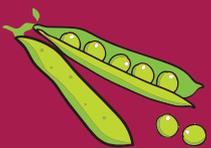


# How to set up a food co-op

in a university  
or college



FoodCoops.org

## Why set up a food co-op?

More and more students want to eat organic, local and fair-trade food but unfortunately it's not always that easy to buy good quality produce or even just something healthy and affordable.

Setting up a food co-op means you can buy food that may not be available locally, and because you're buying direct from farmers and wholesalers you can save a third or more off normal shop prices. Getting involved in running a community project and volunteering on a regular basis is also a great way to meet new people and something that'll look good on your CV.

## What is a food co-op?

A food co-op is simply a group of people who join forces and pool their buying power so they can order food in bulk at cheaper prices direct from farmers and suppliers. You can be as formal or informal as you like and can decide whether customers have to become members and volunteer in order to shop at the food co-op or whether you'll just sell to everyone.

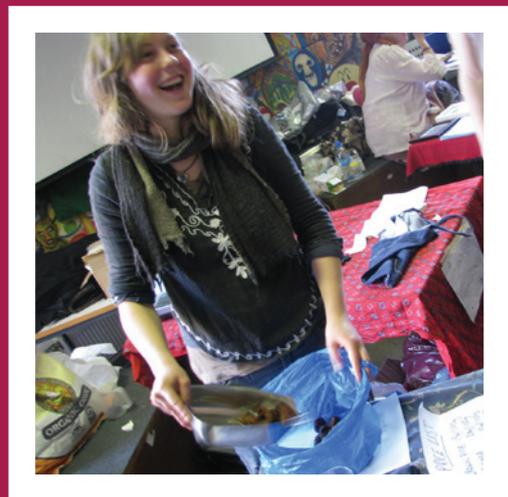
## How to get started:

- **People** – do some publicity and organise a launch meeting to find a group of people who are interested in getting involved with setting up a food co-op and being volunteers or customers. You may want to form a small steering group to make decisions and plan activities.
- **Planning** – work out who is going to do what and when and also how much it is going to cost. You will probably need a small amount of funding to buy equipment such as weighing scales and publicity materials. You may be able to get a small grant from the students' union or could organise a fundraising event.
- **Produce** – decide what you are going to buy and where you are going to get it from. Most student food co-ops sell either wholefoods (e.g. flour, rice, nuts, dried fruit); or fresh fruit and vegetables; or sometimes both. Many food co-ops at universities liaise with local veg box schemes to get a discount on the price by arranging a bulk delivery to one drop-off point.
- **Practical resources** – depending how the food co-op is going to run you may need to buy some equipment such as weighing scales, boxes or jars for storing dried foods, paper bags, shelving and price signs or a blackboard. Overall this shouldn't cost more than £500.
- **Premises** – you need to find a good venue where you can run your food co-op. Most food co-ops are able to negotiate space in the students' union building. You'll need somewhere with good access preferably on the ground floor, somewhere to store food and also hand washing facilities i.e. a toilet and/or kitchen nearby.
- **Procedures and pricing** – you also need decide what day and time your food co-op is going to run and how many volunteers you need to help out for each session. Some food co-ops are open every day; others just run once a week. Food co-ops are usually run on a not-for-profit basis and many of those in universities sell everything at cost price. However, you may want to add a small mark-up so you have some income to cover costs such as getting leaflets printed or buying paper bags.
- **Promotion** – design and print some leaflets and posters to promote your food co-op and also advertise via e-mail and on university websites and blogs, or Facebook.
- **Permits and licences** – all food co-ops need to register with the environmental health department at their local council. This just involves filling in a simple form with details of what you're selling and where you're selling it. Check whether the venue you're in is already registered. For dry goods and fruit and vegetables, the environmental health officer (or the food co-ops website – see details at the end of this fact sheet) will be able to help with basic advice on food hygiene. If you plan to sell products such meat, milk or cheese, you will need to consider food safety training, hygienic waste disposal, and access to equipment such as a refrigerator.
- **Policies and principles** – if you're not already part of a university society you will probably need to set up a new group, particularly if you want to open a bank account or apply for a grant. In order to do this you need to form a committee and put together a constitution. You also need to decide who can join - food co-ops often have a nominal membership fee of £1.
- **Progress** – finally, it's also a good idea to keep a record of customers, members and sales and ask for feedback from time to time so that you can evaluate how you are doing and if you need to expand the food co-op in the future.

## SOAS Good Food and Co-op Society

The SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) food co-op in central London is a new society with a pretty simple aim - to distribute high quality delicious wholefoods to students and the local community at cost price. Every week they say they place a food order with a local wholesaler and then spend the day hanging out, and scooping out grains from big colourful sacks to whoever comes their way!

They sell rolled oats, red lentils, noodles, bombay mix, rice, cloudy apple juice, apricots, pumpkin seeds, and a lot more besides... and it's almost all organic. They received a grant (via Good Food for Camden run by the local council with the support of Sustain) which allowed them to get some weighing scales, a storage space, and lots more food. Participants report that there is "a really nice atmosphere - where there's food there's always community". <http://foodco-op.soasunion.org/>



## Leeds Green Action Food Co-op



The Green Action Food Co-op is an organisation within Leeds University Union run entirely by volunteers to provide cost price ethical food to its members. They are open Monday to Friday 10am-6pm. Many products are organic and fairly traded and they source from sound suppliers, many of which are workers' co-operatives.

They also have weekly deliveries of fruit and vegetable boxes from Goosemoor, a grower and distributor of organic foods based in Wetherby. Any member can order a fruit or vegetable box from Goosemoor through the food co-op. Vegetable boxes are available in multiples of £5 and fruit boxes in multiples of £3. Participants get good quality and healthy organic fruit and vegetables at an affordable price (as with the rest of their stock, they don't add a mark-up).

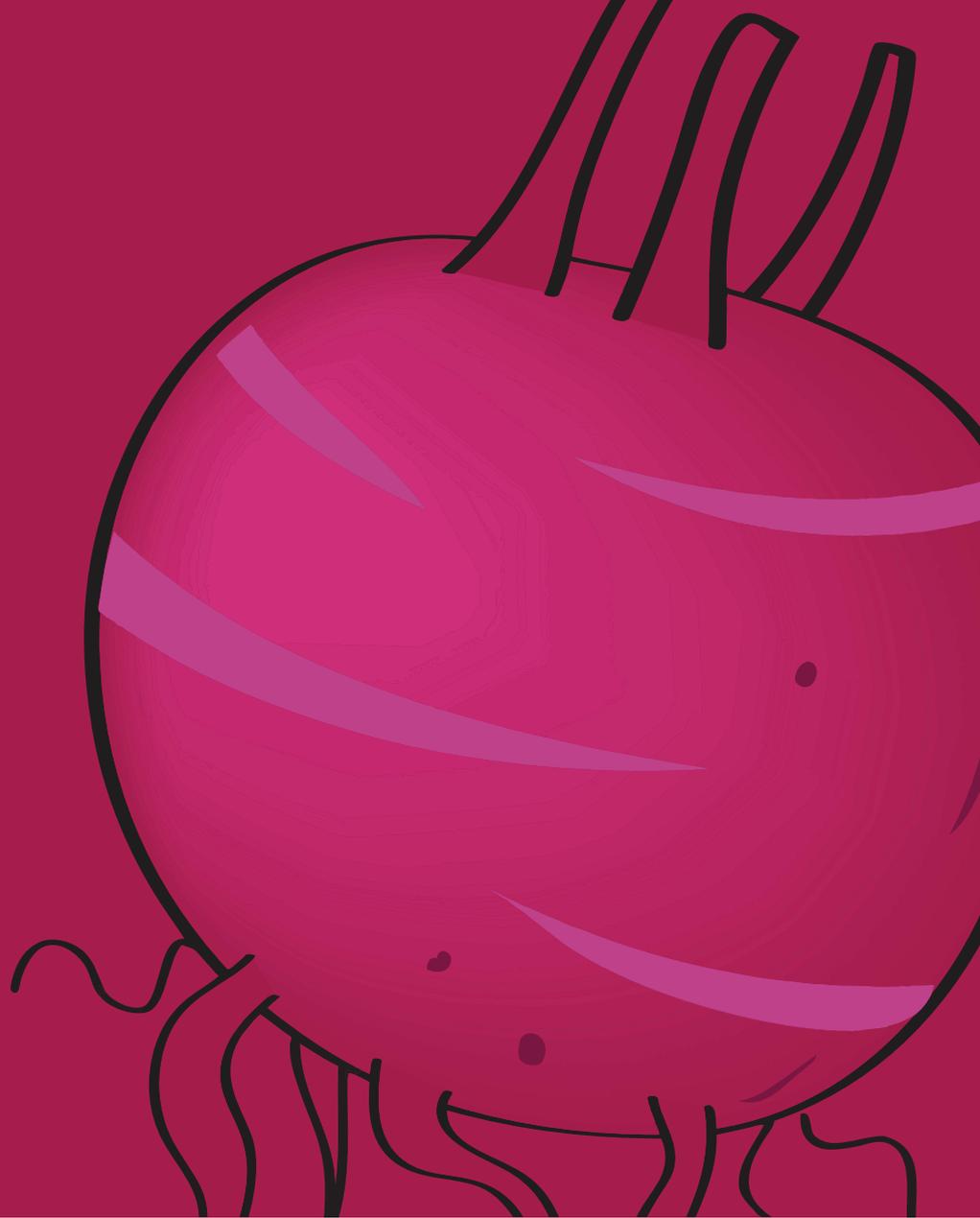
As a co-operative, they share the time and responsibility of running the food co-op, but also benefit from working as a group, and share the control of how the co-op is run and what food is stocked. It costs only £1 to join for a year. [www.greenactionleeds.org.uk/about-green-action-food-co-op](http://www.greenactionleeds.org.uk/about-green-action-food-co-op)

## Hearty Squirrel Co-operative

The Hearty Squirrel co-operative provides its members with organic and ethically traded food at affordable prices. They were set up to offer students (and others) the chance to buy wholefoods in bulk. This saves money, reduces packaging and trips to the supermarket, while helping members eat tasty, healthy foods. It is an offshoot of the Edinburgh University Co-operative Society (EUCS). Based in Solidarity Good on Guthrie Street, Edinburgh, the co-op places bulk orders on a regular basis. It also sells staples over the counter to all and sundry. Membership is open to anyone, and volunteers are always welcome in the shop, which is shared with a number of other like-minded organisations. There are many jobs to do, from volunteering at the shop, to processing orders, helping with publicity to spread the word about the food co-op and its principles. <http://eucs.wikidot.com/>

**For more advice on setting up a food co-op just visit our on-line food co-ops toolkit [www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit](http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit) or e-mail us at [foodcoops@sustainweb.org](mailto:foodcoops@sustainweb.org) or via [www.facebook.com/foodcoops](http://www.facebook.com/foodcoops)**





## Making Local Food Work

The Soil Association and Sustain are part of the Big Lottery funded 'Making Local Food Work' partnership. They can provide specialist support to help you set up your food co-op, buying group or other local food community enterprise.

- [www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk](http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk)

## Soil Association

To find out about the Organic Buying Groups project contact: Traci Lewis

- [tlewis@soilassociation.org](mailto:tlewis@soilassociation.org)
- 07870 268654
- [www.soilassociation.org/obg.aspx](http://www.soilassociation.org/obg.aspx)

## Sustain

To find out more about how to set up a food co-op you can visit our on-line food co-ops toolkit:

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

You can also contact your regional food co-op adviser who will be able to help you set up your group

- [www.sustainweb.org/foodcoops/regional\\_advisers](http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoops/regional_advisers)

For more food co-ops news visit:

- [www.facebook.com/foodcoops](https://www.facebook.com/foodcoops)
- 020 7837 1228
- [foodcoops@sustainweb.org](mailto:foodcoops@sustainweb.org)

