

Members

“The supportive community in CSA can create the stable dimension of the farm that offsets the instability and unpredictability of nature and economic markets.”

—Rowley & Beeman, *Our Field*

CSA brings people into food production by making them members of a specific farm. This relationship is unusual: for farmers, it's a different way of selling; for consumers, a different way of buying.

This chapter discusses how farmers can reach potential members, recruit them, and make them part of the CSA. It covers:

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Recruiting Your Members

This section provides information on finding and recruiting members for your CSA.

Recruiting members is a process. You start by deciding who they should be. Then decide where to find them. Finally, make them want to join your CSA.

WHO ARE YOUR MEMBERS?

You already have an idea of the customers you'd like to have. The type of CSA you have in mind, the products you sell, your farm, your own outlook on life all affect who will join.

Do you want to create a participatory CSA? Then you'll need members who have time to work at the farm, help distribute the shares and attend member meetings. Do you plan to grow mesclun, asparagus and five kinds of tomatoes? You'll want members who appreciate these *specialty* products.

Of course, your members won't all be exactly the same. But they must be somewhat alike, or they wouldn't get the same vegetables from the same farm in the same direct-marketing arrangement.

Here are some member characteristics to consider when deciding whom to recruit.

Member characteristics to consider (there are more!):

Household Size

Income

Ethnicity

Gourmet vs. Plain

Number of Meals Eaten Out

Children (how many? ages?)

Urban vs. Rural

Distance from Farm

Other Activities

Willingness to Experiment

HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Small families and singles need smaller shares or easily available half-shares. Large families may want large amounts of a few items, rather than a little bit of many items.

INCOME

Income will help determine how much and when members are willing to pay. Paying several hundred dollars at once for food to be received in the future takes a certain income.

*CSAs often
change the
way their
members eat.*

ETHNICITY

Different cultures have different cuisines. You may find a market **niche** by specializing in Asian, Hispanic, or other ethnically related foods.

GOURMET VS. PLAIN

Some people only want ordinary food — potatoes, lettuce, broccoli. Others want unusual crops and varieties.

NUMBER OF MEALS EATEN OUT

People or households who eat out often will require smaller shares.

CHILDREN

Families with children may have different needs than adults. Familiarity and ease of preparation may be more important. Farm visits which involve children may also interest them more.

URBAN VS. RURAL

Urban consumers may need more education about how farms operate and seasonality of farm production.

DISTANCE FROM FARM

Where your members live will affect how you distribute shares. Members who live close can pick up shares at the farm, but those in the city may need the shares to be brought to town, even home-delivered.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Members who are very busy with other activities may not be interested in participating in workdays and share distribution. They also may need more leeway in when they can pick up their shares.

WILLINGNESS TO EXPERIMENT

Some members will take anything you give them as long as you say how it can be cooked. Others only want familiar products, regardless of how tasty or nutritious other products may be.

FINDING YOUR MEMBERS

Where do you go to find these members? The profile you've created should give you some hints. Where do people like that live? work? shop? play? eat?

You will find prospective members easily where:

- ❶ People already have a consciousness that fits with CSA, especially with your project, and
- ❷ You have a connection, agriculture-related or not

CONSCIOUSNESS THAT FITS CSA

- ✦ Farmers' markets
- ✦ Environmental groups
- ✦ Agriculture organizations
- ✦ Social justice groups
- ✦ Community action groups
- ✦ Health-food stores
- ✦ Consumer cooperatives
- ✦ Health clubs/gyms

YOUR CONNECTIONS

- ✦ Church
- ✦ Civic organizations – Kiwanis, Rotary, Key clubs, AARP, Scouts
- ✦ Schools
- ✦ Ethnicity/nationality

Waldorf schools are based on the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, as are biodynamic farms. This shared philosophy makes a natural connection, and many biodynamic farms find members at Waldorf schools.

HOW YOU REACH THEM

Use your imagination to find ways to reach potential members. Once again, consider who they are. What will they respond to? The suggestions that follow are a start. Develop your own tools using your own talents and experience.

Making a personal connection to your farm is the best way to get people interested in your CSA. For this reason, **word-of-mouth** and **prepared presentations** (*like slide shows*) are great for reaching new members. Two other common ways are **creating and circulating a Proposal** and **writing news articles**.

The only thing I will discourage is conventional advertising for an unconventional product. Conventional advertising works fine for conventional products. But if you have something different, then you must look at alternative advertising.

Joel Salatin
"Getting Customers"

I You will find more information about **PRESENTATIONS** in the appendix.

WORD OF MOUTH

Excited, happy CSA members will automatically spread the word about CSA and your farm — they won't be able to contain themselves! To help the process along you can offer small thank-you gifts to members who get someone else to sign up. A bouquet of flowers or a dozen eggs is a nice way to say, "Thanks for bringing us business!"

Word-of-mouth is the most common way for CSA projects to recruit new members. However, you need to have members already to get new members this way. Still, a few people committed to the project can do wonders for raising interest in the community.

PREPARED PRESENTATIONS

Presentations (*like slide shows*) make a personal appeal to a specific audience, and so are effective for advertising your CSA. Another benefit is that you get immediate feedback about the CSA proposal.

Although you are generating interest in your farm and CSA, don't make your presentation a heavy sales pitch. Educate your audience about agriculture in the U.S., California and Placer County. Talk about CSA, about the social, economic and environmental concerns that it addresses. The idea that people can participate by joining your CSA should be eased in at the end. They will respond better if you teach them something.

CREATING AND CIRCULATING A PROPOSAL

Once you have designed a Proposal, use it to spread the word and bring in members.

The Proposal describes the CSA project to prospective members and sparks their interest. Ideally, the Proposal is short; the important information should fit in a brochure or a booklet. It should include:

✓WHAT CSA IS

Say it in your own words, or adapt it from this guidebook or elsewhere.

✓WHAT THE BENEFITS ARE

Let people know why they should join your CSA.

✓WHO YOU ARE

Describe you, your farm, the other people involved. Where is the farm, what do you grow, how long have you been farming, is this a family affair?

✓WHAT MEMBERS GET — WHEN, WHERE AND HOW

Summarize everything about harvest schedule, distribution dates and times, share prices, payment plans, etc. Other chapters of this manual will help you develop this information for your project.

✓HOW MEMBERS ARE INVOLVED

Describe work requirements if you have them, or mention voluntary workdays and harvest festivals.

I You can find more information on **BROCHURES** in the appendix.

✓ HOW SOMEONE CAN GET MORE INFORMATION

Say how to reach you, at home or at market. Be sure to include your name, address and telephone number. Also mention other places to look for information on CSA.

✓ HOW SOMEONE CAN JOIN

Include a commitment form with the Proposal pamphlet, or at least a response card to help you build a list of potential members.

Distribute the Proposal anywhere you identified potential members. Stores and other businesses may allow you to put out brochures on their front counters. Find out how to distribute them to school and church communities. In particular, if you are invited anywhere to give a talk or presentation, bring your Proposals, more than you think you might need. They will give people something to take with them and refresh their memories afterward.

Mailing lots of Proposals is probably not worth the expense. However, you might find it worthwhile to mail to a targeted list. A local health food co-op might let you send your proposal out to their members, or include it in one of its mailings. Again, target groups who would be receptive to CSA, or with whom you already have a connection.

A Proposal for a participatory CSA should be more detailed than one for a farmer-directed CSA. Since members will have more control over the farm's production and budgeting, they need to have correspondingly more information to help with their decisions. Include a budget that shows income from shares, capital and operating expenses, and farmer salary.

I You will find more information about NEWS RELEASES in the Appendix.

WRITING NEWS RELEASES

Having a newspaper run an article about your CSA project is cheap advertisement to a large audience. This approach isn't targeted, so you can find potential members you otherwise would have missed.

Writing an effective news release requires sticking to conventions about the style of writing, content, and form the release takes. Information about these conventions is included in the appendix, under *News Releases*.

Recruiting members means getting them excited about CSA and your farm. To sell them on your CSA, remember these things:

- ✦ **Sell What You Like** — You need to be committed to the product and enjoy it to sell it effectively. What you like is also what you know the most about.
- ✦ **Know Your Audience** — Decide what characteristics best describe your ideal member, so that you can target your message at them. When writing or speaking, know your current audience. Finally, get to know the people who do join your CSA — they may be different from those you originally had in mind.
- ✦ **Have A Clear Message** — Choose a few selling points which will make you stand out from the pack, and which will resonate with your audience. Create a logo for your farm, and use it on labels, letters, brochures, newsletters, etc.

Worksheet

Recruiting Your Members

This worksheet will help you start putting your ideas together about your future members.

1. List some characteristics of your members:

Where do they live?

What is their income level?

How many people are in the household?

Are there many children?

What are some other characteristics?



Communicating with Members

This chapter discusses three ways to share information with your members. It also describes how to create newsletters and surveys.

CSA members want to participate in their food supply.

CSA members are not simply buying produce, even if it is tastier and healthier. They are buying participation in their food supply and connection to a farm. At some level they are spending their dollars so that a rural way of life can continue to exist. CSA farmers, therefore, need to foster the connection that members are buying.

Three major ways to communicate with members are:

- ❶ Share notes
- ❷ Newsletters
- ❸ Surveys

Whenever you are communicating with your members in writing, use clear, simple language. Sentences and paragraphs should be short. Use everyday words rather than technical ones.

In addition, have a logo and use it on notes, letters, publications and other written material. Whether it is a picture, a name, a word or a phrase, your logo promotes and advertises your farm. It should capture the essence, or "*feel*," of your farming operation in a simple visual statement that distinguishes you from everyone else. Keep your logo simple, clean and crisp. Too much detail can distract your customers, obscuring your real theme or message. Also, simpler logos are more likely to reproduce well.

SHARE NOTES

Including a short note with each share is a great way to keep your members up-to-date. It can list the items in the share that week and products that should be available soon. This is also the place to introduce unfamiliar fruits or vegetables and suggest sample recipes. Finally, telling your members something about what is going on at the farm gives them a glimpse into the process that got them this bundle of produce.

This note doesn't need to be more than a half-page long. You can type it or write it by hand. The purpose is simply to engage your members.

Remember that your members are not farmers; what may seem ordinary to you may be exciting to them. If the seedlings in the greenhouse are doing well, tell them. If you get a new load of compost, tell them that. Here is an example:

SAMPLE

17 Feb. 94

Greetings –

Well, here we are another month into the new year and with another fresh box of organic produce. An item you have not seen recently is the salad mix that is included this week and it is certainly refreshing to have the taste and crispness of lettuce at the dinner table. A new planting of lettuce is finally ready for harvest, so you will probably be seeing more of this tasty treat in future boxes. Enjoy!

Today's Box

- *butternut squash*
- *green garlic*
- *carrots*
- *dried fruit*
- *collards*
- *red daikon*
- *salad mix*
- *navel oranges*

Another familiar item you have been receiving lately is the green garlic. This is actually my favorite crop at the farm right now because it is so healthy looking and problem-free. It has most of the potency of dry garlic with just that hint of sweetness one expects from a young tender plant. Let me remind you that the whole stalk is usable, including the green tops!

Often I am asked how to tell the difference between the green onions and the garlic, so I thought I would briefly explain. While it is not a sure sign, usually the garlic has a bit of a reddish tint on a bright white stalk, while the onions are usually yellow to pale green. However, sometimes the onions we send are grown from red onions so they too will sometimes appear red-colored, but they are usually a much deeper red, nearly purple. Secondly, and this is a dead give-away, the garlic has flat green tops whereas the onion tops are tubular, like a straw. Finally, if you want the most pleasurable way to distinguish the two plants, you should smell them. The pungent odor of the garlic almost stings the nose and is sure to bring a smile, while the onions are slightly milder, though still with a bit of the sharpness of an onion.

Until next week, remember that eating organically is important for the health of the planet as well as your body. Enjoy your veggies!

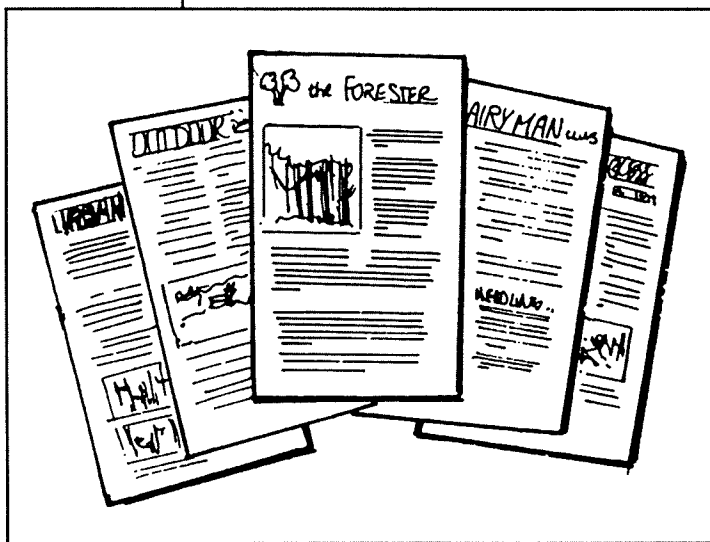
Erik and Full Belly

Used by permission of Full Belly Farm

NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters are short, regularly produced publications. Nearly all CSA farms have them. Like share notes, they let members know what is going on at the farm. However, they come out less frequently than share notes, maybe four times a year. Because you have more time to put one together, you can explain more about the farm, about how you grow the food, about changes that have happened or that you expect. You can also communicate about the CSA, lining up members for the next season, changing drop-off times, and soliciting volunteer help. Some newsletters also include reflections from farmers, workers, or members.

Newsletters are useful for CSAs because they are inexpensive and easy to produce, and their content and tone can be tailored to your audience. On the other hand, they reach a small, select group of people, so they do not create general public awareness of your project or any special events.



Above all, keep it simple. The newsletter is a sideline to the CSA and farming. A one-page general letter to your members that comes out occasionally may be all you are interested in doing.

I You will find information about writing NEWSLETTERS in the appendix.

SURVEYS

A survey of your members takes a little more effort, but involves them more in their food supply. It doesn't have to be long. It should get members' thoughts on the size of the share, the selection of items, the quality, and anything else you would like to know about the CSA. For example, if you hosted a harvest day, you might want to ask for feedback about it.

Try to get as many surveys returned as possible. You can collect them where members pick up their shares, or have them mailed in. The more surveys you get back, the greater the variety of responses.

Complete the communication loop by writing about the results in the next newsletter. Be sure to say how you are going to respond to the results. If most members say that Tuesday is a bad day for getting shares, then think about changing the day. On the other hand, if one-third say there are too many beets, one-third say not enough, and the rest don't care, then maybe the number of beets is fine. However, let people know that you read and thought about what they wrote.

Let members know what you learned from the survey.

I *You will find more information about SURVEYS in the appendix.*

Worksheet

Communicating with Members

This worksheet asks you to consider how you will communicate with members.

1. Will you need to let members know about new or unusual products? changes in the CSA? other information?
2. Is your CSA small enough to communicate with everyone by telephone or in person?
3. Do you want to communicate in writing?
4. How often can you prepare a short note? Every week? Once a month?
5. Do you want to do a newsletter? How often?
6. What will you include in a newsletter?



Worksheet
Communicating with Members
(continued)

7. Do you want to survey your members? In writing or verbally?

8. What to you want to learn from your members about their CSA experience?

9. Do you need a short survey or a long one?

10. Do you want help from members with share notes, newsletters or surveys? How much help do you want?



Working with Members

This chapter
describes
ways
members can
participate in
the CSA.

For just about any task associated with a farm operation, you can find a CSA somewhere that has a member doing it. Working members bring variety and energy to a CSA project. They also bring with them special considerations.

WAYS MEMBERS CAN WORK WITH CSA:

Non-Farming Activities

- ✦ *Planning: budgets, crops*
- ✦ *Recruiting new members*
- ✦ *Writing newsletter, other material*
- ✦ *Bookkeeping*
- ✦ *Legal consulting*
- ✦ *Coordinating social events*
- ✦ *Coordinating volunteers*
- ✦ *Delivering/distributing shares*

Farming Activities

- ✦ *Planting/weeding/harvesting*
- ✦ *"Baby-sitting" greenhouse/shadehouse*
- ✦ *Preparing shares*

NON-FARMING ACTIVITIES

Members responsible for non-farming activities will probably have some expertise in them. The major issue will be **communication**. You and your members need to keep track of each other's activities and expectations. If you expect a newsletter every three months, the newsletter editor should be aware of this expectation. A volunteer shouldn't hear one message from the volunteer coordinator and another from you.

Responsibility and power should be well balanced. A member who is given responsibility for keeping the books of the CSA, for example, should also have a large say in how the records are kept (*they should, of course, be understandable to the farmer, other members, and the subsequent bookkeeper*).

CORE GROUP

The core group in a **participatory** CSA (see the **Introduction**) handles some or all of these non-farming tasks. The core group is three to eight members who commit time and energy to making the CSA run smoothly. They meet often and regularly, sometimes once a week.

What they do depends on the kind of CSA you are creating. They may be involved right from the start, planning what will be produced and helping write the budget. On the other hand, members may be less involved with initial planning, but can still coordinate share delivery or produce the CSA newsletter.

Examples:

One project which has been running since 1991 has in its core group: a construction and parking coordinator (members pick up shares at the farm), a legal consultant, a food resource coordinator, a financial consultant, a volunteer and events coordinator, a publications coordinator, and a couple who do the administrative work.

Another project has these member volunteers: membership coordinator, distribution coordinator, and newsletter editor/publisher.

The core group can have as much or as little responsibility as the farmer gives them.

I You will find more information about **MEETINGS** in the appendix.

PARTICIPATION IN DISTRIBUTION

The most obvious way members can participate in the CSA is in share distribution. Picking up shares at a drop-off point is simple, and involves them in the process. On the other hand, by coming out to the farm, members can witness the seasonal changes. Another way to involve members in share distribution is having them bag their own. You leave the harvest in bulk containers such as boxes or baskets, and they weigh out their shares for the week.

EXAMPLES:

Live Power Farm organizes its shareholders by neighborhood, then has one person pick up the shares for the neighborhood at the produce wholesaler where the shares are dropped off.

Watershed Organic Farm has four pick-up days a week at the farm. Members walk through a produce stand, weighing out their allotment from bins marked with how much they can take.

Several farms have reported that having a short window for people to pick up their shares increases interaction between members. This is especially true if people have to bag their own shares.

FARM ACTIVITIES

With a little effort, you can ensure that your members enjoy working on the farm, and that their time puts you ahead rather than holds you back. The appendix contains tips for training and communicating with working members.

Working on a farm can be a great "day in the country" for city folks.

WORKDAY

You may not have members who help you regularly, but you can still host workdays. One farm which has voluntary workdays reported that members who worked stayed with the CSA more consistently than those who didn't participate. Whether you have a workday once a month or once a year, here are some suggestions to make them more successful:

- ✦ **Know what you want to accomplish.** Have your task or tasks clearly in mind, and decide beforehand how you want to do them.
- ✦ **Choose something that can be completed.** It helps volunteers to have a sense of completion when they leave the farm, and makes them more willing to return. If you really need something done and it is too big for one workday, break it down into smaller parts that can be finished.

I *You will find more information about WORKING WITH MEMBERS in the appendix.*

- ✦ **Have enough tools.** If you don't have them on-site, find more from your members or neighbors.
- ✦ **Celebrate when you get finished.** Get something to drink and relax a bit, go for a swim, have dinner, etc.

Examples of workday tasks include: planting an orchard; putting in a fence; picking beans, peas, or pumpkins; painting the barn.

HARVEST CELEBRATION

For that matter, any way of bringing members to the farm increases their understanding of how they get their food. Many CSAs have a harvest day towards the end of the season. Take members on a tour to explain the different aspects of the farm and how it works. Explain about compost and how it helps the soil. Show where the land is low, helping them understand when it gets flooded.

Arrange for members to work together at something which isn't too difficult — have them pick pumpkins, for example. After a few hours of work, they'll be hungry, so finish the harvest day with a potluck. Add some games and music for more enjoyment.

Remember that making these connections between the farm and members is part of a CSA project. Whether you look at it as building community or as cultivating consumer loyalty and support, making members feel part of the project is essential to its long-term success. Remember, too, that different people want different levels of involvement. Some will be satisfied receiving their shares and an occasional note, while others may want to help write the newsletter or organize the membership. Those energetic people are a great resource for the CSA. At the same time, don't begrudge your non-involved members (*as long as they pay their shares!*).

Worksheet

Working with Members

This worksheet will help you start thinking about the work members will do in your CSA.

1. Will members be involved in non-farming activities?

How?

2. Will members be involved in farming activities?

How?

3. Will your CSA have a core group?

What will it do?



Worksheet
Working with Members (continued)

4. Will you have workdays or celebrations at your farm?

Who will organize them?

5. Will members be required to work?

How much?



Member Survey

(Short Form) • Year: _____

1. How important were the following in your initial decision to become a CSA member? (place check mark under appropriate column)

FACTOR	NOT IMPORTANT	LITTLE BIT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT
Price					
Fresh, tasty products					
Chemical-free products					
Environmental concerns (soil, water, wildlife, etc.)					
Novelty					
Supporting a local farmer (sharing the risk)					
Visiting/connecting with a farm					
Convenience					
Community involvement					
Knowing where and how the food is produced					

2. On the whole, what do you think was the net financial effect of your participation in CSA, as compared to shopping in a store?

_____ Saved money _____ Cost Money _____ About equal



Member Survey
Short Form (continued)

3. How well do you feel the growers did at providing:

ITEM	POORLY	2	3	4	EXCELLENTLY
Quality products					
Consistent supply					
Enough variety					
Fresh foods					
Interesting items					
Products that fit your diet and lifestyle					
Other: _____					

4. Please evaluate the following:

ITEM	POOR	2	3	4	EXCELLENT
Presentation of products					
Member/grower communication					
Convenience of pick-up point location					
Convenience of pick-up time/day(s)					
Other: _____					

5. Are you interested in renewing your share for next season?

_____ YES _____ NO



Member Survey

(Long Form) • Year: _____

1. Had you heard of CSA/Subscription Farming before this experience?

_____ YES _____ NO

Where?

2. How important were the following in your initial decision to become a CSA member? (place check mark under appropriate column)

FACTOR	NOT IMPORTANT	LITTLE BIT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT
Price					
Fresh, tasty products					
Chemical-free products					
Environmental concerns (soil, water, wildlife, etc.)					
Novelty					
Supporting a local farmer (sharing the risk)					
Visiting/connecting with a farm					
Convenience					
Community involvement					
Knowing where and how the food is produced					

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_____ Saved money _____ Cost Money _____ About equal

(Continued on next page)



Member Survey
Long Form (continued)

4. How well do you feel the growers did at providing:

ITEM	POORLY	2	3	4	EXCELLENTLY
Quality products					
Consistent supply					
Enough variety					
Fresh foods					
Interesting items					
Products that fit your diet and lifestyle					
Other: _____					

5. Please evaluate the following:

ITEM	POOR	2	3	4	EXCELLENT
Presentation of products					
Member/grower communication					
Convenience of pick-up point location					
Convenience of pick-up time/day(s)					
Other: _____					

6. Are you interested in renewing your share for next season?

_____ YES _____ NO

If NO, why not?

(Continued on next page)



Member Survey
Long Form (continued)

7. In the future, would you be willing to donate money towards a share for a low-income household?

_____ YES _____ NO

If YES, how much? \$10 \$20 \$25 \$50 Other _____

8. What two items would you like to see MORE of?

9. What two items would you like to see LESS of?

10. What additional items should the CSA offer?

11. Would you like to participate in any of the following aspects of CSA?

- _____ Being a part of a "core group" to coordinate the CSA
- _____ Estimating the price of a share
- _____ Creating the list of what is grown
- _____ Raising additional funds
- _____ Choosing the pick-up dates
- _____ Hosting a pick-up site
- _____ Planting/weeding/harvesting
- _____ Organizing social events
- _____ Writing for the newsletter
- _____ Baby-sitting the farm for a day (*watering, checking greenhouse, caring for animals, etc.*)

(Continued on next page)



Member Survey
Long Form (continued)

12. If you could, what would you change about the CSA relationship and why?

13. Do you garden at home/in a community garden?

_____ YES _____ NO

14. Do you process any food at home (*canning, freezing, drying*)?

_____ YES _____ NO

15. What is the most important aspect of CSA for you?

Please feel free to make additional comments:

