

# Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and Your Early Care and Education Program



**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** is a way to buy local food directly from a farmer. The customer (individual, family, business, or other) buys a “subscription” or “share” of a farm’s produce at the start of the growing season. Then the customer receives a regular assortment of fresh items from the farmer over the season.

## Why participate in CSA?

When you bring a CSA share to your early care and education program, you support the well-being of the children in your care by fostering a healthy relationship with food. CSA subscriptions can expose you to vegetables you might not otherwise buy. It can be a learning tool for you and the children to discover new foods and recipes, and diversify your diet and cooking skills. When you join a CSA farm, you also provide a level of financial security to the farmer.



## How can I find a farm that offers CSA shares?

Find a farm offering CSA subscriptions near you by talking to farmers at a farmers’ market, by contacting your local county extension agent, or by looking up farms via FairShare CSA Coalition ([www.csacoalition.org](http://www.csacoalition.org)) or Wisconsin Farm Fresh Atlas ([farmfreshatlas.org](http://farmfreshatlas.org)). Look for CSA share sign-ups during the winter when farmers are looking ahead to the next season. You may be able to find an “early bird” discount by contacting CSA farms during the late fall and early winter.



## I found a CSA farm! Now what?

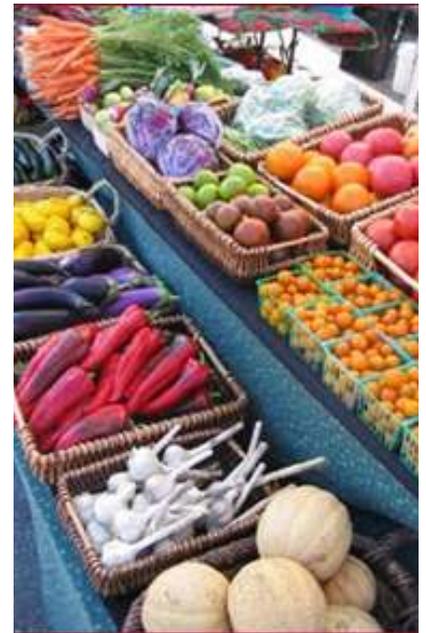
Having a conversation with a farmer is the best way to decide if a specific CSA will be a good match for your program. As you prepare to talk to the farmer, refer to the questions in the box on the next page. The information can help you make decisions about what type of farm or share will match your needs.

Some programs may be interested in choosing a CSA farm that offers a modified share. For instance, a standard share with a smaller amount of many products may be perfect for a program looking to feature the produce in taste tests to familiarize children with new varieties of vegetables. A modified share with larger amounts of fewer products might

be more suitable when looking to incorporate the produce into the program's snack or meal program. Sometimes shares for specific seasons are offered (spring/summer/fall). For delivery, some farms may offer delivery to your site, have an off-farm pick-up location, or have on-farm pick-up, often with additional perks such as U-pick berries, herbs, or flowers.

### Considerations when choosing a CSA farm or share:

- A list of the possible food items that will be available
- Number of children to be served (number of classrooms and ages of children)
- Frequency of delivery (weekly or every other week) and delivery or pick-up location
- Size of share (extra-large, medium, small)
- Availability of seasonal shares (early, peak, full, or storage crop/fall shares)
- Availability of "market" shares (a system where you pick out which vegetables you want farmers' market-style instead of receiving a box with predetermined items and quantities)
- Cost of the different shares and payment plans
- The possibility for any field trips, on-farm events, or farmer visits that may be available with membership



### How to use the produce from a CSA share

- Consider opening the CSA share box with the children and **enjoy the excitement** of the shapes, colors, and textures
- Introduce any new items to children with a **taste test**
- Use the produce for **experiential education** in the classroom (see [Got Veggies? ECE Edition](#) for ideas)
- **Share produce with staff or families** by offering taste tests at pick-up and during family events or send extra items home with them to try
- Use the produce **in daily meals and snacks** – see the next page for tips on menu planning with a seasonal CSA share

***"An electric pressure cooker (like an Instant Pot) can be a great teaching tool in the classroom for use with fresh veggies. It's a safe and easy way to compare the taste and texture of raw vegetables to cooked."***

*- Rebecca Breda, VA Kids Center and Two Good Farms*

## Menu planning

Many CSAs send out a weekly newsletter, including details on what is in the box that week. Some also include a recipe or meal suggestions. If the CSA farm archives their newsletters on their website, refer to the recipes from the previous year to have an idea of what to expect.

Seasonality charts (such as [www.cias.wisc.edu/foodservtools/2-Get-started/wisconsin-produce-calendar.pdf](http://www.cias.wisc.edu/foodservtools/2-Get-started/wisconsin-produce-calendar.pdf) and [www.seasonalfoodguide.org/](http://www.seasonalfoodguide.org/)) are also helpful in predicting what produce will appear in your box. For example, you can expect lots of greens early in the year, with cucumbers, summer squash, and tomatoes in the summer, followed by fall crops such as winter squash and potatoes.



Fairshare CSA Coalition offers two cookbooks that highlight seasonally grown vegetables in Wisconsin (see [www.csacoalition.org/cookbooks/](http://www.csacoalition.org/cookbooks/)). In addition, Local Thyme provides an on-line menu-planning service for many CSA farms and this may be part of your membership ([www.localthyme.com](http://www.localthyme.com)).

## Funding a CSA subscription

- See the FairShare CSA Coalition's Partner Shares Program for possible cost-sharing for a CSA subscription ([www.csacoalition.org/partner-shares/](http://www.csacoalition.org/partner-shares/))
- Look into small community foundation grants in your area
- Talk to the CSA farmer about any discounts for educational centers, or whether their current members might help to subsidize a child care CSA share
- Ask for parent or family sponsorships (consider asking the farmer for a letter describing their CSA subscription) – one CSA farm offered discounts to the center for each family that signed up for their own personal CSA share
- Ask community organizations and local businesses to co-sponsor your CSA share

## Questions? Comments? Get in touch!

Contact our Farm to ECE team at [wifarmtoece@rootedwi.org](mailto:wifarmtoece@rootedwi.org). Visit our website at [rootedwi.org](http://rootedwi.org) for more Farm to ECE resources.

Thank you to Rebecca Breda for her contributions to this resource.

*This project is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan.*

