



Setting up a **FOOD CO-OPERATIVE**

Introduction

This brief paper is designed to give practical information to schools and community organisations about food co-operatives. It outlines options for setting up and running food co-operatives and describes five successful models. The term food co-operative or food co-op is used to describe systems of bulk food purchase which is then divided amongst a group of people.

Why set up a food co-operative?

Food co-operatives are a great way to build a sense of community around food and a practical way to promote messages about healthy eating.

Food co-operatives can:

- make healthy food more affordable for families on a low income.
- improve access to healthy food in areas with poor public transport or limited food shops.
- foster healthy eating habits and improve childrens' behaviour, through better nutrition.
- create opportunities for learning about nutrition, food systems and environmental issues.
- increase skills and social networks of participants.
- support local food businesses and local farmers.

Things to consider when setting up a food co-operative

Who will the food co-operative be for?

School food co-operatives are typically for families with children attending the school and teaching staff, although some extend to the broader community. Community run food co-operatives may be open to all residents living in the suburb/ area, or may be for more specific groups such as older people or cultural groups.

Which foods will be provided?

- Will a choice of food items be offered or one standard food box?
- Are different sized boxes required for different household types?
- Will the co-op provide fresh produce only or a wider range of foods?
- Can special dietary requirements be catered for?

Where will the food be sourced?

- Local food businesses, such as bakeries, butchers and greengrocers.
- Local farmers and farmers markets.
- Flemington Markets, Sydney NSW.
- Surplus produce from community, school and backyard gardens.
- Community food co-operatives or stores.
- Wholesalers (require membership).
For example, schools, community groups and individuals with an Australian Business Number (ABN) can join Campbells Cash & Carry (can purchase single items or in bulk). Go to www.campbells.com.au/ccc/index/jsp for more information.
- Foodbank NSW Warehouse, Wetherill Park, Sydney. Foodbank NSW is a not- for- profit organisation that receives donated food and redistributes it to charities or organisations with a Charity and Fundraising Number (CFN). A CFN can be obtained from the Department of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, through the Office of Charities. For more information go to www.olgr.nsw.gov.au/ and www.foodbank.com.au/

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Things to consider when setting up a food co-operative

What resources are needed?

- People: paid worker and/ or volunteers.
- Car, van or truck to pick up and/ or deliver food.
- Refrigerator and/ or freezer.
- Space for packing and storing food boxes.
- Boxes/ bags for packing food.
- Administrative items, eg photocopier, fax machine, paper and order forms.

How often will the food co-operative run?

How often the food co-operative runs will depend on demand, available resources and the core reasons the co-operative was established. The food co-operatives described in this document operate from a weekly basis to once every school term.

How much will it cost to participate in the school food co-operative?

The cost to participants will need to cover the actual cost of the food as well as other costs related to resources listed above.

Where to seek financial and in-kind support for the school food co-operative

- Local council.
- Local health service.
- Non- government organisations/ community organisations.
- Local food businesses.
- Funding and grant information can be found at www2.communitybuilders.com.au/

How will the food co-operative work?

Food co-operatives can be run like a true co-operative with each member having equal decision-making power. Alternatively, they can be co-ordinated by a volunteer or paid worker, who is responsible for decision-making.

Tips for managing a food co-operative:

- Get support from the manager or school principal.
- Document how things are done to help new volunteers/ workers.
- Keep receipts so cash flow is recorded.
- Determine “rules” of food co-operative and document them so all participants are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- Write down and file important information related to the food co-op.
- Set a minimum level of participation for volunteers and make a volunteer roster.
- Seek support for administrative tasks from office staff.

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Examples of food co-operatives

Inner City Family Food Co-op

The Family Food Co-op is co-ordinated by Jo Fletcher, facilitator of Connect Redfern Schools as Community Centres, located at Alexandria Park Community Centre. The Community Centre is situated in the grounds of Alexandria Park Community School. The co-op is for parents, carers and families of the community centre and school. Jo dedicates about 7 hours a week to working on the food co-operative. The food co-op started because many families did not have a car and the closest food shops in Surry Hills were considered expensive.

An average of 25 families participate in the food co-operative, which runs fortnightly, during school terms. Families can purchase a box of fruit and vegetables for \$25. It is estimated the cost of the box would be around \$50-\$60 if purchased from local supermarkets. Participants pay for the boxes in advance. The Facilitator, Jo, and three parent volunteers go to Flemington Markets to buy the fruit and vegetables and return to the community centre to box the food. Families collect their box from the community centre the same day. The local council provides a twenty-two seater bus at a minimal cost for transport to and from Flemington Markets. Connect Redfern provides free childcare, if required, to the parent volunteers. Shopping and packing food into boxes takes around four hours. A list of fruit and vegetables is used to keep a tally on purchases and prices.

Food Co-op of parents from Yeo Park Infants School

Yeo Park Infants School has approximately 60 students. Twelve families were initially involved in the food co-op and it has been running for over seven years. The co-op runs once a fortnight and was co-ordinated by a parent volunteer. Two parents drive to Flemington Markets and do the shopping on Saturday morning, divide food into boxes and deliver it to the other participant's homes. Food boxes cost \$30 per family. The cost of petrol is paid by the car owner. The shopping roster is done a year in advance and people can swap with others up to two times in the year. The co-op is run informally and there are no written rules. All of the families involved have now left the school and ten families continue to participate in the co-op.

Madang Ave Public School Food Co-op, Mt Drutt

The principal of Madang Ave Public School is passionate about her students eating fresh fruit and vegetables of high quality. Each week, she uses her van, and trailer if necessary, to collect produce from a fruit and vegetable supplier who purchases fresh fruit and vegetables from Flemington Markets daily. The fruit and vegetables are collected in bulk on Thursday night and taken to school on Friday morning where teaching and administrative staff organise the individual boxes. Families can purchase a small box of fruit and vegetables for \$12 and must order and pay for the box in advance. Parents pick up their box from the school. This co-op currently has between 45 and 60 orders each week and has been operating for 9 years.

North Katoomba Public School Foodshare program

The Foodshare program was set up as a result of conversations with parents about the expense of fruit and vegetables. The aim of the Foodshare program was to buy in bulk to keep costs down. The Foodshare program operates weekly, a bag of fruit and vegetables is delivered one week and a bag of meat the next week. The meat is sourced from a local butcher and fresh produce from a local fruit and vegetable shop. These businesses provide the food at a discounted rate. An existing not-for-profit community group, called Inclusion, worked on setting up Foodshare. There is one key person running Foodshare. However, decisions are made as a group. All the people involved are volunteers.

There are 45 families who participate in the program every week and another 45 families who participate about once a month. Foodshare is open to other people outside the school. To participate in the Foodshare program people must do one hour of community service each month, but this is not monitored. People can do a range of activities, eg packing food into recyclable bags or reading with students in the classroom. A bag of food costs \$20* and is valued at \$40- \$50, orders are paid in advance

*Note: the above information was gathered in 2008 and may have changed.

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Examples of food co-operatives continued

Spyns Inc. Food Co-op

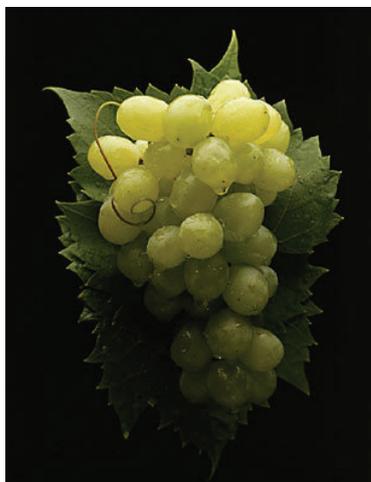
Spyns Inc. is a community-based, non-profit organisation in the Penrith area. Spyns Inc. has been running a food co-op since February 2010, prior to this the co-op was run for a number of years by the Community Liaison Officer and parent volunteers at Kingswood Park Public School.

The food co-op runs twice each school term. Spyns Inc. has a worker dedicated to run the co-op and she spends about 13 hours doing administrative work, such as data entry of food orders, banking and packing family food boxes, each time the co-op runs. Food is sourced from the Foodbank NSW Warehouse, Wetherill Park, Sydney. Foodbank NSW faxes Spyns Inc. a list of foods/ prices and Spyns Inc. gives co-op members the list to complete their order. Individual orders are collated and a bulk order is faxed to Foodbank NSW.

Anyone living in the suburb of Kingswood Park or that have children attending the local school, preschool or playgroup can participate in the food co-op. Twenty- five families are involved, with eighteen regularly participating. To participate in the food co-op all members must volunteer to pack bulk boxes of food into family boxes.

The food co-op would not be possible without a volunteer truck driver, who donates his time to drive to and from the Foodbank Warehouse in Wetherill Park to pick up and deliver food. The driver is reimbursed for the cost of petrol and wear- and- tear on his truck. Each family pays \$10, \$15 or \$20 depending on the weight of food ordered (\$10 for 100kg of food or less, \$15 for 100- 150kg of food and \$20 for 150- 200kg of food) to cover the truck costs each time the co-op runs. Food is costed at 40 cents per item or \$1 per kilo. Some foods are past the used-by-date and some items are free, such as bread, fruit and vegetables.

For more information contact: Spyns Inc. on website www.spyns.org.au or phone (02) 4721 8520



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Information and Support

For more information contact the Public Health Nutritionist, Nepean Blue Mountains Local Hospital Network on phone (02) 4784 6529. The Public Health Nutritionist can support schools and community organisations in the Penrith and Blue Mountains local government areas wishing to set up a food co-operative and provide advice on healthy food choices to existing food co-ops.

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