



May 2026 Update

Colorado Co-op Council

May Issue

<i>Colorado Cooperative Council Monthly Newsletter</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>From Ownership to Education.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Listening First</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>What We're Hearing So Far</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Where We Are Headed</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Heads Up: Recruiting Firms and the Fine Print</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Cooperative Exchange: Questions from the Field.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Closing</i>	<i>7</i>

Colorado Cooperative Council Monthly Newsletter

This monthly update is intended to provide a clear view of the Council's work, the themes emerging from cooperative conversations, and the priorities taking shape across the state. It is designed to create alignment around current realities while keeping the process transparent as the listening phase continues.

Conversations are actively underway across Colorado, and engagement has been strong. The perspectives being shared are directly informing the Council's understanding of current challenges, opportunities, and future priorities.



From Ownership to Education

A question came to mind recently: **Could any of us identify ten people within our cooperative who could name all seven cooperative principles?** Taking this a step further, how many could explain what Principle 5 (Education, Training, and Information) truly means? Ultimately, the question itself matters more than the answer.

Last month, we explored the relationship between ownership and accountability. Both are essential to execution. Yet neither can exist without understanding.

People rarely take ownership of what they do not understand. Likewise, accountability is difficult when expectations, responsibilities, and purpose are unclear. Before people can contribute effectively, they need to understand the business, their role, and what success looks like.

And this is where Principle 5 stands up and waves its hand. Cooperatives invest significant time in educating producers on products, markets, agronomy, lending, risk management, and countless other topics. Yet many members, employees, and even directors may never receive intentional education on the cooperative model itself.

As annual meetings, customer meetings, field days, and producer events take place across Colorado this spring, cooperatives have a unique opportunity. Every gathering is more than a chance to discuss products, services, or market conditions. It is also an opportunity to strengthen understanding of what makes a cooperative different.

Principle 5 emphasizes that cooperatives provide education and training for members, leaders, and staff to support their development and inform the public, especially youth and opinion leaders. It highlights the importance of informed members, capable employees, and prepared directors, seeing education as key to maintaining their identity and ensuring a strong future.

Ownership requires understanding. Accountability requires clarity. Principle 5 helps build both.



Listening First

The second-quarter focus will continue the mindset of meeting in person and listening. Initial cooperative meetings are underway across the state, with additional visits scheduled through the second quarter.

- These conversations are focused on four priorities:
- Understanding current realities across cooperatives
- Identifying education and leadership priorities
- Surfacing operational and strategic concerns
- Clarifying where the Council can provide the most value

Before programs are designed or events are scheduled, the objective is to ensure that any future direction reflects what cooperatives are experiencing on the ground.

What We're Hearing So Far

As conversations continue across cooperatives in Colorado, clear themes are emerging. While each organization operates within its own context, these discussions are revealing consistent patterns in the challenges cooperatives are navigating.

- **CEO Compensation, Selection, and Succession**
 - Recent conversations have raised questions about the CEO compensation structure, compensation benchmarking, CEO selection, and broader recruiting and selection practices. These topics connect directly to succession readiness, leadership continuity, and the ability to attract and retain capable leaders.
- **Compensation Benchmarking and Competitive Positioning**
 - Compensation questions continue to surface as cooperatives evaluate how to remain competitive for talent while staying financially disciplined in a tight-margin environment.



Issue: May 2026

- **Use of Recruiting and Selection Firms**
 - Questions have surfaced around when to use outside recruiting and selection firms for executive or hard-to-fill roles. For some cooperatives, outside support may provide broader market reach, structured candidate evaluation, and added objectivity in high-impact hiring decisions.
- **Manager Development**
 - Interest continues to build around structured development for managers. Technical expertise remains strong, but leading people, communicating expectations, and driving accountability are areas that are not always developed intentionally.
- **Member Education**
 - Many cooperatives are navigating a gap in members' understanding of both how the cooperative operates and why engagement matters. Strengthening member education will be critical to long-term governance effectiveness and participation.
- **From Previous Months**
 - Prior themes remain relevant, including telling the cooperative story, director development and regional timing, understanding bylaws and the cooperative model, peer dialogue among leaders, market and competitive pressure, human capital and succession, and employee development.

These insights will continue to evolve as additional meetings take place.

Where We Are Headed

The Council is following a deliberate process. Below are our current outline of 2026 deliverables:

January–June: Listening and On-Site Conversations

Continue cooperative meetings across the state to ensure broad input and representation.



July: Compilation and Analysis

Insights gathered will be compiled into a statewide summary identifying patterns, regional differences, and shared priorities.

August: Draft Recommendations

Based on findings, draft recommendations will be developed for review. These will reflect what was heard rather than predetermined solutions.

September: Cooperative Feedback

Cooperatives will have the opportunity to review and provide input on the proposed direction.

October: Board Presentation

Findings and recommended priorities will be formally presented to the Council board.

Website Launch

Work continues on the Colorado Cooperative Council website. Due to unforeseen delays, the site is now expected to launch in the next few weeks. Once live, it will serve as a central point for communication, education offerings, and updates as priorities take shape.

Heads Up: Recruiting Firms and the Fine Print

As cooperatives consider outside support for executive or hard-to-fill roles, the recruiting agreement matters as much as the search process.

Before engaging a firm, review the fine print. Key items include fee structure, payment timing, replacement guarantees, exclusivity requirements, candidate ownership, confidentiality, and what happens if the search is paused or unsuccessful. A low headline fee may not provide the best value if the process lacks structure, market reach, or a clear guarantee.

Several cooperatives have successfully utilized firms such as [Hansen Agri-PLACEMENT](#), [PeakView Search Group](#), and [ProValue](#) for executive or specialized searches. While each approach differs, the common lesson is that



selection should extend beyond cost and focus on industry knowledge, search methodology, candidate evaluation, and cultural fit.

The Council can share names of firms that have been used within the cooperative space, but each cooperative should conduct its own review of services, fees, guarantees, and organizational fit before entering into an agreement.

The right partner can expand reach and add objectivity. The wrong agreement can create cost, confusion, and limited results.

When hiring decisions affect succession, culture, and long-term performance, the process deserves the same discipline as any other major investment.

Cooperative Exchange: Questions from the Field

Question: How are cooperatives approaching CEO compensation and executive benefits?

Insights: Compensation discussions are increasingly common as cooperatives navigate succession, recruitment, and retention. Many organizations use compensation benchmarking, peer comparisons, and industry surveys to better understand market expectations. The goal is not necessarily to be the highest payer but to remain competitive enough to attract and retain qualified leadership while maintaining sound financial stewardship.

Question: When does it make sense to use a recruiting or executive search firm?

Insights: Cooperatives are most likely to engage outside recruiting support when filling executive positions, specialized technical roles, or positions where local candidate pools are limited. Beyond candidate sourcing, search firms can provide market insight, structured evaluation processes, confidentiality, and additional objectivity. The key is ensuring the firm's experience, methodology, and guarantees align with the cooperative's needs before signing an agreement.



Issue: May 2026

Question: How should we communicate through a perceived major change?

Insights: Change does not have to be large to feel significant. A new building, a shift in workspace, a change in service delivery, updated processes, or a new strategic direction can all create uncertainty for employees and members. The most effective communication starts with the “why,” explains what is changing and what is not, and offers people more than one opportunity to ask questions. Employees need context before they are expected to support the change. Members need clarity before they are expected to trust it. Early, consistent communication helps reduce confusion, protect relationships, and keep the focus on the purpose behind the decision.

Have a question you would like insights on? Just ask, and I will dig in.

Closing

Thank you to those who continue to meet, share perspectives, ask good questions, and invite the Council into local conversations. The willingness to engage openly is helping shape a clearer understanding of what Colorado cooperatives are navigating and where support may be most useful.

As this work continues, the focus remains practical: listen carefully, identify common themes, and translate what is being heard into relevant education, leadership support, and resources. The goal is not to create activity for the sake of activity. The goal is to strengthen the cooperative infrastructure that helps organizations lead well, communicate clearly, and prepare for the future.

If there are questions, priorities, or areas where additional insight would be helpful, I welcome the conversation.

Respectfully,

Sarah E. Bower Spivey

Executive Director, Colorado Cooperative Council