

BULK BUYING CLUBS – THE BASICS

This two-page briefing on getting started runs through some of the most important considerations. For further information, please refer to the more detailed 'How To Guide' at popupwholefoods.ie/resources

THE CORE IDEA

A bulk buying club combines its members' purchasing power to order at wholesale rates, thus making significant savings. Clubs buying *wholefoods* tend to be small-scale, entirely volunteer run and fairly low-maintenance.



WHAT TO EXPECT

As part of wholefoods buying club, these are key things you could expect...

- Members get at a listing of products and prices to decide what they want to order.
- Individual orders are combined together to create one for the group as a whole.
- Members receive their final totals and pre-pay so that the group has the money to place its order with the supplier.
- On delivery day, several volunteers work together to unload and check-in the food.
- Everything is divided up to match the individual orders.
- All the households collect their goods (or sometimes drop-offs are organised)
- If anything didn't arrive, either a refund is given or a credit for the next order.

Groups that stock up on long-life goods only need a few deliveries a year, so orders may be monthly, bi-monthly or less frequent still.

STARTING A BULK BUYING CLUB

A bulk buying club can operate with just a small number of households, so getting started won't need lots of people. Gathering five or more committed households would be a good start – but it is also quite possible to begin with fewer.

To order wholesale, you'll need to meet a supplier's minimum order level for delivery so this needs to be a key consideration. Different wholesalers have different requirements and terms so this will need a little time to research (see the Guide for a list of wholefoods wholesalers). Ultimately, though, you'll have choices and will find it's pretty straightforward to establish a wholesale account.

TIP: Before you get too far along discussing the idea of a bulk buying club with friends, family, neighbours and colleagues, it's useful to speak with a wholesaler and get a copy of their listing so you can share a PDF that shows an example of the range of products and the pricing that might be available. However, it's also good to avoid 'over-researching' and seek to involve others in investigating supplier options.

A FIRST MEETING

If you've identified a number of interested households and feel ready to hold a meeting, there are a number of things that would ideally come out of it:

- Exploring why people are interested in being part of a buying club and agreeing some common **principles**, goals and values you'll be able to work to.
- Discussing how often group members might ideally like to stock up, since the **pre-order** model is all about forward planning and creates extra storage needs.
- Reinforcing all of the 'what to expect' points outlined above so that everyone is clear on the progression of an order and the vital role of **pre-payment**.
- Establishing that being part of the club will mean making a firm **commitment** to share in the volunteer work needed to run it.

Even if you're the person taking the initiative to start a bulk buying club, that doesn't mean you should shoulder most of the work. The meeting will need to share out some basic jobs. From the beginning, it may be best not to simply put yourself forward to chair the meeting or to take on too many key tasks. Everyone needs to feel responsible for building up the club. One person doing too much can simply store up problems for later – like 'burn out'. Roles can and should be rotated. The more people with experience of different elements of organising the group the better.

Any bulk buying club will need volunteers who are well organised, good with figures and have an eye for detail to...

- Compile all the individual orders into a group order to place with the wholesaler.
- Produce accurate order totals, keep track of funds paid and any credit balances.

It will also need several people able to take on moderate physical activity and lifting to check-in and sort orders on delivery day.

***TIP:** This is the main form of volunteering needed, usually during normal working hours. This needs to be clearly understood and accepted by all as it will potentially mean members taking occasional time off work.*

MOVING AHEAD

At a follow-up meeting, several key decisions will need to be taken, including:

- A choice of wholesaler after more research and reporting back by group members.
- The location that the order will be delivered to for checking and sorting.
- A deadline for submission of orders and a first delivery date, ideally as part of a longer-term schedule.

There are quite a number of considerations around each of these and the Guide offers additional information and support. It also looks at some systems and tools that can be used to operate a group.

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL GROUP

You can sustain a group well with small numbers so think carefully about expanding from your initial core and do so only once you have agreed some basic written principles others can sign-up to as a basis for membership.

Keep general commitments to a minimum (e.g. short meetings) and aim for the operation of the group to be as streamlined as possible. By doing so, you can put maximum focus on building a strong social and fun side to your group.

Bulk buying clubs are sometimes set up as a step toward establishing a co-operative store. However, there is a simplicity and flexibility to doing 'pop-up wholefoods' that makes these groups an excellent model for the long-term, not merely a path to somewhere else.



For more, visit popupwholefoods.ie