

## Farmer Co-ops: Putting Food On Your Table

by Chuck Conner

(NAPSA)—The famous chef and food writer James Beard once said, “Food is our common ground, a universal experience.” From potluck dinners to after-church brunch to a holiday meal, food is the tangible connection between us and our communities.

### Food and Farming

However, despite its importance and necessity in our lives, many Americans have limited knowledge of how food gets to the dining table. Farming has evolved greatly over the decades, with the variety, quality, availability and affordability of food improving steadily. Many of these improvements in food production and supply exist in large measure because individual farmers formed cooperatives to remain competitive in an ever-changing agricultural environment.

### Farmer-Owned Cooperatives

Farmer co-ops are made up of thousands of individual farmers who work together to succeed in a global marketplace. For more than 100 years, they have allowed farmers to pool their risks and better manage agriculture’s volatility.

Co-ops also provide their members with all the tools necessary to run successful farming operations, including credit, financing, feed, seed, fertilizer, fuel and other crop production products. Farmers and ranchers sit on and govern their co-op boards, and guide or make all important decisions. This hands-on level of involvement ensures that co-ops are accountable to their farmer members and the American public.

### Co-op Creations

Some of the most innovative products and recognizable brands on grocery store shelves are co-op creations, providing members with the opportunity to partici-



**For more than 100 years, farmer-owned cooperatives have provided individual farmers with a stake in the marketplace.**

pate in the food and fiber system, from the farm to retail. Whether it’s grains, dairy, meat, fruits, nuts or vegetables, farmers rely on co-ops to help them grow, process, market and deliver Americans’ meals.

### Sharing the Benefits

And the benefits go well beyond the farm. Farmer co-ops provide over 250,000 jobs in rural America, with a total payroll in excess of \$8 billion. Profits of the co-ops are returned to their members and cycle through their local communities, fueling economic growth.

### The Cooperatives’ Voice

Since 1929, the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC) has been the voice of America’s farmer cooperatives. The majority of America’s 2 million farmers and ranchers belong to one or more farmer cooperatives.

Supporting farmer co-ops means building stronger communities and a stronger America. So the next time you are gathered around the dinner table, remember to give thanks to the farmers and farmer co-ops that made your meal possible. You can learn more at [www.ncfc.org](http://www.ncfc.org).

*Chuck Conner is president of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.*