

## 1. Project Name and Contact Information

### A Book on How and Why to Run Cooperative CSA, FNE04-514

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## 2. Goals

Our goal was to write a handbook on how to start and operate a multifarm CSA and why this model is beneficial for farmers and customers. Our target audience was farmers, community members, extension agents, non-profit organizations, or anyone else interested in a cooperative or multifarm CSA model. The motivation to write the handbook came from the recognition that Local Harvest CSA had developed a new system of marketing produce that was proving to be very successful. Because our success was the result of many hours of planning and organizing, we thought that written documentation of our methods would be helpful to others who were interested in our model. Further, we were impressed that other farms attempting multifarm CSA were approaching it from different angles. Since Local Harvest CSA was receiving a lot of attention from farmers who wanted to start similar projects we thought it would be useful for the farming community to have a handbook detailing how we have developed our CSA. We applied to SARE for funding to write the handbook because SARE had provided Local Harvest CSA (then Concord Cooperative CSA) with the start-up grant that made our operation possible. We hoped that SARE would appreciate our interest in telling Local Harvest's story.

## 3. Farm Profile

When we began the project we were partners on one-acre of intensively managed, leased land and sold our produce through Local Harvest CSA. Since then we have each moved and transitioned into other fields. Jill is attending graduate school to become an English teacher and Scott has been focused on carpentry full-time; he plans to become a

teacher in the next year as well. Neither of us is actively farming right now, though we have plans to in the future.

#### 4. Participants

Our advisor, Dale Riggs, has remained a reliable source of prompt, helpful advice throughout the project. The major cooperator in the project is David Trumble, a farmer in Weare, NH and co-founder of Local Harvest CSA. David has a long-ranging perspective on Local Harvest since has remained heavily involved as a grower and leader in the organization. His input has been from direct interviews, email questions and answers, and reviewing the text as we wrote it. We also conducted interviews with the other farmers in our CSA and several farmers in other parts of the country.

#### 5. Project activities

We devised an outline and a budget for our book as included below. As co-authors, we divided the writing based on the subjects we were most interested in.

Scott began by looking through documents we had collected as members of Local Harvest CSA's cooperative board of directors to determine how the CSA has evolved from an idea to its current form. At the time Local Harvest was only in its 2<sup>nd</sup> year and we were still in a period of great transition. We attended all board meetings and were constantly reviewing our handbook's outline of subjects and attempting to match it with the reality of what we were part of. We began a correspondence with David Trumble and then board president Steve Fulton, and handed out surveys to include input from all growers. Scott began an extensive correspondence with our then bookkeeper to determine exactly how we were managing our finances. That section of the book has been modified because that bookkeeping system was not successful and we have since adopted a completely new one.

Scott also had originally planned to do extensive interviews and farm visits with other multifarm CSA's and complete thorough evaluations of these systems in order to exemplify how different multifarm CSA's can look. We have been able to include outline and anecdotal information from interviews via phone and email but determined it would be wise to scale back the scope of the external research and focus more on just our own CSA.

As we began writing Jill felt it was important to provide a basic history and philosophical base of CSA for growers and customers who might be unfamiliar with the



concept. Thus, her initial research and writing, and consequently the first two chapters of the book, focus on these areas. Through Internet research, phone interviews, and the acquisition of several books written by CSA pioneers, Jill was able to chronicle a more extensive history of the CSA concept and philosophy than we have seen anywhere else.

Jill also spent time detailing the way multifarm CSA builds upon the CSA concept and what the additional benefits to growers are. This section is a crucial part of the handbook for growers who are wondering how they may benefit from joining other growers in a CSA endeavor. Since our audience is customers as well as growers, there is a section detailing what we believe to be the benefits for customers who join a multifarm CSA.

As our writing of the handbook progressed we found that the book did, in fact, logically divide into the two categories we had initially set up: why and how. Jill's writing was focusing on why growers should consider a multifarm CSA and Scott's was focused on how we were successful with Local Harvest CSA. As the work divided further, Jill began working on a "big picture" chapter that would provide an overview of the most important aspects of Local Harvest CSA so that the reader would have a clear understanding of how we have structured our multifarm operation.

## 6. Results

We feel very proud of the work we have done towards describing the how and why (methods and philosophy) of our multifarm CSA. Our outline is featured below and it details how we have divided and covered all the subjects we believe are important. Recently, we have been extremely grateful to work with Pamela Angulo, a professional copy editor from Dover, NH. Her professional, keen eye has sharpened our text and made our message much clearer. We recommend hiring a copy editor to anyone doing a major writing project for SARE.

We are entering the graphic design phase of the book and look forward to seeing it transformed from dull Microsoft Word files into a clear and creative form. The design work will be done by Jennifer Durgin, senior writer for *Dartmouth Medicine*, the alumni magazine for Dartmouth Medical School, who is a former designer and editor. In the meantime we have continually received inquiries about the book from farmers who remain very interested in starting or improving their own multifarm CSA. We look forward to sharing this book

with others and have a long list of names and addresses of people who we will send the handbook to as soon as it is printed.

### *Handbook Outline*

#### I. Introduction

#### *Part One: Roots*

#### II. Chapter One: What is Multifarm CSA?

1. Introduction defining multifarm CSA
2. From CSA to Multifarm CSA: The Story of Local Harvest
3. Where Did CSA Come From? A Brief History
4. Multifarm CSA or Cooperative CSA?

#### III. Chapter Two: How Growers and Customers Benefit from Multifarm CSA

1. Introduction
2. Benefits for Growers
3. Benefits for Customers

#### *Part Two: Shoots*

#### IV. Chapter Three: The Big Picture

1. Introduction
2. Our Model
  - a. Board meetings
  - b. Produce distribution
3. Cast of Characters: Who Does the Work?
  - a. Brief outline of every position
  - b. The cooperative board
  - c. Administrative staff
    1. Crop coordinator (see chapter four, Crops and Bids)
    2. Bookkeeper
  - d. Site Staff
    1. Site coordinator
    3. Meeter-greeter
    4. Site assistant
    5. Market table coordinator

### 3. The Budget

- a. Introduction
- b. Example of Local Harvest budget

## V. Chapter Four: Crops and Bids

1. The Crop Coordinator
2. Bidding for Crops in Year One
3. Packing Standards
4. The Bidding Process
5. During the Growing Season
6. Gray Areas
7. Bidding System Options

## VI. Chapter Five: Legal Framework and the Cooperative Board

1. Legal Framework
2. The Decision to Incorporate as a Cooperative
  - a. Articles of Incorporation
  - b. Bylaws
3. Marketing Agreement
4. Cooperative Profits

## VII. Chapter Six: Creating Community

### Appendix A. Other Successful Multifarm CSAs

### Appendix B. Documents related to the CSA

## 7. Conditions

Our project has been largely unaffected by the growing season since it is mainly an economic, social and historical look at multifarm CSA and Local Harvest CSA specifically. We have, however, addressed the subject of weather in the handbook. We feel multifarm CSA provides protection and even advantage over the weather. This is because every farm has its own microclimate and farmers working in cooperation can better withstand short and longer term weather events by spreading out the risk or using the microclimate effect to have longer seasons of short season crops.

Our handbook project has gone on longer than expected. This was due to several factors including delayed initial research during our busy 2005 farming season, and life



events that were unpredictable; namely the dissolution of our personal and business partnership of many years. We also found that Local Harvest CSA learned and changed so much from year to year that we were constantly updating and re-opening sections of the book to better describe the evolving system.

## **8. Economic Findings**

Our economic findings are consistent with the premise for writing our book: Multifarm CSA continues in and improves upon the relatively recent tradition of single farm CSA as an efficient and profitable marketing method for small farms. A multifarm CSA offers growers the chance to sell wholesale quantities of produce at prices that are 20% higher than wholesale prices. Local Harvest has maintained low overhead operating costs while continuing to grow its membership and offer more gross sales to growers in exchange for time spent managing the organization.

The growers we featured from around the country demonstrate that this system can be customized in innovative ways. We feature two unique CSAs that are making this model work in traditionally underserved areas: one that is in a rural area that covers many miles and includes sales to individuals, businesses and institutions, and one in Alabama that works with farmers that are not traditionally CSA farmers.

## **9. Assessment**

The first SARE grant Local Harvest CSA applied for in 2002 was designed to solve the problem that many farms are interested in CSA but cannot manage the requirements of managing a single-farm CSA. Local Harvest CSA succeeded in creating a cooperative solution. With this handbook we sought to make the argument that multifarm CSA is a sustainable and profitable CSA model and to make Local Harvest CSA's system comprehensible to farmers or other individuals.

The problem that we were working to solve was the lack of information about this system for other farmers and potential customers. Through work on the handbook, and some initial outreach activities, we have begun to solve the problem. At this point we have collected a list of names and addresses of farmers and customers who are interested in learning more about Local Harvest's multifarm CSA model. We are confident that our handbook will spur creative cooperative arrangements among farmers and customers that we

could never imagine. Each group will be free to use our system as an outline and fill in specifics to meet the needs of the particular farmers, customers, and land involved.

Additionally, the process of researching and writing the handbook has generated dialogue among Local Harvest farmers about the future and development goals of the organization. Met with a chronicle of the organizations founding and progress, Local Harvest farmers were forced to consider how the success of the endeavor could be best sustained for everyone involved: farmers, customers, and staff. Similarly, as we created and asked farmers to complete questionnaires about their participation in Local Harvest CSA, farmers were compelled to consider and define for themselves how they benefit from their involvement, and why they continue to work with the CSA.

The next step is to implement the remainder of the outreach plan (see # 11) to fully stimulate dialogue and ideas about how farmers and community members can work together in a successful cooperative, multifarm CSA.

## 10. Adoption

Local Harvest CSA is entering its 5th year and continues to be beneficial to growers and customers. We have been pleased and impressed that growers have consistently covered each other's crop failures and continue to customize the crops they bid on to the efficiencies of their individual farms. Additionally, the model has proven effective in its resiliency: growers have left or taken breaks from the organization and the CSA has been able to make up for the loss of production while sustaining and even increasing the size of its membership. We believe that a central benefit of multifarm CSA is that farmers who have worked hard for the cooperative can, if need be, take time off for family or health reasons, and then easily resume involvement with the CSA, while the market and income source is preserved by the other growers. Local Harvest maintains this balance by promoting the goal of having no grower producing more than 25% of the total crop production, and by continually recruiting small or new growers to participate.

As we have both relocated away from the area served by Local Harvest CSA, we hope to use the knowledge gained through involvement with Local Harvest and this handbook project to galvanize interest in the multifarm CSA model among farmers and customers in the areas we settle in. As we join in the dialogue of a new sustainable agriculture community in the Northeast, we hope to use the handbook and our expertise in



the multifarm model to bring together new groups of growers who will work together to profitably serve interested customers. In this way the adoption of practices learned through the research and writing of this handbook will continue for years to come.

## 11. Outreach

Our outreach program began in early 2005 with a table at a "farmer's market" at the Concord, NH Borders book store. We were there displaying information about Local Harvest CSA and our upcoming handbook detailing the CSA's operations. We took questions about both the CSA itself and about the multifarm model in general from those interested.

The next major event was the workshop that Jill gave at the 2006 Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA)-NH Winter Conference. Along with Mary Ann Kristiansen, the Executive Director of the Hannah Grimes Cooperative Marketplace in Keene, NH, Jill gave an hour and a half workshop titled **Cooperative Marketing for Small Growers and Producers** discussing the history and current means of cooperative marketing arrangements. At the workshop Jill distributed copies of chapters from the upcoming handbook to the participants and collected a list of people who would like a free copy of the finished product. The workshop was very well attended, boasting nearly the largest numbers of any workshop at the conference. Please see the attached program for the 2006 NOFA-NH Winter Conference (titled NOFANHprogram.pdf). Jill's workshop is featured under session II, letter G.

As a (former) member of the board of directors of NOFA-NH, Scott was able to, on several occasions, have press releases about the upcoming book published in the NOFA-NH quarterly newsletter. This happened in both 2005 and 2006. Due to these press releases we received contact information from several people and organizations interested in a copy of our handbook.

Looking to the future, Jill has recently sent in an application and payment for a table at the NOFA Summer Conference in August of this year. At the table she will be speaking about and distributing copies of the handbook.

Upon publication of the book, we plan to send press releases to several major sustainable agriculture publications including *Acres U.S.A.*, *The Small Farmer's Journal*, *Growing For Market*, *Alternative Agriculture News*, *Appropriate Technology Voice*, *Biodynamics*, and *Farming*



*Alternatives* as well as organizations that support sustainable agriculture such as the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), and California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF). Thereafter we will continue to be available to give workshops detailing the knowledge we have learned about organizing, managing, and sustaining a cooperative, multifarm CSA. Included is a description of Jill's workshop at the NOFA-NH Winter Conference in 2006.

## 12. Report Summary

The purpose of our project was to create literature detailing the philosophy and methods of cooperative, multifarm CSA for farmers, customers, and others who might benefit from using the model developed by Local Harvest CSA.

Our methods were to research and chronicle through writing the evolution and benefits of the multifarm CSA concept, the practices and policies of Local Harvest CSA, and overviews of other successful multifarm models in the United States. We carried out these methods through interviews and surveys with Local Harvest's crop coordinator, bookkeeper, and farmers; interviews with growers and organizers of other multifarm CSA's; and research into the history and philosophy of CSA and cooperative growing arrangements.

Our result is a thoughtfully written, professionally edited and designed handbook detailing the history, philosophy, and benefits of the concept, the methods and policies of Local Harvest CSA, and a brief appendix of other multifarm CSA models. Over the past two years, as our research and writing has continued, Local Harvest CSA has continued to progress and prosper as a cooperative CSA with seven to nine participating growers serving 250 members and their families. Due in part to Local Harvest CSA's success and in part to farmers' over-arching interest in collaborating with other farmers, there is increasing demand for our handbook. We believe that our handbook, *Cooperative Harvest: The Benefits and Methods of a Multifarm CSA*, will continue to stimulate interest in, and provide a useful framework for multifarm CSA in the coming years.