

FIELD DAY RESOURCE GUIDE

Labor Considerations for CSA Models



BIRCH POINT FARM

Michelle Ferrarese operates a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program at Birch Point Farm in Traverse City, Michigan. Michelle specializes in heirloom vegetables, herbs, and cut flowers. Prior to farming in Northern Michigan, Michelle managed the Michigan State University Student Organic Farm and worked on CSA farms in Michigan and Massachusetts. Birch Point offers a variety of CSA options, including a main-season program and a fall share, and integrates farm involvement as part of the experience that is offered with the customer's subscription.

TIPS FROM THE FARMER

- 1. Provide many opportunities for involvement on the farm.**

Each week, Michelle sends an email newsletter that updates customers on the state of different crops, special events, and ways to work on the farm. The people that come to volunteer on the farm form meaningful relationships with their food and the farm that it comes from. This not only helps to build customer loyalty, but also helps Michelle know what her members like or dislike in their CSA shares.
- 2. Understand that there are good years and there are bad years in CSA.**

When members sign up for a CSA, it is important that they are aware that they share both the successes and shortfalls of the season. Weather and other forces of nature, such as deer eating all of the heirloom tomato plants, can affect farm yields and potential customers should be aware of risks when signing up at the start of the season.
- 3. CSA models can offer a way to balance farm and home life.**

Before her garlic and heirloom tomatoes, Michelle insists that the most important crop that she and her husband are growing is their 4 year old, Rudy. By operating her farm on a CSA model, Michelle is aware of her production goals and revenue flow at the start of each season. This model also offers a variety of ways for customers to receive their shares, including pickup at a farmers market, pickup at the farm, or direct delivery, which provides some additional scheduling flexibility.



RESOURCES

- 1. Getting Started with a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farm.** Michigan State University Extension.
This webinar from MSU Extension walks participants through the history of CSA programs, helps farmers determine if CSA business models are right for them, and provides several resources and processes related to strategic planning and developing a business plan.
- 2. Why Your CSA Needs a Membership Agreement and How to Write One.** Small Farm Central.
This easy to read guide explains why CSA farmers need to have membership agreements and the various components that need to be included. This page also links to blank CSA Membership Agreement templates, examples of agreements from other farms, and other resources for legal help.
- 3. Dear Modern Farmer: How Do I Legally Start a CSA?** Modern Farmer. Kristen Ploetz, 2014.
Written as a response to a letter from a reader, this Modern Farmer article addresses many concerns a farmer would have about starting their own CSA program. It gives brief overviews of legal structures, legal agreements, and some overall tips about delivering the CSA benefits to members.



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