

# Eat Local Grey Bruce Co-operative Inc.

## Producer and Product Policies

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**Notes:** Exceptions and changes to this policy can only be made with approval of the Board of Directors.

## **Section One: Overview**

### **Vision**

Eat Local Grey Bruce is a vibrant community of eaters, growers and makers of food, supporting each other in their commitment to local food production, ecological practices, healthy eating and meaningful employment.

### **Mission**

Eat Local Grey Bruce is committed to connecting eaters with local growers and makers of food. It is a co-operative non-profit that empowers all its members to participate in an equitable and vibrant food culture by:

- Giving all members and employees a voice, prioritizing transparent communication;
- Making sure food is grown and made fairly, with an emphasis on environmental stewardship;
- Having healthy, local food accessible to all, working to break down barriers of cost, mobility, time, and skills;
- Providing education and raising awareness around food-related issues.

**Purpose:** This policy outlines expectations of the organization and producer members, the process for approving new Eat Local Grey Bruce (ELGB, the Co-operative) producers, including the criteria applied to assess applicants, and how ELGB, as a co-operative, balances the need to provide diverse offerings with potential for oversaturation.

**Scope:** This policy applies to producer members and all producers applying to sell products through Eat Local Grey Bruce.

**Policy Principles:** To ensure a transparent application process, ELGB will apply the following principles when assessing new producer members or product offerings:

- Recognition of long-standing producers
- Creation of space for new local producers
- Meeting the needs and considering the requests of eater members
- Ensuring supply can meet demand as it increases
- Consideration of equitable representation and access across our geography as able
- Maintaining positive relationships with potential producer members
- Contributing to the financial viability of ELGB

**Outcomes:** A comprehensive and transparent process for the Co-operative pertaining to producer onboarding and management of product offerings and producer member relationships.

## **Section Two: Organizational & Producer Commitments**

To honour the co-operative nature of Eat Local Grey Bruce, we have outlined key commitments we make to our membership; this applies to consideration of new producer members as well.

**1. Commitment to co-operative objectives**

All producer members must commit to the objectives of ELGB as stated in the bylaws.

**2. Commitment to high product quality**

Product quality is continuously monitored, and the producer commits to continuous improvement, in collaboration with the Co-operative. Refer also to related [Producer Refund Policy](#).

**3. Commitment to honesty in product claims**

This co-op publicizes product distinction attributes (name of the producer, type of production practice) that rely on the honesty of the producer. Any false claims, especially if done with the intention to increase personal profits, may lead to immediate expulsion of the producer.

**4. Commitment to supporting the Co-operative**

Every producer commits to support the Co-operative in ways in addition to providing products for sale. Support may take the form of committee participation, membership drives, handy work, volunteering, donation of infrastructure, promotion of the Co-operative at farmers markets or in stores, or other in-kind contributions that effectively address the needs of the co-op. Attending the AGM is strongly encouraged.

**5. Commitment to providing marketing content**

Every producer commits to working with the Outreach Manager to provide photos, bios, and three short posts to Eat Local Grey Bruce's social media platforms annually (assistance is available upon request). Eat Local Grey Bruce is committed to showcasing all of our producers, providing nuanced discussions on the reality of fostering local food systems, farming, and food sovereignty.

**6. Commitment to respectful conduct**

Every producer agrees and commits to the terms of the ELGB Code of Conduct.

**7. Commitment to comply with Public Health Guidelines.**

Producers attest that they are compliant with standard Public Health guidelines – e.g., prepared food products are made in a Certified Kitchen, respecting safe food handling guidelines.

**8. Commitment to appropriate insurance for sale of goods**

Producers attest that they are appropriately insured to sell all products listed.

## **Section Three: Upholding & Honouring Relationships**

Another key consideration that guides the process of bringing new producers into the organization centres around upholding and honouring relationships. As a non-profit co-operative, we play an important role in creating sustainable food futures, and we take this role seriously.

### **1. Honouring the Co-operative Nature**

As a co-operative, Eat Local Grey Bruce strives to honour the co-operative spirit within all aspects of the organization, this includes bringing on new producer members. While we seek to protect the livelihood of our current producer members in the Co-operative by not oversaturating the market, we also seek to create space for new producer members offering needed, new, unique, niche, and requested products of good quality.

### **2. Encouragement of a fair and vibrant ecological farming sector**

All producer members recognize that a co-operative can only function if decisions are made in mutual respect. For example, a member who enjoys a bumper crop cannot fully displace all other vendors of the same product. Instead, they will actively seek alternative sales mechanisms while respecting the need for continuity of all members. Likewise, while we support the growth of existing member operations, it should not be at the cost of excluding new/established producers should gaps exist. As part of its vision, the Co-operative supports new producers that currently lack effective access to markets. This aligns with the spirit of the Co-operative and is incorporated into practice as demand and sales increase.

### **3. Mechanisms to balance these principles**

In co-operative spirit, decisions are made with consideration of the greater good of the Co-operative, and to avoid excessive competition. It is recognized that making space for a new producer may take some market away from existing producers (particularly in the case of previous exclusivity). The guiding principles are used to inform decisions that affect access to the distribution channel (membership and market share) as well as resolving conflicts about pricing. Price gouging or dumping are not permitted. Existing producer members must reapply for any new commodity or product / product category that they are hoping to sell at ELGB.

### **4. Encouragement of innovation**

As part of its vision, the Co-operative supports innovative approaches to production and management. To promote new production methods that address the mission and vision of the co-op better than the presently used methods, the Co-operative may offer preferential market spaces to develop these techniques and get them ready for markets. To support small and mid-sized local food operations, ELGB does not currently accept applications from franchised operations.

## **5. Conflict Resolution**

Resolution in the case of conflict with new producer memberships or an existing conflict relating to product and producer policies can be recommended to the Board of Directors by:

- A Board member,
- An existing producer member,
- A staff person
- An external facilitator

A final decision is made by the Board, in consultation with all parties involved and with consideration to resolutions presented.

## Section Four: Product Policies & Producer Fit

### Preferential Levels:

Food products sold on the Eat Local Grey Bruce online store are given preference based on the following hierarchy. This hierarchy is most useful when making decisions about new producer members and wholesale products.

In addition, Eat Local Grey Bruce values equity across the supply chain and preference will be given to producers and wholesale suppliers who demonstrate that they employ fair labour practices and source directly or fairly traded ingredients.

<p><b>Level 1: Organic, Ecologically &amp; Locally Produced Food</b></p>	<p>Whole food products (i.e., vegetables, meat, etc.) grown within a 125 km radius from Owen Sound. OR value-added food products (i.e., jams, pickles, pies) that are made within a 125 km radius of Owen Sound AND contain at least one main ingredient grown within a 125 km radius of Owen Sound.</p> <p><b><u>Ecologically-produced:</u></b></p> <p><b>Meat:</b> Humanely raised (i.e., access to pasture during the summer months and adequate space over the winter). Free of growth hormones and sub-therapeutic antibiotics. Non-GMO feed.</p> <p><b>Produce:</b> Free from Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Free from synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.</p> <p><b><u>Organic:</u></b> Food products that have been certified by a regulatory body as meeting all the requirements of organic food production and that are labelled as such.</p>
<p><b>Level 2: Locally-produced food</b></p>	<p>Whole food products (i.e., vegetables, etc.) grown within a 125 km radius from Owen Sound. OR value-added food products (i.e., jams, pickles, pies) that are made within a 125 km radius of Owen Sound AND contain at least one main ingredient grown within a 125 km radius of Owen Sound.</p>
<p><b>Level 3: Certified Organic Ontario-produced food</b></p>	<p>Whole food products grown within the province of Ontario OR value-added food products that are made in Ontario AND contain at least one main ingredient grown within Ontario unless the main ingredients are not commercially grown within Ontario.</p>

<b>Level 3: Certified Organic Ontario-produced food, <i>continued...</i></b>	Food products that have been certified by a regulatory body as meeting all the requirements of organic food production and that are labelled as such.
<b>Level 4: Ecologically-produced Ontario food</b>	Whole food products grown within the province of Ontario OR value-added food products that are made in Ontario AND contain at least one main ingredient grown within Ontario unless the main ingredients are not commercially grown within Ontario. Preferential treatment for products that do not contain GMOs.  Per guidelines for ecological production outlined above.
<b>Level 5: Ontario-produced food</b>	Whole food products grown within the province of Ontario OR value-added food products that are made in Ontario AND contain at least one main ingredient grown within Ontario unless the main ingredients are not commercially grown within Ontario. Preferential treatment for products that do not contain GMOs.
<b>Level 6: Imported - Certified Organic food</b>	Food products that have been certified by a regulatory body as meeting all the requirements of organic food production and that are labelled as such.

Non-food products are handled via Additional Product Policies. Producers, including existing producers, that do not or no longer comply with Product Policies will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, with the Board of Directors reserving the right to withhold further membership as needed.

### Additional Product Policies:

Producers are expected to abide by the terms set out within these further product policies. Any conflicts or issues arising will be addressed as addressed via the Conflict Resolution methods described in this policy. Exceptions may be approved by the Board of Directors on a case-by-case basis.

1. Vegetables & Fruit:
  - a. Eat Local Grey Bruce Co-operative will sell only locally grown vegetables year-round, with the exception of produce that is not available seasonally from our local area and/or is not grown in Ontario (i.e., tropical fruits).
  
2. Meat Products:
  - a. Eat Local Grey Bruce Co-operative will sell only Ontario-grown meat products year-round.

3. Non-food Products:
  - a. Non-food products (e.g., wool, books, preserving equipment, ELGB promotional items, household goods) may be sold with Board approval. Preference will be given to products of Ontario, then Canada, first, followed by internationally-made products.
  
4. Food additives:
  - a. Products containing food additives (such as artificial sweeteners, high fructose corn syrup or MSG) will not be sold at the co-op UNLESS those food additives are more or less essential to the preservation of that product (i.e., nitrites in deli meat) OR unless otherwise deemed appropriate by the Board of Directors.
  - b. Flours, grains or legumes that were desiccated with a glyphosate product shall not be allowed. Baked or prepared goods may use conventional flour, grains or legumes, however, producers are encouraged to seek out non-desiccated flour, grains or legumes as ingredients for products sold at ELGB. Product listing will specifically identify non-desiccated products.
  
5. Labour practices:
  - a. Producers should conduct business in a way that is respectful of applicable labour laws and respects the dignity of staff members. This extends to the sourcing of global commodities such as coffee and chocolate, where fair trade and direct-trade sources should be prioritized.
  
6. Food labelling
  - a. Information about ELGB producers and their products will be made available on the website as soon as possible after a new product enters the online store.
  - b. Products must be listed and labelled in accordance with local Public Health standards (i.e., product ingredients and producer name)
  
7. Protection against dumping prices
  - a. The Co-operative protects supplier members against dumping prices. Protection takes place in cases where new or existing producers post at significantly lower prices that do not reflect production costs, for example, because:
    - i. The producer does not pay themselves or their staff a dignity wage,
    - ii. Prices are maintained through continuous external cash injections,
    - iii. Prices are only realized through excessive reliance on externally provided investment capital or
    - iv. Other significant externalities exist that conflict with the ELGB Mission and Vision.
  
8. Wild Food Policy
  - a. Producers shall adhere to the [Wild Food Policy](#).

## **Section Five: Market and Organizational Readiness**

When bringing on new products or producer members within the Co-operative, ELGB ensures there is a market for such products, alongside capacity. New products should be ready for market and logistically compatible with the ELGB distribution system.

To manage the market appropriately, existing producer members are required to reapply for any new commodity or product category that they are hoping to sell at ELGB. This ensures consideration of balance with current market offerings.

Some key considerations involved in assessing market and organizational readiness are outlined below:

### **1. Product Market:**

- a. When bringing on new products, a key consideration is whether the item(s) have a market within Eat Local, and appeal to our membership. It is important to have specialty items that meet the needs of our diverse eater base, while also ensuring that there is enough of a market to be worthwhile having for the Co-operative (i.e., for Eat Local, producer members, and eater members).
- b. An oversaturation of similar products within the Co-operative must not exist. Competition is not negative, but oversaturation can harm eater members by offering too many options and can disadvantage producer members through potential dilution of market share.

### **2. Packaging**

- a. Is the packaging being provided up to both government-mandated and warehouse needs and standards?
  - i. It needs to be new materials and graded food-safe
  - ii. It needs to be able to travel long distances without spilling, falling apart, breaking, or leaking
  - iii. It needs to be able to manage temperature changes to some extent
  - iv. It needs to be clearly labelled with who the producer is, what the product is, and any other information relevant to the product (e.g., product weight or quantity), and in accordance with legislated guidelines
  - v. It should help in protecting product integrity as necessary.
- b. Packaging considerations are encouraged to be in line with ELGB's waste reduction initiatives (i.e., use of conventional plastics is discouraged, and use of recyclable/compostable packaging encouraged.)

### **3. Warehouse Capacity**

- a. Is there an appropriate space within the warehouse to bring on the new producer and their products?
  - i. If requiring freezer space, is there space for this product?
  - ii. If requiring storage at the warehouse outside of weekly drop-offs (e.g., wholesale goods) is there space available?
- b. Is there the appropriate staffing to carry out bringing on this new product?
  - i. If it requires packaging by warehouse staff (e.g., wholesale goods), there are several considerations to be made in advance (i.e., time, handling, training).

## **Section Six: Application Process & Board Approval**

Eat Local Grey Bruce aims to be receptive to product gaps and eater members' product requests. The Co-operative seeks to gain insight into product availability and demand, as well as issues in regard to product offerings, and attempts to provide varied platforms for open feedback.

The Co-operative is also committed to providing a sound sales avenue for our producers. As such, Eat Local Grey Bruce will ensure that there is a clear understanding of existing supply and demand before accepting new applications.

### **Board Approval Process**

When Board approval is required for new producers or products, ELGB staff will provide appropriate notice and producer applications to the Board of Directors. After reviewing all applicable information, using ELGB product policies as guidance, the Board votes on whether or not to accept the new product/producer. Applications are reviewed quarterly (January, April, July, Oct) with allowances made for very seasonal products.

Any Board Member having a perceived or noted conflict of interest will be asked to abstain from any related voting. A decision may be delayed if further information is required. In the case that a product / producer complies with ELGB policies but there is not current capacity, the product/producer can be held on a waitlist until such time that a known gap exists / opening becomes available.

### **Existing Producer Members**

New items can not be added to the store without Management approval. Existing producers may fill out a [Producer Application](#) form or contact ELGB staff if they wish to list a new commodity or product/product category. If producers list products without going through this process, they will be redirected to do so by Management staff. Once the application is completed, it is forwarded to the designated ELGB staff member, who will review the application, and approve the product or place it as an item for review during the next scheduled Board review as applicable. Staff may add items to the approved list of product offerings for existing producers without the need for Board input should the product be in demand, fulfill a gap and comply with ELGB product policies.

Significant changes to a producer's typically expected offerings (quantity/type) must be communicated in writing to staff on a timely basis. A producer is considered to no longer offer a specific product should the producer not offer the product over a period of a full calendar year. Exceptions to this may be considered at the discretion of the Board, with suitable communication of circumstances.

Should a product have low sales or high cost to handle relative to sales, ELGB staff reserves the right to remove the listing with appropriate communication to the producer.

## New Producer Members

The initial step to applying to the Co-operative involves filling out a [Producer Application](#). The applicant sends the completed application to the designated member of the ELGB staff, who will review the application, place it as an item for review during the next scheduled Board meeting, and be in touch with any follow-up questions regarding the application. Common questions and requests include:

1. If the applicant grows/raises their own products: Where the product(s) are grown, how they are grown, and what materials and practices are used
2. If they source materials to make their own product(s), where are the products from, how are they grown, and what materials and practices are used
3. Provide a sample, if applicable, of the product(s) to the warehouse staff who will taste the product to inform the Board of Directors of its quality, taste, packaging etc.

Once all questions have been addressed, the applicant must wait until the next scheduled Board meeting has occurred for an update. Following the Board meeting, the applicant can expect to hear back about:

- If the application was accepted or denied
- If there are further follow-up questions from the Board
- Why the application was not accepted if it was not, and the option for the applicant to be kept on a waiting list if applicable

## Wholesale Suppliers

As part of its business plan, Eat Local Grey Bruce aims to offer a full complement of grocery items. Occasionally there are producer shortages of staple/requested products that necessitate seeking wholesale options to fill product gaps. In some cases, a product is unavailable from producer members (e.g., cow's milk and related dairy products) and the product is ordered from a wholesale supplier. Offering a full complement of grocery items is vital to Eat Local Grey Bruce's success as a business, and aids in Eater membership retention. Additionally, wholesale products allow the organization to sustain itself with more competitive rates and provide increased margins, as well as providing more accessible and comprehensive options to our eater membership.

Reasons wholesale suppliers are brought on include:

1. To offer a wider breadth of goods
2. To increase our profit margins on a portion of our products
3. To have a reliable, consistent source for some staple products
4. To fill short term gaps in supply for products otherwise sourced from producer members
5. When joining as a producer member doesn't work for an organization - this provides an alternative option in the case of popular/requested products (e.g., dairy)

When deciding who will be brought on as a wholesale supplier, the guidance provided via applicable policies (outlined in *Product Policies & Producer Fit*) still apply, with some exceptions:

- Staff can make the decision to bring on a new wholesale supplier without Board approval. Due diligence is still required, including sampling items or speaking with other organizations who have used the supplier or products to ensure they are a reputable brand/business.
- Staff may identify gaps where a producer member can not be found to offer the products and look for a potential wholesale supplier.
- With wholesale suppliers, payment terms must be considered (minimum orders, ordering frequency, product shelf life, delivery).