

**THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL**  
**TRUST OF AUSTRALIA**

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2003 Churchill Fellow

To study how certain rural communities are able to develop economic opportunities and prospects, the value and structure of cooperatives and the culture of entrepreneurship for sustainable development.

*“Everyone belongs to the community of life”*

*- quote from “Storyeum”, a uniquely performed narrative of the development of British Columbia and its changing landscape of community.*

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Signed

Dated

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project was to study how it is that certain rural communities are able to successfully develop economic opportunities through the utilisation of cooperatives and a culture of nurturing entrepreneurs. In order to come to some understanding as to how rural communities achieve such sustainability, I travelled to the USA, Canada and Ireland and met with a vast array of organisations, examining their structure, ideas, achievements, experiences, programs, goals and networks. All the while I was identifying how these lessons learned could fit the Australian context of creating sustainable rural communities.

It is well documented that Australian rural communities have undergone rapid and universal change. This is a world wide phenomena as evidenced by Edgar Parnell “the typical underdeveloped rural area in industrialised nations will commonly have the following characteristics: low population density, difficulty in sustaining high standards of local services, shortage of affordable housing, relatively restrictive planning regimes and the migration of the most creative elements of the workforce”<sup>1</sup> It has become increasingly challenging to generate economic development in rural communities, to create meaningful employment, business growth and new business ventures for the long term viability of many rural communities. Even maintaining a simple convenience store has become difficult for some!

However, these communities display an apparent spirit of cooperation, incredible resourcefulness and a “never say die” attitude. Rural communities are entrenched as the “grassroots” component of our Australian culture and the essence of our Australian spirit. Technology is playing a major part in breaking down the tyranny of distance and offering opportunities for entrepreneurs to work in rural areas. Young people are encouraged to pursue a high level of education and show a willingness to return to their rural base.

Some Australian communities have managed to sustain local businesses, rally people to create local solutions for local problems by forming cooperatives to meet their business needs thereby growing their community and developing an entrepreneurial spirit. Whilst I do not profess to be an expert on the Australian Cooperative scene and at the risk of generalising, it was puzzling that still many rural people seem unaware of the cooperative movement, the role it could play in community revitalisation and in encouraging local entrepreneurs. Similarly, some hold perceptions of “New Age” extremism. Coupled with this is limited knowledge and support for cooperatives by traditional means as a viable business alternative for small rural communities.

It seemed an appropriate time to investigate the overseas scene with respect to organisations and programs that encourage and support entrepreneurs, countries that have a strong history of cooperatives within their communities and value this in a rural context. An exciting prospect was the opportunity to bring this knowledge back to Australia and just maybe offer a glimmer of hope to rural communities, many of whom have indeed “lost their sparkle”!

## 2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From the initial beginnings of my project, when it was simply an idea to the final day of my travels there are many people that I owe a great debt of gratitude. To Vicki Evans from the Dept. for Victorian Communities, thank you for your initial words of encouragement and absolute faith in my ability to undertake this daunting task. To the wonderful Max Fehring, a Churchill fellow, for your persistent encouragement, support and interest and Mike Stephens for your professional “polishing” as I took those first few tentative steps.

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<sup>1</sup> Paranel, Edgar. (2001) ‘Supporting Rural Co-operation – the role of the Plunkett Foundation’, in *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, 34.1, 8-24

I acknowledge the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for this great opportunity and the financial support to undertake six weeks of international research and for the staff of the Trust for your patience and professionalism.

In particular I would like to thank my husband Paul, and our children - Sam, Matt, Tim and Jess, who are my absolute inspiration and who lead me to believe anything is possible.

Listed in Appendix 8.4 are the names of those who gave so freely of their time to meet with me, organise contacts and share so willingly their knowledge, experiences and networks. I returned with an extensive collection of information and an invaluable resource for this report. I would like to express my sincere thanks to these people and the organisations they represent for enabling me to undertake such an incredible experience and worthwhile Fellowship tour and for reinforcing my enthusiasm and endeavours in creating sustainable rural communities. Your generosity was truly amazing!

I would encourage any community member with a passion or particular interest to consider a Churchill Fellowship. I can assure you it will be one of the most satisfying experiences of your life and a great opportunity to make a difference.

### 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*“To study how certain rural communities are able to develop economic opportunities and prospects, the value and structure of cooperatives and the culture of entrepreneurship for sustainable development.”*

During my Fellowship tour to USA, Canada and Ireland I met with a range of organisations involved in supporting the cooperative scene and entrepreneurship through their activities and programs. They worked passionately to ensure a culture of successful enterprises especially in rural communities who were undergoing similar challenges to Australia.

In Nebraska USA my visit primarily focussed on the organisations and programs that supported the development of entrepreneurship. The Centre for Applied Rural Innovation (CARI) at the University of Nebraska Lincoln is an inspirational world leader in sustainable community development. CARI partners others to undertake research, develop and implement programs to guide and support civic, social and economic entrepreneurs, believing entrepreneurship can be learned and nurtured. CARI staff exhibit a strong passion for rural Nebraska. Their internal networks are effective as they support entrepreneurial concepts and endeavours. Programs such as EDGE are tailored to fit various sectors of the community - youth, farmers, small business people with different learning needs.

The Nebraska HomeTown Competitiveness pilot program focuses on Leadership, Youth, Entrepreneurship and Philanthropy, offering capacity building opportunities, building local wealth and energising participants to grow the community. Likewise “e-towns” in Shannon Ireland utilises technology and partnerships to encourage the uptake of micro-businesses that operate from home.

Discussion with many Cooperative organisations, researchers and enthusiasts left me in no doubt as to the value of cooperatives in sustaining our rural and remote communities who have undergone such dramatic change. It seems that cooperatives are a natural “fit” for Australian rural communities but often underutilised. They have proven over time to be multi-faceted, flexible, people not profit driven and exist in both a social and economic context.

There were some inspirational examples of co-operatives, in particular, a worker cooperative, *Community Care Connections* in Mission Vancouver and *Inisheer Community Cooperative* off the remote west coast of Ireland. They are successful due to passionate, flexible, inclusive and creative leaders, support from various organisations and their flexibility in providing for a particular need/s.

The most powerful mechanism in nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit and in utilising and understanding the cooperative model is the formation of effective and active partnerships between Government, learning and research Institutes, business, community and funding bodies.

Government has a potential leadership role in creating suitable public policy, providing cooperative specialists in the bureaucracy, supporting and promoting the use of cooperatives through adequate resourcing to impact on the sustainability of rural Australian communities and the preservation of our unique Australian rural culture. We need effective, well-resourced Cooperative organisations to work with new and established cooperatives.

Lessons learned from conducting my Fellowship will be shared with politicians, bureaucrats, rural communities, and learning institutions, co-operative researchers and organisations. By disseminating this research information through the media, presentations, distribution of this report and networking I would encourage others to learn about the co-operative model, become familiar with its potential, improve it, and utilise it to impact on rural community sustainability. We need the word “entrepreneur” to feature in our everyday language and strategies to assist innovators in reinvigorating our rural communities.

## 4. PROGRAMME

### 4.1 Itinerary

#### 2004

- 10 July Departed Melbourne
- 10 July Nebraska USA
- 26 July Vancouver and province of British Columbia Canada
- 2 August Province of Saskatchewan Canada
- 9 August Quebec City and province of Quebec & New Brunswick
- 17 August Ireland including Aran Island of Inisheer
- 29 August Return to Melbourne via Hong Kong

### 4.2 Organisations/community visits or contacts

#### United States of America

- University of Nebraska Centre for Applied Rural Innovation, Lincoln NE
- Nebraska Cooperative Development Centre
- Centreville Farmers Market
- Geneva – Planning session with REAP, CARI and Filmore County Development Corp.
- Drought Mitigation Centre, University of Nebraska Lincoln
- Nebraska Development Network South West Region
- Dancing Leaf Cultural Learning Centre, Wellfleet
- Golight Inc.
- Hydroponic Tomato Operation
- Veils Unlimited
- Haymarket Farmers Market
- Heartland Cattle Co.
- Ethanol Plant
- Hometown Competitiveness Program
- Beaver City – stores and organisations including the Remarkable store
- Grow Nebraska, Holbrook
- Cambridge - Bed and Breakfast; Old Oddfellows building; Cottage Curios Cooperative; Artist studio and gallery
- Arapahoe town and historical buildings
- Perks Prairie Paradise – collection of memorabilia, reconstruction of old buildings
- USDA Irrigation projects – Lake Swanson on Republican River, Salt Cedar project

#### Canada

##### British Columbia

- Centre for Sustainable Community Development; Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC
- British Columbia Cooperative Association, Vancouver
- Vancouver Library
- Community Care Connections - Worker Cooperative
- British Columbia Institute for Cooperative Studies University of Victoria, Victoria BC
- Western Economic Diversification, Vancouver BC
- Boundary Regional Resource Cooperative

##### Saskatchewan

- Saskatchewan Cooperative Association, Saskatoon
- Weyburn Credit Union Ltd, Weyburn
- Western Economic Diversification, Saskatoon
- Saskatoon Community Clinic

- Centre for Study of Cooperatives, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon
- Dept of Industry and Resources Business and Cooperative Services, Regina
- Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan, Regina

### **Quebec**

- Desjardins Levis
- Promo Plastik Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, Quebec
- Conseil de la cooperation du Quebec, Levis Quebec
- Coop La Piiix - IGA Grocery Store at Saint- Jean- Port-Jolie Quebec
- Regional Cooperative Development Centre, Moncton New Brunswick

### **Ireland**

- Ireland Cooperative Development Society Dublin
- Sustainable Projects Ireland Ltd Dublin
- Cultivate Centre Temple Bar Dublin – Sustainable Ireland Cooperative
- Shannon Development Shannon Co. Clare
- Abeyton Enterprise Centre
- Cappamore – Project involving restoration of old creamery cooperative
- Cappamore Credit Union
- Inisheer Community Cooperative – Aran Islands
- Centre for Cooperative Studies, Dept. of Food Business and Development, University College Cork.

## **5. MAIN BODY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Local entrepreneurship plays a key role in the health and well being and economic growth of our rural communities who are struggling to maintain their economic viability with limited diversification opportunities. It has been deduced that by nature, 10-20% of people are innovators and present with desire, knowledge and confidence. 30-40 % follow the innovators and the rest will never do anything. It is essential that local entrepreneurs committed to their community be given every opportunity to develop their ideas and dreams into business ventures where feasible.

On undertaking discussion and research within USA, Canada and Ireland, it became increasingly obvious that Cooperatives as a business structure are an important tool in the “Community Building Toolbox” and potentially significant contributors to the economic development and sustainability of rural communities and an important mechanism for support of local entrepreneurs.

History unveils the utilisation over many years of Co-operatives and Credit Unions to affect the lives of rural community dwellers. Co-operatives have been used successfully in all manner of business and industry and hold inherent characteristics suitable for their use in rural and remote communities.

However, for long term success, cooperatives require practical support mechanisms, relevant programs and active organisations. Valuing and understanding rural communities underpins their success. In particular, youth need to be encouraged and supported to develop long term interest and success in cooperative development.

#### **5.1.1 Organisations and Programs in Nebraska USA**

Nebraska USA provided a valuable insight into just how rural communities can develop economic opportunities. Strong networks and the most amazing number of partnerships encourage an entrepreneurial spirit with education and planning a key to successful initiatives and community economic development. There was a sense of pride in Nebraskan rurality and an acknowledgement of the need to be self reliant. Various organisations, public and private partnerships are creating and implementing an incredible array of successful programs.

#### **5.1.2 Centre for Applied Rural Innovation (CARI)**

The Partnership for Rural Nebraska with members, the State of Nebraska, University of Nebraska, United States Dept. of Agriculture and Nebraska Development Network was formed to address rural opportunities and challenges. Within the University of Nebraska Lincoln is the Centre for Applied Rural Innovation (CARI), a world leader in innovative rural community development. CARI staff have undertaken research, offered programs, extension and support workers to encourage civic, social and economic entrepreneurs and sustainable rural community development in the USA. They value “sharing stories” to gain peoples interest and participation in their programs and support extending the universities resources to the people of Nebraska in many community driven programs.

CARI encourages alliances with communities, government and business, offering resources, outreach education, funding, experience and knowledge. Many programs are long term, evolve and adapt over time and are sustainable, with workers on the ground to implement them, Complementary to this is their ability to mobilise finances, form valuable partnerships, recognise and celebrate excellence which leads to the longevity of their programs. They believe that Entrepreneurship can be learned and nurtured and are passionate about maintaining their rural communities despite the difficulties they experience and issues faced.

Those involved at CARI generally originate from a strong rural community background and show an obvious affinity for rural communities. An intern program offers graduates the opportunity to work with staff, develop skills and knowledge during their long summer break and support the implementation of CARI programs. In turn young people’s interest in rural community development is encouraged.

It was noted how the internal networks and various Centres of the University work effectively together offering support and resources for entrepreneurial concepts, ideas and endeavours e.g. food scientist, rural sociologist and business set-up specialist complement the work of a Researcher who is investigating the market in diverse

activities. The researcher ascertains what activity offers some degree of profitability and why, and produces a model for production eg producers in one region each make different types of cheese, hire a cheese maker and utilise a community processing plant.

### **5.1.3 The Nebraska Co-operative Development Centre**

The Nebraska Cooperative Development Centre (NCDC) operates as a partnership between the Nebraska State Dept. of Agriculture and United States Dept. of Agriculture (USDA), Nebraska Cooperative Council and the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension. A team of 28 “First Responders” from multiple agencies are skilled in many areas including Business Planning and Feasibility Studies for co-operative development. They provide a vital link to local, state and federal partners and available resources. The core business of NCDC staff is the back-up group to the first responder’s team. They may ascertain an idea or business venture’s viability and offer advice accordingly.

### **5.1.4 2004 Rural Institute for Community Development**

Nebraskans were certainly not fearful or slighted by the word “Entrepreneur” as a group of enthusiastic organisers and sponsoring partners led the development of the 2004 Nebraska Rural Institute to be held in McCook Nebraska in September. The Institute convenes a series of “action oriented mobile workshops combined with intensive learning sessions” over three days to learn about rural issues, opportunities, challenges and solutions. Four Drive-thru or mobile workshops are to be held based on the following themes:-

- Entrepreneurial
- Value Added Agriculture
- Historic Buildings & how they can be converted into a business prospect
- Natural Resources – water management projects and systems

These workshops offer a mix of economic, cultural and environmental information and classic examples of rural community initiatives through the efforts of local entrepreneurs implementing their ideas with the vast array of support mechanisms to encourage them.

It was easily identifiable that not only did a strong support network exist but this was a powerful collaboration of many organisations, resources and programs. Nebraska Development Network/Southwest Region (grassroots) was working in conjunction with the Partnership for Rural Nebraska (Government) to organise the 2004 Institute. This collaborative effort involved community volunteers, along with staff from government departments, local Congressman’s Rural Initiative team members, CARI, student intern programs and County Councils in offering a most remarkable learning opportunity for the rural sector.

### **5.1.5 Enhancing Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs (EDGE)**

This initiative has been operating for 11 years as part of CARI. EDGE is a community based entrepreneurial training program building business and management skills for new, established, growing and refocussing businesses and not-for-profits and in turn, building community capacity. EDGE is based on local community ownership whereby a lead community organisation or local coalition hires an organiser and instructor (preferably a local eg banker trained by CARI) and encourages people to participate. The EDGE program suggests the success of entrepreneurship is greatly enhanced when approached as a self-development strategy with community inputs and support.<sup>5</sup>

The EDGE program teaches business to set realistic goals, predict cash flow, budget, identify their market, with the final result – a complete comprehensive business plan tailored to the individual enterprise highlighting the challenges facing the business and the strengths upon which to capitalise. Completion of the EDGE course enhances their chance of gaining a business loan.

A specific course has been developed regarding value added entrepreneurs and EDGE is currently developing a Youth Entrepreneurship pilot program operating within the school curriculum.

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5. Allen Dr. J.C., Schlake, M., Korsching, Dr. P.F., 200320 Building an Entrepreneurial Community Coalition Centre for Applied Rural Innovation Nebraska EDGE Program

The success of the EDGE program relies on established and functioning partnerships between CARI, government through public policy and “on the ground” staff, community, business and funding providers eg Nebraska Community foundation. The community requests to be a partner in EDGE and matches the EDGE program dollar for dollar.

### **5.1.6 Home Town Competitiveness Program 2004 <sup>6</sup>**

Nebraska Community Foundation, Heartlands Centre for Leadership Development, and the Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship pooled vision and ideas for a pilot project, the *Home Town Competitiveness Program 2004* to focus on strategies essential for community and economic development. Four components are recognised and a taskforce and training is set up for each component:-

- Leadership -Mobilise local leaders in one all day session monthly for 9 months. Community Asset Questionnaire – survey community to ascertain strong and weak points then offer training for capacity building
- Youth -Attract young people to rural communities – the group I met had decided to “throw out” the chapter in their guide booklet and let the current programs run eg. Future Farmers of America or Youth Entrepreneurship Program as students are already busy and overloaded. They have “rewritten the book” to cater for their own community
- Entrepreneurship - energise local entrepreneurs with skills to grow their businesses or ideas
- Philanthropy - Capture wealth transfer eg start a community foundation to retain money that would leave from the area, gain donations, begin an endowment &/or perpetual fund where you use interest to help businesses do community development. They advocate support for their community through local wealth, a mail-out to all individuals in the county, projects that people can donate funding to, estate planning training for attorneys, funeral home directors to advocate investing in the local community foundation

Communities pay \$10,000 to participate in this program which invests in local human resources and builds and retains local wealth. The program began in Jan 2004 in the townships of Imperial and Grant with 3 months planning prior to that.

### **5.1.7 Youth Entrepreneurship Partnership (YEP) <sup>7</sup>**

The Southwest Nebraska Youth Entrepreneur Partnership (YEP) is another example of a collaborative effort in delivering training to potential young entrepreneurs (Students in Yrs 8-12) considered the future of rural communities. Four main aspects of entrepreneurship are offered in this program – Awareness and Education, Mentoring and Apprenticeship, Training and Business Development. YEP aims to encourage youth and adults to work together to stimulate the local economy by offering young people the skills and knowledge necessary to create employment and business opportunities and become more active in their communities.

## **5.2 Organisations and Programs in Canada**

The provinces of British Colombia (BC) Saskatchewan, Quebec and New Brunswick showed outstanding examples of a strong cooperative culture built over many years, resulting in a formidable number of cooperatives embracing many diverse industries including the financial sector.

Differing opinions and perceptions in the provinces were extended regarding the political context and degree of government support proffered to the cooperative sector. At present the BC experience indicates no tax benefits for cooperatives, less federal government sponsorship and limited provincial or municipal support. However, legislation through the Cooperatives Act does signify sectoral support. In Quebec it is believed the government is a huge supporter of the cooperative movement indicated by the Dept. of Justice which has one employee devoted full time to the co-operative sector.

The Saskatchewan Cooperative experience was positive and enthusiastic “Cooperatives are more evident in rural and urban communities across Saskatchewan than any other kind of organisation. If it wasn’t for cooperatives in many communities, there would be little economic activity. Cooperatives invest and reinvest in their communities.

6. Heartland Centre for Leadership Development, Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship, Nebraska Community Foundation, Home Town Competitiveness Community Workbook 2004

7. *op cit*

The cooperatives model facilitates people in their communities coming together to meet their needs when other forms of business are no longer interested.”<sup>8</sup> Many small rural communities have only retained a retail cooperative and Credit Union as the heart of their business activity. Local people own the cooperative and support it when other businesses have moved on. The Credit Union provides financial support to the community, their social programs, and economic development initiatives.

### 5.2.1 Canadian Co-operative Organisations

A feature of the Canadian Cooperative movement is powerful and effective networks and affiliates of cooperatives into provincial and national representative organisations. They are led by cutting edge research from speciality Co-operative Centres in Canadian universities such as the BC Institute for Cooperative Studies, University of Victoria and the Centre for the study of Cooperatives at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon.

The Canadian Cooperative Association (CCA) as the national network aims to give market power to the Co-operative sector with a unified national voice. CCA, through its activities and programs supports the development and growth of co-operatives in Canada. CCA adheres to the International Cooperative values and principles, links cooperatives regionally, nationally and internationally through the International Cooperative Alliance. And represents the cooperative sector to the Federal Government impacting on policy.<sup>9</sup> Organisations such as the CCA and its provincial affiliates desire to strengthen cooperative study in the school curriculum to address any concerns regarding entrepreneurial support for the cooperative model as an alternative to traditional business structures. This generates long term interest in the co-operative movement and sustainable co-operatives.

1. *Saskatchewan Cooperative Association (SCA)* is a coalition of cooperatives in a province with a very proud history of co-operatives. SCA operates as a community service cooperative, lobbies government, has a strong advocacy role, organises programs, partners Government in policy and program delivery, unifies the cooperative and Credit Union movement in the province, and promotes the cooperative model as part of its long term strategy. SCA provides information to members, supports and encourages leadership and educational opportunities for members and is affiliated with the CCA.<sup>10</sup> SCA has developed the Saskatchewan Cooperative Youth Program as a means of assisting young people to better understand cooperatives, develop community and leadership skills and foster an entrepreneurial spirit. This is an example of an enterprising and active group with grass-roots connections.
2. *British Columbia Cooperative Association (BCCA)* This is a provincial umbrella organisation for Cooperatives and Credit Unions. BCCA assists in setting up cooperatives but maintains there is a weakness in sustaining and developing regional clusters of cooperatives to benefit economically from interconnections. Its core functions include: - membership, support, lobbying, representation in other sectors and public education. BCCA utilises a team of individual private consultants to undertake cooperative development work in a mutual exchange process. The organisation supports the recruitment of young people to cooperative thinking offering workshops in schools and universities and leadership camps.

### 5.2.2 Kootenay and the Boundary Regional Resource Co-operative

The Kootenay region of BC has many cooperatives due to geographic isolation, and difficult and expensive access to the region. Cooperatives are usually small with individual agencies who come together for a collective benefit e.g. Boundary Regional Resource Cooperative (BRRC) – social service organisation set up in 2003 (eg mental health counselling, women’s shelter, addictions counselling, food bank) in response to government cutbacks. BRRC is considering buying a small bus service due to transport difficulties of older residents in the Selmo community. The Cooperative found that accreditation to meet certain standards of quality assurance was less expensive for cooperative structure than for separate organisations. BRRC is considered an innovative model and consequently should gain federal government funding support for coordinators position on part time basis. The cooperative received initial support from the Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program and McConnell Foundation.

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8. Co-operatives: “The Heart of Saskatchewan Communities”, A presentation to the Saskatchewan Cabinet by the Saskatchewan Cooperative Association Regina, 2004

9. Canadian Cooperative Association 2002-2003 Annual Report

10. Co-operatives: “The Heart of Saskatchewan Communities”, A presentation to the Saskatchewan Cabinet by the Saskatchewan Cooperative Association Regina, 2004

### 5.2.3 Community Care Connections Co-operative Mission BC

This worker Cooperative is another example of an enterprising group of people who have formed a cooperative as a solution to their needs and situation. Five women worked at long term care facility with 101 years experience between them. This facility closed and they asked the question “Where do we fit in with the restructure of health care?” A research analyst in their Union told them about Worker cooperatives and so began their journey...

They gained grants from Federal Government and VanCity Credit Union for training, phone, rent and support from the University of Simon Fraser Cooperative Centre. The women structured their co-operative as not-for profit and this has opened many doors for support. The women were excellent care givers, knew their jobs, experienced, competent and passionate about their role. They hired a training manager to work with them individually for skill development but need further training in management. The co-operative structure gave them back their self-esteem and confidence and the opportunity to now grow as business women. The co-operative has networked regularly with Vernon Cooperative, the first health care BC cooperative. These women totally inspire the cooperative specialists from the region and a research project is planned to evaluate their operation.

“The cooperative has totally changed our lives” – a member’s quote

### 5.2.4 BC Youth Entrepreneurship Development (YED)

The BC Youth Entrepreneurship Development (YED) Partnership is a strategy designed to encourage youth into Business. YED fields a team of members from federal and provincial governments, non-profit agencies and the private sector, who commissioned a study to identify key challenges facing young entrepreneurs, provide a framework to enhance entrepreneurship among BC’s youth and facilitate an “entrepreneurial attitude” among youth, their peers and parents. This research identified barriers facing youth in terms of starting and managing their own businesses, gaps and overlaps in service delivery, best practices in program and service provision, to develop a coordinated strategy that encouraged youth entrepreneurship. YEP provides recommendations to government, the private sector and others in support of youth business initiatives. Various recommendations under the headings of Public Awareness, Coordination of Programs, promotion of Youth Business Start-ups and expansion were advocated. In particular the need for supporting on-line programs for rural youth, funding for them to participate in trade shows, networking sessions and training was advocated.<sup>11</sup>

## 5.3 Organisations and Programs in Ireland

### 5.3.1 Irelands Organisations of support

It is the Irish experiences of the Credit Union and Cooperative movement that a correlation to the circumstances faced by many rural and remote communities today became even more evident and gives rise to the need to revisit these as a relevant community development tool in addressing the current situation faced by rural and remote communities.

In Ireland the Credit Union movement arose in the 1950’s from concerns of the Catholic Church and others regarding the social issues of the time such as poverty and unemployment.<sup>12</sup> Many people were reliant on money lenders charging exorbitant rates of interest for small amounts of credit. Unserviceable debt was becoming a serious social issue for Ireland and there were people trapped in a poverty cycle they didn’t seem to see a way out of. Interestingly the history of the Credit Union (CU) movement seems to have been aligned with the particular needs of rural communities many of whom desperately needed savings to become more involved in market economies.<sup>13</sup>

The Credit Union model and ideology proved evolutionary, adaptable, flexible over time and responsive to needs and cultures. In fact the success of the cooperative movement has been due to its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and diverse needs.<sup>14</sup>

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11. British Columbia Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture “A youth entrepreneurship strategy for British Columbia

12. McCarthy, O. (1996) *History and Development of Ballyphehane Credit Union 1960-1994*, Midleton Co. Cork: Litho Press Co. p 6

13. MacPherson, Ian. *The Dynamics of Credit Unions: Explaining Diversity in the International credit Union Movement Review of International cooperation* Vol 92 No 1 1999

14. Tucker, Vincent., *Ireland and the Origins of the Cooperative Movement Plunkett and Cooperatives, Past, Present and Future* U.C.C Bank of Ireland Centre for Cooperative Studies. Edited by Carla Keating

It is felt there was a strong need for cooperatives during the history of Ireland. The co-operative was often the economic centre or hub of the community and a necessity for farmers to market their goods. The 80's and 90's have also identified a need for affordable housing giving rise to a cooperative opportunity. It is interesting to note there is little common ground or linkages between Credit Unions and Cooperatives and limited communication of the cooperative advantage.

However, valuable partnerships, programs and organisations do exist to support the development of Co-operatives in Ireland such as the EU and the well known "Leader" program. Cooperative Development Society (CDS) is one such voluntary organisation based in Dublin offering information and "hands on" support for those desiring to set up a cooperative. Their manager encourages those interested in cooperatives to undertake a business plan and offers assistance to do so. This organisation fills the gaps where business and banks have little knowledge of co-operatives. The CDS is planning a Council in Dublin to form a strong political lobby group of cooperative organisations in Ireland. At present there is no cooperative law or specific act to give credibility to cooperatives, though there is a Credit Union Act 1997.

A very progressive *Centre for Co-operative Studies* operates from the University College Cork providing formal education and training, research and consultancy for agriculture and the community, support for co-operatives, the social economy and rural development organisations through distance learning on Mutual business, rural development, social integration and enterprise and Credit Union studies.

- Distance Education degree - BSc. Mutual and Credit Union Business
- Diploma in Credit Union studies
- Diploma in Social Integration and Enterprise for Community Development Workers
- Masters degree – MBS in Cooperative and Social Enterprise - by distance learning from October 2005 delivering all modules over the web and open to anyone throughout the world with specified requirements. Information and research results are distributed to the regions and Credit Unions for use on the ground.

### **5.3.2 Inisheer Community Cooperative**

On the smallest of the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland (Pop –300; 1000 acres) is the *Inisheer Community Cooperative* which engages in a bewildering variety of business, social and cultural activities in their efforts to keep the community and the Irish language alive.<sup>15</sup> This is a Gaeltacht community co-operative where everyone on the Island is a member. It evolved to address the needs of the community where the State and private sector failed to adequately provide. It is an example of a co-operative responsible for the guardianship of the Irish language and culture for the whole of Ireland. An Irish College was formed on Inisheer as a summer camp with 200 students at a time from the mainland.

The Cooperative is a strong supporter of local business people and entrepreneurs, identifying opportunities and offering information and training where appropriate.

In the 1970's the island had no infrastructure to speak, no running water or electricity and very few sealed roads. The Cooperative ran the Island's electricity until 1996 (when it was delivered via a cable) managed the road infrastructure, is a strong lobby group addressing such issues as a campaign to improve the quality of drinking water, runs courses in computers, the translation of Irish language to English, 1st Aid, basic sea survival and boat building to strengthen Irish traditions, culture and heritage. There are government grants available to support these courses due to high unemployment figures. The cooperative also manages the airstrip, camp site, football pitch, secondary school, fuel, recycling, retails bulky commodities, owns three cottages and lets a summer house, rents rooms for professional services offers a library and internet service. Support is provided by government for the buildings and wages (presently two full time and one part time worker). Local money through a Credit Union also goes into the community.

Inisheer Community Cooperative faces huge issues - the remoteness of the island, demands on the managers and resultant succession issues, the cost of insurance, little cash flow, raising sufficient capital, difficulty in attracting new and active voluntary Board members and limited marketing opportunity. There is an obvious need to

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15. Briscoe, Robert, McCarthy, Olive, Ward, Michael, *Serving the Periphery: Community Co-operatives in Western Ireland*.10 *Review of International Cooperative* Vol 92 No. 1/1999 p 7-13

offer members a benefit/s to belong to the co-operative for its success economically, address the need for adequate capital, and involve the shareholders in the strategic planning or success of the business.

It is difficult to gain volunteers and there is a need to involve younger people. One strategy supported in encouraging young people's involvement is for them to form a committee of their own and then assimilate members onto the main committee two at a time, building their confidence, knowledge and skills during the process. Red tape is increasingly a concern but the Cooperative is very successful in gaining small grants here and there for practical type things. Current management advocates "standing back and being critical and changing direction if necessary"

### **5.3.3 Shannon Development and e-towns project**

Shannon Development is a regional development organisation encompassing 10% of the country of Ireland geographically and 400,000 people with its head office located in Shannon Co. Clare This group's latest initiative is "e-towns", a project whereby technology is utilised to offset the population drift to regional centres and cities and home-based micro-business incubation is afforded through the stimulus the project provides. This is not a new concept but has "melded" early ideas and theory from the Cooperative movement and rural community development concepts to create this new initiative.

Some features are as follows:-

- Requires a town with a population of 1000 people to participate
- Forms a partnership with the community and local government
- Proposes the physical development of the town and a town plan
- Animation and training – local community development organisation and others are involved in portal website development and training with local people to manage and use it.
- Supports Broadband internet access
- Encourages micro businesses that operate from home eg architects, graphic artists, etc – offer a house and business unit to attract people and businesses to these communities
- Aim:- eg bring 10 new families and 10 new businesses into the town of Cappamore
- Principle followed is that you must not simply drop this into a community.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS, KEY LEARNINGS AND THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT**

It seems desirable for the cooperative model to be more effectively applied to support sustainable rural community development in an economic and social sense and we need to be more creative in encouraging local entrepreneurship in rural Australia. My research has recognised there are many mechanisms identified to ensure some degree of success and if implemented the prospects are exciting for rural Australia who face similar issues and challenges to rural communities, world wide. Differences between the scale and size of the environs in countries I visited and their uniqueness does impact on the reciprocity of programs. Nonetheless, the principles underpinning the organisations and their initiatives are transferable to the Australian context.

There are certain inherent characteristics of rural communities that encourage the adoption of the Co-operative model for a more sustainable future:-

- Many rural communities with a local agricultural based economy show a "farmer" kind of world view i.e. self sufficient, independent and strong commitment to community , used to "running their own show" but pool resources and are so inclined to utilise the cooperative model
- Cooperatives are a structure that enables the proliferation of multifarious activities within one organisation thereby addressing the issue of the reduced availability of volunteers and leaders in small rural communities. Cooperatives have been a stabilising factor in this period of decline
- Many rural people are used to investing their own money
- Existing interconnections in rural communities highlight a history of strong family farming enterprises where there are reasonable levels of trust and mutuality
- Evidence of a personal value system that promotes/creates cooperatives
- Loss of services provides an opportunity for communities to set up cooperatives e.g. day care, funerals There are always new needs eg recreational vehicles, information economy
- Rural Communities are becoming more diverse e.g. new community members, greater socio/economic divide. Cooperatives are a means to generate social cohesion

- Historical tradition of working together collectively and cooperative by nature – the more this exists, the more likely a culture of cooperatives in the community develops

### Education

The “buzz words” in all facets of Australian bureaucracy are “capacity building”, a concept generally not readily understood by the community but nevertheless translated into life long learning and education of community members as a means of stimulating economic growth *inter alia*. In particular the globalised economy has raised the need for communities to stimulate their local economies. This is not looking inwardly in a restrictive and isolationist manner but identifying the “leaks” whereby local wealth is deserting the community and creatively “plugging the leaks” to utilise these funds locally. Education plays a major role in encouraging communities to become parochial, support local entrepreneurs and businesses, shop at home, develop local philanthropy, support and encourage businesses such as cooperatives and credit unions whose philosophy is to direct their money into local community ventures and organisations. Education and communication is the key to maintaining the cooperative as a vibrant community business. Likewise, cooperatives and credit unions who are traditionally education focussed may affect the level of support offered by community members to the local economy through their education programs.<sup>16</sup>

### Youth

The issues facing rural youth today are global. Various organisations, government and private agencies are struggling to impact on youth unemployment, access to programs and educational systems that capture the diversity among young people. Once again strong partnerships have been effective in investigating ways to support young entrepreneurs and various programs have been developed. Cooperatives also offer a means to address the desire to engage younger members of the community in local activities and for sustainability of the cooperative movement.

### Leadership

Strong totally committed local leadership has played an important part in the development and acceptance of Cooperatives globally over time.<sup>17</sup> The development and validity of cooperatives in rural communities requires a “champion”, someone who has sound knowledge of cooperatives, the foundation principles, their dynamics and their potential as a significant means to address the issues rural communities face today. There is great value in one key individual with vision, drive, innovation, commitment and a dynamic personality.

### Current Government Policy

Government policy is regionally focussed or centralised and has withdrawn services from most small rural communities. Current government policy underpins the expectations of communities to be self reliant and in control of their own destiny – the choice to “surrender” or regroup and face the present challenges in an organised and motivated manner is theirs. Credit Union ideology and indeed the cooperative movement purport to an “affirmation of the capacity of ordinary people to control and shape their own destiny”<sup>18</sup> Government needs to be supportive of any self-help solutions to maintain and develop local economic and social prospects.

### Cooperative structure

Co-operatives per se are a business structure and the members are expected to make some financial contribution yet, undercapitalisation is a common problem with new cooperatives. We need the reality of business explained by someone who has undertaken it already i.e. mentorship. Also, you must still develop the “business” for sustainability of the operation. Cooperatives need to evolve over time to maintain relevance to the community. and need to be set up to clearly define the difference between members and non-members. There must be a benefit in being a member. Cooperative model is a business model i.e. a vehicle, but you have to develop the business with adequate management and business thinking.

### Networks and representative organisations

There is an enormous benefit to be gained by cooperatives working collaboratively between themselves, sharing ideas, concerns, resource and experiences and forming strong networks and representative organisations to support their endeavours.

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16. Byrne, Noreen. McCarthy, Olive., Ward, Michael., *Training and Education in Irish Credit Unions Centre for Cooperative studies University College Cork 2002*

17. O’Leary, Con., *Agricultural Cooperatives in Ireland after Knapp, Plunkett and Cooperatives, Past, Present and Future U.C.C Bank of Ireland Centre for Cooperative Studies. Edited by Carla Keating*

18. Byrne, Noreen. McCarthy, Olive., Ward, Michael., *Training and Education in Irish Credit Unions Centre for Cooperative studies University College Cork 2002*

### Value in a Historical perspective of the development of the Co-operative sector over time

The history of the Cooperative and Credit Union movement in the countries visited all highlight a struggle by people to gain control over their local economies and financial wellbeing especially in rural areas. Cooperatives provided a solution to their own needs and financial situations. Many cooperatives had their beginnings in rural areas due to lack of access to credit, marketing power, purchasing basic requirements for farms.

### Diversity of Cooperative model

The multifarious co-operatives and range of activities they support is astounding – food, financial, power, technology, workers, community services, funeral services, housing, industry, retail, new generation value added enterprises, tourism, recreational, education, childcare – the list is endless and highlights the seemingly limitless adaptations of the co-operative model to business applications. With Triple Bottom Line principles and the desire for businesses to be portrayed as good corporate citizens and environmentally aware, the co-operative model should be promoted as a desirable business structure to achieve these ethical expectations of society today.

### Entrepreneurship

It seems the very word “entrepreneur” is missing from the vocabulary of Australian rural dwellers. Yet rural and remote communities are reliant on local entrepreneurs to offer any hope of sustainability and strength. We need to overcome our innate shyness or reluctance for whatever reason in promoting the innovative and creative people in our community. We should be nurturing and encouraging these “thinkers and ideas people” through developing appropriate programs, mentoring, offering adequate resources and opportunities to develop their ideas into viable business proposals. There is too much emphasis on large one-off industries “saving” rural areas when the support needs to be focused on the local entrepreneur and micro-business.

### Local dollars for local communities

There is great value in “local wealth working locally” – credit unions, community banking, local philanthropy, community foundations where there is the ability for rural communities to utilise local dollars for their projects and activities.

### Partnerships

There is a critical role for effective partnerships comprising government, community, business, learning institutions, researchers and funding bodies in developing and implementing programs. A collaborative effort between service providers and programs supporting entrepreneurs has more impact by sharing of resources, knowledge and energies. Programs need to be generally long term, have workers on the ground, well resourced and have identified funding sources and must evolve, be adaptable and flexible overtime.

For rural communities it appears that there are certain features of the Cooperative model that offer a natural “fit” and opportunity for them to achieve some level of sustainability and fulfil their needs.

Co-operatives:-<sup>19</sup>

- fulfil a local need and are people focussed rather than solely profit driven and committed to the whole community rather than individual interests<sup>20</sup>
- provide services which may not be otherwise provided as they do not necessarily generate an acceptable level of profit by either corporate structures or government standards<sup>21</sup>
- maintain profits locally
- Supply a wider range of services and goods in rural communities that are vulnerable and struggling to manage change and deal with the current issues the rural sector faces.
- Are not solely profit driven but maintain both a social and economic role
- contribute to the social development and capacity building of rural communities by supporting leadership education and training programs and encouraging members to participate more fully and effectively in other aspects of community life
- build social capital and provide a networking opportunity for rural communities by offering a conduit for exchange of information, ideas and resources between other businesses, organisations, cooperatives, communities, and government
- contribute to social cohesion of the community by bringing community members together for the betterment of their whole community and generating a “whole of community” approach

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19. Ketilson, Lou Hammond, Gertler, Michael, Fulton, Murray, Dobson, Roy, Polsom, Leslie., “The Social and Economic Importance of the Cooperative Sector in Saskatchewan” Centre for the Study of Cooperatives University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon May 1998

20. (The Cooperative Idea p16)

21. op sit p17

- are a catalyst for innovativeness and entrepreneurship within the community where people are empowered to develop and share ideas to solve local problems and build on opportunities
- provide local employment prospects with ongoing professional development of employees
- are reasonably inexpensive and relatively easy to set up in communities that have very limited funding and resources
- provide an opportunity for locals to invest in their own destiny
- principle of collective and local ownership encourages members to shop and do business locally
- are a conduit for further investment and support for the community eg grants, philanthropy and sponsorship
- traditional liaison with Credit Union sector offers potential for partnerships in dealing with local needs and opportunities and maintaining local dollars
- are a model that allows an advocacy and lobbying role for local issues

However, there are of course barriers that may hinder the use of Cooperatives for rural community development. This needs to be acknowledged and addressed when considering a co-operative for any situation:-

- Difficulty in accessing dollars from traditional sources who don't know or understand the cooperative model
- Some people not aware they are utilising a cooperative due to limited promotion from the cooperatives themselves
- "New age" image – communities, government, specialists don't take it seriously as a current business entrepreneurial approach
- Mindset and lack of real knowledge of cooperatives as a structure and how they can support local entrepreneurs
- Lack of on-line learning centres
- Does the cooperative model and philosophy/principles conflict with political climate or govt. philosophy of the time eg conservative governments traditionally do not see cooperatives as a serious valid form of market driven business structure, not pure in an economic sense as it has a social component. This leads to lack of public policy support
- Lack of local leadership with personal access to finance and an entrepreneurial spirit prepared to take a risk
- Cooperatives as an organisation have always recognised the importance of education but not always allotted adequate resources or prominence to develop their membership and the broader community

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Enhance the profile and development of State and National Cooperative Development Associations in Australia. We need an adequately resourced, well-known and easily accessible centralised Cooperative support organisation in each State and Territory with an appropriate National overarching body. It is essential these organisations offer a central source of information and service facility to all those interested in the cooperative model eg rural community members who are grappling with change and identifying new opportunities for economic development, state and federal bureaucracies and professionals involved in advising cooperative enterprises. The organisations need to offer mentoring of new and established cooperatives, maintain a database of cooperatives throughout Australia, support the networking and transfer of information between cooperatives, encourage policy makers to recognise the value of cooperatives in rural community development and develop policies that reflect this, assist in the design of development and training programs for local entrepreneurs, cooperatives and their members. The organisations would offer expert guidance in cooperative formation and development and management, provide training, seminars and workshops.
2. Form partnerships between government, learning institutions, researchers, funding bodies, business and community to facilitate rural community development through holistic and community driven programs. Programs need to be formed, implemented and evaluated with community consultation for sound outcomes.
3. Strengthen linkages with world wide learning institutions that are developing formalised programs for the study of cooperatives in the context of rural community development.

4. Australian learning institutions to offer study opportunities and courses in the history of cooperatives, their start-up and development. Adequate resourcing is essential. We must offer world's best practice programs in governance and cooperative director training that is affordable and accessible.
5. Support for business planning and market research in public and private sectors is essential to the start up of any new business or refocussing business for its long term success.
6. Promotion and support of the cooperative model as complementary to sustaining the culture of Australian rural communities. This is a means of addressing the need to promote our rural communities as a valuable and worthwhile part of the Australian way of life and economy and encourage linkages to urban centres.
7. Programs need to be long term and well resourced to gain the confidence and support of rural communities and offer ongoing support to rural entrepreneurial activities.
8. Support and partner potential international developers and researchers eg on-line Cooperative Learning Centre and Manual (University of Victoria BC Canada). Adequate resourcing for Australian Cooperative Research institutions to enable effective linkages and reciprocity.
9. Flexibility and longevity inherent in relevant government projects to reflect the diversity of rural communities, their needs and structures and give rise to validity and recognition.
10. The need to facilitate programs for *Youth Entrepreneurship* as part of the Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) program currently operating in Victoria to support youth aged 15-19.
11. Scholarships for researchers and co-operative enthusiasts to attend relevant international conferences and for entrepreneurs to attend trade shows and events.
12. Highlight the value of cooperatives as a tool in the Community development toolbox whereby local cooperatives are given the dual function of not only providing a tangible service but supporting and maintaining the rural culture for the whole of Australia.
13. A Cooperative specialist operating within the newly formed Victorian Dept. for Communities to give direction to Community Developers, cooperatives and their representative organisations, local entrepreneurs and communities. (Apply this to appropriate Federal Government department as well.)
14. Public policy and government action that actively promotes and supports the co-operative sector
15. Explore and promote worker and community cooperatives as a valuable means to create jobs and support local entrepreneurs for rural community development.
16. One of the key drivers for community development is for local wealth to be retained locally. This principle should underpin our superannuation and taxation policies to encourage rural and remote communities to become more financially self-sufficient. Rural communities need to embrace initiatives through their own development associations to encourage local philanthropy.
17. Initiate a pilot project based on Ireland's e-towns to develop micro-businesses in rural communities and encourage professionals into rural areas to live and work.

## **8. APPENDICES**

### **8.1 Dissemination of Information**

These ideas and recommendations will be shared with the following organisations through this report so these individuals and organisations have the opportunity to capture and implement any learnings and information for the benefit of our Australian rural communities. Through the media and presentations, networking and attending meetings I intend to share my learnings and lobby to influence appropriate people to utilise my research and information such as policy makers. I intend to use any promotional occasion to motivate rural people to the merits of the Churchill Fellowship scheme. This is an opportunity to build the confidence of rural people, expand their networks and make a difference in their community. My work in a TAFE campus offers me many opportunities to promote learning about the cooperative model and initiate relevant programs for this and local entrepreneurs.

- Winston Churchill Trust
- Victorian Cooperatives Association
- ACCORD
- Federal and State Politicians
- Dept. for Victorian Communities
- Regional Development Victoria
- Sunraysia Mallee Area Consultative Committee
- Sunraysia Mallee Economic Development Board
- Mildura Rural City Council
- Yarriambiack Shire Council
- Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Victorian Farmers Federation
- Ouyen Inc.
- Murrayville Liaison Group
- Patchewollock Progress Association
- Underbool & District Progress Association
- Walpeup Development Association
- Woomelang & District Development Association
- Advance Sea Lake Inc.
- Culgoa Community Cooperative Store
- Murrayville Neighbourhood House
- Dept. Primary Industries
- Dept Sustainability and Environment
- Centre for Sustainability Mildura
- Sunraysia Institute of TAFE
- Partners in Grain
- Grains Industry Training Network
- Grain Growers Association

## 8.2 Definitions and International Principles of Cooperatives

The International Cooperative Alliance defines a co-operative as:

*“An autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.”<sup>1</sup>*

Definition of Co-operation

*“People working together for their mutual benefit. By combining their efforts, people gain from one another’s idea, talents, skills and energies. In this way, they are able to achieve things they could not do as well (or at all) alone”<sup>2</sup>*

The Cooperative model operates most effectively under a set of International principles and governance structure adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance in 1966 and revised in 1995:-

### **THE INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR COOPERATIVES<sup>3</sup>**

- 1 Voluntary and open membership – open to all people who use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership
- 2 Democratic member control – one member, one vote system with members actively involved in policy creation and decision making.
- 3 Member economic participation through capital contribution
- 4 Autonomy and independence – self help organisations
- 5 Education, training and information for members, managers and employees
- 6 Cooperation among cooperatives working together through local, national, regional and international structures.
- 7 Concern for community – cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities.

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1. Birchall, J. (1997), *The International Cooperative Movement*, Manchester: University Press p. 65.

2. Briscoe, B., Grey, S., Hunt, P., Linehan, M., McBride, H., Tucker, V., Ward, M., (1982), *The Cooperative Idea*, Cork: University College Centre for Cooperative Studies p. 16.

3. Briscoe, Robert. Ward, Michael, *The Competitive Advantages of Co-operatives* Centre for Co-operative Studies National University of Ireland, Cork Ireland Litho Press, Middleton, Co. Cork 200

## 8.4. Acknowledgements

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Position</b>
<b>Nebraska USA</b>		
Charlotte Narjes	Centre for Applied Rural Innovation University of Nebraska, Lincoln (CARI)	
Lisa Nelson	CARI – University of Nebraska	Intern/ Graduate in Agricultural Economics
Elaine Klaege	Nebraska Cooperative Development Centre	Project Officer
Mr John Ellis	Centreville Farmers Market	Manager
Dr John Allen	CARI – University of Nebraska	Manager
Marilyn Schlake	CARI – EDGE (Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs) Program University of Nebraska	Program Manager CARI
Ken Wurdeman	North Central Initiative for Small Farm Profitability University of Nebraska	Coordinator
Randy Cantrell	CARI	Rural Tourism Programs Manager
Phyllis Schoenholz Monica Braun Scott Stockwell	Geneva Planning Meeting to coordinate calendars of 3 service providers in Community Economic Development	
Don Wilhite	University of Nebraska Lincoln – Drought Mitigation Centre	Director
***Dave	Univ. of Nebraska Lincoln - Food Processing Centre	University of Nebraska
Jay Hall	Nebraska Development Network/South West Region	Chamber of Commerce Beaver City NE
Vicki Leibbrandt	McCook Community College	
Connie Nelson	University of Nebraska Lincoln	Extension Officer
Bobby Jacobsen	Congressman Tom Osborne's Office - Rural Community Unit	Staff Member
Lory Cappel	Congressman Tom Osborne's Office - Rural Community Unit	Staff Member
Sondra L. Jonson	World renowned sculptor and resident of Cambridge Nebraska	Sculptor
Jim Crandall	Nebraska Cooperative Development Centre University of Nebraska	Associate Director Outreach program Coordinator
Jim Keeler	Nebraska Municipal Power Plant Energy	Eco. Devolpment Officer
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Kami Balthazor	Hometown Competitiveness Project – Imperial and Grant	Community Development Director City of Imperial
Diane Rich	Cambridge Community member	Mobile Workshop organiser
Andela Taylor	Cambridge County Council	Eco Development Director
Ben & Rex	United States Dept. of Agriculture	Irrigation Specialists
<b>Vancouver</b>		
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Melanie Conn	Simon Fraser University – Centre for Sustainable Community Development, Burnaby BC	Program Director
Andrew Jarrett	Boundary Regional Resource Cooperative	Manager
Kathleen Gabelman	University of Victoria British Columbia Institute for Cooperative Studies	Researcher
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Laura Rath	Community Care Connections – Worker Cooperative	Member
Garth Stiller	Wester Economic Diversification Canada British Colombia Region	Manager Rural Sustainable communities BC Region

<b>Saskatchewan</b>		
Warren Crossman	Saskatchewan Cooperative Association Saskatoon	Executive Director
Ingrid Larson	Saskatoon Community Clinic	Membership Director
Michael Gertler	Centre for Study of Cooperatives University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon	Assistant Professor Dept. of Sociology
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Janelle Lindsey	Credit Union Central Regina	Senior consultant, Communications
Michael Fix	Credit Union Central Regina	General Manager
Dale Renz	Weyburn Credit Union Ltd	Executive Manager of Lending
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Marie-helene Begin	Desjardins Levis Quebec	Advisor International Affairs and Strategic Alliances
Francois Gosselin	Desjardins Levis Quebec	Regional Economic Development Counsellor
Serge Kirouac	Promo Plastik Cooperative de travailleurs Saint-Jean-Port-Joli Quebec	Manager
Helene Simard	Conseil de la cooperation du Quebec	Presidente
Denis Lavdie	Coop La Piix IGA Store Saint-Jean-Port-Jolie Quebec	Manager
Gary Steeves	Regional Cooperative Development Centre Moncton New Brunswick	Executive Director
<b>IRELAND</b>		
Dermot McKenna	Ireland Cooperative Development Society	Manager
Michael and Greg	Sustainable Projects Ireland Ltd and "The Village Buzz" Newsletter	Editor and Project Managers
Paul Ryan	Shannon Development Co. Clare	
Brendan McCormack	Shannon Development Co. Clare	
David Humphreys	Abeyton Enterprise Centre – Restoration of old Creamery Cooperative in Cappamore	Project Manager
Ester McKenna	Cappamore Credit Union and publican	Board Member
Paddy Crow	Inisheer Community Cooperative Aran Islands	Manager
Olive McCarthy	Centre for Cooperative studies Dept Food Business & Development University College Cork, Ireland	Lecturer and Researcher

### 8.3 Summary of Organisations Visited and Programs

#### Nebraska Municipal Power

Another interesting and valuable support mechanism for rural communities was through the Nebraska Municipal Power, a non profit business covering seven states with various arms – natural gas, electricity, retail and wholesale and telecommunications. Their economic development unit assists communities to find grants, write submissions, undertake community assessments eg infrastructure, facilitate workshops for entrepreneurs – whatever communities ask for, handle in house or use partnerships to make it happen. The profit goes back to the communities under the guidance of their Board who are community members.

#### Food Processing Centre at the University of Nebraska Lincoln

This centre works with industry to research any food processing opportunities eg small group/family wishes to begin a commercial enterprise using “Grandma’s favourite recipe”. The Centre experiments to bring this to commercial stage i.e. people identify the concept and the centre advances to the production stage. By combining food scientists, students of food science and industry in the laboratory – support mechanism/program to encourage local entrepreneurs eg local woman rents a vat in the dairy room to produce Goats milk cheese and does this once every 4-5 weeks herself utilising the University’s equipment.

#### Centreville Farmers Market

is an example of a cooperative-like business supported by the NCDC selling local organic produce to city dwellers. It displays characteristics of this group that is expanding and moving forward – strong leadership, passion, timely set-up, sound product and market, financially resourced, meets regularly, has received assistance with a Business Plan and grant seeking.

#### Nebraskan 2004 Rural Community Institute

Many interesting and innovative business developments were to be highlighted such as:-

- Hydroponic tomato operation as diversification of a corn farm
- Ethanol plant as a fuel alternative and by-product of corn
- Veils Unlimited - Bridal veil business cooperative model is a business model i.e. a vehicle, but you have to develop the business with adequate management and business thinking which highlighted just how a local woman’s talents have led to a valuable economic development opportunity for a rural community employing other local women in the production of unique and beautiful veils
- Heartland Cattle Co, Fish Farm, Grape production with plans to utilise an old barn as a potential winery
- Creative uses of old historic buildings which not only restores them and preserves their identity but offers a practical use to create a viable business eg Bed and Breakfasts
- Dancing Leaf - Cultural Learning Centre to offer history lessons in early Native American settlement, a research centre for archaeologists and students and also a unique place to stay
- A Light manufacturing plant that has developed a global market
- “Comstock” - a local farmer who has developed three major concerts on his property that annually bring thousand of visitors to his community
- The most amazing and extensive memorabilia collection imaginable on a retired couples farm on the edge of town that has become a focus for local students and learning

#### Cooperative Development Initiative

- a Canadian 5 year \$15 million project - a partnership between the Cooperatives Secretariat (Government) Conseil Canadiaen de la Cooperation (French speaking organisation) and Canadian Cooperative Association. This partnership according to its promotional brochure, offers advisory services to people, groups and communities who wish to develop new and established cooperatives.

#### University of Victoria BC – a cooperative research facility

Useful resources include:-

- manual – able to revise this and adapt this to Australian scene

- International Cooperative Studies Registry
- Galleria – 60-70 cooperatives featured
- Technical Assistance Program offering support and assistance to new cooperatives, conflict resolution skills, feasibility studies and business planning support

#### Western Economic Diversification in Saskatchewan

Oversees Community Futures program and has some autonomy.

Purpose is a government rural lens and window to rural community for government through their programs.

Programs WED supports include:-

- Canada Rural Partnerships (5 yrs old)
- Canada Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNET)
- Community Futures Program – estab. 1986 in response to the needs of single industry towns. CF is a network of local community economic and business development organisations (CFDCs and CFBCs) designed to help communities develop and implement strategies for dealing with a changing economic environment. Over 250 operate in Canada. Community Futures builds partnerships locally, provincially and nationally to access the tools and resources for sustainability. Offers support including financing for entrepreneurs and deals with high risk clients e.g. rural based. It is a community based program with decisions made locally in a collaborative inclusive process and successful in small communities. CFDC's are independent not-for-profit organisations guided by a volunteer board of directors and professionals and work in partnership with the Federal Govt. in areas of community capacity building and business development and entrepreneurial support. Community Futures supports women (Women's Enterprise Initiative) Youth and Disabilities entrepreneurs through specific programs designed to meet their needs. A CED internship program also provides graduates in community development with \$20,000 per year to gain experience. Community Futures now operates in Russia and Ukraine with Canadian assistance and information. (Information provided by CF promotional brochure)

#### Saskatchewan Cooperative Association (SCA)

Their role is to discover what the issues of the day for cooperatives are, then take this message to Government and impact on policy development.

- Strong linkage to provincial government and cooperative government workers
- 3 full time positions and two interns from university over summer
- Saskatchewan Cooperative Youth Program (running for 76 years) 14-18 yr olds, 200-300 young people 35 kids per seminar 2.5 day training for 50 volunteers each year to run the program and affirm succession of the Cooperative sector
- Participation in Cooperative Week
- Cooperative Merit Awards to recognise people who have contributed to coops in certain way
- Youth Advisory committee
- International Education Advisory Committee – what cooperatives are doing internationally
- Education of Cooperative Board members
- Prairie Hub – advisory services for cooperative development
- Is a coalition of cooperatives that work collaboratively to support and promote the cooperative model for community and economic development

SCA's mission is to provide effective leadership in promoting, developing and uniting cooperatives and credit unions for a thriving community presence.

#### Centre for the Study of Cooperatives – University of Saskatchewan

- Began in 1984 and created for political reasons
- Offers university courses in cooperative theory, principles, development, structures and legislation
- Supported financially by the University of Saskatchewan, major provincial cooperatives and Government
- Research and teaching facility supporting other organisations who do extension work
- Creating and disseminating knowledge about cooperative related subjects

- Offers the most extensive cooperative resource centre in English Canada and a substantial listing of publications <sup>1</sup>

#### Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan

– owned by the Credit Unions themselves and affords a pivotal role and communicator to other credit unions, providing leadership, services and support to its members. Board members are voluntary.

#### Weyburn Credit Union (WCU)

– has close contact with local and provincial government and local community. Offers dividends and bonuses to members who must pick these up personally for explanation as to what they are. WCU has linkages with local businesses. Employees earn bonus points if they become involved in the community. There is a high level of volunteerism of employees to community. Employees have \$50 donated to their choice of charity/cause. All Board members participate in Director training. WCU offers strong support to local cooperatives and is a Cooperative among cooperatives. WCU sponsors a local young person to participate in the Cooperative Youth Camp.

#### Desjardins

In 1990, Alphonse Desjardins organised the first “caisse populaire” in Levis near Quebec City and this became the model for the development of credit unions throughout the world. He began this movement as he became increasingly alarmed at the poverty of his fellow countrymen and their reliance on unscrupulous moneylenders thereby effectively trapping them in a never ending cycle of poverty and dependence. The Catholic Church and the intense nationalism of the Quebec people played a huge role in developing the CU movement to improve the life of many throughout the world.

#### Promo Plastik

– situated in Saint-Jean-Paul-Jolie in Quebec. Formed in 1992 and currently has 13 members. Promo Plastik began as the advertising arm of another local enterprise. It is a workers cooperative who banks with Caisse Populaire (Credit Union) who supported them after asking “Do you have dreams – If so, we can support you” This cooperative checks to ensure they adhere to every international principle of cooperation! Promo Plastik is a member of Cooperative Workers Federation, a network of cooperatives. The manager is on another Board to start a new cooperative and has assisted another local group to form a cooperative. Recently this cooperative won a prize at the Regional Enterprise awards night and received support from cooperative organisations such as a Regional Development Cooperative in Quebec City for their formation.

#### Coop La Piix IGA

- providing a necessary service to the community of Saint-Jean-Paul-Jolie, Quebec that was missing. Saint-Jean-Paul-Jolie is an artistic and close knit community. 80% of the town are members of the cooperative with a strong cooperative spirit. There is large support for the community with \$60,000 p.a. given back to the community. Manager was a passionate supporter of his community, the cooperative sector and social economy.

#### Regional Cooperative Development Centre, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada

- Formed 1995 covering 4 Atlantic provinces of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland
- Undergoing major reform and restructure
- Strong emphasis on Youth programs
- Supported by Federal Government of Canada through the coops secretariat.
- Assisted with business planning

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1. *Centre for the Study of Cooperatives University of Saskatchewan, Annual Report 2002-2003*

### The Village

– set up as a not for profit business in 1999 (for tax benefits and insurance) to primarily create an eco village and sustainable community in Cloughjordan Co. Limerick. It is possible that when the village is functioning and integrated with the existing village a new management company will be formed to be owned by all members, potentially a cooperative. The development consists of 67 acres with 12 acres to be developed for living, 30 acres as an organic farm and 30 acres of forest. The local council is fully supportive of the development and has included it in their 5 year development plan and rezoned the area as Sustainable Community development zone. The term sustainability is used in its “purest” form with a strong environmental focus. This is an exciting project and offers a model for other like eco-villages. The potential for supporting local entrepreneurs, consensual agreement in all decisions associated with the development of the village offers a refreshing approach to what it truly means to be “sustainable” and “cooperative”

### Cappamore Project – Restoration of local creamery building, an old cooperative

David Humphreys, a local community activist is the project manager. Building is owned by the community. 3-4 members of Cappamore Development Society have driven this project. The original building was established in the 1890’s and as a cooperative in 1902 with additions in 1960’s when there were no motor vehicles in the town and all milk was taken to the creamery via horse and cart. It is now planned to restore the original section and demolish the rest to offer an aged care/rental housing facilities which may or may not be governed as a cooperative.

### Abington Enterprise Centre Murroe Co. Limerick

– an old cooperative/creamery owned by local council where businesses have relocated to a small community eg engineers, historical building restoration project, second hand clothing, bakery. Attraction includes minimum rent and shared facilities eg photocopier

### Cappamore Credit Union (CCU)

– Set up in 1983 and has 5000 members with substantial reserve funds invested. CCU supports local micro-businesses especially where banks won’t offer support. CCU offers local money for local organisations and events. Dividend paid per membership was 2.5% in 2003. There is a twelve week qualifying period and the need to demonstrate the ability to save. CCU is a not for profit set up to support people who couldn’t afford usually banking system or paid exorbitant hire purchase rates and didn’t have access to credit through usual system. It is considered vital to the community of Cappamore and is a branch of the Central Credit Union. The basic concept is to borrow each others money.

***“Local decisions local dollars into local community”***

