



National Meeting of Cooperativism in Argentina

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Cooperativism in Argentina has a long history and has been key to the economic and social organization of rural communities, towns, and cities throughout Argentina's hinterland. Its development over the years has been linked to the country's economic and political changes. The current economic and political crisis in Argentina presents numerous difficulties for the cooperative sector, but also presents an opportunity where cooperativism is gaining strength as an alternative economic model to traditional capitalism, based on the values of solidarity, self-management, and participatory democracy.

In this context, in order to discuss the challenges faced by cooperativism and strengthen the channels of cooperation within the movement, the Rural Federation for Production and Roots (Federación Rural para la Producción y el Arraigo) decided to promote last May



the first National Meeting of Cooperativism. In this article from our series on cooperativism, you will get to know more about the history of this movement and the contributions of this Meeting.

<https://www.veed.io/embed/a454acfe-f35f-4806-b5da-ce1574864007?watermark=0&color=&sharing=0&title=1>

Video: Ángel Sorkin

Cooperativism, a movement rooted in Argentina

The first cooperatives in Argentina emerged at the end of the 19th century, driven mainly by European immigrants who brought with them the ideas of solidarity, cooperation, and mutualism [1]. Many of these immigrants came from socialist and anarchist traditions, so they promoted cooperativism as “the form of work in which many work in a planned manner, side by side, in the same production process or in different, but related, production processes” [2].

Thus emerged the first cooperatives, mutual societies, development societies, and unions. These collective alternatives made it possible to organize work and production and achieve economic goals. But they also had a strong community imprint: they functioned as spaces for meeting, organizing, and belonging, strengthening social ties and a sense of community [3].

It was not until the 20th century that cooperativism became established as a social movement in Argentina. This was driven by a series of institutional measures. In 1926, the first Argentine law on the subject, General Law of Cooperatives No. 11,388, was enacted. This law established the basic principles of cooperative societies and set the conditions for their legal existence. Thus, it paved the way for a period of formalization and growth of cooperatives. This Law was in force until 1973, when it was replaced by the Argentine Law of Cooperatives (No. 20,337) [4].

Over the years, the Argentine cooperative movement has grown in various sectors, with a strong presence in the organization of agricultural production through agricultural cooperatives. Another important area is service cooperatives, founded in numerous inland towns in response to unmet needs affecting living conditions, such as access to running water and power lines [5]. Starting in the 1980s, worker cooperatives gained momentum, often created from recovered companies (businesses declared bankrupt or abandoned by their owners, where employees take control of management and production).



According to data from the National Institute of Associativism and Social Economy (INAES, after its name in Spanish), in 2022, the number of active cooperatives in Argentina reached a total of 19,076; together with some 3,926 mutuels, there are more than 23,000 active entities nationwide. These represent more than 15% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and bring together 27 million Argentines as associates, which is equivalent to more than 60% of the national population [6].

For all these reasons, they play a fundamental role in job creation and regional development, but they also possess a profound identity, especially in inland towns and rural areas. Cooperativism, thus, is consolidated as a way of life and a genuine expression of Argentina's culture of solidarity. This motivated the holding of the National Meeting of Cooperativism, seeking to strengthen ties between cooperatives.



The National Meeting of Cooperativism was hosted by La Comunitaria Cooperative. Photo: Rocío Guevara.



A federal Meeting to reflect on the transformative power of cooperativism

The National Meeting of Cooperativism, organized by the [Rural Federation](#) together with the [La Comunitaria Cooperative](#) and the Provincial Institute of Associations and Cooperativism (IPAC, after its name in Spanish), took place on May 03 and 04 in the towns of América (Buenos Aires province) and General Pico (La Pampa province).

Representatives of cooperatives, associations, and federations from 11 provinces across the country, as well as from other countries such as Bolivia, Uruguay, and Colombia, participated. Mayors from five localities and officials from both provinces, as well as leaders from the cooperative and rural sectors, were also present.



Authorities, institutions, academics, and representatives of the cooperative sector from both Argentina and other countries participated in the Meeting. Photos: La Comunitaria.

In the words of Yanina Settembrino, leader of the Rural Federation, the Meeting arose from "the need to provide a meeting and working space for the Argentinian cooperative movement, to explore cooperative networks. It's an exercise in sharing our potential and challenges, but with a long-term perspective: considering the strategies that cooperativism can offer the country."

Juan Manuel Rossi, leader of [FECOFE](#), one of the participating Federations, agrees that the Meeting was important for "thinking about joint production and marketing, but also discussing the model of country we want, the agricultural policy we need, and whose hands we want our region's main natural resources to be in. We need to rethink the way we produce, take better care of the environment, and produce healthy food. We need to abandon a production model that benefits very few producers and a very small population, and work toward a fairer model and a more territorially balanced country."



Overcoming the diagnosis and creating inter-cooperative work networks

During the Meeting, presentations and debates were held on the current state and challenges of cooperativism in Argentina.



The Meeting began with a theatre play about the origins of Argentine cooperativism. Photo: Ángel Sorkin.

The first day began with two panels, "Debates on Cooperativism" and "Intercooperative Bridges," featuring national and international leaders of the cooperative sector. In order to transform the assessment into concrete proposals, participants held working committees focused on five topics: Financing, Economy, and Cooperative Work; Marketing Circuits, Value Added, and Formalization; Cooperative Education and Training; Cooperativism and Sustainability; and Solidarity and Community Bonds.

In addition, a fair and exhibition of cooperative products were held during the Meeting, as well as cultural events such as a play about the roots of cooperativism in the country, and traditional dances and songs from the region.

The Meeting concluded the next day with the official opening ceremony of the dairy plant of the La Comunitaria Cooperative, part of the Rural Federation. This plant works



with local dairy farms to add value to production at source. Various varieties of cheese are produced there, and the production of milk in sachets is planned for the near future.



Inauguration of the La Comunitaria Dairy Plant in General Pico, La Pampa. Photos: La Comunitaria

Financing, work, and cooperative circuits

The Meeting's debates were influenced by the current national and global scenario. Regarding this, Alexandre Roig (PhD in Economic Sociology of Development and



president of INAES from 2021 to 2023) pointed out that the national situation, and particularly that of agriculture, is undergoing a shift in the main contradiction that governs the world: "The world is no longer divided solely by the ownership of the means of production, but primarily by the control of the means of valorization. In this context, it is not enough to discuss the redistribution of land; it is also necessary to discuss the control of technology and value added." According to him, this represents a challenge but also potential for the cooperative sector, because "it is cooperativism that puts on the agenda new forms of production and marketing, new forms of work, new forms of financial and state organization; and new forms of territorial reorganization, necessary in a country where 93% of its population lives in cities."

In this sense, one of the key conclusions of the Meeting is that the cooperative sector has the potential to increase its share of the country's GDP and to place the economy at the center as a social, economic, productive, job-creating, and development asset for inland communities. However, to achieve this goal, it is necessary to implement effective strategies to overcome the challenges the sector still faces. Delineating these strategies was the focus of the debate in the working committees.



The working committees were the heart of the meeting. Photo: La Comunitaria.

Regarding financing, one of the key findings was the need for financing and credit lines, both nationally and internationally, so that cooperatives can access the resources needed



to grow and expand. Networks were also strengthened to encourage joint purchasing among cooperatives, thereby reducing costs and increasing competitiveness.

Regarding marketing, the design of cooperative logistics corridors was proposed to gradually replace private services with those offered by the cooperatives themselves. There was a strong demand for the State to create agreements between cooperatives and governments to strengthen and increase public procurement from cooperatives.

Sustainability was another key focus of the Meeting. In this regard, ideas were exchanged on how to promote links between cooperatives from different sectors to create more efficient and sustainable value chains and prioritize the purchase of agroecological products. The need to obtain tax benefits for cooperatives that adopt sustainable practices was also raised, thus incentivizing the adoption of more planet-friendly production models.



Sustainability was a central topic in both the discussions and the exhibitions. Photos: La Comunitaria

Education and community ties

Training and capacity building were recognized as fundamental pillars for strengthening the sector. On the one hand, training for the continuous improvement of production chains, seeking to provide quality cooperative services and products. On the other hand, education strengthens the social and cultural dimension of cooperativism, as a way of life based on collaboration and mutual support.



The participants proposed building a support system among cooperatives, where more experienced cooperatives can provide support and guidance to newer ones. One need that emerged strongly was the promotion of the Cooperative Education Law in institutions at all levels, essential for disseminating the values and principles of cooperativism to the new generations.

Also, it was proposed to encourage the participation of young people in the cooperative movement, who can find opportunities for work, development, and participation in cooperativism. Finally, the need for public policies that promote the repopulation of Argentina's rural areas, strengthening people's roots and connection with nature, was highlighted.





Expressions of traditional and community culture during the Meeting. Photos: Ángel Sorkin and Rocío Guevara.

Cooperating is the task

Despite the challenges facing the sector, the National Meeting of Cooperativism had a festive atmosphere and a clear, proactive focus.

Yanina's words demonstrate this: "The Meeting had a great impact. More than 100 cooperatives, associations, and federations participated, understanding that we need to make concrete progress in creating trade agreements, logistical coordination, and developing our own financial tools that generate social and union economic strength in order to compete in the real economy. An Argentinian economic system that accommodates and recognizes the economic role of cooperativism as a generator of value, production, and employment in our country."



Yanina Settembrino, leader of the Rural Federation. Photo: Ángel Sorkin

Ultimately, the Meeting was an exercise in dialogue to seek a collective solution to collective problems. Strengthening practices of solidarity and union organization to build a more just and sustainable economic and social model that is community-based and locally rooted.

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