

## Marketing Recommendations for CSA Farmers: A CSA Research Brief



**FAIRSHARE**  
CSA COALITION

### Key Findings:

- Only 5% of the *current members* report that they plan to stop buying CSA next year
- *New membership* may not be growing fast enough to keep pace
- Most CSA members have switched farms at least once

### Recommendations:

- Marketing to retain membership is essential
- Offer returning member discounts
- Communicate with members about fresh, healthy, local food and supporting local farmers through CSA

*This project was supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service through grant 15FMPPWI0086. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.*

### CSA Research

FairShare CSA Coalition represents a group of about 50 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms from Wisconsin. FairShare worked with researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Wisconsin-Extension to develop and distribute a survey to Wisconsinites that are *current* CSA members, *former* CSA members, or had *never* bought a CSA share before. The final survey was distributed and data collected between November 2016 and January 2017. A total of 3,227 individuals responded to the survey. This brief shares some key findings.

### CSA Growth and Retention

New CSA members accounted for 17% of the current CSA members in the sample. Considering that only 5% of the Current members report that they plan to stop buying CSA next year, this signifies a net gain for membership. However, new membership may not be growing fast enough to keep pace with the number of new shares offered by new or expanding CSA farms.

The research also found that turnover in CSA membership is pretty common — most members we surveyed had been with their current farm for 2 to 3 years, but had been a CSA member at any farm for 4 to 5 years. That shows that most CSA members have switched farms at least once. This means marketing to retain membership is essential.

### CSA Member Retention – Communication is Key

Communication may help improve member retention. Compared to current CSA members who are planning to switch CSA farms (or stop buying CSA), CSA members planning to *stay* with their current farm reported:

- Feeling more updated about their farm
- That they got to know the farmer more
- The farmer was more responsive to their questions or concerns

In particular, electronic communication is important. Current CSA customers prefer to hear about their CSA farm via:

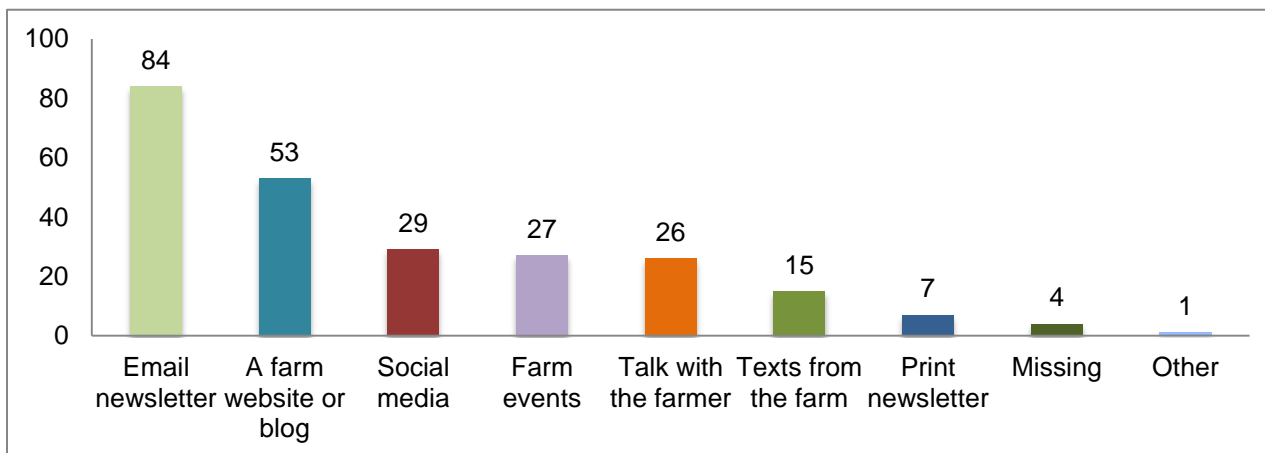
- Email newsletter
- The farm's website or blog
- Social media

### Offer Market Shares

While many CSA customers enjoy having a farmer select a variety of seasonal food for them, the survey found that some people would prefer to individually select their own CSA share items. For those members, a market share would be appealing. With a market share, members pick their own items for their share at a pre-specified time at their CSA farm, or when their CSA farmer is at the farmers' market.

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### How Do Current CSA Members Prefer to Hear From Their CSA Farm?



*CSA members prefer electronic communication. On the survey, these categories were not mutually exclusive.*

Many people join CSA to get fresh, healthy, local food — and to support local farmers. At least some communication to members should relate to these points.

A different way to help retain your current members is to offer discounts for returning members. Among the current CSA members surveyed, that idea was very popular, even more so than options like home delivery.

### Help CSA Members Minimize Food Waste

The survey found that food waste was a major concern for CSA members, and one of the strongest reasons people gave for why they stopped buying CSA. Farms may consider options to help members waste less food - 67% of current members take advantage of one of these strategies:

- Offering size or delivery options that help households minimize the quantity of food received
- Make it easier for households to split shares with another household

Allowing members to reschedule boxes may also help, as members would not be wasting food (or money) on boxes they can't use. One way to do this is to have members pay for 20 weeks of a 22-week season, and let them pick two weeks to skip.

### Attract New Members through Word of Mouth

An ideal way to reach *new* members is through word-of-mouth communication.

- Consider encouraging *current* members to reach out to friends and family about your CSA by offering recruitment perks.
- Host “a friends and family” event at your farm.
- Consider selling a one-time box to a potential *new* member to create a low-risk way for them to experience CSA.

Another option is to advertise on social media to people who know your current CSA members. Facebook allows you to advertise to people who are “friends” with your “friends.” Research suggests social media ads will attract the most attention if you or other farmers at your farm are prominent in the picture used in the ad, and your farm name and location is clearly identified.<sup>1</sup>

Visit the FairShare CSA Coalition website to learn more:

<http://www.csacoalition.org/>

<sup>1</sup>Shaw, B., Runge, K., & Peot, E. (2018). Social Media Marketing Messages for Direct to Market Farms. Available at <https://fyi.uwex.edu/localfoodmarketing/social-media-direct-market/>