

Case study MCP Fruit 'n' Veg Together



Summary

Fruit 'n' Veg Together is a small food co-op that runs out of a church hall in the centre of Southend, Essex. It provides organic vegetable and fruit bags to around 15 families; collection takes place over two sessions once a week. It is a good example of how to integrate a project into the weekly routine of a community with very little effort.

Background

Milton Community Partnership (MCP) operates an office in St Marks Church and hires slots in its church hall for community groups to use. On Thursdays there is a Parent & Toddler group from 10am-12pm and an After School Children's group between 3:30 – 5:30pm. Eleanor Sayers attends these sessions with her two children and in them saw a perfect audience for a veg bag scheme. She asked the MCP if she could start a food co-op in 2008, and it was hosted for free because of its community benefit and non-profit nature.

Produce

Since fresh produce from the surrounding area has been hard to source, Eleanor orders from Abel & Cole, a national organic veg box scheme, and sometimes River Nene, since they both do home delivery. Produce is ordered in bulk sacks, usually 5kg potatoes, 5kg carrots, 1kg onions. Special orders are placed on occasion, for yoghurt and other foods. The order is placed under her name and arrives at her own home – she sorts the produce into each bag and wheels it all to the nearby church in her pram! Paper bags from the supplier are re-used each time, and each bag costs £3.

Procedures

The food co-op isn't constituted, and has no bank account – all bags are paid for in cash which goes straight to the delivery driver who brings next week's vegetables. Bags are ordered a week in advance and payment is taken when the order is placed – very simply and effectively by hand on a piece of paper at the hall, using the supplier's paper price list.

Problems

It's rare for someone not to collect – if it happens Eleanor rings them when she gets home and takes it round for them. If payment hasn't been made and she can't get hold of the non-collector, she eats the veg herself.

Promotion

A friend illustrated the promotional poster, pictured above, which is displayed in St Marks and elsewhere. The original is black and white and has a blank space where the typed text is to promote replication in future – a similar project can put their own details in if they want to use the poster and children could be involved in colouring in the pictures of vegetables.

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Progress

After a visit by an adviser on the Food Co-ops project, Eleanor proved keen to take produce grown at the Growing Together community garden, which she hadn't known produced surplus. Eleanor is in the Transition Westcliff group and her interest in setting up a food co-op very much came out of her principles for re-localising the food economy and doing something for her community. Southend hasn't anything in the way of an organic grocers shop, though it has a proliferation of community growing and food projects.

The MCP plans to construct a community garden of veg grown in pots around it's building this summer and have open 'let's grow' fun days to establish it.