

The New Generation Growth Cooperative

In 2009, some growers in Southeast Missouri expressed interest in reviving the cooperative with the goal of creating lasting opportunities for small producers to make profit from their farm as they did in the past. I accepted to try it again but decided that we could not conduct the business as before. In collaboration with an attorney, who is familiar with cooperatives, we set up a new organizational structure that will increase profits for the farmers, last longer than the founders, and can be transferred to future generations of producers. This structure has a main umbrella cooperative with small limited liability companies (LLCs) as members. While producers are members of the LLCs, no producer would be a member of the new generation growth cooperative (NGGC). This is envisioned to provide stability and longevity for the cooperative. The NGGC is designed not to fail as in the previous cooperatives. If an LLC fails, it will not affect the NGGC because other LLCs will continue to do business through the parent organization. The competition among the various LLCs will lead to increases in production and profits. Assuming the failure of an LLC is the result of a bad year, for instance, when things get better and they still want to rejoin the cooperative, they will be free to do so.

The NGGC was incorporated in 2010 with the state of Missouri and named, "The Missouri Agricultural Products Cooperative (MAPC)." The NCCG will provide different services for member LLCs. The services include Education, Equipment, Growing Resources, Branding Resources, Marketing and Marketing Contract(s), and NGGC Website featuring each team or LLC.

This organizational arrangement will not eliminate the use of the niche markets we identified earlier, such as farmers' markets. In fact it will strengthen them. Again, produce that fails to be accepted by the cooperative's direct buyers, not because of quality but due to size and shape specifications could be sold at these other niche markets, including farmers' markets. It is the intention of the LU AEMP and its collaborators to extend this cooperative organizational structure to other agricultural products beyond fruits and vegetables. The first operation of the MAPC starts this spring and producers are eager to take advantage of this opportunity for increases in farm income, profits, and overall community well-being. Any group that wants to participate in this exceptional venture is asked to contact the person at Lincoln University's AEMP as shown below.