

Social & Administrative Policy



1.0 Who We Are

Coöperatie Hoogstraten has deep local roots and has grown into an organization where hundreds of producers and employees work hard every day. A Cooperative thrives on trust—from producers who entrust us with their harvest, from employees who make a difference on the job, and from customers who count on quality.

This policy illustrates how the Cooperative strives to live up to that trust every day in terms of people and good governance. Not as a reaction to external expectations, but because it aligns with the values of the cooperative and the people who are part of it. Concrete achievements and progress are reported annually in the sustainability report. This document sets the direction.

Sustainability is at the core—not an afterthought

Sustainability is one of the five strategic priorities of Coöperatie Hoogstraten, alongside knowledge, digitization, performance, and growth. It is not a separate initiative—it is embedded in the annual project cycle approved by the Governing Body and implemented by the Management Team.



2.0 Five values as a foundation

Five core values form the identity of Coöperatie Hoogstraten. They were not drafted for a policy document; rather, they describe how the organization has long operated and who it aims to remain.

- **We are reliable.** Producers, employees, customers, and partners can count on us. We honor our commitments, and our communication is honest and transparent.
- **We are constantly improving what we do.** Quality and improvement go hand in hand. We are always looking for better ways to work, produce, and live together.
- **Together, we are stronger.** The cooperative model is not a legal form—it is a conviction. You may go faster alone, but together you go further.
- **We never stand still.** The world is changing rapidly. We adapt, anticipate what's to come, and dare to make choices that are right in the long run.
- **We are constantly exploring.** Curiosity and innovation are in our DNA. Through Harvestis and the Hoogstraten Learning Fields, we make systematic investments in knowledge and innovation.

These values logically explain why this social and governance policy is not an external obligation, but an expression of who Coöperatie Hoogstraten is.



3.0 Who does this apply to?

This policy applies to all employees of the Cooperative—permanent, temporary, agency staff, interns, and volunteers—regardless of position or location. It applies equally to our relationship with affiliated producers and to our collaboration with suppliers and other partners.

Producers hold a special position in this context. As shareholders, suppliers, and customers all at once, they are not external parties—they are co-owners of the future that this policy aims to shape. This calls for an approach that supports and facilitates, rather than controls or sanctions.

4.0 Our People – Home of People

Coöperatie Hoogstraten aims to be a place where people enjoy working and can grow. Not because it looks good in a policy document, but because the Cooperative is sincerely convinced that people make the difference. That sentiment is reflected in the name employees themselves have given to their workplace: Home of People.

4.1 Working Conditions and Well-Being

Safety and well-being are not an afterthought; they are a starting point. The Cooperative implements an active well-being policy, monitored by the **Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work (CPBW)** and through regular internal audits.

The Cooperative offers long-term and stable employment relationships based on mutual respect, trust, and open dialogue. Workable work—with attention to workload, working hours, and work-life balance—is a conscious choice, not a byproduct.

4.2 Equal Opportunity, Diversity, and Inclusion

At the Cooperative, talent matters—not origin, gender, or background. It strives for a workforce that reflects the diversity of its customers and society. Special attention is given to disadvantaged groups, for whom the Cooperative actively opens the door to decent work.

Discrimination, harassment, or exclusion in any form is not tolerated—either in the workplace or in selection and hiring procedures.

4.3 Training and Development — Home of Knowledge

Investing in people means investing in knowledge. Through a wide range of training programs, research center Harvestis, and the Hoogstraten Learning Fields, the Cooperative offers its employees and producers the opportunity to grow—in their profession, in their understanding, and in their contribution to the organization. Here, learning is not a one-time event but an ongoing practice.

4.4 Social Dialogue

Employees have the right to organize and engage in collective bargaining. The Cooperative respects freedom of association and ensures consultation structures where employees have a genuine voice. An open work environment—where people feel safe to ask questions, share concerns, and contribute ideas—is not a luxury but a prerequisite.

5.0 Producers and the Broader Value Chain

The relationship between the Cooperative and its producers is unique: mutually dependent, long-term, and based on trust. The Cooperative takes its role as a central link in the value chain seriously—not only for the quality of the product, but also for the social and ethical conditions under which that product is produced.

5.1 Shared commitment with producers

The Cooperative is working on a shared commitment statement with its member producers. This document sets out mutual expectations regarding quality, sustainability, integrity, and social responsibility. It is not a compliance document, but an expression of shared values and a common compass for the future.

5.2 Seasonal Workers in Cultivation

A large portion of the harvest at member producers is made possible by seasonal workers. The Cooperative recognizes that the working conditions, housing, and social integration of this group have a direct impact on the values of the entire production community and, therefore, on its own reputation and credibility.

Through the **GlobalG.A.P. GRASP framework**—an internationally recognized standard for corporate social responsibility in agriculture—the Cooperative supports its producers in developing a sound social management system. Minimum standards regarding decent work, safety, and humane housing are expected of all member producers.

5.3 Suppliers and Other Partners

The Cooperative expects its suppliers and partners to adhere to its principles regarding human rights, working conditions, integrity, and sustainability. In its procurement process, the Cooperative considers not only price and quality but also safety, local roots, the environment, and social responsibility. Partners who violate fundamental standards risk having their collaboration terminated.

6.0 Consumers and end users

Every day, Coöperatie Hoogstraten guarantees safe, nutritious, and fairly produced fruits and vegetables. That's not just a slogan—it's at the heart of what the organization does.

6.1 Food Safety

HACCP procedures—the internationally recognized system for managing food safety risks at every stage of the production process—along with systematic spot checks and regular external audits, ensure compliance with the highest standards. The Cooperative views food safety as an absolute minimum requirement, not as a distinguishing feature.

6.2 Transparency and Product Information

Consumers and customers have the right to honest and understandable information about the products they purchase. Through a QR code on every packaged product, the end consumer can determine the exact producer from whom the product originates. This radical transparency regarding origin and cultivation practices is a conscious choice and a competitive differentiator.

In addition, the Cooperative is committed to raising broader social awareness about healthy eating through initiatives such as Hopsabees, which helps children develop a positive attitude toward fresh fruits and vegetables from an early age.



7.0 Good Governance

For a cooperative, good governance is not an external obligation; it is inherent in the model itself. One member, one vote. Democratic control. Profit maximization as a means, not an end. This structure makes the Cooperative inherently more transparent and more focused on long-term value creation than a traditional corporation. But structure alone is no guarantee; it also requires a culture that aligns with it.

7.1 Governance Principles

The Governing Body bears ultimate responsibility for the strategic direction. Decision-making is collegial, transparent, and conducted with respect for the interests of all stakeholders. The separation of roles between the Governing Body, the Executive Board, and operational management is strictly enforced to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure the quality of oversight.

The sustainability strategy is presented to the Governing Body annually. Sustainability is therefore not a side note in the board meeting, but a regular agenda item.

7.2 Integrity and Anti-Corruption

The Cooperative does not tolerate any form of corruption, bribery, or conflict of interest—neither internally nor externally. Business gifts are permitted only within strict and transparently communicated limits. Financial and material resources are managed carefully and efficiently.

The Code of Integrity sets out the standards of conduct for employees, management, and the board. Every member of the organization bears personal responsibility for complying with it—this is not a formality but a daily choice.

7.3 Reporting Channel

Anyone who suspects a violation of ethical standards, human rights, or integrity principles can report it safely and confidentially. Reports are taken seriously, handled confidentially, and, where necessary, referred to the appropriate internal or external authorities. Whistleblowers are protected against any form of retaliation.

Reporting Channel

Reports can be submitted via: internemeldingen@hoogstraten.eu

This channel is open to employees, producers, and other stakeholders. Coöperatie Hoogstraten also has an external reporting channel (externemeldingen@hoogstraten.eu) that is available to everyone. This can be found on the corporate website.



7.4 Sector Representation and Social Engagement

Coöperatie Hoogstraten is convinced that fair and forward-looking regulations for the greenhouse horticulture sector cannot be established without the active voice of the sector itself. That is why the Cooperative plays a proactive role in the social and political debate—through sector organizations such as VBT, Boerenbond, and LAVA, and through direct dialogue with policymakers. This engagement is based on transparency and the interests of the entire sector.

8.0 Human Rights as a Minimum Standard

Coöperatie Hoogstraten endorses the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, the **ILO Core Labor Standards**, and the **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)**. These are not abstract documents; they translate into concrete expectations for everyone who is part of the organization or its supply chain:

- **Prohibition of child labor and forced labor**—without exception, in our own operations and throughout the value chain.
- **Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining**—respected for all employees, regardless of status or location.
- **Equal opportunities and non-discrimination**—in employment, in relationships with producers, and in all business dealings.
- **A safe and healthy work environment**—as a fundamental right, not a privilege.

If human rights violations are suspected or confirmed—in our own operations or among partners in the supply chain—the Cooperative takes active measures. These can range from providing support and guidance to, if necessary, terminating the partnership.

9. Governance and Accountability

Who is responsible for what

Board of Directors — ultimate responsibility, strategic approval, and annual evaluation
Management Team — operational implementation and communication with employees and producers
ESG Core Group — coordination, monitoring, and reporting on this policy
HR & Compliance — oversight of compliance, handling of complaints, and training programs
All employees and producers — compliance in daily practice

Progress is evaluated annually and reported to the Governing Body and the General Assembly. Results are published in the sustainability report. Suppliers and producers are periodically evaluated for compliance with the expectations set forth in this policy.



This policy is a living document—it is reviewed every two years, or sooner if significant changes in the organization, the value chain, or the social context warrant it. This review is conducted in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, so that the policy continues to reflect the Cooperative's current practices.

Our Commitment

Coöperatie Hoogstraten actively embraces its social and governance responsibilities—not because it has to, but because it aligns with who we are. This policy is a first formal step toward making visible what we have long been putting into practice. We do this together, step by step, with respect for everyone who is part of our community.

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