



Community Supported Agriculture in Canada

Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Annual Conference
2016

Building Vibrant Rural Futures: Mobilizing Knowledge and
Informing Policy
Guelph, Ontario
13 October 2016

John F Devlin, Meredith Davis , and Nonita Yap
School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
University of Guelph
jdevlin@uoguelph.ca

What is Community Supported Agriculture?

- An agricultural marketing innovation whereby a farmer or a group of farmers
 1. Partner with individuals from the local area who make an investment in the farm by purchasing one or more CSA “shares” in advance of a growing season becoming members of the CSA.
 2. Members receive a share of the harvest (usually weekly), which usually consists of vegetables, but might also include fruit, eggs, meat or other products.
 3. As members, they agree to share both the rewards and the risks of the farming operation for that season.

The Survey

- ❑ A total of 399 Canadian CSA farmers were identified using a broad internet search (provincial / territorial / regional CSA databases and Google searches for each Province and Territory).
- ❑ Out of those, 381 were contacted through e-mail, Facebook message or contact forms on websites. The remaining 18 were not able to be contacted because they did not have an e-mail address or contact form on their website or did not have a website or Facebook page at all.
- ❑ 100 farmers completed the full survey, providing a response rate of 26.2%.

How many CSAs?



CSAs in Canada 2016	~400
Farms in Canada 2011	205,730
CSAs as %	0.2 %

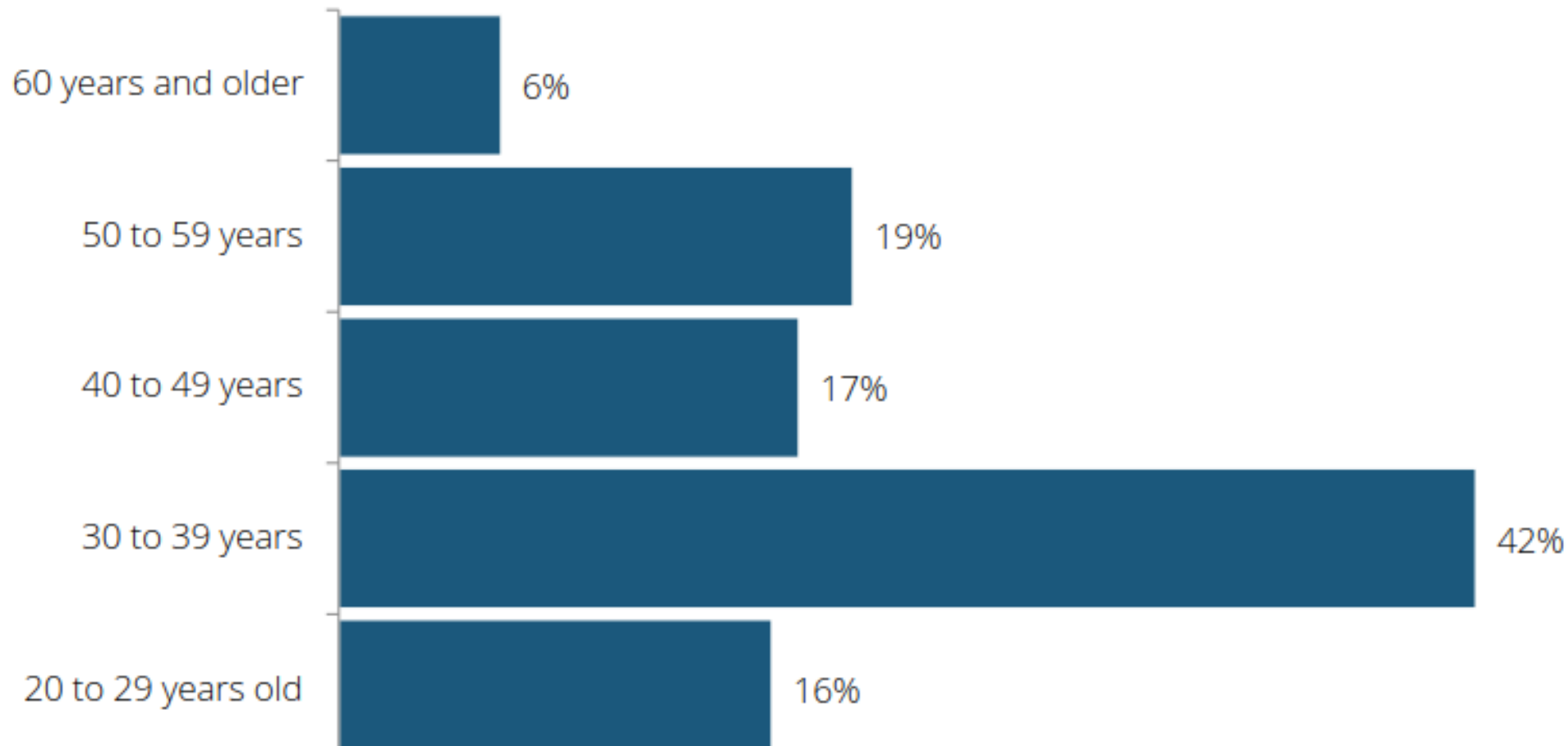
Source: 2011 Agricultural Census
CSA Survey

The Questions

- ❖ Characteristics of your CSA and some personal characteristics;
- ❖ Reasons why you chose to adopt a CSA model as opposed to and/or in addition to other marketing options;
- ❖ The advantages and challenges of running a CSA;
- ❖ Helpful supports that exist currently for CSAs;
- ❖ Additional supports that you believe would help you to be more successful in running your CSA;
- ❖ Whether you view the idea of Community Supported Agriculture as a movement and your perceived role within such a movement; and
- ❖ Your plans for the future with regards to your CSA.



Age Range



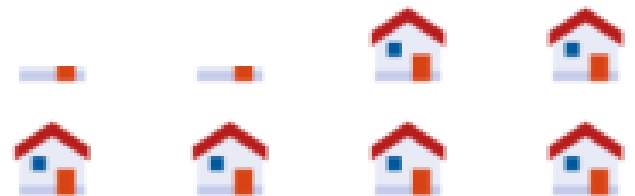
CSA farmers are young compared to the typical agricultural population in Canada. 58% of respondents were under the age of 40. The 2011 Census of Agriculture shows that only 9.9% of all farms across Canada had the oldest farm operator under 40 years of age (Beaulieu, 2015).

Average number of shares = 100

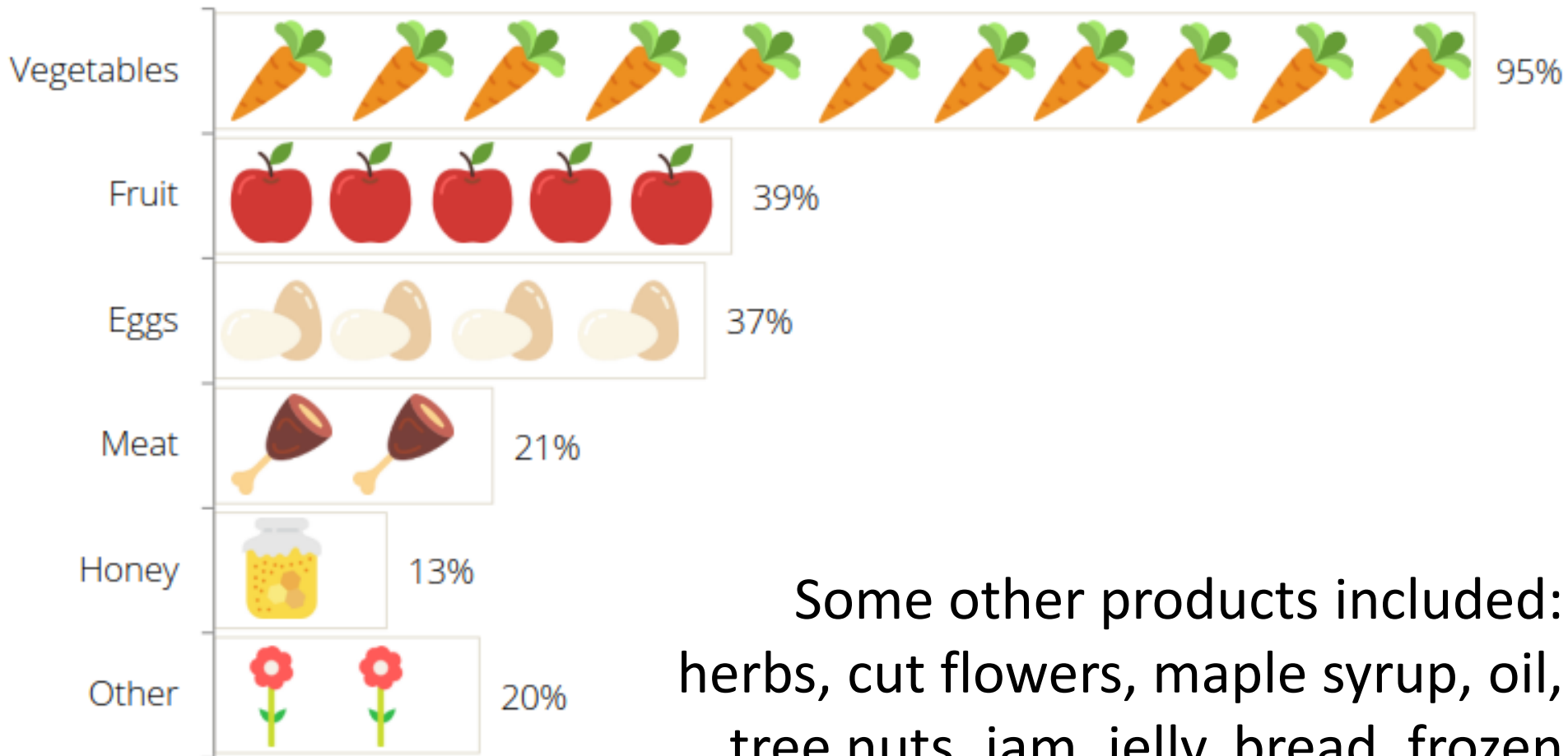


Smallest number of shares = 2

Largest number of shares = 657




Products included in a share



Some other products included:
herbs, cut flowers, maple syrup, oil,
tree nuts, jam, jelly, bread, frozen
vegetables, pickles, mushrooms,
flour and sprouts.

How are food shares distributed?

- 
- On-farm pick up 77%
 - Deliver to intermediate pick-up locations 71%
 - Deliver directly to members' homes, 31%
 - Deliver to other places (e.g, farmers' market) 11%

On average, CSAs provide two different options for how CSA shares are distributed, with some providing more options and some just one option.

Engagement with Members

- ☐ 93% provide members with regular e-mails or brochures regarding the farm, including recipes;
 - ☐ Other ways that CSAs engage with their members is through social media (Facebook, blog posts);
 - ☐ 72% invite them to farm visits (e.g., harvest celebrations, meals);
 - ☐ 17% host optional on-farm work days/work bees;
- But only
- ☐ 2% require members to commit to a specific amount of on-farm work; and
 - ☐ 2% involve members voluntarily in the administration and organization of the CSA.

Motivation	Average Level of
	Importance
	(out of 5)
Providing higher quality food to consumers	4.24
Financial viability of the farm	3.98
Quality of life/enjoyment of life	3.96
Educating customers about the reality of food production	3.88
Localization of food	3.88
Greater economic stability	3.87
Having a closer relationship to your customers	3.85
Building community	3.77
Being able to farm using environmental best management practices	3.75
Source of working capital	3.69
Reducing food miles	3.62
Reduce risk of failure	3.47
Survival of the farm	3.43
Social justice	3.38
Better prices	3.27

Advantages of a CSA – Top 10

1. A guaranteed and predictable source of income (34%);
2. Support from members and relationship and/or community building (32%);
3. Greater ease of production planning (i.e. easier to plan crop volume and type, knowing exactly how much to plant, resulting in less waste) (28%);
4. Having early income in spring to cover labour costs and capital for investments (such as seeds, equipment and supplies) (24%);
5. Efficiency (i.e. less time and energy wasted being able to sell right on the farm; simplicity of harvest and distribution processes) (10%);

Advantages of a CSA – Top 10

6. Greater control (i.e. the ability to make own decisions, set one's schedule and prices, follow one's own ethics) (6%);
7. Marketing in the off-season (6 %);
8. Consumer education (i.e. about modern agriculture, the realities of growing food, teaching kids where food comes from, eating in season); which in turn, helps to change eating habits and strengthen commitment (6%);
9. Being able to grow a diversity of crops (4 %);
10. Providing quality food to members (3%).

Challenges in Running a CSA – Top 10

1. Production management (ie. ensuring sufficient variety and volume; crop rotation, planting and harvest projections; stress of delivering quality and quantity each week; trying to meet varying customer tastes; 45%);
2. Administration (ie. time and complexity; and balancing administration with production) (21%);
3. Marketing (member retention & recruitment) (16%);



Challenges in running a CSA – Top 10

4. Member education (ie. time spent educating members about seasonal eating, eating different varieties, eating the whole animal, viability of farming, what a CSA is) (14%)
5. Finances (ie. low prices, cost of labour and challenges with cash flow) (9 %);
6. Weather & climate change (7 %);
7. Distribution challenges (6 %);
8. Crop failures (5 %);
9. Time constraints and trying to find work life-balance (4%);
10. Having to be a jack of all trades (3 %):



The future

Running a CSA in 2016?

Yes: 96 / 100



How long will you continue to offer shares?

- ✓ More than 10 years = 61.9%
- ✓ Up to 10 years = 9.27 %
- ✓ At least 5 years = 15.46%



Conclusion

- The Community Supported Agriculture model holds great potential for developing the local and regional economy by bringing farmers and consumers together.
- Increasing the number of CSAs can be an important contributor to building strong local food systems.

BUT...

Some Policy Recommendations

- Policymakers, planners and economic development officers need to help by
 1. Promoting the importance of buying local;
 2. Producing CSA educational materials;
 3. Providing suitable pick up locations;
 4. Helping build the network of local CSAs, and
 5. Working across service sectors (health, nutrition, education, recreation) to develop community food plans and local food organizations which engage with CSAs.

Consumers can help by

1. Joining a CSA
2. Appreciating the challenges of farming;
3. Being ready to pay a fair price;
4. Eating seasonally;
5. Not expecting the variety available in supermarkets;
6. Support campaigns asking government to recognize and provide financial programs for small farms.

- We thank first the farmers who participated in the study.
- We would also like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding this study under its Partnership Development Program – SSHRC PDG 890-2011-0026.
- The Rural Policy Learning Commons who has co-sponsored this CRRF conference, and
- The Rural Development Institute of Brandon University who hosts the Rural Policy Learning Commons



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



RPLC
RURAL POLICY
LEARNING COMMONS



RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

And thank you!

References

Beaulieu, M.S. (2015). Demographic Changes in Canadian Agriculture. Statistics Canada.
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/2014001/article/11905-eng.htm>

Devlin, J and Davis, M (2016) Community Supported Agriculture in Canada. School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph. An electronic copy of this report may be found at
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/~jdevlin/CSA-in-Canada-2016-Report>