

Appendix A: Definitions

Community Supported Agriculture

There is no ‘formal’ definition. One of the most basic is offered in *Sharing the Harvest* by Elizabeth Henderson and Robyn Van En: “*Community Supported Agriculture is a connection between a nearby farmer and the people who eat the food that the farmer produces.*”

Robyn Van En once summed it up as “*food producers + food consumers + annual commitment to one another = CSA and untold possibilities.*”

From www.csafarms.org: “*Community Supported Agriculture links the source of food (the farm and farmer) to the destination of the food (the consumer, or eater). A central concept in CSA is that farm members, as partners with the farmer, share some of the risks of production.*”

Biodynamics: “*Consumers and farmers work together on behalf of the Earth and each other. While the farmer is tending the Earth on behalf of others, consumers share the costs of supporting the farm and share the risk of variable harvests (and also share the over-abundance of a particularly fruitful years).*”

USDA definition: “*CSA consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community’s farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production.*”

The “Classic” CSA Model:

According to a locaharvest.org newsletter, “*In its purest state, a CSA was owned by a group of community members, each of whom had purchased a share of the business. They hired a farmer who raised crops that were divided amongst the shareholders. If crops were bountiful, everyone ate especially well. The risk of crop failure was shared as well, so the farmer was paid the same in good years and in lean ones.*”

The group referred to here is usually called a *core group* and its existence as part of the project still defines CSA to some observers.

Bottom line: with no formal definition (and most CSA growers and advocates are not suggesting that it be formally or legally defined) CSA is to an extent what you make it to be in your setting. If it *seems* to be CSA, even if some ‘key’ component is missing, it is CSA. For example, the pre-paid share is often cited as a defining feature, but many growers offer pay-as-you-go to accommodate limited budgets or for other reasons. Sharing of risk is a complex issue and some growers, when actually confronted with crop failures, seem reluctant to follow through on this aspect.

Community Shared Agriculture: Most common term for CSA in Canada

Box Scheme: Another term often used in Canada and overseas. A box scheme sometimes implies a hybrid form of CSA where products from other regions or even from large distances are consolidated (usually with local produce) to offer longer seasons and/or larger variety.

Subscription Farms

This term is sometimes applied to CSA farms that are farmer-owned as opposed to community- or consumer-owned.

The Consumer

Growers have various terms for their farm members. Some include:

- Farm Member
- Shareholder
- Sharer
- Subscriber

Some Comments on Community

Anthropologist and long-time CSA advocate Laura B DeLind suggests that "CSAs weave interpersonal relationships, place-based values, and ecological and social responsibility into their food as well as into their farming activities. They build community and restore a sense of place." Some growers actively form a community around the farm; others watch as it develops on its own. So how do some of our local Michigan growers see community?

Jo Meller at Five Springs Farm thinks of community on her CSA as a "farm full of happy faces." She considers CSA a way to feed her friends and neighbors. Jim Schwantes (Sweeter Song Farm) echoes the sentiment: "Community is, literally, my neighbors." For Mike Wells at Wells Family Farm "Community means a shareholder making her reluctant teenagers turn our compost, just to help us out." Todd Springer is interested in bringing a broad spectrum of people into his community at Grey's Fruit Farm and CSA. He likes the idea of offering a place for different groups to learn about their individual strengths, their common interests, and their differences. "CSA is a way to bring these groups together...and they don't even know it!"

Sweeter Song Farm takes community service seriously. "For every 25 shares that people purchase, we donate one to a family that can't afford a share." This program has grown from the four shares that the farm donates to include donations of partial shares from farm members and cash donations for additional shares. "We know the community supports us...and we believe it is important that we support our community. That is what community is all about"

A Very Brief History

The origins of Community Supported Agriculture in North America, though recent, are subject to some interesting discrepancies. Japan's 'Teikei' groups - translated as 'food with the farmer's face' are often reported as inspiring the earliest CSA farms. Reporting on CSA for the online magazine newfarm.org, Steven McFadden found European roots in ideas articulated by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). These ideas were cultivated in post - WW II Europe. "The ideas crossed the Atlantic and came to life in a new form, CSA, simultaneously but independently in 1986 at both Indian Line Farm in Massachusetts and Temple-Wilton Community Farm in New Hampshire," according to McFadden.

From these two farms the idea spread rapidly throughout the NE United States then beyond. Estimates of the number of CSA farms is still often given as 1300, but some observers believe that many are not counted. We have seen estimates of 2,000 and even 3,000 growers using CSA as part or all of their farm operation.