

STARTING A COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE PROGRAM AT YOUR PARK AND RECREATION SITE

In our other guide, “Bringing a Farmers Market to Your Park and Recreation Site,” we share considerations for starting a fun, healthy, nutritious project – establishing either a traditional, regularly-occurring Farmers Market (FM) or a “pop-up” FM that occurs less-regularly and usually is smaller in size. While we hope some of you are working on creating a FM at your park and recreation (P&R) site, others may be interested in starting a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

Buy a share in CSAs

A CSA program creates a unique way to connect nonfarmers to the farm-community. Citizens get a “share” – a box or basket of fresh-picked produce – every week from local farmers!

At the beginning of a growing season, members pay a farm to join a CSA (which could be you). The payment helps the farmer pay for seeds, tractors and other farming equipment, as well as other things needed to grow fruits and vegetables at a farm. Then, in a few months, the farmer gives the CSA member (you) a “share” of the farm’s harvest – some of the produce (fruits and vegetables), that they grow!

The farmer typically picks the produce the day of (or the day before) your CSA pick-up, to ensure everything is super fresh! Usually, you have the option to choose a half or full share. If you have a large family, the full share likely would work best for you. A full-share box usually has enough produce to feed three or four people for a week, and includes 5-20 pounds of vegetables, fruits and/or herbs per week. The CSA box also may include a newsletter from the farmer and/or recipes for using the fresh produce found in the box.

Nationwide, the average cost per CSA pickup is about \$22. Research shows that this price is less expensive than if you bought the same produce at a farmers market.¹ A CSA member would pick up their CSA box the same time every week, at the same location. Often each box of produce will be labeled with a family name, so each family/person knows which CSA box is theirs. Being a CSA member is a great way to get colorful, nutritious fruits and vegetables grown by farmers who live near us!

So, how would you go about starting a CSA at your P&R site? This guide provides some suggestions for getting started.



Ask your community what it wants in a CSA at your P&R site

When examining the feasibility of a CSA program at your P&R site, you can start by asking your community what they want in a CSA:

- Talk to parents as they drop off and pick up their children.
- Talk to older children who participate in your activities.
- Work with teens at your site to create a short survey to give to everyone who comes to your P&R site.
- Survey people who live nearby to see if they would be interested in coming to your P&R site to pick up a CSA box if you hosted a CSA program!

Some topics you may want to cover in surveys to gauge interest in a CSA program could be:

- Frequency (weekly, biweekly, monthly), and time of day for delivery
- Length of the CSA season (CSAs can run only during the summer or stretch from the spring to the fall using greenhouses and growing tunnels!)
- Foods and products in addition to produce that may be of interest (some CSAs offer eggs, milk, meat, soap, syrup, etc).
- Price individuals would be willing to pay for weekly/biweekly fresh produce and other foods, products
- Information on preparing fresh fruits and vegetables provided in a CSA box (interest in attending a cooking/food preparation demonstration at your P&R site)
- Interest in using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars to buy the CSA², if community members participate in the program



After surveying local community members about the characteristics of a CSA they desire, make a document summarizing the results. You can present this document to farmers and/or use it during discussions about developing your CSA program.

Learn from the experiences of other P&R sites with CSAs

When considering a CSA program at your site, the next step is to learn about both the positive and negative experiences of other P&R sites with similar programs! A few sites in NRPA's Commit to Health (CTH) network already have CSA programs or farmers markets, so reach out to them for some strategic advice.

Some CTH partners with CSAs or FMs are:

- City of Farmington Parks and Recreation, New Mexico
- City of Davenport Parks and Recreation, Iowa
- East Orange Recreation & Cultural Affairs, New Jersey
- Grow Appalachia, Kentucky
- NORD/Market Umbrella, Louisiana

Find farms in your community to support a CSA at your P&R site

After you know what CSA characteristics would work best at your P&R site, it is time to identify farmers in your area. Learn who already offers a CSA, or if none do, ask if they would be willing to start one. If a farm already offers a CSA, contact them and find out any requirements for adding your P&R site as a pick-up location. Determine the frequency of delivery, size and prices of shares, items typically included in a share, facilities your site would need to host the delivery (parking lot/field space, tables, etc.) and dates the CSA season begin and end. Check to see if your choices match answers provided in your survey responses.

If you can't find a farm already offering a CSA in your community or if you find one that is full and unable to provide shares to your P&R site, then you may have to work on developing a new CSA partnership. To initiate discussions with the farmer, use data about the components of a CSA that your community requested. If supply seems to be a challenge in your community, sometimes organizers of farmers markets can pull together produce from distributors and/or farmers to make CSA boxes; this may be your best option.



Identify good CSA partners

Once you have established a partnership with a farmer or farmers market to bring a CSA program to your P&R site, start cultivating a set of community partners to help you pull it off! Community partners may be able to help get donated or reduced-price supplies such as tables, cooking demonstration equipment and wipe-off signage boards (white boards) to celebrate new items in each CSA box. Volunteers from various community organizations can help organize and distribute CSA boxes to shareholders each week (consider local 4-H clubs, U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] Master Gardeners, churches, high schools, etc.). Cooperative Extension nutrition educators can be strong partners, helping with nutrition education, cooking

classes and other fun activities! If you want shareholders to be able to use USDA SNAP funds, partner with the farmer and/or certify your site.²

CSA-associated nutrition education and fun!

Even though many farmers already include newsletters and/or recipes in their CSA boxes, you may want to create some fun, CSA-focused nutrition education activities at your P&R site! The type of produce that appears each week in the box likely will change, so staying in touch with your farmer to anticipate upcoming produce is the first step in organizing a CSA nutrition-education plan. Find out what will be offered, then find tools on the CTH website to help you lead food-based activities highlighting the produce in the shares. For example, check out the Summer Fresh Foods materials that are part of the CTH Foods of the Month program³ for newsletters to hand out, activities for kids to do (make a Foods of the Month booth) and recipes to make during cooking and non-cook food demonstrations.

The new CTH Summer Fresh materials³ focus on foods that likely would be in the share boxes, so seek these out! Get your teens and older adults involved as nutrition-education ambassadors and teachers. Partner with your local Cooperative Extension nutrition educators for extra support in education and cooking classes. There are many fun ways you can help educate your community on how to prepare and eat the nutritious foods that appear each week in the CSA boxes!

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR CSA PROJECT!

Remember to get the word out and promote your CSA, so lots of people will know about the opportunity to get fresh, nutritious fruits and veggies at your P&R site! Check out some of the CSA tools for kids on the CTH website⁴ – use these to promote your CSA program!



REFERENCES

- 1 Hawthorne Valley – Farmscape Ecology Program, "CSA Price Comparison Study," www.hvfarmscape.org/sites/default/files/csa_price_comparison_study.pdf
- 2 Vermont Law School Center for Agriculture and Food Systems, Farmers Market Legal Toolkit, Selling SNAP-Eligible Foods website, farmersmarketlegaltoolkit.org/snap/legal-topics/snap-eligible-food-items/csas
- 3 NRPA, Commit to Health Foods of the Month nutrition literacy curriculum, www.nrpa.org/our-work/partnerships/initiatives/commit-to-health/foods-of-the-month
- 4 NRPA, Commit to Health website, www.nrpa.org/our-work/partnerships/initiatives/commit-to-health