



The Grub Hub

Background

In 2006, the Soil Association ran a workshop on how to set up a local food group in the Barton Hill area of Bristol. Following this meeting a group of local residents and a representative from the Soil Association who lives in the local area decided to set up the 'Grub Hub,' a local buying group.

The aim of the group is to provide access to healthy food, that's affordable and available to all locally, including organic food which is not readily accessible in the Barton Hill area of Bristol.

How is the buying group organised?

The Grub Hub is an Unincorporated Cooperative, registered with Cooperatives UK. The group has a bank account, Secretary and Treasurer and around 20 members, 12 of which order regularly. Each member pays £5 a year to cover Co-operatives UK's fees, and any surplus funds go towards the cost of any events that are organised. The group organisers including the Secretary, the Treasurer and ad hoc order helpers are all unpaid volunteers.

How is food purchased and distributed?

The group place an order with Essential Trading Cooperative, a locally based wholefood wholesaler, every two months. Order procedure tasks are currently shared with members taking it in turns to co-ordinate the order. Food is delivered to a central point which is currently a member's house, where one or two members sort the order, and people come to collect their individual orders. The group hope to open a shop in the future and it is felt that the success of the buying group has demonstrated the need for affordable healthy food in the area.

Organic produce

The Grub Hub buys cases of organic and non-organic dried and tinned foods, wholefoods, toiletries and beauty products and split them according to requirements. The group estimate that they spend about £3,300 in the course of a year and at least 50% of this is spent on organic produce. All of the group members buy some organic produce and about a quarter of members buy mostly organic produce.

Positive outcomes of the buying group

The food bought through the Grub Hub is often cheaper than the equivalent in supermarkets. Members are able to purchase healthy, ethical (including organic), affordable and nutritious produce locally; there is nowhere else in the local area where this range and type of food can be purchased. There is also a social element to the group as members have been able to meet local people interested in the same issues as themselves.

Problems/issues encountered by the group

The process of placing the order and working out payment can be very time consuming and the amount of work involved is not attractive to many people. Not all of the group members are confident in their ability to co-ordinate the order and some do not have access to or are not used to working on a computer; as a consequence mistakes are sometimes made. It is felt that there has to be a maximum number of people involved in the group to prevent the administration from becoming even more complicated and time consuming.

The group have found it hard to find a suitable drop off point for the orders as most of the group members have small houses and the roads are narrow. A local church offered the use of its premises but there were issues with security so the food is now delivered to one member's house and collected the same or the next day by the other members of the group.

The Grub Hub would like to make contact with more 'excluded' groups in the community but don't feel that they have achieved this yet. Having a shop front would make it easier to make links with people and more social events would be attractive, but people don't have much time to organise or attend events.

The Grub Hub would like to buy fresh, local, organic produce such as fruit and vegetables, but this has not yet been possible because of time constraints and difficulties in sourcing produce. However, members of the group have managed to encourage a local green grocer 'Stella's Fruit and Veg' to stock some fresh organic produce.

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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