



Community Supported Agriculture



Why offer Green Employee Benefits?

Green Employee Benefits are an easy, fun, and most importantly, low-cost way to engage employees. As cited in the [Practice Greenhealth Employee Engagement toolkit](#), employees who say they have the opportunity to make a **direct social and environmental impact through their job report higher satisfaction levels** than those who don't, by a **2:1 ratio**. Providing incentives and programming to employees to improve the health of their homes, families, and friends is a way to extend the "culture of caring" beyond the walls of the organization.

Green Employee Benefits can facilitate behavior changes with tangible results which also measurably benefit the environment. They have the potential to accelerate meaningful environmental impacts and bring sustainability values deeper into the fabric of an organization. The services can help retain and attract employees, as well as benefit their health and financial well-being.

Community supported agriculture or CSA

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) can be generally defined as a partnership between a local farm and a community of supporters ("members") that wish to support local agriculture and secure for themselves a reliable, healthy, and safe source of food. Members, also called shareholders, typically purchase a CSA share in advance, which helps support the farm throughout the growing season. In return, members receive regular boxes (bags, baskets, etc.) of farm fresh food.

Community Supported Agriculture programs are successfully operated at a number of hospitals throughout the country, and the popularity of programs is increasing steadily. Facilities that host CSA's receive the benefits of a farmers market while having fewer space and oversight requirements. Hospitals that lack the space or foot traffic to sustain a farmers market may consider hosting a CSA. Many farms offer members the opportunity to participate in farm visits and work days. Through CSAs, local farms benefit from a guaranteed investment in farm operations, making long-term planning and farm management less volatile and dependent on market forces, while members get access to fresh, locally grown produce.

Why support CSA

Participating in a CSA program offers health systems the opportunity to support climate-friendly agricultural practices while connecting employees to local, sustainably produced healthy foods. Food produced in a sustainable way uses less energy-intensive fertilizers and chemicals, maintains ecosystem biodiversity, and reduces pressures on farmland. A new study estimates that healthier diets that double fruits and vegetables and takes out red and processed meats could contribute up to 23 percent of the greenhouse gas emission reductions required to meet the U.S. Climate Action Plan.¹

Supporting locally owned and managed farms reinforces the economic well being of producers and communities served by the hospital. By increasing the availability of local and sustainably produced foods through CSA programs, health care institutions can promote awareness and help provide access and affordability of fresh local food for their staff and patients all while supporting the local economy.

Concentration, memory, attention span, and motor performance are affected by diet and poor nutrition may cause the quality of

work to suffer. Improving ease of access to healthy food is a relatively simple and low-cost way to support staff throughout their often physically and mentally demanding workday.²

The Goal - Support or host a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) food box program.

SUPPORT OR HOST A COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA) FOOD BOX PROGRAM.

1. *Promote to internal staff. Set Up alternative payment methods and/or discounts for employees.*
2. Link CSA to employee health outcomes. Collect voluntary participant data e.g. demographics, biometric screenings, percent usage of produce, number of people fed from box. Offer discounts on CSA membership or health insurance premiums to encourage participant sharing information.
3. In addition to their local sustainable CSA basket encourage participants to choose sustainably produced foods when shopping. Connect participants to other wellness and educational offerings like recipe shares or cooking classes.

1 University of California - Santa Barbara. (2017, March 8). Diet and global climate change: Eating healthier food could reduce greenhouse gas emissions, says a new study. ScienceDaily. Retrieved March 14, 2017 from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/03/170308154423.htm

2 Winston, J., Johnson, C., & Wilson, S. (2008). Barriers to healthy eating by National Health Service (NHS) hospital doctors in the hospital setting: Results of a cross-sectional survey. BMC Research Notes, 1(1), 1-69



Get Started

Step 1: Identify the Team

When partnering with a farm to support a CSA food box program it will be necessary to identify an internal champion to coordinate program activities such as drop site and delivery times, billing, pick-up alerts, and storage. Documenting program details is important to insure a smooth hand off if coordinator takes vacation or sick days or if program coordination is taken over by another staff member.

In addition to managing weekly CSA logistics, the coordinator plays a vital role in assessing the success of the program and taking feedback from participants and the farmer to ensure continued program viability. The champion may come from any number of departments like health and wellness, human resources or food services and should have a passion for promoting access to local, healthy foods.

Administration buy-in can establish support for CSA box incentives such as payroll deduction or reduced health insurance costs for participating employees.

Involving a green team or other departments, such as operations or food and nutrition, is important to assist with storage logistics as well as the marketing and recruiting of CSA members. Multi-day storage of uncollected food boxes requires the support of the food department to access cold storage. If access is not available let members know that food boxes unclaimed on pickup day will be given away or disposed of to avoid food safety concerns.

Step 2: Find a Farm with Community Supported Agriculture

There are several ways to locate a farm with a CSA: talk with local growers at your nearby farmers markets; visit online resources such as Local Harvest (www.localharvest.org); or contact your region's sustainable agriculture organization or your state's agriculture **department to help you find a CSA in your area.**

Resources:

Farmers Market and CSA Guide <https://noharm-uscanada.org/documents/farmers%E2%80%99markets-and-csas-hospital-grounds>

Local Harvest. Information and listings on CSA's throughout the United States and many other resources on local food production. <http://www.localharvest.org/csa>

It is important to understand the model of your partner CSA program. There are many types of CSA structures ranging from mixed box to market value choices. Start simple to help with program management and to gain attention and traction. Long-term work with the farm(s) to offer greater consumer choice can help to retain members.

Types of CSA

- Most commonly, a CSA involves a single farm that sells shares to members and delivers mixed boxes of fresh produce during the growing season to a designated area. Box content is dependent upon harvest and farmers' choice.
- Community Supported Agriculture programs operated by third-party organizations combine the offerings of several farms into farm fresh boxes and manage the billing and delivery logistics on behalf of the farms.

Newport Hospital, a member of the Lifespan health system, works with Veggie Box of Rhode Island to offer employees seasonal CSA boxes from June-January. In addition to farm aggregation, building the produce boxes, delivery, and direct-member billing, Veggie Box provides a weekly newsletter highlighting that weeks' produce, a farmer spotlight, and recipe ideas to accompany that weeks' specific offerings.

- Some CSA farmers use a structure that allows consumers to select the items and quantities they would like each week.

- Still, others set an annual market value and track the market value of items. Unlike a box program, members select from an onsite weekly CSA market stand until they have “spent” their membership fee.”

Step 3: Attract Members

In order to make a CSA financially viable for small farms, a minimum number of members must be established for each drop-off site. This threshold is determined by each individual farm or program. Attracting members and maintaining membership thresholds year over year is vital to the success of a CSA program.

Promoting the CSA

Some ideas for attracting members include distributing e-newsletters, hard copy advertisements such as posters or passing out flyers to employees, and offering membership drives and preview days where the farmers are on site to meet prospective participants. Consider tying the promotion of the CSA program to health awareness events such as American Heart Month, National Nutrition Month, Earth Day, or Food Day to launch or refresh awareness around your employee CSA program

Payment Incentives

Easy payment methods assist with attracting and retaining members. Baystate Franklin Medical Center in Greenfield, MA started a CSA program to increase staff members’ access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The medical center deducts CSA membership dues from employees’ paychecks to reduce the hassle of processing payments.

Pricing strategies may also be effective in attracting new members. Negotiating a group discount based on a minimum number of participants can increase interest by reducing the cost beyond what employees could access on their own. If the CSA requires a one-time signup fee, consider covering this fee to attract more participants.

Providing subsidized CSA boxes to employees earning below a set income threshold can help improve access to healthy food for hospital employees in all departments.

Structuring health insurance rebate for those who participate in the CSA’s ties together food choices and health outcomes and provides employees with a unique

benefit offering. A 2005 Wisconsin rebate program showed when health insurance customers were offered plan rebates for enrolling in a CSA, both CSA participation and health plan satisfaction increased.

John Muir Health in Northern California has started a CSA program at three of its hospital campuses. Subscribers receive a weekly basket of fruits and vegetables from a local farm. The CSA program is coordinated by a member of the hospital system’s Healthy Food Committee. This committee is also working to include membership in the CSA in the system’s Health Matters employee wellness program. If included, CSA members will be eligible for health plan discounts.

Finally, creating a referral program where both the existing member and new member each receive a discount can attract new participants and spread positive reinforcement by word of mouth.

Step 4: Coordination and Management

Some CSA farms manage all paperwork, invoicing, construction of food boxes, and delivery, while others share these management tasks with members or a coordinating sponsor, such as a hospital. Discussing the shared responsibilities with the farmer(s) upfront allows for an estimate of the hours needed to coordinate the program. At minimum, a hospital CSA program will need a coordinator to promote the program, encourage staff to become members and provide storage and inventory management on pick-up days.

Program Coordination

Program coordinator may be required to collect payment, securely store vegetable boxes pending pickup and find homes for forgotten boxes. Some hospitals provide refrigeration for those employees who need to return to work after they pick up their food.

Coordinators should communicate with members about the delayed arrival and coordinate box pick-up times. Setting up a policy and communication strategy for employees who will miss a pickup due to vacation and illness can help avoid waste generated from unclaimed CSA boxes and increase the satisfaction of the member.

Other management considerations are how to manage CSA memberships if employees leave the organization in the middle of a season. If members pay up front, offer the employee an opportunity to continue picking up their box, potentially from another drop site. Establishing an agreement for a final paycheck deduction if members have boxes automatically deducted from their paycheck can reduce inquiries and negative feedback to the HR department about the CSA program.

Food Safety

Food safety is an important component of any successful CSA program. With the following precautions in place, you can ensure the safety of the food for members and also manage any possible infection control concerns.

Be sure the CSA agreement or contract includes language that addresses the safety procedures, liability guidelines and notes any food safety certifications held by the farmer. Hospital procedure for ensuring food safety after delivery should also be outlined. This will lay the foundation for a partnership centering around the safety of members. The CSA farmer, similar to any hospital vendor, takes responsibility for delivering safe food and the program coordinator must see to the safety of the food until pickup.

Ask your CSA farmer about their delivery vehicle and request to see that the vehicle is free from dirt, food residue, chemicals, manure, and other food safety hazards. Food boxes should be delivered in an enclosed vehicle to protect from weather and allow for temperature control.

If delivering food that requires cooling ask your CSA farmer to explain standard procedures and provide documentation of temperature control methods. If the CSA box included foods, such as cheese and dairy products, these must be maintained at 41°F or lower, eggs must be 45°F, or below.

When boxes are delivered be sure there is shelving or racks in the holding area to keep food off of the floor. Key safety consideration for delivery of product include regular inspection of delivery vehicles and holding areas that are safe from weather elements like direct sun, rain, wind, contaminants and pests.

Boxes that are not picked up same day must be held at temperatures appropriate to the content. If temperature controlled storage is not available the coordinator might consider finding an alternative party to take all or part of the box content or can dispose of the products preferably through an animal feeding or compost program.

Step 5: Evaluate Success

Members

Annual evaluation of the success and participation of a CSA program can ensure long-term viability. Member retention indicates a successful program and quantifying of members addition each year can provide insight into the effectiveness of member attraction strategy.

Program success and growth can be evaluated by tracking the number of returning and new member signups each



year. Detailed tracking of the members who have left the program can also provide valuable insight into the program.

Surveying current participants and past participants annually can help identify what parts of the program are successful and where improvement is needed. Ask about variety, quality, perceived value (the worth of the CSA basket in the mind of the member), satisfaction with program logistics such as payment and pickup, and ease of use (do participants have waste because they are not familiar with the produce type or they need more recipe ideas).

Member loss is common, some farmers report losing 10 to 15% of their members from one year to the next. When coordinating a CSA program it is important to consistently evaluate and refresh the CSA offering and marketing efforts to retain members and make new members recruitment viable.

CSA Farmer(s)

CSA programs are a way for the farmer to increase their profit and farm viability; working closely with the farmers promotes a long-standing relationship. Some CSA relationships are discontinued not because of member loss but instead because the partnership is not beneficial

for the farm. Talk to your farmer about how your hospital's participation is supporting their success and what improvements can be made.

Employee Health Impacts

Connecting employee health outcomes to participation in a CSA program is a powerful way to share the story of healthy food access and can provide backing for the administration to provide cost incentives to lower the CSA box cost of members.

Collecting biometric screening data such as weight, height, and cholesterol of participants at signup and renewal each year can help quantify the health impacts of purchasing more fresh fruits and vegetables. Consider different types of incentives to help increase collection of these data points such as offering a discount on the CSA membership cost or a health care credit for CSA members who also participate in biometric data collection.