

Farmworker Cooperative Housing: Training Needs Assessment

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I. Executive Summary

California farmworker housing cooperatives represent a small, but important, sector of California's affordable farmworker housing stock. Farmworker housing cooperatives first took root in the state as the result of farmworker-led grassroots initiatives to fight displacement and establish roots in the communities where they worked. The first four out of the eleven farmworker housing cooperatives that have been established in the state were driven by farmworkers seeking ownership and control of their housing in the 1970s and early 1980s (Bandy 1992). These farmworkers were motivated by years of living in substandard conditions as renters at the mercy of labor contractors, large growers and slumlords. They sought out the cooperative as an intermediate form of ownership that could deliver ownership, control, dignity and security in situations where single-family housing was infeasible. Many years later farmworker housing cooperatives still fill this important niche in the farmworker housing inventory by providing affordable ownership in settings where single family or condominium ownership is not feasible.

Recent research shows that cooperatives are performing this role well. A recent study of four farmworker housing cooperatives found the housing was financially viable, well managed and had strong resident support for the cooperative model (Bandy and Wiener 2002). Many residents at these four cooperatives value the benefits of cooperative housing – ownership, control and opportunities to participate in the governance of their housing. Unfortunately, this same study also found that many of the residents do not fully understand how the cooperative housing they live in operates and that there is a substantial need for membership training.

This assessment was undertaken as a follow up to the training issues identified by the 2002 study. In this assessment, the training needs of a total of nine out of the eleven farmworker housing cooperatives in the state were assessed. Results from these assessments showed that only one cooperative provided systematic and sustained member and board training and just four in total were doing any kind of training for their boards. Only one cooperative was directly training their general membership. Just one cooperative used suitability for cooperative housing as a new member selection criteria. New members receive very little if any orientation at any of the cooperatives in the assessment.

That these problems would arise in the farmworker cooperatives is hardly surprising. There are no dedicated statewide cooperative housing resource and support organizations to help them. The farmworker cooperatives are isolated from one another and do not collaborate on training or other issues even though many are in close proximity to one another. Cultural and linguistic barriers may also play a role in limiting the cooperatives from participating in national and regional cooperative housing and related training opportunities.

The primary goal of this assessment was to help farmworker cooperatives address these problems. Through site visits, meetings with cooperative boards, interviews with cooperative leaders and professionals this assessment sought to identify 'best practices'

examples of training methods within the cooperative housing sector and farmworker homeownership programs that could be applied to these farmworker cooperatives. The solutions that emerged from this process show methods that farmworker cooperatives can institute an integrated system of membership selection, orientation and training that can meet current deficiencies. These solutions are:

1. Cooperatives must use member selection and orientation processes that ensure those selected are suited for cooperative ownership and also have personal skills and interests that will contribute to the cooperative.
2. Cooperatives must build their own internal capacity to provide integrated and self-sustaining training for members and their boards by using consultants to train and prepare the cooperative boards to assume this responsibility.
3. Due to the limited amount of cooperative training resources in the state, farmworker cooperatives must more aggressively take advantage of outside training opportunities that may not be specifically intended for cooperatives but provide transferable skills or information.
4. Cooperatives need to develop member handbooks and other reference materials for use by their members and board.
5. Cooperatives should join together with other cooperatives in their region to undertake joint training activities and produce member handbooks and other reference materials.
6. Farmworker and cooperative housing support organizations should consider undertaking regional capacity development initiatives that will jumpstart the training processes and establish the self-sustaining training systems that are so desperately needed by farmworker housing cooperatives in the state

II. Training Challenges facing Farmworker Cooperatives

When a farmworker enters a cooperative for the first time they encounter a complex and often bewildering form of housing. The unconventional cooperative housing structure of collective ownership and democratic control is itself overlaid with an array of additional nontraditional and unfamiliar ownership configurations, management-resident relationships and equity limitations. Occupancy restrictions and regulatory oversight by federal and/or state agencies that have provided funding add further complexity.

Farmworkers with a life experience that includes poverty, demanding agricultural labor, renting substandard housing and often existing on the margins of society are suddenly handed the keys to a multi-million dollar multifamily property. A field hand who may speak or read little or no English must now make decisions about management contracts, replacement reserve deposits, refinancing, capital improvement plans, house rules, evictions and the selection of new members. Within this decision-making process, farmworkers with a limited education must engage an array of sophisticated and experienced professionals such as property managers, lawyers, accountants or lenders.

Even with extensive training and preparation of a cooperative's membership, these demands would be daunting challenges under the best of conditions. That farmworker housing cooperatives have to some degree met this challenge in California is a testimony to the resilience, strength and cultural resources of this social group. Unfortunately, many farmworker cooperatives in the state appear to be struggling with these challenges.

Recent research conducted by Bandy and Wiener (2003) that examined the performance of four representative farmworker housing cooperatives found lack of cooperative knowledge and training are serious issues facing farmworker cooperatives. The study found that the majority of members surveyed in all four cooperatives identified insufficient knowledge of cooperative housing as one of the primary reasons more residents did not participate. Majorities of those surveyed also felt that many members did not understand how cooperatives worked and that more training was needed. Managers and professionals who were interviewed as part of the study backed up this survey data.



Rancho Sespe

III: Objectives of the Assessment

This training needs assessment was undertaken in response to these findings. The primary objectives of the assessment are to determine the extent to which farmworker cooperatives are able to provide member and board training and identify training solutions for deficiencies that can be realistically implemented and sustained by farmworker cooperatives. Training, in this assessment is viewed as an integrated and ongoing process that prepares members and cooperative boards to understand and perform their roles within the cooperative by providing them with necessary information, skills and learning opportunities. Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. Document and evaluate current assessment practices of California farmworker housing cooperatives
2. Identify board and membership training and development “best practices” solutions for training deficiencies
3. Identify transferable board and membership training and development “best practices” utilized by housing with democratic resident governance features similar to cooperatives
4. Provide specific recommendations for the content and format of training and membership development activities that can be undertaken by farmworker cooperatives
5. Identify models of integrated and self-sustaining training systems
6. Identify joint or cooperative strategies to deliver board and membership training to farmworker cooperatives on a sustaining basis

IV. Methodology

A. Cooperatives Participating in Assessment

California currently has eleven farmworker housing cooperatives as shown in Table I. Of these, nine participated in this training needs assessment. All of these cooperatives are 100% resident owned and operated, require all or most of the residents to be farmworkers and limit equity appreciation on shares and restrict occupancy to low- or moderate-income households. As Table II shows, the cooperatives in this assessment are representative of the development type and equity structure of farmworker and other affordable housing cooperatives in the state. Only one development, Rancho Sespe, is not technically a cooperative due to its structure as a resident controlled nonprofit corporation that owns the rental housing the farmworkers live in. However, it was included in this assessment because as resident owned and operated housing it is virtually a cooperative in every other respect except that resident’s have no ownership.

Table I: Farmworker Housing Cooperatives in California

County	Cooperative	City	Participated in Assessment
Contra Costa	La Colonia Santa Maria	Brentwood	Yes
Contra Costa	Villa De Guadalupe Coop	Brentwood	Yes
Monterey	La Buena Esperanza	King City	Yes
Monterey	Las Casas de Madera	Salinas	Yes
Monterey	San Jerardo	Salinas	Yes
Monterey	Santa Elena	Soledad	Yes
Monterey	Vista de la Terraza	Salinas	Yes
Monterey	Cooperativa Las Tres Palmas	Gilroy	No
Ventura	Cabrillo Village	Saticoy	Yes
Ventura	Rancho Sespe	Ventura	Yes

Table II: Farmworker Cooperatives Participating in the Assessment

Cooperative	Housing Form	Equity Structure	Units
La Colonia Santa Maria	Single Family - New Construction	Structured Equity	10
Villa De Guadalupe Coop	Single Family - New Construction	Structured Equity	7
La Buena Esperanza	Multifamily - New Construction	Limited Equity	40
Las Casas de Madera	Multifamily - New Construction	Limited Equity	75
San Jerardo	Multifamily - Rehabilitation	Structured Equity	60
Santa Elena	Mobile Home Park - Rehabilitation	Fixed Equity	100
Vista de la Terraza	Multifamily - New Construction	Limited Equity	40
Cabrillo Village	Multifamily – New Construction & Rehabilitation	Fixed Equity	80
Rancho Sespe	Multifamily - New Construction	Resident-controlled nonprofit rental	100

B. Interviews

The training issues identified and solutions offered by this assessment were derived from the experiences of farmworker housing cooperatives with training and other sectors of cooperative and farmworker housing. Site visits, meetings with cooperative boards and interviews with cooperative board members, management staff, consultants and technical assistance providers were all employed to assess the current training practices of these

farmworker cooperatives. Site visits were conducted at three farmworker housing cooperatives to meet with the board of directors and management staff to review the member selection process, new member orientation and board/membership training. Management staff, board members, training consultants and technical assistance providers were interviewed at the remaining six farmworker cooperatives where site visits were not conducted.

This assessment of current farmworker cooperative training practices was further supplemented with the experience of cooperative housing professionals, leaders, trainers, managers and consultants outside the farmworker sector. Those interviewed in this group consisted of current and former board officers of established and socially diverse limited equity housing cooperatives, cooperative development professionals and technical assistance providers. Training, development and management staff for the most successful mutual housing association in the state and regional community land trust housing groups were interviewed to review membership selection processes and board/membership training procedures with the aim of identifying practices that could be applied to farmworker cooperatives.

This assessment also tapped into the training experiences of the USDA 502 Mutual Self Help Housing Program. Although not cooperative housing, this highly successful homeownership program serves primarily farmworkers and uses cooperative methods to carry out self-help construction. In this program, farmworker families are recruited, trained and organized in democratically run construction groups to cooperatively build their own single-family homes. Trainers for these mutual self-help housing groups were interviewed to compare training methods, identify common training issues and discover methods and techniques that could be applied to farmworker cooperatives. Additionally, a housing counselor for first-time homebuyer programs that have served a large number of farmworker households was also interviewed for the assessment.



Las Casas de Madera

Interviews were conducted either on site or by telephone. Participants were provided with an overview of the findings of the 2002 study. They were then asked to recount their experience with cooperative training. From there, the participants were asked a series of questions covering training methods, topics, strategies, issues and problems. A total of 22 interviews were conducted for this assessment. Table III provides a breakdown of those interviewed and their cooperative background.

Category Interviewed	Number Interviewed
Cooperative Board of Directors	3
Board Members or Officers	3
Cooperative Training Consultants	2
Technical Assistance Providers	1
Cooperative Managers	5
Cooperative Developers	2
Mutual Self-Help Housing Group Workers	2
Government Housing Program Staff	1
Community Land Trusts	2
Mutual Housing Associations	1
Total Interviewed:	22

V. Context of Farmworker Training Needs

Farmworker cooperatives depend on the commitment and competency of their membership to ensure their viability perhaps more so than in any other form of housing. In a cooperative, the membership must share both the ownership of the housing as well as the responsibility for its operation. Unlike a condominium, ownership occurs within the structure of a nonprofit cooperative corporation, which holds a blanket mortgage on the property. Individual members hold shares in the cooperative corporation that confer the right to occupy an individual unit. Shareholders operate their cooperative through an elected board of directors that oversee the management, maintenance and fiscal integrity of the cooperative.

Within this structure, members depend upon one another to ensure that the cooperative functions smoothly. Members must take an interest in the affairs of the cooperative, serve on the board or board committees, provide input on issues facing the cooperative, and participate in nomination and elections for the board of directors. As a self-governing organization, cooperative members must ultimately decide to abide by and enforce the rules they set for themselves. This is especially important in financial matters where a default by just a few members on their monthly payments can jeopardize the entire cooperative.

Interdependence, in turn, requires that cooperative members fully understand how a cooperative works, what their roles and responsibilities are and have the skills to carry them out. This is especially true for farmworkers. Socially marginalized and culturally isolated, there is little in the life experience of agricultural laborers that provides them with the legal, technical or financial skills needed to own and manage a multifamily property or mobile home park. Often speaking little or no English, with a limited education and accustomed to renting substandard housing, they enter a housing situation that provides an atypical form of ownership and control through a democratic and

collective process. In such a situation, preparation, training and ongoing support is essential for the long-term success of the cooperative.

A. Consequences of Insufficient Training

When a large enough number of members are apathetic, do not fully understand how cooperative housing operates or are unprepared to assume their responsibilities as members, serious problems can arise. When new members are not interested in serving on the board of directors, prolonged board vacancies may occur. Important initiatives that benefit the residents and build community, such as social services, youth programs, educational activities and social events cannot be undertaken. The quality of board decisions, management and maintenance may deteriorate without oversight and input from the membership. If cooperative members are unwilling or are unable to take the long-term view of what is best for the cooperative, necessary but painful decisions, such as raising carrying charges, may not be made. Fiscal problems can then fester to the point where the viability of the cooperative is threatened.

In the void created by an inactive and disengaged membership, board nepotism, favoritism and corruption may occur. If the board and membership default on their roles and responsibilities either because of apathy or the inability to perform them, the cooperative may increasingly overly rely on the site manager and/or the management company to make decisions. In the worst cases, the management company essentially takes over the cooperative by default with the board serving as little more than a rubber stamp.

Dissatisfaction and social conflict can also emerge when members have little understanding of cooperative housing. Members who do not fully understand share ownership, equity limitations and use restrictions that are placed on them by state law and funding programs may become confused or disappointed. They may think they fully own their own individual units and have the same prerogatives as regular homeowners. When they find they cannot rent their unit out or sell it at a market price they may feel disillusioned.

In the case of one farmworker cooperative and an urban limited equity cooperative, this disillusionment seriously disrupted the cooperatives. In both cases, members who did not fully understand cooperative housing, embarked on costly and fruitless efforts to disband their cooperatives and transform them into individually owned housing units. With sufficient understanding of the nonprofit corporate structure of their cooperative ownership and other restrictions placed on the housing by funding programs and use permits, members would have realized that conversion to individually-owned market rate housing was simply impossible. Instead they were swayed by a “reform” slate of board members who promised individual ownership. The learning process for both cooperatives was a painful one that included nepotism, fiscal mismanagement and bitter internal conflict.

VI. Current Farmworker Cooperative Training Practices

Farmworker housing cooperatives in the state generally provide little in the way of training to members and boards despite its importance. As noted, the 2002 study of four farmworker cooperatives found both a need for expanded training and problems that may, at least in part, result from inadequate member and board development. In this assessment of nine farmworker housing cooperatives, only two have ongoing board training programs, two have completed short-term training programs for their boards and five other cooperatives do not currently have training and development programs for their boards or membership. Just one of the cooperatives employ member selection processes that screen prospective new members to ensure suitability, interest and aptitude for cooperative ownership. Only one cooperative conducts a formal resident orientation session. None of the cooperatives provide new members or board directors with a handbook.

A. New Member Selection and Orientation

Cooperative training begins with the process by which new members are selected for membership. Interviews with housing developers, training consultants, managers and board members stressed the need for selecting members who have the social skills, aptitudes and interest in living in collectively owned and operated housing. In their view, the membership of a cooperative constitutes its lifeblood. Cooperatives must select new members who can contribute to the cooperative and then prepare them to participate. Otherwise, they run the risk of creating a large segment of the membership that is ill suited for cooperative ownership and takes little interest in the affairs of the cooperative.

Deficiencies in Current Member Selection and Orientation Processes

Currently, as Table IV shows, farmworker housing cooperatives typically do not employ member selection processes to select new members who are likely to contribute to the cooperative. Nor do the cooperatives do much to prepare them for the roles and responsibilities of cooperative ownership. By and large, farmworker cooperatives select members primarily on their ability to meet the income and occupational eligibility requirements of the various state and federal housing financing programs under which they were funded. Only Las Casas de Madera has attempted, with little success, to select residents based on their interest and aptitude for cooperative housing.

Screening Criteria at Las Casas de Madera

At Las Casas de Madera the process begins when the manager screens households at the top of the waiting list for income and occupational eligibility. As part of this process, the manager tries to provide information on cooperative housing and share ownership. However, the manager noted that the orientation takes place in a setting where eligibility and application information is being reviewed and the other information related to residency such as house rules is being presented. Consequently, the time available to

provide a thorough orientation to cooperatives is limited and, by that time, the applicant may be already overloaded with information.

Once the manager has three households that are eligible for the housing, the board of directors conducts a final interview of the three applicants and then makes a selection. At the final interview the applicants are asked eight questions related to cooperatives. These cover knowledge and interest in cooperative housings, ability to work with groups and willingness to participate in specific meetings and functions of the cooperative.

The board of directors expressed dissatisfaction with this approach when interviewed. They felt that applicants simply gave them the answers that were expected. It was felt that most of the applicants were really attracted to the low cost housing and would say or promise whatever it took to get into the housing. Once they were accepted into the cooperative, they seldom honored their interview commitments of participation. The feeling of the board was that more extensive screening was needed than simply asking applicants whether they were willing to participate in the cooperative.

Table IV: Cooperative Aptitude Criteria in Member Selection	
Cooperative	Selection
La Colonia Santa Maria	None – No New Members last 20 years
Villa De Guadalupe Coop	None – No New Members last 20 years
La Buena Esperanza	None
Las Casas de Madera	Limited – board interviews prospective members during selection process about interest & willingness to participate
San Jerardo	None
Santa Elena	None
Vista de la Terraza	None
Cabrillo Village	None
Rancho Sespe	None

Orientation after Membership Selection

By the time prospective new members have reached the top of the waiting lists for membership and entered into the selection process, they often have, at best, a very limited understanding of cooperative housing. They understand little about share ownership or membership responsibilities. It is not unusual for new members to receive their first real information about the cooperative after the selection process has been completed. As Table V shows, the orientation is typically conducted by the site manager and occurs when they are completing their membership application and going through the eligibility certification process.

Cooperative	Selection
La Colonia Santa Maria	None – No New Members last 20 years
Villa De Guadalupe Coop	None – No New Members last 20 years
La Buena Esperanza	Manager provides orientation during application process
Las Casas de Madera	Manager provides orientation during application process
San Jerardo	Manager provides orientation during application process
Santa Elena	Manager provides orientation during application process
Vista de la Terraza	Manager provides orientation during application process
Cabrillo Village	Board provides orientation after application is completed at meeting to select new members
Rancho Sespe	Manager provides orientation during application process

B. General Membership Training

Once a new member joins the cooperative, they, along with the rest of the membership, are unlikely to receive any further training in most of the cooperatives in this assessment. Only one cooperative, Santa Elena, is conducting training for its general membership. Another two cooperatives, Rancho Sespe and Cabrillo Village, did allow members to attend board training sessions conducted in 2004. Currently no other general membership training is planned. One other cooperative, Las Casas de Madera, previously attempted systematic training of its membership several years ago, but has since discontinued the training. The remaining six cooperatives do not provide training for the membership.

Cooperative	Type of Training Provided
La Colonia Santa Maria	None
Villa De Guadalupe Coop	None
La Buena Esperanza	None
Las Casas de Madera	None
San Jerardo	None
Santa Elena	Yes – twice annually
Vista de la Terraza	None
Cabrillo Village	Yes –board trainings are open to membership
Rancho Sespe	Yes – board trainings are open to membership

Las Casas de Madera General Membership Training

Between 1997 through 1999, Las Casas de Madera embarked on an ambitious training program for its membership. Trainings were generally held on a monthly basis and were scheduled for three hours per session. After each session, the training materials were to be placed in a binder that, at the end of the process, would become the core for a member reference and training manual. Attendance was mandatory for these sessions.

The results of this training initiative were mixed. A core of ten to fifteen residents attended these sessions consistently and some members increased their understanding of cooperatives. But most members did not participate and much of the membership was not interested. Enforcing mandatory attendance was problematic. The board and manager, when interviewed, felt that in retrospect, the sessions were too long and ended too late in evening for the membership who had to get up early for work the next day. Additionally, they felt the training materials and presentations while of high quality, accurate and complete, were too complex for the membership to understand and presented more information during the sessions than the members could digest.

Reference and Resource Materials

As Table VII shows, only one cooperative has any written informational or educational materials for members. Cabrillo Village has a pamphlet with some basic information on the cooperative. Las Casas de Madera has the training materials from its discontinued training program but does not use them for orientation or distribute them to the members. None of the cooperatives provide members with a member handbook or manual. Some of the reasons cited for this lack of reference and education materials are the cost of production and literacy issues with some farmworkers.

Cooperative	Selection
La Colonia Santa Maria	None
Villa De Guadalupe Coop	None
La Buena Esperanza	None
Las Casas de Madera	None
San Jerardo	None
Santa Elena	None
Vista de la Terraza	None
Cabrillo Village	Yes –informational pamphlet
Rancho Sespe	None

C. Board Training

On the positive side, four cooperatives have provided training for their boards in 2003 or the first half of 2004. Cabrillo Village and Rancho Sespe have completed training in 2004 for their boards through an affordable housing technical assistance agency – Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC). Unfortunately, this training is being provided through a limited technical assistance program and may not be available on an ongoing or long-term basis. Beginning in the winter of 2003 and continuing into 2004, RCAC conducted two training sessions for the boards and general members at each cooperative. The sessions covered cooperative structure, roles and responsibilities of the board and members, budgeting and finance and oversight of the management process. The goals of the sessions are to assist the current board members to understand and perform their roles and hopefully to prepare other members to serve on the board in the future.

Cooperative	Selection
La Colonia Santa Maria	None
Villa De Guadalupe Coop	None
La Buena Esperanza	None
Las Casas de Madera	Participating in outside grassroots leadership development program
San Jerardo	No formal training, informal mentoring, learn-by-doing training of new board members by experienced ones.
Santa Elena	Self-sustaining internal board and member training program
Vista de la Terraza	None
Cabrillo Village	Yes –3-4 training sessions planned for 2004
Rancho Sespe	Yes –3-4 training sessions planned for 2004

Outside Board Training With Transferable Skills

Las Casas de Madera Board Members have begun participating in a grassroots leadership development program that is being provided by a local nonprofit organization. While the training program is not oriented specifically to cooperatives, it does provide leadership and organizational skills training that can be applied to the cooperative.



Cabrillo Village

Integrated and Self-Sustaining Training

Santa Elena has adopted the most advanced training program. Their approach is intended to be self-sustaining and integrated. Working closely with two bilingual and experienced cooperative training consultants, Santa Elena first conducted a series of eight training sessions for the

board beginning in late 2002. Sessions were conducted approximately once a month and covered the following areas:

1. Introduction to Housing Cooperatives: One session
2. Budgeting: Two sessions
3. Understanding a Fiscal Statement: One session
4. Cooperative Documents: One session
5. Management and Operations: Two Sessions
6. Meeting Management: One Session

Once this series was completed, the program then shifted to “training the trainers.” In two sessions, the board learned how to plan and deliver training in these same topic areas. After these two sessions had been completed, the board then began training the membership. Because of the size of the cooperative, the membership was divided into three sections. Training was mandatory for members. The board trained each section the same topics they had learned using the same training materials. The training regimen initially began at a topic per month pace. But due to the time demands of training three sections on each topic, training will likely take place twice a year in the future.

San Jerardo On-The-Job Training

San Jerardo conducts no formal training for their board. Instead, San Jerardo tries to get a new member elected to the board as quickly as possible. Once on the board, it is felt that the member can learn about the cooperative by carrying out their duties while being mentored by more experienced board members. This approach is employed because new members to the cooperative are usually the adult second generation children of older households. The board feels that most of the new members are really not new and having grown up in the cooperative they already are ‘oriented’ and at least somewhat knowledgeable about the cooperative.

D. Training Issues and Problems

Training, Orientation and Managers: Limits and Issues

One of the key issues identified by the assessment is an over reliance on managers to provide orientation and training for new and existing members. Put simply, the managers at these cooperatives have a substantial workload that is typical for the management of any multifamily property. Added to the normal workload are compliance with the various funding programs requirements for reporting, eligibility certifications and conformance with other regulations. All the managers in this assessment exhibited dedication to the cooperative and in some cases have gone far beyond the call of duty in

carrying out their management responsibilities. However, when cooperatives become overly reliant on management for training and board support problems and issues arise.

This is because training is a significant undertaking in and of itself. When managers go beyond their customary responsibilities and become too deeply involved in areas such as member selection, training and board development they can be taking on tasks that begin to displace the board and membership from responsibilities that should be assumed by the cooperative. In at least one cooperative, the board appears to overly rely on the manager for guidance and support.

In another case, tensions were reported to have developed between the board and the manager regarding expectations of board support and authority to implement decisions. To be sure, some tension between managers and boards is inherent in the cooperative model where the manager essentially works for those that they manage. However, in this case, some of the tension appears to result from board members not having sufficient understanding of their role and/or the skills to carry out their responsibilities.

On the other side, management agents can experience financial and staff stress when they have to assume increasing responsibility for membership selection, orientation, training and board development. Management staff of one nonprofit housing corporation that has both developed and managed farmworker housing cooperatives described the problem as one of increasing expectations on the part of board and cooperative members for training and support services that were not covered by management fees. When they tried to meet those expectations, the nonprofit essentially incurred the financial costs of providing 'pro bono' training and technical assistance. Additionally their efforts to provide extra technical and training support services to the cooperatives put significant stress on management staff who had to work longer hours and assume a larger workload.

From this nonprofit's perspective, farmworker cooperatives require labor-intensive technical support and training services for their boards and membership. However, restrictions on monthly housing costs that are needed to maintain affordability and regulatory control over operating budgets by funding agencies combine to limit the financial resources available to cover these additional costs. Training and technical assistance are substantial undertakings requiring dedicated staff supported by an appropriate cost center. Simply put, this kind of support cannot be provided for free.

Lack of Cooperative Support Systems

Perhaps the largest problem facing farmworker and all other affordable cooperatives in California is a lack of a supportive institutional infrastructure. In contrast to other areas of the country such as New York City or Boston, California lacks established and specialized cooperative support organizations and businesses. There are, for example, no large management companies that specialize in cooperative management. Technical assistance providers or state and regional cooperative housing associations that provide the training, technical assistance and other kinds of support that are so desperately needed in California simply don't exist. Agencies such as USDA Rural Housing Services or the

California Department of Housing and Community Development that hold regulatory agreements with farmworker cooperatives they fund are rarely in a position to provide any substantial or sustained training or other support. The one entity that had been filling some of that void, the UC Davis Center for Cooperatives, was closed in 2004 due to the state's budget crisis. Previous efforts to form state and regional cooperative housing associations were not successful.

As a result, farmworker and other cooperatives in the state are left scrambling when they need training or other specialized support. For farmworker cooperatives with specialized linguistic and cultural needs, it is particularly difficult to locate the kinds of training and other services they need. As an example, the recent training provided by RCAC to Rancho Sespe and Cabrillo Village, while of good quality, was conducted by a staff person who was not bilingual. In Monterey County, one of the two bilingual and experienced farmworker cooperative trainers is now retiring from this work. The other trainer has other full-time employment and provides training only on a part-time and limited basis.

No Cooperation Between Cooperatives

Despite the proximity of a number of the cooperatives with one another, there have been no joint training endeavors. The cooperatives have had little contact with one another although board members expressed positive interest in joint workshops. This lack of contact hinders the cooperatives in that they are unable to learn from one another or, share costs of training consultants. According to the former manager of San Jerardo, the cooperatives in Monterey County used to work with one another around training and other common issues in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Lack of Resources for Training and Membership Development

Developing the capacity of a cooperative's new and existing membership to own and manage their housing collectively is a substantial and long-term undertaking. It is not a matter of a simple one-shot series of trainings that will quickly prepare the membership. The skill set and knowledge required of cooperative members must be cultivated and reinforced with ongoing training, support and technical assistance. Few of the cooperatives in this assessment have the additional financial resources to support dedicated training and membership development staff positions. And, as discussed earlier, the normal duties of management staff preclude them from fully fulfilling this vital need.

By way of comparison, the Sacramento Mutual Housing Association (SMHA), the most advanced cooperative housing organization in California, has nine resident-governed developments with almost 2,000 residents to whom it provides extensive and ongoing training and support services. A mutual housing association essentially represents a confederation of cooperative and/or resident-governed housing developments under a democratic resident and/or community controlled parent organization. New housing development, management and support services are combined under one roof. The

mutual housing model provides the specialization and economies of scale to pay for training, technical assistance, management and other support services that would otherwise be difficult and/or expensive to obtain for an individual housing development.

This model has allowed SMHA to provide training and support to residents at a level far beyond what an individual farmworker cooperative could. SMHA employs dedicated full-time resident organizers who work closely with the residents to support their participation in the cooperatives. Virtually all professional staff – including the chief fiscal officer, the executive director, project developers and manager – spend at least some of their time working on resident training and related support. As a result, SMHA is able to devote the full-time equivalent of one professional staff to each of their developments in addition to an onsite management staff.

VII. Cooperative Housing Best Training Practices

Interviews with cooperative and farmworker housing trainers and cooperative housing leaders from outside the farmworker sector were conducted to identify best practices training methods that could be used by the farmworker housing cooperatives. Findings presented from interviews represent areas of consensus among those interviewed or similar experiences unless otherwise noted. Training systems or methods specific to a particular cooperative or cooperative housing organization will be identified as such.

A. Member Selection Criteria and Process

Two former and one current nonfarmworker cooperative board members, one farmworker training consultant and two community land trust organizers felt strongly that farmworker cooperatives should employ member selection criteria and methods that will allow them to select only those who are most suited for cooperative housing and likely to make a contribution to the cooperative. Their rationale is that cooperative housing, like condominiums, single-family home ownership, mobile home or self-help housing, is not for everyone. Each form of housing places certain demands and restrictions and also offers certain opportunities to owners. In a cooperative, ownership and operation is essentially collective and interdependent. Many of the benefits of cooperative housing can only be realized through an active and engaged membership. For these reasons, cooperative ownership requires members who have the skills, experience and interest that make them effective members of a social group or community. Particularly important is a sense of concern and contribution to the larger welfare of a community or social group. New members with these qualities are more likely to mesh with cooperative housing and ultimately become contributing members of the cooperative.

Conversely, individuals who join a cooperative primarily because of housing need and otherwise lack the interest or ability to participate in the cooperative will inevitably drain resources and energy from it. As the number of these noncontributing members increase, it becomes harder to fill board positions and organize resident committees. When such members do concern themselves with issues facing the cooperative such as increases in carrying charges, they are likely to act on the basis of short-term individual

self-interest rather than the interests of the cooperative at large. Further, these kinds of members often provide fertile recruiting ground for disruptive initiatives such as attempts to disband the cooperative and convert it to individually owned, market-rate housing. Such members, with little understanding or interest in cooperative housing, may be easily swayed by arguments of individual gain or alternatively, may remain passive in a situation where the general membership needs to step forward in defense of the cooperative.

Santa Rosa Creek Commons: Prequalifying the Waiting List

Santa Rosa Creek Commons, in particular, has a highly evolved system of member selection. This small, 28-unit limited equity cooperative requires significant participation on the part of members. Attendance at board and general membership meetings is mandatory as well as participation on at least one committee. Since the cooperative is entirely self-managed, all members participate in the operation of the cooperative through its committee structure. A minimum contribution of eight hours per month is mandatory with sixteen hours being more the norm.

For this system to work, new members must be able to participate and contribute. To ensure the match between new members and the cooperative's participatory structure, those on the waiting list are prequalified for membership. The process begins with the household on the waiting list completing a membership application and then being interviewed by a representative of the membership committee along with another member at large. Part of the application requires the applicant to submit a personal statement regarding why they are interested in living in the cooperative and how their membership will make a contribution. Next, the applicant must attend at least one board/general membership meeting, one committee meeting and a social event at the cooperative. The overall process is intended to acquaint prospective members with how the cooperative works, what will be expected of them and allows them to meet some of the membership. The cooperative then has a chance to interact with and evaluate the applicant's suitability for this type of housing in several different settings.

Marathon Cooperative: Participation Experience

The Marathon Cooperative is a limited equity development in Los Angeles. When the cooperative board interviews an applicant they ask about participation in social and community activities or groups such as the PTA, clubs, church or union. After the interview, the applicant's participation record is checked by calling the references to verify that the information given is correct. The preference of the cooperative is for applicants who have a track record of participation in social and community activities and organizations.

The former board members from Marathon who were interviewed emphasized that this process was strictly consistent with Fair Housing guidelines. Information requested and interview questions asked were the same for all applicants. Nor were certain types of

participation weighted more heavily than others such as the PTA versus a church. The primary goal was to ensure that the member could meet all the requirements of cooperative housing that depends on owners participating in the collective operation of their housing.

Northern California Land Trust: Open House, Screening and Orientation

The Northern California Land Trust (NCLT), which develops a mix of small cooperatives, homeownership and resident-managed, housing, begins the orientation process well before selection is finalized. Land trusts ensure housing remains affordable by retaining the rights to the land on which housing is developed. This removes the land cost from the price of the housing when a homeowner wishes to sell the house and allows the land trust to maintain affordability regardless of current market prices. The housing developed on the trust's land may be single family, rental or cooperative. However, the NCLT, like many housing land trusts, values housing that is cooperative or at least resident governed.

For cooperative and other projects that involve shared ownership and/or resident management, NCLT works to ensure that new residents can both assume the responsibilities of collective operation of the housing and are suited for that type of housing. For these kinds of housing developments, NCLT has required prospective members to attend an open house and orientation. This allows potential members to learn more about how the housing is operated, what will be expected of them and the benefits of the housing. To ensure Fair Housing compliance, these events are conducted in a structured and consistent manner. This orientation consists of:

1. Presentation providing basic information on the housing and NCLT
2. Questions and answer session
3. Guided tour of the housing

NCLT will then interview those applicants that are still interested. Again, the interview is conducted in a systematic and consistent manner. It includes questions aimed at determining the motivation and suitability of applicants for cooperative and/or resident managed housing. All questions in the interview have an objective and consistent rating system to evaluate responses.

Self-Help Farmworker Housing Screening

Nonprofit agencies that operate the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Housing Service (RHS) 523 Mutual Self-Help Housing program, in which participants build their homes as a group, typically have to screen applicants for the suitability for this type of owner-builder program. Participants build their houses as a group. No one can move in to their house until all the homes are completed. In order to keep families from favoring their house and cutting corners with other homes, programs do not assign the house to families until all construction is completed. Homes are then assigned to individual families through a lottery. Since the families have to perform 40 hours of construction per week over a nine to ten month period and work as part of a

team, this program is not suitable for all first-time, low-income homebuyers. Program staff that recruit, qualify and organize these families try to screen applicants who are not suited for the program.

During the application process to determine eligibility, applicants are counseled about how physically demanding the program is and that there is very little flexibility for those unable to keep pace with construction. Applicants are reminded that construction work generally proceeds no matter how hot or cold the weather. Further, it is reiterated to families that they have to work until all homes in the group are completed and this could potentially mean working even more than 40 hours per week in some circumstances. Hours are monitored closely and families who fall behind on their contribution can be and are removed from the program. It is stressed to applicants that children cannot be on the construction site and that lack of childcare will not remove their work requirement. Families are also required to attend important preconstruction trainings on safety, program rules and group organization. Families who miss these meetings may be disqualified.

The tone of these interviews and meetings, while positive and courteous, is to emphasize the strict requirements and physical hardships of self-help construction. It is intended to ensure that those finally joining a self-help group are fully capable of making the necessary labor contribution. This is essential because construction is inherently unforgiving. It must accommodate a number of constraints ranging from the scheduling and availability of subcontractors to completing certain phases of construction before rainy winter weather sets in. If even one or two families fail to make their labor contributions, the entire process can be jeopardized. For this reason, it is critical that only households who are fully suited for this program are actually participating in it.

Small Business Development: Screening for Entrepreneurial Skills

One of the cooperative consultants is also working with a community development entrepreneur program designed to train and develop the capacity of low-income and minority women to start their own businesses. A key component of the program is to identify women who have an entrepreneurial aptitude. Because certain personality traits and skills are essential to entrepreneurial successes, it is vital that the program identify those applicants who are most likely to benefit from training and support. Entrepreneurial traits and dispositions are the focus during applicant interviews. Applicants are asked about their participation in church, community, school or civic group activities. Hypothetical problem solving questions are posed that are designed to assess whether and how applicants would engage family, social networks or outside support systems. Communication skills, initiative and creativity are also examined in the selection process. While far beyond what a cooperative might undertake, this and the other selection processes selected show both the importance and methods of matching applicant interests and skills to the requirements to the housing.

B. Resource Materials

Member and Board Handbook Template

As noted earlier, none of the cooperatives have member handbooks. One cooperative consultant who has worked with a number of the cooperatives in this assessment recommended that a standardized training manual and member handbook template be produced. This template could then be easily adapted for the different housing types, funding programs, occupational restrictions and equity structures of the different cooperatives.

Additionally, the use of standardized handbooks and training manuals can prevent the “reinventing of the wheel”. This has quite likely occurred over the years as training modules on the same subjects have been independently produced for individual cooperatives at different times in their histories. Over time these materials get lost or forgotten and are then once again recreated.

Santa Rosa Creek Commons Cooperative Handbook

Santa Rosa Creek Commons maintains a member handbook that also doubles as an operating, policy and procedure manual. This manual is maintained and updated by a handbook committee and reflects all decisions and policies adopted by the cooperative. In the event a new issue is encountered or a deviation or exception is made to a policy or procedure, the handbook is updated to reflect that change and the specific circumstances or rationale for making the change. In this way the handbook is a ‘living document’ that memorializes the evolution and adaptations the cooperative has made over the years. As such, it is the central point of reference for the membership, board officers and working committees for both purposes of training and orientation as well as operational decisions.

It should be noted that Santa Rosa Creek Commons is a small cooperative with only 27 units. Further, its membership, while diverse, is also generally literate and educated. To date, the handbook has not become overwhelmed by minutiae nor choked with excessive or arcane issues. The production and updating of this handbook reflects the consensus-based and highly participatory system of self-governance and management this cooperative uses. How well the handbook would work in a larger, less participatory cooperative remains to be seen.

Marathon Cooperative Annual Report

The Marathon Cooperative produces an annual report that is designed to be a user-friendly document that serves to both inform and educate the membership. It is produced in both English and Spanish by a bilingual consultant and provides both fiscal reports and explanations of the major actions undertaken by the cooperatives during the fiscal year. The budget section provides a detailed line item breakdown with budget notes that explains in very simple, jargon-free language what the line item pertains to. Significant actions or events such as major repairs, litigation or board actions are explained using



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simple narratives, tables and pictures. For example, the 2002 annual report includes a section that provides a detailed breakdown by unit for a major renovation project undertaken by the cooperative. A description of renovations for each unit is provided along with pictures from selected units highlighting the upgrades. This approach allows members to see which members received repairs and some of the outcomes of those repairs. An added benefit

is that the affairs of the cooperative are more transparent and unfounded rumors of or social divisions about favoritism, corruption or financial mismanagement are preempted.

C. Training Methods and Format

Integrated Member Training: Sacramento Mutual Housing Association (SMHA)

The SMHA provides an integrated and progressive system of resident orientation, training and leadership development. This system of membership support and development allows the SMHA to select residents primarily on program eligibility and not screen for aptitude or suitability for resident-governed housing. Instead, beginning upon entry to an SMHA project and continuing through their tenure, residents are provided with systematic support designed to encourage and foster their development as active and participating members of their housing development and the SMHA.

The SMHA support is provided within a bottom up governing structure. Starting at the project level, residents play a major role in the governance of their housing and the SMHA. Resident councils at each of the SMHA's projects participate in the management and the operation of the housing. These resident councils are built on a further democratic substructure of councils from the individual buildings that make up the property. Other committees within the project structure include Welcoming, Education/Recreation, Community Watch and Community Health Committee. A Public Policy Advisory Group, made up of resident representatives from the Resident Councils represents the interests of the collective membership of all the properties and provides important input on SMHA operations, services, policies and any issues facing the residents or SMHA as a whole. Residents are also selected to serve on the SMHA Board of Directors as well as committees of the Board.

Within this structure, resident orientation and support begins early in the selection process. New residents are greeted on their first day by a resident welcoming committee and later meet with a resident support staff. The purpose of this meeting is to brief the new resident on the SMHA structure and services, encourage them to become involved and identify social needs they may have. With the equivalent of one full-time professional dedicated to each development for support, the SMHA can work closely with Resident Councils and various building committees to provide on-the-spot support and provide or arrange for needed training.



Vista de la Terraza

Whenever possible, the SMHA will provide training for councils and committees from multiple buildings. However, if needed, the SMHA can provide training for support to Resident Councils and committees at individual buildings. In addition to the training and support provided to the councils and committees, SMHA staff also encourages and supports the development of individual residents to become leaders in their housing. This staff training and support is backed up with appropriate reference materials for resident organizations and leaders.

Learning by Doing at Santa Rosa Creek Commons

At Santa Rosa Creek Commons new and existing members are trained on the job through its highly participatory governance and extensive self-management structure. In this cooperative, all members are on the board of directors with board officers being elected by the membership/board. Since all members are on the board of directors, monthly general membership meetings are board meetings. Governance of the cooperative occurs through a committee structure in which committee members perform the functions of the committee. Currently the cooperative maintains committees that perform most of the maintenance, landscaping and accounting. Other committees are responsible for member education, facilitating communication and maintaining the handbook.

All members are on the board of directors and must serve on at least one committee. The training system is one where a new committee member learns on the job with informal and individual coaching, mentoring and training by more experienced committee members. Over time, as members serve on different committees, knowledge of the various aspects of the cooperative become diffused amongst the membership.

Santa Rosa Creek Commons is an exemplar of integrated membership selection, orientation and training. The member handbook discussed earlier serves an important dual role as a reference manual and guide for committee members regarding how to perform their functions as well as a policy and procedures guide for the cooperative. Also, this system of self-management, supported by a member selection and orientation process, goes a long way towards ensuring that new members already understand and are suited for the levels of participation the cooperative requires.

Mandatory participation as a director on the board is another mechanism where members learn by doing. All board decisions are made at the monthly board meetings through a consensus process. These meetings are highly participatory and provide new members with an opportunity to learn about the overall operations, affairs and issues of the cooperative as well as a chance to participate in the decisions on those matters. While the Santa Rosa Creek Commons self-management and training process is probably not feasible for the much larger farmworker cooperatives, elements of its learn-by-doing approach could be feasibly adopted by farmworker cooperatives.

Content of Training

The focus in this section is to identify the key content that is essential for a



Cabrillo Village

comprehensive and successful cooperative training regimen. These content areas have been identified from the experience and suggestions of cooperative trainers, technical assistance providers, managers, cooperative developers, farmworker homeownership program staff and staff from other cooperatives housing organizations who were interviewed for this assessment.

1. Cooperative Housing Organizational Structure

This material should provide a broad overview of what a housing cooperative is and cover the basic organizational and ownership structure of cooperative housing. This includes the nomination, election and board decision-making processes along with the roles and responsibilities of the general members and board. Training here should overview the ownership structure of the nonprofit cooperative corporation in which members hold shares. A key part of understanding the ownership structure is how the blanket mortgage works and its relationship to the monthly carrying charges members pay. This training should also present a short history of the cooperative including the funding program(s) that have financed its development.

2. Ownership

There is sometimes much confusion by cooperative members – especially new ones – regarding ownership. It is not unusual for cooperative members to think they own their individual unit rather than owning a share in a nonprofit cooperative corporation that confers occupancy rights. They may not completely understand that it is the cooperative corporation itself that owns the property. Cooperative members must fully understand what ownership means in a cooperative and its limitations. Training should explain share equity, appreciation, occupancy rights, tax benefits and share transfer/sales processes. It was emphasized that first time homeownership for farmworkers – whatever the form of ownership – can require substantial training. Farmworkers who have spent their entire life renting substandard housing, have limited education, speak little English and sometimes live on the fringes of society may become confused or not understand what cooperative share ownership means.

This occurs even with the most traditional and widely understood ownership model - single-family ownership programs. Here too issues related to ownership still occur. Interviews with self-help and first-time homebuyer programs for farmworkers brought out that even within a traditional, individual ownership model; some farmworker families do not always fully understand what ownership entails. For example, it is not unknown for farmworker families in self-help or other first time homebuyer programs to believe that the nonprofit agency that operated the program was also responsible for making repairs much like a landlord. In other cases, farmworkers may not fully understand resale and use restrictions placed on their properties as a condition for receiving subsidies necessary to make the housing affordable. Restrictions regarding who can buy their house, how much they can sell it for or even prohibitions against renting out their house can easily cause confusion and disappointment. For these reasons, substantial training and preparation is always necessary and seldom simple in any farmworker homeownership program.

3. Operations and Management

Related to ownership is the role of the management company, or if the cooperative is self-managed, the role of the manager and other staff employed by the cooperative. Members need to understand that member ownership and control means that the cooperative and not individual members supervise the management agent and/or management staff. This, in turn, requires that members clearly understand the role and functions of the cooperative board of directors, why the current management method was selected and how the management process works.

Without a clear understanding of the management process, members can sometimes swing to extremes in their attitudes toward management. On one end, they may feel that as owners the manager is their employee and that they are the “boss.” This can lead to placing inappropriate demands on management or not respecting authority that the cooperative has delegated to management staff. The other reaction is a sense of disempowerment when the members find that they don’t have individual authority over management staff. When this happens, it is easy for the member to revert back to the familiar tenant-landlord role and begin to feel and act like a renter.

A key part of this training includes a review of repair requests, complaint processes, eviction/foreclosure procedures and capital improvement plans. Here members will learn about how long term maintenance occurs, what to do when they have a repair problem and what the roles of the board and management staffs are in these processes. Part of this training should familiarize members with commonly used forms and documents - especially copies of the management and maintenance plans and house rules.

4. Finances

Cooperative finances training should work off of the cooperative’s budget and show members what their monthly carrying charges are used for, why those expenses are necessary and how members benefit from them. At minimum, members should be able to read and understand the cooperative’s annual operating budget. Requirements or restrictions on the uses of certain funds should be made clear. As an example, CDBG funds designated for structural rehabilitation of cooperative infrastructure can’t be used for a swimming pool or to pay off the mortgage. For boards, this training can be expanded into budget, reserves or capital improvement planning.

5. Cooperative Documents

Subject matter under this category should include a review of key cooperative documents such as the membership agreement, articles and by laws, house rules, share certificate,

use agreements or use permits. This training can also incorporate relevant sections of state and federal law governing nonprofit corporations or key sections of the regulations of housing programs that have financed or assisted the cooperatives. The goal here is not a painstaking and detailed review of these documents but rather to acquaint members with these documents, the most important sections, what they are for and how they are used.

6. Meeting Management

This topic may be more suitable, at least initially, for the board of directors and is more essential for them than the general membership. Training content in this subject area would teach the basics of how to conduct board and general membership meetings. Those receiving this training would learn about planning, organizing, setting agendas, room preparation, taking minutes, quorums and other key elements of organizing and conducting meetings. An important part of this training would be basic facilitation techniques and meeting practices such as Roberts Rules of Order.

7. Roles and Responsibilities of Cooperative Boards

Subject matter here would cover the functions of the board of directors and how board members carry them out. Included here would be information on the different board officers, the role of each officer and the scope of their authority. Requirements – and the reasons for those requirements - for record keeping, minutes and other documentation would be reviewed. Important concepts such as fiduciary duties and liability of individual members would be covered in simple terms. The key elements of the nomination and election process would be covered under this topic. Ethical and legal issues should be integrated into the subject matter with examples of common pitfalls. For example, fair housing and nepotism issues and their potential impact on the cooperative and individual board members could be related to member selection or cooperative hiring or contracting processes.

Format of Training

Keep it Simple

One of the principal recommendations coming from the interviews was that training for board and members should be provided in a series of “small doses” over an appropriate sequence of time. There was a general sense that should be not be overloaded with too much information nor should too many different subject areas be covered in a single session. Sessions should be focused on the key or most essential information regarding each topic area.

Keep it Short

Long, all day training sessions that attempt to cover multiple subject areas such as articles and bylaws, meeting management and budgeting can overwhelm farmworkers.

Cooperative trainers, managers and developers emphasized that training should be delivered in a sequence of short training sessions delivering basic information. This approach not only prevents farmworkers from being overwhelmed with too much information, but also is also respectful of the conditions of agricultural labor.

It was noted that farm labor is physically grueling and often entails long hours in the fields. Often both heads of the household and some of the older children may be engaged in farm labor on at least a part-time or seasonal basis. A farmworker, who has just spent ten hours harvesting vegetables in 100-degree heat, has three children at home and has to be up early the next morning will probably not be too receptive to a highly abstract and complex three-hour lecture or training session on a weeknight.

For these reasons, training sessions should be short and generally in the range of an hour and a half to two hours. Three hours was seen as the maximum with longer sessions pushing the limit for many farmworkers/residents. Training should be scheduled in the early evening and not end late in the evening due to farmworkers typically having to arise early for work.

Engaging and Interactive

It was stressed that training must actively engage residents through interactive learning techniques. Training must use a series of methods such as small group learning exercises, questions and answer formats, humor and visual or graphic aids to maintain attention and interest. The use of examples or experiences that are common to farmworkers and are also similar to the concepts and topics of the training should be employed liberally. These examples in turn could be used to engage those receiving the training by asking them to share an appropriate real life experience that will reinforce the topic or concept being focused on. For example, the concepts of budgeting or replacement reserves could be complemented by a member's experiences with budgeting or saving for household or future expenses.

Highly abstract, “talking heads” kinds of presentations along with jargon and highly technical language should be avoided. Where technical language or jargon has to be employed to some degree, techniques should be used to demystify or simplify it. Often such language ultimately refers to or is based upon simple concepts or common experiences. Reducing jargon and technical terms to those basic elements makes the concept more accessible and less intimidating.

Culturally Competent

Training must be delivered in a manner that does not demean or disrespect farmworkers or their culture. Presentations that use too much jargon, rely too much on abstract concepts or are overly technical may come off as patronizing or “talking down” to farmworkers. It is particularly important to check that curriculum and training materials do not assume a set of life experiences or knowledge that are more appropriate for a more middle class or professional audience. When introducing new concepts or terminology

for the first time, trainers should especially share or relate how these are sometimes difficult concepts or terms for others, or even for themselves, to understand the first time.

Farmworker culture should also be seen as a resource that can be drawn upon in conducting training. Trainers should try to identify and draw on similar concepts or experiences from the farmworkers' culture or life experiences that are similar to or illustrate the training objectives or concepts. These experiences can sometimes be so much a part of the lives of farmworkers that they themselves don't recognize the linkage.

Yet many of the key skills and concepts central to cooperatives have counterparts in farmworker life. Sharing a motel room during harvest season, pooling money to buy food, working with relatives to repair a car, preparing a field for planting, paying off a personal loan and preparing a household budget are the kinds of common experiences that illustrate various principle and facets of cooperative housing. For example, the sharing of a motel room during harvest season where each farmworker had to pitch in and pay their share of the room charge can easily be related to concept of the blanket mortgage. This can then be built upon to explain the importance of everyone paying their carrying charges on time. The failure of a few families to make their monthly payment can have the same effect as a shared motel room where everyone is kicked out if someone doesn't pay their share and they can't meet the full cost of the room. These kinds of methods have been employed for some time to successfully prepare farmworkers for participation in homeownership programs, self-help housing and farmworker housing cooperatives.

Scheduling of Training

When training is held, how long the sessions last and the context in which they are conducted can do much to ensure their success. Based on the interviews, training sessions should not be conducted more than once a month with four times a year considered more realistic. If a monthly training regime is to be used, training should be skipped on months during holiday seasons and peak agricultural labor times such as the harvest season. Weeknights tend to be better than weekends due to the need of farmworkers to take care of personal business and run errands during the weekend. It should be remembered that it is often hard for farmworkers to take time off from their jobs during the day. Also, during peak periods, farmworkers may have to work on weekends as well.

Linking Training to Social Events

Linking training to a social or recreational activity can increase the turnout. When possible, training sessions should be piggybacked onto other cooperative meetings such as a general membership meeting or a social event. This helps the training draw on the larger turnout of the cooperative and tap into some of the energy generated. When linking the training to a larger cooperative event or activity is not possible, some type of social activity should be integrated into the training. Adding a barbecue, potluck or even just some snacks and beverages can help generate a more upbeat tone to the training event. This also helps dissipate a sense of drudgery that can settle about a training event.

Training should also be scheduled in a logical order where the initial sessions provide a foundation for the proceeding ones. A session that provides an introduction to cooperative housing is an obvious candidate for a kickoff session. One trainer recommended cooperative finances as a candidate for one of the beginning training sessions. In their view, starting with cooperative finances early in the training series is useful because understanding equity and what their monthly carrying charges are used for are often among the most immediate concerns to members – especially newer members. Also, following the cash flows of the cooperatives and understanding equity, if presented correctly, is almost a schematic of the cooperative structure. Finally, members usually have some financial experiences – household budgets, loans, and car maintenance - which they can relate to financial topics.

VIII: Training Recommendations for California Farmworker Cooperatives

Currently, California’s farmworker housing cooperatives, with one exception, are not adequately training or preparing their membership and boards of directors. They tend to operate in isolation from one another in an environment without dedicated cooperative support organizations. This isolation has prevented them from jointly developing and sharing training resources or conducting joint training sessions. On an individual basis, the cooperatives themselves, have limited resources to provide the level of training and support necessary to fully develop their membership. This lack of training has made itself felt through over-reliance on management staff to fill the void. In one case, these pressures appear to be at least partially responsible for one nonprofit housing organization scaling back its cooperative management services.



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However, this problematic situation also holds within it the seeds of some solutions. One cooperative that is taking on the challenge of cooperative training offers a model of self-sustaining membership training that could be emulated by other cooperatives. The other solution lies in reversing what they are not doing – namely cooperating with one another to undertake more cost effective joint training initiatives. These potential solutions lead directly to the recommendations of this assessment.

Recommendation 1: *Cooperatives should institute member selection and orientation processes that ensure new members are both suited for cooperative ownership and also have personal skills and resources that will contribute to the cooperative.*

The new member selection process by farmworker cooperatives is a haphazard process at best. New members are selected with little regard for either their suitability for cooperative ownership or ability to be a contributing and participating member of the cooperative. During and right after the selection process, new members receive little orientation.

Cooperatives must begin employing member selection processes that result in new members who are suited for cooperative housing, can participate and contribute once they join and are prepared for membership in the cooperative. Farmworker cooperatives should:

1. Provide information on cooperative housing to households at the top of the waiting list prior to their submission of an application through open house events, formal orientation meetings or interviews with the board or membership committee.
2. Formally incorporate cooperative aptitude and suitability criteria into the member selection and application process such as:
 - a. Requesting participation information on the application that identifies specific involvement with civic, school, social or education groups and activities
 - b. Ask for and check “participation” references and history
 - c. Develop and utilize objective and consistent participation and cooperative aptitude questions and criteria to be used in all facets of the selection process
 - d. Require applicants to provide an oral or written statement on their motivations for joining the cooperative and ways they plan to contribute
 - e. Use culturally appropriate cooperative-oriented problem solving exercises or questions during interviews
3. Require participation on a cooperative committee during the first year of membership
4. Conduct a formal orientation session once a member has been selected
5. Provide new members with a handbook and/or other written materials

Recommendation 2: *Cooperatives must develop internal, self-sustaining training systems*



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Given the lack of cooperative support organizations and other cooperative resources it is imperative that farmworker housing cooperatives themselves develop their own capacity to provide member and board training. The best model for this approach is the training regimen that is being implemented in Santa Elena. First, a series of board trainings were conducted to build the cooperative knowledge base of the board of directors so that they could better

perform their duties and also take on responsibility for training the membership. The next series of trainings prepared the board to conduct training sessions themselves. After these “training the trainer” sessions, the board then assumed their new role as trainers and began conducting sessions for the general membership. While this strategy should be modified or adapted to the specific circumstances of each cooperative the key elements of this approach are:

1. Outside training consultants should be contracted with the primary objective being the development of the cooperative’s capacity to self-train and a secondary objective of remedial cooperative training for the board.
2. Build the cooperative knowledge base of the board of directors through a series of training sessions.
3. Train the trainers by teaching the board how to conduct sessions for the general membership about the same topics the on which the board was trained.
4. Institute a training regimen for the general membership that should begin very shortly after the board has been prepared to take on the training responsibility for the cooperative so that momentum and recently acquired knowledge and training skills are not lost.

Recommendation 3: Take advantage of outside training opportunities

Currently, only one cooperative, Las Casas de Madera, is taking advantage of outside training opportunities. This is unfortunate because cooperative and related affordable housing training opportunities are available to farmworker housing cooperatives to take advantage of. These may be cooperative specific activities such as those hosted by the National Association of Housing Cooperatives or others that provide training in areas that are closely related to or have application in cooperative housing. Grassroots leadership development, meeting management, property management, replacement reserve planning, budgeting or just some of the workshops that area available at national, state, regional or local affordable housing and community development workshops and have clear applications for farmworker housing. To be sure, travel expenses and lack of translation can be barriers to farmworker participation. Still, Las Casas de Madera, with a board that is primarily Spanish speaking was able to find a local grassroots leadership training program that it is using to raise board skill levels. Farmworker cooperatives need to follow the example of Las Casas de Madera and more aggressively seek out training opportunities.

Recommendation 4: Develop member handbook and other informational materials

None of the cooperatives provide members with a handbook and few of them use informational materials of any kind for orientation or training. Handbooks or short pamphlets on key topics and training modules can all contribute to the process of member

selection, orientation and training. These kinds of materials are excellent candidates for joint ventures with other cooperatives.

Recommendation 5: Cooperation with other cooperatives – joint-training initiatives

Cooperation among cooperatives is a basic principal of the cooperative movement. Yet despite often close geographic proximity and common training needs there is virtually no formal or informal cooperation between the farmworker cooperatives in this assessment. By working together, the cooperatives could undertake joint trainings or develop common training materials. Through this cooperative approach, the cost to the individual cooperative can be reduced. Also, joint initiatives will allow the cooperatives to



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undertake projects that would otherwise be too expensive for an individual cooperative to pay for. And, in the case of joint training events, such activities provide an opportunity to share experiences and learn from one another. Coming together for such joint activities could also be a catalyst for other ways of networking and working together in the future on other cooperative related projects or activities.

Recommendation 6: Regional Cooperative Capacity Development Initiatives

As noted, the institutional infrastructure to support farmworker housing cooperatives is quite limited in California. However, there are some cooperative support organizations and farmworker/rural housing advocacy and support agencies in the state. What is needed is coordinated regional capacity development initiatives in the two primary areas where farmworker housing cooperatives are clustered: northern Ventura County in Southern California and Monterey and Santa Clara Counties in Northern California. Such an initiative would be aimed at jump-starting cooperative training in those regions through an infusion of training and technical support designed to build the capacity of farmworker cooperatives to institute self-sustaining training and undertake joint training related initiatives. This kind of capacity-building initiative could, over a one to two year period, build a dedicated core of well-trained cooperative leaders in each cooperative who could then train other members in their cooperative. Such a technical support initiative could catalyze other cooperatives to work together on training or support the production of common training and reference materials such as member handbooks, model documents and common training modules.

References

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