

# Community supported agriculture (CSA) in the UK

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# Community supported agriculture (CSA) in the UK

- Community supported agriculture (CSA) takes many forms in the UK.
- This reflects the fact that CSA farms have grown from grassroots initiatives and individuals finding their own way and do not following a set model.
- However all share the common principles of sharing the risks, rewards and responsibilities of food production.

# Different approaches to CSA

## Producer-led

A farmer offers a share of production in return for a fixed subscription. The share may vary as production goes up and down (so the risks and rewards are shared), while the subscription is generally payable in advance and for a relatively long term (providing secure income to the producer).

This is a widely used approach

# Different approaches to CSA

## Community-led

The farming enterprise is set up and owned by the community (formed as a business entity), which takes on direct responsibility for production. Labour may be provided by volunteers and/or employed professionals.

Produce may be distributed amongst the community and/or sold for the benefit of the enterprise, including using the share of the harvest model.

# Different approaches to CSA

## Producer-community partnerships

The enterprise, owned by the community through a co-operative or similar structure, works in close partnership with existing producer(s)

This can provide a secure and long-term supply of produce to CSA members.

# Different approaches to CSA

## Community-owned farms

In this type the farming enterprise is secured through community investment but does not necessarily trade primarily or exclusively with the community members.

# Range of benefits

1. Community farms help enable communities to take control of their food supply by providing their members with a variety of local, often organically produced food from vegetables and meat, to milk, bread and honey.
2. These multiple benefits are provided to at least 5,000 trading members and they feed around 12,500 people a year in the UK.
3. Additional benefits accrue to local economies and the environment through helping people to develop and share skills, with over three-quarters of CSAs offering training programmes. Local employment is also boosted, with CSA's showing up to 5 times higher levels of employment relative to the land available than in UK agricultural land as a whole.

(Soil Association 2011)

## Examples: Canalside Community Food

Canalside is a company limited by guarantee, growing a large variety of vegetables and fruit on about 4 hectares of leased land, on a certified organic farm on a rolling five year lease. It is a completely separate company from the local farm and is managed by a steering group of 10 members.

They have seven polytunnels, a self-built polebarn and a geodome, included in the rent is access to farm machinery including a small tractor.

Canalside currently supplies vegetable shares all year around, supplemented by seasonal fruit. They grow all their own field-scale vegetables including potatoes, carrots and onions and offer three sizes shares to their members on a monthly payment basis

# Examples: Chagfood

Chagfood (a large-membership Community Interest Company, limited by guarantee) is a community supported market garden supplying fresh, seasonal fruit and vegetable shares to households in Chagford and surrounding area. They rent about 2.5 hectares on a three year rolling farm business tenancy (FBT) and farm 50 varieties of seasonal vegetables, 20 apple trees and over 50 other fruit trees.

The farm is run entirely organically however, they are not certified as 'organic' as they feel that the CSA model enables their members to trust the farm with maintaining organic standards. Rather than use a tractor they have two traditional farm horses.

Members receive a full box for 28 weeks between July and Jan while from Feb to June they get one or two seasonal items weekly and there is a 'hungry-gap' where they cannot harvest in March and April.

## Examples: Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm

Oak Tree Farm is managed by the South Suffolk Low Carbon Food Community Interest Company (CIC) and has 4.96 hectares of rented land. The CIC has three directors, who are also the growers. CSA has vegetable shares, as well as offering pork, egg, cut flower and beef shares. Each vegetable share member subscribes weekly and commits to working two hours per week during the summer and one hour per week during winter.

Just over 1 hectare is vegetables, with chickens and rare breed pigs between crops acting as a “pig plough” and adding fertility to the soil. 1 hectare is permaculture forest garden, the rest is pasture, some of which has fruit trees in rows. Two bullocks are kept outside all year, rotating around the pasture.

Key development issues are soil improvement and increasing revenue.

## Examples: Growing Well

Growing Well is a farm-based charity promoting mental health recovery and well-being, that runs a CSA veg share scheme. They rent about 2.5 hectares of land for community-focused organic vegetable growing and have a contract to supply Social Services, thus enabling volunteers working on the farm to benefit from a dynamic opportunity that promotes and enhances their recovery process.

Their site contains six polytunnels and three yurts, used for training and relaxing. A weekly work-plan is used to direct volunteers and a purpose built sales system produces detailed picking and packing lists.

The company is an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) for the Benefit of the Community. They are a corporate entity, with limited liabilities for members, regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Membership costs £5 a year, which covers administrative costs. Their board of directors contains members voted in at their AGM.

# Examples: Growing Well

Growing Well run a Crop Share scheme supplying local families with seasonal vegetable bags. A weekly share, paid monthly feeds a family of about three. Shareholders can buy more than one share if they wish.

From January to May the bags are packed fortnightly or every three weeks, from June to December they become weekly. All produce supplied is grown on the farm and is available for collection from Thursday onwards.

# Benefits for UK farmers

For farmers, CSA can help by providing secure cash flow, business resilience and increased customer loyalty.

Farmers can:

- produce vegetables or meat for committed members who pay up front
- offer a CSA monthly meat box
- ask customers to buy a pig share or share of other livestock
- sell cow bonds, asking customers to cover the cost of one cow receiving interest or being paid back in milk
- rent a field to the local community to grow their own vegetables
- get financial support from your community who pay up front
- set up work days to receive help with sowing, weeding, harvesting and packing from enthusiastic members
- invite members to come to social events on the farm

# Benefits for Communities

Receiving a share of food, have direct contact with the farmer or grower and knowing that they are helping to provide them with a sustainable income.

Many CSA farms offer volunteer opportunities, work parties and open days where they are their family learn more about how food is produced and meet lots of new people.

- sustainably reared meats
- cheese
- eggs
- herbs
- fruit
- fruit juices
- honey
- flowers
- locally baked bread
- sponsor an apple tree schemes, to share in its fruit
- rent-a-vine schemes from a vineyard

Thank you