



Community Supported Agriculture

An analysis of seven community supported agriculture enterprises

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1. Introduction

The Soil Association (SA) is a partner in the Big Lottery-funded Making Local Food Work (MLFW) Programme. The twin aims of this collaboration are to (i) help connect people to the land, through food, and (ii) support the development of robust and thriving social enterprises.

The SA contribution to the programme is to support the development of community supported agriculture (CSA). While preparatory work for MLFW began in late 2006, the CSA work started in April 2008.

This paper offers an analysis of seven trading CSA enterprises. The analysis explores the particular as well as the generic factors which influence the development of CSA in the country at the moment. We set the circumstances of each enterprise against a series of attributes which we consider as characteristic of CSA.

It is not straightforward, on the basis of our interviews, to categorise the enterprises as entirely within or outside a CSA structure. In all cases, some elements of our self-defined CSA attributes are met, others are not. What is clearly defined is that the social fabric of (i) place and (ii) common cause seem strengthened, even if temporarily, through participation in CSA.

This paper is principally designed for internal use – that is for members of the Making Local Food Work programme and our close allies with an interest in local and social food enterprise. We intend that this paper should inform the way in which the programme supports the development of stable and successful CSA enterprises. However, in the interests of sharing learning from a publicly funded project, it is available, freely, via the Soil Association web-site.

2. Definitions

For the sake of this analysis, we understand a **social enterprise** as a business which reinvests its profits to generate social benefit. This is formally iterated in an earlier definition by what was the Department for Trade and Industry (now DBERR):

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Social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profits for shareholders and owners. (DTI 2002 – reference needed)

Co-operatives

Co-operatives (co-ops) are often the chosen (or assumed) structure of CSA. We understand a co-op as an enterprise owned and operated by its members for their mutual benefit. Co-ops are characterised by a governance structure where each member has one vote in enterprise decision-making, irrespective of the size of share-holding, and board members are drawn from the membership. Membership of a co-op is usually financially accessible – in some cases (such as Country Markets) a few pence. Any dividends are distributed among members. The regulation of a co-op occurs in law, as a form of Industrial and Provident Society. In this respect co-ops may be referred to as societies, rather than companies. Co-operatives UK, based in Manchester, is a legacy of the Rochdale Pioneers of 1844, and supports co-ops and monitors their economic impact. Co-operatives UK is also a partner in MLFW.

We underline here that a co-op is a way of governing enterprise and distributing profit, and that co-ops are legally regulated, as Industrial & Provident Societies or as limited companies, just as private or public companies are. We emphasise these facts in order to move away from any assumption in this report that co-ops are informal, amateurish or purely philanthropic.

Community Supported Agriculture

Defining **community supported agriculture** presents some challenges. Essentially, the Soil Association, as currently the main champion of CSA in England², sees CSA as representing a food production enterprise where, ideally, the risks and rewards are shared by producers and consumers.

For some time, CSA has worked very well as a peri-urban horticultural model in North America³. Similarly, CSA seems particularly suited to small-scale horticulture in southern Australia⁴. However, a legacy of Cultivating Communities was that several innovative approaches to supporting dairy farms and meat schemes emerged in rural areas of the UK.

Consequently, it is the ambition of the Soil Association to seek out and support breadth in innovation and practice. One sticky notion is that community is about place. We see in the following sections that some successful CSA enterprises enjoy support from local people. However two examples show, respectively, that lack of local embeddedness of the CSA causes problems; and that a community of interest, rather than of locality, can make a CSA thrive.

² Soil Association(2007), *Cultivating Communities – Reconnecting food and farming*. Bristol.

³ For example: Henderson, E. with Van En, R. (2007) *Sharing the Harvest – A citizen's guide to Community Supported Agriculture*. Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

⁴ Department for Primary Industries, State of Victoria (2004) *A Guide for the Establishment of Community Supported Agriculture Farms in Victoria*.

Lastly, a farmer sometimes suggests that if s/he runs a private organic box scheme and all of his or her customers are local people, that this enterprise is CSA. The Soil Association would not consider such a business is CSA, on the basis that risk is not shared.

So what are we talking about when we refer to CSA? It is important to address this question, at the very least, because the Soil Association work within MLFW proposes to offer publicly funded enterprise development support. Supporting one business over another may sail close to the wind in terms of state-aid rules, and potentially compromise the Lottery's aim to help good causes which generate social, public or environmental benefit.

Therefore, we list here those characteristics which we commonly associate with CSA, based on experience to date. These characteristics are:

- Shared risk
- Advanced payment for produce
- Transparent governance and finances
- Members of the enterprise may also be customers/consumers
- Consumers may contribute to labour needs of the enterprise
- Profits are re-invested in the CSA enterprise
- A social network develops around the CSA farm

In other words, if an enterprise meets some, or all, of these characteristics, and the Soil Association freely passes on learning from working with the enterprise (with consent) to others, we can feel satisfied that we are using public money wisely and in good faith.

Consumers

Consumers are people who buy and then eat food. **Members** are people who invest formally (usually by becoming co-op members) in a CSA scheme. CSA may help to blur the distinction between the two, as we shall see.

Risk

We finally focus on **risk**. Risk is present in any farming enterprise. For example a crop may fail if the season is poor, or if the producer is unskilled. Supermarkets have been vilified in the media and elsewhere for changing the terms of supply contracts as, or if, demand patterns change. The point for us is that in many conventional food production enterprises the risk is carried by the proprietor (which is mainly synonymous with the farmer). The proposition of a CSA is that risk is shared more equitably. For example, if poor weather blights a crop, the consumers share the loss. In return, consumers may (for example, as members of the CSA enterprise) feel they can help support the direction the enterprise takes (ie. by advocating sustainable husbandry) or negotiating leisure access to the land.

Appendix 1 outlines the concept of inherent risk in agriculture and suggests how a CSA approach may in some cases, offer potential to mitigate this risk.

3. Method

(i) Selection of CSA enterprises

In the autumn of 2008 the Soil Association selected a number of CSA enterprises to become the subjects of this exploration. Original intentions were that any selection should collectively cover the following considerations:

- Breadth of governance
- Variation in model
- Breadth of food produced
- Geographical spread
- An established record of trading
- Range of size

Table 1 below briefly outlines which enterprises were finally selected. Further descriptions will follow. *The CSAs in this report have been made anonymous as interviews were carried out with a guarantee of confidentiality due to the sharing of commercial details.*

Table 1 – CSA selection for analysis

CSA 1:	An organically certified vegetable enterprise, operating on two plots of land totalling 18 acres, producing for 80 veg-boxes a week. The farm is owned by a community land trust. Five customers currently contribute labour for their box. The development to a CSA was lead by the grower employed by the Trust, keen to engage with the community. Farmer led. Turnover £52,000 approx.
CSA 2:	A large, well established CSA with 190 members, producing food on 48 acres of rented land. Two farmers are employed full time, one growing vegetables which members pack and collect, and a stockman giving members the option of buying beef, lamb or pork from the farm. Food is produced using biodynamic principles. The CSA is registered as an IPS. Consumer led. Turnover £80,000 approx.
CSA 3:	A newly established CSA growing vegetables on one third of a hectare rented from an organic farmer. The scheme attracted 12 subscribers 4 of whom worked for their share of veg. Farmer led. Turnover £12,000 approx.
CSA 4:	Long established CSA incorporating 2 farms covering 700 acres and employing a range of staff. The CSA has over 500 members. Together the farms produce vegetables, fruit, beef, pork, poultry, bread flour, dairy all of which are sold through the farm shop. Membership of the CSA does not entitle them to food, but this must be purchased from the shop. Farmer led. Turnover £600,000 approx.
CSA 5:	A 22 acre orchard CSA. Members pay an annual fee making it more of a crop-share arrangement. In return, members receive a share of the harvest and the opportunity of participating in orchard events through the year. They have also established an Adopt a Tree scheme. Farmer led. Turnover £52,000 approx.
CSA 6:	A 2.5 acre walled garden on an organic farm. The CSA has 35-50 members who receive a weekly share of veg. Although set up by a volunteer, the subscription income now meets running costs such as paying a grower, and some capital costs. Farmer led. Turnover £28,000 approx.

CSA 7:	This CSA rents 22 acres of land and produces fruit and veg for 175 families. It is connected to a spiritual community. It is established as a workers cooperative and has 9 employees, mostly part time. Subscribers can work for their share. Consumer led. Turnover £90,000 approx.
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We also indicate that CSA 1 and CSA 3 were started only in March 2008. In the case of CSA 3, this is nine months before the interview took place. This was because an opportunity arose to interview the grower, who was moving home, and it was felt that some useful retrospective reflections might be gleaned. In this case CSA 3 may be seen as a 'dry-run' for the remaining interviews, rather than as an indicative case study. We include short details about it in this report.

Finally, as members of CSA 2 were commissioned in 2008 by the SA to outline a structured and detailed account, members of that enterprise were not interviewed. Instead, the report provided data.

(ii) Involving Co-operatives^{UK} and establishing lines of inquiry

Informal enquiries combined with experiences of Soil Association development workers reflected that many CSA enterprises welcome help with their governance. As Co-operatives^{UK} was also keen to develop joint work with other MLFW partners and to understand the governance needs of the programme's beneficiaries, it was agreed that Co-operatives^{UK} would either include governance-related lines of inquiry in interviews carried out by Soil Association staff, or in two cases (CSA 6 and CSA 5) Co-operatives^{UK} staff joined interviews.

Lines of inquiry (ie. questions) are presented in appendix 2.

(iii) Confidential interviews

Interviewees were contacted and sent a list of questions. In each case it was explained that the questions did not need to be strictly adhered to, rather that they represented areas of inquiry which interested the Soil Association. If, for example, interviewers felt that a particularly fruitful area of discussion was being pursued, they were encouraged to let that discussion take its own course. In that sense, we suggest our data collection is based on semi-structured interviews. Given also that interviewers are employed to promote CSA development, the position of interviewers might be considered broadly supportive, or as a 'critical friend' of the interviewee. Interviews were confidential to encourage honest reflection. After the interviews, the discussion was written up by the interviewer and represented to the interviewee for review or correction of errors.

(iv) Analysis

Once interviews were collected they were distributed to Sarah Alldred and Richard Snow, with contextual suggestions relating to how an analysis might be approached.

In essence, analysis was to consider whether and how interview data related to the Soil Association concept of CSA. The aim was to explore whether CSA enterprises have special characteristics or more generic ones, which may apply to any form of small or medium scale food production enterprise.

The three analysts met on 8th April in Birmingham. In exploring the characteristics of CSA and scrutinising that data in the interviews, we asked three questions:

- What is the aim of the individual CSA enterprise?
- How can the MLFW programme support it in practice?
- What are the parameters for our support to them (ie. how do they qualify for it)?

Each enterprise was thus examined.

4. CSA descriptions

(i) CSA 1

CSA 1 operates on two plots of land totalling roughly 18 acres. Vegetables are cultivated by a grower to supply for 80 vegetable boxes in the surrounding area. Following two poor growing seasons in 2007 and 2008, half the produce for the box schemes is bought in from local wholesalers and a local organic farm.

CSA 1 is a farm owned by a community land trust, which was formed in 2002 by six individuals with additional loanstock from 4 people that have no say in the running of the company. The grower is both director of the trust and soletrader tenant who is responsible for the management of the box scheme. There are six trust members. The not for profit land trust formed in order to try and buy a farmhouse which would allow an agrarian lifestyle for its members, akin to the Tinker's Bubble community in Somerset (<http://www.geocities.com/capitolhill/congress/7727/tinkers.htm>).

The grower was inspired by a CSA event supported by the SA. The grower channelled this enthusiasm into the development of a CSA business plan for CSA 1, partly in response to the eventual decision by the land trust not to pursue its residential ambitions. The grower thus became a sole-trader tenant from October 2006, starting with only 4 customers, though within a year this rose to 90. The Trust meets biannually and makes key decisions about the land, for example prescribes organic production methods (it has been certified by the Soil Association since February 2006). The grower controls vegetable production.

This hands-off arrangement is not what the grower envisaged from CSA. It bears few differences to any conventional landholder-tenant relationship. The grower is therefore considering how to establish more involvement with the enterprise through its customers, for example through their membership of an IPS or a Community Interest Company⁵.

Of the existing 95 individual customers taking the 80 or so vegetable boxes, five of them regularly contribute labour for their box. This is valued at £6 per hour, though most tend to work beyond the equivalent value of the box. Other existing involvement from the box customers has been contribution to marketing the scheme (though leaflet drops, radio interviews and open days).

(ii) CSA 2

CSA 2 was established in 2002, a few months after four local people discussed opportunities to change the way they feed themselves. CSA 2 is characterised as a community-led and highly organised approach to CSA enterprise.

⁵ CIC is a recently developed company structure. CICs are limited companies designed for people who conduct their business for community benefit. Thus private profit is not the primary goal. Companies can become CICs if they satisfy a community interest test and are associated with an asset lock – whereby assets are held by the community if the company winds up. See www.cicregulator.gov.uk

Within six months of an initial public meeting which attracted 80 people, an acre of land had been rented and a grower was employed to produce vegetables. At this early stage, concerns about the personal liabilities of the consumers and investors in CSA 2 led to the establishment of an Industrial and Provident Society.

Today CSA 2 has almost 190 subscribers, who each pay £2 a month toward co-op membership. The vast majority of them are also consumers and pay an additional £8 a month for a crop share. Some members contribute labour in return for food, though this follows a discussion with the farmers who can judge where best to utilise skills and enthusiasms. Decisions are made on the basis of consensus, though, in recognition of the difficulty of achieving this from a large membership, smaller sub-groups are elected to tackle particular issues. The membership selects from its numbers a core group of executive officers who form a board. The membership of this core group is time limited to ensure rotation.

Two farmers are employed, one to manage vegetable production, the second who cares for the beef cattle, sheep and pigs. Both are paid an hourly wage which earns them roughly £19,000 a year. Food is produced on 48 acres of rented land, a mile from the town, on a 10-year tenure. Additional land, six miles away, is rented from a school. Other plots of land are rented from additional land holders. Husbandry is based on bio-dynamic principles. Other employed staff include the part-time treasurer, an administrator and casual farm staff, all paid on an hourly basis.

Farmers meet monthly with the core group to offer a farm report. The farmers are trusted to competently produce food and set production plans and budgets. The core group may make broader decisions, for example on enterprise development. While labour contributions are not obligatory, monthly work days help to familiarise members with the circumstances of production and, along with social events such as harvest suppers, help to build a social network within the membership.

Food is, in the main, collected from a store shed on the land. Members help themselves to a range of vegetables in quantities stipulated by the grower according to availability at the time. Meat is available in a freezer and joints are priced individually. Access to the shed is restricted to members, who will know the code of the combination lock. Unwanted produce can be swapped by leaving it in a 'swap-box' within the shed. Flowers and herbs are also grown and available as 'pick-your-own', to avoid deterioration. No notable difficulties with this system of honesty have been encountered.

To ensure supply levels, some produce is bought in (such as onions and potatoes) and in times of surplus food is sold to a local wholesaler. A few paid deliveries of produce are made to customers via a local whole-food shop in the town.

CSA 2 has received some grants for capital costs, including the purchase of a poly tunnel, though the enterprise is self-financing

(iii) CSA 3

At the time of our interview, CSA 3 was about to undergo a change, as described in section 3 above. CSA 3 is newly established, having been launched in March 2008. The following description highlights challenges in its operation and we include it simply as an illustrative example, with lessons to be learnt about community engagement, expectation and grower proximity to the land under cultivation.

Until the CSA started growing vegetables, the land had been used for organic barley production. The CSA scheme was offered 1 ha of this land by the landowner, an organic farmer, who is friendly with the CSA grower and wanted to support a CSA experiment. Of this 1ha, only one-third was eventually used for vegetable production to support the emerging CSA scheme.

Following an open meeting in the local pub the CSA was eventually established with 12 subscribers. Eight of these paid a little under £9 for a regular box of vegetables, containing, it was intended, enough to ‘feed a family for a week’. The remaining four subscribers contributed labour for their food. Initially a weekly box was envisaged but in practice this sometimes stretched closer to fortnightly. The regularity depended on the grower’s ability to juggle family life and growing at the field, which lies a 40 minute drive from her home.

From the outset, the grower wanted to avoid the onerous task of delivering a box scheme to subscribers. Earlier experiences had shown that too much time on the road and in traffic could be better spent on the land. Therefore, access to produce was organised by the grower telephoning subscribers to agree a meeting time in the field. There was no storage building though a suitable barn had been identified for future use.

The small scale of the production area and the limited membership belies a wide range of produce which includes mixed chard, kales, cabbages, sprouts, purple sprouting broccoli, leaks, a variety of beans, squash, potatoes, parsnips, carrots, radish and beetroot.

(iv) CSA 4

This CSA is the largest and, with CSA 7 (see vii below), one of the oldest in the UK. Though unique, it challenges preconceptions of CSA as small-scale vegetable concerns. Formed of two farms, the combined enterprise covers 700 acres, employs a wide range of staff, many of whom live on the farms, in the company of three residents with learning difficulties. The CSA has a combined membership of over 500 people, most of whom live locally. The way the CSA is established is more complex than other examples cited in this paper but this brings several benefits, as we will describe.

Both farms involved in CSA 4 originally belonged to a local college and sold to a community land trust in 1995. The first farm covers 200 acres with another 300 acres rented mainly nearby (there is also a parcel in the next county). It produces cattle, pigs, poultry and a small amount of bread flour. The second farm is a 200 acre mixed farm with dairy, poultry, beef, lamb, pork and 15 acres of seasonal fruits and vegetables.

When owned by the college, both farms began to be loss making in the 1990s until the current CSA structure was embraced. A feature of the CSA is that membership of the enterprise does not entitle members to food, most of which is bought from the farms’ shops, contributing to the farms’ combined turnover of around £600,000, of which about one-sixth is income from social services.

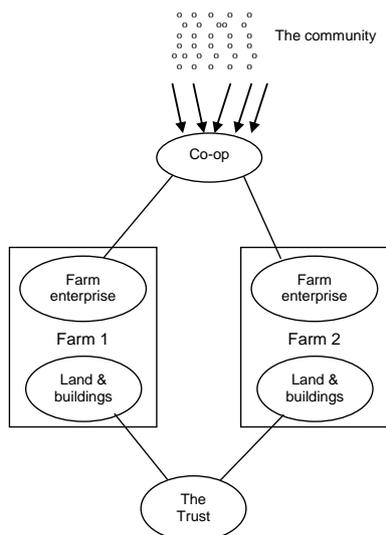


Figure 1: CSA 4 landholding and enterprise structure.

The diagram above illustrates how individual citizens combine to form the CSA 4 co-operative. This co-op governs the enterprise (ie. food production and sales, and social service residencies) of both farms. However the land occupied by the CSAs and buildings used by them is owned by a local land trust. In other words, the land and the business of farming is separate. In addition, as tenants of the land, the CSA enterprise, through its payment of rental, to some extent finances the maintenance of its infrastructure.

(v) CSA 5

CSA 5 is a 22-acre cider and dessert fruit orchard. The CSA scheme is really a crop-sharing arrangement whereby subscribers pay an annual fee of £325 a year (£295 for standing order payments) in return for produce and participation in orchard-based events.

A key motivation in establishing the crop-share scheme was the decline in the orchard business due to competition from imports and a progressive reduction in wholesaling trade. Farmers' market retailing had been partially successful but inadequate to fully support the business. Organic certification was rejected and the success of a box scheme seemed unlikely given the seasonality of the limited produce range.

The crop-share scheme was launched in 2001. Produce purchased by subscription includes fresh fruit, juice, cider and preserves. In addition, subscribers are invited to 4 event weekends a year which include walks, cider tastings, local festivals and visits to local farms and craft outlets.

In addition to crop-share subscription, CSA 5 also offers opportunities to adopt a fruit tree. This costs £50 per tree for a period of five years. Unlike a crop-share, tree- sponsorship does not provide a produce shipment, but sponsors are able to come and pick fruit from their tree if they wish. Currently around two-thirds (c. 2,000) of trees are sponsored and the initiative is an effective method to re-stock the orchard, partly grubbed up in earlier, more challenging times. There is no clear plan yet how the scheme will continue once the first five-year sponsorship period expires.

In addition, a fruit-share scheme has been offered for 3 years, in which surplus apples are available by post to a second tier of subscribers. The fruit-share option allows people to support the orchard anywhere in the country, is cheaper than a full crop-share and was established as a way of extending subscription custom without the associated need for accommodation linked to visitors holding a full crop-share. Interest in the narrower fruit-share scheme has been limited, perhaps indicating the attraction of visiting the orchards among crop-share subscribers. Several supporters however do not live nearby and at least one has never visited the farm.

A local cider initiative, *Once Upon A Tree*, was launched in 2007 and produces high quality cider from fruit bought from CSA 5. Sales are in retail, wholesale but also to crop-share subscribers. In other words CSA 5 is able to sell its fruit to Once Upon A Tree and 'sell on' the resultant cider to crop-share subscribers. On-farm cider sales will follow this year.

Crop-share subscription conditions are clearly explained in an agreement (see appendix 4). In the case of crop failure the orchard owners will buy in fruit from other local growers, (though this may beg the question of whether, as long-standing growers, the CSA and its neighbours might not *all* suffer crop failure).

Quarterly newsletters help to keep supporters informed of events and seasonal developments in the orchard. Important links from the orchard are made to local fine food networks, cultural events, and orchard landscape celebrations, which the orchard may host.

Growth in sales has risen from £7,000 at inception in 2001 to £15,000 in 2007/08. This is enough to pay for orchard maintenance and a small profit for the owners. The cost of subscription is absorbed by roughly half in produce supply and half to cover accommodation costs for four annual visits.

(vi) CSA 6

CSA 6 is a discreet 2.5 acre walled garden plot within an existing 160 acre farm. The farm was converted to organic production in 1999. About 70 acres are cultivated, including the walled garden, the remainder being woodland, lake and marsh. It is a mixed farm producing turkeys, ducks and chickens, eggs, sheep, pigs and beef. Earlier dairying at the farm, where the current farmer has lived for 50 years, has been abandoned for some time. Most produce is sold from the farm shop, or at local farmers' markets, and to local caterers.

CSA production comprises fruits and vegetables only and serves 50 members. The orchard has been extended and strawberries have been planted within the walled garden. A new poly-tunnel has been erected outside the walled garden to supply growing CSA demand.

The CSA scheme was initiated by a volunteer with an interest in CSA (and who still works at the farm – she benefits from farm shop discount and use of a small area of the farm's land). In June 2006 the volunteer started planning a CSA scheme with existing farm shop and farmers' markets customers. In March 2007 the scheme was established by the volunteer and the farmer, initially supplying 35 members, all of which paid a year's fee in advance, equivalent to just under £12 a week. The CSA scheme aims to supply members all year round, though Jan – Mar can be lean months and subsequently potatoes, carrots and onions are bought in from local suppliers. The income from 35 members met running costs and some capital costs of the CSA scheme, including wages for a self-employed grower.

The farm has a rather overlapping range of participants, as described. Table 2 below clarifies the actors involved.

Table 2 – Categories of actors at the organic farm and relationship with CSA

Actor	Status	Role within CSA
Farmer	Landlord	CSA Director (CSA is subsidiary of farm enterprise). Contributes 10 hours per week to CSA in return for 5 shares to sell in the farm shop. Buys 5 additional shares for the shop.
Farm Volunteer	Catalyst (started CSA)	Core group member. Community outreach. Leads SUMA buying group.
Grower	Self-employed	Produces CSA food.
CSA members	Customers (of, in effect, a private box scheme)	Elect members to CSA core group. Set up social events.
Butcher	Employee of farm	None.

The scheme was immediately popular, but rather than expand membership before the scheme was fully established, a waiting list was started. During the second year of operation, membership rose to 50. This level is now, again, considered a viable level at which to continue CSA development, though a future target of 100 members is aspired to.

A buying group using the whole-food wholesaler SUMA was organised for CSA members, and also 2 meat buying groups were set up by members of a local development trust keen to

source organic meat from a local farm – collection is from the farmers’ market, and provides an opportunity to bulk buy the farm’s organic meat at a lower price.

(vii) CSA 7

CSA 7 is linked to a spiritual community and motivated by a desire to increase the supply of locally produced food. The governance structure of the CSA, uniquely in this series, is a company limited by shares, though the shares may only be held by workers. In that respect, the organisations structure is a worker’s co-operative.

The production area of seasonal fruits and vegetables covers three rented holdings covering about 22 acres. At the time of the interview the CSA boasted 175 family consumer subscriptions who collect vegetable boxes from various local drop-off points. In addition, there are three institutional customers – a local shop and two community kitchens. A feature of CSA 7 is subscribers must subscribe for a year. This both ensures security but also customers can get the full benefit of the seasonal range. A recent marketing development has been weekly supplies to subscribers working at the local Council.

Nine employees, of which two are full-time, include farmers, packers and management and finance staff.

Like CSA 2 and CSA 3, customers may contribute labour to attract a subscription discount (of 10%). For a single person, labour contributions of three hours, means that a subscription costs as little as £4.40 per week.

Social events are a feature of the CSA as well as annual open meetings and subscriber surveys and interviews.

5. Discussion

The descriptions in section 4 above reveal a range of different approaches to CSA. Several share features of operation, especially advanced payment or opportunities to accommodate consumers of varied economic backgrounds. We outlined early on in the paper that the CSAs were selected to reflect diversity. Even so, it is not easy to recognise what might be a typical CSA from our selection. To provide some summary from the CSA descriptions, basic data are presented below.

Table 3: CSA selection summary

CSA	Why formed?	Legal structure	Members	Size of holding (acres)	Produce	Method of distribution
CSA 1	Individual farmer inspiration	Ltd company (Sole-trader)	80	18	Vegetables	Box
CSA 2	Collective action	IPS	180	50	Vegetables, fruit, meat, flowers	Pick-up from farm, few boxes delivered
CSA 3	Individual farmer inspiration	Unincorporated association	12	1	Vegetables	Pick-up from field
CSA 4	Community farming/ biodynamics	IPS	500+	700	Vegetables, fruit, meat, dairy	Retail
CSA 5	Enterprise strategy	Ltd company	45	22	Apple and pear produce	Postal delivery/pick-up
CSA 6	Individual volunteer enthusiasm	Ltd company	40	2.25	Vegetables	Pick-up from farm or farmers’ market.

CSA 7	Collective action	IPS (worker-led)	175	22	Vegetables, fruits	Box
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In trying to answer our own analysis questions, we also face the task of exploring the challenges faced by the CSAs we interviewed. How are these reconciled with, and overcome through MLFW?.

(i) Motivations for CSA and engagement by the management board

CSA 1's landlord is a land trust set up to enable an agrarian community inspired by Tinker's Bubble. Nevertheless, the CSA leader at CSA 1 feels the land trust board is less actively engaged with the operation of the CSA than he would like. Similarly, CSA 2's experience shows that the CSA's highly competent grower, to whom day-to-day decisions on food production are deferred, now increasingly finds himself taking responsibility for wider CSA management – previously the task of the CSA board.

Both these examples contrast with what CSA 4 commentators describe as the benefits of 'farming free from the burden of inheritance' – in other words the freedom to concentrate fully on production. Inheritance is not suggested for any of the CSAs, but the point made at CSA 4 is that food production and enterprise operation can, and should, be separated. Failing to achieve this satisfactorily may increase risk (by over-reliance on the farmer) or remove some of the need for a CSA structure (if the farmer is largely in control/carrying the can).

By contrast, the enthusiasm of, but hesitancy in decision-making by CSA 6 board members led the farmer to suggest, for the sake of expediency and production, that plans to copy CSA 2's IPS structure were revised. The CSA is now essentially a subsidiary of the wider farm.

We also note also that owners of CSA 5 have little discernable 'political' motivation. Creative methods have proven successful in bringing their orchard business back into profit despite underlying structural and economic difficulties. This creativity has contributed to the preservation of orchards in a county significantly defined by its orchard landscapes.

(ii) Certified or not?

CSA 5 and CSA 1 offer interesting contrasts to CSA 6, CSA 2 and CSA 4 in terms of certified production status. Orchard for dessert fruit is both highly seasonal and difficult under organic standards and subsequently CSA 5 has not embraced them. This seems to offer no detraction for its customers. CSA 1 is Soil Association certified, though as the CSA engages on trade during times of scarcity, its organic status may restrict the ability to buy in produce locally – not many other local suppliers are certified. In any case, the CSA proposition of fostering a close, even intimate relationship between land, farmer and food, may render the reassurances offered by organic status unnecessary. Both CSA 1 and CSA 6 complain of the onerous administrative burden of certification particularly for smaller farmers and suggest a small-holder scheme might be beneficial.

On the other hand, we note that CSA 2 and CSA 4 are deeply motivated by biodynamic methods and see these as part of the intimacy with nature which CSA offers. Similarly, CSA 7 is motivated by its spiritual roots, while CSA 6, simply a distinct parcel within a private organic farm, currently presents no reason to produce anything other than organic food.

(iii) How connected are subscribers?

We find little argument with the idea that CSA is a good vehicle for attaining connection with the detail, even the practice of production. In some cases this is an attraction – CSA 2's work

days are well attended. In some cases, such as CSA 7 and CSA 3 labour contributions can replace the need to pay for food.

A question is raised though about the extent to which community dedication, or connection is necessary. On one hand, we note that far-flung subscribers are happy to support CSA 5, and indeed may not turn up to collect their crop share (of course, this neglect will involve weighing up the cost, convenience and priority of travelling long distances to pick fruit). CSA 5 is by no means democratic – subscribers have no say over the business decisions, though the approach to the crop-sharer enterprise is consultative, based on regular correspondence with subscribers and social gatherings.

CSA 1's farmer was able to raise 50 letters from his membership to support a successful planning appeal, compared to one letter of objection – here we witness the mobilisation of CSA membership as a campaigning body.

On the other hand we note that members of CSA 4 are less actively involved in the social network of the farms than at its inception, and many are motivated by the high quality of the food available through the farm shops.

To what extent is the production-community dynamic required to make the CSA succeed, is another relative issue. Common sense may suggest that a committed CSA consumer-base should stick by the farm through thick and thin. This is a key CSA proposition. But consider (i) CSA 4's request through MLFW to review its marketing approach in the light of the recession; (ii) the successful regaining, through marketing, of lost customers by both CSA 1 and CSA 7; (iii) the stated upper limit of 200 subscribers which CSA 2 considers imposing on its membership before the intimate social dynamic between land and consumer change the current nature of the CSA. Finally, CSA 5's dispersed supporter group might be considered as a community of interest which, to a modest degree, may facilitate onward investment through its social gatherings in the local rural economy.

Setting aside consumers, experience at CSA 4 shows that there are two levels of community: (i) the community 'outside' the farm, that is the customers, members and supporters of the CSA; (ii) the community 'inside' the farms – 26 employees, residents and apprentices who live, work, eat meals and reflect together. This tight (and partly time-tabled) bond, perhaps above all, underscores the connections which CSA can create not just between people and the land but between people in common cause.

(iv) Risk

Another key proposition of the SA's advocacy of CSA is the equitable distribution of risk. CSA 6's (and possibly CSA 3's) customers seem to accept that gluts and scarcities may need to be seen in the round – there is a sense that you have to be thankful in good times and philosophical in the bad (three wet summers in a row now pay great tribute to the skill of the CSA growers, and underscore some of the advantages of crop diversity).

The CSA 4 model, in separating membership from access to food effectively removes risk from the consumer. CSA 3, likewise, shows how CSA customers, dedicated and supported though they may be, stand to lose little if the CSA fails. In fact CSA 3 and CSA 1 both illustrate that their farmers have, respectively, shouldered considerable personal financial burdens, or written off any hope of an income, in favour of carrying out their CSA innovations.

CSA 6 is an interesting case: the risk between producer and customer is clear (for example through advanced payment), but complicated by the additional work created for the

farmer/landlord, whose 'rent' is paid in CSA shares. So one key way to mitigate risk in a CSA may be to professionalise the management duties (that is, pay for them), just as some CSAs have succeeded in professionalising food production by employing farmers.

(v) Generic or specific challenges

We have already heard how economic circumstances, governance problems, perceptions of the desirability of buying in foods, and the need to negotiate the values or ethics of a CSA, all conspire to influence its development.

In particular, our interviewees raised a number of specific areas of development support, these include help with:

- Production certification
- Governance review
- Finance
- Land tenure
- Crop planning

It is the Soil Association's intention to address these needs through a CSA development and mentoring programme from August 2009. But it is notable that, with the exception of crop planning, none of the development needs stated are particularly CSA-specific, indeed the middle three are not even specific to food enterprises.

The issue of finance is important to CSA. We suggest it is possibly a mistake to hook CSA emergence to grant-giving. This is because (i) grant programmes reach an end; and (ii) temporary subsidy gradually must be replaced by increased profits in future balance sheets. CSA 4 have shown inspiration by regularly raising capital (and paying it back) from its membership, while others have literally paid for their enthusiasm for CSA establishment: farmers at CSA 1 and CSA 3 had difficulty earning a living through the CSA, while the income of the self-employed farmer at CSA 6, for a full-time equivalent job⁶ is above the minimum wage at £8.00 per hour. Farmers at other CSAs, for example CSA 2 and CSA 7, are more secure and the crop-share model has been a major factor in the financial viability of CSA 5.

Nevertheless, several of the CSAs in this paper show that 'socialising' the outcomes of food production can build trust between producers and consumers, enhance material wealth of farmers and enhance the (social) well-being of consumers, as well as developing resilience through diversity of cropping, trading and building customer loyalty. The skills needed by CSAs to secure such achievements can be facilitated and enhanced by external help, such as is offered through MLFW.

6. What next for MLFW in supporting?

Because the MLFW programme makes use of public money to support social enterprises, we propose to:

- (i) support food enterprises expressing an interest in a CSA approach; and
- (ii) the amount and type of support will depend on the degree in which the existing enterprise exhibits our CSA characteristics (see section 2. above).

⁶ The interview revealed that the grower may work a 15 hour week in winter and a 60-hour week in summer.

In other words, MLFW should encourage and support food production enterprises which are supported by a community (of locality or interest) and which exhibits social benefit (at least to its supporters). Because of the weaknesses our analysis reveals, developmental support through MLFW is perhaps best directed at securing good governance and business planning, which can be reinforced through methods such as mentorship and CSA study visits.

Finally we note that, with the exception of CSA 6 which aimed to imitate elements of CSA 2's democratic operation, that the way our interviewed CSAs are run has remained consistent. However, knowledge of at least two other CSAs in the SA network shows that CSAs have been transformed as going concerns to private companies. We will not introduce new details of these enterprises here, except to suggest that CSA may have propensity to constitute a development phase not just an end in its own right.

7. Conclusions

This paper represents an analysis of seven CSAs (though note earlier provisos about CSA 3) based on data gleaned from semi-structured interviews. These were carried out between December 2008 – April 2009.

It is not straightforward, on the basis of our interviews, to categorise the enterprises as entirely within or outside a CSA structure. In all cases, some elements of our self-defined CSA attributes are met, others are not. There is especially a question over democracy and risk, though neither may inhibit the success of the CSA. In fact, we conclude that like most small food enterprises, success depends on generic issues such as good governance, quality and understanding of customer demand/motivation. What is clearly defined is that the social fabric of (i) place and (ii) common cause seem strengthened, even if temporarily, through participation in CSA.

Appendix 1 – Agriculture, risk and CSA

Risk	Illustration	Effect	Mitigation	Does CSA help?
1. Disease	Livestock death and/or crop failure	Loss of herd genetics Reduction in yield Risk of onward contamination Loss of income Loss of reputation.	Good husbandry and breed selection Crop diversity Closed herds/systems Insurance	If risk is realised, the financial effect may be shared by members. Engaged consumers may be more willing to embrace hardier varieties with less cosmetic appeal.
2. Increased regulatory burden (NB regulation also can be considered beneficial)	Bio-security Competition, locality or hygiene rules	Increased costs Limitations in activity Increased workload and skills needs. Emotional effects on producers (e.g. EU-phobia)	Training and information Joining a network Understanding how to 'work' the system (cheating)	Some skills needs may be identified among members. 'Internal market' may mean that customers also own stock in some cases, removing certain restrictions, such as on-farm slaughter.
3. External economic factors	Increased or volatile costs (rents, loan interest, fuel, feed, inputs...) Phasing out of subsidy Reduced access to credit	Reduced profitability or loss Threat to business viability	Anticipation of cost increases in business plan Avoidance of over-borrowing and prefer fixed rates Adopt techniques which reduce reliance on/use of oil and inputs Negotiate forward contracts Consider diversification of crops and market channels Consider processing (though this may require extra credit)	Negotiation of cost-price ratio with members before production starts. Opp. to raise capital from members at low interest or interest in produce, with potential flexibility for term of repayment. Growth may not be a priority and broad motivations of members may allow flexibility if prices increase, May be some opp. to fix rents with public, charitable or sympathetic landlord.

			<p>Buy bulk (with others?) at times of advantageous price</p> <p>Grow feed and generate on-farm electricity</p> <p>Ensure accurate agronomic forecasting</p>	
4. Lack or loss of labour (skilled and casual)	<p>Reduced supply of labour</p> <p>Increased cost of labour</p>	<p>Difficulty in harvesting</p> <p>Poor husbandry and move towards de-skilled activities</p>	<p>Favour 'simple' or few crops</p> <p>Offer tied housing</p> <p>Use migrant labour scheme</p> <p>Offer apprenticeships</p>	<p>Some CSA use free members' labour, usually unskilled. May be voluntary or in return for food.</p>
5. Bad weather	<p>Hail damage</p> <p>Flooding</p> <p>Drought</p>	<p>Reduced yield or crop loss</p> <p>Affect on animal health causing need for housing and/or vet attention</p> <p>Increased [feed] costs</p> <p>(If weather is good, surplus may cause reduction in prices)</p>	<p>Potentially none</p> <p>Protective cropping (hedges, poly-tunnels, fleeces) and irrigation</p> <p>Diversification of type and/or variety to reduce loss of entire crop</p> <p>Processing (eg juice hail damaged apples) and feed use (frosted veg fed to cattle)</p>	<p>Tendency to diversify</p> <p>Some flexibility in absorbing loss</p> <p>Potentially accessible short-term emergency labour-force.</p>
6. Damages	<p>Vandalism</p> <p>Theft</p> <p>Third party damage by escaped stock</p> <p>Pollution/contamination</p>	<p>Cost of replacement and/or compensation</p> <p>Temporary loss of land</p>	<p>Enhanced security</p> <p>Insurance</p> <p>Community embeddedness (neighbourhood watch)</p> <p>Encourage human presence – e.g. management of footpaths</p> <p>Adopt environmental best practice/HACCP</p>	<p>May offer some additional opps for human presence (but may also attract more attention if well known).</p>
7. Poor image due to crises (eg cumulative effect of BSE, FMD etc)	<p>Loss of public support for farmers</p>	<p>In some cases possibly sales loss due to selective patronage.</p>	<p>Outreach work with community and local press</p> <p>Transparency</p>	<p>CSA proposition embraces connection with and knowledge of farm and production as a central ideal. Members of the company are also consumers.</p>



	Critical look at social/economic role and cost of farming)			Social network is a common facet.
8. Competitiveness	High costs (of labour, distribution, production) in dynamic and price-sensitive market.	Loss of sales	Marketing and cultivation of uniqueness, quality and/or customer loyalty Potential benefits in co-operation Diversification Adaptation to market needs Cut costs	Within reason, CSA may not suffer too much external and no internal competition; most will knowingly supply only a proportion of members' food needs.
9. Land tenure	Insecure or short-term tenure	Difficult to invest in business development, infrastructure, longer-term systems (e.g. orchards)	Negotiate long leases with supportive land lords Buy land Remain flexible and ready to move	Very few CLT examples so far. If anything, short leases are more common, partly due to unconventional proposition of CSA.



Appendix 2 – lines of inquiry

Questions should seek (i) to deepen our understanding of the nature and development of CSA and of social enterprise, as well as (ii) recording the ‘stories’ of CSA entrepreneurs in their own words.

Questioning might draw out issues such as:

- (i) structure and description of the company
- (ii) motivation for establishment and operating ‘ethic’
- (iii) turnover trajectories
- (iv) attitude to, strategy for, and barriers to growth (including self-imposed)
- (v) generic food market conditions
- (vi) challenges and stumbling blocks
- (vii) plans for the future and ideas how to achieve them