

4.0 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

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Introduction: Community Supported Agriculture

UNIT OVERVIEW

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a rapidly developing agricultural and community development movement that serves a dual purpose: as a new and financially stable marketing opportunity for growers, and as a way to reconnect consumers with the sources of their food and foster closer personal relationships between farmers and their communities.

This unit on direct marketing through Community Supported Agriculture introduces students to multiple aspects of the CSA model. Each unit contains appendices that include student exercises and/or information that the instructor can use as visual examples and student handouts.

Unit 4.1: "History of CSA" explores the history and development of the community supported agriculture movement, introducing students to the principal figures and the economic and social values that have directed the growth of this model of sustainable agriculture in Europe, Japan, and North America.

Unit 4.2: "CSA Structure and Organization" examines the various forms that a CSA operation can take, from those run by a farmer to those run by the community. It discusses variations on the CSA model, examines some of the challenges of running a CSA project, and lists training opportunities for learning CSA farming skills.

Unit 4.3: "CSA Outreach" looks at strategies for recruiting CSA members, developing low-income memberships, developing a core group, and producing outreach materials such as brochures, pledge forms, and newsletters.

Unit 4.4: "CSA Administration" introduces the nuts and bolts of organizing the administrative details of a CSA operation, including advertising, correspondence with CSA members, billing, and creating databases.

Unit 4.5: "CSA Crop Planning" covers the basic considerations involved in developing the type of diverse mixed fruit and vegetable operation required for CSA production. This unit also includes a crop planning exercise and a number of appendices that can be used to develop a crop plan and track CSA field production.

Unit 4.6: "CSA Crop Rotation and Soil Fertility" introduces the principles and practices of crop rotation, examines the agronomic and economic benefits of this important farming practice, and offers a case study based on rotation cycles at the UCSC Farm.

Unit 4.7: "CSA Harvest and Post-Harvest Handling" outlines the techniques involved in successful harvesting and post-harvest handling of crops for CSA operations, including information on packing CSA shares, harvest record keeping, and harvest crew management.

MODES OF INSTRUCTION

> LECTURES (1–2 hours each) and STUDENT EXERCISE (Unit 4.5)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

CONCEPTS

- Historical development of community supported agriculture in Europe, Japan, and the U.S.
- Various CSA structures and organizational models
- Opportunities and challenges presented by the CSA model
- Techniques for recruiting CSA members and administering a CSA
- CSA crop planning considerations
- Principles and practices of crop rotation for a mixed vegetable CSA operation
- Harvesting and post-harvest handling considerations for a CSA operation

SKILLS

- Ability to develop a basic crop plan for a mixed vegetable CSA operation

Resources

BOOKS

Bringing the Food Economy Home: The Social, Ecological and Economic Benefits of Local Food, by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Todd Merrifield, and Steven Gorelick. International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC), 2000.

An ISEC report showing that the globalization of food is not only undermining farmers and damaging the environment, but also posing a real threat to human health, food security, local economies, and, ultimately, consumers.

Bringing the Food Economy Home: Local Alternatives to Global Agribusiness, by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Todd Merrifield, and Steven Gorelick. Zed Books, 2002.

Based on the ISEC report (above), this book includes some new and updated information, a resource guide, and an index.

Farms of Tomorrow Revisited: Community Supported Farms – Farm Supported Communities, by Trauger Groh and S. McFadden. The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1997.

Farms of Tomorrow Revisited provides an introductory overview of the need for alternative farming systems and provides multiple case studies of successful CSA operations. Contains useful overviews of alternative land tenure options for CSA producers. Sample budgets for a CSA operation are included, along with suggestions for the formation and management of farmers' markets.

From Asparagus to Zucchini: A Guide to Farm-Fresh Seasonal Produce. Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition, 1996.

The main section of the book features 51 different vegetable and herb sections. Each section includes nutritional, historical, and storage information as well as cooking tips and specific recipes—over 385 recipes in all. Includes essays that address how food choices fit into our economy, environment, and communities. Includes information on home food preservation and an extensive resource section and recipe index.

From the Ground Up: Rethinking Industrial Agriculture, by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Peter Goering, and John Page. ISEC and Zed Books, 2000.

An analysis of the roots of the environmental, social, and economic crises facing modern industrial agriculture, and a review of more sustainable options.

Local Harvest: A Multi-Farm CSA Handbook, by Jill Perry and Scott Franzblau. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), revised 2010.

Offers straightforward guidance on an innovative practice that is helping CSAs stay strong and viable over the long term: cooperative marketing. The 130-page book details how farmers in CSA cooperatives can best work together to market their produce, including advice on staffing, volunteer boards, distribution, legal topics and other practical information. Available for free download at <http://www.sare.org/publications/csa/csa.pdf>

Local Harvest: Delicious Ways to Save the Planet, by Kate de Selencourt, with a foreword by Helena Norberg-Hodge. Lawrence and Wishart, 1997.

Outlines the array of benefits—for people and the environment—that responsible food production and marketing can bring. It also shows that good food costs less when it's local.

A Share in the Harvest – An Action Manual for Community Supported Agriculture. Soil Association, 2001. (Ringbound manual)

A practical guide to support those—including farmers/growers, consumers, and activists—who wish to develop community supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives. The manual uses experiences from CSA farms in the United Kingdom and overseas and includes information on CSA models, membership, finance and legal issues, land and share issues, grant advice, and useful publications.

A Share in the Harvest – A Feasibility Study for Community Supported Agriculture. Soil Association, 2001.

This feasibility study looks at how community supported agriculture (CSA) can help in the development of local and sustainable food economies. It investigates community involvement in farming around the globe and in a number of established and planned CSA initiatives in England. Eleven case studies provide the basis of discussion, along with relevant policy recommendations and areas for future research.

Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture, by Elizabeth Henderson; with Robyn Van En. Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 2007.

A revised and expanded version of this excellent introduction to the CSA model. Covers all aspects of CSA from organization to production and distribution considerations, including how "community support" may be applied to other industries.

Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economics for Security in an Unstable World, by R. J. Douthwaite and Richard Douthwaite. Green Books, 1998.

Chronicles the many efforts by regular people to recapture their economies and their resources from sprawling, globalized systems. Chapter 6—Living from the Land—has a section about CSA as well as Buschberghof. Available online in its entirety at www.feasta.org/documents/shortcircuit/index.htm.

WEB SITES

The Alliance for Sustainability:

www.mtn.org/iasa/csalist.html

A non-profit sustainability advocacy group that brings together diverse businesses, government agencies, academic institutions, religious organizations, nonprofits, community groups, and individuals in support of sustainability initiatives, including CSA. Maintains a comprehensive listing of Midwest regional CSA programs.

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center:

www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa

An excellent and comprehensive resource for accessing information on all topics in print and video media relating to CSA. AFSIC is a cooperative effort between the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) and the National Agricultural Library (NAL) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 'CSA Resources for Farmers or Producers' provides extensive CSA-related information, online articles, and print resources. 'Organizations and Related Web Sites' will take you to the support groups in your area that can provide further, regionally specific information and the crucial one-on-one support for CSA endeavors. These centers provide information about books and periodicals, and provide access to farm budgets, crop tracking sheets, and management software.

Angelic Organics:

www.csalearningcenter.org

A comprehensive information clearinghouse on all aspects of CSA. The CSA Learning Center is a nonprofit resource center (501(c)3) that provides opportunities for diverse community members, prospective farmers, and CSA shareholders from the greater Chicago area. Includes youth education programs; models for developing low-income CSA shares; technical assistance and training programs for regional producers, among others.

The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association:

www.biodynamics.com

The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association is a nonprofit, membership organization and is open to the public. The association has an educational focus and conducts conferences, workshops and seminars. The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association maintains a national CSA online database.

California Farm Link:

www.californiafarmlink.org

California FarmLink provides workshops and one-on-one technical assistance to beginning farmers in the areas of business planning, financing, and land acquisition. The California FarmLink office serves as a clearinghouse of information and contracts regarding intergenerational farm transfers. Services are provided free or at minimal cost to farmers.

The Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS):

casfs.ucsc.edu

The Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems is a research, education, and public service program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, dedicated to increasing ecological sustainability and social justice in the food and agriculture system. On the UCSC campus, the Center operates the 2-acre Alan Chadwick Garden and the 25-acre UCSC Farm. Both sites are managed using organic production methods and serve as research, teaching, and training facilities for students, staff, and faculty. The CASFS operates a 140-member CSA program and conducts research and publishes articles on the efficacy of alternative food initiatives such as CSA.

Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems:

www.cias.wisc.edu

The Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems at the University of Wisconsin at Madison brings together university faculty, farmers, policy makers, and others to study relationships between farming practices, farm profitability, the environment, and rural vitality. Includes links to sustainable grazing dairy systems, pastured poultry, and the School for Beginning Dairy Farmers; research summaries on CSA; information on the School for Beginning Market Gardeners and on developing farm-to-college projects.

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF):

www.caff.org

A searchable web resource containing information on CSA and other related regional food system initiatives. Contains notices of current agriculture public policies, listing of current CAFF publications as well as a calendar of sustainable agriculture events. Contains links to multiple CAFF-sponsored agriculture and wildland interface projects.

Community Supported Agriculture of North America at University of Massachusetts Extension:

www.umassvegetable.org/food_farming_systems/csa/

Provides a concise overview of CSA and an excellent annotated bibliography of publications on CSA.

Educational and Training Opportunities in Sustainable Agriculture:

www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/AFSIC_pubs/edtr.htm

A comprehensive listing of post-secondary education and training opportunities in sustainable agriculture. Contains listings of both academic and practical training programs.

The Equity Trust, Inc.:

www.equitytrust.org

Equity Trust, Inc. is a nonprofit organization concerned with the principles of equity and their practical applications as they relate to land tenure. Equity trust provides planning, financial, and technical assistance in negotiating alternative land tenure arrangements for low-income persons. Equity Trust, Inc. also maintains a low-interest revolving loan program for new CSA farmers.

The Food Project:

www.thefoodproject.org

A unique program involving youth workers and adult volunteers growing organic vegetables for homeless shelters, CSA shareholders, and farmers' markets in the Boston area.

The Hartford Food System:

www.hartfordfood.org

The Hartford Food System (HFS) is a private, nonprofit organization working to create an equitable and sustainable food system that addresses the underlying causes of hunger and poor nutrition facing lower-income and elderly Connecticut residents. HFS has developed dozens of projects, initiatives, and coalitions that tackle a wide range of food cost, access, and nutrition problems.

International Society for Ecology and Culture:

www.isec.org.uk

The International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC) is a nonprofit organization concerned with the protection of both biological and cultural diversity. ISEC has developed and maintains many programs that focus on promoting local production and consumption of products as a way to maintain economic and cultural self-determination.

Just Food:

www.justfood.org

Just Food encourages new marketing and food-growing opportunities that address the needs of regional, rural family farms, New York City community gardeners, and New York City communities through encouraging CSA relationships, hosting workshops, providing training materials in horticulture, marketing, garden preservation, leadership development, and emergency food relief. Just Food also conducts training, leadership development, and outreach programs to address these issues.

Local Harvest:

www.localharvest.org

Local Harvest maintains a public nationwide directory of small farms, farmers' markets, and other local food sources. Their search engine helps people find local sources of sustainably grown food, and encourages them to establish direct contact with family farms in their local area.

Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition:

www.macsac.org

Provides generic CSA information along with case studies of CSA farms, and a model for linking low-income and special needs households with CSA farms.

The Maine Organic Farming and Gardening Association:

www.mofga.org

A sustainable horticulture and agriculture advocacy group offering technical assistance; agriculture, public policy, and consumer awareness education programs; organic certification services; and public events.

Marcie Rosenweigg's Market Farm Forms:

www.nwpub.net/marcie.html

Market Farm Forms: Spreadsheet Templates for Planning and Organizing Information on Diversified Market Farms is a software program containing recordkeeping spreadsheet templates for use in direct-marketing operations (e.g., farmers' markets, CSAs, direct sales to restaurants and co-ops). The forms are intended to help direct market growers make better management decisions and to help small producers comply with the record-keeping requirements for organic certification.

Nolo Press:

www.nolo.com

Dedicated to helping people handle their own everyday legal matters or make more informed legal decisions, Nolo Press publishes reliable, plain-English books, software, forms, and up-to-date legal information covering almost any legal topic. Includes an extensive list of publications and online articles on the types of legal ownership structures that are available and do-it-yourself manuals on forming sole proprietorships; partnerships; limited partnerships; limited liability companies (LLC); nonprofit corporations; and nonprofit cooperatives. Includes links to other helpful web sites.

Northeast Organic Farming Association:

www.nofa.org.

An association of organizations encouraging the adoption of sustainable farming and gardening practices and direct market/consumer support relationships. See, e.g.: www.nofamass.org; www.nofany.org.

The Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture:

www.pasafarming.org

A sustainable agriculture advocacy organization promoting environmentally sound and economically viable regional agriculture through marketing and production-oriented technical assistance programs.

The Robyn Van En Center:

www.csacenter.org

An excellent clearinghouse for all information relating to CSA. Includes a national CSA farm directory; publications and products; an online posting of events, positions, and technical assistance relating to CSA production.

Urban-Rural: To Generate New Commitments between Citizens (URGENCI):

www.urgenci.net

Seeks to be a worldwide network for imparting information about consumer/producer and urban/rural relationships. Sponsored the "First International Symposium on Local Contracts between Farmers and Consumers" in February 2004 and has sponsored events biannually since then.

Research Bibliography

To what degree are CSAs meeting their economic and social goals?

STUDIES THAT INCLUDE FINDINGS ON ECONOMIC GOALS

NATIONAL STUDIES

Laird, T. 1995. "Community Supported Agriculture: A Study of an Emerging Agricultural Alternative." Master's thesis, Natural Resource Planning, University of Vermont.

Lass, D. A., G. W. Stevenson, J. Hendrickson, and K. Ruhf. 2003. CSA across the nation: findings from the 1999 CSA survey. Madison, WI: Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS), University of Wisconsin-Madison. www.wisc.edu/cias/pubs/index.html#produce.

REGIONAL STUDIES

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