

UW Center for Cooperatives 2025 Impact Report

In 2025, the UW Center for Cooperatives (UWCC) fulfilled our mission of delivering collaborative, innovative, and research-informed programming to help people start and sustain cooperatives that meet the needs of communities in Wisconsin and beyond. During times of social and economic change, many groups turn to cooperatives as a solution, and this year was no exception. We received more requests than ever from people interested in starting cooperatives. Read on to learn more about our programs and accomplishments in 2025.

Cultivating Fertile Ground for Cooperatives to Thrive

Part of UWCC's work is fostering an ecosystem of co-op friendly policies, capital, and professional service providers that make it possible for cooperatives to launch and thrive in Wisconsin.



UWCC cooperative development specialists Kristin Forde Hurckes and Charity Schmidt provided in-person testimony at the Assembly Ways and Means Committee hearing in April.

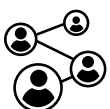
2025 Ecosystem Highlights



In April, UWCC staff testified in support of Assembly Bill 17, aimed at encouraging business transitions to employee ownership. The bill passed the Wisconsin Assembly unanimously in June; however, its companion, Senate Bill 21, did not make it to the Senate floor before the legislative session ended. We are encouraged by the bipartisan support and look forward to working toward its passage in the next session.



Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's (WEDC) Cooperative Development Grant Program, which provides \$200,000 annually to established and new co-ops for development related expenses, was oversubscribed for the third year in a row. UWCC supported over half the 2025 grant recipients and provided co-op education and resources to the WEDC staff.



We expanded our work in Milwaukee through participation in the Milwaukee Employee Ownership Support Network. The network, hosted by UW-Milwaukee's Small Business Development Center, includes government, non-profit, and financial institution representatives committed to promoting employee ownership to local economic developers and service providers.

Education, Training, and Resources for Co-ops

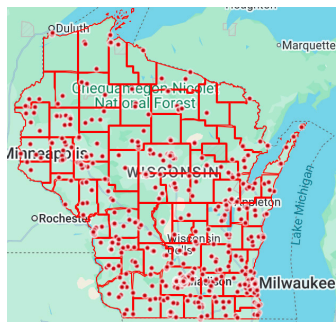


During the CCMA 2025 plenary session “Everyone Welcome? Challenging the Myth of Inclusion in Food Co-ops,” co-op leaders discussed how even with the best intentions, exclusion can still show up in food co-op spaces.

UWCC develops regional workshops, national conferences, and tailored education for cooperative leaders from Wisconsin and beyond.

Updated WI Co-op Directory

In 2025, we updated the Wisconsin Cooperative Directory, which showcases the 683 co-ops incorporated in our state. The directory can be sorted by sector, membership type, county, or legislative district. Three interactive maps offer different views of cooperatives across the state.



Expanded Spanish Resources

UWCC expanded its Spanish-language resources to make cooperative information more accessible. The updated website features *Cómo Desarrollar Cooperativas: Una Guía Práctica* and a new flyer, “Que es una Cooperativa?,” which is available for use at community events, schools, churches, and other outreach settings. The website also now includes:

- A Spanish-language form for groups to request technical assistance from UWCC.
- A comprehensive list of Spanish-language resources making it easier to find trusted educational tools in one place.

UWCC also held four Co-op 101 sessions in Spanish, reaching over 100 people, and collaborated with La Voz de Beloit to share the co-op model with new audiences in southern Wisconsin through video clips, interviews, and a social media campaign.

2025 Education Highlights

- 35** co-op employees attended Cooperative Roots, our training for new employees of cooperatives.
- 97** co-op board members attended UWCC's director training series.
- 362** leaders from 84 co-ops attended CCMA, the largest national gathering of food co-ops annually.
- 1,550+** co-op leaders participated in UWCC educational programs.

“

CCMA provided meaningful takeaways and a strong reminder of why we do this work. It was both professionally valuable and personally reinvigorating.

—CCMA 2025 attendee

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CCMA 2025 attendees visit Eco3 Urban Farm in Duluth, Minnesota, during the Connecting Community and Expanding Access through Innovation and Partnership Tour.

Developing New Cooperative Businesses

UWCC supports new cooperatives and businesses exploring converting to cooperative ownership through technical assistance, startup and transition planning, and guidance on management and governance. We received a record number of requests for support in 2025.



UWCC helped Respite Care Association of Wisconsin (RCAW) launch a Cooperative Development Technical Assistance Program that offers free, hands-on coaching in business planning, governance, marketing, and more to groups who have completed RCAW's free online home care co-op training. Start-Up Grants are also available for groups ready to formally launch their cooperative.



UWCC became an approved provider in the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) Technical Assistance program. The program, funded by the US Treasury, provides specialized assistance to very small and/or socially or economically disadvantaged small businesses seeking access to capital. Eligible co-ops can receive up to \$1,000 in free assistance from approved TA providers such as UWCC.

We were thrilled to welcome Dendroyka as Wisconsin's newest worker co-op. Dendroyka is the company behind Landscape, a software platform that supports land stewardship and conservation management. Dendroyka converted to a worker co-op with four employees in 2025. They received a WEDC Cooperative Development Grant along with support from UWCC and the ICA Group.



2025 Co-op Development Highlights

3

new co-ops launched, including a farmers market and a worker owned software company.

37

active groups or cooperatives that received direct technical assistance.

60+

requests for support were submitted by individuals, organizing groups, and co-ops.

“

I love working with UWCC.

Creating a mutualistic infrastructure is extremely challenging... I value this organization so much for helping to keep sustainability and community and the cooperative ethos at the heart of what we do.

—Technical assistance recipient ”

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Logger and Trucker Co-op Purchases Chip Mill

In October, Timber Professionals Cooperative Enterprises (TPCE), a cooperative of loggers and truckers from Wisconsin and Michigan, closed on the purchase of a wood chip mill in Shawano County. In 2020, UWCC and USDA began supporting timber industry businesses to form cooperatives in response to the closure of a large pulp and paper mill in Wisconsin Rapids. One of the first cooperatives was ultimately not able to purchase the Wisconsin Rapids facility, however the organizing entity, the Timber Professionals Cooperative, continued to actively look for opportunities to purchase or develop forest industry businesses that would fulfill their mission of improving the livelihoods of loggers and truckers and ensuring the future of the region's forest products industry. TPCE incorporated in 2023, built their membership, and worked diligently to raise the capital needed for the mill purchase.



Researching the Cooperative Model

UWCC's research reflects the Wisconsin Idea—it is driven by real-world cooperative experiences and informs our education, outreach, and development programming. Current projects explore member experiences, governance, and the potential impacts of governance on social and economic performance.

2025 Research Highlights

Cooperative Governance Research Initiative (CGRI)

In December, UWCC released *Findings From the Cooperative Governance Research Initiative 2024*. The report features data on the governance practices of the 436 cooperatives that participated in the 2024 CGRI survey.

Wisconsin Worker Co-op Study

This study, completed in 2025, explored workers' perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of participating in collective businesses. Two manuscripts featuring different aspects of the findings are in development.

Global Dialogue on Cooperatives

In July, the team presented research findings at the International Cooperative Alliance Conference on Cooperative Research, which was held jointly with the annual Association of Cooperative Educators (ACE) Institute. Yanni Liang, PhD shared findings from the Wisconsin Worker Cooperative Study and presented an advanced analysis of the CGRI data that explores the relationship between cooperative governance and organizational performance. Courtney Berner convened and led a panel on "How Governance Research is Informing Co-op Education, Development, and Practice," and Charity Schmidt presented on "Strengthening the worker cooperative ecosystem & expanding cooperative education in Wisconsin." The joint conference was a valuable opportunity for UWCC staff to participate in the global dialogue about cooperative research and practice.



UWCC Hosts Cooperative Delegation from India

In January, UWCC hosted a delegation of six individuals from the Ministry of Cooperatives in the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh. The delegation traveled to Wisconsin to learn more about dairy cooperatives. In their state, they have roughly 500 cooperatives in various industries, but Ministry is focused on further developing the dairy cooperative sector. The visit included presentations on the U.S. cooperative economy, cooperative governance, and the state of dairy in the U.S., as well as tours of two dairy farms and three dairy cooperatives: Foremost Farms, Westby Cooperative Creamery, and CROPP Cooperative/Organic Valley.



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