

**COMMUNITY SUPPORTED  
AGRICULTURE  
(CSA)**



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**Legal Aid of Nebraska, Farm Law Project**  
In collaboration with  
Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska and  
Nebraska Department of Agriculture  
Under a grant from  
USDA/Risk Management Agency: Community  
Outreach and Assistance Partnership Program



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**WHAT IS COMMUNITY SUPPORTED  
AGRICULTURE?**

■ In community supported agriculture (CSA), consumers purchase a direct share of a farm.



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## HOW CSA WORKS:

- Consumers pay a set price to the producer, either in a lump sum or in installments, at the start of the season.
- As members of the CSA, consumers take on some of the risk and the reward of the venture.
- In return, they receive a variety of produce over the course of the growing season.

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## CSA BENEFITS

### Farmers receive:

- Money upfront for seed and operating costs
- An assured market
- Reduced risk as loss is taken on by members
- Chance to stay on farm
- Fair return for product
- Access to labor from members
- Freedom to diversify
- Opportunity to educate members on agricultural practices

### Members receive:

- Access to fresh and high quality produce grown close to home
- A closer tie to the land and to the production of their food
- Chance to support, in some cases, sustainable/organic practices
- Sense of confidence in food choices for health and society
- Access to local farm for educational/recreational activities
- Possible voice in planting decisions
- Opportunity to support/expand a local food community

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## DETERMINING MEMBER SHARE PRICE

In setting share price remember:

- CSAs are a business
- Do not underestimate the value of what you are selling
- Keep in mind that value will not solely be based on farmers' market prices
- Organically raised products cost more
- CSA products are usually the freshest available to consumers



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## METHODS FOR SETTING SHARE PRICE: FOUR OPTIONS

1. Sell at market price
2. Approximate market value
3. Calculate costs
4. Established community farm model




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## SETTING SHARE PRICE: OPTIONS 1 AND 2

### Methods for Setting Share Price: Sell at Market Price

- Most farmers use this method
- Charge members a set amount (usually \$15-\$20 a week), then give them a share of produce which would cost them that amount if they bought it elsewhere - usually use farmers' market prices to determine value



### Methods for Setting Share Price: Approximate Market Value

- Estimate how much a family spends on produce for the season (consider where they currently purchase them) - this is the share price
- Decide on what you want your income to be (you need to know what your farm can produce - its supply and labor requirements)
- Divide the gross income by the share price to come up with the number of shares you can offer
- Example - if members spend about \$600 for 9 months of produce, and your goal is to earn \$24,000, you need to sell 40 shares

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## SETTING SHARE PRICE: OPTIONS 3 AND 4

### Methods for Setting Share Price: Calculate Costs

- This method takes more time but provides detailed accounting for farmers and members
- First decide how many shares you can produce from your land, and then figure the costs for raising that amount (include farmer and worker labor for growing, harvesting, distributing, and ALL production costs)
- Divide the farm budget by the number of shares and you have the share price

### Methods for Setting Share Price: Established Community Farm Model

- Requires a very committed community, but provides for real costs of production from year to year
- Farmer works with members to determine budget and share price
- Farmer calculates income requirements, production costs, and farm expenses for the year - full cost of farm operation
- When the total farm and farmer needs are determined, that figure is divided by the number of current or potential members
- Example: share price would be \$650 if the total farm budget is \$65,000 and there are potentially 100 members
- Works best if number of members is high

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## PAYMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- Full payment at beginning of season minimizes bookkeeping and assures income
- The annual cost, generally ranging from \$400-\$700, depends on the length of the harvest season and the variety of produce
- Many CSAs offer payment plans to increase accessibility to low-income members
- Some CSAs subsidize or donate shares to low-income families or homeless shelters
- Working memberships cover all or part of the cost of a share if members work on the farm a set number of hours per week
- CSAs generally do not refund money in the event of crop loss
- The biggest contributing factor to CSA burnout and failure is setting the share price too low
- A waiting list indicates that people will pay more for a share
- If members are complaining about getting too much food or lots of people are splitting shares, the share size is probably too big

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## RECRUITING MEMBERS

- Research the potential customer base to determine demand
- CSAs are about community and relationships so the best advertising is word of mouth. Open houses, group presentations and pot lucks all can get the word out
- Use brochures to explain the concept and benefits of CSA, the story and goals of your CSA, the products available(how, when, where), the share price, how members can join and whom to contact for more information
- Newsletters can keep members informed throughout the year
- Try to provide a harvest schedule and an idea of what may be included in each delivery

**The most successful CSAs have a core group of members who are highly involved.**

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## TIPS FOR RETAINING MEMBERS

- Educate members - provide them with a schedule of when to expect their shares of certain fruits and vegetables
- Print and distribute your best recipes; offer classes on canning and storing
- Renew memberships in the fall rather than waiting until spring
- Decide what the "Top 10" vegetables are for your area and increase the quantity and length of their season
- Continue the newsletter during the winter months to stay connected to members during the off season
- Select varieties for eating quality
- Add variety to your selection such as cut flowers, mushrooms, and berries
- Perform end-of-the-year surveys and use these to help plan next year's crop

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## WHAT DO MEMBERS WANT?

- Members usually prefer the traditional, basic, and familiar vegetables they are accustomed to buying, but small amounts of exotic produce are periodically welcome
- Fruit is in high demand
- Most members do not favor large quantities each week - members sometimes drop out of CSAs because they feel overwhelmed by the amount of vegetables
- Members generally prefer wide variety rather than a large quantity
- High-quality, clean produce

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## PLANTING AND HARVEST AMOUNTS/SELECTING VARIETIES

- The best way to determine how much to plant for your desired yield is to measure and record the production on your own farm over several years
- Plant a number of different varieties of each crop in succession to provide a long harvest season
- Heirloom varieties are usually popular
- Choose varieties based on flavor



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## DEVELOP A CROP PLAN

- A well-thought out crop plan is absolutely essential to a successful CSA
- Succession planting is critical
- Spread out the harvests so members don't receive all of the crop at once
- Use season extension techniques to lengthen the season



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## HOW MUCH SHOULD I DISTRIBUTE?

- Start small. Get accustomed to the work load before expanding.
- Weekly shares vary in size and variety over the course of the season
- Typical CSAs offer an average of 10 total pounds of produce a week per member, with a range from 8-20 lbs. over a season
- Aim for 5-12 different types of produce each week
- Remember a share is usually what a family of four would consume




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## DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS

- On-farm pick-up
- Central distribution site
- Farmers' market distribution
- Home delivery
- Bulk distribution
- Some CSAs offer a choice of 1-2 days to accommodate a variety of schedules
- Boxes may be filled for the member with a standard amount of produce or filled by the member "market-style".

THIS WEEK'S SHARE		
	QUANT	PRICE
Strawberries	1	7
Blueberries	1	7
Zucchini Squash	1/2	4.50
Zucchini	1	1
Yellow Onion	1 onion	2.00
Dark Red Potatoes	1 bushel	2.00
Red Potatoes	1 lb.	3.50
Shallots	1 lb.	2.50
Cherry Tomatoes	1 lb.	1.00
Cucumber	1	1
Pepper	1	1
Broccoli	1 head	1.00
Greens	1 bunch	1.00
*Boxes filled and priced by member		

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## PRODUCTION AND LABOR CHALLENGES

### Production challenges

- Detailed planning is required given the diversity of planting and harvesting
- Since high quality is essential, extra crops must be grown to allow for poor weather or pest problems.
- Produce that thrives might not be popular (i.e. kale or beets) so educating members on their use is helpful

### Labor challenges

- Given the demands of the planting and harvesting of 5 - 15 varieties of produce, the amount of needed labor is high
- Farmers may hire workers or recruit volunteers, interns or apprentices reimbursed with reduced CSA payments

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## OTHER CSA PRODUCTS

- Cut flowers
- Baked and canned goods
- Poultry and eggs
- Meat and dairy products
- Fiber products
- Honey and beeswax products



This presentation was adapted from ATTRA, UNL, ISU Extension, McGill University and CIAS(University of Wisconsin).

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