

# Democracy and Shared Prosperity: Charting the TFS Way

“Technicians For Sustainability (TFS) has always been mission-driven” says Nicole Koch, one of the co-founders and previous owners of the Tucson-based company. This local solar company fulfilled a long-held goal this year when it transitioned its business into an employee-owned cooperative. The business, which has focused on installing residential and commercial solar energy systems in Tucson and Southern Arizona since 2003, is now cooperatively owned by 14 employee-owners, with more employees in the process of becoming owners.

Nicole and Kevin Koch, had been talking about putting more of the company in the hands of its employees for years, and decided in 2016 to embark on the journey of transitioning TFS to an employee-owned cooperative. It took a full year to sort out the accounting and logistical aspects of changing the business, in addition to on-boarding the first set of employee owners. On January 3, 2017, TFS officially became an employee-owned cooperative with 14 employee owners. “We have encouraged a sense of shared mission and shared ownership of that mission from the very beginning of TFS,” says Kevin Koch. “Employee Ownership is a natural legal manifestation of what was already present in our company culture.”

TFS now has a Board of Directors made up entirely of employee owners. These board members, who are elected by the employee-owners, help guide the big picture of the company. Decisions are also made at employee-owner meetings, and have special venues for bringing forth owner concerns and ideas. Anyone who has worked at TFS for one year is eligible to become a worker-owner. There is a candidacy process that can take between 6-12 months, and all new employee-owners are voted in by the existing owners, and also purchase a share in the company.

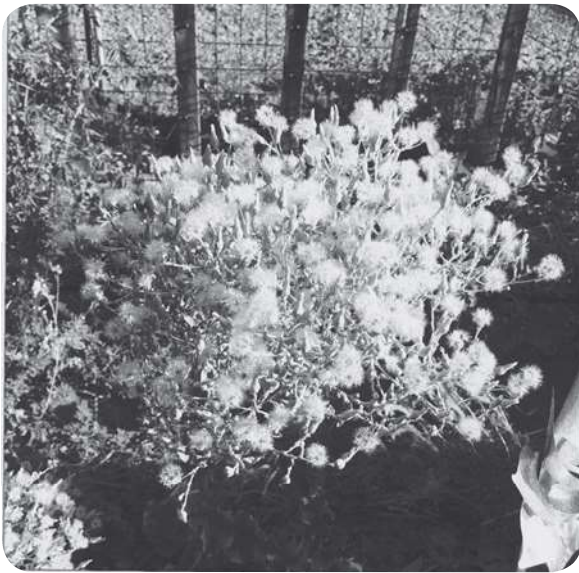
On the path to becoming an employee owned cooperative, TFS had already charted a journey of transforming other aspects of their business from the supply stream to the financing in what Nicole describes as viewing “the whole big picture” or the “whole life cycle” of their company. Working this way in TFS we are “regenerating our community not just for our staff but for our community in a way that creates value for all stakeholders.” TFS began looking at other aspects of how they did business like alternative transportation. TFS introduced electric vehicles into their fleet, used biofuels, and did installations by bicycle. In 2011, TFS had a role in forming Amicus Solar Cooperative, a purchasing cooperative--or buying club--with other solar installation companies. Amicus is jointly owned and cooperatively managed by its member companies in Puerto Rico, the U.S. and Canada.

Most recently, TFS was involved in chartering the first-of-its-kind Clean Energy Credit Union (CECU) in Boulder, Colorado which will launch in late 2017. The CECU will enable solar loans for people and investment in clean energy. CECU’s mission is to promote clean energy, environmental stewardship, and cooperative enterprises through financial services provided to members.

TFS continues to lead the way as a sustainable company, making the B Lab “Best for the World” list for a third year in a row. B Lab, a nonprofit organization that serves a global movement of people using business as a force of good, named TFS both “Best in Environment” based on independent assessments of company policies, as well as placing TFS in the “Best for the World: Changemakers” list for companies that have most improved their overall impact on the environment, their employees, their community, and more.

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Lettuce plant that has bolted and is setting seeds

**Seed saver's toolkit:**

- Garden journal to help her remember what she planted, where she planted, and when she planted
- Pollination bags to prevent unwanted plant sex (aka cross-pollination). These can be hand-sewn from mesh-like fabric scraps found at the fabric store, but you can also find them at Native Seeds/SEARCH or online.
- Seed screens, mesh colanders, bowls, and wind for separating plant matter (chaff) from the seeds (the library has an array of different sized screens for you to borrow)
- Seed saving resources (the library has many wonderful and easy to follow seed saving books for you to check-out)
- Curiosity and patience



Lettuce "fruit"

**Dig Deeper**

Check-out the library's calendar of events for gardening, seed saving, and community engagement programs offered in our libraries. We work with many of our community's conservation and gardening organizations, including Native Seeds/SEARCH and Pima County Master Gardeners, as well as local gardeners like Brandon Merchant and Jacqueline Soule, to help our community grow. Or learn more from borrow from the many books, magazines, and videos available to you through the library.

*Vegetable Literacy: Cooking and Gardening With Twelve Families From the Edible Plant Kingdom, With Over 300 Deliciously Simple Recipes* by Deborah Madison

*Growing A Garden City: How Farmers, First Graders, Counselors, Troubled Teens, Foodies, A Homeless Shelter Chef, Single Mothers, and More Are Transforming Themselves and Their Neighborhoods Through the Intersection of Local Agriculture and Community--and How You Can, Too* by Jeremy Smith

*Seed Libraries: And Other Means of Keeping Seeds in the Hands of the People* by Cindy Connor

*The Seed Underground* by Janisse Ray

*Seeing Seeds: A Journey into the World of Seedheads, Pods, and Fruit* by Terri Dunn Chase ■

TFS Way, continued from page 11

Additional 2017 Best for Environment honorees include: People Against Dirty (Method +Ecover); New Belgium Brewing; and Plum Organics.

"Best for the Environment honorees like Technicians For Sustainability are redefining what it means to be an 'environmentally-friendly' business," says Jay Coen Gilbert, co-founder of B Lab. "We're proud to shine a light on their achievement in a meaningful way. Best for the World is the only list of businesses making the greatest positive impact that uses comprehensive, comparable, third-party-validated data about a company's social and environmental performance."

A total of 846 Certified B Corporations were named 2017 Best for the World Honorees, including: Patagonia; Seventh Generation; National Co-op Grocers; and Business Development Bank of Canada. Forty-eight countries are represented, including Afghanistan, Kenya, Nicaragua and Turkey. The selection criteria for Best for the World honorees are available at <http://bit.ly/29ZYRSp>. ■

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