

An Often Overlooked Business Model

Next time you shop at Ace Hardware, stay at a Best Western hotel, bank at a credit union or enjoy a Sunkist product, be aware that you are supporting a cooperative.

Cooperatives contribute more than \$210 billion to the nation's economy, employ more than 500,000 people and serve nearly 130 million members, according to a 2005 national study. Still, the business model is not widely understood, says Debbie Trocha, executive director of the Indiana Cooperative Development Center.

"It's a very viable business structure that most people don't even think about," Trocha asserts. "It's not taught typically in business schools so unless you've run across one, you bank at a credit union or you live in a rural area and you get your power from a rural electric, you've probably never been exposed. But they are everywhere."

Some of the best known cooperatives in Indiana include CountryMark, Ace Hardware stores, Indiana's rural electrics and Fort Wayne-based Do It Best. Trocha says the types of

cooperatives include housing, food, utilities and retail.

She describes a cooperative as "a business that is owned and operated for the benefit of those using its services." Members of cooperatives own a piece of the business, and they help make decisions about how that business is run, she notes.

A person needn't be a member of Ace Hardware's cooperative just to shop there. Instead, each store is individually owned and operated by a co-op member. This business model allows a local person to own the business while benefiting from a larger purchasing system for products and advertising, Trocha relates.

Cooperatives benefit the local economy because they are "very local, so the money stays within that local community and that multiplier effect kicks in." Because decisions are made by local owners, it's unlikely the business will leave the area or outsource jobs, she says.

Resource: Debbie Trocha, Indiana Cooperative Development Center, at (317) 275-2247 or www.icdc.coop

Indiana's State Government Workers Older Than Most

As the aging workforce gives employers reason for concern nationwide, Indiana may want to pay particular attention to its state government employees. Indiana trails only Nevada in the largest proportion of mature workers in state government. According to The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College, 34.3% of Indiana's state government workers are age 55 or older.

Just as interesting is the low percentage of young workers – only 1.3% of state government employees are under 25 years old. Only nine states have fewer than 10% of its employees in that age group with Indiana having the fewest by a long shot (Missouri is next with 5.6%), the study shows.

The Sloan Center found the public sector workforce, in general, is aging more rapidly than that of private companies.

Despite the high proportion of state employees nearing retirement age, there is good news for Indiana. Only 2.8% of the state's workforce is employed by state government (compare that to Delaware's 8.6% or Oklahoma's 6.8%), data indicates.

Resource: The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at www.bc.edu/agingandwork

Albany Start-up Takes Fish Farming to New Scale

An Albany company hopes to make a splash this year in the fish farming industry.

Bell Aquaculture plans to start selling yellow perch from its Albany facility in early spring. The company already is raising fish at its all-indoor farm, and its processing facility is expected to be completed in January.

"Right now we are the largest indoor aquaculture facility in the state of Indiana," notes Michael Miller, president and COO. Miller, who serves on the Indiana Aquaculture Association board of directors, says his company is the largest yellow perch operation in the United States.

Miller first learned about aquaculture during his previous career in broadcasting. After more than 15 years of studying the industry, he was ready to start Bell Aquaculture.

"I spent a lot of time trying to determine the best species of fish to raise and knowing that yellow perch had once been a highly prized fish for restaurants, that seemed like the logical choice," he offers.

Capacity for the farm is planned at more than 10 million pounds of fish, though the company will start much smaller. First, the company needs to expand its market and grow into that level of production. Miller says the company will start selling to a few local restaurants in January and February. Product will be more widely available beginning in March or April.

Resource: Michael Miller, Bell Aquaculture, at www.bellperch.com



Shorts written by Candace Gwaltney

Hoosier Company Rocks Yankee Stadium

Indiana's ties to the New York Yankees will be etched in stone when the famed team unveils its new \$1.3 billion stadium this April.

Spencer-based Indiana Limestone Fabricators supplied 92,000 square feet of limestone for the new Yankee Stadium, including the stone for three entrances with four-foot high gold leaf embossed engravings of the stadium's name.

The project is the biggest yet for the company founded in 1995, says president Brad Mobley. Developers chose limestone for the outside of the stadium from Bedford and stone from Bloomington was used in the Legends Suite.

"The Yankee Stadium in New York City – this is a temple to these people out there. It really required a lot of attention," he notes.

Indiana Limestone Fabricators worked on the project for nearly three years from bidding to completion with all 30 employees involved, Mobley says. The carved "Yankee Stadium" letters were done at the Owen County facility by machine. Employees signed the back of one of the stone panels before they were shipped to Canada to be set into larger panels (and gold leaf added to the letters).



While landing the Yankee Stadium contract was a home run for Indiana Limestone Fabricators, it's just one of several New York projects for the company. Currently, the company is working on the new Ralph Lauren building on Madison Avenue. The company has a sales office in the city, and Mobley expects the stadium work will help yield additional projects in that market.

Resource: Brad Mobley, Indiana Limestone Fabricators, at www.indlimfab.com

How Wet Are Indiana's Wetlands?

When waterfowl start their annual migration this spring, they will make pit stops in Indiana's wetlands as they head north for the summer. Ducks Unlimited, the world's largest wetland and waterfowl conservation organization, wants to know exactly how well those wetlands are holding up.

Ducks Unlimited is currently doing an inventory of Indiana's (as well as other Great Lake states) wetlands. Using aerial photos of Indiana taken in 2005, the organization will compare data to the old inventory completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service more than two decades ago, says Robb Macleod, Ducks Unlimited's manager of geographic information systems.

As wetlands are identified, workers and volunteers are visiting the sites for verification. "You need to also go out in the field and verify that what we see in the photo is actually what is occurring on the ground," Macleod explains.

About 20 people throughout the state have volunteered so far. The inventory is expected to be completed in June.

Ducks Unlimited will share the data with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, a partner in the wetlands inventory. The full report will be posted on both the Ducks Unlimited and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services web sites.

Macleod says his organization will use the inventory in its modeling and planning efforts. "We have a research study that we're doing on spring migration for waterfowl. ... A lot of our models are based on the wetlands because that is where the waterfowl stop to feed and get fat enough to keep flying north to the breeding ground."

Inventory progress can be tracked online at <http://glaro.ducks.org/nwi>.

Resource: Robb Macleod, Ducks Unlimited, at (734) 623-2000 or www.ducks.org

All-in-one Machine Makes Building Barns Easy

It could be described as the Swiss Army knife of pole barn building. An Anderson company will soon begin selling its construction machine called Framer, which allows contractors to build pole barns with fewer workers and a single machine.

"The machine is the first and only machine that has been developed for a contractor to use to build pole barns," asserts Richard Smith, CEO of Framer LLC. "It has all of the attachments that the contractor needs to physically build a pole barn."

Using the Framer, a crew of three workers can build a pole barn in the same amount of time it would take a crew of four to six to build one using two pieces of machinery. Contractors can expect at least a 25% savings in labor by using the Framer, Smith surmises.

Framer LLC signed a contract with Anderson Tool and Engineering to manufacture the product. While the company considered relocating to North Dakota, Smith first consulted with Anderson's economic development office and was referred to Anderson Tool.

"We are on target for a January delivery of the first production machine," he says.

The machine will be unveiled in Anderson at the Flagship Enterprise Center, a business incubator. Smith will then take the machine to a national frame building exposition in Nashville, Tennessee, in February.

This spring Framer LLC will partner with three builders to demonstrate how the machine works.

Source: Richard Smith, Framer LLC, at www.framerllc.com