

Local and European Elections 2014

**Your Guide to What it Means for You and
Your Co-op**



Local and European Elections May 23rd, 2014

What they can mean for you and your Co-op

ICOS (the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society) represents co-operatives and organisations in Ireland – including the Irish dairy processing co-operatives and livestock marts – whose associated businesses have a combined turnover in the region of €14 billion, with some 150,000 individual members, employing 12,000 people in Ireland, and a further 24,000 people overseas. Outside of ICOS member co-ops, it is estimated that over 3 million Irish people are members of at least one co-operative.

Co-operatives create a diverse economy, contribute to business start-ups and growth, and generate jobs and wealth. They come in all shapes and sizes, from micro enterprises to multinationals.

Co-operatives are businesses owned and run by their members. Whether the members are employees, customers or local communities, they are everyday people who have an equal say in what their business does and a share in the profits.

They operate in all parts of the economy: from accounting to housing, agriculture to services, credit unions to crèches, shops to sports clubs, banks to bakeries, energy to education.

We believe that the co-operative business model can play a key role in:

- Delivering a real economy, serving people's needs and aspirations rather than financial markets
- A resilient and innovative economy that allows a diverse range of business models to flourish
- Equipping young people are equipped to realise their entrepreneurial aspirations
- Promotion of an environment that supports the start-up and growth of people-centred businesses
- Enabling citizens as users of goods and services to exercise control

In light of the existing and further potential for positive impact co-operatives have had on rural areas, ICOS suggest that when your prospective local and European election candidates approach you looking for your vote, the following issues could be of interest to you and the Co-op you are a member of.

ICOS's key recommendations to elected representatives are:

- 1. Reform of Irish & EU policy and regulatory Framework for Co-operative enterprise**
- 2. Increase Co-operative business model awareness In Ireland & Europe**
- 3. Delivery of training for the implementation of governance and standards for local people interested in starting co-operative enterprise**
- 4. Ensuring that staff in the relevant agencies and Departments understand the co-operative model and where it has application**

Co-operatives and the European Parliament

In 2013, the EU Parliament adopted a report recognising the positive role of co-operatives through the economic crisis. ICOS wants to build on this and work with incoming Irish MEPs to develop effective measures to use the co-operative model strengthen Ireland's economic recovery.

ICOS are key members of the Co-operative Alliance of Ireland with our sister co-operative organisations - the Irish League of Credit Unions and the National Association of Building co-operatives.

From a European perspective, co-operatives consist of 160,000 businesses across the continent. Between them, Europe's co-operatives employ 5.4 million people and have 123 million members, meaning they are owned by one in five Europeans.

It is imperative that Irish voters hold MEP's to act on such a vital sector that impacts on so many people.

To this end, we have highlighted some issues that you may like to ask European election candidates that approach you:

- **CAP implementation**

CAP funding comprises of the vast bulk of EU funding to Ireland, and helps underpins the profitability of many co-operative members. We wish to work with new MEPs to ensure the new CAP is implemented to ensure our co-operative businesses have the capacity to grow and thrive.

- **Single Common Market Organisation (sCMO)**

ICOS has focused on the neglected sCMO aspect of the CAP, as it is integral to how our co-operative business cope with market problems and opportunities that will present themselves in the coming years.

- **Importance of Agriculture to overall economy & Co-op enterprise role in that**

The importance of the unique co-operative business model in the Irish economy, especially in agriculture is insufficiently supported in policy and legislative laws. It is important that this is reinvigorated to encourage a new generation.

- **Trade Policy**

Ireland is locked into EU trade policy as part of a single market of 500 million. 3rd country markets are the future of growth for many of our established co-ops. It is imperative we fight to ensure that we are at the table to take advantage of opportunities and defend against threats to our businesses.

- **Food Chain & Competition Issues**

Co-operatives have always been the best tool to give members strength in the food chain. But sometimes large factories and retailers can still abuse this, as seen in the current beef crisis. ICOS will continue to use co-operative leverage to combat competition distortion and give members power and a united voice.

- **Environment & Climate Change efforts**

Co-operative businesses and members have traditionally striven to have best practice in green working methods. But this traditional commitment does not mean that our businesses should be mired in overzealous regulation that will choke our growth and employment potential for no real benefit for our surroundings.

- **Sustainability agenda in Co-ops**

ICOS has championed the sustainability agenda for our co-operative business as a means to mark out our world class products as we seek new markets. We look forward to developing initiatives within EU legislation such as promotion and innovation to push this further.

- **Employment in Co-op enterprise**

We are in the midst of one of our nation's most devastating jobs crises, yet the co-operative model has remained resilient through it all and has even added jobs and output. We hope that policymakers take note of this and put in place strategies to enable our businesses to foster job creation further into the future.

- **Ongoing EU Policy Campaigns**

ICOS has one of the oldest Irish presences of any organisation in the EU with over 40 years of continuous representation and experience representing co-operative business. We work closely with our MEPs across a vast spectrum of issues and below are a shortened list of some of the ongoing campaigns at present:

- Dairy Policy and Market Development, Quota Soft-landing, Beef Competition, Promotion of Products, Rural Development & Co-ops, Taxation, Labelling, Electronic ID of Animals, Energy, Veterinary Medicines, Animal Health Law, Producer Organisations, Risk management, Volatility Mitigation, Development of Research and Innovation Funding.

Co-operatives and County Councils

Co-operatives are one of the oldest forms of community and enterprise organisation in rural Ireland with the benefits of being a member of a Co-op felt by an estimated 3 million people in Ireland.

County Councils now have an increased role in rural enterprise and community development with the recent creation of Local Enterprise Offices within the councils that replace the old county enterprise boards. It is also in the pipeline that the Local Community Development Programme (LCDP) and the LEADER programme will now come under structures of the county councils. The Co-operative model is a long established, successful, sustainable method of carrying out development work in rural areas and potential county councillors need to be encouraged to implement the model in the work of the local authorities.

To this end, we have highlighted some issues that you may like to ask County Council candidates that approach you:

- **Local enterprise Offices & encouragement of co-operative model**

The Co-operative Model has ensured that the agriculture and other rural sectors can be maintained for the benefit of its members and the model can also be successful in other enterprise sectors in rural Ireland. County Councillors should work to promote the Co-operative Model within the new Local Enterprise Offices (LEO) to replicate the successes of the dairy and livestock Co-operatives in other sectors

- **Work with communities to encourage Co-operative Renewable Energy projects and prepare planning policies to support these projects**

Successive Government policies encourage community ownership of renewable energy production and the co-operative model is proven internationally as being the best way of organising these projects. County Councils should work with community groups to aid them to get around planning difficulties many of them face when starting projects

- **Encouraging Community co-ops and maintaining Community Involvement in Community Development and LEADER Structures**

The changes that are proposed to the entities proposed to implement the community development programme and the LEADER Programme could have disastrous effects on rural communities if they are not properly involved in the processes. ICOS feel that to ensure the co-operative model is promoted as an option for organising rural communities, a wide participation from different sectors of the community is integral to the operation of the programmes.

- **Driving community and enterprise development**

Rural communities in Ireland have been hit with mass unemployment and emigration. County Councils must be drivers of rural development to ensure that all rural areas are afforded opportunities and not just those who already have the capacity for development. Ideally communities should be able to help themselves, but the impacts of unemployment and emigration mean that some areas need to be encouraged by their councils to develop their areas.

- **Clarify the position of Group Water Schemes under Uisce Eireann**

The National Federation of Group Water Schemes have not been able to get successful clarification from their respective local authorities or Uisce Eireann as to what entity they deal with on the provision of water to their members – this needs to be clarified.

- **Re-Invigorating rural towns and villages**

Many villages around rural Ireland have lost shops, post offices and pubs. They are being threatened with losing schools and transport services. ICOS feel the local authorities should encourage community Co-operatives to work together in preserving and re-opening services to rural communities.