The background of the image features several glass jars of various sizes, some with copper wire lids. The jars are arranged on a light-colored surface, and the lighting is soft, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. The copper wire lids are a prominent feature, adding a rustic and artisanal touch to the scene.

step by step  
guide to start a

# **BUYING GROUP**

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# CONTENT

<a href="#"><u>Background Information</u></a>	3
What is a buying group	4
<a href="#"><u>Why should I create or join a group?</u></a>	4
<a href="#"><u>Why buy organic?</u></a>	6
<a href="#"><u>Bulk buy benefits</u></a>	7
<a href="#"><u>Obstacles</u></a>	8
<a href="#"><u>Challenges &amp; Solutions</u></a>	9
<a href="#"><u>Growing Community</u></a>	10
<a href="#"><u>Step by Step Guide</u></a>	11
<a href="#"><u>Members</u></a>	12
<a href="#"><u>Coordination and Management</u></a>	14
<a href="#"><u>Payment</u></a>	17
<a href="#"><u>Delivery and Collection of Goods</u></a>	18
<a href="#"><u>Divvy</u></a>	19
<a href="#"><u>Storage of Food</u></a>	21
<a href="#"><u>Suppliers</u></a>	22
<a href="#"><u>Dry Goods</u></a>	23
<a href="#"><u>Local Farmers</u></a>	24
<a href="#"><u>Appendix : Template</u></a>	26
<a href="#"><u>References</u></a>	27

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The aim of this e-book is to inspire people to connect with **other community members** and start buying food mindfully, reducing food miles and plastic waste, as well as supporting local farmers to increase the resilience of our local food systems.

**Buying food together can cut costs and save packaging waste, especially if the buying group is focusing on organic food.** Yes, the price tag will be higher than non-organic food, but in the long term it will mean less visits to the pharmacy, doctor or naturopath. Eventually this means more vitality, connection with food, less processed goods and a food culture more in-tune with nature.

In February 2021, the project received 23 responses to a survey sent to 40 buying groups who order from Honest to Goodness in Australia. **The findings are the basis for the information in this guide.**

This e-book is part of the Head Heart and Hands climate resilience project, funded by a NSW Government Increasing Resilience to Climate Change community grant. Head Heart and Hands, and the Love Food Hate Waste Community Partners program, is a project of the Port Macquarie Hastings Sustainability Network and is auspiced by Port Macquarie Community Gardens.



## WHAT IS A BUYING GROUP

A buying group or 'food co-op', is a group of individuals or organisations who use their combined purchasing power to achieve the best prices from suppliers.

Purchasing food through a buying group may be a new concept for you and your family.

If you have never considered being part of a buying group, read on. If you are already committed to doing so but need some help to get started, skip to the **Step by Step Guide**.

## WHY SHOULD I CREATE OR JOIN A BUYING GROUP?

Reasons people join buying groups include to:

- achieve the best prices
- enable the purchase of organic products
- access sustainably produced goods
- reduce waste
- enable the purchase of local products
- build community
- improve health
- increase convenience.

According to the survey completed for this ebook, the commitment to consuming organic food is the main reason people are part of a buying group.

WHY ARE YOU  
PART OF A  
BUYING  
GROUP



**37%**

COMMITMENT  
TO ORGANIC  
FOOD

**28%**

COST  
REDUCTION

**18%**

BUYING  
POWER

**13%**

WASTE  
REDUCTION

**4%**

COMMUNITY  
FEEL

for more information see [Background Information](#)

## WHY BUY ORGANIC?

### TOP TIP

*Rather than 4 little 500g bags of oats, you can purchase 2kg and store it in jars at home – the bag that was originally used for the bulk amount of oats can be reused to either store or divvy in the next order.*

Purchasing organic food is an investment in our and the planet's health. Organic food is grown without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilisers, and without genetically modified products. The farming practices used promote animal welfare and aim to work in harmony with the ecosystem. Organic farming can support biodiversity, sequester carbon, improve soil fertility, reduce chemical residues in food and increase some nutrient levels. When the food we eat is grown organically, everyone benefits.

Buying organic food is generally more expensive than buying non-organic as we are more likely to be paying the farmers a fair price and production is more labour intensive. When buying organic, we are also paying for the continued health of ourselves and the planet. Purchasing in bulk through a buying group can ensure we make this choice as economically accessible as possible.

Increasingly, buying groups are also seeking food grown using regenerative agriculture methods. Regenerative agriculture works to rehabilitate the land by rebuilding soil organic matter, restoring soil biodiversity and increasing soil carbon sequestration. This has benefits for the water cycle, climate change and biodiversity.

For more information visit: [Regeneration International](#).



## BULK BUY BENEFITS

As well as reducing costs, buying in bulk helps us to reduce packaging. You will quickly see a **reduction in plastic packaging** you need to dispose of when involved in a buying group. It will take time to adjust to buying food less frequently. Instead of purchasing 500g of almonds, you may choose to purchase 2kg. Your pantry, will need some reorganising.

Each household has different needs so it will take some time to fine-tune the quantities required. If you run out of something you may choose to go and buy it from the shops or you may choose to use something else instead. **This will help you use everything you purchase and not waste goods that are in the dark corners of the pantry.** Despite these early adjustments, in the long term many people find it easier and less time consuming to purchase food in bulk.

**For bulk buy storage ideas,** see the [Storage of Foods](#) section of the Step by Step Guide.



## OBSTACLES

Obstacles and fears may arise when joining or creating a buying group. You may have come across these challenges before when part of a larger group or these may be entirely new to you. Once you get started, you may find some of these barriers won't be an issue at all.

See the Challenges and Solutions table on the following page, advising how to address common obstacles when joining a buying group.

## GROWING COMMUNITY



One of the great advantages of a buying group is the opportunity to connect with community. Knowing how our food is grown, where it comes from and meeting the farmers who nourish, tend for and harvest it can be life changing. You can ask questions and you know exactly what you are eating and feeding your family. Without any hidden ingredients.

Purchasing directly will support the local economy as the price you pay is going entirely to the producer. Often, farmers selling food to supermarkets do not receive a fair share of the retail price. Working together with other group members and purchasing food locally can increase our sense of belonging in the community and improve social cohesion, as well as making food systems more resilient.



## CHALLENGES

## SOLUTIONS

9

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Household planning required for longer lead time between order and delivery.

- To calculate requirements for a monthly order, note what your family consumes in a week, or how frequently you buy 500g of flour and then multiply that by 4 weeks.
- Start with a small order of a few items so it doesn't seem like an overwhelming task.
- Involve family members with the order - if you have older children at home, they may love the mathematics challenge.
- Be patient! Planning skills will develop with time and practice

---

Food storage for larger volumes

- Start slowly with a few staples like rice and sultanas .
- Ask local cafes or bakeries if they have storage containers leftover from delivery of their own bulk produce
- Op Shops and Buy Swap Sell groups are good sources of used jars and containers.

---

Concerns about product shelf life

- Ask friends or other members of an existing buying group how much they usually order, how frequently, and any tips or tricks for extending shelf life
- Start with a few staples that have a longer shelf life like flour and sultanas
- Order smaller quantities initially and see if that is enough for a month, if it isn't next time you can order more

---

This may feel like “one more thing” in an already busy household

- Experiment; give it a go, see how much time purchasing food this way takes
  - Keep in mind that after the initial transition, buying in bulk can increase convenience as you reduce trips to the supermarket and always have the basics in the pantry
  - Make a list of why you want to change, including all the benefits e.g. saving time, reducing waste, supporting local farmers, the social connection with other group members or the pleasure of smelling a newly opened box of fresh organic dates
  - Remember that purchasing in a buying group is a choice - you can start next month if this month doesn't work, or next year
-

## INTERESTING FACTS

*The average Australian family wastes one in five shopping bags of food bought - that is equivalent to well over \$3,000/household/year - what could you do with that?*



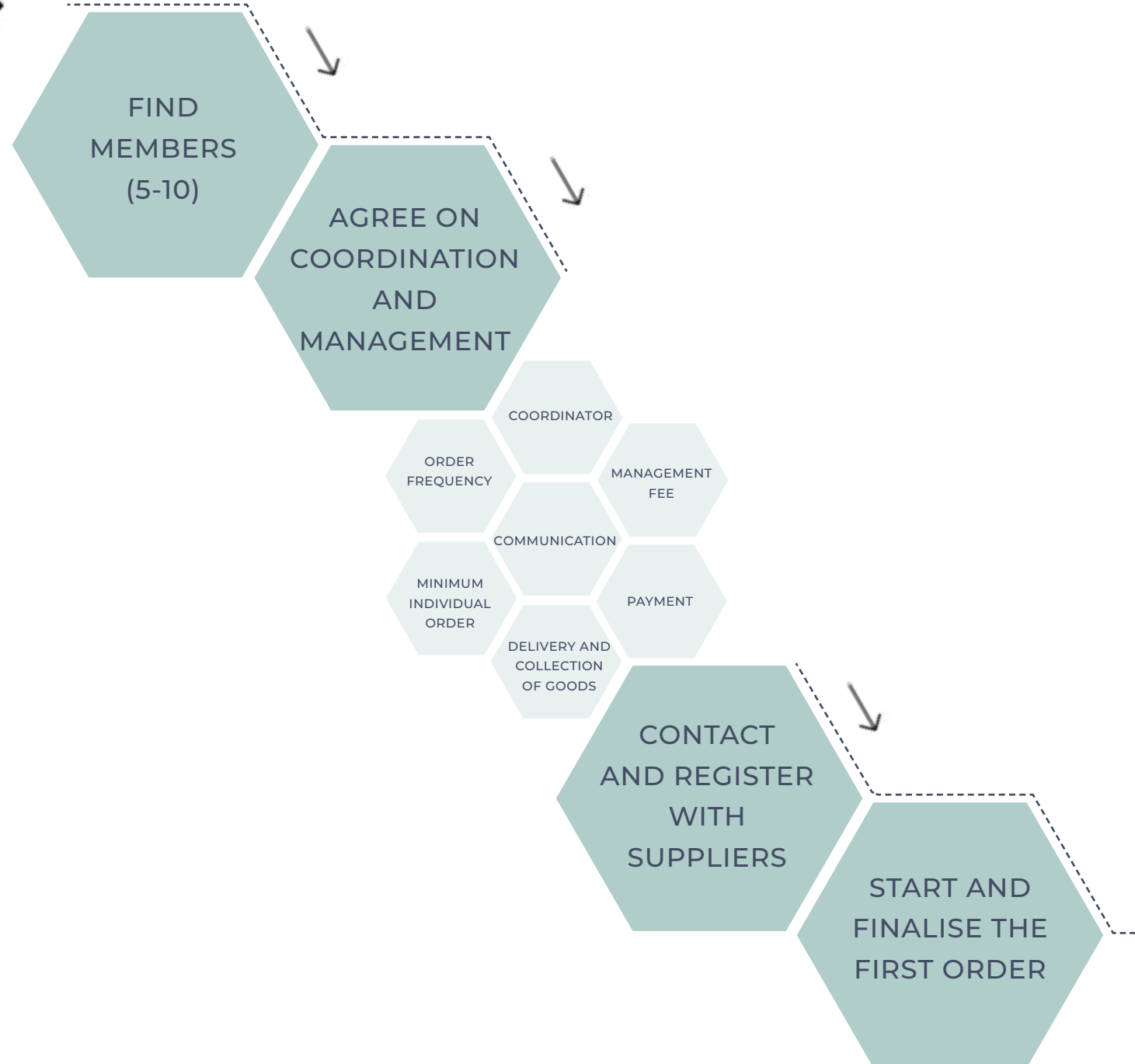
**This guide will help you create a buying group.** You don't need to create one though. Most groups are open to new members, so you can also find one that suits you and join in. How? You can ask one of the suppliers if they know of any groups in your area, ask your local school or university about affiliated groups, or ask on social media.

If you do decide that starting your own group with your friends or neighbours is the way you want to go, please ensure that the group's values and objectives are set before the first order. As a coordinator, ensure that your expectations and priorities are clear too.

Refer to this guide, where you find lots of tips for a smooth start to your buying group journey. Always ask questions, don't be afraid to learn from people already involved in a buying-group community.

**And have fun!**

START HERE →



## MEMBERS

Starting with a group of people you already know ensures that the common values and **community feel** are already in place. With time the group will most likely grow outside of the friendship circle and the coordinator can decide whether to **take more or less members** depending on the current work load.

It has been found that most groups in the Port Macquarie Hastings LGA prefer having 10-20 members.

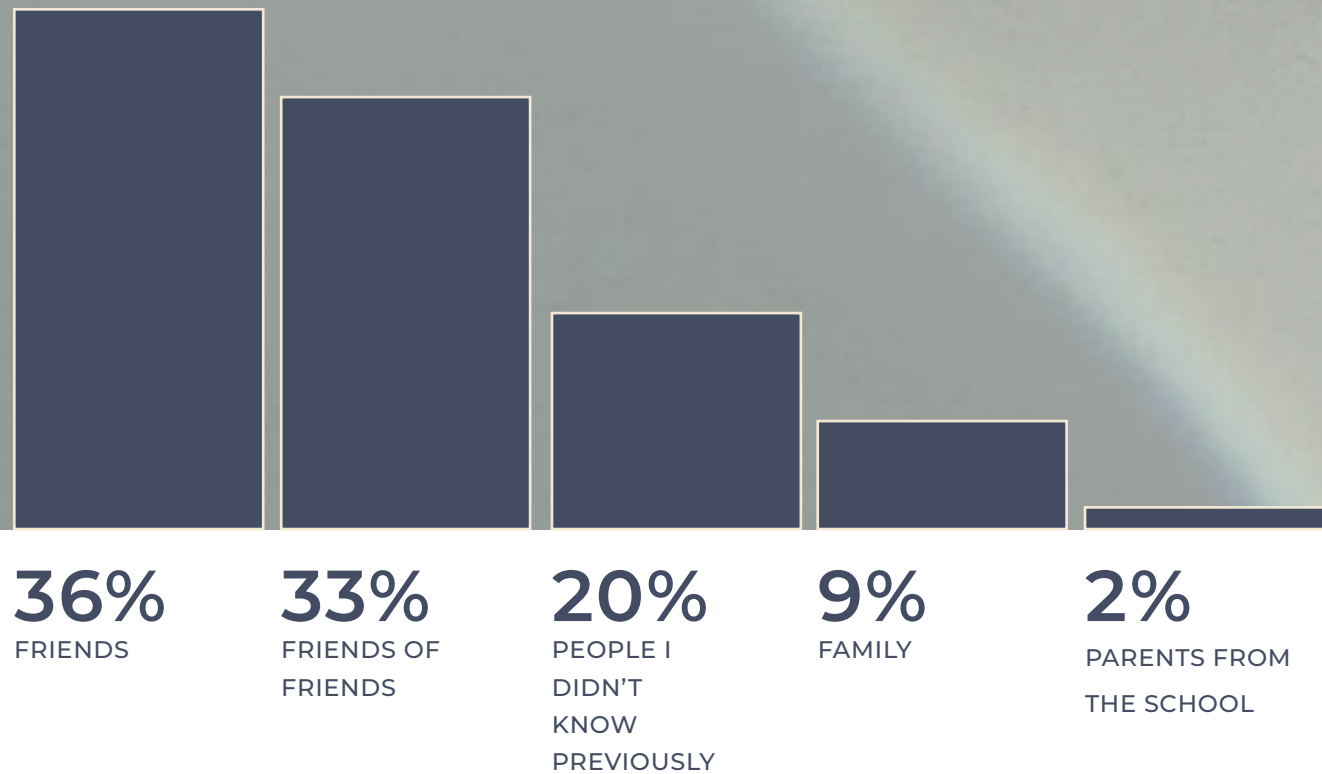
**The more people that get together, the bigger the buying power of the group and the bigger the bulk quantities can be, saving more money and plastic waste.** The maximum number of members in a buying group is entirely dependent on the organisational capacity of the coordinator and the location of delivery and divvy.

## INTERESTING FACTS

*In major cities in Australia there are groups of 200 – 500 members.*

It is important to keep in mind that members may not order every time there is an order. So, although there are 30 members in a group, there may be only 10-15 orders coming in from different members each time.

MEMBERS  
OF A GROUP  
CONSIST OF



for more information see [Background Information](#)

## COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT

It is important that **everyone in the group agrees** how the coop should be run, but remain mindful that it may change with time and membership. New members will need orientation to the group rules. An example template for a written agreement is available [in the appendix](#) though many groups function without this written down.

The group will need to identify a coordinator, in larger groups this role may be shared between several people. A management fee for the coordinator's time is essential for motivation and to value the person's time. The most common management fee range is 5-10%.

The **frequency of buying food depends** entirely on your group: it could be weekly, monthly, every 3 months. If you are buying perishable foods from local farmers this will most likely be a frequent meet. If the group only purchases dry foods such as nuts, grains and dry fruits, then 6 weeks might be perfect. It will take a few orders for everyone in the group to learn how much food their household needs in a monthly period. Consistency in ordering food is essential for the efficient continuation of the buying group.

### INTERESTING FACTS

*If food waste was a country, it would be third-largest producer of carbon dioxide in the world, after the USA and China.*



Having a minimum order value (e.g.\$70) or a minimum order quantity (e.g.1 kg) ensures the commitment to bulk buying. It eliminates the risk of divvying 250g of cranberries out of a 5kg bag.

**The location, date and time for divvy and pick up of goods should also be discussed.** Some groups prefer to have the dates set out for the year ahead, others set it as needed.

The timing of the collection depends on the person coordinating the divvy.

A **communication method** that matches your group is essential. Communication could be via an online platform, social media group, messenger or chat app.

There are different platforms that could be used to organise each order. Excel in google drive works well for small groups and small orders. Once there are more people and goods involved you may need a platform such as [managemy.coop](https://managemy.coop).

Email and phone is preferred for some groups digitally savvy members.



63%

OF THE BUYING GROUPS  
ARE OPEN FOR  
NEW MEMBERS

70%

BELIEVE THAT THE  
OPTIMAL NUMBER OF  
MEMBERS IN A  
BUYING GROUPS  
IS UP TO 25

60%

OF THE GROUPS HAVE  
ONLY ONE COORDINATOR  
OR ONE OTHER  
PERSON WHO  
HELPS



## PAYMENT

Most distributors have a platform or an online shop where the coordinator can purchase by card or bank transfer. Usually, payments are made by group members into a designated bank account. The coordinator then pays for the order on the group's behalf. It is recommended that the coordinator does not finalise the order until each member has made payment, this ensures that the coordinator will not be out of pocket after an order is made.

The coordinator needs to keep track of the payments that are still outstanding as members may forget to pay. It is essential to send out a reminder every few days per email (the coordinators bank details could be added to each reminder) or message the people that have not paid yet directly. If keeping track of payments is getting tricky, you may wish to set up an excel sheet where payments made, payments due and credits are clearly stated by member.



When ordering directly from farmers, the preferred option may be cash. Members can transfer cash to the person coordinating the order (not necessarily the coordinator, but whoever has found a great farmer to buy food from). This can either be a rule or can be organised on an ad hoc basis.

When refunding a member, please ensure that the amount includes the freight charges. Freight fees are usually calculated by weight and when an item is unavailable the distributor should amend the freight fee accordingly.

## DELIVERY AND COLLECTION OF GOODS

It is essential to set rules for the delivery of goods.

Consider food safety when choosing the delivery location, which should be **a place that can be locked and is safe from potential hazards, such as animals, floods and strong winds.**

Once the order arrives, the receiver or coordinator should ensure that everything that has been ordered is there, by **cross referencing with the sales order invoice.**

When checking the delivery, it is also essential to check for quality e.g. broken glass, opened bags, bugs and critters in food (especially nuts and grains).

**If anything is amiss the seller should be contacted straight away for either replacement or refund.** The quicker this is done the easier and better the result. When stock is unavailable but has already been paid for by members, ensure that they receive a credit for the amount or a refund.

See [Payment](#) for more information.



## DIVVY

**The divvy can be a huge and boring task on your own. Instead, take the opportunity to meet the other members of the group.** Most longstanding groups prefer having a number of volunteers to help out with their own scales.

To ensure you have enough volunteers you can:

- Make the gathering fun with dinner or a snack
- Create a volunteer roster
- Plan the divvy days in advance for the year to ensure availability of volunteers

### **To prepare for the divvy**

- Ask members who are not available to help to drop off jars/containers prior to the day. This will ensure that the volunteers at the divvy have enough containers available
- Ask volunteers to bring a set of scales.
- Write on bags (e.g. a 5kg jasmine rice bag: 1kg Sandra, 2kg Tom, 2kg Hayley)
- Sort goods in areas (e.g. nuts on this table and grains on the bench)
- Label boxes with each individual's orders (e.g. Paul's box has his soap and 1l maple syrup, Sarah's box has 2kg of pasta)



The space and the divvy area should be kept clean and safe from contaminants. Please also ensure that everyone involved in the divvy, washes their hands thoroughly before sharing the food into containers.

People that were not able to attend divvy should pick up their order straight away and get in touch with the coordinator if delayed. Storing food that has been divided can impact on quality, especially for items that should be stored in the fridge.





# STORAGE OF FOOD

## TOP TIPS

*Cafes and Bakeries may purchase their supplies in glass jars or bulk containers. Ask them to keep these for you so you can start your own collection of storage jars.*

Appropriate food storage is important to ensure food safety and reduce food waste.

Ensure everyone is aware of what needs to be stored in the fridge, such as divvied organic maple syrup and organic hazelnuts. In summer many additional goods may need to be stored in the fridge or freezer. E.g. nuts stay fresh in the freezer for many months.

**Most dry goods are best stored in an air tight container in a cold and dark room.** We suggest glass, stainless steel or BPA free plastic containers. Keep in mind that glass can be heavy and if it breaks you may spoil a lot of food.

When purchasing fresh produce or harvesting from the garden, fridge life can be extended with reusable produce bags such as [The Swag](#). This is an Australian product that keeps produce crisp, healthy and happy for weeks.

Further Food storage ideas can be found in the [Love Food Hate Waste website](#).

## SUPPLIERS

A great way to start is with a distributor that has a wide range of dry goods that your group needs.

Local farmers are often keen to sell straight to a buying group, but as this food is perishable more organisation is required and orders will be more frequent.

Goods that you may be able to source locally include honey, olive oil, soap, dairy, bread, eggs, veggies and fruits, meat and milk.

Following is a list of potential distributors for your buying group in Australia.



## DRY GOODS

**Honest to Goodness : [goodness.com.au](http://goodness.com.au)**

Minimum \$500 order required for bulk prices. Organic and non organic dry foods, retail and bulk amounts available. Buying Group Platform. Shipping from Sydney.

**Nut Grocer : [nutgrocer.com.au](http://nutgrocer.com.au)**

Organic and non organic dry foods available.

**Austral Herbs : [australherbs.com.au](http://australherbs.com.au)**

Organic Herbs and Spices

**Who Gives a Crap : [au.whogivesacrap.org](http://au.whogivesacrap.org)**

Recycled toilet paper, paper towels, tissues

**Blants : [blants.com.au](http://blants.com.au)**

Bulk amounts for salts, magnesium, washing soda, bentonite clay, citric acid

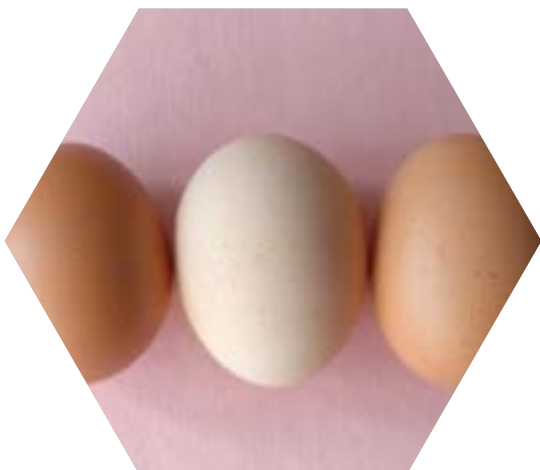
**Ulu Hye : [uluhye.com.au](http://uluhye.com.au)**

Organic nut mylk jars created to make your own mylk at home. Saving tetra paks from landfill.



# LOCAL FARMERS

MID NORTH COAST



**Port Macquarie Food Hub :** [portmacquariefoodhub.com.au](http://portmacquariefoodhub.com.au)

monthly orders for local and regional produce. Ethical meat, cheese, bread, condiments, fruits and vegetables

## **Organic garlic**

There often is a local farmer posting in Facebook Marketplace. Get in touch and then keep the contact for future seasons if the garlic was good.

## **Avocado**

Plenty of avocado farms in Comboyne, Rollands Plains and Telegraph Point. Such as:

Avocado Jo (Red Hill): [avocadojo.com.au](http://avocadojo.com.au)

## **Honey**

Amber Drop Honey, King Creek Honey, the Beekeeper:  
[amberdrophoney.com.au](http://amberdrophoney.com.au)

## **Macadamias**

Hand'n'Hoe Organics (Comboyne): [handnhoeorganics.com.au](http://handnhoeorganics.com.au)  
(organic macadamias)

## **Eggs & Meat**

Oxhill Organics (Redbank): [oxhillorganics.com.au](http://oxhillorganics.com.au)  
(also sell meat straight from the farm)

Idlewilde Farm (Elands): [idlewildefarm.com.au](http://idlewildefarm.com.au)

Chef2Farmer of Little Eden:

[facebook.com/chef2farmeratlittleeden/](https://facebook.com/chef2farmeratlittleeden/)

(ethical eggs, beef, pork)

Near River Produce (Pappinbarra): [nearriverproduce.com.au](https://nearriverproduce.com.au)

(biodynamic pork)

Meander Welsh Black Catlle (Logans Crossing):

[facebook.com/BenandCateColes/](https://facebook.com/BenandCateColes/)

(sustainable beef)

### **Veggie Boxes**

The Davis Farm (Sancrox): [facebook.com/TheDavisFarm/](https://facebook.com/TheDavisFarm/)

(vegetables and Farm experience)

Sohip (Kew) :

[sohiporganics.com.au](https://sohiporganics.com.au)

(vegetables)

Homegrown Organics (Rollands Plains):

[mastersoffresh.com.au](https://mastersoffresh.com.au)

(vegetables, pies, nut butter, preserves)

Placid Trees Farm (Marlo Merrican): [placidtreesfarm.com.au](https://placidtreesfarm.com.au)

(vegetables, berries, eggs)



## BUYING GROUP TEMPLATE

*This is a template that you may use as a guide if you wish to. Many groups do not have a written agreement, however, this may help you at the start. It may help you set the values and management required to ensure the success and efficiency of your buying group.*

Welcome to our Group! *(Insert your Buying Group Name)*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ am the coordinator of \_\_\_\_\_ Buying Group. And I am pleased to invite you to our journey of purchasing food together. Our group's values and commitment are *(you may tick the boxes or choose to write your own values)*

- ☐ Purchasing organic food
- ☐ Purchasing local food (and Australian)
- ☐ Reducing waste
- ☐ Creating community
- ☐ Sharing recipes

The orders will be *(please choose which one applies for you):*

- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Fortnightly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ 6 weekly
- ☐ Bi-monthly

Payments will be finalised before the order is delivered. The management fee is \_\_\_\_\_.

Payment details are to be transferred to:

Name:

BSB:

Acct Nr:

When the order is delivered. Divvy will be at this

location \_\_\_\_\_

As a member of this group you agree to be responsible for *(here you may add what is important for you, this is an example of what you can add)*

- ☐ On time Payment of your order
- ☐ Helping out during divvy  
*(whenever you are available, at least 3 times a year, every time etc)*
- ☐ Collection of your order on the day of divvy

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Please sign below (pdf sign is preferred) to confirm your commitment to this buying group

Name:

Date:



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