

# The healthy food association

Colin Austin 17 Oct 2014

## Aims

I believe everyone should have the right to healthy food.

Modern factory food is slowly killing us. Throughout the developed and developing world people are suffering from poor health from an unbalanced diet.

Factory food is full of fats and sugars, which are addictive and provide excessive energy but is lacking in the critical vitamins and minerals essential for our bodies to replace cells as they degenerate. The answer should be simply to eat more fruit and vegetables but now these are often force grown with N,P,K fertiliser so are lacking in both nutrients and taste.

In an ideal world people would grow their own food, but the reality is that most people do not have the time, space or skills for home grown food. Even skilled growers find it is also difficult to ensure a steady supply, feast or famine is the order of the day.

The aim of the Healthy Food Association is to enable people to have access to healthy home grown food even if home gardening is not an option.

## The technology



The system is based on the wicking basket principle in which a basket with a wick sits in a container of water so there is minimal maintenance. Plants can be germinated or matured by experienced growers then the complete basket with plants, nutrient rich soil and water container transferred to the customer who can eat, preferably on a chop and chew system with very little work other than an occasional top up with water.

## Organisation

The organisational structure could be called a social business. You only have to consider the effects of a poor diet, diabetes, heart problems, stroke, cancer and more to see that providing fresh healthy produce is highly socially desirable. But 'doing good' may be satisfying but it is not enough - for an operation to be viable people must earn a fair return for their efforts.

The Health Food Association is a group of separate operations working cooperatively together. They may vary from amateur gardeners who have some surplus produce which they are happy to sell, to large scale commercial growers, organisations which can provide transport and marketing; even our customers can help by spreading the word on healthy food through their social media.

The common theme is a belief in the benefits of healthy food and the principles of social business.

Our web site [www.healthyfoodassociation.com](http://www.healthyfoodassociation.com) is at the centre helping to coordinate the activities of all members and customers.

Various growers produce young or mature plants which are then collected and transported in bulk to markets in the city. The consumers orders on line either ordering speciality herbs, spices and medicinal plants which are not generally available or buy what is available immediately without the hassle of physical shopping.

**About the website** [www.healthyfoodassociation.com](http://www.healthyfoodassociation.com)

## **Growers**

Every member creates their own home page (we can help). This is primarily intended for but not limited to growers. Generally this will be in two parts.

### **The home page**

The first part will be a description of their operation so customers can understand how their food is grown. We do not legally enforce growers to adopt any particular approach, they are free to choose their own system but we do ask that they tell the customers about their methods. And how they achieve high nutrient levels.

A basic principle of the healthy food association is to provide nutrient rich produce by ensuring the soil is rich in both nutrients and biology which are essential for healthy produce. If minerals are not in the soil they cannot be in the plant. We hope that growers follow this theme and we offer advice and share knowledge on how this can be achieved.

Some growers may be organically certified, which they can promote on their page, but we trust that growers who are not legally certified will still follow the basic principles of trying to avoid toxic sprays and chemicals.

### **The catalogue**

The second part is the catalogue of produce. This obviously contains descriptions of produce which is currently available for sale. However a key feature of the web site is that customers can pre-order specific produce that they would like to buy. There are many specialised plants, particularly medicinal herbs and spices, which are not generally commercially available. Growers may not want to run the risk of growing these plants on spec while many customers may never have even heard of them.

The web site allows growers to advertise that they are willing to grow a particular plant, then customers can 'book' these plants with the grower who then avoids the risk of 'speculative' growing.

While some customers may like to purchase mature plants others may like to receive young seedling which they mature themselves.

## **Transport**

Transport can be a significant cost. Members can offer a transport service (at a cost) picking up produce from the gate or a local depot then taking it to market or home delivery. Again this can be promoted on the web so growers can contract transporters to deliver the produce.

These arrangements and costings are entirely between the grower and transporter.

## Additional services

The prime aim of the web is to provide a mechanism for people to trade healthy plants, however there is no reason why people cannot use the website to promote related services, for example some people may have gardening equipment they wish to sell while others may offer specialist skills for example in constructing shade houses or undertaking gardening work.

I would prefer that these related services keep to the main theme of healthy food.

One aspect I am particularly keen to encourage is selection, preparation and cooking of healthy food. From my and others experience in moving away from a traditional fat and sugary diet to a largely vegetarian diet I know that the thought of living on boiled cabbage is not exciting. However there are many spices and specialist plant which can make an otherwise boring meal extremely tasty.

I am therefore anxious to encourage people with these skills and knowledge to share this with others on their home page.

## Money

Now we come to that difficult question of money and payment. Here I want to describe the basic scheme but I should make clear that I reserve the right to make changes as we develop experience with the system.

The web site is set up for commerce and people can pay for services over the web. Legally when a grower sells produce there is a contract between the grower as the 'seller' and the customer as the 'buyer'. The Healthy Food Association is not part of this contract.

Grower decide the price they will offer the produce at which may well be based on three parts, the reward the grower want for the effort in growing the crop, the cost of transporting the product and the costs involved in the wicking basket system.

Prepayment is important when using a transporter. My understanding is that many growers simply do not want the hassle of transporting produce to market and would like to use the services of a transporter. This is best done by the customer prepaying on the web so that the transporter job is simply delivering the produce, either to a market for collection or to the home.

My intelligence to date is that transporters are willing to deliver produce and get paid directly by the grower but do not want to be involved in the process of collecting money. This is however an issue directly between the grower and transporter.

The costs of transporting are entirely between the grower and transporter but have to be agreed up front so they can be incorporated into the price the grower charges.

The third cost is the wicking basket themselves

## Cost of wicking baskets

Growers can place an order for wicking baskets directly from me (actually my Company Cohort International Pty Ltd). Having spoken to growers there is an issue with the amount of upfront money if they wanted to buy a large number of wicking baskets, money which could be tied up for two or three months while they grow and sell their produce.

I am therefore proposing, for the time being, that they only pay for these baskets when they are sold. To protect myself there would be a limit of ninety days (or as agreed on a case by case) after which they should pay.

The current cost of the complete basket is \$35 which would be included in the price the grower charges, however there is a replacement scheme so when the customer returns the basket (in good condition) there is a refund of \$30. In practise this is simply deducted from the bill when the customer orders.

## Customers

Consumers can readily search to see what products are currently available for sale, (or are available for pre-ordering). The search engine has sections for locality, species and varieties of plants, and whether seedling, mature growing plants, produce or services. Consumers can simply click 'all' or the specific features they are looking for.

Growers have their own page which describes both how they grow and the produce they are able to offer. This may well include a short video. This is important; customers are not just buying a bunch of green leaves of the supermarket shelves with no idea how it was produced, they are selecting a grower they have confidence in to provide quality food with the essential nutrients.

We are anxious to encourage growers to offer speciality plant which have specific benefits but may not be widely available or even known. For example plants, such as the first fleet lettuce and heirloom tomatoes are highly beneficial having good taste and loaded with nutrients but not commercially available as they have limited shelf life.

We are anxious to encourage growers to provide these specialist herbs and spices which may not be well known. One great advantage of the buying on the web is that customers can buy plants they may never have even heard of simply by searching through the growers home pages.

Many consumers will not be aware of these speciality plants so will not be searching for them specifically. They will be asked to enter the species and variety of plants but they can also enter keywords which will help consumers find that plant. These key words will be displayed to the consumer and can be anything which helps identify the plant such as the particular benefits. These are examples of keywords which may be useful in helping the consumer find your page 'iron, selenium, calcium, diabetes, arthritis, memory'.

If you want to find out more have a look at <http://youtu.be/lh2XJwggMEo>

## Competition and the big guys

It must also be recognised that the food industry is the world's largest industry and has shown that it has little scruples in using its market power and the legal and intellectual property laws to generate unjustifiable profits, often at the expense of the population's health. We have to be smart and cooperate to be successful.

The harsh fact of life is that the processed food industry spends billions of dollars on advertising and promotion. They have also a track record of being unscrupulous in exploiting their commercial might and legal powers. We cannot possibly hope to match their market power directly.

However they have two great weaknesses which we can exploit. Firstly their products are damaging to health and there is ever increasing publicity from respected sources about the health dangers of processed food. We have the advantage of offering a genuine service which benefits health; this is a natural advantage.

We just have to get the message out.

There second great weakness is that as large and powerful organisation they are totally impersonal. We are real people offering a genuinely beneficial service. This has immense pull with people. Twenty years ago this would have been no practical advantage but in the age of the internet and social media this is an immense advantage, obviously all members of the association should be using the public and social media to make people aware of the health benefits of this system.

It is important to focus on the improved nutrient content of the plants (that is what we are really selling) this way customers are likely to be telling their friends about the system on Facebook etc.

Believe me this really works; I started promoting wicking beds over ten years ago, no advertising just my web, now they are absolutely everywhere just by word of mouth or the keyboard.

It is also important to have legal protection in the form of patents and trademarks – I am therefore ensuring that all steps are taken to protect intellectual property rights with overseas and Australian patents pending.

This is a new way of food growing and distributing food which provides a viable alternative to the supermarket and processed food system. The priority must be to get the system established and up to a scale where it is economically viable. At this moment there are no royalty payments but should they be required, for example to provide funds for promotional campaigns I reserve the right to introduce royalties at a point in the future.

At this moment I have confidence that offering a genuinely superior product, the ability for people to communicate with real people and the amazing power of the internet to spread information will have amazing results.

