



What is CSA?

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a radical approach to the production and supply of food that builds strong, close and mutually beneficial partnerships between communities and producers. It's defined as a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared.

As the name suggests, CSA is agriculture (or other types of production of food, fuel or fibre) that is supported by the community.

The approach can vary. Consumers, often described as CSA members, are closely linked to the farm, and provide support that goes beyond a straightforward marketplace exchange of money for goods. This involvement may be through ownership or investment in the farm or business, sharing the costs of production, accepting a share in the harvest and/or providing voluntary labour.

The community supports the farm but the farm also supports the community. Farmers receive a more stable and secure income and closer connection with their community. Consumers benefit by eating fresh healthy local food, feeling more connected to the land where their food is grown, and learning new skills.

CSA farms are most likely to produce vegetables but some produce fruit, eggs, poultry, pork, lamb, beef, dairy produce, honey or bread. CSA schemes are also developing around woodlands for firewood and fish.

CSA is about consumers taking some responsibility for how their food is produced and how it gets

to the table. It is a direct relationship between a farmer, and the people who eat the food the farmer produces.

CSA farms are directly accountable to their consumer members. They strive to provide fresh, high-quality food and typically use organic or biodynamic farming methods. Generally there are more people working on CSA farms than on conventional farms. Some CSAs encourage members to work on the farm in exchange for a proportion of their membership costs and/or recruit additional volunteers.

CSA is a shared commitment to building a more local and equitable agricultural system, one that allows farmers to focus on good farming practices on a smaller scale and still maintain productive and profitable farms.

Models of CSA

Community supported agriculture (CSA) takes many forms in the UK. The diversity of CSA reflects the fact that CSA farms have grown from grass roots initiatives and individuals finding their own way to address the challenges of food production, rather than following a set model.

All share the common principles of sharing the risks, rewards and responsibilities of food production. The CSA Network UK has identified four approaches to CSA:

Producer-led

A farmer offers a share of production in return for a fixed subscription. The share may vary with the vagaries of production so the risks and rewards are

shared. If there is a bumper harvest members will get more, but if crops fail they'll get less.

The subscription is often payable in advance and over a relatively long period, providing secure income for the producer. Most members pay a month in advance and commit for a whole season. This is the most widely-used approach and is also common in France and the USA.

Good examples of producer-led CSA farms include Chagfood and Canalside Community Food.

Community-led

A farming enterprise is set up and owned by the community, which takes on direct responsibility for production. Labour may be provided by volunteers and/or employed professionals.

Produce may be distributed among the community and/or sold for the benefit of the enterprise, including using the share-of-the-harvest model.

A lot of smaller CSAs are community-led and much of the work is done by the members on a voluntary basis. At others the community oversees the running of the CSA and employs one or more farmers to produce the food.

Examples of this model include Stroud Community Agriculture and Camel CSA.

Producer-community partnerships

The enterprise, owned by the community through a co-operative or similar structure, works in close partnership with existing producer(s) to provide a secure and long-term supply of produce to CSA members.

In many cases the farmer(s) already own land but are not able to manage it all. So they work with the local community to set up a CSA to farm some of the land. In other examples the community helps to grow and harvest on an existing working farm and gets to take home a share of the produce.

Good examples of this model are The Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm and Cambridge Cropshare.

Community-owned farms

A farming enterprise is secured through community investment but does not necessarily trade primarily with the community members. In these initiatives the community is supporting the farm by investing in it and buying community shares. However, the members or farm shareholders are not necessarily the same as the customers.

Some examples of community-owned farms have been set up when an existing farm needed to be sold. Others are new farms that have been set up after the community, or a land trust, has bought the land and leased it out to a farmer.

Fordhall Farm and The Community Farm are the best known examples of this model.

NB this A-Z guide to setting up a CSA doesn't cover in detail how to set up a community-owned farm but you can download this guide produced by the Plunkett Foundation feanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/A-guide-to-setting-up-and-running-Community-Farms.pdf



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OTHER USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

- ▶ Introduction to CSA from the Biodynamic Association in the US biodynamics.com/content/community-supported-agriculture-introduction-csa
- ▶ CSA Network UK video on what community supported agriculture means youtube.com/watch?v=h8g_IRLfE6E
- ▶ The Impact of Community Supported Agriculture - evaluation report produced by the Soil Association as part of the Making Local Food Work programme communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/resource/full-report-the-impact-of-community-supported-agriculture
- ▶ A Share in the Harvest - an action manual for community supported agriculture produced by the Soil Association communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/resource/share-in-the-harvest
- ▶ See more information about What is CSA on our website, including case studies communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/what-is-csa/case-studies, communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/about/csa-charter/