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Shopping

Make a cereal killing

Beat superstore prices on health food by buying in groups, says Nick Kettles

Sunday August 10, 2003

[The Observer](#)



The expansion of supermarkets into organic and wholefood lines continues to put the squeeze on independent health food shops. But rather than be enticed, many consumers are clubbing together to form buying groups, to make even bigger savings direct from wholefood wholesalers.



Priya Hallam is a member of a buying group in Ashbourne, Derbyshire. 'Some friends told us how much they were saving each year,' she says. 'So we sat down and rationalised our supermarket receipts over three months. By cross referencing the items we always brought with the equivalent from our local wholesaler, we worked out we would save over a thousand pounds a year. That's before the cost of petrol to travel to our local Sainsbury's.'



According to Paul Grassick, company secretary at Lembas, a speciality vegetarian and wholefood wholesaler in Sheffield, the number of these 'informal co-operatives' has doubled as a percentage of their customer base since 1994. 'We only had 20 groups then. Currently the figure stands at 150,' he says. Grassick adds: 'The clear trend is that buying groups are defecting from supermarkets, not health food shops.'

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The Observer

Forming a buying group is, for many people, the only way to make savings, and for those living in remote rural areas the only way to get the produce to the door. Highland Wholefoods in Scotland, for example, serves many groups who live miles from a suitable wholefood retailer.

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The majority of buying groups are based on friendships with no formal membership, average between three and six members, either individuals, couples or families, and are run on an ad hoc basis. Although the administrative burden prohibits most from growing larger, a few, such as The Good Food Co-Op in Chesterfield, which has 25 members, have adopted a formal legal structure. Some wholesalers, like Green City in Glasgow, actively encourage this by requiring groups to set up a bank account in the group name.

The majority of orders are for staple items and household goods, leaving most groups to find chilled, frozen and fresh items elsewhere. Minimum orders start from £100, usually including free delivery. Buying groups must have one point of order and delivery, although some wholesalers allow individual group members to call in top-up orders.

The motivation for setting up buying groups varies. Saving time and money is the primary motivation, with wholesale prices ranging from 10-15 per cent cheaper on established brands and 25 per cent on organic items. But some have other motivations.

Tess Rigby runs the Ashbourne buying group. She says: 'I'm primarily motivated to be able to afford to buy organic. It's helped me to become vegan, because I no longer have to drive round lots of different shops to get what I want.'

Wholesome alternatives

[Green City](#) - Glasgow (0141 554 7633) Minimum order £150 (delivery free). Delivers north to Perth and Aberdeen, south to Ayr, Berwick, and Dumfries. Will not serve buying groups within the vicinity of Green City's regular retail customers

[Highland Wholefoods](#) - Inverness (01463 712393) Minimum order £100; £250 to benefit from discounts. Delivers to Highlands

[Lembas](#) - Sheffield (0845 458 1585;) Minimum order £100+ depending on distance from base (delivery free). Delivers within a range defined by Liverpool, Halifax, Lincolnshire, and Birmingham.

[Suma](#) - Halifax (0845 458 2291) Minimum £200+ depending on region. Delivers to whole of UK. Will not serve buying groups within the vicinity of Suma's regular retail customers

[Infinity Foods](#) - Brighton (01273 424060) Minimum £150 for local orders (delivery free), £350 for orders beyond Oxford, Watford and Portsmouth). Will not serve buying groups within the vicinity of its



regular retail customers.

[Foodfirst](#) offers information on speciality foods including a directory of producers, wholesalers and retailers.



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