

Community Supported Agriculture in Michigan

Garrett Ziegler, MSU Extension Community Food Systems
Educator

2020 MSU Extension Beginning Farmer Webinar –
February 12th



[illegible]

Presentation Outline

- The Michigan Statewide CSA Network
- Statewide CSA Farmer Survey
 - Results
 - Conclusions
- National CSA Innovation Network
- CSA Outreach and Marketing Strategies
 - CSAs and Food Access
 - Worksite CSAs
 - Communicating the value of your CSA



Michigan Statewide CSA Network

- Formed in 2016
- Have met regularly for the last 3+ years
- Originally supported and facilitated by Michigan Food and Farming Systems and Department of Health and Human Services
- Key goals:
 - Better understand CSA farms in MI
 - Increase collaboration across organizations supporting CSA farms
 - Develop and share models for increased CSA access

Michigan Statewide CSA Network Members



groundwork
CENTER FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



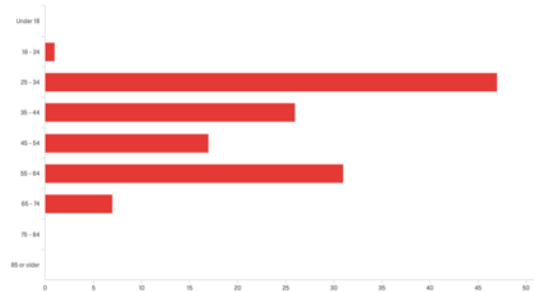
Michigan Statewide CSA Survey

- Network Identified a need to better understand current “situation” of CSA farmers in MI
- Developed using input from several previously utilized CSA surveys from around the country
- Input from network partners and farmers
- Launched in spring 2018
- Distributed through statewide listservs, local contacts (MSUE), farm organizations
- Collected data through early summer 2018

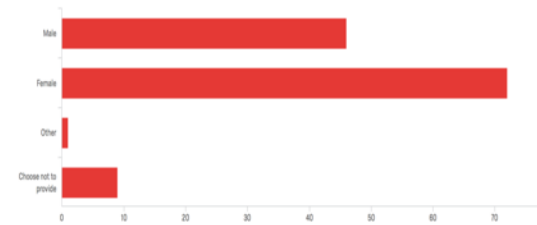


Results – Who are CSA Farmers in MI?

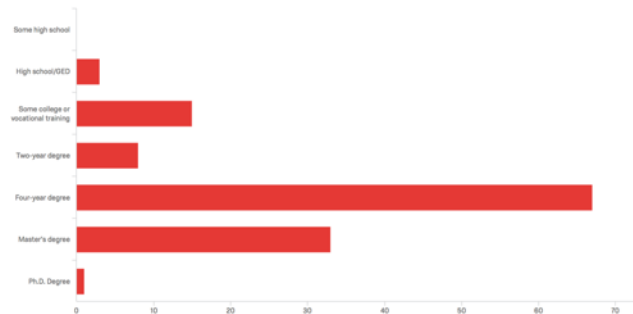
Q5 - Please indicate your age below.



Q9 - Please specify your gender:



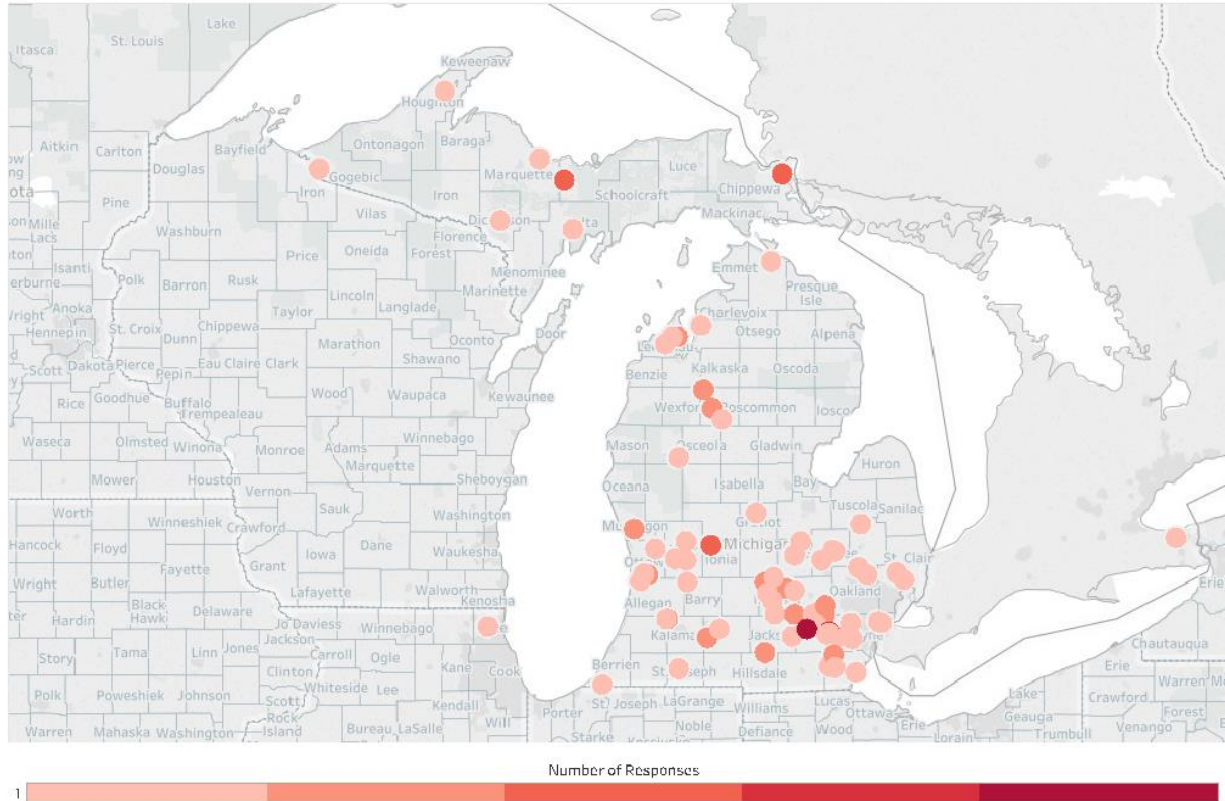
Q6 - What is the highest level of education you have completed?



Q8 - Please indicate your race/ethnicity:



Map of 2018 CSA Survey Responses
(MI County Level)

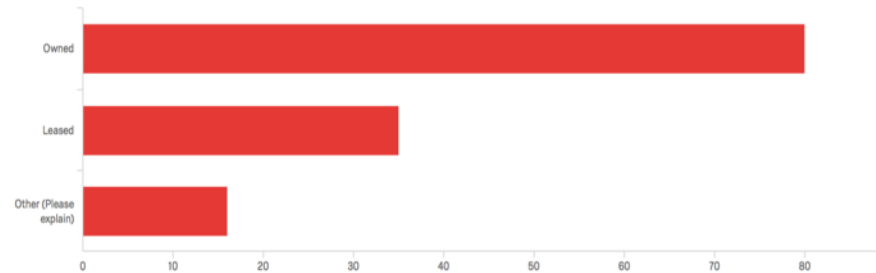


Results – What do CSA Farms in MI look like?

It varies....a lot!



Q12 - Do you own or lease the farmland you are growing on? (you can choose both)



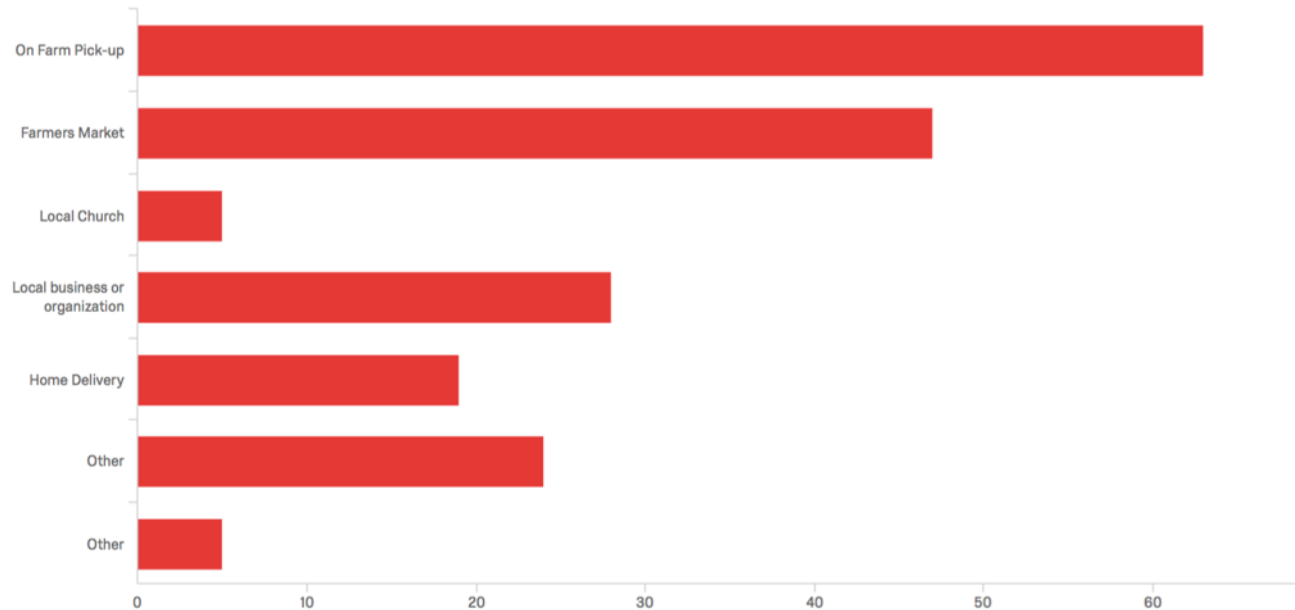
Results – What do CSA programs in MI look like?

- Price of full share ranged from \$0-\$1200, with average being \$523
- 10 farms indicated they offer work share CSAs
- Definition of a standard share = 8-12 items (or 10lbs) with a value of \$20-\$30/week
- 63% of respondents offer share "add-ons"



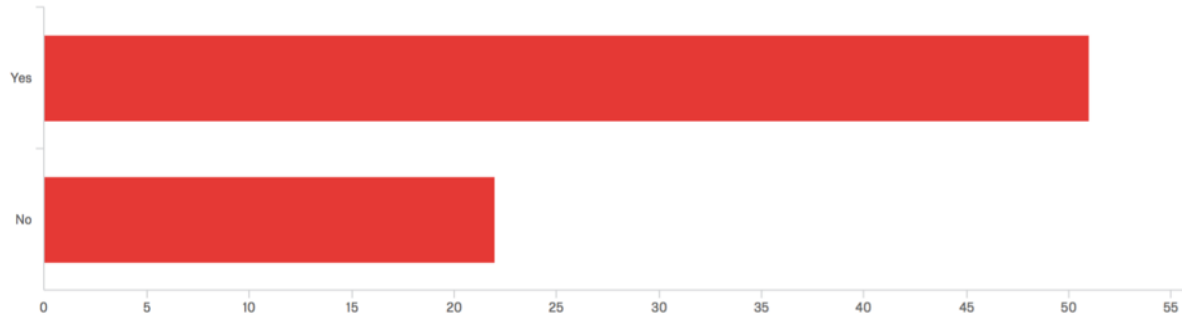
Results – What do CSA Programs in MI look like?

Q19 - Tell us a little more about your CSA distribution. Select all drop-off/pick-up locations that your farm has.

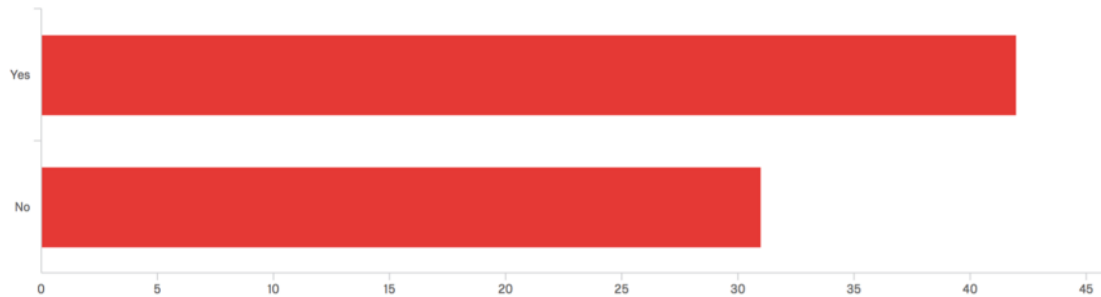


Results – How do CSA farmers view business viability?

Q31 - Do you consider your farm to be a viable business?



Q35 - Does your farm/CSA program depend on off-farm income for support?



Results – How do CSA farmers view business viability?

Farmer Financial Satisfaction:

- 56% somewhat or extremely satisfied with financial ability to meet annual operating costs, 31% somewhat or extremely dissatisfied
- 36% satisfied with farmer/owner compensation, 42% dissatisfied
- 24% satisfied with financial security including health insurance, retirement, 58% dissatisfied



Michigan CSA Survey Results – exploring CSA Labor

- Seasonal farm labor more common than year round labor
 - Year round employment also add seasonal employees
 - Difficulty with incentivizing return for seasonal farm labor
- Few took advantage of interns, apprentices or woofers
- Roughly 25% of farmers responding to labor questions used CSA Workshares for part of their labor
 - 2-25 workshares
 - Discounted labor cost, earned income for Market share,



CSA Labor – less common practices

- Many don't consider themselves paid labor
- Using contracted crews for occasional large harvests
- Non-traditional (or traditional) workers - High school volunteers, 4H/FFA clubs, children
- Groups of volunteers – nonprofit status allows local businesses and organizations to host volunteer days on farm, other community focused events
 - Volunteers thrive on easy, monotonous, large scale tasks – not for highly specialized labor
 - Important to assess cost v benefits



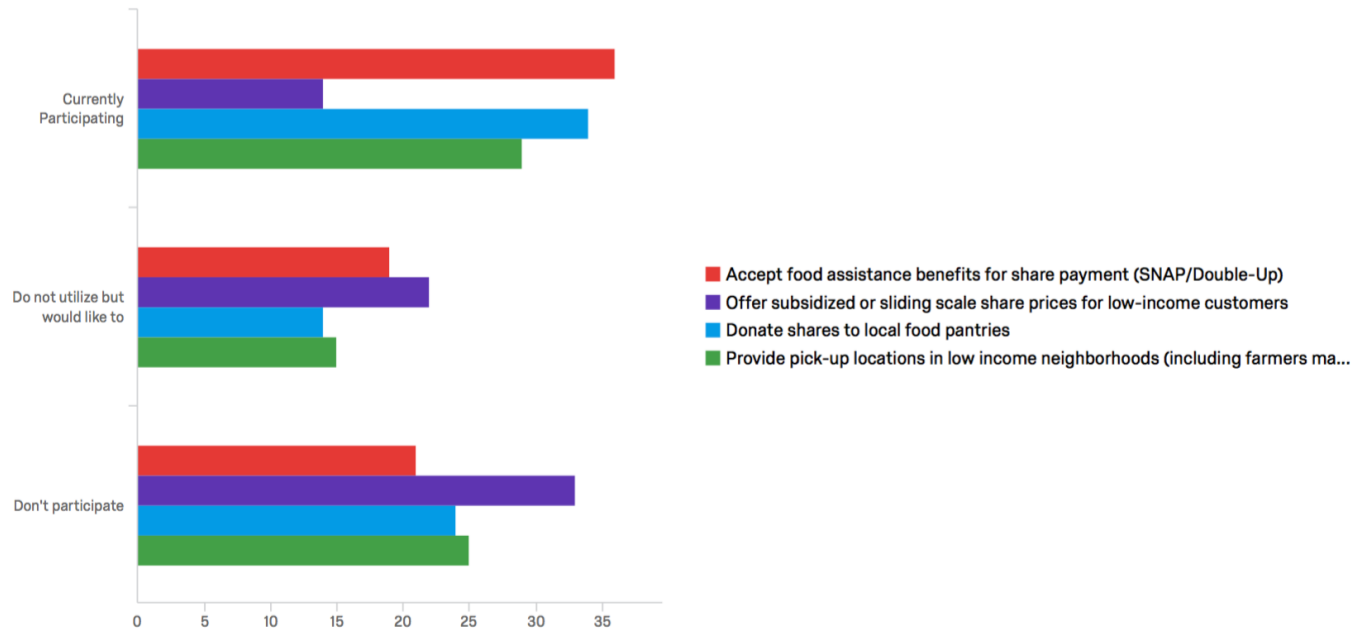
Primary labor challenges

- Inconsistent pool of skilled labor
- Difficulty retaining quality labor from year to year
- Creating pathways for growth for labor
(education, promotion, increased pay, side hustles)



Results – Working to improve food access through CSAs

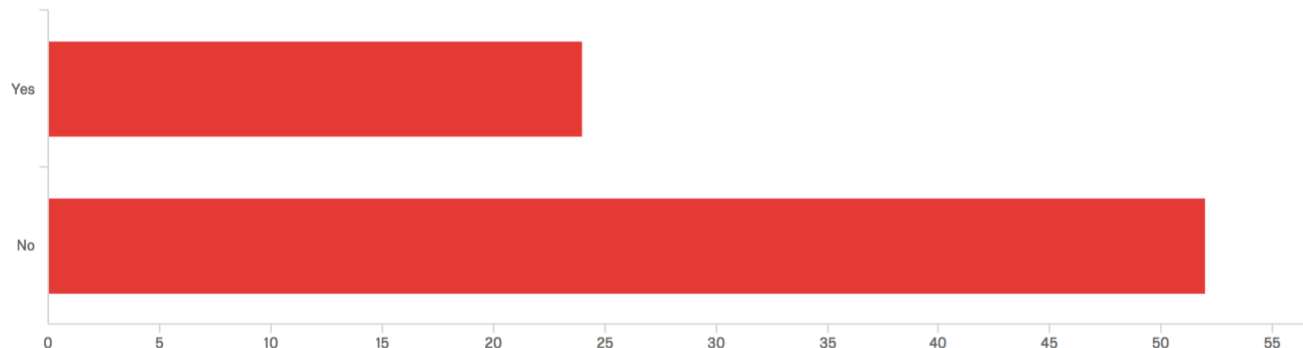
Q25 - Please select any strategies that your farm utilizes to improve food access in your community.



Results – Working to improve food access through CSAs

Opportunities exist to greater connect CSA Farms and food access organizations!

Q27 - Are you currently working with any external organizations to develop strategies for food access through CSA's (Ex. Growers Groups, Non-profits, Extension, etc.).



Broad Survey Conclusions

- There are many diverse CSA farms in Michigan working at all sizes and scales.
- Opportunities exist for organizations like non-profits, extension and other community organizations to connect CSA farms to work on food access.
- Farmers use a variety of definitions for farm viability and there are a variety of goals that farmers have for their CSAs. This is reflected in their labor practices.
- Farmers see a need to grow the pie of local eaters and understand they are working in a very competitive marketplace that requires large changes in the way we eat.



CSA Innovation Network Purpose



Photo by: NOFA-NY

The CSA Innovation Network is a resource base of programs and tools built by and for individuals and organizations supporting Community Supported Agriculture development. The purpose of the CSA-IN is to generate and facilitate idea sharing across the CSA community and to build awareness of the value of CSA to consumers.

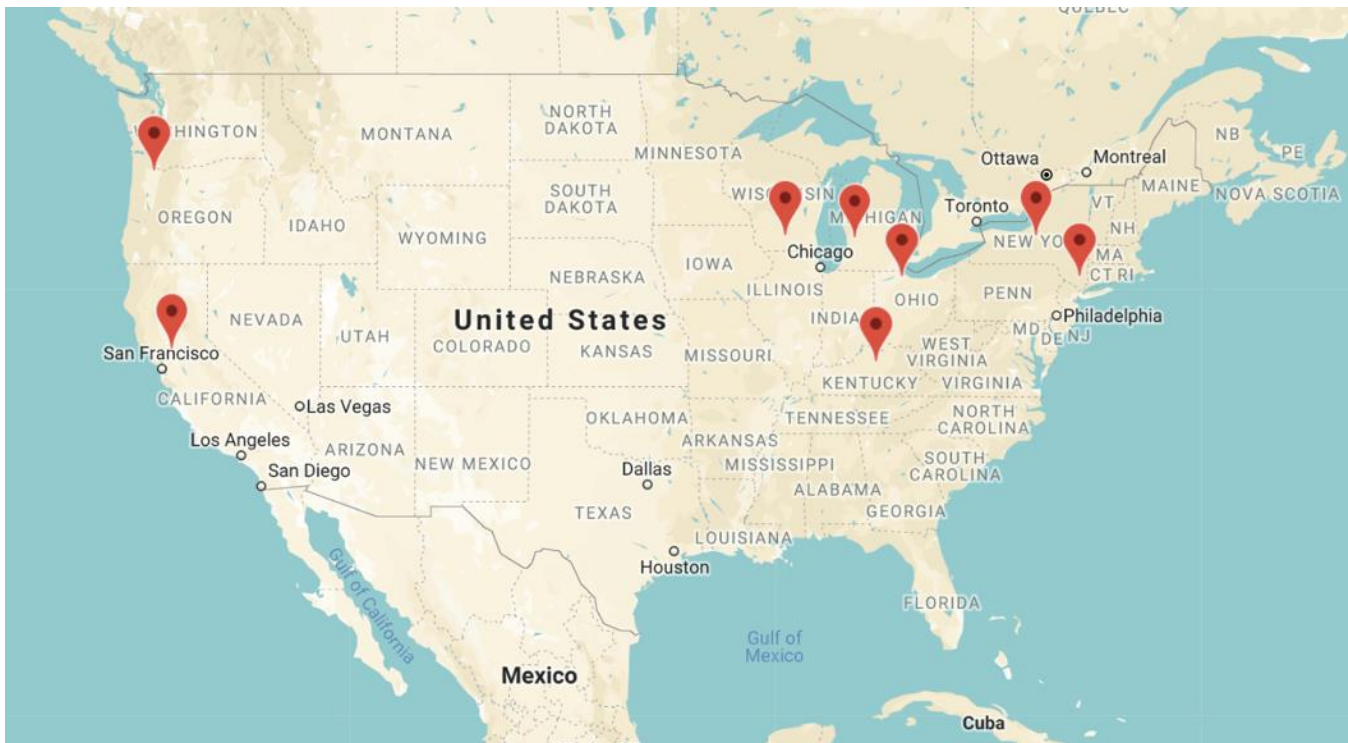


CSA-IN Participating Organizations

Partners



Collaborator



Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments

MYDIGITALFARMER



Linking Food Access and CSAs

Food Access (from USDA):



Photo: WMGG/Full Hollow Farm

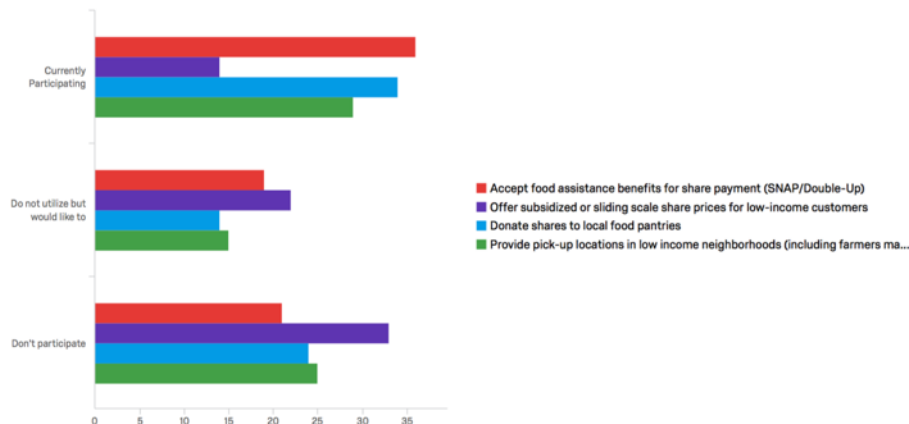


CSAs as a Tool for Food Access

The CSA Model lends itself to utilization as a tool for healthy food access.

Programs designed to bring new customers to CSA market, increase farm viability and provide greater access to healthy, local food.

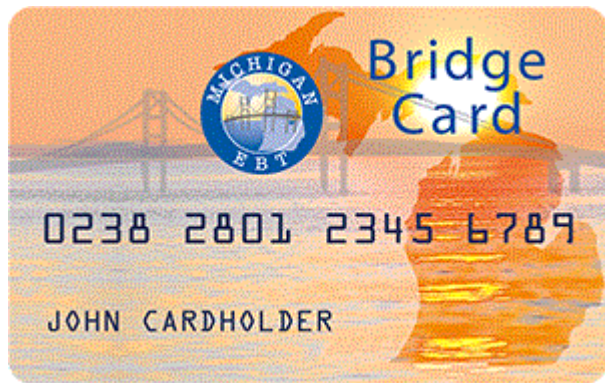
Q25 - Please select any strategies that your farm utilizes to improve food access in your community.



Currently $\frac{1}{3}$ of CSAs in MI working with community orgs on food access programs



Federal/State Nutrition Incentive Programs



- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Women Infants and Children (WIC)
- Project Fresh
- Double-Up Food Bucks
- Prescription for Health
- Gus Shumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)

Food Access/CSA Case Studies



New City Urban Farm

- Utilize Bridge/Double-Up Food Bucks for share purchase
- On-site pick-up only
- Offer several different share types to accommodate different new members



Access WM and the WMGG

- New unique partnership development between charitable food organization and local farmer group
- Connecting CSA farmers with local food pantries
- Gaining “access” to a wider more diverse audience
- Grant funded effort to start but still working on long-term sustainable funding models



Work Place Community Supported Agriculture

- Benefits to the workplace
- Benefits to the farmer
- Important things to consider
- Strategies for success
- How Extension can help



Benefits to the workplace

- Improved dietary patterns
- Camaraderie and community among employees
- Convenience
- Can lower healthcare costs
- Attractive employee benefit
- Increase job satisfaction and employee retention



Great story!



Benefits to the farm

- Guaranteed sales
- Reduced burden of finding members and coordination logistics
- Develop lasting relationships



Things to Consider



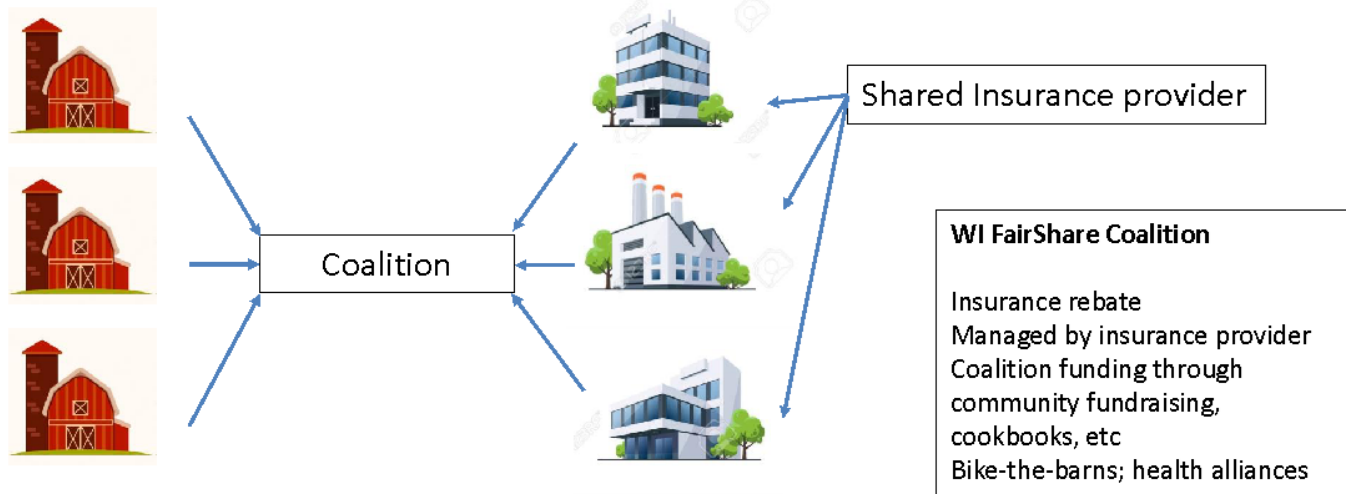
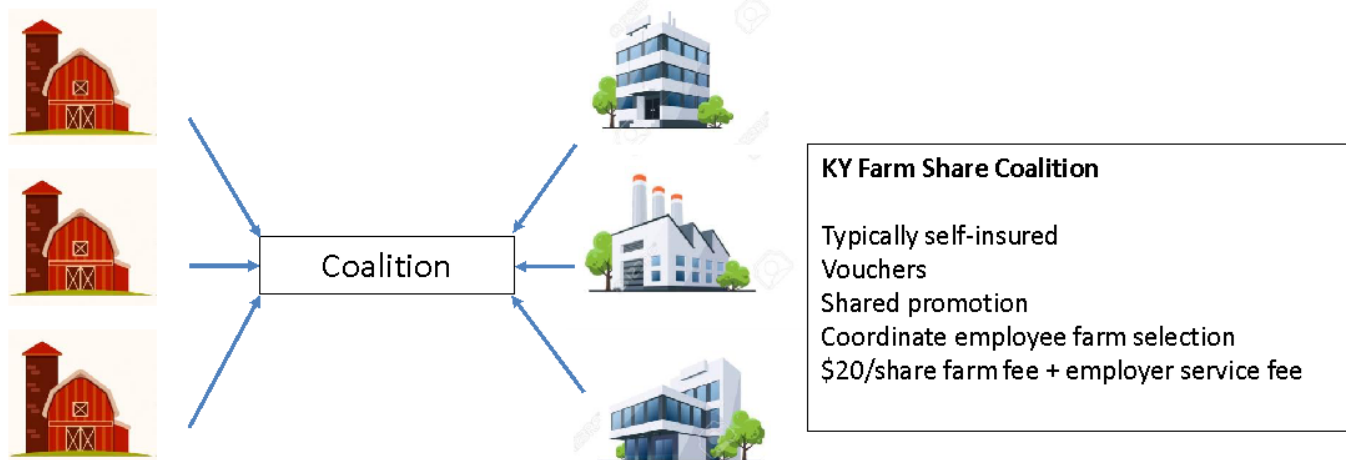
- Timeline
- Minimum share # requirements
- Drop-off/pick-up site and logistics
- Communication
- Missed share pick-ups
- Payroll Deduct



Choosing the Right Farm

- Farm location
- Season
- Share size/type
 - Crop Mix
 - Cost
- Communication style
- On-farm activities, events for worksite or CSA members?





Strategies for Success

- Survey employees
- Payroll Deduction
- Incentives through wellness programs (bags, \$, etc.)
- Drawings for \$ off shares
- Matchmaker for share splitting
- Cookbooks
- Cooking with your CSA Chef Demo
- Utilize social media
- Volunteer at the farm
- Share potluck at work



REFLECTION



Photos: Eva Deitch for the Hudson Valley CSA Coalition

Who is your **target CSA member**? Do your new and current members match that profile?



BY THE NUMBERS

In the Hudson Valley, 300 current CSA members were interviewed. Their demographic information was as follows:

- 90% had at least 2 years of higher education
- 83% were white
- 82% were homeowners
- 82% were female
- 74% were employed
- 74% were married
- 53% lived in suburban regions
- 50% had an income of \$100,000 or more
- 47% had children (mean household size: 2.9)



Eva Deitch for the Hudson Valley CSA Coalition

RECRUITMENT MESSAGING

- Start by defining CSA.





CSA: SAMPLE EXPLANATION

Community Supported Agriculture, CSA for short:

- Connects consumers closer to farmers by allowing people to subscribe to a farm or group of farms
- In return for subscribing to a harvest, members receive either a weekly or bi-weekly box of produce or other farm goods selected by the farmer based on what is in season

CSA Members:

- Pay upfront to purchase a “share” of a farm’s seasonal harvest, which provides cash flow for the farm to purchase things like seeds and equipment when it is most needed
- Receive a regular selection of **freshly harvested food**, picking up their shares at the farm itself or at another designated location
- Benefit from enjoying the freshest possible food at the height of the season and studies show that they adopt healthier eating habits than non-members



RECRUITMENT MESSAGING CONT'D

- Next, emphasize the following aspects of CSA:
 - Fresh, high quality produce (or meat)

 - Prices compare favorably to farmers markets and grocery stores
 - Supporting local economies
 - Encouraging healthy eating habits/improving health



COMMUNICATING COST

- Consider advertising the price of your share **per week** or **per pickup** rather than by lump sum.
 - \$650 per season
 - \$46 per week (~\$1 100 per season)



COMMUNICATING COST CONT'D

- Pricing models are important, too:
 - In the Hudson Valley study, potential members found payment plan options to be more appealing than upfront payments.
 - Younger and lower income individuals in particular are more likely to prefer payment plan options, insurance incentives, subsidies, and/or working shares.
- Communicate member satisfaction!

Glynwood study: The Comparative Value of CSA



- 24-week CSA
- 50 kinds of vegetable
- ~250 lb of produce
- Compared to prices of equivalent produce at 3 nearby grocery stores
- Overall takeaways: Glynwood's CSA was more expensive than conventional produce options, but was cheaper than organic/regional options at grocery stores.



NET PROMOTERS AND CSA AMBASSADORS

- Net Promoter Score (NPS): metric used worldwide to measure customer loyalty
- Range of scores -100 to +100
- Positive score (above 0): Good
- +50-70: Excellent
- Above +70: World Class



Hudson Valley CSA Score:
+77

REFLECTION

What should be your
**core marketing
message(s)** to recruit
your target CSA
member?





RETENTION

- Of the current CSA members interviewed in the Hudson Valley CSA research, 90% expressed satisfaction with their shares and intend to continue their farm memberships. Aspects of CSA that current members valued most include:
 - **Quality of food (98%)**

 - Variety of food in the shares (83%)
 - Growing practices at the farm (84%)
 - The amount of food in each share (67%)

 - Payment options/structure (21%)



RE-RECRUITMENT

- Incentives, discounts, or other types of a “special deal” can make all the difference when people are on the fence
- Remind them why they signed up for CSA in the first place





CONTINUED COMMUNICATION



- Frequent updates (newsletters)
- Communicating the contents of each share
- Social media
- Ask members to share their stories!

Key Takeaways

- The CSA model is experiencing changes due to changing food buying habits and a turn to convenience
- Opportunities exist for CSA farmers to access new and different customers by partnering with local employers
- Opportunities exist for CSA farmers to work with food access non-profits who are looking to increase local food choices and options for their constituents
- It is important to know who your customer is, so that you can develop messages and marketing strategies that reach those “ideal CSA members”



Resources:

- National CSA Innovation Network
<https://www.csainnovationnetwork.org>
- National CSA Day – February 28th, 2020
<https://csaday.info/farmers/>
- MSU Extension Community Food Systems Team
https://www.canr.msu.edu/community_food_systems/



Questions?

For more information contact:

Garrett Ziegler

zieglerg@msu.edu

