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Co-op Month Web Site Offers New Materials for October Celebrations, Including 25 Pages of 'Community Commitment' Case Studies

Washington, D.C.—A host of new tools to help individual cooperatives with Co-op Month celebrations in October are now available on the Co-op Month web site, **www.coopmonth.coop**.

Included are an eye-catching new Co-op Month logo, three different print advertisements, a searchable database of approximately 14,000 co-ops, extensive tips for how to celebrate Co-op Month, and nearly a dozen sample documents ranging from draft newsletter articles to newspaper op-eds. The logo and ads can be downloaded and adapted locally.

All the materials reflect the 2004 Co-op Month theme, *Cooperatives: Owned by Our Members, Committed to Our Communities*.

Building on that theme, the centerpiece of the web site is 25 pages of case studies highlighting how cooperatives in each sector are giving back to their communities. The case studies feature examples from nearly 100 different co-ops and co-op organizations. For those not featured in the case studies, the web site has a "community commitment gallery" on which co-ops post materials that highlight their own projects.

"We are really excited to be able to offer a comprehensive and innovative package this year," said Roger Eldridge of the National Milk Producers Federation, chair of the National Cooperative Month Planning Committee for 2004. "The website includes a long list of items never before offered. These are things co-ops have asked for to help them organize their efforts. It amounts to a 'one stop shop' for co-ops looking to design or improve their Co-op Month celebrations in 2004."

Eldridge singled out the case studies as both useful and "inspiring" reading. "They show the breadth and depth of cooperatives' commitment to their communities and should help any co-op looking to expand its community involvement," he said.

In addition, Eldridge said, the case studies are tangible proof of what sets co-ops apart from investor-owned businesses. "Cooperatives are owned largely by the people who live and work in the communities they serve," he said. "That gives them a different perspective from businesses owned by distant investors. Sure, investor-owned

corporations make charitable contributions. But for co-ops it's more personal. It's a critical part of what we do and why we do it."

Eldridge encouraged all co-ops and co-op organizations to go to www.coopmonth.coop and view the new and exciting things the web site has to offer. In addition, he asked co-op organizations to promote the web site among their own networks. "With the tools provided this year, every co-op, from the smallest to the largest, can find new ways to celebrate Co-op Month in 2004," he said.

Eldridge added that next year's Co-op Month effort will build on this year, with a planned research project to better quantify co-ops' community investments. "I'm excited that the coming year's project will be useable by co-ops for years to come," he said. Here is a rundown on this year's website:

- A single downloadable PDF of the entire Co-op Month tool kit that can be distributed electronically.
- The new, animated **logo** puts in a single image the notion of Co-op Month plus the breadth of the co-op sectors. It can be downloaded in a wide variety of formats.
- The **print ads** are also available in a variety of formats and with considerable flexibility to resize and customize to meet local needs.
- The **case studies** are available in three formats including Microsoft Word. The Word version allows co-ops to add highlights of their own projects to the documents.
- The 14 pages of **tips for celebrating Co-op Month** include hundreds of ideas that co-ops can draw from. They also include ways to demonstrate community commitment year round.
- The **sample documents** include news stories, opinion articles and news releases for use internally and externally. All reflect the core 2004 Co-op Month messages.
- The searchable **online directory**, in addition to including 14,000 co-ops already, allows individual co-ops to add their own information to the list.
- The **community commitment gallery** allow co-ops to post press releases, brochures, photos and materials from their own community projects.

Also on the web site is a Co-op Primer with facts and figures and a comparison between co-ops and investor-owned corporations. Still available are materials from Co-op Month 2003, including details of a national opinion survey in which consumers rated co-ops more trustworthy than investor-owned corporations. Rounding out the site is an "About Co-op Month" section with background, history and organizational structure.

Eldridge thanked members of the Co-op Month Committee for their contributions to the 2004 effort and encouraged all co-ops to celebrate Co-op Month actively this year.

The Co-op Month Committee contracts with the National Cooperative Business Association to coordinate work on Co-op Month. Other members of the committee are ACDI/VOCA, CHF International, Cooperative Development Foundation, Credit Union National Association, National Association of Federal Credit Unions, National Association of Housing Cooperatives, National Cooperative Bank, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, National Farmers Union, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative, National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, Overseas Cooperative Development Council, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Cooperative Month has been celebrated annually since the mid-1920s. It became a national event in 1964. In 1971 responsibility for Co-op Month was turned over to cooperative organizations themselves. Today, the *National Cooperative Month Planning Committee* selects a *theme*, prepares supporting materials, conducts public relations activities and provides financial support for Co-op Month. To ensure the involvement of all cooperative sectors, each year a different national co-op organization chairs the planning committee, raises funds and directs activities.