

How to...

How to set up a vegetable bag scheme





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What is a Vegetable Bag Scheme?

- A vegetable bag (or more accurately a produce bag) scheme offers fruit and vegetables at a very good value to the community.
- A vegetable bag scheme offers an affordable pre-bagged mixture of seasonal produce sold weekly through a community centre.
- The bag scheme helps promote the relationship between local suppliers/farmers and their consumers, building links and understanding about where their food comes from, who produces it, and its seasonal availability.
- The vegetable and fruit in the scheme are not necessarily organic. There are organic box schemes but these tend to be more expensive

What are the benefits of a Vegetable Bag Scheme?

- The bag scheme provides a mixed variety of fruit and vegetables every week, therefore hoping to encourage people to try to increase their consumption of fruit and vegetables and make it easier to make fruit and vegetables an integral part of their diet
- The bag scheme was originally created for areas where a lack of shops and transport are barriers to people being able to buy fruit and vegetables. The scheme aims to overcome this by making fruit and vegetable readily accessible and affordable.
- Providing advice and learning opportunities on using seasonal produce can enhance the value of a vegetable bag scheme.

What are the aims of a Vegetable Bag Scheme?

- To improve the access and availability of fresh seasonal and local produce in a low-income community
- To provide fresh, seasonal and local produce at an affordable price to a low-income community
- To raise awareness of a healthy lifestyle by encouraging people to eat more fruit and vegetables and make fruit and vegetables an integral part of their daily diet.

A 5-Step Guide to setting up a Vegetable Bag Scheme

Step 1: Research the local area

Research the area where you would like to run the vegetable bag scheme.

Take into consideration:

Local Shops

- Are there any local shops in the area?
- Do they stock/sell good quality and a variety of fruit and vegetables?
- How much are the fruit and vegetables priced at?

Public Transport

- Is there regular public transport in the area?
- Is the public transport easily accessible

Supermarkets

- Are there any supermarkets in the area?
- Do they provide a free bus service?

Community centres

- Is there a community café?
- Does it run regular activities and groups sessions (cook & eat courses, mother and toddler group, baby massage groups and UK online)
- Does the centre have a snack bar or shop?

Characteristics of the population in the area

- Which socio economic group are predominates the area?
- Are there more elderly and housebound people living in the area?
- Is there a high incidence of teenage pregnancy or single parent families?

The community

- Has a community needs assessment identified poor food access as an issue for the community
- Have members of the community expressed a need to source more affordable fruit and vegetable?
- Did any of the community organisation undertake a questionnaire or survey to learn if the community will use and support the scheme

Education/leisure centre

- Are there any local nurseries/schools/colleges nearby?
- Are there any sport centres nearby?
- Are there tuck shops/vending machines/café/canteen in these locations; what do these services offer?

The information you have collected on your research of the area will inform you about the area and whether the community has identified a need for improved food access. If there is easy access to fruit and vegetables which are affordable then it won't be necessary to set up a bag scheme, however, it may be beneficial to work with the local shop to encourage them to provide a variety of good quality fruit and vegetables and which are affordable.

Step 2: Identify a reliable supplier

Identify a supplier for your fruit and vegetable scheme. The supplier is a very important factor in a successful bag scheme. They will need to be reliable, local and flexible.

- Your suppliers could be farmers, producers, wholesalers, allotment plot holders, school vegetable gardens etc. You can source the produce from more than one supplier.
- Delivery - Is the supplier willing to deliver to the venue for free or is there a charge?
- Sourcing - If you are highlighting the benefits of local produce (eg. to the local economy, of seasonal produce, or of rural/urban reconnection) then you need to ensure that your supplier can actually source local produce. Most suppliers will buy in produce from wholesalers or markets and may not be able to supply food grown locally.
- Quality - Accept only good quality produce from your supplier. It is important that you deal with poor quality produce on the day of delivery to avoid any loss or wastage. Usually if the quality of the fruit or vegetables is poor you can request from the supplier to change at the next delivery or a discount for your purchase.
- To act as a guide to your volunteers, request a sample of a vegetable bag each week from the supplier as a guide to help volunteers or staff know how many of each item goes into a bag.

(Many suppliers may be willing to deliver free of charge but may not be willing to make up all the bags therefore it is important to have staff of volunteers who can assist with making up bags.)

Step 3: Staffing the scheme

Identify a community organisation or volunteers who could run this project. As well as a good supplier for a successful bag scheme there is also a great need for reliable volunteers.

Your volunteers could be:

Parents, community members, workers from an organisation that is running the scheme, members of other organisation (eg MIIND, MENCAP, Age Concern) and family liaison officers

Your volunteers are needed to:

- Make an order each week from the supplier requesting the number of bags that is going to be sold
- Be at the venue to receive the order and pay for the order
- Make up the bags according to the sample that has been delivered by the supplier
- Collect the cash from the sale of the bags
- Keep a record of the weekly sales as this will be a good indicator of success
- Try and promote the scheme through flyers or any other organisations.

If you have dedicated volunteers who are not paid members of staff but are a parent or a service user, maybe as recognition for their time and effort you can provide them with a free bag of vegetables each week.



Step 4: Choosing a venue

Choose an appropriate venue to run your bag scheme.

Things to consider when choosing a venue,:

- Easily accessible
- Parking spaces
- Disabled access
- Free of charge or do you have to pay rent?
- Does it already have a captive audience (e.g. do they have a community café, mother and toddler group)

Some suggestions for a venue:

- Children and/or family centres
- Community centre
- Church hall
- School
- GP surgery
- Community organisation venue
- Community café
- Allotments or community gardens
- Sports or leisure centres
- A local pub



Step 5: Preparation for the scheme

Plan out all the logistics and details of the scheme.

- Decide on the contents and the price of your bag. A typical bag will have a selection of seasonal vegetable and/or fruit for a set price. A suggested price for a bag of vegetables is £1.50.
- It is also important to decide on the day and the time of day that you would like to run the scheme. Should the scheme run on a weekday or at weekends? If on a weekday which day would be most suitable for the community to access the scheme.
- When starting the scheme, it is important to start it on a small scale, therefore you don't need to worry about any surplus stock or unsold bag. There is a greater chance for sustainability if the scheme is gradually built up slowly to allow the scheme to establish in the community. Keep a list of the people who are using the scheme and contact them prior to the delivery day to ensure that they would still like a bag that week. Take extra care during school holidays as many of the families might be going on holiday.
- All community projects will require a forward plan once the funding for the project comes to an end. With this type of project if you are seeking funding then it is usually more than enough to find funding for 6 weeks initially. In this time period the scheme will be able to collect enough money to continue the scheme without further funding. Also when seeking for funding it is important to build in costs for:
 - promotional items and vouchers for the scheme
 - advertising
 - rent (it is important to get a free venue as this would assist to make the project sustainable. If a venue if charging rent then it will be difficult to continue the scheme once the funding comes to an end)
 - volunteer expenses (alternatively you can offer volunteers a free bag)
 - bags (if you have a contact with a local Primary Care Trust, they will be able to order the 5 A DAY bags available from www.5aday.nhs.uk - resources)
- Make sure you have volunteers on board early on and make sure that you plan for emergency cover. What will you do if your key volunteer leaves? Plan for it early on

To measure the success of the project an evaluation is essential.

Look back to the aims of the scheme. When evaluating the project it is important to:

- keep a record of sales each week
- interview community members who purchase the bag scheme
- design a questionnaire to investigate whether the scheme has provided more access to fresh, local and seasonal vegetables at an affordable price

A Step-by-Step Guide to Millmead Vegetable Bag Scheme in East Kent

Description of the area

This is an example of a vegetable bag scheme in the Millmead area of Thanet. Millmead falls into the 10% most deprived areas in the country. There is high unemployment and elevated levels of crime and child poverty.

Locally Millmead comprises of one greengrocer which does not stock a variety of good quality and affordable fresh fruit and vegetables. There are no supermarkets nearby and the public transport is not regular.

There is a community café attached to the Sure Start in the area. Millmead has also been a focus for many other regeneration projects such as allotment projects, safer travel routes, employing a debt worker, cook and eat courses and health walks.

The organisation

Northdown Community Association (NCA) is a community organisation which helps set up different projects in the Millmead area to improve the quality of life of the Millmead residents. The organisation was approached to run the scheme as part of the 5 A DAY programme. As NCA is located in Millmead, it has grounded information on the residents in the area, very good links with other organisation in the area and is seen to be a trusted organisation by the residents. The organisation then identified a few members of staff and a few volunteers who would be willing to run the scheme.

The supplier

It was important for us to find a local supplier as we wanted to promote locally grown produce as part of the scheme. We approached two farm shops initially, both of the suppliers were very keen on the idea unfortunately one of the farms did not do delivery. As delivery was essential to this scheme we decided to go ahead with Nash Farm as the supplier for our scheme.

The scheme

The aim of the 5 A DAY programme was to improve access, availability, awareness and positive attitude towards fruit and vegetables in the most deprived communities in East Kent.

1. Consult the community

- The community in Millmead were consulted on how much they would be willing to pay for a bag of mixed vegetables at the start of the scheme. The price range for a bag was between £1.00-1.90. They also identified that Wednesdays would be a good day for them to purchase the bag.

2. Discuss with the farm shop

- We consulted with the farm shop regarding the contents of the bag for the price range and came up with £1.50 as a reasonable price.
- We discussed with the farm shop to make a sample bag every week so that the volunteers making up the bages knew how many of each items went into a bag.

3. Advertise

- We produced flyers and posters to advertise the scheme. We have a poster of the veg bag scheme in the front of the window at NCA, at the Sure Start building in the area, another resident's association and the local church
- NCA also promoted the scheme by word of mouth to the residents in Millmead

4. Funding

- We funded the first 6 weeks of the scheme through the 5 A DAY funding available
- Once the money was collected for 6 weeks the scheme then started purchasing the produce through the money collected in the 6 weeks

5. Starting at a small scale

- As this project was very new to the area we started with a small number of 14 bags initially to guarantee that there were no leftovers or waste.
- As the scheme started developing the number of bags sold each week has increased steadily. At present the scheme is selling up to 60 bags a week

6. Sustainability

- the funding was only provided for a short term of 6 weeks so that the scheme would be able to self sustain

7. Promotional vouchers and seasonal recipes

- To promote the scheme further we introduced a voucher scheme. Each bag was given a voucher every week and if they collected 5 vouchers then their 6th bag was free.
- This was done once every three months as an incentive to the residents who purchased the bags
- From time to time, seasonal recipes were included with bags

8. Evaluation

- The scheme was chosen as one of the 14 case studies in the country for community food initiatives to be evaluated by the national 5 A DAY Programme and Big Lottery Fund. The result of the evaluation will be available on the 5 A DAY website and the Big Lottery Fund website.

9. Learning curve

- The scheme became quite popular and had built a good reputation around the Millmead area early on. Unfortunately a keen volunteer running the scheme left and due to staff shortages the scheme had to stop suddenly.
- NCA re-launched the scheme and involved a few other organisations to build up the scheme again. Some of the members of staff deliver to housebound residents.
- NCA received a lot of queries on the vegetables that were sold in the bag. A lot of the residents did not know how to prepare and cook the vegetables. NCA then consulted with us (5 A DAY and Health Promotion) to insert seasonal recipes with the bags to encourage healthy eating. The Farm shop also produces information about the produce and recipes that could be used in the bag.
- During the summer, NCA received a complaint that the bags were too expensive. The following week a member of staff and a volunteer purchased the equivalent from a local greengrocer, a Tesco Metro and a corner shop demonstrating that the Bag Scheme offered the best value (see appendix 1).
- NCA also approached a retired home economics teacher to give tips and advise residents on how to cook the produce from their bag schemes
- NCA actively seeks continual feedback from the residents in Millmead to improve the scheme

A typical vegetable bag day at NCA

- The scheme runs on a Tuesday
- Staff and volunteers get their cup of tea or coffee before the delivery arrives. The delivery from Nash Farm arrives between 10am – 11am.
- Once the delivery arrives, members of staff and volunteers present frantically start making up the bags.
- They insert any healthy eating leaflets or recipes available into the bags
- They might already have a list of their regular purchasers. Most residents come in to buy their bags between 1pm and 4pm that day.
- One of the staff/volunteer will deliver the number of bags requested by Sure Start and other resident organisations
- Another volunteer delivers to homes of some residents who are housebound
- If there are a few more requests at the end of the day, NCA places an extra order with Nash Farm to be delivered the following day.

Our strengths and weaknesses in this scheme

Strength

A committed community organisation

A very supportive supplier

A good set of volunteers

The scheme is part of a wider scheme to promote healthy lifestyle in Millmead

Good quality produce and is affordable

The scheme is popular with the local community

Free venue

Weakness

Heavily reliable on members of staff and volunteers

Provide only local and seasonal produce

Volunteers need support and training and emergency volunteer cover needs to be planned



Appendix I

5 A DAY veggie bag scheme price comparison fruit and salad box – July 2004



5 A DAY and Local Farmer's Vegetable Bag Scheme £1.50



Local Corner Shop £1.73



Northdown Road Grocer £1.79



Tesco Metro £1.50



SureStart



New Opportunities Fund
LOTTERY FUNDED

East Kent Coastal
Teaching Primary Care Trust



Appendix 2

As the vegetable box scheme primarily sources locally sourced produce, here are some suggestions of the seasonal produce you and your supplier could include into your bag scheme:

English Spring fruit and vegetables:

Purple sprouting broccoli, cauliflower, spring greens, radishes, parsley, rhubarb, leeks, carrots, lettuce, watercress, new potatoes and asparagus

English Summer fruit and vegetables:

New potatoes, asparagus, carrots, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, summer cabbage, spring cabbage, courgettes, sweetcorn, peas, chard, the first outdoor french beans, lettuce, fennel, peppers, broad beans, Chinese leaves, and green beans grown in tunnels, soft fruits including blackcurrants, strawberries, gooseberries, cherries loganberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants, tayberries, and herbs.

English Autumn fruit and vegetables:

Blackberries, early apples, damsons, pears, plums, spinach, figs, onions, all of the cabbages, curly kale, cucumbers, lettuce, tomatoes, French beans, courgettes, cauliflowers, red onions, peppers, aubergines, marrows, sweetcorn, leeks, red cabbage, beetroot, broccoli, swedes, sprouts, potatoes, apples, pears and quinces

English Winter fruit and vegetables:

Turnips, swede, parsnips, leeks, green cabbages, parsnips, turnips, sprouts, celeriac, jerusalem artichokes, shallots, mushrooms and forced rhubarb

Reference:

Guardian Unlimited, British season,
http://www.guardian.co.uk/food/focus/story/0,13296,961325,00.html#article_continue,
Saturday May 24, 2003

To find out more about seasonal produce visit:

<http://www.soilassociation.org> <http://www.nfu.org.uk>

Appendix 3

Five A Day voucher



5 A DAY



Veggie Bag Scheme

Collect 5 of these vouchers and get your
6th Veggie Bag for **free!**

This voucher cannot be redeemed for any other offer



East Kent Coastal **NHS**
Teaching Primary Care Trust

Appendix 4

Copy of article from Health News

Vegetable Box Scheme

A vegetable box scheme is a box (or a bag) which contains a mix of fresh, seasonal and locally grown produce sold at a reasonable price every week in a community venue. The box scheme has helped strengthen the relationship between local farmers and their consumers which can help educate consumers about where their food comes from and the seasons of when the produce is harvested. There are a few community venues that are actively promoting the scheme:

Northdown Community Association
2 Swinford Gardens, Margate CT9 3XR
and **Dane Valley Arms**
Dane Valley Road, Margate CT9 3RY
Contact: Barry De Bachi 01843 229714
Every Wednesdays

Newington Community Centre
Princess Margaret Avenue, Ramsgate
Contact: Jan Brandrick 01843 597652
Every Wednesdays (term time only)

Dame Janet Community Junior School
Newington Road, Ramsgate CT12 6QY
Contact: Carmen Flynn 01843 593463
Every Thursdays (term time only)

Appendix 5

Flyer and poster to promote vegetable bag scheme





NHS



Written by Buvana Ailoo, East Kent FIVE A DAY Co-ordinator, 2005

Download more 5 A DAY Toolkits at

<http://www.foodandhealth.org.uk/news/5ADayToolkit.asp>

For more information on 5 A DAY visit the 5 A DAY website

<http://www.5aday.nhs.uk>