

CCMA 2019 in Durham, North Carolina

A CONVERSATION WITH MEGAN WEBSTER

CCMA 2019 will take place from June 6-8 in Durham, North Carolina. Organizer Megan Webster, outreach specialist at University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, answers a few questions about the event.

This will be the third year that you and others from UW Center for Cooperatives have been planners of CCMA. How do you see UWCC's current role with the conference?

MW: As a University, we are neutral and we don't have an agenda that we are trying to push. At the heart of it, CCMA is a conference by and for co-ops. Our role is that of convener. The conference has rich traditions that embody the spirit of "by and for co-ops."

The first ingredient is the host co-ops—they have a wonderful opportunity to show off their city, their farmer and vendor partners, and what makes their co-op shine.

Next we have a co-op sector that truly takes Principle 6 (Cooperation among Cooperatives) seriously—and you can see that in the responses that we get from the Call for Proposals. This past year we had over 60 proposals, and they were all really good. There is a wealth of knowledge in this community and a passion to share that knowledge.

Lastly, we have our planning committee. They are engaged, thoughtful, and critical. Sometimes I have dumb ideas and they say, but in a nicer way, "that's really dumb, how about this instead." It is great to plan a conference with over 350 years of collective co-op experience in your back pocket.

Share a glimpse of your vision for CCMA

We are trying to take some of the changes that the National Cooperative Business Association started and turn them up a bit. One was trying to democratize the process of selecting content. Anyone can submit a proposal for a breakout session. We have a subcommittee of ten reviewers, which means that proposals are reviewed by at least four people coming from different backgrounds and places within the food co-op community. It is a tough process, because there are so many great proposals. We want the process to be as transparent as possible. If proposals aren't selected, we give constructive feedback as to why and how that proposal could be improved.

In the end, we want to put together a valuable conference. People are pulled in so many directions these days in terms of time, money, and attention span. Myself included! I just try to harness all those ingredients mentioned above into an experience that attendees can take back to their co-ops.

Have you experienced any big surprises since working on CCMA?

Some surprises, but mostly good ones. My background is originally in international credit union development. For the past five years I have worked on farmer cooperative education and general co-op education at the UW Center for Cooperatives. I think that one thing that has come out of working with the food

co-op community is a strengthened belief in the cooperative model. Whether you come from a farmer co-op, an electric co-op, a credit union, or a food co-op, the strengths and weakness of the cooperative model are all there, because we are human. We see it in every co-op sector—decision making can be slow, governance can be a challenge, but there is real power in coming together in ownership, in risk, and in democracy. And that makes me hopeful.

The only other thing I would mention, is that I was born and bred in Wisconsin, land of cheese, brats, and beer. I have learned a lot about the various diets from this group and I am still learning!

What can people expect in Durham?

We are excited about Durham! It is such a cool town—it has a quirky feel, great food, and a vibrant music scene, yet it is still a little rough around the edges. I had a whirlwind trip down to look at conference venues last July. I tried fried green tomatoes and pimento cheese for the first time. I've gotten some great recommendations on barbeque and biscuits.

But enough about food! I am looking forward to some great tours and content from our hosts, two inspirational co-ops, Weaver Street Market and Durham Co-op Market. Also, North Carolina is a hotbed of cooperative development—so we are hoping to bring in some local innovations that can be shared with the wider co-op community. •

Find more information about CCMA 2019, including names of members of the planning committee, at ccma.coop

CCMA stands for the Consumer Cooperative Management Association.



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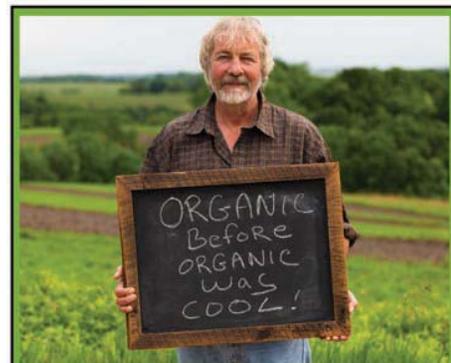


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