

Editorial

This edition reflects the established standing of the Journal as an international publication in co-operation with contributions from leading academics in Germany, Scandinavia and the United States. These are complemented by a thought-provoking and challenging paper exploring the emergence of a form of co-operative enterprise in rural Lincolnshire.

The first three papers all concern agricultural and food co-operatives and the current challenges they face operating in an increasingly aggressive and competitive market-place. The papers from Germany and Scandinavia analyse the organisational and structural changes that co-operatives will have to implement to compete efficiently and effectively in the market; the third, from the United States, takes a different approach and analyses how a focus on the environmental and ethical values of co-operation can in itself

ensure the continued relevancy, and ability of agricultural co-operatives to serve as countervailing agents in the market place.

In the paper, *Challenges of a Vertical Coordinated Agri-Food Business for Co-operatives*, Hanf questions the future role of Raffeisen co-operatives in the changing agri-food business and explores the structural, organisational and managerial challenges of operating within vertical coordinated chain systems. For co-operatives, the drive is to increase efficiency and improve the quality of the process and delivery channels "from the 'stable to the table'", in order to compete effectively in the market. Nilsson and Ollila too are concerned in their paper on co-operative dairy processing with the drive to efficiency and effectiveness in the market-place, but are worried that the

trend towards differentiation, large scale operations and internationalisation is so strong that members [of dairy co-operatives will] have difficulties governing and financing the co-operatives.

Like Hanf, they explore the structural changes

to co-operative organisation, which they see as being

decided by the need for strong market strategies rather than by the members' demands.

The authors tend to conclude, maybe somewhat pessimistically, that if

co-operatives do not fulfil the market requirements, they will hardly survive in today's intense competition.

On the other hand, they argue that they may survive even if they do not meet the farmer members' requirements, if they adopt another business form to that of a traditional co-operative.

Gray and Mooney, writing from the United States, take a different and more radical approach in their somewhat complex but fascinating account of the struggle between the multi-billion dollar Monsanto Corporation and the relatively small 147 member Tillamook Co-operative Creamery Association. The issue was the introduction of the synthetic and genetically engineered, growth recombinant bovine hormone, rBGH, into the dairy business. Gray and Mooney analyse the complex discourse of the struggle between these two organisations and unpick the understandings, meanings and motivations that lay behind Monsanto's drive to introduce rBGH as commercial sense given that this hormone stimulated milk production and profits and Tillamook's principled opposition to it. Gray and Mooney, however, see the significance of this struggle not so much in the voiced arguments used in the public discourse between these two organisations but in the fundamental tension between

the rights of private property and the internal agency of a co-operative (social self-governance).

For it was only the latter that was able, in practice, to ensure the effective and successful rBGH-free development of the

Tillamook business. In an increasingly complex world beset by such problems as global warming, global inequality, and myriad cross group conflicts, the authors argue for a fuller consideration of alternative models of socio-economic organisation and against a flight to adopt the business practices of capitalist enterprise. They argue that the key to genuine democracy will be the struggle by communities and citizen's organisations to collectively make decisions about their own futures.

The fourth and final paper by Frith, McElwee and Somerville maintains the rural theme of this edition and explores the business history and development of Hill Holt Wood, a small (34 acre) woodland operating as an environmental social enterprise in rural Lincolnshire. The authors describe and analyse the origins of this new and innovative project and follow its progress from a private initiative through to its becoming a community social enterprise. Purists may wish to debate the co-operative identity of such an endeavour and claim that it should be seen more in social enterprise terms. However, Frith, McElwee and Somerville convincingly argue that the community ownership of woodland, and its

control by a voluntary and elected board of directors, defines it as an imaginative and distinct form of rural co-operation, even though it uses a non-co-operative institutional form in order to gain tax advantages. Hill Holt Wood seems to exemplify something of the struggle by local communities to collectively make decisions about their own futures, as argued for by Gray and Mooney above.

Avid readers of the *Journal* will notice that this edition does not contain any of the shorter practically-oriented or think-piece articles that the Editorial Board sees as important to include in the Journal. It is the experience of the current editor that persuading co-operators, co-operative managers and activists to record their initiatives and thoughts in articles is often the hardest challenge of all. Please do encourage ideas people and innovators within the co-operative movement to consider submitting short papers to the Journal. The *Journal* would be much richer and inclusive for it.

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