



Cooperative Minds Virtual Field Trip

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Understand the intricacies of how agricultural cooperatives operate.
- Draw conclusions about the benefits and tradeoffs of participating in agricultural cooperatives.
- Discover the importance of communication and collaboration in agribusiness.
- Understand the 7 cooperative principles.
- Analyze an existing cooperative against the 7 principles.

OVERVIEW

Agricultural cooperatives, or co-ops, have been around for more than 250 years—since the beginning of the industrial revolution. One of the first known examples of a co-op is from the 1860's when a group of farmers fought for restrictions on grain-storage and railroad fees. While 96% of American farms are family-owned, many partner with other farms to collaborate towards common goals and agricultural success. Cooperatives are like corporations in many ways but, instead of being owned primarily by shareholders, they are owned by their members. Agricultural cooperatives are typically owned by their farmer and rancher members. CHS, the largest cooperative in the United States, incorporates farmers, ranchers, and other local cooperatives in its membership and operates in 50 states and 65 countries.

There are many benefits to being part of an agricultural co-op. Together, members can buy the resources they need for their farms and ranches in larger quantities, so it is cost-effective for all. This is called leveraging buying power. Some members also sell their farm products, such as grain, back to the co-op—giving them greater market access. The members of a co-op often work together with their co-op partner through every stage of the agricultural business—from prepping soil and seeds to harvesting and selling grains and even working together to get the most nutritious feed.

This virtual field trip focuses on the business and occupational elements of agricultural cooperatives. Co-ops aim to promote positive communication and effective collaboration between farmers, ranchers, consumers, and those involved in agriculture.

MATERIALS

- Pencil
- Device with internet access, one per student
- **WebQuest** student handout, one per student*
- **Talk the Talk/Walk the Walk** student handout, one per student*
- **Analyze a Co-op** student handout, one per student*

Note: See the facilitation options throughout for tips on remote learning.

BEFORE THE FIELD TRIP (30–45 MINUTES)

1. Engage students in the upcoming activities by asking one or more of the following open-ended questions:
 - What do you think of when you hear the word “cooperative”? Do you think of it as an adjective or a noun?
 - Have you ever heard the word “cooperative” used regarding farming?” What about other kinds of businesses?
 - What do you think an “agricultural cooperative,” or co-op, does?
2. Explain the concept of an “agricultural cooperative,” or co-op, in which farmers and ranchers have the ability to purchase needed resources by leveraging their buying power.
3. Distribute one **WebQuest** handout to each student. Read through the instructions.
4. Explain that in preparation for learning the intricacies of how a co-op works during the virtual field trip, they will be investigating the multi-faceted elements of an agricultural co-op in order to draw their own conclusions in the end.
5. Give students time to explore and answer questions.
6. Invite students to share their conclusions with the class.

FACILITATION OPTIONS

If your students are learning in a remote environment, consider the following:

- Introduce the **WebQuest** handout via screen share.
- Collect responses virtually via a learning management platform, live video, shared online document, photos, etc.

DURING THE FIELD TRIP (45–60 MINUTES)

1. Remind students that an agricultural co-op is about positive communication and collaboration to solve big problems, achieve common goals, and find mutual benefit.
2. Explain that during the virtual field trip, students will be recording instances and examples of positive communication and collaboration.
3. Distribute the **Talk the Talk/Walk the Walk** handout. Read through the instructions.
4. Play the Power of Cooperatives Virtual Field Trip, reminding students to record their thoughts on their charts throughout.
5. After the Virtual Field Trip, have students share a few of their ideas and reflect on their key takeaways.
6. Optional: Conduct a discussion on how many of the elements that students recorded are present in the classroom. Debate whether a classroom can be operated as a form of a cooperative.

FACILITATION OPTIONS

If your students are learning in a remote environment, consider the following:

- Use screen share to play the virtual field trip.
- Have students watch asynchronously and share their thoughts using the tool of your choice (online document, photo, learning management system etc.).
- Use live video conferencing or chat rooms to conduct a whole group discussion.

AFTER THE FIELD TRIP (45–60 MINUTES)

1. Distribute the **Analyze a Co-op** handout to each student.
2. After reviewing the seven principles of a successful co-op, revisit the question from during the VFT: Can the classroom be operated as a form of a cooperative? Instruct students to record their thoughts and notes in the box at the bottom of page 1.
3. Taking the principles into account, ask students to brainstorm any co-ops they can think of. Record a list on the board. Anticipated responses might include REI, Ace Hardware, Ocean Spray, Associated Press, etc.
 - **Note:** *If students have trouble thinking of examples, you can provide them with some from the list above or from [this article](#).*
4. With a partner or small group, students should choose one co-op to research. They can use the chart on page 2 of the handout to organize their notes.
 - **Note:** *You can choose to assign co-ops, allow students to choose from a curated list, only allow one group/students to choose each co-op, etc.*

FACILITATION OPTIONS

If your students are learning in a remote environment, consider:

- Facilitating this activity as a whole group discussion via web conferencing and completing analysis together.
- If students work independently, direct them to submit multimedia presentations via a learning management system or shared online document.

5. Instruct students to use their research to create a multimedia presentation in which they analyze the co-op model and whether the organization adheres to the seven principles.
6. Provide an opportunity for each student/group to present their research and the result of their analysis to their peers.

POSSIBLE LEARNING EXTENSION:

- Challenge students to turn their classroom into a profitable cooperative. They should determine a process for electing a Board of Directors and identify the requirements for membership in the cooperative. After deciding what to sell, they should come to a consensus on how they will collect sales and how they will make a profit and distribute those profits to the members. Throughout, they should reflect on if they are adhering to the seven principles.

NATIONAL CONTENT STANDARDS

CCSS in English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.C

Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.D

Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.D

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7

Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

National AFNR Content Standards (Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources)

ABS.01.

Apply management planning principles in AFNR businesses.

ABS.01.03.

Devise and apply management skills to organize and run an AFNR business in an efficient, legal, and ethical manner.

ABS.04.01.02.a.

Categorize the characteristics of the types of ownership structures used in AFNR businesses (e.g., sole proprietorships, cooperatives, partnerships, and corporations).

5. What careers or jobs are present in an agricultural cooperative? Can an agricultural co-op function with only farmers?

6. Visit <https://www.chsinc.com/> and summarize the services CHS provides to farmers:

Draw Conclusions

Based on your investigation, would you recommend that large-scale farmers join a co-op or not? Provide an explanation for your opinion.

Directions

As you watch the virtual field trip, use the chart below to record instances or examples of positive communication and collaboration used and present in an agricultural co-op.

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION	COLLABORATION

1. Review the seven principles of a successful co-op below:

1. Co-op membership is voluntary and must be open to anyone who uses the co-op's services and is willing to accept the stated responsibilities of membership.
2. Co-ops are controlled by their members using a democratic process. The members decide how the business is run and who leads it. The leaders are responsible to the members, who all have equal voting rights.
3. Members benefit from a co-op's profits in proportion to their transactions with the co-op.
4. Co-ops are independent. Any agreement with another organization must maintain the co-op's democratic control by its members.
5. Co-ops provide education and training for its members, which allows the members to contribute to the success of their co-op. Co-ops also inform the public about the benefits of cooperation.
6. Co-ops work together with other cooperatives locally, nationally, and internationally.
7. Co-ops are community-minded, and they work toward the sustainable development of their communities by utilizing local resources and investing locally.

Let's Revisit

Can our classroom be run as a form of a cooperative? Record your thoughts, questions, and conclusions here:

2. Which co-op will you be researching? _____

3. Use the chart below to organize your research:

How can a person become a member of this co-op?	
What are the responsibilities of a co-op member?	
How is the administration of the co-op formed?	
Does this co-op work in cooperation with any other?	
Does this co-op provide education or training for its members? For the public? Is it free?	
In what cities, states, and/or countries does this co-op operate?	
How does this co-op help local communities?	

What's Your Analysis?

Based on your research and the seven principles, do you believe this organization to be a good example of a co-op? Why or why not?