

Marketing the Cooperative Advantage —

Why Cooperatives are Special

Cooperative businesses are special because they are owned by the consumers they serve and because they are guided by a set of seven principles that reflect the best interests of those consumers.

More than 100 million people are members of 47,000 U.S. cooperatives, enabling consumers to secure a wide array of goods and services such as health care, insurance, housing, food, heating fuel, hardware, credit unions, child care or utility service.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all people able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, one member-one vote, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions.

3. Members' Economic Participation

Members contribute equally to, and democratically control, the capital of the cooperative. This benefits members in proportion to the transactions with the cooperative rather than on the capital invested.

4. Autonomy and Independence

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If the Co-op enters into agreements with other organizations or raises capital from external sources, it is done so based on terms that ensure democratic control by the members and maintains the cooperative autonomy.

5. Education, Training and Information

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperative. Members also inform the general public, particularly young people and opinion leaders, about the nature and benefits of cooperatives.

6. Cooperation among Cooperatives

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.

7. Concern for Community

While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of communities through policies accepted by the members.