CHAPTER 8

COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Self-Help Through Services. When one thinks of the Cooperative Movement, it is usually in terms of commodities bought or sold. There is, however, another angle of the Cooperative Movement that is gaining ground continually both in this country and abroad. This is the idea of SERVICES rendered on a cooperative basis. On many farms in America, this idea has been followed out in the matter of threshing grain, filling silos, husking bees, barn raising, and countless other community activities. Crews for these various farm jobs are organized, going from farm to farm in the neighborhood in order to get the work done on each farm in short order. Ordinarily, no money changes hands in these enterprises. Labor is exchanged between the various farmers in the community until the grain is all threshed, or the silos all filled, etc. This is one form of service cooperation, whether it has been regarded as such or not. Cooperative services have extended in scope in late years beyond the bounds of the threshing ring, and a few of these services, together with their possibilities, will be considered at this time.

Stallion Cooperatives. How he is to find a suitable stallion for breeding his mares has always been somewhat of a problem for the average farmer. In some communities, there can be found one or more farmers who own a stallion that is available for breeding purposes. When such a stallion is of excellent breeding, and the charges for his services are reasonable, the problem of horse breeding in that locality may be well taken care of. However, not all communities are favored with such an ideal situation. Either the stallions available are undesirable for breeding purposes, or the condition prevailing may be unsatisfactory. Under such situations, a community-owned stallion would be the means of improving the caliber of the breeding of horses in such communities to a considerable extent. Usually from 25 to 50 farmers or more, if possible, form a cooperative stallion club by each buying a share costing from $10 to $25. This money is used in purchasing a purebred stallion of some recognized breed. In some associations, one farmer is given charge of the stallion, and transports him to the different farms as needed either on a truck or on a trailer. More often, however, a good horseman in the community is hired to do this work, and paid a regular salary by the cooperative. Charges usually run between $10 and $15 for
each mare served for members, with somewhat higher charges for non-members. When the sire cannot be used in the community further, arrangements are sometimes made between two stallion cooperatives which sponsor the same breed for exchanging sires. This plan obviates the necessity of the two cooperatives spending more money for a different sire. There are still many communities who could use the cooperative stallion plan to good advantage.

Cooperative Artificial Breeding Associations. Another cooperative service that is fast gaining recognition in America is the organization of artificial breeding associations in dairying communities. This plan is now used widely in Russia and Denmark, and is spreading rapidly to many other countries. A typical set-up of such a cooperative service would be as follows: Dairymen who raise the most common breeds of cattle in a given community agree to pay a certain fee per cow for breeding services. Perhaps this fee might be $5 per cow per year. A full-time veterinarian is hired by the cooperative to do the work. Proved sires are purchased for the source of semen. This semen is taken from the sires artificially and held at proper temperature for several days, if necessary. For example, when a Guernsey breeder, who is a member of this association, finds that he has a cow ready for breeding, he calls up the veterinarian at once. The veterinarian goes out to this farm with a capsule of semen obtained from the Guernsey bull owned by the association, and injects it into the reproductive organs of the cow in question. This plan eliminates the necessity of the farmers who belong to the cooperative from keeping a herd sire on the farm, which is a decided advantage in itself, but furthermore, it assures the average farmer of a much better standard of breeding than he could ordinarily afford otherwise. This same plan is also being used with horses and sheep as well.

Dairy Herd Improvement Associations. In the dairy sections of America and other countries, cooperative associations have been organized for the purpose of measuring the production of butterfat of herds of dairy cattle. Farmers who join these dairy herd improvement cooperatives are usually charged from $30 to $40 a year for this service. An association is usually composed of 26 or more dairymen, who organize and hire a cow-tester. This tester spends a day each month on each farm, testing the milk from each cow and computing the results in terms of butterfat. The tester also advises the farmer regarding feeding practices, use of herd sires, etc. Such a testing program enables a farmer to weed out his poor producers. This testing association set-up is now in the process of revision in some sections, and being patterned after the Washington plan,
whereby a central testing laboratory is established in a county, and one person is hired to do all the testing and accounting in this laboratory. Meanwhile, several field men are employed, who deliver the sample kits and scales to the farmers in the association. For example, a field man might deliver four milk-sampling outfits and scales to four neighboring farmers on the same day. He would take samples on one of these farms himself, while the other three farmers would do their own sampling and weighing. The next morning he would collect all four sample kits and scales and take them to the central laboratory for testing and computation. Later, the field man would return to these four farmers their herd record books, interpret the results, advise them on herd management problems, etc. This type of association considerably reduces the annual cost of testing to the farmer and because of this factor is encouraging wider participation.

Cooperative Spray Rings. Because not many farmers engaged in general farming own spraying equipment or are familiar with proper spraying schedules or the ingredients used, the cooperative spray ring is used for spraying fruit in many sections of the country. When a number of farmers agree to spray their fruit cooperatively, they may not organize as a bona fide cooperative society, but simply form an informal organization by paying for their respective shares of a sprayer of some description. Very often one or two young farmers in the neighborhood will take over the responsibility of spraying the fruit of the members with the company sprayer, using the proper spray ingredients in the proper amounts and at the correct stage of growth of the fruits sprayed. These men are paid for the time spent on each farm by each farmer, as well as for the amount of spray material used. This plan seems to be preferred by most farmers, because they often feel they cannot spare the time to spray when necessary. Because disease and insect enemies make it practically impossible to produce sound fruit without spraying, the spray ring idea is fast gaining ground with farmers engaged in general farming. Many of these spray ring members often use the spraying outfit to whitewash their barns, also.

Cooperative Health. Cooperative health associations of various kinds are spreading rapidly in America. They have been in vogue in some European countries for many years. One common plan is to form a cooperative health group from a number of families in a community, perhaps 100 families or more. Each family contributes a certain fee, in some associations $5 per month, for which the cooperative doctor will service the entire family for all ordinary ailments. This,
of course, does not include hospitalization. The first cooperative hospital association in America was formed at Elk City, Oklahoma, supported to a considerable extent by the Farmers Union. This cooperative hospital has enjoyed remarkable success, despite the combined opposition of many local doctors. This hospital cooperative is formed in a manner similar to the health insurance cooperatives. Each family is charged a certain fee per month or year. This fee entitles any member of the family to hospitalization for a certain length of time without any extra charges, except for major operations. Because of the success of the cooperative hospital at Elk City Oklahoma, many other localities are now considering plans for organizing similar hospitals.

Cooperative Libraries. Because some public libraries do not fulfill the wants of people interested in the Cooperative Movement, some communities have organized cooperative lending libraries whereby books dealing with the various phases of cooperative activities are purchased by the association and loaned out to its members. Many study clubs and farm cooperatives of various kinds have such a library for the benefit of their members. Under this plan, members are enabled to read a great variety of cooperative literature at relatively small expense.

Miscellaneous Cooperative Services. To list all of the numerous cooperative services employed in this or any other country would be a physical impossibility. Only a few of the more common services have been discussed. Credit and fire insurance cooperatives have already been treated. Some communities have formed burial cooperatives, while cooperative laundries flourish in many countries. Farmers of this country have organized a number of feed grinding cooperatives. Hauling milk and cream is a common form of cooperative service among farmers of many localities. Doubtless this particular phase of cooperative activity, cooperative services, will be constantly enlarged as the cooperative idea continues to gain momentum in this country.

GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 8

1. What other major cooperative activity is employed in many countries besides the buying and selling of merchandise?
2. Explain how a cooperative stallion club can be made to function for the benefit of the farmers in a given community.
3. Of what benefit to the average farmer is the artificial breeding ring?
4. Explain the Washington plan of the dairy herd improvement association.
5. Describe how a fruit tree spray ring can be operated on a cooperative basis.
6. Describe the possibilities of the cooperative health program that is now being fostered in this country.
7. Describe how a cooperative library may be made to function.
8. Enumerate several other cooperative services practiced by the farmers of this country.