

Energy, Economic, and Environmental Sustainability

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The goal of cooperative enterprise is to enable members to meet their needs equitably and provide a dignified way of life for their members, the community, and the planet. In an increasingly interconnected world, what we do is important, but how we do it matters even more.

Extensive research about the impact of climate change both locally and globally has focused welcomed attention on green business practices, energy efficiency, and economic and environmental sustainability. How we use natural resources to meet human needs has become as important as why. That's good news for people and for the planet.

Typically, our use of natural resources is highly inefficient. Most of us are aware that when we use resources at an unsustainable rate, there are long-term negative consequences for society and the environment. But we often think it's too complicated or expensive to do something about it.

That's an unfortunate mistake. The truth is that inefficiency wastes money, and that hurts long-run profitability and the overall viability of business enterprise. It damages public trust, cooperative image, and the bottom line, and could ultimately cost jobs and livelihoods.

Using resources more efficiently adds value to the enterprise and enables the creation of new products, services, and economic activity. Improved productivity reduces the impact of our activities on the social, economic, and natural systems we rely on, and extends the life of limited natural resources. Attention to sustainability enhances national and global security by reducing conflict over scarce resources.

What does this actually mean in practice? How can we measure progress? Since decisions we make locally have an impact globally, it's important to take into consideration how people and the environment are going to be affected. Any policy, product, or investment decision can and should identify the impact of that decision on the sustainability of social, economic, and natural systems.

Sustainability involves a detailed examination of costs and operations, and then planning ways to do the same work or provide the same services with fewer resources. Implementing sustainable practices often leads to reduced costs and enhanced productivity. For example, efficient buildings cost less to heat and maintain. Solar heat and hot water systems often recover their initial cost within three or four years, and after that, it's free. Reducing waste and recycling materials lowers costs and enhances productivity. In the process, good jobs have been created in the renewable energy, recycling, and construction industries.

Taking a sustainable approach in decision-making often leads to more elegant, lasting solutions with multiple benefits- solutions that can lead to breakthroughs in technology, collaboration, and human and social development. Sustainable solutions are leveraged to create many more opportunities.

By adding sustainable and socially desirable goals and objectives to everyday operations, cooperative members and workers create a renewed sense of commitment to their work and loyalty to the enterprise. Cooperators that continually re-create their enterprise to be more strategic, innovative, and effective create new opportunities for growth and development.

The sustainable approach to cooperative business:

- Minimizes waste, resource depletion, and environmental impact
- Adds value by reducing costs and improving efficiency and productivity
- Differentiates cooperative products and services and builds customer loyalty
- Enhances image and standing among stakeholders and the community