



## **Chapter XV**

# **Information Systems for Co-Operative Procurement of Organic Food as a Basis for Decentralised Eco-Villages**

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## **Abstract**

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*In this chapter we describe the “eFood-Coop” software system that supports an eco-community in ordering, purchasing and delivering organic products such as food, clean construction material and so forth. In addition, offering services and hiring or lending goods such as tools and so forth can be supported. Besides presenting products, the software supports communication and co-operation among the members/consumers. This promotes a sustainable economy locally and makes it possible to order organic food at wholesale (which requires collecting single orders to exceed the minimum order quantities required to obtain wholesale sales*

*units). Thus, it is one essential contribution to a decentralised eco-village structure, where several hundred people consider themselves as inhabitants of a virtual village. This village is spread over a limited area with a diameter of about 20-30 miles. The local restriction is necessary because otherwise material flows would be too extensive and maintaining social bindings would be more difficult.*

## Introduction

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In the space of environmentally friendly products and services, organically produced food is an essential contribution to sustainable development (World Commission, 1987), especially if it is produced and sold within the same region. Food-coops are groups that purchase organic food in a self-organised, co-operative manner.

## Organic Food

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There are different ways to sell and buy organic food (see e.g., Kreuzer, 1996, for selling by electronic means (Nachtmann, 2002)):

- purchasing from an organic farm (e.g., a farm-shop) directly,
- farmers' markets,
- green box schemes (food delivery service),
- natural food shops,
- supermarkets with a product range in organic food,
- Internet grocery portals,
- wholesalers,
- producer/consumer communities, and
- food-coops.

The last way means to procure regional organic food by having consumers organise the buy-side on their own in a co-operative (BAG, 2000). A food-coop is characterised by:

- a group of people interested in (co-operatively) buying regional organic food,

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