

Community Supported Agriculture: The CSA Guide for Atlantic Canada



ACORN

ATLANTIC CANADIAN ORGANIC REGIONAL NETWORK

Community Supported Agriculture: The CSA Guide for Atlantic Canada

For more information contact:

ACORN
BOX 6343 Sackville, NS E4L 1G6
Tel: 506-536-2867
Toll free: 866-32-ACORN
admin@acornorganic.org
www.acornorganic.org



This project was made possible with funding from ACORN

Researched and written by Jennifer Melanson
Special thanks to Ruth Lapp, Derek Eagles, Steve Law, Evelyn Jones,
Gary Clausheide, Judy Lien, Mike Rabinowitz, David Greenberg, Rowena
Hopkins, Dave Méthot, Kent Coates, Ruth Coates, Becky Townshend

Copyright 2001, Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network Co-op Ltd.
Second edition 2008, Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network Co-op Ltd.

Why a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) manual for the Atlantic region?

There are lots of CSA resources out there—books, websites, organizations, as well as many experienced farmers—but compared to the rest of the country and continent there are relatively few CSA farms in the Atlantic region. With this in mind, we decided there must be something unique about the region!

As a new and younger CSA farmer, I feel very committed to the CSA model of growing and distributing food. My farm partners and I have found our CSA program so much more rewarding than growing and selling produce at local farmers' markets. Not only do we receive money and a commitment up front before we start planting, making it easier to plan our crop types and amounts, but our members share some of the risks. There is less waste at harvest time, and our members are learning to use food that is locally produced and seasonally available.

Being fairly new to this area of the country, we have made valuable community connections through our CSA. The CSA program has also provided a channel for local community development projects. With the support of the Department of Community Services our farm has become a hub of activity and community projects.

The CSA model in all of its diversity is working successfully for over 1,000 farms in North America. CSA is an exciting opportunity for organic farmers, which needs to be shared and developed by looking at successful examples in our own region and others.

Thanks to all of the farmers who participated in this research, and the many farmers before us who passed on their knowledge.

In This Manual...

CSA DEFINED... p. 4

CSA FARM PROFILES...p. 9

SAMPLE CSA LITERATURE...p. 22

CSA RESOURCE LIST...p. 29

CSA TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS...p.32



CSA Defined

"Food Producers + Food Consumers + Annual Commitment To
One Another = CSA & Untold Possibilities"
(Robyn Van En, in Henderson, 1999)

What is CSA?

Community shared (also referred to as 'supported') agriculture (CSA) is part of a growing social movement that encourages urban and rural citizens to share responsibility for the land where their food is grown, as well as for how their food is produced. It is a mutual commitment between farmer and consumer.

CSA is a partnership between agricultural producers and consumers. "Members", "subscribers", or "shareholders" pay a fee at the beginning of the growing season to meet all or part of a farm's operating expenses for the upcoming season. In return, members receive a portion of the farm's produce each week throughout the growing season. Such co-operation lets farmers and consumers share in the risks and benefits of farming.

Unlike conventional marketing, in which farmers bear the risks of weather, pests, and the marketplace alone, in community shared agriculture the farmers and members share both bounty and scarcity. While the exact arrangement between farmers and members varies from one CSA farm to another, there is generally a sharing of full or partial risk of crop failure (see p.27 for an example of a crop failure policy). This co-operation can provide farmers with a more equitable return for their labour and investment while relieving some of the burdens and uncertainties of conventional marketing.

Community shared agriculture also encourages ecologically sound farming practices. Nothing about the structure of a CSA requires that the produce be grown organically, but the majority of CSA members value fresh, local produce that has been grown without any synthetic chemicals or GMO seeds. This type of farming also minimizes food waste by producing just the amount of food members need, with minimal unused surplus.

CSA fosters connections between urban dwellers and the land and encourages co-operation among rural and urban communities. Increasingly, people don't know where their food is coming from or how it has been grown. CSA offers members an opportunity to participate in the planning and growing process of the food they will consume. Members can visit their CSA farms and help plan and harvest crops. Many farms host field days, produce newsletters, and hold workshops that educate members about sustainable farming and healthy food choices. These activities, in addition to gatherings and potlucks, bring people together socially throughout the season. At the same time, consumers gain a new voice in how their food is grown, processed, and distributed and

where their food dollars are going.

This mutually supportive relationship between growers and community members helps create an economically stable farm operation in which members are assured the highest quality produce, often at below retail prices. In return, farmers and growers are guaranteed a reliable market for a diverse selection of crops.

Each CSA is structured to meet the needs of the participants. Many variations exist, including the level of financial commitment and active participation by the shareholders; financing; crops grown; and details of payment plans and food distribution systems. On one end of the spectrum are CSA farms which require all members to do some work as part of their commitment. At the other end are what have come to be known as 'subscription' CSAs, where the farmers do all the work and members simply receive their share on a weekly basis.

Although CSA arrangements take many forms, all have at their centre the creation of more local and equitable agricultural system.



CSA– A brief history

Community shared agriculture began in the early 1960s in Germany, Switzerland, and Japan as a response to concerns about food safety and the urbanization of agricultural land. Groups of consumers and farmers in Europe formed co-operative partnerships to fund farming and pay the full costs of ecologically sound, socially equitable agriculture. In 1965, mothers in Japan concerned about the rise of imported food and the loss of arable land started the first CSA projects, called *teikei* in Japanese, which translated literally means partnership, but philosophically means "food with the farmer's face on it."

- Japan has more than 600 producer-consumer groups that supply food to more than 11 million people.
- The largest co-operative network in Japan is called the Seikatsu Club. Local chapters of this club can involve thousands of people and support up to 15 farms.
- Community supported agriculture began in the United States on two East Coast farms in 1986. It emerged as a marketing strategy in Canada in 1989. Since that time, community supported farms have been organized throughout North America, mainly in the Northeast, the Pacific coast, the Upper Midwest, and Canada. CSA in Canada more commonly stands for Community Shared Agriculture.
- In his article, "CSA's World of Possibilities," Steven McFadden, co-author of *Farms of Tomorrow* and *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited*, estimated that in 2004 there were over 1,700 CSAs in North America.



Types of CSAs

Community shared agriculture has diverse goals and forms depending on the farm. The following four main types of CSAs offer a sense of the diversity:

1. **Subscription or farmer-driven.** The farmer organizes the CSA and executes most of the management decisions. The shareholder or subscriber is minimally involved in the farm activities. This kind of CSA is quickly becoming the most common.
2. **Shareholder or consumer-driven.** Consumers organize the CSA and hire the farmer to grow what they want. The consumers make most of the decisions.
3. **Farmer co-operative.** A kind of farmer-driven CSA in which two or more farms pool their resources to supply customers. This may allow the CSA to offer a wider variety of products (i.e., fruit, eggs, meat, and milk). With such an arrangement, the sharing of resources may allow a small farmer to avoid devoting space to land-extensive, low-value crops such as pumpkins or sweet corn and a larger farm wouldn't have to dedicate time to labour intensive crops like carrots or herbs.
4. **Farmer-consumer co-operative.** The farmer and consumer co-own land and other resources and work together to produce food.

Most CSAs in the Atlantic Provinces are subscription or farmer driven, with varying levels of member involvement.



How CSA Works

Early in the year, members of CSA farms pay a fee to cover anticipated costs of the upcoming season, including labour, seeds, and supplies. Membership fees vary but typically run between \$350 and \$500 per season for a household. In return, members receive a weekly portion of the farm's harvest throughout the growing season. One share is usually designed to provide the weekly vegetable needs for a family of four. Some CSA farms also have half shares for smaller families or single people.

Distribution styles also vary for each CSA farm. Once the day's produce is harvested, the entire amount is weighed and the number of pounds or items (e.g. heads of lettuce, ears of corn) to be received by each share is determined. Some CSAs have members come to the farm and weigh/measure out their own share. Other CSA farms have a distribution crew to divide up items and pack shares to be picked up by members at centrally located drop-off sites (a member's house, health food store, or farmer's market).

CSA farms in Atlantic Canada range from 1 to 10 cultivated acres and provide food for 10 to more than 100 households. Most farms producing for CSA seem to be able to provide an average of 20 shares per acre. CSA farms are highly diversified, usually growing more than 30 different vegetables, herbs, and fruits. Some farms also supply meat, eggs, and other value-added products. One CSA farm profiled in this manual plans to provide food for up to eight months of the year by making successive plantings and using greenhouses and root cellars to extend the seasons.

CSA production systems require tremendous diversity to meet a family's produce needs for the week. This means that farmers need to produce a consistent supply and range of fruits and vegetables throughout the season, which entails more work for the farmer in the planning and planting phases. Farmers must also have a greater knowledge of basic growing practices for each of the different crops.

CSA projects rely to varying degrees on member volunteers to work on the farm and help with various tasks. Many CSA farms could not survive without a "core group" of committed volunteers who help manage distribution sites, plan the harvest, and recruit new members. By assuming these responsibilities, core groups enable farmers to focus on producing food and caring for the land. Most CSAs in the Atlantic Provinces rely on employees, apprentices and volunteers to meet their labour needs as opposed to member labour.

Why Is Community Supported Agriculture Important?

Community Shared Agriculture–ADVANTAGES

Benefits to the farmer

- Increased financial security–money at beginning of season when farm inputs are bought
 - Secure markets enable farmers to concentrate on growing quality produce
 - Members are the crop insurance (or part of it)
 - Farmers can diversify the crops being grown
 - Reduction of waste through careful planning
 - Immediate feedback on production quality
 - Excellent way to integrate into a community

Benefits to members

- Participate in the production of their own food
- Opportunities to gain knowledge of growing food
- Can enjoy fresh, organic food in season at reasonable prices
- Know how and where their food is being grown and who grows it
 - Convenient pick-up locations and times
- Support a viable local agriculture and healthy local economy
 - Don't have to spend extra time in large grocery stores
- Encouragement to try new food items and eat more healthy

Benefits to the community

- Food dollars stay in the local community and contribute to the maintenance of regional food production
- The biodiversity of a given area and the diversity of agriculture is supported through the preservation of small farms producing a wide variety of crops
 - Opportunity for dialogue between farmers and consumers
- An increase in understanding how, where, and by whom food is being grown

Community Shared Agriculture–DISADVANTAGES

Farmers

- Faced with the challenge of growing a variety of produce
- Organizational aspects of running a CSA are time intensive

Members

- Commitment to paying up front for food and picking up products on assigned days
 - Accepting some or all of the risk of failed crops
- Shares are not usually customized, so there must be willingness to try new things
 - May be required to attend meetings or provide farm labour
 - Do not know what they will receive from week to week

Thinking of Starting a CSA?

Converting to CSA seems easiest for farmers who own a piece of land and some equipment, have a few years experience growing vegetables for market and have established a customer base. However, one should not be discouraged from starting if these factors are not in place.

Questions to consider:

- Will growing for a prepaid group of customers be more of a benefit or a heavy obligation?
- Is my farm located in an area where I can attract CSA members?
- What are my production costs?
- How many shares can I handle?
- Do I want to combine elements of a CSA with other marketing?
- Do I want to share the work with another farm?
- How much participation from members do I want/ require?
- How will I meet the farm's labour needs?
- Does this fit into my (and family's) long-term farming/ personal goals?

Finding members:

It is often said that the best advertising is word-of-mouth, but this is especially true for finding CSA members. People who already know and trust the grower will tend to be the first ones to participate. As the CSA grows, it is the members who will do the most recruiting in a successful operation. Other good places to advertise include fairs, environmental and social justice groups, health food stores (which often don't have much fresh product), and churches. It is important to do as much recruiting and marketing as possible during the winter.

References

Bauermeister, Jim. 1997. "CSA--A first year's experience" Washington Tilth Autumn. p. 3, 12-15.

Cicero, Karen. 1993. "These farmers have customers who care" The New Farm. July-August. p. 18-22.

Henderson, Elizabeth, and the late Robyn Van En, *Sharing the Harvest: A Guide to Community-Supported Agriculture*, 1999, Chelsea Green Publishing.

Leap, Jim. 1996. "A farmer's perspective on the CSA movement" The Cultivar. Winter. p. 7-8.

Internet sites:

www.csacenter.org

http://www.umassvegetable.org/food_farming_systems/csa/index.html

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>

CSA Farm Profiles

The farm profiles in this section offer examples of different types and sizes of CSA farms in the Atlantic Provinces. The diversity of CSA farms is reflected in the language farmers use for example, to describe their customers—member, sharer, and subscriber are all used synonymously. Each profile includes the terms farmers use to describe their CSA projects.

The CSA structure offers a lot of room for innovation and diversity, which is part of the reason that the model has spread so quickly throughout North America. The following profiles highlight the unique aspects of each CSA program. A profile of a CSA operation that is no longer functioning has also been included to shed light on why CSA is not a viable model for every farm.

Innovative Partnerships

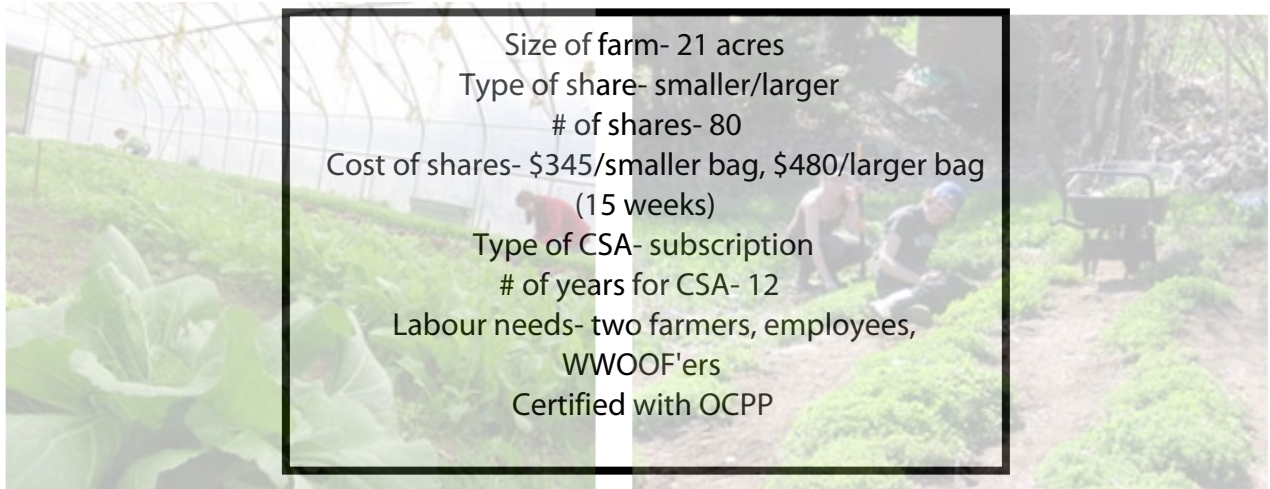
Partnerships with churches, government organizations, as well as other farms have been an important part of the success of many of the CSA operations in Atlantic Canada. These partnerships make CSA more farmer friendly by leaving some of the recruiting of members, and educational work, up to the organizations, instead of the farmer.

- In the past, SunRoot Farm has partnered with the Department of Community Services to provide organic produce locally to individuals and families on fixed incomes. Currently, SunRoot Farm continues to be involved in the community by running a non-profit organization, SunRoot Eco-Solidarity Association, which facilitates awareness of environmental stewardship, social justice and community development.
- Organic Farm and Lien Family Farm had partnered under one CSA to offer a wider variety of produce and to share the recruiting and logistics work. Each farm was able to focus on what they do best, while offering their members better service.

Note: Since this manual was created, these farms decided to offer CSA's individually as the demand grew so large



Veggie Co-op: Organic Farm



Mike Rabinowitz of Organic Farm and Judy Lien of Lien Family Farm had been operating a cooperatively run CSA program close to St. John's, Newfoundland for several years before splitting into independent CSA programs. They provided mixed vegetables for 18 weeks from spring to fall. Each farm grew certain vegetables and fruit and contributed to part of the administrative work. Each farmer's share in the profit was based on the percentage of the work contributed over the season. Judy and Mike state that their operation was successful because they "pay attention to clients' concerns and provide a large variety of excellent vegetables at a very reasonable cost."

The idea for a CSA program began after Mike gave a number of talks on environmental issues to Memorial University students, who then asked him to establish a CSA program. The students did all of the organizational work for the CSA the first year. Now the clientele has changed and the subscribers are older and include people who are committed to eating well, who buy organic on principle, or who are ill and believe eating organic will help.

Today, the Organic Farm's Veggie Co-op operates under the same principles. Each spring Mike and Melba Rabinowitz send out an opening letter to past and prospective members, explaining the share costs and distribution logistics. Subscribers are asked to pay in advance by cheque within a flexible payment schedule.

There are currently approximately 80 families or groups subscribing to the Veggie Co-op. CSA membership has increased every year without advertising, and only about a third of members each year don't repeat the following year.

New members are required to purchase two nylon bags, which are used to transport the vegetables. The bags are made by a small Newfoundland Company and cost \$20.00 each.

A bag of vegetables is provided each week and subscribers are asked to return the empty bag.

Mike grows the herbs, lettuce and carrots, greenhouse vegetables and other field crops (See the impressive variety of produce offered at www.theorganicfarm.net). Subscribers who opt for the smaller bag receive their vegetables on Mondays at 6 pm at the Memorial University Science building while those who receive the larger bag pick them up at the same time and location on Wednesdays. A packing slip is provided each week listing the vegetables of the week, the cost of each of the included items, notes, estimations about what will be included the following week, and recipes. Members line up in the parking lot to receive their produce. People that forget to come are phoned, and their bags are left at the university or taken back to the farm. Members also receive weekly "farm notes" via email, which includes listings of the week's vegetables, recipes, and information about the farm.

Mike says that their members "generously accept our decisions each week on the make-up of the bag." From Mike's perspective, the advantages of CSA are that the funding arrangement provides the farm with a cash flow for the entire growing season making it much easier to pay employees; that they can experiment with all kinds of vegetables; and that there is very little waste produced. They also get a better price for their produce through the CSA than by selling it to health food stores and other markets.

Mike feels that the challenge involved in CSA is that it takes a great deal of time to figure out the vegetables to be included each week. Packing bags for 80 groups is also tricky time consuming affair. Finally, dealing with forgetful subscribers is always time consuming and sometimes frustrating.

With 12 years of experience with the Veggie Co-op, Mike and Melba, who are recently retired from full time work, have started offering workshops. The first workshop involved growing wheatgrass, which is used as a part of cancer survivors' health recovery regime. Mike and Melba's connection to their customers allows them to teach about self-sufficiency and introduce customers to the wide variety of vegetables that can be grown locally.

Organic Farm
Mike & Melba Rabinowitz
42 Churchill Rd., Town of Portugal Cove,
St. Phillips, NL A1M 2P6
709-895-2884
organicfarm@nl.rogers.com

Greenberg Family Farm

Size of farm- 10 acres
Area cultivated- 3 acres
Type of share- full
of shares- 30 full
Cost of shares- \$100/month
Type of CSA- subscription
of years for CSA- 1
Labour needs- farmers, 2 employees
Certified with NSOGA

Update: Many things have changed since this manual was created and the Greenberg CSA is no longer operating (although it was very successful). David is still farming at a small scale and marketing directly to his customers, but not through a CSA.

David and Stephanie Greenberg, along with their three children, have been farming in Port Williams, in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, for two years. This is the first year of the Greenberg Family Farm CSA program. Sharers pay \$25 a week on a month-by-month basis, committing to the next month by the middle of the current month. Some members have given post-dated cheques for the season. This season, the Greenberg's have 30 shares, and aim to increase the numbers of shares over the next few years.

Sharers come to the farm, only a 15-minute drive outside of Wolfville, on Thursdays, between 2 and 9 PM to pick up their baskets of organic produce. All day Wednesday and Thursday mornings, the Greenbergs, along with hired help, pick, wash, and lay the produce out on tables in a cold storage facility on the farm. A list of available produce for the week guides sharers as they self-pack their baskets. Each sharer is allowed one basket per week. Some items are limited, such as garlic and salad mix, while items such as lettuce can be taken in unlimited quantities. The Greenbergs grow a wide range of produce, including salad greens, lettuce, carrots, leeks, potatoes, apples, peaches, plums, garlic, onions, beets, cucumbers, herbs, tomatoes, beans, peas, squash and spinach.

David and Stephanie decided to start a CSA program to "complete the chain of farming from production through marketing, without relying on a third party," says David. They also need to expand their customer base beyond the weekly Saturday farmer's market. A number of their market customers asked them to start a CSA program. The Greenbergs were reluctant at first, because they thought that running a CSA would be a lot of extra work. Yet, while they have found that the harvesting is a lot of work, the CSA is an efficient way to get produce to people, because they don't leave the farm. They are conveniently located close to Wolfville, which makes it feasible for members to make the trip out to the farm each week.

The Greenbergs employ two full time workers. They do not take WWOOF'ers, due to the inconsistent comings and goings. They pay their employees well, and expect a lot of work in return. They feel that "this is a more cost-effective way of running their operation. They are able to accomplish more with a steady labour supply, even though it is hard to hand over the money at the end of the week."

David says the advantage of CSA for their farm is the secure market, the direct connection between people and the land, and knowing that their members are healthier because they are eating more vegetables. In general, the disadvantage to CSA is that the packing and distribution are time consuming. Their system works well, because the sharers do the packing, and come to the farm to pick up their produce. David thinks CSA as a model could work for a wide variety of farms because there is a lot of room within the structure of a CSA to make each program unique to the farmers' and members' needs.

After one year of operating a CSA, David and Stephanie already have a waiting list of fifteen and growing. All of their sharers have come to them by word of mouth, which David attributes to the quality of their produce and constant presence at the local farmers market.

To really compete with a farmer's market, the CSA has to be well planned, to give members the produce they need each week, throughout the growing season. Because of this, David is happy that they waited a year before starting a CSA program. Last year they grew for the market and made connections in the community.

The Greenbergs will be increasing the cost and number of their shares for next year. They underestimated the amount of produce people would take each week, and need to receive an adequate return for their labour. They will also reduce the selection of vegetables available in order to make planning and harvesting easier. This year, the CSA runs from July to December. David stated that they would like to eventually produce for a year round CSA, using greenhouses and cold storage to extend their season.

For an update, see www.greenbergfarm.com and select "Food Guild."

SunRoot Farm

Size of farm- 140 acres
Area cultivated- 2+ acres
Type of share- full and half
of shares- 15 full / 21 half shares
Cost of shares- \$600/ full, \$350/half
Type of CSA- subscription/ farmer driven
of years for CSA- 9
Labour needs- three farm partners, one intern,
WWOOF'ers, friends, volunteers

SunRoot Farm is a 140-acre property that runs along the Kennetcook River in East Hants, Nova Scotia. The farm is owned and run collectively by Evelyn Jones, Steve Law and Jennifer Melanson. There are also two silent partners that live outside of the province. The farmers have been stewards of this land, previously a conventional cattle farm, for 9 years. They produce vegetables and some fruit for the Dartmouth Farmer's Market and a CSA project, while also working part-time off the farm.

SunRoot Farm offers a wide range of organic vegetables—including salad greens, root crops, tomatoes, beans, peppers, and some fruit (mainly apples) for four months, from mid-June to mid-October. (See Harvest Chart on p.27 for a full list of produce) Shares cost \$350 for a half, and \$600 for a full. Evelyn describes the reasoning behind the different shares, "We decided to have two different sized shares to cater to both small and larger families. A few of our members come together to share a full share as a way to save money and still receive the larger quantity of produce. The two sizes work both for us and the members."

For three years, a portion of SunRoot's CSA included a partnership with the department of Community Services. The farmers received funding from Community Services to implement an educational program, which included a children's activities series, a community newsletter, along with workshops on food use and preservation, and environmental stewardship. Families with the Department of Community Services received their weekly bag of veggies from the farm, and return, recipients gained a renewed sense of community and developed valuable life and employment training skills as they became involved in farm activities providing labour, delivery of the shares, and organizing educational and social events.

Although this partnership has ended, SunRoot maintains an extremely high level of community involvement. In 2005, SunRoot founded SunRoot Eco-Solidarity Association, a non-profit organization created in order to facilitate awareness of environmental stewardship, social justice and community development. Through Eco-Solidarity

SunRoot has supported low-income families and single mothers in East Hants in order for them to receive local organic vegetables as part of their CSA program. SunRoot also holds workshops every year. In 2005 and 2006 they held a Garlic Festival on the farm attracting up to 400 people.

10 shares are part of the Eco-Solidarity program and are supported by Kids Action, The East Hants Community Health Board and Kairos. The farmers deliver shares to Halifax on Tuesdays from 4-6 pm and shares in the Eco-Solidarity program are picked up on the farm on Tuesdays. All farmers agreed that it was nice to have direct contact with the people for whom they are growing the food. "It is a lot of work to farm organically on a commercial scale, so hearing positive feedback from our members when they pick up their vegetables affirms our commitment to continue doing the work that we do," Evelyn added.

Evelyn says that the SunRoot farmers would like to focus on the CSA program, instead of the farmer's market, as it is a much more rewarding experience. "As a result, we try to please our members– if they want something grown, we grow it; if they want to have choice in what they receive, we offer an exchange box; and we ask formally and informally for feedback. We also provide a newsletter with each delivery which includes the contents of the shares, farm updates, and recipes as a method of communicating with members."

The biggest challenge these farmers face is having enough produce in the spring. They supplement the weekly shares early in the season with granola, sprouts, herbal tea mixes, herbal vinegars, and baked goods. When asked why they chose CSA as a marketing avenue, Steve stated, "It seemed the most sane and community minded approach to growing food for other people. Financially it is more secure than growing for a market, and we really wanted to focus on growing for local consumption, and building community connections here, as opposed to having to sell everything in the city". The SunRoot farmers plan to expand their non-profit organization, SunRoot Eco-Solidarity Association, and continue to promote awareness, social justice, and community development.

SunRoot Farm
3101 Hwy 236, RR#1 Kennetcook, NS,
B0N 1P0
(902) 632-2497
sunroot@ns.sympatico.ca

Amarosia Organic Gardens

Size of farm- 4 acres
Type of share- large and small
of shares- 70. 1/3 large, 2/3 small
Cost of shares- 22 week -\$550/ large, \$330/small
18 week - \$450/ large, 270/small
Type of CSA- subscription/ farmer driven
of years for CSA- 1

Amarosia Organic Gardens' CSA, known to their members as the Farm Share Program, is a new venture for farmers Rowena Hopkins and Dave Méthot, beginning in 2008. Rowena, a former chemistry teacher and certified organic inspector, and Dave, who comes from an engineering background, operate 22 and 18 week programs that, according to their extremely up-to-date and informative website (<http://www.amarosia.com>), "benefits [their] members by ensuring that they have access to a wide range of certified organic produce, picked at peak ripeness for maximum flavour and nutrition." As farmers, the Farm Share Program allows Rowena and Dave to focus their skills and energy on growing the best possible crops, which are paid for at the beginning of the growing season. According to Rowena, "Having a CSA means increased flow of information in both directions and forming a more stable bond. I would never have a 'pay as you go' system simply because some people keep forgetting to collect their boxes and I have to call to remind them. Since they have paid in advance, if they forget, we don't lose out." Rowena likens the pre-paid CSA system to a gym membership where customers are more apt to make the most of their investments and collect their shares; thus, the farmers are not left with a surplus of vegetables and they get paid for their efforts.

22 week "Farm Share Program" members may receive either large boxes delivered every week for \$550 at the beginning of the season (\$25 per week) or small boxes for \$330 (\$15 per week). 18 week members receive the same options for the same weekly cost, equalling \$450 for large baskets and \$270 for small baskets. Currently, there are 30 members in the month of June and 70 from July until early November, with a waiting list of 150. Large baskets are typically enough for a family or two vegetarians, while small baskets are enough for two people or one vegetable lover. Members also have access to a "swap box" at the collection point where they may exchange vegetables with other members. Currently, 2/3rd of Amarosia Organic Gardens' Farm Share members opt for the small box, while 1/3rd, who are mostly regular customers, receive large boxes. Rowena is optimistic that as some of their newer members get to know the farmers and their products they will upgrade to the large box. The farmers even expect to offer extra large \$40 per week boxes for serious vegetable eaters in the future. Members can choose to pick up their boxes at Sequoia health food store in Moncton on Wednesdays from 4pm to 7pm, Shediac Market on Sundays from 8am to 10am, or the Farm Gate (Grande-

Digue) on Sundays from 10am to noon.

Members receive benefits that extend beyond fresh organic produce. Members also receive a newsletter featuring recipes, tips on preparation, cooking, and preservation of their vegetables, nutritional information, updates on the farm, information on how the food is grown, and the opportunity to communicate with the people growing their food. Additionally, Rowena and Dave offer an annual Farm Share open day, when members are invited to visit the farm and meet other members and the farmers. Also, Rowena and Dave welcome volunteers to the farm for either a whole or half day; thus, people are able to experience the care Rowena and Dave take in growing food first hand and appreciate it more fully. In the future, Rowena and Dave would like to invite people to the farm more frequently.

According to Rowena, the farmers would, "love to see [their] CSA expand, particularly in the Grande-Digue and Hédic area so that [they] can reduce the food miles as much as possible." Concerning the future of the farm, Rowena says that the Dieppe market will remain a staple; however, "in the longer term, [they'd] like to move towards an increasingly CSA based system, not only because of the security it provides for us, but also because of the stronger bond [they] form with [their] members."

Amarosia Organic Gardens also has an education mandate to "help people eat more healthy balanced diets by providing them with food that is delicious and easy to prepare." Rowena also notes that, as farmers, her and David wish to introduce members to foods they would not normally buy, or would not have access to, and provide recipes and instructions for preparation. With this increased variety of produce, the farmers can also produce a diverse selection throughout the season.

According to Rowena, one of the biggest challenges is teaching people about seasonality. In a CSA, customers must accept that their produce is season dependent and their eating habits must change along with the seasonally available food. Rowena notes other causes for customer dissatisfaction as being more vegetables than the customer can eat, fewer vegetables than the customer expects, dislike of certain vegetables, inability to pick up boxes at a fixed place and time, and desire for out of season produce. Along with these potential challenges, Rowena faces the fear that their members' boxes will not always be full. Such a fear pushes the farmers into working incredibly hard to produce enough high quality, safe produce to satisfy their members. Rowena states, "Having a CSA doesn't let you 'off the hook' in terms of effort required. No one wants to write the note 'sorry there wasn't much in the boxes this week, there will be more next week, I hope...' You want to keep your members happy and that means that you still have to work hard to do so."

Rowena advises new farmers to spend a year selling at farmers' markets before delving into a CSA. She suggests that the following you build at farmers' markets is the pool from which your CSA members will come. She also suggests keeping good records of what is available and in what quantity. With this information, a new farmer will have a good idea of how many members he or she can sustain and the sort of diversity he or she can maintain through the growing season; moreover, it is helpful to prepare recipes that include the crops available during each month of harvest. Rowena credits well-placed

publicity as a key to Amarosia Organic Gardens' Farm Share program's success. According to Rowena, "A well written article in a well read local paper is worth its weight in gold. All it takes is a carefully written press release. Ours was the first 'membership based CSA' in the Moncton area, which made the story newsworthy. Even if there are already CSAs in your area, choose an angle that makes your unique."

On their website, the farmers sum up the advantages of the CSA to farmers and consumers:

We believe that hard working, environmentally conscious food growers should receive a stable income. By buying a share of the harvest in advance of the growing season you enable us to plan what to plant and harvest. This means that we can invest our time and efforts into growing the best quality food for you, instead of worrying about whether we will be able to sell it.

We also believe that hard working environmentally conscious food eaters should have access to fresh, nutritionally rich, uncontaminated foods and should not be limited to the selection available at the supermarkets.

By buying a share of the harvest you can spend your time trying out our simple, delicious, seasonal recipes and eating them with your friends and family, instead of worrying about what to buy and where to find it.

Amarosia Organic Gardens
Rowena Hopkins and Dave Méthot
469 Route 530, Grande-Digue, NB
E4R 5E1 Canada
info@amarosia.com
tel/fax: 1 506 533 1087



Fortune Organics

Size of farm- 40 acres
Area cultivated- 2 1/2
Type of share- One size
of shares- 40
Cost of shares- \$25 per week
Type of CSA- subscription/ farmer driven
of years for CSA- 3

For three years, Becky Townshend has been exploring a sort of market/CSA hybrid with Fortune Organics' unique CSA program. Because community supported agriculture is a relatively new idea in Souris, Prince Edward Island Becky feels that a week-by-week payment is more suitable for her customers. Every Wednesday, customers pay 25 dollars for her "one size fits all" basket.

Although customers sometimes forget to pick up their baskets, Becky doesn't worry too much. Each uncollected basket is donated to the local food bank in the customer's name. This gesture is greatly appreciated by Becky's members and allows her to give back to her community. As the idea of community supported agriculture becomes more widely spread in Souris and Fortune Organics' program evolves, Becky hopes to develop a more farmer-protected model of distribution.

Fortune Organics' CSA program has already received national recognition in the form of an article in the Globe and Mail by chef Michael Smith. In this article, Smith details the benefits of community supported agriculture and notes the joy of receiving a box of fresh seasonal produce, including some delicious surprises, from Becky's farm. Becky also partners with other local organic farms and offers products, such as strawberries and shiitake mushrooms, in her well-stocked weekly boxes. Becky notes that in the small community of Souris there is a serious interest in organics and this interest will only grow with the development of programs like Fortune Organics' CSA.

Fortune Organics
Becky Townshend
Highway 308, #74
Souris, PE
COA 2B0
beckytown@gmail.com

Nature's Route Farm / Sackville CSA

Size of farm- 15 acres
Area cultivated- 2
Type of share- Full / Half
of shares- 60
Type of CSA - Subscription/farmer-based
of years as CSA - 2

Upon leaving their respective careers in the Canadian NAVY, Kent and Ruth Coates settled into a beautiful farm in Point de Bute, New Brunswick. After years of aspiring to start what Kent calls a “subscription-based” farm system, Kent and Ruth were approached by a group of community members from nearby Sackville, New Brunswick seeking the service Kent and Ruth wished to provide. Although Nature's Route's land was not yet prepared, Kent and Ruth happily accepted 20 members to what would be called Sackville CSA and farmed a borrowed piece of land from a nearby property belonging to Kent's parents.

In its second year, Sackville CSA has blossomed significantly. Kent and Ruth's own farmland now produces much more variety in higher quantities and serves 60 members during peak season. Rather than just providing local vegetables in the summer, Kent and Ruth also offer a winter package that includes a variety of storage vegetables. Pickup times are on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4 until 6 pm at the Cackling Goose, a Sackville health food store. Kent notes that although the 20 members of Sackville CSA's first year were already a tight-knit group, this year's significantly larger group has enjoyed the social experience of gathering together to pick up vegetables, which Kent notes are typically picked the day they are received by members to ensure maximum freshness. Members treat the vegetable pickup as a sort of meet and greet, where they are able to both enjoy each other's company and become acquainted with the people who grow their food.

Unclaimed vegetables are donated to the local food bank, and Kent and Ruth return to the farm with no waste. Kent appreciates this connection to the farmer that his members feel and notes that this connection to the farm is something that has been lost to many people. According to Kent, this connection his members have to Nature's Route Farm recalls days when everybody knew or was related to a farmer and understood the work that goes into producing quality food. Kent also invites members to come to the farm to help out with various chores, such as weeding or removing potato bugs and typically ends these days with a potluck meal.

According to Kent, the CSA system makes the most sense for Nature's Route farm. Kent suggests that selling through CSA rather than farmers' markets allows the farmer to avoid the disappointment of driving back to the farm with a truck full of unsold vegetables that will likely go to waste. With Sackville CSA, Nature Route's products are sold at the beginning of the season; moreover, Kent and Ruth are able to pick only what they need to.

Sackville CSA currently has a waiting list and sees a bright future for its CSA program. Kent and Ruth are open to inviting new producers into the program, which will allow it to expand significantly and take on more new members. Kent hopes that the current interest in community supported agriculture and supporting local farmers will continue and allow Sackville CSA to grow even more.

Nature's Route Farm

Kent and Ruth Coates
785 Route 16
Point De Bute, NB E4L 2P1
naturerf@nb.sympatico.ca



Sample CSA literature

Brochures

It is important to provide a brochure that explains what CSA is all about and sets realistic expectations for members. The brochure should be as specific as possible, listing vegetables (and other products) that will be offered and approximate harvest times, so that consumers do not expect sweet corn in May or strawberries in August. The cost of the shares, the size of the shares (such as full, half, and seasonal), and delivery times and places are all very important pieces of information.

Newsletters

Some CSA farms include a weekly or bi-weekly newsletter with a list of produce, farm updates, recipes and tips for using and storing the produce. Watershed Organic Farm in Princeton, New Jersey, offers a member's handbook which members receive when they sign on. The handbook addresses many commonly asked questions and helps members have realistic expectations. The subjects covered in the handbook include:

1. What to do when you get to the farm (parking, containers, weighing food, the exchange table, information about you-pick crops etc.)
2. Splitting a share.
3. Children on the farm– keep your eye on them at all times.
4. Safety on the farm– electric fencing, rodent holes, tractors and equipment.
5. Organic pesticides and how they work.
6. Volunteering.
7. Information about the Veggie Hot Line.
8. How to care for produce (for each vegetable)
9. Sample recipes

Sample newsletter from SunRoot Farm's First CSA delivery of the year:

Welcome to SunRoot Farm's Community Shared Agriculture Program 2001!

Issue #1 June 27, 2001

SunRoot Farm– 3101 Hwy 236, RR#1 Kennetcook, B0N 1P0
902-632-2497 sunroot@ns.sympatico.ca

We are excited to be including in your vegetable pick-up this week:

- Spinach (in a bag)
- Lettuce (heads)
- Salad Mix (including: oakleaf, simpson, and romaine lettuces in addition to

arugula and edible flowers- calendula and rose petals)
- Alfalfa Sprouts (which are high in protein, essential amino acids, vitamins and minerals plus they also taste good in salads!)
- Baby Greens (swiss chard and kale—we prefer to steam or stir-fry them)
- Garlic Scapes (dice and add to food for garlic flavour)
- Fresh Herbs: original oregano; aromatic thyme; and tasty basil
- Herbal Tea (an organic mixture of nettle, mint and sweet fern—just add 1 Tbsp of dried herbs to a cup of boiling water, steep 10 minutes, and strain)
Plus for full shares: Granola (organic ingredients include: oats, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, flax seeds, oil, honey, & raisins. Non-organic ingredients: cinnamon and fennel)

Sample CSA introduction letter:

TO: ORGANIC CO-OP MEMBERS AND PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS
FROM: MIKE RABINOWITZ AND JUDY LIEN

Hi,

As usual, we have been thinking about our gardens and the Veggie-Coop. Our thoughts seemed more like fantasy than reality until the last few days. However, things are beginning to happen in the garden. The garlic is beginning to creep out of the ground, three months later than last year, but creeping it is. The rhubarb should wake up real soon now.

Anita Best again has agreed to be the Veggie Coop Coordinator. Address all your membership questions, cheques, etc. to Anita. Questions regarding non-membership garden matters may be addressed to either Anita, Judy, or Mike.

Our goal is to break even and to pay our employees a reasonable wage! Both of us lost money last year and neither of us takes a salary from the co-op. At our peak, we supplied 80 families with vegetables in 2000 and we would like to expand a small bit in 2001. We would be grateful if you would pass this letter on to a friend!

We hope to provide a service comparable to last year. We are increasing the membership fees by 10 percent to cover the cost of the coordinator and increasing fuel prices. We forgot to do both last year.

With the exception of the one membership group that paid by cash, we would very much appreciate it if you paid your membership by June 8 using one or more post dated cheques. We don't even care if you use as many as eight post-dated cheques. We are just trying to minimize the administrative hassle and the likelihood of unexpected losses.

Thank you for your loyal support and cooperation in the past! We hope to see you soon.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICES FOR 16 WEEKS

Previous Member: \$330 OR \$82.50 per month

New Member: \$370* OR \$92.50 per month

*This \$40.00 difference will pay the cost for 2 large nylon canvas bags (manufactured in NF) in which your veggies will be delivered.

SPECIAL NOTES

Pick-up time is Tuesday at 9:30 PM in the MUN Science Building interior parking lot or at the Lien farm on either Tuesday nights or Wednesdays (the Lien's now have a chill room). Please let us know your preference.

Because of the late start, June 26 is our goal start date. However, if the weather stays hot, we might be able to start a week earlier. Similarly, if the weather again turns cold, we might have to start a week later. We will give you at least one week's notice before starting.

If you wish to share the bag of vegetables (and the expenses) and do not have someone in mind, we will try to help you find a co-op partner. Anita would appreciate receiving cheques from both yourself and your partner at the same time. One of the partners will be the designated contact person. Partners will be responsible for divvying up the bag of vegetables themselves.

VACATIONERS

If you will be away some Tuesdays please let us know in advance and we will add your name for an extra week or two at the end of the 16-week period OR allow you to reduce your subscription by \$15.00 for each of the week(s) you are away. Since some of our subscribers were tardy in notifying us last year, this year we will insist on being notified at least one week in advance for the week(s) you will be away.

OUR PRODUCE AND PRICES

The Organic Farm (Mike and Melba Rabinowitz) and the Lien Family Farm (Judy and Jon Lien) are certified organic farms through OCPP. Over the last 20 years both farms have built soil and learned techniques that have made it possible to produce a quite unique variety of vegetables for Newfoundland.

Our new members should note that our prices are considerably below those offered by similar organic operations located in other provinces. Depending on the vegetable, our charges are 10 percent to 75 percent cheaper. Supermarkets, grocery stores, and specialty

shops are now adding organic vegetables to their produce departments but they look for a 50-100% profit margin over the farmers' prices. Last year the Lien Farm supplied some vegetables to Food for Thought, while the Organic Farm supplied some vegetables to Belbin's Grocery, the Cabot Square Dominion, and the Coop. Those of you who prefer the convenience of shopping at a retail store rather than being a member of the Veggie Coop and want a somewhat restricted variety of our organic produce, might consider using one or more of these retail outlets. Note that at these outlets we cannot guarantee quantities, varieties, prices, or even whether or not they will continue to carry our produce. However, we enjoyed very good relations with these retailers last year and hope they will continue to carry our produce.

As usual, we are experimenting with some new vegetables this year which include 5 new varieties of garlic and one new variety of arugula. Among the vegetables we introduced over the last few years, we intend to supply artichokes, oriental greens, shallots, and tomatillos.



PRODUCE AVAILABLE AND PRICE LIST FOR 2001

Veggie Co-op
Arugula \$2.20/bag
Artichokes \$1.90 small size,
\$2.45 large size
Beans \$3.50/lb
Beetroot \$0.75/lb
Black currants \$3.30/cup
Bok Choy \$1.55/lb
Broccoli \$2.40/bunch
Brussels Sprouts \$4.80/stalk
Cabbage \$0.65/lb
Carrots \$1.75/bunch
Carrots (baby) \$1.20/bag
Cauliflower \$1.30/lb
Celeriac \$1.65/root
Celery \$1.80/stalk
Chard \$2.40/bag
Chinese Cabbage \$1.65/lb
Chinese Radish \$1.30/lb
Chives \$1.20/bunch
Corn Salad \$1.20/bag
Cress \$1.20/bag/ bunch
Cucumbers \$0.80/cucumber
Dill \$1.20/bunch
Elephant garlic \$7.25/lb
Fennel Roots \$2.20

Garlic (regular) \$0.80/bulb or
\$3.30/lb
Gooseberries \$6.00/quart
Green Onions \$0.45 each
Herbs (assorted) \$1.20/bunch
Kohlrabi \$1.55 each
Leeks \$1.30 each
Lettuce \$1.55/head
Mesclun Mix \$2.40/bag
Mixed Greens \$2.40/bag
Mustard Greens \$1.40/small bag,
\$2.40/large bag
Onions \$0.90/lb
Oriental Greens \$2.75/bag
Parsley \$1.40/bunch
Parsnip \$1.80/lb
Peas (pod) \$6.60/lb
Peppers \$0.80 each
Potatoes \$0.75/lb
Pumpkin \$0.55/lb
Radicchio \$1.20/small bag,
Radish (regular) \$0.80/bunch
Rhubarb \$0.90/lb
Shallots \$5.50/lb
Spinach \$2.75/bag
Sprouts \$2.25/tray
Summer Squash \$1.10/lb
Tatsoi \$1.20 each
Tomatoes (red) \$2.50/lb
Tomatoes (green) \$1.80/lb
Tomatillos \$2.50/lb
Turnip.....&0.70/lb
Winter Squash \$1.00/lb
Zucchini \$1.10/lb

PRODUCE AVAILABILITY– SunRoot Farm 2001

JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER
Kale	Lettuce	Garlic	Beans	Potatoes
Salad mix	Turnip	Peas	Summer squash	Carrots
Beet greens	Parsley	Salad mix	Swiss chard	Swish chard
Garlic scapes	Peas	Summer squash	Potatoes	Kale
Radishes	Summer squash	Beans	Carrots	Peas
Sprouts	Broccoli	Broccoli	Green pepper	Tomatoes
Spinach	Cabbage	Carrots	Cucumbers	Broccoli
Greens	Green peppers	Apples	Tomatoes	Apples
	Radishes	Potatoes	Peas	Salad mix



Sample Crop Failure Policy

SunRoot Farm uses organic methods to promote plant growth and build soil fertility. Notwithstanding our best efforts, ultimately, nature plays the most important role in our garden. We are committed to bringing you the freshest, best tasting vegetables to the best of our abilities. If one crop is adversely affected by disease or pests, we will supplement it with another crop. We also recognize that there may be extreme circumstances beyond our control such as a natural disaster (for example, a severe drought) that could result in crop failure. In the event of major crop failure, we propose the following:

- 25% failure = no rebate
- 50% failure = a voluntary rebate of 25% of the outstanding share (For example if 3 months have passed, we would rebate \$25 from the remaining \$100 for a full share)
- 75% failure = voluntary rebate equaling 35% of the outstanding share
- A total crop failure affecting 100% of our vegetables = a voluntary rebate of 50% of the outstanding share. This is our proposed refund policy in the event of crop failure. We thought it important to address this possibility. However, we are open to further discuss how best to address this issue.

Sample Evaluation

Evaluations are an important method of gaining feedback from CSA members. They provide useful information for next year's planning.

Quality/Amount/Price

- 1) What were your 3 favourite veggies?
- 2) What were your 3 least favourite veggies?
- 3) What produce would you have liked more of?
- 4) What produce would you have liked less of?
- 5) Did you throw anything away? If so, what? How often?
- 6) Is there anything that you would have like to receive that you didn't?
- 7) Do you think the amount you received over the season is good value for the price?
- 8) For the quality?
- 9) Were there any vegetables in share that you were unfamiliar with?

Delivery/Pick-up

- 1) Was the pick up location convenient for you?
- 2) Was the pick up time convenient for you?

Newsletter

- 1) Did you find the newsletter useful?
- 2) Did you use the recipes provided in the newsletter?

General

- 1) What did you like best about being involved in the CSA?
- 2) What did you like least about being involved in the CSA?
- 3) What does being involved in a CSA program mean to you?

Next year

- 1) Are you interested in receiving a share next year?
 - 2) If yes, would you like to be more or less involved in:
Planning farm activities more less
Planning for the growing season more less
Participating in farm activities more less
- Please feel free to add additional comments.
Thank you for your feedback!!

CSA RESOURCES

PUBLICATIONS

CSA Farm Network, 1996. Steve Gilman. Materials gathered during the formation of a Northeast network to link all CSA farms in the region, including resources, general information and survey results. \$6.

CSA FarmNetwork Vol. II, 1997. Includes additional research results and new information. \$8. Available from CSA Farm Network, 130 Ruckytucks Rd., Stillwater, NY 12170. (518) 583-4613 or NOFA-NY.

Community Related Agriculture, Brochure outlining the organization and planning of community farms, CSA and subscription Farms. 10 pages. \$1.00 + SASE. Available from the BioDynamic Association, PO Box 550, Kimberton, PA 19422. (800) 516-7797.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): An Annotated Bibliography and Resource Guide, Suzanne DeMuth. 1993, updated per request. Free. Available from the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC). National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD 20705-2351, afsic@nal.usda.gov

Community Supported Agriculture, Making the Connection, UC Cooperative Extension. Guidebook covers CSA design, recruiting members, creating production and harvest plans, setting share prices and legal issues; incorporates ideas and strategies of successful CSA farms. \$25 + \$5 S/H. Available from UC Cooperative Extension, attn: CSA Handbook, 11477 E. Ave., Auburn, CA 95603.

CSA FoodBook, David Stern and Elizabeth Henderson. 1994. A guide to eating, cooking and storing 70 small fruits and vegetables typical of CSA farms. \$9.00 + \$2.25 S/H. Rose Valley Farm, PO Box 149, Rose, NY 14542.

Farms of Tomorrow—Community Supported Farms, Farm Supported Communities, Trauger Groh and Steven McFadden. 1990. Farms of Tomorrow-Revisited, 1997, Basic text and updated version on CSA in general and on several BioDynamic farms in particular. Available from the BioDynamic Assoc.

Our Field: A Manual for Community Shared Agriculture, Tamsyn Rowley and Chris Beeman. 1994. How farmers can better connect with community members and how community members can have more influence over how food is produced. Beginning and marketing CSA projects; best agricultural practices suited to CSA; includes appendix of CSA farms in Canada. 89 pages. \$15 Canadian. Tamsyn Rowley, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G2W1. (519) 824-4120 ext. 8480, fax (519) 763-4686.

Rebirth of the Small Family Farm: A Handbook for Starting a Successful Organic Farm Based on the Community Supported Agriculture Concept, Bob and Bonnie Gregson. 1996. Tells one family's story of beginning and operating a small, organic vegetable farm run on CSA model; managing small scale farms; start up requirements, crop selection, marketing strategies, and related topics. Includes resource list. Available from IMG Associates, PO Box 2542, Vashon Island, WA 98070. (206) 463-9065

Sharing the Harvest: A Guide to Community-Supported Agriculture , 1999, by Elizabeth Henderson with the late Robyn Van En. Available from Chelsea Green publishing–www.chelseagreen.comThis book is a followup to the first how to manual by Robyn Van En and much expanded. Many examples of how different CSA farms succeed plus great historical background and context.

What's Your Share Worth? Some Comparisons of CSA Share Cost vs. Retail Produce Value, J.P. Cooley and D.A. Lass. 1996. An extract of Cooley's Master's thesis covering three CSA farms in Massachusetts over one season. Available from CSA Farm Network, 130 Ruckytucks Rd., Stillwater, NY 12170. (518) 583-4613.

PERIODICALS

Biodynamics: A Bimonthly Magazine Centered on Health and Wholeness, Classifieds offer lists of positions for CSA growers, etc. 6 issues \$35. BioDynamic Assoc., PO Box 550, Kimberton, PA 19442. (800) 516-7797.

Canadian Organic Growers Magazine, The quarterly journal of the Canadian Organic Growers Association includes sustainable agriculture projects, ideas and growing tips from across Canada. See COG in organization section.

The Ram's Horn, (11 x year) Provides information and analysis of the whole food system, Ram's Horn, S6, C27, RR#1 Sorrento, BC, V0E 2W0, [brewster\(a\)ramshorn.ca](mailto:brewster(a)ramshorn.ca)
www.ramshorn.ca

Growing for Market: News and Ideas for Market Gardeners, Features regular stories on CSA issues. Annual subscription \$27. Available from Fairplain Publications, PO Box 3747, Lawrence, KS 66046. (913) 841-2259.

The Community Farm: A Voice for Community Supported Agriculture, 3480 Potter Road, Bear Lake, MI 49614., fsfarm@mufn.org Jim Sluyter and Jo Meller editors, Cdn \$26/year subscription. Practical information on CSA.

INTERNET DISCUSSION GROUP

Internet discussion group on all aspects of CSA for members and farmers. For free subscription, send e-mail message to listproc@prairienet.org stating "subscribe csa-L (your e-mail address)." Do not use the quotes or parentheses. Once a subscriber, to send a message to the entire list, address it to csa-L@prairienet.org.

WEBSITES

- www.csacenter.org–Robyn Van En Center website– thorough overview of CSA
http://www.umassvegetable.org/food_farming_systems/csa/index.html
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>

ORGANIZATIONS

National

- Canadian Organic Growers – Canada's national membership-based education and networking organization representing farmers, gardeners and consumers in all provinces. Extensive lending library– 323 Chapel St., Ottawa, ON, K1N 7Z2, 1 (888) 375-7383
www.cog.ca
- Ecological Agriculture Projects – Great online resource! McGill University, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, QC, H9X 3V9, 514-398-7771, info@eap.mcgill.ca,
<http://eap.mcgill.ca>
- Ecological Farmer's Association of Ontario – Information source for CSA projects and ecological agriculture– Box 127, Wroxeter, ON, N0G 2X0, www.efao.ca
- Equiterre – a non-profit dedicated to ecological, socially just choices through action, education and research. Equiterre promotes CSA to consumers, and educates farmers. 2177, rue Mason, bureau 317, Montreal, H2H 1B1, sara@equiterre.qc.ca
www.equiterre.qc.ca
- Farmfolk/Cityfolk – Organization promotes local, fresh, seasonal foods, grown using farming practices that contribute to the health of the planet– Farmfolk/ Cityfolk 106 , 131 Water St., Vancouver, BC, V6B 4M3, www.ffcf.bc.ca
- Food share –A food security organization that works on food issues from 'field to table'– it focuses on the entire system that puts food on our table: from the growing, processing, and distribution of food to its purchasing, cooking and consumption–
www.foodshare.net
- SOIL –A farm apprenticeship placement program with national listings, matching any farms with sustainable/organic practices with apprentices for 8 weeks or more.
www.soilapprenticeships.org
- Toronto Food Policy Council – A sub-committee of the Toronto Board of Health that develops policies at municipal and provincial levels to support farmers–
www.city.toronto.on.ca/health/tfpc_index.htm
- WWOOF – A farm and volunteer program with national listings, matching many CSA

farms with willing volunteers for short term work in exchange for room and board.
WWOOF Canada, RR#2, S.18, C.9, Nelson, BC, V1L 5P5, wwoofcan@shaw.ca, 250-354-4417, www.wwoof.ca

Regional

- ACORN – A regional network for farmers, gardeners, consumers, and industry professionals, 1-866-32-ACORN, admin@acornorganic.org www.acornorganic.org
- Weston A. Price Foundation – Toronto and Nova Scotia chapters provide information on sources of organic and whole foods– www.westonaprice.org
silvanacastillo@auracom.com, (902) 257-2428

United States

- BioDynamic Association, PO Box 550 Kimberton , PA 19442. (800) 516-7797, internet www.bionet.com/~claymont/bd/assoc.html A major promoter of CSA in North America, publishing a bi-monthly newsletter, sponsoring CSA conferences, providing catalog of related resources and maintaining a large CSA database.
- CSA Works, 115 Bay Road, Hadley, MA 01035. (413)586-5133. Provides assistance to the farmers of tomorrow in locating the tools and techniques needed to run efficient CSA enterprises. Coordinated by Michael Docter, Linda Hildebrand and Dan Kaplan.
- Equity Trust Inc., 539 Beach Pond Road, Voluntown, CT 06384. (860) 376-6174. A community development organization that has created a revolving–loan fund for CSA farms to acquire and develop agricultural land with appropriate conservation easements and/or other tenure arrangements that serve both farmers and communities; provides technical assistance and advice to CSA farms on land tenure issues.



Eight Tips From the Experts to Make Your CSA Project a Success

by Amunda Salm

To me, ecological agriculture is a way of having more control over knowing where my food comes from because then I know that the methods of production reflect greater environmental responsibility. As a graduate student in Ecological Agriculture, I chose as my thesis topic to look at community shared agriculture (CSA), the strongest link between Canadians and their food unless one is producing oneself. I wanted to determine, ultimately, whether CSA provides consumers with greater access to information about where their food comes from, production methods and so on. To do this, in October and November of last year, I sent a socio-economic survey to all CSA producers on the list of the CSA Resource Centre in Wroxeter, Ontario, asking for their perspectives on this form of marketing. I also personally interviewed as many of these producers as possible in the vicinity of Ottawa and southern Ontario. The questionnaire tried to inventorise how CSA looks in Canada, and then to look at the various ways consumer members become involved in the farm beyond simply buying food. Forty current and six former CSA operators responded to the survey. All except two use organic methods, and over half are certified. A quarter of the responding growers choose CSA as their main marketing strategy, and three depend on it for their total household income. The membership base for this sample averaged 42 members, with the largest CSA having 112 members. Many interesting issues came up in this sample based on growers' experiences, and I have summarized the more pertinent findings in the form of advice to new producers. Since this study concentrated on the voices of growers, it would be interesting to see some research conducted among consumer members of CSAs in order to get their viewpoint on this marketing system. Here is what experienced CSA operators suggest to those considering this type of marketing (Quotes have been taken directly from the surveys):

1. Talk to other CSA farmers

The most helpful source of information for setting up a CSA comes from other CSA operators. In addition, it is best to experience farming (e.g., by apprenticing on a CSA or by market gardening) first in order to see if it suits your needs and abilities. Also, if you have very little growing experience, don't start right away with a CSA.

2. Start small

Many stressed that the best way to get into CSA is to start with a small group and to experiment for the first year to find a manageable cropping plan. "Realize the difference between farming and gardening; make sure you can do a 30-40 crop polyculture before you sign up 100 shares." Also important are capital ("You can't expect to make money from the start"), another source of income and long-term access to land.

3. Be prepared to work very hard

The first year is the hardest, but it gets easier with time; for example, with time members

will spread the word to other potential customers about the CSA, and thus do your recruiting for you. In this sample, it was found that most of the workload in CSA is carried by the farmers and their families. Half of the CSAs receive some help from their members, averaging to 7% of the workload (varying from 0.5% to 40% of total workload). Two-thirds of the CSAs also depend on hired and nonmember volunteer labour contributions, averaging to 23% of the workload. When members contribute, they help in distribution, harvesting and outreach.

Although having members experience the farm firsthand is part of the idea behind CSA, many of the farmers find that this requires a lot of their energy to organize. Some ideas were provided on how to get members to participate more: setting up compulsory work as part of every share (e.g., 2.5 days a season; one day of work or pay \$25 for someone else to do it); setting up working shares for a reduced rate (a quarter reported at least one member joining in this way); linking participation to learning a skill (organic or food preservation workshops); or linking work with social activities (e.g., "weed & feed").

4. Try to set up a core group

Half of the CSAs had managed to set up a core group of members they can regularly consult, especially for help in times of heavy workload and outreach to members. For example, two members on one CSA took over all the tasks involved in providing a newsletter to members; another set up a committee to manage the garden's irrigation system. As a variation on a core group, another CSA (which works on a pay-as-you-order basis) has set up a rotating committee of members coordinating orders and drop-off outlets: "independently they need to figure out order details, and do the marketing for the farm themselves."

5. Research consumer base in area

One of the biggest problems was found to be distance to members. It is difficult to build up a strong membership base from the local communities. "Do some preliminary marketing research to ensure there is a market. We have had enormous amounts of publicity yet have only TWO local share-members out of over 100. It may not be feasible in very rural areas unless there's a city nearby to draw from" (3-year CSA). Also, "in some rural areas, if people are into organics, they will grow it themselves." One 7-year CSAer has even experienced adverse reactions to CSA and organics in his local farming community: "If you live in a conventional area, you confront hostility." When members are scattered in different locations, then a lot of time and finances become shifted towards transportation. And if members are far away, it is even more difficult to get them to become involved in the farm. One 5-year CSA operator stated that he finds communities with a high proportion of 25- to 35-year olds with children to be the best to target.

6. Depend on many marketing outlets

As mentioned above, most CSAers depend on various strategies to sell their produce. From a 6-year CSA: "Always grow a CUSHION of excess veggies, with some backup form of marketing for excess."

7. Try to carry on through the winter

In Canada, the CSA season is very short – 4 months on average in this sample. Very few (7 CSAs) offer produce as part of the CSA "deal" through the winter, and 6 others keep selling to members on a separate pay-as-you-order basis. Most CSAs concentrate on fresh vegetables and herbs, with less than half offering fruits/berries and storage crops. Very few offer other products such as flowers (8), value-added foods (8 – e.g., pesto, jam, maple syrup, etc.), chicken and eggs (3) within their CSA. As one 5-year CSAer states: "Don't stop during the winter – members forget about you – you should try to keep the CSA going once a month during the winter. There is enough organic stuff out there, fresh or for canning . . ."

8. Cooperate with other farmers

Many mentioned the difficulty of providing a wide diversity within such a short time. Sharing the risks with consumer members includes the risk of failed crops. Half of the responding CSAs keep to this principle, communicating difficulties to members. However, many are not comfortable with this concept and buy from or exchange with other farmers to supplement losses. Three of the responding CSAs include more than one farmer/farm working for a common membership base, which reduces the stress of a wide cropping plan and allows for more flexibility in times of crop failures. The drawbacks would be less of a personal connection between members and a farm, as well as a less diverse (and possibly sustainable) farm system.

What of members?

All but one CSA operator responded that awareness about agriculture/food issues is raised amongst their members. Also, most (37) find that members are at least a bit interested in being involved in joint decisions about food distribution, outreach and problem solving. None of the responding farmers found that they had less control over their work when compared to other marketing strategies. In fact, they provided many examples of positive solutions coming from discussions with their members (e.g.: loans, suggestions on how to make distribution system more efficient, members taking on tasks, accepting that crop appearance might be affected by weather or pests, etc.). "A lot more things become possible when a group of people get a little enthusiasm for past success (i.e., a good harvest year) and start to take some ownership or responsibility for the future success of something like this. In other words, they seem to get better as they mature." (7-year CSA).

One of the conclusions of this study was that there is a need to establish a strong network of CSA in Canada in order to share information and experiences better. The CSA Resource Centre has recently moved to Ecological Agriculture Projects (EAP), just outside Montreal. If you would like to get more information on CSA or a longer version of this study, contact: Ecological Agriculture Projects (see resource list for contact information).

copyright Amunda Salm 1997. Reprinted with the author's permission.

This publication has been produced with funding from ACORN as a guide for those interested in the development of community supported agriculture in Atlantic Canada. This guide features a wealth of information such as history, case studies, sample literature, and a resource list that is designed to inform consumers and farmers about the possibility of participating in community supported agriculture.

