

# the co-operative economy in the East of England



*“I’ve seen the positive influence successful co-operatives have on the social and economic well being of their communities and I’m convinced of their huge potential to affect social change.”*

*Phil Hope MP,  
Minister for the Third Sector*

The East of England region consists of the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk and the unitary authorities of Luton, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock.



*MillRace Furniture Restoration Co-operative focuses on providing a supportive environment in which people seeking to recover from mental health problems can engage with the world of work and the world of business. Their most exciting corporate outputs are confidence and self-esteem.*

The region has for centuries been a major centre of agricultural production and has a number of agricultural co-ops large and small involved in every aspect of the modern agricultural industry. These range from multi-million pound marketing organisations such as Fengrain through to agricultural buying co-operatives such as Anglia Farmers. The region also boasts at least one fishing consortium in the form of Kings Lynn Fishing Industry Co-operative Ltd. East Anglia Food Link, a multi-stakeholder co-operative, supports and promotes local and organic food production and consumption in East Anglia.

### Co-operation for the Local Economy

There are four independent retail Co-operative Societies in the region: the Co-operative Group, the East of England Co-operative Society, Anglia Regional Co-operative Society and Chelmsford Star Co-operative Society. All are actively playing their part in the economy of the region.

The East of England Co-operative Society makes a positive contribution to the local economy and the community through its extensive

retail and property developments and its engagement in a wide variety of community activities and events across Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Covering 2,000 square miles and 70 towns and villages, over 200 outlets make the Society the largest community retailer in the region.

Chelmsford Star Co-operative Society has posted record results for its 9th consecutive year. New food stores, funeral offices and a travel centre have been opened in new communities and its two department stores in Chelmsford and Braintree have been refurbished to a very high standard. The Society is working vigorously within schools and universities to develop its next generation shoppers through a variety of programmes including setting up Fairtrade tuck shops, “farm to fork” awareness and mentoring for co-operative entrepreneurs.



Anglia CS serves 33 communities in the East of England where more than 70 outlets provide a range of goods and services. Their food stores, furniture stores, funeral homes, travel agencies, department stores, petrol stations and bureaux de change give Anglia’s 220,000 members a wide choice of co-operative trading opportunities.

The Co-operative Group, which has food stores, funeral branches, Travelcare, pharmacies, The Co-operative Bank and Co-operative Insurance operations in the East of England, is working with like-minded

### A co-operative is...

... an autonomous association of people or businesses united voluntarily to meet their common economic, cultural and social needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

Co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

*“There is a large number of secondary co-operatives in this region – mostly agricultural co-ops, as farmers have long recognised the benefits of getting together to share costs of materials, transport and marketing. More recently, small producers of all kinds have used the same model, including crafts people and micro brewers.”*

*Nicky Stevenson,  
Company Secretary,  
Social Enterprise East of England  
(a secondary co-operative)*



“Co-operating to learn” event at The Forum, Norwich.



Young people at a co-operatively run conference for promoting enterprising behaviour.

organisations to promote fairtrade, ethical trading and climate change issues to members and customers alike. Groundbreaking Education Conferences, Health Events and Environment Events and Community Fund awards to local voluntary groups are excellent examples of the impact The Co-operative Group has within the community.

The Co-operative Group’s Community Fund, donated to by its members, has awarded £7m in the last 10 years, benefiting over 2000 community groups with awards of between £100 and £5000. These awards are voted for by the area committees, which are in turn elected by members in the locality. The Group has arranged for the installation of solar panels in 100 schools nationally to provide an environmentally friendly alternative energy source.

### Finance

The Co-operative Bank is proud to provide banking services for all 7 Local Authority districts in Norfolk, including Norfolk County Council.

Co-operative & Community Finance has been a dedicated lender to the co-op sector throughout the UK since 1973. It offers unsecured loans at

competitive rates, in a sympathetic manner and with support for borrowers. Over the last 5 years around £1.5 million has been lent in the East of England region to small worker and other co-operatives. This has levered in as much again in finance from other sources and has created or sustained around 300 jobs.

### The Size of the Co-operative Economy in the East of England

Sector	Turnover (£millions)	No. of employees	No. of enterprises
Retailing	1,185	12,680	23
Agriculture	181	230	35
Financial Services	182	742	32
Housing	10	1	22
Other	59	373	103
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,617</b>	<b>14,026</b>	<b>215</b>

### Co-operation in Communities

There are 30 credit unions in the region with a combined membership of over 15,000, of whom more than 3,000 are children. In the last 2 years savings have grown by 25% to over £6m and loans by 20% to £5m. Credit Unions East (CUE) Forum is helping to spread the awareness of credit unions as a fair alternative to banks: safe savings, fair loans, budgeting accounts and even community banking initiatives.

The many housing co-ops, worker co-ops, consumer co-ops and

co-operative social enterprises rooted in local communities throughout the region all help to strengthen local economies and social cohesion.

### Co-operation in Regeneration

“Co-operation in Regeneration” was a key feature of the 10 year strategy document commissioned by the Eastern Region Co-operative Council in 2002. As the successor body to ERCC, Co-operatives<sup>EAST</sup> seeks to raise the profile of co-operatives and the co-operative movement in the region.

### The Diversity of Co-operative Enterprise

The co-operative model is successfully applied in many different ways.

We are all familiar with the consumer co-operatives on our shopping streets. Employee owned co-operatives have grown in popularity over the last twenty-five years or so, and are becoming ever more well known.

Housing co-operatives provide an increasingly important element of the UK’s social housing market, while business co-operatives (wherein each member is a business in its own right) offer great potential for economic development.

Other novel approaches continue to be developed,

including community ownership, multi-stakeholder co-operatives, and a co-operative Community Interest Company.

Co-operatives operate in all areas of our society and economy, delivering sustainable, profitable goods and services to diverse markets.

## Co-operatives Nationally and Internationally

Co-operative enterprise is a major force for sustainable economic and social development not just in the East of England but across the UK and throughout the world. Nationally, Co-operatives<sup>UK</sup> has verifiable data confirming turnover of £28 billion, and estimates the UK sector as a whole is turning over in excess of £30 billion. There are 4,370 co-operatives, employing some 203,000 people and with a total of 11 million members (as at 2007).

At the global level, the International Co-operative Alliance estimates that over 800 million people are members of co-operatives, which together employ over 100 million people. A 2007 survey of co-operative and mutual enterprises worldwide ([www.global300.coop](http://www.global300.coop)) found that the top 300 such businesses alone were together equivalent in scale to the world's tenth largest economy, with a collective turnover nearing 1 trillion US dollars.

*“Co-operative working creates an environment in which all members participate in the challenges of the business and benefit from its success. Members share a high level of commitment to the co-operative and to its customers.”*



*Peter Cockerton,  
Management  
Committee Chairman,  
Delta-T Devices Ltd.*



### Co-operative Development

We wish to encourage the development and support of new co-operatives across the region and want to provide an opportunity to network, share ideas and to complement the mainstream business support available in the region to meet the unique needs of co-operative enterprises.

### Contact

For further information about the co-operative economy in the East of England, and the work of Co-operatives<sup>EAST</sup>, contact us:

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