Community Supported Agriculture in Canada

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Introduction: Reporting Back on the Community Supported Agriculture in Canada Survey

In April 2016, our team of researchers from the Rural Planning and Development program at the University of Guelph surveyed farmers from across Canada who are involved in running Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations.

Community Supported Agriculture is an agricultural marketing innovation whereby a farmer or a group of farmers partner with individuals from the local area who make an investment in the farm in advance of a growing season and become members of the CSA. As members, they agree to share both the rewards and the risks of the farming operation for that season. Members receive a share of the harvest (usually weekly), which often consists of vegetables, but might also include fruit, eggs, meat or other products.

The purpose of the research was to explore the idea of Community Supported Agriculture as an agricultural innovation and to identify reasons for the adoption of CSA as a marketing strategy. The survey was online and involved a mix of closed and open-ended questions that asked farmers about:

- characteristics of their CSA and them personally as a farmer running the CSA;
- reasons why they chose to adopt a CSA model as opposed to and/or in addition to other marketing options;
- advantages and challenges of running a CSA;
- helpful supports that exist currently for CSAs, as well as additional supports that they believe would help them to be more successful in running their CSA;
- the idea of Community Supported Agriculture as a movement and their perceived role within such a movement; and
- their plans for the future with regards to their CSA.

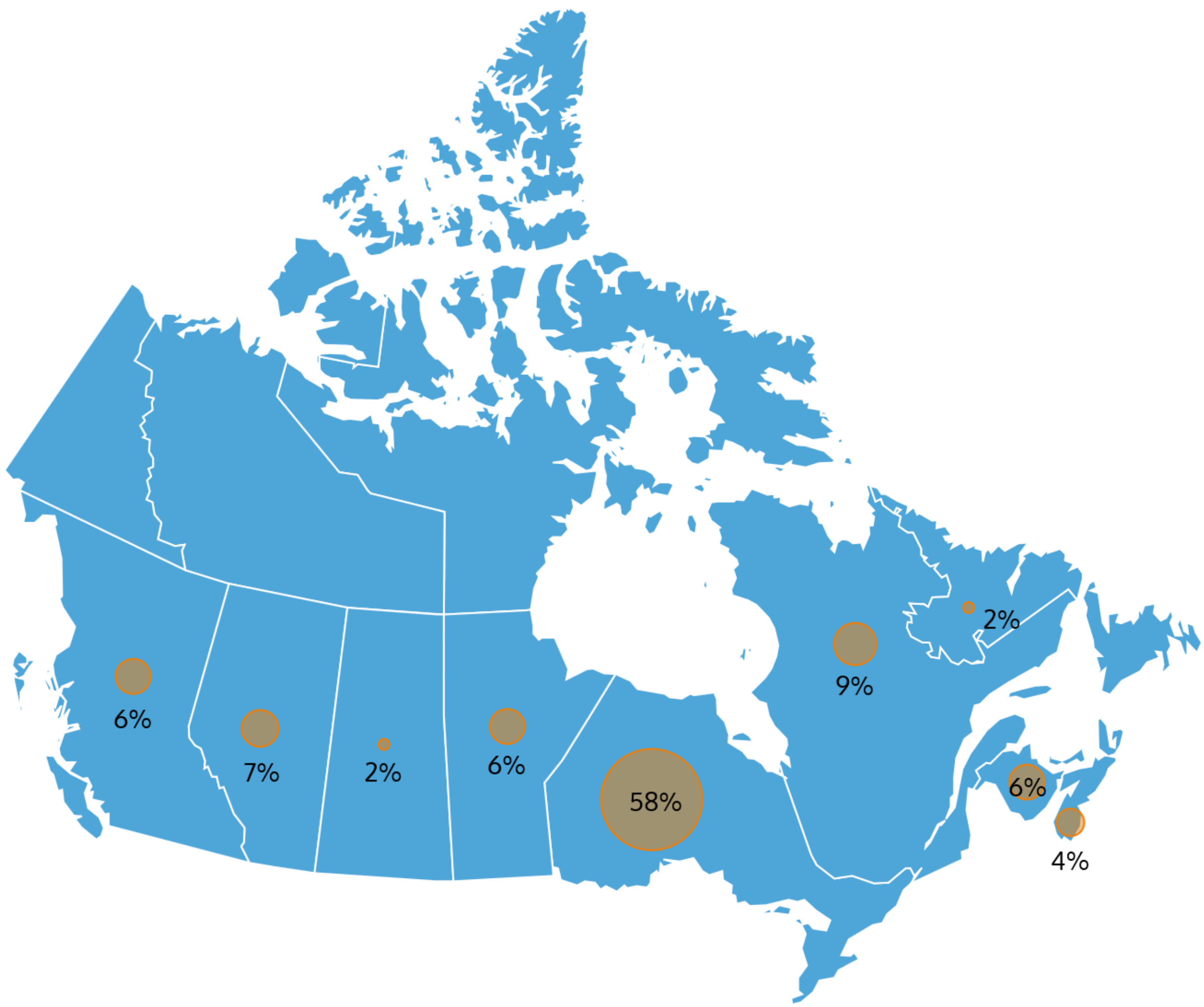
A total of 399 CSA farmers were identified using a broad internet search (provincial / territorial / regional CSA databases and Google searches for each Province and Territory). Out of those, 381 were contacted through e-mail, Facebook message or contact forms on websites. The remaining 18 were not able to be contacted because they did not have an e-mail address or contact form on their website or did not have a website or Facebook page at all. Out of the 381 farmers successfully contacted, a total of 100 farmers completed the full survey, providing a response rate of 26.2%.

We are grateful to those 100 farmers for taking time out of their very busy springtime schedules to share their thoughts, experiences and information with us. Here is what we heard.

Who did we hear from?

Geography

CSA farmers responded to the survey from nine Provinces across Canada. This sample of respondents is fairly representative of the initial larger sample that we contacted with the notable exception of a lower proportion of respondents from Quebec (9% compared to 15.5% in the original sample; most likely due to the fact that the survey was not translated into French) and British Columbia (6% compared to 14.5%); and a higher proportion from Ontario (58% compared to 44%).



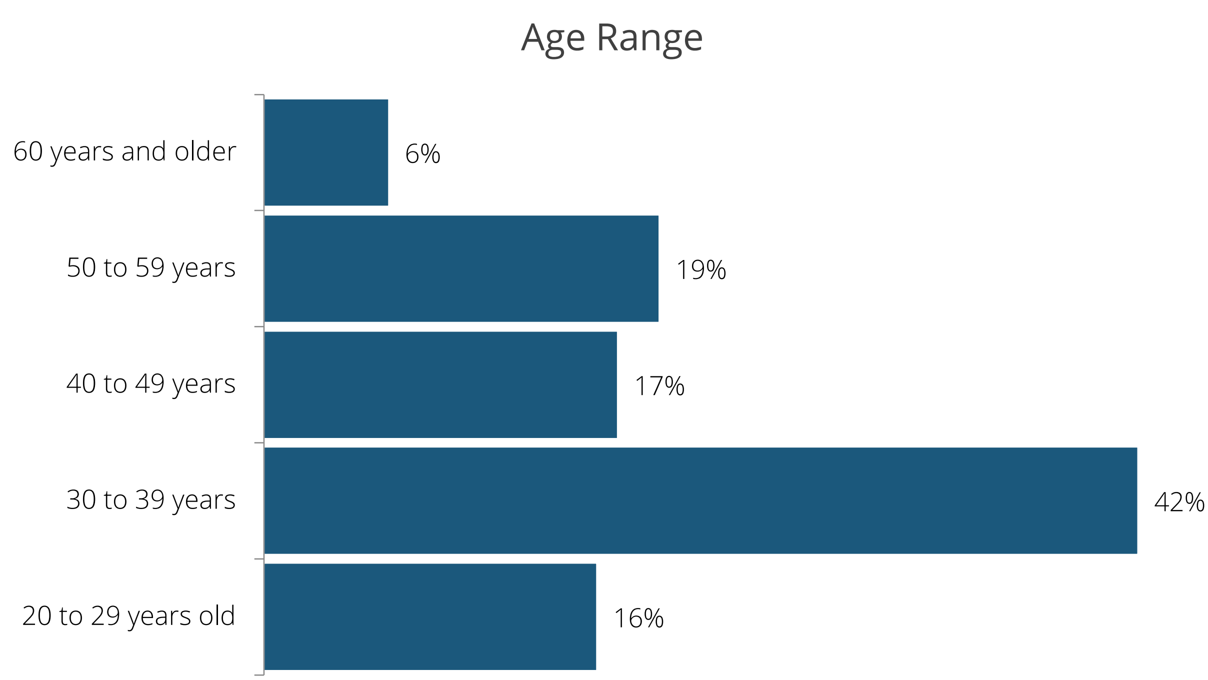
Gender

With reference to gender, 57% of respondents identified as female, 36% as male and one as transgendered. Two responded to the survey on behalf of multiple people so did not provide a single gender and four did not respond to the question.

It is worth noting that this number does not necessarily reflect the gender make-up among CSA operators overall because many of the farms are run by more than one person, but only one responded to the survey. So it is possible that more female respondents in a pair including only one female participated in the survey.

Age

The age of farmers we heard from is young compared to the typical agricultural population in Canada. 58% of respondents were under the age of 40. The 2011 Census of Agriculture shows that only 9.9% of all farms across Canada had the oldest farm operator under 40 years of age (Beaulieu, 2015).



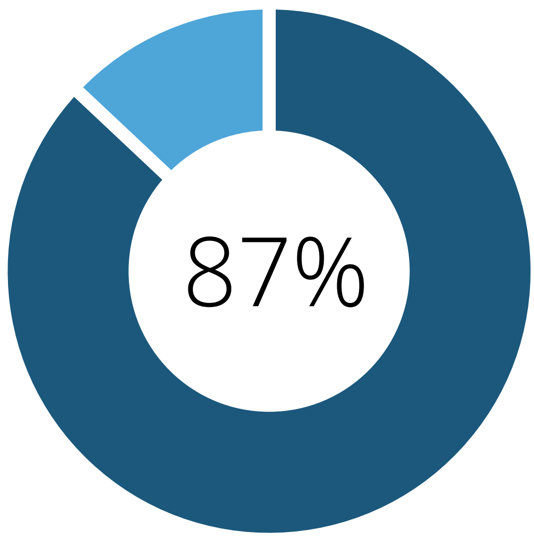
Years of Experience Running CSAs

A range of experience levels were represented among survey respondents, from two of the farmers who were offering a CSA for the first time in 2016 to one who had offered a CSA for the first time 31 years ago in 1985. The average years of experience per farmer was 5.86. That was 586 combined years of experience between all 100 people we heard from!

Level of Formal Education

The level of education among CSA farmers who responded to this survey was also higher overall than the national average. The CSA farmers reported 87% having completed a post-secondary education. The 2011 Census of Agriculture indicates 51.6% of all farm operators in Canada had a post-secondary education (Statistics Canada, 2016).

CSA Farmers Completed Post-secondary Education



Off-Farm Work

Off-farm work was reported by 45% of respondents while the remaining 55% worked entirely on the farm.

Off-Farm Work

Of those 45 farmers involved in off-farm work, 17 were involved in agriculture-related jobs, such as working for a seed-biodiversity NGO, an agricultural research station, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, a commercial grain farmer, a tomato greenhouse, a seed-cleaning plant; teaching biodynamic farming courses; and doing new farmer education.

Seventeen were in involved in non-agriculture related jobs, including holistic nutrition, hair styling, electrical engineering, retail, hospitality, nursing, supply teaching and landscaping.

Eight provided examples that were impossible to tell whether they were agricultural or not (e.g., consulting and teaching); two provided examples of their partner working off-farm (which is likely the case for many more as well); and two mentioned the work they do in raising children (again, which is likely a large role for many survey respondents, especially given the age demographics).

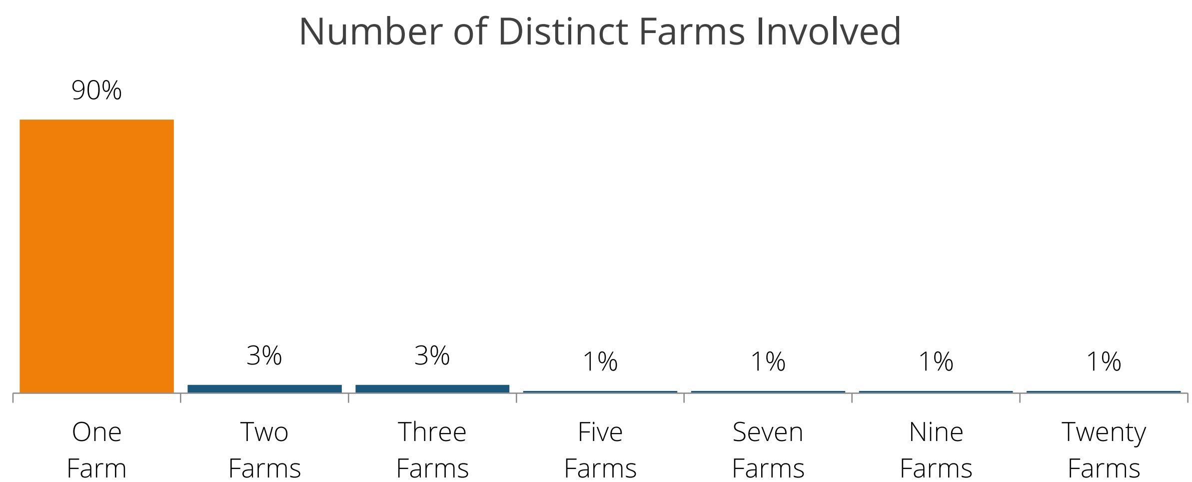
Farming Background

There was a range of historical backgrounds in agriculture among the people who responded to the survey. Thirty-seven percent had grown up on a farm while 35% had no family farming background. The remaining respondents had some degree of farming background in their family but had not necessarily grown up on a farm themselves. Analysis of this question was limited by an error in survey design, which resulted in respondents only being able to select one response rather than all that applied.

What do CSAs in Canada look like?

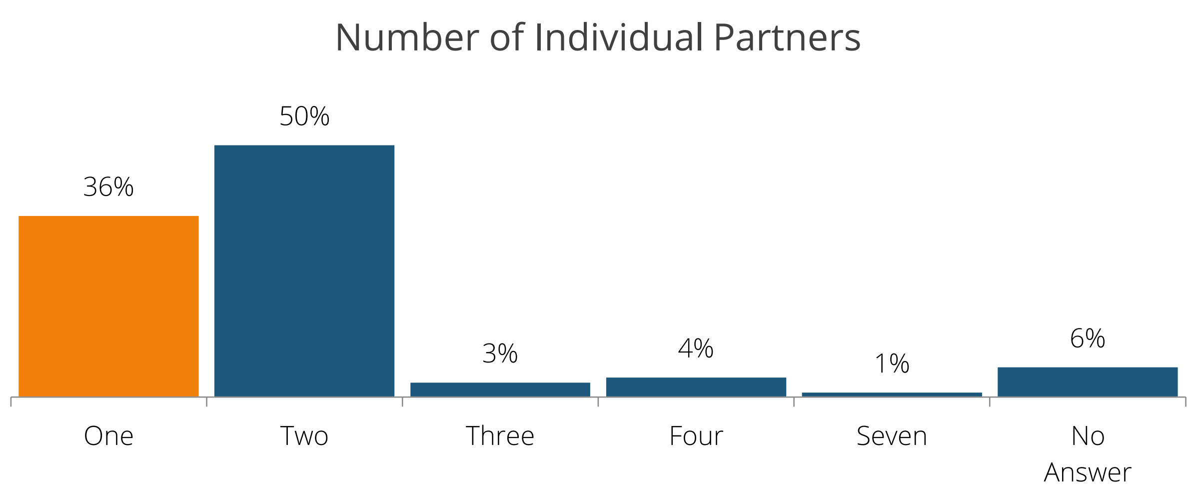
Number of Farms Involved

With respect to the number of farms involved in the CSA, 90% of the respondents reported being the only farm involved in the CSA (although some supplement when needed by purchasing from other farms). Ten CSAs reported running the CSA cooperatively with one or more farms.



Number of Farm Partners Involved

Thirty-six percent of CSA farmers were operating on their own, 50% of the respondents were operating the CSA with one other partner/co-owner, 3% with three others, 4% with four others and 1% with seven others.



Labour

On average, the CSAs reported a total of 5.6 people working on the CSA. This included partners/owners, full-time employees and part-time employees. A few people indicated that the labour was not always paid, and included interns.

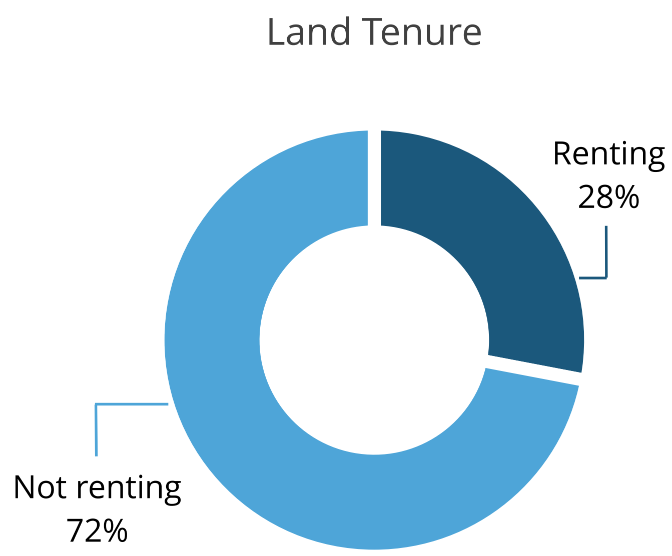
Land Under Production

Farmers provided the number of acres (or hectares, which were converted into acres) that were under production in total and for the CSA specifically. On average, 25.9 acres were under production in total, with the maximum total being 1,200 acres and the minimum being 0.25 acres. For the CSA specifically, an average of 3.17 acres were under production, with the maximum under production for the CSA being 25 acres and the minimum being 0.05 acres.

We were able to calculate that on average 0.05 acres was used to produce food for a single member household.

Land Tenure

Twenty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they were renting land for their CSA and 72% were not. Of those renting land, 18 (out of 28) were renting 100% of their land used for the CSA. Of those respondents renting land, an average of 81% of the total land used for the CSA was rented.

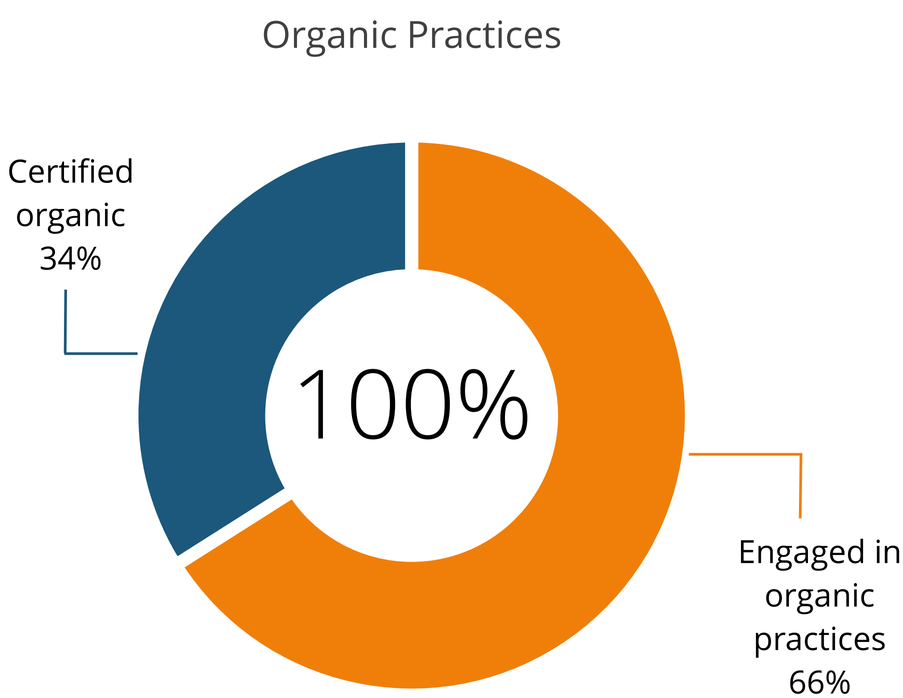


Of the 99 farmers who responded to the full series of questions on land tenure, an average of 22% of the total land in production for their CSAs was rented and 78% was owned or accessed through an alternative arrangement at no cost.

Organic Certification

With respect to organic certification, 34% of farms were certified organic. Of those 66% that were not certified organic, all of them engaged in at least one of the following organic practices:

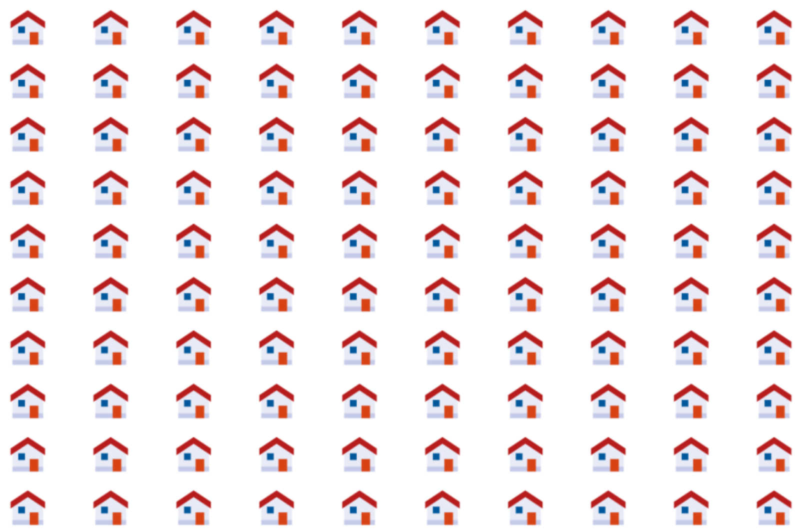
- 96.97% incorporated compost, non-composted plant matter and manure into soil to promote fertility and biological activity;
- 90.91% followed a multi-year crop rotation plan;
- 89.39% did not use genetically engineered products or materials;
- 84.85% did not use synthetic fungicide or pesticide products intentionally using nanotechnology;
- 74.24% minimized tillage;
- and 22.73% used other methods including: cover cropping, purchasing organic seed whenever possible, insect netting, biodynamic farming (ie. keeping the fertility cycle contained, not bringing in outside manures, feeding the animals as much as possible from fodder grown on the farm), companion planting, heavy mulching, intercropping, starting with non-conventional older genetics, and growing rows of pollinator habitat; and in the case of one beef producer, raising cattle without grains, hormones, antibiotics and with minimal health products.



Member Households

The average number of CSA member (shareholder) households was 100, with two being the smallest number reported (although this was in the case of a hybrid model where alternative arrangements other than share purchase were made with additional households) and 657 being the largest. This number includes both full and half shareholders (when a difference was provided), so is representative of the total number of individual member households rather than the number of full shares.

Average Number of Shareholder Households



One Hundred

Cost of Shares

It was not possible to derive an average share price for all of the CSAs surveyed due to the range of share options mentioned (e.g., some offer three sizes of shares, others have a sliding scale and others full and half shares). There need to be greater parameters placed on this question in future surveys.

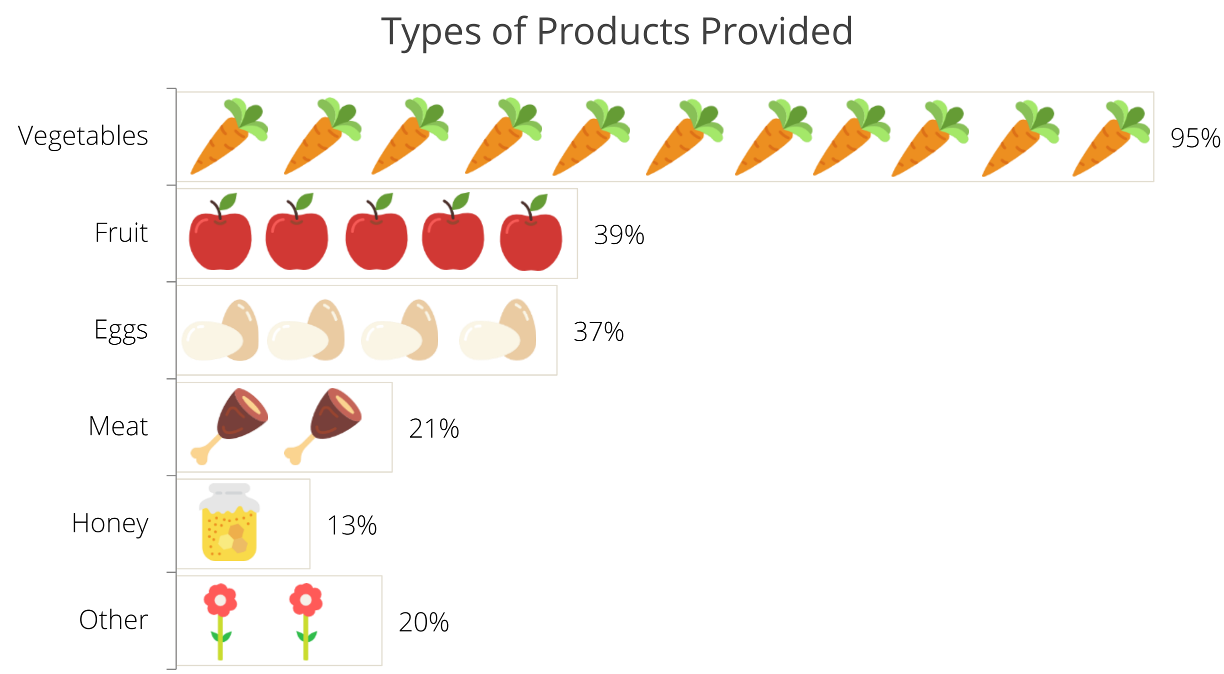
Out of all the responses, a single share price was provided or was easy to derive for 74 respondents. Of those 74, there were two major outliers as far as price is concerned for a year-long grain CSA and a meat CSA. These two were excluded from the calculations. Of the others, the average share price was $476.

Taking this further, we were able to calculate an average weekly share price for 71 respondents. The average weekly share price was $26, with the maximum being $52 per week and the minimum being $11. These numbers need to be clarified further with the average number of people each share feeds.

Out of all responses, we were able to derive the average weekly share price *per person* for 67 respondents. The average weekly share price was $9.24 per person; the maximum was $17.31 per person; and the minimum was $5.00 per person.

Types of Products Provided

Vegetables constituted all or part of the share for 95% of CSAs surveyed. A combination of product types (vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs, honey and/or others) were provided by 59% of CSAs, 37% provided vegetables only, 3% were meat only CSAs, and 1% was a CSA focused on certified organic grain and whole grain flour. Below is a chart displaying the percentage of farms that provided each type of product (either alone or in combination). The percentages do not add up to 100 because many CSAs offer more than one type of product.



Some of the other products provided by farms included: herbs, cut flowers, maple syrup, oil, tree nuts, jam, jelly, bread, frozen vegetables, pickles, mushrooms, flour and sprouts.

Eight respondents specified that certain products (eggs, meat, etc.) are offered at additional cost in addition to the regular vegetable or fruit and vegetable share. It is likely that that is the case for many more but this was not specified in the response. Those products have still been included in the calculations above.

Distribution

Farmers indicated how members receive their weekly share. On-farm pick up is offered by 77% of CSAs, 71% deliver to intermediate pick-up locations, 31% deliver directly to members' homes, and 11% deliver to other places (most notably the farmers' market). On average, CSAs provide two different options for how CSA shares are distributed, with some providing more options and others just one option.

Engagement with Members

In addition to providing CSA members with produce, farmers engage with their members in a variety of other ways:

- 93% provide members with regular e-mails or brochures regarding the farm, including recipes;
- 72% invite them to farm visits (e.g., harvest celebrations, meals);
- 17% host optional on-farm work days/bees;
- 2% require members to commit to a specific amount of on-farm work; and,
- 2% involve members voluntarily in the administration and organization of the CSA.
- Another way that CSAs engage with their members is through social media (Facebook, blog posts).

Why do farmers choose to start a CSA?

Initial Motivation

Farmers shared the level of importance on a scale of 1 to 5, of various motivations for choosing to start a CSA.

The top five motivations were:

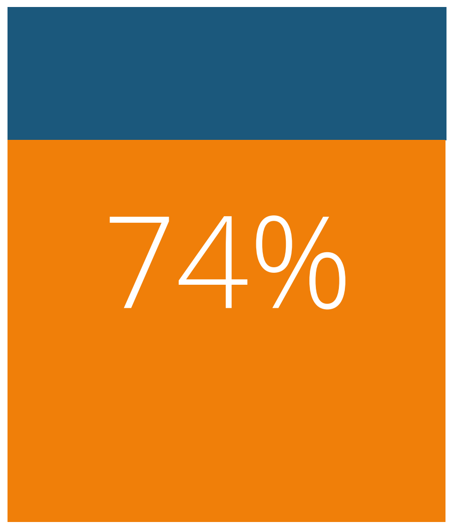
1. Providing higher quality food to consumers;
2. Financial viability of the farm;
3. Quality of life/enjoyment of life;
4. Educating customers about the reality of food production; and,
5. Localization of food.

Motivation	Average Level of Importance (out of 5)
Providing higher quality food to consumers	4.24
Financial viability of the farm	3.98
Quality of life/enjoyment of life	3.96
Educating customers about the reality of food production	3.88
Localization of food	3.88
Greater economic stability	3.87
Having a closer relationship to your customers	3.85
Building community	3.77
Being able to farm using environmental best management practices	3.75
Source of working capital	3.69
Reducing food miles	3.62
Reduce risk of failure	3.47
Survival of the farm	3.43
Social justice	3.38
Better prices	3.27

Importance of Hearing Success Stories of Other CSAs

Hearing about the success of other farms running CSAs played a role in the decision to start a CSA for 74% of respondents.

Hearing about Success of Others Played a Role



Farmers shared how they had heard about other farmers' successes and also ranked how important each source of sharing was in shaping their decision to start a CSA. The most common way they had heard about successes was by word-of-mouth from farmers who they knew (36%) and this was also the most important in shaping farmers' decision to start a CSA. The second most common and important way was by word-of-mouth at conferences or meetings (32%). Other ways that farmers heard about other farmers' successes, although less commonly and of lower stated importance were:

- by reading articles or news stories online (30%);
- by reading articles or news stories in hard copy (23%);
- by viewing films or videos (18%);
- from a representative of a farm association (12%);
- from a government representative (8%); and,
- other, including while working on other farms/CSAs and from being a CSA member themselves and two farmers in Québec mentioned that they had heard from the organization Èquiterre.

How economically viable is the CSA model?

Cost of Inputs

Farmers surveyed reported that their share prices were sufficient to cover the cost of inputs in 93% of cases; 6% reported that share prices did not cover costs; and one person did not respond to the question.

Covering Wages of Hired Staff

In 43% of cases share prices were sufficient to pay hired staff an adequate wage; 55% reported that they were not; and two people did not answer the question.

Inputs, Hired Labour and Paying One's Own Labour

Share prices were sufficient to pay input costs, hired labour and pay owners and co-operators a decent wage in 30% of cases; for the remaining 63%, they were not; and six people did not answer the question.

Some common themes gleaned from the explanations provided were that interns and apprentices make up an important labour source for many farms; capital and other start-up costs in the early years make the CSA less profitable and efficiencies gained with experience increase the financial viability of the CSA over time; and it is important to factor in non-economic benefits (e.g., having access to high quality food and being engaged in an operation that you feel passionate about) when calculating the value of running a CSA.

Putting it all Together

Of those 23 who responded positively to being able to cover the costs related to all three of the above questions (i.e. inputs, adequate wages for hired labour and one's own labour), here are some of the explanations they provided:

> *"I hope for a bit more improvements to increase my 'salary' a little, but we have reached a sustainable level of income on Year 2 of the CSA (Year 3 of the business). Year 1 of the CSA was break even."*

"Why would you run a business and not make a decent profit for yourself? One point for us is to have a profitable family farm, to provide us with a decent life style while offering our produce to customers at a decent price."

From the group who felt they could pay for inputs, adequate wages for hired labour, but could not afford to pay themselves an adequate wage, here are a few of the things we heard:

"We did not make an adequate wage for the work we do. No farmer does. I did the math and we were paid about $3.00 per hour."

"North America has a cheap food policy and it is very hard to get paid what the vegetables we grow are worth. Stores use food as a loss leader and we can't compete with that."

"Talking about hired help and wages is misleading. I don't hire anyone, but take on apprentices. This is equally a learning and work experience. They are getting a free education in exchange for working on the land. The whole apprentice model needs to be understood from an agricultural perspective, since they live on the farm it is quite different than interns or apprentices in other vocations."

"It was our first year and we had a lot of extra cost we believe we won't have in the next years (equipment investment, etc.). Also, we started with less subscriptions than our goal, which means less income. I guess that around 2017, when we will be done with major investment and we will be more efficient, so I guess we will need less labour. We should be able to get some money for us soon."

"Everyone gets paid but us! However, we eat well. ;-)"

"Our farm is in a growing phase and we don't yet make a living wage after all cash-flow is considered. We are succeeding, but actual living wage plus profitability remains a future goal!"

Of the group who could cover the costs of inputs and pay themselves an adequate wage, but not pay hired staff a sufficient wage, here is what we heard:

"We didn't hire any labour but our farm (including the CSA) makes up the whole livelihood of the 2 owners."

"If I include all of the benefits I gain from this (food for myself, pleasure in doing exactly the work I want to) I am adequately compensated. We have paid part time staff from the CSA in the past, last season we had a full summer woofer. If I calculated an hourly wage from the work it would be quite low."

"Income was achieved by limiting hired labour and having owners do most everything involved with [the] CSA."

"Enough for everything if some labour are interns receiving room/board/stipend rather than hourly wage or salary."

Of the group, who could pay for inputs but not adequate wages for operators/owners or hired staff, here is what we heard:

"My husband and I don't pay ourselves. We live on our pensions and pay the workers but mostly rely on interns and WWOOFers."

"Scaling the CSA is important. As the scale grows hopefully the inefficiencies decrease to make it more profitable."

"We do not have hired labour and since we are still a relatively new farm we don't take a salary and reinvest all of our profits back in the farm. In that sense we do make enough money to cover all our costs and are able to keep purchasing equipment that will allow us to grow more and or be more efficient."

"It is a supplement to our spring start-up. We are also in an area where CSAs are a new and foreign concept, therefore we have tried to keep our share prices low to educate the local people."

"I'm close to covering costs, however still dependent on intern labour (underpaid, in my opinion), as well as making large capital purchases each year. I don't expect to be a profitable farm for a few more years."

"Last year was a bad year; we took a serious loss. This would have been true had all our sales been through farmers' markets. Some of this was weather; some was our errors; some (perhaps half?) was low crew productivity."

"We paid ourselves $4.25 hr for 40 hr week - even though some weeks ran into 60 hrs. This however enables us to save for the winter/spring."

"Important to consider the value to me of having high quality food year round for my family and to share with friends."

Of the group who answered negatively to all of the questions, here is some of what we heard:

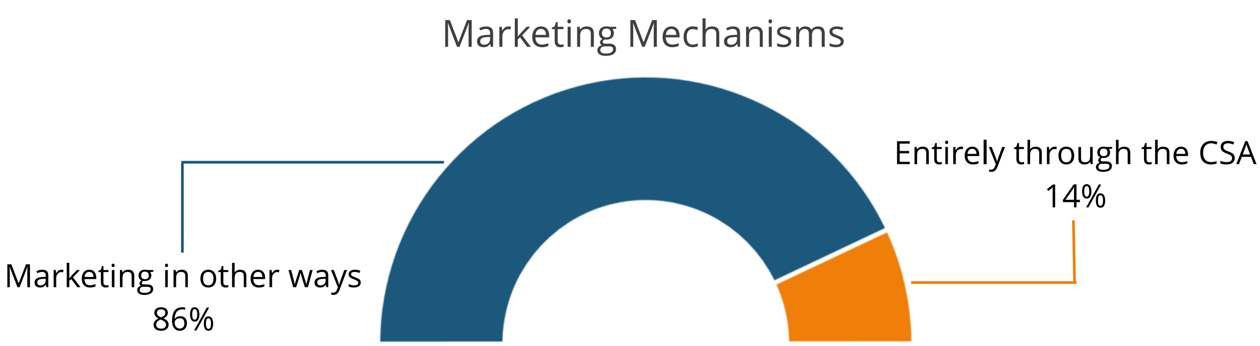
"Last year was our second year. Anticipating better financial outcomes in current and future years now that initial capital costs are mostly in place and systems are set."

"If we had a higher number of CSA members, perhaps we could achieve this goal. We calculated our fees mainly based on the cost we can get per vegetable, and the "going rate" of CSAs in our area. Still, the true cost of producing our food is not yet what people are willing to pay."

How do CSAs compare to other marketing mechanisms?

Other Ways Farmers Market

Of farmers surveyed, 86% had marketed their products in other ways in addition to the CSA in the last year and 14% had marketed their products entirely through the CSA.



Due to an error in survey design not all respondents were provided with a follow-up question asking about the other types of marketing mechanisms they had used. Of the 84 who responded after this question was corrected or to a follow-up e-mail, an average of 3.5 marketing mechanisms was used per farmer. The most popular in addition to the CSA were farmers' market (63.1%), farm gate stand (46.4%) and direct to restaurants (35.7%).

Marketing Mechanisms	Number	%
Farmers' markets	53	63.1
Farm-gate sales/stands/kiosks	39	46.4
Selling directly to restaurants	30	35.7
Selling directly to grocery stores	21	25.0
Creating value-added products with your produce and marketing them yourself	20	23.8
Selling to fresh produce wholesalers specializing in local food	17	20.2
U-pick	10	11.9
Selling to other fresh-produce wholesalers not specifically focused on local produce	5	6.0
Other	12	14.3

Other marketing strategies included: online sales, special on-farm days, direct to a university, direct to a retail butcher shop, direct to a bakery, direct to a distillery and at a garlic festival.

Comparison between CSA & Other Marketing Mechanisms

Half of all respondents thought their CSA was better than other marketing mechanisms they had tried in the past (at least to some degree), although five of those qualified their response with the fact that it is also more complicated and two were undecided whether it was better or about equal so included both responses. Eighteen thought it was just more complicated; 17 thought it was about equal; and one thought it was about equal and also more complicated. The remaining 14 did not provide a valid response, due to survey error in the case of five responses (where they were only able to select one response and so only selected the comment response); no response from five; and the fact that four had only run a CSA so had no point of comparison.

Comparison with Other Marketing Mechanisms	Number/%
Better	43
More complicated	18
About equal	17
Better but also more complicated	5
Have only run a CSA	4
Both better and about equal (or somewhere in between)	2
Could not decipher a response based on comment (survey error)	5
About equal and more complicated	1
No response	5

Here are a few specific responses we heard that demonstrate the range of comparisons between CSAs and other marketing mechanisms.

"The CSA is an extremely labour and time intensive vocation. I do it simply for my passion to connect people with agriculture. It is much simpler to just sell raw product (crops and cattle) to the grain elevator and the auction market."

"Better in the sense that in our area we don't have a very strong history with farmers markets, so people are not used to buying vegetables there. With CSAs its easier to get people on board and easier to get the customers to eat the majority of their vegetables from a local producer instead of picking up a few treats from the farmers market."

“The amount of e-mail in setting up and running our CSA is enormous. Thus, it requires a great deal more administrative time than our other outlets: stores, restaurants, and Farmers' Market. On the positive side, there is little waste and our members are great to deal with.”

“The CSA is always an evolving part of our business which makes it more demanding then other marketing that follows more traditional lines.”

“Tried farmers market first, but in our area there is no market busy enough. From what I am learning, that is the case nearly everywhere, even in large metro centres. CSA is the only way to reach enough 'dinner tables' consistently week after week. Farmers markets, the customer's schedule has to consistently match up with yours (the market time) on a window of only 5-6 hrs a week. Doesn't work with busy people and busy farmers. The time for setup, travel and marketing at Farmers market is just too great, and very hard to manage the risk of a slow market day (if you are lucky enough to get busy ones at all!).”

“It is as good as farmers market for us (they complement each other), but way better than any other mechanisms we tried.”

“We have an online market, and go to farmers markets. I find that small farmers markets do not pay for the time it takes to go. Our online market has potential, but still requires people to change their shopping habits, it lacks the personal connection of the CSA. I suspect a market stall on the farm could be very good if we had a high traffic location.

What are the greatest advantages of running a CSA?

Advantages

Farmers shared the greatest advantages of running a CSA in their experience. The most common themes (beginning with most frequently mentioned) were:

1. A guaranteed and predictable source of income (34 respondents):

   "We know all our produce is sold, before any seeds are even in the ground."

2. Support from members and relationship and/or community building (32 respondents):

   "Having a strong connection with the consumers who understand the variability of the basket content. ... Having a community who appreciate our work and push us to always do better."

3. Greater ease of production planning (i.e. easier to plan crop volume and type, knowing exactly how much to plant, resulting in less waste) (28 responses):

   "Vegetables you produce are already sold, which helps with production logistics."

4. Having early income in spring to cover labour costs and capital for investments (such as seeds, equipment and supplies) (24 responses):

   "Investment at the beginning of the season when expenses are the highest."

5. Efficiency (i.e. less time and energy wasted being able to sell right on the farm; simplicity of harvest and distribution processes) (10 responses):

   "Opportunity to sell a lot of produce really fast; in 3 hours we can sell 4000 lbs. of fresh veggies directly to the customer! That includes the time from when the truck leaves until when the truck comes back."

6. Greater control (i.e. the ability to make own decisions, set one's schedule and prices, follow one's own ethics) (6 responses):

   "Greater control. Harvest at optimum time for the crop, fine-tune the amount grown, flexibility to sell what is best each season as it comes into maturity with no pre-existing commitments to a timeline or particular crop."

7. Marketing in the off-season (6 responses):

> *"Selling everything ahead of time is the biggest advantage. Not because we necessarily need the money in the spring but just so all our marketing happens in the shoulder seasons."*

8. Consumer education (i.e. about modern agriculture, the realities of growing food, teaching kids where food comes from, eating in season); which in turn, helps to change eating habits and strengthen commitment (6 responses):

> *"Allows farmers to educate consumers about food, food security, and food politics."*

9. Being able to grow a diversity of crops (4 responses):

> *"Direct marketing allows me to educate customers about unique and hard to find vegetables that I want to grow - they are then enthusiastic about consuming these vegetables."*

10. Providing quality food to members (3 responses):

> *"Having more time to produce the vegetables and get them to final consumer in the freshest possible state."*

What are the biggest challenges of running a CSA?

Challenges

Farmers also shared the biggest challenges that they face in running a CSA. The most common themes (beginning with most frequently mentioned) were:

1. Production management (ie. ensuring sufficient variety and volume; crop rotation, planting and harvest projections; stress of delivering quality and quantity each week; trying to meet varying customer tastes; 45 responses):

   "Try[ing] to keep everyone happy: as many people want more kale in the basket as want less kale! We have to find the happy medium that keeps our members happy but also allows us to run a business that is lucrative."

2. Administration (ie. time and complexity; and balancing administration with production; 21 responses):

   "Much, much, much more work than marketing from the farm gate or farmer's market. Insane amount of marketing, correspondence, spreadsheets, member database, online sign-ups, etc. It's nuts, and I would never do it if I didn't need the money up front."

3. Marketing (member retention & recruitment; 16 responses):

   "Maintaining a loyal CSA base! We seem to have 20-30 customers come back each year, but the remaining shares are always changing."

4. Member education (ie. time spent educating members about seasonal eating, eating different varieties, eating the whole animal, viability of farming, what a CSA is; 14 responses):

   "Explaining to people what the hell a 'CSA' even is... [M]ost people don't get it. Even the smart ones. They just want their meat."

5. Finances (ie. low prices, cost of labour and challenges with cash flow; 9 responses):

   "Lack of viable labour and the ability to pay ourselves, and our workers, adequately."
   "Getting customers to pay early enough to allow you the working capital you need in the spring."

6. Weather & climate change (7 responses):

   "The weather is a huge factor with the crops."

7. Distribution challenges (6 responses):

> *"Dealing with people going on vacations/ getting members to return the reusable shopping bags each week in exchange for full bags/ having different pick-up days/ CSA share sizes leads to variations in what people receive depending on the day/share size and makes you need to send out many many many more emails to smaller groups within the CSA rather than just one mass email each week."*

8. Crop failures (5 responses):

> *"Our CSA doesn't completely forgive crop failures. So if we lose stuff we're buying it in from other farms. So you don't wanna have a lot of that cutting into your bottom line."*

9. Time constraints and trying to find work life-balance (4 responses):

> *"Constant work - especially our extended season- from early March until late November we are going. We have really had to learn how to take care of ourselves, and manage problems as they arise. It also gets redundant, and we would like to have other activities on the farm (livestock and fruit) but there is little time to invest in long-term projects."*

10. Having to be a jack of all trades (3 responses):

> *"Needing to be good at so many things: not just being good at growing food, but marketing, finance, advertising, etc."*

Policy Advocacy

Involvement in policy advocacy that is relevant to their CSA or CSAs more broadly was reported by 24% of respondents. Specific policy changes that they are advocating for include:

- Abolishing fees for organic certification/public support for certification fees;
- Augmenting the number of animals organic producers can have;
- By-law and zoning changes in nearby cities that they deliver to;
- Participating in studies (e.g., ours, health region);
- Banning neonics;
- Better support for local food systems regionally;
- A moratorium on GM alfalfa;
- Creation of a national food policy;
- Ease of government red tape;
- Increased government support to small scale and local agriculture (e.g., year-round sustainability; access to capital for local food producers);
- Local food retention through value-added products;
- New farmer issues;
- Creating a national food policy;
- Local protection of small acreages of agricultural land within BC's Agricultural Land Reserve for future use by new and/or prospective young farmers;

- Promoting buying local to public and institutions;
- Revisions to supply management to enable a growth path for new farmers;
- Ensure health/safety regulations are not inadvertently damaging to small-scale producers (i.e. "getting sideswiped" with regulations aimed at large enterprises);
- Training for small farmers (ie. apprenticeships, rather than agricultural degrees);
- Changing quota for small chicken and laying hen farmers; and,
- Protecting agricultural land from financial investors.

What kinds of supports are important for CSA farmers?

Most Important Supports

Farmers were asked to rate the level of importance of various types of supports in helping them to run their CSA on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all important" to 5 being "extremely important."

The most important type of support when taking an average of the rankings was information on agricultural technologies, followed by emotional support, information on business management, advertising and marketing support and financial support such as loans, grants and gifts.

Types of Support	1 Not at all important	2 Slightly important	3 Moderately important	4 Very important	5 Extremely important	Average Value
Information on agricultural techniques	6	7	17	40	28	3.79
Emotional support	6	14	21	29	28	3.60
Information on business management	7	6	27	42	15	3.54
Advertising and marketing support	9	12	24	36	18	3.42
Financial support (loans, grants, gifts)	26	12	13	24	24	3.08

Sources of Support

In a related question, farmers identified which of the above types of support were important to them and then shared who had been the most important source of each type of support (note the percentages below are based on those respondents who identified each type of support as important, not all respondents):

- Information on agricultural technologies (88/100 identified this as important): By those 88 respondents, farm organizations were identified as being the most important source of information on agricultural technologies (35.2%), followed closely by other CSAs (30.7%). Government programs and services ranked particularly low (4.5%).
- Emotional support (85/100): Farmers identified family (60.0%), friends (17.6%) and CSA members (11.7%) as the most important source of emotional support.
- Advertising and marketing support (78/100): Farmers identified family members (21.8%), farm organizations (20.5%), friends (19.2%) and CSA members (16.7%) as the most important sources of advertising and marketing support.
- Information on business management (76/100): Farmers identified farm organizations (27.6%), government programs and services (21.1%), family members (18.4%) and other CSAs (17.1%) as the most important sources for information on business management.
- Financial support (74/100): Family members were the most important source of financial support (44.6%); followed by government programs and services (27.0%) and CSA members (23.0%).

Other Types of Supports that CSAs Could Use

Farmers shared their thoughts on additional supports that would be helpful for them in running their CSA. The main themes that came up were:

- financial support in the form of government grants (labour and start-up), access to loans, student loan forgiveness, reduction in Federal income taxes;
- marketing support from the government and a formal regional CSA network;
- mentorship programs for young farmers and other labour solutions; and
- production information from other CSAs (what's worked and what hasn't; what other CSAs grow) and from extension agents who know about small-scale mixed farming.
- Some additional suggestions that were not as commonly mentioned were:
    - better Canadian seed producers;
    - access to better scaled tools and supplies;
    - crop insurance for small mixed farms;
    - ease of government red tape; and
    - information about margins/profits/capital and statistics about customer retention from other CSAs.

Here are some specific and creative suggestions that were made:

"CSA newsletter maker provided by an organization (ACORN in our case). This should be in a nice format, personalizable, bilingual ... and easy to pick from different recipes and veg info provided."

"It often feels like we are reinventing the wheel on our farm, I wonder if there could be some sort of formal network of CSA farmers, similar to other industry organizations. I look at the types of support other types of farming receive, they often have associations that work to

promote their members interests. In our case, this is still a new idea, and promoting it as a normal, easy way to feed yourself seems to be the most important thing. I'm sure less than .1% of the population feed themselves this way, and we need that to change if this is going to grow as a business model."

"A public service ad campaign run by the government to explain on TV to regular folks what a CSA is, why knowing your farmer is a good idea, and how everyone benefits from local agriculture."

"Much more info needed on the way that digital technologies can help CSAs."

"Some sort of certification of the term CSA with a percentage of what you are allowed to resell." (in response to competition from a local re-sale service delivery initiative)

"Our CSA relies mostly on word of mouth. It would be very helpful if there were an attractive up-to-date 'go-to' online source for all local CSAs."

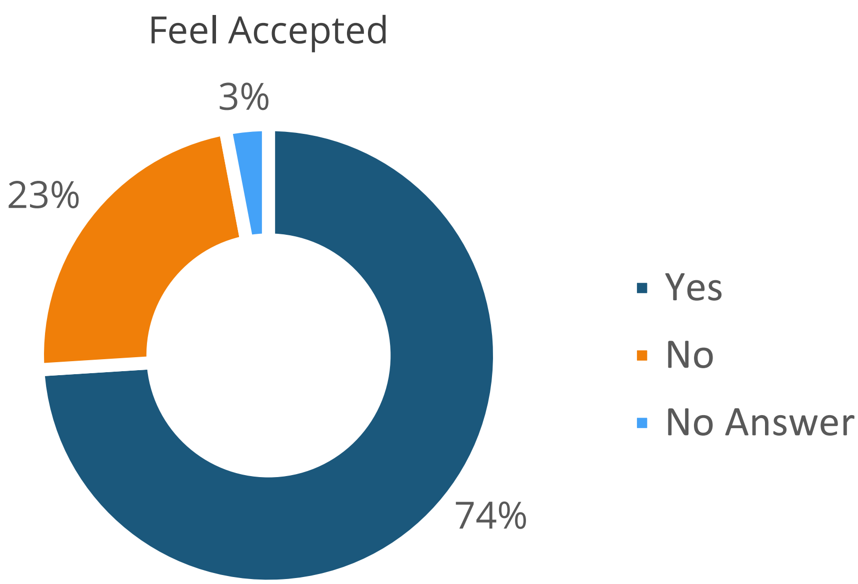
Engagement with Other CSA Operators

Farmers shared how they engage with other CSA operators and how frequently:

- 87% have informal contact with other CSA farmers (20% at least once per week; and 18% at least once per month)
- 80% have contact with CSA farmers at conferences (14% once every few months; 62% less frequently than that)
- 69% have contact with CSA farmers across their Province (24% at least once per month; 19% once every few months; 26% less frequently)
- 59% of farmers are involved in a formal CSA farmer network (25% at least once per month, 14% once every few months and 20% less frequently)
- 47% have contact with CSA farmers in other Provinces (and this contact is very infrequent).

Wider-Support of the Farming Community

When asked whether they feel well-accepted by other farmers in the region, who are not operating CSAs, 74% of farmers said yes, 23% said no and 3% did not answer the question.



For those who reported a lack of acceptance, ways in which it is expressed included:

- a general fear/dislike of organic farming;
- a lack of faith in their capabilities;
- not even really noticed or shown a lack of interest;
- calling what they're doing "gardening" or "bushel farming";
- disregarded as a non-quota farm;
- looking down upon for not farming on a large scale; and
- not taken seriously.

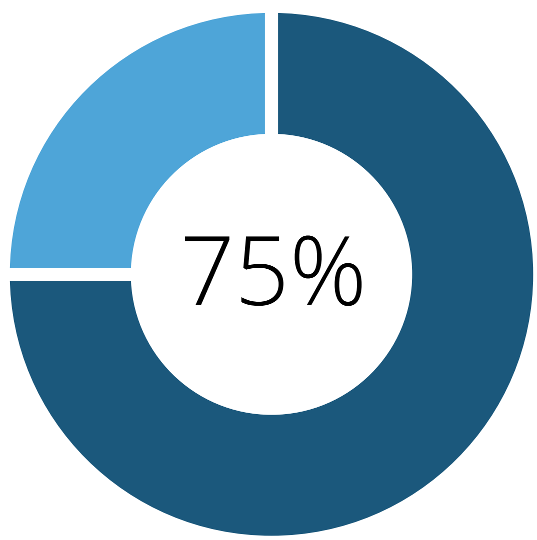
What is the future of Community Supported Agriculture in Canada?

Community Supported Agriculture as a Movement

When asked if they believe that Community Supported Agriculture is a movement, 75% of respondents said yes. Of those:

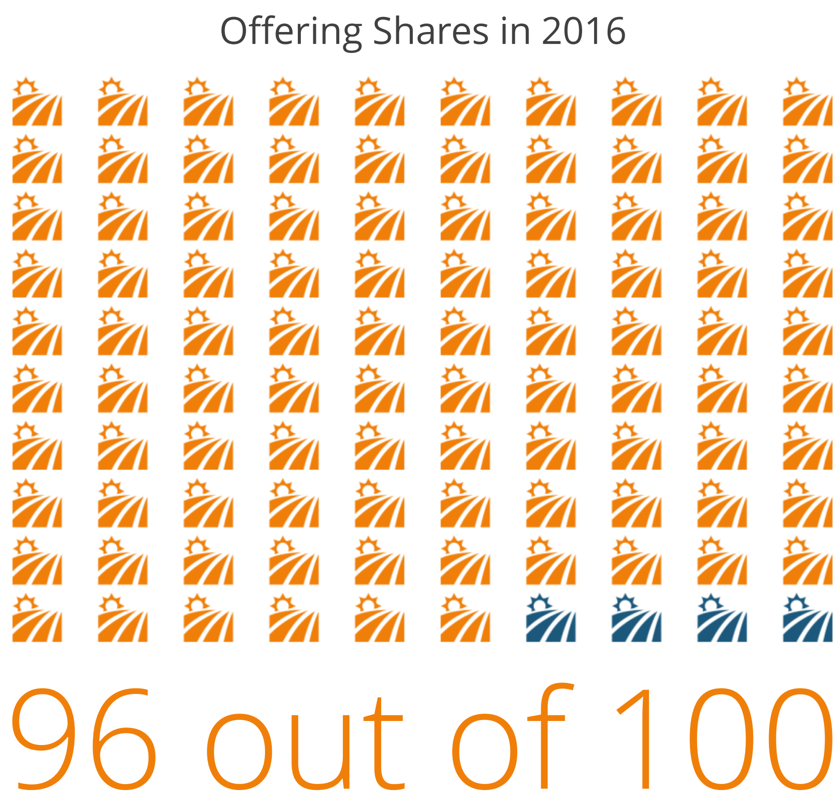
- 48% consider themselves a leader in the movement and 52% do not consider themselves a leader.
- 74.7% believe the movement is growing in Canada, 20% believe it is stable and 5.3% believe it is declining.

Believe Community Supported Agriculture is a Movement



Sustainability of CSAs

Of the 100 farmers surveyed, 96 are offering shares in 2016. Of the four who are not offering shares, one who had left the profession because they could not support themselves; two were trying out other direct marketing models similar to a CSA but without shares; and one was taking a year off to build a new business line on the farm to complement the CSA in future years.



Asked how long they intend to continue to offer shares, 61.9% of farmers surveyed believe that they will offer shares for more than 10 years into the future after 2016 (15.46% for 5 years and 9.27 % for 10 years).

The future outlook is bright!

References

Beaulieu, M.S. (2015). *Demographic Changes in Canadian Agriculture*. Statistics Canada. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/2014001/article/11905-eng.htm

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