

The CSA farmer to farmer booklet





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Acknowledgments

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Copy Editor: Hannah Twomey

Graphic design and illustrations: www.camalab.it



website: csact.urgenci.net

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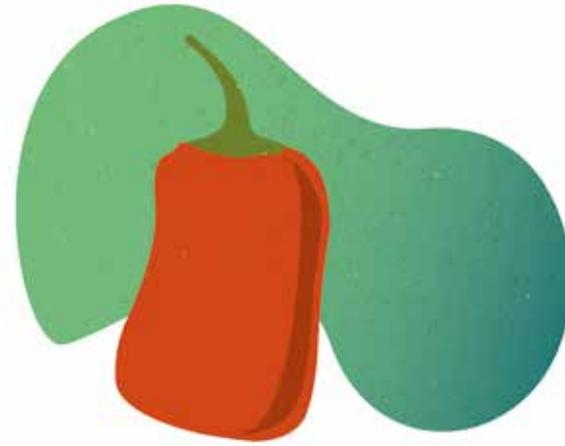
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Introduction

In a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) partnership, the producer is at the heart of the network of human relationships. The European CSA Declaration, adopted during the^{3rd} European Meeting of CSA Movements in Czech Republic in September 2016, states that *“CSA is a direct partnership based on the human relationship between people and one or several producers”*¹. The Declaration’s guiding principles similarly highlight the importance of community relationships: *“Guiding principles: Community building through direct and long term relationships with shared responsibility, risks and rewards. Active participation based on trust, understanding, respect, transparency and cooperation. Mutual support and solidarity beyond borders”*². A third part of the Declaration asserts the importance of face-to-face interactions: *“We are a grassroots movement: we believe that the power of CSA is in pragmatic, everyday action and face-to-face relationships. We are connecting with each other, with the producers in our communities, and with the living soil beneath our feet”*³. The producer-consumer relationship is the foundation of the CSA direct partnership. This makes the task of CSA farmers highly challenging.

1 URGENCI. *“European CSA Declaration”*. URGENCI, September 2016. <http://urgenci.net/the-european-csa-declaration-adopted-in-ostava>.

2 URGENCI. *Ibid.*

3 URGENCI. *Ibid.*

For years, CSA farmers have been identifying this specificity through CSA meetings and self-organised 'farmer-to-farmer' (F2F) workshops. The predominant practical questions arising throughout these F2F sessions include:

- **How can we deepen our mutual support and synergies with other CSAs?**
- **How can we efficiently organise communication, advertising, and our relationships with our customers?**
- **How can we earn a livelihood through CSA farming?**

Some solutions to these challenges have been identified, such as: inviting members at the initial onset of the scheme in order to foster unwavering support to the farmer throughout the scheme, as well as improving cooperation between producers, which is a method for encouraging skill share and a desire to overcome obstacles together.

Previous training programmes designed by the European CSA Movements, such as **Be Part of CSA!**, insist on training farmers and consumers concurrently in order to build a strong community. This booklet focuses on the need for educational guidance designed for CSA farmers.

The objective of this booklet is to provide prospective and/or new farmers that are interested in venturing into CSA with the best practices as well as necessary economic, technical, logistical, agricultural, and social knowledge. It does so by outlining tips and insights gathered from experienced CSA farmers from all over Europe. It explores such questions as: how might we understand the occupation of a "CSA farmer"? Which types of skills (both hard and soft) does it require? How do we understand the failures and successes with respect to the profitability of CSA farms? Which strategies are most successful for running a CSA farm? Which tools are necessary to create and share? How can we better organise cooperation across multiple producers? How can we better organise community building within the CSA core group?

In addition to the knowledge, skills, and experiences, which are required for managing a complex, ecologically-based production system, CSA farmers also need strong skills for building a social organisation, which this booklet outlines.

This "CSA Farmer-to-Farmer booklet" consists of the following four chapters:

1. Farming challenges: What are the main challenges that a CSA farmer faces? This chapter takes a deeper look at soil fertility, irrigation, biodiversity, and crop planning.

2. The economic sustainability of CSAs: What is considered a fair share? CSA farmers need to determine how much is considered fair as well as how much produce to include within a share.

3. Diversified marketing, logistics and distribution: Many farms combine CSA with other forms of marketing, such as selling at farmers' markets and/or to restaurants and retail stores. This can be an excellent strategy from an economic standpoint, but it can also generate conflicts. Where do multiple-producer CSAs fit into this model?

4. Community building: How can we encourage committed members to support CSA farmers, thereby providing farmers with ample time to focus their energies and skills on producing high-quality food, regenerating their farmland, and caring for themselves?

The basic teaching principles explored throughout these chapters are illustrated through applied case studies from experienced European CSA networks as well as from inspiring stories of CSA farmers.





I

Farming Challenges

CSAs are based on three milestones:

1) solidarity economy, 2) food sovereignty and 3) agroecology.

Agroecology is simultaneously a social movement, a science and a set of agricultural practices. As such, agroecology requires us to challenge and transform structures of power in society. It stipulates that we place the control over seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons into the hands of the people who feed the world. Agroecological production practices are based on ecological principles similar to those of organic agriculture:

“Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved”.¹

¹ <https://www.ifoam.bio/en/organic-landmarks/definition-organic-agriculture>.

There is no defined agricultural technique that a CSA farmer must follow. Each CSA farm may choose the particular method of cultivation that they determine as appropriate, insofar as it respects the principles of the European CSA Declaration, which was adopted in Ostrava, Czech Republic in 2016. These include:

- *“Responsible care of soil, water, seeds and all other common goods, through the agroecological principles and practices, highlighted in the previously mentioned declaration and in that of Nyeleni in 2015;*
- *Production of food rooted in local realities and local knowledge;*
- *Respect for the environment and animal welfare;*
- *Food should be fresh, local, seasonal, healthy and accessible to all”.*

Most commonly, the CSA model coincides with small-scale agriculture, which prioritises maintaining and improving the characteristics of the landscape and the natural resources of the territory. A CSA farmer, in fact, may choose to practice a form of agriculture that respects nature, while also maximising the resources available from the farm and the local area. This offers the possibility of reducing production costs and creating healthy, productive and resilient ecosystems. CSAs therefore also present a great opportunity to restore the fertility and quality of agroecosystems.

Some of the identified challenges that CSA farmers must overcome include:

- Preserving and increasing **soil fertility**,
- Respecting and conserving **water**,
- Offering a **wide diversity** of nutrient rich products to CSA members,
- Conveying the importance of **seasonality** to consumers,
- Preparing the soil with the most **appropriate tools**.

In the CSA model, the know-how of producers is fundamental, and so the CSA model provides avenues for members to enhance and share their skills, particularly when some members possess technical skills or manual skills.

Given that CSA's can take the form of agro-ecological projects, they are able to host agro-ecosystems that promote the inclusion of biodiversity, such as plants, fungi, and animals, thereby creating synergies that improve the health and quality of our environment, whilst producing healthier food that is free from synthetic chemicals.

CSA FARMING IS LIKE CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY

1.

Soil fertility

In the current agricultural world, soil is considered to be “*the big unknown*”. This is unfortunate because soil is the most valuable asset that a farmer and a CSA enjoy.

Soil is a non-renewable resource on which 95% of the global food supply depends. Within a single handful of fertile soil (100g), there are more living beings than within the entire human population. The living components of soil include algae, fungi, bacteria, actinomycetes, nematodes, insects, earthworms etc. All of these organisms are responsible for the decomposition of organic matter and for creating the bioavailability of minerals for plants. In healthy soil, all of the biogeochemical cycles that are indispensable for life are naturally present. It is the wealth and health of the soil that enables the cultivation of healthy and balanced plants, which in turn generate health for animals and for humans.

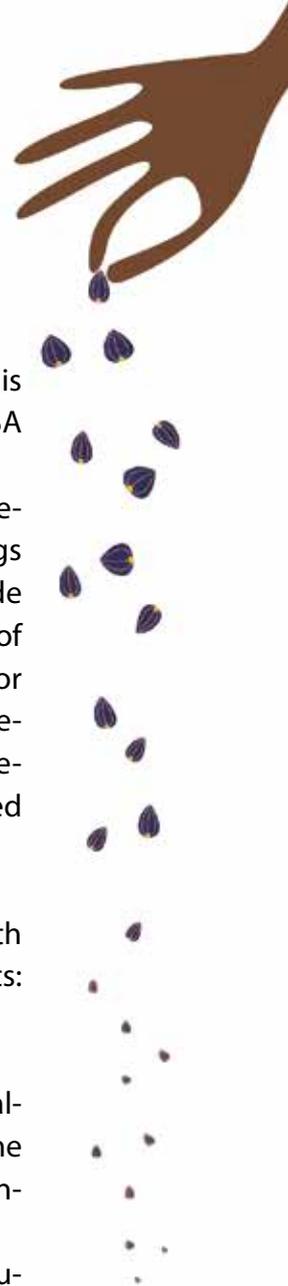
Life in fertile soil is very intense. The roots create numerous interactions with other soil organisms, thereby generating the most biodiverse habitat that exists: the rhizosphere.

Abused soil will lose its fertility and will result in poor harvests, creating challenges for any farmer that is tending to it. Therefore, it is always worth the time dedicated to caring for the soil, as it facilitates our access to generous and abundant crops.

The fertility of the soil is dependent upon its organic matter content, the solubility of minerals available, and the microbiological activity. Healthy vegetables are obtained from fertile soils, with a good supply of humus. Soil fertility can be approached from a chemical point of view (i.e. an adequate supply of mineral nutrients), a biological point of view (i.e. an adequate supply of organic matter and microbiology), and from a physical point of view (i.e. a solid soil structure with strong relationships between macro and micro pores).

There are many methods that farmers employ to maintain and increase soil fertility. These include:

- Composting vegetable waste, pruning waste, etc.
- Creating manure
- Applying cover crops





- Producing green manure
- Ensuring rotations
- Using organic mulches (straw, wood chips, cardboard)
- Introducing grazing animals
- Increasing the complexity of the agricultural ecosystem through the planting of perennial crops, such as trees, shrubs and herbaceous perennials.

Plants feed on mineral elements that are “trapped” in organic matter. Soil microorganisms degrade organic matter, releasing the nutrients that are then absorbed by the plants. The absorption of water and nutrients by the plants also occurs due to the presence of mycorrhizae.

There are several ways to maintain and increase the presence of microorganisms in the soil. Perhaps the most important method is to restrain mechanisation, which means avoiding deep ploughing in order to preserve the organic matter. By avoiding the overmechanisation, the CSA farmer has the opportunity to redefine the production waste not as a garbage, but rather as a key resource paving the path toward the CSA’s economic, ecological and agronomic sustainability. Thus, preserving the microorganisms (by not overmechanising) lead the farmer to rethink waste.

It is advisable that each farmer utilise the most appropriate resources within their vicinity, suitable to their own local context. Healthy soils are the key to biodiversity, fertility and food security. Through carbon fixation, they play a crucial role in rebalancing climate change. Healthy soils represent a heritage connecting com-

munities of the past and present, and they enable us to defend food sovereignty.

In the words of Wendell Berry (North-American farmer, environmental activist and poet) : *“Soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life. Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life”.*

2. Irrigation

Water is the source of life. Continuous availability of water is essential to ensure the development and health of both the soil itself and its microbiology, to sustain the plants we grow and the animals we breed. Water represents on average between 80% and 85% of the weight of plants, making it the number one component of a plant. As such, water is indispensable for photosynthesis and essential for the growth of all plants. Water is the medium through which the nutrients are dissolved and assimilated by the plant.

Water can also be a limiting factor of soil health, whether supplied in excess or in shortage. To prevent problems of loss of fertility and soil erosion, the farmer must adequately manage the water that he has access to, whether it is sourced from a well, an aqueduct, or the rain.



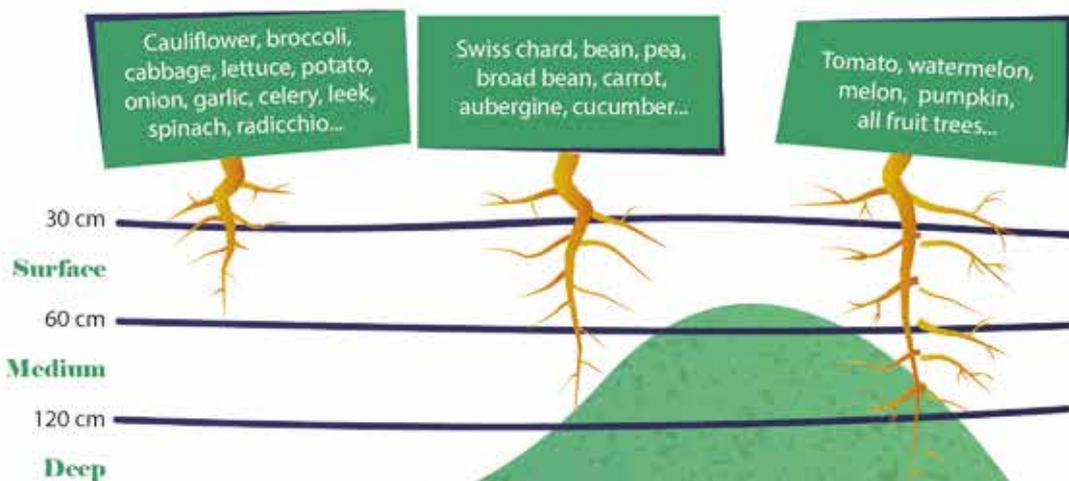
Soil that has a solid structure, indicated by a healthy quantity of humus, will naturally undertake water collection. In fact, humus has a remarkable capacity for water retention due to its hydrophilic colloid qualities - the property to bind the water molecules to its surface. This quality allows humus to absorb a quantity of liquid equal to 20 times its own weight!

One of the most effective and simple strategies that farmers can adopt to promote water retention is to keep the soil covered, either with mulch, green manure and/or cover crops. It is important for a farmer to stay informed about the precipitation patterns (whether it is rain, snow or hail) in his/her area, in order to be prepared for periods of drought or flood.

Another important aspect for CSA farmers to consider is that during the summer season, rainwater does not provide the adequate supply that is necessary to satisfy the water needs of plants and animals. Therefore, it is very important to conserve water to overcome these critical moments. In the case of very dry climates, it is recommended to use collection tanks, and to consider the possibility of exploiting the surface of building roofs for rainwater collection.

Many of the production problems farmers encounter today are due to poorly managed irrigation. This is even more pronounced in cases where there are a great diversity of vegetables that have variable water needs, as frequently occurs in CSAs. Watering is important, but it is also important to not overdo irrigation, as excess moisture can facilitate the development of cryptogamic diseases. It is preferable to maximise the use of the plant's roots, which behave like water pumps due to their ability to transport fluids from the depths of their root systems.

ROOT SYSTEM OF SOME VEGETABLES / FRUITS



Furthermore, excessive irrigation does not promote faster root development. In fact, with excessive irrigation, plants become much more vulnerable during periods of drought or flooding, which naturally leads to production losses.

The majority of the plant's root system is situated between 20-30 cm below the ground. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that this layer of earth is sufficiently damp, but not saturated, in order to promote the conditions for ideal root development as well as to increase the volume of soil available to the plant system. It is advisable to avoid abundant and/or inconsistent watering, as this can trigger plants to enter into 'water stress'. Instead, frequent irrigations with low water volumes are advisable.

The most critical moments related to water management occur after sowing. During this period, the soil must remain moist to support seed germination and similarly, following transplanting, to encourage the root development of the plant and its rootedness in the soil. It is advisable, however, to do these operations with the appropriate soil tilth, i.e. soil that is not too wet and not too dry. Furthermore, sowing and transplanting should be carried out in soil that has already been irrigated, as opposed to watering following the sowing or transplanting process. By making sure that the seed and / or the seedlings are placed in a moist soil, they will be triggered to germinate and to develop roots.

There are several irrigation methods practiced by farmers, some of which include:

- **Flooding:** Not advisable - requires excessive use of water, promotes soil erosion, risks causing plant roots to rot;
- **Seepage through furrows:** Not advisable - requires excessive use of water, favours soil erosion, risks causing plant roots to rot;
- **Sprinkling:** Requires high water consumption - can promote the development of cryptogamic diseases because it saturates all of the leaves. If you water plants during the day, then the rate of evapotranspiration increases and plants become dehydrated. However, the sprinkling method is advisable for leafy plant species, such as lettuce, swiss chard, and spinach;
- **Drip irrigation:** Advisable - a more effective system with higher energy and water savings. Drip irrigation is compatible with any type of mulch. Care must be taken during tillage because machines and tools can easily damage the piping. It has a higher installation cost than previous techniques, but the water savings and ease of management offsets this expense.

In very humid climates or in conditions that favour the development of cryptogamic diseases, it is better to leave sufficient space between the plants to

enable ventilation. It is also a best practice to situate those vegetables with similar hydration needs together.

To avoid thermal shocks in the plant, the most suitable time for irrigation is when the temperature difference between the soil and the water is at its lowest. This occurs generally in the early morning hours or late at night. However, the actual consumption of water depends very much on the soil structure, the needs of the crops and fruits, the plant development stage, and the meteorological conditions.

An excellent water management strategy for sloping land is *Keyline design*. **Keyline design** is a set of principles and techniques for managing, regulating and efficiently using water within a piece of land or a portion of territory. By controlling superficial water flow, erosion is reduced, the availability of water for crops is increased and the proliferation of micro-organisms in the soil is facilitated. After a topographic survey is carried out to obtain an accurate mapping of the land, new rainwater runoff lines can be implemented, and these will comprise a network of mini-infrastructures such as: new processing directions, surface and underground canals, walkways, and small reservoirs. For further information, see: <http://yeomansplow.com.au/8-yeomans-keyline-systems-explained/>

3.

Diversity and crop planning

Cultivating for CSAs means cultivating for the community. CSAs provide the valuable opportunity to enhance all production and to become autonomous with respect to the needs of large-scale distribution.

Yet, there are many challenges that a CSA farmer must overcome, including:

- **Product diversification** (i.e. vegetable, animal, processed food)
- Increasing the **amount of production** suitable to meet the needs of the CSA
- **Work scheduling**, particularly important for vegetables
- How to **lengthen the productive** season

Each of these challenges will be discussed further below.

A. DIVERSIFICATION

One key objective that CSAs should consider setting for themselves is to satisfy



the consumption needs of its members through the CSA's production. Diversification and quantity of products are among the greatest challenges for CSAs. The CSA share should offer different products in accordance with the season and with the quantities necessary to minimise the extent of 'external' food shopping a CSA member might have to do elsewhere. Production diversity must be with respect to both space and time (meaning diversity at a given time of the year, and diversity in accordance with a physical space).

If the CSA only offers fresh products (i.e. vegetables), then it should ensure that there are at least six or seven different varieties of those fresh products within each delivery. Meeting this demand would require planting around 20 different vegetables in the field, including intraspecific varieties (i.e. different types of lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, etc.).

Not all months are equally productive with respect to quantity or diversity. The most productive and diversified times for the vegetable plot occur at the end of the summer and the beginning of the autumn, during which time there are both summer cultivations as well as the early autumn products.

The most critical moments are, without question, the end of winter and the beginning of spring. At this time, the winter crops are no longer producing and the spring-summer crops have not yet arrived. During these periods, it is advisable to cultivate fast-growing vegetables, such as: radishes, rocket, herbs, cut lettuce, mustard, spinach, etc. In doing so, the CSA demonstrates its additional added value of educating consumers about the seasonality of the vegetables and encourages consumers to adjust their eating habits to the natural rhythms of the seasons.

One idea for the CSA to consider is to create processed goods to overcome critical periods of low production and to make use of surplus production in an optimal way. This could be done by, for example, making sauce from tomatoes, producing *sauerkraut* from cabbage, and canning onions, potatoes, carrots and beets; many of the products can be canned or dried. To do so, the CSA must take into account the legislation in effect for each country or region. These processed goods can be useful to cover periods of scarcity in the fields (i.e. the period between the winter rest and the spring awakening of the farm). This length of this period varies depending upon latitude, climate, etc.

The extent of product diversity is a choice that can be defined with the help of the CSA members. The most appropriate time to ask CSA members what their

most desired products are and whether they are interested to try a new product is during the organisational and planning meetings held during the winter. This survey can also be undertaken during the productive season, as it will increase the farmer's awareness of consumer satisfaction. As farmers are often overburdened at this time, it is recommended that the CSA coordinator or a working group undertakes this task

The following are examples of questions that can be used to survey the members of your CSA:

- **Which crops do you like the most?**
- **Which crops or products would you like to find inside your CSA box?**
- **Would you like to taste something new? If so, what?**

CSAs can also operate as breeding centres to allow for the protection of product varieties that are being lost due to neglect by large retailers. Some CSA members might be involved in an organisation that specialises in seed saving, or the CSA



itself might directly participate in movements to promote biodiversity preservation.

The **Dynaversity** project, funded through the Horizon 2020 programme and with Urgenci as a partner, has identified several European CSAs that work in this area. Moreover, the cultural diversity of CSA members is a great opportunity, particularly given the ongoing migration of people to and across Europe. This is also a way of enlarging and enriching the community by introducing other food cultures.

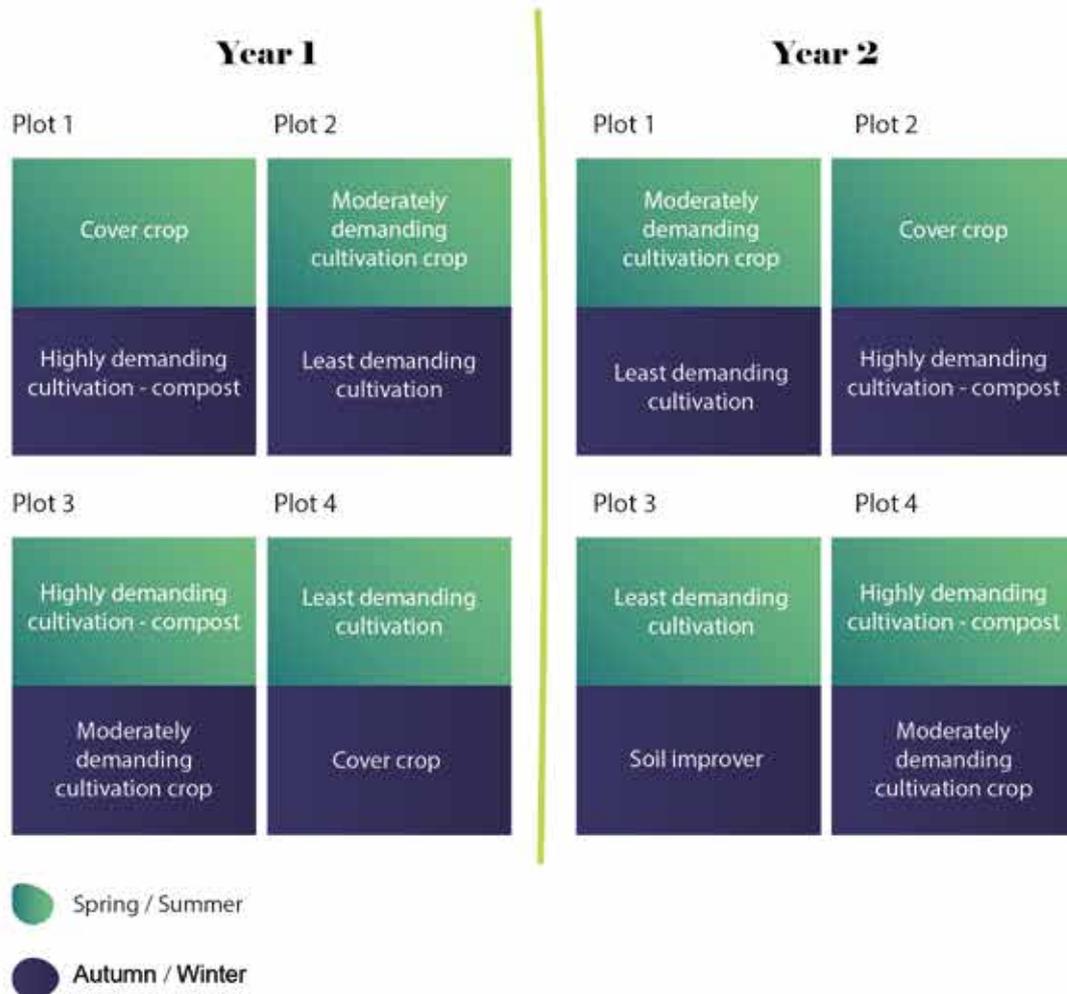
To promote crop diversity, the fields should be managed in a strictly organised way. To facilitate this, we recommend dividing fields into several equal-sized plots. Within each plot, establish cultivation beds. An ideal width for cultivation beds is around 80 cm, while length can vary. The nearby paths should be around 40 cm wide, sufficient to allow a person and a wheelbarrow to pass through easily.

It is highly recommended to work with permanent beds as they have several advantages, including: they reduce the work required to prepare the soil, they favour the use of manual equipment, and they maximise efficiency when applying soil improvers and fertilisers. Moreover, fertility or renewal plans can be optimised, soil compaction minimised, drainage and soil structure improved, and production increased. Whether or not to raise these beds will depend on the condition of the soil and the climate of each area. A raised bed will enable the soil to heat up faster as well as water to drain quicker, which makes it less advisable for arid climates.

The vegetables grown in each plot will vary based upon its edible component (i.e. whether it is the root, leaf, fruit, and/or flower that you seek to harvest). Two additional types of crops can also be added to each bed. By introducing early, medium, and late varieties of each crop, the overall diversity will be enhanced. For plots that contain very small surfaces, it is possible to increase the diversity by prioritising vegetable associations, but this requires a great deal of organisational and planning work and it considerably increases the amount of time spent harvesting.

The pattern of cultivation and rotation must be clear and defined at the beginning of the season. By organising this properly, the farmer will be equipped to quantify the seeds and seedlings needed, define fertility plans, as well as identify when to integrate the compost and when to allow for fallow time, green manure and even introduce animals.

Rotation table



- **HIGHLY DEMANDING** (usually all fruit vegetables): potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, pumpkins, courgettes, cucumbers, artichokes, cardoons, strawberries
- **MODERATELY DEMANDING:** beetroots, garlic, onions, leeks, fennel, asparagus, kohlrabis, celery.
- **LEAST DEMANDING:** carrots, parsley, spinach, chard, chicory, lettuce, rocket, aromatic herbs.
- **SOIL IMPROVERS:** legumes (peas, fava beans, beans, chickpeas, lentils, green beans...)

To perform excellent rotations that take into account both soil fertility and productivity, we recommend to following a few simple rules, which include mixing:

- **different families**
- **different edible parts**
- **different nutritional needs**
- **different root zone exploration**

Purchasing seedlings is considerably costly and this can impact the CSA's overall budget. Yet obtaining high quality seedlings from organic nurseries in the area will alleviate the workload for the farmer because maintaining a high quality nursery requires time and experience on the farmer's part. The seedlings, at the time of transplanting, must already be healthy, strong and with well-established roots. While producing one's own seedlings will lower costs, the overall workload of the farmer will increase. We recommend producing only those seedlings which are easiest to maintain and transplant, such as tomatoes, pumpkins, courgettes, rocket, etc. as well as some flower crops.

Forming a thriving support network between farmers is a new area to explore and enhance if we want to increase the diversity of products. This network should ideally also work as a support system in cases of calamities and heavy production losses.

In addition to vegetables, a CSA vegetable grower may consider raising small, low maintenance animals such as hens, which can also be included in the rotations. With proper oversight, animals are capable of tending the soil and providing manure. Additionally, animal products (i.e. cheese, eggs, butter, etc) may represent another item that a CSA might offer through their box scheme. Raising animals requires daily care and sufficient space for their pasture and shelters, and therefore the costs and benefits should be carefully evaluated Also consider that the maintenance cost may affect the CSA budget.

With regards to community, which is a critical aspect of CSAs, animal breeding may bring new insights. On the one hand, animal breeding may attract new members that are interested in conscious meat consumption, but on the other hand, it may also be a source of contention amongst people who do not view animals as a source of food and/or work aid.

One form of animal husbandry that is generally accepted amongst CSA members is that of beekeeping. Bees today are greatly endangered and the CSA can offer a healthy environment for protecting them. Bees pollinate 70% of the fruits

and vegetables we eat². They produce honey, which can become an additional item to place within the CSA box scheme. Beekeeping also contributes to pollination and propagation of flowers on the farm.

Cultivating flowers on the farm adds both an aesthetic and productive value. Flowers are visually appealing, and they attract pollinating insects to the fields, which in turn helps to increase biodiversity. Some flowers are edible and can therefore be an additional product within the CSA box. Example of edible flowers include: sunflower (seeds), nasturtium (leaves), borage (leaves), calendula (flowers), etc.

² In particular, up to 35 percent of food production globally is attributable to the role of bees. Of the top 100 cultures on which 90 percent of the world's food production depends, 71 of these are linked to the work of bee pollinators. Within Europe, as many as 4,000 different crops thrive today due to the direct impact of bees (data Unep - United Nations Environment Program).



Planting a fruit tree is, at times, beneficial even on small plots of land. Trees may function as hedges (i.e. berry bushes) or we can choose highly productive trees that require minimal maintenance, such as fig, wild plum or cherry trees. Trees have an additional benefit of creating shade on a farm.

B. PRODUCTION SEASON

Seasonal fruit and vegetables are richer than those consumed out of season, with regard to their nutrient content and taste. Depending on climatic conditions, we can utilise structures and devices that could extend harvest time by 2-3 weeks.

To do so, we must first understand the length of the growing season, including for how many weeks of the year can we guarantee crop production without the aid of structures. Then, we can evaluate the potential of building tunnels and / or microtunnels, which will lengthen the harvest time.

Currently, given the significant climatic variability we face, tunnels or greenhouses represent a *“virtually guaranteed”* harvest space, since they give us control over the internal climatic conditions (namely humidity and temperature).

While building tunnels is expensive, they allow farmers to bring forward or postpone production during the winter period. To reduce costs, you can search for second-hand tunnels, which are relatively easy to find. The standard dimensions of a tunnel are 8 x 40 m, which amounts to a 320 square meter surface area for protected crops. These tunnels are generally covered with a transparent plastic sheet (preferably polyethylene).

To justify the expense of the tunnels, the internal ground surface must be used very efficiently. Doing so will require that we better utilise the vertical space or practice intercropping. To protect and maintain soil fertility, we must also practice good rotation and incorporate compost within the tunnels.

Internal conditions within tunnels raise temperature and humidity, which unfortunately can lead to many insect and fungal pests. A periodic check is therefore recommended in order to prevent attacks. A very controlled irrigation scheme can prevent losses, given that moisture enables the proliferation of cryptogamic diseases.

During the summer months, especially in areas with high temperatures, plants are at risk of reaching a standstill in their production. To avoid this, farmers can

employ greenhouse climate control strategies, such as: painting the transparent plastic sheet with lime (which is water soluble and not harmful to the environment), inserting shading sheets, opening side windows or designing an open-sided tunnel.

On the other hand, during winter, greenhouses enable us to maintain production. In the event of temperature drops or cold spells, it is also advisable to install a non-woven fabric cover to prevent frost. On some occasions, microtunnels can also be installed inside of the main tunnel.

The microtunnels (which are ideally constructed of polyethylene) are much cheaper than tunnels and are ideal for growing small fruits and vegetables, such as strawberries, different varieties of salad, radicchio, rocket, and herbs. With a relatively small investment, it is therefore possible to protect crops and increase the production and the diversity of products even during the coldest season. This explains the widespread use of microtunnels. Their dimensions vary between 30 and 70 cm in height, depending on the size of the supporting arches. Non-woven fabrics are recommended in autumn and spring when the risk of early or late frost is higher. Non-woven fabrics are used to protect plants from the cold, specifically to prevent frost damage.

To learn more about protected crops, you may look at the work of Eliot Coleman who runs the company FourSeason (www.fourseasonfarm.org), in the north of the United States. FourSeason is a market garden whose produce is grown entirely in greenhouses throughout all four seasons of the year. While FourSeason does not operate as a CSA, it can nonetheless serve as a good source of inspiration.

C. SCHEDULING

Guaranteeing production throughout the year is not easy, even if there are sheltering structures in place. In addition to the importance of field diversity discussed above, other operations like sowing, transplanting, harvesting, and fertilising also need to be carefully organised. The calendar is a useful and essential tool for CSAs to organise effectively in order to ensure production throughout the delivery season(s).

One aspect for CSAs to take into consideration is the holiday period when members are no longer at home. And while the summer garden is often the most productive and satisfying one, it also coincides with the holidays for many members. Organising the vegetable garden effectively will enable us to reduce waste and to increase the surface area for growing autumn vegetables. One strategy to deal

with the holiday period is to identify late varieties of summer vegetables for the summer garden, and early autumn varieties for the autumn garden, in order to ensure that CSAs are providing a rich and varied box scheme throughout these seasons.

The CSA can opt for varieties of vegetables that can be well-preserved such as carrots, beets, onions, potatoes, pumpkins, and cabbage. Some vegetables can withstand the cold and may even thrive in the cold, since the cold causes the plant fibers to break and soften, thereby producing a sweeter crop; (this is the case for leeks, savoy cabbage, and tuscan cabbage). Other crops may freeze on the outside but remain tender inside (such as *radicchio*).

CSAs should plan for the direct sowing of some spring cultivation crops toward the end of autumn (for example peas, broad beans, garlic or onion). Toward the end of winter, it is advisable to schedule planting fast-growing vegetables, so that we can offer a ready supply of fresh vegetables (i.e. herbs, lettuce, cut radicchio, radishes, valerian, and rocket). Late and early varieties of some vegetables, such as cabbage, leeks, and radicchio, are also a good option to plant. In other words, selecting the most suitable vegetables for each season is critical. This is especially true for leafy vegetables, which can grow throughout the year if one carefully chooses the specific varieties in line with the season (i.e. growing “Ice Queen” lettuce in winter or romaine lettuces in summer).

For the CSA farmer, it is essential to have a support calendar that outlines clear markings as to when sowing, transplanting, and harvesting occur for each crop and its varieties (i.e. early, medium, late). Such a calendar will also be helpful for consumers who are interested in reconnecting with the seasonal nature of the products.

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Sun | Water |
|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------------|-------------|
| Tomato | | ● | ● | ● | | | | | | | | | full sun | medium |
| | | | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | | | |
| Radish | | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | | | | | partial shade | medium high |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | |

- Sowing
- Planting
- Harvest

We must keep in mind that the timetable varies considerably depending on the latitude and altitude of the CSA site. Therefore, it is critical to always refer to the specific conditions of the territory in which we live. The information provided by other local farmers, together with the nurseries, will greatly assist the CSA farmer in understanding the specific context.

To better organise and improve upon planning, a farmer and a CSA organisation should always keep track of their operations. A very useful tool for this task is the Country Notebook, which allows the farmer to track sowing, transplanting, and harvesting information across years. Over the years this will enable the farmer to compare harvests and moreover, to pass on the information to a new farmer in the event of a staff change within the CSA.

Notebook Template

| | | | |
|---|--|----------------|--|
| Crop: | | Variety: | |
| Sowing date: | | Quantity: | |
| Transplant date: | | Quantity | |
| Harvest date: | | Quantity | |
| Treatments carried out: | | Total Harvest: | |
| General remarks (cultivation plot, health conditions, etc...) | | | |



D. CROP PLANNING

How much should we produce to sufficiently provide for the CSA? How much land do we need to do so?

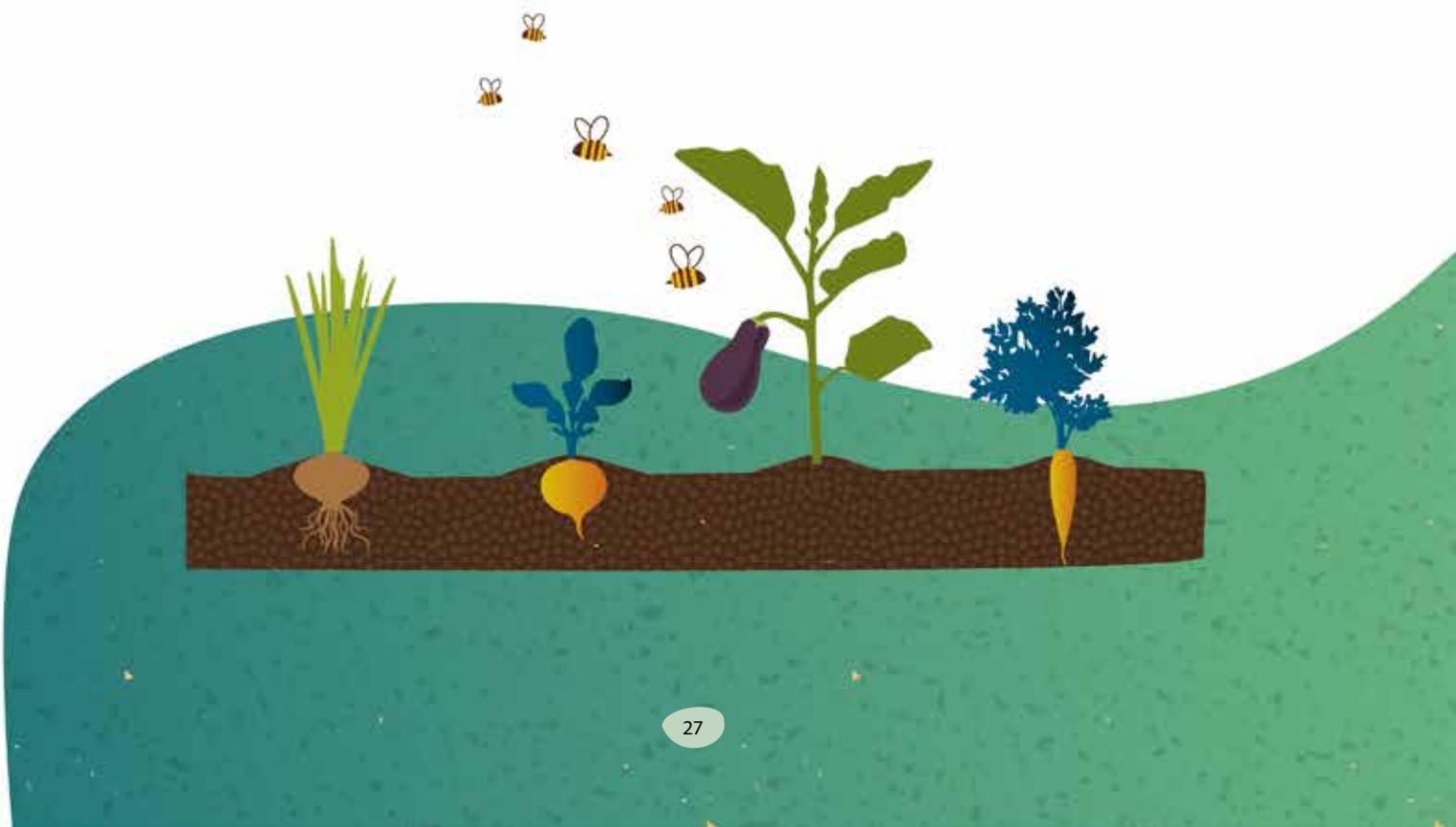
In addition to product variety discussed above, crop planning is another one of the biggest challenges that CSAs must face. It is a challenge that is related to meeting customer demands and desires. Generally, those who join a CSA want to have their vegetable and/or fruit demands met entirely via the CSA, and would prefer not to buy these products elsewhere. It is a challenge for the farmers to meet this demand at times, even more so for the less experienced farmers who have not yet mastered the art of estimating crop yields.

Hence, it is very important for farmers to put in place solid vegetable garden planning, a strong diversity of products, as well as a sufficient quantity for each product. A rough estimate of land use for food production per capita is around 40-50 square meters. Naturally this value can vary significantly depending on factors such as: cultivation techniques used, soil fertility and structure, the climate, and the crops we choose to grow. Far-reaching crops like potatoes require much more surface area to grow.

Therefore, it is strongly recommended to calculate the cultivation area for each crop and to do so by taking into consideration the distance between the rows as well as within each row. Soil type will certainly influence crop choice and arrangement. In particular, the texture and pH of the soil will be key factors for crop health.

The CSA meetings and any organisational meetings present opportunities to further calculate the number of members and the quantity of crops needed.

Another useful tool is a chart that indicates the crop distance required between the rows and within each row, with respect to direct seeding and transplants. The planting layout will also vary based on the crop variety we grow (eg: the distance varies greatly depending on whether head salad or cutting salads are planted, despite both being varieties of salad). In such a chart, farmers will record, during sowing time, the crop density for each bed and, during harvest time, the yield obtained for each bed as well as the total yield. This way we will begin to collect data that will ensure production calculations required for the CSA are as reliable as possible.



| Vegetable / distance | Between the rows (in cm) | Within the row (in cm) | Quantity per bed | Yield per bed | Total yield |
|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Beet | 30 | 15 | Calculate according to the bed size | | |
| Swiss chard | 30 | 30 | | | |
| Broccoli | 70 | 60 | | | |
| Cauliflower | 30 | 50 | | | |
| Kohlrabi | 40 | 30 | | | |
| Leek | 30 | 5 | | | |
| Pumpkin | 150 | 100 | | | |

4. Low-tech tools for small organic farms

All CSAs require some degree of tools, even if some of these tools may entail simple equipment. Mechanising some of the tasks will save physical labour. However, we must consider that the purchase or rental of mechanised tools has a substantial impact on the CSA budget.

Depending on which mechanical equipment is used on a farm, it can lead to relatively high production costs. CSAs, which are generally small-scale agricultural projects, can usually afford equipment that is appropriate for their needs. There are some situations in which the farmer requires more specialised mechanisation. In such cases, however, it is crucial to include the cost of this equipment within the final budget of the CSA.

In cases where the CSA is also a large-scale agricultural company, purchasing a tractor, preferably second-hand, may be advisable. Purchase is advisable given the cost and trust that would be required to rent a tractor. In the event that the purchase of machinery is unavoidable (for instance, in order to lower the production cost of performing a critical operation quickly), then sharing the risk of the investment among the members of a community is preferable to leaving this investment solely to the farmer.

Knowledge, operating skills and maintenance skills are essential when using machinery. Due to issues surrounding work safety and insurance, most CSA members will not generally use large machinery.

Some manual or semi-manual equipment can actually make the agricultural tasks of the CSA easier. We can call those tools "*smart farm tools*". Examples include: broadforks, seeders, motor hoes, brushcutters and manual transplanting machines. Managing such tools is key for the farmer and the CSA, meaning that tools should be kept in an orderly fashion, while being easy to access and in good condition. The CSA should also perform routine maintenance on the tools. Optimal equipment management will save time and money in the long run. Some tools can be made by a craftsman (i.e. a blacksmith), or existing tools can be modified. Information on how to the manufacture agricultural equipment can be found on the internet.

The participation of all CSA members in farming activities is important and possible, in particular, if the country's legislations and rules allow for routine work to be carried out (i.e. weeding, tying tomatoes, etc.). The contribution of members would free up time for farmers to engage in more demanding or delicate tasks.

Harvesting vegetables is one of the most time-consuming activities. It is estimated that about 60% of the farmer's time is spent on harvesting. Therefore, possessing tools that facilitate harvesting help to reduce both the work time and the work intensity.



A list of useful tools for CSAs can be found on the website of Jean Martin Fortier, a Canadian farmer who cultivates using market gardening through his company *The Market Gardener*: <http://www.themarketgardener.com/market-gardening-tools>.

Agroecology relies on natural processes, biodiversity, and biological cycles adapted to local conditions and their natural resources. Agroecology is a production system that regenerates the soil, the ecosystem, the local communities and economies. CSAs ideally will cultivate not only products, but also healthy soils and communities.

An example of an agricultural company that manages an admirable agroecology project combined with a CSA is that of *Azienda Agricola Iside*, located within Italy. Its farmers, Paola and Matteo, sell their products through the CSA, feeding a local community that has proven to be strong and resilient, and which has supported the project undertaken by this young couple and family.

Case box: Azienda Agricola Iside, www.iside.farm

Contact persons: Paola Archetti/Matteo Mazzola

Azienda Agricola Iside is a 6 ha terraced farm located on a slice of the Dolomite Prealp alongside Lake Iseo. It is a young farm that is growing rapidly into a complex agro-silvopastoral system managed via an agroecological approach. Products are sold through a simplified CSA system with the objective of attracting conscious supporters that believe in the regenerative capacity of agriculture.

Currently, the farm produces vegetables with an approach that focuses on space efficiency, erosion and resource control, as well as remineralisation and carbon sequestration. But the annual vegetable production is just the tip of the iceberg with respect to its agroecological potential. A mixed sequential silvopastoral orchard is developed on approximately 1 ha of the land. There are hundreds of species and varieties inhabiting a growing complex system that is composed of fruit trees, berries, nitrogen fixing and biomass crops, as well as flowers and perennial vegetables.

In the least accessible areas of the farm and on the main slopes, carbohydrates and fat production from perennial crops such as hazelnuts, almonds and walnuts coexist together with alternative perennial plants used for grazing. All of these crops allow for a diverse herbivore diet and an increase in the on-farm protein production.

All of the silvopastoral systems within the Azienda Agricola Iside farm are efficiently managed and progressively regenerated through non-selective grazing carried out by sheep and poultry. The soil health is the base of the system. Compost, along with biofertilisers, biochar production and the use of rock dusts, comprise the foundation of the fertilisation technique and the critical elements for soil regeneration. Cover crops, mulching and the use of appropriate agricultural machineries are another important part of the regeneration strategies used for restoring the ecosystem. *“In few years or so we expect to see a beautiful diverse agroecological system characterised by the efficient succession of forestry and pasture systems, dynamized by the presence of the right species and numbers of animals”* explains Paola. *“We are building a productive and ecologically impactful farm”* adds Matteo as a conclusion.

Useful links to learn more:

<https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/>

<https://www.soilfoodweb.com/>

<https://rodaleinstitute.org/>

<http://fourseasonfarm.com/>

<http://farmhack.org/tools>

<https://www.latelierpaysan.org/English>

Crop calculator: <http://urgenci.net/french/actions/be-part-of-csa/plan-de-culture/>

<http://www.themarketgardener.com/>

<https://www.sustainweb.org/secure/MossBrookGrowers.pdf>

http://organiccentrewales.org.uk/uploads/hortguide_eng.pdf

<https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Q.pdf>

<http://www.ridgedalepermaculture.com/>

<https://agriculturaregenerativaiberica.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.agricolturaorganica.org/>





The economic sustainability of CSAs

Economic sustainability, as it is commonly defined, refers to the management of the accounting and budgets in a way that generates paths towards sustainable production schemes. Sustainability should be understood as the capacity to maintain productive activities in accordance with social and environmental principles. As a concept, economic sustainability raises questions about each project, with respect to its costs and the income generated.

What is particular about economic sustainability within the context of a CSA initiative? According to the meaning suggested by the 'Solid Base' report, economic or financial sustainability refers to *"the ability of the farmer (or farmers) and the CSA community to maintain both the farm(s) and the CSA initiative in the long-term. In order to achieve this long-term resilience, the farm should not depend on specific external grants or donations, and should not transfer debts either to the next generation of farmers, or to the community"*.¹

¹ Internal report written for the project SolidBase (<http://urgenci.net/?s=solidbase>), not published yet.

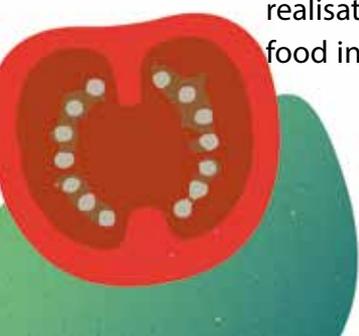
Two fundamental elements for guiding the financial management of any CSA project are income and costs. Income is the amount of money that is generated by a project. Within a CSA farm, most of the income generated stems from the shares that are sold to the members. Share prices can be defined according to different formulas. In some cases, these prices are a flat rate. In other cases, they can vary according to the income of the individual members, based on what they can afford. In other cases, in-kind contributions that take the form of voluntary work on the farm or a specific service provided to the farmer, can serve as payment for a share.

At the same time, achieving the goals of the CSA comes with a cost with respect to resource consumption. While it is straightforward to calculate the income of the CSA farm, because this generally matches the budget entries presented on a bank statement or within the cash register of the project, some members' payments to the CSA farm can at times be significantly delayed.

Costs involve the consumption of goods (whether material or immaterial) that are necessary for the project to be executed. This includes compost, seeds, water, fuel, electricity and labour that is used for production. It should also encompass the depreciation costs of longer-term materials, such as a tractor, computer or a specific software used to manage purchase orders. Costs should be distinguished from expenses. For example, a farmer can buy a given quantity of compost one day and make the payment to her/his supplier at that time. Yet, if she only uses half of the compost that was purchased during the production cycle, the cost will be half of the expense. In another case, a farmer buys a cultivator. She/he will have to pay the price generally up front, which will be an expense at that given time. It is likely, however, that she/he will continue to use the cultivator every year until it is broken / unable to be repaired.

The profit is the result of deducting costs from income, which gives a sense of the economic growth for a given year. Positive profit (income > costs) allows farmers to further grow their projects, to be resilient against possible risks and to achieve a positive social impact within the area.

One of the main aims of the CSA movement is to promote sustainable lifestyles for producers and to build a fair system where they can earn decent salaries. Another main objective of the movement is to provide consumers with access to a healthy, diversified, local and nutritious diet. This model directly promotes the realisation of food sovereignty as producers and consumers decide about their food in accordance with the principles of sustainability for both the planet and



its people. In practice, this means that:

Income generated should...

- ...cover the costs of production;
- ...cover fair salaries for producers and employees without requiring excessively long working days and with adequate labour conditions for all;
- ...allow producers to have a retirement pension;
- ...allow producers to pay their taxes and social security;
- ...allow for savings;
- ...enable the initiative to grow, including the development of spaces where those involved can bond.



The costs...

- ... must be covered, including unexpected costs, such as those stemming from natural disasters. There should be a clear risk assessment effort, in order to prevent and handle possible risks should they manifest;
- ...should cover resources used throughout the production process. Alternatively, donations can be collected to improve infrastructure;
- ...should be collected and analysed in order to assess fair prices.

The management and organisational model should...

- ...control the production in a way that preserves the environment and nature
- ...be based on basic financial knowledge that is understandable by all within the group, to facilitate budget management and sharing;
- ...identify one person responsible for the project and continue to develop her/his abilities and knowledge, so that this knowledge can then be shared with the larger group;
- ...have a clear system of operating and of making decisions, including defining the various functions that each CSA member is responsible for;
- ...enable the creation of spaces for cultural exchanges with other models.

These core ideas are fundamental to any agroecological operation and for the financial longevity of CSA farms. Moreover, as mentioned above, practicing the principle of social justice is the basis of this model. In addition to supporting the local production in a fair way, nutritious and healthy food must be made available for everyone. Once this need is widely recognised and valued, CSA groups will develop payment and distribution systems that ought to subsidise the costs of this food for low income populations.

Diversity is a core quality of the CSA model. Integrating members from different

social backgrounds however requires relationships founded on trust and solidarity between community members. Indeed, the path to financial sustainability requires a redistribution of costs and the collaboration of everyone involved. Contributions made can take the form of material support or in-kind donations, such as by donating one's working time. Supporting economically-marginalised consumers should not become the financial burden of solely producers, who should be able to earn sufficient income for their work.

And yet, even economically, not everything can be reduced exclusively to budget figures. It is critical to ensure that the relationships within the CSA groups are built to promote trust, and that caring for people is part of the DNA of the CSA. In a similar line of thought, the relaxation (work-life balance) time of producers is often overlooked, partially because they do not count their working hours. Their tasks are generally not fairly distributed across the CSA members.

In striving for fair relationships within CSA communities, it becomes necessary to analyse, incorporate and acknowledge the caring efforts being performed within our groups. From a gender perspective, socially unequal division of labour found outside of the CSA group are often replicated within it. We see women who quit farming while pregnant and then become *"stay-at-home moms"*. We also see overworked producers and consumers, who lack time for social activities. Moreover, CSA projects often require a change of household habits, including more time spent in the kitchen - a space that has, until recently, been reserved for women. Only when tasks are shared by all genders, will a woman be able to participate fully within her community. The entire group must contribute to this effort.

1. Tools for sustainability



The sustainability of projects requires the incorporation of tools that will allow us to achieve our goals. Crop planning to determine the food consumption needs of CSA members is always a reliable approach. But it is also important to establish planning methods for other tasks, which includes maintaining the economic, personal and emotional health of a CSA group.

A. INFORMATION REGISTER

It is crucial for the CSA group to collect information regarding the farm's operations throughout the seasons. It is particularly important to note that such assessments cannot be realised by merely watching daily routines and inserting numbers into the cash register. The reasons why it is important to establish a method of data collection include:

- Earning money does not mean it is a financially sustainable activity. If the CSA group knows exactly where the money comes from and where it goes to, farmers will be equipped to find more effective ways of managing the business.
- Data will enable the CSA members to track contributions, including who paid for what, where the money has been distributed and/or spent, and who has received a specific amount of money. Without written registers, conflicts can arise.
- Registers can be used for tracking the costs of production and to identify exactly how finances are used/spent. This will serve as input into future plans.
- Developing the CSA group's information register need not be a long and arduous task. Given that each individual works in different ways, a written record of all activities carried out will help to standardise the format and what is selected for recording.

Rather than requesting copies of all tickets and/or bills on a daily basis, it is useful to continuously carry a notebook and record the following information:

- The tasks that have been accomplished on the farm;
- The approximate amount of time spent on these tasks;
- The types of tools and machines required to undertake these tasks;
- Who is carrying out tasks on the farm;
- Any expenses and/or purchases made.

B. TOOLS FOR ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

The instruments required to ensure the viability and longevity of an agricultural project, regardless of its aims, and vision, do not differ from those applied to conventional enterprises. Hence, experiences gained in the field of microeconomics can also be applied to CSAs.

The three tools used in microeconomics include: 1) the Income Statement (or Loss and Profits Account), 2) the Cash-flow statement and 3) the Balance Sheet. The first two tools are dynamic, meaning that they illustrate the live receipt and cash disbursements made. The third tool is static, meaning that it captures a financial moment frozen in time of the project.

To illustrate this more concretely, we can use an example. Let's think about a tractor. The vehicle will cost a certain amount of money that will be obtained through various sources, such as savings, loans, and/or crowdfunding, etc. The Income Statement allows us to track the tractor's efficiency. The Treasury Sheet tells us the status of our deposit within the tractor. The Balance Sheet lets us know, in a specific moment, the market value of the tractor and the amount of funds still owed to.

In other words, the Income Statement allows us to calculate the profit (or loss). The Treasury Sheet helps us to become aware of the funds available at a given "t" time. And the Balance shows us the value of every single input used throughout the production process, which includes the material and immaterial goods and how are they are financed.

The Income Statement for the project has the following structure:

INCOMES

| Sales | | | Subsidies | Tasks in other holdings | Others |
|---------------------|------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------------|--------|
| Product | Units sold | Price (€/unit) | Type | Task | Type |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| TOTAL INCOME | | | | | € |



COSTS

| Direct variable | | Direct Fixed | | Repayments | | Financial expenses | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Group | Concept | Group | Concept | Group | Concept | Group | Concept | |
| Raw materials | Seeds | Building repair and maintenance | | Agricultural machinery | | Incomes | | |
| | Plants and seedlings | | | | | | | |
| | Compost and fertilisers | | | | | | | |
| | Phytosanitary | | | | | | | |
| | Animals (<1 year old) | Land ownership | Leasing | Farms and others constructions (other machinery) | Cattle buildings and infrastructure | Expenses | | |
| | Feed | | | | | | | |
| | Forage | | | | | | | |
| | Reproduction products | Others | General infrastructure | | | | Financial expenses | |
| | Zoosanitary products | | | | | | | |
| | Irrigation water (storable) | Insurances | Crop | Planting | | | | EBT (Earnings Before Taxes) |
| | Auxiliary materials (plast, etc.) | | | | | | | |
| | Containers and packages | | | | | | | |
| | Parts (not machinery) | | | | | | | |
| | Others | Properties | | | | | | EBT-Financial expenses |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Supplies | Electricity | Fee | | Livestock | | | Impuestos | |
| | Water | | | | | | | |
| | Others | | | | | | | |
| Labour | Eventual | Fixed labour | | | | | | |
| | Fixed | Health insurance | | | | | | |
| Machinery rent | | Own machinery fixed costs | Accommodation, Insurances and Taxes | Irrigation | | Directs | | |
| Own machinery variable costs | Fuel | | | Energy sources | | | | |
| | Lubricant | | | Intangible assets | Transfer rights, production quotas | | | |
| | Conservation | | | | | | | |
| | Repairs and maintenance | Others | Computer software | | | | | |
| Contracted services | | | | Indirects | | | | |
| Professional services | | | | | | | | |
| Co-ownership and share farming | | | | | | | | |
| Third-party transport | | Others | Others | | | | | |
| Others | | | | | | | | |
| Total direct variable cost | | Total Direct Fixed Cost | | Total Repayments | | #RIF! | | |
| Gross Margin | | EBITDA (Benefit Before Repayments, Interests and Taxes) | | EBIT (Earnings Before Interests and Taxes) | | Benefit | | |
| Incomes-Direct Variable Cost | | Gross margin-Total Direct Fixed Cost | | EBITDA-Repayments | | EBT -Taxes | | |

CASH-FLOW STATEMENT

| Concept | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dic | Year |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Sales charge | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Charges for services | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Capital injection | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Loans | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TOTAL CHARGES | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Raw material purchases | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Payments to employees | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Social welfare | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Leasing/renting | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Maintenance and repairs | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Transports | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ensurances | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Advertising | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Supplies | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fuels | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Taxes | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Loan | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TOTAL PAYMENTS | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| BALANCE 1 (Charges-Payments) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| BALANCE 2 ABOVE | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACCUMULATED BALANCE (B1 + B2) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

BALANCE

| Active | | | | Pasive | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|---|------------------|---------|---|
| Type | Subtype | Concept | € | Type | Concept | € |
| Not current | Material | | | Own funds | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | Long term debts | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | Immaterial | | | | |
| Current | Realisable | Stock | | Short term debts | | |
| | | Customers | | | | |
| | | Debtors | | | | |
| | Available | Bank | | | | |
| | | Savings | | | | |
| | | | 0 | 0 | | |

From an economic point of view, the sustainability of a project depends upon the following variables:

- The Income Statement displays both profits and losses.
- The Treasury Sheet is on the + side.
- The Balance Sheet is clean, meaning that the relationship between investment and finance is coherent.

C. TOOLS FOR PERSONAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are multiple factors that influence whether or not those engaged within CSA projects are able to sustain their involvement over time. This includes factors such as: the work environment, their relationships with others involved in the project, their overall health, and whether or not there is a balance between their time invested and economic remuneration. Each of these factors can be evaluated qualitatively through a series of tools.

One of the most determining factors of the mental and physical health of farmers are their working hours. Time is often perceived as an inexhaustible resource, and so time tends to be used to compensate for any lack in economic resources, at the expense of the farmer's time. Similar to money, the working hours of

farmers are measurable, which is a crucial dimension to evaluate the personal sustainability of CSAs. Finally, we should strive to reach an annual designated allotment of working time, which is realistic for us to reach our goals.

We recommend the following tools to be used when evaluating the dimension of personal sustainability:

1. An annual schedule sorted by task - This schedule can be developed using the expected planning cycles. It will consist of all possible tasks/actions necessary to be implemented on an annual basis, each of which will have an approximate time allocation assigned to it. To estimate the time allocation and required tasks, one can draw from the records of previous years.
2. Create a prioritisation system – The degree of urgency and importance of any given task should be considered when determining one’s involvement in that task. Therefore, we recommend categorising tasks on the basis of how urgent they are with respect to how important it is overall. The table below demonstrates what to do when balancing urgency with importance.

| | urgent | not urgent |
|---------------|---|--|
| important | do it now | decide when to do it |
| not important | delegate and asses how it is being done | discard it and every certain time check it again |

CASE BOX: ASDECOBA

asdecoba.org

Contact: Emiliano/María asdecoba@gmail.com

This CSA project is part of a bigger project developed by ASDECOBA association. The project staff, Emiliano and Maria, work with socially-excluded people. The project includes 6 farm workers working on 6 hectares, who together feed 50 families every week. ASDECOBA is also in the process of developing a catering service, which will bring meals to rural areas, prioritising old people who live alone. Each day they distribute approximately 200 meals.

Two years ago, ASDECOBA hosted a canning workshop with the aim of utilising their surplus produce. Canning is an effective strategy to include within their delivery baskets as well as their catering, particularly suitable for times when the availability of fresh produce is lower. With the understanding that food is a human right and not merely a commodity, ASDECOBA has created methodologies to facilitate the access to fresh and healthy food for the entire population.

Emiliano and Maria have had the support of their CSA members from the onset of their project. They have also planned effectively throughout the different stages of the project, with an overall philosophy of proceeding slowly.

For example, prior to growing any produce, Emiliano and Maria had access to a reliable network of people that knew about their proposed project, the farmers and the philosophy of the CSA model. Therefore they began by creating a community. From that starting point, they could access to land as well as the support required to develop different elements of the project.

Other tools:

The following is a booklet (written in Spanish) designed for ensuring economic sustainability for agroecological projects. While it has not been written exclusively for CSAs, = it contains useful elements for CSAs:

Mirene Begiristain-Daniel López. 2016. "*Viabilidad económica y viabilidad social*". https://www.eneek.eus/files/2017/03/20161102_viabilidad%20DEFINITIVO%20web.pdf



3

Diversified marketing, logistics and distribution

1. Logistics: a check list for CSA farmers

Below is a list of questions that can be used to guide you when developing a plan for the CSA's logistics:

- a. How do you intend to transport your produce to your members? Which mode of transportation, such as a van, bicycle, or public transport, do you intend to use?
- b. What are the key features of the designated pick-up point you have selected? For example, is it a public, private, collectively-owned, sheltered, and/or outdoor space?

- c. Do you require a storage facility at the designated pick-up point? Storage is sometimes used to ensure security and / or refrigeration.
- d. Is the designated pick-up point easy to access? Is it located in the vicinity of an accessible parking lot?
- e. Is there a drop-off point where the shares can remain unsupervised until CSA members are able to pick them up? Is it possible for the drop-off point to be locked? Are CSA members permitted to arrive at any time (this may be facilitated by, for example, the use of a digicode)? An accessible pick-up point is important in cases where CSA members are unable to pick up their box shares on time. Pick-up points present an opportunity to interact face-to-face with your CSA members. Hence, it is useful to consider how much of your time you would like to dedicate to interacting with your CSA members. In the event that it is not convenient to be present at a drop-off or pick-up point, it is useful to consider which other outlets you can create face-to-face time with your CSA members.
- f. Is the drop-off site a busy place where you can raise your CSA's profile and recruit new members?
- g. Although CSA means "*as local as possible*", what mechanisms do you have in place in the event that you need to travel to find your customers, or if they need to travel to find you? What are your values as a farmer and how do you balance the value of convenience with that of relationships?



CASE BOX

How to Get Members Involved in the CSA Logistics: the Example of Dunasziget-i Zöldségközösség (a vegetable CSA in Dunasziget, Hungary)

<https://www.facebook.com/dunaszigetizoldsegekzosseg/>

Contact persons: Anna Payr and Ferenc Czina

The year after Anna and Ferenc moved to Dunasziget, Hungary in 2011, they began an agroecological production on a farm. The farm is 2 hectares in size, of which 6,000 m² are used for vegetable production. Ferenc learned about the CSA model while on a prior study visit to Switzerland and so by 2013, they began their operations as a CSA. To start with, they produced five large shares for eight to nine families. By 2019, they have grown significantly and are now producing 30 large shares for around 50 families. Both Anna and Ferenc are working on the farm and they have also hired one employee. They produce around 45-50 types of vegetables (in some seasons, this can be upwards of 150 different varieties). The commitment year lasts from May to the following April. There are weekly deliveries until November. During winter, they continue to deliver, but only every other week. The main drop-off point is in a small town close to the farm, but there is also a delivery point at the farm.

The personal relationships that Anna and Ferenc have built with the CSA members is important to them. To build and maintain a community near their farm, they suggest considering the following:

a. Regarding location

It is very important that all of the CSA members live in the vicinity of the farm. Even though there are some large cities nearby (e.g. Győr, Bratislava), Anna and Ferenc made the decision to deliver only to the closest small town, called Mosonmagyaróvár. Any new prospective CSA members are encouraged to visit the farm at least once beforehand in order to meet the farmers.

b. Regarding delivery

There are two designated drop-off points. One of the drop-off locations is within the nearby small town, while the other is at the farmgate itself. An important practice that Anna and Ferenc maintain is to be both physically present at the delivery sites, in order to be able to converse with the CSA members and answer any questions they may have. At the delivery, which is organised once a week during the evening, members gather the vegetables themselves, based on the weekly list. Members also participate by helping to carry the vegetable loads from the car to the delivery point as well as with helping to clean the space afterwards. There is the possibility to pick up the

vegetables directly at the farm for those who live near the farm or who cannot come on the evening of the delivery in the small town. In that case, CSA members come to the farm and serve themselves.

c. The farm is open for CSA members.

Any of the CSA members are welcome to visit the farm and enjoy the atmosphere, bringing for example, their children to play while picking up vegetables.

Three farm visits are organised throughout the year. On those days, members visit the farm, as well as cook and eat together. In addition, there are specific farm visit occasions more spontaneously organised. For example, when the nearby river froze, the farmers invited CSA members for a winter walk. On other occasions, CSA members were invited to practice preservation methods and salad-making together.

d. Volunteering.

Volunteering is not obligatory. Around 5-10 of the CSA families volunteer on a regular basis. They are welcome to help at any time on the farm, but delivery or harvesting days are preferred. Those CSA members who have volunteered on the farm understand more as to what this work entails and means. The farmers understand that for some people working on a farm is not pleasurable. Therefore, they also provide the option to volunteer in other kinds of activities (i.e. translation, recipe writing and sharing, short film making, as well as packing vegetables for delivery).

e. Planning

Planning is organised with the involvement of the CSA community. CSA members are asked to evaluate the type, quality and quantity of vegetables that they would like to receive. Then the production is planned for the following year, based on this feedback. The annual budget, including all of the cost items, is shared across all of the CSA members. This is determined transparently via an open meeting with the farmers of the CSA. Future plans are also discussed at this meeting. There is also a meeting designated just for the topic of community building. Every year new ideas concerning community building are generated (such as canoeing together on the river). However, the farmers would also like to see more initiative from the members in organising and planning the community events, as their heavy workloads limit their time.

f. Communication

The main form of communication between the farmers and CSA members is a Google mailing list. Messages sent to this list are primarily written text and descriptions, and therefore are not read by all of the CSA members. The farm also manages a Facebook page, which is open for all, as well as a closed Face-

book group, that is only for members). Greater help from the CSA members would be welcomed for any of these communication tasks.

CASE BOX

Lessons on arranging CSA farm logistics from Dobrzyńskie Warzywa, in Poland (<https://www.facebook.com/rwsdobrzyn/>).

A family farm from Dobrzyń on the Vistula River is providing families from Toruń, Warsaw's neighborhoods, Grochów, Ursynów and Żoliborz with vegetable boxes. Since 2014, farmers Bartek and Ada have been running a thriving CSA farm, where they grow produce on about 5 hectares of land. They grow dozens of varieties of vegetables, cultivated using sustainable agriculture methods. Every week, they deliver boxes full of fresh and fragrant vegetables to their members because they believe that everyone should have access to healthy food at affordable prices. Thanks to the CSA model (which is Rolnictwo Wspierane przez Społeczność, RWS, in Polish), they have been continuously evolving and modifying their own practice for five years and are conveying the secrets of the agricultural world to all of their CSA members.

Before starting this CSA, Bartek and Ada worked in corporate business. Their transition from this lifestyle toward running their own CSA was gradual. They began by first cultivating various vegetables in their spare time during weekends. Then they slowly transitioned toward supplying rare vegetables for Warsaw cooperatives, such as: hot chili peppers, various carrot varieties, etc. Eventually, they assumed the risk of taking over Bartek's parents' farm and in doing so, exchanged financially secure jobs in the capital for farmer's shoes. With the support of one of NGO (non-governmental organization), which at the time encouraged the development of CSAs in Poland, it was possible to create a well-functioning and stable farm that would sustain them. After five years of running their own CSA, they now provide good quality, seasonal vegetables for around 300 families.

Below are additional national Polish initiatives with similar stories that might be useful for a farmer interesting in starting a CSA:

E-links: www.wspierajrolnictwo.pl

FB profiles: https://www.facebook.com/groups/rwspolska/?epa=SEARCH_BOX.

2.

Collaboration with other CSA farms

Collaborating with other farms or CSA groups can be a way of diversifying both your customer base and your products. It can also be a way to access and share resources. Furthermore, working with other organic and/or CSA farms and farmers can increase your sense of solidarity with the wider agroecology and food sovereignty movement.

Gregoire Delabre, a fruit producer from the Southern part of France, conveys the benefits of collaborating with other group to access more customers and deliver to a single drop off place: *"I am selling apples to 700 customers through various AMAP groups. I find it convenient to have a single CSA drop off point where hundreds of people gather to pick up their produce from various producers at the same time"*. Another form of collaboration is expanded upon by Ewa Wiechowska, from Poland: *"My farm, Kwaśne Jabłko (www.kwasnejablko.pl) is planning to create CSA in two Polish cities - Olsztyn and Warsaw. We want to be an all-year round CSA farm, which is not common in Poland"*.

Tasos Tsakalis, from Greece, also identifies the benefits of collaborating with other CSAs to form a larger group through which to distribute products: *"My biggest challenge this year is to begin a CSA project in two cities (Chalkida and Athens) and help to find CSA consumers in both cities. The idea is to create a CSA group with 8-10 farmers providing vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, sauce, bread, honey etc from my area. Once a week, the products are distributed by one of the farmers in the two aforementioned cities"*.

3.

What is diversified marketing?

Diversified marketing refers to the strategy to expand into new market areas beyond what is currently engaged in, such as through new ways of selling your farm produce.

4. Why diversify?

Many farms combine the CSA model with other forms of income generation, such as selling their produce at farmers' markets or to restaurants and retail stores. Such a strategy ensures that farmers are not entirely dependent on a single income source - namely the CSA groups. Some farmers might also have prior experiences selling their produce via other schemes, such as farm gate direct selling, and wish to continue engaging in these outlets. However, while this may be an excellent strategy from an economic standpoint, it can also cause some unforeseen issues to arise.



On the other hand, some CSA farmers choose to follow a simple straightforward model in which they only grow or produce for their CSA members. But this also can raise various challenges, such as: What might you do during times of shortages or surplus (i.e. when your members have had their fill of a certain crop)? What might you do income-wise if your CSA is seasonal and operates only during part of the year?



5. **What are the options for CSAs seeking to engage in diversified income strategies?**

Option 1: Offering extra products that CSA members can choose to purchase in addition to a share, and/or offering different types of shares. Such 'extras' may include products like: eggs, flowers, top fruit plants (i.e. tomatoes or herb plants).

Option 2: Hosting stalls at farmers' markets through which to sell your produce. This is also a useful strategy for recruiting new potential members and may serve as a pick-up point for delivering the CSA boxes.

Option 3: Selling produce to restaurants. This can be an effective marketing strategy if the restaurant agrees to give visibility to the use of your produce. Often this requires first building a relationship with the restaurant and informing them about the CSA model. Informing them can help, for example, to encourage restaurants to purchase cheaper cuts of meat in addition to the more well-known expensive cuts.

Option 4: Distributing to wholesale business. This is particularly useful if you

have large quantities of excess produce. It is also useful to generate income by deciding to produce large quantities of a specific crop that you know has a high demand.

Option 5: Selling produce directly through your farm shop and/or stall.

Option 6: Selling the processed output of your produce. You can choose to make jams, pickles, preserves, and/or dried produce, such as those used for tea infusions, which can all be placed into the CSA share boxes, particularly during times of lower production.

Option 7: Forming economic relationships with other CSAs. By arranging to grow or produce specifically for another CSA, you can deepen these relationships and expand your income sources, whilst diversifying food sources for the consumer.

Option 8: Developing a box scheme that is independent of a regular commitment or membership, through which you may charge a higher price per box than CSA members contribute.

Option 9: Engaging in external ('off farm') activities, such as educational activities, events, training courses, workshops, catering using your own produce, and/or agro-tourism.

6.

Warnings and recommendations concerning diversified marketing

- a. Setting prices - How might you estimate the benefits of diversifying your income generation beyond the CSA and is it worth diversifying compared to the "100% CSA"-model? It is an accepted best practice to begin by comparing the prices of your produce with that of other organic farms and shops in the area. A general important rule is to incentivise longer-term loyalty by your CSA members. This includes community building efforts, and different actions to grant them recognition for their commitment.

- b. Production and crop planning - Production and crop planning are more complex than setting prices. Growing produce to satisfy a weekly share requires successive planting, which entails a different set of planning considerations than growing a large quantity of one crop for wholesale that requires harvesting a minimal number of times.
- c. Management of shortages and surplus – Another consideration is how to address surpluses that may be generated. Will you choose to give any surpluses to the CSA members or would you prefer to sell the surpluses, and if so where? On the other hand, in the event that a crop fails, will you be able to supplement the CSA box shares with other products?
- d. Prioritise transparency – It is a best practice to ensure that the CSA budget and prices are made available for CSA members, so as to increase transparency. Consider how you intend to communicate and distinguish between CSA-related costs versus costs that generated from producing for other (non CSA-related) markets? This requires estimating and separating costs, such as the extent of your time spent on one activity versus another, and/or the percentage of the total tractor cost that can be attributed to the CSA.
- e. Value your CSA members - Treating your CSA members well and expressing your appreciation toward them with positivity will ensure that they feel valued! As stated by Agnes Jansen of Bioferma Albastre, Romania: *“Prioritise your CSA members. They are your VIPs as they have made a commitment to you and your farm”*. A CSA farmer who shows disregard for his CSA members and/or fails to improve his/her economic situation, will dissuade new CSA members from joining. In the event that financial challenges arise, it is important to transparently raise these issues with a solutions-oriented attitude. Remember different markets require different promotion and relationships with different types of customers.
- f. Engage in non-farming activities – It is important to plan and budget for non-farming activities, which ought to come from outside of the usual farm budget. Be sure to budget in the additional time necessary to organise and run these activities. Alternatively, you could consider recruiting an additional person to be responsible for these activities.



7. Links and References

The following online resources offer practical advice on diversifying one's marketing channels:

<https://openfoodnetwork.org/>

<https://www.panierlocal.com/>

Bashford, Jade, Kathleen Cross, Wolfgang Eichinger, Andreas Georgakakis, Morgane Iserte, Fabian Kern, Daniel Lesinsky, et al. European Handbook on Community Supported Agriculture. Aubagne: URGENCI, 2013. <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/425101/> .

Bouffartigue, Cathy, Wim Merckx, Jocelyn Parot, and Peter Volz. Training in Alternative Food Distribution Systems: Regional Logistics. Kernel Editions. Aubagne: URGENCI, 2015. <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/425080/>
http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Training-in-AFDS_final_print.pdf.

Perényi, Zsofia, Morgane Iserte, Georgiana Paun, Mihaela Vetan, and Jan Valeska. Be Part of CSA! Supporting Booklet for Training on Community Supported Agriculture. Budapest: TVE/ProBioLiga/CRIES/URGENCI, 2016.
http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/BPCSABooklet_2016_eng.pdf.



4

Community building: how to keep the community connected to your farm

1. Two Approaches to Community Building

We can distinguish between two main approaches to community building. The first approach for a farmer consists of connecting with a consumer group in a local city or urban area. In the second approach, the farmer assumes a more active role in creating a group around the farm. (S)he builds a network based on individual connections with members. In some rarer cases, a farmer may also be approached by an existing consumer group that wants to partner with their farm.

Both approaches require the farmer to leave their day-to-day farm operations and to be able to communicate on a regular basis with potential members about what she/he is doing on the farm.

Some contexts lend themselves more to one of these approaches over the other. For example, in some regions or countries most of the CSA farmers are new to CSAs and even potentially, new to farming. They are thus in need for community support.

CASE BOX

“Από κοινού” (Apo Koinou), meaning *“All Together”* in Greek, offers a good example of an initiative in which many different tools are being used to foster community building. Apo Koinou is a cooperative community in Crete. The core vision that the community members are defending is a vision through which an autonomous and harmonious micro-economy flourishes as opposed to one of profit-making and competition. The initiative has three interrelated parts:

1) cultivation 2) education and 3) cultural activities.

These three sectors operate with individual assemblies as well as a joint general assembly, where decisions are made in consensus. The capacity to participate to the decision-making process is an essential part of belonging to the community. *Apo Koinou* has various farm-related activities. For example, *“Kyklos”* (*“Circle”*) CSA gathers ten small producers of fresh vegetables, milk and processed vegetable products. All of them are members of the cooperative and participate in the weekly assemblies. These producers provide a weekly basket to CSA members. The CSA members can choose the content of the share through the use of a web platform to select products. Eventually, it will also be possible to pay for the CSA box scheme using an alternative currency, called *“Kouki”*. The cooperative also tries to minimise food waste by conjointly operating a processing unit and a falafel restaurant, in which any remaining produce is used. Moreover, solidarity-based olive oil exports to CSA groups in foreign countries (France, Belgium...) is another common activity. The cooperative farmers *“believe in the collective and strive against solitude”*. They encourage locals to join open farm-visits in order to have a better understanding of where our food comes from.

For more information, you can visit: <http://www.apokinou.gr/el/>

2. Where is your community and what do they look like?

The Overview of CSA in Europe¹ found that CSA members are often young, urban, well-educated, socially-conscious people, and hypothesised that this group of traits tend to also be more open to innovation. Where CSA as a model is more established, the approach has also expanded beyond this core group of people. The following points are useful to consider when looking to establish your community and build up a solid base of consumers. Although it can be difficult to reach out beyond these groups, it is useful to consider from the onset how you intend to integrate the principle of economic solidarity.

ACTIVITY

Create a profile of your ideal (or existing) CSA member. Think about and write down their age, what they do for a living, their economic and family status. Where do they live, what do they like to eat, where do they shop, how much spare time do they have, what do they read, what else are they involved in, for example environmental organisations, and what is important to them.

Understanding your potential or existing CSA members better will help you to decide how and where to reach out and recruit them to start with. It will also provide you with insight as to what they might want in their share, how you will get it to them and how to keep them involved in a partnership with you and your farm.

3. How to recruit members

Once you have an idea of who and where your members are, you can use a variety of options to promote your CSA to these people. The easiest option will be if they are already customers of your farm!

¹ Volz, Peter, Philipp Weckenbrock, Jocelyn Parot, and Nicolas Cressot. Overview of Community-Supported Agriculture in Europe. URGENCI. Aubagne: URGENCI, 2016. <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/416085/> <http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Overview-of-Community-Supported-Agriculture-in-Europe-F.pdf>.

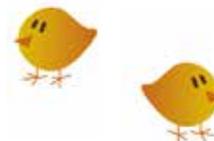


In the likely event that you need to reach out for more members, you might consider the following actions (listed in the *Be Part of CSA* - booklet²):

1. Reach out to people at farmers' markets. If you have already sold your products at a specific market, some of the satisfied customers might be interested in joining your CSA model.
2. Ask your friends or neighbours if they are interested. You will not have to start building trust from ground zero if you already have personal relationships with these people.
3. If you need to search beyond your close circles, search for existing groups, such as: day cares, environmental or other organisations, civic groups, churches, workplaces, alternative schools, yoga centres, etc. All of these could be potential places to find people who are interested in healthy food and community-based partnerships. Additionally, you may also consider contacting existing CSAs, as they may know some possible consumers from your region who are already familiar with the idea. They may even have waiting lists!
4. Contact your national CSA network or any NGO that is working to promote CSAs or on any related issue (i.e. traditional agriculture, food sovereignty, healthy food, social economy, sustainable development, etc.).

To identify and attract members, you might try to use these communication channels:

- o Post or handout flyers
- o Organise meetings
- o Spread the idea to friends
- o Find a willing journalist to write a story
- o Post via social media, such as on Facebook. While social media outlets have been very useful in reaching potential consumers, recent changes make it harder to promote your business or groups to individuals.



² Perényi, Zsófia, Morgane Iserte, Georgiana Paun, Mihaela Vetan, and Jan Valeska. *Be Part of CSA! Supporting Booklet for Training on Community Supported Agriculture*. Budapest: TVE/ProBioLiga/CRIES/URGENCI, 2016. http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/BPCSABooklet_2016_eng.pdf.



4. **Organise Public Meetings**

With your first allies, you should be prepared to participate in public meetings designed to attract consumers. For future cooperation, it is crucial to be honest and transparent at these meetings, as consumers appreciate these qualities. Do not be afraid if you lack extensive experience or if you have some fears. CSA is a partnership. Try to involve the consumers in finding solutions.

Possible agenda for a first public meeting:

- o What is a CSA?
- o Why should we eat locally grown food?
- o Why do small farmers need support?
- o What are the risks of industrial agriculture?
- o What are the advantages of becoming a CSA member?
- o Assess the level of commitment of participants
- o If the level of commitment / interest is high, move forward towards creating a core group

Open days or social events on your farm are a great way for people to see what you are doing, taste your products, meet other potential members and learn more about the community that they can become a part of.

Make sure to keep track of what works and what does not work by using trackable indicators. For example, you can offer a discount code on leaflets, advertisements or via local news articles that are specific to each location, which will provide you with essential data as to which forms generated which leads. Thereafter, you can focus your efforts on these methods and locations.

5. **How can you maintain your members?**

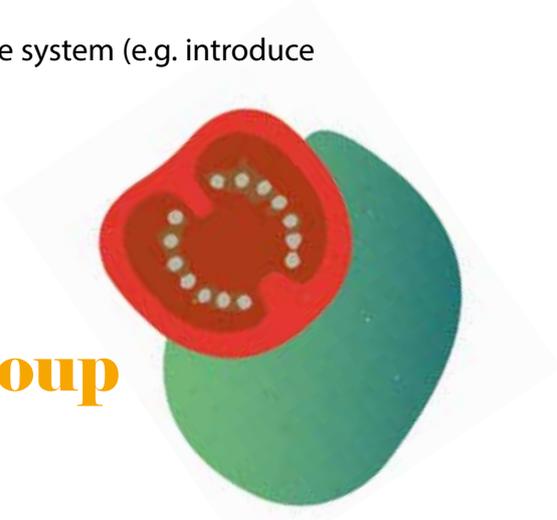
Consider the various ways in which your members engage with your CSA farm. If your distribution method involves transporting your produce to the city, where

it is left at a designated drop-off point, then you may rarely have the opportunity to meet your CSA members face-to-face.

Suggestions for consideration:

- Build a genuine relationship with your members (e.g. face-to-face meetings on the day of delivery, farmer's "happy hour", farm events)
- Keep your members posted (e.g. a weekly newsletter which lists that week's vegetables distributed within the box)
- Involve your members in decision-making processes (e.g. working groups via e-mail)
- Facilitate cooperation among the members (e.g. setting up a CSA Whatsapp group)
- Ask for feedback (e.g. run an annual evaluation survey)
- Educate your members if necessary (e.g. send descriptions about the characteristics of less known vegetables or recipes that are relevant to that week's box)
- Provide a degree of flexibility and freedom within the system (e.g. introduce a swap-box to exchange products from the share)

6. **Community building, communication and group processes**



Community building requires tangible skills. It is important that your CSA members feel that they are part of a community, which will facilitate them building mutual support and trust, as well as better understanding what producing healthy, affordable local food entails. Community building will also make your job as the farmer much easier and more enjoyable!

However, most CSAs cannot afford to pay a professional to perform the necessary community building tasks, so it would be strategic to find people within your community that have such skills and are willing to undertake tasks, such as arranging social events, recruitment activities and facilitating meetings about what is needed on the farm. Such a person is especially important to include when hosting meetings to present farm budgets and membership fees.

ACTIVITY

Below is an exercise³ designed to help participants better understand that community building and deepening community relationships in fact consist of several tasks and responsibilities. These tasks will not spontaneously complete themselves and therefore it is vital that the responsible person(s) continuously completes them.

ACTIVITY

Suggested time:

- 40 min: 20 minutes for the labelling exercise and 20 minutes for the plenary discussion

The facilitator divides the group into four small groups and asks each group to choose one person who will be the main coordinator/farmer of a CSA. The other participants of the small groups write down on coloured post-it notes, as many tasks as they can think of that are related to community building within a CSA context. The appointed coordinators are then positioned in the middle of the group. The participants then stick all of the post-it notes onto the coordinator for their groups. A photo can be taken at this time. Post-it notes are then removed from the coordinator and categorised on the wall or a piece of flip-chart paper for the next exercise.

Trainers facilitate the group discussion by asking questions such as: *'How was this exercise for you?'; 'How the farmers/coordinator feel with so many tasks to manage?'; 'What was the conclusion for you in this exercise?'; 'How can one person manage this without breaking down?'; and What or who could help this process?'*

7.

Community building tools

There are various approaches that you can explore to help you facilitate the community development of your CSA. Among the possible approaches is the use of visioning exercises for the whole CSA group to engage in together concerning

³ This activity was initially presented in Perényi, Zsofia, Morgane Iserte, Georgiana Paun, Mihaela Vetan, and Jan Valeska. *Be Part of CSA! Supporting Booklet for Training on Community Supported Agriculture*. Budapest: TVE/ProBioLiga/CRIES/URGENCI, 2016. http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/BPCSABooklet_2016_eng.pdf.

what they would like the CSA to achieve, how you can manage decisions, and how you can improve upon the various communication styles employed. Some of these tools are accessible online, while others are available through training courses that you may attend.

A CSA member that witnesses the CSA farmer continuing to struggle after their engagement for some months or years may start questioning the meaning of the partnership. Therefore, it is important to show your consumers how helpful and supportive their commitment is for you. They are a key part of the change!

Collaboration: With collaboration tools we mean online tools that allow to work together without being in the same place. The concept of the *"paperless office"* comes to mind where everything is stored digitally and accessible for all team members. We need collaboration tools to share files, simultaneously work on documents, share calendar, contacts and to take notes. The selection of tools includes:

Nextcloud: for file sharing, calendars and contacts

OnlyOffice: shared document editing

Etherpad & CodiMD: notes

<https://hack.allmende.io/solidbase-collaboration>

Communication: Communication is the most common reason to use IT tools. Initiatives differentiate between the internal communication among working groups and members and external communication. Existing tools can be roughly divided into *"one-to-many"* and *"many-to-many"*. The *"one-to-many"* communication is a one sided communication where information is intended to be passed and not necessarily discussed. These include websites, blogs, newsletter and to some extent social media. *"Many-to-many"* tools allow a more dynamic communication. It includes Chat/Messenger, E-mails, Mailing lists, Forums, Wikis, Group calls and Social Media.

Sociocracy - <http://www.sociocracy.info/>

Way of Council - <http://waysofcouncil.net/>

Nonviolent communication - <http://www.cnvc.org>

Mailchimp for newsletters - <https://mailchimp.com/>

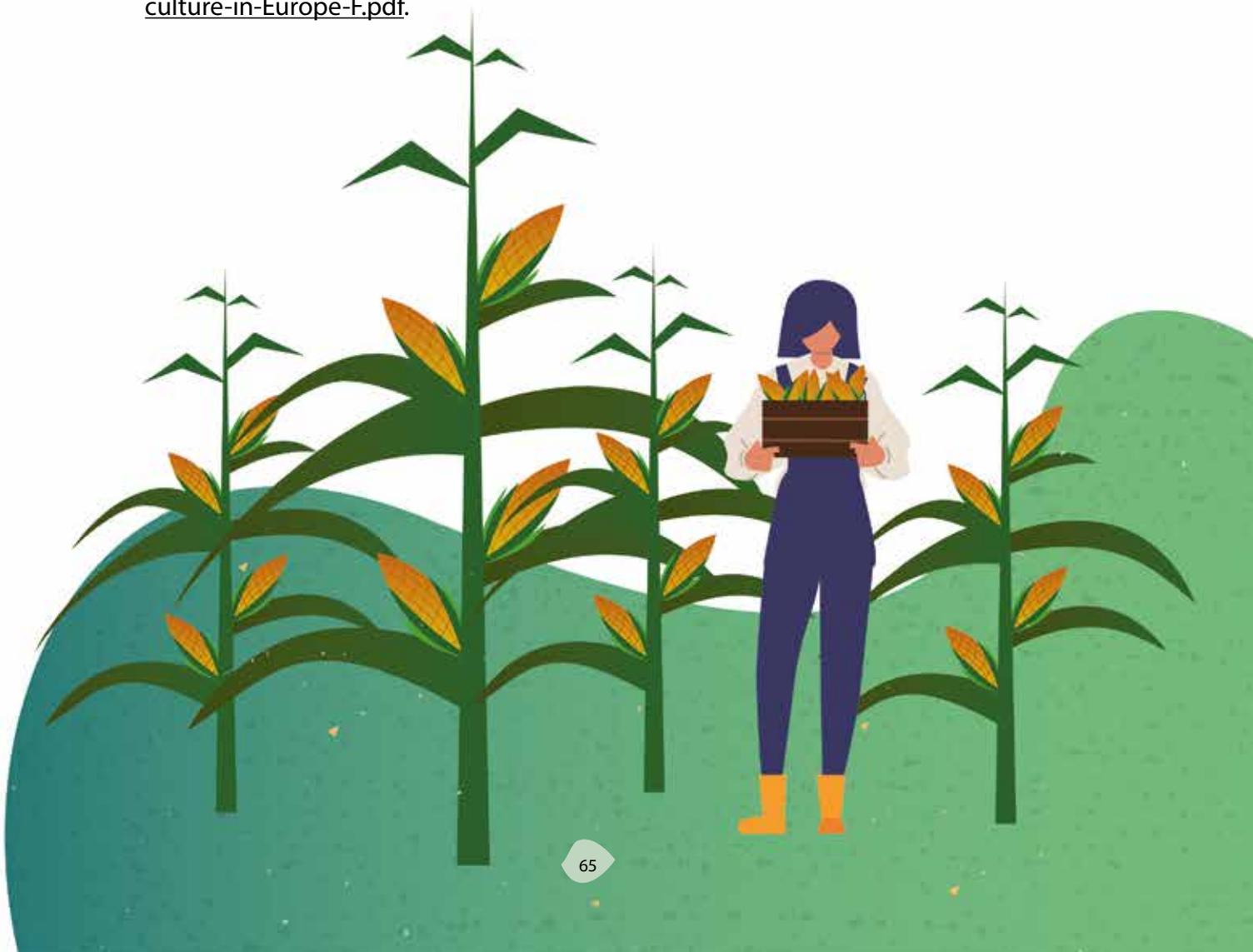


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Bouffartigue, Cathy, Wim Merckx, Jocelyn Parot, and Peter Volz. Training in Alternative Food Distribution Systems: Regional Logistics. Kernel Editions. Aubagne: URGENCI, 2015. <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/425080/> http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Training-in-AFDS_final_print.pdf.

Reisman, Erica. *"The Experience of Members of European CSAs"*. Master Thesis. Lyon: ISARA / NMBU, October 10, 2018.

Volz, Peter, Philipp Weckenbrock, Jocelyn Parot, and Nicolas Cressot. Overview of Community-Supported Agriculture in Europe. URGENCI. Aubagne: URGENCI, 2016. <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/416085/> <http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Overview-of-Community-Supported-Agriculture-in-Europe-F.pdf>.





Conclusion

The “CSA Farmer-to-Farmer Booklet” is based on the farmer-to-farmer exchanges that took place during the European meetings of CSA movements in Ostrava in September 2016, and in Thessaloniki in November 2018. These exchanges were also informed by the first specific farmer-to-farmer event conducted in Cascina Santa Brera, Italy, in February 2018, which consisted of a five-day-programme for CSA farmers. Thirty farmers from across Europe met at the organic, permaculture farm called Cascina Santa Brera near Milan, Italy, to **“share their hands-on experience of producing healthy sustainable food for local communities and learn new skills to better equip them for the job of being a CSA farmer”**¹. This CSA Farmer-to-Farmer Booklet can be understood as the concise compilation of the various experiences of these CSA farmers, the majority of whom are vegetable growers. Such knowledge and experiences should be carefully preserved as they are dynamic and ever-evolving. Therefore, updates and improvements should be incorporated in on a regular basis, as the movement and its actors continue to gain new experience.

This booklet is also a tool in the broader strategy of the international network, URGENCI, to reinforce farmer-to-farmer exchanges within the CSA movement. As shown by countless sociological studies across all regions, farmers are dan-

¹ <https://urgenci.net/csact-springs-into-action/>

gerously isolated. This is even more the case for pioneering farmers, such as CSA farmers, who at times face a hostile professional environment. This booklet strives to break that isolation. It is one tool, alongside many others, used to support and reinforce CSA farmers. Other ways to share experiences and knowledge for fellow farmers include the e-learning platform created by URGENCI and its partners within the CSAct! project (<http://csact.urgenci.net>). These different approaches of training and learning should not be understood as competing with one another, but rather are complementary to each other. An e-learning platform cannot replace a practice-oriented booklet, and a booklet will never replace face-to-face trainer-participant interactions. This booklet is therefore modest in its ambitions. It is just one tool to assist in training CSA farmers.

This booklet is however very timely and it seeks to fill in a huge need in training CSA farmers, which is a key element of the broader socio-political transformation taking place today. Without a solid training base, no can be no broader transition to agroecology. Without the transition to agroecology, we will continue to face increasingly horrifying impacts of climate change and biodiversity losses. Hence, CSA represents more than a viable marketing model that is based on partnership. It may represent a new way of production and creating communities.

*Lots of Little People,
in many Little Places of the world,
they will grow Small Gardens...
that will feed the World.*

Gustavo Duch (Journalist and food sovereignty activist),
Mucha gente pequeña, Pol.len Edicions, 2012





The objective of this booklet is to provide prospective and/or new farmers that are interested in venturing into CSA with the best practices as well as necessary economic, technical, logistical, agricultural, and social knowledge. It does so by outlining tips and insights gathered from experienced CSA farmers from all over Europe. It explores such questions as: how might we understand the occupation of a “CSA farmer”? Which types of skills (both hard and soft) does it require? How do we understand the failures and successes with respect to the profitability of CSA farms? Which strategies are most successful for running a CSA farm? Which tools are necessary to create and share? How can we better organise cooperation across multiple producers? How can we better organise community building within the CSA core group?

In addition to the knowledge, skills, and experiences, which are required for managing a complex, ecologically-based production system, CSA farmers also need strong skills for building a social organisation, which this booklet outlines.

This “CSA Farmer-to-Farmer booklet” consists of the following four chapters:

1. **Farming challenges:** What are the main challenges that a CSA farmer faces? This chapter takes a deeper look at soil fertility, irrigation, biodiversity, and crop planning.
1. **The economic sustainability of CSAs:** What is considered a fair share? CSA farmers need to determine how much is considered fair as well as how much produce to include within a share.
2. **Diversified marketing, logistics and distribution:** Many farms combine CSA with other forms of marketing, such as selling at farmers’ markets and/or to restaurants and retail stores. This can be an excellent strategy from an economic standpoint, but it can also generate conflicts. Where do multiple-producer CSAs fit into this model?
3. **Community building:** How can we encourage committed members to support CSA farmers, thereby providing farmers with ample time to focus their energies and skills on producing high-quality food, regenerating their farmland, and caring for themselves?