

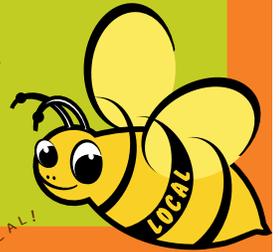
# FARM FRESH WORKPLACE



The Carrot and Stick CSA shares

## CONTENTS:

- What is a CSA?
- Why Participate in a Farm Fresh Workplace?
- How to Set Up a Farm Fresh Workplace
- What You'll Need
- Policies to Consider
- How to Select Your Farmer
- Contact Information



B E E E E E E LOCAL!

# FARM FRESH WORKPLACE TOOLKIT

For planning your  
Workplace or Group  
Community Supported  
Agriculture Program



## What is a CSA?

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** is an alternative, locally-based economic model of agriculture and food distribution. A CSA also refers to a particular network or association of individuals who have pledged to support one or more local farms, with growers and consumers sharing the risks and benefits of food production. CSA members or subscribers pay at the onset of the growing season for a share of the anticipated harvest; once harvesting begins, they receive weekly shares of vegetables and fruit. Many CSAs also include herbs, cut flowers, honey, eggs, dairy products and meat.



Ephraim from The Carrot and Stick delivering Workplace CSA shares

## Why Become a Farm Fresh Workplace?



**A Farm Fresh Workplace** (or Workplace CSA) is another offering within the CSA model where local farms deliver their customer's share to a place of employment. This makes the Workplace CSA program a convenient and attractive way to participate in the growing trend of buying farm goods directly from local area farms. Generally, a minimum number of shares must be purchased through each workplace, usually 5 or more, in order for the farms to deliver directly to the workplace. However, smaller businesses or those with lower employee Workplace CSA participation often partner with other businesses nearby to reach the minimum number of shares required for delivery. The partner businesses then decide on a central delivery point/workplace that works best for all the subscribers. Every year, Sustainable Connections conducts a survey regarding the Workplace CSA program. Noted below are some of the results from a recent survey:

- 95% of respondents found Workplace CSAs either very convenient (80%) or moderately convenient (15%)
- 100% of respondents found Workplace CSAs either very easy (75%) or satisfactory (25%)
- 90% of respondents cited the desire to eat more fresh local produce as a primary motivation for participating in a Workplace CSA

***"My daughter and I enjoyed having fresh fruit and vegetables delivered weekly. It was almost like having our own garden without doing the work."***

***"It makes it so easy to eat well and the fresh produce is so delicious. It inspires eating at home and trying new recipes."***

Employers are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of engaging in proactive employee wellness programs. For every dollar spent on wellness programs, the average employer saves \$3.27 in medical costs. In addition, sick leave, health plan costs, worker compensation and disability costs decrease by about 25% per year with a wellness program in place. <sup>[1]</sup>

Whether or not you choose to help subsidize the cost of employee CSA shares or simply help facilitate the program, there is little doubt that engaging in a Workplace CSA can help reduce costs to your business. The evidence is widespread and compelling that investing in your employees and their wellbeing will pay dividends in terms of employee productivity, retention and loyalty. Additional positive benefits include:

- Employees who are subscribers to a Workplace CSA instantly share something in common with their peers allowing them to make new connections while they discuss recipes, trade items with each other and share cooking stories.
- Many employers have seen increased camaraderie because a Workplace CSA can bring together employees from multiple departments, if even for a short period of time, who otherwise interact infrequently throughout the normal course of business.
- Facilitating a Workplace CSA program is also a great way to show your commitment to our community and local economy.
- Your support of local farming is an important component of maintaining choice and vibrancy in our local food economy.

## How to Set Up a Farm Fresh Workplace



1. Send an email or memo to staff to gauge interest. Contact Sustainable Connections for examples of sample letters if you're not sure where to start.
2. Once you have 5 or more employees interested in signing up, select a farm to work with from the CSA Farm List generated by Sustainable Connections and the Community Food Co-op.
3. Determine if you are able to offer payroll deduction to help incentivize your employees to participate.
4. Contact the farm to talk through cost, payments, deliveries, products, etc.
5. Relay information to staff.
6. Sit back and enjoy fresh food being delivered to your workplace each week!

## What You'll Need

You need to determine if a Workplace CSA fits with your business and if you have the capacity and facilities to administer the program. Setting up a Workplace CSA is pretty simple and once you have selected your CSA farm the program runs smoothly with few additional resources, but there are a few things to consider as you evaluate your ability to participate in a Workplace CSA:

- Can you recruit an internal Workplace CSA champion (an administrator) and also allow some time for them to help employees enroll in the program? Up front work by your champion helps ensure your program runs smoothly once deliveries begin and reduces extra work.
- What is the likelihood of at least five of your employees participating or joining with partner businesses to meet the minimum share requirements?
- Do you have a space to receive and adequately store the CSA deliveries when they occur? (vegetable shares hold up fine without refrigeration if taken home at the end of the day)
- Do you have any security issues that need to be addressed?
- Accurately characterizing the cost of a Workplace CSA is important as it can seem expensive, but compared to buying organic or farm fresh produce through other avenues, a Workplace CSA is actually a cost effective and convenient way to purchase high quality food.

## Policies to Consider

A change in food purchasing and cooking habits is an enjoyable journey if approached thoughtfully. A Workplace CSA may require some extra planning. Setting up clear policies at the outset of your Workplace CSA is an important component of a successful and long term program. Policies you may want to consider:

- Set up a time frame in which individual shares must be picked up.
- If an individual share isn't picked within the required time frame, determine the best option for redistribution.
- Establish a policy for when employees are gone or on vacation.
- Consider a "swap table" where employees can swap out and trade items in the shares. Some employees may love beats and others dislike them. Providing options keeps produce from going to waste.
- Consider an internal newsletter to supplement the farm newsletters that may come with your CSA delivery.
- Consider a CSA employee lunch. Some places of employment add the fun experience of preparing a CSA lunch together utilizing the produce from their shares.
- Share recipes, successes and failures. After all, cooking with new foods can be a bit of a learning process.
- As an employer, are you able to subsidize some portion of an employee's CSA? Many places of employment provide free coffee, soda and other snacks. If you are such an employer, what about a slight shift in this budget?
- Since the current Workplace CSA model requires upfront payments for the season, many employees have found payroll deductions very helpful. If your company is in a position to offer this, it is an added benefit for your employees and shows your commitment to their health and well-being.

## Other resources:

- **Meet with farmers** to learn what they have to offer at Sustainable Connections "Workplace CSA" Member Lunch in the beginning of March.
- **Attend the Bellingham Farmers Market**, where you can find many CSA farmers. It's a great way to meet the farmers and check out their quality produce.
- **Visit our website** for additional tips and tricks: [www.sconnect.org](http://www.sconnect.org).
- **Contact our Sustainable Business Manager**, Sara ([Sara@sconnect.org](mailto:Sara@sconnect.org)), with questions or to request a presentation for your employees.



*Eat Local First is a year-round way to connect farmers and food businesses with local market support, and a label to help everyone find and eat more local and seasonal food. Many of the farmers who provide CSAs also participate in the Eat Local First program which lets all consumers know which foods are produced locally.*

*Left: Steven Roll and Jeanne Dinehart of Roll Organic Farm offer individual CSA shares as well as workplace CSAs.*

## How to Select Your Farmer

Ok, so you've decided that your workplace would like to dive in and sign up for a CSA, great! But how do you choose a CSA Farm? It's a good idea to take time to take a look around, because each farm and CSA program varies in its particulars. Here are some tips from LocalHarvest.org

Most farms offer a selection of pre-packed fresh seasonal produce for their CSA boxes, but others have a mix-and-match or "farmers market style" system where members can select their own items for their boxes and have a degree of choice about what is included or left behind. Some CSA models also offer add-on options such as meats, dairy, fresh pasta, coffee and even flowers. Some farms allow members to pay monthly; though more common is a system of paying up front for the year.

You may want to ask whether the farm provides all the produce itself, or if the farmer sometimes purchases produce from other farmers. If so, you might want to know which farms, where they're located, how much of the produce comes from them, and whether it is organically grown. The parameters of the contract may vary too--such as delivery days, how they manage if a participant is out of town, etc.

It's all about not making assumptions, and having reasonable expectations ahead of time. Here's an example: if you assume being a CSA member means never having to buy produce at the farmers market or grocery store, you'll likely be disappointed. Most CSA members find that they have to supplement their produce, particularly fruit and oft-used items like onions.

How much supplementation to expect is something you might reasonably talk about with the farmer before signing up. You're considering making a major investment: go ahead and ask a lot of questions before you join.



Cedarville Farm sells produce at the Bellingham Farmers Market and offers CSA shares.



There are many ways to purchase fresh local produce. A Workplace CSA program is a convenient and rewarding way to enjoy better nutrition and support your local farmer. By using the resources Sustainable Connections provides, setting up a Workplace CSA at your business can be an expedient process that is a great benefit to both employers and employees.

## Eat Local First Video



Watch our movie, *Staying Connected From Farm to Fork*, which focuses on eating local and knowing where your food comes from. The film highlights local farmers who provide CSAs. Feel free to contact them directly about setting up a workplace CSA for your business! Click on the photo above or watch it here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwrCsH-PSbl>

## Contact Sustainable Connections

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[1] "Health Policy Brief: Workplace Wellness Programs," Health Affairs, May 10, 2011.