



Food for All food coop

Background

The Hartcliffe and Withywood estate is a large out-of-city housing estate in Bristol. Thirteen years ago a group of local residents decided to set up the 'Food for all' food coop because there was nowhere on the estate to buy wholesome, healthy food. The group decided to buy food locally in bulk which they then decanted and sold to other local residents in order to meet their own needs and to provide something for the community.

The aim of the group is to increase access to and affordability of healthy foods including local and organic, for local people. The Food for all group is supported by Hartcliffe Health and Environment Action Group (HHEAG), a community development project which was set up in 1990 as a response to health concerns. HHEAG supported the local residents to establish the group, providing an office base, a telephone line and a part-time community development worker to support the group's development.

How is the buying group organised?

Food for all membership is open to anyone who lives or works in the BS13 area of Bristol. The group currently have 191 members. They pay an annual fee of £2.00, which entitles them to 10% off everything they buy. There is an elected management committee made up of 8 volunteers who oversee the group's activities. In addition the group employ a part-time shop manager whose salary is paid by HHEAG. Volunteer opportunities are offered in the shop, at the market garden and on the community market stalls; the group currently have 10 volunteers but they always need more.

How is food purchased and distributed?

Food for all buy fresh fruit and vegetables grown at the local allotments as well as wholefoods from a locally based wholesaler and a range of fresh

produce from local producers including meat and eggs. Produce is sold in the shop and the group also hold regular community market stalls where a stall is taken to local community venues and events, for example to the local children's centre and to older people's units. This has proved to be a good way to develop and maintain community interest in the project. In addition members can place an order directly with the wholesaler and meat producer via Food for All which will then be delivered to the shop on a weekly basis. The group have a bike and trailer which is used to deliver orders directly to group members. Food for All try to link the produce sold to recipes which are sent out to group members via quarterly newsletters. They also hold special food days to raise awareness and promote seasonal produce, for example the local honey producer came in one day with his bees.

Organic produce

Food for All sells organic and non-organic wholefoods from a locally based wholesaler, meat and eggs from local producers and fruit and vegetables grown without pesticides from the community market garden and from a local organic producer. The group decided to sell organic produce because the project is committed to healthy eating and feel that organic products offer a healthy alternative to conventional produce, in addition the group are aware of the environmental benefits of organic farming and want to make organic food more accessible to local people.

The volume of organic produce sold through the shop has definitely increased over time; none of the group's 187 members exclusively buy organic but approximately half buy organic produce some of the time. A lot of customers buy organically grown vegetables from the market garden but the primary motivation is to support the gardens as a local resource rather than because the produce is grown organically.

Positive outcomes of the buying group

The Food for All coop offers members local organic and non-organic produce with minimal packaging. The coop has the added benefit of providing local residents with a highly personalised, local food service. For example, people can ring in to see what fresh produce is available in the

shop that day. In addition Food for All is able to provide a secure market outlet for produce grown in the community market garden and also supports local producers by offering an outlet for their produce.

Problems/issues encountered by the group

Food for All is not currently able to survive without the support of HHEAG. The group hope to be self funding in the future but they have experienced a lot of problems in recent years, namely the opening of a large Morrison's supermarket in the area who sell similar products a lot cheaper than Food for All. In addition the Food for All unit used to be in a community centre and had a significant customer base. However, with the office relocation of a large project Food for All has consequently lost members.

Food for All is exploring its Governance model in order to choose the most effective to ensure its sustainability.

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The Soil Association is working as part of a partnership programme called Making Local Food Work which was awarded funding through the Big Lottery Fund for the next 4 years. The programme aims to reconnect people and land through issues of food: access to fresh, healthy, local food that has a clear provenance using social and community enterprise approaches to link communities and producers. For more information on the programme see: www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk