



# Final Report

## MLFW Food Co-ops Evaluation

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation report examines how the operation and delivery of the Food Co-ops and Buying Group (FCBG) project met the project goals set by the five-year Making Local Food Work (MLFW) programme (2007-2012). It also looks at the level of support that food co-ops have received from Sustain as the project partner and aims to build the broader context on the role of food co-ops in England.

The range of food co-ops operating in England and the motivating factors for establishing them is diverse. For the purpose of the MLFW programme and this evaluation we have used Sustain's definition that describes a food co-op as '*any outlet run by local people that is involved in supplying food for the benefit of the community, rather than for private profit*'.

The findings from Sustain's data and an in-depth analysis of 18 food co-ops from across England that participated as case studies for the evaluation reveal that:

- food co-ops have diverse operating structures, ranging from formal co-operative membership (22% of case studies evaluated) to those set up as part of health-related initiatives (39% of case studies evaluated);
- 10 of the 18 food co-ops (55%) evaluated were established during the MLFW Programme, although three (17%) had been operating in excess of 15 years;
- 83% of food co-ops that were evaluated were reliant on volunteers and many were reliant on external funding which poses issues for their long-term sustainability/viability; and
- long-standing food co-ops (that operated formal co-operative structures) had taken steps to become financially secure, they developed business plans and used a mixture of paid workers and volunteers.

Support, training and advice from Sustain and the regional advisers had played an important role in addressing issues to improve good practice in the food co-ops. Many reported that their role in organising networking and training events was the most important impact of the project.

The evaluation concludes that although the flexibility of the food co-op model enabled these enterprises to address a range of issues within local communities that are related to local food systems, this diversity hampers evaluating the actual contribution they make to the sustainability of local food systems. What the findings do confirm is that all food co-ops aim to improve access to healthy and affordable food at the local level and, except for those established very recently, most customers/members have regularly used the food co-ops in excess of one year. In addition, the majority of those living in low-income areas, report increasing their intake of fruit and vegetables as a result of using the food co-op. All food co-ops also felt that they were well known in their immediate local communities because they were integrated into wider health, environmental or social initiatives – these went from Healthy Start<sup>1</sup> to Transition Town groups<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/> [accessed 2 May, 2012]

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/> [accessed 2 May, 2012]

Sustain's support and advice had clear benefits for the majority food co-ops in the evaluation. This does, however, raise questions about how the withdrawal of these services and support will impact on the food co-ops now that the programme has ended.

Finally the report recommends that because the diversity of the food co-op model can be confusing, communities should be clear about their motivations/ethos for starting up and running a food co-op. They could explore the benefits of more formal membership systems, based on co-operative principles of democracy and mutuality, as a way of encouraging sustainability/ commitment when external funding is withdrawn. Concomitantly, policy makers and funders should also be clear about what they are supporting/funding – is it a community food project /health initiative or a 'true' food co-op? Both models have benefits, but the underlying ethos appears to have implications for their longer-term sustainability/viability.

The evaluation also concludes that strategies to support change and network building are critical for the future sustainability/viability of food co-ops in England. For example, not every food co-op has to become a formally registered co-operative that is community owned and defined by membership, the potential exists for a co-operative of co-ops where individual local food co-ops/community food projects are the members. If further funding is obtained by Sustain we recommend this option be explored, this could be an umbrella co-operative for the country or for the various regions. Some 20% of the co-ops surveyed already used this model.

## 1. Scope

### 1.1 Project Overview

The Food Co-ops and Buying Groups (FCBG) project<sup>3</sup> is managed by Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming, as part of the Making Local Food Work (MLFW) programme.

The bid for the Food Co-ops project was originally submitted by Food Links UK which later merged with Sustain. The original partners in the project were all members of Food Links UK (FLUK) or of London Food Link (which was itself a member of FLUK). They were Food Chain North East, Somerset Community Food (which took over the project from Somerset Food Links), f3, London Food Link, Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency and Newham Food Access Partnership. All the partners were involved in Year 1 of the project and Food Chain NE, Somerset Community Food and London Food Link also continued into Year 2. The Soil Association is an additional MLFW partner carrying out work on supporting Organic Buying Groups. The in-depth evaluation presented here does not include this aspect of the project.

In Year 1 of the MLFW programme the partners, who all had experience of setting up or supporting food co-ops, were commissioned to research and write up their findings on different areas involved in running food co-ops such as education and awareness raising, volunteer support, distribution, needs assessment, ICT systems, governance and finance. This work resulted in the production of the *Food Co-ops Toolkit*. The second year of the programme focused more on providing more direct support to new and existing food co-ops for example via training courses, events and free resources. In Year 3 eight part-time regional food co-op advisers were employed by Sustain to support the development of new and existing food co-ops across England. The regional food co-op advisers have continued to provide advice and support to existing and new food co-ops to enable them to improve their sustainability – this includes:

- One-to-one advice, via e-mail, phone or in person
- Written guidance via the Food Co-ops Toolkit
- Fact sheets for schools, universities and workplaces
- Free marketing materials including banners, leaflets and cotton bags
- Promotion via the food co-ops finder online map, newsletter and social media
- Networking events
- Training, for example on communication skills and conflict resolution
- Study visits and open days at other food co-ops
- Referrals to the Enterprise Support strand of Making Local Food Work
- Referrals to Co-operatives<sup>UK</sup> for support under the governance strand of MLFW

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/about/fcbg/> and [www.foodcoops.org](http://www.foodcoops.org)

## Project Goals

The aims of the FCBG project set out by MLFW are that after five years:

1. 200 existing and new food co-operatives and buying groups who have taken part in the project will have made changes to improve their sustainability.
2. 100 new food co-operatives or buying groups will have been established.
3. The overall turnover of the 200 food co-ops and buying groups involved in the programme will have doubled (monetary rather than amount of produce).
4. Five new trade links will have been established between groups of organic producers by the end of the project (Soil Association target)
5. Ten per cent of people using food co-ops and buying groups will report eating a healthier diet because of using a food co-op or buying group.
6. 80 per cent of direct beneficiaries who are working to establish food co-ops and buying groups in England will be aware of good practice and regularly share information by the end of year three.

Our role as evaluators was to examine some of these in more depth, some of the concrete outputs as in the numbers of new co-ops established and helped were collected by Sustain as part of their on-going monitoring.

### 1.2 Defining food co-ops for this project and evaluation

Sustain recognises key commonalities between food co-ops. These are that they:

- Are run by the community for the community
- Aim to supply produce at affordable prices
- Are run on a not for profit basis
- Generally rely on the support of volunteers, either in their day-to day running or on the committee.<sup>4</sup>

These commonalities provide a working definition of a food co-op for the purpose of this evaluation. However, the range of food co-ops operating in England and the motivating factors for setting them up is diverse (see section 3.2). Sustain acknowledges this range and diversity and point out on their food co-ops website<sup>5</sup> that:

“The term food co-op is used to describe lots of different initiatives and so everyone has a slightly different interpretation about what a food co-op is. Some community-run food co-ops are registered formally as co-operatives however, the term food co-op has over the last few years come to be used to define any community food outlet run on a not-for-profit by basis for the benefit of local people. Not all of these community food co-ops have a formal membership structure and so do not necessarily meet the definitions of a co-operative. It is for this reason that many community-run food co-ops also go by many other names such as food clubs, social food outlets, food groups, or simply describing whatever they do, for example operating a bag or box scheme, community market, fruit and vegetable stall or mobile store. **For the purposes of the MLFW project we have used the term food co-op to describe any outlet run by local people that is involved in supplying food for the benefit of the community, rather than for private profit.**”

The complexities of defining food co-ops are explored further as part of the evaluation.

### 1.3 Aims of the evaluation

The three-year evaluation feeds into a larger collation of MLFW projects being undertaken by SERIO at Plymouth University. The guidance from SERIO encourages all MLFW evaluations to look specifically at the level of support food co-ops have received from partner organisations, in this case Sustain.

As well as responding to the project goals and guidance from SERIO, this evaluation aims to build broader context on the role of food co-ops in England by pursuing the following evaluation goals:

- Assess the impact of food co-ops on beneficiaries;
- Develop clear tools for communicating the range of impacts that are anticipated;
- Develop a simple, consistent, creative and easily applicable evaluation process, and to develop methods that will be useful to the local food sector in planning and evaluating future work.

### 1.4 Literature Review

Although the Co-op supermarket remains the fifth largest retailer in the UK and the biggest consumer co-operative organization in the world, Sodano and Hingley (2009: 507) observe '(w)hat had previously been the Co-ops strength: mutualism, localism and community serving and community-based business' became unfashionable in the last quarter of the 20th century as global supply chains and centralised systems took over. The beginning of 2012, however, saw a renewed focus on the 'co-operative economy'<sup>6</sup>, the year is designated as the International Year of Co-operatives and there have been new attempts to define the complexity of co-operative enterprises<sup>7</sup>. In addition, a new body of literature suggests that food co-ops have become a particular focus of both media and political attention under the new coalition government in the UK. Food co-ops are being regarded as symbols of the 'Big Society', demonstrating how communities can re-energise economies, environments, health and social issues through food<sup>8</sup>.

Co-operatives are not about making profits for shareholders, but creating value for customers – this is what gives them their unique character. In the food system, co-operatives can help preserve organisational diversity by maintaining the principles of democracy, solidarity, mutuality, collaborative behaviours, and preferences for equity (Sodano and Hingley, 2009). However, motivations for setting up a food co-op may vary from cost and affordability, through health initiatives, to concerns about the environment. Any of these, or a combination of factors, may give a different focus to each food co-op (Ronco, 1974, Hines, 1976).

Although research and evaluation of English food co-ops is not extensive, there is evidence that contemporary food co-ops operate under a range of flexible models with a variety of management and organisational structures that do not necessarily conform to the founding

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.uk.coop/resources/documents/practical-tools-defining-co-operatives>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.uk.coop/economy2011>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.conservativecoops.com/>

tenets of the co-operative movement; namely, those of democracy and mutuality (Machell and Caraher, 2012). The academic literature tends to focus on the potential health benefits of a group of projects classified as food co-ops (Caraher and Dowler, 2007; Elliot et al 2006; Dowler and Caraher, 2003; Caraher and Cowburn, 2001) where funding or other support can come from local authorities, health authorities, lottery monies or other charitable sources (Caraher and Cowburn, 2003; Dowler and Caraher, 2003), or on the ‘second’ food co-op movement of the 1970s which was based on the principles of alternative and sustainable actions (Belasco, 2007).

Those food co-ops that focus on their health-related benefits are the most widespread initiative identified by the health sector to tackle food poverty and poor nutritional intake (Co-operatives UK, 2011, The Scotsman, 2010). Some research suggests (see for e.g. Dobson et al, 2000; Luckett, 2000; McGlone et al, 1999) a period of at least two years funding and support is required for these types of food projects to deliver any meaningful change. Food co-ops established on the premise that the future of farming, the environment and a healthy society requires a fair, ecological and co-operative food system (see for e.g. Seyfang, 2008; Mooney, 2004) are frequently considered as part of an ‘alternative’ agrifood system that has arisen to counter the dominant global, industrialised food system.

Recognising that the term ‘food co-op’ describes a range of food projects, this evaluation comes at an opportune time to help clarify the existing role of food co-ops and their potential for delivering affordable food within local delivery systems.

## **2. Rationale**

Our evaluation employed three inter-related phases (detailed below) but the case study method lies at the core of the rationale for this evaluation. This provided a focus at the local level in line with the MLFW aims of ‘reconnecting people and land through local food’ and in doing so, the evaluation was able to examine why food co-ops work differently in different contexts. However, our evaluation also recognised the need to combine this in-depth knowledge with macro-level analysis and, for that reason, it also draws on data from Sustain’s database to complement and contextualise the individual case study findings presented here.

### **2.1 Evaluation methods and tools**

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, drawing on both the experiences of those engaged in food co-ops and the diversity of these enterprises, as much as possible. From an initial analysis of Sustain’s database of co-ops to provide baseline data, evaluation tools were developed to conduct case study research.

Following a phased approach, this included: semi-structured interviews with co-ordinators and volunteers at food co-ops; observation; feedback from local users through graffiti walls; and survey ranking exercises around the four areas of environment, health, economic and social benefits of the food co-ops.

This approach provided both quantitative and qualitative data which enabled us to consider not only the scope and scale of food co-ops operating generally, but also how they were developing during the three year period of the project’s evaluation.



### **Phase 1: Scoping stage**

During the first phase of evaluation, case studies of three food co-ops were conducted in three regions of England: the North East, London and the South West.<sup>9</sup> Thus nine case studies were conducted in order to scope the various operating structures of food co-ops and their development in these regions.



**Key evaluation method in phase 1:** visual representations on radar charts of how those running and shopping at each food co-op perceived the different impacts of their actions in terms of health, economic, environmental and social benefits (see Report 1, June 2010 for full details).

### **Phases 2: Case studies**

The wide range of food co-op types that emerged from the three geographical areas in the first phase of evaluation informed the mixed method approach taken in phase 2. Two food co-ops from each of the nine regions in England were selected as case studies by Sustain's regional advisers. The advisers also provided additional information to measure progress against project goals and valuable insights on the impacts of the food co-ops in their particular regions.

The 18 co-ops selected represented the broad spectrum of food co-ops identified in phase 1 and data were collected using the same range of evaluation tools, fine-tuned by the initial scoping exercise. This was triangulated with data from Sustain's database, used routinely to monitor food co-ops in the MLFW programme (see section 3.1).

- **Key evaluation method in Phase 2:** Progress towards the project goals was examined from the completed analysis of nine case studies (of 18) completed at the end of phase 2. A traffic light system was used to present these findings (Green represented target met, Amber, still in progress and Red not met or in danger of not meeting set targets) (see Second Interim Report, January 2012 for full details).

### **Phase 3: Meeting the project goals**

Continuing this inter-related and phased approach, phase 3 built on the findings of the two earlier phases. The remaining nine case studies were completed and additional questions asked of them, and in order to look more closely at the impact of the MLFW Programme, the success towards achieving the project goals, and the impact of Sustain as an information and support service for food co-ops around the country, more time was spent on in-depth analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with food co-op co-ordinators as part of the case study research.

- **Key evaluation method in Phase 3:** in-depth case study analysis, drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews conducted with food co-op coordinators was used to tease out findings from the two earlier phases of the evaluation.

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<sup>9</sup> At the time of the research there were nine regions in England including London, the Coalition Government have dismantled these as separate entities.

## 2.2 Lessons learned across time

Combining quantitative data collected by Sustain to examine the scope and scale of food co-ops operating in England with qualitative case study evaluation methods provided a methodology for evaluating the project with the following provisos:

- collecting data and starting dialogues with food co-ops can be challenging and the evaluation would have benefited from more time being allocated to the process;
- addressing the diversity and ever-changing form of food co-ops and, in particular, the various operating structures as well as the day-to-day operational difficulties put additional pressure on the evaluation.

Ethical approval for the project was obtained from the School of Health Ethics Committee at City University, London.

## 3. FINDINGS

The findings are presented in two sections<sup>10</sup>. These present the case study findings; section 3.1 details and briefly discusses key characteristics and commonalities of the 18 food co-ops; and section 3.2 uses qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with the co-op coordinators to examine in more depth how successful the project has been in reaching its stated goals, and the role that Sustain has played as an information and support service.

### 3.1 Case Studies: key characteristics and commonalities

Initial analysis of the semi-structured interview data gathered from the 18 food co-op coordinators participating in the evaluation, demonstrated the diversity of food co-ops by type, their longevity, the various suppliers and outlets used, the range of organisational structures employed and the various food co-ops' primary ethos/ motivations (see *table 3.1*):

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<sup>10</sup> Sustain's database research (presented in a separate report) provides an overview of food co-ops operating in England. It contextualises the extent and geographic range of these food co-ops and presents further data on some of the main achievements of the project.

Table 3.1: *Food co-ops participating as case studies*

Case study	Region	Type of Co-op	Outlet	Organisational structure	Date established	Supplier	Ethos
True Food Co-op	SE	Grocery	Mobile shops and a community shops	Formal co-op membership structure	1999	Organic/local/ethical wholesalers	Social/environmental
The Grand Veg Bag Scheme	SE	Mixed fruit and veg bag scheme	Library on council estate	No formal structure. Community-led initiative	2009	Farm shop – including local produce	Food access and promoting health
Backwell Food Co-op	SW	Market stall (dried foods)	Community centre	Formal co-op membership structure	2009	Organic dried foods wholesaler	Social/environmental
Exeter University Scoop food co-op	SW	Market stall (dried foods)	University	Student society	2010	Organic dried foods wholesaler	Social/environmental
Shoots Food Co-op	NW	Mixed fruit and veg bag scheme	Children's centres and council estates	Housing association initiative	2005	Local wholesaler	Food access and promoting health
Dallam Primary School food co-op	NW	Mixed fruit and veg bag scheme	Primary school	School policies and practices	Sept. 2011	Local wholesaler	Food access and promoting health
Warwick Area Fresh Food Co-op	WM	Mixed fruit and veg bag scheme	Children's centres, community centres	Community Interest Company manages group small co-ops	2005	Local wholesaler	Food access and promoting health
Growing Local is Going Local	WM	Mixed fruit and veg bag scheme	Schools, delivery	Community Interest Company	2010	Local growers - 50% organic	Social/environmental
Shotton Community Centre Food co-op	NE	Market stall	Community centre	Managed as one of eight food co-ops by East Durham Trust . NHS funded	2010	Local wholesaler	Food access and promoting health
Haswell Mencap Food Co-op	NE	Market stall	Community centre	Managed as one of eight food co-ops by East Durham Trust . NHS funded	2010	Local wholesaler	Food access and promoting health
Christ Church Armley Youth Project Food Co-op	Y&H	Market Stall	Church	Not for profit church organisation	2010	Local wholesaler	Food access and promoting health
University of Leeds Green Action Food Co-op	Y&H	Shop	University	Formal co-op membership structure	1997	Suppliers of organic, fair trade and ethically sourced produce	Social/Environmental
From the Ground Up	London	Organic box scheme	Pub and a Community Centre	Housing association initiative	2010	Organic and local producers	Social/environmental

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Beethoven Food Co-op	London	Market Stall	Community centre	NHS initiative	2005	Local wholesaler	Food access and promoting health
Lowestoft Fresh Food Co-op	East of England	Mixed fruit and veg bag scheme	Community centre	No formal structure. Community-led initiative	2005	Local wholesaler via Great Yarmouth Mobile Food Store	Food access and promoting health
Community Connections Mobile Food Store	East of England	Mobile food store	Estates, traveller sites, schools, churches	NHS initiative	2005	Local wholesaler	Food access and promoting health
Leaf Cycles	EM	Organic box scheme	Delivery and pick-up from workers co-op	Formal co-op membership structure	1995	Organic and local producers	Social/ Environmental
Aspley Miles Better Food Co-op	EM	Market stall	Church car-park	No formal structure. Community-led initiative	2008	Local allotments	Food access and promoting health

### Types of food co-ops

Data from the case study food co-ops revealed the scale and diversity of these enterprises, namely: two operated as community shops (11%); six operated mixed fruit and vegetable bag schemes (33%); seven operated as market stalls (39%); two operated organic box schemes (11%); and one operated as a mobile food store (6%) (Figure 1).

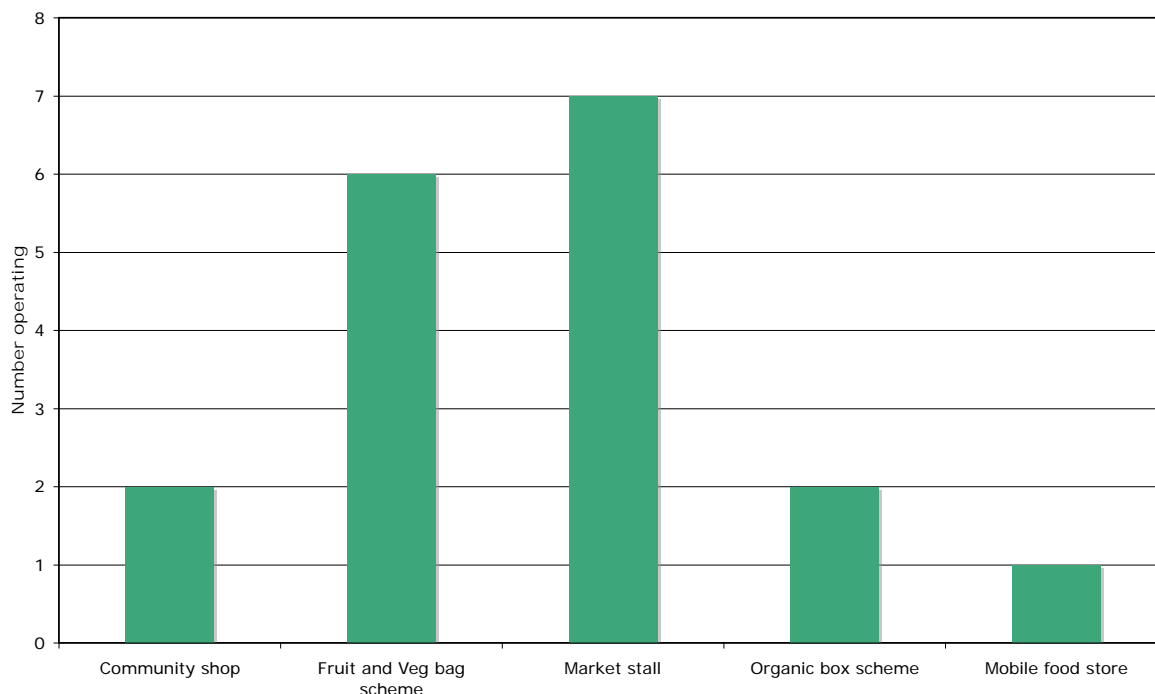


Figure 1: Types of case study food co-ops

## Outlets

A whole range of outlets was used by the food co-ops. The most common outlet being community centres (28%), others included a church and church car park, schools, a library, universities and mobile shops. These decisions were often motivated by the fact that either no cost, or minimal cost, was required for using these facilities. Additional reasons included they offered convenient community drop off points, were staffed by other volunteers so open for longer periods eg community centre or pub, were centrally located and used by the community for other purposes.

## Organisational structures

Similarly, the organisational structures were diverse, ranging from four food co-ops operating with formal co-operative membership structures (22%), to two Community Interest Companies (11%) and two not for profit organisations (11%), to seven that were incorporated as part of health-related activities of the local PCT, schools or housing associations (39%). Three had no formal structures in place and were run by volunteers as community-led initiatives (17%) (Figure 2).

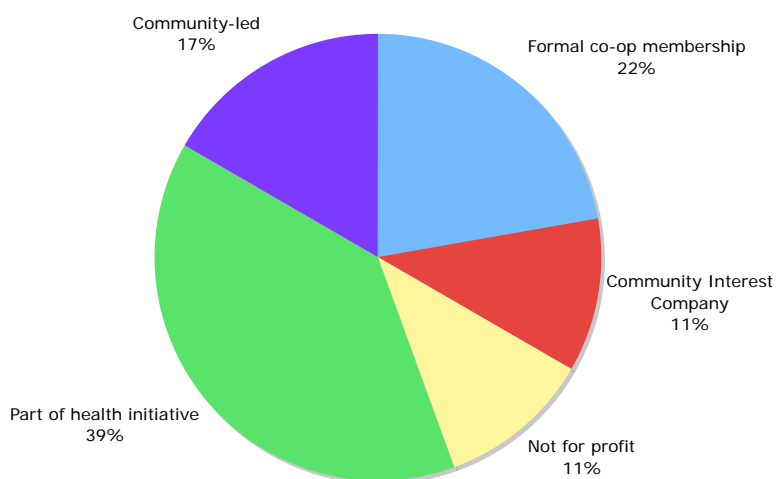


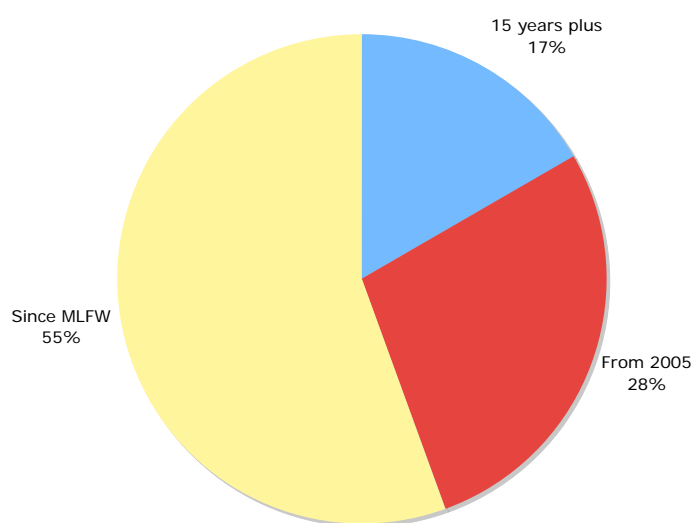
Figure 2: Organisational structures of case study food co-ops

There was a correlation between those more long-standing food co-ops that were motivated primarily by their social/environmental impacts and formal co-operative membership structures (True Food Co-op, Leaf Cycles, Leeds University). There was also evidence of networks existing between food co-ops in the individual regions. For example, Warwick Fresh Food Co-ops used a Community Interest Company to manage a number of small co-ops in the West Midlands, as did the East Durham Trust, which was funded by the NHS in the North East –both were models of ‘a co-op of co-ops’. In the Eastern region, the Community Connections Mobile Food Store, which was based in Great Yarmouth, also

supplied the fruit and vegetable bag scheme in Lowestoft as part of this PCT health initiative.

### **Length of time in operation**

The analysis showed that 17% of food co-ops (three) had been operating in excess of 15 years. Five food co-ops (28%) had been established prior to the MLFW programme in 2005, whereas 10 (55%) were newly established during the period of the MLFW Programme. Those that had been established more recently were particularly reliant on external funding and support which came from a range of sources including PCTs, local authorities, a university student union, churches and the private sector (Figure 3).



*Figure 3: Length of time case study food co-ops in operation*

### **Food suppliers and ethos**

There was a strong correlation between how each food co-op sourced its food and its declared ethos. Nine out of the 11 food co-ops that aimed to provide access to fresh fruit and vegetables as part of wider health initiatives sourced food from local wholesalers (50% of total number of case studies). Many of these expressed a desire to source only local food, but for many, price was the driving factor and demand for basic staples did not always make this possible.



*“like once they (the wholesaler) put in courgettes and aubergines – people don’t want it. They just want their staples - which are potatoes, onions, carrots, cauliflowers – where the prices are lower’.* Food co-op coordinator (NW)

*“yes, we go for local if we can but here we are deprived, and so price matters.’*  
Food co-op coordinator (E)

Those that had more focus on the social/environmental impacts of the food co-op sourced food from local growers and/or organic and ethical producers and wholesale suppliers. Two co-ops (Growing Local is Going Local and Aspley Miles Better Food Co-op) sourced only from local growers in order to provide local food to local communities.

*“our integrity lies in the fact that we are only supplying local produce’.*  
Food co-op coordinator (WM)

Although the impact ranking surveys conducted in the scoping phase for this evaluation found a striking difference between perceived food co-op impacts from rural and urban stakeholders, the declared motivations given by co-ordinators of the case studies participating in the second phase were less clear-cut. In phase 1, those based in rural areas (Somerset) indicated that social and environmental impacts were the biggest ones that food co-ops could make, whereas in London and the NE, there was more emphasis on health and economic impacts. However, in phase 2 which included all 9 English regions, there did not appear to be such a strong relationship. For example, more long-standing food co-ops that were based in cities like True Food Co-op in Reading and Leaf Cycles in Northampton, had a strong focus on their social/environmental impacts.

➤ **What the findings reveal:**

- **the food co-op is a flexible model and operates at a range of scales;**
- **community centres are a common outlet for food co-ops (28%);**
- **food co-ops have diverse operating structures, ranging from formal co-operative membership (22%) to those set up as part of health-related initiatives (39%);**
- **10 food co-ops (55%) were established during the MLFW Programme, although 17% had been operating in excess of 15 years and;**
- **there is an apparent relationship between food co-ops as part of wider health-related initiatives and sourcing from local wholesalers, and**

**between those with a social/environmental focus sourcing from local growers and from organic/ethical producers and wholesalers.**

### 3.3 Success of the project goals and the role of Sustain

The Second Interim Report (January 2012) investigated progress towards each of the project goals and found from initial case study research (nine case studies) and Sustain's data that good progress had been made towards achieving each goal. 50% had already met/exceeded the proposed targets laid down by the MLFW Programme.

This section reviews progress since this interim report was written using qualitative data from interviews with food co-op coordinators and looks in more depth at the role that Sustain and the regional advisers have played in this success. It uses the same project themes employed in the interim report of: sustainability, growth in the number of food co-ops operating in England, financial growth of food co-ops, health impacts and good practice.

#### 1. Sustainability

**Project goal 1: 200 existing and new food co-ops who have taken part in the project will have made changes to improve their sustainability<sup>11</sup>.**

#### Key sustainability issues identified by food co-op coordinators

##### 1. People:

- the majority of food co-ops were reliant on volunteers (83%) in order to survive financially. When managed well this had helped viability. However, for some food co-ops this was also a potential threat to sustainability:

*“the fact that we are students means we are the age to have more questioning power – to do things with less financial support and more commitment. But then at the same time there's a high turnover of students at university, so there's constant change which means there's no-one permanent in place”* Food co-op coordinator (SW).

*“we're totally reliant on volunteers which can be a bit up and down – the co-ops wouldn't work if there weren't volunteers”* Food co-op coordinator (WM).

- three food co-ops (17%) were not reliant on volunteers; two of these relied on government training schemes (Future Jobs Fund, work placement students), which also provided work experience, to support those in paid positions. The third felt the sustainability issue went deeper than this:

*“this is the problem with sustainability – this is going to be dependent on the amount of work that we as a school can put into it which is more than just having volunteers”* Food co-op coordinator (NW).

<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of this evaluation, sustainable changes are considered changes that positively impact the longevity and efficiency of a food co-op.



## 2. Planning for the future:

- some food co-ops took their long-term viability seriously and planned to become self-sufficient financially:

*“without the capital to get stuff, nothing is going to happen [...]. We want to move away from being grant dependent and are exploring social investment loans – as in the Unicorn model’ Food co-op coordinator (SE).*

*“ in terms of longevity, if we just wanted to stay as we are, and if we could double the bags that we are doing at the moment, then we would be sustainable on a small scale, yes, over a long period of time’ Food co-op coordinator (WM).*

- other food co-ops did no planning and just relied on repeat grant funding:

*“we can only keep going with funding for the part-time post. There is no long-term planning, just year on year. We don’t have a business plan.’ Food co-op coordinator (WM).*

- some food co-ops had adopted a more pro-active approach to maintaining their sustainability/viability and were thinking ‘outside the box’ and using various innovative activities including:
  - social networking
  - text alerts
  - facebook pages
  - card loyalty schemes – for example, buy nine bags and get the 10th free
  - £20 discount vouchers for every three hours worked per four weeks by volunteers
  - free punnet of strawberries for every £5 spent in summer

### How Sustain has helped food co-ops become more sustainable:

There were three key areas where support from Sustain had helped food co-ops become more sustainable: support from regional advisers, help with promotion and marketing and training.

For example, several food co-op coordinators commented on the difference it made to know that they could contact their regional adviser for help and information. This was particularly true for those just setting up:

*“L. has been very good [...] I met with him very regularly over the last two years - we’ll miss him because you feel that there is always somebody that has that bit of extra knowledge’ Food co-op coordinator (EM).*

*“Basically any questions we had we could ask her [...] knowing that there was someone there that if we’ve got problems we can ring them up and ask what to do about it.’ Food co-op coordinator (E).*

*“A. gave us initial advice and she was also a bit of emotional support as well in terms of saying things like ‘just ring in’ which was helpful’ Food co-op coordinator (SW).*

The regional advisers also contributed more ‘practical’ help in terms of promotional materials (including posters, banners, flyers and canvas bags), help with volunteers and payments for food co-ops that took part in the evaluation and hosted study visits:

*“we had a volunteer who came through L. She came for a couple of months and set up a website’ Food co-op coordinator (EM).*

*“J. made us aware of the £150 that they (Sustain) were allocating [...] This has enabled us to buy an LED display for the back of the bus to do more promotion’ Food co-op coordinator (E)*

Some food co-op coordinators had benefited from training sessions offered by the project which had helped them improve their practices and efficiency:



*“one of the main bits of support was around health and safety and the legalities of storage and also around liability[..] And from that, I guess, we became aware of the different policies and principles around food storage and how we sort of handle food [...] The finance-theme workshop was really helpful because C. went on the workshop and took over all our finances. She’s a volunteer’ Food co-op coordinator (SW).*

The *Food Co-ops Toolkit* (developed in year 1 of the project) had proved a useful resource for setting up and running food co-ops, although for some food co-ops that participated in the evaluation, it’s primary use was more as a reference resource and something to refer to when the need arose:

### THE FOOD CO-OPS TOOLKIT

*“ I looked through it but we already have own policies and procedures – but interesting to see what others are doing’ (London)*

*“ we’ve read through it – I mean it’s things we already know to a certain degree’ (E)*

*“ I’ve looked at it for ideas but you know I haven’t really used it. Ours is such a small venture, you know. We have never needed anything like a business plan, cashing up sheet or anything.’ (EM)*

*“ the Toolkit’s good because volunteers can take a look and it helps sort of formalize it in their heads and makes them realise all the different things that we are involved in [...] but I don’t think we actually used any of the documents’ (SW)*

➤ **What the findings reveal:**

- **the majority of food co-ops were reliant on volunteers (83%) and on external funding. For some, this was the only way they could survive, although for others, this reliance posed a potential threat to their future sustainability/viability;**
- **managing the volunteer workforce was also identified as a problem;**
- **although long-standing food co-ops (that operated formal co-operative structures) had addressed trying to become financially secure, most others had little incentive to grow or to make long-term plans;**
- **Sustain’s support and advice had raised these issues and provided training in key areas like finance and volunteers to help improve practice.**

## 2. Growth in the number of food co-ops

### **Project goal 2: 100 new food co-ops or buying groups will have been established**

It was also found that new food co-ops followed two different models; namely, those established as wider health-related initiatives and those that were community-led/driven. As already discussed in this report (section 3.1), 10 out of the 18 case studies had been established since the start of the MLFW Programme and analysis of these revealed that six had a primary focus on food access and health and four were either community or student-led and focussed more on social/environmental impacts.

Two case studies illustrating this diversity and the role that Sustain has played in helping them set up are presented below:

### **Case Study 1**

#### **Scoop Food Co-operative, University of Exeter**

##### **Overview**

<i><b>Established:</b></i>	2010
<i><b>Membership cost:</b></i>	£2 per annum
<i><b>Organisational structure:</b></i>	Student society: elected student committee of at least 3 members

#### **How the food co-op was established**

The food co-op was initially started in 2010 as a pre-order system from the organic dried foods wholesaler SUMA, but then the original group of students graduated and the food co-op restarted in November 2011 as a market stall with one of the founding members. The first market stall was held in November 2011 with 15 members and 80 people on the volunteer list.

*“a really key question is how you transition from people with social activism ideas to a system that everyone feels is more equal and democratic – more inclusive [...]Tackling the issue of people thinking this is something I can volunteer for, rather than being part of, is crucial” Food co-op coordinator (SW).*

The food co-op has a facebook page, space on the student union web-site and is using various networks like the student change initiative to promote itself.

### **What the members say**

One of the members explained that there was a bus laid on by Asda to the university campus which had discouraged students from shopping locally. However, as the food co-op points out on its website:

‘We’ll try to undercut supermarkets when possible (isn’t hard...), for example buying sunflower seeds at ASDA is £6.67/kg but through us is £1.99/kg!!’

Other comments from members included:

*“I think that it’s just one of those ideas whose time has come. I know that sounds a bit strange, but it’s kind of like every time I talk to someone about this – everyone has started thinking about their food and where it comes from”*

*“it’s more kind of everybody doing a little bit”*

*“I think that we are more than a food stall – more of an information hub – like a place of awareness”*

### **Developing and sustaining the food co-op: the role of Sustain**

The food co-op is open to non-members but they pay 10% extra, which is another way the co-op raises money to cover costs. It also receives support because it is a student society and has negotiated much-needed storage space with the university campus authorities. Currently the food co-op has no plans to implement a formal co-operative structure. The co-ordinator felt that the students preferred its informality.

Scoop had received advice from Sustain’s regional adviser in the South West, from the Soil Association and from KABIN, Cornwall’s Cooperative Development body in the initial start-up phase.

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## **Case Study 2**

### **Primary School food co-op, North West**

#### **Overview**

**Established:** September 2011

**Membership cost:** Not applicable

**Organisational structure:** Incorporated as part of school’s policies and practices

#### **How the food co-op was established**

The food co-op was launched in September 2011 to help improve attitudes/practices to healthy eating amongst the children attending the primary school and their families living on a large estate in the North West. In many ways the food co-op is an ‘add on’ to other work the school is doing in this deprived area.

The staff coordinating the food co-op began with a taster session and then asked parents if they would be interested in a fruit and vegetable bag scheme and received a positive response. They now offer a 5-a-day fruit bag for £1, a salad bag for £2 and a vegetable pack for £2.

*“I think that the whole initiative is targeting deprived areas and the underlying issue is that this involves preparation and planning – the food co-op is really the end result, but you’ve got to tackle all the other issues behind it. We need to get the parents on board because at the end of the day it’s going to be the parents buying the food and cooking it.”*  
Food co-op coordinator (NW)

### **What the members say**

To keep costs down, the vegetable bag has basic seasonal staples but some of the parents had commented on the repetitive nature of the vegetables in the pack each week. However, one parent who helped as a volunteer appreciated the good value and said:

*“ the fruit is much cheaper than the supermarket and there’s more variety. I couldn’t buy all those varieties in the supermarket”* Food Co-op volunteer

### **Developing and sustaining the food co-op: the role of Sustain**

The food co-op has only been going for a few months and some parents needed reminding in order to get the order forms and money in on time. The school’s text messaging service will be used in the future to help trigger a better response.

Those coordinating the food co-op had received support and advice from the local council. This led to contact with Sustain’s regional adviser in the North West who came down to meet them and explained how they went about setting up the food co-op. She also put them in touch with their F&V supplier, a local wholesaler.

Attending a conference organised by Sustain had also been helpful to the coordinators. It provided an opportunity to meet others running food co-ops and to hear their experiences. It made the organisers realise that taking a step back and doing more planning, like for example, volunteer induction, would be helpful for getting the food co-op on a firmer footing.

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#### ➤ **What the case study findings reveal:**

- **preparation and planning are important when food co-ops are being set up;**
- **food co-ops frequently address a set of wider/less tangible issues in the community;**
- **those motivated by more ‘formal’ co-operative principles found it difficult to ensure that everyone had a sense of ownership;**
- **there was evidence that Sustain’s networking events had clear benefits for co-op coordinators by providing the opportunity to talk to others running food co-ops.**

### 3. Financial growth

#### **Project goal 3: The overall turnover of the 200 food co-ops involved in the programme will have doubled**

The case study data provides an insight into the different attitudes that food co-ops had to increasing their financial turnover. As not for profit organisations, with a primary objective of creating value for their customers /members, increasing their turnover or attracting new customers was often not high on the agenda. Some felt that they could not grow bigger. For example, one co-ordinator said:

*“in it’s current form it’s really good as it is – to take it to the next level is a whole different thing and whether we could sustain that is questionable”*  
Food co-op coordinator (EM)

However, another had come to realise that although they did not initially consider the food co-op a business (this one was part of a health initiative), she had come to realise that really it was one. She said:

*“ I went to give a presentation on this and was talking about the pricing structures, how we have cut the price of some things and make others more expensive in order to balance the books and get people to buy the cheaper things – it evens out the prices with loss leaders. I’m standing there giving this talk about loss leaders and people picked me up and said you are talking with your business head on there.”* Food co-op coordinator (E).

How much the food was marked up varied. Some food co-ops put no mark-up, many added 10% to cover costs, one food co-op selling organic produce had needed to add an additional 50% to make the co-op viable. As was seen from one of the case studies non-members were charged ten per cent more than members. The small-scale that many food co-ops operated at, and their primary motivation to keep prices as low as possible, meant that there was limited scope to increase financial turnover.

➤ **What the findings reveal:**

- **as not for profit organisations, small and newly established food co-ops were concerned with creating value for their customers/ members rather than increasing their financial turnover;**
- **some of the larger food co-ops did acknowledge that they operated as businesses and had systems in place to improve their financial viability.**
- **there was a link with the ability to plan for the future with the fragile nature of managing a volunteer workforce**



#### 4. Health impacts

**Project goal 4: Ten percent of people using food co-ops will report eating a healthier diet**

Health impact surveys were administered in some of the food co-ops involved in this phase of the evaluation in an attempt to add more to the profiling of who was shopping in the food co-ops and to further examine their reported health impacts on diet.

Analysis of health impact data from 17 questionnaires completed in the Eastern and South West regions demonstrated how food co-ops which were located in low-income areas in the East (Community Connections Mobile food store and Lowestoft food co-op) tended to have older customers (aged 45+). For the food co-op operating in the South West (Backwell- a formal food co-op with 22 members), which served a more prosperous area and ran alongside a fairtrade café, the questionnaire data showed that many of these shoppers were in their mid 30's with young families. In all three food co-ops, shoppers reported that they had used the food co-op in excess of one year.



When it came to amounts people were spending in the food co-op, most of those using the Community Connections mobile food store in the Eastern region said that food bought on the van was 25% of their weekly food bill, whereas those using the fruit and vegetable bag scheme in Lowestoft reported it was less than 10%. In Backwell, shoppers were a mix of members and the public (who paid an additional 10% mark-up) buying dried food on the food co-op's market stall. These shoppers reported spending between 10-25% of their weekly food bill at the co-op but some said that they would spend more if fresh food/ bigger selection were available.

The Backwell shoppers (24%) reported that the food co-op had not really improved their diet because they already had an awareness of healthy eating but the low prices, social atmosphere and organic food was important to them. In the food co-ops in the Eastern region, all shoppers felt that shopping for fresh food at the co-op had increased their intake of fruit and vegetables (76% of those questioned overall).

When impact ranking surveys were administered in these three food co-ops, those operating in low-income areas in the East gave health and economic impacts priority, whereas in Backwell, most rated the social impacts a priority, with the food co-ops environmental and economic impacts also rated as important.

➤ **What the findings reveal:**

- **analysis of additional survey data showed that all customers/members had been using the food co-op for more than a year;**
- **those who reported having a long-term interest in healthy eating (24%) said the food co-op had not changed their pre-existing healthy diet but had made it easier to maintain this;**
- **those on low incomes (76%) reported that shopping for fresh food at the co-op had increased their intake of fruit and vegetables.**

## 5. Good practice

**80 percent of direct beneficiaries who are working to establish food co-ops in England will be aware of good practice and regularly share information by the end of year 3.**

Analysis of the interview data supplied by food co-op coordinators demonstrated how many of the food co-ops had benefited from Sustain's role in organising networking and training events over the course of the programme. This, for many, was the most important impact of the food co-op project.

Some of the coordinators said that meeting others running food co-ops at these events had been the trigger to expand or improve their practice.



*“when we went to the food co-ops event we found some other people were doing Healthy Start vouchers so it came from there. I kind of researched it and saw that it was do-able.”*  
Food co-op coordinator (SE).

*“I’ve done some talks at MLFW events so it’s helped me to sort of get involved with other networks of people setting up local food co-ops”* Food co-op coordinator (SW).

*“ we’ve recently been to a conference organised by Sustain and that was probably for us more useful than the toolkit because it gave us an opportunity to listen to other people.”* Food co-op coordinator (NW)

Also, as reported in section 3.3, some of the food co-ops were using social networking, like text alerts and facebook, to improve their visibility and network with others.



➤ **What the findings reveal:**

- **many reported that Sustain's role in organising networking and training events was the most important impact of the project;**
- **some food co-ops were increasingly incorporating social networking as a way of promoting and marketing their enterprise.**

## **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The evaluation methods and tools were successful in providing both quantitative and qualitative data which enabled us to consider not only the scope and scale of food co-ops operating, but also how they developed during the three year period of the project's evaluation. We suggest that many of these methods and tools are transferable to future evaluations for food co-ops.

However, the amount of time available for the evaluation did pose some limitations on how it was conducted and on reaching an in-depth assessment of whether the project had met its stated objectives. The quantitative nature of the project goals made it difficult to progress beyond the headline figures required.

The findings present an analysis of the flexibility of the current food co-op model and how this is impacting in local communities and on local food systems. This raises some issues about the future of the food co-op model post-MLFW and the ending of funding and support. This is briefly discussed, and some conclusions are drawn, in the three sub-sections presented below and from this, some recommendations are made for the future.

### **Food co-ops today**

The findings reveal that the food co-op is a flexible model that operates at a range of scales, from formal co-operative membership structures to those set up as part of wider health initiatives; they address a set of wider and less tangible issues that are related to food access but that also involve a differing range/combination of social, health, environmental and economic issues in each community.

For this reason evaluating the food co-ops' contribution to sustainable local food systems posed some problems. Differing sourcing practices that ranged from sourcing from the cheapest local wholesaler to using local growers and organic/ethical producers and wholesalers, made it complex to assess how much locally produced food was being sourced by these enterprises.

What the findings did confirm was that all food co-ops aimed to improve access to healthy and affordable food at the local level and, except for those established very recently, most customers/members had regularly used the food co-ops for over a year. In addition, the majority of those on low-incomes reported increasing their intake of fruit and vegetables as a result of using the food co-op.

For most food co-ops, reliance on volunteers and external funding posed critical issues for their longer-term sustainability/viability. Small and newly established food co-ops were concerned with creating value for their customers/members rather than increasing their

financial turnover and there was little incentive to grow or make plans beyond the end of the next year's funding. In contrast, those operating under long-standing formal cooperative structures had addressed how they developed and remained viable without external funding. The confusion over what a food co-op actually is, and the lack of distinction between a volunteer-led food delivery project and a 'true' food co-op, tends to side-line how those that operate under formal membership structures are able to involve the community and take action to sustain themselves over the longer term in a systematic and democratic way using an established framework.

### **Impacts:**

In the same way that the flexible food co-op model addressed a range/combination of social, health, environmental and economic issues in each community, so socio-economic factors affecting local communities are reflected in the diversity of food co-ops operating, their associated impacts and the motivations that underlie their contribution to local food delivery systems. However, all food co-ops felt that they were well known in their immediate local communities because they were integrated into wider health, environmental or social initiatives – this went from Healthy Start to Transition Town groups.

The findings highlight the distinction between food co-ops operating in low-income areas and those serving more affluent areas. Those in low-income areas were attempting to address the poor selection of fresh fruit and vegetables available locally. Many coordinators talked about how their estates were down to only one shop selling fresh fruit and vegetables (and these were likely to be pricey and of poor quality) and that the bus fare to outlying supermarkets was expensive. One said that Asda had replaced the corner shop and many people went there every day. Whereas those in more affluent areas were not motivated by poor access to fresh and affordable food but by wanting to increase their access to more ethically sourced food.

So just as socio-economic indicators affect where people shop for food in other retail contexts there was evidence that the same considerations and limitations affected those shopping in food co-ops. In other words, people shopped where they felt comfortable and where they perceived they could afford to shop, and for this reason, the outcomes for the local food delivery systems were different.

### **Future of food co-ops**

Sustain's support and advice had clear benefits for most food co-ops in the evaluation. For example, training in key areas like finance and volunteering had helped improve practice, and networking events had provided valuable opportunities for food co-op coordinators to learn from one another. This does, however, raise questions about how the withdrawal of these services and support will impact on the food co-ops now that the programme has ended.

In addition, in order to clarify how much food co-ops currently contribute to local food delivery systems and what their potential benefits could be, the argument for developing a clearer typology for a food co-op is that it could help different communities address issues related to local food delivery systems. It could in addition enable policy makers and funders to support initiatives that are in danger of floundering when their external funding and support comes to an end. Not every food co-op has to become a formally registered co-operative that is community owned and defined by membership, the potential exists for a co-operative of co-ops where individual local food co-ops/community food projects are the

members. If further funding is obtained by Sustain we recommend this option be explored, this could be an umbrella co-operative for the country or for the various regions. Some 20% of the co-ops surveyed already used this model. There were additionally some who operated a membership fee but were not incorporated as co-operatives. In this latter instance membership offered lower prices.

## **Recommendations**

### **For communities:**

- the diversity of the food co-op model can be confusing; it is suggested that those setting-up/running food co-ops should consider how they are understood by their local communities when considering both the ethos and terminology they use to describe themselves;
- one option could be to explore the benefits of more formal membership systems as a way of encouraging sustainability/ commitment when external funding is withdrawn;
- another option could be to explore membership of a co-operative of co-ops where individual local food co-ops/community food projects are members of an umbrella co-operative operating at national or regional level;
- most food co-ops can not operate without volunteers; ensuring good induction, training and ways of ensuring the relationship benefits both ways are essential for the food co-op to establish, survive & flourish; and
- marketing the food co-op outside the immediate community, for example by using social networking, could help longer-term viability.

### **For policy makers and funders:**

- the diversity of food co-ops means that funders and policy makers should be clear about what they are supporting/funding – is it a community food project /health initiative or a ‘true’ food co-op? Both models have benefits, but the underlying ethos appears to have implications for their long-term sustainability/viability;
- explore the model of a co-operative of co-ops where individual local food co-ops/community food projects are members of an umbrella co-operative operating at national or regional level;
- set realistic goals when supporting food co-ops and ensure robust and in-depth evaluations are conducted that can be closely tailored to these goals. Draw on case studies to provide ‘real life’ local examples of food co-ops in practice;
- implement strategies/policies to support the viability of each food co-op, including funding strategies to support change and network building;
- prioritise new initiatives that have a particular focus on poverty alleviation; and
- ensure there is a realistic and well-thought through exit strategy. For example, evidence suggests (e.g. Dobson et al, 2000) that those food co-ops related to health initiatives require at least two years of support to get established.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Food co-ops – sustainability interview guide

1) People 2) Planning 3)Produce 4)Premises 5) Practical Resources 6)Procedures and Pricing 7) Promotion 8 and 9) Policies and Principles 10) Progress.

NB for the purposes of this questionnaire and the Food Co-ops and Buying Groups project what we mean by the sustainability of a food co-op is its viability and whether it is likely to carry on running in the long term.

#### 1. People

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to People?
- Are you reliant on small number of volunteers? Yes / No
- Do you always have enough people to carry out essential tasks? Yes / No
- Do you feel that you have enough customers? Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?
- Do you have any negative issues/problems relating to volunteers or customers?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues/problems?
- Where have you found useful advice on people and food co-ops?
- Who has supported you to in relation to this subject?
- What type of further support would be useful?

#### 2. Planning

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to Planning?
- Do you have a written business plan / action plan for your food co-op? Yes / No
- Did you carry out any market research / needs assessment when you first set up the co-op? Yes / No
- Do you discuss plans for the on-going development of the food co-op? Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to planning?
- Do you have any negative issues or problems with planning?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful advice on planning and food co-ops?
- Who has supported you to plan sustainably?
- What type of further support would be useful?

#### 3. Produce

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to Produce?
- Are you able to get all the types of produce that you and your customers want? Yes / No
- Is the produce good quality and a good price? Yes / No
- Do your suppliers deliver everything you need and at the right time? Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?

- Do you have any negative issues/problems with this area?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful advice on produce and sustainability?
- Who has supported you to make produce more sustainable?
- What type of further support would be useful?

#### 4. Premises

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to premises?
- Do you have a good venue for free – or at a rent you can afford?
- Yes / No
- Does it provide all the space, storage and facilities you need?
- Yes / No
- Do you have any long term security over your rental terms?
- Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?
- Do you have any negative issues/problems with this area?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful advice or information on premises?
- Who has supported you to make your premise more sustainable?
- What type of further support would be useful?

#### 5. Practical resources

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to Practical resources? •
- For example: •
- Do you have all the equipment you need to run your food co-op? • Yes / No
- Do you rely on external funding in order to operate the food co-op? • Yes / No
- Have you got long term plans about how you are going to fund the running costs of your food co-op in the future? • Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?
- Do you have any negative issues/problems with this area?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful practical resources?
- Who has supported you in using/accessing practical resources that help the sustainability of your food co-op?
- What type of further support would be useful?

#### 6. Procedures and pricing

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to Procedures and pricing?
- Do you have procedures to deal with the admin and finance of running the food co-op? Yes / No
- Are you able to sell produce at an affordable price that customers are happy with and charge some mark up? Yes / No
- Do you have procedures to ensure you don't have a lot of waste produce? Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?
- Do you have any negative issues/problems with this area?

- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful advice or information on procedures and pricing?
- What sort of support has helped you access information or advice on procedures and pricing?
- What type of further support would be useful?

#### 7. Promotion

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to marketing and promotion
- Is your food co-op well known within the local community? Yes / No
- Do you find it easy to recruit new customers? Yes / No
- Do you have enough promotional materials to help you publicise your food co-op? Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?
- Do you have any negative issues/problems with this area?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful advice on promoting your food co-op?
- What sort of support has helped you promote your food co-op?
- What type of further support would be useful?

#### 8. Policies and principles

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op's Policies and principles are?
- Do you have a committee / steering group that oversees the running of the food co-op? Yes / No
- Do you have a written set of rules / constitution saying what principles the food co-op's activities are based on? Yes / No
- Do you have any other written policies e.g. environment, health & safety, etc? Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?
- Do you have any negative issues/problems with this area?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful advice on developing policies and principles?
- What sort of support have you experienced?
- What type of further support would be useful?

#### 9. Permits and licences

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to Permits and licences
- Are you registered as a food business with the environment health department? Yes / No
- Are you aware of trading standards regulations and how to ensure you meet them? Yes / No
- Is your project covered by insurance? Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?
- Do you have any negative issues/problems with this area?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful advice on permits and licensing?
- What sort of support have you experienced in this area?
- What type of further support would be useful?



**10. Progress**

- On a rating of 1-10 how sustainable do you feel your food co-op is in relation to Progress
- Do you carry out any evaluation to ensure your customers / volunteers are happy? Yes / No
- Do you keep records of the weekly number of sales so you can monitor progress? Yes / No
- What positive / success stories has your food co-op had in relation to this factor?
- Do you have any negative issues/problems with this area?
- What have you done / are you going to do to address these issues?
- Where have you found useful advice on food co-ops and progress?
- What sort of support have you experienced that has helped your food co-op progress?
- What type of further support would be useful?

**Appendix 2**

**Food Co-op Support Survey**

1) From this list below, which areas of sustainable food co-ops have you received support from your Food Co-op Regional Advisor?

People		Promotion	
Planning		Policies and principles	
Produce		Permits and licensing	
Premises		Progress	
Practical resources			

2) What type of support has been the most helpful? e.g. marketing materials, finance, events, advice.

3) Have you received support from any other sources?

4) a) Do you use the food co-op toolkit (please circle)? YES NO

b) If yes, please place a tick next to the tools you have used from the list below:

Induction checklist		Cashing-up sheet	
Volunteer agreement		Marketing checklist	
Volunteer task list		Leaflet templates	
Business plan template		Fruit and vegetable images	

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Action plan template		Co-operative principles	
Retailer survey		Sample constitution	
Price comparison table		Essentials of food hygiene	
Community audit table		Guide to selling fruit and vegetables	
Sample needs assessment questionnaire 1		Sample evaluation form	
Sample needs assessment questionnaire 2			
Bag scheme order form			

Have you attended any of the following events? Please tick the box next to the event/events that you or someone from your food co-op attended:

<input type="checkbox"/>	17 March 2011 - Study visit to Green Action Food Co-op – Leeds	<input type="checkbox"/>	18 July 2010 – Talk on food co-ops and housing communities - Manchester
<input type="checkbox"/>	17 March 2011 – Getting Started FCBG event – Plymouth	<input type="checkbox"/>	7 July 2010 - Getting Started FCBG event – Bristol
<input type="checkbox"/>	7 February 2011 – Getting Started FCBG event – London	<input type="checkbox"/>	1 July 2010 – Consumer Co-operation event - Swindon
<input type="checkbox"/>	7 February 2001 – Well London food co-ops workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	25 June 2010 - NW Food co-ops networking event - Manchester
<input type="checkbox"/>	27 January 2011 - Getting Started FCBG event – Derby	<input type="checkbox"/>	May 2010 - Workshop for volunteers at Bag a Bargain
<input type="checkbox"/>	26 January 2011 - Getting Started FCBG event – Dorset	<input type="checkbox"/>	20 May 2010 – Food Co-ops talk at Community Lunch - Bedford CVS
<input type="checkbox"/>	25 January 2011 - East Anglian food co-ops mini conference – Stowmarket	<input type="checkbox"/>	28 April 2010 – WM Getting Started FCBG event - Birmingham
<input type="checkbox"/>	22 January 2011 - Good Governance/ Co-op Communication Skills Training day	<input type="checkbox"/>	28 April 2010 Food co-ops workshop – Fresh Ideas Event
<input type="checkbox"/>	17 January 2011 - Getting Started FCBG event – York	<input type="checkbox"/>	23 March 2010 - Food Co-ops and CSAs Information Evening - Colchester
<input type="checkbox"/>	6 December 2010 - Southampton Local Food Workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	January 2010 - Open space session on food co-ops - FoE Y&H Get Together
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 December 2010 - Getting Started FCBG event – Exeter	<input type="checkbox"/>	30 November 2009 – Training day for Shoots Food Club volunteers
<input type="checkbox"/>	26 November 2010 - Food Co-ops Networking Event - Liverpool	<input type="checkbox"/>	28 April 2009 - Mendip Food Co-ops training – Somerset Community Food
<input type="checkbox"/>	23 November 2010 - Food co-ops workshop - Bath	<input type="checkbox"/>	24 April 2009 - Somerset Community Food conference
<input type="checkbox"/>	8 November 2010 - Food co-ops workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	27 March 2009 - South Somerset Food Co-op Training Course
<input type="checkbox"/>	20 October 2010 - Good food for local communities conference – Leamington Spa	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 February 2009 – Food co-ops national conference - London
<input type="checkbox"/>	30 September 2010 - Visit to Somerset Organic Link	<input type="checkbox"/>	13 November 2008 - Food co-ops workshop – Fresh Ideas event
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 September 2010 - Getting Started FCBG event - Bristol	<input type="checkbox"/>	1 November 2008 - Pilot one day food co-ops training course
<input type="checkbox"/>	9 September 2010 - True Food Co-op Open Day – Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	17 January 2008 - West Somerset Food Co-op training course

### Appendix 3

Food Co-op Name:
Date:

#### Food Co-op Impact Ranking

Sustain has identified 4 issue areas where food co-ops can make an impact by providing benefits. These are Health Benefits, Environmental Benefits, Social Benefits and Economic benefits. We want to learn which issues are most impacted by your food co-op.

To complete the ranking exercise, order the issue statements in the boxes below by indicating which issue statement is the biggest impact, the next biggest impact and the smallest impact. A scale of either 1-3 or 1-4 is used in each section to indicate the different levels of impact.

**EXAMPLE:**

*Health Benefits on a scale of 1-3:*

*1 = The biggest health impact*

*3= The smallest health impact*

<i>Increase access to affordable fruit and vegetables and other healthy foods</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Raised awareness of the benefits of eating a healthy diet</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Improved well being in volunteers who often gain increased self esteem, confidence and sense of purpose</i>	<i>2</i>

**Within each benefit section, please do not repeat rankings, for example by ranking two issue statements as the biggest impact.**

#### PART 1

**Health Benefits: Rank on scale of 1 - 3**

**1 = The biggest health impact**

**3= The smallest health impact**

Increase access to affordable fruit and vegetables and other healthy foods	
Raised awareness of the benefits of eating a healthy diet	
Improved well being in volunteers who often gain increased self esteem, confidence and sense of purpose	

**Are there any other health benefits that are not listed? If so, please list them in the box below:**

--

**Environmental Benefits: Rank on a scale of 1-3**

**1 = The biggest environmental impact**

**3= The smallest environmental impact**

Increase the supply of local and organic produce	
Make it easier for people to shop by foot or by bike by providing outlets in residential areas	
Provide food that often has less packaging, and therefore generates less waste	

**Are there any other environmental benefits that are not listed? If so, please list them in the box below:**

--

**Social Benefits: Rank on a scale of 1 -4**

**1 = The biggest social impact**

**4 = The smallest social impact**

Engage local people in their community, which may then lead to other activities	
---	--

Provide a more social place for people to shop	
Act as a focal point for local people to meet up and make new friends	
Help to revitalise community facilities	

**Are there any other social benefits that are not listed? If so, please list them in the box below:**

**Economic Benefits: Rank on a scale of 1 - 3**

**1 = The biggest economic impact**

**3= The smallest economic impact**

Help to support local producers, growers or other smaller or more ethical suppliers by providing an outlet for their goods	
Help ensure money spent stays in the local economy	
Offer volunteers new skills and work experience that could be used in other settings, and possibly help them get paid employment	

**Are there any other economic benefits that are not listed? If so, please list them in the box below:**

--

**PART 2**

Rank the following 4 issues: Environmental benefits, Health benefits, Social benefits, Economic benefits.

- 1= the issue that is most impacted your food co-op
- 2= the issue that is impacted the second most by your food co-op
- 3= the issue that is impacted the third most by your food co-op
- 4= the issue that is least impacted by your food co-op

Environmental benefits	
Health benefits	
Social benefits	
Economic benefits	

**Appendix 4**

**Food Co-op Health Impact Survey**

*Background information – please circle your answers.*

I. Male      Female

II. Age: 18-25    26-35    36-45    45-55    56-65    66-75    75+

**Questions**

**1. How long have you been a customer/member at this food co-op?**

- a) Less than 3 months    b) 3-6 months    c) 6 months –1 year    d) more than a year

**2. What does ‘healthy eating’ mean to you? Please circle the answer that best describes your feelings/thoughts.**

- a) 5-A-Day    b) Low-fat    c) Cooked from scratch    d) Organic    e) Local  
 f) Meat free    g) other (please describe).....

**3. a) Since becoming a customer at the food co-op, has your diet changed? Please circle your answer.**

YES    NO

*If NO go straight to question 4, if YES please answer question 3.b.*

**3.b) What do you eat less of, what do you eat more of?**

Less	More

**4.a) Approximately how much do you spend when you shop at the food co-op? Please circle your answer.**

- a) Less than £5    b) Between £5-£10    c) Between £10-£15  
 d) Between £15-£20    e) Over £20

**4.b) How much of your weekly food bill does your food co-op shop represent? Please put a tick in the box next to your answer.**

More than 90% of weekly food bill		25% of your weekly food bill	
75% of your weekly food bill		Less than 10% of weekly food bill	
50% of your weekly food bill			



**5. Why do you shop at the food co-op?** *Please circle the answer that best describes your reasons.*

- a) Top-up shop      b) Main shop      c) Main fresh food shop      d) Social activity

**6. Since shopping at the food co-op, do you cook more food from scratch?** *Please circle your answer.*

YES      NO

**7. Do you always know how to prepare and/or cook every item of food you buy from the food co-op?** *Please circle your answer.*

YES      NO

**8. Before shopping at the food co-op how often did you manage to consume 5 portions of different fruits and vegetables?** *Please circle your answer.*

- a) Every day      b) Most days      c) Some days      d) Rarely

**9. Has your intake of fruit and vegetables changed since shopping at the co-op?** *Please circle your answer.*

YES      NO

*If you answered YES to question 9, please answer question 10.*

**10. Since shopping at the food co-op how often do you manage to consume 5 portions of different fruits and vegetables?** *Please circle your answer.*

- b) Every day      b) Most days      c) Some days      d) Rarely

**Thank you!**