

# Why Food Co-ops are *Rockin'* the Uni Boat

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The whole ideal of food cooperatives is to promote a more interactive community space and develop individual empowerment within the political sphere. And we all know that Universities are the institutions in which the 'new generation' is intellectually stimulated to question their place within society and ultimately guided towards occupations and levels of participation in the broader community. So if we put a food co-op inside of a university then give it a little shake, roll it and stick it together, we're likely to get an 'oh so lovely' duo that will stimulate, question, inspire and help one and all who enter inside this profanely sacred space.

Most food cooperatives trace their roots to the 'buying clubs' of the late 60s and early 70s, founded by counterculture sorts seeking healthy, chemical-free food not found in supermarkets. (Marshall, 1997) The ideal of cooperatives within current green academic and activist literature aspires towards "individual responsibility, empowerment, participation and communal politics" (Smith, 2005). Green citizenship is a term coined by contemporary 'green' theorists that implies individual empowerment through community knowledge sharing and an increased participation in creating a healthier community and society that is 'aware' of the consequences of their actions. Smith proposes that this 'citizenship' "does not emerge fully formed – rather it needs to be cultivated and developed in different institutional settings." (Smith, 2005) Participation in a food co-op is one way to begin to develop this 'green conscience.'

I reckon that in Australia attending a university is both a 'right' and a 'privilege.' It is a right that all should have access to if they claim to be living in a democracy that is based on participation through informed choice. It is a privilege that we live in a society that has enough common wealth to enable its citizens to apply their time to occupations other than those whose primary focus is for immediate survival. However with the current 'user pays' policies that are being forced upon us initiated by the HECS scheme, followed by upfront payments, less positions for those who can not pay, ID cards for library use that exclude public access and the current issue of VSU... the idea of university study being both a 'right' and 'privilege' is being eroded. University is now considered not as a place to foster learning, individual awareness and community responsibility but rather as a place to 'obtain' a degree through competition so as to further an individual career. As competition is encouraged within the university system, ideas for developments towards a more egalitarian community are not perceived as an organic growth from human interaction but an idea that must be justified.

Government support is vital in encouraging cooperatives and their ideologies. In a 2001 paper on cooperatives in Australia, Mark Lyons found that the culture of Australia is not a "fertile ground" for cooperatives, "with its emphasis on individualism and consumerism." (Lyons, 2001) The government has contributed to this culture with its history of "indifference" and currently "under the influence of neo-liberal thinking, attitudes of some influential parts of government are moving from indifference towards hostility" (Lyons, 2001).

I feel that the ideals behind the food co-op encourage community-type living, sharing, volunteering and an awareness of the environment through what you consume. Wendy Berrel states that humans remain "connected to the land by their gastrointestinal tract" (Marshall, 1997). So by being aware and enjoying what we consume, we will retain that connection to that gorgeous land that allows us to swim in the immensity of her sea and gaze star struck at her skies. Participation within a food co-op creates a publicly "spirited deliberation is the process by which we learn of our dependence on others (and the environment) and the process by which we learn to recognize and respect differently situated others (including nonhuman others and future generations)." (Eckersley, 2000: 120).

So let's all eat, drink, be merry and cook delicious potions with love. We can share the physical, mental, network and spiritual space together as our ideas flow with the fluid freedom of curiosity and our feelings legitimise our thoughts and our thoughts create deeper feelings.



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