

provinces, co-operatives are giving better value in food and other consumer goods. They make significant contributions in numerous other fields. Organizations range from small intimate groups for community self-help to powerful enterprises on a regional or national scale."

Federated Co-operatives Limited, with home offices in Saskatoon, provides manufacturing, wholesaling and other central services to 430 retailing co-operatives across the West. In 1973, nearly \$355 million worth of merchandise was provided to retail co-ops or sold elsewhere by Federated manufacturing operations — a record. Federated reported 1973 savings of nearly \$17 million on behalf of the Co-operative Retailing System of Western Canada, easily a record.

## petition

Central co-operative and credit union organizations in Western Canada are backing a petition for a new Canadian chartered bank with a head office in Winnipeg. The Co-operative Society of Manitoba is one of the sponsors, with Federated Co-operatives of Saskatoon and Co-operative Implements of Winnipeg and others.

Canadian co-ops come in virtually all varieties. There are co-ops in the taxi business, medical services, trucking, nursery schools, funeral services and even in the purchase of church supplies. Ontario Hydro was founded essentially as a co-operative of local power companies. Nova Scotia leads Canada in percentage terms in co-operative housing. The Co-operative Federation of Quebec — counterpart of the West's Federated — provided a world map showing the results of agricultural co-operation in the province. This shows export-import dealings with thirty-seven countries. The Co-operative Agricole de Granby, Canada's premier dairy enterprise, operates a plant in Taiwan, for instance.

Growing from Quebec's first agriculture co-op founded in 1903, the "Federee" had some 220 member co-ops in 1972 and sales of \$300 million in 1973, before patronage dividends and income taxes, an increase of 18.6 per cent over the previous year. Net earnings of \$8 million, nearly double 1972, represented a 35 per cent return on members' equity.

## record

The Canadian agriculture department issues an annual report on co-operatives in the country covering five basic groups — marketing and purchasing, production, fishermen's service and wholesale. This excludes such activities as insurance and credit unions. The latest report available to the CUC — covering 1971 — shows business activity rose by nine per cent in that year to \$2.4 billion, a record. Saskatchewan was biggest in volume, followed by Quebec, Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island.

A change in the pattern of co-operative business in Canada was noted in 1958. The handling of supplies and consumer goods became more important in relation to marketing. Co-operative supermarkets, as a result, have made their biggest progress in the Western provinces, though generally this aspect of Canada's co-op movement does not match the British performance in terms of business handled. In 1958, one of the finest supermarkets opened in Canada was a co-op — the Red River Co-operative in Winnipeg. It was not just a food store but a shopping centre with departments for foods, drugs, dry goods, service station, hardware and even insurance. A co-op supermarket operation in Calgary, the oil capital of Canada, now does an annual business of \$50 million.

How did it all begin?

The history of co-operatives in Canada is far older than Confederation in 1867, going back to the days of wilderness and uncluttered streams.

## planter's co-op

One historian notes that the first recorded co-op venture of a commercial nature — the "Colonica Societas" — was formed in 1788 in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, by settlers known as the "planters," who came from New England to the Land of Evangeline following the expulsion of the Acadians. Nova Scotia also claims the first consumers co-operative store, opened in Stellarton in 1861, only seventeen years after the Rochdale pioneers began their venture on Toad Lane and enunciated the basic democratic principle — one member, one vote — that came to be revered by co-operators around the world.

The Stellarton Union Co-operative Store, opened by immigrant miners from Britain, flourished for a time but folded within two years of the retirement in 1914 of its first manager, clearly a strong-minded leader. Two years after the opening of the Stellarton enterprise, a co-operative association was formed at Sydney Mines in Cape Breton Island's coal-mining area, serving household needs for forty-two years. Destroyed by fire, it was succeeded in 1906 by an institution that became widely known in co-op circles — the British Canadian Co-operative Society. (As a matter of the most marginal interest, this writer — now sadly snowy on top — well recalls toddling after his mother through that wondrous institution, which has the distinction of being the sole surviving charter member of the Co-operative Union of Canada, formed in 1909.)

## moves south

By that year, the Quebec movement founded by Alphonse Desjardins had taken shape and moved to New England parishes. Many French-Canadians, overflowing their ancestral lands on the banks of the St. Lawrence, were emigrating in those days. In 1892, Desjardins, who had

chronicled debates in the Quebec legislature, was named official reporter of the House of Commons in Ottawa. He noted speeches dealing with usury and excessive interest rates imposed on the small borrower, and legislation proposed to eliminate the worst of those abuses.

He had studied the plight of the needy in his spare time for fifteen years. He came to the conclusion that such things as life insurance and legislation were not sufficient to protect the common man, deprived of access to credit. Just as Charles Dickens, by being a court reporter, came to the conclusion that "the law is an ass," Desjardins, as a parliamentary reporter, came to the conclusion that credit and savings were a mess as far as little people were concerned.

He did his homework well. At age 46, this man with the handlebar moustache and determined jaw — his likeness adorns countless caisses populaires today — began his great adventure, with his wife handling the accounts. They took in \$26.40 the first day. He went on to get co-op legislation in Quebec and later assisted in obtaining credit union legislation in Massachusetts in 1909 and New York in 1912. He was invited to the White House by President Taft but had to decline because of ill health. The typical United States credit union retained the basic framework of the Desjardins *caisse populaire*, but the U.S. credit union movement was predominantly urban and not rural as in Quebec. Members were usually linked by a social or occupational common bond, invented as an alternative to the geographic boundaries of the parish which limited boundaries of *caisse populaires*.

In view of modern developments, Desjardins seems to have spoken in truly prophetic terms in an address to a youth congress in 1908. He spoke primarily of *caisses populaires* but also predicted the formation of other corporations of societies which later on would form an "integrated unit" and provide tools for bringing about a "deep and beneficent evolution." ♦

## Machine bites spaghetti

Machines are being used to "taste" spaghetti at a research laboratory in Winnipeg, Canada. A complicated apparatus bites into the spaghetti, "chews" it and tells scientists what they want to know about its firmness, texture and chewiness.

Specifically, the biting machine measures the gluten strength of Canadian-grown durum wheat and new breeding varieties now being developed. Gluten is a protein substance intermixed with the starchy endosperm. It is thought to be the main factor in determining the cooking quality of pasta products, including spaghetti, made from durum wheat. ♦