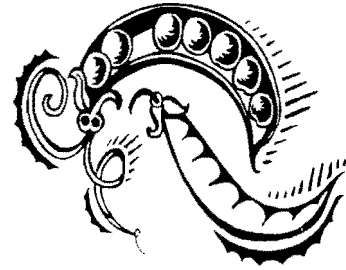


# CHAPTER 20



## ALTERNATIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES

### COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

In recent years the Community Supported Agriculture movement, originating in Europe in the 1980's, has arrived in the U.S., and is spreading rapidly as local consumers decide to take a more active interest in the production and handling of the food they eat. According to Groh and McFadden (1997) the first CSAs were started in America in 1986, and in 1997 there were about 1000 farms involved with nearly 100,000 households.

In the classic case, a CSA farm sells shares in its farm produce to consumers, based upon the actual cost of production. Throughout the growing season, shareholders then receive a weekly allotment of mixed fresh produce (the volume is based on the number of shares purchased and the total amount harvested). Shareholders either pick their produce up at the farm or have it delivered to a central location in their neighborhood. The CSA organization is comprised of farmers (who are responsible for growing the produce), a steering committee (active in planning and managing daily operations) and shareholders (who agree to pay up front to support the farm by purchasing shares). For example, 100 shares might be sold, each priced at 1% of the projected cost of production, harvest and distribution. Included in the costs are a basic salary and benefits for the farmers who produce the crops, and a budget for those who work together to sell shares, plan production to meet the needs of shareholders, and manage farm activities (harvest, washing,

packing, delivery, etc). People who participate in CSA tend to be risk-takers who provide the capital for production, and may also provide labor during production and postharvest handling.

**Benefits of CSA:**

- grower receives payment for produce during production
- very low postharvest losses, deliver exactly what you harvest and pack
- less time and money spent on handling and marketing
- shared risk of financial failure
- customer gets fresh, just-picked produce

“Get some local folks together, find out what they want you to grow and in what volume, figure out how much it will cost you to grow and distribute (including your time). Divide the costs by the number of shareholders you have recruited to determine the cost per share.”

Source: Lee, 1993

Example of a CSA marketing brochure:

## **COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE**

### **Valley Farms of the Highlands**

Throughout the harvest season from April to October, your weekly share of vegetables and fruits will be the freshest and best quality we can provide. The actual variety and amount of each in your share will depend on the weather and our success in avoiding production problems. Here's an example of one week's share during two different months from last year:

#### **June:**

- 2 heads of lettuce**
- 2 dozen radishes**
- 2 lbs spinach**
- 1 head chinese cabbage**
- 2 lbs mixed greens**
- 1 bunch green onions**
- 1 lb tomatoes from our greenhouse**
- 1 lb snap peas**
- 1 lb shelling peas**
- 1 lb green beans**
- 2 quarts strawberries**

#### **September:**

- 2 heads lettuce**
- 4 lbs mixed greens**
- 1 bunch of celery**
- 2 lbs broccoli**
- 2 lbs eggplant**
- 5 lbs tomatoes**
- 2 lbs zucchini**
- 4 lbs winter squash**
- 2 lbs beets**
- 5 lbs potatoes**
- 1 lb onions**

### MEMBERSHIP FARMS AND SUBSCRIPTION AGRICULTURE

In California, CSA has taken a slightly different path, and is more or less incorporated into the many marketing options being used by small-scale growers. Rather than depend upon local consumers to provide the entire budget of the farm up front, subscriptions for a set amount of produce or memberships are sold to individuals at the start of each season. This is referred to in some places as subscription farming or subscription agriculture, and in others as membership farming.

These alternatives are similar to CSA, in that they allow consumers to sign up for produce to be delivered for a set price throughout the harvesting season. The price of a subscription is not necessarily tied exactly to the cost of production, and subscribers are not locked in for the entire growing season. Subscribers like these marketing arrangements because of the convenience, the wide variety of fruits and vegetables provided forces them to be more creative when cooking, and because they seem to enjoy the idea of knowing who grows their food

Some variations practiced by CSA and membership farms to increase sales and profits include:

- providing home deliveries of produce to members for an additional fee
- supplementing produce with additional items purchased from another grower or wholesaler (tropical fruits, out-of-season produce)
- adding processed products (purchased dried fruits, specialty canned or bottled products)

## DO'S AND DON'TS FOR HIGH QUALITY PRODUCE VIA CSA OR SUBSCRIPTION FARMING

Plan ahead, with your shareholders or subscribers, to determine which crops to plant in what quantity.

Consider setting up Pick-Your-Own operations for commodities requiring a lot of labor to harvest (for example: raspberries, strawberries, peas, green beans).

Provide training when shareholders or members offers to take on farm labors, harvesting or postharvest handling tasks. Emphasize harvesting at proper maturity for desired use, gentle handling throughout and cooling as soon as possible after harvest.

Don't worry about uniformity in size or shape, but sort produce to ensure high quality (remove immature, over-mature, diseased or badly damaged produce before cooling and packing).

Use appropriate cleaning, packing and cooling practices for the commodities handled (see Chapters 4 through 6) to increase shelf life and protect nutritional value and food safety.

Store produce at recommended temperatures and relative humidity to avoid chilling injury, water loss and protect produce quality (see Chapter 7).

Avoid mixing ethylene sensitive produce (vegetables, leafy greens) with those that give off ethylene (ripe fruit) during packing, storage and transport.

**RESOURCES: PERIODICALS, BOOKS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

Many references and information sources are available for those interested in implementing CSA or subscription farming approaches.

Community Alliance with Family Farmers      annual directory of direct marketers  
P O Box 363, Davis, California 95617  
(530) 756 8518

Small Farm Center      *Small Farm News*  
One Shields Ave. UC Davis, Davis, California 95616

Growing for Market      magazine for small-scale farmers  
P O Box 3747, Lawrence, Kansas 66046      (913) 841-2559

The CSA Food Book      handbook providing crop descriptions,  
Elizabeth Henderson      recipes, storage tips  
Rose Valley Farm, P O Box 149, Rose Valley, New York 14542

CSA Handbook      worksheets, legal issues,  
Cooperative Extension      postharvest handling  
11477 E Avenue, Auburn, California 95603      (530) 889-7385

CSA of North America      not-for-profit educational network,  
Indian Line Farm      information and technical assistance  
57 Jugend Road, Great Barrington  
Massachusetts 01230, (413) 528-4374

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