

# Worker Cooperatives support Occupy Wall Street...

The United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC) stands in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the Occupy movements around the world. As a national grassroots membership organization of worker cooperatives—businesses owned and democratically controlled by our worker members — we support and are honored to join you in this call for an economy organized to meet human needs.

We are heartened to see the beginnings of a genuine discussion and debate about different economic models — models that value fairness at their core. As many of us come together for the first time to discuss the problems that face us, and as we begin to collectively reimagine our economy and society, we believe it is critical to actively make space for all voices to be heard. We urge this new movement to remain open and plural.

## ...and we invite you to join us in occupying Main Street

**Cooperatives are the fastest growing socio-economic movement in the world, with close to one billion members.**

Worker cooperative businesses are in all sorts of industries: engineering, importing coffee, baking bread, doing web development, cleaning houses, nursing and home health care, running grocery stores, driving taxis, and more. But worker cooperatives are part of a much larger cooperative economy that includes credit unions, consumer coops, housing coops, agricultural producer coops, and rural electric coops — in the US, nearly 30,000 cooperative enterprises own over \$3 trillion in shared assets.<sup>1</sup>

**Cooperatives are based on values.**

Worker cooperatives are businesses that are owned and operated on democratic principles by the people who work in them. Because they are organized around the will, talents and needs of the human beings who work in them rather than the imperative of growth and ever-increasing profit margins, worker cooperatives have the capacity to promote and extend new, humane and imaginative ways of

meeting the material needs of people by producing and distributing goods and services in society.

When dozens, hundreds and thousands of these enterprises pool resources and cooperate with each other based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, a fundamental transformation of culture and society occurs. This has taken place most notably and enduringly in Mondragon, Spain, and the Emilia Romagna region of Italy, where worker coops drive the economy and fund and control social services, health care, retirement and education.

**The cooperative movement needs you. And the world needs the cooperative movement.**

As the Occupy movements have made clear, and as the UN recognized in declaring 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives, we need a new way forward to a better world. Cooperatives can be economic engines and laboratories for democracy — a powerful, practical part of building an economy and society that works for all its members.



## Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World

[www.usworker.coop](http://www.usworker.coop)

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Thank you to Coop Zone in Canada ([www.coopzone.coop](http://www.coopzone.coop)) for the inspiration and some words for this statement.

1. *University of Wisconsin, Research on Economic Impact of U.S. Cooperatives, 2008.*

# Cooperative Values and Principles

**Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.** In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. The cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice.

## **1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership**

Co-operatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

## **2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control**

Co-operatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organized in a democratic manner.

## **3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation**

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

## **4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence**

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter to agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

## **5th Principle: Education, Training and Information**

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

## **6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives**

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

## **7th Principle: Concern for Community**

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.