



A Share in the Harvest



An action manual
for community
supported agriculture
2nd edition

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Section 1

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Using this guide

1 Using this guide

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a relatively new and evolving concept in the UK. The advice given in this manual is based on the experience of a number of CSA initiatives in England, and also draws on a body of experience from overseas, the USA in particular, where several good texts on how to establish CSA have been published¹.

The Soil Association has been working to develop and promote CSA since 1999 and based on the information and experience gathered, have produced a number of publications to support this work. A feasibility study for CSA in the UK, *A Share in the Harvest*, was carried out providing valuable background information about CSA. *Cultivating Communities*, a 3 year support project followed, enabling the publication of the first edition of this action manual, a booklet containing an interesting collection of case studies, and a number of practical guides including one on organisational structures for local food enterprises and pig keeping.

This manual, newly updated, aims to provide support for anyone interested in developing a CSA scheme. It is a dynamic document providing a skeleton to build on as we explore the possibilities for CSA in the UK. It is intended not to be overly prescriptive and provides practical information and signposts to further help.

A number of other case studies are mentioned in this manual. More information on all of these and others can be found on the website: www.soilassociation.org/csa.aspx

If you have additional information and advice to share, or feel that any of the information in this action manual is incorrect, then please contact:

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¹ *Sharing the Harvest: A Citizens Guide to Community Supported Agriculture*, Revised and Expanded by Elizabeth Henderson and Robyn Van En (Paperback – Nov 1, 2007)

Community Supported Agriculture – Making the Connection, University of California, 1995

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Section 2

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What is Community Supported Agriculture?

2 What is Community Supported Agriculture?

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is about taking responsibility for how our food is produced and how it gets to the table. It is a direct relationship between a farmer and the people who eat the food the farmer produces. The term Community Supported Agriculture was coined in America and encompasses a broad range of partnerships between consumers and producers. Each of these CSA arrangements is unique, tailored by the circumstances they develop out of. We define CSA as:

A partnership² between farmers and consumers where, at best, the responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared.

As CSA farms are directly accountable to their consumer members they strive to provide fresh, high-quality food and typically use **organic** or biodynamic farming methods. Generally there are more people working on CSA farms than on conventional farms, and some CSAs encourage members to work on the farm in exchange for a portion of their membership costs.

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

2.1 Models of CSA

CSAs reflect the culture of the communities they serve, the capabilities of the CSA land and the farmers who manage it. Therefore no two CSAs are likely to be the same and tend to be dynamic as the community's needs change over time. In England alone there is a rich variety of initiatives such as: whole farm CSAs, customer supported box schemes, conservation based initiatives, intentional communities³, rent or adopt schemes, urban food growing projects, community allotments and charitable projects.

A number of case studies are available on the website or in the booklet (go to www.soilassociation.org/csa.aspx to see some examples of what can be achieved.

CSA therefore, does not describe an end product, CSA is more about **how** to develop a new local food system. However CSAs can be categorised according to who organises them or the motivation behind them. These are described below:

- **Farmer-driven**

Organised by the farmer, to whom the members financially subscribe, with little other involvement, but this obviously varies between schemes. This kind of CSA is probably the most common in the United States. In the UK this is equivalent to a producer-run vegetable box scheme often with activities bringing customers to the farm.

² Partnership: a relationship based on mutual trust, openness, shared risk and shared rewards.

³ People living in communal groups who 'intend' to achieve a better social system.

- **Community/consumer-driven**

Consumers participate in or may even run the scheme working closely with the farmer who produces what they want. The degree of consumer involvement is variable. It was this model of CSA that was first introduced into the USA. Stroud Community agriculture and Camel CSA are good examples.

- **Farmer co-operative**

Farmer-driven CSA where two or more farms co-operate to supply its members with a greater variety of produce. This model allows individual farms to specialise in the most appropriate farming for that holding (larger farms may concentrate on field scale production, smaller farms on specialist crops and upland farms on rearing livestock). There are several examples of this in Japan and Germany⁴.

- **Farmer-consumer co-operative**

As described above, farmers develop co-operative networks to access a variety of products but there is greater commitment by the consumers. Consumers may co-own land and other resources with the participating farmers and work together to produce and distribute food. Stroud Food Hub is a pioneering model where the co-op is jointly owned by both producer and consumer members.

2.2 Is it for you?

CSA is an opportunity to participate in the development of a special initiative supporting your local food economy. But first ask yourself why do you want to be involved in a CSA?

Do you simply wish to produce or eat local food? In which case there are other options that might be more appropriate. Direct marketing methods such as box schemes⁵, farm shops, and farmers' markets require less of a commitment than CSA. Although these methods of distribution may also be employed by CSA, CSA is also an understanding of mutual support between the farmer and members. For example, consumer members may commit in advance, in cash or kind, to buying their food (or a farm product) directly from the farm. In return they have the opportunity to influence how the CSA is run. If you are a farmer you may have to commit to supplying produce to the CSA members for a full season.

In short, CSA:

- Is a relationship of mutual support
- Requires commitment
- Can be hard work for the organisers
- Is about bringing local culture back into agriculture.

⁴ Soil Association CSA Feasibility Study, *Sharing the Risk, Sharing the Reward*

⁵ A vegetable box scheme is a box (bag, sack or net), containing freshly picked, locally grown, organic produce, delivered weekly to your door, or to a local drop off point. The operator decides what vegetables go into the box, and this will vary each week depending on the seasonal vegetables available (See Soil Association Technical Guide, *How to Set Up a Vegetable Box Scheme*)

2.3 Farmers wanting to start a CSA

From a farmer's point of view there are pros and cons to the CSA system:

Advantages:

- CSA can provide a secure (but modest) income
- shared responsibility means that if there is a crop failure, the consumers share the loss
- community engagement can be a real boost to morale – CSA farmers talk about how much direct positive feedback they get from the people who are eating the food the farmers are growing
- having more people on the farm can make it more sociable and enjoyable

Disadvantages

- there is some loss of control when a community group starts to get involved in planning how the CSA will work. This disadvantage can be minimised by some careful planning in advance.
- having more people on the farm can be frustrating for the farmers (and even dangerous)

2.4 Finding a CSA to join if you don't want to start one

It is possible that there are CSAs trying to establish themselves in your locality and looking for new members and growers. You can find out what is happening in your region on the website: see local CSAs

An example of how a CSA Farm might be organised

CSA farms may provide their members with vegetables distributed on a weekly basis through a vegetable box scheme, delivered to the home or collected from a pick up point or from the farm. Once it has been agreed what the farm is capable of producing and members have indicated the range of produce they would like to receive, the farmer develops a crop plan and a budget for the season. This will incorporate all the production costs and fair wages for the farmers. The budget is then put to the members for approval, and the cost of an annual share calculated by dividing the total cost between the participating members.

Alternatively an elected core group of members can decide a recommended subscription and members can choose to pay more into a bursary programme that can be used to subsidise members on a lower income. See section 9.1.1 for more detail.

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Developing your CSA

3 Developing your CSA

Some initial questions you will have to consider:

- Why is there a need for a CSA?
- Who wants a CSA and why?
- What are you really trying to achieve?
- What opportunities are available to you?
- What are the values on which the CSA will be based?
- How will you develop the vision for a CSA?
- What input is required from all participating members?
- What is most likely to make you fail?

3.1 Chicken or egg?

Where do you start? For a CSA initiative there are four essential elements:

1. Group or individual capable of motivating CSA members.
2. A capable producer willing to share responsibilities and choice with the public.
3. Informed consumers.
4. Accessible land.

The first step therefore is to take stock of what you already have. This manual is designed to help you bring together the rest of the mix. However, whatever your starting point, the steps you have to take in the development of your CSA will be quite similar, what varies is the degree of member participation. In general, as mentioned previously, there tend to be two approaches:

1. Consumer led schemes – with lots of member involvement.
2. Farmer led schemes – with less member involvement.

3.2 Getting started – things to consider

It is a good idea not to be too ambitious, start small and grow organically! If you are a farmer with land in production, it is a good idea to maintain a diversity of markets for your produce until the CSA is more established. Try to arrange a visit to an existing scheme and get a feel for how they do it. Contact the Soil Association for help on arranging this or check the case studies on the website for ideas on appropriate models to visit.

Making the partnership between producers and consumers work for mutual benefit is what CSA is all about. This relationship takes time. Planning and development take place through a series of meetings. But as handling large groups of people requires some experience, you may like to consider involving a facilitator to help run the first meetings, as this will set the tone for future meetings.

The points listed below will help you to make the most of your meetings (see also section 11 for Guidelines on Holding an Effective Meeting):

- Set clear and achievable objectives for each meeting
- Ask what sort of a group, people would like to work in and what rules of engagement they would like to set themselves
- Have methods for making decisions and dealing with conflict
- Acknowledge areas of shared interest and areas of different interest
- Give everyone a chance to speak on an issue. Break into small groups then collect summaries from each group
- Take a non-critical stance
- Work with each other's strengths, weaknesses and differing perspectives
- Consider what people need to know in order to be able to make good decisions
- Be open about money and any other issues that might result in misunderstanding
- Finally, there is no substitute for good listening!

Partnerships

The principles of partnership working are the essence of CSA, not only between consumers and the farmer, but also between the other parties involved. A partnership is different from buying-in contract services as all parties involved take responsibility for the project, its development and ideally for the wellbeing of the other partners. Consider whether it would help your CSA to form an informal or formal partnership, for example, with another farm or the village shop.

3.2.1 Ten steps to forming a CSA

Although the development of your CSA will be determined by your circumstances, the following steps serve as a useful guide. Each step could require separate, even several meetings. The exploration step is crucial because it helps clarify purpose, build vision and inspire participation.

1. Exploration of CSA:

Why eat local food?

What is CSA?

Why do small farms need support?

What is the interest in starting a CSA?

CSA as an opportunity to shape the countryside for what you want.

What is sustainable food and farming ?

How will our community feed itself when the oil currently used to produce and transport most of our food becomes too expensive or even runs out?

2. What do you want out of your CSA?

Organic food? How do you want the land managed and food produced?

Access to a farm?

Opportunities to work?

What does the group desire for the future?

What are the objectives of the CSA?

Who will plan and develop the CSA?

3. Electing a core group:

Do you need a core group?

What are the responsibilities of the core group? (See Core group in Section 4 CSA Members and Section 5 Making an organisation and legal issues)

How will they be elected, how long for, can they be re-elected?

How can you ensure the work is shared fairly.

4. Finding land and someone to farm it:

(See Section 7 'Land', and Section 8 'Production for CSA')

5. What finances are available to you?

What is special about your situation?

Setting up a CSA bank account.

Appointing a treasurer.

Grant funding (See Section 6 'Financing CSA')

6. Share costs and distribution:

(See sections 8 and 9)

What is the farm going to produce?

What are the production costs?

How much will it cost each member?

How are you going to get the produce to the members? (See Section 9 'Managing the shares')

Will there be gaps in supply in different seasons?

Do you buy in for hungry gap? If so – where from? Is there a limit on how far you will transport bought in produce?

Will you support other local farms to broaden the range of produce you can offer your members?

7. Recruiting more members:

Writing a CSA proposal. (See Section 4 'CSA members')

Will you offer members the opportunity to work for all or part of their share?

What sort of members do you want?

How will you find members who are part of different social networks?

8. Farm activities:

Starting the farming activities.

Organising events and activities. (See Section 10 Farm activities)

How can you spread the load of making events and activities happen?

9. Legal structures:

What are the principles that guide your CSA?

Who is responsible for what?

Writing a constitution. (See Section 5 'Making an organisation and legal issues')

10. Keeping in touch

(See Section 4 'CSA Members', 'Communication')

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Section 4

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CSA members

4 CSA members

How do you find people willing to commit to CSA and maintain that commitment? How many you have to recruit depends on the initiative you have in mind. It could be as few as 10-15, usually between 50-100 for vegetable producing schemes and even up to 1000 if you are considering purchasing a farm between you (see Fordhall Farm case study, as above). It is also important to understand members' motivations.

There are three main reasons why people would want to join a CSA:

1. As a source of fresh, local organic food.
2. To support their local farmers.
3. To know who grows their food and how they produce it.

And increasingly these days:

4. Food security in the event of oil prices making conventional food production and transport unaffordable or generally because people want to support low energy agriculture in response to global warming and the depletion in world oil supplies.

Other factors affecting peoples' decision to join a CSA have been identified as:

- Income – how much are members willing to pay?
- Family size – what quantity and variety of produce is needed to feed the whole family?
- Food tastes – is there a demand for unusual crops and varieties or should you stick to more common produce?
- Does the farm keep animals for meat? This can put off some vegetarians. On the other hand, it can be attractive to families who want their children to have a connection with animals on a farm.
- Free time for preparing the food (as CSA membership will involve share collection, cleaning, storing and cooking the produce).
- Urban or rural member – these two groups may have similar motivations (wanting to reconnect with farm; wanting to know the provenance of food production, etc.) but will have different circumstances. Often urban communities are more detached from food production which means that the relationship that urban communities can have with a CSA will be more limited in practical terms because of access; often with shares being brought into the town/city to community drop off points, with occasional farm visits and celebrations. However, this is still a highly valued opportunity to many urban CSA supporters.
- Distance to site of production – determines the members' relationship to the farm and methods of produce distribution. Setting up a pick-up point in a nearby town could open up a CSA to a new group of members. This also reduces the carbon footprint of a CSA because fewer food miles are needed to deliver the shares to the members.
- Awareness – Knowledge of CSA and concern for environmental issues.
- Health – Physical exercise and social support

4.1 Where do you find them?

CSA members will not all be exactly the same but there has to be a degree of commonality so that the CSA arrangement will satisfy all their needs. You probably have a fairly good idea of what member characteristics would work for your CSA and this will determine how to find them.

Recruiting members by word-of-mouth appears to be most effective and provides greater long-term stability. But this is really only an option for an established CSA where contented members will naturally spread the word. Initially members will probably have to be contacted by more remote means such as circulating leaflets describing the proposed CSA or by giving a presentation. A presentation could be the basis of a first meeting (see Ten steps to forming a CSA, Section 3 Developing your CSA) and should describe what CSA is, what the benefits of CSA are, what members could achieve or expect from the CSA and how they can be involved.

The best place to start is amongst your immediate acquaintances, your friends, family and work colleagues. Start by arranging a point of contact through which people can consistently reach you.

If you then have to look for members further afield try contacting existing common interest groups. Farmers' markets could be an opportunity to establish links with potential CSA members. Other groups you can consider contacting:

- **Community groups:** Housing associations and neighbourhood groups, the Women's Institute (WI).
- **Consumer groups:** Food co-ops and food buying groups. Local Organic Support Groups (contact the Soil Association to find your local group).
- **Environmental groups:** Transition Towns Network, Community composting groups, local Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace groups.
- **Community gardens, community orchards and city farms:** Operate with similar principles to CSAs. They tend to be smaller than rural farms and emphasise social and cultural benefits. They may be good sources of support and contacts, especially with activists, if you are seeking to set up a larger scale CSA. (See The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, Appendix 11.2)
- **Religious groups.** Use community notice-boards or put an article in the parish magazine.
- **Groups addressing food poverty/access:** School breakfast clubs, community cafes, community gardens, consumer co-ops, cooking clubs, fruit barras⁶, van schemes, meals on wheels, soup runs, healthy schools tuck shop projects. (See Food Access Network, Appendix 11.2) Special diet support groups, such as diabetes. The health promotion department at your local authority or health authority is a good place to start these investigations. They also often have small grant schemes and usually focus on disadvantaged communities.
- **Political groups:** Many towns have a local Green Party group
- **Local paper:** try to get some press coverage in your local paper or place an advertisement
- **Flyers:** print a flyer and leave in cafes and on notice boards.

⁶ Found in Scotland, a trolley that fits in high-rise lifts and does door to door sales.

Agencies

There may be agencies in your area that would like to support the development of a CSA. They will tend to have their own agenda, but may often be helpful. A CSA initiative is more likely to succeed if assisted by an agency rather than run by one, as it is unlikely that agency-led schemes will find committed participants. There are some examples of successful agency-run CSAs, for example, in the health sector where food-growing projects have provided opportunities for exercise, occupational therapy, nutritional education, community building and socialisation. Each area will have different needs and hence different priorities for agency support.

4.2 Core group or steering committee

Like CSA the term 'core group' was also coined in the USA for an elected body, which performs member functions, allowing farmers to concentrate on growing. They can be responsible for everything beyond growing and harvesting produce or as a project becomes more established the core group sometimes takes on more of the role of trustees, meeting less frequently to consider the long-term focus for the project.

Do you need a core group?

Perhaps your CSA is small enough that most of its members have sufficient input into its running, or the CSA may be the initiative of an energetic individual able to cope with all the responsibilities. It is possible that farmers can manage to grow, pack, deliver and maintain very close customer/member links. However, in most cases, the core group forms the heart of the CSA. Responsibilities could include:

- Member recruitment
- Communications
- Food distribution
- Finances
- Organising events

Essentially the core group runs the CSA. They ensure its goals are being met and within the principles agreed by its members. The core group works with the farmer to set the share price. The farmers often sit in the core group, but if not the core group act as mediator between farmers and consumers. They are usually a volunteer group, meeting regularly, more often as the CSA starts up and then reducing to monthly when things are running smoothly.

Consider who is to take on the various roles within the group and be explicit about what their powers are. Which people have authority and responsibility for which kind of issue?

Some CSAs choose to have a core group to take on most of the decision-making and sub groups or individual volunteers for jobs such as newsletter production, promotions, events, etc. See 'The story of CSA in Stroud' section 4.

Who should sit on the core group?

The bulk of the core group is normally made up of ordinary CSA members elected by the membership. Some CSAs choose to include the farmer(s) as part of the core group. Others also include the landowners. If a CSA project decides to include the farmers and/or landowners in the core group it is important that there are clear agreements about how these

different interests will work together. However amicably a new CSA may start out with its landowners, there can be complications later on if it becomes clear that the interests of the landowner are at odds with the interests of the CSA project. One way around this is to have a written agreement with the landowners that they are invited to attend some or most of the core group meetings but not as a voting part of the core group. As part of the process of drawing up this agreement, a group can encourage all the parties (landowners, farmers, community group and anyone else involved) to be as clear as possible about;

- what they want from the project
- what they are offering the project
- what are the limits of their offer

Once these interests have been explored they can be written into an agreement that can help guide the project in the future. It can be reviewed and re-written as the project develops. Stroud Slad Farm Community has two written agreements – one with the landowners and one with the farmers.

It is also important to think about the total size of the core group. It needs to be large enough so that the workload is spread amongst several people. However, if it becomes too large the process of getting to consensus can be cumbersome. Stroud Community Agriculture has a core group of between 5 and 9 people, always including at least one of the farmers as a voting member.

How does the core group make decisions?

Many community groups choose to make decisions by consensus. This means continuing to work on issues until a decision is reached that all core group members can live with (though not necessarily all agree with). This process can require a lot of patience but the reason it is so popular is that decisions rarely leave anyone feeling hard-done-by.

The process of consensus requires all members to make very careful use of their right to veto a decision. See 'The story of CSA in Stroud' on the website for more on consensus.

4.3 Communication

CSA members are not simply buying produce, they are participating in their food supply and want to be connected to a farm. Keeping people informed is the key to maintaining this relationship. Ideally CSA members should be encouraged to visit the farm as often as is practical. Alternatively, communication can be through regular updates:

- Weekly share notes
- Newsletters
- E-mail, websites and Blogs

and more occasionally through:

- Member surveys: pre start, short term and long term
- Members' handbook
- General meetings
- Participatory planning events, conversation cafés, etc (see section 11 for details on running a CSA conversation café)

4.3.1 Weekly share notes

Including a short note with each delivery of produce is a simple way to keep members up-to-date. In these you could include:

- A list of items in the share
- New varieties of produce. Write up information about each one, this can provide interesting stories on its origins and uses
- Recipes. Include a couple of recipes for the seasonal produce in that week's share, especially suggestions for the more unusual items. Ask members to contribute their own recipes
- The latest farm news. Give members a glimpse of what was involved in getting them their share of produce.

See example share notes in section 11

4.3.2 Newsletters

Produced less frequently than share notes, maybe quarterly, newsletters are an opportunity to go into more detail. Here members can be informed about:

- The farm and its production methods
- Changes in produce distribution
- Members' recipe suggestions
- What to do with surplus produce – jams and pickles
- Forthcoming events
- Recruitment of volunteers
- Promotion of community activities – walks and fundraising
- Book reviews
- Features on topical food and countryside issues.

As newsletters require a little more time and thought it is a good idea to keep them simple, do not be overly ambitious. An occasional one-page letter may be all that a farmer may find time to do. Alternatively, a member may like to take on the role of journalist and be responsible for disseminating regular news to members.

See example newsletters in section 11

4.3.3 E-mail, websites and blogs

With increasing access to the internet, e-mail and websites are also a popular means of communicating with members, although it should not be the sole means. Past newsletters and recipes could be posted on a website. Members can also be directed through links to a vast range of information about food and farming as well as receive support from similar groups and organisations. (see CSA Websites, Appendix 11.1) A blog (from web log) is a website where entries are written in chronological order, usually displayed in reverse chronological order. Blogs can provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. They are interactive, allowing comments, and typically combine text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other related media resources.

One of the downsides of internet-based communication is that it can leave out members who don't have internet access. One way around this is to set up a buddying system, which encourages members with internet access to help out other members in their locality by keeping them up-to-date with internet-based news.

Whichever of these methods are used, it is important for the members to know where the focus of information lies. For this reason, don't overstretch yourselves. Choose a method (or methods) of communication that can be maintained regularly and continuously.

4.3.4 Members' handbook

Producing a handbook for new members which addresses commonly asked questions is a good way of providing the practical information such as:

- Distribution and collection methods
- What to do if collecting produce from the farm
- Description of unusual vegetables and what to do with them
- Safety on the farm, children
- Principles of organic farming
- Volunteering

4.3.5 Surveys

Surveys are a means of receiving feed back from the CSA members. Questions can help explore opinions about the CSA such as what type of produce should be grown, in what quantities, how and when it should be distributed. For example, you might want some feedback about an event the CSA hosted. Complete the communication loop by writing the results in your next newsletter and reporting what action will be taken in the future.

A questionnaire could be used when recruiting members for the first time, to determine initial production for the CSA. This could be followed up with another either mid-season or at the end of the season to further adjust the service to suit its members. See appendix.

4.3.6 General meetings

General meetings are an opportunity to get all CSA members together. There will be occasions when decisions have to be made in consultation with the entire CSA membership and require more discussion than can be achieved through written communication. General meetings could be arranged in conjunction with other events (see Section 10, Farm activities). Be clear about what you want to achieve. For tips on managing a good meeting see Section 3, Developing your CSA, and section 11 (below) for Guidelines on Holding an Effective Meeting.

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Section 5

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Making an organisation and legal issues

5 Making an organisation and legal issues

Consideration should be given as to the most appropriate legal structure during the development of your CSA. Good governance, which includes reviewing the progress and direction as well as the legal structure of your organisation are important building blocks and can provide focus to an organisation both in the short and long-term.

5.1 Informal agreements

Many producer-consumer partnerships are based on an informal arrangement. This is an option for small projects where there is little risk to any of the parties involved, and for start up projects that have yet to learn about the particular set of circumstances in which they are striving to operate. A simple contract drawn up between CSA members and the producers may be all that is required.

5.2 Formal structures

As a CSA increases in size and complexity, it is wise to have clearly defined rights and responsibilities which are recognised in law – in legal terms these are written as memoranda and articles of association for companies and as rules for industrial and provident societies. This will ensure accountability and the smooth running of the scheme.

5.2.1 Choosing a legal structure

Organisations that have no legal identity separate from its members are known as unincorporated organisations. Members are jointly and severally liable for the debts of the organisation. By becoming incorporated an organisation is creating a separate legal personality from its members which is recognised by law. An incorporated organisation can own property, and enter into contracts in its own right, it can also sue and be sued. Often, incorporation can give the organisation greater credibility as it will have separate identity recognised by external bodies. An organisation's rules on how it operates are written up as its constitution, articles or rules. One of the significant benefits of incorporation is its limited liability, – this means that if an incorporated organisation should wind-up with outstanding debts the members are only liable for the amount they agreed to pay on becoming a member. For example in a company limited by guarantee, a member is liable to the amount of the guarantee stipulated in the memorandum of association of the company. Incorporation is often a requirement by grant giving bodies, as the funder has more chance of getting the money back if it sued a corporate body rather than trying to pursue the individual people for the debts owed.

An organisation can currently incorporate itself in a variety of ways, including:

- As an **Industrial and Provident Society (IPS)**

IPSs are governed by a rulebook. The following definition is taken from the website of the Financial Services Authority which regulates IPSs:

An Industrial and Provident Society is an organisation conducting an industry, business or trade, either as a co-operative or for the benefit of the community and is registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965. IPS's are registered with the FSA and are regulated by HM Treasury.

Are all Industrial and Provident Societies cooperative? No, there are two routes.

Registration as a bona fide co-op or a society for the benefit of the community. IPS's that are registered as a bona-fide co-operative are run for the mutual benefit of their members, with any surplus usually being ploughed back into the organisation to provide better services and facilities and/or giving a dividend to members.⁷

The characteristics of IPS's for the benefit of the community are similar to those of a bona fide co-operative, but its profits and assets must not be shared among members, and the society must be able to show that it will benefit people other than its own members.

- As a **Limited Company**, limited by guarantee or by shares

Members of a company limited by guarantee, guarantee to provide a pre-determined amount if the organisation is wound-up with outstanding debts this may be as little as £1. Charities, development trusts, social firms and community businesses frequently adopt this legal form.

A relatively new form of limited company, a Community Interest Company (CIC) is available for companies trading for community benefit. CICs are required to pass a community benefit test on incorporation and have an 'asset lock', which ensures their assets are protected in the long term for their intended purpose.

All companies are registered and regulated by Companies House

It is advisable to seek professional advice as these structures can be quite complex with the possibility of hybridising and adapting to suit individual circumstances. In practice the guiding principle should be '**structure follows strategy**'. Think carefully through the objectives of your enterprise, who are the different stakeholders, what are their concerns and interests in the scheme? When you are clear about this then you are ready to seek professional advice and in a good position to make the most of their time, and especially if any free or subsidised advice may be available to you. It is very tempting to copy the structure of an already-established CSA project. But this is a risky route because no two projects are the same and the process of incorporating a group can be very formative. One of your members may have legal experience that could assist in this area.⁸

⁷ See: www.fsa.gov.uk

⁸ For further information and advice see Co-operativesUK, Plunkett Foundation and Co-Active in Appendix 11.2. The 'Making Local Food Work' project can provide advice and support to community based local food enterprises. For more information go to: www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk

A valuable guide, written jointly by the Soil association, Plunkett Foundation and Co-operativesUK is also available. 'Cultivating Co-operatives – Organisational Structures for Local Food Enterprise' will guide you through all you need to know when considering the development of your new enterprise, and includes suggestions for finding people to work with, business planning, managing participatory meetings and several inspiring case studies. This is available to download from the website: www.soilassociation.org/csa.aspx or for £15.00 from the Soil Association or see: www.soilassociation.org/shop.aspx. Also see the 'Good Governance' guide available from the Big Lottery website. It sets out the level of governance needed to satisfy funders that their money will be well managed and for the intended cause.

5.2.2 Becoming a Charity (in addition to choosing a legal structure)

Some social enterprises do not seek or qualify for charitable status. In order to register as a charity a social enterprise has to be set up solely for public benefit and have wholly charitable objects. Charities are also limited in the amount of trading they can carry out which may not fit with a social enterprise that may wish to benefit a specific sector of people and will generate a large amount of its income from trading. However a charity can establish a subsidiary to carry out trading activity that it is not permitted to carry out under the charity. A subsidiary can be used for training and other community development activities. A subsidiary will not have charitable status.

5.3 Issues to consider

- **Who are the stakeholders?**

Typically a CSA will involve: A landowner, farmers and growers, the consumer members, other farms, grant giving organisations. What do each of these groups want out of the partnership? What level of commitment? Does it need a written contract?

- **Who ultimately has control of the business decisions? How will the enterprise be managed?**

Is it the farmer, or are the farmer(s) employed by the CSA? Or is it the investors? Consumer members? The landlord? Workers? An elected board? A combination?

If consumers are to share the risks of farming, they should also have the opportunity to understand and influence the way that their food is produced. But do you want members to be able to vote on day to day issues such as when and where to plant carrots, or only when money has to be spent on a new planting machine? Are everybody's interests protected?

Do you need to protect the enterprise from private interests, as in a charity? Will your structure protect the enterprise against militant and disruptive individuals who wish to take control? Consider not only who has power in theory but also who actually has power in practice, for example a landowner may have a single vote but the power to evict from their land.

How will you protect the enterprise – from hostile takeover? Or ensure the enterprise continues to deliver its intended purpose?

- **What is the relationship with the landowner?**

Does the community group own the land? If a landowner allows a community group to work their land will the community group gain rights to it? Should the community group rent the land or buy it?

Is the land to be held in trust? (see Land, Section 7).

Stroud Slad Farm Community has always had a very supportive relationship with its landlords. However, it still took time at the beginning of the CSA project to write agreements with the landowners making the mutual responsibilities as clear as possible in advance.

- **How will the CSA get start up capital?**

Start up capital will always be required but, in addition, money will be needed if you have to buy land or machinery, which could amount to a large sum. Who will pay for the labour required to start up a CSA? Who will own the animals, the land and the machinery? If there are grants available, who ultimately owns the assets acquired with this money?

- **How will the CSA get working capital?**

There will be times when CSAs want to expand, set up a farm shop, employ an extra worker to set up a box scheme or buy a polytunnel. Depending on the legal structure of the CSA, you may want to be able to sell shares in the organisation to raise capital for these projects. These shares could be with or without voting rights. Investors may want their money to earn interest. See case studies on Whiteholme Organic Network and Tablehurst and Plawhatch farm for examples of CSA's raising capital.

In practice a CSA, Land Trust or any social enterprise is likely to raise finance using the following options:

- shares (with or without paying interest/dividend),
- loans (with or without interest),
- grant funding,
- and conventional borrowing from banks as loan or mortgage.

Ideally community enterprise seek to borrow least from the banks.

- **Who will profit?**

If the enterprise makes a profit, who gets it? Absent shareholders? The workers? Consumers? The landlord? Will it be reinvested in the business, put aside for a bad year or divided equally between the members?

- **Who will benefit from increases in value to the scheme?**

A grower may put years of labour into a piece of land and its infrastructure. What happens when they leave. Will they be remunerated for their 'sweat equity'? Similarly, a community group (especially the core group who have put lots of volunteer time into making the project work) will become 'attached' to the land that grows their food and feel they have made an 'investment' in it. How will you acknowledge this value?

- **Will your structure accommodate change in the future?**

What if your charismatic leader should leave? If you want to double the number of employees? Buy more land? Take on more charitable objectives, such as providing cheap produce to people on a low income?

- What happens to assets if you should wind up the scheme?
- Who is liable should the business go bankrupt?
- Should you have a constitution?

5.4 What is different about CSA farm businesses?

The success of a business is usually measured in terms of its increased stocks of money and physical assets. However, the CSAs priority should be the services and benefits it provides to its members, while still remaining viable as a business in economic terms. If considered in this way, CSAs can be classified as social enterprises. Social enterprises lie somewhere between the private and the public sectors and are often referred to as the ‘third way’. ‘Triple bottom line’ measures the success of a business in terms of its economic, social and environmental performance. For more on Triple Bottom Line accounting see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triple_bottom_line

The financial structure of a social enterprise is different from other businesses in that it does have access to social investment funds and in some cases is eligible for tax relief. As businesses they are self-sufficient – being viable trading concerns, making a surplus from trading. They can be either profit making or not-for-profit enterprises. However, their profits are shared among the business stakeholders or are used to benefit the community rather than as a return on share capital. This is what distinguishes social enterprises from voluntary sector organisations, which depend entirely on donations and grant aid.

The principles of co-operative organisations (below) are a good ideological basis for CSA.

5.5 Liability and insurance

If members of the public go onto a farm there are three types of insurance that need to be considered:

- **Public liability:** Even if members of the public cross the farm on a footpath, you will need public liability cover. Different cover is available according to needs. If you have a farm shop, for instance, you will need cover for every day of the year. If, however, the farm is only open for a specific event insurance can be arranged for that day.
- **Employer’s liability:** Although CSA members are not technically employees, if they are to do any work on the farm they need to be insured against potential injury.
- **Product liability:** This is required if you intend to sell any farm produce for public consumption.

The NFU has specialist insurance services, but like any insurance it is worth shopping around – start by looking in the agricultural press (see Appendix 11.4) for specialist agricultural brokers.

Stroud Community Agriculture made a decision on ethical grounds to go for minimal insurance. This is written into its membership agreement (see section 11) and communicated to members who are encouraged (in line with CSA principles) to ‘share the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming...’

5.6 Organic certification

To label agricultural produce as ‘organic’ or with reference to organic production methods, it must by law (EU Regulation 2092/91), be certified with an approved certification body. The Soil Association currently certifies over 70 per cent of UK organic producers and processors and is recognised as having the highest standards of food quality and production. Organic certification is the most rigorous of all systems of accountability for food production, thus consumers can be confident of the integrity of the food they eat. The certification process first

requires that land goes through a two-year conversion period where it is managed organically, but crops and livestock may not be marketed as organic, only as organic 'in conversion'.

CSA may be exactly the support a holding needs to get through the difficult conversion period before expanding into further markets later on. Organic farming principles emphasise the use of crop rotations, green manures and/or the use of animal manures to build and maintain natural soil fertility and control pests and diseases. Organic standards prohibit the use of genetically modified organisms, promote good livestock husbandry and encourage the development of a healthy environment that considers the landscape and its biodiversity.

Why go for organic certification?

- It is a legal requirement if you wish to market produce as 'organic'
- You may wish to sell produce surplus to CSA requirements to other local markets, for example farmers' markets
- You will be producing to recognised standards and good practice
- Gives organic producers and processors credibility.
- Organic standards provide a clear line for when to say 'yes' and 'no'. For example, if there is any debate about farming practice such as how to deal with slugs or invading docks. You will also have a case for rejecting non-organic inputs
- With Soil Association certification you have access to technical support through producer membership (see below).
- Most farmers take pride in meeting recognised organic standards

However, as CSA initiatives are directly accountable to their consumer members, organic certification may not be necessary as members know the farmer, the production methods and can see it in practice. CSAs may also be quite small making the cost of certification an extra 'luxury' (see the listing for the Wholesome Food Association, Appendix 11.2).

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Financing CSA

6 Financing CSA

Like all aspects of CSA, the finances available to you will be determined by your particular circumstances. To ensure accountability it is advisable that one person is responsible for the CSA finances. A member of the core group (see CSA members, Section 4) could take on the role of treasurer.

Members

The main source of income for a CSA is from its members. Members usually commit to buying farm produce for a full growing season and preferably pay for this in advance, thereby providing some working capital. In addition members may invest through shares, an investment by each member of £10 to £1000 or more, which can then be used to raise further capital.

Stroud Slad Farm Community raised several thousand pounds from its local community by requesting several options:

- non-repayable gifts
- loans for which the interest was payable in vegetables (backed up with a written agreement specifying capital repayment terms)
- pre-payment of shares (backed up with a written agreement) i.e. the member paid for 12 or 24 months of vegetables in advance (thus giving the CSA a cashflow advantage).

Bank loans

If you can demonstrate that you have the commitment of a group of people to a CSA, in the form of letters of intent for example, this would strengthen a CSA business plan for a loan, mortgage or funding proposal.

Banks will provide loan funds to social enterprises on the same basis as they lend to the private sector. Some banks also have special programmes and products to support social enterprises. Several banks provide special packages to credit unions, while others offer special products for employee-owned businesses, particularly employee share ownership plans. Some banks also have staff that specialise in supporting community enterprises and co-operatives.

Revolving loans

Other community groups have chosen to set up revolving loans. This is a fund that members contribute into, which is then lent to members who apply for use of the fund. Applications are considered by a committee of members using agreed principles to make their decisions. The idea is that borrowers try to pay back more than they initially borrow. There is not, as yet, a revolving loan for CSA projects although there have been discussions about setting up such a loan which would provide capital to CSA projects either to help them start up or develop an existing project. These loans normally are based on an agreement that the project which borrows the capital will try (if possible) to repay more than the original loan so that the loan fund builds up as more projects make use of it.

Social investment funds

There are a number of funds available to social enterprises. Community finance initiatives provide loan finance to social enterprises and micro-enterprise, which may require less security than banks.

Community investment can be an important source of capital for community supported agriculture ventures. It involves members and supporters of a CSA venture investing money through the purchase of bonds or shares. Bonds are a form of loan agreement, providing finance for a specified period, after which the enterprise repays the loan plus the agreed interest on the loan. Share capital is different. It is a permanent or semi-permanent investment, in return for which the investor becomes a member and part-owner of the CSA, and may receive interest or dividends on their share capital, if the CSA is profitable. For more information see: www.soilassociation.org/csa.aspx

Grants

Some social enterprises, particularly those addressing social exclusion, receive start-up and capital grants. CSA initiatives are an opportunity to revive struggling rural businesses and communities and can also be linked to less-advantaged urban communities. If you are seeking grant support, start by considering your local circumstances, are there any development needs that may be aided by the establishment of a CSA? For example, will you be providing employment or training opportunities, improving the conservation management of a holding or providing fresh produce to a community that otherwise finds it difficult to acquire it? Your local Rural Community Council (RCC) may be able to help you identify local needs and sources of support. Contact ACRE or visit their website to find your local RCC office (see Appendix 11.2).

Of particular relevance to CSAs is the Big Lottery Local Food fund – see below.

6.1 Potential sources of grants and loans

Agricultural Mortgage Corporation

Specialises in finance for the agricultural sector.

T: 01264 334747 W: www.amconline.co.uk

Big Lottery – Local Food fund

This fund will support a variety of food related projects with grants ranging from £2000 to £500,000. The programme runs from spring 2008 to 2013/14. The fund has been developed by a consortium of organisations and is managed on their behalf by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. The programme will run until December 2014, with all projects having to be completed by March 2014.

T: 01636 670000 (ask for local food) E: localfood@rswt.org W: www.localfoodgrants.org

Charitable Trusts

Grant-giving trusts are listed in The Directory for Social Change. Libraries usually have a copy of this, or have the facility on a Fund Finder CD-Rom or are registered to use the online service www.dsc.org.uk

T: 020 7209 5151 W: www.dsc.org.uk

Ecology Building Society

The Ecology is a mutual building society dedicated to improving the environment by promoting sustainable housing and sustainable communities.

18 Station Road, Cross Hills, Keighley, West Yorkshire BD20 7EH

T: 0845 674 5566 F: 01535 636166 E:info@ecology.co.uk www.ecology.co.uk

Local Enterprise Agencies

These are companies limited by guarantee, typically set up as partnerships between the private and public sectors. Your local Business Link should have details of your Local Enterprise Agency. The main role of the Enterprise Agencies is to help establish small businesses, and to encourage the growth of existing businesses within their particular area by being able to quickly identify and respond to the needs of their local business community. They can advise on topics such as: new business start-ups, business planning, financial planning as well as advise on the day to day running of your business. Local Enterprise Agencies can arrange for a free legal consultation (45 minutes) for your business.

South West Rural Enterprise Gateway (SWREG)

The Rural Enterprise Gateway provides information, training and business development support to rural businesses and in particular, agricultural and land-based business groups. The project is also a gateway to other initiatives that help rural businesses develop their ideas and expertise across the region and make the most of the wide range of support available to them.

SWREG takes a proactive approach to the economic development and diversification of rural areas. Through SWREG, support is available for rural businesses, helping to improve their productivity, skills and growth potential.

The Rural Enterprise Gateway is a central point of contact for rural businesses, which provides funding and expert advice on rural business issues, training support, encouraging rural businesses to work together and sharing best practice.

www.regsw.org.uk

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Land

7 Land

A CSA cannot exist without land. There are a variety of ways to access land but it can be difficult to arrange long-term agreements. CSA members are more likely to invest time and money in land if they are sure they will also reap the long-term benefits. It also takes time to become familiar with the capabilities of a piece of land and build up its fertility.

Think carefully about the future needs of the CSA when considering your land requirements. What do you need in terms of accessibility? Do you need buildings for packing, meetings or accommodation? Are there any planning restrictions? Are you able to erect a polytunnel?

7.1 How much land will you need?

This will depend on how many members you intend to provide for and how you intend to farm the land. If your own holding is to supply all the produce packed (for a vegetable box scheme) it would be realistic to expect to manage about 60 boxes per hectare per week⁹. This requires fairly intensive production such as raised beds and a lot of hand labour! Expect much less through field scale production. Growing for 100 weekly vegetable boxes would provide a suitable income for one person (with seasonal help), but this requires great skill, managing between 30-50 crops and using protected cropping techniques.

You can look for land in the farming press (see Appendix 11.4). Contact your local firm of land agents to find out if there is any land for sale or rent in your area. Try advertising in the farming press or local paper. You may even be able to encourage a reporter to do a feature about the idea. Also see the Organic Market Place on the Soil Association website: www.soilassociation.org/organicmarketplace.aspx. Also check out your council, the National Trust, Church, Network Rail, Water Board etc.

7.2 Buying land

Buying land or a farm has the benefit of long-term security, as long as it can be managed as a viable business! A successful CSA initiative can provide the security a small farm needs. Commitment by CSA members allows for long-term business planning which is essential when seeking a loan.

CSA members can be asked to invest in a non-profit making share, the capital from which may be used to secure a loan. Members wishing to leave the CSA can then recoup the value of their share. This could even be repaid in farm produce!

Most high street banks would consider providing loans against a good business plan, and a few even have specialist agricultural advisers. The Agricultural Mortgage Corporation specialises in finance for the agricultural sector. Triodos Bank and The Ecology Building Society are ethical banks that will look favourably on enterprises with social and environmental benefits. Triodos Bank also has assets specifically targeted at the organic sector. But you will still have to demonstrate that you have the capability and produce a convincing, viable business plan.

⁹ Soil Association Technical Guide, Setting Up a Vegetable Box Scheme

7.3 Land Trusts

Land Trusts fit in well with the CSA concept. The purpose of a Land Trust is to purchase land and remove it from the market thus protecting its integrity for a specific purpose. For example, the National Trust was set up to “act as a guardian for the nation in the acquisition and protection of threatened coastline, countryside and buildings”.

Land Trusts can acquire land and ensure its use for the production of food, by sustainable means in perpetuity. Land held in trust producing food for a community, can be protected from undesirable development.. As the purchase is a collective responsibility, or even given in donation, the farming business would not necessarily have to accommodate a large mortgage or rent. As described above, capital can be raised through non-profit making shares that can be redeemed if shareholders leave the locality. They could be made responsible for selling their own shares.

Stroud Common Wealth ran a project supporting the development of Community Farm Land Trusts. It developed an online Action Pack, which is available at www.stroudcommonwealth.org.uk

Soil Association Land Trust

The Land Trust is a new initiative combining the energy and resources of its founding partners, the Soil Association, Land Heritage Trust and the Paget Estate, to safeguard land for organic and sustainable farming, in perpetuity. The Trust's mission is to acquire organic and traditionally managed farms and land through gifts, bequests and purchases, and to safeguard their future by managing them in trust in perpetuity, organically and sustainably.

The Land Trust is a registered charity and constituted as a company limited by guarantee. For further information see the website, or contact Ruth Curtis on rcurtis@soilassociation.org or telephone 01647 24511.

7.4 Renting land

For those new to farming or wishing to trial a CSA initiative, renting land seems a sensible option. Renting land on an existing farm with a willing farmer may be of benefit as they can offer their expertise and experience of the land, and use of machinery. A CSA established in this way may bring additional benefits to the farm such as an opportunity for the farm to market produce from the rest of the farm ie. The non-CSA produce.

The disadvantage of renting is that there is less scope for long-term projects, and there may be little recompense at the end of the tenancy for any increased value, such as, improved soil fertility, organic status or improved infrastructure. Some tenancy agreements also forbid the involvement of third parties, which could restrict rentals from tenant farmers or the inclusion of investing CSA members. Look carefully at the legal arrangement (see Section 5, Making an organisation and legal issues)

7.5 Land quality and suitability

Whether you are buying or renting land, it may be wise to check the quality and suitability of the land before making a commitment. One way to do this is to have soil analyses carried out. Stroud Community Agriculture had two types of soil testing done.

The conventional chemical and organic matter test was done by NRM Labs
T: 01344 886338 E: enquiries@nrm.uk.com

The second test was a quite different assessment of the soil bacteria, fungi and microflora at a new lab at Laverstoke Park. See www.laverstokepark.co.uk and follow the link to 'soil foodweb' for detailed information on their methods.

If funds were available both tests would complement each other but if money is short then the first, more conventional test, is probably the one to go for.

Other, less technical issues for a CSA are:

- Accessibility – how easy will it be for members to get to the farm, is it on a bus route?
- How visible is it? If people can see the veg growing and you put up notices in the fields that lots of people will see, this can be a great source of new members.
- What buildings are available? The farmers will need buildings to house animals and keep tools. You will need somewhere for the veg to be stored and packed (and possibly to be collected by the members). Having a building on the farm where you can hold member meetings and social events can be more effective in building community than renting a room away from the farm.
- How supportive is the landlord (if you are renting)? Can you get a long-term lease on the land? Is the landlord willing to have large numbers of people on the land?

7.6 Farm tenancies

County Councils own farms as part of their estate. These are leased out to tenant farmers for approximately ten years. When farms become available they are usually advertised in local and regional press, although larger 'flagship' farms will also be publicised in the national press, for example Farmers Weekly (see Appendix 11.4 for this and other publications). There is a statutory requirement of at least five years farming experience, but three of these can be time spent in education. Potential tenants have to submit three things in a tender:

1. A formal tender of rent.
2. A financial statement demonstrating that you have the assets to purchase the required stock and machinery, to take on the previous tenants fixtures (their improvements) and have sufficient funds to complete the first year of trading.
3. A description of how you plan to farm the holding with an account of your farming experience and history. This can be as little as one page stating a continuation of current approach, or it can be quite a detailed business plan. A proposed CSA, although possibly giving some financial reassurance, is a less than traditional farming arrangement and it would need a clear description with forecast budgets.

Leonard Stanley Food Enterprise wrote a proposal to Gloucestershire County Council to take on a County Farm. (See section 11 for their proposal).

Private land owners have similar requirements to County Councils and advertise in the same way. The Tenant Farmers Association is a membership organisation that provides support and advice for tenant farmers see www.tfa.org.uk.

7.7 Allotments and other options

If you are new to growing, an allotment is an excellent opportunity to trial your skills before taking on a larger commitment. They can cost anything between £7 and £50 a year. Your Local Authority should be able to advise you regarding your nearest allotments and contact details for the membership secretary.

Many local authorities have allotments to rent, and some allotments are privately owned. They are affordable and usually let on one-year agreements. It is possible to run a small scheme to CSA principles on allotments. Informally, you can share a single plot of course. Increasingly community groups are running community gardens or orchards on allotments and some local authorities see this as a way of regenerating run down sites. Some sites are run by allotment associations. They may collect rent and undertake maintenance and support, sometimes on behalf of the landlord. For urban groups such an arrangement could meet their CSA aspirations. Allotment tenants may also be good recruiting grounds for farm CSAs. Most (if not all) statutory allotments have rules preventing allotment holders from selling produce. Some allotment groups are very 'traditional'. See Stroud Communal Allotment case study.

The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (see Appendix 11.2) provide free advice to Affiliated Members in connection with all horticultural and gardening matters including interpretation of legislation. A good practice guide, *Growing in the Community*, explains how to ensure a secure future for allotments (see Appendix 11.3).

There are all sorts of opportunities for growing food in the urban environment; even things like bee keeping are possible from a moderate sized garden. Sustain (see Appendix 11.2) has produced several reports on the potentials for urban production (see Appendix 11.3). The National Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (see Appendix 11.2), exists to promote, support and represent groups engaged in community led development of open space through locally managed farming and gardening. They are in discussion with government and local authorities looking at providing greater opportunities for local involvement in food growing projects.

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Production for CSA

8 Production for CSA

To provide an interesting variety of vegetables, for as long as possible throughout the year, and to co-ordinate this with the longer term plan of crop rotations is quite a challenge for any grower! In the following section we illustrate some considerations when growing for CSA.

8.1 What is to be grown for the CSA and by whom?

The capabilities of the land available to you and the skills and experience of the farmer will determine largely what can be produced. The next step is to establish what the members want and then translating this into a working crop plan. There are two approaches to this. A farmer-driven CSA, with land already available to them, will know what they can and want to grow with suggestions from the members. A consumer driven CSA can decide what they would like produced for them before approaching a farmer with or without land. What has to be stressed to potential CSA members is the seasonality of production. Be clear what members can realistically expect to receive and when. Take the opportunity of celebrating seasonality and working with it in ways that make it interesting and not a hardship.

A CSA can provide nearly anything that can be produced on the farm. Fresh vegetables tend to be central to CSA production. But eggs, milk, meat and firewood can all be provided through CSA arrangements, although appropriate storage and distribution has to be considered. To keep organisation simple it is easier to treat each product separately, allowing members to buy into a share for the season. For example, one member may choose to receive a weekly egg share with their vegetables others may like milk.

8.2 Paying for the shares

Another consideration is how and when members will pay for their share. The ideal method is that everyone pays for the entire year at the beginning of the year. However, this is impractical for a lot of people, and is quite a challenging concept at the moment. Offering a discount to members who choose to do this may encourage more uptake of this method. Currently though, most CSA members pay monthly in advance.

Then you have to decide if the payments are to be made by cheque, standing order or direct debit? Payments by cheque will require constant administration and attention and is not really recommended. Of the two electronic payments methods, standing orders require the member to set up the payments, and means that when the cost of the share has to be increased, every member has to change their own standing order. This requires quite a lot of administration. These standing order payments need to be checked regularly. Direct debits, once they are set up, need less administration, but accrue bank charges of a few hundred pounds a year.

It is important that an agreement is drawn up between the member and the CSA, so that everyone is clear as to what should happen if they wish to cancel their membership. For example, members can be asked to give 3 months notice, though of course there's nothing to actually stop people cancelling their standing orders before this.

8.3 Crop planning

How long is your growing season, how many people are you providing for and what are you going to provide? These all have to be answered in developing a cropping plan.

The cropping plan will have to include a suitable crop rotation and allow for a fertility-building crop. This plan will show the area available to each crop grouping. The amount of each vegetable then grown within these groupings can be planned according to taste, the suitability of the site, and the number of members. On a very small scale some gardening books can give useful information of expected yields of the various crops. It is important to keep accurate information of planting dates and yields etc for compiling subsequent crop plans.

In many ways, producing vegetables for a CSA is the same as producing for a box scheme and there are reference books to help with this. See Soil Association publication 'How to set up a Vegetable Box Scheme'.

How much of each crop do your members eat?

Issuing a questionnaire to CSA members is a good way of establishing people's likes and dislikes, you may even get some measure of the quantities required. See the example in section 11. Growers already producing for vegetable box schemes are a good source of advice (contact the Soil Association for information on training events). The book *Sharing the Harvest* (see Appendix 11.3) also has figures for quantities required for a share. Keep in mind cultural and dietary differences though, for example, some box scheme producers have noted a reduction in demand for potatoes, possibly because we are increasingly eating starch in other forms such as rice and pasta. In addition we are also eating more fresh salad crops.

It is usually best not to give members a choice in what they receive in their veg share but you can provide a 'swap box' or 'gift box' where people can leave any unwanted veg and take any veg left by others. (This box could also be used for members wishing to donate any surplus produce from their own gardens that they might wish to give away).

An approximate mix of vegetables can then be designed for each week throughout the season; quantities and planting times are then calculated retrospectively. A crop-planning chart is a useful tool to visualise the harvest periods for each crop and to design a balanced combination for the growing season. To maintain interest and provide for a healthy and balanced diet, you should strive to have between 9-15 different crops available for harvesting throughout the season.

There are several good references that can assist your planning (see Appendix 11.3). The HDRA Cooks Garden Planner is a useful wall chart, and you can find tools for crop planning at The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association website (see Appendix 11.2). Are you going to produce for 12 months of the year? If so, are you going to buy in produce to cover any shortages, especially during the 'hungry gap' in May and June? Planning and budgeting to buy in some produce allows some leeway for crop failures and shortages whilst experience is gained in managing the land and the requirements of the CSA.

8.4 Extending the season

Staggered planting times, using different varieties, protected cropping and crop storage are all means to extend the growing season. Staggering your planting will extend the harvest period for a particular crop reducing potential gluts. Certain varieties will do better at different times of the year. Choose early and late varieties to extend the season. Protected cropping methods

such as fleeces and polytunnels allow early planting and some varieties can even be grown throughout the winter, such as Japanese salad crops. Some crops are also suitable for storage, in particular the root crops, potatoes, onions and carrots. Pumpkins and other squashes also store well, and if chilled storage is available dense vegetables, such as cabbages, can be stored.

Processing fresh produce in order to add value to it and to enable storage for use during the leaner times is a good idea. This also provides opportunities for communal activities such as pork processing days. See section 10.

Adequate polytunnel space or protected cropping areas are essential if you are going to produce veg for 12 months of the year. Reckon on about 4 to 5 sqm per veg share for 2 adults.

8.5 Co-operating with other farms

CSA is a perfect opportunity to develop links with other local farms to supply the variety of produce that CSA members would like. For example, you may concentrate on vegetable production, but offer to supply dairy products from a nearby dairy farm. Or it might be that your neighbour is a large farm with the land and machinery to grow field scale crops whilst you concentrate on providing higher value varieties. Your CSA may act as a central hub for the distribution of all sorts of local and regional produce, but this will require much more time to organise and administer. There are instances where experienced organic growers with large vegetable box schemes have co-operated with other local farmers, helping them in their conversion to organic production, sharing specialist machinery and planning crop rotations between the farms.

Stroud Food Hub has taken this co-operation to another level by creating a co-op with a membership made up of local food producers and local consumers. The Hub provides a direct purchasing link between producers and consumers. It also builds social connections and increases opportunities for practical support between producers. For more details on Stroud Food Hub contact nick.weir@localfood.org.uk

8.6 Labour

Who is going to do the work?

As discussed below, providing opportunities for voluntary work is also important for a CSA. A group of people can get a surprising amount of work done in a small amount of time, and putting the time in to arranging this can really pay off. From the farmers perspective though it pays to not rely on this too much. Volunteers can provide invaluable help, but unless you put the time in to ask people personally, and make specific arrangements, it can be a hit and miss affair as to how many people will turn out on any particular day. You also have to take in to account people's varying experience and capabilities.

For the farmer, producing vegetables for a CSA requires social skills as well as horticultural skills. The farmer needs to give time to talk to members and share the news of the farm. This can both enrich a farmer's work life and interrupt it. People's interest and enthusiasm for the farm is what makes CSAs special and different, and ultimately will make it successful or not. Giving time to foster this interest is important, but interruptions can be a bit challenging at busy times of the year. Sharing farm news may entail writing newsletter articles, posting notices, and updating a website. See example farm news updates in section 11.

The farm must be accessible to members at most times; after all it is their farm. Some CSA farms produce some vegetables such as peas and leaf beet on a 'pick your own' basis. Even if members don't come to the farm to collect their vegetables on a regular basis, it maybe helpful to have a 'pick your own' section anyway – an area where members can come and help themselves to things like flowers and herbs can help towards engendering a sense of ownership of the farm.

In order to encourage this access, the farm will have to be kept tidy and safe. Try to keep all tools, etc clear of the main access points to reduce chances of accidents and to give people the feeling that they are welcome, and are not encroaching on a workplace. Toilets and hand washing facilities need to be provided and ideally a place where members can meet and sit together. Occasional health and safety checks need to be carried out and information signs posted to warn of any potential dangers.

Another important aspect of a CSA is that all members share the responsibilities of running the farm. However, in practice this responsibility will be felt more keenly by a few active members (including the farmer). For the farmer this can at times make decision-making long-winded and frustrating. It is important that there is a clear agreement between the farmer and the CSA core group as to what decisions the farmer can take alone. This agreement may set out spending limits, and leave most of the crop and farm planning decisions to the farmer. Clear communication between all parties is important. Inevitably though, no matter how clear the agreement, conflicts will occasionally arise, and will need to be resolved. All of these discussions, decisions and conflicts, approached with goodwill, can strengthen the CSA and add to its success.

The agreement between the farmer and the core group will also need to specify who is responsible for managing the finances of the farm and the CSA. To keep the business running smoothly the farmer will need to be able to pay for many of the day-to-day transactions. The farmer will have to be involved, along with the core group, in setting the annual budget. This will then clarify spending limits and financial responsibilities.

Recruiting a farmer or grower

If you need to recruit a suitable farmer or grower, place an advert in the appropriate farming press (see Appendix 11.4) or approach farming and horticulture training colleges. Contact other CSAs or producers growing for vegetable box schemes, and they may be able to put you in touch with some suitable candidates. They should have good organisational skills and be self-motivated yet willing to share control. During the height of the growing season extra help might also have to be brought in. Other qualities to look for in a producer for a CSA include:

- What previous farming experience do they have?
- Do they have experience of organic or biodynamic farming methods?
- Do they work well with other people both individually and in large groups?
- Volunteer management (see below)
- Interested in community and willing to work with some of the frustrations around consensus building
- Are they willing and capable of passing on their skills?

Members

Members could be given the opportunity to work in the production of their own food. This could be on a completely voluntary basis or as part of the cost of their CSA share. It is not wise to count on members voluntary help for crucial farming operations; better to consider their efforts as a bonus. As members will require some time from the grower or farmer in supervision it is advisable to set specific times or days as work days, and have some work ideas prepared – be organised!

Alternative currencies such as LETS and ‘time banking’ could be used as a means for exchanging people’s time and skills through the CSA. LETS schemes (Local Exchange Trading Schemes) enable people to decide the local unit of ‘currency’ and trade their skills in this. In time banking schemes – new from the US – the currency is the hours spent volunteering, so that babysitting or shopping for elderly people becomes an alternative form of ‘money’.

More information and software for managing these schemes can be found at the New Economics Foundation website (see Appendix 11.2)

Volunteers and apprentices

There are many people who would like the opportunity to embark on a more sustainable and satisfying lifestyle. CSA is an opportunity for new entrants to farming to gain access to land and have the close support of an informed community. CSA initiatives provide an opportunity to gain valuable experience in practical growing and farming in a social environment. Volunteers and apprentices seem to be a feature of almost all CSAs encountered. Some CSAs provide all living costs and some pocket money for apprentices. The Soil Association apprenticeship scheme will provide valuable support to CSA projects interested in working with an apprentice.

An important part of a CSA is to encourage members to become involved in the work of the farm (and in the running of the project as a whole). Some CSAs make this a mandatory part of membership, asking for a few 3 or 4-hour shifts a year. This however may deter some people from joining. Whether you adopt this policy or not, providing structured opportunities for volunteering will help to build a sense of community and ownership, and get some valuable work done!

The jobs allocated to volunteers need to be straightforward, fairly simple and have an achievable end. It doesn’t really work to be doing a lot of small jobs that need a lot of direction and intervention. A larger job (such as weeding or digging carrots etc) where everyone can join in for as little or as much as they wish, is much more suitable. This also allows more freedom to socialise. It helps to provide tools and gloves etc, and have one person who oversees the work and provides direction. It can also be helpful to have one person to keep an eye out to welcome people as they arrive. Other tasks that can work well for large numbers of volunteers include working together for specific tasks such as potato harvesting, hay making, or barn building. This is especially so in the formative years of the CSA when it is especially important to build a sense of community.

Some CSAs provide specific activities for children so that the parents can join in with the adult tasks. Children love being involved in the farm though, so its good to have some small tasks designed specifically for them with supervision.

By law, a risk assessment should be carried out before any work begins (see example in section 11). In practice, give clear instructions to the volunteers before they start work and alert them to any potential dangers. A first aid kit must be kept handy, and toilet and hand wash facilities provided. As mentioned in section 5.6, the CSA should have public liability insurance.

On completion of the work, its important to allow time for sharing food, socialising and mutual congratulating.

Volunteers tend to be short term and will therefore need fairly close supervision.

Providing board and lodging seems a fair exchange for voluntary labour, but it may be reasonable to also charge a boarding fee if you can give volunteers sound and valuable experience in return.

WWOOF (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) is an international network which co-ordinates voluntary placements on organic farms. (See Appendix 11.2). You can also advertise for volunteers in appropriate press (see Appendix 11.4). You will probably find that once you have established yourself, and with a good reference from previous volunteers, they will be contacting you.

8.7 Volunteer management – implications for the farmer

One of the most common mistakes in managing volunteers is failing to provide a clear enough agreement and then failing to enforce it. This probably stems from the fact that the volunteer is giving their time unpaid and the manager feels that they should be 'grateful and kind' in response. However a volunteering situation has many similarities to situations involving paid contracts:

- Both parties benefit from the work (the volunteer would not be there if there was not something in it for them – it might be worth finding out what their motivation is)
- The volunteer needs to know what to do and how to do it. Otherwise their work will be ineffective, they will get de-motivated and everyone loses.
- If the job is not being done properly the volunteer needs to be put right. This helps the volunteer to learn and prevents other volunteers becoming de-motivated by seeing the job done badly.

A Share in the Harvest

Section 9

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Managing the shares

9 Managing the shares

The term 'share' is really only appropriate in a CSA where members each receive a share of the total harvest, however, it is a convenient description for the regular supply of farm produce to CSA members. Here we consider how to price shares, and the post harvest handling of shares, which includes washing, packing and distribution. There are three different parties that can take on responsibility for handling the CSA shares, the farmers, the members or somebody from outside the CSA.

9.1 Pricing the shares

Under-pricing CSA shares is the most common reason for CSA failure! The cost of a share should reflect the full production costs and includes a fair wage for the farmer or grower. There are two common approaches to pricing CSA shares. The simplest is to establish approximately what a household would normally spend on produce each week and provide the equivalent in CSA produce at market prices. This method is commonly used by producer run box schemes, but only with experience can a grower know if they can produce profitably at these prices.

For new CSAs it is probably more reliable to draw up a budget at the beginning of the season. This can be used to compare with the actual financial progress throughout the year. This will highlight any significant overspends or savings, and will provide greater accountability for CSA members. In arrangements where members agree to take on greater responsibility (shareholder CSA), a record of the actual costs should be kept, and at the end of the season shortfalls can be charged for or leftover funds returned or kept for the following season.

Whichever method of setting the value of the shares is used, it is important to keep it in line with the current value of a regular box scheme vegetable share. This can be researched on the Internet. At Stroud Community Agriculture currently (2008) a share designed for 2 adults costs between £30 and £40 (depending on income) a month, and one for a family of four costs between £45 and £55 (depending on income) a month. The value of the share must meet with people's expectations, especially if you are trying to reach potential new members who are new to the concept of CSAs. This may mean that it will be necessary at times to buy in produce to supplement the share (and that there may be surplus produce to sell by other methods during the summer).

Bear in mind the economies of scale within a CSA – as membership increases and the fixed costs are spread across more and more members, each new member adds more to the profitability of the operation. So it makes sense to set the share price at a level that will be profitable at the lowest level of membership that a new CSA is likely to achieve. You can then lower the price of a share as membership levels rise.

9.1.1 Members on a low income

What if consumers do not have the resources to pay for food months before it is grown or even pay for food at all? Below are some ideas that allow consumers with a range of incomes to participate in a CSA:

- Accepting payments on a long-term instalment plan
- Offering a sliding scale share fee
- Having a revolving loan fund
- Offering reduced-price or free shares, which are usually paid for by members or organisations who donate a share or by members who agree to pay more for their share, with the proviso that the extra funds will go towards the free shares.
- The CSA core group could decide to pay a percentage of CSA turnover into a bursary fund that is then used to offer reduced-price shares to members on a low income
- Allowing members to work for some or all of a share, either through farm labour or through administrative and distribution work.
- Savings groups
- Include in your budget a number of shares which are free or subsidised
- Get better off members to pay for one or more harvest shares for low-income members.

9.2 How to distribute produce?

Getting food from the farm and into consumers' homes in an environmentally responsible way that is also convenient for the members, is a major factor in the success of a CSA. This transaction is also the main opportunity for interaction between members and farmers. The way you do this will be determined by your own set of circumstances, such as the location of the farm, available transport and the degree of member participation. A CSA is likely to be more robust if members feel they are involved and taking on some responsibility for the way they acquire their food – try and strive for this but incorporate as much flexibility as possible to allow for limits in members' time and lifestyles.

Collection from the farm

For the farmers, the easiest method is to have members collect their produce directly from the farm. Produce does not even have to be individually apportioned. This is also the lowest cost option for the CSA because there is less labour involved in packing the veg shares into bags or boxes. Some CSAs will list the items for that week's share on a board, and the quantity that each member is to receive alongside. Members then help themselves from bulk lots of freshly harvested produce. This spreads packing time among all the members, and gives a degree of choice. If slightly more produce is harvested than required, then even the last member to collect can pick and choose. To allow further choice, you can put out a swap box with a selection of each item, members can then exchange one of their own items with one from the box or swap with each other. Or simply have a 'gift box' where people can leave and take what they want. Members can then choose to use the gift box to offer produce from their own allotments and gardens.

The downside of all the members collecting from the farm is the environmental impact of all those car journeys. One way to reduce this effect is to get permission from members to circulate everyone's addresses and phone numbers so that members can collect for each other.

Drop off points

If CSA members don't live close to the farm, produce can be delivered to a more convenient drop off point or series of drop-off points. These could be members' homes, if they have sufficient space such as a garage, a church or community centre or even at a farmers' market stand where the CSA could also do some trading. Produce can again be delivered in bulk or already divided into individual shares. Drop off points can provide a valuable social function as a place where members can meet each other and the farmer; although not entirely necessary it is a good opportunity to maintain the connection with the project.

This option is more environmentally sound because one van drives round and drops off all the shares in one journey. Although there is also a budgeting implication for the time needed to pack all the shares and deliver them. However the lack of contact with the farm can reduce members' sense of ownership of the farm – seeing the colourful rows of produce growing in the fields of their farm is truly inspiring. Members also miss out on the opportunity to 'pick-your-own' produce such as flowers, spinach, etc.

Home delivery

This is a method that has been used successfully by many vegetable producers. Pre-packed boxes of vegetables are delivered direct to members' homes. It requires the least in terms of member participation, which is both its advantage and disadvantage. As it is the connection between consumers and producers that is the essence of CSA, a box scheme which has little or no consumer participation probably falls outside what we should consider as CSA. (See Appendix 11.3 and the Soil Association technical paper, How to Set Up a Vegetable Box Scheme).

One of the benefits of home delivery is that it can allow some people to support a CSA who may not otherwise be able to do so due to lack of time. If you do consider offering home delivery, make sure that all the costs involved (weighing, packing and delivery) are covered in the option.

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Section 10

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Farm activities

10 Farm activities

CSA is about fostering links between the producers and consumers of food, therefore members should be encouraged to visit the holding. However, in practice, it is wise to stick to agreed visiting times, such as when they can collect produce from the farm, or when a workday or an event is organised. This means that someone can be around to supervise which this may simplify insurance requirements.

10.1 Open days, festivals and celebrations

There are plenty of opportunities around which to organise a get together on the farm, such as the seasons: first day of spring, midsummer's eve and so on. Pagan and Celtic festivals are built around seasons and food production. There are lots of good websites with festival suggestions. Other opportunities for community fun are offered by the agricultural calendar: lambing days, apple day, organic fortnight (September) and pumpkin day. Here are some specific suggestions taken from the Soil Association Action Organic manual. For more detail on any of these headings see Section 11.

- Harvest supper
- Plant and cake swap
- Scarecrows.
- Calf naming
- Wild food walks
- Night-time walks
- Field names
- Art exhibitions
- Local food picnics and roving meals
- Giant pies
- Food paths and pictures
- Apple Day and variations
- Children's vegetable activities
- Easter eggs
- Snail racing
- Meeting places
- Slug contests
- Special plantings
- Maps, banners and posters
- Window boxes
- Festival days and processions
- Old ways with food
- Wine making

Try and divide the responsibility of event organisation, as they require more time and thought than first imagined. This is an area of responsibility ideally suited to a CSA sub-group or working group rather than being another task for the core group.

10.2 Workshops

Access to a farm and its resources is an attraction to CSA. It is also an opportunity to further develop the skills of CSA members to better appreciate the arrangement. You might consider organising a cooking demonstration for some of the more unusual produce, or get together to process and preserve some of the more abundant produce, jam making, bottling, pickling or cider making for example!

Many members' motivation for joining a CSA is because they want to understand and take on some responsibility for their food production. Organic growing and permaculture workshops might be popular among CSA members, especially those considering putting some labour into CSA production.

10.3 Conservation work

Members can be encouraged to carry out various conservation projects around the farm. Creating new wildlife habitats – tree planting, pond digging – or maintaining existing habitats – coppicing woodland or learning to lay hedges. We have even come across an initiative, Lower Woods, where local people pay to manage an area of woodland in exchange for its yield in firewood. This can be combined with relevant training (for example, chainsaw use, charcoal making). Your local Wildlife Trust and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (see Appendix 11.2) should be able to provide advice and suggestions for good conservation practice on farms.

10.4 Visitors on the farm

A farm is a wonderful place for children to explore and learn about plants and animals and where and how their food is produced. But farms are not without their dangers, and it is advisable to draw up some guidelines for members.

Try to keep visitors away from hazards such as machinery, slurry pits and livestock. It is also vital that good washing facilities are provided and that visitors and farm staff are aware of the risks.

Facilities to occupy children on pick up days and during farm activities may increase the incentive to join.