

How About a Labor Co-op?

Bill MacKentley

Several months ago, a small number of us in the Potsdam area formed a child care co-operative. Born of necessity and a tight budget, our co-op is working better each week and new members are slowly enlarging the group. The basic floor plan is very simple. You earn one point per hour for taking care of children up to age 8. For example, if you watch four children for five hours, you earn 20 points. These points are then "spent" when someone else takes care of your child(ren). As a loosely-run group, transportation is arranged by the parents. Usually it is the parent's responsibility to transport their children to the house of the individual who will take care of the child. Each member has different needs. Some need evening child care, some daytime, others sporadic and occasional, while yet others need regular 9 to 5 child care. The only "paid" member of the co-op is the recorder or secretary who maintains the credits and debits for each member. Pay is in the form of points for every so many points booked.

A few weeks ago it occurred to me that this format would be ideal for a work co-operative. In essence, you would earn one point per hour to be spent when other(s) gave you a hand. Many of us in the NFC have different "busy" times and "slack" times. For example, spring, fall and winter are hectic here at our nursery, while summer is a slow period. For some of you the exact opposite may be true. Listed below are some of the advantages I see of forming such a co-op.

- Better utilization of busy and slack periods as discussed above.
- It would provide an opportunity to become better acquainted with other NFC members.
- Since most people are shy about asking for a hand but can't afford to hire someone, they often end up doing a 2-3 person job alone, often with much difficulty. Paying their helpers in points, members would hopefully be less reluctant to ask for help when they need it most.
- Work parties are difficult to organize and most farm work requires a small number of people on a sporadic basis. The structure of the co-op would easily accommodate everything from large work parties to one person "shoveling shit for an hour".
- The NFC is made up of members who make their living in widely diverse ways. The co-op would provide an opportunity for members to gain new experience doing things they've never before done. Since different people have different skills, members would also have a wider variety of skills available to help them.

What is necessary to get this work co-op going? Below I would like to suggest a basic set of guidelines followed by a questionnaire.

1. Each volunteer worker shall receive one point per hour, regardless of the type of work performed. Conversely, for every hour of work done for someone, that person is debited one point.
2. Transportation to and from the work site is the responsibility of the worker.
3. The volunteer worker shall perform all work as the "workee" directs, regardless of the volunteer's opinion as to how it "should be done".
4. A recorder will record and keep tallies of all credits and debits. A monthly tally will be given to each member. The recorder will be reimbursed with points for time spent.

5. It is the responsibility of the person who received work to call in the credits and debits at the end of each day.
6. On accrual of +25 or -25 points the recorder will notify that person that he either needs to spend or earn some points. This should be simply a reminder and not a "cut off" point.
7. All members will receive a complete list of other members, giving name, address, telephone number, types of work needed, type of labor preferred, and any other pertinent information, such as handicaps and other limitations.

Needless to say, most of the fine points and particulars will be worked out individually. It seems to work best to keep the structure loose so that necessary adjustments can be made with a minimum of hassle. If you are interested in such a project, please fill out the questionnaire and return to Bill MacKentley, Route 3, Potsdam, 13676. If there were sufficient interest we could even have a north and south group, each working within a given area, thus obviating the need for long-distance phone calls.

I am definitely interested in becoming an active member in an NFC work co-op and would like my name placed on an initial membership list.

Name _____	Physical limitations _____
Address _____	and/or other pertinent _____
Telephone _____	information: _____
Type of Farm _____	_____
Work Most Desired _____	_____

WE NEED YOU!

Several NFC members have expressed an interest in hearing about new homesteaders who have moved into the area. They thought it would be a good idea to feature one or two new (or old) NFC members in each issue of the newsletter.

So . . . if you are a new or old NFC member make my day by sending me a few paragraphs about your homestead, plans, family, ideas, etc. Especially useful would be a list of goods and services that you might want to sell, buy or barter.

I will, of course, have to call all you shy people if no one volunteers to write themselves up.

- Kathy Montan