

**REACHING OUT:
Community Supported Agriculture
In New York State**



**Hunger Action Network of New York State
December 2004**

REACHING OUT: Community Supported Agriculture in New York State was prepared by Gwendy Donaker and Benjamin Shute for the Hunger Action Network of New York State in December 2004.

This report is meant to be shared; feel free to reproduce it for any non-profit purpose.

Funding for this project was provided by the Indirect Vitamins Purchases Antitrust Litigation Settlement administered by the Attorney General

The Hunger Action Network of New York State is a statewide anti-hunger coalition that combines grassroots organizing at the local level with state level research, education and advocacy to address the root causes of hunger, including poverty. Founded in 1982, we are a not-for-profit organization comprised of emergency food programs, concerned citizen advocates, low-income individuals, community agencies and religious organizations.

Hunger Action Network of New York State

www.hungeractionnys.org

info@hungeractionnys.org

275 State Street, 4th Floor, Albany NY 12206
260 West 36th Street, Suite #504, NY, NY 10018

REACHING OUT: Community Supported Agriculture in New York State

Executive Summary

The Hunger Action Network of New York State's 2004 Survey of CSA farmers found that New York CSAs:

- **Support the local economy** by keeping over \$2.6 million in the state.
- **Protect the environment** by protecting more than 1,100 acres of diversified farmland with sustainable farming practices.
- **Provide healthy, affordable and fresh produce** to over 6,000 NY families in 38 counties.
- **Reach out to those in need**, with over 70% of CSA farms doing specific work with low-income members in their communities, and over 80% looking to reach out in the future.
- **Innovate and work together** to make CSA economically feasible and accessible by offering scholarships, payment plans, working shares, surplus produce donation, cooking classes, acceptance of food stamps and other unique programs.

This report provides:

1. A comprehensive **overview of 41 CSA programs** in New York State (Pages 4-5)
2. CSA farmers' **views and experience** on working with low-income communities (Pages 6-7)
3. **Common barriers** to including low-income members in CSA programs (Page 8)
4. **Solutions** to these barriers (Page 9)
5. Four **case studies** of innovative CSA programs (Pages 6-9)
6. **Next steps** for CSAs and CSA supporters (Page 10)
7. **Contact information** for active CSAs in New York State (page 12)

REACHING OUT: Community Supported Agriculture in New York State

In the fall of 2004, the Hunger Action Network of New York State conducted a state-wide survey of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs with four main goals:

- 1. Provide a comprehensive picture of CSAs in New York State.**
- 2. Gauge experience and interest in including low-income communities in NY CSAs.**
- 3. Share innovative low-income outreach techniques between farmers.**
- 4. Encourage decision makers and funders to support CSA programs.**

A Background of Community Supported Agriculture:



Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system that links a local community with a nearby farmer in a direct, mutually-beneficial partnership. A CSA allows families to join with a local farmer and pay in advance for the season's harvest. Every week during the harvest season, members pick up a box of fresh vegetables at a neighborhood location or on the farm. CSAs provide farmers with guaranteed year-long demand for their products and provide consumers with high-quality, locally-grown produce at below-retail prices. Therefore, CSA programs are a key component of achieving the goals of **community food security**: that all people have access to an adequate amount of nutritious food, at all times, through local, non-emergency sources.

In New York, there are currently over 45 CSAs and many work directly with low-income communities that otherwise have very limited access to fresh vegetables.

This report provides comprehensive statistics on New York's CSAs, work being done with low-income communities, and the future outlook of CSAs in community food security. It also includes brief case studies of four innovative CSA programs and ideas for both CSA farmers and CSA supporters for increasing CSAs inclusion of low-income New Yorkers.

CSAs in New York: Survey Methodology and Results

In October 2004, the Hunger Action Network surveyed over 100 New York farms listed as running CSA programs. Due to farm and CSA program closures, as well as non-responders to the survey, a group of 41 active CSA farms thus comprise the survey set for the remainder of this report.³ While the 41 CSA farms included in the survey vary greatly in terms of size and structure, they all provide weekly shares of fresh vegetables. In addition to vegetables, many CSAs, either independently or with a partner farm, provide a wide range of other locally-produced foods to their members, including fruit, meats, eggs and dairy products. Contact information for these farms is included in an appendix at the end of this report.

Survey Results: General CSA information

- **Counties represented:** CSA farms are located in 24 counties, and deliver to another 14 counties. Over 60% (38/62) of New York counties have access to at least one CSA program.
- **Farm size:** Farm acreage ranged from 1 to 500 acres, with a number of farms using a significant portion of farmland for production for farmers markets, restaurants, livestock or other non-CSA uses.
- **Years running a CSA:** There are 287 collective years of CSA experience amongst the survey respondents, with an average of 7 years of experience. The two newest CSAs had been in existence for only one year, while the longest running (Quail Hill Farm) has been around for 17 years.



Survey Results: Share options and pricing

- **Season length:** Season length ranged from 10-29 weeks, with an average of 22 weeks/CSA. Several CSAs also offered winter (5), spring (3), summer (2) and/or fall (4) shares.
- **Full shares sold:** Full shares sold ranged from 8 to 820, with an average of 133 shares/CSA.



5

- **Price per share:** Share prices range from \$150 to \$775, with an average share price of \$400.
- **Share size:** 14 CSAs offered smaller share options in addition to the standard share size. Shares were often available in two sizes and named differently (family/single, full/basic).
- **Share options:** In addition to vegetables, CSA shares were available for fruit (16), meat (9), dairy (2), eggs (8) and flowers (8). Other products available on the farms (not necessarily as shares) include bread, herbs, dried flower wreathes, you-pick berries, fermented vegetables, honey, maple syrup, yogurt, fresh juice, fresh corn and dinners on the farm.

CSAs Reaching out to Low-income Communities:

The community component of New York's CSAs is alive and well. A significant portion of survey respondents already reach out to lower income members of their community, and more hope to in the future. Despite ongoing challenges, these farmers have made a personal commitment to reaching out.

Of the farms surveyed, nearly 70% (28) currently have some sort of program in place to include low-income households. Overall, at least 690 households were included in CSAs as a result of this outreach. Specific efforts included flexible payment plans (20), scholarships/sliding scale (14), working share (10) and acceptance of food stamps/EBT (5). Additional diverse payment options included student shares (1), senior shares (2), paycheck deduction (1), 1 free share per 40 paid (1) bartering arrangements (1) and low share price (1).

Share the Burden: West Haven Farm

West Haven Farm has learned to depend on their 185 members to include low-income households in their CSA. Relying on an open sliding payment scale (with no income requirements), higher income members provide scholarships for those with fewer resources. Several non-members also have contributed to scholarship funds. Along with working share (for reliable members only) and payment plan options, over 35% of the CSA members benefit from some type of support.

<http://westhavenfarm.ithaca.ny.us>

In addition to their outreach as part of the CSA, many farms also donate significant amounts of fresh produce to local food pantries or soup kitchens. 25 farms report donating surplus produce on regular basis, while another 3 donate occasionally. Of all these efforts (both donations and CSA specific activities), we categorize 20 as “successful”, 6 as “challenged”, and 2 as “unsuccessful” based on an analysis of written responses. This 70% success rate amongst the participating CSA programs demonstrates the possibilities CSA presents for achieving community food security.

Future Interest in Reaching Out

A vast majority of survey respondents (80%, 33) answered that they were interested in “reaching out to include more low-income members” in the future. Another 8% (3) responded “maybe” with their conditional interest based on a need for assistance from their core

Build on the Community: Sister’s Hill Farm

Sister’s Hill Farm is a not-for-profit farm owned and managed by the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul of New York. Strong advocates for the poor, the farm donates between 10-20% of its harvest each week to various organizations. Several shares are also donated to former members who are experiencing economic difficulties. Building on the work of social service agencies in their community, Sister’s Hill Farm donates additional shares to ESL and women’s programs. After on-site cooking lessons, the produce is shared amongst the program participants – spreading the bounty of each share to additional families in need.

www.sistershillfarm.org

group. Of those that responded “no”, 12% (5), the major reasons cited were economic difficulties, lack of a core group and limited energy (from several older CSA farmers). When asked if they would be interested in receiving funds from the Hunger Action Network to support new initiatives, 73% (30) responded with a firm “yes” (often with exclamation points). Of the 15% (6) that responded “maybe”, their conditional interest was dependent on interest and assistance from their community group, as well one conditional upon non-federal funding. In terms of the respondents

overall future outlook (based on both interest and experience), we categorize 70% (29) as “positive”, 25% (10) as neutral, and 2 (5%) as “negative”.



6

Barriers to reaching out

The most common barrier to outreach to low-income members mentioned was the economic situation of the farmers/farms themselves. One farmer mentioned that “I am the most low-income person I know” while another stated that the “low-income” members they served often had more funds than the farmer. At least one farmer mentioned the disparity between low-income farm workers and the generally high-income CSA members they serve. In general, even for farmers who were actively reaching out to low-income members, they expressed an unwillingness to “reach out so much that I am in poverty myself.” Given these responses, as well as the significant number of farms no longer running CSAs (18), it is clear that the economic situation of each farm/CSA program (especially the very small ones) is a significant determinant of interest and ability to reach out to lower-income members. While this paper does not attempt to provide broad recommendations for improving economic conditions for farmers, policies or programs which support small farms would likely have a positive impact of their ability to reach out to needy communities.

Additional barriers/challenges mentioned include lack of interest in CSA model and/or donated fresh produce, members’ lack of experience preparing certain vegetables, inconsistent fulfillment of work obligations, inconsistent pick-up of shares as well as transportation/delivery problems.

Notably, no respondents cited up-front payment that is required for typical CSA shares as a barrier to participation. Because many respondents have adopted policies such as flexible payment plans or sliding share prices, it appears that many CSAs have successfully overcome this barrier.

Focus on Staff: Thanksgiving Farm CSA
Part of the Center for Discovery, a residential community for developmentally disabled adults, Thanksgiving Farm grows fresh vegetables for onsite meals and a 130 member CSA. Over 85% of the CSA members are staff at the Center, and many choose to deduct the CSA fee directly from their paychecks. CSA membership has increased staff member’s interest in fresh vegetables - which they then promote to the Center’s residents. Residents also participate in various farming activities as physical/occupational therapy.
www.thecenterfordiscovery.org



7

Innovative Solutions for Reaching Out

In addressing the insecure economic situation of CSAs themselves, many survey respondents noted that reaching out doesn't necessarily mean giving handouts. While there are cases in which farmers do not have the time or funds to consider additional programs, there are alternative ways to reach out. For example, one farm (see *Focus on Cost* - page 9) focuses on

Focus on Costs: Future Farm

Rather than focusing on subsidies or scholarships, the Future Farm CSA (a non-profit organization) aims to keep overhead costs as low as possible, thus making the share price (\$200 for a 26 week season) affordable to all. Cost-saving steps included raised beds (for increased productivity), partnering with a local horse farm for free fertilizer, using bio-diesel trucks and equipment, focusing on excellent customer service (to eliminate marketing costs) and significant volunteer support. Future Farm believes that the key to a financially viable, fully participatory program is incremental growth and, of course, hard work.
Rob Young - 607-589-4102.

keeping costs low and creating a business model that makes it profitable to work with low-income households.

Another farmer (see *Share the Burden* – page 6) recognized the importance of stabilizing the CSA membership initially, and then asking dedicated members to do the outreach.

Some farmers see farmer's markets as an easier way to start reaching out to low-income people. Others seek funds from churches or community groups. Whatever method(s) an individual CSA chooses, survey respondents agreed that economics alone were not insurmountable barriers.

In terms of the other barriers mentioned above, respondents also provided innovative ideas. In the case of a lack of experience cooking/eating certain vegetables, CSA farmers have provided cooking classes on and off farm, and reached out to local nutrition/health organizations for assistance in providing education. To deal with lack of fulfillment of work-share obligations, one farmer chose to offer this option only to dependable members, while

another only offers administrative work-options. In terms

of inconsistent pick-up of shares, one farm (see *Build on the Community* – page 7) donates shares to previous members with current economic hardships, and other shares to community organizations that insure the food is not wasted. To deal with transportation/delivery problems, farmers arrange pick-ups at community centers or focus on low-income households within a small radius of the farm itself. For marketing/outreach problems, farmers suggest working with an organization already in the community, rather than re-creating contacts one by one.

Next steps for:

Farmers new to reaching out to low-income members:

- Ask your core group to help – share the burden.
- Consider adopting a “1 free share for X paid shares” policy.
- Donate a share to a local community center – rather than a household.
- Start small.

Farmers challenged by reaching out to low-income members:

- Work with a local community organization with a compatible mission.
- Try another strategy, organization, etc.
- Reach out to other farmers for assistance and encouragement.

Farmers successful at reaching out to low-income members:

- Mentor other farmers – hold a class or workshop to share ideas.
- Contact your local newspaper – share your story.
- Keep up the good work.

Other interested parties:

- Consider joining your local CSA – or start one.
- Visit a CSA farmer – bring the media.
- Give a CSA share to a needy family – a season long gift of health and community.
- Vote for policies and policy makers that support small family farms.

Conclusions

In conclusion, while there are significant barriers to including low-income members in CSA programs, outreach is both possible and rewarding. Each situation demands its own strategy and economics will often play a role. CSA farmers are contributing the health of New York’s economy, environment and communities, and supporting them benefits us all.



Additional reading/resources:

- Model CSA Projects in New York State: Profiles exploring how New York's farmer's are providing low-income families with healthy, fresh and nutritious fruits and vegetables. Hunger Action Network, 2004. http://www.hungeractionnys.org/commfood_csa.htm
- Obesity, Poverty and the Case for CSAs. Hunger Action Network, 2004. http://www.hungeractionnys.org/commfood_csa.htm
- Robyn Van Eyn Center for CSA Resources: <http://www.csacenter.org/>
- Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group: <http://www.smallfarm.org/nesawg/index.php>
- CSA programs in New York City: www.justfood.org

¹ Photograph from Genesee Valley Organic Community Supported Agriculture website.

² Photograph from Golden Earthworm Organic Farm website.

³ Survey Methodology: In October 2004, two-page surveys were mailed out to over 100 New York farms which potentially had CSA programs. Follow up phone calls were made to all survey recipients. Responses were received by mail, phone and internet. Of these farms, nearly half (39) were determined to be non-CSA farms for one of several reasons. Reasons included inactive CSA (5), misidentified as CSA (7), no longer farming (3) or running CSA (13), non-working address (6) or phone (5). Representing nearly 20% of the total survey group, closed farms and discontinued CSA programs underscore the challenges of CSA programs and farming in general. Another 24 farms were non-responsive to repeated attempts to include them in the survey and therefore are not represented in the data presented. Of these farms, at least four are confirmed to be running CSA programs. Because one potential cause of non-response might be a lack of interest and/or experience in working with low-income populations (the focus of the survey), this should be taken into account in generalizing the survey results over a wider population of CSAs. A group of 41 active CSA farms thus comprise the survey set for the remainder of this report.

⁴ Photograph from Our Farm CSA website.

⁵ Photograph from the Grindstone Farm website.

⁶ Photographs from Green Rabbit Farm website.

⁷ Photograph from Huguenot Street Farm.

⁸ Photograph from Sisters Hill Farm website.

Appendix: 2004 Active CSA programs in New York State, survey respondents only

Farm Name	Phone	City	Distribution Sites	E-mail	Website
Bloodnick Family Farm	607-625-4141	Apalachin	Tioga, Broome		
Blooming Hill Farm	845-782-7310	Blooming Grove	New York, Orange	bloominghillorganicfarm@yahoo.com	http://www.bloominghillfarm.com
Buffalo Organics	716-257-3006	Little Valley	Cattaraugus, Erie	buffalocsa@nativeofferings.com	http://www.nativeofferings.com
Canticle Farm	716-373-0200 x3358	Allegany	Allegany, Cattaraugus	fran1180@earthlink.net	
Cooke Hollow Farm/The Alleged Farm	518-692-9065	Valley Falls	Albany, Kings, Rensselaer	allegedfarm@post.harvard.edu	
Denison Farm	518-664-2510	Schaghticoke	Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga	den_farm@yahoo.com	http://www.denisonfarm.com
Earth's Harvest Farm	607-263-5536	Morris	Otsego	pkoch@wilbernet.net	
Four Winds Farm	845-255-3088	Gardiner	Ulster	parmour255@aol.com	http://www.bestweb.net/~fourwind/
Frosty Morning Farm	607-842-6799	Truxton	Cortland, Onondaga	frostymorningfarm@yahoo.com	
Future Farms	607-589-4102	Van Etten	Chemung	rly1@cornell.edu	
Genesee Valley Organic CSA / Peacework Organic Farm	315-331-9029	Newark	Wayne	ehendrsn@redsuspenders.com	http://www.gvocsa.org
Golden Earthworm Organic Farm	631-722-3302	Jamesport	Nassau, Queens, Suffolk	goldeneearthworm@earthlink.net	http://www.goldeneearthworm.com
Green Rabbit Farm	315-893-7647	Madison	Madison, Oneida	rabbitt@dreamscape.com	http://www.greenrabbitfarm.com
Green Thumb Organic Farm	516-726-1900	Water Mill	Queens, Suffolk	mail@cobblehillcsa.org	
Grindstone Farm/CSA-CNY	315-298-4139	Pulaski	Jefferson, Onondaga, Oswego	gsforganic@aol.com	http://www.grindstonefarm.com
Hand in Hand Farm	607-538-1864	Hobart	Delaware, Kings	nhaycock@dmcom.net	
Hawthorne Valley Farm	518-672-4465 x105	Ghent	Bronx, Columbia, Nassau, Rockland		http://www.hawthornevalleyfarm.com
Hearty Roots Community Farm	845-943-8699	Tivoli	Dutchess	briana@heartyroots.com	http://www.heartyroots.com
Huguenot Street Farm	845-256-0686	New Paltz	Ulster		http://www.flyingbeet.com
Lucky Moon Farm	315-655-2283	Cazenovia	Madison		
Malven Hill Farm	607-627-6638	Smyrna	Chenango, Madison		
Our Farm	518-692-9910	Middle Falls	Rensselaer, Schenectady, Warren, Washington	ourfarm@logical.net	http://www.ourfarmcsa.com
Phillies Bridge Farm CSA	845-256-9108	New Paltz	Ulster	pbfarm@ulster.net	http://www.philliesbridge.org
Porter Farms	585-757-6823	Elba	Erie, Genesee, Monroe	porterfarms@wnynet.net	http://www.porterfarm.org
Poughkeepsie Farm Project	845-473-1415	Poughkeepsie	Dutchess	info@farmproject.org	http://www.farmproject.org
Quail Hill Farm/ Land Trust	631-267-8492	Amagansett	Suffolk	schaskey@peconiclandtrust.org	
Roxbury Farm	518-758-8558	Kinderhook	Albany, Columbia, New York, Schenectady, Westchester	info@roxburyfarm.com	http://www.roxburyfarm.com
Siren Farms	607-589-4799	Spencer	Tioga, Timpkins	sirenfarms@aol.com	
Sisters Hill Farm	845-868-7048 or 718- 543-6627	Dutchess	Bronx, Dutchess, New York, Westchester	mgausto@aol.com	http://www.sistershillfarm.org
Stoneledge Farm	518-678-3003	South Cairo	Greene, New York, Westchester	stoneledge@surferz.net	
Sunny Hill Farm	607-692-7911	Whitney Point	Broome	sunhfarm@hotmail.com	
Thanksgiving Farm CSA	845-436-7623	Hurleyville	Sullivan	newfarmer@sdtc.org	http://www.thecenterfordiscovery.org
The Farm at Miller's Crossing	518-851-2331	Hudson	Albany, Columbia	kasorganic@hotmail.com	
Threshold Farm	518-672-5509	Philmont	Columbia, Ulster	threshold@taconic.net	
W. Rogowski Farm	845-258-4574	Pine Island	Kings, Orange	wrrfarm@warwick.net	
Wake Robin Farm	315-689-0034	Jordan	Onondaga	megschader@wakerobinfarm.org	http://www.wakerobinfarm.org
West Haven Farm	607-272-4636	Ithaca	Tompkins	bokaer-smith@ev.ithaca.ny.us	http://westhavenfarm.ithaca.ny.us
Whistle-Stop Gardens	607-693-3378	Tunnel	Broome	WSGCSA@tds.net	
Wild Roots Farm	845-439-4799	Livingston Manor	Sullivan		
Wood Creek Herb Farm	315-339-1109	Rome	Madison, Oneida	woodcreekherbfarm@netzero.net	
Wunschen Farm	845-635-3918	Pleasant Valley	Dutchess	wunschenfarm@msn.com	