



Cooperative
Extension Service

Center for Crop Diversification

CCD-MP-26

CSA to University *- toolkit -*



SKILES

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PREFACE

Overview:

CSA Innovation Network (CSA-IN) is a national partnership working to facilitate and accelerate idea-sharing around innovations and best practices in community supported agriculture. The network connects farmers, technical assistance providers, and consumers to increase the viability of community supported agriculture. Through educational programs, tools, idea sharing and engagement opportunities, the CSA-IN builds awareness of the value of CSA and facilitates the creation of stronger, more equitable CSA programs. Through the existing twenty-plus partners spanning the U.S., the network has far-reaching partnerships that serve over 2,500 CSA farmers and 300,000 agency and consumer shareholder connections.

History and Work:

Need: Connection with Local Food

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs are much more than weekly boxes of food – they are powerful investments in health, community, and local economies. CSAs started as a way for consumers to connect directly with farmers. Community members – through pre-season subscriptions – help offset farmers’ input costs, and provide the security of a stable market outlet. In exchange, those members get a "share" of the bounty throughout the growing season. CSA is a unique marketing model with nuanced production and distribution challenges that requires specialized technical assistance, especially as the model evolves and innovates.

Response: CSA Innovation Network (CSA-IN)

The CSA-IN was created in order to strengthen CSA nationally, by creating connections and sharing resources across farmers, technical assistance (TA) providers, and consumers. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of these connections in responding to disruptions and building the resilience of local and regional food systems. The landscape of CSA was already shifting prior to the pandemic; however, the evolution of the model was drastically accelerated. CSA-IN was invited to be one of seventeen food sector contributors to the [USDA Ag Marketing Service Local Food Response to COVID project](#), where we represented the voice of CSA and shared pandemic impacts at a national level. Having TA and resources at the ready, as well as sharing innovations and best practices is the niche that CSA-IN fills for CSA growers and supporters.

“The cross-sharing has been invaluable, and the lessons learned from others doing similar work has put us miles ahead in our own work.” (Pacific Northwest CSA Coalition)

Significant Achievements

- Created a [Resource Library](#) with nearly 100 educational resources related to CSA
- Hosts the [CSA Ideas Lab](#) webinar series with 50+ guests on a recurring basis
- Published an [E-Commerce Report](#) comparing 12 sales platforms, with farmer input
- Led a national marketing campaign promoting CSA and sign-ups to 150,000+ people
- Leads [CSA Week](#) annually, with 2,000+ participants and over 500 farms on the map
- Maintains communication about CSA happenings with an audience of 5,000+ people
- Keeps fresh content on the [CSA-IN site](#), receiving over 600 unique visitors per month
- Facilitates deeper and more frequent (at least three times more on average) collaboration on projects, coordination on technical assistance, creation of strategic plans, and development of grant proposals with other network participants according to a [social network analysis](#)

Acknowledgments:

The CSA Innovation Network owes its success to the farmers and organizations who have been part of building and growing the Network. The efforts of these partners have enabled the CSA-IN to offer support, aggregate research, and develop resources and training programs to meet the needs of both technical assistance providers and CSA farmers. Our collaborators* are:

Community Alliance with Family Farmers, CA - Michelle Wyler, Elizabeth Vaughan

Community FarmShare, MD - Jenny Freeman

FairShare CSA Coalition, WI/OH - Clare Stoner Fehsenfeld, Sadie Willis, Liv Froehlich, Tess Romanski, Beth Knorr

Farm Generations Co-op & GrownBy, NY - Michael Parker, Eric Sannerud

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My Digital Farmer, OH - Corinna Bench (Shared Legacy Farm CSA)

Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, NY - Teddy Tomao, Elizabeth Henderson

Organic Association of Kentucky & KY Farm Share, KY - Katie Harvey, Natalie Rider, Brooke Gentile, Sarah Geurkink, Dee Owens

Pacific Northwest CSA Coalition, OR - Holly Hutchason

Taste the Local Difference, MI - Tricia Phelps, Christina Marbury, Carrie Hause

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University of California - Davis, CA - Alicia Baddorf

University of Kentucky, KY - Tim Woods, Jairus Rossi, Savannah Columbia

Washington State University-Extension, WA - Marilyn Sitaker

West Michigan Growers Group, MI - Sam Otto

**In addition to the organizations above, we are actively working to diversify the Network both in terms of demographics and location and expect to have new participants join over time.*

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INTRODUCTION TO WORKPLACE WELLNESS CSA



What is CSA?

CSA is a direct-to-consumer marketing strategy in which customers (aka members, subscribers, or shareholders) buy a share of a farm's harvest prior to the growing season. This subscription-based model offers customers a diversified diet of fresh, seasonal produce and a relationship with the farm and farmers who grow their food. For farmers, it provides a reliable and flexible market, up-front funds to pay for seeds, supplies, and labor, and a relationship with the end users of their product. Members and farmers share in both the harvest and the risk of planting, tending, and harvesting crops. The CSA model requires farmers to grow a wide variety of produce with practices that can enhance sustainability and biodiversity.

Why CSA as a Wellness Benefit

While there are effective workplace programs to incentivize physical activity (e.g., free wearable fitness trackers, worksite gym, nutrition education, etc.), wellness initiatives have a limited ability to change the diet habits of employees. By offering an incentive for members to invest in a CSA, employers encourage a sustained commitment from employees to incorporate more produce in their diet, a behavior necessary for optimal health and wellness.

Advantages of the program to universities

University Social Responsibility. Institutions of higher education are increasingly integrating social responsibility initiatives into their public strategic plans. Climate change, increasing inequality, and public health crises are global “wicked problems” that appear at a local scale on university campuses. A workplace CSA program is a meaningful and practical approach for universities to address multiple “wicked problems” while gaining other direct and indirect benefits described in this document below.

Employee satisfaction. A good benefits package plays an important role in recruiting and retaining employees. A program that shows the university's commitment to employee health, sustainability, and investment in local economies gives employees a *positive perception of their employer*. At University of Kentucky, feedback on the CSA Voucher program has repeatedly corroborated this. In 2022, 91% of participants surveyed said the voucher program gave them a more favorable view of the University.

Healthy workforce. Employees are invaluable assets to a workplace. Businesses with a healthy workforce are more productive, have lower direct medical costs and suffer fewer productivity-related losses from employees missing work (absenteeism) or underperforming when they do not feel well at work (presenteeism). Investing in employee health by offering an incentive for healthy eating makes good business sense.

Community relationships. Universities are highly visible “Anchor Institutions” in their communities and often have various outreach goals and programs. A workplace CSA program offers multiple opportunities for relationship-building within the local community, including growers, local farm support organizations, and area businesses looking to replicate the program.

Research capacity. Universities have researchers from diverse disciplines with the capacity to develop research programs on topics related to CSA.

Land Grant ties to the local farm economy. Land Grant Institutions have extension personnel and demonstration farms on or near campus that can provide training and technical assistance to farmers interested in transitioning to the CSA model.

Advantages of the program to university employees

Health benefits. Increasing fruit and vegetable intake is necessary for optimal health and wellness. Workplace CSA gives shareholders a vehicle for sustained commitment to incorporate healthy, locally produced, diverse fruits and vegetables into their diet.

Community participation. CSA customers benefit from connecting with the farmers who grow their food and other shareholders throughout the CSA season. Shareholders benefit from knowing where their food dollars are going.

Whole household benefit. Workplace CSA benefits apply to the employee's entire household. CSA can be a highly participatory experience, involving family members in the pick-up, cooking, and eating experiences.

Engagement with university Health and Wellness programming. Complementary cooking and nutrition education programs empower workplace CSA participants to learn new skills and try new recipes. Participation in complementary programming can expose employees to other workplace wellness benefits and resources.

Advantages of the program to farmers

Reach new customers. Workplace CSA gives farmers the opportunity to reach new customers in a concentrated and convenient location, lessening marketing and delivery burdens. Customers who are part of a CSA may be more likely to visit a farmers market, attend agritourism events, and purchase from a farm during the off-season.

Higher retention rate. A financial or convenience incentive to employees – as well as programming that supports new CSA members – can help farmers retain more CSA members from season to season.

Stronger university connections. Stronger ties to a university could yield more opportunities for farmers to benefit from and utilize relevant university research.

Why Workplace CSA at Universities

While any workplace can support a CSA program, colleges and universities – especially land grant universities – are large employers with resources and infrastructures that uniquely favor CSA. These attributes enable them to develop and study replicable employee benefits

programs that fulfill outreach, sustainability, and wellness goals while investing in local economic and agricultural development.

Favorable Attributes:

- Universities are highly visible to their surrounding communities. Innovations at universities can serve as an example for other employers to develop similar programs.
- Many universities are self-insured and/or associated with a hospital. Employer-sponsored subsidies for CSA have the potential to lower healthcare costs for the institution.
- Existing Wellness units within the institutions have the built-in capacity to support innovative workplace CSA programs. They often already offer educational programs related to food preparation and nutrition, which complement a workplace CSA program.¹
- Universities have researchers from diverse disciplines with the capacity to develop research programs on topics related to CSA.
- Many institutions have demonstration farms on or near campus that can provide training and technical assistance to farmers interested in transitioning to this model.
- E.g., [visual map](#) of UK Voucher Program's impact.

CSA to University Case Studies

See example story map: [The Local and Regional Food Systems Resilience Playbook](#)

[Summary of Case Studies](#)

University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky (2015-Present)

Overview:

The University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Human Resources offers a Health and Wellness CSA Voucher Program to UK employees and retirees enrolled in UK health plans. Participants who opt into this program receive a voucher (aka discount code) to put towards the cost of a 20+ week CSA share from a participating local farm. The program covers about 25% of the cost of the share. The program was piloted in 2015, offered with limited availability (lottery for selected participants) in 2016-2018, and offered as a general benefit to all employees and retirees beginning in 2019.

What's unique about this program:

The UK CSA Voucher Program was started by UK Health and Wellness, researchers at the UK Department of Agricultural economics, and a non-profit partner, the

¹ Consumer engagement with complementary programs supports behavior change for first-time subscribers and leads to greater willingness to renew a subscription. See Rossi and Woods (2020).

[Organic Association of Kentucky](#) (OAK). The team worked to form the [Kentucky Farm Share Coalition](#) (KYFSC) to administer Workplace CSA programs for UK and other employers in Kentucky. KYFSC's administrative costs are primarily funded by fees-for-service charged to participating employers (\$20 per share) and farmers (\$12-20 per share).

Recruitment and Retention:

Kentucky Farm Share Coalition provides its partner employers with some resources to recruit employees, guide participants through the sign-up process, promote food preparation and nutritional education opportunities, and evaluate the program each year. UK HR and Health and Wellness promotes the program through various UK newsletters to employees and UK's benefits lists featured on their HR website, during employee orientation, and during open enrollment. In partnership with the Kentucky Farmshare Coalition, UK hosts a virtual farmer meet-and-greet, where interested employees can hear from all participating farms and decide if they want to try the program, and which farm is the best fit for their household. The event includes a raffle for 4 free CSA shares, which promotes higher attendance rates. In 2023, UK researchers piloted a peer promotion program, where participants are paid a stipend through the CSA season to promote the CSA Voucher program to their peers, recruiting new participants and helping beginner CSA members learn how to make the best of their shares. UK Staff Dietitians manage a recipe blog, coordinate a facebook group for participants, and host cooking classes throughout the season.



Measuring Impact:

Impacts of the UK CSA Voucher program are measured and monitored by multiple stakeholders for various reasons:

- UK Human Resources funds the program and administers a postseason survey to measure employee satisfaction, farm produce quality, participant health behavior change and overall health impact;
- Researchers in UK's departments of Agricultural Economics, Dietetics and Human Nutrition, and Nursing study impacts of CSA and higher consumption of produce, collecting data on CSA's impact on healthcare costs, health behavior, and biometric health markers;
- Kentucky Farm Share Coalition, the community partners who administer the program, monitor program efficacy, employee satisfaction, and farmer satisfaction through mid-and post-season surveys and focus groups; and

- Kentucky Farm Share Coalition also measures the economic impact of the program on participating farms each year (in 2023, they worked with 8 organic farms and 13 employers to generate over \$576,000 for local farms through CSA programing).

Read more:

[UK's CSA Voucher Program](#)

[Kentucky Farm Share Coalition](#)

Luther College, Decorah, Iowa (2015-present)

Overview:

Luther college offers a CSA Reimbursement Program for faculty and staff working 0.75 FTE or greater. Participants receive a 50% reimbursement on CSA shares purchased from one of three partner farms up to a total of \$100. Reimbursements are paid in the fall, after the CSA season. Luther hosts educational and food preparation events that are offered to participants throughout the season, including events hosted by Luther's student-run edible gardens. The program's goal is to encourage healthy eating as a means to improve health and to build community on and off campus. The program does not have a maximum capacity, and hovers around 60-70 participants each year, about 6% of Luther employees. Luther's CSA program is administered by the Center for Sustainable Communities, which focuses on various aspects of sustainability, including "food as wellness", but is jointly funded by general budgets of three entities on campus: the Health Care Fund, Wellness Program, and Center for Sustainable Communities.

What's unique about this program:

Partner farms have adapted their offerings in ways that will help subscribers make better use of the benefit. The program's administrators at Luther College value the farms' ideas and flexibility to implement innovative marketing strategies that make the program a more positive experience for customers. Over the years, farms have implemented home delivery options, market shares, shorter shoulder season shares, and customization.

Recruitment and Retention:

Program administrators attempt to get as many participants as they can each year. Recruitment (and retention) efforts include: reaching out to previous participants, announcing—and bringing in CSA farmers to speak—at staff and faculty meetings,

including program information in the employee newsletter, and working with the CSAs to ensure their customers who are Luther employees are receiving the benefit.

Measuring Impact:

Program administrators are committed to the program as both a health promotion strategy and a way to engage with and benefit the local community and economy. Surveying efforts have shifted from measuring increased consumption of vegetables to identifying which participants are first-time CSA subscribers.

Read more:

[Luther College CSA Reimbursement Program](#)

Rooted Community Health (RCH), Nashville, TN (2017 - present)

Overview:

Rooted Community Health's (RCH) Growing Good Health Program provides a 15% rebate towards the cost of a CSA share for any VUMC employee, and a fully subsidized CSA share for those making less than \$40,000 a year. RCH works with three partner farms that participants can choose from. The program is supported and championed by the VUMC's Human Resources department and senior administration. There are about 2,500 eligible employees, and the program budget, which started with capacity for 50 participants, can now accommodate 400.

What's unique about this program:

RCH is a program of the Center for Biomedical Ethics and Society at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC). The vision for the program is to address climate change and human health crises by supporting environmental and community health in concrete and integrated ways. By providing a subsidy to employees for CSA the program diminishes financial and knowledge barriers to entry, achieves positive health outcomes for the community, and invests in the local sustainable food system and economy. RCH facilitates community engagement, scholarship, and research in ecology, health, and sustainability through its programs.

Recruitment and Retention:

VUMC HR coordinates outreach and communication for recruitment into the program. RCH develops resources and coordinates partnerships to support good retention. RCH works with partner farms and the Vanderbilt Dietetic Internship Program to develop educational opportunities to help participants navigate cooking

less familiar, and more, vegetables. These include written material, videos, and classes focused on foundational cooking skills (e.g., chopping peppers, meal planning) and recipes that don't take long to prepare and use common ingredients and kitchen equipment. Classes led by VUMC's employee health program (HealthPlus) allow attendees to see and taste healthy recipes that incorporate CSA produce and leave with an example of a week-long meal plan based on a CSA box.

Measuring Impact:

RCH plans to conduct medical impacts and biomarker studies in the future, pending IRB approval. Currently, RCH encourages participants to fill out a confidential survey before and after the CSA season that asks about food and lifestyle behaviors to help evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Read more:

[Rooted Community Health](#)

[Growing Good Health](#)

Ohio University, Athens, OH (2011-Present)

Overview:

Ohio University's (OHIO) workplace CSA program was created by OHIO's WellWorks department in 2011 with the goals of facilitating employee and community access to local, healthy food and encouraging consistent healthy eating habits. Participants can opt for weekly or every-other-week deliveries, and can pay ahead in a lump sum or quarterly (every 6 weeks). The program has two pick-up locations: The first is open to employees and the general public and is centrally located on OHIO's campus; the other is located at OHIO's daycare center and open only to staff and daycare families. Shares that are not picked up are donated to local donation centers. The program's current capacity is limited to 70 shares between both locations, and interest typically exceeds that.

What's unique about this program:

OHIO's workplace CSA program is offered to both employees and interested members of the community. Additionally, it is administered collaboratively with community partners. It began with a local organic CSA farm that delivered produce shares to various locations on campus. When this farm partner discontinued their CSA program after the 2017 season, WellWorks issued a county-wide "Request for Proposal (RFP)" through OHIO's central purchasing division to find an alternative provider. A local non-profit, Rural Action, submitted the winning bid and began a

partnership with WellWorks in 2018. Rural Action administers a buying club that aggregates local produce shares from crops purchased wholesale through their social enterprise, Chesterhill Produce Auction.

Recruitment and Retention:

Administrators recruit members each year by reaching out first to past participants, then using various university communication channels like newsletters and social media. In the future, OHIO hopes to grow the program and increase accompanying nutrition education, including cooking demonstrations, and in-person teaching at pick-up locations.

Measuring Impact:

WellWorks staff have measured impact with pre- and post-season surveys to measure changes in vegetable consumption and other health behaviors around eating.

Read more:

[Ohio University Produce Buying Club](#)

[Rural Action](#)

[Chesterhill Produce Auction Buying Club](#)

Iowa Food Hub, Decorah, IA (2013 - 2018)

Overview:

The Iowa Food Hub was started by Iowa State University Extension with grant funding for a staff member and a delivery truck. The Iowa Food Hub's goal was to operate as a wholesale distributor and enable mid-tier value chain sourcing for schools and institutions, opening those markets to smaller producers. The Worksite Foodbox Program (WFP) was started to generate cash flow so that the food hub could work up to that. Eventually, the IFH was able to generate enough capital to start operating as a wholesale distributor, and the Worksite Foodbox Program was phased out. During the pandemic, the software platform was transformed into an online farmers market. The online market continues to operate and serves individuals who want to purchase local products. They offer multiple pick-up options and home delivery to customers who live in Decorah.

What's unique about this program:

To generate new local food purchasers, help make the concept of CSA more “mainstream,” and avoid competing with area CSA farms, the Iowa Food Hub intentionally sought out non-traditional worksites with a blue-collar audience for the Worksite Foodbox Program. They recruited employers like John Deere (whose factory workers were new to CSA) started with small, \$20 shares of about 4-6 vegetables per week, and included more “traditional garden fare” in the bags. Once the program gained traction and customer buy-in, they began using ecommerce software (Shopify) and offering different box sizes and add-ons such as milk, bread, and egg shares. In the height of the program, the food hub was selling 170 shares weekly, working with 8-12 worksites and 30-40 farms, and moving \$80-100k in product per month. Customers paid for their boxes on a weekly basis prior to delivery instead of ahead of the whole season, and could change their preferences, suspend their account, or cancel their subscription anytime, making the program appeal to a wider audience.

Recruitment and Retention:

The Iowa Food Hub initially utilized workplace recruiters to encourage employee sign-ups. Those recruiters also worked with HR departments at the employers to market the program as an additional employee benefit available to workers. They focused first on “anchor buyers”, employers in areas that had a large number of employees. Once they secured accounts with those anchor buyers, they were able to cover the costs of smaller deliveries nearby. Iowa Food Hub created materials for promotion of the program, and to help customers use their produce, like recipes and cooking tips.

Measuring Impact:

In a 2014 survey of participants, 95% of respondents said they had never participated in a CSA, and 50% said they were not regular farmers’ market customers. Half of the new Foodbox customers joined because they wanted to support local farmers, with the second-most cited reason being convenience of a worksite pick-up.

Read more:

[Iowa State University Food Box Program Toolkit](#)

[Managing Cash Flow for a Low-Capital Food Hub Start-up](#)

**Seattle-King County Worksite CSA Program, King County, Washington
(2015-2017)**

Overview:

In 2014, King County launched a pilot worksite CSA program for its employees as part of a new Local Food Initiative, which aimed to create a more resilient and sustainable local food system that is both economically viable and capable of providing healthy food to county residents. The 3-year pilot was funded through King County Conservation District, 2015-2017. During that time, the program evolved from a loosely-supported program with 1 farm supplying CSAs to 49 employees in 3 worksites, to one with part-time staff to administer a program with 4 farms supplying CSAs to 130 employees in 12 municipal government departments. Note: Employees participating in this program did not receive a voucher or discount on the cost of the CSA subscription. Instead, the program made them eligible for a discount on out-of-pocket medical expenses through employer-sponsored medical insurance. This arrangement, developed with input of the public employees labor union was developed to decrease claims costs through improvements in health behaviors. The program was discontinued after the pilot phase as part of a reformulation of the wellness initiative.

What's unique about this program:

King County has over six thousand employees in 180 different worksites, and each with staff that range from a handful to several thousand employees. The worksites are scattered geographically across 142 square miles, with some posing unique logistical challenges due to the nature of their use (e.g., courthouse, juvenile detention facility, and bus transit stations). For this reason, a conscious decision was made to offer the program to worksites with 30 or more employees, and worked closely with facilities management during the early planning stages to address logistical and security challenges related to the worksite.

Recruitment and Retention:

Initial outreach consisted of informational materials about the CSA concept, and about the worksite program. Materials were distributed through county-wide and departmental emails, the King County employee wellness website and blog, posters, and in-person events at some worksites. In 2015, a web-based survey was administered to employees to help the program team understand employees' experience with CSAs, gauge interest in participating in a worksite program, and identify factors that would be important to employees in selecting participating farms. Subsequently, year-end evaluation participant surveys were used to inform program planning for the next season.

Measuring Impact:

The pilot program conducted annual end of season surveys to assess employee satisfaction as well as the experience of participating farms. The employee surveys identified a need to address logistical barriers for employees interested in CSA.

Read more:

[King County Lessons Learned document](#)

FairShare CSA Coalition, Dane County, Wisconsin (2005-2013)

Overview:

In Madison, WI, in 2005, a pilot program was launched to provide CSA rebates to employees of the University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin state employees who were members of the Physicians Plus HMO. In collaboration with the FairShare CSA Coalition, a Madison-area nonprofit that facilitates a network of CSA farms, this program matched farms from FairShare's coalition to provide CSA shares to the UW Physicians Plus plan members who elected to receive an "Eat Healthy Rebate" for joining a CSA. The initial launch saw the program partner with two FairShare farms,



Vermont Valley Community Farm and Harmony Valley Farm, and then expanded in 2006 to include all of the coalition's farms (12 in 2005, over 50 by 2013) as options for Physicians Plus members to choose their CSA from. The program stimulated the Madison market for CSA shares, and continued to grow from 2006 to 2012, with FairShare administering more rebates year-over-year through Physicians Plus as more CSA shares became available and in continual demand.

What's unique about this program:

One of the keys to the program's success was the coalition's ability to vet farms to qualify. Physicians Plus HMO did not want to be in the business of determining which farms were bonafide CSA farms using sustainable practices. FairShare's criteria for endorsing farms as members of the coalition, and then using that as the basis for eligibility to participate in the rebate program, was viewed as key by Physicians Plus. Additionally, FairShare worked to reduce the burden on the farmers by acting as the administrator for the program, rather than having the rebate go directly to farms.

Recruitment and Retention:

The year Physicians Plus HMO took the CSA benefit "live," it was the thrust of their marketing. "It was the main story we were telling in all our marketing and promotion," said Kathryn Auerback, marketing director for Physicians Plus at the time. "The CSA

rebate just seemed like the right thing to do to help improve health in various ways for people, farms, and our community, and we had the agility to do it... It got a lot of incoming media interest, and we saw a rise in [HMO] enrollment.” Following the demonstrated success of Physicians Plus, all four Madison-area HMOs began to offer CSA rebates (\$200 for a family, \$100 for an individual) in collaboration with FairShare.

FairShare CSA Coalition also increased recruitment for farms to join the network as endorsed members based on the impact of the rebate program. After the first year, it was clear that the demand for CSA spurred by healthcare plan members’ ability to receive a rebate had led to CSA shares selling out when they hadn’t in previous years. Barb and Dave Perkins, who operate the 1250-member Vermont Valley Community Farm, said that the entrance of other HMO companies was key. “Every year, suddenly there was competition between providers,” said Barb Perkins. “We saw our CSA membership grow, and the rebate program really helped.”

Measuring Impact:

	2005 (pilot)	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Estimated total CSA rebates issued by all HMOs per year	96	972	1282	3550	6100	6800	7300	7200
Approx. # of shares available via FairShare member farms	2000	2800	3500	4500	6950	8650	8733	9700

Beginning in 2013, when one of the Madison-area HMOs discontinued the CSA program in favor of an alternative health-tracking program, the rebate program administered through FairShare started to scale back. HMOs began offering their own incentives for members to join CSAs, not in conjunction with FairShare farms specifically. Over the next decade, the coalition continued to see demand increase for CSA in the Madison area, but no longer serves as an intermediary in offering incentives through healthcare providers or the University of Wisconsin.

Read more:

[Workplace CSA Toolkit](#)

[CSA Incentives Toolkit](#)

[Health Insurance Rebate Info from FairShare CSA Coalition](#)

[Using Health Insurance Rebates to Make CSA Membership More Affordable](#)

ADVOCATING FOR AND STARTING A CSA-TO-UNIVERSITY PROGRAM

“Quick start guide” - things to consider, what you’ll need to get a program started

1. **Gather your Champions.**

Successful University and Workplace CSA programs have started with a champion, or team of champions, who advocated for the program, sought funding, built partnerships, and built a strategy to maintain the program sustainably. Identify those champions in your institution who will carry the program through the advocacy and planning process. It is helpful if those champions can help administer a pilot, have connections with local farmers, or can coordinate research that will yield impact data for program adoption or expansion beyond the pilot.

2. **Champion Resources** for outreach and advocacy within a university

a. **Who can help champion a CSA-to-University program as a way to build a culture of health?**

- i. Decision makers, such as Directors, in these areas:
 1. Department of Sustainability
 2. Department of Human Resources
 3. Department of Health and Wellness
 4. Benefits Team
- ii. Medical School Staff or Faculty
- iii. Researchers who can secure grants for a pilot program
- iv. Campus Farm Staff, or Faculty who support a campus farm
- v. Donors, trustees, notable alumni who are CSA Members

b. **Be sure your approach includes university leaders and decision makers:**

While any champion for a CSA-to-University program can advocate for the program, it is especially useful to reach decision makers who have the time and systems-level perspective to consider how the program could fit into the capacity, budget, and metrics goals of the institution. A passionate employee champion with no support from higher level or HR or wellness leaders in the university can make the program vulnerable to failure if the employee leaves the university or becomes more time-limited.

See [University of Kentucky Case Study](#), above, for more details.

- #### c. **Pitching a Workplace CSA program to the university:** Include a description, details, benefits, and costs of the program in your approach. Provide examples of other successful programs, data on benefits to the university and its employees, and name the individuals or departments in the university who could benefit from or be involved in the program (e.g. research, sustainability

metrics goals, employee recruitment and retention goals). Selling points can include reduced healthcare costs, employee satisfaction, reduced absenteeism and presenteeism, and public or community relations.

See example: [Informational sheet for employers, Southwest Washington Food Hub](#)

d. Template email for approaching decision-makers:

Dear [\[team or name of administrator/decision maker\]](#),

We are writing because we are staff/faculty of [\[Institution name\]](#), and would like to talk about the possibility of introducing a Workplace Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program as part of our employee benefits offerings.

OR

I am writing today on behalf of [\[organization\]](#), a coalition/network of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in [\[location\]](#). We administer CSA programming for workplaces in [\[location\]](#) to make eating local, organic foods more convenient and affordable for employees. More specifically, we help employers offer incentives for CSA shares as part of a wellness benefit program (view details here [\[link\]](#)).

This style of program can complement existing wellness programs that promote good nutrition and a healthy diet. The combination has the potential to increase employee satisfaction, strengthen the local food system, and reduce future diet-related employee health costs.

We would love to talk with you about partnering on creating a program like this at [\[Institution name\]](#). We believe universities are a particularly fitting setting for a workplace CSA because of the opportunities to interact with research, foster relationships with the community, and serve as an example to other employers. We currently coordinate/assist CSA voucher programs at nearby colleges and universities like [\[example institution\]](#) and would love to share more ideas about how this could work at [\[Institution name\]](#).

I've attached [\[list attached resources\]](#) in case you'd like to learn more about CSA and this kind of workplace program. Please let us know if we can set up a time to discuss this in the near future.

Sincerely,
[\[your name\]](#)

Attachment and link options:

Workplace CSA FAQ • General Steps in Starting a CSA Program • Initial Survey • Participating farm(s) CSA brochure(s) • Timeline • Employee Incentives for WCSA • Video explanation of CSA

Example: [Outreach email to employers, Southwest Washington Food Hub](#)

Example: [Benefits for Employers](#), Southwest Washington Food Hub

Example: [Frequently Asked Questions](#), Southwest Washington Food Hub

3. Plan a Pilot.

A pilot program allows administrators to confirm proof of concept. The following are things to consider when planning a Pilot Workplace CSA Program. (See “[CSA Administration and Upkeep](#)” for more detailed descriptions.)

- a. Define the goals, objectives and features of your program
- b. Create an evaluation plan, with strategies for the type of information and mechanisms for data collection ([see further details on evaluation and data collection](#))
- c. Determine where initial pilot program funding could come from and develop a realistic budget ([sample budget below](#))
 - i. Cost for vouchers (\$250/share)
 - ii. Staff time for:
 1. Program administration
 2. Participant education
 3. Program evaluation
 - iii. CSA participant support
- d. Determine who will administer the pilot program
- e. Identify the target participant
- f. Identify partner farms
- g. Set a realistic timeline for program rollout
- h. Make a plan for marketing and recruitment
- i. Logistical considerations (where, how and who)
- j. Collect data to evaluate progress towards meeting the goals and objectives of the pilot

4. Grow the program.

After establishing proof-of-concept through a pilot program, champions can report on the program’s success and advocate for growth, new partnerships, and consistent, hard-line funding. Successful Workplace CSA programs have grown the number of partner farms and participants over time. By taking a phased approach, administrators can avoid over-promising to farmers or having a mis-match in supply and demand for the program.

Example: Year-by-year UK employee participation in the program:

- **Pilot Benefit**
 - 2015 - Grant Funded Pilot – 95 Participants
 - 2016 - UK Funded Pilot – 200 Vouchers
- **UK Employee Benefit (lottery for selection) - 250-300 vouchers available annually**

- 2017 – 253 vouchers redeemed
- 2018 – 270 vouchers redeemed
- ***UK General Benefit (no lottery) 1000 vouchers available annually***
 - 2019: 602 vouchers redeemed
 - 2020: 643 vouchers redeemed
 - 2021: 711 vouchers redeemed
 - 2022: 868 vouchers redeemed
 - 2023: 714 vouchers redeemed

CSA PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND UPKEEP

Piloting and sustaining a Workplace CSA program requires good coordination and management. Below is a detailed guide to help champions determine the features and parameters of the program to make it impactful and sustainable.

Financial Considerations

Funding for a pilot can come from a number of sources depending on the goals and make-up of the program. Some ideas include:

- Research grants
- USDA Agricultural Marketing Services
- University Departmental or HR-Benefits funding (i.e. Health and Wellness, Sustainability, Medical School)
- Philanthropy/donations

Operating Funding. Sustaining a program beyond the pilot will require hard-line funding.

- After a successful pilot, champions can use findings about the health benefits, cost savings, or employee satisfaction to advocate for building the program into a budget (e.g. wellness, benefits, or sustainability).
- Work with an insurance company to offer points or rebate based on increased health outcomes for employees.
- **Funding Examples:**
 - As part of the 2022 USDA Local Foods Promotion Program, the Southwest Washington Food Hub was funded to collaborate with motivated employers to implement an employee Workplace Wellness Farmshare with the objective of growing food hub sales. Funding included line items to help support a sales and customer service manager as well as a program coordinator.
 - Michigan's Taste the Local Difference [CSA Employee Wellness Program](#) was offered to local businesses, who were charged a \$30 per capita fee per participating employee, along with flat fees for additional services such as CSA newsletters with educational resources, a local chef cooking demo, employee wellness surveys, and customized wellness resources.

Identify the target participants and capacity. Determine the maximum number of participants based on the pilot budget (if offering an incentive) and administrative capacity. Narrow down eligibility based on program goals. Examples of eligibility criteria include employees on the university's health plan, staff at a specific worksite or location, in a certain job classification or income category, or individuals with diet-related diseases. A lottery system can limit the program more precisely to a budget and capacity constraints. After a successful pilot, the target audience can expand from there as the program budget allows.

Financial incentives or payment assistance. Employers can assist employees in paying for a CSA share in a few ways:

- Offer a voucher or stipend (e.g. University of Kentucky), or a rebate (e.g. Luther College). A financial incentive can remove the perception of CSA as a “niche” experience for wealthy consumers and encourages it for employees of all pay grades. Note that in most universities, this kind of benefit is considered taxable income. Be up front with your employees about this so they are not surprised.
- Offer payroll deduction that allows participants to pay for their share in installments, making it more feasible.
- Consider sliding scale incentives to allow for more financially able employees to elect a lower voucher amount than those with limited incomes.
- Facilitate the use of SNAP benefits so that lower-income employees have greater access to your program.

Develop a budget. The cost of a workplace CSA program depends on whether the employer is offering participation incentives such as vouchers or other cost-offsets. It will also depend on the number of employees that are targeted for the program. Once these parameters are known, the budget for operating facilitating a workplace CSA will be more apparent. We provide an example budget for a small pilot voucher program. In this case, the University is funding the vouchers and is paying an organization (internal or external to the university) to manage the voucher redemption process and to facilitate the interaction between farmers and shareholders. Farms can be asked to pay a per-share fee to off-set operational costs since CSA promotion may generate new subscribers.

Sample Pilot Program Budget based on 50 Shares

CSA Share Vouchers	\$250/Share	50 Shares	\$12,500
Admin Fees (Employer)	\$20/Share	50 Shares	\$1,000
Admin Fees (Farm)	\$10/Share	50 Shares	\$500
CSA Support Supplies	\$25/Share	50 Shares	\$1,250
Total Cost	\$15,250 – total combined cost \$14,750 – total cost to University \$500 – total cost to participating farms		

Administering a University Workplace CSA

Administrative models to consider:

- Internally by a unit within the University that can dedicate staff time to plan, do outreach, coordinate, and evaluate the program (i.e., Human Resources, Benefits Office, Health and Wellness, Sustainability, University hospital, etc.). [Example employer agreement](#)
- By an outside partner (i.e. a local non-profit, farm, farmer coalition, or food hub). In some cases, a partner may require a fee-for-service for this work.

Offer supporting programs, materials, and resources that help new members transition to a different way to buy food. Supporting materials include:

- All participants should have access to a program website with important program information that can be referenced any time.
- Participants who are new to the CSA model usually need some support in order to have a successful first experience. Not only do they need to get used to having items pre selected for them, but must learn how to store, cook, and use a variety of fresh produce items, and spend more time planning meals and cooking.
- Potential educational topics include, but are not limited to: kitchen basics and vegetable cooking techniques; knife skills; simple produce preservation (drying, freezing, pickling); meal planning using [USDA's My Plate](#); healthy swaps for favorite recipes; avoiding food waste (note the international recipes in this [Stop Food Waste Cookbook](#) from WSU Extension Skagit County); healthy snacks for kids; using herbs and spices to replicate favorite restaurant cuisines; and focus on local food systems and agriculture.
- Some educational information can be conveyed by farmers in their weekly newsletters. Alternatively, the employer or the university may offer classes and webinars on cooking and nutrition as part of their employee wellness program
- Examples of educational materials related to cooking skills and nutrition
 - A recipe blog updated regularly with seasonal cooking ideas (e.g. [University of Kentucky Live Well blog](#))
 - A [weekly newsletter](#) that teaches a cooking skill with an accompanying instructional [video](#) featuring local chefs; shares nutritional information and tips for storing, preparing, and using a [featured vegetable](#); and links to additional resources.
 - Social media and/or print resources (e.g., [Kentucky Farm Share Coalition](#)), including a Facebook group for participants (e.g., [Southwest Washington Food Hub](#))
 - Peer Promotion strategies: building social support networks to reinforce healthy eating habits. For example, experienced CSA participants can promote and explain CSA to their coworkers, offer guidance on CSA box usage, and organize events related to local foods. [Reference the example toolkit here.](#)

- [Example Shareholder Support Resources](#)

Identify partner farms. Determine good farm or food hub matches based on the goals of the program. Potential criteria for partner farms:

- Minimum years experience offering CSA
- Reputation, reliability, (e.g. member retention above X%, positive customer reviews or references)
- All CSA offerings grown in-state or within a geographic radius
- Ability to accept credit/debit payments
- Ability to accept discount codes or deduct employer contribution from total share amount as part of an online CSA sign-up process
- Capacity to report CSA sign-ups sorted by discount code to the university
- Communication practices (social media presence, regular customer newsletter, written policy/agreement to share with customers)
- Capacity for timely communication with university administrators as needed
- Liability insurance
- Willingness to present to employees once a year and collaborate with University coordinators on supplementary programs
- Third party food safety or organic certification, FSMA documentation, or food safety training
- Minimum length of season (for health impacts)
- Farm proximity to the workplace
- Drop-off locations/delivery requirements
- [Example farm criteria resources](#)

Considerations on working with Food Hubs offering an aggregated CSA “Veggie Box”

- There are potential advantages to working with a food hub:
 - Some of the administrative labor of a Workplace CSA Program could be outsourced to a partner food hub (i.e., marketing, customer tracking, payment processing, deducting university employer contributions, data collection, communication with farmers, and customer service)
 - A food hub can vet and provide revenue for multiple farms
 - Access to multiple growers can result in more variety and reliable volumes

Request for Proposal. Some universities might require a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process through their purchasing department. Work within your institution’s systems to prevent roadblocks down the line.

Program Rollout Timeline. Ensure that administrators, farmers, and participants have ample time to prepare for the program. Plan any complementary nutrition or cooking education programming in advance and include it in your timeline.

Example: University of Kentucky CSA Voucher Program Timeline:

- **January:** UK HR Health and Wellness hosts a CSA Voucher Fair virtual event. This is a meet-and-greet for employees to learn about UK's 10+ partner farms, their unique offerings (some farms offer customization, u-pick, add-ons, etc.), pick-up location options, and more. This event helps employees to determine which partner farm is the best fit for their household. Employees who attend this event are entered into a raffle for a free CSA share (paid for by UK Health and Wellness).
- **February – April:** Vouchers are available for employees to claim. This process is online. Employees log into the university's web portal, where a unique voucher code is generated for them. The voucher code can then be used when employees purchase a share directly from their partner farm of choice, through the farm's website. Employees then owe the cost of the CSA share minus the discount. Most partner farms offer payment plans so that customers do not have to pay the full balance at once, but a non-refundable deposit (on top of the voucher) is typically required. Farms invoice UK Health and Wellness for the value of the vouchers used to purchase shares from their farm.
- **May:** First virtual CSA cooking demonstrations (e.g., "[Make a date with your CSA](#)") are offered. KYFSC posts [guides](#) for storage and preparation of CSA produce to prepare employees for their upcoming CSA shares. For most farms, the CSA season begins in late May.
- **June – October:** CSA Season. Weekly pick-ups at various locations on and off campus. Logistics around remaining payment, share pick-up, add-ons, etc. are between the customer and the farm (UK and KYFSC are not involved). KYFSC shares [resources](#) for CSA members and farmers to use throughout the season and works with local partners to offer a CSA-centered cooking demonstration. UK Health and Wellness offers multiple cooking demonstrations throughout the season, as well as a [recipe blog](#) and UK Employees with a CSA Facebook Group for ongoing CSA support.
- **November:** KYFSC and UK partner to craft postseason evaluations for CSA members and partner farms. In past years, this included surveys and focus groups of various consumer segments within the CSA program. Surveys and focus groups are used to modify program delivery in subsequent years.

Marketing and Recruitment

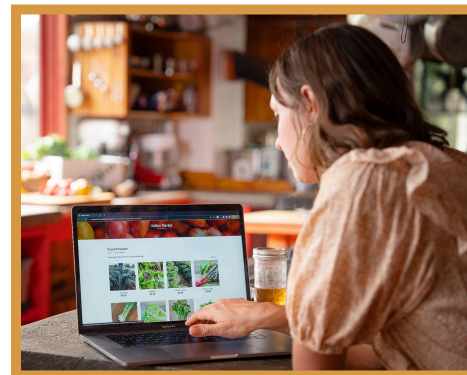
- **Identify the existing communication channels** on your campus that you can use for marketing and recruitment, and note the process for submitting content to each of them. Platforms for marketing the program include employee newsletters, wellness newsletters, social media channels, and open enrollment benefits listings.
- **Template emails/outreach to employees**
- **Selling points** for the program include: convenience, quality, pricing, supporting local, choice, time savings, flexibility, and a way to introduce more produce into your

diet for better health

- **Publish an employee poll to gauge interest in a Workplace CSA Program.** Prior to the start of the first season, survey employees to gauge their interest in participating in the CSA-to-University program. Questions about what employees hope to get from the program and potential barriers to participating will help you attract participants and address any concerns they may have as part of your outreach efforts. Knowing what characteristics employees want in their CSA (such as payment plans, different share sizes, organic, customization) will help you attract more participants and recruit fitting partner farms.
- **Create a landing page that explains the program,** introduces partner farms, answers common questions, and leads to an application or sign-up process. Include a link to this page in your marketing and recruitment materials.
- **Plan an orientation or “meet and greet” event** (in-person or virtual) for employees to learn about the program and meet the farmers. Consider offering an incentive for employees to attend (e.g. University of Kentucky enters meet-and-greet attendees into a raffle for a free CSA share).

Logistical considerations

- **Create a system for employees to sign up for the program online.** Use this system to gather basic data like name and contact information as well as any pre-season data you want to collect to measure impact. If the program includes a financial incentive, the sign-up system could include a discount code generator or other way to facilitate the incentive.
- **Identify a good distribution site(s) for workplace delivery:**
 - **Accessible** for a simple delivery process for farmers (parking, unloading, delivering)
 - **Temperature controlled** to keep produce fresh during the pick-up window
 - Accessible by foot or car for employees/customers, unlocked during pick-up window
 - **A distribution site coordinator** is crucial to help farmers and shareholders find their way in the first couple of weeks, to clean up the site after distribution, and to store or donate forgotten shares.
 - In some cases, **farmer drop sites in other locations** can be offered to employees who work remotely or have different schedules.
- **In-season communication:**
 - **Assign a contact** for farmers and shareholders to reach out to if problems arise



- **Offer supporting programs for participating employees**, such as cooking classes, recipe blog, a facebook group, or a way for participants to communicate with and support one another.

Evaluation & Data Collection

- **Feedback and surveying** can help champions justify investment in the program to upper management. It can also help those involved in program implementation identify areas for improvement, measure impacts, demonstrate success, and advocate for more and sustained funding.
- Ideally, an **Evaluation Plan** should be developed during the planning stage of the pilot. When designing a data collection process, program leaders should consider what types of data meet their evaluation needs, identify potential participants and target populations for evaluation, and an ideal schedule for data collection and evaluation.
- Start by **identifying the main outcomes** you'd like to see in the group of employees who participate in the pilot, such as:
 - Increases in fruit and vegetable consumption and/or decreases in processed food consumption
 - Engagement with other wellness programs
 - Behavioral changes including improvement of food preparation skills and vegetable-centric meal planning
 - Improvement in perceptions related to wellbeing, energy, or health
 - Changes in biometrics including weight, A1c, and/or blood pressure
 - Improved knowledge about local food and agriculture
 - More positive attitudes about the employer sponsoring the program
- Many of these metrics can be measured at baseline and at the program's end, for pre-post comparison. You may also wish to **measure progress on these outcomes** during the season. Mid-season evaluations can also give you feedback on their experiences navigating the CSA process. This feedback can help you, your employees, and your CSA farmers improve the program.
- **Behavioral and perceptual metrics** such as fruit and vegetable intake can be measured using self-reported questionnaires. Assessment of these objectives often use a 5- or 7- point Likert scale. Sample questions can be found in the appendix and are linked in the previous paragraph.
- **Biometric changes** require direct measurements in a clinical setting or access to secondary data. You may be able to partner with university or medical center partners to collect these types of data.

- Other program outcomes to assess among participants include **knowledge and attitudes towards regionally grown foods, farms and local agriculture**. Additionally, you can ask participants how frequently they shop for fruit and vegetables, and where (e.g., grocery store, box store, online, farmers' market, other CSA, etc.) and whether they have prior experience with a CSA subscription.
- In addition to evaluating outcomes and interim objectives you may want to **assess participants' response to the CSA to University program overall as well as response to specific program components**: logistical arrangements, ease of sign up/payment procedures, program cost and convenience, attributes of the food, content/format/delivery of nutrition education and other peer support elements.
- Additionally, you'll want to **seek feedback from the farmers involved in supplying the food, university and medical center partners, and other shareholders** to get a holistic picture of how the program is going and to improve the experience for all parties. Feedback can be collected using surveys, but could also be collected in focus groups with multiple stakeholders, or through individual interviews.
- **Midseason surveying** of participants, farmers, and partners can alert administrators to a problem they may not otherwise see, and inform easy adjustments to resolve them in real time.
- **End-of-season surveys** allow farmers, employees, program promoters, and administrators to reflect on the entire season and make suggestions for improvements on all parts of the program. In SW WA, a summary of results from the participant evaluation was shared with each employer as part of a debriefing and feedback session, during which stakeholders offered suggestions for program improvements, and plans for the subsequent season were discussed. Stakeholders were provided with a written report that summarized the participant evaluation, employer feedback, suggestions for improvements, and plans for the next season.
- **Focus Groups** can also be a valuable way to collect impact data and insights on how the program is operating. UK regularly holds post-season feedback sessions that ask voucher participants to reflect on the impact of the CSA experience on their food-related lifestyle behaviors. They also ask about challenges that participants face during the season related to CSA usage as well as their experiences related to how the program is administered by the University. These discussions are valuable ways to identify areas where the CSA program can be improved in terms of administration and impact. Examples might include suggested tweaks to the sign-up process or voucher level, strategies for advertising the program better, or ideas for supplementary programming by health and wellness entities. Additionally, program leaders might hold focus groups with individuals who decided against signing up for the program to understand how to make CSA more accessible.
- **Example Program Evaluation Templates & Resources**
- Example evaluation reports from Southwest Washington Food Hub:
 - a. [Evaluation report, multiple worksites, for funders](#)

b. Pre-post pilot evaluation for individual employer

Applying an Equity Lens to Workplace CSA in the University

Reflect on this set of guiding prompts before initiating a partner relationship with a CSA farm. Think about how to best reach underserved employees, partner with farms to deliver culturally relevant foods, support BIPOC farmers, and more.

- a. Consider allocating vouchers on an income-based scale: give higher value vouchers to employees with lower take-home pay. Or use a sliding scale approach for employees to self-select how much voucher value would be useful for them.
- b. Consider letting employees self-select to be given first access to vouchers based on need; release vouchers in waves, so that those with greatest self-identified need are able to access them first, followed by opening up any remaining voucher availability to all interested.
- c. Seek out BIPOC-led CSA farms in your area to support. They might also be growing more culturally relevant foods that would meet the needs of your employees.
- d. Work with a local farmers market or CSA support organization to ensure the farm can accept SNAP from any employees who are eligible to use SNAP.
- e. Think about flexible CSA pick-up options on-site: is there cold storage available for the CSA boxes to be delivered to, so that it can be safely stored across all worker shift times? Or are there CSA farms in your area that offer home delivery?
- f. Consider whether you can integrate the university's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office into the CSA process, in support of diverse and equitable communities. The department might be able to champion supporting local BIPOC or other historically marginalized farmers.
- g. Seek out farms with flexible payment options for members, and consider offering an employee payroll deduction option, where employees don't have to pay upfront at signup and can have their share balance deducted over a longer period of time.

Appendix

Template Emails/Outreach to Employees

- [Informational sheet](#) for employers from Southwest Washington Food Hub
- [Benefits for Employers sheet](#) from Southwest Washington Food Hub
- [Template email for employer outreach](#) from Southwest Washington Food Hub

Example Shareholder Support Resources

- [University of Kentucky's CSA Blog](#) with recipes and other information
- [Offer a CSA at Your Workplace](#) from Kentucky Farm Share Coalition
- [Sample newsletter](#) from Southwest Washington Food Hub
- [Harvest Tip Sheets](#) from WSU Extension Skagit County

Example Employer Agreement

- [Kentucky Farm Share Coalition employer agreement](#)
- [Southwest Washington Food Hub](#)

Example Farm Criteria Resources

- [Kentucky Farm Share Coalition Farm Information Form](#)
- [University of Kentucky CSA Farm Visit Criteria](#)

Data Collection and Evaluation Resources

- Pre-program employee interest poll example
 - [Southwest Washington Food Hub](#)
- Pre-Season employee baseline survey examples
 - [Southwest Washington Food Hub](#)
 - [University of Kentucky](#)
- Mid-season evaluation
 - [KY Farm Share Coalition letter to employers and employees](#)
- Post-season employee survey example
 - [University of Kentucky](#)
 - [Kentucky Farm Share Coalition](#)
 - [Southwest Washington Food Hub](#)
- End of season focus groups
 - [University of Kentucky](#)

Research articles

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