

As I Was Saying

By Jerry Kirk, contributing editor



Jerry Kirk has been part of the *Tennessee Cooperator* staff for more than 35 years, serving as editor from November 1972 until his retirement in April 2001. He continues as a contributing editor.

Cooperatives are still a big part of my life

Come April 30, I will have been retired six years. It doesn't seem nearly that long, but the calendar says it's so. And with a busier-than-usual schedule these last several weeks, I sometimes have fleeting doubts as to whether I'm actually retired.

But then, when I step back and look closely at my life today, I realize how "retired" I am.

For one thing, the schedule I maintain is a long way from being hectic. I get up early every weekday — by choice — and take a 45-minute, two-and-a-half-mile walk. Back at home, I settle into my recliner to have a cup of coffee as I read the newspaper. Likely as not, I'll catch a little nap before I start whatever needs doing that day.

A few days each month, I get ready and head to LaVergne to "help out" with the *Tennessee Cooperator*. The good folks at Tennessee Farmers Cooperative still allow me to do that. They also let me help out at annual meeting time and on some "special projects" that remain near and dear to my heart. I'm eternally grateful for these special opportunities.

No one has any way of knowing how special it is that I remain connected with the Co-op family in Tennessee — the people at TFC, our member Co-ops, and the thousands of farmers who actually own our highly successful cooperative system. I now have a 35-year association with Co-op, and it remains as special to me now as it was when I was coming to work here at TFC every day.

Another few days of my month are spent at Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association (TECA) in Nashville where I do some editing for their membership publication, *The Tennessee Magazine*. I know lots of you folks receive that great little magazine as members of your local rural electric cooperative. I was editor of *The Tennessee Magazine* for a couple of years back in the late 1980s and have known the current editor, Robin Conover, since then. She just happens to be, by the way, one of this country's top photographers. As evidence, she's won the Cooperative Communicators

Association's "Photographer of the Year" Award something like five times.

The electric cooperative family is special, too, and many of the people I worked with at TECA and its local co-ops are still on the job today. It's been wonderful to reconnect with those fine folks.

And now, for the past several months, I've been administrative secretary-treasurer of the Tennessee Council of Cooperatives, which is observing its 25th anniversary this year.

When the council was formed back in 1982, I handled the publicity. TFC's W.E. Bailey served as the council's first president, and I worked closely with the organization's first board and officers and for many years covered events the council sponsored — from young couple conferences to Cooperative Month (October) observances.

Now, a quarter of a century later, I'm working with the council again, having succeeded Anita Barrett of Caney Fork Electric Cooperative in McMinnville as administrative secretary-treasurer. What a great job Anita did over the past several years! Tedious and precise recordkeeping by that dedicated woman made assuming the duties so much easier.

As with the electric co-op family, my reconnection with the council has been gratifying and rewarding. I'm working again with some people I've known for years, but I'm also getting to know a new generation of professionals who give of their time and talents to promote cooperatives and educate the public about the benefits of the cooperative way of doing business.


I guess by now you get the gist of what I'm trying to say about my life in retirement. It's simply this: Cooperatives continue to be a big part of my life. They give me the spark and the will to keep telling the co-op story. And they make me feel so much a part of the family.

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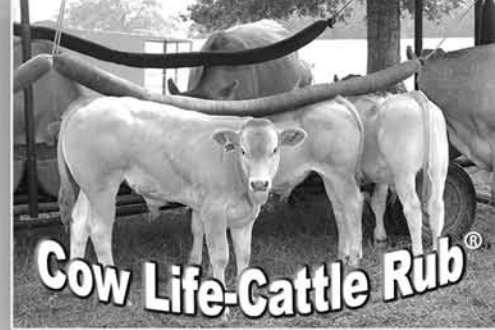
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