

Eco-Farm CSA Workshop Summary
Tanya Smith
2/2/06

The CSA workshop was facilitated by a panel of four women who shared their various experiences with CSA. The woman who opened the discussion, shared with us her travels to Japan and France. According to her, Japan was the first to begin CSA, where farmers would deliver the produce to the customers and enjoy tea with them. This developed a strong farmer/customer relationship that is vital for community. She went on to talk about France and the farmer's market there, where they had more of a "middle-man" market. She does a little different CSA program. She is in a co-op type CSA where farmers from all over the region come together for a CSA "buffet" weekly. This gives the customers a greater diversity to choose from, as well as getting to pick what they want. The farmers can then pick and choose differently what types of crop they want to produce. Her main point was that CSA was about more than just food, it's about community and sharing and cooperation.

The other three women had fairly similar stories. They each had two businesses, or farms. They had a "commercial" farm and then CSA production, and they kept them separately. They each had a large client base ranging from 250 shares to 950 shares (in partnership). They mainly discussed the necessity for good record keeping, diverse crops, and specialty products such as cheese, bread, grains, and the relationship with community and customers. They each shared that CSA is a great deal of work, organization, and marketing. They do not recommend CSA for new farmers. Marketing was what they emphasized the most, including: special VIP events such as U-Pick for one day, Harvest Fest ideas, farm tours, potlucks, newsletters and kid events, networking, labeling, and so on.

What I took away from this work shop is the necessity for communication and connection between farmer and customer. CSA is an incredibly flexible form of market that can be engineered around each individuals needs. It can literally be tailored to fit you and your customers. The key idea is to know your customers and what they want then figure out what you can do to achieve those goals. I think for someone who is interested in building community, CSA is a really logical form of market to implement either alone or with other types of marketing.

On an economic note, the only woman who mentioned finances, would only state that with her commercial farm she made an 8% net profit and with CSA she made a 17% net profit. She claimed that that's the way it should be since with CSA members you have to do a lot more compromising and hand holding. I found that statement to be rather telling in my mind's eye. I gathered throughout the workshop that as much as they discussed community, the bottom line is always money and what can make the higher profit.