

Clarity needed over food co-op motivations

March 19 2013

The diversity between models of food co-op can cause confusion, a new report from the [Centre for Food Policy](#) has concluded, and communities need to be clear about their motivations for running one.

Food co-ops are run by local people and supply food for the benefit of the community rather than for profit. After falling out of favour in the last quarter of the 20th century, in recent years there has been a resurgence of interest: 2012 was designated International Year of Co-operatives, and co-ops are a symbol of the Big Society idea of the [coalition government](#) in the UK.

However the report found that the operating structures of food co-ops range from formal cooperative membership to those set up as part of a health initiative. While both were seen to have benefits, the underlying ethos appears to have implications for their longer-term sustainability and viability.

This means that policy makers and funders should also be clear about what they are supporting/funding, according to authors Dr Julie Smith, Georgia Machell and Professor Martin Caraher. They need to ask: is a community food project /health initiative a 'true' food co-op?

The 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, and aims to build the broader context on the role of food co-ops in England.

Key findings from 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);
- 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.

Read the [full evaluation report](#).

Provided by City University London

Citation: Clarity needed over food co-op motivations (2013, March 19) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-03-clarity-food-co-op.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.