

HDFFA's Workplace CSA Toolkit

A guide for employers interested in bringing Community Supported Agriculture to the Workplace

The High Desert Food and Farm Alliance piloted a Workplace CSA program in 2018 and continued the program the following two years. This toolkit represents what we learned about the most successful strategies for both companies and farmers. We hope it starts you and your company on a path toward a fun, fulfilling, healthy CSA program that lasts many seasons into the future. Throughout this document, you'll find clickable PDF examples from successful CSA programs in green boxes like the one to the right, and **helpful tips in purple**. We are indebted to Central Oregon Workplace CSA participants and partners with whom we have worked, and to other nonprofit, local food supporting organizations like Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) in Massachusetts, who have developed some of the examples you will see here as part of a USDA grant.



Look for the veggie basket for tools and examples!

What is a CSA?

"CSA" stands for *Community Supported Agriculture*. This way of engaging with farmers has been in place in the US since the mid-1980's, and it's still growing in influence and adoption every year. We like to say it's like having your own personal farmer, or being part of a "farm team": you pay a farmer before the season starts, and they use that money to buy seed, or feed, or whatever they need. When the harvest starts, you get part of the bounty, usually in the form of a CSA box, or "share". This helps your producer at the beginning of their season during a time when they don't have much income, and will provide you with a bunch of fresh local goodness that you can enjoy throughout the spring, summer, and into the fall.

There are many CSA models: single farms or multiple farms; veggies, meat, dairy, eggs, or a combination; pickup at the farm or market, or delivery; with or without choosing what specifically will be in your box in a given week. Some farmers need full payment up front, and some allow for a number of partial payments over time. Some farmers offer multiple sizes and others don't. Something they all have in common is the chance to get to know who your farmer is, and to get a deeper sense of what's involved in producing the food you enjoy.



Why bring a CSA to your workplace?

A Workplace CSA can benefit both the company and its employees. Busy employees who don't make it to a farmers market can enjoy the convenience of having a farmer regularly deliver Central Oregon's local bounty right to their workplace. Employers find that offering a Workplace CSA can result in increased employee satisfaction and productivity. In the long term, we know that having ready access to healthy fresh food increases the odds that employees will eat a healthy diet, and this means a decreased risk of cardiac disease, stroke, diabetes and other chronic diseases.



Is a CSA right for my workplace?

When a CSA is right for a workplace and the pieces come together, it's a beautiful thing. Not all workplaces are right for a CSA share, though, and bringing in a CSA program before your workplace is ready will mean a lot of work and a decreased chance for success. Here are some considerations to keep in mind as you decide whether your workplace is, or could be, "CSA Material":

- **Critical mass:** farmers usually require a minimum number of shares in order to deliver to the workplace. The number varies with different farmers, but you can expect it to be between 7 and 10 shares. **Some smaller companies are successful in "teaming up" with nearby companies to reach their minimum.** Farmers may also have a maximum number of shares available, and this is something to keep in mind (though especially in the first few seasons, it's less of a consideration for most workplaces).
- **Employee interest/ability:** meeting that minimum number of employee shares takes a bit of organizing for many companies, even though almost all employees will agree that it's a fun and interesting idea. Some employees already belong to a CSA and want to stick with their farmer. Some employees are intimidated by the idea of a box of veggies every week. Some employees work remotely and travel a lot, so a weekly delivery to the workplace isn't something it makes sense to commit to. Depending on your workforce, employees may find it difficult or inconvenient to make a full up-front payment, which might range from \$300 to over \$600, depending on the size and composition of the share. **Bring the idea up in casual conversation or team meetings** to see if it could be a viable program for your company.



- **A coordinator:** the coordinator keeps the wheels turning through the season. This is usually an outgoing, communicative, organized employee who is passionate about local food and can be on site on delivery day. Their job may include recruiting members of the CSA and, making sure shares are delivered and picked up., If there are issues with shares, delivery, or anything else, the coordinator will work towards a resolution with the farmer and/or employees. The coordinator may also set up surveys, collect feedback for the farmer or management, organize farm tours or visits, or do any troubleshooting or promotion necessary to keep things running smoothly. **The coordinator is a key person in your workplace's CSA program, and they should have a designated backup** who can step in if they go on vacation or are otherwise unavailable. Most of the time farmers will offer a share to the coordinator at a discount of 10% or more to thank them for their contribution.



- **Management support:** this is a critical success factor for workplace CSAs. Companies that value or advocate for community engagement and healthy lifestyles in their workforce can prioritize the small changes required by the implementation of a workplace CSA - this includes the use of some company time and space to support employees in the program. Other ways management can show support include:
 - using company communications like a newsletter to support signups, or in-season updates
 - allocating paid time to the CSA coordinator, and dedicating a space for CSA shares to be dropped off and for crates or boxes to be stored for pickup by the farmer
 - organizing a company visit to the farm for family or team-building fun
 - buying a “company share” for the breakroom
 - subsidizing employee shares or giving shares as performance rewards or incentives
 - posting pictures or stories about the CSA and the farmer on the company’s social media
- **A secure, climate-controlled space:** your farmer will be dropping off veggies at the peak of freshness. If they are delivering meat, it will arrive frozen. Especially on hot summer days, these shares need to be kept cool, though a refrigerator usually isn’t necessary unless your farmer delivers specialty items like milk or ice cream. **The space needs to be accessible by farmers and employees on the day they are delivered, but shares need to be secure from unauthorized activity** like “sampling” by people or critters. Companies often use a part of the break room or a clean,



protected storage room for share pickup. Ice chests or other protective containers are a nice touch, especially for frozen meat. Unless you are planning on refrigerating or freezing the shares (as appropriate), your coordinator will need to make sure the shares are picked up or otherwise taken care of on the day of delivery.

Timeline for a CSA program

You've determined that your workplace may be a good candidate for a CSA. Great! When should you start things rolling? The short answer is: as soon as you can. Many farmers have repeat customers season after season, and November or December is not too early to start talking to farmers and to your employees. An early investment of time and organization will pay off throughout the season - you will have more logistics to work out than a single-share customer, but once you figure out your system and collect that first CSA share, it should be smooth sailing. Here's a general timeline of the year:

October - November

Decide if a CSA is right for your workplace (above) and take a moment to define what you are hoping to achieve and how you might measure that. Are you interested in employee wellness or employee retention? Office morale? Community engagement? Photo ops for social media? Increasing productivity by offering convenience? There really aren't any bad answers, but **try to narrow it down to three things you would like to achieve with the program**. When you decide what's most important to you, identify two or three things to measure whether you have achieved them. For example, if you are looking for ways to establish your company's reputation as supportive and forward-thinking, you might measure how often the workplace CSA shows up in employee social media or how often they talk about it with friends. If you'd like to help employees live a healthier lifestyle, you might want to know if their workplace CSA share led to them eating more fresh veggies or healthy proteins. You might also want to measure general employee satisfaction with the program and the actual investment the company is making - for these you might look at whether employees are happy that they signed up for a share, and how much time your coordinator is spending managing the program. Most of these questions can be answered with a simple survey administered before, during and after the season, or through a couple of quick feedback sessions, or as part of the coordinator's ongoing collection of communications -



whatever works with your company culture. **Knowing what “success” is for you and how you plan to measure it will help guide all the decisions you make about your CSA program.**

November-December

Start asking your employees if they would be interested in participating in a workplace CSA, and what they would like it to include. You can do this via a formal or informal survey, a signup sheet, or a show of hands at a company meeting - you don't have all the details yet, but you can find out whether this is something that sparks interest for your employees, and whether it makes sense to move forward. At the same time, make sure that management is on board and clear on how they will support the program.



December-January

Find your farmer. There are a good number of CSA programs each season in Central Oregon. The offerings and process for engaging each is a little different, but you can use what your employees have told you about what's important to see if you can find just the right match. **An excellent place to start looking is hdffa.org/csa** - you'll find HDIFFA partners located all over Central Oregon with a wide variety of offerings, from meat to flowers, from eggs to eggplant, and everything in between. Some farmers team up with others, and some produce a share that is single-farm. Either way, January is a good month to interview farmers and find out what would work best for your workplace and the farmer's schedule, offerings, and price point. You will know your company's culture best, so you will know if employees are willing to pay a little more and get regular recipes, access to Facebook groups, or other "perks" of some CSA programs. Especially in the first year, **you might want to consider keeping offerings simple - all one size, or with minimal customization** (if the farmer offers it). This will make pick up days a lot easier. Make sure you understand the farmer's process for signups, payment methods and prices, their timeline for meeting the minimum number of shares for delivery, the delivery days, the first and last day of the season, and anything else the farmer will want you to know about being their customer.



January- April

Sign up employees. Many workplaces will invite their chosen farmer to come to the workplace for a “lunch and learn” or “meet the farmer” event, where employees



Program
Poster
Example 1

have the chance to learn about the farmer’s practices, what kinds of things might be in their CSA share, whether they could visit the farm, and more. The coordinator or another company representative will communicate the details and deadlines of the program and answer or forward questions to the farmer. The farmer will have a “last day to sign up,” and it’s common for employees to wait until just before the deadline -



Sample
email
content

many coordinators choose to make the “employee last day” a day or two earlier, so that they can pull together lists, confirmations and start organizing. The coordinator or a company representative should **check and confirm with the farmer about what happens if your workplace is not able to reach the farmer’s drop off minimum:**



Program
Poster
Example 2

employees who have signed up may have the option for a refund, or the option to pick up their share at a farmers market, at the farm, or at another of the farmer’s pickup locations.



Sign Up
Form

May/June-October

This is the typical CSA season. For at least the first few drop offs, the coordinator should plan on meeting the farmer and smoothing out any “hiccups” or details - for example, if the dropoff area is in a badge-protected area, how will the farmer gain access each week? Will the agreed-upon times and days work for the farmer? Are there any last minute questions, suggestions, or anything unanticipated? Before too long, everyone will be a pro! **This is also a great time to grab some pictures for the company’s social media** or newsletter, as there is almost always a lot of excitement when the CSA actually starts. The most successful workplace CSA sites are those where the employees and program point people have embraced the farmer, farm family, and farm as one of their own. Creating opportunities for shareholders to build a direct relationship with the farmer is a key element to a successful workplace CSA project. Each farmer is different in the ways they connect with customers, but they will often have a newsletter, their



own social media, or “come visit the farm” days. Keep in the loop on these and share as appropriate!

October/November

Wrapping up the season: at the end of the season, many farmers host a “CSA Customer Day” on the farm or other event to celebrate the end of the season. This is also a good time to look back on successes and challenges of the season (see #4 below). You could make your own questionnaire, or use a tool like Google Forms to collect responses. Depending on your company’s goals for the program, some questions you might ask participants could be:

- Satisfaction levels generally, and specifically with the quality, quantity, and variety of the produce.
- Convenience of the distribution time, day, location, and method.
- Changes in eating habits and awareness
- Strength of connection to the farm, including whether they visited, read the newsletter, and were pleased with the farmer’s customer service
- Level of support for incorporating more local food into their workplace cafeteria.
- Why they joined the CSA.
- If they would like to help promote or expand the program, and resources they have to offer.



Managing and troubleshooting your Workplace CSA



Pick ups

The coordinator should have a way of tracking who has picked up their share, and make sure that employees pick up their own share and not someone else’s. If the farmer can provide a packing list or put customer names on the share boxes or bags, that can really help, especially if shares are customized for the members. Most coordinators like to use sign out sheets or share pick up forms to create a record of who has picked up their share (and who belongs to any un-picked up shares).



Sometimes employees will want to split a share - in this case, there needs to be just one responsible person for that share.

It's not unusual for employees to forget to pick up their shares, especially at the beginning of the season. Many coordinators **create a recurring calendar invitation or email to remind employees about their share pickup**. Depending on the facilities available and company preference, there are a number of ways to handle extra unpicked up shares: the coordinator can "adopt" unclaimed shares (another coordinator perk, donate to someone else at the workplace, or the share can be put in the employee break room. **Decide in advance where any extra produce will go each week and who is responsible for its distribution**. HDFFA, NeighborImpact, or nearby food pantries may be able to take a share and help it find a good home - HDFFA has a "Grow and Give" booth at most farmers markets for collecting produce from farms, gardens, and elsewhere for redistribution. As a last resort, shares should be removed and disposed of within a day to ensure food safety and cleanliness in the drop off area, but this hardly ever happens since a free box of produce will usually get a lot of attention!

CSA seasons often coincide with times when employees like to take



vacations. There are some farmers who will keep track of shares and payments, but most farmers do not. Workplaces are most successful when they are clear in putting the responsibility of share pickup in the hands of the employee. That means employees should arrange for pickup by a coworker (either selling or giving them the share) or by someone else. In most cases, coworkers are happy to receive a share, and just need to sign out under the vacationing member's name. Many coordinators like for employees to just let them know someone else will be picking up their share,

but for best results, the **disposition of the share should be the employee's responsibility**.

Problems to anticipate and possible solutions

In almost all cases, good communication is the best way to resolve issues with a workplace CSA program. Of course, there are always unanticipated events or conditions in a workplace. Here are a few things we have seen come up, and how companies successfully dealt with them:

- **Employee leaves the workplace:** a lot can happen over a four to six month CSA period: employees may leave the company or be reassigned, may be called away for long-term travel assignments or



have to step away to attend to family business. As noted above, what happens to the share should be the employee's responsibility, but the company can often assist with farmer communication and brainstorming solutions. If the employee remains in the area, farmers are often able to offer their share at another pick up location. If the employee is not able to pick up locally, they often sell or donate the remainder of their share deliveries to colleagues or friends. **We have never encountered a case where the farmer was unwilling to work with their customer** to the best of their ability - this is a big advantage to working with a local producer who you can build a trusting relationship with.

- **Coordinator leaves role or company:** in this situation, the coordinator's backup will often become the primary contact for the company and the farmer. If the coordinator leaves after the beginning of the season, there is usually a good system in place and the coordination work can even be picked up by one or more of the employee share members.
- **Problems with share quality or quantity, or general dissatisfaction:** this is often a classic communication issue. Employees may not be familiar with Central Oregon seasonality (which means lots of greens early in the spring), or the farmer may experience a crop loss due to pests, disasters, or weather events (part of the shared risk for being in a CSA), or the farmer may not be as careful as employees would like with washing, bagging, or selecting high-quality produce, or employees may feel they are not getting their "money's worth". You should expect your share delivery at about the same time and day each week, and there may be times when this is not consistent. In any case where the farmer has control of the problem, the coordinator should contact them to determine the cause and a resolution. **The coordinator will find that the farmer is usually very receptive and will do their best to keep customers happy** - they are in business and want to stay in business!

Ways to expand program and impact

Your company's support of a Workplace CSA program represents an investment in employee happiness and wellness, *and* in the economic and social health of the community. **Don't wait until the end of the season to celebrate and share the benefits of the program.** You might think about publishing the (anonymized) results of your participant survey, feature information about creative uses for CSA shares



in your internal communications, organize a volunteer work day on the farm for employees and their families, or have regular social media updates that feature employee members or your farmers. When the program is running smoothly, having a workplace CSA can be a joyful experience for employees, far beyond the benefit of having convenient access to local food.

Tax, safety, access and liability issues

This is an area you will want to take up with your company's legal staff if it is a concern for you. The main risks to bear in mind are potential for injury to either farm employees dropping off shares, or workplace employees picking them up; contract issues involving satisfaction or delivery, and food safety. Most farmers carry at least \$1 million liability insurance directly related to their business, but you can ask for proof of this or other coverage you require before accepting the farmer you have chosen. The very safest way for both the farmer and your business to be sure of adequate protection is to check in with a corporate counsel or other attorney, and an insurance agent.

Employers with workplace security policies because of the number of employees or the nature of the work they do need to be sure to work with their security department to ensure that there will be acceptable ways for the farmer to easily enter the property and drop off shares each week. In some cases this is a simple sign in/sign out process, or the farmer may be accompanied into secure areas when they arrive. As with liability issues, working early on to develop an acceptable process will usually result in a smooth and trouble-free season

Developing assigned responsibilities and processes for keeping the dropoff facility and storage area clean and tidy will be an important part of keeping your facilities department happy and keeping employees safe and healthy.

Wrapping up, looking forward

At the end of the season, many workplaces have a debrief with the participants and coordinator to identify wonderful parts of the workplace CSA program, and to make suggestions for improvement. We have found that this short conversation can ensure continuity and the evolution of a program that improves over time and can start to be one way for employers to differentiate themselves, attracting and retaining high-performing employees who are active, health-conscious, and community minded, like their Central Oregon neighbors, colleagues, and employers!



We hope you have found this document useful, and that it helps you along the way to a robust and trouble-free Workplace CSA program. We encourage you to [join HFFFA as a partner or a sponsor](#), and to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), and to engage with our local food education and promotion program at [getataste.org](#).

If you have any questions, suggestions, or spot any errors, please don't hesitate to contact HFFFA – drop us an email at info@hfffa.org or give us a call at (541) 390-3572.

