



# Members

**CSAs are different from other farms because they have members rather than just customers. Engaging with your members is an essential part of your CSA scheme as their relationship to the farm is more than just a commercial one. One of the keys to the success of a CSA is ensuring your members are actively involved but the level will vary according to the type of project. Some CSAs are totally community run and everyone is a member. In all types of CSA your members may be customers, volunteers, partners, employees and/or directors.**

## Why do people join CSAs?

There are five main reasons why people may want to join a CSA:

- 1. As a source of fresh, local organic food
- 2. To support their local farmers
- 3. To know who grows their food and how they produce it
- 4. To get involved with producing their food
- 5. To be part of a local community

However, there are a variety of other factors that can affect peoples' decision to join a CSA. You will need to take these into consideration when setting up your project so you have wide appeal and can recruit sufficient members to be stable and profitable.

- Income - how much are members willing to pay?
- Family size - what quantity and variety of produce is needed to feed the whole family?

- Food tastes - is there a demand for unusual crops and varieties or should you stick to more common produce?
- Does the farm keep animals for meat? This can put off some vegetarians. But it can be attractive to families who want their children to have contact with animals on a farm.
- Sufficient time to prepare food (as CSA membership will involve collecting, cleaning, storing and cooking the produce).
- Urban or rural member? These two groups may have similar motivations, for instance wanting to reconnect with farming, wanting to know where and how their food is grown, but live in different circumstances. Often urban communities are more physically detached from food production, meaning their relationship with a CSA will be more limited in practical terms. Shares of the produce may have to be brought into the town/city to community pick-up points, with occasional highly-valued farm visits and celebrations.
- Distance to the production site determines the members' relationship to the farm and distribution methods. Setting up a pick-up point in a nearby town could open up a CSA to a new group of members. This reduces the carbon footprint of a CSA because fewer food miles are needed to deliver the shares to the members.
- Awareness - knowledge of CSA and concern for environmental issues.
- Health - physical exercise and social support

CSA members will not all be exactly the same but there has to be a degree of commonality so that the

CSA arrangement will satisfy most of their needs. You probably have a good idea of the member characteristics that would work for your CSA and this will determine how to find them.

## How to recruit members?

### Social media

In order to get the word out about your CSA before you've even set it up it's good to set up one or more social media accounts. A Facebook page is probably the most useful at this stage (but could change in the future) as it is used by more people but you can also use Twitter and Instagram (see the Promotion section for more information).

Make sure these are kept up to date with regular posts, photos and perhaps videos. Ensure someone is responsible for responding to queries and comments. Share the posts on your own CSA page on other local groups' Facebook pages - for instance environmental groups, clubs with an interest in food, or groups for your town/village. If you are holding an event, set up a Facebook event page.

### Traditional methods

Recruiting members by word-of-mouth is generally the most effective method. It works best for an established CSA where contented members will naturally spread the word. If you are starting up from scratch spread the word among your immediate acquaintances first e.g. friends, family, neighbours, fellow club members and work colleagues.

Try to get some media coverage in your local paper or parish magazine or local radio. Print an eye-catching flyer and/or posters to distribute in cafes, libraries, health centres, sports centres, community halls. Laminate some posters to pin on community noticeboards. Run a stall at a local green fair or other community events to recruit new members.

### Public meetings

Organise a public meeting to launch your CSA and do a presentation about what CSA is, what the benefits of CSA are, what members could

achieve or expect from the CSA and how they can be involved. If you provide some free food and entertainment as well you're likely to get more people to come along. This works particularly well if you're located in or near a village and are aiming to get members from a smaller catchment area.

### Via existing groups

Lots of CSAs have been set up as part of, or in partnership with, other local community groups, in particular Transition Town groups, or other environmental groups, and community food organisations. So make sure you let other local groups in your area know about your plans.

- ▶ Community groups: Housing associations and neighbourhood groups, the Women's Institute (WI).
- ▶ Environmental groups: Transition Towns Network, local Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace groups, Green Party groups.
- ▶ Other community food groups: Community cafes, community gardens, food co-ops.

## Member agreements

In most CSAs around the world members sign a formal agreement with the farm detailing what members should expect in terms of produce and other commitments required. This seems to be less common in the UK but it is definitely good practice.

A member agreement aims to explain the CSA farm's offerings and policies, in order to solve any problems before they start.

The membership agreement could include:

- ▶ Contact details - including emergency contacts
- ▶ Description of how your CSA works - How long is your season? Do you offer delivery or pick-up? Do you offer work shares?
- ▶ Explanation of growing practices - Do you use organic methods and are you certified? How do you control pests? How do you build soil

fertility? Do you buy any produce in from other farms and what methods do they use?

- ▶ Rules and procedures - Be specific about any rules and what is expected of members , for instance do they need to volunteer a certain number of hours per month/year? What is your policy if members don't pick up their box?
- ▶ Cancellation policies - Outline how you will deal with a member who wants to cancel mid season. Do you offer refunds? Is there a cancellation fee? Are there any reasons why you would discontinue or temporarily suspend a membership.
- ▶ Payment - How much is a share? Do you have to pay annually or monthly? What payment methods can they use? What are your policies regarding missed payments?
- ▶ Explanation of CSA risks & rewards - Remind your members about what it means to join a CSA. Let them know how you plan on dealing with crop failures and setbacks as well as benefits like bumper crops.
- ▶ Customer signature - Get members to sign, or e-sign the agreement so that you know they received it and understand the contents.

If you don't have a formal agreement, at the very least provide a members' pack which clearly outlines all these issues. Using the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) format is very effective.

### Membership fees

Many CSAs charge a membership fee included in, or on top of, the monthly or annual cost of a share. This helps cover some of the running costs and means people are committing to being farm members. Some CSAs offer a range of membership fees, with varying costs depending on the amount of voluntary work put in.

You may want to offer a different type of membership to people who are not customers of the CSA but still want to support it, receive newsletters, and be invited to events. This includes farms that have done a community share offer, as anyone buying shares will be a member of the CSA but may not necessarily be customers.



### OTHER USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

- ▶ Information from the US about CSA member agreements [memberassembler.com/hub/your-csa-needs-a-membership-agreement](http://memberassembler.com/hub/your-csa-needs-a-membership-agreement)
- ▶ Stroud Micro Dairy CSA Agreement [stroudmicrodairy.co.uk/stroud-micro-dairy-csa-agreement](http://stroudmicrodairy.co.uk/stroud-micro-dairy-csa-agreement)
- ▶ The Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm explain what membership is all about on their website: [the-oak-tree.co.uk](http://the-oak-tree.co.uk)