



Community-Supported Agriculture in Schools

“...sharing the risks, rewards and responsibilities of farming...”

What is Community-Supported Agriculture?

Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a relationship of mutual support between the people who produce food and the people who consume it. Groups of people, or communities, get together to provide the capital needed to farm and produce food. The money raised covers the cost of producing food for a season; seeds, livestock, feed, equipment, and wages. They may choose to do the farming work themselves, or they may pay a local farmer to do it for them.

The Soil Association is one of 7 partners in the Making Local Food Work programme which works throughout England to reconnect people with the land through food.

For more information please visit www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk and www.soilassociation.org/csa.

Why run a school farming project as a CSA?

- **Self-financing** – members of a CSA usually pay for their produce up-front, providing enough capital to run the project for a set period, and as a result they enjoy...
- **Financial independence** – all funding needed is provided by the shareholders, and therefore there is no need to apply for external funding. In fact, any profits from a CSA scheme could be used to fund another school project.
- **Business experience** - As well as growing and farming skills, many other skills are needed to run a CSA. Running a CSA project in school could offer students invaluable experience in running a successful social enterprise.
- **Broad interest** – cover more elements of the national curriculum with the ‘Food For Life’ programme, by involving students from across the subject spectrum – Business Studies, Media, Design Technology, IT, Biology - in running a CSA.
- **Good value, fair-trade** – everyone involved is engaged in a fair, non-exploitative relationship – workers are paid a fair wage, and consumers pay the true cost of food – no profit is lost to the middleman.
- **Community Involvement** – an opportunity for parents, staff and friends of the school to become more closely involved in the school’s activities.

How to run a CSA

The cost of producing food for a year is divided by the number of people who can be supplied, to reach a figure for the cost of a ‘share’. Shares are sold to ‘members’ (consumers, or shareholders).

CSAs come in all shapes and sizes. There is no set format, simply the aim of sharing the risks and rewards of food production more evenly. How this takes form will vary according to each school's circumstances.

A project might be run by a 'core group'. The core group deals with the day-to-day issues – making sure invoices are paid, receiving share payments, banking and communicating with the membership.

For example **School A:**

- 1 acre available
- students want to grow fruit and vegetables, and rear hens for eggs.

Students, staff and parents hold an open meeting to brainstorm what they would like to eat, and how much they can produce from the land available. They decide on apple, pear and plum trees, 20 different types of vegetables, and 10 laying hens to produce eggs.

A group forms to run the project, to determine costs, budgets, roles, recruiting members and distributing produce, and all other aspects of the project. Someone is appointed to supervise the growing and manage the hens at the weekends and during school holidays. It is important to stress that the vegetables available will be largely dependant on the season – plenty in September/October, and almost nothing in March/April.

VEGETABLES

Approx ½ acre and one greenhouse estimated yield = 20 shares
(1 share = 1 box of fruit and veg for a family of 4, each week – contents and quantities vary, depending on the season)

Costs:

Labour (part-time grower/trainer @ £7.00/hr, 20 hrs/week, 52 wks /year)	£7280
Seeds and trees	£100
Equipment (plastic sheeting, tools etc)	£200
Insurance	£100
Total	£7680

£7680 ÷ 20 shares = £384 per share = **£7.38/wk**

EGGS

Costs:

10 point of lay chickens	£50
feed @ £0.85/kg, 50kg/yr/hen	£425
Labour @ £7.00/hr, 2 hrs/weekend, 52 weekends/year	£728
Equipment (drinkers, feeders, fencing etc) (housing to be built by DT students)	£100
Bedding @ £10/month	£120

Total **£1423**

£1423 ÷ 10 shares = £142.30 per share

1 share = 1 box eggs/week (48 wk laying period) = **£2.96/box**

Labour costs may be reduced by shareholders and students undertaking weekend work on a rota basis. School kitchen left-overs can provide additional food for the hens.

School B:

- No land available on campus
- Food For Life link with local mixed livestock farm

Students, parents and staff are keen to become more involved in sourcing local food, but have no land available to them. They arrange with their partner farmer to receive X number of meat boxes each month, paid in advance, to be delivered to the school for collection.

In addition, groups of supervised students convert local residents' disused gardens into vegetable plots, providing them with a weekly box, and using the surplus to sell to parents. Funds raised may be used to buy equipment, insurance, publicity etc.

Legal structure

In the UK there are CSAs set up as Companies Limited by Guarantee, Community Interest Companies, or Industrial and Provident Societies, amongst others. On top of this, they may be run as for profit or not-for-profit enterprises, worker cooperatives or member cooperatives. Land may be rented, owned in Trust, or privately owned, and both formal and informal contracts are in use. In short, no two CSAs work in the same way. Each has been set up to work in its own specific context.

A school CSA will depend on the school's legal status – for advice contact Cooperatives UK, one of our partners in the Making Local Food Work programme (www.cooperatives-uk.coop).

Community Supported Agriculture has been found to be a successful way to run agricultural businesses throughout the world – for more information and case studies go to www.soilassociation.org/csa

Further resources:

- Community supported agriculture: www.soilassociation.org/csa
- Making Local Food Work: www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk
- Priestlands School case study - <http://priestlandsecowarriors.com/About-Us.php>
- RHS - <http://www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening>
- Garden Organic: http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/schools_organic_network/index.php

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