

Because rattling off numbers and showing graphs can make even the most interested co-operator glaze over, we've created a happy little story to begin explaining the social and economic impact of the co-op sector.

We call it "A day in the life of Jeff"

This is based on data taken from the first ever census of Ontario co-operatives, credit unions and caisses populaires,, supplemented with information from other sources.

It's Wednesday morning. Jeff wakes up and makes some delicious coffee (fair trade and organic, of course).

He prepares breakfast, packs lunches, checks his email, and leaves his house to take his adorable 4 year-old daughter to nursery school.

He has some errands to run so he picks up a car, gets some gas, and heads to do some banking.

Jeff picks up some groceries, buys a present, then stops by his office. **It's not even NOON and Jeff's life has been affected by over 12 organizations within the co-operative sector.** Our Jeff is one of over a million Ontarians who are members of the province's 1300 co-ops, credit unions, and caisse populaires.

The co-op sector has a widespread social and economic impact on the daily lives of Ontarians. So in a rather light-hearted way, let's look a bit closer at Jeff's life, which may help you get a better idea of the scope and impact of the co-operative sector in Ontario.

Jeff lives in a housing co-op. Jeff's housing co-op is fairly progressive, actively works to foster a strong sense of community amongst its residents, monitors the co-op principals, and is currently researching environmental retrofit options. Like most housing co-ops, his co-op is staffed by less than 5 employees, and relies on volunteers to meet many of the needs of its membership. Jeff is a member of the housing co-op's Board of Directors, an honour he shares with 10,000 other volunteers who govern Ontario co-ops.

Jeff's email and phone service comes from a telecommunications co-op, and he smiles when he reads a joke sent by one of his neighbours. The smile continues when he remembers that the rural resident who sent the message has high-speed internet service, while others on the same country road have only dial up because they remained with the phone company.

Jeff sees his daughter off to school. His daughter goes to one of over 200 co-op child care centres in the province. Here, parents are able to participate in their child's pre-school education in a nurturing environment that fosters development. Twice a month, Jeff volunteers at the nursery school, which is a requirement of membership for this co-op.

Jeff doesn't require a car every day. He has some errands to run today, so he has booked a car from his car share co-op (though he could have easily have called the co-op cab company).

He purchases a large double-double from the coffee shop, operated as a worker co-op. He fills his car with ethanol blended gasoline from his local co-op store, and as he goes inside to pay, he notices the wide range of goods available for sale to members – it's not just about farming equipment, animal feed, and heating oil anymore, and hasn't been for a long time.

With his grandmother's birthday approaching, Jeff ducks into his local artist's co-op, one of 10 such co-ops in the province, to get her a gift. He buys a nice piece of jewellery and pays for it with his MemberCard, linked to his credit union chequing account.

At the farmer's market, Jeff buys organic coffee, produce, milk, and cheese all produced by local co-ops, supporting local farmers and strengthening the local economy. He packs them all in cloth bags made by a local women's sewing co-op.

Jeff checks his watch, it's almost noon and he doesn't want to be late for his afternoon shift at work. Where does he work? At a co-op, of course! Jeff is a greenskeeper for a co-op golf course, and is one of 16,500 people in Ontario who are employed by, and receive benefits from, the co-op sector.

Co-ops 101:

- One definition: The co-operative model uses its unique form of business enterprise to accomplish social and policy ends, making them optimal for the delivery of service in the social economy.
- The key organizational distinction between a co-operative and other corporate structures is **democratic participation through 'one-member, one-vote.'** No single member can take control of a co-operative. Decisions are made by the majority, on the theory that people ultimately know what is best for them.
- Co-ops are responsible to their own members. The members determine how the co-op will be run, elect the Board of Directors and allocate the profits of the co-operative among its member-owners

www.ontario.coop

www.coopsontario.com

Background on the census:

Why On Co-op is in the survey business

- The Social Economy Centre of the University of Toronto/OISE partnered with On Co-op because we are the apex organization for many of Ontario's co-ops. Imagine Canada was also a partner and provided invaluable resources in developing the census document(s) and evaluating the census data.
- We know co-ops; we work with them and for them every day. On Co-op helps in their development, promotion and ongoing enhancement.
- As a provincial association of co-operatives, On Co-op needs to maintain accurate records and facilitate knowledge and understanding of co-ops... and it was obvious to us that we were the best suited to undertake the work
- Imagine Canada and the Social Economy Centre have made excellent partners, and we thank them.

Why a census on co-operatives?

- Our role was to take the 2002 national survey of non-profit and voluntary organizations (NSNVO) survey and customize it to reflect co-op issues and organizational structure while keeping as much compatibility with the original survey as possible for statistical analysis
- Co-ops are a strong component in the social economy. Co-ops can be found in almost every sector or industry – literally from cradle to grave – child care co-ops to funeral co-ops
- Very little has been done in the past to comprehensively research their social and economic impact in Ontario. This is not currently within the mandate of the Ontario government.

Who to survey?

- On Co-op's criteria was clear: the organization must be a co-operative, incorporated under Ontario's Co-operative Corporations Act, or a federal co-op which carries on business in Ontario.
- Co-op like organizations were not included because while they may have operated like a co-op, they were not incorporated as one, so their structure or operations were technically subject to change.

What were we trying to capture in this census or survey?

- Primarily: The **Strength** of the sector, **social & economic** impact, asset size, number and types of co-ops; challenges and capacity information.
- Secondly: Directory and contact information, which did NOT form part of the confidential census data. (Visit www.coopsontario.com to see the listing of all co-operatives in Ontario.)

Revisions required to NSNVO survey to reflect the Ontario co-op sector

- **Changes** were required to the survey questions themselves, placement of questions and general process
- **Compatibility** maintained wherever possible for statistical analysis. It took **12 versions** to get 77 core survey questions. The best case scenario, if participants skipped all possible, were 52 questions. The poll (the shortest form of the census) had 28 questions with no skip-overs at all.
- **Method of contact:** NSNVO was completed using phone only using Stats Canada to gather data; the co-op census utilized phone, mail, fax, personal contact, and online versions (plus one French version)
- Ultimately, there were compatibility issues with NSNVO, and Imagine Canada has worked very hard to bring us information on co-ops, and provide a complementary view of the co-op world, in relation to the non-profit sector where possible.

Timeline:

We began creating versions in earnest June of 2006, and finally sent the data to Imagine Canada for analysis in **July 2007**. Detailed analysis and emerging themes are still ongoing, - there is a lot of data to review!!

About the process...

Approximately **1900** initial contacts were made, to organizations we were initially aware of. Of those 1900 identified “co-ops”, it turns out only **1300** were active, functioning incorporated co-ops/credit unions

....and of those 1300 active contacts, **about 54%** completed some version of the census

Of the 1300 surveys: the most popular method of completion was **ONLINE**- approx 70% . The next most popular method was **PAPER LONG-FORMAT** - approx 15% then **TELEPHONE** - approx 10%

To learn more about the diversity of Ontario's co-operative sector, and the social and economic impact of co-ops and credit unions, visit www.ontario.coop or www.coopsontario.com or contact Denyse Guy, Executive Director, Ontario Co-operative Association at 1.888.745.5521 ext 27 or dguy@ontario.coop.

The Ontario Co-operative Association (On Co-op) is a resource and common voice for Ontario credit unions and co-operatives in the areas of co-operative development, government relations, membership and communications and lifelong co-operative learning. On Co-op develops, unites and promotes co-operatives throughout the province of Ontario.