



CSA Summary

Contents

1. Impact of Community Supported Agriculture in Wales	3
2. Impact of CSA in Wales in numbers	5
3. CSA projects in Wales	6
4. Economic benefits	7
5. Environmental benefits	8
6. Social benefits.....	9
7. Strategic fit	10
8. Other community food businesses and projects	11
9. References	11

Impact of Community Supported Agriculture in Wales

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. In practice this usually means a group of people in the community ('the members') committing to buying a share of the produce from a local farm for a year. In buying a share rather than a fixed amount, members take on some of the risk of food production.

CSA is more than just a different way of selling food. These community food businesses actively build communities around local food. Members are often involved in running the enterprise, for example volunteering on the field or in the packing shed, helping with financial management and marketing and facilitating access to land or capital investment. Celebrating together through gatherings and other social events is a vital element of community building.

Learning and developing skills is a key focus of many CSA enterprises. Members learn new skills through volunteering, and many CSA's organise workshops and other events for their members and the wider community. As well as informal learning some businesses work closely with schools, universities and other research organisations.

This document gives an overview of CSA in Wales and highlights the benefits it brings for the CSA businesses, the communities they serve and the environment. It is based on research carried out between February and April 2020 supported by Social Farms & Gardens, Tyfu Cymru and the CSA Network UK.



The research was conducted with the 10 established CSA in Wales. Data collected included:



Baseline data - Enterprises; land area; number of employees; number of members; number of volunteers



Economic benefits - Financial resilience; contribution of CSA members to capital investment, access to land, and financial management



Environmental benefits - Organic and agroecological production systems



Social benefits - Food security; community cohesion and expansion of social networks; mental health and wellbeing; diet; skills education and learning

Information was collected through



An email survey of CSA producers/ project managers (7 responses)



Online survey of CSA members (95 responses)



Interviews and focus group workshops with project members and producers

The full report can be found [here](#)



Impact of CSA in Wales in numbers



10 Established CSA's



63% of members increased their knowledge of food production and sustainability issues



11 CSA enterprises in development



55% of CSA members learnt a new skill or improved an existing one



500 families supplied with produce per year



58% improved their cooking skills as a result of being a CSA member



19,000 vegetable shares, 500 Kg beef and 4000 loaves of bread produced per year



5 school projects delivered



70 Ha of land



1 citizen science project delivered



In **40%** of CSA's members were instrumental in accessing land



91% of members said CSA had a positive impact on their mood, general happiness and wellbeing



£17,500 raised by community members for infrastructure



62% of members made healthier food choices and 80% increased the variety in their diets



15 Full Time Equivalent jobs supported



90% said their social networks had increased by being a CSA member



100 regular volunteers



74% said their awareness of their communities (activities, projects, different cultures) had increased

CSA projects in Wales



Horticulture

The majority (8 out of 10) of CSAs in Wales are horticultural businesses. These are small diverse, market garden enterprises, growing on 1–5 ha of land. They produce a wide variety of crops (typically between 30 and 40) including protected and field crops. Most CSA enterprises aim for year-round production. Some manage to supply their members entirely with produce from the farm, but others buy in produce during the hungry gap to maintain the diversity of their offer to members.



Beef

The beef CSA is a conservation grazing project based on common land on the Gower. Five cows graze a 40ha common, helping to manage the vegetation for the benefit of wildlife. Community members take responsibility for the welfare of the stock and pay in advance for the meat.



Bread

This community supported bakery grows its own heritage wheat varieties on 13 Ha of land in Pembrokeshire, and mill and bake on site. From July 2020 they plan to increase production from 80 to 240 loaves per week.



Economic benefits

By providing a guaranteed income for a period, usually a year, CSA members made a significant contribution to the financial resilience of the business. Regular fixed payments help to mitigate cash flow issues, a problem for food producers the world over, and to enable effective financial planning.

"It helps us pay for inputs & wages in less productive times of the year."

Producer survey

"It helps cover up front costs and is important to the viability of the business."

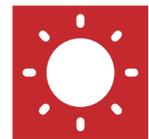
Producer survey

"The business would not be able to function were it otherwise."

Producer survey

Members also contributed to financial resilience in other ways. Some made credit available to the business mostly to cover capital and infrastructure costs. These arrangements helped CSAs to reduce or eliminate cost of borrowing and strengthened the relationship between the community and the business.

15 fulltime equivalent jobs were supported by CSA projects in Wales collectively.



Where members were not in a position to offer credit, they volunteered their time and expertise to help the community food business access grants or run crowdfunding campaigns. They often played more strategic roles for example by providing financial oversight, and helped with accounting and bookkeeping on a voluntary basis.

In 4 out of 10 of the cases, CSA members made a significant contribution to facilitating access to land, either by making their own land available at favourable or peppercorn rents or through their social and professional networks.

CSA businesses also brought benefits to the wider economy. Collectively, CSA's in Wales supported the equivalent of 15 fulltime jobs and 70% of members said this was an important motivation for joining. 83% said supporting local producers more widely was 'very important'.

Other research has shown that for every £10 spent £29 worth of money benefit is kept, recycled and re-used in the local economy rather than in the main disappearing through supermarket spending.

Members provided or facilitated £17,500 of credit to projects through:

- Low/ no interest loans
- Purchase of 5 years of produce up front
- Preparing funding bids
- Running crowd funding campaigns

Data from producer survey

"Local food producers contribute to building resilient local economies, it is ever so important for me and my family to be able to participate in local production."

CSA members interview

Environmental benefits

Sustainable food production was one of the main reasons community members joined CSAs in the first instance. 90% of members said that organic farming principles were 'very' or 'quite' important to them and 95% said that it was the ethics of the business that attracted them.

4 out of **10**

active projects hold organic certification.



In Wales, 4 of the 10 established CSAs hold organic certification. Other CSAs felt that formal certification was not necessary because of the close connection of their members/ consumers with the farm and their open farm policy which allows visits to the farm at any time.

Relationships between producers and consumers that are based on trust are central to CSA.

"I have trust in what I'm eating and I feel part of a community of likeminded people. The food is fresh and local and therefore nutritious and environmentally responsible."

CSA members survey

Key environmental benefits of organic and agroecological farming:



lower carbon emissions associated with using animal and green manures in place of synthetic fertilisers.



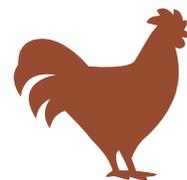
Higher carbon sequestration through increasing soil organic matter.



Less pollution through using less soluble forms fertility that do not leach into water.



Higher biodiversity through prohibition or severe restriction of pesticides and diverse cropping systems (involving up to 40 different crops in the case of market garden type systems).



Higher animal welfare.

Social benefits

Over 90% of members said CSA had had a positive impact on their mood and general happiness. This appeared to be related mostly to a feeling of being part of a community and meeting new people from different backgrounds.

Working together, whether volunteering on the field or working on a specific project such as building a store house/veg packing shed, appeared to be a particularly powerful way of increasing community cohesion and the sense of shared purpose. A third of CSA Members join in 'usually' or 'often' with volunteering and a further 53% 'a little bit'.

Empowerment was a recurring theme. This was expressed partly as being able to take positive action to address environmental and food system issues members were concerned about. Members also valued being able to influence how food was produced through the CSA itself; 73% felt that they could have a say in 'how their food was produced' and 64 % felt they could be a part of the 'decision making process'.

Over 60% of members said 'a better diet' was one of the most important benefits of being a CSA member.



Over 60% of members said 'a better diet' was one of the most important benefits of being a CSA member. A significant number of respondents said they made 'healthier choices' and 58% said they ate more fruit and vegetables. 58% had also improved their cooking and almost 80% had increased the variety in their diets and experimented with new ingredients.

Education, in its widest sense was an important part of CSA. 61% of members said their understanding of how their food is produced had improved and 55% of members said they had learnt a new skill. These are not necessarily food related and included business administration, website maintenance, social media skills, event organisation.

Two of the projects worked directly with schools. Children were actively involved in all the ingredients and preparing the food (pizzas and soups) and learning about food and sustainability more widely. One project worked with the Centre for Agroecology and Water Resilience (CAWR) at Coventry University on a citizen science project on community decision making in sustainable food systems.

"A main benefit for me is connecting with people leading to greater confidence."

CSA member survey

"I always feel positive and uplifted by my time on site – even after a wet day!"

CSA member survey

"I feel I am part of the solution, not part of the problem."

CSA member comment

"I've started to cook everything from scratch, I'm enjoying being inventive when I see what's in my veg share."

CSA member comment

"The children see the crops in the fields as we arrive to get our veg."

CSA member survey

"We have learnt about animal husbandry, plant identification; river ecology, role of grazing animals in biodiversity and more."

CSA member survey

Most (62%) members felt that their CSA was inclusive to all sections of society, and exclusion was due mainly to sites being inaccessible by public transport. However, some CSA members and several producers acknowledged that memberships tended towards more affluent sections of society. Some members felt that committing to regular monthly payments helped with budgeting and that less frequent trips to the supermarket reduced impulse and 'junk food' buying, thereby making healthy food choices more affordable. Some businesses had taken steps to include those on lower incomes for example 'pay it forward' schemes where those on higher incomes paid more, working with food banks and facilitating work shares.

Strategic fit

CSA can contribute to the goals of some important Welsh Government policies, strategies and legislation. CSA is relevant to many of the goals of the Well-Being Of Future Generations Act. It also closely aligns with the objectives of the new Sustainable Farming Scheme including: a high market potential; better risk management; resilience and future proofing; sustainable food production; improved health and wellbeing; and education. It is wholly applicable to other Acts such as Wales' Environment Act and others.

Well-Being Of Future Generations Act goals:

<p>A Prosperous Wales</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Contribution: Rural employment; efficient use of resources; well informed communities.</p>	<p>A Resilient Wales</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Contribution: Economic resilience of CSA business model; environmental resilience through sustainable production.</p>	<p>A Healthier Wales</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Contribution: Improved mental health and wellbeing and better diets.</p>
<p>Cohesive Communities</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Contribution: Increased social interactions better connected communities.</p>	<p>Globally Responsible Wales</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Contribution: Environmentally responsible food production methods.</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div>

Other community food businesses and projects

With the exception of risk sharing, the benefits identified in this study are not unique to CSA. Social Farms & Gardens identified a further 36 community food businesses that did not identify as CSAs but shared many of the key characteristics including sustainable production, volunteering, education and social events. A baseline survey by Tyfu Cymru identified an additional 27 vegetable box schemes in Wales, many of those are likely to have a high degree of customer loyalty, and some may pay through weekly or monthly standing orders.

In addition there are at least 326 community gardens and 24 community orchards, which deliver the same and similar benefits for mental health and wellbeing, diet, skill sharing and learning and many of the other social benefits but are less focused on the commercial production of fruit and vegetables.

References

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