CSA is a system of direct marketing where consumers pay the farmer at the beginning of the growing season for a weekly box of fresh fruits and vegetables. A CSA “share” is harvested and delivered to customers over a period of several months. CSAs may include meat, grain, flowers, or value-added products such as bread or cheese, in addition to fresh produce.

A core philosophy of the CSA model is that customers (or “members”) truly support their local CSA farm by sharing the risk each season. This means that even if there’s a bad harvest, the members still pay the same amount for the season. Members are willing to do this to ensure that “their” farm survives over time as a healthy food source and connection to the land for the local community. A CSA farm has the opportunity to cultivate a very loyal customer base.

**Advantages**
- Customers pay up front, which generates operating capital.
- The major marketing push is completed before the season starts, leaving more time to farm during the growing season.
- CSAs can build loyal customers who may be willing to share the risks of farming. Farmers must earn that loyalty by growing high quality products.
- No standard pack or grading is required.

**Considerations**
- CSAs require thoughtful planning to maintain a continuous supply of crops.
- Packing is labor-intensive because of the wide variety in the weekly box.
- CSAs require an extensive post-harvest handling set-up for washing, sorting, packing, etc.

**Tips**
- Build community through efforts such as harvest parties, work days, and newsletters.
- Conduct annual surveys to get customer feedback on quality, variety and service.
- Consider collaborating with other CSA farms if you want to offer a wider selection.

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*Serendipity Farm. Photo: www.serendipity-organic-farm.com*
### Key Questions to Ask Yourself about CSAs

- **Timing and planning are critical in a CSA. How will I ensure consistent weekly harvests of a variety of vegetables and fruits for my CSA customers? See ATTRA’s “Scheduling Vegetable Plantings for a Continuous Harvest.”**
- How many other CSA farms are in my area? Do they have waiting lists—unmet demand that I could tap into?
- Will I enjoy the social aspects of running a CSA, such as hosting festive gatherings or work days for members, writing newsletters to include in weekly boxes, and generally creating opportunities for people to get to know the farm?

### ATTRA Publications

- Prices vary for individual publications, many are free. An inexpensive subscription to ATTRA will give you access to all 350+ publications and databases. [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)
  - Scheduling Vegetable Plantings for Continuous Harvest (2008)
  - Season Extension Techniques for Market Gardeners (2005)
  - Community Supported Agriculture (2006)

### Books and Guides

- **Community Supported Agriculture** by Matt Ernst and Tim Woods. University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, New Crops Opportunity Center. 3pp. [www.uky.edu/Ag/NewCrops/marketing/csa.pdf](http://www.uky.edu/Ag/NewCrops/marketing/csa.pdf)

### CSA Software

- **Farmigo** is a computer software subscription service that provides recordkeeping and membership management. It costs 2% of gross sales from the CSA or farm. [www.farmigo.com](http://www.farmigo.com)
- **CSA Toolbox** is an online “toolbox” that offers programs to communicate with your customers, do your paperwork, handle your billing, and take payments. [www.csatoolbox.com](http://www.csatoolbox.com)
- **CSAware** is a customizable, user-friendly Community Supported Agriculture software from LocalHarvest.com designed for CSAs with lots of moving parts. The cost is 2% of sales. [www.csaware.com](http://www.csaware.com)

### Recursos en Español

- **La Agricultura Apoyado por la Comunidad (CSA):** Una guía de entrenamiento para el ranchero de CSA nuevo o prospectivo. producido por CSA-MI. [www.csa farms.org/downloads/csa_manual_spanishpdf.pdf](http://www.csa farms.org/downloads/csa_manual_spanishpdf.pdf)