



Weekly Digest

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Editorial

Welcome to the fourth issue of the *Weekly Digest*.

We continue to receive much positive feedback about the need for and importance of the *Digest*. However, like many new ventures we have been suffering from a few technical problems finding a way for all our readers around the world to be able to access the *Digest*. We are working on these and in the near future will also be making copies of the *Digest* available in PDF as well as Microsoft Word formats.

To assist us in making this new publication as user friendly as possible we are establishing a small and representative reference group. Its task will be to ensure that the *Digest* develops along lines consistent with members' needs and interests. In a similar vein, we will shortly be calling for nominations for the ICA's Communication Committee. Along with the proposed survey of members' communications needs these initiatives are designed to ensure that all our activities in this area are relevant and effective. We believe that the ICA is doing much that is of value to its members. The communication challenge is to make sure our members are aware of these activities.

European Commission Adopts "Communication on Co-operatives"

The European Commission believes that the potential of co-operatives has not been fully utilised and that their image should be improved at national and European levels. These findings are contained in a recent *Communication on the Promotion of Co-operative Societies* which the Commission adopted on 23 February 2004. See: europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/entrepreneurship/coop/consultation/index.htm



The *Communication* has been welcomed by Dame Pauline Green, President ICA Europe (*photo opposite*). "The Commission has been very positive in its assessment of the future role of co-operatives in an enlarged Europe" she said. "This is very encouraging. I am particularly pleased that it acknowledges the key role played by ICA Europe and the Co-ordinating Committee of European Co-operative Associations (CCACE) in advancing the interests of co-operatives in Europe."

The *Communication* is the result of an extensive consultation process. Responses to the initial "*Co-operatives in Enterprise Europe*" discussion paper were received from over 48 co-operative organisations, including the ICA. The new document reflects the main issues highlighted during this consultation phase. It also establishes what the Commission, Member States, and co-operatives themselves can do to exploit the business potential of co-operatives.

Editor: Garry Cronan
Email: cronan@ica.coop

ICA
15 Route des Morillons
1218 Grand Saconnex
Geneva, Switzerland
Tel +41 22 929 8888
Fax +41 22 798 4122
Website : www.ica.coop

Its attention is directed towards three key areas:

- The promotion of the greater use of co-operatives across Europe by improving the visibility, characteristics and understanding of the sector.
- The further improvement of the co-operative legislation in Europe.
- The maintenance and improvement of co-operatives' place and contribution to the European Community objectives.

Twelve specific recommendations for action are proposed. They include legislation and government policy, working with co-operative representative organisations, employment creation, regional development, financial instruments, statistical collection, business support, education and training. Particular reference is made to the ICA Co-operative Identity Statement. The Commission firmly states that when drafting new laws governing co-operatives national legislation should be based on the ICA co-operative definition, values and principles.

Pauline Green noted that, "the achievement of this EU wide *Communication* can be added to other recent international co-operative successes including the UN Guidelines, ILO Recommendation 193 and the European Co-operative Statute. All of these are important building blocks for a more supportive environment. They are testament to the hard work of many co-operative organisations, not least the ICA".

Within the European Union (EU) there are around 300,000 co-operatives, providing 4.8 million jobs. They exist in all Member States and accession or candidate countries. At the same time they influence the every day life of more than 140 million citizens who are members of co-operatives in Europe. Please contact the ICA Regional Director for Europe, Gabriella Sozánski at icaeurope@ica.coop or visit the website at www.ica.coop/europe for more information.

Meeting Considers Implications of Co-operative Research

ICA President, Ivano Barberini and Director-General, Iain Macdonald met on 24 February in Milan, with Professor Mario Mazzoleni, Bocconi University of Italy and members of his staff (*photo opposite*). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss research he has undertaken on co-operatives.

Preliminary results of the research were presented to the ICA Board's Genoa meeting last December. The objective of the study was to gain an insight into members' expectations of the future role of co-operatives in a global environment. It is largely based on the results of a survey of ICA members carried out in 2003 by the GruppoMazzoleni. The survey had a response rate of approximately 29% (74 out of 254 questionnaires were completed and returned). Some interesting facts emerged.



Members were asked their views of the future economic and social role of co-operatives. Over 83% expect their economic role to increase, 13% think it will decrease over time. This compares to 73% who expect the social role of co-operatives to become more relevant in the future. Overall, 90% of the sample thinks the co-operative movement will continue to grow and develop. Opinions on co-operative principles are largely positive, although some are seen as more important than others.

Over 95% of members think globalisation has massively affected people's lives. Not surprisingly, increased competitiveness is seen as the key to survival and relevance. Members had mixed views as to the benefits of this process. However, in most cases globalisation is considered an opportunity; although competing with multinationals, while retaining your co-operative values is identified as a potential problem.

Only 33% of the sample thinks international institutions are supportive of the co-operative movement. In fact almost half believe these institutions are indifferent or non-supportive of co-operatives. The figures would seem to confirm the importance of and need for the ICA's work to create a more supportive international environment for co-operatives among these global institutions.

The on-going importance of co-operative legislation is confirmed. Over 80% believe amendments to co-operative legislation in their country are needed, with 77% expecting these to occur. Importantly, 82% of the sample has been actively involved in drawing up and reviewing relevant legislation – 17% have not.

Based on this research and further analysis, Professor Mazzoleni and his team are developing guidelines for possible future action. The final report including an extensive analysis of the survey results and suggested guidelines is expected to be available within a couple of months. Professor Mazzoleni can be contacted on gruppomazzoleni@mariomazzoleni.com or visit his website www.mariomazzoleni.com.

Help Us to Help You!

The ICA relies on members to provide us with up to date information including e-mail and website addresses. A recent review by our Database Officer at Head Office in Geneva revealed the following:

Of our current 238 members, 210 (88%) have advised us of relevant e-mail addresses while 157 (66%) have known websites. Of the recipients of the Weekly Digest – contacts within ICA member organisations and structures -- we have approximately 50 to 60 non-delivered e-mails. This means some of our members are missing out on this new publication.



We need your help to ensure that we have your most up to date contact details. Good reliable databases are essential to ensuring that our communications efforts reach the right people. If you have any doubts about whether we have your complete contact details please contact Marie-Claude Baan (*photo*) at directory@ica.coop.

Promoting the Exchange of Best Practice



Through its wide membership base, the ICA has access to much of the latest international research relating to co-operatives. The gathering and exchange of this experience is an important part of the ICA's work. One way in which this occurs is through study tours and organised visits to the ICA offices. The most recent visitor to the ICA Head Office was Associate Professor Michael Gertler, a sociologist from the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada.

Professor Gertler met with the ICA's Director General, Iain Macdonald (*see photo opposite*) to discuss a range of issues, including sustainable environmental practices of co-operatives, fair trade and membership issues. Mr. Macdonald indicated that issues of fair trade were becoming an increasing priority within the ICA development programme. "It is no accident that fair trade is often synonymous with co-operatives", he said. "This ethical base along with membership focus is what is at the heart of the co-operative revival in many parts of the world", he added. Professor Gertler's research interests focus on organisational innovations that support agricultural diversification, agricultural co-operatives, the social ecology of sustainable resource use and sustainable rural communities.

Inspiring Examples of Co-operative Success

ICA Director of Development Jan-Eirik Imbsen and Director of Finance Guy Malacrida recently visited Costa Rica to participate in the ICA's Regional Office for the Americas annual planning meetings. While there and at the invitation of ICA Regional Director, Manuel Mariño, they visited two local co-operatives.

"This is normal practice for us" Jan-Eirik Imbsen said. "We take every opportunity we can to visit co-operatives in the regions we visit." The two co-operatives were CoopeAgri and CoopeSilencio, both of which are members of the Forestry Network established by the ICA with the support of SOCODEVI (Canada). The aim of the Forestry Network project is to strengthen the socio-economic capacity of co-operatives involved with sustainable forestry in the Americas.

CoopeAgri



At CoopeAgri, Mr Imbsen said "we were shown the coffee and sugar processing plants. We also saw how they process fertiliser from the waste products of the coffee and sugar processing" (*see photo*). Research carried out at the co-operative's own research farm showed this organic fertiliser to yield very impressive results, up to 12 times that of commercially available non-organic fertilisers. Forest conservation is another of the main activities of this very impressive co-operative.



CoopeSilencio

CoopeSilencio was founded in 1973 by a group of "campesinos" (farmers) who wanted a better life for their families. The village is located near the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, south of the city of Quepos. It is surrounded by tropical forest on the northeast, and is bordered by the Savegre River to the northwest. Since its beginning, the co-operative has focused on sustainable agriculture. Its mission is to "promote the social and economic development of its families through profitable enterprises and to protect the environment that surrounds them." The co-operative owns almost 1000 hectares (2400 acres) which are used for African palm tree cultivation, reforestation, conservation of primary rainforest, and ecotourism.



Río Savegre Wildlife Rescue Centre

<http://www.costaricawildlife.org> was begun in October 2000 as a pilot conservation project by CoopeSilencio. The only wildlife rehabilitation centre in the area had recently closed its doors, and those animals needed a place to live. CoopeSilencio's mission is to preserve Costa Rican wildlife diversity by rehabilitating wild animals which have been injured or orphaned and reintroducing them to their natural habitat. They provide shelter and veterinary attention to wild animals that have been confiscated from the illegal pet trade.

Mr Imbsen observed that "in over 25 years of international development I have rarely seen more worthwhile and inspiring co-operative development projects. They deserve every success. It shows once again the success of the co-operative model in helping to create a better life for people. Not only that, they are also outstanding examples of fair trade practices and environmental sustainability".