National Coppice Federation
Supporting the Coppice Industry

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Co-operatives Discussion Group
NCFed Gathering, 14th Oct 2023

Duncan Goulder (The Coppice Co-operative[1]), Tom Coxhead and Josh Lawson (Leeds Coppice Workers[2]) led a presentation at this year's Gathering, answering questions on how their businesses share the responsibilities, benefits, and challenges of running a coppice business co-operatively.

Key points were:

- Tasks are distributed according to individual strengths, yet with constant commitment to training so that knowledge and capacities are shared widely.
- People are the most valuable asset. Kit might be expensive to repair, yet the investment in training someone up is arguably worth more.
- While wages might be low the benefits of co-operative working are enormous, allowing flexibility to tackle larger jobs, shift work patterns, learn skills on the job and pay for admin tasks that self-employment rarely charges to the customer.
- Funding for worker co-ops is rare, yet Co-ops UK and Plunkett Foundation provide mentoring and business development advice. Other organisations with funding support valuable summertime income, commissioning training for groups with particular needs.
- Balance between jobs taken individually and those managed co-operatively needs to be managed with good communication and willingness to share tricky decisions with others in the co-op.
- PAYE means benefits like paternity and sick pay are available yet may be waived by voluntary agreement with employees. 'Bonus Hours' may be earned in relation to hours worked, in lieu of holiday pay.
- Most working arrangements can be moulded to fluxes in staff, workload, health and cash flow as regular meetings ensure constant feedback and communication between workers.

[1] https://www.coppicecoop.co.uk/
[2] https://leedscoppiceworkers.co.uk/

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