

# Food Co-ops Toolkit



# What is a food co-op or buying group?

- Foods co-ops are a way for groups of people to buy good food at a more affordable price by ordering food in bulk direct from suppliers.

## Main things that they have in common are that they are:

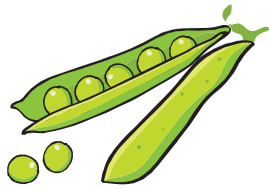
- Are run by the community for the community
- Aim to supply produce at more affordable prices than other outlets
- Are run on a not for profit basis
- Generally rely on the support of volunteers, either in the day-to day running or on the committee
- However they differ in what they sell, when they sell it, how they sell it and where they sell it.



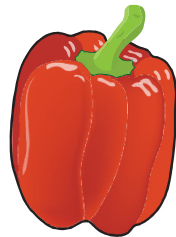
# Key Ingredients for success



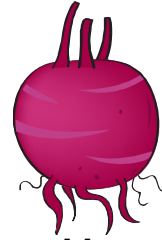
High quality,  
good value produce



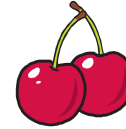
Committed  
volunteers and staff



Marketing and publicity



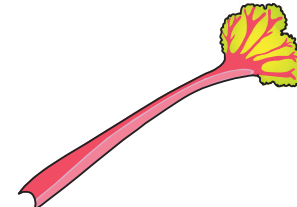
Good location



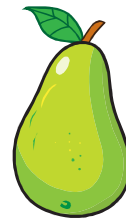
Partnership  
working



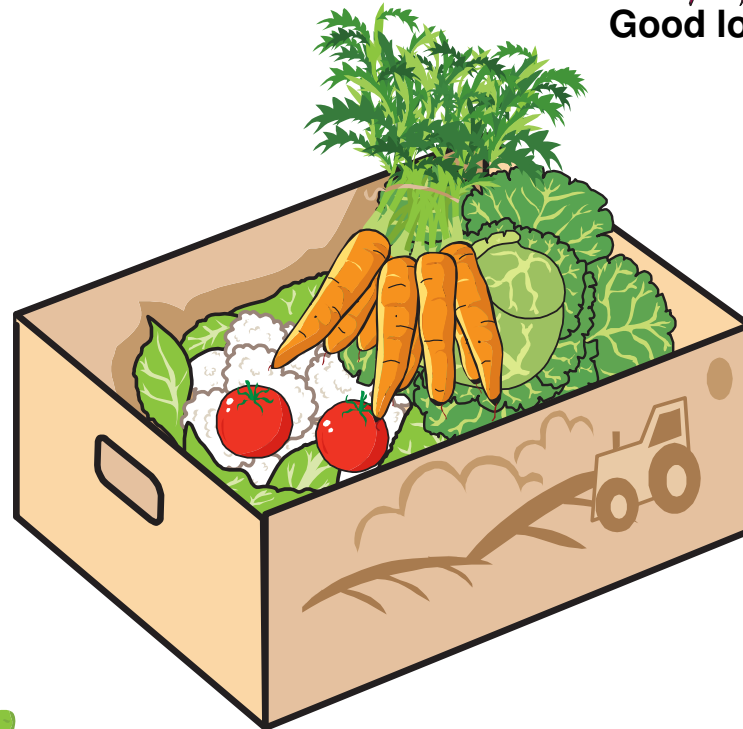
Sufficient time  
and resources



Finding out what  
people want and need

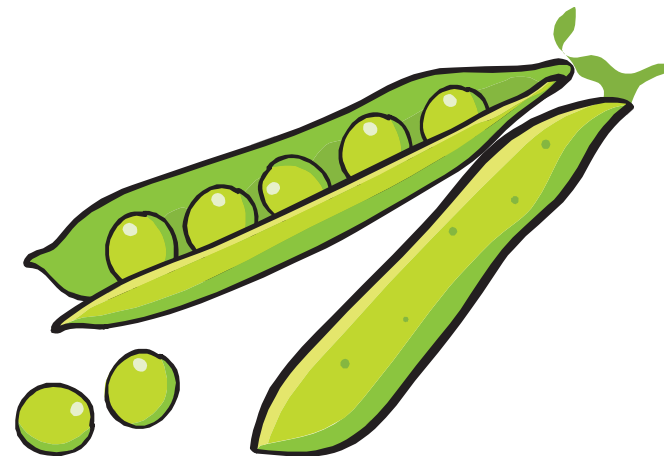


Community  
involvement



# Setting up a food co-op in 10 P's:

1. People
2. Planning
3. Produce
4. Premises
5. Practical resources
6. Procedures and pricing
7. Promotion and publicity
8. Permits and licences
9. Policies and principles
10. Progress



# 1 People



- **The first thing you need in order to set up a food co-op is people.**
- Whether you are an existing organisation or an individual you will probably need to get more people involved in order to get started.
- The main groups of people you need are the:
- **Organisers** - people involved in setting up and planning the food co-op e.g. the committee or steering group
- **Workers** - volunteers or staff doing day to day work
- **Customers** – people shopping at the food co-op
- **Partners** – other organisations that can support the food co-op
- Need to identify and engage these people and work how many you want to be involved and what their needs are.



## Target customers

What do you think the needs of different customers would be?

Older people	
Families with young children	
Young people	
Working professionals	
People from different ethnic backgrounds	
People lacking cooking skills	

## 2

# Planning



### **Good planning is essential to setting up any new project**

- This presentation aims to identify key things to think about.
- It is good to create an action plan showing:
  - What do you want to do?
  - Who is going to do it?
  - When are you going to do it?
  - How much will it cost?
- Also you could carry out some sort of needs assessment / market research to find out whether there is a need for a food co-op.
- If you are planning a large scale project a more formal business plan is a good idea.



## Produce



### What do you want to sell?

- Most food co-ops sell fruit and vegetables or wholefoods
- Could sell meat, dairy, etc. but food safety is more of an issue
- Do you want to do organic, or local?
- Range of exotic fruit and veg that appeal to different communities

### How do you want to sell it?

- There are a range of different types of outlets e.g. stalls or bag schemes
- What you sell and your target group will determine what type of outlet is more suitable, how often you run and what sort of premises you need.

### Where will you buy it?

- Main types of supplier are wholesale markets, local wholesalers, social enterprises, farmers or community growing schemes
- This will depend on where you are based and how much you want.





## Different types of outlet

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Buying club		
Stall		
Bag or box scheme		
Mobile store		
Shop or market		

# 4

## Premises



### You also need to find good premises

- It is important to have an accessible location – if possible with other activities already taking place
- If possible food co-ops try to find venues that are rent free
- How much space will be available?
- Is there easy access for deliveries and parking?
- Does it have toilets and hand-washing facilities?
- Is there any storage?
- Are there other activities running in the same venue?
- Are you going to be indoors or outdoors?
- Will you get any passing trade?
- Will your office facilities be based in the same place?

# 5

## Practical resources



**You will also need some equipment and other practical resources.**

- This may include:
- Electronic scales
- A till or cash box
- Order forms
- Bags and/or boxes
- Price signs and baskets
- Leaflets and posters
- Delivery vehicle
- Office facilities e.g. computers, printers, phone, etc.
- In order to buy these you may need to apply for start-up funding
- You will need to have a constitution and bank account in order to get funding.

# 6

## Procedures and pricing



**You need to decide basic operational procedures e.g.**

- What day/s and times of the week?
- How many people you need helping out?
- Whether people need to order and pay in advance?
- It is very important to have good finance and admin systems.
- You also need simple procedures in relation to ordering, storage, quality control, wastage.
- You need to set pricing structure in order to ensure you can cover your costs e.g. bags, wastage, rent, promotional materials
- Some co-ops add set amount to each order, others add a percentage mark up

# 7

## Promotion and publicity



- **You will need to promote your project both when it starts and on an on-going basis**
- Need to weigh up what is most effective based on costs, time , staffing needed and resources available e.g.
- High profile launch
- Articles in the local press
- Community newsletters
- Radio
- Banners, leaflets and posters
- Special offers
- Word of mouth
- Events
- Educational activities e.g. taster sessions

# 8

## Permits and licences



### Local authorities treat food co-ops 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.
- A 'food premises' is any premises that is used for storing, selling, distributing, or preparing food.
- You will need to register as a food premises if you are running more than 5 days in a 5 week period.
- There are rules about what fruit and vegetables you can sell by weight and what can be sold per item or by the bunch.
- If you want to run a stall outdoors you may need a street trading licence – so need to contact the council about this.
- You'll also need insurance cover e.g. public liability insurance.

# 9

## Policies and principles



**You need to decide the policies and principles for your food co-op:**

- This relates to the organisation's ethos, how it is run and who is responsible for managing its activities i.e. it's governance
- You need to ensure that you are running the food co-op appropriately and risks to the group and the members are minimised. Need to decide:
- Does everyone who shops have to be a member?
- Who is responsible for managing volunteers?
- Who will be on the committee?
- Is it an informal group or will you have a constitution?
- Do you need to incorporate – what is the best legal structure?
- If your project is quite large-scale or want to apply for funding you'll need certain policies e.g. Health & Safety, Environmental, Equal Opportunities.



## Progress



### **It is also important to monitor and evaluate your progress**

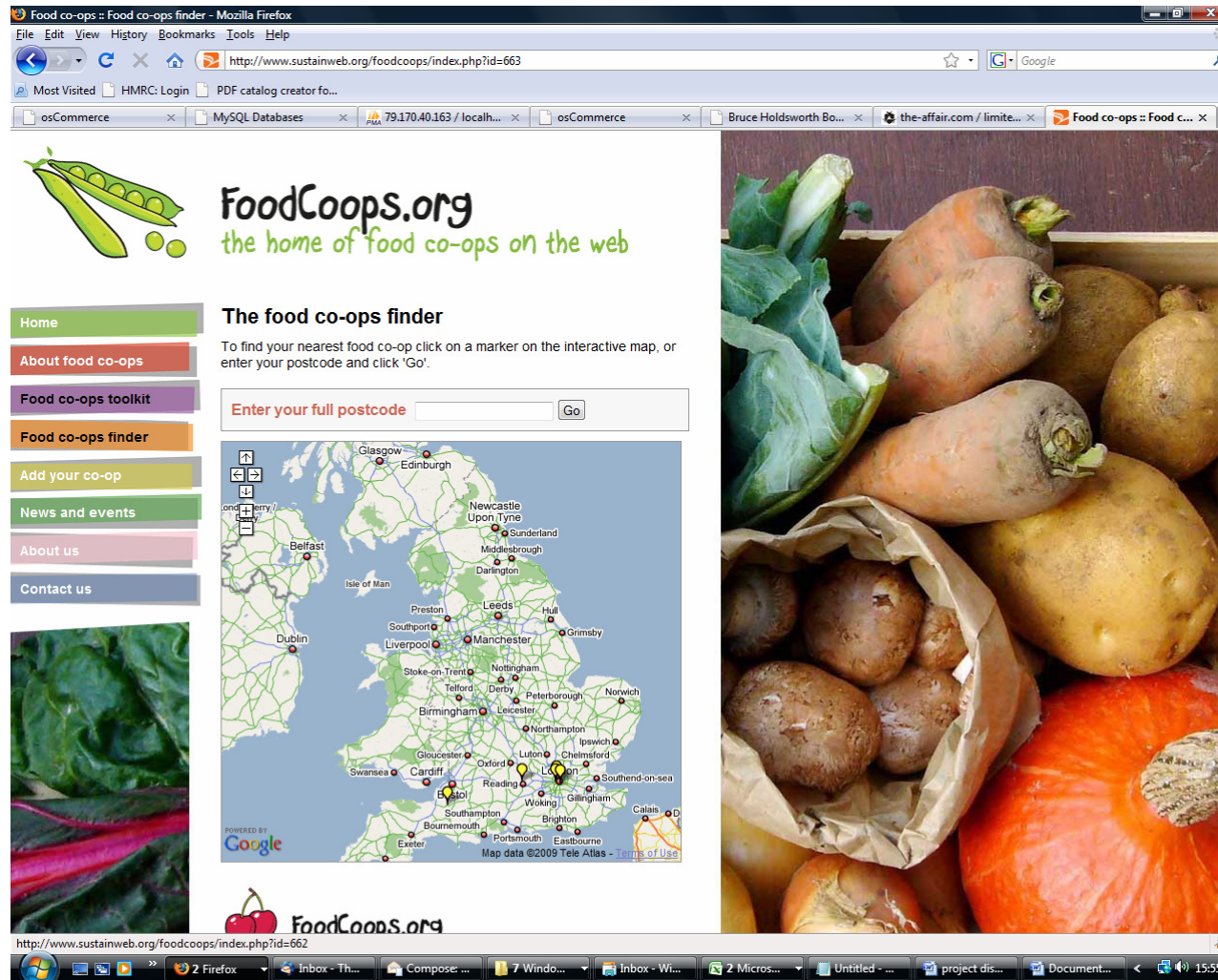
- Most of the information so far in this toolkit relates to the things you need to do when setting up your food co-op
- However once it is up and running there is still a lot of work to do to ensure you food co-op continues to be successful.
- In order to be sustainable in long term you need to ensure you are covering all your costs and that volunteers and customer are happy.
- If you have external funding you also need to monitor whether you have achieved your targets.
- E.g. by doing an annual customer satisfaction questionnaire
- And also consult volunteer about the benefits of being involved.



Our food co-ops website [www.foodcoops.org](http://www.foodcoops.org) aims to raise the profile of food co-ops and get more people to shop there



People can also find their nearest food co-ops with the food co-ops finder



The website features information about food co-ops and how to set them up in the toolkit section

**Food Co-ops Toolkit**  
a simple guide to setting up food co-ops

You are here: Introduction > People

**PEOPLE**

**The first thing you need in order to set up a food co-op is people.**

As any food co-op involves two or more people joining forces to accomplish something they probably couldn't do alone.

You may already be part of a group or organisation that has some people ready and willing to get involved or you may be an individual who's decided to set something up from scratch, but whoever you are, you need to think about the number and types of people you want to engage in your food co-op.

**The three main groups of people you need are:**

1. Organisers i.e. people involved in setting up the food co-op and the on-going planning e.g. the board or management committee.
2. Workers i.e. people, usually volunteers, who will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the food co-op, and
3. Customers i.e. people who will be buying food from the co-op.

In some food co-ops the workers, customers and organisers of the food co-op are all the same people, as customers are required to become members and also to volunteer and attend meetings. Whereas in other food co-ops they are more separate, for example the people involved in setting up the food co-op, which may be an existing organisation, may not all be involved in helping to run the co-op on a day-to-day basis.

How you decide to structure your food co-op depends on what the people involved want (see [Policies and Principles](#) 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. Generally whether you are an individual, an existing community group or a

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