

Worker Co-ops



WORKER CO-OPS ARE OWNED BY THEIR EMPLOYEES. There are roughly 300 of them in business today, providing everything from home health care to taxi service. As with other types of co-ops, worker co-ops add significantly to the economies of their communities both employment and pay-rolls. They are also involved in their communities in other ways, contributing to charities and working to better the environment. Here are just some of the things they are doing.

Caring for the Community

Collective Copies, Amherst, Massachusetts. Community reinvestment has been a policy at this printing and duplicating co-op since its founding in 1983. Ten percent of its pre-tax profits are donated to student groups, community organizations and individuals. The contributions go to causes including labor and human rights, the environment, child development and homelessness. A bulletin board at one of the co-op's two locations is dedicated to non-violent action for peace.

Cooperative Home Care Associates, Bronx, New York. When this co-op was launched in 1985, the goal was not simply to provide employment for its worker-members. The co-op intended to offer a model for how the entire home health care industry could be improved. It has continued to pursue this goal, creating a non-profit home health care training organization called the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute. As both the co-op and the training organization continue to expand, more low-income home care providers are finding quality jobs.

Citybikes Worker Owned Cooperative, Portland, Oregon. The co-op makes contributions to bicycle advocacy groups, progressive media, local schools and others from a social investment fund made up of approximately 10 percent of net yearly profits. A committee meets once a month to decide how to distribute the funds. Citybikes has also worked closely with the Building Convergence project to promote environmentally preferred building materials. Every Thursday morning, the co-op also allows a health clinic to use the store's parking lot and back room to serve day laborers and other low-income neighborhood people.

Rainbow Grocery, San Francisco, California. The co-op hosts community-oriented special events, contributes to community groups, and maintains a commitment to environmental awareness as part of its mission. Last year, more than 80 community groups received contributions from the co-op, including a community economic development organization serving a low-income area near the store, and WAGES,

or Women’s Action to Gain Economic Security, a non-profit organization that develops worker-owned residential cleaning services for immigrants. The co-op’s environmental mission is partially fulfilled through an extensive in-store recycling program and an ecological education program for workers and customers. The co-op also made a significant investment in energy-efficient lighting for the store.

Equal Exchange, Canton, Massachusetts. The co-op has developed its Interfaith Coffee Program to connect religious organizations with poor farmers in the developing world. Under partnerships established with churches, fair trade coffee is sold to numerous congregations. Fair trade coffee guarantees that farmers receive an income adequate to feed their families and allow their children to go to school rather than work the fields.

Community Pharmacy, Madison, Wisconsin. Within its mission of providing comprehensive health care options, Community Pharmacy organizes public workshops on pharmaceutical and alternative health subjects. The co-op’s Outreach Team promotes consumer education in the Madison area while a community donation program supports local agencies that promote health. Community Pharmacy also publishes pamphlets and a bi-monthly newsletter.

Union Cab, Madison, Wisconsin. The co-op offers taxi service to people in wheelchairs at no additional cost in the evening and on weekends, when few special transportation services are available. The co-op bears the additional expense for the special vehicles at a loss to make sure people in wheelchairs are not stranded.

Caring for the Environment

Red Sun Press, Boston, Massachusetts. The co-op is a recognized leader in the printing industry for its use of environmentally preferred products. It uses paper with a high post-consumer waste content, tree-free alternatives, and vegetable-based inks. Red Sun recently received the Massachusetts “Buy Recycled and Environmentally Preferred Products” Business Award for its pioneering role in promoting recycled paper for printing. The co-op also has a donation program that supports community and grassroots organizations.