



CORNERSTONE

CO-OP THE HEARTBEAT OF THE COMMUNITY

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CORNERSTONE CO-OP

THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Making Life Better in Communities
with over a century of successful
cooperative excellence



AT A GLANCE

CORNERSTONE CO-OP

- WHAT:** An esteemed cooperative with a rich history standing as the heart of its region.
- WHERE:** Established in Mannville, Alberta - Central Alberta.
- WEBSITE:** www.cornerstoneco-op.crs/sites/cornerstone

EAT OF UNITY



When it comes to community development, local Co-op Associations play a pivotal role. They represent unity, sustainability, and shared prosperity and require large, robust leadership to function optimally and no one knows this better than Cornerstone Co-operative that has experience in the sector that

spans over a century.

As Cornerstone Co-op points out, if the synergy between visionary leadership and engaged member-owners sets the stage for growth, then strategic planning, diversified services, and collaborative ventures propel a cooperative beyond the ordinary.

The essence of a thriving local co-op lies in fostering a cozy, inclusive atmosphere where every member feels not just heard but essential to the co-op's narrative. From the warmth of the staff greeting customers to the community events that spark new connections, every interaction should embody the cooperative spirit. Cornerstone Co-op embraces this sentiment and has already given it central focus in its day-to-day operations.

At Cornerstone, success transcends profit margins. It's about the familiar faces in aisles, the community projects funded, and the sustainable practices embraced. It's about the joy of member-owners actively participating in shaping the co-op's destiny, knowing that every purchase contributes to the collective well-being.

This successful co-op stands as a hub of vitality, a brand embedded in its community's heart, and a beacon of cooperative values that stand the test of time. In the annals of history, Cornerstone Co-op stands as a testament to resilience, community morale, and the enduring power of collective action.

INITIATING AND UPGRADING THE COOPERATIVE SPIRIT

Cornerstone Co-op was one of the first cooperatives established in 1919, at its first location in Mannville, Alberta. It held a pioneering role in the cooperative movement in the area.

Picture the early days—a tight-knit community pooling resources for essentials like barrels of apples, loads of coal, heating fuel and meat lockers for fresh meat. It was about bringing vital services to central Alberta in a farming and agricultural environment that otherwise wouldn't have access to these services.

Of course, this also implied that collaboration





was good for survival, and soon, this implication became an obvious norm that sparked a large wave of centralization among the individual co-op associations in the area.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Kory Kralkay, explains this phenomenon succinctly, saying, “In the 1930s and 40s, we [saw] a lot of these co-operatives originate and eventually join forces... they realized that by pooling their resources together as a regional or geographic co-op, they became better together.”

Pooling of resources became the initial basis for a number of amalgamations that have taken place, with the association built on strategic mergers, going through 5 amalgamations with the first one being in 1966 between the Mannville and Vermilion Co-ops. In 2017, a pivotal moment unfolded with the merger of the St. Paul and District Co-op and Eastalta Co-op to form a new association signifying stability and community-centered values, Cornerstone Co-op.

Over the past century, Cornerstone Co-op has transformed from its humble beginnings into a dynamic entity with upgraded facilities, diversified offerings, and an expanded footprint.

“We’re such an essential service... in some of the communities we serve, we’re the only food offering that the community has,” Kralkay says, highlighting how important the co-op’s presence is in providing such a critical service. Facility upgrades within the 8 Eastern Albertan communities they serve has reached \$55M since 2016, expanding from 21 to 24 locations in that time and updating and modernizing several existing stores with modern and sustainable improvements like LED lighting and energy-efficient refrigeration systems.

The co-op, once rooted in providing bare essentials, has diversified to meet the evolving needs of member-owners. Today, it boasts six food stores, two pharmacies, four liquor stores, agriculture and commercial petroleum services, three gas bars, and two home and building centers.

Its journey spins a story of not just sustaining but thriving, from foundational services to embracing newer frontiers like liquor and pharmaceuticals.

A FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

As Cornerstone expands, sustainability has remained a core value. To show its commitment, the co-op has implemented several initiatives that minimize waste and promote responsible consumption.

One initiative in particular, called Loop, focuses on connecting its local food retailers and farmers in a complementary partnership.

“When you look at all the perishable goods that traditional food stores produce, there’s a lot of waste in order to be full and fresh to the customer every day,” Kralkay says, explaining that the Loop Resources initiative essentially aims to repurpose that waste in a way that will have a meaningful impact on the local ecosystem.

It’s a win-win for both parties, and it’s been phenomenal for the environment, as the initiative has already diverted and repurposed over 300 tons of food scraps since 2018 that would have otherwise ended up in a landfill, to over 40 local farm and animal producers.

However, Cornerstone’s environmental mindfulness does not end there; it can be found even in the operational practices of many of Cornerstone’s stores. All stores recycle cardboard. The home and building centres recycle metal and batteries and every location has a dedicated paper shredding procedure. Food store deli bistros play their part and collectively recycle thousands of liters of used cooking oil each year. All said, over 90% of waste is diverted from landfills.

These unique initiatives are made possible thanks to the hyper-local vendor economy that has been created via the co-op’s resource network. To further explain, this essentially means that over 200+ products available in the Co-op’s food stores were manufactured less than 200 kilometers away from their retail locations.

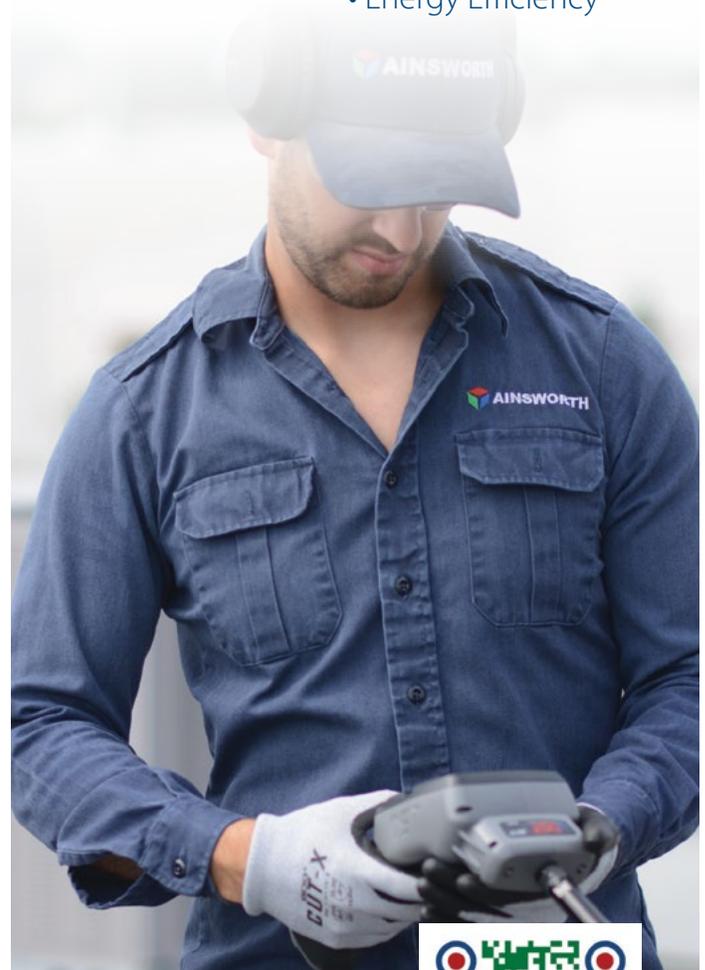
Cornerstone also leans on community engagement as a pillar of strength when promoting its initiatives. It established its Community Giving Program, showing



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that its commitment to the community extends beyond commerce.

Associate Director of Brand Jordyn Prior explains that the program exists to financially assist certain groups and nonprofits as they apply for funding and make efforts to upgrade or expand.

“We gave back just over \$210,000 to over 180 different groups... and in 2022, we invested \$10,000 per day to our local communities via equity, cash back, donations and volunteerism,” Prior says as a valid point of pride. This program stands in tandem with other initiatives like the “Goodbye to Hunger” Campaign and “Communities in Mind,” which focus on raising money for local food groups and raising awareness about mental health, respectively.

Cornerstone also fosters youth engagement through programs like “Bags for Breakfast” which actively donates a portion of profits from recyclable bag purchases back into the nutritional food budget for local schools.



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A VISION FOR CONTINUED COMMUNITY IMPACT

At the heart of Cornerstone's success lies the unique member-ownership structure. With 33,000 member-owners, its model ensures that profits circulate within its local trading area.

Through a one-time ownership share fee, owners participate in profit-sharing, reinforcing their role as stakeholders steering the cooperative's direction.

"We share our profits back to our member-owners based on the spend that they do at their local Co-op. So, the more they patronize their local cooperative, the more cash is shared and equity allocated that builds over the years," Kralkay says, explaining how the model's structure encourages members to engage with their co-op as a means to invest in their financial security.

The next five years hold promises of innovation and sustained community influence.



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Cornerstone Co-op remains dedicated to enhancing the lives of its member-owners, and it is doing so with four pillars as its guiding values.

“All of [our] pillars have to be checked in every box to make sure that we’re doing something for the right reasons. There is our People Pillar, our Market and Operations Pillar, our Financial Pillar... and finally, our Community and Environmental Sustainability Pillar,” Kralkay explains.

While Cornerstone’s specific growth strategies are contingent upon its pillars, the true spirit of the cooperative is fueled by its devotion to the hardworking character of its locality.

As Cornerstone Co-op strides into the future, it aims to measure its success not merely in financial terms but by the freedom and benefits allotted to both its members and local partners.

The co-op seeks to create vibrant scenes of community collaboration, sustainable practices, and



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member-owners actively participating in shaping their cooperative's destiny. Victory here is more about the continued growth of a brand that not only expands its offerings but leaves an indelible mark on the very fabric of the communities it serves

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