

The Benefits of Community Supported Agriculture

Addressing the Global Food Crisis with Economical and Sustainable Farming Practices

Tag Words: community supported agriculture, sustainability, food production, food crisis, container garden, Khuda Ki Basti, Rutgers

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Summary

Community supported agriculture is a new innovation in classic farming techniques that utilizes sustainable agricultural practices while fostering economic, environmental, and economic consciousness. This model brings together entire communities or people who can reap the benefits of healthier, organically grown food. By splitting up the responsibilities involved in supporting and maintaining a farm both financially and labor wise, people are brought together in various ways to lead healthier, happier, and more prosperous lives. Our primary mission is to introduce the CSA concept to developing countries in order to address the issues they are currently facing, such as unstable economies, unstable food production, and unstable lives. For this project, we focused on introducing CSA to Khuda Ki Basti, a small, poverty stricken town in Pakistan with a population of 1,800. By creating a community compost, splitting up container gardens throughout the town, and using raised beds, families will be able to have food and have more sustainable communities, not just gardens. (ZP/AD)

Video Link

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JqcC4g8IHs

What is CSA?

(ZP) Community sustained agriculture is a socio-economic model of responsible, sustainable agriculture and food distribution where a community of individuals pledge to share both the costs and benefits of food production. The community in which a CSA were to be implemented, consists of producers and consumers where the producers will provide the care taking and oversee the food production and the consumers will provide direct, up-front support for all the finances needed to sustain the CSA. Both parties commit to a CSA after taking into consideration and understanding the risks and benefits of food production .

This concept of locally grown food was first founded in the early 1960s in Japan and Switzerland. After a massive increase in the import of foods as well as a constant loss of farmland to development and the migration of farmers to cities, Japanese people looked for a solution to put an end to their ever-growing problem. Furthermore, a Japanese philosopher by the name of Teruo Ichiraku introduced consumers of Japan of the ideas of safe farming and the dangers of the chemical dangers of agricultural used the major food suppliers, thus, setting off the organic agriculture movement. With the help of homemakers of the community, Teruo Ichiraku began the first “teikei” which means partnership of a community and a farm. And today Japan has clubs that operate under a “teikei” concept where hundreds of farmers harvest enough food to serve thousands of people. Similarly, in Switzerland where fifty farmers came together in to late 1970s on rented land, poor tools and only one crops to plant, turnips. Organizations began throughout Europe and spread quite rapidly to all different regions.

In the mid-1980s, this innovative idea reached the United States from Europe where the first 2 CSA farms were established in Wilton, New Hampshire and Egremont, Massachusetts. And by 2007 there were over 12,000 CSA farms established throughout the United States. Today we hear of new CSAs with new and improved structures and systems involving non-profits, farmers markets, and work places. CSAs range from size and region. Not only can the idea be implemented in rural areas but also in urban areas where it is referred to as urban agriculture. CSA farmers typically use organic or biodynamic farming methods, and strive to provide fresh, high-quality foods. More people participate in the farming operation than on conventional farms, and some projects encourage members to work on the farm in exchange for a portion of the membership costs.

Something important to be noted and mentioned earlier is the characteristics of a CSA. What is a CSA exactly? How does one know how to properly start one? There is no right answer to this, CSA take many forms, the arrangement range from farm to farm and are specific to those who have agreed to be a part of that community. It is said “If there is a common understanding among people who have been involved with CSAs, it is that there is no formula. Each group that gets started has to assess its own goals, skills, and resources, and then proceed from that point” (5). However there are some key concepts that need to be resolved before the beginning of a CSA, as stated by Lamb, some practical arrangements must be made:

1. For farmers to know the needs of the community before beginning to work the land.
2. For the consumer to have an opportunity to express to the farmers what their food needs and financial limits are.
3. For commitments to be consciously established between farmers and consumers.
4. For farmers; needs to be recognized, thus freeing them to serve the community. (4)

Most CSAs offer a diversity of crops like vegetables, fruits, and herbs in season and some provide a full assortment of farm harvest, including eggs, meat, milk, baked goods, and even firewood. Some farms offer a single commodity, or they team up with others farms (like those seen in Japan) so that members receive goods on a more nearly year-round basis. Some individual CSAs are dedicated to serving particular community needs, such as helping to liberate homeless persons. Each CSA is structured to meet the needs of the participants, so many variations exist, including the level of financial commitment and active participation by the

shareholders; financing, land ownership, and legal form of the farm operation; and details of payment plans and food distribution systems. The agreements within each community don't need to be documents legally; they can be a written agreement or even a spiritual one in which all parties just agree.

Benefits

(AD) CSA as a sustainable philosophy has been so immensely successful in places where it had been implemented because of the numerous range of advantages which it can provide. These include economic, environmental, health, and social benefits.

Economic Benefits

Perhaps the most pervasive trend of modern day agriculture is the expansion of industrial farming, a system which has already established itself in many developed countries such as the United States and continues to take root globally, working itself into the food production arena in rural communities around the world. Since the main focus of industrial agriculture is to maximize profits, this corporate mentality often fails to consider both small-scale farmers, who struggle to compete against these corporations and adapt to changing technologies and practices, as well as consumers, who feel as though they have little say in the way their food is being produced. Since it requires the cooperation of both producers and consumers on behalf of one another, and both parties are required to share both the costs and benefits of maintaining the farm, CSA bridges the gap between farmer and ordinary individuals through community involvement, fostering a close, intimate relationship between two vital parts of the agricultural production and consumption process. As a result, it makes the consumer more conscious of his or her role in the food production process while simultaneously helping the farmer gain a better understanding of the impacts agriculture has on the community, ultimately allowing both sides to gain the necessary knowledge in order to maximize the positive benefits of their contributions. When producer and consumer begin to work directly with each other, the process of bringing food from the farm to the dinner table is simplified. Cutting out big corporations as well as the need to compete against them to produce local food helps small-scale farms stay afloat and thriving. Because smaller farming operations require less capital investment to grow and transport food, this ultimately ensures that less money is being poured into colossal corporate farms that do not have the people's best interest in mind. Furthermore, industrial agriculture primarily aims to support export markets, leaving local people hungry and short on food. Therefore, a more substantial amount of successful local farmers can mean a rise in food security because the food they produce will surely be distributed throughout the community, not shipped off to faraway place overseas.

Environmental Benefits

Due to the resource- and capital-intensive nature of industrial agriculture and its concern

over maximizing profits rather than the health of the people and the environment, agricultural corporations utilize and waste huge amounts of pesticides, inorganic fertilizers, and fossil fuel energy on food production. These unsustainable practices generate damaging run-off that pollute soil and waterways, increase the spread of diseases through lack of sufficient sanitation, and contribute to the current climate change issue and the energy crisis. With its focus on bringing people closer to the environment, CSA addresses all of these issues. Consumers have become so far removed from the actual food production process that the devastating impacts it can have on both the natural and the human environment fail to reach our grasp. However, since CSA farms and gardens utilize primarily organic and sustainable practices to their best advantage, such as the method of using non-synthetic pesticides and natural as opposed to chemical fertilizers, these practices elevate and maintain the health of both the people and the environment. In simplifying the food production process, CSA reduces the travel miles that are required to reach people's plates, which reduces emissions and lowers the carbon footprint. In essence, shedding the dependency on corporate food production and refining the food supply chain reduces our need to rely solely on the unsustainable practices, bringing power and influence back to the people while increasing food security for the general population by providing it with fresh, high-quality produce that is readily available at the community level.

Social Benefits

Beyond these advantages, the positive socio-economic impacts are a vital part of CSA as well. Direct participation by shareholders strengthens social conditions because it gives people a sense of purpose in their roles as consumers and contributing citizens, heightening social concerns enough for people to begin to address the multitude of ongoing problems in their communities, such as poverty and class tension. Many CSA operations have successfully incorporated educational programs into their agendas, which offer families and children a broad understanding of sustainability and ways to participate in community farming or gardening. Moreover, direct participation and cooperation between people of all different socio-economic backgrounds results in a heightened sense of community, providing those involved with greater incentive to nurture livelihoods beyond their own. Food production by way of CSA also allows the underprivileged sectors of society to afford healthy, nutritious produce, bringing more money and wealth into the community and simultaneously creating jobs.

Limitations

On the other hand, however, CSA systems do come with several drawbacks. Because all CSA farms require that shareholders sign a contract that may last anywhere from a single season to a full year and pay an up-front amount of money to participate in the system, it is possible to actually lose money if the individual fails to pick up the food grown after each production period, which is usually a week. Consumers can also lose out due to unforeseen consequences which can potentially ravage a farm and its ability to grow the necessary amount of produce, such as inclement weather conditions, bad harvests, pests, and overall unfavorable growing

seasons. Therefore, there is always a certain degree of risk involved, forcing the consumer to weigh the pros and cons of participating in such an operation. Moreover, consumers do not always have much say in what type of crop is grown, so they must take whatever the farmer chooses to give them, a dismaying reality for those who crave constant variety in their crops. Eating locally means adjusting to the diverse growing seasons and accepting the fact that certain crops can only be produced at certain times of the year because imported, out-of-season food is no longer a possibility under this particular system.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of CSA is the fact that not every region has the available resources to implement and properly maintain a garden or farm by this system. Garnering enough support to build and nurture one presents yet another shortcoming to the entire philosophy. Applying CSA to a certain area requires a thorough understanding of that particular area's unique climate, growing seasons, soil quality, water sources, wealth, demographic, social and economic conditions, and so on. Ultimately, it requires an immense amount of time and a certain amount of capital to get these projects off the ground, and in poor, rural communities, especially those in developing countries around the world, there is a general lack of leadership, talent, and initiative necessary to start a CSA project. Before CSA can become a widespread reality for the less developed regions, people will first and foremost need to be provided with substantial knowledge on how to grow food using CSA and why CSA is a valuable system in the first place.

The Food Crisis

(ZP) When one thinks of food crisis many other terms come to mind such as hunger, food security, food aid and malnutrition. A food crisis is generally considered to be a state of emergency in which populations are at risk of death, disease and panic due to dire shortages of food (i.e. famine) or food contamination (e.g. BSE outbreak). There is currently a global food crisis happening right now. There are many countries and regions throughout the world today where the people all go to sleep hungry every day because they are poor and or don't have access to fresh food water or livestock. Places all around the globe are suffering due to high and volatile food prices. According to a number of sources food prices have been hitting record peaks since 2007. As the Washington post states "Today, about 90 percent of Nigeria's agricultural output comes from inefficient small farms, according to the World Bank, and most farmers have little or no access to fertilizers, irrigation or other modern inputs. Most do not even grow enough food to feed their own families. According to UNICEF, 65 percent of the country's population roughly 91 million people are what humanitarian organizations call "food insecure."

The constant increase in food prices has left 925 million people hungry. Recent inflation in cost of grain and fuel seem to be the lead causes of the most recent global food crisis. Many countries such as Nigeria, India and many more are unable to feed the mouths of their own due to the extreme demand for these two items. Gas prices have doubled, therefore doubling the cost of transport of products which leads to an increase in prices for everything else to make up the cost of importing. Also the recent introduction of agro-fuels has been introduced as a substitute to gas. This recent discovery has resulted in an extreme increase in the demand for the source of this fuel which is grain. The demand for grain has increased so drastically farmers have moved

away from crop raising and look to solely grow this cash crop. But the problem is, countries that have such a high demand for these products do not have populations suffering from malnutrition. The high demand for such a cash crop has led countries with starving people to neglect their own people to make money and suffice the greedy mouths of people wanting for efficient fuel. What those looking to make a quick buck are failing to realize is the long term effects of planting a consistent amount of grains and corn to supply the hungry mouth of a selfish beast; that beast being countries with a little to no starvation or malnourishment. The need for oil-bearing crops is reducing the land available to produce food crops in Europe and clearing rainforests in Indonesia and Malaysia.

However, identifying the cause of a world food crisis is not the goal here, what we are looking to do is help put an end to it. Approximately 1 billion people worldwide do not have secure access to food, including 36 million in the US. National and international food and agricultural policies have helped to create the global food crisis but can also help to fix the system. What we are looking to do is attempt to help decrease the number of those in third world countries that are starving and suffering from malnutrition because they cannot afford to buy the crops needed to sustain them and their families. We are looking to bridge a gap between a food crisis and a CSA. By introducing the concept of not just one family attempting to live off a farm, we are attempting to get the entire community involved in working together to sustain a garden or farm to feed the mouths of their starved children. It is said that in Africa 38 percent of children in Nigeria suffer from moderate to severe malnutrition and about 90 percent of Nigeria's agricultural output comes from inefficient small farms. If we were to attempt to take these small inefficient farms and have them pool their resources perhaps one less child would go to bed hungry.

One major country heavily affected by the food crisis is Pakistan. After the flood in July of 2010 hit and swept away all the nations' most important provinces and destroying corn crops, vegetables and orchards, the country is suffering. The flood submerged 17 million acres of Pakistan's most fertile crop land, killed 200,000 herds of livestock and washed away massive amounts of grain and left farmers unable to meet the fall deadline for planting new seeds, which implies a massive loss of food production in 2011, and potential long term food shortages. People have been left homeless and hungry; some 17 million people have been affected and many have been killed. The marketplaces are empty, and farmers haven't been able to get seeds and plant in time for the fall season. Poverty has increased as over 23 percent of the nations' cash crops and farmlands have been wiped out. People are landless homeless and foodless. The country is now left with washed away crops and bare farmland. The country is hoping to receive funds and food handouts. But something deeper must be done to help relieve some of the stress of such an astronomical increase in the demand for food supplies.

CSA Abroad

(AD) Although the adoption of CSA farms and gardens is continuing to spread rapidly throughout the US and have been tremendously successful, our main focus is on the implementation CSA projects in developing countries, such as those in rural Latin America, Africa, and Asia. In regard to this endeavor, we raise several pressing questions. Can such a

model be applied to impoverished regions of the world struggling with famine? Would this be feasible? And moreover, will the benefits be far-reaching, and exactly how much impact will CSA have on the world's food crisis? To begin to address these questions, we chose to present a case study of one enormously successful CSA system abroad to demonstrate that CSA is very much a promising possibility elsewhere.

Little Donkey Farm: A true sign that the tide may be shifting, the Little Donkey Farm located in a rural village northwest of Beijing is the first-ever Chinese CSA farm. Established in 2008 by Shi Yan, a graduate from the Renmin University of Beijing, the farm grows a wide variety of crops such as green beans, eggplant, corn, and Chinese cabbage and has the support of four hundred families who pay an annual membership in exchange for a share of the harvest as well as an extra 260 families who rent small plots of land for their personal gardens and numerous international supporters. Each customer must pay in advance before the growing season, thus the benefits and risks are shared between by the farm and the participants. The Little Donkey Farm has been such a huge success because it continues to effectively address the growing concerns of agriculture in China and the recent trends that are threatening to the food system, such as wide use of pesticides that are contaminating food supplies and the environment alike. By using organic methods and involving the community, the farm has dodged these unsustainable practices while maintaining a smart and flourishing business model that contributes to an increasingly healthy community that supports an increasingly healthy population.

Unique Method

(ZP) One of the aspects of CSA we tried to focus on was implementing a CSA farm or garden in different geographical areas. A single basic design of a CSA farm or garden may or may not be suitable for some areas. Many developing countries have regions that are incapable of supporting a farm or garden on a large scale, but there are other methods to implement the concept. Poverty stricken regions of developing countries come in many shapes and sizes. The method of CSA in the form of raised beds and container gardening would be best suitable to tightly packed regions with dense population and minimal open land.

Raised bed gardens are a rather simple concept in which wooden two by fours are used to create the regions on which the gardening would take place. Raised beds would be very desirable to implement as opposed to open fields of crops because it would ensure a more organized system in which the care and upkeep of the CSA system created could be split up. Furthermore many crops are easier to grow when they are isolated from other crops; for example tomatoes are best grown separately because they grow rapidly and outwardly as opposed to other crops which don't overtake the area with outgrowth.

Alternatively, container gardens are also an option. Container gardening is actually a well renowned practice throughout the world. From big farms to small suburban cities with pots on the window ledges, the concept behind container gardening can fuse the that of CSA; small towns of dense populations living closely together with little to no space for a large farm or even raised beds can still use the idea of a community sustained agriculture. The community can still

plant containers, crates, or any form of container to keep in their homes to raise a specific crop. The work can be divided amongst the family members and the entire house hold can go to sleep on full stomachs. To create a container garden may seem like a small contribution and not a big milestone, but little by little it can make a big difference. Compact areas with houses built close together like those found in Brazil, Pakistan, India, just to give some examples. Small networks can be established between a couple of household in which common a compost is used to raise the crops in the container gardens and then they are later utilized to trade share amongst each other. The logic lies in that each household puts in the same amount of energy and effort to raise their crops and now a modified yet successful CSA container garden is established.

Service Project

Our primary goal is to bridge the gap between the ongoing global food crisis and the use of CSA farms and gardens. This idea can be carried in a region of the world which we believe would gain the most benefits from the CSA concept. Such farms are largely used in the US for safe farming and lessening the burden on farmers and consumers alike. However, what if we could introduce and implement this concept to a rural community in desperate need of safer, more sustainable agricultural practices? To create a CSA operation in a poverty stricken, developing country suffering heavily from malnutrition and a general shortage of food would be ideal. Many nonprofit organizations look for funding to help with food handouts and buying food for poor areas. However, we believe it is especially crucial to focus on the lessons behind the phrase “give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Thus, with this service project, we essentially are looking to broaden the spectrum of sustainable, economical, and socially just agriculture. By introducing CSA to countries such as Pakistan, Haiti, or Nigeria, we can begin to help unify communities and stabilize world agriculture.

By working along with a Rutgers based organization “Thaakat,” we are looking to reach out to a poverty stricken small town in Pakistan. The Thaakat foundation, founded in Chicago, Illinois primarily strives to give each individual an opportunity to make a difference one step at a time. Through personalized events, Thaakat has been able to reach out to many different causes and stand as a beacon of hope for those who are in need. Thaakat foundation at Rutgers New Brunswick has been given great opportunities to help the community, globally and locally. Recently the organization is working alongside with a solid waste management project called Green Gold on a site in Pakistan called Khuda Ki Basti that they are looking to test a small sustainable living project in. Investing in chickens and hens were to be part of the project to encourage the people to take selling and growing of eggs as a source of income.

We introduced the idea of a community supported garden or farm as well has steps on how to implement one. The main idea is to understand weather patterns and crop varieties that would be best suited for specific region and that would best sustain the community. Khuda Ki Basti is actually quite a large town consisting of about 1800 people, all living in close homes made of sheet metal and scraps of wood. The idea of a CSA farm turned out to be an unrealistic goal due to the minimal amount of land available. Despite this shortcoming, however, we

attempted the idea of raised bed gardens and came to settle on the container gardening method discussed above. The homes of this town are very close in proximity with one another and so establishing connections and trust among families within the community is not a difficult task. Along with tending to the chicken farms, each individual family can tend their individual gardens and contribute to a thriving community as a whole.

This small town would reap not just the benefits of full stomachs and a stable lifestyle, but will also learn the dynamics of a community working together for the common good. The advantages of this project are endless; the transition from malnourishment to organically grown crops filled with nutrients will overall not just make the villagers look better but they will feel better. The community will learn to work together, learn respect for each other's hard work. Organization looking to help different parts of the world will be able to teach one group to fish and move forward to their next damsel.

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Letters to the Editor

To Asbury Park Press (ZP)

To whom it may concern,

I am a Rutgers student, currently working on a project regarding community sustained agriculture (CSA). Community sustained agriculture is a broad concept consisting of a small or large community working together for the common good. The idea involves family or individuals reaching an agreement to work together to plant a garden or farm and then reap the benefits of the crops they harvest. The system in terms of how it works and the logistics of it vary from CSA to CSA. But what our project is concentrating on is how this well renowned

concept can be applied to more worldly problems.

We are working with a well established Rutgers non-profit organization called “Thaakat.” This idea of sustaining a community through the CSA concept may be a promising one. Khuda Ki Basti is a small town of 1800 people in Lahore, Pakistan. This poverty stricken community suffers from malnutrition and little to no source of income. The project begins with the raising of chickens to eat and sell the eggs. With the current food crisis, things like eggs wheat and rice are very costly and hard to come by. The community would raise the chickens together, sell the eggs together and ultimately see some growth in the community as a whole by a stable income. Furthermore, the agricultural part stems from the chicken idea; the chicken feces will be used to create compost and that compost will be used to create container gardens. This small town is very tightly packed with small homes made of scraps of random items and sheet metal. Introducing community compost which helps maintain each families separate container garden at home is what the goal we are looking to reach.

I am writing to you to help raise awareness on a proactive way to help solve the food crisis and world hunger one family at a time. Thaakat isn't looking for donation to help feed people, we aren't sending this poor town food. On the contrary we are teaching these people how to fend for themselves. As the old saying goes “Give a man a fish and feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” We are taking this idea and capitalizing on it. Monetary donations or spread of the word on our project is our aim. My contact information is below as well as Thaakat's information.

Thank you for your time,
Zain Paracha
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Natural Health Magazine (AD)

In conjunction with Natural Health Magazine's motto to promote a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, I am writing this to raise awareness about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a concept which I feel fits nicely with the sustainability philosophy as a whole. In a nutshell, CSA is a socio-economic system agriculture that relies on sustainable practices and a process of food distribution whereby a community of individuals pledge to share both the costs and benefits of crop production. Many large CSA farms implement a process in which shareholders from the community sign a contract, paying money upfront in order to participate in the system. In return, they are provided with fresh, organic fruits and vegetables on a weekly basis. The good thing about the concepts and methods behind CSA is that they can be applied at the smaller level as well, meaning any individual can grow a basic CSA garden in his or her own backyard. In essence, all this really requires is a basic knowledge of gardening and growing crops as well as the ability to mobilize one's family members, friends, and neighbors to partake in the operation.

I believe this idea is extremely important in the current atmosphere of growing food, energy, and resource concerns. CSA promotes awareness about where our food comes from and

allows the consumers to have a say in the food production process. It has advantages for the farmer as well, helping to keep local food production entities afloat in the face of powerful corporations and their shady agricultural practices. Eating more local food allows one to reduce travel miles food usually takes to reach our places, which in turn reduces the carbon footprint. In bringing together and unity people of all different backgrounds and statuses in the community, this method of growing food can even bridge the socio-economic gaps in the community. With its many far-reaching benefits, CSA holds a promising ability to mark a shift from our current enterprise unsustainable and unethical food production to a much more healthy and environmentally friendly way of life.