

**PROMOTING RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: COMMUNITY
SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA) FARMS IN THE UNITED STATES**

(An Abstract of)

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Abstract

Since the 1950s there has been a major shift towards a more industrialized food system in the United States, and with this shift questions about its environmental, economic, and social impacts have been raised. Over the past few decades a number of alternative food systems have emerged to counter the current industrialized system. They are typified by more environmentally sound farming practices and an attempt to reconnect people with the land. One idea that has gained support is direct market agriculture, which attempts to directly market farm produce to the consumer. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a form of direct market agriculture that arrived in the U.S. in the early 1980s, is the subject of this research.

In this study the geographical aspects of CSA farms in the United States are examined by asking, *how does location impact the viability of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in the United States?* Research data was collected through a national survey of 746 CSAs, of which 373 responded. This survey, sponsored by the Illinois Council for Food and Agriculture Research (C-FAR), investigates whether different levels of urbanization or regional locations influenced the success of CSA farms in the United States.

Since their arrival in the United States in the mid 1980s, CSAs have diffused to all regions and rural-urban locations. Results suggest that CSAs have higher levels of success in more urbanized locations and in the Northeast and Pacific regions of the United States. These measures of success include larger CSA farms, subscription numbers, and gross revenues. Despite these differences, other results imply CSAs are experiencing similar types of success and challenges regardless of location. These

similarities include that: the average CSA grows and provides a diverse variety of produce, averaging over 45 types per farm; CSA farms continue to grow in acreage throughout the country; two-thirds of CSA subscribers are estimated to rejoin each year; CSA farmers are generally satisfied with their CSA and feel it's a success; and most CSA farmers do not make enough money solely through the CSA to provide for their families. Overall, these results show that CSAs represent one possible strategy to counter the effects of the industrialization of agriculture, while reconnecting farmers and consumers to provide good food grown in a sustainable manner.