

Wynlen House

Artisan Village Farm



Wynlen House “Growing” Community – A Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) Community

What is a CSA?

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a direct partnership between farmers and consumers / eaters. It can encompass a continuum of models of food production and distribution that directly connects farmers and consumers / eaters; transforming the role of customers from the passive consumer to an active “co-producer,” sharing with the farmer the costs and risks of farming as well as the bounty.

At Wynlen House we prefer to use the term co-producer rather than the term consumer or the term eater. **The Slow Food movement** defines the term co-producer as:

A conscious consumer who goes beyond the passive role of consuming and takes an interest in those who produce our food, how they produce it and the problems they face in doing so. In actively supporting food producers, we become part of the production process. The term co-producer was coined by Slow Food to highlight how collectively our consumer choices can bring great change to how food is cultivated, produced and distributed

CSAs vary in their structure and payment terms, but the principle is that farms supply their produce directly to their members through a “subscription” model. **A key component is a commitment from the co producer to accept the produce they are given and to share the risk of the harvest with the farmer.**

The origins of Community Supported Agriculture stems from the 1970’s originating in Japan with organic vegetable farmers and is based of the **Principles of Teikei**,(1978) meaning partnership in Japanese. These principles include:

- Principle of mutual assistance
- Principle of accepting the produce
- Principle of mutual concession in the price decision
- Principle of deepening friendly relationships
- Principle of self-distribution
- Principle of democratic management
- Principle of learning among each group...

From these beginnings in organic agriculture in Japan, it has spread across the world and is now seen as a movement bringing together citizens, small farmers, consumers, activists and concerned political actors at a global level (URGENCI Network) through an alternative economic approach.

URGENCI, the International CSA Network formed in 2011 promotes “all forms of partnership between producers and local consumers, all kinds of **Community Supported Agriculture**

initiatives, as a solution to the problems associated with global intensive agricultural production and distribution.

*Farmers alone have been shouldering the risks of the increasingly ruthless global market, which has forced millions of them from the land. **Community-Supported agriculture offers one of the most hopeful alternatives to the downward spiral, and is the only model of farming in which consumers deliberately agree to share the risks and benefits with farmers.***

*It takes many different forms in the various parts of the world, based on the social, historical, geopolitical, agricultural and economic specificities of each country or region where they have developed. **Fundamentally, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a direct partnership based on the human relationship between people and one or several producer(s), whereby the risks, responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared, through a long-term, binding agreement.***”

Wynlen House started its life in 2006 with a primary focus on producing food to be consumed locally. Having a life time passion for organic farming and self sustainability with a strong interest in (re)developing, organic, sustainable and local food systems using agricultural practices that have environmental, economic and social outcomes, I was aware of the idea of Community Supported Agriculture or CSA's and decided that this would be a reasonable way to move from self supply to supplying others.

My earliest contact with CSA's was around 1984 with the development of a subscription farm in Berry NSW in the Shoalhaven region. The Berry subscription farm model involved subscribers purchasing a subscription and making a regular farm work commitment. My understanding of CSA's has grown from this time. The continuum of models that have developed over this time, as I have understood them are:

Community Garden Model the late 1980's: Where local government, health services, housing services and employment services developed garden or farm sites, with an employed coordinator or manager, but wholly owned by the participant community and often called a community garden. This model of community gardens has changed over time with a number of non for profit “city farm” type organisations in this space.

Subscription Farms: The farmer owns and manages the farm, subscribers buy an annual share in the produce and may also contribute some labour to the running of the operation. This model is prevalent and subscription can be for differing time periods – seasonally, monthly, quarterly... In the USA members will often fund the farmer up front prior to planting, covering the cost of seed etc. Many farms now use a subscription or direct sales model but do often not identify directly as a CSA.

Relationship Marketing: The farm is wholly owned by the farmer who also does all the work. The farmer delivers the produce directly to committed families, restaurants or other retail outlets. Many farms now use this type of direct sales model but are not necessarily considered as a CSA or identify as a CSA. According to URGENCI a key aspect in determining if you are a CSA is if you have a commitment from your community to share the risk of your harvest with you – that is, they would still pay if your tomatoes were wiped out by blight or your entire crop by hail – if yes, then this is fundamentally a CSA. If your customers would not pay if your crop failed under the examples above, then it is not a CSA, which has at its essence the sharing of risks and benefits.

Wynlen House started out, opting for the relationship marketing model. We approached some acquaintances and friends and asked if they would be interested in committing to buying produce from the Wynlen House garden on a weekly basis. Six households were happy to

make this commitment. In practical terms this was also our marketing plan and we did not have to think further about how to distribute our produce, and true to its name it meant the developing of a food relationship with our customers, discussing varieties of vegetables, preferences, sharing recipes and so on. Over time, as the farm has grown, we have moved away from only supplying our committed co-producers to running a weekly market stall. This has extended our availability and relationship to many more of the local community.

Our new venture – the Wynlen House Membership Community is in our view a continuum of the Community Supported Agriculture model. That is, you as members or co-producers are directly supporting our farming enterprise and in exchange although we are not directly sharing our produce, we are sharing our farming and growing knowledge with you extending the growing of local food and self sustainability.

Appendices

<https://www.slowfood.com/about-us/slow-food-terminology/>
<https://foodskil.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/a-guide-to-csa-in-victoria.pdf>
<https://afsa.org.au/csa/>
<https://urgenci.net/the-network/>

