

# Food Co-ops Toolkit

a simple guide to setting up food co-ops



## Acknowledgements

The toolkit was compiled and edited by Maresa Bossano and Kath Dalmeny from Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming.

It was written by Sustain in partnership with several other organisations as part of the Making Local Food Work programme, which is funded by the Big Lottery.

Many people and organisations have contributed to this toolkit. In particular, we would like to thank our partners for all their assistance:

Caroline Lewis and Linda Hull (Somerset Community Food)

Suzanne Natelson (London Food Link)

Joyce Osei (Newham Food Access Partnership)

Anthony Armstrong, Simon McCabe and Nigel Race (Food Chain North East)

Matthew Stiles (Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency)

Greg Pilley (f3)

Mark Simmonds (Co-operativesUK)

We would also like to thank food co-ops and other organisations around the country who have contributed sample documents, case studies or other information or publications that have also been included or referred to in the toolkit, including:

Community Food Enterprise

Fareshares Food Co-op

Herbie Fruit and Veg Van

Hungry Snail Food Co-op

Soil Association

Somerset Food Links

Tower Hamlets Co-operative Development Agency

True Food Co-op

Wellington Food Co-ops

West Lothian Food and Health Development

Westminster Primary Care Trust

Ystad Goffa Food Co-op

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily the view of those acknowledged or of Sustain's membership, individually or collectively. All errors and omissions are entirely those of the author.

The on-line food co-ops toolkit <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit> will be updated and added to on a regular basis and so will contain the most current information.

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# INTRODUCTION

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More and more communities are setting up food co-ops so they can get good food at an affordable price and have more control over where their food comes from.

Co-operation is all about people working together to achieve something they couldn't do on their own. In the case of food co-ops a group of people volunteer their time and pool their buying power so they can order produce at cheaper prices, direct from suppliers and local farmers.

This toolkit has been produced as part of the Big Lottery funded Making Local Food Work programme to help more communities set up their own food co-ops and buying groups.

It has been produced by Sustain in partnership with Somerset Community Food, London Food Link, Newham Food Access Partnership, Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency, Food Chain North East, F3 and Co-operatives UK.

We are also providing lots of other support to new and existing food co-ops across England including training days, networking events, conferences, exchange visits, 1:1 advice and free marketing materials.

To find more please contact us at [foodcoops@sustainweb.org](mailto:foodcoops@sustainweb.org) or visit <http://www.foodcoops.org>.



# How to use the toolkit

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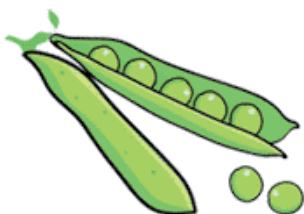
This toolkit aims to provide an overview of the important things you need to think about when setting up and running a Community food co-op.

The content of this toolkit is divided up into explanatory text and 'tools'. The 'tools' are useful documents such as sample questionnaires, checklists, and other templates that your food co-op can photocopy and use.

Certain sections will be more relevant to some types of food co-ops than others, for example a lot of the information relates to the sale of fresh fruit and vegetables; however you will not need to know all of this if you are planning to run a wholefood co-op. We have therefore tried to divide the information up into different sections so you only need to read the pages that are most relevant to you.

The food co-ops toolkit has also been published on-line at <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>. This is to make it easier to download separate documents and adapt them to your own needs. The website has links to a wider range of resources including Excel files and PDF publications. It will also be updated on a regular basis to add more text and useful documents.

There are lots of other websites and guidelines that focus on some of the areas covered in this toolkit, such as volunteer management, marketing and finance. So rather than repeating this information we have tried to summarise the areas we feel are most relevant to food co-ops and wherever possible put in links to other sources of information, such as other organisations and publications.



**FoodCoops.org**  
the home of food co-ops on the web

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# Who is this toolkit for?

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This toolkit is most useful for individuals and groups who are thinking of setting up quite small scale food co-ops that are going to be run on a not-for-profit basis, mainly by volunteers.

These may include buying clubs, stalls, bag or box schemes, mobile stores or home delivery schemes, markets or shops.

A lot of the information in the toolkit relates to selling fresh fruit and vegetables as this is what most of the food co-ops involved in writing the toolkit supply. However, there is also information about wholefoods and a lot of the content will be relevant whatever types of food you decide to sell.

The toolkit is most relevant to food co-ops that either register as consumer co-operatives or that run more informally by a group of friends or by an existing organisation.

Although some of the information may be relevant to other types of co-operatives, such as workers co-operatives, the content does not focus on running commercial businesses so for more information about setting up other co-operative enterprises it is best to contact Co-operatives UK (<http://www.cooperatives-uk.coop>).

This food co-ops toolkit also focuses on information about distributing or selling food; however it does not aim to provide any information about how to grow produce or run catering projects.



# Terminology

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The term 'food co-op' is used to describe lots of different initiatives and so everyone has a slightly different interpretation about what a food co-op is.

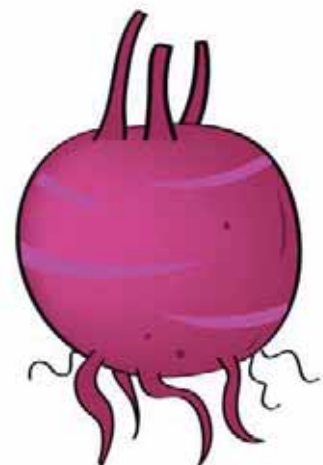
Many community-run food co-ops are registered formally as co-operatives in which case they sign up to the **co-operative principles (Tools p143)**. The term food co-operative is also used to describe any type of **co-operative business (see p12)** that is involved in producing or supplying food.

However, the term food co-op has, over the last few years, come to be used to define any community food outlet run on a not-for-profit by basis for the benefit of local people. Not all of these community food co-ops have a formal membership structure and so do not necessarily meet the definitions of a co-operative.

It is for this reason that many community-run food co-ops also go by many other names such as food clubs, social food outlets, food groups, or simply describing whatever they do, for example operating a bag or box scheme, community market, fruit and veg stall or mobile store.

Our project supports both food co-ops and buying groups but these terms are also often used interchangeably. In some cases buying groups are defined as food co-ops that are run informally, for example by a group of friends, but there are also examples of larger, more formal buying groups.

Therefore in order to simplify things in this toolkit we have used the term food co-op to describe any outlet run by local people that is involved in supplying food for the benefit of the community, rather than for private profit.





# Notes





# ABOUT FOOD COOPS

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The main principle behind all community food co-ops is that by pooling their buying power and ordering food in bulk, direct from suppliers, a group of people can buy good food at a more affordable price.

Small food co-ops or buying groups work by collecting together everyone's orders in advance, whereas other models operate more like other food businesses in that they order the produce from suppliers and then sell it to their customers via stalls, bag or box schemes, mobile stores, shops or other types of outlet.

**The main things community food co-ops have in common are they:**

- Are run by the community for the community
- Aim to supply produce at affordable prices
- Are run on a not for profit basis
- Generally rely on the support of volunteers, either in the day-to day running or on the committee

However, that is where the similarity ends, as every food co-op is unique, and the way it runs will depend on the community it serves and the people who run it. Food co-ops can differ in almost every way including:

- **What they sell** e.g. a lot of food co-ops sell fruit and vegetables, whereas others focus on organic wholefoods and some also sell eggs, meat, dairy produce or other foods.
  - **When they sell it** e.g. many food co-ops only run one day a week, some meet once a month, and others are open every day.
  - **How they sell it** e.g. some sell their produce loose on stalls, whereas other sell it pre-packed in bags or boxes.
  - **Where they sell it** e.g. food co-ops run in a wide range of locations e.g. schools, community centres, church halls or even have their own shops.
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# Types of co-operative

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Co-operatives can be categorised in more than one way, so it can be a little confusing at first.

They can be defined according to their ownership structure and primary members, or to the product or service the co-op offers, or the activity they are engaged in.

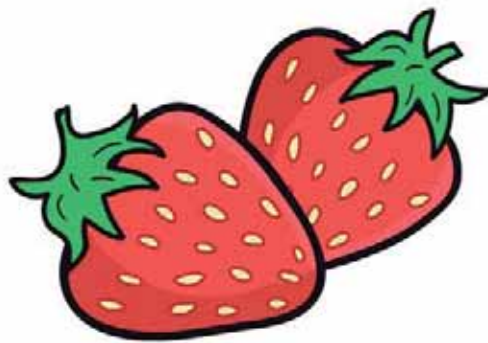
Therefore the term 'food co-operative' is used to describe any co-operative business that is involved in the production or supply of food.

This may include:

- **Worker co-operatives** - in which the members are the workers. These are businesses that are owned and controlled on a democratic basis by their employees. Many wholefood wholesalers and wholefood shops are run as workers' co-operatives
- **Producer co-operatives** - which are owned and controlled by farmers. These can be involved in producing, processing or marketing agricultural products; they might also supply agricultural inputs and services to their members.
- **Consumer co-operatives** - in which the primary members are the co-operatives' customers. These types of co-operative can provide a variety of goods or services and can range from small groups of friends to large chains of retail outlets.

As our project is funded by the Big Lottery our website and toolkit focuses on community-run food co-ops that operate on a not-for-profit basis. These are often set up as consumer co-operatives but may also run on a more informal basis.

If you are interested in setting up another type of co-operative you can get more advice from Co-operatives UK (<http://www.cooperatives-uk.coop/>).



# Why set up a co-op?

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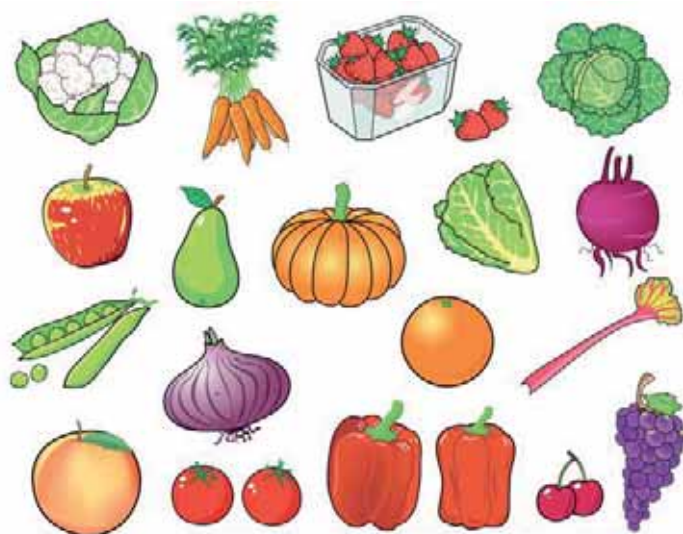
The main reason people set up food co-ops is to make it easier and cheaper to buy good food.

This is because in many areas it is actually quite hard to buy healthy and sustainable foods, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, local and organic produce, bulk wholefoods or exotic ingredients.

This may be because:

- There are no shops where you live, whether that is a rural village or an urban estate.
- Nearby shops have a limited choice of food that may be expensive or poor quality.
- To get to a decent shop you have to get a bus, taxi, or drive, which makes shopping more expensive and difficult.
- You want to buy unusual foods that supermarkets or other shops do not stock.
- You would prefer to buy food direct from farmers or ethical suppliers, rather than support large supermarkets.
- A good shop has just closed and you want to replace it.

Food co-ops can also have lots of other benefits for the community, such as providing healthy food at an affordable price, opportunities for volunteers, and a sociable place to shop and meet local people.



# Benefits of food co-ops

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Food co-ops can have a wide range of benefits and so setting up a food co-op is not just about providing good food. They include:

**Health benefits; food co-ops can:**

- Increase access to affordable fruit and vegetables and other healthy foods.
- Help raise awareness of the benefits of eating a healthy diet.
- Improve well-being in volunteers who often gain increased self esteem, confidence and a sense of purpose.

**Environmental benefits; food co-ops can:**

- If set up to do so, increase the supply of local and organic produce.
- Make it easier for people to shop by foot or by bike by providing outlets in residential areas.
- Provide food that often has less packaging, and therefore generates less waste.

**Social benefits; food co-ops can:**

- Engage local people in their community, which may then lead on to other activities.
- Act as a focal point for local people to meet up and make new friends.
- Help to revitalise community facilities.
- Provide a more sociable place to shop.

**Economic benefits; food co-ops can:**

- Help to support local producers, growers or other smaller or more ethical suppliers by providing an outlet for their goods.
  - Help ensure money spent stays in the local economy.
  - Offer volunteers new skills and work experience that could be used in other settings, and possibly help them get paid employment.
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# Notes

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# PEOPLE

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The first thing you need in order to set up a food co-op is people who are ready, willing and able to get involved.

Whether you're part of a small community group, a large organisation or an individual who's decided to set something up from scratch, you'll need to think about the people you need to run your food co-op, this may include the:

- **Organisers** i.e. people involved in setting up the food co-op and the on-going planning, such as a steering group or management committee.
- **Workers** i.e. people, either volunteers or staff, who are responsible for the day-to-day running of the food co-op, and
- **Customers** i.e. people who will be buying food from the co-op.

In consumer co-operatives the organisers, workers, and customers of the food co-op are often all the same people, as everyone has to become a member to shop there and also help to run and develop the co-op. But in many community food co-ops nowadays these groups of people are more separate. Also a lot of food co-ops are open to everyone, rather than just members.

How you decide to structure your food co-op depends on what the people involved want (see **Policies and Principles p99** for more information this). However, in order to succeed any food co-op has to have enough volunteers or staff to carry out the work and enough customers to be able to order sufficient quantities from suppliers and cover any costs. The following pages in this section have more information on how to support volunteers.

## Participation

It is a good idea to hold a public meeting or event to discuss the idea for a food co-op and invite along anyone who you think may be interested in helping out or shopping there. This may include friends or neighbours, parents at a local school, or other local residents.

## Partners

You may also want to invite people from potential partner organisations, such as the local council, primary care trust, community groups or residents' associations. These groups won't be directly involved in running the food co-op but may be able to support it in other ways, for example by providing a free venue or training.

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# Volunteers

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To keep costs as low as possible, community food co-ops usually rely on volunteers to carry out much of the work.

Many food co-ops are run entirely by volunteers, whereas others (generally those operating on a larger scale) have some paid staff and are supported by volunteers.

The approach your food co-op takes to volunteers will probably depend on how it co-op has been set up. Some food co-ops are formed by a group of individuals who are all working together to run the co-op as volunteers. Other food co-ops are set up with the support of an existing organisation such as a primary care trust, housing association, environmental group, or school. These usually have paid staff to help oversee the food co-op.

If your food co-op is solely driven and managed by volunteers then it is good idea to encourage everyone to play an equal part in decision-making and running the group. You will need to recruit enough members to make the co-op work, and ensure that everyone contributes so that all the work does not fall on a few individuals. You may have a policy that all members and customers of the food co-ops need to volunteer a certain number of hours a month (in which case some of the information below may not be so relevant to your situation). However, as the food co-ops grows you may wish to designate certain members with specific responsibilities such as managing the orders or the money. Another useful role is to have someone whose main task is to co-ordinate the tasks of other volunteers.

Many food co-ops are also run by, or in partnership with, an existing organisation such as a children's centre, school or community centre. In this case there may already be volunteer policies and procedures that you will need to follow.

The pages in this section highlight the main points that any organisation with several volunteers needs to consider, especially if you are setting up a new group or have not worked with volunteers before.



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## Volunteer tasks and role description

**Before you recruit volunteers you should work out the main tasks that need to be done and produce a task list or role description.**

It is also helpful to say how long each task will take. For example, if a food co-op runs a stall once a week from 10am-12pm, a volunteer would probably need to help for 3 hours per week. This would cover running the stall, but also include time for setting up and packing up afterwards.

Tasks could also be divided up into the day-to-day activities involved in selling the produce, for example: ordering the food from suppliers; serving customers; or packing bags or boxes. Volunteer tasks might include other activities involved in managing and developing the food co-op, for example: writing press releases, applying for funding, or doing the accounts.

It is important to allocate tasks according to people's capabilities and preferences. For example, you may have volunteers who don't want to count money but are happy to put the produce out on display.

If your food co-op is working with - or as part of - a larger organisation such as a housing association or primary care trust, it may be that paid staff will take on some of the tasks. Alternatively, it may be an explicit aim of your organisation to help train volunteers to take on roles such as financial management, in which case tasks can be allocated as part of your plan for training or work experience.

## Recruitment

**How you recruit volunteers will depend on the type of organisation and the tasks that need to be done.**

For volunteers involved in everyday activities food co-ops usually recruit in one of the following ways

- Word of mouth
- Official volunteer services
- General publicity
- Referrals

However, if you are looking for volunteers with specialist skills, like web design, then you may need to advertise vacancies more widely.

### Word of mouth

By far the best way to recruit volunteers is by word of mouth, as food co-ops usually work best when local people that live or spend time in the area are involved. A survey of food co-ops across the country conducted in 2008 showed that four out of every five food co-ops (over 80 per cent) said they had recruited their volunteers this way. To encourage people to volunteer, you might talk to friends and neighbours, parents at a school or individuals already involved at the venue where you are hoping to hold the food co-op, such as a residents' association or church group. If your co-op is already running then many of your customers are also potential volunteers. Many food co-ops find that they can attract new volunteers by pointing out the benefits, for example meeting new people, gaining useful skills and experience, and the chance to make a difference in your community.



# Volunteers

## Official volunteer services

Volunteer bureaux and Councils for Voluntary Services (CVSs) support many different kinds of voluntary and community groups and can be a mine of information on issues such as promoting your food co-op, recruiting new volunteers, and training that could help your co-op run more smoothly. If you're looking for new volunteers you could also use the matchmaking services offered by the volunteer bureaux. This is where people who want to volunteer are put in touch with you when you need help. Such volunteer opportunities are often advertised in a regular newsletter, in the local press or online and can double as publicity and promotion for your co-op, so you might even get new customers. You will usually have to fill in a form giving contact details for your co-op and outlining the tasks and the time commitment required and the training or induction offered to help a person understand what is expected of volunteering with a food co-op.

## General publicity

The same methods that are used to promote the food co-op - for example leaflets, posters, or newsletters - can also be used to include requests for volunteers. If you have an email list of customers and others linked to the food co-ops, or your own website, you can also use these to provide updates about volunteer opportunities. You could also send articles to local newspapers or community publications saying why you need more

volunteers, what tasks they can get involved with, and what benefits this will bring to the community. There are various national websites where you can advertise volunteering opportunities or search for potential volunteers (see Links). These are generally most useful if you are looking for volunteers with specific skills or to carry out a short-term task.

## Referrals

Another way to recruit volunteers is to get referrals from other organisations that are set up to find work placements or volunteer opportunities for people they support. Such organisations generally work with specific groups of people who are not in work, for example young people not in education, training or employment (NEETs), or those working with people with learning difficulties or mental health issues. Such volunteers may need more training and support, so you have to be sure that you are able to offer this support. Also, some referrals may only be able to volunteer for shorter periods of time. However this can be ideal if you have particular activities that need a lot of volunteers for a short period of time, for example renovating your premises or building a food growing space. You may also be able to attract people who work for local businesses to volunteer for short-term activities.



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## Interview and induction

**The most useful and rewarding volunteering occurs when the job that needs doing is filled by someone who has the skills and temperament to do it well and to enjoy it.**

Volunteer recruitment and retention takes time and energy, so it's important to try and get this match right, and an interview can help. This doesn't have to be too formal but allows you to make sure that the needs of both the food co-op and potential volunteer can be explored, and that the volunteer understands fully about the role and commitment required.

A trial period of perhaps three months is a good way of allowing the volunteer to have a taster of working with the co-op and also allows for a period of review at the end of three months when feedback from both sides can be given. If it isn't working out, you can part company on good terms. If both you and the volunteer are happy to continue, this can be a good point to offer training or other benefits.

**Once you have selected a volunteer, how will you introduce them to the co-op and the people they will be working with?**

A volunteer is much more likely to enjoy the experience if they feel welcome, know what they're supposed to be doing and are appreciated for the effort and time they've put in. From the food co-op's points of view, you need volunteers to fit in, feel confident about completing their task well, and to derive enough benefit, enjoyment and satisfaction that they keep coming back.

An informal induction to the organisation is a good way of making the volunteer feel comfortable and explaining how the organisation works. Some general induction points to consider are:

- Explaining the main tasks involved in the role and how they need to be carried out
- Introduction to other volunteers and any paid staff, including those who are based in the same venue but are not involved with the food co-op
- Tour of the building, location of toilets, kitchen, where volunteers can safely leave their things
- Who to contact in an emergency and if they have any problems
- Information about where they can go locally if they want to leave the building during breaks
- How they can claim expenses
- Explanation of the volunteer policy (if there is one) and a background to the organisation.

You can also use an **induction checklist (Tools p126)** to record the areas that have been covered.

There may be certain duties and roles in your food co-op that require other specific **training (see p188)**.



# Volunteers

## Expenses

**Volunteers give their time for free, so it is good practice for a food co-op to pay for reasonable expenses.**

This will enable volunteers from a range of backgrounds to volunteer in the food co-op regardless of their personal circumstances. It is also a way of demonstrating that their contribution is valued.

Some food co-ops choose to give volunteers a flat rate, for example five pounds worth of fruit and vegetables per session. While this might be simpler to administer in terms of paperwork, it can cause problems for both the organisation and its volunteers. There are legal complexities around this because if a volunteer is reimbursed for more than they have spent, or given other payments (such as vouchers, or a free bag) than this could be classed as an official payment and could interfere with benefits they are claiming, or cause problems for the organisation under the National Minimum Wage Act.

Volunteers in receipt of state benefits and asylum seekers are entitled to receive out-of-pocket expenses only. If you give benefit claimants a reward for their work that is worth more than their actual expenses, then they may lose part of their means tested benefit, and the nature of their volunteering may also be called into question. The Inland Revenue may consider that you are employing the person, rather than them being a volunteer. Money or goods with a cash value over and above out-of-pocket expenses is also regarded as income by the Inland Revenue, and is therefore taxable.

The most trouble-free way to avoid encountering these problems is to reimburse the volunteer only for their direct costs (also known as “out-of-pocket” expenses), for which they need to provide evidence, such as till receipts or bus tickets. These expenses could include:

- travel to and from the place of volunteering
- travel while volunteering
- lunch or other meals eaten whilst volunteering
- childcare or care of dependants whilst volunteering
- postage, phone calls, stationery or other sundry costs associated with volunteering
- clothing or items the volunteer must use as part of their role.

Another thing to be aware of is it can become costly to provide expenses if there are lots of volunteers, but it is difficult to withdraw the offer of a volunteer position once you have agreed it. So you need to make sure that you have enough money in your budget, or are putting a high enough mark-up on the food you sell to cover these costs reliably. You also need to have someone impartial and trustworthy, for example your treasurer or volunteer co-ordinator, to be responsible for reimbursing expenses and keeping good records.



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## Benefits and incentives

The benefits of being a volunteer for a local food co-op can include:

- Helping access to good quality and affordable healthy food for the local community
- Meeting new people and learning to work together
- Increasing confidence and self esteem
- Trying something new
- Gaining useful skills and experience, that they can put on their CVs and improve their employment prospects
- Finding a stepping stone, for example, back into work or into other community activities

You can also offer volunteers a range of other benefits and incentives such as free training courses or visits to other food co-ops. However, all volunteers have different reasons for wanting to get involved. Some may want to get useful work experience, whereas others just want to get out of the house for a few hours a week and so may not be interested in any training or other activities. It is therefore important that you understand your volunteers' needs and help them to fulfill them. To find out more about training for volunteers go to the **Training section** (see p188).

## Volunteer agreement and management

When a new volunteer starts, an agreement set out on paper can be a good way of clarifying the role of the volunteer and expectations of the food co-op.

It is important to ensure that the legal status of any agreement is made clear (i.e. that it is not a contract of employment), otherwise the volunteer will be subject to employment law. You can download a sample **volunteer agreement** from our website or see **Tools p127** and adapt it to the needs of your organisation.

It is also good for an organisation that has a large number of volunteers to have a volunteer policy which clarifies how volunteers are recruited, reimbursed for expenses, etc. to ensure consistency and fairness in working with volunteers.

It may also be a good idea to appoint a volunteer co-ordinator to undertake any administration associated with working with volunteers and also provide a contact person for the volunteers to communicate with.

This role could be a paid position or one of the more experienced volunteers in the food co-op. This is a good way of maintaining continuity of the food co-op, and ensuring that tasks are reallocated if a volunteer leaves or takes time off.



# Volunteers

Some tasks that the volunteer co-ordinator could undertake are:

- Recruitment
- Training
- Induction
- Co-ordination of volunteer tasks and rotas
- Troubleshooting
- Organising away days
- Organising volunteer meetings
- Dealing with volunteer expenses
- Organising one-to-one sessions with volunteers to check on progress, overcome problems and help plan training or other support

Regular contact with the volunteer is important to ensure that both parties are happy with the work. How you do this will depend on how informal or formal you wish to be. Discussions can be run by the co-ordinator if there is one, or you might prefer to bring the volunteers together as a group to talk about how things are going. It is very important to praise volunteers, value their contribution, and find opportunities to celebrate successes.

## Volunteers: Useful Information

### Documents

- Induction checklist (**Tools p126**)
- Volunteer agreement (**Tools p127**)
- Volunteer task list (**Tools p128**)

### Websites

- Volresource:  
<http://www.volresource.org.uk>
- Volunteering England Good Practice Bank:  
<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/Resources/goodpracticebank>
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations:  
<http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/>
- Volunteers Week:  
<http://www.volunteersweek.org.uk/>
- Professionals 4 Free:  
<http://www.professionals4free.org.uk/>
- Reach:  
<http://www.volwork.org.uk/>
- Do-It:  
<http://www.do-it.org.uk/>





# Notes

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# PLANNING

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Good planning is essential to setting up any new project, including a food co-op.

This toolkit aims to help you work through the things you need to think about when planning your food co-op.

The main stages in planning any project are to:

1. Identify your aims and objectives
2. Establish the need
3. Explore different options
4. Design your project
5. Implement your plan
6. Monitor
7. Evaluate



A key part of the planning process is therefore to carry out a **needs assessment** (see p28) to find whether there is a need or demand for a food co-op in your area.

Even if you are setting up a very small food co-op it is a good idea to create an action plan answering the following questions:

- What do you want to do?
- How are going to do it? What resources are needed?
- Who is going to do it?
- When does it have to be done by?
- Where is it going to be done?
- How much will it cost?

If you want to set up a larger scale food co-op and plan to apply for large amounts of funding you might need to create a more detailed project plan or business plan. A business plan is a document that describes your food co-op, what you hope to achieve, how it will operate over time, and how you will manage the money. It will help you to develop your ideas and can be used to plan and monitor progress.

## Useful documents:

Action plan template (**Tools p130**)

Business plan template (available from <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>)



# Needs Assessment

Before you start to develop a food co-op, you need to know if people are likely to use it and if it will suit their needs.

You can find this out by carrying out some sort of needs assessment or market research. Try to do this early in the planning process before you have invested a lot of time and effort, because you may find out that people want something different from what you expect. For example, there may already be other outlets that are supplying the type of food you are planning to sell.

Whatever size or type of food co-op you are planning, doing some sort of research is highly recommended. However, the approach you take will vary according to what you are aiming to achieve, and what funding and resources you have. Some needs assessments take a lot of time and money that not all projects can afford. Often these are carried out by local primary care trusts or councils and aim to assess the overall health needs in a local area.

Alternatively, if you are setting up a very small food co-op, then your needs assessment may simply involve asking a few questions of friends and neighbours to find out if they'd be interested in shopping at a food co-op and what they'd like to buy.

## Key things to think about:

**Before carrying out a needs assessment you need to consider various questions.**

- What do you want to find out?
- Who is the information for? Just for your own planning, or will it also be used for a funding application? If so, then will the needs assessment answer the types of questions your funder might ask?
- How can you express your questions in plain language that people will understand and respond to?
- What specific questions will you ask, and will the answers really tell you what you want to know?
- How will you gather the information?
- Who is going to do the research? How much can you do yourselves and with which parts do you need help?
- Where are you going to do the survey, or find information?
- How much is it all going to cost? Draw up a budget.
- How much time have you got and when does it need to be done by? Draw up a timetable.





The information in this section includes some of the key areas covered by needs assessments for other food co-ops around the UK, in particular this is based on the work of Greenwich Community Food Co-op and Westminster Primary Care Trust.

## Case study - Greenwich Community Food Co-op

Greenwich Community Food Co-op has been using a well-developed community needs assessment process for several years. The community needs assessment process was developed in association with the Healthy Greenwich Network Community Food Initiatives Project run by Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency and Greenwich Teaching Primary Care Trust. The research is carried out by field workers or volunteers and grouped into three main stages: reviewing local statistics; community audit and a questionnaire. The resulting report uses the research data to identify opportunities, need and interest in establishing health projects in Greenwich.

## Case Study - Westminster Primary Care Trust

Westminster Primary Care Trust (PCT) carried out a comprehensive needs assessment at the same time as analysing the effectiveness of its food co-ops in the North Paddington area. It took a broad look at access to healthy food in North Westminster and what influences people to buy and eat fruit and vegetables. It aimed to make suggestions for a project that could increase consumption. The project had a strong health focus and also needed to prove that public money would be spent wisely. Westminster PCT identified geographic areas where people would be in the greatest need, on the basis of estimated obesity prevalence rates and the estimated level of fruit and vegetable consumption in those areas. It then studied the availability and access to fruit and vegetables in these areas of highest need. The report that Westminster PCT drew up was very detailed and produced a list of options for projects to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, which included running food co-ops, working with established local businesses or setting up a mobile food project.



# Needs Assessment

## Local statistics

**To understand more about the type of people who live in your area and who may use your food co-op you can look at statistics such as the Census and reports from organisations like the local council or primary care trust (PCT). It is also useful to include local statistics in funding bids and business plans.**

This section is particularly relevant for food co-ops that are being set up to improve health or to help deprived communities, for example by increasing access to affordable fruit and veg. For these types of projects, data may be useful on, for example, the incidence of diet-related diseases in the area, such as heart disease, diabetes or obesity.

You can also find general information on the type of people who live in your area, such as the age profile, whether a lot of people are in work or not and whether they have cars. You can find statistics that relate to your region, county, or city, town or village, down to particular postcodes, wards or 'super output areas' (which cover just a few streets).

What statistics you choose to look at depends on the area that your food co-op will cover. Unfortunately, although there are some national statistics about how much fruit and veg people eat and how many people have a healthy diet, there is not a lot of accurate information on this at a local level and often it is based on estimates.

Public Health Reports are produced by every local PCT and should be available on local PCT websites. A list of all PCTs can be seen at:

**<http://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/Pages/PrimaryCareTrustListing.aspx>**

Food strategies are also produced by some local councils and PCTs and often start with a summary of the area. Search on relevant websites or phone them up to ask for details. Your local council may also have other documents that contain relevant information, such as a Community Strategy or Local Area Agreement.

### Sources of useful statistics include:

**Community Health Profiles** are produced for each local council in England.

**<http://www.communityhealthprofiles.info/>**

**Neighbourhood Statistics** allows you to find local data by searching via postcode.

**<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/>**

**The Food Standards Agency** publishes a number of national dietary surveys.

**<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/dietarysurveys/>**

This **NHS Information Centre** has various statistics on diet and healthy lifestyles.

**<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles/diet>**



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## Food mapping

**Community food mapping involves finding out where people can buy, grow and eat food in a local area.**

The information might be displayed on a physical map, or computerised version or some other visual representation of the area. A community food map might include anywhere supplying food, such as corner shops, greengrocers, street markets, supermarkets, cafés, farm shops, restaurants and take-aways - however you may just wish to focus on retailers, rather than places selling cooked food.

As well as finding out what foods are on sale it is also useful to note down other factors such as the different varieties available, price and quality. This is particularly important for fruit and vegetables as the quality can vary greatly, and some shops may not sell them at all. You can use the **retailer survey** and **price comparison table** (**Tools p131 and p132**) to record your findings.

Food mapping need not cost much. Volunteers are often happy to help, and you may only be mapping a small area such as a village or local ward. However, food mapping can also be done on a larger scale that gives a really detailed picture of food access.

In some places, such as Sandwell (West Midlands) and Sefton (Sheffield), food access mapping across a big area has been carried out using sophisticated Geographic Information System (GIS) computer software. GIS mapping helps local authorities identify those areas that are furthest away from food shops, and communities that may be experiencing problems with buying good food. The needs assessment then helps to identify whether a food access project might be needed. This is a much more expensive process and will most likely need support from the local primary care trust or another statutory body.



# Needs Assessment

## Community audit

**A community audit is a type of mapping, but goes into more detail than food mapping because as well as finding out about food outlets, a community audit also includes other local facilities and services.**

This may include such as shops, schools, health clinics, recreation centres, community centres, cafés, clubs and community leaders who might be likely to support food projects.

To inform this process, a community audit might list:

- Physical infrastructure such as community buildings and other facilities;
- Regular activities going on in the local area such as women's groups, cookery groups and sports clubs;
- People and organisations interested in economic regeneration and community health;
- Information about the local population.

Such details should help you to identify people and facilities to support your work. For example, by visiting community centres in your area you may find a venue for your food co-op. By talking to local regeneration organisations, you may find partners to help you connect with communities or attract funding. You may also identify organisations running cookery groups or food growing projects that you could work with or buy produce from.

To assess food access in the area, a community audit also checks the local availability and prices of fresh fruit and vegetables. Community leaders and key figures in local public services are often also interviewed to build up a picture of local food access and whether a project is needed to overcome any identified problems.





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## Consulting the community

**You also need to ask questions of your likely food co-op customers to find out if this is something they want or would use if it was available.**

There are various ways of consulting local people, for example informal conversations, a questionnaire, focus group or participatory appraisal. What you choose will depend on how much time and what funding you have and how many people you wish to consult.

If you want to consult several hundred people, then a questionnaire is likely to be the most feasible option. If you want to talk to only 10 people, then informal conversations or a focus group may be your best choice.

### Questionnaires

The questions you ask will depend on what you are going to sell and why the food co-op is being set up, but common themes could include asking:

- Where do you buy food now?
- Do you have any problems with getting certain foods?
- Would you be likely to use a food co-op?
- What days and times would you go there?

- What sort of products would you like to buy?
- Would you be interested in volunteering for the food co-op?

Many food co-ops are set up to improve access to fresh fruit and veg, and hence to improve people's health. So you might like to ask about people's current consumption of fruit and vegetables. It may also be useful to ask how much people spend on particular foods per week to give you an idea how much they might spend at the food co-op.

As with any survey, there will probably be a bias in the responses as those who bother to fill them in are more likely to feel positively about the idea of a food co-op. So be careful what conclusions you draw from analysing the answers. The length of the questionnaire is also crucial: make it too long and the response rate could be low. Greenwich Community Food Co-op advises that an early version of its questionnaires had 34 questions, including sections on personal health and smoking. But only 15% of those approached completed such questionnaires. Learning from this experience, they now use a short questionnaire of just six simple questions, with a much higher response rate.

### Key things to think about:

- It is much better to ask closed questions i.e. with a list of options or tick boxes. It will be much easier to count and compare the answers than if you ask rather 'open' questions, to which different people will respond in very different ways.
- Do you need to translate the questionnaire for areas where English is a second language for many people?
- Can you offer any incentives for completing the questionnaire, such as a free gift or prize, which may increase the response rate?



# Needs Assessment

## Participatory Appraisal

Participatory Appraisal is a method that some groups use to consult communities, and can be used to help you work with a community to find out if a food co-op would be welcomed. The method uses pictures and plain language and so often works well with people who don't like filling in forms. This can be great fun and breaks down barriers, but using visual methods is also a more immediate and striking way of, literally, 'seeing' a problem. The methods can help you reach the most socially excluded people who might not otherwise take part in consultation processes. Participatory Appraisal also enables members of the community to think creatively and suggest the kind of community-run projects they would like to see in their area.

Some examples of this approach can be found in a Sustain report *Reaching the Parts: Community mapping: Working together to tackle social exclusion and food poverty*. It can be downloaded from the publications section of the Sustain website: <http://www.sustainweb.org>

Before starting this type of community consultation some points to consider are:

- What is likely to happen as a result of your consultation? Be realistic about what can be achieved. You don't want to get people's hopes up, then not fulfil them
- What might be the costs of organising and publicising a public event to bring people together?
- It may be good to ask a trained facilitator to run an event.

## Needs Assessment: Useful Information

### Documents

Retailer survey (**Tools p131**)  
Price comparison table (**Tools p132**)  
Community audit table (**Tools p133**)  
Sample questionnaire 1 (**Tools p135**)  
Sample questionnaire 2 (**Tools p137**)

### Websites

Read more about food mapping on the Food Vision website.  
<http://www.foodvision.gov.uk/pages/food-mapping>



# Notes

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# PRODUCE

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The key to a successful food co-op is providing high quality produce at an affordable price.

Your food co-op will therefore need to decide:

- what you want to sell, i.e. the type of produce
- how you are going to sell it i.e. the type of outlet and
- where you are going to get it from, by finding a good supplier.

Most existing food co-ops either sell fruit and vegetables or wholefoods, such as rice, beans, nuts, and flour. This is because it much easier to buy these foods in bulk quantities and also to divide them up and redistribute them easily and safely. But you can decide to provide any type of food you like, for example meat, dairy, preserves, or baked goods. Some food co-ops also supply other products in addition to food, for example environmentally-friendly cleaning products.

What you sell will determine how your food co-op will need to run. For example, if you are only going to sell bulk wholefoods or dried goods then you may only need to run once a month, whereas if you want to supply fresh produce you will probably need to run at least once a week.

You may already have in mind the overall type of food you want to buy but you'll also need to decide the specific varieties and whether you are going to try to supply local, organic and/or fair-trade or just conventional produce.

What you decide to sell also depends on your customers and whether you have a particular target group in mind. For example older people may have very different tastes from a family with young children. Also customers from different ethnic origins may have very different demands about what types of foods they would like to buy.



# Types of outlet

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Once you have decided what produce you will sell you also need to determine how you will sell it.

There are several different methods you could use for supplying or distributing the food you buy.

The method you choose will depend on a variety of factors such as who most of your customers are, and also what type of outlet you have the capacity to run - as some may require a lot more time and money.

Food co-ops usually fall into one of the categories below although some large projects with several outlets may also have combination of all of these:

- Buying clubs
- Stalls
- Bag or box schemes
- Mobile stores or home delivery schemes
- Shops
- Markets



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## Buying clubs

**The simplest type of food co-op, which is often called a buying club or buying group, is basically where a group of friends or neighbours club together to buy food from the same supplier.**

Everyone chooses what they want from a list then all the orders are collated and placed with the supplier by phone or e-mail. The order is delivered to one location, usually someone's house where everyone else comes to pick up their items at a set time.

Buying clubs usually work on a pre-order, pre-pay system. You should ask everyone to pay in advance by cheque - if possible made out to the supplier. However, some suppliers may only want one cheque and so someone may have to take on the responsibility of paying for the whole order.

These groups usually buy bulk wholefoods and other products that can be supplied by one of the large wholefood wholesalers. Normally members order whole packs of food, e.g. 5kg of rice, rather than having to weigh things out. However if foods are pre-packed e.g. in tins or jars then it is not too complicated to split a case. Buying clubs usually only meet once a month or less often, as these foods keep a long time so don't need to be ordered on regular basis.

It is not as common to buy fruit and vegetables and other fresh produce via an informal buying club, because it would then need to meet weekly rather than monthly. Also, a lot more space may be required to divide up sacks of fruit and vegetables. It is therefore not so convenient to meet at someone's house and may be better to use a community venue instead. Another option would be to get pre-packed bags or boxes are delivered to one location, where everyone could pick them up.

The main advantage with buying clubs are that they are simple to run, there is very little paperwork, and you are not handling cash. There are also no real costs involved if you are operating from different members' houses.

The main disadvantage is that these groups generally have to stay quite small to be manageable. Also customers need to be able to pay in advance by cheque and store large quantities of food, which may be more difficult for those on low incomes or in cramped accommodation.

### Relevant pages

- Wholefood suppliers ([see p52](#))
- Ordering tips wholefood buying clubs ([see p80](#))



# Types of outlet

## Stalls

**A stall can be set up on a temporary basis in a variety of locations such as a community centre, a school, a church hall, or outside on the street.**

Stalls generally only run one day a week for a few hours but can be held more or less often depending on demand. You may be able to get your supplier to deliver direct to the venue where the stall is running. However if you want to buy direct from a wholesale market you will probably need your own vehicle to collect the produce yourself.

Generally with stalls a lot of the produce is sold loose by weight so you will need a set of weighing scales. You can also pre-weigh items and sell them in bags labelled with the weight (see **Trading standards - p111** - for more information). Stalls usually supply quite a wide range of produce, so if you were selling fruit and vegetables you would probably aim to have at least fifteen varieties.

If you are running a stall indoors this usually involves laying out baskets or boxes of different produce on tables. If you are outdoors you would probably want a sturdier structure.

The main advantage of a stall is that customers can pick and choose exactly the varieties and amounts they want. This means that you are more likely to appeal to a wider range of customers. Because you supply a much wider range of foods, you can include more exotic or unusual varieties if there is a demand for this in your area.

The main disadvantage of a stall is that you are more likely to have waste produce at the end of the session, as it's very hard to predict exactly how much you will sell. You will need some way to deal with your leftover stock, such as selling it at a discount or giving it away to a cookery group. When running a stall, it's a good idea to have quite a lot of stock with a wide range of produce on sale to ensure the stall looks attractive. So in general, stalls work better when you have a larger number of customers.

However it does take longer to serve customers as you have to weigh everything out and calculate how much it costs. You will also spend longer cashing up at the end of trading, and in turn keeping accurate records is more complicated. Because of these factors, you may need more help from volunteers to run the stalls and their role will be a bit more challenging as it may involve adding up or using a till.



Greenwich Community Food Co-op





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## Bag or box scheme

**Bag and box schemes both involve selling a selection of different fruit and vegetables in a container.**

The main difference is that boxes are often larger and have more varieties in them, so may cost a bit more.

In most bag or box schemes customers do not get a choice about what they get, and receive a different selection every week based on what fruit and vegetables are in season or the best value. Typically, a £3 bag may have 4 or 5 different varieties in it.

Bag or box schemes work on a pre-order, pre-pay system so customers have to place their orders in advance. For bag schemes this is usually done on a weekly basis paid for by cash, but for some box schemes you need to order for a whole month in advance and set up a regular standing order to pay a fixed sum regularly into the food co-op's bank account.



Even within bag and box schemes there are differences in the way they operate based on whether the produce is delivered unpacked or pre-packed.

### Unpacked

In many bag schemes suppliers deliver loose fruit and vegetables that are packed by volunteers at a community venue. Rather than weighing out the produce, it is divided up equally between the number of bags, e.g. if there is a box with 60 apples and 15 bags to fill – each bag gets 4 apples. This makes the role for volunteers much less complicated as they just need to count out the produce rather than weighing everything.

### Prepacked

In other bag or box schemes the produce is delivered pre-packed. The boxes have already been filled either directly by the supplier (often a local farm) or by food co-op volunteers or staff at a central location. In this type of model the food co-op outlet is merely a drop-off point. The role of people at the venue may just be to take orders on behalf of the food co-op rather than actually pack bags or boxes. Some box schemes may also do home delivery rather than dropping off to community venues.

The main advantage of bag and box schemes is that because the food co-op receives all orders in advance, staff can work out exactly what to order and so have little or no waste. It also makes it a lot easier to



# Types of outlet

handle money as usually the bags or boxes are priced at a nice round sum, such as £3 a bags so it makes doing your finances much less complicated and time-consuming and it is easy to keep accurate records. The other advantage is that for volunteers helping with the food co-op their role is also often much simpler, as they are mainly just involved with packing bags rather than weighing and pricing.

The main disadvantage is that your customers won't get a choice about what they get and will only get a limited number

of different varieties of fruit and vegetables each week. For example, a bag may contain only 4 or 5 varieties; a box may contain 8 or 9. This is fine for some people and they often like the surprise of not knowing what they'll get each week. But for others who are less confident with cooking and may have more specific preferences, it may not suit them. With limited variety, it is also more difficult to include exotic fruit and vegetables, as the items in the bags and boxes need to appeal to everyone – although some schemes do put more unusual items in larger boxes.

## Case Study - Ystad Goffa Food Co-op

Ystad Goffa Food Co-op is run by three volunteer residents at a retirement housing scheme supported by Wales & West Housing Association and the Rural Regeneration Unit. The volunteers spend 2 to 3 hours each week sorting the produce, taking orders and collecting the money. They supply bags of fruit, salad, or vegetables for £2.50 or a half-bag for £1.25. Customers order and pay for next week's selection when they collect this week's. The supplier chooses the selection of seasonal fruit, vegetables and salad to offer the best value for money that week. For example: the vegetable bag will generally have potatoes, carrots and 3 or 4 other items. A 'swap' box is also available for co-op customers to exchange items with other residents. Anyone can use a co-op as there is no membership fee. Customers can order as little or as much as they like. All the money taken goes directly to the supplier with no profit being made by the co-op.

## Relevant pages and publications

Bag scheme order form (**Tools p139**)

Tips for ordering for a box scheme (**see p79**)

Veg bag scheme toolkit (South East 5 a Day programme)

Visit Foodcoops toolkit website: <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>





## Mobile stores or home delivery schemes

**Food co-ops may set up mobile stores or home delivery schemes because they want to cover a wide area, perhaps where there are either lots of urban estates or rural villages that have no other shops.**

A mobile store will usually operate in a similar way to a stall, displaying trays of different varieties of fruit and vegetables that must be weighed out individually. Customers are able to come on the van and choose what they want.

This differs slightly from a home delivery scheme, where orders will be placed in advance – and customers either order exactly what they want or place a regular order for a bag or box with a selection of fruit and vegetables (see Bag or box schemes).

Most mobile stores or home delivery schemes will operate on a daily basis visiting different locations on different days of the week. They will also have premises where they can store produce from one day to the next.

The main advantage with mobile stores is that it can be less time consuming to have a van that visits several locations rather than having to set up and pack up stalls in lots of different venues. For schemes that cover a large area it also means that they don't have to spend lots of time finding suitable venues that they can use and recruiting lots of volunteers to run stalls or pack bags in each location. For customers who live in remote locations or who find it difficult to get to stalls when they are running, it may also be much more convenient.

The main disadvantage is that you'll need enough funding to buy a van, and will also need to spend more money on fitting it out if it is going to be used as a mobile store. You will also have running costs to cover fuel, road tax, vehicle insurance, etc. Also mobile stores and delivery schemes often employ paid drivers to ensure a consistent service, rather than relying solely on volunteers. Note: these issues will arise with any food co-op needing to use a van to collect produce or run several stalls.

### Case study - Herbie Fruit and Veg Van

This initiative was set up by MERCi to provide affordable, fresh fruit and vegetables to residents living in areas of East Manchester (Miles Platting, Ancoats, Collyhurst, Ardwick, Clayton and Gorton) with poor access to fresh foods. Herbie operates like a mobile greengrocer. Customers can walk on board and choose from a good range of affordable fresh produce. The food co-op also supplies boxes of fruit to schools and works closely with local schools, sheltered housing, churches, health clinics and resident groups to ensure that it reaches as many people in the local community as possible.



# Types of outlet

## Shops

**Some community-run food co-ops have shops but this is less common than other types of outlet, mainly because of higher running costs and lack of premises that are available for cheap rent.**

To bring in enough income, shops usually stock a wide range of foods and other goods, not just fruit and vegetables. Many food co-ops with shops will have limited opening hours and so may either be open only on certain days, or sometimes every day but only for a few hours.



There are a lot of wholefood shops that are run as co-operatives – but in the UK these are mainly worker co-ops rather than consumer co-ops. There are also examples of village shops that are being run on a co-operative basis by local volunteers. Both these types of shop tend to be run on a more commercial basis though and do not necessarily aim to supply food at cheaper prices.

The main advantage of having a shop is that there is usually a lot more space to store and display produce, so shops can sell a wider range of different products. They can also keep items that have a long shelf life in stock, without about having to worry about having to sell everything in one day.

The main disadvantage is that more people are needed to run a shop and keep it open for sufficient hours to make it worthwhile. There will also be other costs associated with having a permanent outlet, such as rent, electricity, rates, etc.

The Plunkett Foundation has lots of useful information on rural community shops.  
<http://www.plunkett.co.uk/whatwedo/rcs/ruralcommunityshops.cfm>

### Case Study - Fareshares Food Co-op

Fareshares is a non-profit making community project in Elephant and Castle in London that stocks simple healthy food and related products. It was set up in 1988 by local people to provide good food for the community at affordable prices. The store is open to anyone who wants to use it. It operates on a DIY basis where customers bring their own bags, weigh out and price up the goods they want. The food co-op is run on an entirely voluntary, unpaid basis by the people who use it.





## Markets

**There are some food co-ops which run markets with a variety of stalls or with lots of different types of produce, such as fruit and vegetables, wholefoods and other household products.**

Food co-ops may also run stalls at other existing markets but this is not always possible, as they may not meet all the criteria needed to attend some markets, such as farmers' markets.

NB. The organisation Country Markets (<http://www.country-markets.co.uk>) has local societies that run over 400 separate co-operative markets all round the country. There are also examples of co-operatively run farmers' markets (<http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/about/cfm/index.cfm>). Both these types of markets are being supported by other strands of the Making Local Food Work programme (<http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk>).

When selling food at markets some stallholders pre-weigh and pre-price all their produce so that it is quick and easy to sell, as they do not have to spend time



weighing things out. They also often price things up to a round figure e.g. £1 for a 1 kg bag of apples – so that it makes it easier to handle money quickly as well.

The main advantage of markets is that they are more of a 'one-stop-shop' so customers can buy a wide range of goods in one place so may not need to buy anything from other shops. Markets are also seen as more of a 'destination shopping' experience i.e. they are a fun day out as well as a place to buy food, and often have cafés running alongside, so people can stop and chat.

The main disadvantage is that you may need a much larger venue or outdoor space which may be hard to secure, especially for a low rent or without the need for street trading licences if it is outside. You may also need a lot more helpers to run all the stalls at a market, unless producers ran them themselves.

### Case study – True Food Co-op

True Food Co-op is a not-for-profit organisation based in Reading and serves the surrounding areas in Berkshire. It offers a huge range of organic wholefoods, fresh fruit and vegetables and eco-friendly household products at markets held in neighbourhood community centres. You do not need to be a member to shop at the markets and entry is free. Local people that have excess produce, from growing foods in their gardens or on allotments, can also arrange to bring their produce to markets for selling or bartering or as a donation.



# Suppliers

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Food co-ops across the country use a range of different suppliers. Some create direct links with producers whereas others buy from wholesalers.

What suppliers are available will depend on a variety of different factors, for example whether you are in a large city or small village.

Some regions will have far more commercial farmers growing particular types of produce than others. Also, the size of your food co-op will affect which suppliers are willing to deliver to you or whether you will have to collect.

The information in this section mainly relates to suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables and also wholefoods. However a lot of it will also be relevant if you are interested in buying other types of fresh produce.

Whatever supplier you choose the most important thing is to ensure that the produce you buy is good value for money, high quality and the service is reliable, as that is what your customers will expect. You will need to compare the prices and quality at a number of different suppliers before choosing and should always consider having a back-up in case a problem occurs with your main supplier.

It is also important that you can give a supplier as much information as possible about your requirements, for example: what you want to buy, what day you plan to run, what times you are available to take a delivery, and what sort of quantities you are likely to buy.



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## Wholesale markets

**There are only a limited number of wholesale markets left in England, and the rest of the UK.**

So generally this will only be an option if you are based in or near a large city – for example, London, Liverpool, Gateshead, Birmingham, Glasgow, Wolverhampton, Nottingham, Manchester or Leicester.

The main advantage with wholesale markets is that they sell a very wide range of produce, so you should be able to get everything you need and be able to buy more unusual or exotic produce. Conversely, if you are interested in locally grown food, you may find that it is harder to buy or even identify local produce at wholesale markets.

You will be able to see what is at the market and pick and choose between different traders to get the cheapest prices. However, prices fluctuate daily and so you won't be able to know exactly how much everything is going to cost in advance.

The main disadvantage with wholesale markets is that in order to get the best prices you will generally need to have your own vehicle to go to the market and pick up produce, rather than have it delivered.

And you will have to get up very early in the morning to go there - most food co-ops who buy direct from markets get there about 6am at the latest.

## Local wholesalers

**Most towns and cities will have one or more local wholesalers that supply largely to the catering and retail trade.**

The main advantage with local wholesalers, as with wholesale markets, is that they offer a wide range of produce and so you will probably be able to get everything you want in one place.

But if you are interested in locally produced food, although many wholesalers sell some local and UK produce they usually do not promote this and it is hard to tell from product lists where produce has been grown or raised.

Local wholesalers generally offer free delivery and will deliver quite small amounts if you are in their current delivery routes.

But, as with many other suppliers they will generally prefer to deliver in whole boxes, and if they have to split a box or supply only a few of each item they will charge a lot more for this than a whole box. It is not untypical for a local wholesaler to put on a 20% mark-up for smaller amounts, meaning that it will be harder for you to offer produce at very affordable prices.



# Suppliers

## Farmers

**Some food co-ops buy some or all of their fruit and vegetables direct from farmers because of the benefits to the environment and local economy.**

This has many advantages such as that the produce is likely to be much fresher and can be a lot cheaper than buying the same varieties from a 'middleman' such as a local wholesaler. You can also find out more about how the produce is grown and make links with the farms, for example by organising farm visits for customers once a year.

The main disadvantage is that it is unlikely that a single grower will be able to supply all the produce for a food co-op over a whole year, as not all farmers grow a wide range of different fruits and vegetables and many specialise in one type of produce, such as salads, potatoes or apples. You may therefore have to buy from several different suppliers which will make things more complicated.

Also some large-scale farmers may not be willing to deliver to very small projects, as they may not consider this commercially attractive as the extra admin involved and delivery costs may reduce profit margins.

Many food co-ops have got around these problems by working with farmers who grow a range of their own produce but are also willing to act as a wholesaler, supplying produce from other neighbouring farms, as well as some imported produce such as bananas or oranges. These may be producers who have formed farmer co-operatives or farmers who also run a retail outlet such as a farm shop or market stall and so already have to buy in other produce anyway.

You could also contact any Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes in your area. CSAs tend to be quite small and so may be more willing to supply food co-ops. They are also generally run by producers who want to work with the local community.

Go to **Local Produce** (see p53) to find out more about sourcing local produce.





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## Community growing projects

**Some food co-ops buy produce from community growing projects or other non-commercial growers such as allotment holders.**

Many growing projects are set up with the main aim of providing training and so they don't always have an outlet for their fruit and vegetables - so linking in with local food co-ops is often a very attractive proposition for them.

The main disadvantage with most non-commercial growers is that they probably won't be able to supply all your needs all year round and so you will have to rely on other suppliers as well. However, they can help to provide variety and interest to the produce you sell and many customers will appreciate the fact that it is grown on a small scale, and possibly by members of their own community.

Because community growing projects aren't necessarily trying to make a profit and probably won't provide class A (visually perfect) produce they can also offer very good prices or even provide surplus produce for free, or trade it for something else.

There are also other community initiatives that could help you find produce in season, for example scrumping projects that gather surplus fruit from trees in people's gardens or unused orchards. You can try to find other local food projects by contacting your local Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) or local authority as they often have information on community-run groups. Or why not just start by asking people you know about what food projects there are in the area. This can be done as part of the needs assessment.

NB. It is often thought that produce from allotments cannot be sold, but there is rarely an objection to the occasional sale of surplus produce. What is prohibited by law, under the Allotments Acts, 1908-1950 (section 22, subsection 1), is that an allotment cannot be used to support a business. But if an allotment holder can prove they have more than they can use themselves, it won't be regarded as illegal to sell the surplus.



# Suppliers

## Social enterprises

**In some areas of the UK social enterprises have been developed specifically to supply food co-ops with fruit and vegetables.**

They also often supply other community-based organisations such as schools and children's centres, and possibly some commercial outlets such as restaurants. Examples include Food Chain North East in Gateshead, Community Food Enterprise in Newham and West Lothian Food and Health Development.

These organisations have often evolved from small food co-ops or have been formed when different community food projects have joined together to make their food buying more efficient.

They tend to be based in areas where there is a wholesale market, as that is where many of them buy their produce and then deliver it to food co-ops who do not have their own vehicles.

However, a lot of these projects are now also making links with local producers in order to buy direct from farms. Social enterprises may be more willing than other suppliers to supply exact amounts or half boxes and may also offer sale or return.

In addition, many of these projects have been specifically set up to provide not only the "raw materials" but also have staff who can help develop and support food co-ops and offer training opportunities.

### Case study – Food Chain North East

The Food Chain (North East) Community Interest Company currently supports over 60 local food co-ops and other community food projects across the north east of England. They are based in premises in the regional fruit and vegetable wholesale market, giving them access to a wide range of fresh produce. In addition they buy local produce from regional farmers and growers and are currently helping local community projects to produce food for use in food co-ops. They have their own vans with dedicated drivers who understand how food co-ops operate and a team of community development workers who can support communities to develop their local food co-ops at every stage. The Food Chain is able to buy in sufficient quantities to allow savings through economies of scale which allows lower costs to be passed on to food co-op customers.



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## Retailers

**Food co-ops do not usually buy from retailers like shops, street markets or box schemes because the main way to cut prices is to cut out the “middlemen”.**

However, in some areas where there are not many other suppliers, buying from a retailer may be your best option, especially if you want to buy a whole range of goods from one place.

Some shops may already offer a wholesale service alongside their retail outlet. Also you may have a very good greengrocer, box scheme, street market or farm shop in your

area which some people would like to use but are not able to get to, for example due to lack of transport. So rather than compete with them you may want to work with them.

Many shop managers will be willing to negotiate on price depending on how much you want to order.

If you are able to provide a bulk order that can all be delivered to one collection point, it is well worth asking if they will offer a discount on their normal prices – especially if you can make a commitment to regular purchases.



# Suppliers

## Wholefood suppliers

**Finding a supplier for wholefoods is relatively easy as there are a number of large wholesale suppliers who either make deliveries in a particular region or across the whole of the UK.**

Most of these wholesalers will have a minimum order amount that they are willing to deliver which ranges from £100 - £375 and increases depending on how far you are from their main delivery area. They will also deliver to particular areas on different days of the week so you will need to check their websites for information on

delivery days and times before deciding what day is best to hold your food co-op.

Some of the wholesalers will not serve food co-ops within the vicinity of their regular retail customers because they don't want to undermine the trade of the small shops they supply. Some of the suppliers also require food co-ops to have a constitution or to be formally registered before they will supply them. However, many wholesalers are run as worker co-operatives and have often developed from small buying clubs and so are usually keen to work with food co-ops.

**Essential Trading** – Bristol. Delivers throughout most of the southern half of England and Wales. <http://www.essential-trading.coop>

**Green City** - Glasgow (0141 554 7633). Minimum order £150 (delivery free). Delivers in and around Scotland. <http://www.greencity.co.uk>

**Highland Wholefoods** - Inverness (01463 712393). Minimum order £100; £250 to benefit from discounts. Delivers to Highland. <http://www.highlandwholefoods.co.uk/>

**Infinity Foods** - Brighton (01273 424060). Main customer base is the south east of England. <http://www.infinityfoods.co.uk>

**Lembas** - Sheffield (0845 458 1585). Minimum order £100+ for non-trade depending on distance from base (delivery free). Lembas regularly delivers within a radius of about 90 miles of Sheffield. <http://www.lembas.co.uk>

**Rainbow Wholefoods** - Norwich (01603 630484). Minimum order is £200 for delivery and £50 for collection. Delivers across East Anglia and beyond. <http://www.rainbowwholefoods.co.uk>

**Suma co-operative** - Halifax (01422 313861). The largest vegetarian foods and eco-products wholesaler in the country. Delivers to whole of the UK. Minimum order £250+ depending on region. <http://www.suma.coop>



# Local produce

More and more food co-ops want to buy local produce because of the environmental and social benefits and because of the growing demand from consumers.

Some of the advantages of supplying local and seasonal food are that it is:

- Fresher: often you will get a delivery the day or even a few hours after it's been picked.
- Tastier: if your fruit and vegetables are fresh and in season you can taste the difference.
- Healthier: vitamins essential for health can deteriorate with long storage times, so for fruit and vegetables, the fresher the better.
- Good for reducing food miles: even local food still needs to be transported but no-one can dispute the difference between ferrying apples a few miles down the road and importing them from across the globe.
- A way to support local farmers and keeps growing skills alive: we are going to need people who can grow food, as it becomes ever clearer that we cannot keep transporting it from thousands of miles away.
- Helpful in supporting the local economy: buying locally helps ensure more money circulates in the local economy helping more local farms and food enterprises stay in business.

## Case study - Wellington Food Co-ops in Somerset

Two co-ops run in Wellington, one during the afternoon on Tuesdays at Wellington Children's Centre (since July 2007) and the other at The Young People's centre on Monday evenings (since June 2008). They supply some pre-ordered fruit and vegetables weekly; occasional fish and meat packs; and eggs and fruit juice are also sold - and all of this produce is from the surrounding area. Wellington is a good example of a food co-op buying very local produce from a range of suppliers. They have an added advantage as the vegetable grower, Ray Weymouth, spends time at the co-op talking with customers to build strong customer-farmer links. Due to the reliable and regular purchases of his crops by the food co-op, Ray has taken on an extra field to grow more vegetables. Soft fruit is available when in season, including raspberries and strawberries, which are supplied by a local fruit farm and delivered jointly with the vegetables. Apple juice and eggs are both sold each week and £15 and £30 meat packs are provided by Beech Hayes Farm.



# Local produce

## Finding producers

**Some of the main methods you can use to find local producers include:**

- Searching on the Internet
- Local food directories
- Looking in the phone book or Yellow Pages
- Contacting Local Food Link organisations
- Visiting local farmers' markets
- Going into farm shops or other local food outlets
- Visiting farms directly

### Searching on the Internet

There are several websites you can use to search for local food by putting in your postcode or searching via your region. These include:

- <http://www.freerangereview.co.uk/>
- <http://www.localfoodfinder.org/>
- <http://www.localfoodadvisor.com/>
- <http://www.foodloversbritain.com/>
- <http://www.bigbarn.co.uk/>

These can be useful, although they tend to be consumer focused and so usually list more farm shops, box schemes and markets, and don't always say whether farmers supply wholesale. Also be aware that not all web listings are kept up-to-date.

You can also just do a general search on the Internet via Google - including searching using Google Maps which will bring up results on a map. Try putting in the search terms 'local food' or 'fruit and vegetable growers' and then your county, region or town. This may also take you to other websites that list local producers or other on-line directories like the Yellow Pages.

### Local food directories

Whilst searching on-line you may also come across local food directories that have been produced specifically for your town, county or region. These usually list local producers selling direct to the public through farm shops, farm gate sales, or pick-your-own, as well as having details of farmers' markets, food businesses, restaurants providing locally produced food, box schemes and home delivery services. Local food directories have been produced by a number of different organisations including councils, local food groups and environmental organisations because of the many benefits of local food. If you don't have access to the Internet you should be able to get printed copies of local food directories, if they've been produced for your area, by contacting your local council or asking in the library or tourist information centre.

### Looking in the phone book or Yellow Pages

Using your computer to search for local food via the Internet can use up a lot of electricity and time, so it might be easier to search in a printed copy of your local Yellow Pages or phone book. Such directories will list farms in specific categories such as farm shops, pick-your-own produce or box schemes, so you may have to look in several different sections.



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## Contacting Local Food Link organisations

Local Food Link organisations have been set up in many locations around the UK to support the development of the local food sector. Some of these are government-funded bodies whereas others are smaller community-run networks and so they all focus on different activities. For example, some have helped develop farmers' markets, whereas others focus on providing local food to publicly funded organisations such as schools and hospitals. However they all work with local producers to a greater or lesser extent and so should be able to help point you in the direction of suitable farmers or give you more information about what products are grown in your region.

## Farmers' Markets

Visiting a farmers' markets is a good opportunity to talk to local growers in person and see the range and quality of produce they sell. Visiting the nearest market will help you find producers who may be able to deliver to your area. If you do have a farmers' market in your town then stallholders may be willing to drop off to you on the same day as the market. You can find

details of farmers' markets on the following websites and also by looking in local food directories or doing an Internet search.

- National Association of Farmers Markets <http://www.farmersmarkets.net/>
- Farmers' markets in London: <http://www.lfm.org.uk>
- Farmers' markets in Scotland: <http://www.scottishfarmersmarkets.co.uk/>
- Farmers' markets in Wales: <http://www.fmiw.co.uk/>

## Going into farm shops or other local food outlets

Many farm shops supply some of their own produce, as well as buying from other local farmers and they may also provide a wholesale service or be willing to provide a discount if you order in bulk. The Farm Retail Association website: <http://www.farma.org.uk/> has a list of farm shops.

Another (slightly cheeky) thing to do when visiting any other local food outlets including wholesalers, greengrocers or farm shops is to look on the sides of produce boxes, as these often have the contact details of farms on them.



# Local produce

## Visiting farms directly

Not all food producers are listed on-line or in published food directories, so it may be a good idea just to drive or cycle around the countryside speaking to people in village shops, stopping at farms or wherever you see produce growing, or ask who grows fruit and vegetables in the area. The farming world is tight knit and generally helpful and so they will probably know of other farms nearby. You should also ask your existing networks about any farms they know and you could also contact local agricultural colleges or places with land-based studies courses. You could do this at the same time as you are carrying out any food mapping or needs assessment. You may come across small-scale growers who may not be commercial farmers but will still have signs out saying they've got produce for sale.

It is a good idea to phone or email in advance of visiting, but if you don't have a farm's contact details there is no harm in dropping in quickly and seeing if anyone is available or arranging a meeting for another time. However, you should also consider that some times of the year are very busy for farmers. Try to be aware of the farming calendar, and avoid cold-calling during busy periods such as sowing, harvesting or lambing time. Always be prepared to drive away if you arrive when things are fraught or busy. Some farmers, particularly large organisations or Farm Managers, expect to be contacted for an appointment. Wet days usually mean less outside activity and probably more time to talk.

## Potential barriers

**Finding a good supplier of local produce, particularly locally grown fruit and vegetables, can be harder than you might imagine.**

This is because fruit and vegetable production is much lower in the UK than in other European countries and has been declining dramatically over recent years. In addition, the short supply of seasonal labour, high input and machinery costs, and low profit margins means that growing fruit and vegetables may not be as attractive as other types of agriculture. So although there are a lot of websites and directories listing local producers there tend to be far more meat and dairy and secondary producers (food processors or manufacturers) listed than there are fruit and vegetable growers.

Also, even when you have farm's contact details, you may find it difficult to find someone to speak to as farmers are very busy and often out in the field, so may not always respond straight away to phone calls, letters or emails. However, it is worth persisting and contacting as many potential growers as possible, making sure that you provide details about your project and what you are interested in buying.

Once you do get in touch, many farmers may not be interested in supplying food co-ops because they are not able to deliver small orders, are already at capacity or have decided to concentrate on one main outlet, such as selling via farmers' markets





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or running their own box scheme. They may even see you as competition. It is important that you 'sell' the objectives of your food co-op, the fact that is aiming to help the community and not make a profit and that, if successful, it could provide a long-term outlet for their produce.

You may also find it hard to find the range of produce you need for your food co-op. What farmers grow depends on the individual supplier and their location. Some producers grow a range of vegetables, others focus on one crop. Some farmers will grow just potatoes for example; others concentrate on supplying outdoor crops such as a full range of seasonal vegetables, which will mean that what is available will vary markedly depending on the time of year. Others will use greenhouses and polytunnels to produce crops that need protection such as salads and exotics like peppers. Many might also be able to supply eggs. Fruit growers tend either to specialise in tree fruit (also known as top fruit) such as apples, pears, plums or cherries; or soft fruit such as strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries and blackcurrants.

It is also important to remember that most shoppers at food co-ops will want to buy some produce that cannot be grown locally, such as bananas and oranges. So if you are going to provide all your customers' needs you will need to buy some imported as well as locally grown fruit and vegetables. This means you may have to use more than one supplier, for example a local farmer for some produce and a wholesaler for others. Alternatively you may be able to work with local farmers and see if they are also willing to act as wholesalers. As well as supplying their own produce, they could also deliver different varieties grown by neighbouring farms, as well as some imported produce. These may be farmers who either run or supply other retail outlets such as farm shops and so already have to buy other produce anyway. There are also a number of farmer co-operatives or distributors who will supply on behalf of a number of producers.



# Organic food

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In addition to all the locations where you can search for local produce there are also some places that specifically give information about organic farmers and suppliers.

These include:

## Websites

The Soil Association has developed a website for processors looking for specific ingredients, and you can use this to search for producers in your region by searching for specific products such as apples. Visit <http://www.soilassociation.net/web/sacert/sourcemarketplace.nsf/>

## Lists of organic licensees

The Soil Association also has comprehensive lists of certified organic farmers, growers, wholesalers, etc on a county, regional or national basis:

For UK wide enquiries contact Soil Association Certification Ltd

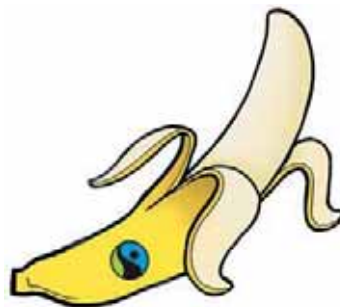
T: 0117 914 2412

E: [prod.cert@soilassociation.org](mailto:prod.cert@soilassociation.org) <http://www.soilassociation.org/>

For enquiries in Wales contact Organic Centre Wales

T: 01970 622248

E: [organic@aber.co.uk](mailto:organic@aber.co.uk) <http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk/tradedirectory>



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## Organic producer marketing groups

Many food producers understand the advantages of getting together with other local farmers and growers and forming marketing groups. This means they can ensure greater continuity of supply throughout the year, greater quantity of food, and a wider variety of products. These marketing groups are often able to supply food co-ops as well larger markets such as schools, hospitals, caterers and restaurants. For example:

- Somerset Organic Link <http://www.somersetorganiclink.co.uk/>

For a list of organic producer groups contact the food and farming department of the Soil Association on 0117 914 2400.

## Organic fruit and vegetable wholesalers

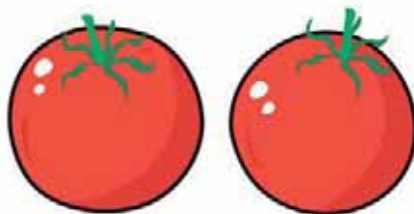
Some fruit and vegetable wholesalers sell a small amount of organic produce but there are also a number of wholesalers across the country that specialise in only supplying organics. These include:

- <http://www.langridgeorganic.com/>
- <http://www.organic-connections.co.uk/>
- <http://www.organicrepublic.co.uk/>
- <http://www.phoenixorganics.ltd.uk/>

## Useful publication

Setting up an organic buying group (Soil Association)  
Available from <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>

The Soil Association are working in partnership with Sustain and can provide further advice about where to buy organic produce - to find out more contact [adaniel@soilassociation.org](mailto:adaniel@soilassociation.org)



# Notes

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# PREMISES

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Where you choose to run your food co-op will affect its popularity and success.

Most food co-ops use venues that are free (or very low cost), as otherwise they have to generate enough money to cover rent on an on-going basis.

Many small buying clubs simply run in someone's house. However, if you plan to be open to the wider public and want to attract as many customers as possible you should try to find a location that's easy to get to and that local people already use or know about. It is also a good idea to run your food co-op when there are other activities running in the same venue on the same day, for example a toddler group or lunch club.

For this reason food co-ops often run in premises managed by other community-based organisations, such as community centres, schools, children's centres, church halls or other community buildings.

However, sometimes it can be quite difficult to persuade groups to let you use their space for free, because their main income may come from renting out their rooms. So you'll need to emphasise the potential benefits. Food co-ops can help to revitalise community facilities by bringing in more people, who may then use other services, for example visiting a community café or signing up to other groups or training courses. For community venues, letting a food co-op use their space can help them meet their own targets, such as promoting healthy eating or engaging volunteers.

## Key things to think about:

- Will you have to pay rent and if so, how much will it be per hour or per week?
- How much space will be available to pack and/or display your produce?
- Will you have anywhere you can store things from one week to the next?
- How many people or groups already use the venue on the same day?
- Is the venue in a good location that's likely to attract passing trade?



# Facilities

The type of outlet you've decided to run also affects what type of premises and facilities you need.

For example bag schemes will need quite a lot of space with several tables to lay out produce and pack it in bags. Whereas a stall can often operate in a smaller space.

If you are running a stall you could decide to have it outside, as you may find it easier to attract customers, especially if you are in busy location with lots of passing trade. But do remember that you may need a **street trading licence** (see p113) unless you are on private land. Also, you will have to cope with the weather, so may need a covered stall or somewhere to go if it rains. Many food co-ops therefore prefer to be indoors where both volunteers and produce are protected from the elements.

If you are forming a food co-op as part of an existing organisation you may already have your own venue, so just make sure you find a room that has all the necessary facilities.

### The main facilities you may require from your food co-op premises are:

- Enough space to lay out all your produce on a stall, or to pack bags or boxes.
- Tables and chairs that you can use.
- Easy access for delivering heavy boxes, preferably on the ground floor.
- Somewhere for suppliers to park or stop temporarily to drop off deliveries.
- Toilets and hand-washing facilities.
- Kitchen facilities to make tea and coffee.
- Somewhere to store equipment, and possibly food, from one week to the next.
- Recycling, composting and other waste disposal facilities.
- Access to an electrical point to plug in scales and/or till.
- Access to a computer, printer and possibly a photocopier.

This guidance mainly relates to food co-ops than run just one stall or bag scheme. However, larger food co-ops with several outlets often have their own premises to store food and make up orders, and also more comprehensive office facilities. Food co-ops with shops may also have broader requirements depending on what they sell.



# Notes

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# PRACTICAL RESOURCES

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In order to run a food co-op there are certain items of equipment and other resources that you may need to get going.

This will depend on what sort of produce you want to sell, what type of outlet you are going to run, and the scale at which you're operating.

Some types of food co-ops in particular **buying clubs** (see p39) and certain **bag schemes** (see p41) are set up in such a way that they do not require any equipment to operate. This is because any produce is either ordered in whole packs or divided up by number and so does not need weighing out.

However, for all other food co-ops you will probably need a set of scales as a basic requirement. Other resources, such as a cash till, are optional if you operate on a very small scale, but if you have a lot of customers then they become more useful in order to make it quicker and easier for you to handle orders. More information about equipment needed is given later in this section.



In order to purchase equipment you will also need a small pot of money (unless you are able to get items donated). It can therefore be a good idea to apply for an external grant to get started. More information about funding is given later in this section.

Alternatively you could charge a membership fee to recoup some of your start up and on-going running costs. However, you need to ensure you have enough members and charge a large enough fee, for example just to cover the cost of a set of scales you would need to have around 100 members paying at least £2.50. Some food co-ops may charge much larger fees for example Park Slope food co-op in New York has a \$25 non-refundable joining fee and members also have to contribute a \$100 investment to the co-op.

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# Equipment

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The equipment and other resources you may need to run your food co-op include the following:

Please note the listing of specific products or services above does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation by Sustain or the Making Local Food Work programme.

- Electronic scales
- Cash box or till
- Paper bags and carrier bags
- Cardboard boxes or plastic crates
- Delivery vehicle
- Shopping baskets
- Price labels or blackboard
- Leaflets and posters
- Tables or stall
- Fridge or chiller
- First aid box
- Calculator
- Knife or scissors - to open produce packaging
- Cleaning materials
- Shelving
- Access to phone and fax
- Access to a sink
- Access to computer and printer
- Access to photocopier

## Tips on buying equipment:

- Try to get three quotes from different suppliers so you can compare prices;
  - The cheapest is not always the best - make sure whatever you order meets your specifications;
  - Try to find a local supplier in your Yellow Pages, you may get better advice and support, and somewhere to go if you need something repaired.;
  - Advertise on Freecycle for resources - this can be a good source of office furniture or old fridges;
  - Any retail or catering supplier may be able to supply most of the items on this list.
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## Electronic scales

It is normally best to get electronic scales rather than manual ones with weights as they need to be stamped and approved by Trading Standards. Also electronic scales can be used to calculate the price of produce as well as the weight. Before ordering try to work what the maximum weight of produce you are likely to supply is as this will affect the price. Most scales are rechargeable and so will be able to run on battery power outside for a certain length of time. Electronic scales are available from the following suppliers they cost from around £150 upwards:

<http://www.inscale-scales.co.uk/>;

<http://www.mksscales.co.uk/>

## Cash till or cash box

Most food co-ops that have electronic cash tills run stalls that have quite a large number of customers. If you are running a stall with fewer customers or a bag or box scheme you may only need a lockable cash box. Electronic cash tills cost from around £50 to £250 and are available from the following suppliers:

<http://www.cashtillsdirect.co.uk/>;

<http://www.buyatill.com>.

## Paper bags and carrier bags

Paper bags are useful for bagging up small items of produce e.g. new potatoes or mushrooms, and also those that may be easily damaged e.g. peaches. If you are running a bag scheme you will also need carrier bags to pack your produce in. However, if you want to avoid having any plastic bags you can simply use old ones or ask your customers to bring their own -

and you could offer a small discount as an incentive. Alternatively you could get fabric bags printed and sell these at your food co-op for anyone who hasn't brought a bag. If you are selling wholefoods by weight you could also ask customers to bring their own containers. Paper bags, carrier bags and other packaging are often available from Cash and Carry stores and also some wholefood wholesalers. Recycled brown Kraft paper bags normally cost from around £5 per 1000 depending on the size.

## Cardboard boxes or plastic crates

If you are planning to run a box scheme you will need sufficient boxes to supply your customers for at least two weeks in a row, based on them returning them every week. Be aware that even with a deposit system, lots of people are very bad at returning their boxes and may also leave them out in the rain which will mean they won't last as long. The main options for boxes are either to get cardboard boxes or plastic crates. It is a good idea to get those that can stack or fold up so they take up less spaces both in your premises and people's homes. The following suppliers sell folding cardboard boxes or plastic crates:

<http://www.avoncrop.co.uk/>;

<http://www.pgpackagingltd.com>.

If you are starting on a small scale you can use the boxes that the produce comes in as a lot of these are quite sturdy and work well. These boxes and crates are also really good for displaying produce on stalls - so keep hold of as many as you can. Alternatively you could use wicker baskets to display produce on stalls:

<http://www.basket-ware.co.uk/>.



# Equipment

## Delivery vehicle

If you are going to purchase a van the best place to go is to your local dealer so that you can view and test drive any vehicles. If you have received a grant you also need to check whether you are able to purchase a second hand vehicle. In order to reduce their impact on the environment some food co-ops have converted old milk floats that run on electricity or alternatively use biodiesel. Other food co-ops prefer to use bicycles and trailers to deliver their produce. Leafcycles in Northampton currently have bicycle trailers for sale. If you are going to have a mobile store you will need to have your vehicle specially converted and you will need to assess the cost of this before going ahead with purchasing a van.

## Shopping baskets

Plastic or wire shopping baskets costs from around £3.50 upwards. There are available from the following suppliers:

<http://www.edenshop.co.uk/>.

You may prefer to get wicker baskets although these will probably cost more

<http://www.basket-ware.co.uk/>.

## Price labels or blackboard

In order to meet Trading Standards requirements you nearly to clearly label prices along with the type of produce and in some cases the variety. You could do this either on individual price labels or on a blackboard. A lot of food co-ops print out price signs on paper or hand write them. However you can get spikes or card holders to make them stand out more. The following suppliers sell price labels or blackboards:

<http://www.poscentre.co.uk/>;

<http://www.nisbets.co.uk/>.

## Leaflets and posters

Sustain has free generic leaflets and banners available which are suitable for food co-ops selling fruit and vegetables. The leaflets have a colourful design on the front but are left blank on the back so you can add your own details. To order copies e-mail [foodcoops@sustainweb.org](mailto:foodcoops@sustainweb.org).



# Funding

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Many food co-ops apply for funding to help cover some of their costs.

A grant could help you get the equipment you need to get started or cover additional costs to enable you to expand. However if you want your food co-op to be sustainable in the long term it is important not to be reliant on external funding, as generally funders want to support new activities and will not keep giving the same projects money year after year. Therefore if you are getting funding for your core running costs it's important that you have plans for how to cover these once the funding has run out, for example through generating income from sales.

In order to apply for any funding you will need to have a constitution and a bank account. If you are just starting up and don't have either of these things yet in some cases you may be able to apply through another organisation that can act as the accountable body e.g. a school or community group that you're working with to set up the food co-op.

**Small grants** e.g. up to £500 or £1000 – these can be very useful for getting funding for the basic equipment to run your food co-op. Often small grants schemes are run by local councils or primary care trusts. There may also be charitable trusts in your area that will support local community projects. Usually the application forms are quite short and not too hard to fill in and in general you won't have to do much monitoring and will probably just have to write a short report after you've spent the money.

**Medium grants** e.g. up to £20,000 – these are available from the Big Lottery e.g. via Awards for All and also other Lottery-funded schemes e.g. Local Food Fund (NB the Local Food Fund is soon to be suspended so you only have until 21 August 2009 to put in a first stage application). Normally these schemes have quite a quick turnaround and so you will hopefully hear if your bid has been successful within about 8 weeks. The application forms and reporting procedures will generally be a bit longer than for small grants but should still not be too onerous, as you will only have to do an end of grant report, rather than reporting on a quarterly basis. Often it can be easier to get funding for capital expenditure i.e. buying items of equipment, vans, etc. than it is to get funding for revenue, e.g. paying salaries, rent.

**Large grants** e.g. over £20,000 up to £300,000 or more - generally if you want to cover the costs of salaries and get funding for several years you will need to apply for a large grant. Usually funders will prefer to give large grants to projects that already have some history of managing funding and so it is a good idea to apply for smaller grants first and apply for more money as you develop and expand. Applying for large grants requires a lot of time and effort, and they can take up to 6 months to complete, especially if you have to write a bid alongside doing your day-to-day work. You will need to put in a very detailed budget, come up with milestones and outcomes and possibly submit a business plan as well.

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# Funding

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## Funding - Useful Information

Possible sources of funding include:

**Awards for All** - <http://www.awardsforall.org.uk/>

**Local Food Fund** - England only - <http://www.localfoodgrants.org/>

**Big Lottery** - <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/>

**Esmee Fairbairn Foundation** - <http://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk/funding/food.html>

**Tudor Trust** - <http://www.tudortrust.org.uk/>

**Sheila Mckechnie Award** -

[http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how\\_we\\_work/damemckechnieaward/](http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/damemckechnieaward/)

**Awards for Food Action Locally** – Wales only -

<http://www.food.gov.uk/wales/nutwales/afal/>

**Community Food and Health** - Scotland only -

<http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/funding/smallgrantsopen.php>

Sources of advice on funding:

**Funding Central** - <http://www.fundingcentral.org.uk/>



# Notes

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# PROCEDURES + PRICING

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The most successful food co-ops have simple procedures that are easy for everyone to understand and implement.

From the start you need to decide your basic operational procedures, such as:

- What day and time are you going to run?
- How many volunteers do you need to help out?
- Do people need to order and pay in advance?
- How much mark up are you going to add?

Food co-ops are not about profit, but they do have to put some mark up on the prices of goods to cover their overheads, such as the cost of produce, packaging, volunteer expenses, etc. This mark up will vary from one food co-op to another as overheads differ. It is important that you decide on your pricing structure by working out your costs first, rather than just trying to sell food cheaper than other outlets.

It is also very important to have good admin and finance systems for handling money, and keeping records of all your customers and sales.

You also need decide how you are going to deal with all the other aspects involved in running your food co-op, including:

- ordering the produce,
- storing food,
- maintaining quality
- reducing waste.



# Admin

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Food co-ops need to have good administrative systems to keep records of orders, sales and also contact details for members and customers.

There are a variety of systems that you could use including:

- paper-based systems
- Excel spreadsheets
- Access databases or
- web-based databases.

## Paper-based systems

This involves using a note book or record sheets to write down orders, amounts sold, and customer details. You can buy pre-printed cash books from many stationers. But you may need to have to have several different books to record different information.

The advantage with a paper-based system is that it's simple and you don't need access to a computer or any technical knowledge. However, you need to make sure that volunteers always have the relevant books, as they have to be taken to every food co-op session. Also it is more difficult to create a back up copy, apart from with carbon paper or making photocopies - so if your books were ever mislaid then you could lose a lot of valuable data.

The other disadvantage is that as everything has to be handwritten it could

also take a lot of time to fill in, especially if there are a lot of members. It may also be more open to error due to misreading the information or adding up wrong.

## Excel spreadsheets

You can use Microsoft Excel or a similar spreadsheet programme to type your information into a table on the computer. Excel is designed to record both contact details and financial information and can be used to do various calculations, including working out your prices or calculating your overall expenditure.

The advantages with using a computer-based spreadsheet are that the data is in a standardised format and it can be e-mailed to different people involved in the food co-op. It is also possible to cut and paste information from other spreadsheets, for example catalogues from wholefood suppliers.

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The main disadvantage is that you need to have a copy of the software, as well as IT equipment and so this is another on-going cost you will need take into account when doing your budget. Anyone responsible for updating the records will need to have IT skills, although spreadsheets are relatively easy to use.

## Access databases

Access databases are quite sophisticated but are also simple to use for entering information. You may need a dedicated admin person who is responsible for entering all the orders - but it is also important that everyone else at the food co-op understands how to use it in case of sickness or absence.

The main advantage of using a database is once you have set it up and entered all the products and customer details it can speed up order compilation and reduces errors. You can also produce reports so you can see easily whether your sales have increased. An Access database works well if you have regular customers and they order similar items every time e.g. if you run a bag or box scheme or a wholefood co-op.

The main disadvantage is that Access databases do not handle finances apart from putting in total prices of goods per customer. So you will still need other software to do your accounts, such as Excel or Sage. Also they can be quite complicated to set up if you are not fully trained in how to use Access.

## Web-based databases

Having a web-based database allows your customers to place their orders and pay on-line. Most web-based systems will manage all finances as well as customer details and orders and also have other functions such as enabling you to print off invoices. This sort of system is good if you have large numbers of customers and also if you have several different outlets or multiple drop offs.

The main advantage is that all your orders will be handled by one system rather than lots of different spreadsheets and databases. Also if designed well they are generally very user friendly and easy to use.

The main disadvantage is that anyone using the system needs to have Internet access. However in some cases if a lot of your customers don't have computers then you may be able to identify someone who could enter orders on their behalf e.g. a school receptionist entering orders on behalf of parents. Also there is always a cost whenever you pay on-line, as payment systems like Paypal charge a fee per order and a percentage of the cost. Therefore paying on-line is really only cost effective if you are spending quite a lot. However, it is also possible for people to order on-line but still pay by cash, cheque or standing order. A web-based system may also cost quite a lot to develop so you may need to secure funding for this and there will be an on-going web hosting cost.

Sustain is currently working with various food projects to trial IT systems in particular web-based databases to work out if they offer a cost effective solution and help to reduce time spent on admin. To find out



# Finance

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Any community project that is handling money on a regular basis needs to keep good records of its income and expenditure.

If you are thinking of applying for funding it's also essential that you have good financial records as any funders will ask to see your most recent accounts.

Dealing with finances for food co-ops is often more difficult than for other small community projects because as part of their normal activity they may:

- deal with a large amount of cash income; i.e. notes and coins;
- find it hard to predict their income and expenditure due to fluctuating sales;
- have several different volunteers handling money at different locations.

It is therefore very important to have a set of simple financial procedures that everyone understands and can follow easily in order to avoid problems. It is also good to have standardised paperwork to record income and expenditure whenever your food co-op is running, for example by having a cashing up sheet for volunteers to fill in.

If you are setting up a buying club that is going to operate informally, e.g. as a group of friends, then you may not want to open a bank account. The best way to avoid this is to get everyone to pay by cheque in advance direct to the supplier. If you have a bag scheme running where everyone orders and pays in advance you can also arrange to pay direct to your supplier.

Certain types of food co-op, such as box schemes in which customers have a regular order on a monthly basis, can avoid having to handle cash by getting everyone to pay set up standing orders or pay by cheque. However, this is not really practical when running a stall or market and it is likely that most of the money you take will be cash.



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## Cash handling procedures:

- Always ensure you have a float for the same amount, that is checked by two people, and is accurate both at the start and the end of the food co-op.
- Ask your volunteers to count up the money taken at the end of the food co-op and record this on a sheet. This should then be double-checked.
- Any food used throughout the day for tastings or promotions should also be recorded, as well as any wastage e.g. bad items that could not be sold.
- When counting cash you need a secure space with a table on which to count and bag up the money.
- Banks require coins bagged up with the types of coins and the amounts as specified on their plastic coin bags.
- Pay your takings into the bank as soon as possible so that they appear both in your financial records and on your bank statement on the same date.
- If you need to keep any cash from one day to the next, make sure you have somewhere secure to store it, such as a lockable cash box or safe.
- Never make payments directly from cash received. Ideally, no cash payments should ever be made other than through petty cash.
- When paying suppliers try to use cheques where possible so that you have a clear record on your bank statement.
- If you do have to pay cash e.g. when buying from producers at a farmers' market, always get a receipt.
- All money paid out, including volunteer expenses, should have a receipt and you should record the goods purchased, the provider and the cost.

## Finance - Useful Information

### Documents

Cashing up sheets (**Tools p140**)

### Websites

**CASH on-line** -

<http://www.cash-online.org.uk/c/1/>

**Finance Hub** -

[http://www.financehub.org.uk/manage\\_money.aspa](http://www.financehub.org.uk/manage_money.aspa)



# Ordering

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## Ordering direct from a wholesale supplier or local farmer is very different from buying food in a shop.

If you are buying in bulk you will need to buy whole boxes or sacks of produce, in amounts set by the supplier. For example, potatoes usually come in 25kg sacks, and apples in 13kg crates. But for some types of produce these sizes can change from one week to the next, so cucumbers may be in a box of 12 one week and a box of 10 the next, which can make it hard to plan. Most suppliers will not want to supply less than a box / sack of anything and if they do have to split a box they will usually charge you more. It will always be cheaper to buy a whole box or sack of each item, so your planning needs to take this into account.

With wholefoods and packaged goods, items will also often come in packs of 10 or 12 (sometimes called a "case"). If you are buying bulk items then you may have slightly more choice. For example, you may be able to choose between 5kg or 10kg. Many suppliers prefer not to split cases but some will do this on some products.

To guarantee convenient delivery, many suppliers will specify a certain day and time that you need to order. Farmers in particular may be hard to get hold of, so you may need to agree a time slot during the week when you can place your order. It is often easier to order by fax or email, so everything is written down and mistakes are less likely to occur. However, some suppliers will only take orders over the phone.

It is very important to get your ordering right, or you could end up with a lot of produce that goes to waste. One way to make ordering easier is to run a pre-order system, asking your customers to place their orders in advance, for example by having a bag or box scheme or wholefood buying club. However, having a pre-order system is not really possible if you run a stall, shop or market.



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## Ordering tips

### Stalls

- To help you order the correct amounts for a weekly stall it is a good idea to try to keep a record of items sold each week, for example by writing down customer orders or weighing trays of produce before and after the food co-op. This will give you an indication of the pattern of people's purchases and preferences. However, inevitably your sales will vary from one week to the next due to factors such as the weather.
- School holidays or other events may also affect your sales, so during these periods you may need to order far less than normal.
- It is often better to under-order rather than over-order – so that you will sell out rather than have waste.
- Another good tip, especially if you only have a small number of customers, is not to order too many similar types of produce. For example, it is unlikely that people will buy several different types of cabbage. So if you have just a few customers, you could sell one sort of cabbage each week, rather than red, white and Savoy cabbages, and change the variety from week to week.
- That being said, it's also important that you provide customers with enough choice and variety. This is also important when running a bag or box scheme where you are deciding the contents.

### Veg box schemes

- Try to ensure there is a variety of different types of vegetables e.g. root vegetables, leafy greens, squashes, salads, and lots of different colours.
- Most veg box schemes try to include between 8 and 10 different varieties of vegetables in a large box.
- Decide your position on potatoes! Many boxes always include potatoes, and other standards like onions and carrots, but all the other items should vary from one week to the next. A few veg box schemes specifically offer a "no potatoes" option.
- Always try to include at least one bulky item such as cauliflower or cabbage every week to fill up the box. But try not to put the same item in several weeks in a row.
- Try to balance the amount of affordable varieties (such as cabbage, carrots, potatoes) with more expensive items such as runner beans or soft fruits.
- Some items are sold per item or per bunch and some will need to be weighed, so if possible try to offer a majority of items that do not need weighing to save time when packing.
- Some people will not like more unusual items such as chard or celeriac, and may not know what to do with them. It's a good idea to not put them in every week, and when you do, include a recipe or some information about how to cook them.



# Ordering

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## Ordering tips

### wholefood buying clubs

- All the wholefood wholesalers offer a huge range of products including nuts, pulses, dried fruit, flour, and lots of goods in tins and jars, as well as non-food items.
- They are all supplied in bulk but the pack sizes will vary e.g. you may be able to get rice in 5kg bags or in 10 x 500g bags.
- You will save most money by buying things in large packs, and also usually make bigger savings buying organic products.
- But you need to be careful not to buy foods that will go off before you've got through them.
- Pulses and grains will last a long time e.g. 12 months or more, but dried fruit and nuts will deteriorate in quality sooner than this, especially if not kept in ideal conditions.
- If you are setting up a small buying group it is probably best to start with a few main products lines rather than asking everyone to go through the whole catalogue, which can be a bit overwhelming.
- You could ask members to list the 10 items they eat most often and from that make up a list of 20 items to include on an order form.
- People can then also order extra items from the catalogue if they buy a whole pack and want something specific.
- You also need to decide if you are going to split cases e.g. if someone only wants one jar of jam, and they come in packs of 12 what will you do with the other 11? Normally buying clubs arrange this amongst themselves but would need to buy at least half a case.





# Storage

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Fruit and vegetables and other fresh produce are very perishable and will go off quite quickly, especially in warm temperatures.

If you are running several outlets and need to store produce from one day to the next you will need to ensure you have proper storage. Wholefoods such as cereals and pulses have much longer shelf lives and will last more than 12 months in optimum storage conditions. However, you still need to store them properly to prevent them deteriorating.

The following tips will help you to keep your produce in good condition:

- All food should be stored in a clean dry place, off the floor and out of direct sunlight.
  - Most produce should be stored on shelving that is easy to clean, preferably without nooks and crannies to harbour dirt or pests.
  - Most foods are better kept cool, from about 8°C to 15°C . Warmer conditions will reduce the shelf life.
  - All foods should be properly rotated so that older stock is used first.
  - Check your stock regularly - daily for fruit and vegetables, and weekly for wholefoods.
  - Keeping some fruit and vegetables in a fridge or cold store will make them last longer. Chilled storage is essential if you are supplying meat, dairy products or fish.
  - If you only have limited space in a fridge it is good to use this for items likely go off quickest, or those that are most expensive such as soft fruits, salads and leafy green vegetables. Some items should not be stored in the fridge, for example bananas and potatoes.
  - Most fruit and vegetables should not be kept for more than 3 or 4 days – the main types of produce that can be stored for longer are apples, potatoes, onions, pumpkins, and unwashed root vegetables (washed carrots will go off much quicker).
  - Items that are not ripe when they are delivered, such as pears and tomatoes, do not need to be stored in the fridge straight away but once they start to ripen they should be kept cool.
  - Once a box, sack or packet of any dried goods has been opened, the contents should be kept in a sealed container with a tight-fitting lid. Make sure you keep the batch details and the 'best before' date – it can be cut off the packaging and taped to the container.
  - Clean your storage area regularly and sweep up all food spills, wipe shelving and clean up dusty corners.
  - The main problems that may occur with dried goods are mould, sugaring on dried fruit, fermentation or infestation by pests (such as beetles, caterpillars or rodents). If you find an infestation, remove the stock from your building as soon as possible and then seek specialist advice, such as from your local authority environmental health officer.
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# Quality control

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Quality control is very important in any food business, as if customers receive damaged or rotten food they may not order again.

You need to ensure that any items you have on sale are fresh and good quality, and not over-ripe. However, this does not mean that everything you sell has to be physically perfect like in supermarkets. Fruit and vegetables with marks or blemishes are still good to eat - you may also be able to get Class II produce at a slightly cheaper price.

As well as proper storage the following procedures will help you ensure good quality control:

- Always check the quantity, quality and condition of produce when it is delivered.
- If your supplier delivers any whole boxes of poor quality or damaged produce, return the box and ask for them to be taken off the invoice.
- Remove any bruised, mouldy or over-ripe items before putting produce out on display.
- Always open up any plastic packaging straight away, to allow the air to circulate.
- Fruit and vegetables should be kept cool and away from sunlight for as long as possible, so you may need some sort of shade or awning if you have an outdoor stall.
- Some fruit and vegetables damage easily and should be handled with care. When packing bags or boxes, or stacking crates of produce, make sure any more fragile items such as tomatoes or plums are put on the top.
- During storage, check produce for signs of spoilage every day and remove any bad items. See the Waste section for suggestions about what to do with these items.
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers understand the importance of these procedures – include tips on handling fresh produce in your induction.



# Waste

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## Different types of food co-op generate different amounts of waste.

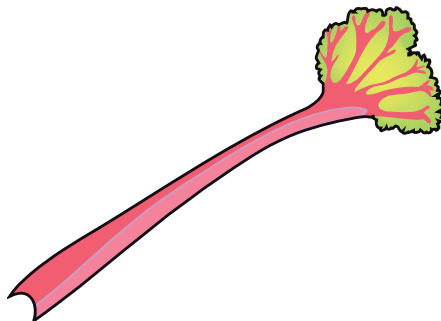
Bag and box schemes generally have very little waste because everything is ordered in advance. In comparison, if you run a stall or mobile shop you won't always be able to predict how much will sell. This is why some food co-ops run several stalls during the week – leftover produce from a stall on one day can then be sold the next day.

Good ordering systems and proper storage will help you to reduce the amount of waste you generate. However, a small amount of waste is inevitable in any food co-op, so it's worth coming up with ideas to make the best use of any leftovers.

For example, you could give leftover food to volunteers or donate it to a community-run cookery group, homeless shelter or youth club. You might even want to invest in a juicer, and use any fruit and vegetables that are likely to go off to make juice or smoothies to sell at your co-op.

Failing all else, you can compost leftover fruit and vegetables or use them as animal feed rather than just putting them in the bin. A local allotment scheme or community garden may be pleased to receive regular leftovers to build their compost heap.

The Love Food Hate Waste campaign - <http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/> - can give you other tips and hints.



# Notes

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# PROMOTION

It's very important to promote your food co-op both when you first set it up and on an on-going basis.

When you start you'll need to attract customers and volunteers and let everyone in the area know what you are doing. However, you'll also need to keep on promoting it. For a variety of reasons, you'll probably lose customers along the way, so to make your food co-op viable you will always need to attract new customers, or try to win back customers who have drifted away.

There are lots of different ways you can promote your food co-op. However, it doesn't matter how much promotion you do - if your food co-op has not been set up in the right way to appeal to your target customers then you won't attract enough people. So you need to think about how you will market your food co-op right from the start. This may also affect your decisions about how you run your food co-op.

Another way you can help promote your food co-op is through educational activities. Buying food through a food co-op is a different way of shopping and so for many people the benefits may not be obvious at first, so it is a good idea to try inform people about the ethos of food co-ops and what's so good about shopping there. Many people may not know how to prepare or cook all the food you sell, particularly if you supply a lot of local and seasonal produce. So offering cookery demonstrations, seasonal recipes or tasters of unusual produce may help encourage customers to buy a wider range of produce.

If you are planning to apply for a grant, providing educational activities alongside running a food co-op may make your project eligible for a wider range of funding opportunities.



# Marketing methods

Just like any business food co-ops need to make sure they are marketing:

- the right product
- to the right person
- at the right price
- in the right place
- and at the right time.

**Product, Price, Place** and **Promotion** are known as the “4 Ps” of marketing. The term ‘marketing mix’ means the combination of these factors that you need to consider when marketing your food co-op effectively to a particular customer group.

When you start to plan your marketing you first need to identify your target customers, i.e. the sort of people you think will shop at the food co-op.

For example, do you think most of your customers will be older people or families with young children? Are they likely to be of a particular ethnic background? Are they likely to be people living on low incomes or with a bit of cash to spare? You may not have a particular target group in mind, but it’s useful to remember that a food co-op will find it hard to appeal to everyone at the same time. Unlike a large supermarket, you won’t be able to supply everything that different people like to eat. You might choose to stick to just a narrow range of produce. Or, if you want to appeal to a wide range of different people, you may need to operate in slightly different ways at different locations.

## Product

The type of food products you choose to sell will affect who you appeal to. Some examples of questions you might like to think about are as follows:

- Are you going to sell fruit and vegetables, wholefoods, or other products such as free-range eggs?
- Are you going to sell organic food, locally grown food, or Fairtrade products, or are you not going to make a feature of such issues?

- Are you going to sell a wide range of exotic fruit and vegetables?
- Are you going to sell your products by weight so customers can buy as much as they want, or are they going to be pre-packed in bags or boxes?

The most important factor, whatever you sell, is to ensure that your products are fresh and of high quality. If the food you sell is damaged, out-of-date or poor quality, you will lose customers. See **Produce section** (see p37).



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## Price

A product is only worth what a customer is prepared to pay for it. You don't necessarily have to sell the cheapest food in the area, but the price does need to be competitive. In most cases food co-ops are set up to try to provide food at a more affordable price than other local outlets, so many set their prices by making sure they are lower than the local supermarket. However, it is also very important to make sure you are covering all your costs. Work out your prices carefully by calculating your costs first (for example rent, bags, petrol, and buying food). Some food co-ops add little or no mark-up to the cost price to make their products as cheap as possible.

## Place

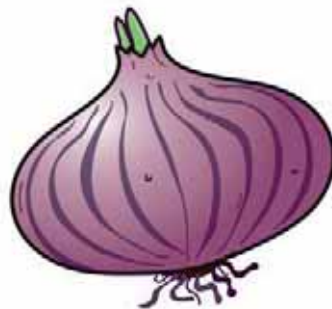
To reach as many customers as possible the place or premises where you sell your goods must be appropriate and convenient for your target group. For example if you are trying to appeal to older people it may be easier to deliver bags or run a stall at a sheltered housing scheme. Whereas if you are trying to target families it may be more convenient to have a stall or drop-off point at a school or children's centre (see the **Premises section** on **p61**) for more information).

## Promotion

You can promote your food co-op in lots of different ways. You could produce leaflets and posters, send out press releases, set up a website, have a big launch event, or run a special introductory offer. It is a good idea to use a combination of promotional methods to reach as many people as possible, but do bear in mind that promotion can be time-consuming and costly. Before you go ahead and print thousands of leaflets, think about what will be the most effective use of your time and money. If you only have very limited money, try to think of ways to get free publicity, for example:

- Write a short news item or feature and send it to the editor of the local newspaper or community newsletter. If you include an attractive photo, it is more likely to be used.
- Ask local organisations to include news of your food co-op on their websites.
- Prepare a promotional email and ask others to send it to their friends or colleagues to spread the word.

There is more information in this section about other promotional ideas.



# Marketing methods

## Publicity materials

**Most food co-ops produce their own publicity materials, such as leaflets and posters. It's important to include as much information as you can on any leaflet about how your food co-op runs.**

For example if your food co-op supplies pre-filled bags, it is good to say how much these cost, if they have to be pre-ordered, how often they are available (for example weekly or monthly), and the likely bag contents (for example how many different varieties of fruit and veg they contain). You should also say when and where your food co-op runs and a contact phone number or email if possible. You could also include a brief description about your food co-op, why it was set up and anything you'd like to say about the benefits of shopping there.

Simple black and white leaflets and posters using mainly text can be designed quite easily on a home computer, and reproduced relatively cheaply on a photocopier.

Photographs may not reproduce well in black and white or on a photocopier, but if anyone in your food co-op is good at art, simple line drawings can look good in black and white. Fruit and veg images are also available to download from our website.

Leaflets and posters in colour are a lot more expensive to print but can be very attractive and eye-catching. If you have enough money you may want to get your own materials designed professionally. However, printing leaflets is usually far more cost effective when you are having at least 5,000 leaflets done, which may be far too many for your food co-op.

It is a good idea to ask new customers where they heard about the food co-op, or to offer a discount for new customers who bring a leaflet with them to the co-op. Otherwise, it is hard to tell how effective your leaflets and posters have been, and whether your money was well spent. Research for this toolkit showed some promotional methods are better than others. A number of food co-ops in Somerset, for example, reported that a handful of new customers came along after seeing a poster displayed. However, many food co-ops say that door-to-door or general leafleting is not very effective. So you may want to use leaflets at targeted locations instead. For example, if you run a food co-op at a school or housing association, you could ask them to give leaflets out to every parent or resident. Posters should be also placed in relevant locations where your target audience will see them.

Posters and leaflets can also help create an identity for your project, so it is a good idea to choose a style for your publicity materials that people will come to recognise.





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## Tips

- When preparing leaflets and posters, if any details such as opening times or phone numbers are likely to change it is best to only print a small number of leaflets at a time, as and when you need them.
- If you would like to print in colour, you could consider getting some posters printed with a colourful border, with blank space in the middle for you to add black-and-white text, using a photocopier, for different promotions and events over the year.
- Create additional publicity by running a competition for local schoolchildren to design your promotional materials. In Somerset, Wellington Food Co-op ran a competition at the local school to design a logo to use on their printed publicity. This involved local people and created a distinctive image for their project.

## Useful documents

**Marketing checklist (Tools p141)**

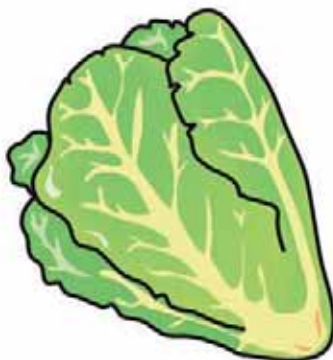
**Leaflet template (Tools p142)** - also available to download in colour from <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>

**Free** publicity materials for fruit and veg co-ops.

Sustain has free leaflets for food co-ops that have a full colour design on the front but are left blank on the back so you can add your own details.

We also have large banners. To order copies e-mail:

**foodcoops@sustainweb.org**



# Marketing methods

## Media

**You can generate free publicity for your food co-op by submitting news, stories and event information to newspapers, magazines, community newsletters, or local radio.**

Many local newspapers or radio stations are keen to promote “good news” about local projects involving local people.

Try to develop a friendly working relationship with someone working at your local newspaper and find a strong angle or “hook” to increase the likelihood of your story being published.

When we undertook research for this toolkit, about half of the food co-ops we spoke to in Somerset had had press coverage and got occasional new members from this method.

Opportunities used by food co-ops to generate free publicity include:

- An event, for example a food competition or cookery demonstration
- Involvement of a local school, for example with a competition to design the logo or a poster for a food co-op
- Milestones, such as the project’s launch or reaching the five-year mark
- Project changes, for example the food co-op has started to accept healthy start vouchers to help low-income families buy good food
- A dignitary’s visit, for example a visit from an MP or local councillor.

## Events

**Many food co-ops organise high profile launch events and also promote themselves at other local community events on an on-going basis.**

Before committing to a big launch event, you need to think about how many people you want to attract and how much money you have. If starting big is part of your plan, then go ahead. But if you are happy to start small, perhaps with just a few friends or one local school, then a less ambitious event may be more your style.

Rather than simply running a stall with leaflets or putting up a display board you may also want to do something more interactive, such as a smoothie-making demonstration, tasting session or recipe swap (see **Educational activities p94**) as this will attract more people to come and find out about what you’re doing.

Attending events can be time-consuming in preparation, attending and clearing up afterwards, and you probably need at least two people there throughout the day. So before attending an event you need to think about the target customers for your food co-op and work out whether the event is likely to attract these types of people. You may have the most success at community events or fun days in your local area such as, school fairs, food festivals, or sustainability and environment events.

You will need publicity materials such as leaflets to give out with your food co-op’s details, and some way to collect contact details of people interested in the food co-op so that you can contact potential customers afterwards.



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## Word of mouth

**The best publicity you will ever get is if people recommend your food co-op to their friends and colleagues. There is nothing to beat a personal recommendation, because people value the opinions of those that they know and trust.**

Most food co-ops say that 'word of mouth' is their most effective way of attracting new members, and if your food co-op is well run and popular, then people will recommend you to their friends anyway, with little encouragement.

Information about your food co-op could be passed on in conversations, or via an email, online message board or website. Some ideas for encouraging personal recommendations are as follows:

- Identify local 'champions' who can tell people about your food co-op in formal and informal settings.
- Encourage customers to tell their friends by offering them incentives such as a free bag of food for each new customer they bring along.
- Provide the text for emails and website announcements, to make it easy for people to spread the word.

You can also promote your food co-op by networking with other agencies, groups and individuals who are interested in similar issues. For example:

- Some primary care trusts have health trainers, whose job it is to inform local people about how to live more healthily. So they may be keen to find out about local food co-ops and can refer people to you that they believe could benefit by taking part.
- Many children's centres or schools see food co-ops as a great way to promote healthy eating, and so may be happy to promote your food co-op to parents or even help set one up.
- Some food co-ops can get support through local environment groups or groups interested in sustainability, such as Transition Town Initiatives

Many of these community organisations may also produce their own newsletters or have a website where they can feature free adverts or listings that could include information about your food co-op.



# Marketing methods

## Special offers and discounts

**Everyone loves a bargain - so if you are going to compete with other outlets you may need to attract people by offering reduced prices on an occasional basis.**

This can be quite hard for food co-ops as generally the produce is very cheap anyway but it may be beneficial in the long term if it helps you get more customers. You could have an introductory offer to attract new customers, for example by giving out vouchers offering 20% off the first order.

Special offers can also help you maintain customer loyalty and encourage regular customers to spend a bit more. For example, you could offer a free item if people spend over £5. Such discounting can also be a good way to benefit your customers whilst also getting rid of your excess stock, if you have over-ordered by mistake.

Another way to use special offers is to lure back customers who have stopped ordering. People sometimes stop shopping at a food co-op if they simply get out of the habit, perhaps after they have been away on holiday. If you have their details on record, you send them a 'welcome back' offer such as a discount voucher to encourage them to start shopping at your food co-op again.

If you are considering doing a special offer at your food co-op you will need to work out how you will cover the cost of this promotion. Retailers generally offer discounts only on goods that they have to sell quickly or that they acquired for free. Rather than offering discounts on produce you might be able to get 'freebies', such as recipe books or cooking equipment that you can then give away to attract customers.



# Education

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Educational work is often an important part of the activities of food co-ops.

For example around 8 out of 10 food co-ops we surveyed as part of the Making Local Food Work programme said they ran some educational activities.

Nutrition and sustainable food are confusing issues for many people but food co-ops and other community food projects offer a great opportunity to offer healthy eating advice and promote simple messages to their customers, volunteers and the wider community. They can also help point people to other services such as healthy eating programmes or food growing schemes. Such activities could be run with support or funding from the local primary care trust that may also be able to offer staff time from health promotion workers or nutritionists to help run events or training. Alternatively you could work in partnership with other local organisations such as Sure Start or children's centres that want to promote their services to particular target groups. When planning educational activities, it might be a good idea to map local organisations who could support your activities, as this could also be used to create a useful directory for your customers (this can be done during your needs assessment).

Food co-ops often provide information or run activities on subjects such as:

- Healthy eating
- How to prepare, cook and store different foods
- Seasonal and local produce
- Reducing food and packaging waste
- Food miles
- Organic food

Education work can be quite formal, for example by having an organised talk, training sessions, cookery courses or demonstrations or educational visits to other projects. Or it may be informal, for example by offering cooking tips when people are shopping at the food co-op or by simply giving out educational leaflets, newsletters or recipe cards.

It may be possible to run some activities at the same time or alongside the food co-op depending on the space and facilities you have available. However it may be more convenient to run a session at a separate time and to publicise it to the community. You could also run educational activities at other community events such as church, school or village fairs which can also help promote the food co-op and hopefully attract new customers. If your money and time are limited it may be useful to target particular groups of customers or to focus on training your volunteers, who once they understand the key messages, will be able to share their knowledge with others.

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# Education

## Key things to think about:

- You need to pitch any educational work at the right level so it's useful without being patronising or too complex.
- Educational materials can be made available but it is important not to swamp your customers with too much information too often.
- Find out what resources are already available (especially those that are free) don't waste time and effort reinventing the wheel.
- Check the materials used are up to date, attractive and user friendly.
- Assess the skills of staff and volunteers who will run the education activities. Are they the right people to do it? Do they need extra support or training?
- Incorporate educational messages in other food co-op publications, for example a newsletter, posters or recipe cards.

## Activities

### Tasting sessions

Offering tasters of food co-op produce is a good way to involve people directly with food and is a great way to start a conversation. This could include chopping up a few of the more unusual fruit and vegetables whenever the food co-ops is running so people can 'try before they buy'. This will hopefully encourage customers to buy a wide range of foods. Alternatively you could try having a one-off event to provide a wider range of both fresh produce and cooked dishes.

### Cookery demos and courses

Showing people how to prepare and cook produce is a popular way of sharing skills and knowledge and you'll probably engage more people if they can actually take part in the food activities. If you don't feel confident doing this and don't have the kitchen equipment and facilities you need, you may be able to invite in a community chef to run a demonstration. You could also focus on foods that are simpler to prepare and don't need cooking, for example different salads or fruit kebabs and smoothies.



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## Case studies - Somerset food co-ops

A community food worker, in Watchet in Somerset, organised a tasting session at the local children's centre, where a wide variety of bite-size fruit and vegetables were laid out attractively to encourage healthy snacking. This led to the centre ordering produce regularly through the co-op and the children being more open to trying new types of food.

Prior to starting up co-ops in the Mendip of Somerset, potential customers were asked if they could taste the difference between local, organic produce compared with 'value' branded produce from a local convenience store. Many people had a preference, but not always for the obvious choice. One participant described a carrot as being too 'carrotty'! It was a great process for getting talking to people about food, where they shop and what they value when it comes to food.

A community co-op worker in Highbridge in Somerset ran a short cooking course for young mums. Each week a healthy meal was prepared and adaptations were suggested to make the food suitable for babies. The sessions concluded with everyone sitting round the table, eating the food and discussing the costs and nutritional value. Participants told the organiser that they were keen to try out the recipes at home.

## Resources

**There are lots of resources and educational materials available that you could give out to your customers to promote healthy eating and sustainable food such as recipe cards, leaflets, posters and newsletters.**

Many of these materials can be ordered for free either from your local primary care trust or from national organisations - see the Links section.

### Linking with national campaigns

A useful way to promote your work is to tie your activities to national food celebrations, such as Fruity Friday or Apple Day. This can help you to get more publicity.

Many national campaigns also provide free information packs with guidance about what activities you could do and other tools, such as a sample press release. Sustain's food calendar lists many of these celebrations and events, month by month.



# Education

## Resources

### Games

As part of training sessions and educational activities you could also run some interactive games or a quiz. For example you can use pieces of fruit, tins, packets and cartons to ask people to guess five items they think can count towards the recommended consumption of 'at least 5 portions of fruit and veg per day'. You can then discuss the answers or place them on a big picture of the 'Eatwell plate' picture showing healthy eating guidance (previously known as the 'Balance of Good Health' plate).

Large floor mats are now available showing the Eatwell plate that can be used for group sessions. It may be possible to borrow materials like these from your local Health Promotion Library if there is one at your primary care trust. Otherwise they can be ordered from companies like the Comic Company:

**<http://www.comiccompany.co.uk/>**.

Sustain has also developed a new Seasonal Food Calendar floor mat as part of the Good Food Training for London project. If you are interested in finding out more about this please contact Pamela Brunton:  
**[pamela@sustainweb.org](mailto:pamela@sustainweb.org)**.

## Education - Useful Information

**5 a day** - <http://www.5aday.nhs.uk/>

**British Heart Foundation** - <http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications.aspx>

**Comic Company** - <http://www.comiccompany.co.uk/>

**Eatwell** - <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/>

**Food Standards Agency** -

<http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/publications/nutritionpublications/>

**Fruity Friday** - <http://www.fruityfriday.co.uk/>

**Think Vegetables** - <http://www.thinkvegetables.co.uk/>

**World Cancer Research Fund** -

[http://www.wcrf-uk.org/preventing\\_cancer/health\\_professionals/resources.php](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/preventing_cancer/health_professionals/resources.php)





# Notes





# POLICIES + PRINCIPLES

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The policies and principles of your food co-op will define its ethos, how it is run and who is responsible for managing its activities, otherwise known as its 'governance'.

Governance is defined formally as "the systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, supervision and accountability of an organisation".

In practice, this boils down to ensuring that you are organising your food co-op appropriately. This is important to ensure that risks to the group and the members are minimised and that your food co-op is as accountable and open as possible.



Any group that defines itself as a co-operative will sign up to the **co-operative principles** (**Tools p143**) defined by the International Co-operative Alliance. In a consumer co-operative the members of the food co-op, and people responsible for running it, are also its customers.

However, a lot of community food outlets, known as food co-ops, particularly ones set up in recent years, are not necessarily run as consumer co-operatives and may have a variety of different structures or ways of working. Some people setting up food co-ops have opted not to have members, committees or a constitution, let alone a more formal legal structure. The main reasons for this are that:

- Some food co-ops are run as part of existing organisations e.g. schools, or community groups and so are an activity of the main organisation, rather than a separate body.
- Some food co-ops are just run by a group of friends as an informal buying club, so they don't feel the need to have a formal agreement.
- Some people just want to shop at a food co-op and do not necessarily want to become a member of an organisation.
- Some volunteers are happy to help out on a stall for a couple of hours a week but do not want to take on the responsibility of helping to run a group.
- Some food co-ops want to avoid having any additional paperwork, meetings, etc.



# POLICIES + PRINCIPLES

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It is worth noting, however, that if a food co-op does not have a committee or any governing documents, then difficulties may occur. This is often because the roles and responsibilities of volunteers and those running the food co-op are not clearly defined, and this can lead to confusion, disagreements and problems with keeping people involved. For existing organisations running food co-ops it is also important to clarify other areas, such as who is responsible for managing volunteers and covering insurance.

In some cases a local organisation can help start a food co-op by working with local people, but then hand over responsibility to the community to carry on running it. If such a food co-op does not have any kind of documentation stating how it is run and how decisions are made, the co-op may find it much harder to survive in the long term. Also, once a community has become used to having external support and someone to help them deal with problems, they may find it harder to sort out such issues themselves.

As well as determining the overall policies and principles by which your food co-op will run you may also wish to have some written policies clarifying these commitments.

This may not be necessary if you are a small informal group but it is good practice if you have any paid staff or a number of volunteers involved. Many funders or partner organisations that you work with may also require you to have certain policies in place. These may include:

- Equal opportunities policy
- Health and safety policy
- Environmental policy
- Child protection policy

## Useful document

**Co-operative principles (Tools p143)**



# Membership

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Many food co-ops require everyone who wants to buy food there to become a member and pay a nominal fee to join before they can start shopping.

Other food co-ops allow non-members to shop as well, but often give a discount to members to encourage people to join.

Food co-ops may also decide that everyone who shops there has to volunteer for a certain number of hours a month. However, many food co-ops do not have a membership system for their customers and are open to anyone to shop there.

Having a formal membership system is a good way to keep a record of all your customers and also to gather information about where they live or other details, in case you need to provide this data to funders. Also if people stop shopping at the food co-op you can contact them to find out why. Customers will also feel more involved in the running of the food co-op if they have signed up as members.

If your food co-op is going to have members then you need to decide who will be eligible to join. Usually this will be anyone living or working in the area served by the food co-op. You also need to decide whether you will charge a fee, what this will be and whether anyone will be entitled to free membership. Usually most food co-ops have a very small fee, for example between £1 and £5. However, if you are planning to use income from members to help cover some of your start up or running costs you need to make sure you charge enough money.

The membership fee can be reviewed annually. Some food co-ops decide to issue life membership but if you have annual memberships these are usually renewable after the AGM. It is also a good idea to issue a membership card so that customers can bring this along when they shop at the food co-op. You could also change the colour of your membership cards every year so that current ones are instantly recognisable.

If there are enough volunteers or staff, you could appoint a membership officer who will be responsible for keeping membership lists up to date, issuing numbers and keeping membership money separate.

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# Constitution

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Ideally, a food co-op should have a governing document or constitution, giving details of why the organisation exists, what it is there to do, how it is going to do it and how it is organised.

This prevents misunderstandings among the membership and allows new members to understand what it is they are joining. A governing document can be changed by the membership.

A typical governing document will set out clearly:

- The name of the food co-op
- What the food co-op is going to do (also known as the “Objects”)
- Who can become a member of the food co-op
- How members can join or leave
- How and when general meetings are called
- How many members have to be present in order for decisions to be legitimate (also known as being “quorate” at general meetings)
- Who is allowed to vote at general meetings
- Election of a committee (if the food co-op has one)
- Who can be a member of the food co-op committee
- What happens to any profit made by the group (also known as “application of surplus”)
- How the governing document can be changed
- How and what happens when the food co-op is dissolved

In addition to the governing document, the food co-op may use other documents, for example:

- A member agreement, setting out the relationship between the member and the food co-op.
- A volunteer agreement (**Tools p127**), setting out the relationship between the food co-op and anyone undertaking voluntary work.

## Useful document

**Sample constitution** (**Tools p144**)

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# Committee

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In a small food co-op or buying Club a separate committee may not be necessary as decisions can be taken by the whole group.

However, as an organisation grows, meetings of the whole membership may become harder to co-ordinate and the meetings themselves become unwieldy.

In this case you might want to elect a smaller committee to meet regularly and deal with the management of the food co-op, with more infrequent (generally annual) meetings of the whole membership.

Normally most committees will have particular officers including a chair, treasurer and secretary. These officers will be elected at the annual general meeting (AGM).

When recruiting committee members and electing officers you need to ensure that the people involved have enough time and commitment to take on board the responsibilities involved and attend regular meetings and also that they have the skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles.

The chair provides leadership for the organisation and ensures the committee fulfils its responsibilities for good governance. Other tasks include authorising actions to be taken between committee meetings, and signing cheques and legal documents. It is good if they have leadership skills, tact and fairness, 'people' skills and also a good knowledge of food co-ops.

The treasurer takes the lead in overseeing financial affairs and must ensure that the organisation is financially viable and that proper financial records and procedures are maintained. Their responsibilities include preparing and presenting budgets, accounts and financial statements, so you need to find someone who has some financial experience and business planning skills.

The secretary is responsible for preparing agendas as set by the chair and other committee members and circulating them and also writing minutes of the meetings. They may also make all the arrangements for meetings e.g. booking the room, arranging for equipment and refreshments. They therefore need to be quite organised and good at writing minutes.

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# Legal structures

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## How formally you wish to constitute your food co-op is up to you.

In practice most food co-ops trade as “unincorporated associations”. In the eyes of the law, they are a group of people who have agreed (contracted) to come together for a particular (non-profit making) purpose.

Smaller food co-ops may prefer not to take on the additional responsibility and expense of incorporation. There is very little financial risk involved in a small food co-op or buying club, as they do not employ people, own property or enter into contracts. But even in these circumstances, food co-ops will still generally have a governing document or constitution.

You might choose to have a formal legal structure and to register your food co-op. There are numerous different types structures that a food co-op could register as. The main advantage is that if your food co-op has a formal legal structure, and is “incorporated”, then the membership automatically has limited liability. This means that if there are ever financial difficulties, the members have legal protection. If the food co-op is an unincorporated association, the members are personally liable for the debts of the organisation.

As your food co-op gets bigger, then financial risks may become a more important consideration, and incorporation may become appropriate or even essential. This is particularly important if you are employing staff or managing large amounts of funding. It is recommended that you seek advice on the most appropriate legal structure to adopt.

### Legal structures - Useful Information

**Cultivating Co-operatives** (Soil Association) -

Available from <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>

**Making Local Food Work - Good Governance** -

<http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/about/gs/index.cfm>

#### Free training

As part of the MLFW programme Co-operatives UK are offering regional training sessions and advice on governance and legal structures to find out more e-mail: [mlfw@cooperatives-uk.coop](mailto:mlfw@cooperatives-uk.coop)

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# Avoiding problems

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## How to avoid typical governance problems

### 'Founder syndrome'

Understandably, the founder members of any group sometimes find it hard to share responsibility and control as new members join. Conversely, new members often feel shy of getting fully involved. These are often perceptions rather than the reality. To overcome this issue, set up a good induction for new members, which welcomes them, describes the organisation, how it works and encourages participation by all members.

### Reliance on a few voluntary committee members

Commonly, food co-ops can become reliant on just a few individual volunteers to help oversee the food co-op. If that individual can no longer continue in the role, for whatever reason (perhaps due to over-work!), the group faces an administrative crisis. To avoid this issue, ensure that people spread the work and responsibilities. Share out the key roles, or make sure there is a back-up person available.

### Inefficient meetings

Time is precious. Inefficient and chaotic meetings will lead to members of your food co-op not bothering to attend meetings. Some tips for running efficient meetings are as follows:

- Elect a good chair - choose someone who can manage the meeting effectively, keep it inclusive, to time and to the agenda
  - Choose a good venue and time - ensure that the venue is accessible, comfortable and held at a convenient time for members.
  - Inform the membership - give members plenty of notice of meetings and supply them with information between meetings - minutes, regular news by email, etc.
  - Write a concise agenda - keep it as short as possible and circulate it prior to the meeting
  - Be clear about decision-making - make sure that you and the chair know how you are going to take decisions. Do you need to all agree? What do you do when you can't achieve consensus? Agree these as ground rules at your meeting, and include them in your governing document
  - Encourage participation - perhaps combine the meeting with a social event or meal
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# Notes



# PERMITS + LICENCES

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## Local authorities treat a food co-op just like any other food business.

Because it is supplying food to the public, it needs to comply with food legislation, mainly covering hygiene and trading standards.

You may be inspected to make sure that any food or drink being sold is safe to eat and the description of the food does not mislead customers. There may also be other permits or licences you need to apply for.

The information in this section was correct in March 2009, based on advice from the Food Standards Agency, and rarely changes. However, if you are planning food trading activity, we recommend you get in contact with your local Environmental Health department to let them know what you are planning and to check if any details are different. Contact your local council to find out more.

The rules may seem complicated and fussy, but they are designed to stop customers from receiving poor quality food, and to reduce the risks of food poisoning or other health problems. Once you get into a routine of following the rules, they are quite straightforward to follow.



# Registering premises

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Anyone starting a new food business must register with the local authority at least 28 days before doing so.

This only applies if your food co-op is operating for five or more days in any five consecutive weeks. So if you are setting up an informal buying club that will only meet, for example, once a month – then you won't need to do this.

Registering your food business simply involves telling the environmental health department about any 'food premises' which means the venue you use for storing, selling, distributing or preparing food. You will need to fill out a form giving your contact details. Registration cannot be refused and there is no charge. If you have more than one stall or outlet you may have to register them all separately. The registration form must be sent to your local authority.

If you use premises in more than one local authority area, you must register with each authority separately. If you use vehicles for your food co-op as well as other premises, you only need to tell the local authority how many vehicles you have.

However if you have one or more vehicles but no permanent premises (for example if you have a mobile store but nowhere else where you store or sell your produce), then you must tell the authority where the vehicles are normally kept.



# Food hygiene

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Once you have registered as a food business, then the local environmental health department may come and inspect your premises to check on food hygiene.

Your premises include all of the rooms or buildings you use for your food co-op. You must keep your premises clean and maintained in good condition and you must have enough work space to carry out tasks hygienically - with appropriate facilities to protect your food from pests and also store food at appropriate temperatures. You must also have access to toilets, which must not open directly into rooms where you handle food, and a washbasin just for cleaning hands (i.e. not for washing your produce). You must not store cleaning chemicals and disinfectants in areas where food is handled.

Any vehicles you use to transport foods must also be kept clean and maintained in good condition, and items used to hold food (e.g. boxes) in vehicles must not be used for transporting anything other than foods where this may cause contamination. If you do transport anything other than foods, you must keep the items separate so that there is no risk of food becoming contaminated.

Some food co-ops start by storing foods in a garage or cupboard, and with volunteers using their own cars to deliver orders. So it's very important you think about food hygiene. It can be all too easy to put a crate of vegetables in the boot of a car that also has cleaning materials in it. Think carefully about the risk of contamination and take steps to prevent it happening.

Most food co-ops are not regarded by local authorities as a 'high risk' for food contamination or food poisoning, as they usually only sell fruit and vegetables or wholefoods. These will usually be washed and cooked before they are eaten, and are less likely to harbour food poisoning bacteria. Wholefoods are often packaged, again reducing the risk of contamination. However, you still need to think carefully about food hygiene to keep the risks as low as possible.

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# Food hygiene

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If you are going to sell meat or dairy products, there is a much higher risk of problems, so you will need to have excellent systems in place to manage food safety and seek advice from your local environmental health officer. Regulations for meat are particularly stringent, especially if it is not pre-packed. For example, you will need to keep it cool at all times. Frozen meat may therefore be easier to deal with than fresh meat.

It is not a legal requirement for all food co-op volunteers to have attended a training course on food hygiene (although you may want to offer this – see Training section) but it is important that anyone involved in the day-to-day running of the food co-op is aware of the essentials of food hygiene.

## Useful documents

**Essentials of food hygiene (Tools p146)**

**Guide to selling fruit and vegetables (Tools p147)**

**Hygiene fact file (Foodlink) -**

Available from <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>

**Food hygiene - a guide for businesses (FSA) -**

Available from <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>



# Trading standards

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Any food co-op needs to comply with trading standards legislation. There are legal requirements when selling goods that have to be weighed and/or measured.

You will also need accurate weighing scales if you are going to weigh food. These must either be crown stamped or bear some other approved mark to be legal for trade use – check this when you buy them.

All produce that you sell by weight must be sold in metric quantities - grammes and kilogrammes (Kg) and any unit prices must be the price per Kg. If you also want to put to put the price per pound (lb) as well you can - as older people often prefer to know this - but on any signs the price per pound should not be bigger or more prominent than the price per Kg. Selling things only by the pound is illegal. Even large supermarket chains sometimes break these rules – as selling things by the pound makes things seem cheaper than they are, because customers are used to seeing the price per Kg.

All prices must be clearly indicated, for example by having price labels on all your boxes of produce or by having a blackboard with the prices. All food must also have its name (for example, 'Tomatoes') clearly shown on the label, attached to the food or on a notice close to the food. The name used for melons and potatoes must include their variety (for example, 'Maris Piper potatoes' or 'Galia melons').

When selling food by weight you need to make sure customers know how much they are buying. This can be done by:

- weighing the goods in front of the customer
- by marking the weight on the packet
- giving the customer the weight in writing
- stating the weight on a display notice
- If you are weighing goods in front of customers you need to position your scales so they can see the weight clearly.

There are rules of what fruit and vegetables you can sell by weight, per item or by the bunch. For more guidelines on selling fruit and vegetables see **Guide to selling fruit and vegetables (Tools p147)**.

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# Trading standards

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There is also specific weights and measures guidance on Bag and Box Schemes. This covers all selling methods (such as food co-ops) where the seller is selecting a variety of items of fresh fruits or vegetables and placing them in a container for sale. Weights and Measures law generally requires the weight of pre-packed foods to be made known to customers. However, for packs of fresh fruits and vegetables, you may sell 'by the box' if one or more of the following conditions apply:

- the box contains more than 5 kg of produce, or
- the box contains three or more different types of fresh fruits and vegetables

All the rules relating to the sale of fresh fruits and vegetables still apply.

If you need more advice it is best to contact your local trading standards officer who will be based at your local council.

## Useful document

**Guide to selling fruit and vegetables (Tools p147)**

## Taking care with your marketing

You might want to promote the special qualities of the produce in your food co-op. For example, you might write the country of origin on the price label or include a description of the farm or growing method in your food co-op newsletter. You might highlight that the produce is seasonal, or promote the fact that you sell items that are Fairtrade certified. Such claims are of course permissible under trading standards law. The main guideline when using such descriptions is that they must be true, and you should not use them to mislead your customers as to the true nature of the product. For example the description 'organic' can only be used to describe food that is produced and prepared in accordance with the detailed standards laid down and must be inspected and certified by an authorised body. It is great to sell the benefits of your produce and scheme, but at the same time it is important that you do not exaggerate the benefits. The guiding principle is that you should be honest and trustworthy, and have evidence to back up your claims. If in any doubt, have a chat with your local trading standards officer.





# Street trading licences

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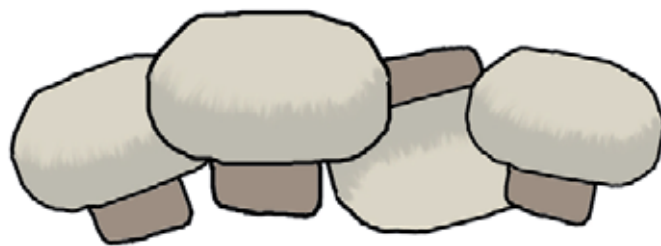
If you are planning to have a stall or market outdoors then you may need to apply for a street trading licence.

Street trading is defined as “the selling or offering for sale of any article in the street within designated areas”.

Anyone who wishes to sell items from a trailer or stall in a street must first obtain a Street Trading Consent from the Council which will cost a certain amount per year. If you are trading on private land (for example, on an area outside a community centre or church hall) then you may not need a consent, but whoever owns the land may need Planning Permission. To confirm the situation it is best to contact your council's planning office.

If you wish to sell food, you will probably also need to provide evidence that you have public liability insurance and that your business is registered with your local council. Local residents and businesses who may be affected by your application may also be consulted before any Street Trading Consent is granted. Consent may not be granted when adverse comments are received or where there is a risk to road safety or possibility of a nuisance being created.

Some food co-ops that do run stalls in the street have built up good links with their planning departments so that they may not always have to pay for a street trading licence.



# Notes



# PROGRESS

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It is also important to monitor and evaluate your progress and if necessary further develop your activities.

Most of the information in this toolkit relates to the things you need to do when setting up your food co-op, however, once it's up and running there is still a lot of work to do to ensure it is sustainable in the long term.

Sustainability is all about ensuring that your food co-op is able to keep running. This is highly dependent on economic factors i.e. can the food co-op bring in enough income to cover its running costs. It is therefore important to monitor the success of your food co-op by keeping a record of customer numbers and sales of produce.

The long term success of your food co-op also relates to social factors, such as whether the volunteers involved are happy, and whether the food co-op meets customers and members needs, for example is it on at a convenient time? It is therefore a good idea to survey both customers and volunteers to find out what they think. More information about monitoring and evaluation is given later in this section.

In some cases it is a good idea to offer volunteers training to enable them to feel more confident in fulfilling their roles. More information about training is given later in this section.



# Monitoring + evaluation

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It is a good idea to monitor and evaluate your food co-op's activities so you can assess how successful it has been in achieving its objectives.

In particular it is good practice to monitor the numbers of customers and members on an on-going basis so you know whether these have increased or decreased.

Also if possible try to gather contact details for your customers e.g. name, address, e-mail - the easiest way to do this is to have a membership card system. You can then keep customers updated with news from the food co-op, for example via an e-mail newsletter. If customers stop shopping at the food co-op you can also contact them to find out why and get some feedback.

If you have received external funding for your food co-op there may also be additional information about your customers and volunteers that you need to gather to put in funding reports such as age, postcode, gender, etc.

You can also survey your customers to find out what they think of the food co-op and what changes or improvements could be made. It is important not to bombard your customers and members with surveys too often - so you may only want to do this once a year. Many food co-ops aim to help people to eat more healthily so you may want to include questions about whether people feel they are eating more fruit and vegetables or wholefoods as a result of shopping at the food co-op.

You can also evaluate the success of your food co-op by analysing your sales figures over time - so it is important to keep records of how much you sell and also if possible which items sell best. If one of your aims is to support local producers you can keep a record of how much local food you sell and contact your suppliers to assess whether their business has increased as a result of your custom.

Another main area that many food co-ops evaluate is how many volunteers they have involved and how they have benefitted, for example have they made new friends, increased their confidence, attended any training courses or gone on to take part in any other community activities or paid employment.

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## Monitoring and evaluation - Useful Information

**Useful documents:**

**Sample evaluation form (Tools p148)**

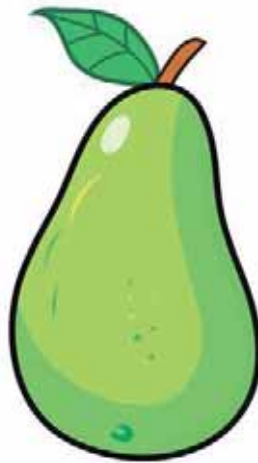
**Other publications:**

**Evaluating food projects (NW Food & Health Task Force) -**

Available from <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit>

**Links:**

**Evaluation guidance (Food Vision) - <http://www.foodvision.gov.uk/pages/evaluation>**



# Training

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Running a food co-op requires many different skills. To help build these skills in your team, you may wish to arrange training for the people involved, including volunteers, paid staff and committee members.

This will help provide information they need to enable them to carry out their roles effectively, build confidence and provide additional skills to help them develop in their personal lives and careers. Offering free training can also be an incentive to help you attract and retain volunteers and staff. Many community projects provide training as a core part of what they do and secure funding to cover the costs.

The following are some examples of themes on which your staff and volunteers might like - or need - training:

- What is a food co-op and why the project has been set up
- Food safety
- Trading standards
- Marketing and publicity
- Quality control
- Customer service
- Handling money
- Nutrition and healthy eating
- What is sustainable food?

## Case study - Healthy and sustainable food training

During 2008, training on healthy and sustainable food was piloted in Somerset and Newham as part of the Big Lottery funded Making Local Food Work programme. Feedback was very positive, with participants reporting that the training had improved their knowledge and would increase their confidence when talking to others about sustainable food. Another positive result was that all food co-ops requested copies of training materials to use in their own food co-op.

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## Existing training courses

**If you run a small organisation it might be a good idea to sign up to existing courses run by other bodies rather than try to run them in-house or design them from scratch.**

Many of these are free of charge for community projects. If there is a fee, funding may be available. Your local primary care trust or environmental health department may offer free courses on nutrition, cooking skills or basic food hygiene.

If you have a Volunteer Bureaux or Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) they will probably offer free training courses on, for example, volunteer management, fundraising or making the most of the

media. Business Link organisations also offer some free or low-cost training courses, for example on marketing, customer service or book-keeping. There may also be relevant courses run at your local college, which will also be free or subsidised for those receiving benefits.

Some community food initiatives also run their own accredited training courses, specifically to help share learning with other community food projects such as food co-ops. These can be quite in-depth and take place over several weeks or months. Some courses may be offered free to people in the local area but participants from further afield would usually have to pay.

### Case study - Know Your Onions

Somerset Community Food has developed and run a popular and engaging programme of training called 'Know Your Onions'. The course is for people working on food access issues, to help them address local needs and to set up sustainable community food projects. The courses are also for community groups and individuals interested in food issues. Somerset Community Food is at present exploring the possibility of offering this training more widely, including developing a distance learning version. The training course has been accredited by the Open College Network so, on some courses, participants will be able to gain nationally recognised qualifications. The six modules are: Community Projects, Sharing, Growing, Nourishing, Handling the Money and Bid Writing. For more information visit : <http://www.somersetcommunityfood.org.uk/?Training>



# Training

## Case study - Community Food Enterprise National Training Programme

The National Training Programme for Community Food Workers was developed by Community Food Enterprise Ltd (CFE), which is based in the London Borough of Newham in East London. The course has its roots in the experience of community food workers in many parts of England and, in particular, food access and food poverty projects in Newham. It is a 28-session programme comprising seven units spread over four months and costs from £250 - £310 per unit. The programme covers a range of themes: food access; food poverty; nutrition; cooking skills; food policy; and food, environment and globalisation. For more information visit: <http://www.community-food-enterprise.org.uk/>

## Training volunteers

**There are some issues you need to consider when training volunteers. They may work for you for just a few hours per week and are likely to have other commitments, so you may find it hard to get people to come to training courses, especially if there are several sessions.**

However, if you feel that some training is essential – such as manual handling or food safety - you can stipulate that training is mandatory for all volunteers and build this into your induction programme. If your food co-op is part of a larger organisation, it is worth considering they might require that all volunteers have training, especially on safety issues.

Some volunteers may not be interested in receiving training, so you will need to agree which skills and knowledge are essential, and which are optional. If you receive funding to provide training, it may be important to encourage participation, as funders are often expecting to help volunteers gain the skills and experience to qualify for a paid job. But you should not force volunteers to attend if they would prefer not to.

As well as skills and knowledge on food themes, training can also increase a volunteer's confidence and benefit the person and the food co-op in several ways, for example:

- Giving volunteers the sense of being valued and improving self esteem
- Inspiring volunteers, developing their motivation and boosting morale
- Building skills for the project to run in the longer term
- Giving volunteers a chance to assess their progress
- Providing opportunities for volunteers to meet and learn from each other

You might also arrange training as a way to bring all your volunteers and members of staff together, and to cover a wide range of issues in one go, for example by running a one-day course with all new volunteers.

Existing food co-ops advise that to increase the chances of volunteers taking part in training (whether run by your organisation or provided by another body) it is useful to:







- Have already developed a rapport with potential participants
- Arrange for the training to be at a local venue and at a convenient time
- Ensure that training is short and to the point. Half a day of concise and relevant learning is better than a long day with too much detail
- Check that there are clear benefits for attending, including incentives such as a certificate, take-home training materials or freebie
- Highlight that there will be an opportunity to meet other food co-op volunteers
- Build the training into a bigger event, such as a food co-ops conference
- Offer to pay for basic expenses such as travel or childcare, and to provide useful services at the session such as a creche
- Makes sure that a nice lunch is provided!

## Designing your own training course

**You may feel that it is more appropriate or convenient to run training yourself, to meet the needs of your staff and volunteers.**

If you are dealing with issues such as food safety or manual handling, it is important to ensure that your training is in line with recognised good practice. For example, you can:

- Get advice on food safety and food handling issues from your local environmental health officer (contactable via your local council). Tips on food safety are available from the Food Standards Agency at: <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/keepingfoodsafe/>
- Find useful materials on worker safety when moving heavy objects on the Health & Safety Executive website, for example: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg143.pdf>

- See nutritional guidelines on the Food Standards Agency website at: <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/>
- Read information about sustainable food on the Sustain website at: <http://www.sustainweb.org/sustainablefood/>

It is also important to consider consulting your staff and volunteers about their existing knowledge, experience and needs. Training should be designed with clear aims, and with agreement on what themes you and your colleagues wish to cover. You might do this informally in discussions, or via a training application form.

Training sessions are more likely to be popular and effective if they are interactive and fun – including games, discussions and demonstrations as well as more formal presentations.



# Training

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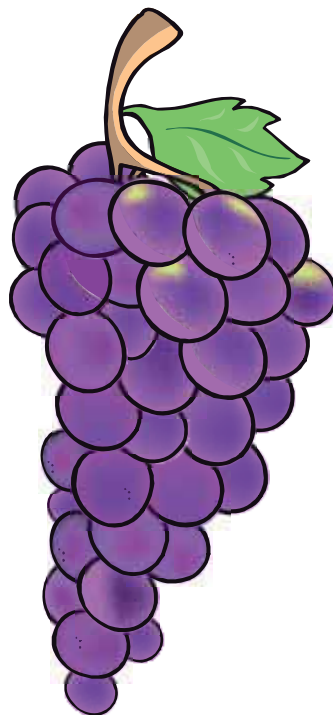
## Informal learning

**Sharing skills informally can also be useful, whether as a group, in a one-to-one session, or simply “learning on the job”.**

Regular involvement in running a food co-op can help people to develop skills in:

- Running an organisation
- Communications and marketing
- Time management
- Maintaining good working relationships
- Financial management
- Team work
- Managing staff and volunteers

It may be worth discussing such themes with your volunteers to find out if they feel they are learning enough. If they are interested, they may wish to have formal training, or informal support from another member of the team, to help sharpen their skills.



# Sustainability

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The sustainability of a food co-op relates in part to whether it is able to carry on running in the long term without the need for on-going funding.

Some food co-ops get external funding to start up but once this runs out they may find it more difficult to cover all their running costs. However, most funding bodies want to give money to projects that are sustainable, as they don't want them to end as soon as their grant runs out.

The two main approaches that different food co-ops may take to achieving economic sustainability are either to reduce their costs, for example by relying on volunteer labour and minimal equipment; or alternatively by increasing their profits, for example by expanding their services and supplying other outlets.

Some food co-op projects are set up as social enterprises and aim to generate income from a wide range of activities rather than just community-run food outlets. This may include supplying more commercial outlets, such as cafés; providing bulk deliveries of fruit, for example for nurseries or workplaces; or providing other paid for services such as health promotion activities or training courses.

In order for your food co-op to be sustainable it is also important to consider all the aspects of sustainability i.e. economic, social and environmental factors, and to try to measure these as part of your monitoring and evaluation. For example:

## **Economic**

- Are there enough customers?
- Does the food co-op cover all its costs?
- Do the volunteers get their expenses covered?

## **Social**

- Are volunteers happy?
- Are the customers satisfied?
- Does the venue benefit from a food co-op being there?
- How else does it contribute to the community?

## **Environmental**

- How much of the produce is local?
  - How much is organic?
  - How much food and packaging waste is produced?
- 



# Notes



# TOOLS

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# Induction checklist

<b>Introduction to the Food Co-op</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
Who's who, and what each person is responsible for		
How members of the team works together		
How decisions are made		
Volunteer rights and equal opportunities		
Formal training opportunities (e.g. basic food hygiene certificate)		
Opportunities for informal learning on the job and trying out different tasks		
Volunteer expenses and reimbursement		
The Food Co-op's aims and legal structure (if it has one)		
Background history of Food Co-op		
<b>Venue and Facilities</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
Storage facilities for food and equipment		
Tour of the venue and facilities, including hand basins and toilets		
Getting to the venue (e.g. lift-sharing) and parking		
<b>Food and food handling</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
How to handle food without bruising it		
How to pack a bag or display the produce		
Understanding seasonality		
<b>Health and safety</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
Safe lifting of boxes and bags		
Safe stacking		
Working on surfaces at the right height		
Wearing suitable clothing		
Hazard analysis of venue and activities		
<b>Personal Hygiene</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
Wash hands before and after handling food		
Ensure cuts and sores are covered with blue catering-standards waterproof plasters		
Do not smoke, eat or drink while handling food		
Do not handle food if you have suffered from diarrhoea or vomiting in the previous 48 hours		
<b>Waste disposal</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
How waste food is disposed of		
How waste packaging is disposed of		

This document was produced by Somerset Food Links and Somerset Community Food

# Volunteer agreement

**We really value our volunteers and the work they do, and will do the best we can to make your volunteer experience with us enjoyable and rewarding. This Volunteer Agreement describes the arrangement between our food co-op and you.**

## The organisation

[Insert description of the food co-op and what it does]. Your role as a volunteer is to help us to run our food co-op by carrying out the activities in the volunteer task list starting on [insert date].

## Induction and training

- We will provide induction on the work of our food co-op, the people involved, your volunteering role and the training you need to meet the responsibilities of this role.

## Supervision, support and flexibility

- We will explain the standards we would like to achieve and encourage and support all our volunteers to achieve and maintain them.
- We will provide a named person who can meet with you to discuss your volunteering and any successes and problems.
- We will do our best to help you develop your volunteering role with us.

## Expenses

- We will repay out of pocket expenses including: travel to and from home to the food co-op and during your volunteering.

## Health and safety

- We will provide any relevant training and feedback in support of our health and safety policy.

## Insurance

- We will provide adequate insurance cover for volunteers whilst undertaking voluntary work approved and authorised by us.

## Equal opportunities

- We will ensure that all volunteers are dealt with in accordance with our equal opportunities policy.

## Problems

- We will try to resolve fairly any problems, grievances and difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us and in the event of an unresolved problem will meet to discuss the issues.

## The volunteer

We expect you to:

- To help our food co-op carry out its activities.
- To perform your volunteering role to the best of your ability;
- To follow the organisation's policies, procedures and standards.
- To meet time commitments and to give reasonable notice if your not able to attend so other arrangements can be made when this is not possible;
- To provide referees as agreed who may be contacted, and to agree to a police check being carried out if necessary.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (on behalf of the food co-op) Date

\_\_\_\_\_ (volunteer) Date

This agreement is binding in honour only, is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us and may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither of us intend any employment relationship to be created either now or at any time in the future.

# Volunteer task list

## Sample task list for fruit and vegetable bag scheme using local growers and a wholesaler

Tasks done by volunteers	Number	Time taken	Risks	Action
1. Taking orders including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recording the names of the people ordering.</li> <li>Recording money collected for the others.</li> <li>Storing money safely in cashbox.</li> <li>Keeping tally of numbers of fruit and vegetable orders.</li> </ul>	1-2 volunteers	1 – 2 hours per day taking and checking orders.  Possible phone calls on other days.	Safe keeping of records.  Cashbox being taken.	All order forms kept together in file.  The cashbox will be kept with an identified responsible person at all times when at centre.  The co-ordinator will take the cashbox home and store safely.
2. Phone local growers to place orders	1 volunteer	15 minutes	Volunteer being unwell or unable to contact grower.	Another volunteer identified as stand in. Grower informed they should contact co-ordinator or stand if they are not contacted by the usual time.
3. Going to wholesaler to buy fruit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taking all money collected for fruit orders from cashbox.</li> <li>Using weekly price list and help of the wholesaler staff select what is the best quality fruit that day for our budget.</li> <li>Making sure everyone gets at least 4 different kinds of fruit.</li> <li>Paying for fruit and keeping receipts for accounts.</li> <li>Transporting the fruit to venue.</li> </ul>	At least 2 volunteers	1 hour	Carrying large amount of cash  Loss of receipts.  Lifting boxes that are too heavy.	Two people to go to wholesaler whenever possible.  Records kept of weekly orders and wholesalers keeps copy of receipts.  Volunteers will use food co-op trolleys and have lifting and handling training provided. Only trained volunteer will move produce.
4. Calculating how many pieces of fruit each bag ordered has marking boxes.	1 volunteer	15 minutes		
5. Sorting and counting out number of bags needed for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>£1.25 fruit bags</li> <li>£2.50 fruit bags</li> <li>£1.25 vegetable bags</li> <li>£2.50 vegetable bags.</li> </ul>	1 volunteer	5 minutes		
6. Filling fruit bags with number of fruit indicated on box	All volunteers	15 - 30 minutes		
7. When vegetables delivered transferring any larger vegetable onto tables for sorting so growers can take back as many of their boxes as possible.	2-3 volunteers	5 minutes	Lifting too heavy weight.	Volunteers have lifting and handling training. Work together to move boxes as necessary.



# Action plan template

Topic	What actions will you take?	Who is responsible for making it happen?	When will it be done?			What things are needed to make it happen?
			Now	Soon	Later	
People						
Planning						
Produce						
Premises						
Practical resources						

	What actions will you take?	Who is responsible for making it happen?	When will it be done?	What things are needed to make it happen?
<b>Procedures and pricing</b>				
<b>Permits and licences</b>				
<b>Promotion and publicity</b>				
<b>Policies and principles</b>				
<b>Progress</b>				

# Retailer survey

To use this survey visit shops in your local area and note down the number of varieties and quality of fruit and veg in each outlet. You should also complete a price comparison table for each retailer

**Location:**

**Date:**

**Quality rating:** 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = average, 4 = good, 5 = very good

	<b>Retailer / Outlet</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Are there any fruit and vegetables?</b>	<b>Number of varieties</b>	<b>Quality rating (1-5)</b>
<i>Example</i>	Spar	42 St Georges Road, Leeds TN25 8RS	Yes	10	3
<b>A</b>					
<b>B</b>					
<b>C</b>					
<b>D</b>					
<b>E</b>					
<b>F</b>					
<b>G</b>					
<b>H</b>					
<b>I</b>					
<b>J</b>					
<b>K</b>					
<b>L</b>					
<b>M</b>					
<b>N</b>					

Based on a table developed by Westminster Primary Care Trust

# Price comparison table

Use this table in conjunction with the retailer survey to record the prices of the main varieties of produce sold in the shops you visit. Always record the cheapest variety on offer. This can be used to compare fruit and vegetables or other types of food.

Item (price per kg)	Retailer														
	<i>Example</i>	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Bananas	95p/kg														
Apples	£1.20/kg														
Potatoes	70p/kg														

**Notes:** please add any notes on varieties measured and other prices, etc.

Based on a table developed by Westminster Primary Care Trust

# Community audit table

Location:

Date:

Name of person conducting audit:

[NB: walk or cycle around the local area where you are planning to set up a food co-op and note down the details of any food outlets, community facilities, etc. You can also mark the locations on a map as you carry out the audit.]

	Name	Address	Phone and / or e-mail	Comments
Shops selling fruit and vegetables or other food (use the retailer survey and price comparison to note down quality and prices of produce)				
Catering outlets e.g. cafes, restaurants, takeaways				
Health-related facilities e.g. doctors, chemists				
Community venues				
Sports facilities or clubs				

Schools, colleges or other educational facilities					
Other community facilities e.g. libraries					
Allotments or community growing projects (Add location, size, state of allotment)					
Other healthy food activities e.g. cookery groups, lunch clubs					
Housing Associations					
Children's centres, playgroups, or other activities for families with young children					
Agencies or community workers based in the area e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal					
Community groups (Add details of name of group, day they meet, contact person)					

Based on the community audit table designed by Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency

# Food co-op questionnaire

We are thinking of setting up a new volunteer-run food co-op to provide good quality food at an affordable price. We would be very grateful if you could help us decide what type of food co-op to set up by filling in this questionnaire.

**01. Do you have problems buying good quality food in the local area?**

Yes  No

**02. If we set up a food co-op do you think you would shop there?**

Yes  No

**03. What sort of products would you be interested in buying from a food co-op**

Fresh fruit and vegetables  Wholefoods e.g. rice, beans, nuts, flour, dried fruit, etc.   
Meat and dairy foods  Other (please say what)

**04. Is there any particular type of food co-op you'd most like to use?**

Informal buying club i.e. collecting pre-ordered foods from people's houses   
Stall at local community venue  Bag or box scheme   
Mobile store or home delivery  Shop

**05. What factors are most important to you about where you buy your food (please tick 3)**

It is cheap  It is nearby  The food is organic   
There is a car park  I can choose the varieties I want  The produce is local   
I can do all my shopping in the same place  There is lots of choice  It is open late

**06. Where do you currently shop for food?**

Supermarket (please say which ones and where) .....

.....

Smaller or independent food shop (please say which ones and where) .....

.....

Box scheme (please say which one) .....

Farmers' market (please say which one) .....

Other (please say which one) .....

**07. Which day(s) do you usually shop on?**

Mon  Tue  Wed  Thurs  Fri  Sat  Sun

**08. What time do you usually shop? Morning  Afternoon  Evening**

**09. Approximately, how much do you spend per week on food? .....**

**10. How big is your household? No. of adults.....No. of children.....**

**11. The food co-op will be run by volunteers - would you be prepared to spend some time volunteering on a regular basis?**

Yes  No

If yes, what day and times are you available?.....

**12. Are you interested in being involved with setting up the food co-op or being on the committee?**

Yes  No

If yes, what day and times are the best for meetings?.....

**13. Would you like to be kept updated about the progress of the project?**

Yes  No

**If you answer yes to any of the questions above, please let us have your contact details:**

Name: .....

E-mail:.....

Tel: .....

Address:.....



# Food co-op questionnaire

We are conducting a survey to find out from local residents if a food co-op is needed locally. The co-op would sell a wide range of quality fresh fruit and vegetables at affordable prices.

---

Name: .....

Address: .....

Post Code:.....

Age:   under16       16- 24   25- 34       35-50       51-65       65+

Gender:       Male/Female

Ethnicity: .....

Disability   Yes/No

Do you have problems buying fresh fruit and vegetables locally?

Yes                                No

If yes what are some of the problems (you can tick several boxes)

Transport                        Lack of shops                        Other  
 Cost                                Range                                Access  
 Children                        Quality

How far do you travel to purchase your fruit and vegetables?

1-5 min    5-10min        10-15min    15-20min    20 min or more

If there were a fruit and vegetable co-op at a local centre selling fruit and vegetables at affordable prices would you use it?

Yes        No

How would you describe your current health situation?

Excellent                        Good                                Ok                                Poor

How many portions of fruit and vegetables do you eat in a day?

1        2        3        4        5        More than 5

Which day would you prefer the co-op to open?

Monday        Tuesday    Wednesday        Thursday        Friday

Which time would you prefer the co-op to open?

Morning (11am – 1pm)                        Afternoon (2pm – 4pm)

Would you be interested in helping to run the co-op?

Yes                        No

Other comments

.....  
.....

Which of the following do you buy regularly?

- |                          |                    |                          |                         |                          |              |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Avocado            | <input type="checkbox"/> | Ladies finger (Bhendhi) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Radish       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Apricots           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Leek                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Satsuma      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Apples             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lemon                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Spinach      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Aubergine (Begoon) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lettuce                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Spring Onion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bananas            | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lotha                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strawberries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Beans (oori)       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mangoes                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sweet Potato |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Broccoli           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mandarin                | <input type="checkbox"/> | Tomatoes     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Brussels Sprout    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Melon                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Turnip       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Cabbage            | <input type="checkbox"/> | Muki (Ado)              | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yam          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Cauliflower        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Muli (Mula)             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Zinga        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Carrot             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mushrooms               | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Celery             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nali Shaag              | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Cherries           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nectarines              | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Chillies           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Okra                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Chow Chow (So So)  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Onions                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Coriander          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Oranges                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Courgette          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Parsley                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Cucumber           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Parsnip                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Dudi (Khodu)       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Peaches                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Garlic             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pears                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ginger             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pepper                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Grapes             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pineapple               | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Grapefruit         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plantain                | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Kiwi               | <input type="checkbox"/> | Potatoes                | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |

Based on a survey developed by Tower Hamlets Co-operative Development Agency



# Cashing up sheet

Name of Food Co-op:

Date:

<b>Notes</b>		
£50		
£20		
£10		
£5		
<b>Coins</b>		
£2		
£1		
50p		
20p		
10p		
5p		
2p		
1p		
<b>Total cash</b>		
Float		
<b>Actual cash takings</b> (Total cash - float)		
Cheques		
Vouchers		
<b>Total takings</b> (Actual cash takings + cheques + vouchers)		
<b>Number of transactions</b>		
<b>Z Reading on cash till</b>		

Cashed up by:

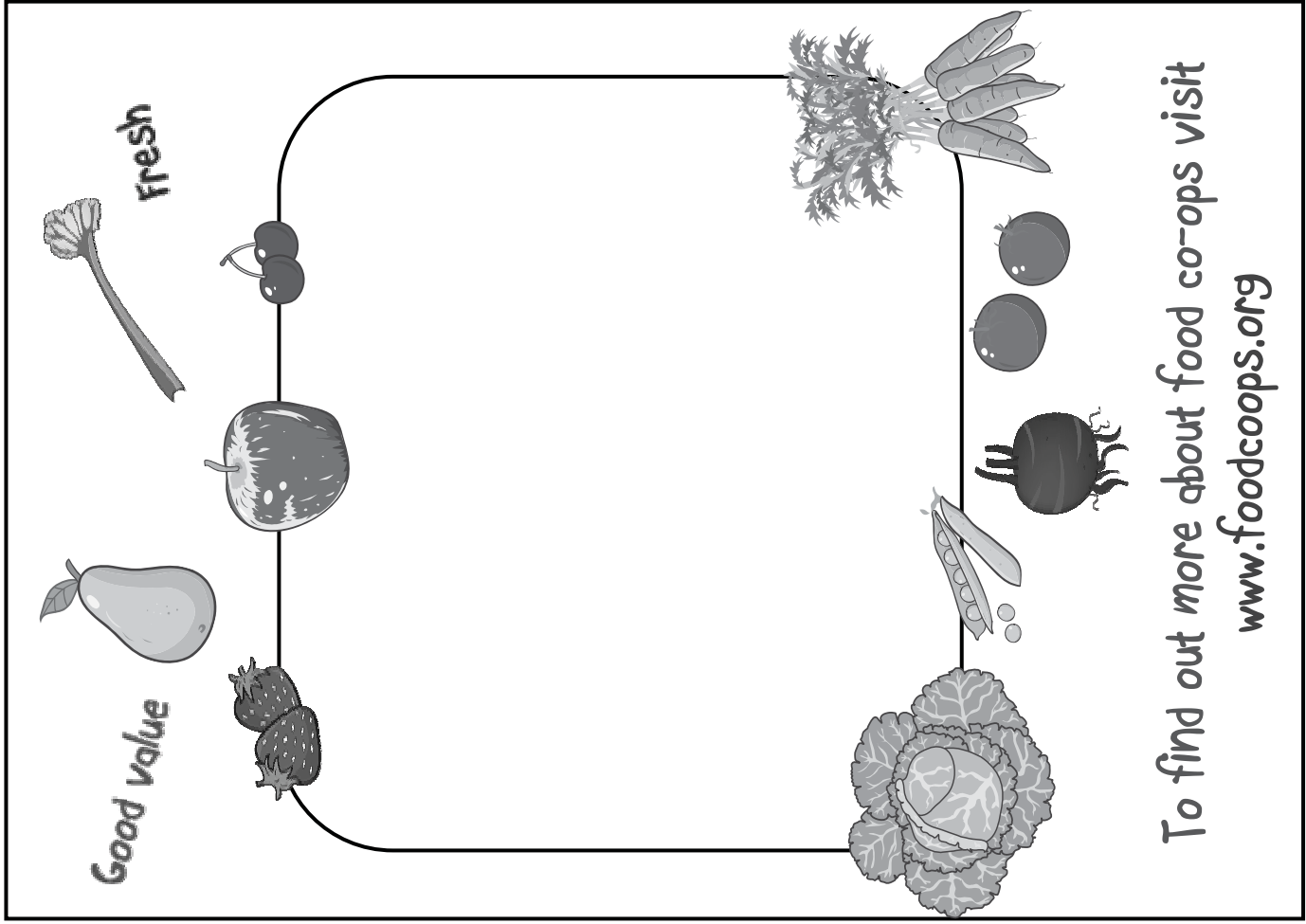
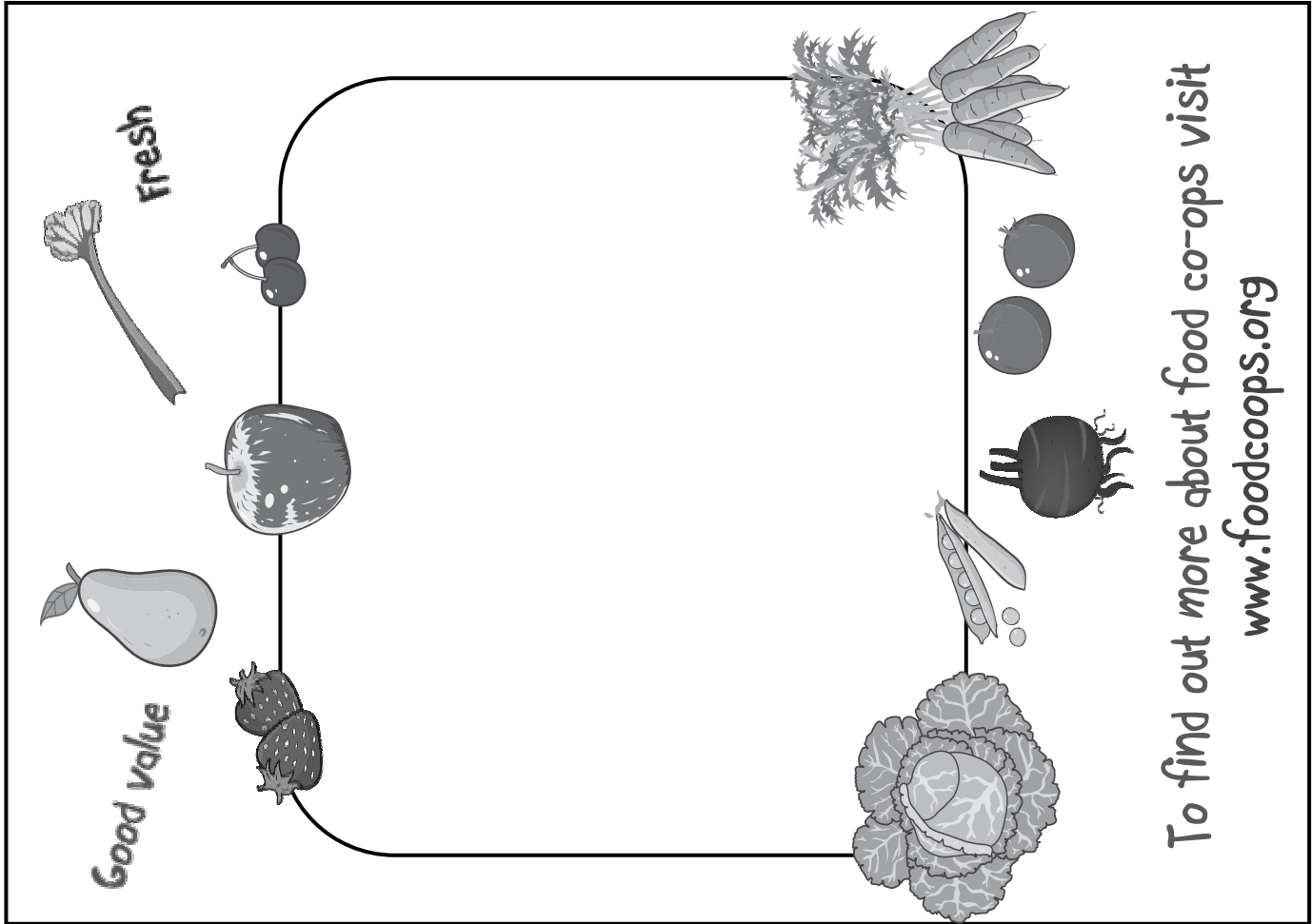
Name

Signature

Notes or additional comments:

# Marketing checklist

Type	Cost	Time
<b>Promotional materials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Leaflets</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Posters</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
<b>Press releases</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Local paper</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Countywide paper</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Community newsletters</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Radio</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
<b>Websites</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Listing on local food websites</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Town / parish website</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Community websites</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
<b>Publicity large statutory organisations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Local school</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children's Centre</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Local council</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Primary Care Trust</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Housing Association</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> </ul>		
<b>Promotion to voluntary sector organisations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> CVS</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Environmental groups</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other community groups</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
<b>Run promotional events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fruity Friday</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Organic Fortnight</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Apple Day</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> </ul>		
<b>Referrals to your food co-op through the following agencies:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Doctor's surgeries</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other health workers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Local hospital</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
<b>Special offers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Vouchers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> New customer discount</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		



# Co-operative Principles

A statement on co-operative identity produced by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA)

## Definition

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

## Values

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

## Principles

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

### 1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

### 2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

### 3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

### 4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

### 5th Principle: Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public—particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

### 6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

### 7th Principle: Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

# Sample constitution

## 1. Name

The name of the group shall be .....Food Co-op

## 2. Objects

- To buy, store, process, package, distribute and sell foodstuffs and other products.
- To raise funds and receive contributions where appropriate to finance the work.
- To open bank accounts.
- To make rules and standing orders for categories of members and their rights.
- To take out insurance.
- To organise meetings, training courses and events.
- To work with similar groups and exchange information and advice with them.
- To take any action that is lawful, which would help it to fulfil its aims.

## 3. Membership

- a. Membership of .....food co-op shall be open to anyone who is interested in helping the group to achieve its aim and willing to abide by the rules of the group.
- b. Every member shall have one vote at general meetings.
- c. The Management Committee shall have the power to refuse membership to an applicant, where it is considered such membership would be detrimental to the aims, or activities of the group.
- d. Registration and termination of membership:
  - Any member of the association may resign his/her membership and any representative of a member organisation or section may resign such position, by giving to the secretary of the association written notice to that effect.
  - The Management Committee may, by resolution passed at a meeting thereof, terminate or suspend the membership of any member, if in its opinion his/her conduct is prejudicial to the interests and objects of the association, PROVIDED THAT the individual member or representative of the member organisation (as the case may be) shall have the right to be heard by the General Committee before the final decision is made. There shall be a right of appeal to an independent arbitrator appointed by mutual agreement.

## 4. Management

- a. ....food co-op shall be administered by a Management Committee of not less than three (3) people and not more than fifteen (15) members elected at the group's Annual General Meeting. Committee Members must be at least 18 years old.
- b. The officers of the Management Committee shall be:
  - The Chairperson
  - The Treasurer
  - The Secretary
  - and such other officers the group shall deem necessary at the meeting.
- c. Voting at Management Committee meetings shall be by show of hands on a majority basis. If there is a tied vote then the chairperson shall have a second vote.
- d. Power to set up sub-groups and working parties as deemed necessary who shall be accountable to the committee.

## 5. Finance

- Any money obtained by the group shall be used only for the group.
- Any bank accounts opened for the group shall be in the name of the group.
- Any cheque issued shall be signed by at least two of any three nominated signatures.
- The Management Committee will ensure that the group stays within the budget.



**6. Committee Meetings**

- The committee shall meet at least four (4) times each year.
- The quorum (minimum number of people required) for a meeting shall be five (5).
- The committee shall be accountable to the members at all times.
- All meetings must be minuted and available to any interested party.
- All committee members shall be given at least seven (7) days' notice of a meeting unless it is deemed an emergency meeting.

**7. Annual General Meeting**

An Annual General Meeting shall be held within six months of the close of the financial year of the Food Co-op, the business of which shall include:

- (i) the receipt of the accounts and balance sheet,
- (ii) the election of Committee Members, if it has been decided to have such a Committee.

The quorum for Annual General Meeting shall be at least eight (8) persons of which no more than four (4) shall be committee members.

**8. Application of surplus**

The Food Co-op shall not trade for profit. Any surplus of the Food Co-op shall be used as a general reserve for the continuation and development of the Food Co-op.

**9. Alteration of the Constitution**

- Proposals for amendments to this constitution, or dissolution must be delivered to the secretary in writing. The secretary in conjunction with all other officers shall then decide on the date of a meeting to discuss such proposals, giving at least four weeks (28 days) clear notice.
- Any changes to this constitution must be agreed by at least two thirds of those members present and voting at any general meeting.

**10. Dissolution**

The group may be wound up at any time if agreed by two thirds of those members present and voting at any general meeting. Any assets shall be returned to their providers, if they require it, or shall be passed to another group with similar aims.

**11. Adoption of the Constitution**

This constitution was adopted by the members present at the AGM held on.....

Signed .....	(Chair)
.....	(Secretary)
.....	(Treasurer)

# Essentials of food hygiene

**Everyone volunteering must read and understand this sheet before starting helping out at the food co-op.**

- Keep yourself clean and wear clean clothing
- Always wash your hands thoroughly:
  - before handling food,
  - after visiting the toilet,
  - after handling raw foods or waste,
  - before starting work,
  - after every break,
  - after blowing your nose.
- Tell your supervisor, before commencing work, of any skin, nose, throat, stomach or bowel trouble or infected wound **YOU ARE BREAKING THE LAW IF YOU DON'T.**
- Ensure cuts and sores are covered with a waterproof, high visibility dressing
- Avoid unnecessary handling of food
- Do not smoke, eat or drink in a food room and never cough or sneeze over food.
- Clean as you go and keep all equipment and surfaces clean
- If you see something wrong tell your supervisor
- Follow any safety instructions either on food packaging or from your supervisor.
- Do not prepare food too far in advance (only applicable to those cooking food)
- Keep perishable food either refrigerated or piping hot (only applicable to those cooking food)
- Keep the preparation of raw and cooked food separate (only applicable to those cooking food)
- When reheating foods ensure it gets piping hot (only applicable to those cooking food)

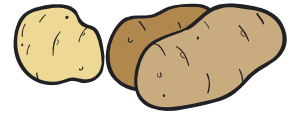
**Signed (volunteer)..... Date.....**

**Signed (on behalf of the food co-op).....**

# Guide to selling fruit and vegetables

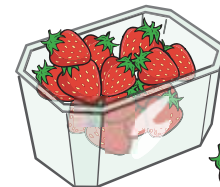
## What is meant by 'net' and 'gross' weight?

- Net weight: The weight of the goods without the wrapper.
- Gross weight: The weight of the goods plus the weight of the wrapper.
- Weight of wrappers is strictly controlled. If sold by gross weight the wrapper must be within certain weight limits (check with your local Trading Standards department) and it is probably better to pack only by net weight (i.e. the weight of the produce itself).



## Potatoes

- Loose potatoes may be sold either by net or gross weight, and you can sell any weight of them.
- Pre-packed potatoes can only be sold in the following amounts: 500g, 750g, 1kg, 1.5kg, 2kg, 2.5kg, 5kg, 7.5kg, 10kg, 12.5kg, 15kg, 20kg, 25kg.
- The container must be marked with the net weight. Or, if each potato weighs over 175g (such as big baking potatoes), then the container should be marked with the number of potatoes it contains and a statement that each potato weighs not less than 175g.



Strawberries  
£1 per punnet

## Soft fruits and mushrooms

- Soft fruits and mushrooms can be sold by either net or gross weight.
- In either case, the weight must be made known before customers buy.
- Soft fruits can also be sold by the punnet they are:

Bilberries  
Cherries  
Raspberries

Blackberries  
Cranberries  
Redcurrants

Blackcurrants  
Gooseberries  
Strawberries

Boysenberries  
Loganberries  
Tayberries

Brambles  
Mulberries  
Whitecurrants

## How can other fruit and vegetables be sold?

- Loose fruit and vegetables may be sold by either net or gross weight.
- If you sell fruit and vegetables pre-packed, these must be sold by net weight (i.e. the weight of the produce itself). You can pack them by number only if they appear in the list of 'Countable Produce'. The container must be marked with either the net weight or the number of items.
- An exception to this is if the packet is transparent and there are not more than eight items of 'Countable Produce' in it, which the customer can clearly see and count for themselves.

## Selling by bunch or number

Some vegetables can be sold by the bunch and certain fruits and vegetables can be sold by number. These are known as 'countable produce'.

## Countable produce

Apples  
Apricots  
Artichokes (globe)  
Aubergines  
Avocados  
Bananas  
Beetroots (incl. cooked)  
Cabbage  
Cauliflower  
Capsicum (peppers)  
Celery

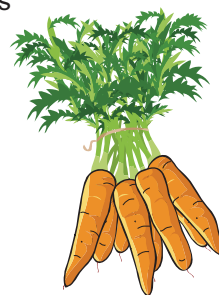
Corn-on-the-cob  
Coconuts  
Cucumber  
Fennel  
Fresh figs  
Garlic  
Grapefruit  
Guavas  
Kiwifruit  
Kohlrabi  
Lemons

Mangoes  
Lettuce  
Limes  
Marrows  
Melons  
Nectarines  
Onions (not spring)  
Oranges  
Passion fruit  
Pawpaw  
Peaches

Pomegranates  
Pears  
Pineapples  
Plums  
Pomelo  
Pumpkins  
Radishes  
Shaddock  
Soft citrus fruits  
Tomatoes  
Ugli

## Vegetables sold by the bunch

Asparagus  
Beetroots  
Carrots  
Chives  
Endives  
Garlic  
Mint  
Mustard and cress  
Onions (including spring)  
Parsley  
Radishes  
Salad cress  
Turnips  
Watercress



Carrots  
99p per bunch

# Food co-op evaluation form

Dear Food Co-op customer

In order to help us ensure our food co-op is meeting your needs we would be very interested in hearing your views and experiences of shopping at the food co-op.

We would be very grateful if you could take a few minutes to fill in this short questionnaire.

## What things do you like about the food co-op?

- Being able to buy fresh food
- Meeting other people
- Accessing other services within the centre
- Volunteering at the food co-op
- Accessing healthy eating information
- Other

## What things do you not like about the food co-op?

- Poor quality food
- Unhelpful staff
- Prices
- Inconvenient opening time
- Inaccessible location
- Lack of shopping baskets
- Range of food
- Queues
- Meeting other people
- Other.....

## How do you find the quality of the produce sold at the food co-op?

- Excellent
- Good
- Poor

## How would you compare the price of produce sold at the food co-op to other shops?

- More Expensive
- The same
- Cheaper

## Do you have any comments or suggestion on how we can improve the running of the food co-op? (For example location, timing, accessibility, quality, product range)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Thank You

Based on a evaluation form designed by Tower Hamlets Food Access Project





# Food Co-ops Toolkit

a simple guide to setting up food co-ops



[www.foodcoops.org](http://www.foodcoops.org)

Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming  
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London N1 9PF

Tel: 020 7837 1228  
Web: [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

