



Community Supported Agriculture

A Publication of ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service • 1-800-346-9140 • www.attra.ncat.org

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This publication reports on the history of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in the U.S. and discusses the various models that have emerged. Recent trends in the CSA movement are presented and demographic information provided about the distribution of CSA farms in the U.S. Several CSA cases are profiled and a survey of recent research is presented. References and resources follow the narrative.

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CSA dinner. Hedgerow Farm, Boulder, Colorado. Photo courtesy of Hedgerow Farm.

Introduction

The concept of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) was brought to the United States by Jan VanderTuin from Switzerland in 1984. Projects in Europe date to the 1960s, when women's neighborhood groups approached farmers to develop direct, cooperative relationships between producers and consumers. By 1986 two CSA projects in the United States had delivered harvest shares from Robyn Van En's Indian Line Farm in Massachusetts and the Temple/Wilton Community Farm in New Hampshire.

In an impassioned rationale for CSA, Elizabeth Henderson (www.gvocsa.org/

foodandag399.html), who grew up in New York City, offers a personal account of how her CSA work grew out of twin hungers for community and for connection to the land.

Twenty-five years ago, many young professionals left jobs in northeastern cities to revitalize abandoned New England farms. They found a dying local agricultural scene. Production of dairy, fruit, poultry, and vegetables was squeezed out of local markets as the food industry consolidated and shipped products became more common.

Direct farmer-to-consumer arrangements seemed to offer an answer. Young

In basic terms, CSA consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Members or shareholders of the farm or garden pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares in the farm's bounty throughout the growing season, as well as satisfaction gained from reconnecting to the land. Members also share in risks, including poor harvest due to unfavorable weather or pests.

—United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) definition
www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa/csadef.htm

Related ATTRA Publications

Direct Marketing

Market Gardening:
A Start Up Guide

Season Extension
Techniques for
Market Gardeners

workers desired a less-regimented life. They also sought integration into a rural community while undertaking revitalization of its agricultural base.

New England features a harsh climate that limits production to about four months of the year. Consequently, a comparatively narrow range of foodstuffs could be raised and economies of scale were rarely an advantage. Still, the CSA concept was born and has since become widely publicized.

Over time, two distinct types of community supported agriculture have emerged: the shareholder CSA and the subscription CSA. (www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/files/csa_0105.pdf and www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa)

Subscription CSA (farmer-driven). In this approach, the farmer organizes the CSA and makes most of the management decisions. Farm work is not required of subscribers. A permutation is the farmer cooperative, where two or more farmers organize to produce a variety of products for the CSA basket. Subscription CSAs now constitute more than 75 percent of all CSAs.

Shareholder CSA (consumer-driven). This type of CSA typically features an existing “core group” that organizes subscribers and hires the farmer. The core group may be a not-for-profit organization and land may be purchased, leased, or rented. Most key decisions are made by core group personnel.

Long-standing local food security programs may integrate CSAs as part of a comprehensive plan to ensure all segments of the

community have access to good food—through food banks, community farms, community gardening, internships, training, farmers' markets, transportation, and advocacy. The CSA is a means to involve all social strata and to supplement grant income. Some CSAs operated by nonprofits offer a certain number of free or reduced-price shares.

Some CSAs have “add-on” options to the basic basket. Subscribers usually self-harvest intensive-labor crops like snowpeas and berries. In fruit growing regions, subscribers can have tree fruits and berries as part of a “fruit share.” (1)

More information on the history and philosophy of the CSA movement can be found at the Web site of the organization dedicated to the late Robyn Van En (1949-1997), co-founder of the U.S. movement. The Robyn Van En Center (www.csacenter.org) links to many other resources, including a federal database and an excellent bibliography at www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa. This site also links to support groups that provide region-specific information and planning help for traditional CSAs, including books and periodicals and consultants with access to CSA farm budgets, crop tracking sheets, and management software.

The original idea of CSA was to re-establish a sense of connection to the land for urban dwellers and to foster a strong sense of community and cooperation with a decided social justice goal to provide food security for disadvantaged groups. As operated by nonprofits like the Western Massachusetts Food Bank and the Hartford Food Project, the CSA complements related food security programs. It provides work and training for the unemployed, fresh produce for the food bank, and a venue for other local farms to sell products. In addition, the CSA offers a measure of farmland preservation, insurance against sudden disruptions of the food supply line to major urban areas, and offers transportation for disadvantaged inner-city residents to sources of healthful, reasonably priced groceries.

A part of the original CSA aim was to enlist support from urban consumers for local and sustainable agriculture. A key concept of early CSA organizers was to assert local control over a food system that was growing increasingly consolidated and remote. In an era of price supports for commodity crops and chronic agricultural surpluses, organizers saw a food system that overemphasized competitive advantage and externalized many costs while failing to offer the small farmer a fair return.

The 2005 book by Leslie Durham entitled *Good Growing—Why Organic Agriculture Works* advocates “a new certification label—the Fair Share.” According to this philosophy, the small, organic farmer receives “a fair price (say, 75 percent of the consumer price) for the products sold.” The label further verifies that the products are marketed outside corporate agribusiness channels. (2)

Twenty years after its beginnings, the CSA movement has moved in a number of new directions. Two recent permutations of the CSA concept are profiled below: the cooperative that sells shares in farmers’ market offerings and the workplace CSA. As of publication (2006), these CSA forms remain to be studied, and little research data is available.

About 10 percent of CSAs are operated by non-profit organizations. The Hartford Food Project’s Holcomb Farm CSA and the Food Bank Farm CSA, operated on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Community Food Bank, are profiled below. About three-fourths of all CSAs are now operated by individual produce farmers as one of several direct marketing methods. The remainder are core group subscribers who hire farmers to grow for them and who have considerable decision making authority. Peter C. Reynolds, in a perceptive critique of the development of CSA plans, points to the connection channel as all-important: “The CSA is not a single farm but the place in a web of complementary farms where consumers connect with the land.” (3)

The success of any type of CSA depends heavily on highly developed organizational and communication skills. Organizers must enjoy the complex scheduling and task management that goes with CSAs. Computer literacy is a plus. CSA seasonal labor needs can be met either by relying on shareholder labor, family labor, or interns.

Trends/Statistics

USDA maintains a searchable database of CSAs in the United States at <http://wsare.usda.edu/pub/index.cfm?sub=csa>. The initial development of this database was the outcome of a series of USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grants to Northeast U.S. sustainable agriculture organizations—the first in the U.S. to survey CSA farms.

These related projects began with a series of farm surveys in 1996 (for the year 1995), 1997 (for 1996), and 1998 (for 1997), funded by USDA’s SARE program (subsequently continued with other funding). The first comprehensive portrait of the CSA movement in the U.S. was a National CSA Farm Survey conducted early in 2000 for the year 1999. Three hundred sixty eight CSA farmers responded (of 1019 names).

A 2000 SARE grant helped collaborators envision building CSA farm networks nationwide while implementing a whole range of services, including a national CSA farm directory. Objectives included linking to efforts outside the Northeast, setting research agendas, and developing public policy reforms. Agenda items included tax incentives to make farmland more affordable and accessible, allowing food stamps to be used at CSA farms (subsequently enacted in 2001 for low-income seniors) (5), and removing policy barriers governing on-farm processing and farm apprentice labor. (6)

In December 2001, one source reported a net total of 761 CSA farms registered with USDA. As of March 2004, a study published by the Leopold Center at Iowa State University found 1,034 CSAs in the national database—an increase of more than 25

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Two Traditional CSAs

Holcomb Farm CSA

The CSA program at Holcomb Farm is one of an array of projects sponsored by the Hartford, Connecticut, Food System (HFS), which began operation in 1983. A nonprofit, non-governmental organization, HFS works on social justice and local food security issues, while influencing food policy. It also operates training programs and works to protect local farmland. According to *Organic Food Matters* (4), "The Hartford Food System has successfully challenged all the barriers that keep organic produce from the heart of low-income areas." Programs include the following.

- Food Policy and Advocacy
- GROW Hartford (cultivating youth leadership and civic participation through training hundreds of Hartford young people and families on a half-acre sustainable urban farm)
- Holcomb Farm Community Supported Agriculture
- Farmland Preservation—Working Lands Alliance
- Grocery Delivery
- Research

The Hartford Food Project sponsors a farmers' market, and local farmers may sell complementary products (such as eggs, meat, honey, and bread) at the weekly CSA pick-ups.

Its special concern is the food needs of the handicapped and elderly, women with small children, the unemployed, and disadvantaged minorities. See also the sample newsletter from the Holcomb Farm CSA, below.

Food Bank Farm CSA

The 600-member Food Bank Farm CSA is operated on 60 acres by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, a nonprofit agency. Six million pounds of food is distributed yearly to 420 programs in four counties—including soup kitchens, food pantries, homeless shelters, childcare centers, and elder programs. About half of the production of the farm goes to provide fresh vegetables, flowers, and small fruits to Food Bank clients. The Food Bank also sponsors Brown Bag (supplementary groceries for the elderly), a school hunger education program, and nutrition education for low-income people.

Food Bank Farm provides shareholders with fresh produce May through October and storage vegetables in November and December, in two sizes of shares—a Farm Share for a family of three to five and a Farm Share Plus for five to seven. Some crops are U-Pick. Additional fresh local products available on pick-up days include brick-oven sourdough bread, local and organic eggs, tofu, goat cheese, tempeh, miso, salad dressings, granola, baked goods, fruit, beef, lamb, chicken, fresh pasta, biodegradable detergents, and soap made locally by bicycle-powered equipment. Internships are offered each season. (See ATTRA's Internships database at www.attra.ncat.org.)

percent in three years. A count in July 2005 showed 1,144 in the USDA database. The organization Local Harvest (www.localharvest.com) maintains its own national database, with a current total of 1,080 CSAs. See the chart below for numbers by states.

Washington, Iowa, and Minnesota/western Wisconsin publish directories of CSA farms. The Kansas City Food Circle publicizes many local food system elements—small organic vegetable producers, farmers' markets, restaurants, groceries, value-added small businesses, U-Pick

opportunities, and CSAs—through its widely distributed directory. (7) Assuming 50 to 500 subscribers each, CSAs supply more than 270,000 U.S. households during the growing season.

Research

A multi-year project known as the SARE Lass Study, had three objectives:

- Develop a mail survey questionnaire to gather cost and return data from Northeast CSA Farms for 1995, 1996, and 1997, and analyze the data

CSA Farms by State as Measured by USDA and Local Harvest

| | USDA | LH |
|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|----|------|----|
| AK | 6 | 5 | HI | 3 | 9 | ME | 32 | 25 | NJ | 16 | 15 | SD | 2 | 4 |
| AL | 7 | 6 | IA | 39 | 37 | MI | 40 | 44 | NM | 16 | 16 | TN | 15 | 17 |
| AR | 4 | 1 | ID | 16 | 12 | MN | 35 | 42 | NV | 1 | 4 | TX | 21 | 24 |
| AZ | 9 | 8 | IL | 20 | 26 | MO | 18 | 24 | NY | 101 | 76 | UT | 3 | 2 |
| CA | 81 | 81 | IN | 12 | 16 | MS | 2 | 3 | OH | 31 | 35 | VA | 25 | 32 |
| CO | 27 | 26 | KS | 8 | 11 | MT | 3 | 3 | OK | 4 | 5 | VT | 40 | 36 |
| CT | 22 | 17 | KY | 15 | 15 | NC | 26 | 33 | OR | 45 | 39 | WA | 61 | 60 |
| DE | 4 | 3 | LA | 3 | 1 | ND | 2 | 4 | PA | 69 | 64 | WI | 66 | 71 |
| FL | 15 | 9 | MA | 60 | 45 | NE | 5 | 4 | RI | 10 | 7 | WV | 7 | 9 |
| GA | 5 | 14 | MD | 36 | 37 | NH | 21 | 22 | SC | 4 | 5 | WY | 1 | 4 |

- Conduct outreach—development of print and electronic publications, including a network directory
- Organize peer-mentoring workshops, telephone consulting, and a conference

Analyses (see **Resources** below) of the survey data indicate that CSA operators cover direct costs through shares, but operator labor and fixed inputs are not adequately covered. Most CSA farms surveyed were operated by a “core group.” Chief investigator Daniel Lass has reported on further implications of survey findings, including the 2003 booklet *CSA Across the Nation: Findings from the 1999 CSA Survey*. (See **Resources**, below.)

With funding from USDA, the University of Wisconsin’s Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems and other partners conducted a national survey of 1999 CSA data in early spring of 2000. The study is known as the National CSA Farm Survey and was conducted by Daniel Lass, Steve Stevenson, John Hendrickson, and Kathy Ruhf. For analysis of the findings, see Lass et al., 2003, *CSA Across the Nation*, and Stevenson and Hendrickson, 2004, *Research Brief: Community Supported Agriculture Farms, National survey results*. (5) The latter analysis notes that a significant proportion of CSA farmers did not own land, but made rental or lease agreements. More than 70 percent of responding CSAs were

in 12 states in the Northeast, West Coast, or North Central Region.

A subsequent survey was performed for the year 2001 by the same team. (See **Resources**)

Kathy Ruhf of the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group led a team including Northeast non-profits, universities, Extension services, and farmers and published the Northeast CSA Network Project in 2000. Project objectives included the following:

- Improve and expand regional CSA support services to reach new users
- Put on a regional conference to promote development of new CSA farms
- Sponsor a regional research project on priority CSA topics
- Take final steps toward a self-sustaining organizational capability

(Initial report, April 2000)

The third northeast CSA conference in 2001 attracted 350 participants. Pre-conference mini-schools (6) attracted 100 participants, 30 to 40 percent of whom indicated they would make specific changes in their farm operations. Sixteen percent stated they would like to start a CSA.

With a new business plan to become self-sustaining, the Robyn Van En Center

(Pennsylvania) became the main portal for the national on-line directory of CSA farms, although USDA (through its Sustainable Agriculture Network) still provided technical support. (The directory is now hosted by Western SARE.) A national CSA farm census was conducted in 1999, to build an initial conference mailing list, with 76 CSA operators responding. The project team completed a preliminary survey on research needs. (*Final report, 2002*)

In 2003 the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University began a study of CSA farms in the Midwest, surveying 55 farm operators “to provide a regional characterization of the movement.” (8) The fact that almost all labor on the surveyed farms was provided by family members implies that only one type of CSA was characteristic of the Upper Midwest—the farmer/landowner operating a CSA as a marketing strategy. Ninety-seven percent of the farmers were “completely satisfied” or “satisfied” with their CSA operations. They believed that 83 percent of their members were “satisfied most of the time” and 17 percent “very satisfied.”

Farmers identified causes of dissatisfaction for their CSA members as “too much produce, too much food preparation time, and lack of product choice.” Surveyed CSA operators were more highly educated and younger than the national average. CSA returns were higher than the average return per acre for commodity crops in the Midwest. (However, it should be noted that, without factoring in price supports, Midwest commodity crops consistently show negative net returns.) (9) A major conclusion of the Leopold Center study was that share prices should be increased to provide a better return to the farmer. The study ignored social justice aims common to other types of CSAs, as well as integration of CSAs into a comprehensive local food-system plan with many types of services, programs, and activities to ensure community food security.

J.M. Kolodinsky and L.L. Pelch studied CSAs from the point of view of consumer acceptance. Their study was supported by grants from USDA and SARE and findings were published in the *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*. Kolodinsky

CSA and Beginning Farmers

Vegetable production (most CSAs focus on vegetables) is a highly complex, financially risky career, demanding great creativity and professionalism. To initiate a farming operation with the CSA structure may not be the wisest choice for the beginner. The operation, from the very start, will face the dual challenges of mastering complex production and post-harvest handling techniques, while simultaneously managing and servicing the needs of an unusually large customer base. Existing vegetable operations that add CSA as market diversification strategy appear to have a high likelihood of success.

Many farmers, especially those with less experience, feel that one of the chief advantages of the CSA structure is a ready supply of up-front cash at the beginning of the season. In a typical arrangement, the CSA might have 100 members each paying \$300—half at the beginning of the season and half at mid-season. The operation would, indeed, have \$15,000 to work with at the beginning of the season. The attraction of that kind of interest-free operating money leads many inexperienced operators (and not a few experienced ones) to overlook other important considerations. “Interest-free” does not mean “without cost.”

Administering 100 fifteen-dollar accounts every week for something like 20 weeks can be quite time consuming, and therefore expensive. Here’s the hitch. Most of the time, it is possible to borrow \$15,000 of operating money at the bank for less than 12 percent per year. The use of \$15,000 for six months, therefore, will cost less than \$900. Since the second \$15,000 comes in at mid-season, it is effectively a payment for the vegetables sold in the first half of the season and thus (unlike the first block of money) represents no particular advantage to the CSA structure compared to any other type of marketing system.

Therefore, in this example, having the use of early-season money is worth \$9 per member. Nine dollars per member is the maximum amount that can be spent on administration and other overhead before that part of the CSA arrangement becomes a decided money-loser. At the minimum wage, the CSA operator can afford to spend no more than five minutes per week on each member. Operators who value their time at \$9 per hour for cost-accounting purposes need to have a system capable of completely administering each member in less than three minutes per week. (10)

and Pelch (11) found the likelihood of membership in a CSA to be highly correlated with food shoppers who have a high degree of education, who buy organic, and who consider political/economic/social factors in choosing their off-season (winter) produce venue. Likelihood of CSA membership was negatively correlated with the presence of children or teens in a family, having adequate storage space for canned or frozen foods (presumably lessening the need for fresh produce every week), and lower educational attainment.

Hearing about the CSA through word-of-mouth increases membership probability, while posters and flyers have an insignificant impact. (Contemporary methods of seeking shareholders through the Internet, via a “local food” or “slow food” site such as Local Harvest, have developed since the Kolodinsky study was published in 1997.) While income was found not to be correlated with the decision to join a CSA, higher cost of share per person decreases the likelihood of membership.

The Harvest Home Organics project received a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Farmer grant from Northeast SARE in 2000. The project objective was to establish a CSA for marketing organic vegetables, flowers, and herbs. While the produce venture was successful, community-building among shareholders did not meet the expectations of the grant recipient. Shareholders did not find the social and aesthetic meaning in the CSA system that the investigator did, but viewed it primarily as a source of fresh produce.

With a grant from the Organic Farming Research Foundation, Santa Cruz, California, Deborah Kane of the University of Georgia’s Institute of Ecology studied perceptions of new CSA members at the beginning of the 1996 growing season compared to season’s end. Published as *Maximizing Shareholder Retention in Southeastern CSAs: A Step Toward Long-Term Stability*, in 1997, the Kane Study noted that a majority of respondents (66 percent of the 259 surveys mailed) perceived that the value

of their shares had declined. Ten percent perceived an increase in value and 26 percent perceived no change in value. Kane noted that “shareholders were split fairly evenly” in regard to community-building aspects of CSA.

Fifty-two percent of the new shareholders interviewed in the spring indicated that they didn’t have any expectations whatsoever. They didn’t want to go out to visit the farm, they didn’t want to meet new people, and they didn’t have time to volunteer or help out with distribution. Of those that did care about the community aspect, a minority expressed any sense of deep commitment to the concept.

The variety of produce received played a key role in overall satisfaction. Participants’ stated expectations were contradictory. Most of the people who said before the season began that they wanted to get involved in the farm never actually made it out to the farm.

Production Considerations

Most CSAs plan to raise 30 or more vegetables per season. Some, like Food Bank Farm, provide “winter shares” of root vegetables for storage in November and December. As already mentioned, many CSA organizers try to augment selection by creating a venue for other locally grown and locally raised products.

Organizers must carefully assess the subscriber threshold for price per share as well as number of shares issued. Make sure all input costs are addressed. Irrigation costs should be included when setting the price of a share. In most regions, irrigation is necessary for at least a portion of the crop year.

In addition to the original 1999 *Sharing the Harvest* handbook, by Elizabeth Henderson and Robyn Van En, several entities have published CSA handbooks or fact-sheets, including Iowa State University, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of California at Davis. (See **Resources**)

Hearing about the CSA through word-of-mouth increases membership probability, while posters and flyers have an insignificant impact.

Tips from the Ecological and Agricultural Projects, McGill University, Montreal

- Talk to other CSA farmers before taking the plunge
- Start small
- Be prepared to work very hard
- Try to set up a core group of subscribers/members
- Research the consumer base in your area
- Depend on other direct marketing outlets
- Try to carry on through the winter with other products
- Gain flexibility by cooperating with other farmers in supplying the CSA

CSAs and the Internet

Computers greatly enhance the work of a CSA—not only in scheduling crop production and harvest, but keeping track of the makeup of the weekly (or biweekly) basket, whole shares and half shares, workdays, and division of available produce into equitable shares. Members can be kept informed by e-mailing a newsletter, recipes, workday notices, schedule changes, and

personal notes. Enhanced communication helps build community and increases the likelihood that the CSA will survive and prosper. The company Fearless Foods (www.fearlessfoods.com) offers CSA software—some free.

Information/Training

Newsletters help farmers (or the core group) communicate with CSA subscribers. Many CSAs add them to the baskets on pick-up

days. Interactions may take a different form when the community has hired the farmer and face-to-face decision-making meetings are the norm. Holcomb Farm CSA of the Hartford Food Project publishes a very detailed newsletter, in print and e-mail form, that provides specifics on how its CSA works as part of a local food system. Current and back issues are archived on the Holcomb Farm Web site.

Cookbooks. CSAs may publish their own cookbooks (see mention in the Holcomb Farm newsletter). While CSA subscribers may find commercially published cookbooks useful, especially those featuring ethnic cuisines that traditionally use only a small amount of meat and large amounts of vegetables, there are disadvantages. These include having to cull the few usable recipes from a collection, individualizing them to foods produced in a particular region, and allowing for the fact that an occasional cookbook author has changed authentic recipes to accommodate contemporary tastes for meat, sugar, and fats. Ideally, a CSA group will develop its own recipes featuring its regional produce, or exchange recipes with CSAs in other parts of the country, as a networking project. Fortunately, the Internet now puts vast numbers of recipes at our fingertips, and an impressive array can be instantaneously found for every conceivable ingredient. A CSA

Two New CSA-Type Plans

Hardin's River Mercantile Cooperative, Little Rock, Arkansas

Buyers of a share (about \$700 in 2005) or a half-share in the cooperative can receive \$60 worth of Arkansas products every month at the Hardin's location at the Little Rock River Market. Four Arkansas meat producers who sell at the market provide antibiotic-free beef, lamb, goat, pork, and chicken for the plan—along with produce vendors and a dairy. Share fees are paid up-front to participating farmers. "If the seeds don't do well, the crop will still get paid for, and the farmer can produce something else," according to Hayden Henningsen, the River Market's produce specialist. (See www.naturallyarkansas.org.) Participants are encouraged to can or freeze part of their bounty. (13)

Corporate-Hosted CSA

According to Denise M. Finney (14), who is studying office-based CSAs, "changes to the original CSA concept are making it more appealing to the general public." A report on her research in North Carolina appeared online in September 2005. It includes "profiles of the volunteer committee of members, each farm involved in the program, and several shareholders." A promotional piece describing the concept is designed to be used by growers when they approach a business to initiate a workplace CSA program.

Where, When, and How Do I pick Up My Share?

On Farm Distribution Times

Tuesday: 2-6 PM

Thursday: 3-7 PM

Saturday: 9 AM-12 PM

You are welcome to arrive early to walk around the farm or harvest the pick-your-own crops, but the share room won't be ready until the posted start time!

Directions to the Holcomb Farm CSA, West Granby

Once You're at The Farm...

Enter the barn through the north door near the parking lot. Check off your name on the member board and pick up a paper newsletter if you don't get an email newsletter. The crops will be displayed in two ("Greens" and "Mix and Match") categories. Sometimes we add a third "Extras" category. Take a "Greens" bag (one size for full shares, one size for half shares) and fill it up with whatever you like from the "Greens" section. Do the same for the "Mix and Match" section.

Standardized bags will be provided for each section, but we encourage you to bring your own bags to consolidate all of your goodies for easy transport. We will have some grocery bags available and we welcome contributions of paper and plastic grocery bags.

All crops, bags, and categories will be clearly labeled. When pick-your-own-crops are ready, we'll add those to the share board and we will have signage and picking supplies in the field.

Sound confusing? It makes sense after the first week or two and there will always be a staff member and often a volunteer to help.

Farm Guidelines

- Only really nice, leashed dogs are welcome.
- Park only in the designated parking areas. There is one parking spot right next to the barn reserved for handicap members or members with infants.
- Please **do not** allow children to trample the pick-your-own crops. Please **do** allow them (and yourselves) to eat as many ripe pick-your-own crops as they want. Pick only the crops that are labeled for picking. The other ones aren't ready yet and won't be good anyway. If you don't know the proper way to harvest something, ask the staff monitor.
- As tempting as they are, tractors are not for climbing. Also, please keep children from wandering into the farm workshop (opposite end of barn from distribution area) where all sorts of hazards await. You are welcome to walk around and view the equipment and the greenhouses.
- You are welcome to use the picnic tables, visit the chickens, or take a hike around the farm anytime. There are miles of hiking trails in the woods behind the farm.

West Hartford Shares

Tuesdays 4-7 PM

Directions

Park in the driveway or along the road. The share boxes will be stacked in the garage. Check your name off on the member list and take a paper newsletter if you don't get an email newsletter. There will be a stack of full share boxes and a stack of half share boxes. All boxes will have similar contents. There will be a swap table. If there are items in your box you don't want, leave it on the table for others to take. You can pick up items that others leave. **Please return your empty share boxes every week** so we can reuse them.

[The newsletter also listed farm events and volunteering opportunities.]

Holcomb Farm CSA: Related Food System Services

Baked Good Shares

Diana [Flynn] will deliver her freshly baked breads, cookies, and pies to the farm on pick-up days each week for the twenty week season.

| | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 1 Loaf per week: | \$75 |
| 2 Loaves per week: | \$140 |
| Add ½ dozen cookies: | \$45 |
| Add one dozen cookies: | \$80 |
| Add 5 seasonal pies: | \$55 |

For more information and to sign up, call Diana at [ph. #].

Products from other Local Farms

We sell on a cash basis at the on-farm distributions a limited range of products from other local farms that we do not produce ourselves. We hope this adds convenience for our members while supporting our neighbor farms.

- Eggs from Sol-E-Terre Farm, Suffield
- Honey from Jeff, who keeps hives at Holcomb Farm
- Sweet Corn from Rosedale Farms, Simsbury
- Apples from Bushy Hill Orchard, Granby
- And maybe, Maple Syrup.

Bring Us Your Compost!

Want to compost your food scraps and yard waste but don't want to deal with a compost pile? Bring it to the farm! We'll have a big compost receptacle outside the barn. Just toss your compostables into it and we'll add it to our big compost piles. We'd also love to have your leaves in the fall. We use them to mulch many of our crops.

www.holcombfarmcsa.org/newsletters/May%202005.pdf

The Holcomb Farm CSA Cookbook

Julie Sochacki has compiled a beautiful book of recipes and food preservation tips from CSA farms and CSA members around the country. It is an indispensable guide to all the familiar and unfamiliar abundance that comes with a CSA share. \$16/each. They will be available in June at distribution. You can reserve your copy by sending a check to the CSA. More info at www.farmcookbook.com.

www.holcombfarmcsa.org/newsletters/May%202005.pdf

cookbook for the Midwest was published in 1998 by the publishers of *Growing for Market*. (15)

Food preservation tips. A vital part of the services that a CSA can offer is reacquainting two generations of Americans with food preservation techniques. In other words, what do you do with a basket of peak quality raw ingredients? How do you change them into a tasty meal—for either now or next winter (when the CSA has gone away till spring)? There is a

revival of interest in fermented foods—like pickles, sauerkraut, and kimchi—and condiments of all sorts. With modern home freezers, arduous canning procedures have been superseded by quick freezing tricks. Absolutely ripe tomatoes, raw peppers at all stages, and blanched vegetables such as greens, broccoli, okra, corn, and peas are quickly popped into the freezer. Cabbages and root vegetables will keep for a long time in the vegetable compartment, and garlic and onions at room temperature.

Windborne Farm, Scott Valley, California

Jennifer Greene's Windborne Farm is in the Scott Valley, in remote northern California. She has done something unique, which is to market grains, beans, and edible seeds through her 90-member CSA, mostly to customers in the San Francisco Bay Area. Grains and beans have a much longer shelf life than fruits or vegetables, so Jennifer can make year-round, once-a-month deliveries.

Jennifer adds value by processing her grains into many kinds of flour or hot cereal mixes. Over the course of a year, her deliveries also include several different types of garbanzo beans, lentils, and other types of dry beans. Jennifer farms using biodynamic principles—she has a couple of draft horses for some of the work, many goats for milk and cheese, along with chickens for eggs, and the usual complement of cats and dogs.

Jennifer augments her farm income by having week-long workshops for kids on topics such as blacksmithing, spinning and weaving, and bread and cake making. She is interested in providing information to others interested in small grain CSAs. To receive her monthly mailing about her farm, contact Jennifer at windborne3csa@yahoo.com.

Dill and other delicate herbs that do not dry well can be frozen into individual ice cubes. Berries can quickly become preserves, just by following the directions in every package of pectin. High-priced condiments like jalapeno or red pepper jelly are easily produced, as well. Making a \$3.00 jar of salsa is as easy as putting one fully-ripe tomato, one hot pepper, one small onion, and a handful of cilantro in a blender and giving it a few pulses. Season with olive oil and a bit of sweetener, to taste.

Promotional material. Promotion of a CSA should take advantage of free media outlets whenever possible. Promotion through related venues such as health food stores and farmers' markets is a good idea. (Many CSA farmers also sell at farmers' markets.) Printed materials such as brochures and flyers are not as effective as word-of-mouth in recruiting subscribers for a CSA. (11) However, a document setting out expectations and procedures is helpful.

End of year evaluations. At least one direct marketing farmer surveys his customers at the end of the year to determine satisfaction and solicit suggestions. A group operating a CSA might also make use of a survey to iron out any problems before the next season.

A Systems Approach to Local Food Security

Concepts like CSA can achieve many different (sometimes contradictory) ends. CSAs have been envisioned as vehicles to build

community, preserve local food production systems, protect the environment, and provide for the poor. Perhaps unstated is the implication that farming as a business should support a middle-class lifestyle.

Many people see a loss of control over their own food supply. This public concern is coupled with the evaporation of the industrial base that replaced subsistence agriculture in the United States 150 years ago. Superstore prices have already begun to reflect rapidly rising transportation costs, which leads to questions about the long-term sustainability of a food system based solely on comparative advantage and low-cost energy. Many environmentalists believe that those who choose to practice small-scale agriculture for local markets deserve a social reward for the services they provide. Such rewards are not compensated through today's market mechanisms.

Meanwhile, as the CSA concept has spread beyond New England, it has changed. In the Midwest, CSA becomes only one among many direct marketing techniques. The Iowa Study focused on potential enhancement of return per acre through a CSA plan—if the land owner could increase the share price sufficiently. The longest enduring CSAs, however, tend to be institutions, not-for-profit organizations, and committed groups of individuals (like the Hartford Food System) that integrate the original CSA goal of local community building with a wide array of enhancements. This approach ensures the widest possible

Promotion of a CSA should take advantage of free media outlets whenever possible.

participation in a locally based food production and distribution system.

When they began in the U.S., CSAs were a major or even sole source of organic produce in their localities. But with the advent of the National Organic Program (NOP), the relationship between local and organic has become more and more tenuous. Large organic operations in a few states now supply much of the available organic food to the rest of the country. Delivery is through the traditional oil-dependent transportation network.

More and more production now occurs on certified acreage outside the U.S. With growing urban populations offering a concentrated market for large-scale production, economies of scale tend to swamp individual local producers, who can at best hope to reach the shrinking 20 percent of Americans who put environmental and social justice concerns ahead of other considerations. However, the outlook for integrated local food systems, including the CSA models, still holds considerable promise to enhance local food security.

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Resources

The USDA National Agricultural Library's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) offers a comprehensive listing of resources, including a bibliography of major publications on CSA—as well as periodicals, listserves, Internet links, associations, conferences, and CDs. The list is both in print and online. www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa/csafarmer.htm

Internet

CSA-L@prairienet.org
www.prairienet.org/pcsa/CSA-L
 Web site has archives.

Handbooks

The basic handbook is still

Elizabeth Henderson and Robyn Van En. 1999. *Sharing the Harvest: A Guide to Community Supported Agriculture*. Chelsea Green, White River Junction, VT. 254 p.
As of Winter 2004, Northeast SARE had bought up the last copies of this book. To order, call 802-656-0484, or e-mail sanpubs@uvm.edu.

Since then, another handbook has been published by Iowa State University Extension, and a series of research briefs by the University of Wisconsin Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems. The University of California at Davis has published (1995) a handbook for CSA producers.

See also, Trauger Groh and Steven McFadden. 1997. *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited: Community Supported Farms—Farm Supported Communities*. Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Kimberton, PA. 294 p.
Distributed by Chelsea Green Publishing, P.O. Box 428, White River Junction, VT 05001. 800-639-4099.

Consultants

As a result of the 2000 SARE project, Cooperative Extension offers CSA support services in seven states

(CT, ME, MA, NH, NY, PA, and VT). www.csacenter.org/tech/eats/index.htm

Farmers with CSA experience offer consulting services in NY, PA, MA and 27 other states. www.csacenter.org/tech/farms/index.htm

Software

The *CSA Planning Chart*, a computerized spreadsheet that allowed growers to calculate how many of each crop to grow for a specified number of users, is no longer available except through private consultants.

See the ATTRA publication *Agricultural Business Planning Templates and Resources*. ATTRA also offers the CD *Agricultural Risk Management*.

Collections of CSA profiles

The New American Farmer: Profiles of Agricultural Innovation, 2nd edition
www.sare.org/publications/

ATTRA Internships database
www.attra.ncat.org

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NOTES

Community Supported Agriculture

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