

# **Member Attitude** *Toward* **Cooperatives**

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## Foreword

Many farmers in Oregon market their produce and buy their supplies through cooperatives. This bulletin shows what a sample of 192 members think of their cooperative and what they are doing to be good members. In addition, information was obtained which shows what members expected management to do to help make them desirable members.

Most members in this study expected the cooperative to increase their net incomes and to generally render good service. These farmers believed patronage was their most important responsibility as members. Loyalty and a general understanding of agricultural cooperation also received high ratings as important responsibilities of members.

Members felt that courteous and efficient employees was the most important single factor in making them desirable and well-informed members. Good financial reports and an informative and interesting annual meeting were also considered to be important factors in maintaining and improving membership understanding.

The final section of this bulletin outlines the ideal in cooperative membership understanding and attitude. Some members have achieved or have approached the ideal in membership understanding. Others who are interested in more fully discharging their responsibilities as members will find this report to be of interest.



Dean and Director

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# Member Attitude Toward Cooperatives

by

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**M**EMBERS have certain responsibilities and privileges as owners of their cooperative. Lack of understanding and participation in the affairs of the cooperative may lead to unnecessary failures or some loss in efficiency. It is reasonable to believe that where membership understanding can be improved by carrying good ideas from one cooperative to another or by other means, cooperatives in Oregon will serve their members more effectively. The purpose of this study will be achieved if it assists members, boards of directors, and managers in formulating membership relations work that will contribute to the success of Oregon farmer cooperatives.

A second phase of this study will deal with management and director relations in Oregon farmer cooperatives. It will be completed in 1952 and a report similar to this one will be prepared.

## Procedure

A total of 192 records was obtained by personal interview with farmer members in four types of cooperatives. The types were (1) purchasing, (2) grain, (3) dairy, and (4) fruit and vegetable processing associations. It was felt that a more satisfactory representation would be obtained if members to be interviewed were selected from more than one cooperative of each type. Consequently, 10 to 13 records were obtained by random sampling procedure from each of four cooperatives making a total of between 42 and 51 records from each type of cooperative. Records were taken in all parts of the state.

The first section of this report contains some background information concerning the members that were interviewed. The next three sections deal to a large extent with actual activities of members and how they felt about these activities with respect to making them better members. The activities covered were the annual meeting, newsletter, and entertainment sponsored by the cooperative. In the next three sections of the report, members' opinions concerning what should or might be done to keep them informed are summarized and analyzed. These were members' reactions to manager and management policy, members' opinions on methods used to keep

membership informed, and opinions concerning responsibilities of members.

The next section deals with the reasons for joining the cooperative and the feeling toward it and the final section indicates the ideal in membership understanding and attitude.

## Members Interviewed

On the average, the farmers included in the sample had been members of a cooperative for 13 years. Those belonging to dairy cooperatives had been members for 11 years and the average membership of those belonging to fruit and vegetable associations was 15 years.

These same farmers had been farming for an average of almost 21 years. One had been farming for 60 years and the newest farmer had been in the business for only two years. The average age of all farmers in the sample was 50 years. The oldest was 84 years of age and the youngest was 22. Of the total 178 were married, 11 were single, two were widowers, and one had unknown marital status.

Each of the 192 farmers in this study belonged on the average to slightly more than two cooperatives. Seventy-two per cent of the members belonged to either one or two cooperatives. The other 28 per cent belonged to three or more cooperatives.

## Annual Meeting

### Attendance

Perhaps in no other single way can members obtain as much information about their cooperative as by attending the annual meeting. Yet, this study shows that only 30 per cent of the members attended the last annual meeting\* (Figure 1). Less than 20 per cent attended from purchasing and grain associations. The best attendance was among those members who belonged to fruit and vegetable associations.

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\* In comparing attendance at meetings in Oregon cooperatives with the results obtained in one other state, it appears that many members characteristically do not attend. See W. A. Anderson and Dwight Sanderson, *Membership Relations in Cooperative Organizations*, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Ithaca, New York, Mimeograph Bulletin 9, October 1943, p. 12.

### Importance of annual meeting

Nearly 85 per cent, 163 out of 192 members, indicated that the annual meeting was of major importance as a device in keeping members well informed. The average distance from the farm to the cooperative was only 10 miles. Distance apparently was not an important factor in keeping many members from attending the annual meeting. Although most members indicated that they should have attended the meeting, other work or inertia prevented them from doing so.

### Attitude toward annual meeting of those who attended

Almost one-half, or 28 out of 57, of those attending annual meetings indicated they liked the report of the manager the best of anything on the program. Nearly 16 per cent liked the speeches the best or at least as well as the manager's report. In a few instances members indicated that the best part of the program was the general discussion. It can be seen that members were interested in reports presented by the manager and in good speeches. Part of the lack of interest in the annual meeting may stem from unorganized and uninteresting programs.

Nearly 45 per cent of the sample, or 25 out of 57 members, indicated they liked all of the program. Seven members had no comment. Several had definite dislikes. These are listed below.

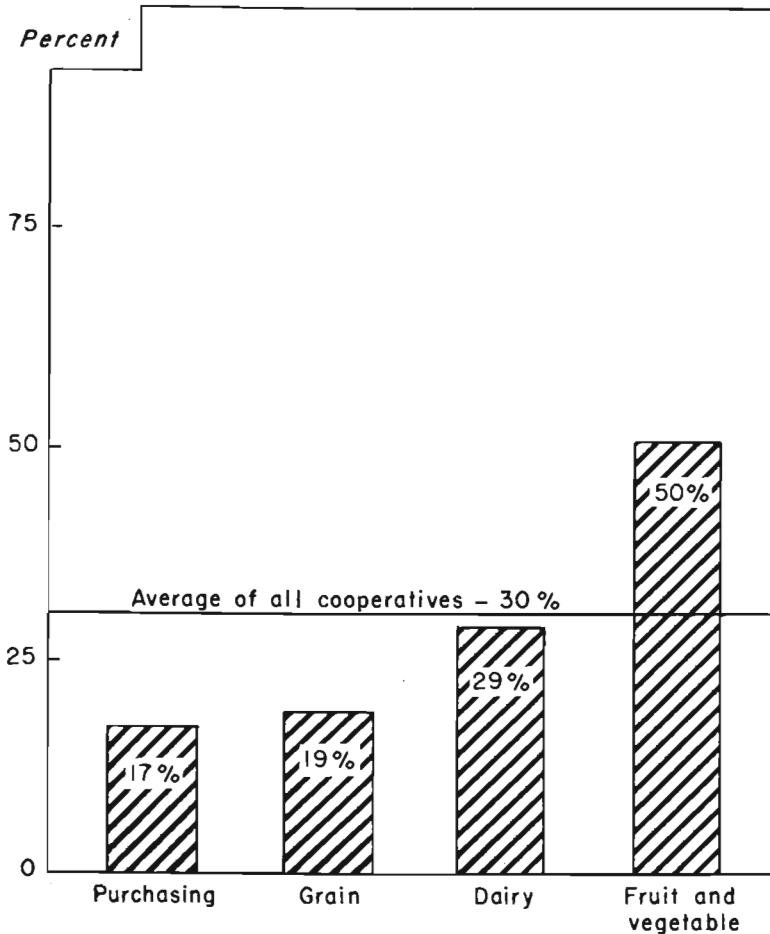
Poor food	Trivial interruptions by members
Poor chairman	Lack of members' understanding
Poor entertainment	Sales talk
Small attendance	Speeches too long
	Should analyze subjects more fully

## Newsletter

Of the 16 farmer cooperatives in which members were sampled, only seven published a newsletter or house organ. In some cases this consisted of one mimeographed sheet, but it did contain important information about the cooperative.

### Interest in newsletters

A total of 77 members indicated that their cooperative published a newsletter and that they received it. Of this number 81 per cent said they read all of it, 17 per cent said they read part of it, and one member said he did not look at any of it. It also may be noted that 10 additional members said their association did not publish a newsletter. This was not the case. A newsletter was published but these 10 members apparently had forgotten or did not bother to look at published material sent out by their cooperative.



Per cent of 192 members attending last annual meeting by type of cooperative, Oregon, 1951.

#### Attitude of members toward contents of newsletters

Members were asked what they liked best about the newsletter. Of those responding, 41 per cent preferred the general articles dealing with cooperative affairs. Another 35 per cent said the best part of the newsletter was the report of the manager. Slightly more than 12 per cent preferred the financial report. The remaining 12 per cent were divided among advertisements, jokes, and pictures.

Members were also asked to indicate what they liked least about the newsletter. Of the 77 who responded, it is significant to indicate

that 62 had no comment, had no dislikes, or liked all of the newsletter. Only 15 members had definite dislikes. It is recognized that no newsletter will necessarily have universal appeal.

## Entertainment Sponsored by Cooperative

Members were asked if their respective cooperatives sponsored any entertainment, such as potluck suppers and dances. A total of 105 members stated such events were held from time to time, 83 said no, and 4 did not know. Twenty-six of the members stated they always attended, 40 said they sometimes attended, and 30 never attended. Regular attendance at social events probably is not important in itself, but it may at least indicate membership interest. Members who attend these functions may take more interest in the business affairs of the cooperative.

If social events are successful, they must be carefully planned by the manager or a committee. Publicity is always desirable because it stimulates interest which in turn should increase attendance. Some farmer cooperatives have been highly successful in the entertainment events they sponsor. Members and their families had enjoyable times and usually increased their acquaintanceship.

## Members' Reaction to Management

### Manager

The members were asked if the manager was friendly and if he was capable. With reference to friendliness, 180 out of 192 members or 94 per cent said their manager was friendly (Table 1). Only one member said his manager was not friendly. Eleven did not answer this question mainly because they did not know the manager well enough to give what they believed to be a fair answer.

An overwhelming majority also believed the manager was capable. Of the 192 members interviewed, 164 or 85 per cent felt the manager of their cooperative had sufficient ability to be considered capable. Again, it is important to note that only 5 members felt their manager was not



Table 1. RESPONSES OF 192 FARMER COOPERATIVE MEMBERS CONCERNING FRIENDLINESS AND CAPABILITY OF MANAGER.

(Oregon, 1951)

Type of cooperative	Is manager friendly?			Is manager capable?		
	Yes	No	Not stated <sup>1</sup>	Yes	No	Not stated <sup>1</sup>
Purchasing .....	40	....	2	35	2	5
Grain .....	47	....	....	44	....	3
Dairy .....	43	....	8	38	....	13
Fruit and vegetable .....	50	1	1	47	3	2
Total .....	180	1	11	164	5	23

<sup>1</sup>Or did not know manager. In some cases manager was a new man.

capable. A total of 23 felt they could not answer the question mainly because they were not acquainted with their manager. Some of the managers were new in their positions and all members were not acquainted with them.

### Management policy

Members were asked if they obtained all the information they needed in regard to price, profits, losses, and what the manager might be thinking (Table 2). Generally speaking, the members did not rate the managers as high on these points as on friendliness and capability. With respect to both price and profit-loss information, about 25 per cent of the members felt they were kept in the dark more than was necessary. There may be some tendency on the part

Table 2. RESPONSES OF 192 FARMER COOPERATIVE MEMBERS CONCERNING MANAGEMENT POLICY.

(Oregon, 1951)

Type of cooperative	Is enough information obtained concerning:								
	Prices?			Profit-losses?			What manager thinks?		
	Yes	No	Not stated <sup>1</sup>	Yes	No	Not stated <sup>1</sup>	Yes	No	Not stated <sup>1</sup>
Purchasing ..	30	12	....	26	14	2	18	7	17
Grain .....	42	4	1	38	9	....	28	3	16
Dairy .....	42	8	1	42	8	1	34	4	13
Fruit and vegetable ..	39	13	....	41	11	....	36	13	3
Total .....	153	37	2	147	42	3	116	27	49

<sup>1</sup>In some cases members said they did not know if the manager gave them all the information concerning the present and future plans of the business.



of cooperative managers to give too little emphasis to keeping the members informed on these two important issues.

Sixty per cent of the members felt that the manager was keeping them reasonably well informed concerning present and future plans. More than 25 per cent felt they could not answer this question. Only 14 per cent felt they should know more about the manager's general feeling and policies of the board of directors concerning the operation of the cooperative.

## **Members' Opinions on Information Program**

Members were asked to rate 15 methods as to their effectiveness in keeping members informed (Table 3). Members were asked if they considered the methods listed to be of major or minor importance in keeping them informed about their cooperative and in establishing better working relationships and understanding. Where members had no experience with a particular method and had no idea whether it would be of major or minor importance, it was so indicated.

### **Courteous and efficient employees**

Farmer members stressed the importance of good and efficient employees more than anything else. Managers may, therefore, find it desirable to give close attention to employing personnel that works well with the members. There probably is no better way to build good will in the organization.

### **Financial reports**

Members believed that financial reports were the second most important method of keeping the membership informed and in creating better understanding. Members in all types of cooperatives thought highly of financial reports.

### **Annual meeting**

The annual meeting was considered to be of major importance by 85 per cent of members. The annual meeting was given a high rating in all types of cooperatives with grain marketing associations at the top.

### **Personal contacts**

Members felt personal contacts with the manager and other employees were highly important. In most cooperatives, managers had a good record of making themselves and other key employees readily available. This study indicates that members attached con-

siderable importance to being able to talk things over with the manager or other employees.

### Field men

Seventy-two per cent of the members said field men were of major importance. Field men ranked high in the minds of members because this was an easy way to obtain personal contacts. The field man is a technical expert who may be of considerable value to the farmer in producing and marketing the crop.

### Circular letters

Sixty-three per cent of the members sampled said circular letters were of major importance. Members probably liked circular letters because they contained information that helped them with their production and marketing problems or in the case of purchasing cooperatives, recommended the use of certain feeds, seeds, sprays, and other supplies which may increase the members' net incomes.

Table 3. ORDER OF IMPORTANCE ATTACHED BY 192 MEMBERS TO VARIOUS METHODS OF KEEPING THE MEMBERSHIP INFORMED.

(Oregon, 1951)

Item	Of major importance	Of minor importance	No experience
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
1. Courteous and efficient employees .....	98	2	....
2. Financial reports .....	92	6	2
3. Annual meeting .....	85	12	3
4. Personal contacts .....	75	21	4
5. Field men .....	72	22	6
6. Circular letters .....	63	30	7
7. Educational exhibits .....	52	32	16
8. Local discussion groups .....	48	36	16
9. Newsletters .....	46	46	8
10. 4-H club projects .....	44	35	21
11. FFA projects .....	44	33	23
12. Radio programs .....	28	43	29
13. Motion pictures .....	27	41	32
14. Contests and awards .....	20	43	37
15. Women and youth programs .....	13	29	58

### Educational exhibits

About half of the members interviewed believed educational exhibits were of major importance. It is interesting to note that among dairy cooperatives 76 per cent of the members felt educational exhibits were of major importance. This is understandable

because dairy farmers have found that educational work has done much to inform the consuming public about the nutritional value of dairy products.

### Local discussion groups

Local discussion groups can play an important part in improving membership understanding. Among the members interviewed, however, less than half said it was of major importance. Here is a real opportunity for the membership to learn more about the general principles of cooperation and their own cooperative.

### Newsletters

Forty-six per cent of the members indicated this method was of major importance. As indicated earlier, not all of the cooperatives in the sample published a newsletter. When the responses of only those who received a newsletter were tabulated, 64 per cent thought this method of helping them to be good members was of major importance.



### 4-H Club projects

Forty-four per cent of the members believed that 4-H Club projects were of major importance in making them better cooperative members. The interest stimulated in farm boys and girls by 4-H Club projects is undoubtedly reflected through the parents to some degree. Cooperation between parents and their children is necessary before success can be achieved in 4-H Club work.

### FFA projects

Members gave FFA projects the same rating as 4-H Club projects.

### Radio programs

Radio programs as well as the remaining methods to be described were given a relatively low rating by the members. It may be indicated that very few members have had any experience with radio programs in their cooperatives. This method of keeping members informed may have real value in the years ahead. Radio time usually is not as expensive as some people may believe.

### **Motion pictures**

Motion pictures and film strips received about the same rating as radio programs. Here again members have had little or no experience with this method of education, consequently, there may be some tendency to underestimate its value.

### **Contests and awards**

This method of keeping and building interest among the membership has not been employed widely in Oregon. Some members expressed interest in it and wanted to know the type and kind of contests that would be considered as appropriate.

### **Women and youth programs**

This method received the lowest rating. In nearly all cases the questions were answered by men. If this question had been asked the wives of members, it is possible that a greater percentage may have indicated this to be of major importance.

## **Opinions Concerning Responsibility of Members**

Cooperation is not a one-way street. Members can expect their cooperative to do certain things for them, but the membership also needs to do its part. Membership alone is not enough. It is necessary that members be well informed and active. The membership can reasonably expect the management to help keep them informed, but the farmers must be receptive and cooperative.

Members were asked to rate the three most important of five factors which were (1) loyalty, (2) patronage, (3) voting, (4) attending meetings, and (5) understanding cooperation. The ratings of the number one choice are shown in Table 4. Patronage and loyalty were considered to be of about equal importance. In purchasing and grain associations the members felt patronage was the most important responsibility. In dairy, and fruit and vegetable associations loyalty was given the top rating. Both loyalty and patronage are important. In fact, loyalty and patronage mean about the same thing. Members that patronize their cooperative also are loyal. Loyalty, however, is more inclusive and includes more than patronage. Patronage may have been selected as the most important responsibility because it is easier to understand than some of the others. The members interviewed, however, appeared to practice what they believed. A total of 177 members or 92 per cent said they used the cooperative all or most of the time. A total of 10 members said they sometimes patronized their cooperative and only 5 indicated they hardly ever used it.

Table 4. AN INDICATION OF WHAT 192 MEMBERS BELIEVED TO BE THEIR PRINCIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES, BY TYPE OF COOPERATIVE.

*(Oregon, 1951)*

Type of cooperative	First choices					
	Loyalty	Patronage	Voting	Attending meetings	Understanding cooperation	Did not know
Purchasing .....	10	16	2	4	3	7
Grain .....	8	25	2	---	4	8
Dairy .....	16	11	3	2	9	10
Fruit and vegetable..	27	16	2	1	3	3
Total .....	61	68	9	7	19	28

Fifty members believed patronage was their second most important responsibility. This means 60 per cent of those interviewed felt patronage was either first or second in importance in making them responsible and desirable members.

Understanding cooperation was given as the third most important member responsibility. Perhaps the reason this very important responsibility received a lower rating than some of the others is because it includes so much and yet nothing specific. For example, it means that farmers usually find it desirable to know what belonging to a cooperative means to them, how cooperatives operate, and what can be expected from this type of organization. Some farmers, for example, do not know that they are part-owners of the business. It is their business, not someone else's. If it fails, it is their own business that fails, not someone else's.

## General Feeling Toward Cooperative

### Reasons for becoming members

The opportunity to be able to buy for less or to be able to obtain a higher net return in selling was considered to be the most important reason for joining a cooperative (Table 5). However, members gave several other reasons for joining a cooperative. The other reasons given for becoming members usually can be translated into more income in the long run.\* For example, 35 out of 189 members an-

\* A study of membership problems in a milk marketing organization in Pennsylvania more than 20 years ago shows that the members gave about the same reasons for joining a cooperative as those in Oregon. See J. K. Stern, *Membership Problems in a Milk Marketing Organization*, Pennsylvania Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 256, May 1930, p. 5.

Table 5. REASONS 189 MEMBERS JOINED A FARMER COOPERATIVE.  
(Oregon, 1951)

Item	Number
Buy cheaper and/or sell for higher price (increase income) .....	81
Good or improved service .....	35
Did enough business with cooperative to obtain membership .....	18
Joined on own account without any real reason .....	13
Thought cooperatives would create more competition .....	10
Urged to join by friends .....	7
Would have an interest in the business .....	7
Do away with middleman's profits .....	6
Cooperatives are concerned with farmers' problems .....	5
Believe in cooperatives .....	5
Other .....	2
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>189</b>

swering this question joined a cooperative because it rendered either better service or a new service. A case in point would be a cooperative creamery with no other such outlet in the community.

A total of 18 members said they obtained their membership almost automatically. They did enough business with the cooperative to obtain a membership and then apparently continued to patronize it. A total of 13 members said they simply joined the cooperative without any real reason. Ten others joined because they thought a cooperative would create more competition in the local market.

#### Features of cooperatives liked best

A total of 163 members indicated what they liked best about their cooperative (Table 6). A total of 53 members said better

Table 6. WHAT 163 COOPERATIVE MEMBERS LIKED BEST ABOUT THEIR FARMER COOPERATIVE.  
(Oregon, 1951)<sup>1</sup>

Item	Number
Better prices (increase income) .....	53
Good service .....	49
Cooperative provides a ready market .....	19
Cooperative stabilizes prices—increases competition .....	12
Friendly, efficient employees .....	12
Cooperative is beneficial to members .....	7
Members help operate the cooperative .....	7
Other .....	4
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>163</b>

<sup>1</sup>Twenty-nine other members had no comment.

prices with another 12 indicating stabilized prices which may be another way of saying better prices and more income. Forty-nine rated good service as the best feature of their cooperative. Another 19 said cooperatives provided a ready market for their product which may mean better service than provided by private concerns.

### Features of cooperatives liked least



A total of 101 members indicated what they liked least about their cooperative (Table 7). The other 91 that were visited had no particular dislikes and appeared to be satisfied with the operation of their cooperative.

Of those having dislikes, 19 indicated poor or incomplete service. Examples were waiting several hours to unload grain, poor repair service, poor loading and/or unloading facilities and poor location. Another 19 members felt retains and other deductions were kept too long. Both of these criticisms of cooperatives may have considerable validity. With respect to patronage refunds and other deductions, some cooperatives keep their funds so long members wonder if they will ever receive them. There may be an economic need to

Table 7. WHAT 101 COOPERATIVE MEMBERS LIKED LEAST ABOUT THEIR FARMER COOPERATIVE.

(Oregon, 1951)<sup>1</sup>

Item	Number
Poor or incomplete service .....	19
Retain patronage refunds and other deductions too long .....	19
Poor and/or inefficient management .....	12
Lack of general efficiency .....	10
Unfair treatment (poor pooling arrangement) .....	6
Expanding too fast .....	5
Lack of field and price information .....	5
Lack of member support .....	4
Friction among directors and/or management .....	4
Give too much credit .....	3
Sometimes little or no saving .....	3
Cooperative is too large .....	3
Other .....	8
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>101</b>

<sup>1</sup>Ninety-one other members had no comment.

expand and build adequate reserves but boards of directors often may find it necessary to compromise to some extent so members can see some cash benefits without waiting too long. Some members have indicated that their cooperative is expanding too rapidly.

Poor and/or inefficient management was liked least by 12 members. Several of these members indicated that the poor managers had already been replaced. A manager cannot please everyone. The best policy for a manager to follow is to attempt to operate the cooperative as efficiently as possible and above all to treat all members fairly.

### The Ideal in Membership Attitude

In previous sections of this report the degree of participation and interest by cooperative members has been indicated. Members can, on the average, work more closely with their cooperative and thereby achieve greater success. Some members, however, have achieved or at least have approached the ideal in membership understanding and attitude. Still others have indicated they would like to properly discharge their responsibilities as members but often do not know what is expected of them. There is still another group that probably would be more active in their farmer cooperatives if a sound, continuous educational program was designed and carried forward by the management. Finally, there is a small group in most cooperatives that does little or nothing to contribute to the success of its organization, but expects all the rights and privileges. Even among these members, however, greater understanding may be achieved by good management and direction.



The purpose of this section is to indicate briefly the ideals in membership understanding and attitude. It may not be possible in some instances to achieve the ideal but continuous effort may be exerted to attain this goal.



### 1. Understand the principles of cooperation

It is essential that members understand the basic principles of cooperation. Perhaps this is the most important single element of membership understanding. A farmers' cooperative is an extension of the farmer's business into either marketing of farm produce or purchasing of supplies. A cooperative is operated for the benefit of the membership, is composed of members, and should, therefore, be run by the membership. In order to participate actively in the management of the cooperative through the board of directors, it is important that each member understand what his cooperative is striving to accomplish. For example, it is essential that members know their cooperative is striving to operate democratically (one-man-one-vote), on a nonprofit basis, and as efficiently as possible. There is no magic connected with successful farmer cooperative enterprises. Successful farmer cooperatives usually have built understanding among the membership.

There are responsibilities connected with being a good member. At all times farmer members need to keep in mind that their cooperative is an integral part of their business and that it deserves and requires their attention and active participation.

### 2. Be loyal to the cooperative

It is difficult for members to be loyal unless the cooperative is "loyal" to the members. When the cooperative is effectively serving the members, however, loyalty may come easily—particularly when the principles of cooperation are well understood.

It is important that the members stick with the cooperative during periods of temporary adversity. Members who desert their cooperative at the first sign of a storm are only fair weather patrons. Most of the highly successful farmer cooperatives have had periods when the members might have fared better if they had dropped out of the organization. The membership has an obligation in supporting its cooperative.

### 3. Be an understanding member

Each member has the responsibility of striving to establish policies for the association which will be fair to all. Members need to do careful and independent thinking, express honest opinions, but be open minded and good team workers at the same time. It often may be necessary for members to change their opinions to some degree to conform with those of others. Group activity inherently involves compromise. In other words, members need to respect the other

fellow's point of view—he may be right. Members need not compromise their convictions, however, unless they are reasonably certain it will be in the interest of the general membership.

There undoubtedly are times when some of the members will not agree with the policies established by the board of directors and carried forward by the manager. In such instances it is important to try and follow the policies, particularly if they meet with the approval of most of the members. When the policies of the board of directors, on the other hand, appear to be contrary to the best interest of the organization, steps need to be taken to elect new directors.

#### **4. Exercise the right to vote**

Frequently members do not exercise their right to vote. In cooperatives as well as democratic government, voting is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is important that members vote for and urge the election of directors, including younger members who are capable, aggressive, and willing to give close attention to the affairs of the association.

Members need to seek full information about the association and study its problems so they can vote intelligently and help adopt up-to-date methods and procedures. Once members have voted, however, they are obliged to abide by the decisions of the majority, even when they are in the minority. No member has the right to insist that his ideas always prevail.

#### **5. Follow established lines of organization and control**

This study indicated members frequently did not know whom to see or what to do when problems arose. Members may feel that they have the right to give orders to the manager and other employees of the association. It is appropriate to register complaints with the manager and discuss the affairs of the association. It is easy to see, however, that the manager and other employees cannot take their orders directly from each member. The board of directors should establish the policy of the organization in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the membership. It is the responsibility of the manager to carry out the policy previously established by the board of directors. As indicated earlier, members may and should deal directly with the manager or his staff on all matters such as prices, market information, and methods of grading. Members should never expect privileges from the association that are not available to others.

## 6. Include women in planning and organization

Women often play an insignificant role in farmer marketing and purchasing associations. It may be desirable to have a women's auxiliary in connection with the cooperative. The women may in this way stimulate interest in the whole family. Women spend a substantial part of the family income which makes it appropriate to include them in plans dealing with increasing net incomes.

Outstanding women in the community often may make excellent board members. The membership should always be on the alert for good director material. It is important to keep in mind that farm women often have a great deal of business sense. Women could play an important part in improving the quality of some boards of directors.

## 7. Do not expect too much from your cooperative

In the early years of cooperative organization, members were promised the impossible; consequently, there were many unnecessary failures because members were disappointed. Sometimes it is difficult to see whether the cooperative is serving the interests of its members. This may be particularly true when only a few years are considered. It is in the interest of farmers to work for and with their cooperatives even when increases in net income and service may appear to be small. In some segments of agriculture, cooperatives may render service as a stabilizing force. As long as the cooperative is serving the members, it should be supported wholeheartedly by them.

## Summary and Conclusions

A total of 192 members of 16 Oregon farmer cooperatives were interviewed to obtain an indication of membership understanding and attitude. On the average these members were 50 years of age, had been farming for almost 21 years, and had been members of a cooperative for 13 years.

Most members indicated that they liked the annual meeting of their cooperative but only 30 per cent of those interviewed attended the last meeting. The parts of the meeting liked the best were the manager's report and good speeches. Those having dislikes for the annual meeting listed such things as poor food, poor chairman, and trivial interruptions by members. It is apparent that members want an informative and well organized annual meeting.

The features of the newsletter liked the best were the general articles dealing with cooperative affairs and the manager's report. The chief criticism of the newsletter was that it contained too little information.

An overwhelming majority of the members indicated their manager was both friendly and capable. Only one member in 192 indicated his manager was not friendly and only 5 said their manager was not capable. With respect to prices and profit-loss information, about 25 per cent of the members felt they were kept in the dark more than was necessary.

Farmer members were asked what they thought of 15 methods that were or could be used to maintain favorable membership relations. Of these 15 methods, having courteous and efficient employees received the highest rating with 98 per cent of the members saying this was of major importance. Financial reports were listed as being of major importance by 92 per cent of the members, and the annual meeting was third with a rating of 85 per cent. Personal contacts, field men, and circular letters also received relatively high ratings as means of keeping the membership well informed. Radio programs, motion pictures, contests and awards, and women and youth programs were considered to be of minor importance by the majority in building a well informed membership. Farmers in Oregon, however, have had little experience with these methods.

Members believed their most important responsibility toward the cooperative was patronage. Loyalty to the cooperative was second in importance and understanding cooperation was third. Members practiced what they believed with respect to patronage. Ninety-two per cent indicated they patronized their cooperative all or most of the time.

Eighty-one members said they joined the cooperative in order to buy for less or to sell for a higher price; 35 said they joined to obtain improved service; and 18 did enough business with the cooperative to obtain an automatic membership.

The features of cooperatives liked the best were higher prices and good service. A total of 65 members ranked higher or more stable prices first and 49 ranked first the good service they received.

The features of their cooperative liked the least were poor or incomplete service, waiting too long for refunds, and poor management. However, 91 members had no dislikes at all which indicates that many members were well satisfied with their cooperative membership.

The ideal in membership understanding and attitudes may never be achieved but all good members strive to reach this goal. Probably the most important of these ideals is understanding the principles of cooperation although patronage, loyalty, voting, and having reasonable expectations of achievement also are important.