

[Article]**How Do Farmers Establish a Relationship with Their Consumers in Community Supported Agriculture?**

Yumi Kubota*

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1. Introduction

The concept of community supported agriculture (CSA), a US initiative by which producers and consumers make a prior agreement to do business together, is being considered as a means of increasing domestic self-sufficiency in Japan. The new Food, Agriculture Food, Agriculture and Rural communities plan approved by Cabinet on 30 March 2010 stressed the importance of business transactions that re-emphasize “food” and “locality”. Interest in CSA is increasing.

Up to now, in all the CSA interactions introduced into Japan from the US, the focus of research has mainly been on organic agriculture. For example, surveys by Daniel Lass, G.W. Stevenson and collaborators in the US found that out of the farms that participated in CSA, more than 90% were organic or biodynamic. For this reason there has been a great deal of research interest on CSA in Japan from an organic agriculture standpoint. There is little information on the subject of this investigation, which takes a broader definition of “community supported agriculture” to incorporate the viewpoint of specific beneficiaries.

According to Suzanne DeMuth (1993), CSA is a new idea in farming that has gained

* Department of FOOD BUSINESS, Assistant Professor

Key Words : 1) Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) , 2) local food system, 3) direct marketing

momentum since its introduction to the United States from Europe in the mid-1980s. The idea was taken to Switzerland and Japan, where consumers interested in safe food, and farmers seeking stable markets for their crops joined together in economic partnerships in the 1960s. E Henderson and R Van En (2007) introduced “teikei” in the 1970s in Japan as the CSA equivalent. A report by the US Department of Agriculture Office of Community Development (USDA OCD) also describes the inspiration for CSA as the Japanese “teikei” in 1965.

CSA is similar in several ways to direct-supply contracts developed between commercial supermarkets and agricultural producers and to the Sanchoku movement, which is part of “teikei.” In Japan, the largest Sanchoku market was “Co-op Sanchoku¹⁾.” This has become known as Community Supported Agriculture in English and been popularized under this name, but the core concept came from “*sansyourenkei*” (Producer and Consumer Co-operation) agreements, already existing in Japan.

The concept of “community” is extended to include, not only those living in the same region, but also groups of people who have an emotional bond with each other or who share similar values. Groups of producers and consumers living in different conditions and localities can form their own community based on common interests. By understanding these common interests, the existing *sansyourenkei* can continue to develop and these may contribute to the overall improvement of Japanese agriculture.

Recent data showed that one third of Japanese farmers would prefer to work on a direct-supply basis (MAFF, 2010). Eighty-five percent of consumers were willing to support agriculture and the local community by directly buying from a producer (MAFF, 2009).

According to the 2010 World Census of Agriculture and Forestry in Japan, in 2010, there were 1,679,000 agriculture management entities, representing a decrease of 16.4 percent compared with the number five years earlier. Of these, 1,644,000 were private farms, showing that the Japanese food supply system is supported by small farms. There is a limit to the revenue that farmers can earn by supplying food under the current market distribution system. In addition, Japan is rapidly aging and Japanese farmers are no exception. The number of Japanese commercial farms is on the decline.

It is important to increase the number of consumers who are concerned about a sustainable food economics system. In addition, the food we eat is often grown away from

the table by anonymous farmers, often resulting in reduced vegetable and fruit safety. CSA is one way of building a sustainable relationship between the farmer and consumer.

This research investigates CSA systems in the US. The research firstly aims to determine what triggers the initial connection between producers and consumers, and what efforts are required to continue the relationship. In Japan, accumulated knowledge on CSA has been limited by the research emphasis on organic agriculture (Ooki 2008). This research will not take the organics route but will look at whether producers and consumers can come together directly to form a cooperative and what the future may hold for CSA. We conducted in-person interviews to investigate how CSA farmers establish a trusting relationship with their consumers.

2. What is Community Supported Agriculture?

(1) Defining Community Supported Agriculture

CSA is a connection between a local farmer and the people who eat food that the farmer produces. The first CSA in the United States, a new idea for a sustainable local food system, came into being in the 1980s (Robyn Van En 1995). To use the terms of Cone and Myhre (2000), CSA may be defined as a growing social movement that strives to establish direct connections between the producers of food and those who consume it. In Robyn (1999), CSA was summed up as “food producers + food consumers + annual commitment to one another = CSA and untold possibilities.” Another viewpoint is provided by Brown and Miller (2008), where CSA can be paraphrased as follows: it is a marketing strategy where consumers buy “shares” in the farm before planning begins and receive a portion of whatever is available each week of the growing season. The dictionary meaning of CSA is as follows: a system in which people purchase a share from a local farm and periodically receive vegetables and other agricultural products throughout the farming season²⁾. Most people do not know where or how their food is grown. Food comes from stores and restaurants and vending machines. It had been washed, processed, packaged, and transported long distances. CSA offers fresh and local food to the costumers directly.

(2) Operating CSA

CSA members/consumers usually receive fresh products in a box on a weekly basis.

Most CSAs strive to provide fresh vegetables, fruits, and herbs in season; some provide livestock products such as eggs, meat, and milk, as well as baked goods and flowers. CSA farmers typically use organic or biodynamic farming methods (Lass, Daniel, et al., 2003). Advance payment of receipt of food (whether by season, month, or other schedule) is required for CSA members. CSA can be classified into two distinct types: shareholder CSA and subscription CSA. Shareholder CSAs typically have a core group that decides member responsibilities, fee policy, approval of the budget proposed by the farms, etc. The core group is usually organized as a nonprofit organization. In a subscription CSA, most of the management including price and distribution of food is organized by the CSA farmer. At present, subscription CSAs constitute >75 percent of all CSAs (Adam 2006).

(3) Statistics

To explore CSA in the US, we had to rely on existing survey data from a number of researchers, and databases from representative not-for-profit groups like Local Harvest. The largest of these surveys was the All US CSA investigation carried out by Daniel Lass from Massachusetts University in 2001. This survey was sent out to approximately 900 CSA farms in 41 states. Out of these, 354 replies were received, and this is still believed to be the most comprehensive survey undertaken. In addition, more than 800 CSA farms have registered on the data base of the "The Robyn Van En Center" which is a National Research Center. Official government statistics on CSA farms have been lacking until the publication of the 2007 agriculture survey in 2009. The publication of this data means that quantitative analysis can now be carried out.

The 2007 Census of Agriculture maintains a number of CSAs in the United States. According to the census, 12,549 farms in the United States reported marketing products through a CSA arrangement. Number of farms in the United States is the 2,204,792, CSA farms is of 0.6% of the total farms share. Table 1 provides the number of CSA farms broken down by state. Among the fifty states, California had the most CSA farms (953, 7.6 % of all CSA farms in the country, 1.2% of all farms in the California State) and Texas the second most with 883 farms (7.0% of all CSA farms in the country, 0.6% of all farms in the Texas State). One reason that the States have a many CSA farms is because of a heavy urban population, a prosperous in small family farm and the regional economic situation.

Table 1 CSA Farms in the U.S.

Geographic area	Marketed products through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) (farms)	Rank	Share (%)	Subtotal (%)	Farms (number)	Shar of CSA (%)
United States	12,549	—	100%	100%	2,204,792	0.6%
California	953	1	7.6%	7.6%	81,033	1.2%
Texas	883	2	7.0%	14.6%	247,437	0.4%
Kentucky	544	3	4.3%	19.0%	85,260	0.6%
Iowa	487	4	3.9%	22.8%	92,856	0.5%
Michigan	463	5	3.7%	26.5%	56,014	0.8%
Missouri	450	6	3.6%	30.1%	107,825	0.4%
Washington	437	7	3.5%	33.6%	39,284	1.1%
Wisconsin	437	7	3.5%	37.1%	78,463	0.6%
Ohio	424	9	3.4%	40.5%	75,861	0.6%
North Carolina	413	10	3.3%	43.8%	52,913	0.8%

Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture United States, United States Department of Agriculture

For more details regarding the CSA census see Kubota (2012). Local Harvest (<http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>) maintains its own national database of CSAs and reports 5,925 farms. For more information about the National CSA Survey see Lass, Daniel, et al., (2003).

3. Research Method

The data for this study, derived from in-person interviews conducted in 2013 with a well-established CSA farm in California, United States. Consistent with the purpose of the project, which is to investigate the status of continuing relationships, the sample farm has been running the CSA business for two decades and counting.

We conducted open-ended interviews with one of the four CSA farm owners. They were analyzed to determine the relationship between the system of outreach by the CSA members and the extent of participation in the farm.

4. Case Study: a process of building trust by a CSA farm with members in California

(1) Full Belly Farm information

Full Belly Farm is a three hundred and fifty-acre certified organic farm located in northern California, north of Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay area. Full Belly has been farmed using organic practices since 1985, is certified by California Certified Organic Farmers, and has operated as a CSA since 1992.

(2) Start Full Belly Farm's CSA

The owners had been visiting the farmer's markets and really enjoyed the connection between themselves and the customers since starting Full Belly Farm. They wanted to extend this connection even further and CSA was an excellent way to build and strengthen the connection between the farm and customers by providing them with seasonal produce. There were few CSA farmers in the 1990s even in the United States, and they were still trying to understand how this system would operate. When Full Belly Farm decided to start a CSA, one of the role models was the CSA of the Live Power Farm, which was started before Full Belly Farm in California. The Live Power Farm enabled Full Belly Farm to learn the operation and management of CSA.

(3) Characteristics of Full Belly Farm's CSA

Full Belly Farm has played a pioneering role in CSA in northern California since 1992. A CSA has a volunteer core group composed of consumers and farmers. The core group usually decides the role and operating standards of CSA. However, there was no core group in Full Belly Farm; the owners make all decisions regarding the operation of their CSA farms, determining prices, sites, contents of the CSA box, etc. Approximately 1200 families receive one box per week. They began with approximately 30 families but rapidly grew by approximately 40-fold.

(4) Operating CSA

There were several drop sites in the East Bay area; some in South San Francisco, Sacramento, Woodland, etc. There were approximately forty-five different sites; however, all are not listed on the website because some of them were schools (see Figure 1). The schools were not public sites but were reserved for parents. The consumer could choose a convenient pickup location and time. Convenience of the consumers is an important factor in continuing as a CSA member.

CSA members were allowed to place the contents from the CSA box in a bag and take them home, and the empty CSA box was left behind and signed off on the list. They did not face the issue of a nonmember receiving a box because a good relationship of trust was established between the members and the owners. Therefore, the drop sites were not monitored.

(5) Advantage of CSA farming

Economic impacts of CSA were the biggest issue for the Full Belly Farm. A good cash flow by advance payment of membership fees supported the farm expenditure. The second advantage was that they could decide the operation policy of Full Belly Farm without a core group. This CSA type is called a subscription CSA, as previously explained. Deciding the contents of the CSA box resulted in a more effective operation. The contents of the CSA box were determined by Full Belly Farm, and members sometimes received unfamiliar vegetables such as rutabagas. In addition, they received the same products, such as butternut squash, several times in a row. Repetition of the same item will lead to boredom and people may be unsure of what to do with it. Full Belly Farm printed a newsletter that contained a variety of recipes, farm news, and events to develop customer understanding. In addition, education of CSA members was extremely important for them. Direct connections to CSA members played an important role in fostering a good understanding of the local food system and agriculture in the community.

(6) Building trust in CSA

The members receive the weekly newsletter in the CSA boxes, along with receiving it by e-mail. It informs them regarding activities on the farm. In addition to this, they are informed via the official website (<http://fullbellyfarm.com>) and Facebook page. Whenever the owners receive a message, an email, or a concern from their CSA members, they reply to it immediately; they may even telephone the consumer. They are extremely accessible and available to the CSA members. A CSA starts when a relationship of trust has been established between the farmer and the consumer. If this practice is carefully followed, the consumer will begin to trust the farm. In addition, Full Belly Farm holds an open-farm day several times a year that attracts approximately one hundred people from around San Francisco.

(7) Marketing

Most farmers do not make a marketing plan. They know how to grow good food, but do not have the knowledge to build a website for their market. However, CSA farmers have to create a good market for their customers by themselves. This is a disadvantage of the CSA that farmers have to spend time communicating with their members. Full

Belly Farm communicates not only through farm events but also through farmer's markets at least three times a week. Full Belly Farm was considered to make good use of consumers' voices.

(8) Acquiring new members

Some of the consumers learned about CSA through the website. They gathered information by surfing the Internet when they planned to start their CSAs. However, the most important strategy to expand the organization and acquire new members was by word-of-mouth publicity.

(9) CSA member advantages

There are several choices of CSA in California. How does a consumer choose a CSA farm? Full Belly Farm CSA not only communicates well with its members but also is economical compared with other CSAs across the region. Their CSA price is one of the lower-priced boxes on the market, at \$18 for one week.

The advantage of the first members was that they could eat more fresh vegetables on receiving a CSA box. In addition, they were more likely to learn about vegetables they had not previously eaten, and eating a more diverse diet would translate into better health. Families may feel a connection with the farm through CSA. Several members of the Full Belly Farm's CSA have children and like bringing them to the Farm. This connection is extremely important for certain CSA members.

The second advantage was a good reputation of Full Belly Farm's CSA. People appreciate being connected with Full Belly Farm and the Hoe Down Harvest Festival in Yolo county every October. They hear about the farm from people who tell them about our box.

(10) Future prospects

Full Belly Farm derives twenty-five percent of its revenue from CSA; twenty-five percent from the farmer's market; and the remaining fifty percent from restaurants, stores, and wholesale distributors. On being asked about their future prospects, the owners responded that they hope to extend the share of the CSA to improve cash flow in the future.

Table2 CSA daily schedule of Full Belly Farm

No.	Day	Adreess	Time
East Bay CSA delivery site.			
1	Tuesday	North Oakland Noon	~7 PM
2		Berkeley Farmers Market	12:30–6 PM in winter (7 PM in summer)
3		Oakland	12–4 PM
4		Berkeley	12:30–7 PM
5		El Cerrito	2–4 PM (seasonal October–June)
6	Wednesday	Oakland	11 AM–8 PM
7		Oakland	1–8 PM
8		Oakland/Piedmont Noon to	6 PM
9		Orinda	8 AM–7 PM
10		North Oakland	1–8 PM
11		West Berkeley	1–6 PM
12		North Berkeley	1:30–5:30 PM
13		Berekley	1:30–6 PM
14	Friday	Oakland	11 AM–9 PM
15		Albany	10 AM–8 PM
16		Albany	10:30 AM–8 PM
17		Oakland	8 AM–7 PM
18		Oakland	8 AM–7 PM
19		Oakland	9 AM–7:30 PM
20		El Cerrito	10:30 AM–7 PM
21		Berekley	4–9 PM
22		Emeryville	11 AM–7 PM
23		Berkeley	8:30 AM–6 PM
24		El Cerrito	11 AM–8 PM
25	Saturday	Danville	9 AM–7 PM
Home or Office Delivery available on Tuesdays or Wednesdays by approval only in selected East Bay locations for an additional \$7.00 per week.			
North Bay Area CSA delivery site.			
26	Thursday	Farmers Market	7:30 AM–12:30 PM
27		Mill Valley	8 AM – 7 PM April–December (1–7 PM January–March)
28		San Anselmo	8 AM – 8 PM
Sacramento, Davis, Woodland, & Esparto CSA delivery site.			
29	Wednesday	Sacramento	2–7 PM
30		Sacramento	2–7 PM
31		Sacramento	2–8 PM
32		Sacramento	4–7 PM
33		Davis	3–7 PM
34		Davis	3–7 PM
35		Woodland	3–7 PM
36		Esparto	9 AM–5 PM
37	Saturday	Sacramento	9:30 AM–3 PM
Home or Office Delivery: Available on Wednesdays in Sacramento for an additional \$7 per week. Before ordering home or office delivery.			
San Francisco CSA delivery site.			
38	Saturday	San Francisco	2–8 PM
39	Wednesday	San Francisco	12 –7 PM
South Bay CSA delivery site.			
40	Saturday	Fremont	8 AM–7 PM
41		Mountain View	8:00 AM–12:30 PM
42		Palo Alto Farmers Market	8 AM to 12 PM from May–December
43		Menlo Park May–Dec.	10 AM–1 PM (Jan–May 9–11 AM)
44		San Carlos	2–6 PM

Source: Full Belly Farm Web site, 2013.11.30

(11) Food literacy and education

From our case study of the successful precedent of a CSA that has operated for over twenty years, we concluded that mutual cooperation based on a relationship of trust in a CSA came from food literacy and education. This is achieved by using a farmer's market, the Internet, a newsletter, and an open-farm day as a means of sharing information and experience.

The farmer's market acted as a go-between the CSA farm and consumers. Face-to-face selling provided opportunities to promote awareness of local food and agriculture. In addition, their website provided much information, such as farm news, in an up-to-the-minute update. In addition, landscape images on their web page, including vegetables in the field, flowers, workers, and animals provided the consumers with a real-time sense of the farm. A newsletter containing the latest recipes and daily farm news could play a role in educating consumers regarding agriculture and the local food system.

When Full Belly Farm gave farm tours on the open-farm day, they were asked how they deal with pests and weeds. Keeping an open mind in listening to consumers' questions contributes to building trusting relationships between CSA farms and consumers.

5. Conclusions

CSA is not only a way in which people can directly purchase agricultural products from the farmers, it is a way of forming communities of likeminded people from among both farmers and consumers. It is a way of supporting local agriculture and environmental sustainability. As this research shows, CSA is a way of building up trust between farmers and consumers over the years. Farmers are actively involved in sharing information and allowing purchasers to access their farms.

Through their relationship with the farmers, consumers learn about how to cook and prepare vegetables, crop cultivation techniques, appreciation of nature, and the importance and enjoyment of agriculture. They also learn about how necessary it is for consumers to work together to support agriculture. Direct communication broadens the horizons city people, and inspires a deeper commitment to the local food system and their community. Creating a bond between agriculture and city people will enable to educate consumers on the advantages of local food, the risks involved in agriculture such as

seasonal limitations, and local farming systems.

In Japan too, active co-operation between farmers and consumers may be a way for those with common values to support each other. As consumers become more active in their vision for collaborative agricultural enterprises, CSA will become more commonplace, and locally based agriculture will continue to grow and develop.

However, in the case of a CSA farm, it is uncertain whether a good relationship would affect the profiles of the consumers. Would the profile characteristics of consumers enhance the effects made evident in this case when the CSA consumer's profile was made salient? These questions speak of the complexity of the CSA operation and emphasize the need for careful consideration of specific elements and contexts.

Despite these data limitations, our findings advance the understanding of how CSA farmers establish a relationship of trust with their consumers. Future studies may explore some of the issues identified in this study using data from the consumer side.

Notes

- 1) For details regarding Co-op Sanchoku see Ada, Rick, and Kawasaki (1997) .
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