ESTIMATING THE ECONOMIC FOOTPRINT OF COOPERATIVES IN THE CAROLINAS

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I. Executive Summary

Carolina Common Enterprise (CCE) and the Cooperative Council of the Carolinas (CCC) partnered with NCGrowth to assess the economic footprint of cooperatively owned enterprises across North and South Carolina. This assessment was informed by the 2009 national cooperative census by the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives and represents a renewed effort to measure the scale, diversity, and community contribution of cooperatives in the region.

Through an electronic survey distributed in the summer of 2025, data was collected from 47 active cooperatives spanning 12 industries and 37 cities across four states, representing a combined 917,028 members and 4,422 employees (full- and part-time). These findings offer valuable insight into cooperative stability, economic footprint, and development needs.

In addition to survey responses, this project compiled, verified, and analyzed a master list of 1,304 cooperatives with operations in the Carolinas, drawing on direct outreach, public records, and previous studies. The majority of the cooperatives in the dataset, 1,225, are headquartered in either North or South Carolina. The remaining establishments are headquartered across 25 states, with activity in the Carolinas. This dataset also includes both active and inactive cooperatives, providing insights into sector turnover and historical trends. Of the cooperatives identified, 618 are currently active. Of the 618 active cooperatives, 569 are headquartered in the Carolinas, with 429 in North Carolina and 140 in South Carolina. Subsequently, this database provides the most comprehensive accounting of cooperatives in the Carolinas and serves as a baseline for ongoing census efforts.

1,304

Total Cooperatives on Master List

618

Active Cooperatives

47

Surveyed Cooperatives

Estimated Economic Footprint of Cooperatives in the Carolinas

The following estimates summarize the overall economic footprint of cooperatives in the Carolinas. Based on available data, cooperatives reported a combined 13,256 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs across 88 cooperatives identified through survey responses and public records research (42 and 46 cooperatives, respectively), with an average of 151 FTE per cooperative. Separately, the 37 cooperatives that reported revenue through the survey collectively generated $948.6 million in annual revenue, averaging $25.6 million per cooperative. These figures represent documented totals and should be understood as a floor for the sector's true economic footprint. Extrapolating these averages across all 618 active cooperatives in the Carolinas, the sector is estimated to support approximately 93,000 jobs and generate over $15.8 billion in annual revenue; given the limited sample sizes underlying these averages, these extrapolated figures should be understood as indicative of scale rather than precise totals. These figures highlight the substantial role cooperatives play in regional employment, economic stability, and community investment across both states.

Table 1: Key Metrics of Economic Footprint of Cooperatives in the Carolinas

Metric	Estimate	Source Notes
Total Active Cooperative Establishments	**618**	Verified through surveys and public records research (2025)
Total Members	**≈ 36 million**	Based on an average of 58,240 members across 111 cooperatives, 43 from survey responses and 68 from online research
Total FTE	**≈ 93,000**	Based on an average of 151 FTE across 88 cooperatives; 42 from survey responses and 46 from public records list research
Estimated Annual Revenue	**≈ $15.8 billion**	Based on the average annual revenue of $25.6M reported by survey respondents
Average Co-op Age	**42**	Verified through surveys and public records research
Top Industries	**Agriculture (27%), Utilities (18%), Finance & Insurance (13%),**	Industry data was verified for 569 co-ops via surveys and public records research
Primary Ownership Types	**Consumers (40%), Producers (32%), Organizations (21%), Workers (6%)**	Ownership data was verified 530 via surveys and public records research
Geographic Reach	**259 cities across 19 states**	Verified through public records research
Legacy Co-ops (Founded before 2000)	**≈ 56%**	Founding data was verified for 611 co-ops via surveys and public records research
New & Emerging Co-ops (Founded in 2000 or later)	**≈ 44%**	Founding data was verified for 611 co-ops via surveys and public records research

Key Findings

Economic Footprint

- Active cooperatives across the Carolinas are estimated to support 93,000 full-time jobs and 36 million members. These extrapolations are based on employment data from 88 cooperatives and membership data from 111 cooperatives, collected through surveys and public records research, yielding averages of 151 FTE and 58,240 members per cooperative.
- Annual revenue across active cooperatives in the Carolinas is estimated at $15.8 billion, based on an average of $25.6 million reported across survey respondents. Survey respondents reported a combined $948.6 million in total revenue.

Longevity and Growth

- Of all known 1,304 cooperatives established since 1880, 47% are still active.
- The average age of active cooperatives in the Carolinas is 42 years. As the age range of these cooperatives spans 1 to 112 years, the average age is skewed by a handful of very old cooperatives. The median age of 34 better reflects the typical Carolina cooperative.
- Of the 611 active cooperatives for which founding-year data is available, 64% have operated for more than 20 years.
- Fifteen percent of the active cooperatives were established in the 2020s and represent an opportunity for continued growth and diversification.
- Creation and survival rates vary considerably by decade:
    - The 1900s through the 1920s saw the creation of fewer than 20 cooperatives.
    - Formation accelerated from the 1930s through the 1960s, with 80 to 100 new cooperatives each decade.
    - Survival rates were lowest in the 1970s and 1980s, at 39% and 35%.
    - Survival rates have climbed steadily since the 1990s, averaging 71% across the 2000s, 2010s, and 2020s.

Industry and Ownership

- Cooperatives exist in 17 industries across the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).
- The agriculture, finance, and utilities industries together account for 57% of active cooperatives in the Carolinas. Of the 618 active cooperatives, industry data is available for 569. Agriculture is the largest sector, with 154 cooperatives (27.1%), followed by Utilities with 100 (17.6%) and Finance with 73 (12.8%). These

cooperatives are predominantly owned by producers and consumers and provide access to markets, critical economic development infrastructure, and financing in underserved areas.

- Survey data offer some directional insight into how economic activity varies across industries, though these observations should be treated as suggestive rather than conclusive, given the smaller sample sizes involved.
    - Finance and Insurance respondents reported the highest average membership at nearly 66,000 members per cooperative, nearly double the Utilities average of 28,000, suggesting that financial cooperatives tend to serve broader member bases.
    - Utilities respondents reported the highest average annual revenue at $48.1M per cooperative, compared to $29.9M for Finance and $17.5M for both Agriculture and Retail.
    - Agriculture stands out as the most labor-intensive sector, with an average of 217 FTE per cooperative — notably higher than Finance (160), Utilities (97), and Retail (73).
- The cooperative landscape of the Carolinas consists primarily of consumer and producer-owned enterprises, representing 40% and 32% of active cooperatives with known ownership type, respectively. The next largest group is cooperatives owned by other cooperatives, businesses, or organizations, accounting for 21% of active cooperatives. Worker-owned enterprises account for 6% of active cooperatives. These figures are based on the 530 of 618 active cooperatives for which ownership data was available.

Geography

- Cooperatives operating in the Carolinas are based across 259 cities in 19 states. Within the Carolinas, there are 429 active cooperatives headquartered in North Carolina and 140 in South Carolina.
- Raleigh is by far the dominant location with 57 active cooperatives, though this is somewhat overstated as many cooperatives have an administrative address here but primarily serve outside of the city. Asheville ranks second with 26 active cooperatives, followed by Durham (22) and Charlotte (15).
- Notably, several small cities also make the top 15, including Black Mountain (7), Chapel Hill (6), Henderson (6), Hendersonville (6), and Boone (6), demonstrating the versatility of the cooperative model and its ability to serve rural needs.

Momentum is Building

Overall, this data suggests there is significant momentum for the cooperative model in the Carolinas. The data presented in this report provides a foundation for the next steps to support the diversification, growth, and impact of the cooperative model.

Forty-three percent of surveyed cooperatives seek technical assistance in securing capital, board training, financial management, and strategic planning. Survey responses emphasize the need for enhanced capacity building, targeted financial support, and adaptive governance strategies to sustain and grow cooperative enterprises.

The master list contains hundreds of establishments that have not previously engaged with Carolina Common Enterprise (CCE) or the Cooperative Council of the Carolinas (CCC). Creating an engagement strategy to build relationships with the active cooperatives identified in the master list will increase the model's visibility and ultimately support the growth and economic contribution of cooperatives across the Carolinas.

Report Structure

In this report's structure, a detailed analysis of survey responses is followed by a broader analysis that integrates survey findings with data from the master list of cooperatives, which was developed as part of the survey distribution effort. Recommendations for future surveying efforts, building on this data and lessons learned through the research, are included at the end of the report.

II. Introduction

Background and Purpose

Carolina Common Enterprise (CCE) and the Cooperative Council of the Carolinas (CCC) strive to enhance cooperative enterprise development as a sustainable, community-centered economic model in North and South Carolina. In partnership with NCGrowth, this study was initiated to map and measure the cooperative economy in North and South Carolina. Building upon prior 2009 national cooperative census efforts, this project aims to assess the regional cooperative sector's size, diversity, and economic footprint. The primary purpose of this report is to provide a current, data-driven understanding of cooperative scale, composition, financial health, and development needs of CCE and CCC clients, while advocating for strategic decision-making and support for cooperative growth.

Data Sources & Methodology

Data for this study was collected through two different approaches: compilation and validation of a master list of cooperatives in North and South Carolina, and distribution of a detailed survey to cooperative contacts.

Master List

A comprehensive database of 1,304 known cooperatives in North and South Carolina was compiled and updated via outreach, Secretary of State records, partner organizations, and prior public records research, creating the most regionally detailed picture to date. The list began with a dataset from CCC containing approximately 275 cooperatives, many of which lacked contact information. Using Secretary of State business registration records from North and South Carolina, CCC & CCE membership and contact lists, partner networks, web research, and direct verification, the team added approximately 1,000 records. Each organization was individually reviewed through public records, website confirmation, or direct contact, resulting in 618 confirmed active cooperative listings with detailed contact and organizational information.

Although comprehensive efforts were made to update and verify the master list to obtain accurate contact information for survey distribution, complete coverage of all cooperatives was not possible due to varying levels of public records availability.

Cooperatives exist under a multiplicity of legal structures; as such, pulling a comprehensive list of cooperatives from the Secretary of State data was complex. The research team first pulled all records that were available under legal structures exclusive to cooperatives (such as “cooperative association”). The team then selected entries that included “cooperative” or “coop” in the business name. Both of these methods have limitations that can lead to omissions and false positives. Data were cross-checked and verified based on publicly available data where possible.

This master list serves as a baseline for comparing survey results with the broader cooperative landscape and as a foundation for future outreach and survey efforts.

Survey

A detailed survey was distributed in the summer of 2025 to capture in-depth organizational data. The survey was sent out primarily through direct email and phone outreach to an initial list of 282 contacts; this list was compiled from contacts provided by CCC and CCE, as well as from online research. Each prospective respondent was contacted by the survey team at least three times by direct email and once by phone. In addition, the survey was shared broadly by partners via direct email, newsletters, and social media posts.

When contact information was available, the survey link was also sent to new entries in the master list. However, without any prior engagement, these entities were far less likely to respond.

The survey included questions covering annual revenue, number of employees (full and part-time), membership size, industry sector classification, legal status, and operational challenges. A full copy of the survey tool is provided in Appendix A.

Survey Response

A total of 111 survey responses were received, of which 47 were unique, complete, and valid. The high number of incomplete surveys may indicate that respondents lacked access to the necessary information, found the survey too long or time-intensive, were not comfortable sharing information, or were less available due to its initial distribution during the summer months.

Most responses came from North Carolina. South Carolina cooperatives were underrepresented, likely reflecting CCE and CCC's limited exposure in the state. A majority of responses came from large, established cooperatives, particularly electric membership corporations and credit unions. These organizations are more likely to have easily discoverable contact information, administrative staff with the capacity to take the survey, and regular reports on key metrics, which may explain the higher response rate compared to smaller or newer cooperatives.

Some financial and operational data was provided as internal estimates rather than audited figures. While this data remains useful for serving as a general scale and identifying trends, it should be interpreted as approximate indicators rather than precise measures.

Despite targeted outreach, identifying the appropriate point of contact within each cooperative proved challenging. In many cases, survey invitations were received by individuals who did not have direct access to accurate organizational data. While many were able to forward the survey or provide an alternative contact, this friction likely contributed to participant drop-off.

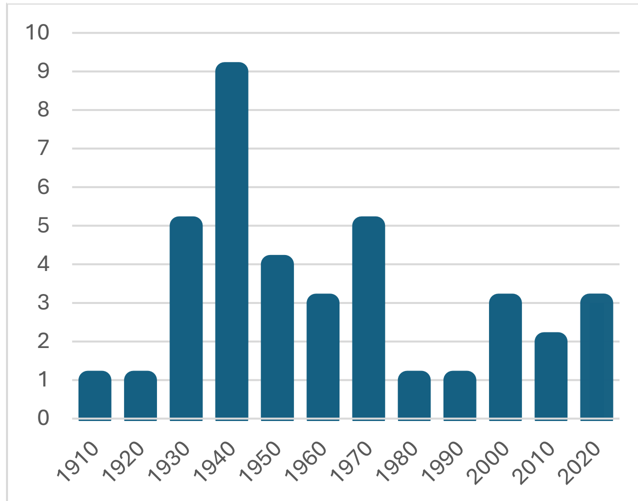
III. Survey Results

The following analyses represent data from the 47 respondents who completed the survey.

Organizational Demographics

Cooperative Age

Figure 1: Surveyed Co-ops by Founding Decade



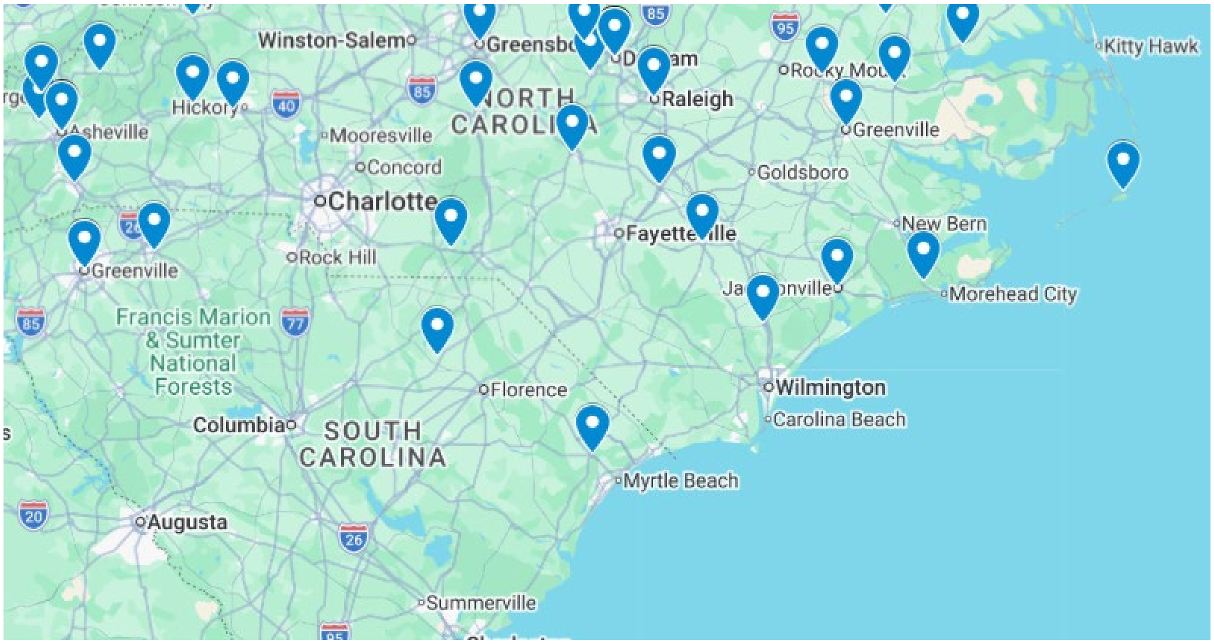
The cooperative sector in North and South Carolina is largely composed of mature, well-established organizations. Of the survey respondents, 46 provided a founding date. Based on these responses, the surveyed cooperatives have an average organizational age of 55 years and a median age of 57 years, suggesting deep community roots and long-term operational stability. At the same time, the sector demonstrates ongoing renewal. The range of organizational ages spans 108 years, ranging from a legacy cooperative founded in 1916 to a new startup established in 2024. This breadth highlights a dynamic balance between enduring institutions and emerging, innovative organizations.

Segmenting cooperatives by organizational age reveals clear differences in scale and function between long-established and newer organizations. Legacy cooperatives, which were established before the year 2000, comprised 74% (34) of the survey respondents with a founding date and have an average age exceeding 70 years. They generate substantial economic impact, contributing 97% of the total revenue and 97% of the jobs reported by survey respondents. They have a reported average annual revenue of $37.0 million and an average of 139 full-time employees each. They serve 98% of the reported membership, with an average membership base of approximately 29,900. Within this legacy group, cooperatives in the Utilities and Finance & Insurance sectors are particularly dominant. They represent 46% of all survey respondents and account for the overwhelming majority of reported membership, revenue, and employment.

In contrast, the 12 cooperatives established since the year 2000 are smaller in terms of staff and revenue and cover a wider range of industries. Across these 12 cooperatives, seven industries are represented with a total of 132 full-time employees, $24.8 million in revenue, and 20,230 members served. This amounts to an average of 11 full-time employees, $2.1 million in revenue, and 1,686 members per cooperative.

Geography

Figure 2 Map of Surveyed Co-op



Not pictured: Herndon, Virginia, and Saint Paul, Minnesota

The survey respondents are distributed across 37 cities in North and South Carolina and beyond. North Carolina accounted for the majority of respondents, at 83% (n=39). South Carolina contributed 13% (n=6), while the remaining 2 respondents are located outside the Carolinas, indicating that although their headquarters are elsewhere, they have operations within the region. A majority of the respondents are located in rural areas; urban clusters are found in Durham (n=5), Greenville (n=3), and Asheville (n=3).

Establishment Type

Legal Incorporation

Table 2: Legal Incorporation of Surveyed Co-ops

Legal Incorporation	Count
Business Corporation	11
Cooperative Association	10
Limited Liability Company LLC	8
Non-Profit Corporation 501c3	5
Other (define in comments below)	6
Blank	7

About 27% of respondents selected “other” or left the question blank; this may indicate that the choices were not appropriately defined or that respondents were unfamiliar with the legal details of how their respective organizations were incorporated. The full list of "other" text responses is included in Appendix B.

Tax Status

Table 3: Tax Status of Surveyed Co-ops

Tax Status	Count
C Corp not filing as a cooperative	3
C Corporation filing Subchapter T	3
Partnership	2
S Corporation	4
Tax-exempt 501(c)4 or other	11
Tax-exempt - 501(c)3	5
Other (define in comments below)	4
Blank	15

Five respondents indicated in the comments that they were a 501(c) (12) nonprofit; these responses were reclassified as "Tax-exempt 501(c)4 or other." Even with this reclassification, 40% of respondents left the question blank or selected "other." These omissions may indicate that the choices were not appropriately defined or that respondents did not know this information. The full list of "other" text responses is included in Appendix B.

Cooperative Ownership and Membership

Cooperatives are defined by their ownership structure. The survey data reveals a sector that is predominantly consumer-owned, be it shoppers, residents, borrowers, etc., while still reflecting meaningful diversity across ownership models and industries. Consumer-owned cooperatives account for 36% of survey responses, followed by multistakeholder ownership (17%), business, organization, or cooperative ownership (17%), worker ownership (15%), producer ownership (9%), and other ownership structures (2%). This mix highlights the varied ways cooperatives are structured to meet the needs of their members and communities.

Membership reflects not just consumer participation but also economic and community engagement. Across all ownership types, the 47 cooperatives surveyed collectively serve 917,028 members, underscoring the sector's significant economic and community footprint. Notably, Utility and Finance & Insurance cooperatives account for 93% of this member base.

Table 4: Ownership Type of Surveyed Co-ops

Ownership Type	Count	FTE	Revenue	Members
Consumers	17	1,844	$571,925,000	727,513
Multistakeholder	8	538	$101,799,000	77,166
Businesses/Organizations/Cooperatives	8	592	$207,700,000	85,402
Workers/Employees	7	61	$8,350,000	6,677
Producers (Farmers, Fishers, Artists, etc)	4	1,062	$51,350,000	767
Other	1	64	$7,500,000	19,500
Blank	2	0.5	—	3

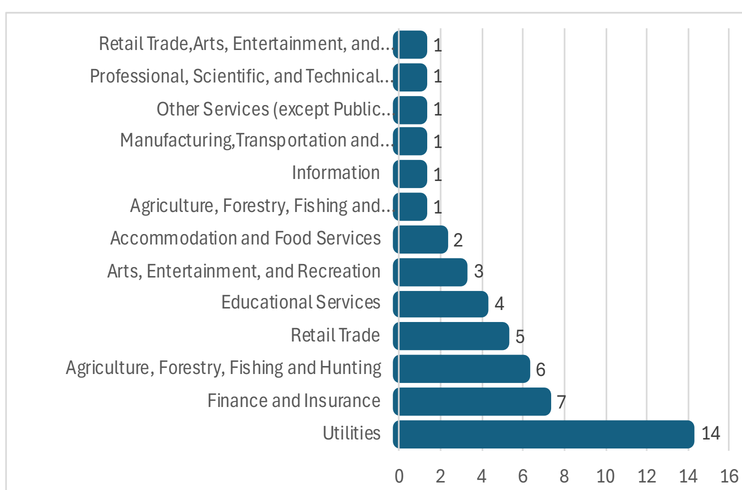
Industry

Among the surveyed cooperatives, Utility cooperatives represent the largest segment at 28%. The next-largest share is held by Finance and Agriculture at 14% each, followed by Retail Trade at 12%. Cooperatives are found in 12 industries across the Carolinas; however, among South Carolina respondents, only two industries were represented: Finance and Educational Services.

Utility cooperatives, which primarily include Electric Membership Corporations (EMCs), represent about 28% of survey respondents with 14 responses. This industry serves 392,034 members, representing 43% of the reported total, and has the highest average age of 83 years. The reported industry employment total was 1,266 full-time equivalents (FTE), and the reported annual payroll total was about $89 million. These figures represent reported totals from survey respondents and should be understood as a floor, providing minimum estimates of the sector's economic impact. The actual footprint of Utilities cooperatives across the Carolinas is considerably larger.

Finance & Insurance cooperatives, which primarily include credit unions, constitute the second-largest industry segment among respondents, with seven responses. These cooperatives have the largest member base, with an average of 66,003 members per respondent. Total reported membership was 461,920, representing about

Figure 3: Surveyed Co-ops by Industry



50% of the survey's total membership. Like the Utilities industry, this industry is well established with an average age of 77 years. These cooperatives also have the highest average employment, with 160 FTE per establishment and a total of 1,118 reported FTE. This is the highest paying industry among all those surveyed, with an average reported wage of about $112,000 per employee and an average total annual payroll of $16,000,613 per cooperative.

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting cooperatives had seven responses. These cooperatives are relatively younger, with an average age of 45 years. They report relatively low membership, with only 784 members. However, they have relatively high employment, with an average of 155 FTE per cooperative and a total of 1,086 FTE across cooperatives. Wages in this industry are the lowest of all the surveyed industries, with a total reported payroll of $720,000 across all seven cooperatives. This is likely due to the producer ownership structure most common in this industry, and is somewhat balanced by relatively higher revenues.

Retail Trade cooperatives, which primarily include food cooperatives, represent the next largest group, with six responses. This industry reported 39,317 members, representing about 4% of the reported total. It is a younger industry, with an average cooperative age of 30 years. Total reported revenue was approximately $105 million. Employment totaled 438 FTE, averaging 73 FTE per cooperative.

Educational Services cooperatives totaled five respondents. These include homeschool cooperatives that often serve specialized populations and have smaller administrative structures, which can create challenges for data reporting. Only three respondents reported revenues, while the rest left this question blank. That said, the reported total revenue was $749,000, average employment was two FTE, and average membership was 43 members. It is a younger industry, with an average establishment age of 17 years. Three of the five respondents were based in South Carolina, comprising half of the total South Carolina responses in the survey.

Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation cooperatives tend to be younger and smaller in scale. The four respondents have an average organizational age of 36 years and operate with minimal staffing, averaging about three full-time equivalent employees. Together, they report total annual revenues of approximately $5 million. Despite their smaller size, these cooperatives contribute meaningfully to cultural vitality and community development within their local economies.

The remaining cooperatives span Information, Other Services, Manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing, Accommodation and Food Services, and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, each with one or two survey respondents. These industries collectively demonstrate the diversity of the cooperative model, even though individual industries may have only one or two responding organizations.

The following table summarizes survey data by primary industry, showing variations in age, revenue, membership, and employment.

Table 5: Data Summary by Industry of Surveyed Co-ops

Industry	Count	Avg Age	Revenue	Members	Total FTE	Payroll
Utilities	14	83	$529,000,000	392,034	1,266	$89,060,945
Finance & Insurance	7	77	$179,575,000	461,920	1,118	$112,004,292
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	7	45	$52,549,000	784	1,086	$720,000
Retail Trade	6	30	$104,850,000	39,317	438	$17,120,660
Educational Services	5	17	$749,000	217	9	$80,000
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	4	36	$4,950,000	76	10	$508,000
Accommodation and Food Services	2	23	$8,250,000	11,600	46	$600,000
Information	1	72	$35,000,000	10,910	65	$5,050,429
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1	27	$35,000,000	166	114	Undisclosed
Manufacturing	1	8	$1,500,000	2	10	$500,000
Transportation & Warehousing	1	8	$1,500,000	2	10	$500,000
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	1	9	$750,000	11	6	$483,570
Total*	**50**	**N/A**	**$953,673,000**	**917,039**	**4,178**	**$226,627,895**

* These totals are larger than the total number of survey respondents (47) because they include three cooperatives that belonged to multiple industries and were thus double-counted.

Federal Funding

Eighteen respondents reported receiving federal funding. Interestingly, the average age of these respondents is significantly higher than that of respondents who did not receive federal funding. Over half of the respondents who said yes are in the Utilities industry.

Table 6: Surveyed Co-ops by Federal Funding Received

Answer	Count	Avg Age (years)
No	23	42
Yes	18	70
(blank)	6	64

Economic Footprint

Revenue

The surveyed cooperatives represent a significant collective economic force in North and South Carolina. Revenues were reported as ranges, and a mid-point calculation was used to estimate a combined annual revenue of approximately $950 million. This question was answered by 37 of the 47 surveyed cooperatives, yielding an average of $25.6 million per cooperative.

Table 7: Surveyed Co-ops Revenue

Annual Revenue	Co-ops
less than $50,000	1
$50,000-$100,000	1
$100,000-$500,000	5
$500,000-$1 million	3
$1-2 million	2
$2-5 million	1
$5-10 million	4
$10-50 million	7
more than $50 million	13
No Data	10

Employment & Payroll

In terms of employment, data on full-time and part-time employees were standardized to full-time equivalents (FTE), resulting in a total of 4,161 FTE reported by 42 respondents, averaging 99 FTE per cooperative. The payroll question was an open-response question and the most skipped in the survey, with 32 valid responses, resulting in an estimated annual payroll of $225.8 million and an average of $7.1 million per cooperative.

Table 8: Employment and Payroll

Data Point	Sample	Total	Average
Employment	42	4161	99
Payroll	29	$220 M	$7.6 M

VI. Growth Outlook, Challenges & Technical Assistance Needs

Growth Outlook

Overall, respondents reported a positive growth outlook, with 77% expecting to grow slightly in the next year and 13% expecting to grow significantly. This reflects the dominance of large, well-established cooperatives in Utilities, Finance, and Retail. Those that indicated an expectation of decreased growth were in Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting. Those who indicated an expectation of decreased growth were in Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services and in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting.

Challenges

Table 9: Projected Growth of Surveyed Co-ops over the Next Year

Annual Growth Outlook	Co-ops
Decrease	2
Remain the same	2
Grow Slightly	30
Grow Significantly	5

Respondents were asked, "What is the co-op's greatest challenge?" Analysis of the 28 open-ended responses reveals a variety of obstacles, external pressures, and internal hurdles faced by cooperatives. Because responses were open-ended, many addressed more than one challenge and were coded under multiple themes. Economic and market pressures emerged as the dominant theme, accounting for 17 of the 28 responses and spanning challenges ranging from inflation and affordability to agricultural market conditions and competitive positioning. Given the breadth of this category, it has been broken out into sub-themes in Table 8a. See Appendix B for full response data.

Table 9: Frequently Cited Challenges of Surveyed Co-ops

Major Theme	Mention Count	Primary Drivers
Economics & Market Pressures	**17**	Inflation, costs, competition, economic downturns, and agricultural market pressures.
Workforce & Labor	**6**	Employee retention, living wages, and staffing shortages.
Cooperative Growth & Support	**5**	Expanding membership, transitioning to cooperative, and supporting member cooperatives
Governance & Policy	**5**	Regulations, permitting, tax policy, and political climate
Other	**3**	General management, infrastructure constraints, and the impact of AI

Table 9a: Sub-Themes for Economic & Market Pressure

Economic Sub-Themes	Mention Count	Primary Drivers
Broader Economic Conditions	**5**	Economic downturns, changing business environment, tourism impacts, and regional economic decline
Inflation, Cost Pressures & Affordability	**5**	Rising operational costs, employee wages, wholesale prices, and affordability for members
Competition & Market Positioning	**4**	Local competition, market differentiation, market share growth, and competitive regulatory pressures
Agricultural Market Conditions	**3**	Commodity pricing, climate change, and unsustainable farm income

Technical Assistance Needs

A little over 40% of the surveyed cooperatives expressed interest in learning about available technical assistance. The most pressing needs for technical assistance largely fall under the themes of growth and governance, with specific needs indicated in Table 9.

Table 10: Technical Assistance Needs

Technical Assistance Need	Count
Applying for loans/grants	11
Training new board members	9
Access to capital	8
Member engagement	8
Strategic planning	8
Marketing and outreach	8
Increasing sales	7
Bylaws/policy updates	6
Meeting efficiency	6
Increasing profitability	6
Economic inclusion	6
Management/Operations	5
Accounting systems	4
Recruiting/retaining members	4
Financial projections	4
Getting into business	1
Transitioning existing business to cooperative ownership	1
Other	1

One respondent selected "Other" and described their need for technical assistance as human resources. One additional comment, submitted through the open commentary section, expressed interest in mergers and structuring ownership across state lines. One comment also noted the tension between spending time accessing resources versus running the cooperative, saying "[We] don't have a lot of time for these things, so [we] are wary of going to workshops."

VII. Population Analysis

This section integrates survey findings with the full comprehensive "master list" database compiled for North and South Carolina cooperatives to present an analysis of the full population of cooperatives in the Carolinas, providing the most complete picture to date of the cooperative economy in the region. An interactive Tableau dashboard of the master list data is available at https://go.unc.edu/CarolinaCoops.

Image 1: Tableau screenshot from https://go.unc.edu/CarolinaCoops

Master list Overview

As previously described, the master list comprises 618 active cooperatives with operations in North and South Carolina, spanning 259 cities across 19 states and representing 17 industries. Of these, 569 are headquartered in the Carolinas — 429 in North Carolina and 140 in South Carolina — while the remaining 49 are headquartered in other states but maintain an active presence in the region. The master list includes survey respondents and expands to include all known cooperatives across the Carolinas, identified through key stakeholder conversations, Secretary of State records, and internet research.

The 47 cooperatives surveyed represent an 8% sample of the total active cooperative population in the Carolinas. This is below the threshold required to achieve statistical significance and to allow survey details to be extrapolated to the full population. With a total population of 618, the ideal sample size would be 237 (38%) to achieve a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Additionally, many respondents skipped questions, further reducing the sample size for specific data points. For this reason, extrapolating survey data to the full population is limited to a handful of headline economic footprint metrics, which should be treated as rough estimates.

Industry

Table 8: Industry Distribution of Active Master List Co-ops vs. Surveyed Co-ops

Industry	Master List Count	Survey Count	Survey Share
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	154	7	5%
Utilities	100	14	14%
Finance and Insurance	73	7	10%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	45	1	2%
Retail Trade	38	6	16%
Real Estate Rental and Leasing	29	0	0%
Educational Services	29	5	17%
Health Care and Social Assistance	29	0	0%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	18	1	6%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	17	4	24%
Construction	7	0	0%
Wholesale Trade	7	0	0%
Information	6	1	17%
Transportation and Warehousing	6	1	17%
Accommodation and Food Services	4	2	50%
Manufacturing	4	1	25%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	3	0	0%
No Info Available	**49**	**0**	0%
Total	**618**	**47**	**8%**

Of the 569 active cooperatives for which industry data is available, Agriculture, Utilities, and Finance together account for 57%. While the survey response rate was highest from the utilities industry, the response rate is still under what would be considered statistically significant for the evaluation of the full population. The remaining are scattered across 15 industries, ranging from Other Services to Administrative and Support Services. In smaller industries where the share of identified cooperatives appears higher relative to the survey, the total number of cooperatives identified in the census is too small to support statistically significant conclusions about that industry's broader cooperative landscape.

Cooperative Age

Of the 1,039 cooperatives for which founding-year data was available, legacy cooperatives established prior to 2000 constitute 64%. The Finance, Utilities, and Agriculture industries dominate this group. The Agriculture, Retail, Real Estate, and Education industries dominate the newer group of cooperatives, those established in 2000 or later, which account for the remaining 36%.

Figure 7: Master List Cooperatives by Decade Founded

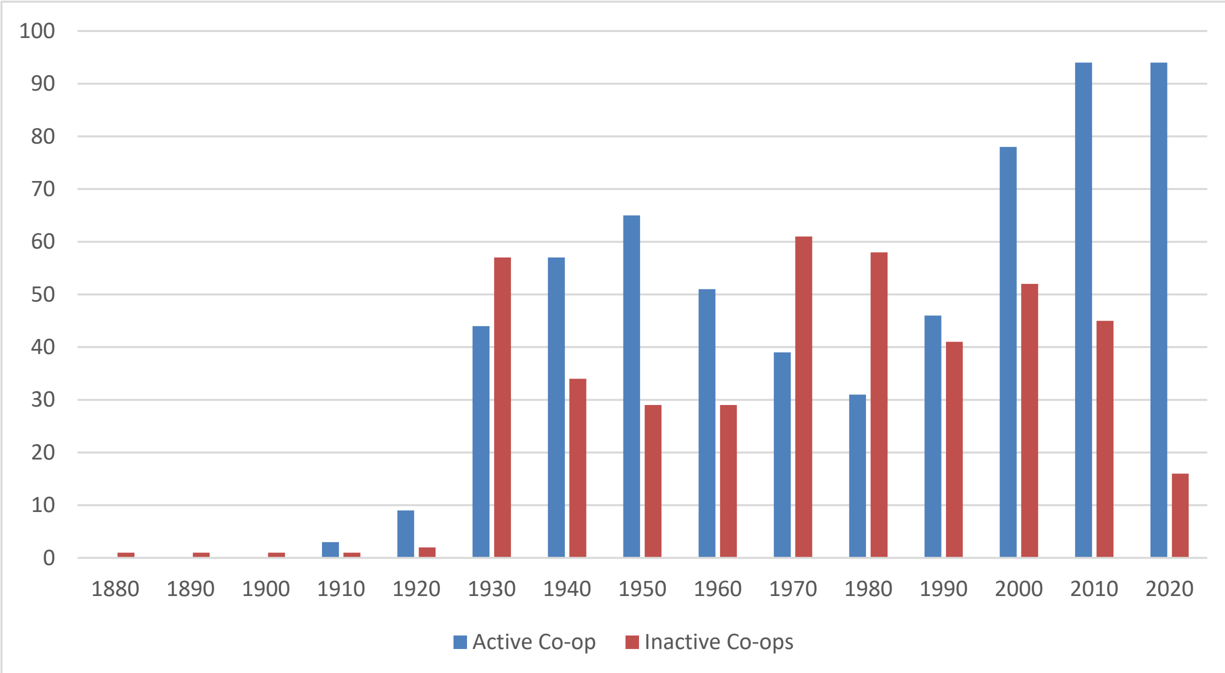
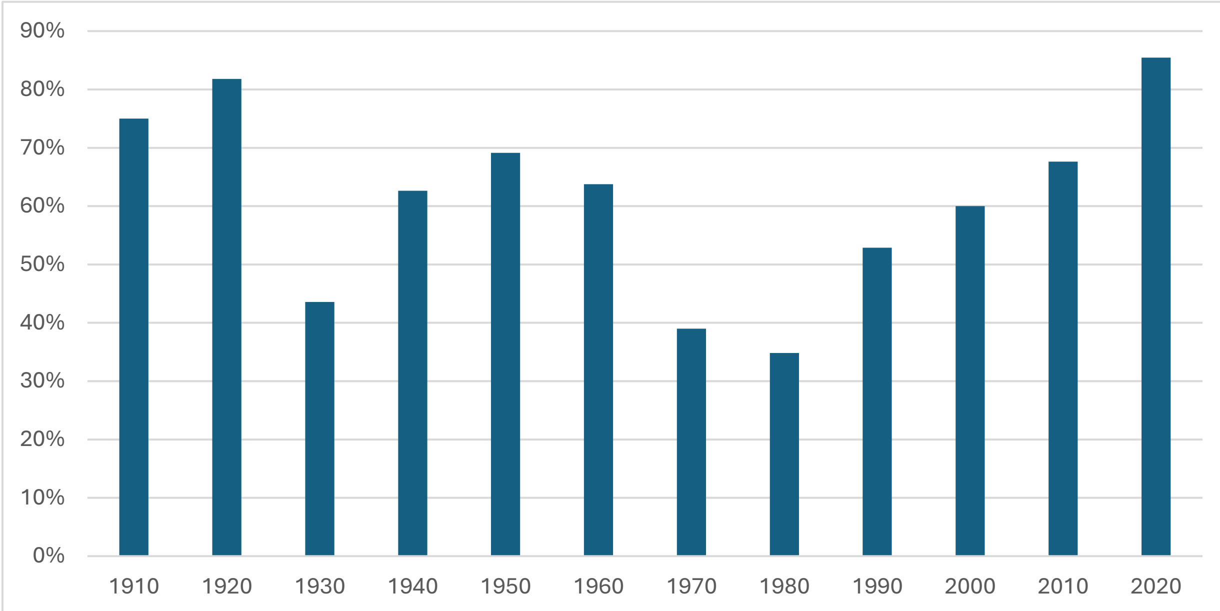


Figure 7 shows the number of cooperatives, inactive and active, founded by decade. This chart demonstrates the cooperative model's long legacy, with cooperative formation in the Carolinas dating back to the 1880s. The 1940s through 1960s is a notable period of high formation, driven primarily by agricultural cooperatives and mutual services organizations, with Electric Member Cooperatives (EMCs) also forming in significant numbers during this era, contributing to the persistence of utilities cooperatives in the dataset today.

Figure 8: Master List Cooperatives Survival Rate by Decade Founded



Of the 1,039 cooperatives for which founding-year data was available, cooperative formation and survival vary considerably by decade. The 1900s through the 1920s saw the creation of only a handful of recorded cooperatives, with fewer than 20 in total. These decades represent the cooperatives model's earliest and most limited stage of presence in the Carolinas. Formation accelerated substantially from the 1930s through the 1960s, a period that produced 80 to 100 new cooperatives each decade and established the base of long-lived cooperatives, particularly Electric Membership Cooperatives, that still anchor the sector today.

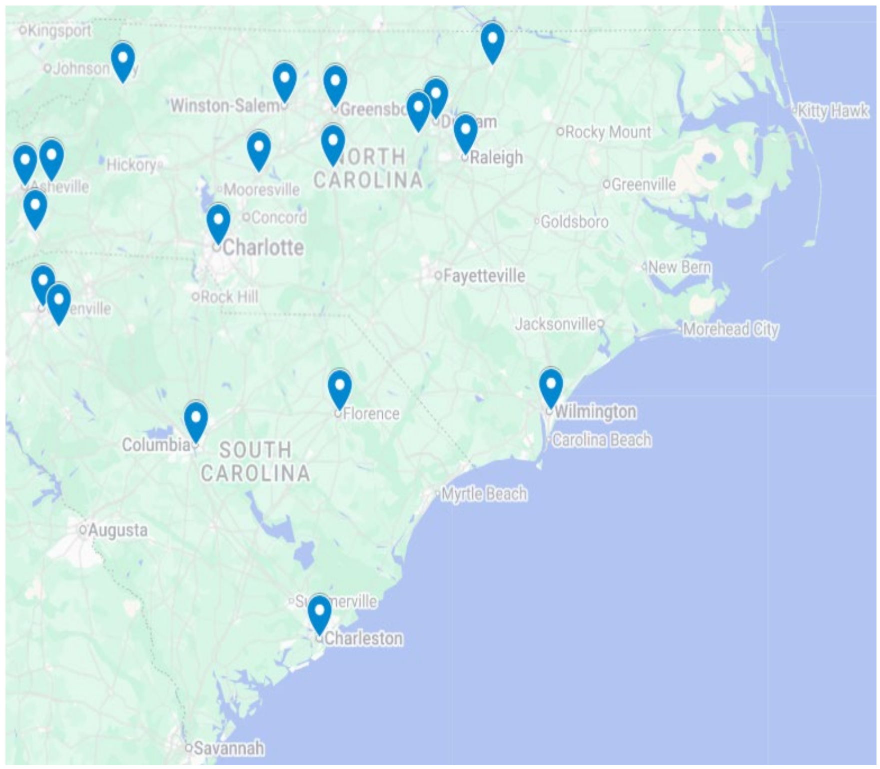
The 1970s and 1980s were a high-stakes era of formation: cooperative formation remained strong, but the majority of cooperatives founded in this period are no longer active, resulting in the lowest survival rates on record, at 39% and 35%, respectively. Starting in 1990, the sector entered a recovery, with a consistent upward trend in both new formation and survival, and active cooperatives beginning to outnumber inactive ones. For the 1,039 cooperatives, the survival rate across all decades averages 58%, but since the 2000s, survival rates have climbed to an average of 71% across the 2000s, 2010s, and 2020s. This trend suggests that more recently established cooperatives are demonstrating greater staying power than their predecessors. The 2020s may prove to be the most transformative decade yet for the cooperative model in the Carolinas, with 94 cooperatives already established and four more years to go.

Geography

The map below shows the locations of active cooperatives from the master list, with a focus on the Carolinas. While cooperatives are distributed across the landscape, there are clear hotspots: Raleigh, Asheville, and Durham. North Carolina stands out as its cities have the highest density of cooperatives. The data for Raleigh is likely skewed upward, as many cooperatives in the NC Secretary of State data list a Raleigh address for administrative purposes, though their operations are primarily located elsewhere.

Table 10: Cities with at least Five Cooperatives in the Carolinas

City	Active Co-ops
Raleigh, NC	57
Asheville, NC	26
Durham, NC	22
Charlotte, NC	15
Columbia, SC	13
Wilmington, NC	12
Charleston, SC	12
Winston-Salem, NC	11
Greenville, SC	9
Greensboro, NC	9
Black Mountain, NC	7
Hendersonville, NC	6
Chapel Hill, NC	6
Henderson, NC	6
Boone, NC	6
Florence, SC	5
Salisbury, NC	5
Simpsonville, SC	5
Asheboro, NC	5



Economic Footprint

The following figures draw on data collected through both the cooperative survey and the broader census to characterize the economic footprint of cooperatives in the Carolinas. Averages calculated from available survey and research data have been applied across the full population of 618 active cooperatives to produce extrapolated estimates of scale; given the limited sample size underlying these averages, the resulting figures should be understood as indicative rather than definitive. Alongside these extrapolations, this section also reports the sums of figures collected through the survey and identified through public records research, which establish a concrete, verified baseline for the minimum economic footprint of cooperatives across the Carolinas. The actual footprint of the sector is considerably larger than these baseline figures suggest.

Membership data was available for 111 active cooperatives in the master list, drawn from both survey responses and public records research, the majority of which are credit unions and electric membership cooperatives (EMCs). These types of cooperatives tend to serve very large member bases by the nature of their business model — collectively, the Utilities and Finance & Insurance cooperatives in this dataset account for 6,412,448 of the 6,464,619 total documented members, with an average membership of 72,050 per cooperative. Employment data was similarly available for 88 active cooperatives, totaling 13,256 documented jobs. This composition highlights an important distinction within the sector: a relatively small number of cooperatives, primarily large utilities and credit unions, account for the overwhelming majority of total membership, while a much larger number of cooperatives serve smaller, more actively engaged memberships.

Revenue data was available for 37 of the 47 cooperatives surveyed, with an average reported annual revenue of $25.6 million per cooperative. Extrapolating this average across the 618 active cooperatives identified in the master list yields an estimated total annual revenue of approximately $15.8 billion for the Carolinas cooperative sector. Given the limited sample size underlying this average, this figure should be understood as indicative of scale rather than a precise estimate.

Payroll data was available for 32 of the 47 cooperatives surveyed, with an average reported annual payroll of $7.06 million per cooperative. Extrapolating this average across the 618 active cooperatives yields an estimated total annual payroll of approximately $4.36 billion. As with the revenue estimate, this figure should be interpreted as indicative of scale rather than precise, particularly given that payroll-reporting respondents skewed heavily toward larger utilities and credit unions; the actual total may vary considerably due to differences in industry composition, organizational size, and compensation practices across the broader cooperative population.

While comprehensive data on total member donations, profit sharing, and community contributions were not available for all 618 cooperatives in this study, these forms of distribution and local reinvestment are a defining feature of the cooperative business model. The estimated $15.8 billion in annual revenue represents the economic activity generated by cooperatives, a significant portion of which is recycled back into the local economy through these member dividends and community investments, rather than being extracted as distant shareholder profit. This reinforces the cooperative model as a way of building localized, resilient wealth.

Ownership

Consumer-owned cooperatives (EMCs, credit unions, food co-ops) form the backbone of the sector by count, representing 40% (212) of all active cooperatives with known ownership type. This category includes utility cooperatives (electric membership corporations) and finance & insurance cooperatives (credit unions), which provide essential services directly to consumer members.

Producer-owned cooperatives account for 32% (171) of the total and are most common in the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting sector. These cooperatives allow producers to collectively process, market, and distribute their goods. This ownership type is crucial for sustaining rural livelihoods and local food systems.

Business-owned cooperatives are the third largest group at 21% (112). These are typically purchasing or marketing cooperatives.

Worker-owned cooperatives represent 6% (31) of the sector. They are highly concentrated in specific service industries like Arts & Entertainment, Food Services, and Professional Services. This model gives workers a direct stake in the success of an enterprise and promotes job democracy.

A small segment (1%) consists of multi-stakeholder cooperatives (4). These are a blend of ownership classes, such as consumers, workers, and producers, into a unified governance and decision-making structure, allowing them to address community needs by aligning the interests of multiple groups.

Table 12: Ownership Type Distribution of Surveyed and Master List Co-ops

Ownership Type	Master List Count	% of Total
Consumers	212	40%
Producers	171	32%
Businesses/Organizations/Cooperatives	112	21%
Workers/Employees	31	6%
Multistakeholder	4	1%
Total	**530**	**100%**

*Note: Ownership type was available for 530 out of 618 active master list cooperatives and 45 out of 47 surveyed cooperatives

Table 13: Ownership by Industry

Industry	Consumers	Producers	Buz/Org/Co-op	Workers & Employees	Multiple Stakeholders	Total
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting		148	2	2		**152**
Utilities	83		10	1	1	**95**
Finance and Insurance	62		8		1	**71**
Other Services (except Public Administration)	3		42			**45**
Retail Trade	20	4	2	8	2	**36**
Health Care and Social Assistance	1		25			**26**
Educational Services	20		4	2		**26**
Real Estate Rental and Leasing	19		1	1		**21**
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation		15	1			**16**
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services		1	6	8		**15**
Construction			3	3		**6**
Accommodation and Food Services	4					**4**
Manufacturing		1		3		**4**
Wholesale Trade		2	2			**4**
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services			1	2		**3**
Information			2	1		**3**
Transportation and Warehousing			3			**3**
Total	**212**	**171**	**112**	**31**	**4**	**530**

It is noteworthy that survey responses showed a notably higher relative participation from worker-owned and multi-stakeholder organizations than their share of the master list. Worker-owned cooperatives accounted for 15% of survey respondents compared to 6% of the master list, while multi-stakeholder cooperatives accounted for 17% of survey respondents compared to just 1% of the master list. This suggests that while these co-ops are fewer in number, they are actively engaged in sector development and may have distinct support needs.

VIII. Next Steps

The cooperative model has a significant and growing economic presence in the Carolinas. This report establishes a foundation on which further research can build to more comprehensively and precisely estimate the economic impact of cooperatives. The metrics gathered at this stage can be shared with policymakers to emphasize the strong economic footprint of cooperatives in the Carolinas in terms of the number of firms and approximate annual revenues. To conduct an economic impact analysis, much more detailed firm-level information will be needed to establish the statistical significance of potential inputs, such as the number of employees or annual revenue by industry. The following steps will help pave the way to an economic impact analysis and a more robust understanding of the cooperative ecosystem.

Improve Accuracy and Completeness of Cooperative Contact Information

This project required creating a comprehensive master list of cooperatives across North and South Carolina, compiled from multiple state filings, public directories, personal contacts, and other external sources. This list provides a strong foundation for future surveying efforts. Future research will benefit from maintaining this master list with periodic updates, email address verification, and designated points of contact.

Some responses appeared to come from staff who did not have access to complete financial or operational data. Identifying the appropriate point of contact within each cooperative ahead of future surveys would support more accurate data collection and higher response rates.

Build Relationships to Prepare for Future Surveys

People are much more likely to respond to a survey coming from a trusted contact. Reaching out and building relationships with the expanded list of cooperatives before sending a survey will help to ensure higher response rates.

The survey results were weighted toward larger, more established consumer-owned cooperatives, Utilities, and Finance & Insurance. Smaller cooperatives, which tend to be worker- and producer-owned, were less responsive. Future research would benefit from more targeted outreach to these smaller cooperatives to improve data quality and get a more accurate understanding of trends and opportunities.

Shorten Survey and Reduce Complexity

There was a noticeable gap between the number of surveys opened (111) and the number of valid responses (47). This could indicate that the survey was longer or more detailed than respondents expected. Potential respondents may have opened the survey, seen the detailed financial and operational questions, and planned to return later with the necessary information, but forgot about it. For future surveys, shortening the survey, reducing the number of free-response questions, and streamlining financial and operational questions could improve completion rates. For example, instead of asking for the number of employees or members as a free-response, provide a list of ranges to select from.

IX. Conclusion

This analysis of the cooperative sector—drawing on detailed survey responses and the extensive research underpinning the master list—reveals a diverse and resilient ecosystem spanning numerous industries across the region. Together, this data provides the most up-to-date picture of the scale, diversity, and economic significance of cooperatives. Across 618 active organizations, documented data shows cooperatives collectively serve at least 6.46 million members and provide at least 13,256 jobs, while reported annual revenue among survey respondents totals at least $948.6 million, based on available survey and public records research. Based on extrapolated averages from survey and desk research data, the sector is estimated to generate approximately $15.8 billion in annual revenue and support approximately 93,000 jobs across the Carolinas. As the sample size underpinning these extrapolations is modest, the figures should be understood as indicative of scale rather than precise totals.

The cooperative model proves highly adaptable, operating across 16 industries. Ownership structures vary by sector: consumer-owned cooperatives dominate utilities and finance, producer-owned cooperatives anchor agriculture, and worker- or employee-owned cooperatives are increasingly present in community-oriented and local service markets.

A little over 40% of surveyed cooperatives expressed interest in technical assistance, with the most frequently cited needs centered on applying for loans and grants and training new board members, followed closely by access to capital, member engagement, strategic planning, and marketing and outreach. These priorities align closely with the economic and market pressures identified as the sector's most commonly cited challenge, underscoring a sustained need for support to secure capital, strengthen governance, and build organizational capacity amid a difficult economic environment.

The age profile of the sector reflects both stability and renewal. Legacy cooperatives, many of which have operated for more than 50 years, provide long-standing infrastructure and economic continuity. At the same time, newer cooperatives are emerging to address modern needs such as workforce development and sustainability.

Geographically, North and South Carolina serve as regional hubs for cooperative development. In North Carolina, Raleigh, Asheville, and Durham support the largest clusters of cooperative activity, while in South Carolina, Columbia, Charleston, and Greenville serve a similar role. Beyond these urban centers, rural communities across both states rely on cooperatives in agriculture, utilities, and essential services that underpin local economies.

Although this study establishes a strong baseline, gaps in data completeness highlight the need for improved reporting and ongoing engagement. Strengthening cooperative participation in future data collection will enhance advocacy, inform policy, and better equip the sector to meet emerging challenges.

Overall, this integrated analysis offers a foundation for ongoing monitoring, future research, and continued advocacy to support the growth and impact of cooperatives across the Carolinas.

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

This appendix includes the full 2025 Carolina Cooperative Impact Survey developed by Carolina Common Enterprise (CCE), the Cooperative Council of the Carolinas (CCC), and NCGrowth. The survey was created and distributed using Qualtrics during the summer and fall of 2025.

Carolina Cooperative Impact Survey
The Cooperative Council of the Carolinas (CCC) and Carolina Common Enterprise (CCE), in partnership with NCGrowth at UNC Chapel Hill, are conducting a study to better understand the economic footprint of cooperatives across North and South Carolina.

Participation Details:

- This survey is meant to be filled out only once per organization.
- Before you get started, it'll be helpful to have a couple of things handy:
    - A list of your cooperative's full-time and part-time workers from the most recent fiscal year
    - Your most recently completed tax forms (e.g., IRS Form 990, 1120-C, or other relevant filings)
- Participation is voluntary, and you may skip any question or exit the survey at any time.
- The survey is estimated to take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality:
Your responses will be visible by members of the research team including NCGrowth, CCC and CCE. Data will be reported only in aggregate form, and no identifying information will be shared publicly.

By continuing with this survey, you are indicating that you have read and understood this consent information and agree to participate. If you have any questions about this survey or how your data will be used, please contact study coordinator Carolyn Fryberger: carolyn_fryberger@unc.edu.

Thank you for your participation! By contributing to this important initiative, you're helping to build a stronger, more informed foundation for cooperative growth and advocacy throughout the Carolinas.

Together, we CAN make a difference.

Sara Coats
Cooperative Council of the Carolinas
Director@CarolinasCouncil.coop
919-834-5544

Thomas Beckett
Carolina Common Enterprise
Thomas@CommonEnterprise.coop

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1. **Primary Contact** (text entry)
    - Name
    - Title
    - Email
    - Phone
2. **Organization Information** (text entry)
    - Co-op Name
    - Street Address
    - City, State, Zip
    - Website
    - Email
    - Phone
    - Year Established
    - Brief Description
3. **What is the co-op's estimated annual revenue?** (select from list)
    - N/A
    - < $50,000
    - $50,000–$100,000

- $100,000–$500,000
- $500,000–$1 million
- $1–2 million
- $2–5 million
- $5–10 million
- $10–50 million
- More than $50 million

4. **Co-op Size** (text entry)
    - Number of Members
    - Number of Full-time Employees
    - Number of Part-time Employees
    - Annual Payroll

---

5. **Which of the following best describes the co-op's ownership type?** (select all that apply)
    - Workers/Employees
    - Producers (Farmers, Fishers, Artists, etc.)
    - Consumers (Shoppers, Residents, Borrowers, etc.)
    - Businesses/Organizations/Cooperatives
    - Investors
    - Other (please specify)
6. **Which of the following best describes the co-op's stage of development?** (select all that apply)
    - Pre-start / Organizing
    - Start-up (first year of operations)
    - Established (>1 year of operations)
    - Inactive
    - Re-establishing
7. **Comments on Stage of Development** (optional)
8. **Does your co-op receive federal funding (grants, loans, or guarantees)?**
    - Yes
    - No
9. **Comments on Federal Funding** (optional)
10. **What is the co-op's industry?** (select all the apply)
    (for definitions or to lookup by keyword visit https://www.census.gov/naics/?58967?yearbck=2022)
    - Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting
    - Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction

- Utilities
- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Wholesale Trade
- Retail Trade
- Transportation and Warehousing
- Information
- Finance and Insurance
- Real Estate Rental and Leasing
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- Management of Companies and Enterprises
- Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services
- Educational Services
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Other Services (except Public Administration)
- Public Administration

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11. **What is the co-op's form of incorporation?**
    - Cooperative Association
    - Business Corporation
    - Limited Liability Company (LLC)
    - Nonprofit Corporation (501c3)
    - Project of a Nonprofit Fiscal Agent
    - Unincorporated Association
    - Other (define in comments)
12. **Comments on Incorporation** (optional)
13. **What is the co-op's tax status?**
    - C Corporation filing Subchapter T
    - C Corporation not filing as cooperative
    - S Corporation
    - Partnership
    - Tax-exempt – 501(c)3
    - Tax-exempt – 501(c)4 or other

- 521 Tax-exempt Farmers Cooperative
- Other: ___________

14. Comments on Tax Status (optional)

15. Is the co-op's Board of Directors directly elected by the membership?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

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16. What is the co-op's growth outlook over the next year?

- Grow Significantly
- Grow slightly
- Remain the same
- Decrease
- Other (please describe)

17. What is the co-op's greatest challenge? (text entry)

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18. Are you interested in learning about available technical assistance for co-ops?

- Yes
- No

---

19. [IF YES] Technical Assistance Needs (select all that apply)

- Getting into business
- Transitioning existing business to cooperative ownership
- Training new board members
- Accounting systems
- Applying for loans / grants
- Access to capital
- Recruiting / retaining members
- Member engagement
- Financial projections
- Management / operations
- Bylaws / policy updates
- Strategic planning
- Marketing and outreach
- Meeting efficiency
- Increasing sales

- Increasing profitability
- Economic inclusion
- Other

20. **Comments on Technical Assistance Needs (optional)**

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21. **Are there other co-ops in your network that should be included in this study? If yes, please provide contact information or organization names below.** (text entry)

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

Appendix B: Opened Ended Response Data

Q5: Which of the following best describes the co-op's ownership type?

Other - Text:

- “Members”
- “All owners are invested but are also producers”

Q7: Comments on Stage of Development

- "We lost our building in Hurricane Helene last September on our 50th anniversary- we are currently in the process of fundraising and rebuilding"
- "The co-op purchased all of the assets of a pre-existing 11 year old bookshop and is, in essence, a continuation of that shop with a new ownership model. The co-op aspect would still be best described as in the start-up phase."
- "Getting the business up and running / profitable was our first priority. Now that we are sustainable we have been working on our bylaws and ownership structure. We are hoping to bring all employees into the coop by the end of this year."

Q9: Comments on Federal Funding

- "We received a USDA ReConnect Grant in 2020 for a fiber project"
- "We became a nonprofit after the storm because we had run that way for years anyway, and we knew it would be the only way to fundraise to rebuild"
- "Inactive economic injury disaster loan from 2020 (federal loan from COVID)"
- "They mostly get grants from National Co-op Grocers"
- "RUS BORROWER"
- "CDFI"
- "FA grants from CDFI"

Q11: Comments on Form of Incorporation

- “Non-Profit 501(c)12”
- “not for profit”
- “Federal Credit Union”
- “Quasi-Governmental Entity formed under chapter 117”
- “Credit union 501c1”
- “Cooperative Corporation”

Q12: Comments on Tax Status

- “Non-Profit 501(c)12”
- “501(c)(12)”
- “501c12”
- “Tax Exempt, Not For Profit, 501 (c) 12”
- “not for profit”
- “Federal Credit Union”
- “C Corp 501-C12"
- “Money goes to the members so they declare it”
- “Not sure”
- “Mentioned they are an S-Corp because the IRS doesn't recognize their LLC yet”
- “Corporation filing but does not know whether or not it is subchapter T. Not finding any other information”
- “Exploring whether or not to file as co-op for 2025”
- “we have an llc as well as a 501 c3”

Q16: What is the co-op's growth outlook over the next year?

Other – Text:

- "All dependent on weather and cotton market"

Q17: What is the co-op's greatest challenge?

- “Keeping costs affordable for our members, with an increase in costs to us. “
- “Increasing wholesale power costs that drive rates up”
- “Weather & marketing cotton - world shifting to synthetic blends “
- "Lack of economic development and growth. Decreasing population. Aging workforce"
- “Providing reliable and affordable electricity (serving an island so it's hard to be reliable)”
- “Greatest challenges are, but not limited to, regulations, permitting, competition. “
- “Need more depositors.”
- “Regulations”
- “Continuing to grow and differentiate in an increasingly competitive marketplace. “
- “Economy”
- “The weather, prices, the cotton market”
- “We have raised most of the funds needed to rebuild, and are waiting for our contractor to start construction. We are using sustainable building practices, and hope to have local involvement in finishing the interior. Tourism is our lifeline in the mountains of NC. We are working on ways to keep people coming in until the Blue

Ridge Parkway is fixed and summer tourism picks up again. The town of Burnsville and the chamber of commerce are working on this currently also.”

- “Being self-employed is the challenge but things still go pretty smoothly”
- “Staffing and inflation (grocery)”
- “Weather for growing cotton and also marketing cotton - everyone uses synthetic materials now”
- “Gaining market share in a hyper-competitive retail environment.”
- “Supporting 166 independent cooperatives operating with differing systems across 39 states”
- “Local Competition”
- “Economic downturn: What they do is so specialized so everything they sell will be a luxury item. When the economy is tight, it is hard to justify purchasing an expensive Electric Violin.”
- “Retaining employees and growing ownership.”
- “Changing with the ever-changing business environment as well as what is going on at the federal level. Our customers are always asking for changes and staying up on those expectations is difficult at times.”
- “Fascism: they are not worried about economic factors, more concerned about political climate (censorship, human rights).”
- “Keeping up with inflation and paying our employees enough to have a good quality life and just not get by. Most of our owners do not live in the same city as our business because of cost of living. “
- “Artificial intelligence is impacting our translation work (written work)”
- “The farming sector is a very complex sector, the income it is not always sustainable, be a partnership farm It is not so beneficial from a tax point of view. We need to adapt our operations to many climate crisis.”
- “helping families to afford the associated costs”
- “Good employee fit; parents.”
- “To continue to grow the ownership base at a steady rate beyond the initial surge after the original announcement of the co-op transition.”

Q20: Comments on Technical Assistance Needs

- "They would always love help, but they are more concerned with the last three (increasing sales, increasing profitability, and economic inclusion)"
- "Don't have a lot of time for these things, so they are wary of going to workshops. They said they feel set up well on everything else"
- "Human Resources" (written in "Other - Text" field)

Appendix C: Methodology & Data Definitions

This appendix provides further detail on the methodological choices and definitions used in this study to ensure clarity and reproducibility.

Master List Compilation Methodology

- The master list of 1,304 known cooperatives (618 active) was built through a multi-step process:
  - Base List Aggregation: Consolidating lists provided by Carolina Common Enterprise and Cooperative Council of the Carolinas, and data requests from NC and SC Secretaries of State.
  - Sector-Specific Verification: Cross-referencing with member directories from the Carolinas Credit Union Foundation, NC Electric Cooperatives, and USDA Rural Development.
  - Active Status Verification: Each entity was individually verified for active operational status via website review, internet research, public record search, or direct contact.

Key Metric Definitions & Calculations

- "Active Cooperative": Defined as an enterprise formally organized as a cooperative that was verifiably conducting business or providing services to members in 2025.
- Total Members Calculation: The figure of 6,464,619 members is the sum of:
  - 917,028 members reported directly by 43 of the 47 surveyed cooperatives.
  - 5,547,591 members from the remaining cooperatives in the master list, identified through public records research, based on their public-facing membership data.
  - *Note: Membership data from national cooperative alliances (e.g., Touchstone Energy) was excluded to maintain a geographically accurate count for the Carolinas.*
- Total Employees Calculation: The figure of 13,256 documented jobs is the sum of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment reported across 88 cooperatives in the master list, comprising 42 cooperatives through survey responses and 46 cooperatives through public records research. This figure represents a conservative floor, as employment data was not available for all 618 active cooperatives.

- Estimated Annual Revenue: The figure of approximately $15.8 billion was calculated by applying the average annual revenue from the 37 surveyed cooperatives that reported revenue (~$25.6 million) to the total population of 618 active cooperatives from the master list.

Ownership Type Classifications

- Consumer-Owned: Members are individuals who use the cooperative's services (e.g., electricity, banking, retail goods).
- Producer-Owned: Members are businesses or individuals who produce goods (e.g., farmers, artisans) and use the co-op to process or market their products.
- Worker-Owned: Members are the employees of the organization.
- Business-Owned: Members are other businesses or organizations that use the co-op for collective purchasing or marketing.
- Multi-Stakeholder: The cooperative formally integrates two or more of the above membership classes in its governance.

Appendix D: References

This appendix details the sources of information, data, and support that contributed to the development of this report and the 2025 Cooperative Survey.

- 2025 Cooperative Survey (46 participating co-ops)
- USDA Agricultural Cooperative Statistics (2023)
  - https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/publications-for-cooperatives
- NC & SC Secretary of State business registries and data
  - https://businessfilings.sc.gov/businessfiling/Entity/Search https://www.sosnc.gov/online_services/search/by_title/search_Business_Registration
- UW Center for Cooperatives
  - https://uwcc.wisc.edu/
- USDA Rural Development
  - https://www.rd.usda.gov
- Carolinas Credit Union Foundation Data
  - https://carolinasfoundation.org/impact-report/
- NC Electric Cooperatives Data
  - https://www.ncelectriccooperatives.com/our-members/
- North American Industry Classification System
  - https://www.census.gov/naics/