

Agriculture & Community Supported Agriculture

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Background of Agriculture

Agriculture is one of many subsistence strategies that human groups have used to sustain themselves. Popular depictions of local foods systems often emphasize close relationships that develop between producers and consumers.¹ However, this may gloss over the necessary complexities of a healthy local food system.¹ What happens when the process of getting the food we eat from farm to our table becomes exceedingly complex? Given the distance our food travels and number of links it passes through as it travels the chain from field to table, it is not surprising that people are largely ignorant of environmental and social costs associated with our food system.⁵ With the rising prices of food and numerous recalls and safety scares on the fruits and vegetables we love, community supported agriculture could be an ideal choice for people who are looking for a more environmentally friendly way to acquire their foods.¹ Community supported agriculture (CSA) is an idea that allows the middle man to be cut out.

Challenges & Opportunities

Agricultural and community issues that arise in both rural and urban settings provide many challenges and opportunities. Community supported agriculture can bring people together through production of food and by contributing to building communities. CSA can not only help build relationships and communities, but in urban settings it can help revitalize cities that are experiencing urban decay as well as helping to provide fresh produce to areas that are in lack of such.⁵ Challenges with CSAs exist, and some issues they face are to produce a variety of food that pleases the member preferences. This gives incentive to educate members of CSAs on various cooking methods and recipes, so they have a broader range of varieties of food they can make. Other challenges include the fact that CSAs may struggle to stagger crops so that plants mature at different times and produces yields throughout the growing season instead of in periodic bunches.²

Background of CSA

The Community Supported Agriculture movement began in the United States in the 1980s. It originated in Japan in the 1970s in a group of women who were concerned about the quality of their food.¹ The idea of, “share the cost, share the harvest” coined by Van En, meant that farmers could receive money for their harvests early in the season, saving them the expense of paying on their own without the profit their harvests usually bring them throughout the year; in turn provide fresh shares to the members weekly.¹ Community supported agriculture also benefits farms by guaranteeing sale of their produce. CSA is beneficial to consumers because it guarantees them fresh produce and while the one-time payment may be a little costly it will still far outweigh the cost of buying produce from the super market several times a month. Community supported agriculture is community based in both rural and urban areas. In more urban areas, CSAs are beneficial because degraded urban areas can be converted into land for growth of produce which aids in a common lack of access to fresh produce.⁵

Benefits

Community supported agriculture encourages local food production and consumption as well as well as improving access to healthy foods. CSAs are proven to improve urban environments by creating an urban sanctuary that benefits individuals, neighborhoods, and the larger community.⁵ Participating in such a system can directly enhance physical health and nutrition as you consistently have access to high-quality, fresh food. In an urban setting it provides a deeper connection to nature as more time is spent in an “urban oasis” rather than an asphalt dominated areas. It also provides exercise as you can grow your own food. Social barriers are broken down as it brings together a diverse set of people and it helps people build social bonds by working together in a community. A local food system has the potential to connect consumers to both the land that produces their food and to the farmers who grew it for them.⁴