Sustainability & Farmer Co-ops

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When you hear “sustainability” do you picture this? Or this?
Co-ops have a vital role to play in defining sustainability for their members—and if co-ops don’t do it, others will.
The three pillars of sustainability

• Environmental stewardship

• Long-term economic viability

• Good neighbors/social responsibility
Question to ponder: Are farmer co-ops inherently sustainable?
Is the family farm/agriculture inherently sustainable?
Thinking about environmental stewardship

• What are you as a producer already doing to reduce: soil erosion, input usage, production efficiency?
  – Precision agriculture/data driven agriculture
  – GMOs
  – Nutrient management

• What are your co-ops doing to assist producer-members in these areas?
  – 4R principles
  – Agronomy services
  – Thought leadership
Need to shift thinking on sustainability in this area from this...
What concerns you most about agriculture today?
To this...
What excites you most about agriculture today?

- New technology
- Market opportunities
- The job
- The lifestyle
- Livestock industry
- Being my own boss
- Being profitable
- New products
- Diversifying
- Providing food for consumers
- Raising a family
- High commodity prices
- Unpredictability of the market
- Expanding the operation
- Nothing
Thinking about long-term economic viability

• Is your co-op prepared to meet the needs of a changing member demographic?

• Is there a marketplace advantage in belonging to a farmer co-op?
Looking ahead 5 years, will your operation have outgrown the need to work with a co-op?

**Large-Scale Producers**

*Respondents who currently work with a local Co-op

- Don't know / refused: 2.7%
- Yes: 12.7%
- No: 84.6%
Is your long-term outlook for the success of the cooperative system generally positive or negative?

**Large-Scale Producers**

- **All Respondents**
  - Positive: 76.8%
  - Neutral: 7.5%
  - Negative: 13.8%
  - Don’t know: 1.9%

- **Works with a Co-op**
  - Positive: 90%
  - Neutral: 47%
  - Negative: 29%
  - Don’t know: 2%
How has the size of your farm or ranch changed over the past five years?

Young Producers

All Respondents

- Expanded: 44.6%
- Contracted: 7.2%
- Stayed the same: 47.6%
- Don't know / refused: 0.6%

Works with a Co-op

- Expanded: 45%
- Contract: 6%
- Stayed the same: 49%

- Expanded: 43%
- Contract: 11%
- Stayed the same: 46%
Is your long-term outlook for the success of the cooperative system generally positive or negative?

**Young Producers**

- **All Respondents**
  - Positive: 72.3%
  - Neutral: 17.6%
  - Negative: 7.5%
  - Don’t know: 2.6%

- **Works with a Co-op**
  - Yes: 85%
    - Positive: 5%
    - Neutral: 10%
    - Negative: 47%
  - No: 34%
    - Positive: 12%
    - Neutral: 10%
    - Negative: 5%
Would you find value in serving in a cooperative leadership role in the future?

**Young Producers**
*Respondents who currently work with a local Co-op*
Thinking about social responsibility
Farm co-ops and our members have a great story to tell about sustainability—and it’s past time that we start telling it!
But concrete plans are also being demanded by:

- Buyers’ mandates
- Consumer interest
- Environmental advocacy groups
- Social media attention
- Regulatory action
- Changing market trends and norms
Finding a farmer co-op approach to sustainability

- September 2014—Co-op CEOs push to have NCFC look at a unified approach to sustainability for members
- November 2014—Survey of membership on current practices and areas of need
- December 2014-January 2015—Work with co-op sustainability staff to identify objectives and next steps
- February 2015—Report to NCFC Council for approval & focus on issue at Annual Meeting
Will the results of this week’s elections have any impact on sustainability?
Thank you.