

Bringing environmental activism to the kitchen

a look at Happy Bellies Food Co-Op

Kim Waters

Food co-ops are a gas, especially if you eat all those chick peas! No, Seriously, food co-ops aren't just political hot air, they are a political activity, especially when the dominant political paradigm is neo-liberalism. That is when big is beautiful if you're a conglomerate owner, and the political institutions are geared to 'securing employment'.

Food co-ops are: run by volunteers, are not profit centred, question the origin of food, and provide an alternative to supermarket shopping. This list could go on because the possibilities are limited only by those who volunteer in the co-op.

On campus, here in sunny Wollongong, (where spring is not only a season but a verb which describes the way people walk) we have Happy Bellies, which strictly speaking, is not a food co-op but a Club and Society which buys and sells food.

Some of the food is organic, some biodynamic, some just damn tasty, but all free of genetically engineered organisms! Happy Bellies is open at lunchtimes and is staffed by a happy and cooperative volunteers who work at least one hour per month. The volunteer aspect of all food co-ops is essential to providing cheap and alternatively sourced food. The retail mentality at Happy Bellies is clearly not 'shop til you drop', but as a clear commitment to extended trading hours we do occasionally work past the lunch break.

So if quietly messing up dominant paradigms is your thing then join the quiet, but messy, revolution in the food world and head on down to the belly of happiness.



Going Organic

by Amanda Akien

Many see recycling an effective way to help the environment. But what about changing your eating habits? Ditching conventional fruit and vegetables for organic produce not only provides a healthier eating option but also helps the environment.

There was a time, not too long ago, when the casual mention of 'organic food' would conjure up an image of longhaired, vegetarian hippies spending their dole cheques on beans, pulses and lentils. Thankfully those days have passed. Today organic food has never been cheaper and more accessible to the general public. It is big business with an increasing number of people choosing to buy it for health and environmental reasons.

Choosing to eat organic food has huge benefits for the environment. Organic agriculture is a more sustainable farming system producing healthy crops and livestock while minimising damage to the environment. It aims to avoid the use of artificial chemical fertilisers and artificial pesticides that conventional farmers often use in excessive amounts. Instead, organic farmers rely on developing a healthy fertile soil and growing a mixture of crops.

Pesticides are the main environmental problem in conventional farming. Some pesticides occur naturally but the majority used in agriculture are synthetic chemicals. These chemical substances used to kill and control pests have many harmful effects in humans as well as in the environment, affecting its biodiversity. Pesticides are toxic to species deemed as pests but can also harm or kill beneficial species, which have a knock-on effect on entire ecosystems.

Organic farming helps to protect the quality of water. Despite its importance, traces of dangerous pesticides (some cancer causing) regularly contaminate ground water.

An American report in 1987 by the National Academy of Sciences estimated that pesticides might cause an extra 1.4 million cancer cases among Americans over their lifetime. The bottom line is that pesticides are poisons designed to kill living organisms and can be harmful to humans. The obvious result may be cancer

but pesticides can also be responsible for birth defects, nerve damage and genetic mutation. An estimated 1 million people are poisoned each year by pesticides with a high number being those who work in the farming industry.

Despite the numerous environmental and health benefits of organic farming the words 'organic food' do not appeal to everyone. Organic fruit and vegetables are not always as visually tempting as their conventionally farmed rivals but there is a high price to pay for picture perfect looks. Vast amounts of conventionally farmed products fail to make the grade each month and are left to rot in fields.

Consumers choose to buy potatoes free from dirt and apples that are polished and lime green. There are benefits of buying vegetables that will last for months in the vegetable rack and not just a day. But if people stop to consider the fact that a tomato may have been treated 40 times with up to 100 different chemicals before being harvested the idea of eating organic seems increasingly appealing.

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Though slightly more expensive, the price of organic food is starting to drop as it gains credibility. The word 'organic' is appearing more than ever on the Australian supermarket shelves and this promotes healthy competition. Today, due to the rise of internet companies, an increasing number of private companies are promoting organic food at affordable prices. Better Health Organic Food Co-op is a NSW based company and aims to promote food free from pesticides and chemicals. The public need to be members which will cost from \$15-\$30 but in return they are sure of getting organic fruit and vegetables. On a national level the 'organikfood.com' delivers organic food around Australia.

It is recommended that we eat at least seven types of fruit and vegetables a day. Every year more and more statistical and scientific evidence reveals eating vegetables and fruit can help prevent illnesses such as some cancers and heart disease. But eating chemically treated food could do more a lot more harm than good.

For further information:
<http://www.coop.hawke.asn.au>
<http://www.organikfood.com>

**Nature is complex,
But never complicated**