

Food Next Door Co-op



Champion:

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Age of co-op:

Three years

Industry:

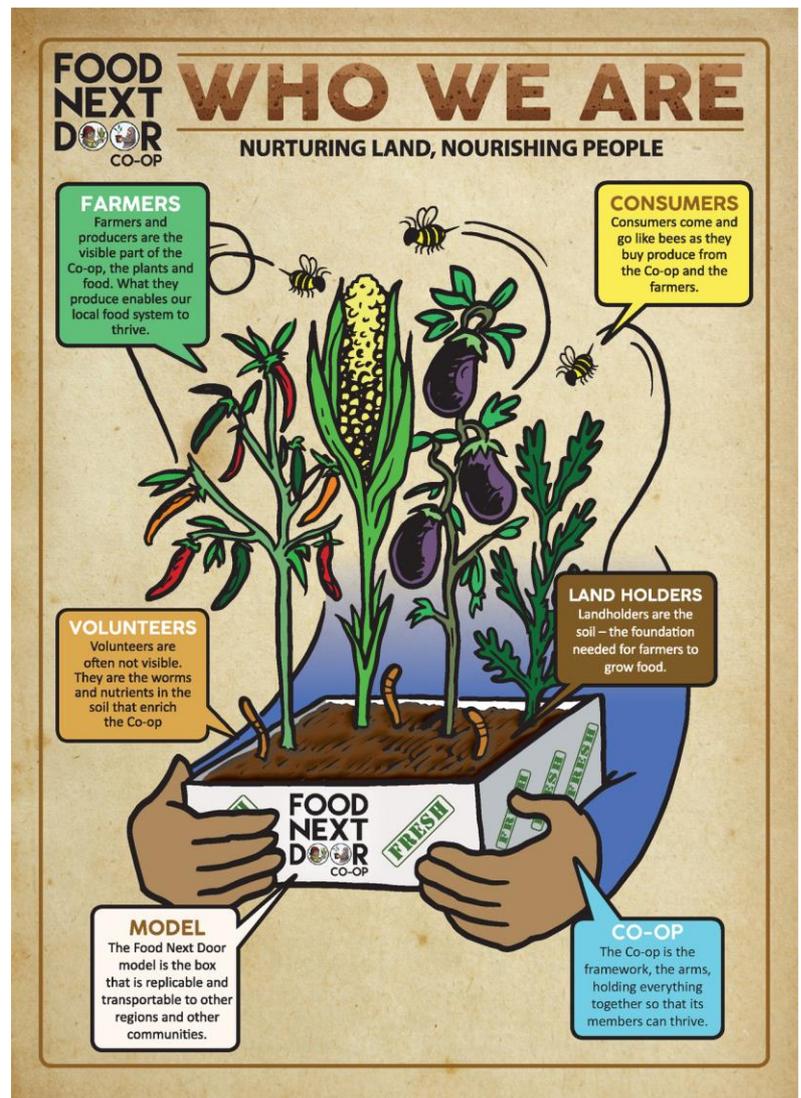
Mixed; fruit and vegetables

Location:

Mildura, Victoria

Region:

warm climate, good soils, ag dominated economy, largest city in northwest Victoria.



Food Next Door matches under-utilised farmland with landless farmers to support small-scale regenerative farming, growing diverse crops and engaging people from diverse backgrounds to supply food to local households. In 2017 and 2018, Farming Together funded this co-operative to assist in establishing the Out of the Box initiative which supplies local consumers with fresh, local, organically grown produce.

The Catalyst for Change

- Lack of available local produce for the community.
- Local food security issues as the community heavily relied on food being brought into the region.
- Recognised the need for growing the capacity of the community to have a strong local food market.

The Opportunities

- Created weekly local produce scheme “Out of the Box” to supply 100% local produce to households in Sunraysia.
- Developed an approach to relieve the suffering and distress of newly arrived migrants and refugee groups, particularly those without access to land and living in rural and regional areas, by supporting these groups to re-engage in farming and grow food, including their traditional foods.
- Around 25% of land in the irrigation district of Sunraysia (Mildura) is no longer utilised for growing food as there was no one who wanted to farm it themselves.
- Connected landless refugee farmers to unused farming land.
- Developed options for small scale farming using regenerative practices.
- Created a multi-stakeholder co-operative model from an incorporated association to connect people in the community with more local food.

The Challenges

- Initially trying to engage too many people and had high expectations on ourselves.
- Working with different personalities and people.
- Locating financial support to continue and expand existing operations and projects.
- Developing a business model that effectively and correctly positioned all our stakeholders.

The Enablers

- Focus on working one-on-one with people and developing the capacity of your core people rather than focusing on looking for more members.
- Keep people connected through tools like texts and WhatsApp which are more personal than emails and e-newsletters. Consistent and meaningful communication and listening to people e.g. by using social media to convey response to surveys.
- Prioritise building and maintaining strong relationships.
- Collaboratively reflect on your practices and processes.
- Develop a shared values statement and culture to underpin your co-op e.g. being kind, a culture of caring.
- Focus on the goodness of people. Identify poor behaviour and address the issue there.

The Success Story

- 61 co-op memberships including 110 total individual members.
- 90 households subscribe to Out of the Box.
- 7 acres of previously unused land being accessed and farmed.
- 37 farmers involved including 30 Burundian and Congolese farmers.
- 30% of income from Out of the Box is generated from food box sales. Grants cover the remaining operating costs. They are aiming to increase their income by expanding their enterprises, however, the group will continue to apply to external source funding for their charitable work.

Future Looking

- **Talk to other multi-stakeholder co-operatives:** learn first-hand from others.
- **Look inside** for knowledge and skills within your co-op while looking outside for support and to see the forest from the trees.
- **Stay informed and educated** on your industry, your business model and the agriculture sector more broadly to be open to new opportunities and to support others in their learning.
- **Start where you are at, bring everyone along the journey with you and do the work!**