



A Yard & A Half is a landscaping cooperative based out of Waltham, Massachusetts. When founder Eileen Michaels was ready to retire, she chose to sell A Yard & A Half to her employees who have continued to grow the business and secure its long-term success.

Since 1988 A Yard & A Half Landscaping has provided high quality landscape design, stonework and maintenance to homeowners in Greater Boston. In 2013, founder Eileen Michaels decided to sell the company to her employees to get a return on the business she built, to thank her employees for their commitment, and to ensure that the jobs and services associated with the business remained in the community. As an owner, Eileen often solicited feedback from employees and used an open book management system which helped with the transition to employee ownership. Today, A Yard & A Half is celebrated as one of the most successful examples of a cooperative conversion in the country.

A Yard & A Half employs thirty-six people, and almost half of the employees are 'worker-owners' in the cooperative. Employees are eligible to become part owners after two years of employment, and are required to take a series of six courses on topics such as financial management, cooperative governance, communications and leadership. Worker-owners participate in quarterly member meetings where they review the company's financials and elect members to the board of directors. And while the company still has a traditionally hierarchical management structure, worker-owners participate in department committees (HR, executive, finance and education) which make proposals to the board. As the company grows, it continues to build structures that ensure that it remains responsive to the insights and needs of its worker-owners.

Location: Waltham, MA

Size: 36 employees

Year Founded: 1988

Year Converted to Employee Ownership: 2013



While some customers are drawn to A Yard & A Half because of its worker ownership structure, many more choose the company based on its long-standing reputation in the community, quality stonework, life-time guarantees on hardscaping (patios, retaining walls, walkways, etc) and use of organic materials.

The company's continued growth has paid off for its workers. Many have been able to buy houses in the community, and have begun to invest in retirement plans and save for their childrens' education. Employees, including many immigrants from Central America with little or no formal education, have benefited from the professional development that worker-ownership supports and encourages. A Yard & A Half has been able to pay for many members to take English and Computer courses, supporting both individual skill-building and capacity building within the organization. Additionally, a number of worker-owners have stepped into leadership roles by participating in the company's governance over time. A Yard & A Half's story, as a majority immigrant-owned cooperative, continues to be an inspiration to others in the growing national cooperative movement.

The Massachusetts Center for Employee Ownership advocates employee ownership through education and outreach to business owners across the Commonwealth. MassCEO is administered by the ICA Group, the oldest national nonprofit organization dedicated to the development of worker cooperatives with a mission to center worker voice, grow worker wealth, and build worker power.

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