



Workplace CSAs

A Summary of Models

October 2013

By: Local Food Research Center
ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project)
306 West Haywood Street
Asheville, NC 28801
828-236-1282

About ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural Project):

ASAP has been a national leader in the local food movement for more than a decade. ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. The organization's work includes a broad array of planning, communication, grassroots organizing, research, and advocacy in order to generate awareness and increase consumer demand for local food and farms, develop the regional capacity to support local farms, expand the availability of locally grown food, and foster systemic change in agriculture and the food system.

www.asapconnections.org

This report is based work supported by the Farmers' Market Promotion Program (FMPP) Grant Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, under award No. 12-25-G-1380. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Suggested Citation: Local Food Research Center. "Workplace CSAs: A Summary of Models." Asheville, NC. Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, 2012.

This report summarizes research conducted from November to December 2011 to identify workplace CSA models in practice in the United States. A total of 14 models were identified and their structures were divided into five workplace CSA categories: (1) businessmodels, (2) institutional models, (3) residential models, (4) mobile CSAs and farm cooperative models, and (5) other program models.

The workplace CSA models included in this report were found through general web searches. The models cover a variety of workplace CSA structures, from corporations looking for ways to promote health and wellness among employees, to mobile CSA cooperatives looking to expand market opportunities for local farmers, to state-wide programs focused on improving access to healthy foods by area residents. Though CSAs in the workplace are a relatively new trend in workplace wellness promotion, the projects covered here provide an assortment of successful models for businesses and initiatives interested in developing their own workplace CSA models.

Why Workplace CSA's?

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) describes a method of off-farm direct marketing of farm products. In a traditional CSA model a customer pre-purchases a “share” of a farmer or farmer group’s harvest before planting; the customer then receives a box of harvested products weekly throughout the growing season. CSA programs have been in operation in the United States since the mid nineteen-eighties and have seen rapid growth in popularity over the past decade.¹ As of 2007—the most recent year of publication—the United States Department of Agriculture reported that 12,549 farms in the United States market their products through a CSA.

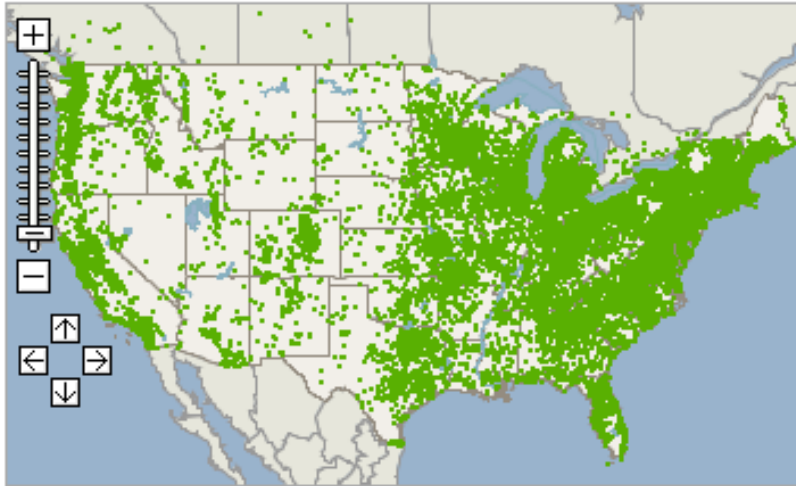


Figure 1. Location of CSA farms in the United States 2013. Image from Local Harvest

Two of the major challenges facing farmers marketing their products through CSA programs are: (1) recruiting a sufficient number of customers each season and (2) navigating the logistics of delivering share boxes each week.² Workplaces can address both of these issues by providing a stable base of customers in one location, making workplace CSAs an economically attractive option for farmers.

In addition to the benefits this kind of CSA model can bring to farmers, companies can use workplace CSAs as a proactive approach to support health, wellness, and overall satisfaction among their employees. Workplace CSAs offer an affordable, convenient benefit to add to any wellness program. In return, employees gain access to fresh, local produce and the opportunity to support a local farmer or farmer group.

However, implementation of a CSA program that is fully-integrated into employees’ benefits packages in a corporate or institutional setting can be difficult because of obstacles related to personnel, resources, contractual, time, and communications commitments. In their research into workplace CSA models in western Massachusetts, the CISA working group (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture) found that the perceived interest in workplace CSA participation among company employees often exceeded the capacity of Human Resource

¹ Katherine L. Adam, “Community Supported Agriculture,” (ATTRA-National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, 2006), 1.

² Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, “Community Supported Agriculture for the Workplace: A Guide for Developing Workplace Community Supported Agriculture Distributions,” (CISA, 2008), 7.

departments to organize and sustain a program.³ Companies often assume that a workplace CSA is a simple matter of asking a farmer to supply a weekly delivery of produce. In fact, a fully integrated workplace CSA program involves effective management of communications with the farmer and employees, a shareholder enrollment process, payment processing, departmental approval procedures, company policy navigation, and contingency plans.⁴ Not all companies are up to the immense time commitment of a company-wide and company-run CSA program, so innovators from around the country have come up with modified workplace CSA packages to fit the needs of any Human Resource department.

The following sections present 14 workplace CSA programs from around the nation. These programs are meant to provide examples and inspiration to companies and employees interested in pursuing a workplace CSA program. The CSA models are divided into five categories: (1) business models, (2) institutional models, (3) residential models, (4) mobile CSAs and farm cooperative models, and (5) state funded program models.

Business Models

GE Analytical Instruments (Boulder, CO)

GE Analytical Instruments offers its employees a traditional CSA package provided by Grant Family Farms in nearby Wellington. Rather than run the program directly, the Human Resources department of GE primarily promotes the availability of the CSA program to employees, but it is up to the employees to pay for and manage their own share options on the farm's website.

Employees are able to purchase their CSA shares directly from the producer at a price set at the beginning of the growing season. For 22 to 26 weeks, depending on the package employees order, the farmer delivers fresh boxes of certified organic root crops, greens, herbs, peppers, green beans, and eggplant to a drop-off point on the GE campus. In this arrangement, the farm takes on the bulk of the responsibility of communicating with GE's employees about special events at the farm, the content of the boxes, and important ordering information. The farm offers a variety of ways for CSA members to stay up-to-date on farm activities and box contents, including a weekly newsletter, blog, and online web store.

Workplace CSAs like those between GE Analytical Instruments and Grant Family Farms are sustained by a well-organized, established CSA farm that is able to offer a high level of support and resources. As a result, the resource and time requirements on the part of the business' Human Resource department are greatly reduced.

For more information see: http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_15581786

³Ibid., 9.

⁴Ibid., 16.

HealthPartners (Bloomington, MN)

The HealthPartners workplace CSA grew out of a HealthPartners Research Foundation project, which aimed to study the impact of CSA's on employee health. HealthPartners collaborated with Featherstone Farms of Rushford Village to provide 400 participants with fresh organic produce and herbs. Though HealthPartners staff promotes the CSA program and coordinates employee participation, the employees are responsible for purchasing their own whole or half shares, or they can split the cost (and boxes of produce) among their co-workers.

Like the GE Analytical Instruments CSA program, the HealthPartners workplace CSA also shifts the burden of operation to the farm. In their workplace CSA model it is the role of Featherstone Farm to take on all tasks involving the enrollment process, payment processing, delivery scheduling, and communications of the CSA program. HealthPartners Human Resources staff is solely responsible for promotions and authorization from the company to conduct a workplace CSA program.

For more information see: <http://communityofaplate09.wordpress.com/tag/community-supported-agriculture/>

Research Triangle Institute International CSA (Durham, NC)

Research Triangle Institute International (RTI) coordinates a multi-farm CSA program in the heart of Research Triangle Park. Brinkley Farms, Britt Farms, and Locals Seafood deliver fresh vegetables, fruits, cheeses, eggs, meats, firewood, jams, honey, baked goods, cut flowers, seafood and more every Thursday to CSA members who work at the Park or live nearby.



RTI supports the workplace CSA program by screening and selecting farmers to participate in their workplace CSA and then compiling and listing all of the information about the CSA vendors on their website. It is up to individual patrons to sign up with the producer of their choice, but the RTI website manages the links to sign-up forms and prepay information. In addition, RTI human resources staff coordinate a yearly "sign-up event" to encourage Park employees and nearby residents to join the program. RTI staff is also in charge of coordinating farmer delivery. Though the farms themselves are responsible for keeping track of CSA participation and payment information, RTI staff assumes a major role when it comes to the workplace CSA's organization and promotion.

For more information see: <http://www.rti.org/csa/index.cfm>

Duke Mobile Farmers Market (Durham, NC)

The Duke Mobile Farmers market was created for busy professionals. Managed by LIVE FOR LIFE, the mobile market is a way to provide fresh, local produce to Duke employees unable to attend the Duke Farmers Market.

LIVE FOR LIFE staff selects vendors for the program based on an application process, and coordinates farmer drop-off locations. They also distribute farmer fact sheets and manage online profiles for the vendors detailing their product listings, pick-up locations, and cost and payment options. Employees can sign up with as many of the vendors as they would like, though registration and payment are handled directly by each farmer.

Unlike many other workplace CSAs, the Duke Mobile Farmers Market is able to offer product year round. The twelve farms that make up the program have been specially selected—with help from North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University’s Cooperative Extension Program—for their ability to provide product year round with season extension techniques.



Institutional Models

Highland General Hospital (Oakland, CA)

Highland General Hospital began its CSA program as a way to promote health and wellness among employees and patients. Using funding from the hospital’s Physician Foundation, and with support from the California Endowment funded Healthy Eating, Active Communities Initiative, the hospital partnered with West Oakland’s Peoples Grocery to have a truckload of fresh fruits and vegetables delivered to the hospital each week.

People’s Grocery, which is a community-based organization that operates a network of food projects in West Oakland, runs the GRUB Box, a flexible CSA program that allows members to choose from a variety of subscription packages and then delivers produce on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

For \$24 per box, Highland General Hospital staff members receive 12 to 14 pounds of fresh produce. Additionally, the hospital has structured the program so that part of the payment for each share goes toward helping to subsidize a free or reduced-price produce box for low-income patients. The hospital promotes the program by offering free samples of produce to department personnel to try, as well as providing cooking demonstrations for staff to teach them different ways to prepare the fresh produce. The partnership between Highland General Hospital and People’s Grocery is viewed as another way that hospital doctors and staff promote a culture of wellness in their community.

For more information see: <http://www.californiaconvergence.org/gallery/story/oakland-hospitals> or <http://oaklandlocal.com/article/highland-hospital-peoples-grocery-partner-affordable-produce-grub-box>

Colorado State University CSA (Fort Collins, CO)

Colorado State University, Colorado's land-grant university, offers programs in specialty crop production that teaches students about fruit and vegetable production systems and market opportunities for specialty crops. In 2005, the Specialty Crops Program began a CSA program on campus to provide the organic produce that students grow in class to the university community.

The CSA program, though run by the university, is open to anyone who wants to participate. CSA members sign up using an online form and receive weekly newsletters from the student producers with information on the vegetables in their shares, producer profiles, and upcoming events on the farm. The shares are delivered weekly to the campus's Plant Environmental Research Center (PERC) where shareholders have the option of picking up a traditional pre-prepared box or choosing their own mix "farmers market style." The weekly event at PERC offers another opportunity for shareholders to learn about how their food is grown and who grows it, and it is an opportunity for students to practice the skills they have learned in their marketing classes.

For more information see:

http://www.specialtycrops.colostate.edu/CSU_CSA/SCP_csu_csa_members.htm#newsletters

Earth Ethics Institute Miami Dade College's CROPS (Miami, FL)

CROPS or Community-Rooted Organic Produce Services is a collaboration between the Earth Ethics Institute (EEI) and the Center for Community Involvement of Miami Dade College. Marketed as an organic food buying club, this workplace CSA is available to students and employees at Miami Dade College on a first come, first serve basis.

The CROPS program is unique in that it does not partner with specific farms to provide organic produce to shareholders. Instead, the food purchasers for the program buy from a variety of farms and wholesalers in Florida and the Southeast to meet their primary goal of providing fresh food to members. Aside from the procurement practices, the CROPS program is run much like other workplace CSAs. Members pay in advance on a bi-weekly basis; share cost is based on a sliding scale. Participants can purchase half or full shares and have the opportunity to purchase additional items each week at the pick-up locations. Student volunteers assemble the bags of produce from the main shipment, and shareholders can pick up their bags from any of four Miami Dade campuses.

For more information see: <http://www.mdc.edu/enviroethics/crops.asp>

NYC Council CSA (New York, NY)

In 2011 New York Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn decided to implement a CSA program to provide a positive example of her FoodWorks initiative to improve New York City's food system. The building that houses New York's City Council is also home to the New York State Senate, the New York State Assembly, and the New York City Housing Authority, providing an ample number of potential participants for a CSA farm.

Following a traditional CSA model, anyone who works in the 250 Broadway building is able to pre-purchase a 22 week fruit and/or vegetable share directly from Norwich Meadows Farm of Norwich, New York, and the farm delivers the shares to the building once per week. Since the idea for the CSA program originated with the City Council, Christine Quinn and her employees take on the bulk of promoting and supporting the program for the building's share recipients. However, as is the case with many workplace CSA programs, the logistics and management aspects of the program fall to Norwich Meadows Farm.

For more information see: <http://council.nyc.gov/html/pr/042011/freshprod.shtml>

Residential Models

Albanese Organization (New York, NY)

The Albanese Organization is a New York City Real Estate Development and Management company that offers three of its apartment building residents the opportunity to sign up for CSA shares from Vermont-based Holton Farms.



This residential CSA program was originally set up by the Albanese Organization and is still promoted to residents by the Organization, but management of the subscription process is a direct interaction between residents and Holton Farms. Unlike other workplace CSA models, customers of this program have the added benefit of being able to customize their weekly orders through Holton Farm's online web portal, which offers a range of produce, meats, and dairy products to customers.

In addition to weekly deliveries of CSA shares, the Albanese Organization's model is unique in that Holton Farms provides a mobile produce truck that sets up outside each apartment building over the weekend to offer fresh fruits and vegetables to the entire community

For more information see: <http://www.psfk.com/2010/10/nyc-apartment-buildings-receive-exclusive-farm-to-table-deliveries.html>

Mobile CSAs and Farm Cooperatives

High Country CSA-A Project of Maverick Farms (Boone, NC)

The High Country CSA is a cooperative partnership of 10 organic farms and one organic farm cooperative all located in the High Country mountains of Western North Carolina. Because it is a cooperative, the High Country CSA is able to offer customers product year-round.

The High Country CSA program offers box drop-offs to area workplaces if at least 15 employees sign up for a share. For workplaces that do not have 15 employees, the cooperative encourages businesses to partner with neighboring firms to achieve the 15 person minimum. Workplaces are in charge of organizing participants and pooling everyone's pre-payments, but the High Country CSA covers the logistics of the promotion, payment processing, and delivery.

Current patrons of the program include the Watauga Medical Center (60 employee participants), the Appalachian District Health Department, and Watauga County.

For more information see: <http://highcountrycsa.org/>

Good Food Collective (Rochester, NY)

Like the High Country CSA, the Good Food Collective is a multi-farm CSA project made up of eight organic farms serving residents of Rochester, New York. In addition to their traditional Good Food CSA program that serves individual community members and families, the collective offers a "pre-boxed share" (PBS) program for employees of participating workplaces.

The collective currently has two workplace CSA delivery locations: Arnett Branch Library and Bausch and Lomb. Individuals and families who work at either of these delivery locations can sign up for a share through their human resources departments. The Good Food Collective works with both businesses and health insurance providers to customize opportunities for PBS shares, including consultations in ways that businesses can set up payroll deductions or by providing information on health insurance programs that offer subsidies to their clients for CSA memberships.

For more information see: <http://thegoodfoodcollective.com/>

Madison Area CSA Coalition (Madison, WI)

The Madison Area CSA Coalition offers one of the most unique workplace CSA programs currently in operation. The coalition is part of a joint effort between Madison area health insurance plans and Madison area CSA farms. Residents in the area covered by Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin, Physicians Plus, Unity Health, or Dean Health insurance plans are automatically enrolled in a subscription reimbursement program where, in exchange for ordering a produce share from a Madison Area CSA Coalition farm, employees are reimbursed up to \$100 (\$200 for families of two or more) for purchasing a share. Individuals

sign up for their shares directly from the farm and fill out their insurance's Wellness Reimbursement Form each season to receive their rebate.

The Madison Area CSA Coalition program is a part of a larger project to promote health and wellness among Madison's residents. The program has been highly successful with both the insurance companies and businesses issuing newsletters, emails, and information packets to make sure that all persons eligible for the program are aware of the benefit and know how to use the service.

For more information see: <http://www.csacoalition.org/our-work/csa-insurance-rebate/>

Other Programs



Farm Fresh Rhode Island

Farm Fresh Rhode Island is a nonprofit based in Pawtucket, Rhode Island that works to connect local food and farms to community members and expand the capacity of the local food system in Rhode Island. One of their programs is the Veggie Box, a weekly program that sources fresh fruits and vegetables from 23 Rhode Island and Massachusetts farms and delivers shares, newsletters, weekly recipes, and farm stories to participating members. For site delivery, the program requires that at least 10 people purchase a share, making a workplace an ideal location for a drop-off point. Unlike the other CSA programs covered so far, the Farm Fresh Rhode Island program is able to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits (SNAP) Electronic Benefits Transfer as payment.

Employees of participating businesses can register for their shares on the Farm Fresh Rhode Island website. Local businesses including the Rhode Island Department of Health, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and Miriam Hospital all use the program to provide their employees with easy access to fresh, local produce.

For more information see: <http://www.farmfreshri.org/about/veggiebox.php>

Texas Department of State Health Services Farm to Work Initiative

The Farm to Work Initiative is not a traditional CSA program; employees of the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) do not pre-pay for a season's worth of shares, but participate in a weekly ordering program.

Each Friday—year round—employees of DSHS order one (or more) baskets of produce and pick up their order the following Tuesday. Central Texas-based nonprofit Sustainable Food Center (SFC) processes the online orders each week, coordinates with local Texas farms to stock the baskets, and delivers the shares to the various drop-off locations.

Though the program was originally created to serve DSHS employees, the program does allow other Texas worksites to join the program if they are able to meet specific requirements around a staff coordinator, distribution coordinator, ordering and payment system, promotions and program costs, and legal clearance regulations.

For more information see: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/nutritionfarmtowork.shtm>