



Cooperative Business Model

Framework, legal structure, and illustrative financials for the Origins Reclaimed nonprofit-cooperative federation

2026 - 2036

The Central Design Question

Most nonprofits doing community land and food work face a structural paradox: they exist to build community self-determination, but the communities they serve remain dependent on the nonprofit for access to the resources the nonprofit controls. Origins Reclaimed's cooperative model is designed to dissolve that paradox from the outset by ensuring that the people who live and work on trust land are genuine co-owners of the economic activity happening there - not beneficiaries of it.

The answer to the design question is a federated structure in which two distinct but complementary legal entities work in relationship: the nonprofit as permanent land steward, and member-owned cooperatives as the economic engine operating on that land. Neither alone achieves the goal. Together they create something more durable than either could build independently.

The nonprofit holds the land so no one can take it. The cooperatives hold the economy so the community owns it. The federation holds them together so neither drifts from its purpose.

The Two-Entity Architecture

Every cooperative entity in the Origins Reclaimed federation is legally distinct from the nonprofit. This is not an accounting convenience - it is a governance principle. The nonprofit does not control the cooperatives. The cooperatives do not control the nonprofit. Each entity has its own membership, governance, and decision-making processes. What binds them is the land lease agreement and a shared values framework written into both sets of governing documents.

Origins Reclaimed, Inc. (Nonprofit)	Cooperative Entities
Holds land in permanent trust	Lease land from the trust under long-term agreements

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Sets land use standards and ecological stewardship requirements	Conduct economic activity on leased land within agreed parameters
Provides governance frameworks and legal templates	Govern themselves democratically through member vote
Administers grants and institutional partnerships	Generate revenue through productive activity
Maintains the replication toolkit and national network	Pay modest land lease fees to the nonprofit
Cannot dissolve or sell trust land without member approval	Build collective equity among members over time
Board elected by organizational members	Board elected by cooperative members

This separation protects both entities. If a cooperative encounters financial difficulty, the land trust is not liable. If the nonprofit faces organizational challenges, the cooperatives continue operating. The land itself is protected regardless of what happens to either governing entity because it is held in trust with a dissolution clause that returns it to conservation or community use rather than private sale.

The Five Cooperative Entities

Origins Reclaimed's model contemplates five cooperative entity types across the ten-year development arc. Not all five need to exist simultaneously from the outset. Phase 1 identifies which cooperative is most needed and most feasible in each state node. Phase 2 formalizes the first entity. Subsequent phases build the federation as the land base and community capacity develop.

1. Food Production Cooperative

Purpose

Collectively govern the syntropic food forestry demonstration sites and produce food for community distribution, cooperative CSA, and local market sales.

Membership

Farmers, growers, and land workers who contribute labor to the demonstration sites. Membership earned through documented contribution rather than purchased.

Legal structure

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Worker cooperative under Florida cooperative statute (Chapter 865, Florida Statutes). Members share in surplus after operating costs are covered, proportional to labor contributed.

Revenue sources

CSA subscriptions, farmers market and institutional sales, value-added products (preserves, dried herbs, medicinals), educational workshop fees, and research documentation fees paid by UF/IFAS partnership.

Land relationship

Long-term ground lease from Origins Reclaimed nonprofit at below-market rate. Lease terms require ecological stewardship compliance documented annually.

Phase of formation

Phase 2, Years 3-5. First cooperative to be formally incorporated.

2. Housing Cooperative

Purpose

Own and govern residential buildings on CLT land, providing permanently affordable housing to member-residents while building modest collective equity.

Membership

Resident households who purchase membership shares in the cooperative corporation. The cooperative owns the building; Origins Reclaimed owns the land under a 99-year ground lease.

Legal structure

Limited equity cooperative. Share values appreciate at a defined formula (typically indexed to area median income growth) rather than at market rate, preserving affordability for successive generations of members.

Revenue sources

Monthly carrying charges from resident-members covering mortgage (if any), maintenance, insurance, and modest land lease payment. No profit extraction - surpluses remain in the cooperative for capital improvements.

Land relationship

CLT ground lease from Origins Reclaimed at below-market rate. Ground lease terms include resale restrictions ensuring permanent affordability and owner-occupancy requirements.

Phase of formation

Phase 2-3, Years 4-6, contingent on first CLT housing development completion.

[Origins Reclaimed Inc.](#) | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



3. Distribution Cooperative

Purpose

Connect syntropic producers - from demonstration sites to transitioning small farms to converted suburban gardens - with food desert communities, institutional buyers, and cooperative retail channels.

Membership

Multi-stakeholder cooperative with two member classes: producer members (farmers and growers contributing food to the network) and worker members (staff managing logistics, sales, and community relationships).

Legal structure

Multi-stakeholder cooperative. Producer members share in surplus proportional to volume contributed. Worker members share proportional to labor. Governance representation balanced across classes.

Revenue sources

Distribution margin on food moved through the network (targeted at 15-20%, substantially below commercial distributor margins). Institutional supply contracts with schools, hospitals, and food service providers. Cooperative buying club membership fees from consumer members.

Land relationship

Operates from warehouse or distribution hub on trust land. Ground lease for operational space at below-market rate.

Phase of formation

Phase 2-3, Years 4-6, once food production cooperative is generating consistent surplus.

4. Worker Cooperative (Land Stewardship and Labor)

Purpose

Employ and govern land stewardship workers who maintain the ecological systems across trust land - syntropic pruning and succession management, conservation easement monitoring, pollinator corridor maintenance, and farmer transition support.

Membership

Workers who perform land stewardship labor as their primary livelihood. Democratic governance of working conditions, scheduling, and surplus distribution.

Legal structure

[Origins Reclaimed Inc.](https://www.originsreclaimed.org) | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Worker cooperative under Florida cooperative statute. All surplus after operating costs distributed to worker-members proportional to hours worked.

Revenue sources

Service contracts with Origins Reclaimed nonprofit for stewardship of trust land parcels. Service contracts with allied organizations and private landowners for regenerative land management. Grant funding from NRCS and conservation organizations for ecological restoration labor.

Land relationship

Does not lease land but holds service contracts with the land trust. Members may also be members of the housing cooperative as residents.

Phase of formation

Phase 3, Years 6-8, once land base is sufficient to support full-time stewardship employment.

5. Consumer Cooperative (CSA and Buying Club)

Purpose

Organize community members as co-owners of their food supply - not customers of a food system but members of one. Pool purchasing power, reduce food costs, and direct demand toward the production cooperative.

Membership

Community households who purchase annual membership and receive weekly or monthly food shares. Members vote on share composition, pricing, and cooperative governance.

Legal structure

Consumer cooperative. Member investment (annual membership fee or share purchase) funds operating capital. Patronage dividends returned to members proportional to purchases when surplus allows.

Revenue sources

Annual membership fees and weekly/monthly CSA subscription payments. Volume purchasing contracts with food production cooperative and allied farms.

Land relationship

No direct land relationship. Distributes food produced on trust land and from allied farms through the distribution cooperative.

Phase of formation

[Origins Reclaimed Inc.](https://originsreclaimed.org) | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Phase 2, Years 3-5. Can be organized informally as a buying club before formal incorporation - the informal structure generates demand data that informs production cooperative planning.

Governance Principles Across All Entities

All cooperative entities in the Origins Reclaimed federation are governed using sociocratic principles adapted to their specific membership structure. Sociocracy was chosen because it specifically addresses the failure mode that undermines most cooperative and intentional community governance: the capture of informal power by the most charismatic or most available person.

Core sociocratic principles applied across all entities:

Consent-based decision making: Decisions pass when no member has a paramount objection - not when everyone agrees, but when no one's core interests are overridden.

Defined domains: Each role and circle has explicitly defined authority. Power is distributed by function, not by personality or seniority.

Double-linking: Each operational circle sends a representative to the governing circle and receives one in return, ensuring information flows in both directions.

Explicit accountability: Every role has documented responsibilities and an explicit process for when a role-holder is not meeting those responsibilities - preventing informal power accumulation.

These principles are embedded in the governance documents of each cooperative entity from incorporation. They are not aspirational additions retrofitted after dysfunction emerges - they are structural requirements that must be in place before a cooperative formally begins operations.

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



The Nonprofit-Cooperative Financial Relationship

The financial relationship between Origins Reclaimed and its cooperative entities is designed to achieve two things simultaneously: keep cooperative operating costs low enough that the cooperatives can be genuinely financially sustainable, and generate enough revenue for the nonprofit to reduce its grant dependency over time.

Flow	Description
Land lease payments	Cooperatives pay below-market ground lease fees to Origins Reclaimed. Rates set at 20-30% of market value for comparable commercial leases, reviewed every five years.
Service contracts	Origins Reclaimed pays the worker cooperative for land stewardship labor on trust parcels. This is the primary revenue stream for the worker cooperative.
Grant pass-through	Grants held by the nonprofit may include subcontracts to cooperative entities for specific program activities. This allows cooperatives to access grant funding they could not access independently.
Technical assistance	Origins Reclaimed provides governance support, legal templates, and replication resources to cooperatives at no charge as part of its nonprofit mission.
Surplus reinvestment	When cooperatives generate surplus beyond member distributions, a portion is designated for a shared capital fund held by the nonprofit for land acquisition and organizational development.

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Illustrative Financial Projections

The following projections are illustrative, not predictive. They are based on comparable cooperative-CLT federations and are intended to show the arc from grant dependency toward self-sufficiency, and to identify the key revenue drivers and cost centers that the board should monitor. All figures are in US dollars. Adjust based on actual land costs, labor rates, and market conditions in each state node.

Important note: These projections assume a single Florida node as the base case. SC and NC nodes add revenue and cost in roughly equal proportion and do not substantially change the self-sufficiency trajectory - they accelerate it by distributing fixed costs across a larger network.

Origins Reclaimed Nonprofit: Revenue Trajectory

Revenue Source	Year 2	Year 4	Year 6	Year 10
Grants and donations	\$120,000	\$180,000	\$150,000	\$80,000
Land lease income (cooperatives)	\$0	\$8,400	\$21,600	\$43,200
Service contract income (stewardship)	\$0	\$0	\$15,000	\$30,000
Shared capital fund contributions	\$0	\$5,000	\$12,000	\$25,000
Individual major donors	\$10,000	\$25,000	\$40,000	\$60,000
Total Revenue	\$130,000	\$218,400	\$238,600	\$238,200
Total Operating Costs	\$130,000	\$200,000	\$220,000	\$200,000
Cost Recovery from Cooperative Revenue	0%	6%	20%	41%

The grant dependency reduction is gradual and deliberate. By Year 10 the nonprofit is covering approximately 40% of costs from cooperative-generated income. Full grant independence is a horizon condition beyond Year 10 as the cooperative federation matures and the endowment generates investment income.

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Food Production Cooperative: Illustrative Financials

Based on a 5-acre syntropic demonstration site reaching productive maturity over Years 3-8, with additional income from workshops and UF/IFAS research documentation fees.

Revenue Stream	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 10
CSA subscriptions (households)	\$12,000	\$28,000	\$45,000	\$72,000
Farmers market and institutional sales	\$5,000	\$15,000	\$28,000	\$48,000
Educational workshops and farm days	\$3,000	\$8,000	\$12,000	\$18,000
Research documentation fees (UF/IFAS)	\$6,000	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000
Value-added products	\$0	\$4,000	\$10,000	\$20,000
Total Revenue	\$26,000	\$63,000	\$103,000	\$166,000
Operating Costs (labor, inputs, land lease)	\$28,000	\$55,000	\$78,000	\$110,000
Net Surplus for Member Distribution	-\$2,000	\$8,000	\$25,000	\$56,000

The Year 3 deficit is expected and budgeted - pioneer systems require more labor investment than they generate in early years. The trajectory to surplus by Year 5 is consistent with documented syntropic systems of comparable scale. Member distributions begin modestly in Year 5 and grow substantially as the canopy matures.

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Distribution Cooperative: Illustrative Financials

Based on aggregating food from the production cooperative, three transitioning small farms, and two suburban conversion sites. Distribution margin targeted at 18%.

Revenue Stream	Year 5	Year 7	Year 10
Distribution margin on food moved	\$18,000	\$42,000	\$90,000
Institutional supply contracts	\$8,000	\$25,000	\$60,000
Consumer cooperative membership fees	\$4,500	\$9,000	\$18,000
Total Revenue	\$30,500	\$76,000	\$168,000
Operating Costs (logistics, staff, hub lease)	\$32,000	\$65,000	\$120,000
Net Surplus for Member Distribution	-\$1,500	\$11,000	\$48,000

The distribution cooperative's startup deficit is small and short-lived because it does not require land or significant capital infrastructure - primarily logistics coordination and relationship management. Break-even occurs in Year 6 as the producer network reaches sufficient volume.

Housing Cooperative: Illustrative Financials

Based on a 6-unit housing cooperative on CLT land, financed through a combination of FHFC program funding, CDFI loan, and member share purchases. Monthly carrying charges set at 30% of member household income, averaging \$950 per unit.

Financial Element	Amount
Development cost (6 units)	\$840,000
CLT land contribution (land held by nonprofit)	\$0 to members
FHFC program funding	\$300,000
CDFI below-market loan	\$420,000
Member share purchases (6 x \$20,000)	\$120,000
Annual carrying charge income	\$68,400

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Annual debt service	\$28,000
Annual maintenance and operating reserve	\$20,000
Annual land lease payment to OR nonprofit	\$6,000
Net Annual Surplus to Capital Reserve	\$14,400

The housing cooperative is structurally conservative by design. The CLT land contribution eliminates land cost from the development equation, substantially reducing the financing required and the carrying charges members pay. The net annual surplus builds the capital reserve for long-term maintenance and eventual unit improvements.

Federated Self-Sufficiency Trajectory

When the cooperative revenue streams are aggregated and set against the nonprofit's operating costs, the self-sufficiency trajectory looks as follows:

Metric	Year 2	Year 5	Year 8	Year 10
Total nonprofit operating costs	\$130,000	\$200,000	\$220,000	\$200,000
Total cooperative revenue to nonprofit	\$0	\$13,400	\$48,600	\$98,200
Grant funding required	\$120,000	\$161,600	\$131,400	\$80,000
Cost Recovery from Cooperative Sources	0%	7%	22%	49%

The 49% cost recovery figure at Year 10 is the foundational target. Beyond Year 10, as food forests reach peak productivity, cooperative revenues continue to grow while nonprofit operating costs stabilize - compressing the remaining 51% gap through endowment income and sustained major donor cultivation rather than grant dependency.

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



Formation Sequence and Legal Steps

The sequence of cooperative formation matters. Each entity provides the foundation the next one builds on. The following sequence is recommended based on organizational readiness, legal complexity, and revenue generation speed.

Recommended formation sequence:

Step 1 (Year 2-3): Consumer cooperative as informal buying club. No incorporation required initially. Generates demand data, builds community relationships, and creates a membership base before formal cooperative structures are needed.

Step 2 (Year 3-4): Food production cooperative formally incorporated under Florida cooperative statute. First legal cooperative entity in the federation. Apply for USDA SARE and NRCS funding as a cooperative entity.

Step 3 (Year 4-5): Consumer cooperative formally incorporated once buying club membership reaches 30 or more households and annual volume justifies the governance structure.

Step 4 (Year 5-6): Distribution cooperative incorporated as production and buying club volumes reach the threshold where informal aggregation becomes inefficient.

Step 5 (Year 6-7): Housing cooperative formed concurrent with first CLT housing development reaching construction phase.

Step 6 (Year 7-8): Worker cooperative incorporated once land base is sufficient to support full-time stewardship employment for at least three worker-members.

Resources for cooperative formation in Florida: the Florida Department of State Division of Corporations handles cooperative incorporation filings. The National Center for Employee Ownership and the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives both provide model bylaws and formation guides. The Cooperative Development Institute offers technical assistance for multi-stakeholder cooperatives specifically.

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



What Makes This Model Different

Most food and housing nonprofits create dependency. This model is designed to create ownership - and to make that ownership impossible to reverse.

The distinction between this model and conventional nonprofit community development work is not rhetorical. It is structural. When Origins Reclaimed acquires land and places it in trust, that land cannot be sold regardless of what happens to the organization, its leadership, or its funding. When a cooperative is incorporated and members purchase shares, those members have legally enforceable ownership rights that the nonprofit cannot override.

This irreversibility is a feature, not a limitation. The communities that most need alternatives to the extractive economy are also the communities most often promised alternatives that quietly dissolve when funding runs out or when a charismatic leader moves on. The cooperative-CLT federation model is designed to outlast its founders, its funders, and any individual organizational crisis - because the land is protected by legal structure and the economy is owned by the people participating in it.

That is what makes it infrastructure rather than programming. And infrastructure, once built to adequate standard, tends to persist.

Origins Reclaimed Inc. | Contact: info@originsreclaimed.org

Origins Reclaimed Inc. EIN: 39-4427766 is a federally tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.