

# Reference

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# Frequently Asked Questions

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THERE IS A CROP FAILURE?

The first thing to realize is that crop production is unpredictable. The chance that one crop will have a bad season, even "fail" outright, is fairly good. But on a diversified farm, the chance that all the crops will "fail" is pretty low.

Generally, CSA projects ask consumers to recognize that they are supporting the farm, through good seasons and bad. Ordinarily, farmers bear the risk of crop loss; CSAs ask consumers to shoulder some of that risk. Therefore, most do not make provisions for refunds. Some do promise to refund the members' money which has not already been spent for production, in the event of a crop failure.

CSA farms have found that some members do get angry when crops fail, especially if they don't get a refund of their money. The members that stay with the project, however, learn a lot about the problems that farmers face and recognize their own role in preserving small-scale, ecologically-sound agriculture.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THE ACTUAL EXPENSES FOR A SHAREHOLDING CSA EXCEED THE PROPOSED BUDGET?

Farmers should be able to draw up a reasonable budget. If there is an overrun, then shareholding CSAs ask members to make up the difference. Some CSAs create a contingency fund of 10% of the budget, just in case expenses are more than expected. Others include on the commitment form a pledge to pay up to 10% or 12% more than the original share price.

If expenses are more than 10% or 12% percent higher than expected, it should be apparent early in the season. This situation generally calls for a renegotiation of the membership agreement, so that either farmers scale back production or members increase their financial commitment.

## **DO MEMBERS SAVE MONEY ON THEIR FARM PRODUCTS?**

This is a difficult question to answer. Products received through the CSA are not the same as other products, being fresher, tastier and sometimes different from those bought elsewhere. In addition, a CSA with a sliding scale may save some people money and cost others.

Nevertheless, the "sense" of farmers and members, backed by at least two studies<sup>1</sup>, is that consumers pay about the same or slightly less for their produce when they buy through CSA.

## **HOW DO MEMBERS KNOW THE FARMER WILL MAKE A GOOD-FAITH EFFORT TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF FARM PRODUCTS?**

Some consumers may find it strange to give their money to a farmer in return for receiving future products, some of which have yet to be planted. They may wonder why the farmer would grow as much as possible if he or she has already been paid.

This is the reason for having a personal relationship between the farmer and the members. Members who know the farmer realize the effort and commitment going into producing their shares. Talking with the grower, visiting the farm, even helping with the logistics of the CSA help members form the personal bonds that cement a project.

## ISN'T THIS A LOT OF WORK?

A CSA is not ideal for every grower, or every consumer. Some will find it "a lot of work" because they do not enjoy it.

For growers who do enjoy connecting with a community of members and who like the style of farming a CSA requires, there are two benefits. First, much of the organizational work can happen in the off-season. Organizing for a CSA is like marketing in another outlet, only in most other outlets the marketing happens once you have a crop. This is often a very busy time. Because CSA allows you to handle your "marketing" in the off-season, you can concentrate on farming in the farming season. You also spread your work out better over the year.

The second benefit is less work. Many CSA farmers, including those in a study by Rochelle Kelvin for the Rodale Institute Research Center, report that they spend less time marketing in their CSAs than they did when selling through other outlets.

<sup>1</sup>*Community Supported Agriculture* (Kimberton, PA:Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Inc., 1990), p. 9b; and Trauger Groh, *Farms of Tomorrow: Community Supported Farms, Farm Supported Communities* (Kimberton, PA:Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Inc. 1990), p. 167.

# Resources

## CSA ORGANIZATIONS

**Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Inc.,**  
Kimberton, PA; 1 (800) 516-7797.

**Community Supported Agriculture of North America (CSANA),**  
contact Robin Van En, CSA Indian Line Farm, RR# Box 85,  
Great Barrington, MA 01230; or J. P. Schwartz, 818  
Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C.  
20006.

**CSA West c/o CASFS,** 1156 High Street, Santa Cruz 95064;  
(408) 459-3964, FAX (408) 459-2799.

**Equity Trust,** contact Chuck Matthei; (203) 376-6174.

## PERIODICALS

***Growing for Market,*** a journal of news and ideas for market  
gardeners (P. O. Box 3747, Lawrence, KS 66046).

***The Harvest Times,*** a CSA quarterly (P. O. Box 27, Mount  
Tremper, NY 12457).

***Seasonal News,*** a quarterly CSA newsletter (818 Connecticut  
Avenue, NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20006).

## FAIRLY AVAILABLE PRINT RESOURCES

Gerry Cohn, ed. ***Community Supported Agriculture Conference.***  
University of California, Davis, December 6, 1993. (available  
from the Small Farm Center, UC Davis)

Eliot Coleman. ***The New Organic Grower: A Master's Manual of  
Tools and Techniques for the Home and Market Gardener.***  
Chelsea, VT: Chelsea Green, 1994.

**Community Related Agriculture, An Introduction.** Kimberton, PA: Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Inc. 1 (800) 516-7797, 1990.

Suzanne DeMuth. **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): An Annotated Bibliography and Resource Guide.** National Agricultural Library (Beltsville, MD 20705-2351), September 1993. (also available from the Small Farm Center, Davis)

**Egg Inspection Manual.** California Department of Food and Agriculture, Egg Quality Control. Revised December 1992.

**Family Farm Series.** Small Farm Center, Cooperative Extension, University of California, Davis. especially "Marketing for the Small Farmer: Direct Marketing and Quality Control" and "Small Scale Cold Rooms for Perishable Commodities."

Eric Gibson. **Sell What You Sow: The Grower's Guide to Successful Produce Marketing.** Carmichael, CA: New World Publishing, 1994.

Trauger Groh and Steven S. H. McFadden. **Farms of Tomorrow: Community Supported Farms, Farm Supported Communities.** Kimberton, PA: Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Inc., 1990.

**Growing Across the Seasons: A Manual for Harvest Extension.** University of California Cooperative Extension, Placer County (available Winter 1995).

John Jeavons. **How to Grow More Vegetables (Than You Ever Thought Possible on Less Land Than You Can Imagine),** revised. Berkeley, CA: 10 Speed Press, 1991.

Johnny's Selected Seeds, Commercial Catalogue, 1995.

Rochelle Kelvin. **Community Supported Agriculture on the Urban Fringe: Case Study and Survey.** Kutztown, PA: Rodale Institute Research Center (611 Siegfriedale Road, Kutztown, PA 19530; (215) 683-1400), 1994.

Jered Lawson. **Community Supported Agriculture Reader.** 1992. (contact CSA West c/o CASFS, 1156 High St, Santa Cruz 95064; 408/459-3964, FAX 408/459-2799).

Michael Olson. **MetroFarm: The Guide to Growing for Big Profit on a Small Parcel of Land.** Santa Cruz, CA: TS Books, 1994.

Dennis R. Pittenger. *Home Vegetable Gardening*, ANR #21444, University of California Cooperative Extension, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1992. (available at Placer County Cooperative Extension)

Tamsyn Rowley and Chris Beeman. *Our Field: A Manual for Community Shared Agriculture*. Wroxeter, Canada: CSA Resource Center. (519) 335-3557, 1994.

Joel Salatin. "Sales Can Fail." *The Stockman Grass Farmer*, vol. 51, #6 (June 1994), p. 31.

*Small Farm Handbook*. Small Farm Center, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of California, Davis, 1994. (also available at Placer County Cooperative Extension)

Robyn Van En. *Basic Formula to Create Community Supported Agriculture*. Great Barrington, MA: CSA Indian Line Farm (RR# Box 85, Great Barrington, MA 01230), 1992

Oscar A. Lorenz and Donald N. Maynard. *Knott's Handbook for Vegetable Growers*. Third edition. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1988.

## LESS AVAILABLE PRINTED MATERIAL

Erwin Allerdings. *CSA Information Package*. Saskatchewan, Canada: Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration - Agriculture Canada (#603 - CIBC Tower, 1800 Hamilton Street, Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 4L2; (306)780-8229), 1995.

William H. Blake, III. *Community Supported Agriculture and Late Capitalism*. Master's thesis, University of California, Davis, 1994.

*Communications Made Easy: A 4-H Guide to Presenting Information*. 4-H Youth Programs, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University.

*Direct Marketing Resource Notebook*. Agricultural Program Area, Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota, 1990.

***Growing Your Own Vegetables.*** United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Information Bulletin 409, December 1977.

***How to Establish and Operate a Roadside Stand.*** Direct Marketing Program, California Department of Food and Agriculture.

James A. Johnson. ***The Sonoma Ecology Center Community Agriculture Project, First Annual Report,*** 1994.

William Luckman and Robert Reynolds. "***Small Farm Finance.***" ***Enterprise Farming,*** 1986.

Kathleen Murray, Esq., ed. ***Child Care Center Legal Handbook*** (out of print).

## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FROM (CALIFORNIA UNLESS NOTED):

Beneficial Farms (*New Mexico*)

Fiddler's Green Farm

Full Belly Farm

Good Humus Farm

Green Heron Farm (*Pennsylvania*)

Orgasmic Organics

Twin Creek Shared Farm (*Winnipeg, Canada*)

Vegetable Club CSA

Watershed Organic Farm (*New Jersey*)

...and other CSA farms



# Glossary

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

A partnership between consumers and farmers in which consumers pay for their food in advance, and farmers commit to supplying sufficient quantity, quality and variety of food.

## CSA

Community Supported Agriculture.

## FARMER-DIRECTED

A type of CSA in which the farmer does nearly all the work, using CSA to recruit loyal customers.

## LAND TRUST

An arrangement in which a non-profit organization maintains land in agriculture.

## MEMBER

A consumer who buys farm products through a CSA.

## PARTICIPATORY

A type of CSA in which members help with planning or farm work.

## PROPOSAL

A written description, usually a flyer or brochure, of the farm, farmer(s), land, expected share contents, share price, and other facets of the CSA project.

## SHARE

A part or fraction of the harvest that a member buys. There can also be half-shares and quarter-shares.

## SHAREHOLDING

A type of CSA project in which members divide up the whole farm budget between them, guaranteeing a salary or wage to the farmer. Members may all pay the same amount, or on a sliding scale. They do not know ahead of time how much they will receive in their share each week.

## SUBSCRIPTION

A type of CSA in which members pay a certain dollar amount per week, paying for a month or a quarter in advance. The dollar value of the farm products in the share is pre-determined, although what exactly is in the share varies by season.