

Farming Pioneers

Now in its seventh year, our Farming Pioneers programme continues to champion the next generation of farmers and growers aged between 21 and 35. Through a free 30-month training programme, we're teaching business skills like lean management and succession planning, as well as exploring salient issues such as mental health. We aim to continue investing in and expanding the Farming Pioneers programme so more young people can benefit from the scheme.



Local sourcing

Our members and customers tell us that access to local products and supporting small producers is important to them and, as a community retailer, promoting locally sourced products and showcasing small producers within our stores is a key focus.

This year we used customer insight to develop a purpose-led, local strategy. The strategy aims to improve the range we currently have and increase sourcing from more purpose-led suppliers which give back to their community, aligning with Co-op Values. Our new strategy is focused on working closely with local and small producers to create stronger communities and a more diverse supply base.

We were delighted to have partnered with the Quality Food Awards for the sixth consecutive year, to celebrate small producers across the country. The Quality Food Awards allow us to showcase a

group of suppliers who not only have innovative products but have purpose-led initiatives built into their ways of working. This year we had two winners: our Ambient winner was Pelagonia with their Aivar red pepper paste, and our Frozen winner was Caliendo's pistachio gelato.

We want to support small suppliers who are aligned with our Co-op Values, so this year we launched The Apiary, our Co-op Incubator scheme. Our scheme is based on a programme of support designed to help small suppliers upskill and get their products 'retail ready'.

By underpinning our Incubator programme with collaborative knowledge and skill-sharing, member-centric insight and mentoring, we have created a sustainable space for entrepreneurs to develop their businesses.

We have selected our first cohort of small suppliers, and new products will land in stores throughout 2022. Partnering with suppliers who keep sustainability and purpose at the forefront of everything they do will help us to get closer to what our members need and care about.