



Social Enterprises
Knowledgeable Economies
and Sustainable Communities

Community Supported Agriculture

Putting the “Culture” Back into Agriculture

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and Saskatchewan Regional Node of the Social Economy Suite**

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Entreprises sociales
économies intelligentes
et communautés durables

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



C.S.A

Putting the “Culture” Back into Agriculture

This paper is part of a collection of research reports prepared for the project
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Institute for Social Research at the University of Saskatchewan,
the Winnipeg Inner-City Research Alliance,
and the Community Economic and Social Development Unit
at Algoma University College.

The project also includes more than fifty community-based organizations
in four provinces, the United States, Colombia, and Belgium.

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What is Community Supported (Shared)** Agriculture?

An alternative food supply system that gives local people the power to help protect the environment

A system which connects local growers to local consumers in cooperation

A model that helps develop a healthy regional food supply system

A system which helps build a strong local economy

"Farming with a Face on it!"

A method of "empowering people on an individual basis, then on a community basis, and eventually, on a regional, national and even global basis."

{Robyn Van En}

CSAs raise the social status of farmers in a community. They put the "culture back into agriculture."

**The term "Community Shared Agriculture" has been used since 1985 when the first CSA was established in Massachusetts.

Community Supported Agriculture and Community Shared Agriculture may be used interchangeably in reference to this model.

By participating in a CSA you are:

-supporting your local farmers, community and a healthy local food supply system

-contributing to a healthy lifestyle by eating locally grown "no spray" food

-working with people who really care about the environment and the food we eat

-encouraging land stewardship

-honouring the knowledge and experience of local growers

-reconnecting with nature's cycles and the passing of time

-eating local, seasonal food which is fresher and more nutritious

-promoting a feeling of responsibility towards food, cooking the food you bring home to expand one's "culinary paradigm"

-trying a variety of unusual produce

-promoting volunteerism

| CSA Philosophy | Significance | CSA Model | Conventional Market Model |
|---|---|---|--|
| Supporting local agriculture | Strengthens and brings equity to the local economy; reliance on local resources rather than dependence on monocultures-favoring sustainable solutions over "technical Band-Aids." | Payment of member shares at start of season ensures farmers efforts are not wasted; guaranteed income for farmers; able to plan for next season | Market prices of produce too low for local farmers to compete with; achieved through use of chemical inputs |
| Maintaining access to healthy, organic "no-spray" produce | Food produced with no chemical inputs and delivered with minimal transportation is healthier; promotes greater use of vegetables over processed foods | "No-spray" means no pesticides or chemicals used in farming; expensive and complex formal "organic certification" not required; maintains fair and affordable prices | Grocery store prices for certified organic produce too high for most to afford regular purchase |
| Alternative Economic Model (Making a political statement against globalization) | Proves that small, locally-controlled sustainable economic development initiatives aimed at supporting local growth can flourish. | This model supports local agriculture and small-scale local food production systems; allows consumers to have some level of control in a food distribution system; promotes sharing of local knowledge of growing cycles, local crops and the value of food; information exchanges between members during meetings and events | Food is a commodity; farmers are faceless to consumers which allows for "behind the scenes" undercutting of producers; average consumers not aware of difficulties and struggles producers are subject to as part of global market |

| CSA Philosophy | Significance | CSA Model | Conventional Market Model |
|---|---|---|---|
| Acknowledging full cost of food production | This element requires a unique producer-consumer relationship, which establishes equity in the food production system | Growers and buyers negotiate to establish prices affordable for the buyer and fair to the grower; can involve agreements for work-shares where members assist grower to offset lower share cost; produce sold directly to consumer eliminating 'middleman' and associated costs | Consumers pay for produce what the market and grocers dictate; competition for markets force producers to farm in ways that minimize cost and maximize output/profit; consumers cannot identify or establish relationships with producers |
| Cooperation and consensus decision making | Participation in CSA process includes activities which help strengthen and build community | Members involved in decision-making; encouraged to participate in social activities and communications with other members | Consumers are disconnected from producers and other consumers; purchasing food is an individual task; decisions are made by corporate authorities which creates intense competition and undermines income security amongst producers |
| Protection of the environment, supporting healthy farming practices | Allows for continual, sustainable method of food production by keeping land fertile; avoids ground water pollution and toxic residues on food; justifies the preservation and protection of green space near cities | Avoiding chemical pollutants and growing diverse produce viable in local climate nurtures land; prevents environmental damage caused by excess transportation | Produce in grocery stores from large-scale farming; transportation of food over long distances increases pollution, erodes fertile agricultural land and reduces crop diversity |

CSA Models

The Community Supported Agriculture model of food distribution is open and flexible, depending on the members' and farmers' needs. Groups exist with varying levels of member participation payment arrangements.



The above diagram illustrates just two variations of the CSA model.

1. In the first group, the farmer is responsible for everything – growing and maintaining the crops, harvesting the produce, transporting to the pickup location (or having members pickup at the farm), and sorting produce into shares. Members are only responsible for paying for and picking up their shares. This type of arrangement can result in higher costs for member shares to reflect the farmer's extensive labour.
2. The opposite end of the spectrum demonstrates a cooperative arrangement between the farmer and the members, which may have members involved in the actual farming process by performing tasks such as weeding, sorting and transporting of shares to a meeting place for pick-up. Also, full working shares for members with financial difficulties may be arranged, where the member works in exchange their share of the produce.

There are CSA groups with organizational structures similar to these two examples, and many that fall in between.

The model that any CSA model will follow depends on the needs and expectations of the growers and the members of each group and the relationships they establish together.

How to set up a CSA group

1. Identify and approach potential growers. Speak with growers involved in existing CSA groups.
2. Arrange meetings with potential growers. Discuss farming practices, capacity that grower can support, type of CSA organization desired, share costs, possible meeting location for share pickups, grower's openness to farm tours and observation of farming techniques by group members (e.g. local farmers market, grower's farm, etc.)
3. Identify possible members through word of mouth and advertising (local papers, contact local organizations). Contact other CSA groups to find out if they know of anyone interested in joining.
4. Meet and educate potential members about CSA and the different roles and responsibilities involved, (i.e. share sorting responsibilities, share pickup location, communications, expectations, possible group events, etc.)
5. Have a meeting that includes the grower and the members to discuss the process of the CSA group. It is good practice to consensually decide this process. Discuss individual member responsibilities such as who will be responsible for contacting members to remind them of their duties, who will be organizing social events like potlucks and farm tours, whether a newsletter will be produced and who will take on that responsibility. Establish a schedule of duties which includes members' commitments. Establish supplies needed (i.e. bags for sorting shares, container for storage, tables, signage, etc.)
6. Collect member shares to establish member commitment
7. Establish first pickup date with grower and communicate this to members. Be sure to remind members about a week before the pickups are to commence if group is established well before the growing season begins.

Tips for making your CSA group a success!

1. Speak with farmers who have been growing for established CSA groups.
 - These experienced growers may have information about other growers who are interested in growing for a CSA
2. Start small.
 - Ensure your members do not exceed the grower's capacity to enable members to receive suitable shares each week.
3. Make sure members really understand the CSA philosophies and benefits to ensure buy-in and commitment.
 - Members should fully realize the benefits to joining a CSA, as well as the risks they will be sharing with the farmer (i.e. whether it is a good or bad season, members acknowledge the work the farmer must do to produce shares)
4. Expect that some members will perform their duties diligently, while others may not.
 - It is helpful to make membership meetings and fee payment upfront mandatory for this reason
 - Be sure to keep your members informed of organizational procedures and scheduling changes as they occur
 - Regular communication is essential to keeping your group cohesive
5. Link with community organizations that provide services involving food, such as soup kitchens or Good Food Box programs and local community gardens.
 - This helps promote the local production/distribution of locally grown food
6. Tell all your friends about your CSA. Keep a list of people that are interested in joining a CSA, even if your group is at capacity.
 - This will help build future CSA groups as the positive news of your group spreads!
7. Remember to keep the "Community" aspect of your Community Supported Agriculture group alive!
 - Organize a newsletter with recipes that include your fresh produce, plan potluck picnics and enjoy getting to know people that share similar values – remember to have fun!
 - Solicit feedback from both growers and members to determine level of satisfaction, identify challenges/barriers and capture suggestions for future improvement

CSA Checklist

- Contact farmer.
- Meet with farmer and establish expectations, share costs, etc.
- Advertise for members
- Have a meeting to educate and identify members
- Have a meeting with grower and members to establish CSA organization and member duties
- Collect member share fees
- Establish first pickup date, organize necessary supplies
- Enjoy meeting new people and making relationships with local community members who share your community spirit!
- Start a list to record individuals that are interested in joining future CSA groups.

Just Picked Community Supported Agriculture



The Just Picked CSA was formed in the summer of 2004 with two farmers and twenty families. Free advertisements provided by the Sault Star and Sault This Week attracted these families. After being screened (educated about the CSA model to be used and confirming members understood cooperative component); each family paid a member share fee of \$150 in advance to receive a bag or two of fresh "no spray" vegetables every week for 16 weeks. Starting in June and running into September, members picked up their shares at the Algoma Farmers Market, located near the Roberta Bondar Pavilion.

By the end of the 2005 season, the Just Picked CSA group had 5 growers, 45 people participating, and many people on a waiting list for the following year. In the spring of 2006, the 45 members were called to attend membership meetings to indicate their continued interest in being a part of a group. The group is now working with two growers who are providing 24 member shares. The Soup Kitchen Community Centre has purchased a member share to include in their Good Food boxes as well.

The shares in the Just Picked model are considered Partial Working Shares, which means members assume administrative and distribution duties as well as coordination of volunteer duties as part of payment towards their member share. Agreement to use to this system was arrived at through a consensus decision-making process. A schedule of roles and responsibilities required throughout the season was put together and members signed up for the roles they preferred.

Membership shares were increased to \$155, an increase in fees by five dollars to cover administrative costs. This established a pool of money to cover photocopying and incidentals. Extra monies after incidental expenses will be applied towards an end of season potluck.

An email listserv was created to facilitate communication for those members with access to email. Members without email are contacted by phone or receive messages in person during pickups. The Just Picked newsletter is produced monthly and sent by email and copies are sent by mail to those who do not use email.

Shares that are not picked up are often donated to the Soup Kitchen community Centre, Phoenix Rising Women's Center or Women In Crisis.

At the end of the season, one member will call around to identify which members will be participating next year. People will be called again in the spring to confirm and arrange a meeting.

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Regional Partner Organizations



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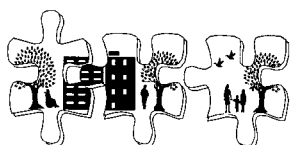
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