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Foreword The benefits of bulk buyers group

Changing the world with food, friends, and a lower grocery bill.

Gathering over food is a core part of our 'humanness.' Since we first worked out which berries were safe and how to throw a spear, communities have gotten together to share resources, feed each other and connect over a meal.

The turbulent times of the last few years - fires, floods and pandemic - have seen an increased desire for group food experiences (and tightened purse strings), and we've seen a big jump in people enquiring about Bulk Buyers Groups. These small but powerful groups are intertwined with so many things that have the potential to take on or heal many of the big challenges we're facing as a society: cost of living, food security, social isolation, environment, community empowerment, the list goes on.

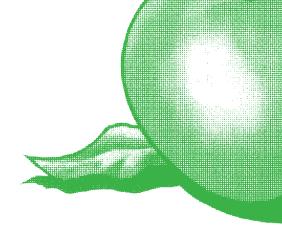
We've been helping groups like this get started and nurture communities for over 15 years - both as a supplier, and as an advocate for fair systems (read more about our work on page 59)

"Saying eff you to the big supermarkets, saving \$\$\$, meeting like minded people, learning new things, buying better quality at lower prices - I would recommend joining a co-op for so many reasons."

BNE Buyers Group



What exactly is a bulk buyers group?



Bulk buyer groups, mini co-ops, secret foodie societies... they all run differently and for different reasons, but are essentially all just groups of people getting together, pooling their buying power to access the food they want. This works by accessing bulk quantities and prices.

Groups we've seen include:

- students who value sustainable, healthy food but can't stretch their budgets to the prices of organic grocers
- parents who want a more affordable way to nourish their hungry teenage boys
- colleagues at a bar banding together to give up plastic and support local regenerative farmers
- neighbours looking for another excuse to catch up for monthly gin club
- savvy business owners using a buyers club as a way to build a community around their aligned offerings.
- health conscious foodies

And many more.

No matter the motivation, we believe they're all key to a stronger, fairer, more affordable food system for everyone.

Is it right for me?

Being part of a Bulk Buyers Group is for you if any of these sound good:

- High-quality, earth-friendly produce for less
- · Cutting food miles and packaging
- Supporting regenerative farmers
- Shopping small and reinvesting in your local community
- Learning more about where your food comes from
- Regularly getting together with likeminded people over food, a cuppa or wine

We believe in the beauty and potential of these groups, and as part of our commitment to advocating and catalysing fairer, robust food systems for all, we've been working to make it easier than ever for new groups to get started.

We've combed through our experience supporting these Groups, both through Food Connect Foundation, and our original business, Food Connect. We picked the brains of our community. And we've created this guide to make it a whole lot simpler to form your very own buyers club.

How to use this guide

Bulk Buyers Groups come in all shapes, sizes, from a variety of backgrounds and with different reasons for getting started. There's no "right way" to do it and this guide is not the be-all-and-end-all but it will take you through the basics, share some of the most common ways to go about it, and give you some things to consider before you set out.

You don't need to read from start to finish - dip in and out of the sections as you're ready or need ideas.

Please know that we are here to give suggestions, link you in with other buyers groups and co-ops in the area or generally answer any of your foodie questions. This is an exciting time for Buyers groups, and this growing movement is filled with generous people who love to share their knowledge, wins and ways to tackle problems - you will read many of these tips in the following pages.





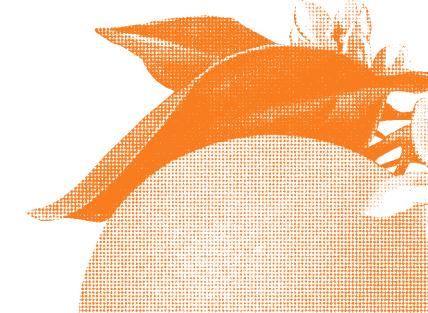
Part1-Starting Your Group

This part covers the essentials for getting your group up and running. We've cut them into bite sized pieces for you.

Step 1 -Find your foundation members

Bulk Buyers Groups are as much about community as they are food. And while you could lone-wolf it and work out all the details first, we recommend finding a handful of people to come on the journey from day one. This way you can tackle the next steps together, and create a model that is exciting, inspiring, and (most importantly) doable for everyone.

When finding people to be in a Bulk Buyers Club with you, look for **like-minded folks** who are in it for the same reasons, whether that be affordability, access to high quality food for your families, wanting to be more involved in the local community, a passion for supporting farmers or food sovereignty... Whatever your motivations, the process will be easier (and more fun) if you share them.



TOP TIP

We've found that these groups work better if the founding members are already connected in some way. As you're all used to cooperating, it would be easy to fit into your schedule, and trust us when we say you'll look forward to veggie day! In turn, the Bulk Buyers Club is then an awesome way to make that group even better - attracting new members, team building, fundraising and more.

This could be:

- neighbours
- a sports team
- student guild
- church community
- colleagues or volunteers at the same organisation etc

How others are doing it

"We kicked off the co-op with a small number of people, consisting of the staff that worked at The Scratch and Netherworld only. After a few months, we were able to add a few more people until we got to a comfortable capacity for our space."

The Good Family Scratch Co-op.

"Friends were the easiest way to gather initially but consider also focusing on people who live close (friends of friends or advertising in local groups) to help your co-op long term."

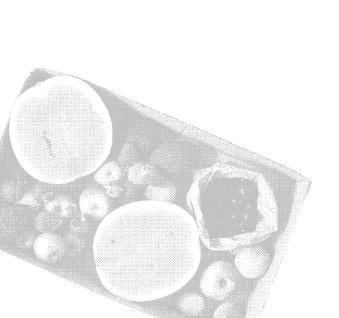
The Awesome Co-op of Doom.

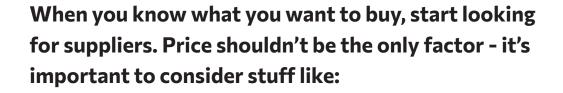


Step 2 -Work out what you want to buy and from where?

While most Bulk Buyers Groups revolve around fresh produce and dried goods, some also include meat, dairy, eggs plus cleaning products and loo-roll, so it's worth getting on the same page about what your group can or will order.

- Will you only buy fresh fruit and vegetables?
- Only organic? Only local?
- Will you order meat (and if so, every week or just monthly)?
- Is it a free-for-all from whatever your suppliers have available?





- Minimum order quantities
- Product range
- Delivery schedule
- Customer service
- Their ethics and sourcing approach.

Most groups start with one main supplier, and then add smaller artisans and farmers over time. Suppliers trusted by other groups in South East Queensland:

- **Sovereign Foods**
- Mount Cotton Organic Fruit & Vege
- Honest to Goodness
- And more check out Open Food Network for suppliers near you

Step 3 Decide on a model

At its most basic, a Bulk Buyers Group is just that - a group of people who pool their collective buying power and time to purchase good food in bulk, in order to access lower prices. Sounds obvious, right? But there are a lot of different ways to do that!

Over the years of working with Bulk Buyer groups we've seen a number of formats and models. For this handbook, **we have identified two** that are not only the easiest to get started, but tend to be the most efficient and resilient.





All members agree to a set spend - for example, \$45 a week. Using that budget, group preferences and what's available through your suppliers, someone in the group orders a range of produce. The items get packed into mixed boxes, with everyone receiving the same thing - e.g. a kilo of spuds, a lettuce, some apples and some carrots. This is a simple and popular way to approach Bulk Buying for a small group of friends and family, and a great way to start a bulk buying group.

Pros

- less time spent collecting orders
- easy to set up repeat orders
- packing orders is simple because each box is exactly the same
- easier to take advantage of the bigger bulk quantities
- easier to manage personal and group budgets
- flexiblity around substituting one item for another of equal value
- everyone having the same produce encourages conversation about recipes and ideas

Considerations

- maths involved in meeting the weekly total kitty amount
- who's responsible for choosing and ordering?
 Regular role or rotating?
- do you let people know what might be in the box that week before they order, or make it a surprise?

Type 2 - Individual orders

Each member of your group places their own unique order from the available products, and those orders get consolidated into a single wholesale order. This format is best for groups who communicate well and are happy to negotiate splits and sharing, or have enough members to reach higher quantities of each.

Pros

- everyone can choose what they want
- encourages communication and collaboration around meeting order quantities
- Less maths for everyone!

Considerations

- somebody will need to collate and place the final orders. This may be the same person each time, or require a roster
- if one member only wants a small amount of something, they may need to find other members willing to split with them to reach wholesale quantities, or pay the slightly higher retail price for that item



How others are doing it ...

"We use a Google Sheets spreadsheet where everyone adds their own order and I use it to refer to while sorting our delivery. It keeps track of everyone's total which I can then match against the payments in our co-op bank account."

The Awesome Co-op of Doom

"Make it simple. Everyone pays \$25 and gets the same haul - seasonal produce that farmers and suppliers have on offer. Once we got the hang of that, we were able to add in some extras, such as bread, mushrooms and kimchi."

The Good Family Scratch Co-op.

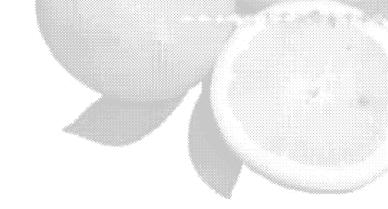


Part 2 - Waking it Work ork

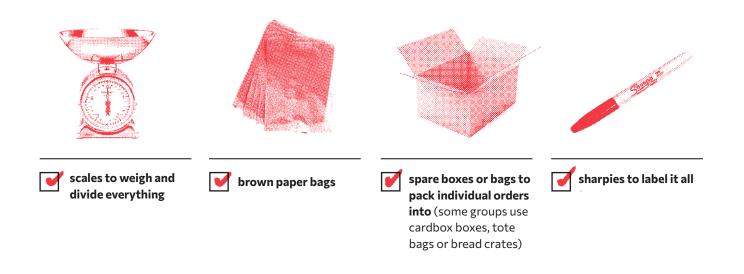
So you've got your core members, you know **what** to do and **why** - now it's time to work on the **how**

You don't need to have all of these set in stone right away (you'll find your way over time) but having these sketched out can make that first order or two a lot smoother - you'll be bonding over broccoli in no time.

Equipment



Since ordering bulk quantities means most of your produce will come in large boxes and need to be split up, we highly recommend getting:



Then if/when you're ready, you can add nice-to-haves like:



^{*}Facebook marketplace or your local Buy Nothing groups are great for this!

Location

You'll need to decide where your products will be delivered to, divvied up and collected by members. We recommend setting a regular 'home' for your group, so you always know where to go.

Most just operate from a member's home or yard, but you could also use:

- hall or club rooms
- communal shed or workshop
- bar, cafe or venue
- School canteen

All you need from the space is:

 enough room to lay out the delivered boxes/ pallets and then pack individual orders

easy access for members to collect their boxes

Other things you can consider include:

- Cold storage particularly access to coolers/ fridges, and if there's likely to be a delay between your delivery and it being packed (e.g. waiting for members to finish work)
- Parking
- Ability to gather and have fun there without feeling rushed to get out the door



Task sharing

Who is going to do what and how often? We find the most successful groups (the ones that last the longest, and don't stress their members out!) are those that clearly task members with a role to play.

Have a think about:

- Which tasks need to be done, and which jobs can you separate or combine into roles? Think about how you'll collate and place the orders, who will collect the money, packing or laying out produce, group communications.
- Will these roles be permanently held, or rotate?
- Will the roles be given to those with relevant experience, or someone looking to build their skill-set/be more involved in their community?
- Do responsibility-holders receive a discount or free product for their time?

Some of the more social groups have everyone available come every time to hang out and pack together.

Alternatively, some smaller groups have been very successful with a single co-ordinator who orders for the group, packs the boxes with help from family or housemates, and then receives their own produce for free or a significant discount.

For more help with dividing tasks, see the appendices to this guide.



How others are doing it

"At Yumscrum, we encourage our members to become involved as a 'Roots Crew' Member. Roots Crew work on a rotational basis ordering and dividing the produce. They answer the important questions like "what's in the box?" and "how can this thing work better?. Communication, administration and accounting are imperative to the success of YumScrum"

YumScrum

"One or more people can take on the part/s of the operation including balancing the payments and invoices, redoing the spreadsheet with each week's prices, submitting the order, sorting the delivery, and communicating with members. We use a private Facebook group for the latter."

The Awesome Co-op of Doom

Timing and frequency

Most Groups order either weekly or fortnightly. The **most important thing is consistency** - if people can't make it a predictable part of their lives, they're much less likely to stick with it.

When deciding your timing and frequency, consider things like:

- Schedules and commitment of you and your members
- Availability of your chosen/possible locations
- Delivery days of your chosen suppliers
- How long it takes your members and their households to get through larger quantities of produce
- Typical grocery budgets of your members

Logistics and admin

Every group does this part differently, and it'll be a lot easier to work out if you've got clearly defined roles

Things you'll need to work out:

- How will you collect orders from members? e.g. email, spreadsheet, Google form?
- Is payment due at time of order?
- When is the cut-off for members to order, and how far out is that from your suppliers' cut offs (e.g. COB Wednesday or by 9am Friday)
- Can members order from everything available through your suppliers, or will you choose a smaller selection of core products to limit admin and make it easier for the group to meet larger bulk quantities (and lower prices) of those products?
- How will you let members know that ordering has opened for the week/fortnight?
- Will you follow-up with members who haven't ordered for the week, or keep a strict deadline?



How others are doing it

"Be consistent. By having a regular schedule with the process, the group knows exactly which day to order, pay and pick up. It is the same every week"

Good Family Scratch Co-op.

"We make orders to suppliers on a monthly basis. Payment is required within 24hrs of orders closing and is made via PAYID - any late payments will mean that individual order is cancelled"

BNE Buyers Group.



Money stuff

We can't talk about collective buying power without talking finance. But don't worry - even if you're not a numbers person, there's actually a lot of empowerment and joy to be found in self-organising, trusting and collaborating with your community, and together putting your money where your values are.

Here are some ways to tackle it

- Consider opening a bank account for the group to make it easier to keep things fair and transparent
- Charge members a small contribution to cover running costs e.g. stationery and packing supplies, coffee/wine for packing nights, maybe insurance or accounting software. This could be an annual membership fee, or a small % on each order.
- Decide how and when you'll receive payment from members and be clear about it - e.g cash up front when they or an invoice with payment terms once the order is confirmed.
 From our experience, we recommend getting members to pay up front for orders so the kitty doesn't go into debt.
- How will you handle shortfalls (e.g. underpayment from members, or not reaching quantities for lower prices)? You could keep a buffer in the bank account, or invoice/chase-up members for the remainder.
- Decide if you will you offer refunds or credit if items are unavailable or not up to scratch



How others are doing it ...

"Having everyone add an initial deposit to the co-op bank account ensures there is always enough money to cover the invoice even if some members' payments haven't cleared by the delivery day. These can be recorded in the spreadsheet and refunded when the member leaves the co-op."

The Awesome Co-op of Doom



Communication



One of the most important elements for an effective (and enjoyable) Bulk Buyer Group is clear communication.

You'll need a streamlined, reliable way to contact all members. This is crucial for the operational stuff like coordinating weekly orders, finding volunteers for a task if someone can't make it, floating the idea of new products etc, but is also great for the social side such as sharing tips & recipes and organising social activities.

It helps to keep all communication through a single channel (or two at the most) so that nothing gets missed. The tools and platforms chosen by some of our Groups include:

- Facebook groups or Messenger chats
- Whatsapp groups
- Email
- Text messages

TOP TIP

For the sake of community and connection, we like 'open' tools that provide more visibility and discussion among all group members like Facebook groups and Whatsapp. Most groups use something like this, and then a 'closed' channel like email for the financial side and individual orders.

Formalities and Covernance

Don't be scared - the legal structure and governance of your group can be as simple or as robust as you choose. Most smaller groups opt not to register or operate under any formal structure, but larger ones often do.

Things to consider:

- Some suppliers require an ABN to become a customer. This is the main reason we see small groups go down the path of registering with the ATO. It's not tricky if you decide to do so.
- Depending on location, you may need to consider public liability insurance in case a member gets injured. A simple at-home business policy can be a cost-effective option if appropriate (you can cover costs through a small membership fee)
- If you're running the buyers group from an existing organisation like a school, sports team or church, you might already have these.

DISCLAIMER: we love pumpkins, not precedents - we're not in a position to give legal advice. These are just options/approaches we're aware of through our community, but recommend you seek advice from those qualified to give it if you decide to go ahead.



Part 3 Making Your First Order

7 easy steps and you'll be off and running



So you've got everything in order? Awesome! Submitting your first order only takes a few steps - it might look a bit like the below. It might take a bit of getting used to, and that's OK - have fun with it!

- In advance, set up an account with your chosen supplier and familiarise yourself with the ordering platform and cut-off times.
- When it's go time (we recommend midweek, in line with your schedule), send a message to your members letting them know that ordering is now open, with details of how and when to submit theirs.
- Members individually submit their orders and transfer the corresponding payment to the nominated bank account.
- When the member deadline has passed (and any stragglers have been contacted), collate their orders into one place.
- 5 Place the group order via your suppliers' chosen platform.
- On delivery day, get together to pack the big delivery into individual orders! Check over what's arrived, and start sorting the items into boxes/bags/crates for what each person has ordered. We recommend everyone gets involved for at least the first packing day make a party of it!
- **T** Everyone grabs their box and heads home, buzzing with excitement from what you've all just started.

Boom - It's that easy!



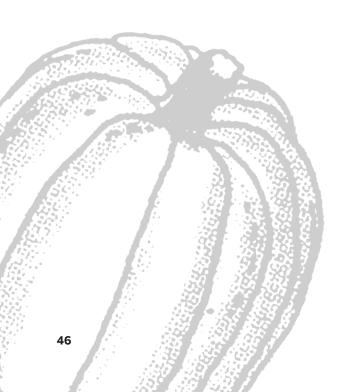
Part4Building a Food Community

Growing your group



Once your founding members have the hang of things, it's time to look at how big (or intimate) you want this thing to be in the long term, and how you'll maintain that.

Some groups stop at a tight-knit 4-6 households, and that's cool. Most tend to start small, but find about 15-20 households is the sweet spot - enough people to hit those bigger bulk quantities, small enough to feel friendly and manageable.



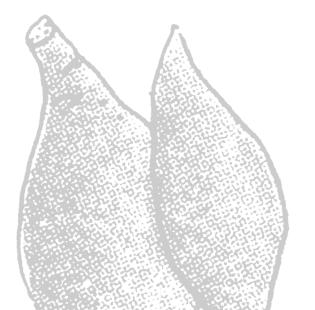




When you're at this point, have a think about:

- How many members do we need to hit minimum orders, or think we can handle with our chosen venue and logistics?
- Who else do we want to welcome in? Friends, family, other parents from the kids' school, neighbours further down the street? Is it limited to that group only?
- Will we actively seek out new members, or just be open to being approached?

Will adding more people change your structure and systems around ordering and communication?







Attracting new members

So you want to open your group to more people?

Awesome! Depending on how selective you plan to be, some great approaches are:

- Posting about your Group in local and/or likeminded Facebook pages (like the Food Connect Community group)
- Putting a note in your school/club/church newsletter
- Word of mouth get existing members to bring a friend each.
- Whipping up a flyer (Canva makes it easy) and dropping it in nearby mailboxes
- Send an email or Facebook message to Food Connect Foundation and we can share with our networks
- Holding a fun picnic or meet-and-greet event

Make sure you focus on what a new member will get out of being part of your fantastic group!



Making it work long term - nuturing connections

The Bulk Buyers Groups who go that little bit further to connect to each other and their community are the ones that last. Over time, even those who started simply as a way to get cheaper fruit and veg realise just how powerful these little clubs can be for building friendships, improving kitchen literacy, encouraging community activism and more.

If you want your Group to go the distance – whether in consistency, or wider impact – we recommend giving some of these a try:

- Create a set of commitments to one another

 it's great if this is done early in the game,
 but it's never too late. Some groups have full
 on charters, others have guidelines or shared
 values.' We recommend starting with a couple
 of agreed intentions for what everyone wants
 the group to achieve, and then a couple on
 what you commit to doing for each other e.g.
 sharing responsibility, embracing seasonal
 produce.
- Start a monthly newsletter share recipes, information on your suppliers, upcoming events and more.
- Get together have picnics, try local restaurants together, or just break out the wine at the occasional packing session and spend time getting to know each other as people away from the boxes. Some groups even organise cooking demos or presentation nights to share skills.

- Connect with other Buyers Groups tap into the wins, challenges and lessons learned from others doing what you do! We're happy to link you to groups like your own, or get in touch with the bigger 'old school' types like Chewsday - they've been around the block and are generous with their knowledge.
- Start sourcing from small producers using your Groups' buying power to engage other local suppliers is a brilliant way to meet more people and get involved in the local food system. You could hit up your local baker, or nearby market gardeners.



Top Tips For Success

A pick'n'mix of advice from Groups who have been there, done that - take what you need!

"Have a kick off meeting for everyone to get to know each other before you start."

"Start small and manageable with 5-10 households, and (slowly) expand when you're ready."

"Start small. - Begin by ordering a couple of staples and add more products over time. If you try to replace your entire grocery shop straight away you'll get overwhelmed." "Start with people who you know and are comfortable with - it'll make it easier to iron out any kinks when you're figuring it all out at the beginning."

"We have a no whingers policy.

Everyone needs to be a little bit flexible
- sometimes we won't meet a certain
order quantity or something will
happen to a farmer's crop, so we might
all have to pay a few \$ extra, or we
don't get a certain product. Accepting a
similar substitute (or just going without
that week) is all part of eating locally
and seasonally."

[&]quot;Have a kick off meeting for everyone to get to know each other before you start."

"Set clear expectations, and agreed upon a simple systems. One group leader says "I don't chase people up for their payments, if your \$50 is not in the account by COB Friday it's assumed you don't wish to order for that fortnight."

"Make sure you don't end up in a situation where there's only one person who knows how to do a crucial part of the process."

[&]quot;Have fun! If you take it too seriously it won't last."



Thank you!

Thanks for your interest in Bulk Buyers Groups and the local food movement in South East Queensland! We love getting to know motivated and curious foodies like you.

If you have any suggestions, comments, feedback or how we can provide support, feel free to send an email to projects@foodconnectfoundation.com.au.

A big thank you to Yum Scrum Collective, Chewsday Collective, The Awesome Co-Op of Doom, Turnstyle Bulk Buyers, Good Family Scratch, Food Buyers Club Loganholme, BNE Buyers Group and all our buyers groups for allowing us to share their helpful tips, and comments from their own welcome documents.

About Food Connect Foundation

The Food Connect Foundation is a not-for-profit registered charity committed to creating a new regenerative food system.

With a vision of a world where everyone has access to fresh, healthy food that's fair to growers, eaters and the planet, we establish and nurture initiatives that make it possible. We pilot social enterprises, support growers, and promote conscious food choices through consultancy, advocacy and education.

To find out more visit foodconnectfoundation.org.au

This guide was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Ubuntu Foundation. In their mission to 'create a world that works,' Ubuntu Foundation nurtures foster unity, build communities, and address the underlying disconnects that plague our world today. Find out more at <u>ubuntufoundation.com.au</u>

Food Connect Foundation wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians, past and present, of the Aboriginal Nations of 'South East Queensland. We respect their wisdom and rich history as the original owners, farmers, and community builders of these lands and waters.









