

Evaluation of the Impact of Community Supported Agriculture in Wales



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Executive summary

Community Supported Agriculture is a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. Commonly, a regular payment entitles the member to a share of the produce. The social, economic and environmental benefits of CSA in Wales were assessed, working with seven of the 10 established CSAs in Wales (5 Horticulture, 1 beef and 1 arable/ bakery).

Impact of CSA in Wales - in numbers

10 established CSA Businesses	63% of members increased their knowledge & understanding of food production and sustainability issues
11 CSA Businesses in development	55% of CSA members learnt a new skill or improved an existing one
500 families supplied per year	58% improved their cooking skills as a result of being a CSA member
19,000 vegetable shares, 500 Kg beef and 4000 loaves of bread produced per year	5 school projects delivered
70 Ha of land	1 citizen science project delivered
In 40% of businesses members were instrumental in accessing land	91% of members said CSA had a positive impact on their mood, general happiness and wellbeing
£17,500 raised by community members for infrastructure	62% of members made healthier food choices as a result of being a CSA member 80% increased the variety in their diets
15 full time equivalent jobs supported	90% said their social networks had increased by being a CSA members
100 regular volunteers	74% said their awareness of their communities (activities, projects, different cultures) had increased

Economic benefits

By providing a guaranteed income for a period, usually a year, CSA members made a significant contribution to the financial resilience of the business. Regular fixed payments helped mitigate cash flow issues (a problem for food producers the world over) and enabled effective financial planning.

In addition, some members made credit available to the project, mostly to cover capital and infrastructure costs, amounting to £17,500 across the seven enterprises who responded. These arrangements helped CSAs to reduce or eliminate the cost of borrowing and strengthened the relationship between the community and the business. Others made contributions 'in kind' for example volunteering their time to prepare grant applications, run crowdfunding campaigns and provide financial oversight of the project.

CSA also brought benefits to the wider economy. The seven participating CSAs supported the equivalent of fifteen full time jobs (FTE) and provided marketing opportunities and other support to a range of additional local food businesses.

Environmental benefits

A commitment to agroecological and organic farming and growing systems is central to CSA and one of the main motivations for community members joining. As a result, CSAs deliver a number of important environmental benefits including: lower carbon emissions; higher carbon sequestration; less pollution through using less soluble forms of fertility that do not leach into water; higher biodiversity and higher animal welfare.

Social benefits

Over 90% of members said CSA had had a positive impact on their mood and general happiness. Working together, whether volunteering in the field or working on a specific project, appeared to be a particularly powerful way of increasing community cohesion and a sense of shared purpose. A third of CSA members volunteered on a regular basis and a further 53% occasionally.

Empowerment was a recurring theme. This was expressed partly as being able to take positive action to address environmental and food system issues that members were concerned about. Members also valued being able to influence how food was produced through the CSA itself; 73% felt that they could have a say in 'how their food was produced' and 64 % felt they could be a part of the 'decision making process'.

Over 60% of members said 'a 'better diet' was one of the most important benefits of being a CSA member. A significant number of respondents said they made 'healthier choices' and 58% said they ate more fruit and vegetables. 58% had also improved their cooking skills and almost 80% had increased the variety in their diets and experimented with new ingredients.

Education, skills and learning was an important part of CSA. 61% of members said their understanding of how their food is produced had improved and 55% of members said they had learnt a new skill. These are not necessarily food related and included business administration, website maintenance, social media skills and event organisation. Two of the CSAs worked directly with schools and one project participated in a citizen science project.

Most members felt that their project was inclusive to all sections of society, but it was acknowledged that memberships tended towards more affluent sections of society. Some CSAs had taken steps to include those on lower incomes for example 'pay it forward' schemes, working with food banks and facilitating work shares.

Strategic relevance

CSA can make a highly significant contribution to the goals of some important Welsh Government policies, strategies and legislation including: The Well-Being of Future Generations Act (2015), the Environment Act (2016) and post Brexit agricultural policy. The research focused on CSA, but other models of community-based farming and growing deliver some of the same benefits. Recent studies (2020) by Social Farms & Gardens and Tyfu Cymru identified a further 36 community food businesses, 27 vegetable box schemes in Wales, 326 community gardens and 24 community orchards.

Conclusions

This research, taken together with other evidence, highlights the potential for CSA and other community food businesses to deliver a wide range of benefits across several key Welsh Government policies. In the light of this the following recommendations are made:

- Support CSAs and other community food businesses, including those under 5Ha, through new Sustainable Farming Scheme at a level commensurate to the public goods they deliver.
- Recognise the role of CSA and other community-based food businesses in addressing mental and physical health. Steps should be taken to actively involve these businesses in the provision of health care services including social prescribing and other health initiatives.
- Prioritise CSAs and other community food businesses wishing to access publicly owned land.
- Remove key planning restrictions that disadvantage CSAs and other community food businesses over other land-based businesses.
- Support organisations working to improve access to land for new entrants.
- Continue to provide generic support to CSA and other community food businesses, building on projects such as Tyfu Fyny and Tyfu Cymru.

1. Background

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared ([More information](#)). In financial terms, that usually means that members of the community commit to paying a monthly subscription to a local farm in exchange for a share of the harvest or product. Being a CSA member involves more than simply making a financial commitment. As the name suggests it is about building direct relationships both with the producers and other community members.

The roots of the modern CSA are widely considered to be in Japan in the late 1960s. The concept spread to the USA in the mid 80's, and according to [UDSA statistics](#) there were 7400 by 2015. This growth has been mirrored in Europe. According to the [European CSA Research Group \(2016\)](#), there were nearly 2800 CSA's in the 22 European countries it surveyed. In the UK, the first CSA projects appeared in late 1990's. The [CSA Network UK](#), established in 2013 to continue support for CSAs after the Making Local Food Work Project ended, currently identifies 160 CSA enterprises (April 2020).

At the time of writing, 10 of those CSAs are based in Wales. Of these 8 are horticultural enterprises producing a wide range of fruit and vegetables on 1-3 ha including some protected cropping (usually polytunnels). Of the remainder, one produces beef from common land as part of a conservation grazing project and the other is a community supported bakery growing 13 Ha of heritage wheat.

2. Aims and scope of the research

This research explores the impact of CSA in terms of delivering economic, environmental and social benefit of CSA Businesses and their members. Specifically, it examines:

- The impact of the CSA model on the financial resilience of the business
- The contribution of sustainable production systems, which underpin CSA, to delivering environmental benefits
- The contribution CSA makes to delivering social benefits including improved social cohesion, expanding social networks, improving mental health, better diets, and skills, education and educational opportunities
- The degree to which other models of community farming and growing and community food businesses deliver some of the same benefits
- The extent to which the delivery of these benefits contribute to key policy and strategy aims

3 Methodology

Seven of the 10 established CSA projects in Wales participated in the project. Data was collected through a combination of surveys and semi structured interviews and included growers/ managers and community members.

The surveys and questionnaires were developed within a framework developed by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience at Coventry University, specifically to assess the impacts of agroecological enterprises, and is summarised below.

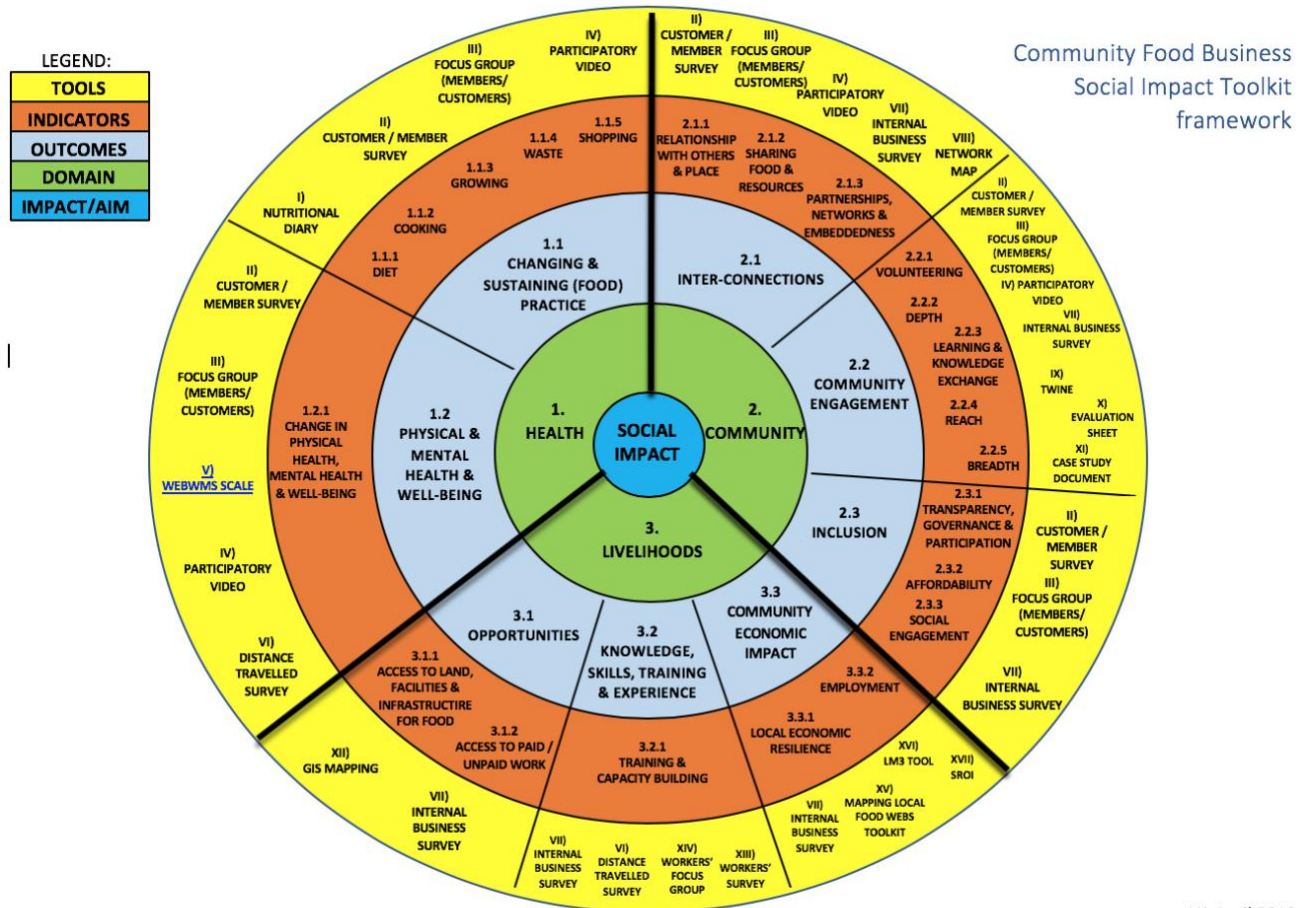


Figure 1: Framework from 'Social Impact Tool Kit' from Owen et al, 2018

Separate surveys were designed for CSA producers and community members and are summarised in Table 1 along with information on the distribution methods, dates circulated and return rates. The full text of the surveys is available [here](#) for producers and [here](#) for members

In addition to the surveys, semi structured interviews were conducted with members of five CSAs. Questions were deliberately open ended and were intended to stimulate broad discussion in the following areas:

- Supporting sustainable food systems
- Food skills and lifestyle
- Health and wellbeing
- Land, production and business structures
- Money matters

In four cases, researchers were present when members came to pick up their shares and carried out interviews on an individual basis. The fifth business based on beef animals which will not mature for another 18 months, did not have a regular pick up point and an informal focus group meeting was arranged instead.

	CSA Farmer/ grower	CSA members
Key topics	<p>Base line data: Enterprises/ crops; Land area and tenure; Productivity; Employment; Distribution model; Future development.</p> <p>Importance of financial commitments of CSA members for the viability of the business (3.3.1).</p> <p>Degree to which CSA members help to finance the project infrastructure and development and access to land.</p> <p>Skills the CSA members bring into the business.</p> <p>The contribution of the project to the wider local economy.</p> <p>The degree to which being a CSA enriched lives of producers.</p> <p>The extent to which being a CSA improved social interaction and integration. The rewards and benefits of having volunteers on the farm.</p> <p>The extent to which the farm is used as a community and education resource.</p>	<p>The key benefits of being a member of a CSA.</p> <p>Degree to which being part of a community producing own food is valued.</p> <p>The nature of social interactions with the CSA community.</p> <p>Participation in volunteering.</p> <p>The inclusiveness of the project.</p> <p>Impact on cooking skills, diet and food waste.</p> <p>Impact on food production skills.</p> <p>The importance of supporting local producers.</p> <p>The importance of supporting sustainable production systems.</p> <p>The impact of being a CSA member on physical activity.</p> <p>Impact on overall mood.</p> <p>The extent to which membership reduced social isolation.</p> <p>Whether or not membership increases awareness and learning around issues of environment, sustainability, and food justice.</p> <p>Fairness with respect to pricing.</p> <p>The degree to which regular payments helped with budgeting.</p> <p>Awareness of the wider local economy.</p>
Distribution	Email	Survey Monkey
Date	14 Feb – 24 March 2020	
Responses	7 (70%)	95 (18%)

Table 1: Key subject areas covered by the producer and membership surveys

4 Results and discussion

4.1 *Baseline data*

Table 2 shows the key characteristics of the 7 participating CSAs. In summary

- 5 were market garden type enterprises producing a wide range of fruit and vegetables on 1-3 ha including some protected cropping (usually polytunnels).
- 1 produced beef from common land as part of a conservation grazing project
- 1 was a Community Supported Bakery growing 13 Ha of heritage wheat
- CSAs had been established from between 6 months and over 10 years
- Membership numbers varied from 20 to 120
- The number of Full time Equivalent (FTE) jobs varied from 0 to 5
- The number of volunteers varied between 0 and 35

The characteristics of individual CSAs are detailed below (data derived from this study, Mitchell, 2020; and Wheeler, 2020).

Table2: Key characteristics of participating CSAs

Name	Enterprises	Estab- lished	No. of Members	Bags/ year	Area	Tenure	Employ- ment (FTE)	No. of Volunt- eers	Notes
Banc Organics	Horticulture	2009	60	2500	1	Owned – additional to 1-2 ha to be rented in 2020	0.5	4	In process of moving some production/ packing operation; Significant expansion planned 2020 – 2024. Additional produce bought in to supplement shares. Internet shop in addition to CSA shares
Coed Organics	Horticulture	2010	50	2500	2	Rented	5		Changed structure to workers Co-op. Supplies Local market as well as CSA
Caerhys Organic Community Agriculture (COCA)	Horticulture	2010	60	3000	1.5	Owned	0.5	10	Started to provide further income to support next generation
Cae Tan	Horticulture	2016	120	6000	3	Rented (1ha peppercorn)	2	30	Active education programme with schools & lifelong learning

contd

Name	Enterprises	Established	Members	Bags/year	Area	Tenure	Employment (FTE)	No of Volunteers	Notes
Cowtan	Beef	2018	12	5 cows	40 ha	Commons	0	12	Conservation grazing. Beef purchased up front by members
Flintshare	Horticulture, Apiculture	2010	85	750	0.75	Occupied by permission of landowners (3 sites)	0	35	Community led and run by volunteers. 3 sites serve 100 members
Torth y Tir	Bread	2013		4000 loaves	13	Rented	1.5	5	Started in 2013, currently baking small quantities. Bakery in construction, which will increase capacity to 12,000 loaves/ year plus pizza production/ sales at events & festivals

Table 2: Key characteristics of participating businesses
 Supplementary data from: Mitchell, 2020; and Wheeler, 2020

4.2 Economic benefits

All projects indicated that the commitment from community members making regular monthly payments make the business ‘a great deal’ more financially resilient. Cash flow problems are particularly acute for agricultural and horticultural businesses. For growers, it can be several months before expenditure on seed, compost and other inputs are recouped in sales. In beef systems, it will be over two years. In conventional models this is often covered by taking out a loan. A study in the USA estimated that CSAs made savings of up \$20,000 in interest they would have to otherwise pay (Paul, 2018). While this is not directly comparable to the situation in Wales, it serves to illustrate the importance of regular payments throughout the year. Guaranteed markets at fair prices are also important contributors to financial resilience and viability.

CSA members also contributed to the financial health of the business in other ways. Four CSAs gave examples where members provided access to credit, usually to assist with capital investment. This reduces or eliminates the cost of borrowing for the business and just as importantly demonstrates members’ long term commitment.

Members who were not able to support the business with cash were able to contribute to the financial health of the business in other ways. These included running crowd-funding campaigns, preparing funding applications and in one case providing accommodation for the producer at a reduced rent.

Other contributions were non-monetary. In 5 of the 7 CSAs members brought their skills and expertise into the business, taking on roles such as budgeting, accounting, bookkeeping, legal and governance skills, and marketing all on a voluntary/ pro bono basis.

The high cost and low availability of land is a huge problem for new entrants wanting to establish their own farm businesses. There are a number of approaches to tackling the issue including preferential access to local authority owned farms, agroecological land trusts (for example the ecological land co-operative) and access to low interest loans (Landworker’s Alliance, 2019). CSA membership had an important role in facilitating access to land in four of the projects (Figure 2). In some cases, members made their own land available (in one case for a peppercorn rent).

CSA business model

“It helps us pay for inputs & wages in less productive times of the year”

“It helps cover up front costs and is important to the viability of the business”

“The business would not be able to function were it otherwise”

Members provided or facilitated £17,500 of credit to projects through:

- *Low/ no interest loans*
- *Purchase of 5 years of produce up front*
- *Preparing funding bids*
- *Running crowd funding campaigns*

Derived from producer survey

In others, members played an enabling role, using their social and professional networks to help secure land for the project. The beef CSA, where one of the members was able to use his professional position to ‘broker’ agreements to use the grazing rights of farmers on common land, was particularly interesting. Access to land for new businesses and new entrants is becoming increasingly difficult making these sorts of ‘alternative’ approaches important.

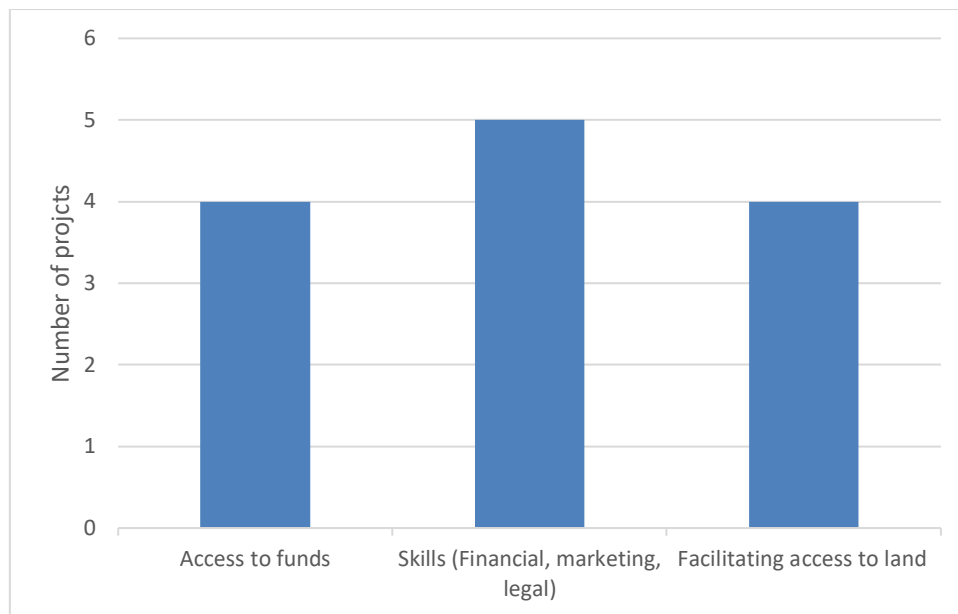


Figure 2: Ways in which memberships contributed to CSA businesses

Risk sharing is a central tenement of the CSA approach. In its simplest form this is members accepting that the loss of a crop due to circumstances outside the control of the grower results in them not having that item in their share. Some CSAs source extra produce for their lean times, or to supplement a failed crop, in order to reduce the risk of no or a small share. This may be required to attract enough members to make the project viable. In the context of CSA, the main mechanism by which financial risk sharing is achieved is through regular fixed payments for a share of the product, however, members who provide loans in whatever form are also sharing risk, as are those who invest considerable unpaid time.

Perhaps surprisingly, most CSA producers in this study did not see themselves as contributing to the wider local economy to any great extent. In response to the question ‘My project contributes to the wider local economy’ of the 5 CSAs that answered 3 said ‘A little’, one said ‘moderately so’ and one ‘not at all’ (figure 3). The question was interpreted more narrowly than intended and answers focused solely on the creation of opportunities for other local businesses, for example offering products from other local businesses to members, supplying local shops and supporting local farmers’ markets. Only one business identified the jobs the business

“Local food producers contribute to building resilient local economies, it is ever so important for me and my family to be able to participate in local production.”
Comment from CSA members interview

supported as a contribution to the local economy.

Saltmarsh et al 2011 found that successful CSA initiatives contribute directly to local economies through the employment they provide (an average of 2.6 employees in their study) and other spending, particularly trade with other producers (38% of initiatives buy from other producers). They also showed that indirectly, CSA can help to build economic potential through provision of education, training and volunteering opportunities: 77% of initiatives in their study counted education or training among the services they provide; initiatives had an average of 44 regular volunteers each year.

CSA members saw the contribution to local economy in much the same terms as those in Saltmarsh's study: Supporting their local food producer was 'very' or 'quite' important to 95% of survey respondents; contributing to local jobs was 'very important' to 70.33% of members and 'quite important' to a further 15.4%; and in response to the question 'Has your involvement made you more aware of the local economy?' 57% replied with either 'a lot' (32%) or 'moderately' (25 %).

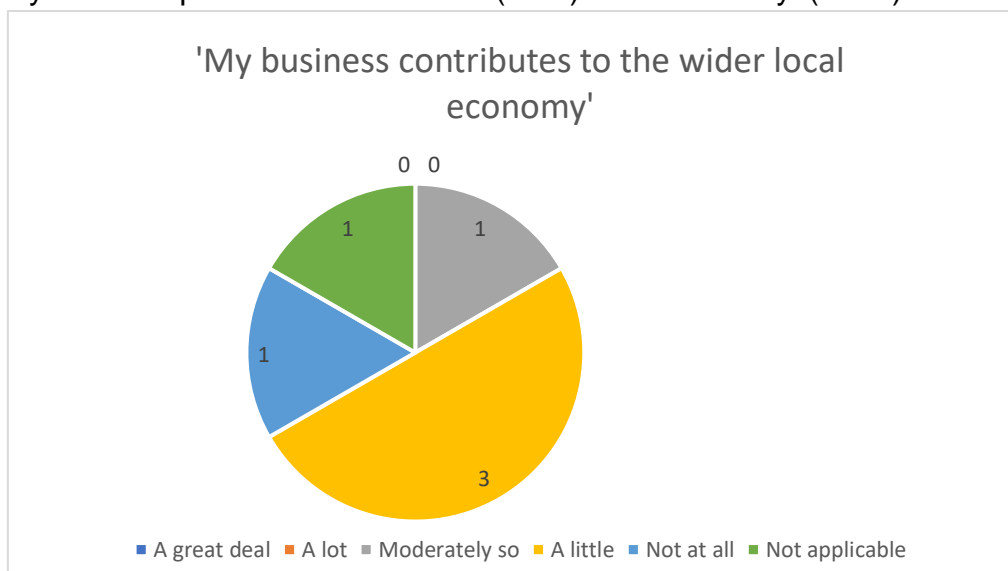


Figure 3: Producer perceptions of the contribution CSAs made to wider local economy

CSA projects have an important role in the development of other businesses. In some instances, their role is providing training for new growers and helping new entrants to build up the confidence and skills to set up their own projects and businesses. For example, one vegetable CSA on the Gower was the catalyst for the establishment of two other horticultural businesses in the area (one a CSA and the other not). In other cases, they provide the inspiration for new projects. For example the same vegetable CSA was the impetus for setting up the beef based CSA on the neighbouring commons. The impact is not restricted to food and farming, for example the establishment of a micro energy scheme by a group who met through their CSA.

4.3 Environmental impacts

Sustainable production systems are central to the ethos of CSA. Indeed, the movement has its root in a deep dissatisfaction with industrial food and farming systems and began as a way to allow small farmers to make a living based on sustainable production systems (Paul, 2019; Groh & McFadden 2000). In many countries, most notably Austria, the development of CSA is inextricably linked to the development of organic farming (European CSA Research Group, 2016). Urgenci, the organisation representing CSAs at EU level, is a signatory to the '[Declaration of the International Forum on Agroecology](#)' effectively committing its members to agroecological principles.

The benefits of agroecological, and in particular organic, production systems are well documented and widely accepted (Lampkin, 2002). These include:

- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity (Smith et al, 2011)
- Healthier soil through higher organic matter and promoting biological activity (Ghabour et al, 2017)
- Reduction of emissions mainly through eliminating N fertilisers which emit large quantities of CO₂ during their production, although, this is mitigated to some extent by lower yields when emissions are measured per unit production (as opposed to per hectare) (Bos et al. 2014)
- Cleaner water through reducing leaching and pollution with pesticides and synthetic fertilisers (Niggli 2015)
- Higher animal health and welfare standards
- Food security (Muller et al)

In Wales, 4 of the 10 active CSAs hold organic

certification. There are a number of reasons why CSAs might not certify. One of the key functions of the certification system is to give the consumer confidence that the farm is producing to minimum standards. Many CSAs argue that because of the close connection of their members/ consumers with the farm (some will actively be involved in producing the food), and their open farm policy which allows visits to the farm at any time, certification is not necessary. In addition to not being valued by producers, there is a cost (typically £500/ year in the UK) to certification as well as robust

"I have trust in what I'm eating and I feel part of a community of likeminded people. The food is fresh and local and therefore nutritious and environmentally responsible"

Comment from CSA member survey

"I am actively doing something about important issues around food by being involved in my CSA"

"I feel I am part of the solution, not part of the problem"

Comment from CSA members' survey

"I struggle with the contradiction of having to drive several miles out of my way to pick up locally sourced organic veg, and 'reduced food miles is' a fallacy as members use vehicles to travel short distances to sites to collect relatively small amounts of veg".

Comment from CSA Members' survey

reporting requirements. Businesses can be unwilling to pay for a service they do not perceive that they need.

The results of this study showed that sustainable food production was one of the main reasons community members joined CSAs in the first instance. 90% of members said that organic farming principles were 'very' or 'quite' important to them and 95% said that it was the ethics of the business that attracted them. For some members, supporting a CSA business was an important practical step to 'do something about' the environmental concerns they had about the wider food system, and therefore CSA has a role to play in empowering people to take action.

Some members also felt that CSA contributed environmental benefits by reducing food miles. However, others were of the opposite view because of large numbers of people travelling to the pickup point to collect relatively small quantities of food.

This can be mitigated to some extent by members working together. In this study we identified an instance where six members took turns to collect shares for others. The greater use of renewable energy for local transport in the future will substantially change these findings.

4.4 Social impacts

4.41 Community cohesion and extending social networks

In general terms, building a community around local food was highly valued. All respondents to the members' survey 'valued being a part of the community their food comes from', and 87% of members considered the provenance of the food 'very important' (Figure 4). Knowing who had produced their food was also a highly valued (74% said it was 'very beneficial' and a further 16% 'quite beneficial'). This suggests the 'who' is as important as the 'how' and 'where' aspects of the food system.

"This is essential for my sense of community and belonging"
"We love being part of our veg place, they're so welcoming, encouraging, helpful, friendly and great with the kids. We totally value seeing how our food is grown and being inspired to do some at home. It is totally different to other food purchases and I would love it if more people had similar experiences"

Comments from members' survey

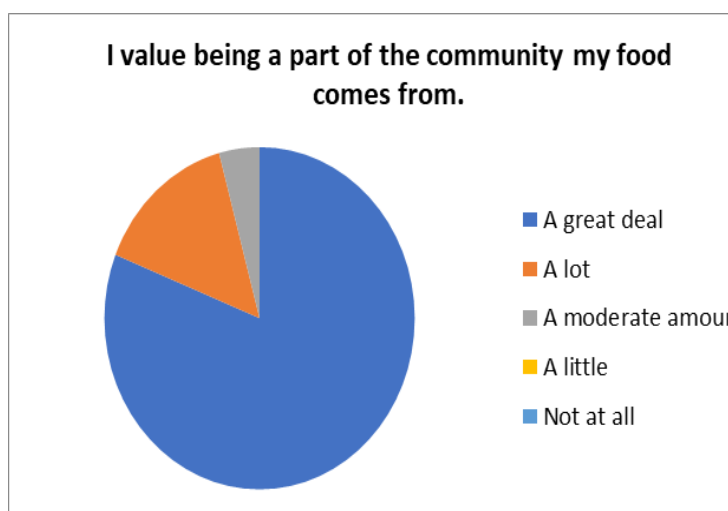


Figure 4: Being part of a 'food community'

The community aspects of CSA were also hugely important to CSA producers. Of the 6 producers that responded to the statement 'My life has been enriched because of my involvement in a CSA' 5 answered 'A great deal' and one ' a lot' (Figure 4). Answers to subsequent questions give an insight into the contributory factors. All but one of the producers felt that being part of a CSA helps them integrate with their local communities, and two felt they were more valued and respected as a result of the project. In the case where CSA did not lead to greater integration, this was because they were geographically distant from their membership and in the community in which they actually grew *"supporting community business is not highly prioritised"*.

"I always wanted to grow, and I always wanted to do something community based, so in a way CSA helped me fulfill my ambitions"
 Comment from CSA producer survey

One important role of a CSA project is to provide the opportunity for members to either meet for the first time or to strengthen existing networks. In response to the question 'What are the main benefits of being involved for you?' 65% felt that being part of a CSA had strengthened their social networks, 45% to a 'large extent'. Only 10% of respondents felt little or no impact and only 15% of members never took part in social events/ activities and volunteering sessions.

CSA membership can also be a catalyst for the development of other community projects and initiatives. 80% of CSA members said they had had 'more chats with like-minded people' indicating strong opportunities for people to make connections within their local environs providing a resilient social infrastructure.

"The connection of local people leads to other things. A few of us started a micro energy scheme having met through the CSA"
 Comment from CSA members' survey

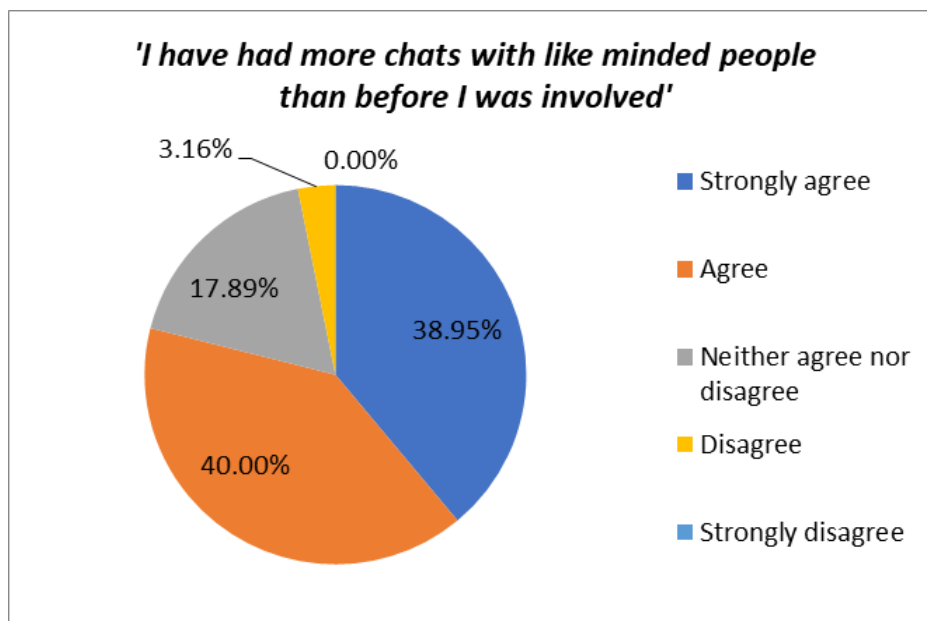


Figure 5: Chat's with likeminded people

The members' survey also suggested that CSA has a role in community cohesion. 76% indicated that they were more aware of what was happening in their local communities (new projects, new people moving to the area etc). Almost 74% viewed improved relationships between farms and locals as 'quite' (37.9%) or 'very' (36.8%) beneficial indicating a positive impact on local community cohesion.

"It would be nice to have more local production in walking distance for people who don't drive".
Comment from members' survey

Respondents were asked whether they felt the project was 'Inclusive to all sections of society?' 62% felt their CSA was 'always' inclusive a further 31% responded with 'moderately' or 'mostly but with exceptions'. Comments reveal that sites are often only accessible by car which excludes those who are reliant on public transport. However, in the CSA movement more widely there is an acknowledgement that there is a predominance of white, middle class and relatively affluent people (Kneafsey et al.,) and, independently of this study, one of the projects indicated that establishing a business in predominantly low-income areas is much more difficult. Overcoming this barrier, where it exists, is important to the development of the wider CSA movement, and this is explored further in section 4.45

4.42 Health and wellbeing

Both the semi structured interviews and survey results indicate a positive effect on health and wellbeing for individuals who are involved in a local food producing community (Figure 6).

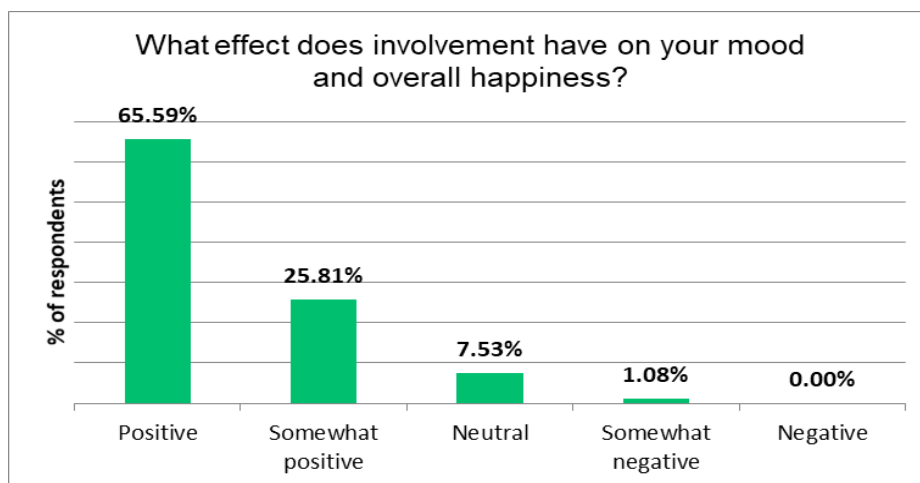


Figure 6: Impact on mood

A feeling of belonging and a sense of empowerment were recurring themes and these quotes (right) are powerful statements of personal wellbeing.

Working together was valued as an enjoyable activity with nearly a third of respondents joining in 'usually'

"I'm growing for me but with others – not alone' and 'a main benefit for me is connecting with people leading to greater confidence"
"I feel I am part of the solution, not part of the problem' and 'I am actively doing something about important issues around food by being involved in my CSA"
"I feel better about myself. I'm doing something good for me"

or 'often' with volunteering and a further 53% 'a little bit'. Cultivating together on the farm provided a 'feel good factor' to members.

One way in which CSA engendered a sense of empowerment was the inclusion of members in the decision-making process and sometimes in the running of the business. 73.3% of members felt that they could have a say in 'how their food was produced (e.g. organically, high welfare etc)' and 63.7% felt they could be a part of the 'decision making process'. This clearly demonstrates a degree of empowerment and feeling of belonging within their food producing community.

"I always feel positive and uplifted by my time on site – even after a wet day!"
"Once here I never want to leave!"
Comments from members' survey

There is sometimes a case made for the role of CSA in promoting physical exercise, but this was not borne out by this study though one survey respondent said, "*The physical activities of composting ...has become a fundamental part of my exercise regime*". However, exercise levels had not increased 'at all' for 42% of respondents and only 'slightly' for most of the remainder as a direct result of being a CSA member. Comments suggested that individuals were already physically active when they joined.

CSA membership did appear to have a big impact on diet. In response to the question 'What are the main benefits of being involved for you?' a 'better diet' was stated as 'very beneficial' by over 60% and 'quite beneficial' by 32% with only 2% saying they had not really benefitted from this (almost 6% had no view). A significant number of respondents said they made 'healthier choices' as a result of being a member of a CSA (Figure 7).

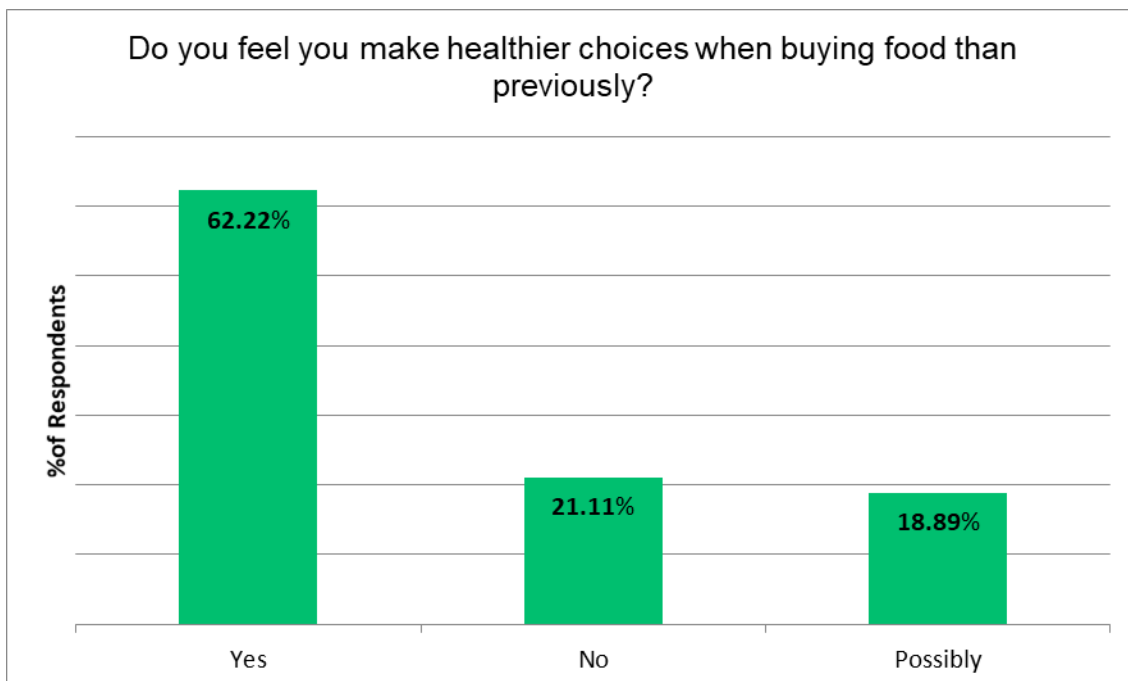


Figure 7: Impact on 'healthy food choices'

A key aspect of this is increased consumption of fruit and vegetables with 58% saying they ate more as a result of being a member of a CSA. Some commented that they visited the supermarket far less and therefore bought less 'junk food'. "Cooking more seasonally" was also a common phrase from the interviews.

Regarding cooking some respondents felt they already had excellent cooking skills (and diets). However, 58% indicated an improvement in their cooking and almost 80% had increased the variety in their diets and experimented with new foods. 72% had shared recipes or cooking tips 'occasionally' or 'often'.

Some CSA projects supplied recipes, either at the collection point or through the newsletter, which were also valued.

Other responses to the question 'What are the main benefits of being involved for you?' showed very strong importance placed on the organic methods used and the local provenance of the food with comments such as "Good clean food (no GMO or pesticides) contributes to my welfare". Greater freshness is also appreciated - "I'm amazed by how long the food lasts at home".

4.44 Skills and education

The acquisition of skills and a widening of awareness around food and environmental issues emerged as a major benefit of CSA for members. Just over 40% had learned a 'medium' or large amount about how to grow fruit and vegetables. Interviewees said they had learnt about preserving, harvesting, growing, pruning fruit, composting, biodynamics, gluts and hungry gaps. In similar vein 61.3% said their understanding of how their food is produced has improved, and 25% said they were 'much more aware' and 42.4% 'a bit more aware' of the origins of food (e.g. where it comes from and how it is produced). The role of CSA in the informal education of children was highlighted many times.

The interview with the beef CSA members was

"We feel healthier, cooking more healthily, eating more veg and less convenience food"

"Harvesting is the start of the juices flowing – I'm already thinking about cooking and eating it!"

Comments from the members' survey

"I enjoy the recipe suggestions for the less known veg. It has widened my diet"

"I've started to cook everything from scratch, I'm enjoying being inventive when I see what's in my veg share".

Comments from interviews

"I go home and do there whatever we have done here [on the farm]"

Comment from members' survey

"Kids are seeing how their parents collect their veg from the farm"

"The children see the crops in the fields as we arrive to get our veg"

"Having collected the food with us the kids now help to prepare the meals – they're excited to use the produce!"

interesting because it was set in a different context (commons grazing), and therefore the set of skills and learning points were different. New skills/ knowledge included: animal husbandry, plant identification, river ecology and the role of grazing animals in creating biodiversity.

55% of members' survey respondents indicated a benefit from 'learning new skills/training'. These are not necessarily food related and can be skills acquired for admin purposes such as bookkeeping, website maintenance, social media skills, event organisation, language skills and others.

"I practice my Welsh in the pickup shed"
"I pick up art techniques from another member"
Comments from interviews

As well as the volunteering based learning, several projects also organised skill sharing workshops such as willow weaving, baking, preserving and fermenting.

In addition to informal and lifelong learning, several projects worked with schools, colleges and universities. Three of the businesses worked directly with schools. In two cases, children were actively involved in all stages of producing the ingredients and preparing the food for pizzas and soups as well as learning about food and sustainability more widely. A third has a programme in place which will include a visit from over 500 children in 2020. Another business worked with the Centre for Agroecology and Water Resilience (CAWR) at Coventry University on a citizen science project on community decision making in sustainable food systems.

While involvement in education is not unique to CSA the results suggest that the close relationship between the project and the community (e.g. parents of children at local schools) creates a vehicle through which schools and farms can link up. It is evident that food and farming educational activity is highest in areas that have an active food and farming sector and a strong food culture (Personal Communication, LEAF Education). CSA's unquestionably make a contribution to enhancing food culture.

4.45 Money matters

The majority (85% of respondents) felt that the food was fairly priced, with many adding comments on 'value for money'. Some commented on other ways in which membership of CSA helped making good food more affordable through better buying decisions. Some said that they visited the supermarkets less and therefore spent less money on things they might impulse buy there. Some highlighted that they wasted less because they valued the food more and all of the 56 who responded to the relevant questions said that they found committing to regular monthly payments helpful for weekly budgeting.

"Very cheap for organic"
"Knowing its provenance is priceless"
"I'm more inclined not to waste food. I value it"
Comments from members' survey

However, as discussed in Section 4.41, memberships of the CSA movement tend to be dominated by more affluent sectors of society and it would be disingenuous to suggest that the perception of CSAs, and local food in general, as more expensive does not exist. In addition to highlighting some of the points made above, three CSA businesses in this study had taken steps to include those on lower incomes. Examples are pay it forward schemes where those on higher incomes pay slightly more, working with food banks and community cafes and facilitating contributions of labour rather than cash for a share of produce.

5 Relevance to other community food businesses

With the exception of risk sharing, the benefits identified in this study are not unique to CSA businesses. Social Farms & Gardens identified a further 36 community food businesses in Wales that did not identify as CSAs. This is likely to be primarily because the risk sharing element is less prominent or the 'membership' is less clearly defined. However, they have many characteristics in common with the group participating in this study.

- All are based around local, sustainable farming systems producing food to organic and agroecological principles.
- All have close links with their local communities, and many hold open days, festivals and other events to promote community cohesion and integration.
- Many offer similar volunteering opportunities and educational and lifelong learning activities.

The same study identified 326 community gardens and 24 community orchards, which deliver the same and similar benefits for mental health and wellbeing, diet, skill sharing and learning and many of the other social benefits but are less focused on the commercial production of fruit and vegetables.

A baseline survey (Wheeler, 2020) identified 27 vegetable box schemes operating in Wales (not including the CSAs in this study). Many of those are likely to have a high degree of customer loyalty, and some may pay through weekly or monthly standing orders thus ensuring regular payment over a period of time. Some of those businesses may also offer volunteering opportunities and formal and informal training.

The benefits highlighted in this report will be associated with all these types of business/ organisations to a greater or lesser degree depending on their precise nature. CSA's point of difference is that it brings all these elements together into a coherent approach.

6 Strategic fit

The study highlights some significant ways in which CSA can contribute to the goals of important Welsh Government policies, strategies and legislation.

CSA is relevant to all the goals of the **Well-Being Of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

- **A Prosperous Wales** – Primarily CSA provides employment for a food producer but also fulfils ‘using resources efficiently’ and contributes to a well educated community particularly around climate change and food.
- **A Resilient Wales** – CSA and community food businesses ‘maintain and enhance a biodiverse natural environment’. They have also shown themselves able to respond to local and national changes e.g. flooding, COVID 19 pandemic.
- **A Healthier Wales** – CSA and community food businesses contribute to the wellbeing of their members and facilitate a healthy and varied diet.
- **A Wales of Cohesive Communities** - CSA and community food businesses provide an environment in which social interactions can take place and lead to ‘well-connected’ communities.
- **A Globally Responsible Wales** – Due largely to their use of environmentally responsible methods CSA and community food businesses ‘make a positive contribution to global well-being’.

In addition to the WFG Act, the benefits CSA delivers closely aligns with the objectives of the new Sustainable Farming Scheme and the strategies that underpin it, including:

- **Economic benefits:** A *high market potential*, linked to the commitment to buying a share of the produce at a fair price ensuring production is closely aligned with the ‘market’; High potential for *diversified income* as diversification projects are undertaken in close consultation with, and the direct involvement of, communities. Risk is not only managed, but shared with community members; *Future proofing* linked to short, local supply chains and biologically based production systems which insulate business from many external factors such as trade agreements, exchange rates, fluctuations in the price of inputs such as synthetic fertilisers, and oil prices.
- **Environmental benefits** are associated with sustainable production systems including *low carbon farming*; *carbon sequestration* through methods that increase soil organic matter; increased biodiversity through prohibition or severe restriction of pesticides and diverse cropping systems (involving up to 40 different crops in the case of market garden type systems).
- **Social benefits** including improved mental health of producers and communities through decreased isolation and increased community cohesion; education and learning (schools, HE and FE institutions and lifelong learning through volunteering); improved diets and cooking skills.

7. Barriers to CSA

This research deliberately focused on the benefits. It worked with established, and therefore more successful, businesses and because the survey was voluntary it effectively

selected the members most likely to respond enthusiastically about the project and those who feel they have benefited most.

However, in order for CSA to develop, there is a need to understand the barriers and how they might be addressed. Existing evidence suggests that key issues are as follows:

Lack of policy support. The majority of CSAs are based on small areas of land, many under 3Ha in size. As such they have historically been ineligible for financial support from mainstream agricultural policies, including BPS and Glastir. Those that are eligible have benefited little from a system based on holding area payments. With the UK leaving the EU, and therefore no longer bound by the CAP, there is the opportunity to support CSAs and other community food businesses at a level commensurate with the public goods they deliver as evidenced throughout this report. The close fit with the goals of the WCFG act adds weight to this argument.

Access to land. On account of the close relationship with communities, CSA farms need to be located on the fringes of settlements. The potential for development in these areas tends to push the price of land well beyond the reach of small farmers and growers. In the light of the benefits for producers and communities, action is needed to address this issue, including:

Prioritising CSA and community food businesses when offering local authority smallholdings and land for sale or rent. The recent case of [Trecadwgan](#) in Pembrokeshire is a useful case study.

Supporting agro-ecological land trusts through low interest loans to provide starter farm opportunities. In this model government would provide long term, low interest loans to agroecological land trusts that met certain criteria. These loans would be used by the land trusts to buy land, which would then be subdivided into 'starter farms' and leased to new entrants. Existing examples include the [Ecological Land Cooperative](#) and the [Kindling Land Trust](#).

Further information and supporting evidence is available in the following publication: [Landworkers Alliance 2019](#)

Planning restrictions. The small physical size of many CSA businesses means that Permitted Development rights do not apply. This presents a significant barrier to businesses wishing to expand and develop for example by building packing and storage sheds or added value processing facilities. The granting of PDR based on the benefits CSAs deliver would address this barrier. Further information and supporting evidence is available in [Planning for small scale agriculture in Wales](#).

Lack of awareness/ understanding of CSA and its benefits for producers and communities. This is a key barrier to building memberships. CSA is a relatively new idea in the UK and represents a radical change in the relationship between food producers and their local communities, and the way in which food is distributed. A continuation of the support the Welsh Government has provided to, for example, Social Farms & Gardens and the CSA Network UK through the Tyfu Fyny project will help address this need.

Further research into the barriers to CSA development is needed, including CSA businesses that have failed, members who have dropped out and people who actively chose not to join CSAs. This research should then underpin the development of a comprehensive action plan to expand CSA in Wales.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

This research, taken together with other evidence, highlights the potential for CSA and other community food businesses to deliver a wide range of benefits across several key Welsh Government policies. In the light of this the following recommendations are made:

- Support CSAs and other community food businesses, including those under 5Ha, through new Sustainable Farming Scheme at a level commensurate to the public goods they deliver.
- Recognise the role of CSA and other community-based food businesses in addressing mental and physical health. Steps should be taken to actively involve these businesses in the provision of health care services including social prescribing and other health initiatives.
- Prioritise CSAs and other community food businesses wishing to access publicly owned land.
- Remove key planning restrictions that disadvantage CSAs and other community food businesses over other land-based businesses.
- Support organisations working to improve access to land for new entrants.
- Continue to provide generic support to CSA and other community food businesses, building on projects such as Tyfu Fyny and Tyfu Cymru

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