

Principles and Values of Co-operative Sustainability

As human societies move further into the new millennium, there are growing concerns regarding social disparity and environmental degradation. Co-operatives have and will continue to play a leading role in defining and implementing organizational systems that are financially, socially and environmentally sustainable. For example, over the past twenty years, Canada's credit union system has pioneered social auditing, housing co-ops have introduced energy conservation technology, and organic food and fair trade co-ops have brought social justice and environmental goals to their bottom line. More recently, large co-operatives such as Mountain Equipment Co-op, VanCity, and The Co-operators have introduced sustainability reporting into their management systems.

The Co-operative Principles and Values are the starting point and the foundation for co-operative sustainability. The table at right provides a comparison between the Co-operative Principles and Values and related Sustainability Principles. —Russ Christianson

For additional information, see "Resources and References" at www.cooperativegrocer.coop.

References

The **Aalborg Charter**, was signed on May 27, 1994 at the European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns in Aalborg, Denmark. This conference was a follow-up to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit on Sustainable Development and was part of the United Nations Environment Program's Agenda 21. The Charter was updated and made more specific at a 2004 meeting, also in Aalborg, resulting in the Aalborg Commitments.

The **Bellagio Principles** were developed in November 1996, also as a followup to the Rio Earth Summit. This meeting was sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation's Innovation Fund and brought together an international group of measurement practitioners and researchers from five continents to Rockefeller's Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy.

The **Principles for Domestic Fair Trade** were developed by the Domestic Fair Trade Working Group, and approved for distribution on December 13, 2005. The basis of these principles was established at the first meeting of the Domestic Fair Trade Working Group at La Farge, Wisconsin, August 23 and 24, 2005. The draft principles were further developed by the working group which included Erbin Crowell (Equal Exchange), Jason Freeman (Farmer Direct Co-op/fairDeal), Michael Schneider, (Organic Valley/CROPP Co-operative), Michael Sligh (Rural Advancement Foundation International and the Social Justice in Agriculture Project), and Cecil Wright (Organic Valley/CROPP Co-operative).

Co-operative Principles	Co-op Values	Sustainability Principles
Voluntary and Open Membership	Equality, Openness	Equality within the current population and between present and future generations (See references at end, Aalborg, Bellagio, Fair Trade, Melbourne, ORTEE)
Democratic Member Control	Democracy	Members create and share a long-term vision and goals, and govern the organization democratically (Aalborg, Bellagio, Fair Trade, Melbourne, ORTEE) All relevant stakeholders are included in the design and implementation of the project (Aalborg, Bellagio, Fair Trade, ORTEE)
Member Economic Participation	Equity	Achieve long-term economic and social security for all people (Aalborg, Fair Trade, Melbourne)
Autonomy and Independence	Self-responsibility	Empower people and foster participation (Aalborg, Fair Trade, Melbourne) Enable individuals and communities to minimize their ecological footprint (Aalborg, Melbourne, Natural Step, ORTEE)
Education, Training and Information	Self-help, Honesty	Recognize the intrinsic value of biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and protect and restore them (Aalborg, Fair Trade, Melbourne, Natural Step, ORTEE) Enable continual improvement based on accountability and transparency—data, methods and interpretation are public, accessible and clear (Bellagio, Fair Trade)
Co-operation Among Co-operatives	Solidarity	Expand and enable co-operative networks to work towards a common, sustainable future (Aalborg, Fair Trade, Melbourne, ORTEE)
Concern for Community	Social Responsibility, Caring for Others	Social/community well-being (local and global) and the ecology are fully considered (Aalborg, Bellagio, Fair Trade)

The **Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities** were developed at an International Charrette held in Melbourne (Australia) from April 3 to 5, 2002. The meeting was organized by the United Nations Environment Programme International Environmental Technology Centre and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria. Over forty participants from around the world contributed to the preparation of the Principles. This meeting was a follow-up to the International Workshop on Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems (CASE) which took place in Toronto (Canada) on March 18 and 19, 2002 (organized by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority,

sponsored by Environment Canada). The CASE Workshop was instrumental in defining many of the concepts which ultimately led to the development of the Melbourne Principles

The **Ontario Roundtable on the Environment and Economy** (ORTEE) developed its Model Principles for Sustainable Communities in 1991.

The **Natural Step** is a nonprofit organization founded in Sweden in 1989 by a Swedish oncologist, Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt. Following publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987, Robèrt developed The Natural Step Framework, setting out the four system conditions for the sustainability of planet Earth.