**How to write a BUSINESS PLAN for**

**Community Support Agriculture (CSA) Projects**

“The business plan is a formal statement setting out the aims and objectives of your business. It assesses whether they are achievable and what your plans are for reaching them. It should also include some brief information about the organisation and the people involved as well as how income will be generated. Risks such as the weather, poor harvests, gluts and lack of markets should also be considered.” 1

1. CSA Network UK:

[https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/B.pdf](https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/B.pdf2)

**Why?**

**Business planning is:**

* **Crucial** in applying for grants, business loans, and to enable you to offer community shares.
* **Helpful** in working towards financial sustainability & long-term success.
* A **forward look** at your business & should consider 5 to 10 years ahead.
* A **working document** that should be reviewed annually.
* **Simple, clear & tangible**, with clear aims and ways to measure success.

**Before you start:**

Before you start writing up your business plan you will need to estimate your crop figures and investments needed to operate. The CSA Network provide a very useful Horticultural Cropping Tool that will allow you to play around with crop numbers – this will help you figure out how much you will need to grow & how much land that equates to so you can cover your costs. It will also help you work out how many veg boxes and members you will need/ be able to provide:

[Horticultural cropping tool (communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk)](https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/resource/horticultural-cropping-tool/)

**Assumptions** - you will need to think carefully about yield, price and borrowing needs & test things out. A **risk and sensitivity analysis** is essential to help prepare and mitigate against potential catastrophic impacts such as extreme weather conditions, price drops/increases, fertiliser crisis etc

**Starting small** is always the most sensible approach - increasing yield and membership yearly as appropriate to your situation. Covering **start-up costs c**an be tricky but it’s a good place to start engaging with your potential members (and sharing risk). Crowdfunding or asking for donations towards specific items is not only a good way to get some start-up funding in place but also helps promote your CSA & build up membership. Normally CSA’s ask for membership costs 1 month in advance – this also gives you a month notice to find a new member if someone leaves.

**This Document: The following headings can be used to form the main sections in a Business Plan. They can be changed or re-ordered to help the story and vision of your business to flow. They are there to stimulate thought and help you to ask questions of your vision & plans, to make sure that funders, staff and volunteers all understand the ambition of the project.**

**The Business Plan**

**Executive Summary**

* Brief Summary of how the idea came about & what you want to achieve – what’s the main purpose of your CSA?
* Vision /Mission statement – don’t forget to mention your target beneficiaries.

**Values & Principles**

* It may be useful at this point to show how your CSA fits with core CSA principles. There are many different models for CSAs but below is outlined some of the core values and working principles as outlined by the CSA Network UK in their Charter2.

2. CSA Network UK Charter <https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/about/csa-charter/>

“CSA has been defined in the UK as meaning any food, fuel or fibre producing initiative where the community shares the responsibilities, risks and rewards of production in a spirit of mutual trust and openness. This may be through ownership, investment, sharing the costs of production, or provision of labour.”

This partnership between producer and consumer supports three pillars which represent our core values: People Care, Earth Care & Fair Share

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| People Care | Earth Care | Fair Share |
| A fair and steady income for the producer and a relationship based on trust with the consumers/members. Access to healthy food at affordable prices. | A chance for the land and biodiversity to flourish due to ecological farming methods and shared interest in these methods of production. | A share in the harvest of healthy (mostly organic or biodynamic), local and low carbon produce; a connection with the producer, the land and each other. This includes a commitment to support the farmer through both good and poor harvests. |

The CSA model is quite diverse in the UK, ranging from the purist model, where the farm is self-sufficient and receives regular support from members with farm work and administration, to models where the bulk of the work and organisation is by the farmer, with some supplementary produce bought in, during the hungry gap for instance. It is up to the farm and community to build a model which suits them best.

However, the CSA is structured, certain common working practices are demonstrated by all CSA farms (although a farm may demonstrate all or only some of these characteristics). These include: Direct Distribution, Shared Risk and Connection to the Farm

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| Direct distribution | Shared risk | Connection to the farm |
| Members have a relationship with the producer and the production. CSA farms are not food hubs or shops; although they may buy some produce or supplementary items in to bulk up their share. CSA may make up only part of the whole farm enterprise. | Producer and consumer share the risks of production through a pre-arranged agreement between members and the farm for instance on the crops to be grown and fair price to be paid or through investment in the farm (whether financial or through time commitment). | Members have the opportunity to understand the extraordinary commitment a farmer demonstrates to produce our food, and an opportunity to be connected to the working life of a farm and what’s produced there. |

**Introduction & Background**

* Who are you?
* What are you going to produce & how? Are you organic/biodynamic etc.?
* Where are you based?
* Why are you doing this? What skills /experience etc?
* What is your Unique Selling Point (USP)?
* When? Are you established? Start up? Timescales?

**Aims & Objectives**

*CSA’s provide a number of “public goods” & deliver charitable aims such as improving health (diet and physical activity), providing education and training (to members, volunteers, schools), and helping the environment by growing using agroecological methods & reducing food miles.*

* **Set SMART objectives**

*Set some Key Targets including the number of customers, members, and the amount of veg or number of boxes produced. Include some dates, and you may want to provide this as a table.*

* **S** – Specific - set clear objectives
* **M** – Measurable – set targets to measure against
* **A** – Agreed - stakeholders in a business must agree about their objectives, this will give objectives a much better chance of succeeding.
* **R** – Realistic - Objectives must be realistic for the size and scale of the business.
* **T**- Time-bound. Objectives have a time limit e.g. 6 months or 1 year

**Demand**

* Why is the project needed?
* Evidence to demonstrate need? (have you conducted any community consultation?)
* What do you know about other CSA’s
* Who are your Stakeholders?

**Management**

**Legal structure**

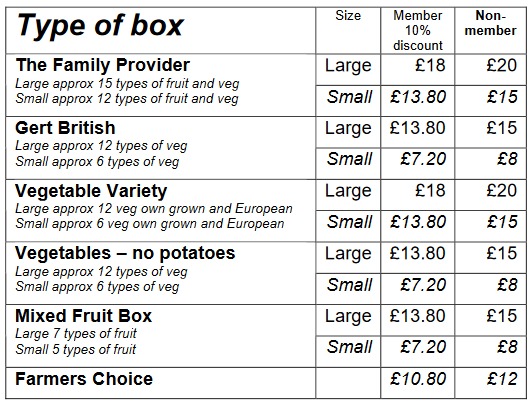
*CSA is about a partnership between producers and consumers, so it is common to have a legal structure that reflects this. Two popular legal forms are a Community Interest Company (CIC) or a Co-operative. A CIC will require a “community interest statement” at point of registration and an “asset lock”, stating that your company’s assets will only be used for its social objectives and there is a limit to what money you can pay shareholders.*

* Core group e.g. Directors or Committee (who/ how many people)
* How will you run your CSA? Who’s involved? - Name people skills & experience
* Staff &/or Volunteers? Are they paid or unpaid, can you cover expenses/refreshments?
* On-the-ground delivery – what will this look like?
  + - * Field work (day to day field work procedures)
      * Weekly Collection Hub (how do you plan to run collections?)
      * Recruitment & reporting
      * Trainees - will you take on trainees? If so, how will this work?
      * Volunteer Co-ordination
      * Insurance, Health & Safety, Risk Assessments (do you have public/employers liability cover?)

**Marketing & Sales**

**Products**

What will you grow? Are you planning to grow throughout the year? What methods of production? Will you be organically cert?



Example from The Community Farm Business Plan3

3. <https://www.thecommunityfarm.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/CF-Business-Plan-Oct-20103.pdf>

**Membership**

Remember members are your market and you need to define what your membership offering will look like.

**Operations**

* Where is your CSA located?
* How will you distribute?
* How much land do you have/need?
* What facilities do you have/need? *(e.g. food storage / packing sheds)*
* What equipment do you have/need?
* Pricing strategy
* If you’ve already started, how do you want things to develop over next 5-10 years’?
* What will your relationship with other organisations be, e.g. will you buy in veg in the hunger gap? *You can find ideas for crops to fill the hungry gap in both outdoor and protected cropping systems* [Soil Association Annual Conference 2009 - WORKSHOPS (communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk)](https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Hungry-gap-fillers.pdf)
* Will you provide any added-value products (either now or in the future)?
* Do you plan to donate any food boxes to low-income families?

**The Market**

* Who are your customers? Define your membership offer?
* What/who is your competition?
* What’s your local supply chain like?
* Are you sharing risk with your members? How will this work?
* Are you selling direct/online/wholesale?

**SWOT Analysis**

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| **Strengths**   * What do you do well? * USP? * What do others see as your strengths? | **Weaknesses**   * What could you improve? * Financial or resource issues? * Capacity/skills to deliver? |
| **Opportunities**   * What opportunities can you see? * Horizon scan/ Trends? * How can you turn your strengths into opportunities? | **Threats**   * What could harm your business? * What is your competition? * What threats do your weaknesses expose you to? |

**Marketing your CSA**

* What are you marketing? To Who? Why? How? When?
* Include a separate marketing plan

*Your marketing plan should cover the 4Ps – Product, Price, Place and Promotion. It should look in detail at the market for your enterprise and detail exactly how big your customer base is, who your customers and how you will reach them, the competitors in the marketplace and other risk factors. Don’t forget to include aspects like; How will you keep your members informed of what your organisation is doing and how it receives feedback from the members.*

**Community engagement & Outreach**

* What community engagement will you do? Will you host events? What social Media platforms will you use (& who will manage these)?
* Will you provide educational activities or training?
* Do you plan to engage local schools?

**Measuring success?**

* What will success look like & how will you measure it?
* Examples of quantitative/qualitative?
* Set targets e.g. produce sold & grown, no. customers/veg boxes, people engaged/vols, events & training held.

**Financial Plan**

**Food production / shares should be considered as your core business & any other income streams are added value (e.g. events, courses etc). Viability of the core business needs to cover its costs**

* Start-up costs: *these will be different for everyone but examples inc. Staff, planning applications, packing shed, water system, polytunnel, seeds, compost etc*
* Grants / loans: *see useful resources for ideas & further info*
* Risk assessment / sensitivity analysis
* Financial surplus/ reserves plan
* Cashflow/ Long-term financial forecast - create a template that works for you (e.g. excel)

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TIP: Income needs to cover expenditure – don’t confuse income with profit.

Also fully explain any assumptions and think about what happens if things do not go as expected (sensitivity analysis).

**Appendix**

Add in anything extra that you may feel is helpful including risk assessments, engagement plans, marketing plans, policies.

If your SWOT or Marketing Plan is particularly long it may benefit from being in this section as long as it is referred to in the main text.

**Useful Resources**

Tyfy Cymru – support for Horticulture sector in Wales by Lantra [Tyfu Cymru | Lantra - Wales](https://www.wales.lantra.co.uk/tyfu-cymru)

Social farms and Gardens [Wales | Social Farms & Gardens (farmgarden.org.uk)](https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/your-area/wales)

UK CSA Network

[https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk](https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/)

Cae Tan YouTube channel (how to videos) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSWuaOk08w42_eoSGDBiO7A/videos>

Community Land Advisory Service (CLAS) [The Community Land Advisory Service | Social Farms & Gardens (farmgarden.org.uk)](https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/clas)

Land Workers Alliance [Membership Levels – Landworkers Alliance](https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/membership-levels/#:~:text=Membership%20of%20the%20Landworkers%E2%80%99%20Alliance%20is%20open%20to,Agriculture%20projects.%203%20Agricultural%20workers.%20More%20items...)

Impact of CSA’s in Wales Report 2020 [Impact of Community Supported Agriculture in Wales (tyfucymru.co.uk)](https://www.tyfucymru.co.uk/home/knowledge-hub/industry-insights/impact-of-community-supported-agriculture-in-wales/)

Canalside CSA (nr Leamington Spa) – useful online examples of policies & governing documents [Canalside Community Food » Canalside policies](https://www.canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk/about-canalside/policies-legal-documents-and-agm-reports/canalside-policies/)

Horticulture Wales [Our research – horticulture Wales](https://horticulturewales.co.uk/category/our-research/)

**Funding – where to start?**

Crowdfunding **–** a number of platforms now available inc. Crowdfunder, GoFundMe, Just Giving, Local Giving Wales, Global Giving, Earth Ways, Wonderful, Total Giving, PayPal Giving fund

Natural Resources Wales send out an external funding newsletter quarterly – to sign up email: [NRW.grants@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk](mailto:nrw.grants@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk)

Funding Wales portal - [Funding Wales](https://funding.cymru/)

CFiW funding portal - [Grants - Community Foundation Wales](https://communityfoundationwales.org.uk/grants-overview/)

Local Community Voluntary Councils – find yours here: [WCVA, County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) & Volunteer Centres | GVS](https://www.gvs.wales/about-us/wcva-county-voluntary-councils-cvcs-and-volunteer-centres-vcs)

Social Business Growth Fund [Social Business Growth Fund - WCVA](https://wcva.cymru/funding/social-investment-cymru/social-business-growth-fund/)

Community shares [Community shares step-by-step | Wales Co-operative Centre](https://wales.coop/community-shares-step-by-step/)

The Cooperative Bank [Charity Loans For UK Charities & Social Enterprises - Charity Bank](https://charitybank.org/charity-loans?msclkid=3f66b317178a1d8a8678d32184e1790c&utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Loans%2001%2F19&utm_term=%2Bsocial%20%2Benterprise%20%2Bloans&utm_content=Social%20Enterprises)

Development bank of Wales [Business start-up loans from £1,000 to £5 million (developmentbank.wales)](https://developmentbank.wales/get-business-finance/starting-business)

Banc Cambria [Banc Cambria | cooperatives-wales.coop (cooperatives-wales.coop)](https://www.cooperatives-wales.coop/banc-cambria/)

Ecology Building society [Ecology Building Society - Ethical Savings & Mortgages](https://www.ecology.co.uk/)

Triodos <https://www.triodos.co.uk/en/business/borrowing/organic-farming>

Kickstart scheme (apprenticeships) Kickstart Scheme - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)