

5 A DAY • Fruit on Deck
• Growing Fruit and
Vegetables • Food



Mobile Fruit & Vegetable Vans



NORTH WEST FOOD & HEALTH
TASK FORCE



INVESTING IN
englandnorthwest



Connecting Farming and Food in England's Northwest

What is a Community Mobile Fruit and Vegetable Van?

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Community mobile fruit and vegetable vans aim to improve access to fruit and vegetables for people living in areas with limited access to shops selling fruit and vegetables. The need for this kind of project is usually identified by some mapping of the areas for shops selling fruit and vegetables or by participatory appraisal techniques to identify that residents have difficulty in buying fruit and vegetables

They aim to provide fruit and vegetables at a low cost by street trading and supplying other fruit and vegetable outlets e.g. food co-ops, local community centres, Sure Start projects or schools



They offer opportunities for community members to work as volunteers or as paid workers and build transferable skills to enable these workers to move to other employment.

They often rely on a great deal of good will and enthusiasm of the whole team to keep the service running. Developing a mobile fruit and vegetable van requires a large amount of planning, a written business plan and adequate funding.

This guide aims to cover many of the key points to consider but can only do this in brief detail. Talking to other mobile vans in the NW and learning from their expertise is strongly recommended.(see appendix 1 for details of the existing vans in the NW)

How do they work?

The mobile fruit and vegetable vans in the NW have been set up with short term funding from a variety of sources (see contact information for details of the existing vans in the NW) – usually on the assumption that the van will become sustainable at the end of the fixed term. Experience shows this cannot be the case if sustainability is to be judged on fruit and vegetable sales only. The broader benefits of the vans need to be considered in the sustainability criteria e.g

- skills gained by volunteers and the raising of their self esteem and aspirations,
- the health benefit of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption to disadvantaged communities
- increased community cohesion.

The vans buy fruit and vegetables from a wholesale market or local wholesaler and sell the fruit and vegetables on the street at recognised and pre advertised venues through out the day (up to 10 venues for 30 mins/day over 5-6 day week) Supplying other community venues helps increase turn over and reduce running costs.

It is important to aim for at least five days trading per week as wastage of the fruit and vegetables is inevitable if trading is limited to a smaller number of days

What kind of van is needed?

The vans are either leased or bought for the project. Refrigeration in the vans is useful but this increases the initial cost and the running costs substantially. The running costs of a fruit and vegetable van will vary depending on the project's aims.

Size/capacity of vans – Initially a long wheel based parcel van may be sufficient but as the business expands your vehicle will need to follow suit.

How many Staff are needed?

A full health and safety evaluation should be taken out before the van is ready to go out on the road, along with a risk assessment for driver and public safety. The van should meet environmental health requirements for the selling of fresh produce.

How many staff are needed?

If the fruit and vegetables are bought at a wholesale market at least one member of staff will need to be working from 6-7am . This may require staff to work a shorter number of long working days rather than limit the number of street sales by an early finish to the working day.

The minimum staffing for the van when on the road is considered to be two people for security purposes (but this could be 1 paid worker and 1 volunteer). Parking the van in sites covered by CCTV or recognised safe points is recommended for street sales to reduce the risk of crime. Building up relationships with community street wardens and local community organisations has helped reduce the risk of crime. In the projects in the NW staff are paid for 20 – 37.5 hours /week . Additional staffing is required to cover for sickness, holidays and training.

Adequate planning and realistic costings for staff are essential. Relying on good will is a strength of all the projects and enables the projects to have lower running costs. However relying on this good will is not sustainable in the long term.

Can the projects realistically rely on volunteers?

Using volunteers can keep the running costs down. However volunteers will need some training and will expect to gain some additional skills. This requires paid staff time to be diverted to fulfill this role. There is a potential for some increased partnerships with community training organisations and adult learning.

Where do the fruit and vegetable come from?

Fruit and vegetables will be considerably cheaper if they can be bought from a wholesale market. However the increased costs required to have staff available to buy from the market has to be set against this benefit. It may be more cost efficient to buy fruit and vegetables from a local wholesaler who can deliver within the 'working day'. Good relationships can be established with the wholesale market traders enabling the projects to take advantage of low cost produce. The savings made here can offset the extra few hours to pay someone to go to market.

Maintaining the quality of all the fruit and vegetables sold is vital to maintain the customer base. Customer care and information on the produce you are selling is also important. People need to know how to cook, prepare and store what they buy.

What about seasonal, local and organic produce?

Each of the projects in the NW recognises the benefits of using seasonal, local and organic produce if available at the right price. These principles differ between projects. Organic produce may not be considered appropriate if it has been flown/shipped vast distances across the world. Organic produce can occasionally be the cheapest in the markets and having a good relationship with the traders has often led to these products being reserved for the projects. Local and seasonal produce is often the cheapest in the markets.

The projects have looked to buy produce from local farmers but had found that this created too much paperwork and practical difficulties. This is an area of work that will be pursued by the NW Food and Health Taskforce and has been over come in other Regions (See appendix 1 for contact details)



Is wastage a problem?

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The storage requirements of fruit and vegetables requires specialist knowledge. You will need someone who has this knowledge or can be trained, to minimise any wastage. In winter the wastage of fruit and vegetables is very low although produce may need to be protected with horticultural fleece or similar over night. In summer the wastage can be much higher. One project in the NW has a zero waste policy with all fruit and vegetables and packaging reused, recycled or composted. This project will not buy produce with excessive amounts of packaging or packaging that cannot be recycled.



If the van can trade over a 6 day week there will be less wastage due to continual rotation of stock. If the van is only able to trade over 3 days there will be fruit and vegetables left at the end of the 3 days that can not be sold at the next day of trading (i.e.4 days later)

How is the cost of fruit and vegetables calculated?

The aim of the project is to be able to supply a wide range of fruit and vegetables at low cost to the communities without access to shops selling fruit and vegetables. The fruit and vegetables need to be a comparable or lower price than supermarket fruit and vegetables. The amount of mark up needs to be decided by the project management group and defined in the project business plan. A mark up of 25-50% can still provide prices cheaper than the supermarkets.

To be able to do this the buyer will need to buy from a wholesale market and have good relations with the market traders. This mark up can cover fuel, fruit and vegetable costs and wastage and some staffing costs. It also means that the project may be able to subsidise the more expensive or organic produce that will add variety to the fruit and vegetables that can be offered for sale.

In order to keep the fruit and vegetables at a low cost the full running costs can not be covered. It has been calculated by one project that they would need to increase the price of their fruit and vegetables by a further 33% to achieve sustainability. There is a balance between providing fruit and vegetable at the right cost and meeting the costs of the project. This balance needs to be agreed by the management group.

To increase sales and increase consumption bargain bags are often used, selling a set amount of fruit and vegetable for a set cost (e.g. 8 pieces of fruit or vegetables for £1.) Volunteers can be used to bag the fruit and vegetables at the fruit 'depot'. Some projects use different prices for supplying different venues. Direct selling from the van and sales in schools are kept at the lowest price whereas organisations/companies working for a profit will be charged a higher price

Step by step guide

1: Establish a need:

Is there evidence that some low income residential areas do not have easy access to shops selling a variety of fruit and vegetables? A local health and lifestyle survey may have data on the numbers of people in an area eating small amounts of fruit and vegetables. It is unlikely to have identified the reason why. A participatory appraisal approach with the community may identify why people are not eating fruit and vegetables. Carrying out a mapping project of shops in the area will identify if access to shops selling fruit and vegetables could be a problem.

Who will be the Suppliers?

For examples of Participatory Appraisal and mapping exercises see appendix 1.

Additional questions to ask:

- is a mobile shop the best way to supply fruit and vegetables in these areas?
- are there any food co-ops selling fruit and vegetables in the area – could these be developed?
- are there retailers who could be encouraged to sell fruit and vegetables in addition to existing foods in the area?

2: Identify partners

A management group will need to be established with expertise to write a business plan. Your local Business Link will be able to help with business planning (see useful links). The Development Trust Association (DTA) have an enterprise accelerator programme to support people in the start up process after the business plan and funding have been agreed. There is a cost of £200 for this service. Contact other local community/not for profit groups for help and advice

3: Develop a bid for funding

Funding will be required for set up costs AND for continuation funds. Do not expect a mobile fruit and vegetable van to be able to cover all its costs.

4: Who will be the suppliers?

If buying from the wholesale markets consider the additional hours required for staff to buy from the market.

Consider:

- how many times will you have to visit the market
- what storage facilities are available

Most wholesale markets run on a similar system to a normal market but on a much larger scale. So the best way of getting contacts is by going down to the market and chatting with the many different wholesalers, explain to them what you are doing and why you are doing it. Some will be completely uninterested but some will respect what you are trying to do and will give you a lot of help.

5: Market the service and establish a customer base

Keeping regular customers is crucial for success. It is vitally important that your customers knows that you exist. They need to know the times and places you are trading. Use community radio, leafleting, posters, etc. Tell health centres, community centres, dentists, etc. Leave posters and flyers.

Use marketing techniques such as :

- occasional price promotions e.g. money off vouchers, 3 bags for the price of 2
- incentives e.g. introduce a new member & receive a free bag or money off voucher
- introduce a loyalty card
- tasting sessions – opportunities to try new or unusual varieties of fruit & vegetables

Consider additional venues e.g. schools.

Will a school allow you to sell in the grounds of the school?

Anyone working in contact with children will need to have Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance This cost around £50/per person. Selling in school premises could attract the young people themselves (Secondary Schools) or their parents (Primary Schools) to buy produce.



Developing the Business

Will a Sure Start Centre or extended Schools act as a distributor for the van?

If the van could deliver fruit and vegetables to a central point the staff may organise their own sales to people using the centre.

Is there a fruit on front desk scheme running in your area?

This is a scheme where fruit is sold at reception desks of community centres and workplaces for staff and visitors (see Guide to running a Fruit on Front Desk Scheme in this pack) and requires a regular supply of fruit.

6: Evaluating the project

It is important for any funding organisation that the project is evaluated. Evaluation takes time and money (approximately 10% of a project cost is suggested as appropriate evaluation costs).

The additional benefits that a mobile fruit and vegetable van brings (e.g. training for volunteers, numbers of volunteers moving into employment, local employment opportunities, social contact for isolated people etc) are more difficult to evaluate but important outcomes of the project.

Is there a community research project in your area that may be able to help with evaluation? A Project currently exist in Runcorn. (see appendix 1)

There are plans to develop a core set of common evaluation methods for the North West Region that projects could use. There is an added value in projects using comparable evaluation methods to strengthen the evidence base by building a bigger picture across several projects in different areas.

7: Developing the business

There will be cost efficiencies if the business can grow. Trading on a six day cycle reduces wastage; increasing the amounts you can buy will reduce wholesale costs.

Advice on developing the business is beyond the scope of this guide. A more detailed advice sheet is planned for existing businesses.

Acknowledgement

Many thanks to all the staff involved with Mobile Fruit and Vegetable Vans in the NW. Particular thanks to Simon Hollingworth at MERCI Manchester.

Appendix 1:

Further sources of information:

5 A DAY Programme Public Health Team Government Office

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Establishing a need

Sustain http://www.sustainweb.org/poverty_index.asp

Reaching the Parts... Community mapping: Working together to tackle social exclusion and food poverty.

Examples of mapping of food retail outlets (Knowsley) – contact mary.farell@knowsley.gov.uk

Fresh Evidence and Fresh Ideas- available from MERCI
Contact Simon Hollingworth simonh@bridge-5.org

Local sourcing of produce

- NW Food and Health Taskforce
www.foodandhealthnw.co.uk
Angela Towers/Martin Ashton
Contact 01772 895428

- National Farmers Union
www.nfuonline.com
Terry Abbott
Contact 01695 554900

- North West Organic centre
<http://www.nworganiccentre.org>
Contact 01995 642206

- North West Fantastic Food partnership & links to regional food groups
www.nwfantasticfoods.co.uk

Contact Information

- Food Links UK
<http://www.foodlinks-uk.org>
- Local Food Works website
<http://www.localfoodworks.org>

Community Research project

Happen 4U is a community research project in Runcorn established after the Local Strategic Partnership identified a need for a home grown organisation to carry out research in a more socially beneficial and cost effective way

Contact 01928 513323 janet.conway@happen4u.co.uk

Developing a social enterprise:

Sustain has just launched the SAUCE TOOLKIT, an online social enterprise toolkit for community food projects.

The site explores the potential for community food projects to engage with social enterprise methods as a means of securing greater financial security.
Visit www.sauce-toolkit.org

Business Link

Have a sub regional programmes to support those wishing to start-up a new social enterprise with the opportunity to research and develop their business idea into a fully operational social enterprise. Services include:

- group workshops
- one-to-one reviews with expert business advisers
- long-term support
- free access to 3SE events, workshops and other activities

www.businesslink.gov.uk

search on this site for social enterprise

NW Development Trust Association (DTA)

Enterprise accelerator programme

Regional Development Officer
Development Trusts Association (NW)
Royal Standard House
330-334 New Chester Road
Birkenhead CH42 1LE

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Mobile Fruit and Vegetable Vans in the North West

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Vegetables • Food
Co-operatives • Mobile
Fruit & Vegetable Vans
• Community Cook &
Eat Training • Evaluation



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