

10 STEPS

For

Starting

And

Growing

Your

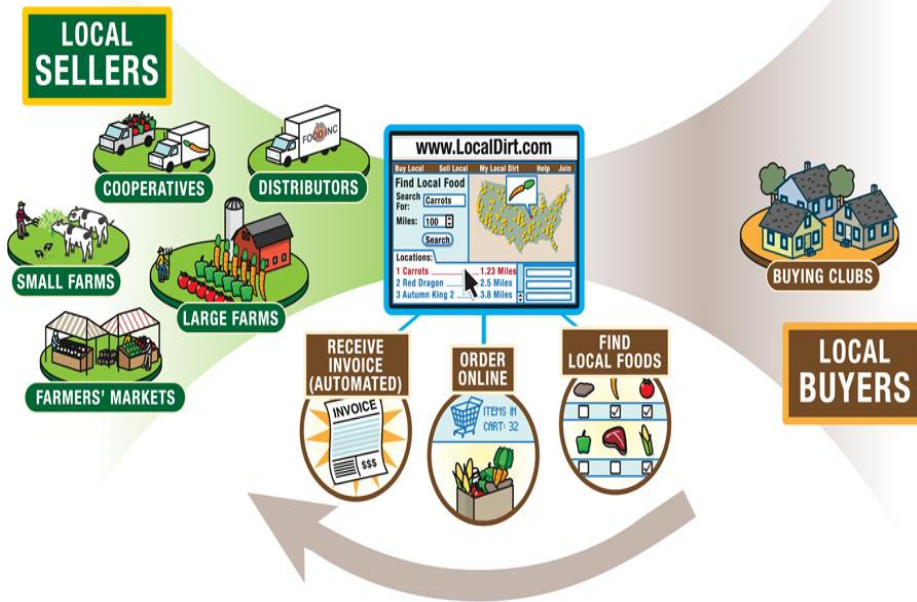
Buying Club

With

Local Dirt 

Why Start a Buying Club?

Everyone would like to have a Farmers Market in their own back yard, but farmers and producers don't always have time to be at one location all day.



If having a farmers market isn't an option, try organizing a Buying Club. Instead of the producers standing at the market all day, they will drop off product that has been preordered at a determined location and time.

With buying directly from farms and local producers, you will be putting two times the amount of money back into your local economy. So not only will you be supporting your local economy, you will be enjoying fresher, healthier food, decreasing your carbon footprint and supporting responsible land development.

Who can start one? Anyone can start a buying club. You just need to have about 15+ people to participate on a regular basis and one organizer. As a group, you can decide how often you would like to have deliveries.

CONTENTS



1 Getting Started

Get all your basics online in order by creating a user account and password. Then create a profile to draw people to your buying club.

2 Organizing the Details

Gather all the information you'll need to have to create a successful and thriving buying club.

3 Linking Everyone Together

Create the connection between the farmers, producers and the buying club, to ensure that customers have options to buy from.



4 Perfecting Your Price List

Each individual producer (or you can for them) list all of their products for sale, and keep them current by entering availability dates.

5 Sending Out Your Price List

Ensure that members are consistently receiving your price list so that orders can be placed and your buying club can begin!



6 Product Drop Off and Distribution

You already have the location determined, but now it is time to sort and distribute the goods accordingly amongst your members.



7 Financials

Arrange how the payment to the producers will be done and find one person to keep it all straight.

8 Getting Help

We are here every step of the way. Feel Free to contact us with anything you may need. We even offer online interactive tutorials.



9 Keeping Everyone Happy

Keep it original. With our help, create new ideas to keep people coming back and ways to continue support from your community.

10 Growing Your Buying Club

Take advantage of the free opportunities out there. Grow your buying club and make it as successful as you want it to be.





(1) GETTING STARTED

Choose a Leader

Whether it is yourself or someone out of your group, choose the person who would be best suited to head up your buying club.

Register on Local Dirt

After you have a good amount of interested individuals and chosen an organizer, the organizer will then go to www.localdirt.com, and click "join local dirt". The Organizer would join as a BC Manager. You'll enter in your general info, choose a password, agree to the terms and conditions then submit.

Confirm your Registration

You'll receive an email immediately upon joining. Simply click on the link to activate your account.

(2) ORGANIZING THE DETAILS

Create your Profile

Click on "my local Dirt" along the top and then on "group biography". Upload a picture of yourself, your family and even of your family pets. Then enter some background info about your buying club. Go ahead and brag about yourself. It's ok, people enjoy having the connection. You can also use this section to attract new members, fun bits for your current members, or even just how you got started.

Expect the Unexpected –Organize a Return Policy

It's rare that it comes up, but it does sometime happen that the member is not fully satisfied with the product. Communicate with your producers on how your buying club will be handling these situations.

Setting a Schedule

Determine the dates for when your buying club will be operating, sending out your price list, product ordering cutoff, product drop off, and product pickup. Be sure to keep these dates **consistent** to help with the organization of the buying club.

WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE JUST INTERESTED IN EATING FRESHER FOOD, OR ARE LOOKING TO UNLOAD EXCESS CSA PRODUCT, A BUYING CLUB CAN WORK FOR ALL SITUATIONS. YOU DON'T NEED TO COME FROM A FARM BACKGROUND OR EVEN HAVE BEEN IN A BUYING CLUB BEFORE; YOU JUST NEED TO BE PASSIONATE ABOUT THE FOOD YOU EAT AND KNOWING WHERE IT CAME FROM.

Checklist

Arrange all aspects of your buying club, by determining all of the details by using the checklist below.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Create a password for farms and producers to join | <input type="checkbox"/> Determine schedule for ordering cutoff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send out invites for farms and producers to join | <input type="checkbox"/> Select a product drop off schedule |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decide on membership fees | <input type="checkbox"/> Select a product pickup schedule |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decide on any markup fees | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange a drop off location |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send out invites for members | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange a storage Location |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule operating dates | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange a pickup Location |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determine price list email schedule for members | <input type="checkbox"/> Organize a Return Policy |

“Local Dirt makes ordering easy. Before, I was trying to work with emails and spreadsheets and keep track of customers’ orders for my vendors. Local Dirt really facilitates this process, and it’s far less time consuming on my end.”

Devica Urwick, Spring Run Market

(3) LINKING EVERYONE TOGETHER

Finding Local Food

If you don’t already have a group of producers or farms on board, try searching for farms signed up within 100 miles or so and sending them a message to see if they will be interested. (To send a message, simply click on the farm and then view their profile. Once in their profile, you will see “send a message”, click on that and enter your message for the farm.) You can also visit your local farmers’ market to see which vendors already come to your area. This way you can talk with them face to face and invite them to join local dirt for free too.

Producers signing up

Once you have located farms within your area to join, they will need to sign up on local dirt using the same process as the buying club manager, except clicking on “small farm” instead of “BC Manager” to join. They will simply input their contact info and then activate their account when they receive the activation email.



Producers enter in the Buying club password

Once the producer is logged in, click on “sell local” along the top and then on “groups”. Enter in the password in the buying club section.

Spreading the word to attract members

To gain members, try handing out one of the flyers on how to join, if they express interest, send them an invite with a link to www.localdirt.com so they can sign up. Also, try sending out an announcement via email. The individuals can simply join by clicking on the “join local dirt”.

(4) PERFECTING YOUR PRICE LIST

Add variety

When searching for producers, be sure to choose producers that have a good mixture of things to sell to your buying club. Keep in mind that producers don't just have meat, produce and milk; some also supply yogurt, bread and pies. Mixing it up allows more purchases to be done through your buying club.

Entering the Products

Either the producers themselves can, or the organization can for them, enter in the products for sale. To do this, once you are logged in as the producer, click "sell local" then "products" and finally on "post new product for sale. The producer should be sure to check the buying club box within each product so that it is included in the buying club.

Show your products off

Make your product stand out. Try uploading a picture of your product. This can be a stock photo found on Google or it can be an actual photo of the product that you took.

Tell them why your product is great!

Write a brief description of what makes your product unique. Was there a special process done to achieve its quality, is the color extra rich, or is the product abnormally large?



"Right now, we're starting with a group of pre-defined customers, and our goal is to use Local Dirt to add new customers and to allow all of our customers to customize their order. To do that, we offer multiple delivery and pick-up options and we are partners with nearby businesses to offer even more selection."

Ryan Pesch, Lida Farms

(5) SENDING OUT YOUR PRICE LIST

Members join your buying club

Whether you have new members or existing members, everyone will have to sign up on Local Dirt. To do this, they join as "my local dirt" and then "individual". They enter in general information and "submit".

Activation

Just like the producers and your BC manager account, your members will receive an email shortly after signing up and they will need to click on the link to activate their account.

Members join your buying club

Now you will need to add your members. Go to "sell local" and then click on "members". Here is where you will be adding your members to your buying club so that they will be able to order from you. Click on "add members" and in the text box, enter in their email addresses (the ones they used to join Local Dirt). The system will automatically keep track of those people when they log in so that they can access your buying club. This will keep your buying club available for people to find but also keep it exclusive for membership fee reasons.

Sending out your product list

Now you need to get your price list to your members. To do this, once you have added your members, in the members section, click on "send product list to all". This will email the product list link to all of your members. This is a current list, no matter what time you login to buy. If someone buys all of the apples in the morning, someone putting an order through at night will not see them on their list.

What happens next?

So the email and link is out... what now?
Your members will get an email that came from your email address and the message will read "Take a look at our online price list. You can find it by logging in then clicking on the link below. I'm looking forward to hearing from you. (Your link here will automatically be inputted)"

Order confirmation

Once your members place an order, the member will receive a copy of the order and the buying club manager will also receive a confirmation of the order. As the buying club manager, you will receive an email every time an order is placed. You can also see consolidated orders for each farm by looking at reports. The farms will receive updated orders that are consolidated every time a product is purchased. On their orders, they will only have quantities, total dollar amounts, and drop off date.

(6) PRODUCT DROP OFF AND DISTRIBUTION

Receiving the product

At your predetermined drop off location, have ready a consolidated order for each farm so you can easily check each product off and make sure it is accurate. If you notice anything right now about the product not being up to your standards, now would be a good time to address that as well.



Storing the product

Depending on how long the difference from your drop off time and your pickup time are, and what the product is, depends on how you will need to store the product. Meats should be kept separate from any other products and stored in a freezer or cooler.

Packing the orders

In addition to printing the consolidated orders, you should print each member's individual orders, which will have the person's name with all the different farm's products listed on one invoice. Separate the items appropriately; again keeping things like meat separate from the other items. Attach a copy of the order to each member's bag or whatever you may have their product in. (Tip* this may be a good opportunity to reuse all of those old grocery bags we all accumulate stored in the cupboard)

(7) FINANCIALS

Payment types

Your members will be able to pay online.

Taxes

Cover your bases. Stay on top of business requirements. Know when to bring in a professional if any questions arise.

(8) GETTING HELP

Online Tours

Want to see an interactive demonstration? Simply go to the home page and on the very bottom click "Read the entire article". Choose a time that best works for you. Don't see a time that fits into your schedule? That's no problem either; simply email us to arrange a time that works for you. On these demonstrations, you will be able to show me exactly what you see and you can see exactly what I see. This can be very helpful if you aren't very familiar with using a computer or need some help with details.

State Agriculture Department

Check with your local Department of Agriculture on the regulations regarding your product. Some sell restrictions and/or taxes may apply.

Contact Us

If at any point you need help with organization, help locating producers, don't understand the process, or you just have all the info on paper and don't know what to do next, we can help! Email dirt@localdirt.com or call 608-554-4800.



(9) KEEPING EVERYONE HAPPY

Ideas to keep your members and your surrounding community happy

I'm sure you would like to at the least maintain your member list if not grow it. Here are some different ways to help you do that. These ideas will not only maintain your list but other ideas attract attention to grow your list.

Create a newsletter

Either monthly or weekly, try putting together a newsletter and send it out. On this you could include things like fun facts, recent articles that relate to your members, community events, or the most popular are seasonal recipes.

Including recipes

Not only could you put a recipe in the newsletter, you could also include a recipe with each pickup, using seasonally available food. You could also take a collection of recipes that everyone has made out of local food and make your own cookbook to share.

Contests

If one item happens to be very plentiful at any time, everyone could make any dish involving that item and whoever has the most original and delicious one, wins whatever prize you deem worthy. You could also theme the type of dishes for the contest. Another way to do it would be by using the recipes you handed out the week before, and the following week everyone could bring in their best attempt at it. With all of the dishes made up, all of your members could enjoy a potluck.

Serve a local meal

Another thing different communities have done to support local food, is they have invited local area restaurants to participate in a local food night. Restaurants will prepare a completely local meal and feature it one or two nights at their restaurant. The restaurant could order from your buying club to make accessibility of food easier. Try seeing if your local paper or news stations would be interested in promoting this community event as well.

Sales

During harvest season and the first frost, many producers have a lot of product they want to push and not take a chance with spoilage. Work with your producers to see if they have items they would like to offer at a discount if bought through your buying club.

Seasonal products

Try featuring different items during different times of the year. For example, turkey during Thanksgiving, Ham during Easter and cranberries during Christmas time.

Gift packs

During the holidays, it may be a good idea to offer some gift baskets or packs to your members. Find out what's available and put together different items to be given as gifts. Depending on where you live, depends on how much you can put together.



Donating food to a shelter or pantry

Two ways to go about this: One, everyone buy a little extra of something, and with the extra product, bring it over to a food shelter or pantry or shelter. Two, use a portion of the membership fee to donate to the pantry or shelter.

Fundraising

Consider starting a buying club as a fundraising activity to bring in extra funds for your cause.

(10) GROWING YOUR BUYING CLUB

Profile page

The simplest and free way to market your buying club is by updating your local dirt profile page. Take the time to create a background story and add pictures. Create an image that someone else can be a part of.

Ads

Try taking advantage of the free advertisement opportunities that are available. Look at your favorite restaurant to see if they have a bulletin board, church newsletter, company newsletter, post an ad on craigslist or try looking for a listserv in your area.

Opening membership

Another way to increase your sales is by opening your membership up to local restaurants or other places with a large kitchen being used.

Keep it exciting

Using the ideas before, don't forget to implement them monthly to really make the most of your buying club.

Social networking

Other resources to grow your buying club that are also free include, creating a page on Facebook, Myspace, Twitter or LinkedIn

Any Questions? Thoughts? Need Ideas?
Contact Us.
Email us at dirt@localdirt.com
Or call 608-554-4800