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Truman Torgerson: Leadership Straight from the Shoulder: Book Review

Mike Boland

Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

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Book Review

Torgerson, Randall. *Truman Torgerson: Leadership Straight from the Shoulder*. Authorhouse Press, Bloomington, IN 2006

Truman Torgerson cast a big shadow over cooperatives in Minnesota and Wisconsin for over 40 years. As General Manager of Lake to Lake Dairy in Wisconsin, Truman's name was linked to a broad range of activities. His son, Randy, has written about his father in a book entitled "Truman Torgerson: Leadership Straight from the Shoulder." The book is a tribute to his dad as much as it is a history of cooperatives and the dairy industry in the upper Midwest. The book builds upon a previous book written by Truman entitled "Building Markets and People Cooperatively: The Lake to Lake Story." The book contains many tributes by friends and colleagues of Truman.

The book provides a combination of biography, history, management practices, and education about cooperatives in the Upper Midwest. Truman began his career as an extension agent for the University of Wisconsin and was involved in the startup of Lake to Lake Dairy Cooperative in the 1940s. He was asked to apply for the position as General Manager and embarked upon a 30 odd year career with Lake to Lake Dairy Cooperative. While too numerous to describe here, the author offers many examples of Truman's experiences as a "father, sportsman, manager, director, and champion of the cooperative method of doing business." These include attention to detail, personal integrity, socialability, and communicator.

The book describes the economic conditions that led to the formation of Lake to Lake Dairy Cooperative and the successful use of marketing techniques which helped the cooperative develop a competitive advantage in cheese in various markets. Pages 206 to 208 provide a list of Principles of Excellence in Cooperation. While the operating practices and principles are not foreign to anyone who has worked or studied successful organizations, the list is a good introduction to Truman's management philosophy. The list is also a good introduction to anyone who wants to learn more about being a successful manager of a cooperative.

The book provides an excellent overview of changes in dairying in Wisconsin and changes in the industrial organization of the dairy sector in the upper Midwest during the latter half of the 20th century. As someone who has worked for a local cooperative, a regional cooperative, a state cooperative trade association, and currently is a professor of agricultural economics with an appointment in extension, research, and teaching in a center funded by cooperatives, this book was a joy to read. It should be read by anyone who has an interest in dairy cooperatives, their historical role in the U.S. dairy industry, and management of cooperatives. If you enjoyed Kenneth Ruble's classic "Men to Remember", you will enjoy this book as well.

Mike Boland