

Keeping animals

Horticulture has been at the core of the CSA model since its development. Now the number of CSAs keeping animals is growing as more farmers and consumers are choosing the model as a means of sharing the responsibilities and rewards of producing different types of food. In 2016 Volz et al found that 38% of CSAs in Europe offer eggs, 29% meat, 28% honey, and 26% dairy products.

Strategically, it is important that the CSA movement becomes more diverse in terms of what we offer. If we only focus on horticulture, we limit the number of farmers who can participate in areas where livestock systems dominate, for example in Wales. Existing CSAs may simply want to expand beyond growing just fruit and vegetables to meet their members' additional dietary needs. If you do choose to include livestock as part of your CSA see the Rules and regulations section for important guidance on how to register your livestock with the relevant authorities.

Livestock CSAs work in very much the same way to fruit and vegetable based CSAs, but you need to factor in additional costs, time commitments, and regulatory requirements regarding keeping animals. A community group seeking to establish a meat, dairy, or egg CSA could consider working in partnership with a farmer who already has the expertise and resources. This is what many existing meat and dairy CSAs in the UK have done.

Challenges to consider

Land

- Is the land large enough for livestock?
- Is it adequately fenced?

- Does someone live on site or nearby?
- Do you have permission to keep animals on the site? Many tenancy agreements may specifically exclude the keeping of livestock.

Time

- Can you ensure that you have a group of people who can commit to keeping the animals to the standards your group would want? This includes having one, or ideally more than one, person available "on call" in case livestock are ill, escape, or are attacked by a predator.
- How will you ensure that the animals are fed, watered and checked regularly?

Costs

- What will do you if an animal gets sick?
- Have you factored in abattoir fees and transporting livestock? Do you have access to a trailer?

Members

- If you are an existing CSA looking to diversify into keeping livestock, do you have any vegetarian/vegan members who may be unhappy? When Stroud Community Agriculture first moved to keeping animals, they lost several members (Weir et al. 2005).
- Do you and your members have experience of keeping animals? Do you know any friendly farmers who might be willing to help? If you buy young livestock locally you may find the person who sells to you would be willing to offer advice too.

Access to killing, cutting and packing facilities

- If you are producing meat, you'll need access to a local abattoir and someone who can cut





and pack for you. The centralisation of meat processing systems means it can be hard to find businesses that are willing and able to process a small number of animals/ carcasses. Tracking them down should be one of your first steps

Food safety

- ▶ With animal products, you are getting into a whole different level of risk/ responsibility/ legislation compared to fruit and vegetables.
- ▶ Make sure you are aware of what is required of you and have all the facilities you need to store and distribute animal products safely (especially meat). One possibility is to find a local butcher who is willing, and able (from a regulatory point of view) to cut the carcasses so that members can collect meat shares from the butcher's shop.

Integrating livestock into CSA is a lot of hard work, and you may be wondering why anyone would want to even try! But there are a lot of benefits to having animals involved in CSA:

Food

- ▶ Livestock CSAs allow the risk and reward of meat, dairy, egg, and honey production to be shared more equitably between producers and consumers.
- ▶ The CSA model creates a route for food sovereignty for animal products, allowing communities to produce and access animal products in ways which are important to them.
- ▶ Livestock CSA allows people to have a confidence in where, how, and by whom their animal products are produced, creating a level of transparency, understanding, and confidence in consuming animal products.

- ▶ Creating animal products that are specifically “yours” carries particular significance for many people.
- ▶ CSA allows for more ethical meat-eating. You can rear and keep animals to higher standards, allow a more efficient “eating of the whole animal” and support the continued existence of heritage and rare breeds.

Marketing

- ▶ Animals can increase interest in CSA projects and engage more members and the wider public.
- ▶ Offering a wider range of food products helps draw in a different range of people.
- ▶ Having animals involved helps attract greater numbers of “supporter” memberships - people who don't necessarily want a share of the CSAs produce, but want to support animal welfare, or want to be able to visit the farm and help look after the livestock. Animals are a particular draw for families with young children.

Education

- ▶ Rearing animals together as a community offers a chance to educate people about the realities of farming and the costs of meat eating.
- ▶ Animals create an additional resource to work with schools and families.

Farming

- ▶ All animals provide valuable fertility if managed well; US farming Guru Joel Salatin of Polyface Farm recommends that all animals be moved onto fresh ground at least every two weeks for animal and soil health.
- ▶ Pigs offer a useful “digging” service on veg beds.

In the interests of food safety you must move them regularly and avoid crops that may be eaten raw afterwards. Get advice from people who have done this before.

Examples of Livestock CSA in the UK

There are many different ways of integrating livestock into a CSA model, from producer-led CSA where an existing farmer leads and drives the project with members financially subscribing, to consumer-led CSA where community members work together to rear animals.

Brighton Sheepshare

Brighton Community Agriculture works with a local farmer to support conservation grazing and traditional farming practices, purchasing and sharing meat between interested residents.

brightoncommunityagriculture.org.uk

Canalside Community Bees

Canalside Community Bees is a honey CSA. Members invest at the start of the year to buy the required equipment. Through the year members get involved in managing the bees, building hives, planting bee friendly flora, harvesting honey and making use of hive products. Honey share members pay extra to get a share of the honey at harvest time. canalsidecommunitybees.blogspot.co.uk

Chagfarm

Chagfarm produce goats' milk dairy products, free-range pork, woodland poultry and honey under a community supported agriculture business model. Customers sign up as members and commit to buy a certain amount of produce over a period of at least a year. chagfarm.org

Jollyfarm

Jollyfarm is a livestock farm supported by the local community in growing lamb, beef, and pork. Members get to know where their meat comes from and have a say in how it is reared. jollyfarm.org.uk

Leconfield Grange

Leconfield Grange produce their meat on a community supported agriculture basis. Customers pay for the meat before the animals arrive on site; this allows the CSA to know how many customers they have (allowing them to keep costs down) and enables members to get to know how the livestock are raised and looked after to the highest standards. Some members visit on a regular basis, meet the animals and help with tasks around the smallholding. Others only visit when the meat is ready for collection. leconfieldgrange.org

The Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm

The Oak Tree offers a CSA egg share, consisting of ten boxes of half a dozen eggs. Egg share members won't necessarily get eggs every week, but they are guaranteed to get ten boxes in total. CSA members also have the opportunity to pay in advance and reserve a share of Oak Tree pork (half a pig), or a share of beef (one eighth of a cow). The CSA's livestock is intimately interlinked with the vegetable production as the farm's animals eat much of the waste veg from the farm and provide fertility for the soil with their manure. the-oak-tree.co.uk



OTHER USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

- ▶ An introductory Soil Association guide to small scale pig keeping communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/resource/pig-ignorant/
- ▶ The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens has put together this guide on the necessary steps to maintain both animal and human health. farmgarden.org.uk/resources/keeping-farm-animals-what-do-we-need-know

What does
CSA mean
to you?

Knowing
animals get good
care and have
high welfare
standards