

THE BASICS

AN INTRODUCTION TO

ALFALFA HOUSE

COMMUNITY FOOD COOPERATIVE LIMITED

WHAT IS A COOPERATIVE?

A cooperative is an autonomous association of people who come together voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. It is distinguished from other forms of private or public organisations by its participatory ownership, its democratic structure, and its use of capital for mutual rather than individual benefit. While its activities may be commercial, a co-op exists primarily to serve the needs of its members and the community, rather than as a vehicle for the investment of capital. In other words, a co-op *is* its members. In the tradition of the founders of the cooperative movement, co-op members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. They also ensure any criticism is constructive and that they're prepared to join in helping resolve any problems that arise. Alfalfa House is a not-for-profit consumer cooperative, that is, a co-op that retails consumer goods to its members. Our main aim is to provide minimally packaged and minimally processed, affordable, wholesome, organic food to our members and the community as a whole.

HOW DO I JOIN?

If, after reading this infosheet, you like what you've read, complete the member application form and give the form, along with your joining fee of \$20 (cash or EFTPOS/credit card only), to a Shop Coordinator (person operating the cash register). The joining fee is a one-off payment and is not refundable. A membership card with your membership number on it and a receipt will be left at the till for you to collect. Shop and office coordinators are happy to answer any queries. Also check out the website. Once your application has been processed, your details will be entered in the database and you can start shopping at the discount rate.

To maintain your membership you must shop at least once a year.

When you don't shop for more than two years . . .

If you don't shop for two years in a row, then the co-op is legally obliged to cancel your membership. This is because under the Cooperatives Act, you must maintain some kind of relationship with the co-op, which is called being an 'active' member. Being an 'active' member of Alfalfa House means shopping at least once a year, which is presumably why you want to join in the first place. As a courtesy, if you haven't been shopping for 18 months, the co-op will contact you to remind you, so please keep your contact details up-to-date, especially your email address. You can of course suspend your membership (see box), in which case your time away isn't counted.

What if you want to resign?

If you do decide to resign, simply write a short letter to the MC c/o the co-op or email it to coordinator@alfalhouse.org. Include your name, membership number and why you're resigning. While other members of your household may shop on your card and receive the discount and also help volunteer for the extra discount, the person's name on the membership card is the member. Therefore, if you move house, the rights of membership moves with you and can only apply to those in your current household.

GOING AWAY?

If you are going away for between 12 months and five years you can let co-op's board (the Management Committee) know and your membership will be suspended until you return. Apply in writing to the Management Committee c/o the co-op or via email (coordinator@alfalhouse.org).

THE OBJECTIVES OF ALFALFA HOUSE

A to provide a retail source of wholefoods so that members may have some control over the sources of their food supply;

B to provide information on and promote the use of:

- low-cost, ethically-produced and packaged wholefoods;
- cruelty-free foods;
- vegetarian foods;
- vegan foods;
- organic foods and
- genetically modified-free foods;

C to run an ethical, not-for-profit business;

D to minimise resource wastage and, hence, encourage reuse and recycling;

E to support other cooperatives whose objectives are similar or related to the objectives of the cooperative; and

F to stimulate community development, foster community spirit and promote sustainable living.

■ **Please show your membership card when you shop.**

LOST CARDS

If you lose your card, ask a Shop Coordinator to leave a note with your name and membership number, and we'll organise for a replacement for you to collect at the till.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

If you change your address, phone number/s and email address or household members, ask a Shop Coordinator to record these changes in the membership database or email them to coordinator@alfalfahouse.org.

SURPLUS

Any surplus the co-op makes is used to reduce prices and improve services to members. The beauty of the cooperative system is that the more you shop, the cheaper the goods become; and the cheaper the goods are, the more people will shop at the co-op!

THE DISCOUNTS

Every member is entitled to receive the Basic Discount (10%) every time they shop. You can earn bigger discounts by helping run the co-op. Each two hours' work you do in the co-op entitles you to a single unlimited 25% discount shop, also known as the Casual Extra Discount (XD). (To make the most of the discount, it's smart to save the 25% discount for a big shop rather than use it to buy a few items.) There are various kinds of work members can undertake including, for example, shop maintenance and refurbishing; data entry; restocking; storeroom maintenance; recycling and waste minimisation; helping make decisions at committee meetings; product research. Some people choose to do their two hours and then shop on the XD. But you don't have to; you can use it later. When you want to use a casual XD, let the Shop Coordinator know that you would like to use it when you are showing your card so they can apply the appropriate discount. (The number of XD shops you have appears on the transaction page when you shop; one is automatically deducted when you shop.)

You can also earn a Permanent XD (25%) every time you shop – even if you shop ten times a week. To get this extra discount, you need to make a commitment to the co-op of either two hours a week or four hours a fortnight and you must do this each week or fortnight. If you work more than this, you can accumulate credits for single use if you decide you no longer want to work for the Permanent XD or you want a break from volunteering.

When you've done your volunteer work shift – casual or permanent – ask a Shop Coordinator for the XD folder. Please record the work you do in this book; it is later updated in the members' database.

OTHER DISCOUNTERS

While Alfalfa House has a policy of giving the basic discount (10%) to members of any food co-op in the world, not all food co-ops reciprocate. But ask anyway. Co-ops in the Sydney region that do reciprocate are Thoughtful Foods (Uni of NSW), Sydney Uni (in the Wentworth Building), UTS (Student Union area, University of Technology Sydney main tower), Manly (21b Whistler Street, Manly), Green Tucker Store (51 Arthur Street Forestville), the Blue Mountains (Halfpenny Arcade, Katoomba). There are also food co-ops in Melbourne (Friends of the Earth, Melbourne University Food Co-op), Cairns (Community Foods), Darwin (POD), Canberra (ANU).

HOUSEHOLD MEMBERSHIP

While your membership card is in your name, you can allow other members of your household to shop using your card and to get the discount to which you are entitled – 10% or 25%. If you decide to allow them to use your card, it's best if they bring the card along when they shop or at least remember the number or whose name is on the card. You should also familiarise them as to how the co-op works: ask them to read this booklet or show them around the co-op. If you are on the casual or permanent XD, they can also help do the voluntary work. You could bring them along with you when you are working and divide the work time required to get the XD.

PRODUCTS

Alfalfa House stocks a surprisingly wide range of foods, including the staples like dried fruit, nuts, seeds, grains, rices, beans, sourdough breads, dried herbs and spices, teas and coffees, cooking oils, plus lots of refrigerated goods such as tofu and tempeh, as well as pastas, macrobiotic lines, sea vegetables, soy and rice milk, juices, chocolate and carob snacks and an season range of fresh fruit, vegetables, herbs and spices. We also stock a range of laundry and cleaning products as well as personal care items such as soaps, toothpaste, eco toothbrushes. There's a full list on the website; including a list of new products. Most of what we sell is unpackaged. Ideally, you bring your own containers and scoop, pour or ladle out the exact amount you want. You only buy what you need – the price per kilo is the same whether you buy five grams or five kilos! Like many other food co-ops, Alfalfa House takes a leading role in promoting commercial waste minimisation and avoidance. We aim to reduce waste by purchasing wholesale goods in bulk and encouraging members to bring-their-own packaging. We encourage reuse by returning bulk packaging (such as boxes, drums and crates) to suppliers. Finally, we recycle and compost wherever possible, and encourage all members to do the same.



We aim to supply ethically and environmentally sound products; we're concerned for who produces the goods, under what conditions and by what methods. Because of the damaging environmental and health effects of contemporary food production, we prefer to stock goods produced by organic or biodynamic methods and by other co-ops. As much as possible we buy from local suppliers and all our organic and biodynamic groceries are certified. Sometimes, members bring in excess produce they've grown without chemicals in their home gardens; they are clearly labelled as such. All fruit+veg is Australian and certified organic or biodynamic unless otherwise stated; some produce is uncertified organically-grown Farmer-Direct and is labelled as such.

BULK ORDERS

You can order food in bulk (in the minimum weight or quantity the co-op buys the product in) and receive an extra 5% discount on top of any other discount to which you are entitled. If it's not a regular co-op product, we may still be able to get it for you. Talk to the Stock Coordinators or one of the Shop Coordinators (on the till).

When the scientific community is divided over the safety of a product or ingredient, the co-op has a policy of not buying that product or ingredient. For instance, we don't stock products that contain sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS), the foaming agent in many soaps, shampoos, laundry and dishwashing liquids, and toothpastes. We are also concerned that our products are processed ethically. For instance, up until March 2003, the co-op didn't stock cashews because we couldn't be certain they were processed without causing injury to the people who work in the processing factories. We now have a supply of organic cashews that have been processed ethically.

The co-op relies on its members to suggest new products. If you think the co-op should get a new product, bring the label and supplier's name and contact details to the Stock Coordinators. Or you may put the details in the SUGGESTIONS box next to the nut butter machines. If your product fits with co-op policy, and we have the shelf space, we can stock it. We are constantly refining the stock to replace any remaining not-organically grown and distant imported products with their organic, unpackaged, locally-sourced equivalent.

HOW ARE DECISIONS MADE?

Alfalfa House encourages its members to be directly involved in deciding co-op policy. Members are entitled to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and any special general meetings as well as the monthly Management Committee (MC) meetings. All members can raise proposals and vote at the general meetings. However, while any member can attend and speak at the MC meetings, only committee members can propose and vote. The committee, which comprises between four and seven members elected at the AGM, oversees the financial management and general ongoing policy-making of the co-op. It meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month from 7.30pm – see the News page of the website for more details. (The MC is financially and legally liable for the co-op as a whole, and when circumstances require, has the power to cancel a person's membership, e.g., because of stealing). The AGM is held in the spring. Special General Meetings are held at the request of members proposing changes to the co-op that require broad membership approval. Major changes to the co-op, especially those affecting the constitution, must be decided at the level of a general meeting. Each member is entitled to one vote at these general meetings. Notices regarding any general meetings are sent to you. There is also a monthly newsletter that you can have emailed to you; it can also be viewed on the website. As well, all bookkeeping and accounting processes are freely available for member scrutiny, as is the co-op's constitution, which can be downloaded from the WHO ARE WE? page on the website.

TRADING HOURS

MONDAY	11am-7pm
TUESDAY	11am-7pm
WEDNESDAY	11am-7pm
THURSDAY	11am-8pm
FRIDAY	11am-7pm
SATURDAY	9am-6pm
SUNDAY	11am-6pm

STAFF+VOLUNTEERS

There are a number of paid part-time coordinators appointed by the Management Committee to oversee the day-to-day running of the shop. They look after stock purchasing, administration, finance and the cleaning. There are also a number of paid Shop Coordinators who operate the till and manage the shop. They are supported by a team of volunteers, drawn from the membership, who help with the day-to-day running of the shop as well as helping with customer needs. If you would like to volunteer, the co-op welcomes and encourages your commitment – from a regular shift to simply helping fellow shoppers refill an empty bin.

MORE INFO

WEB www.alfalahouse.org
TEL. 9519 3374
STREET+POSTAL ADDRESS
113 Enmore Road
Enmore 2042

UPDATED NOVEMBER 25, 2009

HOW TO SHOP

1. If you're going to be getting food from the bins or jars, the co-op asks that you wash your hands first. There's a sink with soap and paper towels at the back of the shop. **PLEASE DO NOT USE YOUR HANDS TO GET FOOD FROM THE BINS AND JARS;** use the scoops and tongs provided.

2. Alfalfa House encourages shoppers to bring their own bags, jars and bottles when they shop, although there are recycled paper bags, calico bags and new glass jars for sale. There are some donated containers in the drawers below the breads (opposite the fridge). The co-op does accept some clean pre-loved containers, but shoppers are urged to only use them for non-food products. If you do use them for food, the co-op doesn't guarantee they are clean for food; you do so at your own risk.

3. Weigh any jars, bottles and calico bags before you fill them. (If you're buying expensive products such as echinacea or maca powder and you're going to put them in a paper bag, you might want to weigh the paper bag as well. It does add up.) There are two sets of scales in the shop. Please be considerate of others shopping at the till when weighing containers. There's a marker pen next to each of the scales to write the weight of the empty container on the jar or bottle.

4. Next, do your shopping. Only come to the till when you've finished and are ready to pay. Please avoid doing more shopping while it's being processed, especially if there's a queue. If there's no one else wanting to shop, no problem. Use your discernment. **Please remember to tighten the lids on the bins and jars after you've got what you've wanted.** Loose lids allow the dreaded weevils in (or out to get into other bins). And **please refrain from grazing or nibbling as you shop**, because every little nibble adds up and it's also a health hazard.

5. TROUBLESHOOTING

- No scoop? There's a drawer below the packaged breads opposite the fridge that has all sorts of clean ladles, scoops and tongs you can use. It is clearly marked. There are also funnels that can be used to help pour liquids from the liquid dispenser taps to your bottle.
- Can't get the liquid out of the dispenser? To help, there's an air hose that you can attach to the top of the dispenser. Use the pump located near the floor in the middle of the liquid dispenser section to pump air into the dispenser. That should increase the flow. If you're having trouble ask the Shop Coordinator. By the way, please keep an eye on the product flowing into your container; there have been minor floods over the years due to shoppers walking away to do other shopping and then forgetting about the container.
- A product has run out or is very low? Let the Shop Coordinator know and they or a volunteer may be able to look for more in the storeroom. Or if you have done work shifts, you can look yourself. The co-op aims to keep bins close to full at all times. Occasionally products will be out of stock due to seasonal variation, shortages, weather or our suppliers may be out of stock as well. Visit the PRODUCTS page of the website for updates.
- What if I spill something? There are cloths in a drawer below the packaged breads opposite the fridge. It is clearly marked. When you're done, either leave the cloth on the shelf under the sink or rinse it and hang it on the line just outside the back door.

6. When you are ready for the till, show the till operator your membership card and they will enter your number into the computer and apply the relevant discount to your shop. If you forget your card, please remember the number. It can be looked up on the computer, but slows down shopping, especially if there's a queue forming. And please be considerate of the person working on the till. The co-op is continuing to improve shopping times, but not everything happens at once.

7. The co-op accepts cash, EFTPOS and major credit cards. There's a small surcharge on credit/debit cards and EFTPOS (savings/cheque) transactions.

MEMBERSHIP NUMBER



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

PLEASE WRITE CLEARLY. NO PENCILS.

FIRST NAME

LAST NAME

HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

Members of your household may also shop on your card, however for verification, could you please include their names here.

ADDRESS

SUBURB

POSTCODE

DATE OF BIRTH

PHONE (H)

(W)

(MOB)

EMAIL

E-NEWS YES

NO

Please include your email so we can send notice of the Annual General Meeting, which will save postage costs. Only tick YES if you wish to receive our monthly eNews. We do not provide your details to any third party.

I have read and understand the four-page information sheet. I agree to be bound by the rules of the cooperative and by any alterations thereof registered in accordance with the Cooperative Act (1992) NSW.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Are you interested in volunteering? YES NO If yes, please circle any of the following
shop computer (MAC) computer (FILEMAKER) data entry carpentry
legal electrical garden fundraising management human resources
financial management cooperative experience product research

OTHER SKILLS

OFFICE USE ONLY

TOTAL PAID \$20

CASH EFTPOS CC MONEY ORDER

DATE RECEIVED AT COUNTER

STAFF MEMBER

CASH/MO SIGHTED

ENTERED MYOB

STAFF MEMBER

DATE

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