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## **Thriving Co-op Extends a Hand to Emerging Co-ops**

The Co-operators offers \$200,000 in prize money to help smaller co-ops clear 'first hurdle of growth'

An emerging food co-op in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley is now better positioned to seed a thriving local food system, with a \$25,000 prize from a 2013 Canada-wide competition. Valley's Best Co-operative is looking to establish a locally-owned grocery store providing healthy, affordable, local and fairly traded products through partnerships with producers.

The Nova Scotia organization is one of about 20 emerging co-ops in Canada to receive a significant financial boost over the last two years through the National Co-op Challenge.

It's hosted by The Co-operators, a Canadian-owned co-operative with more than \$36 billion in assets under administration. CEO and president Kathy Bardswick says the challenge is among the ways her organization aims to support the co-op sector's growth.

"The International Co-operative Alliance's [2020 vision](#) includes the co-operative form of business becoming the fastest growing form of enterprise by the year 2020," Kathy says.

"We share this vision, with great enthusiasm and optimism."

Co-operatives around the world generally seek to operate under a similar set of principles and values, one of which is co-operation among co-operatives. The National Co-op Challenge is one way that The Co-operators is manifesting its

commitment to this value, Kathy adds.

This year, The Co-operators is again offering \$200,000 in prize money to emerging co-ops in Canada. Two finalists from each of four regions — Quebec, Atlantic, West, Ontario — will receive \$25,000 each, as well as a consultation session.

“The most challenging aspect of running a successful business is getting over the first hurdle of growing it beyond its initial size and scope,” Kathy says. “That’s why we are focusing on emerging and expanding co-operatives — a \$25,000 prize can make a world of difference to a small co-op.”

In addition to enabling existing co-ops to thrive, the challenge is expected to open more people’s eyes to the promise in co-ops, especially through the 90-second videos that finalists can create for the competition.

“Those of us already involved in the co-operative movement understand its ability to build more fair and inclusive societies, and recognize just how important that is in this era,” Kathy says.

“But reaching out to those who are not familiar with co-operative enterprises can be challenging.

“(The videos) are a great way to make an emotional connection with the viewer, who may not easily grasp all the benefits of the business model, but who can easily see the difference these co-ops are making in their communities.”

The 2014 National Co-op Challenge launched May 5.

For more details, visit [The National Co-op Challenge section of The Co-operators website](#).

*You can comment on this story below, or e-mail [michelle\(at\)axiomnews.ca](mailto:michelle(at)axiomnews.ca).*

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