



# Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, Inc.

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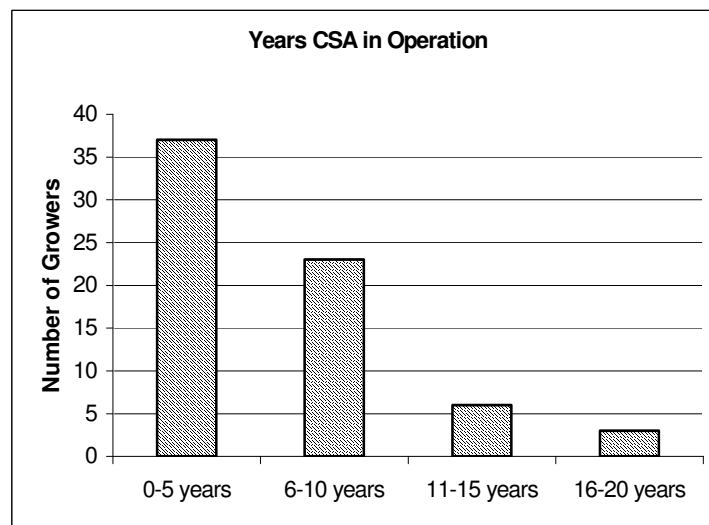
## Survey of CSA Farms in New York State

In April of 2007 the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) of New York identified 120 CSA farms in the state of New York and conducted telephone surveys with 75 of these CSA farms<sup>1</sup>. The survey was a first step in NOFA-NY's development of a CSA support network. One purpose of the survey was to obtain background information on the distribution and types of CSA farms that exist. An additional objective was to ask CSA farmers directly about the challenges they face and what kinds of assistance they would like from NOFA-NY.

As a next step in developing a statewide CSA network, NOFA-NY will be conducting five regional gatherings from January through March of 2008. These gatherings will provide an opportunity for farmers to network with one another, to discuss themes and topics identified from the survey results, and for NOFA-NY to solicit additional feedback from farmers and active CSA participants about how we can best provide support to CSA farms.

### Background Information

- At the time of the survey, 69 out of 75 CSA farms surveyed were still in operation as CSA farms. Two of the farms surveyed had gone out of business; four were still in operation but no longer had a CSA program.
- Many CSA programs are relatively new. 26% of the CSA programs have been in operation for less than two years (18 out of 69).



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<sup>1</sup> CSA refers to Community Supported Agriculture, which is an arrangement between a farmer and consumers to share the risks and the bounty of the growing season. A farmer sells shares in the next season's produce before the season begins. Each week of the season, the shareholder receives a share of fresh produce from the farm. A typical CSA might provide 4 to 15 pounds of vegetables to a family each week from June through November, often for less than it costs to buy the same conventional produce in supermarkets. CSAs create connections between farmers, members of a community and the land on which the food was grown and in this way build community and provide support for environmentally sound farming practices.

- Farms ranged in size from 5 to 700 CSA members<sup>2</sup>. The median size was 45 members.
- 3 acres was the median number of acres under production.
- On average, farmers get 53% of their farm income from the CSA; the rest of their farm income comes from other sources including farmers markets, retail, and wholesale accounts.
- On average, farmers get 44% of their total income from off-farm sources.
- Share prices varied widely and ranged from \$150 to \$750<sup>3</sup>. The average share price was \$442, but the length of the season and products included in the share varied. Some farms offer working shares or subsidized shares.

### Challenges Experienced by CSA Farmers

- 77% of the growers said they experienced difficulty producing enough food or enough variety during some period in the growing season; most often, farmers identified the early part of the season as the difficult period.
- 56% of the growers said they do not have enough labor.
- 43% of the growers identified weeds as a problem.
- 28% said they do not have enough land.

### Survey Themes

- Most farmers want to **increase CSA membership** (73% of all farmers surveyed). Farmers would also like to shift more of their marketing to the CSA program (57%) and increase member participation in the CSA (54%).
- Farmers requested help with **consumer education** and building support for the CSA concept (58% of farmers identified this issue in an open-ended question about how NOFA-NY can provide support).
- Farmers would like to see more **farmer-to-farmer networks**, mentoring programs, regional groups, and opportunities to share information and collaborate. (36% identified this issue in an open-ended question).

### Regional Issues

We divided the survey respondents into six regions: Capital Region, Central NY, Hudson Valley, Long Island, North Country, and Western NY. The following themes emerged for each region:

- **Capital Region:** These CSA programs are younger on average. Farmers in this region tend to rely more heavily on off-farm income than average. Issues of particular interest to this group are increasing member participation in the CSA, consumer education, and finding qualified labor.
- **Central NY:** While 65% of the farmers would like to increase member participation in the CSA, only 15% of the farms in this region have core groups<sup>4</sup>. Farmers in this region are especially interested in engaging in more consumer education and several expressed interest in a regional “Buy Local” campaign.
- **Hudson Valley:** These CSA programs tend to be older and larger than the statewide average. Compared with other groups, almost twice as many farmers in this group identified lack of land as a problem (53%). Farmers in this group would like to educate consumers and shift more of their business to the CSA. In open-ended questions several farmers said they would like to find ways to diversify their membership.
- **Long Island:** These CSA programs tend to be older and larger than average. Most of the farmers surveyed in this region have core groups, but even so 83% said they would like more member participation in the CSA.
- **North Country:** Our survey identified only a few CSA programs in the north part of the state and those that exist are small in size. Farmers in this region are interested in finding ways to make their CSA programs more viable.
- **Western NY:** There are several very large, well-established CSA programs in this region and several smaller, newer farms. Lack of labor is especially problematic for these farmers (75%). The vast majority of these farmers want to increase membership in their CSA programs (85%).

You can find an updated list of CSA farms in New York at <http://nofany.org/dbapplet/csadirectory.html>. If you would like more information about this project or if you would like to participate in a regional gathering, please contact **Abby Youngblood, the CSA Network Coordinator at NOFA-NY, at 347-445-2384 or by email at [csaproject@nofany.org](mailto:csaproject@nofany.org).**

<sup>2</sup> Some larger CSA farms exist in New York State, but we were unable to conduct an interview with them for this survey. For example, Roxbury Farm, which distributes vegetable and fruit shares to NYC, Westchester, the Capital District, and Columbia County now has over 1,000 members.

<sup>3</sup> Not included in these figures are a winter share that sells for \$125 and a meat share that sells for \$900.

<sup>4</sup> Some CSA farms have a *core group*, which is a decision-making body made up of the farmers, CSA members, and sometimes staff for the CSA. Core groups often participate in goal setting, prepare a budget, publish member newsletters and publicity materials, conduct outreach, organize events for the CSA program, and distribute leftover produce to emergency food providers.