

Food Co-operative Models Information Sheet

Fair Food Fit Families has been researching various models of food buying groups, with the goal of supporting members of the community to establish a sustainable food co-op.

What is a food co-op?

A food co-operative (co-op) is a group of families who bulk buy their fruit and vegetables on a regular basis. Bulk buying fresh produce often means it will be cheaper and of a higher quality.

The benefits of being a member of a food co-op include:

1. Save money on the cost of buying food through bulk purchasing.
2. Higher quality, fresher fruit and vegetables.
3. Opportunities for social interaction and community strengthening from people working together.

Fundamental points to consider for a establishing a successful food co-op group:

- Ideally there is between 5 – 20 families living in the same area and willing to be part of a group for activities such as decision making and sharing the workload.
- Members commit to paying for their food promptly, as the group determines.
- Once a group has been formed, a decision on the type of food co-op to be established needs to be made, based on the nature of the group members.

There are three different models that a food co-op can follow:

1. Group Co-op
2. Co-op Shop
3. Flemington Markets Direct Service

The different models all have the common goal of providing quality food at cheaper prices; however the organisation of the group and how it goes about its activities may vary depending on the needs and resources of the group. More information on each of the three models is detailed below.



1. Group Co-op

This is the simplest form of a food co-op and is organised when a group of individuals come together with the common goal of pooling their buying power to buy quality produce at cheaper prices. Some examples of groups could include family members, neighbours, friends sporting or school groups. The success of the co-op relies upon their ability to work together as a group – being prepared to attend meetings, make joint plans, abide by majority decisions, and accept other's tastes and preferences. In order to keep costs down the group must also share the workload amongst themselves in a fair manner, usually a rotating roster basis. Another option could be for a group to locate a third party (possibly an existing fruit and vegetable shop or a community member) to act as the designated shopper, for an agreed compensation.

Once there is a group of interested people it's important to invest time into reaching mutual agreement on organisational and operational procedures. This will result in the establishment of a successful and sustainable food co-op. Some of the issues the group will need to address are:

- How regularly will the co-op buy produce?
Eg. weekly/fortnightly/monthly
- What day of the week will the co-op operate?
- Where will the produce be bought from?
- Do all members have the capacity/resources to perform each task?
Eg. physical ability, large enough vehicle for all the shopping, an accessible distribution location
- How will the workload be shared amongst the members?
- Draw up a tasks roster
- Determine the amount of purchase for each household – Eg. \$20/\$30 per family.
- Which foods are preferred amongst the group and draw up a food frequency and quantity list
- How will the group manage unavailable/seasonal foods?
- How will the group manage payments from each family and for the produce?
- How will the group communicate amongst each other?
- What happens if problems arise?



2. Co-op Shop

Co-operatives that are based in a shop environment are not-for-profit organisations that are run by the community, for the community, with the aim of providing quality products at a reasonable cost. The shops are open to the public, but offer a sliding scale of discount to those who become financial members and/or contribute work hours. One of the principles that cooperative shops are based on is the concern about reducing waste, so many products are stored in bulk bins and shoppers are encouraged to bring their own containers to buy as little or as much as they need.

Co-op shops are also concerned about the ethical and sustainable production of foods and are therefore good sources of organic and locally grown produce. There are a few co-op shops located in and around Sydney. Some of the universities also run co-ops for the university community and the general public:

Manly Food Co-operative www.manlyfoodcoop.org
21B Whistler St
Manly NSW 2095

Alfalfa House Co-operative www.alfalfahouse.org
113 Enmore Road
Enmore NSW 2042

Blue Mountains Food Co-op www.bluemtnsfood.asn.au
Shop 1&2 Ha'Penny Lane
Katoomba NSW 2780

Green Tucker Store Co-op www.greentucker.org.au
Shop 4, 51 Arthur St
Forestville NSW 2087

Thoughtful Foods Co-op www.thoughtfulfoods.org.au
Roundhouse
University of New South Wales

The USYD Food Co-op www.usydfoodcoop.org.au
Level 4 Wentworth Building
University of Sydney

UTS Food Co-op
Level 3, UTS Tower Building www.sa.uts.edu.au/services.foodcoop
1 Broadway
Broadway NSW 2008



3. Flemington Markets Direct Service

Based in Sydney Markets, Flemington Direct delivers boxes of market fresh fruit and vegetables throughout Sydney. The company also provides a service to co-op groups with a minimum of 10 families and a central drop-off point, offering \$5.00 discount per box off the regular prices. Members of a co-op group have the choice of three box sizes:

small \$43
medium \$53
large \$66

For families that don't have a lot of spare time this service offers the benefits of a co-op, without the time commitments of shopping, distributing the produce into everyone's individual boxes and then delivering the orders. To save even more time, ordering can also be automated, avoiding the need to remember to place the weekly/fortnightly order. The service allows for flexibility within the group, with members being able to individually select their produce as well as box size – as long as there are a minimum of 10 families in the co-op, the box contents and sizes can differ.

The company has a comprehensive website:
www.flemingtondirect.com.au which details all the relevant information on ordering, produce selection, pricing and delivery.



Summary of Food Co-op Models

Food Co-op Model	Advantages	Disadvantages
Group Co-op	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run in a way that best suits the group members • Cheapest option because the work is all done by co-op members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most time consuming, as co-op members buy and divide up produce themselves
Co-op Shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoppers can receive further discounts dependant on becoming a member and any work they put in • Good source of organic and locally grown produce • Shoppers can buy the quantities they want by bringing their own containers • Ethical principles – supporting local farmers, the environment, waste reduction and sustainable farming • Foster a sense of community – a community owned not-for-profit store 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires the highest level of organisation, from its establishment to the ongoing day-to-day running • A substantial amount of capital is required to set up the shop • Heavy reliance upon volunteers for all levels of operation
Flemington Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least time consuming option as members are not required to attend the markets or divide up produce • Families can individually select their produce and box size • Orders can be made and changed online which saves time, or even automated if the order remains unchanged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most expensive option because tasks are preformed by people outside the co-op

