Are You Passionate About the CSA Model and Movement?

*Understanding the ethic and history of Community Supported Agriculture*

**Objectives:**
1. Help you understand CSA history and movement
2. Increase awareness of shared risk and shared bounty
3. Explain what sets CSA apart from other business models
4. Help you recognize generally agreed upon, CSA best practices

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How do you feel about CSA after watching the video? Write down everything that comes up for you.
2. What are your reasons for wanting to start a CSA farm? What fuels your passion?
3. What makes you most excited about starting a CSA farm?
4. What feels most overwhelming or daunting?

**Key Resources:**
- [FairShare CSA Coalition](#) -- a coalition of farmers and eaters in the upper Midwest with abundant resources, workshops and toolkits for farmers
- [CSA Innovation Network](#) -- a national resource base of programs and tools built by and for individuals and organizations supporting Community Supported Agriculture development
- [Community Alliance with Family Farmers](#) -- a sustainable agriculture organization in California with extensive resources for CSA farmers
Gaining Production Skills

*Do you already have solid production skills in agriculture, experience on another farm, or are you willing to develop relationships with consultants and mentors from the beginning to help you obtain the skills you need quickly?*

**Objectives:**
1. Help you understand why experience is important for your CSA farm *and* the CSA movement as a whole
2. Increase awareness of different ways to gain production experience
3. Explain other routes into CSA if you have limited experience or skills

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Which of the farmers’ stories about gaining production experience resonated with you most? Why?
2. Do you already have solid production skills in agriculture, experience on another farm, or are you willing to develop relationships with consultants and mentors from the beginning to help you obtain the skills you need quickly? Explain how you think you’ll go about gaining the experience you think you’ll need.

**Key Resources:**
- [Organic Vegetable Farm Manager Apprenticeship Program](#) -- the first registered apprenticeship productions in the country
- [Big River Farms](#) -- an educational organization in Northern Minnesota with an aggregated or cooperative CSA run by farmers who have historically been underrepresented in farm ownership
- [MOSES Organic Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring Program](#) -- one-to-one guided mentorship program offered in the Midwest
- [Growing for Market](#) -- a magazine for market farmers and gardeners that provide information about growing and selling vegetables, herbs, flowers, herbs, and other food products
- [Wisconsin School for Beginning Market Growers](#) -- intensive three-day course that teaches what it takes to set up and run a successful market garden or small farm
- [Farm Beginnings](#) -- unique, farmer-led, community-based yearlong training program that offers farm business-planning sessions, on-farm field day workshops, and one-on-one mentoring from area farmers
Creating a CSA Crop Plan

Are you interested in creating a dynamic crop plan with many moving parts and do you have the skills and systems in place to plant in multiple successions per season?

Objectives:
1. Explain what constitutes a good CSA box and show the diversity of products that go into an average CSA share
2. Help you understand the importance of having a solid yet flexible crop plan
3. Teach you a couple different methods for crop planning
4. Explain how shared risk and shared bounty fits or doesn’t fit into the equation

Questions to Consider:
1. Are you interested in creating a dynamic crop plan with many moving parts?
2. Do you feel like you have the production experience needed to fill a good CSA box each week?
3. Does Kat or Liz’s crop planning process resonate with you more? Why?
4. After watching this video, how will you go about creating a crop plan?
5. If you already have a crop plan, how will you go about adapting it to better fit the CSA model?

Key Resources:
- Johnny’s Selected Seeds Planning Tools & Calculators -- We especially love the Seed-Starting Date Calculator for Seedlings, the Succession-Planting Calculator, and their Yield per Row or Acre charts
- Fedco Vegetable Planting Guide -- great information on basic spacing recommendations.
- Roxbury Agriculture Institute Farm Manual -- detailed manual for 40+ crops
CSA is All About the Details

In addition to farming, are you committed to administering the many small details related to managing your CSA members?

Objectives:
1. Help you understand the administrative work required of CSA farms
2. Teach you the difference between pre-season administrative work and in-season administrative work
3. Help you understand why it's important to track the value of your CSA box throughout the season
4. Explain what tools and systems will help you get it all done

Questions to Consider:
1. In addition to farming, are you committed to administering the many small details related to managing your CSA members?
2. Are you willing to figure out the administrative systems you need to help your CSA run smoothly?
3. Are you willing to spend some time at the computer each week of the growing season managing these administrative systems?
4. Would you consider a software system to help you manage all the details? Does Katie or Curtis’s system resonate with you more?

Key Resources:
- Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets— a good spreadsheet system is going to be key for tracking CSA data (especially in the beginning)
- Google Forms— a great, free app in the Google Suite that can be used as a sign up form in the early years
- Farmigo— CSA software system
- Harvie— CSA software system that allows customization
Building a Financially Strong CSA Business

*Is it your main goal to run a profitable farming business?*

**Objectives:**
1. Describe CSA's unique farm financial management issues
2. Teach you how to use a basic cash flow spreadsheet
3. Share how a couple different farms manage short and long term goals as well as debt, investment and growth on their growing CSA farms
4. Explain some tools and resources for outsourcing

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Is it your main goal to run a profitable farming business?
2. Are you interested and/or willing to develop skills in financial management and budgeting?
3. What fears do you have surrounding developing these skills?
4. Do you feel confident taking on the responsibilities of profitability and financial solvency throughout the year? Why or why not?
5. How can you support your development in these areas?

**Key Resources:**
- [Paul Dietmann’s Cash Flow Spreadsheet](#)
- [Compeer Financial](#) -- a member-owned, Farm Credit cooperative serving and supporting agriculture and rural communities in the Midwest; provides loans, resources, and financial expertise
- [Fearless Farm Finances](#) -- one-of-a-kind resource packed with instructions, tips and tools for setting up and managing a farm’s financial system, written by guest speaker Paul Dietmann
- [Richard Wiswall’s Farm Business Handbook](#) - a complete guide to managing finances, crops, and staff - and making a profit
Marketing the CSA Farm

*Do you understand your farm’s unique identity and are you comfortable marketing your farm in your community?*

**Objectives:**
1. Help you understand the basics of marketing and its importance for CSA
2. Describe the different marketing strategies that will work in a saturated CSA market versus a region that is new to CSA
3. Explain the significance of storytelling in marketing a CSA farm
4. Share tips for communicating your story and uniqueness to customers and future customers

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Do you understand your farm’s unique identity and are you comfortable marketing your farm in your community?
2. Do you want to build relationships within your local community and learn how to tell your story effectively?
3. Do you want to help people feel connected to the person who grows their food?
4. How does marketing your farm make you feel?

**Key Resources:**
- **My Digital Farmer**— podcast. Facebook community, and email list run by Corinna Bench that teaches farmers online marketing strategies to help you clarify your message, find new customers, increase sales, and build a strong farm business
- **Simon Huntley’s Cultivating Customers: A Farmer’s Guide to Online Marketing**— a step-by-step guide to efficiently growing your business by leveraging all of the advantages afforded by modern marketing techniques
- **Sharing Your Story & Cultivating Community on Instagram**— a beginner’s guide to getting started on Instagram
- **Farm Beginnings**— unique, farmer-led, community-based yearlong training program that offers farm business-planning sessions (including sessions on understanding your farm’s niche and unique identity), on-farm field day workshops, and one-on-one mentoring from area farmers
Establishing & Managing Customer Expectations

Are you willing to communicate with your members throughout the season in a consistent and organized fashion?

Objectives:
1. Explain how communication can establish and manage customer expectations
2. Share various methods of communication from different CSA farmers
3. Share the annual arc of CSA communications
4. Help you understand how CSA communication ultimately leads to retention
5. Help you understand that consistent and regular communication is a non-negotiable part of running a CSA

Questions to Consider:
1. Are you willing to communicate with your members throughout the season in a consistent and organized fashion?
2. Does ongoing communication with CSA customers during the farm season appeal to you?
3. How do you think you could fit it in while actively farming and producing for your CSA?

Key Resources:
- My Digital Farmer-- podcast. Facebook community, and email list run by Corinna Bench that teaches farmers how good communication is the key to CSA customer retention
- Email Service Providers-- an essential tool for automated communication with CSA customers (especially as they sign up to join your CSA)
  - MailChimp
  - Convert Kit
- Private Facebook Groups-- great, free way to create a private community for your CSA members to communicate in season and also share various resources with them throughout the season
- Canva-- a free, online graphic design tool that can help you make PDF, ebooks and other resources to share with your CSA members
- Remind-- great free app to send reminders to CSA members on CSA pick up day; technically made for teachers, but still works well for CSA model
- Google Forms-- a great, free app in the Google Suite that can be used to create end of season CSA surveys
Prioritizing Customer Service

Are you committed to doing ongoing customer service and education as part of your weekly work for much of the year?

Objectives:
1. Help you understand what it means to run a human-centered business
2. Help you understand the customer service that comes with calling yourself a CSA farm
3. Explain the importance of education
4. Share the ways different farms provide customer service
5. Provide you with options to outsource aspects of this work

Questions to Consider:
1. Are you committed to doing ongoing customer service and education as part of your weekly work for much of the year?
2. Do you have the patience to answer members’ questions throughout the year? How do you expect to deal with this?
3. How do you feel about the responsibility of educating your members on how to store, use and cook with their produce?

Key Resources:
- My Digital Farmer Podcast Episode 11: 8 Ways to Boost Member Engagement with Your Weekly Newsletter—podcast episode with video producer and CSA newsletter enthusiast Lauren Rudersdorf (includes a newsletter template)
- Video Sharing Platforms
  - YouTube
  - Vimeo
  - Facebook Live
- Recipe Development Services
  - Cook with What You Have
  - The Leek & The Carrot
  - Local Thyme
  - Certain CSA software programs include recipes, research those options if you are considering using a software program to manage your CSA
Learning to Make Sacrifices

Are you willing to make sacrifices for your business and are you comfortable with the fact that the farm will often come first?

Objectives:
1. Help you understand the sacrifices inherent in any business
2. Explain the most common sacrifices we’ve seen in CSA farming and organic production
3. Help you understand that a certain level of sacrifice for the greater CSA model is part of the contract you take when you call yourself a CSA farmer
4. Explain the difference between healthy and unhealthy sacrifice
5. Share tools and strategies for navigating the difference between healthy and unhealthy sacrifice

Questions to Consider:
1. When you heard Beth share some of the sacrifices most common in CSA businesses, how did you feel? Is it what you expected?
2. Did anything feel heavy, burdensome, or out of alignment?
3. Are you willing to make sacrifices for your business and are you comfortable with the fact that the farm will often come first?
4. Which sacrifices don’t you want to make?
5. What kind of life do you want to live and how do you think farming can support that?
6. What tools will you use to evaluate your farm life and ensure it’s in alignment with the kind of life you want to live?

Key Resources:
- **Plant to Profit** -- Elen Polishuk’s farm coaching and consulting business.
- **Mark Manson’s The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck** -- a book Ellen recommends that helps people determine what their priorities are and how to build a life in alignment with these priorities
- **HMI Training Programs** -- an organization that educates farmers on holistic management, a regenerative agricultural practice that prioritizes healing the land, strengthening businesses, and improving farmers’ quality of life. Their Holistic Management Foundation Course teaches farmers how to effectively manage the triple bottom line (social, environmental, and financial sustainability).
Managing Stress on the CSA Farm

Do you have a plan for managing stress throughout the season and dealing with the constant pressure of a weekly harvest for several months on end?

Objectives:
1. Help you understand the difference between stress and sacrifice
2. Explain the specific stress risks related to CSA farming
3. Help you develop a plan to manage stress on your farm or future farm
4. Share how different farmers manage stress on their farms

Questions to Consider:
1. Do you have a plan for managing stress throughout the season and dealing with the constant pressure of a weekly harvest for several months on end?
2. How have you handled stressful events in the past?
3. Do you prioritize physical and mental health?
4. Do you have a support system in place to support you during times of stress?
5. What do you consider effective, enjoyable stress management techniques?
6. What would an actionable self-care plan look like to you while farming?

Key Resources:
● Farm Coaches
  ○ Plant to Profit
  ○ Organic Farmer Coach
● Farm Camaraderie
  ○ FairShare Farm Network-- Google Group and email listserv for farmers primarily in the Midwest; email claire@csacoalition.org to join
  ○ CSA Farmer Discussion Facebook Group
  ○ CSA Marketing Discussion Facebook Group
● Yoga with Adriene - Free yoga station on YouTube
So... Should You Start a CSA Farm?

*Making the most of this educational video series*

**Objectives:**
1. Summarize the lessons learned in this series
2. Help you evaluate if CSA is a good fit for you right now
3. Share alternatives if you don’t think CSA is a good fit at this moment, or ever
4. Share resources for those looking to move forward with a CSA business

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How do you feel at the end of this series?
2. Do you feel energized and excited to cultivate new skills to support you in CSA? Or do you feel drained and overwhelmed?
3. Are there particular aspects of being a CSA farmer that concern you most? Are you willing to invest time and resources to nurture and develop these skill sets so you can get started?
4. Did any of the farmers’ stories resonate with you? Who? Why?
5. Does CSA feel like the right next step for you right now? Why or why not?
6. Do you still want to start a CSA farm? Why or why not?

**Key Resources:**
- [CSA Innovation Network](#) -- a national resource base of programs and tools built by and for individuals and organizations supporting Community Supported Agriculture development; great place to take CSA-related trainings and find CSA coalitions in your region
- [The Rodale Institute](#) -- an organic agriculture research and education organization with regional resource centers
- [The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service](#) -- an organization that offers an expansive array of workshops, programs, and publications related to organic farming in the Midwest as well as an annual conference attended by 3000+ farmers every year
- Local Extension Agencies
- [CSA Quickstart](#) -- An online course for aspiring CSA farmers developed in 2020 by video producer Lauren Rudersdorf and Corinna Bench of My Digital Farmer. It is a step-by-step guide to getting a profitable and resilient CSA up and running in 60 days.