

Why I love the Food Co-op (and hate supermarkets)

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Food co-ops are an important form of environmental and social activism. By making ethical decisions about how we spend our money we exercise our power as consumers.

Being involved in the co-op is one of the most central and empowering things in my life. It allows me to make ethical choices about my own consumption, at the same time helping to provide others with an affordable alternative to mass-produced, over-packaged food grown using agricultural practices that are damaging to the earth. Buying food from the co-op is the next best thing I can do after growing my own. All food is certified organic, unpackaged, and sourced as locally as we can get it, from Tasmanian growers where possible, and mainland Australian growers where it is not.

I firmly believe that environmental activism begins at home. It is not enough to vote green, and turn up to a rally every now and then. Nor is it enough to be actively involved in campaigns against environmental destruction, though all of those things are important. To me activism involves making conscious choices about our actions with the awareness that everything we do has an impact on our environment. Everything we buy comes from somewhere. It seems obvious enough, but in urban settlements most of us don't know where our food comes from. We don't know who grew it, where it was grown or how it was grown. We don't know if the growers were paid fairly for their labour, or if they were paid sweatshop wages while the managing directors of multinational corporations got rich off the profits. Nor do we know anything about the environmental consequences of growing our food. Was it grown using pesticides, herbicides, artificial fertilisers, excessive amounts of irrigation? Choosing organic, locally grown produce allows us to ensure that our consumption supports local growers and environmentally sustainable agricultural practices.

We live in a world driven by economics, where decisions are made based not on social or environmental outcomes, but on profitability. As such we often have very little influence on decisions that affect us. The forest issue in Tasmania is an obvious example of corporate dominance in decision making. Living in such a society can be disempowering and overwhelming. But we have more power than we realise, and it is up to us to make use of it to its full extent. Our choices as consumers, which we all are, matter as much as our votes, and in many ways more so. We vote once every three years, we buy almost everyday. In a society where decision making is dominated by economics how we choose to spend our money is a way of voicing our values and supporting the things that are important to us...like sensible and sustainable agriculture, reducing waste, taking responsibility for the impacts of our personal consumption on our environment, supporting local economies and building community.

As for why I hate supermarkets, well quite frankly they scare me. If you've ever experienced the horror of walking around a supermarket with a five year old you'll know what I mean. The chocolates and toys placed at just the right eye level and vantage point to inspire the most desire, and the loudest tantrums when denied. Then there are all those fluoro lights and falsely cheerful checkout chicks who are really bored shitless because they've been listening to the scanner go beep beep beep, and saying 'have a nice day' for the last five hours. Not to mention the bad music, and the overpriced, over-processed, over-packaged food. I walk around supermarkets and see great piles of landfill stretching in all directions. It's not a vision I enjoy. I'd prefer to see vacant cleared land turned into community gardens, or put to native bush regeneration than see yet another landfill. And while we're at it can I have a co-op run by the local community in every few suburbs, an end to clear-felling of native forests, a sustainable fishing industry, sensible agricultural practices suitable to this arid continent, empowered, informed local communities and a new government?

