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Message of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

## 13<sup>th</sup> UN International Day of Co-operatives – 07 July 2007

### “Co-operative Values and Principles for Corporate Social Responsibility”

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a promising approach for co-operatives that help to reduce poverty, strengthen the bargaining power of rural producers, provide employment and benefit over 800 million people worldwide. CSR is a concept which has gained much momentum in recent years. Cooperatives are said to espouse corporate social responsibility when they make decisions based on immediate and long-term social and environmental consequences for members, customers, employees and communities, rather than purely based on financial motives, such as profits or dividends. The core elements of this concept are not new, but have been successfully practiced by some organizations in the co-operative movement for more than 150 years. Co-operatives can, on a voluntary basis, integrate social, economic and environmental concerns in their business operations, in their member-based decision making and in their interactions with other stakeholders.

Values common to many co-operatives include self-help, self-responsibility, equity, equality and solidarity. They are put into practice through principles, such as autonomy and independence, voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, economic participation of members, education, learning opportunities and information for members and employees, accountable and transparent management, co-operation with other co-operatives, networking, and an explicit concern for their community. By practicing these values and principles, many co-operatives have long placed CSR at the centre of their business operations.

Some co-operatives demonstrate corporate social responsibility by operating transparently and accountably or by voluntarily exceeding minimum legal requirements and obligations, for example in their support to, engagement with and requests from suppliers and other stakeholders. Other co-operatives exhibit corporate social responsibility by engaging in or supporting Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), sustainable community forestry management, responsible fisheries practices, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), pro-equity education programmes, pro-equity savings and credit programmes, fairer conditions of employment, integrated soil and water management, regional networking programmes aimed at food security and poverty alleviation, livelihoods promotion for disadvantaged groups, fair-trade marketing and labelling of healthy food and non-toxic chemicals, organic agriculture, post disaster rehabilitation, renewable energy at community level, awareness campaigns on child labour practices, and promotion of human and labour rights.

On this occasion, FAO would like to commend those agricultural and other co-operatives that have made special efforts to achieve not just their business objectives, but also voluntary goals that bring social and environmental benefits. FAO would like to invite its member countries and rural small and medium entrepreneurs throughout the world, as well as global initiatives such as the UN Global Compact, to strengthen their dialogue and cooperation and exchange experiences with those co-operatives that have proven to be centres of excellence for CSR practices.