

**NCBA CLUSA's
U.S.–Cuba Cooperative Working Group
March 2015**

The U.S.–Cuba Cooperative Working Group (USCCWG) is a national-level, multi-sectoral U.S. cooperative leadership group representing consumer, purchasing, worker, and producer cooperatives from a broad range of sectors, such as agriculture, energy, finance, grocery and consumer goods, transportation, insurance, and housing, among others. The USCCWG is led by the National Cooperative Business Association, CLUSA International ([NCBA CLUSA](#)).

Mission

The U.S.–Cuba Cooperative Working Group (USCCWG) promotes mutually beneficial engagement between the U.S. and Cuba's cooperative sectors in an effort to support US cooperative growth and Cuban economic updates that will result from the ongoing success of strong and vibrant cooperatives in both countries.

Objectives

- Serve as the leading, unified voice for U.S. cooperatives collaborating with Cuba's cooperative sector.
- Provide mutually beneficial platforms for sharing best practices and technologies between the U.S. and Cuban cooperative sectors.
- Support other economic and social activities through a cooperative business approach.
- Develop relationships with the Cuban cooperative and social enterprise sector for sharing and learning perspectives, tools, and innovations.
- Support Cuban cooperatives through understanding and application of the seven internationally accepted cooperative principles as a vehicle for economic and social development.
- Promote Cuban cooperatives' equitable access to markets, technologies, finance, and information.
- Partner with local cooperatives improving Cuba's food security and nutrition initiatives through the development and strengthening of Cuba's agricultural cooperatives, improving access to markets, technologies, and sustainable farming practices that increase farmers' production, productivity, and incomes.

Approach

The USCCWG uses a peer-to-peer approach that involves Cuban cooperators as partners and equals in developing cooperative solutions to meet the economic and social needs of the Cuban people. Since 2011, the Cuban government has set in motion a set of economic updates to support the development of the cooperative and private sectors of the economy, in an attempt to promote more autonomous agricultural cooperatives, the change of state-run enterprises into cooperatives, and the creation of new cooperatives in non-agricultural sectors, such as food services, retail trade, transportation, housing construction, consumer goods, and business services. As U.S. cooperative leaders from across economic sectors, the USCCWG is well-positioned to participate in programs and initiatives aimed at strengthening and learning from Cuban cooperative development that is based on that country's unique needs and grounded in the international cooperative movement, which boasts over 1 billion members worldwide.

Agenda

On December 17, 2014, President Barack Obama announced plans to normalize diplomatic ties with Cuba, marking a historic shift in U.S.–Cuban relations. To implement the policy changes announced by the President, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has amended the Cuban Assets Control Regulations. The changes, which have eased travel restrictions to and from Cuba and have opened a window for new business opportunities between the two nations, went into effect on January 16, 2015.

This move comes as Cuba pursues updates in an effort to strengthen its economy, which has included bolstering the role of existing cooperatives and allowing space for the formation of new cooperatives. In recent years, the Cuban government has provided the framework to change state-owned farms and business enterprises into worker-owned cooperatives.

President Obama's announcement and the subsequent regulation changes have ushered in a new era for U.S.–Cuba relations. In light of these changes, and others to follow in the U.S. and Cuba, the USCCWG seeks to increase its support for the advancement of Cuba's cooperative sector through the following activities:

- Facilitate dialogue through presentations, workshops, learning sessions, and forums on a wide range of cooperative development and sustainable growth topics tailored to the Cuban experience, including governance, business administration, management, membership, market development, access to finance, and social and community engagement, among others.
- Coordinate multi-sectoral exchange visits between U.S. and Cuban cooperative leaders and practitioners.
- Support international cooperative principles and values in Cuba through technical assistance, sharing of best practices, and other learning opportunities.
- Partner with Cuban farmers and cooperatives on improving agricultural productivity, sustainable agriculture practices, production, market linkages, and other topics relevant to the sector.
- Promote the strengthening of national level cooperative entities and service providers in the different economic sectors, including the creation of second and third-tier cooperatives.
- Contribute NCBA CLUSA's experience in any future efforts to develop a national cooperative institute and a federation of cooperatives in Cuba.
- Share experiences with other U.S. public and private sector groups interested in supporting Cuba's cooperative movement.
- Capture unique perspectives and experiences of the Cuban cooperative sector for use by the global cooperative sector.

About Us

The USCCWG was formed by the National Cooperative Business Association, CLUSA International (NCBA CLUSA) in collaboration with SOL² Economics in early 2014 to explore opportunities for partnering with Cuba on cooperative development in various sectors of its economy. In forming the USCCWG, NCBA CLUSA reached out to a network of U.S. cooperative leaders from multiple sectors and types interested in establishing linkages with Cuban cooperatives, cooperative researchers, and policymakers.

The USCCWG's first activity was a one-week exploratory [trip to Cuba in July 2014](#) to better understand the Cuban cooperative movement, the overall economic situation in Cuba today, U.S.–Cuban relations, the history of Cuban cooperatives, and the increasingly important role that cooperatives are playing in the process of economic updates. The group also wanted to gain a better understanding of ways in which the U.S. and international cooperative movements could partner with their Cuban counterparts in an effort to collaborate and strengthen this emerging sector in Cuba.

NCBA CLUSA is the oldest not-for-profit cooperative development and trade association in the United States and an international development organization working in 16 countries in Africa, Latin America, and SE Asia. For nearly 100 years, NCBA CLUSA has sought to advance and protect cooperative enterprises, highlighting the impact that cooperatives have in bettering the lives of individuals, families, and communities. NCBA CLUSA provides cross-sector advocacy, education, and technical assistance that helps cooperative businesses thrive.

NCBA CLUSA's international program has a 60-year history of supporting cooperative development in over 100 countries around the world, and is actively expanding its work in Latin America and the Caribbean, both as an implementer of projects that support sustainable local development and as a leader in the cooperative movement in the Americas through membership in the International Cooperative Alliance. NCBA CLUSA works in the areas of food security, agricultural development, strengthening of communities and farmer organizations, community-based health, natural resources management, and empowerment of smallholder farmers, women, and youth.

[SOL² Economics](#) has been engaging with cooperative leaders in Cuba, Canada, and Latin America around the topic of socially responsible enterprise in Cuba over the past five years.

U.S. Cuba Cooperative Working Group Steering Committee

Michael Beall, President and CEO, NCBA CLUSA
Carlos Calderon, President and CEO, OAS Federal Credit Union
Amy Coughenour Betancourt, Chief Operating Officer, NCBA CLUSA
Carla Decker, President and CEO, District Government Employees Federal Credit Union
Andrew Jacob, Executive Vice President, Co-Bank
Rebecca Kemble, President, U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives
Eric Leenson, President, Sol² Economics
Martin Lowery, Executive Vice President, External Affairs, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and U.S. Director of the Board, International Cooperative Alliance
Jerry McGeorge, Director of Cooperative Affairs, Organic Valley