

Distribution

CSAs aim to get food from the farm and into peoples' homes, preferably in an environmentally responsible way that is also convenient for the members. The distribution method that works best for your CSA will depend on:

- ▶ your location - for instance whether it's urban or rural
- ▶ your capacity - whether you have a vehicle or enough staff to do deliveries
- ▶ your members' needs - CSA members may feel more a part of the farm if they are involved in collecting their own produce. Distribution day is one the main times that farmers and members can meet on a regular basis.

CSA farms need to be as flexible as possible to allow for time limitations and differing lifestyles, as a lot of members will work full time or have other commitments.

Collection from the farm

For the farmers, the easiest method is to have members collect their produce directly from the farm. Produce does not even have to be pre-packed as members can also weigh and pack their own boxes. This is the lowest cost option for a CSA because it eliminates the considerable labour involved in packing the shares into bags or boxes.

Some CSAs will list the items and quantities for that week's share on a noticeboard. Members then help themselves from bulk lots of freshly harvested produce. This spreads packing time among all the members, and gives a degree of choice. If slightly more produce is harvested than required, then even

the last member to collect can pick and choose. Some members like to involve their children in the weighing and packing which can quite innocently lead to errors, so it is always wise to harvest approximately 10% extra. But sometimes the last people to pick up end up with the lowest quality and smallest produce, or even undersized shares, so for this reason, some projects pack shares into bags or boxes.

You need to provide adequate all-weather shelter where produce, noticeboards and scales can be laid out for members who are going to weigh and pack. This can be a challenge for new CSAs struggling with planning permission issues. Packed boxes are more compact and can be housed in a moveable stall.

A "swap box" with a selection of each item allows further choice. Members can exchange one of their own items with one from the box, or swap with each other. Or you can simply have a "gift box" where members share surplus produce from their own gardens and allotments.

The downside to all the members collecting from the farm is the environmental impact of all those car journeys. It can exclude people who don't drive. The increased road traffic may upset farm neighbours.

Another solution is to get permission from members to circulate everyone's addresses and phone numbers so that members can collect for each other, or you could organise more formal optional "distribution groups" where members who live close to each other make arrangements between themselves to collect each other's boxes from the farm and/or pick-up points.





Clear communication is essential. Make sure everyone has access to the information on where and when they are collecting their shares without needing to call you or your team at antisocial hours!

Pick-up points

If CSA members don't live close to the farm, produce can be delivered to more convenient drop-off points. These could be members' homes (if they have sufficient space such as a garage), a church or community centre, a small lockable shed, or even at a farmers' market stand where the CSA could also do some trading. Produce can be delivered in bulk or already divided into individual shares. For example Sims Hill Shared Harvest in Bristol has seven pick-up points around the city. All shares are delivered by 5pm on Thursdays, and members can pick up any time after that until Sunday morning. Depending on the location there may be slightly different timings, but some points are 24-hour access.

Pick-up points can provide a valuable social function as a place where members can meet each other and the farmer. If your pick-up point is in a very visible place, for example in a community centre, it can also raise the profile of the project in the wider community and help you to attract new members.

This option is more environmentally sound because one van drives round and drops off all the shares in one journey. Some CSAs use electric vehicles or bicycle delivery. One uses a horse and cart. Make sure you budget for the time needed to pack all the shares and deliver them.

The lack of contact with the farm can reduce members' sense of ownership of the farm - seeing the colourful rows of produce growing in the fields of their farm is truly inspiring. Members also miss out on the opportunity to "pick-your-own" produce such as flowers, fruit and spinach. So you may want to organise other special events for members so they still get to visit the farm (see Events section).

Home delivery

This is a method that has been used successfully by many vegetable producers. Pre-packed boxes of vegetables are delivered direct to a member's home or workplace. It requires the least in terms of member participation, which has both advantages and disadvantages. You will need to ensure that you have enough staff or volunteers to pack and deliver the boxes, and a suitable delivery vehicle.

One of the benefits of home delivery is that it can allow some people to support a CSA who have a lack of time, or transport. But it will cost a lot more, so if you do consider offering home delivery, make sure that all the costs involved, weighing, packing and delivery, are covered in the share price.

You may like to charge extra for delivery to cover your costs and to educate members on the breakdown of the costs involved in providing their vegetables.

Pick your own

Some CSA produce vegetables, such as peas, and soft fruits, on a "pick your own" basis, as they are more expensive to harvest. Even if members don't

What does
CSA mean
to you?

Buying direct
from producers
and getting
great value,
healthy food

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come to the farm to collect their vegetables on a regular basis, it may be good to have a “pick your own” section anyway, where members can come and help themselves to flowers and herbs. This can help create a sense of ownership of the farm. Pick your own soft fruits in particular is a good

incentive to members to come to the farm, as it is quite hard to find really fresh organically-grown strawberries and raspberries and it’s a fun activity for all the family. You may choose to charge extra for the “pick your own” produce or include it in the share price.