

A Comparative Synthesis of 20th Century Agricultural Cooperative Movements in Europe^{*}

by

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Journal of Rural Cooperation, 33(1), 2005:47-65

Abstract

To ignore the historical perspective of socio-economical phenomena while looking ahead to the future in an attempt to raise expectations and set new challenges, can prove a risky move when approaching the cooperative movement as a whole. This is particularly so in the case of the European agricultural cooperatives. We expect them to play a relevant role in the overall panorama of a globalized world. The aim of this article is to trace the origins of the agricultural cooperative movement in seven European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom) and discuss the coincidences and differences which account for common problems with a view to avoiding them in future joint ventures. Some issues discussed here are, among others, the legal framework, the public institutions concerned with the promotion and development of cooperatives, promoting social groups, the underlying values involved, and finally the various types of cooperatives and the important role they play in specific economic sectors. The analysis includes a comparative synthesis as a point of departure for new challenges in the near future.

Key-words: economic history, history of micro enterprise, cooperative enterprise, agricultural markets.

* This article has been written as a project within the framework of the I+D project (VHA 2002-2444), *The Cordova cooperatives in the context of the European associative movement, 1939-2000: Documental heritage, new technologies and socio-historical analysis* funded by the Spanish Inter-Ministerial Committee of Science and Technology.