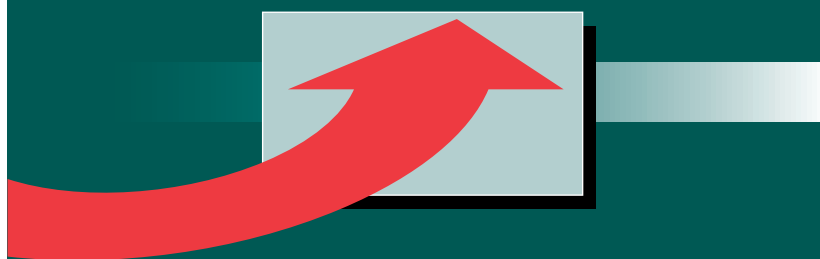


Gouvernement
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Worker Co-operative Success Stories



In partnership with:
**The Canadian
Worker Co-operative
Federation**



*Co-operatives Secretariat
Secrétariat aux Coopératives*

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Preface

A worker co-operative's main objective is to provide employment to its members through the operation of an enterprise where control rests with its employees. Worker co-operatives have existed in many industrialized countries of Europe for over 100 years. Even though, worker co-operatives are not too common in Canada, they do have a long history: East Pubnico Co-operative, the oldest formal worker co-operative in the country, was established in Nova Scotia in 1935.

However, it was during the 1980s that worker co-operatives sprang up and took root all across Canada. Today there are 247 of them in fields as diverse as forestry, health care, restaurants, and consulting, to name a few. While the largest in terms of employment and revenues are found mainly in the forestry sector, a growing number of Canadians from all walks of life are looking at worker co-operatives as a viable economic alternative that can play a vital role in economic recovery.

Worker Co-operative Success Stories showcases some unique achievements made by these worker co-operatives in Canada. As you will see from these stories, co-operatives are actively involved in the socio-economic and community regeneration of their regions.

Our sincere thanks to Hazel Corcoran, Executive Director of the Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation who participated closely in the production of this publication. We are also grateful to Rising Tide Co-operative Ltd, The Co-operators and to all the worker co-operatives for their contributions and for sharing their experiences.

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The Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation

Helping worker co-ops help themselves

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1992
Number of members: 23 co-op/organisation members,
Plus 2 regional federation
members (Ontario & BC)

Number of employees: 2

Activities: In conjunction with regional
federations, provision of services to existing worker co-ops.
Securing and Co-ordinating resources for worker co-op
development.

At a meeting in Ottawa in February of 1990, representatives of worker co-operatives from across Canada came together for the first time to discuss whether there was a need for developing a national organization to represent the interests of worker co-operatives.

This first meeting set the tone for the new Federation. Most of the participants, living in different provinces, were unknown to each other; but by the end of the first day the group was arranging to meet in one of the suites to cook dinner, and share some food and wine. The unofficial meeting went on long into the night with worker co-op stories from Newfoundland to British Columbia.

After a couple of days it was clear that there were opportunities that could only be met by forming a national bilingual organization. Further discussion led to the formation of a working group mandated to develop the Federation and organize the founding meeting. This took place in the spring of 1991 at the Coady International (Co-operative) Institute in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, where the Canadian Worker Co-op Federation or 'CWCF' was born.

Since that time, the CWCF has carried out its activities with very modest resources. For the first two years, its operations were carried out entirely by its volunteer Board of Directors. Since that time, a part-time Executive Director has been employed to guide the activities and coordinate the volunteer efforts of the Board of Directors and others. The CWCF has been financed through members' and associates' dues, fees for service contracts and donations from supporting organizations in the established co-op sector.

Modest resources haven't stopped the CWCF from making a significant contribution to the Worker Co-op sector.

The CWCF and the Conférence des Coopératives Forestières du Québec lobbied to secure changes to allow members of worker co-operatives to invest the shares of their co-operative in a Self-Directed RRSP. This has enhanced the sector's ability to raise necessary capital.

Many worker co-operatives have difficulties with rulings from Revenue Canada regarding the nature of the employment relationship between the members and the co-operative. The CWCF wrote a brief on this issue to clarify the various options for structuring a worker co-op to ensure that the members have the relationship they desire, either an employer-employee relationship (insurable employment) or an independent contractor relationship (self-employment).

The CWCF has been the catalyst that has prompted worker co-operatives in Ontario and British Columbia to form regional federations.

All in all, the CWCF/FCCT has greatly increased the communication within the sector, through regular newsletters, through holding conferences in all regions of the country, and with the development of a Worker Co-op Developers' Network.

The CWCF has recently received from the Government of Canada a \$1.5 million dollar investment fund to be used for worker co-op development. This pilot project will support equity investments and loans to new and expanding worker co-ops that are members of the CWCF.

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Anim'Action

*An experience of solidarity and commitment
towards the disadvantaged populations*

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1991
Number of members: 6
Number of employees: 6

Activities: Action research, training,
activity facilitation, support for
organizations, evaluation

Revenues: \$270 000

A nim'Action is a worker co-operative that provides custom training, activity facilitation, support, action research and evaluation services to organizations and institutions working with the economically disadvantaged. The co-operative is located in a working-class neighbourhood in Quebec City, but works on a regular basis in other parts of the province.

The co-operative was established in 1991, when representatives of institutions approached three women, who were already involved in the community, to develop a project with parents of children attending an elementary school in a working-class neighbourhood and to organize a training session on working with the economically disadvantaged. At that same time, the *Assemblée des évêques du Québec* asked two of the women to help set up a training program on spousal violence, to be delivered in the different dioceses across Quebec. For these women, the dreams of seeing their activism translate into employment had all of a sudden become a real possibility! They decided to form a worker co-operative, so that their work could reflect the values of community spirit, social justice and sharing, values they were striving to promote in society.

For five years, Anim'Action provided part-time work to its members, who also worked elsewhere. In 1995, the co-operative reached a turning point, as one of the women decided to give up her other activities to dedicate therefore full-time to the co-operative. In 1996, two major projects enabled the co-operative to grow: the organization of a regional forum on socio-economics and the co-ordination of an extensive, eye-opening survey with eight community-based organizations. The team purchased a computer, rented an office, and embarked fully on the co-operative's development. A number of persons were then asked to join the co-operative. Contracts increased, providing enough work for four, and then five people. In 1999, Anim'Action moved to larger premises, in the *Maison de la coopération et de l'économie solidaire de Québec*, a service co-operative bringing together under one roof some fifteen organizations working to promote co-operation and community-based development.

Anim'Action has developed the expertise to help organizations working to eradicate poverty and social exclusion and to implement social and economic alternatives. It is actively involved with community organizations, consultation committees, religious groups, institutions in the health and social services network, local economic development organizations and co-operatives. Anim'Action also contributes directly to developing innovative projects. For example, for the last two years, it has been working on setting up the *Centre de ressources pour la création d'entreprises collectives*.

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Atikokan Fish Co-operative Inc.

*Snow Lake Fish farm from an abandoned eyesore
to a green job creator*

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1996
Number of members: 3
Number of employees: 17 FT/PT
Activities: Rainbow Trout
Revenues : 1999 - \$453,370

From the 1950s through the 1970s, Atikokan, west of Thunder Bay and north of Quetico Park, boasted that it was one of the world's largest open-pit iron ore mines. When the ore ran out and the mine closed in the late 1970s, it threw at least 1,000 local people out of work.

David Lindsay wanted to do something to preserve his community, so he looked around for alternative enterprises. He ended up creating a workers' co-op that has helped turn an environmental liability into a "green," job-creating asset that may eventually benefit other Northern communities.

The idea was hatched when Lindsay noticed that the former mine pit was filling with water. Knowing the keen interest southerners have in northern fish, he came up with the idea of fish farming in the abandoned open pits.

In 1989, Lindsay and some friends pulled together fish netting and fresh-cut logs from the surrounding woods to build their first fish pen. The fish grew, despite predictions that the severe climate would make it impossible. This pen is still functioning today, and is the basis of the Snow Lake Fish Farm, the label of a workers' co-operative that now sells half a million pounds of rainbow trout to Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Toronto and New York.

Transforming a mine into a fish farm hasn't been easy. Initially there was a great deal of skepticism about the fledgling industry. Some experts even said fish farming in the North couldn't be done due to the severe climate and lack of accessible markets, but Lindsay and his group were not discouraged.

"David was driven by a vision for his community," recalls John Brouwer, who develops worker co-ops for the Ontario Worker Co-op Federation. Brouwer became involved with Snow Lake largely because of Lindsay's commitment to worker co-operatives. With time, the obstacles presented by the severe climate were overcome by the co-op's commitment to developing new solutions. It's also become clear that the markets are there once the fish are ready to be sold.

Then there was conflicting advice about what fish was best for fish farming. Early suggestions to farm Chinook salmon proved disastrous. "Fish farmers across Canada lost a lot of money trying to raise a fish which we now know can't be domesticated," says Brouwer. Raising rainbow trout has proven to be much easier.

Another challenge was the understandable perception that fish farming in a former open pit mine was "a little weird." However, the concept has proven to have had unforeseen environmental

benefits, and Lakehead University with support from Falconbridge has taken a keen interest in further exploring those benefits.

"An open-pit lake has been stripped in mining," says Brouwer. "It looks like fish farming kickstarts biological activity, because of the fish waste by-products. They add nutrients that are a problem in open water, but not bad in such a sterile environment."

About a year ago new financing took Snow Lake to the commercial level and today the income from the sale of fish supports nine full-time staff. Membership in the worker co-operative, the Atikokan Fish Co-op, is open to all permanent full-time employees. Once the newly-opened fish processing plant moves from batch processing to larger production runs this fall, there should be more people working full-time. By next year, Brouwer estimates, 25 people should be eligible for membership in the Co-op.

The impact on the community has been significant. "These are decent jobs with growth potential and it's interesting work," says Brouwer. "Jobs give people hope. People who've left are coming back to town on the basis of this work."

Snow Lake Fish Farm continues to confront the challenges of running a small but growing business in the North. Some of these can be fairly easily solved, like how to transport fish fry safely over the long journey from southern Ontario hatcheries. Others, such as lack of staff development and training, are proving more difficult. Fish farming is a relatively new field and staff need further training, but the nearest aquaculture and fish processing training is in southern Ontario, hundreds of miles away. Snow Lake is hoping that a funding request to the Ontario Government will rectify this problem.

Clearly, Lindsay has tapped into a potentially rich vein. Interest from other northern communities with open pit mines is growing. Wawa is looking seriously at replicating Snow Lake's methods. Ear Falls has expressed interest. And the Falconbridge research connection has led to enquiries from a community at the north end of Vancouver Island with a former copper mine.

"There's a lot of water in the north that could support aquaculture," says John Brouwer, "and there's a lot of abandoned open-pit mines. The research being done by Lakehead on the Snow Lake pits could lead to better use of what are currently liabilities."

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Co-op Taxi Line Ltd.

You Always Ask Where They Are Going

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1992
Number of members: 11
Number of employees: 18
Activities: Taxi Service
Revenues: N/A



At 7:30, on a cold December morning, you might find Neil Shaw at the car wash cleaning the salt and ice off his 1994 Ford. By noon, you can usually find him in the office reviewing the financial projections. In the evening, he might be meeting with city officials to discuss rezoning or cab stands. Like most cab drivers, Neil also puts in many hours a week behind the wheel of his car. A day for Neil and others can involve these activities, which all seem quite different, but once he explains that he is president of a taxi Co-op the pieces begin to fall into place.

First and foremost, Neil is a cab driver, sometimes working 12 hours a day. At the same time, he is an owner of the Co-op Taxi Line Ltd. which has grown from three members when it was incorporated in 1992, to the most professional cab company in Prince Edward Island's capital city with 27 cabs and 11 members.

As president, Neil works more than 40 volunteer hours a month to the Co-op. "We have no manager so therefore we are a very hands-on board," says Neil. He also noted that the directors must look after the interests of the Co-op by lobbying government for changes in regulations when necessary and by negotiating with suppliers for discounts on bulk purchases of gasoline.

Outside the office situated on Euston Street there is a sign explaining what the Co-op is all about, a reminder to all the members as they come and go. "This Co-op is committed to quality and professionalism. Our customers know that they will drive in clean full-sized cars. The cars all bear the Co-op logo and are painted in white and green. All must have the radio and Co-op Taxi Line Ltd. roof light. It is an investment of over \$3,000 plus a car for the driver once he becomes a member, to conform to the Co-op's standards. Members keep joining because the Co-op has a good reputation and maintains a high levels of customer service." "Because of this says Neil, the Co-op has many regulars. These are people that are picked up each day who sometimes ask for specific cars when they call. But one thing I've learned is, you always ask where they are going. That's the professional way," says Neil.

When you meet members of Co-op Taxi Line Ltd. their professionalism is very evident as you listen to the discussion between the dispatcher and drivers. Tiger, a driver with the co-op for six years proudly notes that his car is so clean that it is still dripping from the car wash. "I'm proud of the reputation we have," says Tiger.

The professionalism is also apparent as Chuck MacKeen, Bill MacEwen, Neil Shaw, Donald MacLean and George Bernard, the Board's Executive, discuss the problems the Co-op is facing and work to resolve them. These five members have been involved in this Co-op for more than six years and together they have more than 20 years of experience as drivers. They say that managing the business is a new challenge and they are learning as they go. They related that it is easier because all five have strengths and together they can come up with creative solutions. Neil concluded, "We try to always remember that we too must ask ourselves, 'Where are we going?' and then decide how the Co-op will get there."

"You Always Ask Where They Are Going" written by Maureen MacLean and Brenda MacKinnon, Rising Tide Co-operative Ltd., as part of a research study on "Worker Co-ops and their Impact on the Atlantic Economy" supported by funding from The Co-operators.

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La Coopérative Laterrière

A success story based on partnership and vision

Statistics :

Year of incorporation: 1960
Number of Members: 500
Number of employees: 750
Activities: Cutting, silviculture, sawing,
planing, wood processing
Revenues: \$100 million

The *Coopérative Laterrière* was founded 40 years ago by a small group of forestry workers interested in establishing their own business. They chose the workers' co-operative as a model.

Originally the co-operative devoted its activities strictly to planning and harvesting the raw material, but in 1982, it moved into processing in a big way when it purchased the Laterrière sawmill. Over the years, the co-operative has experienced strong and steady growth, either by purchasing and streamlining existing plants or building new ones from scratch.

Today, as it celebrates its 40 years of existence, the *Coopérative Laterrière* has become the leading co-operative of its type in Canada. It manages cutting areas in the Saguenay – Lac St-Jean and North Shore regions and operates plants at Laterrière, Falardeau, Larouche, Labrieville (in co-operation with the *Coopérative Manicouagan-Outardes*) and Rivière-sur-Jean on the Lower North Shore. It will soon be established at Natashquan. The co-operative is also a major producer of spruce seedlings (an average of 5 million annually) and ornamentals. It employs 750 workers, of whom about 500 are members in good standing of the co-operative.

The value-added challenge

The Larouche plant is the pride of the co-operative. It is brand new and was built at a cost of \$25 million. The plant currently produces I-joint flanges and will shortly supply the construction industry with a structural product called Egelam. This is a large-size panel obtained by jointing and laminating 2 x 3s produced by the co-operative's various divisions.

In a region whose economy is based mainly on natural resources, the co-operative, in establishing its Larouche plant, wanted to give added value to its traditional products. "Carrying out further processing of the wood locally before exporting it is considerably more profitable and it creates more jobs or collective wealth than if we confine ourselves to basic products like 2 x 3s or 2 x 4s, and so on," said Luc Houde, general manager of the co-operative.

Mr. Houde made this comment recently at the *Gala des 2000* when he received the *Prix d'Or* for job creation in the co-operative sector.

Co-operation with the Montagnais based on mutual respect

As a result of a partnership agreement with the Montagnais community, the *Coopérative Laterrière* is currently planning the establishment and management of a new company, of which it will have 45% equity ownership (the other 55% belonging to the Montagnais, the project promoters). The plant of this new company will be located in the Natashquan area and will create many jobs for members of the Montagnais community. It should begin operation next year.

More recently, the co-operative purchased 50% of the equity of the Industries Gonthier Inc. sawmill located at Rivière-Saint-Jean. It thus strengthened its presence on the North Shore and plans strategic links between the Rivière-Saint-Jean and Natashquan plants.

People of vision

The success of the *Coopérative Laterrière* is not the result of chance. It was achieved thanks to the vision of its directors and management team, the commitment of its members, and the deep conviction that risks must be taken in order to succeed.

The success can also be explained by the fact that the co-operative has shown respect for the various communities in which it has established plants over the years. This respect for local communities has enabled it to put down deep roots and to find the necessary support to achieve its mission: to provide work for its people while ensuring the future of the Quebec forest.

By diversifying its activities, modernizing its production equipment, and updating the technical knowledge of its members and workers, the *Coopérative Laterrière* has become one of the leaders in the forestry industry. It clearly shows that the co-operative formula can lead to success when it makes the most of the latest major trends in industry and management.

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La Coopérative Travailleurs Forestiers McKendrick Ltée

You Can't Ask for Anything Better

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1991
Number of members: 60
Number of employees: 72 Seasonal
Activities: Silviculture
Revenues: \$1.3 million



The wind blows strongly across Sommit L'Acadie tattering the provincial flag and encouraging people to wear hats and mittens even on this early October morning. Across the road from La Cooperative Travailleurs Forestiers McKendrick Ltée an unoccupied glider swings back and forth rhythmically reflecting the heartbeat of this small community in northern New Brunswick.

McKendrick, population of 700, is located behind the Sugarloaf Mountain and about 15 kilometers from Campbellton, New Brunswick. The community itself is now able to withstand the harsh winds of economic change because within it has grown a strong co-operative business, La Cooperative de Travailleurs Forestiers McKendrick. During the 1999 season it was able to provide full or part time work for more than 60 members, contracted to manage the forests in a 350-hectare area. The members generate full and part time employment for more than eight months each year. The impact on the community can be measured in financial and economic terms. An annual payroll of \$1.1 million and a yearly contribution to the local, provincial and federal tax base of more than \$480,000 is of note in a community where a few years ago the young people left and seldom returned. However, there is another contribution this worker co-op and others like it all over Atlantic Canada is making, it develops and strengthens community capacity.

Yves Levesque son of a forestry worker, grew up in McKendrick. He went off to attend community college in Bathurst in 1990. He wanted to work in the woods, as was the tradition in his family for many years; he took a two-year diploma program as a forestry technician. Following graduation he worked for two years away from home until he found out about the Co-op.

Yves was the first technician the Co-op hired in 1993. Today this Co-op has hired six technicians, some of them young men who saw that they could find work near home and therefore chose forestry as their career.

Now as a worker-owner Yves has been able to be assured of a job where he can live near his parents and in-laws. He has built a small home in nearby Val D'Amour and together with his wife and a three-year-old has become a part of the growing community of Maltais.

Just elected as vice-president of the Co-op, Yves shares the fact that the skills he has learned as a director and the self-confidence he has gained has enabled him to take an active role in the community. It is easier he says because he is surrounded by people. "I have become a volunteer fire fighter just a few months ago. Without my involvement in the Co-op, I could never have done that. You can do all that when you feel you have job security." Yves says that the Co-op tries not to lose any jobs, but to create more. "We want to help people live better." He added that the Co-op people might be working otherwise for a private contractor. "But here at the Co-op, it's my business. We are not working for somebody. Everything goes to us and you can't ask for anything better."

"You Can't Ask for Anything Better" written by Maureen MacLean and Brenda MacKinnon, Rising Tide Co-operative Ltd., as part of a research study on "Worker Co-ops and their Impact on the Atlantic Economy" supported by funding from The Co-operators

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Future Forestry Services Co-op

"You've Gotta Have the Right People"

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1987
Number of members: 5
Number of employees: 14
Activities: Forest management,
planning and Consulting
Revenues: Approx. \$920,000



Inside the equipment shed, the noise of the porter's engine is deafening as it rumbles to life. However, to the owners of Future Forestry Co-op, like Brian Moser, who just spent the last two hours fine-tuning the Timberjack 230, it is a welcomed sound. "When you have over \$50,000 tied up in one piece of equipment, you want your machinery to be dependable," says general manager George Dempsey. When the porter is loaded onto a flat bed and delivered to a job site it's important that the crew know they will not be held up due to equipment breakdowns.

When a crew of men go out they know just what they can accomplish that day. Their job is to go in first and cut the trail. Then with power saws they cut standing timber and pile the wood into logs, pulp and studwood. The porter, who arrives after the crew by about a week, transports the wood from the cutting area to the roadside in four cord loads, moving approximately 300 cords from a 8-10 acre area. The porter can and often does work alone, sometimes two weeks after the men have cut the wood and left. It is a co-operative effort. The machine needs to work to capacity and it is really important that the people do, too. Worker owners, Ron Grant and Bruce MacLeod, who supervise the crews, ensure that everything operates smoothly, that time isn't lost and that the porter doesn't sit idle.

Ron and Bruce are two of the original-founding members of Future Forestry Services Co-op Ltd. operating in MacLellan's Brook, Pictou County, in Nova Scotia. Founded in 1986, the Co-op has grown from a small silviculture business with assets of \$5,000 and operating out of a desk in Bruce's home, to a business with an annual payroll of \$400,000 and assets of \$250,000.

The Co-op now has four members that have individual skills which contribute to their collective enterprise. Brian, is the president, also operates and repairs the porter. George, the director, general manager and a certified forestry technician, sets up and maintains work. Ron the secretary-treasurer of the Board and silviculture supervisor, is responsible for much of the Co-op's public relations. He also is chair of the Nova Scotia Silviculture Contractors Association, sits on a governmental committee that is looking to pass new forestry regulations. He also represents silviculture contractors on the Voluntary Planning's Forest Sector Committee. Bruce, the chairman and financial manager, supervises working crews.

For Future Forestry change and growth has come dramatically as it has to the forestry industry over the past 15 years. In some companies, harvesters now do the work of 15 men. They don't

need to rest and their owners don't need to pay 12 per cent compensation for them. Therefore, businesses using such equipment can contract jobs at a lower price, but Future Forestry continues to use the traditional methods to create employment. "Our job then becomes one of public relations and sales. We need to convince our customers that they get added benefits by using our services including silviculture and good forestry practices; that we are the right people for the job," says George.

The Co-op is a small business according to many people's standards, but it is a good example of what community economic development is all about. Except for one technician from Antigonish (45 km away) the employees are all local. The number of employees can go up as high as 35 during May and June when the Co-op plants over 8,000 seedlings. "We put a lot back into the community, wages, spin-off work; we purchase gas, parts for equipment, material, tools, we make donations to charity and do in-kind community work," George stated. "And we will continue to do this as we grow."

However, he added that it's a much harder than it was 15 years ago. All the changes, the new equipment, the need for constant training in computerization, global position systems, puts a strain on such a small group. As members and owners they need to keep up-to-date on everything. They have to show that they are the right people for the job or they won't get the contract. In addition to skills based training, the members have to know about human resources, health and safety regulations, government policy and regulations and forest management practices.

Over the years, members recognized that a worker Co-op structure based on self-management was not the ideal. For this reason, a more traditional top down management system evolved with it frequent staff meetings and job descriptions.

Over the past 15 years "we have learned that each of us is a worker and an owner. We bring the skills we have but we also need to develop new ones because we know that to be successful we gotta have the right people that together can create a successful enterprise." In addition, they meet about eight times a year as a board to look at their responsibilities as member-owners.

"You've Gotta Have the Right People" written by Maureen MacLean and Brenda MacKinnon, Rising Tide Co-operative Ltd., as part of a research study on "Worker Co-ops and their Impact on the Atlantic Economy" supported by funding from The Co-operators.

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Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op

Growing the Business

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1996
Number of members: 5
Number of employees: 8

Activities: Roasting and selling fairly
traded coffee & tea

Revenues: Approx. \$560,000



Coming in from the crisp, cold morning in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, the heat generated by the roasting machine is most welcomed. The smell of the coffee, as it makes its many thousands of rotations over the gas flame, is intoxicating. Down in the lower level of Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op in New Minas, Nova Scotia, David Mangle spends most mornings supervising the transformation of the glossy green organically grown beans into the aromatic coffee bearing such enticing names as "Jungle Blend", "French Roast" and "Rainforest Rhapsody".

Only eight years ago, David would have spent his mornings teaching music at the local high school. The idea of starting the worker co-op grew from a commitment of a group of friends and family members who wanted to own their own business, which contributed to their personal satisfaction and desire for a more just society. They wanted to offer a fair and just return to the farmers from whom they purchase their beans. They were ahead of their time even by most international standards. The International Fair Trade Association only came into being in 1998. Now they continue to lead. Just Us! Is one of a few groups trying to organize a national structure for worker co-ops involved in fair trade.

"We are committed to quality, to fair trade and to growing the business," says Mangle. All these have taken time to set up and require a major financial contribution by the members who each have to personally guarantee \$75,000 for each shipment of green beans.

Just Us! strongly supports fair trade and delivers several educational events to promote this, each year. They also donate coffee to community activities and, as individuals, the members have taken leadership roles in various community organizations. Four of the original five founding members are still working at the Co-op. They also have seven full-time and seasonal part-time employees.

Mangle will roast 500 pounds of beans today in 25-pound increments, each roast taking about 25 minutes. All the jobs are important, but that of coffee roaster is especially critical, because a poorly processed batch will have to be destroyed costing the Co-op hundreds of dollars. David learned roasting from Jeff Moore, also

a member-owner who except for a few short visits to roasters in the United States and Mexico is self-taught.

Since their roasted coffee and now fairly traded tea has become known, the Co-op has made the decision to purchase a building in a nearby community and renovate it specifically for roasting and storing coffee and operating a café and small farm market selling organic produce and natural ice cream.

Customers are loyal to their current location on Commercial street in New Minas, which includes a cozy coffee café, because there is a lot of history there. However, with business up as much as 150 per cent in the past 18 months, changes must be made. If plans materialize the Co-op will be moving approximately 12 kilometers to Grand Pre, but will remain an important part of the communities of Wolfville, Kentville and New Minas.

Mangle says that change is inevitable and good. "To grow the business you need people, products and ideas. Innovative thinking emerges from group synergy." Together David, Jane, Valerie, Debbie and Jeff, as well as the others who work with them have dreams about Just Us! One of their most innovative ideas was to set up an investment fund, which allows people outside the Co-op to contribute money to their personal RRSP plan and receive an equity tax credit of 30 per cent. Then this money can be used toward the capital needed for the expansion. Investors get a tax credit and a portion of their investment is guaranteed. The Co-op gets access to capital. The fund, supported by policies put in place by the Nova Scotia government, means that friends, families and others who believe in the Co-op and its fair trade vision have an option to demonstrate this by working together to make the dream a reality. Mangle concludes that for Just Us! producing an excellent product, opportunity for expansion, access to capital and commitment to the co-operative's social vision are all integral parts to growing the business.

"Growing a Business" written by Maureen MacLean and Brenda MacKinnon, Rising Tide Co-operative Ltd., as part of a research study on "Worker Co-ops and their Impact on the Atlantic Economy" supported by funding from The Co-operators.

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Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd.

*Cultural brokering in health: achieving equity in health
for culturally diverse groups*

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: Nov. 30, 1999
Number of members: 13
Number of employees: 5

Activities: Culturally and linguistically
parenting support, "cultural brokering" support to immigrant
and refugee families for health and social services,
community-based research on multicultural health issues

Revenues: \$ 400,000

Picture yourself arriving in a new country, having to adapt to your new environment, learn a new language and learn some of the culture around you in order to fit in. The lack of being able to communicate becomes a barrier in getting the help people need, hence causing them to become isolated and vulnerable to a variety of health and social issues.

"When I came to Canada, I was pregnant and had a seven-month-old baby. I did not speak English. I knew no one and had no family or friends here. I felt so lonely and so sad.... I didn't know what it was going to be like in the hospital or what they would expect me to do. It would have been beneficial to get information about the system here and what it is going to be like having a baby in this country. But most of all what I wanted was just support – the kind that comes from having someone to talk to – the kind of support that comes from the heart."

In 1993, before the Co-op was created, the Edmonton Board of Health, Royal Alexandra Hospital, and Grant McEwan College provided a training program on prenatal education for nine immigrant women from six ethnic communities. The training enabled them to provide support to isolated minority women who were experiencing health and other social issues. For the first 5 years, they worked on their own in their respective communities reporting directly to the Board of Health which later became the Capital Health Authority in 1995. This same group of women, who make up the Co-op today, had been working together in the community for seven years. Although they had a sense of independence from the head organization, they were not fully satisfied with the system set-up.

"If you're working for the system, how can you speak up for your community? How can you challenge the system and point out where the change is needed?" (MCHB, May 1998) "As the years passed we noticed that in order to provide service to such diverse nationalities, the governing system had to be of more democratic in nature."

That's when the members decided to become a co-operative, operating under democratic governance, direct responsiveness and accountability, fairness and social justice. They had been operating under those terms on their own; however with a mechanism that applied those rules in its practice, it was a perfect fit.

The uniqueness of Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative (MCHB), is that it was formed to serve culturally diverse communities such as Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, South Asian and Somali among others, in gaining access to health services and social supports within the context of their language and culture. The worker-members are mostly foreign-trained professionals such as medical doctors, nurses, social workers, computer analysts, graphic artists, and teachers. The Co-op offers social, emotional and informational support to immigrant and

cultural minority families. It also provides prenatal education, parenting classes, hospital tours, support groups and community development projects. An integral part of the Co-op is support for policy development. Various organizations and health institutions contact the Co-op for their input in hospital policies and cross-cultural health issues.

In addition, translation is an essential component in the Co-op's range of services. "We help them in getting their papers translated in their own language, as well as developing manuals in the various languages," says Surinder Dhaliwal. However, in producing manuals for the various communities, the co-op ensures that a community member participates in the translation of the document, in order to include their perspective on the issue at hand."

What makes the Co-op a success? It plays a large role in preventive medicine, in-home recovery, and providing people with the required services outside the hospitals, as well as the ability to communicate effectively with the immigrants and refugees in their own language.

"Some mothers who chose not to take prenatal courses end up mixing the wrong formula, or they give their new-born concentrated formula. We are able to identify dehydration in the early stages preventing minor cases from escalating into larger problems," says Sarah Borquez.

In general, immigrants and refugees who have just moved to a new environment tend to be shy in dealing with people who don't know how to speak their language. The Co-op manages to breakdown those barriers allowing people to open up and understand how the system really works. "We have been having "celebration of life" for the women. The men asked if they could come too. This established a new tradition. We are oriented to the outcome of increasing capacities of women we work with ... I encourage the formation of friendships in my groups." (MCHB, May 1998)

A recent study on breast-feeding among Chinese women revealed an increase of 79% in breastfeeding rate among mothers under the care of the MCHBs.¹ Similar results among East Indian women (with 64% increase) points to an improvement in maternal health practices due to the involvement of the Co-op in the community.

This is one of the many glaring transformations that the Co-op has to offer. "Our role in the health system is being recognized," says Surinder. The Co-op is actively educating and assisting minority communities to adapt to their new environments by bridging information, knowledge, resources and support. Many of the services that are provided by the Co-op are focused on facilitating access to opportunities and resources that would prevent illness and diseases and promote health-enhancing practices. The MCHB may be the first of its kind. With its great success and leading role in developing healthy communities, it will surely inspire more of its kind.

¹ Currie, L, Fung, M, Lau, A. Breastfeeding Survey in the Chinese Community. Unpublished report. August 1997.

Neechi Foods Community Store

Addressing the needs of urban aboriginals

General Information:

Resource person: Claire Clarke
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Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1986
Number of members: 14
Number of employees: 11
Activities: Retail food & craft,
Aboriginal specialities
Revenues: \$475,000

It's early morning in the north end of Winnipeg and the smell of bannock baking in the oven at Neechi Foods fills the air as you approach the store. Nearly ten years ago Elaine Clarke, now store manager, started baking bannock at Neechi Foods. Neechi, which means "friends" in both Cree and Ojibwa, is owned and operated by an aboriginal worker co-operative.

Some of the people at the store have changed since it started up a decade ago, however the commitment to individual empowerment, co-operative principles, healthy living and local community economic development has thrived and lives on at Neechi.

The store offers a full line of groceries distributed by Federated Co-operatives Ltd. In addition to the homemade bannock and fruit pies, the Co-op specializes in offering pickerel and whitefish from northern fishermen, blueberry jam and wild rice from aboriginal co-ops, and locally handcrafted aboriginal products.

Neechi however, is more than a co-operatively owned grocery store. It is a vital link in local community economic development in the north end of Winnipeg, an area that has seen some dramatic changes over the years. Once a thriving community, it is now characterized by poverty, deserted boarded-up homes and storefronts, and high unemployment rates. Neechi has tackled this problem head on, not only does it provide employment, it also promotes aboriginal culture and provides education. Neechi currently employs four full-time workers and seven part-time workers.

Located in the largest urban native population in Canada, Neechi distributes products such as moccasins, dream catchers, aboriginal children's stories and a variety of products unique to aboriginal culture. It also educates by offering a wide selection of books on child rearing, peace education and community economic development. It promotes healthy living by providing a "kids only" fruit basket at the front of the store where fruit is sold to kids at cost as a replacement for candy bars. The store also refuses to sell cigarettes because of the damage they cause especially to the many children in the area. Tobacco is sold for ceremonial purposes only.

General Information:

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Regina Women's Construction Co-operative

*renovates homes, rebuilds lives - and challenges
institutions*

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: August 1997
Number of members: 12
Number of employees: 2
Activities: Renovations and accessible
housing modification
Revenues: Approx. \$120,000+ per year

Regina Women's Construction Co-operative is looking forward to a successful year. This will be a tremendous achievement for everybody concerned. In January of this year, three of the employee-members went to the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), for their fourth and final level of their carpentry apprenticeship. The candidates themselves were all social assistance recipients four years ago, lacking both employability skills and employment opportunities.

The Co-op is the third phase of a small initiative launched to help disadvantaged women earn a significant income – one that enables them to bring dignity, not mere subsistence, to their lives and those of their dependants. The choice of carpentry as the occupational target was due to the skills of the leaders on hand (Denise Needham and Valerie Overend), and to their shared belief that women should be afforded equal opportunity in the public education system. Hence, the co-op's efforts are directed by a twin agenda of personal transformation and institutional change.

In 1995, a coalition of provincial and federal government departments made a commitment to support a program that would bring more women into Saskatchewan's building trades. The standard provincial training program was inadequate for the task. As an alternative, Denise and Valerie proposed a 5-year strategy, enabling those who had completed the educational requirements to join a workers' co-operative, supplying the women with trade time for the balance of their apprenticeship and first-hand experience in the management of a viable business.

The two leaders of this initiative are fully certified carpenters and know intimately what it requires from people and offers to them, financially and otherwise. In addition, Denise had been using her firm, the Women's Renovation Company, partly in training capacity for several years. Valerie was on the Provincial Apprenticeship Board and was Executive Director of Saskatchewan Women in Trades and Technology (SaskWITT), a non-profit membership organization dedicated to promoting recruitment, training and employment of women in trades, technology, and blue-collar work.

The Co-op's objective was to serve as a business which would sustain the training. The Co-op's skill base and job repertoire would expand as its employee-members progressed with their apprenticeships. Each calendar year would channel a group of

women toward the Co-op where they would train as they worked to accumulate apprenticeable trade time credit.

The first intake of 16 participants in the training program (the Women's Work Training Program, or WWTP) was established in February 1996. Everyone who wrote the exam passed their Level 1 exam and 9 of them helped launch the Regina Women's Construction Co-op the following year. Three years and two more WWTP intakes later, this initiative has had contact with 65 to 70 workers, 13 of whom are currently co-op employees, and all but two are members.

Today, the Co-op commands a growing reputation in its chosen market niche, residential access renovations – that is modifying homes to accommodate people disabled by age, accidents, and health condition. Access renovation currently accounts for a third of the work. But what the Co-op accomplishes as a business seems quite modest (or maybe downright remarkable) when you take into consideration that these types of renovations are only part of the agenda. To create an environment in which at least a significant fraction of our worker-members can reinvent themselves and their lives – what they have done, what they can do – absorbs a huge chunk of their time and energy.

One of the Co-op's goals is to give its people the opportunity to earn wages on the basis of which they can enjoy a living standard equivalent to men in this occupation. Another delicate, but crucial aspect of Co-op policy is flexibility with regards to a person's availability for work. Transformation takes time, and time is what the Co-op makes available to people. Life has set these people up for failure. To a great extent, every day they show up is a "step to beating the odds."

To a great extent, the Co-op has succeeded, whether or not it survives, because of the changes in the women themselves. Two of the women now own their own homes, while several others have put an end to destructive spousal situations. How do you document achievements like this?

The proof of the value of the WWTP/Construction Co-op initiative may lie in some compilation of the life changes of the people involved. After earning a good wage for two years, growing in confidence and security, and seeing how that affects their relationship with their dependants, these women will likely never return to social assistance.

General Information:

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N1H 4E4
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Speed River Co-op

Brewing success one cup at a time

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1999
Number of members: 5
Number of employees: 20 FT/PT
Activities: Restaurant, Fair trade organic coffee wholesale/retail, Prepared foods.
Revenues: New business – projected \$500,000 in 2000

Something's brewing down at the Planet Bean Café in downtown Guelph. Make that one coffee with a conscience, double-double.

"It's one of the tastiest bowls of Java on the planet," percolates Guelph-based Bill Barrett, who is helping launch a worker co-operative coffee roasting and café business based on supporting co-operative ideals in coffee producing countries.

The 36-year-old co-op enthusiast is as high as a double-espresso on the concept of building a worker-run business around a top-quality product produced in a system that is sustainable for workers and the global environment. Confident Planet Bean can compete with big coffee shop chains on both quality and price, Barrett believes the new Speed River Worker Co-operative's trump card with consumers will be the 'grounds-to-ground' traceability factor behind the beans they're imbibing.

Whether it's organically grown, Rainforest-friendly coffee beans, or organic grains such as spelt and kamut, "know thy farmer" is the principle behind Speed River, which has three founding members and 20 workers, all brimming with the youthful idealism of the twenty-something set. Bulk buying with a similar workers co-op venture in Nova Scotia (Just Us!), Speed River purchases green coffee beans through the Fair Trade Licensing Organization (FLO). The FLO certifies and audits source farms to ensure the farmer is part of a democratic workplace and is receiving a fair return, and that there is a commitment to local community economic development.

"Our mission in terms of the trade is helping to nurture a democratic workplace creating environments where people are able to receive a reasonable return for their work and have some form of security," says Barrett, who has been involved in the venture for almost two years. While sounding poetic in his description of Planet Bean as "a small blossom on the wasteland of globalization," Barrett insists the venture is not "a Mickey Mouse business." It must be based on sound business principles in order to provide stable employment.

Taking over the business, including coffee roaster, restaurant, bakery, prepared foods sales, mail order and catering, from another worker co-op, will take an investment of about \$200,000. Barrett says Speed River is getting strong buy-in from the co-operative sector, adding that the local credit union has been "very supportive." Coffee is sold ready-brewed at the café in bean or ground form, or by mail order. The business plan includes a take-out bar.

Advice for structuring the worker co-op came from the Ontario Worker Co-operative Federation. Workers will be invited to join Speed River as members after a year; they will be able to purchase shares, and make an equity investment in the company.

Ethical issues aside, however, Barrett insists that Planet Bean can win the battle of the bean on taste alone. The big coffee chains roast their beans before shipping, therefore increasing the possibility of "stale" beans. Planet Bean roasts beans on-site for maximum freshness and aroma, like fresh-baked bread. Roasted to the desired darkness in "a machine resembling a giant popcorn popper," beans are higher-quality and better tasting at a competitive price averaging \$12.50 a pound.

"This is the micro-brewery of coffee," Barrett enthuses. "Canadians have been misled in terms of what coffee should be like. "We want to re-educate the Canadian coffee palate.

General Information:

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E2L 2G1
Region: Atlantic Canada
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Fax: N/A

Taco Pica Co-op

No One Can Dream For You

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1991
Number of members: 4
Number of employees: 7
Activities: Restaurant co-op
Revenues: N/A



Ice cubes snap and crack against the blender's metal blades as they turn the strawberries into a Deluxe Tropicana Strawberry Margarita. Fernando Bregel, the manager of Taco Pica Restaurant, will have to order an extra crate of berries this weekend due to the popularity of the margaritas. Managing the restaurant in the busy St. Germain Street area in Saint John, New Brunswick, is much like blending the berries and the ice.

Bregel stops to talk briefly to the women at the corner table as he serves up their drinks in the attractive cactus glasses. Together with Gloria, Flor, and Santos he owns this worker co-op restaurant.

"We are a blend of unique people who came together in 1991 with a dream to form this worker co-op. We have had to do a lot of what we could call cracking the ice, coming to Canada from Guatemala. First for some, the language barrier - members spoke only Spanish or Cachechl." "Then," he said, "we blended our skills and training." Members were kindergarten and schoolteachers, an architect, business people and office workers.

"We had to crack the market. The area where we set up in downtown Saint John had more than 10 restaurants and eateries when we began. We also had to learn about operating as a worker co-op in a province where there were not many models to follow." Now, 10 years later, the Co-op can boast recognition as a fine restaurant winning a "Best Place to Eat Award" in 1994, 1995, 1996 and a successful Co-op. There are four of the original seven members still in the Co-op. They also employ three part-time workers year-round.

"It was hard at first," says the president Santos Ruyan, "and very different from my job as a teacher in Guatemala. But here in Canada I couldn't find work except as a janitor. I wanted better. We all had dreams. We all wanted to work. Most of us were refugees and we couldn't go back home so we were determined to create a new home in Canada."

The Canadian Red Cross Refugee Services assisted with training and education both in the area of food management and co-op

development. "Their help was most valuable. They encouraged us to realize our dream and we will never forget Seth Asimakos and Leticia Adair who worked so closely with us in the beginning over a three year period. We found we had so many friends in this new country; people who helped us test the markets, location and narrow our focus into these specialty foods that we prepare."

Food at Taco Pica is spicy in flavour and served in an atmosphere reminiscent of a typical cafe in Central America. Cacti grow on the window ledges, colourful wall murals and weavings hang from the walls. Fernando's paintings cover the walls and compliment the brightly coloured tables and chairs. The members of this worker co-op have been successful in blending their recipes from home into succulent and tasty menu offerings which meet the approval of today's customer, many of whom want healthy, flavourful, and attractively presented meals and drinks.

A dish like Paella Espanola with mussels, scallops, haddock, chicken and vegetables with rice, or Pepian spicy beef stew, Guatemalan style, are popular dishes with Taco Pica's many regular customers.

The worker owners have faced many struggles in the development of the organization and the business but today 4,000 miles from the country they used to call home and approaching their 10th anniversary they know that Taco Pica's success is a result of a lot of hard work and the ability to blend cultures, skills and dreams in a viable business.

"It is ours," concluded Santos. "A dream that we wanted so much we have been able to survive the crushing and the blending and in so doing realize this dream...a place to work where we can *decide what is to be done. Now, we own the dream.*"

"No One Can Dream For You" written by Maureen MacLean and Brenda MacKinnon, Rising Tide Co-operative Ltd., as part of a research study on "Worker Co-ops and their Impact on the Atlantic Economy" supported by funding from The Co-operators.

General Information:

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B0E 3B0

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Village Grocery Workers Co-operative

We Have Our Jobs as Owners and Workers

Statistics:

Year of incorporation: 1989

Number of members: 15

Number of employees: 30

Activities: Retail grocery store

Revenues: Approx. \$ 4 million



The last of the shopping carts rolled into the entry way, Alfred Samson locks the front door and makes one last check to be sure that everything is secure before he heads home. Saturday night is one of the few nights he gets to eat supper with all his family.

Store managers everywhere recognize evening work and staggered mealtimes as a reality but in Alfred's case he has the added pressure of managing and owning the store. However, Alfred's situation is unique in Atlantic Canada because he is only one of the 15 worker-owners of Village Grocery Workers Co-op, in the community of St. Peter's on Cape Breton Island.

Back in 1989 Alfred and the others were employees of Foodland when they decided to form a union. The employees, who together had more than 50 years experience working in the retail food outlet, decided to try to buy the store and operate it themselves as a worker co-op. "The model of worker ownership was new to Nova Scotia and we didn't have a lot of resources or examples," says Alfred. However he noted that they all felt they had the experience and determination they needed to be a success. And today, more than 11 years later, they are a viable community enterprise, providing 15 full-time and 15 part-time and casual jobs. Sales are approximately \$4 million and they contribute more than half a million dollars to the local and provincial community through municipal and provincial taxes, purchases of goods and services, support of community activities and wages.

Of the 16 original members, 15 still work at the store. "We were unaware of the worker-owner idea when we began. We had a lot of help from the Community Development Co-operative of Nova Scotia and Peter Hough but for us it has proved to be a viable model of community economic development, entrepreneurship and self-employment in a group setting; it has created jobs and a training ground for democratic leadership and self-development. We have our jobs in the store and we have our roles as directors. Both are important and interconnected."

One final check and Alfred resets the alarm and heads home, secure in the knowledge that his job, his business, his future and those of other members is here in the community where he has lived for more than 30 years. This is co-operation at its most primary level. From the inside, it's 15 people creating a local enterprise based on need. Yet, from the outside, it is co-operation at its most ideological level, the creation of a community enterprise, based on equity, equality and self-help.

"We Have Our Jobs as Owners and Workers" written by Maureen MacLean and Brenda MacKinnon, Rising Tide Co-operative Ltd., as part of a research study on "Worker Co-ops and their Impact on the Atlantic Economy" supported by funding from The Co-operators.