



FOODCOOP

4 Employees and 500 Members

Overview

FoodCoop Barcelona, also known as FoodCoop BCN, is the first cooperative and participatory supermarket in Barcelona. It operates as a non-profit entity focused on sustainable, healthy, and fair consumption, prioritising local, organic, and fairly traded products from small and medium-sized producers, often cooperatives in Catalonia. The cooperative emphasises reducing plastic use through bulk offerings, supporting food sovereignty, and fostering community involvement without aiming for profit.

History and Inspiration

The project began in March 2018 with a gathering of about 250 people from diverse backgrounds at Cocheras de Sants in Barcelona, timed to coincide with Consumer Rights Day. It was sparked by a screening of the documentary "Food Coop," which profiles the Park Slope Food Coop in New York (a model with over 17,000 members where 70% of the work is done by members contributing about 2 hours and 45 minutes monthly). An association to promote cooperative supermarkets was formed in May 2018, and after four years of community efforts, FoodCoop BCN opened in February 2022. It draws inspiration from similar models like La Louve in Paris, Bees Coop in Brussels, La Cagette in Montpellier, and local Catalan/Spanish initiatives such as SuperCoop in Manresa, La Feixa in Mataró, and Osa in Madrid. FoodCoop BCN is part of the Spanish Network of Cooperative Supermarkets (launched in October 2021) to share experiences and advocate on issues like macrofarms. Membership grew from around 450 at opening to about 550 shortly after, with goals to reach 1,000–1,200; current figures aren't publicly specified in recent sources, but the cooperative remains active.

How It Operates

The supermarket is open to the public for purchases at standard prices, but membership provides benefits and involves participation. Decision-making uses a sociocratic model: a non-hierarchical, democratic structure with assemblies for voting and "circles" (working groups) handling areas like community care, operations, purchases, finances, communication, governance, ICT, and local relations. Members contribute to keep costs low, employing only a small staff (e.g., three people as of 2022) to coordinate. The cooperative hosts events like workshops, talks, producer visits, and cooking demos (e.g., a food waste prevention session in January 2025)

Membership Options and Requirements:

- **Consumer Member:** One-time 40€ contribution to social capital (payable in installments); commit to 2–2.5 hours of work every 4 weeks (exemptions for those over 65, with mobility issues, illness, parenthood, etc.). Work includes restocking, cashier duties, cleaning, supplier relations, event organisation, or remote circle tasks. Families can share shopping benefits, and tandems allow turn-sharing.
- **Collaborating Member:** 90-40€ contribution; no work or discounts, but voting rights in assemblies.

Benefits: 10% discount on all products; voting rights; access to exclusive activities; inter-cooperative perks (e.g., with partners like Som Energia for energy)

Products

Over 1,200 items, mostly local and organic (though some conventional), including fresh produce (fruits, vegetables, dairy, meats), bulk goods (grains, pasta, nuts to minimize packaging), beverages, packaged foods, cleaning supplies, hygiene products, and cosmetics. No fresh fish due to handling challenges. Emphasis on seasonality, zero waste, intercultural inclusion, and sustainability; examples include tahini, almond cream, sweet wines, and vitamin C-rich items like oranges and kiwis.

Costs

The cooperative operates a 250 m² shop (80% selling space, minimal warehouse). The shop's design prioritises selling space over warehouse storage, potentially reducing storage-related costs but increasing reliance on efficient inventory management.

There are day-to-day expenses for running the supermarket. Specific costs include utilities (electricity, water), maintenance of the physical space, and overheads such as cleaning or

equipment upkeep.

FoodCoop's operations involve expenses for purchasing over 1,200 products, primarily local, organic, and sourced from small to medium-sized producers or cooperatives in Catalonia. Costs include fresh produce (fruits, vegetables, dairy, meats), bulk goods (grains, pasta, nuts), beverages, packaged foods, cleaning supplies, hygiene products, and cosmetics. The cooperative emphasizes sustainability, sourcing directly from farmers or through one intermediary (farmers' cooperatives), which may increase costs due to premium quality but supports local economies. A margin is applied to maintain financial viability, though the cooperative remains non-profit.

While member volunteers contribute 3 hours monthly (e.g., restocking, cashier duties, or working groups), the cooperative employs a small paid staff of four (two part-time) for critical roles: a purchase manager, a community facilitator with shop duties, a shop coordinator collaborating with finance-related volunteer groups, and a part-time general director. These roles ensure operational continuity and community engagement, with one staff member dedicated to tasks like event organisation and volunteer coordination.

There are expenses for managing the membership system, which supports ~530 members (as of early 2024) with benefits like 10% discounts on purchases. Costs cover administrative tasks such as tracking member contributions (€40–€90 one-time social capital payment, with possible variations for vulnerable individuals), processing discounts, and organizing assemblies or working groups (e.g., governance, communication). Initial setup costs included legal fees and licenses, which were significant during the pre-opening phase in 2021.

Costs are incurred for the maintenance, hosting, and support of servers and the cooperative's website, available in Catalan and Spanish. These expenses support online visibility, member communication, and plans for an online store (part of a 2024 crowdfunding campaign).

The cooperative hosts workshops, talks, producer visits, and cooking demos (e.g., a food waste prevention session in January 2025), incurring costs for materials, space preparation, or external facilitators. These activities strengthen community ties but add to expenses, especially when held in the shop or external spaces (e.g., BBQs in the private street, permitted with neighbour notification).

Funding Sources

FoodCoop BCN relies on a mix of community-driven and public funding, with a goal of self-sufficiency. It is non-profit but maintains margins for sustainability. Key sources include:

- **Member Contributions (Social Capital):** One-time payments upon joining, refundable upon leaving: €90 for both consumer and collaborating members, and down to €10–€40 for vulnerable individuals
- **Subsidies and Grants (Subvenciones):** From Barcelona municipality and regional administration, awarded via project calls (e.g., for commercialization or community kitchens). It is not annual and does not cover 100% of costs therefore requiring matching funds.

- **Bank Loans:** Negotiated for startup.
- **Crowdfunding/Microfinancing:** Multiple rounds via platforms like Goteo to cover operations, expansions (e.g., online shop), and collaborations. Second round in June 2024 aimed at covering functioning expenses, opening an online store, expanding networks, and joint purchases.

Revenue Generation

Primary revenue comes from sales, with efforts to become independent of subsidies. The shop is open to the public (standard prices) and members (discounted up to 10%).

The cooperative’s focus on sustainability and local sourcing may elevate product costs compared to mass retailers, though member discounts and bulk offerings aim to maintain affordability.

The cooperative’s financial challenges stem from a hidden location (private street, limiting foot traffic) and mismatched expectations at opening (e.g., lack of fridges), impacting revenue growth. It aims for self-sufficiency but relies on crowdfunding and subsidies to bridge gaps.

No events or inter-coop perks generate direct revenue, but support retention.

Cost categories

Assets	Operational costs	Personnel costs	Administration and management
Tangible fixed assets (e.g., shop equipment, shelves, cashiers)	Utilities (electricity, water) included in other operating expenses	Staff salaries	Event and community engagement
Depreciation on fixed assets	Supplies/consumables (e.g., cleaning supplies, event materials)	Social security charges	Volunteer coordination
Member contributions to social capital	Repair and renovations (shop maintenance for 250 m² space)		Managing the membership system
	Insurance & legal compliance		Maintenance of the IT infrastructure and website
	Purchasing of products		Legal fees and licenses (initial setup challenges during pre-opening)