



Worksite CSA Toolkit

How to start a Community Supported Agriculture program at your workplace



WHY JOIN A WORKSITE CSA PROGRAM?

YOUR HEALTH



A diet rich in vegetables and fruits can lower blood pressure, reduce risk of heart disease and stroke, prevent some types of cancer, lower risk of eye and digestive problems, and have a positive effect on blood sugar.



Being involved in a CSA program gives you access to fresh, quality produce from a known, trusted source. Fresh food, picked at the height of ripeness, is healthier food.

YOUR TIME

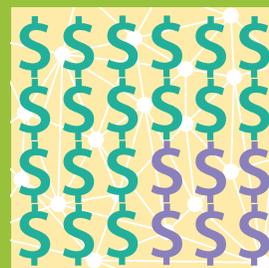


If you're like most adults, you spend the largest portion of hours per day at work.



Having fresh fruits and vegetables delivered directly to the worksite is convenient — it means fewer trips to the grocery store, less hassle, and less fuel.

YOUR COMMUNITY



Supporting a local farmer puts 3x more money back into your local economy than if you buy from a chain. (And, as they say, that's a whole lotta lettuce.)



Your involvement in a CSA program creates a sense of community as you learn where, how and when local products are grown and harvested.

BENEFITS FOR THE WORKSITE



MAKES FOR HEALTHIER EMPLOYEES Healthy employees are happier and more productive.



BUILDS CAMARADERIE Coworkers and farmers can share recipes and suggestions for learning about and using fresh produce.



SHOWS YOU CARE Your worksite CSA program visibly helps protect the environment and support the local economy

Contents

Introduction 1

Phase 1: Assessment 2

Phase 2: Logistics 5

Phase 3: Communication 9

Phase 4: Evaluation 13

Appendices 16



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“Hosting a CSA distribution site at your company is a great way to make it convenient for your employees to access the produce they need to move toward a healthier lifestyle.” — *Bob Lominska, Owner of Hoyland Farm*



Introduction

Both locally and nationwide, there is growing interest in increasing access to healthy, locally grown foods. One way to increase access is through community supported agriculture (CSA). CSA programs are an agreement between community members and local farmers.

Here’s how it works: Community members buy a membership or subscription from a farmer, making them shareholders. Once the growing season begins, the farmer delivers weekly “shares” (boxes) of fruits and vegetables to a consistent location at a consistent time.

Worksite CSA programs work well because they provide a convenient location for farmers to easily deliver shares to a large group of shareholders. CSA programs offered through worksites help support the local environment and economy, which then benefits the company and its employees. A worksite CSA program gives a company’s employees convenient, regular access to fresh produce, contributing to their overall health and wellness. Additionally, they foster interaction among employees when swapping fruits and vegetables and sharing recipes.

WORKSITE CSA PROGRAMS

-  SUPPORT LOCAL ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT
-  PROVIDE EASY ACCESS TO FRESH PRODUCE
-  BOOST EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLNESS
-  ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEE INTERACTION



Assessment

During the assessment phase, there are main stages to be completed. The order in which they can be completed varies from workplace to workplace. They are:

- **Meet with a farmer**
- **Assess employee interest**
- **Get approval from senior management**
- **Determine the capacity of the building**

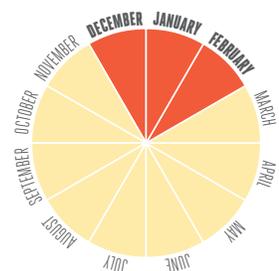
Evaluate your workplace and determine which one of these steps would be most important to complete first. Some companies assess employee interest first to ensure that going further in the process is even worth their time. Showing that a large number of employees is interested in participating will also be helpful when asking for permission from senior management. Other workplaces — especially those with multiple companies in the same building — may initially ask for approval from facilities for the delivery space. This ensures that the building is able to accommodate the program before going any further in the implementation process. You can do these steps sequentially or simultaneously.

TIPS >

- Some companies subsidize shares, pay the upfront costs, and use payroll deduction to collect payment from employees.
- Provide the farmer with building access as necessary, as well as a table and a cart to help expedite moving produce.
- Hang a bulletin board for the farmer to post a weekly checklist and messages for employees.
- Post instructions about how to break down CSA boxes, if applicable.

TIMING >

Begin Phase 1 in December or January.
Complete by the end of February, at the latest.



COMPLETE THESE STEPS SEQUENTIALLY OR SIMULTANEOUSLY

MEET WITH A FARMER

Arrange a meeting with a farmer. Talking early on and directly with a farmer will allow you to **acquire in-depth information** from a source that will know the ins and outs of a CSA worksite program. A farmer will be able to give suggestions and tell you things that others may not think of.

GET APPROVAL FROM SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Schedule a meeting with senior management and ask them if they are willing to give their support. Bring the informational brochure with you to this meeting. It may be necessary to **educate senior management** about what a CSA program entails and how it can benefit the company. If senior management is willing, **ask them to share their support with the rest of the company**. This can be done by email or a presentation to employees. See Appendix C for a sample email to employees. During the meeting, ask senior management if the company is willing to contribute financially to each share so that costs are lower for the employees. If so, how much are they willing to contribute?

ASSESS EMPLOYEE INTEREST

Your first step here is to **educate employees** about what community supported agriculture (CSA) is. See Appendix A for a sample informational brochure that you could send out through email, mailboxes, and/or bulletin boards. A variety of methods may be necessary to reach all employees. After distributing the brochure, **send out a survey** to assess how many people may be interested in participating. See Appendix B for a sample initial interest survey that can be printed, emailed or formatted online using a website such as SurveyMonkey.com. Ask employees to complete the survey and send you their contact information if they wish to participate. Compile names, phone numbers and email addresses of interested employees.

DETERMINE THE CAPACITY OF THE BUILDING

Pay attention to the building layout and **brainstorm ideas for possible delivery locations**. The space will need to be at a central location which is easily accessible to the farmer as well as to the employees. Floor protection, such as a tarp or wood pallets, may be necessary depending on the size and scope of the CSA program. Ask facilities management to **approve the delivery location** for a specific day/time each week. Ask about obtaining a table or tables for the produce, as well as a cart to facilitate moving the produce into the building. Working closely with facilities management during the early planning stages will make the process go much more smoothly.

A graphic consisting of a dark grey circle on the left containing the word "PHASE" in white, uppercase letters. To the right of the circle is a large, stylized number "2" in a purple color. The entire graphic is set against a yellow background.

PHASE 2

Logistics

In the logistics phase, there are three main stages to be accomplished. It is best to complete them in this order:

Establish worksite liaison > **Develop selection criteria** > **Recruit and select farm/s**

First, **establish a worksite liaison** so employees have someone to talk with if they have questions. This will help the entire program go more smoothly. The worksite liaison could be you or someone else who is passionate about starting up a CSA program at your workplace. It could even be an existing wellness committee.

TIP > Ask senior management if they are willing to cover the cost of the liaison's share to create incentive for someone to take on the position.

The worksite liaison would be responsible for the following:

- Marketing the CSA initiative to employees and encouraging participation.
- Providing easy communication between the farmer and shareholders.
- Sending out weekly emails, text reminders, or newsletters to shareholders, reminding them to pick up their shares.
- Showing the farmer where to park, where to enter the building, and where to unload shares.

Depending on the number of interested employees, it may be necessary to **form a volunteer CSA program committee**. If your workplace already has a wellness or sustainability committee, ask them if they would be willing to coordinate the CSA program. The committee would be responsible for monitoring program logistics and ensuring that the company's expectations are met.

Establishing a liaison and/or a responsible committee is essential to the long-term success of a worksite CSA program. It helps foster close relationships with the farmer/s and increases the likelihood of renewed employee participation each season.

ON AVERAGE, THE WORKSITE LIAISON
WILL DEVOTE
approximately **3-5 hours** per week
WHEN SETTING UP THE PROGRAM

and **20 minutes** per week
DURING THE SEASON TO ANSWER QUESTIONS
AND MONITOR THE DROP-OFF TABLE

Next, to **develop selection criteria**, brainstorm with the wellness committee or volunteer CSA committee about what you would like the farm to offer the company. Create a list of criteria that you feel the potential farm should be able to fulfill.

When making the checklist, consider the ability of the farm to do the following:

- Meet the requested number of shares for your workplace.
- Deliver shares to the worksite location on the day and time that works best for employees.
- Practice conventional or certified organic farming, if expressed in employee interest survey.
- Possibly provide online payment capability.
- Send out a weekly newsletter with preparation and handling instructions, including a list of what is in each week's share.

Most likely, local farms will not be able to meet all of your criteria. Decide which ones are absolutely essential for a successful CSA program at your workplace, and work with the farmer to compromise on the rest. If demand within the company is high enough, signing contracts with more than one farm may be necessary.

When you are ready to **recruit farm/s**, consider that all may not be able to accommodate the same number of shares. See Appendix K for resources to help you locate local CSA farms. Contact farms by sending a letter or email or calling them to inform them of the interest your company has in forming a CSA program partnership. Share your company's needs and selection criteria. Ask interested farms to send information showing how they can meet these criteria to the liaison or committee. See Appendix D for a sample request for quotes.

Then, **select the farm/s** that meet all or most of your selection criteria. There are multiple ways to make a selection. Consider these options:

HOLD A TRADE SHOW

Invite interested farms to come to your workplace and showcase their products (this works best the summer before, so they have fresh produce to show). Schedule a two- to three-hour window for employees to stop by and learn about each farm, then submit their votes in a ballot box. This option may work best if several companies in one building are interested in forming a CSA program together.

USE A MATRIX

The worksite liaison or committee can calculate member demand and farm options to select which farm/s meet the company's needs best. See Appendix E for a selection matrix to use when deciding between farms.

TAKE A VOTE

After employees who are interested in participating in the worksite CSA program have sufficient information about each farm, ask them to vote for their favorite/s, either through a ballot box or electronically (e.g., SurveyMonkey.com).

After selecting the farm/s, **create an agreement** between the company and the farmer. See Appendix F for a sample agreement.

Consider the following when establishing an agreement:

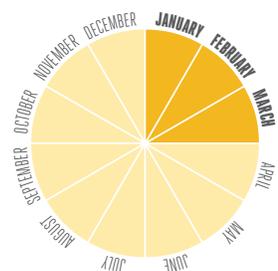
- Holding the company not responsible for any CSA program-related incident on the premises.
- Including a requirement that the farm provides fresh fruit and vegetables from their farm and according to organic standards, if desired.
- Including other delivery service requirements for your workplace.
- If the company is not financially contributing to the shares, clearly state that the membership is between each employee and the farmer, and the company is not to be held responsible for financial discrepancies.

TIPS >

- Consider marketing the CSA program as a local produce subscription service, if that terminology makes more sense to employees.
- If the farmer requires more shares than the company can supply, work with neighboring companies to satisfy the farmer's needs. Decide which company has the most convenient location for the drop-off site.
- Plan accordingly: Farmers who are invited to show products at your worksite probably prefer to do so when they can bring fresh produce, which most likely means the summer before you want your CSA program to begin. If timing doesn't allow for that the first year, ask if they can bring photographs or other materials.

TIMING >

Begin Phase 2 in January or February.
Complete by the end of March, at the latest.





Communication

Ongoing communication and education is essential to creating a successful CSA program. Phase 3 is all about education, education, education! The biggest cause of seasonal attrition is misunderstanding of what a CSA program is all about. Refer to Appendix K for more information about CSA programs.

TIP > If you normally send tons of emails each week, ask someone else on the committee to email CSA program information so that it's more readily recognizable.

Once the farm has been selected, **advertise the program**. Send an email to employees who expressed interest in the initial survey. Offer an informational presentation for interested employees during a lunch break or another identified time; put an informative letter in each employee's mailbox; hang flyers on central bulletin boards; ask to be included in the company newsletter. See Appendix G for a sample presentation that addresses the most important issues during the education phase. Inform participating employees which farm was selected and specifics regarding payment, pick-up day and time, etc. Utilize your knowledge of your employees and workplace to decide which communication vehicle/s would be most effective.



The information you provide to participating employees should include these key points:

- A clear explanation of “shared risk.”
- The reasoning behind any upfront and/or ongoing costs.
- Benefits to the company, the farmer, and the shareholders.
- Kids are more likely to try new fruits and vegetables if they are from their “own” farmer.

Joining a CSA program is not for everyone. Ensure that those who plan to participate thoroughly understand what they're getting into. A large percentage of attrition is due to members having other expectations and not committing 100%.

Communicate with employees about how to sign up with the selected farm/s. Have the farmer/s send shareholder subscription forms to the worksite liaison or committee. Distribute forms to interested employees through email or in mailboxes. Set a specific deadline for employees to return completed forms. Make it clear if employees should return forms to the worksite liaison or send them directly to the farm operator. If employee interest exceeds available shares, explain to employees that participation will be on a first-come, first-served basis and encourage them to sign up quickly.

Continuing education is essential when running a successful, sustainable CSA program year after year. **Listen to complaints and concerns** of participating employees and come up with ways to solve them.

EMPLOYEE CONCERN

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

"I don't know what this fruit/vegetable is."

- Ask the farmer to send a weekly newsletter including pictures, names, and descriptions of each item in the share that week.

"I don't know what to do with this fruit/vegetable."

- Hold an occasional cooking class, using produce from that week's share.
- Help employees find a "go-to" recipe that they know they like and can cook quickly if they don't have a lot of time.

"I have too much food. I feel badly about throwing produce away."

- Encourage sharing with a neighbor or coworker. Suggest they divide each share, or take a full share in alternating weeks.
- Encourage worm composting to help make wasted produce sustainable.
- Encourage donating excess produce to a food pantry.

"I keep forgetting to pick up my shares."

- Send a reminder email the day of pickup. Or, if possible, send a group text through a program such as GroupMe or other mass notification system. Post a reminder flyer in high-traffic areas of the worksite on delivery days.

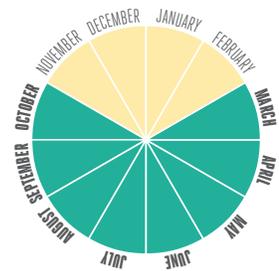
Get creative! Solutions such as these give people easier access to ideas and recipes — plus, they tend to build rapport among coworkers. To increase re-subscription for the following year, work with the CSA program committee to brainstorm solutions to concerns. Remember that farmers can help — they are happy to offer recipes and suggestions for using produce.

TIPS >

- Employees generally sign up and pay a few months prior to the first delivery. Send periodic emails while they wait, updating them on how the farm is doing, giving a countdown to the first delivery, and/or sharing easy recipes for preparing fresh produce so they can practice before receiving their first share.
- Ask the farmer if it's possible to provide additional goods at the delivery table to sell to employees who are not currently participating.
- See Appendix K for additional resources for shareholders to keep enthusiasm high.

TIMING >

Begin Phase 3 in March–April.
Continue education and encourage participants throughout the entire growing season.



A graphic for 'Phase 4' featuring a dark grey circle containing the word 'PHASE' in white, and a large orange number '4' to its right.

PHASE 4

A horizontal orange banner with the word 'Evaluation' in white text.

Evaluation

The evaluation phase happens before, during, and after the growing season. There are two main steps to take to ensure a successful program in the future:

- **Evaluate the program**
- **Follow up**

To **evaluate your worksite CSA program**, define your program goals and identify how you will measure success.

Send out short surveys during the middle of the season and at the end of the season to track local produce consumption and satisfaction. See Appendix H for a sample mid-season survey and Appendix I for a sample end-of-season survey. Clearly specify the date by which surveys should be returned in order to evaluate the program in a timely manner.



Feedback and comments from employees participating in the CSA program are essential when making improvements for the following year. Feedback and comments from those who choose not to participate are also extremely valuable. Survey employees who did not participate to gain a better understanding of employee concerns. See Appendix J for a sample survey to non-subscribers. Revising the program to reflect participant suggestions or concerns will support repeat participation the next season and gain new supporters. Ask participants to share their favorite recipes or suggestions about how to use produce to incorporate in an end-of-season report/ mailing.

To **follow up**, analyze the survey results. Compare produce consumption responses from the initial interest survey, the mid-season survey, and the end-of-season survey. Look at consumption trends and see if they meet the goals you had defined. Pay close attention to comments at the end of each survey to make improvements for next year. Concerns from shareholders vary from company to company, but studies have shown that the main reasons for not participating, or not continuing to participate the following year, are:

- Not knowing what the produce is or how to prepare it.
- Having too much food to eat, throwing most of it away, and feeling like they're throwing their money away with the food.

After the season, meet with the farmer/s and ask for suggestions for improving the CSA program partnership. Share employee feedback from mid-season and end-of-season surveys. Work together to make sure both the company's and the farmer's needs are met and to make improvements to the program partnership for next year.

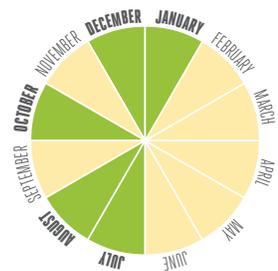
Give a report to senior management to show local produce consumption trends among employees participating in the worksite CSA program and whether or not goals were met. Together, discuss areas for improvement and make a decision about the program for next year.

TIPS >

- After a successful season, offer the ability to sign up in the fall, instead of the spring, in order to ensure membership for the next year. If subscriptions are still available after fall sign-up, offer another sign-up opportunity in the spring.
 - Send thank-you notes to those who helped make your worksite CSA program successful.
-

TIMING >

Begin Phase 4 with the interest survey in December or January. The mid-season survey should be done in July or August. The final survey should be completed after the season ends, around October.



Appendices

- Appendix A:** Sample informational brochure
- Appendix B:** Sample initial employee interest survey
- Appendix C:** Sample senior management supportive email
- Appendix D:** Sample request for quotes
- Appendix E:** Sample farm evaluation matrix
- Appendix F:** Sample company-farm agreement
- Appendix G:** Sample educational presentation
- Appendix H:** Sample mid-season survey
- Appendix I:** Sample end-of-season survey
- Appendix J:** Sample non-subscriber survey
- Appendix K:** Additional resources