

Farmer Co-ops



MORE THAN 3,000 FARMER CO-OPS include a majority of the nation's 2 million farmers and ranchers. These cooperatives market products, bargain for higher crop prices, manufacture and sell farm equipment, and provide credit. Democratically owned and run farmer cooperatives also contribute significantly to rural communities. They account for as many as 300,000 jobs and a total payroll of over \$8 billion. They also foster interest in farming as a profession and contribute to many local charities. Here is a sampling of how farm co-ops contribute to their communities.

Caring for the Community

CHS, Inc., Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota. CHS and its employees are serious about supporting charities and improving their community. Last year, they contributed more than \$330,000 to United Way while also sponsoring families for the holidays and organizing an American Cancer Society fundraiser. In addition, CHS donates a truck to United Way during the holidays and its employees volunteer time to a United Way newsletter. To improve the community, CHS employees and family members paint homes for low-income seniors and disabled adults. CHS also participates in the annual Minnesota FoodShare drive. In 2003, they donated 13,000 pounds of food and \$11,500 in cash to the effort.

Land O'Lakes, Inc., Arden Hills, Minnesota. Land O'Lakes wants its employees to volunteer in the community. It provides *Community Tool Kits* each quarter that include everything needed for a successful community project. In addition, it has at least three ways to encourage its employees to volunteer:

Dollars For Doers makes cash donations—up to \$250 per employee annually—to nonprofit organizations based on volunteer hours. Employees volunteer in nursing homes, hospices and hospitals or as museum or zoo docents, crisis line advocates, fire fighters, or nonprofit board members.

Community Splash encourages Land O'Lakes employees to pick a community activity to coordinate at their plant or office location. In 2004, it will recognize one group volunteer project each quarter with a \$1,000 grant. To be eligible for the “Big Splash!” the project must involve at least four employees or retirees, who complete a total of at least 40 hours of service.

Expanding Community and *Horizon Outreach for Seniors* encourages retirees to stay active and get involved in their communities.

Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, LaVergne, Tennessee. Tennessee Farmers Cooperative came up with novel promotion to benefit two of its favorite charities. It uses a limited-edition commemorative pocketknife to raise funds for 4-H and Future Farmers of America. Over the last two years, the promotion has triggered more than \$25,000 in donations from 68 locally owned member co-ops.

Caring for the Environment

CF Industries, Long Grove, Illinois. CF Industries has joined forces with The Conservation Fund to sponsor the National Watershed Award. The award honors three communities and one corporation annually for local partnerships that improve water quality by balancing a watershed's environmental and economic needs.

CHS, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota. CHS also encourages employees to participate in activities benefiting the environment. Its corporate sponsored programs includes:

Carpooling—A list of employee names and zip codes is available to those wanting to connect with others for carpools. Also, carpool spaces in the employee parking lot are close to the building entrance.

Adopt-A-Highway Volunteers help cleanup a two-mile stretch of a local street three times per year. Equipment needs are handled jointly by CHS and the city Public Works Department. Twenty-nine CHS volunteers, including senior management, helped in cleanups in 2003.

Greeting card recycling—CHS employees are encouraged to recycle holiday greeting cards by sending them to St. Jude's Ranch for Children, where the children make them into new cards, ornaments and gifts. St. Jude's is a center for abused and abandoned children with three campuses in Nevada and Texas. In 2003, CHS sent 64 pounds of cards to the charity.

Committed to Children

CoBank, Denver, Colorado. A key source of credit for farm co-ops for 70 years, CoBank also supports higher education through scholarships, internships and endowments. Scholarships are provided to five universities with a strong commitment to agribusiness, cooperative education and research. Endowments support research at six other universities.

Growmark Inc., Bloomington, Indiana. Growmark wants to get children involved in cooperative businesses early. Its employees work with elementary school kids to form co-ops that sell bird seed. The students come up with the name, bag the seed, set prices, and sell door to door. The students also get a patronage refund from the money they raise.

CF Industries, Long Grove, Illinois. CF Industries also wants school kids to learn more about agriculture and the environment. And it's willing to back up that desire with money. Since 1998, it has donated more than \$250,000 to teachers who find new ways to incorporate these topics into class projects. The grants, which average around \$250 each, go to educators in communities in which CF Industries works. In 2003, more than 11,000 students were involved in more than 150 grant-funded projects. Among the uses for the grants are field trips, water testing programs, and precision farming projects. A separate grant program supports firefighters, emergency responders, and other community projects. Over the last eight years, CF has donated more than a half million dollars to fire departments, ambulance services, sheriff's departments, and American Red Cross chapters.