

Article



# **Current Status of the Community-Supported Agriculture Model in Poland—Exploring Key Areas of Sustainable Operations**

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**Abstract:** Social innovations responding to the local needs of farmers and consumers are the subject of recent studies, and their results indicate effectiveness in mitigating the effects of crises and, in the long run, in building the resilience of local communities to future challenges. One of the social innovations is the Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. This article presents the current status of active CSA groups in Poland. The paper's main objective is to identify active CSA farms in Poland and then analyse the individual farms' CSA offers, the number of people they reach, and their members' characteristics, motivation, and degree of involvement. As of 2023/2024, when the study was conducted, 13 food-producing farmers were inventoried for 35 groups, reaching an estimated 1200 people. Taking into account the Polish context and referring to the experience and examples of CSA communities in Europe and the world, the following conclusions were drawn: the need to establish an umbrella organisation to network the current CSA community in Poland and to support the already active farmers through, among other things, advocacy, education and coordination of CSA model development at the national level.

**Keywords:** sustainable food system; short food supply chain; food resilience; Poland; CSA; alternative food systems

# 1. Introduction

Based on financial efficiency and conventional farming methods, the current food system is the primary source of the ongoing climate crisis and its most prominent victim [1]. The impact of weather anomalies on crops and the living conditions of entire communities is forcing migration or leading to hunger and loss of food sovereignty for whole communities [2]. In 2015, the United Nations Agency adopted the Agenda2030 document outlining 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030. The second goal refers to the elimination of world hunger [3]. Unfortunately, just 6 years later, in 2021, the same United Nations Agency announced that this goal would not be able to be achieved, and hunger and food insecurity were worsening due to the then-growing crisis in Eastern Europe and a pandemic [4]. The most recent report, published in 2024, found the trend of increasing hunger in the world continues, although it varies from continent to continent [5]. The target set in 2015 proved far beyond the possibility of achieving it by the expected date.

The food crisis is closely linked to the climate crisis: since the 1980s, the number of extreme weather events has doubled, and a further increase in the global average temperature will only intensify the occurrence of droughts, floods or hurricanes [6]. The food crisis results from various factors influencing and reinforcing each other, including climatic conditions and the political and economic situation [7]. Industrial food crops



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Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/ licenses/by/4.0/). initiated in the 1960s were supposed to save the world from starvation but ultimately led to environmental degradation. At the same time, on average, one in four people on the planet faces severe or moderate food insecurity [5,8]. Social innovations in the food sector, particularly those leveraging local crops and addressing the specific needs of both farmers and consumers, have been extensively studied. Empirical evidence indicates that such innovations play a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of crises and, over the long term, contribute to enhancing the resilience of local communities to future disruptions [9,10]. The Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) model is a prominent example of such an innovation.

It is a model of food access based on a long-term commitment between food producers (farmers) and people who buy products produced on the farm (consumers) [11–17]. This specific form of short supply chain was initiated in Japan in the late 1960s, while in Europe, it has gained popularity in the last 25 years. Significantly, in the context where the CSA model was born, the first group was formed by concerned Japanese mothers who reported lead contamination in food [16,18]. Mutual trust and solidarity in the cultivation process are the basis for the model. The operation details are determined by each group or by a national network supporting CSA groups. Nevertheless, the boundary features for this type of cooperation included in the European CSA Charter are the locality of cultivation, long-term collaboration (at least a season), solidarity and sharing of cultivation risks, and joint care for the environment (cultivation with at least organic methods) [15,17,19,20]. The assumed organic production or regenerative agriculture methods rank this model as beneficial for the environment (low carbon). From the economic and social side, it revitalises the local agricultural economy, increases community food security and educates consumers about agriculture and the environment [11,17,21–23].

The Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) model is present on five continents and has a membership exceeding 1.5 million individuals [22]. In Poland, the CSA model was introduced in 2009 as part of a pilot initiative led by the international organisation URGENCI, which aims to promote and expand the model globally [24]. At that time, Poland had recently joined the European Union (2004), and the demand for organic products was increasing alongside the growth of local and organic food markets. However, Poland's socio-cultural context, characterised by relatively low levels of cooperation, mutual trust, and openness, presented challenges to the widespread adoption of the model [25].

Since the first CSA group was established in Poland in 2012 [13,26] through to 2024, this study represents the first comprehensive attempt to characterise the CSA model in Poland qualitatively and quantitatively. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews conducted with farmers operating within CSA groups. The primary objective of these interviews was to identify active farms engaged in CSA-based food production. The second objective was to examine the diversity of farm offerings and assess the number of consumers they serve. The third objective was to explore the operational dynamics of these groups, including their structural characteristics, motivational factors, and the extent of member engagement.

The structure of this article is as follows: First, we outline the research methodology and the key areas of evaluation. Next, we provide an overview of the agricultural and social context in which Polish farms operate. The results section presents interview findings, categorised according to the thematic areas explored in the study. In the discussion, we compare these findings with examples from other countries where the CSA model is practised, highlighting similarities and divergences from broader trends. Finally, the conclusion outlines potential directions for future research and further development of the CSA model in Poland.

## 2.1. Sampling Process and Sample Size

Before data collection, information about the planned research was disseminated through multiple communication channels, including direct contact with known CSA farmers and collaboration with individuals and organisations supporting organic farming, such as the Ziarno Association and the Folk Ecological University in Grzybów, Poland. Given the comprehensive outreach efforts, the likelihood of excluding an active CSA farm from the study is minimal. The farm's selection was based on the self-identification of a CSA group and the snowball method. The questionnaire was validated through a pilot survey conducted on the first two participating CSA farms.

# 2.2. Questionnaire

The study was conducted using in-depth individual interviews. Participation in the interviews was voluntary and free of charge, with all conversations recorded for analysis. The interview questions were based mainly on the global census of CSA groups conducted by URGENCI in 2023 [27]. However, due to the authors' concurrent involvement in developing and promoting the CSA model in Poland, an additional question was included regarding the type of support farmers require. This addition was deemed relevant to assess whether challenges persist in establishing and maintaining CSA groups at their current development stage in Poland.

The questionnaire consisted of 40 questions designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data:

- Farm location and size;
- Product range and number of consumers;
- Group dynamics, conflict resolution, farmer motivation, and expected support;
- Financial viability—assessing the extent to which the CSA model benefits farmers economically;

The questionnaire included 25 closed-ended questions and 15 open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted remotely via online meetings between December 2023 and April 2024, primarily for time and cost efficiency. Each interview lasted approximately 1.5 h on average.

- CSA Farm—A farm that provides food for a group of people based on a long-term commitment and shared risks. One farm could provide food to many CSA groups.
- CSA group—A group of people that cooperate with one or more farmers on a long-term commitment and shared risks.
- CSA members—They can be individuals when it comes to involvement in particular jobs or activities but when it comes to the number of 'CSA members' in a group, it is considered to be a family, a household. This is important to obtain an idea of how large the community is.

# 2.3. Key Areas of CSA Farm Operations

The questionnaire covered key areas of CSA farm operations, which were subsequently explored in individual in-depth interviews with farm representatives. The main areas of inquiry included the following:

- 1. General farm characteristics—location, number of individuals involved in farm management, duration of operation, farm size versus cultivated area, and the number of families or individuals receiving food through the CSA model.
- 2. Crop diversity and product offerings—types and varieties of crops grown, number of cultivated species, composition of deliveries, and frequency of distributions per year.

- 3. Social dynamics and group organisation—communication methods within the CSA group, conflict resolution strategies, and member role distribution.
- Financial aspects—pricing structure per season and delivery, payment methods (onetime or staggered payments), and the extent to which CSA-generated revenue contributes to the farm's overall financial stability.

## 3. Results

Context of the conducted study.

Agricultural areas in Poland account for more than 52% of the country's total agricultural area, of which organic crops account for 3.5% of all crops [28]. The potential for developing organic agriculture in Poland is high for at least two reasons: the first is due to internal conditions and the second relates to external factors. The internal factor is the favourable, dispersed agrarian structure and the use of traditional agriculture technologies, which favours the transition from conventional to organic farming [29]. The external factor mobilising the development of organic agriculture is the EU policy, which envisages several measures aimed at achieving at least 25% of agricultural land cultivated organically by 2030.

At the same time, public awareness of the conditions of intensive production by conventional methods and their negative impact on the environment is growing [30,31]. The survey of Polish consumers showed that for 66% of shoppers, environmental friendliness is important, and one in four respondents (26%) started buying organic products when they found out that in this way, they could reduce their negative impact on the environment. In turn, for 75% of Polish consumers, food must be grown without pesticides and chemical fertilisers, and the welfare of farm animals is also important (74%) [32].

#### 3.1. Key Area 1: General Farm Characteristics

This study examined Poland farms that supply food to community-supported agriculture groups (CSA). Thirteen farms were identified in Poland that fulfilled the criteria of a CSA model described in the European Declaration of CSA. In total, they are providing food to serve 35 CSA groups, with some supplying multiple groups. However, there is a risk that the identified CSA holdings do not reflect the full number of all groups of farmers and consumers based on a long-term commitment and solidarity basis. The farms that participated in the survey voluntarily and swiftly call themselves CSA community food farms.

Most are in central and eastern Poland, with a few exceptions (Figure 1). One farm is situated in the north, in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship (CSA Stary Jesion), another farm in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship in southern Poland (CSA Smaczna Grządka) and a group of CSA farms operating at the Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences. In the latter case, one can talk about a specific social innovation, which is the formula of providing food to employees with the specifics of the CSA model (among other things, commitment to the season and composition of weekly deliveries resulting from current crops).

The CSA groups studied differ significantly in terms of total farm size, crop area, number of recipients and the province where the farm is located (Table 1).

When assessing the scale of CSA farms, two key indicators should be considered: the total farm area and the specific area allocated for CSA crop production. At the same time, CSA Farma Stary Jesion is the largest in total area (36 hectares), with only 2 hectares dedicated to vegetable cultivation (Figure 2). Similarly, the Wrocław University of Life Sciences, the second-largest producer, utilises two research stations with 25 hectares under cultivation alongside 1200 square meters of tunnel-grown crops. An exception to this

pattern is CSA Dobrzyńskie Warzywa, where all 4 hectares are dedicated solely to food production. This farm also distinguishes itself in output, preparing 502 weekly deliveries for the 2024 season. Each delivery consists of a selection of seasonal crops tailored to household needs. Among the remaining farms, the cultivated areas dedicated to CSA production range from 0.2 hectares (CSA Zielona Rzodkiewka) to 0.3 hectares (CSA Smaczna Grządka and CSA Green Leaf). However, in all cases, the total farm area extends beyond the portion used for CSA cultivation.



Figure 1. Location of CSA producers in Poland.

Table 1. Size, land use and number of members for each CSA farm in 2024.

CSA Name	Total Farm Area (ha)	CSA Production Area (ha)	No CSA Members	Region	
CSA "Wojciechówka"	6	2	50	Masovia	
CSA "Green Leaf"	15	2.3	80	Great Poland	
CSA "Dobrzyńskie Warzywa" (eng. Dobrzynskie Vegetables)	4	4	502	Kujawsko- Pomorskie	
CSA "Zielona Rzodkiewka" (eng. Green Radish)	5	0.2	15	Masovia	
CSA "nad Bugiem" (eng. On the Bug River	4	0.5	15	Masovia	
CSA "Grądzkie Warzywa" (eng. Grądzkie's Vegetables)	2.9	1.3	33	Warmia and Mazury	
CSA "Farma Stary Jesion" (eng. Old Ash Farm)	36	2	18	West Pomerania	
CSA "Gut u Anki"	14	0.5	30	Kujawsko- Pomorskie	
CSA "Zielona Zagrody" (eng. Green Homesteads)	42	4	70	Great Poland	
CSA Marianka	6	1	120	Lodz	
CSA "Skosztuj To!" (eng. Taste It!)	27.5	5.2	170	Lower Silesia	
CSA "Smaczna Grządka" (eng. Tasty Bed)	1	0.3	50	Subcarpatia	
CSA "Ogrody Permakultury" (eng. Permaculture Gardens)	10	0.35	7	Lublin region	
TOTAL	173.4	23.05	1160		



Figure 2. Total farm area vs. CSA production area and number of CSA consumers.

For the 2024 season, CSA farms in Poland collectively provide food for approximately 1200 families. The largest CSA, Dobrzyńskie Warzywa, supplies weekly vegetable deliveries to 502 families, whereas the most minor groups, CSA Zielona Rzodkiewka and CSA nad Bugiem, serve around 15 families each. Compared to other European countries, the scale of CSA farming in Poland remains relatively modest. Poland currently has 13 CSA farms, whereas the Czech Republic has 23 [33] and France has over 2000 AMAP groups (Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne), where multiple farmers typically contribute to each group. However, interest in the CSA model in Poland is increasing. The previous census in 2014 [13] recorded only eight CSA groups serving approximately 700 individuals, indicating a 70% increase in the number of participants over the past decade.

The total land owned by the surveyed farms amounts to approximately 170 hectares, yet only a fraction is allocated to CSA food production. Interviews indicate that, on average, 0.5 to 0.8 hectares are required to supply 100 people. Operating a CSA farm typically necessitates the involvement of the entire family or, at minimum, the farmer's partner. Running such an enterprise single-handedly is challenging while hiring external labour presents financial and logistical difficulties. Moreover, finding employees with the necessary skills and a shared commitment to CSA values remains a significant challenge.

#### 3.2. Key Area 2: Diversity of Production

A common characteristic among all interviewed farmers, regardless of gender, is their extensive knowledge of crop planning. They strategically cultivate various species and varieties to ensure continuous yearly yields. The weekly CSA supply comprises produce harvested directly from the field, crops grown in tunnels, or processed products such as pickles, preserves, and juices.

Diversity is a fundamental feature of CSA group operations. At the Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences, crop planning and seasonal package composition are guided by established nutritional recommendations for adult vegetable and fruit consumption—75 kg and 50 kg per year, respectively. However, in practice, group members found these amounts relatively large. At this stage of the study, whether this perception stems from additional food purchases made by members or from generally low vegetable and fruit consumption in their daily diets remains unclear.

Other CSA farms assemble their weekly packages based on seasonal availability. For instance, CSA Grądzkie Warzywa guarantees its members a package containing at least six different vegetable types, with an average total weight of 4.5 kg per week, supplemented once a year with three jars of sauerkraut. Some farms diversify their offerings beyond vegetables. CSA Zielona Zagroda provides members with flour, bread, and oil, while CSA Gut u Anki offers dairy products such as milk and, occasionally, cottage cheese. CSA Farma Stary Jesion includes honey in its deliveries. Notably, CSA Zielona Zagroda stands out for its extensive selection of preserved products, offering over 30 varieties, including bottles of vinegar, pickles, and salads.

The diversity of cultivated crops varies significantly, with farms growing between 20 and 80 different species and varieties (Figure 3). This high level of crop diversity aligns with CSA farming practices observed internationally; for instance, in the United States, CSA farms typically cultivate 40 different crop types [14].

CSA	vegetables	fruits	eggs	milk	honey	herbs	bread	oils	pickles	poultry	edible flowers	wild superfood
Wojciechówka												
Green Leaf												
Dobrzyńskie Warzywa												
Zielona Rzodkiewka												
Nad Bugiem												
Warzywa Grądzkie												
Farma Stary Jesion												
Gut u Anki												
Zielone Zagrody												
Marianka				10 m								
Skosztuj to!												
Smaczna Grządka												
Ogrody Permakultury												

**Figure 3.** A variety of major product groups is provided in the CSA model in Poland. Green indicates the presence of a product on offer.

#### 3.3. Key Area 3: Cooperation and Social Aspect

A key aspect of CSA operations is the central role of the farmer in coordinating the group. While farmers acknowledge that the primary support the community provides is the direct purchase of food, organisational responsibilities largely fall on their shoulders.

Although CSA groups are often initiated by consumers, their involvement in ongoing logistical and operational tasks tends to be minimal.

A recurring theme in farmers' statements is scepticism regarding the potential for meaningful assistance from consumers. Many express frustration over the additional burden of organizing work for members who may be willing to contribute but require direction. Due to time constraints, farmers often prefer to manage essential tasks independently rather than delegate responsibilities such as farm labour, delivery coordination, or communication efforts.

An exception among the surveyed farms is CSA Nad Bugiem, where strong farmermember collaboration has been embedded from the outset. In this model, the farmer manages cultivation, product preparation, and delivery, while a CSA member is responsible for recruitment and a portion of the group's seasonal communication. While consumer initiative often plays a role in launching CSA groups, sustained internal communication about CSA's principles and objectives is crucial for ensuring long-term commitment. This becomes particularly important during periods of crisis, as a well-informed community is more likely to actively support local agriculture in times of need.

Another significant aspect of CSA participation is the strong environmental awareness shared by both farmers and consumers. The motivation to contribute to ecological sustainability is a common factor among CSA members [32]. All surveyed farms adhere to at least organic farming principles, implementing agricultural practices aligned with organic certification standards. In two cases (CSA Dobrzyńskie Warzywa and CSA Skosztuj To!), farmers have agreements with their groups that allow limited use of chemical or synthetic inputs only in cases where existing organic methods prove ineffective and there is a serious risk of crop failure. Of the 13 farms, 6 hold formal organic certification, while all employ additional regenerative practices to enhance soil quality, conserve water resources, and promote biodiversity. Notably, two farms emphasize their commitment to ecological stewardship in their names: Green Leaf Regenerative Farm and Permaculture Gardens.

#### 3.4. Key Area 3: Financial Aspects

Pricing is a critical aspect of the CSA model, as it encapsulates multiple fundamental principles of this food system. Establishing fair and transparent pricing requires farmers to openly communicate the costs associated with running their farms. This includes not only direct production expenses but also the valuation of their labour, which must be reflected in the final cost of weekly deliveries. Additionally, CSA pricing necessitates a systematic approach, involving meticulous record-keeping of expenses, time management, and financial planning, all of which must be effectively conveyed to consumers.

Discussing financial matters within the CSA framework—such as calculating actual production costs, valuing farm labour, assessing financial feasibility, and openly addressing economic needs and constraints—requires a broad set of competencies. These discussions are shaped by cultural, social, and communication factors, as well as substantive financial knowledge. Given these complexities, the surveyed CSA groups often overlook financial transparency. In most cases, farmers set prices unilaterally without direct input from consumers. The only exception is Marcin Wojtalik (CSA Nad Bugiem), who has expressed interest in introducing a participatory pricing model incorporating a bidding process [34–37]. Another outlier is the CSA initiative at Wrocław University of Life Sciences, where food prices are kept intentionally low due to the university's institutional structure and financial support.

These findings highlight the challenges of implementing participatory pricing mechanisms within the CSA model. Addressing these barriers may require further education and capacity-building efforts to enhance financial literacy and promote more inclusive pricing discussions within CSA communities.

There is a significant variation in the pricing of weekly deliveries in Polish CSA groups. The most economically favourable option is offered by CSA Skosztuj To!, operated by the Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences (Figure 4). The 32-week season costs PLN 1120, resulting in a per-delivery price of approximately PLN 35.





This lower price is possible because the food is produced at the university's research station, and the university authorities subsidise the initiative as part of the employee social benefits package.

For most CSA farms, the cost of a weekly package typically falls within the PLN 80–90 range (CSA Nad Bugiem, Green Leaf, CSA Marianka). To accommodate individual consumption patterns, some farmers offer smaller parcel options or allow members to collect their shares every other week to avoid surplus. Each delivery primarily consists of seasonal vegetables, including leafy greens and root crops. Fruits are frequently included, while eggs are supplied by six farms. Many farms also provide preserved foods, such as pickles, particularly at the end of the season. Meat is available from only one CSA farm (Green Leaf), while a few others offer additional products such as honey, oil, or cottage cheese. Except for CSA Gradzkie Warzywa, which operates year-round, all surveyed farms begin their CSA season in May and continue weekly deliveries for 24 to 32 weeks.

For most farms, CSA revenue constitutes more than 75% of the household income. In cases where additional earnings supplement the farm budget, they typically come from direct sales at farmers' markets or through food cooperatives. Three CSA farms (Marianka, Green Leaf, and Dobrzyńskie Warzywa) reported that 100% of their household income is derived from CSA activities.

## 4. Discussion

Over the past 50 years, experience with Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) worldwide has demonstrated its significant benefits for local communities, including consumers and food producers. The model ensures a stable market outlet for farmers

and reduces dependence on fluctuations in conventional agricultural markets [38,39]. Consumers, in turn, gain access to high-quality food while having opportunities to develop new skills in nutrition, cooking, and food production through interactions within CSA groups [39–41].

Beyond individual benefits, the CSA model has been recognised for its broader positive impact on communities. In many countries, CSA umbrella organizations actively engage in advocacy efforts to influence food policy, promoting CSA to achieve food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is "peoples' right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their food and agricultural systems" [42]. Additionally, CSA contributes to the resilience of agroecological systems by enhancing soil quality and protecting biodiversity [41–43].

This study of Polish farmers supplying CSA communities revealed their strong commitment, passion, and belief in the positive impact of the CSA model on their lives and work. The study identified 13 CSA farms serving 35 CSA groups across Poland, providing food to approximately 1200 families from 24 weeks to year-round production (52 weeks). The longest-running farm, Dobrzyńskie Warzywa, will begin its 11th season in 2025, while the youngest, CSA Smaczna Grządka, will be entering its third season. Compared to other European countries, the number of farmers engaged in CSA in Poland remains relatively modest. The neighbouring Czech Republic has 23 CSA farms [33], while France has over 2000. However, interest in the model is growing. The previous census published in 2014 [13] recorded only eight CSA groups serving an estimated 700 families. Over the past decade, this represents a 70% increase in CSA participation. Encouragingly, the CSA sector in Poland continues to expand. Social crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021) and the war in Ukraine (2022) appear to have had a positive influence on CSA participation. None of the interviewed farmers reported experiencing significant challenges or negative impacts on group growth during the 2020–2022 period. The sector's expansion is reflected in the fact that of the 13 currently active CSA farms, only 6 were in operation before 2020 (CSA Dobrzyńskie Warzywa, CSA Wojciechówka, CSA Zielone Zagrody (formerly Ekoluchowo), CSA Marianka, CSA Gut u Anki, and CSA Ogrody Permakultury). Additionally, two other CSAs (CSA Dobrodziej and CSA Słoneczna) were previously active but are no longer operating. The remaining six farms were established either during the pandemic or in the past two years. The youngest farm, CSA Smaczna Grządka, is entering its second season in 2024. During interviews, farmers expressed optimism about the growing interest in CSA, with several planning to expand and transition to full-time professional engagement in the model. In Poland, CSA groups are primarily established by professional farmers transitioning from conventional market-oriented agriculture to the CSA model. Unlike some other countries, where CSA groups may involve member-driven farming or the hiring of a farmer to cultivate crops, Polish CSA farms are owned and operated by farmers themselves. Among the surveyed farms, all farmers own the land they cultivate, with one exception (CSA Gradzkie Warzywa), where a portion of the land is leased for additional production.

A notable challenge among the surveyed farms is the limited involvement of CSA members in farm labour or community-building activities. Consumer support for farming primarily consists of adhering to CSA operational rules, sharing financial responsibility, and making advance payments for the season. Instances of consumer participation in farm work are rare. Every farmer interviewed highlighted the demanding and unpredictable nature of agricultural labour, particularly in light of increasing climate variability and extreme weather events. The seasonal workload is highly irregular, with peak labour demands being physically strenuous. As a result, organizing additional work for CSA members is often beyond the farmers' capacity.

The surveyed farmers largely acquired their CSA-specific crop planning and cultivation knowledge independently, primarily through online resources, observing CSA farms abroad (mainly in the United States, France, and the United Kingdom), and consulting older horticultural textbooks. Notably, none of the respondents utilized support from the Agricultural Advisory Center, citing concerns about the advisors' lack of expertise in CSA-specific and agroecological practices. Similarly, formal agricultural training programs at universities and vocational schools remain largely focused on intensive, conventional farming methods, with minimal emphasis on organic farming or direct-market approaches such as 'garden marketing'.

The final stage of the interviews explored the types of support farmers consider necessary for further development. Key takeaways from these discussions highlight the need to (1) enhance professional education—training farm advisors and incorporating short supply chain models into formal agricultural education; (2) strengthen knowledgesharing networks—fostering peer-to-peer education within the CSA community, particularly across the Visegrád region, given the cultural and economic similarities among Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic; (3) leverage farmers' agroecological expertise—facilitating the exchange of best practices among CSA farmers to further optimize sustainable food production. (4) It is worth continuing research work on this food access model. Particularly worthy of further investigation are the following issues: the reasons for the low involvement of members in group development, the relatively low (compared to neighbouring countries) interest among farmers and consumers in the CSA model, and the composition of weekly shares (market and nutritional value). These findings underscore the importance of institutional and community-driven efforts to support the continued growth and resilience of CSA farming in Poland. These findings highlight the need for greater institutional support, specialized training, and advisory services tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities of CSA farming in Poland.

## 5. Conclusions

The above observations highlight key areas for action to further expand the CSA model in Poland and support existing CSA farms. The following recommendations aim to strengthen the CSA movement by fostering collaboration, advocacy, accessibility, and value-sharing among stakeholders:

- Networking among existing CSA farmers—Facilitating knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning among CSA practitioners is crucial. The relatively small CSA community in Poland encompasses individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, ranging from academic researchers involved in CSA at the Wrocław University of Life Sciences to practitioners of regenerative agriculture (e.g., CSA Green Leaf) and operators of well-established farms with extensive consumer bases (CSA Dobrzyńskie Warzywa, CSA Marianka). Additionally, CSA Gradzkie Warzywa, the only year-round CSA farm, offers valuable insights into continuous production strategies. Strengthening connections among these farms would enable the exchange of best practices, improve resilience, and enhance collective problem-solving.
- Advocacy at local and national levels—Efforts should be directed toward recognizing the CSA model as a viable and beneficial component of a resilient food system. This involves leveraging existing research and practical case studies that document the advantages of CSA in fostering sustainable food networks [35–37,43]. Advocacy should be pursued at multiple levels, including local government policies, regional urban planning, and national food policy development.
- Expanding CSA as a tool for food accessibility and consumer education—CSA participation can play a vital role in shaping healthy food habits and ensuring access to

high-quality food for low-income populations. Incorporating CSA-based food distribution into municipal social welfare programs (e.g., through partnerships with local government agencies) could improve food security for vulnerable groups [34,36,38]. The existing CSA initiative at the Wrocław University of Life Sciences, which integrates food access with social benefits for university staff, presents a valuable model that could be adapted in other settings.

- Strengthening the shared values of CSA practitioners—The common identity and ethical foundations of CSA farming requires ongoing dialogue and reflection within the community. Most Polish CSA farmers acquired their knowledge from foreign sources, and awareness of initiatives such as the European Declaration for CSA remains limited. Additionally, there are few opportunities for structured discussions on fundamental questions regarding the role of farmers in society, the nature of food as a commodity, and the broader socio-economic implications of CSA. Establishing regular evaluation meetings at different levels—within individual CSA groups (e.g., seasonal reviews), among CSA practitioners (e.g., annual CSA meetings), and through informal gatherings at farms—could provide spaces for these critical conversations.
- Continuing research into the food access model in CSAs and other types of short supply chains.

Based on these findings, a key priority is establishing a formal umbrella organization to coordinate Polish CSA groups and facilitate structured communication with international CSA networks. Research on CSA network development in other European countries has demonstrated the importance of such organizations in fostering cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange [34,38,44]. At the national level, a CSA umbrella organization could represent the interests of CSA farmers in policy advocacy at local (municipal), regional (urban agglomerations), and national levels; engage with academic institutions to advance research on CSA farming methods, agroecology, and food sovereignty; strengthen partnerships with civil society organisations working on sustainable food systems and social inclusion.

CSA groups promote a specific form of community-based food production, influencing multiple interconnected systems, including social relations, the local economy, and environmental sustainability. How these systems evolve will determine whether we deepen the current food system crisis or transition toward a solidarity-based model that prioritises collective well-being and ecological resilience.

Establishing an umbrella organisation will require collaboration across multiple sectors of the broader food movement. However, initial steps toward this goal have already been taken, marking an important milestone in the continued development of CSA in Poland.

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