



Want to stay safe around power lines? Don't go near them.

Your safety always comes first. If power ever goes out you can rest assured a trained line technician is on the way to make things right. In turn, all we ask is for you to be alert and careful when working or playing outside. Keep all tools clear of overhead power lines – especially metal ladders. Don't touch them. Ever. The first rule of every Do-it-Yourselfer is to do it safely.



Touchstone Energy* Cooperatives
of South Dakota
*The power of human connections**

Looking out for you.

Produced by the following electric cooperatives in South Dakota and western Minnesota:

Black Hills Electric, Custer, S.D.
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Half the Country



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Nearly 22,000 cooperatives. More than 154 million members. Annual revenues topping \$273 billion.

Those are the key numbers in a new statistical snapshot of U.S. co-ops in nine key sectors. The data was collected by the National Cooperative Business Association on behalf of the National Cooperative Month Planning Committee. It's available on the Co-op Month Web site at www.coopmonth.coop.

It's not a comprehensive look at U.S. cooperatives. But it's the best we have right now. And, like NCB's Co-op 100 or the International Cooperative Alliance's new Global 300, it can be very useful in demonstrating co-ops' impact. Consider:

- 154 million members is one out of every two Americans or seven out of 10 adults.

- \$273 billion in revenues would put co-ops collectively third on the Fortune 500 list, behind only Exxon and Wal-Mart.

The membership total is especially potent. Co-op members are half the U.S. population. True, some individuals are members of more than one co-op, but they are balanced out by many co-op members who aren't included in this count. Among those who aren't counted, for example, are 2 million members of REI, the nation's largest consumer cooperative.

So it's reasonable to say that co-op members are half the country. Those members can defend cooperatives from attack and speak up for cooperative values. One-hundred-fifty-four million Americans trained in

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economic democracy and co-op principles. One-hundred-fifty-four million Americans who can lobby Congress, advocate before state legislatures and speak up at town councils. One-hundred-fifty-four million Americans who can't be ignored.

And there's even better news. A much more comprehensive count is on the way.

Last year, at NCBA's urging, Congress appropriated \$500,000 for a university-led study to quantify the contributions of all co-ops to the U.S. economy. The Department of Agriculture recently selected the University of Wisconsin to oversee that study and Congress is on track to vote another \$500,000 for the project early next year.

The goal is to establish a permanent partnership between cooperatives, the federal government and major universities that will provide an ongoing stream of data on the co-op business sector.

This isn't research for research's sake. Among other things, it will help determine how co-ops can address issues like health care and housing and how they can provide affordable services compared with other forms of business. It will also make it much easier to advocate for co-ops on Capitol Hill.